



Newcastle Unitarians

The Calendar



August-September 2026

www.newcastleunitarians.org.uk

facebook.com/NewcastleuponTyneUnitarians

**A member Congregation of the General Assembly
of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches**



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The cover photo shows the Summer Solstice service held at Flowergate Unitarian chapel in Whitby in June 2026 (photo taken by Louise Reeve).

Articles for the next calendar to be submitted by **Sunday 27 September, 2026**. Thanks to all those who have contributed to this calendar.

Chair's Hello August and September 2026

Summer has been busy! We've had heatwaves, the World Cup (never mind), eclipses, and from a more local point of view, we've started our '**Unitarians in the Community**' project here in Newcastle, with two 'Something to Think About' midweek gatherings at ReCoCo in Newcastle in June ('Stillness at the Solstice') and July ('Pride and Presence'). These gatherings are led by Stevie Devlin, our Spiritual and Community Project Lead. In her words:



"Each of our midweek 'Something to Think About' sessions explores a different theme, which we explore through meditation, discussions, readings, music, and contemplation. Whether you come to listen, pause or simply spend an hour in thoughtful company; you'll be warmly welcomed. There is no expectation to share, no previous experience needed and you are free to engage

in whatever way feels right for you. All are welcome here.”

To find ReCoCo: The venue is in the building with the protruding black 'No. 1 Carliol Square' sign before you get to the footbridge. Look for the colourful wall mural and glass doors. Press '3rd RECOCO' on the intercom and someone will let you in. There is a lift to Floor 3 where we are. The address is: ReCoCo, 1 Carliol Square, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 6UF. There are public car parks nearby, the bus stops on Market Street, Blakett Street and John Dobson Street are less than a five-minute walk, as are Monument or Manors Metro stations.

We've got the following **events** coming up:

- **Harvest Service 6 September 2026:** Diana Bebbey is leading our Harvest Service we will be collecting items for the **People's Kitchen**. If you would like to bring something with you to **donate** to them to support their work with homeless people in Newcastle, here's a list of items they would like:
<https://peopleskitchen.co.uk/get-involved/>. We will take the items to them the week after the service. If you can't donate an item but would

like to donate online, here's a link:

<https://www.justgiving.com/campaign/peopleskitchen2025>

- **Midweek events** – ‘Something to Think About’: Our midweek events will take place on the following Wednesdays:, September 23, October 14 and 28, November 11 and 25, and December 9 and 23. It's 5.45pm for 6-7pm at ReCoCo in (the Recovery College) in Carliol Square in Newcastle. If you'd like to join us, you're welcome to come on the day, but if you are able to email in advance so that we have an idea of numbers, that would be great: stevie.devlin@newcastleunitarians.org.uk.
- **Newcastle Quakers and Unitarians Social 11am, 11 September 2026:** We're still finalising the arrangements for this, but we're looking at having a social with Newcastle Quakers on Friday 11 September at 11am at the Quaker Meeting House in Gosforth. Confirmation to follow soon, if you're interested in coming, speak to David, Jane, or Louise, or email us at: info@newcastleunitarians.org.uk.
- **Fairtrade Fortnight 26th September – 11th October:** We're a Fairtrade Place of Worship,

using Fairtrade coffee, tea and biscuits, and a member of the Newcastle Fairtrade Partnership. This is the annual celebration of Fairtrade – watch out for the Newcastle Fairtrade Artwork trail! We'll put information in our emails and on our website.

- **Newcastle Fellowship Meal 4 October 2026**
TBC: Sunday 4 October is Fellowship Sunday – watch this space for details of a possible visit to our old home, the Church of the Divine Unity, and a Fellowship lunch after our Sunday Gathering!
- **Northern Unitarian Association Annual Meeting 24 October 2026, Stockton**
Unitarian Chapel: The annual gathering of Unitarians from Newcastle and Stockton at Stockton Chapel, when we'll make plans for the future, and meet our joint Generally Assembly Presidents, Rev. Alex and Rev. Jean Bradley.

I look forward to seeing everyone soon!

Louise Reeve, Chairperson, Newcastle upon
Tyne Unitarians

Newcastle Unitarians at Newcastle Pride 25 July 2026

As in previous years, we went to Newcastle Pride on 25 July 2026, attending the 'Christians Together at Pride' service at St. James URC church before the march at noon from Newcastle Civic Centre. This year, there were two of us! Louise Reeve



(Chairperson), and Stevie Devlin, our new 'Unitarians in the Community' Project Lead. Stevie writes:

"2026 was my first year marching in Pride. The day began with a beautiful service from Northern Lights MCC (Metropolitan Community Church). I was excited to do a reading, and we did an

insightful exercise based around what Pride means to us.

The march itself was really moving. People gathered to wave and cheer, and there was a real sense of community and togetherness. It felt especially important to be there this year, as there have been a lot of hate comments on social media about Newcastle Pride, and with the backwards movements around trans rights in the UK.

But the theme of this year's Pride 'City of Hope, Streets of Joy' resonated as we marched from the Civic Centre to Grey's Monument. Seeing tens of thousands of people unapologetically celebrating the LGBTQIA+ community was a moment of real hope."

Louise writes:

"Perhaps everyone has always felt they live in turbulent times – 'it was the best of times, it was the worst of times', as a much better writer than me once wrote – but right now feels especially uncertain. Newcastle Council recently attracted over 10,000 comments on their Facebook page for daring to fly the Pride flag alongside the Union Flag, Armed Forces Week flag, and St. George's Cross* (England had a World Cup match that

evening**). The Newcastle Chronicle has posted several times calling out hateful comments on their articles when they post anything related to Pride. Beyond our home town, it feels sometimes as though there is a concerted attack on the rights of gay people, trans people, bi people, and indeed anyone who isn't a straight cis*** person.



Perhaps that's why Newcastle Pride had a huge turnout this year, with over 8,000 people marching, including myself and Stevie. Following a moving and joyful service at St. James' URC, we joined our fellow people of faith near the Council Chamber. Whilst it's not a formal arrangement, many churches and congregations who support LGBTQIA+ rights choose to gather together and march as a group. As we marched past the announcer at the start, he called the message proclaimed by many present, 'God is Love', adding 'I couldn't agree more!'

Stevie took photos as I tried to keep our flag flying high (it was a windy day!) as we strolled down St. Mary's Place and Northumberland Street to the Monument, soundtracked by brass bands, drummers, and a mobile disco complete with glitterball. Street photographers roamed about, asking participants if they'd like to pose for them – many were only too happy to show off their outfits!

It was nice to be back on Newcastle's high street now that the roadworks have finished, although given the new street furniture, the cry of 'BOLLARD!' was often heard echoing up and down the march, lest someone walk into one by mistake. We arrived at the Monument to listen to speakers from across Newcastle, from the North East Mayor to UNISON's General Secretary, speak on all things Pride-related, and explore the market stalls.

If it seems bad to me as a straight ally, I can only imagine how grim things must sometimes seem to those directly affected by homophobia, transphobia, and prejudice of all kinds. And yet... many of those comments on Newcastle Council's page were supportive. Indeed, some were from gay and lesbian veterans, who wanted to see the Pride and veterans' flags flying together. The

Council is still flying the Pride flag and affirming their support. People rallied to raise funds for Durham Pride after their council pulled their funding. Over 8,000 people marched in Newcastle.

This won't banish prejudice and hate on its own. The fight continues. But it's a start."

* My biggest claim to fame this year; I took the photo showing the flags.

** They won.

*** 'Cis' is a word used to describe people who are not trans, in other words, people who identify as the sex they were assigned at birth.



Lay Worship Leaders Training Day 13 June 2026

Louise Reeve (Chairperson) and Stevie Devlin (Newcastle Unitarians in the Community Project Lead) attended this training day at Walmersly Chapel in Bolton. We both appreciated it! One of our fellow attendees, Rev. Mandy Reynolds, wrote this article about the event.

“At the Committee meeting on 10 November 2025 Rev. Tina Gandhi, mindful that there was the need for Lay Preachers and Non-Unitarian



Ministers to have access to support, proposed that there should be a local one-day gathering, hosted and facilitated by Unitarian College. The idea was that through practical workshops, reflective sessions and shared learning with time for mutual encouragement we would feel encouraged and inspired. NELUM agreed to fund the event.

The day exceeded my expectations. There was a good mixture of activity. We began with coffee before moving into the Chapel for worship led by Rev. Ant Howe from Unitarian College. He was also the organist so there was a bit of dashing back and forth to the lectern, which was handled effortlessly. We moved to the schoolroom and began with a check-in. I made a careful note of everyone's names and where they were from and

can still picture where everyone was sitting in the big circle. If I hadn't done this, it would have been in one ear and straight out the other however hard I tried!



One of the things we did was to stand in a timeline – the newest to Unitarianism at one end and the longest the other. I found myself about half way down the line (16 years ago) near Andrew from Scarborough and Phil. After lunch we paired up by day and month of birth before going out on a 'Credo Walk' having been given a prompt question of 'what keeps your spirit alive and well?'

I enjoyed a walk outside with Louise from Newcastle upon Tyne. We were in other small groups for practical exercises such as discussing the sort of questions that people are asking at the moment and then later on we were asked to think about the elements we could bring into a service

and the format of it. In my group the theme was 'The Rising Cost of Living'. At one point we were put on the spot and asked to spend five minutes writing a welcome, chalice lighting or blessing. I came up with this:

'What is it that you bring with you this morning?

Is your heart heavy or is it bursting with joy?

Let us be here for each other.

Let us give and receive according to where we are right now

for it is that feeling of connection which nourishes our souls.'

I am so glad that I went. What I took away from the day was how much commitment and passion there is in our small denomination. New people are joining, Unitarian College is providing high-quality training and it is possible to stay rooted in our tradition and free to explore new ways of being together. It is hoped that there will be more training days in the future. If you lead Services or are thinking about it I would recommend it. One person I spoke to early in the day had only taken one so far, but I sense that he would go down very well at Kendal. Perhaps Nick has already booked him for next year!"

The Rev. Herbert Barnes Memorial Award 2025: ‘Thank You for the Books!’

The Rev. Herbert Barnes Memorial Award for 2025 was awarded to Rev. Rob Foreman. This is an annual award presented by Newcastle Unitarians to a student from Unitarian College who, in the opinion of the College Principal, is a worthy entrant to the Unitarian Ministry. The object of the award is to provide each year the beginnings of a library for an outgoing student at the college who is about to enter the Unitarian Ministry.

You can find out more about the Rev. Herbert Barnes Memorial Award here:

<https://newcastleunitarians.org.uk/herbert-barnes-award/>

Rev. Foreman writes:

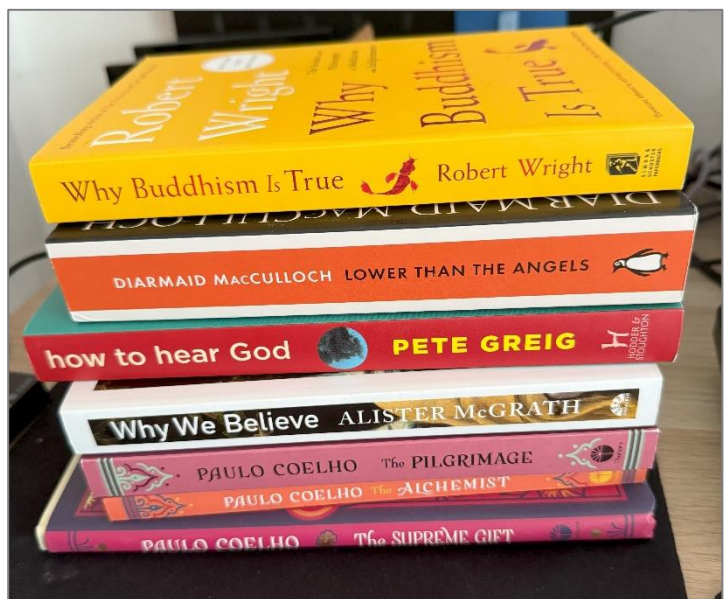
“Last year I was deeply honoured to receive the Herbert Barnes Award from the congregation at Newcastle Unitarians. I wanted to take this opportunity to thank everyone for your



generosity and to let you know how I have used the award.

As someone born in Accrington and raised in the shadow of Burnley, I was struck by an unexpected connection with Herbert Barnes's own story. Learning that his wife, Beatrice (Lizzie) Watterson taught mathematics in Burnley made me smile, as I attended Gawthorpe High School, now Shuttleworth College, just a few miles away. It is a small coincidence, but one that made receiving an award bearing his name feel all the more meaningful.

The books I chose reflect both my ministry today and the lifelong journey of learning that ministry invites. I purchased 'Why Buddhism Is True' by Robert Wright, as I continue to deepen



my understanding of other faith traditions and the insights they can offer into human flourishing. Alongside this, Diarmaid MacCulloch's 'Lower Than the Angels' promises to broaden my

understanding of the history of sexuality and the Church, an important area of study for anyone committed to an inclusive ministry.

I also chose 'How to Hear God' by Peter Greig and 'Why We Believe' by Alister McGrath. Although they come from theological perspectives different from my own, I value reading widely and engaging thoughtfully with voices across the Christian tradition. I believe that our own convictions are strengthened when we are willing to listen generously to others.

Finally, I completed my purchase with three books by Paulo Coelho: 'The Pilgrimage', 'The Alchemist' and 'The Supreme Gift'. These have a special place in my heart because I have long held the dream of walking the Camino de Santiago. Rather than seeing it as a single journey to complete, I hope to return to it throughout my life, walking different sections over many years. I hope it will become a recurring pilgrimage that keeps me grounded, reminds me to travel lightly, and continually calls me back to my spiritual path.

Thank you once again for your kindness and encouragement. Awards such as this do far more than purchase books; they invest in the

continuing formation of ministers. I am grateful for your support and look forward to sharing the fruits of these readings in my ministry in the years to come.”

Rev. Foreman led a service for us on ‘A Faith for the Future’ on 31 May 2026, and you can see the video of this here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FxRFysdEig8>



Add Your Voice – Calling on Prime Minister Andy Burnham to Take Stronger Action on Climate Change

The General Assembly has signed a new ‘Zero Hour’ petition, calling on Prime Minister Andy Burnham to take urgent action on the climate and nature crisis. The campaign is urging the Government to meet the UK's climate and nature commitments, pass the Nature and National Security Bill, reject new oil and gas licences and support the transition to clean energy. If you’d like to support this, here’s a link to sign the petition: <https://www.zerohour.uk/andy>

Newcastle upon Tyne Unitarians

Sunday Gatherings and Midweek Events:

August–September 2026

August

- 2 Chris Carr – ‘Memories of a Swing’
- 9 Diana Bebbby – ‘Stuff’
- 16 Louise Reeve – ‘Walking the Labyrinth’
- 23 Kainara Motta – ‘Yoga and Non-Possessiveness’, in person only
- 26 Stevie Devlin – ‘Something to Think About’
- 30 Norman Moore – ‘Unitarian Faith in Unitarian Hymns’

September

- 6 Diana Bebbby – ‘Harvest’ and Management Committee
- 13 Kainara Motta – ‘Yoga and Purity’ – note that the Great North Run takes place on this day!
- 20 Carolyn Briggs – TBC
- 23 Stevie Devlin – ‘Something to Think About – Mabon and the Autumn Equinox’
- 27 Chris Daniels ‘To ID or not to ID’

Sunday Gatherings take place in Northumbria University’s Large Spiritual Commons Room in

person and on Zoom, link is:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89981324654>

Midweek Events take place at ReCoCo in Carliol Square, Newcastle, in-person only.

Recordings of online services are here:

YouTube: tinyurl.com/NUnitarianYouTube

Facebook:

facebook.com/NewcastleuponTyneUnitarians



The Inquirer's 2026 Creative Competition: 'Dissent'

From Laura Autumn Cox, editor of *The Inquirer* magazine: "What does dissent mean to you? How do you dissent? Should we dissent? What causes inspire you to take action - and what does this action look like?"



You can submit to three categories – art, poetry, and prose.



Email entries to admin@theinquirer.org.uk by 1 October 2026, with an author photo and 20-word biography.



Send artwork in PDF or .jpeg format with a short description of the work.

📝 Send poetry (500 words per poem), and prose (1,500 words per piece) as Word attachments.

🏆 All winners and runners-up will be published in a special edition of *The Inquirer*.

💰 Entry donation: £5.00, sent via <https://www.inquirer.org.uk/pages/donate/>

If you have any questions, please contact the editor at: Lac170395@gmail.com



**National Unitarian Fellowship
Conference 2026**

Saturday 3rd October 2026

10.00am arrivals & refreshments
10.30am till 3.30pm conference

NAVIGATING CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM

"Christian nationalism" is on the rise, but what is it? Where is it leading?
Dr Stephen Backhouse has spent more than three decades studying and writing about religious nationalism. He is well placed to help us understand the dangers it poses and to find a coherent, effective response.

www.stephenbackhouse.com



Speaker:
Dr Stephen Backhouse

Register by email:
NUF secretary Ros Connolly
secretary@nufonline.org.uk

Registration deadline:
Friday 25th September

Cost: £10.00 payable on arrival cash or card
Light lunch & refreshments included

Venue:
**Cross Street Chapel, 29 Cross Street,
Manchester, M2 1NL**

Remembering Fiona Tait, 25 July 2026

Fiona Tait was a much-loved member of our fellowship who died in 2020. Her entry in the Robinson Book of Memorials reads:

Fiona Tait (b. 18 December 1968). Died 17 July 2020



“Fiona joined Newcastle upon Tyne Unitarians in February 2014. She was elected to the committee at the 19 April 2015 AGM, and brought a fresh perspective and energy to our congregation until resigning due to ill-health in February 2016. She was also the Calendar Editor from May 2014 until February 2016. Her interest in the Unitarian Earth Spirit Network and nature-centred spirituality led to the first Flower Communion Service at Newcastle upon Tyne Unitarians.”

Each year her friends and family gather in July at her memorial tree and bench in Belsay Woodlands to remember her – a lovely sunny day this year!

Supporting local, national, and international charities

We continue to support various charities in the North East and internationally. We invite anyone who wishes to do so to donate to charities helping those suffering through the war in Ukraine and Gaza, refugees fleeing war, persecution, and natural disasters. Please search online for a charity that speaks to you.

More locally, GAIN is a charity that helps those with autoimmune conditions. Donate online here: justgiving.com/fundraising/geordie-leather

We continue to support the Joseph Cowen Centre, helping homeless men in the city. They need tea, coffee, sugar, powdered milk, men's socks, underpants and toiletries plus paper, pens, puzzle books and playing cards – you can take them to the Byker centre or drop them at our church, or you can make a financial donation online: localgiving.org/charity/tynehousing



About Newcastle upon Tyne Unitarians

We are a free religious faith and affirm the unity of the human family, regardless of race, creed, class, orientation, or sex. We believe that peace,

compassion, and justice should be the hallmarks of a truly spiritual society, pursued in a spirit of freedom, reason, and tolerance.



The Unitarian Community in this city traces its history back to 1662, when Dr Richard Gilpin and Rev. William Durant started separate Nonconformist meetings after the Act of Uniformity. Under the Rev. Herbert Barnes, our former building in Ellison Place opened on Sunday 21 January 1940.

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