Newcastle Unitarians

The Calendar



October-November 2026

www.newcastleunitarians.org.uk

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

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Articles for the next calendar to be submitted by **Sunday 29 November 2026**. Thanks to all those who have contributed to this calendar.

Chair's Hello October and November 2026



We're heading into the autumn having had a busy summer in which our midweek gatherings have continued, we've launched a Spirituality course at ReCoCo (Recovery College Collective) led by Stevie Devlin – see left for details – and we've had two events with local Quakers – a coffee morning at the Quaker Meeting House in Gosforth, and a talk I gave at Stocksfield Quakers on 'This Spiritual Life.' I really enjoyed this chance to share our beliefs with fellow travellers, and we hope we'll work more closely together in future.

Even better, we're about to welcome a new member of our team! Yiyi Zhou is joining us in a part-time role as our Communications Lead, having previously worked for the Confucius Institute. We hope she'll have chance to meet everyone soon.

A reminder that we have our midweek events, ‘Something to Think About’ happening soon. **These** will take place on the following Wednesdays: October 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. In Stevie’s 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.”

I look forward to seeing everyone soon!
Louise Reeve, Chairperson, Newcastle upon Tyne Unitarians

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Notice of Annual General Meeting

In accordance with NUA Rule 6: General Meetings, formal notice is hereby given that the 181st Annual General Meeting of the Northern Unitarian Association will take place on Saturday October 24th 2026 at Stockton Unitarian Centre at 11.30am, and will also be available via Zoom for those unable to attend in person. Joining instructions will be forwarded to members shortly before the meeting.

The programme for the day, including the AGM agenda, is shown on the next page.

Member Churches and Individual Members are reminded that subscriptions for the current year are due. Please contact the Treasurer at the email address above for details of how to make payment.

It would be helpful if any items for inclusion in the Annual Report could be sent to the Secretary at the above email address by 19th October 2026.

Northern Unitarian Association

Annual Meeting - Saturday October 24th 2026

Programme for the Day

11.00 Arrivals, welcome, and coffee

11.30 Opening Devotions

11.40 NUA Annual General Meeting

Agenda:

1. Appointment of Chair for the meeting
2. Apologies for Absence
3. Minutes of the 2025 Annual General Meeting
4. Presentation of Reports:
   Committee Report
   Church Reports – Newcastle Stockton
   Treasurer's Report
5. Election of Officers:
   President, Secretary, Treasurer, Two Ordinary Members
6. Appointment of Accounts Examiner
7. Report on the NUA Innovations Fund Project
7. Any Other Business
8. Votes of Thanks

12.45 Lunch

13.30 **Session led by Revs Jean and Alex Bradley**
Joint Presidents of the Unitarian General Assembly

14.15 Discussion

15.00 Closing worship – Revs Jean and Alex Bradley

15.15 Tea and biscuits

15.30 Departures

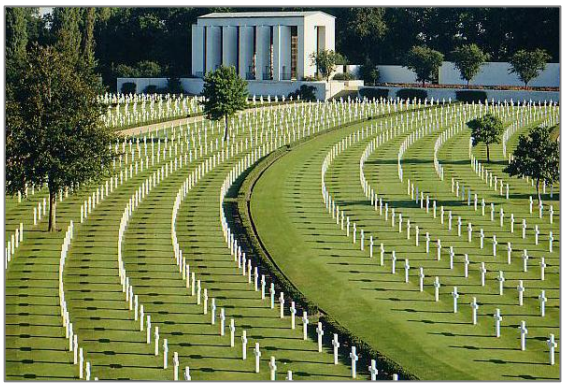
Whitby Summer Solstice Celebration
21 June 2026, by Louise Reeve



Whitby Flowergate Chapel hosts four services a year, to celebrate the equinoxes. On Sunday 21 June, Unitarians from across Yorkshire, Stockton and Newcastle joined them for their summer solstice gathering, a 'Celebration of Trees'. Rev. Claire Lee's invitation read: "We will be celebrating the light and also the sacredness of trees. So, if you have a short story about a tree that means a lot to you or an image of one then please share this with everyone!"

We gathered together for a celebration of trees and what they mean to us, sharing our stories before we went outside to mark the work that has been done to redevelop the Chapel's garden (see above), then back indoors to share a Strawberry Communion and hear performances from Whitby Community Choir. A wonderful event and many thanks to Rev. Clare Lee for inviting us!

Through the Doorway



Guest writer Suzanne Cleary from Ipswich Unitarians has shared this reflection on the 4th July celebrations with us:

“For many Americans, this 4th of July was a sad time. Our ideals have been trounced. I was deeply troubled by the disappointing spectacle of what was meant to be celebration of the 250th anniversary of the founding of our nation, a nation that is no doubt flawed but yet is reaching to create an ever-more perfect union. Or at least used to be.

Instead of a commemorative speech, an authoritarian used the occasion to attempt to consolidate his power. He tried to increase fear of “the other,” and clearly outlined who America’s “enemies” are scientists and doctors working on behalf of all of us, teachers and librarians—the most innocuous “enemies” one can imagine, the journalists fighting against great odds to inform us of the facts, researchers, immigrants—anyone who works for the common good, for an open

and just society; anyone who could stand in his way.

Yet I am heartened by two things, both of which moved me to tears. The first was watching the inspirational celebration of the opening of Former President Obama's Library in Chicago. In case we have forgotten how an American president speaks and acts, how he encourages the whole country to be a better version of itself, that was on full, joyful display at this amazing event that hit all the right notes and was attended by every living president except the current one.

The second heartening event was last week when we visited the Cambridge American Military Cemetery. As we walked through the doorway into the cemetery, we entered a quiet, well cared for sanctuary with rows upon rows of crosses and Stars of David. This visit brought into focus America's and the world's best ideals and actions.

It was sobering and touching at the same time to be in the presence of all those who had made the ultimate sacrifice so that freedom and democracy could survive. It is sad to think of all the lives lost far too soon. What would all of these heroes and their families have contributed if only they had



lived? In these days of crass, self-serving politicians, we can scarcely contemplate the bravery and commitment to our deepest ideals that was called forth during World War II. In the Visitors' Centre, it was especially tragic to see the photos and read the stories of some of those buried there. One young pilot was killed on his 25th mission. His wedding was scheduled for the next day, and his wife-to-be was there with countless others, expecting to greet him on his glorious return and celebrate the beginning of

their lives together. Alas, he rests in the Military Cemetery instead.

As I walked through that garden gate, I knew I had found a way to honour the birth of the founding of the United States of America 250 years ago. I had found a way to honour my father, who served from Normandy to the Battle of the Bulge, surviving the war without a scratch. I had found a way to honour the final sacrifice made by so many for all of us. As proclaimed at the cemetery, “Each one paid the cost, each one earned our freedom.”

As I walked through that gate into the peaceful burial ground, I felt proud once again to be an American and felt a renewed commitment to fighting for American ideals. The outcome depends upon standing up for our constitutional rights and especially on one of our key founding principles: voting. I’ll do my part by voting, donating funds to endangered candidates and sending postcards to encourage others to vote. While results in early elections are encouraging, it will ultimately depend upon all Americans to stop this current travesty of a government and make the dreams and ideals of America into reality.”

The Whitby Unitarian Journey

Rev. Margaret Kirk shared this article with us, written for a workshop on Change at the General Assembly Meetings in March 2026.



“The mission to preserve Flowergate Old Chapel [pictured above] has a strong basis in our story of dissent and social justice. Particularly the story of one man, one Minister who over 200 years ago crusaded against extreme poverty and unbridled privilege in the town. He became notorious for doing it! He was imprisoned many times and pilloried ceaselessly in the press. A few years ago, he was acknowledged by Whitby Civic Society, as ‘a brave defender of people`s rights.’ These are words on the blue plaque proudly displayed on the wall outside our chapel.

It is this crusading spirit of defiance against social injustice that has inspired a group of us to work

over a number of years towards saving our building for the community, to honour that spirit and prevent our chapel from becoming yet another holiday home to enrich the pockets of property developers. We are a part of Whitby`s history and the mission for social justice continues in this small coastal town just as keenly as it did then.

Throughout we have been able to draw upon the support of Simon Bland, our Ministry and Congregational support Officer. Two years ago, we drew up a Licence contract with Flash Company Arts, a Community Interest Company. They have a licence to use the chapel for small arts activities. They support our Unitarian ethos and have been coming regularly to our monthly services.

We gained planning permission to remove pews, re-flag the floor and remove part of the screen between the entrance area and the main worship area to satisfy fire regulations. An expensive undertaking that absorbed most of our funds. We now have an open space to allow for more active arts activities

which user groups are delighted with and we feel we have achieved a great deal. Above all, we

want our building to be used by the community to enrich the lives of local people.

But, unfortunately, the four of us have had to face up to the fact that we cannot take the chapel into the future. We approached the Deceleration Team to help us through our conflicting feelings. They helped us to accept that our Trusteeship had run its course. So, it came as a great relief to be informed that the Innovation Fund had provided a grant to steer us through the process and a person to give us advice and encouragement.

Christopher Daniel arrived in Whitby in January 2026, together with Simon Bland. They visited the chapel and were enthusiastic about its new space, the potential for more community activity and the evident commitment of our two community workers – our licensees. Their commitment to our Unitarian values and the social justice issues that are part of our heritage, have helped to reassure us that there is a future.

Together with Simon, Chris is helping to steer us through the process of dissolving our charity, working closely with the district treasurer as our assets are transferred to the district temporarily. The district will hold the assets until a CIC

(Community Interest Company) is set up to manage them permanently.

Although, there are no longer monthly services, the two community workers and our lay leader, Claire Lee have agreed to hold services four times a year to celebrate solstices and equinoxes. The first one was held on the 21st of December and attracted 35 people. Most of them were local."

Rev. Margaret Kirk – chair of Flowergate Old Chapel CIO

August 2026's Letter from Liz Slade

Liz Slade, the Chief Officer of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches, writes in August 2026:

"I am very proudly an infrastructure nerd. I am delighted by the well-designed or organically grown systems that enable things to work – often the unloved essential networks that so many important things depend on.

Part of this love perhaps comes from my former career in the world of health systems – work that included creating tools that helped doctors design local health services that met their communities' needs while following best practice care.



Our glorious and frustrating NHS is some of our most precious national and local infrastructure, yet so much of it was designed at a time when people's lives were very different, and it can be hard to uproot ways of working when new needs or new treatments appear. And it's infrastructure that is tended by people with extraordinarily deep care and commitment – for many NHS workers, it's far more than just a job, but a calling, knowing they are part of something bigger than themselves, something worth going all those extra miles for.

Britain's spiritual infrastructure has long fascinated me too. Each church building is a



story of the cultural context in which it was built – whether it's a Norman church with an ancient yew tree in the churchyard telling a story of its pre-Christian history, an early Dissenting meeting house deliberately made to look unlike a church so its congregation may be 'hidden,' or something even more unusual like the Octagon Chapel in Norwich (picture above)..

In recent decades, as church attendance has dropped, there are fewer pairs of hands to tend the inherited infrastructure, but also less creative energy to build what is newly needed now.

Buildings designed a few centuries ago with a higher level of congregational support in mind can eat the best part of a community's attention; the physical infrastructure is hard to ignore, and so often takes the first bite of the available energy.

Meanwhile, there are new demands placed on congregations that their Victorian or Georgian

ancestors wouldn't have had to deal with in the same way. Financial management, meeting Charity Commission reporting expectations, implementing safeguarding policies well – these are all essential for tending the invisible infrastructure that keeps a congregation healthy.

Beyond those management responsibilities, there is of course cultural infrastructure – the coffee rota, the pastoral care team, the person who keeps track of members' birthdays, or finds the right words for the poster on the noticeboard.

All of these play an essential role in a congregation being a place that can safely, reliably, sustainably offer spiritual health. All before a candle has been lit or a word has been said from the pulpit. A lot of these can take the same amount of work whether there are six people in the congregation or sixty.

An important question for us as a movement is how to make the care of our collective infrastructure viable. Is it appropriate to expect a congregation of half-a-dozen people to steward their inherited infrastructure alone? What might alternatives look like? We know that the risks of weak governance affect us all, through reputational risk and the potential to lose

precious parts of our network of spiritual infrastructure. Might Unitarian congregations take a route similar to the Quakers, who are combining multiple local and area meetings into a single charity?

We are keen that the GA's innovation fund supports the health of the invisible infrastructure, enabling different approaches to governance and management tasks, or getting some outside help to get over a hurdle.

The practical, management side of tending our infrastructure is necessary for our movement to be healthy, but it is not sufficient. The energy to tackle this practical work comes from a sense of calling, a clear vision of what the congregation offers, what it stands for, the impact it makes on people's lives and the local community. This needs the space for imagination – exactly the thing that is hard to call on when local leaders are worrying about the hole in the church roof, or managing hall rentals.

But without this clear vision, the practical work can feel impossible or overwhelming. Amid the demands our buildings, governance structures, and charity management make on our time, we

need to create space for the reason we are gathering in community.

Each congregation will express this uniquely, and it is more than a rational ‘mission statement.’ I think of this sense of vision and purpose for a congregation as something that is alive, that is embodied, that is held in the hearts of leaders, and is held in relationship. It’s something that is tender, and so relies on trust and good relationships – it’s very hard for someone to express the deep calling they feel in the congregation amid an argumentative committee meeting.

Some congregations and Districts will be blessed with skilled facilitators who can create the conditions for exploratory conversations to happen, where members can tune into their deep sense of what the world is asking of the congregation, and others will choose to engage an external facilitator who can support the right conversations to happen.

It’s important that amid the noisy clamour of the day-to-day demands of keeping our congregations going, we also create the spaces for stepping back, reflecting, imagining. We welcome expressions of interest to the Innovation

Fund if this is something you would like to try; the smaller development grants are designed with this kind of work in mind, the groundwork that prepares the soil for new ideas to grow. And do contact Nick if you'd like to know more about him hosting a Three Horizons workshop in your area.

This reflective work is a different approach to tending the infrastructure that we are stewarding to the work of preparing accounts, or getting quotes for fixing the guttering, or managing the hall rentals – but it is just as essential.

I have deep faith that the ideas for the future flourishing of our congregations are already held by its members – at least as a tiny kernel, if not yet fully formed. But I also know that ideas don't let themselves be known until the conditions are right – and that means making space outside of the day-to-day. I'm pretty sure that what Quaker writer Parker J. Palmer says about the conditions for the soul to arise applies to our sense of vision for congregational life too:

"The soul is like a wild animal — tough, resilient, savvy, self-sufficient, and yet exceedingly shy. If we want to see a wild animal, the last thing we should do is to go crashing through the woods, shouting for the creature to come out. But if we

are willing to walk quietly into the woods and sit silently for an hour or two at the base of a tree, the creature we are waiting for may well emerge, and out of the corner of an eye we will catch a glimpse of the precious wildness we seek."

For everyone who is grappling with the hard work of sustaining our Unitarian infrastructure, I hope that as we come to the end of this summer, there can be moments of this quiet stillness, and the conditions to share what you find there with your fellow stewards."



Newcastle upon Tyne Unitarians
Sunday Gatherings and Midweek Events:
October – November 2026

October

4 Chris Carr – Fellowship Sunday

11 Kainara Motta – ‘Yoga and Contentment’, Management Committee

14 Stevie Devlin – ‘Something to Think About: Truth and Truths’

25 Rev. Jean and Rev. Alex Bradley – ‘The Ministry We All Bring to One Another', NUA AGM Weekend

28 Stevie Devlin – ‘Something to Think About – Samhain’

November

1 Louise Reeve – ‘The Fellowship of All Souls’, Management Committee

8 Louise Reeve – Remembrance Sunday, **START TIME IS 10.45am**

11 Stevie Devlin: ‘Something to Think About’

15 Smajo Beso – ‘Compassion’

22 Chris Carr – TBC

25 Stevie Devlin – MIDWEEK: ‘Something to Think About’

29 Rev. Paul Walker – Advent

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

Comms Clinic, 22 September 2026

It's a common saying among Unitarians that 'more people would come, if only they knew about us!,' so much so that 'If only they knew about us!' was the name of a communications workshop at our Annual Meetings this year. My own feeling is that better communications on its own isn't the single solution to declining attendance among some congregations that it's occasionally touted as, but it's hard not to argue that in a world where people are bombarded with information, it's essential to proactively get your

message out if you want people to actually find and join you.



Happily, the UK Unitarian and Free Christian movement has recently recruited two new members of staff, Pamela Welsh, and Jess Ackroyd, to support communications, and they've been busy working on this! Among their work is the creation of a new monthly 'Comms Clinic' for Unitarian communications to share ideas and discuss problems, rather like the Unitarian Administrators and Unitarian Finance Networks. In their words:

"Doing comms for a congregation can be a lonely business. You put a post together, send the newsletter out, update the website, and often have no idea whether any of it is landing or whether you're approaching it the right way. There's rarely anyone to ask, and it can feel

disheartening when your efforts aren't rewarded with more people through the doors.

That's why we're starting a monthly Comms Clinic. It's an informal drop-in where you can bring whatever you're working on, or whatever's been bothering you, and talk it through with others who understand the challenge. Expect practical advice, fresh ideas, and plenty of peer support."

I've long been an advocate of better support for, and links between, people working on the administrative side of keeping our congregations going, and as a member of the previous Uni-Coms network for Unitarian communicators, I attended the first Comms Clinic on 22 September. I'd strongly recommend it, it was a good discussion and as always, it's just great to connect with others across the UK facing the same challenges and get mutual support and encouragement. The next one will be later this month, check here for more details:

https://www.unitarian.org.uk/whats-happening/

or email Jess Ackroyd at: JAckroyd@unitarian.org.uk

Louise Reeve

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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