



THE YORK UNITARIAN

St Saviourgate Unitarian Chapel, York, YO1 8NQ

July 2022

From the Minister

I am, as many of you will have gathered by now, no historian. My sense of the passing of time was questionable before lockdown, and almost two years of disrupted routine seems to have eroded what little sense of chronology I had. It's not uncommon for me to say 'see you Sunday' when leaving on Saturday night, failing to observe that Sunday is in fact tomorrow, or to mention something which happened 'the other week' only to discover the memory is months or even years old. So it's not surprising that I find it impossible even to imagine the passing of 350 years - the amount of time since a liberal religious congregation began meeting in St Saviourgate.

As David Zucker points out on our website (<https://yorkunitarians.org.uk/2022/05/10/york-unitarians-350th-anniversary-1672-2022/>), 1672 was a fascinating year. There were many changes taking place in the world at the time our chapel had its origins. The economy was a mess and Europe in political turmoil. In a volatile political and cultural context, the place of religion was open to question as never before.

So while I may struggle with the dates and details of our past, I can say with confidence that the seeds of our present congregation were sown in those first years after the Act of Toleration, when our forebears set out to imagine a place of worship which would provide spiritual sustenance to thinkers and rule-breakers and inspire them to tackle some of the worst injustices of their society. Of course, they could not have begun to imagine some of the conversations which have emerged recently: Brexit and coronavirus, hybrid worship and human rights as a term were all a long way off. But they would recognise our approach to these challenges.

If our preachers today cannot say, with Theophilus Lindsey, that "Holy Scripture" is our "only rule and guide," we can certainly say that "you were not to believe any thing because it was spoken by me" but to "examine and compare" for yourselves. Time has changed many things, but it has not changed the need for a faith which respects the reason and conscience of the individual. And while I don't have a crystal ball, I feel pretty secure in predicting that intelligent religion will still be a requirement in another 350 years!

JULY AT A GLANCE

**A MONTH OF
SUNDAYS
at 11am
In Chapel and on Zoom**

3rd July 11am
Stephanie Bisby, *350 Years and Counting*
Music: David Hammond

10th July 11am
Chris Newsam, *Belonging, Becoming and Beyond*
Music: Laura Jones

17th July 11am
Stephanie Bisby, *Bring Flowers to our Altar*
Music: Laura Jones
(This is a flower communion service - you may like to bring a flower for someone else to take away)

24th July 11am
Rev Nicky Jenkins
You Never Step in the Same River Twice
Music: David Hammond

31st July 11am
Simon Cross (*Progressive Christianity Network*)
Music: David Hammond

Please note Stephanie will be unavailable from 5-7 July at the 'Ministry in the Making' residential and from 18-24 July (holiday).

Thursdays at 11am, congregational meditation group in Chapel and on Zoom, contact Dee or Stephanie for details

Saturday 2nd July

11am Talk: Unitarians past, present and future

1.30pm Ukulele music

2.30pm Wind Quintet followed by refreshments

3.45pm recorder music

6.30pm Poetry open mic - poets, please email Stephanie to book your slot

Sunday 3rd July Recorder and piano music and refreshments following the service

Friday 8th July St Crux fair

Saturday 9th July Yorkshire Unitarian Union Summer Gathering at Scarborough

Tuesday 12th July 6.30pm 'Why are we Here?' discussion group on Zoom - 'Spirit'

Friday 15th July 12.30pm Concert: Eleanor Kornas and Paul Milhau, piano/violin

Tuesday 26th July 6.30pm 'Why are we Here?' discussion group on Zoom - 'Mission'

Wednesday 27th July 7pm Poetry group meeting on Zoom and at members' homes, contact Dee or Stephanie for details

Friday 29th July 12.30pm Concert: Nick Morrice, The poetry of Keats with music by Schubert, readings plus music by David Hammond and Catherine Strachan



LIBRARY BOOKS**by Barbara Barnes**

Review of a new library book: "faithful practices: everyday ways to feed your spirit".

edited by Erik Walker Wikstro.

This book, published by the Unitarian Universalist Association in 2018, is a compilation of 22 chapters divided into: spiritual practices born (i) in tradition, (ii) in play and (iii) in daily life. Some such practices are quite formal, others more simply reflective, attending in a more focused way to what we do each day. A clue to the scope of what is termed 'spiritual practices' may be in the background of the editor. Before being ordained as a Unitarian Minister, he was a juggler, magician, escape artist, clown and fire-eater!

The chapters range from 'My Cosmala', 'Making Magical Moments' and 'Letting Them Go', 'Creating Community' to 'Roller Derby' (a strange American sport) and even 'Integrating Technology into Spiritual Practice'.

Some of this book's contents have been addressed more fully in other publications but, for me, the brevity, variety and especially the 'questions for your consideration' which followed each chapter are what held my attention. So much so that I wonder if these questions could be the focus for members and friends to ponder together? A study group may be too formal: a social group too unfocussed but something in between perhaps?

From Stephanie: I agree this would be a great topic for discussion. Please let me or Barbara know if you share that view!

PS Roller Derby is not just an American sport - I have several British friends who participate, but although I love roller skating (see right), I haven't yet been brave enough to try Roller Derby!

BIRTH AND REBIRTH

York Unitarians: then and now
an historical recounting for their 350th anniversary

by Andrew Hill

of their early (17th century)

and

their recent (21st century) story

Followed by some thoughts about the future from Stephanie Bisby

Saturday 2nd July in St. Saviourgate Chapel at 11 a.m.

WHY ARE WE HERE?

Members of York Unitarians and other YUU and neighbouring congregations are invited to an online discussion group in July and August based on 'Why are we Here? Discerning our Unitarian Mission in an Upturned World'. The book has been published this year by the Lindsay Press. You don't have to have read the book to take part, but there is a copy in the library if you want to have a look, and the essays in it are based on last year's Hucklow Summer School theme talks, which are still available online to listen to at <https://www.hucklowsummerschool.co.uk/>

Sessions are at 6.30pm on 12th and 26th July and 9th and 23rd August, and generally last around an hour. Stephanie will be coordinating the group and would be happy to have volunteers to do readings and/or co-lead sessions.



Welcome as a spiritual practice
By Jenny Jacobs
A talk delivered at the Unitarian General
Assembly Meetings in Birmingham in
April

The worst welcome I ever got was at a Unitarian chapel which doesn't even exist. Rather embarrassingly, I first discovered the Unitarians through doing an online quiz - something like, what religion should you be? (I'm a sucker for online quizzes.) And having filled out a fairly lengthy questionnaire, the quiz told me that my best match was Unitarian. Unitarian? I wondered, what's that? (as many have wondered before me...) Anyway, I stayed online to find out more, and that's where the trouble started.

I live in Harrogate, so not unreasonably, I wondered if there was a chapel near me and Googled Harrogate Unitarians. Sure enough, a web page came up which told me that Harrogate Unitarians meet at the Friends' Meeting House in Harrogate at 3pm on the second Sunday every month. So, greatly daring, I set off one chilly Autumn day for my first visit to a Unitarian service. There was no-one at the Friends' Meeting House when I arrived with about ten minutes to spare, it was all locked up, and no-one turned up while I was waiting. Three o'clock came and went and eventually I realised no-one **was** coming, gave up and went home... It was at least six months before I had another go, visited St Saviourgate Chapel in York, and have been going there ever since. But it was not an auspicious start. Some might have been put off forever from trying their local Unitarian chapel if they'd had a similar experience.

Much to my horror, when setting out to write this piece, I checked to see what came up - seven years on from my initial experience - if I googled Harrogate Unitarians again and the same page is still up there on the web, even though the link to the UK Unitarians homepage no longer works, because of course we have a new website. But that page from the old website is still there, also announcing to would-be Unitarians in Yorkshire that there are two Bradford congregations, although I'm pretty sure that Bradford Broadway Avenue has closed, and giving details about services at chapels in Whitby, Lydgate and Pudsey which have also closed their doors. This

matters. It may well be the case that **other** pages from our old website are live, misdirecting people who might be trying to find us. And that's no way to welcome anybody.

So that was my **worst** Unitarian welcome. But so long as the chapel is actually open, it's almost bound to be better than that! I thought a lot about welcome before sitting down to put my thoughts in writing (I can't do off-the-cuff, sorry). And I'm sure that what works for one person might be exactly the wrong thing for someone else. Some might want and expect a warm greeting, some might just want to hide unnoticed at the back, at least at first. For example, first and foremost I was looking for a **spiritual message** which resonated with me. I was hungry for the message, and wasn't bothered that much about who else was there or whether they noticed I'd come along.

Before I joined the community at York, I had for a few years been going regularly to Ripon Cathedral. The first time I turned up there, they ignored me completely. And the second time and the third time and the fourth.... You get the picture. But did that put me off? No. I liked being anonymous and just one of many. Actually as time went on, I did end up getting quite involved there one way and another, but at first there was no welcome of any sort whatsoever - and I was fine with that. What put me off Ripon, in the end, was that the message didn't resonate with me, a lot of it didn't make sense and some was positively off-putting, particularly the words to some of the hymns.

On the other hand, on another occasion, I went to a very popular Anglican church in the centre of Harrogate, because the Diocesan Environmental Officer was giving the service on an environmental theme, and the local Green Party had been invited along. I went as their representative. I entered a packed church - and I mean packed, it was as if someone famous or very popular had died - I've never seen anything like it apart from at Christmas at Ripon. I sidled into a pew at the very back of the church. But much to my surprise, and indeed horror, the vicar, Father Tony, somehow spotted the alien face amongst his numerous flock and the next thing I knew he was striding right down the length of the church, gripped me firmly by the



hand and bade me welcome. How did he DO that? I don't know. But I just felt a bit embarrassed. It was a warm welcome. But it wasn't what I was after.

I must digress here for a moment and tell you about a friend of mine who had an even **warmer** welcome. He's been a church-goer all his life, and as a youngster was brought up in a Congregational church (now the URC). But when he went away to university, he thought he'd try the Pentecostal church near where he was living. The way he tells it, in order to get into the church that first Sunday, he had to get past two large gentlemen guarding the entrance at the top of a flight of steps. "Before I knew it," he told me, "one of them had grabbed me and planted a kiss smack on the mouth. Maybe I looked a bit startled because he explained that the elders of the church had instructed them to "greet the brothers with a holy kiss." "

Apparently this command comes in a letter from Paul to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 16:20) although I don't think Paul specifies where the kiss should land! Despite all this, my friend did actually keep going to this church for a few weeks, ducking or averting his head every time he went in. What put him off, finally, was the preacher announcing during the morning sermon that anyone who stayed away from church to watch a football match could not consider themselves "a man of God". England was playing Germany in the 1970 World Cup that evening.

His current church is an evangelical establishment, what he himself refers to as part of the "lunatic fringe". But whenever there's a big football match on, they get in crates of beer and everyone watches the match on the big screen in the church (which is in a warehouse on an industrial estate). You decide which church is more welcoming!

So what was my welcome like on that first day when I visited York? I simply can't for the life of me remember. I don't recall who spoke to me, or indeed whether anyone did, although we do customarily have one or more people on the door saying hello and handing out hymn books and service sheets. But what I DO remember is the service. It was brilliant and I remember it in detail (and whenever I see that Marta Hardy is giving the service, my heart lifts and I am

always there). And for me, that was what I was looking for – not a friendly community, not greetings beforehand or coffee afterwards, though indeed I did find all of those things and more – but an inspirational service, a meaningful message, a genuine spiritual experience which spoke to me and which made me feel I'd found my spiritual home.

And if you've got that, what more do you really need?

As I carried on going to York, regularly, obviously I found myself becoming part of a community, particularly after I started doing services myself. It was after I did my first service that someone approached me and asked, "Have you ever thought about becoming a member?" Until that moment, I confess it had never crossed my mind! Not coming from a church background, I think I wasn't even aware that there were members and non-members. I remember being surprised that I actually had to apply to become a member and that there was the possibility that I might be rejected!

And that brings me to all those customs we have and the things we do each week as a matter of course, things that seem obvious to us but may be completely new to someone visiting us – possibly visiting any church - for the first time

For example, years ago, before I started any of my church-going, I went along with my son to the local Baptist church, as there was a possibility he might become one of their regular musicians and we wanted to see what would be expected of him, musically speaking. We sat through the service but when it came to the collection, all I had was small change in my pockets, I hadn't brought my wallet. I put all I had in the collection plate – it wasn't a lot, a couple of quid maybe - and the lady next to me actually said out loud, "It's a long time since we had anyone who didn't put **folding** money in the collection plate!" I was mortified – I hadn't actually realised that you had to pay to go to church! And of course you don't, although we prefer it if you do. But had I been thinking that Harrogate Baptists was the church for me, this incident would have disabused me right away.

So another thing to bear in mind as regards welcome is that people come from



many backgrounds and some may never have set foot in a church or chapel before and simply have no idea of the conventions. A lot of the things we may think are obvious actually aren't obvious at all and may need explaining. Gently and kindly.

Finally, I feel I should at least once allude to the topic on which I've actually been asked to speak, welcome **as a spiritual practice**. My initial thought was that I really didn't have anything to say about this at all and I was quite surprised to be asked. But as I've thought about this more and more, there are two things that have emerged. Firstly, that welcome is about far more than what happens when someone first turns up at a Unitarian chapel, or what happens on the door each week. It's about extending that feeling of welcome to the **existing** congregation, and especially to the odd awkward customer, the person who seems to find fault with everything that's happening - or not happening - or the way it's happening... It's about hearing those people, being there with and for them and responding with love as the guiding principle, no matter how irritating they may be in that particular moment. We're all human and we all have our awkward moments and afterwards we look back and think we could have handled things differently and better. But the main thing is to keep trying, and keep that principle of loving welcome at the forefront of our minds.

And finally, I can't help harking back to my favourite George Herbert poem, which became a famous hymn (and it still features in a slightly edited format in our green hymnbook, number 57, Teach me my God and King). The poem is called The Elixir. I won't read the whole thing but the pertinent lines are these:

**Teach me, my God and King,
In all things Thee to see,
And what I do in anything
To do it as for Thee.**

.....

**All may of Thee partake:
Nothing can be so mean,
Which with his tincture—"for Thy sake"—
Will not grow bright and clean.**

**A servant with this clause
Makes drudgery divine:
Who sweeps a room as for Thy laws,
Makes that and th' action fine.**

**This is the famous stone
That turneth all to gold;
For that which God doth touch and own
Cannot for less be told.**

So - I don't want to labour the point - but I agree with Herbert. Everything in life can be a spiritual practice - **life** is a spiritual practice - if done right, if done for the glory of God, however you conceive of God. And if you don't like the term God, then as if done for the essential right order of the Universe, the beautiful underlying pattern, the enduring melody. Bear that in mind, **whatever** you're doing, and you won't go far wrong. And that - of course! - includes welcoming.

St Crux fund raising day Fri 8th July 2022

A reminder that we are booked in for our usual fund-raising day at St Crux but this year we plan to do things a little differently than in previous years. We will not be selling any bric-a-brac this year. Instead we will be concentrating our efforts on having just three stalls outside.

There will be the book stall which will include CDs and DVDs. There will be another stall that will be 'regifted items' and finally a craft stall where any home-made items can be sold and these can include jams or chutneys. We will of course still have the café sales inside.

Please do sign up for the rota even if it's only for an hour or two! Every little helps...

Induction Service

On 28th May we were finally able to celebrate Stephanie's induction as minister. Three York ministers attended in person (pictured below: Margaret Kirk, Nicky Jenkins and of course Stephanie Bisby) and a fourth, Myrna Michell, was present on Zoom.



Rev Claire MacDonald charged the congregation to "hold and care for Stephanie as your minister, since a minister is a host and a guest as they say, in your strong, continuous congregational life."

Rev. John Carter gave the charge to the minister, featuring wisdom from the world of musical theatre. The congregation gave Stephanie the kind gift of flowers, pictured.



Pride Weekend

Thanks to everyone who helped with setting up and staffing the stall in Knavesmire on Saturday 18th June, and who joined us on the march.



If you missed the Pride service on Sunday 19th June, you may like to read the opening words on the UUA website:

<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/opening/protest-and-party>.

The service ended with these thoughts:

"Pride can be set against humility, and we can say that humility is a virtue and pride a sin. But pride can also be set against shame, and when society has done all it can for the longest time to make a person feel as if they don't deserve to exist, don't deserve a space in the world, don't deserve love or happiness, then pride can be a very healthy antidote.

Pride in our progress encourages more progress. Pride in ourselves and our society encourages us to treat one another better. And pride in our diversity encourages us to care for each other regardless of race, ability, gender and sexual expression. Ultimately, I was proud to march yesterday behind the banner 'Unitarians celebrate diversity' - because Pride is how we celebrate diversity."



Anneliese Emmans Dean

On Monday June 20th, Unitarians joined family and friends of Anneliese Emmans Dean at York Cemetery to celebrate her life.

Anneliese was a hugely talented poet and performer and a passionate environmental activist. She was born on 1 June 1963 in St Albans, Hertfordshire and when she was 3 her family moved to York, which was to be her home for the rest of her life. Her passion for languages took her to France, Germany and Mexico, as well as to Cambridge to study Modern and Medieval Languages. While housebound with ME she worked on phonetics for the Oxford English Dictionary, as well as proofreading linguistics journals.

Anneliese and Mike were married at the Unitarian Chapel, by Margaret Kirk, who recalls:

“Anneliese and Mike were married at the Unitarian chapel here in York in 1999. It was an especially joyful occasion at which the couple celebrated mazel tov, the smashing of the glass followed by the resounding mazel tov cheer- a Jewish ritual honouring Anneliese’s Jewish roots. A few years later, the chapel became the venue for her very first Buzzing performance about insects: it was exciting, full of all those qualities we associate with Anneliese - poetry of ingenious wit performed with panache but always grounded in a scientific understanding of the creatures she was bringing to life. Anneliese always insisted that it was this first performance that launched her career and led to performances throughout the UK.”

Tributes can still be left, and read, at: <https://annelieseemmansdean.muchloved.com>

Donations to [St Nick’s](#), of which Anneliese was a patron .

If you would like to make a one-off donation to York Unitarians CIO by BACS, the details are:

York Unitarians CIO
Sort Code: 40-52-40
Account number: 00032702

A Monthly Standing Order is particularly welcome. Please also consider Gift Aid if you are a taxpayer. More information from the Treasurer
Richard Brown

USEFUL CONTACT DETAILS

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Laura Cox, Elizabeth Faiers,
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Colton’s Hospital Trustees:
Nicky Jenkins (Chair),
Elizabeth Faiers (Treasurer),
Stephanie Bisby, Dee Boyle, Laura
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***Please send your contributions for
the next issue to Stephanie.***

