



*Brighton*  
**Unitarians**

## September Newsletter

### **Sunday Services**

Please note: services are at 11 a.m. unless otherwise stated.  
Everyone is welcome.

We would be grateful if you would switch your phones to airplane mode before the start of the service.

01st September- Jef Jones, Lay Pastor, Brighton Unitarian Church  
Pianist Stuart Deeks

08th September - Jef Jones, Lay Pastor, Brighton Unitarian Church  
Pianist Kathy Pitt

15th September - Jo O'Sullivan, Member, Brighton Unitarian Church  
Pianist Pamela Nichols

22nd September Equinox Service  
Jef Jones, Lay Pastor, Brighton Unitarian Church  
Pianist Joe Ward

29th September - Rev Duncan Voice, Ditchling Unitarian Chapel  
Musician to be confirmed

Quiet Reflection Circle 7 - 8 pm, Thursday 12th September 2019.

See below for more information.

### **Our Mission Statement**

Brighton Unitarian Church provides a caring environment, with spiritual depth, without dogma, offering a community resource to diverse groups in congruence with our values, promoting a diversity of Unitarianism nationally, and with a concern for a more compassionate world.

## Welcome from Jef

Welcome to our newsletter for September.

You'll see below an appeal for more volunteers from Helen Lee, who is running our Setting Up Rota. Our Sunday services depend on our volunteers opening and setting up the church and I would encourage you to positively consider Helen's appeal.

On the evening of September 26th all members of our church community are invited to a workshop about safeguarding and safe lone working in the church. Again, please do consider coming along.

The 22nd September is our Autumn Equinox service. As always if you'd like to contribute a reading, a short reflection or just a few words on what the Equinox means to you, you are most welcome.

With all best wishes, Jef Jones

## From the Lay Leader

This is longer than my usual piece for the Newsletter. On Sunday 18th August my address celebrated the 199th anniversary of the first service at Brighton Unitarian Church. Several people asked for copies so I thought I would make the address from that service my piece for this month's Newsletter.

On Sunday, August 22nd 1820 three hundred and fifty people came to our first service. The new church in New Road had 16 trustees, and in honour of that original congregation and its sixteen trustees I would like to share with you sixteen thoughts about liberal religion as it was then, and as it is today.

### **1. Our founders were brave and their bravery came from an interior struggle.**

They would have been raised with the notion of God as a loving and forgiving force but that God would also have been a moral judge, part of a punitive scheme in which all human beings were held to be innately sinful. This principle of Original Sin was not just the prevailing intellectual idea in Christianity, it lived inside people as a truth. Our founders' truth, a God of reason and love, a God of possibility was not exactly new but for that generation of Unitarians to redefine God in this way was unorthodox. Some of our founders must have struggled in their very souls. This inner process must have been committed, painful, creative and liberating.

### **2. Our founders not only rejected the dogma of Calvinism, they actively asserted their own faith.**

They revered Jesus the man for his moral example, for the poetry of his soul and for his sense of justice and compassion. This was their anchor; a serious and thoughtful respect for Jesus. They believed in God as the true and sacred spirit of the universe; they believed Jesus was not God but a godly man even so.

Unitarianism loses depth and resonance when it forgets its Christian origins. I have heard some Unitarians speak of Jesus with a kind of casual contempt, in a way that

they would not dream of speaking about the founders or prophets of other faiths. If we say that one of our fundamental values is respect for other faiths then it must surely be spiritually unhealthy to despise our own roots, our own story. Our founders were open to teachings and traditions outside of Christianity but, in the freedom they bequeathed us, we can easily forget their Christianity. Indeed we can forget the creative dynamic generated by Christians struggling with Christianity, and struggling to become new kinds of Christians. That dynamic created our church.

**3. Our founders weren't just open to non-Christian ideas and teachings they were actively interested in them.** They were positive and curious about what they could learn from Greek philosophy, Buddhism, Hinduism, the Romantic poets, the American transcendentalists. They reached out to the world and they positively embraced new ideas.

**4. They were open-minded but not so open-minded that their brains fell out.** They believed in thinking. This is one of the most distinctive features of Unitarian pioneers. They were shaped by the Age of Enlightenment, and its ethos of reason. They believed it was possible to have a religious life without dogma, superstition and hierarchy. And today we too strive to be a thoughtful, reasoning, questioning church.

**5. They had a positive attitude to science.** They were living through an age of astonishing scientific discoveries and so are we, although our troubled times distract us from it. Our troubled times, however, also compel us to face the reality that what we do with scientific knowledge can turn out to be destructive. Let's not lose sight of the fact that petrol, plastic, antibiotics the internet were not invented by evil geniuses. They were exciting contributions to human life. For Unitarians and for everyone alive on earth right now this leads to some interesting questions. How can humanity as a whole interact with science so that it benefits both humans and sustains the natural world? How can we learn to think beyond our immediate convenience, and anticipate more intelligently the long term consequences of technology and manufacturing? Given what science has achieved surely that is not beyond us.

**6. Our relationship with the divine, with God, cannot be made out of thought alone.** One of the reasons I joined this church was its commitment to thinking. But over-thinking God can lead us into the trap of believing that God is tidy, comprehensible and mathematical. Actually, God might very well be mathematical but they must surely be the mathematics of music, galaxies, enzymes, oceans, evolution, a fabulous mathematics beyond the comprehension of a single human mind. Whatever you think you know about God is precious but it is also partial. You might know God from thinking but also from dreaming, praying, dancing, wondering, playing with your children, gardening and swimming.

**7. Our founders were inclusive and their inclusivity was religious.** We would certainly regard their social and political values as generally progressive for their day. They were democrats, they were abolitionists, they questioned religious and civil hierarchies and they were the first to recognise the ministry of women. Their inclusivity drew on a positive vision of humankind, and on a belief in the sacred dignity of every single human soul. These are our values too.

**8. One of the gifts and the challenges of our liberal faith is that we do not have a singular spiritual practice.** We do not have a set form of prayer for our services. This gives each one of us freedom but it can also leave us struggling to find a routine and ritual way of being with the divine. Prayer and meditation are powerful and demanding ways of bringing our souls into a living relationship with our truth. When Unitarianism neglects these practices there is a prayer-shaped hole in it.

**9. This is about living.** A church should be consoling and affirming and inspiring but the point of what happens here is how it changes us when we are not here. Certainly for our predecessors their faith was about how they were changed and about how they might change the world. Spirituality is a way into the world, a way of being and doing.

**10. We are co-creators of Unitarianism.** We have an exciting history but this church really only amounts to what has been done here and what we do together in the present. Our original congregation and its committee did not have a massive institution behind them and neither do we. We have friends around the country and we get valuable support from the General Assembly of Free Christian and Unitarian Churches. However on any one Sunday there are only about 4,000 people at Unitarian churches in the whole country, so there are real limits on what the Assembly can do for us.

What our original congregation achieved 199 years ago is humbling. The hours and days of unpaid work and sacrifice that today's congregation donate to this church, often behind the scenes, and often at considerable personal cost, is humbling. The church was built and is built by its members.

**11. They called it, as we still do, a Church.** It's a difficult word for some people. Some people have been hurt and lied to by churches. And yet some of those very people come to this church and find a way into their healing here, and that too is humbling.

**12. The past is not a value in its own right.** However lovely and resonant some traditions might be, the fact that we have always done things that way does not make doing them that way wise or kind or right.

There is that wonderful story, I think it's American, about a family that every Sunday sliced a few inches off the joint of beef before they put it into the oven. It had been passed down to them from previous generations that this was the best way to roast a joint of beef. One day a long lost great aunt turned up for Sunday lunch. She explained to them that the family had done this in her childhood because they only had one small roasting tin, which as far as she knew had been thrown away years ago.

There are ways of honouring the past with integrity and meaning and there are ways of getting stuck in it as though it was a rather small roasting tin.

**13. Change is not a value in its own right.** Change isn't necessarily kind or wise or right either.

Over the last hundred years church attendance has dropped steadily across the country each decade. People go to mosques, they go to synagogues but very few people go to church anymore.

And so churches that are keen to grow try out new things, and you get, as you may have seen in the press recently, a helter skelter in a cathedral and a crazy golf course in a church. There's nothing inherently wrong with a helter skelter in a cathedral. However if your first experience of a cathedral was a helter skelter, and it somehow spoke to your spiritual needs and moved you in your soul, and not just on a mat, then you might reasonably expect dodgem cars the week after, and a ghost train the week after that. Using gimmicks and gizmos to get folk into church is a high risk strategy and over the long term it hasn't really worked.

Sooner or later the life of the soul and the work of being changed will need to be addressed, and it might not be easy, instant or convenient.

To some extent these things are about personal taste but there is a certain attitude, a certain way of changing religion in order to sell it, which reminds me of something the late Archbishop Robert Runcie said of the Anglican Church. He said it was like a swimming pool where most of the noise comes from the shallow end.

**14. Every Unitarian attempt at numerical growth I have witnessed over the last twenty years has failed when its focus has been numerical growth rather than spiritual depth.** Perhaps our goal might be a kind of dynamic continuity, where neither change nor tradition are practised for their own sake but both are honoured where they bring a truly spiritual life.

**15. We are not called by the sacred to be Unitarians or to persuade other people to be Unitarians.** We are not called to support the Unitarians as we might support a football team. We are called to a relationship with the sacred that comforts and challenges us, that affirms and changes us, that brings us depth, joy and resilience. We are each called into the loving and awesome presence of our God.

**16. We are called into the presence of each other too.** It's easy to say right-on things about inclusivity and community but for this space to be sustained as a sacred space it must be tended with practices of respect and loving kindness, with practices of listening, of giving other people space, with practices of forgiveness. The Jewish theologian, Martin Buber, says *There is no single God's word which can be known and advocated but the words delivered are clarified for us in our human situation of being turned to one another.*

It isn't always easy being turned to each other in this way, but it can be beautiful. I have seen it change people. I have seen people become more wholly themselves as a result of turning to each other, not just with respect but with tenderness and enthusiasm and vulnerability and thoughtfulness. When that happens, it blesses our church and makes it even more sacred.

Amen.

## **Safeguarding & Safe Lone Working Awareness Workshop 26th September**

Those of you who volunteer will already have had an email about this workshop which will be facilitated by Ann Woodhead, Trisha Purchas and Caroline Drijver. However, everyone is invited, and it may be of particular interest if you are interested in becoming a volunteer for the church in any capacity.

The workshop will run from 7pm to 9pm on Thursday 26th September. We will start promptly at 7pm, and you are welcome to arrive at 6.30 for refreshments. There will be cake!

So we can have an idea of numbers, please email or call Caroline if you are coming. [caroline.drijver@btinternet.com](mailto:caroline.drijver@btinternet.com) tel 07791781022.

## **Workshop for September Leading Prayers and Meditation in Church Sunday Sept 1st 1.30 - 4.30 pm**

A skills workshop for anyone interested in leading prayers or meditations in workshops and services, or for anyone who already does this and would like to develop their skills. We will practice in the church and you are invited to bring a short prayer or meditation you might like to work with.

This workshop is free and will be led by Jef Jones at Brighton Unitarian Church. If you would like to book a place please email [buc@brightonunitarian.org.uk](mailto:buc@brightonunitarian.org.uk)

## **Heart and Soul Gatherings In September**

Heart and Soul gatherings are an opportunity for us to come together as a congregation during the week. There is a time of reflection and stillness and we go on to explore different aspects of our spiritual lives together. Everyone is welcome! If you would like to lead a gathering of Heart and Soul, or suggest a topic for discussion you are also welcome.

Gatherings this month will be on Thursdays at 7pm on 5th and 19th September. All are welcome.

## **Quiet Reflective Circle Thursday, 12th September, 7pm**

On Thursday 12th September we will gather for candle lighting and quiet reflection. As always there will be readings, time for candle-lighting, stillness and a few simple closing words.

If you've been having a busy week, and could do with some stillness, do come along. If you're looking for a time and place to reconnect with your spirit, do come along. If you'd like to sit quietly in a sacred place, please do come along. All are welcome!

## Can you help?

Isn't it lovely to know they'll be a service every Sunday at 11am. Obviously behind the scenes there is lots of work to make it happen. One of the important jobs is setting up and closing the church. This includes sweeping the portico, setting up tables and chairs in the hall, putting out the chalice etc. I find it a very practical way of feeling more deeply connected to our Unitarian community. Since I've got familiar with what's involved I often find it quite a special experience. We desperately need three or four new people to join the setting up rota in 2020. We've also got a couple of gaps in October if anyone would be able to start this year.

Please get in touch with me Helen Lee if you'd like to volunteer or would like more information about what's involved. Drop me an email [helenlee71@gmail.com](mailto:helenlee71@gmail.com) or give me a ring on 07505 089162



## September

**6th:** Violinist Sophia Bartlette will present a selection of pieces from Jewish composers who were persecuted during and after the war. Forbidden music by Bloch, Weil, Schreker and Schoenberg.

**13th:** The Music of Trees. A new composition by Geoff Robb inspired by the trees of Sussex. Music that blends Geoff's background in classical & jazz guitar with his love of Spanish & Celtic music.

**20th:** Guitarist Jon Rattenbury & Cellist Ivana Peranic present a programme mixing evocative music from Spain and Latin America, with Baroque and Classical works. A rare chance to hear the fascinating sound of cello and guitar performing together.

**27th:** Jessica Summers and Jelena Makarova return for another recital in their LIVING SONGS project, showcasing songs by living composers alongside more well-known song repertoire.

Doors and coffee at 12 noon. Concert 12.30 - 1.15 p.m.  
Tickets on the door. Suggested donation £4.

## **Dates for Your Diary**

### **Interfaith Group Prayers First Wednesday of every month 6-7pm 2019 Brighton Baha'i Centre, 19 Stanford Avenue, Brighton, BN1 6AQ, United Kingdom**

Many feel the need to express feelings of solidarity and support for those communities that have suffered at the hands of terrorists and political groups. The IFCG holds monthly peace vigils at the Baha'i Centre at 19, Stanford Avenue, Brighton BN1 6GA on the first Wednesday of the month from 6 to 7 pm. You are warmly welcome to join us. Upcoming dates: 4 Sept, 2nd Oct, 6th Nov, 4th Dec.

## **THE TREE OF LIFE: CELEBRATING TOGETHER**

**Sunday 8 September 2019, 2 – 6pm**  
Brighton & Hove Progressive Synagogue  
6 Lansdowne Road, Hove BN3 1FF

Free entry, all welcome.

*Please register in advance via [members@interfaithcontactgroup.com](mailto:members@interfaithcontactgroup.com)*

In response to recent terrorist assaults against Jewish, Muslim and Christian communities, the Brighton & Hove Interfaith Contact Group is dedicating an afternoon to bringing together community groups across Brighton and Hove to express solidarity with synagogues, mosques and churches across the world that have been attacked during the past year and to explore the positive images associated with the Tree of Life in different faith traditions. The afternoon will include commemoration of those killed in terrorist attacks from Pittsburgh, USA to Christchurch, New Zealand to Colombo, Sri Lanka to Florida USA. We also wish to celebrate the work of many within our own community who work tirelessly all the time to help people thrive together.

For more details of this inspiring event please go to  
[interfaithcontactgroup.com/news-and-events/](http://interfaithcontactgroup.com/news-and-events/)

To keep up-to-date with all that is happening at Brighton Unitarian visit our Website [www.brightonunitarian.org.uk](http://www.brightonunitarian.org.uk) or follow us on:

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YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCT1m35l-Urvbyg2AsRRsF9g>