



Brighton
Unitarians

March Newsletter

Sunday Services

Please note: services are at 11 a.m. See below for details

We would be grateful if you would switch off your phones before the start of the service

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 November and welcome back to our more usual Newsletter.

It has been a difficult year to say the least but

i'm pleased to inform you that we are going to be holding regular services in the church beginning with the Remembrance Day Service on November 8th. Due to the need for social distancing places will be limited to twenty: you will receive an email during the next week inviting you to book a place. Face masks are now mandatory at religious services and

From the Lay Leader

At a Sunday service several months ago I asked members of the congregation to write down their religious or spiritual questions and I said I would do my best to address these over the following year. One of the most striking questions was *Can I refuse to be free?*

My first response when I saw this question was something like ~ but we aren't free, or at least not completely. As long as we live, we are our bodies and subject to our appetites and our physical needs for warmth and shelter. We are so much more than captives of our bodies, but the living fact of them and their limitations is very real. We are, to a large degree, creatures of our biology. We have a genetic back story and an embodied present. Moreover we are dependent on each other, not just for food, water, heating and shelter but for a sense of self. We exist in relationships, in communities,

in culture. For our emotional and mental well-being we are tied to other people in ways that bring our lives positive meaning. Only a very few committed ascetics and hermits can live entirely free of the restraints and possibilities these ties bring.

On a similar note a lot of our existence is in language too. It might just be possible in dreams or in states of mystical intensity or maybe in drug-induced conditions to have experience without language but most of the time most of us are bound by the language we learnt as children, by its vocabulary and the linguistic habits we call grammar. Can you imagine living your daily life without language? Would it be a welcome release to live only in the present or a kind of reduction to meaninglessness? In these and in many other ways we are already less than free.

My next thought was that the person asking this question might be suggesting that they were tired of freedom. Unitarians tend to be rather pleased with the idea of spiritual freedom, with our lack of a religious dogma and we have a tendency to question, to seek and to journey. Is the person asking this question weary of all this? If so I have some sympathy with them. I have often wondered if Unitarianism implies by its very nature that it is wrong to draw firm and lasting conclusions to religious questions. Is it wrong, spiritually, to arrive somewhere and stay there? If that's what this questioning soul meant by *Can I refuse to be free?* then my answer would be yes. We do not have to live in state of perpetual seeking.

I remember being rather shocked the first time I heard, many years ago, an Anglican friend of mine talk about dogma. He assumed that I would understand that he meant it as positive term. For many people of faith the very point of their belief is dogma, a set of principles established as divine truth by what they regard as reliable sources of authority and moral example. Of course these words *truth* and *authority* are freighted with difficulty and debate for Unitarians but many Christians love Christian dogma. We talk about finding our own truth and we take it for granted that this is a good thing. We regard Christian dogma as a series of highly problematic ideas and prejudices. Christians however might welcome it as a framework of moral and mystical truth. Subscribing to dogma, obviously, does not remove choice from their lives nor does it prevent them from questioning but they might be glad of a structure in which they can find guidance. Dogma

then might be a place in which they can feel held, rather than a prison. We might not think of it as freedom but Christians might describe dogma as freeing them from what they regard as wrong behaviour. There are ways out of the kind of religious freedom Unitarians tend to value but they might only lead to other kinds of freedom.

Finally might not the very fact of being able to ask the question *Can I refuse to be free?* suggest the answer *Probably not?* It might be that the ability to frame such a profound and creative question requires an independence of mind, a conscious and questioning self that would be very hard to close down or step away from altogether. How do you stop asking that kind of question in order to be less free? The habit of dissatisfaction is a mark of our age but thankfully there are conditions other than being free or not free. Perhaps the answer to a burdensome sense of freedom is not to repress or abandon questioning but to quieten it sometimes with stillness and inner peace, through prayer and meditation.

For myself I believe that freedom is the best and most dignified way for us each to come to our spiritual truth but I believe that this process is best enabled in a set of relationships. We might look to philosophers and religious thinkers past and present and to a community of like minded seekers for sustenance and challenge. If that sounds rather procedural I mean that these human bonds also make our spiritual path more beautiful, more tender, more alive.

By the way I said I would try to address the questions rather than offer definitive answers! There is clearly no correct answer to a question such as this, but you, dear reader, are of course free to consider it for yourself!

Notes from the Committee

The committee met on 12th October. We were all present, including our newly co-opted member Rev Susie Courtault.

We have a few hirers coming in which is good news, but still far fewer than we need to make ends meet. Of course concerts and the larger events

cannot take place, and it is these that bring in significant revenue for us. If anyone is aware of any possible funding streams then do let us know.

Still on the subject of fund-raising, we thought about having an outdoor Christmas stall to sell cakes etc. If anyone wants to co-ordinate this then we have some cake makers ready and willing, but no-one to organise such an event. Please contact the church and leave a message if you can help, or send an email to buc@brightonunitarian.org.uk

The Welcome Cafe remains on pause. It is hoped that this can restart at some point, but again, it would need a co-ordinator.

Sarah West is kindly helping us to buy camera equipment for live-streaming. It is hoped that we will have this in early December. We have been given some funds for this by Rev Martin Whitell for which we are very grateful. It will be attractive to potential hirers as well as useful for us. Thank you, Sarah.

Ashleigh has created a beautiful new website which will go live very soon. Look out for this! Thank you Ashleigh.

For the moment we have not re-applied for a license to conduct civil partnerships as these have been mostly replaced by everyone being able to be married in our church. At this time the cost of a licence is considerable for us.

The entire committee will be standing down on 24th January. Our Chair, Caroline Drijver, is planning to stand down from the committee altogether and two other members are unsure about whether they will stand for election again. Our Secretary, Jennifer Sanders, will not be standing for Secretary again in January. This will leave significant gaps about which you will hear more.

Our AGM will be held on Sunday 24th January. This will most likely be remote, and we will look into how to get this to those of you who cannot access remote video links. Jen Barton will co-ordinate the Committee

Election which is likely to be via an online survey. Again, we will make sure that those of you that cannot access this have a way in which to vote.

Please continue to practice Social Distancing and wear a face-mask when entering, leaving and being in the church. Please do not come to the church if you have symptoms of Coronavirus, if you are awaiting a test result or if you believe you may be a risk to others in any way.

That's it from us! Do be in touch with any comments or questions. You can email buc@brightonunitarian.org.uk or call the church on 01273 696022 and leave a message for someone from the committee to call you back.

Best wishes, the BUC Committee Team

A Tribute to Steve Whittington

Our member Steve Whittington died in August and I was sadly unable to attend his funeral. It was led by our member Fanny who kindly read this tribute to Steve on my behalf.

I'm grateful for this opportunity to express the affection and respect in which Brighton Unitarians hold our friend and member, Steve. He was a kind and engaging presence in our church community: we have missed him since he became too ill to come to church and we continue to hold him in our hearts.

When I heard that Steve had died I asked members of our congregation to send email messages for me to forward on to Alan. In their messages our members again and again described Steve as gentle, thoughtful and kind. They also expressed their appreciation of his gift for putting people at their ease: two of our members related how he had chatted with them during their first visit to our church. They remembered that he had engaged with them in a way that had made them feel not just welcome, but comfortable in our sacred space.

On a personal note it was my honour to support Steve in the early days of his diagnosis and illness. I am still moved when I recall the way he dealt with such a difficult and upsetting challenge. A man with a very fine mind was

beginning to experience some of the early symptoms of dementia; a man who had seen his father die of the same condition. Yet he remained stoical throughout. He brought a kind of quiet, steady resolve to what he faced and there was not a hint of self-pity. Steve was determined to cope as best he could, and to live as fully as he could and enjoy his life with Alan. Later I visited Steve in hospital and in his care home too, but even then, as he became more poorly, he was still Steve.


Steve was an interesting man. He and I talked a lot about travel, and about languages and literature. He loved these things very much and made his own unique contribution to that world, when his novel Quest was published, much to his modest delight.

Steve contributed to our church too. He was a member of our committee for several years, and we appreciated his perceptive and constructive input. We certainly benefitted from that fine mind. Steve also contributed to the world around him. He volunteered for a charity concerned with loneliness in old age, and I very much admired the way he visited two isolated old women until he became too ill to do so.

I'd like to end on a note of gratitude for Steve, and for his commitment to his own spiritual quest. This spirit of seeking, his sense of adventure, brought him to our church with all his integrity, kindness and intelligence, and for that we are deeply grateful.

Jef Jones, Lay Pastor, Brighton Unitarian Church

FUSE 2021



unitarians

- share a quest for wholeness
- share a concern for social justice
- provide a caring community
- provide new ways to experience spirituality

Heart and Soul

Thursday Evening at 7.30 pm on Zoom

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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.

We asked two regular attenders at Heart and Soul to describe what it means to them.

Fanny Tulley said “Heart and Soul is something I look forward to every Thursday. I used to attend occasionally in the church, but now that it’s online it is so accessible, and has become an important part of my week; equal to the Sunday service. It’s sociable, soulful, and gentle. Always interesting and varied, being facilitated by different people each week. I do hope we can sustain it in the long term.”

Katherine Malthouse wrote “Heart and Soul has been good for me in several ways. Firstly, it doesn’t matter if I have had a bad day or a good day, I can join the group and feel listened to and supported without being judged or advised. Secondly, I enjoy the readings and meditation as I always feel better at the end of the evening. Finally, the topics are thought-provoking and usually take me outside my comfort zone in an interesting and stimulating way.”

So if you have never come to one of our Heart and Soul gatherings why not come along and give them a try? You would be very welcome.

New Safeguarding Officer

We are grateful to our member Susie Courtault for stepping into become our New Safe guarding Officer. If you have any concerns about your own safety, or that of others, in the church please contact Susie through the church. contact details are at the end of this newsletter.

Congratulations to Stephen and Jennifer

Congratulations to our member Stephen Crowther, who has retired from his very successful vocation as Lay Pastor at Hastings Unitarian Church, where he will be very much missed. Congratulations are also due to our member Jennifer Sanders who has been appointed as the new Lay Pastor at Hastings.

You may be interested to know that over the last fifteen years our church has produced three lay pastors; Jef Jones, Stephen Crowther and Jennifer Sanders, and three ministers; the late Rev Jane Barraclough ministered at Bethnal Green and Manchester Cross Street Chapel, Rev Kate Whyman is the minister at Plymouth Unitarian Church and the Rev Maria Curtis recently retired from her ministry with Horsham Unitarians.. Modesty forbids but we think this is a record!

To keep up-to-date with all that is happening at Brighton Unitarian visit our website www.brightonunitarian.org.uk or follow us on:

Twitter: @BrightUnitarian

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/BrightonUnitarian/>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/brightonunitarianchurch/>

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCT1m35I-Urvbyq2AsRRsF9g>

Brighton Unitarian Church, Brighton, BN1 1UF

Telephone: 01273 696022

Email: buc@brightonunitarian.org.uk

Web: www.brightonunitarian.org.uk

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