



*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

- 1st March     Jennifer Sanders, member, Brighton Unitarian Church  
Pianist Joe Ward
- 8th March     Jef Jones, Lay Pastor, Brighton Unitarian Church  
Pianist Pamela Nickels
- 15th March    Rev Martin Whitell, District Minister  
Pianist Kathy Pitt
- 22nd March    Equinox Service  
Jef Jones, Lay Pastor, Brighton Unitarian Church  
Pianist Pamela Nickels
- 29th March    Stephen Crowther Lay Pastor, Hastings Unitarians  
Pianist Kathy Pitt

Quiet Reflection 7 - 8 pm, Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> March

## **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 March.

It is easy for any one of us to forget how important time at our services is for some people. It might be the only time they get in our sacred space. Many people who come to our services like to prepare and centre themselves before the service begins by entering a time of stillness and contemplation when the piano prelude starts. This is usually between five or ten minutes before 11. o'clock. I would request that we each respect this time with our own stillness, and that we make sure our mobile phones are switched off.

Most readers will know by now that I shall be leaving my post as Lay Pastor at the end of September this year. There is likely to be a gap between my departure and the appointment of a new minister and so we are seeking a volunteer to edit the Newsletter. This takes no more than a day a month and involves working in the Mailchimp format, which is really quite straightforward. (If I can do it, it must be!) If you're interested and would like to make this key contribution to our community, please do let me know.

Please note I will be away from 16th to 20th March and from 30th March to 8th April.

## 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!

## **MEMBERSHIP**

Membership numbers are slowly growing but we would like them to grow further. People say that membership gives them a sense of (even more) belonging and commitment to our spiritual community and it also helps to raise Brighton's profile in the wider Unitarian movement.

On a practical level, members are able to elect our BUC committee after 6 months membership. There's nothing too formal about membership so please have a word with either myself or Jef, our Lay Leader, if you would like to find out more and are considering becoming a member of the Church.

As one member said recently "Being a member has meant that at times and there have been and will continue to be many, when I have attended less often –I know that I am still a part of the church and it is still a part of me. I like this feeling.'

From my own personal experience it was only when I was first asked to consider joining the committee that I realised I couldn't as I wasn't a member, even though I had been attending services regularly for over 2 years and volunteering when I could. This prompted me to start thinking about what the Church means to me and I realised that I wanted and needed the sense of community with others, building friendships with like minded

people, and the regular services that I find so positive, meaningful, uplifting and thought provoking. The opportunity for shared silent reflection in a sacred place.

Much to my surprise I now find myself starting a 2<sup>nd</sup> year as a committee member helping to serve the church and its members as best I can in the hope that we can continue to expand and provide this valuable resource in the centre of Brighton for future generations.

Jeannette Webb, Membership Secretary.

## **EQUINOX LUNCH**

after the service on Sunday March 22nd

Quite a few new members have joined the church recently and we are seeing new faces at our services. We thought it might be a nice idea to give everyone a chance to meet each other and share a simple potluck lunch after the Equinox service on Sunday March 22nd. Please do bring simple food to share. Everyone is welcome!

## **FROM THE COMMITTEE**

The committee had its first meeting following the AGM having said farewell to Jo and Fanny and welcomed Jo Howarth.

We are smaller in numbers - 5 in total, with a lot on the agenda for this our celebratory 200th year as well as the search for a new leader. Both of these things are in hand and Jef will be sharing with us more about what wonderful plans there are afoot for the celebrations in August.

We will keep you posted about the plans for Jef's replacement.

The work on the first of the two windows has begun and the office

has had a spruce up. We are looking into replacing the staging in the church for a lighter more portable version.

Some of you may remember the amazing research Christine Clark Lowes did on the name plaques in the church of the fallen. We are hoping to make this into a booklet in time for the celebrations .

The monthly lunch club has run twice now with a great take up and discussions are ongoing as to how this can continue . We will let you know the outcome of this

## **HEART AND SOUL**

7.30 pm Thurs 5th March 2020

7.30 pm Thurs 19th February 2020

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.

## **QUIET REFLECTIVE CIRCLE**

Thursday, 12th March, 7 - 8 pm At our monthly Quiet Reflection Circle we 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!

## WELCOME CAFÉ

Our Welcome Cafe is a new church initiative which provides a complimentary lunch for people experiencing isolation and homelessness. And if the first Café is anything to go by then this will become a joyous event in our church calendar. The volunteers were wonderful and were greatly appreciated by our guests who were respectful, grateful and, for the most part, extremely hungry! It was a very positive experience for all of us involved and for the guests who were able to enjoy a hot meal and some friendly company during the coldest time of the year.

We will improve the delivery of the operation in the future with continued guidance from those with experience in this area and with your feedback. Your contributions for tea and coffee on Sundays will now be set aside to help fund this enterprise. The Welcome Café will only take place in February, March, September and October this year but next year we will be able to run it on the second Saturday of each month.

We need volunteers (the more the merrier!) for the next two cafés, the first of which will take place on March 14th, You can choose either to take orders, greet the guests, help with serving tea, coffee and soup or sit and talk to the guests, whichever role you feel more comfortable with. We all chipped in with clearing up last time. We will need volunteers to arrive by 1pm at the latest, although a small number of us will be in the kitchen from 11am preparing Jo's delicious cheese sandwiches, warming the soup and heating the hotdogs.

If you would like to get involved, please let me know. I can be contacted at [trishapu213@gmail.com](mailto:trishapu213@gmail.com) or on 07710 288399.

Trisha Purchas

## A MESSAGE FROM ANNE

As many readers will know, our good friend Anne, who brings such lovely flowers to our church, has for a long time been collecting items of bric a brac which she then uses to raise money for various good causes. Sadly Anne has asked us to pass on that she is no longer able to do this due to mobility problems. Even so, thank you Anne for all the good works you have done and for the flowers which continue to bring colour and beauty to our church.



## MARCH

**6th:** LIPS wind quintet and pianist Steve Carroll-Turner play quirky, cheerful music by Francaix and Nielsen, and the wonderful, rarely performed sextet by Gordon Jacob.

**13th** Meera Maharaj (flute) and Dominic Degavino (piano) will perform Sonata in E minor by J.S Bach and Sonata for flute and piano by Prokofiev.

**20th:** Classical Bohemians (formerly Classical Folk) are Sylvia Akagi (voice and flute), Andrew Wickens (violin) and Peter Golden (guitar). Light Classical music and song: Russian, gypsy, romantic.

**27th:** 'Portraits of love and passion' - From the vivid Spanish colours of De Falla's Siete Canciones to the intimacy and warmth of Schumann's Frauenliebe und -leben, with solo piano pieces from Granados and Brahms to complement. Eva Rustige (soprano) and Joe Ward (piano).

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

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:

Twitter: @BrightUnitarian

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

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

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCT1m35I-Urvbyg2AsRRsF9g>

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