

Banbury Unitarians News



*A spiritual and religious fellowship, encouraging
tolerance and independent thought*

Issue 1, January – March 2012

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Letter from the Student Minister

Dear Friends,

Welcome to the first issue of the new-look newsletter of the Banbury Unitarian Fellowship. I am hoping to produce a copy once a quarter. All comments (and contributions for the next issue) welcomed!

2012 sees a new chapter in all our lives, as I take over from our dear Malcolm Sadler as leader of the Fellowship. I am pleased that Malcolm's close connection with the Fellowship is going to continue, in the dual roles of Secretary and Musical Director. At our December service, Chairwoman Elaine Nomura made a presentation to him, and everyone present raised their glasses to him in tribute to his many years' dedicated service to the Fellowship. (tribute on page 3).

I hope that we will be able to journey together towards a bright future, maintaining and strengthening the Unitarian witness in Banbury and the surrounding area.

One thing I would very much like to do, once the worst of the Winter weather is over, is to start a mid-month Discussion Group, perhaps following the syllabus of the British version of *Build Your Own Theology*. Don and Rosemary Booth have very kindly offered to host a mid-week afternoon meeting, so at our January service, it would be good to hear how you feel about this. I would like to start the Group up in mid-March.

I am also planning to visit you all during the first few months of the year, so that I can get to know you better, and to serve you the best way I can.

In fellowship,
Sue

A Tribute to Malcolm Sadler

The Banbury Unitarian Fellowship owes a great debt to Malcolm Sadler, who has been supporting them since the mid 1990s when Ruth Fowles started a Unitarian group in Banbury after a gap of Unitarian worship of several years. Malcolm returned enthusiastically as pianist and gave Ruth valuable support.

When Ruth's health let her down Malcolm took over as Lay Leader and continued in this role until Sue was appointed as Student Minister this January 2012. However Malcolm's ties to Banbury go back much further than this. In fact back into the mists of time to the 1950s (!!) when Malcolm drove the well-trodden path from Stratford-upon-Avon to Banbury weekly to play for the Unitarian services taken by the Rev. Short of Manchester College Oxford. These services were held at the Quaker Meeting House in Banbury, and later in a converted shop in North Bar, as by this time the Unitarian church building had unfortunately been sold.

Eventually, Unitarian meetings in Banbury ceased, so when Ruth Fowles took the brave step of re-creating the Unitarian Fellowship in Banbury in the 1990s, those people in the area with Unitarian interests and connections were delighted. None more than Malcolm who, despite being heavily connected with the Warwick Chapel and responsible for running the music there, willingly resumed a monthly trek to Banbury to play for the services. These first took place in The Old People's Community Centre which was a good venue if you didn't let the name put you off. We then moved to Dashwood School and finally, when Malcolm took over as Lay Leader, to a room in the Town Hall, where we still remain.

Malcolm has worked hard as Lay Leader taking many enjoyable services, inviting and hosting many interesting visiting preachers, organising the newsletter and arranging social events.

Despite his health problems of the last two years, and his enforced absence for a while, he has bravely soldiered on, his enthusiasm holding us together as a group, and now we are very happy that he is able to stay on as Secretary and pianist to support Sue. It is difficult to express enough thanks to Malcolm for all he has done for Banbury Unitarians, but I know that the best way in which we can show our gratitude to Malcolm is to keep the group active and growing.

Elaine Nomura



*Malcolm Sadler at Great Hucklow November 2011
(photo by Fran Pitt)*

Calendar for January – March 2012

January

Sunday 29th Worship service, led by Sue Woolley

February

Sunday 19th Worship service, led by Sue Woolley

March

Sunday 18th Worship service, led by Sue Woolley

*All worship services are held at
Banbury Town Hall and start at 11.00 am*

Karen Armstrong and the Core of Religion

A goodly number of Unitarians were among the capacity audience at the Liberal Jewish Synagogue on 7th December to hear Karen Armstrong deliver the annual Younghusband Lecture of the World Congress of Faiths.

Karen spoke for an hour, entirely without notes, sharing her passionate belief in the sovereign importance of compassion as a force for good in the world. I believe that the message of the Charter for Compassion is one that all Unitarians should heed. Imagine what the world would be like if everyone followed it! If every person genuinely tried to behave to the rest of humankind with a concern and care for how they would feel. As it says in the *Charter for Compassion* “Compassion impels us to work tirelessly to alleviate the suffering of our fellow creature, to dethrone ourselves from the centre of our world and put another there, and to honour the inviolable sanctity of every single human being, treating everybody, without exception, with absolute justice, equity and respect.” By following it, Unitarians could make a difference in the world. **(a full report will appear in *The Inquirer*)**

Between Present and Future: A Reflection

I would like to share some words by Patience Strong: "It is good to throw away the old calendar with its all too familiar picture, and to hang something fresh on the wall. How clean and bright the new calendar looks! It seems to symbolise the high hopes of this new morning of a new year. But as I flick through the crisp new pages of the months, I am suddenly aware of the strange mystery of the future. These pages with their neat rows of dates represent un-lived time, the promise of seasons not yet come to fulfilment." This time of year is full of new promise.

During the past year, all of us have fallen short, and been less than the best people we can be. But we have also done some things well, and lived up to our potential as human beings. Many world religions have a special time of year, during which adherents "reflect on and evaluate their thoughts, words and actions over the past year [and] acknowledge their prejudices, negative behaviours and bad habits so that they may begin the process of transforming themselves." [Bhalodkar] The Hindu festival of Diwali is one, and the ten-day period leading up to the Jewish festival of Yom Kippur is another. For Christians, it is the period of Lent, but for the vast majority of people in Britain, who do not follow any particular religion, New Year is the time for reflecting on the past, and making resolutions for the future.

The process of self-examination is not an easy one. One of my favourite theologians is the wonderful Rabbi Lionel Blue. Over the years, he has taught me that the only thing that God wants from us is for us to be more kind, more generous to everyone (including ourselves) and more honest, both with ourselves and our fellow travellers in the world. It is about listening to that inner voice, whether we call it God, or the light within, or our conscience, and about doing the right thing rather than the easy one. **SW**

Regional Events

Midland Unitarian Association of Lay Preachers And Service Leaders: Spring Training: Namings

Led by: Rev. Lynne Readett, Merseyside District Minister

When: Saturday 10th March 2012

Where: Kingswood Meeting House, Packhorse Lane,
Hollywood, Worcs. B47 5DQ

Time: 10.00 am – 4.15 pm (coffee/tea available from 9.30 am)

Cost: Free to MUA delegates

Midland Unitarian Association Annual General Meeting

When: Saturday 31st March 2012

Where: Warwick Unitarian Chapel, High Street
Warwick CV34 4AX

Time: 10.30 am for 11.00 am

Guest Speaker: Rev. Dr. Ann Peart, President of the
General Assembly of Unitarian & Free Christian Churches

Please bring your own lunch; refreshments provided by the
Warwick congregation

More details about these events from Sue Woolley (see p.8)

**Banbury Unitarian Fellowship,
At the Town Hall, Bridge St, Banbury OX16 5PX
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Student Minister: Sue Woolley

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Chairwoman: Elaine Nomura

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Secretary & Musical Director: Malcolm Sadler

01789-205571 e-mail: malcolmsadler@live.co.uk

Treasurer: Don Booth

01295-253921 e-mail: donbooth@talktalk.net

In this time of anticipated Spring by Terasa G. Cooley

In this time of anticipated Spring, let us allow ourselves to extend the anticipation – to value the time of budding before blooming, of seeding before sprouting.

This is a time of revelation: the revealing of that which is eternal, which we see every year, but still need to be reminded to see it in a new way.

There is also the revelation of that which is new. Every Spring we encounter something never before seen. It is that very newness which embodies hope and potential for the wholeness which is yet to be.

Let us allow Spring to unfold slowly that we may appreciate the true mystery of rebirth and renewal.

Amen