

Fellow Seekers

March 2025

Monthly News and Views from the Bath Unitarian Fellowship for its Members and Friends



"Impossible is just an opinion."

Paulo Coelho

**Next Meeting at Barrow Castle
Sunday 23 March
10.45 Coffee, 11.15 Worship
Led by Tim
Theme: *A Time for New Dreams***

Following on from Judy's service last month on Inspirational People, the title of the March service is taken from the great writer Ben Okri, the author of one of her readings. Where will inspiration lead us? Can we, as he urges us, re-dream this world and make the dream come real?

After the Meeting anyone who wishes to is invited to stay on for an afternoon discussion on growing the Fellowship. If you wish to do so, please bring something for lunch.

Reflection: *It's not just us*

In February the last AGM of the Active Retirement Club (Westbury) was held. Sadly, the members acknowledged that we had come to the end of the road. The Club could not find new officers (especially the crucial post of Programme Secretary) and membership was dwindling. The Treasurer (over 80 and suffering from eye problems) has no successor. We will meet over lunches and coffee in the months ahead, but that's all. If this sounds painfully familiar, it is. Voluntary groups are closing like clam shells. Even those juggernauts of women's organisations, the WI and the TG, are shadows of their former selves.

Research has been carried out into the decline of the voluntary sector. It suggests that there are several underlying causes: a lack of time (perceived or real); a shift from social interaction to individual entertainment; competition for leisure time; and pressure of work, combined with delayed retirement. Among those who **do** have availability for volunteering, the emphasis is on helping those in need, for example by assisting in a Food Bank.

Churches are (with minor exceptions) voluntary organisations. Joining is an act of personal choice, albeit influenced by childhood experience. Unsurprisingly many churches face the same problems as other voluntary organisations – an ageing population, a lack of people willing and able to take on responsibilities, and constant competition for the filling of leisure time on a Sunday. It may be some consolation that the Unitarian Community nationwide is not alone in its Canute-like attempts to turn back the tide, but it is also saddening that our beloved faith is struggling.

Churches have the added problem of the secularisation of our society. This is a long-standing interest of mine, but this is not the place for a recap of the process. Suffice to say that where, in the past, the Church was a key presence in people's lives, many of its functions have been taken over by secular bodies. Also, many people are inclined towards a personal spirituality rather than commitment to a Christian denomination that requires certain beliefs to be accepted. Those generations that have grown up with comparatively little knowledge of Christian teaching or experience of churchgoing are especially likely to have acquired their spiritual orientation from a variety of sources. Others do not even consider religion: they are probably not baptised, and marry in hotels. And why not?

In a discussion group many years ago, someone asserted that we live in a "Godless society." I couldn't agree. We may live in a society that has turned its back on "God" (or the Ultimate, or the Divine, depending on how we envisage the Mystery which is beyond understanding) yet that does not mean that God is dead, as one writer on secularisation put it. I believe that "God" is present everywhere, even though that belief is challenged daily on the news channels. Consequently I also believe that time spent in worship is time well spent, that my faith tradition is worth working for, and that interaction with like-minded souls is vital for my spiritual health.

"Church" is more than a social club, more even than the most worthwhile charity. It is where we try to focus our minds on the Infinite.

Kay

Poem of the Month

Abou Ben Adhem

Abou Ben Adhem (may his tribe increase!)
Awoke one night from a deep dream of peace,
And saw, within the moonlight in his room,
Making it rich, and like a lily in bloom,
An angel writing in a book of gold:—
Exceeding peace had made Ben Adhem bold,
And to the presence in the room he said,
"What writest thou?"—The vision raised its head,
And with a look made of all sweet accord,
Answered, "The names of those who love the Lord."
"And is mine one?" said Abou. "Nay, not so,"
Replied the angel. Abou spoke more low,
But cheerly still; and said, "I pray thee, then,
Write me as one that loves his fellow men."

The angel wrote, and vanished. The next night
It came again with a great wakening light,
And showed the names whom love of God had blest,
And lo! Ben Adhem's name led all the rest.

Leigh Hunt

Sad News from Trowbridge

Following the closure of the Meeting House in Trowbridge the remaining members have come together as a Fellowship. Now the awful news that Jo Clay has a terminal illness has been a blow to all who know her and Maurice. As Jo was the Secretary of the Fellowship and Maurice the Treasurer, and they are now essentially focused on Jo's health, there are no officers to take over responsibility. The remaining few (one of whom is housebound) are not able to conduct business due to age and health problems of their own. Sadly, therefore, they have decided to close the Fellowship.

Looking back to the days of the Wessex Area Ministry, Trowbridge was a congregation with a meeting house and many members, while Bath and Swindon were fellowships meeting on Quaker premises. Rev Liz was our shared inspiration for Unitarianism.

Now, my heart goes out to Jocelyn and Maurice, with particularly fond memories of the music they both provided to services, and their three daughters, Davina, Lauren, and Briony, who are such a credit to them. I'm sure all of us will hold them in our hearts.

Kay

Resolutions at 2025 GA

Six general motions have been put to the General Assembly next month. Of these, a maximum of four will be considered.

Therefore, if you have a view on which should go forward, please let Kay or Rod know within the next few days. Although Bath will not be represented at the GA, the district representative, Edgar Mihas, will be briefed at the District Council meeting on 22 March, so your views will be taken into account.

Proposals can be viewed at <https://www.unitarian.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Motions-2021.pdf>

As You Go . . .

Let nothing disturb you
Let nothing frighten you
All things pass away
Only Love remains
Patience obtains all things
She who has Love lacks nothing
Love alone is enough.

Rev Laura Dobson



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