

WATFORD UNITARIAN NEWSLETTER



Civil and religious liberty  *the world over.*

www.ukunitarians.org.uk/watford/

The function of prayer is not to influence God, but rather to change the nature of the one who prays.

Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855)

SERVICES OF WORSHIP WILL BE HELD AT 3pm at
The Quaker Meeting House, 150 Church
Road, Watford, WD17 4QB.

Conducted by:

7 January – Julian Smith

4 February – Rev Martin Whittell

3 March – Alan Ruston

(Service followed by AGM).

7 April – Patricia Fieldhouse

Flowers:

Camilla

Rosemary

Valerie

Pat

NEAREST RAIL STATION: Watford Junction - exit station, turn right along Station Road, cross St. Albans Road (A41), right along St. Albans Road, left at pedestrian access to Church Road. The Quaker Meeting House is on the right-hand side (approx. 10 minutes' walk).

WATFORD UNITARIAN FELLOWSHIP has its origins in the liberal wing of Non-conformist Christianity. It offers an approach to liberal religion in the Watford and surrounding area.

NUF One-day Conference Cross Street Chapel Manchester 7 October 2023

The Rev Cody Coyne opened the proceedings with a short period of worship. Attendance was not large but a varied group from a variety of Unitarian ‘backgrounds’. Tony McNeile gave a short introductory talk about the National Unitarian Fellowship and how it operates and provided information on how events are publicised. He also referred to UK Unitarian TV and the Dorothy Archer prize.

The first session was a workshop led by Helen Mason (Director of Unitarian College). *Sharing how we Unitarians inspire and share our values*

Helen introduced herself and explained that she had two Unitarian grandfathers (Leonard Mason and ‘Humph’ Winder) and further back her ancestry included the founder of Unitarian College Manchester – John Relly Beard. She then gave a résumé of her childhood and earlier times and the connections with Unitarianism.

Helen then spoke of the leadership crisis in UK Unitarianism. The need for STRONG leadership for a community to THRIVE; the ongoing campaign for new ministers as there are many vacancies. She then outlined how it had been necessary to look at training and making it accessible; to ensure that the necessary competences, the skills and attributes, became the basis for the academic theology. Ministerial training has changed greatly and now involves distance learning, residential workshops and conferences – sometimes at a Retreat Centre – but still with the requirement to appreciate and understand not just the Judaeo-Christian theology, but also the need for pastoral care.

She also referred to the Lay Training courses, now using the Zoom facility. The Foundation, Intermediate and Advanced Level; again not just workshops on the ‘preaching’ but also on pastoral care.

Helen then had us break into small groups (threes or fours) by asking us silently, using just our hands and fingers, to indicate to one-another our date and month of birth – some mirth here! We were then asked to tell each other in our group ‘How Unitarianism has saved my life’! Then, back as a large group, we all had to write what attracted us to Unitarianism VALUES on a small piece of paper, just a couple of words; these were put into a pot which was passed around the room and each person took out a slip (not their own) and read it aloud. So we all met, and mixed, mostly with people we had never met before – but who we will remember in the future.

The afternoon speaker: Professor Linda Woodhead (Kings College London).

Teaching Ethics, Religion and Morals in a ‘post-church’ age.

An absolutely fascinating journey from the first post-war political discussions about how to teach values, the compulsory teaching of (non-denominational) RE in state schools (parents allowed to opt their child/ren out) to the wider ‘Personal, Spiritual, Health Education (PSHE) coverage. Accepting that practising (even thinking about) religion has declined there is now the ‘value statement’ in education establishments, when teaching covers ethical topics, other (not just Christianity) religions, non-religiousness, morals. Even cosmology and theology – is there a God? Or many Gods? or spirits?

In the UK we do not consider it the answer to NOT teach religion in schools (the USA and France do not) but also important is the function of religion in society. Does it involve power and influence, the abuse of power; indoctrination; what about parents' views?

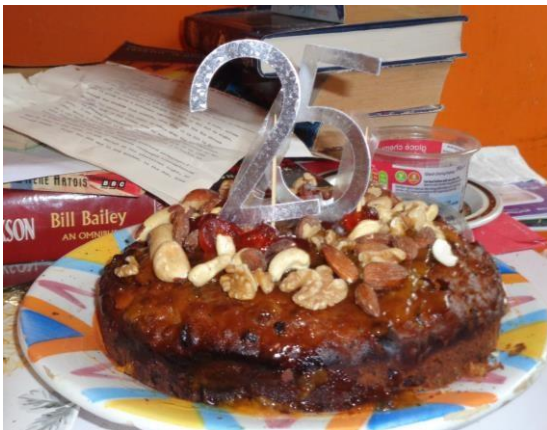
A very interesting discussion ensued, not just about spirituality but also ritual; the latter including, Rites of Passage, music festivals, football/other sports matches – even Paganism, Tarot, Astrology! One very clear opinion from the room was to get rid of selective requirements for 'Faith' schools.

Valerie Walker October 2023

SILVER CELEBRATIONS.



Fellowship members celebrate at Prezzo, Hemel Hempstead.



The Anniversary cake (newly made, at home).



The cake, at the Fellowship.



Camilla and Steven at the December service.

In November 2023 we marked the 25th Wedding Anniversary of Steven & Camilla Williams. Celebrations began with a meal for Fellowship members at the Prezzo Italian Restaurant in Hemel Hempstead.

Then for the December Fellowship service, the couple made a fruitcake, which was enjoyed by all.

The Birth of Jesus

Alan and I went to Hampstead church at the weekend for their family carol service, and there were over 90 people and 15 children in the congregation. The church choir, augmented I think, sang several Christmas carols plus The Shepherd's Farewell, one of my favourites. The children were given bells and other instruments and sang and played 'Jingle Bells'. We did too!

There were several readings, no address. I want to mention one of them, given by a student for the, the UK and the UUA ministry, called Adam Slade. Adam read the Christmas story from St Luke's gospel and then commented on it. "Everyone knows the story, of Mary and Joseph going to Bethlehem, nowhere to stay, and ending up in a stable in an inn. Mary has her baby and puts him in a manger". We all have such sympathy for them, nowhere to stay, all alone, like refugees or homeless people.

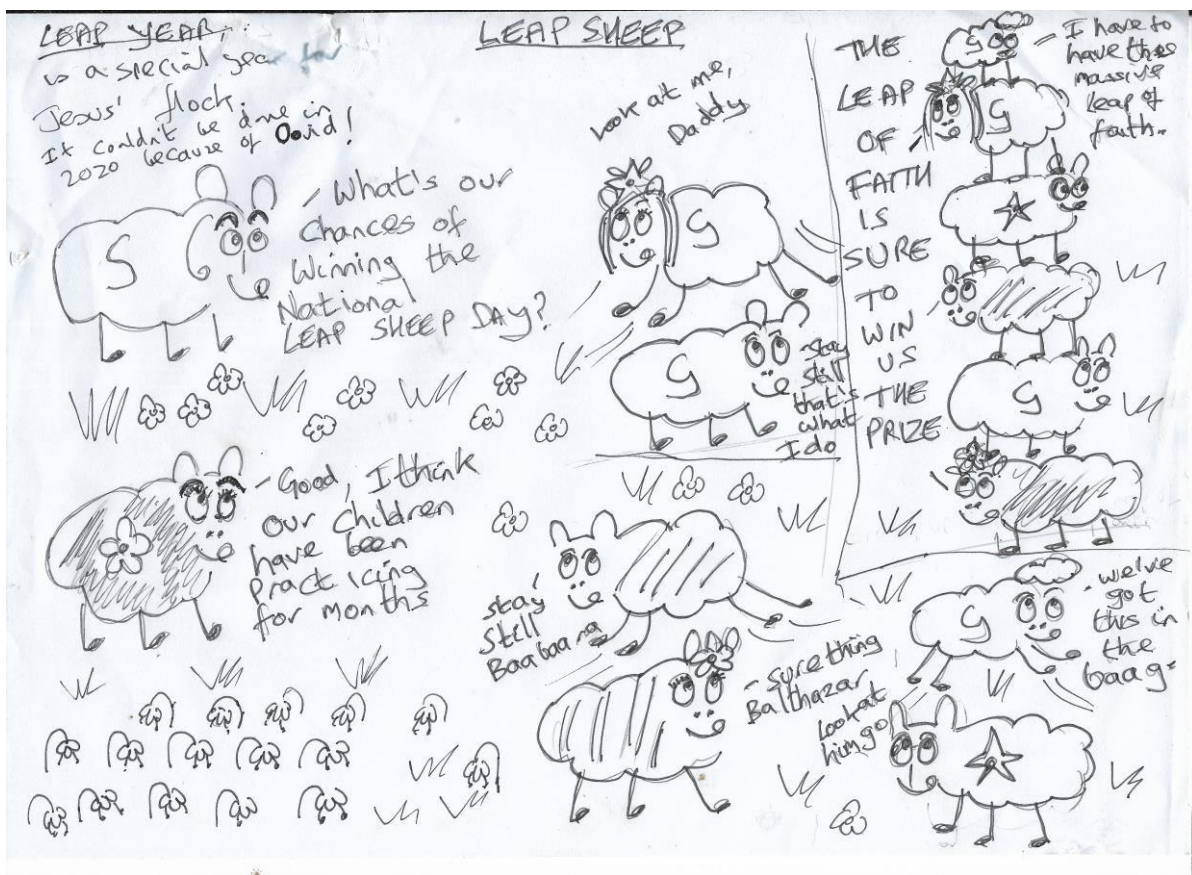
Adam said he often questioned this story, and then he discovered an alternative one, from an evangelical leader. This man heard about a priest who in the 16th century, looked at the Greek words used in the original translation, and found that two words in particular had different meanings in the 1st century AD. The 'Inn' was a private house and the 'manger' was a baby basket.

New translation. Joseph was travelling back to his home town. There would be no way that he and his pregnant wife would have had nowhere to stay – the family house would be full of his relations, many of them coming to be counted too, all happy to welcome a new baby and help Mary with her labour. A family, a community, a Jewish family.

The emphasis for Adam in the story was that Mary and Joseph became part of a community, Joseph's family.

I would like to add something of my own – to the original story, which I have always thought was pretty basic. Even if one takes the story at face value, there is no way that Mary would have had her baby on her own. Up until recent times, and still too often today, labour is a dangerous time for both mother and baby. All the women around, including the one who normally attends all the local women in labour, would have been there, to help Mary. (No mention of them, perhaps because pregnancy and labour were women's work....

Rosemary Ruston.



SOME DATES FOR YOUR DIARY.

28 March – 1 April – Foy Conference – Nightingale Centre, Great Hucklow
info@thenightingalecentre.org.uk

14-16 June – FUSE – The Friars, Aylesford (to be confirmed).

The Unitarian Christian Association intends to continue online worship via Zoom most Sundays at 6pm for the foreseeable future. Meeting ID 853 0987 4584, passcode 204828 <https://www.unitarianchristian.org.uk/liveworship>

SOCIAL MEDIA.

Watford Unitarians are now on Facebook www.facebook.com/watfordunitarians
and Twitter twitter.com/WD_Unitarians

MATERIAL FOR THE APRIL-JUNE 2024 NEWSLETTER to the Editors not later than
10 March 2024, preferably not more than 650 words per item.

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