



Northampton Unitarians News

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

Issue 78, December 2023 – February 2024

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Statement of Belief (taken from our website)

Unitarianism is a religious movement in which individuals are free to follow their reason and conscience; there is no pressure from creed or scripture. We are open to change in the light of new thought and discoveries.

We believe that:

- everyone has the right to seek truth and meaning for themselves.
- the fundamental tools for doing this are your own life experience, your reflection upon it, your intuitive understanding and the promptings of your own conscience.
- the best place to do this is a community that welcomes you for who you are,
- complete with your beliefs, doubts, and questions.

We offer:

- liberty of conscience from imposed creed, confessions, and dogmas.
- a fellowship where people come together to worship; to share times of celebration and trial; and to help each other in the quest for a faith to live by.

We affirm the universal values of love and compassion, peace, truth, and justice.

We welcome all who come to us in the spirit of goodwill and enquiry, regardless of ethnic or religious background, age, gender, or sexual orientation.

Our thanks to the General Assembly Information Department, for extracts from 'A Faith Worth Thinking About' by Peter Sampson et al; and to Ipswich Unitarians for extracts from a leaflet by Rev. Cliff Reed.

Websites & Social Media

www.northamptonunitarians.org.uk
[https://www.facebook.com/Northampton Unitarians](https://www.facebook.com/NorthamptonUnitarians)
<http://sue-still-i-am-one.blogspot.co.uk>
<http://www.midland-unitarian-association.org.uk>
www.unitarian.org.uk
www.unitariansocieties.org.uk

Calendar for December 2023 – February 2024

Events for December to February are as follows:

December

Sunday 3rd Carol service: Aleks Zglinska 11.00 am
Sunday 17th Congregational Circle service. Theme: Winter
and the Solstice 11.00 am

January

Sunday 7th Worship service, Jon Small, 11.00 am
Sunday 21st Worship service, Aleks Zglinska, 11.00 am
Each Weds. Blue Boat, Noon till 4.00 pm
Each Weds. Labyrinth Walk, 5.30 till 6.30 pm
Weds. 31st Threads, craft and chat group 2.00 till 4.00 pm

February

Sunday 4th Worship service: Rev Sue Woolley
Sunday 18th Worship service: Aleks Zglinska
Each Weds. Blue Boat, Noon till 4.00 pm
Each Weds. Labyrinth Walk, 5.30 till 6.30 pm
Weds. 28th Threads, craft and chat group 2.00 till 4.00 pm

Please join us for our new initiative, “Walk in Wednesdays”, which will be taking place each Wednesday between 12 noon and 6.30 pm during January and February.

See p. 4 for more information.

Message from our Community Development Coordinator: Northampton Unitarians

Season's Greetings! Merry Christmas! Hanukkah Sameach! Blessed Yuletide! Happy New Year! And however you celebrate during this holiday season may you be blessed with friends and family to spend it with and the comforts and joys of hospitality and good food.

This year we are once again doing a collection for the Crisis at Christmas Appeal in both our December services. From the Crisis website-

“Why donate £29.73 to Crisis at Christmas?

We calculate that it costs £29.73 to help someone experiencing homelessness over the Christmas period - whether that's in our day centres, hotels or in our year-round services. This includes longer term support to help leave homelessness behind for good.

This is based on the number of people we expect to support and includes set up, food, clothing and accommodation, travel and insurance. We review this figure every year.”

We will welcome donations at our services in December but it might also be that you can hold an additional personal event at work or with friends to raise funds for the charity – there are lots of ideas on their website. If we could help just one person that would be excellent, but it would be great to aim for more if we can.

On the topic of helping the community, during January and February, the **Blue Boat** returns in a new format as a warm room between midday and four in the afternoon each Wednesday. Our hall area will be set up with tables for tea and coffee, there will be

toys and crafts available for all ages, and the sanctuary will be available as a space for reflection for the whole community. There will be light refreshments available.

After this, from 5.30pm to 6.30pm, we will open for **Labyrinth Walking** with tea and coffee. We have missed the labyrinth, so having it back in regular rotation will hopefully feel spiritually grounding for the community and perhaps bring us into contact with new friends.

We hope that these “**Walk-In Wednesdays**” will foster a place for mutual community support and the development of stronger links with our local community. We will be seeking funding to support us in keeping the heaters running during the programmed winter season. Our greatest hope is that by March, when I write to you again, we will have an established programme that will allow us to seek more funding from external funders and improve our facilities and offerings to the community. We are so lucky to have our home in the heart of Northampton and the compliments we get about the welcome from other community groups who use our space alongside us are very encouraging. We are becoming known for our inclusive welcome and radical hospitality and that is something we should all be very proud of being a part of.

We have two services for Christmas: the 3rd is a Carol Service with a Christmas Story led by Aleks. We'll trim our tree on the same occasion, so please also wear your Christmas garments (jumpers, hats, scarves, jingly earrings etc) if you'd like to, which will make our photos very jolly! All are welcome: the young, the old, the young at heart. The 17th is a Congregational Circle on the theme of *Winter and the Solstice* and will be more reflective. We will have mince pies and mulled wine/ juice afterwards. You are welcome to send or bring in contributions for the Circle. You can read these yourself or ask a friend to share them, music

contributions are also welcome. If I can get it on Spotify, just let me know. Again all are welcome.

Holiday blessings from myself and my family to you and yours.

Aleks

The World in Festive Splendour by Sue Woolley

The Romanian-born American writer, political activist, Nobel laureate and Holocaust survivor, Elie Wiesel, once wrote, “the world appears in festive splendour to those who look at it without desire.”

At this time of year, when we decorate our houses (both inside and outside) and our shops and our streets, the world may indeed seem to have “festive splendour.” But I'm not sure that is what Wiesel was talking about. The meaning of his words is much deeper. He seems to be saying that “beauty is in the eye of the beholder” and that if we can detach ourselves from our desires, anything can look beautiful. Whereas if we cannot detach ourselves from our desires to have other than what we already do, then the most beautiful scene or object may seem tawdry, cheap, not enough.

So perhaps our challenge this Christmas is to truly appreciate what we have – to look at it with new eyes, so that we see its “festive splendour”, rather than casting envious glances towards the lives of others. If we watch too many TV adverts, with their visions of happy families getting together, silly paper hats on their heads and corny Christmas jumpers stretched across full stomachs or dresses of velvet and sequins, and of tables groaning with

delicious food, and our own lives are less than ideal, it can be easy to be seduced into believing that everyone else is better off than we are.

Nevertheless, these visions are far from the reality for many people. As I have written before, Christmas has a darker, largely unacknowledged side. There are many lonely people who simply don't have anyone to share Christmas with, who wouldn't feel like celebrating even if they did. For them, the contrast between their lives and the "ideal Christmas" projected through the media can exacerbate their feelings of isolation, panic, stress, and depression. Christmas becomes a season to be got through somehow, rather than a time of joy and sharing.

So perhaps we should also bear these people in mind, and do our best to make their Christmasses a little better, a little happier, in whatever way we can. By giving generously to our Crisis at Christmas collections, for example, or by making a donation to a food bank, or another charity for the homeless, or taking the time to visit a neighbour whom we know is alone.

It doesn't take much to make a positive difference. Not only for them, but also for us. Because if we can concentrate on the needs and desires of others, it will have a beneficial effect on our own perceptions of this complicated season.

May your Christmas be full of festive splendour and may our "Walk in Wednesdays" early next year enable us to share the much we have with others.



Northampton Unitarians

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### *A Chalice Lighting for Christmas / Yule by Yvonne Aburrow*

Every child is a miracle and a mystery  
And in the one born at midnight  
In the dark time of the year  
We see all children leaping into the light  
And as we light this flame  
We honour the light in everyone,  
the Christ in everyone,  
the child in everyone.