



Northampton Unitarians News

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

Issue 79, March - May 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/Northampton%20Unitarians)
<http://sue-still-i-am-one.blogspot.co.uk>
<http://www.midland-unitarian-association.org.uk>
www.unitarian.org.uk

Calendar for March to May 2024

Events for March to May are as follows:

March

- Sunday 3rd Worship service: Aleks Zglinska 11.00 am
Sunday 17th Congregational Circle service.
 Theme: Dreams 11.00 am
Weds. 27th Threads, craft and chat group 2.00 till 4.00 pm
Weds. 27th Labyrinth Walk, 5.30 till 6.30 pm

April

- Sunday 7th Worship service, Aleks Zglinska, 11.00 am
Sunday 21st Worship service, leader TBA, 11.00 am
Each Weds. Labyrinth Walk, 5.30 till 6.30 pm
Weds. 31st Threads, craft and chat group 2.00 till 4.00 pm

May

- Sunday 5th Worship service: Rev Sue Woolley
Sunday 19th Worship service: Aleks Zglinska
Each Weds. Labyrinth Walk, 5.30 till 6.30 pm
Weds. 29th Threads, craft and chat group 2.00 till 4.00 pm

We have decided to reinstate our weekly Labyrinth Walk following the Spring Solstice, as the weather (and the building) should be a little warmer. It is a lovely, gentle spiritual practice.

You are most welcome to join us between 5.30 and 6.30 pm

Message from our Community Development Coordinator: Northampton Unitarians

Spring is one of my favourite seasons. There are only four to choose from of course, but in the ranking of them I think Spring, for me, would come at the top. Every season has its best features, but Spring always contains my favourite festivals. I enjoy Easter for the colour and pageantry of the rituals I inherit from my Polish ancestors. I love painted eggs, but I've never had the patience to try painting or dyeing real ones. Though, through the magic of the Internet, I've now watched a lot of videos of them being decorated. Growing up, my parents had a lot of wooden painted eggs, the shapes were to my small hands (and still are!) pleasingly round to hold. The pine wood smells slightly of that warm scent we all associate with freshly milled conifers! The surfaces of the eggs are multicoloured, with folk art painting reminiscent of the canal style you might know better in British culture. I now have the eggs in my house... at some point I must have either just claimed them or my mother (never as enamoured by having trinkets to dust as I am by the look and feel of said trinkets) relinquished them to my care. At this time of year they make it out of the cupboard. I pile them up in bowls or stack them inside vases. Traditionally they were meant for swapping and gifting, adding to the Easter basket that would be taken to the church for blessing filled with bread, meat and salt.

During the pandemic I was offered the opportunity to join with friends for the seasonal celebrations of another faith, one I was not raised in, but the celebrations of which I have come to respect as those of my friends and neighbours. For Passover, they held an Online Seder which I attended: since we were in lockdown I had to prepare the plate myself at home. I made my versions of many of the items, using what I could from the cupboard (especially in 2020!) I know Scottish oatcakes are not Matzo, but I used what I had on hand!

I was familiar with the story retold during the Passover, but the lens through which I had viewed it in my formative years was that of a Christian; the symbols used to fulfil a later story. The development of The Haggadah and the copies of various versions of historic texts and translations etc is a whole other article of its own that I'll not digress into right now (try <https://www.jewishbookcouncil.org/pb-daily/a-brief-history-of-the-haggadah> for a very thorough timeline of texts for various purposes: it's a living tradition!)

But the text used by my friends was inclusive, with people of all genders participating equally, an orange included on the plate to signify LGBTQ+ liberation also. I read some small sections of the shared storytelling (I do not recall which now) but it was a privilege to be able to celebrate among friends who held this as their tradition. I have only more recently come to understand that some of the people my Babcia (paternal grandmother) would have had as neighbours were Ashkenazi (Eastern European) Jews. I did not grow up in a part of the UK where there is a significant Jewish population, and I don't recall anyone from my local primary school who was Jewish. Since I attended a Catholic secondary school, the likelihood of meeting and including Jewish friends amongst my peers was pretty low (just statistically) rather than thorough personal deliberate avoidance. I have therefore had to develop my understanding of this culture as I have had the opportunity to get to know people whose own origins and personal cultural experiences differ from my own.

And what I have come to learn is that valuing culture cannot be done in a vacuum which excludes all else. I am not an expert in international politics, or particularly well-read on the decisions taken by various governments throughout the 20th century, the impact of which have real-world consequences for millions of people today. Still, the value I do hold of trying to understand the cultural practices of my friends, neighbours and colleagues is one

I relish as part of my adopted Unitarian identity. I also cannot claim to be at the final destination of a personal understanding of cultures which differ from my own. The work of Milton Bennett (see <https://organizingengagement.org/models/developmental-model-of-intercultural-sensitivity/> for a great primer on this topic) emphasises the need to be accepting and not reductive in our approach to intercultural understanding. It is so very tempting (and I have and likely on occasion continued to do this myself) to emphasise 'sameness' when trying to bridge understanding in differences. To say "We are all human", "Everyone is the same underneath" etc. But as I have emphasised before when exploring Disability identity or Queer identity, these platitudes can squash the recognition of the very things we are attempting to make space for in exploring alongside each other as we do. There are steps beyond this that we can take to fully include cultures alongside each other and support and truly celebrate each other and our diversity.

This Spring season let us continue to come together, recognising that we are all on our own, unique journeys of understanding and that our purpose as ever in holding a community together is to all grow in understanding and support one another in meaningful ways which acknowledge the many facets we each have as complex and varied human beings.

Aleks

Blessings of Spring by Sue Woolley

It is another beautiful blue sky day, so welcome after all the rain we've had, and Spring is well and truly here. On my walk today, the annual frenzy of growth was evident, at the sides of the path, in the hedgerows and in the trees. Everywhere, there were buds and flowers and blossoms, and a thousand different shades of

green. And it was beautiful. When I opened my ears, the air was full of bird-song. On such a day, it feels good to be alive.



I have a book of meditations for the months of the year, by Dorothea Breitzter-Kings. Part of the meditation for March fits perfectly with my feeling of well-being this morning:

“The wind is still cool, but when it brushes your face there is a freshness and sweetness in it that leaves you in no doubt that Winter is turning at least. Open yourself to this stirring sensation... let yourself tune into the rousing energy of approaching Spring, along with all of nature around you... Now the sun comes out from behind a passing cloud: it is surprisingly warm and strong. The first rays of Spring sunshine: remember how you have longed for them on dark, overcast Winter days... They are heaven’s kiss of life to the earth after the long Winter sleep. Enjoy how good they feel. Along with all the growing things around you, let yourself, too, be kissed into a Spring awakening by the first warm sunshine.”

Spring is a time of renewal and promise and hope.

How wonderful, how full of wonder. I am blessed, and grateful.

Northampton Unitarians

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### *A Springtime Blessing* by Laura Dobson

May we be blessed by the fertile Earth,  
Our foundation and bedrock,  
With gratitude.  
May we be blessed by the Spring rains  
And the glistening dew,  
Quenching our thirst for freedom and beauty.  
May we be blessed by the shining Sun  
And the growing light,  
Renewing and revealing all as it truly is.  
May we be blessed by the sweetly scented Spring breeze,  
Sweeping away the cobwebs of Winter,  
And bringing us inspiration and hope.