



Northampton Unitarians News

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

Issue 87, March - May 2026

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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>
<http://sue-still-i-am-one.blogspot.co.uk>
<http://www.midland-unitarian-association.org.uk>
www.unitarian.org.uk

Calendar for March - May 2026

March

Sunday 1st Worship service, Heather Korbey, 11.00 am
Sunday 15th Worship service, Jon Small, 11.00 am
Thurs. 26th Threads, craft and chat group 2.00 till 4.00 pm

April

Sunday 5th Worship service, Rev Sue Woolley, 11.00 am
Followed by committee meeting
Sunday 19th Worship service, Chris Nelson, 11.00 am
Thurs. 30th Threads, craft and chat group 2.00 till 4.00 pm

May

Sunday 3rd Congregational worship service:, 11.00 am
Theme: TBC
Sunday 17th Worship service: Mark Beaumont
Thurs. 28th Threads, craft and chat group 2.00 till 4.00 pm



People are So Lovely

It's easy to look around the world and think that people (on the whole) aren't very nice. In some cases this may be an understatement (thinking of certain political leaders, warmongers, the super-rich who fleece the poor, and so on).

Yet, it has been my experience, throughout my life, and particularly in the last few weeks. that most people really are so lovely. Or perhaps I am just lucky in my friends and colleagues.... Perhaps I should explain: since 4th January, I have been visiting all the congregations of the Midland Unitarian Association, to say my farewells, as I am retiring from the posts of both District Secretary and District Minister at the end of February. And I have been overwhelmed by the kindness and good wishes and flowers I have received. None of which I was expecting.

Then, for the last couple of days, I have been on retreat with my ministerial covenant group, which I helped to found, back in 2013. We had our usual time of deep sharing and togetherness, and I am going to miss it heaps. But it is a group for working ministers, so it is time for me to step back and let them go. They, too, presented me with a beautiful rose and a lovely card - so very kind.

All the loveliness of the past few weeks has filled my heart with gratitude and also sadness, that I am no longer going to be in community with these people. Or at least, not for the next twelve months. And if I do begin to lead worship around the District again after that, it will not be the same. I will be an ordinary visiting preacher, not District Minister. And part of me will miss it - will always miss it, I think.

But I will not be disengaging from Unitarianism altogether - I will still be involved with our local Ministers' Meeting, with the Peace Fellowship, with Northampton Unitarians and as a tutor of the Worship Studies Course and a regular columnist for *The Inquirer*.

Heaven and Hell by Jon Small

Early religions and mythologies don't seem to have had a heaven or hell as we understand them – just a place for those that have died to go to.

A Neanderthal cave burial found in the last century included grave goods – a joint of meat and the soil in the grave was full of pollen; showing that the grave had been filled with flowers. They obviously believed in some sort of afterlife and supplied him with at least meat, if not other food of which no sign remained, perhaps for his journey to the land of the dead.

When one has an authoritarian culture, then one seems to acquire a heaven and hell. Once the community becomes large and complex with leaders and privileged classes there becomes a need to control the people; to tax them and administer laws and punish those that break them. One of the ways of controlling people, apart from an official force (army or police) is religion. This can, like the society that gave it birth can become; complex, authoritarian and coercive. On the one hand you have the fear of arrest and punishment and on the other – hell. For those that toe the line and do as they are told there is the carrot – heaven where all that conform, pay their taxes and respect the upper classes and priests will go when they die.

Sometimes the role of king/emperor and high priest were combined as with the Roman Emperor also being the High Priest and Chief Sacrificial Officer of the Temple of Jupiter. When Constantine decided that the best way to keep his ailing empire going was to have a unified, state religion, he chose Christianity (although Mithraism was a close second). He retained the secular power of Emperor, but passed the position of High Priest to the new leader of the new unified and dogmatized Christianity, who became the Pope.

Problems arose when State and Church did not agree as in the case of King Henry VIII of England. A king can arrest you,

torture you and execute you – but a Pope or other high priest can put your very soul in jeopardy. You have to choose!

An alternative to heaven is extinction. The ancient Egyptians believed the soul (*Ab*) was weighed in a balance against the feather of Maat, the goddess of truth, justice and equilibrium. If your soul was 'lighter than a feather' you went to the Elysian Fields, a well-watered land where one could grow anything – even Pharaohs are shown happily tilling the fertile soil! If, however, your soul proved to weigh more than the feather you were immediately eaten and ceased to exist by a composite monster, Amenti largely made up of crocodile that waited by the balance.

The idea of an afterlife seems to be a characteristic of most belief systems. It is thought that the idea derives from sleep. Death is very much like sleep, it's just that you never, ever wake up again and the body you inhabited turns to dust. People today and no doubt in the past dreamt of people they have known who are dead, so the link is made – people when they die go the same place as people who dream go to. We find the idea of extinction difficult to accept – that is probably why the Egyptians found the idea of being eaten by Amenti so frightening. We don't like the idea of the body just rotting and 'pushing up daises'!

Religions such as Christianity say we have one go to get it right and then its waiting for Judgement Day – when its eternal pleasure or eternal pain.

Punishment works in this world. If I do something the state or authorities don't like it can do something to me that I don't like so that next time I think to do that thing I remember the consequences – it's a deterrent and it also functions to deter others. State killing is only a deterrent for others – the convicted definitely won't do it again! It also gives a sort of perverse satisfaction to the populace and possibly the victim if there is one.

What the hell use is hell in religions like Christianity and Islam? Why would the Almighty punish wrong doing for eternity – what sort of pervert is this god? If one has transgressed and is dead one's life (lives?) are over – so it's not going to stop you

doing it again as there will be no opportunity. However, it could serve to satisfy the rest of the followers who could get some sort of satisfaction from the imagined suffering of others and maybe deter them. I find the whole idea sick, the result of corrupt and over-authoritarian religion or faith.

I believe G-D forgives – or at least understands – it is surprising when you look into background of an offence you can think, “Well, I can see why they behaved like that – it’s not right what they did, but given the circumstances am I sure I wouldn’t do something similar?”

We all know the Nazis were evil and the death camps almost unimaginable. How could any human behave that way, do that to a fellow human? Psychological experiments have shown that practically anyone given the right circumstances will do the most surprisingly cruel things to others - ‘judge not, lest thou be judged thyself.’

I personally believe in reincarnation, no - I know that reincarnation takes place and it makes sense, the mistakes I make in this life (and there has been a few, believe me!) can be run past me in another life. I believe we go through many incarnations, gaining Spiritual experiences until we reach a state which superficially can be seen to be undesirable – total extinction – but this is the extinction of the individual and absorption into the Mind of G-D – a true heaven!

As for hell, it exists, not as a place of punishment and pain, but as a place of introspection, a realm of self-examination where one comes to recognise ones mistakes and their consequences.

In a Spiritual Experience I had many years ago that I call the Vision of the Red Halls of Justice I came to meet the Dreadful Judge and it turned out to me myself. One judges oneself more harshly than any second party could, that was hell, it was only a vision, a trailer if you like – I have that to come before my next incarnation – and I believe so do you!

You can then forgive yourself and resolve to do better in your next life.

Northampton Unitarians

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Spring 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.

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