



THE OPEN ROAD

November 2021



*“Any person who, with all the sincerity of heart, is in search for God, on land or in the sea,
is worthy of respect.”*

Riaz Ahmed Gohar Shahi

PLYMOUTH UNITARIAN NEWSLETTER

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From the minister

For our Membership service last week, at which we welcomed six wonderful new members, Suzanne created a beautiful display with the words 'Build bridges & walk together'. I'll be picking up that theme in our first service of the month, but the words have also chimed with recent experiences.

For example, on the weekend of 15-17 October I took part in the Western Union retreat (called 'Refresh') at Hilfield Friary in Dorset. It was a beautiful weekend. The Friary is home to an Anglican Franciscan community who are wonderfully welcoming and hospitable to friends and strangers alike, and it's set in grounds that looked particularly stunning in their autumn colours. In addition to Mary, Michael and myself from Plymouth, other retreatants came from Bridport and Bristol congregations, as well as further afield from Cardiff and Abergavenny. The weekend offered us all a chance to get to know the Brothers (Mary shared memories of Truro with Brother Malcolm, who also used to live there), to eat with them and to experience something of their contemplative lifestyle. It also gave us an opportunity to meet and understand each other better, though silence, singing and sharing, by dancing together and working with clay. I felt we truly built bridges and walked the path together. Two more retreats are being planned at the Friary for 2022. Perhaps you would like to take part in one.

New member Joan from Castle Donington in Derbyshire described how she found us when Myron got in touch via UKUTV, which films Unitarian services and events. Knowledge and experience was shared, bridges were built and now we walk a path together even though separated by many miles.

As our community goes forward we'll keep focusing on building more bridges, not just between ourselves but also with other communities, other faiths, people with diverse backgrounds and cultures, different interests and concerns. We say that everyone is welcome here and, like the Brothers, now's the time to put our words into practice. *Blessings, Kate*

Promptings.

Why do we do what we do? How have we travelled to this point? what are the connections between us? What is our connection with the church? What is our direction of travel as a church community? We meet in person, we meet online, we are members and attenders near and far but one together in being Plymouth Unitarians. We have a church building and this houses us, and all the other groups that share the premises with us.

And this is where some of our difficulties arise. The physical aspect of the building, as we know from our own homes, needs attention to keep everything in working order. It doesn't happen by magic but the magic happens when attention is given. We see this with any change, the problem has to be recognised before it can be remedied.

And we are individuals coming together to express our commitment to a life that recognises the intrinsic part of our spiritual self in our ordinary everyday living. For me, the secular and the spiritual are not separated, all is one, a flowing together. But where can we have these necessary discussions to enlarge our understanding of who we each are?

Both our buildings and our church community need our attention.

The Congregational meeting on the 10th Oct. was the 1st in these shared meetings to be open with each other of what is required as we go forward into 2022. Our next is on Sunday 28th Nov. The conversation continues.

Normally in the Nov. Meeting we decide upon a charity to support for the coming year but we, the trustees! would like us all to take a rethink of this practice. In our church strategy we talked of social engagement and creative partnerships, how does this translate into practice? How best to raise money and awareness? This is an opportunity to take stock and appraise what we have done but is it what we want to continue doing? Your views are essential, whether in person, online, emailed or written!

From a questioning Kathy

Bits and bobs

I'm wondering yet again, where does the time go. It now seems ages since the Green Weekend and now we're moving forward to our next event - The Xmas Fayre.

This will be Saturday November 13th from 2 pm - 4.30, the week before the Guildhall Fayre. So save your pennies and spend them all at ours.

We need raffle prizes and new items for the tombola stall. So if you have any, please bring to church.

A little update on one of our dancers from the Green Weekend - Christina Vargas - keep her name in your mind, I think she is a future rising star.

I was lucky enough to be invited to her dissertation piece which she has now performed at the Exeter fringe festival and has been having talks with people from the theatre.

If you missed her performance at the Green Weekend you can still see it as we recorded all three dancers and you can see Christina on our YouTube channel on the following link. (She's the last dancer to perform after Lauren and Sophie and starts 24 minutes into the video. Myron has set the link to start at 24 minutes, if you want to see the Lauren and Sophie just start the video from the beginning.)

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/GbATRlp5F5M?start=1385>

Enjoy this changing season,

God bless,

Ann

'Some beings will walk with you for the duration of this bodily existence, up to the very end. Some will come with bright promises, bright lights, but they fade quickly. Others come, they don't look like they will go very far, but they are marathon runners; they're there with you all the time. You cannot determine this... Somehow in the flow of your own unique river, you will see that everything is as it should be.'

- Mooji

Kind Children By Peter

This reflection was prompted by one of Ann's Musings in a recent Open Road. She wrote of a young member of her family, a bright and promising boy, whose teachers were impressed by, remarked on his kindness.

That revived a memory for me of a child's kindness in the 1990's when I lived in London.

In the successive lockdown periods and still for those unable to go about as freely as they have normally done, very many people, especially when alone, must have spent time deliberately reflecting, recovering memories, dormant but not lost, from earlier years. Certainly these could not all be happy.

My approach though, was "reasons to be grateful" even now.

One afternoon I fell heavily on a cracked, uneven pavement in a side street near Victoria Station. This was distressing and unnerving. My right hand and knee were bleeding (my trousers torn!) Within seconds, it seemed, a little girl, aged five or so, was at my side herself upset by the sight. She had outrun her mother, who speedily arrived, but not before I thought, "someone really cares, take heart." That young comforter, I trust, is now an adult woman. It isn't possible to thank her again.

You may know, or easily look up, Thomas Hardy's poem, "At the Railway Station, Upway" in which a small and kind boy plays his violin (he says "fiddle") for a handcuffed convict (Hardy's words) being escorted away to prison. Hardy's touching short poem, a short story almost, never loses its freshness for me.

Giving time to ponder one's past does, amongst sadness and disappointments, also revive blessings. How important it is in these still strange and unsettling times for us all to encourage young journeyers - not forgetting their teachers with their burdensome workloads.

Recalling one's past does give substance, frequent reason for gratitude here and now.

The deadline for submissions for the December issue of TOR is 1pm Wednesday 24th November (max 345 words a page to puc.myron@gmail.com).

Services in November– all services at 11am

7th Rev Kate Whyman 'Building bridges'

14th Rev Kate Whyman 'Remembrance Sunday'

21st Ann Kader 'Who are you hiding?'

28th Jennifer Sanders 'Hope' (followed by Congregational Meeting - please bring packed lunch)

Dates for your diary

1-1.45pm, Wednesday 3rd November - Oasis of Calm

2-4.30pm, Saturday 13th November - Christmas Fair

2-4pm Tuesday 16th November - Poetry group in the hall

12-1pm Wednesday 17th November - Green Team in the vestry

7.30-8.30pm Wednesday 17th November - Congregational gathering on Zoom

2-4.30pm, Saturday 20th November - Death Cafe led by Rev Kate and Poppy Buttons.

7.30-8.30pm Thursday 25th November - Heart & Soul on Zoom.

Church cultural outing

I (the Editor) found out that our dear Rev Kate, who is a member of the Plymouth Symphony Orchestra, will be performing in the 'Mayflower 400 Concert' at the Guildhall on the 24th of November, a great opportunity to have a church outing? Tickets in advance, contact Sheila or Myron.

Poetry group

Tuesday 16th Nov 2pm in church hall. The meeting will focus mainly on the planning of the service in December. The theme is 'the rebirth of Wonder' please bring poems on this theme As usual tea and cakes and lively exchanges.

The Green Slot 'What's all the fuss about.' The Editors take.

A response to a talk by David Ramsden at our recent Green Eco Weekend, summarised by Nigel Robers on the Saltash Baptist Church blog:

<https://saltashbaptist.co.uk/2021/10/08/climate-ecological-crisis-whats-all-the-fuss-about/>

Extinction Rebellion, Greta Thunberg and David Attenborough have, in their own ways, been very effective in bringing the scientific findings on climate change to the attention of the public, we've all got a pretty good idea of what all the fuss is about. Unfortunately translating that into meaningful action both personally and collectively that encompasses the complexity and interconnectedness of our globalised world is not so easy to achieve.

How a message is delivered has a great bearing on how that message is acted upon, facts by themselves are neutral but very often facts are interpreted and selected in order to support an ideological position which leads us to set of somewhat depressing and hopeless conclusions.

Without solutions there is only despair and despair crushes the spirit

"We need to remind ourselves that we can still turn this around. It's entirely possible if we are prepared to change. Hope is all around us." Greta Thunberg

Hope springs eternal. The BBC recently broadcast a series of programmes, 'The Earthshot Prize' <https://earthshotprize.org/> which may help turn the tide of indifference and despair. Led by an international panel including Prince William and David Attenborough, the Earthshot Prize

'...aims to turn the current pessimism surrounding environmental issues into optimism, by highlighting the ability of human ingenuity to bring about change, and inspiring collective action.'

Caroline Earl a member of our Green Team says, *"As a country and as a world I think we're all a bit fragile not to say traumatised by the rigours of Covid19.*

My heart was lifted after watching the Earthshot programme. Without downplaying in any way the climate emergency humans need hope and inspiration otherwise life isn't worth living.'

Plymouth Unitarians Congregational Meeting Sunday 10th October 2021

Kathy welcomed all to our first congregational meeting for 2 years. 15 people attended, 13 members, 2 regular attenders; 13 in person, 2 via Zoom. 9 sent Apologies. Here follows a very brief summary. Ask Sheila for fuller account.

Christmas Fayre – Saturday 13th November, 2 – 4.30pm. Stall fee £12. Ann Kader asks for helpers.

Big Green Weekend: Wonderful talks, displays and stalls raised environmental awareness and took £344.67. Thanks to all helpers.

Conversion of church to Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) – should be complete by year end, when all members automatically become CIO members, fitting us for the future, relieving us of financial liability should it ever need to be wound up. Initial Trustees: Kathy Gilbert, Sandra Exley, Sheila Evans. We need another five, plus volunteers to take on various roles, enabling church survival long term, including:

Treasurer – Sandra will resign at AGM 2023. Her replacement would ideally join CMC at AGM 2022, learning from her to ensure a smooth transition.

Western Union (WU) Representative – One delegate required to attend quarterly Council meetings.

Parking – Vacancies filled thanks to Kathy, who stands down at AGM 2022.

House-keeping: Many varied tasks. We need volunteers to keep this place, which sustains us all, in good condition.

Live Streaming: Myron: further developments in the pipeline.

New Website: Myron: On-line content could also be printed and displayed on noticeboards.

Discussion on Outreach/ recruiting members: Many contributed. We need more, especially younger, people to carry us forward.

Suggestions: 'Evangelise' – promote Unitarianism in our individual groups; Display calendar of groups meeting in church, and how to engage with them; Ann had spoken in Arabic to some of the young women who attend the meals Red Cross offers and some of them came to our BGW. There is already a diary on church website; An Interactive Screen fed continuously with updates NB Don't put it all onto Kate, already very busy! How well do we communicate amongst ourselves, as well as people outside? Spirituality: People are thirsty for this. Our spiritual identity needs to be pursued so that people know what we stand for. Many ways of expressing spirituality besides Sunday Services, e.g. Pre- lockdown Mindfulness lunches, gardening, Socinian Communion. Future possibilities: online midweek 'wellness' sessions; LGBTLB+ seek a 'home' with some spiritual connection; they need to know we are here. Daytime activities eg discussion group. Our new monthly Art class is open to non-church people and is run by a *young* artist. For newcomers: How to help them integrate once they have come through the door for the 1st time? Needs a balanced approach. One new member came via the Café and especially liked the Interfaith event. 3 new members are online. How to maintain the connection online and in person?

Recurring Question: Who will do it all? We need to be careful who we ask. This is about community and shared responsibilities

Kitchen improvements: Red Cross hirers have offered to help with fund raising.

Anti-racism course: will be offered in the Spring by Sandra and Rev Kate.

Smoking: Many cigarette ends outside the back door. Some from hirers, e.g. AA group. Some from Midland House staff. Discussion on what to do included removing boxes on outside wall. Send an email to MH, who should offer them a space on its own premises.

Meeting closed at 2.15pm

Date of next Congregational meeting: Sunday 28 November following the Service. This will continue the discussion.