



## THE OPEN ROAD

December 2021/January 2022



*"May we be light bearers, "better to light a candle than to curse the darkness."*

Kathy Gilbert

## PLYMOUTH UNITARIAN NEWSLETTER

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## To find out more about us...

please visit our website: <http://www.ukunitarians.org.uk/Plymouth> or find us on

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## From the minister

Dear Friends

'Abandon your religion and know that the One, the Lord of all worlds, fills every vessel.' Kabir, 15th century Indian mystic

I've been reflecting on the strange year we've just had. It seems hard to believe now that the church was closed for the first (almost) five months, with services going out only on Zoom, Facebook and by post until 23rd May, when we finally reopened. Since then we've been coming out of our shells little by little, some cautiously and others less so, none of us entirely sure we're out of the pandemic woods even now. It has been – and continues to be – a tricky time to navigate, personally and in relationship. Having to adjust to unpredictable cycles of lockdown and varying levels of restriction and 'freedom' has taken its toll on us all, I think, at least to some extent. And while many will be entering this winter more hopeful than at the same time last year, of course that's not true for everyone. We can only guess at the long-term effects on children and their education, on those who were already disadvantaged who have seen their situations worsen, and on the mental health of us all. More than ever, then, people are in need of hope and light and encouragement. We need more compassion for ourselves, for each other and for all people and life on earth.

May we end this year as I hope we will begin the next: by remembering our own fully human and fully divine natures, and by seeing that same shared humanity and divinity in everyone we encounter, whoever they are and whatever their circumstances. Only by recognizing that we are all bound together by forces both seen and unseen – by physics, by biology, by spirit – will we ever build a world in which we can all be truly free. For good.

*Love and blessings, Kate*

## Glasgow and COP 26

It's nearly 2 weeks since COP 26 ended and with it my hopes that the world's leaders would show real leadership in this emergency. Yes, there was movement towards some sort of action but not nearly enough to keep the temperature below the 1.5 degree rise put forward in the Paris agreement. Big business and the fossil fuel industries seemed to rule despite officially having no representatives there! Speaking to those involved it appeared that indigenous people and those from places like The Maldives, where 80% of the land is at most one metre above sea level with nowhere higher than 3 metres) were not really given much of a voice.

The Glasgow 6th November march was attended, in pouring rain, by an estimated 100,000 individuals including representatives from all the environmental groups, the churches etc and, like the march in Plymouth on the same day, really showed, we hoped, that there were millions of people worldwide who were watching COP and demanding strong solutions.

How did we spend our time? Well we marched a lot. We stood with banners, Cornish flags and placards outside places like the headquarters of JP Morgan, the bank with by far the biggest investment in fossil fuels and Drax, the power station company who received £832million in subsidies from UK tax payers in 2020 alone for using wood pellets shipped in from around the world, often from virgin forests and which, rather than being carbon neutral as Drax claims, actually have a large carbon footprint if the destruction of woodland, the manufacturing and transport costs are considered. We listened to many talks, especially powerful were those from people from the most affected areas where droughts, flooding, fires and in some cases complete loss of their homelands have already happened. We also had time to enjoy Scotland with 2 beautiful long walks in mainly sunny weather. We spoke with people from all over the world but most of all we were just there, hopefully showing we cared.

Marianne

## To be at one with the living God

I was reading a poem by DH Lawrence, "All that matters is to be at one with the living God, to be a creature in the house of the God of life." He ends with the words: "feeling the presence of the living God like a great reassurance, a deep calm in the heart". This poem has always brought me comfort, yet it challenges, and this month particularly. Why so? Well-- I am much perturbed and concerned with the distress of many friends, acquaintances and by stories in the news regarding work conditions. This isn't just of the whole caring professions, in hospital and also in the community but of support staff in colleges and universities, bank and finance staff, postal workers, admin. and, liaison workers et al. The work environment is toxic

There is a pervasive feeling of not being valued, being treated as a number, an object. Fewer folk are doing more work and then the stress begins as one can see that it is impossible for one person to do the work of 3 others—or more?!

This life is God's life, and this Advent season reminds us that each child is born into original blessing, as Ann noted in her service. And children become adults – we all should be valued--right throughout our lives. We, as a society, are faltering, services are at breaking point.

In speaking with those who are being stretched beyond limit, I find their one common refrain is: please do pay attention, please write to your MP, your councillor, do be involved with any consultation with Plymouth City Council, or from any other service. But also, if writing to the press or in ordinary conversation, counter the demeaning language often used, such as 'Louts', 'Scumbags', etc as this adds to the dehumanising of another human being, legitimises their treatment and the way they're viewed.

We're now entering a season of light in the depth of winter darkness, Advent, Diwali, Hanukkah. May we be light bearers, "better to light a candle than to curse the darkness".

Hopefully, Kathy.

## **The Sheep and the Lion, a Hindu story**

There was a mother lion with her cub. The mother dies and the cub is on its own. It's wandering around the savannah and it comes upon a flock of sheep. At this point it has no idea of what it is. But the sheep know what it is and when it moves towards the sheep they get a little nervous. Though they quickly realize the lion has no bad intentions. The flock accepts the lion, which begins to live as though it is a sheep. It tries to baaa, has concern about becoming a sweater and so on. Time goes by and the lion is well respected in the flock. Is even considering taking a mate. Then one day another lion, an old one, gives chase to the sheep. As he nears he sees the young lion. Thinking it is joining him in the hunt he continues the chase, but soon realizes the young lion is running away from him along with the sheep. The old lion veers off and grabs the young lion. The young lion is begging for mercy, crying out, "I'm just a humble sheep." Saying nothing, the old lion drags the young lion to the water hole so they can both see their reflection. Seeing their faces together the young lion wakes up. The old lion says, "Roar." And the young lion roars. He doesn't need to take a three month course of roaring. The ability was always innately there. He has recognised he is not a sheep.

### **Security Concerns**

Dear friends, it has come to our attention that on several occasions recently, doors have been left open or unlocked, and lights left on after the building has been vacated. This is a risk to the security of our beautiful building and its contents, and could invalidate our Insurance if we had to make any claims. So, please, take a few minutes to check that you have turned off all lights and closed all doors, firmly behind you when you leave. NB Please make sure the main front door to the church is locked from the inside. Thank you.

The deadline for submissions for the February issue of TOR is 1pm Wednesday 26th January (max 345 words a page to [puc.myron@gmail.com](mailto:puc.myron@gmail.com)).

## Services in December/January– all services at 11am\*

### December

5th – Poetry Group ‘The rebirth of wonder’ (Edinburgh Unitarians join on Zoom)

12th – Rev Kate Whyman ‘Candlelit Carol service. **Please note this service begins at \*4pm.**

19th – Rev Kate Whyman ‘Light in the darkness’

26th – Sheila Evans ‘Soothing Sunday’ with calming seasonal music. For those attending, we hope you would like to bring food to share afterwards, like a mini ‘Faith Lunch’.

### January

2nd – Sheila Evans ‘Thoughts for the New Year’

9th – Rev Kate Whyman ‘Living with intention’

16th – Rev Kate Whyman (Brighton Unitarians join on Zoom)

23rd – Jennifer Sanders

30th – Rev Kate Whyman

### Dates for your diary

#### December

Wed 1st **Oasis of Calm** 1-1-45pm in the church

Wed 1st **Art session** 2-4.30pm in the hall. Ask Ann for details

Tue 7th **Poetry group** 2-4pm in the hall

Wed 15th **Community Café – Christmas party** – 10-1pm in the hall

Wed 15th **Green team** – 1pm short meeting about plans for January

Wed 15th **Congregational Service – ‘Seasonal reflections’** – 7.30 on Zoom

Thursday 23rd **Heart & Soul – ‘Finding calm’** – 7.30pm on Zoom

#### January

Weds 5th **Oasis of Calm** 1-1-45pm in the church