

Opening video/music:

'The Imitation Game' by Alexandre Desplat (on YOUTUBE) 2 minutes 37 seconds.

<https://youtu.be/eN0rD9BezjE>

Welcome + Introduction

Today's service is an atheist themed service written by Steve called 'losing my religion'. Steve has asked the congregation to deliver the service and these are his words.

Steve got the idea for today's service after hearing about a growing non-religious movement called the Sunday Assembly.

The Sunday Assembly is in reality just a church service for atheists and agnostics. They meet in a service style similar to a Christian church but minus the religious elements. The movement started in 2013 in London to create a space where people who had left Christianity but missed the social and communal aspects of going to church could meet.

Steve knows that some of the congregation members are agnostics or atheist.

Others have perhaps once been Christians, but their religious journey and life experience have led them out of mainstream Christianity towards a more liberal church such as ours, or down a different spiritual path which being a Unitarian enables, encourages, and supports.

Steve describes himself as a spiritual person and does follow any set religion. He is not opposed to religion, just religious extremism, which is not compatible with western liberalism as it wants to curtail the rights of other individuals they don't agree with.

Apparently if you say to an atheist, you are a spiritual person, they will roll their eyes, as it is such a broad term. But we Unitarians have respect for all religions and all people, including those of little or no faith, or what is now termed NONES.

Not NUNS as in the term for a woman who vows to dedicate her life to religious service, but NONES, spelt N-O-N-E-S, as in no religion.

The opening music by the way was from the 2014 film THE IMITATION GAME and was composed by Alexandre Desplat.

The film tells the story of atheist British mathematician, and computer scientist Alan Turing played in the movie by Benedict Cumberbatch.

Turing is considered the father of theoretical computer science and worked for the Government Code and Cypher School (GCCS) breaking the code used by the German military to encode their radio communications during WW2. He played a crucial part in the Allied victory over Nazi Germany.

He was also sadly a victim of mid-20th Century attitudes to homosexuality. In 1952, Turing was prosecuted for gross indecency and accepted chemical castration as an alternative to jail. He died in 1954 from cyanide poisoning which an inquest determined was suicide.

Turing was granted a royal pardon in 2013 for his 1952 conviction.

Can you imagine if you told him in 1952 that one day his portrait would be printed on the highest numbered banknote in Britain? And that is exactly what has happened. If you ever have a £50 note, Turing will be the figure you see along with King Charles III.

We start as usual with the lighting of our chalice.

Normally we say as a symbol of our free religious faith but today we are going to be real rebels and say as a symbol of NOT having any religious faith.

Chalice is lit

1st Hymn Number 233 in the Green Hymn Book: 'Others call it God'.

This is a hymn Steve first heard in one of Kate's last (if not last service) with us in December 2024. Steve says he vaguely remembers her saying it was a hymn she heard when she went to her first Unitarian service in Brighton and sparked her interest in Unitarianism and becoming a minister.

A fire-mist and a planet,
A crystal and a cell,
A star-fish and a saurian,
And caves where cave-folk dwell;
The sense of law and beauty,
A face turned from the clod –
Some call it evolution,
And others call it God.

Haze on the far horizon,
The infinite tender sky,
The ripe rich tint of cornfields,
And wild geese sailing high;
And over high and low land,
The charm of golden rod –
Some people call it nature,
And others call it God.

Like tides on a crescent sea-beach,
When the moon is new and thin,
Into our hearts high yearnings
Come welling, surging in,
Come from the mystic ocean
Whose rim no foot has trod –
Some people call it longing,
And others call it God.

A picket frozen on duty,
A mother starved for her brood,
And Socrates drinking hemlock,
And Jesus on the rood;
And millions, who, though nameless,
The straight, hard pathway trod –
Some call it consecration,
And others call it God.

Words: from William Herbert Carruth, 1859 - 1924

Tune: 'Aurelia' by Samuel Sebastian Wesley, 1810 - 1878

Part A

The first part of our service is a summary of atheist history, a sort of timeline of events so to speak. _Atheism is a lack of belief in a deity, God, or the supernatural. _Atheists rely on

reason, scientific evidence, and philosophical inquiry as the basis for their worldview. Atheism is not a modern movement and has existed since ancient civilisations.

Scepticism towards the existence of a God can be found in the writings of philosophers dating back to ancient Greece. It was the Greek philosopher Anaxagoras, one of the first known atheists who said that everything has a natural explanation. The moon is not a god but a great rock, and the sun is a hot rock.

Atheism did not take shape however until much later on in history though. Matthias KNUTZEN who lived from 1646 to around 1674 was a German critic of religion. He is considered the first atheist known by name and in person.

The period we now call the 'Enlightenment' in the 17th and 18th centuries marked a significant turning point and led to increased scrutiny of religious beliefs.

The most famous conflict between religion and science was probably the 1633 trial of Galileo Galilei by the Roman Catholic inquisition. A prominent scientist and astronomer, he proposed the heliocentric model of the universe, rather than the geocentric view of the church. His opinions contradicted accepted biblical interpretations, and the church sentenced him on charges of heresy to house arrest where he remained until his death in 1642.

In the age of science, religion is often seen as harmful superstition, and most scientists identify quite openly as atheists. Science is sceptical of religion because it is based on faith rather than empirical evidence.

In 1789 came the French Revolution, which saw the birth of a Republic and the de-Christianisation of France.

The church, which was seen as a tool of the ruling classes was suppressed, clergy exiled, or killed, and in 1793 the Christian calendar replaced by one starting from the date of the Revolution. It set an example for future revolutions, including the Russian Revolution of 1917.

It was a bit like Year Zero imposed by the communist Khmer Rouge in 1975 Cambodia.

That religious dogma was incompatible with science was solidified in the 19th century with the theory of evolution, and they have never reconciled.

It would be an understatement to say that Charles Darwin and his 1859 publication 'On the Origin of the Species' set the atheist cat amongst the religious pigeons.

Evolution was a direct contradiction to the biblical creation story in Genesis and that life has developed due to natural processes rather than as the creation of a loving God. Darwin was ridiculed and lampooned as heretical and his theory is disputed even today, particularly amongst evangelical Christians.

Think of the 1925 Scopes Trial where a high school teacher was accused of violating the Butler Act, a Tennessee state law which outlawed the teaching of human evolution in American public schools.

And then there is Intelligent Design, formulated in the 1990s which disputes the theory of evolution and is mainly taught in America.

The 19th century also saw the rise of prominent figures who shaped the atheist movement, primarily Karl Marx who described religion as the opiate of the people and served as a distraction from the struggles faced by the working class. They were told to accept their lot, and that a glorious reward awaited them in heaven. Religion encouraged passivity, and to accept authority, control, and the status quo.

The Russian Revolution of 1917 overthrew the Tsarist regime of the Romanovs and led to the establishment of a communist government opposed to the Orthodox Church. The church was a source of authority and legitimacy for the Tsar. The communists saw the church as an enemy and sought to diminish its influence. They seized church property, and curtailed religious education and training of clergy. They promoted atheism as the new state religion although many practiced their faith in secrecy.

The 15 socialist republics which became the USSR or Soviet Union, the majority of eastern Europe, Cuba, and several Asian countries such as China followed suit.

Albania was the first country to constitutionally and formally declare itself an atheist state in 1967.

There are five remaining communist states, China, Cuba, Laos, the Democratic Republic of Korea (or North Korea), and Vietnam. All are non-religious countries although some citizens worship in private or in secret.

Revolutions often suppress religion and religious institutions as they hold God as a higher authority than the state which is a no-no in their eyes. The state is top dog, not God. There is a conflict of interest, a power struggle. Loyalty to the state is paramount, not religion.

This is why the Nazis regarded Jehovah's Witnesses as enemies of the regime, as they refused to take an oath of loyalty to Hitler.

This is also why they are considered an extremist group in Putin's Russia as Jehovah Witnesses refuse to salute the flag, participate in politics, or serve in the military.

The Catholic Church was terrified of communism and its atheist creed.

Had America not intervened with the Marshall Plan post WW2 and provided economic aid to Western Europe to rebuild our war-torn economies, then all of Europe would have come under Soviet influence and Catholicism in Europe would have been curtailed, even destroyed.

Pius XII was the wartime pope, and he is a controversial one due to his silence on the fate of Europe's Jews during the holocaust. He was terrified of communism, seeing what it had done in Russia, and in 1950 issued an encyclical, 'Anni Sacri' on a program combating atheism.

The cold war between 1945 to 1990 was a clash of cultures, and many Americans saw themselves as part of a religious battle against godless communist atheists.

Look at the Joseph McCarthy communist witch hunts between 1945 to 1954.

And then Ronald Reagan, propelled to power by the Religious Right or Moral Majority in the 1980s. In 1983 Reagan in a speech to the National Association of Evangelicals, called the Soviet Union an evil empire and the focus of evil in the modern world.

In Russia, a complete atheist U-turn has occurred. The Russian Orthodox church has seen a resurgence following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. It has now become entwined with a national Russian identity with many Russians embracing the church as a pillar of their cultural heritage. The Russian Orthodox Church led by Patriarch KIRILL and President Vladimir Putin are bedfellows and support Putin's political agenda. Their condemnation of western values, liberalism, and perceived decadence has gained legions of fans across Russia and beyond.

Amazingly the Russian Orthodox church is gaining a foothold in America with its anti-woke, anti-feminist, anti-LGBT agenda, and promotion of traditional family values and unapologetic extreme masculinity.

It's also one of the reasons many evangelical American Christians are more supportive of Putin than Ukraine and have urged President Trump to cease providing financial and military aid to Ukraine.

Another former atheist communist country, Poland, embraced its former catholic roots after 1989, mainly due to former Pope John Paul II who was from Poland and one of the key figures in the Fall of Communism or what is sometimes called the Autumn of Nations. It is now one of the most religious countries in Europe.

The New Atheism movement gained momentum in the early 2000s with Richard Dawkins author of the God Delusion emerging as one of its key voices. But it is globalisation and the internet that has fostered the growth of the NONES in the last 25 years. The internet has become a platform for debate, discussion, solidarity, connection and advocacy for NONES across the world, including countries where it is difficult, and even dangerous to be openly atheist.

Some countries have criminalised atheism. Declaring oneself an atheist is illegal and considered apostasy. It can lead to serious consequences, including the death penalty in countries such as Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan. This often means many atheist Muslims remain what are termed closet atheists, faking belief in a deity for social acceptance within a community. Such is the fear that it is said there are only two places for an atheist Muslim, and that is either in the closet, or in the grave.

2nd Hymn : number 216 in the purple Hymn Book, 'Wide Green World'.

Steve says he knows this is more of an eco-hymn, but he chose it for two reasons.

The first is the growing anti-green movement or rejection of environmentalism within Christian fundamentalist circles.

The second is that one of the key themes in atheism is a focus on the natural world and exploring its wonders as an alternative to religious explanations.

Wide green world, we know and love you:
clear blue skies that reach above you,
moon-tugged oceans rising, falling,
summer rain and cuckoo calling.
Some wild ancient ferment bore us,
us and all that went before us:
life in desert, forest, mountain,
life in stream and springing fountain.

We know how to mould and tame you,
we have power to mar and maim you.
Show us by your silent growing
that which we should all be knowing:
we are of you, not your master,
we who plan supreme disaster.
If with careless greed we use you
inch by extinct inch we lose you.

May our births and deaths remind us
others still will come behind us.

That they also may enjoy you
we with wisdom will employ you.
That our care may always bless you.
teach us we do not possess you.
We are part and parcel of you.
Wide green world, we share and love you.

Tune 'Schmucke Dich' melody Johann Cruger, 1598 – 1662

Words © June D. bell b. 1918. Used by permission

We now have a short prayer Steve created using an AI prayer generator.

In this moment of reflection, we gather our hearts and minds, embracing the wonder of existence and the beauty of our shared journey.

May we find strength in our connections, drawing inspiration from the kindness and love that surrounds us.

Let us cherish the mysteries of life, celebrating the resilience of the human spirit and the light of reasoning that guides us.

With gratitude for the experiences which shape us, we look towards the future with hope and a commitment to compassion.

Together, we honour our shared humanity.

With respect and intention, we close this moment of connection.

As this is an atheist prayer, there is NO amen.

And now a poem called 'Life Without Gods' by Sikandar Kumar Mehta

In a world without gods or fate
We make our own destiny
With every choice and every step
We shape our lives, our legacy

No higher power to guide us
No holy book to show the way
We trust in reason, science
To lead us through each day

We find beauty in the natural
The stars above, the oceans wide
We find wonder in the mysteries
Of science yet to be tried

We live for love and laughter
For family and for friends
We strive for peace and progress
Until our journey ends

In the end, we are but dust
But our impact will linger on
In the hearts and minds of those
Whose lives we've touched upon

No heaven or hell awaits us
No judgment day to fear
We live and love and learn
In this one, precious year

Part B

Our second part of the service is called: 'I once wanted to become an atheist, but I gave up, as they have no holidays'.

This is not exactly true.

There is the National Day of Reason on the first Thursday in May which is popular with atheists and secular individuals.

There is also Atheist Day on March 23, and Atheist Pride Day on June 6 where those in the atheist closet traditionally come out as non-religious, sometimes by announcing their atheism on their social media platforms.

You don't have to be religious to enjoy celebrations like St Valentines Day, St Patricks Day, the four seasonal points, the solstices and the equinoxes, Halloween, Thanksgiving, even Christmas.

You can focus on the community traditions, meeting up with friends and family, buying gifts, and spoiling the younger members of your clan.

There is also NEWTON-MASS which you can celebrate on December 25th if you really object to Christmas. It's a secular alternative celebrating the December 25th birthday of Isaac Newton, a key figure in the scientific revolution and enlightenment.

So, what DO atheists focus on? A life well lived.

Focusing on this, their only life. An exploration of death as the end; there is no afterlife.

A rejection of all things supernatural; a focus on the natural world.

Humanism and ethics, rights, and personal freedom.

This is why so many humanist causes come into conflict with religion, such as LGBTQ+, or reproductive rights, as biblical texts condemn them.

It's another reason religion condemns atheists as immoral.

There is no official atheist bible or holy texts so to speak, unless you count Richard Dawkins, author of the atheist bestseller 'The God Delusion' of course.

There is plenty of reading material though, just type into any search engine and you will have a limitless choice to choose from.

I suppose Dawkins can be considered the High Priest of Atheism.

If you ever hear him speak, he really oozes contempt for anyone who is a believer.

Steve sometimes thinks if he wasn't so contemptuous, Dawkins might get more converts to atheism.

I guess you could call him an atheist fundamentalist.

In some countries being an atheist can lead to social ostracism or even persecution.

America for example is extremely anti-atheist and distrusting of atheists despite having a constitution which separates church and state.

They are one of the most disliked groups in America and it's doubtful any atheist would ever get into the White House as President.

It would be political suicide. A bit like an MP being outed as gay in the 1980s; it meant career death.

The founder of American Atheists was called Madalyn Murray O'Hair. She led the organisation between 1963 until 1986, and she was branded the most hated woman in America by Life magazine in 1964.

There is a perceived link between atheism and lack of morals. You can't be a good person if you don't believe in God which is complete nonsense.

Secular morality is one not based on religious or supernatural revelation, but reason, logic, and empathy.

Morality does not need a divine origin, and just because someone is religious does not mean they are a good person.

Steve says he has met some vile people in other more traditional churches, including a minister he really disliked. His encounter with other churches is one of the reasons he left Christianity and joined our church.

This church accepts you for who you are, and on your terms.

Other churches will often not accept you for who you genuinely are, or will, but on their terms.

We will now hear from the High Priest of Atheism himself in a short two-minute video called All Aboard the Atheist Bus Campaign.

YOUTUBE: Richard Dawkins: 'All aboard the Atheist Bus Campaign' (2.07 minutes).

<https://youtu.be/bSrSwRpBdHk>

Silence + meditation

We now come to a period of silence followed by some music for your personal reflection.

The music is the orchestral version on the John Lennon song IMAGINE.

It is one of the greatest pop anthems of the 20th century and one of Steve's former work colleagues had it played at his funeral which had no religious content.

He was called Richard, but everyone called him Jello. Why he was called Jello, we never knew, but Jello was kind, and loving, always smiling, and without a bad bone in his body. He

loved to travel and visited some amazing places in his life including SE Asia when the terrible tsunami hit in 2004. His parents thought he had been killed in the tsunami as they lost contact with him, but he was fine.

Jello died in 2022 at the age of 48 after a short illness.

Every time Steve hears this song he thinks of him. A song can become engrained with a memory, good or bad.

Steve says he isn't sure if Jello had any religious beliefs but would like to dedicate this service to him anyway. I am sure he wouldn't mind.

The song calls on humanity to love as one, in peace and has become a secular anthem.

Humans without reliance upon anything supernatural can create a better, humane world.

Since being released in 1971 it has sold millions of copies and went to Number 1 in the US and UK pop charts.

Hilariously, one of the candidates for the 2025 papacy, Filipino Cardinal Luis Antonio TAGLE, who is a karaoke fan went viral on TIK TOK after footage emerged of him singing this song in 2019.

This atheist anthem came back to haunt him with a vengeance and was perhaps one of the reasons he did NOT get elected as pope. We will never know!!

Song from YOUTUBE

John Lennon's 'Imagine' played by EPIC Orchestra (2020) – 4.35 minutes.

<https://youtu.be/rIYxwLEL8yI>

Part C

The final part of our service talks about individuals who lost their religious beliefs.

They are now agnostic, even atheist, but previously held strong, even evangelical beliefs prior to leaving religion.

For some, it was personal tragedy that destroyed their religious beliefs.

Alan Turing who we talked about earlier in the service renounced his faith in 1930 after his friend, Christopher Morcom died suddenly from tuberculosis.

Steve once watched a 1985 Nazi holocaust documentary called 'SHOAH' which is a mind boggling nine and a half hours long. It interviews survivors, perpetrators and witnesses to the event.

He has always remembered one survivor who interviewed in Israel, explained how he had abandoned Judaism and was now an atheist.

This is a common theme amongst holocaust survivors. How could God have permitted such a tragedy?

Tragedy challenges traditional notions of faith and divine justice.

There is even a 2008 film called 'God on Trial' based on the true story of how during World War two a group of Jewish prisoners in Auschwitz passed judgement on God for abandoning them.

Ask someone why they don't believe in God, and they will likely say the following to you.

How could a loving benevolent God allow such suffering in the world?

A just world would reward good and punish evil, but this does not appear to be the world we live in.

When bad things happen to good people, or when we see the wicked flourish and go unpunished, we feel like God hadn't held up His side of the bargain.

It is a subject which has perplexed the greatest minds for centuries, and it is a question that will never be answered.

Some responses to this question include one from a Hasidic Master who said that a God who limits Himself to actions that we humans can understand couldn't possibly be God.

Another one is trying to explain God to man is like trying to explain to an ant how a TV works.

Think of the Book of Job in the Old Testament – His wife turns to him and says:

'Do you still persist in your integrity? Curse God and die.'

That biblical story is as close as you can get to the example of man abandoning God due to personal tragedy.

God responds to Job in Chapter 38 verse 4: 'where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?'

It is a book that states God's wisdom and justice are beyond our assumptions about fairness, beyond our reasoning.

Steve's father died in 2019 and had a humanist funeral. He held no religious beliefs. His mother is not a fan either, but whenever Steve visited them in Edinburgh, he used to go to a small local Church of Scotland near their house, as he liked the minster.

She was called the Reverend Louise Duncan and was one of the best ministers Steve has ever met or listened to; she radiated kindness and was genuinely loved by the church and wider community.

He used to give her a chocolate bar every visit to the church just as a simple act of kindness.

Reverend Louise was health conscious and ran marathons for charity, but at the age of around 40 was diagnosed with a rare form of bone cancer, which within about six months confined her to a wheelchair and eventually killed her.

She had a husband and son; I think the son was about seven when she had the cancer diagnosis.

Steve remembers bumping into her prior to her cancer diagnosis near his parents' home as she was walking her dog with her son, chatting with her, and how happy she seemed.

Reverend Louise took part and led services in the church up to the day she was transferred to a Marie Curie Hospice in Edinburgh where she died shortly afterwards.

Steve says he thinks about her a lot, even though she has been dead ten years now.

In those ten years he has seen family members and work colleagues die as well, but Reverend Louise's death is one that really sticks with him. He thinks it's because she was cheated by life, yet never lost her faith in God and that really made an impact on him. She didn't curse God and die.

Anyone who dies young is cheated; it's why we rage when this happens to someone we know.

It really is one of the greatest injustices in the world.

It's a reason we should never complain about our age and getting old, as so many people don't get that chance.

Steve often wonders what impact her death had on the faith journey of the congregation, her family, especially her husband and son. They were all devout Christians. Did they rage at God like Job's wife? I am sure they all prayed fervently for her physical healing, which never materialised.

Steve's mother says that no minister has managed to fill the void left since Reverend Louise died, and the minister that took over the church didn't last long. Her shoes were simply too big to fill.

Others leave religion as their faith journey evolves. Mainstream Christianity is not working for them. Perhaps they have just changed, people do. None of us are the same person we were 10 years ago.

This can even be seen in countries.

Look at the Republic of Ireland, up to recently one of the most die-hard Catholic countries where the Church dominated every part of Irish life.

Many young Irish abandoned Catholicism as a result of the devastating sex abuse scandals, and growing liberalism which is incompatible with the Church's stance on gay rights, reproductive freedom, priestly celibacy, and rejection of women priests.

Ireland became the first country in the world in 2015 to legalise same-sex marriage in an historic referendum. Over 62 per cent voted in favour of amending the country's constitution to allow gay and lesbian couples to marry. This was an overwhelming majority of the population and would have been unheard of, unimaginable in Ireland years ago. It was literally a slap in the face of the Irish Catholic Church. A protest vote. Ireland even voted in an openly gay Irish prime minister in 2017, Leo Varadkar.

This is another reason many countries are abandoning religion, as many religions including most Christian denominations are no longer in sync with society, especially more western, liberal countries.

It is also the reason that Christian denominations including the Church of England are splintering, as congregations in more conservative regions such as Africa don't see eye to eye with more liberal western congregations.

Do you remember Jonathan Edwards the British former triple jumper? He is widely regarded as the greatest triple-jumper in history.

He was a devout Christian, the son of a vicar. He even refused at one stage in his career to compete on Sundays.

Edwards presented 'Songs of Praise' up to 2007, but his religious journey led him out of Christianity, and he now calls himself agnostic, practically an atheist.

I wonder what impact Edwards losing his religion had on his relationship with his family, especially his father?

Then there is Dan Barker, who helped found the Freedom from Religion Foundation in the USA. He was an evangelist preacher from a young age, but said he just outgrew his faith.

Steve watches his YouTube channel as well an atheist podcast called Thank God; I'm Atheist hosted by two ex-Mormon missionaries.

The biggest fear of American Atheists appears to be the ever-growing power of Christian Nationalism, their impact on non-believers in the USA, and the reversal of both women's reproductive and LGBTQ+ rights.

There is also an organisation in the USA called the Clergy Project.

They provide support to clergy who no longer believe in God and want out of their vocation or religious careers. This is across the whole religious spectrum, not just Christianity. The Clergy Project offers support, advice, even career transition assistance including career coaching grants.

It is not quite as simple as saying to someone, just walk away, if you don't like your job, look for another one. The longer you are in a job, the harder it is to move to another one, as you become institutionalised and fear change. Those in religious vocations can lose everything.

Look at Catholic priests for example.

They get a stipend instead of a salary, but also free board, clothing, expenses, cook, even a housekeeper. Think of Mrs Doyle in 'Father Ted'.

Church of England clergy get free housing as well, and I think their council tax paid. Imagine losing your job and home in one, and the impact if you had a family to support.

Also, many who leave a clerical role due to losing their faith can end up being ostracized from their former congregations. They are to all intents and purposes, completely abandoned.

Statistically there will be clergy who have become agnostic or atheist, continuing to work in their respective religious vocations out of fear of losing their livelihood and home. They would just be going through the motions, maybe the older ones hoping to coast the final working years to retirement.

In 2023, the Catholic Church reported 406,996 priests worldwide. Even if one per cent had lost their faith, that is over 4,000 individuals.

Others do bravely leave or come out of the atheist closet like Margaret Ann Gretta Vosper, an ordained minister with the United Church of Canada, a mainstream Protestant denomination. She came out as atheist after the 2016 Charlie Hebdo shooting in Paris. She stated that belief in a supernatural God promoted hatred, and this led to the church instituting a formal review as to whether she was suitable to remain with them as a minister.

In 2018 they came to an agreement with her that she was free to remain with them in the role of minister, but I am sure some of the congregation would be uncomfortable with her atheist status. It would be a bit like attending an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting with a drunk speaker preaching abstinence.

Would we mind as a congregation that our next minister is an atheist?

Steve said he wouldn't. He was not sure what Kate's religious beliefs were, and she was the only minister he knew here.

And finally, some people instead of losing their religion altogether embrace a different spiritual path, even mixing religions.

Perhaps religious dilution would be the term?

Steve googled the internet to see if there was a term, and there is!

It is called believe it or not – 'Trans-Religious'. It means to adopt a broader religious identity beyond calling yourself a specific religion such as a Christian; basically, seeing yourself as a global religious citizen.

Hybrid religion?

Universal Unitarianism, the Bahai faith, celebrity influence would fit the trans-religious criteria perhaps?

Think of the swinging 1960s when the Beatles embraced eastern spiritualism and made it fashionable among the young.

Or the Jewish mysticism craze Kabbalah several years ago with legions of fans following pop icons Madonna, Britney Spears, and actress Demi Moore.

Final Hymn: Purple Hymn Book Number 11: 'Blessed Spirit of my life.'

Blessed Spirit of my life,
give me strength through stress and strife;
help me live with dignity;
let me know serenity.
Fill me with a vision,
clear my mind of fear and confusion.
When my thoughts flow restlessly,
let peace find a home in me.

Spirit of great mystery,
hear the still, small voice in me.
Help me live my wordless creed
as I comfort those in need.
Fill me with compassion;
be the source of my intuition.
Then when life is done for me,
let love be my legacy.

Music Tune: 'Prayer' Shelley Jackson Denhan

Words: Shelley Jackson Denhan © Used by permission

Closing words

There are two.

The first is one Steve found on Twitter. He refuses to call it X.

'Nothing makes atheism more attractive than American Christianity.'

The second is a poem written by a Coventry Catholic priest who left a church as he could no longer stand the congregation. He said it was a parting gift to them.

It went viral on the web and is called 'Not I Lord surely!

'Gossip flows from holy lips.

A mix of disgruntled, unlikeable, entitled, offended, who don't want to know.

Better than you, holier too.

Tutting for a living, whispering about you know who.

What makes people not come to church?

Could it be the people who already go?
The righteous, the clique, the worthy.
The disdainful look given, the thought of you're in my seat.
The unfriendly, so that a stranger remains always so.

Steve says this poem really made him laugh as he has been to a church this could have been written for.

Thank you for listening.

Chalice is extinguished.

Music video

'No Time for Caution' by Hans Zimmer (Epic Orchestral Cover) 4 minutes 20 seconds

<https://youtu.be/j7IP4L2Ct-0>