

## Service lead by Linda “ Congregational Service ” May 10<sup>th</sup> 2026

### “How I Came to this Church”

#### (Audio MP3 'Finlandia' Jean Sibelius 3:51 mins)

Our opening music was a really old 1921 recording that has been remastered, of 'Finlandia' by Jean Sibelius played by The Philadelphia Orchestra conducted by the famous conductor Leopold Stokowski.

#### (The Welcome)

Welcome to you all, those of you here in the church and all of you zoomers joining us online; also those who might later be watching the recording on You Tube.

You are all welcome here how ever you are feeling, what ever your faith or religion, or even if you have none. All are welcome here in this our Unitarian Church.

#### (Chalice Lighting & Chalice Prayer)

And now, as is our custom, I'll begin this time of prayers, readings, and hymns by lighting our chalice flame as a symbol of our free religious faith.

#### (Light Candle)

The chalice prayer I've chosen is

#### “The Liberal Light” by Cliff Reed

We kindle the light of our liberal faith : may it be  
the light of knowledge to dispel ignorance,  
the light of reason to dispel superstition,  
the light of love to dispel bigotry and inhumanity,  
no matter what their guise.

#### (An Opening Prayer)

#### “The Universal Conscience” by Cliff Reed

Whatever our quality of faith concerning God,  
Whatever name we use to praise the Ultimate,  
Whatever sacred way we claim to take,  
Whatever sage or prophet we invoke,  
Whatever avatar or epiphany we say commands our heart,  
it will suffice – if we act rightly according to love and conscience.  
At the last, may their testimony witness to a life  
that healed and blessed the world as best it could.  
And in that, may we be granted peace.

**(Opening Hymn 280 in the Green hymn book )**

Our opening hymn was chosen by Steve Finnie as one of his favourites and is a good one to open this service with. It is Hymn number 280 in the Green Hymn book "Morning Has Broken" Stand if you are able, the words will appear on the screen.

**"Morning Has Broken"**

(Gaelic Melody / Eleanor Farjeon)

Morning has broken,  
Like the first morning,  
Blackbird has spoken,  
Like the first bird,  
Praise for the singing!  
Praise for the morning!  
Praise for them, springing  
Fresh from the Word!

Sweet the rain's new fall,  
Sunlit from heaven,  
Like the first dew fall,  
On the first grass.  
Praise for the sweetness,  
Of the wet garden,  
Sprung in completeness,  
Where his feet pass.

Mine is the sunlight!  
Mine is the morning,  
Born of the one light,  
Eden saw play!  
Praise with elation,  
Praise every morning,  
God's re-creation  
Of the new day!

**(My Opening Words)**

In the Spring of 2023 I along with a few other members of the congregation took part in a study group lead by our now retired Reverend Kate Whyman.

The subject was “Being Unitarian” and took the form of three sessions.

The first “Exploring Our Journey”, the second “Belief” and the last “Practice”.

In preparation we were asked to consider: what we hoped to find by coming to church.

We studied the origins of the Unitarian faith and read several pieces by various Unitarians past and present; including “Unitarian? What's That” by the Rev. Cliff Reed.

I will quote a piece from one of them, written by Marilyn Sewell who is a retired Unitarian Universalist.

She wrote :~

“We believe that human beings should be free to choose their beliefs according to the dictates of their own conscience. We believe in original goodness, with the understanding that sin is sometimes chosen, often because of pain or ignorance. We believe that God is One. We believe that revelation is ever unfolding. We believe that Jesus was a prophet of God, and that other prophets from God, have risen in other faith traditions. We believe that love is more important than doctrine. And lastly; We believe that God's mercy will reconcile all, unto itself in the end.”

The writers varied in their views and we discussed the writings at length.

Our Homework was to put into our own words our own spiritual journey. During the course I wrote three pieces which I titled “Me and My Faith”, “Being Unitarian” and “Awe and Wonder”. We did have the opportunity to read our pieces out to Kate and our fellow students.

Recently I found a folder in the Vestry which contains similar writings by other members of the congregation past and present. I realised reading through them that most of the people are no longer of this world, the few that are still with us, made really interesting reading, however none were on the Study Group with me.

I was going to ask anyone who wasn't included in this folder to add their pieces to it.

As we were going to have a Congregational Service I thought that this was an ideal opportunity to get everyone to contribute their thoughts on the subject of “How we came to this church” and, more importantly, what keeps us coming here.

During this service I will be asking members of the congregation to come up and read their pieces for us. To start us off I'm asking Christel to come up and read the words from the Hymn 'Song of Peace' which is one of her favourites; it is sung to the music called 'Finlandia' by Jean Sibelius that we heard playing as we came in to church.

The lyrics were written in 1934 by Lloyd Stone and it is also called 'This is My Song'

A third verse was added in 1964 written by Georgia Harkness.

Unfortunately the third verse doesn't appear in the hymn book.

**(1<sup>st</sup> Reading) Christel ~**

This is my song, O God of all the nations,  
A song of peace for lands afar and mine;  
This is my home, the country where my heart is,  
Here are my hopes, my dreams, my holy shrine;  
But other hearts in other lands are beating  
With hopes and dreams as true and high as mine.

My country's skies are bluer than the ocean,  
And sunlight beams on clover leaf and pine;  
But other lands have sunlight, too, and clover,  
And skies are everywhere as blue as mine.  
O hear my song, thou God of all the nations,  
A song of peace for their land and for mine.

May truth and freedom come to every nation  
May peace abound where strife has raged so long;  
That each may seek to love and build together,  
A World united, righting every wrong.  
A World united in it's love for freedom,  
Proclaiming peace together in one song.

Thank you Christel.

**(2<sup>nd</sup> Reading) Stephen :~**

Now I'm going to ask Stephen to come up and read his piece for us.

After my many bad experiences in the Christian Church, I vowed never to set foot in a church ever again. However, Margaret became aware of this church during the Covid lockdown, and she wanted to go, so I was her chaperone for the day. I was surprised at how warm the welcome was and at how friendly people here are. I liked the fact that I was not judged about my beliefs and that people would listen to me. This is such a lovely church that I have been coming to this church for well over three years now.

Thank you Stephen.

**(Second Hymn 24 in the Purple Hymn Book )**

Our second hymn was chosen by Ann Kader as one of her favourites and it is also a favourite with many of us.

Hymn number 24 in the Purple hymn book “Come Sing A Song With Me”

Stand if you are able, the words will appear on the screen.

“Come, Sing a song with me”

(Words & Music by Carolyn McDade)

Come, sing a song with me,  
come, sing a song with me,  
come, sing a song with me,  
that I might know your mind.

And I'll bring you hope when hope is hard to find,  
and I'll bring a song of love and a rose in the winter time.

Come, dream a dream with me,  
come, dream a dream with me,  
come, dream a dream with me,  
that I might know your mind.

And I'll bring you hope when hope is hard to find,  
and I'll bring a song of love and a rose in the winter time.

Come, walk in rain with me,  
come, walk in rain with me,  
come, walk in rain with me,  
that I might know your mind.

And I'll bring you hope when hope is hard to find,  
and I'll bring a song of love and a rose in the winter time.

Come, share a rose with me,  
Come, share a rose with me,  
Come, share a rose with me,  
that I might know your mind.

And I'll bring you hope when hope is hard to find,  
and I'll bring a song of love and a rose in the winter time.

**(3<sup>rd</sup> Reading) Ann Kader :~**

And now I'll ask Ann to come up and read her piece for us.

How I came to the church

When I moved down here 20 years ago, I wanted to find a spiritualist church as I had been going to my spiritualist church in London for about 25 years and loved it. Unfortunately I wasn't keen on the spiritualist churches here in Plymouth.

I kept walking past our church and there was a sign outside saying "everybody welcome"

So I said to the lady outside , who I found out later , was lovely Sheila - " I'm a spiritualist, can I come here". She invited me in. I heard Richard Lovis give a sermon , which I found meaningful, I can't remember what it was about but the hymn was Weaver God Creator , this has been one of my favourite hymns ever since.. I also found out that there was a Unitarian Psychical society which I joined. I got to know the people who attended, who are now my friends.

So I came because of the interesting services, the community of caring people and it is in walking distance from where I live.

And I've never left.

Thank you Ann.

**(4<sup>th</sup> Reading) Anne Ashley:~**

And now I'll ask Anne Ashley to come up and read her piece for us.

I attended a small Church of England School in a village in Surrey. I loved the days when the vicar talked to the children about the parables and stories of Jesus. However, I wasn't so enamoured when, as I grew up, I was expected to attend Sunday School which inevitably led to actually leading Sunday School, as well as attending weekly services. There was no way to escape – until I did! The habit of church had been so instilled into me that I searched out churches as I went through life. By the time the early 1980's had come along, and by now only an occasional service attender, I wished to be married in a church as opposed to a registry office. As the C of E would not recognise marrying divorcees, my now ex husband and I had to come up with a plan. It was at this point that he remembered the connection his grandparents had had with this very church. After an appointment with the Rev John Storey, the rest is history as they say. I became a member and have attended ever since, albeit not quite so regularly these days. I have been Secretary of the Western Union, a keen attender of the Annual Meetings, and also chair, secretary and President of our own church. I only gave up most of these posts around the time my daughter was taken ill. After four years caring for her, I became older and a little more selective about what I chose to do, hence my more backstage appearances these days. The church, and what it represents, has always been a presence. I have learned a lot, met some lovely people, and enjoyed the stimulation that it provides. It's ethos of a non-creedal and free-thinking church has been, and still is, of great value. I will continue supporting my church for as long as I am able, adding additional years to my already 45 plus years of membership.

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I'd like to read the last two verses of hymn number 233 in the Green Hymn book before I read some words of; and about our previous ministers.

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.

### **(My Reading ) Previous Ministers :~**

That was the words of the hymn called “ Others call it God”  
This is mentioned by our former minister the Reverend **Kate Whyman** who was our Minister from 2014 until she retired in 2024.  
It appears in the book “Fragments of Holiness” and I'd like to read it to you.

“The first Unitarian service that I ever attended included the hymn 'Others Call it God' by William Herbert Carruth . I was quite unable to sing it. The idea that God might be encountered in the “high yearnings” of our hearts, in “a picket frozen on duty” or “a mother starved for her brood” literally took my breath away and filled my eyes with tears..... The words spoke to me of a divine power that finds expression through each one of us when we dare to live fully and fearlessly from the depths of our hearts and souls; when we willingly make sacrifices out of love and concern for others; and when we allow ourselves to be guided by spirit rather than merely by ego – in other words, when we live with integrity. “

*The minister before Kate was*

**Brian Packer** from 2001 to 2009

He wrote the history of how this church building came to be built. It was published in May 2008 the year before his ministry ended, and the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of its opening on 31<sup>st</sup> May 1958. He called it "From Chapel to Church" and there are several copies in the church library if anyone would like to read it. In it he transcribes the now faded Foundation stone located on the east wall of the church. It reads :~

"This stone was laid on 13<sup>th</sup> July 1957 to mark the foundation of this Chapel to be used for the worship of God in a spirit of religious liberty by the Plymouth Unitarian Congregation which was established in the year 1662 and met in two successive Chapel buildings situated in Treville Street during the years 1689 to 1941, also to commemorate , the removing in 1949 of the Burial Ground from the site adjoining the Treville Street Chapel to a common memorial garden at Efford Cemetery.

The stone on the western wall was removed from the ruins of the second Chapel destroyed on the 21<sup>st</sup> March 1941 during the second World War and records the date (1831) when the first building was replaced."

Unfortunately he doesn't give us any personal details, obviously a very modest man.

*And before him was*

**Richard Lovis** who was Lay Preacher from 1994 to 2001 and who had served the church for many years before that. He wrote :~

"But it's not about theology, is it ? It's about fellowship too. Over the years the members of this church have been a kind of second family for me, with all that word means in terms of caring. Squabbling, forgiving, supporting and yes, loving. I have tried to pull my weight as a family member, I have held every office, including the privileged one of being Pastor, and I have done my share of most things from polishing the floor to painting the ceiling! I'm getting on a bit now, but as I look back at how in my experience the congregation here at Notte Street has treated its elderly members, I am confident that my presence here, my beliefs and my opinions will continue to have the respect and affection that a good family affords to its older members, while it also gets on with the important task of involving new members in its life and making the changes that changing times and generations require of a living church and fellowship."

*Before him*

**Rev. Patricia Womersley MA** was Minister from 1984 to 1992 she wrote :~

"Welcome to this church, where we are trying to create a living community, not on the basis of uniformity of belief, but out of our shared concern for the central and most significant issues of life and death. We ask only that you try to live from your own depths, and respect others in theirs. In this church you are free to believe what you honestly believe now, but you are also free to change your mind, as you grow and develop. Our message, therefore, can never be finalised. Your personal religion is of ultimate importance: don't let others decide for you, what it is."

*And lastly before her the Minister was :~*

**John Andrew Storey** from 1979 to 1984

He wrote the words to 32 hymns that appear in the Unitarian green hymn book, but only eight of these are on our system. I'm going to read the words of one of these; hymn number 173; it's title is "The Fellowship of the Church".

"The Church is not where alter stands within the hallowed walls,  
but where the strong reach out their hands to raise the one who falls;  
not stately building, standing fair, where people sing their creeds,  
but fellowship of loving care which serves all human needs.

The Church is not where ancient rite is seen on sabbath days,  
but wisdom's constant beam of light to guide our common ways;  
the Church is me, the Church is you, not mortar, brick and stone;  
it is with all who love the true, and where true love is shown."

**(MP4 Reflective Video "Imagine" Music Travel - Love & Friends 3:34 mins)**

Before our last two readings we will have a few moments of quiet reflection to meditate on what we have heard so far followed by a video : ~  
of "Imagine" written by John Lennon and sung by people from various countries around the world.

Imagine there's no heaven  
It's easy if you try  
No hell below us  
Above us only sky  
Imagine all the people  
Living for today... Aha-ah...

Imagine there's no countries  
It isn't hard to do  
Nothing to kill or die for  
And no religion, too  
Imagine all the people  
Living life in peace... You...

You may say I'm a dreamer  
But I'm not the only one  
I hope someday you'll join us  
And the world will be as one

Con't

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Imagine no possessions  
I wonder if you can  
No need for greed or hunger  
A brotherhood of man  
Imagine all the people  
Sharing all the world... You...

You may say I'm a dreamer  
But I'm not the only one  
I hope someday you'll join us  
And the world will live as one

### **(5<sup>th</sup> Reading) Gill :~**

And now I'll ask Gill to come up and read her piece for us.

“I came to this church via the Cafe, because Ann and Christina kindly offered the walking group **teas**. The Barbican Legends were thinking about setting up a place to meet up and to finish their walk. The walk never materialised, but I stayed! I've always loved being in a church, but only when the vicar was absent! Rev. Kate changed all that, but I was astonished when she suggested I become a church member. The congregation were lovely people, but I couldn't imagine they wanted me as a member. I'm not keen on parties, but when I went to one, I often celebrated not wisely; but too well! I rarely called a spade a spade, it still is 'A bloody Shovel' which isn't exactly dignified! Kate insisted I was wanted, so in October 2021 I joined. That was one of my better decisions! The congregation are still lovely people, but now I count many of them as valued friends, and this little church as a special place of peace and joy.”

Thank you Gill

### **(6<sup>th</sup> Reading) Steve's piece read by Sheila :~**

And now our last reading which was written by Steve Finnie and will be read for him by Sheila.

*Con't*

These are Steve's words.

I began attending regularly in early 2019, drawn by the style of services, and became an official member on 24 October 2021. I joined because this church feels far more relaxed than others I have attended. This is largely due to its liberal and progressive outlook, both within the congregation and in the way, services are conducted.

Ours is among the most liberal denominations – comparable in many ways with the Quakers – with a strong commitment to inclusion and social justice, values that are so often less evident in more traditional churches. Here, you can truly be yourself. You are accepted on your own terms, warts and all, whereas in many other churches acceptance can feel conditional. I genuinely feel a strong sense of community within this congregation. We care about one another in a real and meaningful way – even, at times, for those who test our patience. I would describe us as something of a Marmite church - our style and attitude tend to inspire strong reactions, and not everyone connects with what we do. I have attended other churches in Plymouth, including Methodist Central Hall, St Andrews Minster Church just up the road, and one in St Judes. However, I have never quite experienced the same sense of belonging or acceptance as I do here. Many of us who attend regularly have stepped away from mainstream Christianity for a variety of reasons. That said, I have not left religion altogether – I still consider myself a spiritual person.

I know that term can make some people, particularly atheists, groan because of how broad and ambiguous it is. Nevertheless, it is the best way I can describe how I feel. My spiritual journey has led me to this church - a place where I truly feel I belong.

Thank you Steve and Sheila for reading it out for him.

**(Closing Hymn P167 “ There is a place I call my Own”)**

And now our closing hymn which I have chosen. It's my favourite and was also a firm favourite with our dear Thelma who sang beautifully but sadly, like many others is no longer with us.

It's hymn167 in the purple hymn book “ There is a place I call my Own”

Stand if you are able, the words will appear on the screen.

**“There is a Place I Call My Own.”**

(Words & Music Don Besig)

There is a place I call my own, where I can stand by the sea,  
And look beyond the things I've known and dream that I might be free;  
like the bird above the trees gliding gently on the breeze,  
I wish that all my life I'd be, without a care and flying free.

But life is not a distant sky, without a cloud, without rain,  
and I can never hope that I, can travel on without pain.  
Time goes swiftly on it's way, all too soon we've lost today.  
I cannot wait for skies of blue, or dream so long that life is through.

So life's a song that I must sing, a gift of love I must share;  
and when I see the joy it brings, my spirits soar through the air.  
Like the bird up in the sky, life has taught me how to fly.  
For now I know what I can be, and now my heart is flying free.

**(Closing Words & Prayers)**

I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to today's service. I hope everyone here in church, on Zoom, later watching it on YouTube, or reading the script on our Website has enjoyed all that has been written, sung and read by the present congregation and former Ministers of our church. I hope it has sparked your interest in finding out more about the Unitarian faith, and we look forward to maybe welcoming you into our church and our fellowship one day.

This prayer is a recasting of words by Charles Dickens' written in 1844 as his tribute to the Unitarian Reverend Edward Tagart. Dickens admired Tagart greatly and attended his services, and the Minister influenced Dickens's personal religious views. The letters of Charles Dickens mention Tagart frequently, describing him as a "celebrated Unitarian minister" and a "very highly" respected friend.

“May our religion have sympathy  
for people of every creed  
and venture to pass judgement on none.  
May the lessons of Divine Truth  
sink into our hearts and not be forgotten in our practice”.

And a closing prayer before I extinguish our chalice flame: ~

*“Parting In Love” by Cliff Reed*

Uniting God, who transcends our differences  
and holds us in your loving hands,  
we thank you for the spirit of  
goodwill and co-operation that you  
have brought to us today.  
Forgive our failures and  
be with us in our struggles to  
sense your will and to do it.  
As we part, let it be in love,  
with resolve to find a way forward  
for our communities of faith,  
and bless us as we go our homeward ways.

Or maybe you will be staying on the Barbican to enjoy what's left of Pirate Weekend!

**( Extinguishing of the Chalice candle followed by the closing video and our notices )**

***(Extinguish Candle)***

The closing video is the song “Blue Boat Home” by Peter Mayer  
After which we will have our Notices and you are welcome then to join us for  
tea or coffee in the hall.  
Please also try to donate any small amount you can, to our offertory - thank you.

**(MP4 Closing Video “Blue Boat Home” 4:02 mins)**

**Notices & Tea & Coffee in the Hall**