

The Liberal Christian

Herald

An Adult Faith?

Summer Meeting

Does prayer have any effect?

September 2014 No81



Rev David Usher at the Summer Meeting

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From the Editor



There may be no obvious theme to this issue but some common threads do stand out.

The first is the continuing complexity of our spiritual lives as Unitarians, reflected in articles about prayer and our relationships to other Christian groups.

The other is our relationship to the world at large. I hardly dare comment on recent events as things change so quickly

from day to day, but the levels of violence and aggression seem never-ending and the disparity between rich and poor seems to grow ever greater. It is at this point that my recent encounter with the sculptures of Timothy Schmalz have been very instructive. He has upset many comfortable Christians by highlighting the reality of poverty which Jesus himself constantly alluded to, a teaching which Pope Francis has also taken for his own and become equally challenging across the Roman Catholic world. Maybe this is the very thing which could unite us. Not so much a social crusade as a spiritual one which would draw together the teachings on charity and poverty across religious beliefs and move to practical ways of bridging the gap which we daily experience. It is not someone else's responsibility—it is ours.



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Cheques payable to the Unitarian Christian Association should be sent to Catherine Fozard, 20 Handforth Road, Wilmslow, Cheshire SK9 2LU.

The photographs of the 2014 AGM which appeared in the last issue were taken by

Ian Bradbury.

We apologise that he was not credited at the time and are most grateful for his contribution to the Herald.

An Adult Faith?

Rev Jean Bradley



Over the last few months, my husband Alex and I have been leading a course called 'Embracing An Adult Faith' created by the American theologian Marcus Borg. The small group met at our home fortnightly. Each session consisted of watching Marcus Borg discussing different aspects about faith and theology on a DVD. The five subjects were *God, Jesus, Salvation, Practice* and *Community*.

The handbook which comes with the DVD offered several approaches in leading the two hour sessions, which was very useful, as each group may have varying theological backgrounds or differing places of worship. So Alex and I would prepare each session in the way we thought appropriate for our particular group. That preparation was also a useful time for us, as it gave us a new opportunity to consider or even rethink some of our own theological positions.

For my part, I found the subjects God and Jesus very stimulating but when it came to salvation, I felt very apprehensive. As a liberal Christian Unitarian, I have managed to skim my way over salvation, and considered it a word that was used by evangelical Christians. The word salvation, therefore, conjured up words like sin, saved, evil, hell and damnation and that was not for me. My theology is about peace and love rather than suffering.

Yet, because this was part of the course, it enabled me to work my way through the subject. As a Unitarian, I have never felt that I had to be saved. I know that I am far from perfect and have a long way to go before I can see myself as an emotionally and spiritually rounded person. I follow the teachings and example of Jesus as best I can and try to be constantly seeking the divine in all things, but I have never sought salvation in the fundamentalist sense.

When our group met, the discussion was an extremely interesting one, (perhaps the best of the five sessions). No one thought that we had to be saved, in the sense of Jesus saving us, as we tend to think that living our lives

by the teaching and example of Jesus was enough and that it was a personal state or condition to find salvation. This was generally described as a healing rather than a 'saving' of the human condition. A spiritual healing that allowed the love and peace of God to come into our hearts and our everyday living.

The more discussion we had, the more I felt that was my situation too. If I have peace and love in my life, I have no need for aggression; I only want the best for people, strangers and friends alike. So the concept of someone with a faith that declares eternal hell and damnation to others who do not think as they do, gives me great concern for our world and its salvation or healing.

* * * * *

These thoughts remind me of an experience I had a number of years ago. I was visiting a nearby town on my day off, when, just as I was passing a hairdressers, I thought to call in to see if I could get my hair cut. I went in and was pleased to be told that they could 'fit me in'. A very nice girl showed me to a chair and starting putting the gown on me and asking about my hair. As she started to cut, she asked me the usual questions, where did I live, did I work, and so on. When the subject of me being a Unitarian came up, she informed me that I would go to hell. The only way to be saved was to be like her, as her religion was the only one which saved its people when the world came to an end.

I was quite amazed, I said that we all had our different roads to God and that it seemed quite extreme to think that everyone except her church were going to hell. She was quite adamant. She spoke very sincerely, but firmly. And she kept on cutting away at my hair!

After a few moments of listening to the details of my eternal damnation, another hairdresser came over to us and asked if we had met before as she saw us in deep conversation and even thought we might have discovered that we were distant relations to each other. My hairdresser said no, we had

never met before but explained that we were talking about religion and that I would not be saved.

The second hairdresser quickly jumped into the conversation by telling us that her religion was the only one in which anyone could be saved and both my hairdresser and I were damned! As you can imagine, this brought a great debate between the two girls (I was surprised that neither had discussed their faith before and they seemed to know each other well). So the two of them heatedly discussed who really was going to be saved, as the snipping of the scissors continued and my hair was getting shorter and shorter!

Neither of them seemed to think that, if their beliefs were true, their friends, neighbours and work colleagues would all be suffering indescribable pain by burning in hell for all eternity. But, no, they were insistent; their thoughts were focused on their own salvation. And I found that very worrying.

AND WHAT OF ME?

WELL I LEFT THE HAIRDRESSERS WITH VERY SHORT HAIR.

If being saved goes with knowing that all your friends, neighbours, and colleagues will suffer agonies for all eternity, I don't want to be saved. For me, being saved, or finding salvation, is more like a healing rather than an action after death. I think salvation is for now.

The word salve, is an ointment or a soothing that heals. I think it's about how we choose to live our lives together. Salvation cannot be found alone: healing and peace can only come through interacting with others. This allows personal discoveries as well as a greater understanding of others in community. There can be no ego or selfishness in salvation. So in sharing and supporting each other, in loving God and each other, I believe we can find that state of salvation for us and for the world. But I end with one note of caution; *choose your hairdresser carefully!*

The Universe is awesome,
The Universe is wondrous,
The Universe is Beautiful,
And thus deserving of all love:
Who needs a god?

The Universe is Father,
The Universe is Son,
The Universe is Holy Spirit:
The dogma of the trinity?
Who wants such words?

The Universe is Life
The Universe is Light,
The Universe is very Good:
Who needs the Universe? I do!
And don't you too?

The Universe is Truth,
The Universe just Is,
The Universe is Here and Now,
And time, space, form and number
dreamed
By you and me.

The Universe *is* Me,
The Universe *is* You,
The Universe is All- in One:
O holy, holy Universe,
Our God made flesh!

Brinley Price

Church of England and Unitarian ?

One person's path

Rev John Bunyan



Some of the story of the origins of Unitarian Christianity will be familiar to readers of this journal. It begins, of course, with Jesus himself. He and his early Jewish followers were Unitarians in the sense of worshipping one God but elements in the Gospels and in the writings and experience of St Paul and then “St John”, as they became authoritative, led to continued pondering of the relation between God the Father and Jesus and eventually to the 4th century creeds, and the Councils’ dogmas of the Incarnation and the Trinity.

Those doctrines, enriching but also endangering, came to be seen by some in the 16th century as un-Scriptural but their denial could bring execution as in the case of Servetus or in England that of some condemned in Archbishop Cranmer’s court to be burnt to death. Transylvania’s Prince John Sigismund provided a rare example of (short-lived) toleration and its episcopal Unitarian Church survives today.

Nonetheless, Unitarian Christianity came to have influence within both the Church of England and in the non-conformist Churches. Thomas Firmin (1632-1697) was one of the early Unitarian members of the former. The Rev Theophilus Lindsey (1723-1808) in general shared his views but with the failure in 1772 of the Feathers Tavern Petition of latitudinarian churchmen seeking to end obligatory subscription to the 39 Articles of Religion, Lindsey resigned his parish and established the Essex Street

Chapel, with revised Prayer Book services, based on proposals by the somewhat unorthodox Dr Samuel Clarke, in which prayers were addressed to God alone.

Unitarian thought influenced some in North America. Boston’s oldest Episcopal church, King’s Chapel, founded in 1686, became independent after the Revolution, with a revised Book of Common Prayer based on Lindsey’s. It describes itself as “Unitarian Christian in theology, Anglican in worship, and congregational in governance”.

The Ten Commandments, the Lord’s Prayer, and the Apostles’ Creed remain on the sanctuary wall, with a cross placed later above the Table, seen as symbols of the tradition of the worldwide Christian Church – although the Creed is not included in services, and with members free to follow that tradition as they understand it.

In the 18th and 19th centuries in England many Unitarian adaptations of the Prayer Book liturgy similar to that of King’s were in use, evidence that some Unitarian chapels, Presbyterian, in

origin often felt closer to the Established Church than to other non-conformists, as the late Dennis Wigmore-Beddoes showed in his *Yesterday's Radicals : A Study of the Affinity between Unitarianism and Broad Church Anglicanism in the Nineteenth Century*. Like some members of the Church of England (Thomas Arnold a notable example), they would have welcomed a broadening of its borders.

Sir Alister Hardy in his Gifford Lectures, *The Divine Flame*, said his heart was in the Church of England "with all its beauty and deep sense of holiness" but not his mind, "repelled by its unreal dogmatic doctrines". He hoped for a day when that Church had services "for those of a more liberal faith". Some others have considered their Unitarian beliefs incompatible with continued membership of a "Trinitarian" Church, the Revd Dr A.R.Kingston, for example, leaving Methodist ministry to join the Free Presbyterian Church of Ireland. His *God in One Person*, a clearly argued defence of Unitarian Christianity, deserves re-printing.

I myself remain C.of E. Fortunately, subscription to everything in the Articles was abolished in 1865 after a long campaign. Since then in Australia only an undefined "assent" has been required (in England now an even vaguer affirmation).

Nonetheless, I should love to see Hardy's hope fulfilled. I treasure the language of the Book of Common Prayer, including the 2nd person singular, more than ever appropriate for addressing the God who is not "a person" but the one eternal Spirit, beyond all our comprehending, in whom we live and move and have our being. I agree with Scottish scholar, Ian Bradley that "it is no accident that liberal preaching and theology are often embedded in highly traditional and liturgical worship. The liturgy

provides a safe structure, a safe and secure home for radical, speculative, imaginative theology. Ordered worship" (and I should add with fine, poetic language, old or new) "allows space for mystery, contemplation, and truth beyond words" if free from those "unreal, dogmatic doctrines".

*Ordered worship allows space
for mystery,
contemplation,
and truth beyond words.*

However, I think flexibility is needed that takes into account modern Biblical criticism, fresh theological insights and scientific understanding (though science will always have limitations) and I have attempted such revision. In the meantime I can use much in the Prayer Book, understanding some elements as historically and poetically symbolic, as the *singing* rather than the saying of the Apostles' Creed can suggest, although both it and far more so the Nicene Creed are too easily misunderstood and taken literally and I think their use should be optional.

In *Morning Prayer Matters* I have argued for a restoring of a flexible, imaginative Morning Prayer in the C.of E. (without the Creed) for some "on the fringe" or agnostic. or "un-committed" – perhaps including Unitarians able to get only to a parish church.

Although in recent times a fearful world has seen both a resurgence of very conservative forms of Christianity, in my neo-Puritan, un-Anglican, often intolerant Diocese of Sydney but also in the UK, *and* of aggressive, ignorant forms of atheism, there are still broad church Christians in mainline Churches, especially among lay-people – appreciating the best in all traditions, in a

liberal and tolerant spirit, with whom I hope Christians in Unitarian churches might have a real sense of fellowship.

Mainline churches in turn I believe, like the non-Christian, theistic Unitarian churches in the UK and America, can be blessed by the thoughtful witness of Unitarian Christian congregations.

Those who have influenced my own thinking include Dean Stanley (himself influenced by Unitarian Channing) and a greater contemporary, Biblical scholar and bishop, John William Colenso, with his courageous seeking for the truth, and defense of the Zulu people, and his teachings especially in the *Natal Sermons* - Unitarian Christian in his theology. Of later scholars I have gained much from Paul Badham (in *The Contemporary Challenge of Modernist Theology*), James Barr, C.K.Barrett, Christopher Evans, Leslie Houlden and Dennis Nineham (on the Scriptures), John Hick (on the metaphor of incarnation), G.W.H.Lampe (on *God as Spirit*), Hans Küng of course, Hastings Rashdall (on the "Atonement"), Maurice Wiles (on the making and re-making of Christian doctrine), and Val Webb (on spirituality - and Florence Nightingale!).

With regard to searches for the historic Jesus, my views are not those of the old Jesus Seminar (though I value Marcus Borg's recent writings) and I would not be labelled a "Progressive Christian". For me, among many works in *this* field, very important have been E.P. Sanders, Geza Vermes, the Jewish scholar, not least in *The Changing Faces of Jesus* and *The Authentic Gospel of Jesus*, and Maurice Casey with his magisterial *Jesus of Nazareth*.

As for the classical dogmas, some such as R.C. theologians James Mackey and Roger Haight S.J. seek to re-interpret them, and in the latest issue of "Modern Believing" (April 2014), Keith Ward does that with regard to the Trinity. He has a great mind ; I am just an ordinary parson, but it seems to me his premises about the historic Jesus cannot be substantiated.

We can never know enough of the Jesus behind the Gospels to gain a foundation for those doctrines such as it was long thought the Fourth Gospel and St Paul's letters could provide. Here is the fundamental basis of my Unitarian Christianity !

*Jesus is indeed the
unsurpassed master
of...laying bare the inmost
core of spiritual truth*

Intellectually I am agnostic in the light of what, for example, David Suzuki tells me of the nature of our bodies, and of what scientists tell us of the long, evolution of life and of mammals, and of unending, innocent human and other animal suffering. We see "through a glass darkly". If God acts in our world, it is in "mysterious ways". Yet there are also what seem to me authentic visions, inexplicable spiritual experiences (I have had just *one* in my life) to which Sir Alister Hardy, Dr David Hay, and the Religious Experience Research Centre have pointed us, amazing serendipities, answers to prayer (though the prayers of *many* go unheard), and the sense of God as Spirit somehow deep within, or just out of the corner of one's eye - and the fact that in reverent, joyful worship, and in encountering good and gracious people in churches and charities, books and biographies, hospital wards and homes, and in the beauty of the *good* parts of nature, a beauty reflected in fine architecture, art and music, my heart is strengthened.

As for Jesus himself, I remain inspired by many saints but fascinated first and foremost by One with whom, I think, no other founder of a faith can compare (though I think the founding of a Church was providential, not the intention of Jesus). I cannot share his

particular understanding of the Jewish Law, nor his belief in demons, nor his expectation of an imminent coming of God's kingdom, nor his confining his mission almost entirely to his own people (even if he thought that God would eventually bring the Gentiles into that kingdom).

Here I tend to follow Vermes. Jesus was not a "modern liberal Christian". But from what we do know of Jesus from the most authentic parts of the Gospels (his God-centredness, his wisdom, his compassionate healing, his open hospitality), in the words of Vermes, Jesus is indeed "the unsurpassed master of...laying bare the inmost core of spiritual truth", and "the just man, ... the helper and healer... the teacher and leader, venerated by his intimates and less committed admirers alike as prophet, lord and son of God."

For eirenic Archbishop Welby, whom I much admire, the essential heart of Christianity is "the worship of Jesus as Lord and God". That worship cannot be for me – unless perhaps radically "un-packed", but I can sing to the Jesus of Nazareth from hymns, for example, in the 1991 *Hymns of Faith & Freedom* ("Christ be our Light", a more recent example), although seeking to worship God alone. (St Matthew 8.10)

A liberal Christian faith is less common among Church leaders today. Many learned scholars such as Bishop Tom Wright, and the largest churches, are often "evangelical" and "charismatic". Nonetheless, although believing in a broad church and appreciating any deep faith changing lives and the world for the better, I see dangers, for Christianity and other important religions, (and support for the opponents of all religion) when there is dogmatism, Biblical literalism, and over-emphasis on experience, numbers, cultural conformity, and outward "success", a forgetfulness of earlier spiritual experience, and an ignoring of the deep,

courageous, *thinking* of "open" Christians of today *and yesterday*.

So the witness of intelligent, Unitarian Christianity – whether within the small Unitarian Churches of the British Isles, Transylvania and the U.S.A., or within their older and far more prominent siblings, I think remains important for both, grounded in the living and dying and in some true sense living again of the one who for me, as Horatius Bonar put it, is "my Star, my Sun", within a mysterious enveloping *Universe* of Goodness and Divinity, and in whose "Light of life I'll walk, till travelling days are done."

John Bunyan is a priest of Sydney Diocese who has worked in Australia and the UK, his last post before retirement 22 years as Rector of a suburban parish. He has post-graduate qualifications from Sydney, London, Durham, Lambeth, and San Francisco. He is a parishioner of St John the Baptist's Parish Church, Canberra, a member of King's Chapel, Boston, and a member-in-association of the Uniting Church. He is a member of the UCA and of the Unitarian Universalist Christian Fellowship, inspired not least by the Rev Arthur Long of the former and by Emeritus Minister of King's Chapel, Rev Dr Carl Scovel. He is Honorary Chaplain of the Australian Intelligence Corps Association, and for many years has been Honorary Cof E Chaplain at Bankstown-Lidcombe Hospital.

His theology has been mainly expressed in his hymns and poems in e.g. A Drover for the Day, Canticle Road and Celestial City, Jubilee Junction, and A Sydney Anglican's Seventy Five Sonnets, but also more prosaically in his recent Searching for Liberty : Seeking for Truth. His recent small liturgical books are Celebrating BCP : A Map for the Minister, Morning Prayer Matters, Prayer Book Patterns and Principles.

Does prayer have any effect?

A rationalist enquiry

Roger Booth

Many persons of faith will answer a resounding 'yes' to such a question because they have experienced the effects of prayer in their own lives. However, the question deserves discussion from the standpoint of reason. Religious prayer presumes a channel of communication between God and man, and is central to the practice of religion.

Belief in the existence of a God is therefore necessary, and prayer may be defined as talk with God. In much talk with God the making of petitions to God is an important element. If the petitions were to be shown to have been answered, the effectiveness of prayer and the existence of God would both be proved. Certainly, human beings have an instinct to seek the help of a deity when confronted by problems. The request to the deity for help may be communicated by sacrifice or dance or prayer. It may seek rain for a good harvest or human fertility or relief in any other need.

We must consider first whether a channel of communication between human beings and a supernatural God is possible. Morse-code and radio have shown that messages can be sent from human to human over distance without the use of the eyes or the need for physical presence. Tests carried out by J.B. Rhines and others have shown that thoughts can be transferred between humans by telepathy i.e. by the power of the minds of the transmitter and the recipient. It seems possible that thought in the form of prayer can be transferred to God in a similar way.

Moreover, just as the transfer of sound by airwaves was thought impossible until the discovery of radio, so the transfer of thought to God may be discovered in the future to be a process consistent with the laws of physics.

Assuming that this transfer of thought to God in prayer is possible, how can the petitioner know whether the deity has been moved to action by the request? If God is all-powerful, he is able to grant the prayer. But there is evidence that his powers are limited by the natural laws which he established at creation, namely the laws of chemistry, physics and biology.

For God is described in the Bible as loving and merciful, yet he does not intervene to over-reach the physical laws which produce the natural evils which afflict mankind. For example, he does not prevent cells from coalescing and becoming cancerous nor does he prevent the fracturing of the earth's crust which causes an earthquake.

Admittedly, to counteract such happenings would necessitate gigantic interference with the operation of the laws established at creation, but a risk-free environment would not be beyond the power of an omnipotent God. And being a loving God, he must desire to prevent these evils. Therefore the fact that they occur must be due to his inability to curtail the operation of the natural laws which cause them.

However, there are situations in which the grant of the prayer would not necessitate a breach of the natural laws.

For example, a request that God will grant peace of mind would not involve such a breach. Turning distress of mind to peace would involve influencing the thought-process of the sufferer, but that does not involve a breach of the biological laws, since the thought-processes of human beings are always influenced by the speech and actions of other humans in accordance with the natural working of the brain. But even in these cases the prayer may not effect or change anything, because, being omniscient, God is aware of all instances of suffering, and as a loving God will already have taken appropriate action regarding them, irrespective of the prayers received.

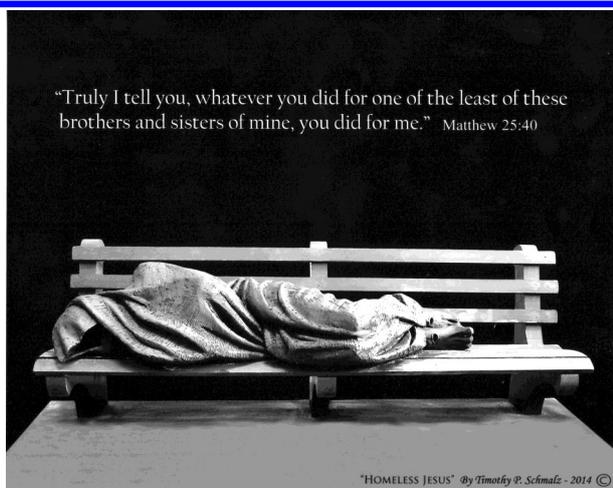
Prayer may, however, have effect in the following ways. Human beings, have, as mentioned, an instinctive urge to plead with the deity for protection in times of trouble, and the appeal to a supernatural power may give cathartic relief to the petitioner.

Secondly, where the patient knows (by word of mouth or by telepathy or other means) that people have been asking God for the patient's recovery or other welfare, this may encourage the patient's state of mind which may psycho-somatically aid the recovery of the patient's body.

Thirdly, prayer by a patient for healing may be effective if accompanied by faith that the prayer will be answered. Jesus said to a woman with an issue of blood whom he cured, "Your faith (meaning trust or belief) has made you well." (Mark 5.34).

For the patient's prayer may manifest such trust in God's willingness to heal that this trusting state of mind may, again psycho-somatically, affect a bodily cure.

Jesus—Homeless and begging?



Jesus the Homeless was designed by Timothy Schmalz, a Canadian sculptor and Catholic. It depicts Jesus as a homeless person, sleeping on a park bench. His face and hands are obscured, hidden under a blanket, but crucifixion wounds on his feet reveal his identity. The statue has been described as a "visual translation" of the Gospel of Matthew passage in which

Jesus tells his disciples, "as you did it to one of the least of my brothers, you did it to me". Schmalz intended the bronze sculpture to be provocative, admitting, "That's essentially what the sculpture is there to do. It's meant to challenge people."

Reception of the statue has been mixed. One paper noted "The reaction [to the cast at St Albans, Davidson, North Carolina] was immediate. Some loved it; some didn't." Some Davidson residents felt it was an "insulting depiction" of Jesus that "demeaned" the neighbourhood. One Davidson resident called police the first time she saw it, mistaking the statue for a real homeless person. Most however have understood the point Schmalz is making.

We understand that Westminster Cathedral may be interested in buying a copy for themselves. The smaller versions are not currently available in this country but photos can be ordered via the web site. More details from www.sculpturebytps.com

Tim Moore at the Summer meeting

I always relish an opportunity to travel to London, so on 19th July, at the height of the summer's heat, I was glad to join fellow Unitarians and Free Christians at the UCA's summer gathering at Mansford Street Chapel, in Bethnal Green.

London is a changing city, yet no area of the capital has been more in a state of flux than the East End. Over the centuries, new communities have settled here before moving on, Huguenots, Irish, Jews, and latterly Bengali migrants. The building of Mansford Street Chapel is therefore something of a constant in the area. The chapel, built originally as a Congregationalist church and purchased for use as a Unitarian mission church in the 1880s, surrounded by 1960s and 70s housing developments, the blocks and houses named after famous Unitarians.

Following worship led by David Darling, we had the pleasure of hearing from the Revd. David Usher, London district minister, who told us about the history of the building and community that worshipped in it. While the congregation at Mansford Street gradually declined from the post-war period, ownership of the chapel building was taken into trust, to relieve some of the burden from the congregation. This set-up, together with the Chapel's long relationship with Rosslyn Hill Unitarian Chapel, Hampstead, as well as the London District, sowed the seeds for the transformation of Mansford Street.

The Rev Rob Gregson joined us to talk about Simple Gifts, the Unitarian Centre for Social Action at Mansford Street



Chapel. Why heard that after listening to community leaders, Simple Gifts found ways to reach out to the local community, which includes a significant Bengali population, taking advantage of the Chapel's location next to a school. Because of the Vision and growth of Simple Gifts, the Chapel is a hive of activity again, with games and sports after school, homework clubs, English conversation classes, youth mentoring, plus plans and hopes for the future. It was inspiring to hear of a Unitarian and Free Christian meeting place reaching out to its wider community in so many ways.

Poignantly, we were reminded during the day that the last minister of the Chapel was Jane Barraclough, who passed away earlier this year and was also my minister at Cross Street Chapel, in Manchester, where she brought most of the current congregation into Unitarianism. Coming to Bethnal Green was like a pilgrimage to me, as it helped me to understand the things that Jane learned about urban ministry in the East End, which she later took with her to Manchester.

My visit to Bethnal Green left me with the impression of a chapel and a Unitarian community that has repeatedly reinvented itself as times and the character of the area changed. This most recent UCA summer gathering offered me a glimpse of the Unitarianism of the past, present and future.



‘Pilgrim’ Jeff celebrates 25 years of Ministry



It was one of those perfect days, Sunday 17th August. More than 140 people squeezed into Dean Row Chapel, Wilmslow, in Cheshire, to help the Minister, Rev Jeffrey Lane Gould, celebrate the 25th anniversary of his Ordination.

Typically, Jeff made the day as much a celebration of the communion between the two chapels he serves – Hale Chapel at Hale Barns, and Dean Row – as about himself. Members from Hale joined those from Dean Row, and friends from across the country, for the special service, including members of the UCA – Jeff is, of course, the Events Officer.

The chapels’ joint choirs sang the Carolyn McDade song ‘Spirit of Life’; Cathy Fozard, treasurer and membership secretary of the UCA, gave the first reading, from the Gospel of Luke (9. 18-27), which was also read at Jeff’s ordination. A prayer was delivered by Hilary Shaw, wife of the Dean Row Chairman, Peter Shaw, who also played the organ for the service. Averil Hart, Secretary of the Hale Chapel congregation gave the second reading, from ‘The Country Parson’ by George Herbert.

This piece chimed with the theme of the sermon, given by Rev Canon Hugh Wybrew, who attended Jeff’s ordination in 1989 after they met at

Manchester College, Oxford. Canon Wybrew reflected that both Jeff’s Ministry to the two chapels – his second sojourn with them – and the chapels’ love of their Minister were sacramental: demonstrations of sacred significance imparting grace.

As a long-standing friend, Canon Wybrew knows, as do all Jeff’s congregations, his fondness for table Fellowship, so after the service Jeff generously arranged a delightful time in the chapel’s Tercentary Hall, during which canapés and ‘fizz’ were served, to the accompaniment of a string quintet of players from the Hallé Orchestra.

Peter Shaw, thanking Jeff on behalf of both congregations, presented him with a cheque comprising gifts from members.

Perhaps the day, and Jeff’s Ministry with us, may be summed up in a verse from his favourite hymn from the purple hymnbook *Sing Your Faith*, which we sang with joy: “We are pilgrims on a journey and companions on the road; we are here to help each other walk a mile and bear the load.” *Mike Cuerden*

THE UCA HEADS WEST!

The Unitarian Christian Association will hold an afternoon gathering at The Unitarian Meeting, Brunswick Square, Bristol on Saturday, 11 October 2014 entitled 'Connections'. The event will be open to all members and friends of the UCA, and any persons who are interested in learning about current developments in liberal Christian worship, ecumenical co-operation and contemporary forms of faith and witness. It is hoped that members of congregations in the Western Union will take advantage of this opportunity to benefit from a visit of the UCA to their district.



The day will begin with a buffet lunch, served from twelve noon. This will be an opportunity to meet up with old friends and to make new acquaintances. An act of worship will take place from one o'clock, which will seek to demonstrate how a liberal Christian approach to liturgy can extend beyond the traditional 'hymn sandwich' format. The afternoon will continue with a workshop, in which participants will explore the variety of ways in which members of Unitarian and Free Christian congregations can connect to the wider world of liberal Christian thought, practice and celebration. Derek McAuley, who is the Chief Officer of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Churches, will provide an update on the denomination's relationships and encounters with ecumenical bodies and institutions, and developments in leadership. The event will end with a substantial afternoon tea, so that there is sufficient time in which to chat freely with fellow-participants.

The UCA is grateful to the congregation and officers of the Unitarian Meeting, Brunswick Square for their hosting of this event. There will be no charge for taking part in the day's activities and the two meals are offered free of charge. Donations towards the work of the Unitarian Christian Association would be gratefully received, but it is hoped that no one will be prevented from attending owing to financial concerns. It would be helpful if attendance were indicated (for planning and catering purposes), by contacting the UCA Events Officer, Jeff Gould: jeffreylanegould@btinternet.com; telephone, 01625 403509; mobile, 07989 858963. Please do contact Jeff, should you have any questions, concerns or ideas to share.



