



IMPULSE

Promoting Unitarianism in London and the South East

Autumn edition 2023



Our theme speaker
for FUSE 2024



Peter Tachell hails
Unitarian role



Unitarians rally
for climate justice



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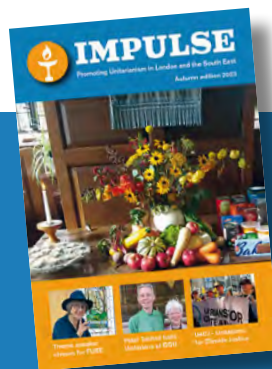


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COVER: Harvest Festival at Ditchling Unitarians.



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The London and South East Unitarian District is a constituent part of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches, whose stated purpose (Object) is: "To promote a free and inquiring religion through the worship of God and the celebration of life; the service of humanity and respect for all creation; and the upholding of the liberal Christian tradition."

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Calls for justice grow

Message from the District Minister Rev'd Jim Corrigan



After a lull over the summer, events in our District have been picking up as we move through autumn towards year-end. In September alone a series of Unitarian gatherings took place in the LDPA area – and each was of wide significance. What were these?

First, the celebrated equality campaigner Peter Tatchell spoke at Golders Green Unitarians in north London on 9th September at the opening of the LGBT+ Unitarian Voices Exhibition there. Another prominent speaker was the former chief officer of British Unitarians, Derek McAuley. On the same day, Brighton Unitarian Church hosted a celebration of the life of Jef Jones, their much-loved former lay leader (the timings clash was unfortunate for the many who wanted to be at both events).

On 21st September, a meeting to promote the social justice coalition Citizens UK was held at New Unity in north London. New Unity is already affiliated to a local branch of Citizens UK, while our Oxford congregation has decided to sign up too. Yet joining the coalition is not cheap, and it remains to be seen if other congregations, or indeed our District, will become involved. Meanwhile demonstrations over the climate emergency were held around the UK in September; it was inspiring to see Unitarians for Climate Justice

playing their part in these protests in London and other centres.

Much of the activity I've referred to is reflected in this edition of IMPULSE.

So as editor, I commend it to you!

News from our General Assembly

Our General Assembly has set up a series of Zoom gatherings entitled 'Coffee & Comms', which are intended to spotlight "some of the interesting, creative and excellent communications work being done by Unitarian congregations, and for sharing best practice with those who'd like to up their game".



And the very good news is: at their online gathering on Tuesday 7th November (at 11am) they are to welcome our own LDPA District administrator and designer Helen White to discuss "revitalising newsletters, websites and other forms of communication". An excellent choice of guest! To join this event, visit www.unitarian.org.uk and search for 'Coffee & Comms'.

The Power of Story + Song

We're delighted to announce that plans are well underway for our next Festival of Unitarians in the South East (FUSE 2024), to be held once again at The Friars retreat centre at Aylesford in Kent in June.

And we're equally delighted to say we've chosen a festival theme – The Power of Story and Song – and a theme speaker, the Jerusalem-based storyteller and singer Hanna Yaffe (pictured). Some of you know Hanna from her highly-appreciated performances at interfaith celebrations at Kensington Unitarians over the past two years.

So who exactly is Hanna Yaffe?

She describes herself as 'an ardent peacemaker' who uses stories and music to foster healing and unity in her work with Christian, Hindu and Muslim musicians and story-tellers in Israel/Palestine and in the UK.

What in particular attracts Hanna to stories and songs? "Both of these," she says, "connect us to the beat of the human heart. They encapsulate joy, sorrow and celebration, serving as a bridge between individuals and their faith."

Recordings of her works 'Lullabies from Jerusalem' and 'Birth in a Time of Bloodshed' are available on CD and have been widely acclaimed. In addition,

'Return Again' contains a collection of her Hasidic tales and melodies.

Although she draws on a range of sources for stories, Hanna is rooted in the Jewish Hasidic tradition of story-telling. Hasidism arose as a spiritual revival movement among Orthodox Jews in eastern Europe in the 18th century. With a strong mystical base, it stresses the importance of seeing the divine in the everyday.

Hanna Yaffe was born into a Rabbinic family in London; she leads prayers at her local synagogue while maintaining an observant Jewish lifestyle. She lives in Jerusalem with her husband and with seven grandchildren nearby.



Other plans taking shape for FUSE 2024 include:

Workshops for body, mind and spirit; services of worship, prayers and meditation; music, songs and entertainment. A children's programme will once again be led by the ever-popular Jim Blair and Jenny Canfield.

Reserve the date now!

Further details will follow. FUSE 2024 takes place at The Friars monastic retreat centre, Aylesford, Kent, on the weekend of 14-16 June. See you there?

REV'D JIM CORRIGALL

PICTURED RIGHT FROM TOP: The Friars: Chapels, Tudor Block, a Tudor bedroom and the Peace Garden.

LEFT: Hanna Yaffe.

“Hanna Yaffe describes herself as ‘an ardent peacemaker’ who uses stories and music to foster healing and unity in her work”



Greetings from our President

'Digital catch-up needed'

The past few months have been a joy for me as LDPA President, taking services across the London District and Midlands and in my own congregation at Oxford. I've preached at hybrid services at New Unity in north London and at Richmond Unitarians, while also leading Zoom services at Golders Green. Nationally I led the Sunday evening Zoom service for the Unitarian Christian Association.



I've been active in our Unitarian movement for over a decade now and served on committees at local, regional and national level. However, leading a gathering of diverse but open-minded individuals in worship has become a most joyous spiritual engagement for me. There's no doubt our Unitarian community is shrinking numerically and the reasons are many: aging members, an aversion to proselytising, an inability to raise our profile despite social justice activities, and an inability to articulate our identity. But we shouldn't miss the growth of recent years.

There's been recruitment of new followers who join online and aren't interested in the old membership structures. Zoom and hybrid services have sparked new ways of thinking about how we conduct worship and how we maintain community. Who do we consider 'our' community? How do we serve in-person and online members? The four congregations in the London District where I led services recently have a regular online component to their worship, albeit in differing ways. The new world of digital connections has overtaken us and we are lagging behind in equipment, technical skills and know-how.

If I had a magic wand, I'd install audio-visual equipment and stable Wi-Fi connections in every chapel that wanted these, with a virtual troubleshooting a technical team on call at all times! Imagine the celebrations from volunteers currently struggling with the 'tech' in chapels across the LDPA each Sunday (myself included!).

While membership numbers are falling, my firm belief is our Unitarian community has a part to play in this world, and, as we let go of some past baggage and explore new ways of worship, we should feel secure we have a firm foundation for building a new digital future for ourselves.

DR JACKY WOODMAN

Rallying to save the planet

Unitarians for Climate Justice

On Saturday 16th September, LDPA Unitarians from U4CJ - Unitarians for Climate Justice - joined in global demonstrations against the fossil fuel industry, calling for de-investment from further fossil fuel exploration, and a rapid phasing down of existing capacity. This sense of urgency arises from the growing conviction that nothing less than an urgent transition to renewable sources of energy can prevent catastrophic climate breakdown, which will bring huge social and economic distress in its wake, particularly for the poorest and most marginalised of the world's people. This is a really important

issue to Unitarians, especially with our concern for social justice.

If you want to know more about U4CJ, then join the Facebook group and/or our Whatsapp group. We'd love to have more ideas and more active supporters. There's not too much time left to make a difference - the time to get involved was 20 years ago, but failing that, **NOW**.

DR ROB OULTON

PICTURED BELOW: The London event, but Unitarians were involved in events in other cities including Plymouth, Cardiff, and York.



Act now for justice!

Julio Torres puts the case for Unitarians to join Citizens UK

A famous religious figure who attended Unitarian services and almost became a Unitarian was Rev'd Dr Martin Luther King. He listened to people to hear what issues they faced, and gathered groups around the United States to form the Poor Peoples' Campaign. He worked towards the Economic and Social Bill of Rights. This was a spiritual engagement with the political, but it was non-partisan, aimed at influencing politicians and corporations to support human rights.

I believe we Unitarians need to engage in more systemic change to bring about social justice for all in Britain, starting with the poor. We need to hear from the refugees, the homeless, those in poor housing or with bad landlords, as well as those who don't earn enough to afford basic living costs.

Recently I attended a Citizens UK workshop in North London and heard of the needs of people in these groups.

Nationally their demands are reflected in Citizens UK campaigns. Unitarians need to become part of the change to better peoples' lives. We need to become involved ourselves.

How to become involved?

We should build alliances with other faith groups, with non-profit organisations and charities who align with our values. This can create 'relational power' which is different from traditional power. It promotes 'love in action' which can move us to end poverty, racism, sexism, war, and the climate crisis.

To bring this change without revolution requires creating democratic power across all sectors of society. To achieve this we must embrace community organising, so we can speak with a united voice when making demands to those in power. This is where Citizens UK comes in. They describe themselves thus (see top of next page):

“Citizens UK is a national charity which uses community organising methods to create local, regional and national change. From the Living Wage to migration and refugee projects, to supporting parents in the community, from green jobs to community-backed housing, we work on issues which our members are affected by and care about.

Over the past 30 years we have won £1.6bn in additional wages for low-paid workers, ended child detention for immigration purposes, secured an amnesty of 'legacy cases' for 160,000 asylum applicants, as well as winning many victories at the local and regional levels. We build power with people so that together we can move from the world as it is, towards the world as it should be.”

That last sentence is key: building power to make change. As Unitarians, we believe in social justice. Our flaming chalice is a symbol which stood against fascism, many of our congregations play a part in building a better world. Community organising is a powerful way to go about this. The successes of Citizens UK are evident in their victories as well as their growth from an East London organisation in 1989 to a nationwide force.

Citizens UK makes demands of businesses, landlords and corporations at local, municipal and national levels. They have a lot to teach us. The five steps of community organising are: listening, research, planning, action and negotiation. It's a cycle. Joining Citizens UK requires a financial contribution, it requires us as congregations to engage with some of their campaigns and with

our local communities. With a general election approaching, a national campaign is needed for political manifestos to reflect the demands of the poor. Jesus was all about grassroots organising. In Luke's gospel, we are told he comes to 'bring good news to the poor, liberty to the captives and freedom to the oppressed' (4:18-19). That anti-imperial agenda is still relevant in post-empire Britain.

We know all people deserve a decent quality of life. Learn about Citizens UK at www.citizensuk.org and find out for yourself about their history, training and campaigns.

REV'D JULIO TORRES

Minister at Lewisham Unity and an LDPA Council member.



Tatchell hails Unitarians

The celebrated human rights campaigner Peter Tatchell paid a moving tribute to Unitarians for their decades-long work for equality when he spoke at the opening of the **LGBT+ Unitarian Voices Exhibition** at Golders Green Unitarians (GGU) in North London on 9th September.

Expressing his appreciation for the work of Unitarians for LGBT+ rights and the rights of women and for others who suffered victimisation, he told the gathering: "You have been standard-bearers of progressive thought and action. I know from my own experience how important the Unitarian contribution has been. From the bottom of my heart, a huge thank you."

Peter Tatchell went on to reflect on the life of GGU member Dudley Cave whom he'd known as friend and fellow campaigner from the 1970s. He recalled the work of Dudley and the GGU minister of the time, Rev'd Keith Gilley, in establishing Intergroup at Golders Green and conducting blessings for same-sex couples.

Intergroup brought together LGBT+ and straight Unitarians with members of the wider LGBT+ community to promote understanding at a time of much prejudice. Dudley was also key to establishing the Gay Bereavement Project which supported those who'd lost their partners. "These projects saved lives."



Dudley Cave had been a prisoner-of-war of the Japanese in the Second World War, but he later campaigned for peace and reconciliation between POWs and their Japanese captors, despite his personal suffering. "This was the measure of the man." Peter Tatchell then recalled their years of campaigning together for recognition of the contribution of LGBT+ servicemen and women, in the face of official hostility.

The former chief officer of the Unitarian General Assembly Derek McAuley also spoke at the gathering, giving insights into the more recent campaign for equal marriage led by Unitarians, Quakers and Liberal Jews.

Travelling exhibition's run extended!



ABOVE Derek McAuley at Golders Green with an exhibition poster quoting his words. OPPOSITE PAGE Peter Tatchell at GGU with its minister Rev'd Michael Allured.

The General Assembly's LGBT+ Unitarian Voices Exhibition is on a tour of our district until the end of this year, after gaining an extension. It will visit Lewisham Unity in October and Rosslyn Hill in November. There are still available slots if you wish to host the eight banners. This is alongside the online interviews with Unitarians: www.unitarian.org.uk/lgbt-unitarian-voices-timeline/

Is your church keen to host the exhibition? If so, please email: administrator@ldpaunitarians.org

RIGHT Brighton Unitarians hosted the exhibition in August.



No dampers on 300th!

What do you do when you've planned dozens of tents for your event and the Met Office tells you they'll all be blown away? That's the challenge Horsham Unitarians faced on Saturday 15th July as they prepared for their church's 300th Anniversary exhibition and celebration.

In the event, all was fine. After Friday's frantic relocation of exhibits and stallholders in the church and church hall, the new crowded arrangement proved remarkably successful.

Wild Garden Tour

No weather warning dampened interest in the unique children's 'Wild Garden Recognition Tour' around the Nature Reserve being created in the church's north-west garden. Comments by accompanying parents were interesting. One claimed there was no need to stock the newly-created pond, as water life just appears as if from nowhere. Another demanded the church go in search of more hedgehogs, as "probably having only one is depriving the poor thing of its marital rights".

A particular image proved of special interest in the historical display, which traced the story of the church from 18th century religious dissent to pioneering work as a junior school, lending library, and core of the town's museum. That image was the photo of the still-existing

Mill Pond at Broadbridge Farm to which, up to 1771, early converts would trek for baptism.

A more recent past was there in the persons of the two previous ministers, one of whom had flown in from America. Meanwhile, the current minister, Rev'd Duncan Voice, represented the new thinking that has launched the church's free and year-round 'Unity Café', which offers food, company and friendship to so many.

Now for the next 300 years!
PATRICK WYNNE-JONES

BELOW Ministers past and present at the Horsham celebrations: (l to r) Jopie Boeke (who flew from the US), Maria Curtis and Duncan Voice.



District Noticeboard

Citizens UK in focus

Rev'd Julio Torres of Lewisham Unity and Olivia Blanning, the North London organiser for Citizens UK, were key speakers at Newington Green Meeting House in North London on 21st September. This gathering was called to consider strengthening Unitarian engagement with this social justice grouping. Members of the New Unity chapter of Citizens UK also addressed the meeting. In-person attendance was low on a wet night, but 17 people attended online from across the UK. *The case for Citizens UK, see p 8-9.*



Surprised by David!

London District ministers were surprised by the arrival of Rev'd David Usher, former LDPA district minister (2007-14), at one of their gatherings at Newington Green meeting house in North London in July. The surprise was mutual: David – visiting from the United States where he's been living for several years – called in while passing in the hope of seeing the renovated building and its new minister. Anyway, there was delight all round at the chance re-union!



Ministers pictured at New Unity are (l. to r.): David Usher, Sarah Tinker, New Unity minister CJ McGregor, and Feargus O'Connor. Photo by Jim Corrigan.

News from the Council

I write this news piece for IMPULSE as the chair (and acting secretary) of LDPA Council because it's important to raise awareness across Unitarian communities in London and the South East of the work that members of Council do to enable the District to function. We meet every two months on Zoom and our most recent meeting was on 20 September. A fair chunk of Council's time together is taken up with routine business: reviewing the LDPA budget and the nuts and bolts of developing and implementing various projects.

Jim gives us a run down on the work he's been doing for the District. Often there's a report from Helen White on an aspect of communications and LDPA support for congregations choosing to update their website. Currently we are exploring how the District might get involved with Citizens UK. And we always discuss the District's money: income and outgoings, the health of investments and oversight of buildings that were once but are no longer the homes of functioning congregations. Soon the annual exercise of the Sustainment Fund grant process will be upon us.

“I hope this away day will be the beginning of a conversation across the whole District about our Unitarian vision and purpose”

Away day

In November members of Council, along with Jim, Helen White, our administrator and minutes secretary, and Bruno Martin, our professional finance officer, will be meeting for an away day in Croydon. My hope is that this will give us an opportunity to begin some of those strategic policy discussions that we rarely have time to hold, due to all the routine business to be dealt with in our bi-monthly Zoom meetings. I would love it if by then we had an armful of responses from you to Jim's call for thoughts on the goals the District approved before the pandemic.

I hope this away day will be the beginning of a conversation across the whole District about our Unitarian vision and purpose – as constituent congregations of a larger network - as we move towards the 2030s. As Helen Keller wrote: 'Alone we can do so little, together we can do so much'. What can you do to build faith, hope and joy by working for our Unitarian presence in the District and the wider world?

Blessings,
REV'D MICHAEL ALLURED

District Council



Rev'd Michael Allured
Chair + Secretary



Rev'd Simon Ramsay



Rev'd Sue Sinnamon



Rev'd Julio Torres



Jo O'Sullivan



Rev'd Feargus O'Connor

Non-voting officers



Rev'd Jim Corrigan
District Minister



Professor Jacqueline Woodman
President



Helen White
Administrator



Bruno Martin
Finance officer

‘Disrupt and survive!’

The question of how to sustain congregations while making necessary changes was at the heart of discussions at the District’s Autumn Quarterly at Newington Green Meeting House on Saturday 7th October.

‘New ways of sustaining congregations’ was the theme addressed by workshop leaders Dr Lizzie Kingston-Harrison of the General Assembly (*pictured below*) and Rev’d CJ McGregor, minister at New Unity. Around 25 Unitarians from across the District attended.



Lizzie began by asking for silent reflection on the question: What sustains us, individually and in our congregations?. Rich sharing followed, and Lizzie revealed she’d heard similarly deep responses nationally. “This question brings people alive,” she said.

She went on to say members often report they are sustained by ‘all that lies beyond us, all that transcends us’, an insight embodied in our religious traditions. Change need not mean abandoning our heritage.

However we cannot simply rest on what sustains congregations, she insisted. Innovation is needed to disrupt ‘business as usual’. An example was the largely beneficial rise in online worship during the pandemic. And national online groups had sprung up too, like the weekly Unitarian & Free Christian Bible discussion group. “It draws on our oldest tradition – reading the Bible – to understand contemporary dilemmas.”

Rev’d CJ concentrated on ways congregations might work together to ensure denominational survival. Examples he gave were New Unity’s social justice group which, through its affiliation to Citizens UK, had been able to offer other Unitarian congregations the chance to join campaigns.

Would congregations also share administrative and financial resources? CJ conceded this was more difficult, but suggested it was essential to keep looking for ways to increase sharing.

A collection for the Red Cross Ukraine appeal raised £200, and the day ended with a fine tea. Thank you to New Unity!

RIGHT CJ McGregor addresses the Quarterly

