



IMPULSE

Promoting Unitarianism in London and the South East

Summer edition 2023

Salad days at FUSE



New Minister at
Lewisham Unity



Gospel Choir at
Croydon Unitarians



Multicultural
celebrations



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COVER: At FUSE enjoying the Friars' Peace Garden.



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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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On a 'high' after FUSE

Message from the District Minister Rev'd Jim Corrigan



Many of us are still feeling buoyed up by the weekend we spent together at the Festival of Unitarians in the South East (FUSE) at The Friars in Kent in early June (see report on next page). I confess the Festival surpassed even the expectations we as organisers had for its success. It has certainly been gratifying to see such positive feedback from attenders (see pp. 6-7).

Quarterly. They are looking forward to welcoming us and I hope there will be a strong turnout from members around the District (Report p. 9).

Be aware that worship leaders are needed throughout our District, and it's good to see there are chances to train in worship skills from September, in online courses run by Unitarian College (see p. 16). Do make enquiries if you are interested, and hopefully you'll enroll too. We in the District will give support.

Despite last-minute cancellations because of rail strikes, just over 80 people still attended. It's fair to say all elements of the Festival worked well: theme talk, workshops, children's programme, worship and entertainment. And we felt blessed to be amid beautiful surroundings while enjoying good weather.



Your feedback did contain constructive criticisms too, and we will take on board your suggestions for the future wherever we can. Thank you! We now have good ideas to follow up on for next year.

Looking ahead

But before that, there are events to look forward to this year. Our District's Autumn Quarterly takes place at Newington Green Meeting House in North London on Saturday 7th October. It's been a long time since New Unity congregation (of which Newington Green is part) hosted a District

Not everything has gone well recently, though. We took a late decision to withdraw from the Pride in London Parade on 1st July after only two people committed to attending. This was despite a strong appeal in EPULSE on 19th June. I feel a rethink on this heavily-regulated London event may be needed. Either a small group needs to mobilise support for it, or Unitarians around the District should rather continue supporting local Pride parades (in places such as Brighton, Croydon and Surrey). What do you think?

FUSE: 'An enjoyable whirl'



For the organising team, FUSE 2023 at The Friars Retreat Centre in Kent in early June seemed to exceed expectations. The weekend went by in an enjoyable whirl as we connected with old and new friends and enjoyed deep experiences – of worship and workshops within sacred spaces and natural beauty.

But were we organisers deluding ourselves? Happily we quite soon had the results of a 'FUSE 2023 Feedback Survey' (thank you Andrew Mason at Essex Hall for the number-crunching!) The survey showed a large majority felt very positive about almost all aspects of the FUSE programme (see a selection of these on pages 6-7)

Stephen Lingwood's Theme Talk on 'Building Paradise' attracted most praise, but the varied workshops received positive commendations too.

And the children's programme run by Jenny Canfield and Jim Blair gained whole-hearted support from parents.

So were there criticisms? Yes! These centred on the somewhat basic accommodation, particularly the showers, but almost everyone accepted that the benefits of this ancient Carmelite monastery outweighed the problems.

Another criticism was of Christian elements in the 'Love Feast Communion' led by Stephen Lingwood and Susie Courtault, and in Romola Parish's 'Seeking Paradise through the Arts' embroideries. (The criticism seemed not to take account of how Christian our own traditions are). But again, there were far more positive reactions than negative here. One response: 'Romola's artwork was exquisite and more thought-provoking than words'.

PICTURED RIGHT top to bottom: Stephen Crowther's Welcoming service, Eleanor Chiari's 'Exploring the Radical Imagination', Romola Parish's 'Paradise through the Arts' and Stephen' Lingwood's theme talk.

“I thought the setting was spectacular, it was sacred, inclusive and with so much natural beauty ... ideal for Unitarians.”

Early morning worship and meditation also attracted positive reactions, as did the Welcome service. And there were useful suggestions for changes to the programme. As organisers, we will study these carefully and take on board what we can (but inevitably not all suggestions will be practicable).

Forty people returned the survey, half the 80 who came in the end (we had a few late cancellations because of rail strikes). Thank you, we've been heartened by your responses! And thank you to all who attended and made FUSE 2023 such a success, including the programme leaders and helpers for the hard work. We can all be proud of the result.

JIM CORRIGALL

Jim's 2-page report on Stephen Lingwood's theme talk (A Journey towards Paradise) appeared in The Inquirer on 22 June.



Your comments on FUSE

Feedback from our survey:

The venue?

- The Friars was a wonderful venue: Gorgeous setting and connection with the religious past in a non-intrusive way. As it was warm summer time, we were able to enjoy the outdoors too.
- I thought the setting was spectacular, it was sacred, inclusive and with so much natural beauty ... ideal for Unitarians.

BELOW Lighting a candle at the Love Feast Communion in St Joseph's Chapel led by Stephen Lingwood and Susie Courtault.

Highlights?

- The Building Paradise keynote speaker (Stephen Lingwood) was definitely the high point – so eloquent and humorous, and with a message so relevant.
- Stephen Lingwood's thought-provoking theme talk and the subsequent discussion. His refusal to go for easy answers. Inspirational.
- The Love Feast Communion was wonderful, as was Saturday night folk with Stuart Coupe.
- Everything I attended was good and uplifting.
- I loved the peaceful environment and the food. The people made it for me.

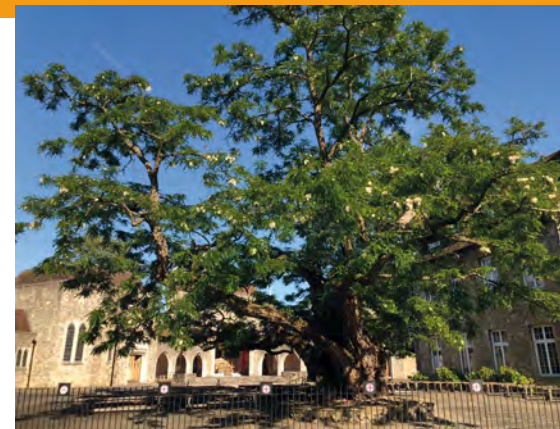
The Children's Programme

- The children loved every minute of their time at fuse. Jen and Jim were fantastic and did a great job at feeling the children's needs and giving them space to do things on their own on the wonderful grounds. I was delighted by how much pride, joy and fun the kids took in their theatre production and that they were willing to perform it so confidently in front of so many people. My kids are still talking about their experiences there and will cherish their adventures for years to come.
- My children both had a great time. I think you had just the right combination of structured activity, play and free time. Thanks!

Overall?

- Coming from a small congregation, it was beautiful to feel part of a large congregation, especially with the singing.
- It was a successful programme – a good mixture of everything.
- I want to commend the FUSE Team for doing incredible work and running a wonderful, inspiring and exciting festival. The vibe was good, it really felt like our movement is back on track after some bumpy years.

PICTURED RIGHT top to bottom: Ancient tree at The Friars; children's performance at the closing service; dining in the Pilgrims Hall and the Fuse Team with Stephen Lingwood (centre).



The Gospel Truth



ABOVE The Monterey Gospel Choir in full flow at Croydon

The notice read: “Award-winning gospel choir available to perform in churches in London.” I’m still not sure why, but I responded immediately. A guy in California told me when I rang: Yes, they could perform in our Croydon church. The leader of the Monterey Peninsula Community Choir, Johnny Nash, would be in London soon, and would come to look at the church. My pleasure at being accepted was followed immediately by a sense of anxiety. A Gospel choir in a Unitarian church? Had I taken leave of my senses? I asked a cautious question: would they be doing fundamentalist Christian numbers? Johnny laughed. “Try to convert Unitarians? Don’t be silly.” So, I took a deep breath and agreed. Am I glad I did.

In the event, there was a bit of what you’d have to call “old time religion,” but the sheer good-natured energy of this group smothered any trace of theological discomfort. All that was lost

in the joyful vocals accompanied by drums, sax and electric bass guitar. To my amazement, the place was filled to bursting – standing room only. The music swept us all away and, when our own Rainbows Across Borders chorus joined in, made us cry.

Afterwards I learned that many of the choir members were Unitarian Universalists. One of them told me that the group was as varied and mixed, racially and theologically, as any in the world. When I asked if he objected to the fundamentalist language of some of the songs, he said, “I never pay attention to the words – I just love the music.” You can say that again.

As in any genuinely spiritual event, barriers came down and friendships formed. A friend of mine on a first visit, who found himself moved by the music, wondered if all Unitarian services were this powerful and joyous. If only.

REV'D ART LESTER

Minister at Croydon Unitarian Church.

Quarterly at New Unity

How to sustain our congregations

The District is delighted to announce that our Autumn Quarterly is to be hosted by New Unity congregation at their splendidly-refurbished Newington Green Meeting House in north London on **Saturday 7th October from 12 noon.**

The theme is *How to sustain our congregations*, with workshop leaders Rev'd CJ McGregor of New Unity and Dr Lizzie Kingston Harrison of the General Assembly. Both speakers are doing exciting work with congregations. **Not to be missed!**

Timetable for the day: From 12 noon – lunch (bring your own) with tea and coffee provided. Also a chance to view this historic meeting house following the renovations; 1pm – Act of Worship; 1.45pm – Presentations and workshops on keeping congregations alive, with questions and discussion. From 3.45pm – Tea, socialising and departures. Thank you to New Unity!

WHAT? LDPA Autumn Quarterly.

WHEN? Saturday 7th October 2023 from 12 noon.

WHERE? Newington Green Meeting House, 39 Newington Green, Stoke Newington, London N16 9PR



Tributes to Jef Jones

News of the death of the retired Lay Leader of Brighton Unitarian Church, Jef Jones, in early May was met with deep sadness throughout the London and South East District, where Jef was a much-loved figure.

Jef was a deeply spiritual and gentle man, who over the course of many years touched so many with his passion, wisdom, knowledge and wonder of the cosmos, as well as his twinkling humour.

Jef was a long-standing member of the church having joined in 2000. In December 2008, Jane Barton (now Roberts), who had been Minister from 1997, stood down, and during the following 18 months, Jef played his part with others in keeping the church going.

In October 2010, Jef was formally adopted as Lay Leader at Brighton at a Service of Commitment led by the late Jane Barraclough. In addition to this role, he made significant contributions to Unitarian Summer School and to our General Assembly.

With his declining health, Jef had intended to stand down as Lay Leader at the end of September 2020 but he extended his term for another six months to support the congregation through Covid, retiring at the end of March 2021.



Jef expressed a wish before he died that a collection of poetry he was working on be shared, and in time this will be published as part of his legacy. A selection will be included in a live and streamed celebration of Jef and his legacy on Saturday 9th September at 3pm at Brighton Unitarian Church. To reserve your place in church, email: celebratingjef@brightonunitarian.org.uk For details of the live stream, visit: www.brightonunitarian.org.uk

JENNIFER SANDERS
Minister Elect at Brighton Unitarians

LGBT+ Unitarian Voices Travelling Exhibition



The General Assembly's LGBT+ Unitarian Voices Exhibition is on a national tour. Currently it's on display at Unitarian chapels in East Anglia, and in August is due to move to Brighton Unitarian Church (with support from our LDPA District).

The exhibition features interviews with Unitarians such as Ann Peart, Jeff Gould and Derek McAuley.

An online version can be viewed here: www.unitarian.org.uk/lgbt-unitarian-voices-timeline/

Is your chapel keen to host the exhibition (pictured above with those who helped create it) – for a month or so beyond August?

If so, contact Rory Castle Jones by email: rcastlejones@unitarian.org.uk or Lizzie Kingston Harrison email: ekingston@unitarian.org.uk at Essex Hall headquarters.

▪ We took a late decision, with regret, to withdraw our District's participation in the 2023 Pride in London Parade on July 1st. This was after only two people responded to our appeal in EPULSE for commitments to attend. (See comments on this in District Minister's message).

Death Cafes

Creating safe spaces



ABOVE Rev'd Kate (left) with Death Cafe participants at Rosslyn Hill. The ghostly cups have been added as the real ones were taken away before the photo was taken!

As a Unitarian minister serving an open-minded spiritual community, I encounter discussions about death regularly. Families who are adrift having lost a loved one can agonise over planning a funeral which would honour the wishes of the deceased. The most successful memorial services combine suggestions from the person who has died with suggestions from the family. A fully pre-planned service gives no room for manoeuvre, but if the loved one has not talked about what they want, this can cause even more distress to their family.

This is why I wanted to ensure that there was a safe space where people could talk about death in my neighbourhood.

Before the pandemic, I had run Death Cafes once a year – usually around Halloween – since there were other regular Death Cafes in the area. We usually had a good response. Then in October 2021, I held our first in-person Death Cafe for two years and at the end of the session, someone asked when the next one would be. ‘Er ... this time next year?’ I replied uncertainly. But there was a clamour for more of these gatherings, as local Death Cafes had ceased to meet in-person during Covid. With the help of a small team of volunteers, I have managed to offer a monthly Death Cafe at Rosslyn Hill Chapel in Hampstead on the last Sunday of the month.

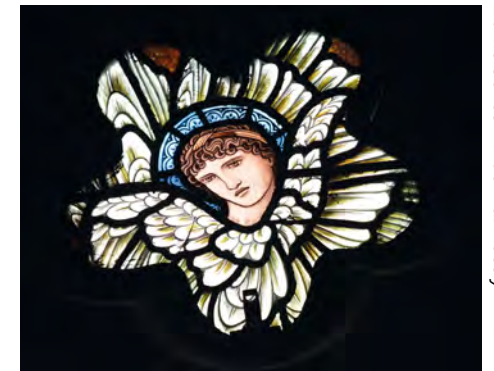
“Where we meet in our vulnerability”

We usually have between 12 and 20 people. We begin with brief introductions through the question: ‘Why have you come here?’ Then after tea and cake, those present divide into smaller groups of 6-8. Each person has five minutes of uninterrupted time to share whatever is on their mind, with a short period of silence between each speaker. We end up back in a circle in the wider group to share any final reflections before the session finishes.

One participant commented: “It is beautiful to experience how vulnerable some people are and how courageous in sharing their vulnerability and doubt about death.” She described why she agreed to become a regular facilitator: “I’m fascinated by humans in all their experiences during different phases of their life. I am a childcare teacher because it is my passion to learn from youth as well as to show what it is to nurture, share, and communicate. I know that death is a part of every human’s life at some point, and I am both curious as to how people have dealt with the loss of loved ones and how they face their own questions of mortality.” She said that for her, spirituality played a huge role.

Another volunteer facilitator said: “Rosslyn Hill Cafe is held in a wonderful church, there is a peaceful silence, an inviting silence, a restful silence, that holds me, inspires me and gives me the

space to go into the depth to explore what usually I do not make time to explore. Initially I went because I was looking for a place to talk freely about death and related issues, but I have found people who listen. I feel heard by them and every time we leave the meeting, I feel like they really see me. Now, I go because I find that something is soothed inside me each time. I have decided to become a facilitator because I want to give back the gift I have been gifted. When the meeting starts, I feel separated from people, yet by the end I feel intimate with all of them because we have allowed ourselves to meet in our vulnerability.”



Burne-Jones window at Rosslyn Hill

“One of my treasured memories is of two people who had come separately – burdened by loss, grief, loneliness and isolation – and they had left the meeting together laughing and making jokes as if they’d been friends for years.”

REV'D KATE DEAN

Minister at Rosslyn Hill Chapel



Same-sex marriage now offered at Dover

Dover Unitarian Church has become the first place of worship in this Kent town to offer same-sex marriage ceremonies. In this, our Dover church joins three other Unitarian places of worship in Kent and more than 100 others throughout the UK.

Rev'd Daniel Costley, minister of Dover Unitarians, spoke to BBC Radio Kent about the news in late May. He said: "I am delighted the congregation has endorsed this move so willingly. The authorisation granted by the General Register Office enables us to provide a religious wedding to all couples that truly love each other, to provide a spiritual and religious beginning to this step in a couple's life together for those that wish it."

Unitarians were among the first faith groups to offer same-sex marriages after we led the successful campaign to make this legal in the UK, together with Quakers and Liberal Jews.



New minister for Lewisham Unity

Lewisham Unity has announced 'with pride' the formal appointment of Rev'd Julio Torres as their new part-time minister. A statement in May said the relationship would be reviewed annually and they expected him to be their minister for at least two years. He was thanked for 'bravely accepting' the challenge.

Rev'd Julio has been working with Lewisham Unity as visiting minister since Rev'd Claire MacDonald retired a year ago. The congregation paid tribute to his

work, saying he'd helped navigate a period of change while developing their support network.

The appointment was approved at a meeting of the congregation on Sunday 30th April, with the District Minister, Rev'd Jim Corrigan, attending.

BELOW Rev'd Julio Torres (centre) pictured with (l to r): Rev'd Jim Corrigan, the congregation's chair Ann Howell, and congregational members Joel Xhaard and Lynne Markey.



Learn to lead worship?

Unitarian College is offering an online course for Unitarians interested in conducting high-quality worship this coming autumn. Led by Unitarian ministers and experienced lay people, this renewed Worship Studies Foundation Step course includes: Exploring your own theology of worship; Elements of a great service; Sermons and addresses; Prayers, meditations and readings; Hymns, music and copyright; Story-telling; Voice and communication skills.

Zoom course

The course will be run on Zoom, taking place on Wednesday evenings (7pm to 9pm) on 20 and 27 September, 4 and 11 October, 1, 8 and 15 November with an additional day for final assessment on Saturday 2 December 2023.

The cost is £100, and participants are encouraged to approach congregations and Districts for help with funding. To book your place and find out more, email: HMason@unitarian-college.org.uk or send an enquiry via the Unitarian College website.

'In-person' Worship Studies in Spring

In addition, we in the London and South East Unitarian District are planning to run 'in-person' Worship Studies training in early Spring next year in co-operation with Unitarian College. Details, including dates, are still to be worked out.

District Noticeboard

IARF for Transylvania

The International Association of Religious Freedom (IARF) is holding its 36th World Congress from September 4 to 6 in Transylvania, Romania, in the historic centre of Cluj-Napoca, also known as Kolozsvár. Unitarians and religious liberals are warmly invited to attend.

The theme is 'Faith in Reconciliation' and there'll be a mix of talks and workshops on the role of religion in inspiring healing, as well as interfaith devotions. Online participation is possible. Keynote speaker is Prof. George Williams; other speakers include Rev'd Rosemary Bray McNatt, Prof. Kathy Matsui and Prof. Kunihiko Terasawa.

You can register for in-person or online participation, with limited accommodation available at Unitarian College in Kolozsvár, at: <https://iarf.net/congress-2023#registration>.

Beforehand there's a chance to join a tour of historic landmarks in this region, many integral to the history of Unitarianism. The tour is from September 1 to 3. More details from Rev'd Kinga-Reka Székely by email: szkingareka@gmail.com or at <https://iarf.net/congress-2023#tour>

Then following the Congress, the International Association of Liberal Religious Women will hold their World Congress in Cluj-Napoca from September 7 to 8. Details here: <https://iarf.net/congress-2023#ialrw>

Chanting with Stephen Lingwood

Those who enjoyed the presentations at FUSE by Unitarian minister Stephen Lingwood might like to try his monthly online 'Contemplative Prayer and Chanting' gatherings.

Stephen describes these evening sessions as "rooted in the conviction there is a universal, unconditional source of love within each person and that it's possible to have a personal encounter with this source". Participants are muted

so they can feel free to sing along to the chants. An introduction guides attendees through different forms of prayer to quieten the heart and mind before opening 'to a loving encounter with the Beloved'.

The gatherings last an hour and normally take place on the second Wednesday of each month from 7.30 pm. If you'd like to attend, please email Stephen at: s_lingwood@hotmail.com

Policies for safeguarding

Safeguarding is not something we like to think about, but it is necessary in our communities to protect children and vulnerable adults.

Each of our congregations needs its own safeguarding policies and procedures, as does our District as a whole. Many of you will have developed policies and procedures before the pandemic. These need to be reviewed to see whether they still meet today's needs.

Safeguarding policies and procedures start with training, which provides a framework for going forward. Training is available from charities like 31:8, which our General Assembly and the London District have affiliated to. Their training is online, and you work your way through the course at your own pace.

Policies help answer why questions: Why are we doing this? Who are we protecting? Who are the vulnerable and where are they? Our policies need to address online safeguarding today too, as ways of gathering have changed.

Safeguarding requires an identified lead person. Who do you go to if you have concerns about behaviour you have experienced or observed? The lead will listen and discern the next steps. This is why the training is so important. It gives the lead the framework to determine what to do next.

Another key element in safeguarding is background checks (known as DBS checks). As a congregation, you need to determine who should have checks. Firstly this should be people working directly with children and vulnerable adults. Surprisingly perhaps, a check with one organisation is not valid with another. Even if you had had checks in your employment, say, you would still need checks for a safeguarding role in your congregation.

'In plain sight'

Organisations create the policy that tells the community who they are safeguarding and why. And procedures spell out who to report to and how to report. These documents should be available in plain sight for the people in your building. The policy applies to other groups that use the building too.

This is important work in our faith communities that establishes trust. There are resources available to help you at the GA and LDPA. Do not hesitate to reach out.

SUE SINNAMON

Rev'd Sue is Safeguarding Lead for the LDPA Council.



Contact her for further information on email: ssinamon@gmail.com

Multicultural celebrations



Avibrant evening of multicultural music, arts and storytelling took place at Kensington Unitarian Church in west London on Sunday 25th June. It was organised by the interfaith charity Spirit of Peace as part of the Lord Mayor of London's Community Weekend. Our District was proud to co-sponsor the event and it was good to see Unitarians present (only a few – but then Sunday evening events can be difficult for church-goers!)

Hanna Yaffe

The celebrations featured performances by the Jerusalem-based singer and story-teller Hanna Yaffe (pictured above), as well by graphic artists and musicians. There were songs in Aramaic, Arabic and Greek accompanied by oud, frame drum and bouzouki instruments. A rich celebration of cultures!

A Godalming Welcome

Five weeks after Rev'd Martin Whitell started as the new Minister at Meadow Unitarian Chapel in Godalming, Surrey, the congregation held an official service of welcome on Sunday 14 May.

Both Rev'd Martin and the congregation had chosen not to have a traditional Induction service, as Martin is already well known at the Chapel as former District Minister and as a regular visiting minister for many years before that.

With the ground floor full, and with more people in the chapel's small gallery, the Chair of the Trustees, Christine Martin, and the District Minister Rev'd Jim Corrigan, warmly welcomed the new minister on behalf of both congregation and the wider denomination. The right hand of fellowship was extended. Then the congregation joined in saying an affirmation written by Frank Clapburn.

Rev'd Martin used his address to highlight strengths of the congregation,

past and present. Speaking to the theme 'A time for Thanksgiving', Martin looked back at influences that had brought Minister and congregation together. Then, speaking directly to the congregation, he outlined its many strengths. Notably between 2014 and the pandemic, there'd been a steady numerical growth, with the graph on an upward trajectory. Rev'd Sheena Gabriel's ministry had left a sound legacy, he said.

But the future 'is for us to grasp'. While the older underpinning truths of the world's faiths were not popular in contemporary thought, we should not strip out our traditions, he said.

After a lively and engaging service, a superb lunch was served in the School Hall. We look forward to seeing Godalming Unitarians continue their spiritual journey, not least through their practical engagement in social action.

LEFT TO RIGHT: Martin Whitell, Christine Martin and Jim Corrigan

