



NEWSLETTER

.....
Autumn 2009

"supporting lay ministry in all its forms"

In this issue

From the Editor's Desk	---	2
President's Piece	---	3
In memoriam	---	4
GA Chester 2009	---	5
Training chances ...	---	6
Need inspiration?	---	7
What you said ...	---	8
Members' News	---	13
Dates for your diary	---	14
UALM Object & Committee	---	15
Contact details & How to Join	---	16



From the Editor's Desk

Hello everyone!

It doesn't seem six months since our last issue, but there's a distinct chill in the air and evening arrives much earlier, so I suppose it really is autumn. I think I must have blinked and missed summer ...



There's an interesting mix of contributions this time - keep them coming, we want to hear from you! Reading Lucy Harris's piece on 'Why I Spend More Time in Church of England Services than Unitarian Services' (page 11), I was struck by a thought... (yes, I know, it doesn't happen often!)

We Unitarians are a diverse lot, and our services vary tremendously. Some congregations may have a communion service as a regular part of their worship, others prefer meditation or a standard sort of 'hymn sandwich' approach, or something else. Which is great - but how do you find out which congregations offer worship which is to *your* taste? And how do newcomers know what to expect? If they don't like the service at your community, we may know that they might feel more at home at a different Unitarian church - but are *they* made aware of that?

Is there a case for setting up a register of the types of service that you could expect to find at each congregation? Or maybe we should be listening to our congregations and giving them the service(s) they need ... accepting that an individual will prefer one style of service over another, but recognising that others have different tastes. What do you think? Send your comments on this (or anything else in this issue) to me for publication in the next issue - let's start a conversation...

By the time you read this, all those beginning training for ministry this year will have started their courses. Those studying at Unitarian College, Manchester (Nicky Jenkins and yours truly) began in mid-September, those at Oxford (Sue Woolley and Jim Corrigan) started a month later. Wish us luck, we'll need it!

Kath Riley

President's Piece

Do you ever need to write a sermon but the inspiration is lacking? You sit there with a totally blank page in front of you, taunting you, 'go on then, fill me up'. I have exactly that sort of problem right now; Editor Kath Riley has phoned, reminding me that my deadline has passed (well, it's today, actually, 5th September) and would I please get on with it!



Malcolm Sadler

So here goes.....

I can report that the Committee held a most useful meeting on August 7th at Unitarian New Meeting Church, Birmingham when we went through the new Constitution with a fine tooth-comb and this will be presented to members at the AGM at the Annual Conference in November (don't forget to book!).

We discussed arrangements for the Conference. Sue Woolley presented her revised 'The Conduct of Worship' manual, which will be available for purchase at the Conference. Also, Chrissie Wilkie presented a draft document, a suggested Code of Conduct for Lay Leaders in relation to their dealings with their congregations. Two versions were put forward, and the Committee felt that it would be better if Chrissie combined the two suggestions and put them to the next meeting prior to it being put to the AGM. We were most grateful to Chrissie for her hard work in preparing the ground for this, but it was mentioned that the Ministers have a similar Code but not all have signed up to it, as consciences and opinions differ (inevitably, being Unitarians!).

It has been most encouraging to keep getting revised, and enlarged, lists of members, much of which is due to the efforts of our indefatigable secretary. It has been of particular sadness to me to hear of the death of Mary Rimington in July. She was one of our early 'recruits' having a leadership role at her church in Hull.

For many years she came to our Annual Conferences and contributed much to the proceedings.

Like all good workers she will be sadly missed.

So it remains for me to just give a final gentle reminder of the fast-approaching November Conference; if you haven't booked yet, hurry along as places are limited to 35 this year. I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible then.

Have a happy (if non-barbeque) Autumn!

Malcolm Sadler, UALM President.

In memoriam

In his President's piece, Malcolm mentions the loss of Mary Rivington, and Chrissie Wilkie (pages 9-10) speaks of Hilary Ellis.

Since the last newsletter, we have also lost Janice Ashley, a lifelong Unitarian who from 1992 - 1993 was President of the Unitarian Lay Preachers Association (which later merged with the Unitarian Association of Lay Leaders, now UALM). She was a regular worship leader, travelling widely around the Midlands from her base in Coventry.



Janice Ashley

We shall miss them all.

"Love is stronger than death.

Even though it can't stop death from happening, no matter how hard death tries it can't separate people from love. It can't take away our memories either.

In the end, life is stronger than death."

Author Unknown

UALM slot at GA meetings a success!

Over 40 people crowded into the smallish room for the UALM meeting at the GA meetings in Chester. And this in spite of the fact that we were scheduled against not one but two Receptions, where the wine was flowing freely! Thank you to everyone who attended - both UALM members and interested others. The following report appeared in the next morning's GAZette, courtesy of Angela Maher, of Unitarian New Meeting Church Birmingham, and is reproduced here with her permission.

"The Unitarian Association of Lay Leaders has changed its name to the Unitarian Association for Lay Ministry (UALM). To allow all those present to appreciate why the change was necessary, first Malcolm Sadler outlined the history of the association from its beginning as a kind of self-help group for lay people in positions of leadership in their congregations, then Chrissie Wilkie explained the reasons that lay behind the change, particularly the idea that congregations die without lay ministry and that ministry for all and by all is the cornerstone of the Unitarians.

Once it was clear why UALM was so called, Sue Woolley gave a quick tour of the new website. It looks pretty good, with a nice logo, and helpful sidebar menu, and has information on the history of the association, the worship studies course, and links to some great worship resources - plus, if like me, you wanted to know the differences between a lay leader and a lay pastor, there are a collection of helpful definitions to explain them. 'New name, new website, new newsletter' was the introduction of the first UALM newsletter by editor Kath Riley. Mostly this was a plea for non-members to buy a copy (very reasonable, 50p each) and for contributions for the next issue which is expected in the Autumn. Also in the Autumn is the UALM conference, whose theme will be Pastoral Care, as explained by David Monk.

The slot ended with questions, which included several comments about the validity, worth and importance of lay ministry, and plugs for some of the excellent training that takes place through district associations, the GA and opportunities that may exist externally. If you want to join UALM, you can find details on the website. Membership fees are £10."

Bright training chances for worship leaders

Training opportunities exist for Unitarians keen to assume leadership roles in congregational life – with courses at national and district levels.

Nationally, two programmes exist which encourage in-depth study of religion, including of our Unitarian movement, and neither is expensive. These two courses are in fact very similar, with one – called the Unitarian Studies Course -- designed primarily to develop knowledge; while the other – the Worship Studies Course – aims to help members lead worship as well. (The two programmes are usually known by their abbreviations -- USC and WSC).

Those undertaking the Worship Studies Course are required first to complete training in leading worship (known as the Foundation Step – training provided by some Districts, and now also on a national level.)

Both USC and WSC are for part-time 'distance learning' with tutors, and they can be started at any time of the year. The two courses are designed to be taken over three years, but they can be completed more quickly. The first year is a Preliminary Step with four areas of study: 'Unitarian Theology', 'Unitarian History', 'Biblical Studies' and 'World Religions'. In this first year, you submit one sermon -- or one essay -- on each of these topics (normally sermons for the WSC course and essays for the USC).

Then for the Advanced Step, the four modules remain the same, but the pace hots up. You are required to submit six sermons (or essays) on each topic. (So that makes 24 sermons for this step – over two years that would mean one a month). These courses can help you become a Lay Leader within our denomination, but they are not a pre-requisite.

To gain entry to these courses, you need a proposer and seconder. You can start with the USC course and later switch to the WSC (or vice versa) – starting with the USC can be a good way to begin if it is difficult to begin a Foundation Step training course. Details from Liz Shaw (Course Administrator for the General Assembly): lizzy.shaw50@btinternet.com

Jim Corrigan

(Ed: You may find that your local District will fund you to take the Worship Studies Course - it's worth asking!)

Need inspiration?

*I asked 'What was the most unusual service you have ever taken?'
Here are some replies!*

From Dorothy Haughton

I wanted, really, to get people to walk a labyrinth but our church is too small and cramped. So I devised a different activity for a number of different pews – marked these with large numbers and handed out a sheet as people entered. I got people to sit in the old choir stalls and go up into the pulpit.

Example activity: (underneath the Darwin memorial plaque)

Charles Darwin worshipped here, probably at his mother's instigation.

What qualities have the people who brought you up given you?

If you are a parent, what qualities are you giving your children?

From Martin Gienke

To answer your question about unusual services – I had two when I was in the Cambridge congregation.

In the 1970's (early days for audio visual services) I organised a service of readings from Jonathan Livingstone Seagull with rear projected slides of seagulls behind the readers and sounds of sea and seagulls throughout.

On the Sunday morning of Princess Diana's death we in Cambridge were due to have a supply minister coming from Northampton. I got a phone call at 9.00 am saying his car wouldn't start and he was unable to be with us. I phoned 3 or 4 other members of the congregation and, considering the circumstances, asked them to bring readings about death. Thus we put together the service ad hoc and it was one of the most meaningful times of worship we have experienced.

*Any more? Remember that what is normal in your congregation might be unusual for a different group - and we'll find it interesting!
Send your story to the editor...*

What you said ...

David Monk

The thing that attracted me to Unitarian ministry was a good friendship with Rev David Doel from my late 20s, prior to which I was an evangelical gospel preacher at various churches and used to stand in Bolton market and on the town hall steps trying to win souls for Christ, after being "born again" when I was 17!

My close friendship with David together with some other influences led me to a much more liberal religious position, and I felt increasingly attracted to the Unitarian Movement. I did occasional Sunday services at Hindley Unitarian Chapel, where David was minister, until he took on the ministry at Dukinfield in 1976. When he left, the congregation at Hindley invited me to become their Lay Person in Charge. I willingly accepted this and continued in that role until 1994. After one year of ministry training at UCM, I then continued as Rev David Monk, and I am still there as their minister - now aged 70. It has been a lovely ministry in which we have all been together in a liberal, inclusive and mutually respectful spiritual fellowship.

During my ministry at Hindley I have also led a meditation group for the last 17 years, and also led meditation days at various Unitarian chapels around the country. I have also been leader of The Meditational Fellowship retreat organisation since 1985. I was a part time tutor at UCM in Pastoral Counselling and Spiritual Practice for 10 years, having been a full time student counsellor in higher education for 20 years, a private psychotherapist at my home, and a meditation teacher. This has led me to doing seminars and talks at different Unitarian fellowships in which I have combined psychotherapy with spiritual practice. I also wrote articles on this subject for "Faith and Freedom" in every issue for many years. Now I just write occasional longer articles.

My ministry in the Unitarian Movement has been a very creative and fulfilling life experience.



Rev. David Monk

Chrissie Wilkie

I joined the North West Unitarian Provincial Assembly Course for Worship Leaders in September 2006. I had never led worship before, but a number of years ago had the intention to join the Ministry, but family circumstances scuppered my plans. This seemed to be an ideal solution, just a short course and then the occasional service when the Minister is off sick. Little did I know then how involved I would become.



Chrissie Wilkie

We are all aware that there is a shortage of trained Ministers and that more and more of our congregations are being kept alive by the 'Lay Ministry'. I did not even know that there was a support system for the laity until I became a Worship Leader and it took me until last year at the AGM of UALL (now of course UALM) to 'join up'. I have to say that I have thoroughly enjoyed being able to share worship with a number of congregations and have always been made very welcome at the Chapels.

Out of my experiences I have made some very good friends and a group of us who joined the Worship Leader course at the same time have decided to form our own group, EnCompass, who are available to Chapels who ask us to lead worship for them. We started by leading worship at the Provincial Assembly AGMs and have grown from there. The first service we wrote was to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Women's League and at the moment we are presenting a new service on Dreams. The EnCompass services are slightly different to the norm, in that we do not have an address, but each person (usually four of us) has a reading or mini address. We write our suggestions for content and send them back and forth by email until we have a good balance for the service, then we have a run through at a meeting to iron out any problems. We do not make any claim for fee or expenses to the Chapel as these are occasional 'special services'.

I think that this is very similar to what is being done already by the congregations in some chapels. I do believe that any formal or informal groups of the same kind would benefit from membership of UALM for support and reassurance. I have spoken to quite a number of people who have expressed interest in leading at least part of their Chapel's worship, but have felt too nervous to give it a go. It is very rewarding and congregations are often happy to experience something a bit different. I would encourage anybody who might be interested in holding worship to think about taking the Worship Leader course. It does not mean that you have to make a huge commitment to hold worship every week, but it does give lots of help and advice and confidence to those who would like to take the occasional service or part of service. Lastly, I would say don't hold back! The Unitarian movement needs you!

Hilary Ellis joined EnCompass for the 2009 North West Provincial Assembly Service and the Dreams service and here I would like to pay tribute to a beautiful, loving and sincere person whose life was sadly cut short on the 16th July 2009.

Kath Riley

There are people from about ten different denominations studying at Luther King House (where UCM is based), and it is a tradition that we take turns in leading the hour-long Tuesday worship. So it came about that recently - for the first time in my life - I attended and took part in a communion service.

The bread and (non-alcoholic) wine was passed around the circle. I don't think I could have coped with being told that 'this is the body/blood of Christ'. Luckily, I had Unitarians either side of me, so they were given to me with the words 'this is the bread of life' and 'this is the spirit of Jesus', which was fine.

I was surprised by the feelings generated in me by this event. The worship leader had managed to introduce the communion in a very welcoming way, and I did feel that I was truly a part of the group. So much so that I am now considering how I might introduce a communion service to one of the congregations I lead occasionally. It may be a challenge!

Lucy Harris: Why I Spend More Time in Church of England Services than Unitarian Services

Seems a straightforward enough title, doesn't it? So let's start with the straightforward explanation. On family, ecological and sustainable commitment grounds (i.e. don't pretend you can become a fully active member of a congregation if you can't sustain your activity with it), I consider it is only worthwhile travelling to a worship event if the journey time to/from it is less than the duration of the event. So for a service lasting an hour, with parking and self-preparation time, I would not want to travel more than (maximum) 45 mins. This puts the formal services at Trowbridge, Southampton and Bournemouth out of reach.

Hang on, says the geographer, if that's your triangle, you must be somewhere close to Salisbury, and there's a vigorous if unofficial fellowship in Salisbury. Er, yes. That's where the question stops being quite so straightforward. I enjoy the company of the SFUU in Salisbury. They are intellectually testing, diverse, caring, supportive and generous, as you would wish a vigorous Fellowship to be. Their meetings are varied, including addresses, little rituals like candle lighting, readings, music, periods of silent contemplation. And meetings are always thought provoking. So why is this not my natural home?

Firstly, there is to be considered the number of Sundays that I can allow to be taken up with worship activities each month. Or as my husband, would express it, how many Sundays each month are interrupted and broken into by my hobby, which he does not share. 6 p.m. is a very awkward time. And we have many other hobbies that we share and with both of us working 12 hour days during the week, our time together at the weekend is very precious for catching up and re-centring on our marriage, rather than on our jobs. For some years now the balance seems to be struck with about one Sunday a month being "interrupted", though more recently I have been able to sneak some more worship time owing to timing (more later). I used to be a regular member of SFUU. But somehow the use of my one Sunday a month with SFUU still left me hungry - something, it was gradually made clear to me, was missing in that routine. So it was a waste of my one session a month for me to go there.

It took me some years to work out what the issue was and I'm still amending my analysis. But fundamentally it has to do with what worship is about for me. Worship must have both solitary and communal aspects for me, and of course the solitary aspects I can deal with on my own. The communal bit is about standing in a space, devoting time and focus and energy to making a personal approach to God - the communal bit is that it is a group of people that make the space safe in which to do this. They need not very often actually be there in person; but feeling part of a group that on a regular basis is turning towards God and surrendering concerns and failures, and by doing so making enough quietness for nourishment to enter or emerge, is what makes the space feel safe. And every now and then it is necessary to experience the groupness firsthand, by physically standing and moving together inside the group, carrying out the same act towards the same end (though in individual ways). "Though we are many, we are one body, for we all partake of the same bread."

I have only on one occasion got this feeling in a Unitarian service, and that was in one which included a simple version of the labyrinth dance. The rest of the time it either seems to be the liturgy of the word (very much showing the Protestant roots) or else a humble - or not so humble - set of personal observations on how we could better serve or live within the world. So only the once in 11 years has there been the experience of making an approach to God.

Whereas, of course, with the C of E communion service the whole thing is set up to facilitate approach to God. As you would expect, I have tremendous theological difficulties with the words, and a lot can be destroyed by a "Jesus-Man/God"-centred sermon. But when they stay away from that a bit, I have enough headroom in the general run of the wording to carry out my own simultaneous translation that suits my own pantheism - I have enough time to hear their metaphor for God and internally to map it to one of my several metaphors.

Added to which, we all know our movements around "the stage". There is a stately flow of people making room for each other, and respecting the downturned eyes as people move back to their seats from the altar rail or free-standing table. It is, in some senses, a dance. And at least for the duration of the ritual, there is suspension of scepticism, disputation, otherness. All together at the table; all together at the foot of the Redeemer; room for all (leave the

arguments about church finances, women bishops, and ordination of people who are in same-sex relationships till later). There really is a lot to be said for it, for me at least.

And there are churches everywhere I go. One is 400m up the road and there are four more in a ring of radius 3 miles (5-10 mins). Down the road 9 miles in Salisbury there is that great epiphany in stone, that great shout for joy that is the Cathedral. I go to Taize services there, and sacred dance, as well as glorious Evensong.

Where is all this for me within the Unitarian movement?

If only the CofE would give up their identification of Jesus with the second person of God I'd be there week in week out (because they have 8 a.m. services every Sunday that don't impact at all on a sleepy husband who doesn't wake till 9 a.m.!).

How can we in UALM meet the needs of devotional people like me who cannot accept Jesus as God?

Regards to all
Lucy

Members' News

UALM Members accepted for training

Since our announcement in the last issue, Rob McPherson has decided to defer his arrival at UCM for one year. When you are in Australia, making arrangements to come to Manchester for training is somewhat trickier than from within the UK!



Wedding bells!

Dr Peter Forder (Evesham congregation's chairman) and Ms Kathleen Riley (your editor, of Cheltenham) are delighted to announce their engagement.

The wedding will be at Oat St Chapel in Evesham, probably next summer. Ideas on putting together a wedding service gratefully received!

(Though I will have done the UCM training for it by then ...)

Dates for your diary

UALM Conference 2009

When: Friday 13th - Sunday 15th November 2009

Where: The Nightingale Centre, Great Hucklow

Theme: Pastoral Care

Arrive any time from 4:00 pm on Friday 13th November for our annual conference in Great Hucklow. Through discussion, role play, trial and error we shall all learn from each other this weekend. We have three sessions on the theme of pastoral care:-

1: *Self-awareness in pastoral care* by Rev. Helen Mills

2: *Psychodynamics in pastoral counselling* by Rev. David Monk

3: *Unitarian Reach-out* by Rev. David Shaw

Also on the agenda are the AGM for UALM (Friday evening after dinner) and a session on training courses with tutors and administrator (Saturday afternoon). And our own Sue Woolley has been asked to lead the service in Old Chapel on Sunday 15th November - do support her!

If you haven't already sent your application in to David Arthur, send it now! Forms were sent by email, if you've lost yours, ask Sue Woolley for another one.

There will be an opportunity to renew your membership of UALM at the conference.

Next issue ...

The next issue of your newsletter will be published in spring, before the General Assembly meetings in April. Please send *your* contribution for the next issue of your UALM Newsletter **by February 28th 2010** to:-

Kath Riley at ualm.newsletter@googlemail.com **or**
Sue Woolley (contact details on page 15)

Though the printed version is in black and white to keep costs down, the colour version of this newsletter will be downloadable from the website In due course.

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Last Word ...



A little girl became restless as the sermon
dragged on and on.
Finally, she leant over to her mother
and whispered...

'Mummy, if we give him the money now, will he let
us go?'

Our Object

The Unitarian Association for Lay Ministry exists to support lay ministry in all its forms. UALM's objectives are as follows:

1. to support all those involved in delivering worship in Unitarian churches and chapels
2. to support all those involved in lay leadership of a Unitarian congregation, whatever form this might take
3. to promote and share best practice in Unitarian worship and lay ministry
4. to support the General Assembly of Unitarian & Free Christian Churches

Do YOU take services for a Unitarian congregation? Are YOU involved in Unitarian lay leadership? Yes? Then join us.

How to join UALM

Our membership is now 42, doubled since last October! A very warm welcome to all those who have joined UALM in the past few months.

If you aren't already a member of UALM, and are involved in lay Ministry - in any form - please join us. Membership is open to all those involved in lay ministry in Unitarian congregations.

The subscription rate for 2009/10 has been held to £10, the same as last year. You may renew your membership at the November conference; or by post by downloading an application form from <http://ualm.org.uk/join.htm>, completing it, and sending it with your cheque for £10 (made payable to 'UALM'), to:

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