



## Northampton Unitarians News

*A spiritual fellowship, encouraging tolerance,  
reason and independent thought*

**Issue 83, March - May 2025**

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### Statement of Belief (taken from our website)

Unitarianism is a religious movement in which individuals are free to follow their reason and conscience; there is no pressure from creed or scripture. We are open to change in the light of new thought and discoveries.

#### We believe that:

- everyone has the right to seek truth and meaning for themselves.
- the fundamental tools for doing this are your own life experience, your reflection upon it, your intuitive understanding and the promptings of your own conscience.
- the best place to do this is a community that welcomes you for who you are,
- complete with your beliefs, doubts, and questions.

#### We offer:

- liberty of conscience from imposed creed, confessions, and dogmas.
- a fellowship where people come together to worship; to share times of celebration and trial; and to help each other in the quest for a faith to live by.

**We affirm** the universal values of love and compassion, peace, truth, and justice.

**We welcome** all who come to us in the spirit of goodwill and enquiry, regardless of ethnic or religious background, age, gender, or sexual orientation.

*Our thanks to the General Assembly Information Department, for extracts from 'A Faith Worth Thinking About' by Peter Sampson et al; and to Ipswich Unitarians for extracts from a leaflet by Rev. Cliff Reed.*

### Websites & Social Media

[www.northamptonunitarians.org.uk](http://www.northamptonunitarians.org.uk)  
[https://www.facebook.com/Northampton Unitarians](https://www.facebook.com/NorthamptonUnitarians)  
<http://sue-still-i-am-one.blogspot.co.uk>  
<http://www.midland-unitarian-association.org.uk>  
[www.unitarian.org.uk](http://www.unitarian.org.uk)

## Calendar for March to May 2025

### March

- Sunday 2nd    Worship service, Aleks Zglinska, 11.00 am  
Sunday 16th    Worship service, Jon Small, 11.00 am  
Thurs. 27th    Threads, craft and chat group 2.00 till 4.00 pm

### April

- Sunday 6th    Congregational Circle Service.  
                  Theme: Asking Questions, 11.00 am  
Sunday 20th    Easter Worship service, Heather Korbey, 11.00 am  
Thurs. 24th    Threads, craft and chat group 2.00 till 4.00 pm

### May

- Sunday 4th    Worship service: Rev Sue Woolley, 11.00 am  
*followed by*    committee meeting.  
Sunday 18th    Worship service: Mark Beaumont  
Thurs. 29th    Threads, craft and chat group 2.00 till 4.00 pm



## Keep Asking Questions by Sue Woolley

We live in a very strange world. Bertrand Russell once wrote, "In all affairs it's a healthy thing now and then to hang a question mark on the things you have long taken for granted." I wholeheartedly agree. But in our world today, in both politics, and mainstream religion, it seems to be certainty that is prized. To doubt or question is seen as somehow bad, or incorrect. I find this quite ironic, particularly in the religious sphere. Many mainstream religions, in both Christianity and (for example) Islam, insist that their followers believe X, Y, and Z, otherwise they are not deemed to be "proper" Christians / Muslims / fill in the blank yourself.

The reason why I find it odd, is that the classic definition of faith is, "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen", to quote the *Epistle to the Hebrews*. Frederick Buechner writes: "Faith is not being sure where you're going, but going anyway. A journey without maps."

We can never prove that God exists (or doesn't exist), but we can have faith that He (or She or It) does. And live our lives as though we believed it. Which includes a healthy dollop of doubt – not taking anything for granted, not accepting anything without questioning it first. So today I'm going to advocate that we should cherish our doubts, keep asking questions, for this is how we grow and mature in faith, and as people.

We Unitarians do not claim to have all the answers – every Unitarian I've ever known has been a spiritual seeker, just like me. We are all on the same journey, "seekers and sharers, fellow pilgrims on the path" (to quote Cliff Reed).

Outsiders may find it difficult to understand how the denomination holds together, placing, as it does, so much

importance on the freedom of individual belief based on reason and conscience. Cliff Reed explains this in *Unitarian? What's That?*: "The Unitarian answer is that shared values and a shared religious approach are a surer basis for unity than theological propositions. Because no human being and no human institution can have a monopoly on truth, it is safer to admit that from the outset. ... The values underpinning the Unitarian movement have to do with mutual caring and mutual respect. They involve a readiness to extend to each other a positive, involved and constructive tolerance. ... They are the values of a community that is open to truth from many sources; a community of the spirit that cherishes reason and acknowledges honest doubt; a community where the only theological test is that required by one's own conscience."...

But we should still keep asking questions, if it appears that we are deviating from these values at any point.

Another way of putting it is to say that we all have the same *attitude* to religion and spirituality. All of us believe profoundly in the necessity of personal freedom of religious belief – the freedom to grow, and to act in accordance with our beliefs, to work out our own answers, to be able to share our doubts and questions. We share a devotion to spiritual freedom and find that the insights of others can enrich our own beliefs. What could be better?

We Unitarians have always been in the habit of questioning beliefs and cherishing doubts. I would guess that many of us came to Unitarianism exactly by that path – by starting to question some of the beliefs that we grew up with. In my case, I realised that I could not accept the divinity of Jesus as the unique Son of God, and also struggled with the idea that his death on the cross somehow put me back into right relationship with God. When my father gave me Alfred Hall's *Beliefs of a Unitarian* to read, it was such a relief to learn about a denomination that

"holds faith and doubt in reverent balance", to quote Jan Carlsson-Bull.

What does holding faith and doubt in reverent balance mean? I believe that it is a very delicate balancing act, which certainly needs to be undertaken with reverence. It means actively searching for and working out what gives your life meaning, putting your whole heart and mind and soul into it, and yet *at the same time* totally respecting the right of every other member of your Unitarian community to disagree with you. It can be a very tough call sometimes.

Because it is only human nature to feel passionately about religious and spiritual matters, about things that touch us deeply. And when we feel passionately about something, it can be difficult to remember that our fellow Unitarians are absolutely free to disagree with us. And that it is our job *as Unitarians*, as folk who are aiming to "live Unitarianly", to use Michael Dadson's wonderful phrase, to not only tolerate their different views but also to wholeheartedly accept and cherish them. And to not feel aggrieved because Reverend X or Mrs. Y has written something on Facebook with which we disagree. What does it matter?

Holding faith and doubt in reverent balance also means being open to new ideas, from wherever they come. Unitarianism at its best is a wonderfully open way of approaching life and religion, based on an appeal to reason, conscience and your own life experience. And it is an ongoing process – you don't just experience a one-off conversion, and then rest on those fixed beliefs for the rest of your life; every Unitarian has a duty to approach all new ideas and concepts reverently and critically (whether they have anything to do with our faith or not), and take from them what speaks to our own reason and conscience, and what makes sense in the context of our own life experience, in order to live out our lives in the best and truest way we can.

The interplay of individuals' beliefs should be one of the great strengths of a Unitarian congregation – the bouncing of ideas off each other means that we can never be complacent about what we believe. It is stimulating to belong to such a congregation, but it can be very hard work. Nothing is set in stone, and each individual is responsible for keeping their mind open to new ideas, so that our faith can grow. As Robert T. Weston wrote, "Doubt is the key to the door of knowledge; it is the servant of discovery. ... Doubt is the testing of belief."

One of the most oft-quoted Unitarian aphorisms is, "We need not think alike to love alike", often mistakenly attributed to our Transylvanian founding father Francis David. Our fierce defence of freedom of belief, within the denomination, and in the wider world, boils down to our belief in this one phrase, "We need not think alike to love alike." And this inevitably includes holding space for doubts and questions.

For us, being Unitarian means having the freedom to believe what we will (so long as it is consonant with our reason and conscience, and doesn't harm anyone else) whilst simultaneously being a member of a religious / spiritual community, whose members share the attitude that we are all on a spiritual journey together. We come together in community, providing a sacred space in which all can explore what gives our lives depth and meaning. For some this may involve a belief in a divine presence, which they may call God; for some it may be more of an internal process; or a faith in humankind; or a reverence for the natural world.

What matters is that we continue to ask questions, to take nothing for granted. And then, when we have answers which satisfy our reason and conscience, to take action. Because that is what will make a positive difference in the world.

## Northampton Unitarians

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### *A Springtime Blessing* by Laura Dobson

May we be blessed by the fertile Earth,  
our foundation and bedrock,  
with gratitude.

May we be blessed by the spring rains  
and the glistening dew,  
quenching our thirst for freedom and beauty.

May we be blessed by the shining Sun,  
and the growing light, renewing and revealing  
all as it truly is.

May we be blessed by the  
sweetly scented spring breeze,  
sweeping away the cobwebs of winter,  
and bringing us inspiration and hope.