



Great Meeting Chapel Leicester

Newsletter Autumn 2025-Winter 2026



300 years of Freedom, Reason and Tolerance

SUNDAY SERVICES:

Starting at 11.00 am and led by the Minister

2025

October 5th

October 12th

October 19th Harvest Service - shared lunch

October 26th Clocks go back

November 2nd All Souls

November 9th Remembrance Service

November 16th

November 23rd Honouring the dark

November 30th 1st Sunday of Advent

December 7th 2nd Sunday of Advent

December 14th 3rd Sunday of Advent

December 21st Carol Service at 3.00 pm

December 28th

2026

January 4th Epiphany

January 11th

January 18th

January 25th Burns Lunch

Thanks to Jude Casson for the cover photo taken at Leicester Pride on August 30th . As usual GM was well represented.

REGULAR EVENTS

- ♦ THURSDAY 11.00 AM – 1.00 : **COFFEE MORNING**
Tea, coffee and warm company in our beautiful garden room
- ♦ THURSDAY 1.00 – 1.30 PM: **MID-WEEK RECHARGE**
Half an hour of meditation, music, poetry and pause.
- ♦ FIRST SUNDAY OF THE MONTH: Join us after the service for a bring-and-share lunch, followed by a convivial afternoon playing **BOARD GAMES**.

UPCOMING SPECIAL EVENTS

18th – 19th October: *Meeting of the Executive Committee of Unitarians UK at Great Meeting*

19th October: *Harvest service. Please bring along your produce, to decorate the Chapel and go on sale after the service to raise money for the Trussel Trust. Contributions for the shared lunch afterwards gratefully received - see sign-up sheet in the Garden Room.*

26th October: *Chapel AGM—immediately after the service. Attendance of all members and Associates would be most welcome*

21st December: *Mince pies etc gratefully appreciated for the festive tea to be held after the Carol Service. Sign up sheet in the Garden Room*

25th January: *Burns Lunch. Volunteer(s) are sought to co-ordinate this popular event. Involves sourcing the haggis (both vegetarian and meat) and cooking them and accompanying “tatties and neeps” on the day. Support available from those who have done so in the past.*

FROM THE MINISTER

The light is changing. Evenings creep in sooner, mornings have that faint crispness, and before long it will be Christmas! A few traces of summer still linger somewhere on the edges, but Autumn has most certainly arrived. The in-between season of gradual transition set between the highest light and the deepest dark. As always, the seasons tell the truth about us too: nothing stands still, not even the things we wish would.

Our congregation moves in much the same rhythm. Over the summer we scatter; many of us travel. In the autumn we return, gathering again around our flame to cosy up, hold a mug of warm tea with both hands, and tell our favourite familiar stories again. But even the stories we have heard a hundred times will always feel a little different, because we come back changed from our endeavours.

Writer Cindy Ross once said that returning home is the most difficult part of a long-distance hike: you have grown outside the puzzle and upon your return you discover that your piece of the puzzle no longer fits. But perhaps in a community like ours that values mosaic-making over forcing puzzle pieces to fit, this is good news! Returning home can be the exciting part – it allows us to relocate ourselves within the community, to discover afresh in what ways we belong here.

We need a space where we can keep shaping that ever-shifting mosaic. And there are many people out there also looking for a place to land their pieces. They are longing for kindness, for meaning, for a circle where their stories will be honoured. Some don't know we exist. Some assume they wouldn't fit in here. But when a group of misfits makes space for one more chair at the table, life shows up in ways we could never plan, and grace sneaks in through the cracks.

So as summer fades and we come home again (changed and to a community that's changed around us too), let's resist slipping back into sluggish, lethargic routines or winter hibernation. This is the ongoing work of our community: sharing what we have with generosity, receiving what others bring with gratitude, and always making space rather than flaring elbows out. May this continue to be our practice, our prayer, and our shared aspiration. And as the days grow shorter and the light around us dims, may this be the season when the light within each of us shines even more brightly.

With every blessing,

Arek

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ONLINE CONNECTION

Below are some Unitarian interest groups you might like to explore. They offer opportunities for online connection and networking beyond our local church - a way to meet others, share ideas, and deepen your spiritual journey.

Unitarian Christian Association

Weekly Bible Discussion Group

When: Mondays at 6:30 pm

Zoom Meeting ID: 823 7804 2367

Passcode: 460019

More details on the *Unitarian & Free Christian Bible Discussion* Facebook group.

Unitarian Christian Online Worship

When: 2nd and 4th Sundays of each month (with occasional services on special days such as Christmas)

Zoom Meeting ID: 853 0987 4584

Passcode: 204828

Website: unitarianchristian.org.uk

Unitarian Hindu Connections

Monthly meetings with guest speakers, Unitarian prayer, and Hindu mantras.

When: Usually the 1st Wednesday of the month at 7 pm

Zoom Meeting ID: 853 0987 4584

Passcode: 204828

To be added to the mailing list,
email: unitarianhindu@aol.com

Unitarian Earth Spirit Network

Occasional Zoom gatherings around solstices, equinoxes, etc.
Find more information on the *Unitarian Earth Spirit Network*

Facebook page or visit:

unitarianearthspiritnetworkandfile.wordpress.com

Heart and Soul Circles

Heart and Soul is a contemplative spiritual gathering in which you can take time to reflect on life in the company of others. It follows a regular pattern, including readings and music from an eclectic range of sources, time for guided prayers of gratitude, compassion for others, self-reflection, and silent meditation.

When: Online gatherings on Thursday, Friday, and Sunday evenings.

To sign up visit: heartandsoulcircles.org.uk/locations

Other Unitarian Events Online

Occasionally other Unitarian events are run by volunteers, such as:

NUBI (New Unitarian Beginnings Ingathering) for those who are new to Unitarianism

Church Admin Support Network

Safeguarding Network

For details visit: unitarian.org.uk/whats-happening

GUITAR RECITAL

On Saturday 5th July about 40 people gathered in the Chapel for an inspiring afternoon of music performed by local classical guitarist and composer Yvonne Bloor.

The recital opened with *Five Spanish Folk Songs* (arr. F. San Andres) a colourful journey through the musical landscapes of Cordoba, Granada, Murcia, Andalucia and Valencia. This was followed by Yvonne's elegant interpretation of J.S. Bach's *Cello Suite No. 1. in G major*

She went on to play a selection of her own compositions. *Praise/ Prayer/ Promise* offered a moment of quiet reflection showcasing her expressive style; *Clarendon Park* delighted South Leicester locals in the audience. Then came *Variations on a Korean Folksong* based on the traditional melody *Arirang*. The work, Yvonne explained, was inspired by a visit to South Korea to see her daughter who was living there at the time. The six variations conveyed a rich emotional journey - from joyful reunion to the sorrow of parting - ending on a tender and heartfelt note.

The new stage worked well to improve visibility of Yvonne at the front of the Chapel and her varied and sensitively performed programme was greatly enhanced by the chapel's excellent acoustics.

After the concert the audience enjoyed light refreshments in the Garden Room.

A total of £168 was raised for Chapel funds.



CELEBRATION OF UNION

In the afternoon of Sunday 27th July many members of the congregation attended the ceremony to celebrate the union of Hertogin and Ross.



The service was expertly led by Arek. Afterwards the guests were treated to a delicious buffet, including vegan Indonesian dishes. This took place in the Christopher Wykes room which was beautifully decorated for the happy occasion.



Hertogin and Ross were happy to welcome many guests including from the Indonesian community, and friends and family watched the ceremony online from Indonesia, New Zealand, Australia and the UK. Dance is an important element of weddings in Indonesia and, during the reception, guests were led in a traditional conga-style dance.



The whole congregation joins in wishing Hertogin and Ross every happiness in their married life together



Thanks to Anthony Fletcher for all the pictures above.

“THE ONLY CONSTANT IS CHANGE”

This well known quote is usually attributed to the Greek philosopher Heraclitus of Ephesus (ca. 530-460 BC) and has been passed on in numerous re-translations. However, the Buddha, flourishing at about the same time (now dated ca. 460-380 BCE) but in a different continent, used the idea as a central basis for his teaching.

As a young man I knew nothing of all this. I had the very naive idea that some things in life were constant and set out to find them. I had misunderstood that science could provide answers, or ultimate truths, and pursued a career as a scientist, actually an ecologist. I spent some years travelling the world, seeking truth in the rain forests of South America, deserts and the Arctic tundra. After marvellous adventures in wonderful places, gradually it dawned upon me that there was nothing constant in nature. This was not science's fault of course, but merely the mistaken and romantic ideas of youth. Science is most valuable in providing facts and explanations, but all are provisional and not ultimate truths.

Even in the UK I was seeking something constant in nature. It was not until fairly late in life, maybe in my 50's, in the Scottish Highlands in the very far north, that I accepted that this supposedly pristine wilderness that I had grown to love since teenage, was nothing of the sort. One dark night in spring my hosts were driving me to their home after I had given a talk in a village hall. Way out on the moors there was a glow on the horizon, “a fire” my host exclaimed, “blessed vandals!”. We approached the site and indeed the moor was ablaze right to the road-side with flames shooting up to 20 feet in the air. The following day we returned to inspect the damage. It was a fairly limited fire apparently, affecting only a few hundred meters, but I have since seen them travel for several miles, inflicting huge damage on property that happens to be in the way. “What's that about vandals” I asked. It seems there is an ancient custom among some locals to set fire to the heather every few years. This creates very nutritious ash enriching the normally very acidic peat, and this supports fresh grass to be enjoyed by sheep for a few seasons. So for centuries it was a useful activity. But nowadays heather burning is no longer needed as the sheep

have largely gone and the fire-raising survives as a sentimental passion. And some people seem to enjoy making wildfires! No longer needed are the hill farmers, annual round-ups, dipping and shearing because lowland sheep, needing less intensive labour, are cheaper to raise or even import. So, the young people who once depended on sheep for a living, have departed. Not that the highlands are becoming depopulated, far from it. They are now increasingly popular with retirees, seeking what? A pristine wilderness of course!

Heather moors are actually an historical artefact, largely made by man, it is now thought. There was a time when the highlands were not populated by sheep. Mass sheep husbandry was introduced into Northern Scotland around the 18th Century, when sheep were deemed more valuable than people, hence the notorious highland clearances. But those de-populations were simply the latest of a trend starting in England, Wales and then Southern Scotland some centuries before that. Then and now, the Scottish heather moors were 'managed' by wild Red Deer which are now increasing dramatically as sheep and their shepherds have moved out. The current issue is one of over-grazing, especially detrimental to young trees such as native Birch, Rowan and Hazel, and the deer are having to be culled to allow woodlands to re-establish. What were these moorlands like in the past? Probably there was a mosaic of heather and trees with man hunting and managing the grazing Red Deer. Certainly trees were more common, testified by peat pollen studies and archaeological evidence of middens of Hazelnut shells in the Neolithic and Bronze age periods.

These observations on fire explained to us the curious absence of snakes and lizards from the area, and woodland trees are now restricted to ravines where sheep and deer cannot graze, and the absence of wildflowers common elsewhere. These absences are not due to a harsh climate. The real cause is obviously man who has, over the centuries, managed the landscape by fire and grazing for his own ends. I was struck on reading an article demonstrating that Bronze Age barrows and hut circles are found mainly in upland heather moorland, probably because the inhabitants had fired the landscape and encouraged the heather.

So our pristine landscapes are man-made and man-managed. We now know that similar conclusions apply to the tropical forests, deserts and even Arctic tundra. Man is as effective in managing the planet as the physical forces of climate and nature. Fortunately we are now becoming aware of this - that man is a force of nature.

Now I realise that I didn't need to travel the world in order to discover change, I could have stayed at home. Looking from my window every day there are Magpies, often several at a time, squawking in the bushes. But in my childhood in Essex, I had to go into Epping Forest to find Magpies which sightings were so noteworthy I had to tell everyone about them. Generally it's concluded that they are opportunists, finding food and nesting sites in urban gardens well stocked with food waste. Foxes have done the same thing, attracted to our garbage bins and streets with discarded takeaways - they seem to like fried chicken bones. In my Leicestershire garden over the past five years there has been a quite unusual moth, a big one nearly 2 inches across called 'Scarlet Tiger'. Very conspicuous July day-fliers, with bright red wings, they are even mating so appear to be here to stay, for a while at least. Until a few years ago these moths were found only along the south coast, in Dorset, Devon, etc., but they have been moving northwards, year-by-year, encouraged, we think, by global warming. A temperature difference of less than one degree is sufficient to help them establish farther northwards. A similar story can be told about the 'Little Egret', an exotic Heron-like bird which is pure white and about the size of a largish gull. The past 3 years they have been along the banks of the River Soar, less than half a mile from my home and this year one flew over my garden. Also this year there have been three at a time, so they may well be breeding nearby. Like the Scarlet Tiger, these were found along the south coast, coming in as casuals from France and the Mediterranean. Once again climate change seems to be the reason. I could go on, citing numerous examples of opportunism in nature. But the keyword here is adaptability – the ability to exploit and survive in new habitats.

Of course because of climate change we are losing some species, especially plants. The moorland Cotton Grass is declining and is rare now in Charnwood Forest where it once was common. Some of our big trees, such as Ash, Horse Chestnut, and probably Oak are under threat due to fungal disease encouraged by higher

temperatures. We lost the Elms when I first came to Leicestershire in the 1970's, due to the Elm Bark Beetle carrying a pathogenic fungus. But why was the beetle doing so well? Most likely climate change, even as far back as the 1970's. Can we do anything about such losses? But do we need to do anything? The history of nature demonstrates that species come and go depending on whatever. We might view it as unfortunate that we are present to witness such events, but things will change, as they always have.

Heraclitus's writings are found only in paraphrases by his contemporaries or later writers. What did he make of his discovery of change? We'll never know. But the Buddha making the same discovery, was not content merely to record the fact but went on to develop the observation into one of action. He noted that one of the things that make people unhappy is that they do not accept change. We find this throughout human culture, ancient and modern – the omnipresent urge to fix things, to make them permanent, secure. We think when we have fixed things we can at last be happy. But does it work? Has it ever worked? It seems that as soon as we fix one thing, something else breaks down and needs fixing in turn. Or the thing we fixed no longer works as well as it did. The Buddha asks us to be guided by our own experience and urges us to contemplate our own body which changes year by year, day by day, minute by minute. We need to look at this and our unhappiness with that situation, which we don't like to think about and which can't be altered. But it's the way the universe works. Fix what we can fix or needs to be fixed by all means. But if we accept that change will happen we can be happier. And save ourselves a lot of useless effort.

*"Nothing's changed
But nothing feels the same"*

From "2 Lines" by Juliette Jackson, in album "Here is Everything" by The Big Moon.

Anthony Fletcher

HERITAGE OPEN WEEK

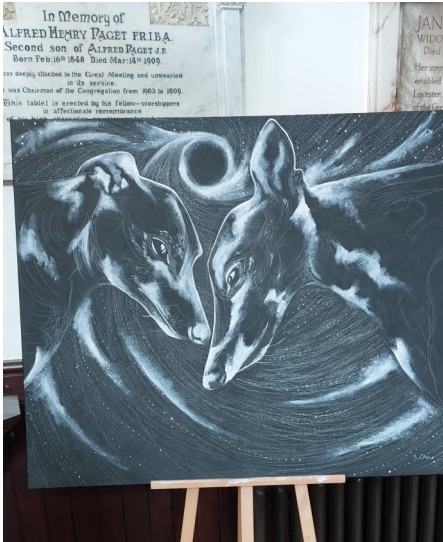
This year's Heritage Week took place between Saturday 13th and Sunday 21st September and provided us with our annual opportunity to participate in a national event designed to make heritage buildings more accessible to the public.

On the first of the two Saturdays we joined with a total of 316 other Leicestershire churches and chapels to take part in the fund raising event **Ride + Stride**. We registered 86 cyclists, walkers and joggers visiting our Chapel on that day. 50% of the sponsorship money they collect will have gone to the church or chapel chosen by the participant with the other 50% going to the Leicestershire Historic Churches Trust.

Saturday 13th was also the day chosen for our annual **Tea In the Garden** event. This featured some familiar features: a book sale, a tombola, a programme of jazz classics (played in the garden by a talented quartet including Huw and George), a tea and cake stall and tours of the chapel.



The experience of people who went on such a tour - either as part of **TiG** or on other days the Chapel was open during the week - was greatly enhanced by an exhibition of paintings by our new member Shaun Crane. Shaun's work is inspired by his deep love of animals, especially his dogs –both past and present - and the bond he shares with them whilst walking. He



works mainly with acrylic paints - but also explores charcoal, graphite and watercolour. Through these mediums he aims to capture a sense of connection: the energy of living beings intertwined with the shifting atmosphere of land and sky.

As these quotes from the visitor's book show the feedback received from those experiencing tours and the art exhibition was overwhelmingly positive

Adelight to visit you wonderful
church this morning for Hide & Seek.
Claudia - Steven & I.

from the Churchwardens & friends of St Peter's
Mountsorrel - an absolute delight. David Bird,
David Owen.

Hi! But Segr. Works
Very good god bless thuty art. Mark Sims

Magical garden, lovely people.
Thank you for your warm welcome.
With hugs, Marguerite X

A lovely welcoming church, friendly people
& wonderful art. LIZ BARRETT.

Church - Mary

Very good tour, we really enjoyed it and it
was interesting to find out about the history of the
building. We liked all of it, especially the hidden garden.
Thank you for taking the time to show us around.

Come to see Sharon's Art work.
Lovely work.

What a beautiful light & airy building - brought to life
by the priest. Wonderful atmosphere.

Bravo! Sharon, Wonderful! ♥ xx
Kendra Shumman

Fantastic - how wonderful! Pat Kelly

24.05.16 P. - Had a wonderful time with 1st class nat'l c.
Andreas S. - Really glad I had the opportunity
to visit the amilman chapel here
in Leicester. I learned about its history &
enjoyed the view the mosaic here. &
interesting building. Very nice!
Lillian and Brian - Leicester interesting tour!

Grateful thanks go out to all who volunteered their time and energy to setting up, baking, serving, guiding, running stalls, and playing music.

After expenses the Tea in the Garden event raised £190 for chapel funds

AUTUMN EQUINOX WALK

On a sunny Sunday 21st September, after a meditative service focused on the Autumn Equinox, led by Jude, several of us walked from the Chapel to Abbey Park. The aim of the visit, suggested by Ros, was to give participants the opportunity to surround themselves in nature and appreciate the beauty of the turn of the seasons

A highlight of the visit was discovering the Green Man sculpture featured in the photo below.

Whilst its origins are steeped in paganism, the figure appeared in medieval European churches and has long been associated with May Day celebrations.

Modern interpretations connect the Green Man to the ecological movement and the concept of nature's inherent vitality.

A Unitarian Spring-watch walk is now in the planning!



CULTS & POWER – PART 1

Cults are fascinating organisations found all over the world, some well-known ones originating in America. When deviant beliefs or behaviours come to light, many hit the headlines - they are strange and difficult for most people to understand and final outcomes can be dramatic and bad, therefore newsworthy.

Most cults start with a leader who is charismatic, gathering individuals into his sphere of influence, able to hold their attention and lead a group persuasively. Followers are keen to conform to group norms, gain new members and fit in with the ethos of the group, abiding by rules made by the leader. Initially the rules seem reasonable so followers go along with them, perceiving them to be for the good of the whole community, leading to a fulfilled life (and/or afterlife). However, the group structure gradually becomes more hierarchical, strictly controlled and lacking openness to outside influences, the leader demonstrating the charismatic power of cult development. He (it is usually 'he') is looked up to and trusted by followers.

Frequently the leader has a text to live by, with which followers need to become familiar. This may be The Bible or other religious, philosophical or spiritual text, often well-known and trusted. So the leader, who has all the required knowledge, has expert power and will teach from the text that they have interpreted, test followers, and encourage them to conform to the text's rules which are picked out as essential to the furtherance of everyone's well-being. Many hours each day can be taken up with readings, prayers, chants, rote learning and indoctrination.

Cults can be successful and long-lasting, perhaps starting spontaneously with a few local people with novel beliefs. In contrast, others may incorporate millions of people from many different countries, expanding rapidly, particularly because an important task of followers is to find new members. As cults grow and develop, they become more exclusive with loyalty to the leader being sought, often inappropriately. The leader has referent power because they are looked up to and many followers wish to

emulate them. These different kinds of power are thus beginning to build up, ensuring a 'flock' of conforming followers.

To encourage greater dependence, followers may be encouraged to give all their money and possessions to the cult and are isolated from their families and friends. Although marriages may take place with the leader as officiant, males and females may be separated and females regarded as subservient to their husbands, many of whom take on leadership roles as in the Jesus Army. Children may be kept apart from their parents to be raised in the 'right' way. The leader becomes more authoritarian, laying down specific rules and punishing those who disobey – a form of coercive power. Although the process is seen as beneficial to the community, it can become more and more absolute with no meaningful accountability and followers become more isolated from the 'outside world'. De-personalisation can occur such that followers may be denied features of individuality involving their choice of clothing, ability to make decisions or parent their own children; they may be denied appropriate food, sleep, activities, medications or medical procedures such as blood transfusions (as in the Jehovah's Witnesses). A lot of time is spent carrying out repetitive tasks following the leader's rigid timetable, bound by long lists of rules and regulations as shown by the UK-wide Jesus Army (disbanded in 2019).

For acceptable behaviour followers may be given gifts and various indulgences, sometimes including 'special time' with the leader - this is reward power. The system makes the follower increasingly dependent on the leader and therefore more likely to attempt to please and appease them; unsurprisingly, this can lead to abuse as in the Jesus Army where the leader was involved in physical and sexual abuse - forms of coercive power. The leader's many powers are put to use by gradually manipulating subservient followers who may also be controlled by trusted, well-chosen 'enforcers' ensuring obedience. They are likely to be encouraged to inform on others (even family members) who are deviant. Followers may feel extreme guilt, shame and despair regarding their inability to please the leader and conform to group norms; they are 'letting the group down' and

collective punishment may ensue. But, of course, it is perceived as being deserved.

Followers *need* to stay in the group for their own safety, the furtherance of the group, fear of punishment and the leader's wishes or commands. This was seen in 1978 when The Peoples Temple, originating in California, ended as an agricultural commune in Guyana. In the event of attempted escape, some followers were told they would be rounded up by the government and put into concentration camps. The cult followers became so fearful of the 'outside world' that, at the leader's command, they drank cherry soda laced with cyanide resulting in the deaths of 900 people. Similarly, in 1993 the Branch Davidian followers at Waco in Texas, obeyed their paranoid cult leader and attempted to fight against armed federal authorities culminating in a huge fire. The leader failed to trust anybody in the 'outside world' and became the [well-armed] protector and saviour. Nearly 80 people died, others were left traumatised. In a sense, the leader's prediction was right – the outside world was a dangerous place lacking tolerance of special groups.

Any individual unhappy or disturbed enough to wish to leave a cult may be made to feel evil, negative, never good enough, dishonouring their family and the group as well as having deviant, selfish desires. After all, the world is regarded as a place full of evil conspiracies, bad practices, persecution and catastrophes which may soon take place. Any attempts to discuss or evaluate issues, to find information from outside sources, or to use reason or critical enquiry are not to be tolerated because the leader is *always* right and is the unquestionable source of *all* necessary knowledge and power.

What other examples are there and how can individuals leave such organisations, re-enter the 'outside world' and discover a normal life? See Part 2 in a future Newsletter.

Ros Cole

References are available on request

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