



Great Meeting Chapel Leicester

Newsletter Summer 2026



300 years of Freedom, Reason and Tolerance

SUNDAY SERVICES:

Starting at 11. 00 am and led by the Minister unless otherwise stated

June 7 - Service led by Andy Frost

June 14 - Ordinary Sunday

June 21 - Summer Solstice

June 28 - Service led by Kelly Almond-Lundy

July 5 - Ordinary Sunday

July 12 - Ordinary Sunday

July 19 - Ordinary Sunday

July 26 - Service led by BE Almond-Lundy

August 2 - Ordinary Sunday

August 9 - Ordinary Sunday

August 16 - Ordinary Sunday

August 23 - Service Leader TBC

August 30 - Ordinary Sunday

Sept 6 - Leicester Pride Service

Sept 13 - Celebrating Our People (Membership Celebration)

Sept 20 - Autumn Equinox

Sept 27 - Ordinary Sunday

Thanks to James for the cover photo of the GM delegation to the annual Unitarian AGM . For his write up of his attendance at this event please see pages 8-11

REGULAR EVENTS

THURSDAY 11.00 AM – 1.00: **COFFEE MORNING**

Tea, coffee and warm company in our beautiful garden room

THURSDAY 12.30 AM – 1.00: **MID-WEEK RECHARGE**

Half and hour of meditation, music, poetry and pause.

FIRST SUNDAY OF THE MONTH: a more **RELAXED FAMILY-FRIENDLY WORSHIP EXPERIENCE**. These services will centre children and young people, will be lighter in their content, and there will usually be some form of sensory/experiential prayer or meditation. Join us after this service for a bring-and-share lunch, followed by a convivial afternoon playing **BOARD GAMES**.

UPCOMING SPECIAL EVENTS

Monday 15 June, 6-8pm : first session of the new **Delta course** . This will run monthly. Please sign up with Arek

Saturday 13th June at Hinkley Chapel. 11.30 **EMU quarterly meeting** followed by lunch and, at 2.30, annual **East Midlands District Service** jointly led by the Revs Alex and Jean Bradley

Friday 11th to Sunday 20th September: Heritage Open Week. As in previous years we will serve refreshments on Saturday 12th and will open during the week (most probably 16th, 17th and 18th) for guided tours only. Volunteers needed for the Tea in the Garden event and for the rota to support the opening of Chapel to the public. Please consider donating a home made cake and/or a prize to our Tombola table. See sign up sheet in the garden room.

Saturday 12th September: 'Ride and Stride', the excellent initiative run by the Leicestershire Historic Churches Trust.

FROM THE MINISTER

“Don't be too timid and squeamish about your actions. All life is an experiment. The more experiments you make the better.”
— Ralph Waldo Emerson

In May I had the privilege of leading the induction service for my friend and colleague Rev. Jo James, who has begun a new ministry with Bradford Unitarians. I had never inducted a minister before. I've had it done to me, of course, but there was so much happening on the day that I can barely remember how it all worked, never mind what was being said. So, in some sense, I had to make it up as I went along. And you know what? It went well.

So it got me thinking: when was the last time you did something for the first time even though you felt apprehensive about it? Something that stretched the boundaries of your comfort zone a little? Something that made you nervous because there was no guarantee you would get it right? Or where the imposter's syndrome crept in?

After that service, another minister very kindly described the sermon I gave as “a masterclass in preaching.” I'm not going to let that go to my head. I don't want to end up like a certain president: *“This was the best sermon ever preached, no one preaches better sermons than me, everyone says that!”* But the strange thing is that, despite putting a fair amount of effort into preparing it (more than usual, frankly), I thought what I produced was fairly “mid”. Not terrible, not great, just alright.

And I suspect many of us do this. We look at what we create or contribute and find it lacking, insufficient, incomplete, not quite good enough. Especially in the areas of life that require creativity. Being in relationship with an artist, I see it even more clearly: we are often convinced our own work is vaguely embarrassing, while everyone else seems to be creative genius. We see the work of others, we are often quick to admire it, to be moved by it, to think: “how brilliant, how clever”. I certainly do it.

In my vocation, public speaking is my creative outlet. I listen to someone else's sermon or speech and think, "Wow! That was insightful, deep, witty." Then I examine my creative work and usually think, "Well, this... collection of sentences... just about made sense. I hope." Most of us are our own biggest critics. Why do we do that to ourselves?

Perhaps part of having faith is learning to loosen our grip on perfectionism and have faith that what we can offer is more than good enough and will be appreciated. If we wait until we feel fully ready, fully confident, fully "good enough", we may never begin at all.

Every meaningful part of life asks us to risk imperfection. After all, as Emerson reminds us, all life is an experiment. So go on - try something new. Make a mess. Risk it. See what happens.

Arek

CONGREGATION NEWS

Kathy's Elcox is on schedule to complete sponsored swim target of 66 miles over 3 months to raise money for Diabetes UK. Its not too late to sponsor her at

<https://swim22.diabetes.org.uk/fundraising/kathy2027>

Congratulations for two personal bests, Kathy . Speed: a miles in 27.57 minutes and furthest distance ever in one go: five kilometres.

Olivia Mould has applied to the Council of Christians and Jews' Interfaith leadership programme. Following chaplaincy training at a weekend long residential course the young adults who go through the programme will be able offer inter-faith events on university campuses across the country. This is incredibly important for sustaining the pastoral care of students and Olivia is greatly looking forward to doing the work and using the skills she has gathered being a member of such an inclusive congregation.

ADRIFT: SENEGAL'S COASTAL CRISIS AND THE DEADLY ROUTE TO EUROPE

The Sunday service on Feb 15th was followed by a screening of a short documentary filmed and produced by Mike and Nicky's daughter Kate who works for the Environment Justice Foundation.



“Adrift” follows Abdou, an artisanal fisher who made the journey from Senegal to Tenerife after losing his livelihood due to depletion of fish stocks by foreign fleets. It highlights the dangers of migration and the human pain it causes, separating families and communities.

EJF are using the film to raise awareness for the need for urgent action to protect ocean eco-systems and support the vulnerable people on the frontline of climate and ecological crises.

In the discussion after the screening we focused on what we, as individuals, could do to lend support to this effort. The impact of purchasing power was raised as a promising tool for change. Mike highlighted a website—<https://www.mcsuk.org/goodfishguide/> which enables the consumer to check whether the fish he/she is buying has come from an environmentally responsible source.

The film recently achieved a Bronze Award in its category at the Smiley Charity Film Awards.



KINDERTRANSPORT: THE CONCERT DOCUMENTARY

On 11th April the Chapel hosted Simcha an 8-piece band based in Lincoln. Simcha plays traditional klezmer — the secular Jewish music from Eastern Europe, Russia the Baltics and Balkans.

The show they performed in the Chapel combined music, readings and audio-visuals telling the story of the 1938 rescue of 10,000 Jewish children from Nazi-occupied Europe. The music accompanying the documentary first half was partly composed by their clarinetist Jonathan Rider.



Simcha is Yiddish for celebration and the second half of the performance certainly captured that feeling. Several members of Leicester's Progressive Synagogue were in the audience and it was a huge pleasure to see them take to their feet to dance in the aisles for the closing number.



UNITARIAN ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING: HAYES CONFERENCE CENTRE. 27-29 MARCH 2026

This year's Unitarian Annual General Meeting was held for the first time at the Hayes Conference Centre in Swanwick, Derbyshire.

The Centre was built in the 1880's and was the home of Mr Fitzherbert Wright (Grandfather of the Duchess of York), the builder of St Pancras railway station in London. In 1910, his son sold it to a company that adapted it for use as a Christian Conference Centre.

Interestingly, the centre was transformed during the Second World War by the arrival of German P.O.W.s, known as Camp 13 and was the site of one of the most daring escapes of the war when five German prisoners, including the ace fighter pilot, Franz Von Werra successfully tunnelled out of the camp while the P.O.W. choir distracted the guards. Some of us of a certain age may remember the film, 'The One That Got Away', starring Hardy Kruger, that was based on these events.

The entrance to the thirty metre escape tunnel was discovered in 1980 behind a fireplace in Room 102 of a former Garden House Building.

Over 280 delegates had registered to attend the conference and it occurred to me that with an average age of 55 (err on the generous side), I had entered a 'space' of at least 15,400 years of knowledge, innovation, wisdom or/and dissent. The scene was set and I felt a little nervous of what to expect over the next few days so it was useful to know that I had a quick escape route in Room 102!

On the first day there was a number of welcome receptions and I was invited to meet other "Newbies" from other chapels around the country. It was good to meet other like-minded people and we had the opportunity to ask questions about the business and voting procedure of the AGM.

Over the two and half days there were four Plenary Sessions and a Closing Session that predominately dealt with the business side of running the Unitarian movement such as the adoption of standing orders, appointment of committee members, annual report, and accounts, Chief Officer's Report, adoption of motions and the recommendations from the Stipend Review for 2027.



Highlights for me were the welcoming of new Ministers on the G.A. Role of Ministry that included our own Arek, and the appointment of the new Co -Presidents, Rev. Jean Bradley and Rev. Alex Bradley.

Also, three resolutions: [1] giving the Chief Officer greater freedom to make public statements about fast-moving current events on behalf of the Unitarians, without waiting for the next AGM. [2] Confirming protest as a Unitarian spiritual practice that is at risk of being hampered by current laws restricting the right to protest. [3] Calling for an immediate end to the Iran war and urging Unitarians to give generously to aid agencies in the region. [See *Liz Slade in May Uni-News*,]

During the sessions, Robert Ince from Southampton shared with the delegates the outcome of the Charity Commission enquiry into the mismanagement of Southampton Unitarian

Branch funds that is now under police investigation and the lessons for all in respect of Governance. As recently said by the Chief Officer, “there are vulnerable congregations across the country and they are at collective risk to weak governance that allows poor practice in the congregation but does not always cause risks to the people in the congregation, or to the local assets but of course reputational damage affects us all... supporting these vulnerable congregations does not rest with the General Assembly but us all”. We were encouraged to review our own processes, and procedures in respect of governance. Lizzie Kingston-Harrison announced some new *Essential Trustee and Committee Members training sessions* to be hosted in the summer.

Between the plenary sessions a wide variety of workshops were held on Unitarian history, heritage, nourishing the soul, social action etc, too numerous to list. With my interest in Eastern philosophy I decided to attend the Satsang workshop hosted by the Unitarians Hindu Connections group.

A Satsang is a gathering for spiritual discourse, meditation, chanting or other devotional activities. These gatherings aim to seek truth, gain spiritual insight and support each other on our spiritual journeys. All were welcome, regardless of faith or background.

The event was well attended and it was not long before I was caught up in the chanting of prayers, and the energy in the room supported by the music provided by musicians from the Leicester Hindu community.

To my surprise the man sitting next to me got up and started to whirl around the room in slow graceful movements. He was completely absorbed by the music and seemed to be at one with all. It was a beautiful sight to witness and I realized that only at a Unitarian meeting would you find Christians, Hindus

and Muslims (he was a Sufi), praying together. It was a joyous event and I felt connected and at home. For me, the whole weekend was about connecting with other like-minded people. A time to celebrate being a spiritual being, a Unitarian with our shared values with all, a time where we shared what we had in common rather than what divides us. A time to catch up with other members of our congregation attending, Arek, David Wykes, Gabby Provan, Kathy Elcox and her children Struan and Callie.

It was a privilege to represent our congregation and sincere appreciation for your support

You will be pleased to know that I did not need Room 102!

James Locke

KEEPING CHAPEL A SAFE PLACE

The Chapel has a commitment as outlined in our Code of Practice that everyone at the Chapel should be treated with dignity, respect and fairness. No Chapel member or visitor should feel to be subject to harassment, bullying or unwanted and/ or inappropriate attention. If you have concerns that there has been a breach of these principles, please do not hesitate to contact our safeguarding team – Arek Malecki, Ros Cole or Diane Romano-Woodward.

Following discussion at the AGM on May 17th, triggered by James's feedback from the National AGM (see above) Vestry will review our Chapel's Constitution to ensure it follows best practice, as outlined in Charity Commission guidelines.

In the meantime the Code of Practice and other relevant policies (e.g. Safeguarding) will be posted on the Chapel Website.

GROUP VISIT TO ABBEY PARK IN SPRING

Sunday 18 April was a perfect day for 10 of us (and Bertie) to visit Abbey Park. A volunteer had mentioned that the “Garden of the Senses” had recently been cleared of rubbish and replanted, all plants being chosen for their foliage, flowers, stems and/or scent, including a variety of aromatic herbs. Sculptures and wind-chimes were used to provide a pleasant and fully accessible experience for



people with physical and/or sensory disabilities, with a focus on sight, sound and scent. We also visited the Friendship Garden, opened in 1989, with many Chinese plants as well as a ‘pagoda’ with a Taiwanese painted ceiling.

Passing the model railway was an attraction for several of us who travelled



around the track while others went to look at a variety of trees and lichens. It was a beautiful time of year with plenty of blossoms and with leaves just opening on many of the trees. As a little oasis of nature on the edge of a busy city, we are lucky that it is within easy walking distance of the GM. Another group walk will be suggested in the Autumn.

Rosalind Cole



CORO NOSTRO

CALMO: SONGS OF PEACE

On 25th April Leicester's highly regarded chamber choir 'Coro Nostro' performed a well-attended full concert in the Chapel entitled 'Calmo: Songs of Peace'.



The varied programme spanned several centuries of music from the renaissance through to a finale from a specially arranged version of 'Pyramid Song' by Radiohead. We even had a W H Auden poetry recital as part of the entertainment.

The choir were magnificently rehearsed and directed by Lydia Hind and it was a joy to hear the chapel resound with their unaccompanied voices. Their provision of refreshments and generous donation to Chapel funds was much appreciated.

We feel privileged to be chosen as a venue for the choir and hope to welcome them back again in the future.

OPERATION GARDEN SPRUCE UP

At the end of April seven intrepid chapel volunteers did a full days work, weeding, cutting back and loading up the skip.



This cleared and tidied the rear path and reduced the size of overgrown bushes to allow more light into the Chapel. The skip contents were trampled down and, by the end, there wasn't room to fit even another twig!

Many thanks to all involved.



PEOPLE'S EMERGENCY BRIEFING COMMUNITY SCREENING

Sunday 26 April we took part in a *Unitarians For Climate Justice* "Roadshow" event. The service took the environmental emergency as its theme and included a *Litany of Lament* which was experienced as very moving. We then shared a vegan lunch together with an amazing platter provided by Ross and Hertogin as the highlight.



Following lunch there was a screening of *The People's Emergency Briefing* in the Christopher Wykes room. This is a 50-minute public information film and grassroots initiative designed to honestly communicate the realities of the climate and nature crisis in the UK. It is based on a landmark 2025 Westminster briefing where leading UK scientists and



experts presented evidence on climate and nature breakdown to over 1,200 politicians and leaders. It features well-known figures like Chris Packham, Deborah Meaden, Jennifer Saunders, outlining how climate change directly threatens UK health, food security, the cost of living, and national security.



Following the screening there was an audience discussion, facilitated by Dr Rob Oulton from Unitarians for Climate Justice (U4CJ). This was designed to help us digest the evidence, share concerns, and plan an actionable response (see next newsletter for an update). Participants left with Rob's words ringing in their ears .

“This sense of urgency arises from the growing conviction that nothing less than an urgent transition to renewable sources of energy can prevent catastrophic, climate breakdown, which will bring in its wake, huge social and economic distress, particularly for the poorest and most marginalised of the world's people. This has to make it an issue of real concern to Unitarians, especially with our concern for social justice. There's not too much time left to make a difference – the time to get involved was 20 years ago, but failing that, NOW.”

SING WITH THE BLUEBELLS: DEMENTIA FRIENDLY CONCERT

On April 29th Leicester Musical Memory Box returned to the Chapel for what has become a favourite fixture in the calendar – the Bluebell sing-a-long led by Kyle Newman and accompanied by our own Robin Lister on the digital piano.



After the traditional tea and biscuits, we collected cups and saucers [no singing and refreshments at the same time, thank you very much] and proceeded through a catalogue of old favourites such as Danny Kaye's 'A Windmill in Old Amsterdam' [oh ,the days of innocence and Children's Favourites on the Light Programme].

Well -attended, with a cohort from Melton and as usual Geet Sangeet. After the concert's finish, out into the garden to admire the bluebells at their peak best. Fortunately, we hit that April warm spell so a good crowd ventured out. Thanks go to the chapel volunteers who helped to steward the event with refreshments and clearing up afterwards. Always a happy day, this one.

Mike Drucquer

POTATO PLANTING

Spring is here! To celebrate, we have been very busy in the garden, preparing for the autumn harvest! Hertogin and Ross were kind enough to provide 30 (yes, 30!) potato bags to plant a wide variety of potatoes - even a fancy mix of white and red. With the help of Arek and Gabby, and their willingness to get their hands dirty, we filled the bags.

The compost was absolutely fantastic - lovely, soft and full of worms! We are expecting a good yield, plenty to have a jacket potato feast when autumn approaches. For now, the potato bags have been placed neatly along the side of the chapel. They have sprouted amazingly well already!

Olivia Mould



CULTS: Part Two

Leaving a cult, or a religion with cultish elements, can be hugely challenging. The power exerted by a cult leader can be so strong that many people who consider leaving experience a wide range of difficult feelings and emotions. These can include guilt, fear, shame, sadness, grief, feelings of failure, loss of agency, loss of relationships, loss of routine, inability to make decisions, concern about life after cult membership, ... and many more. Some cult members will have given up all their wealth and possessions meaning that life after the relative 'safety and security' of the cult will be full of practical difficulties: where to live, how to survive on little or no money, who to approach for help and who to trust.

Having been controlled in regimented and closed (or partially closed) systems for so long, making decisions and own choices can be extremely difficult. Along with all the other feelings, severe anxiety, compounded by loneliness and isolation, can lead to depression and possibly self-harm. The outside world can seem such a confusing place so meeting new people and knowing who to trust can be overwhelming.

Without external help, the future can often seem daunting and perhaps almost impossible. In addition, in some cults, assistance may be needed to escape physical barriers such as locked exits, fences and barbed wire.

To address many of these problems, various organisations have set up help-lines and online resources providing information about ways to escape the control of the cults. This enables reinstatement of individuality and the ability to make choices and decisions, with psycho-social support and practical help.

An example is Cult Recovery 101 (USA) which provides free initial evaluation and will help people to extricate themselves from cult control. Several universities, particularly in the USA, provide similar services to help their students who are in the right age range to be pulled into (potential) cult membership. Students, being young and perhaps having left home for the first time, tend to be idealistic, open to new ideas and the persuasive power of groups with an apparently like-minded, ready-made community. These features can be very compelling.

In the UK in 2015, Humanists UK set up a helpline: "Faith to Faithless" to help people wanting to leave faith groups including cults and cultish

groups within established religions. It is recognised that leavers (“apostates”) are likely to need psychosocial and practical help – a place to live, an income, access to qualifications and help from a trusted person as well as a counsellor or therapist if necessary.

The following quote comes from the British Humanist Association 2026, about a Faith to Faithless animation which was shortlisted for an award:

“Leaving a high-control religious group can be one of the most painful and frightening experiences a person will ever face. The fallout is often immediate and devastating: physical, emotional, and financial abuse; ‘honour-based’ violence; coercive control and threats; shunning by family and friends; sudden homelessness; and the loss of community, identity, and livelihood. In a single moment, someone can lose everyone and everything they have ever known. The psychological toll can be as profound as the practical consequences.”

For a person in a cult, and considering leaving, awareness that help is available can provide emotional support and confidence. However, the process can take a long time. There will be many doubts and the individual may not be able to share their thoughts and misgivings with others. Being on the “outside” will represent a huge challenge and the longer the individual has been inside the cult (particularly one which is closed) the more problematic the changes in the outside world will be. The decision to leave will not be made lightly and is likely to be the end result of months or years of agonising about the decision itself and how to achieve the “escape”.

There are now hundreds of people escaping high-control organisations and some stories about cults and coercive leaders have been aired via the media. There is now more awareness about how easy it is to be sucked into such organisations. Understanding how they work is key to maintaining our own decision-making processes, individualism and agency.

This piece about Cults (Parts 1 and 2) was written because my son often says, jokingly, “Are you off to your cult today?”. The Unitarians could never be regarded as any kind of “cult” as members maintain their own autonomy, come and go as they please, do not adhere to any particular creed or dogma, and participate in meetings with their own views and opinions. There is certainly no physical or mental barbed wire - we don't need to be kept in!

GREAT TREES AT GREAT MEETING

The London Plane trees in the chapel gardens seem to excite attention, partly because people know what they are, but also because of their great size. I decided to investigate further so we could answer any further questions.

Firstly, they are truly London Plane (*Platanus x hispanica*). This hybrid arose between the Oriental Plane (*P. orientalis*) and the American Butterwood, also known there as 'Sycamore' (*P. occidentalis*). To further confuse, in Scotland, the English Sycamore is called 'Plane'. Our London Plane has leaves like the American Butterwood but the female catkins are in strings of 2-6, not borne singly. The parents are rare in Britain and appear to have hybridised in Spain. The first known record of their offspring was in the Oxford Botanic Garden in 1666, planted 1663. Further early plantings are in the Bishop's Palace, Ely and Bryanston School, Dorset, where the trees are huge. It became frequent in London's streets and parks in the 1700's, hence the common name, but is rare north of the Pennines because it likes warmth. It also tolerates air pollution, perhaps because the bark flakes easily, taking soot with it, or the glossy leaves are washed clean with rain water. But possibly of more importance is that it can tolerate compacted soil, like in the paved streets of Leicester, so it's an urban survivor. We can view some Oriental Planes in Leicester planted between HMV and Cafe Nero. I have not yet seen the American Plane anywhere in Britain.



The Oxford and Bryanston trees are apparently healthy and doing well, despite being 350 years old. I wondered therefore, how old our trees might be, and how long they might last. An hour of measuring gave an answer. Trees can be aged roughly, by measuring their girth at breast height (4.5 feet). The rule of thumb is one inch of girth equals 1 year of growth, and this is very close to the values for the girth/ages of the Ely and Bryanston trees.

Great Meeting's London Planes, measured 16th March 2009

London Plane Tree	Girth	Age approx.
Front gate 00755	14ft 6in	174 years
Graveyard west end	14ft 10in	178
Graveyard middle 00757	11ft 2in	134
Graveyard east end	14ft 3in	171

The numbers are Tree Preservation Order numbers, two having dropped off. The girths of three trees are very close suggesting they were planted at the same time. The lower value for tree 00757 may be because its growth was checked long ago, evidenced by a large area of missing bark on the trunk. The exposed heart wood is infested by dead-wood beetles that are making the tree hollow but will not damage it further. As the other old London Planes are now very old, still growing strong, and suffer no diseases, not even wind-throw, it seems likely that those at Great Meeting could last a long time yet. They may incidentally, reach 150 feet high, like those in Dorset.

So our Plane trees appear to be about 170-180 years old. This places the date of their planting around 1830-1840. This is suspiciously close to the year of Queen Victoria's accession when large numbers of commemorative trees were planted around the country. Maybe a search through the chapel vestry minutes around these dates might reveal a commemorative planting?

Anthony Fletcher

DIRECTORY

MINISTER

Reverend Arek Malecki
Tel: 0746 2958402
minister@leicesterunitarians.org

PRESIDENT

Dr David Wykes
'Whitewings',
3 Southmeads Road,
Oadby, Leicester
LE2 2LR
Tel: 0116 2710784
wykesdl@gmail.com

CHAIRMAN

Dr Michael Drucquer
47, Elms Road
Leicester
LE2 3JD
Tel: 0116 2219685
m.drucquer@ntlworld.com

TREASURER

TBC

HEALTH and SAFETY LEAD

Jude Casson
judecasson@doctors.org.uk

NEWSLETTER EDITOR

Nicky Drucquer
nickydrucquer@gmail.com

ORGANIST

Mr Robin Lister
Tel: 0787 019 5026

CHAPEL ADDRESS

Great Meeting Unitarian Chapel
45 East Bond Street,
Leicester, LE1 4SX

CARETAKER and LETTINGS Shay Feare

lettings@leicesterunitarians.org

CHAPEL E MAIL:

info@leicesterunitarians.org

CHAPEL WEBSITE

leicesterunitarians.org

SAFE GUARDING TEAM

Arek: see above

Ros Cole: 07531 407965
charmcole716@gmail.com

Diane Romano-Woodward: 07962
427295

fossilmatron@msn.com



[leicester_unitarians](https://www.instagram.com/leicester_unitarians)



[leicesterunitarians.bsky.social](https://www.bsky.social/leicesterunitarians.bsky.social)



The Great Meeting Unitarian
Chapel, Leicester