



Leicester **unitarians**



Great Meeting Chapel Newsletter July–October (Q3) 2026

300 Years of Freedom, Tolerance and
Reason

Chapel Events

- **Sunday 11.00pm – 12:00pm:
Sunday Service**

A time for shared worship in the chapel or garden room. Led by Rev. Arek Malecki unless otherwise stated.

- **Thursday 11.00am – 1.00pm:
Coffee Morning**

Tea, coffee and warm company in our beautiful garden room.

- **Thursday 12.30pm – 1.00pm:
Mid-Week Recharge**

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

- **First Sunday of the Month:
Bring-and-Share Lunch &
Board Games**

Regular Sunday service, followed by shared lunch and board games.

October

Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa	Su
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	
3:☉	10:☿	18:☽	26:☼			

Sunday 4th (After Service) - Harvest Festival (bring item for pay-as-you-feel market)
Saturday 24th (Morn) - Abbey Pumping Station tour

November

Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa	Su
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30						
1:☉	9:☿	17:☽	24:☼			

Sunday 1st - Halloween/All Souls' Day service
Sunday 8th - Remembrance Sunday
Sunday 15th - Safeguarding Sunday
Sunday 29th - Start of advent

December

Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa	Su
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			
1:☉	9:☿	17:☽	24:☼	30:☼		

Sunday 20th - 3pm Carol Service (no 11am service on this day)

A Letter from the Minister

Welcome to the newest edition of our Newsletter and, perhaps more importantly, welcome to Olive, our new editor! I'd like to thank Nicky for her twelve years of editing the Newsletter. Twelve years is a pretty impressive run! And now I'm sure we all wish Olive well as she takes over the editorial reins.

We have now reached the end of summer. I used to think of summer as a slightly boring time in church. In the traditional church calendar, the long stretch between Pentecost and Advent is known as "Ordinary Time". I used to assume that this "ordinary" meant "unremarkable". But the name comes from the Latin "ordinalis" meaning "ordered".

Every year I find myself wondering what on earth am I going to talk about about between June and September.

There are no Christmas carols, no Easter eggs, it's too late to celebrate flowers, too early to mark harvest. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why some churches historically had a summer recess. The Unitarian church in Prague, for example, traditionally held its Flower Communion on the last Sunday before breaking up for the summer.

As a nonconformist minister in a nonconformist congregation, I am under no obligation to follow the church calendar. But I enjoy sticking to it, though I am not a slave to it. It gives our year a rhythm. The problem is that once you reach Ordinary Time, you suddenly realise that you can talk about anything and it can be difficult to decide what to talk about. The blank page paralysis!

This time, however, there was very little that felt “ordinary” about the summer just gone. I don't know whether it was the endless succession of heatwaves, the

drought, things happening in the life of our chapel, or simply the state of the world beyond our walls, but there was plenty happening and plenty to talk about. The contents of this edition of the Newsletter are a testament to that.

And now we turn towards the darker part of the year, a season that invites reflection. It is a time to slow down a little, make space for the things that are difficult or unresolved, acknowledge our losses, and to search for light in darkness. Curiously, the time ahead is also the busiest part of the church calendar: from the Harvest Season, through the season of Remembrance, to Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, and eventually Candlemas or Imbolc – early Spring. Perhaps it reflects something of our human need to be together. As the nights draw in, we have this impulse to gather together around whatever sources of light and warmth we can find, tell familiar stories, sing familiar songs, and

remind ourselves that we are not alone. So there will be plenty happening in the coming weeks and months, and I hope you will join us for as much of it as you can. But as we move into this busy season, please remember that autumn and winter invite us to rest (as well as to gather)! May this next season bring us plenty of good reasons to be together, but may we also recognise when it is time to stop, go home, put the kettle on, and put your feet up!

With every blessing,

-Arek Malecki

Celebrating Our Community

As you have likely noticed, this issue of the chapel newsletter looks a bit different! This is because after over a decade of much appreciated work, Nicky is no longer editing the chapel newsletter.

This is due to the prior newsletter software being discontinued, alongside change in social media management.

As such, newsletters will be returning to quarterly intervals. The new schedule is as follows:

April 1st – Quarter 1

July 1st – Quarter 2

October 1st – Quarter 3

January 1st – Quarter 4

Going forward, please direct any contributions, compliments or criticisms

to Olive Whitehead.

An updated phone number and email address will be added to the directory at the end of this newsletter for this purpose.

I hope I do you proud, Nicky! We are all grateful for your hard work!

Olive will be beginning interfaith campus leadership and representing the chapel at Loughborough University.

Kathy completed her sponsored swim, 66 miles in 3 months for Diabetes UK! She also swam 1 mile in under 28 minutes and swam 3k (3.1 miles) in one swim!

James, Gabby and Olive are starting the foundation lay worship leader training!



Leicester - Intercultural City Pledge

We, the congregation at the **Great Meeting Unitarian Chapel**, join the efforts of other local communities and organisations playing their part in developing Leicester as an intercultural city, focusing on intentional mixing across differences.

To this end, we pledge to:

1. Seek to establish contact with the Baitul Ikram Mosque community.

We heard of elements of Ahmadiyya community's experience (as a religious minority within the wider Islamic tradition) that resonate in some respects with the historical and contemporary experience of Unitarians (as a religious minority within the wider Christian tradition). We hope that an exchange between our communities will provide an opportunity to learn from one another's faith traditions, and explore both our shared experiences and our distinctions.

Deadline: by the end of the year.

2. Bridge the gap between urban and rural communities.

With sadness we recognise that there is a growing divide between the City of Leicester and some of the surrounding rural communities. We are aware that people living outside of the city are often hesitant (or refuse) to visit Leicester, expressing concerns about safety, believing that the city has very little to offer, or regarding the city with suspicion. We will invite a church congregation from a nearby village - ideally one with a relatively homogenous community - to visit us and experience Leicester with us. Our guests will be invited to a walking tour of the city, led by the members of our congregation who are local history guides. We hope to challenge the perception that the city is unsafe or has little to offer.

Deadline: By the end of summer, but if unsuccessful we will try again in spring 2027.

3. Seek to build relationships with Leicester's Polish community.

In autumn, we will attend the traditional Polish harvest celebrations - Dożynki - at the Polish Centre in Evington, where we will experience traditional Polish music, dance and cultural traditions. In return, we will invite Polish Song and Dance Group "Polesie" to perform at Great Meeting Chapel, should they wish to do so, creating an opportunity to celebrate and share Polish cultural heritage with our wider community.

Deadline: Autumn 2026

4. Learn Leicester's Windrush story.

Our congregation will visit the Windrush Memories exhibition at Leicester Museum. We will seek to deepen our understanding of the experiences and contributions of the Windrush generation, whose members answered Britain's post-war call to help rebuild the country and whose legacy continues to shape our city.

Deadline: 18 October 2026

5. Build new friendships through Leicester Pride.

As a congregation, we will participate in Leicester Pride alongside other faith communities. We will intentionally use the occasion not only to demonstrate our support for LGBTQ+ people, but also to build new friendships with people from different faiths and community organisations who share a commitment to inclusion and equality.

Deadline: 5 September 2026

**The Minister & the Congregation
at The Great Meeting Unitarian Chapel,
45 East Bond Street, Leicester, LE1 4SX**

Dated:
28 June 2026

Here are the details of the intercultural pledge our chapel has made to engage with various groups in and around Leicester. This includes:

- Establishing contact with Baitul Ikram Mosque
- Bridging the gap between urban and rural communities
- Build relationships with Leicester's Polish community
- Learn Leicester's Windrush story
- Build connections through Leicester Pride

With all of these lovely cultural activities, we are bound to have a busy autumn ahead!



An extended congratulations to Ben and Kieran Mardle-Moss on their beautiful vow renewal! The decorations, food and band were spectacular. They worked so hard to make sure the day was lovely. May their love prosper for many years to come. (Plus, we got to see Arek in clerical garb which is a rare treat!)

A huge thank you to Debs and Arek for making us a brand new and beautiful reflective space! In addition to that, there is a wonderful little herb garden and hedge fencing around it. Bringing some much needed TLC to our chapel gardens, the arbour is now available to use if you are in need of some quiet and contemplative reflection.





Thank you to everyone who turned up to represent our congregation at the East Midlands Unitarian Annual Service! It makes a massive difference to having our voices heard in concerns and matters that impact the entire district. Presidents Alex and Jean Bradley co-hosted a very touching and lovely service. Hinckley Unitarians were incredibly hospitable and we could not be more grateful to them for hosting the event!



I am delighted to become a full member of the Unitarian community at the Great Meeting Chapel. I wanted to thank everyone for making me feel so welcome and a part of this warm and caring meeting place. I will always cherish the friendships that I have made here.

-Carole Cafferty



This year, we fulfilled our intercultural pledge by having a big presence in the Leicester pride march! Thank you to everyone who attended.

Flower Communion Summer Solstice

The flowers I brought were a mix of shop-bought bouquets (admittedly, I rescued those with a yellow sticker from the supermarket that were already slowly turning, but were still looking the part!), some red roses from my tiny front yard, and the yellow Rose of Sharon

growing near the entrance to the Garden Room. I brought way more flowers than we needed so that no one would be left without a flower.

The flowers left in the vase after the service lasted long enough for us to enjoy the sight of them the following Sunday.

However, on the afternoon after our Flower Communion service, I drove to Boston in Lincolnshire to lead their 5pm service, and I took a handful of our communion flowers with me to Boston, just in case some people in their congregation hadn't got the memo about my plans to celebrate the communion service with them as well on this midsummer Summer Solstice Sunday. So, a proportion of the flowers we saw in our chapel that Sunday got "communed" twice!

-Arek Malecki



The Flower Communion was the first service I ever joined at the chapel, and it was unlike any service I had experienced before in other churches. I loved the practice of bringing flowers and placing them in a shared vase, as I found the flowers in the vase to be a beautiful image of our differences and the beauty we are able to create collectively. Each flower was individual, with its own colour, shape and character, yet together they created something far more beautiful than any one flower could have created alone. What particularly stayed with me was hearing minister Arek explain the story behind the Flower Communion and how Norbert Čapek created it as a service

that everyone could take part in, regardless of their beliefs or background. This service drew me to Unitarianism and the friendly congregation in the chapel, and I began coming to Sunday services as regularly as I could. I wanted to experience more of the creative ways in which the Unitarian church express faith and community, and have always left the services with a lot to reflect on.

- Zoya

Filmmaker's Summer Camp

Well, we had a rather eventful day at the Great Meeting Chapel in August! A failed wedding (with a runaway bride), a murder plot in the pews and a body of someone's ex-wife in the graveyard...

But before you call the police - it was a pleasure to host the young

cinematographers doing filmmaker's Summer camp at the Phoenix cinema again!



Our chapel was used for the third year running as one of their filming locations. The goal is for young people to learn and explore their passions in filmmaking from scratch. This includes writing screenplays, casting, directing, acting, shooting footage, capturing sound and editing! This time round, we are hoping to get copies of their short films to show at the chapel, subject to the appropriate permissions!

-Arek Malecki

Soil and its Spiritual & Physical Nature

Following Arek's well-timed service in mid-August with the theme of water, a train of thought developed about its partner: soils. Both soil and water are naturally occurring commodities often taken for granted. Always there, in one form or another, water and soil are vital substances, essential components of the cycles of life. Along with light from the sun providing energy, soil and water are needed for the growth and development of healthy plants. Being essential, desirable and wonderful stuff, soil provides nutrients and structure for seed germination and plant growth. It comprises important components: minerals, organic matter, living organisms, air and water. Surprisingly perhaps, soil stores about 60% of all the water on the planet. Minerals are derived from the bedrock – the geological layers beneath the soil such as chalk, clay or

sandstone. Each rock has its own chemical and physical properties such as: mineral content, permeability, pH (acidity/alkalinity), texture, and stability. Rocks provide minerals such as sodium, potassium, silicon, calcium, phosphorus, and micronutrients such as magnesium and selenium. Nitrogen is absorbed from the air or provided by plants such as clover which, as well as bacteria, produce nitrogen. Along with minerals we find carbon-based organic matter derived from decaying plant matter, animal remains, droppings, general detritus and other rotting matter such as sheep wool, all of which are rich in nutrients and feed the soil as well as giving structure.

Living components of the soil include bacteria and other micro-organisms, fungi, slime moulds, slugs, nematodes, worms, beetles and many others, alongwith their droppings, eggs and larvae.

Combined with air and water in the pore spaces between soil particles, all these form the basis of a healthy soil with its constant turnover, thanks to the activity of those organisms.

In addition, humans may add compost, with its rich and healthy population of living organisms, providing many additional nutrients and texture to soil, far healthier than synthetic fertilisers.

Nurturing soil by avoiding pollution, wind erosion, excessive run-off into rivers, and compaction are all ways of keeping healthy soil where it needs to be for our uplands and heathlands, forests and woodland, farms and gardens.

However, if misused and/or not anchored by appropriate vegetation, dust bowls and bare bedrock may result – humans have learned this the hard and expensive way. Soil, having taken hundreds of years to form, can be washed away all too rapidly, often in pursuit of financial gain.

In some countries soil is called “dirt” which perhaps gives the impression of something unpleasant and undesirable! However, like water, soil is often regarded as having its own spiritual nature, being recognised in many cultures as having intrinsic value, as a living and essential system. Many traditions from indigenous American



Pictured: statue of the Goddess Gaia

peoples, the Māori of New Zealand and Aboriginal Australians see soil as a living ancestor and/or a gift from Mother Nature to be revered and nurtured. Many other spiritual traditions have similar ideas.

In Hinduism, soil represents stability, fertility and nourishment; in Buddhism it is a metaphor for growth and transformation, resilience and interconnectedness. In Taoism soil is nurturing, receptive of energy; likewise in Christianity, it symbolises receptivity and burials are seen as returning human remains to the soil, dust to dust, ashes to ashes.

Modern spirituality (e.g. Deep Ecology or Gaia theory) sees soil as a vital part of a living and interconnected whole earth system. Soil is thus a vital part of our lives, receiving and holding water and air, allowing seeds to germinate, holding them in place and providing nutrients for their growth and development, allowing us to grow the resources we need for our survival. It surely needs to be understood, valued and nurtured.

-Das Cole

‘Not strangers, not friends, but something harder to explain’



As many of you may know, Arek and I disappeared to spend a week in the ‘Hucklow Bubble’, also known as summer school!

In all honesty, I don’t know what I expected. I knew going in that Hucklow summer school is a week of spiritual

education, a bit of an emotional rollercoaster and a lot of new faces.

What I couldn't ever imagine, or comprehend, without experiencing it first-hand is the relationships you build with other people – 'not strangers, not friends, but something harder to explain.'

The immediate humanity and intimacy shared with people you considered strangers on the first night is something that simply cannot be replicated. You quickly learned whether people preferred mornings or evenings, what hot drink they like in the morning, how they use their cutlery and their favourite pair of slippers. You feel at home, because you aren't the only one who naps, likes sugar in your hot chocolate or takes bugs outside when you find them on the floor. You get glimpses into their daily life that usually stay within the comfort of four walls.

Then comes the emotional closeness. You gain material from the engagement groups that unlock the deepest parts of yourself that you have inadvertently buried in the hustle and bustle of daily life. You are given space to talk about what you find, to be listened to. And suddenly, those people you once considered strangers are hearing (not listening, but truly hearing) the deepest aspects of your subconscious.

And naturally, these feelings aren't left in the room. They follow you around the Nightingale Centre. They join you for quiet conversations on the terrace, the deepest thoughts spilling out onto the sunlounge sofas, the occasional tear falling on the carpets. You extend your soul to them, and theirs to you. You find yourself feeling so consumed by emotion, by love, by compassion for these people you once considered strangers.

And at the end, you hug, or sometimes

even shake hands or wave goodbye. You accept that you may not see these people you swapped souls with for an excess of a year. You won't talk, or text everyday, because you aren't friends. But you aren't strangers either – you are something harder to explain.

It can feel a little lonely at first, but after a while it just feels like you pressed pause on the movie; not that you're seeing the end credits.

It's confusing, and it's overwhelming, and yet you've never been so grateful to have a heart so full... All of this to say, it is the community that makes this soul-searching possible. You are not the same person when you come back from Hucklow as when you left – in the most beautifully complete way possible.

(Title inspired by a reading produced by Rev. Dr. Jane Blackall and Raj Savarapu for the final epilogue of summer school)

-Olive Whitehead

Tea in the Garden

The weather forecast for the afternoon on September 12th suggested rain but, thankfully, we were fortunate; the skies steadily darkened as the afternoon progressed but the first drops did not fall until we were finished and had put the outside gazebo away.



This was lucky as it meant our guests were able to sit outside in the garden to enjoy the two excellent sets of jazz classics provided by an accomplished quintet comprising Huw and George and three non -Unitarian friends – Bud, John and Jan. In addition to many members of the congregation, over 100 visitors attended TITG this year.

About 60 of them took advantage of a heritage tour around the Chapel with expert commentary provided by Tony, Arek and Mike. Sixteen cyclists taking part in the Historic Churches Trust annual Ride'n' Stride initiative were signed in by Steve on the desk. This was slightly down on last year's figure ... perhaps that gloomy weather forecast was to blame?

In addition to tea and coffee a wonderful range of sweet treats was on offer. Thanks go out to all who baked a cake or contributed a savoury offering (with special thanks to Arek for the Polish-specialty cold beetroot soup that he cooked up). The refreshment team comprised Hertogen, Debs, Carole, Carol, Gabby and Nicky.



They worked hard all afternoon and did a great job abiding by, and enforcing, the “no more than three in the kitchen rule”, despite being rushed off their feet at times.

The tombola was popular and raised a useful amount towards the overall total for the day. After expenses were deducted this was £294, a very pleasing sum.

We were pleased to welcome two Polish guests from (the currently homeless) Gdansk Unitarian Fellowship to TITG and to the Sunday service the following day. Andzej and Klaudia have been following Arek on his Polish Unitarian Tik Tok channel and arranged this visit in order to learn face to face about how we do things at Leicester Great Meeting. In exchange they brought Arek some useful resources and an offer of reciprocal hospitality including, all being well, a visit to a chapel of their own in the future.

-Nicky Drucquer

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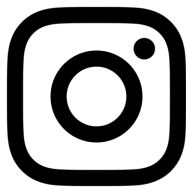
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