

# Stockton Unitarians



**March brings:** St David's Day (Wales); Commonwealth Day; St Patrick's Day (Ireland); First Day of Spring; Marie Curie Great Daffodil Appeal; Ovarian Cancer Awareness Month; Self-Injury Awareness Day; UK World Book Day; No Smoking Day; Sports Relief; Red Nose Day; International Women's Day; International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; World Water Day; Holi (Hindu); Wesak (Buddha Day); Purim (Jewish); Ramadan (Islamic); Mother's Day; Palm Sunday; St Patrick's Day (Ireland); Feast of Naw-Ruz (Baha'i); Maundy Thursday; Good Friday; Easter Sunday; British Summer Time begins.

**April brings:** April Fool's Day; Easter Monday; St George's Day (England); Passover (Pesach); World Health Day; Baisakhi (Sikh); Eid al-Fitr (Islamic); Ridvan (Baha'i).

## Church News

March / April 2024



*Congratulations and Happy Birthday*  
to those Celebrating their Birthday in

*March*

**Gail Moore**  
**Stephen John Dodds**  
**Elisha Hutton**  
**Erik Cosidius Robinson**

*April*

**Josie Jobson**  
**Arthur Tyr Robinson**  
**Carys Thompson**  
**Grace Joy Whitham**



*Wedding Anniversary*  
**Hazel & David Warhurst in March**

There was a lady who was posting a parcel containing an old family Bible to her brother in another part of the country. "Is there anything breakable in here? Ask the post office clerk. "Only the Ten Commandments," answered the lady.

## **Date for your Diary**

**Knit 'n' Natter Group** meet on alternative Tuesdays from 11.00am to 1.00pm. Bring along your crafts, knitting, crochet, sewing and enjoy a cup of tea and a chat whilst you work.

£1 contribution for the tea/coffee biscuits. **Dates: 5th and 19th March, 2nd and 16th April 2024**



**Coffee Mornings every Saturday**  
**10.00am to 11.30am**

Come and enjoy a cup of tea or coffee with biscuits, good conversation in a friendly and welcoming group.





## Sunday service reviews for January and February 2024

### 14th January Margaret Robinson led a service on **Being Connected**

We had 6 in the chapel and 1 person on Zoom.. We had opening words “Call to Worship” written by Margaret Kirk, a prayer by Cliff Reed, a Children’s story “United we stand! By Bill Darlinson. We sang ‘Children of a bright Tomorrow’, ‘O let us now our voices raise’, ‘When our heart is in a holy place’, ‘Dear weaver of our lives’ design’ and ‘We would be one as now we join in singing’.



Margaret looked at a number of analogies to describe our Unitarian community: like **a garden**, where people’s spiritual needs differ so they need differing treatments, diverse and self-renewing (a number of the congregation liked this one); like a **quilt**, a patchwork of people of different shapes, sizes and prejudices, enthusiasms, ages and moods; like **a rainbow**, multi colour of theologies, diverging and merging into one; like a **stew pot**, everyone mingling in it together; like a **glue pot**, full of lovely sticky people, a community holding us gently while we move round about and in and out; like **a rock**, busy and buzzing; inside; like **a packet of liquorice allsorts**, all conditions of people, diverse theologies, some complex, some plain awkward; like **a box of chocolates**, we don’t know what we’ll get next.

We should not get obsessed with any one metaphor, but move freely from one to another, always adding new likenesses. Two members of the congregation gave other metaphors, like **a kaleidoscope** or like **a bus full of passengers**. What do you think your congregation is like?

### 21st January Rev Paul Walker on the Theme of ‘**Thinking about Gaza**’

Do we need to start again. Should we have a hard look at what we are doing in the world? Do we need a complete change of thinking? Metanoya (Greek) - Meta means change and noya means though. These are worrying times - 25,000 people

have died in Gaza but there are problems in many other countries, including Israel, Palestine, Pakistan, Lebanon, Ukraine etc. There is a rise in Fascism, Pirates in the Red Sea. Environmental issues, gun and knife crimes. War solves nothing



Are we being pessimistic? The world has transformed itself in the past, so could in the future. Change starts with ME. Repentance — Change your ways.

We had 4 people on Zoom and 7 people in chapel. We sang the following hymns ‘Love will guide us’, ‘She comes with mother’s kindnesses’, ‘The Voice of God’, and ‘The Choice is Ours’. Paul read Arthur Clough’s ‘Say not the struggle not availeth’.

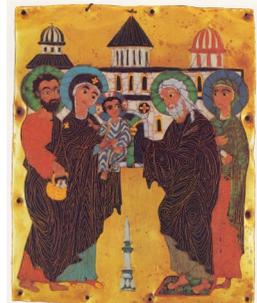
### **28th January Rev Margaret Kirk on the Theme of ‘A Cup of Tea’**

Margaret brought a beautiful cup and saucer from a set she had been gifted at Christmas. Her hymns included ‘At Candlemas’, ‘We Sing the faith’, ‘Love will guide us’ and ‘Spirit of Life’. Margaret used the readings ‘For Just One night’ from 50 Tales to Ponder by Derek Smith, and ‘Two Teachers and Tea’ from Kindness (A Treasury of Buddhist Wisdom, collected and adapted by Sarah Covenor)



### **4th February Rev Paul Walker on the Theme of ‘Christmas ended on Friday - what was that about?’**

with hymns ‘Not Always on the Mount’, ‘Ground, it’s time for your rebirth’, ‘Dear Lord and Father’ and ‘Now let us sing’. Candlemas, also known as the Feast of the Presentation of Jesus at the Temple by Joseph and Mary. Based on an account in Luke 2: 22-40. The Feast falls on the 2nd of February, which is traditionally the 40th day of the conclusion of the Christmas—Epiphany season. While it is customary for Christians in some countries to remove their Christmas decorations on Twelfth



Night (Epiphany Eve), those in other Christian countries historically remove them after Candlemas. Also many Christians take their candles to their local church, where they are blessed and then used for the rest of the year. These blessed candles serve as a symbol of Jesus, who is the Light of the World.

### **11 February Bring and Share service on the Theme of Love**

Love is a force of nature. We sang 'O Come together in Love', 'A rose in the winter time', True Simplicity', and 'Spirit of Life'. Members of the congregation gave a number of contributions including 'Valentine' a poem by Carol Ann Duffy, 'The wounded Cupid' words from a song by Anacreon, Excerpts from 'The Seven Natural Laws of Love' by Deborah Anapol, 'Black Friars Bobby' and a prayer by Tony McNeil. We had 2 people on Zoom and 6 people in the chapel. We lit candles of joys and concerns.

### **18th February Margaret Whitham led the service on the Theme of 'Time'**

Margaret opened the service by playing Pete Seeger's song, based on Ecclesiastes 3, with the Chorus 'To Everything turn, turn, turn. There is a season turn, turn, turn. And a time to every purpose, under Heaven'.

We sang, 'So simple is the Human Heart, 'Now is the Time', 'Leisure', 'Tomorrow is a Highway' and 'We Shall Overcome'. Margaret read a poem 'My Time' by Fred Brunt from Seasons come and go, Words by Richard Gilbert 'Celebrate the Interval, from In the holy quiet of the hour. Other readings were 'History of a day' from Values and Visions, and 'There is Plenty of Time'

Margaret played a recording of The Swan. from Carnival of the Animals by Saint Sans. For quiet reflections Margaret used a violin recording of Massent's Meditation from Thais. The congregation were asked to share their thoughts, whether of special moments, where music conjured up memories or emotions. It was generally felt that as a child Time went very slowly, and as we get older Time seems to have quickened up.

Margaret told us about a time when she and a friend went walking, neither of them had a watch, but they knew when it was lunchtime because of where the sun was. On their way back to the car they guessed what time it would be and when they asked someone in the car park they were only ten minutes out.

# Leading into the Future – 26-29 October 2023: A Conversation on Global U/U Theological Education and Lay Leadership in Prague, Czech Republic

## Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> October – Welcome!

From across the globe, we arrived! I shared a taxi from the airport with fellow Unitarians, arriving after a very early start at the charming Residence Bologna. After the chaos of checking in, we had a brief rest there, before walking a short distance to the Unitarian Church. A modern church reached down a short flight of steps, it has the intriguing Czech Unitarian symbol of two sunflowers of different heights growing towards the sun – symbolising how all of us, different as we are, are equally valuable in our search for spiritual community. Some had arrived earlier, others had just arrived there, but together we gathered, prayed, and greeted each other. We also familiarised ourselves with our hosts' excellent coffee and tea facilities.

We began with opening worship, and the memorable quote: "What a joy it is to be together, and make this holy noise!" There was much hugging and helloing. In our opening session, we agreed: "We are here because we care about facing at least part of our future together." The organisers commented, "Our slightly crazy idea from 2022 has come true!" This would be our space for meeting and working together, and there were many thank-yous for everyone's hard work across many time zones! We acknowledged the language barriers and inherent inequalities, and the difficulties of making this fair, and agreed that a ground rule would be that: "when you sit at a table, make sure there are 3-4 people you don't know there."

We then walked over to the canteen of the Czech National Theatre, ate dinner, then had the chance for a short evening walk around Prague (or just an early night). I took the chance for an evening ramble, and a swift half of the local dark lager in a nearby pub, before retiring for the night.

Louise Reeve



Prague  
27 October 2023  
Day Two  
Keynote Speaker  
Bayo Akomolafe

## **UU “Leading Into the Future” Day 2, Friday 27<sup>th</sup> October – Worship and Keynote Speaker Bayo Akomolafe, Keynote Panel on Theological Education**

We began with a grounding with worship morning session, 9.30am at the Unitarian Church of Prague. (Actually we began in the hotel with a bunfight over the coffee and croissant breakfast buffet. Truly, nothing unites people of all nations more than the firm desire for a hot drink and a pastry product first thing in the morning, which can be a challenge in a very small dining room.) On a more enlightened note, the worship was beautiful, and our chalice was lit by our worship leaders in unison, symbolising the light we hoped to find over the next for days.

Our keynote speaker, Bayo Akomolafe, joined us online. A philosopher, writer, activist, professor of psychology, and executive director of the Emergence Network, his talk was by turns inspiring, challenging, difficult to grasp in one go (not necessarily a criticism), ranging from the stories told by his ancestors, to the world of microbes and fungi, to how we ‘do faith’ in an increasingly interconnected world. His talk, entitled: “Making Sanctuary Together: Faith in a more-than-human world” can be seen here: <https://vimeo.com/uuainternational/lifkeynote>

“In an increasingly interconnected world, in a world of fungi and microbes, in a world in which humans are problematically central, it seems we are forced to reframe faith as a post-humanist thing.”

“Making sanctuary... a vocation of ‘catching them where they fall’; thinking of losing faith as accompanying each other in loss, in grief, of seeking new pairings, of holding space for the fugitive.”

“Faith is an ongoing inquiry not a conclusion. It is sustained fidelity and commitment to collective questioning and discovery.”

Our panel of Unitarian leaders from across the globe then discussed theological education, exploring what this means in a world radically different from that of our Unitarian forebears. A wide-ranging discussion, quotes included the following (the full discussion can be viewed online here: <https://vimeo.com/uuainternational/praguepanel>)

“Not a small number of our members all over the world would appreciate lay leader education, based in our values, of course. It is

important from my point of view not to start with the offer, but with the question of: what we need?" *Kristyna Ledererová Kolajová*

"I think the theological education that we need helps our Unitarian leaders to have a strength of not knowing, of holding that inquiry, in a way that's deeply rooted." *Elizabeth Slade*

"No matter what community you come from, the world is changing under our feet. And whatever it is that is next for us, there are still people in the here and now who don't want to be there and don't want to go. How do we minister to them without blocking the urgent need for what is next?" *Rosemary Bray McNatt*

"The question that is real in my mind, as I think about the future of theological education is how do we move from economies of exchange – in which there has to flow capital from one end to the next to make something feasible and happen, into economies of service – in which we understand what is needed and the particular life and ethical work to be done in our community." *Elías Ortega*

"There are younger generations who don't see themselves as religious or church people, but they are still asking life's big questions. They are still interested in where we came from, what we are here for, and where we may be going to, and how we can live our best lives." *Helen Mason*

"Someone, somewhere on the African continent, learns about Unitarianism and is trying to learn and to understand. Where does that person learn from what is written from the UUA, from the UK and other places which are not Africa? And how does what the person has access to be translated into their own culture, their own context, and build something new and beautiful?"

*Mwbitsa (Fulgence) Ndagijimana*

Louise Reeve



Prague

27 October 2023

Day Two

Speaker

**Uni-sing!** A Zoom hymn singing group, with break out groups for a chat in the middle. For more information email Louise Rogers [louise.rogers256@gmail.com](mailto:louise.rogers256@gmail.com)

see [facebook.co/groups/ 687366168770017](https://facebook.co/groups/687366168770017)

**Sessions 2024 - Saturdays at 3.00pm - 2nd and 16th March, 13th and 20th April, 4th and 18th May, 1st and 15th June.**

Dear **Mary Thompson Fund** friends and supporters.

Well, we made it to the end of 2023, our 22nd year, despite worrying increases in conflicts and human rights abuses in many countries across the world, creating more refugees and displaced persons. We hope you all had a great Christmas and that 2024 will be kind to all of us.

Thanks to you and your generosity we have managed to keep the fund going, providing much needed support to people seeking asylum on less than 70% of income support; people refused asylum but still legally in the UK, who are not entitled to any public funds and not allowed to work; and to settled refugees and their families when in hardship. We had great Christmas drop-ins for destitute and homeless asylum seekers in Boro and in Stockton with double cash payments, lots of general food and toiletries, and special Christmas treats.

All thanks to generous and caring Teessiders including Jenny from North South Trading; Fair Food Fund supporters; Anthony at Terence Higgins Trust; the Jill and Norman Franklin Trust; K Home International, Middlesbrough Council, Abingdon and Egglecliffe schools, and scores of individuals who support us. We run entirely with volunteers: Abdilla, Alison, Amina, Andrew, Bini, Cathy, Eed, Fiona, Haja, Ibrahim, Jeanette, Joe, Kath, Liz, Lucie, Marek, Maureen, Pete S, Pete W, Sally, Sardar, Stephen, Tryphineh. And of course our heroic and brave clients, fighting for justice and human rights.

There was also some sadness, with the passing of four of our great supporters: Norman just before the beginning of 2023, Geraldine in May, Terence in June and just recently Hilary on the 20th December. Love and strength to all their families. Our annual report will be circulated when completed and in the meantime, thank you so much for your fabulous support - we wouldn't exist if it wasn't for you.

Peace, Love and Unity.  
Mary Thompson Fund

Remind yourself of how far you've come in your journey; what you calmly do today you may have feared to attempt last week, month or year.

## ***CHURCH DIRECTORY***

**Address:** Stockton Unitarian Centre, Wellington Street,  
Stockton-on-Tees, **TS18 1RF**

**Church Telephone:** 01642 671115

**New website:** <http://stocktonunitarians.co.uk>

**facebook:** Unitarians in and around Stockton-on-Tees

**Twitter now X:** Stockton Unitarian Centre

**Chairperson and Flower Secretary:** Jean Watson - 01642 658376

**Margaret Robinson** - Secretary and Church News Editor  
telephone: 01642 782219 mobile 07799896452

email: [margaretrobinson81@gmail.com](mailto:margaretrobinson81@gmail.com)

3 Castle Dyke Wynd, Minerva Mews, Yarm, TS15 9DE

**Worship Committee Co-ordinator:** Margaret Whitham 01429 298641

**The Worship group** meet on Wednesday 28th February 2024 at 10.00am at church, to discuss services for the coming year.

**The Church Council** meet on the Saturday  
13th April 2024 at 11.30am at Church

**Deadline for the next edition of Stockton News is the  
24th April 2024.**

Please send your contributions for the May/June edition to the  
Editor: Margaret [margaretrobinson81@gmail.com](mailto:margaretrobinson81@gmail.com)

## Sunday Services for 2024



**Zoom link: 6680459646**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Worship Leader</b>
3rd March	6.00pm	Diana Bebbly
10th March	6.00pm	Rev Victor Ball Mothering Sunday
17th March	6.00pm	Margaret Robinson
24th March	6.00pm	Rev Paul Walker
31st March	6.00pm	Rev Margaret Kirk Easter Sunday
7th April	6.00pm	to be arranged
14th April	6.00pm	Rev Victor Ball
21st April	6.00pm	Rev Paul Walker
28th April	6.00pm	Rev Margaret Kirk
5th May	6.00pm	to be arranged

**Offers to lead worship would be appreciated, please contact Margaret Whitham 01429 298641**

**If you would like to contribute to the flower fund or buy flowers in memory of a loved one and have your name added to the flower list please let Jean Watson know. 01642 658376**

### Flowers for March 2024

3rd March	Rev Margaret Kirk
10th March	Flower Fund
17th March	Mrs Josie Squires
24th March	Hazel & David Warhurst
31st March	Mrs Jane Tomlin
7th April	Mrs Pam Coates
14th April	Hazel & David Warhurst
21st April	Rev Margaret Kirk
28th April	Mrs Jean Watson
5th May	Mrs Joan Unwin
12th May	Mrs Josie Squires



Please note all services will be held in the church building.

Most services will also be transmitted via **Zoom**, in a hybrid service. Joining information for Zoom will be sent out through email by the Church Secretary - Zoom: **6680459646** [margaretrobinson81@gmail.com](mailto:margaretrobinson81@gmail.com)