Stockton Unitarians



NUA weekend visit from GA Presidents Revs Alex and Jean Bradley with Stockton congregation on Sunday 25th October 2026

Photo H & D Warhurst

News

a unitarian meeting place

November/December 2026

Services held in August, September and October 2026

On Sunday August 30th Diana Bebby led the service on the theme of "Being a Grown-Up" exploring the concept of adulthood and questioning whether feeling like an adult is solely determined by chronological age. She discussed how different cultures approach aging and distinguished between being childish, which involves problematic behaviours, and being childlike, which involves maintaining a sense of wonder and finding joy in new experiences. Diana noted that a healthy mind can fluidly move between childlike playfulness and responsible attitudes, emphasizing the importance of maintaining a sense of wonder throughout life.

Diana read poems and passages from various to discuss themes of growing up, acceptance, grief, and the idea that real adulthood involves increased capacity for handling life's complexities rather than achieving specific milestones.

Margaret Kirk read "How Old Are You?" by H S Fritsch, Diana then discussed the multifaceted nature of growing up, emphasizing that being responsible and competent in some areas doesn't mean one is capable in all areas, and highlighted the importance of knowing when to lean on others. Ben read "Making a Man" by Nixon Waterman, which humorously addressed the rush to maturity in modern society.

Diana discussed the definition of adulthood, noting that while an adult is typically someone over 18, the experiences and challenges of adult years vary significantly from person to person. the concept of adulthood and the challenges of navigating life without traditional milestone-based maps. She referenced Annie Wright's insights about real adulting involving complex psychological and relational work, including constructing identity outside childhood roles, navigating unchosen paths, maintaining relationships through disappointment, and finding meaning beyond external achievements. She reflected on how the linear career trajectory that dominated mid-20th century society may no longer be relevant in the 21st century, leaving a void that people must fill in new ways.

She referenced insights from cultural anthropologist Mary Catherine Bateson and journalist Moya Sana, emphasizing the importance of tolerance for uncertainty,

complexity, and discomfort as key aspects of maturity. highlighted that facing life's challenges and accepting inadequacies are essential parts of growing up, contrasting with the idea of avoiding pain or loss associated with aging.

Diana discussed the concept of adulthood and grief, explaining that grief is a permanent feature of adult life rather than a temporary state to be overcome. She emphasized that acceptance of losses, oneself, and life's uncertainties is a key aspect of maturity, distinguishing it from resignation or denial, concluding that being "grown up" involves bravery in facing fears, expanding personal capacity, and approaching challenges with kindness, rather than following traditional milestones.

Diana led a guided meditation focused on sending loving kindness to different versions of oneself, including teenage and adult versions. She asked everyone to send gentle, warm kindness backward through time to past experiences and forward to future selves, emphasizing the importance of feeling supported and loved throughout all life stages.

Hazel read "A Mother's Love" by Lionel Gauthier, and Jean read the final poem "The Voice" by Shel Silverstein about listening to one's inner guidance. We sang “Here we are gathered”, “We laugh, we cry”, “Lord of the growing years”, “Unfolding Life” and “Just as long as I have breath”. There were six people in the chapel, and one person joined us on Zoom.

On Sunday 6th September we had a Bring and Share service on the theme of “Holidays”. The opening was by Harry Youlden and the Reading was “Summertime” by Tony McNeile. Jean read the poem “Picnic” by Patience Strong. Hazel and David shared slides and told us of the interesting places they visited on their holiday in Italy around Florence and Tuscany. Then each person read two short poems about various holidays, cultural, summer, winter, at home, in the city, in the mountains, and by the sea. We sang the hymns “Come sing a song with me” ”Moods of Summer” and “May the road rise with you”.

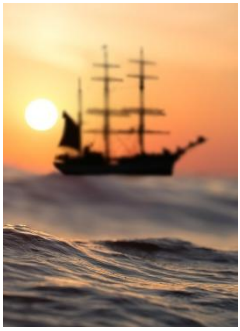


On Sunday 13th September Rev Margaret Kirk led the service on the theme of "Odyssey" focusing on the theme of journeys, especially through the lens of Homer's Odyssey. Margaret opened with a short story "Two Wolves" about two opposing forces in the human heart - one representing positive qualities like generosity and compassion, and the other representing negative qualities like resentment and bitterness. She explained that the winning wolf was the one that received the most attention and feeding.

Margaret delivered a spiritual message about self-worth and authenticity, encouraging people to believe in their strengths despite limitations and to be genuine in their actions. She prayed for those who have lost their sense of self-worth and emphasized the importance of respecting others' rights to be themselves. Margaret read a short story about a long-distance truck driver who faced the daunting task of driving from Montreal to Vancouver, "The Truckdriver" by Margaret Silf, facing darkness and light.

Margaret discussed her thoughts on journeys, specifically focusing on Homer's Odyssey and how life journeys resolve or fail to resolve personal issues. Margaret shared a poem "Ithaca" by C P Cavafy about Odysseus's journey home to Ithaca, explaining key elements including the 10-year journey, encounters with the gods Poseidon, cyclops, and Laestrygonians, and the poem's message about valuing the journey over the destination. She connected the poem's themes to her grandson starting university, emphasizing how the learning and experiences along the way are more important than the final destination. Margaret expressed

gratitude for Jane Tomlin's return to help with music, noting they had been managing well but not as effectively without her.



Margaret discussed the concept of an "Odyssey" as a metaphor for life's journey, drawing from both personal ministry experiences and the film adaptation of Homer's epic. She shared details about a tense scene from the film where Odysseus and his crew are trapped in a cyclops's cave, describing how Odysseus cleverly blinds the one-eyed monster and enables their escape by hiding among the sheep. Margaret explained how the word "Odyssey" has come to represent the struggles people face in dealing with hardships, illness, and disappointments in life.

Margaret discussed the meaning of arrival in the context of the Odyssey, explaining how the journey itself provides experience and wisdom rather than just reaching a destination. She reflected on how Ithaca represents a place of equilibrium where one can let go of anxiety and find peace, particularly as people age.

We had a congregation of eight. We sang "Pilgrim's Hymn", "Thanks be for these", "The Star of Truth" and "We are travellers on a journey". Organist Jane Tomlin

On Sunday 20th September Diana Bebby led our service on the theme of "Stuff"

Diana focused on consumerism, materialism, and the impact of excessive possessions on individuals and the planet. She explored how Western culture encourages dissatisfaction and ties personal worth to material possessions, drawing on Buddhist philosophy, biblical quotations, and poetry to illustrate the problems with consumerism. The service included readings "October Shopping" by Lydia Robb, "The Mall" by Dominic Windram, as well as hymns, and concluded with a communal activity where attendees wove together herb fronds to symbolize connections to people and nature.

Diana discussed how advertising creates feelings of inadequacy and encourages unnecessary spending, using examples from a documentary about Christmas

loans. She explored how valuing material possessions over people can lead to isolation, whether through excessive consumption or by rejecting material culture entirely. Ben, Diana's partner Ben read poems titled "At the Galleria Shopping Hall" by Tony Hoagland and "The Shopping Forecast".

Diana read an article by Alan Ruston about the modern concept of decluttering, tracing its origins to the 1960s and discussing how it reflects contemporary society's increasing awareness of the need to manage possessions. She explored how decluttering extends beyond physical items to mental clutter, referencing Marie Kondo's approach and the concept of "retroactive facilitation" in psychology. Diana suggested that decluttering the mind is important, as total recall could be overwhelming, and our memories are influenced by emotions, hopes, and fears.

Diana discussed the concept of decluttering, suggesting that while disposing of physical items is straightforward, mental decluttering requires meditation and creating calmness. She emphasized that decluttering should extend beyond objects to address untidy or overcrowded places in both homes and minds. Diana also read poems about consumerism and greed, questioning who suffers from these practices and praying for courage to address environmental and social challenges.

We had a congregation of eight in the chapel (including three visitors from Sheffield) and one person joined us via Zoom. We sang "Leave behind your Bags and Baggage", "Our World is One World", "Justice for Persons" and "True Simplicity".

On Sunday 27th September Rev Paul Walker led our service on the theme of "Why do people believe in angels"



Paul discussed why people believe in angels, focusing on the upcoming Michaelmas feast on September 29th. He began with a biblical quote from Hebrews and read from Genesis about the first mentions of angels in the Bible, including the cherubim guarding the Tree of Life and an angel encountering Hagar in the wilderness. The transcript ends mid-reading during the story of Hagar and Abraham's servant.

Paul's sermon was about the concept of angels across different religious texts and cultural expressions. He traced the evolution of angelic beings from human-like messengers in biblical stories to the powerful seraphim described in Isaiah and the apocalyptic angels in Revelation. Paul explored how humans throughout history have created meaning and understanding through religious concepts like angels, noting that while he personally doesn't believe in literal angels, he recognizes the human need to make sense of the world and find meaning in mysterious experiences.

We had six people in the chapel and two members joined us via Zoom. We sang "The flame of truth is kindled", "God, the All-holy", "Our world is one world" and "Leave behind your bags and baggage".

On Sunday 4th October 2026 Rev Margaret Kirk led the service on the theme of "Small Acts of Courage."

Margaret read "Victory" by Cliff Reed that honoured Norbert Chapek, a Czech minister who died in Dachau.

Margaret encouraged participants to focus on their potential for love and giving rather than unattainable perfection. She shared a story about a courageous hotel manager in Kigali, Rwanda who provided sanctuary to Tutsi minorities during ethnic cleansing in the 1990s by negotiating with militia members**.**

Margaret discussed the concept of courage, drawing from a Kharkiv meditation by Timothy Snyder that emphasized small acts of courage as more attainable than grand, Hollywood-style heroism. She shared a story about "The Obedient and the Disobedient Servants" to illustrate how sometimes disobedience can lead to better outcomes than unwavering obedience

Margaret shared two personal examples of courage, describing how children might face courage challenges when returning to school after long absences or dealing with disabilities, and how adults can experience similar fears in work situations. Margaret also recalled the social pressure of asking someone to

dance at school dances, contrasting it with the liberation brought by the Beatles and more casual dancing styles.

The congregation shared their own experiences of witnessing small acts of courage, including a story about a woman standing up to racism and another about nurses applying lipstick during a dangerous journey in a war zone.

We sang "Speaking truth in love", "What shall we say to them", "Prayer for strength", and "Now we sing to praise love's blessing". Organist Jane Tomlin

We did not hold services on Sundays 11th or 18th October 2026 due to unforeseen circumstances.

On Sunday 25th October 2026 we had a visit from the joint Presidents of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches, Revs Jean and Alex Bradley, who led our worship service focussed on ministry and community.



Alex and Jean brought greetings from the GA. Jean reflected on the chalice as a vessel holding goodness, kindness, and wonders, inviting others to share their perspectives later. The service had reflections on themes such as gratitude, forgiveness, and compassion for those in need, with specific mentions of those suffering, the bereaved, and animals.

Alex delivered a sermon about the nature of ministry in Unitarianism, emphasizing that ministry belongs to everyone in the community, rather than just being the responsibility of trained ministers and lay leaders. It's about service rather than status. He shared personal anecdotes about his experiences as a Unitarian minister, including stories about conducting services at small congregations and helping individuals in need. Jean also discussed her role as a joint president and concluded by sharing a modern version of the Lord's prayer

written by Francis McNabb, followed by a time of reflection for personal joys and concerns.

The service included reflections on giving and making a positive impact, even without material wealth or success. They referenced a transcendentalist tradition and shared thoughts on planting seeds of happiness and coaxing smiles from others. The service ended with a hymn and final words expressing gratitude for the connections and spiritual nourishment shared among the participants.

Jean read "Ministry is all that we do together" by Gordon McKeeman. Alex read "If throughout your entire life" by Richelle E Goodrich

We had eight people in the chapel and one member joined via Zoom. We sang "Praise to God", "For all that is our life" and "We would be one" Organist Jane Tomlin.

Stockton Unitarians' Directory

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This is the railway tie that Alex Bradley wore at the NUA AGM on Saturday 24th October 2026 at Stockton, in honour of the railway history of the area and because George Stephenson was a Unitarian and an English civil and mechanical engineer known as the 'Father of Railways'. Self-taught, he pioneered steam locomotive design, and established the Stephenson rail gauge that became the global standard. Stockton and Darlington and Liverpool and Manchester railways. Born: 9 Jun 1781 (Wylam)



Changes at the Church of the Divine Unity, Newcastle

When we received the invitation from Louise Reeve to be shown around the building on Fellowship Sunday (always the first Sunday in October) I was very interested, having had a close connection with the Newcastle Church until the age of 24 when I married David and we moved to Somerset.

We arrived a little before 11am to be told we could explore everywhere at our own pace before gathering at 11.15am to join in a service conducted by visiting Lay leader Chris Carr.

I am delighted to report that the present owners, Northumbria University, have sympathetically adapted the interior to enable it to be used appropriately by their students- especially in the two Halls and the main Church worship space.



Photo by Hazel Warhurst

Comfortable seating makes the most of the available space and panels have been installed to improve audibility and supress unnecessary noise.

In the worship space the pews and balcony have been removed and the colour scheme changed from blues to tone with the seats. The Pulpit, Reading Desk and Choir stalls have gone but the Communion Table and two display cabinets made from oak and decorated with a unique wave design remain. The organ is still in situ so maybe one day it can be used for a recital or concert.

The tinted glass windows are still in the church and not a sound could be heard of the outside world.

Two panels in the outer vestibule, dedicated to William Durant and Rev Herbert Barnes, have been preserved to tell something of its history.



All the toilet facilities have been modernised but the tiled walls and floor in the ladies is exactly as I remember it from years ago. The vast storage area beneath the Durant Hall has yet to be tackled, and I was amused to see the old labels from Sunday School and UYPL days still on the green cupboards.

Thankyou Louise for enabling us to visit on 4th October. Let's hope another service can be held there some time in the future.

Hazel Warhurst

Knit 'n' Natter Group meet alternative Tuesdays from 11.00am to 1.00pm on 3rd, 17th November and 1st and 15th December 2026. Have a cuppa and a chat while you knit or crochet



43 Prem-baby hats off to the hospital from Knit 'n' Natter

Sunday Services 2026 Zoom link: 6680459646

1st November 6.00pm Harvest Festival
Gifts of Non-perishable goods for The Mary Thompson Fund

8th November 6.00pm Rev Victor Ball
Remembrance and Membership service

15th November 6.00pm Dr Barry Thomas

22nd November 6.00pm Rev Paul Walker

29th November 6.00pm Rev Margaret Kirk

6th December to be arranged

13th December to be arranged

20th December no service at Stockton, visit to Whitby Flowergate Chapel for Winter Solstice gathering at 2.00pm

Flower Rota – November 2026

1st November Jane Tomlin
8th November Margaret Kirk
15th November Jean Watson
22nd November Flower Fund
29th November Mrs Smith and Mrs Fish

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.

Most services are in the chapel and will 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