

Warwick Unitarian Chapel, High Street Warwick. August 2021

When I last wrote I could say that the threats of Covid were diminishing. It is true that the restrictions that have helped to keep us all safe, together with the excellent and impressive vaccination programme, have done their work, even though the overall threat of the pandemic is still very live in many countries around the world and as I write now the numbers in our own locality are still not as good as one might hope. To this effect, we will continue to encourage the use of masks in the Chapel, especially during the singing of hymns, try to keep some kind of social distancing and use hand sanitiser and hand washing routines where possible. We have managed to keep safe thus far, with only one member of the congregation caught for a while by this virus, and it would be a pity to fail at this late stage.

We were finally able to hold our belated Annual General Meeting on July 4th. As Chair I reported on our journey through the last many months and both the initiatives we have seen to provide worship regularly through online and Zoom services and our attempts to restart services in July and December last year. We hope that we will be able now to continue our usual weekly pattern of worship. I also reported on various maintenance issues in the Chapel.

Cherry reported on a passably successful year financially despite the almost total loss of rental income from the Chapel itself. Elaine talked of various administrative issues and the Pulpit Rota. The Committee was re-elected, and Frances Carr volunteered to join it too.

I also said: One of the by-products of the last year has been a very substantial effort by Mark Hutchinson of the Cotswold Group to create a thriving online community. One of the great things about the internet is its capacity to connect people without the hinderance of physical distance, and Mark has been building such a community via a series of different Zoom activities that everyone can participate in. This is an excellent way to introduce Unitarianism to people who have otherwise no experience of it, and to share resources useful for outreach and for the education of the young. Mark has obtained a valuable financial grant from a Unitarian charity and has asked to involve other Midland chapels in the enterprise. He has met with members of our committee and will come and talk to us all later in August to explain the project.

One of the restrictions that has been particularly difficult for many of us once services were permitted but singing was not has been the inability to participate in the service in a meaningful and active way through the singing of hymns. We have been grateful to Peter Flower for playing us through the hymns and letting us read the words of all the verses, but the act of joining in singing and the recital of prayers has been a major part of worship in many religions for centuries. To be able to reflect and meditate while listening to beautiful music is one thing. To contribute with one's own voice, however unremarkable, is quite another and this has been recognised in churches all over the world, so it has been an impoverishment of our worship to be stopped from joining in. It is with great pleasure and relief therefore that we are now permitted to sing together again. We should respect the evidence that singing is more likely to encourage the spread of the virus, and remember that masks are for the protection of others as much as for the wearer. The aim now should be involvement but not over-lusty singing

On that note, we are fortunate in Warwick Chapel that Peter provides us with quality music week after week, but he has also been heavily involved in producing the Kingswood Zoomed services for the last year and we are delighted that he has agreed to lead a live service for us this month.

Peter will join Diane Rutter, Gavin Lloyd, Mark Hutchinson and Jeffrey Bowes as service leaders in the next few weeks and we are very grateful to them all for their commitment to Warwick.

Malcolm Burns