

# Warwick Unitarian Chapel, High Street Warwick. June 2021

It is many months since I have written a Newsletter, but as the threats of Covid diminish, thanks to the massive and impressive vaccination programme that the country has managed to implement and as we can at last contemplate meeting again in our own beautiful Chapel, the time seems right to start again. The garden is burgeoning though we may have missed the Laburnum and honeysuckle at their joint best. It is said by allotment owners and gardeners that nature shows us the right time to start planting things out once the soil is warm enough: it is when the weeds start to grow. This year's May has been a challenge to that as the rains have fostered much weed growth while the temperatures have been so disappointing compared to last year. But our gardener has been busy too and it will be good to see the garden back in use.

We hope this will be a time of joyous reunion as we try and regain some normality after all the isolation of the last year, but we should also remember that each of us may well have suffered the loss of friends or family during that time, and that the toll of self-isolation may well have affected each of us in different ways. Not everyone has been able to hunker down with family, some have had to rely on rather impersonal deliveries rather than venture out to the shops as they used to and will have missed out on daily social contact with others.

Even the wearing of masks means that the casual smile of acknowledgement to an acquaintance seen outside for the first time in ages may not be appreciated or understood. And a walk in the park has meant avoiding runners panting past and dog owners gathering in groups on the paths.

Though I myself have actually been fortunate enough to have had a shoulder operation, others may have found their medical needs either neglected or relegated to appointments months ahead. After holding back for so long to avoid overloading the NHS and the GPs everyone finds that it is now hard to make appointments and our problems and pains are still likely to go unresolved for a while as the backlog of essential operations is attended to.

Our instinct may be to greet old friends with a hug, even the limited physical contact of a handshake is still forbidden, let alone an embrace. And sadly the

Government is still insisting that singing indoors, whether of hymns in church or in a choir rehearsal, is not to be permitted, although those who want to gather and sing raucously in crowds at football matches are deemed safe.

Over the last year of lockdowns and different levels of restriction we have of course failed to hold an Annual General Meeting and it is important that we should do this soon so we have decided to have a shortened service on Sunday July 4<sup>th</sup> followed by an AGM. Please put that date in your diaries and be sure to attend if at all possible.

The other annual Unitarian function that could not be held in 2021 was the General Assembly gathering due to have been celebrated in the Hilton outside Birmingham. It was decided to try a Zoom format this year and although there were inevitably some moments when technology defeated people it came out as a smoothly running organisation. Everyone missed the social interactions that are such an important element of GA, helping to bond our small and scattered denomination. Singing a hymn alone in your room is rather less inspiring than joining with 300 other Unitarians in the GA meeting! But it was adjudged a success by the participants, even as they all wish to be back in Birmingham next year.

One of the key moments was the installation of Rev Sue Woolley as part of the Presidential team and as the Vice President for 2021-2022. The next two years will be busy ones for Sue, but we trust that she will still find space in her diary to be able to come and take services at Warwick from time to time. I haven't counted how many services Sue has prepared for online delivery (she will I am sure know the figure very well!) but she started back in March 2020 and has kept them coming to support all the MUA chapels ever since. We thank her for sharing her thoughts and providing stimulating messages week in week out for the last year.

Other successful online initiatives were evident too, for example Mark Hutchinson's from Evesham and the Cotswolds, and Diane and Peter Flower between them producing some excellent services from Kingswood. Is this an area which we should be exploring ourselves?

We are very grateful to Diane Rutter, Gavin Lloyd, Mark Hutchinson and Sue Woolley for leading our services.

Malcolm Burns