

waymark

unitarians in edinburgh



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**In times of darkness,
be the lighthouse to others.**

**Inside this issue: we honour our journey into autumn
and the richness of the season.**

Image and words by Rev Peter Fairbrother

A Very Warm Welcome to St Mark's

from Rev Peter Fairbrother



'The practice of gathering, no matter the distance, no matter the means, reminds us that we are connected by unseen, but real threads of care and intention, for one another and for humanity.' These words by Rev Susan Fredrick-Gray feel particularly resonant as we continue to gather on Zoom. I am grateful for the various technologies that keep us connected during this pandemic: pen and paper; telephone; and, of course, the Internet.

Often when I describe our pluralistic approach to faith and spirituality to those unfamiliar with Unitarianism, I'm asked how such a diverse community 'holds together'. Certainly, it's not through the 'old ways': we don't do 'telling', nor do we seek to hold people through fear. Instead, ours is a community of spiritual explorers, rooted in values that affirm unity, inclusivity, and acceptance. The 'connecting gel' is our willingness to see each other, to hear each other, to support each other, to understand our interconnectedness, and to grow together. The last six months have shown that we can do this using the technologies mentioned above, just as we can when we (are able to) meet physically. As we journey once more into the darkness of autumn, with Covid-related uncertainties, never has the need been greater for connection to enriching community.

Thank you for being that community.

**With love,
Peter**

Unitarians in Edinburgh

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Future Sunday Services at St Mark's

Join us online on Sundays, 11am



for time together in community



Unitarians in Edinburgh

We are continuing our time together in community online every Sunday, via Zoom.

These gatherings provide space for personal sharing, readings, music and song, and time held in silence, meditation and prayer.

To join us simply go to <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/459569403> on **Sunday** at **11am**. Immediately after, drop by for **virtual teas and coffees** at <https://zoom.us/j/939360646>.

Other **weekly** Zoom gatherings occurring during October and November are:

- **Tuesday — Mindfulness@Lunchtime** from **12.30pm-2pm**. A time of guided meditation, silence, and sharing at <https://zoom.us/j/390019616>. Meeting ID: 390 019 616, Password: Mindful
- **Wednesday — drop-in** between **2pm and 3pm** for chat at <https://zoom.us/j/106391104>.

Our **monthly** Zoom gatherings during October and November are:

- The **Bereavement & Support Group** meet on **Saturdays 17 October** and **21 November** at **11am**. For more information email Jane at ja11951@outlook.com
- The **Poetry and Prose Reading for Pleasure Group** meet on **Saturdays 10 October** and **7 November** at **1pm**. The October theme is "Poems that have been translated into another language" and will be introduced by Eli Roth — please bring 2 poems on that theme to share. The November theme is "Performance Poetry in Times of Crisis" and will be introduced by Rachael King — poems on that theme will be circulated to participants nearer the time. For more information email Margery at stmarkssecretary@btinternet.com
- The **Journaling Group** meet on **Sundays 25 October** and **22 November** at **1pm**. For more information email Julia at juliamacintosh.uk@gmail.com.

Update on Re-Opening St Mark's

Dear friends,

I hope you're all keeping safe and well at this difficult time.

I'm writing to outline the work our Re-opening Group has done to make our church building at Castle Terrace safe to hold services, and the conclusions we've reached with regard to the viability of re-opening at this time.

Ann Sinclair has been chairing a number of meetings to identify and address how we make our premises safe to re-open. Roger Hartley prepared a framework of tasks to be undertaken and we have been working through these. There has been a deep clean of our premises, new hand sanitising equipment has been installed, and we have been considering how to implement social distancing. However, at our last meeting, we recognised that many of the most loved aspects of our time together: participatory elements such as singing hymns; sharing tea and coffee etc., remain high risk activities when undertaken in our building at this time. More importantly, many of us are in the vulnerable category, either due to age or health risks, or are living with someone we're shielding. Given that our priority is the health and wellbeing of our community as a whole, this has led us to conclude that present circumstances are not conducive to re-opening our church building for the time being. We reached this decision just before the virus became more prevalent and further restrictions came into force. Given that it's likely we'll be living with ongoing social restrictions during the autumn and winter months, we anticipate that this may mean that we'll be unable to return to the building until the spring or when a vaccine is available. We will review this decision in the light of further information and will keep everyone informed of future plans.

As confirmed at our recent AGM, our Zoom services will continue every Sunday led by Peter, Lesley and the Ministry Team, guest Ministers and service leaders. Further, we intend building on the opportunities Zoom creates. We reaffirm our commitment to continuing with Zoom when our Church at Castle Terrace re-opens, broadcasting services live from there. And for those not online, our Pastoral Care Team will continue to reach out in all ways possible, including by telephone and post. (Members and friends without Internet will continue to receive this magazine by post, and other printed materials.) Please do let us know if there are additional safe and practical ways we can support our connection with you during the months ahead.

I know that all such provisions are not the same as meeting up with everyone at Castle Terrace, but it is important that we all stay safe and minimise the risks we take. Thank you for your understanding.

Take care, keep safe, much love,

Mary McKenna, Convener

Lighting the Chalice

Members and friends of St Mark's share their recent chalice lightings.

Elizabeth Finneran

I am lighting the Chalice for all the families who have lost a loved due to this pandemic.

When we started lockdown we never realised we would lose so many people to this terrible virus. Each day I think most of us checked on our TVs and could not believe what was happening. Since certain sanctions have now been lifted we are all trying to create a sense of normality in our lives.

The number of deaths have come down dramatically and although not publicised as they were in the beginning, we must remember, that behind every one of these numbers is a person and a family in mourning. We must also never forget that a great number of people who caught this virus are now living with the aftermath and will do so for a long time.

James MacDonald Reid

When the Covid-19 virus was first reported to be present in Scotland I was one of the first people to make the decision to self-isolate. I did so largely because it was easy for me to do: I own my home and have everything that I need, I have no need to go out to work, there is a spacious shared drying green out the back which is rarely used by anyone but me.

As time went on and more and more friends in similar circumstances began self-isolating and eventually a nation-wide lockdown was announced, there were frequent reported instances of younger people not taking these precautions as seriously; including students on my stair who I could hear laughing and singing, visitors coming and going. I have read condemnations of such careless behaviour and I myself feel concerned for their safety and for the safety of others. But I cannot bring myself to be so judgemental. They are at the very time in their lives when their hormones and their desires are geared towards an active social life; when they are making new friends and relationships, starting new jobs, finding new homes, exploring future possibilities. Further, this pandemic and the restrictions which it imposes upon all of us will impact on their overall lives in a far more profound way than it does on those of us who have already been through those experiences and processes.

So I light this Peace Candle for those young people who are having to deal with the pandemic with perhaps far more difficulty, against greater odds, and with far more profound repercussions than those of us for whom staying at home for a few weeks is really just a doddle.

Ann Mills, Vice-President of the GA

As we light our chalice today, let us bear in mind that change constantly affects us all. May the light from our chalice-candle signify for us the hopes we have that a newer, better world will one day emerge. Give us serenity and peace, as we deal with change in our present, troubled lives.

Tomorrow will be a new day; endue us all with knowledge, so that we can approach fresh situations wisely, with strength to alter what we must; and acceptance to cope, if we feel powerless to create and sustain change.

Although our future may seem uncertain, help us to approach our lives undaunted, with quiet calmness in our hearts and minds.

Amen

More from lockdown...

St Mark's Poetry Group meet once a month on Zoom to share poetry old and new. Group member Margery MacKay tells us what inspired her to write.

"At a special Poetry Group meeting this July we welcomed Veronica Aaronson, an outstanding published poet. She told us about how she came to write poetry and the group read some poems from her book "Nothing About The Birds Is Ordinary This Morning". Veronica inspired me so much that I went away and wrote my one and only poem, "Ancestral Homeland", something that had been floating about in my head for a while. I have dedicated the poem to Veronica and to Ellen Beard who took me to Durness, Balnakeil and Tongue in Sutherland for the first time in 2018. The power and beauty of the place overwhelmed me; the place from where my ancestors the MacKay, Forbes, Gunn, MacKay branch of the family came (traceable to 1789)."

Ancestral Homeland

Overwhelming emotion, unbidden, unexpected, firsthand,
Innate sense of belonging by Loch Borrallie and the long-
forgotten grass-covered headstones in the kirkyard on that
lonely Northern headland in the stolen, harsh paradise of
the banished Gael.

Like a Pope kissing hallowed ground, a Chinese Emperor
kowtowing to the ancestors,
Or an ancient Celt honouring a tree,
On Durness beach spellbound, I stepped forward
and placed my hands into the turquoise sea.

The Season, the New Moon, and the Autumn Equinox thoughts from Colm McClean

This week we experienced the dark moon, or new moon as it is known as, on 17 September. We also celebrated the Autumn Equinox on 22 September, in the 14th year of the 21-year cycle of the Earth, Moon and Sun. The Light of the Sun in the Wheel of the Year stands in the West, in the Place of Balance between the Light and the Darkness. This is a time of the Great Tides, and the Gateway of the Year.

This Feast is known by many names to many people, for the Truth is reflected from many mirrors. It has been celebrated in Britain by Druids for centuries as Alban Elfed which translates loosely as "the light of winter" and Harvest.

At this time, our ancestors saw the Sun, for the first time in half a year, be unable to outshine the Dark. Although it still shines with strength, its strength grows weaker as the days grow shorter.

This is a time of Thanks, farewell and gratitude for the summer that has been. At this time, our ancestors saw the Lady who is the Spirit of the Land stand before her people with the full bounty of her Harvest.

Here is the reward of labour and reverence of the Land. This is the fulfilled promise of the days of spring and summer. This is the Reckoning of the Year, the Harvest is now complete and the portions are set to feed folk and animals through the cold dark days that lie ahead. This is a time for turning of the light into darkness. Let us step forward into the darkening days holding before us the promise of new Light at the end of the Dark Days, from year to year and lifetime to lifetime.

Autumn thoughts from Bryan Webb

Autumn leaves, hugging the earth.

No-thing arrives or departs in isolation. A leaf first appears as a bud, yet before her formation she was latent, asleep within the branch. Time elapses, the tree is nourished by the earth through minerals from the soil. Nourishment arrives in sunshine, rain and air. When the time is ripe (spring) a leaf arrives to dance for a while. In due course autumn reveals herself, and the leaf and all her cousins lay down and hug the earth with their bodies.

Life is really one season. Autumn, Winter, Spring, and Summer are temporary garments life wears for a short time.

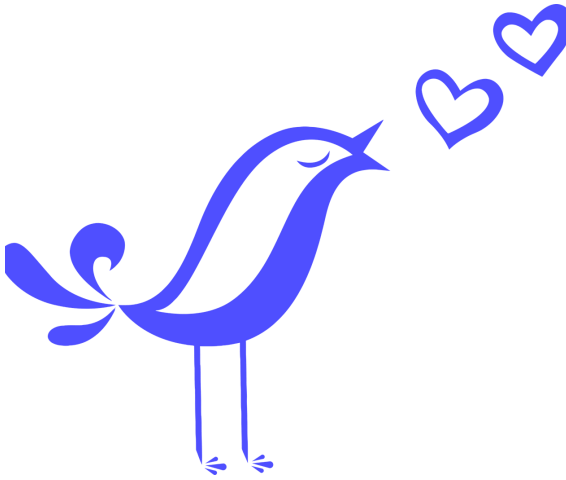
Our bodies are a garment we gift ourselves, for our true nature is life itself. Are you able to see yourself as you truly are? Life unadorned.

Breathing in. I am the autumn leaf.

Breathing out. I am the whole of autumn.

St Mark's Chalice Singers are back in action! Lesley Hartley tells us all about the Singers.

"St Mark's Chalice Singers were formed in 2016 to take part in the last service marking the end of Maud Robinson's ministry at St Mark's. We even enjoyed performing our songs again in Brian Wade's garden at the 'goodbye' party afterwards.



So what have we been doing since then...? It took some time for a raison d'etre to evolve but we have built up a repertoire to sing on special occasions, such as Harvest, Christmas, the Fringe, the first anniversary of Peter's ministry — and of course just for the fun of singing. We've enjoyed having Ailsa to accompany us during performances and for some rehearsals too — a big treat!

The Singers do not perform at the drop of a hat; it takes time to learn music. We rehearse once a fortnight for 40 minutes before the Sunday service — we think this enables stronger singing in the congregation as we can help lead the hymns. We would be delighted to be asked to sing by service leaders but need plenty of notice — at least 4 rehearsals.

Rehearsals are now up and running again on Zoom — a very different experience in music making, and we can now involve people who wouldn't normally be able to travel to church.

We would welcome anyone along who likes a sing — being able to read music is not a necessity. Zoom allows us to have any size choir — from 5 to 500! There are no limit on participants as the 'room' has elastic walls — come and join us!" For more information you can email Lesley at lesley.j.hartley@gmail.com.

Friday Night is Quiz Night!

Moira Holmes is now hosting a regular quiz night via Zoom on the **first Friday of the month**. The next dates are **2 October** and **6 November**. Get your thinking caps on and join in! The Zoom details are:

Meeting ID: 889 0401 6144
Passcode: 938953



Welcoming the Darkness — Rev Peter Fairbrother

Some of you may be acutely feeling the onset of autumn: days still warm, but with a slighter cooler, crisper feel; dawn a little later in the morning, and dusk a little sooner in the evening; the berries in full flourish; and the last of our avian summer migrants, making their final swoops and dives around us before once more embarking on the journey south.

Alas, Summer is now but a memory, and we might be asking ourselves 'where did it go?', 'why so soon?', and even 'was it ever here?'

COVID-19 has lived amongst us now for little over half a year, and we've lived in ways far removed from usual, this spring and summer past.

And yet, obviously, the wheel of life continues to turn... The expected in unexpected times.

If truth be told, I adore this time of year. I enjoy the rich subtleties of autumn. Yes, into October and the countryside remains effusive in its verdant abundance, but around us there's much evidence of nature breathing out. The summer sun has set, blossom has turned to berry, fruit to seed.

Perhaps our embrace of the season is a little less fulsome this year. I know for some of us the thought of the onset of autumn and then into winter is a dread-filled one. Our primal self is terrified of the dark, a defence reaction driven by the great fear of the unknown. And this year, of all years, perhaps that fear is heightened: what will the darkness bring this time?

Of course, in any present moment we'll never know the answer to this.

But, friends, our reaction ought not be one of fear.

We need darkness for our own nurture.

We need darkness to rest.

We need darkness to bring our egoic self into perspective.

And we need darkness to give us appreciation of the light.

I am grateful for these wise words (alas, unattributed):

*We need to stop associating darkness with scariness, evil and bad.
When you close your eyes to kiss, dream, sleep, relax or meditate you go into the darkness.
The night sky allows us to see the Moon and the stars shining.
Most of the universe is in constant darkness.
When we plant a seed in the ground we plant it into darkness for it to grow.
The new life a mother carries, the child is formed and develops in darkness before being born.
Darkness is the breeding ground for creation and life.
Embrace the light and the darkness equally as one cannot exist without the other.
The darkness is just as important and as beautiful as the light.*

Friends, darkness is returning, but do not be afraid.

It is our friend. Befriend it.

Like the trees and the plants, and all that's living around us, it's time to exhale, breathe out, let go, and rest.

Zooming Stateside for Coffee!



The lovely folks of North Shore Unitarian Church in suburban Chicago have invited us to join them for a virtual coffee afternoon on **Saturday 21 November at 2pm** (our time). Simply a social occasion, it's an opportunity for us to make connection with another Unitarian community, share experiences, and hopefully make some new friends. The Zoom link will follow with a reminder in our e-bulletin, but in the meantime put the date in your diary! Our Minister Peter will be participating, and if you'd like to join in too, email him to express your interest at minister@edinburgh-unitarians.org.uk. We hope to engage in more such (online) connections in the time ahead, and your suggestions of churches (Unitarian and other), groups and organisations you'd like us to dialogue with are most welcome.

A little of my life so far by Lesley Mckeown

How I became a Unitarian is quite an incredible story and often retold.

It was around the early 1980's I was living in Orkney, after moving from England in 1974.

I was a single parent with four children working at that time in a bakery. The owner was an evangelical Christian who one day engaged a man who had come into the shop in a very interesting conversation which I overheard, small shop! The customer was Brian Cockroft, a Unitarian Minister in Northern Ireland. His words had a profound effect on me and I eventually found out there was a Unitarian living in Stromness, a bookseller called John Broom. Initially he said he wasn't involved with Unitarians anymore, but then he had a stroke and got in touch with me. Eventually I heard about the Inquirer and got in touch with its then editor Keith Gilley who became a good friend. He invited me to meet him in York at the GA, then sneaked me into supper and I sat next to — none other than Brian Cockroft!

In 1995 I moved down to York, joined the St Saviourgate congregation, started my Lay Pastor training at Manchester Luther King House, founded the Harrogate Fellowship, and left York in 2003 to establish a Unitarian Retreat Centre - Haughland House on the small Island of Shapinsay, 25 minute ferry journey from the Orkney Mainland. We sadly left Shapinsay in 2015 because of health and age reasons and to be nearer family in Elgin. Lockdown gave me the opportunity to Zoom in the various services and that's how I landed up at St Marks. Thank you for welcoming me so warmly. I will probably only ever be a virtual friend, however for my 80th birthday I watched the rugby live at Murrayfield. So you may see me sometime.



A photograph of a sailboat on the water. The sail is white and has some text on it. The background shows a blue sky and a bridge in the distance. The water is dark blue with some whitecaps. The sun is reflecting on the water in the foreground.

Facing the Corona Virus by Veronica Aaronson

What isn't true is that if you are part of an armada, a fleet or a flotilla, you won't have to do this journey alone.

What isn't true is that everyone's navigation skills are up to the ride and that someone somewhere has a map.

What isn't true is that all boats have been well maintained and carry rafts, life jackets with whistles on board.

What isn't true is that the doldrums will only last for a few weeks and that severe storms are always tameable.

What isn't true is that the uncertainty of being alone at sea for months on end with no sight of land is easy.

What isn't true is that if you pretend there is no sea to cross, you won't have to make the journey.

What is true is that not all of us will make it to the shore.

Veronica Aaronson lives in a quiet haven in South Devon. She started writing poetry for her grandchildren. She is the co-founder and one of the organisers of the Teignmouth Poetry Festival, runs open mic evenings in Teignmouth and produces 'Pzazz', a yearly magazine showcasing the work of local poets, which features as an event at the festival.

Children's Corner with Rachael King

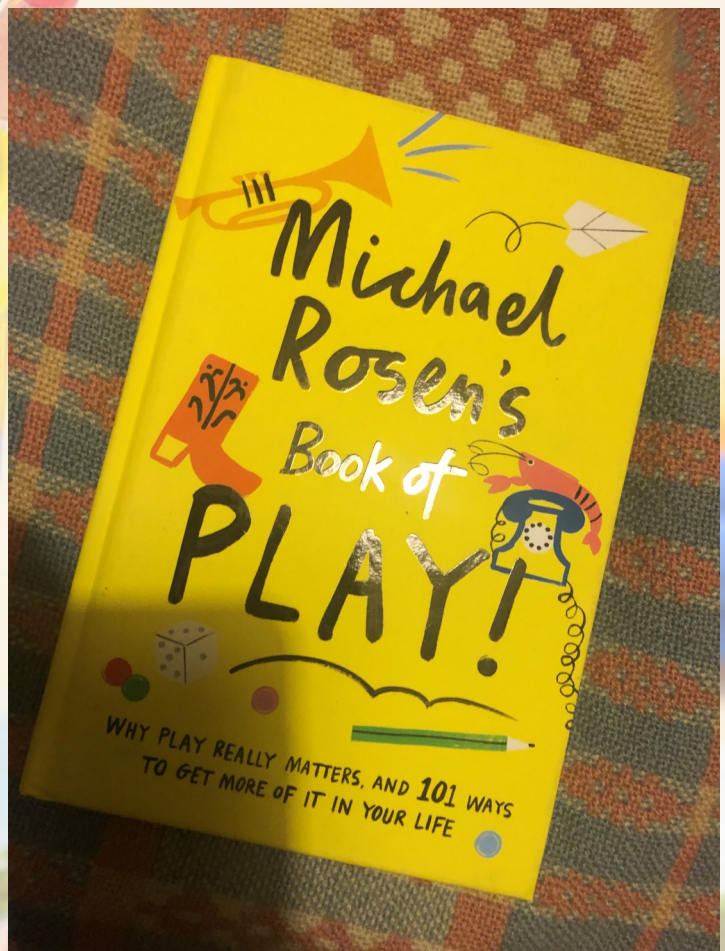
Hello and welcome to the Children's Corner!

With a month or so of school now under our belts our children have been sharing with each other news about their new classes and teachers. Although our schools look and feel a bit different with sanitizer stations, staggered playtimes and no assemblies, it seems our children have settled back with enviable positivity and without hesitation and a special well done to the children stating new schools.

Our Children's Programme meets at 10.30 on Sundays, and we have had a bit of a focus on sharing our Joys (which have included making up a card game with Dad, birthday parties, basketball, playdates, a special dinner out to celebrate Mum's birthday) and also our concerns (which have included the inevitable return of coughs and colds and bumps and bruises). We have also had a focus on games, and good old PLAY.

Drawing on inspiration from Michael Rosen's "Book of Play", we gather on Zoom and play:

- ◇ Make up a story, one line each
- ◇ Find vegetables that begin with the first letter of our name
- ◇ Would You Rather?
- ◇ Guess the Origin of This.



We have had a lovely response from our Chennai partner church to the video the children prepared and look forward to sharing more with them.

We have had to press pause on outside meet-ups so will now concentrate on bringing our families together virtually. If anyone has a craft, activity, hobby or story they would like to share with our children, please do not hesitate to get in touch, we'd love to hear from you!



**“Now is the season to know that everything
you do is sacred.”**

Hafiz

Image by Rev Peter Fairbrother