

waymark

unitarians in edinburgh



St Mark's Community & Friends Enjoying the Community Atmosphere of The General Assembly Meetings 2018



The General Assembly meetings were held at the De Vere Staverton Estate, Daventry from 4 -7 April. It was a wonderful experience and we came away feeling '...informed, stimulated, encouraged, inspired, and energised!'; (see page 5 for the address by our new GA President, Joan Cook). We are already looking forward to next year's meetings (from 16-18 April at the Birmingham Metropole Hilton), in the hope that other people from St Mark's will join us!

Thank you to Rev Daniel Costley for having taken the group photograph, above. We were delighted that Ross Hartley was able to join the group. However, his parents, Lesley and Roger Hartley were busy rehearsing with the choir, which provided the wonderful music at the Anniversary Service later on that day. Their photo, on the right, was supplied by Lesley.



**St Mark's Unitarian Church Edinburgh, also known as Unitarians in Edinburgh,
is a registered Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation Scottish Charity Number SC014167**

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Search for 'Unitarians in Edinburgh' on

www.facebook.com



From 15 May, our Minister, Rev Peter Fairbrother,
can be contacted on **Sundays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays**
Telephone Number: 0131 659 7600

Email: minister@edinburgh-unitarians.org.uk

Joan Cook
Lay Celebrant & Lay Preacher
(Available for rites of passage)

WHO'S WHO

Convener: Mary McKenna
Secretary: Margery MacKay
Treasurer: Ali McDonald
Pulpit Secretary: Lesley Hartley
Social Secretary: Lynsey Bailey

Management Committee: Ann Sinclair

Ministry Team: Lesley Hartley

Children's Programme

Co-Ordinator: Sara Robertson

stmarkschildrensprogramme@gmail.com

Church Flowers: Mary McKenna

Venue Enquiries: venue@edinburgh-unitarians.org.uk

Music: Ailsa Aikenhead

PASTORAL SUPPORT AND CONCERNS

If you know of anyone who has any pastoral concerns, and may like some support, please let us know. In the vestibule, there are paper slips on the table and a box on the ledge by the incoming mail, for such concerns. Alternatively please telephone or email us. Details are below.

Contact details: 0131 659 7600

minister@edinburgh-unitarians.org.uk

Waymark

Editor Jane Aaronson, for Unitarians in Edinburgh

Email ja@ednet.co.uk

Waymark is published ten times a year for members and friends of St Mark's. If you wish to receive Waymark by post, a suggested donation of around £15.00 per year towards the cost of publication will always be welcome. For more information please speak to our Treasurer, Ali McDonald or email: stmarksunitariantreasurer@gmail.com

We welcome contributions, though space is limited, therefore contributions will be published at the discretion of the editor. Email to ja@ednet.co.uk by the 7th of the month. If you cannot send copy electronically, please note that Audrey Simon will type and email material to the editor. Please contact Audrey at St Mark's.

Attendances

April	1	31 (adults) + 1 (children) = 32
April	8	36 + 0 = 36
April	15	34 + 0 = 34

SUNDAY DUTIES AT ST MARK'S

SUNDAY STEWARDS

May 6 Jill & Tom Stamper 13 Rachael King
20 Margery MacKay 27 Kirsty Murray **June 3** Lesley &
Roger Hartley

PEACE CANDLE LIGHTING

May 6 Craig Hamilton 13 ICUU 20 Richard Ross
27 Rachael King **June 3** Bláthnaid Quinn

*International Council of Unitarians and Universalists

WELCOME

May 6 Mary McKenna & John Reid 13 Kirsty Murray &
Ali McDonald 20 Ann Sinclair & Ross Harper
27 Julie Finneran & Louise Rhodes-Ritchie
June 3 Heather Coates & Rose McDonagh

COFFEE

May 6 Margery MacKay & Billy Lee 13 Kris Calder &
B Jones 20 Jill Stamper & Liz Marshall
27 Rose McDonagh & Kirsty Murray
June 3 Bláthnaid Quinn & Hilary Anderson

CHILDREN'S PROGRAMME

May 6 Kirsty Murray & Tom Stamper 13 Amy McDonald
& Rachael King 20 Blathnaid Quinn & Sara Robertson
27 Ali McDonald and Kirsty Murray
June 3 Amy McDonald & Lynsey Bailey

FLOWERS

May 6 Mary McKenna 13 Margery MacKay
20 Hilary Anderson 27 Jane Aaronson
June 3 Roger Hartley

Roster of volunteers for St Catharine's Homeless Project



May

4 Roger & Lesley Hartley
11 Karen Blair & Gill Fox
18 Kate Foggo & Phillida Sawbridge
25 Brian Robertson & Margaret Mackenzie

June

1 Elaine Edwards & DM
8 Richard Ross & Kirsty Murray

We are looking for volunteers, so if you would like to be a part of this very worthwhile initiative, please speak to Elaine Edwards or email elaine.m.edwards@virginmedia.com

Doors Wide Open

*Our new minister, Rev Peter Fairbrother,
writes for the first time in Waymark*

It's with a heart filled with joy that I'd like to begin with two very important words, *'thank you'*.

Thank you supporting my candidature to be your minister, thank you for placing your trust in me, and thank you for all the lovely well wishes and messages of congratulation that I've received subsequent to the Special General Meeting in March. I am deeply touched and most grateful for your warmth, kindness, and generosity.

It is both an honour and a privilege to be elected to serve as your minister, a role I will endeavour to hold with the utmost care and sensitivity, as well as with passion, enthusiasm, and good humour.

As you may already be aware I start on the 14 May, with my first Sunday service occurring on the 20 May. It feels particularly apt that my first service occurs on the Christian festival of Pentecost, a time of hope, celebration, and new beginnings. At time of writing I am amidst preparations for this service and indeed for my first collection of services as your new minister. And I'm very much with the energies of endings and beginnings as I prepare to relinquish my existing employment with the NHS, whilst at the same time making plans for stepping into this wonderful new role with yourselves. Perhaps you are with these energies too in acknowledging the end of one era at St Mark's and the beginning of another? It is an exciting time, a time of much planning and organisation, and also a time of great possibility and promise. And I'm with a big smile in being with it all.

During the candidating service I spoke of the importance of connection and community, of simply being present and sensitive to the worlds occurring within us and around us. For me this is the beating heart of ministry, and as I prepare to



embark upon our journey together, I hold it as my touchstone. I come with one sole and gentle intention: to simply be with you.

In instances where we haven't yet met I'm looking forward to saying 'hello'. And where we already have some familiarity with each other I'm looking forward to deepening our relationship. Whether your connection to St Mark's is held through Sunday service, Mindfulness @ Lunchtime or the Sangha, nurtured through church groups and meetings, maintained by Facebook, or sustained through the pages of this very newsletter, I'd like for us to take time and care in getting to know each other.

With this I'm mindful of our mutual commitment to ministry, and to the myriad of ways in which this is expressed: some occurring within our physical church space and some outwith, such as through personal spiritual practice, the ministries of daily life, and in all that we hold and carry around with us wherever we are and whatever we're doing. As your minister I bow to it all, I celebrate the diversity of *who we are* and *how we are*, and I look forward to exploring with you ways in which we can nurture and grow our community as we journey together. Exciting times, new times, new beginnings. Doors wide open. Let's see what we will find.

Words from the Heart *(from Peter's Candidating Service, on 11 March)*

It is often said that Unitarianism is the church of free thinkers. What I hear less commonly expressed, although in my experience it seems equally true, is that Unitarianism is also the church of the tender-hearted. A faith and a place where we can:

- show more than the masks of daily life;
- be open, honest, and vulnerable;
- be with curiosity and exploration;
- be in acceptance of ourselves and each other in appreciation of our wholeness and diversity.

In short, a faith and a place where we can quite simply be.

As your minister I come not to lead you from one particular place to another, nor to impress upon you my way of seeing the world, nor to shuffle things around in yours simply for the sake of it.

I come to be alongside you, to offer my support,
to sometimes comfort you,
to sometimes challenge you,
to sometimes provoke and infuriate you,
to sometimes delight you,
but above all else to simply be with you whatever the weather so that together we may see life through the cracks, in all its hues.

I can't promise to always be all that you want,
but I can promise that I will always reflect all that you need.

And throughout it all to this I readily commit:
to serve you from my heart, as best as I can.



*'Narcissus' photo
taken by Peter Fairbrother*

Joan Cook, appointed President of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches for the year 2018-2019

At the recent General Assembly Meetings in Daventry, Joan Cook, was appointed as President of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches for the year 2018-2019. Readers will know that Joan is our Lay Celebrant and Lay Preacher. Another St Mark's Member, our Convener of the Management Committee, Ann Sinclair, seconded the motion. The text of her speech appears on this page. Rev Celia Cartwright was appointed Vice-

Mr President, Fellow Unitarians

Ann Sinclair, Edinburgh and Associate Member

I'm delighted to be seconding this motion. Joan and I have each been members of St Mark's in Edinburgh for a long time. My first memory is of her sitting in one of the side pews, with firstly her daughter, Hannah, and later with her son, Adam too. Needless to say, she was soon involved with the children's programme.

Often on these occasions we hear reminiscences of growing up in Unitarian Sunday schools, May queens, youth groups, but not for Joan. She is one of those of us who came across the Unitarians, or perhaps the Unitarians found her.

Joan has always been based in Edinburgh, except for a time in her childhood when her family was out in Hong Kong. She was brought up as an Episcopalian [roughly speaking, that's Scottish for Church of England]. As she grew older she had trouble accepting the doctrine, so stopped going to church. When she started to attend meetings of the local Amnesty International group, she entered the portals of St Mark's Church and so she found the Unitarians. When the time came, she and Stan were married in St Mark's.

As many of you know, Joan trained as a nurse. I've heard tell of the usual wild escapades of youth but can't embarrass her or you because I can't remember the details. She registered in General & Psychiatric Nursing and became a ward sister at Edinburgh's psychiatric hospital. But as family responsibilities came, she decided she would prefer to focus on the prevention of ill-health, so she undertook training to qualify as a health visitor. In her work she focussed on maternal and infant mental health and was also area lead for dementia. And a few years later she took a degree in Psychology with the Open University.

I have never known Joan to be fazed by a practical situation. I think it is the result of her personality and her experiences in nursing. There can't be much she hasn't seen. In an emergency, she is there. At St Mark's, if we have water pouring into the building during heavy rain, Joan is there finding all the mops and buckets. Or if someone is suddenly ill or has an accident, she is there offering help, suggesting appropriate action – and quietly follows up afterwards.

At St Mark's, Joan has been Convener of our Ministry Committee, she has served on our Council of Trustees and was its Convener for five years. During her term the GA meetings were held in Edinburgh and she attended for the first time. The Anniversary service was held in St Mark's. Joan led the children's story and Adam lit the chalice.

As we approached the retirement of our minister of many years standing, Joan worked to become a celebrant for weddings and other rites of passage. She has subsequently completed the Advanced Level of the Worship Studies Course and become an official Lay Preacher.

About ten years ago, she and I became the St Mark's representatives on the Executive Committee of the Scottish Unitarian Association or SUA. Currently Joan is in her second



term as its President. You'll recall that Scotland has its own legal system and it's through the SUA that persons deemed suitable to conduct Unitarian weddings are recommended to the Registrar General for Scotland. Since the advent of the Scottish Parliament in 1999, the SUA has increasingly been involved in representing our movement at national level. Joan was active in lobbying for same-sex marriage and continues to represent our approach on matters such as assisted dying.

Joan stood for election to the Executive Committee in 2008, served the full four-year term, stood for election again and served another full term of four years. I think she is the only person with such a record. Some of her colleagues on the EC were kind enough to share their impressions of working with Joan. What came through was the person I know: someone who is well-prepared, and who has a common-sense approach to life. She says it as it is. She will be critical when she thinks it is necessary, but can use humour to defuse a difficult situation. Others have shared how supportive Joan has been over periods of personal crisis and I can identify with that too.

Scotland can seem a long way away, but please remember it is as far to travel south as it is for southerners to come north! Through her work as EC link to several districts and through leading services for a number of congregations, Joan has already visited many parts of our Unitarian domain. For a while, if meetings were in London, it was a bonus that she could also meet up with Hannah. On a holiday which took them to India, she and Stan attended the Unitarian Church in Chennai, which is regarded as a sister church by St Mark's. There is a lovely photograph of them each wearing one of the long flower garlands bestowed by the church upon honoured guests.

Joan will be the seventh President to come from Scotland over the past forty years or so and the third woman President to come from St Mark's.

It's been a privilege for me to work alongside Joan and to see her develop in her various roles. Our movement can be proud of the opportunities it offers to its members and of the people nurtured by it.

Mr President, I have much pleasure and confidence in seconding the motion that Joan Cook be appointed President of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches for the year 2018-2019.

Joan Cook, President of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches for the year 2018-2019

After Joan Cook had been installed as President, she led worship to close the General Assembly Meetings. We are pleased to print her address in this issue of Waymark.

Sacred Energy

We have come to the end of our meetings, we have argued, agreed; discussed, debated; eaten, elected; criticised and connected. So now with our depleted energy levels we prepare to leave, to return to our homes, our families, our daily lives and congregations. But these meetings will not have served their purpose if you aren't just a little more informed, stimulated, encouraged, inspired, and energised!

It is difficult following on from a meeting, or conference, to maintain the levels of energy and commitment which are built up, during time spent with others in pursuance of a shared activity or aim, but that can be overcome.

One sure way to ensure a replenishing of spiritual energy is by action. Just as we often feel more energised after a walk, or a swim, our spiritual energy can be re-energised by action. And didn't we all just feel a little more energised after the Buyan Opening Ceremony? Evidenced by the number of people jiggling their way to the bar!

But what do we mean by spiritual energy? Well for a start, I don't mean the type of energy that enables one to complete a marathon, climb a Munro, or sail single handed across the Atlantic. What I mean is the type of energy which spurs us on to follow through on our ministries, to live our lives according to our Unitarian values, our spiritual energy. The energy we create, and benefit from, by being part of encouraging, spiritual communities.

If we leave this place, and pack up all the interesting discussions, meetings, and workshops into our suitcases, along with the dirty washing and well-thumbed copies of the annual report, we will feel drained. We will feel that have nothing more to offer; but tomorrow, many of us will be back in front of congregations who have no notion of what has gone on here, and may well be thinking their delegates have had a jolly at the expense of the church's bank account, then not only will we lose out, but our congregations will lose the opportunity to benefit from our time here.

Those of us who have been fortunate enough to have spent the past few days in such inspiring company, whether or not delegates, have a duty to take our experiences back to our communities, to share that information and inspiration with others. And in order that we can pass on some at least, of the inspiration, learning, and sense of connectivity that we have found here, we need to be able to draw on resources within us. Our spiritual energy.

So, at the end of some long days, where can we find this energy. How can we become energised? Well, we can find sources for such energy from various sources around us. From the music which we have heard; in our various comings together in social groups and events; as well as in our times of worship. We heard about energy and communities from Matt Carmichael in the John Relly Beard lecture on Wednesday, and the importance of inter-personal connections. The hymns we have sung, the words we have heard, all these energise us, helping us find resources which we thought were depleted.

From our environment; the sights and sounds of the natural world, the signs of re-growth we are starting to see around us, fortunate as we have been to have spent the past few days,



and for some even longer, surrounded by these beautiful open spaces. Many of us find the physical environment provides an energising force, in many ways, not only physical. There are those who see the divine in every 'root, stone and tree'.

These all stimulate the energy within us, the energy which is our connection with each other, our world, and the divine. But perhaps the greatest of these is the connecting and connections we have made with each other. In our coming together, in communion, we energise ourselves and others, we create energy! What we gain from our time with one another, as we meet together, talk, worship, share ideas, meals, and experiences, is what contributes most to the growth and development of the spiritual energy that is within us.

Much has been written about the advantages of being part of a group, human beings are after all social animals, and psychologists have proved time and again, how being part of a group leads to improved physical and psychological health, as well as enabling us to make better decisions. Being with others where we can express ourselves, and discuss issues of importance to us, also helps us to develop a deeper understanding of our own personal spirituality.

I can't remember where I first came across this story, it is about a minister on one of the islands, off the west coast of Scotland.

Every Sunday the minister would lead his flock in worship, but one Sunday he noticed Tam was absent, thinking he may be unwell, the minister walked across the island to Tam's croft, where he found him sitting quietly and alone by the fire. He asked him if he was well, and hearing he was, the minister sat down opposite Tam.

After a while of sitting together in silence, the minister picked up the fire-tongs, reached into the fire, pulling out a burning coal, and set it alone on the hearth.

Once more the two sat in silence. The glow from the coal, grew less and less, it ceased to burn, and eventually darkened. At which point the minister picked up the coal, and dropped it back into the glowing fire, where it once again began to flame. Nodding to Tam, who returned the nod, the minister left, and made his way back across the island to the manse.

(continued on page 6)

(continued from page 5)

The following Sunday, Tam was back in his usual pew, joining in the service with his fellow islanders.

This story illustrates the need we have for each other, to be part of something. How being with others kindles their spark, just as they kindle ours. We often hear the argument that you don't actually need to go to church to be a Unitarian, well, no, you don't. There are plenty Unitarians who live far from Unitarian congregations, but it is by being with others, of like mind, sharing the same ethos, and principles that we find our own personal faith becomes stronger, glows more brightly, and that we don't lose our glow, darken and die. And it is our personal faith that enables us to live our Unitarian lives.

These lines are from the statement of Mutual Commitment to Ministry, compiled by members of St Mark's, and our previous minister, Rev Maud Robinson.

'We aspire to be open to learning,
to be open to new ways of connecting with each other
and with the ultimate reality

We commit to give as we are able
And to receive the gifts of others.

We aspire to bring enthusiasm, joy and humour
To all that we do together.'

So, as we leave here today, may we be inspired to 'deepen and develop our liberal and progressive faith'* by our living energy!

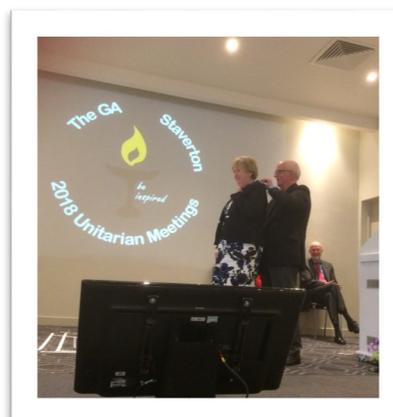
*(Derek MacAulay, website video)

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Joan Cook is installed as President of the GA 2018 –2019



Ann Sinclair seconding the motion, watched by Joan Cook, Rev Celia Cartwright and Stan Cook



Joan Cook receiving the chain of office from Rev Charles VanDenBroeder, President of the GA from April 2017 to April 2018



Helping those affected by the loss of a baby by among other things:

- Setting up Support groups in the Community
- Providing Family Rooms in Hospitals
- Memory Boxes - *essential tools to help parents to gather as many memories as they can of the precious time that they spend with their baby*

'SiMBA has been supported in its fund-raising efforts by many individuals, organisations and businesses. The families who have suffered the loss of a baby have been instrumental in their support and SiMBA endeavour to be 'reactive' to their needs. SiMBA was founded by a team of dedicated individuals in October 2005 in response to the needs of those affected by the loss of a baby during pregnancy or close to the time of birth.'

For more information go to www.simbacharity.org.uk/
or speak to Lynsey Bailey



Left to right: Margaret Hill, Joan Cook, Rev Andrew Hill, Ann Sinclair, Hannah Cook, Adam Cook, Stan Cook, Derek McAuley, Chief Officer

Laughter as a Spiritual Experience

by REV ROGER FRITTS

Once upon a time, a young bride-to-be went into a fabric store. She asked for fifty yards of chiffon for a nightgown. The surprised clerk asked why she needed so much material. She explained, 'Well, my fiancé is a Unitarian Universalist. He would rather seek than find.'

Amidst the stresses of 2017, we live in a golden age of comedy. The Fringe Festival includes about a thousand comedy acts, ranging from stand-up routines to scripted plays with large casts. Live stand-up comedy is popular in the United States also. Last June a stand-up comedy festival in California drew 45,000 people. And comedy shows on the web are very popular, including a one-hour special on Netflix that following a comedian as he performs for a month at the Fringe. In 2016 Netflix released 19 new stand-up specials. This year they are releasing a new stand-up shows at the rate of about one week.

In my review of American Unitarian sermons in the 19th century and in the first half of the 20th century. I could find no jokes. However, these days American Unitarian ministers often tell jokes in sermons.

At the annual meeting of the America Unitarian Universalists held in June (2017), my colleague, Rev Cheryl Walker spoke to 4,000 of us. The size of the gathering is important because, we humans, are much more likely to laugh in the presence of others if others are laughing. She started her sermon by describing a Facebook post that urged people to 'badly describe your profession,' Walker described finding responses from ministers who badly described their profession. One minister said,

'Once a week I talk about stuff I'm interested in, and I get mad if everybody doesn't come to listen. The rest of the time I worry about money.'

Another said, 'I patrol the parking lot making sure no one is parked in the spot reserved for the minister.'

A third said: 'On Sunday I tell people they can make the world a better place. When things don't improve that week, I repeat myself.'

Rev Walker was not the only minister who did this. Other sermons I heard from colleagues at the annual meeting of Unitarian Universalists included humor.

The Hebrew Testament contains one of the oldest records of laughter. In Genesis God and Abraham talk. Abraham is one hundred-years-old years old and his wife is ninety-years-old.

'God said, 'As for Sarah your wife . . . I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.'

According to the scripture, at the thought of his ninety-year-old wife having a son, Abraham fell on his face laughing. In spite of Abraham's laughing at God, Sarah did have a child, and he was named Isaac, which means laughter.

In the 1990s a movement called 'holy laughter' was developed at a Pentecostal church in Toronto. 'Holy laughter' is a term used within charismatic Christianity that describes a religious behavior in which individuals spontaneously laugh during church meetings. According to descriptions I have read, laughter starts with jokes from the minister and builds into a contagious laughter response by the congregation. Many in the congregation laugh so hard they stagger and fall to the floor wailing, laughing, and making animal sounds. Pentecostal visitors experience holy laughter service and carry the 'Toronto Blessing' back to their home congregations passing on this church specific laughter.

Hindus also engage contagious laughter. In Bombay an ancient yoga breathing exercise based on laughter has been transformed into a booming enterprise called the Laughing Clubs International. Started in 1995, the clubs have grown to over 2,000 chapters, with a web site laughter online University. After starting with a warmup unison ho, ho, ho, ha, ha, ha, the group moves on to more esoteric variations with mouth open and close. The favorite laugh posture is standing with arms raised above the head, this is similar to the posture Christian Pentecostals use when performing their own holy laughter in Toronto. A Global Laughter Yoga Conference was held in June (2017) in Frankfurt.

Why do we laugh? The philosopher Plato said laughter helps us feel superior to other people. For example, consider this story that was ranked as 'the world's funniest joke' in a study at a British University. Two hunters are out in the woods when one of them collapses. He doesn't seem to be breathing and his eyes are glazed. The other guy whips out his phone and calls the emergency services. He gasps, 'My friend is dead! What can I do?' The operator says, 'Calm down. I can help. First, let's make sure he's dead.' There is a silence; then a gunshot is heard. Back on the phone, the guy says, 'OK, now what?'

In the joke we feel superior to the stupid hunter who shoots his friend to make sure he is dead. We are too smart to make such a stupid mistake. Plato thought that it was wrong to laugh at the foolishness of others and he urged people to refrain from laughing. Plato would not have felt at home at the Fringe.

Sigmund Freud developed another explanation as to why we laugh. Laughter, Freud said, is a way in which people can release our pent-up thoughts in a socially acceptable way. These include pent-up thoughts about death, sex, marriage, authority figures, bodily functions, anything that is socially unacceptable to say. To Freud, humour provides a kind of relief, a way of coping with the problems of our lives or issues that we are embarrassed or reluctant to confront. Freud might say the purpose of the hunter joke is to release our pent-up feelings about death.

In many jokes, there is an apparent release of repressed thoughts about such topics as sexual fidelity. For example, a man has six children and is very proud of his achievement. He is so proud of himself that he starts calling his wife 'mother of six,' in spite of her objections. One night they go to a party. The man decides that it's time to go home and wants to find out if his wife is ready to leave as well. He shouts at the top of his voice: 'shall we go home, mother of six?' His wife, irritated by her husband's lack of discretion shouts back: 'anytime you're ready, father of four!'

In 1979 the American Writer Norman Cousins published his book called *Anatomy of an Illness as Perceived by the Patient* suggesting that a purpose of laughter is to help us heal. Although this has become popular, so far little empirical research has been done on the effects of laughter and health. The best-known research, which claims that people who laugh have healthier immune systems, is based on studying only five people. ¹

Immune System Changes During Associated Laughing, 1991. Berk.

In the words of one expert:

The evaluation of health issues of laughter in humour is at a very early stage with most of the important work yet to be done. . . . Faster and better physical healing to laughter remains an unrealized, tantalizing but still reasonable prospect. (Robert Provine).

The philosopher, Henri Bergson, argued that the purpose of laughter is to communicate with other people. Dr Robert Provine at the University of Maryland spent ten years studying laughter and came to the same conclusion. In his book, *Laughter a Scientific Investigation*, he argues that laughter evolved as a way to interact with other people.

Dr. Provine recorded and studied many conversations. He documented that in general, men tell the jokes and women supply the laughter. He also looked at personal advertisements in newspapers and documented that many women seek men who make them laugh, and many men try to comply with this request.

In a study of spontaneous conversations between mixed sex pairs of young German adults who were meeting for the first time, the more a woman laughed aloud during these encounters, the greater was her self-reported interest in seeing the man again. A man's laughter did not indicate interest in the woman, but men were interested in seeing again women who laughed a lot in their presence. The laughter of the female, not the male, is the critical positive indicator of a continuing relationship. Also, simultaneous male and female laughter was a predictor of mutual interest.

Laughter, researchers conclude, is one way we communicate attraction or lack of attraction in relationships. Laughter is a form of communication that plays a role in social bonding, in solidifying friendships and pulling people into the fold. Most ministers know this. We tell jokes as a way of solidifying a religious community, a way of pulling people into the fold of the congregation.

So, there are several reasons why we laugh.

- Plato said laughter helps us feel superior.
- Sigmund Freud said laughter how we express our
- taboo thoughts in a socially acceptable way.
- Norman Cousins said laughter helps us heal.
- Henri Bergson said laughter is one way we communicate.

I have yet another reason why we laugh. I first read it in a book by the science fiction writer, Robert A. Heinlein. In his

1961 book *Stranger in a Strange Land*. Robert Heinlein invites us to imagine that a highly rational and logical Martian comes to earth where he tries to understand our culture. The Martian struggles to understand why human think things are funny.

After weeks of trying to understand, one day the Martian breaks out into uncontrollable laughter. When he finally calms down he explains to his human friends 'I have found out why people laugh. They laugh because it hurts . . . because it is the only thing that will make it stop hurting.'

I agree with Robert Heinlein. We laugh to help in order to cope with the tragedies in our lives, both small and large.

In 2005, my eighty-eight-year-old aunt was living in a wonderful home on a small stream in a small town in the western United States. Along the stream one-hundred-year-old cottonwood trees were growing, providing shade and homes for birds. One day a rain storm dumped about five inches of rain in the canyon above the small stream and a flash flood came rushing down. My eighty-eight-year-old aunt got to high ground, but her house of twenty-five years was swept away in the flood, along with the one-hundred-year-old trees. I talked on the phone with my aunt, shortly after this disaster. I ask her how she was feeling. 'Well,' she said, 'I have to look at the positive side. When it was clear we were going to lose the house, we had about an hour when everyone ran in and carried everything thing they could out into trucks. I discovered that you can get a lot of stuff out of a house in an hour when you have many people helping.' She paused, then she said. 'As for the rest, I had wanted to go through and throw out a lot of stuff and clean the house. Now I don't have to!' And she laughed.

On the deepest level, laughter is a spiritual affirmation, a source of faith in people and in the future.

*Copyright Roger Fritts, used by permission,
given in St Mark's on 20 August 2017*

Rev Roger Fritts is the minister of the Unitarian Universalist church in Sarasota, Florida, USA. He was our guest minister in 2007.

Roger, and his wife Rev Leslie Westbrook, spent a few weeks in August last year enjoying the Edinburgh Festivals. We were very pleased that Roger found time to lead our worship on 20 August 2017, and we are delighted to print an edited version of his address. It was a pleasure to renew our connection with Leslie and Roger.

Mindfulness @ Lunchtime

meets at St Mark's at 12.15 on Tuesdays

Interbeing Buddhist Meditation

meets at St Mark's every Thursday, usually at 19.15

For further information speak to Jon Bagust

www.facebook.com/mindfulnessatlunchtime

ST MARK'S BOOKMARKS

This group is open to all

For more details, please contact Joan Cook
joancook@hotmail.co.uk

The Bereavement Support Group

The next meeting will be on 5 May at 11.00

The Bereavement Group offers support to anyone suffering a loss through bereavement, separation or estrangement.

More information via Jane Aaronson ja@ednet.co.uk

Poetry Reading for Pleasure

on

Sunday 6 May at 13.00

Come and share some favourite poems

Want to know more?

Please speak to Margery MacKay

Thanks Giving 2017-2018

Once again, we give, and record, our thanks to all the members and friends who have helped during the year with the life and work of St Mark's.

Lay Celebrant and Lay Preacher: Joan Cook
Officers: Convener - Mary McKenna,
Treasurer - Ali MacDonald Secretary
- Margery MacKay
Council: Jane Aaronson, Jon Bagust, Bláthnaid Quinn,
Ann Sinclair, Elizabeth Welsh, David Wood
Pulpit Secretary: Lesley Hartley
Ministry Team: Lesley Hartley, Jane Aaronson,
Hilary Anderson, Lynsey Bailey, Tony Finlay,
Rachael King, Bláthnaid Quinn, and, ex officio,
Mary McKenna
Everyone who has been responsible for, or involved in
Sunday services
Management Committee: Ann Sinclair, Brian Robertson,
Richard Ross, Tom Stamper, ex officio, Mary McKenna
Search Committee: Margery MacKay, Jon Bagust,
Kris Calder, Roger Hartley, Jill Stamper
Venue Group: Ann Sinclair, Roger Hartley,
Mary McKenna,
Gift Aid (tax reclaim): B Jones
Acting Venue Manager: Ann Sinclair
Administrative Assistant and Venue Treasurer
Suzanne Stirling (until January 2018)
Fringe: Our Fringe Manager and Front-of-House
Manager
Lettings: All volunteers who helped with front-of-
house and box office during the Fringe, and those who
attended public events throughout the year, assisting
our paying guests, and looking after security
Caretaker: Euan McGlynn
Housekeeper: Kay Thornhill
Music: Ailsa Aitkenhead, Margaret Christie,
Patrice Fitzgerald & Richard Leslie, Veronika Gancheva,
Michael Graham, Lesley Hartley, Jack Westwell
Waymark Editor: Jane Aaronson with assistance from
Kirsty Murray
Website Manager: (from March 2018) Annabel
Treshansky
Website: Caroline Puck Graves (web builder),
Jane Aaronson, Lynsey Bailey, John Clifford,
Kate Foggo, Suzanne Stirling (Waymark until
December 2017) and Elizabeth Welsh
Mindfulness@lunchtime: Jon Bagust and helpers
Bereavement Support Group: Jane Aronson and all
who facilitate this group
Chalice Singers: Lesley Hartley and singers
Poetry for Pleasure: Margery MacKay
Social Secretary: Lynsey Bailey
Bring and Share Suppers: Lynsey Bailey,
Elizabeth Welsh and all who facilitate this group

Children's Programme: Co-ordinator - Ida Silkenat,
(until end September 2017) Sara Robertson (January
2018) assisted by Lynsey Bailey, Rachael King, Amy &
Ali McDonald, Kirsty Murray, Bláthnaid Quinn,
Tom Stamper, Susanne Urquhart and those on
standby duty
Sunday Duties: all the Sunday stewards, peace
candle, welcome and coffee people
Sunday Coffee (maintaining supplies): B Jones, Ann
Sinclair
Flower Rota: Mary McKenna, and thanks to all who
dedicated and arranged flowers
Duty Rotas: Jane Aaronson
Good Cause Arrangements: Jane Aaronson
St Catharine's Homeless Project: Elaine Edwards and
all volunteers who help with this project on Friday
evenings, and who help in other ways during the year
Chennai Fund: Jon Bagust, Mike West
Care of indoor plants: members of children's
programme
Waymark mailing: Minnie Masterman, Jane Aaronson,
Jean Lapsley, Margaret Mackenzie, and others who
gave occasional help

Representatives: General Assembly - Lesley Hartley &
Ann Sinclair in 2018; Scottish Unitarian Association -
Joan Cook, Ann Sinclair; Edinburgh Interfaith
Association - Margery MacKay (From January 2018)

The Scottish Unitarian Association Annual Meeting



will take place at St Mark's
on Saturday 12 May from 11.00 until 16.00

11.00	Arrivals and coffee
11.30	AGM
12.30	Lunch [provided]
13.30	Workshop on Diversity in Faith presented by Farkanda Chaudry
15.00	Break
15.15	Service led by Joan Cook, President of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches and of the SUA
16.00	Departures

After lunch, a workshop on 'Diversity in Faith' will be presented by Farkanda Chaudry who regularly presents full courses on Religious Diversity and Anti-Discrimination Training.

The day will close with the Anniversary Service led by the President of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches and of the SUA, Joan Cook.

Lunch will be provided
More information from Ann Sinclair
annsinclair530@btinternet.com

Please add this event to your diaries!

Chalice Singers Rehearsals

*If you enjoy singing, do come and rehearse
with us. You don't need to be able to read
music*

We will meet in the upper hall from 10.00-10.45
on the following Sundays

May
13
20

Please speak to Lesley Hartley to find out more

MAY IN ST MARK'S

Every Sunday 11.00 Church Service and Coffee
Every Tuesday 12.15 Mindfulness@Lunchtime

Monday 1 May and Tuesday 2 May
Degree concerts by students from Napier University,
which begin at 19.30.
All are welcome. Entrance is free.

Saturday 5 11.00 – 13.00 Bereavement & Support Group (see page 8)
For more details email ja@ednet.co.uk

Sunday 6 13.00 - 14.00 Poetry Reading for Pleasure (see page 8)

Saturday 12 11.00 – 16.00 SUA AGM (see page 9)
Please email Ann Sinclair annsinaclair530@btinternet.com

Sunday 13 10.00–10.45 Chalice Singers Group Rehearsal (see page 9)

Sunday 13 14.00 – 17.00 Elgar Society Talk by Geoff Scargill, (Former chairman of Elgar Society North-West Branch)
Song Recital – Songs by Elgar & others with a German connection.
Susanne Horsburgh, mezzo-soprano. David Lyle, pianist

Friday 18 19.00 - Bring & Share Supper (see below)

Sunday 20 10.00–10.45 Chalice Singers Group Rehearsal (see page 9)

Friday 25 11.00 – 12.30 Waymark folding and mailing.
Please email ja@ednet.co.uk if you are able to help

BRING AND SHARE SUPPER

to welcome
Rev Peter Fairbrother
as our new minister
on
Friday 18 May
at 19.00

Please bring a savoury or sweet dish to share.
Look out for a sign-up sheet in the upper hall

Contact Lynsey Bailey
lynsey.bailey@yahoo.co.uk
if you can help her to set up and/or clear away

SUNDAYS IN MAY IN ST MARK'S

Services are at 11.00 in the church, with coffee and conversation in the upper hall afterwards.
Children sit with their parents for the opening part of the service, and then follow their own programme.

The good cause in May and June is SiMBA - Simpsons Memory Box Appeal (See page 6 for more information).

6 May Iain Brown

The Nag Hammadi Scrolls

Some forms of Christianity you and I were never supposed to know.

Iain Brown is a member of Glasgow Unitarian Church

13 May Jim Millar

Religious Naturalism

A religion old or new, that stressed the magnificence of the universe as revealed by modern science, might be able to draw forth reserves of reverence and awe hardly tapped by the conventional faiths. Sooner or later such a religion will emerge. — Carl Sagan. Pale Blue Dot: a Vision of the Human Future in Space (1994)

Religious Naturalism is an approach to spirituality which rejects super naturalism. Instead, it draws its inspiration from the natural world as revealed by modern science and from the humanities. Today I shall explore this paradigm, why it is important for me and how it fits with Unitarianism.

Jim Millar is a member of Glasgow Unitarian Church

20 May Rev Peter Fairbrother

Ignite!

Endings and beginnings, and the constancy of passions that burn bright throughout, honouring the Christian festival of Pentecost and its message to the world. Come, light your fire!

Sunday 27 May Rev Peter Fairbrother

Children of the Sea

Exploring our connection to the deep-sea around us and within us through poetry, prayer, and song.

Sunday 3 June Lynsey Bailey & Jane Aaronson

Flower Communion

As we join together, to share our Flower Communion, we remember the first Flower Communion led by Norbert Capek, in Prague on 4 June 1923. Everyone is asked to bring one, or a few, flowers (garden or wild flowers, if you can). During the service, members of the congregation are invited to come forward to choose a flower different from the one they brought.

Lynsey Bailey & Jane Aaronson are members of St Mark's