

waymark



unitarians in edinburgh

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**Let us sit quietly and quiet our minds, bring nature's glory
from outside, in
Let us imagine and breathe into ourselves a walk, together,
over the hard, brown earth,
Under the dark grey sky, clouds laden like massive bags full of
rain,
Shall we pass by the trees that have lost their leaves but are
ready to grow them anew?
To the place where bright pops of colour appear, where
critters start sniffing and digging,
Where nature is ending its struggle through Winter, And has
arrived to breathe in Spring,
Where we will return, when we can, when the time is right to
be in nature's arms again.**

Image by Rev Peter Fairbrother, words by Christina Harper

A Very Warm Welcome to St Mark's

from Rev Peter Fairbrother



Responding to COVID-19 — connecting with and supporting each other

As the pandemic continues, it goes without saying that we find ourselves living in difficult times. I'm particularly aware of the emotional and practical challenges of living with social restrictions and other constraints. Since this crisis emerged a number in our community have come forward to offer help and support to others through phone check-in, running essential messages (in localities within Lothian and Fife), or through other ways. I'm coordinating this assistance, so please get in touch with me if help is needed, or if you'd like to join our register of helpers. Alongside, I am available for pastoral care support by telephone or Zoom. My contact details are below.

Also, we're publishing a weekly e-bulletin with news, developments, and helpful resources. Do sign up for it if you haven't already - contact St Mark's secretary Margery Mackay at stmarkssecretary@btinternet.com. Let's keep connected and lean into one another in the time ahead.

With love,

Peter

Unitarians in Edinburgh

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Future Sunday Services at St Mark's

Join us **online** on Sundays, 11am-12noon

for time together in community



Unitarians in Edinburgh

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic our church-based services are suspended until further notice.

Instead, we are holding time together in community **online** every Sunday, 11am-12noon, until we're next able to be together at church.

Our time together online includes virtual chalice lighting, prayer, time for silence and meditation, shared words and readings, music, and we will take time and care to check-in with one another regarding how we are. There will be plenty of opportunities for participation.

We are using the 'Zoom' platform. To join us simply go to **<https://zoom.us/j/459569403>** each and every Sunday at 11am.

Immediately after each service Sunday steward Eli Roth will be hosting virtual teas and coffees at <https://zoom.us/j/939360646>. Come join us for a blether. For those getting to grips with Zoom, Eli is kindly offering support. She can be contacted by email at eli.roth.personal@gmail.com. A very big thank you Eli!

I hope you can join us.

Best wishes,

Rev Peter Fairbrother

A Message from St Mark's Convener

At this difficult time Peter and I are working closely together to support our community and to ensure we emerge stronger and more relevant to everyone. We are all having to adjust our priorities and initial concern that we stay connected. Thankfully we have digital contact with most people and we will augment this where needed.

Council have been preparing our Annual Report with the intention of holding our AGM in April. This will have to be postponed to later in the year as all our efforts will be to support our members and friends and sustain our community.

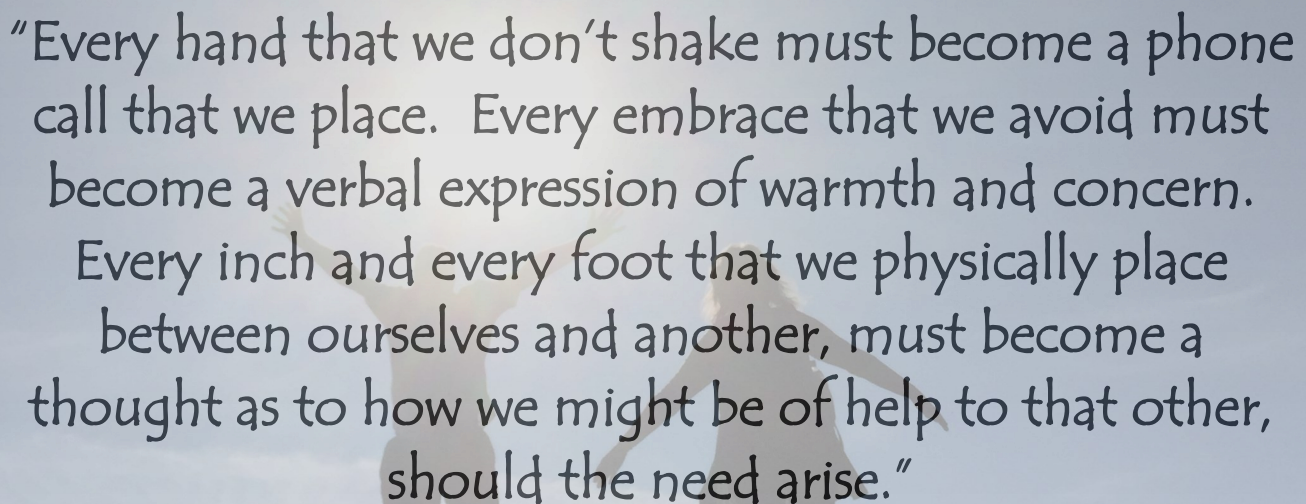
In the forthcoming weeks and months the values we hold dear as a community will inform all our efforts:

Community, Integrity, Learning, Kindness, Joy, Peace

Keep safe, keep strong, and keep these values alive.

In love,

Mary McKenna, Convener



“Every hand that we don't shake must become a phone call that we place. Every embrace that we avoid must become a verbal expression of warmth and concern. Every inch and every foot that we physically place between ourselves and another, must become a thought as to how we might be of help to that other, should the need arise.”

Rav Yosef

Ministry team – calling new members!

The Ministry Team would like 2 more members of the congregation to join them. The team meet approximately every 3 - 4 months, providing feedback on past services, as well as feeding in ideas for future services, all the while aiming to foster worship of the highest quality at St Mark's.

If this is of interest to you, please email Lesley Hartley at lesley.j.hartley@gmail.com, or Rev Peter Fairbrother at minister@edinburgh-unitarians.org.uk, for more information.

Please note we will advise the date of the next meeting as soon as we can.

Who do you think you are?

Our minister Rev Peter Fairbrother gives an early heads-up on a service he'll be holding on the first Sunday of June.

Each of us hold a myriad of identities: some that we're proud to show the world; and some that remain in the shadows due to denial, shame, or fear. On Sunday 7 June, 11am, I invite you to show up on Zoom presenting an image of yourself rarely seen... perhaps not even to yourself.

This may be an aspect of you which is usually hidden from the world, either intentionally or unintentionally. It could be a cherished part of your self identity or something more challenging... Maybe an identity you have always yearned to embrace, or one that repels you, or even something you're curious about and would like to 'try out'?

Perhaps... unbeknown to the wider world you hold a particular hobby or interest that is a big part of your life and your sense of self. Maybe you're an ace ballroom dancer, super golfer, intrepid scuba diver, or martial arts expert, to name but a few possibilities? Could you come attired in something that represents your interests and passions?

Maybe... you hold an occupation that you don't usually discuss when we meet – perhaps you may wish illustrate something of that during our time together?

Perhaps... you might wish to take the opportunity to represent the inner romantic, the inner child, or an 'ideal' version of you... Maybe you've always wanted to give expression to the glamorous you, the powerful you, or the natural you?

Perhaps... you've always been curious to experience what it would be like to dress as another gender in public? Or to wear a suit, shirt and tie, if you abhor that style... or the abaya, jilbab, dupatta if this dress is something that intrigues or challenges you...

It doesn't need to be a dramatic statement: it could be as simple as wearing a particular colour of significance to you, a brooch or button-hole that sums up a special part of who you think are you, or even a flower in the hair if that speaks to your sense of self.

You are welcome to dress up, but this is more than 'dressing up'... It's an invitation to each of us to lower our defences a little bit more and allow ourselves to be truly seen in a safe, respectful space... and all from the comfort of our own home too! Perhaps we might even wish to let our imagination run free and have a little fun with this.

Of course, as with all our activities, participation is entirely voluntary. During our time together online there will be the opportunity to share a little about your presenting identity and its meaning to you (again, if you feel comfortable doing so), and to hear the stories of others.

A little meditation

At this time when we may feel constrained by the instruction to stay at home, I'm reminded of a dear Spiritualist friend who would console those grieving by inviting them to remember that their loved ones are 'only a thought away'. For those of us just who would prefer to be out and about with others rather than being indoors, I would encourage us to hold onto these words also, remembering that our preferred ways of being are only a thought away too. Indeed, it might be helpful to bring to mind cherished people and places, particularly if we find ourselves struggling with present restrictions.

Friends, there is no greater expanse than the spaciousness we create within, and a little meditation is something almost all of us can do, usually anywhere and at any time. Needless to say, there are many ways to meditate and perhaps you might have your own practice(s). I find guided visualisation helpful and so I've provided below a short self-penned script which I hope is helpful to you, particularly if you're feeling down and/or hemmed in at home. The meditation guides our mind's eye along a walk on the beach. For me I picture the beautiful beaches near where I live in East Lothian when undertaking this meditation. Indeed, the image behind these words is the beach at Yellowcraigs, a particular favourite of mine. I invite you to bring to mind your favourite coastal place should you choose to walk this meditation... And if you do so, please take your time and linger over what comes to mind as you read through the script. Savour, relax, and enjoy the journey.

Peter

Firstly, make yourself comfortable. Take a seat. Ensure that your back is firmly positioned into the back of the chair, your feet firmly on the ground, and if you can, allow your arms to rest where they will, perhaps lightly on your lap or, if it feels more comfortable, by the sides of your body. And if you're bringing this meditation to mind in the future, you may wish to close your eyes too.

Now ease yourself in by gently connecting with your breath...

The natural rhythm of your breathing...

Focus on the *breath in* through the nose, then taking the breathe down into the body, followed by a gentle *breathing out* through the mouth.

As you *breathe in*, imagine the incoming tide gently caressing a golden sandy beach, and as you *breathe out*, imagine the water receding back into the magnificent expanse of the deep blue sea.

Repeat.

I now invite you to bring to mind a bright spring day, one in which you are stood on this golden sandy beach.

The sun is shining and the sky is crystal clear without a cloud in sight. The grains of sand on the beach are twinkling in the sunlight and beneath your feet they feel soft and warm.

You decide to take a gentle walk along the beach.

As you begin your journey you feel the warmth of the sun on your face...

the caress of a light onshore breeze on your body...

and the taste of tangy salt sea air on your lips.

Far off in the distance, you can hear the cries of seagulls... You watch them soar in the sky, swoop down into the sea, and then fly off again.

Up ahead you spot an outcrop of rock, so you walk towards it.

Once you reach the rock you lightly touch it. It is dry and silk-like, smoothed by the sea, and it is warm, for it too has been warmed by the sun. Note how it feels.

Then you take time and care to look closely at the rock, observing all its colours – shades of grey, hints of blue and green. Relish the rich vibrancy of what you see.

You decide to take a rest and sit on the rock.

You gaze out to sea, staring intently at the motion of the waves rolling onto the shore. Each wave breaks against the coast, rising slowly upward along the beach, leaving a deposit of new stones and shells. Slowly the wave retreats back out to sea, only to be replaced by another that comes forward... working its way up the beach... then slowly retreating back out to sea.

With each motion of the tide, you find yourself feeling more and more relaxed.

The tranquility creates a deep sense of serenity, peace. All is well.

As you stare into the distance, you see that the sun is beginning to set. The sky is turning brilliant hues of gold, russet and auburn, while the sun sinks down, down into the horizon. You continue to watch the sun set until it leaves the sky. Relaxed and soothed, you get up from the rock and walk back down the beach... returning to where you began... and then back, back into your chair where you are currently seated.

Being with loss

Our minister Rev Peter Fairbrother extends a personal invitation.

How are we with grief?

Commonly, grief is associated with one particular form of loss - the physical death of a loved one. Of course, as we're aware, this is only one form of loss among many. We grieve for all sorts of things. For example, we may grieve for the deterioration and loss of our mental and/or physical faculties resulting from ill health and/or ageing. We may grieve the ending of an important relationship, or the loss of a job, or the conclusion of a significant role or association that we've held. And perhaps at this time of pandemic we may grieve the loss of many personal freedoms we had earlier taken for granted.

And just as there's a multitude of expressions of loss, so too there are many and diverse expressions of grief. Sometimes we expect our experience of grief to be linear - a straight line from points A to B. However, what we more often find is something a lot more complex: rather than a straight line, our grieving can resemble an entangled squiggle with many twists and turns and loops back and forth and in-between. As many of us have come to realise, there is no right way to grieve, that is if we permit ourselves to grieve at all...

At this difficult time I'm acutely aware that many of us are struggling with all kinds of loss. And so in collaboration with the church pastoral care team, together we've decided to create safe space for some personal exploration: to explore what we accept as loss; to take time and care to be with our feelings; and to ascertain what, if any, are the shared threads that invisibly connect us all in being with loss.

We begin our exploration on **Sunday 31 May, 11am**, during what I expect will be our online time together in community, when we take our collective first steps in being with and understanding loss.

Following this, a few days later on **Wednesday 3 June, 6-7.30pm**, again likely to be held online via Zoom (to be confirmed closer to the time), we will be holding space for more intimate talking, listening, and reflection. This will be a smaller, more informal gathering to support and enable deeper sharing.



And so my invitation to you, dear reader, is this: if you're like to participate in our time together online on 31 May by offering a reading, personal sharing, or other contribution relating to your experience of loss(es) I'd be delighted to hear from you. This doesn't necessarily mean speaking on the day - it could be providing something you'd wish me or someone else to read / share on your behalf during the service. (And please note that what you share *does not* have to be attributed to you, if you don't wish it to be.) Equally, if you'd like to express interest in attending the 3 June gathering that would be wonderful too - simply email me at minister@edinburgh-unitarians.org.uk and I will provide you with details nearer the time.

Lighting the Chalice

St Mark's member Mike West lit the Chalice on Sunday 2 February with these words:

It was difficult to turn a blind eye to our leaving the European Union on Friday. Some will have felt elated by the celebrations. For my part, I felt disheartened.

The European ideal had attracted me strongly in student days. I realised it could bring an end to conflicts in Europe and point the continent towards a better economic future. I admired the courage and imagination shown at the end of the war by Adenauer and Monnet in foreseeing that the Germans and French could one day be united in true friendship. In the 60s I became an active member of our university's European Society; we held a European seminar, hosted talks on European issues and published a magazine.

The subsequent history is well known. Once de Gaulle had resigned, Prime Minister Heath took us into the Common Market in 1973. The Maastricht and Lisbon treaties were staging posts on the way to a more committed union, and the union itself steadily enlarged.

Like many, I was shocked by the referendum result in 2016 but kept some hope alive that it might be reversed. December's election finally extinguished that hope.

I was moved by the singing of Auld Lang Syne in the European Parliament and in particular by the warmth and graciousness of the farewell. EU President Ursula van der Leyen ended her speech with memorable words by George Eliot:

"Only in the agony of parting do we look into the depths of love."

There was slight consolation in decisions to keep the Commission flag flying outside the Scottish Parliament, St Andrew's House and Victoria Quay. The end to the three year political process on Friday prompted me to reflect on the prayer of Reinhold Niebuhr:

"God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

I think of myself as a European and am loath to see our comradeship with fellow Europeans disintegrate. So I light the candle today to our fellow Europeans and the hope that we shall maintain close friendship and cooperation.



Reflections at St Mark's

Wallace Browning Tavener was minister at St Mark's from 1927 to 1958.

On Sunday evenings he gave political commentaries, and was the third of a series of ministers who took social and political criticism from a faith perspective very seriously. Some Edinburgh Unitarians remember him with affection and great appreciation for his honest thought and his realistic vision about how things are and might be. He was a convincing exponent of humanistic theology long before it became a significant factor in British Unitarian thought.



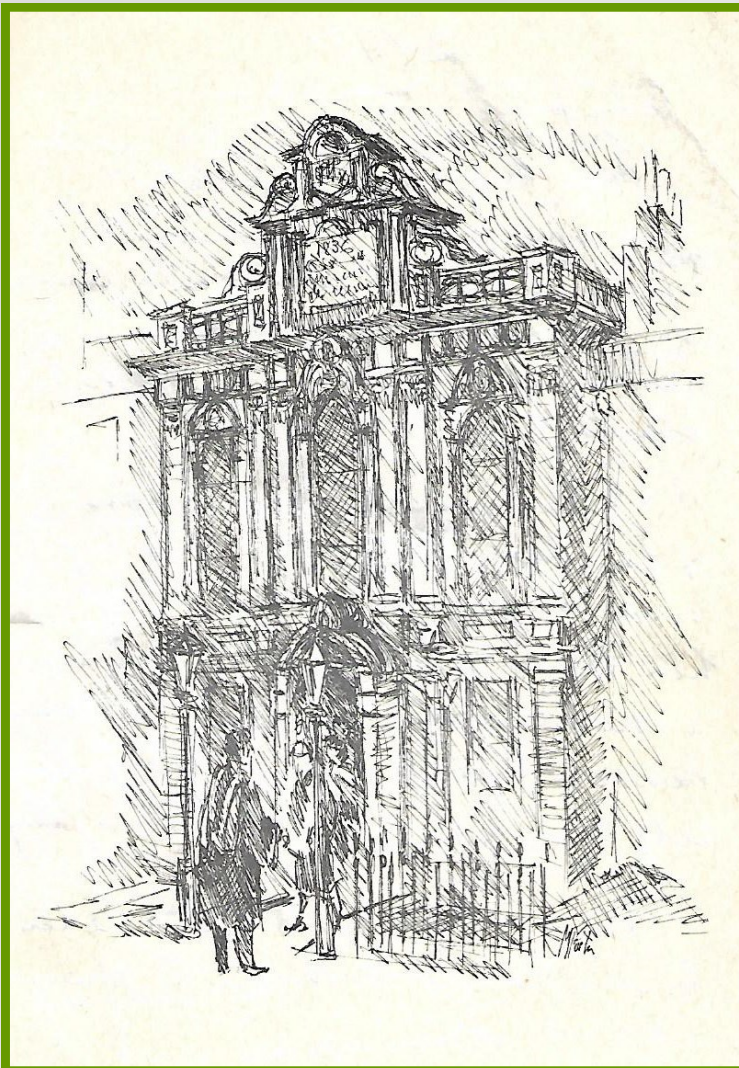
Wallace Browning Tavener

St Mark's member Anne Witcomb provides this reflection on Wallace Tavener.

"My memories of Mr Tavener are mainly of his Minister's Class which was for those who were young teenagers and too old for Sunday School. It was held every Sunday after the church service, (there was no coffee time in those days; we had monthly congregational socials instead). I clearly remember him being shocked at our lack of knowledge of current affairs and I am sure this was one area he would have explored with us.

We had YPL (Young People's League) meetings on Friday evenings and, although they were generally recreational, Mr Tavener led discussions from time to time and on at least one occasion we had a group of youngsters from Friends to debate with. It was important to him that we learned to think for ourselves and make our own decisions.

He took us to other church services, evening ones, of course. I remember going to, among others, high Church of England, Roman Catholic, Christian Scientist and I think I am right in saying that we went to the Synagogue. We all thought very highly of him and, to be honest, we were a little in awe of him. But having said that, I remember him with admiration and affection."



*Sketch of St Mark's Unitarian Church by Margaret Foster
Copy provided by Anne Snoddy*

Au revoir... but not goodbye... to Sara!

"The wonderful Sarah Robertson stepped down from the role of St Mark's Children's Programme Co-ordinator at the end of March. The children's programme has flourished under her leadership and we have all enjoyed some lovely services with the children. Unfortunately we'll have to wait a little while before we can give Sara the warm send-off we had planned." says Pulpit Secretary Lesley Hartley.

Our intergenerational services have seen us making Christmas tree decorations and paperchains; applauding the children's contributions in their on-stage plays (*see picture on right*); sharing our church space with pets; and enjoying a church of pop service. Children and parents have been on trips with Sara to the cinema and the museum and had some sunny picnics.



Sara has produced weekly plans for the adults in charge to use — plans that have always been inventive and frequently using some colourful arts skills. During services, Sara's 'time for all ages' stories have been carefully linked to the activities the children were undertaking each session. The children have created bubbles in science week, made lanterns for the festival of light, and helped feed the bees in our courtyard garden with a bee drinking-station.

When Waymark changed its format, a 'Children's Corner' appeared and with each issue there have been vibrant photos of the children's work and the children at work. There have also been examples of poems and points of view - this has provided a strong voice for the children of St Mark's.



It's no mean feat carrying out this role of children's co-ordinator — it takes a patient temperament, an addiction to emailing and a skill with doodle-poll — all this alongside capturing children's interest, promoting fun and enjoyment and a family-friendly space for children of all ages.

Sara has played an important part within the National Unitarian Youth movement and can often be found at the General Assembly meetings each Spring along with her husband Colin and son Fergus. These links are important when we consider the activities our children experience.

So now, Sara heads off on a different path, but we are very pleased that she plans to maintain the connection with St Mark's and keep her name on the helpers' rota.

Thankyou Sara, from all at St Mark's.



"Love is the ultimate meaning of everything around us. It is not a mere sentiment. It is truth; it is the joy that is at the root of all creation."

Rabindranath Tagore

Image by Rev Peter Fairbrother