

waymark

unitarians in edinburgh



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Season's Greetings!

Image by Kris Calder

A Very Warm Welcome to St Mark's

from Rev Peter Fairbrother



Light at the end

Whatever else we may feel about 2020, I think most of us will agree that it's been a pretty remarkable year. Whether we've found it brimful of opportunities or difficulties, the challenges of living with the pandemic has shown us who we are, individually and as a community. During our various Zoom gatherings, we've shared our bewilderment, our anxiety, our heartbreak, our grief, and on occasion, our joy and laughter. Throughout, we've shared our authentic selves.

The spirit of sharing has extended to Waymark too, with our 'lockdown issues' being among the biggest we've created and the most popular. Indeed, we end 2020 with another magnificent bumper issue. A big thank you to all the contributors. And extra special thanks to Kris, our wonderful Waymark Editor, who has given her time, talent, and energies to ensuring our bi-monthly magazine has continued without interruption during these challenging times, going from strength to strength. You are amazing, Kris. Thank you so much.

December and January are packed with feast days, Holy Days, and holidays. However you decide to spend them, I wish you every happiness. Take good care of yourself and each other.

With love,
Peter

Unitarians in Edinburgh

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Future Sunday Services at St Mark's



Seasonal offerings from Unitarians in Edinburgh

Sunday 13 December, 11am: **Blue December**
a service for those who find the festive season tough-going.

Sunday 20 December, 11am: **Festive service for all ages**
celebrating seasonal customs near and far, old and new.

Thursday 24 December, 4pm: **Christmas Eve carols & readings**

Friday 25 December, 11am: **Christmas Day service**

Sunday 27 December, 11am: **Love in rewind**
We give thought to the year that was... and to the one to come.

Join us on Zoom: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/459569403>

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 December and January are:

- **Tuesday — Mindfulness@Lunchtime** from **12.30pm-2pm**. A time of guided meditation, silence, and sharing. For more information contact the team via **Mindfulness at Lunchtime** on **Facebook**.
- **Wednesday — drop-in** between **3pm** and **4pm** for chat at <https://zoom.us/j/106391104>.

Our **monthly** Zoom gatherings during December and January are:

- The **Earth-based Paths Exploration Group** meet on **Wednesdays 16 December** and **20 January** at **12.30pm**. The December theme is death, decay, and renewal. For the Zoom link email Eli at eli.roth.personal@gmail.com or find **Earth-Based Paths Exploration Group** on **Facebook**.
- The **Bereavement & Support Group** meet on **Saturdays 12 December** and **16 January** at **11am**. For more information email Jane at ja11951@outlook.com
- The **Poetry and Prose Reading for Pleasure Group** meet on **Saturdays 5 December** at **1pm** and **16 January** at **2pm**. The December theme is Winter holiday poems, please bring 2 poems on that theme. In January Jane Aaronson will introduce poems by Wendy Cope.
- The **Journaling Group** meet on **Sunday 30 January** at **2pm**. For more information email Julia at juliamacintosh.uk@gmail.com

Reflections from the Convener

All of us will remember 2020. A year of many challenges, restrictions, and constraints. And yet, for me, there have also been benefits during this difficult time, largely through connection to our caring community. Sunday services on Zoom are the highlight of my week: singing hymns; sharing thoughts; hearing the contributions from young and old; seeing familiar, smiling faces; and meeting new friends. All these things have helped restore my sense of equilibrium during these turbulent times, and perhaps they have for you too.

While I miss not being together physically, Zoom has provided a most accessible alternative. It has enabled us to share our gatherings with folk from around the world (including those from other Unitarian communities). I'm excited to hear that our Ministry Team is planning Sunday services involving speakers from overseas (who would not otherwise be able to be with us) in 2021.

Alongside, Council have plans for further outreach and growth in the year ahead, and while it is regrettable that we have not been able to use our church building during much of this year, we have found that the building neither defines us, nor determines our future development. We have worked hard over many years to generate income through lettings and events to support the building. The challenge we now face, akin to many others in a similar circumstance, is how we ensure our growing community is financially sustainable in the longer term, whatever challenging economic circumstances we may face.

In the meantime, we celebrate our most important asset: you! People are the beating heart of our community. You matter to us. As we approach Christmas please keep yourself safe and your loved ones close. I wish you all a safe and peaceful Christmas and a less challenging year ahead.

Mary McKenna
Convener



Lighting the Chalice

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

Ruth Bartram, 15 November

Winter and darkness are upon us. I was quite worried about this time of the year. I have spent already a lot of time in the house on my own due to Covid - as have probably many of you too. But then I listened to two radio programmes*. One was about darkness and one about the winter. Both reminded us of the importance of this time for nature as a time of rest and renewal. It is important for nature to be ready in spring to start up again. Accordingly, the programmes encouraged us to embrace this time of darkness, the winter. So I decided to do just that, to get out in darkness and when it is miserable outside. I am also getting the advent decorations out - against the odds. Make my home cosy, enjoying the candles. I have a lot to be grateful for: friends; family; this community to support me; food on the table; and a roof over my head. I therefore light a candle for all those people who are missing one of these components.

*I recommend these programmes, available on BBC Sounds: Out of Doors - episodes "Embracing Winter" and "Hello Darkness My Old Friend".

Barbara Clifford at the Remembrance Day Service led by Rev John Clifford, 8 November

I am aware that so many of us present this morning have witnessed the effects of wars, from the first and second World Wars to so many recent major conflicts around the world, many involving British troops: these have caused so much suffering to people through death but also through illness, poverty, destruction, and causing so many orphans. During our two minute silence, let us remember and pray for all those that have suffered because of war.

Elaine Edwards & Duncan Dornan, 8 November

The poppy as a symbol of remembrance, as many of you will know, was inspired by the WW1 poem "In Flanders Fields" by John McCrae, but before it became the emblem we know today - as a mark of remembrance the government issued Memorial Plaques.

Known as Death Pennies, they were introduced in 1919 and sent to the next of kin of all British and Empire service personnel who were killed as a result of the war.

By this time though the red poppy, as we know it today, was a symbol of loss and gratitude to those who sacrificed their lives. The first poppy day in Britain was in 1921. Poppies were sold in Canada, USA, Australia and New Zealand, all with their own design, whilst France had the Cornflower and Belgium the Margarine Daisy.

But over the past few decades the poppy has become somewhat controversial. In the 1970s it was even used in an advert by the National Front.

The white poppy that many of you will know was introduced in 1933 and, unlike the red poppy, represents all those affected by war with of course the additional message of peace. 2015 saw the introduction of the Black Poppy Rose to represent the African contribution to WW1.

Whatever one's feelings about wearing a poppy of whatever colour, the original intention of the red and the white poppies was always inclusiveness and an aim to help heal wounds, both literally and metaphorically.

Allow Yourself Time to Re-treat

An extract from an address given by our minister, Rev Peter Fairbrother, during our time together in community on 25 October.

In Christianity, retreat is commonly defined as a determined length of time spent away from one's normal life for the purpose of reconnecting with God through prayer. Jesus' fasting in the desert for forty days and forty nights is often cited as the biblical example.

Of course, Christians aren't the only ones to undertake spiritual retreats. It is a common practice for many faith paths. Retreats are considered essential in Buddhism, having been a common practice since the Vassa, or rainy season retreat, was established by the Buddha. Likewise, meditative retreats are an important practice in Sufism, the mystical path of Islam. The Sufi book *Journey to the Lord of Power*, published over 700 years ago, is a guide to the inner journey. Of course, there are many other examples...



Looking at the diversity of expressions of spiritual retreat across faiths, it is interesting to note the salient characteristics common to most, and how these might illuminate the advantages of retreat for ourselves. I've identified four key characteristics:

1. Retreat as **dedicated 'time out'**, removing ourselves from everyday pre-occupations, or 'distractions'.
2. Retreat as a means of **creating greater spaciousness** to facilitate a deeper connection to the God of our understanding. Perhaps linked to this, retreat provides us with opportunities to dedicate time to reflection, prayer, or meditation.
3. Retreat as a **counterpoint to our everyday experience**, to reawaken or reinvigorate our experience of being human. For example, we may retreat into solitude and silence as a break from the frenetic, or we may take a deep dive into intentional community and collective participatory experience when we yearn for deeper human connection.

And 4 there's something about the potency of retreat **to facilitate inner and outer transformation**, to that which facilitates change. This dimension brings to mind the image of each of us as acrobats traversing life's tightrope – letting go of what holds us back, and swinging towards those things that liberate us. The path isn't always a smooth one, sometimes we lose our purchase, sometimes we get bruised, but reaching out (often again and again and again) is one of the greatest acts of faith, hope, and trust that I can think of.

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In places like Loch Derg (for a little background see www.loughderg.org), the pilgrims there are not just letting go of their shoes for a few days, but relinquishing a sense of material comfort to re-encounter/ reconnect with other elements of human experience, to reawaken an understanding of peace, and of being at peace, as Spirit in fragile human form.

Perhaps the world of Loch Derg might feel a million miles away from the one we (are prepared to) inhabit, but retreats don't have to be extreme.

For me, I like to hyphenate the word retreat to re-treat; that is remembering to treat ourselves with dignity, care, with respect. For me re-treat is about stepping into choice and empowerment.

And yes, I might decide to retreat far from my physical home in order to receive certain forms of nurture, but retreat is something we can also incorporate into our everyday life too. We all can retreat if we tilt our perspective and approach to living.

We can retreat from abusive people and relationships, and those things that do us harm.

We can retreat from picking at our wounds and manifesting cyclical negative behaviours.

And we can make a conscious decision to dedicate 'time out' to enjoy the gift of living. In this, re-treat might be feet-up with a good book, or time lost in music. For me its often indulging in the escapism of one of my many Doctor Who DVDs! And why not? In all these things we are remembering to treat ourselves.

Part of our experience of re-treat may be to create greater spaciousness to be with the God of our understanding. During this time of pandemic restrictions, I like to re-treat into the spaciousness of nature, by being in parkland, woodland, and by the coast. Walking in the colours and textures of each season is, for me, is a way of making profound connection with the Divine. The great thing is that each of us can go on a nature re-treat whenever we choose. Whether by simply taking ourselves to our front door or looking out the kitchen window, there's always something to delight and inspire us. We are blessed with a beautiful world if we choose to see it.

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Equally, we can re-treat indoors. We may choose to take time each day to nurture ourselves through reflection, prayer, or meditation. Perhaps we may do this through the act of simply lighting a candle, or stepping into a quiet moment of conscious awareness, like mindful breathing.

We also re-treat when we affirm boundaries with others. This might be in articulating our need for solitude, and ringfencing time and physical space for it, even if it's only for a few minutes after the kids have gone to bed.

Pre-pandemic, I treated the hour-long bus journey from my home to our church on Castle Terrace as an opportunity to re-treat. Headphones on, favourite music playing, I would allow myself time to simply be with the music, letting my gaze drift over the passing Lothian landscapes as the bus made its way into the city.

And of course, we have the blessing of our community in which to re-treat. Our time together each Sunday for all intents and purposes is a time of re-treat from the everyday. Mindfulness@Lunchtime too, and all the other sacred spaces we intentionally create and share with each other, are opportunities to re-treat.

Indeed, there are so many opportunities to re-treat! And the great news is that most are freely available to us.

Friends, let us re-treat to those things that nourish us and sustain us.

To close, I'd like to offer you these words by Lama Willa Miller, who says:

"In a pandemic, self-isolation is called quarantine. In Buddhism, it is called retreat. From the cave of our home, like the meditators of ancient times, we can consciously kindle the lamp of compassion and connection."

In these dark days may our light shine ever brighter.



EDINBURGH FOOD PROJECT

XMAS APPEAL

2020

2020 has been a year of uncertainty, worry and stress for many people, with Covid-19 having an impact on everyone's day-to-day lives. For hundreds of people in Edinburgh it has meant accessing foodbank centre for the first time. Through the pandemic, Edinburgh Food Project has been providing a next day home delivery service to anyone, who through a lack of funds, was referred to their foodbank services. From April to October this year they provided 2,030 family parcels and 4,994 parcels for single people or couples through their referral partners.

To complement the home delivery service, Edinburgh Food Project adapted their Money Advice Service to provide a benefits and welfare telephone helpline. Since implementing the advice line their part-time Advisor has taken over 190 calls and has helped to maximise people's income by over £18,000 through benefit and grant applications.

The foodbank centres are now open again, and they are preparing for a busy Christmas. Edinburgh Food Project need as much support as they can get.

Ways you can support Edinburgh Food Project this Christmas:

Shop online through **Smile.Amazon** or **EasyFundraising** and choose Edinburgh Food Project as your good cause and a donation will be made to them

Make a Donation direct to Edinburgh Food Project, either by committing to a monthly payment through Virgin MoneyGiving, or by making a one-off donation of £5 by texting EFP33 to 70970

Fundraise with your colleagues or family – have a Christmas Jumper Day, run a Virtual Quiz, walk 10,000 steps a day – whatever takes your fancy!

Have a **Reverse Advent Calendar** and rather than eat a little chocolate for breakfast, why not add the items suggested below into a box and take it to Edinburgh Food Project, Unit 12 New Lairdship Yards, EH11 3UY. The warehouse is open until 22 December, but any Christmas items such as Christmas cake, mince pies etc should be with them by 11 December.

1 Rice	2 Custard	3 Tinned Fruit	4 Long Life Fruit Juice	5 Tinned Vegetables	6 Pot Noodle
7 Pulses	8 Tinned Cold Meat	9 Jam	10 Pasta Sauce	11 Rice	12 Cereal
13 Rice Pudding	14 Custard	15 Cereal	16 Chocolate	17 Coffee	18 Microwave Pasta
19 Snacks	20 Pasta Sauce	21 Jam	22 Long Life Fruit Juice	23 Tinned Fruit	24 Festive Treat

Edinburgh Placenames

A trip around Edinburgh with James MacDonald Reid

I find many of the local placenames in Edinburgh quite fascinating and often revealing. There are also many which are no longer in use or covered over by more recent developments. I started a Facebook group with the aim of sharing some of these names: their meanings and origins. I reckon some of the long forgotten or unused placenames in my own area (Portsburgh, on the hill above the West Port) are worthy of being brought back into use. I'm sure there are many more to find and revive!

Where Castle Terrace was constructed and the current Farmers' Market and carpark are situated was Orchardfield. It was one of the city's municipal orchards; not only for fruit trees but also for berries and crops such as cabbages, onions, garlic and kale. My end of Bread Street was formerly called Orchardfield Street and it had a direct passage leading down to the orchards.

This space just off King's Stables Road, below the castle, was the ground on which the jousting tournaments were held. Within the past few years most of the buildings have been knocked down and new ones built; only one of the old tenements was renovated and left to stand. Fortunately, they left the jousting yard intact and installed a rail which marks the divide that separated the knights when they were charging toward one another.



View from James' window on top of the rise known in old times as Elvanside, overlooking the buildings on Pocketslieve.

The hill upon which my tenement on Bread Street was built was called Elvanside, but that name hasn't survived in any of the streets, buildings or shops. The slope going down from here to just below the castle — on which Argyle House and Webstersland were constructed — was Pocketslieve. That too is no longer in use. Apparently the first element (Pocket) was originally Polcat (Polecat) and I assume that the second element (sieve) was from the Celtic word (sliabh in modern Gaelic) for a slope. I like the idea that my neighbourhood was noted for elves and polecats! On the other hand, 'elvan' is also a type of flint stone.

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There is a small vennel near the junction of Morrison Street and Lothian Road which extends to the back of Filmhouse. This is called "Chuckie Pend". A chuckie is a chicken; a pend is an arched passageway. Just off Fountainbridge near Earl Grey Street is a similar passage called Thornybauk. Great names!

Tollcross was originally near the spot which became known as Main Point. It was later shifted to the southwest where it is now. There is no evidence that there was ever a toll booth at the current Tollcross.

Where the canal now passes by Fountainbridge there was a rope-making factory. It was quite long because it involved horses going up and down to twist the ropes. The family who owned and ran it was called Gilmore. When the canal was built the ropeworks were destroyed but the family name was preserved in Gilmore Place.

There are buildings and short places in the south side of Tollcross (around the Cameo Cinema) which are called Lochrin. Apparently this came about from the time when there was a small loch in the Meadows. If there was a particularly rainy season the excess water would overflow the loch and run down the slope which became known as The Lochrin = "the loch run". I picked that up from oral lore; asking people whose families had lived here for countless generations. I haven't found any written accounts of that story.

Drumdryan Street is pure Gaelic: 'druim' is a ridge, 'droigheann' is bramble. So Drumdryan means Brambleridge.

The area which has been built over and newly named "Quartermile" was formerly known as "The High Riggs". There's still a short street nearby which bears that name. But originally it encompassed the entire area between The Meadows and Lauriston Place. As the name suggests, it was mostly cultivated land.



The Academy for the Deaf and Dumb was founded by Thomas Braidwood in 1746, possibly the first in the world. The building became known as 'Dumbie House' and the area as Dumbiedykes. Local oral lore has it that the home for deafmutes on that spot predates Braidwood's foundation by many years and that it was originally set up by the order of nuns known as The Sisters of Bethlehem who looked after people with disabilities. It is that order which gave us the word 'Bedlam' from 'Bethlehem'.

On the western slope of Arthur's Seat are the Salisbury Craggs. Tour guides tend to say these were so called because the English Earl of Salisbury used the craggs to place his cannons when firing upon the city. But the name predates that attack by centuries. The Salis- part is Celtic for willow, and the -bury part was originally -brae (a steep slope), also Celtic. So it's simply the Celtic version of the same placename as occurs on the opposite side of Arthur's Seat; Willowbrae. Nevertheless, the placename of Salisbury in southwest England probably also is of Celtic origin with the same meaning.

Quiz Time!

On the corner of Spittal Street and Grindlay Street (entered by the stair in the latter) is a flat which was the lifelong home of a very famous Edinburgh character. **Who was it?**

Soup Glorious Soup!

Curried Parsnip Soup

A spicy, seasonal, winter warmer from Phil Nugent



Ingredients:

750g Parsnips – about 6 or 7 peeled and diced
1 Medium Potato peeled and diced
2 tbsp Olive Oil
2 tsp of Garam Masala
1 Large Onion finely chopped
2 Garlic Cloves crushed
2 Bay Leaves
1 Litre of Vegetable or Chicken Stock
Sour Cream/Double Cream/Chopped Fresh Coriander to serve (all optional)

Method:

Heat the oil in a large saucepan over a medium-high heat and fry the onion for 7-8 minutes until softening. Add the garlic to the onion pan and cook for 2 minutes more.

Add the garam masala and bay leaves and stir for a minute, then add the chopped parsnips and potato, frying and turning in the fragrant oil for five minutes before adding the stock.

Bring to the boil, then turn down to a medium heat and cook for 30 minutes or until the vegetables are tender.

Remove and discard the bay leaves, then whizz the soup using a stick blender (or in a blender with the cap removed and a folded tea towel held over to stop the hot soup exploding out) until smooth. Season with salt and freshly ground black pepper.

Serve with a swirl of double cream or sour cream and garnish with chopped coriander.

Virtual Connections

Monika Strell, an Interfaith Minister based in the very far North of the Scottish Highlands, recently led an online service at St Mark's.

This is the first time I have the honour of leading a service for you but I've had the pleasure of joining you online since April. What brought me to Zoom? I've had an interest in Unitarians for a long time but because of where I live, I couldn't take this connection further...until this spring when you moved online. And suddenly there was this door, this link to click so I could overcome the challenge of distance. I'm glad to still be here.

Why am I talking about *Virtual Connection* today other than because this is your six-month Zoom anniversary? Well, when I'm not a minister, which means most of the time, for 15 years or so I've been working in the online world in various roles and settings. For a long time I wasn't sure if I could somehow bring my online experience into my ministry, but there are some challenges and I think I owe it to minister to those who need guidance and support in this online maze to find satisfying ways to connect.

Connection is not about technology or tools today. What I really want us to explore is the human angle. Let's think about what we can all do, individually, and as a group, to make the online world, or at least our very own corner of it, a better place. I will share thoughts on how basic virtues, like courage, compassion, generosity, patience, love, and forgiveness, already an expression of our faith, can contribute.

But before I go into any of this, let us indeed celebrate this anniversary. Let me tell you, and I have hours and hours of virtual meetings every week for comparison, you *do* Zoom beautifully!

It starts with what Peter called the 'Joy of Unmuted Beginnings', the arrival with all the waving and calling names and the infectious joy — there is no better word than joy — of a community coming together.



I love seeing you arrive in what we called the 'square circle' during my online training as an Interfaith Minister. The gallery view on Zoom has edges but still shows a tightly packed circle. What is special is that when you attend services here, you bring yourself, but by coming online you're generously inviting all of us into your home too. As you appear on camera the window that shows you also opens a window to your very own personal space. I love seeing you surrounded by your books, in your kitchen, with your children, even the view from your window. It takes courage to share in this way and yet it creates this very special connection, because we are all in each other's homes on Sunday mornings.

The sense of community here continues, whether you join in, sit back, or whether you speak or type into chat or say thank you. Even when you simply nod or smile, you are present. You might feel these things are all normal and happen everywhere, but take my word for it, they don't!

So I would like to thank you all for making this possible, those who plan behind the scenes, hold the space on the day and those who bring themselves. You are making connections possible for me, and for the others who otherwise couldn't have been part of this community.

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Let's take a step back now and look at the bigger picture of our virtual lives. I don't know what kind of online life you lead. You may be an avid and happy user of Facebook/Twitter/Instagram, or you may have mixed feelings, but use these to connect to family and friends because it now is the only way to stay in touch. You may also shun online communication because it lacks something essential or you've had a bad experience.

As I've said, I've been working in this virtual medium a long time. I started as what was called an online facilitator. That had a beautiful ring to it, of bringing people together, of connecting them, and making sure they didn't fall out with each other. Then I was a moderator and community manager and online teacher, and they were also inherently positive roles -- I kept the web a clean and safe space and I helped to build communities for mutual support and brought knowledge to those who could otherwise not access it. And then came Facebook/Twitter/Instagram — what we now call Social Media — and what was initially mainly about personal relationships and connections with friends and family, quickly became a very busy and less personal place with businesses and news crowding in.

In all these roles I've seen the worst and the best of it. The worst language and images I cannot unsee, and yet incredible kindness and support also, which I will forever cherish because they demonstrate the potential of virtual connection.

What I've learned is that the quality of virtual connections is not about the tool, or the technology, or an algorithm, it's about people. It's about what you and I bring to the virtual table in terms of how we treat each other and about our true intent.

Before we come back to these basic questions of how to connect let's reflect on why we need to connect at all and why the means of connection inevitably had to change and become virtual.

We've always needed to connect to survive, and thrive, and support each other. This isn't just the case for humans, but we also see it in nature. We now know that trees communicate and share information and support through a web of fungi under their roots — the Wood Wide Web.

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Humans have always needed to share food and other resources. We've been hunter-gatherers and evolved to farming communities. It's a lot harder, if not impossible, to survive and thrive alone. We can still find this core need in virtual connections. The ongoing pandemic is a good example — Covid-19 Mutual support groups quickly appeared on Facebook and Whatsapp, connecting those who needed help with those who could provide it.

However, humans also need social connection. We need friends, family, acquaintances, and a link to a wider community. Without these, loneliness may make us ill or even threaten our survival. At the core of these social connections is the need to be loved but also seen.

Social Media and posting about your life often get bad press because sharing can be seen as vanity, angling for attention and validation. And whilst I accept the risk at one extreme end, at the other end of the spectrum I think there is something healthy about needing to be seen.

One of the exercises during my interfaith minister training was one called 'I see you, and I am here to be seen'. We stood face to face and spoke those words and it moved me profoundly. An American Psychologist states that "four minutes of eye contact brings people closer to each other better than everything else". It breaks down prejudices and barriers. Right now, we can't meet up and look each other in the eye for long. Yet if I put myself out there, to be seen, to connect, with everyday pictures of what I do, with little snippets of my everyday life, I enable *You* to see *Me*.

Virtual connections have become important because our lives have changed — we meet more people in our lifetime, and in different contexts. With the help of technology, we can keep links that would have previously been broken or have diluted to just an exchange of cards at Christmas.



My own story is a good example of how lives can change. I left my home country of Austria for short periods in my early twenties and for good when I was 27. I made connections everywhere I lived and stayed in touch when I moved on. I ultimately moved to a remote area with a population of about 800, where It takes me about one hour to drive from one end to the other. There aren't many people to meet for a coffee and even fewer with whom I share interests or feel an affinity for. But I don't feel isolated because I have virtual friends and, to me, they are as essential as friends I can meet in person. If you cut my virtual connection, you would put me into a very lonely place.

So how can we make our virtual connections more positive and constructive? And what can guide us in this search and practice.

First, it's worth remembering we're not looking for solutions from technology or from others. It's about what we can do. You and me and all of us.

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To start with we can of course find guidance and inspiration in all faith paths because almost all major spiritual traditions emphasise the importance of relating to each other with goodwill, or love. What else but relating to others is at the centre of any connection.

As I was searching for ways to pass on my views about better virtual connections, I was inspired by a lovely Presbyterian minister in the US who has written a book about Friending in a Virtual world. She bases all her thoughts about how to be a good friend in a virtual relationship on two pieces of writing from the New Testament, both about love. One of them is in Paul's First letter to the Corinthians.

I don't have the space and time she had in her book, so I've decided to go down the daring route of rewriting Paul's words to fit this talk. I took out Love, the love that needs to be at the centre of our virtual connections, and added 'When I am online' instead...

*When I am online I am patient, and I am kind. In my virtual connections
I do not envy, I do not brag, I am not arrogant.*

*When I am online I am not selfish or rude, I don't demand to get my own way,
I am not irritable, I don't bear grudges, I hardly even notice when others
do it wrong. In my virtual connections I am not happy with injustice,
but I rejoice when the truth wins out.*

*When I am online I am always supportive, always loyal, always hopeful,
and I always persevere.*

So how can we be loving and caring while sharing online? First, let us be in control and act with intent. It's tempting to treat our online connections like we are spectators. We might be tempted to sit back and watch what's happening on Facebook in the world of our friends and in groups, or pages we follow. We want to be entertained or proven right. But this can easily be changed to create virtual connections where we intend to give rather than take.

About two years ago I consciously changed the way I use Social Media, and rather than *spending* time I *invest* time. I ignore the readymade menu offered and seek out the friends who I really want to connect to. It takes longer but it makes the experience so much richer.

Because love is **kind** we need to make the effort to truly see and take in what others are sharing, a kind of virtual deep listening. So let's slow down as we scroll because then our friends' words or images get a chance to move from our minds to our hearts. My heart stores those memories much more readily than my brain!

Because loving virtual connection is *patient* and *loyal* and definitely not rude, we can accept that not everything others share may interest us. Even if it bores or annoys us -- if we respect our virtual connections we meet others where they are -- their kitchen or their garden, an unpleasant experience with a neighbour, ranting or venting, worries and heartaches, their love for sharing images of kittens. The sharing itself becomes the gift for us, not the content.

The same goes for accepting that some share more than others and, like in 'real life', those we love most might not be the most prolific sharers.

In the words of Sufi mystic Rumi, "*Be grateful for whoever comes, because each has been sent as a guide from beyond.*"

There is one caveat. When I invest time, I look for those who are unusually silent or invisible after they have shared something that they might be struggling with. It's the same as looking for those houses with the curtains drawn or the newspapers and post piling up. Why? What is happening? Is there somebody in need...alone? That is the moment to knock on the door, virtually!

Because our aim is to be supportive, we need to show appreciation for any connection, to make it obvious that we've listened. We show our loving attention with a like or a comment.

Continued on next page...

Finally, we need to remember that because love always perseveres when it gets difficult online, we don't despair or throw our connection away. There may be misunderstandings. Because we can't hear the tone of a voice or see facial expressions, we may misinterpret silence or walking away or being too busy to connect. We may doubt the virtual connection is viable or valuable or we blame the tool and technology. The collateral damage is the person we are in connection with.

Of course, genuinely good connections are dependent on giving and receiving. So, what about what *we* put out there? It really starts when you share a part of yourself virtually, in public or private. We need to offer insight into our life and our passions, but also our struggles and vulnerability. It takes courage to share but we all need to open our own curtains, we need to lower the fence around our garden, so people can not only see us and our lives but also talk to us over the fence. I mentioned earlier that one of the amazing things of virtual connections is the support we can receive, but to get this we must be willing to ask for help. If we both share and listen, then our virtual connections will succeed.

All of these things sound like work rather than fun but let's call it a labour of love.

A quote by an Indian monk and yogi sums up what for me is at the core of how to cultivate virtual connections:

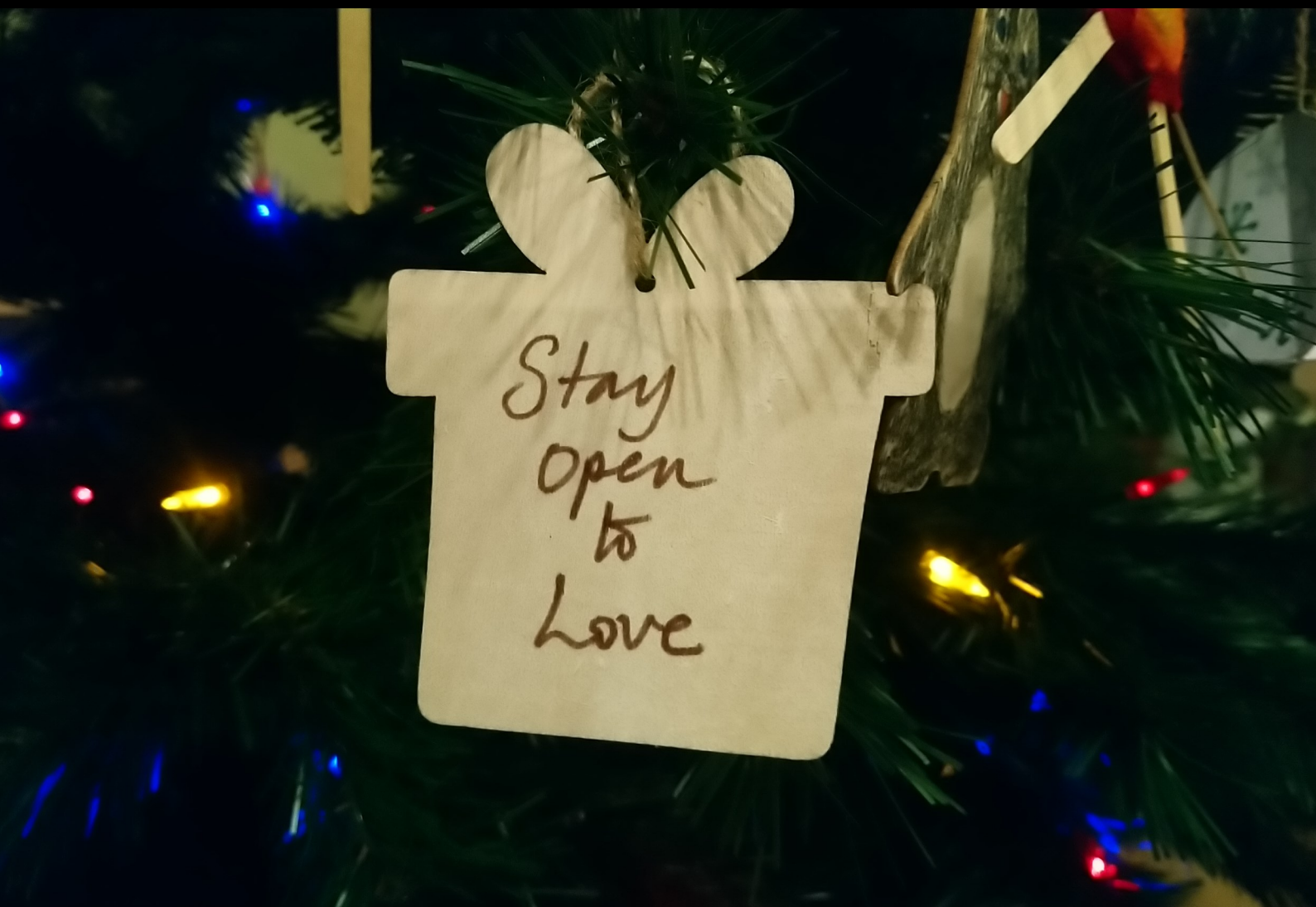
"There is a magnet in your heart that will attract true friends. That magnet is unselfishness, thinking of others first; when you learn to live for others, they will live for you" – Paramahansa Yogananda

To conclude, I'm delighted that many of you will be returning to meet at St Marks in the hopefully not too distant future and I also hope that one day I'll join you there. I'm also happy that the virtual connection will continue in some form. Until then let's enjoy what we have here and be grateful for this connection and all the connections we have in our lives.





Ordered before the pandemic, with delivery delayed because of it, our new church noticeboard was finally installed in October. Presently advertising our online services, we think it looks fabulous, and are looking forward to using it extensively to raise awareness of our community to city centre passers-by.



An Introduction to...Gary Richardson

I was delighted to be accepted as a St Mark's member recently and invited to write a little piece for Waymark. I have chosen to tell you about my journey to Castle Terrace, which started in Cornwall and crossed the Atlantic and back.

The story starts in Cornwall where I grew up. My mum's side of the family had a traditional Cornish, Wesleyan Methodist tradition and both she and her cousin, Stella, were brought up with this strict backdrop. Indeed, Stella's father was a Wesleyan Minister. When Stella was a young girl, her father decided to move the family to Truro, Nova Scotia where he was to be Minister. During my childhood, my brother, sister and I loved having an aunt in Canada. We all adored, "Auntie Canada", her lovely letters, seasonal gifts and her two visits home to England.

During my teenage years in the '70s and struggling to come to terms with my sexuality, I considered Stella, thousands of miles away, to be one of very few people that really understood me; yet nothing was ever said or ever needed to be said. Stella graduated and moved to Edmonton, Alberta where she became a very gifted teacher, laterally working with young people with special educational needs. The special connection I felt as a child was now benefitting other young people.

Many years passed and I was living in Stirling with my husband when news came in 2011, that Stella was to marry — for the first time — in her seventies. She was marrying a fellow long-standing Unitarian Church of Edmonton (www.uce.ca) member and I was not going to miss the wedding, come Hell or high water! My father, sister and I flew to Edmonton — my first visit to Canada, after all this time.

I liked what I saw and "felt" at Stella's church and I came to realise (how did I not know before?), that Stella had been a Chaplain there for eight years. After the wedding ceremony, we all went outside for photos in the garden of church building, which is a modern, out of town "unit". I noticed amongst the shrubs a little stone painted in rainbow Pride colours. Stella saw me looking down at the stone and very quietly and with great tenderness, said to me, "we're a welcoming congregation". That she noticed me deep in thought looking at the stone and her words, touched me greatly.



Upon return to Scotland, I investigated if there were Unitarians in Scotland and yes, there was a church in Edinburgh. Unfortunately, a mixture of apprehension and distance from home meant it took me until December of 2019 to start driving to Castle Terrace on a Sunday. I am so pleased that I did as I received such a warm welcome and felt very at home.

And so here I am, a new member who, thanks to Zoom, can join regularly, without the 80-mile round trip. Thank you, people of St Mark's for the welcome you extended to me and extend to all new members and thank you, Auntie Canada – I got here in the end.



Gary and his sister, Donna, congratulating Auntie Canada

Prayer for Tartan

Almighty Weaver,
Wrapped snugly round us against the cauld,
Your warp stretching through weft
And your weft interlacing with warp,
Weaving a heavenly plaid o' chequered cloth.

Keep us warmly in our plaid this day and all days,
And pardon us for keeping others in the cauld,
As we pardon those who have kept us in the cauld.
And spare us please from clannishness.

For tartan is for all clans,
For all races, for all nations,
People without end,
Everywhere! Everywhere! Everywhere!

Amen

Inspired by a poem in the Gaelic oral tradition

Composed by Rev Andrew Hill, former Minister of St Mark's Unitarian Church, Edinburgh
for people everywhere

Background image The Internationale Tartan designed by David McGill

Friday Night is Quiz Night!

Moira Holmes hosts the next quiz nights on **4 December** and **1 January** at **7pm**.
The Zoom details are:

Meeting ID: 889 0401 6144
Passcode: 938953

Quiz!

Children's Corner with Rachael King

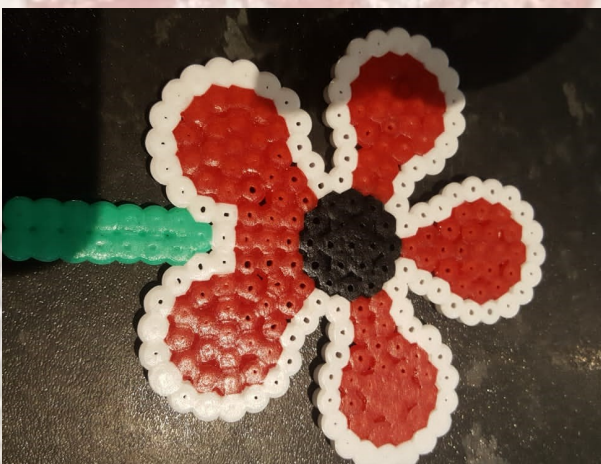
Hello and welcome to the Children's Corner!

It's been a busy few weeks for our younger friends. We enjoyed a half-term 'Bake-Off' over Zoom, and all the cakes and biscuits looked delicious, it's just a shame smell and taste do not translate well online.



The pictures above show Sam and Martha's cupcakes, and the McDonald family's creation of a 'Rice Crispie Chalice' (yes, I too was speechless when it was unveiled!)

We shared time together over Samhain and discussed the origins of the festival and plenty of Halloween themed jokes were shared. We were even treated to wee Catriona dressed as a pumpkin.



We also recognised Remembrance Sunday and Leo and Cora showed us the pebble they had decorated to form part of a path to the local War Memorial, Martha made a beautiful poppy from Hama beads. As ever, we are inspired by our young friends, their creativity, cheer and resilience really do keep us going!



'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.' (John 1:1)

'and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.' (John 1:14)

Image by Rev Peter Fairbrother