



# THE INQUIRER

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The voice of British and Irish Unitarians and Free Christians



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Unitarian leaders on what  
people of faith can do

# THE INQUIRER

The Unitarian and Free Christian Paper

Established in 1842, The Inquirer is the oldest nonconformist religious newspaper.

**“To promote a free and inquiring religion through the worship of God and the celebration of life; the service of humanity and respect for all creation; and the upholding of the liberal Christian tradition.”**

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## Inquiring Words...

‘Our world has become so interdependent that violent conflict between two countries inevitably impacts the rest of the world. War is out-dated – non-violence is the only way. We need to develop a sense of the oneness of humanity by considering other human beings as brothers and sisters. This is how we will build a more peaceful world.’

[The Dalai Lama on Ukraine](#)

### Let us burden each other

**A Unitarian friend who lives across the country sent a message recently. We'd exchanged pleasantries on Facebook and she followed up. She said she has been facing a terrible health challenge. I was saddened to learn that she hasn't been well, and wished there was something I could do – more than say a prayer and stay in touch.**

She explained she had not let me know sooner of her health problems, saying, ‘With all the dreadful things that keep happening in our world, I did not think it appropriate to burden anyone with my ills.’

I completely understand why. We've all done this to a certain extent. Asked how I was doing in lockdown, I'd say, ‘fine’, then point to all the people grieving, struggling with Covid, or teaching their kids at home while working full time. Compared to them I was ‘fine’.

Now, war. Our newspapers and televisions and phones are filled with images of children and mothers struggling to survive. Husbands and fathers cling to their wives and children one last time before facing an enemy already excelling at war crimes.

In the face of all that, we can just keep telling each other that we're ‘fine’ – even though the despair is right in front of us. We can discount our own grief and trauma and illness, because we are grateful not to be trudging toward a snowy border, gripping the limp, exhausted hand of a toddler, not knowing when we will next eat.

Or we can acknowledge that things in our lives are still hard. We can reach out and seek the support we need – particularly within our Unitarian movement, our beloved community. We can work and contribute to help refugees, and we can protest Putin's aggression. But we can also take care of each other. We have had two years of uncertainty, of illness, of isolation, of grief. None of that is easy. And, isolating ourselves further from each other, not sharing our own burdens – purely because other people are suffering worse – feels like just one more thing the pandemic is stealing from us.

Perhaps it is time for us to turn to each other and say, ‘actually, I'm not fine’ and share our burdens. It is when we express our vulnerability that we are able to know each other better, to genuinely love. And, if we are stronger within our community, we can do more for others.

**MC Burns**

Nancy Jay Crumbine on inventing the world while no one looks

# We are everywhere

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*The grounds for hope are in the shadows, in the people who are inventing the world while no one looks, who themselves don't know yet whether they will have any effect. Rebecca Solnit, Hope in the Dark*

**As we stand with Ukraine, reading her poetry, honouring her courage, we must connect Putin with his supporters – white supremacists worldwide, allies in cyberwars against democracies – but we must also connect ourselves with the visionary people who resist such terrorists.**

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In its many guises, oppression creeps into everything, from the poisonous spraying of our crops to the bombing of Kharkiv. So also, fascism's brave opponents creep into everything. And we are everywhere.

For always, what matters is less what happens to us than our response. And here we have the blessing of history from which to draw our strength. In particular, we have the courage of all those people off stage, those who are so often outsiders, the unusually quiet, the undiscovered who go off in the wrong direction, or so their teachers believe, and who come round to show us the way – in the never-ending cycles of having to be saved from fascism reappearing, oppression re-blossoming, when the soil reaches a certain poisonous temperature.

We stand today, with our blue and yellow ribbons and our scarves, our hearts broken, we stand with President Volodymyr Zelensky and his brave beloved country in the terrible days and weeks ahead. And while we do so, we must remember past and future times when the soil has been the right temperature for the opposite of war, times of creativity and wisdom, of resistance and activism. In dark times like these, we turn to those outsiders to learn, to keep us from despair, to pull us toward hope, to motivate

“We must remember past and future times when the soil has been the right temperature for the opposite of war, times of creativity and wisdom, of resistance and activism.”

us to resist, each in our own particular way.

To name the three closest to my heart: Rachel Carson against the chemical industry, Jane Goodall against the traditional animal science of her times, Greta Thunberg against the empty rhetoric of ‘Blah blah blah’. Carson, a minor editor in the US Fish and Game Department, a female scientist ignored. Goodall, off in the wilds of Tanzania quietly taking notes at which the scientific community will scoff.

Thunberg, a mere child, sitting alone doing her homework on the steps of the Swedish parliament building.

In the 1950s we thought nuclear Armageddon was imminent. We worried about sending our sons to Korea. We were haunted by Joseph McCarthy's witch hunt for domestic communists. It was the generation, as William Styron wrote, ‘... subtly traumatised not only by what we had been through, not by the almost unimaginable presence of the bomb, but by the realisation that the entire mess was not finished after all. There was now the Cold War to face: and its clammy presence oozed into our nights and days.’

It was during that traumatised time that Jane Goodall took her first trip to Africa and Rachel Carson began

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“We must at the same time remember what we love, must let ourselves be lost in that love, our life’s work, to let it invent the world in ways we will never know.”

**Shown left:** Women hold hands at the Medyka crossing point in the Polish-Ukrainian borderland on 6 March. DEC photo by Anthony Upton

Continued from page 3 >

researching *Silent Spring*. Neither of these women were taken up with the fears of the day, neither were glued to the morning news, wasting hours of creative time, as some of us do. Neither, in fact, looked in the direction everyone else was looking. They were instead courageously doing the work they loved, writing about what they had brought themselves to know – to know thoroughly – as no one else had ever paid such attention. It is that attention, that full-on obsessive attention, that single-minded love that brought them to change the way we all think today – of the planet, of climate and habitat, of ethics itself. And so with Greta, her neuro-uniqueness allowing her unfettered access to the facts and the necessity of action.

### Explore what we love

Outsiders all, three key women in our planet’s struggle to survive, Carson, Goodall and Thunberg teach us about essential diversity, spirituality, and our own clarity of purpose. They argue for a radical shift in how we inhabit the planet, each articulating the danger of science and technology unmoored from ethical responsibility. They have been outsiders – as females, as wanderers, Jane off in Africa; Rachel, a shy government science editor, a woman in an almost entirely male world – writing alone, way into the night, in a little cottage on the Maine coast; Greta living the isolation of autism.

What they teach us is to explore what we love, commit to it with the passionate focus of a lover, ignore how odd others find us. The love of the sea leads to a David taking down Goliath, a woman already dying of cancer testifying before Congress. The love of animals transforms our understanding of all species. An obsessive focus on the science of climate change on the part of a desperately lonely, isolated and mute teenager leads to a worldwide social action.

And now here is President Zelensky – an actor, a comedian. Columnist Maureen Dowd wrote in *The New York Times*: ‘The 44-year-old Ukrainian president has become a symbol of bravery. His leadership has been defined by

nimble action against overwhelming odds, great one-liners like ‘I need ammunition, not a ride’, and modesty. As he said in his inauguration speech in 2019: “I would very much like for you to not have my portrait in your offices. No portraits! A president is not an icon, nor an idol. A president is not a portrait. Put photographs of your children there, instead. And before making any decision, look them in the eyes.”

### Our life’s work invents the world

We stand with Zelensky and Ukraine, with her people, oppressed over so many years, by fascists from both east and west, these people who now stand up to force the accounting of countries and leaders. They have already, in the first week of war, moved the dial on the balance of democracy and autocracy. Our world is utterly changed by their courage, by the small acts of kindness of their neighbours, in the poetry being written as we speak, in the subway tunnels and cellars of ordinary people.

We must not skip over or turn in any way from the heart break and the horror of these days. But we must at the same time remember what we love, must let ourselves be lost in that love, our life’s work, to let it invent the world in ways we will never know.

*The grounds for hope are in the shadows, in we who are inventing the world while no one looks, who ourselves do not know yet whether we will have any effect.*



### Nancy Jay Crumbine

The Rev Dr Nancy Jay Crumbine is a Unitarian Universalist author and minister. A frequent speaker at Hucklow Summer School, she delivered the Essex Hall Lecture to the Unitarian General Assembly in 2005.

# Making peace wherever is in our reach

By Jane Blackall

Peace seems like it's out of our hands. 'People want peace,' said the Catholic Worker Dorothy Day, 'but not the things that make for peace.' That's challenging. What did she mean? I understand it is to say the conditions for peace – not just peace between warring nations but peace in every dimension of human existence and at every scale – is dependent on a whole lot of groundwork. This groundwork is taking place all over the planet, every single day of our lives, and it needs all of us to get stuck in. There might not be much you or I can do to directly influence what's happening in Ukraine but there is plenty we *could* do, just where we are, to play our part, and help nudge the unfolding human story towards greater peace and justice, for the sake of future generations.

## Prescription for a peacemaker

Dorothy Day said the 'things that make for peace' were daily, unstinting, unlimited works of mercy: 'to admonish the sinner, to instruct the ignorant, to counsel the doubtful, to comfort the sorrowful, to bear wrongs patiently, to forgive all injuries, and to pray for the living and the dead. The corporal works are to feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, to clothe the naked, to ransom the captive, to harbour the harbourless, to visit the sick, and to bury the dead.'

The words that Day used might not be language we would use today, but it's a powerful – and demanding – rule of life that she prescribes for the peacemaker. The groundwork consists of acts of mercy – meeting the needs of the worst-off – the poor, the marginalised, the oppressed – and bold acts of resistance and revolt against the injustices which made the people poor, marginalised and oppressed. It might come (relatively) easy to us to comfort the sorrowful or visit the sick. Perhaps we don't feed the hungry or clothe the naked with our own hands, or harbour the harbourless in our own homes, but I know many support charities who do this vital work.

## Attend to our moral compass

What about 'admonishing the sinner' and 'instructing the ignorant'? These phrases might be a little more jarring but I'd still argue we should embrace their spirit. We need to attend to our moral compass in all spheres of our lives and the life of the world we share. And when we discern that things are morally wrong – when people are behaving unjustly – causing harm to others, whether that's out of malice or ignorance, we need to call them on it. Even if our chances of righting that wrong or changing

that behaviour seem slim, there is value in speaking up, testifying to what is right, if only because of the influence we might exert, when we voice, 'this is not right, and it doesn't have to be this way'; 'another world is possible.' We need to name what's really going on, as we see it, and speak our truth out loud.

## Risk a difficult conversation

I'm not just thinking about large scale geopolitical rights and wrongs. I'm thinking about all the many injustices we witness every day, the harmful behaviours we encounter, including ones we might be tempted to just shrug sadly about, for a quiet life, rather than risk difficult conversations and confrontations. I'm thinking about scrutinising all the ways-we've-always-done-things and asking hard questions about what we might need to change, maybe change pretty radically, for the sake of the common good. And doing this at all scales of our lives – in our personal relationships, communities, society – truly seeking peace *and* justice (because we can't truly have one without the other). What power, privilege, or resources might we need to give up – or redistribute and share more equitably – to make peace a reality for future generations? It's tough stuff. No wonder people don't want 'the things that make for peace', as Day said.

It might not seem entirely obvious how this approach connects with our feelings and concerns about what's going on in Ukraine – or any of the other relentless horrors we witness in our world. And, laudable as our little-local-actions-for-peace in our own community might be, we can feel like they don't count for much, given the scale and complexity of what we're up against. A friend shared a quote on this matter, one which I found helpful and hopeful, and so I want to share it with you. It's by Ursula Wolfe-Rocca, an educator and activist, who simply wrote: It can be overwhelming to witness, experience, and take in all the injustices of the moment; the good news is that they're all connected. So, if your little corner of work involves pulling one of the threads, you're helping to unravel the whole damn cloth. Let us take heart from that image, and pull on whatever threads are in our reach, each doing our little bit to unravel the 'whole damn cloth' of injustice, and usher in the reign of peace that is our heart's desire. For the world needs each and every one of us to play our part as peacemakers in whatever way we can.

**The Rev Dr Jane Blackall is ministry co-ordinator at Essex Church, Kensington.**

# Keep a handle on hope

Where does it hurt? Everywhere. Everywhere. Everywhere.

It really does feel like that right now. Everywhere we look things are awful. The world is only just starting to pull itself out of the horror and sadness and weirdness of the pandemic, and over on the far side of the continent people are experiencing terror and fear the like of which most of us have never known, and war is still ravaging other countries, and here, at home, we are facing rising costs for essentials which are worrying for us all and which will be devastating for some.

The world feels broken, and we don't know what to do. Whatever faith we have – in God, in the essential benevolence of the world, in the supreme goodness of humanity – might well be shaken by what's happening. We know that there is always pain and suffering, but just right now it can seem that that's all there is. My theology is normally very sensible and rational. But a couple of years ago, just around the time the pandemic was about to hit us, when the news was full of the virus spreading across the world and then across Europe, when Australia was burning, and the seas themselves were on fire and we were being battered by storms and floods and we could almost see the coastlines eroding, and people were being displaced and being drowned trying to reach safety, I realised that I have something I now call my 3am theology. And that's a less positive one. At 3 in the morning, when I couldn't sleep, I would – and it's hard to admit this – start to wonder if it really was the end of the world. The end of time. Wondering if the horsemen were coming. Wondering if all those people who stand on the street – or hang out on Facebook – telling us the end is nigh might have been right after all. And then, of course, I'd fall asleep, and wake up in the light of day and pick up my normal theology again. I don't know if you have felt like that, or whether you're feeling it right now, with a new war erupting and a new group of people living in terror. But even if it doesn't go that far, I think we're all a bit sad, and all a bit scared. We don't know what to do, and we feel helpless. We are being bombarded with awful news, about

“I think we're all a bit sad, and all a bit scared. We don't know what to do, and we feel helpless.”

which, we feel, there is nothing we can do. There are things, though.

If you're feeling like that, I have some invitations for you.

Firstly, I invite you to allow those feelings to be there. When you need to, just for a while, let the pain and the grief and the anger be there with you. Lament.

Acknowledge the awfulness. If you believe in a spirit you can talk to (whether or not you get a response when you do) shout at it. If you call that spirit 'God', then shout at God. Tell God off. Sit with that pain and grief and anger. Do not think that feeling pain and grief and

anger is nothing. It isn't. And certainly do not think that feeling pain and grief and anger is wrong. It absolutely isn't. The things which are happening in the world justify it.

The practice of 'lamenting' is time-honoured and universal. We're just not very good at it. We live within a culture where we try not to show those sorts of feelings, and I think it's a shame.

In the poem from which 'Where does it hurt?' is paraphrased above, the poet Warsan Shire, a British/Somali woman who, herself, was a refugee says, 'i cried the way women on tv do, folding at the middle like a five pound note'.

(See: <https://tinyurl.com/shire-poem>)

Maybe we can't bring ourselves to that place, but we can certainly allow our tears and honour them. The Old Testament is full of people wailing at God.

And then, when you've acknowledged the sadness and the horror, I invite you – those of you who pray – to pray. If you don't pray, maybe you meditate, or maybe you just sit in quiet

spaces and think actively. Whatever you call what it is that you do, I invite you to do that. I don't mean just the prayers that ask some external something to fix something – though those are better than nothing, of course, but the prayers that listen to the promptings of the world, God, the spirit, or your conscience, and inspire you to act when maybe you thought there was no action to take. Listen to what you're being prompted towards. Maybe it's to do nothing – genuinely, it might be that. Maybe you'll be prompted to donate, or to support someone, or to send letters. Listen to what you, personally, are being prompted towards. And then act on that: we're seldom prompted to do something we can't do.

### **It's OK to be cross**

And the next invitation, is, sometimes, to ignore it. I know we feel like we shouldn't ignore it, because it's awful. But sometimes I genuinely think we have to. I'm not good at this. I fret, and I look at the news, and I listen to the radio and I see what's going on on Facebook – and not much of it is good. I think I need to stop sometimes. There are times, for all of us, when we can't take on any more than we're already carrying, and we are currently carrying a lot. So turn the news off for a while. Scroll past the online stories which raise your anxiety. Put the newspaper to one side. And don't feel guilty about it.

Because there's a lot that makes us feel guilty when the world feels like it does. I know that we can feel guilty when we turn the news off, and I know we can feel guilty when we do silly, fun, trivial things, or when we just get on with our lives, or when we get cross about things which are smaller than the current crisis in Ukraine.

### **Do carry on**

But my next invitation is exactly to do all those things. Carry on – in this world which is hurting – doing all those things you normally do. Watch nonsense on the telly, play games on your computer, go for walks, laugh at silly jokes, make shopping lists. And take joy in them. And do not feel guilt. The world always goes on, and it's really important that we go on with it. Don't feel that you're not allowed your smaller unhappinesses, either. Feel sorry for yourself when you have a cold. Complain when your toast burns. Get cross when the person in front of you doesn't hold the door open. And, again, don't feel guilty.

We have to carry on living lives as normal as we can amidst all this sadness, even if we have to pause sometimes to fully fear the sadness and scaredness.

And my last invitations are these: feel the sadness, definitely, but try not to let the sadness be all there is. Keep a handle on hope. Even when there isn't much optimism, there is always hope. And look out for those things which you can do. However little it may be, there will be something you can do.

**The Rev Kate Brady McKenna is minister with Bury Unitarians.**

# Love is calling

**By Daniel Costley**

There has been an amazing response to the carnage in Ukraine. The outpouring of love and compassion by the general public to the displaced, the refugees, and other Ukrainians suffering from the invasion has been phenomenal. A reminder of the potential held within all humanity to do good. In stark contrast to those who have fermented, directed and supported the invasion, there are millions upon millions more people who are opposed, and are prepared to do something about it.

It is a human example of the transcendent love we all yearn for. In a meditation by Unitarian Universalist writer Jess Reynolds, in their book *Love Like Thunder* (Skinner House Books), 'Love is Calling', we hear of the desperation of a living Love.

*Love is calling for liberation.  
Love is hoarse from calling,  
Her voice raw from the decades  
She has spent chanting at protests  
And speaking from pulpits  
And singing the songs of freedom.  
Love is weeping into a white candle  
She cups in her hands at a vigil  
For one more Black life lost,  
Ripped away, gunned down, forgotten.  
She is holding the hand of a grieving mother  
And praying aloud for peace.  
This is where Love shows up,  
Where Love has always shown up.  
She is tugging at our hands and sleeves,  
Begging us to lay down our egos  
And take up our courage  
And dedicate our lives to justice.*

Not written for Ukraine, but this reflection calls on a universal truth that, in the time of deepest oppression, in the time of murder, in the time of protest and devotion, this is where Love shows up; this is where Love has always shown up. Love works through us. Love finds us, love is within us, love inspires us. It is through human hands that love and goodness might find its way. If we can lay down our egos, take up our courage, and dedicate our lives to justice, then we too can bring love to the world.

Invading, conquering, oppressing people. Tyrannical acts. These are not the acts of those who seek to bring God, Good or Love to the world. They are, by definition, the acts of a tyrant.

It is in our response to these acts that we play our part in allowing love to tug us into the real world. To give us courage. To support us in our work for justice. We cannot wait the 40 of Lent days for Love to appear. Our courage and compassion is needed now, as we seek to resist tyranny with Love.

**The Rev Daniel Costley is a Unitarian minister to the Kent congregations of Dover, Sevenoaks and Tenterden.**

# Big year for anniversaries

We are in what seems to be a year of significant anniversaries. My guess is that most if not all Unitarians will look kindly upon the Queen when her Platinum Anniversary is enjoyed with a holiday in June. We do have, I think, a small number of republicans among us, but none that would stridently oppose the celebration of her reign, remarkable not simply for its length. I know of congregations that have invited members of the royal family to attend a significant event or anniversary. The General Assembly is held in sufficient regard in royal circles for us to receive occasional invitations to a Buckingham Palace garden party. My wife and I are among those who have enjoyed one such event. More significantly, I'm glad we are included with the faiths that are represented at the Remembrance Day Ceremony at the Cenotaph in Whitehall, when the monarch lays a wreath. Each year we watch the TV broadcast of this moving event, and listen hopefully for a mention of the General Assembly by the BBC commentator. Perhaps this year's anniversary will prompt some sermons. May I suggest a title? 'Patriotism, Nationalism and Unitarianism'.

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Our relationship with the BBC is less comfortable. As we celebrate its centenary this year, there is an opportunity to consider its value, and ponder the best way to fund it. I am a lifelong fan, having listened devoutly to *Children's Hour* in my boyhood. I have a memory of laughing out loud, aged about 6 or 7 years, at an episode of *Toytown*. Older readers will recall with me the avuncular voice of Uncle Mac (Derek McCullough) introducing Larry the Lamb, Denis the Dachshund, Mr Growser, the Mayor, Captain Higgins and the other delightful characters. What prompted my chuckle was to hear the town's little oompah band marching off to the tune, 'Yes, We Have No Bananas'. I enjoyed especially the dramas, usually serialised on Fridays. This led on to listening to thrilling nightly serials like *Dick Barton*, *Special Agent*, then sitting quietly with my parents, enthralled by 'a good play on the wireless'. As broadcaster Clive Anderson once put it, 'It's like television, only the pictures are better.' Also, newscasts were always believable. In my pre-TV, postwar childhood it gave me a window onto the wide world. Our discomfort with the BBC is to do with their reluctance to allow Unitarians to broadcast worship services on Sundays, or *Thought for the Day* on weekdays. Despite considerable efforts in the past, these have occurred only rarely. When challenged about this, the BBC response has been that we are a small denomination. Nonetheless, I remain a loyal believer, and trust the commentators who tell us that for overall quality the BBC

## FUNNY OLD WORLD

By John Midgley



is the best in the world. Long may it be so and long may it remain independent.

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Not content with simply marking the centenary of the foundation of the Republic, 2022 is part of a whole decade of centenaries in Ireland. It's a complex period in Irish history, including the Struggle for Independence, the Civil War, the Foundation of the State and Partition. Our two Unitarian congregations in the Republic, Dublin and Cork, appear to be in good heart. Dublin is offering hybrid services (in person and zoom) on Sundays and a similar midweek reflection on Wednesdays, as well as other activities. Let's hope they can resume their special service to commemorate all those who have died in the Northern Ireland conflict since 1968. This service, suspended because of Covid, is normally held on Good Friday to mark the 1998 Belfast Agreement, which was instrumental in largely bringing the Northern Ireland Troubles to an end. The Cork congregation is still working hard on the upgrading of their 17th-century building. Their Facebook pages show heroic volunteers with brushes and rollers brightening the interior walls. Their services, led mainly by minister Mike O'Sullivan, who is celebrating a 5th anniversary since his induction, are also hybrid (in-person and on Facebook). Both congregations are well set up with online means of supporting their cause financially. The Limerick Fellowship has suspended its meetings, while holding out a small hope of revival. Will Irish Unitarians celebrate 2022 and all that? Patriotism and Nationalism mean something different there, especially with their very positive participation in the European Union.

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It's just 80 years since the Goya painting of the Duke of Wellington was stolen from the National Gallery. I can heartily recommend the film, *The Duke*, based on the story of the thief and his motivations. Starring Jim Broadbent and Helen Mirren, it presents as a caper, but the truths in the story are serious. It was a campaign to help the elderly poor. You will leave the cinema grateful and smiling. As well as the story itself, watch out for the passing Geordie gags. She says, 'Shall I put the kettle on?' He says, 'Well, aye pet, if you think it will go with that outfit.'



# Retreat and refresh

**Registration is now open for a Refresh Retreat, a contemplative gathering for Unitarians in the South West.**

It will be similar to one held last October, when about 20 gathered at The Hilfield Franciscan Friary, near Dorchester, for an uplifting weekend retreat called Refresh. Led by John Harley, and others we felt restored and nourished by being given time to contemplate and go deeper into ourselves. Surrounded by autumnal trees, fields and nature we unwound, shared, sang and danced. Some of the special workshops on offer were: Dances of Universal Peace; climate change concern; naked voice singing workshop; bring and share worship and a morning meditation in the secret garden. We ate at the refectory table alongside the community of friars and we slept in comfortable rooms looking out at the trees, accompanied by birdsong and the daily rhythm of life. It was a joy to get to know each other at a deeper level. Participants came from many corners of the Western Union and beyond. Within hours of arriving we were immediately absorbed into a new, accepting and caring circle.

It was a nourishing, healing and creative time and we plan to offer it annually.

Some comments from the feedback were: ‘Much silence, beautiful space, gorgeous space holding.’ ‘Wonderful venue, dance, singing, art.’ ‘Good mix of people. Small feedback groups were supportive.’ ‘Great balance of activities. Comfortable accommodation. Right amount of humans.’ ‘Community. Food, biscuits, trees, garden, accommodation, kitchen, leaders, participants.’ ‘Well organised, lovely venue, wonderful people, nourishing activities.’ ‘I think everything worked well. I loved it all. Was a fabulous experience.’

Another retreat is booked at Hilfield Friary for Friday – Sunday, 7-9 October. The cost is £150, including full vegetarian board. If you would like to book a place please request a booking form by email from Angelica Kennard, on [wucdo2019@gmail.com](mailto:wucdo2019@gmail.com) or ring 07837287366. The retreat is open to all. Places are limited to 18 residents for each occasion and bookings close on 1 August.

**John Harley, Alan and Linda Heeks, Lucy Starchild and Angelica Kennard**

## Linda Hart to speak

John Biddle’s legacy to us is his unwillingness to be silent about his deepest beliefs, and his clarity about the necessity of living a Godly life. What might this look like in our century? The Rev Dr Linda Hart blends her personal journey with an excavation of the ties between the trafficking in humans and the industrial north of England and suggests how we might create a more just legacy for the generations to come. She will speak on Zoom from 7-9pm on 23 March.

Linda is a Unitarian Universalist minister serving the Tahoma Unitarian Universalist Congregation in Tacoma, Washington. Over her nearly 40 years in ministry, she has served congregations in Vermont, Connecticut, Washington state and the Richmond and Putney Unitarian Church, as well as working in a community-based ministry in Chicago serving homeless teens. She shares her life with her husband Peter Teets, daughter Claire, and black Labrador Cooper. Her hands are often busy with knitting or writing poetry when she’s got a free moment.

Her talk will last 30 to 40 minutes and will be followed by a Q&A session and will be hosted by the Rev Mark Hutchinson. All are most welcome. Find the Zoom link here: <https://www.unitarian.org.uk/event/john-biddle-annual-event/>

## Share LGBTQ+ stories



On 22 March at 12.30pm, join Lizzie Kingston Harrison, General Assembly congregational connections lead, and the Rev Rory Castle Jones, communications officer, on Zoom to discuss an exciting new project around LGBTQ+ Unitarian stories, as we seek to gather, record, and share stories from the struggle for LGBTQ+ equality and inclusion within the Unitarian and Free Christian Churches – and our denomination’s contribution to LGBTQ+ equality in wider society, in the past, present and future.

Everyone is welcome for this hour-long call – whether you are an LGBTQ+ person or an ally, whether you helped your congregation to offer same-sex marriage ceremonies or yourself married your same-sex partner in a Unitarian church, whether you remember the historic struggles of the past or care passionately about LGBTQ+ inclusion today and in the future, all are welcome – we can’t wait to hear your stories! Find the Zoom link here: <https://www.unitarian.org.uk/event/lgbt-unitarian-stories/>

**Photo by Daniel Costley**

# Letters to the Editor



## Avoiding sacred cows

Gavin Lloyd  
Bicester

**To the Editor** › I write in support of the timely letter of the Rev Sue Woolley (*Inquirer*, 5 March) about the design of the new chalice symbol and her

appeal to focus on what the symbol of the flaming chalice stands for. I can do no better than quote these words from the Roman Catholic Benedictine Monk Bede Griffiths:

*The use of symbols points to the mystery of human life, that is, that we are pushed beyond ourselves, beyond our limits. Symbols are powerful signposts towards reality, signs which make reality present to us but which can never exhaust and manifest reality in all its fullness. Each religion has its sacred and revered symbols. A contemplative awareness will take us beyond all these to the one reality with which we seek unity.*

Imagery of this kind is important, but its appeal will vary from person to person, and thank God it does. There would be no human progress or walk in faith without it. And, imagery has its 'sell-by date'. The early fish symbol of Jesus' followers was replaced by the cross, but in recent times has undergone a limited revival. But I would add a word of warning about images or symbols. They can become sacred cows, an end in themselves. Images yes; idolatry no.

**Shown left:** The Rev Bede Griffiths, also known as Swami Dayananda Saraswati



## Terrorists on the other side

Victor Anderson  
London

**To the Editor** › The recent letter labelling climate protestors as 'eco-terrorists' (*Inquirer*, 19 February) surely has things the wrong way round. Terrorists cause damage, death, and destruction. That's not something done by those peacefully blocking a road for a short time or marching along Whitehall with a samba band.

But it is an accurate description of the fossil fuel companies which don't simply threaten to destabilise the entire global atmosphere, but are rapidly driving ahead with doing so, bringing floods, fires, hurricanes, and loss of life in their wake. Let's understand who the real terrorists are!



## Symbol or logo?

Phil Silk  
Newcastle-Under-Lyme Unitarians

**To the Editor** › I think Sue Woolley (*Inquirer*, 5 March) has missed the main point of the resistance: individuals are free to create symbols. Congregations and districts can, too – if they are voted on by their officials (and ratified/supported by their members). This is what was missing in the sudden appearance of our group symbol. It was not supported by us before it was adopted. Perhaps it was intended as a business logo, not an official symbol? It stimulated some interest in chalices and symbols, anyway.

**Inquirer letters policy:** Letters should be succinct. It is preferable that they are sent by email to [inquirer@btinternet.com](mailto:inquirer@btinternet.com) Typewritten or legible handwritten submissions may be sent to the editor at 46A Newmarket Road, Cringleford, Norwich NR4 6UF. Letters should be signed with the writer's full name and, if applicable, the name of the group or congregation with which the writer is affiliated. A postal address and telephone number are required, for verification purposes. Letters will be edited for length and content and may appear in an excerpted form. Any affiliations listed with letter writers' names are for identification purposes only, and should not suggest the view expressed is representative of that body.

**Feargus O'Connor** and Unitarian leaders ask people of goodwill to save lives

# How to help



*Shown above: A 4-year-old Ukrainian refugee is welcomed in Poland. DEC photo by Adrienne Surprenant©*

**We are seeing a terrifying tragedy unfold before our eyes. The people of Ukraine are facing the worst disaster and Europe as a whole, our most dangerous political crisis since the Second World War. Many children's lives are in immediate danger, 7.5 million are directly affected by this rapidly escalating conflict. Homes, schools and hospitals have been damaged or destroyed.**

Water, electricity and other essential facilities have been badly disrupted. Landmines and other devastating weapons are killing many innocent civilians. Should not Unitarians and all people of goodwill feel morally impelled to act now to save lives?

Bombs rain down on Ukrainian cities. Innocent civilians, including defenceless women, children and the elderly, are subjected to incessant shelling and are forced to take cover in basements and shelters. They endure days without water, food and other basic supplies.

As of 9 March, Red Cross teams in Ukraine have distributed over 30,000 food and hygiene parcels and provided food, warm clothes, and other aid to around 8,000 people sheltering in metro stations. First aid training has also been delivered to over 2,000 people taking cover in metro stations and bomb shelters, so they have the skills to treat their loved ones if needed.

By donating to the British Red Cross Ukraine Crisis Appeal you will help Ukrainian victims of war by:

- Supporting families with food, warm clothing, first aid and medicines.
- Taking people to hospitals, transporting medical supplies and helping set up blood donation units.
- Supporting and funding hospitals and primary healthcare facilities, fire fighters and civil

protection units.

- Repairing homes, schools and community centres.
- Rebuilding or replacing Ukraine's vital infrastructure damaged or destroyed by war.

If you wish to respond to this urgent appeal please call: 0300 023 0820, visit: [redcross.org.uk/Ukraine](https://www.redcross.org.uk/Ukraine) or send a cheque made out to the British Red Cross and send it to British Red Cross, 44 Moorfields, London EC2Y 9AL. Please kindly earmark it to the British Red Cross Ukraine Crisis Appeal.

#### **Signed:**

**Anne Mills, president of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches**

**The Rev Sue Woolley, vice-president of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches and secretary of the Unitarian Peace Fellowship**

**The Rev John P Carter, president of the Unitarian Ministerial Fellowship and chair of the Unitarian Peace Fellowship**

**Robert Ince, global president of the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF), and member of the General Assembly Executive Committee**

**Derek McAuley, chair of the IARF British Chapter  
Plus many other Unitarian leaders.**

# A Prayer in Time of War: for Ukraine

For the people suffering under aggression and unjust war we ask the strength and the endurance to prevail. And may we find wise ways to help them do so.

For the aggressor and the tyrant we ask the grace of utter defeat, that they may learn humility and be freed from the folly of their arrogance, their inhumanity and their criminal ways.

For the human instruments of the oppressor and the warmonger, those fooled or forced into the commission of evil deeds, we ask the insight to see the wickedness and illegitimacy of their master's orders – and the courage to disobey them.

For ourselves and all humanity we ask for the impulse to be kind, to be generous to those driven from their homes and homeland, those in desperate need of welcome, food and shelter, those seeking refuge from the scourge of war, those cruelly touched by violence inflicted on them without valid reason or just cause.

For us all we ask for the love to heal all enmity and for the wisdom to bring us, weak and sinful as we are, to the way of peace with justice.

May it be so.

**Cliff Reed**

*Photo by Anselmo Pedraz via Pixabay*

