

ABERDEEN UNITARIANS

A CHURCH OF THE OPEN MIND



'And looked abroad on foreign lands'

CALENDAR
APRIL 2020

TERRACE VIEW

It seems hard to believe that just four weeks ago I was writing a Foreword about what we could learn from the beauty and flow of the River Dee, our Calendar photo last month. Since then it has felt like we are all being carried along in the rapids, unable to stop the tide of rising concern about the devastating effects of coronavirus and the subsequent dismantling of our lives as we have known them.

When I showed my husband the photo Sue has chosen for our shortened version of our Calendar this month, he told me how he had been in awe of the giraffes he had seen when he was travelling in Africa as a young man. He spent about a year travelling with friends and found the sight of graceful giraffes really spectacular as they crossed the roads in Kenya. Up to nineteen feet high, their legs alone are taller than most humans. My husband, David, has many wonderful photos from his year travelling by Land Rover and it struck me that these fantastic opportunities open to us in the past may never be possible in quite the same way again. Global travelling has been a factor in the fast spread of this current pandemic, and with concern already about the effects on our planet of so much flying, this disease may change our attitude to long distance travel far more radically than the environmental protests we have seen in recent years.

I am sure many of us will have felt bewildered in recent weeks by the sudden changes in our everyday lives. We live in a country where we have probably taken our freedom for granted so I for one have found it very hard to adjust to the limits now being placed on so many of our activities. It was with a heavy heart that we had to choose to close our church until it is safe to reopen, and I find it very hard to accept that I cannot visit our more isolated church members and friends. Both young and old have had their lives turned upside down, and feelings of grief, anger, fear and confusion abound.

The giraffe sculptures in our photo are outside the Children's hospital at Aberdeen Royal Infirmary and this helps to put all the change into perspective. Our already amazing health service is being stretched like never before and we can only be guided by its professionals and our scientific community to act as responsibly as we can to minimise a potentially catastrophic situation.

When I have felt particularly sad and anxious, I have been comforted by hearing about the acts of kindness taking place. Many community groups are being established to help vulnerable and isolated people. Many people are using their talents to reach out to others and provide solace. Unitarian church members across the UK have been striving to find ways to help their local communities and are being adaptable in how they provide a sense of spiritual connection to all those who need it. It is a steep learning curve for all of us, having never faced anything like this.

Most importantly, as always, we need to stay focused on compassion and kindness. For ourselves, self-care is vital to keep us strong and calm at such an uncertain time. For expressing our faith towards others, this is the true challenge of practising what we preach. This may just mean sending loving thoughts to all those suffering at this time, both from this illness and in other critical circumstances made worse by this pandemic, in particular for people who are homeless, refugees, those without families, or grieving for lost loved ones.

It may mean picking up the phone and keeping in touch with others to maintain loving connection. Some of us may be working in key roles, providing vital services to those in need or we may feel able to donate time or financial help to those suffering most.

Whoever we are and whatever we do we can bear in mind three questions:

Connection – how can we stay positively connected with others?

Contribution – how can we contribute something good in such difficult times?

Compassionate Care – how can we care kindly for ourselves and others so that we do not separate ourselves and judge others, but show understanding and appreciation that we are all in this together, imperfectly doing the best we can?

Our GA President, Celia Cartwright sent out a letter today which and she quoted a nurse who was physically and verbally abused on her way to work but who obviously has a forgiving heart:

“This is the time to look after each other and be kind to one another, in this time of global crisis; kindness is the most effective response.”

May we keep looking after one another and being kind to ourselves, our families, friends and wider communities. May kindness anchor us through this bewildering and sad time so that our hearts stay connected whatever happens.

Caroline Cormack

TAKE NOTE: APRIL 2020

During the current situation, we will not be holding Sunday services at Skene Terrace. If you would like to follow an online service, here are a selection of UK and Irish churches holding such events, with links to enable joining. Services are usually at 11.00 am.

Edinburgh Unitarians <https://zoom.us/j/459569403> .

Doncaster Unitarians <https://zoom.us/j/333352251>

Cross Street Chapel in Manchester <http://mixlr.com/crossstchapel/showreel/>

Cork Unitarian Church. Sunday service at 11.00 on their Facebook Page. Also broadcasting an excellent short programme of prayer nightly at 22.00 on the same page
<https://www.facebook.com/Unitarian-Church-Cork-122952697781880/>

There's a fuller list of countrywide services at this link

<https://unitariansinyorkshire.wordpress.com/unitarian-congregations-delivering-online-services>

Also worth viewing is a public Facebook group called UK Unitarians, on which many events are advertised.

LIVING OUR UNITARIAN FAITH AND KEEPING OUR SPIRITS UP THROUGH CORONAVIRUS

During these unprecedented times it is vital to find ways to cope and live which allow us to stay mentally and spiritually healthy as well as physically healthy. Many people are experiencing severe anxiety and this is understandable due to our lack of control over what is happening. Our evolutionary 'fight or flight' response is likely to be triggered and yet there is nowhere to run away to (in fact the complete opposite!) and no-one to fight. This can result in our behaviours changing so we may be more likely to experience insomnia, restlessness, anger with others and feeling generally more volatile emotionally.

HELPING YOURSELF

Particularly if you are feeling more anxious, find one breathing practice which helps calm you. Breathe in and out of your stomach area for two or three minutes with your out breath being a little longer than your in breath. Do this gently in a way which feels right for your body whenever you remember.

Phone someone who you can trust to listen to you and not judge you and make sure you stay connected with all of your most loving supportive family and friends in whatever way is safe at this time.

Do something creative with your hands. This can help us physically and emotionally so find something which you enjoy or feel drawn to trying. Colouring, drawing, baking, writing poetry, knitting, doing jigsaw puzzles are some simple things which calm us.

Eat regularly and healthily and if you can still go outside then do so.

Try to avoid – watching too much news especially if it increases your anxiety and avoid any negative habits such as drinking too much or staying up all night.

Listen to or watch anything you can find which is funny or light-hearted to balance the worrying news we cannot avoid hearing. I have found some radio programmes very uplifting to listen to – there was a lovely story on a phone in on Radio 4 yesterday when an elderly woman rang to say she had been in touch with her estranged son after many years of not speaking when he had realised life was too short to let their estrangement continue.

Write a list of all the things that you normally enjoy and find a way of timetabling your day to include any of these things which are still possible for you to do, especially some form of exercise even if it is just a dance round the living room!

HELPING OTHERS

Our wider Unitarian movement has been busy learning how to hold online services and find ways of sharing spiritual inspiration at a distance. Details of links for online Unitarian resources can be found elsewhere in our Calendar. They can provide us with a vital connection to our wider Unitarian community as well as giving ideas of how we can keep helping others.

Locally, Community groups are being quickly established to help those who are vulnerable in our city. Thousands of people have signed up to a Facebook group called 'Aberdeen Helping Hands' and some of these people will be shopping for vital groceries and medicines needed by those who can't get out to the shops.

Aberdeen City Council's Communities Team have been asking for volunteers as well (for shopping for the vulnerable etc), and can be contacted by email at:
communities@aberdeencity.gov.uk

They have not issued a phone number at this time but are aiming to do that soon. If someone emails them they send a form which you complete and then they try to match you up to your local area so you are only travelling to help those living very locally.

Our church are keeping in regular phone contact with all those we have contact details for. There are a group of us who are happy to be contacted if anyone just wants a chat or needs some vital medicines or groceries delivered. Unfortunately we can no longer physically visit peoples' homes but at this time a few of us can still deliver to peoples' doorsteps or find someone who can. See the list of contact phone numbers below.

Some of us have also decided to spend a few minutes sitting in prayer/meditation/reflection each day at around 11am to send out loving thoughts to those who are struggling with this pandemic and its effects. You can do this in your own way but if you would like a guiding mantra you could think or say the following words (a simple version of a metta kindness meditation):

"May all beings be peaceful,
May all beings be happy
May all beings be safe and healthy
May all beings be free"

And/or you might like to try a Tonglen meditation where you think of others who are also feeling anxious or having challenges – breathing that in and breathing out kindness to them.

We hope by connecting in these different ways (phone calls, emails, shared meditation times, sharing of any helpful information and resources) we can maintain a sense of our church community whilst we cannot use the church building itself or meet together in person. Hopefully we can feel less alone and remember that we are all experiencing this together, and that love and kindness are always more deeply powerful than fear and change.

CONTACT LIST

Caroline Cormack – 01224 865799/07743959540
Judith and Noel McCullough – 01224 790093
Moir Macleod – 01224 790840
Brenda Rafferty – 01224 747777
Arthur Bruce – 01224 789777
Jess McCulloch – 01224 321706

If you would like to be on this contact list and have your phone number available to anyone feeling isolated, needing help or just wanting a chat, please let me know. **Caroline Cormack**

Tae a Virus

by a very distant cousin of Rabbie Burns

Twa months ago, we didna ken,
yer name or ocht about ye
But lots of things have changed since then,
I really must salute ye
Yer spreading rate is quite intense,
yer feeding like a gannet
Disruption caused is so immense,
ye've shaken oor wee planet.

Corona used tae be a beer,
they garnished it wi' limes
But noo it's filled us a' wi' fear
These days are scary times.
Nae shakin hawns, or peckin lips,
it's whit they a' advise
But scrub them weel, richt tae the tips,
that's how we'll a' survive

Just stay inside the hoose, ye bide
Nae sneakin oot for strolls
Just check the lavvy every hoor
And stock-take your loo rolls
Our holidays have been pit aff
Noo that's the Jet2 patter
Pit oan yer thermals, have a laugh
And paddle ' doon the waater '

Canary Isles, no for a while
Nae need for suntan cream
And a' because o this wee bug
We ken tae be..19
The boredom surely will set in,
But have a read, or doodle
Or plan yer menu for the month
Wi 95 pot noodles.

When these run oot, just look about
A change, it would be nice
We've beans and pasta By the ton
and twenty stane o rice.
So dinnae think ye'll wipe us oot
Aye true, a few have died
Bubonic, bird flu, and TB
They came, they left, they tried

Ye might be gallus noo ma freen
As ye jump fae cup tae cup
But when we get oor vaccine made
Yer number will be up.





CASTLES OF SCOTLAND

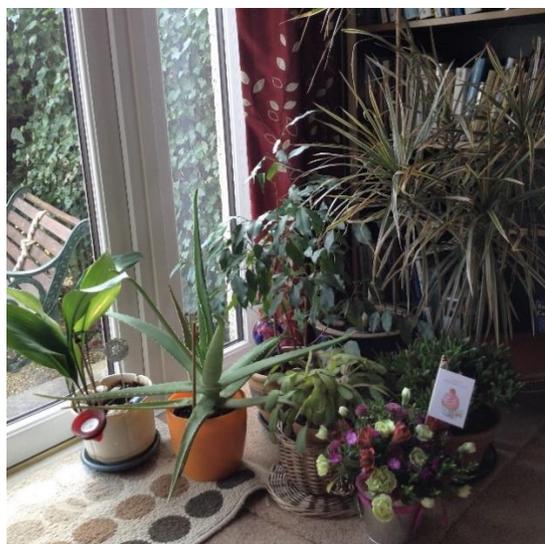
- 1 A bonnie place, with financial institutions and hills _____
- 2 Sounds like an admirable castle _____
- 3 Emmy loses a thousand amid confusion _____
- 4 GANFALING _____
- 5 Former M.P.? Yes, and former P.M. _____
- 6 Mother and baby doing fine _____
- 7 Almost murder the butter-maker _____
- 8 Onevie, twovie, need I go on? _____
- 9 Edinburgh worthy – not so worthy! _____
- 10 Sounds more like a retreat than a castle _____
- 11 UNCLEZA _____
- 12 This one's a piece of cake! _____
- 13 The raven is calling before the unfinished portal _____
- 14 A much simpler way to request admission _____
- 15 SHEILA _____
- 16 Stopped abstaining from meat, we hear _____
- 17 After the hill the tradesman, or perhaps a TV reporter _____
- 18 Not the walls, not the ceilings, but the _____
- 19 Agitate the fish _____
- 20 Theatrical ringer _____
- 21 Killed going south _____
- 22 NORTLIED _____
- 23 Endless board game surrounds a rodent _____
- 24 Nessie's haunt _____
- 25 ANTROTUND _____
- 26 Confused care precedes an old lark _____
- 27 Drab personnel going north for a very long time _____
- 28 Beat it, or follow it _____
- 29 ICARAVIGER _____
- 30 Sounds like a route from gate to door is necessary _____

Answers in next month's Calendar, but if you really can't wait, email sue@btopenworld.com

Journeying around my room

Quite by chance, I led a whole service about eighteen months ago on “How to cope with anything”, covering quite a number of tried and true methods of dealing with situations not of our choosing. I spoke about the method adopted by a French soldier serving in Turin, called Xavier de Maistre. In 1790 he was arrested as the result of fighting a duel and sentenced to six weeks house arrest, which I suppose is rather similar to social isolation. He used the time to write something that he called “A journey around my room”. Wearing his favourite pink and blue pyjamas, he described in minute detail his progress, from the bed to the mirror, past all the pictures and on to the sofa. You may think that sounds really odd, but even though many of the allusions to people from his own time are not really comprehensible to a modern reader, the stories he weaves around the smallest detail in his surroundings are still enjoyable.

As the editor, Alain de Botton, said:- “De Maistre's work springs from a profound and suggestive insight: that the pleasure we derive from journeys is perhaps dependent more on the mindset with which we travel than on the destination we travel to. If only we could apply a travelling mindset to our own locales, we might find these places becoming no less interesting than the high mountain passes and jungles of South America”

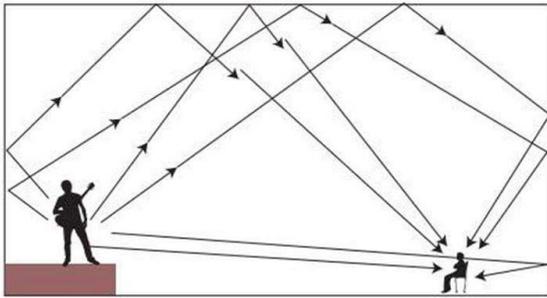


Well, who am I to argue with Alain de Botton? I thought I would give it a try, starting with just a corner of my living room, what I might call the “conservatory corner”. Here are my plants, starting at the twelve o'clock position, with Figgy, who has died back and been resurrected umpteen times over 30 years, so a real survivor. Moving clockwise, we have Arthur, a yucca who is almost as tall now as his namesake and thriving. He seems to prefer my new central heating system to the hot air one that was there before. Just below him is Bargain Betty. I don't know what she is, some sort of succulent, but she was the last of a batch of plants in Asda that I rescued at a bargain price. She seems grateful. To her left is Mum's Easter cactus, another one that dies back and resurrects regularly. Next is Vera, an aloe who is going to need a bigger pot very soon. Right by the window is someone of whom I take great care. When the children were smaller, I often used to do scavenger hunts round the house and one favourite clue was “Find the oldest person in the house”. This is the oldest person, an aspidistra known as “The Old Lady”. She belonged to my husband's granny and had pride of place in her parlour, so must be at least 150 years old. She sprouts new leaves fairly regularly, but she also loses them. I can't say she is my favourite in the looks stakes, but I feel obligated to keep her going. The blooms in the front are my lovely Mothering Sunday flowers, from my daughter. On the bench outside the window you can see my legacy from membership of the Guides – a brace applied to keep the wood from cracking. Can't say I ever thought my plaiting and whipping would be strong enough, but it worked and just becomes firmer with time.

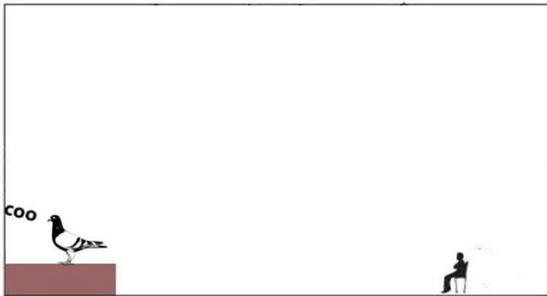
I look forward to a spate of “journeys round my room” from contributors, but if not, you can all await with eager anticipation a tour of my library next month, possibly followed by a viewing of my store cupboard. Happy social distancing!

PS Did you see on the news this morning about the chap who ran a marathon round his back garden? It was something like 829 laps! Between the house stairs and the back garden, I might manage a marathon walk. Slow going, though.

RAISING A SMILE



The sound from a musician on stage bounces off the auditorium walls to surround the audience.

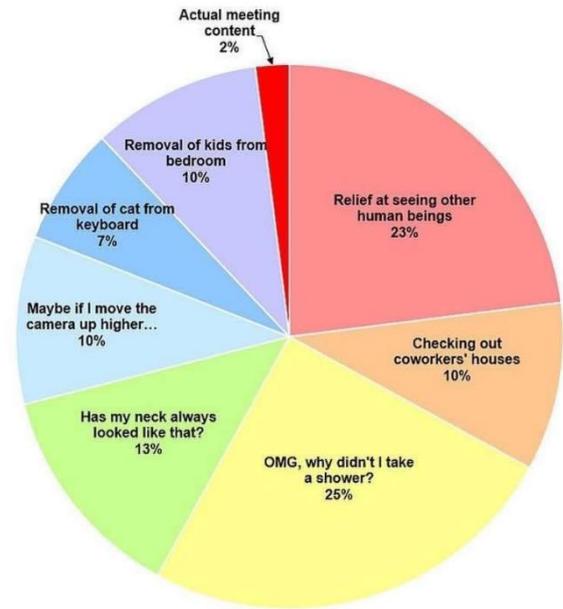


The sound from a pigeon on stage does not do this. The reason is a coo sticks.



Look, it's working!

Diagram of Zoom Meeting Attention Span



The amount of bad coronavirus jokes is starting to reach worrying numbers.

Some scientists claim it might become a pundemic.



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As Statutory Office Bearers –

John Robinson (Chairman) Alan Prosser (Treasurer) Bill Good (Secretary)

As Members –

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