

ABERDEEN UNITARIANS
A CHURCH OF THE OPEN MIND



CALENDAR
December 2019 - January 2020

TERRACE VIEW

Earlier this year we held a service on the theme of 'Birds and Bees' and we listened to the RSPB single called 'Let Nature Sing' which has become very popular. I noticed recently whilst in Union Square shopping centre that they were playing birdsong and it seemed to me that the atmosphere was happier and 'chirpier' than usual. I enjoy many types of bird coming to my bird feeders but one of my favourite and more frequent visitors is the robin so I was delighted to see them featured on our Calendar this month.

Their association with Winter and Christmas is a long one. They are one of the few birds who still sing beautifully in the Winter months and one Christmas story tells of how the robin got his red breast after burning himself on a fire that he fanned to keep the baby Jesus warm. In this story Mary praises the robin for his noble deed and his red breast is described as covering his "humble heart".

The evening before I found out that robins were going to front our Calendar this month, I had bought a children's book written by Scottish singer Karine Polwart entitled "A Wee Bird Was Watching" and, of course, it is about a robin! Her story is about a mother and her young daughter with no home, sheltering in a wood as they make a journey. They build a camp fire and the mother goes off to forage for food but a wolf starts approaching the little girl. Meanwhile a wee robin is watching everything that happens and just as the wolf starts to attack the girl, the bird flies at it and fans the flames of the fire so that the wolf gets injured and flees. In this story the robin also gets singed, hence its red breast.

In both stories of the robin's heroism, the bird is seen as a spiritual guardian, watching and helping when most needed.

The Christmas story is one of deep faith in angels being there to guard and assist us. I know that some Unitarians do believe in spiritual angels acting as our guides. Others take a more humanist view but may still appreciate the human 'angels' in our lives, ever there to lend a hand or give a comforting word when needed. Sadly our congregation has lost one of these human angels recently.

Christmas can be a time of joy and hope, and it can also feel painful and lonely for those who have lost their human angels. Love is even more vital at this time of year and I have been reflecting on some words sung by Karine Polwart at her concert. She was singing a Gerry Rafferty song entitled "Whatever's written in your heart, that's all that matters". This darker time of year can give us an opportunity to slow down and reflect more deeply on what is written in our own hearts and to cultivate love for ourselves and others as we do this.

So we send all our love to those who need it at this time and give thanks for the joy provided by life's most loving friends and family, including our friend, the robin!

Caroline Cormack

*Come now,
Come into the peace
Come into the warmth
Come to this place of attention
Come into the sacred.
Come to the calm
Come to the singing, and hearing, and being.*

*Come now,
Come from the busyness.
Come from the cold,
Come from the distractions
Come from the everyday
Come from the stress
Come from the shopping and cooking and doing.*

*Come now.
Come into the sacred
Come into community.
Come into this, our celebration of Christmas.*

Kate Brady McKenna

TAKE NOTE: DECEMBER 2019

Sun 1st	11.00 – 12.00	MORNING SERVICE WITH BARBARA CLIFFORD
Mon 2nd	7.30 – 9.30	Bon Accord Scrabble Club (Inkson Room)
Tues 3rd	10.30 – 12.30 7.00 – 8.00	NOTEWORTHY SINGING GROUP EVENING MEDITATION WITH CAROLINE
Wed 4th	10.00 – 12.00 12.30 – 1.15	TERRACE COMMUNITY CAFÉ LUNCH TIME MEDITATION WITH CAROLINE
Sat 7th	10.00 – 12.00	TERRACE COMMUNITY CAFÉ WITH JUDITH AND NOEL
Sun 8th	11.00 – 12.00	MORNING SERVICE WITH REV. CAROLINE CORMACK
Mon 9th	7.30 – 9.30	Bon Accord Scrabble Club (Inkson Room)
Tues 10th	7.00 – 8.00	EVENING MEDITATION WITH CAROLINE
Wed 11th.	10.00 – 12.00 12.30	TERRACE COMMUNITY CAFÉ WOMEN'S LEAGUE LUNCH – ASHVALE RESTAURANT
Frid 13th	6.00 – 7.00	REFLECTIVE SERVICE WITH CAROLINE “OPENING OUR HEARTS TO WINTER”
Sat 14th	10.00 – 12.00	TERRACE COMMUNITY CAFÉ WITH JEAN AND DOT
Sun 15th	11.00 – 12.00	MORNING SERVICE WITH SUE GOOD
Mon 16th	7.30 - 9.30.	Bon Accord Scrabble Club (Inkson Room)
Tues 17th	10.30 – 12.30	NOTEWORTHY SINGING GROUP
Wed 18th.	10.00 – 12.00	TERRACE COMMUNITY CAFÉ
Sat 21st	10.00 – 12.00	TERRACE COMMUNITY CAFÉ WITH ANITA AND BILL
Sun 22nd	11.00 – 12.00	CHRISTMAS SERVICE WITH REV CAROLINE CORMACK
Mon 23rd	7.30 - 9.30.	Bon Accord Scrabble Club (Inkson Room)
Sun 29th	11.00 – 12.00	NO SERVICE

DECEMBER FOLK

	Welcome: Bill Good		Collection: Kathleen Bruce
	TEAS	SUNDAY	FLOWERS
1st	SUE		DOT
8th	ANITA AND BILL		DOT
15th	JUDITH AND NOEL		DOT
22nd	RHONA AND MAUREEN		DOT

TAKE NOTE: JANUARY 2020

Sat 4th	10.00 – 12.00	NO TERRACE CAFÉ
Sun 5th	11.00 – 12.00	MORNING SERVICE WITH REV. CAROLINE CORMACK
Mon 6th	7.30 – 9.30	Bon Accord Scrabble Club (Inkson Room)
Wed 8th	10.00 – 12.00	TERRACE COMMUNITY CAFÉ
Sat 11th	10.00 – 12.00	TERRACE COMMUNITY CAFÉ WITH JUDITH AND NOEL
Sun 12th	11.00 – 12.00	MORNING SERVICE WITH SUE GOOD
Mon 13 th	7.30 - 9.30.	Bon Accord Scrabble Club (Inkson Room)
Tues 14th	10.30 – 12.00 7.00 – 8.00	NOTEWORTHY EVENING MEDITATION WITH CAROLINE
Wed 15th	10.00 – 12.00 12.30 – 1.30	TERRACE COMMUNITY CAFÉ LUNCHTIME MEDITATION WITH CAROLINE
Sat 18th	10.00 – 12.00	TERRACE COMMUNITY CAFÉ WITH MOIRA AND SUE
Sun 19th	11.00 – 12.00 12.30 – 3.00	MORNING SERVICE WITH REV. CAROLINE CORMACK COMMITTEE MEETING
Mon 20 th	7.30 - 9.30.	Bon Accord Scrabble Club (Inkson Room)
Wed 22nd	10.00 – 12.00	TERRACE COMMUNITY CAFE
Sat 25th	10.00 – 12.00	TERRACE COMMUNITY CAFÉ WITH JEAN AND DOT
Sun 26th	11.00 – 12.00	MORNING SERVICE WITH DR. JOHN ROBINSON
Mon 27 th	7.30 - 9.30.	Bon Accord Scrabble Club (Inkson Room)
Tues 28th	10.30 – 12.30	NOTEWORTHY
Wed 29th	10.00 – 12.00 12.00 – 2.00	TERRACE COMMUNITY CAFE KNIT, STITCH AND CHAT

JANUARY FOLK

Welcome: Bill Good

Collection: Kathleen Bruce

TEAS

SUNDAY

FLOWERS

5th
12th
19th
26th

ANITA AND JESS
KATHLEEN AND KATHLEEN
RHONA
SUE

PASTORAL GREETINGS

We send heartfelt Christmas greetings to all our Members and Friends who are unwell or unable to regularly join us for any reason at this special time of year.

You are still very much in our thoughts and we really appreciate your ongoing support for us.

Rev Caroline is very happy to take a phone call or come to anyone who would like a home visit.

PLEASE JUST PHONE CAROLINE ON 01224 865799.

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LOOKING BACK

SCOTTISH INTERFAITH WEEK

10th - 17th November

This year, Aberdeen Unitarians were involved with two interfaith events held in Aberdeen as part of Scottish Interfaith Week. The theme this year was "Eat, Share, Love".

The first event, called 'Dine and Dialogue' was attended by Dr Maureen Sier, Director of Interfaith Scotland. She spoke about why they had chosen this theme. They felt it has been a difficult and challenging year with everyone anxious about the climate crisis and Brexit uncertainty so Interfaith Scotland wanted to find a theme which would uplift everyone and bring people together in a positive way. They felt the idea of hospitality and hope would be a positive one and the young people on the committee wanted to use wording that all ages could relate to so they chose this simple wording 'Eat, Share, Love'.

Maureen pointed out that there is so much around the sharing of food that can make a difference in creating cohesive community. Coming together and eating together is very powerful. Maureen gave us examples of this - she particularly enjoyed attending an 'Iftar' in New York- a meal where muslims break their fast at the end of the day during Ramadan. She remembers the feeling of welcome she felt being invited into the heart of the muslim community in New York, seeing the real face of Islam, hospitality and warmth at a sad time when Islamophobia was growing.

Maureen also pointed out that when we are going through difficult and vulnerable times, being offered food can be incredibly comforting. She gave examples of this, including one where two different religious groups had been reconciled through offerings of food and kindness after a violent situation.

At the 'Dine and Dialogue' event, we also heard from a police Inspector Sheila McDerment who feels a more loving attitude is being brought into policing work. She runs a team which supports local communities in feeling safe and respected and making sure peoples' human rights are upheld. It is good to know that vulnerable groups and communities can turn to someone like her, particularly when they experience hate crime which unfortunately happens more often than is reported.

We also heard from a lovely woman called Gun and she is promoting the City of Sanctuary scheme which is based on hospitality, kindness and generosity. If enough organisations are providing supportive and welcoming spaces to people moving in to that city then they may be able to join this scheme.

On Saturday 16th November we held an interfaith gathering where we heard from people representing different faith groups and their thoughts on the theme of 'Eat, Share, Love'. There was some music, singing and Hindu dance and Arthur from our church played 'A Man's a Man For A' That' beautifully on his violin. It was clear that food is seen as an essential way of expressing care and love to others across different faith groups - it is at the heart of hospitality. And this sharing of perspectives was followed by a wonderful Food Mela which was very much about the sharing of food and also fund raising for the new building purchased by Aberdeen Hindu Temple Trust which will enable them to continue eating, sharing and loving together more regularly and easily.

Aberdeen Unitarians have been involved in interfaith work for many years and our involvement this year showed once again that at the heart of all faith, all humanity, the same simple concepts unite us and are the foundations of our peace and joy - coming together to share food with others, taking pleasure from that connection and expressing our love for others is really what the best of life is all about.

Caroline Cormack

LOOKING FORWARD

MEDITATION

EVENING MEDITATION

Second Tuesday of the month: **7- 8pm**

Tuesday 3rd December

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LUNCH TIME MEDITATION

Second Wednesday of the month. **12.30 – 1.15pm - except ** below.**

Wednesday 4th December**

Sessions are held upstairs in our relaxed Inkson Room, and include some mindful breathing techniques, relaxing music and guided meditation.

Come and enjoy some space and stillness and nurture your own well-being

REFLECTIVE SERVICES

Caroline will be holding an evening Reflective Service on **Friday 13th December at 6pm.** The theme will be "Opening our hearts to winter".

Everyone is very welcome.

FUTURE SERVICE INFORMATION

Sunday 22nd December at 11am – Our Christmas service.

NOTEWORTHY

The **December meetings will be on the 3rd and 17th at 10.30.**

The group is open to everyone, members and non-members alike. There is no audition so if you would just like to sing come along, you'll be made very welcome.

KNIT, STITCH AND CHAT

The group continues under the guidance of Jess McCulloch on the last Wednesday of the month. All are made very welcome, so please bring along your particular craft work to show to the group.

The next meeting will take place at 12.00 on January 29th 2020



2019 ANNIVERSARY APPEAL

At the end of September, we celebrated the 186th Anniversary of Unitarianism in the city of Aberdeen with a service led by GA Vice President, Mrs Anne Mills of Bury Unitarians.

It has long been our custom to have an **Anniversary Appeal** to help us maintain our pastoral work and our warm, welcoming building which was built in 1907.

The Appeal is still OPEN, until the end of the year. If you feel able to contribute to this appeal please get in touch with me on:

07484115246 or at **bill.good101@btopenworld.com** - to discuss your contribution.

Or send your donation directly to the church. Postal address on the back page.

WOMEN'S LEAGUE

The Women's League Christmas Lunch will be held at the Ashvale Restaurant on December 11th

"DRY GOODS" CHARITY DONATIONS

At a recent committee meeting it was agreed that to provide a focus for contributors, **we would set a date of the last Sunday in the uneven months, for the "Dry Goods Collection Box" contents** to be delivered to the selected charity, rather than let it sit there 'til full. Currently the selected Charity is the Aberdeen Cyrenians.

Our Choices Define Us

We had no choice in our existence or indeed in our genetic makeup yet for generations we have been informed, by theologians, psychologists and numerous philosophers, that our greatest possession is free-will as manifested in our freedom to choose. Indeed only a few weeks ago the Rev Lynne Readett, a retired Unitarian Minister in the Merseyside District, and a member of the Executive Committee of the General Assembly, in embracing the concept of free-will, put it thus: 'Our freedom to think and make our own choices, based on personal conscience is one of the greatest strengths we have'. She then went on to say that, for her, 'the ability to belong to a community and having the choice of religious perspective on matters of belief is paramount'.

But in the context of Christianity's origin, and its teaching to his disciples by Jesus, the freedom to choose was very limited. *The quote, 'I loved to choose and see my path, but now lead Thou me on',* attributed to the recently-canonised John Henry Newman is an example of the limited free will of orthodox Christianity. In fact the choice in the biblical message is between God, the spiritual, and mammon, the material, with the clear message that one couldn't have both and that God was the only safe option.

The power and influence of that most limiting of choices has been reflected down the ages by theologians and influential poets as, for example, William Butler Yeats.

*The intellect of man is forced to choose
Perfection of the life, or of the work.
And if it take the second must refuse,
A Heavenly mansion, raging in the dark.
When all the story's finished what's the news?
In luck, or out, the toil has left its mark.
That old perplexity an empty purse,
Or the day's vanity, the night's remorse.*

Interestingly, in the biblical narrative involving the choice between the spiritual and the material, Jesus used examples from nature to downplay the importance of the material by pointing out to his followers that even the material needs of the fowls of the air are taken care of; *'they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns yet your Heavenly Father feedeth them'*.

It is this nature-based pantheism which seems to me to have been an integral component of Jesus's ministry that I find intriguing in the context of our choosing to be Unitarians. Currently it is estimated that somewhere between a third and a half of Unitarians are pantheists who view the awesome power of nature as the most appropriate focus for their reverence.

In a recent article, also in *The Inquirer*, the Unitarian historian, Alun Ruston, in posing the question, 'Do Unitarians lack Imagination?', informs us that, in his view, people with a restricted over-materialistic view of things 'generally don't choose a religious path'. They lack the imagination possessed by those who choose religion. He then goes on to point out that critics of Unitarianism often claim we lack imagination and require proof in making decisions. We, in Alun Ruston's words, are seen by other faiths as feeding only the mind and not the heart. He even cites Wordsworth, whom I would regard as a Unitarian, in the Pantheist category, as having said, 'The Unitarian religion allows no room for imagination, and satisfies none of the cravings of soul'. Of course, Alun Ruston, with a lifetime of exposure to Unitarians and Unitarianism, doesn't go along with this view. He regards modern-day Unitarians as recognising that their lives cannot be governed solely by a strictly rational approach. If that was the case we would be unable 'to empathise with people whose experiences are very different to our own'. He does however accept that we need to ensure that our vision never becomes restricted by an over emphasis on factual information. We must leave room for the imaginative leaps that 'enliven and quicken our living'. This holds true not only in our Unitarian faith but in our personal lives too; the one should promote and enhance the power of the other. It is a merger of reason and imagination that amplifies our overall power for the creation of an orderly society.

It has, as its basis, a faith that is moulded by choices and choices that are moulded by faith. Its importance has long been appreciated as this extract from a recent article by the Scottish columnist, Gillian Bowditch, points out, 'the pursuit of an orderly society where citizens make positive life choices has been a political holy grail since Pericles, the Athenian Statesman, was in short chitons, i.e. trousers'.

Given the current world situation I feel I can justifiably claim that, after two- and- a- half thousand years of evolution arising from the choices that humankind has made, we have fallen far short of achieving an orderly society. Indeed, at present the political aim in Western Society appears to be the exact opposite. Reasoned debate and faith have been replaced by confrontation that is fuelled by aggressive and offensive language

directed to character assassination. This is stifling the art of diplomacy that is required to sustain an orderly society.

So why has what is claimed as the World's most advanced parliamentary system, chosen in its debating chamber, to display scenes of anarchy and disorder that modern science is showing us can become permanently embedded in our DNA and therefore is in danger of corroding the whole of our society?

In his book, 'A Brief History of Humankind', Yuval Noah Harari provides a commentary that goes some way to answering this question. He is of the view that despite our outstanding achievements we are now, more than ever, unsure of our goals. We have made choices that in the words of Harari, 'have advanced us from canoes to galleys to steamships to space shuttles, but nobody now knows where we're going. We are more powerful than ever before but have very little idea what to do with that power and, worse still, we seem to be more irresponsible than ever'. It is his view that as self-made gods with only the laws of physics to guide us we regard ourselves as 'accountable to no one'. Our quest for our comfort and amusement is involving choices that are eroding our ecosystems yet never achieving satisfaction. This to me explains, at least in part, why arrogance and aggression, arising from dissatisfaction, is becoming so prevalent.

In providing us with an ever-increasing number of options for choice, the commercial application of scientific advances has increased our individual expectations for perfection to a level that stifles our ability to compromise. This has resulted in what the American psychologist and Professor of Social Theory, Barry Schwartz, calls 'The Paradox of Choice'.

The idea that increasing choices make us feel better off and more satisfied seems logical but 'empirically it isn't true'. In fact, the opposite is the case. Too much choice generates anxiety, frustration and dissatisfaction. Having made a choice, we are left to ponder how much better life might have been if we had chosen differently. In orthodox Christianity the biblical choice is binary, either accept or reject it. In each case the consequences are clearly stated. But ponder for a moment on just how much confrontation, bloodshed and lost lives have resulted from the many ways in which humans have chosen to interpret what is acceptable to do in the name of Christianity. The religious editor of the Times Literary Supplement, Rupert Shortt, in a recent article entitled, 'Choosing Our Religion', which is based on his book, 'Does Religion do more Harm than Good?', sets out his views on the criteria that enable us to distinguish between good and bad expressions of religion. They are based on what he sees as the important questions regarding 'what sort of outlook is being nurtured by the practice of faith'. These questions are: Is it open-minded, outward looking, conducive to human flourishing in the fullest sense? Is it freely chosen and adaptable without being weak-kneed? Is this all reproduced on a larger scale, namely through the acceptance of pluralism within society? To me these criteria all seem very Unitarian.

Given the growing secular nature of society, the act of choosing in our everyday living is increasingly driven to satisfying our material as opposed to our spiritual needs, yet there are many instances in which an ethical dimension should be involved in our material choices. Here, in this season of harvest, the choosing of which bread to purchase seems particularly relevant given our historic tradition of giving thanks for it.

Like many purchasers of a loaf of bread whom I have spoken to recently I hadn't fully appreciated the huge range to choose from. It was only the recent decision by our local small Scotmid Co-op to position, at reduced prices, prepacked bread items labelled with the previous use-by-date, alongside the daily newspaper stand with the sign 'too good to discard', that I became aware of how much of our grain harvest had been ending up in landfill. It was clear from the wide range of past-their-sell-by-date breads on offer that the greater the choice the greater the amount, that in the absence of adequate compositing facilities, ends up in landfill where, in addition to its wastage, it produces methane, a contributor to global warming. Loaves of white bread, brown bread and a 50/50 mixture were available in thin, medium and thick slices and in small and large sizes from anyone of three suppliers. Claims of the health benefits of alternatives to wheat such as quinoa is now adding to choice and the creation of even greater wastage.

This is just one example of the environmental cost of an abundance of choice for a single item of food. It is also a good illustration of how greater freedom of choice is used to attract customers, increase market share and boost profit.

There comes a point however in the provision of choice where, solely from a materialist view, the expense it incurs exceeds its profit-generating power. A good example of this was witnessed by TESCO back in 2015. With falling profits due to, amongst other factors, competition from Aldi and Lidl, its chief executive, Dave Lewis, removed 30,000 of its 90,000 products from its shelves. That left it still well in excess of Aldi and Lidl's two to three thousand products. By way of contrast shoppers at TESCO before its product-reduction range had 24 different tomato ketchups to choose from whereas those at Aldi had only one, in one size.

From a business profit perspective this reduction in product number proved to be a smart move. More importantly it was a demonstration of our need to reduce dramatically our options for choice. Our resources are finite so our choices can't be infinite, just at best good enough.

The Unitarian minister, John Andrew Storey, in the first verse of his hymn, 'The Choice is Ours', in our Green Hymn book published 34 years ago, was well ahead of the current Extinction Rebellion in alerting us to the importance of choice for our survival as a species. He didn't call for mass rallies, protest marches and disruptions to commuter travel to convey his concerns; he used his literary expertise in providing this succinct overview of earth's resources and our dependence on them.

*O earth you are surpassing fair,
From out your store we're daily fed,
We breathe your life-supporting air
And drink the water that you shed.
Yet greed has made us mar your face,
Pollute the air, make foul the sea.
The folly of the human race
Is bringing untold misery.*

And then in an appeal 'to save the planet while there's time', John Andrew Storey appeals to us to make our choice in the final verse of the hymn;

*We must decide without delay
If we're to keep our race alive:
The choice is ours, and we must say
If we're to perish or survive.*

Our apparent lack of appreciation of the earth's finite resources combined with our relentless drive for greater material wealth have led us to believe that the more we have to choose from the happier we will be; the opposite is in fact the case. Excessive choice leads to anxiety in decision making. It conveys the notion that somewhere in such a wide range of options, there must be a perfect choice when in fact, in the context of what we envisage as perfection, there either isn't or if there is, it takes far too long to find it. Even the assumed idea that greater choice enhances sales is not the case. It too is the opposite as one often-quoted example from Schwartz's book on the, 'The Paradox of Choice', demonstrates. When given the option of 6 jams in a gourmet food store, 30% of those customers exposed to the 6 purchased a jam whereas only 3% of customers who were given the option to choose from a display containing 24 made a purchase.

While the vast majority of our decisions, estimated for some of us to be as high as 10,000 each day, are not based on choices that are consciously calculated, the small number that we agonise over clearly are. A good example of the latter category is Robert Frost's famous poem, 'The Road Not Taken'. Agonising over what to choose raises the question of how much of the agony associated with it is based on free will and how much is, in actual fact, dictated by business promotions, advertising and the rules and regulations enforced by laws based on Acts of Parliament with the latter, in particular, increasingly hindering our expression of free will.

If our choices are not based on free will what is the point in our being, you may well ask?

The more science reveals about the brain activity involved in decision making the more it seems that many of our choices are governed by coercive forces that are an integral component of everyday life. We either choose to acquiesce to these forces or resist them. Neuroscience and molecular genetics research now inform us that our choices are a function of our inherited DNA, for which of course we had no choice.

Irrespective of whether or not our choices are based on free will a number of psychologists now contend that what really matters is whether or not we **believe** that our choices are based on free will. The act of believing that they are puts the onus on each of us to be more acutely aware of how our choices influence not only our own lives but also the lives of others and indeed the future of our planet. It behoves us all to choose wisely.

Robert Johnson

THE LIFE OF MARGARET ROBINSON



Margaret was born at 12 Lisburn Street, Hillsborough, Northern Ireland to the Magill family on 3rd April 1944 during wartime austerity. She had two older sisters, Sally and Mary and her father, Sam, ran a grocery shop in Lisburn Street, where he was well known in business and social circles. Margaret's older sister, Sally remembers that Margaret's placid and loving nature shone through right from the beginning which was lucky as it was her and Mary's job to lull Margaret to sleep before they got out to play!

Margaret's mother was a cook at Government House in Hillsborough, the Queen's residence when she is in Northern Ireland, so she was used to being around dignitaries. She was a kind, considerate woman and Margaret took after her in many ways, including obviously her ability to cook incredibly well!

Margaret and her older sisters had a very happy, simple childhood, playing in the local area, in the village and Forest Park, often going out in the morning to play and not going home until hunger took them back at teatime.

Margaret's first school was Downshire Primary School and she became a stalwart in Church Junior Choir as well as starting the Brownies. She graduated into Senior Choir and Sally remembers her walking in procession in her choir robes, with her lovely blonde hair and singing her heart out. Margaret also became a Brownie Leader, Tawny Owl to Kathleen Dougall (then known as Kathleen Bell) Brown Owl and they made a great team together. From a young age Margaret seemed to get on with all types of people, and wasn't phased when she represented the Brownies at a service at Westminster Abbey and found herself sitting next to the Duke Of Gloucester at the lunch there! Royalty also visited the local church regularly so Margaret and her friends performed in the church choir in front of them.

Another of the highlights of Margaret's childhood was in 1957. Sally remembers Margaret waiting for her coming back from school at the bus stop, jumping up and down with excitement, she could hardly get her words out, they had got a TV, 14" inch black and white, it cost £70; taking into account at that time a working man's wage would have been £5 that was an enormous amount of money!

On leaving school, Margaret did secretarial studies and worked with a business firm doing shorthand typing and other secretarial work.

Margaret lived near Hillsborough Research Institute where John worked and they met at a dance in Hillsborough Orange Hall. Their relationship had a bit of a bumpy start including an incident where John was trying to teach Margaret to drive! (She ended up passing her test after lessons with a driving instructor!). However after their marriage in 1967 they settled together very happily and their marriage provided all the support and love they could wish for.

Their wedding took place in St. Malachy's parish church and then they began their married life in the South East of England where John had a one year contract to work at the University of London's Wye college. However, in 1968 John was appointed to a permanent post in Aberdeen so they moved north to their "lifetime home" in Bucksburn, just outside Aberdeen city. When they settled in Aberdeen Margaret became a P.A. in a shipping agent office. She enjoyed her work there and made many friends and soon also became Brownie Guide Leader of her local pack. From 1970-72 she worked as a P.A. in a large paper mill close to their home, then became a full-time mum when Lyn and Andrew were born in 1972 and 74.

Of course that didn't mean that Margaret just stayed at home from then on! When the children went to school she became a volunteer for the WRVS and drove for 'meals on wheels' for the next twenty years. Once the children went to Secondary School, Margaret worked part-time for Woodlands School, with children with special needs and found this work extremely rewarding. She chose a job with hours in the middle of the day so she could still be there for her children before and after school.

Of course, added to all this Margaret was providing much support to John in his scientific research work. He had to travel away from home for his work sometimes and when he was at home, Margaret was a

wonderful host to his many students and colleagues as they came to sample her delicious cooking and hospitality.

Andrew is now going to share more about his mum's hospitality and generous nature:

ANDREW ROBINSON:

Our mother never liked any fuss to be made of her and if she were here she would be urging me to get on with it so for you mum I will try and keep this brief.

Mum, you lived your life to help others. The most important thing for you was that the rest of the family were happy and doing what they wanted to do in life. You were the proverbial glue that bound us all together and allowed us to fulfill our potential. You were the least volatile, the peacemaker, the one who relieved the tension. As long as everyone else was happy then so were you. You were kind and generous to friends and family alike.

And you were a feeder. Oh my goodness you liked to feed us. I am sure that there will not be many people in this room that have not eaten something made by mum whether it was a neighbour supplied with a pot of soup or a friend visited with some homebaking in hand. It was quite difficult over the years to pop into mum and dad's house and not be fed.

Indeed Andrew Watt, Lyn's husband, was the best fed undergraduate in Aberdeen. What started out as a weekly visit for an evening meal soon turned into 3 evening meals a week and 4 doggy bags taken away.

And with John as a husband mum's culinary versatility was frequently tested.

Just imagine it's 5pm on a weeknight. Mum is busy trying to sort Lyn and I and dad phones

"Margaret just wondering if it's ok to bring back 3 foreign students for tea in about half an hour? Oh and by the way one is not keen on beef and I think another won't eat pork". Without any resentment or wavering mum would always reply in the affirmative and produce beautiful food on time and to spec as requested.

Mum was an organiser – the calendar that hung on the door to the larder was kept meticulously updated and she never missed a birthday or anniversary. For all their married life she organised Dad to which I know he is eternally grateful.

I am reliably informed that when Lyn was born the midwife phoned Dad at 05.30am to inform him that this was his early morning alarm call as he had to be up to catch a train to Edinburgh (Oh and by the way you became a father to a beautiful baby girl at 01.50).

My dad's work in research by definition was never ending. There was always another paper to write or experiment to conduct. And I know that he would publicly like to acknowledge mum for allowing him to work all hours whilst she got on with running the house. However because mum was a "Brown Owl" Brownie leader and Dad was working in the evenings it did mean that for several years I was the only male Brownie in Aberdeen – gee thanks guys.

Mum was passionate about voluntary work and was an active member of the meals on wheels service in Aberdeen for many years.

She was a committed church goer throughout her life and she fully immersed herself in café duty on a Saturday morning.

She derived enormous satisfaction from escorting the special needs children to Woodlands school for over 30 years only retiring from this job in 2017. Many children and parents from the school run remained friends for many years.

She loved a good social and had the most fantastic network of friends. She was constantly organising and attending lunches out, theatre trips and meals at friends right up until the end. Indeed Lyn and I would often comment that she had a better social life than ourselves to the point where Lyn had to make an appointment in advance if she wanted to meet mum for lunch.

She made my wife Caroline welcome from the outset and the 2 Mrs Rs would enjoy many happy shopping trips together in Aberdeen or the Borders.

She was very close to her sisters Mary and Sally and although they all lived in different countries within the UK they spent as much time as possible together.

Mum was immensely proud of her 4 grand-children – Finlay, Innes, Charlotte and Emily.

To Finlay and Innes she meant leek, tattie and bacon soup and chocolate Magnums in the freezer for her best boys in the world and to Charlotte and Emily she meant lemon drizzle cake and hour long stories read aloud. All 4 grand kids adored their Granny Margaret and Granny Margaret loved nothing more than spoiling them.

Although mum travelled extensively throughout the world visiting many countries with Dad I think that she was most happy at home – scouring the relevant bits of news out of the days paper or simply doing the ironing in front of Coronation Street.

She had a very positive attitude to life right up until the end.

The last time we spoke to her in the hospital we kissed her and told her it would be fine. The doctors were delayed for a few minutes so again we kissed her and wished her all the best – at which point she immediately replied “this is great. All these kisses its just like Hogmanay”.

Mum, a life well lived full of love, kindness and generosity and as you said to us all every night before bed “Good night, God bless, sleep tight”.

Andrew has expressed so much about Margaret’s loving nature. Lyn has also spoken to me of her mum’s generosity, both moneywise and with her time and what she did for other people. Lyn feels that her mum has taught her to be a doer, with no procrastination and admires the enormous difference her mum has made during her life. She made the most of any time she had. Lyn’s husband also admired Margaret in so many ways but summed that up by saying she made the most “amazing double shortbreads ever”!

We benefited greatly at our church from Margaret’s cooking and baking, not to mention her constantly cheerful, positive and loving support for all of us and all of the activities we have at Aberdeen Unitarian church. She organized the church holidays, making sure everyone who wanted to come was included. She helped out the lesser able church members, with lifts, accompanying them to appointments, shopping, in fact anything that was needed. From a personal point of view as Minister, she gave me her total support from day one and knew words to comfort and boost. She loved social events and had a great sense of fun - we have a lovely memory of her looking very happy when she won the Beetle drive at our last social event in September!

I know all the organisations she was involved with, will have similar happy memories and feel great gratitude for her involvement with them. I know she loved the Kingswells Rural Institute, the Women’s League, the Bucksburn Ladies and all of her other friends who were very dear to her.

Margaret was a happy, contented person and she would often say after services on themes such as gratitude or love that she felt so lucky with her life, that she had had everything she could have wanted, most of all a very happy marriage and family life, and then on top of that, work she had enjoyed, and many good friends.

Tributes have been pouring in to John and some of them sum her up very clearly. One person wrote “the world has lost one of the best”, others have praised her “Bright, lively, cheerful presence”, “a truly can-do person.”

One beautiful tribute from close friends I think expresses much of what so many feel:

“ We loved Margaret. Her loss has left us feeling bereft, in shock, devastated. She enriched our days, brightened our life like sunshine. She was generous, kind, caring, thoughtful. She responded spontaneously to appeals for help and seemed to be forewarned of occasions when help was going to be needed. Now we endure a vast emptiness where there was a brimming, vibrant person. ...Margaret’s warm reassuring presence... a bright, glowing spirit.”

Caroline Cormack

PICTURE GALLERY

We will remember



CIRCLE DANCING

During One World Week we held a Circle Dancing evening and this is one of the pictures taken on the night. We have Mick the Market Trader, Barbershop Bill, Efttie Banana and Fortunita, our City Fairtrade mascots, all joining hands in a circle. What a disparate crew, you might think, but that is really what circle dancing is all about.

Anyone can take part, regardless of age, gender or ability and our group of twelve participants included three men and a couple of people who were slightly less able. It didn't matter a bit and led by Pamela, we danced our way round the world, with a great variety of dances, to the accompaniment of a very eclectic range of music, including folk, country and light classical. Everyone entered wholeheartedly into the spirit of proceedings and in all the years I have been attending One World Week events, I don't remember one that quite so successfully lived up to the purpose of the week, which is simply celebrating unity in diversity. It was

also a good workout for the brain, as we tried hard to follow the steps, although as Pamela said, it didn't matter as any mistakes were just variations. Just to help us, she wore shoes with laces of two different colours, especially for those like me who had difficulty in telling their left foot from their right.

Laughter was a natural added ingredient to the evening and although we broke for refreshments, we were all keen to keep on dancing. As we all linked arms in a close, unbroken circle at the end of the session, we expressed the wish that we would meet again. I would like to think that we will do it again sometime soon and send many thanks to Pamela and the ladies of Stonehaven Circle Dance who came to help us learn and enjoy.

RAISING A SMILE

What do reindeer say before they tell a joke? **This one will sleigh you!**



Kim Jong Un will play Santa this year in the South's annual pantomime. He said he fancied a Korea change!

The reader in church brought the Bible up to the 21st century when she read that Herod asked the wise men to "go and search digitally for the child"! (She meant "diligently")

Some misinterpretations of Christmas songs:-

Deck the halls with Buddy Holly

Oh what fun it is to ride with one horse, soap and hay

We three kings of porridge and tar

You'll tell Carol, "Be a skunk, I require"

Noel, noel, noel noel, Barney's the king of Israel
(A promotion from Lord Provost, I suppose)



Another Inversnecky offering.



Santa's working to rule this year -20's plenty

How do Joseph and Mary travel to the supermarket?
On a Lidl donkey

And looking forward to New Year, here's a quote from Sarah Millican:-
"My New Year's resolution is to get in shape. I choose round."

VOLUNTEERS

As a small congregation we are always on the look-out for volunteers to help with events, particularly cafes, during the year.

If you feel you could give us 2-3 hours of your valuable time on any particular Saturday for a café or other event, we would be very keen to hear from you. Talk to anyone from the committee and your offer will be gratefully received. You would be assisting a regular volunteer so would not be expected to work on your own.

THIS APPEAL IS OPEN TO MEMBERS AND FRIENDS OF THE CHURCH

If you have any other questions about our church please don't hesitate to ask a member.

Current Committee Members / Trustees for 2019 are:

As Statutory Office Bearers –

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

As Members –

Kathleen Bruce, Sue Good, Jess McCulloch, Judith McCullough, Kathleen McGregor, Dot Prosser, Anita Stephen, Rhona Stewart.

CHURCH HISTORY

If you want to know a bit more of the history of the church in Aberdeen since the first services were held in 1833, there is information available in booklets in the Inkson Room and a potted history of the church is available on our web site. Past secretary Bill Stephen is also a source of much historical information.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE CALENDAR

The Calendar has long been the focus for activities within the church and those external events, such as Aberdeen interfaith and Fair Trade that some of our members have been quite heavily involved in over the years. Although small in numbers I feel we have contributed significantly to the ecumenical scene in the city and in doing so, to significantly raise our profile. This has also been helped by our recent recognition, through a memorial service and civic reception, of the work of perhaps the greatest of our Unitarian ministers in Aberdeen, the Rev Alexander Webster, instigator of Fresh Air Fortnight holidays for deprived children towards the end of the 19thC. Saying all that, I still get the response "Unitarianism – what's all that about?" from time to time.

This spread of information has been helped by the ever-increasing E-circulation of the Calendar, locally, nationally and internationally. I know how many copies are "sent into the ether" monthly but would have no idea how many are then "forwarded on". Hopefully, quite a few.

I feel it would be good to broaden the content by including contributions on relevant topics from all readers and not just our local members. So, if you feel that you could put "finger to keyboard" once in a while and put three to five hundred words together on an eclectic topic of your choice, Wow, that would be great. I'm sure, as a regular reader, you have a good idea of what would be appreciated.

Looking forward to hearing from you. Just for information, this section amounts to some 270 words.

Bill

**THE CONGREGATION OF ABERDEEN UNITARIAN CHURCH
“ABERDEEN UNITARIANS”
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FACEBOOK: www.facebook.com/AberdeenUnitarians

TWITTER: <https://twitter.com/abdnunitarian>

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THE UK GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIAN CHURCHES

WEB-SITE: www.unitarian.org.uk

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THE SCOTTISH UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION (SUA):

An Association of the Scottish Unitarian Congregations set up in 1813

WEB-SITE: <http://www.sua.org.uk/>

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THE INQUIRER:

The oldest Non-conformist journal still published in Britain, the Inquirer, published every fortnight, is for honest inquiry into matters of faith.

WEB-SITE: www.inquirer.org.uk

TWITTER: https://twitter.com/the__inquirer

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THE UNITARIAN

Established in 1903 and published by the Manchester District Association of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches

CONTACT: theunitarian@outlook.com

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