

BURY UNITARIAN CHURCH: ANNUAL REPORT:2017:

As I have read through the 2017 Calendars, I have, yet again, been impressed by how much we have achieved, during the past year, and by how interesting many of the calendar-pieces were. If you have a complete set of calendars, you could try this yourself---or you can access the calendars via our website. It's a timely reminder of how active and successful we are, in so many ways.

Sadly, we have lost some stalwart members of our congregation: Ted Gerrard, Derek Worthington and Laurie Lancashire will long be remembered with affection, as will Harvey Evitts, whose funeral came very early in January. Ainsworth, too, lost members, some of whom had had associations with Bury, also: Marjorie Gill, Harold Greenhalgh, and Bob Alker. Our own members suffered bereavements, too, and to all those who endured loss, we send our thoughts and sympathies, as we do to those whose health has been poor, with our good wishes for speedy improvement.

Kate is now into her second year as our Minister, an event which we celebrated on the first Sunday in November, with a card and flowers for her, and cake for everyone! However, the past year has been a steep learning-curve for Kate; this has been a bruising time for her, as she has struggled with problems on a personal level. It is easy to forget that Kate is a newly-qualified, relatively inexperienced, Minister, and still greatly in need of our support, as she seems so competent, and so willing to embrace all aspects of church-life. The outside meetings, seminars, workshops and retreats Kate attends are not only very necessary for her personal and spiritual development, but of benefit, ultimately, to the congregation. From my vantage-point in the choir-stalls, I am able to observe the congregation during services, and I can see that people are eager for worship to begin; we have heard very accessible sermons, on a wide variety of interesting topics, and we look forward to many more. The format of services is not yet quite settled; it is still a work in progress, and we need to bear with it. Our Orders of Service are attractive, with appropriate pictures and titles on the covers, plus the more important of the week's notices, on the back, including details of Kate's working-week. Her Friday vestry-sessions have become increasingly popular, as the year has gone on, and this is important, because it leaves her freer to visit those who are more in need or more desirous of home-visits. Kate has proved to be an approachable and understanding person, always willing to discuss problems---even when complaints have to be dealt with! At her first service with us, and, again, during her Induction Service, Kate quoted from "Alice in Wonderland": "If you'll believe in me, I'll believe in you": a subtle reminder that ministry is a two-way process, as we should all endeavour to remember!

Whilst we consider our appreciation of Kate's qualities and give thanks to her for all she does, we must also convey our thanks to Ade, who supports Kate so well, and who has endeared himself to us all, by his willingness to help in many capacities---even, as a fully-paid-up vegetarian, by cooking all the bacon, on Christmas Morning!

Our Worship Support Group has contributed substantially to services, during the year, bringing a high degree of professionalism and depth of thought to their work. Thanks are due to Val, Abi, Susan (Mitchell), Marian, Betty and Anne for their efforts; on Mothering Sunday, because of Kate's absence at very short notice, Anne not only presented Kate's service but added her own elements---and baked the cake served afterwards!

The choir has ably continued to support worship, although it still lacks a leader. Grateful thanks are due to Catherine Coyne and Anne Mills for their efforts in this sphere; it involves a huge amount of organisation, beforehand, a fair amount of multi-tasking during rehearsals, and a degree of responsibility. This year's triumph was an anthem sung in flawless Hungarian, thanks to Anne's linguistic abilities, upon which Chris Price conferred the supreme accolade of "absolutely beautiful"!

So---what, specifically, did we do, in 2017? In January, Kate presented the prizes to the Junior Church members. In February, Hope Maden Hunter, a third-generation Bury Unitarian, was

baptised; at the end of that month, we held yet another very successful Quiz, which attracted many people from outside the church, and a good time was had by all! March brought Kate's Induction, which was attended by 120 people, including many dignitaries, and those who were unable to attend sent messages of support; Cody Coyne led the service; Jim Corrigall preached the sermon; Gillian Peel gave the Charge to the Congregation, and Lynne Readett the Charge to the Minister; this was a splendid and momentous gathering, and the result of a tremendous amount of behind-the-scenes organisation. Subsequently, the March Congregational AGM voted unanimously to appoint Kate as Bury's permanent Minister. Seven representatives from this church attended the GA AGM's, in Birmingham, in April, and this included three first-time delegates (Abi, Susan Mitchell, and Val), all of whom returned enthused and inspired---an excellent sign! In May and September, we held First Aid Courses; Judith Jones, of the British Red Cross, conducted both sessions, conveying her professional knowledge and expertise in an easy and encouraging manner. A decision to buy a defibrillator for the church and its neighbours was taken, following the second course. The Flower Communion, held on the first Sunday in June, in the wake of the Manchester Arena Attack, commemorated each of the 22 victims who were killed, with a yellow rose; members of the Junior Church, who assisted with this service, acted with a maturity and dignity beyond their years, which was most impressive. Molly Ratcliffe, who resigned as Flower Fund Secretary, after more than 40 years of extraordinarily beautiful arrangements, was thanked with a card, a basket of flowers, and a voucher for Afternoon Tea, at The Pavilion Restaurant. The Strawberry Tea, at the end of the month, went well---the food and drink disappeared amazingly quickly---much more so than on previous occasions!

In June, Kate organised a Julian of Norwich Workshop, on behalf of the NELUM Ministers' Group; this was its first session, and very successful it was, too! We exchanged visits with members of Bury's United Reformed Church, in July. We again participated in the Bury in Bloom event and contributed to the glittering prizes gained by the borough. Anne and Roger organised an illustrated talk ("Travels Down Under") about their holiday in Australia, New Zealand and Abu Dhabi, which was much enjoyed. The Fun Run, mid-September, again caused problems; arrangements offered by the organisers were not fulfilled, and this issue will have to be re-negotiated, in 2018. The Mancunian Singers visited us and gave a relaxed, enjoyable and professional performance which was a joy to hear. A "Bury: Past and Present" evening, in October, was much enjoyed; this was a quite different event---a pleasing joint-effort, organised by The Camera Club, The Men's Fellowship, and The Women's League, and the evening's profit was donated to Prostate Cancer UK, the League's 2017/8 annual charity. Four services, in their different ways, made this a special month: I'll return to two of them later; but the Pets' Service, in addition to an "animalised" version of "All Things Bright and Beautiful", contained spontaneous reminiscences about animals, including a brilliant contribution from Bryan Freemantle. Bryan and Barbara again took centre-stage, quite literally, when they renewed their wedding-vows, in a special, separate, service---a bittersweet occasion. Bury Light Night was low-key; it attracted a small but appreciative attendance at the church, but, on the whole, in the town, was somewhat uninspired. November brought our Remembrance Services---as always, poignant and emotional; Norah laid the wreath with great dignity. Later in the month, The Lancashire Fusiliers performed a concert of stirring brass-band music, to a high standard. The GA President visited, at the end of the month, and conducted part of the service. Before we knew it, we had reached December, with its Christmas Services, including the Candlelight Carol Service; the music and the many readings were excellent, but bad weather meant that attendance was depleted, which was a shame. The children sang their own carol, at two services, and they enjoyed their Christmas Treat of a visit to the cinema and tea at McDonald's. An innovation, this year, was a visit to The Nightingale Centre, at Great Hucklow, for a Christmas Lunch; plans are already in hand for a repeat-visit. A church Christmas Lunch, followed by a reading of excerpts of Dickens' "A Christmas Carol", given by Gordon and Veronica Walker, from Bank Street Bolton, was well-attended, and raised a goodly sum for Prostate Cancer UK and for Fortalice, a Bolton charity, which supports abused women and children.

In addition to regular committee-meetings, our usual groups continue to meet throughout the year. The Women's League hosted The Manchester District's AGM, and heard talks from Mike Connolly about his year as Mayor of Bury, and from Birte Langden, a Danish lady, whose family helped

Jews to escape during the Second World War. The Men's Fellowship have enjoyed several delicious lunches, after listening to talks about Cuba, from Sue McMullen, and the newspaper industry, from Bill Hargreaves. The Book Club enjoyed Victoria Hislop's "The Thread", but gave a definite thumbs-down to "The Time Traveller's Wife". The Lunch Circle changed its name, so as to seem less exclusive, and held a "Bring a Friend" Lunch, in May, which resulted in a significant increase in membership; they would like to recruit more chefs, and more helpers, in order to spread the workload, though. The newly-formed Camera Club has more than doubled its membership (from 2 to 4 or 5!) and would welcome more members; it plans another slice of nostalgia, in 2018. The Ministerial Support Group meets regularly with Kate; its meetings will continue, for the time being, as they are felt to be of great benefit to the Minister and the congregation.

I record here my thanks to everyone who contributes to the active life of this church: to all committee-members, especially those who act as Chair or Secretary, and to the Church Officers; to those who run the various church-societies; to those who provide coffee on Saturdays and Sundays; to our flower-ladies; to our calendar-editor, and to those who maintain our Facebook and website presences; to those who organise The 100 Club and The Sunshine Smarties collection; to those who have provided or written Profiles; to those who organise raffles, especially the Christmas one; and to everyone for being part of this church, for belonging and attending.

Change is inevitable; sometimes, it is forced upon us by circumstances, or by the decisions of others. A new Ministry will bring changes, otherwise we stagnate and die. Let's accept the changes we have to contend with, assess them and see what happens, rather than giving in to the instinct to complain, first and foremost! The increasing average age of this congregation causes change, also, and we must accept that we cannot always continue as we have in the past; we need to adapt so as to ensure that the outcome remains close to what it was previously, even if the method, time and effort are different.

Over the past year, these are some of the positive changes we have made. The Fair Trade Fortnight Service contained a challenge from Kate for us to support the Traidcraft Stall more strongly, and increased sales have resulted. At our Harvest Service, we were asked to bring tins and packets of food, and toiletries, instead of fresh fruit and vegetables; this eventually extended to a monthly food-collection for Bury's new food-bank. Kate's service on Homelessness produced donations of sleeping-bags, clothing, and food for those who are destitute. We have raised our Inquirer-profile by resuming our sponsorship and by individuals contributing items to it throughout the year. During the Christmas period, we included a children's tree, in the worship-area, alongside the main tree. We took a decision to award Junior Church prizes on the basis of the children's personal attributes, rather than on attendance alone. The children now have their own chalice, which they light from the main chalice, before they leave the service, to provide a sense of continuity for them. We served bacon butties before the Christmas Day service, to promote a special sense of community. Kate has commented on our generosity; like the Widow's Mite, what we give is symbolic; we can be justly proud of what we do, and of the spirit in which it is done, and this is precisely the attitude which should propel us forward into 2018.

Anne Mills: March 18th, 2018.