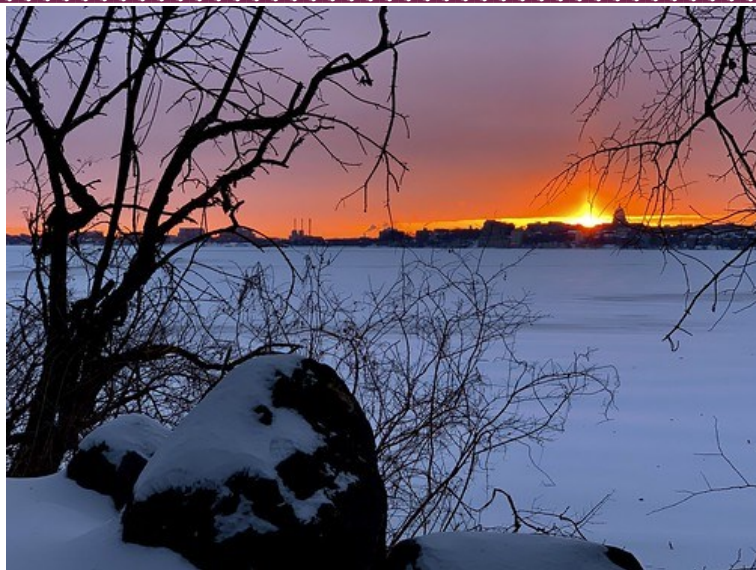


# Stockton Unitarians



Happy  
New  
Years  
2025  
2024

**January brings us:** New Year's Day, Epiphany, Twelfth Night, Holocaust Memorial Day, RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch, Birthday of Guru Gabind Singh Ji,

**February brings us:** St Valentine's Day, Shrove Tuesday, Ash Wednesday, Raynaud's Awareness Day, NSPCC Number Day, World Cancer Day, Pannirvana Day (Buddhist), Lailat al-Isra wa-l-Mi'raj (Prophet's Ascension (Islamic),

Church News  
January/February  
2025



*Congratulations and Happy Birthday  
to those Celebrating their Birthday in*



*January*

*Margaret Robinson*

*Joan Unwin*

*Margaret Whitham*

*Aaron R H Robinson*



*February*

*William Dixon Oliver*

*Pat Wilkinson*

**Uni-sing!** A Zoom hymn singing group, with break out groups for a chat in the middle. For more information email Louise Rogers  
[louise.rogers256@gmail.com](mailto:louise.rogers256@gmail.com)

see [facebook.co/groups/ 687366168770017](https://facebook.co/groups/687366168770017)

**Sessions: Saturdays 3.00pm (open 2.30pm), 18th January,  
1st and 15th February, 1st and 15th March 2025**

**Knit 'n' Natter Group** meet on alternative  
**Tuesdays from 11.00am to 1.00pm.** Bring  
along your crafts, knitting, crochet, sewing and  
enjoy a cup of tea and a chat whilst you work.  
£1 contribution for the tea/coffee biscuits.  
**Dates: 7th and 21st January, 4th and 18th  
February, 4th and 18th March 2025**



**Coffee Mornings every Saturday  
10.00am to 11.30am**

Come and enjoy a cup of tea or coffee with  
biscuits, good conversation in a friendly and  
welcoming group.



## News of members and friends

Sadly Jean Sudron passed away before Christmas after a brave battle against cancer. When my cousin Alan died Jean continued to get the Church Calendar and enjoyed reading it, hearing about people she knew through Alan. Jean lived in Diss where her funeral will take place on January 8th. 2025.

I was in touch with Pat Wilkinson today(28/12/24), who is sorry that she can no longer get to church, but sends her good wishes to everyone. I was also able to speak to Pat's sister Janet, from Frankfurt, because of flight cancellations due to the weather. She too sends her good wishes and hopes to be able to join us via zoom for a service next time she visits Pat.

Today I was also in touch with Professor Paul Harvey. Paul is sadly now in a care home, near Durham, as his mobility is very poor and he is extremely deaf. I phoned him on my iPad because I can regulate the sound. It took a while for him to realise who was calling but with the nurses help we got there. Paul sends his good wishes to all at Stockton.

I've also spoken to Pam Coates ( formerly Price ) today, who sends her good wishes to those who remember her. Pam's last visit to the church was the day we set the balloons off for the balloon race.

We wish everyone a happy, peaceful, joyous and healthy New Year for 2025.

Margaret Whitham

## ***CHURCH DIRECTORY***

**Address:** Stockton Unitarian Centre, Vane Street,  
Stockton-on-Tees, **TS18 1RF**

**Church website:** <http://stocktonunitarians.co.uk>

**Church facebook:** Unitarians in and around Stockton-on-Tees

**Twitter now X:** Stockton Unitarian Centre

**Chairperson and Flower Secretary:** Jean Watson - 01642 658376

**Margaret Robinson** - Secretary and Church News Editor  
telephone: 01642 782219 mobile 07799896452

**email:** margaretrobinson81@gmail.com

3 Castle Dyke Wynd, Minerva Mews, Yarm, TS15 9DE

**Worship Committee Co-ordinator:** Margaret Whitham 01429 298641

## Sunday services reviews for October, November and December 2024

**On 27th October 2024 the Worship leader was Rev Margaret Kirk. Her theme was “Being in Control”**

Margaret had two readings: 100 Wisdom stories from around the world “Two Questions” by Margaret Silf, adapted from a story by Leo Tolstoy. “The most important time is now” and from Hearts and Minds, book Two by Rev Robert Pounder.

“Earth’s the right place for love”.

“Think just what is in front of you, is all you need to be concerned about.”

“When I let go of what I am, I become what I might be” Lao Tzu

Margaret’s Meditation was by Kathleen McTigue “Breathing Peace into Being”.

We sang “We light the flame”, “Each seeking faith” and “Now we sing” We had one person on Zoom and a congregation of six.

**On 3rd November the Worship leaders were Hazel and David Warhurst on the theme of “Home is Where the Heart Is”**



The service began with a Chalice lighting words by Jane Blackhall and also the lighting of a Candle for Peace for all the conflicts around the world.

Hazel read an extract from The Hobbit by J R R Tolkien, describing the home occupied by the Hobbit Bilbo Baggins. (photo of inside of his home)

We sang “A shelter from the vast we win”, “For everyone born”, “The Huck-

low song", "I stand outside your door", "Our Nation" and "Let people living in all lands". David read the words and then played the song "Home, Sweet Home" by the American poet John Howard Payne. Other music played was "Home Sweet Home" sung by Vera Lynn, "Home, home on the Range" sung by Bing Crosby.

We had a poem "This is our base, our favourite place" by English poet Ms Moem, a Meditation by Jenny Jacobs (a member of our York congregation), a version of the Lord's prayer by Rev Laura Dobson and closing words by Dawn Buckle.

Home, is a place we live or were born, or a much loved places which has a special meaning for us. For Stockton Unitarians our church is our spiritual home, a place we come to be together. For many The Nightingale Centre in Great Hucklow is also a place where we feel at home.

Sadly, a small minority of people are unwilling to share and would go to great lengths, even violence to exclude outsiders. This is the root of many of the conflicts we see around the world today. It is also a sad fact that, despite all the wonders and the wealth of the modern world, millions of people are homeless. In England Shelter estimates that 309,000 people are homeless. Worse, are in places like Syria, Palestine, Israel, Lebanon, Ukraine and many more, families are being wiped out in their homes, often without any warning.

But we are not powerless, we cannot solve these daunting problems on our own, but we can contribute to charities such as the British Red Cross, Shelter, Amnesty, UNICEF, Medecins sans Frontiers to name a few.

The service closed with the playing of "Show me the way to go home" by Jimmy Campbell and Reg Connolly under the pseudonym Irving King..

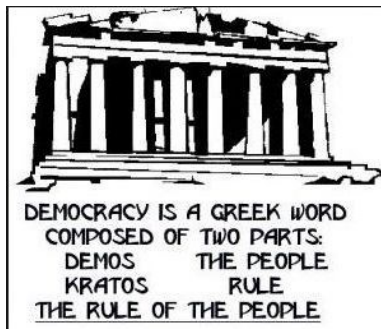
**On Sunday 10th November the worship leader was Rev Victor Ball. This was our Remembrance Sunday service.**

Victor's readings were "The Soldier" by Rupert Brooke, and "The war to end war" from the 1914 book "The War That Will



End War" by HG Wells. We had a Meditation Honouring our Ancestors and a prayer by Norbet Chapek. We sang "We Shall be Strong and Free", "O'er Continent and Ocean", "The Vision of a World Set Free" and "Dreaming of Widening Love".

**On Sunday 17th November the worship leader was Rev Paul Walker on the theme of "Democracy".**



Democracy is a system of government in which power is held by elected representatives who are freely voted for by the people

Paul read from the Bible on the subject of democracy: While the Bible does not directly address democracy, it does expound on principles related to leadership, freedom, justice, and governance. Some key points include: The Bible emphasizes the dignity and worth of every individual, a principle that underpins true democracy. Jesus never promoted democracy, and nowhere in the Bible do people vote or serve for designated terms. Democracy can only be as good as the people who make it up.

Paul also read Abraham Lincoln's speech delivered at the dedication of the Soldiers' National Cemetery at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania on November 19th 1863, extract below:

"Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth, on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honoured dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in



vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”

Paul spoke about various forms of democracy from ancient Rome, Greece, the Vikings, Iceland, Isle of Man etc. We sang “Here we are gathered”, “To you who would as pilgrims go”, “We’ll build a land where we bind up the broken” and “In this time on earth we’re given.” We had four people on Zoom and five in the chapel.

**On Sunday 24th November 2024 the worship leader was Rev Margaret Kirk, theme “Bread and Roses”**

Margaret used words by Cliff Reed for the opening words, prayer and closing words.

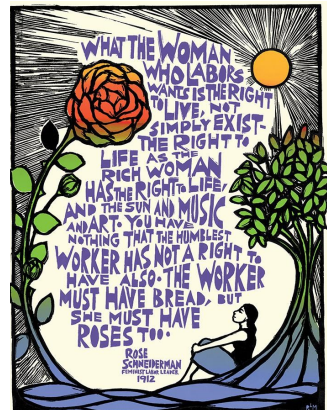
We sang “Come and find a quiet centre”, “Bread and Roses”, “Our world is one world” and “Kum ba Yah”

Margaret’s two readings were from the book “Orwell’s Roses” by Rebecca Solnit “We fight for Roses too” and “In Praise of” The book explores the relation between Orwell’s interest in gardening, his love of roses and his authorial and political commitments.

George Orwell went to Spain to report on the Civil War, but stayed to fight. He was seriously wounded in his throat and returned to England with his wife, where he planted roses in his garden.

Bread and Roses is a political slogan as well as the name of the poem and song. It originated in a speech given by American women’s suffrage activist Helen Todd; in a line in the speech about “bread for all, and roses too” inspired the poem by James Oppenheim, which was later set to music.

There is also a legend of Elizabeth of Hungary. She is the saint mostly related to charity and care for the poor. The legend tells the story of Elizabeth smuggling bread to the poor, against the will of her husband. When she was caught in the act, she had to uncover her basket, but only roses were found in it. The bread represents the basic needs, the rose the dignity, appreciation and human rights.



**On Sunday 1st December 2024 we held out Tree Dressing and Gift service led by the Worship Group**

Baubles were placed on the tree by the congregation and shoe boxes were collected for the seafaring community bringing good into Teesport.

Eight candles were lit for joy, truth, morality, courage, freedom, faith, hope and love.

Hymns and carols sung were "All are welcome here", "Shalom Havayreem", "Joy to the World", "In the Bleak Midwinter", "O little town of Bethlehem" and "Silent Night".



**On Sunday 15th December 2024 the worship leader was Rev Victor Ball** when members of the congregation were asked to bring appropriate readings to share during the service. Carols sung were "O Little Town of Bethlehem", "In the Bleak Midwinter", "It cam upon a Midnight Clear", "We three Kings of Orient are", and "Silent Night"



**On Sunday 22nd December 2024** at 3.00pm we held our Sing the Season service, where we had a congregation of 8. The chalice was lit for Peace and Goodwill to all. We sang "Mary's Boy Child", "Joy to the World", "Silent Night", "Christmas Alphabet", "Winter Wonderland", "Ding Dong! Merrily on High", "When Santa got stuck up the chimney", "Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer", "Twelve Days of Christmas" and "We wish you a Merry Christmas". The Readings were Yorkshire Nativity by Gervase Phinn, If I were a Christmas Tree by Bonnie Compton Hanson, Dear Father Christmas, and An Alternative Twelve Days of Christmas.





## **Mary Thompson Fund**

Dear wonderful friends and supporters, we hope you are keeping safe, warm and well. We can guarantee that every penny donated to us goes directly to people claiming or refused asylum and settled refugees who are in hardship. This takes the form of cash grants, food and toiletries. We apply for various grants for the very little unavoidable expenses like postage, leaflet printing (designed for free), and a contribution to Middlesbrough Council for heating, lighting and general services for the rent-free premises they have kindly given us. Our Stockton drop-in premises are kindly provided completely free by Justice First. The term 'Lean and Keen' comes to mind!

Every year at our Christmas drop-ins, we give our homeless and destitute clients extra cash, food and toiletries, and some extra treats: mostly what the rest of us would see as everyday items! To do this we need to raise additional funding as our current income from individual donations and grants are allocated throughout the year.

We would like to highlight a few issues and events we've been involved with over the past few months:

Many of you will have come across Father Peter Keeling, a local priest for many decades. Some of us attended his funeral a couple weeks ago. He was an extremely kind and generous man who campaigned all his life for peace and justice. He was a regular donor to MTF and a great friend. St Francis church was completely full with standing room only at the back. Peter had a great send off from his friends. Rest in Peace Father Peter.

The International Centre on Abingdon Road in Middlesbrough has completed the first phase renovations and it is looking really smart and welcoming. If you recall we will be moving in once renovations are complete. However, there is still funding to be found to complete the works before we can easily move in. There is an area that could be 'tarted-up' that we have been offered for now, but it would need damp-proofing, re-plastering and decorating, so we are still thinking about it!

However: Our current drop-in space at Broadcasting House was shared with the North of England Refugee Service. But they have now shut their Tees Valley office and made their staff redundant. This means there is spare space that Middlesbrough Council wants to fill. We have been told that we will either have to share with another organisation or be moved out to an unknown location: both uncertain futures. It may make the International Centre offer a bit more appealing! We will keep you informed.

It is great news to hear of the overthrow of the brutal Assad regime in Syria, but it is a very unstable and dangerously uncertain future for the thousands of Syrian

refugees across the world. We have supported lots of Syrian clients due to more than a decade of civil war. Many have refugee status, but there are around 6,500 who are still waiting for a decision in the UK alone. We have co-signed a letter urging the UK government not to suspend Syrian asylum decisions. Many Syrians have been waiting for years held in limbo with no right to work and should not have to wait even longer before their future is secured. The jury is out for the new regime of Hayat Tahir al-Sham and other rebel factions. It could be years before we will know how safe the country will be for returning Syrians – if at all!

**Diary date:** The 40 strong Fylingdales Folk Choir and The Marigolds acapella group have kindly offered to perform for free at a fundraising concert for us. We are really excited about this and have booked Saltburn Theatre for the evening of **Friday 28<sup>th</sup> March 2025**. Please make a note in your diary. There will be more details to follow.

Finally a reminder to check out our revamped website at [www.marythompsonfund.org.uk](http://www.marythompsonfund.org.uk) Many thanks to our most recent Trustee Joe Smith for setting it up. There is a 'donate' button on the site or use the information below if you are in a position to make a donation.

Many thanks and have a wonderful Christmas and a safe and peaceful new year

Mary Thompson Fund, Unity Trust Bank, Sort Code: 608301 Account Number: 20103929. Please let us know if you are eligible for gift aid: Mary Thompson Fund c/o Justice First 133 Norton Rd Stockton-on-Tees TS18 2BG

Tel: 07419375807 [marythompsonfund@gmail.com](mailto:marythompsonfund@gmail.com)

[www.marythompsonfund.org.uk](http://www.marythompsonfund.org.uk) supported by the generous donations of individuals, the Jill and Norman Franklin Trust, K. Home International, the Teesside Charity, and local organisations. Charity No 1112610

Life is full of endings, but every ending is also a new beginning.

When you're forced take a different directions in life, it can sometimes lead to things you never even expected.

## **Deadline for the next edition of Church News is the Wednesday 26th February 2025**

Please send your contributions for the March/April 2025 edition to the Editor: Margaret Robinson

[margaretrobinson81@gmail.com](mailto:margaretrobinson81@gmail.com)

## **It Came Upon the Midnight Clear**

The words to “It Came Upon the Midnight Clear” were written by a Unitarian Minister, The Rev Edmund H Sears while he served the Unitarian church in Wayland, Massachusetts. The hymn was first performed in that church in 1849.

Sears wrote the hymn when he was experiencing personal melancholy that was heightened by his concern for war in Europe and America's war with Mexico. His words express the image of a dark world, filled with “sin and strife”.

Sears was one of the most conservative, mystical theologies of all the Unitarian ministers of his time, affirming that there is no physical resurrection, but at the time of our deaths, we become angels or evil spirits.

## **Jingle Bells**

The other famous musical Christmas piece, *Jingle Bells* (published in 1857) was written by James Pierpont, organist and choir director of the Unitarian Church in Savannah, Georgia, where his brother John was the minister. Their father John, minister of the Medford Unitarian Church in Massachusetts was a strong abolitionist and temperance advocate.

Now known as a Christmas classic, and one of the all-time best selling musical compositions, *Jingle Bells* was written for a Thanksgiving church service at the Unitarian Church in Savannah, Georgia. It was so well received that the children of the church sang it for the Christmas service.

A different version of the song's origin has Pierpont writing the song in Medford, Massachusetts - a story that held until 1969 when Savannah Church claimed the distinction. At that time, the mayors of both cities wrote rather testy letters back and forth, each claiming their city as Pierpont's place of composition. The people of Medford said - and probably still do - that James wrote the jaunty, jingly piece at the Simpson Tavern, a boarding house with the only piano in town.

## **Rudolph**

Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer started life as a poem created by an American advertising executive called Robert May. He was requested to produce a poem that could be given away to children by Santa Claus at Christmas. Robert had a natural flair with words and was able to compose the Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer poem specifically designed to appeal

to children. It was commissioned by the Montgomery Ward department store who was up to this time purchased colouring books to give away at Christmas, this idea was conceived as a cheaper option.

## Twelve Days of Christmas

The Twelve Days of Christmas is an English Christmas carol, dating back to 1780, when it was a chant or rhyme, thought to be of French in origin. The tune was composed in 1909 by an Englishman called Frederic Austin. The twelve days start with Christmas Day and finish on the Eve of Epiphany. Each of the twelve days had a religious significance.

All life experiences are connected, the pieces of the jigsaw you put in place today will be part of who you are in the future.

We have no power over the events of each new day, but we do have power over our attitude towards them.

## Pulse Meeting: UK Unitarians Reacting to the US Election Outcome

It's fair to say that many people around the world watched the outcome of the recent US election with bated breath and that, for many of us, the re-election of Donald Trump was not the outcome we had hoped for. On 9 November 2024, several UK Unitarians gathered online to discuss our reaction to it, our communities' reactions to it, and our thoughts about the way forwards.

Many of us were concerned, even distressed, about what the future might hold, and several people stressed the importance of giving people time and space to accept what has happened before trying to move forwards. Some felt that whilst it is important to look at what we can do in future, trying to move forward too fast can feel like putting pressure on people to deny their feelings and minimise their concerns. Others noted that Unitarians, like all people, are diverse in their political views, and that we need to be careful not to assume that everyone shares the same thoughts and perspectives. Some thought back to divisions in communities that emerged around the 2016 Brexit vote, and the Covid-19 pandemic, and suggested we aim to remember what happened then and what lessons we had learned. Behavioural covenants were mentioned as a possible option.

Whilst it was something of a sombre gathering, many of us valued the opportunity to gather together and come to terms with what the future is likely to be, and remind ourselves that our spiritual community endures.

Louise Reeve



# Unitarian Music Society

Summer Conference

8th -11th August 2025

Nightingale Centre  
Great Hucklow, Derbyshire



## Folk Songs Forever!



Contact - Margaret Robinson - UMS Secretary - [margaretrobinson81@gmail.com](mailto:margaretrobinson81@gmail.com)

## Unitarian Women's Group Conference

Friday 5<sup>th</sup> to Sunday 7<sup>nd</sup> SEPTEMBER 2025

The Nightingale Centre, Great Hucklow



Changing the world with your purse  
shop ethically shop green shop fair shop right

**Women of all ages are welcome to this weekend of friendship**

We will explore the theme through workshops and discussion.

The conference will be facilitated by **Dorothy Haughton**.

Talk Think Listen Laugh

To book contact Margaret at [margaretrobinson81@gmail.com](mailto:margaretrobinson81@gmail.com) or  
01642 782219 or 07799 896452

Remember everyone – book early to ensure a place





# Coffee and Comms



**Informal online gathering with lots of time for questions!**

## **Social Media for your congregation**

- Which platforms are right for you? Facebook, Instagram, etc.
- Ways to make posting easy and effective
- Who should be posting for your chapel or group? How often should you post?
- Bring your own questions!

**Tuesday, 14 January at 12:30 pm**

**For link, email: [ahowell@unitarian.org.uk](mailto:ahowell@unitarian.org.uk)**

## **What does the EC (GA Executive Committee) do?**

EC members represent the movement and are democratically elected by members across the country to be the trustees of the GA charity. Their work is to enable the smooth running of the charity according to the GA's [charitable object](#). They bring experience from within our movement and from their professional and voluntary work elsewhere. This may be in management, finance, communications, change management, charity governance, or some other experience.

The EC meets around six times a year, either in person with an overnight stay (with one longer two-night meeting per year), or by video conference. We have recently moved to holding meetings at weekends to make EC membership more accessible to those in work. This arrangement could be altered further for the new configuration of members.

**When is the election?** Biographical information on the candidates will be sent, and the election will open, in February 2025. There will be a five-week period for voting and the election will close on 28 March 2025. The results will be announced shortly afterwards. Successful candidates will take up office at the end of the Annual Meetings in April 2025.

## Sunday Services for 2025

**Zoom link: 6680459646**



<b>Date 2025</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Worship Leader</b>
5th January	3.00pm	Bring and Share service
12th January	3.00pm	tba
19th January	3.00pm	tba
26th January	3.00pm	tba
2nd February	3.00pm	tba
9th February	3.00pm	tba
16th February	3.00pm	tba
23rd February	3.00pm	tba
2nd March	6.00pm	tba

**Offers to lead worship would be appreciated, please contact Margaret Whitham 01429 298641**

**If you would like to contribute to the flower fund or buy flowers in memory of a loved one and have your name added to the flower list please let Jean Watson know. 01642 658376**

### Flower Rota 2025

5th January	Mrs Pam Price
12th January	Mrs Josie Squires
19th January	Mr Jimmy Lees
26th January	Mrs Smith and Mrs Fish
2nd February	Mrs Jean Watson
9th February	Mrs Margaret Whitham
16th February	Mrs Jose Squires
23rd February	Mrs Powley
2nd March	Rev Margaret Kirk



Please note all services will be held in the church building.

Most services will also be transmitted via **Zoom**, in a hybrid service. Joining information for Zoom will be sent out through email by the Church Secretary

- Zoom: **6680459646**

**[margaretrobinson81@gmail.com](mailto:margaretrobinson81@gmail.com)**