

# Stockton Unitarians



Church News  
January/February  
2026



## Church services held in November and December 2025

**On Sunday 2nd November 2025 we held our Membership service, led by Jean Watson (Chairperson)**

Jean began the service with Celia Cartwright's Chalice lighting and the opening words beginning "This is my church. It is composed of people like me."



The congregation stood for eulogies of members and friends who had died during the year - Patricia Wilkinson, Professor Paul Harvey and Paula Watson. We remained standing to read together the Church Affirmation about valuing fellowship, faith, worship and membership.

We were joined in the chapel by Pat's son Colin and daughter Helen and her granddaughter and on Zoom by Pat's sister Janet from Germany and Margaret Kirk.

The congregation were asked to say a few words: Jane and others discussed the importance of belonging and community, questioning whether meeting every Sunday is necessary given the difficulties in attendance and preparation. They considered alternative options like meeting fortnightly and making each gathering more meaningful. The group also reflected on the meaning of church membership in today's context, acknowledging the need for change and adaptation to ensure the congregation's sustainability.

Several members shared reflections on their connections to Stockton Unitarian Church, highlighting the importance of community and technology in maintaining church membership. Janet expressed gratitude for participating remotely from Germany, while Margaret Kirk emphasized her sense of belonging as a member rather than a minister. Hazel shared personal stories of reconnecting with old friends and fellow church members, including a chance encounter with Margaret Kirk, who was known to her from their teacher training days in Bingley and Bradford.

Margaret K shared her reflections on the importance of community and the church, emphasizing the value of being part of something meaningful, even if not attending regularly. David highlighted the freedom to explore ideas and the strong sense of caring for life that the church embodies.

We sang “Come Together in Love”, “A New Community”, “To Worship Rightly”, “Here we have gathered” and “Go now in peace”. We had two responsive prayers “A Fellowship of Free Souls” by Cliff Reed and “Welcome” by Roger Courtney.

**On Sunday 9th November 2025 Rev Victor Ball led our Remembrance service,** commemorating military and civilian servicemen and women from past and present conflicts, while also celebrating the lives of church members, family, and friends who have passed. The service included a message emphasizing the importance of leaving a



positive legacy for future generations. The congregation were encouraged to reflect on their personal connections with ancestors and to consider the world they would leave for their descendants.

Victor spoke of the significance of the pipe ceremony in Native American traditions, emphasizing its role in connecting people with the Great Spirit, Mother Earth, and ancestors. He highlighted the ceremony's importance in fostering peace and understanding, both within individuals and between nations. Victor also shared insights from historical accounts, such as the bravery of Sitting Bull and the role of the pipe in peace-making, and encouraged the congregation to reflect on these teachings in contemporary contexts.

Victor read “They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old, age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn. At the going down of the sun, and in the morning, we will remember them,” We will remember them.

Victor shared the video of Paul McCartney's song Pipes of Peace. We sang "Prayer for Strength", "The Golden Heresy of Truth", "The Moment to Decide", "Sing Your Country's Anthem", and "Let Peace encircle all the world".

The service concluded with a musical performance and a message of peace, highlighting the significance of using music to convey messages and promote unity. We had a congregation of seven in person and three people on Zoom.

**On Sunday 16th November 2025 Christine Walker led the service.** Christine drew inspiration from Pat Barker's trilogy (Regeneration, The Silence of the Girls and The Women of Troy) about the siege of Troy. The service included a reading from the Book of Jeremiah and a meditation on the roles of women in war, highlighting their experiences as labourers, nurses, refugees, and victims of sexual violence. The service concluded with an invitation for participants to share their thoughts and reflections on the topic.

Christine gave an historical account of women working in munitions factories during World War II, particularly focusing on the Devil's Porridge factory in Scotland where women handled gunpowder. She shared stories about the health risks and safety concerns faced by these workers, including chemical exposure and yellow discoloration of the skin.

The change in women's skin colour in munitions factories during the World Wars (the phenomenon began in WWI and continued into WWII) was caused by exposure to trinitrotoluene (TNT) and other chemicals like picric acid. The women affected by this condition were nicknamed the "Canary Girls" because their skin and hair turned a distinctive orange-yellow. The chemicals in the TNT reacted with the keratin in the skin and hair, causing a bright yellow staining. This yellowing was primarily an external discoloration, but it was difficult to

wash off and usually faded over time once exposure ceased. A more serious, internal consequence of prolonged exposure and TNT poisoning was liver toxicity, which led to a condition called toxic jaundice. This gave the skin a different, more serious yellow hue, and could be fatal. "Canary Babies": Some women even gave birth to babies with a yellow tint to their skin due to their exposure in the factories. The discoloration in the babies also faded eventually.

Christine then shifted to modern issues regarding gender relations and power dynamics, leading to a discussion about the need for education and cultural change to address gender inequality.

Christine shared stories of women who served in various capacities during times of war, highlighting their contributions and sacrifices. She told of the experiences of women like Violette Szabo, Noor Inayat Khan, and nurses who worked during D-Day, emphasizing their courage and the challenges they faced. She also mentioned the White Rose Movement and prayed for women affected by conflict worldwide. The talk underscored the often-overlooked roles of women in war and their resilience in the face of adversity.

**On Sunday 23rd November 2025 Rev Margaret Kirk** led the service on the theme of The Power of Compassionate Caring

Margaret's service focused on the theme of caring, emphasizing its importance in compassion, kindness, and humanity. She shared a reflection by Celia Midgley, highlighting the contrast between caring and indifference. Margaret expressed concern for those suffering due to homelessness, war, and injustice, and encouraged attendees to engage with others compassionately despite feeling helpless.

Margaret spoke of the importance of caring for all aspects of life, from small creatures to large systems, emphasizing the need for constant review and balance in our actions. She shared a prayer for

fostering kindness and humility, and the group sang the hymn “Wide Green World”, reflecting on the spirit of caring and environmental consciousness.

Margaret shared a story about a young doctor, named John, who was experiencing frustration and anger with the medical system, particularly regarding his 80-hour work weeks and the way residents were treated. John expressed resentment towards his colleagues and the hospital administration, sharing multiple examples of what he saw as callous and uncaring behaviour. Through therapy sessions, John began to question the larger issues at play, ultimately asking why children suffer, which marked a significant shift in his perspective.

John’s final therapy session, through guided imagery, he encountered a representation of St. Francis of Assisi, which led to an emotional breakthrough as he realized his true calling in paediatrics, despite his current frustration with the profession. The session concluded with John acknowledging that his work as a paediatrician aligned with his values, though he still struggled with the challenges of the role.

Margaret told us of her recent train journey to visit a friend, noting the kindness and helpfulness of strangers. Margaret also touched on the theme of caring from a religious perspective, referencing Jesus’ teachings on love and compassion. We also sang these hymns “Caring God”, “Blessed Spirit of my life”, “We sing the faith”. We had seven in the congregation.

**On Sunday 30th November 2025 Margaret Robinson** led a reflective service on the significance of November, emphasizing its role as a month of transition and introspection. She highlighted the beauty of change, encouraging participants to reflect on their past and prepare for future opportunities. She also talked about the

upcoming Christmas season, the importance of showing goodwill and peace, and the value of connecting with nature and others during this time. Margaret concluded by inviting everyone to consider what gifts they would put on a Christmas tree, with peace being one of the suggested gifts. including tolerance, hope, faith, kindness, understanding, compassion, charity, love, gratitude, and respect for everyone and the environment.

Margaret also talked about various historical and modern practices related to Advent, including medieval nativity scenes, German Christmas countdown traditions, and contemporary Advent calendars. She explained how Advent calendars and candles are commonly used to count down the 24 days of Advent in the UK and other regions, with some calendars containing valuable items like diamonds. Margaret also described an Advent crown used in churches, which features four candles around a central one, each representing different Christian values like hope, love, joy, and peace, with the middle candle representing Jesus as the light of the world. We sang “’Tis Winter Now”, “Advent hymn”, “Dark of Winter”. We had a congregation of five and two people joined us on Zoom.

**On Sunday 7th December 2025 we and our Tree Dressing and Gift service.** There were six of us present – Paul, Jean, Jane, Margaret W, Hazel and David. It was a very nice service which went well despite the small numbers. Although it was billed as organised by the Worship Group, and was delivered by its members, it was mostly the work of Margaret Whitham for which she was most warmly thanked. In line with long standing tradition, the congregation was invited to add decorations to the Christmas Tree - which looked most attractive – and to place shoe boxes for the South Tees Mission to Seafarers, a good cause which Stockton Unitarians have supported



annually for over 20 years.

The service included a meditation on A Tree of Hope. Followed by a reading by Rev Margaret Kirk entitled Decorating the Tree, and also the Responsive Prayer for Advent written by Rev Cliff Read - Let Christmas Come!

During the service we were invited to think about people in need in various ways such as those affected by floods, famine, homelessness and war. Margaret Whitham reminded us in a reading of the baby born in a tree in Mozambique in 2000, because of floods and crocodile infested flood waters of the Limpopo river below – “Carol for Rosita”.

There were also some heartwarming stories told. Jane Tomlin wanted to counter the popular view that young people don't care much about anyone but themselves, and similar negative stories in the media, by telling us about a lovely surprise she had on the previous Wednesday. There was a knock on the door and there was her Granddaughter, with a beautiful bunch of flowers. She said she couldn't let her Grandpa's 95th birthday pass by without remembering him and seeing Jane. She had diverted from her long drive home from work to see Jane. Jane said she hadn't been thinking particularly about it being Mike's 95th and she was quite overwhelmed by such a loving thought and action. It certainly brought tears to David's eyes.

That prompted David to tell people about the Warhurst boys/men raising money for the prostate cancer charity, Movember, following his diagnosis and treatment. Keith set up the team – Warhurst Mo Team – with a target to raise £1,000. The team members are Keith Warhurst, Harry Warhurst, Neill Warhurst, Dave Slaven, Marcus Slaven and Alexander Slaven. Each team member has his own individual target and there is some healthy competition going on! As

you can imagine, David was very touched by this lovely gesture which tunes in with what Jane was saying about how our young people are so often badly misrepresented in the media. The team has raised £668 towards their target so far. Contributed by David Warhurst

**On Sunday 14th December 2025 Rev Victor Ball led a Mid-winter Festival**

We sang these carols, which were interspersed with relevant readings. "O Little Town of Bethlehem", "In the Bleak Midwinter", "We three kings", "It cam upon a midnight clear", "The Universal Incantation" and "Silent Night",

**No services were held on Sundays 21st or 28th December 2025**

In living we must do our best to find the good, the true,  
with joyous hearts, enquiring minds.  
To look at life anew.

***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 07799 896452

**email:** margaretrobinson81@gmail.com

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

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

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

*January*

Margaret Robinson

Joan Unwin

Margaret Whitham

Caron R K Robinson

*February*

William Dixon Oliver

Sam Walker



**Coffee Morning at Stockton Unitarians is on the  
second Saturday of the month from 10.00am till  
11.30am**

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

**Saturday 10th January 2026  
Saturday 14th February 2026  
Saturday 14th March 2026**



**Deadline for the next edition of Church News is the  
Wednesday 25th February 2026**

Please send your contributions for the March April 2026  
edition to the Editor: Margaret Robinson

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

**Visit to Whitby Old Capel on 21st December 2025 for the Winter Solstice service** led by Clare. The Winter Solstice is the shortest day and longest night in the Northern hemisphere.



During the service there was a Mummers play, Readings, Wassailing and Reflections, with the lighting of candles in apples. The apple represents the world and the candle is lit to celebrate the returning of the light

There were over 30 people in the congregation, which sat in two semicircles. Jean Watson attended with her son Andrew, granddaughter Aurora and Margaret Kirk and Neill Warhurst. Jean Watson



# ANNUAL MEETINGS

## Date For Your Diary - GA 2026, 27-29 March

Friday, 27th March 2026 (Day1 from Plenary I at 2.00pm) to Sunday 29th March 2026 (Day3 – finishing after lunch, in the usual way).

The Venue is The Hayes Conference Centre, Hayes Lane, Swanwick, Alfreton, Derbyshire, DE55 1AU.

<https://www.cct.org.uk/the-hayes/the-hayes-conference-centre>

**Our Knit 'n' Natter Group** meet on alternative Tuesdays from 11.00am to 1.00pm. If you enjoy knitting, crocheting , sewing or just chatting, come along bring your lunch and enjoy a couple of hours in good friendly company with a cup of tea.

**Dates: 13th and 27th January, 10th and 24th February, 10th and 24th March 2026.**

We make items for friends and family, also for prem babies (hospital), baby-banks and other charities (Catalyst for the elderly, St



Mungo for the homeless)



## **'Seeds of the Future' Workshop 29th November 2025**

As the 6am Kings Cross train hummed to life at Newcastle Central Station, the chief steward came over the speakers and apologised that, owing to a signal failure ahead, we would be leaving the station travelling backwards. Since it was pitch-black outside (ah, Newcastle in November), this made little difference, except perhaps to those of us hoping this was not a metaphor. I stuck my coat behind my head, and nodded off and awakened in the grey light of early morning at Kings Cross, just in time to hop off, wander past a picture of a labyrinth (the metaphors were coming thick and fast) and get the Tube to the Thames and Essex Hall.

'Seeds of the Future' was a workshop comprising about 15 Unitarians from across England and Wales, led by Nick Butler-Watts of the Innovation Fund, and Liz Slade, our Chief Officer. After coffee (of course), a chalice lighting and check-in, we began with a short roleplay, in which we formed groups of three who each discussed a situation one might encounter in a church – to move the pews out of the meeting hall, or keep them? from the perspective of three different 'types' of people one tends to encounter in a congregation; the manager, the entrepreneur, and the idealist.

After that, we moved on to discuss what we saw emerging in our movement, and what excites us. I thought of the joy of Hucklow Summer School, and the increasing number of groups such as Heart and Soul, Facilitators Network, Administrators Network, and what I see as greater connection between Unitarians across the UK. Are we seeing a more national Unitarianism emerge, that can help us pool our resources to survive in the new world? I hope so.

At lunchtime we nibbled bagels, and I went for a walk to the riverside, ending up with 'Waterloo Sunset' stuck in my head. It could have been worse. (It could have been the 'Salmon Dance'.)

As we progressed into the afternoon, we considered how Unitarianism might spark spiritual renewal and social change in the UK (may as well aim big!). I came up with the strapline "With heart, soul, and rolled-up sleeves", which I was quite pleased with. We drew a matrix, and placed factors on Post-It Notes affecting us and our congregations along the axes 'Inside / Outside Our Control' and 'Energising / Draining'. We closed out our session with a check-out and benediction, then we ambled off for a pint and a chat at The Olde Cheshire Cheese before returning home after a long, but productive, day.

Louise Reeve

## *New Year Wishes*

To those who partied around the world  
Or those that lay in bed and curled  
up to the one they hold so dear  
I wish you all Happy New year.

The homeless sleeping on the street  
feeling the hunger and defeat,  
May these few words fill you with cheer  
may you do well this brand New Year.

Those Women fearing for their lives  
battered girlfriends, battered wives,  
Husbands, boyfriends, living in fear  
pray Lord protect them this New Year

For Nurses with devoted ways  
caring for someone's final days,  
Stay strong no matter how severe  
love is your gift in this New year.

For Police protecting us each day  
hand them the torch to light our way,  
To face the foe showing no fear  
we wish them all a safe New Year

That Fireman risking life and limb  
Daily, facing scenes so grim,  
those burning buildings hold no fear  
May God be with him this New year.

Those soldiers in the line of fire  
living life close to the wire  
From Private to the Brigadier  
May God protect you this New Year.

For those alone, without a friend  
I hope your darkness soon will end,  
Your guiding light is close - so near  
may friendship find you this New Year.

Talk to your friends don't text them all  
speak face to face without phone call.  
Make pals feel wanted, keep them near  
make them happy this brand New Year.

Those people who've lost faith, like me  
who have no other Deity  
May church folk comfort them - endear  
restore their faith in this New Year.

Around the World we should link hands  
North, South, East, West to all Gods lands,  
Should learn to live in love - not fear  
let's make this year a brave New Year.

By Eric R Harvey in January 2019

A wish for all those who aid us or who are in peril whilst performing their duties.

**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](mailto:louise.rogers256@gmail.com) Or see [facebook.co/groups/687366168770017](https://www.facebook.com/groups/687366168770017) **Sessions: Saturdays 3.00pm (open 2.30pm) 3rd and 17th January, 7th and 21st February, 7th and 21st March 2026**

*All good wishes for the New Year  
Peace, Health and Happiness in  
2026*

## Sunday Services 2026

### Zoom link: 6680459646



Date	Time	Worship Leader
4th January	3.00pm	no service
11th January	3.00pm	Looking Forward service
18th January	3.00pm	
25th January	3.00pm	
1st February	3.00pm	Rev Margaret Kirk
8th February	3.00pm	
15th February	3.00pm	
22nd February	3.00pm	
1st March	6.00pm	
8th March	6.00pm	

**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 for January, February and March 2026

11th January	Mrs Josie Squires
18th January	Jimmy Lees
25th January	Mrs Smith and Mrs Fish
1st February	Mrs Jean Watson
8th February	Flower Fund
15th February	Mrs Margaret Whitham
22nd February	Mrs Josie Squires
1st March	Mrs Powley
8th 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)