

Stockton Unitarians



There are many days both in the UK and Internationally that are celebrated throughout September and October 2026, these are just an example. **21st September International Day of Peace, 10th October World Mental Health Day and 24th October United Nations Day**

News
September October
2026



Services held in June, July and August 2026

On Sunday 28th June 2026 Rev Margaret Kirk led the service on the theme of "Mercy"

Margaret read from Luke's Prodigal Son story and 'The quality of mercy' by Portia from Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice, and a reading from Cliff Reid's Sacred Earth. Followed by reflections on the theme of mercy. She discussed the concept of mercy through Portia's speech about mercy surpassing legal justice and being a divine attribute, while also reflecting on mercy in the context of refugees and immigration issues.

"The quality of mercy is not strain'd,
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath: it is twice blest;
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes:"
"Tis mightiest in the mightiest: it becomes
But mercy is above this sceptred sway;"
"Though justice be thy plea, consider this,
That, in the course of justice, none of us
Should see salvation: we do pray for mercy;
And that same prayer doth teach us all to render
The deeds of mercy. I have spoke thus much
To mitigate the justice of thy plea;"

We sang "A dream of widening love", "To mercy, pity, peace and love", "Justice for persons" and "Love will guide us". We had a congregation of six.

On Sunday 5th July 2026 Rev Victor Ball led the service on the theme of "Independence or Interdependence," focusing on the 4th of July and the historical context of American independence. Victor explored the difference between independence and individualism, drawing connections to early American settlers and religious independence movements, while emphasizing the importance of community and interdependence over selfish individualism.

Victor read part of the Declaration of Independence from 5th July 1776 "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." When the United States of America became independent of Great Britain and the King. He read from various texts

including John Winthrop's sermon about a "city upon a hill" and discussed how modern American celebrations of independence have become politically polarized. He also read John Donne's poem "No man is an island." and referenced the Pilgrim Fathers and John Bunyan's hymn, focusing on unity and interconnectedness among people.

Victor led a prayer focused on fostering mutual understanding and respect in community, asking for clarity of mind and purpose. He prayed for those affected by personal sorrows, tragedies, and natural disasters, specifically mentioning the people of Venezuela. The prayer concluded with a reflection on historical movements of independence in the 16th and 17th centuries and their impact on religion and science.

Victor discussed the history of Virginia's colonization, including Queen Elizabeth I's charter and Sir Walter Raleigh's expeditions. He read from Raleigh's writing "The Pilgrimage," which described his planned journey and included symbolic items like a scallop shell and staff. Victor also shared his personal connection to American history, revealing that some of his ancestors were early settlers in the American colonies from the 1630s and fought in the War of Independence in 1776. We sang "To be a pilgrim", "The Depths of Inner Space", "Dare to think" and "One World This". We had five people in chapel, and two members joined us via Zoom.

On Sunday 12th July 2026 Margaret Robinson led the service on the theme of "Joy" The opening words were by Rev Ant How and the Chalice lighting was by Dawn Buckle



The service included the prayer "In this Sacred gathering" by Rev Ant Howe and the group read a prayer about the mystery of life and celebrated the joy of possibility while working toward equity and justice (a version of the prayer of Jesus) written by Rev Maude Robinson

Margaret discussed the power of imagination to transform negative experiences into positive ones and emphasized the importance of play and enjoyment in daily life. She shared numerous examples of how ordinary things can be perceived differently through imagination and suggested ways to incorporate more fun and light-hearted activities into life.

She read a list of life principles from "An alphabet of life and living" by Bernice Lashbrook, covering topics from acceptance and beauty to zest for life. The

principles emphasized various aspects of personal growth, including curiosity, bravery, listening, gratitude, and sharing joys with others. Highlighting the importance of friendship, companionship, and meaningful connections as sources of deep joy and fulfilment. She also spoke about inner freedom, using an analogy about a child sitting down outwardly but still standing up inside to illustrate that outward conformity doesn't necessarily indicate inner compliance.

The service concluded with participants sharing personal sources of joy, Margaret Kirk discussed the distinction between joy, happiness, and pleasure, describing joy as something more intense and short-lived that comes from unexpected moments. She shared personal examples of joy, including experiences with music, nature (specifically snowdrops), and grandchildren, emphasizing how these moments are temporary yet deeply meaningful. She referenced William Blake's poem "Kiss the joy as it flies" to highlight the transient nature of joy, suggesting that recognizing its impermanence makes it all the more profound.

Jane discussed the joy she finds in nature, flowers and her garden, and Margaret Whitham talked about her grandchildren and a new baby great-grandchild named Sebastian, Jean spoke about her dog. David spoke time spent in hospital and family relationships and Hazel described the joy of observing two pink water lilies opening simultaneously,

We sang "We gather together", "Joy of Living", Sing, sing fir joy" and "Let it be a dance". We had three people in chapel and three people joined us via Zoom.

On Sunday 19th July 2026 Rev Victor Ball led the service on the theme of "Time"

Victor led the service, which included lighting candles for several reasons such as the kindness of healthcare workers, family gatherings and celebrations, the value of spending time with loved ones, and the beauty of nature, and the importance of appreciating the present moment despite global challenges. Victor read from Ecclesiastes about the seasons of life, referencing the popular song "Turn, Turn, Turn". He also talked about the nature of time, referencing Stephen Hawking's views on the universe and the concept of a first cause



Victor spoke about the concept of time, drawing connections between natural cycles, the seasons, and human life. He explained how ancient civilizations measured time using the sun, moon, and stars, and guided participants in creating a mandala to visually represent these celestial cycles. The discussion explored how these natural cycles parallel human life stages, from birth in spring to adulthood and eventual decline, with participants placing different life stages on the mandala corresponding to seasonal positions.

Victor discussed the cycles of life and the natural world, explaining concepts like equinoxes, solstices, and the alignment of ancient monuments with celestial events. He shared insights about the philosophical questions of causation and creation, drawing parallels between children's curiosity about "why" and the broader questions asked by scientists and cosmologists about the origins of the universe. The discussion concluded with references to Stephen Hawking's views on the universe's creation and his interactions with Pope John Paul II regarding scientific study of cosmology.

We sang "Here in the moment's song", "In this time on earth we're given", "We celebrate the web of life" and "O Lord give us strength"

We had seven people in the chapel and two members joined via Zoom

On Sunday 26th July 2026 Brigitte McCready led the service on the theme of "Imagination"

Brigitte read some children's stories to illustrate imagination, about Prince, Faraway Giant, Valley of Dreams and Treasures in a paper bag. The magic of having children. To use imagination, you don't need a passport, you just need an open heart. Life is a journey, not a destination.

During the covid pandemic many people felt like being creative, painting, drawing, sculpting, knitting etc, using their imaginations. We sang "Come and find a quiet centre", "Mother Spirit, Father Spirit", "How can I keep from singing" and "Spirit of earth, root, stone and tree"

We had eight people in the chapel.



Sundays 2nd, 9th, 15th and 23rd August we did not meet for worship.



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: 8th and 22nd September, 6th and 20th October, 3rd and 17th November 2026.

Uni-sing! A Zoom hymn singing group,
louise.rogers256 @gmail.com Sessions: Saturdays 2.00pm
5th and 19th September, 3rd and 17th October 2026

Stockton Unitarians' Directory

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

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

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 News Editor**

telephone: 01642 782219 mobile 07799 896452

email: margaretrobinson81@gmail.com

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

Congratulations to all our children and grandchildren (Jobson, Robinson, Slaven, Walker, Watson), on their A level and other academic results – Well done and Good Luck in their next educational step.



Congratulations and Happy Birthday

to those Celebrating their Birthday in

September

Jessica Eva Dodds

October

Allan Warhurst

Melody Dixon Oliver

Gemma Hutton (Watson)

Michael Unwin

David Warhurst

Rhys Hutton

Josie Squires

The Whitby Journey – written for a workshop on Change at the General Assembly Meetings held at the end of March 2026

The mission to preserve Flowergate Old Chapel has a strong basis in our story of dissent and social justice. Particularly the story of one man, one Minister who over 200 years ago crusaded against extreme poverty and unbridled privilege in the town. He became notorious for doing it. He was imprisoned many times and pilloried ceaselessly in the press. A few years ago, he was acknowledged by Whitby Civic Society, as a brave defender of people's rights: these are words on the blue plaque proudly displayed on the wall outside our chapel.

It is this crusading spirit of defiance against social injustice that has inspired a group of us to work over a number of years towards saving our building for the community, to honour that spirit and prevent our chapel from becoming yet another holiday home to enrich the pockets of property developers. We are a part of Whitby's history and the mission for social justice continues in this small coastal town just as keenly as it did then.

Throughout we have been able to draw upon the support of Simon Bland, our Ministry and Congregational support Officer. Two years ago, we drew up a Licence contract with Flash Company Arts, a Community Interest Company. They have a licence to use the chapel for small arts activities. They support our Unitarian ethos and have been coming regularly to our monthly services.

We gained planning permission to remove pews, re-flag the floor and remove part of the screen between the entrance area and the main worship area to satisfy fire regulations. An expensive undertaking that absorbed most of our funds. We now have an open space to allow for more active arts activities

which user groups are delighted with and we feel we have achieved a great deal. Above all, we want our building to be used by the community to enrich the lives of local people.

But, unfortunately, the four of us have had to face up to the fact that we cannot take the chapel into the future. We approached the Deceleration

The Whitby Journey (continued)

Team to help us through our conflicting feelings. They helped us to accept that our Trusteeship had run its course. So, it came as a great relief to be informed that the Innovation Fund had provided a grant to steer us through the process and a person to give us advice and encouragement.

Christopher Daniel arrived in Whitby in January together with Simon Bland. They visited the chapel and were enthusiastic about its new space, the potential for more community activity and the evident commitment of our two community workers – our licensees. Their commitment to our Unitarian values and the social justice issues that are part of our heritage, have helped to reassure us that there is a future.

Together with Simon, Chris is helping to steer us through the process of dissolving our charity, working closely with the district treasurer as our assets are transferred to the district temporarily. The district will hold the assets until a CIC (Community Interest Company) is set up to manage them permanently.

Although, there are no longer monthly services, the two community workers and our lay leader, Claire Lee have agreed to hold services four times a year to celebrate solstices and equinoxes. The first one was held on the 21st of December and attracted 35 people. Most of them were local

Rev. Margaret Kirk – chair of Flowergate Old Chapel CIO

The next service at Flowergate Old Chapel, Whitby is on
Saturday 19th September 2026 at 2.00pm to celebrate the
Autumn Equinox.

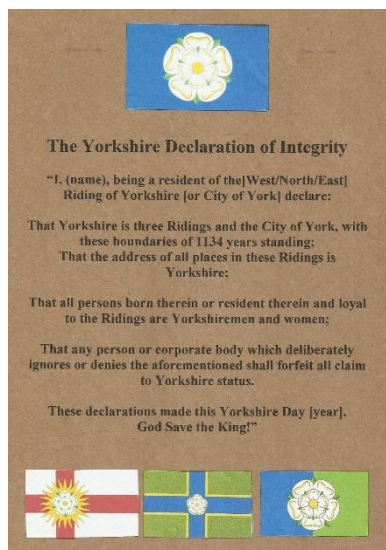
1st August Yorkshire Day

The 1st of August is classed as Yorkshire Day to celebrate the county's heritage and protect the 1974 local government boundary changes.

The date was chosen to commemorate the Battle of Minden which dates back to the 1st of August 1759, during the Seven Years War, when soldiers from Yorkshire Regiments picked roses from the battlefield to wear on their headdresses in tribute to fallen comrades. The Rifles who succeeded the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry still celebrate the day each year, known as 'Minden Day.'



The date is also significant because the Slave Abolition Act 1833 officially came into force across the British Empire on 1st August 1834, largely thanks to the tireless campaigning of Yorkshire native and MP William Wilberforce.



Traditionally the day is marked by the official reading of the Yorkshire Declaration of Integrity which asserts the boundaries and pride of the county.

This proclamation was read outside of Yarm Town Hall on Saturday 1st August 2026 by Nigel Wilkins from Historic Counties Trust, Association of British Counties and Yorkshire Riding Society, with the Yorkshire flag proudly flying, in the presence of Yarm Town Councillors and Yarm Residents.

Deadline for the November December Stockton Unitarians News is October 20th 2026. Please let the editor Margaret Robinson have your news, articles, and photographs
Margaretrobinson81@gmail.com

News from August's edition of Uni-News

The recent heatwaves across the UK and Europe make us all too aware of the effects of climate change, with the direst outcomes hitting the most vulnerable: the elderly, chronically ill, young children, and those financially disadvantaged. There is a moral imperative to alleviate suffering due to these effects, but also to do what we can to bring about real change via local and national government. Many of our congregations have been moved to act in different ways.

Most recently, there have been screenings of the **People's Emergency Briefing** at Unitarian churches and chapels around the UK. This 45-minute film features clips from experts as they spoke at the National Emergency Briefing last November to an audience of politicians and leaders in business, culture, faith, sport, and the media. It also shows reactions from members of the public, which helps to humanise the material. It is a very powerful film with strong messages, but easy to take in and lending itself to very useful discussion. You can find everything you need to know about how to host a screening on their website.

Another way chapels have been involved is by hosting **Climate Cafés**; self-help gatherings for people trying to navigate their own feelings about the climate crisis and to support one another. These are advice-free zones. They are not activist or political organising events nor spaces to give practical advice on personal actions. This a very spiritually supportive way to connect with your congregation and the local community about the climate crisis.

Finally, some churches and chapels are also finding out how to become **Climate Emergency Centres** by offering "cool spaces" during heatwaves, or other needed space for the local community. If you would like to know how Rosslyn Hill is getting involved, you can contact Allison Bybee.

Unitarians for Climate Justice share information regularly about these initiatives and more on their WhatsApp group. Anyone is welcome to join!

The summer edition of the **Social Justice Newsletter** will be going out this week, with updates from Unitarians for Climate Justice, LGBTQ+ Unitarians, Unitarians for Justice for Palestine, the Peace Fellowship and more. If you would like to get on the mailing list, please email **Ann Howell**.

Sunday Services 2026 Zoom link: 6680459646

30th August	6.00pm	Diana Bebbby
6th September	6.00pm	tba
13 th September	6.00pm	Rev Margaret Kirk
20th September	6.00pm	Diana Bebbby
27 th September	6.00pm	Rev Paul Walker
4 th October	6.00pm	Rev Margaret Kirk
11 th October	6.00pm	Rev Victor Ball
18 th October	6.00pm	Rev Paul Walker
25 th October	6.00pm	Rev Jean and Rev Alex Bradley
		GA joint Presidents
		NUA weekend
1 st November	6.00pm	tba
8 th November	6.00pm	Rev Victor Ball
15 th November	6.00pm	tba
22 nd November	6.00pm	Rev Paul Walker

Offers to lead worship would be appreciated, please contact
Margaret Robinson

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.

Flower Rota – August-September 2026

30 th August	Rev Victor Ball
6th September	Rev Margaret Kirk
13 th September	Mrs Poultney
20 th September	Mrs Josie Squires
27 th September	Paul Walker
4th October	Mrs Smith & Mrs Fish
11 th October	Mrs Jean Watson
18 th October	Gail Moore
25 th October	Hazel & David Warhurst

Most services are in the chapel and will 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