

Minister's Message

Over twelve months ago I began my ministry at Oldham Unitarian Chapel. It has been a year in which I have tried, with the help of our small congregation, to make some important changes. I see these changes are fundamental to the well-being of a worshipping community that wants to survive into the 21st century. Obviously it's not the building and the fixtures and fittings that make a church or chapel but the people who make up the membership, that attend the services, lead the services, initiate, organise and help to create events that reach out to the wider community.

A church exists for the worship of God and to witness God's loving presence by seeking a mission within the community. That might be fund raising or helping disadvantaged children, or helping to alleviate the suffering of destitute asylum seekers, it matters not for we are all of one family, one people created by God. We seek therefore to make our witness in Oldham not one of simply making pious statements but rather in something that is real, something that is meaningful, personally rewarding and therefore worthwhile.

In the last twelve months we have painted, decorated, put up new signage and regularly updated the wayside pulpits. We have had new curtain blinds fitted and new carpeting for one area. By reconfiguring the worship area we can now use audio-visual resources in worship and of course for education and entertainment. This development alone is a welcome and modern addition and something that we should celebrate and be proud of. We continue to fight a continuing battle against 'clutter' and in doing so we have cleared an under-used room and decorated it. Once modestly re-furnished it will provide accommodation for the new counselling service which we hope to offer shortly to the people of Oldham - watch this space!

Our work in the wider community continues to grow with the asylum campaigns we are currently running on behalf of Abdoulaye Diabate and Taha Ghasemi; see details of our campaign on this website. On December 18th, following our carol service (11.00 am to 12 pm), we will be holding a children's Christmas party (starts at 2 pm) in conjunction with a local charity known as 'Key to the Door'.

Our Sunday services, unless otherwise stated, begin at 11 am each Sunday, and we aim to have something slightly different each week. The second Sunday of each month we have our guest organist Ian Taylor to play for us and Helen Fleming, a qualified artist, takes the children for discussion and topic work, often involving drawing and painting (see the September - December newsletter). More than this, we have encouraged discussion on issues and questions that are fundamental to faith, such as "if there is a loving God, why is there so much suffering in the world?" With such questions in mind we have looked at the life and ideas of C. S. Lewis, we have organised reading groups on Eckhart Tolle's spiritual classic *The Power of Now*, and Rev. Dr. David Doel's book *The Man They Called The Christ*. David Doel, an experienced psychotherapist, has been a regular preacher at Oldham Unitarian Chapel has also spoken at the chapel about the technique and benefits of meditation.

Other highlights from the past year include a very enjoyable evening of live folk music, and a spicy and delicious curry night; we have recently started a season of entertaining and thought provoking film shows (see website for details). We held a

Taizé workshop and service and hosted the Unitarian Christian Association's 20th anniversary service and celebration. In June we were joined by Rev. Bill Darlison, author of *The Gospel and the Zodiac*, who gave an interesting and stimulating account of his book and later, in September, the Right Hon. Michael Meacher MP came to the chapel to discuss his book, *Destination of the Species*. In it Michael sets out his understanding of the interface between science and religion.

Already a very busy year, we look forward to celebrating our 198th anniversary on November 20th, when our Sunday service will commence at 2.30 pm. The service will be taken by Mr Ken Johnson, president of the Manchester District Association of Unitarian churches; refreshments will be served after the service and we extend a warm welcome to anybody who wishes to attend.

As we move towards our 200th anniversary in 2013, we continue to recognise that it's the people that make a church, and we will continue to invite people, from whatever background, to come and join us, not only to play a part in the renaissance of liberal faith and exploration of all aspects of religion/spirituality, but to be part of positive local social action for the Oldham area. We have just distributed 5000 promotional leaflets to Oldham households, giving exactly that invitation – and it's an invitation that applies to you! In serving others we are serving ourselves for in the web of God's creation there can be no divisions.

Best wishes as always
Bob