

QUAKER UNIVERSALIST GROUP NEWSLETTER NOVEMBER 2020

Dear QUG supporter

Universalist

Thank you so much for responding to our request for items for the June and October editions of *Universalist*. Please keep writing: we welcome any articles related to universalism. No one has yet written to us on how different religious groups around the world have responded to the Coronavirus. We suspect that it might have some relationship with attitudes to science, but we would love an essay on this.

Please send any articles to Tony Philpott (by replying to this email), or directly to the Editor of *Universalist*, Shona Lowe, at shonal@qug.org.uk.

Outside Time

In preparation for next year's conference some of us are interested in collecting thoughts on the experience of being outside time. Have you had such 'timeless moments'?

If you have any ideas on this topic, or can reference people who have, please write briefly in reply to this email.

Our website - <https://qug.org.uk/>

Our website is open for comments at any time, so please use it. For example, it would be good to have some QUG perspectives on how you are coping with Coronavirus and what the future might be post-COVID 19 (if that will ever be possible!). See <https://qug.org.uk/posts/>

Progressive Christianity

We have recently been exploring how much universalism there is in Christian churches apart from Quakers. Here is a note from one of our committee members, Peter Varney.

Reaction to the fundamentalist evangelical forms of Christianity, which seem to be gaining strength in most denominations of Christianity, has led to the formation of groups which are more open and liberal. 'Open' has now become code not only for accepting biblical criticism but also acceptance of different expressions of sexuality. In the UK **Modern Church** brings together mainly Anglican academics, the **Progressive Christianity Network** (PCN) has a wider range of adherents, and **Free to Believe** has sprung out of the United Reformed Church. All three have newsletters and conferences likely to be of interest to those linked to QUG.

The PCN website pcnbritain.org.uk gives a summary of their approach which strongly resonates with Friends and more directly with QUG people: 'experiencing the sacred in all of life, guided by the life and teachings of Jesus, acting with compassion, working to achieve a just, sustainable and peaceful world.' There are local groups often with more than a sprinkling of Friends. I warmly commend PCN.

The next issue of *Progressive Voices*, the PCN newsletter, has two articles by Friends, Rhiannon Grant and Gerald Drewett. Rhiannon writes about the 8 points which form the basis of PCN's approach. She finds close links with all except the one relating to outward sacraments and brings up to date the Quaker response to the WCC 1982 document *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. Gerald writes on religion and science: 'Science does not deny the existence of God the Divine Mystery because that is not its job.'

St Ethelburga's

St Ethelburga's is an ancient church in London. Its address is 78 Bishopsgate, EC2N 4AG. It is now a multi-faith centre for reconciliation and peace, but it is still consecrated for Christian worship and, for example, holds a communion service once per month. To quote from its website: 'St Ethelburga's is a Christian charity that works with people of all faiths and none and has a multi-faith team and board of trustees' (See <https://stethelburgas.org/>).

St Ethelburga's work is rooted in four core principles: put values into action; seek opportunity in crisis; build community across differences; and protect what is sacred.

At our QUG Conference in 2015 we were delighted to have as one of our speakers Justine Huxley. Justine is the CEO of St Ethelburga's and has a Sufi Muslim background. You can hear Justine's talk on our website at <https://qug.org.uk/conferences/conference-2015/>. In 2019 Justine published her first book called *Generation Y, Spirituality and Social Change*: this is a collection of interviews with millennials living a radical new vision of faith and action.

This year Justine has written a blog which reflects on the Coronavirus pandemic and puts it in the context of deep time. We will be publishing this in our next copy of *Universalist* since it speaks so well to us and relates to the theme of next year's conference. You will find this blog on the St Ethelburga's website (<https://stethelburgas.org/after-the-fire-sourcing-hope-in-a-landscape-of-collapse/>) or you can wait until we publish the October *Universalist*.

Membership of QUG

Renewals for QUG membership were due on 1st January 2020, so to renew your subscription for this year (or to join QUG for the first time) please complete the membership form at the end of this newsletter or on our website at <https://qug.org.uk/membership/>

Do remember that you can make any payments to QUG by bank transfer. Our bank details are on the membership form.

QUG Annual Conference - LIFE, TIME AND ETERNITY

As you know, our conference this year at the Quaker Study Centre in Woodbrooke, Birmingham, has been postponed until May 14th – 16th 2021. We have been thinking about various ways through which we might organise next year's conference and we have discussed three possibilities:

- 1 We hold a conference at Woodbrooke in the traditional manner** (with the only difference being perhaps social distancing and other Covid rules during the conference).
- 2 We hold a 'blended' conference**, with some willing to go to Woodbrooke in person, but others joining online. Speakers could either come in person or present their talk online (either live, or on YouTube).
- 3 We hold a conference that is entirely online.** We could have pre-recorded or live talks online over the weekend. We could have discussions – in plenary or in breakout rooms. We would use Zoom or similar software.

Any comments on these alternatives would be welcome (by replying to this newsletter).

We cannot of course guarantee that we will have the same speakers, though some of them may be free and willing to come. We will, though, have the same topic.

We have refunded all the money paid by the participants to us for the 2020 conference. If you have had any problems with this please contact our treasurer, Geoff Gates, at geoffg@qug.org.uk. We might, for example, be able to refund money by bank transfer, if a cheque has not been suitable.