



# UNITARIAN ANNUAL MEETINGS

27-29 MARCH 2026

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**Handbook**

# WE'RE SO GLAD YOU ARE HERE!

Welcome to the 2026 General Assembly. We hope you will make yourself at home in this special venue.

This handbook has all the information you need for our days here together - it's worth a read before you dive in.

The programme is rich: workshops, talks, worship and social time. We've deliberately created more breathing room this year, because you told us you wanted it – more space, more time with friends old and new.

It says a lot about the times we find ourselves in that both the motions we have received from our membership are about how we stand up and speak out for what we believe in. In our days together, may the fabric of our community grow stronger such that we can leave with hope and courage to take our message of free and inquiring faith back out into the world.



**Liz Slade, Chief Officer, on behalf of the GA team and Annual Meetings Panel**

# MAKING THE MOST OF THE ANNUAL MEETINGS



The Annual Meetings are designed as a balance of shared gatherings, smaller conversations, worship, and time to connect informally.

Each day includes plenary sessions, where we gather together as a whole movement, alongside workshops and conversations where you can explore particular themes in smaller groups.

You will notice that the programme this year allows for more space between sessions, following feedback from previous years that people valued time to talk, reflect, and connect with one another.

A typical day includes:

- Shared worship or devotion
- One or more plenary sessions in Derbyshire Hall
- Workshops or conversations where you choose between several options
- Time for tea, conversation, and informal meetings
- Shared meals and social time

You do not need to sign up in advance for workshops – simply go to the room listed in the programme.

Some sessions may be busier than others, so arriving a few minutes early is helpful.

# MAKING THE MOST OF THE ANNUAL MEETINGS



## ACCOMMODATION

You can check into your room from 3pm on Friday 27th March. Our programme starts at 2pm, so as guests arrive we invite you to leave your bags with the venue at your own discretion. The check in desk will be located next to the main desk. Rooms need to be vacated, with keys returned, by 10am on the day of departure, but you can leave your luggage with the hotel reception, at your own risk.



## FOOD AND DRINK

Meals will be served in The Chatsworth and The Haddon rooms. The Chatsworth dining room will be our quiet dining area. We won't insist on total silence, but we do want to create a space that is welcoming to introverts, those whose social batteries are flagging, and others who are looking for a moment of peace. Teas and coffees will be provided throughout the day.



## MEDICAL SUPPORT

If you have a medical condition that may require attention during the Meetings, it can be helpful to carry a note with you highlighting your diagnosis and a list of any medications you are taking. If you feel comfortable, you can also tell us about any relevant medical information when registering.



## HEARING LOOP

Hearing loops will be available in all of the main meeting and workshop rooms.



### DISPLAYS AND STALLS

Feel free to explore the exhibition, which will be held in the Main Conference Hall. There are stalls from the Send A Child to Hucklow Fund, the LDPA, the Unitarian Women's Group and the Nightingale Centre. There are also stalls from the Foy Society, Great Hucklow Chapel and the Unitarian Social Justice Network, as well as the LGBTQIA Group, the Unitarian Christian Association and the National Unitarian Fellowship.



### BOOKSHOP

The General Assembly bookshop has a range of carefully curated titles, including titles from the Lindsey Press and will be in the Main Conference Hall. There is also a used book stall.



### METHODS OF PAYMENT

There is no cash machine on site so please do bring cash if necessary. The bar and front desk 'tuck shop' take cards, as does the GA bookshop. We will invite donations to a collection during the anniversary service, and will accept cash, cards, or cheques made out to 'General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches'.



### BANNERS

There will be a parade of banners during the Opening Worship on Friday and the Closing Worship on Sunday. Please do bring your congregational, districts, and affiliated banners and take part. Each banner should have a designated carrier who should come to the room 15 minutes beforehand, for instructions. Please do not pack banners away early

# MAKING THE MOST OF THE ANNUAL MEETINGS 2026



## CHOIR

Choir rehearsals will be on:

- Friday 27th March 4pm, Chapel
- Friday 27th 8pm, Derbyshire Hall
- Saturday 28th 4pm, Chapel

The choir will gather in the Derbyshire Hall at 6.45pm on Sunday evening, ahead of the Anniversary Service.



## CHAPLAINCY/PASTORAL SUPPORT

Your chaplains will be a team led by Rev CJ McGregor. If you would like to speak with a chaplain during the Annual Meetings please call 07515 199648 and leave a message. A chaplain will return your call and offer support and/or plan a time and place to meet. CJ can be reached by anyone seeking pastoral support during the meetings.



## MOMENTS OF CALM

The Quiet Space will be in the Derwent Room, and there is as a Sensory Space in the Tissington Room



## WIFI

There is free wifi available at the venue.



## SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

Due to popular demand, we have created more space in the programme for socialising – more time to connect with old friends and new. Our keynote lecture has now moved to the afternoon slot, and after dinner, your evening is free.

You might relax in the bar, take an evening stroll, or have an early night – and there are also some events on offer:

- Craftivism workshop
- Associate Members' Reception
- Newbies' Reception
- Inquirer Reception
- Self-compassion workshop
- Peace Vespers
- Choir rehearsal (choir participants only)

As well as the bar and lounge areas, please do feel free to use to the dining halls for board games, crafting, and chatting. The quiet room will also be open for those wanting a peaceful space. You can find a full schedule on page 12

# WORSHIP



The Opening Worship will start the Meetings at 2pm on Friday in Derbyshire Hall and will be led by Rev Philip Waldron.

Morning worship will take place at 8am. Those attending are asked to be in their seats five minutes beforehand.

We have a more traditional worship (A) and a more meditational one (B).

On Saturday, services will be led by:  
A: Julie Wolstenholme  
B: Rev Simon Ramsay

And on Sunday, services will be led by:  
A: Rev Robert Foreman  
B: Rev Kieren Mardle-Moss

The Anniversary Service will take place on Saturday at 7.30pm in Derbyshire Hall.

Various worship sessions will take place during the plenary and breakout sessions.

There will be a closing worship service led by our new co-Presidents Revs Jean and Alex Bradley.

# KEYNOTE SPEAKER

## SARAH CORBETT



Sarah is an award-winning activist and author, Ashoka Fellow and founder of the global Craftivist Collective.

Born in Everton, the fourth most deprived ward in the UK into an activist family, she squatted in social housing when she was 3 years old, led successful campaigns at school and became Activism Manager at Oxfam GB before running the global Craftivist Collective full time.

Her unique 'Gentle Protest' methodology to craftivism (craft + activism) has directly helped change hearts, minds, policies and laws around the world. She prioritises engaging non-activists and people nervous of activism and is passionate about mitigating risk of polarisation in protest.

Her TEDx speech 'Activism Needs Introverts' was chosen as a TED Talk Of The Day. Corbett is an Honorary Fellow at Goldsmiths University of London, a Member of the Art Workers' Guild, Hard Art Collective and a Service Designer trained at the Royal College of Art. The Craftivist Collective Handbook was awarded best multimedia book of 2025 by the Creative Book Awards.

# FRIDAY 27 MARCH

Time	What	Where
11am - 12.30pm	<b>Arrivals</b> Join us at the Hayes, leave your bags and check-in	Foyer
12.30pm	<b>Lunch</b>	Chatsworth and Haddon
2pm	<b>Opening Worship</b>	Derbyshire Hall
2.30pm	Break	Lounges
2.45pm	<b>Plenary 1</b>	Derbyshire Hall
3.30pm	Afternoon tea	Lounges
4.15pm	<b>Derbyshire's Unitarian Heritage</b> Belper Chapel	Derbyshire Hall
	<b>Researching Unitarian History</b> Unitarian Historical Society	Chapel
	<b>Nourishing the Unitarian Soul</b> Unitarian Renewal Group	Butterley 1
	<b>What the Union can do for You</b> Faith Workers Unite	Butterley 2
5.15pm	<b>Break</b>	Lounges
5.30pm	<b>JRB Keynote lecture - Sarah Corbett</b>	Derbyshire Hall
6.30pm	<b>Dinner</b>	Chatsworth and Haddon
Social time		

# A BIT MORE ABOUT FRIDAY'S WORKSHOPS

## **RESEARCHING UNITARIAN HISTORY**

A panel of active Unitarian researchers will focus on the practical issues that arise when we try to explore individual, congregational and institutional histories. Speakers will be: Alan Ruston - researching at Harris Manchester College Oxford (HMCO); Dr David Wykes - 18th century research; Rev Dr Rory Castle Jones - researching in Wales; Derek McAuley - undertaking research online during Covid. Speakers will each talk for ten minutes to be followed by Q&A

## **NOURISHING THE UNITARIAN SOUL**

As the Unitarian movement continues to evolve in rapidly changing times, questions arise about what truly sustains us – as individuals, as communities, and as a national body. What does it mean to nourish the Unitarian soul today? How do we deepen our spiritual foundations, strengthen our shared values, and respond with integrity to the challenges around us? After a short introduction to the theme, invited speakers will offer brief reflections, followed by space for shared conversation. Together we will consider where nourishment is most needed and how the Renew Group might best support this work in the years ahead

## **DERBYSHIRE'S UNITARIAN HERITAGE**

Derbyshire is the birthplace of the modern factory, and the Derwent Valley is a key site in the onset of the Industrial Age. One man, Jedidiah Strutt, was a significant player in shaping that history, and creating the world's first cotton mill town, Belper. His Unitarian beliefs shaped countless lives and continue to influence the town, now recognised by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. If you want to find out more about the rich heritage of the local area or be inspired to discover more about heritage – please come and join our workshop!

## **WHAT THE UNION CAN DO FOR YOU**

The Unitarian section of the Faith Worker's Branch of Unite the Union will be present at the whole of the Annual Meetings this year. We will have a presentation/workshop where we will promote the benefits of union membership. We will also have a stall where we will display materials, including information on campaigning issues. We are a small denomination, but we are well represented and respected within the larger branch, and we would like to build on that. We hope to double our membership and to increase the number of Unitarian reps over the next few years. Come and say hello if you would like to find out more, especially about the training and educational opportunities the union offers.

# FRIDAY'S SOCIAL TIME

Time	What	Where
8pm-9pm	<p><b>Associate Members' Reception</b> A time for Associate Members (or those interested in becoming Associate Members) to get together, hear from the EC – and to thank long-serving volunteer Rosemary Ruston as she steps down. Hosted by EC members Sarah Benfield and Stephanie Bisby (EC members) with guest speaker Rev Daniel Costley</p>	Butterley 2
8pm-9pm	<p><b>Newbies' Reception</b> A time for people who are here at the annual meetings for the first time to meet, connect, and find their bearings, led by Rev Kieren Mardle-Moss</p>	Buxton
8pm-9pm	<p><b>Self Compassion Workshop</b> Building on the successful workshop Aisha recently hosted in Cambridge, she invites you join this session to learn more about self-compassion and self-kindness and their importance in our work as congregations</p>	Amber
8pm-8.30pm	<p><b>Craftivism</b> Following Sarah Corbett's keynote, join her for some quiet craftivism</p>	Committee Room (max 12)
8pm-9pm	<p><b>Choir rehearsal</b> For those who are taking part in the choir for our anniversary service, this is one of the three rehearsal slots, led by Rev Marianna Michell</p>	Derbyshire Hall
8pm-9pm	<p><b>The Inquirer Reception</b> Join our The Inquirer editor Laura Autumn Cox and some of its board for a meet and greet with wine and soft drinks. Learn what plans The Inquirer has for the coming year and find out how you can contribute your voice and skills to improve the quality and reach of our national Unitarian magazine. All welcome!</p>	Exhibition Hall break out Main Conference Hall
9.30-9.45pm	<p><b>Peace Vespers</b> The Unitarian Peace Fellowship host a short reflective worship gathering to close the day</p>	Chapel

# ANNIVERSARY PREACHER REV DANIEL COSTLEY



The Anniversary Service is our main collective worship of the Unitarian calendar, and will be held on Saturday evening.

Daniel is currently Minister to the Unitarian congregation in Dover, Kent. He completed his training at Harris Manchester College in 2010, and has previously served congregations in Sevenoaks, Chatham, Maidstone and Tenterden.

Currently Vice-President of the Ministerial Fellowship, Daniel will take on the Presidency at the Annual Meeting this Spring. He has worked with a number of Unitarian projects and Committees, including the Ministry Strategy Group, the Unitarian Historical Society and the Manchester Academy Trust.

He is author of 'Life's Journey – Creating Unitarian Rites of Passage', published by the Lindsey Press in 2020, and is currently Secretary to the General Baptist Assembly.

# SATURDAY 28 MARCH

## MORNING

Time	What	Where
8am	<b>Breakfast</b>	Chatsworth and Haddon
	<b>Morning worship A (30 mins)</b>	Butterley 1
	<b>Morning worship B (30 mins)</b>	Chapel
9am	<b>Plenary 2</b>	Derbyshire Hall
10am	Morning break	Lounges
10.30am	<b>Plenary 3</b>	Derbyshire Hall
11.30am	Break	Lounges
12pm	<b>Social Action - 'How to be a good ally'</b> Led by Rachel McKenzie, Unitarian Social Justice Network	Derbyshire Hall
	<b>Strengthening Our Ministry</b> Simon Bland and Rev Rory Castle Jones	Chapel
	<b>Satsang 2026</b> Unitarian Hindu Connections	Butterley 1
	<b>How we support Unitarian and Free Christian Buildings</b> John Gregson Trust	Butterley 2
1pm	<b>Lunch</b>	Chatsworth and Haddon

# A BIT MORE ABOUT SATURDAY MORNING'S WORKSHOPS

## **SATSANG 2026 WITH UNITARIAN HINDU CONNECTIONS**

Satsang is a Sanskrit term that refers to a gathering for spiritual discourse, meditation, chanting, or other devotional activities. These gatherings aim to seek truth, gain spiritual insight, and support each other on their spiritual journeys. Join Unitarian Hindu Connections, Unitarian Ministers, supporters, and friends for an hour of experimental devotions. Engage in chanting Sanskrit prayers and melodious Kirtan (devotional singing). Feel the energy and let it uplift your mind and soul, connecting with your heart. No prior experience is needed—just come as you are! All are welcome, regardless of faith or background. Participate as you feel comfortable.

## **SOCIAL ACTION - 'HOW TO BE A GOOD ALLY' LED BY RACHEL MCKENZIE**

This session, suggested and endorsed by the Unitarians of Colour group, and supported by the Unitarian Social Justice Network, offers a calm and supportive environment to explore what allyship can look like in everyday life — in our congregations, our communities, and the wider world. Together, we will in a supportive way consider the difference between intention and impact, reflect on how we can stay open when receiving feedback, and explore small but meaningful steps we can take in solidarity with people who experience marginalisation. Everyone who is seeking to deepen their understanding and contribute to communities rooted in compassion, fairness, and shared humanity is warmly welcome. Rachel Mackenzie is a Black woman of mixed parentage with over thirty years' experience in the criminal justice system, where she now leads regional work on fairness, inclusion and anti-racism.

## **HOW WE SUPPORT UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIAN BUILDINGS**

The John Gregson Trust, which is linked to the Hibbert Trust, is a charity which gives small grants to support Unitarian and Free Christian building projects. We fund quinquennial surveys which are essential tools of effective building management. We also give grants to bigger projects. Come along and find out more about our work and how it also links to that of the Hibbert Trust more generally.

## **WHAT THE UNION CAN DO FOR YOU**

GA staff members Simon Bland and Rev. Rory Castle Jones share their insights into the health of our ministry across the movement. Rory reflects on his two years as Ministry and Leadership Development Officer, the changes that are taking place, and how everyone can play a part in strengthening our ministry - as we build spiritually healthy communities around the country.

# SATURDAY 28 MARCH

## AFTERNOON

Time	What	Where
2pm	<b>Plenary 4</b>	Derbyshire Hall
3pm	<b>Patterns of Change</b> Nick Butler Watts and Lizzie Kingston Harrison	Derbyshire Hall
	<b>Reimagining Essex Hall</b> Essex Hall Trust and Haque Tan	Chapel
	<b>Unitarian Women's League AGM</b> Unitarian Women's League	Butterley 1
	<b>Mixed Blessings: Being a Person of Colour/ Ethnic Minority in the current political climate</b> Unitarians of Colour. This session is open to people of colour only	Butterley 2
4pm	Afternoon tea	Lounges
5pm	<b>Charting stories of spiritual change in British Unitarianism</b> Stephen Lingwood	Derbyshire Hall
	<b>Funding bold ideas for the future</b> Nick Butler Watts	Chapel
	<b>Facilitators' Network</b> Jane Blackall and Lizzie Kingston Harrison	Butterley 1
	<b>Growing our faith from the inside</b> Unitarian College	Butterley 2
6pm	<b>Dinner</b>	Chatsworth and Haddon
7.30pm	<b>Anniversary Service</b> Rev Daniel Costley	Derbyshire Hall

# A BIT MORE ABOUT SATURDAY AFTERNOON'S WORKSHOPS

## UNITARIAN WOMEN'S LEAGUE AGM

AGM and presentation of cheque to the GA Ministerial Students Fund

## MIXED BLESSINGS: BEING A PERSON OF COLOUR/ ETHNIC MINORITY IN THE CURRENT POLITICAL CLIMATE

Please note: this session is open only to people of colour / people of ethnic minority heritage. What does it mean to live with a moral compass that's constantly shaken by racism, rising nationalism, and fear-driven politics? Many People of Ethnic Minority Heritage carry deep moral and spiritual fatigue – from being expected to prove our humanity, forgive harm, or remain “reasonable” in the face of exclusion and hate. In this session, members of Unitarians of Colour/ Ethnic Minority will reflect on the pressures of navigating far-right and fascist currents in the UK and beyond, including the influence of white Christian nationalism on democracy, public life, and our communities. We'll explore the idea of moral injury – the pain that arises when justice and love are repeatedly denied – and consider how faith, solidarity, and community care can help us endure and resist the next decade without our spirituality being rooted only in pain. This is a space for us to speak honestly about our mixed blessings: the gifts of resilience, joy, and resistance we carry, alongside the very real wounds of living in this political moment.

## RE-IMAGINING ESSEX HALL

We are joined by the design partners selected by the Essex Hall Trust to reimagine how our central London building can better use its space to represent our values, serve our movement, and raise awareness of our free and inquiring faith. Haque Tan “work globally, combining the scale of architecture with the ingenuity of art and the eccentricities of technology, to make spaces more democratic, inclusive and culturally-driven” - and the team join us today to hear your input to help shape the project

## PATTERNS OF CHANGE

Nothing is constant except change, and sometimes the wisest and most valuable thing we can do is to recognise and understand the inevitable patterns of change around us. Sometimes change involves loss and letting go; sometimes it brings new energy and joy back into our lives. In whatever way change is showing up in your congregational life, you are not alone. Lizzie and Nick have worked extensively, across the movement with many congregations, and found significant areas of overlap and shared experience. This workshop is a chance to see the big picture and the patterns that are emerging and to find solidarity, inspiration and shared resources to help you understand and embrace the changes you are seeing.

# A BIT MORE ABOUT SATURDAY AFTERNOON'S WORKSHOPS

## UNITARIAN COLLEGE: GROWING OUR FAITH FROM THE INSIDE

Unitarian College staff and students will offer an update on the exciting progress we are making to grow our faith from the inside. Come along to hear about the latest developments in Ministry Training, Lay Leadership training and residential work with children and families. Hear testimonies from students and meet the staff.

## FACILITATORS' NETWORK

Nurturing small groups as spaces for connection, sharing, self-reflection and solidarity is an increasingly essential part of the work we do as a movement. Meeting together well, in right relationship, with awareness and compassion does not happen by accident. The Facilitators' Network has met regularly this year open to anyone involved in the serious, joyful and transformative work of creating strong engagement groups. This workshop is a chance for us to meet in person and equally to welcome newcomers too. With input from seasoned group leaders with years of experience and those who are new to holding space for others, this workshop will be full of valuable help for anyone who does small group work.

## FUNDING BOLD IDEAS FOR THE FUTURE

This session offers an update on the Unitarian Innovation Fund after its first ten months, sharing insights from the first projects that have been awarded funding. Nick will highlight emerging themes, unmet needs, and the kinds of projects we most want to see next, alongside practical advice on developing and applying for funding. A space to get inspired, ask "what if?", and consider how your community's ideas might take their next step

## CHARTING STORIES OF SPIRITUAL CHANGE IN BRITISH UNITARIANISM

Stephen Lingwood presents "How Did We Get Here?", a project to record, understand, and celebrate the living memories of British Unitarianism in the twentieth century. It is a time-limited project led by Stephen for the General Assembly, and funded by the Hibbert Trust. The project consists of collecting stories through oral history interviews and written responses.

# SUNDAY 29 MARCH

Time	What	Where
8am	<b>Breakfast</b>	Chatsworth and Haddon
	<b>Morning worship A</b>	Butterley 1
	<b>Morning worship B</b>	Chapel
9am	<b>Hear from the Executive Committee</b> Executive Committee of the GA	Derbyshire Hall
	<b>Sacred Simplicity: Crafting Worship with Intention.</b> Rev. Erika Hewitt, UUA	Chapel
	<b>Combatting challenges to Religious Freedom</b> IARF	Butterley 1
	<b>The Inquirer: What's the Point?</b> Inquirer team	Butterley 2
10am	<b>Morning break</b>	Lounges
10.30am	<b>Celebrating Ostara mini ceremony</b> Earth Spirit Network:	Derbyshire Hall
	<b>No, You Don't Have to Be on TikTok</b> Pamela Welsh, GA comms lead	Chapel
	<b>Governance and Safeguarding</b> Simon Bland and Gavin Howell	Butterley 1
	<b>Witnessing for Peace in 2026</b> Unitarian Peace Fellowship	Butterley 2
11.30am	<b>Break</b>	Lounges
12pm	<b>Closing session</b>	Derbyshire Hall

# A BIT MORE ABOUT SUNDAY MORNING'S WORKSHOPS

## **COMBATTING CHALLENGES TO RELIGIOUS FREEDOM**

Religious Freedom is under increasing threat in many parts of the world. The progress that was being made, and which we took for granted, has now stalled. In some countries religious freedom has gone backwards. The International Association for Religious Freedom – a global interfaith organization supported by Unitarians around the world - is working to encourage freedom of religion but also freedom in religion. Come along and explore these growing challenges and find out more about what you can do to counter them by contributing to the work of IARF. Contributors Robert Ince and Derek McAuley.

## **HEAR FROM THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

Join the GA's executive committee in dialogue to explore the key issues facing our movement at this time. A chance to hear updates from the EC and for the EC to learn from your experiences across the country.

## **SACRED SIMPLICITY: CRAFTING WORSHIP WITH INTENTION.**

Creating meaningful worship services doesn't need to break your brain! Sometimes shifting our approach—choosing an image or metaphor to anchor the service—can provide sensory engagement, beauty, and deeper meaning. (It's not just about the words we choose.) Join Rev. Erika Hewitt, serving the UUA in the United States, as we explore this way of framing our worship planning. Note: Arrive 15 minutes early to the workshop (8:45) to sing some new songs from the UUA's online hymnal, Sing Out Love. We'll also sing a couple of new songs during the workshop.

## **THE INQUIRER: WHAT'S THE POINT?**

Join the chair of The Inquirer's board in a panel discussion with the editor and writers. We'll discuss pointed topics - including how to write in troubled times, and if words really are worth it.

### **GOVERNANCE AND SAFEGUARDING**

Join GA staff members Simon Bland and Gavin Howell to learn more about the need to strengthen our congregations' governance to create strong foundations for the future, and some simple steps you can take locally.

### **EARTH SPIRIT NETWORK: CELEBRATING OSTARA MINI CEREMONY**

Come and celebrate the Spring Equinox, which occurred a few days ago with the Celtic festival of Ostara. We will offer a 'mini ceremony' and show how these enjoyable and inclusive events can enliven your Unitarian spiritual calendar! Members of the Earth Spirit Network can receive scripts for all eight Wheel of the Year ceremonies as well as an annual publication The File with inspiring stories, readings and ceremonial resources. We welcome anyone who sees the divine in nature and encourage you to offer Wheel of the Year ceremonies to your congregation.

### **NO, YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE ON TIKTOK**

Feeling overwhelmed by all the places you're "supposed" to be communicating? Wondering if your church really needs to jump on every new platform that comes along? This session won't teach you ten tips for better Instagram posts or how to grow your email list overnight. Instead, we're going to step back and ask a better question: What are we actually trying to say, and who are we trying to reach? When you get clear on those two things first, everything else gets easier. Come ready to think differently about how your church communicates, and leave with a clearer sense of purpose. There will be real examples of how this approach works in practice so you can make every announcement, email and social media post more effective.

### **WITNESSING FOR PEACE IN 2026**

There will be a short AGM, followed by an open discussion about what it might look like to witness for peace in these turbulent times.

# THE BUSINESS

A smooth, fair assembly depends on all of us.

Here's what helps:

**Come prepared:** Arrive in good time before each session and bring your documents, ballot papers and voting card. Ballot papers and voting cards are personal to you and can't be transferred.

**Know the rules:** Standing Orders (Document AGM 2/26) set out how our business works — worth a read before we begin.

**Stay in the room if you can:** Your vote matters. Please try to stay for the full plenary sessions.

**Want to speak?** We use "for" "against" and "neutral" microphones so join the queue at the right one when debate opens. If you think you might want to speak, an aisle seat makes it easier to get there. The queue also helps the Chair gauge the mood of the room.

**Can't get to a microphone?** Raise your hand and a roving mic will come to you when the Chair directs.



# MOTIONS

The following motions have been submitted for consideration at the GA Annual Meetings 2026. Amendments may be submitted at any time prior to the final vote on a motion. However, it is in the best interests of clarity for amendments to be advised as far in advance as possible.

## **Motion 1**

"Mindful especially of the need to respond in a timely way to the growing threat to basic human rights across the world, this General Assembly empowers the Chief Officer to issue statements giving a view on current public events, provided that:

- (i) Where they consider it necessary this will be after consultation with the Unitarian Social Justice Network, and/or the Executive Committee and GA President;
- (ii) Where a resolution on the same topic as the statement has been passed by the General Assembly in the preceding 20 years, the statement shall be consistent with that resolution (or if there are more than one, the most recent); and
- (iii) Any statement issued shall not be contrary to the provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and its two covenants: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)."

This motion comes from a sense that Unitarianism in the UK at a national level is keeping quiet about many issues where we should be speaking out and standing up for the values we believe in.

Currently we find ourselves very often seen as "poor relations" of the Quakers, who often publish timely statements responding to current public events, and sometimes we slowly follow on behind the Church of England (or more often do nothing at all). Of course those organisations have more members and staff, so the comparison may be seen as unfair, but nevertheless there are situations where even very small numbers of people speaking out can make a difference.

Any change in arrangements making it easier to speak out must come with safeguards, and this motion sets out what we think those safeguards ought to be -

1. For the sake of clarity and in order to avoid confusion, only one person is empowered to issue statements on behalf of Unitarianism in the UK at a national level: the Chief Officer. This does not of course prevent people from speaking out as individual members, ministers, congregations, etc. This motion is concerned with statements on behalf of the Unitarian movement nationally.

# MOTIONS

2. In most cases it will be useful for there to be consultation. We have specified in the motion the possibility of consulting the Executive Committee, the GA President, and the Unitarian Social Justice Network.

3. We want to make sure that statements don't contradict the policies established by GA Annual Meetings, so that's a necessary constraint on what the Chief Officer can say. Because circumstances change, we have specified that only resolutions carried in the previous 20 years shall be binding in this way.

4. Where we don't have a GA resolution it is difficult for us to specify in advance in the abstract what can and can't be said, so we have used three already existing documents that any statement from us should be consistent with. The UK is a signatory to all three of these, and in 1998 the GA reaffirmed support for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The three documents are: the Human Rights Declaration plus the two covenants which the UN has put in place to guide its implementation: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

## **From 12 full members and Rosslyn Hill Chapel, Hampstead**

Total list of full members supporting this motion (23): Kate Brady McKenna, Eric Breeze, John Carter, Jim Corrigall, Kate Dean, Kath Forder, Chris Goacher, Elizabeth Harley, Peter Hewis, Jo James, Anna Jarvis, Margaret Kirk, CJ MacGregor, Marianna Michell, Celia Midgley, John Midgley, Feargus O'Connor, Ann Peart, Andi Phillips, Lynne Readett, Lewis Rees, Martin Whitell, Sue Woolley.

# MOTIONS

## Motion 2 - Octagon Chapel, Norwich

- That this General Assembly of Unitarians and Free Christians recognises and strongly affirms that protest is a fundamental Unitarian Spiritual practice.
- Believes that recent and ongoing proposed legislation is an attack on the right to protest and is thus a stifling of religious freedom
- Calls on Unitarians to demand a repeal of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 and the Public Order Act 2023
- Calls for withdrawal of further plans to increase police powers and ban protests in England and Wales contained in the Crime and Policing Bill
- Urges Unitarians to join campaigns to effect the above and that the Chief Officer and President continue to join other civil rights, climate change and faith groups to pressure the government to repeal, reverse and/or amend this draconian legislation

Unitarian People So Bold podcast - Unitarian minister Stephen Lingwood explains why he took part in a protest against the proscription of Palestine Action during which he was arrested and why he thinks his actions are part of a deeply spiritual practice. He also describes the law under which he was detained as dishonest, illiberal and immoral (Terrorism Act 2000) requiring him to point that out and protest (<https://youtu.be/Bk9WjcgYBus>)

Since the ban against 'Palestine Action' under the Terrorism Act 2000 came into effect on 5 July, police have made over 2700 arrests across the country for people's engagement in acts of peaceful protest opposing the proscription. (Amnesty International)

Quakers in Britain have urged politicians to curb increasingly repressive protest laws, warning that recent and proposed legislation is preventing them from practising their faith (9 January 2026 <https://www.quaker.org.uk/news-and-events/news/quakers-urge-parliament-to-curb-increasingly-repressive-protest-laws>)

# MOTIONS

UK government falls short on international human rights commitments, says regulator EHRC

<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/media-centre/news/uk-government-falls-short-international-human-rights-commitments-says-regulator>

The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 and the Public Order Act 2023 have significantly expanded the scope of criminal penalties for protest-related activities, which enable courts to impose harsh sentences on individuals engaging in peaceful protest under the guise of maintaining public order. In practice, these laws have led to the arrest and prosecution of peaceful protesters for actions such as slow marching, carrying protest equipment, or simply being present at demonstrations. Individuals have been given disproportionate sentences for non-violent protest actions –raising concerns that the legislation is being used to suppress legitimate dissent rather than address genuine threats to public safety. (Human Rights watch)

The Unitarian website prides Unitarianism as being active, and supporting protest, mentioning the Unitarian minister in Dundee, Thomas Fyshe Palmer, was transported to Botany Bay in 1794 for his radical politics and pro-democracy activism.

As well as many other great historical figures. It carries on to champion “A willingness to stand up to authority has been a constant theme, with international Unitarian involvement in women’s suffrage, civil rights and the LGBT movement. More recently in the UK, Unitarians have been arrested for Welsh language activism in the 1960s, at protests against nuclear weapons in the 1980s, and at climate protests today.” (Uk Unitarians)

Prior motion resolutions (2018 res 5.4, 2016 res 5.c, 2007 res 2.4, 2006 res 2, 2005 res 2.a) include a direct call to action, mentioning taking specific collective action, in coalition with other organisations and concerned citizens, for a shared goal. This motion is in continuation of these motions, and the many more which have come before and called our unitarian congregations, and members and friends of them to act. So that motions can come after in a society that still allows protest, a society of Unitarians that still holds true the motions passed by the great minds, and caring hearts who have come before.

As political discourse in this country becomes more and more polarised we will be called upon to stand up, and defend our neighbours, congregants and communities. Think of our future ancestors, and the future of Unitarianism. Support this action! Support this motion! Support a right to protest!

# MOTIONS

## Procedural motions

- That the Report of the General Assembly Executive Committee and the Accounts of the General Assembly be received and adopted.
- That Sayer Vincent be appointed as Auditors.
- That John Bates be appointed Honorary Treasurer for the year 2026-2027.
- That the thanks of the Assembly be given to John Bates for his service as Honorary Treasurer during the year 2025-2026, and to district association and local officers for their invaluable services.
- That greetings be sent to kindred churches and societies abroad.
- That the thanks of the Assembly be given to Rev Daniel Costley, for preaching the Anniversary Service, and to all those who provided music and other content for the Anniversary Service and on other worship occasions during these Meetings.
- That the thanks of the Assembly be given to the members of the General Assembly staff and to all volunteers for their inestimable help in organising the Meetings.
- That Rev Jean Bradley and Rev Alex Bradley be appointed jointly as President of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches for the year 2026-2027.
- That Jo O'Sullivan be appointed as Vice President of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches for the year 2026-2027.
- That this General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches expresses its gratitude for the services provided by Geoff Levermore as President during the year 2025-2026.
- That the Ministers Stipend Report be received and adopted.

