



Student Ministry Project 2016-17 Report

Cambridge Unitarian Church

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Summary and Reflections

From September 2016 to February 2017, the Cambridge Unitarians have run a pilot student ministry project. It was made possible through a major donation to the church for ministry, which coincided with the GA's plans to roll out 'campus ministry' projects across the country. Susanna Hartland was appointed as the Student Ministry Worker, employed on a consultancy basis by the church to oversee this project. Initially we hoped to use some funding from the GA, but in the end we decided only to run a 6 month pilot project.

The project was called 'The Freethinkers', a name which draws on the Enlightenment tradition of free thought that is so valued in our congregations. During university term time, we ran weekly events, on topics such as LGBT, interfaith, peace, democracy, Christian ecumenism, and progressive Christianity. These took several formats: speaker events, discussion groups, visits, and film screenings. Alongside this, we set up a social action project – the Freethinkers' Timebank. A timebank is a community group where people are rewarded for the hours they give volunteering for others with 'time credits'. This currency can then be spent by asking for help from other members of the timebank. This project was sadly unsuccessful, partly due to the number of similar projects running in Cambridge that we weren't aware of when we started, and partly due to how busy students are. The Freethinkers' Timebank was closed down in February.

The six months of the project were a very useful learning experience. A major achievement was raising the profile of the church amongst students, and we are pleased to report that most events brought at least one new student to the church. However,

attendance wasn't much higher than an average of about 7 or 8 at each meeting, including congregation members, and retention of students over the length of the project was low. Part of the reason for this is unique to Cambridge: since Cambridge University terms are only 8 weeks long, the time students are around is extremely busy, so they rarely find the time to commit to going to church or church events on a regular basis.

A major issue we encountered in carrying out this project was whether we should try to represent what we might call 'Unitarian' beliefs to students, when such things don't really exist in the sense of unifying dogmas that are shared by everyone. This of course is both a blessing and a curse, as many people are attracted by the lack of doctrinal tests in our churches, but it also makes it difficult to present to newcomers what exactly it is that 'Unitarians' believe. In Cambridge, we have long wrestled with to what extent we continue to centre our addresses and liturgy in the liberal Christian tradition. Some young people, myself included, are very attracted by the aspect of the church that is 'liberal Christian', whereas others are looking for more 'Eastern' orientated spiritualities. In terms of external practice, the Cambridge Unitarians are perhaps more Christian-focussed than many Unitarian Churches, primarily because Cambridge is unusually well-provided for in terms of other religious traditions. For example, we have a very active Buddhist centre close to our church, which we visited in March, a largish Hindu Community, and various other groups. However, even within the 'liberal Christian' framework, we do not adopt specific doctrinal statements, such as the 8 points favoured by the Progressive Christian Network.

For this reason, in our student ministry, we have instead focussed on ethical topics that are of interest to both our congregation and students, as mentioned above. We follow the radical, liberal religious tradition in emphasising orthopraxy, right behaviour, rather than orthodoxy, in both our congregation and student ministry. By this we mean that, whilst not everyone has the same views on what an ideal church service looks like, we do all share concerns for issues such as human rights, the environment, interfaith and ecumenical work. We take as our motto, and print on every order of service, the words attributed to the Transylvanian Unitarian, Francis David: 'We need not think alike to love alike'. Therefore, our student ministry project mostly consisted of raising awareness of the ethical stances taken by Unitarians on issues such as same-sex marriage, and interfaith work. In that sense we were perhaps trying to demonstrate to students the importance of an open and tolerant approach to people different from ourselves, but by and large our ministry was one of awareness raising rather than proselytising. In this way, our student ministry project clearly differed from similar projects run by our evangelical friends, in that we were not trying to persuade other people to accept our point of view – indeed, theologically this was undesirable, as touched on above.

In Cambridge, there is a remarkably large conservative evangelical student presence, in the form of the Christian Union. This group is almost entirely focussed on conservative Christian beliefs and evangelism, and it has gained a bad reputation for traditional views particularly around sexuality. Indeed, one of the most popular student events we have ever hosted was a solidarity event for LGBT+ people of faith to share experiences and support at the same time as the Christian Union were running a series of events, one of which features a speaker who has published a homophobic

article. One thing which seems to attract students to the Christian Union is its clear doctrinal basis and certainty. Whatever issues we may ourselves have with clearly defined dogmas, it is undeniable that they are very appealing to many other people, particularly students. This raises the moral question about how best to present the message of liberal religion. Do we seek ways to offer the certainty which is clearly being demanded, particularly by students? There are surely possibilities for a more philosophically definite approach that we sometimes discuss in our own series and conversations such as a clearly defined liberal Christian theology, a process theology, a Spinozistic pantheism, secular humanism, or religious naturalism. However, in our Cambridge congregation we have so far always found that exclusively favouring one approach over another inevitably excludes anyone who does not share this particular theology. Moreover, we have a conviction that certainty and absolutism is a dangerous illusion.

An idea that is often discussed in our congregation is the possibility of rejecting, with Heidegger and Wittgenstein, ultimate grounds for theological truth. As Lee Braver notes in his study of these philosophers, such ultimate grounds are an unjustified, transcendent level at which philosophical explanation stops, which is incompatible with finite creatures like us. He suggests that “we can accept the grounding afforded by human nature and cultural norms as both all that is possible and all that is needed. Once we are weaned off millennia-old cravings for the transcendent, we can learn to live with the human.” One way in which the Cambridge Unitarians aim to push against and resist such ultimate grounds is by encouraging conversation, debate and disagreement,

immediately after the address is given on a Sunday morning, as well as during midweek conversations and more informally at other times. It certainly provides a home for people who have become disillusioned with the doctrinal certainty of more conservative forms of religion. Although people like me are clearly in the minority, we show that there is certainly a diversity of spiritual needs and positions amongst students and young people, and it is difficult to say that there is a 'one size fits all' solution to the problem of how to engage more students with religious groups like the Unitarians.

However, this problem is certainly not unique to the Unitarians. In a recent report published by SCM, it was found that around 50% of churches do not have any contact with students on a weekly basis. Religious groups in general across the country seem to be struggling to develop the enthusiasm and gather the kind of support for a student ministry we might hope to achieve, but this is particularly true for the Unitarians as a denomination. One potential solution for our struggles with attendance that we have discussed in our congregation is the idea that we have lost touch with the 'human face', which, as Levinas argued, is what gives us a grounded sense of infinite ethical responsibility, as well as concrete role models. The obvious human face to focus on for a liberal Christian tradition like ours is, of course, the face of Jesus, or the model he gives us to look into the faces of lepers, prostitutes, and tax collectors. A second possibility is to reconnect with what we might call our spiritual side. Through this student ministry project in Cambridge, we have tried to connect with our friends at the local Quaker Meeting House. We believe there is much that can be learnt from the liberal spiritual approach they take to religion. While the Quakers might identify as 'spiritual but not religious', many

Unitarians might identify as 'religious but not spiritual'. Perhaps a midpoint between the two approaches could be a way forward in terms of connecting with both the rational and spiritual sides of religion. These are both speculative suggestions, and we by no means have any answers to the problems we are facing as a liberal religious tradition. However, we hope that this project can be of help in initiating some serious discussions across the denomination.



LGBT+ people of faith solidarity event

Proposal and Review

Summary Priority Title	Student Ministry proposal by Cambridge Unitarian Church	Review – February 2017
Description of the Priority (purpose)	To set up a campus ministry in Cambridge University and Anglia Ruskin University based in Cambridge Unitarian Church, in order to provide a resource for students and others to explore their religious life in inclusive and open-minded community.	We ran the student ministry project as a pilot from September 2016 to February 2017
Current Position/ Context	In response to the GA's 'Vision' document, the church committee has agree to set up a campus ministry for a 6-month trial period using money from its Ministry Development Fund.	
How will be success be measured?	By establishing a Cambridge University Society	The student group, known as 'The Freethinkers', was registered with the Students' Union, but did not attract sufficient regular members to register with the University.
	By establishing links with other relevant organisations and people.	This was achieved: see below
	By creating a social media presence for the project.	Accounts were set up for the Freethinkers on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.
	By creating and running a programme of relevant events and activities during the academic year of 2016/17.	This was achieved: see termcards
	By keeping a log of events and activities, and recording numbers of student society members and others attending and/or involved, and by using this information when reviewing the Project's success in January.	See this document
	By ensuring that, at the end of the 6-month development period, the Society can continue under volunteer leadership.	This was unsuccessful – we didn't generate sufficient regular attendance for this to happen.

Summary Priority Title	Student Ministry proposal by Cambridge Unitarian Church	Review – February 2017
Key areas of work to be undertaken	Set up and advertise a university society in Cambridge University to provide a hub for liberal Christians, Unitarians, Universalists and other open-minded people.	This was achieved
	Create a social media presence for the project.	See above
	Ensure the Project enables participants to learn and gain experience in interfaith dialogue, leading worship, exploring spiritual practice, theological education, community service.	This was achieved. The Project Worker was able to gain experience of leading a service and giving an address, as well as involvement with local Timebanking groups.
	Designate the church as a link church with Student Christian Movement.	This was achieved
	Develop the church's link with the Progressive Christian Network.	Adrian Alker, chair of PCN, led one of the Freethinkers events in February 2017.
	Collaborate with Centre of Cambridge Churches Forum, and other relevant organisations such as Christian Aid, Just Love, ISACN.	This was attempted but we did not manage to put on a collaborative event.
	Collaborate with college and university chaplains.	We worked with the Deans and Chaplains of Cambridge University and the Chaplain of Anglia Ruskin University to help publicise our events.
	Collaborate with Sea of Faith Network.	We did not do this
	Establish an inclusive approach to promoting social justice (e.g. equality for LGBT people particularly in the religious sphere) and other social, environment or political issues.	LGBT+ issues were prominent in the areas we chose to address in our events: we ran an event about the GA's campaigning work for the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013, as well as hosting an LGBT+ people of faith solidarity event.

Summary Priority Title	Student Ministry proposal by Cambridge Unitarian Church	Review – February 2017
	Promote and develop the church's midweek conversations as a forum for discussion.	We often combined the midweek conversations with Freethinkers events, in order to promote our events more easily amongst the congregation. A legacy of this will be a continuation of the idea of using themes and guest speakers to give the midweek conversations more focus.
	Publicise the church's events and services within the university community.	We used the students' union bulletin, mailing lists of relevant faculties, the Deans and Chaplains mailing list, and social media to publicise our events amongst students.
	In conjunction with the minister, review the project in January 2017, assess the success or otherwise of the project, and make recommendations and plans for the Campus Ministry to continue after the initial period.	We carried out this review in January and decided to end the project in February. This was partly due to the nature of the academic year in Cambridge - most student societies tend to start winding down from the end of the spring (Lent) term – and partly for personal and professional reasons on the part of the Project Worker.



Summary Priority Title	Student Ministry proposal by Cambridge Unitarian Church	Review – February 2017
Timescales	Susanna Hartland to be appointed on a consultancy basis from 1 September 2016 to 28 February 2017.	This was achieved
Links to current work or other priorities	<p>We intend that the Project will have links, discussion, and collaboration with the following organisations and people:</p> <p>Student Christian Movement</p> <p>Progressive Christian Network</p> <p>Sea of Faith Network</p> <p>General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches</p> <p>Other Unitarian communities that have campus or similar ministries.</p> <p>Individuals within the Unitarian movement, or other liberal religious organisations, who have experience of campus ministry.</p> <p>Other relevant organisations.</p>	<p>As well as becoming an SCM Link Church, the Project Worker also attended two days of training run by SCM in Birmingham at the start of the Project.</p> <p>See above</p> <p>See above</p> <p>See below</p> <p>Susanna liaised with the Young Adult and Campus Ministry Associate of the UUA in the US, as well as with a member of the congregation who has previous experience with campus ministry projects in the US. She also discussed student ministry with Rev Jo James, who was thinking of following our example.</p> <p>As well as the above organisations, we also worked with the local Quaker meeting; organised visits to the local synagogue, mosque, and Buddhist centre; engaged with the Christian Union regarding their hosting of a homophobic speaker at an evangelistic event; invited a local pagan academic to speak; hosted screenings of 'I, Daniel Blake' and 'The Gospel According to Jesus, Queen of Heaven'.</p>

Summary Priority Title	Student Ministry proposal by Cambridge Unitarian Church	Review – February 2017
Who needs to be involved?	<p>Susanna Hartland. Cambridge Unitarian Church minister (Andrew Brown), church committee, and congregation. Andrew Brown will act as mentor for Susanna, and will supervise her work on behalf of the church committee. Other Cambridge Unitarians who have links with the local universities.</p>	<p>Susanna met with Andrew Brown on a weekly basis to update him with plans and discuss how things were going. She also worked with the chair of the committee, Andrew Bethune, and another member of the congregation, Rosemary Watson, who has links with local refugee campaigns.</p>
What are the future financial implications?	<p>£10,000 to support the projects initial stage (Sep 2016-Feb 2017) will be allocated from the church's Ministry Development Fund. A grant of £6400 from the GA would enable the Project Worker to continue until the end of the academic year.</p>	<p>See above</p>
What are the future staffing implications?	<p>If a paid Campus Ministry Worker is to be employed post-February 2017, additional funds will have to be sought from other sources and it is hoped that the GA will be able to contribute funds to enable the project to continue at least until the end of the academic year 2016-17.</p>	
What are the future volunteer implications?	<p>Since it may not be possible to pay a Campus Ministry Worker indefinitely, the project will have to become a self-sustaining volunteer-run one. Volunteers could include church members, students or staff of the university, or other people who support the aims of the project.</p>	<p>We didn't manage to gather enough students who attended events regularly to take on the project on a voluntary basis. This was partly due to Cambridge-specific issues, namely the limited spare time students have during term to commit to any voluntary activity. We also didn't have many members of the congregation come forward to support the project. A possibility for future projects in other universities might be to work with the Student Christian Movement: this was attempted in Cambridge but not hugely successful.</p>



Summary Priority Title	Student Ministry proposal by Cambridge Unitarian Church	Review – February 2017
Theological and/or spiritual implications	<p>The Campus Ministry aims to provide a resource for students, university and college staff, and others, to develop their spiritual and ethical lives in an inclusive community, respecting each person’s search for meaning, unconstrained by the imposition of any creedal statements.</p> <p>The Campus ministry is consistent with the GA’s Object of promoting a free and inquiring religion through the worship of God, the celebration of life, the service of humanity and respect for all creation. It seeks to uphold the liberal Christian tradition.</p> <p>The Campus Ministry is a project of Cambridge Unitarian Church, a grounded and welcoming community offering opportunities for spiritual growth and support to those in need. It is rooted in Christian culture but light on baggage from the past.</p>	<p>Several of our events were more focussed on encouraging theological discussion and exploration, rather than just ethical themes. For example, our evening with Adrian Alker from PCN, and our conversation entitled ‘Values After Belief’, were both focussed on exploring liberal Christianity and forms of religion. We also took care to promote the Sunday evening services at the church, which always have a period of mindfulness meditation and Taize chanting.</p>
Form completed by	Andrew Bethune	Susanna Hartland
Date	20/07/16	07/03/17



Freethinkers social meal



Freshers' Fair



Launch event



autumn 2016 termcard

the freethinkers

<p>introduction to the unitarian and free christian tradition with john harley, unitarian national youth co-ordinator</p>	thursday 13 th october, 7.30pm
<p>equal marriage – why it matters with derek mcauley, chief officer of the unitarian general assembly</p>	thursday 20 th october, 7.30pm
<p>interfaith crawl: visiting places of worship around cambridge</p>	sunday 30 th october, 1pm
<p>'i, daniel blake' film screening in collaboration with student christian movement and the anglia ruskin chaplaincy</p>	friday 4 th november, arts picturehouse, time tbc
<p>'the fellow sufferer who understands': radical theology and mental health with susanna hartland, cambridge unitarian student ministry worker</p>	sunday 6 th november, 10.30am
<p>'the immorality of non-resistance': a discussion of the liberal religious tradition and peace</p>	wednesday 9 th november, 7.30pm
<p>liberal religion and radical democracy with andrew brown, cambridge unitarian minister</p>	wednesday 16 th november, 7.30pm
<p>cambridge jazz festival: five top quality concerts at the unitarian church</p>	18 th -27 th november
<p>'we need not believe alike to love alike': an ecumenical discussion between cambridge christian leaders</p>	22 nd november, 7.30pm

Approximate attendance	of which were students
8	1
7	1
6	1
200	5
50	5
12	3
10	3
4	2

all events at
memorial church
emmanuel road
cambridge
unless specified



spring 2017 termcard the freethinkers



 2017: hope not optimism? with andrew brown, cambridge unitarian minister	wednesday 25 th january, 7.30pm
 is a radical church possible? with adrian alker, chair of the progressive christian network	thursday 9 th february, 7.30pm
 lgbt+ people of faith solidarity discussion group	friday 10 th february, 7.30pm
 'i, daniel blake' film screening in association with unite	tuesday 14 th february
 the end of empathy? the golden rule in the age of trump with feargus o'connor, minister of golders green unitarian church	friday 17 th february, 7.30pm
 values after belief? with the cambridge unitarians	wednesday 22 nd february, 7.30 pm
 visit to the cambridge buddhist centre	sunday 5 th march, 1.15pm
 how life looks different to pagans with prudence jones	wednesday 1 st march, 7.30 for 8pm
 'the gospel according to jesus, queen of heaven' film screening	wednesday 8 th march, 7.30 for 8pm

Approximate attendance

of which were students

9

3

8

2

12

10

60

5

6

0

5

0

8

1

9

1

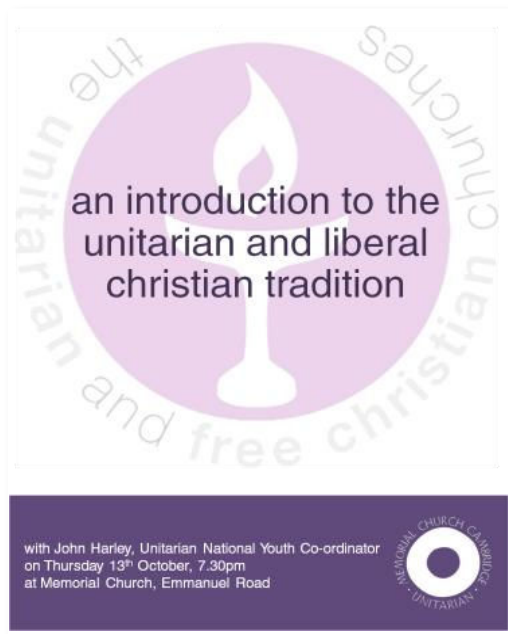
9

0

all events at
memorial church
emmanuel road
cambridge
unless specified




Posters



the unitarian and free christian churches

an introduction to the
unitarian and liberal
christian tradition


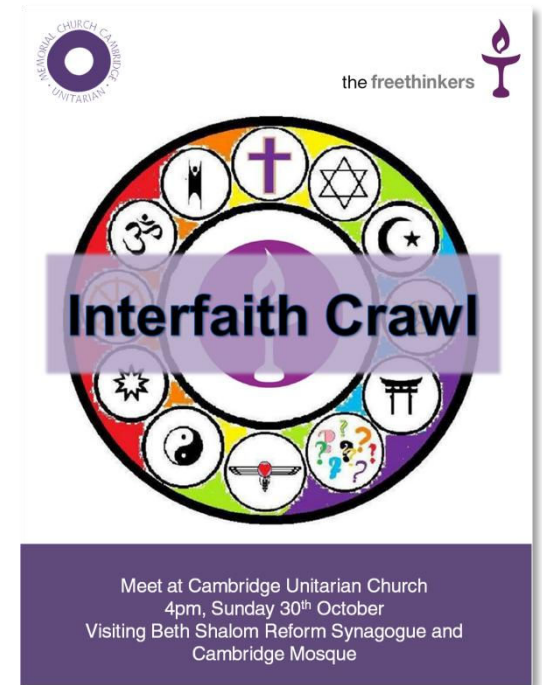
with John Harley, Unitarian National Youth Co-ordinator
on Thursday 13th October, 7.30pm
at Memorial Church, Emmanuel Road



the freethinkers

equal marriage: why
it matters


with Derek McAuley, Chief Officer of the General
Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches
on Thursday 20th October, 7.30pm
at Memorial Church, Emmanuel Road



the freethinkers

Interfaith Crawl

Meet at Cambridge Unitarian Church
4pm, Sunday 30th October
Visiting Beth Shalom Reform Synagogue and
Cambridge Mosque







 the freethinkers 



lgbt+ people of faith solidarity



sharing stories and support
on Friday 10th February, 7.30pm
at Memorial Church, Emmanuel Road

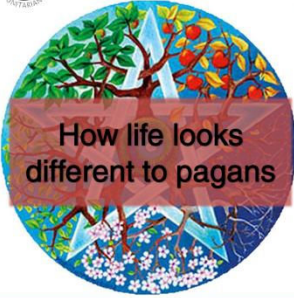

 the freethinkers 



2017: Hope not Optimism?



With Rev Andrew Brown,
Minister of Cambridge Unitarian Church
On Wednesday 25th January, 7.30 for 8pm
At Memorial Church, Emmanuel Road (side entrance)



 the freethinkers 



How life looks different to pagans

Cambridge Unitarian Church
7.30pm, Wednesday 1st March
with Prudence Jones


 the freethinkers 



Visit to Cambridge Buddhist Centre

Meet at Cambridge Unitarian Church
Sunday 5th March, 1.15pm


 the freethinkers 



The Gospel According to Jesus, Queen of Heaven

Film Screening
At Cambridge Unitarian Church
On Wednesday 8th March, 7.30pm




 the freethinkers 




Is a radical church possible?

pcn britain
where contemporary thought and understanding matter as much as scripture and tradition

With Adrian Alker, Chair of PCN Britain
On Thursday 9th February, 7.30pm
At Memorial Church, Emmanuel Road






















 the freethinkers 



Values after belief?

With the Cambridge Unitarians
On Wednesday 22nd February, 7.30 for 8pm
At Memorial Church, Emmanuel Road (side entrance)

The Timebank

Time Bank – Cartoon Questionnaire – What help do you need? How can you help others?																
Tick the boxes below		Need help	Can help	Tick the boxes below		Need help	Can help	Tick the boxes below		Need help	Can help	Tick the boxes below		Need help	Can help	
	Escorting people to appointments				DIY - simple								Housework - occasional			
	Shopping				Decorating - simple				Web design					Cooking		
	Errands				Gardening				Computer skills					Ironing		
	Form filling								Computer design				Hairdressing			
	Office skills								Book keeping					Babysitting		
	Letter writing				Cycle maintenance				Computer maintenance					Child supervision		
	Budgeting				Car washing									Looking after grandchildren		
	Knitting/ Sewing/ Crochet				Assisting at events				Walking companion				Visiting people			
					Attending meetings									Companionship		
										Water Sports						
	Playing a musical instrument				Literacy				Painting and drawing				Dog walking			
	DJ'ing				Translation									Pet care		
	Theatre				Assist with reading				Craftwork					Litter-picking		
	Film/Cinema															
	Car/motorbike maintenance				Heavy moving / lifting				Design work / art							
	Giving people a lift				Improving open spaces				Leaflet delivery					Anything!		

Fill in the gaps with any other ideas, activities, knowledge or skills you might have!

A new timebank
for students and
residents in
Cambridge City

Run by the
Freethinkers, the
student ministry
of Cambridge
Unitarian Church



Find us online:



Join Time and
Talents at
[www.timebank
ing.org](http://www.timebanking.org)



What is a Time Bank?

It will be a way for people to help others in their community and be rewarded for it – in time. For every hour of time you give helping someone, you receive one time credit. The Time Bank will also be running fun, free activities in partnership with the local community.

What can you do with your time credits?

You can 'spend' your time credits when you need help from someone else. You can give them to another person who needs some help. You can save them.

Who can join the Time Bank?

Anyone. Age, ability, lack of finance or limited mobility are not barriers to participating in the time bank. Look inside for the ways in which you can get involved.

Who are the Freethinkers?

The Freethinkers is the student ministry of the Cambridge Unitarian Church. We run weekly events during university terms, alongside hosting this timebank. For more information visit our website: <http://www.cambridgeunitarian.org/about/student-ministry>