



# **Ditchling** **Unitarians**



## **Newsletter**

**February-April 2023**

**Open Minds, Kind Hearts, Free Spirits**

Welcome to our church newsletter. Here you will find details of our activities up to the end of April, along with other information and articles, Look out too for news of our new book reading group starting in May.

We are pleased to announce the return of our **Monday Meeting** which will take place on the third Monday of each month. You can expect an interesting talk from a local speaker, followed by a hot drink and, of course, some delicious cake!

Our Sunday Services are now taking place twice per month. One will be led by our minister Duncan each month, and the other by a guest preacher. During this quarter we offer a warm welcome to Carol Chambers from our Horsham congregation, Edie Campbell from Godalming and Stuart Coupe from Billingshurst.

Our regular “Meditation” and “Coffee and Chat with the Minister” will also be taking place, so do come along and say hello. As the weather improves we will also try to open up the Meeting house for quiet reflection.

All the latest information is also found on our website:

[www.ditchlingunitarians.org.uk](http://www.ditchlingunitarians.org.uk)

**\*\*\*\*\*ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING\*\*\*\*\***

**Notice is hereby given that the church Annual General Meeting will take place after the Service on Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> March at 12pm**

## SUNDAY SERVICES

<i>DATE</i>	<i>SPEAKER</i>	<i>PIANIST</i>
5 <sup>th</sup> February	Rev. Duncan Voice	Phillip Sear
19 <sup>th</sup> February	Carol Chambers	Nicola Grunberg
5 <sup>th</sup> March	Rev. Duncan Voice	Phillip Sear
19 <sup>th</sup> March	Edie Campbell	Nicola Grunberg
2 <sup>nd</sup> April	Rev. Duncan Voice	Phillip Sear
23 <sup>rd</sup> April	Stuart Coupe	Nicola Grunberg
7 <sup>th</sup> May	Francis Clark-Lowes	Phillip Sear

## MONDAY MEETINGS

Organiser — Jill Clutterbuck

**Monday 17<sup>th</sup> April, 2pm**

Join us at this friendly gathering for older people. We welcome a guest speaker for each meeting, and after the talk we enjoy a hot drink and some cake. All welcome.



In each day may I structure a time of silence in which to be reborn. A time to walk beneath the trees and let the blood surge through my body. A time to sit silently and rejoice in the overwhelming splendour of life, and stars, and grass. A time to know I wish to love today; to greet my friends with thanksgiving, to know life is too short to indulge in self-pity. May I avoid the temptation of easy despair, and reach out to at least one other person today.

- *Richard Boeke, retired Unitarian minister,  
Fragments of Holiness, published by The Lindsey press*

## **Hidden Possibilities** by Rev. Duncan Voice

Much of life, the world around us and within us, is hidden from our awareness. Sometimes we recognise this fact and we have idioms to express our feelings about it. I thought of *scratching the surface, not seeing the full picture, only knowing half the story*, or my favourite which is, *the tip of the iceberg*.

An iceberg apparently only has 10-15% of its mass showing above the waterline. The majority of its bulk is hidden from our everyday perspective, so it makes quite a good metaphor for the hidden world. However, what we are aware of in our life encounters, probably represents a much smaller percentage than the visible part of an iceberg. And as for the universe and everything in it, I can't even imagine what a small number our awareness would represent!

And yet, although sometimes we do recognise this, or consider that this may be so - sometimes we don't. Sometimes we carry on as if we know everything about a situation or person. Completely unaware of the potential complexity we might dive into, with our opinions or our actions. Our ignorance, our ego, our rush, our assumptions, our perceived familiarity, our lack of care, many things may play a part in this.

For example, we've probably all reacted quickly in anger at some time or other. Responding to a situation with vicious words, or sending off that furious letter or email. Only to find out later that things weren't quite as we thought. That there were mitigating reasons why the situation that angered us occurred. Unfortunately though, our attention was taken up with our all-consuming rage, wrapped around what we thought was the certainty of our own understanding.

We can't of course know everything about everything, but we can be aware of the fact that we don't! We can keep this in mind and adjust our approach to life accordingly. Just what is the context, background or missing information, of the particular iceberg we have encountered? We might never find out, but we know there is always something. Always more to it.

There is a concept in Zen Buddhism called *beginner's mind*, which has now found its way into western mindfulness therapies. The idea is that we replace some of our habitual ways of thinking with more openness and curiosity. As if we are approaching something for the very first time; rather than seeing the same old, person, place, problem, or whatever else it may be.

The term first came to popular attention in the West through a book by Shunryu Suzuki, called *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, published in 1970. In the book he coins the phrase, *In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, but in the experts there are few*. It is not, I hasten to add, an attack on experts! Expertise is important, and life experience should be valued. Rather it is our state of mind that's being questioned. Do we have a sense of superiority, an inflated ego and sense of self-importance? It cautions us not to start thinking that our knowledge is complete, and will provide us with all the answers. It invites us to keep our minds open to new possibilities. Possibilities perhaps that go beyond the scope of analytical or logical thinking.

Children have a more natural *beginner's mind* than adults. Their life is before them, they have a curiosity and energy to explore the world. They have no preconceptions; life is an adventure! However, this young potential can soon be diminished through upbringing, if it is not nurturing, and through other harmful life experiences. We get older, and as we do so, we may develop deeply ingrained and unhealthy habits of mind and body. We may be bullied or controlled in some way - being told what we are or what to think. Or we may buy into a competitive *dog eat dog* mentality, to "succeed" and achieve our personal goals at any cost.

Our life experience may have left us damaged, frightened, down-hearted or set in our ways, however it is still possible to open our minds and hearts to new possibilities I believe. To cultivate a beginner's mind and to look at life differently. What we were is not what we now have to be. We can let go of the old self to some extent, and explore our own potential with curiosity and compassion. We can begin to see others not as enemies, rivals or worthless, but to try to sensitively see beyond the *tip of the iceberg*; to change our relationship or maybe to move on.

It is easy to think, “oh I’m too stuck in my ways I can’t really change.” But perhaps we can remember what Jesus said to the disciples in the Gospel of Matthew, “*With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.*” The disciples had been in despair after he told them, *it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.* Our beginner’s mind could also be a gateway to a new way of being, a new relationship with the source of all goodness. We talk of the God of love, but what about the God of possibilities? In saying what I have said, I do, however, accept how crushingly difficult it can be sometimes to see beyond our own pain and suffering which can feel all consuming. Or to break habits built up over a lifetime. If nothing seems to have changed for a long time it is difficult to believe it ever will. If we don’t know the answer what direction do we head in?

But we don’t need to be able to see all the outcomes and we don’t need to know the solution. There may not in fact be a neat or perfect solution. With our *beginner’s mind*, as Shunryu Suzuki said, *we can really learn something. The beginner’s mind is compassionate, it is boundless.* There are lots of possibilities. Whatever our spiritual inclinations there is always something to be said for seeking new perspectives, fresh insights to help us discover the hidden possibilities of life.

The Chinese philosopher Lau Tzu said, every journey of a thousand miles begins with one step. A step only we can make, but one we do not make alone. As we head off we just need to know that there **are** other possibilities, and that we **can** make a change. It may feel like an emotional winter is upon us, but we can remember that the colours of the sunrise, and sunset, are most vivid in winter. Beauty beheld with a beginner’s mind goes very deep.

*How beautiful life really is. An inexplicable feeling. It has no anchor in the reality in which we now live. But surely there are also realities other than those one reads about in the paper and hears in the thoughtless talk of frightened people? There is also the reality of that small rose-red cyclamen and of the wide horizon one can keep on rediscovering behind all the noise and confusion of the times. – Etty Hillesum (1914-43)*

## **Coffee and Chat with the Minister**

This is an opportunity to get together for an informal chat and cup of coffee (or something else if you prefer!). No need to book, just come along if you are free.

I will be available on the following dates:

**Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> February, 10.30am – 12.00 midday**

**Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> March, 10.30am – 12.00 midday**

**Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> April, 10.30am – 12.00 midday**

## **Meditation Group**

Our small and friendly meditation group welcomes new members. We practice mindfulness meditation on selected dates. Our evening together usually consists of a guided meditation, a reading about mindfulness or meditation, a time of quietness and sometimes some sharing. We start at **7.00pm**, and each session lasts for about 30-40 minutes. Payment is by donation.

Join us on any of the following dates:

**Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> February**

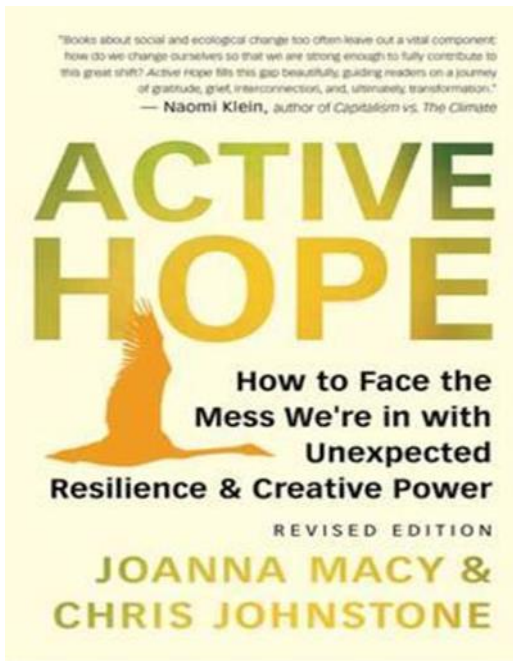
**Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> March**

**Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> April**



# Active Hope

## A New Book Reading Group



Facing the climate emergency and other environmental issues can seem overwhelming. *Active Hope* shows us how to strengthen our capacity to face these crises so that we can respond with unexpected resilience and creative power.

**Would you be interested in reading *Active Hope* and discussing it in a supportive and friendly group? Contact Duncan to express an interest.**

The start date will be **Tuesday May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 7pm**. Then we will meet every two weeks up to and including **Tuesday July 11th**. You will need to purchase a copy of the book to participate.


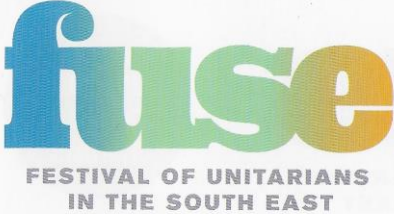
## Christmas Carol Service Collection

We are pleased to say that the collection from our Christmas Carol Service raised £130. The money was used to purchase much needed supplies for Burgess Hill Foodbank. Thank you to everyone who joined us on a cold and icy night in December and donated generously.

## District Events

**LDPA AGM Saturday 11th March** at 2.30pm online by Zoom  
Congregations can have two delegates present. Please let us know those wishing to attend by emailing: [administrator@ldpaunitarians.org](mailto:administrator@ldpaunitarians.org)


**Festival of Unitarians in the South East**, 2<sup>nd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> June 2023. Visit our District website for more details, [www.ldpaunitarians.org/fuse2023](http://www.ldpaunitarians.org/fuse2023)



# Building Paradise


Visit our website to see the full programme as well as the publicity video, which brilliantly conveys the flavour of FUSE 2023. Please book your place through our website. Hope you will join us!

**FUSE Festival 2nd-4th June 2023; The Friars, Aylesford, Kent**



Costs (per person)*	
Single occupancy full board	£265
Double occupancy full board (double/twin)	£225
Child (under 12 years old, sharing with adult)**	£50
Youth (12 to 18 years, sharing with adult)	£99
Day Delegate	
Friday pm (includes supper)	£25
Saturday (includes two meals)	£85
Sunday (includes one meal)	£50

For programme, booking and further details visit:  
[www.ldpaunitarians.org/fuse2023](http://www.ldpaunitarians.org/fuse2023)



**LDPA**  
London District and Provincial Assembly  
of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches

\* Some bursaries are available for under 35s on application  
\*\* Children's workshops are for ages 5-18 years

## Food Bank Collections



We are collecting for Burgess Hill Food Bank, 85 Church Walk, Burgess Hill. Here are the items that are most needed

If you are struggling and need the services of the Food Bank, then have a look on their website for details of their voucher system. Vouchers can be obtained from:

**Citizens Advice** – 0808 278 7969 or **Burgess Hill Town Council** 01444 247726.

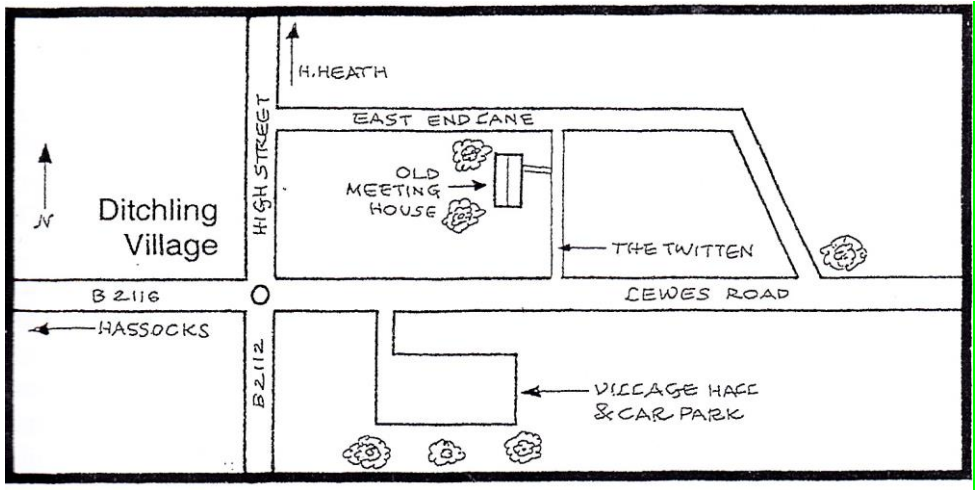
The Food Bank offers collection from Burgess Hill, Hassocks, and a delivery service in Hurstpierpoint, but times are limited. See their website for details,

[burgesshillfoodbank.org.uk/how-to-get-food](http://burgesshillfoodbank.org.uk/how-to-get-food)

## Church Contacts

**Minister – Rev. Duncan Voice** – [revduncany@gmail.com](mailto:revduncany@gmail.com)  
07771609347

**Hall Hire – Philip Eckstein** – [eckstein.philip@gmail.com](mailto:eckstein.philip@gmail.com)  
01273 843549



At Ditchling Unitarians we have a welcoming approach to faith. We believe there is a faith within each person which can be discovered and lived. There is no list of things that Unitarians must believe; instead we think everyone has the right to reach their own conclusions. We see different opinions and lifestyles as valuable and enriching and are open to insights from all faiths, science, the arts, the natural world and everyday living. We believe in the inherent worth and dignity of all – regardless of race, creed, disability, age, gender and sexuality – and seek to be an inclusive community who care about each other and the world. Our free-thinking faith community has been a part of Ditchling life since the early 1700's. We are one of over 160 Unitarian churches, chapels & meeting houses in the UK.