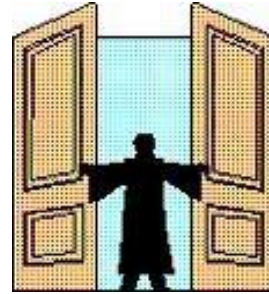


# ***THE OPEN DOOR***



## ***NEWS AND VIEWS OF CROYDON UNITARIANS***

***MARCH 2019***

***Our minister Rev Art Lester is pleased to  
welcome you to worship every Sunday from  
10:30am for the Service at 11:00am and  
afterwards for fellowship and refreshments***



# Taking the Pledge

A brief item in *The Washington Post* caught my eye this morning. An eleven-year-old schoolboy in Florida is facing prosecution for a misdemeanour offence after refusing to repeat the American “Pledge of Allegiance” in class.

Despite a Supreme Court decision giving permission to refuse the oath of some years’ standing, the boy was still in trouble. The principal says it was because the boy was “disruptive” when challenged about his act.

You know how it goes: “I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands...” It goes on to include the phrase “one nation, under God, indivisible...” The phrase about God was added after I left school, and has been the occasion of furious court battles on behalf of atheists, citing the separation of church and state.

Thirty years ago, I was enrolled in a course at a Quaker college in Birmingham. We watched a film about kids in an American high school, which showed pupils reciting the Pledge. After the film, a woman looked at me (the only Yank in the room) and said, “You didn’t really have to say that in school, did you?” Her question expressed horror.

That stung. It stung because I too had refused to say the Pledge during my senior year. I also wouldn’t say the words of what I so easily utter in church these days, the Lord’s Prayer. I was trying on a spot of Marxism coupled with a dash of atheism at the time. As you do. I didn’t get into trouble, because I averted my face and mumbled, avoiding the eagle eye of the teacher. My motive was cowardice, and I survived.

When the Quaker woman reacted with horror at the Orwellian discipline of my homeland, I had a hot flush of anger. While everyone else in the room listened with gleeful voyeurism, I fumed. Finally, I said, “At least we don’t genuflect every time a rich old lady with a herd of Corgis passes by in a carriage.”

There was an immediate gasp from the others. I had insulted the Queen. Quakers, being what they are, arranged a reconciliation session, facilitated by a member of staff. After an afternoon of gentle talk, we both apologised. I had survived a full-blown case of outraged patriotism, probably the last one I ever had. A small brush with anti-American sentiment, which, these days, leaves me unmoved.

I hope that kid in Florida has his day in court. It can't be easy being eleven in East Tampa, in the present state of affairs. I hope he has memorised the First Amendment, and makes everybody blush.

*--Art Lester*

## March 2019 Diary

### Service-Leaders

Our Minister, Rev John Carter Rev or Steve Dick.

PLEASE NOTE: Art will do a pulpit swap with Rev Kate Dean of Rosslyn Hill Unitarians on March 3rd. Kate has taken services before at our church, and is a popular preacher in London."

### March Musicians

|                  |              |
|------------------|--------------|
| 3 <sup>rd</sup>  | Freda Lodge  |
| 10 <sup>th</sup> | Gill Stone   |
| 17 <sup>th</sup> | Freda Lodge  |
| 24 <sup>th</sup> | Bill Higgins |
| 31 <sup>st</sup> | Gill Stone   |

### Events

- Music exams will take place in the church from 7<sup>th</sup> March for 3 weeks.

- **AGM** of the LDPA (London District and Provincial Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches.), to be held on Sat 16<sup>th</sup> March at our Croydon Church.

You are invited to arrive for tea and coffee from 1.30pm for a 2pm start. The business meeting will follow a short service. People who are not delegates may attend the AGM but not vote. The business of the AGM will include the election of members of Council, who are the LDPA's Trustees and your elected representatives for governance of the LDPA's activities. Members are normally elected for three-year terms. The AGM will also elect the Honorary President.

## **A message from Martin White (Secretary)**

Really sorry we've been so absent - it wasn't our intention when we moved down to Worthing but Katie was unwell before Christmas, and the amount of work we've had to do to the new house has been a lot more than we expected - so we've mainly been redecorating and fixing holes in the roof since we moved in. I'm hoping to be able to come to the church a bit more regularly again from March, when we finish a lot of the work we need to do.

In the meantime, though, I know having an absent secretary isn't ideal. If there's anyone else who fancies doing it - then by all means. Equally, I'm happy to carry on doing it (not that I'm doing much currently).

All the best,

*--Martin (& Katie and Euan)*

## **LGBT History Month Launch**

The launch of Croydon LGBT History Month (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) was held again, in the Braithwaite Hall on 7th February. It was a successful, wonderful occasion, with a packed and overflowing hall.

Croydon's Mayor, Bernadette Khan, Leader of the Council, Tony Newman, Croydon Central MP, Sarah Jones, South Croydon MP Chris

Philp and Prof June Boyce-Tullman gave speeches in support of our gay community.

The occasion lasted over two hours, with entertainment performed by people of all ages and backgrounds - including Mark Bunyan (Cabaret Artist), Katie Rose (Jaz Diva), Tom and two other students (Brit School Students), Katherine Pestano, and the Rainbow Across Borders Singers.

At the end, people mingled, while consuming provided snacks.



*Croydon's Mayor,  
Bernadette Khan*



*Katie Rose*



*Tom*



*Brit School students*





*Chris Phelps*



*Katherine Pestano*



*Prof June Boyce-Tullman*



*Sarah Jones*



## Gardens of Pleasure

*I know a garden where roses grow  
And trees and plants and flowers show  
Within this garden there is undergrowth  
In which to seek and hunt for truth  
For in undergrowth there is joy to find  
That which will ease the stress in mind  
To look and move and light to please  
How joyful is the wonder these  
Once hidden now exposed and found  
Answering the hopeful prayers*

**-- Robin Kennedy**

# COINCIDENCE ? IT'S JUST GOD'S WAY OF STAYING ANONYMOUS

Apparently, this was attributed to Einstein, and here is my supporting story; once I owned a luxury old car, which finally at 240,000 miles developed a horrid electrical fault that stopped the engine in its tracks.

It was an intermittent fault. These are the worst kind to deal with. Standing on the drive at home the car behaved perfectly, then sometimes it would refuse to start until I had tried about 10 or 12 times, then it was OK. Until this one evening on my way home down a long country lane suddenly the engine cut out.

With darkness slowly coming on and the battery becoming flatter as I tried and tried to start it, I was getting gloomier by the minute when a car stopped and the driver said 'Can I help you?' It turned out he was an electrical engineer. Together with his expertise and my knowledge of the wiring we discovered the problem and did a bodge to get the engine to fire. He even followed me down the road in case it cut out again - and it did. He stopped again and we 'fixed it good ' this time so it would last me to get home. As he drove off, I waved and waved; he had saved me a lot of difficulty and trouble.

Now last Thursday my current (old) Nissan got a nasty brake problem when the hydraulics seized the shoes in the rear drum and burned the brake till it smoked and smelled in an alarming fashion. I managed to get home at 10 mile per hour and got organised with the spare parts to replace the brake shoes and the hydraulic cylinder.

When the parts arrived, I commenced to do the repair and got to the final hurdle only to discover that I was not able to fit the last retaining spring, as I was not strong enough to snag the hook into place. It is a very tricky one lodged behind the wheel hub and below the cylinder and behind the shoes - I got one side on OK but could not get the other in place no matter how I tried. It was beginning to go dark and people were



coming home from work and walking past me, stepping over the old man lying on the pavement surrounded by car stuff. I was thinking about leaving it there with its wheel off and jacked up half on the pavement outside my house when a voice said 'Can I help you?' and I answered without looking up 'Do you know anything about brakes?' The voice said 'Yes I used to be a mechanic and I did these all the time'.

I was lying on the pavement so I rolled over to look up and see a Chinese man smiling down at me. He was really good and said he had seen me with the brake in bits and thought the evening was coming and decided to see if he could speed the job up. I gave him some latex gloves and he got down to help me re-set the shoes and slip the spring in behind the adjuster on one side then using long nosed pliers, he expertly snicked the spring into the slot on the other side. I watched in awe and thought 'He has done this before, no question' and he did not stop there. He said we must bleed the brake line so I got into the driving seat while he put the drum on and tested the shoes were tight enough. Three or four times he took the drum off to get the shoes exactly right, and then with a quick up and down we got the air out of the brake pipe and he even picked up the wheel and put it onto the studs so I could let the car down onto the ground again.

We talked about how he had changed jobs to become a gas fitter, after his father advised him there was more money in gas than mechanics. I told him I had retrained as an electrician. We ended up swapping business cards and saying how useful the other chap was. I feel sure I will see him again. His name is Kinh.

Coincidence? Man in trouble with old car and expert happens along to pluck success out of the jaws of defeat? Could be a coincidence or like Einstein said it is His way of remaining anonymous. I can live with that.

*-- Lol*

# Has Anybody Here Seen My Old Friend Martin?

Sometime last Tuesday, if he'd lived, Martin Luther King Jr would have had his ninetieth birthday. He probably would have observed that he had out-reached his "threescore and ten" because he loved the imagery of the Old Testament. There would probably have been little about it in the press, because he would not have become one of the most important martyrs of his century.

But tomorrow the United States celebrates a national holiday, because the after-image of a dead young leader is a powerful thing. It is often remarked that an early death is the best way to achieve immortality: like Jesus, Che and JFK. However, that may be, we are not likely to forget Martin Luther King for a long, long time to come.

He was clearly born to be radical in his outlook. From a family of Baptist ministers, he was named Michael at birth, but later changed his name for that of the rebel of four centuries earlier, who had said, "Here I stand; I can do no other." His father and father-in-law were both from that small number of university-educated Southern black people. He was, like so many of history's makers and shakers, born into a situation in which he could have profited personally from doing nothing. But he was propelled onto the American civil rights struggle as if it had been made for and was waiting for him.

You get the impression that he was a somewhat reluctant hero. He studied at what used to be all-black schools and colleges in Atlanta, Georgia, before getting a PhD from the liberal Boston University in 1955. He was attractive, with a particularly rich and pleasing voice. He married Coretta Scott of Marion, Alabama while still a student and started a family. He landed a good pulpit in Montgomery, and within months the civil rights struggle began with the expulsion from a public bus of Mrs. Rosa Parks. King was drafted in to be a leader by his colleagues, and he was the first

president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. The rest is history, culminating in his assassination in 1968. From beginning to end, his career lasted less than 14 years.

What do we remember of King fifty years on? There are the things listed in his biography; there are hundreds of web pages on the internet. The bombing of his house and the physical attacks he suffered; the arrests and humiliating treatment by such men as Sheriff Bull Connors; the trip to India, where he deepened his understanding of the non-violent resistance of Mahatma Gandhi; the huge demonstrations in Washington and New York; the ringing words of the “I Have A Dream” speech at the Washington Monument; his meetings with JFK and Willy Brandt and Pope Paul VI; the Nobel Peace Prize; the passing in 1964 of the Civil Rights Act in the US.

But there are things which the biographers don’t always mention: rumours of serial infidelity during the whole of his career; times of paranoia - often justified - as he was wiretapped and threatened by the FBI and J Edgar Hoover; bitter, sometimes rancorous disputes with other civil rights activists, especially the Black Power groups. And later, revelations that his doctorate in systematic theology had been marred by plagiarism. He, like all of us, had his shadow side.

But he was a key figure in my life. I cannot imagine my youth without the figure of Martin Luther King in it. I was eleven when he began his struggle and twenty-five when he was shot in Memphis. There could have been very few days during that time when I was not aware of something he was doing. He got into the news early and stayed late. He was carrying the consciousness of change for the whole of my country. Love him or hate him, he was impossible to ignore. For me, and for many people of the fifties and sixties, Martin Luther King *was* human rights. So, this morning I want to share some of my memories about him, and perhaps you can recall some of your own.

Way back in the days when everyone in America - on both sides - knew the lyrics to "We Shall Overcome," there was a kind of background music to life. The times they were a-changing. It seemed that humanity was waking up from a trance; things like war and discrimination as a normal condition were finally wearing out. It's true that turmoil was at a high point: Vietnam, race riots and a strange new phenomenon - women's liberation - was rocking the boat. The old ways were being pushed toward the edge, and the fallout from that disturbed the peace that comes with ignorance.

Through the turmoil, though, an alert observer could see signs of a new way of thinking. Casual racism in the South, like the use of the N-word as an actual noun referring to African Americans, left the language of "nice" Americans, and retreated into the category of swear words. You had to start saying "he OR she" instead of just "he." Young people like me thought things were bound to get better, and do so in a hurry.

Then they killed Martin Luther King. They killed Bobby Kennedy. The usually staid process of the Democratic National Convention disintegrated into a riot in Chicago. Students shut down Paris, brandishing the same slogans, and were violently suppressed. The Soviet Union invaded Czechoslovakia, in an attempt to re-establish the same old hegemony. Vietnam wore on. And on. Even the starry-eyed, like me, could see that things might be getting better, but if so, they were taking their damn sweet time.

I believe that if you look at world history from a distance, you will find that change - let's say improvement - happens in predictable stages. There is a surge, brought on by a new consciousness, maybe born of technology, like the invention of the printing press. Gains are made in literacy and other forms of awareness. Jet planes make it easy to meet other people in distant places. The Internet makes us all members of world tribes. The surge moves things around. Gays and lesbians become, not perverts, but people. Skin colour loses relevance. Empire begins to be seen in retrospect as colonial oppression instead of proof of superiority. Women become people

instead of objects of veneration or contempt. Sexuality leaves the dark alleyways and pops up on the front of women's magazines. There is an air of new freedom.

Then the reaction sets in. The comfortable ways that sustained granddad are under threat. Everyone is required to learn new words, new ideas. The pace accelerates until nearly everybody is a little uncomfortable. Some people are even more unsettled. They dig in. They resist change, and follow men who come along and promise a magical return to old ways. We call them populists now, but they have had many names. A kind of chilly conservatism bites, and with it, a new burst of anger. People are saying, "I don't feel safe anymore." So, when someone says they can make America great again, or "take back control" of our borders, money and laws, who doesn't fall prey to that notion?

The image I like best is that of the earthworm, crawling toward the surface, rising two feet, tiring, then falling back a foot and a half as he rests. The pace of change - of improvement - is not steady.

I believe that's where we are at the moment. For some of us, the changes have been easier. If they have resulted in improvements in our condition - if we are happy with the changes - then perhaps we become members of that tribe called the "metropolitan elite." If the changes have not been so kind, and we resist them, we are thought of as "stupid" and "uneducated." We have our own tribe, which we defend loudly. What is now called a "culture war" has begun, with wholly negative consequences. We get to a place where we can hardly speak to each other. We are Democrats and Republicans, leavers and remainers. What seems like chaos breaks out. If you don't believe me, just switch on the radio for five minutes, if you can bear to.

I would be more disturbed by all this if I hadn't lived through a very similar time. At the age of twenty, during the height of Martin Luther King's mission, I somehow landed a job as a reporter on a big Florida daily



newspaper. I was exposed to a great deal of information - some of it new and challenging - about the issues of the civil rights movement.

My best friend, the scion of a wealthy Southern family, began to resent the things I was saying about the emergence of civil rights. His loyalty was to his upbringing in the Deep South tradition, and he saw me as becoming a dangerous radical. It was the time when the Civil Rights Act was passing through Congress. I remember him saying one night, "Do you really expect my mother to sit next to her housemaid on a bus?" The fact that his mother never rode buses didn't faze him. But, when I said (unnecessarily harshly), "Yes. She's no better than her maid," he threw me out of his house.

It was a culture war. It turns out that I happened to be on the side of history, and he did not. But in case I'm leaving you with a false impression, Michael went to law school and became an attorney for the ACLU, defending civil rights for a living. We resumed our friendship easily, and never referred to the split. The worm crawled up another inch.

Martin Luther King once said, "Let us realize the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." In reality, that phrase was first created by the Unitarian preacher, Theodore Parker, who published it in a collection of his sermons in 1853. It has since been used by both Abraham Lincoln and Barack Obama. I see it as a comfort for those of us - and who isn't? - caught in history. I can pull it out of memory when it seems that humanity is hell bent on rolling over and going back to sleep.

MLK, like many great souls, was born about 50 years too early. That is, if he wanted to be comfortable. But that's the fate of the prophets throughout history, who, if they are not assassinated, die without respect.

Tomorrow the US is having a holiday dedicated to his memory. That is, they would be having a holiday if the culture war had not resulted in the shutting down of the government. Meanwhile, the arc of the moral universe is bending, even if we can't see it. It would be like trying to see the curve of the earth from flat ground.

But I feel that we don't need to worry overmuch. I'm sure Dr King would agree with me. We can take the hint from our earthworm, climbing upward to the light. Because the final two feet will not result in sliding backwards again. It will pull him finally into the light.

Rising or slipping back, we are on our slow way upward. Ask Martin Luther King. He promised we would make it someday. And I believe him.

--*Art Lester*

## The Emperor's New Clothes by John Craske

Hirohito was the 124th Emperor of Japan, who in 1946 renounced his legendary divinity and most of his powers to become a democratic constitutional monarch. He had been worshipped by his people as their God and had, the month before, as Commander in Chief of his military forces, declared defeat to end the war with Great Britain and the USA, following the dropping of the two atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It was US General Douglas McArthur, as the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers, who formally accepted the surrender of Japan on board the ship *Missouri*.

McArthur exercised almost unlimited authority, giving Japan a new constitution and a programme of sweeping reform. This began with the demand that Hirohito leave the confines of his Imperial Palace, which was surrounded by walls and show himself to his citizens.

At the time, I was a conscripted Able Seaman, serving in the Pacific, and I had the daily duty of carrying the official papers for delivery to the British Embassy, just outside the walls of the Emperor's Palace. I was then sent to London. I assume that I was chosen because I had been a cadet volunteer with a grammar school education, who had volunteered at 17 and 3 months. If I had not been accepted for officer training, I would have been

called up six months before compulsory conscription for hostilities only, but assured of National Service in the Royal Navy.

Occasionally, I carried a bag containing official documents and took them ashore at a jetty in Yokama Bay. Then I was driven in an American Jeep, with a Royal Marine driver, to Tokyo. On one such trip, I carried (and had read) a pencil notebook, kept by an Irish monk, giving a personal account of the life in Hiroshima during the dropping of the bomb. This was then sent to Prime minister Winston Churchill. It was the first personal account in English of this terrible event.

We saw many destroyed buildings as a result of American bombing. As we entered central Tokyo, we met an escort of eight Japanese Military motorcyclists and an open-top Daimler car with a driver and a short man sitting in the back seat. Although I was in an American Jeep bit in Japan, we drove on the same side as we do in the UK, I was sitting in the seat nearest the centre of the two-lane highway. The Daimler stopped and the elderly man stood up, and was near enough for me to shake his hand. Before I had fully realised, he, with full ceremonious dignity, and with respect that a Japanese person gives to both friends and superior persons, bowed almost to half his height. It was the Emperor. It was as if he regarded me as a very senior person, not just an eighteen-year-old English seaman in his 'blue jeans' uniform. I stood and gave him a military salute, then caught his eye and I knew that this was the moment of personal realisation that he was no longer God but an ordinary human, perhaps for the first time in his life, just like any other person. He drove on and so did we.

Only that morning I had heard on the radio that the Emperor of Japan had been told by the CinC of Allied Forces, to come out of the walled protection of his Palace grounds. I was the first Englishman he met that morning as he left his Palace confines for the first time to make contact with his people.

*To be continued.....*

# Getting to Know You

*Pauline Peet interviews Mabel Kibisha*

**Mabel you have been a member of the church for a few years now, what is it that you like about us?**

I have been coming to the church 4 years now and I like the people, they are kind and welcoming, helping one another.

Since joining the church, I have been happy because I am loved by everyone, especially Pauline and Rev Art; they are like my parents. I remember when I was going to do my interview in Leeds, Rev Art paid for my ticket at that time; I had nothing in my pocket. I will never leave the church because of that. Pauline sometimes passes clothes on to me too. Everyone in the Unitarian Church they are good, like me and I respect everyone, It feels like home here.

**Where would you be if not in church on Sunday?**

I am either at work, at my partners place or shopping with friends around Croydon

**Do you have a favourite hymn?**

It is Amazing Grace, and I like songs about love, love is important to me.

**Has there been anyone one in your life who has inspired you? Or do you have any inspirational words.?**

For this question, I have nothing to answer, it is a very long story .....

**How do you like to relax?**

Mostly me I like to relax in my bed listening to music and watch football on T V - my team is Man United

**Do you have a favourite type of food?**

Really me can eat everything and of course I like African food. Like Matooke and African tea made with ginger water and milk, then we boil it.

**Do you have any pet hates or dislikes?**

I don't like rude people. They make me cry.

**I believe you grew up in Uganda. If not too personal, would like to tells a little about life there.**

Yes, I grew up in Uganda; it is my country, but as you know me, I don't need to say a lot about myself. My life was not easy when young.

**Are there any special times in your life that if you could, you would like to revisit?**

This question makes me cry, because I would like to visit Uganda to see my children, because they are missing to see me and I miss them also.

**Talking to you recently, you said you would like to see more of the world. Where would that be?**

I would like to visit America and Canada but have no friends or family there.

**Finally, if you were to be stranded on a desert island, what three things would you take that would be important to you. (excluding a mobile phone)**

I would take food drink and medicines.

*Thank you, Mabel, we love you too.*

*This is a regular feature (but with custom -tailored questions) for anyone willing to participate. Please let us know.*



## *Happy Birthday!*

*We wish*

*Katie Dent, Euan White, Katie White, Irmí Martin,  
Merryn Craske, Myrddin Thames Adair, Gilly Lester*

*a very happy birthday:*

*From May 2018 a new law requires us to ask you if you would like us to continue sending you emails. If you do not wish us to continue sending you emails, could you please let us know? -- ed.*

# The Croydon Unitarian and Free Christian Church

1 The Croydon Flyover, Croydon, Surrey CR0 1ER,  
Email [croydonunitarian@hotmail.com](mailto:croydonunitarian@hotmail.com),  
[www.croydonunitarians.org.uk](http://www.croydonunitarians.org.uk)  
Tel 020 8667 1681

## Contact Information

|                            |                        |   |
|----------------------------|------------------------|---|
| Minister                   | <b>Rev. Art Lester</b> | <i>Manse:</i> 020 8656 3996<br><i>Email:</i> <a href="mailto:artlester@hotmail.com">artlester@hotmail.com</a>   |
| Chairman<br>&<br>President | <b>John Craske</b>     | <i>Tel:</i> 01342 604770<br><i>Mobile :</i> 0798 2743333<br><i>Email:</i> <a href="mailto:rjohncraske@gmail.com">rjohncraske@gmail.com</a>                    |
| Secretary                  | <b>Martin White</b>    | <i>Tel:</i> 020 8715 6859<br><i>Email:</i> <a href="mailto:deadlymittens@gmail.com">deadlymittens@gmail.com</a>   |
| Treasurer                  | <b>David Williams</b>  | <i>Tel:</i> 020 8661 2489<br><i>Email:</i> <a href="mailto:davidmwilliams@hotmail.co.uk">davidmwilliams@hotmail.co.uk</a>                                     |
| Webmaster                  | <b>Ross Burgess</b>    | <i>Tel:</i> 020 8645 0943<br><i>Email:</i> <a href="mailto:ross@foxearth.net">ross@foxearth.net</a><br><a href="http://www.foxearth.net">www.foxearth.net</a> |

## General information from

|        |                   |  |
|--------|-------------------|--|
| Warden | <b>Lol Benbow</b> | <i>Tel:</i> 01689 841592<br><i>Mobile :</i> 07932 154408<br><i>E - mail</i> <a href="mailto:lolbow@googlemail.com">lolbow@googlemail.com</a> |
|--------|-------------------|--|

*For Church bookings, contact Lol Benbow.*

## The Open-Door Newsletter

Editors **Peter & Jim**  
Email: [peter.taylor1123@gmail.com](mailto:peter.taylor1123@gmail.com)  
Tel: 020 8681 6675, Mobile: 07758 943517

***COULD YOU PLEASE SEND US ANY CONTRIBUTIONS FOR THE  
APRIL NEWSLETTER BY THURSDAY 21<sup>ST</sup> MARCH 2019***