

# **OUR FAITH** • **EIN FFYDD**

*Unitarian voices of Wales in 2013 • Lleisiau Undodiaid Cymru yn 2013*



## *Introduction*

We live in a fast-moving, anxious and often angry society. A 24-hour news culture means that our economy, politics, media, popular culture and religious institutions are constantly scrutinised for the slightest mistake or slip.

The development of the internet since the 1990s means that many people communicate with each other in ways that were previously unimaginable. The onward march of Twitter and Facebook over the last five years means that even e-mail is largely regarded as old-fashioned by younger generations.

Of course, much of this is for the best. In the public sphere, new communications have helped to foster openness and transparency. On a personal level, we can connect with long-lost friends, and communicate much more freely with family members across the world.

However, society's need to share and know everything, instantly, has created new problems. In the wider world, complex arguments are boiled down to a quick soundbite (or 140 characters on Twitter). This can lead to misunderstanding, frustration and anger.

Nowhere is the capacity for instant argument and judgement better exemplified than in the increasingly hostile debate between evangelical Christians and the new form of militant Atheism that has evolved over the last few years.

As Unitarians, we have an opportunity to present a more reflective model of faith, free of anxiety and hostility. This pamphlet is a small attempt to do just that. The pamphlet is based on some two dozen statements of faith by individual Unitarians across Wales who were asked "What does your faith mean to you?" We are grateful to the individuals and congregations who took the time to respond to the call for these statements of faith.

For those who have not come across the Unitarians before, we hope that the pamphlet will provide a snapshot of the worldview of Unitarians in Wales in 2012/13, and offer a glimpse into a new faith and a different way of thinking about things. We hope that you will consider some of the thoughts in the pamphlet, and possibly make contact with the Unitarians when you feel ready to do so.

Readers who are already committed Unitarians will know that, as with any other faith, our own tradition comes with its difficulties. At a time when organised religion is in decline, it can be tempting to look for the negative in any situation. Some of us can also find ourselves so immersed in the everyday work of Unitarian committees and structures at congregational, district or national level, that we can sometimes forget the radical and loving essence of our faith. We trust that this pamphlet will offer a few minutes' reflection and renewal for you, too.

We would like to end with one final thought. In 2013, we celebrate the 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the 1813 Trinity Act. Prior to that Act, Unitarian views, such as those contained within this booklet, were considered Blasphemy by the British state. We therefore dedicate this pamphlet to our predecessors in the faith: those men and women who upheld Unitarian beliefs across these islands prior to 1813.

**Dr Carwyn Tywyn (Secretary, Welsh Department, Unitarian and Free Christian Churches)**

## *Love and friendship*

When uncertainty and fears surround me, I try to be brave enough to choose love.  
(*Nia Roberts, Bangor*)

A group of friends, with whom I share a spiritual journey of justice, tolerance and compassion. (*Dewi Owen, Cardiff*)

When my sister and I were little, my parents always said 'Hold hands and look out for each other' - well I am grown up now, no parents and no sister, so no-one tells me to hold hands, except my church - metaphorically speaking - but they do it very well and we always look out for each other. (*Marian Whippey, Aberdare*)

## *Freedom of expression*

"Within Unitarianism, I receive spiritual uplift free from chains and fetters." (*Anon., Aberdare*)

"Having come out of a tradition that was quite dogmatic, it was a relief to find a group of people who were not dogmatic but who were as aware as I am of the mystery of life and the universe." (*Paul Smith, Bangor*)

"An opportunity to explore spiritual questions freely without dogma and to live a better life in community with others." (*Sarah Boyce, Cardiff*)

"Unitarianism gives me courage to not accept other people's ideas without questioning, and to try and live a fair and just life. Worshipping in a Unitarian community gives us a chance to open our hearts and minds to feelings, ideas and questions without the impediments of narrow creeds, and to draw strength from each other." (*Sheila Cousins, Haverfordwest*)

"I enjoy being part of a Unitarian community because of what it is not: it is not intolerant, judgements, unwelcoming and dogmatic but respects and welcomes all, irrespective of their beliefs." (*Alun Watts, Aberdare.*)

"I have learned that, for me, the living out of my faith is best done in the context of intentional Unitarian community where I am free to practise living in right relationship with myself, with others and with the mystery that is God." (*Rev. Liz Birtles, Bangor*)

"My Unitarian faith is dogma-free, unfettered and uncomplicated – allowing me the freedom to think for myself." (*Ken Morgan, Cefn Coed y Cymmer*)

## *The journey of life*

“My faith enables me to explore my personal spirituality as I travel the journey: Unitarianism is a way of life.” (*Lis Dyson-Jones, GA President 2012-13*)

“I found Unitarianism by accident at 29, and now being 50 ; it continues to ground my thinking and enlighten my perspective.” (*Marie Rosenberg, Nottage*)

“As someone trying to follow a Christian-Sufi Truth Star, lighting up realms of a God of supreme Compassion, Intelligence and Beauty, I try to walk in the direction of that compass needle, which is currently shining for me on the Highland Place Unitarian Church.” (*Mel Jones, Aberdare*)

## *Community*

“Being a Unitarian for me means to belong to an inclusive band of people who are generous, loyal, loving and gifted with a sense of true fellowship for one another and having a close bond with the local community and beyond.” (*Barbara Chivers, Aberdare*)

“Five generations of my family were devout Unitarians and my parents naturally influenced my early religious faith and beliefs. My own views were also sustained and strengthened by five different Unitarian Ministers of the Graig and Gellionnen Chapel.” (*Colin Morgan, Gellionnen and Graig*)

"For me, being a Unitarian means that I am a member of a community within which I am encouraged to learn and grow" (*Ella Lewis-Jones, Aberdare*)

“Having little faith in faith and less still in dogma, divine guidance or infallible texts, I need all possible assistance from the companionship of fellow searchers and strugglers and our inheritance of cultural, artistic and scientific insights (including of course the great religious teachers), to navigate our world and to grow in compassion and empathy with others and to assist in the stewardship of the planet on which we have, astoundingly, evolved.” (*Professor Gareth Wyn-Jones, Bangor*)

“I am a Unitarian because it allows me to look over the fence and taste different ideas within the Christian community as well as other religions of the world, so that I am able to appreciate what they are able to offer and understand those who see things differently.” (*Rev. Emeritus Eric Jones, Aberdare*)

“A sense of belonging.” (*Barbara Clifford, Glasgow and formerly of Wales*).

“I love the community in my church, as I feel close to God and that my spirit is uplifted – not only through the variety of services, but also through the love and support of the community, which embraces one and all” (*Anne Watts, Aberdâr*)

## *Philosophy*

At my Unitarian church, the readings make me more aware of my inner self and encourage me to explore the different philosophies of many religions which in turn, help me to understand life's events, whilst outside the service, the support of members has helped me through a very difficult time in my life, with love and understanding (*Joan Harlow, Aberdare*)

"I'm not a religious person but Unitarianism helps me to try and live a Christian life 7 Days a week." (*Dai Williams, Alltyblaca*)

I am a Unitarian because the handrails of freedom, reason and tolerance allow me to respect and include everyone on my daily journey as I try to follow the teachings of Jesus. (*Anne Jones, Aberdare*)

"...a conversation with God, of prayer, promptings of conscience, challenges and reassurance" (*Robin Attfield, Cardiff*)

"My faith means YOUR faith - I believe that all true religion is from the same source, and its purpose is the unity of mankind, not conflict and strife." (*Gerald Williams, Bangor*)

"Its radical tradition, the belief in social justice, mercy and goodness – these are the forces which drew me to Unitarianism in the first instance and these are the principles and aspirations which still keep me here." (*Elaine Davies, President, South Wales Unitarian District*)

"A place to grow spiritually as the ideas of the mind and the feelings of the heart meet, and to turn them into compassionate actions for justice and fairness and to create communities that are based on love." (*Rev. Cen Llwyd*)

"The Unitarian faith is a bridge between my Christian heritage and my agnostic mind: the Universalist strand of our faith believes that every single human being on the planet shares the same purpose and destiny, regardless of creed or faith." (*Dr Carwyn Tywyn, Secretary of the Unitarian Welsh Department*)

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