

Bury St Edmunds Unitarian Meeting House

This is a preliminary announcement about a forthcoming vacancy

Job Description

Development Minister / Lay Leader

Part-time (2/5ths FTE) for 2 years in the first instance, from June 2027

BACKGROUND

Bury St Edmunds Unitarian Meeting House (BSE-UMH) in Suffolk has a Grade 1 listed building and shares a Minister with Framlingham Unitarian Meeting House.

Our congregation is dwindling to the point where we risk becoming unsustainable, lacking the volunteers to deal with the governance of our community and the responsibilities of caring for our building.

As a traditional faith with deep roots in East Anglia's dissenting history, we also seek to grow and adapt to the needs of a contemporary audience. We strive to offer not just services, but also spaces for community and personal growth.

We have secured a grant of nearly £20,000 from the GA's Innovation Fund towards a £40,000 project for sustainable rejuvenation. The grant will enable us to employ a Local Outreach Leader to build awareness and engage local people (firstly) with our building and (secondly) with our values-led community, and (gradually) with our congregation and its stewardship. The grant will also pay for new and expanded digital communication and resources.

We now seek an individual in a development role to deliver and/or facilitate a diverse range of spiritual provision that is relevant to the new generation of members we hope to attract, and that will build engagement and renewal over time.

The person appointed will have a free hand to experiment with new ideas, new practices and new forms of worship and to extend the pool of people who lead worship.

MORE DETAIL ON HOW WE SEE IT WORKING

1. With the help of the Innovation Fund we have engaged a Local Outreach Leader, whose role is to:
 - Establish relationships with local community actors (e.g., clubs, schools, charities, religious communities, and social justice organisations), building awareness of the usefulness of the Meeting House and stimulating curiosity about the Unitarian congregation
 - Facilitate a Unitarian presence at local social, cultural, charitable and community activities and meetings
 - Provide physical space at a modest (subsidised?) cost for local community initiatives, events, meetings and groups
 - Invite community partners to participate in Unitarian sponsored events, workshops, and worship events.
2. We anticipate that, among those people who come into the Meeting House for these different activities, will be some who are drawn to the warmth of the community and a few who are tempted to find out about the Unitarian congregation based there. It will be your role to create the kind of programming that will make them feel welcome and tempt them to engage. Your approach will depend on your skills and preferences and on the limited time available, but might include:
 - Delivering and/or facilitating a diverse range of social and spiritual provision that will build engagement and congregational renewal over time, including attracting people who are willing to become Trustees
 - Fostering connection and shared values by working with community partners to create Meeting-House sponsored events, workshops, and worship
 - Developing a pool of people able and motivated to help you with the welcoming and help you to deliver some of the activities
3. You will work independently alongside (but not subordinate to) our shared Minister, Rev Matthew Smith, who is valued for his traditional approach and whose responsibilities include:
 - Driving our Digital Outreach Strategy as part of the Innovation Fund project
 - Researching, developing and delivering a range of on-line publications, interactions and engagement
 - Meeting the needs of the existing congregation for traditional Ministry, including one Sunday gathering in the BSE Meeting House every month in a traditional format, and another on Zoom jointly with Framlingham
 - Providing pastoral care as appropriate to the existing congregation
 - Assisting the Treasurer and the Venue and Operations Manager in managing the practicalities of the building and its revenue from venue hire.

PERSON SPECIFICATION

Essentially, we are looking for someone who can imagine what a thriving Unitarian community could look like for a new generation, build relationships that make that vision possible, and turn ideas into engaging experiences that bring people together.

We have no fixed ideas about the status of the right candidate, except that you must be on, or eligible for, or willing to become eligible to join either the Ministerial Roll or the Register of Lay Leaders. You could be experienced, in training, newly qualified, or a committed lay leader. You might be building a portfolio of roles.

You are likely to have some of the following qualities:

- A strong understanding of Unitarian values and an ability to express them in innovative ways that are relevant to contemporary life
- Demonstrable ability to create inclusive and meaningful spiritual experiences for people with diverse beliefs and backgrounds and those who are new to organised religion or traditional congregational life
- Ability to inspire, encourage and develop others to contribute to worship and congregational life
- Commitment to creating pathways through which participants can become more deeply involved as Members, volunteers and future Trustees
- Collaborative and diplomatic, comfortable with distributed leadership and able to work across congregations and/or faith communities

PRACTICAL DETAILS

You will report to the Trustees of Bury St Edmunds Meeting House.

The post will be remunerated in accordance with the GA's current stipend review conditions, i.e. pro-rata to the full-time equivalent of:

Stipend: £35,189

Provincial Manse allowance £7,948 (NB: no Manse available)

Employer's Pension contribution 12%.

There is a discretionary budget for operating expenses of £3,000 a year.

This is initially a fixed term appointment for 2 years from 1st June 2027, with the hope and expectation that even modest success will motivate BSE-UMH Trustees and others to contribute additional funding to extend the contract in duration, in available hours, and potentially in geographic range.

As a guide to our modest and realistic ambitions, the Performance Indicators for our existing Innovation Fund grant are:

		Month						
	Unit of measurement	3	6	12	15	18	24	30
Digital Strategy	New people engaged with us digitally	500	1500	5,000				
Local outreach	New people using the Meeting House each week				20	30	50	
Development Ministry	New members of the congregation				1	5	10	20

How to apply

Please send an up-to-date CV and a personal statement (max 500 words) explaining why you are interested in the role and the qualities you bring to it.

Please email your application to Rev'd John Carter, Chair of Trustees (revjohn.ukuni@gmail.com) with a copy to Dr Wendy Sudbury, Treasurer, wendy.sudbury@btconnect.com.

If you would prefer an informal chat before applying, please contact Wendy Sudbury.

Closing date 30th January 2027. Shortlisted candidates will be asked to present ideas for new kinds of spiritual activity and to deliver a short worship event on site.