

Been there, done that, got the T-shirt

First things first - thank you so very much for sending me to the General Assembly meetings in Hatfield as your delegate. I thoroughly enjoyed the experience as did Joan.

They certainly worked us hard in the business sessions - 7 motions to debate and vote on. Motion 1 was an easy one to deal with; urge all our congregations to get involved with their local Standing Advisory Committee on Religious Education - unanimous support - this has already been implemented by Hinckley Great Meeting. Motion 2 was passed overwhelmingly and urged the General Assembly to provide support to immigrant British workers who are here legally. Motion 3 was again unanimous and demanded that Her Majesty's Government (HMG) sign the Palermo Protocol against sex-trafficking of human beings (now signed - awaiting ratification) and urged districts and congregations to raise awareness of sex-trafficking (modern slavery), Motion 4 was passed with a large majority and urged support for the "Strangers into Citizens" campaign. Motion 5 was regarding personal Carbon Footprints and urged all Unitarians to complete one - everyone was in favour bar two. Motion 6 was long and verbose, and was brought back the next day for the vote after simplification overnight when it was passed unanimously. Basically the motion demanded that HMG uses all means possible to achieve a diplomatic solution to the situation in Iran. The last motion was passed overwhelmingly and called upon HMG to work to outlaw cluster munitions, and Unitarians to work in support of the campaign. There was also the standard set of procedural motions; thanks, greetings, accept the annual report, and elect a president and vice-president - the next two years should be very interesting as Rev. Celia Midgley, followed by Joyce Ashworth take the presidency. I also brought back some books for the chapel library.

What are my personal highlights? Number one has to be the meeting organised by the Unitarian Womens' Group which I will remember for a long time. Rev. Dr. Carrie Pemberton, CEO of CHASTE (Churches Alert to Sex Trafficking in Europe) was talking about, how in Europe today people (mainly women) are being kidnapped by being taken to another country, usually on the pretext of a job promise; whereupon their passport is confiscated; they are then coerced and brutalised into providing sexual services for up to 40 men a day. Almost as thought provoking was a debate between a minister and a doctor about whether the UK law on "assisted suicide" should be changed. The Essex Hall Lecture on "Governance in Church-based Communities" given by Tesse Akpeki, asked the question "What are you passionate about"?

The British Isles Unitarian Young Adult Network (BUYAN) was again active, furiously knitting items to be bid for in a silent auction, organising a pilgrimage to the Taize community in France in July/August, selling T-shirts, persuading people to buy books for Hucklow, and "busking for Buyan" (Sarah Atkinson and Jen Hazel singing operatic arias accompanied by Andrew Usher) in the restaurant one evening. There was a very interesting range of food provided in the restaurant, including fresh tuna one night. What else did I bring back from GA apart from some memories, a few photos and leaflets, some of which are displayed on the upper schoolroom notice board - two books of prayers and meditations, a CD of a teen pop group from Hull, and a BUYAN T-shirt. I am also available any time to answer questions about the GA meetings. Yours, Howard (and thanks again)