

A VIRTUAL FIRST

Sandy Haggar's Ordination



SNU Today is very happy to report that in March this year, a first of its kind event took place... an ordination. The ordination of a Spiritualist Minister is always a significant occasion, however this had a key difference. Reflecting the increasingly international Spiritualist community within the Union, the ceremony saw both physical and virtual participants in the service for the first time, as Sandy Haggar became a minister of the religion of Spiritualism.

It took place in Christchurch Spiritualist Centre, Dorset. A friendly church in the Southern District which nestles between the houses on Barrack Road, just outside the town centre. The service of ordination was officiated by Minister David Bruton, President of the Union. While a harpist played to welcome the attendees, a remote electronic connection was being made to Victoria BC in Canada to Minister Simon James who was chairing the service from almost 5000 miles away. On this evening, a very different kind of link was being made!

Luckily, Sandy didn't need to worry about the technical aspects. She tells us, "My partner, Spot, used her technical wizardry to maintain the internet link for the entire ceremony." This meant that the congregation was truly international, and she explained the benefits of this, "It enabled Minister Brian Robertson, and Minister Simon James and the 'virtual' congregation from their SNU church, The Open Door Sanctuary in Canada, to give support, to witness and play a vital part in my ordination." Without this international link, her long-term mentor and friend, Minister Simon James would not have been able to be there. Virtual participation also enabled Minister Brian Robertson to provide the reading, which was from Debra Skelton's collection of writings by Spiritualist pioneers, Echoes. Sandy recalls some of the words

from this, coming from American Minister J M Peebles: "When Spiritualism in its divinest aspects is literally practised, our country will be the universe, our home the world, our rest wherever human hearts beat in sympathy with our own, and the highest happiness of each will be altruism. This is Spiritualism, pure, simple and practical." This added further depth to the international flavour of the evening, and perhaps gave potency to the symbolism of two nations joining together for a spiritual occasion. This call for spiritual unity that transcends the borders of all countries is a powerful teaching, and an inspiration to any minister whose role involves conveying and enacting the teachings of Spirit

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in their work. People were also represented from numerous places, with video messages and representatives sent from Switzerland and the Netherlands, which are two areas where Sandy teaches. In particular from Switzerland was Iris Wuthrich who is the country's SNUi representative. Iris read the Seven Principles of Spiritualism to the congregations. The church, physically, was full of friends and family, along with a retired Reverend and Church of England parish administrator from the local area - many being completely new to the teachings and religion of

Spiritualism. It also added a touch of interfaith activity to join the international. Many people will not have attended an ordination service, and so Sandy's gives us all an insight into what happens. The lyceum bell was heard to ring out, symbolically sounding to ring in the changes and mark new beginnings, for both Spiritualism and for the new Minister. This moving part of the service highlights the commitment of the Minister and has been incorporated by the Ministers Administration Committee (MAC) into every ordination service. Many moving tributes were received as well as the videos from overseas, and a personal note from Minister June English, the SNU Vice President, who was unable to be there in person. It is customary for the new Minister to give an address as part of the service. The address, based on 'the meaning of life' reinforced by poignant words from the human rights activist, Martin Luther King, reminded those present that "even if you are unable to do great things, you can still do small things, in a great way."

Afterwards, the former Church President expressed gratitude to Sandy for its power. It was made an extra-special occasion for her since Minister David Bruton formally presented to Sandy the well-deserved Gladys Owen Public Speaking Award, annually awarded by the Exponents Committee for public speaking. This first for Spiritualism concluded with time for those physically present to share some time together after the ceremony with food and in friendship. SNU Today thanks Sandy for sharing her experience of a physical / virtual ordination with us, and sends best wishes as she embarks on her life as a Spiritualist Minister. It's exciting for us all to see how changes in technology are opening up new opportunities for our religion. This was certainly an occasion of two worlds and two nations!