

OVER 700 SPIRITUALISTS ATTEND VIRTUAL DEMONSTRATION BY MEDIUMS

By Alv Hirst, Director of Communications for the Spiritualists' National Union

THE coronavirus lockdown in the UK has seen many religious denominations begin to offer services online. However, there's been no catching up for Spiritualism!

For over a decade, alongside the "bricks and mortar" churches and centres, the online branch of the Spiritualists' National Union has been growing. It's called SNUi.

For some it has been a welcome addition to their regular church attendance. For others, it is not a replacement because there is nothing to replace – it has become their main contact with the world of Spiritualism.

As virtual as SNUi might seem, it is made up of very real people. There were well over 1,000 SNUi members. This has grown rapidly since the pandemic forced churches into temporary closure.

Demand has been high. When SNUi opened up a demonstration of mediumship by Tony Stockwell and Minister Simone Key to the public, over 700 people attended. A new experience to many, I wanted to find out about SNUi's established members.

Lorna J. Hines lives in New Jersey, USA. She tells us a little bit about herself. "In the midst of a rising career path, successful marriage and family, I felt as an Afro-Caribbean/American woman that there needed to be more meaning to my life.

"I grew up in a household where religion and spirituality co-existed. My maternal grandmother was definitely a medium and intuitive, although at that time I did not have the full significance of those words.

"I would describe myself as both spiritual and religious. Nonetheless, there appeared to be a sense that I needed something more tangible.

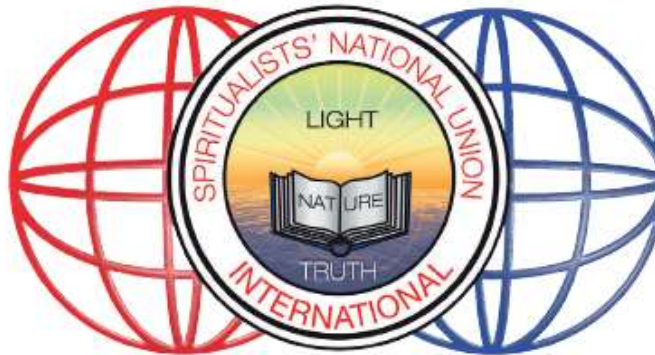
"A friend, mentor and colleague suggested I increase my skills in mediumship and referred me to The Journey Within Spiritualist Church, where I received mentorship, wonderful teaching and guidance from the Rev Janet Nohavoc

(also an SNU officiant).

"I attended classes and services there where I was introduced to the fundamentals of Spiritualism. Both the SNU's Seven Principles and the belief of the presence of God within us resonated with me and felt right.

"It was Janet who also suggested I join the SNUi Platform Accreditation Scheme (PAS) programme. I am glad that I trusted her judgement and good counsel."

Lorna is not alone in finding the online PAS resource invaluable. In the Netherlands, Barbara Spies-Blankenstein



had just completed a mentorship course based in the UK.

Barbara was "feeling kind of lost" when she returned home and "really missed the participation and interaction with like-minded people."

SNUi provided the solution for Barbara when she enrolled in a platform accreditation scheme.

Barbara "learned to value what I didn't understand before because besides the scheme, SNUi offers so many possibilities to engage, learn and enjoy your journey of development by various classes and lectures.

"SNUi really offers me a platform where I can find answers to questions about myself as well as both sides of life."

Barbara's story reveals how the power of our Seventh Principle about eternal progress can be enhanced by our second principle, which advocates a connection

between us all that SNUi is so good at facilitating.

Four thousand miles away in New Jersey, Lorna also found something more than what she was studying. She adds: "In the course of study, attending classes and reading, I began to fully feel the presence of God within me.

"My understanding also increased in seeing that Father God is interested in the inside of us – our hearts, our thoughts, our behaviour and most especially how we treat one another.

"This is not a God of glamour and glitz, but a Godforce Spirit who cares for the least among us and endeavours to help, support and refresh the needs of those who are destitute in mind, body and spirit."

It is clear that SNUi is not your run-of-the-mill online environment, but a community of thoughtful, spiritual people who are able to share their profound experiences despite living in different parts of the world.

Time now to meet Cathy Leigh Tsoukalas. Cathy, who lives in Greece, is Vice-Chair of SNUi and is in no doubt about its importance. She was originally inspired to join by Minister Doris Smith, sister of SNUi

pioneer Vi Kipling.

In 2012, Cathy "wanted to deepen my understanding of Spiritualism and had nothing in the real world, so it was perfect for me.

"Once there, the path I found myself on began to take on a life of its own and doors opened. It began to unfold."

Many Spiritualists who attend a physical church will recognise this story of transformation. However, for Cathy her unfoldment began to take place in the context of the SNUi community.

As Spiritualists, we should not be surprised by the reality of something as intangible as a virtual community. The spirit world clearly has no issues with the virtual nature of SNUi.

Its Chairperson, New Zealand-based Minister Arthur Plumpton, tells me: "I participate in debates, philosophy and some circle work.

"I am truly amazed that you can make a contact for someone 12,000 miles away and be correct, but why not? Spirit knows no boundaries!"

It is this sense of community and connection that is so important for many members of SNUi, especially during global lockdowns.

Many have also realised that it is a unique platform for learning. While initially we might wonder if it is a helpful environment for this, the doubts soon fade away.

Gretchen Meisner in the United States found that SNUi delivered both educationally and personally.

"If it's just a lot of book learning, it can get boring for someone like me," says Gretchen. "I love that there's so much interaction and quite a few brilliant tutors who give constructive guidance and feedback."

She goes on to reveal how being in the virtual environment inspired her to take some next steps.

"After about a year of practising on SNUi, I decided to sign up for an accreditation programme. This is because I met so many kind and wonderful people.

"There is absolutely no competition and everyone is so loving and supportive. It's truly a healthy environment."

Gretchen also has words of encouragement for those new to the online community who might worry about their IT skills.

She reassures us, "There are a lot of resources to help figure it out, but once you get there it's definitely worth it. I would encourage anyone to just keep trying until they do."

Another participant, Carolyn Hornblow, pinpoints a key area of her practice that SNUi has supported.

"It has helped me develop my demonstrating and speaking abilities more easily and quickly than any other way," says Carolyn.

"Listening, learning from other students, being tutored, encouraged and getting the practice – and all from the convenience of my own armchair! It has been a wonderful opportunity.

"Without SNUi, I feel I would have taken a lot longer to get to where I am developmentally."

For Cathy, the intertwined pathway of study and spiritual development was supported greatly by SNUi.

"I became part of a platform accreditation scheme, went on to pass it and then received my certificate," says Cathy.

"I like to feel that I am a positive example of what can be achieved by someone who is totally reliant on the SNUi as a spiritual community and source of learning and inspiration.

"The SNUi is an excellent resource. It enables spiritual development from the comfort of your own home. At the flick of a button you can connect to like-minded souls all around the world."

These are just a few personal experiences that I uncovered about SNUi, and without doubt there are plenty more. It is exciting to think of the potential that it has released in them.

As Barbara says: "The real learning starts when you open up to sharing and expressing yourself. Miracles happen once you have set the intention and welcome what comes to you. I can assure you of that.

"Since I set the intention of wanting to be part of a spiritual community with a solid and knowledgeable foundation to help me further along my path of personal and spiritual development, especially in the world we live in today, I have found it by joining the SNUi." ■

• To find out more and join, please visit www.snui.org



SNUi member Iris Eva Wuehrich CSNU and furry friend.

THE SNU'S SEVEN PRINCIPLES

- The Fatherhood of God
- The Brotherhood of Man
- The Communion of Spirits and the Ministry of Angels
- The continuous existence of the human soul
- Personal responsibility
- Compensation and retribution hereafter for all the good and evil deeds done on earth
- Eternal progress open to every human soul

