



Kensington Unitarians

Newsletter: October 2015

What's On...

Thursday 1st October, 7-8pm
'Heart and Soul' Spiritual Gathering
'(in)dependence' led by Jane Blackall

Saturday 3rd October, 2.30pm
Caroline Blair: Celebration of Life

Sunday 4th October, 11am-noon
'For the Love Of It'
Led by Katie McKenna

Tuesday 6th October, 12.30-1.30pm
Nia Technique with Sonya Leite

Thursday 8th October, 7-9.00pm
Creativity Group: Bring Your Own

Sunday 11th October, 11am-noon
'A Life of Imagination'
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 11th October, 12.30pm
Small-Group Communion
Led by Sue Smith

Sunday 11th October, 2-3pm
Nia Technique with Sonya Leite

Tuesday 13th October, 12.30-1.30pm
Nia Technique with Sonya Leite

Sunday 18th October, 11am-noon
'A Life of Inquiry'
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 18th October, 3pm-5.30pm
True Heart Theatre:
'Our Living Stories'

Tuesday 20th October, 12.30-1.30pm
Nia Technique with Sonya Leite

Thursday 22nd October, 7-9pm
Management Committee Meeting

Tuesday 27th October, 12.30-1.30pm
Nia Technique with Sonya Leite

Tuesday 27th October, 6.45-9pm
Men's Group with Jim Blair

Sunday 25th October, 11am-noon
'A Life of Gratitude'
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 25th October, 12.30-1.15pm
'Finding Your Voice'
Singing Workshop with Margaret

In the Tough Times

A Message from our Minister

In the tough times, our choices may become limited. In the tough times, we realise that we have less control over the course of our own lives than we sometimes imagine we have. But in the tough times we still have the freedom to choose whether to close or open our hearts. Opening our hearts may hurt. An open heart feels more. An undefended heart is vulnerable. But to feel is to be alive and real and human. Don't let me ever criticise another human being for closing down when painful circumstances arise. I've done it often enough myself. The wincing move away from pain when we burn our finger is an instinct residing deep within us. It helps us survive. But that moving away from pain can harden us. We may create a shell, a hard exterior that stops us feeling too much or revealing too much of ourselves. So in the tough times let's soften our hearts rather than harden them. Let's reach out to others rather than hiding away from them. Let's remain undefended and trust our ability to deal with whatever that may bring.

As our news media report the unfolding stories of refugees seeking to escape from dreadful circumstances in their home countries may we find depths of compassion that help us to overcome our fears and anxieties. May we embrace the complexity of all this and not imagine that there are any easy answers to be found. May we use our imaginations to help us view what is unfolding from multiple perspectives. Only if we have truly attempted to imagine ourselves as refugees, as people smugglers, as fierce and repressive regimes, as anxious or hostile fellow citizens, can we begin to comprehend what it is to be human, for to be human is to hold the potential for all these roles and many more. And there is no happy ending to be aimed for. Life here on earth is messy, contradictory and continually changing. So let's help one another to live with what is, to keep love flowing, to be more human than otherwise and to remain open-hearted in the tough times.

Rev. Sarah Tinker

Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh asks, 'Can we look at each other and recognize ourselves in each other?' Here's an extract from his poem 'Please Call Me by My True Names,' in which he explores our infinite potentiality to be many people, many names.

*'My joy is like spring, so warm it makes flowers bloom in all walks of life.
My pain is like a river of tears, so full it fills the four oceans.
Please call me by my true names,
so I can hear all my cries and laughs at once,
so I can see that my joy and pain are one.'*



In this month's newsletter...

* Caroline Blair * 'Precious Things' by Jenny Moy * 'Me and My Life' Sunday Workshop * 'Hucklow Summer School' by Luisa * 'Some Thoughts About Numbers' by Sarah Tinker * 'Pick a Card, Any Card' sermon by Jeannene Powell * Two Weddings at Essex Church * 'The Common Aims of British Unitarians and Prince Charles' by Annette Percy * Two Weddings * 'Ramblings and Buzzings' short reflection by Rev. Sarah Tinker and much more...

Kensington Unitarians

At Essex Church (founded 1774), Notting Hill Gate

Kensington Unitarians are a community of kindred souls who meet each week at Essex Church in Notting Hill Gate to explore, reflect, converse, be still, share joys and sorrows, and support one another on life's journey. We are proud to be part of a worldwide and historic liberal religious tradition.

Our main activity is Sunday worship and we hold a service each week at 11am. All are welcome. Services are usually themed and include readings from a variety of sources, prayers, music, singing, stillness, and a short sermon. Our children's leaders provide an alternative programme of activities for younger people.

Small-group activities are another key part of our programme. We offer courses and one-off workshops exploring spiritual and religious matters and considering life's meaning together with others on the spiritual journey.



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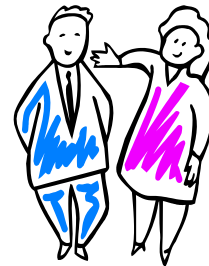
Email: info@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Web: www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk

'Life is not made up of crises; life is made up of little things we love to ignore in order to get on to the exciting things in life. But God is in the details. God is in what it takes in us to be faithful to them. God is in the routines that make us what we are. The way we do the little things in life is the mark of the bigness of our souls. The 'mundane' is certainly dull, I agree, and may even limit us — not only our perceptions but even the breadth of our questions. At the same time, there is something very freeing, very humanizing about the mundane. Doing dishes and buying vegetables get us back in touch with ourselves, give us time to smell the earth of our lives, give us time just to be. We will go on long after the big ideas fade and the profession ends. The question is, will there be anything in me then? Will there be a me in me? It all depends on how I deal with the mundane. The problem with dailiness is that it's not nearly as routine as it's supposed to be. It takes patience and persistence. Dailiness is the great deep pit out of which the character of our lives takes its most lasting shape. It is the repository of our greatest graces and site of our worst losses. It is the treasure house of all our yesterdays and the reserve out of which we draw strength for all our tomorrows. Dailiness is what makes us fully and finally what we really are.'

Joan Chittister

Volunteering Rotas: Stewarding, Coffee and Greeting



Stewarding:

4 th October:	Natasha Drennan
11 th October:	Niall Doherty
18 th October:	Michaela von Britzke
25 th October:	Alice Lambert

Coffee:

4 th October:	Kate Brown
11 th October:	Kate Brown
18 th October:	Jonathan Crawford
25 th October:	Liz Tuckwell

Greeting:

4 th October:	Roy Clark
11 th October:	Annette Percy
18 th October:	Gina Bayley
25 th October:	??? (can you help?)

We circulate the rota list each month by email. Please contact Jane if you are willing to be on the rota mailing list.

rotas@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

'Heart and Soul'

Midweek Spiritual Gatherings

Thursday 1st October 2015 from 7-8pm

Gathering at 6.45pm downstairs in the library
Followed by social time and refreshments



Come and join us for our monthly alternative spiritual gathering, with music and silence, words and prayers, and a chance to explore the evening's topic in relation to your own life. This will be followed by refreshments and fellowship. Our October gathering will be led by Jane Blackall on the theme of '(in)dependence'. This topic was postponed from August due to the tube strike.

If you would like to know more about our 'Heart and Soul' gatherings email jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Some Words for Caroline Blair



We are sorry to have to announce that Caroline Blair our treasurer, a previous chair of our congregation and loyal and hardworking member of Kensington Unitarians has died after a short illness. Her memorial service will be held here at the church on Saturday October 3rd at 2.30pm and will be followed by refreshments. Caroline's family welcome everyone to attend.

Sometimes people just die too soon. Sometimes we don't get the opportunity we meant to take to tell them one more time what they mean to us, to say again how important their friendship has been. Sometimes in the rush of other moments and days and weeks, we forget to say how their laughter gives us joy, too, and that their love of life brings ours alive, too. Sometimes we are left with all the words and feelings still stuck in our hearts even though we had meant to give them away, to pass them along before the time was too late.

And now it is too late. A beloved friend has died too suddenly and too soon, and I find that I left too much unspoken. My good intentions and feelings of affection seem useless now. There is a hole in my life with just her shape.

So I will say what I should have said, and say it out into the world on the off chance that her spirit lingers near. I will say it all in the hope that I remember tomorrow and tomorrow that the time is always short and the future is never certain and we must not wait for the opportunities to arise, but must say what we mean to say each day.

So, Caroline, my dear:

Let me say thank you for the gift of your friendship, its constancy and support

Let me say I love you, and miss you more than I ever imagined I would.

Let me say the world has been blessed by your presence and will ever be a better place because you were,

And my life will ever be better because you were in it.

*Written by Linda Hart,
originally for Patricia Walker Hesson.*

'This I Believe' Written by Caroline Blair for 'Kindred Pilgrim Souls'

I believe that bad things happen to good people. All we can do is identify the things we can influence, and make the best decisions we can, and come to terms with the things that we can't. None of this is easy, and it is an ongoing and forever incomplete process.

I believe that if we get lemons, we won't always be able to make lemonade. Sometimes people get too many lemons at once and their strength gives out. We need to look out for people who are drowning under lemons and be ready to offer a hand with the lemonade making. They may not be easy to spot, or easy to help, or at all grateful.

I believe that science does not have all the answers, not because there is anything wrong with it but because it doesn't ask all the questions. When a child asks, 'Why did Grandma die?' they are rarely asking for a description of mitochondrial deterioration. I love scientific thought, with its impartiality, empiricism and refusal to paper over the cracks with supposition. But there are times when only non-scientific thoughts will do. Literally used words are not always the best means of reaching an understanding of life. We also reach truth via mythology, poetry, music, art, crafts, symbolism of all kinds.

I believe that there is an almost bottomless reservoir of kindness and goodwill among humans; but that it is easily disrupted. We are damaged by our own painful experiences, angry, unwilling to risk further pain, idle, insecure, self-satisfied and unimaginative. It is a tribute to basic human decency that so much kindness and tolerance survives the journey.

I believe that I am a combination of my personality and experiences; I find it hard to warm to any concept of 'past lives' or 'future lives' because without that personality and experiences, in what sense would I be 'me'? But I also believe that my imagination and powers of perception are limited, and that there will be things that I can't understand or envisage. The existence and journey of an immortal soul may be one of those things. I also believe that some form of religious or mythological thinking is as natural to human beings as sight and hearing, and that though not all religions can possibly be 'right', the religious impulse that takes these forms may be a valid human sense.

I believe that love is the answer, as long as it is realistic, resilient, genuine and open-ended. The 'love' that says 'charity begins at home' is nothing more than mean-spiritedness in disguise, as it invariably means 'and ends there'. We have to try and find a way of loving – valuing – the less loveable; and we will never do that if we circle the wagons against anyone a bit different from ourselves.

Caroline Blair

Sunday Afternoon Workshop: 'Me and My Life'

Sunday 1st November. 12.30 to 2.30pm



Through, readings, simple exercises and gentle conversations we'll make space to explore who we are and what's important to us at this point in our lives. Bring your lunch.



Children's Leader Needed



Kensington Unitarians have a new children's leader and are looking for someone to work alongside her or to cover occasional Sundays. Our children's leaders lead inspiring and fun sessions for our children's group on Sunday mornings, 11am to noon. Would suit a parent or someone with childcare or teaching experience. Good pay. Starting soon. We can give full support with ideas for activities.

For more information contact our minister Sarah Tinker on 07960 057567 or info@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Strange Countries

It was a crying day in June when after
hugging each other like brothers you disappeared
to a northern land I shall never see, later
returning to a far south-eastern continent I
shall never fly into.

Strange
your photos show us places which seem so
disturbingly familiar: shops I seem to recognise, even
gardens and trees we might have sat under or
long-ago planted. But why is it all so distant?

'Well' you might say: 'there's a history:
there were ships, ships made our planes possible
now planes twice their size
take us to you and back again.'

I see:
we live on islands: all of us inhabitants of islands
like birds we streak across oceans, seeking familiar nesting places,
knowing some we shall never discover
nor ever claim, nor ever return to.

John Hands



Fitness Fusion of 9 Movement Forms

Second Sunday of the Month from 2-3pm:
11th October, 8th November 2015

Midweek classes on **TUESDAYS** - 12.30-1.30pm

An hour of whole-body conditioning, done barefoot to diverse music. Delivering a cardiovascular workout for any level of fitness. Specific routines allow you to experience - the power of the martial arts, the stillness of the healing arts and the joy of movement through dance.

Cost £10 (£7 to concessions / church members).

Contact: Sonya Leite on 0207 371 1674.

'Kindness is a gentle form of love. When kind to others, we demonstrate the very best of what it means to be human. It takes practice, persistence, patience, and wisdom, and seldom comes without a price. But it has a big payoff. It is truly a full life that kind and caring people live. Kindness nourishes the mind, the body, and the spirit of both the giver and the receiver. It is an opportunity to act in a way that is essentially and ultimately Divine.'

Harold G. Koenig

Precious Things

I'm writing this in the church office, about 10pm on Sunday 13th September. It's Erev Rosh Hashanah - and the other chair is occupied by Beit Klal's two Torah Scrolls which will be locked in here overnight for safekeeping. The scrolls were carried down by Jon Burden the Synagogue Secretary and Janet Burden, the Rabbi leading the services - and they've been covered by a cloth, so I can't actually see them. I'm suddenly curious about the significance of that cloth - so I've done a quick search on Google.

I discover that as the scrolls were carried down here from the church upstairs, everyone they passed should have stood as a mark of respect. Jon & Janet didn't explain this to me, but luckily I'd got up to open the door and didn't sit again until the scrolls were settled in their chair - so that's ok. It's not permitted to sit on the same chair or table that supports the scrolls - but it's alright to be seated in the same room (thankfully - as I've now been sat next to them for some time). However the scrolls should not be stored in a bedroom, as one should always be fully dressed in their presence (not likely to be a problem in the church office). I also find out that ideally, even when a scroll is transported a long distance, one person should carry it the whole way - resting it against their right shoulder. That explains the way Jon and Janet moved: as if they were carrying sleeping children in their arms and settling them in bed.



I can't discover the exact significance of the cloth they then put over the chair, but even under that, each of the two scrolls is in a beautifully embroidered case. I discover that these "Torah Mantles" are the equivalent of a person's clothes. Although they're necessarily removed so that the Torah can be read, the parchment of the scrolls should never be touched with bare hands (except for essential repairs). Continuing the analogy with the human body: when a scroll eventually wears out and is no longer legible enough to be used in religious ceremonies, it is buried in a waterproof container - still in its mantle and preferably alongside a religious scholar.

I feel very honoured to be sharing the office with these scrolls tonight - and also honoured that a few metres away in the library lies the cloth that was decorated by members of the congregation today to cover Caroline's coffin during her funeral on Friday. Torah mantles can be embroidered with symbols evoking hope and power, Jewish history, and the glory of God. Similarly, Caroline's cover has images that represent particular memories and things she loved - as well as hearts, flowers and suns.

Rosh Hashanah is Jewish New Year, it is a time of celebration - but also the beginning of 10 days of repentance, climaxing in the day of judgement on Yom Kippur. Between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, the torah scrolls are also kept at the church - in the storage loft above the largest of our toilets. I was a little disconcerted when Jon first asked permission to store the scrolls there during this period (along with various other things needed for both services) because it seemed such a profane place to keep such sacred objects - but I now realise that it meets the key criteria of being safe and dry and not somewhere people will behave disrespectfully. I also realise that Jon must carefully carry the scrolls up there against his right shoulder, place them upright against a wall (the scrolls should never be lain down) and cover them with this same cloth. Somehow there's something very touching in this mixture of reverence and practicality - and it also reminds me of Caroline: who had the rare gift of continually being able to connect to beauty & laughter while remaining fully engaged with all the nitty gritty ugliness of life.

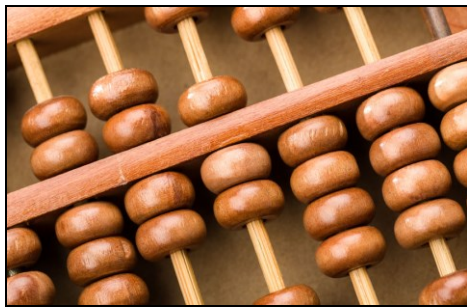
Having written this article (scraping in just before the deadline as usual), I will now go to bed. I'd been wondering where to put Caroline's cloth until Jane can collect it (the library will be used by a children's music class tomorrow - displaced downstairs by Rosh Hashanah) - but it now feels right to drape it over the chair I am vacating & let all these precious things keep company through the night.

Jenny Moy

St. Martin in the Fields - Autumn Lecture Series

Jeannene has alerted us to a forthcoming series of Monday evening lectures at St. Martin in the Fields, with different speakers including Karen Armstrong. These events are free to attend. Visit their website, www.stmartin-in-the-fields.org, for more information.

Some Thoughts About Numbers



These attendance statistics for the last few months are worthy of a bit of comment. Attendance is similar to last year but with more children coming to services. As anyone who has volunteered as steward will tell you, it's not as easy as it looks to count everyone on a Sunday morning so these numbers won't be entirely accurate. In particular there is a clear under-reporting of our four pawed friends' attendance as Bonnie the dog has been one of our most regular attenders yet seems only to have been counted on a couple of Sundays. It's probably because she's so quiet. But whether we get the numbers right or not, I hope the message that each of us makes a difference by our presence here on a Sunday is loud and clear. And that's not about the numbers at all.

Sarah Tinker

Date	Adults	Children	Notes
19 th April	37	2	
26 th April	33	4	2 dogs
2 nd May	43	1	
10 th May	39	4	
17 th May	38	3	
24 th May	34	1	
31 st May	41	1	
7 th June	35	7	
14 th June	42	6	
21 st June	32	4	
28 th June	48	5	
5 th July	42	10	
12 th July	41	3	
19 th July	46	3	
26 th July	36	1	1 dog

Good Cause Collection of the Month Clara Barton Fund (Red Cross): Refugee Crisis Appeal



Collection on Sunday 25th October

The Clara Barton Fund is a British Red Cross fund set up in memory of Clara Barton, who was a founding member of the American Red Cross and a Universalist. To date over £61,000 has been donated to the Clara Barton Fund. A substantial portion of this has gone to the ongoing Syria Crisis Appeal, as well as those for Iraq and Gaza. At the present time the Red Cross is appealing for donations to respond to the ongoing refugee crisis.

For more information: www.redcross.org.uk/refugeecrisis

Previous Charity Collections:

Thank you for your generosity in contributing to recent charity collections. I am pleased to let you know that we will be sending the following donations to good causes:

June – Unitarian General Assembly – £132.42

July – Refugee Council – £149.56

August – Dr Hadwen Trust – £187.95

One Light Spiritual Gathering 'Enthusiasm'



Friday 9th October, 7pm to 9pm Here at Essex Church

One Light Spiritual Gatherings are offered by Joanna Ryam and Suzanne Cohen. We are open hearted One Spirit Interfaith Ministers offering blessings, celebrations, services and spiritual counselling to people of all faiths and none. Members of the Association of Interfaith Ministers - trained and ordained by the Interfaith Foundation. In response to requests, we're are going to start 30 minutes later than usual at 7pm to allow more time to get to gatherings from work. This means that the service part of the gathering will finish at 8.30pm and because of the lateness, we won't be sharing a pot-luck supper. However, you are most welcome to join us for tea and cake until 9pm if you wish.

For further information contact:
onelightlondon@gmail.com

Small Group Communion



11th October, 8th November
at 12.30pm Down in the Church Library

On the second Sunday of each month we hold a small-group communion, after the main morning service, downstairs in the library. These services are led by different members of the congregation. A team of volunteers take turns in leading the services so we can experience a variety of different approaches. The line-up for the next couple of months is as follows:

11th October – Susan Smith

8th November – To Be Announced

If you would like to find out more then please feel free to speak to Jane Blackall or Tristan Jovanović.

Creativity Group: Bring Your Own Crafts

Thursdays 8th October and 12th Nov, 7-9pm



Our creativity group meets once a month and is open to all. You are welcome to bring along whatever art or craft project you're working on and do your own thing whilst enjoying the good company of the group. Participants are often happy to share their skills and recently we have been helping each other learn to knit, to make lino prints, and to do crewel embroidery.

One of the particularly enjoyable features of this group is the space it offers for fellowship and conversation while we are each working on our individual projects alongside one another. Alternatively we have some basic art materials available if you would just like to play with pens, pencils, and paints during the evening. If you know anyone who might enjoy coming along to these sociable evenings then please do help us spread the word.

Jane Blackall

Hucklow Summer School



Four of us from Kensington Unitarians attended this August's Hucklow Summer School up in the Peak District of Derbyshire. Why don't you think of joining us next year and meet lovely and lively Unitarians from around the country and further afield.

This August I went to the famous Hucklow Summer School and brought my ten-year-old daughter with me. This year's theme was the actualisation of dreams.

So far I basically spent my entire life isolated and in a minority, while the 'others' - Christians or Buddhists or atheists - were always in the company of other people like them. For the first time in my life I shared the same space day and night with 60 other Unitarians and not only I felt at home, where much can be taken for granted, where it is not necessary to rewrite the ABC of communal life or redefine the essence of being human, but I was also able to share my joy with the one I hold most dear: my daughter.

I have never seen so many diversities co-exist peacefully, each celebrating their own contact with the divine all in the same function, the same rite or another moment of contact. Amazing how you can laugh and enjoy the same things despite being so different in age, sexual orientation, nationality, spiritual habits, lifestyle ...

Finally I felt no more like a lonely pioneer. Finally I, the eldest daughter, could be guided by these older brothers and sisters of mine, who were ahead of me and more accustomed to that luxury, to such a rich spiritual feast.

So I thank the generosity of those who have financed part of this wonderful experience that I was able to give to myself and my daughter, and all those who put their commitment and passion to ensure that the event ran smoothly and left something valuable in each one.

Needless to say the little one was delighted and wants to go back next year. I am moving to the other side of London so won't see you at Essex Church so often now but I shall look forward to our paths crossing whenever they do.

Luisa

New Beginnings

Several congregation members have left London recently to start new adventures in life. We're sorry to say goodbye to them and wish them all the very best for the future. We're grateful for all they've brought to our community of Kensington Unitarians.



'Hello to all you Kensington Unitarians. We miss you lots but are settling in well in Norwich and enjoying our new life. Caio likes his new school and we have had a great summer. We live near the seaside now! It was good to have Tyler and Jo visit us. Do keep in touch everyone. Love from Sam, Caio and Tommy the Dog.'



'Sending all our love and best wishes to the Kensington Unitarian community. We are settling in well here in Eastbourne and are enjoying being minutes from the seafront. We have found a lovely little two bedroom flat in the middle of town and Alyssia has just started school. It is a lovely school just off the downs and has a very high reputation. They are very nature orientated and have their own allotment so I couldn't be happier. Here is a photo of Alyssia in her new school uniform. I will be starting university at the end of this month. All in all we are feeling very blessed. Thank you to all who thought of us through the last few months. The only thing that is missing is our church and we really do miss the Kensington Unitarians. We will try and visit whenever we possibly can. Love and kindest wishes to all, Amanda and Alyssia.'

Nepal Fundraiser: 108 Sun Salutations



Jaqui Wan wrote to us with news of the sponsored salutations to the sun that her yoga group performed here at Essex Church a few months ago, which raised over £4,000. It's a pleasure to see our building used in such a productive and healthy way. You can watch a time-lapse video of the fundraising event for Nepal.

Watch the time-lapse video at: youtu.be/L3tCVYyqyU0

'Finding Our Voice' Singing Workshops with Margaret Marshall

**Sunday 25th October, 22nd November 2015,
after the service from 12.30 to 1.15pm**

Margaret Marshall has worked as a professional singer all her adult life and is also a very experienced singing teacher. She is leading monthly sessions to help us all find our voice. These workshops are for anyone who is prepared to open their mouth and make a sound. Margaret will show us how to improve the quality and strength of our voices.

Using a few simple exercises we'll gain joy and confidence in our singing by learning how to produce and develop the voice, something everyone can do. We'll work with the breath and overcome unconscious blocks that can prevent us singing with our true potential. Fun and achievement are guaranteed and these sessions are designed for everyone, whatever your experience or ability. All are welcome.

Rev John C. Ballantyne

Those interested in family history will be interested to learn that the family of David Stamford Ballantyne; the well-known potter, painter, designer, teacher and craftsman have produced a website to celebrate his life and work. They have included in the family background section of his biography information about his father, Rev John C Ballantyne, a Unitarian Minister who had a long ministry at Essex Church in Kensington. There are links to two of his publications that are on the General Assembly website: 'Beliefs of a Unitarian' and 'Liberty, diversity and fraternity'. For more info see: www.davidballantyne.net

‘Ramblings and Buzzings’

Some words from our Flower Communion in August

An audio podcast of this sermon is available on our website.

You know how they say our news media in August is often filled with silly news stories? Well this short address is full of really serious stuff and in order to lighten it up a bit I am dressed as a bee. And I have called it Ramblings and Buzzings because it's about bees that buzz and ideas that buzz around your head and rambling thoughts that sometimes join together and create a thought that is fresh and new. But in truth all my rambling thoughts have yet to join up and create that spark. Yet I wonder if my thoughts might link in some way with your thoughts in order to achieve that spark.

Our flower communion today which we will invite you to join in at the end of these ramblings was first created by Norbert Capek, a Czech Unitarian minister of the early 20th century who should be famous for creating beautiful liturgies like the flower communion and writing hymns like the one we sang earlier – mother spirit father spirit. But sadly he is perhaps mostly famous for being brave enough to remain in Czechoslovakia as a leader of his community, when the Nazis came to power and for eventually being killed by them. And his crime? It was to listen to the BBC on his radio.

And that leads to one of my rambling thoughts – that a society needs at least some elements of its media to be free – free of commercial pressures, free of government interference. Let us beware when a free media comes under threat. We need a free media because both governments and big businesses have a tendency to believe their own truths and those truths will not always be for the greater good of all.

You have perhaps heard that honey bees around the world are facing an uncertain future. They have been hit with a host of diseases, losses of habitat, exposure to pesticides like neonicotinoids, which some scientific studies have shown adversely affect bees' brains. Bees need their brains in order to communicate with one another and in order to read their environment, with which they are so closely aligned. Our modern mono-crop style farming also causes bees a feast and then a famine. Did you see England in late May / early June – covered with bright yellow fields filled with flowering oil seed rape: crop dependent on bees for pollination? Yet when the crop is harvested, what will all the bees feed on next? I woke earlier enough to hear Prince Charles on Radio 4's Farming Today programme this morning. The programme had been recorded in a Transylvanian meadow and you could hear the background hum and chirp of birds and bees. Charles has a passion for hay meadows and told the interviewer that since the 1930s the English countryside has lost 97% of its meadows, with their richly diverse flora and fauna.

Bees have long been regarded as a spiritual metaphor – there is a mystery to their way of life, living and working as a group, like the animals in the story we heard earlier on. An old custom was to be sure to tell the bees what was going on around them. They would be carefully told before any attempt to move their hive was made. They would be informed of all births and deaths in the village. Now perhaps the bees are telling us something and are acting as an environmental warning system for us all.

We often include a quote on the front of our orders of service here and usually it's one I agree with. Today's comes from John Galsworthy, author of the Forsyte Saga, who chronicles the fortunes of an upper middle class family here in Edwardian England, a time of great social change and time when the old religious order was losing its power. He writes, 'Religion was nearly dead because there was no longer real belief in future life; but something was struggling to take its place - service - social service - the ants' creed, the bees' creed.'



I can't agree with him that religion is facing its demise. Religion seems rather to have found a new lease of life in the 21st century world. But yes I am with him in saying we need the creed of the bees and the ants - that the greater good of the whole community has to be a key aim for our lives whilst also celebrating the deliciousness of individual consciousness that I regard as a human right.

But 21st century religion like religion of all the centuries past, has a dark, element of extremism, of ghastly thinking that some ideas are right and so everyone else is wrong. All the more need then for liberal communities like ours who say as we did yesterday when I conducted our first same wedding here at Essex Church – you are free to be who you are, you are free to love who you love, you are free to marry the person of your choice, irrespective of colour, creed, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, ethnicity.

Such messages of equality are radical still today. There are groups who would prefer us not to be spreading such messages. Let me quote my colleague Andrew Brown, minister with Cambridge Unitarians, who expresses so well the radical message of our flower communion:

*“Taking a flower from this vase is not to engage in some pointless piece of nice liberal fluffy-bunny stuff and nonsense but to witness to your real intention to stand up to and face down the fascists, racists, religious and political bigots and extremists that are increasingly finding a place in our European societies. To take a flower is to signal your intention, like Capek, to become watchmen and women standing on the crossroad warning people *not* to go back to barbarism and brutality and, at the same time, offering them a new way to be religious in our own age.”*

So as we in a moment conduct our own flower communion, let us think about Norbert Capek and the unique individual that he was. Let's honour his memory, his commitment to liberal religious expression, his willingness to stand up against tyranny and oppression for that which he knew to be right and true.

Let's also fill this ceremony with a meaning that is relevant for us today. The message that we are all unique but equal is one oft heard today. Yet truly putting that ideal into practice continues to be a challenge for us all. And let's remain aware that there are still forces of oppression, still voices of tyranny, still confusions caused by prejudice and lack of education in our world, indeed here within British society today. Let's be the people who help to heal such divisions through our vision and commitment.

Our world needs us now - to live fully, love open heartedly, give generously and speak courageously – for together we know that our hearts and hands and voices can truly make a difference. And may this be so for the greater good of all, amen, go well and blessed be.

'Pick a Card, Any Card'

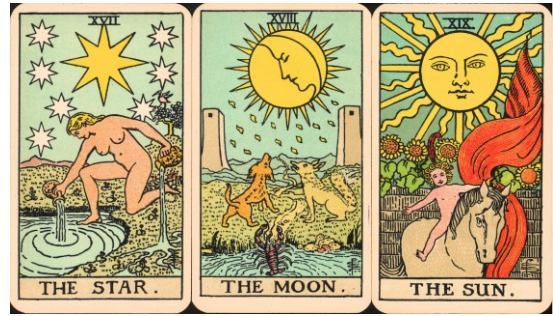
Address by Jeannene Powell from 2nd August

An audio podcast of this address is available on our website.

Story: There are many versions of this story - known as The Fools Journey, taking one through the 22 Major Arcana Tarot cards. There once was a young woman, starting out in college (The Fool). This new, exciting phase of her life. She was quite innocent but blessed with a big adventurous spirit. Her mum (The Empress) was nurturing, creative and loved nature, letting her run freely through the fields as a child, teaching her about the changing of the seasons. Her father (The Emperor) was more structured, more concerned with his status of authority and worldly power, wanting to teach his daughter about how to be more disciplined and ordered in her life. Growing up she'd been very lucky as she'd had wonderful "God parents" - a "God mother" (The High priestess) who'd taught her the importance of trusting her intuition and a "God father" (The Hierophant) who taught her the value of world religions and societal traditions and their importance in living a meaningful and spiritually fulfilled life. And during her high school years, her favourite teacher of all (The Magician), had taught her to believe in her own inner power. That it's possible to influence the world around her, which was great as she saw a lot of injustices in the world and wanted to change them, but didn't know if it was possible. So, off she went to college, ready, or so she thought, for all it would bring.

It was in college that she learnt about love and loss, (The Lovers) through falling head-over-heels in love with a young man that her father didn't approve of. She didn't know what to do, whether to follow her heart or follow her father's wishes. She didn't get to make that choice, as the young man revealed he was interested in one of her friends. Well, now she was angry and wanted to battle it out with her friend, confronting her, finding out if she'd done anything to encourage it. Knowing how close her and her friend was she wasn't sure her friend had done anything wrong, so felt pulled in 2 directions about how to proceed (The Chariot). After a while of pounding cushions and crying, she felt her temper was getting the better of her, and drew upon some wisdom she'd been taught as a child - that there will be challenges in life, but she'll have the inner strength to overcome them (Strength). So she decided to spend the next few weeks having a lot of "me" time, having luxury bubble baths and reading inspiring books, thinking through the situation and looking inside herself for the answers (The Hermit).

After a month of this, realising her friend had done nothing wrong, she emerged looking forward to the term ahead. She'd always been into sports, so was looking forward to trying out for the sports team, but then she learned that the tryouts had been cancelled. (The Wheel of Fortune) "Why do bad things keep happening to me?" she exclaimed, then remembered her god-father once telling her about life having ups and downs and the old saying, "This too shall pass". Sitting, considering the facts of the matter (Justice) she notice the tryouts were rescheduled. But the new dates clashed with a series of social action seminars she wanted to attend. What was she to do? She decided to sacrifice the idea of being on this sports team, in order to gain something which would benefit her more (The Hanged Man). She looked outside to see the autumn leaves falling. "All things must pass away" (Death), she thought to herself, feeling sadness at realising she'd now outgrown a part of her life which was once so important to her. It was important she find a way to balance the different emotions and realisations she was having (Temperance) if not she'd become downhearted. Over the long winter months she did, in fact, start to feel very down. She didn't feel free (The Devil) to live her own life, even though she lived hundreds of miles away from her parents. It was only when her mum phoned telling her that they now had a lodger renting out her bedroom, that the realisation hit her (The Tower): she wasn't a child anymore expected to live as others wished. And living out of others expectations was actually what had been making her so unhappy.



She could change this, and live her own life now, the way she wanted to - the way which was true to her. She felt a surge of inner passion, like an inner light shining to guide her way home (The Star). But how was she going to do this, in a practical way? Things seemed unclear and she felt unsure (The Moon). As the months went by, attending the social action seminar series and taking steps to live her life her own way, she started to feel much happier (The Sun). Summer was fast approaching, and with it graduation and the end of college. And as if it couldn't have been timed any better, she was offered the perfect job in a social change charity (Judgement). She knew what she needed to do. Get her assignments finished and use any money left from her bursary to pay off her debts, so she could start off the next chapter off her life with a clean slate. By the time graduation day came, she had matured. She knew who she was and what she wanted. She'd learnt many lessons and mastered many skills. She felt proud of her achievements and knew that she could succeed at anything she turned her hand to (The world). And as she threw her graduation cap, with all the others, she knew that for her it meant more. It was more than just a cap; it was the taking off of the old, to make way for the start of the new.

Address: There are so many ways practitioners work with Tarot. But, regardless of the way, they all allow insights to arise in relation to a question or situation one wants some clarity or guidance on. By opening ourselves up to listen to the still small voice within, I believe, we allow ourselves to open up to greater wisdom and knowledge. In Barbara Moore's Steampunk Tarot Manual she states, "Some people..... think of a reading as a communication with the Divine, as sacred act. In reaching out to the Divine, they wish to create a liminal space, a time out of time, a place out of place, a world between worlds" I'm definitely one of these people. For me, consulting the tarot is a sacred act. I light candles and use a special cloth to put the cards on and then after preparing the physical space, I prepare myself, by taking deep breaths to still and centre myself and calm my mind. At times I also say a brief few lines, like a prayer, asking for guidance and being able to channel the wisdom in a way which will be of most benefit. I hold the question in my mind and shuffle the cards until I sense it's time to stop. And then I pick the cards which I'm drawn to. The school of thought which many Tarot practitioners hold, is that a person will be drawn to the card or cards which are right for them. Once the card is drawn, it's then for me, to become a "Clear channel" for whatever thoughts, images, meanings or senses arise and to give voice to them.

So that is the experience.

I'm aware that some of you may be quite knowledgeable about Tarot cards, and others less so, but I think most people have more familiarity with them than they think. I'll give two reasons why this is, as well as an introduction to the Tarot. Tarot can be a very broad and deep subject as it's interconnected with layers of symbolism and systems, including numerology, astrology and star signs, spiritual and religious symbols and schools of thoughts such as Kabbalah, Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious as well as other esoteric systems. So, I'll just give a very skeletal overview of the Tarot deck, which is divide into two parts, the Major Arcana and Minor Arcana. Arcana means secret or mystery.

Two Weddings



Congratulations to two couples who held their marriage ceremonies here at Essex Church over the summer. Sherwin and Merly delighted everyone with their beautiful floral arrangements and a ceremony filled with wedding traditions from the Philippines, where they were both born. It was their determination to be married in a church that encouraged us to apply for our building to be registered for the solemnization of same sex weddings and we received the go ahead just a week before their wedding day! Sylvie and Eifion's wedding was a beautiful mixture of a traditional and an alternative ceremony with both of them carrying swords, but very lovingly. They work as actors and apparently specialise in combat scenes. Our church has been filled with love this summer and laughter.

With both of us now registered as authorised persons and keen to conduct wedding and other ceremonies, we're looking forward to welcoming more people to come and create the kind of unique and heartfelt ceremonies that we Unitarians offer the world. Spread the word, everyone!

Sarah and Jeannene

'Pick a Card, Any Card' (*continued*)

The first reason Tarot's probably already familiar to you, is because if you've ever played with a regular pack of playing cards, (with the 4 suits of diamonds, hearts, clubs and spades, and the 3 court cards Jack, Queen and King) then you're familiar with the Tarot suits, which are Wands, Cups, Swords, and Pentacles. However, with tarot, there are 4 court cards, Page, Knight, Queen and King.

In Tarot these suits, numbered 1, known as Ace, up to 10, and court cards are called the Minor Arcana and relate to the details of events we experience. At its very basic interpretation:

- Wands relate to the element of fire and deal with passions, motivations and creativity.
- Cups relate to water and pertain to one's emotional world, such as platonic and romantic relationships and artistic pursuits.
- Swords relate to air and intellectual ideas, communication and problem solving.
- And lastly, Pentacles relate to earth and the material world of work, finances, home and self-worth.

The people in our lives and the qualities we develop within us are described by the Court cards.

The second reason you are more familiar with the Tarot than you may think is because you're human. And part of that means experiencing events in our lives which are common to all human beings. The words from Shakespeare's monologue, "All the world's a stage", likens our lives to that of a play in which, the curtain opens when we're born and we go through many events as we grow up, and grow older, and finally the curtain closes and our show ends. In these events, the details may be different, but the themes are the same.

The story of the young woman who went to college, was in fact, the archetypal journey of the psyche, as depicted through the 22 Major Arcana cards. These cards deal with the bigger themes of life, the lessons we learn, often over and over again throughout our lifetime, taking us from innocence to maturity.

You may relate to the excitement at the start of a new experience or phase in life. Or the challenges of learning how to make difficult decisions about things you love. Or maybe becoming aware of your inner strength during a really difficult situation? Or your desire to leave a legacy or make your mark on the world.

And then there are the people who help us learn these lessons over the years, the nurturers, the teachers, both in person and through the wisdom of the written word. Maybe you had someone in your life, a friend or teacher whose words or actions have inspired you to be more of who you are and share your skills and talents with the world?

I believe we're all in this together, this great journey of life. And throughout our lives, we find different ways to make sense of the things which happen to us, both joyful, sad and everything in between. We try to make sense of ourselves and where we fit into the great scheme of it all.

This is part of being human and the tools which we use to help us find answers are as diverse as we are. Whatever helps us connect to that which we hold as Divine and the deeper truth that we seek, can only be a blessing in our lives.

Let us reflect on the insights we have gained here today, with the aid of the tarot, as I leave you with these words by Sarah York: "We receive fragments of holiness, glimpses of eternity, brief moments of insight. Let's gather them up for the precious gifts that they are, and renewed by their grace move boldly into the unknown." So may it be. Amen

Services at Essex Church in October



4th October, 11am
– ‘For the Love of It’

Service led by **Katie McKenna**

Katie McKenna, ministerial student, member of Norwich Unitarians, and friend of our congregation will be leading this service. She says: “sometimes there’s no point to doing something, and that can be the point of doing it.”

11th October, 11am
– ‘A Life of Imagination’

Service led by **Rev. Sarah Tinker**

The start of a four Sunday exploration of what life can be if we take a counter-cultural approach and imagine that things could be otherwise.

18th October, 11am
– ‘A Life of Inquiry’

Service led by **Rev. Sarah Tinker**

Unitarians tend to approach life as a process of inquiry rather than as a certainty. What important lines of inquiry are you exploring in your life?

25th October, 11am
– ‘A Life of Gratitude’

Service led by **Rev. Sarah Tinker**

With an All Souls ritual in which we will be invited to honour those we love who have died.

1st November, 11am
– ‘A Life of Honesty’

Service led by **Rev. Sarah Tinker**

Followed by a workshop for us to explore what faith and truth mean to us. What kinds of life are religious liberals called to lead? Bring your own lunch.

The Common Aims of British Unitarians and Prince Charles



Sarah Tinker and I were both up early on the morning of Sunday, 9th August, to hear Prince Charles speak about his love of Transylvania on Radio 4’s *On Your Farm* programme.

As we all know, Prince Charles is passionately interested in biodiversity. At the time of the Queen’s diamond jubilee he suggested that wild flower meadows be planted in celebration and there are now 91 *coronation meadows* across the UK. He has now launched the Prince of Wales Romania Foundation to protect Romania’s rural heritage.

I’ve visited Transylvania six times in all, the first time being in 1968 when I was present at the celebrations for 400 years of Unitarianism. On one visit my friends took me by car to a minute hamlet 13 kilometres down an unmade road where there was an old manor house. My friends asked the caretaker to show me the church with ancient murals and when she knew I was English she told me that Prince Charles had been there five times!

I think Prince Charles would be interested to hear that we Unitarians have done our bit to preserve Transylvania’s rural heritage for some time. It started with the UUA’s Partner Church Council with its Project Harvest Hope. This was the dreamchild of one of our Transylvanian ministers, Rev Levente Keleman and his wife Eva in the parish of Ocland in the Homorod valley. There was an old building in the village which was renovated and made into a bakery in an effort to counteract the drift of young people away from the village. Some of us bought shares in the bakery which produced four kinds of bread for sale in fourteen villages and the nearest town. It also provided milling facilities for local farmers to process their grain.

In another part of the parish there was a redundant cooperative farm building and Levente and Eva decided that this could be developed as a dairy farm. The goals of the farm were to employ and train young adults, provide landlease income to elderly widows who farm small areas with no mechanised equipment, thus improving their standard of living and preventing confiscation of their lands.

In 2003 the then President of the General Assembly, Rev Austin Fitzpatrick, who had worked tirelessly on various schemes to help the Transylvanian Unitarians after the Revolution, organised a minibus trip to explore various places in the region. I was one of the passengers. We visited the bakery in Ocland and then the embryo dairy farm in the neighbouring village of Karacsonyfalva. On our return we launched an appeal through the General Assembly’s Romania Fund. Much research had been done on the type of cows to buy at a cost of £650 per cow. Karacsonyfalva means Christmas Village in Hungarian so we had a perfect slogan: *Cows for Christmas Village*. We managed to buy 10 cows in calf, so that our actual contribution was 20 cows.

Thus we did our bit to promote the survival of Transylvanian villages which were under threat and thereby to promote the survival of cultural and religious traditions within these villages.

I think Prince Charles would be proud of us!

Annette Percy