



Kensington Unitarians

Newsletter: October 2011

What's On...

Saturday 1st October, 10am-5pm
'Singing in Community' (1/2)
Workshop led by Jo McAndrews

Sunday 2nd October, 11am-noon
'Songs of the Spirit'
Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 2nd October, 2-6pm
'Singing in Community' (2/2)
Workshop led by Jo McAndrews

Sunday 9th October, 11am-noon
'It's All About Trust'
Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 9th October, 12.30pm
Small-Group Communion
Led by Jane Blackall

Sunday 9th October, 2-3pm
Nia Technique
Led by Sonya Leite

Wednesday 12th October, 7-9pm
Management Committee Meeting

Sunday 16th October, 11am-noon
'Our Harvest Festival'
Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 16th October, 12.30pm
'Finding Your Voice'
Singing Workshop
Led by Margaret Marshall

Tuesday 18th October, 7-9pm
Creativity Group:
'Bring Your Own Crafts'

Sunday 23rd October, 11am-noon
'Patriotism, Prejudice and Love'
Service led by Caroline Blair

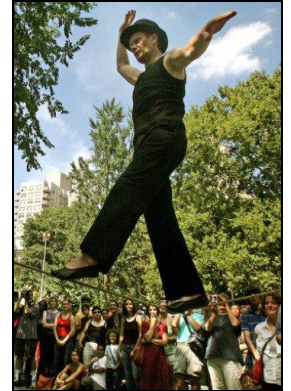
Tuesday 25th October, 7-9pm
Reading Group:
'Regeneration' by Pat Barker

Sunday 30th October, 11am
'All Souls'
Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

A Message from our Minister:

Securely Insecure

These times we live in do not feel secure to me. Uncertainty hovers around like a chilly wind, which hasn't quite decided which way it's going to blow. Our world finances are not behaving as economists would wish. Our climate is changing and most of us seem incapable of making the radical shifts in lifestyle that are needed to reverse such changes. Many people are facing uncertainty about their jobs, their pay and pensions, or doubt that there are jobs that they can ever hope to get. The safety of our streets, even here in Britain, can feel suddenly threatened by the actions of small numbers of other people intent on destruction. Our daily news is filled with scandals uncovered and lies revealed.



But perhaps insecurity is the name of the game when it comes to human existence. We die. People behave unexpectedly. Planet Earth itself is full of surprises, both pleasant and unpleasant. We make plans and life shatters them. Nothing is secure or certain. And if we seek security as our primary goal then our life can become ever smaller. We aren't reach out too far from circles we know well, we must cling to a fixed identity that tells us exactly who we are, we avoid ideas that conflict with our own strongly held views or new experiences that might shake us up or confuse us. From these rigidly held positions it is much harder to hear another person's story or to understand the yearnings of their hearts. It becomes difficult to comprehend realities other than our own.

But these limited ways of being can only offer us a false security in any case. Real security rests in truth and in uncertainty. We have to face the truth that we die, that illness is part of life. Instead of running away from pain and sorrow we can open our hearts to them and accept the rich and uncontrollable mixture of emotion that is our life. In the great span of human existence, the times we live in are probably no more or less secure, though we today are plagued by constant bad news that can disturb the most well crafted equanimity.

To be securely insecure perhaps we need to work at taking a longer view, listening to the wise beings throughout the ages who have reminded us that 'this too shall pass'. Much can be gained from mixing with people who do not feed our anxieties and paranoia but remind us instead that we are in this together, that life is a wondrous gift to be appreciated as best we can, and that a joyous acceptance of insecurity might be quite exhilarating after all.

*"Real security is the ability to tolerate mystery, complexity, ambiguity
– indeed hungering for these things." – Eve Ensler*

Rev. Sarah Tinker

In this month's newsletter...

* Recent Baby Celebrations * Forthcoming Adult RE Course: 'The Humane Virtues' * FUSE: Festival of Unitarians in Southern England * 'The House Swap' by Jo Ridgers * News of Swaziland Sponsorship * 'Meditation on Airports' by Tristan Jovanović * 'Hucklow Summer School' by Jane Blackall * 'Treasures of Heaven' by Sarah Tinker * 'Social Action for the Faint Hearted' - Autumn LDPA Meeting * and much more...

Kensington Unitarians

At Essex Church (founded 1774), Notting Hill Gate

Kensington Unitarians meet to share experiences, to learn from each other, to explore our diverse faiths, to welcome spiritual seekers and offer companionship on life's journey.

The community meets for a service each Sunday at 11.00am. The format varies, and usually includes music, singing, meditation, an address, an opportunity to share joys and concerns, and a children's group. Our wide range of activities includes religious education courses and spirituality workshops, meeting for fellowship, engagement groups on a variety of themes, community arts projects, regular chanting and dance sessions, and opportunities for quiet meditation. All are welcome to come and join us.

Many other groups share our church building. If you are interested in hiring one of our rooms for your own organisation or event please contact our warden by telephone or email.



Kensington Unitarians at Essex Church
112 Palace Gardens Terrace
Notting Hill Gate
London W8 4RT

Office Telephone: 020 7221 6514

Email: info@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Web: www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Celebrating Six Years with Sarah

It only seems a short time since we were celebrating Sarah's five years of ministry with us. In fact it is now six years since Sarah joined us at Essex Church in September 2005. How that time has gone quickly. We all know how much she does for us – taking most of our Sunday services, seeing to our many and varied pastoral needs, leading our small staff team at the church, and keeping an eye on our much loved building.

As chairman of the trustees I particularly appreciate Sarah's involvement in the latter. Our present church building – the third or fourth Essex Church/Chapel, depending whether you include the 'iron church' on the Kensington site – opened in 1977 and as we know is ailing a little in places. We are now in touch with a new firm of structural engineers in the hope that they can offer us advice about the leaking roof. I am grateful to Sarah for taking this forward on our behalf.

So as we mark Sarah's time with us, let us look forward to the next six years!

Howard Hague

God of the Autumn, help us to live
with the grace of falling leaves,
the enthusiasm of the flaming Aspens,
with the serenity of the old trees,
whose roots reach deep into the earth.



God of the Autumn, help us to know
that living and dying are one
that life is precious, and beautiful, and limited.
that nothing good is ever lost.

God of the Autumn, help us to see
in the ways of nature a way for ourselves.

Christine C. Robinson

Volunteering Rotas: Stewarding, Coffee and Greeting



Stewarding:

2 nd October:	Heidi Ferid
9 th October:	?
16 th October:	Veronica Needa
23 rd October:	Howard Hague
30 th October:	Alice Lambert

Coffee:

2 nd October:	Jo Ridgers
9 th October:	Margaret Darling
16 th October:	Caroline Blair
23 rd October:	Gill Hague
30 th October:	Sue Smith

Greeting:

2 nd October:	Lucinda Pitman
9 th October:	Gina Bayley
16 th October:	Jo Ridgers
23 rd October:	Carol Sheppard
30 th October:	John Hands

In recent months, we have been circulating the rota list via email, and this seems to be working well.

Please contact Jane with your email address if you are willing to receive this email once a month.

rotas@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Singing in Community with Jo McAndrews



Weekend of 1st-2nd October 2011

Saturday 10am-5pm/ Sunday 2pm-6pm
At Essex Church – Organised by Veronica Needa

A weekend full of song! Singing together creates connection, deepening of listening, and opening of hearts. We welcome everyone with an inclination to sing whether experienced or a beginner. This is an opportunity to learn many and playful ways to make harmony together as a large group – a capella!

For anyone who loves singing, this is a wonderful chance to fill the beautiful space of Essex Church – the home of the Kensington Unitarians – with our voices and meet people from all over the world. This is a weekend to learn lots of songs and song-games to generate a deep sense of community to support our work. As an optional extra, on Sunday morning, those of us who wish to can make an offering of some of our songs during the service. This is a workshop open to everyone.

Fees: £65 & £45**

**Concessionary fee for low-waged, students & OAPs; unwaged by donation; all welcome.
(members of Essex Church 'by donation')

Call +44 (0) 7221 2694 or email:
playbackschoolUK@gmail.com

About the Trainer: Jo McAndrews has a warm, playful and inclusive approach to singing. She is interested in the sheer enjoyment of singing in harmony with others and has developed an encouraging and informal style of teaching. She leads StroudSong community choir and was part of the extraordinary a capella group Naked Voices based in Bristol. She has sung with community choirs for 11 years and runs singing workshops around the country. She has been involved in Stroud playback for some years and loves the way playbackers throw themselves into singing for warm ups and group building.

www.playbackschooluk.org

Hold Your Celebration at Essex Church!



It's been lovely to have babies in church again recently and to have been asked by their families to conduct ceremonies of naming and welcome for them. Aurelia was baptised by her uncle David Darling in August and is shown here with proud mum and dad, Amy and Luther. I was delighted to create a special welcoming ceremony for Kyra who you can see here with her mum Tiahnna and grandma Jeannene, who so generously helped provide our 'Gathering the Waters' lunch.

Thanks to all the families concerned for inviting us to share in your joyous occasion. These events reminded me how delightful it can be when people hold their celebrations here at Essex Church and how important it feels to have such events in community with others. In recent times we've marked special birthdays and wedding anniversaries, as well as the more usual rites of passage of birth, marriage and death. Some of the memorial services we've held here recently have managed to be true celebrations of people's lives and have encompassed both tears and laughter.

Each time a new person steps through our doors and experiences the freedom we have to create ceremonies that speak from the heart, ceremonies that are unique to the people concerned, my hope is that they will take away with them a positive message about us Unitarians and our approach to life and faith.

In the last week I've heard two newcomers say that they'd never laughed so much in a church before and that they'd never thought a church service could be that much fun. We're not in the entertainment business but it's good to know that we are welcoming and that our services and ceremonies are attractive.

So have a look at your calendar and see if there's a celebration you'd like to hold here some day – either as part of our regular Sunday worship or at another time.

Rev. Sarah Tinker

LDDPA Autumn Quarterly: 'Social Action for the Faint Hearted'

Saturday 22nd October, 10:30am - 5pm
Golders Green Unitarians, Hoop Lane



A day of activities and reflections on what Unitarians offer to our communities, what gifts and talents we have, and some relevant project planning with opportunities to share with friends from other congregations and Fellowships. By the end of the day participants will have generated ideas and plans to take home and carry forward. This workshop has had a warm welcome in other Districts.

Led by Karen Hanley, Chair of the General Assembly Faith & Public Issues Commission, member of St Albans Unitarian Fellowship with worship led by Sheena Gabriel, Lay Leader, Meadow Unitarian Chapel, Godalming

Golders Green Unitarians, 31 Hoop Lane, London NW11 8BS
(ten minute walk from Golders Green tube station)

The Forgiveness Project Annual Lecture

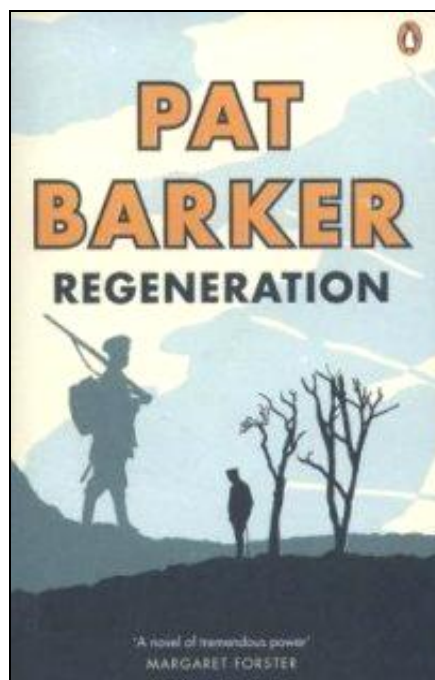
'No Forgiveness Without Justice?'

Thursday 6th October, 7pm
Union Chapel, Compton Terrace, N1 2UN

Clare Short, former Secretary of State for International Development (DFID) will deliver the Forgiveness Project Annual Lecture, 'No Forgiveness without Justice?' As the 10th anniversary of 9/11 passes, an atrocity which changed the global and political landscape and focused the world's attention on terrorism, Clare Short will explore the controversial, contentious and unresolved issues - the dichotomy between 'forgiveness' and 'justice'. The Annual Lecture is chaired by award-winning journalist Yasmin Alibhai-Brown and will be followed by a panel discussion with speakers from The Forgiveness Project - all who have lost loved ones at the hands of political violence.

Tickets are available at www.unionchapel.org.uk
for £12.50 + £1.30 booking fee.

Essex Church Reading Group 'Regeneration' by Pat Barker



Tuesday 25th October 2011, 7.00-9.00pm

The reading group's October session will be based on 'Regeneration' by Pat Barker. This was suggested by Juliet Edwards. A review from the 'Library Journal':

"In 1917, decorated British officer and poet Siegfried Sassoon wrote a declaration condemning the war. Instead of a court-martial, he was sent to a hospital for other "shell-shocked" officers where he was treated by Dr. William Rivers, noted anthropologist and psychiatrist. Author Barker turns these true occurrences into a compelling and brilliant antiwar novel. Sassoon's complete sanity disturbs Dr. Rivers to such a point that he questions his own role in "curing" his patients only to send them back to the slaughter of the war in France. World War I decimated an entire generation of European men, and the horrifying loss of life and the callousness of the government led to the obliteration of the Victorian ideal. This is an important and impressive novel about war, soldiers, and humanity."

The group takes special care to ensure that everybody gets an equal opportunity to speak and be listened to. Members come together to share our diverse views and appreciate our differences in a spirit of curiosity and respect. The group has a relaxed and easy-going atmosphere and newcomers are always most welcome to come along to any session. The group has been meeting monthly since 2003. We take turns in choosing a book for everybody to read so we tackle a wide variety of material. For more information see:

www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk/book.html

'An Evening with Alan Titchmarsh'

Fundraiser for the Rainbow Trust Charity
Royal Garden Hotel, Kensington
Monday 31st October, 7pm

We have received information from the Rainbow Trust (a children's charity which provides emotional and practical support to families who have a child with a life threatening or terminal illness) about a fundraising event with the popular gardening broadcaster Alan Titchmarsh.

Tickets prices are £30 / £20 / £15

Book online at www.rainbowtrust.org.uk
or call 01372 220042 for more information.



Festival of Unitarians in Southern England

From the 3rd-5th February 2012
at the Chatsworth Hotel, Worthing

**A weekend by the sea filled with
Celebration, Inspiration, and Education**

"Lighting the fuse for an explosion of Unitarian vitality"

- For Unitarians and other seekers with a passion for the future
- Sponsored by the London and Southeast district and open to all
- More than 20 workshops including workshops on spirituality, congregational health, worship
- Humour with a message from keynote speaker Robin Ince
- Multiple worships: traditional, contemplative, contemporary, more!
- Programme for children and youth
- Bursaries available to make this event accessible to all
- Main worship service led by Rev. Patrick O'Neil

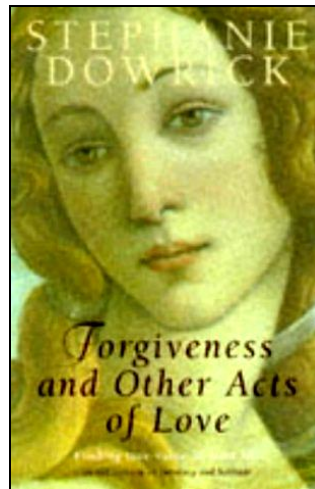
We would like to get a number of participants going along from Essex Church. The committee is keen to encourage people by making a contribution towards the cost of attending. Please speak to Sarah, Jane, or one of the committee ASAP if you are interested.

For more information: www.fusefest.org.uk

A New Adult RE Course at Essex Church this Autumn:

'The Humane Virtues'

Six Thursday evenings from 3rd November



This autumn we will be running a course based on the book 'Forgiveness and Other Acts of Love' by Stephanie Dowrick. In turn we will consider a number of what she calls the 'great humane virtues'.

3rd November – **Courage**

10th November – **Fidelity**

17th November – **Restraint**

24th November – **Generosity**

1st December – **Tolerance**

8th December – **Forgiveness**

Those taking part in the course will need to read a chapter of the book each week to prepare so **please let Jane or Sarah know by Sunday 16th October if you would like to take part so that we can get enough copies for everyone.**

Jane Blackall

Channing Lecture

'Being a Unitarian: A Diversity of Beliefs and Personalities'

22nd October 2011 at 6pm, Golders Green

The inaugural Channing Lecture will be given by Alan Ruston. The Lecture is titled 'Being a Unitarian: A Diversity of Beliefs and Personalities'. The lecture will last about 45 minutes and this will be followed by a period for questions. Alan will be looking at the many colourful and diverse personalities of the past and their variety of beliefs and so give an historical perspective to our present diverse theological spectrum. There will be a voluntary collection and part of this will go to the Unitarian General Assembly.

Golders Green Unitarians, 31 Hoop Lane, London NW11 8BS

Small Group Communion



Sunday 9th October at 12.30pm
Downstairs 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 church library. We have been experimenting with services led by a variety of different people over the last year and we have been very encouraged by the experience so far.

We hope that a team of volunteers will continue to take turns leading the small-group communion services so that we can experience different approaches. The line-up for the next few months is as follows:

9th October – Jane Blackall
13th November – Jim Corrigan
11th December – Tristan Jovanović

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

‘The Divine Love Experience’

Awakening the Inner Beloved

Workshop on 30th October from 4-9pm at Essex Church

This event, organised by Sean and Lila of Illumina Music, will take place at Essex Church on a Sunday evening at the end of the month. They provided the following information:

Seth Newman (Bioenergetics Facilitator and Shaman) will lead the first half by working with the energy patterns of the body through Meditations, Movement and Self Expression. This initiates the body's innate ability to release deeply buried stress and open the Heart. The second half will be a beautiful Chanting/Mantra journey with ILLUMINA which will facilitate the integration of the powerful energy work, taking us deeper into a tangible experience of our inner divine beloved. Illumina's website: www.illuminamusic.co.uk.

Suggested donation £30.00

Please bring a dish to share during the break.

For more information contact:

Sean 0793 119 2867, email: info@illuminamusic.co.uk

One Light Spiritual Gatherings



Sunday 16th October (note date)
6.30-8.15pm – Here at Essex Church

The gatherings are led by graduates of the Interfaith Seminary. All are welcome.

Peaceful and Joyous connection with the Divine, the One Light at the Heart of All through music, meditation and inspiration from many spiritual traditions.

For further information contact service hosts:

Rev. Pamela Ramsden - 07966 478 980

Rev. Kathryn Reynolds - 07976 739 286

‘In loving connection with Essex Unitarian Church’

‘Finding Our Voice’

Singing Workshops with Margaret Marshall

Sundays 16th October and 20th November
12.30 to 1.15pm, at Essex Church



Margaret Marshall has worked as a professional singer all her adult life and is also a very experienced singing teacher. Along with Harold Lorenzelli she has been singing in our choir here at Essex Church for over thirty years now and we're delighted that she is now 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 and 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.

Hucklow Summer School 2011

'Walking the Talk: Living a Life of Greater Integrity'



Participants at Hucklow Summer School 2011 (photo courtesy of Ned Prideaux)

Each year, after summer school, I usually ask someone from our congregation (often a first-time participant) to write up their experience of the event. However, there was an unusually small contingent from Essex Church this year, and most of us were involved in running the event in some way... so I thought it might be time to give my own account of it (the 'staff's-eye-view').

I have been to Great Hucklow for summer school every year, without fail, since 2000 (encouraged in the first instance by Patricia Walker-Hesson, to whom I will be eternally grateful) and have been a member of the organising panel since 2004. I have no hesitation in saying that it has changed my life. Because of the depth and intensity of the experience I have made many of my closest and most significant friendships at summer school. I have learned so much there, and gained a great deal of confidence from taking part, and from subsequently being invited to join the panel and the staff team. We have an informal 'apprenticeship' system where we try to pair more experienced summer school facilitators with those who are newer to it. You can see all the pairs of workshop leaders from this year's event in the photographs on the right. I was lucky enough to work with my dear chum Jef Jones, lay leader of Brighton Unitarians, on a workshop entitled 'Practising Peace in Daily Life'. There was a lot of work involved in putting the course together (both preparation beforehand and a bit of last-minute scrambling during the week) but it went remarkably well and I felt really satisfied that we'd done something worthwhile.

From my point of view a key feature of summer school – the great opportunity and privilege of it – is the chance to go deeper than we might feel able to do at home or in everyday life. We do our best at summer school to create a safe space where people can explore and reflect on sometimes quite challenging themes. Each morning there is an hour-long talk on an aspect of the overarching theme (this year it was 'Walking the Talk: Living a Life of Greater Integrity'). Then small engagement groups spend two hours each day exploring an area which is related to it. In the afternoons and evenings participants offer a wide variety of optional activities and at the end of the day we wander to the chapel in silence, carrying lanterns, for an epilogue service. All this is at the Nightingale Centre, a Unitarian venue, in the beautiful Peak District countryside.

I have slowly come round to the idea that I am going to have to step down from the panel at some point and so am (somewhat reluctantly) making plans to hand over my share of the organisation and step down after next year's summer school... so this will almost certainly be the last time I get to co-facilitate a summer school workshop unless/until someone invites me to come back again further down the line. I know this is going to be an enormous wrench for me!

I'd love to see a few more people from Essex Church at summer school in 2012 (especially as it's likely to be my last one for a little while). Please do come and chat to me about it if you'd like to know more. The provisional dates are 18th-25th August – why not put them in your diary now!

Jane Blackall

Audio recordings of the theme talks may be downloaded from www.hucklowsummerschool.org.uk



Jane Blackall & Jef Jones
'Practising Peace in Daily Life'



Mel Prideaux & Winnie Gordon
'Working with Others'



Rita Woditsch & Caroline Blair
'Giving'



Margaret Kirk & Kate Buchanan
'The Web of Life'



Jim Blair & Peter Teets
Children's Programme

The Zeeman Twins

Essex Church sponsors two orphans in Mbabane, Swaziland. They live at SOS Children's Villages there, where children grow up in mixed age and sex family groups, looked after by a house mother and house auntie. Swaziland is a very poor country with the highest rate of HIV infection in the world. Life expectancy has fallen from 61 years in 2000 to 32 years in 2009. Half of all deaths are from AIDS. We are happy to be able to help two young children in this country of orphans.



Patience Qinisile Zeeman

Qinisile is a tiny little girl who is developing well and of good health. When one sees her body structure you would think she has a poor appetite, but she has a good appetite and enjoys meaty dishes. She is a playful girl, and when outdoors she likes playing with her friends. Her games are skipping rope, swings, dolls and racing around the village. She is more playful than her twin sister. Indoors she spends time reading and playing puzzles. When her twin sister is not in the mood to play she goes around looking for her and begging her so they can play together. Each year Quinisile becomes more responsible; she is starting to do her chores well. Sometimes she does her chores without a push from her twin sister. She is sociable and friendly; she is sometimes a bit too talkative. Quinisile likes singing and she is good at it. She leads the choir at her church. She is a highly religious young girl. Academically Quinisile is progressing very well. She is currently doing Grade 3. Her best subject is English language, and she excels in this subject. Thank you for helping her to reach her goals.

Fortunate Qiniso Zeeman

Qiniso is growing faster than her twin sister; one would say they are not twins but that she must be the older sister. She is sociable and friendly towards everyone in the family house and the village. Qiniso is very active, but what is good about her is that she never provokes anyone. She is a playful child and she enjoys outdoor games; when indoors she prefers puzzles and dolls. Just like her twin sister, Qiniso is developing a love for singing. She likes reading, and sometimes the twins revise what they have done at school by pretending that one of them is a teacher and the other one a student. Qiniso is a jolly girl and likes cracking jokes. She is a bit sensitive and likes to do things perfectly. She does not like to be told that she has done something wrong. Qiniso is responsible with her chores at this tender age. She does not need to be reminded to do them and she reminds her twin sister. Academically she is an intelligent child and she performs above average. She likes reading and is currently doing Grade 3. Thank you for helping her to reach her goals.

Caroline Blair

Warden's Column

It's been a week of glorious autumn sunshine and a busy time in the building as groups restart after the Summer break. The first week of September was a bit of a "phony war", but from Monday the 12th the blank diary pages of August have become thick with bookings: often with groups in the building from 8.30 in the morning till 10 at night.



As a staff team, we're also trying to tap into that "new term" energy – with plans to spend some time visioning together in November; to put up some new signage and to clear out junk. We also want to look back and celebrate what's been achieved in the building in the last five years: terracing the front garden, replacing lights and ceilings, library shelving, buggy store for the nursery – and of course the new kitchen and disabled toilets. If only we could fix that leaking roof!

Jenny Moy



**A Fitness Fusion of 9 Movement Forms
Sessions led by Sonya Leite**

**Second Sunday of the Month
from 2-3pm: 9th October, 13th November**

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 now £8 (£5 members). **Contact: Sonya Leite on 0207 371 1674.**

Meditation on Airports

I love airports. Ever since I was a child, I have relished the busyness, the colours and symbols, the pictogram instructions and the cacophony of language, suitcases, feet and food. I love looking out of the windows at aeroplanes taking off and landing, at flight crews walking together and families being reunited. I love to watch people wait. They read silently or converse with companions. Some are bored. Others are nervous or otherwise upset and some are calm. I love to play with the ideas of places versus spaces—the non-place of the airport's space reserved for passing through.



But there is a part to all this that terrifies me: getting there. The night before I am to travel, I am a wreck. Not because I'm scared of flying but because I'm afraid I won't get to fly because until I have cleared security, I feel totally out of control. I have a little ritual of mad control: I pack my suitcase quickly as I travel light. I take one more book than necessary, just in case. I take the red document folder and retrieve whichever passports I will need and check-in online. The boarding card and passports go in a small plastic envelope in my backpack and I check to make sure they're there several times throughout the evening.

The day of travel, I rise early, having calculated how much time I will need to get ready and to the airport, adding half an hour of breathing room. I check my bag has all I need. I check again to make sure my plastic envelope is there. When I'm on the Tube, I count the stops. And then I count again. I generally don't wear a watch so I check my phone and send a text to my mother. I try to read a bit but cannot concentrate, so I count the remaining stops.

At the airport, I am strangely relieved to find my plastic envelope still in my bag. By this point, my partner has purposefully adopted a calmness to try to calm me down, especially if there is a queue. We check the bags and I insist on going to security immediately. I refuse to be questioned about this decision. I worry that I don't have a plastic baggy for my ever present chapstick, although nobody cares about chapsticks. I start to take things out of my pockets. I have a second plastic envelope for pocket contents. I take my iPad out of my bag, moving constantly. By the time I get to the metal detector, I'm shaking and I don't know why. I watch my bag come through the x-ray and fear that I'll be searched. God knows what I'm worried they would find: two novels? An old tissue? A Flake wrapper?

As I gather my belongings, I finally realise how hysterical I've been. 'I need the loo. And then coffee,' I announce firmly, the same phrase and tone each time. I check the passports are there still and I stop shaking. Flights are announced for places I am not going and I hear strains of German or Dutch or Swedish and feel surprised I still understand them, as if the metal detector could wipe my brain. I sip my coffee and watch the world move around me. I assault my senses in the duty free shops and get ready to board the plane. Strangely, I feel I'm back in control, even when hurtling along the runway (that's when Vlada starts his panic). I breathe deeply as the plane takes off and watch the land disappear, enveloped by cloud.

I am present. I am alive.

Tristan Jovanović

Charities We Support: 'Woman's Trust'



We recently received the following message from Clare Slaney-Davis:

'If you have Facebook or Twitter please consider following Woman's Trust, the domestic violence charity that I work with as a counsellor and groupworker. We offer 18 counselling sessions, unheard of in London and pretty unusual anywhere else, FREE! And we're experts in an issue that kills 2 women a week, effects 1 in 4 women and causes untold distress in children. At least one woman in your church, mosque, workplace and street will be affected by domestic violence. You will know at least one woman who has been or is currently affected by DV.'

I really want to raise the profile of this important charity. The large DV charities quite rightly get a lot of attention and support but local ones, specialists in local issues, can get overlooked. If you could follow us on Facebook and Twitter, pass the message on to your friends, colleagues and contacts, particularly if you live or work in Kensington and Chelsea, that would be great. We also have a *Friends of Woman's Trust* scheme which is free to join as an individual or as an organisation.'

For more information see: www.womanstrust.org.uk or www.twitter.com/#!/womanstrust

The House Swap – August 2011

What a joy to be home! Hmm... I guess that speaks volumes already! My answer to the inevitable question "How was your holiday Jo?" is "Interesting. Mixed. Let's say I'm very glad to be home with all that home offers me. I'm glad I went away and I'm even more glad to be home!" What happened?! Nothing terrible, just a wee bit of a challenge....

In a nutshell, I did a house swap. My house in central London (with on-tap transport and communications) for the holiday home in Saissac, SW France, of friends of a friend who live in a small, quite isolated village in Northamptonshire. They wanted to spend August going to the Proms and I wanted to escape for a few weeks. Perfect! Well it was for them but I got a bit more peace and quiet than I bargained for!

Before I begin my rant I must say that being back in France after about 15 years was delightful. It's a beautiful country. The French have style and taste that we simply don't have in England. Even the electricity pylons are tastefully made! It was FABULOUS to see the countryside I saw and for that I'm very grateful and will go back. I've even ordered a French CD to brush up on my rusty 43+ year old 'O' level French!

I planned this trip with the idea of having an equal swap of facilities i.e. to go with friends who drive who would hire a car in return for me swapping my house. Simple. Easy peasy! BUTThings don't always work to plan!

The plan? To have 3 weeks with 3 different sets of friends. Mix and match. A good plan. So far so good. 5 out of 6 of us booked flights... in April. The 6th person dropped out and I didn't have any luck with filling that very specific empty week with someone I felt confident I could spend a week with. The weeks rolled by and the prices of flights got higher and higher. I knew by about the middle of June that I'd be spending that week alone and made plans to manage it. I spend about 90% of my time alone so I wasn't afraid of the 'aloneness' aspect of it. I made arrangements to borrow a laptop (I have a desktop computer at home) and checked with Vodafone for the cost of making mobile calls to the UK. I packed art materials, pens and paper with me. My preparations were complete and I was in good spirits, certain that 3 weeks in France would be a positive experience.

I booked the flights, going out with Ryanair and back with Easyjet. This was to be my first flight with Ryanair - it may well be my last! In an attempt to keep the cost down I decided to just take cabin baggage with me instead of checking it into the hold. That was a mistake but I didn't know until the night before I flew. I'm a seasoned traveller. I don't over-pack. What I didn't do though was to check the baggage allowance with Ryanair assuming that it would be the same as Easyjet with whom I have flown with many times. WRONG! Ryanair's cabin baggage limit is very strictly 21"x15"x7" and 10 kgs. That's not a lot of baggage for 3 weeks. My suitably sized trolley suitcase and the laptop weighed in at 4kgs! Oops! Not a good start. I went through my laid out belongings brutally throwing aside anything that wasn't essential. That included the laptop and the suitcase in favour of essentials such as my memory-foam pillow (which is light but bulky), a book set in Carcassonne, the minimum of clothes and space to buy some trinkets to remember my time in France.



I had a bright idea (I was short on time to find alternatives at 9pm on Tuesday when my flight was at 12pm the next day) and used a reinforced Tesco bag instead of my trolley suitcase. I felt a bit like a refugee and my arms were hanging off but it worked.

The friend for the first week is someone I know well and have shared many holidays with. We like similar things. The area we were in is Cathar Country. The Cathars were persecuted for their beliefs by Pope Innocent (sic) 3rd in the 12th century and were effectively wiped out over a period of 100 years. I anticipated lots of interesting trips to the surrounding towns and villages. I was excited by the prospect of visiting these ancient sites and soaking up the atmosphere. I arrived on Wednesday late afternoon. I'd had had an exhausting few weeks prior to leaving London so I was happy to sit and 'stare at the wall' for a day or two. We drove to Toulouse for the day on Friday and then to Carcassonne on Saturday. On Sunday we went to look at the Canal du Midi and Castelnaudry. I didn't know it at the time but that was to be the last trip I would make until Saturday two weeks later because my friend's back 'went' and didn't come back unfortunately until she drove back to the airport on Friday, the beginning of my 'retreat'.

The friends who joined me for the last week also are old friends but we have always holiday-ed in the UK in places that don't require driving. The driver of the two realised, on arriving at the airport (sic!) that the driving (left-hand drive car on the wrong side of the road) was too difficult so we made two short trips to Carcassonne and back and that was that! I now know Saissac better than I had ever hoped to and no desire to return in a hurry except for a weekend with someone happy to drive!

So why was this such a challenge? Surely a week alone isn't so bad you may ask? Probably the week on my own would've been more manageable if I'd had lots of visual memories to shore me up from the previous week. I had a few and that was helpful. It certainly kept me going to think about the places I would visit (I made a list!) during the last week. Hmmmm...

Saissac has 5 shops (2 small grocery shops, a boulangerie, a boucherie/charcuterie and a pharmacie) a church (a beautiful church) and the ruins of a chateau. There's a small hotel/bar and a takeaway pizzeria. Bearing in mind that I don't (often) eat bread or red meat and I don't drink alcohol ever there was little to interest me in the shops other than the grocery shops. There are no touristy shops and no cafe. Nowhere to 'hang out' (as they say!) It was August, the children were off school so there was no transport, and not even a bike and anyway it's far too hilly for my rusty limbs to cope with such a sudden demand.

The House Swap *(continued)*



The nearest small town is 8kms away and Carcassonne the beautiful medieval walled city is 15kms. From 12pm until after 6pm the heat (at upwards of 27 degrees) was like a furnace to my UK addled body. Not the most conducive of places to have an interesting, information packed holiday though perfect for lying in the sun (if that's what you like... but I don't!)

I survived of course but the things I had to leave behind would've made my time alone more comfortable. Being away from home with all the distractions I am used to was the hardest part of it all. Leaving the laptop behind was a bad move and with hindsight I would've taken it since there was broadband at the house and I could've communicated by Skype. Hindsight huh?!..... At home I have a 24/7 local, national and international deal with Talk Talk and a generous amount of minutes and texts on my mobile. In Saissac there was a landline but no 'deal' so the calls to the UK and USA would've been exorbitant and the signal for my mobile was so intermittent that I gave up trying. I read once that human beings need 15 minutes of human contact a day to stay mentally healthy and I can really believe that after my time without it.

I was geared up for being alone but it was far more challenging than I had anticipated. I kept a log of what I did and how I felt throughout the day each day that I was alone and that certainly helped with the isolation. I planned my days meticulously to manage the endless hours. Being out had to be either before 12 or after 6 because of the heat. There was no television but I did find an old and battered radio. During the time I was housebound with a debilitating illness I trained myself to relax by listening to classical music 3 times a day for an hour at a time for about 5 years. I learned to know many pieces of music and it was this experience that held me in such good stead in France. I tuned the radio to the French version of Classic FM and had it playing for most of the day. I knew most of what they played and as each piece of music rang out I was soothed. It was like having old friends popping in to say hello to me.

I'm so very appreciative of what I have here at home. Next time I shall go to a large town or city with transport!

Jo Ridgers



All religions, all this singing
One Song.
The differences are just
Illusion and vanity.
The Sun's light looks
A little different on this wall than
It does on that wall,
And a lot different on this other one,
But it's still one light.

We have borrowed these clothes,
These time and place personalities
From a light,
And when we praise,
We're pouring them back in.

Rumi *(trans. Coleman Barks)*

Committee News



1. The electric door of the disabled toilet has been mended, but please use the button to open and close it instead of heaving it to and fro by force.
2. We are grateful to Jenny Moy's friend Arda for helping out with the warden's duties while she was on holiday.
3. The sound system has been very welcome, but needs a bit of rebalancing. This is being dealt with.
4. One of the showers in the manse flat is being replaced as it is beyond reasonable repair. We hope this will stop water leaking into the foyer. The leak from the roof is still under review; we have been recommended some structural engineers who have dealt with a similar leak at Upper Chapel in Sheffield.
5. Various rites of passage ceremonies have been booked at the church. We are always pleased to be chosen for naming ceremonies and other rites of passage.

Caroline Blair

The next meeting of the management committee will be held on Wednesday 12th October at 7pm.

Multifaith Calendar of Festivals for October

✧ 8th October – Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) – Jewish

This is the final day of the ten days of repentance, the holiest day of the year in the Jewish calendar – 'the Sabbath of Sabbaths', and is marked with a total fast for 25 hours. The evening before and most of the day is spent in prayer, asking God's forgiveness for past wrongs and resolving to improve in the future.

✧ 12th October – Pavarana – Buddhist

The day marks the end of the Rains Retreat and is also known as Sangha Day. Monks who have completed the three month retreat invite their associates to reprove them for any failings (Pavarana means 'to invite').

✧ 13th – 21st October – Sukkot – Jewish

The harvest festival commemorating the 40 years that the Jews spent in the wilderness on the way to the Promised Land after escaping slavery in Egypt. A temporary hut with a roof covered only with branches – called a sukkah – is used during the festival. In some warmer countries families may live in their sukkah as well as eating there. Four species of plant are used symbolically during the festival – the lulav (palm branch), the etrog (a yellow citrus fruit), the hadas (myrtle) and the aravah (willow).

🌐 16th – 23rd October –

Inter Faith Week of Prayer for World Peace

The week is supported by members from many different religious communities. A collection of prayers drawn from the literature of several world religions is published for use during the week.

✧ 20th October –

Anniversary of the Birth of the Báb – Bahá'í

Bahá'ís celebrate the birth of the Báb (the title means 'the gate' in Arabic) in Shiraz, Persia in 1819. The Báb was the prophet-herald, whose mission was to proclaim the imminent arrival of 'Him Whom God shall make manifest,' – Bahá'u'lláh, the founder of the Bahá'í Faith. Bahá'ís observe this holy day by abstaining from work. Gatherings on the day usually involve prayers, devotional readings, music and fellowship.

✧ 21st October – Simchat Torah – Jewish

Simchat Torah marks the completion of the annual cycle of reading from the Torah. When the reading of the last Torah portion concludes, the reading proceeds immediately to the first chapter of Genesis without a break, as the Torah is a circle, and never ends. Children dance and sing as all the Torah scrolls are paraded around the synagogue, giving as many people as possible the honour of carrying a Torah scroll.



🕉 26th October – Diwali (Deepavali) – Hindu

Diwali (Deepavali) is the Hindu New Year celebration lasting from one to five days. A festival of light, celebrated with fireworks, Diwali is generally associated with Lakshmi, goddess of wealth and prosperity, or with the victorious return of Rama and Sita after their exile.

🕉 26th October – Diwali (Deepavali) – Jain

Diwali has special significance for Jains, as on this day in BCE 527 Mahavira gave his last teachings and attained ultimate liberation. Lamps are lit and children are given sweets by their parents. Some devout Jains fast for the two days of Diwali, following the example of Mahavira.

🕉 26th October – Diwali (Bandi Chhor Divas) – Sikh

Sikhs also celebrate Diwali, as the sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind Ji, was released from prison on this day. He refused to accept release unless fifty-two imprisoned Hindu princes were also released. The Emperor set a condition that only those who could hold on to his cloak could leave prison, so the Guru had a special coat with long tassels made. Diwali is a time for presents, sweets and new clothes. The Golden Temple in Amritsar is illuminated and firework displays take place.

🕉 31st October – Samhain – Pagan/Wiccan

Samhain (pronounced 'sow'inn') marks the Feast of the Dead. Many Pagans also celebrate it as the old Celtic New Year (although some mark this at Imbolc). Samhain has been celebrated in Britain for centuries and has its origin in Pagan Celtic traditions. It was the time of year when the veils between this world and the Otherworld were believed to be at their thinnest: when the spirits of the dead could most readily mingle with the living once again. Later, when the festival was adopted by Christians, they celebrated it as All Hallows' Eve, followed by All Saints Day, though it still retained elements of remembering and honouring the dead.



"Let everything you touch be treated as if it were as precious as the altar vessels. Whenever you handle any equipment or any person, be reverent. Be full of care with everything entrusted to you. Everything you touch or see, everyone for whom you have responsibility, is to be viewed as something cherished by God, and thus to be cherished by you."

Norvene Vest

'Rainbow' LGBTQI Unitarians in London and the South East



Official Launch Event

Saturday 15th October: Official Launch of Rainbow - Service led by Rev Ant Howe at New Unity Church, Islington, 5pm. For location details: www.new-unity.org

www.unitarian.org.uk/rainbow

Alister Hardy Society Open Meeting 'Remote Viewing and Unconventional Meditation Methods: New Evidence for the Existence of God?'



**A Talk by Professor Gwyn Hocking
Thursday 6th October, 3.00 pm at Essex Church**

This talk illustrates a new book by the speaker, "World Religion & History back to 70,000 BC, discovered by remote viewing, including missing information on the life of Christ". Gwyn Hocking was Professor of Materials Chemistry at Imperial College, University of London (until 2002), and is now Visiting Professor at Imperial College. He has studied technological methods for enhancing meditation, including light and sound machines, beat frequency, EEGs, flotation tanks, and published 150 papers and an (authored) major scientific reference book.

**£7.50 (£6.00 AHS members) at the door:
Coffee, tea and biscuits at 2.30 pm**

Unitarian Christian Association Lance Garrard Lecture



**Saturday, 29th October 2011
Cambridge Memorial Church (Unitarian)
Emmanuel Road, Cambridge, CB1 1JW**

The UCA will be welcoming a speaker from Christian Aid who will be talking about the work of this organisation and in particular the 'Partnership Scheme'. The Unitarian Christian Association has committed to working with Christian Aid in a Partnership Scheme in Sierra Leone. Our objective is to raise £5000 by January 2014. This project is match funded 3:1 by the EU so the amount raised will be £20,000. The UCA will be launching this fund-raising project at Cambridge on 29th October 2011.

12 noon - Lunch (*no charge, donations accepted*)

1 p.m. - Worship

2 p.m. - A representative of Christian Aid will speak on the Partnership Scheme, which the UCA is committed to supporting for the coming 3 years in Sierra Leone.

3 p.m. - Tea and departures

For details and indication of interest,
please contact Jeff Gould, telephone 01282 789742,
email jeffreylanegould@btinternet.com

'Ruby Wax: Losing It'

**A recommendation from Carolyn Appleby
(you've got to be quick – ends on 1st October)**

The very amusing and rather outrageous Ruby Wax and her friend Judith Owen, who uses her fabulous singing voice at the piano are performing their show "Losing It" at the Duchess Theatre, Catherine St, London, WC2 until 1st October. It is about their experiences of mental illness. I enjoyed it and found the question and answer session afterwards very interesting. You can check out the website: www.rubywaxlosingit.co.uk.

I would particularly like to let people know of The Wax/Owen Mental Health Forums every Tuesday from 2-4pm at the Duchess Theatre, Catherine St, London, WC2 *until the end of September*. Ruby Wax and Judith Owen, in conjunction with SANE will host a forum featuring speakers from the fields of psychology, psychiatry and neuroscience, followed by a Q&A session. Just turn up. It's free. Donations welcome.

Carolyn Appleby

'Treasures of Heaven'

Sermon by Rev. Sarah Tinker – 28th August 2011

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

One of the most popular exhibitions this summer here in London has been the Treasures of Heaven exhibition at the British Museum. The exhibition's subtitle is 'Saints, relics and devotion in medieval Europe' and most of the exhibition centres upon a truly stunning collection of reliquaries. These were the exquisitely crafted containers, made to encase the relics that so often were the focus of medieval religious life. The exhibition continues until October 9th at the British Museum and I highly recommend it to you.

I was surprised by how moving I found these exhibits, these medieval devotional objects. As a child brought up in Protestant Britain I'd previously regarded relics as fake, a cheap and nasty trick played on the unsuspecting by a money grabbing church hierarchy, along with the buying of absolution for one's sins. The reading we heard earlier on from Chaucer's The Pardoner's Tale from The Canterbury Tales expresses so clearly that aspect of medieval religion:

*"But sirs, there's one thing I forgot to add:
I've got relics and pardons in my bag
As good as anybody's in England,
All given to me by the Pope's own hand.
If any here should wish, out of devotion,
To make an offering and have absolution."*

Chaucer's Host has clearly no time for the Pardoner's wiles when he replies

*"By the True Cross that Saint Helena found,
I'd rather have your ballocks in my hand
Than any relic in a reliquary
Let's cut them off and I'll help you carry your balls
And have them set in a pig's turd!"*

But for every crook involved in the cult of relics I now realise that there were far more people who genuinely believed in the power of saints to heal their wounds and to help them connect earth with heaven. But how did this all begin? We have to take ourselves back to the early history of Christianity, when Christians faced truly awful and cruel suppression by the Roman Empire. This still new religion, with its central symbolic figure of Christ dying on the cross to save us all, suffered many further martyrdoms – with so many leaders and followers prepared to lose their own lives for their faith. Knowing what we do of human contrariness and also of our remarkable ability to hold on to our ideals, it's perhaps not all that surprising that the suppression of Christianity by the Romans only increased its popularity amongst at first the already suppressed and marginalised members of Roman society and later amongst a wider range of social classes.

Those early martyrs were regarded as saints and it was believed that they held the power to intercede with God on behalf of human beings. Through the bravery of their deaths martyrs were assured of a place beside Christ in heaven and so could be relied upon to speak on behalf of those humans who prayed to them. So saints could be prayed to, called upon in times of need, and their shrines and their human remains were regarded as sacred, holding great spiritual



power. Once Christianity was legalised by the emperor Constantine in AD 313 the cult of saints could develop freely and it is remarkable to realise just how much power saints continued to have in northern Europe till the Reformation and still in many parts of the world to this day.

When early Christian leaders were martyred for their faith, their followers would try to rescue their bodies, which were believed to hold healing power. Jesus' bodily ascension into heaven meant a lack of body relics but articles associated with his death abounded, such as thorns from the crown in which he was crucified, nails from the cross and the cross itself. Helena, mother of Emperor Constantine, spent much time in the Holy Land and legend tells of her search for the True Cross. Three crosses were brought to her but how could she prove which of these was the true cross? A sick woman was brought before her and when the first two crosses were shown to this woman there was no change in her health. In the presence of the final cross her health was restored and Helena was credited forever more with locating the True Cross, fragments of which were used as relics throughout the medieval Christian world.

I've spoken often here of the work of Alister Hardy, marine biologist and Oxford professor, and founder of the Religious Experience Research Centre. Hardy is thought to have been the first person to describe human beings not as 'homo sapiens' – meaning 'thinking man', but 'homo religiosus' – humanity in search of sacred meaning and connection, human beings as seekers of God, who seek connection with the divine, the transcendent, with something greater than ourselves. This search for connection with the divine is a characteristic of the earliest human beings. How can it help us to understand the seemingly bizarre faith in saints and their relics in medieval times?

It's helpful to remember how religion must have imbued medieval life in a way it is perhaps hard to imagine today. Medieval belief systems can be described as supernatural and with only rudimentary medicine and a limited understanding of biology little wonder that they placed their faith in the healing powers of saints and their relics. People had a strong belief in an after life and in the reality of heaven and hell – therefore they needed to earn their place in heaven.

'Treasures of Heaven'

Sermon by Rev. Sarah Tinker *(continued)*

The curators of the Treasures of Heaven exhibition at the British Museum point out the significance of the use of the finest materials by the craftsmen who created the reliquaries – the use of gold and silver and precious stones conveyed spiritual values such as purity and perfection. There was also a significance of place – both shrines and reliquaries were imbued with sacred connectedness, occasionally literally it seems. One humorous medieval picture from Hereford Cathedral shows a pilgrim who has managed to clamber inside a large reliquary and is having to be pulled out, seemingly unsuccessfully, by an assortment of monks. Joseph Campbell, mythologist and writer, describes sacred space as “a space that is transparent to transcendence and everything within such a space furnishes a base for meditation.....when you enter through the door, everything within that space is symbolic, the whole world is mythologized.... This is the place of creative incubation.” No wonder that people yearn to visit and touch relics.

Early reliquaries were highly stylised pieces but as the centuries progressed there was a development from those stylised early reliquaries to later more human, more life-like containers. This golden head of St Eustace (in British Museum magazine) from the 13th century makes an interesting comparison with the oh so human and kindly looking woman saint, possibly, companion to the English princess Ursula, that we have on our order of service sheet today. St Ursula and her virgin companions are said to have been martyred on their way home from visiting relics in the Holy Land. This is a 16th century painted wood reliquary, which would have contained a saint's skull. Her kindly, beatific expression must surely have given hope to those who prayed to her.

From the 12th century onwards, pilgrimage developed as an important aspect of medieval religious life, linked to the sites where relics were held. Pilgrimage became a religious requirement, sometimes as punishment or for the seeking of forgiveness for sins committed, as well as a positive activity for all to embark on at some point in their lives. Pilgrimages brought further developments – the need for something to take away from the shrine which could contain some of its power. Probably the most important English shrine of all time, and the quickest to be developed, was that of Thomas Becket at Canterbury. Monks there collected Thomas' blood from the cathedral floor and mixed it with holy water and distributed it to pilgrims in little lead flasks. It became known as Canterbury water and was regarded as a most effective healer. On the back of one of these flasks in the British Museum is found a Latin inscription that states that 'Thomas is the best doctor of the worthy sick.'

It's perhaps easy to dismiss these medieval beliefs in the healing power of relics as quaint and simplistic. But part of the exhibition at the British Museum has a slide show making connections between the medieval cults of saints, relics and reliquaries and life today. Pilgrimage continues to be of considerable significance in all the world's religions. In our own collection of writings, Kindred Pilgrim Souls, Maire Collins writes of the value she gained from following the ancient Camino de Santiago in Northern Spain and of the way it taught her to “acknowledge people I meet as fellow pilgrims on their own personal journey”.

The next major exhibition at the British Museum will focus upon the Muslim requirement of hajj, visiting Mecca at least once in a lifetime, as one of the five pillars of Islam. Buddhism, Hinduism and Judaism all have their own traditions of pilgrimage, of sacred journeying. And relics still hold great significance for some today – you might have heard of Therese of Lisieux, a Carmelite nun in the late 19th century, who was made a saint in the 1920s. Her relics are on a continuing tour of Europe – they visited Britain in 2009 and were venerated by quarter of a million people at Westminster Abbey. The singer Edith Piaf is said as a child to have been cured of blindness after a visit to Therese's grave.

If we think of the way we sometimes treat famous celebrities in society today – rushing to catch a glimpse of them, taking photos of them and collecting memorabilia of them – sociologists describe this behaviour as the 'cult of celebrity' – and indeed it does seem to have links with religious behaviour of old. Those teenage posters on walls are a statement of who we are and what we value. The photos of family and friends that we admire on mantelpieces give us a sense of connection beyond ourselves, with both the living and the dead. And what of the collections that some of us make of ornaments or other objects? Some of the most interesting reliquaries are those that collect a number of tiny relics together. They are reminiscent of various artists' work to collect small objects in cabinets and of natural history collections – all painstakingly labelled. I wonder how many of us today are wearing pieces of jewellery that hold emotional meaning and significance for us or have other objects that remind us of those we love? Richard Gilbert's poem about the empty chair “evoking memories of those we have loved and lost” that we heard earlier on reminded me of the poignant day that I cleared the kitchen in my parent's house and sat weeping over a Pyrex dish that held so many childhood memories for me.

(In the service people spoke of their own memories connected with objects.)

Photos, jewellery, furniture, humble kitchen objects – all these are testament both to the poignant power of our memories and to our quite remarkable human ability to impart meaning, to connect the material realm with the transcendent, to join earth with heaven. Perhaps we who live in the 21st century are not so different from those medieval seekers of relics after all, perhaps we too are seeking the comfort and connection that objects can bring.

May you live this day
Embraced by tenderness
Nourished in body and spirit
Compassionate of heart
Kind in word
Courageous in deed
Mindful in awareness
Gracious in love.

Amen

"The most profound, crucial, transformative, healing, loving thing we can possibly do for one another when we walk through the doors of our church is to say to ourselves:

"This is a sacred place. This is where I practice being my very best self. It is where I allow others to love me. It is where I work to forgive and to be forgiven. When I work in my church, it is a work of love. I do it not simply in a spirit of business, but with an awareness that we are all here together because we have been called by something higher. This is not business as usual. This is where I make love my business, and let my business here transform me so I can walk away more whole, more able to transform the world outside these walls."

The place and the relationships within make it possible for us to be more healthy and whole; behaving as our best selves, practicing who we want to be, being forgiven and practicing forgiveness and compassion are special opportunities offered by church community. What is church good for? It is good for allowing us to work together through our distortions, through our difficulties, and emerge on the other side in a better place than where we started."

UU Minister, Rev. D. Audette Fulbright

Essex Church Creativity Group 'Bring Your Own Crafts'

Tuesday 18th October 2011, 7.00-9.00pm



We have been experimenting with a new format for the creativity group since early 2011.

Instead of having a specific organised activity every month, which takes quite a lot of planning, we have decided that (most months) participants will simply be invited to bring their own art and craft projects along and enjoy the support and fellowship of the group. We are still intending to offer a specific activity once in a while and will work on projects for the church from time to time.

As ever, all are welcome, and the sessions are sociable and encouraging (with plenty of snacks to share).



Sunday Services at Essex Church

**2nd October, 11am –
"Songs of the Spirit"**

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Music has often played a central part in religious life. Join us today for a musical feast as well as time for peaceful reflection.

**9th October, 11am –
"It's All About Trust"**

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Wise beings throughout the ages have reminded us of the importance of trusting in the face of life's uncertainties. Through stories, meditations and other spiritual exercises this service will help us to consider the value of trust in our lives.

12.30pm - **Small-Group Communion**,
led by Jane Blackall (lasting ~30 minutes)

**16th October, 11am –
"Our Harvest Festival"**

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

There'll be chance to give thanks for the earth's bounty in this ancient autumn festival, which will also link in with One World Week, a charity long supported by Unitarians.

**23rd October, 11am –
"Patriotism, Prejudice and Love"**

Service led by Caroline Blair

This service will be led by the chair of our congregation, Caroline Blair, who says: "We need to find a liberal, inclusive way of being proud of our roots."

30th October, 11am – "All Souls"

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

On this Sunday closest to All Souls' Day and the Day of the Dead, we will be remembering loved ones who have died, and reflecting on the ways in which we may continue to feel their presence in our lives. Our 5th Sunday special collection will today go towards our Swaziland Education project.

Newsletter Deadline



The deadline for submitting items for the next issue is **Sunday 9th October**. Please send items (such as poems, quotes, articles, notices, rotas, etc...) to Jane Blackall or a committee member by that date.

Thank you!!!