



Kensington Unitarians

Newsletter: March 2011

What's On in March:

Wednesday 2nd March, 7-9pm
Management Committee Meeting

Thursday 3rd March, 7-9pm
Adult RE: 'Tapestry of Life' (6/9)

Sunday 6th March, 11am
"Tobias, Sarah and the Entirely Unnecessary Dog"
Service led by Caroline Blair

Thursday 10th March, 7-9pm
Adult RE: 'Tapestry of Life' (7/9)

Sunday 13th March, 11am
"Strong Women, Unitarian Women"
Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 13th March, 12.30pm
Small-Group Communion
Led by Jane Blackall

Sunday 13th March, 2-3.00pm
Nia Dance with Sonya Leite

Tuesday 15th March, 7-9pm
Creativity Group:
'Bring Your Own Crafts'

Thursday 17th March, 7-9pm
Adult RE: 'Tapestry of Life' (8/9)

Saturday 19th March, 1.30pm
London District Quarterly Meeting

Sunday 20th March, 11am
"Stephen Hawking's Universe"
Service led by Sarah Tinker and Howard Hague

Tuesday 22nd March, 7-9pm
Reading Group: 'Teaching a Stone to Talk' by Annie Dillard

Thursday 24th March, 7-9pm
Adult RE: 'Tapestry of Life' (9/9)

Sunday 27th March, 11am
"A Spring Celebration"
Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Thursday 31st March, 7.00-9.00pm
A Taste of Taizé
led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

A DATE FOR YOUR DIARY:
Sunday 3rd April, 12.30pm
'This I Believe' Launch Event

A Message from our Minister: Mentioned by BBC News



Did any of you hear us Unitarians mentioned on the BBC News in mid-February? In coverage of proposed consultations on amendments to the Equality Act the BBC reported that Quakers, Liberal Jews and Unitarians were keen to conduct civil partnership ceremonies in our religious buildings, not allowed under present legislation. Back in the 60s and 70s we Unitarians were at the forefront in offering blessing ceremonies for same sex partnerships and ever since have campaigned for greater equality for legal ceremonies. A few years ago some of our congregations in Godalming, Newington Green and Islington decided that they would cease to offer wedding ceremonies for heterosexual couples until same sex couples had similar rights. It's partly thanks to their stand and to the steady campaigning of our general secretary Derek McAuley that this issue has stayed on the agenda and seems now to have the coalition government's backing. If this legislation is passed then each church will be able to decide for itself whether or not to offer civil partnership ceremonies. None will be forced to do so.

The English laws on marriage ceremonies will still, however, have their quirks. In Scotland it is the celebrant of a marriage who is registered in law, which means that a minister, once registered, can conduct a legal and religious wedding anywhere. In Scotland you can be married in a church or on a beach, in a castle or hotel and you will be able to have your wedding conducted by a minister of your choosing and to include any religious wording that you want.

In England it is the building that is legally registered for weddings rather than the person conducting the ceremony. When the law was extended to allow weddings to take place in secular buildings such as hotels, the Church of England and the Catholic Church campaigned to ensure that a wedding with religious content could only take place in a religious building. This has led to some ridiculous situations where over zealous registrars have not allowed couples to use 'spiritual' terminology in ceremonies taking place in non-religious settings. This has had unintended negatives consequences. The number of weddings taking place in religious buildings has reduced considerably and couples are not able to include readings that may be significant to them, expressions of their shared faith. This implies that certain churches have a kind of intellectual property right over religious readings and prayers which empowers them to deny their usage in some settings.



Hopefully there will be a chance in the forthcoming consultation to raise these and other issues with the government and find ways to ensure true equality for all. The present situation under English law is confused and confusing.

Rev. Sarah Tinker

In this month's newsletter...

- * Reflections from 'Who Needs Sacraments?' Workshop
- * Fairtrade Fortnight
- * 'Heresy Saved Me' review by Howard Hague
- * 'Tapestry of Life' – On Values
- * Congregational Writing Project
- * Report from the 'Light the Fire' Weekend
- * 'An Old Universalism for a New World' – a sermon by Tristan Jovanović
- * Introducing 'Family Friends' by Maire Collins
- * Sabbath Manifesto
- * and 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

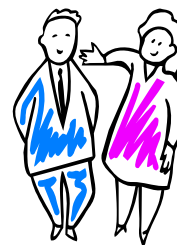
Web: www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk

"The worship... of a free congregation is best understood as the deliberate return of a faithful and loyal community of people who come together – again and again – to be receptive to all that is worthy of renewed love. We come to church to be reminded of, stirred up to recall, and brought again to feel the charm of all that we love and cherish most.

What follows from a free congregation's faithful practice of love and these ways of love? The result is a life-enhancing influence on all whose lives the members' lives touch. Such a church draws in other people wanting to live as human beings are designed to live, and in their heart of hearts want to live, with the integrity of genuine and right loves, with thoughtfulness and mind and intelligence, and with resolve."

UU Minister, Rev. Alice Blair Wesley

Volunteering Rotas: Stewarding, Coffee and Greeting



Stewarding:

6 th March:	Christine Joshi
13 th March:	Maire Collins
20 th March:	Will Lyons
27 th March:	Alice Lambert

Coffee:

6 th March:	Kate Brown
13 th March:	???
20 th March:	Ruth Okine
27 th March:	Margaret Darling

Greeting:

6 th March:	Jo Ridgers
13 th March:	Gina Bayley
20 th March:	???
27 th March:	Maire Collins

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

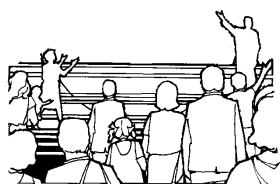
Please contact Jane with your email address if you are willing to receive this email once a month.

As you can see we still need some volunteers for March so please do contact us if you can help.

rotas@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Unitarian District AGM

Saturday 19th March, 1.30-4.00pm
Here at Essex Church



This year we are hosting the London District's Annual General Meeting which will have a short service led by various District ministers, followed by an AGM including an overview of events during the year, and ending with a slap up tea provided by our congregation.

Don't panic. We are getting caterers to bring us the food but it would be lovely to have congregation members here to welcome our guests and to help with cups of tea so if you could arrive early (by 1pm) and stay for half an hour after the event to help tidy up that would be appreciated.

It's good to make links with other Unitarians and to hear more about what's happening elsewhere.

Rev. Sarah Tinker

'This I Believe' Project: Your Last Chance to Join In!



An Invitation to All Members and Friends

We hope to produce a book compiling essays which we will be able to share with the rest of the denomination (and the world!). Our aim is to put it together in time for a launch event in early April so that it will be ready to go on sale at the Unitarian GA meetings in Swansea this spring. Imagine how interesting it will be to read what everybody has to say... and what a worthwhile project it is to leave an account of your beliefs in writing for posterity.

We realise that might seem like quite a daunting challenge but we are confident that it is one that many of our congregation members and friends are capable of rising to! It will certainly take a bit of time and effort to write your contribution, and we have come up with some guidelines for you to follow, in the hope that we can collectively come up with a finished publication that we can all be rightly proud of. At the time of writing **30** people had committed to taking part... but there is still room for more of you to join in!

Writing Guidelines:

Ideally, we would like each person to write two items, each of which will serve a slightly different purpose. The first, a 'personal credo', will give an overview of all your beliefs. The second, a personal reflection which illustrates an aspect of your life philosophy, will hopefully be more anecdotal and as such will give more of a flavour of your personality.

1. Your Personal Credo (400-600 words)

This is a statement of what you believe. For example, you might like to say something about the nature of God, good and evil, your highest values, human nature, ethics, morality, sources of meaning and purpose, your relationship to religious tradition and/or spiritual practice, and why you are part of this Unitarian community. Or you might have other ideas!

2. Personal Reflection on an Aspect of your Life (400-600 words)

This is inspired by the 'This I Believe' project which engages people from all walks of life in writing, sharing, and discussing essays about the values that guide their daily lives. Choose one definite belief or conviction that is important to you and which guides your actions and name it in a sentence or two. In this piece you can expand on this particular aspect of your personal philosophy and illustrate it with an example showing how this belief has played out in your everyday life. In this element it is important to make the essay about you, to speak in the first person, so that it is identifiably your voice. For guidance you can read sample essays online at www.thisibelieve.org.

If you need help with the project please do speak to Jane or Sarah (as soon as possible please!) and we'll see what we can do...

STRICT DEADLINE: 13th March 2011

A Taste of Taizé

Thursdays 31st March & 7th April, 7-9pm
Here at Essex Church



A chance to learn more about the ecumenical community of Taizé in France (on Thursday 31st March) and to experience a typical Taizé act of worship with singing and silence followed by food (on Thursday 7th April). It would be ideal if you could come to both sessions but this is not essential.

Rev. Sarah Tinker

A date for your diary... coming up next month:

Walking Group

Hyde Park / Kensington Gardens

Easter Saturday 23rd April 2011
Meeting 10.30am at Essex Church



In April, our walking group will once again be opting for a route relatively close to home – we expect to go further afield during the summer when the days are longer and the weather might be more reliable – as we take in the sights of nearby Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens.

You'll need to let us know if you plan to come along and we'll confirm the meeting places and a mobile number for last minute contact. We try to start promptly so nobody has to wait around in the cold and will probably walk around 4 miles with a stop for lunch in one of the cafés.

Email info@kensington-unitarians.org.uk or phone the office on 020 7221 6514 or speak to Sarah or Caroline to let us know you are coming.

Essex Church Creativity Group 'Bring Your Own Crafts'

Tuesday 15th March, 7.00-9.00pm



We have been experimenting with a new format for the creativity group in early 2011 and so far it is going well.

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).



Committee News

We're glad to be welcoming Maire Collins and Jo Ridgers to join our church management committee.

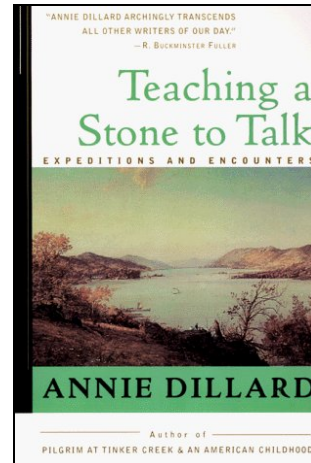
The committee meets about every six weeks and oversees the work of the church and congregation. It's a great way to find out more and get more involved – let us know if you would like to take a more active part in church life in this way.

Rev. Sarah Tinker

The next meeting of the management committee will be on Wednesday 2nd March from 7.00-9.00pm.

Essex Church Reading Group

'Teaching a Stone to Talk' by Annie Dillard



Tuesday 22nd March 2011, 7.00-9.00pm

The reading group's March session will be based on 'Teaching a Stone to Talk' by Annie Dillard. This was chosen by Betty Evans.

Descriptions from Amazon.com:

"Here, in this compelling assembly of writings, Pulitzer Prize-winning author Annie Dillard explores the world of natural facts and human meanings. "

"A collection of meditations like polished stones -- painstakingly worded, tough-minded, yet partial to mystery, and peerless when it comes to injecting larger resonances into the natural world."

"The natural world is ignited by her prose and we see the world as an incandescent metaphor of the spirit... Few writers evoke better than she the emotion of awe, and few have ever conveyed more graphically the weight of silence, the force of the immaterial."

"This little book is haloed and informed throughout by Dillard's distinctive passion and intensity, a sort of intellectual radiance that reminds me both Thoreau and Emily Dickinson."

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

Reflections on the LDPA 'Light the Fire' Event



I attended the LDPA 'Light the Fire' event at The Friars in Aylesford both as a seeker of personal knowledge, and also as a representative of Kensington Unitarians. The event, originally the inspiration of David Usher, was created and facilitated by Louise Baumberg, Kate Buchanan, Andy Pakula, Miriam Lahage and Jen Hazel. Around fifty-three adventurers joined the core facilitation team for a journey of inspiration, personal growth and shared worship. It is difficult to capture the whole event, as being human I can only recall my experiences, reactions and interpretation. The Friars is the home of the ancient religious house of the order of the Carmelites, who in 1242, journeyed here from the Holy Land. I found the setting enhanced the spiritual journey and provided many physical and spiritual areas to explore. I can only assume Carmelites are hardy souls, as the bedding, heating and showers were often minimal.

The programme proved a delight. Whilst lots of organisation was evident, the facilitators had also built in time to explore. Each day began and ended with an opening and closing ritual, which included singing, meditation and prayer. Against a spiritual framework, which included groups designing worship activities for the last day, the focus of the event was lighting the fire of passion, commitment and action. Spark groups also provided opportunities for sharing and preparing worship. The inclusion of a karaoke on the Saturday evening provided an opportunity for shy and retiring types to sing, dance and entertain. A central focus of the weekend was to explore ways to re-energise, share practices and develop stronger community. Specific topics identified by the facilitators were explored by the groups, these included: worship, congregational life, theology, social justice, and personal and spiritual growth. The groups deliberated, reflected and delivered presentations to the whole gathering. The event, which had a warm, welcoming and yet challenging energy, was also inclusive, respectful and stretching. It became apparent that whilst there was a consensus on the need to be compassionate, support and care for others, there were differences in approach. The different sizes, resources and skill within the Unitarian congregations often dictated strategies.

I joined the social justice group, which examined the Unitarians' reforming history, including: factory reform, prison reform and women rights. It was clear that historically individuals had challenged and risked much. For example, the MP for Liverpool in the 1780's, William Roscoe chose his beliefs over his career in politics by standing with fellow MP William Smith against slavery. In a city port, which was financed from the slave trade, this was an unpopular step. Reflecting back provided inspiration, but also raised questions as to how modern Unitarians currently have such a low profile. It became obvious that this claim to social reform appeared mainly historic. We then discussed current activities, both at a local and national level. Whilst Unitarians had played an active part in supporting same sex couples and challenging legislation, this seemed to attract little notice in the press. Discussions included developing a more strategic co-ordinated approach across the UK Unitarian movement. It became apparent that whilst individuals are involved in social justice work in their personal and work lives, they often did not link this activity to their church or the wider movement. I suggested that we audit and celebrate what is currently being done. On a personal level I agreed to write an article for *the Inquirer* in relation to my work in diverting women from crime and reducing the female prison population. The group identified possible future areas of activity for Unitarians, including prison reform (diverting women from crime), challenging violence against women (including forced marriage and 'honour' based violence – multi faith approach), and supporting children and families (particularly those detained under immigration laws).

It was a full weekend, where new friends were made, and people were challenged to take action. The Priory is a historic centre of pilgrimage and has witnessed the joys, hopes and sadness of many pilgrims. I sense that by the close of this weekend, many as I did, departed feeling more alive, more hopeful and also grateful for a caring community.

Jim Blair

Dates for your Diary:

Congregational Book Launch Sunday 3rd April 2011

If everything goes to plan we hope to launch our new book at a special event, featuring readings from some of the essays written by the congregation, after the service.

Congregational Potluck Lunch Easter Sunday 24th April 2011

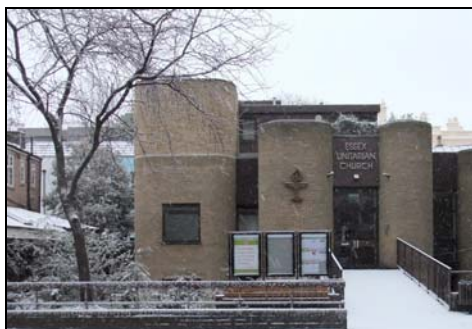
There will be a traditional potluck lunch after the service on Easter Sunday. Please bring food or drink to share.

Essex Church AGM & Membership Service Sunday 15th May 2011

Our AGM will take place after our annual membership service. We like to encourage all members to be there!

Warden's Column

What's Happening in Our Busy Building



Looking out of the office window, I can see light purple irises (donated by Stephanie) and white crocuses. I know that elsewhere in the garden snowdrops, winter aconite and yellow and purple crocuses are blooming with daffodils, tulip, hyacinths and alliums waiting to spring into action. It's an exciting time of year.

There's lots of change inside too: Fraser, our handyman, has installed new shelving in the outside shed and also in the hall cupboards and the kitchen cleaning cupboard.

But probably the biggest change is that, if all goes to plan, we should be having a new sound-system installed in the church at the beginning of March. This would mean we could have a microphone on the table to pick-up candles of joy and concern – and also lapel or roving mikes as necessary. We'll also be able to play recorded music over the sound system or plug in an electric instrument, which hasn't been possible up to now.

2011 seems to be shaping up to be a really good year. Happy Spring!

Jenny Moy



The Fairtrade Foundation's Fairtrade Fortnight is this year encouraging us all to 'show off our labels'.

Buy some fair-trade products and show everyone the labels as a way of heightening people's awareness that there are things we can do to help make world trade a more level playing field. You may already know that both the American government and the European Union give massive subsidies to their own cotton growers, which means that some farmers, particularly in West Africa, just cannot get in to world trade, because nobody subsidises them. Every time we buy a fair trade cotton T shirt we are helping to redress this imbalance.

The Fairtrade Foundation's website gives information on their 'Great Cotton Stitch Up' Campaign, seeking justice for West African cotton growers and telling you how to lobby your MEP.

Here at Essex Church we have made a commitment to buy fairly traded goods whenever we can and to encourage our members and the building's user groups to do the same. Let's join in making this world a fairer place for all in 2011.

Rev. Sarah Tinker



“We want to know that there has been some purpose to our living. What has been the result of our time here on earth? How will we be remembered? What difference has it made that we were here? At the end of life we tend to value more those things which are truly most important. Everyone is different, but in general the details of daily life become more trivial to those who are dying. Relationships seem to be more important. After all, material goods and our accomplishments are things that we can't take with us. But the ways we have touched others live on after we're gone.

We write the stories of our lives all the time with the choices we make — our decisions about how we spend our time and the things we do with it. But as we write, we need to periodically stop to read what we're writing, to take stock of where we've been and where we're going.

Whatever our values are, whatever we consider to be most important in life, let us choose those things to guide our life choices. When we know that our time here is not forever, we can make the most of the time we do have. We pass through this world but once. Let us use this time well.”

UU Minister Rev. Marshall Hawkins

Don't forget: the clocks go forward on Sunday 27th March!



Our 'Tapestry of Life' Course: Reflecting On Values

At the time of writing 13 of us are half way through the 'Tapestry of Life' course with participants attending from various London congregations. The session on values proved particularly thought provoking and left us uncertain about how we distinguish between a value, a principle and a chosen way of behaving. We listed values that had been significant to us at different times of our lives and some values that we thought operated in society but that which we did not aspire to:

Loyalty Justice Equality Compassion Honesty Openness Authenticity Integrity	Fairness <i>"We behave like this"</i> <i>"An upright life"</i> To be good To be nice To please others Supporting family Consciousness	Community responsibility Consideration/kindness to others Freedom Peace Health and well-being Enjoy yourself <i>(not at others' expense; having fun – for others too)</i>	Acceptance of difference Independence Sharing Fight Survival Affluence <i>(this was noted as a value of society at large that we observe rather than one of the group's)</i>
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The course lists seven 'Qualifications for Real Values':

- Values must be freely chosen.
- The alternative option for choice must be real.
- Values are shown by choices made after thoughtful weighing.
- What we prize, respect, esteem, hold dear and enjoy reflects our values.
- Values are apt to be publicly affirmed and even championed.
- Values require action.
- Values persist over time.

and asked us to think about these questions:

- How are your values acquired?
- What are your authority figures (if any) and have they changed over time?
- What pressures do you face maintaining your values?

There'll be more to tell about this course in our next newsletter.

Rev. Sarah Tinker

“Heresy Saved Me”

A New Book on Unitarianism

*“There is a worrying amount of certainty about these days.
Religious fundamentalism slugs it out with atheist absolutism.”*

It is a rare event to find a new book on Unitarianism, so we should welcome the appearance of *Heresy Saved Me – a Unitarian in the 21st Century* by Nicholas Axam. The author is a journalist and campaigner, and is now a member of our Newington Green and Islington congregations, though he also lives in Italy. The back cover states that “Nicholas Axam thought heresy was a thing of the past until he stumbled across an article in *The Times*. It led him to Unitarianism, a free-thinking faith whose followers, from Charles Dickens and Mary Wollstonecraft to Kurt Vonnegut and Tim Berners-Lee, have helped shape the modern world, yet which remains a dangerous enough idea to attract the hostility of the Establishment.”



This book is not a history of Unitarianism but a very personal (at times perhaps almost too personal) odyssey, drawing on psychology and philosophy as well as a religion. The author looks at the reasons for religion – it “evolved to reconcile the act of living with how we make sense of being alive” and all of us “are engaged in the high-wire act of a meaningful life”. He is critical of Christianity, particularly of its creeds, though recognises later that it was probably its tight organisation which has allowed it to survive for so long. There are a number of themes which run through the book, in particular the philosophy of Soren Kierkegaard (“as far as the religious experience goes, one size does not fit all”) and the non-canonical Gospel of Thomas (“But if you do not know yourselves, then you dwell in poverty”), [note to self: must re-read Elaine Pagels’ *The Gnostic Gospels*]. The author has also been sympathetic to the *I Ching* and Taoist philosophy for much of his life (“it advises one to go with the flow, following the path of least resistance”).

Having rejected the Church of England because of its dogma, Nicholas Axam found the Quakers as an acceptable alternative (“I liked their wariness of official texts and how they considered personal testimony to be the most valid ministry”). He even considered applying for membership, but at the time felt that he was not ‘good’ enough and that it would have meant denying the person he was. Then in March 2006 he saw a headline in the *Times* that caught his eye: “‘Heretical’ Unitarians Cast out by Cathedral: Chester Cathedral has denounced the Unitarian Church for heretical views and banned its ministers and members from holding their annual service there”. This was the occasion when the General Assembly was holding its Annual Meetings in Chester, and a previous invitation to hold the Anniversary Service in the Cathedral there was withdrawn when someone (presumably a local Anglican) claimed that this was against Cathedral statutes and the doctrines of the Church of England. This episode earned the Unitarians the most national publicity they had had for many years, with articles in the press (including the *Church Times* and *Guardian* as well as the *Times*) and interviews on the radio. Clearly it earned us at least one new supporter!

The book is a good read, and we have bought a copy for the congregational library. The chapter headed ‘Two Thousand Years of Heresy’ is one of the best descriptions of the Unitarian story that I have seen [note to self: must find out more about Arius, the 3rd century Egyptian priest – Arianism was regarded as the first Christian heresy]. However it is a shame that the Bibliography at the end of the book contains only two titles under ‘Unitarianism’ for further reading, one of which I have not heard of – if there is a reprint one hopes this section could be expanded (I would be pleased to help). Copies of the book are also available from Unitarian Headquarters in Essex Street (near the Strand) for £7.50, plus postage.

Howard Hague

Newsletter Deadline



The deadline for submitting items for the next issue is **Sunday 13th March**. Please send items (such as poems, quotes, articles, notices, rotas, etc...) to Jane Blackall or a committee member before that date.

Thank you!!!

“Compassion is like a sense of caring, of concern for others’ difficulties and pain. Not only family and friends, but all other people, even enemies. If we think only of ourselves and forget about other people, our minds occupy a very small area and even tiny problems appear very big. When you develop concern for others... your mind automatically widens; your own problems, even big ones, will not be so significant.”

His Holiness the Dalai Lama



Two Hours A Week to Help a Family to Help Themselves

I'd like to introduce a local charity where I volunteer called Family Friends. Volunteers provide practical and emotional support to disadvantaged families with children under the age of 16. Established since 1993, they operate in Kensington and Chelsea as well as in Hammersmith and Fulham.

Through encouragement volunteers 'help families to help themselves' by discovering their strengths and building on their coping skills. I find it such a rewarding experience – if I had known about them before, I would have volunteered years ago. They could really do with some more recruits right now.

Over the past year I have befriended an immigrant family with two teenagers. Weekly activities have varied from helping kids with homework, encouraging "mum" to brave school parent-teacher evenings, and generally taking steps to use available community services. Some weeks it is about just listening, other weeks attempting new horizons like trying a café in a different neighbourhood or enjoying a free concert at the national gallery.

The Family Friends service team recruits, trains and matches volunteers with parents, children or adolescents, based on skills, interests and personality. As a volunteer, you can choose either parent befriending or child/adolescent befriending and mentoring.

As in all befriending relationships, it takes time to build a trusting rapport – that is why the volunteering commitment is for 1 year. The two hours a week can be during the day, evening or at weekends. It is well worth the time. I highly recommend the opportunity to volunteer with Family Friends – it is lots of fun and very rewarding. The service team are most supportive.

If you would like to find out more – feel free to contact me: mairecollins@hotmail.com. You can also call Family Friends on 020 8960 9099 or visit www.familyfriend.org.uk. Family Friends is an Approved Provider of the Mentoring & Befriending Foundation.

Maire Collins



"Touch. It is the most primitive of the senses — and in some ways the most powerful. Nothing communicates like touch — to express joy and affection; to heal and soothe, to ease one's sorrow or pain.

Touch is a necessity; an emotional and physical need that endures from cradle to grave. And, I would argue, it is a spiritual necessity as well. Stop and think. There are only three times in life when our bodies are potentially completely accessible to another's touch — when we are an infant cradled in our mother's arms; when we give ourselves over to a lover's embrace; and, when after death, our body is entrusted to those who will perform the last ministrations. Birth, sex, death — in each of those liminal, transcendent moments, touch is key.

Touch is the foundation upon which life evolved and without touch life could not continue. Thus, touch bespeaks the interdependence of all life. As Thich Nhat Hanh says, "*When you touch one, you touch many, and when you touch many, you touch one.*" Could we redeem touch? Perhaps we might if we could recapture the sacredness of touch — if we could recognize that we touch God, the source of all Being, in one another."

UU Minister Rev. Dr. Becky Edmiston-Lange

Small Group Communion



**Sunday 13th March, 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. A number of members of the congregation expressed interest in having a regular opportunity for communion here so, since the autumn, we have been experimenting with services led by a variety of different people, and we have been very encouraged by the experience so far.

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

13th March – Jane Blackall
10th April – Tristan Jovanović
8th May – John Hands and Sarah Tinker

If you would like to find out more about these small-group communions then please feel free to speak to Jane Blackall or Tristan Jovanović.



Rev. Bill Darlison (photograph courtesy of Jim Corrigan)

‘Who Needs Sacraments?’

Reflections on Bill Darlison’s Workshop

As is often the way in our busy building my mind was not entirely focused on Bill Darlison’s workshop all the time, fascinating though it was. When I came downstairs in the morning to set up the room I found that all our chairs had been taken into the other room for a psychology lecture on *‘Anxiety Symptoms and How to Contain Them’*. The humour of that title was not lost on me as I tried to negotiate the return of some chairs. The liberal Jewish group Beit Klal Yisrael was meeting downstairs all day and in the afternoon the Brazilian Seicho No-Ie group started to arrive. Over 300, quite diverse, people used our building on this one day. We Unitarians were one of the smaller groups but it was lovely to look round the room and see Unitarians from Godalming, Golders Green, Cambridge, Norwich and Trowbridge – to mention but a few of the congregations represented. I had a

sense that many of us were keen to find ways to breathe energy and movement into our traditional ways of worshipping and to establish new rituals in marking the transitions in our lives. It’s thanks to our London District’s Christian Affinity Group that this workshop took place and we were glad to be the hosts here at Essex Church, even if there was a tussle to get hold of enough chairs. After Bill led our Sunday service the next day his wife Morag said that she’d not seen such a lively congregation anywhere in the UK and that we reminded her of the Unitarians in Dublin. So thanks to everyone in the congregation who helped to create this atmosphere – especially those stalwarts who made the soup for lunch and cleared it up afterwards.

Sarah Tinker

There is something about the Rev. Bill Darlison – perhaps the fact that he is so obviously on the side of the angels – that enables him to get away with stuff that could easily make hackles rise. In this half-day workshop, he was basically telling us that all the things we might love about the Unitarian Church – the lack of a prescriptive liturgy, the lack of a top-down theology, the appeal to reason – are not enough. The sort of service that attracts an enquirer disenchanted with other churches, and that is as soothing and familiar as a warm bath to the regulars, has jettisoned a lot of the emotional power of more ritualistic religions (which is almost all of them). Where is our equivalent of the solemnity (or at least sense of occasion) of the Roman Catholic sacraments, or Bar and Bat Mitzvahs, or pilgrimages to the Golden Temple or Mecca? All sorts of possibilities were considered, from anointing with oil at a Christening to performing some sort of recognised ritual to a dying person, with everything from circle dancing to postural (kneeling?) prayer considered along the way. As always, it was enlightening to hear people sharing their very different experiences. Of course we did not all agree, let alone start drawing up any kind of manifesto for sacramental ritual. But (amusingly, since the event had concluded with a warning about services that merely provided food for thought) I think we would all agree that it provided plenty of food for thought.

Caroline Blair

As someone who spent most of their religious life in a sacramental church and quite a few years as a priest, I was interested to hear what the Rev Bill Darlison had to say about the sacraments in a Unitarian context. I was fascinated to hear Bill remind us that sacraments are not the property of some Christians but are part of the spiritual property of all human beings. Sacraments are poetic symbols that can mark rites of passage, like birth, marriage, adolescence and death or when we are in a particular need i.e. the anointing of the sick or dying. They are not magic acts but an acknowledgement of the spiritual possibilities of ordinary events. As I am quickly approaching the date, I was interested in his ideas of a “silvering service” to acknowledge a person’s coming of age at 60, when we can relook at the priorities of our lives and give greater room for the spiritual. Part of me is attracted by the idea but part of me feels that I will need to be “grown up” and that still feels like a long way off!

David Francis Darling

This lecture on Bill’s philosophy and his experiences was thoroughly enjoyable. Knowing the background and being familiar with the Dublin church, and the barriers between Church of Ireland (Anglican), Non-Subscribing Presbyterians and the Roman Catholic church, brought it forcefully to me. The message it brought to me was the importance of giving the feeling of self-worth – making children feel valued in the church – through coming of age, and junior membership celebrations. It was apparent that at every point, Bill was willing to listen to his congregation, to let them lead him where they wanted to go, then he would perhaps take up their direction and help them to formalise it, to re-interpret it. When talking of the lack of “holy orders” in Unitarianism, we spoke of the “mutual commitment of congregation and minister” that we held in Kensington with Sarah, rather than an ‘induction’. We talked of the “sacrament of the sick” but didn’t touch on how a patient might feel about a visitation from a clergyman they didn’t really know (and here I am not referring to a patient who is dying). Certainly we might think about Bill’s ‘soul-friend’ interpretation of the role of godparenting and the promise of confidentiality. I love the humour and the essential humanity.

Stephanie Saville

'Who Needs Sacraments?' *(continued)*

I had been looking forward to Bill's workshop for ages. Not only was it a subject I have long been personally fascinated by, but the event seemed to come at a perfect time for us as a congregation, just a few months after we had started experimenting with our own small-group communion services here at Essex Church. I was interested to hear other people's ideas about how we could possibly develop this aspect of our activities as a congregation in a Unitarian-friendly way.

One thing that came across loud and clear was that in a Unitarian context, sacraments would be something that any willing member of the community could offer, not just the preserve of the Minister (with a capital-M).

The classic definition of a sacrament is an "outward sign of inward grace" – a phrase that's been lodged in my mind since doing my Religious Education GCSE – but my understanding of it has changed considerably since then. Rather than being ritual actions that *convey* divine blessing I now much prefer to think of sacraments as a tangible *acknowledgement* of something spiritually significant that is already happening or has happened in our lives. The example that I always think of is that by the time two people decide to get married they are, in a sense, *already* joined in the eyes of God, and the sacrament of marriage is more about affirming the relationship in the eyes of the world, the couple being conscious of their own intentions, and asking for the support and blessings of family and friends. And it's a good excuse for a knees-up!

One thing that I found particularly interesting in our discussion was the "sacrament of the sick": it seems that the practice varies somewhat between different churches but a key feature is some kind of laying-on of hands and anointing of those who are ill with some oil which has been blessed. Bill spoke of the difficulty of knowing quite what to say or do as a Unitarian minister at the bedside of one who is dying. It might come naturally to offer a little comfort by holding the hand of the person, but as there is no set ritual which would be expected in that situation, it is tricky to know what contact would be welcome or appropriate. The use of ritual, for those of us who feel well-disposed towards it, could potentially allow us to bypass some of the social awkwardness that typically arises. This made me think about other forms of ritual touch – one that I am personally familiar with is Reiki – even though I practice it myself (occasionally) I don't particularly choose to focus on the mythology around it beyond the notion that the person laying on hands is in some sense acting as a channel for the loving energy of God. In both of these cases (Reiki healing *and* the "sacrament of the sick") I think the most important elements, for me, are simple human contact and the intention of loving care. The main intention is to let the person who is unwell know that they are loved and cared for... and that alone can help to ease their suffering at least a little.

I feel that I might very well like to be on the receiving end of this sort of sacrament, even if I wasn't at death's door, and would like to explore the possibility of developing some kind of practice along these lines within our congregation. Of course, as Unitarians, we would almost certainly want to negotiate, explore, and tailor the ritual on an individual basis (as some of us have already started to do in planning our own funerals). After this event I feel very enthusiastic about the possibilities.

Jane Blackall

Hucklow Summer School

20th-27th August 2011

Nightingale Centre, Great Hucklow

Walking the Talk: Living a Life of Greater Integrity



The core purpose of Hucklow Summer School is religious education: we focus on matters of religion and spirituality and intend to draw out and develop the potential of all participants. We aim to provide a balanced programme, offering a rich mix of activities for both the heart and head, and a variety of optional sessions showcasing a range of worthwhile activities which participants might "take home" and try out in their own congregations and communities. We also ensure that there are plenty of opportunities for relaxed fellowship and fun during the week.

Theme Talks will be given by a team of speakers:

Rev. Gillian Peel, Jim Corrigan, Rev. Linda Hart,
Jef Jones and Rev. Sarah Tinker

There will be a choice of Engagement Groups:

'The Web of Life: Seeing and Acting Differently'

led by Margaret Kirk and Kate Buchanan

'Practising Peace in Daily Life'

led by Jane Blackall and Jef Jones

'Giving'

led by Caroline Blair and Rita Woditsch

'Working With Others'

led by Mel Prideaux and Winnie Gordon

Applications are due by 21st April 2011

For more information and to download a booking form:
www.hucklowsummerschool.org.uk

For more information speak to Caroline or Jane
or telephone Mel Prideaux on 01924 781 020.

GA of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches
Education and Training Commission
Joined Up Education Panel

National Worship Studies Course Foundation Step

Led by experienced Ministers and Lay Leaders



**Course over Four Saturdays in Summer:
21st May, 4th June, 18th June, 2nd July 2011
from 10.00am to 4.15 pm**

*Sessions at Cross Street Chapel, Manchester M2 1NL
(except 4th June at Luther King House, M14 5JP)*

Leaders include: Rev Ernest Baker, Dawn Buckle, Rev Bill Darlison, David Dawson, Rev Dr Vernon Marshall, Rev Gillian Peel, Rev June Pettit, and Sue Woolley.

The course will cover the Worship Studies Course Foundation Step syllabus including:

- Worship is...?
- Practicalities and Precautions;
- Prayer;
- Music in Worship;
- Speech and Communication;
- Addresses/Sermons/Talks;
- Finding and Choosing Readings;
- Storytelling and Children's Spot.

To gain the Worship Studies Course Foundation Step Certificate participants will need to complete two assessed services.

Bring your own lunch, drinks will be provided.

Cost: Registration: £5.00; each session £10.00*
(£45.00 total) *(Can be paid in full or at each session)

Booking and more information from Dawn Buckle
Email: dawnbuckle@ymail.com; Tel: 01457 763 721.



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

**Second Sunday of the Month from 2-3pm:
13th March, 10th April, 8th May**

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 to members). **Contact: Sonya Leite on 0207 371 1674**

'Finding Our Voice'

Singing Workshops with Margaret Marshall

Sunday 17th April from 12.30 to 1.15pm
(please note the March session has been cancelled)



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.



Multifaith Calendar



☪ 3rd March – Mahashivratri (Great Shiva Night) – Hindu

Every night of the new moon is dedicated to Shiva but this one is particularly important, being the night on which Shiva is said to perform the cosmic dance from creation to destruction. Many Hindus will fast and prayers are focused on Shiva and his shrines and statues.

🌐 4th March – The Women's World Day of Prayer

This international, interdenominational prayer movement, begun in 1887, looks to a different country each year for service material. 2011's order of service comes from Chile.

🌀 5th March – Losar – Buddhist

This New Year festival is celebrated in Tibet, and often Nepal, and includes the rededication of the country to Buddhism. The miracles performed by the Buddha at Sravasti are celebrated.

✝️ 7th March - 23rd April – First Day of Lent / The Great Fast – Orthodox Christian

Eastern Churches start Lent on the Monday before the first Sunday of Lent, and as many Eastern Orthodox Churches still use the Julian rather than the Gregorian calendar the dates of the whole Lenten period can differ from the Western Churches. The Lenten fast involves abstinence from meat, fish and dairy products until Easter.

✝️ 8th March – Shrove Tuesday – Christian

Commonly known as Pancake Day, this is the day before the start of Lent. Traditionally, it is a day for repentance and absolution in preparation for Lent ('shrive' means to receive or make confession). Pancakes were originally made to use up all the rich foods, such as butter and eggs, before Lent. In some parts of the world people celebrate Mardi Gras with carnivals.

✝️ 9th March – Ash Wednesday – Christian

Ash Wednesday marks the first day of Lent, the forty days (not counting Sundays) that lead up to Easter. On Ash Wednesday some churches hold special services where Christian believers are marked with a cross of ash to show their desire to correct the wrongs in their lives.

✝️ 9th March - 23rd April – Lent – Christian

Lent is a time of fasting and discipline in preparation for Easter. As early as the second century CE many Christians were to be found spending time fasting before Easter, and over the next few centuries the time spent fasting increased; this was probably connected to remembering the forty days Jesus spent fasting at the start of his ministry. The word comes from an Old English word for Spring. It is also related to the word 'lengthen'.

☪ 19th March – Holi – Hindu

Various stories are associated with the Hindu spring festival. One story involves Krishna and his antics with the gopis (milkmaids), which gives rise to the tradition of throwing coloured powders and dyes. The story of Prahlada and Holika is also associated with Holi. Prahlada worshipped Vishnu in defiance of his father, and survived when his aunt, Holika, immune to fire, held him while she sat on a bonfire, giving rise to the tradition of lighting bonfires.

☪ 20th March – Hola Mohalla / Hola Mahalla – Sikh

Guru Gobind Singh Ji, the tenth Sikh Guru, introduced the festival as an alternative to Holi, in 1680. It takes place on the day after the end of Holi. First celebrated at Anandpur, in India's Punjab, it includes competitive displays of swordsmanship, horsemanship, archery and wrestling, and displays of weapons and symposia of poetry.

✡️ 20th March – Purim – Jewish

Purim commemorates a troubled period of Jewish history, and how the community was preserved. The story is recounted in the Book of Esther (the Megillah), which is read in the synagogue, on the eve of Purim and also on Purim itself. Colourful costumes and masks are sometimes worn and there is lots of noise as the name of Haman (the villain of the story) is drowned out with boos and rattles (graggers).

♋️ 20th March – Spring Equinox – Pagan/Wiccan

Spring Equinox celebrates the renewed life of the Earth that comes with the Spring. It is a solar festival, celebrated when the length of the day and the night are equal.

☪ 21 March – Naw-Rúz - Bahá'í

Naw-Rúz is the Bahá'í New Year's Day and coincides with the spring equinox. It is an ancient Persian festival celebrating the 'new day' and it marks the end of the annual 19 Day Fast for Bahá'ís and is one of the nine holy days of the year. Celebrations start at sunset on March 20, often by gathering for prayer and a festive meal.

♋️ 21st March – Jamshedi No Ruz – Zoroastrian

The Zoroastrian New Year celebration, according to the Fasl calendar used in Iran. Individuals may pray prayers of repentance for thoughts, words and deeds during the past year, and in so doing prepare for a commitment for future goodness in a spiritually cleansed state. There is a special meal and elder members of the household giving younger members gifts. Families may sponsor a thanksgiving ceremony performed by a priest, or priests, at their home or in the temple. No Ruz is deeply embedded in Iranian culture, and is still celebrated as the New Year in Islamic Iran, although without any religious connotations.

☪ 24th March – Rama Navami – Hindu

Rama Navami, the birthday of Rama, the seventh avatar of Vishnu, is celebrated at noon (Rama was born at noon), by arati in front of a picture of Rama swinging in a cradle.

✝️ 25th March – The Annunciation of the Lord / Blessed Virgin (Lady Day) – Christian

Lady Day celebrates the angel Gabriel announcing to Mary that she is to bear a child, and Mary's response in the Magnificat. The day gives opportunity to focus on the doctrine of the incarnation.

♋️ 26th March – Khordad Sal – Zoroastrian

The birthday of Zarathustra is celebrated on this day. The date is symbolic as the actual date of his birth cannot be accurately identified. It is one of the most important Zoroastrian festivals - people gather in fire temples for prayers and then celebrate with feasting.

'The Duration of Life'

Will says: "Following on the service which was held celebrating the contribution which animals play in our lives, I found the following story..."

When God created the world and was about to determine the duration of life for all the creatures, the donkey came and asked, "Lord, how long am I to live?"

"Thirty years," answered God. "Is that all right with you?"

"Oh, Lord," replied the donkey, "that is a long time. Think of my tiresome existence carrying heavy loads from morning until night, dragging bags of grain to the mill so that others might eat bread, only to be cheered along and refreshed with kicks and blows! Spare me part of this long time."

So God had mercy and gave him eighteen years. The donkey went away satisfied, and the dog made his appearance.

"How long do you want to live?" said God to him. "Thirty years was too much for the donkey, but you will be satisfied with that long."

"Lord," answered the dog. "Is that your will? Just think how much I have to run. My feet will not hold out so long. And what can I do but growl and run from one corner to another after I have lost my voice for barking and my teeth for biting?"

God saw that he was right, and he took away twelve years. Then came the monkey.

"Surely you would like to live thirty years," said the Lord to him. "You do not need to work like the donkey and the dog, and are always having fun."

"Oh, Lord," he answered, "so it appears, but it is different. When it rains porridge, I don't have a spoon. I am always supposed to be playing funny tricks and making faces so people will laugh, but when they give me an apple and I bite into it, it is always sour. How often is sorrow hidden behind a joke? I cannot put up with all that for thirty years!"

God had mercy and gave him ten years. Finally man made his appearance. Cheerful, healthy, and refreshed, he asked God to determine the duration of his life.

"You shall live thirty years," spoke the Lord. "Is that enough for you?"

"What a short time!" cried the man. "When I have built a house and a fire is burning on my own hearth, when I have planted trees that blossom and bear fruit, and am just beginning to enjoy life, then I am to die. Oh, Lord, extend my time."

"I will add the donkey's eighteen years," said God.

"That is not enough," replied the man.

"You shall also have the dog's twelve years."

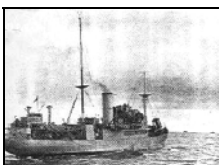
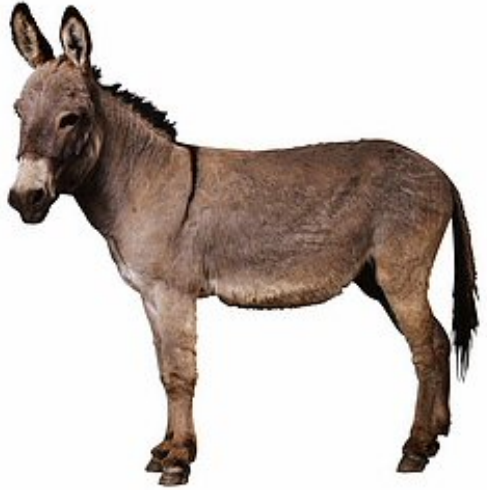
"Still too little."

"Well, then," said God, "I will give you the monkey's ten years as well, but you shall receive no more."

The man went away, but he was not satisfied.

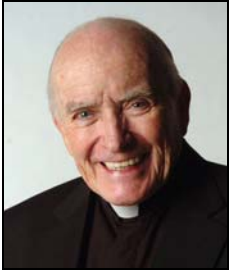
Thus man lives seventy years. The first thirty are his human years, and they quickly disappear. Here he is healthy and happy; he works with pleasure, and enjoys his existence. The donkey's eighteen years follow. Here one burden after the other is laid on him; he carries the grain that feeds others, and his faithful service is rewarded with kicks and blows. Then come the dog's twelve years, and he lies in the corner growling, no longer having teeth with which to bite. And when this time is past, the monkey's ten years conclude. Now man is weak headed and foolish; he does silly things and becomes a laughing stock for children.

Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm
– Submitted by Will Lyons



"All the great persons of the world, whatever had been their mission in life, proved their greatness by this one quality: endurance. The enduring personality is like a ship that can stand storms and winds under all conditions, the ship that saves itself and others. Such blessed personalities, showing the strength of God have been called the saviours of humanity."

Hazrat Inayat Khan



"The hopeful person, then, is one who survives because he believes in survival; he lives because he believes in life; and he celebrates because he believes he has something worth celebrating. He can afford to be more tolerant of others because others are less likely to threaten him. Diversity is not a challenge to his individuality or

his freedom because he knows that nothing can really destroy that which is most uniquely and essentially himself. He is perhaps not any less afraid of death; we are all afraid of death. But he is not paralyzed by that fear, he will not give up and quit, anticipating death by dying psychologically and humanly long before he dies physically. The hopeful person dies only once. He lives strongly and vitally up to the point of death. Hopefulness does not preclude discouragement, disillusion, frustration; it does preclude bitterness and cynicism. Hopefulness does not mean that we do not fall; but it does mean we get up and walk on."

Father Andrew Greeley

The Alister Hardy Society

*supporting the work of the
Religious Experience Research Centre*

World Congress of Faiths

*developing better understanding and
co-operation between people of different faiths*

Joint Day Conference

Saturday 11th June 2011 at Essex Church

*"How might spiritual/religious experience
help towards understanding & compassion?"*

The day conference will begin with registration at 10am and will conclude at 4.30pm. It will include the following talks:

'Fellowship of Faiths: A Communion of Spirit'

Rev. Dr. Marcus Braybrooke
President of the World Congress of Faiths.

'Faith and No Faith: The Contribution of Atheism to the Spiritual Quest'

Dr. Gregory Barker
Director of the Alister Hardy Religious Experience Centre

'From Contemplation to Compassion'

Eley McAinsh
Director of the Living Spirituality Network.

Cost - £25; AHS/WCF members - £20; students - £12

*Details: John Franklin, 21 Park Vista, London, SE10 9LZ.
Tel: 0208 858 4750 e-mail: johnfranklin35@hotmail.com*

New District Group for LGBT Unitarians



We have received a message from Alex Warleigh-Lack, a member of the Richmond and Putney Unitarian congregation, who is in the process of establishing a new group for LGBT Unitarians in the District. He says:

"A few of us with experience in running such groups had a meeting about this at the recent Light the Fire weekend, and there's a lot of goodwill to make this happen. Our initial priorities are to increase LGBT visibility, chiefly via a website, to develop worship and welcome resources for LGBT people and their congregations, and to run a social group. The latter will seek to meet once a month, at venues across the District. We hope to launch the group with an LGBT-themed worship service in the early summer, by which time we would hope to have a full events programme and initial web page in place. If you would like to be involved, and even to lend a hand with getting the group started, that would be great."

Email Alex on alexwarleighlack@gmail.com or phone 07795 412485.

*An event organised by the London District
Liberal Christian Affinity Group:*

Come on a Spring Visit to the National Gallery!



Saturday 12th March from 11.00am

'Lent' is the theme, looking at paintings reflecting this. Our guides will be: Maja Langford (of Hampstead Unitarians) who will place the paintings in their art historical context, and Jim Corrigan (of Golders Green Unitarians) will look at the spiritual aspect (with help from David Morgan). Meet at 11.00am in the main entrance hall of the Gallery (via Trafalgar Square entrance). All welcome!

Further information: Jim Corrigan on 020 8361 1843.

Membership of Essex Church



Thanks to everybody who has returned their form to us confirming their wish to continue as a member or friend of Kensington Unitarians for this coming year.

If you have mislaid your form or have not received one let us know and we'll make sure you have one to fill in. If you are thinking about membership for the first time, have a chat with me or a committee member so we can tell you more.

Rev. Sarah Tinker

"Once we move beyond ourselves, we have faith. Once we live beyond what we control, we are expressing faith in others, and possibly in the universe. We want to think that we are sufficient unto ourselves, able to handle what comes our way alone. It is not true. We need someone – if not something – else, or it is in vain. If I am only for myself, the prophet said, I am nothing. James Luther Adams said that human beings were 'made for mutuality'. We need one another, often more than we are willing to admit, and often in more ways than we can count. We gather here on a Sunday morning to be together, listen to each other, to hear one another into more meaning than we can create by ourselves. To enter the door is to have faith."

UU Minister Rev. R. Paul Mueller

"I think we need to hear the human confusion and pain that lies beneath [Fundamentalist] ideologies. While their ideas may be ridiculous, the fact that so many cling to them is a symptom of something gone tragically wrong in modern life.



The power of fundamentalist ideologies speaks compellingly to the human needs that reason and secularism cannot fill. Modernity tears down the past and leaves a gaping psychic hole. Many people experience the changes of modern life, changes made possible by the stunning success of science and instrumental rationality, as creating a world devoid of meaning, a world in which they no longer know their place, a world that feels hostile. Creating meaning in life and connection to purposes that transcend our individual lives has always been the role of religion. Religion's mythical stories expressed a vision of humanity as the centre of the world, as the crown of creation, as created in God's image and as loved by God.

Fundamentalist movements seek to return to a golden past that never was. The real challenge for us, however, is to create a religious vision that speaks to the deep human need for meaning and the deep to connect that which transcends us all. Science and knowledge, for all their power, do not speak to that deep hunger. Before questions of ultimate meaning science is silent, as it is silent on matters of ethics and aesthetics. Science is about what *is*, not about what should be.

Our task is to create a religious vision that both welcomes human knowledge and feeds our deep hunger for meaning. We need to build upon the great religious traditions, but not be confined by practices and doctrines created for other people living in other times. It is not enough to oppose the reactionary agendas of fundamentalists, though we need to do that. The great challenge is to create a compelling alternative — an alternative that feeds the mind, the heart and the spirit. This is our challenge as a religious movement, and it is a challenge we face together with progressive elements of all the great traditions. We must join hands with the millions of others who seek peace and seek a vision that includes all of humanity."

UUA President, Rev. Peter Morales

One Light Spiritual Gatherings

(Previously 'Universal Spiritual Gatherings')

'Love, Lover and Beloved'

**Friday 11th March, 6.30-8.15pm
Held at Essex Church**



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

"You must love yourself before you love another. By accepting yourself and fully being what you are, your simple presence can make others happy."

Peaceful and Joyous connection with the Divine, the One Light at the Heart of All through music, meditation and inspiration from many spiritual traditions. Bring your beloved self, your family, children and friends. All are welcome

For further information contact service hosts:
Reverend Pamela Ramsden - 07966 478 980
Reverend Kathryn Reynolds - 07976 739 286

'In loving connection with Essex Unitarian Church'

The Sabbath Manifesto is a creative project designed to slow down lives in an increasingly hectic world. It was created by a group of Jewish artists in search of a modern way to observe a weekly day of rest. They are all members of **Reboot**, a non-profit group designed to “reboot” the cultures, traditions and rituals of Jewish life. They have created 10 core principles completely open for interpretation by each individual. The following is from their website: www.sabbathmanifesto.org.



Way back when, God said, “On the seventh day thou shalt rest.” The meaning behind it was simple: Take a break. Call a timeout. Find some balance. Recharge. Somewhere along the line, however, this mantra for living faded from modern consciousness. The idea of unplugging every seventh day now feels tragically close to impossible. Who has time to take time off? We need eight days a week to get our tasks accomplished, not six.

The Sabbath Manifesto was developed in the same spirit as the Slow Movement, slow food, slow living, by a small group of artists, writers, filmmakers and media professionals who, while not particularly religious, felt a collective need to fight back against our increasingly fast-paced way of living. The idea is to take time off, deadlines and paperwork be damned.

In the Manifesto, we’ve adapted our ancestors’ rituals by carving out one day per week to unwind, unplug, relax, reflect, get outdoors, be with loved ones. The ten principles are to be observed one day per week, from sunset to sunset. We invite you to practice, challenge and help shape what we’re creating.

Ten Principles for Observing a Weekly Day of Rest:

1. **Avoid technology.**
2. **Connect with loved ones.**
3. **Nurture your health.**
4. **Get outside.**
5. **Avoid commerce.**
6. **Light candles.**
7. **Drink wine.**
8. **Eat bread.**
9. **Find silence.**
10. **Give back.**



National Day of Unplugging 2011

Sundown, Friday 4th March to Sundown, Saturday 5th March

Can you take the unplug challenge and put down your mobile phone, sign out of email, stop your Facebook and Twitter updates? For 24 hours, starting at sundown Friday 4th March 2011, people across the globe will reclaim time, slow down their lives and reconnect with friends, family, the community and themselves. The Sabbath Manifesto’s principles were created for individual styling, but for one day we are asking you to take on the challenge of Principle Number 1: **AVOID TECHNOLOGY**. Interpret the Sabbath Manifesto as you see fit: to some, “avoid technology” means not sending text messages. To others, it means not using a stove or riding in a lift. Find the balance that works for you.

For more info visit the website: www.sabbathmanifesto.org/unplug

“Many Buddhists spend a lot of time practicing right speech. They are concerned about the power of the tongue to hurt yet are convinced of its potential to heal. The Desert Fathers and the Hasidic rebbes also have much to say about the importance of speech practices. Donna Schaper, a minister of the United Church of Christ, explores the nature of what she calls ‘sacred speech.’ This holy gift is one we must nurture by practice and intention. She says: “A singular characteristic of sacred speech is its openness. It is humble. It is less interested in being right than in being linked, less interested in self-protection than in self-expression, less interested in cages and doors than decks and windows. Sacred speech wants clarity and it wants justice. Sacred speech loves a good, honest boundary. But it also wants to maximize love and minimize fear.”

One of the thorniest areas of sacred speech is judging. We live in an adversarial society that puts a high premium on this social skill; conflict is considered natural and even necessary in both the private and public arenas of life. We are always judging this as good or worthy and that as bad and despicable. And, of course, most of us are better at dishing out criticism than in receiving it... Yet there are certain times when it behooves us to learn from the judgments that come our way. Equally important is to take up the prophetic mantle now and then and let it rip! Discernment, then, is an essential tool for those who want to engage in sacred speech.”

Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat (from www.spiritualityandpractice.com)

An Old Universalism for a New World

Sermon by Tristan Jovanović - Given at Essex Church on 20th February



There is a side to our liberal faith about which we do not often speak — on either side of the Atlantic. Although Universalism is a formal constituent of the Unitarian Universalist Association and not the Unitarians and Free Christians in Britain, we nonetheless embrace its values. Indeed within the UUA, there has been a move to reinvigorate the historical connection with the Universalist heritage, which has been largely subsumed by the always-larger, wealthier, better educated Unitarians.

That is not to say that Unitarians and Universalists are not a good match. Universalists brought a different spirituality to the mix. In their firm belief that all would go to heaven just as they are, they saw an all encompassing nature to their faith, hence Starr King's quip [*"Universalists think God is too good to damn them; Unitarians think they are too good to be damned"*]. For a graphic representation, if you look at the off-centre, encircled cross on the front of your service sheet, you'll see it is indicative of this: a circle of the universe, a beginning in Christianity with room for all other paths to God, represented by the great emptiness, acknowledging that God is indescribable.

After this preface, I think a short historical introduction would be appropriate before moving to the meat of how looking at the 'other side' to our movement can be part of a springboard to a new world. Here's a quick preview: God is love. Nobody is condemned. The way to be happy is to do good. There are sources of truth outside of Judeo-Christianity.

Universalism was perhaps one of the most palpable outcries against Calvinism in the Protestant church. Our ancestors unreservedly rejected the idea that God would predestine some to salvation and others to damnation. Largely in America, they played a great role, along with Unitarians, in forming the liberal spirit notable amongst the framers of the Constitution and early governance of my native country. Jumping forward to the 1800s, the Universalists were at the forefront of social change: they ordained the first woman, Olympia Brown, with full denominational support; they preached Unitarianism before the Unitarians had fully divorced from the Congregationalists; they led the Abolitionists in conjunction with the RSF. During the 1860s, the movement was one of the largest in America. By the time of the merger a century later, Unitarians outnumbered Univ. 5:1, possibly driven by the lack of central organisation and a penchant for experimental worship. There are some more divisive suggestions posited by Richard Trudeau in his book on the subject, but I want to leave the history and look to ideas.

The Universalist GA in 1935/53 summed up their faith in the Washington-Andover Avowal. *"We avow our faith in: God as an eternal and all-conquering love; the spiritual leadership of Jesus; the supreme worth of every human personality; the authority of truth, known or to be known; and the power of men of good will and sacrificial spirit to overcome all evil and establish the Kingdom of God. Neither this nor any other statement shall be imposed as a creedal test."*

My encounter with the UU movement when I lived in the Iowa/South Dakota borders was accidental. I was a strange teenager who actually wanted to go to church. I'd grown up in an American Baptist setting but knew that wasn't what I was looking for. My mother knew of the Unity church and thought that might be a better fit — she made the common mix up. I went on my own — and liked it. When we moved to California, I would go to a bleary eyed 8am mass at the Episcopal Church with my family and then battle to Monterey to the UU. I just couldn't accept that there was one way. I couldn't understand the obsession with sin. I didn't even think I believed in hell. Like John Murray's words on the front of your service sheets, I believe in a God of hope, kindness and everlasting love.

One of my favourite books on matters spiritual is Forrest Church and John Buehrens's *A Chosen Faith*. It was here, around the time I was 16, I read one of Church's earlier versions of the Cathedral of the World. Each reading brings me close to tears as it is one of the few texts I can use to nearly fully encapsulate my beliefs. The imagery of the cathedral: expansive, ancient, interdependent with each of us is powerful. One light shines through myriad windows. The cathedral is too vast to experience in our short time on earth.

I'd like to tell you a tiny story: As we've established, nobody is condemned. Hosea Ballou was one of the major forces of the Universalist movement and he the story is about him. He was an itinerant preacher and had gone to an inland town on a preaching engagement and was to stay with a woman who, incidentally and unbeknownst to him, believed that people can only be saved through good works. Arriving at the house on the Saturday, he found her mopping the kitchen floor. Looking up, she said: *You are Mr Ballou, I presume*. Yes madam, I am. *Well, Mr Ballou, they say you hold that all men will be saved. Can you really believe this doctrine?* Yes, ma'am. I really believe it. *Why sir! Do you really believe that all men are going to be saved just such creatures AS THEY ARE?* What is it that you have in your hand, he asked. *My mop*, she replied laughing. And what are you going to do with it? *I'm going to mop the floor, just as I do every Saturday*. Well, sister, I understand you. But let me ask, are you going to mop the floor just as it is? *Mop it just as it is?* Yes; you wished to know if I hold that all men will be saved just as they are. Do you intend to mop the floor just as it is? *Why*, she said, *I mop it to clean it up*. True, said Ballou. You do not require it to be made clean before you will consent to mop it up. God saves all to purify them; that's what salvation is designed for. God doesn't require men to be pure in order that he may save them.

(continued on opposite page)

An Old Universalism for a New World - Sermon by Tristan Jovanović (continued)

Now, we may no longer talk as much of salvation or theism. But we do hold this value: we affirm the inherent worth of every human being. At the beginning of the story, we learn that the woman believed that it was through good works that one came to heaven. Ballou demonstrates otherwise. So then, why do good? We do good to be happy now. Hosea Ballou uses the word 'happify' to describe doing good because it provides such a long lasting happiness in our lives—not only our own, but for those to whom the good is done. My latent Protestantism tells me 'faith not works' — maybe that should be rephrased to 'not faith in works'. To quote an old Baptist, *'When I do good, I feel good. When I do bad, I feel bad. That's my religion.'*

One of the heroes of 21st century progressive theology, Scotty McLennan, the UU Dean of Religious Life at Stanford, tells of his life in the cathedral. He too went through various throes of spirituality and ended up in India during a university summer break when an undergraduate, where he decided that he should become a Hindu. The priest with whom he was staying, refused him. 'You are American and a Christian,' he said, 'you know a lot about being a Christian. Go and be the best Christian you can be.' Scotty objected in a way that many of us would: but I don't believe in what the rest of Christianity tells me I should. The priest told him to be an inclusive, loving, open hearted, joyful Christian. That's how he discovered UU.

But, as I am sure we all agree, there are many, countless, hundreds of paths to God. Those that are long lasting and affirm the good cannot be anything but valid. Scotty McLennan's Hindu priest counselled Universalism to help him be a Christian. Considering the weight Unitarianism places on embracing world religions, many run a mile at the mention of Jesus or anything to do with Christianity. But, embracing Universalism doesn't mean we become Christians. We can be humanists (or anything else for that matter). What does this mean? It means we're humanists. It means that we don't believe in virgin births or bodily resurrections or the trinity (we're Unitarians).



It means also that we believe in Jesus's message. It means that as fascinated as we are by Lao Tzu or the Gautama Buddha, we think Jesus is just as fascinating. And because of our culture, he may even have a special place in our hearts.

So what about spirituality? Mark Twain quips that we should leave our dogs when we get to the gates. Heaven works by favour. If it went by merit, we would stay out and our dogs would go in. Universalism is kinder in this regard. It offers to augment our heady spirituality, which we just could not function without. It reminds us that there is a power greater than we are on which we are totally dependent, every moment of our lives. It tells you that you are ok — not just ok, but beautiful, perfect — just the way you are. It tells us that humanity is a community of moral equals and we are inextricably bound together.

My spiritual companions, I end with an amended statement of what Universalism claims to be, adapted for young people — although I think it works just as well for us old people — by Rev Dr Elizabeth Strong: *"I believe: God is love. Jesus is a teacher and a friend. In the goodness of people. There is truth I know and more I will know. Service is required of me to live my faith. In the end, all will be well."*

Indeed, all will be well. You are loved. Go and do the same. Amen.



"A person who has humility, a humble person, is generally regarded as unpretentious and modest, someone quiet, self-effacing, understated, someone who doesn't think or act like he or she is better or more important than others.

Each religion has extended and refined the concept of humility, expressing it in a way that fit that religion's theology. For example, it has been observed that for Judaism, humility is more than just a virtue: it is a form of perception, a language in which the "I" is silent so that I can hear the "Thou" of the other. Jesus said "Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" and in Christianity, humility became the first virtue because it removes the obstacles to faith.

A humble person's self-esteem is an accurate, not over-estimated, not-underestimated view of his or her abilities and worthiness. One can stand one's ground when challenged, cope with failures, and not be overly proud of one's successes."

UU Minister, Rev. Barbara F. Meyers

New Essex Church History Leaflet



A new leaflet, written by Howard Hague, is now available. It tells the story of our congregation, and the various sites and buildings it has occupied, since it was founded back in 1774. This leaflet may be of particular interest to newer members of the congregation who are not familiar with the history of Essex Church. Please do pick up a copy from the rack in the church foyer.

If you want to find out more about our history then you might like to download "Essex Church in Kensington, 1887-1987" by Raymond Williams which is available for free from the 'Library and Publications' section of our website.



may my heart always be open to little
birds who are the secrets of living
whatever they sing is better than to know
and if men should not hear them men are old

may my mind stroll about hungry
and fearless and thirsty and supple
and even if it's sunday may i be wrong
for whenever men are right they are not young

and may myself do nothing usefully
and love yourself so more than truly
there's never been quite such a fool who could fail
pulling all the sky over him with one smile

e.e. cummings

Sunday Services at Essex Church



6th March, 11am – "Tobias, Sarah and the Entirely Unnecessary Dog"

Service led by Caroline Blair

The first service in March will be led by the chairperson of our congregation, Caroline Blair, who says: "Sometimes, out of the bleakest times in history, we have been given works of beauty, tenderness and humour. In today's service we will look at one of these."

13th March, 11am – "Strong Women, Unitarian Women"

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

When most Victorian families encouraged their daughters to be quiet and taught them to sew, many Unitarian parents ensured that their daughters got a sound education. And the result? Strong Unitarian women. This service will introduce you to some of them.

12.15pm - **Small-Group Communion**,
led by Jane Blackall (lasting ~30 minutes)

20th March, 11am – "Stephen Hawking's Universe"

Service led by Sarah Tinker and Howard Hague

Stephen Hawking's latest book *The Grand Design* was published last autumn. It soon produced headlines such as 'God did not create Universe' and 'Creation makes sense without God'. Don't newspapers just love the old-fashioned view of the Almighty? In today's service we will be considering some of the ultimate questions posed by the author about the nature of the universe. Why are we here? Why is there something rather than nothing? When and how did the universe begin?

27th March, 11am – "A Spring Celebration"

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Come and join us for an exploration through words and music on this theme of spring and its spiritual messages for us all. Let Sarah know in advance if you would like to take an active part in the service or have a favourite reading to suggest.