



# Kensington Unitarians

Newsletter: May 2011

## What's On in May:

Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> May, 11am

### 'Sabbath'

Service led by Jane Blackall

Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> May, 7-9pm

### Tibetan Buddhism

on Film (1/3): 'Kundun'

Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> May, 11am

### 'Care and Compassion'

Service led by Rev. Sarah

Tinker and Rev. David Usher

Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> May, 12.30pm

### Small-Group Communion

Led by John Hands & Sarah Tinker

Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> May, 2-3.00pm

### Nia Dance with Sonya Leite

Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> May, 5.00pm

### Charity Concert - Tsunami Relief

Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> May, 7-9pm

### Tibetan Buddhism on Film (2/3):

'The Lost World of Tibet'

Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> May, 11am

### 'Kindred Pilgrim Souls'

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> May, 12.30pm

### Essex Church AGM

Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> May, 7-9pm

### Creativity Group:

'Bring Your Own Crafts'

Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> May, 7-9pm

### Tibetan Buddhism on Film (3/3):

'A Year in Tibet'

Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> May, 11am

### 'Michael Servetus,

A Voice of Tolerance'

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> May, 12.30pm

### 'Finding Your Voice'

Singing Workshop

Led by Margaret Marshall

Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> May, 7-9pm

### Reading Group: 'Some

Tame Gazelle' by Barbara Pym

Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> May, 11am

### 'Life Goes On... and On... and On'

Service led by Jo Ridgers

## A Message from our Minister:

### Thank Heavens for Volunteers

May is the month in which we hold our Annual General Meeting here at Essex Church. AGMs are probably not high on anyone's list of fun things to do and I wonder if many would be held or attended if they were not required by law. As a charity we must hold such a meeting and write an Annual Report so that our activities and finances are open and transparent. Each year in our accounts is a statement which reminds us that *"the significant volume of voluntary contribution to the life of the Church by members of the congregation is not quantified in these accounts"*.



The amount of voluntary work carried out by congregation members in a church or indeed in any voluntary setting is not just beyond the calculation of its financial worth. Metaphors like the weaving in a tapestry or the glue and paper that make a collage come to mind. When someone serves the coffee or does the washing up after a service, when someone turns up to a committee meeting or takes a position of responsibility, when someone offers to choose a reading or to sweep the garden, they are contributing more than that one simple action. Along with others who are performing similar tasks they are helping to create and re-create the very fabric of our community, which could not exist without them. Kensington Unitarians are lucky in being able to afford three paid members of staff yet still we need our many willing volunteers. And it's always rather lovely to notice when someone quite new finds a way to get stuck in; perhaps asking that tentative first question, "Do you need some help?" and through that becoming more closely involved. I sometimes joke with people that it's a good idea not to reveal your particular skills in a church because before long you will be asked to use them. But the truth is that getting involved tends to be life enhancing and it can take you in ways you might never have predicted. I wonder what your story might be? Has volunteering helped you develop new skills or interests? Do you like to feel you're putting something back into life?

Yes, there are endless tasks to do here, as in any organisation, and some of them are tedious and repetitive or at times quite onerous. But my hope is that this community never loses its sense of a larger vision about the value of liberal religious communities in the 21st century.

*"If you want to build a ship, don't drum to the women and men to gather wood, divide the work, and give orders. Instead, teach them to yearn for the vast and endless sea." Antoine De Saint-Exupery, The Wisdom of the Sands*

May Essex Church always be a place in which people can explore their deeper yearnings as well as developing skills in making cups of tea. Do make a note of our AGM date in your diary and perhaps have a think about the ways you'd like to get more involved in the year ahead.

Rev. Sarah Tinker

## In this month's newsletter...

\* Highlights of the Unitarian General Assembly Annual Meetings in Swansea \* Our New Book 'Kindred Pilgrim Souls' Now on Sale \* Charity Concert for Japan \* 'Tibetan Buddhism on Film' Course \* 'Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life' \* Reading Group: 'Some Tame Gazelle' by Barbara Pym \* Poems by John Hands \* 'Who We Really Are' Sermon by Rev. Sarah Tinker \* 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.



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"The role of religion should be to open our eyes, to reconcile us in love, to help us overcome our fears and to embrace life in all its beauty, misery and hope. I believe we discover beauty as well as meaning in our lives when we commit ourselves to keep our hearts open to truth and love as far as we are able, whether difficult or easy, joyful or sad. To follow that commitment means we must not deny our potential, including our potential to affect the lives of other people and living beings. It also means we must not deny that we have limitations, and that we always have room to grow – that we are imperfect and incomplete and can never possess morality or truth with total certainty.

We do not lose our beauty when we make mistakes, when we are injured or disabled, when we discover we are different from what we or someone else expected, or when we fail at something we have tried. If we simply hate or try to deny these realities, they become ugly, but if we accept them, seeking to learn and grow in compassion and wisdom as a result, they become part of the beauty of our lives. When we integrate our lives in this way, we also become more patient with the imperfections of others and more able to extend our love even to those who may not know how to receive it."

Unitarian Universalist, Rev. Nathan Woodliff-Stanley

A Date for Your Diary:

## 'The Merry Widow'

Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> May at 7.30pm  
at the Questors Theatre, Ealing

Our very own Harold Lorenzelli has a part in the operetta 'The Merry Widow' by Franz Lehár and so we're arranging a trip to see it. Performance dates are May 12<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> at the Questors Theatre in Ealing. We plan to buy tickets for the performance on Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> May at 7.30 – so do let us know as soon as possible if you would like us to buy a ticket for you.

Rev. Sarah Tinker

## Volunteering Rotas: Stewarding, Coffee and Greeting



### Stewarding:

1 <sup>st</sup> May:	Christine Joshi
8 <sup>th</sup> May:	Alice Lambert
15 <sup>th</sup> May:	Natasha Drennan
22 <sup>nd</sup> May:	Gina Bayley
29 <sup>th</sup> May:	Will Lyons

### Coffee:

1 <sup>st</sup> May:	Margaret Darling
8 <sup>th</sup> May:	Kate Brown
15 <sup>th</sup> May:	John Hands
22 <sup>nd</sup> May:	?????
29 <sup>th</sup> May:	Caroline Blair

### Greeting:

1 <sup>st</sup> May:	Gina Bayley
8 <sup>th</sup> May:	Jo Ridgers
15 <sup>th</sup> May:	Susan Smith
22 <sup>nd</sup> May:	Arthur Krebbers
29 <sup>th</sup> May:	?????

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](mailto:rotas@kensington-unitarians.org.uk)



"Working in our gardens, we discover enduring principles of growth and renewal. A compost pile turns leaves, grass clippings, and kitchen waste into rich new soil. The same principle holds true for our inner lives.

Composting is part of the natural cycle in which nothing is wasted. Apple parings, ends of vegetables, onion skins, tips of green beans, last week's leftovers, vegetables that have gone bad in the refrigerator — all go into the compost bin. No apologies. Whatever they are, wherever they come from, they're part of a larger process of transformation, turning remnants of the past into better tomorrows. In an examined life everything is compost. Cherished memories empower us and enrich our lives. But so can our mistakes, old habits we'd like to break, patterns we've outgrown. Instead of dwelling on a negative experience, we can compost it. Becoming more mindful, asking, "What can I learn from this?" and then moving on can turn any negative experience into a new cycle of wisdom and growth."

**Diane Dreher**

## Essex Church Creativity Group 'Bring Your Own Crafts'

Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> May 2011, 7.00-9.00pm



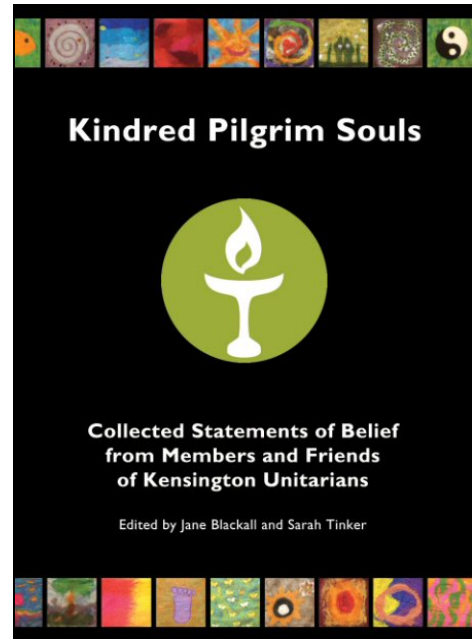
We have been experimenting with a new format for the creativity group in early 2011 and so far it is going well.

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).



## 'Kindred Pilgrim Souls' Congregational Book On Sale



*A community of kindred pilgrim souls meets each week at Essex Church in Kensington, West London, to explore, reflect, converse, be still, share joys and sorrows, and support one another on life's journey. In this book, members and friends of this Unitarian congregation offer their varied perspectives on life, values, sources of meaning, and ultimate worth.*

*Text from the back cover of 'Kindred Pilgrim Souls'.*

Our new congregational book, 'Kindred Pilgrim Souls', was published in April and we are very proud of having put it together. The book contains contributions from over 30 members and friends of the congregation who have written essays about their personal beliefs and values. It is quite fascinating to see the ways in which we are similar in outlook and also the ways in which we are quite diverse.

The book is available for £5 from the church (please speak to Jane or Sarah to buy a copy or send a cheque made payable to 'Essex Church'). Why not buy one as a gift for a friend or family member? It is an excellent way of helping people to get a sense of what our Unitarian community is really like. Alternatively, for readers in far-flung places, it is possible to buy a print-on-demand copy directly from the publishers online at [www.lulu.com](http://www.lulu.com) (simply search for the title). Those who contributed essays are entitled to have a complimentary copy of the book so please speak to Jane or Sarah when you are next at church to collect your copy if you haven't already done so.

We took a big box of our books to the GA Annual Meetings too and (thanks to Sarah's amazing sales techniques) sold the lot to fellow Unitarians from up and down the land!

**Jane Blackall**

**LAST CHANCE TO BOOK!**

## **Hucklow Summer School**

**20<sup>th</sup>-27<sup>th</sup> 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 Corrigall, 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

**For more information and to download a booking form:**

[www.hucklowsummerschool.org.uk](http://www.hucklowsummerschool.org.uk)

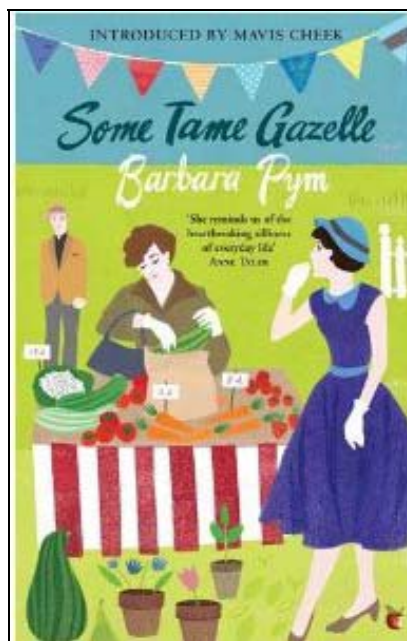
**BURSARIES ARE AVAILABLE TO HELP WITH THE COST.**

To find out more please speak to Caroline or Jane  
ASAP or telephone Mel Prideaux on 01924 781 020.

**Essex Church Reading Group**

## **'Some Tame Gazelle'**

**by Barbara Pym**



**Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> May 2011, 7.00-9.00pm**

The reading group's April session will be based on 'Some Tame Gazelle' by Barbara Pym. This title was chosen for us by Juliet Edwards.

Description from Amazon UK:

*"It was odd that Harriet should always have been so fond of curates. They were so immature and always made the same kind of conversation. Now the Archdeacon was altogether different ...' Together yet alone, the Misses Bede occupy the central crossroads of parish life. Harriet, plump, elegant and jolly, likes nothing better than to make a fuss of new curates, secure in the knowledge that elderly Italian Count Ricardo Bianco will propose to her yet again this year. Belinda, meanwhile has harboured sober feelings of devotion towards Archdeacon Hochleve for thirty years. Then into their quiet, comfortable lives comes a famous librarian, Nathaniel Mold, and a bishop from Africa, Theodore Grote - who each take to calling on the sisters for rather more unsettling reasons."*

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](http://www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk/book.html)

# Tibetan Buddhism on Film

Thursday evenings from 7 to 9pm in the library  
at Essex Church: May 5<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>



The 14th Dalai Lama, recently announced that he would be retiring as secular leader of Tibet. This has shocked some Tibetans, with their long held traditions, maintained despite the fact that their leader has lived in exile in India since 1959. In this short series of evenings we will watch 3 films about Tibet and in the later sessions there will be time for discussion of the issues they raise.

## Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> May: 'Kundun'

Directed by Martin Scorsese and with music by Philip Glass, 'Kundun' tells the story of the Dalai Lama's early life until his exile. It's beautifully filmed, with a meditative feel.

## Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> May: 'The Lost World of Tibet'

This is a BBC documentary based on footage found by the British Film Institute, filmed in Tibet in the 1940s and 50s. It gives a fascinating insight into a now lost way of life.

## Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> May: 'A Year in Tibet'

First shown by the BBC in 2008 this 4 part documentary series gave a remarkable picture of life in modern Tibet, centring on the monks in Gyantse Monastery, in Tibet's third largest town. The film we'll be watching charts the problems of a young monk, his mentor and the monastery's leader. For us who so often take our freedoms for granted, it's a sobering thought to consider that we would be arrested in Tibet if the Chinese authorities found a picture of the Dalai Lama in our possession.

Please let our minister know if you would like to attend these evenings. All are welcome.

# Small Group Communion



Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> May, 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:

8<sup>th</sup> May – John Hands and Sarah Tinker  
12<sup>th</sup> June – David Francis Darling  
10<sup>th</sup> July – Jane Blackall

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.



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

Second Sunday of the Month from 2-3pm:  
8<sup>th</sup> May, 12<sup>th</sup> June, 10<sup>th</sup> July  
(note: there will be no class in August)

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.**

# 'Cycle for Youth' Unitarian Bike Ride



**Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> June, 9am – 5pm  
London to Brighton**

On Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> June a small group of determined (or reckless?) young people and youth leaders will be cycling from London to Brighton – a journey of around 50 miles. These superfit sportspeople (er... well, that remains to be seen) will be taking on this challenge in order to raise funds for the Unitarian National Youth Programme. The more funds we can raise the easier it will be for us to keep our youth weekend charges low for all families and the more we can develop and widen our initiatives across the country.

We are encouraging people to sponsor the whole Cycle for Youth Team, rather than an individual - in order to highlight that this is a team event (like Team GB!). So far the Olympic-style outfit are Liz Hills, Annabel Kramer, Lori Winters, John Harley and others.

If you would like to sponsor the team let me know at [jharley@unitarian.org.uk](mailto:jharley@unitarian.org.uk) or contact any of the team. The starting line will be Croydon Unitarian Church at 9am and finishing point will be Brighton Pier (at around 5pm - God/greater power/inner power willing) with a rest along the way at Ditchling Old Meeting House.

If you are a young person aged 14 and above or a youth leader connected with the Youth Programme and you would like to cycle with us do let me know. Or if you would like to help on the day with marshalling, organising, first aid, refreshments etc do get into contact. Thanks for helping us to gear up for this event.

**John Harley – Unitarian GA Youth Coordinator**

# Warden's Column

What's Happening in Our Busy Building



We had someone round recently to quote for lots of small jobs: putting a hook on the kitchen wall so we can hang up the stepladder; fixing a security tether to the new keyboard; adding a thermostat to the toilet radiator. We also had an invoice for some small jobs done: fixing an extra hosereel in the back garden; putting up the new noticeboards and leaflet racks; staining the replacement skirting board in the library – it was quite a big bill for "small jobs" and yet... a few days ago I used that extra hosereel for the first time: you still have to go down to the side passage to turn the tap on, but then it's easy to water all the back-garden tubs without getting tangled up in great loops of hose-pipe or wrestling it up and down the stairs. I really enjoyed that watering session – just as well, because it's likely to be the first of many this summer. So hopefully, in a small way, that small job will continue to make our lives easier for many years to come.

Small jobs, especially ones I leave undone for a long time, tend to get me down, reminding me uncomfortably of my mortality: limitations of time, energy and knowledge; lack of foresight; the essential crumbling away of everything; but small jobs can be a reminder of mortality in other ways too: in the opportunities they represent for learning; improvement; helping each other.

To misquote a favourite teacher of mine "small jobs will always be with us" yet each small job completed is still a small cause for celebration.

**Jenny Moy**



The most important word in our language is yes.  
It matters what we say yes to.  
It matters what we say no to.  
Every no gets its value from the yes it also affirms.  
To say no to what denies and destroys is also to say yes to what affirms, builds, creates.  
God, said Nathan Söderblom, is the everlasting yes of existence.

**Jacob Trapp, Dawn to Dusk Meditations**

# District Quarterly Meeting

of Unitarians in London and the South East



**Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> June from 1pm  
at Meadrow Chapel, Godalming GU7 3JB**

The afternoon will start at 1pm with a 45-minute service led by Rev. Martin Whitell, minister of John Pounds Memorial Church in Portsmouth, and Convenor of the GA Executive Committee.

Following the service there will be an opportunity for people to get to know each other a little better and then an early tea at 2.30pm. Following this there will be a variety of activities for people to choose from including visiting Winkworth Arboretum, Loseley House, and a circular ramble.

## Winkworth Arboretum

Established in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this stunning natural landscape houses more than 1000 different shrubs and trees, many of them rare. Entrance £5.60 (free to National Trust members).

## Loseley House Gardens

Comparable with gardens considered national treasures, the Walled Garden covers 2.5 acres and is divided into 'rooms' each with its own unique planting scheme. Entrance £3.50.

## Guided Walk along the River Wey

The River Wey runs along the back of Meadrow Chapel and offers a delightful walk into the town less than two miles away. A chance to view narrowboats and learn of inland waterways.



*Nearest station is Farncombe (about 10 minutes walk).*

*Directions can be found on the Meadrow website:*

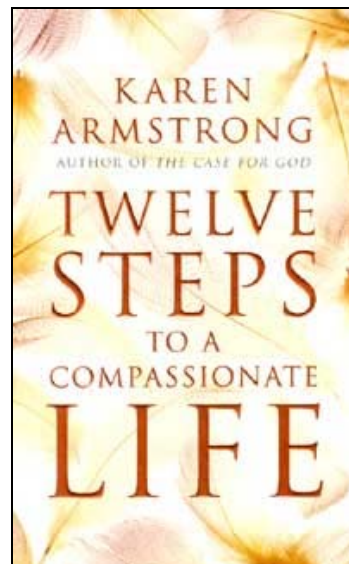
*[www.unitariangodalming.org.uk](http://www.unitariangodalming.org.uk)*

**London/SE District Website:** [www.ukunitarians.org.uk/pulse](http://www.ukunitarians.org.uk/pulse)

**New Adult RE Course for the Summer:**

# 'Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life'

**Thursday Evenings from 9<sup>th</sup> June, 7-9pm**



Based on Karen Armstrong's book, this course will help us to explore how to live more compassionately with ourselves, with others and with the world. The course will run weekly on six Thursday evenings, starting on June 9th at 7.00pm.

Participants will be given a copy of Karen Armstrong's book to study and places will be limited to 10 – so check your diaries and see if you would like to join us for this new course. Contact Sarah or Jane to sign up.

## The Charter for Compassion

The Charter for Compassion is a document that transcends religious, ideological and national difference. Supported by leading thinkers from many traditions, the Charter activates the Golden Rule around the world. It was a project initiated by Karen Armstrong in 2008. The book 'Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life' was written in response to requests for a step-by-step guide to help people put the charter's principles into practice.

At the 2011 meetings of the Unitarian General Assembly (GA) a resolution was passed to affirm the Charter for Compassion, to urge Unitarians everywhere to reflect on the Charter's humanitarian message and act in its spirit, and to resolve to become a partner organisation. This involves actively taking practical steps to promote the message of the Charter for Compassion. Groups such as the one we will be running here at Essex Church in June will help to spread the practice of compassion.

**You can read more at and affirm the charter at:**  
[www.charterforcompassion.org](http://www.charterforcompassion.org)

## 'Finding Our Voice'

Singing Workshops with Margaret Marshall

Sundays 22<sup>nd</sup> May, 19<sup>th</sup> June,  
17<sup>th</sup> July and 21<sup>st</sup> August - 12.30 to 1.15pm



Margaret Marshall has worked as a professional singer all her adult life and is also a very experienced singing teacher. 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.

"We are so busy in our daily lives, taking time for contemplation or rest can be challenging at best.

Thomas Jefferson suggested that human life and liberty were intimately entwined with the pursuit of happiness. Instead, life has become a maelstrom in which speed and accomplishment, consumption and productivity have become the most valued human commodities. We pause to restore a sense of balance and perspective. We rest to put our business in perspective. The Chinese characters for busy are: *heart* and *killing*. We pause to save our hearts and perhaps our very lives. Spiritual teachers from most traditions agree life should not just make us tired; it should be a source of happiness and contentment. Happiness and joy are the fruits of a well lived life. What I know is that joy only grows when we have time to notice and appreciate.

When we act from a place of rest and cultivated restoration, we are more capable of cultivating what the Buddhist call right understanding, right action, right effort and right relationship. Taking time each day provides time to listen to the deeper voices that speak to our essence."

Unitarian Universalist, Rev. Janne Eller-Isaacs

## Joint Day Conference: The Alister Hardy Society World Congress of Faiths

Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> June 2011 at Essex Church

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

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

### '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 Alister Hardy Religious Experience Centre

### 'From Contemplation to Compassion'

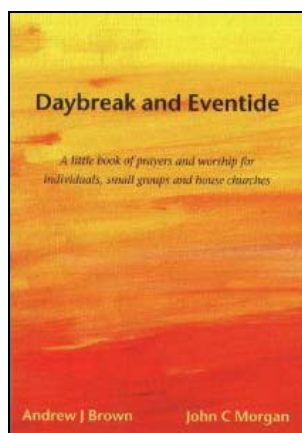
Eley McAinsh  
Director of the Living Spirituality Network.

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

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

## 'Daybreak and Eventide'

Unitarian Christian Prayer Book



The Unitarian Christian Association have kindly given us ten copies of their prayer book, 'Daybreak and Eventide' by Andrew Brown and John Morgan, to give away. Please speak to our minister, Rev. Sarah Tinker, if you would like to have one. First come, first served!



# Reflections on the Unitarian General Assembly (GA) Meetings: 15<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> April 2011 in Swansea

Every year our Unitarian General Assembly holds its Annual Meetings in a different venue around the country and this year we went to Swansea, where apparently the Meetings were last held back in 1965. The memories I've brought back this year include:

- Waking to the sound of seagulls and enjoying wonderfully fresh sea air.
- Being entertained by groups of Welsh children singing with such obvious pride and enthusiasm.
- Listening entranced to the sound of a Welsh harp.
- The pleasure of meeting up with people that I only get to see at these meetings.
- A meeting of the Penal Affairs Panel where a Senior Lecturer in law explained Human Rights legislation to us and told us to value the protection it offers.

I first attended the Annual Meetings in 1996 when they were held in Glasgow and I went as a delegate from Fulwood Old Chapel with my daughter Kelly, who was 11 and part of the Seniors youth group. I remember then feeling proud of the liberal religious movement that I'd discovered but somewhat mystified by the interminable business meetings with their discussions about how our movement is organised and governed. I felt much the same in Swansea this year! Maybe this is the nature of organisations. But it's the people who together create the organisation and it was a delight to meet up with old friends and make new ones. As always there was the chance to learn something new and this year I was surprised to discover Unitarians had been one of the founder groups of Christian Aid and we are also much involved in the Robin Hood Tax campaign.



The main meetings are preceded by a ministers' conference where this year we were trained in using the Internet and social media as tools for 'tomorrow's ministry'. Our trainer, Zan McColloch-Lussier was beamed in from Seattle via Skype and it was a remarkably effective way to hear from someone who has worked in depth with non-profit organisations helping them to introduce new technology into their range of tools. Thanks to Jane Blackall we are one of the few congregations that are podcasting parts of our services for people to access via the Internet and indeed I met people at the Meetings who are regular listeners to our services. But I do hope you don't all start staying in bed on Sunday mornings knowing you can catch up later – it's still good to see you at church!

**Sarah Tinker**

This year, as always, the best bit of GA is spending time with old Unitarian friends and having time to make new ones. The venue this year was the campus of Swansea University with an amazing view over Swansea bay. One of the joys of not being a delegate is that I could slip out occasionally and visit the beach and even manage a brief visit to Swansea city centre.

One of two highlights of the meetings for me was the John Relly Beard lecture given by Rev Eric Jones who reflected on 50 years of ministry in Wales through the prism of the idea of "circles" So often we stay in our own safe circle and fail to understand the viewpoints of others. We need to move out or perhaps expand our circle to include others' circles. For me that's one of the reasons I go to GA. The other highlight was the presentation given at the Penal Affairs forum by Dr Helen Quane, a lecturer in Human Rights Law at Swansea University. She helped clarify things reminding us that we shouldn't believe what we read in the tabloids. I was also interested to note that sometimes lurking under the veneer of Unitarian liberalism there is still a streak of conservatism and that while we might be liberal in the abstract we can react differently when it affects the particular and especially our nearest and dearest. For me the reason we need laws is that I know I will not always behave rationally and need some form of objectivity. For those who haven't attended GA I thoroughly recommend it!

**David Francis Darling**



## Annual Meetings: Swansea GA 2011

Well... there was endless food, singing to my heart's content, lovely walks on the sandy seashell beach and a weekend of glorious sunshine. Oh yes... and there was also the 'work' of course! I nearly forgot!

To be really honest I felt more than a little apprehensive about going because it all sounded a bit formal, dry and potentially hard work when I looked through the mound of papers in the post a couple of months ago. The first couple of hours were a bit challenging actually while I adjusted to being outside of my comfort zone in an unfamiliar place with a few hundred people I didn't know. My desire to hide in Jane, Caroline or Sarah's pockets was quite compelling at first but I resisted (thankfully for them!) and set about finding my way around. An hour or so of 'setting up camp' in my room (a student en-suite at Swansea/Abertawe University) helped enormously and immediate improvement followed with no more thoughts of taking up residence in small comfy and very restricted space.

The weekend began with a fire alarm which brought everyone out onto the lawn while the firemen checked the building, then a lecture by a man [*Rev. Eric Jones*] I wanted to kidnap to be my granddad, followed by the first set of 'Business' which I actually found very entertaining. Things were quickly looking up and by the end of the first evening I had started to enjoy myself. It was a lovely mix of business and pleasure in a very efficient but down-to-earth way. There are 'procedures' which make the whole business of making potentially difficult/controversial decisions safe and manageable. There's a voting system with green cards to indicate 'yea/nay' just like any other organisation and it's done with a lot of good humour. As an observer I wasn't entitled to a vote and that's as it should be! We ended the evening with a lovely display of the banners (like being on a CND march!) from congregations large and small (160+ to 3 or 4) all over the country as well as a bit of dancing interspersed with an excellent video of different people talking about why they volunteer... the theme of the meetings this year. It was truly inspiring and heart-warming, spanning the generations.

By the end of the day I felt a part of it all rather than apart from it and was in awe of how big the Organization/Movement is. Paradoxically, by the end of the weekend though, I could also see how small it is too compared with the USA where Unitarian Universalism is huge. An additional pleasure was of these meetings being held in Wales and having such a joyful, musical and warm bilingual experience. It was particularly heart-warming (and I shed a tear), to witness the formal inclusion of Bangor Unitarians, whose birth I have been honoured to witness since its conception nearly three years ago. What a lovely way to end a great weekend!

I started to come to this church 5 years ago. Gradually I began to take part, little by little, firstly helping with the washing up and then progressing to being a steward on Sunday morning as I became more comfortable. I attended a couple of Engagement Groups and the unfamiliar became an increasingly familiar and important part of my life. A few years later I went to Summer School at the Nightingale Centre, the Unitarian retreat centre in Great Hucklow in Derbyshire (ask about it!) and my tiny Unitarian world got much bigger with meeting people, young and old, from all over the country. My daughter lives in the USA so when visiting her I attended as many, and as often as possible, different Unitarian Universalist churches and experienced being in one congregation the size of the whole of Summer School and another the size of the GA meetings! It's BIG there! All of this has helped me to get a sense of the size of the movement worldwide. This recent GA experience was the next piece in my jigsaw. I had started with my need to find like-minded people to share my spiritual journey with and stumbled upon the Kensington Unitarians. Going to Summer School expanded that picture for me. I was invited to join the Kensington Unitarians Committee a couple of months ago and attended my first GA meetings this year. I'm becoming increasingly more involved and can see how this church fits into the bigger picture in the UK. My travels to the USA have widened that picture further still and I feel proud to be part of such a genuine organization that's so very practical, inclusive, humble and down-to-earth. It will be good to see it grow into meeting the spiritual needs of my grandchildren's generation and find that it has a louder voice.

I'm never going to be a big shot in this organization but I'm most grateful to the people who want to do that, who are willing to do all the nuts-and-bolts stuff of motions and procedures. That's not my cup of tea but I give thanks and support to and for those for whom it is because it is essential. I shall find my place in different ways I'm sure.

Jo Ridgers

# Annual Meetings: Swansea GA 2011

This year's general assembly focused on the role of volunteers, which is of course a major issue in an organisation where almost everything except actually taking the services is done by volunteers. Without volunteers there would be no church at all, in any sense of the word. The general assembly brings together those who volunteer on a grand scale – some people virtually work full time for the denomination, unpaid – and also on a small, local scale. It was the first time I have been to a Unitarian event in Wales, and there was a charming sense of being treated as guests, from the lovely music to the constant offers of Welsh cake.



There was also a quiet room. Imagine that you have offered to help at a big conference, someone asks you to set up a room where people can sit and chill out, and you are offered a very ordinary seminar room and a small budget to make it nice. What might you put in there? A nice tablecloth? Some flowers, a few candles perhaps, maybe a picture or two? The quiet room in Swansea was absolutely a labour of love. There were flowers everywhere – one table with purple, blue and silver flowers – lavender, eucalyptus, bluebells; another table with vibrant spring flowers; a collection of fresh herbs; a whole long table with just green plants, pebbles, lights and a Buddha. There was a sand tray to play with. There were tactile trays full of pine needles, stones and live grass. There were pictures on all the walls, angel cards scattered about, some gentle books and magazines, even a jigsaw. Having not touched a jigsaw for at least 20 years I became mesmerised by the process of doing this one, only regretting that there was so much sky, which looked so very difficult and uninteresting. Returning after an interval I found to my amazement that a lot of the sky had been done. I began to wonder if there was something magical about the room, so that whatever I wished for would be there next time, and wished that next time I came in a tiny but real unicorn might be cropping the grass. This did turn out to be a magical step too far.

The experience made me ponder my own approach to what I am asked to do. The words "Oh, it'll do" are almost my mantra; and by and large I think they are appropriate for day to day living. I believe in what I call my 'working best', which means 'the best that I can do by 5 o'clock on Tuesday'. But the quiet room was so above and beyond a 'working best', so generously and lovingly put together that it became the most moving part of the assembly. My mother in law used to use the expression 'keepy backs', as in 'he used to give me his wage packet with no keepy backs'. The quiet room at Swansea was an example of something given without any keepy backs, not a working best but just a best. It seems appropriate that from a function where the attention was on volunteering it is an act of volunteering that made the deepest impression on me.

**Caroline Blair**



# Annual Meetings: Swansea GA 2011

Generally, I am not a morning person, but twice during this year's GA I found myself at morning worship (which takes place at 7.30am before all the business of the day). My friend Sheena Gabriel, lay leader of the Godalming congregation, took the service on Saturday morning and I wanted to be supportive so went to bed early on the first night and braced myself for the early start. I'm so glad I made the effort! The service was being held in a not-especially-lovely lecture room but Sheena had clearly gone to great lengths to create a special atmosphere for



the service despite the constraints of the venue (including the rather frustrating restrictions on lighting candles – we were allowed just one real flame due to health and safety regulations and otherwise had to make do with battery-operated 'LED candles' – they're not bad at all these days and even flicker rather nicely... though of course I think we'd always rather have the real thing). The curtains were closed as we entered the room and a beautiful centrepiece (see the photo below) conjured up the night sky. The service was on the theme of moving from night into day and half-way through the curtains were thrown open. After the close of morning worship I was in a much better state of mind to face whatever the busy day of meetings had in store. I also made it to the Monday morning worship, led by Kate McKenna of Norwich Unitarians, and enjoyed that very much too. The title of that service was 'All Our Prayers' and the main part of the service was given over to a 'collaborative prayer'. Before the GA, Kate had asked her friends to write down brief one line prayers: wishes offered for themselves, or specific people, or the meetings, or the world. These prayers were written on little scrolls of paper, placed in a small bowl, and during the service people were invited to come up, take one of these written prayers, and say it aloud on behalf of all of us. I like to keep a low profile and was sitting in the back row, so chose not to go up and take a prayer myself, but I very much appreciated this activity. After the service, there were a few scrolls left, and Kate encouraged me to take one away with me. I was rather taken aback to find that the prayer, written by someone else entirely, consisted of a phrase that I say to myself most days. A special moment.

Another thing that started each day off on the right note was the splendid self-service breakfast on offer! It definitely helped my mood to have unfettered access to an generous array of food first thing in the morning. We were also very lucky with the weather and the location was fantastic – just a few minutes' walk from the beach – so I managed to get out in the sun at least briefly each day (although, unlike the ever-intrepid Caroline, I wasn't brave enough to paddle in the freezing water).

Towards the end of the meetings, I went to a brief but excellent session offered by the Unitarian Renewal Group, which featured three speakers tackling the theme: "Too much organisation, not enough God?" Bill Darlison, Sue Woolley and Maud Robinson spoke in turn on this subject. The question seemed rather loaded – perhaps almost everybody attending such a session would already agree with its premise? – so I was particularly glad that the session concluded with a balanced view from Maud. Her take on the question was that both the practical/organisational and the inspirational/spiritual are essential components of the life of the church. Yes, our core purpose is religious... and someone needs to be taking care of the roof and paying the bills. Not everybody is skilled at both – Maud herself cannot abide committee meetings and so has minimised her own involvement in such things, allowing others who are more willing and able to take care of practical matters, while she focuses on spiritual leadership – but we should be equally thankful for those who are called to be organisers and those who are spiritual leaders as both are necessary.

**Jane Blackall**



# Resolutions from the GA Annual Meetings

*During the annual meetings we discuss motions on issues of interest to Unitarians and delegates vote on them. Here are just two of the resolutions that were passed this year.*

That this General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches congratulates the Unitarian Universalist Association on its 50th anniversary as successor to the American Unitarian Association (1825) and the Universalist Church of America (1793).

That this General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches:

[1] applauds this statement about asylum seekers by Kate Wareing, Director, UK Poverty, Oxfam on February 4th, 2011: *"Thousands of people are being forced into destitution as a result of government policies. We must end the policies that lead to destitution, and are unacceptable in the sixth richest country in the world"*.

[2] recognises that such destitution affects tens of thousands of people currently resident in the United Kingdom;

[3] holds that the United Kingdom government should change policies which lead to destitution and should ensure a fair, efficient asylum system which protects the rights and dignity of all who use it.

[4] requests its Chief Officer to write to the Immigration Minister recommending that the United Kingdom government should:

[4a] provide destitute asylum seekers with support to meet essential living needs: either until they are returned to their country of origin or they are given permission to remain within the United Kingdom;

[4b] provide free access to healthcare for all asylum seekers while they are in the United Kingdom;

[4c] grant asylum seekers permission to work if their case has not been resolved within six months or they have been refused, but temporarily cannot be returned through no fault of their own;

[4d] improve decision making and ensure that all those in need of protection receive it.

[5] encourages Unitarian and Free Christian congregations and every individual Unitarian to write to their own MPs in furtherance of these proposals.



# Charity Concert: Japan Tsunami Earthquake Relief



**Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> May 2011 at 5pm  
Here at Essex Church**

This concert will be performed by internationally recognised classical musicians:

**Reiko Kimura - Piano  
Takane Funatsu - Violin  
Osamu Yano - Guitar  
Eriko Shimada - Soprano**

There will also be a sushi demonstration by Yasue Yamaji – a professional chef.

Admission is Free  
(suggested voluntary donation of £10 at the door)

**All donations will go to British Red Cross Tsunami Appeal for Japan.**



The massive earthquake and tsunami that struck Japan on 11<sup>th</sup> March caused widespread destruction and suffering. Almost 28,000 people have been reported dead or missing and tens of thousands are still living in evacuation centres. Since the disaster began, the Japanese Red Cross has been providing people in need with first aid and emergency healthcare, as well as distributing relief items. As the operation moves out of the relief and into the recovery phase, the Japanese Red Cross is helping to fit out 70,000 temporary homes with an appliance package consisting of key domestic items such as rice cookers, microwave and kettles. These items will benefit around 280,000 people in the three hardest hit prefectures of Miyagi, Fukushima and Iwate.

## Cowslips



Surely there are limits set to our designs: from these  
Silent, secret places you perceive how much  
We make in imitation of your world, and yet  
How much desecration. Your chandelier blossoms  
Emit more interpenetrating beams than garish neon:  
For I believe you watch us from afar, take stock  
Record our lack of progress when we think  
Ourselves most forward; this grass reports  
Our oppressive want of space, these trees  
Account for all of those we recklessly bring down, or leave  
To be consumed by unhinged nature; these birds inform of species  
We wantonly destroyed; and in the gorge below  
The river murmurs through its plastic flotsam that we  
Still mindlessly pollute the source of all our being.  
And somewhere, I feel, on flower-filled  
Fresh-forested, bird-jubilant planets these prescient messages  
Are stored, and sadly our accelerating countdown  
Moved for the attention of their mystic tribes.

John Hands

Annual Meeting of the British Chapter of

## The International Association of Religious Freedom

Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> May 2011 at 1.30pm  
Dr Williams's Library, London WC1H 0AR

The annual meeting of the British Chapter of the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF) will feature the Rev. Chris Hudson MBE, minister of All Souls Church, Belfast, and Chair of the Northern Irish Chapter of the IARF.

Dr. David Wykes will welcome us to Dr. Williams's Library, 14 Gordon Square, London, WC1H 0AR. Dr. Richard Boeke will introduce Rev. Hudson who will speak on "Reconciliation and Hope."

After a question session, a brief business meeting will include thanks to Peter Sampson, who is stepping down after many years as Secretary. Treasurer Jeff Teagle will give an update on the over £3000 donated to Tsunami victims in Japan. The Chapter will vote on endorsing the Charter for Compassion. An announcement will be made of the publication date of the new IARF book, 'Servetus, Our Contemporary', and Servetus Conferences this 500th Anniversary of his birth in 1511.

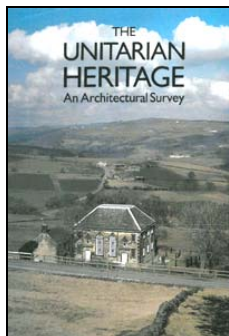
To become a member of the IARF, please send a cheque for £15 made payable to 'British Chapter IARF', c/o Jeff Teagle, Treasurer, 15 Lordsfield Gardens, Overton, Basingstoke, RG25 3EW.

## Famous Unitarian Women – Answers to Last Month's Quiz

*As promised, here are the answers to last month's quiz about the lives of famous Unitarian women... how many did you get right?*

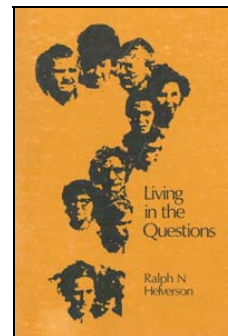
- |                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <b>A:</b> Anna Laetitia Barbauld | Wrote a hymn book for children that was in print for over a hundred years, educationalist.             |
| <b>B:</b> Margaret Barr          | Minister who worked for 32 years in the Khasi Hills of India, establishing education & health schemes. |
| <b>C:</b> Mary Carpenter         | Worked with deprived children and juvenile offenders in Bristol and women in India.                    |
| <b>D:</b> Frances Power Cobbe    | Pioneered animal welfare campaigning, writer and public speaker.                                       |
| <b>E:</b> Sophia Lyon Fahs       | Religious educator whose curricula and inspiration shaped mid 20 <sup>th</sup> century Unitarianism.   |
| <b>F:</b> Margaret Fuller        | Transcendentalist writer, educator, feminist, wrote #575 in grey hymn book.                            |
| <b>G:</b> Elizabeth Gaskell      | Author of a number of best-selling novels detailing social injustices in Victorian Britain.            |
| <b>H:</b> Harriet Martineau      | Writer and journalist, anti-slavery campaigner, member of famous Unitarian family from Norwich.        |
| <b>I:</b> Gertrude von Petzold   | First woman minister in England.   |
| <b>J:</b> Sylvia Plath           | American poet, novelist and short story writer.  |
| <b>K:</b> Beatrix Potter         | Famous Lake District writer and illustrator, came from a Unitarian family.                             |
| <b>L:</b> May Sarton             | Prolific American writer most famous for her journals.   |
| <b>M:</b> Anna Swanwick          | Writer, translator, feminist, helped establish Girton and Somerville colleges.                         |
| <b>N:</b> Kitty Wilkinson        | Established first public wash house in Liverpool; also schools.  |
| <b>O:</b> Mary Wollestonecraft   | Author of 'A Vindication of the Rights of Woman'.  |

# Unitarian Document Library – GA Online Resources



At the Unitarian annual meetings in April we heard about a number of recent improvements to the denomination's website which may be of interest to our readers. One particularly interesting development is the 'Unitarian Document Library' which (so far) contains electronic versions of 36 of out-of-print Unitarian books, transcripts of over 25 Essex Hall Lectures, 10 worship packs on a number of themes, along with all the current promotional leaflets. I was very impressed to hear of this new resource and am grateful to all those involved in scanning all the documents and putting it together. To access the Unitarian Document Library simply visit: [www.unitarian.org.uk/docs](http://www.unitarian.org.uk/docs)

Jane Blackall



## One Light Spiritual Gatherings

Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> May, 6.30-8.15pm  
Held at Essex Church



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

### 'Union of Soul & Destiny'

*Peaceful and joyous connection with the Divine, the healing presence at the heart of all – including beautiful devotional music in the Sikh and Indian tradition offered by Professor Surinder Singh, founder of the Raj Academy of Asian Music. His beautiful music seeks to unite soul and destiny through the eternal sound current "Nag" in order to elevate, heal, live happily and serve. In addition there will be meditation, eternal wisdom, inspiration and spiritual practice, from the essence of many spiritual traditions and none.*

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, family, children, 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'*

*A new initiative in the London District:*

## 'Rainbow' LGBTQI Unitarians in London and the South East



### Draft Calendar of Events, 2011

**Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> May:** Discussion Group: LGBTI lives and Spirituality – experiences and issues. Richmond and Putney Unitarian Church, 5pm. For travel and contact details, please see: <http://www.rpuc.org.uk/>.

**Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> June:** Formal Launch of Rainbow; service by Rev Ant Howe, New Unity Church, Islington, 4pm. For location details, see: <http://www.new-unity.org/>

**July:** No Meeting.

**Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> August:** Social Trip to Brighton. Meet Victoria Station or in Brighton itself; details TBC.

**Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> September:** Building a Welcome for LGBTI Unitarians. Meeting here at Essex Church.

**Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> October:** LGBTI social event and karaoke – New Unity Church, Islington, 5pm.

**Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> November:** Planning meeting: goals and objectives for 2012, Richmond Unitarian Church, 5pm.

**Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> December:** Yule service. New Unity Church, Islington, 5pm. Service leader: TBC.

## Spring Butterflies



A new painting by Heidi Ferid – 'Spring'  
panel from 'Four Seasons Butterflies'

You can see many more paintings from Heidi's recent  
series on butterflies at her website:  
[www.heidiferidart.co.uk](http://www.heidiferidart.co.uk)

Heidi will be holding an open studio in the summer  
so listen out for further details of this event  
which will be held in Vauxhall Street.

## World Congress of Faiths (WCF) Forthcoming Events

**WCF Annual Meeting**  
**Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> June at 5pm**  
London Interfaith Centre  
125 Salusbury Rd, London NW6 6RG

**WCF Youngusband Interfaith Service**  
**Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> July at 6.30pm**  
St Martin-in-the-Fields  
Trafalgar Square, London WC2N 4JJ  
If you wish to attend please send  
an e-mail to [stmartin@worldfaiths.org](mailto:stmartin@worldfaiths.org)

**WCF Interfaith Celebration of Animals**  
**Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> September at 3.00pm**  
Golders Green Unitarian Church  
31 ½ Hoop Lane, London NW11 8BS

## Spring Fiesta

How they love them!

The fireworks in the city square  
Strung together like prancing robots  
Made for one demented moment of guttural  
Defiance, of convulsive exhortation  
To overcome our passivity, our sensitivity  
Shrieking fearfully inside us.

And then there's  
The hysterical bringing-forth of the totemic Saviour  
Followed by his impassive, nodding mother  
Dressed in exquisite Spanish lace like a giant  
Doll in a tourist shop-window. Clutching small squares  
Of flimsy cloth like tea-bags or tampons the women  
Adoringly stretch up to wipe  
The Saviour's ivory coloured plaster limbs, as  
Again and again roaring like parade-ground sergeants  
Arms flung histrionically across their chests the male officiate's  
"Viva el Señor!" prompts an ecstatic largely feminine response:  
"Viva! Viva! Viva!"

Outside  
The impassive Guardia Civil wait. But impressively grey-green  
Military cadets festooned with blood-red braid and  
Girt with gleaming ammunition belts strut like  
Turkey cocks, tossing their guns into the air like miniature cabers  
Stamp, drill, salute, march  
Swinging their arms like demented robots: all space between  
All personality vigorously suppressed. Their girls in uniform  
Trailing behind them emulate it all  
As best they can.

"Viva! Viva! Viva el Señor!"

With more drums banging, more brass trumpets  
Horns and bugles braying, more  
Fireworks, more processing, more ecstatic  
Proclamations the blessed idols  
Parade through each major street till  
Well past midnight

How we adore them.  
The flags, the fireworks, the ecstatic proclamations  
Substitute for conflict, and in themselves conflict.  
Robust affirmation, affirmation that noble We are present.  
In the tribe, in the Province, in the Nation  
Demanding your unreserved, unqualified response:

Vive el Señor!

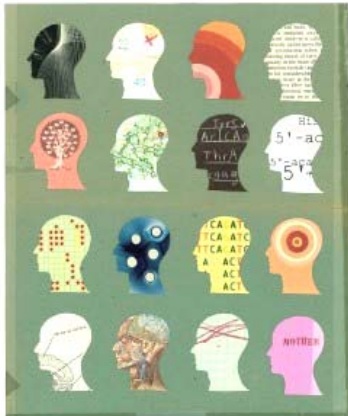
An idol, a statue, presidential features  
Pouting from a glistening screen, flanked  
With flags and flowers, how we adore  
And wistfully massage his beaming image;  
Then dutifully, furtively, late at night return him  
To the depths of our gloomy, repressed  
Seldom-visited Unconscious.

**Orgiva: El Dia del Señor, March 2005.**  
**John Hands**



An event organised by Kensington and Chelsea Mind  
which will be held at Essex Church this May:

## 'Mental Health: A Primary Concern'



*This event is an example of the increasing number of lettings we are getting from local community groups who value using our building. The day is open to anyone affected by mental health issues and offers a wide range of interesting sessions.*

Twice yearly a partnership of service users and providers organise and deliver a 'Borough Wide' event. The 'Borough Wide' event particularly welcomes users of mental health services in Kensington and Chelsea. It provides an opportunity for people to hear from commissioners and providers of services about current and planned developments. Importantly, the event provides an opportunity for service providers and decision makers to hear from people about their concerns and hopes for service development. This all-day event grows in popularity with each occurrence because of the breadth of information available, the interchange of views and ideas and the top quality of food and entertainment. On May 4<sup>th</sup> the event will take place at Essex Unitarian Church in Notting Hill. The theme for the day is 'Mental Health: A Primary Concern'. We are lining up a number of interesting speakers and workshops to raise awareness of services and promoting ease of access. More information, including the event programme, will be published shortly.

Dr Fiona Butler, the GP Mental Health Lead for Kensington and Chelsea will speak on developments around mental health and primary care. There will be workshops on: How to help ensure a good night's sleep, and Tips for recovery.

Kensington & Chelsea Mind Service User Network  
Office 8, 7 Thorpe Close, London, W10 5XL  
Telephone 020 8964 1333 extension 8  
Website: [www.kcmind.org.uk](http://www.kcmind.org.uk)

## Multifaith Calendar

### ☀ 1<sup>st</sup> May – Beltane – Pagan/Wiccan

Beltane is a Celtic word which means 'fires of Bel' (Bel was a Celtic deity). It is a fire festival that celebrates of the coming of summer and the fertility of the coming year. Fire is still the most important element of most Beltane celebrations and there are many traditions associated with it. It is seen to have purifying qualities which cleanse and revitalise. People leap over the Beltane fire to bring good fortune, fertility (of mind, body and spirit) and happiness through the coming year.

### ★ 2<sup>nd</sup> May – Yom Hashoah (Holocaust Day) – Jewish

Jewish people remember the six million Jews, including one and a half million children who were victims of the Nazi holocaust. Memorial candles are lit and people attend special services.

### ✝ 15<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> May – Christian Aid Week – Christian

Many churches devote this week to fund raising for Christian Aid, often through house to house collections. Christian Aid works in nearly 60 countries helping people, regardless of religion or race, to improve their own lives and tackle the causes of poverty and injustice.

### ✿ 17<sup>th</sup> May – Wesak / Vesakha Puja / Buddha Day – Buddhist

Buddhists celebrate Wesak, or Vaisakha Puja, or Buddha Day, according to their tradition. This is the biggest of the Buddhist festivals, with lay people coming together at monasteries. Houses are decorated with lanterns and garlands, and temples are ringed with oil lamps. Theravadin Buddhists celebrate the life of Gotama Buddha on Wesak: his birth, enlightenment under the Bodhi Tree in Bodh Gaya, and his final passing away.

### ★ 22<sup>nd</sup> May – Lag B'Omer – Jewish

The Omer lasting from Pesach to Shavuot, is a period of 49 days of sadness in the Jewish calendar. On the 33rd day, Lag B'Omer, there is a break in the days of mourning with a festival in memory of the end of a plague in Roman times. This is also the one day in the Omer when weddings are allowed to take place.

### ✿ 23<sup>rd</sup> May – Anniversary of the Declaration of the Báb – Bahá'í

The Báb was the co-founder of the Bahá'í faith. Having first declared his mission in Persia in 1844, he heralded the arrival of Bahá'u'lláh and inaugurated the Bahá'í calendar which is numbered from the year of this declaration.

### ✿ 26<sup>th</sup> May – Zartusht-no-diso – Zoroastrian

A commemoration of the death of the prophet Zarathustra when special prayers are recited and the fire temple visited. Services focus on Zarathustra and the Fravashis - spirits of the dead.

### ✿ 29<sup>th</sup> May – Anniversary of the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh – Bahá'í

This day commemorates the death of Bahá'u'lláh in 1892, at Bahji, near Acre, in northern Israel. Bahá'u'lláh's Shrine there is the holiest place on earth for Bahá'ís, and the place which they turn towards in prayer each day.

# 'Who We Really Are'

Sermon by Rev. Sarah Tinker - 3rd April 2011

There is a story that you may know – it's from the Jewish Hassidic tradition and it tells of the great Hassidic master Zusya. When rabbi Zusya knew that his time on earth was drawing to a close, his disciples gathered around him, still eager to hear his words of wisdom. One of them asked him if there was anything that he feared about dying.

*"I am most afraid of what they will ask me when I get to heaven," the great master replied.*

*"Why? What will they ask you?" the eager disciples asked.*

*"Well ... they will not ask me 'Zusya – why were you not like Moses? They will ask me Zusya why were you not Zusya'."*

And in that simple tale is summed up one of the great messages of human life – the injunction to find and understand and express oneself as the unique individual that each one of us is. It was there carved on the lintel above the Temple of Apollo – one of the Delphic Oracle's most famous sayings – 'Know Thyself'. It's there in a different form on the front of your order of service sheet in the quotation from Osho, otherwise known as Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh – a flawed but at times hugely wise figure in the personal growth movement of the 70s.

*"One has to be oneself: that's my basic message. The moment you accept yourself as you are, all burdens, all mountainous burdens, simply disappear. Then life is a sheer joy, a festival of light."*

Danish philosopher Soren Kirkegaard wrote of the purpose of life as *"to be that self which one truly is"*.

But perhaps before delving further into this topic we need to attach a note, a reminder, that this kind of exploration, and development, of the self is a primarily western and primarily modern pursuit. It may seem to us to be the correct path to take but through much of human history, and for much of the world today, an over-emphasis on the self, on the individual, would be seen as potentially harmful to the well being of the group – be that a family, a tribe, a community, a nation. It's sometimes too easy for me to forget that there are many ways to live a human life and that pursuing an individual path of self exploration is not necessarily the best for everyone.

And the path of self exploration is in any case far from a straightforward path. Many years ago I took part in what was called 'an enlightenment intensive'. The whole process was supposed to take three days but I did the one day version and that felt quite enough of an achievement. For that day we sat opposite a partner and for half an hour at a time, taking it in turns, we asked each other – *"tell me who you are"*. You might want to ask yourself that now – who am I?



*(Several people had been asked in advance to think of the descriptions they might give of themselves – singer, parent, partner, retired, treasurer, actual name etc etc. which they then shouted out.)*

As the day went on we exhausted all the roles that human beings can identify themselves as – sons and daughters, partners, parents, friends and colleagues, Unitarians, work roles – teachers, librarians, carers, musicians perhaps, .. then you move on to characteristics – good and bad – kind, mean, judging, calculating, irritable, for example.

If you keep going with this question long enough – it brings up strong feelings – people laughed and cried, became frightened or angry. But eventually all of this falls away and you're left with... well, nothing. But the kind of nothing that is everything, in that mystical kind of paradox that often seems to emerge on the spiritual path. It's almost as if the more we search for something the more it slips away from us – especially if that which we seek is the self that is doing the searching.

Remember these enigmatic words Jesus spoke to his disciples, as recorded in Matthew's Gospel: *"He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it"* — Matthew 10:39.

In most religious traditions there is a concept of a self that exists beyond the trappings of our individualism – an enduring eternal self, rather like the self we explored earlier on in the meditation based on Roberto Assagioli's work from Psychosynthesis. This concept is well put I think in these words by Alan Watts – a western Zen Buddhist writer:

*"Show me your original face which you had before your father and mother conceived you. Show me – in other words – your genuine, deepest self, not the self which depends on family and conditioning, on learning or experience, or any kind of artifice."*

'Show me your original face' – such a beautiful message of acceptance of who we truly are when all the stuff of life is peeled away and reveals our deepest nature.

## 'Who We Really Are - Sermon by Rev. Sarah Tinker (continued)

In our world today, 'who we are' has an almost obsessive importance – as anyone who has tried to open a bank account or get a passport can tell us. One of the fastest growing forms of insurance is that which has been designed to protect us from identity theft. Our governments are forever trying to find new ways to identify those who have a right to be in a particular place and those who do not. Data bases the world over have many techniques designed to verify just who we are. Clerks ask us special questions - the answers to which only we should know – our mother's maiden name, the name of our first pet or first school. How strange we humans sometimes seem. But perhaps such concerns about identity are as old as the hills. There is a lovely story about the Sufi holy fool Mulla Nasrudin – which I'm telling here in a modern version written by Peter Hawkins.

It's said that Mulla Nasrudin went into a bank that he did not usually frequent and asked to withdraw a large sum of money from his account. The bank clerk was naturally a bit suspicious and asked him politely. "Do you have any means of identifying yourself?"

Nasrudin reached down into the pockets of his long cloak and found an ornate hand mirror. He held the mirror up and looked studiously into it and then exclaimed to the bank clerk, "Yes that's me alright".

Nasrudin is playing with the idea that when it comes to our identity – ultimately it is we who decide who we are. Jo read earlier on that very interesting piece by Carl Rogers in which he suggested that transferring ideas from psychotherapy into foreign affairs might bring some refreshing honesty to diplomatic talks.

In the same chapter Rogers lists some of the changes that he has noted in his clients over the years – when they have been allowed and encouraged to explore their true selves.

- He writes of people moving away from facades and false fronts in their identity
- Of moving away from 'shoulds' and 'oughts' in life
- Away from always needing to meet the expectations of others and away from needing to please others
- Moving instead towards self-direction, towards an acceptance of life as an-going process in which little or nothing is fixed or static, of moving towards an acceptance of complexity in human emotions and thoughts, having an openness to new experiences, a greater acceptance of others and a greater trust in oneself.

I think I might add to his list that the more we explore the question of who we are, the more it may become apparent to us that we make much, if not all, of this up, that our lives are constructed through stories, the stories others tell of us and the stories we tell of ourselves.

Which of us does not have at least one label from childhood that sticks to us to this day – for good or ill. You know the kinds of family stories – we might be the clever one or the sickly one, or the messy one or the entertaining one.

We learn this habit of story telling about ourselves and others early on and we continue the habit throughout life. But they are just stories that we choose, either consciously or unconsciously to live into. And one of the fascinating things about us is our ability to become someone different – perhaps by going on holiday or by finding a new interest or a new friend or a new job. Our identities then feel far less fixed. We can gain new perspectives and consider ourselves in a different light. By loosening our hold on our fixed identity we can start to expand into the creatures of infinite potential that we truly are.

Once again the Mulla Nasrudin might be able to show us the way. For there was a day when he was so very hungry and he found himself walking past the palace. Peering inside he saw that there was a great wedding feast going on, held in honour of the son Prince William and his wife Katherine. Nasrudin was so hungry that he slipped into the banqueting hall and found an empty place – not realising at first that he was in fact sitting next to the Queen herself. She politely turned to the Mulla and asked him who he was.

*"Are you a foreign diplomat?" she enquired.*

*"No," he replied. "I rank above a diplomat."*

*"Are you a leader of a country?"*

*"No, I rank above a leader of a country."*

*"Do you run the United Nations?" the by now confused queen asked.*

*"No, I am above the secretary general of the United Nations," Nasrudin calmly replied.*

*"Then you must be God," the queen replied with perhaps a tinge of sarcasm now in her voice.*

*"No," said Nasrudin, "I am above that".*

*"There is nothing above God!" shouted the queen, now thoroughly rattled.*

Nasrudin replied – *"Now you know who I am. That 'nothing' is me".*

And with that the queen and Nasrudin settled back to enjoy the wedding feast and we can perhaps settle back into the comfortable realisation that answering the question of who we are is at least the work of a life time. Amen.

# Membership Service and Essex Church AGM

Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> May 2011



On May 15<sup>th</sup>, we will be holding a special Membership Service to celebrate all our church members and to welcome those who have joined us in the last year.

We will also be taking the opportunity to celebrate the recent publication of our congregational book, 'Kindred Pilgrim Souls' with readings from some of the contributors.

The service will be followed by our congregational Annual General Meeting, required by charity law. This is a brief but worthwhile meeting and gives everyone a chance to find out more about how we run our congregation. We do encourage members to put the date in your diaries and plan to be with us on May 15<sup>th</sup> if you possibly can.

Our Annual Report will be sent to members and friends in advance of the meeting. If you have any questions for the church treasurer, Juliet Edwards, we would appreciate it if you could let her have them in advance.

## Management Committee: Call for Nominations

Church management committee elections take place at our AGM each year. If you think you might like to put your name forward to stand for election please speak to Sarah, Jane, or a member of the management committee (see the photoboard in the foyer to identify current committee members) and find out more about what is involved.

Jane Blackall

## June Newsletter Deadline



The deadline for submitting items for the next issue is **Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> May**. Please send items (such as poems, quotes, articles, notices, rotas, etc...) to Jane Blackall or a committee member before that date.

Thank you!!!

# Sunday Services at Essex Church

1<sup>st</sup> May, 11am – “Sabbath”

Service led by Jane Blackall

*“In today’s world, with its relentless emphasis on success and productivity, we have lost the necessary rhythm of life, the balance between work and rest. Constantly striving, we feel exhausted and deprived in the midst of great abundance”* – words from ‘Sabbath’ by Wayne Muller. In this service we will be looking at the tradition of Sabbath and considering how we can bring this principle of sacred rest into our own lives today.

8<sup>th</sup> May, 11am – “Care and Compassion”

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker  
and Rev. David Usher

We’d all agree that care and compassion are ‘good things’ but it is not always easy to change our habitual ways of being and be truly compassionate to ourselves, others and our wider world. We are glad to welcome David Usher, District Minister, to this service.

12.30pm - **Small-Group Communion**,  
led by Sarah Tinker and John Hands (lasting ~30 minutes)

15<sup>th</sup> May, 11am –  
“Kindred Pilgrim Souls”

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

In this service we shall be celebrating the members and friends who are this community of Kensington Unitarians and hearing some of them reading their contributions to our new book. The service will be followed by our AGM, to which everyone is invited.

22<sup>nd</sup> May, 11am – “Michael Servetus,  
A Voice of Tolerance”

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

This year marks the 500th anniversary of the birth of Michael Servetus, the Spanish theologian who was burnt at the stake for heresy in Geneva in 1553. His writings on the Divine Unity, the humanity of Jesus and the importance of religious tolerance are often regarded as important foundations for the development of Unitarianism and this service will celebrate his legacy.

29<sup>th</sup> May, 11am – “Life Goes On...  
and On... and On...”

Service led by Jo Ridgers

This service will be on the theme of reincarnation and karma. A light-hearted look at the belief of (probably) millions of people worldwide. A very different way to see life and what it means to be a human being here, now, today. Why am I here? Why am I me? Have I lived before? Will I live again?