



What's on this month:

Thursday 4th June, 7-9pm
Adult RE: 'Spirit Body' led by Fiona Watson / Sarah Tinker

Saturday 6th June, 10.00am
Walking Group: Denham Meet at Marylebone Station

Sunday 7th June, 11am
"Letting Go of the Security Blanket"
Led by Caroline Blair

Wednesday 10th June, 7-9pm
Committee Meeting

Thursday 11th June, 7-9pm
Creativity Group:
'Seasonal Wall-Hanging'
led by Patricia Walker

Sunday 14th June, 11am
"Prayer Flags – Blessings on the Breeze"
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 14th June, 2-3pm
Nia Dance:
Holistic Movement
Led by Sonya Leite

Sunday 14th June, 3.30-5pm
'Songs and Silence for the Soul'
Chanting and Stillness

Thursday 18th June, 7-9pm
Adult RE: 'Spirit Body' led by Jenny Moy and Sarah Tinker

Sunday 21st June, 11am
"Midsummer Sun"
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

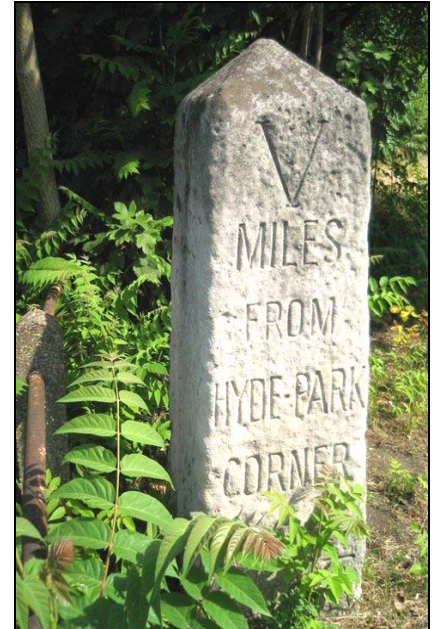
Wednesday 24th June, 7-9pm
Reading Group: 'Plain and Simple' by Sue Bender
led by Betty Evans

Sunday 28th June, 11am
"Celebrating Creativity"
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 28th June, 12.30pm
Summer Celebration:
Official opening of our new kitchen and toilets and unveiling of our wall-hanging

A Message from our Minister... Milestones

Out walking in the countryside I have sometimes come across ancient milestones that tell travellers how far they have come and how far there is yet to go before their destination is reached. We've reached some milestones in the last few years here at Essex Church. We now have a front garden to be proud of. The accessible loo is actually accessible. I remember looking round the church when I came for an interview back in 2005 and wondering, if I was lucky enough to be asked to become minister here, how long it would take us to refurbish the kitchen, which was by then showing all of its thirty years of noble service. It's taken four years since that interview weekend for us to achieve that new kitchen.



At our recent membership service it was lovely to welcome new members and to realise that our membership numbers are now above fifty for the second year running, with new people regularly asking us how to join. Studies of growing congregations often mention this milestone of fifty members and over as significant. When a congregation is smaller than this it may often have very happy members who like the feel of being part of a small and friendly group in which everyone knows everyone and people enjoy doing things together. Such a congregation may feel like a social club. If the church has a minister, then most of the activities will involve him or her.

For a congregation to be able to welcome more members, some of this has to change. A larger church is made up of a number of smaller groupings, where people connect with one another perhaps because of what they have in common or through particular activities. Most people will not know everybody but the church leadership helps to ensure that there are events and activities on offer that will have wide-ranging appeal. Congregation members will take an active role in leading groups and planning events. More members will have a sense of 'ownership' of their church and want to promote its message. Looking round Kensington Unitarians and reading this month's newsletter I realise that this process is already starting to happen. New groups are forming and more people are becoming actively involved in promoting the church and its liberal religious message. It will be interesting to see what other milestones lie ahead of us.

Rev. Sarah Tinker

In this month's newsletter...

* Our 'Elevator Speeches' – 18 members tell us why they attend a Unitarian Church *
"The Making of a Hymn" by Caroline Blair * Essex Church Summer Pub Lunch Social
* "How I Came to Essex Church" by Natasha Drennan * "Walking for Growth" *
Forum of Faiths Tea Party * The Spiritual Bookshelf - "Iron John" chosen by Jim Blair
* "This is What a Church is For" by Carole Grace * Article by Will Lyons * and more...

Kensington Unitarians

At Essex Church (founded 1774), Notting Hill Gate

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

We meet for worship each Sunday at 11.00am. The format of the service varies, and usually includes music, singing, meditation, an address, an opportunity to share joys and concerns, and a programme for children. Our activities also include religious education and spirituality workshops, engagement groups on a variety of themes, meeting for fellowship, a regular chanting session, and quiet meditation. All are welcome to come and join us.

Contact our minister to discuss our unique ceremonies, including child naming services, weddings, blessings, and memorials, which are available to all. 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 phone or email.



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

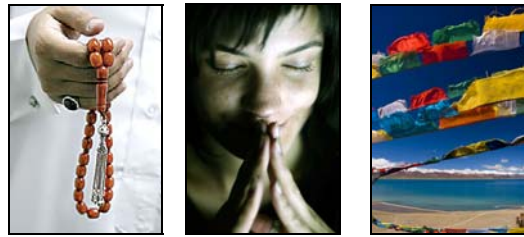
Office Telephone: 020 7221 6514

Email: info@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Web: www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk

'Exploring Prayer'

A New Adult RE Course for the Summer



**Six sessions on Thursday Evenings
from 16th July to 27th August, 7.00-9.00pm
(please note: no meeting on 20th August)**

This new adult RE course will run for six sessions, meeting weekly on consecutive Thursday evenings (7.00-9.00pm), from 16th July to 27th August (excluding 20th August). It is not essential to come to all of the sessions but we would appreciate it if you let us know in advance if you plan to attend... and it would be even better if you could commit to coming to at least four of the six nights.

The sessions will be partly based on the book 'Simply Pray' by Unitarian Universalist minister Erik Walker Wikstrom. During the course, we will focus on four types of traditional prayer which are shared by all the major world religions: naming, knowing, listening, and loving. It is our intention that the course will also provide opportunities for everyone to directly experience various different forms of prayer. There will also be plenty of time for your own personal reflection on the theme and chances to share your views and your own experiences of prayer with the rest of the group. We hope that the course will help each participant to find a way to pray that is authentic to them and their sense of the Holy.

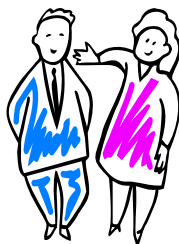
We are still in the early stages of planning for this course and would particularly like to hear from anyone who has their own prayer practice and might be willing to come to the sessions and tell us about it. Please leave a message on 020 7221 6514 or email education@kensington-unitarians.org.uk.

There is also a tentative plan to start up a new regular weekly meeting at Essex Church in the autumn – some form of open, prayerful, quiet group-led space – to be held in an early evening slot. We have some preliminary thoughts about how this might work but the precise details will be shaped in part by feedback from participants in the summer prayer course.

Jane Blackall and Jenny Moy



Stewarding and Coffee



Stewarding:

7 th June:	Will Lyons
14 th June:	Caroline Blair
21 st June:	John Marrow
28 th June:	Angela Gasparetto

Coffee:

7 th June:	Christine Joshi
14 th June:	Julia Alden
21 st June:	Christine Joshi
28 th June:	Mary Spurr

Please speak to Christine Joshi if you are willing to help!

A forthcoming spirituality course here at Essex Church:

Adult RE: 'Spirit Body'

Thursdays 4th and 18th June from 7-9pm

This June there will be two introductory evening sessions here at Essex Church which will explore the idea of us humans as spiritual beings that are embodied, of word and consciousness made flesh in this material world.



Thursday 4th June, 7-9pm
'Being Embodied'

Using art work and gentle movement, music and conversation, we will explore what it is to have a body. The activities can be followed by all fitness levels and participants will be encouraged to explore at a depth that feels right for them. This session will be led by Fiona Watson and Sarah Tinker.



Thursday 18th June, 7-9pm
'Introduction to Contact Improvisation'

This will be a gentle introductory session in which we will experience some contact improvisation exercises, paying attention to our selves and our breathing and movements and to one another. The movements will be slow and gentle but may involve standing for a few minutes. This session will be led by Jenny Moy

Please ring Sarah Tinker on 020 7221 6514 to book a place on either or both of these sessions.

Suggested donation £2.00

July Newsletter Deadline



The deadline for submitting items for the June issue is **Sunday 14th June**. Please send items (such as poems, artwork, quotes, articles, notices, etc...) to Jane Blackall or any of the committee members before this date.

Thank you!!!



Summer Celebration

Official Opening of our Kitchen and Toilets
and Unveiling of our new Wall-Hanging

Sunday 28th June, 12.30-2.30pm



We invite friends of Essex Church to join us in celebrating:

The official opening of our new kitchen and toilets
Come and try our new hand-dryers and electric doors!

The unveiling of our 'Fabric of Diversity' Wall-Hanging
This artwork is the fruit of our community arts project.

Pop in when you can, but let us know if you plan to come for lunch so that we can make sure there is plenty for everyone. Phone the Essex Church office on 020 7221 6514 or send an email to info@kensington-unitarians.org.uk.



"It doesn't happen every day, or just because I want it to. But most days, soon after tying on my shoes and hitting the pavement, I feel the release that comes from relying less on my head and more on my body. The day becomes something to feel and smell, not trudge through. If friends are along, we check in, laugh, offer advice, and compare notes. Hills that looked steep begin to flatten out. Just breathing hard for a while makes the difficult things resolve--or dissolve. Returning home, I feel less complicated, more accepting, more optimistic."

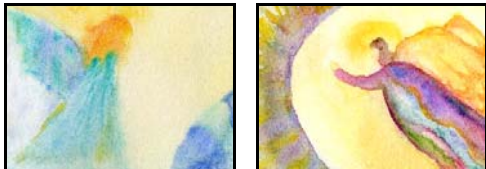


If I concentrate only on the goal, on how many miles it is to the finish, or to the next corner, I often get discouraged, lose faith, and think about quitting. When I remember what I am doing at that moment - that I am free to be outside, using my body, laughing, or solving a problem with friends - the time passes all too quickly. Like our lives, each step is a gift."

Lisa Watts

Forum of Faiths Summer Tea Party

Sunday 7th June, 2.30 – 5.30pm
Kensington Town Hall, Hornton St



Spend an afternoon with angels from differing faith traditions at the Forum of Faiths Summer Tea Party. All are welcome at this Free Event.

Music
Story Telling
Make an Angel Workshops

Please contact Dr Abdelghafour Dahbi Skali,
Forum of Faiths Community Development Officer.
Email: abdelghafour.dahbiskali@rbkc.gov.uk

An Art and Spirituality Network Event

'Walking Creatively'

Living in the Wilderness, Experiencing the
Elements and Exploring a Sense of the Spirit



Thursday 27th – Monday 31st August
Marsett Barn, near Bainbridge, North Yorkshire

A creative retreat with opportunities for walking the landscape, drawing, watercolour, clay, pastels, cooking, gentle body movement, ritual, storytelling and journaling.

Led by Judith Bromley Nicholls and John Harley

Cost per person: £120 includes
4 nights' accommodation, food, art materials.

For more information see: www.artandspirituality.net
or call John Harley on 07985 600 935

The Making of a Hymn

Early 1970's Emmanuel United Reformed Church
Young People's Group, aka The Urchins.

Our leader was a sunny-tempered music teacher called Doreen Newport – Bunty to her friends but (in those more formal times) always "Mrs Newport" to us. As a skilled pianist and trained soprano, she always had high musical ambitions for us, and singing was a major feature of our activities. The early 1970's were the great era of Happy-Clappy music in churches – out went the Wesleys and in came Kumbaiya, and others which have survived less well; 'He Is My Little Brown Brother' seems, mercifully, to have fallen into disuse. As well as singing, Mrs Newport, with the perennial optimism of the sweet-natured, believed that we could write our own hymns. "The Urchins are leading worship at Linton," we would be told; "Go and write a hymn about pollution." (I am not sure why the congregation at Linton, who had no minister, should have been subjected to these beastly things, but they were). I think the hymns we wrote were of variable quality, varying in fact from adequate to embarrassing. The moving refrain of one of our hymns ran,

*Lord, feed us with thy bread
Until we're old and dead.*

(I bet the Unitarian Hymn Book Panel are kicking themselves that they are too late for that one).

On one occasion she decided that we should all write a hymn collaboratively. She had already sketched out a beginning.

"Think of a world without any flowers..." she trilled, then encouraged us to think of other examples of things that we would miss. She gently weeded out the hopelessly inappropriate – beer, perhaps, or Mott the Hoople – and tried to lead us to think more of spiritual matters. By the end of the session the hymn had taken shape, and was almost ready for its debut in Linton U.R.C. Some months later we learned to our surprise that we had been paid £100 in royalties, and the church elders wanted us to discuss how best this money could be spent or invested. Hey, we were young teenagers. We voted for a huge party, with DJ and unlimited cider. We spent a happy evening striking cool, 'don't-mess-with-me' poses while our parents waited patiently outside with cars.

20 years later, at Pinner Wood School harvest festival I was absolutely staggered when the children broke into song and sang OUR hymn. The deputy head, confronted by a wild-eyed madwoman with bulging eyes, explained in puzzled tone that it is a common part of the school repertoire. So I was less amazed than I might have been when it turned up as number 168 in the new purple hymnbook. Seeing it written down it looks tidier, more thoughtful, more structured, dammit BETTER than I remember; possibly Mrs Newport had more input than I had realized. But there it is, and the credit should read "Mrs Newport and some Urchins who spent the royalties on cider."

Caroline Blair

An Event from the Art and Spirituality Network

'Windows Into Ourselves'

Finding Insights through Being With Art



Saturday 4th July 2009, 11.45-4pm

**The Courtauld Gallery, Somerset House,
Strand, London WC2R 0RN**

An afternoon of quiet reflection with time to make personal and deep connections with this fine collection of art. There will be opportunity for silence, art making, time for ourselves and sharing with others.

Please bring your own food, drink and £4 (entrance fee). Art materials will be provided but you are welcome to bring your own (dry material only).

Arrivals from 11.45 for 12pm lunch in the quad followed by workshop in gallery. In poor weather, we'll start the workshop at 12pm and have lunch later at 2.30pm.

The Art and Spirituality Network is a loose network of artists and those of no artistic experience which aims to provide a supportive and challenging space for people to find spiritual fellowship and nourishment through making art. The Network has been running workshops and retreats for over ten years in a range of venues.

Led by John Harley and Tomo Williams.
Please let the leaders know if you are coming.
John – 07985 600 935 / Tomo – 07828 290 362

How I Came to Essex Church

As very much a newcomer to London I found it necessary once I got all my basic needs covered after moving here last October, including finding a job and a great place to live along with general settling in, to start expanding my community. I did a web search and came across Kensington Unitarians which was convenient to where I live in West London so thought I would try it out one Sunday. That one Sunday was back in January and I have been attending as much as possible since. I have found Essex Church to be a very welcoming and inspiring place and an integral part of my new life here in London.



My experience with the Unitarian Church goes back about 7 years to my former residence in Canada, both in Halifax, Nova Scotia and Toronto, Ontario. I explored the Unitarian faith sporadically at best in my time in Halifax, and much more regularly in Toronto over the years. It was a happy coincidence that a very good friend of mine in Toronto whom I met though a political affiliation was also raised Unitarian and had a very progressive upbringing. She has been a very valuable teacher to me over the years when it comes to "what it means (or more apt doesn't mean) to be a Unitarian".

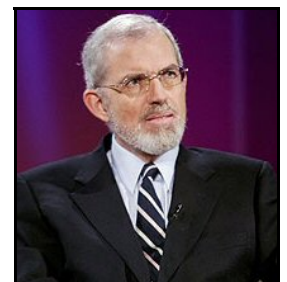
I have always yearned for a greater understanding of the bigger picture of spirituality and the bond between individuals with a common passion. I relish in the time we have at services on Sunday to think about things outside of the hustle and bustle of everyday living and ponder the themes discussed within science and nature, the common thread that runs through all religions across the world, and social justice and responsibility. Every week there is something to take away to further explore my individual spirituality.

To quote Anais Nin: The possession of knowledge does not kill the sense of wonder and mystery. There is always more mystery.

Natasha Drennan

"In what I call the 'Cathedral of the World' there are millions of windows, each telling its own story of who we are, where we came from, where we are going, each illuminating life's meaning. In this respect, we are many. But we are also one, for the one Light shines through every window. No individual, however spiritually gifted, can see this Light – Truth or God, call it what you will – directly. We cannot look God in the eye any more than we can stare at the sun without going blind. This should counsel humility and mutual respect for those whose reflections on ultimate meaning differ from our own."

Unitarian Universalist Minister, Rev Forrest Church





I know a cure for sadness:
let your hands touch something that
makes your eyes smile.
I bet there are a hundred objects close by
that can do that.
Look at beauty's gift to us--
her power is so great she enlivens
the earth, the sky, our
soul.

Mirabai

'Ropes, Wheels and Wings'

A Unikids Weekend for 7-11 Year Olds

Friday 26th-28th June 2009

At Alfriston Youth Hostel, Frog Firle, Alfriston,
Polegate, East Sussex, BN26 5TT



Join us for a weekend of rock climbing, mountain biking and meditation – also games, circle time and all sorts of stuff – in the wildest countryside of Sussex.

Activities: The weekend includes a day of climbing and a mountain bike treasure hunt. Also there will be some meditation and relaxation exercises. Also there will be time for creativity, games and circle time.

Cost: £45 (thanks to generous donations from Unitarian grant bodies) includes all activities, accommodation and meals – if money is an issue a further discount is available – contact John.

Travel: nearest station is Seaford – 3 miles from Alfriston. A minibus will be departing from South London to Alfriston on the Friday afternoon – and back on Sunday afternoon – for more details contact John. Arrivals 17.30 on Friday, departures 14.00 on Sunday.

Your leaders are John Harley, Liz Hills and Peter Teets.

For further information about the weekend please contact John on 020 8670 9280 or 07985 900 935.

Our Warden's Column

What's On in Our Busy Building...



At the end of June, I will have been doing this job for three years – can't believe how the time has flown. When I think about simple tasks I've managed to put off for all that time, I feel deeply embarrassed – but try to reassure myself that actually the building has changed for the better in some important ways.

The new accessible toilet is finally operational and we're celebrating with a Kitchen & Toilet opening party after the service on 28th June. The front garden has also been a joy this year – hard to remember now that it used to be largely nettles. The bright new floor upstairs also lifts my spirits every time I see it.

And of course there have been lots of smaller achievements: fitting new castors to the piano; cleaning the library carpet; and - my personal favourite - putting some pegs on the outside bin so the bag doesn't blow away.

I wonder how many more changes there will be in the next few years. I think Essex Church is very lucky to have a Minister who has a vision of making the building as attractive and welcoming as possible and cares for it like her own home. The Church Committee and Trustees are also hugely supportive and take a keen interest in the detail of what goes on here.

Some plans under consideration are: rewiring and redecorating the upstairs rooms; replacing the Hall curtains and the lobby furniture; fitting some shelving in the outside store; and - perhaps - creating a peace garden out back in the current wilderness area.

Of course all of this will take money, but we're lucky that so far our income, both from lettings and from the nursery has held up well despite the overall recession. The fundraising for the kitchen & toilets also went well and we're hoping that the final cost will come in within the amount we budgeted.

On a personal level, I feel very at home down in my basement flat, and I'm looking forward to watching my tubs through their third summer. Living on my own has been a big change, but so far I seem to be thriving on it - and I'm glad to say that David and I are still good friends, and that he's also thriving (currently pursuing his interests in artwriting through his blog "More Milk Yvette").

So here's to summer 2009 – may it rain enough for the plants, and be sunny enough for the rest of us!

Jenny Moy

Songs and Silence for the Soul

Chanting and Stillness at Essex Church



**Sundays 14th June, 12th July
and 9th August from 3.30 to 5.00pm**

Suggested Donation: £2.00

We've been running this monthly Songs and Silence group here at Essex Church for over two years now and one of its delightful features is how the group varies from month to month, depending on who comes along.

We always meet on the second Sunday of each month from 3.30 to 5pm. We sing a wide range of chants from the world's faith traditions and sit together in candlelit silence. It's a gentle and healing, group-led space in which everyone is welcome to join. No particular singing skills are needed.

Phone Sarah via the church office on 0207 221 6514 or email sarah@kensington-unitarians.org.uk if you would like more information.

Creativity Engagement Group "Seasonal Wall-Hanging"

Thursday 11th June, 7.00-9.00pm



At the next meeting of the creativity group we will be revisiting our seasonal wall-hanging project. Regular members of the creativity group have already crafted a selection of textile panels for the display at the front of the church. Each piece is intended to represent a certain season of the year and so the selection is changed from time to time as the months go by.

It has been a couple of years since any new panels were added and so we are setting aside our session in June to start work on new pieces to refresh the collection.

Please think in advance about what you would like to make and bring along the materials that you need. You might like to make your panel by knitting, crochet, patchwork, appliqué, felting, fabric painting, or any other method at your disposal.

As usual, if this particular activity doesn't take your fancy, you are most welcome to bring your own crafts along, and simply sit with us in good company for the evening. There are usually biscuits and other goodies to eat too...

The 24th London Multifaith Pilgrimage for Peace

Saturday 6th June 2009, meeting at 9.15/9.30am at various locations

Several members of our congregation have taken part in this event in previous years and speak highly of it. Participants visit places of worship from a number of different traditions during the day and stop to eat together en-route. Arrangements are slightly more complicated than usual this year. There are three different starting points to choose from:

- **Central group** meet outside La Tasca café to leave at 9.30am
This group will visit the London Fo Guang Temple and the London Central Mosque
- **North London group** meet at Finsbury Park tube station, Seven Sisters Road exit, to leave at 9.15am
This group will visit the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order and one other venue to be confirmed.
- **West London group** will meet at West Ealing station to leave at 9.30am
This group will visit the West London Islamic Centre and the West Ealing Hindu Centre.

The groups will all come together at the Rayners Lane Zoroastrian Centre at 12.30pm where everybody will stop for lunch. In the afternoon the whole group will visit the Sri Lankan Muslim Cultural Centre and the Brent Sikh Centre. The day will finish by 6.00pm. Please contact Westminster Interfaith on 020 8457 6532 or westminsterinterfaith@rcdow.org.uk to book your place.



“When I use the word spirit, I want you to think about a horse, in the way it seems designed to run, or a child, in the way it is given to play. The quality each of these express in their being is the quality I am talking about when I say spiritual. It is a cluster of characteristics: vital energy, flowing single-minded

focus, which is not forced but free in following whatever attracts, and avoiding whatever unnerves or frightens. It is the quality of being alert and alive.

You can probably think of someone you know, or have known in your life who expressed natural vitality, who demonstrates exuberance, who laughs at every chance, who cries without shame, who is caring, unafraid, available to help out, never too distracted to listen. I hope you have known someone like this, someone who can give witness to the invisible forces which connect them, and all of us, to life, and to the enterprise of living it fully.”

Victoria Rao, Austin UU

Jesus Study Group

Saturday 27th June, 10:30am - 1:00pm

Croydon Unitarian Church, The Flyover, CR0 1ER



Over the past year the LDPA has sponsored what has been called the Jesus Study Group at Rosslyn Hill Chapel under the leadership of Rev. Jim Robinson. This group meets once a month to explore the life and teachings of Jesus by using a variety of sources. The most obvious source is the New Testament, but the group also uses other sources such as the Gospel of Thomas and the Koran. They also explore sources that include Unitarian teachings as well as the variety of non creedal Christian teachings on Jesus. Many have found the group as a place for them to explore their personal and historic issues with Christianity and discover Jesus out side of that or away from that primarily heavy-handed creedal system.

Since the beginning of the Rosslyn Hill group there have been requests for another group on the south side of the greater London area. During the General Assembly meetings a couple of people expressed interest in having a meeting in Croydon. Then after some conversations between Art Lester, Jim Robinson, and myself, it was decided to have the first meeting on 27th June. You are invited to join us at 10:30 for pre-meeting coffee and then conversation and study of the life and teachings of Jesus.

John Carter, Croydon Unitarians

Multifaith Calendar

✠ 11th June – Corpus Christi – Christian

The festival of Corpus Christi in the Roman Catholic Church, or the Day of Thanksgiving for the Institution of Holy Communion in the Anglican Church, occurs 60 days after Easter and celebrates the Eucharist. In the ancient world it was customary to scatter flowers in the path of important people as a sign of respect and reverence. This custom was adopted by the Church to honour the Blessed Sacrament, carried in procession on the festival of Corpus Christi.

☎ 16th June – Martyrdom of Guru Arjan – Sikh

This festival commemorates the fifth Guru who made the first compilation of the Sikh Scriptures, the Adi Granth, and supervised the completion of the Golden Temple in Amritsar. Guru Arjan was executed on the orders of the Moghul Emperor for refusing to pay a fine arising from a charge of treason. Sikhs hold a gurburb on this day, including an akhand path, a non-stop cover to cover reading of the Guru Granth Sahib.

♁ 21st June – Summer Solstice – Wiccan/Pagan

Solstice, Midsummer or Litha means a stopping or standing still of the sun. It is the longest day of the year and the time when the sun is at its maximum elevation. Pagans are in awe of the incredible strength of the sun and the divine powers that create life. For Pagans this spoke in the Wheel of the Year is a significant point. The Goddess took over the earth from the horned God at the beginning of spring and she is now at the height of her power and fertility. For some Pagans the Summer Solstice marks the marriage of the God and Goddess and see their union as the force that creates the harvest's fruits. This is a time to celebrate growth and life but for Pagans, who see balance in the world and are deeply aware of the ongoing shifting of the seasons it is also time to acknowledge that the sun will now begin to decline once more towards winter.



☎ 24th June – Ratha Yatra 'Chariot Journey' – Hindu

This festival is most notably celebrated at Puri in Orissa, India, where thousands of people push huge wagons (rathas) with images of Krishna, known as 'Jagannath' (Lord of the Universe), from which the term 'juggernaut' comes in English. Ratha Yatra is celebrated by Hindus in Britain with processions through some cities.



"An hour here on Sunday morning is not enough to give you a thriving spiritual life... One hour a week is better than nothing, but it isn't enough. Our time together can serve as a reminder and an inspiration - a reminder of our spiritual connections, of our highest aspirations; an inspiration to

persevere, to offer our gifts. It is my hope that we are different when we come here, more open to the spirit, to reminders of connection and community, to the call of justice. These things are the same everywhere, but often we don't notice. Maybe it's easier when we're together here. Alone, our vision is too narrow, our strength too limited. Together - well, together that can be changed. That's not a guarantee. It's a pregnant possibility."

Unitarian Universalist Minister, Rev. Grace Simons

Essex Church Summer Pub Lunch Social



Essex Church has been a busy place lately with more people coming along on Sundays, particularly more younger folk! We thought it would be nice to have a trip to the pub for a lunch one Sunday in July, (and perhaps hit a nearby park after, if the sun is beaming down that day!), for the younger folk of the congregation to have the chance to get to know each other a bit more and just to enjoy the afternoon!

If you would like to be kept posted on this lovely summer outing (or just know that you want to come!), drop an email to social@kensington-unitarians.org.uk and let us know that you want to be put on the Pub Lunch e-list. You can always talk to anyone of us as well if you see us in church.

Angela, Louisa & Mark

A Date for Your Diary: Visit to Ely Stained Glass Museum Saturday 18th July 2009



We will be having a summer outing to the Ely Stained Glass Museum which houses one of the famous Henry Holliday stained glass windows from the old Essex Church. All will be welcome. More details to follow in the next newsletter.

Greetings Card Stall

Looking Forward to Christmas Fundraiser



We have decided not to hold an art and craft fair this year but instead we are hoping instead to have our own card stall at the church from mid-November until Christmas as an alternative fundraising scheme.

If you are willing and able to make some cards to be sold on behalf of the church then we would appreciate it if you could start stockpiling over the next few months.

Please contact Caroline Blair if you would like to get involved or if you have any questions about this project.



Our Elevator Speeches: “Why Do You Go To A Unitarian Church?”

In last month's newsletter, I invited members of the congregation to send me their 'elevator speeches' (brief responses to the question you might be asked by friends or acquaintances: “Why do you go to a Unitarian Church?”). I was very pleased with the response – many thanks to all those who sent something in – all the offerings I received are included on the next two pages. It is fascinating to read them all side-by-side and notice the slightly different emphasis that each person has given. If you are inspired to write your own 'elevator speech' then please let me have a copy and I will compile another newsletter item in a month or two.

Jane Blackall

Talking About Our Experience of Church...

I have mentioned church before, to work colleagues or acquaintances, when asked what I did over the weekend. It's often just a polite, friendly inquiry as people get to know each other. I may say, "I went on a hike with some friends from church." or "I took part in a Community Art Project and learned how to do a bit of felting."

Besides queries such as, "What's 'felting'?", such statements lead to a usual question of: "What church do you go to?"

Of course my reply of “Unitarian” tends to raise further puzzlement and I have often found myself trying to describe, in a nutshell, what Unitarianism is about.

"Well, it's a fairly liberal church..." is how I usually begin.

Because I've always gone to church (except for a few years from early teens to early twenties) my church community was always an important community in my life. But I do recall feeling a bit self-conscious and almost apologetic for talking about going to church at the weekend because I was a bit concerned that people might think I'm 'Religious' or something. Which leads to some further explanation to assuage my self-consciousness.

The last person who asked me about it was a man in his late 70s. A very bright man, and well read, he said, "I've never heard of that." After my brief explanation he added, "I will have to look it up."

Although I went to the UU Church of Halifax (Canada) all my life, I rarely thought of inviting anyone to come to church with me. I can think of one boyfriend, two or three friends, as well as some who attended my father's Memorial Service. Was I proud of being Unitarian? Yes. But built into this liberal perspective was the underlying idea that one should make room for many different beliefs (and 'non-belief') and respect differences. Somehow it didn't feel right to go around trying to persuade anyone to come to church or to consider this church for them. But it's definitely true that there are many, many people out there who would appreciate and could enjoy becoming involved with the Unitarian Church.

Hmmm. Maybe it's time to organize more potluck suppers, special evenings of “read your own poetry” or “come share a song” or such, at church. A couple of long-time members at home had become curious about this Unitarian faith when they attended some singles events at the church. Like many people do, they read the notices on the wall and, feeling their curiosity piqued, overcame their aversion to churches and came to a Sunday service. They loved engaging in the discussions, debates, programmes and special events.

Some came out of curiosity about the kind of church that would post messages such as those that would appear every couple of weeks on the Wayside Pulpit. Quotes from famous thinkers, humanitarians and brilliant Anonymous, intrigued passersby till some dared to come visit on a Sunday, nervous they'd be spotted as an interloper. Again, they stay, at least for some time, because there is something here to nourish them.

The Unitarian Church does offer food... and not just the tea and coffee after service. It offers nourishment of reflection, reading, thinking; of a personal or spiritual search, a search for meaning in our lives; and a way to connect with others on a personal level, to become a part of a community or part of another community, complementing others they value. It's a good thing to check out.

Mary Spurr



A Selection of 'Elevator Speeches' from Essex Church

I used to describe myself as spiritual but not religious. I never thought I'd find a church that I'd want to join. But then a friend asked me to a Unitarian evening group and it was all about exploring your own beliefs and ideas about life and death and if life has meaning and purpose. You know, those big sorts of questions. It was so good to talk about these issues freely – nobody forces you to think a certain way or tells you that there is one true answer; Unitarians think for themselves and don't mind uncertainty and that's really suited me. Have a look at our website – you never know, it might suit you too.

I go to a Unitarian Church in search of a perfect moment when I can stop and sit quietly listening, thinking, pondering, questioning and enjoying the wonderment of being with fellow travellers doing the same.

I go to a Unitarian Church because it has its roots in the spiritual tradition (Judeo-Christian) in which I was nurtured, and because these roots have flourished into a liberal religious community in which I can question aspects of previously held beliefs and which provides me with stories and myths from people of other traditions who have struggled to make sense of life in all its mystery.

I am a member of the Unitarian Church because it provides me an opportunity to search for the divine within, in an open and questioning way. It is also a way that is inclusive of all and sensitive to the journey that we all share in this exploration.

We are a liberal Church which believes in looking for spiritual insights wherever they can be found: not just in Christian sources but in other world faiths, and also in secular writers. We are happy to welcome people with different religious beliefs or none, as long as they are expressed with respect for others.

It's a place to think about and discuss the big picture questions in life without having to subscribe to a specific view at the outset. There's music, tranquillity, thought, singing, friendship and community.

The Unitarians can provide a framework within which you can work out your own religious beliefs according to reason and conscience, without the creeds of the church getting in the way. We believe that each generation has new religious insights to offer.

I had identified a spiritual gap in my life, but was suspicious of conventional religion. Essex Church provides a safe space to explore, challenge and share thoughts and feelings. The community offers compassion, but also challenges my fears and occasionally selfish view of the world, providing me with spiritual nourishment. I can be an undefended human being. In a push and pull world the church is a sanctuary of calm where I can be nourished and refreshed.

I am a Unitarian because the community is actively welcoming and invites difference.

We get together each week to reflect on spiritual matters and remind each other of the things which really matter most in life. The things we do together inspire and challenge me to live in a way that is more closely aligned with my ideals and to play some small part in making the world a better place. It is easy to get disheartened or distracted from all my good intentions in the midst of life's trials but regular attendance at church helps me to keep a sense of perspective and see the big picture. The community has given me a great deal of personal support and has given me many wonderful opportunities for the development of my own creative potential.

I love being with people who ask questions and who don't pretend to know 'The Truth' - whatever that is!! They say they don't know. They say that all paths to GOD - The Divine - The Universe or Nothingness are valid and authentic paths.

Unitarians are a group of people from all walks of life, some of us with different forms of religious belief as well as being part of a Unitarian church. We have no doctrine or creed to which we are required to subscribe, but we do all believe that there is such a thing as spirituality as opposed to unquestioning materialism and hedonism, and we meet in order to share some of our beliefs and celebrate our fellowship, affection, and love for and with each other.

The reason I come to Essex Church is because it is always interesting and vibrant, people don't bitch, I'm not told what to believe and I'm tolerated.

Why do I go to a Unitarian Church? The liberal spiritual approach is perfect for our Christian-Hindu family. Religious teachings from a variety of faiths are used in services by our fantastic reverend. And the choir is the best kept secret in Notting Hill. The music, both traditional and modern, leaves me floating on air.

Nobody tells me they know The Truth; they say they are looking for their own truth / connection with / to something that makes some sense of this curious, wonderful and bewildering world we share. I come here to meet with people who are curious to know more.

Why do I go to church on Sunday and why Essex Unitarian Church, Kensington? Because I know that when I walk in I am entering a community of warm and loving people. And more than that, these people are happy to accompany me on my spiritual journey in the spirit of curiosity and sharing.

I go to a Unitarian Church for:

...the minister at KU; her wit, warmth and intelligence.

...tea and biscuits after the service (I mean it!)

...the plain white interior with plants, flowers and woven hangings for inspiration not crucifixes!

...the use of readings / ideology from all religious traditions **all the time** not just occasionally.

I go to a Unitarian Church because it's a non-dogmatic liberal religious organisation that nurtures my spirituality.

Elevator speeches from Julia Alden, Louisa Bird, Jane Blackall, Caroline Blair, Jim Blair, David Francis Darling, Carole Grace, Howard Hague, John Hands, Debra Hinton, Christine Joshi, Will Lyons, Jo Ridgers, Sarah Tinker, Mark Tribe, Patricia Walker

A Forthcoming District Unitarian Event

LDPA Day Seminar:

Religion and Spirituality in Contemporary Society



**Saturday 6th June, 10:30 - 4:00pm.
Essex Hall, Essex St, London WC2R 3HY**

The District is excited to offer a day-long Seminar on Religion and Spirituality, led by Fr. Adrian Smith. Adrian Smith is a noted author and commentator on contemporary religion and spirituality, and is in much demand throughout the country for his informative and challenging presentations.

A former Catholic missionary in Africa, he is the author of numerous books which challenge the church and society to embrace new forms of religious thinking. In many ways, much of what he proposes is eminently Unitarian. The District Minister, David Usher, has attended one of Adrian Smith's seminars and found it relevant and helpful.

Cost: £7 per person, payable on the day, £6 in advance (cheques payable to the LDPA). Bring your own packed lunch. Hot drinks will be provided. Advance bookings to the District Minister, no later than the 1st June, via davidusher@ldpa.org.uk or (01732) 465248.

A London Lecture which you might be Interested In...

Religion and the Market: Are They In Conflict?

**Monday 1st June 2009 at 6:30 pm
Old Theatre, LSE, Houghton St, WC2A 2AE**

The global revival of religion has been predominantly fuelled by the creation of a religious free market defined by entrepreneurship, choice and personal revelation. So can religion and the market sit together and what can economics teach us about religion? The speakers are John Gray (emeritus professor of European Thought at LSE) and John Micklethwait (editor of The Economist).

This event is free and open to all. Entry is on a first come, first served basis. For information, email events@lse.ac.uk or telephone 020 7955 6043.

The Sense of a Goose



Next autumn, when you see geese heading south for the winter, flying along in "V" formation, you might consider what science has discovered as to why they fly that way. As each bird flaps its wings, it creates an uplift for the bird immediately following. By flying in "V" formation, the whole flock adds at least 71 percent greater flying range than if each bird flew on its own.

People who share a common direction and sense of community can get where they are going more quickly and easily, because they are travelling on the thrust of one another.

When a goose falls out of formation, it suddenly feels the drag and resistance of trying to go it alone – and quickly gets back into formation to take advantage of the lifting power of the bird in front.

If we have as much sense as a goose, we will stay in formation with those people who are headed the same way we are.

When the head goose gets tired, it rotates back in the wing and another goose flies point.

It is sensible to take turns doing demanding jobs, whether with people or with geese flying south.

Geese honk from behind to encourage those up front to keep up their speed.

What messages do we give when we honk our horns from behind in busy traffic?

Finally – and this is important – when a goose gets sick or wounded by gunshot, and falls out of formation, two other geese fall out with that goose and follow it down to lend help and protection. They stay with the fallen goose until it is able to fly or until it dies; and only then do they launch out on their own, or with another formation to catch up with their group.

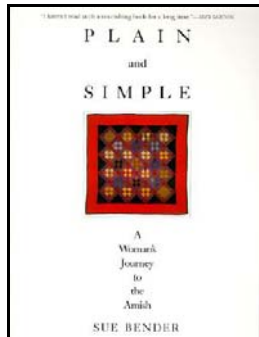
If we have the sense of a goose, we will stand by each other like that.

Author Unknown

Used in the 'Assessing Our Assets' service on 26th April

Reading Engagement Group
“Plain and Simple”
by Sue Bender

Wednesday 24th June, 7.00-9.00pm



The reading engagement group's next conversation will be about "Plain and Simple" by Sue Bender. This book was chosen by Betty Evans and will be the focus of our next group on **Wednesday 24th June**.

Information from Amazon UK:

"In 1967, Sue Bender found herself mesmerized by the dark muted colours of Amish quilts and the haunting beauty of their faceless stuffed dolls. The quiet simplicity of these crafts eventually led her on a journey of self-discovery to two Amish communities in 1982. Not surprisingly, Sue Bender, an over-achiever with two Masters degrees and two careers, found herself strongly attracted to the predictable rhythm of Amish life she encountered. Like her extended retreat, this simple book, describing both the ways of the Amish and their effect upon the author, is an escape for the reader as well. There are glimpses into Amish life: the wagon built to transport benches to the weekly home prayer groups, teenage girls who wear electric blue Nikes under their long black dresses, the democratic selection of a minister by drawing lots, and a no-holds waterfight among the nine Beiler children. Set against this background is Sue Bender's quest to discover inner wealth, to quiet the ramblings of ego, and to explore the part of her existence which values simplicity. With the Amish women as her mentors, she questions the obvious limits of their domain as well as her own frenzied pace. Walking to town one hot sunny day, Sue Bender calls out to the horse-drawn buggies, "Am I on the right road?" It's a question we should all ask ourselves."

All are welcome to join the book group. Please do try to read the books before the meeting if you're planning to come along. It would also aid discussion if you pick out favourite passages to share. Regular members of the reading group take turns in choosing books so we read a wide variety of material. Please check the church website or pick up a flyer listing our forthcoming book choices.

“I'm Spiritual- but-not-Religious”



A two-year research project (completed at the end of 2008) reveals that today's youth view spirituality as an important part of their lives, though most rarely talk to others about it. Evidence of this comes from America, where a survey of 6,853 young people between the ages of 12 and 25 found that they preferred being "spiritual" to being religious.

The survey was conducted by the Minneapolis-based Search Institute. The first question was, "What does it mean to be spiritual?" There were nine choices, running from "believing in God" to "being true to one's inner self." They also could say that there is no spiritual dimension, and there was an "I don't know" option. 93% of the young people surveyed believe there is a spiritual aspect to life.

We have to look more closely at what the respondents meant by "spiritual". "Spending time in nature" topped the list of responses. "Listening to or playing music" was number two, and "helping other people or the community" was third. "Attending religious services" came ninth.

This trend is mirrored in the UK and Europe. Some of the youths who were questioned further by the pollsters said they didn't like the sexism and homophobia and the attendant cruelty of some religions. They didn't like the way that religions all claimed superiority over other world views.

As Unitarians, is it a trend we should welcome and encourage? Young people are showing that it is time for a change. Many will conclude that they don't need any of the supports of unreason and will end up perfectly contented with an attendant "spirituality" that most of us would simply define as common sense and human compassion.

Will Lyons

'Freestyle Felt'

Community Arts Workshops at Essex Church
Six Thursdays from 9th July 2009, 2-5.00pm



A series of textile art workshops will be held at Essex Church starting on the 9th July 2009. All are welcome – no prior knowledge or experience is required – there will be a chance to get some basic instruction in feltmaking at each session.

These workshops will provide an opportunity for beginners and more experienced feltmakers alike to experiment with the craft at their own pace. Participants will be able to make small felt panels, as artworks in their own right, or for use in greetings cards. More adventurous participants may wish to work towards making 3D items such as a hat, bag, or even slippers.

There will be no charge to attend the sessions; however, donations to help cover the cost of materials are appreciated, and we suggest £3 / 6 / 9 per session according to your income. Please email arts@kensington-unitarians.org.uk or telephone 020 7221 6514 to reserve a place.

'PULSE' eBulletin of District Events

The LDPA (our Unitarian district association) has recently launched a new e-mail Bulletin. This is a monthly publication, available only by email, which contains news, information and articles relevant to Unitarians in the South East.

If you would like to receive this monthly update, simply send an email with the word "subscribe" in the subject line to pulse.bulletin@yahoo.co.uk.

Universal Spiritual Gatherings



Run by graduates of the Interfaith Seminary these monthly Spiritual Gatherings are worship with a difference and this year feature guests from particular faiths. Hosted here at Essex Church, it is lovely to see our beautiful worship space put to such good use, with chanting, silence, music, prayer and inspiration.

12th June – 'Courage' with Sikh chants
Friday evenings 6.35 for 6.45 to 8.15pm

All who are committed to a spiritual path are warriors of the heart. We warmly invite you our fellow warriors of the heart to join with us in contemplating the meaning of spiritual courage through inspiration and eternal wisdom from 40 different spiritual traditions. Experience the depth of your inner strength through powerful Sikh chanting led by Balbir Singh Bakhshi.

Dances of Universal Peace



Saturday 6th June, 10.30am-5.30pm
Richmond Unitarian Church, Ormond Road

The Dances of Universal Peace are a type of Spiritual dance or moving, sung meditation invoking peace, contemplation and presence. They are inspired by the wisdom and sacred phrases of the world's authentic spiritual traditions, which are sung as we dance together in a circle. They engender a mood of joy, peace, liberation, contemplation and presence.

Wali and Arienne, who will be leading the day's workshop, have been leading the Dances of Universal Peace and Sufi Practice for over 15 years, travelling Europe and beyond.

Cost for the whole day is £35.00. Some concessions will be available. Advance booking for this event is important

For further information and booking contact Lindsay:
020 8891 5825, lindsayastevens@blueyonder.co.uk
For more details see www.peaceinmotion.eu

Walking Group: Denham Country Park

Saturday 6th June, taking 10.00am train from Marylebone Station

The June destination of the Walking Group has been changed and it is now proposed to visit Denham Country Park.

Meet at Marylebone Rail Station Take 10.00 Chiltern Railways towards High Wycombe Rail Station; arrives 10:24 Denham Rail Station or meet at Denham. This lovely (easy) walk takes us through Denham Country Park, Denham Village (once home to the late Sir John Mills, actor) and along stretches of the Grand Union Canal and the River Colne. Refreshments available at the Visitors Centre or Denham Lock.

Will Lyons

Forthcoming Walks: Saturday 4th July – Lee Valley Country Park

Saturday 1st August – Chelsea

Report of May Walk – Hampton Court

In my preview of the walk last month I had promised deer, swamp cypresses and a boat trip, but I had not realized that we would also be offered a blaze of bluebells and azaleas throughout the woods. We were also able to photograph a whole extended family of red deer; Jim stalked them on his stomach in the long grass while the rest of us walked up to them with our hands in our pockets. They seemed to accept both approaches philosophically. Hampton Court Palace was obviously attracting vast crowds on that day, but almost none of them seemed to realize that there is a lovely 1000 acre park just across the road with woods, streams, lakes and rolling deer parks. On the other side of the river we were able to stop for tea and cake at the cricket club, where a match was in full swing, then watch the rowing club boats training vigorously up and down the river. We even managed to finish the walk at the charity shop where each of us snapped up a bargain. For the benefit of those who could not make that date, I am hoping to repeat the walk some time in the future.

Caroline Blair

Photos by Juliet Edwards and Jim Blair



“Folks, we live in an “argument culture” where there’s an increasing glorification of aggression in public discourse. Everything in the media nowadays is focused on contention and debate. In a debate, reason is misused in order to defeat the other person. Literally, just look at the origin of the word. De is “to the utmost”, bat is “beat”. You see it in words like battle and combat. Debate, in today’s world, is seldom civil and decent; rather it’s a way of proving we’re right, more than finding out what’s right. Yet what we desperately need in our families, congregations, and larger world is more dialogue and less debate. Dialogue is a constructive and instructive way of discovering new ways of seeing. In a dialogue, you have to accept that sometimes you’re wrong, that the other person may be right. Both sides have a chance to change and grow.”

Unitarian Universalist Minister, Rev Tom Owen-Towle

The Spiritual Bookshelf

#5: 'Iron John' by Robert Bly (chosen by Jim Blair)

This is the fifth of a new series of articles in the newsletter where members and friends of the congregation tell us about a spiritual or religious book which has special meaning or value for them. Look out for book recommendations throughout the course of 2009.

In his book 'Iron John', Robert Bly examines the plight of men who have lost their 'wild man'; who have even lost sight or knowledge of him.

"The boys in our culture have a continuing need for initiation into male spirit, but old men in general don't offer it...The ancient societies believed that a boy becomes a man only through ritual and effort."

It is his view that only a man can initiate a boy into manhood. Every boy has to separate himself from his mother and join the world of men; if there is no man to assist in this in this break, he may turn to behaving so badly towards his mother that a break occurs anyway.

I am close to my father today, but when I was growing up my mother played a far greater part in my life. My father was absent for much of the day; not only that, but he was somewhere (down a mine) where I could not follow him. In addition, my personality was far more like that of my mother than my father. My mother was a party person (though severely disabled); she was given to sudden enthusiasms and impatience with detail. My father never seemed to have much thirst for adventure and withdrew from any conflict. To my restless young eyes, I don't think he seemed much of a role model. I was unlucky with my two grandfathers, both difficult and selfish men who became estranged from my parents. My moral life was probably saved by finding the necessary male role models: in the air cadets, Outward Bound instructors and my karate instructor.

My problem is reconciling my 'male' side with the values held by society. My own family consists of a wife and two daughters; even the pet rats are all female. I have kept a list of rules one of my daughters wrote out for me when she was very young:

Stop leaveing the toilet seat up, saying things you won't do, loosing your temper, pooping. Start making nice coments, being polite, tidying up properly, doing chors around the house. Stop making stupid jokes, burping after you eat. (Sic)

With no strong masculine presence in my life it is easy for me to start seeing myself through feminine eyes. This is not pleasant. Who is this coarse, loutish person who walks round the house burping and losing his temper?

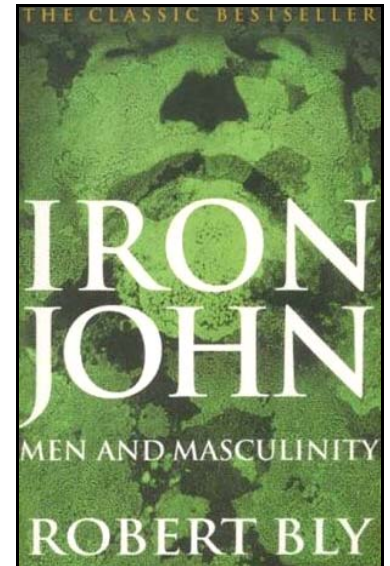
"If a man learns feeling primarily from his mother, then he will probably see his own masculinity from the feminine point of view as well. He may be fascinated by it but he will be afraid of it. He may pity it and want to reform it, or he may be suspicious of it and want to kill it...He will never feel at home with it."

Iron John made a deep impression on me when I first read it, because it seemed to affirm that masculinity is not just a collection of anti-social and unmannerly behaviours. It encourages men to value themselves, just as feminist books encourage women to value their femininity. My mythological bond is to gods, not goddesses; to hunters, not gatherers; to warriors, not nurturers. This has nothing to do with a practical desire to fight, dominate and conquer; even if I took up Belgian lace-making as a hobby, the primitive identification would still be there at the core of my being.

"Many women today say, 'The Earth is female'. A man told me that when he hears that, he feels he has lost the right to breathe. And when a man says, 'God is male', women have said that they feel they have no right to pray...When our mythology opens again to welcome women into sky-heaven and men into earth-water, then the genders will not seem so far apart. White men will feel it more natural, then, for them to protect earth, as the North American Indian men have always felt it right to do."

I wish to be proud as a man.

Jim Blair



"Exuberance is the experience of things as ever new, and ever renewed in God's ever-beginning Creation. The world is always amazing and fresh to the religious heart, the heart of the fool certainly, which knows that every day is the first day of Creation. "

Orthodox Bishop, Seraphim Sigrst

Voucher OFFER!



If you have never been inside any of the Exchange Shops on Notting Hill gate or round the corner in Pembridge Road, why not treat yourself. These are wonderful second hand shops – selling DVDs, modern and classical music on CD or vinyl, books, retro clothes and household items. We have some of their shopping vouchers which we can sell you for the bargain price of £15 for a £20 voucher. Why not have a browse and find yourself something special?

These shops promise to buy anything that you offer them so long as it is legal to do so – so why not think about selling them some of your excess stuff and make room for more clutter at home!

The vouchers are on the notice board in the church office so ask our minister or someone who has an office key if you would like to buy some.



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

**Second Sunday of the Month from 2-3.00pm
(14th June, 12th July, 9th August)**

Mondays from 11.00am-12 noon

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 the dance arts.

Cost £7 (£5 to Essex Church members)

Contact: Sonya Leite on 0207 371 1674

Past President's Project: Walking for Growth



"A just and loving world needs Unitarianism. It needs our gifts of labour, love, and money. Without these, our vision can neither go out into the world, nor help to change it."

Building on experiences and observations during my presidential year, I am aiming to recruit a small group of people from around the country, who are willing to be proactive and to join me in a project to promote Unitarianism and growth within our congregations. Do contact me if you are interested in being part of this.



Some funds will be needed. Initially I am seeking sponsorship for a walk I will embark on from 13th – 20th June 2009 – St Cuthbert's Way. This is a 100 km walk from Melrose in the Scottish borders to Lindisfarne (Holy Island) on the Northumberland coast, which involves negotiating the causeway to Holy Island, only passable at low tide. A map of the route and additional information is available at

www.unitarian.org.uk/growthproject.htm

No donation is too small - individuals or congregations are able to download sponsor forms or alternatively to make direct donations online at

www.unitarian.org.uk/walkingforgrowth.htm

Although no Unitarian Churches are to be found en route, I shall at the outset of this walk, pay my respects to Catherine Helen Spence, who emigrated from Melrose to South Australia as a teenager with her family. She followed a multifaceted career and was announced on her 80th birthday as "the most distinguished woman in Australia", and indeed she was at one time depicted on their \$5 bill. Her skills in public speaking had apparently been developed as a preacher in the Unitarian church, and one of the many causes she successfully promoted was electoral reform, through the introduction of proportional representation.

I shall keep you all informed of proceeds from this venture and of future plans.

Joyce Ashworth



‘This is What a Church is For’

I went to two churches in three days and were inspired and moved by both events. Two quite different churches and yet they had deep similarities and that was their openness to difference.

I returned to my old church, the very beautiful St. James in Piccadilly, to hear Donald Reeves the ex-rector. Donald is an inspiration for me a passionate dogmatic liberal whose sermons would send me flying out of the church ready to change the world. He has been working on changing people's perception on church and morality so effectively that Mrs. Thatcher dubbed him 'a very dangerous man'. A title he clearly relishes as he has used this to entitle his memoirs.

He is now working in the former Yugoslavia bringing together people to enable conflict resolution. He recognises that this can only happen if the Christian Serbs get together with the Albanian Muslims. He has been working for years on bringing different groups together and has succeeded in persuading high level representatives of both communities to come together to dialogue with each other.

He is in this country at the moment as he fears for the Balkans. He feels that we are no longer interested and that with the 'credit crunch' there will not be the money to support peace initiatives. He is also hoping to help people in this country, particularly Christians, to think about their relationships the Muslim population. It is for all of us to make peace.

Two days later I was in Essex Church for 'Healing words - Stories for Peace'. The host was Beit Klal Yisrael, an organisation that I have been drawn to for some time. This was an evening of story-telling and was fun, beautiful and meaningful. The story telling was using both traditional stories as well as personal experiences on the themes of peace. There were story tellers from many different countries including both Jewish and Arab Israelis. Their purpose was to take these stories to Israel and Palestine to draw people from different communities together in friendship and fun to communicate in peace.

I found the personal stories most moving, as they usually expressed the person's lack of knowledge and appreciation of the other's point of view until something opened their eyes. I felt humbled by their honesty and the courage they had in returning to such a conflicted situation and telling a story that might open other eyes.

Now I am left thinking about how I might contribute to peace and understanding. Often I get disheartened at the impossibility of that desire yet every so often I am inspired by these wonderful people to try a little harder.

This is what church is for I believe. To inspire love and understanding is a sacred duty. As we are all 'people of the book' I feel we have any even greater duty in the conflicts we are witnessing.

Some useful websites : www.bkylondon.org.uk and www.adam-insan.org.il

Carole Grace

“The mystics have long insisted that God is not an-Other Being; they have claimed that he does not really exist and that it is better to call him Nothing. This God is in tune with the atheistic mood of our secular society, with its distrust of inadequate images of the Absolute. Instead of seeing God as an objective Fact, which can be demonstrated by means of scientific proof, mystics have claimed that he is a subjective experience, mysteriously experienced in the ground of being. This God is to be approached through the imagination and can be seen as a kind of art form, akin to the other great artistic symbols that have expressed the ineffable mystery, beauty, and value of life. Mystics have used music, dancing, poetry, fiction, stories, painting, sculpture and architecture to express this Reality that goes beyond concepts. Like all art, however, mysticism requires intelligence, discipline and self-criticism as a safeguard against indulgent emotionalism and projection.



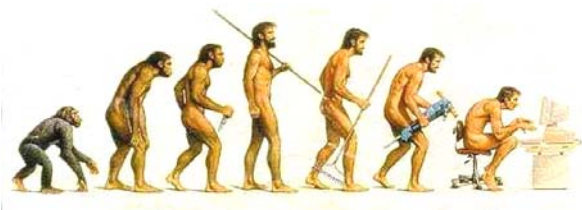
The God of the mystics is not easy to apprehend. It requires long training with an expert and a considerable investment of time. The mystic has to work hard to acquire this sense of the reality known as God (which many have refused to name). Mystics often insist that human beings must deliberately create this sense of God for themselves, with some degree of care and attention that others devote to artistic creation. It is not something that is likely to appeal to people in a society which has become used to speedy gratification, fast food and instant communication.”

Karen Armstrong in ‘A History of God’

A forthcoming event which you might be interested in...

“Evolution & Religion”

What is the Continuing Effect
of Darwinism on Religion?



Thursday 4th June at 5:30 PM.
at Essex Hall, 1-6 Essex St, Strand, London
This event is free of charge to attend

“Evolution & Religion” is sponsored by the World Congress of Faiths (WCF - www.worldfaiths.org), hosted by London District Unitarians, and chaired by Rabbi Jackie Tabick, WCF Chairman.

After Darwin: “How shall religions respond as human population growth destroys the wilderness, the living space of thousands of other species?”

Pejman Khojasteh will discuss the affect of Darwinism on religion from the perspective of psychology of individual followers, and of the effect on religious institutions, also the response to the evolutionary outlook in Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism

“Darwin’s Preception: Explode or Evolve” is the theme of Richard Boeke. Darwin said “Natural Selection is not onward and upward forever.” Think of the bombs we dread today: the atomic bomb, the financial bomb, the population bomb – human threats to the future of earth. Can we adapt as individuals and as a world community?

Forthcoming events from the WCF:

Thursday 18th June at 5.30 pm
“Fideology – Faith as Trust “

Imam A. Sajid, Marcus Braybrooke & Richard Boeke will speak on various topics relating to “Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Prophet of Religious Pluralism”.

Thursday 9th July, 5.30pm
“Beacons of the Light”

Marianne Rankin & Marcus Braybrooke will present the new book by the Rev. Dr. Braybrooke, “100 Holy People who have shaped the history of Humanity.”

For more information: www.worldfaiths.org

Forthcoming event to be held at Essex Church

The Alister Hardy Society

‘Understanding Consciousness
and Spiritual Experience’



Saturday 6th June, 10.30-4.00pm

The day will seek to explore the subject from various viewpoints, each speaker bringing his/her own perspective and understanding. The day will include a debate between the speakers on the implications of the subject and where this might be leading, this followed by questions and discussion from the floor.

11.00am The Extended Mind, Morphic Resonance and Spiritual Experience, talk by Rupert Sheldrake

12.00pm Consciousness and Spirituality: a Mystery at the Heart of Cosmic Evolution, by Prof. Ursula King

1.00pm Please bring packed lunch. Tea/coffee provided

2.00pm The Evolution of Consciousness: Implications for Anomalistic Psychology, by Prof. Chris French

3.00pm Panel and open discussion

Cost: £15.00 for AHS/SMN Members and Students;
£20.00 for Non-Members.

Bookings: email: johnfranklin35@hotmail.com.
Bring your own lunch.

Website: www.alisterhardyreligiousexperience.co.uk



“There were times when I could not afford to sacrifice the bloom of the present moment to any work, whether of the head or the hands. I love a broad margin to my life. Sometimes,

in a summer morning, having taken my accustomed bath, I sat in my sunny doorway from sunrise till noon, rapt in a revelry, amidst the pines and hickories and sumacs, in undisturbed solitude and stillness, while the birds sang around or flitted noiseless through the house, until by the sun falling in at my west window, or the noise of some traveller's wagon on the distant highway I was reminded of the lapse of time. I grew in those seasons like corn in the night, and they were far better than any work of the hands would have been. They were not time subtracted from my life, but so much over and above my usual allowance.”

Henry David Thoreau

Our Scarecrow:

‘The Grand Old Duke of York’



Regular readers may recall that in last month's newsletter, Juliet Edwards asked for help to make a scarecrow, which would be taken to the to Pembridge (Herefordshire) Flower Festival at the end of May.

As you can see from the photograph above, the creativity group did a great job of crafting a splendid ‘Grand Old Duke of York’, who is travelling in the passenger seat of Juliet's car as this newsletter goes to press. We hope to have some more photos of the Duke on his travels next month...

Sunday Services at Essex Church



7th June – “Letting Go of the Security Blanket”

Service led by Caroline Blair

As we go through life, we develop mental strategies to protect ourselves, as far as possible, from pain. But the same strategies can end up protecting us from openness and joy. Can we identify our security blankets and occasionally let them go?

14th June – “Prayer Flags – Blessings on the Breeze”

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

In July we will be starting a course on prayer, to which everyone is invited. This service will use Tibetan prayer flags as a starting point for an exploration of prayer as a concept and as a part of many people's spiritual lives. What does prayer mean for you?

21st June – “Midsummer Sun”

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

As the sun reaches its highest point its light touches the ancient *hele* stone at Stonehenge. This service will consider the importance of the heavenly bodies to ancient peoples and their relevance to us city dwellers today. Have you ever looked up with surprise to see the full moon or a shooting star? Congregation members are invited to bring their favourite readings or personal experiences to this service – let our minister know if you would like to be involved.

28th June – “Celebrating Creativity”

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

After today's service we will be holding a party and lunch to celebrate the official opening of our new kitchens and toilets and the unveiling of our Fabric of Diversity wall hanging. In this service we will celebrate the role played by creativity in human life and its role in assisting us to express our selves and something greater than ourselves. Bring your friends to this special day.