



What's on this month:

Thursday 1st Oct, 2-5.00pm
'Wearable Textile Art' (1/9)

Thursday 1st Oct, 7.15-9pm
Adult RE: 'Building Your Own Theology' (1/8)

Saturday 3rd October, 10am
Walking Group:
Hampton Court
Meeting at Richmond Station

Sunday 4th October, 11.00am
"My Life with Francis"
Led by David Francis Darling

Sunday 4th October, 12.30pm
'Youngsters' Social'

Sunday 4th October, 1-2pm
'The Joy of Drawing'
with Heidi Ferid (1/3)

Wednesday 7th Oct, 7-9pm
Creativity Group:
'Felt Beads and Cords'

Thursday 8th Oct, 2-5.00pm
'Wearable Textile Art' (2/9)

Thursday 8th Oct, 7.15-9pm
Adult RE: 'Building Your Own Theology' (2/8)

Sunday 11th October, 11am
"A New World"
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

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

Sunday 11th Oct, 3.30-5pm
'Songs and Silence for the Soul'

Wednesday 14th Oct, 7-9pm
Committee Meeting

Thursday 15th Oct, 2-5.00pm
'Wearable Textile Art' (3/9)

Thursday 15th Oct, 7.15-9pm
Adult RE: 'Building Your Own Theology' (3/8)

Sunday 18th October, 11am
"When the Going Gets Tough"
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

More listings inside cover...

A Message from our Minister

Blue Bottles

In this life there are at least two sorts of blue bottles – nice bottles in a vibrant dark blue glass and nasty blue bottles that have wings and fly around in a noisy and frenetic fashion. As is sometimes the way, it was the nastier of the two blue bottles that brought me useful messages recently. Following a spiritual practice is a good idea for anyone, but for those in the trade it really is an essential. But knowing the theory and getting into action are two different things. I've been on courses and read books. I've made a commitment to sit and meditate for twenty minutes two times a day, which represents only 2.8% of each day. Why then is it so hard to sit regularly for such a small percentage of time?



Even when I *do* sit down, the promised union with the divine is too often usurped by life's petty dilemmas – what to have for lunch, what to wear tonight, what to write for next month's newsletter. If not distracted by inner turmoil it is outer concerns that perturb – the car siren down the street, the phone, strange noises from the church garden. I try to follow the instructions – stare at a candle, repeat the mantra, follow the breath – but those distractions continue to distract.

And so it was this week that I was visited by a great teacher in the form of a blue bottle that sneaked in through an open window but failed to find the way out again. It buzzed very loudly. It flew around the room repeatedly and tried to pass through the glass window with considerable force. It landed on my head and crawled about for a while. This was when realization came. The previous week I had been meditating at a friend's house when her sweet cat had chosen to jump into my lap.

I liked the cat. I disliked the blue bottle. The humour of this dawned on me, its relationship to our human condition. We are reactive creatures, led by our likes and dislikes. But in truth none of it matters. So what if I sit in meditation for five minutes or five hours a day?

The blue bottle also taught about determination. Its incessant buzzing, and using my head as a landing strip, and banging against the window, eventually persuaded me to go and open the window wide in order to assist its escape. And once I'd got up from the chair it seemed pointless to sit down again so I went and made a cup of tea. Nice or nasty? I guess it depends if you're a blue bottle and which sort of blue bottle you are.

Rev. Sarah Tinker

In this month's newsletter...

* 'Swaziland Sponsorship Project' by Jim Blair * Sermon Podcasts Now Online * Reflections on 'Exploring Prayer' * 'How I Came to Essex Church' by Alice Lambert * 'Wandering Notes: the Chesham Trail' by Mary Spurr * 'Anniversary' by Will Lyons * 'Spiritual Bookshelf: Matthew Fox's "Confessions..." recommended by Charles Miller * 'Hucklow Summer School: A First-Timer's View' by Jo Ridgers * and much 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.



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Sermon Podcasts



In July, we started to experiment with recording our Sunday sermons, so that the audio could be made available online. This seems to be working quite well and now, most weeks, an mp3 of the sermon is available online to download from the church website within a day or so of the service:

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

Alternatively you can subscribe to the podcast using iTunes (or another feed-reader) which will automatically download the latest sermon when it becomes available:

www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk/KensingtonUnitarians.xml

We hope that this will be another way for people to find out about us and get a sense of what this community is about. Also it should be handy for congregation members who are unable to attend a Sunday service once in a while to catch up on the sermon they've missed.

Jane Blackall

What's on this month:

(listings continued from front page)

Wednesday 21st October, 7-9.00pm

Reading Group: 'Brave New World' by Aldous Huxley

Thursday 22nd Oct, 2-5.00pm

'Wearable Textile Art' (4/9)

Thursday 22nd Oct, 7.15-9pm

Adult RE: 'Building Your Own Theology' (4/8)

Sunday 25th October, 11am

"Unitarians and Jesus"

Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

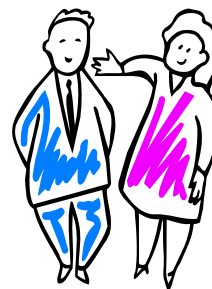
Sunday 25th October, 11am

Congregational Potluck Lunch

Thursday 29th Oct, 2-5.00pm

'Wearable Textile Art' (5/9)

Stewarding and Coffee



Stewarding:

4 th October:	Will Lyons
11 th October:	Christine Joshi
18 th October:	Angela Gasparetto
25 th October:	Michaela von Britzke

Coffee:

4 th October:	Susan Smith
11 th October:	Natasha Drennan
18 th October:	Julia Alden
25 th October:	Christine Joshi

Please speak to Christine Joshi if you are willing to help with stewarding or making coffee. Thanks!

Swaziland Sponsorship Project

In August 2008 Iona and I travelled to Swaziland, a small African state the size of Wales, surrounded on three sides by South Africa and on the fourth by Mozambique. We both immediately fell in love with the Swazi people, renowned for their friendliness and positive view in life. A less positive aspect of this state is the very high incidence of HIV and AIDS. Swaziland is recognised as having the highest rate of AIDS and HIV in the world. The average life expectancy is currently 38 years of age. As a consequence of the high mortality rate many children are left orphaned. Iona and I worked with orphaned children and developed some close links. On returning to the UK we both suggested that Kensington Unitarians should support orphaned children in Swaziland.



Working with the international charity SOS Children's Villages, our Essex Church congregation sponsored Fortunate, a nine year old girl, and also contributed additional funds for the general support of another 160 orphaned children. At this point, Kensington is committed to a five year programme. We have sponsored Fortunate for £250 annually, which provides total life support, including: clothing, food and schooling. She lives in a modern house with nine other children including her twin sister Patience. The children live with a nominated mother, with schooling and medical care easily available on the housing park. The remainder of the church funds so far raised have been donated to the broader support of the remaining 160 children on the site. This will be an ongoing project and future donations are welcome. The church has committed to underwriting a yearly amount of £700 for the next five years. If members of our congregation can continue to give generously, perhaps we can increase this annual commitment to SOS Villages to £1,000 a year – not a huge amount for our community to raise – but it could make a huge difference to these young children's lives.

In July 2009, I visited Fortunate in Swaziland. The Children's Village is located close to the capital Mbabane. I had an emotional visit during which I spent time with Fortunate and her twin Patience. I handed them personal letters written by our younger congregation members James and Alexandra, and presents chosen by our Sunday school staff Jennie Blair and Jordan McCrindle. These gifts included Kensington Unitarians T-shirts, bags, drawing pencils and dolls. In order to include the



other children, I raided Iona's toy box prior to leaving the UK, and therefore was able to present over eighty beanie babies (colourful animal soft toys) to the smaller children and pens and pencils to all. I was told that the pens would be useful for approaching exams. It was an exciting hundreds of presents to excited children. However fair the process appeared, when it came to the group photo, some children still had four pens and pencils. The children and staff were delighted with the visit and the gifts.

I have returned with emotional memories and photographs. We are keen to continue our communication and our ongoing support. Keep an eye out for the display soon to appear in the church. We will also be providing a slide show and account of the visits during our Harvest Festival service.

I hope those who gave money to this project will see how well this money is being spent. Using donations like these, SOS Children's Villages have managed to create comfortable, happy homes for orphaned children in one of the poorest countries in the world. On behalf of Fortunate and the other children, I would like to thank all those who have been so generous as to give money, and to thank in advance anyone thinking of helping us to maintain the sponsorship.

Jim Blair



How I Came to Essex Church



I attended Essex Church for the first time on International Women's Day, March 8, 2009. I'd known of the existence of the church since September 2008, soon after Nick and I had moved to West Kensington. I passed it on my way to work every day, and it intrigued me. However, it wasn't until the next year that I got around to visiting, after having found out more about the church through its excellent website!

I grew up in Belgium and attended an English-speaking evangelical Anglican church. As a teenager, I found that I disagreed with more and more of the church's teaching and could not accept its black and white outlook. When I came to the UK in 2001 to go to university, I encountered a university Christian Union for the first time and was shocked at its extremely conservative nature. I'd known that sexism was still prevalent among Christians, but this was the first time I'd encountered *young* people who believed that women shouldn't be allowed to preach! Over my years at university I grew increasingly disillusioned with mainstream Christianity.

When I moved to London I sporadically attended Quaker meetings. I liked the Quakers very much and fully supported their principles of equality, peace and simplicity, but I missed the structured services of other denominations. I felt the absence of music in Quaker meetings particularly keenly. I occasionally attended Anglican and Methodist services, but, as my feminist consciousness developed, I found it more and more grating to sit through services littered with masculine pronouns.

In March 2008, immersed in work worries and in need of peace, I came to Essex Church; my first Unitarian service. I loved it from the start – the hymns, the candles of joy and concern, the readings, the meditation, the message, the music from the choir – and the fact that International Women's Day was acknowledged! There was an atmosphere of peace and compassion and it rejuvenated me, both spiritually and emotionally.

There are many things I appreciate about Essex Church, one being its use of inclusive language. It's wonderful to attend church services at which the Divine is described in many different ways. I also appreciate the value accorded to creativity, and the importance placed on the natural world. I love the uplifting hymns and the special music from the choir. My choir/musician favourites have been the Hallelujah Chorus (unsurprisingly!) and Fauré's 'Berceuse'. I've found many of the readings and messages helpful and inspiring. I feel thankful to have found such a caring, good humoured community, where people are encouraged to develop their own understanding of the Divine.

Alice Lambert

Reading Engagement Group

“Island” by Aldous Huxley

PLEASE NOTE: CHANGE TO ADVERTISED BOOK

Wednesday 21st October, 7.00-9.00pm



The reading engagement group's next conversation will be about "Island" by Aldous Huxley. This is a change to the advertised programme (following a popular uprising at the last group, we have switched from 'Brave New World', at the recommendation of Michaela von Britzke and Sarah Tinker) and will be the focus of our next group on **Wednesday 21st October**.

Information from Amazon UK:

"One of the truly great philosophical novels. For over a hundred years the Pacific island of Pala has been the scene of a unique experiment in civilisation. Its inhabitants live in a society where western science has been brought together with eastern philosophy and humanism to create a paradise on earth. When cynical journalist, Will Farnaby, arrives to search for information about potential oil reserves on Pala, he quickly falls in love with the way of life on the island. Soon the need to complete his mission becomes an intolerable burden...In counterpoint to Brave New World and Ape and Essence, in Island Huxley gives us his vision of utopia."

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.

Creativity Engagement Group Felt Beads and Cords

Wednesday 7th October, 7.00-9.00pm



At the creativity group in October we will have a go at making felt beads and cords for jewellery. All materials will be provided. It would be helpful if you could bring along an old towel to mop up any soapy water that gets splashed around during the feltmaking process.

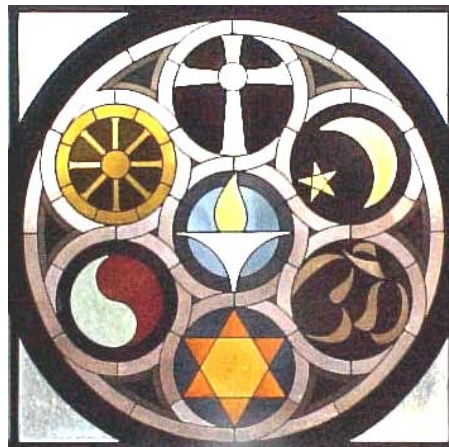
Please note – this is a change to the advertised activity – we will be having our marbling session in the New Year.

Jane Blackall

As usual you are welcome to come along to the group even if you are not particularly interested in the activity on offer – bring along your own craftwork – or simply come along to relax and enjoy the company.

Autumn RE Course at Essex Church

‘Building Your Own Theology’



Thursdays 1st October to 26th November
(excluding 29th October) from 7.15-9.00pm

Facilitated by Sarah Tinker and Howard Hague

One of the best known Unitarian religious education courses for adults is affectionately known as BYOT – Building Your Own Theology. It was designed by its author Richard S Gilbert to help individuals understand, develop and articulate their values in a supportive group setting.

Its central idea, that as religious liberals we must still work to develop our own personal beliefs and values, is as valid today as it was when the course was first published back in 1978, and with course materials that have been updated and ‘anglicized’, BYOT continues to provide a strong framework for personal exploration. It does not provide answers but it does ask important questions of us – how do we make ethical choices, what gives our life meaning, what do I really think about human nature, what is Ultimate Reality for me?

As places are limited you will need to book a place on this course and commit yourself to regular attendance – we hope participants will be able to make at least 5 of the 8 sessions.

Book your place now by talking to our minister.



Autumn District Quarterly Meeting

‘Family Friendly Worship’

Saturday 24th October

Rosslyn Hill Unitarian Chapel, Hampstead

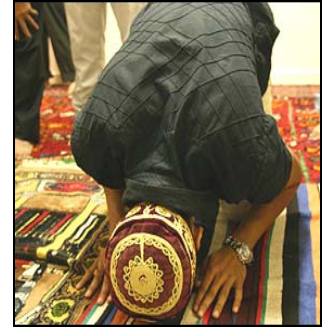


The Autumn Quarterly Meeting, which brings together fellow Unitarians from across London and the South East, will be held at Rosslyn Hill Chapel, Hampstead, on 24th October.

Rev. John Harley, the General Assembly Youth Officer, will lead the worship, and Mel Prideaux of Wakefield Unitarians will give a presentation on Family Friendly Worship. Mel gave this presentation at this year’s General Assembly Annual Meetings, and it was very enthusiastically received.

Rosslyn Hill Unitarian Chapel, Hampstead, NW3 1NG

'Exploring Prayer': Reflections on Our RE Course



When your job involves leading groups there is nothing more pleasant than becoming one of the punters, being able to sit back and enjoy what the group is all about. That was my experience on the recent Exploring Prayer course, run by our Outreach Officer Jane Blackall and our warden Jenny Moy. As various participants pointed out, prayer is a particularly interesting issue for us as Unitarians, with our varied ideas about the nature of divinity. It was fascinating to hear the eclectic ways in which we all approached prayer and to note some of the links between us, particularly a shared sense of connection with something greater than ourselves when out in nature. I'll never forget the evening we lit candles for issues that concerned us; there was such a deep and respectful listening in the room that night. Thank you to Jenny and Jane for facilitating this course so well and thank you to all the other participants for keeping up such regular attendance over the summer months.

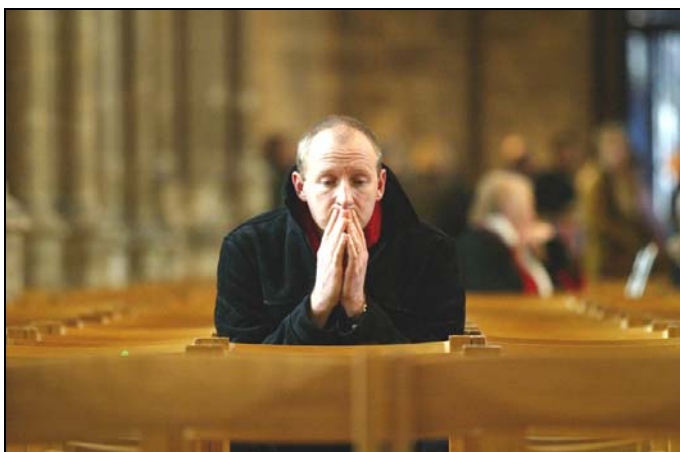
Several people had useful ideas about ways we could perhaps develop prayer in our Sunday services, so look out for details of a meeting that will be held after a service, probably in November. Would you like to lead prayers, or write prayers, or develop some new ways of praying? Susan Smith and Louisa Bird would like to hear from you.

Do get in touch with me or Jane Blackall if you have ideas of other courses and activities you would like to have happening here at Essex Church or that you might be able to co-facilitate.

Sarah Tinker

"Unfortunately I was only able to attend four of the six sessions of 'Exploring Prayer' but found them stimulating and encouraging. There was an excellent balance of theory and practice and I particularly enjoyed the session on praying for others, when we had a session similar to 'candles of joy and concern', but in a much more reflective and meditative manner. I was also moved by this small group of people sharing their stories and spiritual practices. Part of our Unitarian heritage is honouring and valuing our own and others' experiences rather than believing what we are told! These past weeks have been a wonderful opportunity to learn from the prayer experiences from other faith traditions and explore the ways in which these traditions resonate with our own experiences."

David Darling



"After having a Protestant upbringing but having recently become interested in eastern religious philosophy, I wanted to know what prayer was really all about, especially amongst different faiths and practices.

After listening to people's different experiences as to what their prayer practice is, I left the course with a deeper understanding that prayer is a deeply personal thing, a practice or tradition that is difficult to describe or translate into a linear form, but rather is something that is unique and brings comfort, solace and peace to each individual. It made me question my own religious beliefs in a constructive way, and left me searching for a deeper meaning that I wouldn't have otherwise had before participating in the course.

I particularly enjoyed practising prayer from other faiths such as Islam, particularly in a Quaker's clearing practice and also seeing what other people had to say or bring in respect of their own personal prayer experience. Much to my interest, many of the objects that people brought in or spoke about were not religious focussed, which further made me aware that prayer is a very personal thing.

In all, I really enjoyed the sense of community that the prayer course brought and made me realise that many people in this world have a deeper sense of looking for something spiritual to provide comfort and meaning to their lives and that prayer is a means by which one can find this."

Scott Robinson

Community Arts Project: Wearable Textile Art

Thursdays from 1st October, 2-5pm

Following up on our 'Fabric of Diversity' and 'Freestyle Felt' projects at Essex Church, we will hold another series of drop-in textile workshops in the autumn of 2009, this time focussing on 'Wearable Textile Art': hats, scarves, slippers, jewellery, clothes, bags, etc... primarily being hand-made from felt.

The sessions will not be 'taught' as such, but there will always be people on hand who are willing to answer questions, or help get you started if you are completely new to feltmaking. Some basic materials and equipment will be provided (donations are invited to cover the cost of these items) but you may need to purchase your own materials for larger and more complex projects. The sessions have a relaxed atmosphere and all are welcome to come and join us.

Jane Blackall



Reflections on 'Exploring Prayer' *(continued from previous page)*

"I wanted to attend the course because I felt it sat well with the reason why I've been coming to Essex Church; to enjoy the collective spiritual experience.

Firstly, I thought the course was extremely well organised without being 'over managed'. The handouts were a good guide to what was planned to happen throughout the weeks but I was sometimes unable to make the connection between what was discussed on the handout and what we did as a group within the session. There was lots of food for thought to reflect upon at a later date and perhaps then I shall make the connection. The 'ground rules' were very helpful for me and I think were significant in creating the right atmosphere.

Over the weeks, because the individuals in the group were fairly constant, I felt that a level of intimacy was achieved that provided an unspoken bond. I thought the the group candle lighting moment was a very honest and spiritual time and the silence felt very meaningful; a deeper experience, for me, than what is done on a Sunday.

Trying to experience how other faiths pray was interesting. It would have been really good to have had practising Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Jews and others to show us the way. I know Scott is a Buddhist, and Jenny a Quaker, and their contributions were unique. I am so keen to explore the interfaith dimension of worship.

A quote in the 'Loving' extracts. "Prayer is surrender - surrender to the will of God and cooperation with that will." Well I feel that God has told me to get myself back into the collective experience and Essex Church's 'Exploring Prayer' course has not disappointed."

Susan Smith

"If I had the chance to run another prayer course, I'd do it entirely differently – which I hope is an indication that I learnt something!

I felt really humbled by the depth of experience of integrating prayer into their lives brought by so many members of the group. In fact it often felt ridiculous that Jane and I were leading the course when our own prayer lives seemed relatively undeveloped. I kept having to remind myself that's why we'd called the course "Exploring Prayer" rather than "We'll tell you all about Prayer"!

If I was planning another course, I'd probably base it round the practices many people already seem to use: making sacred space in their home with resonant objects and images; using candles; carrying symbolic objects around; visualising or actually going to peaceful natural places; finding or making set words that feel meaningful; committing to regular prayer times in the day/week; being open to dialogue with God at any time; trying to understand and cherish other people; giving thanks; setting intention in the morning and reflecting on the day in the evening; using a spiritual journal/notebook; valuing chance & co-incidence; connecting with breath & the body and the practice I'm most familiar with from my Quaker tradition – getting group support for prayerful decision making.

My original interest in running the course was to force myself find out more about the range of different prayer practices in world religions, and hopefully to be inspired to deepen my own prayer life. I feel I only scratched the surface of researching other traditions, but I did get inspired by the other people in the group. Thank you all!"

Jenny Moy

Prayer to the Great Spirit



Great Spirit, whose voice is heard in the stillness,
Whose breath gives life to all,
We come before thee as children
Needing the help of thy strength and thy wisdom.

Grant us to walk in beauty,
Seeing the uncommon in the common,
Aware of the great stream of wonder
In which we and all things move.

Give us to see more deeply
Into the great things of our heritage,
And the simple yet sublime truths
Hidden in every leaf and every rock.

May our hands treat with respect
The things which thou hast created.
May we walk with our fellow creatures
As sharers with them in the one life that flows from thee.

Jacob Trapp
(After a Sioux Indian Prayer)

*Reproduced from Intimations of Grandeur: Meditations
by Jacob Trapp. (London, The Lindsey Press, 1968)*

The above prayer was used by Howard Hague in his service about Gaia at Essex Church on 16 August 2009. It is reproduced in response to several enquiries about it.



“In some Islamic societies you would never bring a sick person flowers and candles as we do in this country. Instead, you would tell them a story of patience, endurance and triumph. The images such a tale would plant in their awareness would circulate through their souls just as powerfully as a medical elixir would travel to the diseased cells by way of the bloodstream. The more the story is considered, the more it can empower the body's own healing mechanisms.”

Richard Stone

Warden's Column

What's On in Our Busy Building...



It's been a blessedly quiet summer here, with almost all our regular groups taking a break in August. As I'm writing this though, we're about to go into the second week of September, when things return pretty much to normal.

Sarah and I have been talking about how we can try and keep a sense of peace and spaciousness in the building throughout the year. Together with Jane, we did an analysis of all the current users of the building, trying to work out: which were important to us financially; which activities we felt we actively wanted to support and which were most demanding to accommodate.

We came to the conclusion that in general we would be sensible to only accept regular weekly or weeklong bookings from quiet groups who could afford our standard rates and had a consistent contact person. Exceptions should only be made for activities we strongly wanted to support.

So that's the new theory – now to put it into practice. The first step is to negotiate with some existing groups about niggling issues which make their bookings a strain for us. Then we need to start saying no to bookings that we could accommodate but don't meet our new criteria.

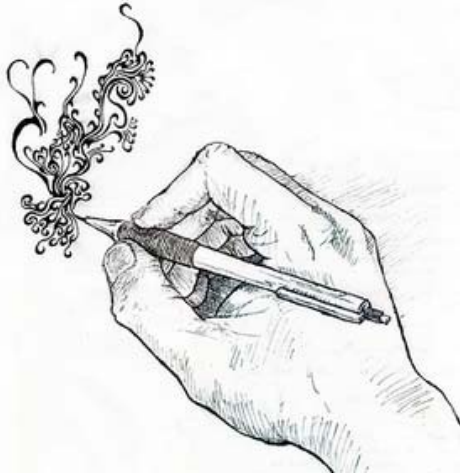
Of course, we still need to make sure we generate enough income from the building to cover the running costs of the Church. So we've set ourselves a target income of £50,000 this year (roughly equivalent to the income from the nursery), but as long as we seem to be on track for that we won't take extra bookings purely for financial reasons.

Ironically, I just had to break off from writing this to deal with a caller interested in hiring the church for occasional concerts. Lovely woman, happy to pay £150 an evening, but just the kind of booking we've now identified as more trouble than it's worth – yet could I bring myself to simply say no? Nope, I merely made discouraging noises and muttered something about being very busy in the evenings while giving her our contact details.

Oh well, practice makes perfect I suppose. Now how should it go? “We don't take one-off evening bookings. We don't take one-off evening bookings. We don't take one-off evening bookings . . .”

Jenny Moy

'The Joy of Drawing'



**Sundays 4th October, 1st November
and 6th December 2009, 1.00-2.00pm**

This short series of community arts workshops will be led by Heidi Ferid at Essex Church this autumn.

Heidi says: "So many of us have been told that we 'can not draw', but this is just not true. Drawing is not only about observing and reproducing reality, it can be just as much about personal expression and mark making. We all can do it and find it enjoyable and interesting. Lines and marks will be our starting point and we will continue our exploration from there, above all I hope we will find out that drawing can be very enjoyable. We shall be using pencils, felt pens, and crayons. Some materials will be provided, but do bring your own if you want to."

Contact arts@kensington-unitarians.org.uk to register your interest and for more information.



Coincidentally, the first of our new 'Joy of Drawing' workshops is due to happen at the same time as the nation-wide 'Big Draw' event is taking place.

Every October, around 1000 venues – from village halls and nursery schools to national museums and castles – take part in The Big Draw. The month-long programme spans art, science, design and the environment and offers something for all ages.

For more information see: www.thebigdraw.org.uk

Congregational Lunch

Sunday 25th October, 12.30-2.00pm



We will be having another congregational potluck lunch after the service on Sunday 25th October. Please put the date in your diary now and plan to be there... think about what food or drink you might be able to bring. There will be a sign-up sheet for your offerings circulated nearer the time.

Songs and Silence for the Soul

Chanting and Stillness at Essex Church



**Sundays 11th October, 8th November
13th December, 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.



Wandering Notes: On the Chesham Trail

It's a clear morning, early autumn weather. We meet and set out by train. The journey begins. As we pass from urban scenery into more treed and open spaces, Will tells me of a poet, Sir John Betjeman. When the Metropolitan line was built, Betjeman fondly referred to this area as 'Metroland'. But there were many aspects of modernization he strongly disliked, which came through in his poetry. The London-born poet laureate preferred more rural ways. Further on Will announces, 'We're passing Wembley.' I look out to see the stadium. There is something like an arched beam across its open top. I wonder aloud about it. Someone explains, then shares an amusing anecdote. When that piece was added, the

television reception throughout the area was so affected that free aerials were distributed to all the households.

We soon arrive at Chesham station. Making our way through the town market, I buy some Braeburn apples from a stall. Seven for a pound! That's a nice coincidence as there are seven of us. We make our way through streets, then up steps that lead into a treed lane. Turning to pass through a stile, we trudge uphill across a wide-open field. At the top we pause underneath the solitary tree there, a 200-year old oak. The view, looking back, is fantastic! Jim calls Buster over, to be included in a group photo, and rewards him with a good scratch. Buster rolls over, enthusiastically, on the dry earth. After the photo we continue on our way.

There is a pleasant, natural flow of conversations as you walk, beside first one person and then another, as our pathway narrows to single-file, then widens out again. Blackberry brambles draw some of us to sampling, then catching up. Through dapple-shaded paths, along edges of fields, through further stiles we go, then pause to verify direction. Carole, Juliet and Caroline consult the map. Down a leafy lane a damson plum tree is spotted. More wild fruit gathered, an unexpected gift, then we go back to finding our way along this route. Along another field, we pass a different kind of hedge. Someone notices a large-ish hole and wonders if it's of a badger's making. As we walk along, Carole notes evidence of coppicing in this stand of hazels. I've not known coppicing, as I grew up in Nova Scotia. She gave some detail about coppices, stands of trees grown to yield wood in an ongoing way, (sustainably). The wood could be used for different purposes, including charcoal making. If I had been on my own, I'd have just passed this hedge that looks wall-like. My 'seeing' is enlarged by another's.

Walking with Carole and Michaela, I learn how charcoal was made. It was a dirty job yet a process that required skill to do just right as a smothered combustion. Charcoal was the preferred fuel for heating and cooking, as well as for metalworking, as it burned cleaner and hotter than wood. Charcoal making was practiced extensively in woodlands like this and all over Europe. Even today. Both knew this was still practiced in places they've travelled to, like Crete. Our group walks on, chatting as we go. A while later, passing a large sumac, another kind of woodland worker comes to mind for Will. He tells me about 'bodgers'. Bodgers were men who worked in the forest, harvesting and turning wood for making chairs and other furniture. Many would have worked in these very woodlands, long ago.

Our group stops for lunch, resting on a grassy spot on the edge of a stubby field. This reminds Carole of childhood and gleaning corn. After the harvesting was done, any overlooked corn was collected from the field to feed the chickens. Cloud is moving in now. It lends a striking beauty and drama, to the sky and landscape. Eating, resting, chatting, gazing; it feels good to be here! We prepare to set off again. I'm standing on the path, waiting but a minute. I glance down and spot some of the chalky flint I admire. Flint's a beautiful stone with a lovely texture, appearing in different hues. This time, at my feet, I notice flint rounded like a beach stone but with a chunk broken away. Picking it up, looking closer, I see an impression like a small thumbprint within the stone. I show the others, wondering if it might be a bit of fossil. We're ready to walk again. I tuck the flint away to investigate later.

Walking with Juliet, our topic turns from musicals to tongue twisters. Then one particular tongue twister turns the topic again. "She sells sea shells by the sea shore. The shells she sells are surely sea shells. If she sells shells on the seashore I'm sure she sells seashore shells." Juliet says she heard that this was about the girl who had, so long ago, collected fossils from the cliffs along the shore at Lyme Regis. I'm excited. I know about her! Mary Anning was famous as a fossil collector in the early 1800s. I have a children's book about her, which I've shared with London classes. I've seen some of the fossils at the Natural History Museum. But I would not have made any connection with this old, familiar tongue twister, one of many I learned from my mother. Her father (my grandfather) was born and raised here in London. I like how sharing stories, like the different paths we've on, inter-weaves. Whatever the next route, whoever comes along, however it gets woven, I will be looking forward, to sharing a journey.

Mary Spurr



Walking Group Report: Chesham Circle in September

We had a good turnout. Caroline and Jim Blair, Michaela von Britzke, Mary Spurr, and Juliet Edwards joined Carole Grace, Buster, and me for the Chesham walk on the first Saturday of the month. This walk was a five mile circular, starting and ending at Chesham railway station on the Metropolitan Line. We met up at Baker Street and, after a last minute scramble due to a platform change, we took the fast Amersham train, changing at Chalfont & Latimer to get the Chesham shuttle.

It was a fine clear day as we began, heading out of Chesham. Climbing White Hill, about a couple of hundred feet above the town, we stopped by a 200-year old oak to look back over the town and across the surrounding Chiltern countryside. The view was fantastic. The route was typical undulating Chiltern, passing across stubbly fields and through hidden lanes hemmed in by ancient hedgerows.



September walkers Will, Michaela, Carole, Mary, Jim, Juliet and Caroline (plus Buster in the front row!)

Many of the kissing gates were new: which is testament to the good work of the Chiltern Society. Finding our route (a co-operative effort) was pretty easy using a leaflet produced by Chesham Borough Council. The route was well devised, being uphill out and downhill back, and one could revisit and easily make another combination as there are so many old lanes in the area.

Will Lyons

Photographs by Mary Spurr, Jim Blair, and Juliet Edwards

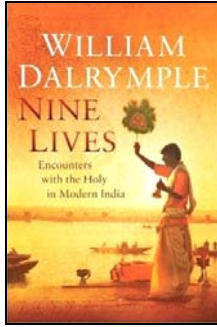
October's walk will be led by Michaela along the Thames Path from Richmond to Hampton Court, taking the train back. Meet at Richmond Station by 10am on Saturday 3rd October – please let Michaela know if you are planning to come.

Forthcoming Walks:

Saturday 7th November - Epping Forest **Saturday 5th December** - Barnes **Saturday 2nd January** - Isle of Dogs
We are still looking for leaders for our future programme of walks... please let us know if you might be willing to help out.



Free Lectures in London



'Nine Lives: In Search of the Sacred in Modern India'

Monday 5th October, 1:15-2.15pm
British Museum, London, WC1B 3DG

Historian and travel writer William Dalrymple introduces his new book: 'Nine Lives: In Search of the Sacred in Modern India', which discusses how traditional religious life in South Asia has been transformed by the region's rapid change. Admission free, booking is advised (call 020 7323 8181).



'Dhoti, Suit and Trilby: M.K. Gandhi and his Opponents'

Thursday 22nd October 2009, 1:15-2.15pm
University College London, WC1E 6BT

M.K. Gandhi, famously described as a 'half-naked fakir', has been visually defined by his dhoti (loincloth). In contemporary India his public image competes with those of other political figures of his era who are depicted in a suit (the Dalit leader B.R. Ambedkar) and a trilby (the Marxist revolutionary Bhagat Singh). Professor Christopher Pinney of UCL's Department of Anthropology will consider what these costumes signify and the very political choices they continue to embody. Admission free, first-come first-served at UCL's Darwin Lecture Theatre.

November Newsletter Deadline



The deadline for submitting items for the next issue is **Sunday 11th October**. Please send items (such as poems, quotes, articles, notices, etc...) to Jane Blackall or any of the committee members before this date.

Thank you!!!

Multifaith Calendar

✧ 3rd October – Sukkot – Jewish

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

✧ 7th October – Pavarana – Buddhist

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

✧ 11th October – Simchat Torah – Jewish

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

✧ 17th October – Divali (Deepavali) – Hindu

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

✧ 17th October – Divali

(Bandi Chhor Divas) – Sikh

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

✧ 19th – 26th October – Inter Faith Week of

Prayer for World Peace

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

Latest News from the Church Committee



1. Following two cupboard break-ins, we unfortunately have to recognise that the church building is not a suitable place to store valuable items: too many people come and go during each week and it is impossible to monitor everyone.
2. Having completed our big kitchen and loo building project we are now gearing up for the next big project, which will be the wiring. The lights in the Lindsay Hall are very temperamental at present, and sometimes several of them refuse to switch on at all, or buzz very loudly when they do. The rewiring will be done in stages; we are planning to do the foyer and the Lindsay Hall first.
3. We now have our own regular maintenance man (Fraser) who will be responsible for routine repairs around the building.
4. The Notting Hill Carnival is always a challenge for those who actually live at the church; the front area was described as a 'sea of rubbish' by the end. Thanks to Sarah and Jenny for coping with the noise and disturbance, and to Daniel Tinker for cleaning up.
5. The Church received over £1400 in gift aid for last year, so thanks to everyone who took the trouble to register their donations.
6. Harold is going to arrange an assessment of the church organ, which for many years has served a purely ornamental purpose, and which has to be separately insured. Since we have a very beautiful piano, it may be best to release the organ into the wild, or at least find someone who would use it more.

Caroline Blair

The next meeting of the management committee will take place on Wednesday 14th October at 7.00pm.

Storytellers' Circle



Saturday 10th October, 11am-2pm
Richmond Unitarian Church, Ormond Road, TW10 6TH

A quarterly gathering for all who wish to learn stories, and share ideas and techniques. This circle will be gathered to provide an opportunity for those who use stories in worship and other settings to swap stories, share resources, and for new storytellers to have the opportunity to learn from others.

Time will be set aside for both telling stories and discussion of tips and techniques. The story topic will be healing stories (bring copies of one of your favourites stories on that topic to share). Bring a packed lunch. Beverages will be provided.



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

Second Sunday of the Month from 2-3.00pm
(11th October, 8th November, 13th December)

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

Anniversary

The beginning of September was a milestone for me. It was the fifth anniversary of my loss of belief in any deity and the event that finally convinced me to let go of what had previously become a tenuous holding on to the idea that there was some supreme, overarching force for good hovering somewhere in the background of our existence. This was the terrorist siege of School No. 1 in Beslan, South Ossetia which began when a group of armed terrorists, demanding an end to the Second Chechen War, took over the school.

It was 1st September 2004, the "Day of Knowledge", the first day of the school year, a local festival. Most of the 1,200 hostages, forced into a gymnasium measuring 10m x 25m, were children, as were most of the eventual fatalities. But hundreds of children, aged five to 18, survived – one way or another. Some lost parents, many lost siblings. All lost friends, neighbours, teachers. Some saw adults shot dead at close range. The building was wired by the terrorists with explosives and there was no drinking water.



On the third day of the siege, Russian security forces stormed the building using tanks and heavy weapons. A series of explosions shook the school, followed by a fire which engulfed the building. A chaotic gun battle ensued between the hostage-takers and Russian security forces. Ultimately, at least 334 hostages were killed, including 186 children. Hundreds more were left permanently wounded.

This short story (courtesy of 'The Guardian') illustrates the terror and suffering of the children involved,

'At first Fatima appears like any other teenager, hugging herself self-consciously in a T-shirt and leggings, gold hooped earrings and a paisley headband. She has peeling silver nail varnish and sparkly butterfly nail transfers. When she's indoors, she tells me sternly, she likes to wear two pairs of socks. As the photographer arrives to take her picture, she says, "Shall I put my evening dress on?"

Fatima means this as a joke. Because she can't dress herself. And although she may almost look like any other 15-year-old, she is different. The left side of her body is partially paralysed. At times she rocks and mumbles to herself, and often obsessively claps and touches her eyes, nose and knees. She struggles to eat without dribbling and can barely walk unaided.

Fatima Dzgoeva is the worst injured of the children who survived the siege of School Number One in Beslan. But she is also one of the town's greatest and most unlikely success stories. Pronounced dead twice, she has survived two comas and countless surgeries. She has had most of her skull remodelled with titanium plates. "Touch my expensive head," she says, tapping her forehead. "It's like gold." But she is alive – and, after long sessions of counselling and physiotherapy in various clinics across Germany, she is learning how to be happy – and ordinary – again.'

Will Lyons

How does your faith respond to life's tragedies and human cruelty? Our service on Sunday 18th October will be considering this difficult theme and there will be time for conversation over coffee after the service.



Traditional Transylvanian Blessing

(Hungarian and English – from Unitarian Universalist Partner Church Council)

Hol hit – ott szeretet

Where there is faith there is love

Hol szeretet – ott béke

Where there is love there is peace

Hol béke – ott áldás

Where there is peace there is blessing

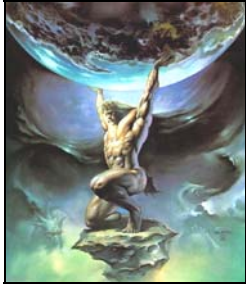
Hol áldás – ott Isten

Where there is blessing there is God

Hol Isten – ott szükseg nincen.

Where there is God is all we need.

Atlas



There is a kind of love called maintenance
Which stores the WD40 and knows when to use it

Which checks the insurance, and doesn't forget
The milkman; which remembers to plant bulbs;

Which answers letters; which knows the way
The money goes; which deals with dentists

And Road Fund Tax and meeting trains,
And postcards to the lonely; which upholds

The permanently rickety elaborate
Structures of living, which is Atlas.

And maintenance is the sensible side of love,
Which knows what time and weather are doing
To my brickwork; insulates my faulty wiring;
Laughs at my dryrotten jokes; remembers
My need for gloss and grouting; which keeps
My suspect edifice upright in air,
As Atlas did the sky.

U.A. Fanthorpe

This poem was submitted by Will Lyons, who says:

*"As I go on to maintenance chemotherapy,
I'd like to dedicate this poem to Carole."*



"A mystic will know most and yet will act innocently. It is the ones who know little who make a fuss about their knowledge. The more a person knows, the less he shows to others. Besides, a mystic is never ready to correct people for their follies,

to condemn them for their errors, or to accuse them of foolishness. He sees so much of errors and follies and foolishness that he never feels inclined to point them out; he just sees life in its different aspects, and understands the process an individual goes through in life. It is by mistakes and errors that one learns in the end, and a mystic never feels that he should condemn anyone for them; he only feels that they are natural."

Hazrat Inayat Khan

Memorial Concert

Sunday 18th October, 2.30pm
All Saints Church, London NW2 2TJ

Margaret Marshall from our choir has informed us of a concert taking place this autumn, which is in memory of her husband, who died earlier this year.

Margaret says: "there will be a wide selection of music, classical and light, with some lovely young performers".

Admission to this concert is free. There will be a collection for the charity "Feedback Madagascar" and the church.

International Felt Day

Saturday 3rd October 2009



2009 has been the United Nations Year of Natural Fibres and International Felt Day is on 3rd October. 'Felt United', a group of felt makers in Holland and Norway, want to celebrate this by encouraging feltmakers across the world to display felt in their own environment such as wrapping trees, draped over gates, carrying items of felt etc on this special day. They are specifying the colour range to be used (yellow through to red). Felters of the world unite!!

Feltmakers from across the South-East will be holding an impromptu 'Felt-In', on the South Bank outside Tate Modern, from 11am to 2pm on Saturday 3rd October to celebrate the occasion. If it rains the feltmakers expect to move inside into the Turbine Hall of the Tate Modern.

People taking part have been asked to wear something in the Felt United colours (yellow, orange and red) and bring a little something to do, maybe some felt beads or just come and talk felt to passers by.

Jane Blackall and Sara Frith from the Community Arts Feltmaking Project at Essex Church plan to go along and take part in this event. Please contact Jane or Sara if you would be interested in coming along too.



Hucklow Summer School: A First-Timer's View

Astonishingly it is now a month ago that I was preparing to go to Great Hucklow, to SUMMER SCHOOL, the place, the event I had heard spoken of in hushed and almost deified tones for the past 3 and a half years! Now I'm just left with the memories and the images... until next year. I will definitely go again, though at the start of the week I wasn't at all certain I'd get to the end of this one! Now why could that be I hear you asking? What's not to like about a Unitarian Summer School? It's just fun isn't it?

The noise! That's what! It was truly overwhelming... in the dining room. The rest of the Nightingale Centre was peaceful and sedate just as Florence herself would have prescribed I'm sure. The dining room however was much better described in a 'typo', a spelling mistake, as the dinning room. My goodness it was a racket! Since my family have gradually (and thankfully!) left home my life has become wonderfully quiet. I listen to the radio for much of the day so apart from the soothing tones of Radio 4 presenters and birds twittering away in my garden I lead a very quiet life really here in Central London.

50+ Unitarians in a dinning room is not a peaceful experience though so if you're planning to go for the first time my best advice is to be prepared and take some earplugs! It took me a few days to settle in and to manage this challenge 3 times a day. Being naturally quite lively and opinionated myself I fit quite well into this diverse and very interesting bunch of people and can see that in a couple of years' time I will certainly be one of the din-making culprits and probably won't even notice it any more!

After this slightly dodgy start, by Tuesday I felt a definite shift from "I'm managing" to "Ah! I'm now enjoying this." What a relief!

By May this year I was all set, clutching my wonderfully cheap Megabus tickets to my bosom and my subsidised (thank you fairy Committee!) place at Summer School in my heart, excited to be stepping out into the unknown. In fact Caroline and Jim drove me there instead so I had a lovely journey out into the Derbyshire Peaks welcoming the scene of sheep cows, trees and fields that are in short supply in Central London. It was a lovely backdrop and introduction to the surprisingly demanding and challenging week. I was very surprised by how challenged I felt actually because I am usually quite confident and happy around groups of people.

A blessing for me was to have a single room. I am, as my children tease me, a bit 'Princess and the Pea', I'm highly sensitive to noise and I sleep lightly. If I don't sleep I don't function at all well. I did book well in advance but I suspect the Panel Fairy/Angels were at work when I prayed for a single room, to have the best chance to have what I needed for a restful week. (Thankyou Panel Fairy/Angels). The Nightingale Centre is delightful, set in pretty though unpretentious gardens. A functional building which I imagine has evolved rather than appeared fully formed. Its structure isn't its appeal, that has much more to do with the people inside it and what they do there.

(continued on next page)



Hucklow Summer School *(continued)*

It was a jam-packed week. Every morning there was meditation and prayers for those brave and hardy souls who can (and I've heard actually enjoy it!) rise early and eat breakfast at 8am. I said my prayers from the comfort and warmth of my bed having, of course, checked first with god who/which confirmed it to be fine. If bed is where I need to say my prayers and meet the day then that, I was assured, was the best place for me! I generally don't eat until about 9.30 so I took mine to my room to eat after the Theme Talks from 9 until 10.15. Perfect.

This year our very own Sarah Tinker did the Theme Talks; warm, funny intelligent and intellectual Sarah who brought along her equally engaging guest speakers (including our own David Darling and Caroline Blair). She set the tone every day on the theme of 'The Journey'. Linda Hart told us a couple of stories every day and the guests speakers told us something about them selves, about their own journey speaking each for about 20 minutes I think. It was a lovely idea since I love to hear people's stories. I'm always surprised and humbled by what I hear. I've learned that nothing in life and appearances can be taken for granted.

From 10.45 until 12.45 every day we joined our previously chosen group. Mine was 'In Whose Shoes...?' led by Michael Dadson and Alison Thursfield. We bonded very quickly and had a fascinating, very rewarding and fun week getting to hear each other's stories in pairings, threes and in the large group of 12. We looked at where we had come from and where we were going using an old or discarded pair of shoes we had brought from home for the purpose as a medium for focus. We looked at how these shoes had served us on our journey so far and whether or not we still needed these particular shoes for the rest, or next part of the journey. It was all very symbolic and profound and I was very touched by the depth of the content and the level of commitment to the preparation for it by Michael and Alison. We had great fun with a room-sized snakes and ladders game which we played in two teams. It could've gone on...and on...and on. It put me back in touch with old, underused in the recent past, skills as well as helping me to see where I have come from and where I am ...roughly at least...going, or aiming to go.

In the afternoons and early evenings (after lunch and dinner...ah ha! is there a connection? Din – dinner) there were other groups to attend. The list, the choice was incredible! If I had gone to even half of what was available I'd have needed a holiday when I got back. I chose a couple but mainly walked, rested, slept and 'absorbed' while the others filled those rooms doing this that and the other. The choice was stunning. What a talented bunch of people! I was very pleased with the Luminaria I made and now have it hanging in my loo to protect the modesty of those who hate my clear glass window. (It looks out onto a brick wall I hasten to add!) I also had a bit of fun with the Fimo modelling clay which has re-ignited my desire to do more creative activities. I particularly enjoyed having the 5 children around. It was truly heart-warming to have them there and to witness their interest and participation in all that was happening. It helped us all to be a bit more careful when Lizzie's hair nearly went up in a puff of smoke as she lit the chalice candle!

I was pleased with myself too for daring to co-lead one of the Epilogues with David Darling. This lovely end to each evening is a memory which will stay with me, particularly of watching the lanterns being carried from the Nightingale Centre down the lane to the ancient chapel. It was a privilege to be asked to do it. Thankyou.

So... though it began with a din I came away with a warm glow that comes from the satisfaction of being in community, a feeling of deep peace. What more could I ask for? (Apart from silence... and that certainly isn't going to happen!)

Jo Ridgers

Photographs courtesy of Jim Blair and Ned Prideaux

For the State of this World



For the state of this world
For the fear and anger and pride
And bitterness of it
Let my tears fall

For those burnt in man-made fires
For those washed away in floods
For those twittering their lives away
In disease-ridden shacks and slums
Let our tears fall

For those without food
In an abundant world
For all those without water
In a polluted world
Let our tears fall.

For the mountains of wealth
Poured out in pursuit of transitory pleasures
For the global enterprises gleefully invested
In the making of weapons
Let our tears fall.

And for the cruelty of crabs
Devouring a helpless wandering seabird
For the quick extinction of scurrying insects
For the destruction of

whales, tigers, and elephants
For the pitiless squashing of thousands of
Birds, hedgehogs, badgers and rabbits
Beneath a million

indifferent motorway wheels
For the predatory instinct which drives
Us and all Nature to the brink of extinction
O Loving One
I cry out to you

I cry out to you
What can this all mean?
For all this misery and premature death
O Loving, smiling,
infinitely Compassionate One
Let our tears fall.

John Hands

Denomination News: New GA Chief Officer

Derek McAuley has been appointed to the post of Chief Officer of the General Assembly (GA) of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches. It is anticipated that he will take up the position in December 2009.

Derek said: "I am excited to be offered this opportunity to serve the Unitarian denomination in a new way and look forward to working closely with current staff at Essex Hall, members of the Executive Committee and Unitarians across Great Britain and Ireland. I want to play my part in developing the movement across the spectrum of its activities and for Unitarianism to grow both numerically but also as a group of communities sharing common values of liberal religion. I have benefited immensely from my association with Unitarianism and I want to see others share that experience. I have a lot to learn but am looking forward to starting work as soon as I can at Unitarian Headquarters."

Derek, aged 50, has been active within the Unitarian movement at congregational, district and national levels and has been a member of the Executive Committee since April 2008 and GA Treasurer since April 2009. He served on the Hibbert Trust collaborative inquiry into the future of liberal religion: "Shaping the Future". He has been a senior manager in the National Health Service for 17 years in Merseyside and Manchester and also brings long experience as a voluntary sector trustee.

Universal Spiritual Gatherings

Friday 2nd October, 6.30pm – 'Hindu Puja'



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.

RE Training Conference

Friday 20th- Sunday 22nd November 2009
Nightingale Centre, Great Hucklow



The Religious Education Coordinators Panel of the ETC has organised a Religious Education Training Conference at the Nightingale Centre in Great Hucklow. All District RE Coordinators, ministerial students, District Youth Officers and anyone involved in adult, children or young people's religious education are invited to attend.

Booking forms and further information are available from margaret.robinson15@btinternet.com or 01642 762219.

Poetry and Religion

Religions are poems. They concert
our daylight and dreaming mind, our
emotions, instinct, breath and native gesture

into the only whole thinking: poetry.
Nothing's said till it's dreamed out in words
and nothing's true that figures in words only.

A poem, compared with an arrayed religion,
may be like a soldier's one short marriage night
to die and live by. But that is a small religion.

Full religion is the large poem in loving repetition;
like any poem, it must be inexhaustible and complete
with turns where we ask *Now why did the poet do that?*

You can't pray a lie, said Huckleberry Finn;
you can't poe one either. It is the same mirror:
mobile, glancing, we call it poetry,

fixed centrally, we call it a religion,
and God is the poetry caught in any religion,
caught, not imprisoned. Caught as in a mirror

that he attracted, being in the world as poetry
is in the poem, a law against its closure.
There'll always be religion around while there is poetry

or a lack of it. Both are given, and intermittent,
as the action of those birds - crested pigeon, rosella parrot -
who fly with wings shut, then beating, and again shut.

Les Murray



Youngsters' Social

Sunday 4th October, After the Service

Ten of us got together for our first 'Youngsters' Social,' back in August, and went out for lunch at a local Thai restaurant. This was all very pleasant, so we decided to make it a regular bi-monthly fixture, and we will be having another get-together on 4th October. The precise details are still being finalised so please send an email to get onto the mailing list and be kept informed of the plans for October and future months: social@kensington-unitarians.org.uk.

Jane Blackall

The Spiritual Bookshelf

#8: 'Confessions: the Making of a Post-Denominational Priest' by Matthew Fox

This is the eighth of a 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 rest of this year...

This is a whirlwind of a book, the autobiography of a Dominican priest who was thrown out of his order because of his unorthodox beliefs, written while his life was in crisis. Mixed with his life story is a theological manifesto for Creation Spirituality, his blend of ancient Christian ideas, contemporary forms of worship and social and ecological activism.

Matthew Fox's influence was at its height in the early nineties, just before 'Confessions' was written. He had collected a group of like-minded teachers and practitioners, including psychologists, dancers, Native American spiritual leaders, a self-styled 'holy fool' and a witch, among others, to set up an Institute for Creation Spirituality outside San Francisco. Its search for God meant letting go of traditional religious forms and, instead "learning to trust our experiences of awe, wonder, darkness, nothingness, creativity, compassion, justice, celebration."

Fox is at pains to distance himself from the New Age movement, with which his Institute could easily be confused: he cites his original and painstaking work on hitherto obscure writings of Thomas Aquinas and similarly non-flaky achievements of his colleagues. Indeed, Fox sees himself not so much as an innovator as the reviver of a lost thread of Christianity from the Middle Ages, a tradition that was subverted by the power of the Vatican. It celebrates nature and the inter-connectedness of life, which allows Fox's brand of spirituality to live happily alongside other religions.

Sounds familiar? Fox was told by a Unitarian 'you are one of us'. Indeed, he has no problem with Unitarianism, but hasn't been inclined to join.

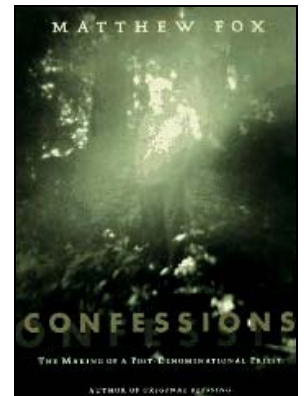
Fox's troubled institutional affiliations are a running theme in the book. For the Vatican, his experimental services and attempts to nudge the church in an anti-authoritarian direction were too much. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, then head of a powerful church committee in Rome, and now the Pope, put pressure on Fox's Dominican bosses until they told Fox he was no longer welcome in the Catholic Church. He found a new home as an Episcopalian, but then, just at the end of the book, the authorities struck again, severing his Institute from its Catholic ecclesiastical home. He was forced to go it alone, and today is a freelance teacher, still busy, but an outsider rather than a church reformer.

The book is often loosely-written, perhaps in a great hurry, and lazily edited. Some of it can seem self-regarding, as Fox reprints eulogies he has received from far and wide. But it is an exciting journey, intimate, passionate, funny and intellectually ambitious. Fox pulls together an impressively coherent vision which places theology, emotion, ecology, morality, personal psychology and community on the same map, and points a way forward for our time:

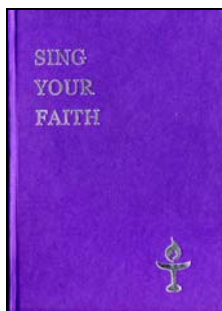
"I believe that prayer is our radical response to life, a response with two "root" (or radical) directions to it: mysticism – our Yes to life in all its mystery and glory and grandeur and pain; and prophecy – our No to injustice and all that interferes with life."

His intellectual self-confidence is supreme; his dilemma has been how to spread his message without becoming some kind of cult leader. He has avoided that, but now, without institutional backing, his ideas will have to make their own way in the world. They are strong and attractive enough to do so, if we have the courage to take them up.

Charles Miller



Blessing Our New Hymn Books



Last year we asked people to sponsor a grey hymn book ('Singing the Living Tradition') and we are very grateful for all the money we received.

This year we have bought a set of 50 new purple hymn books ('Sing Your Faith'), and we are inviting everyone who is a member of Essex Church, or who would like to become one, to bless a hymn book by writing a personal inscription. We'd like this to include your name and some message - perhaps about the congregation or services here or anything at all that you think could interest or intrigue people who might pick up your hymn book in ten years time. We will have some blank forms available for people to fill in during October and then we will type up the inscriptions and stick them in.

At our AGM in May we confirmed some goals for congregational growth. Our current number of members is 53 and we aim to increase this to 75 over the next three years. Our average attendance on Sunday mornings is currently around 35 and we intend to increase this to 50. It'll be lovely to look round one Sunday and realise that we need to buy some more hymn books as there are only just enough to go round.

Sarah Tinker



"There is no need to end our relationship with the dead, for they are still ours. Still ours to struggle with, to learn from, and to love. There is no timeline for grieving them and there is no finitude to loving them. Through time – as long a time as it takes – we take their dreams and their desires and their issues and integrate them into our own. We make use of whatever hard-won wisdom they were lucky enough to gain while they lived. We continue to forgive them, if forgiveness is called for. We continue the work of their hands."

Rev Victoria Weinstein

Sunday Services at Essex Church



4th October – "My Life with Francis" Service led by David Francis Darling

Our very own David Francis Darling will be talking about Saint Francis of Assisi in this service, on his feast day, 4th October.

11th October – "A New World" – Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

"We have it in our power to begin the world over again" wrote the 18th century radical Thomas Paine, whose works had such an influence on revolutionary causes both in Europe and America. In this service we will celebrate the contribution made by individuals such as Paine to social and political progress and will explore his religious beliefs.

18th October – "When The Going Gets Tough" – Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

In the face of tragic occurrences, what happens to our faith? Does it comfort us still? Elie Wiesel's story of the prisoners who put God on trial in a concentration camp will provide a focus for this consideration of divinity, free will, good and evil, and human nature, with time for a discussion afterwards.

25th October – "Unitarians and Jesus" – Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

As the Unitarian General Assembly publishes a new leaflet on Unitarian views of Jesus, in this service we will look back at the growth of interest in the 'historical Jesus' in Victorian times and make space to consider our own relationship with this radical Jewish rabbi who lived 2,000 years ago. In this service we will also be marking United Nations Sunday.

