



What's On...

Sunday 3rd May, 11am-noon
'The Dude Abides'
Service led by Rev. Bill Darlison

Tuesday 5th May, 12.30-1.30pm
Nia Technique with Sonya Leite

Thursday 7th May, 7-8pm
'Heart and Soul' Spiritual Gathering
'Broken-ness' led by Jeannene Powell

Sunday 10th May, 11am-noon
'Love is Stronger' led by
Sarah Tinker & Prof. Mark Harmon

Sunday 10th May, 12.30pm
Small-Group Communion
Led by Elisa Melgosa & Mike Eichler

Sunday 10th May, 2-3pm
Nia Technique with Sonya Leite

Tuesday 12th May, 12.30-1.30pm
Nia Technique with Sonya Leite

Thursday 14th May, 7-9.00pm
Creativity Group: Bring Your Own

Sunday 17th May, 11am-noon
'First Things First'
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Tuesday 19th May, 12.30-1.30pm
Nia Technique with Sonya Leite

Tuesday 19th May, 7-8pm
Singing Meditation with Sarah

Sunday 24th May, 11am-noon
'Sabbath'
Led by Jeannene Powell

Sunday 24th May, 12.30-1.15pm
'Finding Your Voice'
Singing Workshop with Margaret

Tuesday 26th May, 12.30-1.30pm
Nia Technique with Sonya Leite

Thursday 28th May, 7-9pm
Women's Group
Led by Jeannene, Liz and Carole

Sunday 31st May, 11am-noon
'Stepping Forward'
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

A Date for Your Diary:
Sunday 21st June 2015
Membership Service & AGM



LIVE BELOW THE LINE

Beans, Beans, Beans ... and Lentils A Message from our Minister

There's a charity challenge that might be of interest. It's called **Below the Line** and they are asking people to try living on £1 a day for five days in order to heighten awareness of the estimated 1.2 billion people facing extreme poverty around our world. I'm going to give it a go and will make a donation to one of the partner charities supporting this project. But I can tell you now that I won't succeed. Spending no more than £5 on all my food and drink for five days is beyond me. A similar charity challenge some years ago tested my ingenuity. I invited myself to friends' houses for meals; I persuaded the local wholefood shop to give me some wrinkled vegetables for free. I used a few sneaky items from the store cupboard rather than buying everything from scratch. It was a sobering thought to realise that when you're really poor everybody around you would be equally canny and probably similarly poor. There'd be no well to do friends down the road inviting you round for supper, offering to make you a coffee. To really live on £1 a day is utterly grim and will almost inevitably involve beans and lentils, and more beans and lentils.

As we move towards our election day here in Britain, I'd like to search every politician's heart to see what they really think and feel about poverty. They all say the right things about wanting to lift standards of living for everybody but I'm not entirely sure that all of them realise how difficult that is to achieve within our current economic systems. It is rarely a simple matter of 'pulling your socks up' and trying harder. Poverty is woven into the fabric of capitalism and makes it very difficult for people at the bottom of the income ladder to change their position. It is painful to hear those who are privileged then criticising those who attempt to use their own ingenuity to better their situation. Every so called 'welfare cheat' or 'migrant' or 'asylum seeker' is a real human being, a person who generally through no fault of their own is in a life situation far more difficult than ours.

Gandhi described poverty as the "worst form of violence" and it's a violence faced by some 20% of the world's population. The figure of £1 a day has been adjusted to take into account the varying costs of living in different countries and for those who really are living 'below the line' it would also have to cover all the other expenses of life such as housing, transport and clothing. May we who are fortunate find ways to live that help rather than harm those facing such impossible demands.

Rev. Sarah Tinker

In this month's newsletter...

* Chalice Lightings written by members of the congregation for our 'Words for Worship' project *
'Light and Darkness: Reflections on the Symbolism of Chalice Lighting' by Becca Farnum
* 'Singing Our Faith' reflections on what our favourite hymns say about our Unitarian values *
Feedback from the Recent GA Annual Meetings * 'Selma – Fifty Years On' by Annette Percy
* 'News from Cambodia' by Julia Alden * 'In This Together' by Sarah Tinker * and much more...

Kensington Unitarians

At Essex Church (founded 1774), Notting Hill Gate

Kensington Unitarians are a community of kindred souls who meet each week at Essex Church in Notting Hill Gate to explore, reflect, converse, be still, share joys and sorrows, and support one another on life's journey. We are proud to be part of a worldwide and historic liberal religious tradition.

Our main activity is Sunday worship and we hold a service each week at 11am. All are welcome. Services are usually themed and include readings from a variety of sources, prayers, music, singing, stillness, and a short sermon. Our children's leaders provide an alternative programme of activities for younger people.

Small-group activities are another key part of our programme. We offer courses and one-off workshops exploring spiritual and religious matters and considering life's meaning together with others on the spiritual journey.



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London W8 4RT

Office Telephone: 020 7221 6514

Email: info@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Web: www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Singing Meditation

Tuesday 19th May at Essex Church
7 to 8pm with time for refreshments afterwards

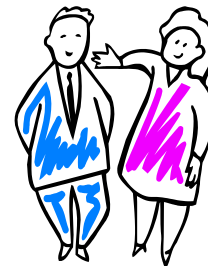


An opportunity to join together in singing simple chants from the world's spiritual traditions, interspersed with candlelit silence. Easy to learn chants bring a deep connectedness and a great sense of well-being. These sessions will be led by Sarah Tinker.

"A song is a thing of joy; more profoundly, it is a thing of love."

St. Augustine

Volunteering Rotas: Stewarding, Coffee and Greeting



Stewarding:

3 rd May:	Juliet Edwards
10 th May:	Niall Doherty
17 th May:	Alice Lambert
24 th May:	Caroline Blair
31 st May:	Natasha Drennan

Coffee:

3 rd May:	Roy Clark
10 th May:	Melody
17 th May:	Sue Smith
24 th May:	Veronica Needa
31 st May:	Elisa Melgosa

Greeting:

3 rd May:	Mike Killingworth
10 th May:	Gina Bayley
17 th May:	Annette Percy
24 th May:	Melody
31 st May:	Jonathan Crawford

We circulate the rota list each month by email. Please contact Jane if you are willing to be on the rota mailing list.

rotas@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

'Finding Our Voice' Singing Workshops with Margaret Marshall



**Sundays 24th May and 28th June
after the service from 12.30 to 1.15pm**

Margaret Marshall has worked as a professional singer all her adult life and is also a very experienced singing teacher. She is leading monthly sessions to help us all find our voice. These workshops are for anyone who is prepared to open their mouth and make a sound. Margaret will show us how to improve the quality and strength of our voices. Using a few simple exercises we'll gain joy and confidence in our singing by learning how to produce and develop the voice, something everyone can do. We'll work with the breath and overcome unconscious blocks that can prevent us singing with our true potential. Fun and achievement are guaranteed and these sessions are designed for everyone, whatever your experience or ability. All are welcome.

'Heart and Soul'

Midweek Spiritual Gatherings

Thursday 7th May, 4th June, 2nd July, 7-8pm

*Gathering at 6.45pm downstairs in the library
Followed by social time and refreshments*



Come and join us for our monthly alternative spiritual gathering, with music and silence, words and prayers, and a chance to explore the evening's topic in relation to your own life. This will be followed by refreshments and fellowship.

Our May gathering will be led by Jeannene Powell on the theme of 'broken-ness'. Jeannene says: In this month's Heart and Soul, we'll explore the theme of "broken-ness", and its transformation into something of value and beauty.' If you would like to know more about these gatherings contact jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk.



A Fitness Fusion of 9 Movement Forms

**Second Sunday of the Month from 2-3pm:
10th May, 14th June, 12th July**

Midweek classes on TUESDAYS - 12.30-1.30pm

An hour of whole-body conditioning, done barefoot to diverse music. Delivering a cardiovascular workout for any level of fitness. Specific routines allow you to experience - the power of the martial arts, the stillness of the healing arts and the joy of movement through dance.

Cost £10 (£7 to concessions / church members).

Contact: Sonya Leite on 0207 371 1674.

Getting More Involved at Essex Church – Dates for Your Diary:

Activists' Group & One-Day Congregational Workshop

**Tuesdays 16th June, 21st July, 18th August, 7-9pm
& Saturday 12th September from 10.30am-4.30pm**

Throughout 2015 we are making an effort to help people get more actively involved in congregational life here at Essex Church. The life of our congregation depends on us all participating and contributing to the life of this community, and our denomination, in whatever ways we feel able to (and perhaps stretching ourselves a little bit and doing new things we didn't know we could!)

'Activists' Group': This summer we are going to experiment with setting up an 'Activists Group' for anyone who is already actively engaged in the life of this community or anyone who wants to be more involved than they are already. This will be a fairly relaxed monthly get-together on a Tuesday evening, open to all, where we can discuss congregational projects and things that we need help with. People will be able to share ideas, offer their services, highlight any training needs, make practical plans of action, and find mutual support. There will also be a simple bring-and-share meal at these evenings to make it more enjoyable for everyone who comes along.

One-Day Workshop: We would like to encourage anyone in the congregation who can make it to set aside a day this autumn – Saturday 12th September to be precise – to come and spend the day together, for a mixture of worshipful moments, exploratory conversations about what we each might like to do for the good of our community, some practical training, and a shared meal.

I would encourage you all to put these dates in your diary now and make a personal commitment to be there and get stuck in! ☺
It would also be very helpful if you could email to let me know you plan to attend: jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk



Jane Blackall

Good Cause Collection of the Month Acid Survivors Trust



Collection on Sunday 24th May

Acid violence is the deliberate use of acid to attack another human being. The victims of acid violence are overwhelmingly women and children, and attackers often target the head and face in order to maim, disfigure and blind. The act rarely kills but causes severe physical, psychological and social scarring, and victims are often left with no legal recourse, limited access to medical or psychological assistance, and without the means to support themselves. Acid violence is a worldwide phenomenon that is not restricted to a particular race, religion or geographical location.

Acid Survivors Trust International (ASTI) is the only organisation whose sole purpose is to work towards the end of acid violence across the world. Recognising the need for local knowledge and expertise in order to combat acid violence effectively, ASTI founded and continues to support the development of six partner organisations in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Pakistan, Nepal, Uganda and India. It also works with UN agencies, NGOs and strategic partners from across the world to increase awareness of acid violence and develop effective responses at the national and international level.

It is hard to look at the face of a woman who has been attacked with acid and imagine how she will live an independent and fulfilling life. Yet despite indescribable pain, disfigurement and psychological trauma, many survivors can and will rebuild their lives when provided with the support they need. To date, ASTI has helped thousands of acid attack victims get the medical attention they need in order to rebuild their lives. They are fully dedicated to helping survivors of acid and burns attacks and confronting this violence wherever it takes place.

For more information see: www.acidviolence.org

Previous Charity Collections:

Thank you for your generosity in contributing to recent charity collections. I am pleased to let you know that we will be sending the following donations to good causes:

February – Down's Syndrome Assoc. - £138.03

Emergency Collection for Cyclone - £205.16

March – Home Farm Trust - £163.57

Light and Darkness



Reflections on the Symbolism of Chalice Lighting

A lifelong Girl Scout (what Guides are called in the US) and the daughter of an American United Methodist minister (our denomination's icon is the cross and flame), imagery of candle, fire, and flame are incredibly central to my expressions of faith and philosophy. Many of my favourite hymns evoke the power of a spark that can raise a mighty inferno, a single light that can illuminate seemingly overwhelming darkness. Many of my favourite childhood memories involve the glorious beauty of candles floating on a lake in the near pitch black at camp. The picture is a powerful one to me, a reminder that one individual can bring truth and love and justice to an ugly reality.

But as a scholar of justice, the youngest sibling of a beloved mixed-race sister, and the product of a highly racist society, the imagery of a single, "good" light overcoming the ugliness and inherent "badness" of dark is problematic as much as it is powerful. Our world is filled with images and narratives of white=good and dark=bad. Whether or not it is intended, this pattern reinforces divisive and unjust claims of the inherent value - and lack thereof - of certain groups of people. As Unitarians, we push against these destructive narratives, knowing the beautiful worth and divine spirit in every individual.

Flames are beautiful. Candles bring peace to many. Light illuminates. But so, too, can darkness. In darkness, we rest. In darkness, we rely on senses other than our oh-so-biased aesthetics and visual appeal. In darkness, often, we truly see.

Symbols do not say the same thing to all of us. Deeply meaningful words to one may be overly trite, pandering clichés to others. Images of flame and light are powerful to some but may carry different connotations to others.

Symbols matter. And symbols help us understand each other and see our world in new and challenging ways. I do not want to get rid of the Chalice. It is important to me, to our community, to our history - and, I hope, to you. But as Unitarians, we are called to question, to ponder, and to invite other ways of seeing, knowing and doing. As we light the Chalice each week and engage in our wonderful rituals of symbolism, may we work to consider the many different things that people may be hearing in our words and seeing in our actions. And may we seek to ensure our worship is as inclusive, Spirit-filled, and loving as possible.

Becca Farnum

Words for Worship

Join in with our new Writing Project!



I would like to invite readers of this newsletter to join in with a new writing project and help us create 'Words for Worship'.

Every other month I will put a little something in the newsletter about a certain element of our regular Sunday service (such as the opening words, closing blessing, prayer, meditation, etc.) and ask you to try and write something along those lines.

The hope is that we would publish them in the next newsletter and perhaps ultimately collect them online or in a little pamphlet as a resource for worship leaders in our own congregation and the rest of the denomination. We often make use of resources from the Unitarian Universalist 'Worship Web' from the USA but there is not, to the best of my knowledge, such a substantial collection of work by UK Unitarians in existence... wouldn't it be nice to do our bit to get something started over here?

I'm going to suggest that we start with **Chalice Lighting**. This is the only regular element of our service that is specifically Unitarian and it symbolically connects us with other Unitarian and Unitarian Universalist communities around the world. UU minister Erik Walker Wikstrom writes: *'Some congregations use the chalice lighting as a time for testimonials about the meaning of the congregation in the lives of its members. Others reflect on the image of the chalice and the flame — the beacon of hope, the light of truth, the warmth of love, the container of community, and more. Why are you lighting your chalice?'*

I invite you – whoever you are, reading this newsletter, including members of other congregations – to send in chalice lightings which reflect your understanding of our Unitarian community and the values you would like to invoke for our Sunday gatherings. Caroline, Gina, Becca and Eliz have sent in some lovely chalice lightings since last month. Feel free to get in touch if you would like more guidance.

Jane Blackall

Chalice Lightings

Let us light this candle to bring light
And be grateful for the gift of seeing.
Let us light this candle to bring warmth
And be grateful for the gift of welcoming.
Let us light this candle to bring clarity
And be grateful for the gift of understanding.
And let us light this candle because it is our tradition
And be grateful for the gift of belonging.

Caroline Blair

We light the chalice with this little flame.
This little flame will lighten the darkness
of ignorance and prejudice.
This little flame will lighten the path
of those seeking truth and meaning to life.
This little flame will shine on everyone
without distinction of race, creed, colour or sexuality.
This little flame will warm and welcome
all who come through our doors.
This little flame will reflect
the spark of the divine which resides within us all.

Gina Bayley

We light this flame as a symbol
of our connection to Unitarian congregations around the world.
It is meant as a sign of hope, of peace, of justice.
This morning as we light it,
may we remember and mourn
the times and places in our world where
light and flame were not bringers of joy,
but rather of sorrow, pain, and destruction.
May we be called to ensure that our light
- and that of others - continues to live up to its high calling.
And may we learn to better appreciate the beauty
that both light and dark can bring to our lives.

Becca Farnum

Poem: A Chalice Arising

A Chalice beckoning the dawn of my Dreams:
maybe they're fading,
so long ago now?

The big safety light in our Hallway
brightens up, greenish at first,
as similarly to that old street lamp outside:
it's early evening arriving.

Presently, I should light the candle
of the Chalice here up front,
and then, maybe, recall memories
through its gentle beam.

Eliz L. Beel

'Singing Our Faith'

In our service on Sunday 12th April a number of members of the congregation were invited to choose a hymn which reflected their Unitarian faith and religious values in some way. Each of us spoke for a few minutes about the hymn we had chosen and what it meant to us. This was a most enjoyable service and we might well do it again at some point so if you have a favourite hymn please consider writing a short piece about it and perhaps we'll plan another service along these lines later in the year.



'To Be A Pilgrim'

When I was growing up back in the 1960s and early 70's, the school day invariably began with "Assembly" a strange affair that blended the secular with the spiritual in some very odd ways. Prayers might be followed by the latest results of our school sports teams, a bible story would preface a very different sort of tale involving a miscreant schoolboy about to be brought to account by the headmaster... hopefully not yours truly! There were always 2 or 3 hymns in the mix and of these perhaps a handful that I really liked and enjoyed to sing.

The tune that this hymn is usually set to is an adapted traditional folk tune "Monks Gate" by Ralph Vaughan Williams, a very pleasant melody to my ear. It seems to meander around "up hill and down dale", much as I imagine the eponymous pilgrim might.

The hymn is drawn from John Bunyan's famous tale The Pilgrim's Progress written in 1684. Actually the lyrics were regarded as strong stuff by the somewhat sensitive Edwardians and for a time, Bunyan's original version was not commonly sung in churches, perhaps due to its references to "hobgoblin and foul fiend". However I have opted for the original... monsters and all.

Looking back I can see that even in those distant schooldays the message of the piece resonated with me at some deep level and connected with a yearning for both self-knowledge and universal meaning. From where I am now, I can readily identify with the protagonist, a simple seeker after truth on a journey of faith not knowing the answers but open to experience ... and hopefully brave in the face of foul fiends.

Roy Clark

'The Tides of the Spirit'

I am aware that, like me, many Unitarians were initially members of other religious denominations; but, for whatever reason, they did not find the spiritual answers they were seeking. Traditionally, we are taught to talk to God to get our answers; however, I have yet to find a Bible scripture that actually says that. Nevertheless, if that is what I was taught all my life - who am I to question it?

Now I am not a big Facebook user, but I recall reading a 'meme' that was posted on my wall several years ago which said "Prayer is talking to God - Meditation is listening to God." I knew very little about meditation at the time, but it seemed so obvious! How was I not aware of this before? Evidently, to acquire any information we must pay attention to the source, yet all I have ever paid attention to is me, my own internal dialogue, my Ego. You see, the ego does not like to attend to anything but itself, it is so sure that it is already right, and certainly does not like to be proven wrong. By attending to our egos our beliefs go unchallenged. Beliefs become our fixed identities, we no longer seek the truth, but for confirmation that we were right all along. But if I am already right, why do I do so many things wrong? Why do I still have so many unsolved problems? And why always the same problems? There is a Buddhist saying: "When the student is ready the teacher will appear."

To overcome this ego of mine, I must first learn Humility. It takes humility to accept that I was not born endowed with all the right answers. To be honest, the primary reason I attend the Unitarian church is to bring my big-headed ego down to size - to listen and learn from others, to allow myself to be challenged, even proven wrong - and to pay attention, especially to the silence. I may not hear the answers I seek audibly, but I know that I progress closer to the truth intuitively every week I attend.

Jonathan Crawford

'What Wondrous Love'

I chose this hymn for today as it is a Christian folk hymn from North America, one of which I was familiar with over the years in my previous time worshiping in the Lutheran Church. I find the melody quite haunting with its minor key and its words remind me of many songs of the spiritual and folk tradition of the early 19th century from the Southern United States. So I decided to do a bit of research into the origins of the hymn and found out a few interesting things.

This hymn has a long standing history that is not very well known, it is thought to be based on a dance melody "Ballad of Captain Kidd" from England in 1701, a song about the notorious pirate. It is believed that the tune was discovered by composer William Walker, an American Baptist song leader, on his journey through the Appalachian region. Though the tune had been around for many years, it was passed on by rote and not written down. It is in an easy to learn musical style with repetition and simple text. Hymnals were scarce and music was rarely written down in the early 1800s. The hymn is written in a mode that makes the singer feel that it should end one step lower than it does, the repetition serves as a mantra, building and reinforcing the power of the message as the hymn progresses. The original Christian hymn had up to six verses, it is more introspective in the start and culminates in elation at the freedom from life's struggles in death.

A little more about the history of this type of song, Walker was a "shape note" singing master, which was a form of singing that uses shapes to denote which pitch should be sung, instead of the European notation used today in music. In order for shape note singing to work the congregation would be divided into four different sections, each section given a separate section to sing.

Natasha Drennan

'One More Step'

I struggle to sing the word 'God' as I am an agnostic. However, I do like singing hymns. That was one aspect of going to church and school assemblies when young that I enjoyed. As I grew older, I found it difficult to sing the words of the hymns as they often spoke of things that I did not accept such as God or the Holy Spirit.

I started to attend this Unitarian church because I liked the community and the principles that are important to Unitarians. I now enjoy singing hymns here both as an activity in itself and because the words of most hymns have real meaning for me. I have read criticisms of Unitarian hymns as bland and not inspiring but I disagree.

The hymn I have chosen is 'One More Step', from the purple hymnbook. I really like those hymns which talk about communities coming together or the struggle for justice for everyone. I like this hymn particularly because of the words.

*We will take one more step,
til there is peace for us and everyone.
We will say one more word,
til every word is heard by everyone*

This hymn, to me, embodies the principles of inclusion and of fairness and justice for everyone. It is not enough that our community has peace, equality and justice, all communities need these and we need to fight for that. Often, my non church going friends express surprise that I, an agnostic, go to church but I think this hymn shows why I come to a Unitarian church.

Liz Tuckwell

'Seek Ye First'

When I first came to this church, back in 1999, I approached with great caution. I was still kind of suspicious about organised religion and was very wary about what I was getting myself into. I was also extremely shy. So, rather than talk to people, in those early days, I spent time before and after services flicking through the hymnbook (the green hymnbook was all we had in those days) and seeing if I could get a sense of whether these Unitarians were legit! Was it all just too good to be true?

The texts of the hymns in 'Hymns for Living' made a big impression on me. I was really impressed with the way that many of the traditional lyrics had been altered to use more inclusive language (especially with regard to gender) and to take out some of the theological concepts that I found difficult back then. I appreciated the hymns that had more humanistic themes, celebrating such values as community, equality, diversity, human striving, and a commitment to making the world a better place for all.

So at the start of my Unitarian journey I was very grateful for these humanistic hymns. That style of Unitarianism gave me a way in to religion which I might otherwise have been forever hostile towards. The tentative, slightly sceptical, agnostic that I was back then would simply never have crossed the threshold of this place had I felt I had to leave my rational faculties at the door...

BUT over time I have come to feel that I am missing out. There is such a richness in traditional religious language and theological concepts... and nowadays I feel actively drawn to go back to this stuff and look at it with fresh eyes. I can find my own interpretation of the traditional language, and engage with the progressive and radical interpretations of others... I am happy to sing of God as 'He' one day because I know we are probably going to sing of God as 'She' or 'We' or 'They' or in some non-personified way next time around. We sing about such a diversity of things that I no longer feel the need to conscientiously object to traditional language, myths, and stories, because it's just part of the picture, just part of what we are about as Unitarians. Getting past my resistance to traditional language has opened up all sorts of new ideas, understandings, and connections for me.

SO that's why I've chosen this particular hymn for us to sing today. I first learned it from Sheila Jones at Hucklow Summer School, many years ago, and I can't remember when we last sang it here so we'll need to have a dry run before we go for it. For me, although the language is very different, this hymn is not a million miles away in message from the humanistic one ('One More Step') that Liz just chose. It's about imagining a better world – the Kingdom of God – not a better world somewhere else but that sense that a better world could be possible right here and now, if we seek that first, above all else. The Kingdom of God is a world where love and peace and justice reign. You can think of it as an image of the world as it might be, the world we might work towards, or you can think of it as a dimension of the world as it is, something we catch a glimpse of whenever we witness or participate in acts of love, peace and justice. The traditional, poetic, religious language touches me and captures my imagination.

So I've partly chosen this as it's a great tune and a joy to sing. Partly because we've sung a lot of old favourites today and it's always nice to keep learning new – or at least new-to-us – songs. And partly because I wanted to encourage others to try and work on any barriers you have to traditional religious language as there are so many riches there if we can get past our initial reactions and dig a bit deeper.

Jane Blackall

'I Wish I Knew How'

My choice is 'I wish I knew how it would feel to be free', a Gospel/Jazz piece by Billy Taylor. The music of this piece some of you may know from TV commercials, the 2004 Olympics or the BBC Film review programme. It was composed by legendary Jazz Pianist, Billy Taylor, one of the most prolific Jazz musicians of his day. He was an Ambassador to the Jazz community and his career spanned over six decades from 1944 to 2010. Along with a vast amount of accolades including 23 honorary doctoral degrees, Billy Taylor was elected to the Hall of Fame for the International Association to Jazz Education.

As he was an advocate for all things Jazz, I imagine he was very pleased that this song became the unofficial Anthem for the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950's and 60's. The song achieved popularity with the version by Nina Simone. It's very passionate and moving. Billy Taylor originally wrote this song for his daughter Kim, he said he was very proud of this piece because it was very spiritual. For me this hymn has a unique mixture of a happy tune with poignant lyrics. It reminds me of how far we have come and how far we have yet to go as a human race. It represents the longing of the individual for their yearnings to manifest. For the individual and the collective. The words express so many wishes to be seen and accepted, the freedom to fly like a bird in the sky, etc. It's a combination of the desire for Freedom and Optimism.

I do hope that the words and music resonate for you. May you feel either or both - the connection to the innocent child and sing the words with optimism and curiosity or may you feel the connection to oppression and sing the words as your own personal anthem to freedom.

Sonya Leite

Selma – Fifty Years On

In the May issue of the Newsletter last year I told you about my friend Orloff Miller who was one of the Unitarian Universalist ministers who took part in the Civil Rights March from Selma to Montgomery in March 1965. Orloff and fellow minister Clark Olsen were with James Reeb when they were attacked and badly beaten outside a restaurant. James Reeb died two days later from his injuries and thus became a Unitarian martyr.

Orloff returned to Selma for the ceremonies to mark the 50th Anniversary of the March and gave me permission to quote from his email.



"By now I hope you have seen the film SELMA with its many historical inaccuracies - but also with its inspiring celebration of the historic victory of black folks willing to risk all on behalf of voting rights. Yes, white folks helped at a critical point, but under black leadership - which in itself was the greater victory! And how wonderful that the film was so ably directed by a black woman from Lowndes County, Alabama.

I am 3 weeks returned from Alabama after attending the Unitarian Universalist Conference, "Marching in the Arc of Justice" - held in Birmingham and Selma - and the 50th year commemoration in Selma of "Bloody Sunday", first of several bridge crossings leading to the successful "March from Selma to Montgomery" - and honoring the lives and deaths of the three martyrs directly involved. Learning that members of the Jimmie Lee Jackson, James Reeb, and Viola Liuzzo families would be attending, I decided I had to be there to honor their loved ones - in spite of our family doctor's misgivings, but with my neurologist saying "go for it!". And though totally exhausted, I'm very glad I went - I even vacated my Rollstuhl and walked across the central steel portion of that infamous Edmund Pettus Bridge one more time!

Thanks to Orloff the Younger ("Rik") who met my plane with a rented wheelchair - by means of which he whisked me from place to place and was my constant companion - I shared many, many memorable hours with the martyr families (including grandchildren), with resident citizens of Selma and Dallas County, (both elderly and those born in recent years) who went out of their way to express their heartfelt appreciation for how UU's had joined with them 50 years ago, and I met younger UU colleagues (especially our many female clergy) to whom the torch has now been passed and who spent many hours in workshops ascertaining what they and their congregations must now do in facing up to unfinished tasks - including making right the wrong done by those old fools on the US Supreme Court in recently ripping the guts out of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the unmet demand for equal police protection and legal rights in Ferguson MO, Florida, NYC, et al. The spirit of Selma lives on!

*If you haven't seen the Selma50 photo album created by staff of the UU World, do take a look:
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/uuworld/sets/72157651182096902/>*

Ava DuVernay's SELMA movie version of the attack on James Reeb depicts only one other minister companion - in reality, there were two of us, Clark Olsen and myself. It was a special joy for me to once more share special moments with Clark, and with his daughter Marika (just returned from a 3rd tour of duty with CNN in Baghdad).

The survivors and the families of the martyrs present were asked the hard personal questions about their reactions by Amy Nelson - a warm and talented photo-journalist - to whom we are deeply indebted for the following thoughtful and beautifully crafted photo essay:

<https://medium.com/matter/was-selma-worth-it-b4193cb1d090>

Peace, love, and audacious hope, Orloff"

Do follow the links. They are most interesting.

Annette Percy

Attendance Numbers

As a new newsletter feature we'll be including some statistics each month. Our stewards already record attendance figures for Sunday mornings so that's a simple figure to include. What else would you like to hear about? We're still completing our annual members and friends exercise so get in touch if you want to be included in our 2015 count.

15th March:	42 adults, 4 children
22nd March:	43 adults
29th March:	31 adults, 4 children
5th April:	50 adults, 1 child
12th April:	39 adults, 3 children

Sarah Tinker

Let's Celebrate our Liberties with a LiberTea



**Sunday 14th June from 1.30 to 4pm
Here at Essex Church**

Come and join us for an event celebrating our freedoms. With crafts and conversation, we'll explore what liberty means to us and how we might work to secure such freedoms for others. Bring your own lunch and we'll provide tea and cakes during the afternoon. All welcome.

Here's some information from the LiberTeas website:

LiberTea is a unique opportunity for the nation to celebrate the freedoms and rights that are close to their heart, and actively mark the rights that have made a difference to them over the years. Is there a liberty, right or representation you are passionate about?

To coincide with the 800th anniversary of the sealing of Magna Carta the Houses of Parliament and the National Trust are asking the nation to take a moment to celebrate, debate and reflect on those liberties which we can very often take for granted but which people throughout history have campaigned to make happen or fought to preserve.

LiberTeas will take place on the afternoon of Sunday 14th June and at 3pm we will ask everyone to mark the moment. This will be the only national commemorative celebration of the sealing of Magna Carta.

Magna Carta established the Rule of Law and started a journey towards our modern day rights and freedoms and we are asking communities and organisations across the nation to mark the anniversary by hosting an event that celebrates rights, freedom and liberty. It could be a debate or an afternoon tea, a public lecture or open house, a street party or a picnic in the park, all we ask is that their event joins the rest of the nation at 3pm to mark the moment.

We would be delighted if you would be able to join this national commemorative moment and share the opportunity with your networks. Help us spread the word and join in celebrating liberty.

See www.liberteas.co.uk for more information.

Small Group Communion



**10th May, 14th June, 12th July
at 12.30pm Down in the Church Library**

On the second Sunday of each month we hold a small-group communion, after the main morning service, downstairs in the library. These services are led by different members of the congregation. A team of volunteers take turns in leading the services so we can experience a variety of different approaches. The line-up for the next couple of months is as follows:

10th May – Led by Elisa Melgosa & Mike Eichler

Creativity Group: Bring Your Own Crafts

Thursdays 14th May and 11th June from 7-9pm



Our creativity group meets once a month and is open to all. You are welcome to bring along whatever art or craft project you're working on and do your own thing whilst enjoying the good company of the group. Participants are often happy to share their skills and recently we have been helping each other learn to knit, to make lino prints, and to do crewel embroidery.

One of the particularly enjoyable features of this group is the space it offers for fellowship and conversation while we are each working on our individual projects alongside one another. Alternatively we have some basic art materials available if you would just like to play with pens, pencils, and paints during the evening. If you know anyone who might enjoy coming along to these sociable evenings then please do help us spread the word.

During early 2015 we are inviting group members to make some new textile panels to add to our ever-changing seasonal wall-hanging which is displayed at the front of the church. Panels should be 150cm long and have a loop at the top to go over the pole they hang from. Contact Jane if you need more details: jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk.

Jane Blackall

John Hands' 85th Birthday Party

Sunday 24th May from 1.30pm
Here at Essex Church

Our very own John Hands will be celebrating his 85th birthday towards the end of May and would like to invite members of the congregation to stay behind after the service on 24th June when he will be holding his birthday party at the church. There will be refreshments, music, and poetry. All are welcome.



One Light Spiritual Gathering 'Contentment'

Friday 8th May, 6.15-8.30pm, Here at Essex Church

Gatherings offered by Joanna Ryam and Suzanne Cohen. We are open hearted One Spirit Interfaith Ministers offering blessings, celebrations, services and spiritual counselling to people of all faiths and none. Members of the Association of Interfaith Ministers - trained by the Interfaith Foundation

***This event is free. Donations for expenses are welcome.
Any surplus will go to Essex Unitarian Church***

For further information contact:

Interfaith Reverend Joanna Ryam 07929 836 935
or email onelightlondon@gmail.com

Forthcoming One Light Gatherings:

8th May – Contentment; 12th June – Patience;
10th July – Presence; 11th September – Risk

'As I understand it anything suggested is more effective than anything laid down. Perhaps the human mind has a tendency to deny a statement. Remember what Emerson said; 'Arguments convince no body'. They convince nobody because they are presented as arguments. Then we look at them we weigh them, we turn them over, and we decide against them. But when something is merely said -or better still - hinted at, there is a kind of hospitality in our imagination. We are ready to accept it. I remember reading some thirty years ago the works of Martin Buber I thought of them as being wonderful poems. Then I ... found... much to my astonishment that Martin Buber was a philosopher and that all his philosophy lay in the books I had read as poetry. Perhaps I accepted these books because they came to me through the music of poetry through suggestion and not as arguments. I think that somewhere in Walt Whitman the same argument can be found: the idea of reason being unconvincing. I think he says somewhere that he finds the night air, the few large stars, far more convincing than mere arguments.'

Jorge Luis Borges

A New Men's Group



'I wish to learn what life has to teach, and not, when I come to die, discover that I had not lived.' - Henry David Thoreau

This is an invitation to join a Men's Group. The journey will be thought provoking, challenging and fun, and provide the opportunity to make some new friends and also better understand who you are.

This will be low-key process, held in an atmosphere of appreciation, attentive listening and self – discovery, offering men an opportunity to explore what it means to be a man. Through shared leadership and participation, we will create a culture of trust and support. Whilst this is not a religious or faith-centred approach, the process of sharing, respecting and nurturing others is likely to be spiritual process.

The meetings will be facilitated and structured to involve, inclusive opening words, readings, sitting in silence, sharing and discussion. During this participatory process, we will strive to be honest with others and ourselves enabling us to deal with our struggles as well as sharing our triumphs.

Session 1 (28th April 2015)
Getting to know one another

Session 2 (26th May 2015)
What it means to be male

Session 3 (30th June 2015)
Friendship, Partnership and Competition

Being supportive will also involve challenging each other to embrace the responsibilities, and the opportunities of being a man. Whilst the Men's group is a supportive and therapeutic structure, it is not a 'support group' or 'therapy session' as such.

We will meet between 7pm - 9pm on the last Tuesday of each month in Essex Church, the home of Kensington Unitarians, located at 112, Palace Gardens Terrace, London W84RT, next to Notting Hill tube station. If you have any questions or wish to attend, please contact me.

Jim Blair

Email: jim_blair_rhino@hotmail.com
Mobile: 07734511921

News from Cambodia



Some of you will know that I left my post as principal of a school in Singapore last year and have managed to see some of you at church these last few months when I'm in London. Now I'm working as a volunteer in Cambodia for a few weeks, at an institution for destitute children that the school in Singapore helped to support in Phnom Penh. Phnom Penh is a very different city from the one I visited ten years ago. Just as other cities here in Asia, such as Yangon, it is much heavier with traffic and pollution. Clear signs of needed development, but the change a sad one from other perspectives. Right now, it is hot and dusty and the monsoon rains have yet to begin, so the weather is certainly something to be reckoned with. I have a 30 minute tuk tuk ride to Sok Sabay, the organization where I am volunteering and where the children live. Each day, I am covered in dirt upon my return. No air con at Sok Sabay so when I arrive at my Guest House, I take a shower and usually collapse!

Sok Sabay has 59 children who live here and go to school nearby in a private institution. Half of the children are there in the morning and the other half rotate and goes to school in the afternoon. I am working with one of the on-site teachers to implement some simple art ideas. I do some ESL lessons and help Marie the founder with some admin work. I am also organizing the many wonderful books they have in their small library. I enjoy working with the children, many who have come from extremely challenging home lives...more than we can ever imagine. I am impressed with the growth and development they have made after spending some years here at Sok Sabay. Several are in vocational studies or at university. It is heartening to see the older students take care of the younger in many ways and they are very responsible. The resilience and perseverance, or even the sheer grit one could call it; to overcome the odds, is astounding. These virtues in my own estimation are close to being of a spiritual nature!

It's entirely humbling to go back into a classroom situation (a table in the open air) and teach, especially in the sweltering 34 degree weather and when students barely understand you. I can't really say just how much support I am giving to the students or the organization: another bigger question for me to answer in the future. My teaching skills feel a bit rusty! It also makes me realize how much I still miss my job as a Principal and certainly, my comfortable life in Singapore and in an international school. Later in the month I'll be joining a few other teachers from United World College in Singapore to do some training for local teachers, which promises to be another interesting challenge. Sarah has asked me to speak more about this work when I'm next at church, perhaps with a view to taking a collection to help with the project. I have spent a lifetime going from amazingly resourced international schools and then to schools that are totally on the opposite end of the development spectrum. Education is such an important resource to help young people escape poverty and the hope is that this can transcend even deeper into the seeds of a ravaged society.

Julia Alden

Happy Cambodian New Year from Phnom Penh

Flat in Spain Available to Rent



Booked your hols yet? If not perhaps you might like to rent my apartment in Andalucía for either a holiday or a mini break.

I have a 2 bedroom flat in beautiful Jerez de la Frontera, Home of Sherry, Flamenco, Dancing Horses... and much else besides. It has wonderful Moorish architecture, great food and is a short hop from the coast.

Cadiz, Seville and Cordoba are all within a short driving distance and are also accessible by train and bus. Jerez has its own airport and direct flights are available from London with budget airlines.

The flat sleeps up to 5 and is ...well... very nice! It is available from June onwards. Rent is negotiable but is very low (I only rent to friends). If interested call, txt or mail me. Alternatively of course you can always have a word with me at church.

Roy Clark

E: royclark@email.com / T: 07903625408



Borough-Wide Mental Health Day

**Thursday 14th May, 9.30am to 3.30pm
Here at Essex Church**

With food, music and workshops on sleep, food, meditation, yoga, exercise classes and more. All Kensington & Chelsea mental health users and staff are welcome.



'Hard Work and No Privileges'

During the 2015 General Assembly meetings, honorary membership of the General Assembly was given to Dawn Buckle. Many people here will know her, though she lives in the Manchester area. She has spent decades working (unpaid, and often in addition to her actual job, though she is retired these days) as a kind of human hurricane in the Unitarian movement, with particular interest in supporting lay leadership, young peoples' activities, and 'church officers', i.e. those who run things.

As she was given the honorary membership (which involved handing over precisely nothing), it was drily observed that "this honour carries absolutely no privileges..." The audience laughed, as we were meant to.

But it did make me think. We are such a small denomination, and everything has to be managed so carefully. Struggling congregations can apply for tiny grants; the kind of money that a wealthy church (probably not a Unitarian one, if we're honest) might spend on a smart cloth for their altar.

The Unitarians survive on good-will; on the commitment and energy of those who care for our future. I went to meetings on apparently dry topics: buildings, safeguarding, finance etc. There I listened to people who are happy to give their time, expertise and energy to solve problems, often for people they have never met and a long way from home. In effect, they are consultants. And we all know that there can be big money in consultancy. Only not here.

There is sometimes a 'standing on the shoulders of giants' feeling to getting involved in anything to do with the running of the church. So many systems have been put in place – legal, financial, practical, even inspirational – by others, over many years. Of course things go wrong; but when they do, there are always people who want to put them right.

So yes, there are no privileges for being one of the people the denomination can rely on. But I hope there is gratitude. We don't sit on a Sunday morning thinking, "thank goodness there is a designated panel to advise on buildings problems!" – but we really should spare them a grateful thought from time to time. The committees and sub-committees and panels are part of the glue that holds us all together, so three cheers for their hard work.

Caroline Blair

2015 Annual Meetings of the General Assembly ('the GA') of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches

Seven of us from Kensington Unitarians (Sarah, Caroline, Jim, Jane, Natasha, Annette and Roy) went to this year's GA annual meetings in Birmingham at the end of March. Here are a few of our reflections on the experience. Photographs courtesy of Roy Clark.

'Focus on Multicultural and Interfaith Matters'

I really enjoyed this year's GA because I wasn't a delegate and so could attend business meetings only when I chose to do so. But my main reason for enjoyment was more generous concentration than I ever remember on multicultural and interfaith matters.

I attended the *Simple Gifts* session and was delighted to hear future plans for our social action project with the Anglo-Bangladeshi Muslim community in Bethnal Green. I've been a Chalice Foundation Trustee at Bethnal Green for many years and have been behind this initiative from the start.

The International Association for Religious Freedom session on *Religious Coexistence: Building Trust* gave us a detailed insight into the work of the Birmingham Council of Faiths and the inspiring Faith Guides training project.

Jill McAllister's talk on Multiculturalism *Why the Whole World* was inspirational in many ways and, of course, Jill was the Keynote Speaker on *Living in the Whole World*. She held the audience enthralled as we watched the powerpoint presentation on the International Council of Unitarians and Universalists and learned of Unitarian movements in far away places from Bolivia to Burundi. I attended an ICUU event which Jill and Transylvanian minister István Kovács organised in Transylvania in 2002 and it was one of the most memorable things I ever did. I'd met Jill twice more in Transylvania since then and her presence made this year's GA very special for me. We should do all we can to support ICUU – it can teach us so much about our fellow Unitarians and can keep us in touch with ways that we can help them in times of need.

Annette Percy





‘Developing Unitarian Ministry’

Some years ago now, our General Assembly’s Executive Committee set itself various goals – one of which was to have 50 ministers actively working within Unitarian congregations. At the time we had 42 ministers working, some of whom would soon be retiring. This goal was relevant to me as a member of both our Interview Panel and Ministry Strategy Group, national groups with responsibility for ministry training. Fast forward some six years to this year’s Annual Meetings. There on the stage during the Anniversary Service were eight people being recognised as new Ministers and Lay Pastors and I felt really proud of them and all that they’d achieved in their training. One of the questions we ask ourselves when we’re interviewing potential candidates for training is ‘would I be comfortable with this person as my minister?’ and as I looked at them all on stage this year receiving their certificates it was pleasing to realise that I could answer ‘yes’ to that question. They’re all now placed with congregations and it will be fascinating to hear how their ministries are developing.

Before the General Assembly Meetings we hold a ministers’ pre-conference and this year two of the recently graduated ministry students spoke to us of the studies they’d completed for their dissertations. The first was about Unitarian ideas of the Holy Spirit and the second was about the concept of salvation for Unitarians. They were both so interesting and I felt very encouraged that some of my colleagues are engaging with theology in such an exciting way. They’d conducted surveys as part of their studies and it was fascinating to be reminded once again what a theologically diverse movement we are.

Another useful session for me during the Meetings was run by our 2020 group, committed to supporting growth and development in our congregations and beyond. We’ll be using some of the materials from this session in workshops here at Essex Church later this year. They asked us to assess where we are now in our congregation and where we’d like to be. I’d be interested to hear your answers to that question. 2020 are running an exciting training weekend for lay people at Great Hucklow, 15th to 17th May and our congregation will gladly pay for people to attend what promises to be a very useful exploration of how to develop vibrant and healthy communities. Let me know if you would like to attend or have more information about this training.

Rev. Sarah Tinker

‘My First GA Annual Meetings’

Well, this was my first visit to a General Assembly, and the first thing I noticed was how pleasant the hotel was and the fact that it

had a pool. The staff turned out to be excellent and the facilities rather splendid. I highlight this because it is the same venue for next year and you might be interested in attending.

I attended with specific responsibilities, as a Youth Leader, with an added brief of helping review Safeguarding issues. I did manage to fit in a couple of workshops and lots of socialising; a major part of the process is meeting old friends and making new ones.

The children turned out to be very excited and great company. We seemed to spend quite a bit of the time in the pool, with a team effort to drown me, was it something I said, like - “it’s time to get out”. They continued to surprise me with their energy, curiosity and compassion. They really sought to take care of each other. We as the young group did get to dress up as birds, me as a Snowy Owl and fly elegantly around the main stage to illuminate the Conference of Birds read by Lindy Latham during the Anniversary Service.

I attended a very well delivered workshop on Multiculturalism, very engaging in challenging perceptions and stereotypes. It challenged personal paradigms in a fun but robust way.

A presentation by Womankind explored effective strategies and successes in challenging Violence Against Women in Girls in an international context. The presentation was very well delivered and demonstrated that a number of African countries had created excellent programmes to bring change. The decision to engage men in the discussions and activities had resulted in improvement for all. I was a little disappointed that there was no capacity to provide time for the survivors of domestic abuse in the audience, who disclosed challenges in their own lives. At least four women declared as survivors. Given that UK statistic indicate that as many as one in three women suffer domestic abuse, I sensed that other women in the group were also triggered by the event and might have benefited from some additional care. I became quite energized and a bit sad. I also felt a bit trapped; I did make several interventions but then decided I was falling into the role of the dominant male taking too much air time. It did remind me that, having worked as a police officer challenging violence against women and girls for over 30 years, that I still have much to offer. Womankind are an excellent organization, dealing with international projects, they do not really have a UK footprint. I felt inspired, energized and feeling a bit guilty at not having done more. Maybe my interventions did help; three survivors later approached me. A had to remind myself that a successful workshop often does not supply all the answers, but sparks of discussion and reflection.

My overall reaction to the General Assembly was very good. Lots of nice people discussing and pursuing a range of spiritual and social justice issues close to my heart.

Jim Blair

GA Annual Meetings *(continued)*



In this article I will focus on a motion on TTIP passed in the GA annual meetings in April in Birmingham along with some facts presented in a breakout session given by the Penal Affairs Panel on myths around immigration, a particularly relevant issue as we go into a time of election where it is being raised as a prime issue in the media.

The first motion presented for debate at the GA was one on the Transatlantic Trade & Investment Partnership (TTIP). The motion submitted from Cross Street Chapel, Manchester:

That this General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches, in the spirit of those of our liberal religious tradition who have strived and strive currently to realise social justice in the world, whilst recognising the freedom of all to believe as their consciences dictate,

A: believes that the proposed Transatlantic Trade & Investment Partnership (TTIP) treaty:

- (1) Poses a threat to many of the hard-won social gains of the 19th and 20th centuries;
- (2) Would hand over uncontested power and influence from democratically elected governments to multi- and transnational corporations and
- (3) Would likely impact unfairly on many of the poorest in societies across the globe.

B: calls upon individual congregations and affiliated bodies of the General Assembly to inform their members of this issue, so that individuals may study it for themselves and, according to their consciences, take action on it, for example if they so wish by contacting their political representatives, and joining their efforts with groups campaigning against this treaty.

It would not be surprising if many of you had not heard much of TTIP, there is an effort being made to keep things very quiet about this. As the motion suggests, in an effort to raise our awareness around TTIP I outline some facts known and other questions unknown about this treaty.

The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership is a series of trade negotiations being carried out mostly in secret between the EU and US. As a bi-lateral trade agreement, TTIP is about reducing the regulatory barriers to trade for big business, things like food safety law, environmental legislation, banking regulations and the sovereign powers of individual nations. TTIP negotiations began last February and the process has been said to be secretive and undemocratic, the secrecy continues with nearly all information coming from leaked documents and Freedom of Information requests. A free trade area between the two would represent potentially the largest regional free-trade agreement in history, covering 46% of world GDP.

It is thought there are several risks to the UK if TTIP were to pass:

- Public services are in the firing line, especially the NHS. One of the main objectives of TTIP is to open up Europe's public health, education and water services to US companies, which could essentially mean privatisation of the NHS. There has been

some contradictory information around the NHS but Lord Livingston has admitted that talks about the NHS were on the table after the European Commission claimed that public services would be kept out of the agreement.

- TTIP seeks to bring EU standards on food safety and the environment closer to that of the US, however US regulations are much less strict including the use of genetically modified ingredients in the majority of products, the use of pesticides banned in Europe, along with the use of toxic substances prior to their being deemed safe to use.

- Changes to banking regulations to remove restrictions put in place after the global financial crisis thought to result in more power being given back to the bankers.

- An easing of data privacy laws and the monitoring of internet activity under the reintroduction of the principles of the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement, even though this was rejected by the European Parliament.

- The EU has admitted that jobs will probably shift to the US due to differences in labour standards and less powerful trade unions in the US, causing greater unemployment in Europe. A similar situation occurred after the North America Free Trade agreement was introduced between the US, Canada and Mexico where jobs moved outside the US although job creation was promised.

- TTIP's greatest threat is to that of democracy, with the introduction of Investor-State Dispute Settlements (ISDS) which allow companies to sue the governments of countries where government policies may cause a loss of profits. In effect it means unelected transnational corporations can dictate the policies of democratically elected governments.

This is a very brief overview of a complicated issue and I urge you to research its implications in more detail. If you disagree with TTIP write to your MP and get involved where possible.

The GA has a series of business meetings where all delegates attend, along with breakout sessions. I attended a breakout session by the Penal Affairs Panel on immigration. Although the immigration topic discussed was a stretch from their usual criminal justice theme it was interesting to hear the inaccuracies of the public view on the facts around immigration to the UK.

It was an interactive session where those attending could lodge answers to questions and the results of the group's answers were displayed in the session. Most of the participants were quite accurate with the facts; however the general public appear to have a much different view on many things.

A few facts presented in the seminar, not the results of the poll from the audience but general figures published by Ipsos Mori:

- 30% estimate that population of the UK are immigrants, true number is only 12%. The UK overestimates more compared to other European countries including France, Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands.

- In the UK 64% view immigration as a problem, in contrast Germany 62% see immigration as an opportunity.

- Asylum seekers are less than 10% of UK immigrants.

- 42% think that immigrants make the UK a better place to live culturally.

- Interestingly the proportion of British people born to British parents note a sense of belonging very similar to that of long-term immigrants at 85% feeling that they belong.

(the Ipsos Mori report from which this data was taken was published in Jan 2014 can be found at www.ipsos-mori.com)

Natasha Drennan

'In This Together'

Sermon by Rev. Sarah Tinker – adapted from service given on 22nd March 2015

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

You've perhaps heard versions of the old Yorkshire saying, "The whole world's a bit strange 'cept thee and me - and I'm not so sure about thee." That just about sums up the message of today's address. I'm asking the question: what might be helpful to us, living on a planet with 7.2 billion other people, when most of us are thinking that everyone else is a bit strange? How can the simple statement that *we're in this together* help us live our days in complex social structures of the 21st century.

Well let's start with the good news: it's completely normal to engage in what we could describe as us and them thinking – stage two of thinking that I'm me and the rest of you ... are weird. We each have a sense of our own individuality and we then seek to gather with people with whom we identify. And the possible groupings are many – family, geography, nationality, gender, education, religion, sports teams we support, music we like ...

I've long admired the work of psychologist Daniel Goleman who writes in his book *Social Intelligence: The New Science of Human Relationships* that we humans are 'wired to connect' – we are social beings who naturally gravitate towards one another. We like being able to say 'us' as well as 'I'. In this book Goleman also explores an interesting feature of the human brain – known as categorization. We seek order, we are constantly assessing the world around us and putting what we perceive neatly together, giving everything meaning. This is the cognitive basis of 'us and them' thinking where we humans sort out which camp we are in as *us* and then consider all those different from us as *them*. Goleman goes on to describe the process whereby this quite normal cognitive function develops into stereotyping and prejudice:

"A vague sense of anxiety, a tinge of fear, or mere uneasiness at not knowing the cultural signals of Them can be enough to start the skewing of a cognitive category. The mind builds its 'evidence' against the other with each additional disquiet, each unflattering media depiction, each feeling of having been treated wrongly. As these incidents build, apprehension becomes antipathy, and antipathy morphs into antagonism."

I don't know about you, but I certainly experience some of those feelings quite regularly. They're part of the disquiet I often feel when reading or listening to the news.

So what we might call 'us and them' thinking is completely normal, it's been around throughout human history, it'll never go away. But – given the crowded and digitally connected nature of the world we live in today I'd say we have an important task. I'd say that our task as spiritually and socially aware people, our task as people who care – is to move beyond the categories in our minds, to work to develop a global awareness, to keep telling ourselves – we are in this together, all of us – our friends, our families, our nations, our sports clubs, and our enemies, all those we don't identify with. We're all here together on planet earth. It's surely the most radical of Jesus' teachings – it's easy to say and hard to do.



Listen to Jesus' radical teaching recorded in Matthew's Gospel: *"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous alike."*

That's a very strong universalist message – that God makes no distinctions, so why do we – no wonder that Martin Luther King Jr reckoned that 'loving our enemies' was a topic he needed to return each and every year. It's a message explored by many Christians. Listen to these words from Gene Robinson, the first openly gay man in a relationship to be appointed as a bishop, who you may remember wore a bullet proof vest at his consecration – having received so many hate messages and death threats - because he loves another man.

"God calls us to the hard work of compassion for our enemies. Some people may quarrel with that characterization, but we do have enemies. It's a word that Jesus used. The hard part is following Jesus' own command to love our enemies. Not to like them, not to be paralyzed by their opposition, not to give in to their outrageous demands, but to love them nevertheless. To treat them with infinite respect, listen to what drives them, try our best to understand the fear that causes them to reject us, to believe them when they say they only want the best for us. That's hard work, and we can't do it without God's own Spirit blowing through us like wind, breaking down our walls, causing our assumptions to 'come loose,' and reminding us that our enemies too are children of God..."

It's a message echoed by all religious and spiritual traditions. In the Dhammapada, a collection of the Buddha's sayings, we are reminded that *'Hate is not conquered by hate; hate is conquered by love. This is the eternal law.'*

None of these teachers are telling us to give up our identities. Nor are they telling us to condone appalling behaviour. There is a moral imperative I believe to hold on to our values and to seek to build a world of justice, equality and love. We know that hatred leads to de-humanizing of the 'other'. That is what chills us so when we hear the words of those involved in genocide – the systematic targeting of particular groups because of their identity. This is what frightens us when we hear the messages of extremists the world over. They have lost a sense of common humanity. They are trapped in 'us and them' thinking.

(continues on back page)

Services at Essex Church this May



3rd May, 11am – ‘The Dude Abides’

Service led by Rev. Bill Darlison

What's the fastest growing religion in Ireland, and probably in Britain too? What is its holy text? What are its sacraments? How can I join? And how is this religion related to Unitarianism? You may be surprised by the answers!

10th May, 11am – ‘Love is Stronger’

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker
and Prof. Mark Harmon

Today we'll explore the power of love to overcome hatred and hear from Prof Mark Harmon, member of the Knoxville Tennessee UUA congregation, about standing on the side of love.

17th May, 11am – ‘First Things First’

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

How living in accord with our values can help us to set priorities. Do get in touch with our minister if you have a story you'd like to tell in this service. If you've ever wondered 'what should I do next?' or had to make a tricky decision, what helped you find your way?

24th May, 11am – ‘Sabbath’

Service led by Jeannene Powell

Considering the various "Sabbath" and "Rest day" observations in various religions, we consider the usefulness of the principles contained in these and reflect on our own "Sabbath" time. This service was rescheduled from March.

31st May, 11am – ‘Stepping Forward: Volunteering as a Spiritual Practice’

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Our congregation has been created by hundreds of people who give their time to support the community. In this service we will honour all who have given, and continue to give, their support in this way and consider possibilities for involvement.

‘In This Together’ *(continued)*

And here is our task as global citizens; because in the face of ‘us and them’ thinking we tend to join in too. If we listen to our current political discourse we might start to think that there is an enemy out there who can be defeated, or that locking people up will make us safe, that building a wall is a sensible way to keep people apart. I don't believe it is. Yes we must take care of ourselves, yes we need to take sensible steps to make our world as secure as we can. But in truth there have always been differences between people and our only way forward is to build bridges not walls, to create connections, to explore differences in curiosity rather than fear, to seek understanding, to accept the complexity of the global situations we find ourselves in.

Edwin Markham, a Universalist poet, wrote these words that speak of the need to include rather than exclude:

*They drew a circle that shut me out –
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.
But love and I had the wit to win:
We drew a circle that took them in. (adapted)*

That's the challenge – to keep thinking of all of us in one circle, living on one planet, well and truly in this together. And remembering that most of us are probably thinking much of the time that the whole world's a bit strange, except thee and me – and in truth I'm still not entirely sure about thee. Amen

A Date for Your Diary – please plan to be there!
we encourage all members and friends to come to

Essex Church AGM and Membership Service

Sunday 21st June 11am and 12.30pm



We would like to encourage all members and friends of Essex Church to come to church on Sunday 21st June when we will be having our membership service and AGM.

The service will include a simple ceremony, welcoming new members to the congregation, and inviting everyone to re-affirm their commitment to our Unitarian community. The AGM is a chance to review our activities, get involved in future projects, and make our dreams for this church a reality.