



Kensington Unitarians

Newsletter: February 2015

What's On...

Sunday 1st February, 11am-noon
'A Rose in the Wintertime'
Led by Caroline Blair

Tuesday 3rd February, 12.30-1.30pm
Nia Technique with Sonya Leite

Thursday 5th February, 7-8pm
'Heart and Soul' Spiritual Gathering
'The Nature of Interbeing'
with Roy Clark

Sunday 8th February, 11am-noon
'New Perspectives'
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 8th February, 12.30pm
Small-Group Communion
Led by Sue Smith

Sunday 8th February, 2-3pm
Nia Technique with Sonya Leite

Tuesday 10th February, 12.30-1.30pm
Nia Technique with Sonya Leite

Wednesday 11th February, 7-9pm
Management Committee Meeting

Thursday 12th February, 7-9.00pm
Creativity Group: Bring Your Own

Sunday 15th February, 11am-noon
'A Visit from Marion'
Led by GA President Marion Baker
and Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 15th February, 12.30pm
Congregational Potluck Lunch

Tuesday 17th February, 12.30-1.30pm
Nia Technique with Sonya Leite

Sunday 22nd February, 11am-noon
'Opening Doors'
Led by Harold Lorenzelli

Sunday 22nd February, 12.30-1.15pm
'Finding Your Voice'
Singing Workshop with Margaret

Sunday 22nd February, 3.00-5.30pm
True Heart Theatre with Veronica

Tuesday 24th February, 12.30-1.30pm
Nia Technique with Sonya Leite

Thursday 26th February, 7-9pm
Women's Group
Led by Jeannene, Liz and Carole

Who Owns this Church?

If the trustees of Essex Church wish to sell it and gamble the money away, or to turn it into a cabaret club, you will be glad to know that they need permission from Essex Hall (the headquarters of our 'General Assembly') first: no one owns Essex Church in the sense that they can do what they want with it. But 'this church' has a dual meaning: the building (which used to be in Essex Street) is Essex Church, but there is another entity altogether, a community of people, called Kensington Unitarians. Who owns that?



Some of you might have a favourite theatre or cinema, art gallery or shop. But we never feel that we 'own' it. We don't refer in conversations to 'my cinema'. So the first principle of ownership is just that: that we think of it, and perhaps talk of it, as 'mine'. The second is the psychological move from feeling like a visitor or customer to feeling like part of the community. "I hope someone will talk to me" is the first; looking round to see if anyone looks a bit left out or in need of a friendly word is the second. The third part of owning the community is a willingness to offer a hand from time to time. I am very fond, for example, of Daunt Books in Marylebone Road (a lovely shop, if you haven't been.) But if I ever visit and see that everyone looks rushed off their feet, I don't leap behind the till for a bit, or rush round with a tray of coffee, or seize a broom and start sweeping. At the church, those who are willing to take ownership do just this kind of thing; signed-for jobs (greeter, steward or coffee maker) or unsigned for: picking up an abandoned hymnbook or two, helping with the church lunches, being hospitable to visitors; the word 'hospitable' is significant, because it marks the transition from guest to host.

And of course we invite people to sign up for membership of the church when the forms are circulated, as they will be soon. Membership of Kensington Unitarians is not like joining, say, the Friends of the British Museum: we don't have a special members' bar, or priority seats on a Sunday morning, or members' evenings, with prawn sandwiches and Cava. You might feel that there are no privileges at all. But membership is a statement of intent: you are saying, "this is my church; I belong here; and on the list of owners is my name."

Caroline Blair

In this month's newsletter...

* 'Lassana Bathily' by Annette Percy * 'How I Came to Essex Church' by Jonathan Crawford *
'Emotional Competence: Workshop Report' by Liz Tuckwell * 'Craftivists' Garden Project
* 'An Experiment with Money' and 'A Life of Prayer: Workshop Report' by Carolyn Appleby *
'A Unitarian Guide to APPiness' by Roy Clark * 'Ministry Training Placement' by Rob Whiteman
* Poems by John Hands * 'Taking Stock' sermon by Rev. 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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Creativity Group: Bring Your Own Crafts

Thursdays 12th February, 12th March,
16th April and 14th May 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



Congregational Lunch

After the service on Sunday 15th February



We will be having a bring-and-share lunch after the service on 15th February, to coincide with the visit of this year's President of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches, Marion Baker. You might like to invite a friend!

Please look out for the sign-up sheet circulating on Sundays in early February and let us know what food or drink you are offering to contribute for the occasion. We would also be very glad to hear from anyone who is willing to offer practical assistance (such as setting out and clearing up on the day).



Thank You

Thank you to our Kensington Unitarians committee, to Jenny our warden and to Jane for encouraging me to take a month's sabbatical and for leaving me to get on with it.



Thanks also to everyone in the congregation for understanding that it's good to step back from time to time. Some of you know that my dear mum died in December and so this month off was very timely and gave me chance to plan a lovely funeral for her and to then have that important quiet time for reflecting on such a loss in life.

The clutter clearing project turned out to be more demanding than I'd anticipated but admitting defeat when it comes to filing has had a positive outcome as I now have someone helping me with paperwork. I've also enjoyed a few days away in Prague and have started on a systems theory course. So I'm looking forward to getting back to work and exploring new ways of being a minister here with you all.

Rev. Sarah Tinker

'A church is not a social club, a hospital wing, a political action centre, or even a spiritual refuge, although all of these disparate components are part of what a church is. Rather, healthy congregations are primarily sites for seeking and spreading the holy: "the deep way"; "the conditions for human transformation"; centres of redemption"; "dealing with ultimate things". *Ecclesia* is the Greek word for a regularly convoked assembly. It refers to folks being "called out" of their daily routines for a sacred purpose...

Even in our own congregations we hear members applaud personal spirituality while denigrating organised religion. They point to the obvious excesses and abuses of institutions. UU minister Gary James offers a convincing rejoinder:

These same people would not say, "I believe in medicine but I do not believe in medical schools, hospitals and clinics." Nor would they say "I believe in law and justice but I do not believe in law schools, courts and police." Nor, "I love art and beauty but I do not believe in art schools and museums." If medicine, justice and art are worth fostering, there must be institutions devoted to those purposes. And so it is with religion.

Put baldly: Unitarian Universalism is a religion, and religion is not personal but institutional spirituality. Of course, institutions are – and always will be – complicated, messy, and in need of constant mending. But that's precisely why we need the interweaving participation of pulpit and pew. Entrusted with the shared ministry of Unitarian Universalism we're not permitted to be freelance philosophers or roving prophets... A healthy local church furnishes a site where human beings can cultivate a relationship with ultimacy and groundedness.'

Unitarian Universalist Minister, Tom Owen-Towle

Essex Church Membership 2015



It's that time of year when we ask members of Essex Church to re-affirm their commitment to this community. We are trying to make the process of membership renewal a bit simpler this year by contacting current members and friends by email wherever possible so that you simply have to reply to say you wish to renew your membership for another year. Those without email will receive a renewal letter by post as usual.

We would like to emphasise that membership is primarily an expression of your personal commitment to, and support of, the work of this community. This church depends on its members and we really value your presence and active involvement. We are therefore very keen to remind everyone that financial considerations should not prevent anybody from becoming a member or friend of the congregation.

If you are not currently a member and would like to join please speak to Jane or Sarah for more information or check out our website to get an application form. The more the merrier!

'Heart and Soul'

Midweek Spiritual Gatherings

Thursday 5th February, 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 time for refreshments and fellowship.

Our February gathering will be led by Roy Clark on the theme 'The Nature of Interbeing'. If you would like to know more about these gatherings please contact jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk.

'Emotional Competence' – Workshop Report



This was a one-day workshop, held on Saturday 17th January 2015, and was facilitated by Jeannene Powell and Sarah Tinker. About a dozen people attended the workshop, which explored our relationship with our emotions and developing "emotional competence". The workshop included the messages learnt in childhood about emotions and how they impact on our behaviour today, interesting and enlightening discussions on four basic emotions, fear, joy, anger and sadness in both small group and the full group formats. There were also some practical exercises such as walking round the room and each person demonstrating how they would physically react to each emotion to help participants become better able to recognise emotions. This was good fun. At the end of the day, Jeannene gave the group some suggested reading material if they wished to pursue the subject further.

Liz Tuckwell



Ministry Training Placement

I would like to thank the Kensington Unitarians' congregation and particularly Sarah your minister for hosting my training placement at the end of November. I am a member of the St Mark's congregation in Edinburgh and am in the first year of training to be a Unitarian minister. As part of this training students are usually attached to a congregation that has a full time minister for six months, attending most weeks. As this sort of placement was not possible for me owing to the distances and travel time I have been following a different model whereby in my first year I spend an intensive weekend at congregations with

full time ministers but at a greater distance and where I can find accommodation – in the case of London this is with my mother. My time at Kensington was one of four placements that I did during the first term – an exhausting but interesting process.

I arrived on the Thursday evening and was straight into the meeting of the Management Committee. As I come from a 20 year career in senior Church Administration this was a comfortable place to begin. On Friday Sarah and I spent time on a number of admin type tasks that are necessary to underpin ministry as well as pastoral meetings that provide some of the joys and purposes of that ministry. We also went for a walk in the park. This was a particular joy as I have many memories of the area as well as my family having photos of me in Kensington Gardens at the age of six weeks. I was born just down the road from your church! This walk was one of many opportunities that Sarah and I took to talk about the various questions that arise but upon which one gets too few chances to reflect. We ended a long day at a production of *The Man who would be King* in Hampstead.

On Saturday I attended the *Life of Prayer* workshop led by Jane Blackall and Jef Jones. This is written up elsewhere in the newsletter so I will say no more than to say that I found it useful and interesting. I also enjoyed the Sunday service led by Sarah with Symon Hill as a visiting preacher. One of the benefits of a placement in a number of locations is seeing how things are done differently. No two congregations are ever the same, even in the smallest details. I have now seen Candles of Joy and Concern done in several different ways, with different names, different places in the service etc. It is interesting to reflect on how and why they feel different. In the afternoon I joined the group going to the Joyce Rupp workshop (also covered elsewhere in this newsletter). Again I was left with much to ponder. It is a slightly disconcerting experience to be in a room with so many nuns, even if most of them are in disguise.

Monday was a quieter day, spent mainly with Sarah, to talk further and debrief on what I had already seen and heard. You can probably sense from how packed this simple list has been what a rich experience the whole weekend was. Thank you.

Rob Whiteman

Dates for your Diary

GA President's Visit and Lunch Sunday 15th February 2015



We are pleased to be welcoming our General Assembly President Marion Baker to co-lead our service, on the theme of 'freedom and responsibility', and join us for a congregational lunch afterwards. Make a note in your diary and join us that day and hear some of Marion's insights into our national movement.



FUSE: Festival of Unitarianism in the South East, 20th-22nd February

A group of people from Kensington Unitarians are already booked in to this Unitarian weekend by the sea in Worthing. The congregation is offering generous bursaries to members who would like to attend – speak to a committee member – the deadline to guarantee a place is 26th January but there may be some places available after this date. See www.fusefest.org.uk for the latest information.



General Assembly Annual Meetings, 29th March-1st April

Each year we send two delegates to our Annual Meetings and this year they are being held in Birmingham. Attending is a good way to learn more about our movement and meet other Unitarians so let a committee member know ASAP if you would like to attend.

How I Came to Essex Church



I was born and raised in a very religious family. My father was a Pentecostal Reverend, and almost every member of my extended family (both UK and abroad) were born again Christians. Christian culture was all I knew, and of all the choices I would make in life - leaving, or even challenging my faith was not one I thought I would ever consider. I was safe, respected and loved in the church community, and my personal relationship with God was very sincere. Yet, I somehow began to question the validity of my faith in my early 20s. Unlike a lot my peers who left church in their teens to explore and experiment, my decision to leave was not motivated by those desires. As my world began to expand, my religion seemed narrow-minded, divisive and intolerant. How can My love be more peaceful and inclusive than the love of God? I have always been one to question something until I fully understand it, but the answers I was getting from religious authorities were illogical and inconsistent. To continue with my faith would appear noble to my fellow Christians, but personally, I felt dishonest.

I eventually left the church, which was not a very pleasant experience. My church friends refused to understand my spiritual transition, so to avoid further judgement; I excommunicated myself from them all. I then tried to replace them with strangers, who, not only misunderstood my journey, but also had no obligation to be loyal, honourable or even care like my former friends. Now, 19 years later, I still yearn for that social network and bond; however, I could never trade it for the spiritual inner peace I have found.

I discovered Kensington Unitarians 18 months ago when I typed a search into Google. I don't recall what keywords I entered, but I wanted to visit a church that provided guided discovery rather than answers, that honoured silence over chaos, is more inclusive than divisive, and more progressive than dogmatic. Kensington Church has provided this in every service I have attended. My only issue is that this is exactly what a lot of young people are currently seeking - yet somehow do not feel they can access.

Jonathan Crawford

Women's Group

Starting at Essex Church in February



26th February, 26th March, 23rd April,
28th May, 25th June and 23rd July 2015

6.45pm (for 7pm start) - 8.45pm

We're starting a monthly Women's Group to be held at Essex Church on the 4th Thursday of each month. This group was due to start in January but the first session was postponed and it will now begin on Thursday 26th February at 7pm.

The aim of this group is to provide a safe space for us to explore issues and topics of interest to us as women. These include things such as spirituality and sacred space; self-image; women and aging; as well as other topics suggested by the group. Each session we'll use various ways, including discussion, art/creative exercises, meditation and other interactive means, to explore the topic for that month. It's unlikely that we can all attend every session, but we hope women wanting to attend can commit to a minimum of 4 of the 7 meetings. The group is open to all but numbers are limited, we'll keep the group small, so please contact Liz to reserve your place as soon as you can.

If you'd like to know more about this proposed Women's Group, please speak with Liz Tuckwell, Carole Grace or Jeannene Powell. Or email us on info@kensington-unitarians.org.uk or leave a message and we'll get back to you: 020 7221 6514.

IMPORTANT: If you are intending to join the women's group PLEASE get in touch with Liz ASAP to let her know. Even if you think you have already told one of the leaders you are coming we would appreciate you re-confirming by email as it can be hard to keep track of conversations. Several groups and events at Essex Church have been in the balance recently because not enough people have confirmed beforehand to make the group viable and then we have had a last minute rush of interest at the point when it's almost too late. We don't like to cancel or postpone groups and you can all help us in this by signing up well in advance (and getting dates in your diary so you don't double-book yourself). Thank you! **Liz' email is: ltuckwell@gmx.co.uk**

Men's Group: First Meeting

Tuesday 24th March, 7pm at Essex Church

There have been some preliminary conversations about setting up a men's group at Essex Church. A date for an initial meeting has been pencilled in: Tuesday 24th March at 7pm. Please contact Jim Blair for more details: jim_blair_rhino@hotmail.com

'Finding Our Voice'

Singing Workshops with Margaret Marshall



Sundays 22nd February, 22nd March
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.



'Spirituality and Hearing Voices'

12th February, 2-4pm, Here at Essex Church

Professor Simon Dein is a consultant psychiatrist with long-standing interests in psychiatry and religion. His work includes study of the experiences of Christians hearing G-d's voice.

Dolly Sen is a writer, artist, film-maker, poet, mental health consultant and trainer, with lived experience of psychosis, mood disorder and PTSD. She is an engaging and inspiring speaker: "I have no religion, but I do see voices as the soul's story told in metaphor and that if you take a holistic approach to voices and listen to the soul, it will tell you your road home."

Chaired by Satyin Taylor, NHS mental health professional, member of Triratna Buddhist Order, founder of the London Group of SpiritualCrisisNetwork.org.uk, lived experience of psychosis.

There will be an opportunity for socialising and exchanging your own experiences with those attending.

Full price tickets are £5 – please register:
www.spiritualitymentalhealth.org.uk

'A Life of Prayer' Workshop Report

I went along to the prayer day with an open mind. As I spend a lot of time on my own I have an active prayer life and use a lot of different techniques. An early point made by Jef was that anything can be a prayer and it's not something that you ever do wrong.

The fact that a lot of those present were training to be Ministers impressed me and I enjoyed how down to Earth they were.

Jane and Jef guided us with ease and as ever, it was good to get in to small groups to talk in some depth, although that also happened in the large group.

On the way home I remembered a technique I had not used for a long time. I had read in a book by Dr Jampolsky to breathe in, in my case Love and Light, and breathe out anxiety, or whatever thought I am finding difficult at the time. Repeated it is positively distracting. Also, as negative or anxious thoughts arise and I am walking along for instance I give each to God. That is incredibly helpful and I only took it up on the way home from the workshop.

Whilst there, on being given the task of writing a prayer about something ordinary, and my washing being in my garden at home, I wrote this.

*Thank you for the machine that cleans the clothes, the sheets, the duster. The one that kills the germs and frees the odours.
Blessed be respectability to turn us out in well-ironed order. Thanks for electricity, the invisible current we take for granted.
From solar panels, through the cables it comes direct, without a qualm. The watts come in at the turn of a switch, day or night.
Plastic, steam and steel, unnatural and natural, all there at our fingertips. With so much thanks, Amen.*

Carolyn Appleby



Foodbank Reminder

Thank you so much to all the generous people who have been donating to the foodbank in the foyer. We are passing the food on to the Trussell Trust, who are very pleased to receive it. Can we please ask that any fruit juice (always a popular product) is of the kind that is stored on the shelves, not in the refrigerator? Unfortunately we had some donations of fresh juice that had to be discarded. The food bank cannot use products that have to be stored in the fridge. Thank you again.

Caroline Blair

Two Days in Phnom Penh...

I arrived late on Friday night from Shanghai. Ari Muttonen, my very dear Finnish friend had said he would send his Took Took man to pick me up. In fact he was there himself, very tall and white amongst the multitudes at the airport exit. The Took Took took (I couldn't resist this!!) us back to Ari and Tapsa's home in the depths of local Phnom Penh. They are both here on behalf of the Finnish Lutheran Mission, for at least a 4 year commitment. Tapsa is to oversee the accounts management of the NGO's that the Mission is funding, and Ari to do leadership development – making sure that the Finnish money is well invested in the local initiatives offering much needed support to the Cambodian people.



Ari told me that a wedding would take place the next day in his home. An old friend and colleague of Ari's – Wäinö - was here with his lady-love – Seerit - and they wanted Ari to marry them. They were married during the high Finnish summer, but the most important ritual for them would be when Ari in his full regalia as a Lutheran Minister performed the ceremony here in Phnom Penh. And I would be bridesmaid, matron of honour, guest all rolled into one. Ari is the first gay minister to be ordained in the Finnish Lutheran Church - only two years ago. Half the Lutheran community were thrilled. At last! they said. And the rest were horrified. Ari and Tapsa received death threats. Some wrote to the Lutherans in Asia and 'warned' them to beware of Ari and Tapsa's arrival in the East. So Ari's work in Cambodia is officially non-religious. For pragmatic reasons. So this request for him to take out his kit and caboodle in his identity as a spiritual guide was an especially meaningful one.

We met in the morning over breakfast, and were promptly bundled out in the Took Took to the nearby Massage and Nail parlour... where we chose some treats from a full menu of possibilities. We were really quite modest in our requests. Back and head massages, and nails – hand and toes – for the girls. And the chaps had a 90 minute full-body massage. Well chilled after this we had a quick lunch at a café that Ari and Tapsa like to go to, and then home to dress for the ceremony. Hannah arrived with her portable piano. She is another Finn who works for the mission, the sixth member of our little party, and would support our ritual with music. And we all went upstairs to the roof top garden where the whole ceremony was conducted in Finnish. Rings exchanged. Lovely lovely - finished off with champagne and sweet dancing to a tiny CD player. Back down to the kitchen and living room for lovely cake, tea and stories. Many stories. Afternoon nap and then a yummy dinner somewhere downtown Phnom Penh.

The next morning Seerit & Wäinö left before sunrise to catch a bus to take them onwards on their Asian adventure, eventually to Ho Chih Min city and then home to the deep winter of Finland.



My second day in Phnom Penh included a 2-hour Christmas service in a local Christian Church with sermons and many carols I knew in English all delivered in the Khmer Language. Very relaxed. Everyone dressed in their best. Families together. Children running up and down the aisles. Every group made a contribution. I went up on stage with Ari, Tapsa and Hannah with her husband and two children to sing a hymn in Finnish. I do not know Finnish, but my theatre training has enabled me to listen and copy almost instantaneously! So I was quite able to sing along without any clue as to what it was about, other than that it was something hopeful connected to the Christmas story! Over 300 of us were then herded outside the Church into the main road... half of which was requisitioned and covered with plastic awning, with about 30 tables set for 10 people each under this. We had a most delicious lunch altogether as a community. And then they returned into the church for games and more songs. Ari, Tapsa and I took this opportunity to return home for the requisite afternoon nap.

I had been instructed by my old schoolfriend, Jenny, to visit a Hostess Bar in Phnom Penh! Her ex-husband was now living in Cambodia, married to a lovely lady here, and was now running ANGRY BIRDS – in the middle of the tourist district. As it happens I know William quite well through old family connections, so I had my own reasons to visit him and say hello. I brought Ari and Tapsa with me to meet him at the Foreign Correspondents Club overlooking the Mekong river, and then we had dinner together over which we spoke at length of the sex industry in Cambodia and in fact across Asia. In his previous work in the development field, Tapsa was well aware of what was going on, and William offered another perspective from his experience as a bar owner. It was disturbing talk about the shadow side of our world which is allowed to flourish. William feels he does his bit by taking care of his employees as well as he can. His girls are well paid to do their job which is just to drink along with the men (99.9% men, and from all over the world) and can make their own choice about whether to leave with their clients at the end of the evening if an invitation is made. But I hear it is not uncommon for girls here to be sold and trafficked to other countries to work in the sex trade. Sigh.

My two days in Cambodia. Love & marriage, church & community, sex & survival. Bali next... over Christmas 2014... and stories of black sand, glorious sky and sea, avocados and mangos, darkness, silence and bugs.

Veronica Needa

True Heart Theatre: 'Our Living Stories'

Sunday 22nd February, 3.00-5.30pm



Since its beginnings in 2006, London's own Chinese-led True Heart Theatre has been regularly performing Playback Theatre on the third Sundays of most months in a variety of venues as our service to the community. Our events have created an opportunity for people from all cultures, across generations and languages, to meet each other through a heart-full exchange of real-life stories and experiences. Entry is by donation. Please book by emailing our very own Veronica Needa at: info@trueheart.org.uk

How powerful this process can be, and how valuable it is to meet people from different cultures"

"I don't think you see a human as a human until you have heard their story"

"[Playback] enthral[s] in the moment and absorbs all into oneness"

Lassana Bathily



I should have lit a candle for Lassana Bathily the young Malian Muslim who saved the lives of 15 Jews during the terrorist attack on the Jewish Supermarket in Vincennes on Friday, 9th January.

When the shooting began Lassana quietly led people, including a small child, into the store's cold room, switched off the power, and told everybody to be calm and keep quiet. When he eventually got out of the store, police arrested and handcuffed him for an hour and a half assuming that because he was black he must be one of the terrorists. When the police finally realized their mistake he was able to help them by giving them a plan of the store which helped them enormously.

This ordinary young man is a real hero. He arrived in France with no documents and was finally welcomed to work in a Jewish store. Lassana, who is 24, said "I am a practicing Muslim and I've said my prayers in the store, in the storehouse, but this is not a question of Jews, Christians or Muslims, we are all in the same boat."

It's good to know that Lassana Bathily has now been granted French citizenship by President François Hollande. Thank you Lassana for lighting a bright candle in a very dark place.

Annette Percy

Small Group Communion



**8th February, 8th March, 12th April
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:

8th February – Led by Sue Smith

8th March – Led by Jane Blackall

12th April – Led by Tristan Jovanović

If you would like to find out more then please feel free to speak to Jane Blackall or Tristan. All are welcome.

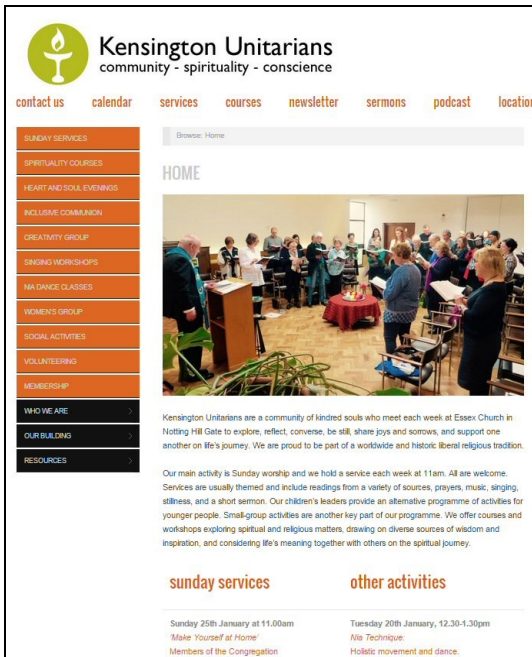
'Issues of Ageing'



Our ageing course facilitated by therapists Sally Payne and Annie Tunncliffe has had to be postponed, probably to the autumn.

But if you are interested in the topic why not come along to a conversation about some of our 'issues of ageing' on Sun 1st March from 1.30 to 4.30pm. No charge, open to anyone aged 50 and over: a gentle opportunity to air some of the issues you are facing in later life. Refreshments provided. Bring your lunch if you plan to stay after the morning service. Please let our minister Sarah know if you plan to join this session.

New Website and Weekly Email Bulletin for Kensington Unitarians



It's been a long time in the making but our new church website will finally 'go live' in mid-February. Part of the motivation for the revamp was the wish to have a responsive site which would work nicely on the smaller screens of tablets and mobile devices that many people will be using to access it these days... but I like to think the new site, which now contains lots more photos of our lovely congregation, looks better than ever on a full-sized desktop screen too.

I hope you will now find it easier to get the information you need. Links to all the key information are along the top of the screen and our main activities are listed in the left-hand menu. One feature that might be particularly useful for some of you is the new calendar feature. If you use Google Calendar then you can add all our forthcoming events to your calendar in a single click of the button in the bottom right hand corner of the events listing. We are still gathering material to add a few more features to the new website so watch out for further upgrades in due course.

www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Please Sign up for the new Email Bulletin!

We are also about to launch a new weekly email bulletin with reminders about forthcoming events, calls for newsletter contributions, and news about volunteering opportunities. If I have your email address you will probably already have received a message from me inviting you to opt-in to join this new mailing list. If you haven't yet replied, please do so!

If you haven't already given me your email address and would like to receive the church email bulletin please do send a message to jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk. Thank you!

Jane Blackall

One Light Spiritual Gathering 'Relaxation'



**Friday 13th February, 6.15-8.30pm
– Here at Essex Church**

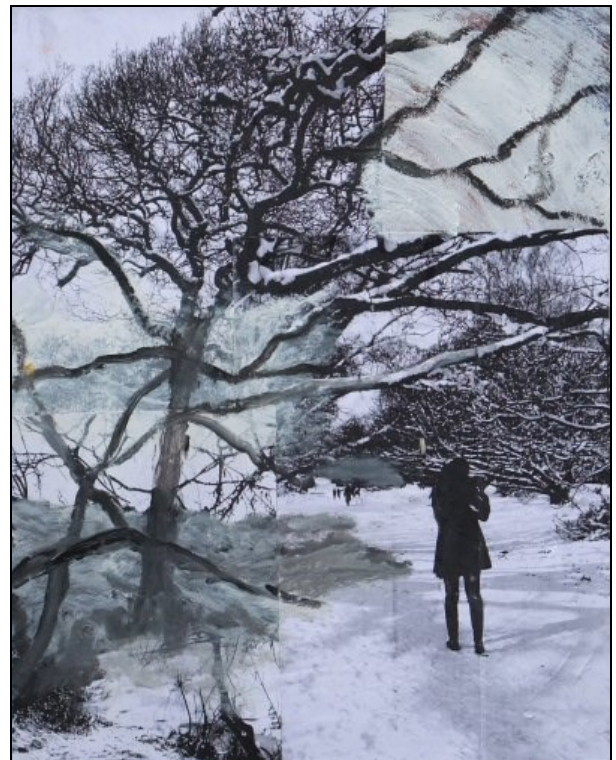
The gatherings are led by graduates of the Interfaith Seminary.

The next One Light Spiritual Gathering will take place on: Friday 13th (with the reminder that 13 is a lucky number in Judaism, and other traditions). It will focus on the blessings of Relaxation! So leave the strain of the working week behind, and come along. Just Be with us from 6.30 – 8.15 pm at Essex Unitarian Church in Notting Hill.

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

*Forthcoming One Light Gatherings:
13th March – Efficiency; 10th April – Celebration
8th May – Contentment; 12th June – Patience*



'Winter Heath' (mixed media) by Heidi Ferid

For more of Heidi's work see: www.heidiferidart.co.uk

'The Unknown as a Doorway to Spiritual Growth'

Some thoughts on a mini-retreat led by Sister Joyce Rupp at Heythrop College



On 30th November Rev. Sarah Tinker, Jane, Sofie, Rob Whiteman and I happened to be sitting a few feet from the lectern, in a full hall. Sr Joyce Rupp, of the Servites (Servants of Mary) Order, based in Iowa USA, appeared dressed in a business suit.

I was struck by her firm yet soothing voice which took us through, in addition to a prayer and some meditation, a Taizé-based Chant, during which I felt a strong connection with the participants. The one-to-one exercise - sharing a current personal hurdle with a stranger, moved me to tears. During the break, I loved the silent time in the regenerating garden, as well as the meditative moment spent in the Chapel (both optional activities).

I came away from that afternoon, strengthened in the belief that accepting the Unknown - in as painful a form as it may manifest - and surrendering outcomes, do indeed remove a lot of the stress of everyday living. Have I grown spiritually since? Time will tell!

Sr Rupp is the author of numerous books (prose & poetry); she has also produced a series of CD's and DVD's. One can sign up for her monthly newsletter: joyce@joycerupp.com

Melody

'A Prayer of Fastening'

Shared by Joyce Rupp at the Mini-Retreat

Fasten my heart to you, Love of all Loves,
that all I am and do finds its motivation in your love.

Fasten my mind to you, Inner Peace,
that whatever stirs within leads to tranquillity.

Fasten my joys to you, Delight of My Soul,
that these memories comfort me in times of trouble.

Fasten my sorrows to you, Compassionate One,
that I experience solace in your kindheartedness.

Fasten my concerns to you, Faithful Companion,
that I withdraw from my fears and place my trust in you.

Fasten my responsibilities to you, Source of Love,
that these daily efforts evolve from a generous spirit.

Fasten my anguished world to you, Holder of Hope,
that my dreams for peace may become a reality.

Fasten the uncertain aspects of my life to you, Eternal Mystery,
that I might give myself ever more fully to you.

Companion on our path of the unknown, time and again, we wait on the threshold of life, wait for you to nurture and encourage us on our journey of spiritual gestation. Once more, we open our minds and hearts to your love, trusting in your presence within us and among us. With courage and confidence we turn toward you, ready to step into what is before us, believing you will guide us through the unknown corridors of the future. Thank you for the gift of your faithful love. Amen.

New District Minister



It has just been announced that Rev. Martin Whitell has been appointed as the new district minister for the London District and Provincial Assembly (LDPA). Martin is currently the minister with Portsmouth Unitarians at John Pounds Church. He has played an active role in the denomination at a national level and was the Convenor of the General Assembly's Executive Committee from 2010 to 2014. Prior to this Martin worked in numerous roles with John Lewis for 27 years and ended up as a member of the board.

'Our psyches go up and down. We have our seasons and days of joyfulness. Sometimes we feel like singing and dancing. Sometimes there is spring in our step. But we have other seasons, too — cold seasons, bland seasons, seasons of tiredness, pain, illness, and boredom. If prayer is lifting heart and mind to God, then clearly during those times we should be lifting something other than song and dance. The celebrant's role is to help gather everything together and direct it upward, like incense smoke to God. Thus, the best celebrant is the person who can act as a radar screen, lifting up all that the people bring, including their tiredness, their hangovers, their woundedness, their emotional and sexual preoccupations, and their boredom. The celebrant gathers it all together and offers it as it is, not as they would like it to be. When we come to celebrate, we bring the alphabet of our lives. If our hearts and minds are full of warmth, love, enthusiasm, song and dance, then these are the letters we bring. If they are full of tiredness, despair, blandness, pain, and boredom, then those are our letters. Bring them. Spend them. Celebrate them. Offer them. It is God's task to make the words!'

Ronald Rohlheiser



We had a great turnout for the Christmas Carol Service and Lunch on 14th December and also a lovely Candlelit Christmas Eve.



“God” is the name we use for nonmaterial stupendous, wondrous “More” that includes the universe even as God transcends the universe. This is God as the “encompassing Spirit,” the one in whom “we live and move and have our being,” the one who is all around us and within us. God is the one in whom the universe is, even as God is more than the universe; the Mystery who is beyond all names, even as we name the sacred Mystery in our various ways.’

Marcus Borg (1942 – 2015)



'Has there ever been a time in your life when your actions differed from your words and beliefs? If you are like most people (including myself), there are times when it may be hard to walk the talk. It is easy to speak our truth when we are around those who openly support and agree with us. On the other hand, it can be a bit more challenging to stand in our truth, walking the talk, when there are people around us who have different beliefs or opposing points of view. The need for approval can be an interesting trap; if we are not careful, it can woo us into compromising our integrity. When that happens, it usually spills over into many different areas of our life. Then what do we really have left except a life that is lived in the darkened shadows of our own self-doubt and diminished self-respect? Developing consistency between what we believe and demonstrating it by how we live in the world is one of the greatest challenges life has to offer, and it is also the mark of a spiritually evolving individual. Spiritually mature people cannot be bought by the world's opinions.'

Dennis Merritt Jones

A Unitarian Guide to 'APP'iness

If, like me, you sometimes find yourself on a crowded tube train in the morning rush hour, you may have observed your fellow passengers plugged into their smartphones or tablet computers busy composing texts, checking e-mails, playing games or even watching their favourite TV show or movie. This might strike some as a major benefit of our technologically advanced society but the disconnection with the environment and other people seems to me not such a good thing.

The sense of isolation, separateness and social disconnect is, in my view an unhealthy effect of big city life. So, how to balance the advantages, timesaving opportunities and just plain fun of the internet with mutually beneficial community living? Well, as the Buddhists say when dealing with such issues, we should look to find the Middle Way. Certainly with the array of internet based services available, selective viewing...or listening, can be knowledge (and life) enhancing. It enables us to learn about what is going on in the world from a different perspective to the one offered by governments and major media agencies. It can also, if used judiciously, bring people together for the common good. Here are a few examples of online community resources that may be of interest to Unitarian folk:



Project Dirt: www.projectdirt.com

Project Dirt is a social network connecting community projects with green and social benefits. It is an important information portal for learning, sharing, encouraging, supporting and promoting environmental activities across the UK. So if you feel like getting your hands dirty clearing an old canal or replanting a neglected woodland, or just learning more about our native trees this is a good place to start.

Freecycle: www.freecycle.org

A very well known, popular and useful service is Freecycle. It's a grassroots and entirely non-profit movement of people who are giving (and getting) stuff for free in their own neighbourhoods. It's all about reuse and keeping good stuff out of landfills.



MeetUp: www.meetup.com

Meetup is an online social network that allows users to form groups with people who share their interests, from craft making to music appreciation, chess to country walking and everything in between. You can either start a new local community yourself through their online organizing network, or find and join one of the thousands already meeting up face-to-face.

OK... I hear you say, I can see the potential community enhancing benefits of these resources but what the hoo-hah is an "App"? Well, it is simply an abbreviation for application. Essentially the same thing as a standard computer software programme but a much smaller version often for a more specific use and designed for a hand held device or smartphone. These micro programmes make it easier to use the internet on a smaller unit, as they are designed to work on a small screen, take up little space and auto download updates when there is a phone signal or WiFi, so you can even use them offline.

I hope you found this Web community primer useful. I should point out that I am finishing this piece for the newsletter as I prepare to leave home to attend our Sunday gathering, but not before tweeting about today's service, and checking the weather on my Smartphone. On route I will swipe my Oyster card on boarding the bus, swipe my debit card to pay for my coffee ... oh and I will not forget to mute my phone before entering the church, of course!

"APP"y trails

Roy Clark

'An Experiment with Money' – by Carolyn Appleby

I am fortunate in having enough money to pay my bills. This is not only thanks to adequate income but also because my needs and wants are few and I don't have dependents. I own my own modest home. I don't have a car, almost entirely drink home-filtered water, hot and cold, don't drink alcohol nor wear make-up and buy most of my clothes and many household items from charity shops. In addition I pretty much only renew things when necessary.

I try and heed to "live simply that others may live." Who is to say what simple living is? It is down to each of us, I suppose. There is luxury in my life. I eat out and go away quite often. That is not necessary, merely pleasurable. Thank God for pleasure! Life, my life and no doubt yours, is hard enough in other ways, both predictably and unexpectedly.

In July I went on holiday twice. The first time was in Edinburgh. I shared someone's flat. I had the most wonderful time. Later in the month I joined friends in a rented house in the Forest of Dean, which is part of the beautiful county of Gloucestershire. I was expecting to pay £180 plus food. I bought some provisions but my partner offered to pay my share of the rent as well as his. He made this offer before I told him what was in my mind and then it clinched what I was to do, as you will see later on. The background is this. The day before I arrived in Gloucestershire, I chatted to a woman on the badminton court at the Council's Leisure Centre. She happened to have told me that she was bringing her 12 year old son there, for sports and exercise during the school's summer holidays as part of her membership. It was her way of keeping him occupied, as she has no spare money for the school holidays. In fact, they as a family were to take only one day's holiday. Her husband was to hire a car and they were looking forward to going to Eastbourne for the day.

Afterwards I went to a cafe, had a drink and read the newspaper. On the front page of The Independent that day was an article about how the Welfare Reforms are hitting all sorts of people with having to pay Council Tax for the first time and the drastic effects of Housing Benefit reductions. It struck me that I am in a privileged position. How could I share this good fortune? The idea I came up with was to get out of the bank the amount of cash that I would have paid for the room rental on my holiday and give it to local people. I rang around some local charities but did not find recipients such as I had in mind. I decided to make random gifts. First to offer £20 each to the woman and child who inspired these donations. I saw them the next week on the badminton court; this time she was with her husband and instinct prevented me offering them money. This was partly because I arrived at the moment they were about to leave. Also, I decided it would be better to offer it anonymously to people I would not see again and so not have any potentially complicated relationships.

On a sunny day I went to the One Stop Shop, where people in need go for advice. Here I enquired about how the local Credit Union works and whether I could give to it. The answer was "No." I ran out of time to offer money at the weekly Foodbank, where I had volunteered and there had been a lot of talk about who does and does not deserve gifts. I am unhappy with this way of thinking. The same as when bad things happen to people we say, "Why me?" When a good thing happens, as with free gifts, why not you or you or you or anyone? I decided to give this money without judgment about how people were to spend it. That was up to them.

On my way to the metropolis, what was easy was calling in on my favourite cafe in my home town. That time I did not go in for refreshments, my visit was just to hand over the money. I left behind a waitress looking bewildered by the arrival of £20 in the bowl for tips after my hasty, whispered explanation. Next I went to Paddington station, with offering any cleaners money in mind, £20 each. They are low-paid and little appreciated, I guess. "Big Issue" vendors were also in the frame but there were none in sight that day. That was my plan and I thought I would quickly get rid of all the money there but it turned out to be just my first day of giving. In fact, I found taking the initiative to give to individuals a difficult process. There I was on a bridge, overlooking busy platforms at Paddington station, with passengers going hither and thither and staff apparently happily getting on with their work. I chose that as a place to select recipients at random because it was a venue I was passing through anyway and of course there were masses of people from which to choose. I was mildly tempted not to start. Then I thought, 'It's not about me and how I feel.' So I prayed to be led and felt more relaxed and loosely guided. I noticed a staircase down to Platform 1 and went down it. Looking inside, I walked past imposing Victorian doors. The first class lounge would not have suited my mission! I came to an open doorway. A security guard was sitting there. I hesitated, expressed the awkwardness of the situation and offered him £20, suggesting he might be on a low wage. He didn't want it but said he could call down someone who worked for a charity upstairs and did so. A young woman came and was touched and appreciative. She was eventually persuaded of my wish to remain anonymous. It keeps things simple. So there we were 3 people representing 3 generations. It was a nice moment of us sharing humanity and compassion. I had not heard of this charity before. It is called Starlight Children's Foundation. It "aims to grant wishes to seriously and terminally ill children." (www.starlight.org.uk)

Next I went to the room where disabled people wait for assistance. The woman at the desk said she does not hand out money and on this occasion I did not offer it to her personally. She was having trouble hearing me. She suggested I ask at the ticket desk for any people who have lost their ticket or found themselves without money. The queue was annoyingly long so I consulted a stuttering man at the Information desk. He said they never hand out money and he didn't want any from me. Their policy is to offer a phone call to a friend or relative to pay for a ticket on the person's behalf. Later a woman officer from the Transport Police said they have people 2 or 3 times a day in such a situation but no one at that moment.

An Experiment with Money (continued)

At this stage I was rather tired and slightly exasperated so I went for a sandwich. Here I found a receptacle inviting donations to the Prêt Foundation Trust. This is to alleviate poverty and they concentrate on giving to charities that support homeless people. I remembered that they give away their unsold sandwiches. It is worth looking up this charity too. Now I have I am particularly glad I gave to them. www.pret.com/pret_foundation_trust/about.htm By the way, usually I donate to charities anonymously by telephone from the personal account I have with the Charities Aid Foundation (sometimes called CAF Bank).

As for giving to individuals, I noticed many cleaners together at the station. I did not know how to choose and did not have enough money for all of them. I did see one woman on her own carrying cleaning equipment but she disappeared in to a train.

I came out of the station. A man who was getting out the Evening Standard newspapers from his bag to hand out to the public refused my £20. He suggested giving it to the Help for Heroes collectors along the road. However, I was in a hurry by then and moved on. Nearby a man was languishing on a bench. I guessed he was homeless but on asking he said he was not! He didn't seem insulted. From my experience, I wonder about these things. Men didn't seem to want my money. Was I being patronising? I decided to offer it to women, who are after all frequently lower paid or work entirely for free in their parenting and domestic roles. (Yes, some men do too.)

My next time of giving turned out differently. I was in a charity shop for the Shaw Trust in Bath, which helps get disadvantaged people in to work. Years ago, when I was severely ill and disabled, I was sent a leaflet inviting me to use their services. I was not up to doing so. Here I spent one of my £20 notes with a split use. I had not originally intended to benefit from this money. Yet, I must admit sometimes I want to be given to when I am giving a lot. So I gained a pair of purple trousers and later a CD, as I'm not the only person who likes to give.

One rainy day I noticed a man with a collecting tin outside Peter Jones in Sloane Square. As a Hare Krishna volunteer he was raising money for their "Food for Life" project for homeless people. We had a good chat. It addressed my prejudice and assumption that all they do is parade on the streets chanting. He gave me a recipe book, which I later passed on to a vegetarian friend.

I embraced another religion when I pleased a Muslim woman begging on Kensington High Street, with £20 in her plastic cup. I had just come out of a posh shop. Seeing her caused me to think about the "haves" and "have-nots." On the other side of the road I had to queue up to address a girl selling "The Big Issue." When I walked past these 2 women later I found them still at their labours, my donations hidden. The second "Big Issue" vendor I found was male. He received £15 and another beggar £5. Then I had £10 left. I was sure they could use it in the YMCA hostel in Hayes Town but no, both the man at reception and his supervisor insisted they could not accept money and she strongly advised me not to give it to individuals. There being so many coming in and out I would not know who to choose. With my final £10 I actually bought 3 small presents and was quite glad my experiment was finished.

Carolyn Appleby

Craftivists' Garden: A #wellMAKING Project



In the autumn, some members of our creativity group took part in a craft project initiated by the Craftivists' Collective, to help create what was described as a '#wellMAKING garden.

We responded to the following invitation:

'This is a unique project that goes beyond seeing craft as a relaxing tool... seeing craft instead as an incredible tool to help us connect, challenge ourselves and help us grow and flourish in our lives in different ways and help us see how we can change the world one stitch at a time. If you're based in the UK, we'd love you to join in and hand-embroider, knit or crochet a flower for our #wellMAKING Craftivists Garden, while reflecting on the importance of wellbeing and what we need in order to flourish as individuals and as a society.'

We were given some questions on wellbeing and craft which we considered as a group in December and we sent back our responses (on matters such as 'realising our potential', 'coping with daily stress', and 'contributing positively to society').

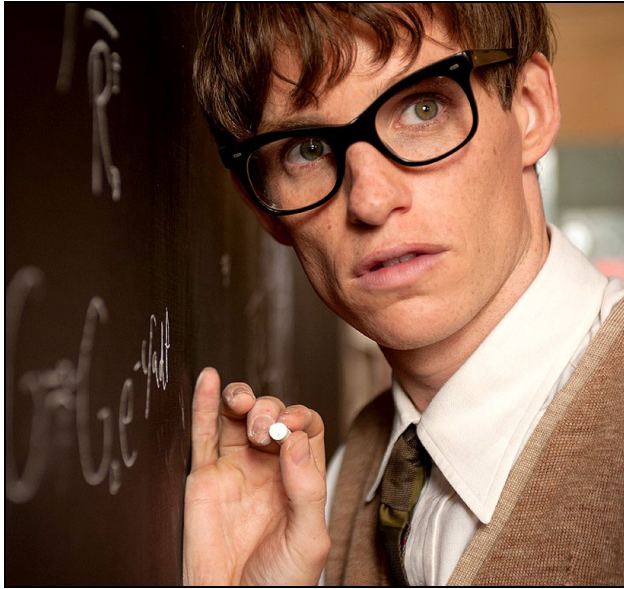
Flowers made by Sue, Juliet, Annette, Caroline and Jane (all pictured above) were collected up and sent off in late December to join all the others that were made by other crafting groups up and down the country. Apparently they collected in over 400 flowers from different groups and these will all be assembled into the finished garden for display to the general public in January.

'Craftivists Garden Party'

**Tuesday 27th January, 12-5pm (drop-in)
Toynbee Hall, Commercial Street, London E1 6LS**

Those of you who pick up the newsletter at church might just read this in time to find out about the grand unveiling – the 'Craftivists Garden Party' – which will be taking place at Toynbee Hall in East London on Tuesday 27th January. This will be open from 12pm to 5pm and people can drop in at any time. The event will consist of an exhibition of the knitted, sewn and crocheted flowers made by participants in their facilitated workshops and is a celebration of crafting and wellbeing. The exhibition will include workshop activities, participants and facilitators sharing their thoughts and experiences, and an 'open-mike' session. You can take part or just wander around looking at hundreds of our flowers. Sandwiches and refreshments will be available – all welcome!

Please register here: www.craftivist-collective.com/events



Film Review: 'The Theory of Everything'

The Theory of Everything is currently doing the rounds in the cinema. I went to see the film recently and thought it was wonderful.

It is the story of Stephen Hawking, probably the most famous scientist of our time and author of the best-selling *Brief History of Time*. It stars Eddie Redmayne as Stephen Hawking who was deservedly recognised for his outstanding performance (in my opinion) in the BAFTA's recently. Felicity Jones stars as his wife Jane and the original Jane has commented on the accuracy of her portrayal. The film covers Stephen's life from his first meeting with Jane as students at Cambridge and the diagnosis of his illness, motor neurone disease, in 1963, through his career, marriage and the breakdown of their marriage until Stephen's invitation to meet the queen which took place after their divorce in 1995.

The film is based on a book written by his ex-wife Jane so this should be borne in mind when watching the film. Interestingly, it is based on the second of two versions that she wrote. The first one, *Music to Move the Stars* was published in 1999. The second, *Travelling to Infinity, My Life with Stephen*, a more positive account of their life together, was published in 2007.

The film did raise a lot of questions for me. It brought to mind the enduring debate between faith and science. Hawking has said that the reward of understanding the universe may be a glimpse of the mind of God. Are faith and scientific theories about the universe compatible? Stephen Hawking apparently thinks so but is he right? Do we as Unitarians, have an easier time of reconciling these than other faiths or not?

When Stephen was originally diagnosed, he was given two to three years to live. Amazingly, he is still alive and currently 73. What must it be like to live for so long with such a progressively degenerating illness and know that you going to get gradually worse and there will never be a reprieve? Stephen Hawking is quoted as saying:

"My advice to other disabled people would be, concentrate on things your disability doesn't prevent you doing well, and don't regret the things it interferes with. Don't be disabled in spirit as well as physically."

He clearly must have a very strong will and motive to carry on living. He credits his wife Jane with giving him the motive to carry on living when he was first diagnosed. But to carry on living for such a long time with such an intense disability must be unimaginably difficult. We explain his motivation by saying that he is a genius but how do other sufferers of similar diseases cope and do we, I wonder, feel differently about other sufferers because they are ordinary people? Stephen Hawking wants to live as long as he possibly can. It made me think more deeply about the arguments for and against of euthanasia. Would I want to live if I has to depend on someone else to help me with all my bodily functions, if I could do nothing for myself, and what part would my faith or spiritual beliefs play in this?

What must it be like to be the carer for someone who has such an illness? In the film, Jane tells Stephen that she wants to be with him for as long as she can but that is when she thinks he will only live for a couple more years. She has since pointed out in interviews that in that era, everyone expected that a nuclear bomb would fall and end the world within a few years anyway. In the event, she was the main carer as well having the responsibility for the home and raising three children for many years because Stephen didn't want outside help. Did he have the right to be so selfish? Was he selfish? To ask for such a very high, never ending level of care from one individual for so long? Should one be willing to do that for someone that you love?

Liz Tuckwell



'The key to accomplishing your life's work and living your wildest dreams is a secret hidden in plain view. It's a promise we make to ourselves and a road map to fulfill that promise, all wrapped into one package. Wherever someone achieves something worthwhile, whenever someone breathes life into a long-held dream, this singular, special key has opened the door. Stick-to-it-iveness is a funny word, some might say it's not even a real word, but it speaks for itself. Sticking to our inspirations, our values, our hopes and dreams. Sticking to our family and friends. Sticking to it even when others tell us to forget it. Sticking with it when we're facing tough times and when we aren't sure whether or not we can make it. We can all use a little inspiration to help us plant one foot in front of the other, to do what we came into this life to do. Here's the key, for you and to pass on to those you care about: perseverance, resolve, determination, doggedness, tenacity, staying power, steadfastness, dedication, persistence, commitment, fortitude, grit, endurance, resilience, guts, stamina. Here's to the power of stick-to-it-iveness!'

Addie Johnson

Tea, Cake and Death



Many of you will recall the Death Café that we held here at Essex Church in March 2013 as part of the 'Spiritual Life Skills' season. In this short piece Sofie Sandell writes of her first visit to a Death Café.

In December I did something that I never thought I would do. I went along to one of London's Death Cafés. A friend of mine went to one in May last year and in November I felt an urge to check it out myself before the end of the year. We met in Putney at a brassiere and the event was organised by Suzanne Michal. There were about 15 people around the table and it was the first time to a Death Café for everyone.

Suzanne told us the rules of the evening: - This is a place to talk about death, and it's good if you start all conversations why you are here. Tonight is a place for dialogues and you aren't here to vent your opinions and tear other's beliefs about death apart. With this in mind I felt much better and I had three 30 minute chats with different small groups. What really surprised me was that I felt so alive when I left. My mind was sharp as a chef's knife and I felt so courageous. Talking about death is not something I do that often with my friends and family. In our culture we are very open about death in art, film, music and on the Web, but if we want to talk about it over lunch someone will quickly change the topic.

What made a huge difference for me after the event was that I dared to talk more openly about death with my parents and some of my friends who have been very ill in the last year. It gave me power to talk about what really matter: life choices and relationships. I also found a TV series about death that I watched over Christmas, something that I think I would have avoided before. I've followed several blogs by people who only have a limited time left to live. The most viral blog post 2014 on Huffington Post was written by Charlotte Kitley. In it she shared her thoughts about her bowel cancer and her feelings about it until she passed away in September 2014. So we are very open to read about death, but avoid talking about it.

The first Death Café was held in London 2011 and Jon Underwood the organiser invited people to his house and his mother who is a psychotherapist facilitated the evening. He was inspired by 'Kaféer mortels' in France and the Swiss sociologist Bernard Crettaz. The Death Café is a growing movement and there are new groups meeting every day around the world. Check out the website: www.deathcafe.com and the Facebook page: www.facebook.com/deathcafe

Sofie Sandell

The Broom, The Broom, The Withered Broom

Walking along life's shortening way
The broom, the broom, the withered broom
I met a girl I loved for a year and a day
The broom, the broom, the budding broom

And manhood I loved when work was play!
The broom, the broom, the blossoming broom
I laughed a lot, some pain there too
The broom, the broom, the flowering broom

I've lived longer than my dad, still life feels new
The broom, the broom, the yellowing broom
I'll live it out – the longest day
The broom, the broom, the fading broom

Uphold me life! I'm here to stay
Not in one place but every room
Wife beside me, children too
I'll face my death, I feel no gloom
The broom, the broom, the withering broom

John Hands

Love One Another If You Can

This man is a scrap-dealer greedy for land
encroaches on heather and hill; washing-machines
batteries, old cars, bits of tractors sprawl
across field and bracken. Weill in with the Council
no amount of neighbourly resentment
can dislodge him from his livelihood.
Hammers or drills from morning to night:
feuds with his neighbours, quarrels with
former friends.

Love one another if you can.

This woman performs exemplary works
sits on committees, rails against unfair
exploitation; rape of earth's
diminishing resources. Then secretly at night
from the scarred, track-worn mountain
cuts turf for her garden.

Love one another if you can.

Hurt and confused unable to understand
lies of neighbours and friends this woman
retired, worn-out confused, broken in health
to a distant lake-side. Graceless, insensitive
strangers possess her old farm-house.
Staunch member of a dying chapel, her legacy
dispersed or squandered.

Love one another if you can.

John Hands

'Taking Stock'

Sermon by Rev. Sarah Tinker – adapted from service given on 4th January 2015

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

I once spent a whole summer holiday working in a stock cupboard. This was in the olden days, way back in the 1970s when you had your pick of jobs. Before each holiday when I was a student I would think what sort of job I'd like to try next and then I'd find a job advert, apply for it, generally be one of only a few candidates and often enough be offered the job and start work a day or two later. It's painful to witness how very different the job market is nowadays and the struggles people go through to find employment.

Not that the jobs I got were always that marvellous but they paid money and they taught me a lot about the world and about other people. And so it was I spent a whole summer holiday working in a stock cupboard. The cupboard belonged to what was then known as the Department of Health & Social Security. It contained two chairs, a desk, a waste paper bin, and rows and rows of shelves, filled to overflowing with piles of leaflets. My task for the summer was to sort the shelves and I was not working alone. The cupboard had been occupied for years by someone I will call Charlie. Back in the olden days there were such things as jobs for life and Charlie looked like he had every intention of staying in that cupboard until it was time to retire. His job was to package leaflets up and send them out as requested by offices round the district. My job was the annual stock taking exercise – I counted the leaflets – every single one of them. I think both Charlie and I knew what a pointless exercise this was and soon settled into a gentle regime of jovial banter, reading the paper and making cups of tea. Sitting in a stock cupboard does give you time to think and in truth I've always appreciated so called mindless tasks – washing up, photocopying, ironing, etc – tasks that occupy one part of the brain but allow other bits to drift. It's a kind of thinking without thinking, time for pottering, pondering, cogitating, mulling over. I wonder what words you use to describe this kind of thinking time.

This time of year lends itself to this kind of stock taking sort of thinking. For many of us it's quieter than usual, our regular routines are disrupted. And on Tuesday it will be the Feast of Epiphany, one of my favourite festivals, and the time when the Eastern Orthodox Church marks Christmas. Theologically it's quite a complicated festival with many meanings - so today I'm simply going to link in with the journey of the magi, drawn from far away to visit the infant Jesus, bringing their gifts. There is something so beautiful about the imagery of this quite sparse story, told only in Matthew's gospel. Not surprising then that artists and writers and even theologians have been attracted by its mystery and have over the centuries embellished the story. We'll probably have our own favourite parts of the magi's story: guided by dreams and visions and stars, prepared to set off into the unknown across desert landscapes, wise enough not to be taken in by the wily scheming of Herod, willing to bend their knee before a child lying in a manger.

The lines we read in unison earlier on: *'May we have the wisdom and the courage to travel on. May wisdom and imagination inspire us to travel on'* – refer to the journey of the wise men and reflect back on our own lives – how often do we need wisdom and courage and imagination to take our next steps. And before



we take next steps it's useful first to take stock. This is the process of self-reflection so often encouraged when we choose to live spiritually. I know from conversations with some of you that we're quite a self-reflective lot here at Essex Church. Some of you have regular reflective practices that serve you well – before sleep perhaps considering the day that has passed, or having simple reminders during the day to align yourself with your higher self – perhaps lighting a candle or noticing growing plants or flying birds. A friend of mine always gives thanks as she switches on a light – and imagines at that moment her deep connection with the life spark in all that is. We can stocktake at any time of year but there is something about the start of a new year that encourages us both physically and spiritually. How many of us are in the midst of clearing projects in our homes – be that a cupboard or drawer, wardrobe or bookshelf? (show of hands)

And as we clear clutter on a physical level I think it helps our minds and hearts to engage in some stock taking too. I wrote a few stocktaking questions on the hymn sheet but you perhaps have your own favourites too to add to the list. Such questions can help us in our reflective process – they're asking us to consider where we are right now and where we might wish to go to next; they're also asking us to go deeper and to consider the underlying motivations of our lives – what really matters to us, what values we live by, what do we habitually avoid or gravitate towards.

Epiphany refers to the journey of the magi and their acknowledgement of the divinity of the Christ Child. It can also mean a moment of epiphany – an ah-ha moment of revelation and understanding. A time of heightened awareness. I like my ministerial colleague Patrick O'Neill's description *"We might view religious living as the practice...the acquired habit, if you will...of looking for the next epiphany"*. It reminds me of the value of being open to the possibility in life, to be open and awake. And paradoxically it also reminds me that epiphanies tend to arrive, in my own life at least, when I'm least expecting them. It's almost as if I need to get out of my own way at times – hence the value I place on seemingly mindless activities – because it's when I'm not puzzling away at an issue that new insights most often arrive.

It's perhaps worth us thinking then what might get in the way of our epiphanies – for me it's busyness, stuck thinking and a fear of facing what's next or accepting the unknown and stepping out anyway. I mentioned earlier on that the journey of the magi has inspired writers. Scottish writer Muriel Spark takes a delightfully different and human approach and considers the magi as made redundant by their own people after they returned home – rulers who were no longer wanted by those they ruled – she writes in this short poem, 'The Three Kings':

'Taking Stock' *(continued)*

(‘The Three Kings’ by Muriel Spark)

*Where do we go from here?
We left our country,
Bore gifts,
Followed a star.
We were questioned.
We answered.
We reached our objective.
We enjoyed the trip.
Then we came back by a different way.
And now the people are demonstrating in the streets.
They say they don't need the Kings any more.
They did very well in our absence.
Everything was all right without us.
They are out on the streets with placards:
Wise Men? What's wise about them?
There are plenty of Wise Men,
And who needs them? -and so on.*

*Perhaps they will be better off without us,
But where do we go from here?*

Where do we go from here? It's not a question just for returning magi. It's a question for us all to ask from time to time as we take stock of our lives. Maybe then our guiding stars will be found twinkling there in the sky as they have been all the time – it's just that we were too busy or distracted to notice them.



Some Queries As We Take Stock:

What more might I have to give the world?
What might be emerging next in my life?
What needs clearing up – how and with who?
What gives my life meaning?
Who or what am I holding on to too tightly?
Who or what might I need to value or cherish more?
What is complete in my life and ready to be moved on from?
What calls for my full attention at the present time?
What really matters to me?
Who am I and who might I be becoming?
And my own questions to explore are

Good Cause Collection of the Month Down's Syndrome Association



Collection on Sunday 22nd February

The February collection will be in aid of the Down's Syndrome Association. This is an organisation that promotes a greater understanding of the issues surrounding children born with Down's Syndrome. It disseminates information concerning the educational problems associated with Down's children as well as providing essential back-up for the parents. It is a cause dear to my heart as my own godchild is a Down's boy.

Harold Lorenzelli

For information visit: www.downs-syndrome.org.uk

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:

October – Prison Phoenix Trust - £274.31

November – Summer School Bursaries - £147.19

December – Refuge UK (Domestic Violence) - £306.14

The Old Battered Bible My Mother Gave Me

From shop to living-room, from thence to old
decayed farmhouse; from thence to city suburb
from city suburb to... so my voice drones on; like
a distant wartime bomber, like a child who
croons for company while mother hangs out washing;
as the milkman thrusts open the garden gate
as Dad roars home on his motorbike
as the years thunder by like an express train –
“keep that kid back from the edge of the platform!”
Under his breath: “if e’ were mine I’d tan ‘is arse.”
All dead, all demolished or broken up
save the old battered Bible which silently survives.

John Hands

Services at Essex Church this February



1st February, 11am
– ‘A Rose in the Wintertime’

Service led by **Caroline Blair**

Our very own Caroline Blair will be leading worship on the first Sunday in February. She will be considering the way in which dark times can lead to hope, compassion and even joy.

8th February, 11am
– ‘New Perspectives’

Service led by **Rev. Sarah Tinker**

Our minister returns from her mini-sabbatical on the 8th February when she will be considering how looking at things from different angles can help keep life fresh and new.

15th February, 11am
– ‘A Visit from Marion’

Service led by **GA President Marion Baker**
 and **Rev. Sarah Tinker**

This service will consider the responsibilities that accompany all freedoms. Followed by a bring-and-share congregational lunch with time to get to know Marion and hear more of her experiences travelling around our Unitarian & Free Christian congregations.

22nd February, 11am
– ‘Opening Doors’

Service led by **Harold Lorenzelli**

Our very own Harold says: “I will be looking at how to unlock the potential of the day. This will involve looking at various techniques that help us achieve that goal.”



A Fitness Fusion of 9 Movement Forms

Second Sunday of the Month from 2-3pm:
8th February, 8th March, 12th April

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.

Volunteering Rotas: Stewarding, Coffee and Greeting



Stewarding:

1st February:	Melody
8th February:	Alice Lambert
15th February:	Natasha Drennan
22nd February:	Julia Alden

Coffee:

1st February:	Margaret Darling
8th February:	Veronica Needa
15th February:	Liz Tuckwell & Gina Bayley
22nd February:	Juliet Edwards

Greeting:

1st February:	Billy Jackson
8th February:	Sue Smith
15th February:	Annette Percy
22nd February:	Veronica Needa

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