



Kensington Unitarians

Newsletter: February 2010

What's On In February:

Thursday 4th February, 7-8.30pm
**Workshop: "Getting Involved:
Worship at Essex Church"**

Saturday 6th February, 10am
Walking Group:
Regent's Canal (to Angel)
Meeting at Warwick Avenue Stn

Sunday 7th February, 11am
"The Gift of Life"
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 7th February, 12.30pm
Youngsters' Social
at the Windsor Castle Pub

Thursday 11th February, 7-9pm
Creativity Group:
'Carving a Printing Block'

Sunday 14th February, 11am
"Love in Plain Clothes"
Led by Dr. Jane Blackall

Sunday 14th February, 2-3pm
Nia Dance: Holistic Movement

Sunday 14th February, 3.30-5pm
**'Songs and
Silence for the Soul'**

Thursday 18th February, 7-8.30pm
**Workshop: "Getting Involved:
Activities at Essex Church"**

Sunday 21st February, 11am
"Heart to Heart"
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 21st February, 1-2.00pm
**Workshop: "Getting Involved
with Congregational Growth"**

Wednesday 24th February, 7pm
Management Committee

Thursday 25th February, 7-9pm
Reading Group:
'Notes from an Exhibition'

Sunday 28th February, 11am
"Sing Your Faith"
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 28th February, 12.30pm
Congregational Potluck Lunch

A Message from our Minister Who's To Blame?

Some months can seem longer than others... and January has been one of those months. Anyone who visits Essex Church regularly will know about our building problem. A 'small' building project, to replace our aged ceilings and lights in the entrance foyer and hall, discovered asbestos round the light fittings and led to the speedy closure of part of our building for three weeks.

Much can be learnt in such circumstances. I learnt how quickly I seek to blame when something goes wrong. I might not have learnt this had our building problem not coincided with a 'weather event', as the Meteorological Office now seem to term anything noteworthy that occurs in weather forecasting. It snowed and it froze. Parts of Britain were quite miserable for some people for some weeks. And our local councils ran short of grit. This led to a frenzy of blame, fuelled by newspaper and TV reporters eager to make a story. It had to be someone's fault. Someone must be responsible. As I laughed about the new British disease of 'grit blaming' I noticed my own case of 'ceiling blame' – looking for anyone to blame – the builder, the architect – 'someone should have warned us, someone should have told us to have the proper sort of test, someone should, someone should, someone should...'

As another, far more serious news story unfolded – the earthquake that hit the Caribbean country of Haiti, causing such terrible and continuing suffering – I heard eminent church leaders on the radio trying to deal with people's questions about God. How could a loving God allow such suffering? Why should already disadvantaged people suffer even more?

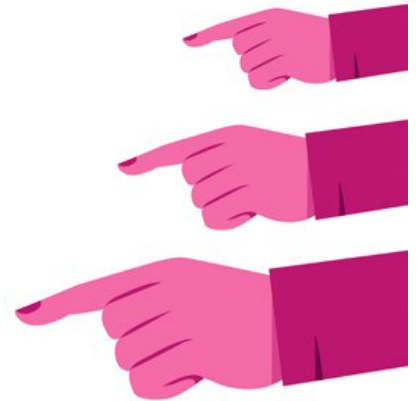
Such questions are another version of blame. It is as though by assigning fault, be it to a builder or a local council or a divine being, we humans hope to find some slight respite from the pain of existence. Yet I wonder if we might be more usefully seeking to understand and accept the inevitable challenges of living in a material world. Earthquakes occur because of the shifting tectonic plates on which our lives are lived. Asbestos was once considered a useful fire retardant. It snows erratically in Britain and stockpiles of grit are expensive and bulky to store. We yearn for life to be perfect and yet perhaps the best we can do is to cultivate what might be called a 'spirituality of imperfection', to help us accept life's challenges and failures with grace.

What touched me most about our building problem was the gracious way that our user groups received the information that we would have to cancel their booking or that the only way to reach their class was by taking a laborious route round the side of the building. Congregation members and visitors showed resilience and humour in finding our Sunday worship gatherings. So thank you to everyone who has been accepting and sympathetic in January and let us await with interest what February might bring.

Rev Sarah Tinker

In this month's newsletter...

* 'Heart to Heart' RE Course * 'How I Came to Essex Church' by Arthur Krebbers * Spiritual Bookshelf choice by David Francis Darling: 'Jesus for the Non-Religious' * 'Beginner's Guide to Permaculture' by Caroline Blair * 'Soul Poetry' RE Course * Reports of Winter Walks in East / West London * Membership * and much more...



Kensington Unitarians

At Essex Church (founded 1774), Notting Hill Gate

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

The community meets for a service each Sunday at 11.00am. The format varies, and usually includes music, singing, meditation, an address, an opportunity to share joys and concerns, and a children's group. Our wide range of activities includes religious education courses and spirituality workshops, meeting for fellowship, engagement groups on a variety of themes, community arts projects, regular chanting and dance sessions, and opportunities for quiet meditation. All are welcome to come and join us.

Many other groups share our church building. If you are interested in hiring one of our rooms for your own organisation or event please contact our warden by telephone or email.



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

Office Telephone: 020 7221 6514

Email: info@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Web: www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Stewarding and Coffee



Stewarding:

7th February: Natasha Drennan
14th February: Erin Lockwood / Lane Powell
21st February: Arthur Krebbers
28th February: Christine Joshi

Coffee:

7th February: Julia Alden
14th February: Caroline Blair
21st February: Estelle Pataki / Adorjani Csilla
28th February: Howard and Gill Hague

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

Kensington Unitarians Membership for 2010

Kensington Unitarians

Becoming a Member of Essex Church: 2010

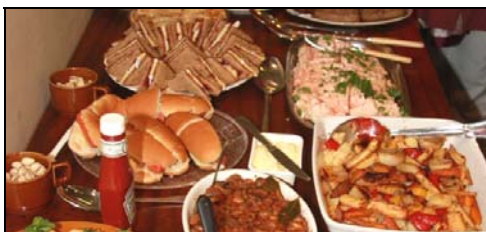


We are here to share our experiences, to learn from each other, to explore our diverse faiths, to welcome spiritual seekers and offer companionship on life's journey.

www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Congregational Lunch

After the Service on Sunday 28th February



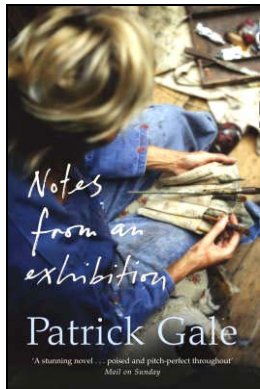
We will be having another potluck lunch after the service on the last Sunday in February. Doris Campbell will be coordinating the arrangements so please think about what food or drink you would be willing to bring and share. All are welcome – why not bring a friend?

As the congregation has been steadily growing our potluck lunches are becoming ever larger – the last one had over 50 people in attendance – and while this is great news it also presents some logistical challenges. Thanks to all those who helped with the enormous task of serving and washing up last time around! How did they do that lunch for the 5,000 without a dishwasher?

Once again we are contacting everyone to ask you to renew your membership here at Essex Church. It is good practice to ask people to complete a membership form each year so if by chance you do not receive your form through the post or when you are at church do please ask for one and return it to our minister during February.

And if you are considering the possibility of joining our congregation do please have a word with one of our committee members or with our minister and again ask for a form to fill in. Membership means different things to different people but for all of us it demonstrates our commitment to a liberal religious ethos and to the value of community.

Essex Church Reading Group
'Notes from an Exhibition'
by Patrick Gale



Thursday 25th February, 7.00-9.00pm

The reading engagement group's next conversation will be about "Notes from an Exhibition" by Patrick Gale. This book will be introduced by Betty Evans at our February session.

Information from Amazon UK:

"Renowned Canadian artist Rachel Kelly has buried her past and married a gentle and loving Cornish man. Her life has been a sacrifice to both her extraordinary art and her debilitating manic depression. When she dies painting obsessively in her attic studio in Penzance, her saintly husband and adult children have more than the usual mess to clear up. She leaves behind an extraordinary and acclaimed body of work - but she also leaves a legacy of secrets and emotional damage it will take months to unravel. To her children she is both curse and blessing, though they all in one way or another reap her whirlwind, inheriting her waywardness, her power of loving - and her demons. Only their father's Quaker gifts of stillness and resilience give them any chance of withstanding her destructive influence and the suspicion that they came a poor second to the creation of her art. What emerges is a story of enduring love, and of a family which weathers tragedy, mental illness and the intolerable strain of living with genius. Patrick Gale's latest novel shines with intelligence, humour and tenderness."

The group takes special care to ensure that everybody gets an equal opportunity to speak and be listened to. Members come together to share our diverse views and appreciate our differences in a spirit of curiosity and respect. The group has a relaxed and easy-going atmosphere and newcomers are always most welcome to come along to any session.

The reading group has been meeting monthly since 2003. Regular members of the group take turns in choosing a book for everybody to read and talk about together so we tackle a wide variety of material (fiction, non-fiction, poetry, etc...). Pick up a flyer or check our forthcoming selections online: www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk/book.html

A Forthcoming Adult RE Course at Essex Church:

'Heart to Heart'

4th, 11th, 18th, 25th March and 1st April
Downstairs in the Library from 7-9.00pm



There will be a new small group running at Essex Church throughout March and into early April. It is entitled 'Heart to Heart' and is based on the book of the same name by Unitarian Universalist minister Christine Robinson and experienced small group ministry leader Alicia Hawkins.

'Heart to Heart' will offer participants an opportunity to connect with each other over five sessions via readings, journaling exercises, and thought-provoking activities on a range of topics. There will be an invitation to spend time in personal contemplation before each meeting and a space to share your own reflections in this small group.

'Heart to Heart' will be co-facilitated by our own minister, Rev. Sarah Tinker, and Jane Blackall. Each of the five sessions will focus on a particular theme:

Thursday 4th March – 'Listening'
Thursday 11th March – 'Gratitude'
Thursday 18th March – 'Balance'
Thursday 25th March – 'Success and Failure'
Thursday 1st April – 'Friendship'

It is not essential to attend all of the sessions but it would be beneficial if you could come to as many as possible. We do request that you sign up in advance if you are planning to come as, to get the most out of the course, there will be a little bit of reading and preparation for you to do before each session.

Please contact Sarah or Jane by 28th February if you would like to take part in this course:

Email sarah@kensington-unitarians.org.uk or leave a message for us at the church office: 020 7221 6514.

"Most people need a few experiences of simply being listened to before they can really believe that just listening is enough. In time, we discover that to be listened to is a way of being loved, and that listening is a way of being loving. We can take what we learn from our sharing groups out into the rest of our lives and bless the world."

Words from the introduction of 'Heart to Heart'

Essex Church Walking Group Reports: Isle of Dogs - January Walk

The Kensington Unitarians' walking group set out on an urban hike around the Isle of Dogs on Saturday January 2nd. The walk was led by local resident Jane Blackall, who has lived in this area her entire life. Seven adults and one baby set out from Canary Wharf station bundled up against the rather cold but clear weather which greeted us that morning.

The early part of the walk took us to see some of the restored dock areas, juxtaposing the modern architecture of Canary Wharf against restored barges and cranes, the latter of which looked like abstract sculptures towering over the waterways. After crossing Cabot Square we made our way towards the Thames, past one of the very odd traffic light sculptures created by Pierre Vivant. It is over eight metres high, contains 75 flashing traffic lights, and is known to confuse both drivers and pedestrians (including some of us) on a daily basis.

Jane then brought us to a building containing flats ('Cascades') which looked fairly inconspicuous as we approached it but turned out to be designed in the shape of a ship with a sail facing the Thames. Not long after we stopped for lunch at the charming Hubbub cafe, located in an old Victorian church. The food was excellent, the portions enormous, and the 'rustic' atmosphere was comfortable and welcoming to all members including the baby who enjoyed dashing around the cafe after she finished her eggs on toast.



Our post-lunch portion of the walk took us further along the Thames path, viewing well known sites on the opposite side of the river including Greenwich and the O2 arena (formerly the Millennium Dome), viewed from a small beach which is used by locals in warmer weather. We also took a small break to see the Mudchute city farm and park where we not only saw a number of rare breed farm animals but also met a few friendly llamas. We concluded our trip by walking near the picturesque canals and mooring areas for house boats near Crossharbour and South Quay DLR stations and included a view of the local landmark, the Blue Bridge.

All in all it was truly enjoyable day and a great chance for to walk through an amazing part of London which still retains a fascinating historical character amidst its futuristic glass and steel façade. Thanks again to Jane for organising the day.

Kate Brown and Denis

Photographs by Jane Blackall



Forthcoming Walk: Regent's Canal – Little Venice to Angel

We have made provisional plans for the next few months, concentrating on shorter routes in town until the weather warms up again later in the spring, so please put these dates in your diary and plan to come along:

Saturday 6th February – Regent's Canal (*meeting 10am at Warwick Avenue Tube Station*)

Saturday 6th March – Chelsea and Battersea (*meeting 10am at Sloane Square Tube Station*)

Saturday 3rd April – Hampstead and Highgate (*meeting 10am at Alexandra Palace Rail Station*)

We usually walk at a rather leisurely pace, chatting as we go, and stopping to admire the scenery and take photos. The route should not be too strenuous and is likely to be no more than 5 miles in length. If you are intending to come please let Jane Blackall or Caroline Blair know or email walks@kensington-unitarians.org.uk to let us have your mobile phone number so that we can let you know if there is any last-minute change of plan. Any suggestions of future walking routes are also welcome.

Essex Church Walking Group Reports:

Hammersmith, Barnes, Chiswick – December Walk

We started out at Hammersmith Broadway Tube station. Present were Jim, Caroline and Iona Blair, Michaela von Britzke, Carole Grace and Will Lyons. The walk proper started on the river just east of Hammersmith Bridge, which was originally designed in the nineteenth century as a crossing for the Serpentine in Hyde Park, which never came to fruition.



Carole and Michaela set up their usual blistering pace and we naturally split into groups discussing various subjects, Jim taking lots of photos. Walking along Hammersmith Mall, we eventually came to Furnival Gardens, and passed by the The Dove public house in which 'Rule Britannia' was composed. It was lovely weather despite the forecast which predicted rain.

We stopped for morning coffee at a restaurant overlooking the river at Corney Reach (an up-market development) where Iona left us as she was attending the Climate Change Rally in Central London.

We resumed the walk to pass through Duke's Meadows, Chiswick, reaching the footbridge at Barnes railway bridge where crossed to the south bank at Lonsdale Road. Heading along Lonsdale road (once home to Gustav Holst) we started the return leg, to leave the traffic again at 'Small Profit Dock Gardens'. This curious name was derived from the name of a local field when the local town dock was replaced, because the land was either unproductive or difficult to work not, as is sometimes supposed, that the Dock itself did not make enough money.

Then into the Leg O' Mutton Nature Reserve, one of those small gems which make it difficult to remember one is in town. It is home to herons, cormorants, swans and several species of wild duck. Back in about half a mile to Hammersmith Bridge and the finishing point.

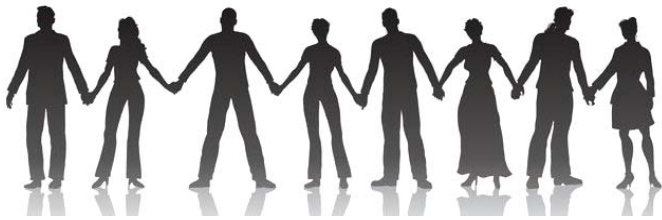
Will Lyons



"If you find pleasure in hiking, camping, canoeing, or any of the many ways of being in nature, you likely have had some moments of profound peace outside. The big sky bright with stars, the full moon rising in the clouds, the deep quiet of snow in the woods. We receive these gifts and they help us remember that peace exists; it is part of our world already. And peace in nature is found not only in wild areas. Walking by the fields on the edge of town or quietly appreciating the backyard tree - these, too, are portals to peace practice. When we are upset or filled with conflict, our ch'i is flying everywhere, looking for something to hit or running to get out of a situation. If we stop for a moment and concentrate on our breathing, we bring our awareness back to the body and return home. If the anger cannot be calmed in a few breaths, we can try walking meditation, aligning the breath with our steps, letting the earth support us. These simple breathing practices are very grounding. They stop the conflict from escalating; they allow us to be present with ourselves and to find a touchstone of reassurance in the solid ground."

Stephanie Kaza

Getting Involved at Essex Church



These three sessions are designed to warm us up in the coldest time of the year by exploring different ways we can get more involved with this community of Kensington Unitarians. The sessions will stand alone though people are very welcome to come to all three. We'll share some snacks and have a drink as we consider the evening's topic, through conversation and small group exercises.

Thursday 4th February, 7.00-8.30pm 'Worship at Essex Church'

This session is for anyone who would like to be more actively involved in worship here at Essex Church. This is your chance to have your say about hymns, prayers, the format of our worship, as well as find out more about choosing readings and stories and writing and delivering addresses.

Thursday 18th February, 7.00-8.30pm: 'Activities at Essex Church'

One of the side benefits of being a member of a church such as ours is that you are welcome to get more involved in other activities. Do you want to know more about our small groups, possible religious education courses, social activities? Do you have ideas for future activities? Would you like to help plan or run events or get more involved with pastoral care? We are so fortunate to have our building here in Notting Hill Gate. What would you like to see happening here?

Sunday 21st February, 1.00-2.00pm: 'Growing our Congregation'

In this session, after the Sunday service, we will watch a short DVD about how to welcome newcomers and then go on to make plans for growing our congregation in 2010. Bring your ideas, your hopes and doubts, your personal experiences.

(This is a repeat of the session first run on Thursday 21st January)

March Newsletter Deadline



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

Thank you!!!

Essex Church Creativity Group 'Carving a Printing Block'

Thursday 11th February, 7.00-9.00pm



This is the second of three linked sessions of the creativity group in which we plan to design, carve, and print pictures (possibly for use as greeting cards or simply as artworks in their own right) using a rubber printing block.

In the February session we will be starting to carve our printing blocks. It is essential that you let Jane know in advance (by the 7th February at the latest) if you would like her to purchase a printing block and carving tools on your behalf. The standard kit contains a 6 x 4 inch rubber block and a carving tool with two blades (the cost is £8). Alternatively you can bring along your own materials.

It is fine to come along to this session without having been present in January – please bring along a design of some sort – ideally at the size you want the finished print to be (i.e. less than 6 x 4 inches if you are using a standard kit). If you haven't already got a design in mind, you might want to go for abstract patterns, designs from nature, or something entirely from your imagination – it is a good idea to go for something bold so it will be easy to carve.

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



How I Came to Essex Church

Literally - how did you find us?

As an exchange student in Chicago, I came into contact with my local Unitarian church there, the First Unitarian Church of Chicago. I was keen to visit a Unitarian church once – having found out about this tradition through the internet (various informative websites, podcasts and articles). I particularly enjoyed listening to the shows on Unity fm. The first service there felt completely 'right': the atmosphere, the mix of religious influences, the non-dogmatic nature. So I was keen to find a similar spiritual home back in London. Having 'Googled' around for options, I came across Essex Church.



What were your first impressions?

I started sporadically going to services in late 2008, and found them highly refreshing. I love the ability to learn from different faith traditions, and see the deeper Truth from new angles. The openness and interactivity in the service also appeals to me. Listening to other people's joys and concerns during the lighting of the candles never fails to touch me. You truly feel like you're walking along life's journey together, and aren't just some individual in the large grey, anonymous mass that London can feel like. I also appreciate the broad variety of different sources that services often draw from: from a short 20th Century poem to an ancient sacred text. And I've enjoyed learning about new ways of praying, meditating and visualising – to help bring you at peace.

Had you moved from another type of church or faith tradition or is church a new thing in your life?

I have been actively pursuing my spiritual journey for some years now. I was broad up as an open-minded Roman Catholic. As I matured, though, I became increasingly liberal in my theology and interested in other faiths. At university, I actively discovered a range of different spiritual and philosophical traditions – Evangelical and Orthodox Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, and also atheism and agnosticism. I attended different worship sessions, presentations and debates – to really understand all these beautiful and rich traditions. This helped me shape my beliefs. Though I didn't agree with the atheists and the agnostics (as I studied philosophy, this included many of my lecturers), I also distanced myself from the literalist and dogmatist tendencies of some religions. I realised that, as peoples of faith, we are all worshipping the same underlying Divine element; that which holds all life together. And our messages, at their core, boil down to the same principles. I became even more convinced of this through reading the works of contemporary spiritual teachers, such as Eckhart Tolle. His book, the Power of Now, changed my perspective on spirituality profoundly: from the mind-made (rules, labels, dos and don'ts) to the deeper, all-encompassing level.

How might you describe your spiritual quest in life?

I enjoy learning more about many of the world's major faith traditions, and experiencing the sense of awe and joy through different ways of worship, prayer and meditation. I continue to attend Christian church services and listen to Christian music – such as modern Gospel singing, but also more solemn Gregorian chanting. I meditate regularly, and also now and then attend Buddhist meditation classes. I enjoy reading spiritual texts, both the ancient and the more contemporary. But I don't feel that the 'spiritual' is necessary confined to that. I can feel fully connected with the wider world through many other activities – through intense sport training, a walk through nature, or seeing a baby smile.

What's important to you?

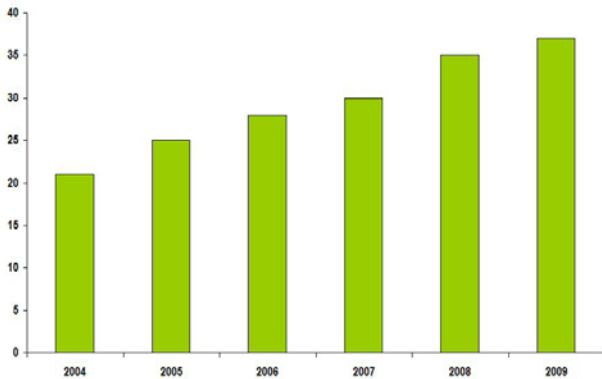
I try to follow the words of St Francis of Assisi: "Evangelise, and, if need be, with words." Rather than talk about spirituality, I try to live a life I consider spiritual. And for that, I believe, the essentials are to love others ('Love thy neighbour as thyself') and honour the present moment. This, to me, is a continuing challenge. Day in day out. Accepting the chatter and judgements of the human mind, and continuing to tap into the deeper, all-encompassing realm. Other than that, I aspire to follow a life along the "path of greatest resistance" – as one entrepreneur once described it to me. This is all about continuing to go outside your comfort zone – and learn and follow new pursuits. As Buddha realised, nothing is permanent – so there's no point in settling for the "easy, secure, path", as many people seem to. Mark Twain puts it aptly: "Whenever you find yourself on the side of the majority, it's time to pause and reflect."

How do your beliefs shape your every day life?

I try to follow these beliefs in my job as an investment banker. In this environment, you can easily get carried away in the everyday stress: Are we going to win the deal? Can I finish all this work? Why is my colleague saying this? I find that, especially here, it is essential to have a spiritual anchor. To remain focused on your inner, peaceful core. To continue to treat others with love and respect – whatever the circumstances. And not to worry too much about what's outside of your control, but to be eager to learn and develop.

Arthur Krebbers

“Lies, Damned Lies and Statistics”



Statistics are not everything, as this title implies, but the gathering, and study, of numbers can help in certain endeavours. As part of our project to grow our congregation here at Essex Church we are collecting statistics so we can measure our progress in moving towards our goals. There'll be more about this in future newsletters so for this month here is a random collection of statistics to mull over:

Number of Kensington Unitarians members in 2006: **26**
 Number of Kensington Unitarians members in 2009: **55**

Average attendance on Sunday mornings from 2004-2009:

2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
21	25	28	30	35	37

Number of people who managed to fit in the library for our Sunday service on 4th January = **34** (when we couldn't use the church - with two sitting on the floor and one standing).

Number of people attending our Carol Service = **63**, with over **50** people staying for the Christmas lunch afterwards.

If you get excited (or not) by statistics perhaps you would like to take a more active part in our congregational growth project. Come and join the conversation after the service on Sunday 21st February when we will be thinking about ways we can be even more welcoming to visitors to the church. We'll watch a short DVD and consider ways to introduce its ideas here. There are two evening discussion sessions you could join on Thursday 4th and Thursday 18th February.

But most important of all is probably for each of us to be clear about what Essex Church means to us, how our spiritual search has led us here, and how people's lives can be enhanced by being part of a religious community. If we can convey all this to others in our speaking, and in the ways we live our lives, then that gives them an opportunity to transform their lives too. And remember those statistics that show that people who go to church live longer and happier lives? What better reason could there be for getting up on Sunday mornings and coming along to Essex Church!

Rev. Sarah Tinker

New Arrival: Parker Reed Mickelson



Parker Reed Mickelson was born to Clara Bradbury and Eric Mickelson on 23rd December at 9:49 a.m. at St. Mary's hospital. He weighed 3.3 kg and was approx 51cm long. Mummy, daddy and baby are all doing well, and Parker is eating and growing quickly. We hope to be back at church soon to introduce him to everyone!

Clara Bradbury



“People are different. They have different needs, different learning styles, different life experiences. Therefore religion needs to be a rich amalgam of sounds, images, smells, tastes, rituals and disciplines. If people are different, the face of God must look different to every person. Therefore religion needs to be a huge tapestry into which thousands of faces and voices can be woven in a dynamic and ever-changing pattern. People are different. The worth and value of each person cannot be assessed by what they produce, or how much money they make, or how many degrees they have. Religion therefore must be the framework within which we can learn to see and honour the intrinsic worth of every individual.”

UU Minister. Rev. Roberta Finkelstein

The Spiritual Bookshelf

#11: 'Jesus for the Non-Religious' by John Shelby Spong

This is the eleventh of a series of articles where members and friends of the congregation tell us about a spiritual or religious book which has special meaning or value for them...

When I was struggling, as an Anglican priest, to make sense of my faith, I was always encouraged by the writings of the now retired Episcopalian Bishop of Newark, USA, John Shelby Spong. Here is a great scripture scholar who remains devoted to Jesus of Nazareth who is prepared to question accepted views of both the bible and Jesus. He tells us that the motto of his theological college was *"Seek the Truth: come whence it may, cost what it will."* And this has been his goal throughout his academic life.

Having drifted away from Jesus for the last few years I was delighted to discover Spong's recent book, *'Jesus for the Non-Religious'* and it has helped me to look with fresh eyes at this man, Jesus, who has influenced the greater part of my life. It was a bit like realising that you can have a good friendship with an old lover! I even put an icon of Jesus back in my little prayer corner.

Those of you who have read any of Spong's other works will know that his main thesis is that in order to understand the Christian story we need to understand the Jewish context in which it began. In the preface he writes:

"I will not shrink from allowing the scholarship of the Christian academy to dismantle piece by piece either the literalized stories of the Bible or the theological constructs that were placed on Jesus of Nazareth... Once these constructs have been shattered, as surely they have been and will be, then I will take what remains, the Jewish Jesus and begin to look anew at that life to determine just what it was about his humanity that caused first century Jewish people to assert that in this life the holy God was somehow met and engaged."

The book is divided into three parts. Part one, *'Separating the Human Jesus from the Myth'*, looks at the "miraculous" aspects of the Jesus story and shows that while the miracles didn't happen they are telling us something about the amazing impact that Jesus had on those whom he encountered. Spong demonstrates how many of the Old Testament allusions that have since been interpreted as prophetic about Jesus were in fact the result of Jesus' Jewish followers searching in their scriptures to make sense of their experience, just as we may try to make sense of our current struggles and joys by reflecting on our own and others past struggles and joys.

Part two, *'The Original Images of Jesus'*, reminds us that the original followers of Jesus would have continued to meet in the synagogue after his death and that it was against the background of the weekly readings from the Jewish scriptures and the liturgical year that the early Christians reflected on Jesus life and made sense of it by weaving in some of these stories and liturgical events into the story of Jesus.

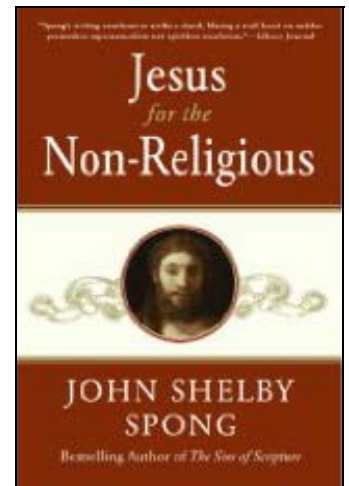
In part three, *'Jesus for the Non-Religious'*, Spong reminds us of the radical-ness of Jesus with such chapter titles as *'Jesus: the breaker of tribal boundaries'*, *'Jesus: the breaker of prejudice and stereotypes'* and *'Jesus: the breaker of religious boundaries'*. But it is the first chapter of this section, *'Who is God met in Jesus?'* that could be particularly helpful to many of us here at Essex Church. Spong writes:

"The word 'God' is a human word and it conveys a particular meaning. Human words do not describe reality outside human experience. The word 'God' does not exist outside the human use of that word"

Then after a brief gallop through the developing ideas of God and descriptions of the harm often caused by these ideas, Spong attempts to show that God is not a figure "out there" but a striving for "openness to life, openness to love and openness to being."

This, for me, was the most disappointing part of the book, as it left me unclear about what Spong actually means by "God". I do, however, thoroughly recommend the book. It is a relatively easy read but may have you searching for that dusty old bible to check out Spong's theories – not altogether a bad thing. It's time we rescued the bible and Jesus from the clutches of the fundamentalists.

David Francis Darling



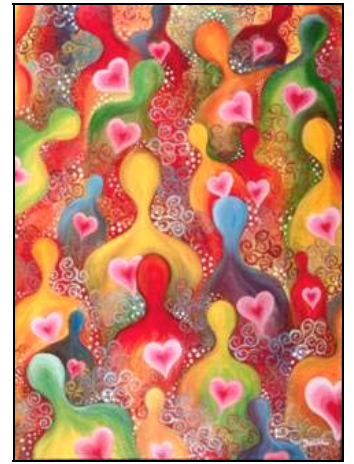
"The task of religion is not to turn us into proper believers; it is to deepen the personal within us, to embrace the power of life, to expand our consciousness, in order that we might see things that eyes do not normally see. It is to seek a humanity that is not governed by the need for security, but is expressed in the ability to give ourselves away. It is to live not frightened by death, but rather called by the reality of death to go into our humanity so deeply and so passionately that even death is transcended."

John Shelby Spong



‘Choosing Life’

A Weekend Course at the Centre for Compassionate Communication



I first heard about the concept of nonviolent communication (NVC) in less-than-ideal circumstances: a few years ago, at the Unitarian General Assembly (GA) meetings in Hatfield, the Peace Fellowship had a short workshop slot – it couldn't have been much more than an hour altogether in length – in which they brought in an invited speaker to introduce us to the concept. In the midst of the hustle and bustle of the GA, in a room crammed full of people who weren't necessarily in the mood, I did not feel safe enough to engage with the suggested

exercises, and crept out of the session at half-time (with most of the rest of the Essex Church contingent, if I remember rightly). However, I had heard enough to be intrigued, and bought a copy of the book which (to the best of my knowledge) started it all *'Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life'* by Marshall Rosenberg. Our minister, Sarah Tinker, had previously attended a training event led by Marshall and recommended it... so I thought that I too would like to explore this further at some point. It has taken a few years but I finally got round to doing more research, and in January I booked up for an introductory course in 'Compassionate Communication' (largely based on the principles of NVC), entitled 'Choosing Life'.

I perhaps ought to say something about the concept of 'violence' in communication – as I see it – because this may not be a use of the word that everybody is familiar or comfortable with. In this context, 'violent' communication does not simply mean direct expressions of physical threat or aggression – instead it encompasses all manner of more subtle forms of communication which lead to hurt and pain, both for others, and for ourselves. For example, an issue which concerns me personally is the dominance of 'violent' communication in popular culture at the present time: antagonistic interviews on the news, and game shows where aggressive competition is encouraged, or participants are routinely mocked and humiliated, are several expressions of this. For this reason I find it quite unbearable to watch much mainstream television (or even to listen to the Today programme on radio 4!)

I suspect I may be unusually sensitive to this form of 'violence' in the media and in personal communication ... but at the same time I know I am just as likely to lapse into speaking in a 'violent' way as anybody else. One very simplified description of the process of nonviolent communication (adapted from Rosenberg's book) is that it helps people to move away from the language of attack, defence, criticism, judgement, and violent reactions. It re-orientates us, instead, towards respect, clarity, honesty, and empathy. My deep wish to increase the peace in myself, in my relationships with others, and ultimately to help cultivate peace in the world – in whatever small way I can – is what led me to sign up for this course in 'Compassionate Communication'.

The course I attended was led by Jill and Richard Broadbent of the Centre for Compassionate Communication in Islington. I was quite nervous by the time I rang the doorbell – I guess I realised that I was likely to be in for quite an intense weekend – but Richard was very welcoming and put me at ease from the moment he answered the door, as did Jill, and they were both very affirming and encouraging throughout the two days. There were seven participants in total, plus the two facilitators, which made for a very comfortable group, and I was really touched at how open and wholehearted everybody seemed to be from the start.

In some ways, the central ideas behind 'Compassionate Communication' seem quite simple, but I am sure it will take a lot of practice to internalise them and make them a part of my everyday existence, as I have such a lot of longstanding habits to unlearn. We packed a lot into the weekend, choosing real examples of difficult situations from our own lives, and considering them in a new light. Some activities that usually strike fear into my heart ('role-play' – eek!) were positively enjoyable in this safe environment. During the first day, we examined the ways in which our thoughts habitually leap to criticism and judgement, and we spent time looking at how we could instead choose to step back from those reactive thoughts, pause, and re-connect with our underlying longings before responding with appropriate words or actions. A word which came up again and again during the training was 'empathy'. As well as examining the way in which we speak, we spent time on day two considering the way in which we receive and understand what others say, and practiced listening for the longings behind the words of others. This seemed to be a very powerful approach which could really change the energy of an interaction for the better and, perhaps, take the heat out of some quite challenging situations. I was rather exhausted by teatime on Sunday – but in a good way – it felt like a very worthwhile weekend and I was grateful for the opportunity to take part and engage with such a committed group.

The centre runs introductory courses throughout the year – the next is on the 6th-7th March – and also offers further courses and practice groups for people who want to take it further. I would highly recommend this workshop and I hope to return for their 'Dwelling in Beauty' course later in the year. You can find out more at their website: www.compassionatecommunication.co.uk.

Jane Blackall

An inspiring quotation which was read to us on the course: "I have learned that human beings are not searching for philosophies, even though it may seem that way sometimes. We are searching for something we can trust. And when we find ourselves in the midst of change, the philosophies are like a broken crutch. They do not hold us up. What supports us is a force, an energy, a vortex of love that expresses through us as warmth, creativity, service and compassion."

Stephen Schwartz

Warden's Column

What's on in our Busy Building...

I'm writing this on Wednesday 20th January; two weeks ago, on Monday 4th January, work started on renewing the ceiling and lighting in the hall and foyer – on Tuesday 5th January asbestos was discovered in the light fittings, work stopped and those rooms had to be sealed off. Since then we've been in a kind of limbo, because anything to do with asbestos has to be notified to the Health & Safety executive and there's then a two week waiting period before work can start.



Finally, today, workmen came to set up scaffolding on the stairs so that the remaining ceiling in the foyer can be taken down - and tomorrow the asbestos company proper will start decontaminating us. I've partly been longing for this to happen, and partly dreading it: there may also be asbestos above the ceiling of the corridor to the library, which means this will probably also be taken down – so from tomorrow getting from my flat to the office could necessitate a trip outside the building!

This will be just one more journey that's suddenly become complicated. For example our regular Qigong group were using the church tonight: to get into it, they had to go down the passageway at the side of the car park, along the back of the church through the nursery play area, up the steps in my garden and in through the garden door – then to get to a toilet, they had to repeat all of that, walk along the pavement to the passageway at the other side of the church near the Ark restaurant and go in through the door by the kitchen. Understandably, we cancelled as many bookings as we could this month, and are offering reduced charges to the rest.

Once work starts on clearing the asbestos tomorrow we should be “decontaminated” in six days: during that time it sounds like we'll look like something out of a science fiction movie, with an airlock at the front of the building and men in white suits and facemasks carrying sealed boxes to a mysterious machine in the car park. We're hoping that by the evening of Tuesday 26th we'll have our front door back, but then the original work on the lights will still need to be completed – so it will probably be another week before we're able to use the hall.

All in all, a tricky start to the year – but as with the recent work on the kitchen and toilets, hopefully it will all feel worthwhile once it's over. In any case it's already given me new appreciation of the simple things in life – like being able to open your own front door – which previously I took completely for granted!

Jenny Moy

Annual Meetings of the Unitarian General Assembly

University of Nottingham, 8th- 11th April 2010

The Annual Meeting of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches will be held at The University of Nottingham, from Thursday 8th to Sunday 11th April 2010.

The annual meetings (generally known as 'the GA') are a great opportunity to meet other Unitarians from around the UK and get a better sense of the diversity of our movement and its various organisations, societies, events and activities. There are also debates about issues of concern to Unitarians.

The deadline for registration is 25th February 2010. Further details and a booking form are available on the GA website: www.unitarian.org.uk. You might like to speak to our minister or a member of the committee about the possibility of going along. It is possible to attend as a day visitor if you are not able to stay for the whole four-day event. Our congregation is usually quite well-represented at the GA meetings – this year Caroline, Jane and David are intending to go so far – but it would be great to get some new faces along.



Fox Among the Foxgloves



"The other night I walked straight into a fox in the dark and it scared me half to death." Mrs Choon Lau (as reported in the Birmingham Evening Mail of 27th of June 1985)

Just as the foxgloves are towering in bumblebee'd bloom,
In broad daylight through the hedge among them comes
A young fox, one of this year's brood;
Not much bigger than a cat
It goes on delicate paws along the cabbage rows
With ears pricked and nose busy, sniffing for food.

One of nature's innocents, it shows
No fear of a world which is largely beyond its knowing,
Until suddenly a dog runs out barking and it hurries away
But pauses as if not too concerned
And peers back with curiosity from a cove of broad-bean stems;
It is completely unlearned
In the ways of people and their raucous pets.

We like to watch foxes, my neighbours and I,
"A bit of wild nature," we say,
And put out chicken skins, bones, skins, sausages, even chocolate
For those foragers of suburban gardens
That usually feast at night; they eat worms
And I've seen them standing on the lawn in darkness and rain
Waiting for a meal to pop up from the grass.

They are wild certainly, and "foxy" is one of our terms
For sly disreputable characters
But compared to us, I would suggest, the fox
Is a virtuous creature, though such ideas mean nothing
In the circles in which foxes nightly roam.

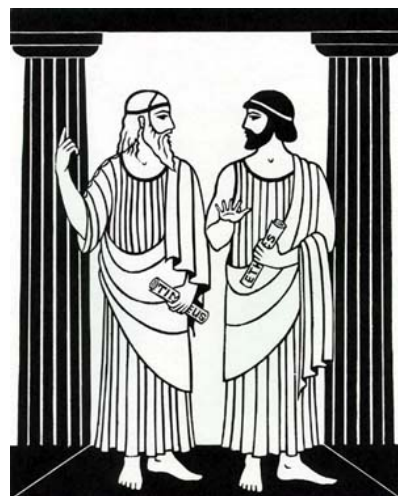
And on this day when news comes in
Of terrorist guns at airports,
Lady, you surely could not think a timid fox would harm you?
Good God! We humans are the only really dangerous animals
Inhabiting this planet. An experienced fox
Is understandably very wary about meeting one of us
In the dark or in daylight, especially then.
Which is where that young fox reveals its innocence
As it wanders wide-eyes among the vegetables
And sights and sounds inexplicable,
Though now I see it departing at last
Into foxgloves and the buttercup wilderness by the hedge.
There are people about. It's learning fast.

Bill Wootton, 29th June 1985

*Taken from the recently published collection of poetry by
Bill Wootton - please contact John Hands or Heidi Ferid to buy a copy.*

A Local Event Which You Might Be Interested In:

'Big Ideas: Is There an Art to Living?'



**Tuesday 23rd February 2010 at 8:00 pm
The Wheatsheaf, Rathbone Place, W1T 1DG**

A evening talk and discussion about philosophical approaches to the way we live our lives. How can we practice philosophy as an art of living? Who should our inspiration be? And why does it matter? Writer and broadcaster Mark Vernon will lead a talk and discussion about philosophical approaches to the way we live our lives.

'There is a story about Thales, the man who is often, in the West, called the first philosopher. One day, he was walking along, gazing at the heavens, when he fell into a ditch. Crying out, a passing woman retorted: 'You philosophers, who cannot see what is before your feet!' Then there is this that was said about Socrates, the person who has become the most famous Western philosopher of all time: he called philosophy down from the heavens, and he did it by talking with others, on the streets, about the things that concerned them from life and love, to shoes and shopping. The stories illustrate the gap between two ways of doing philosophy. The first is perhaps what most people think of when they hear the word philosophy today: arid, obscure and disconnected - not that they particularly care. But the second kind of philosophy, the Socratic sort, is nothing short of a way of life. So the question is, how can we practice philosophy as an art of living, who should our inspiration be, and why does it matter?'

'Big Ideas' is a series of events, mostly held in pubs, in London. Anyone is welcome to turn up.

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

A Christmas Feast



Today's service was lovely, the music was gorgeous, everyone sang and I am sure the angels in heaven were enchanted.

The food, of course, was wonderful. The meal itself was a metaphor for the way I see the community everyone brought something either food or themselves. We all have times when we can give and nurture others and there is a time for being taken care of. We all come with a huge variety of talents and interests and beliefs and together make an incredibly rich community. Like the meal there was far too much and I could not get round to sample all the delights but my thanks to all who participated.

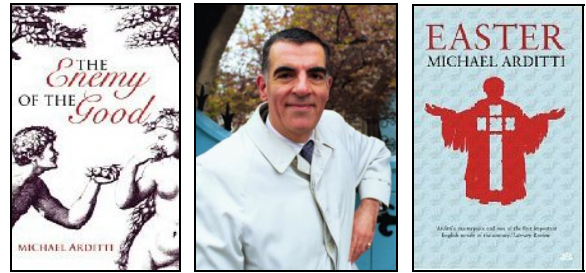
At our table we were discussing the miracle of the loaves and fishes which I take to be a myth with the deeper meaning that when we share our riches we are all fed. I hope with Copenhagen and any treaties that follow it we learn to share and feed everyone.

We have so much to bring to the table.

Carole Grace - 13/12/09
Photos by Jim Blair



Faith and Fiction: Writing about Religion



**Monday 1st February 2010 (7 for 7.30pm)
at Rosslyn Hill Unitarian Chapel, Hampstead**

Acclaimed by Philip Pullman as 'our best chronicler of the rewards and pitfalls of present day faith', Michael Arditti will talk about his life in writing, his journey from critic to novelist, his faith in fiction and, in particular, his fiction about faith – 'The Celibate' (1993), 'Easter' (2000), and 'The Enemy of the Good' (2009), and his work-in-progress, 'Jubilate', set on a pilgrimage to Lourdes. He will discuss the rich material that religious ideas, institutions and personnel offer to the novelist and highlight the unique role that novelists can play in combating fundamentalism in an increasingly religiously polarised world.

Arditti began his career writing plays for the stage and radio. He was for many years a theatre critic for the Evening Standard and is currently a regular book reviewer for the Daily Mail, the Daily Telegraph and the Independent. His other works include 'Pagan and her Parents' (1996), 'Unity' (2005), 'A Sea Change' (2006), and a short story collection, 'Good Clean Fun' (2004).

This is a joint event with the Hampstead Authors Society (<http://www.hasweb.org/>). There will be an admission charge of £5. Wine and nibbles will be available from 7pm.

To make a reservation or for info call: 0207 433 3267

Essex Church Podcasts

Most weeks, the sermon from our Sunday service is recorded, and the audio is made available as a podcast. You can download individual mp3 files from the church website (we have been recording since July 2009 and at the time of writing there is already a back catalogue of 19 podcasts online) or subscribe to the podcast to receive sermons automatically whenever they are released (the easiest way to do this is to search for 'Kensington Unitarians' or 'Essex Church' on iTunes or similar).

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

Latest News from the Management Committee

1. Not surprisingly, most of this month's meeting was concerned with the asbestos issue, and with discussing how to minimize the problems. Thanks are due to many people: to Jenny, our warden, who was initially left to deal with the problem when it was discovered; to Sarah Tinker, who came back from a conference in Derbyshire to find everything upside down, and who has also had a lot to sort out; to the head teacher and staff of the nursery school in the basement who have been so generous with allowing their school to be used as an alternative route to the building; and to everyone who has accepted the problems with good humour and determination.

2. Otherwise it was a quiet meeting; though for those who have been driven a bit mad by the way the Church heaters keep switching themselves on and off throughout the services, we hope that they will shortly be repaired; Jenny has also found a way of rearranging the storage so we can spirit away some of the apparently multiplying colony of chairs that have been taking over the library.

Caroline Blair

The Next Meeting of the Essex Church Management Committee will be on Wednesday 24th February at 7pm

A Date for Your Diary: Essex Church AGM

This year's Annual General Meeting will be on 16th May. This will follow the Essex Church Membership Service. Please put the date in your diary and plan to be there.



"Deep in our innermost core we yearn to be connected with the mystery we call god, or nature, or the spirit. We yearn for that sense of oneness with each other and all creation, to know our place and our value. And, often, we yearn for someone to show us how to get there, to direct us to the right path that will lead us on the way to a deeper spirituality. There is no one right path to a deeper spirituality. There are many right paths, and the one you choose may serve for a while, and then need to be changed over time. Like the Buddha who left everything to go off in search of enlightenment, you many find yourself coming back to yourself in the end, as did he, to your own home and people, to a greater understanding of the mundane alongside the spiritual, and the importance of learning to balance your life."

UU Minister, Rev. Susan Manker-Seale

Universal Spiritual Gathering

**Friday 12th February, 6.30-8.15pm
Held at Essex Church**



The Universal Spiritual Gatherings, led by graduates of the Interfaith Seminary, draw on wisdom and inspiration from all faiths and none.

This month's gathering is the theme of 'collective consciousness' and will include a gentle hands-on Deeksha blessing. Deeksha is a Sanskrit word meaning teaching, blessing or attunement. It is a beautiful 'hands on head' blessing, giving a transfer of spiritual energy to the neo-cortex of the brain that enables the senses to be free from the constant interference of the mind, opening the way for spontaneous feelings of joy, inner calmness and a connection to the oneness in everything.

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

For further information contact service hosts:
Reverends Danielle Wilson - 07802 898 252,
Pamela Ramsden - 07966 478 980,
Kathryn Reynolds - 07976 739 286
Grace Morgan - 07931 132 890

'In loving connection with Essex Unitarian Church'



Chinese New Year is on the 14th February – Year of the Tiger

“A suffering world is not saved by agonizing over it. That only adds to the suffering. The world is saved by love of the good and the bravery to preserve and increase it, by a courageous compassion that faces adversity and moves forward, looking for whatever goodness is possible in any situation. Jesus faces the evil actions of his opponents — and his own inner opposition — like a martial arts master in combat, like a doctor wrestling with cancer, or a therapist up against a patient's suicidal impulse: alert, caring, nimble, and savvy to outfox and outwit the dark enemies of life's goodness with sanity, compassion, and confidence in the power of the good to endure and triumph. His wounds are not the sign that suffering is good, but that some things in life are good enough to suffer for. They are the wounds of a brave warrior bloodied in the fight to free those who have gotten lost in the prison house of suffering. Christ's way of suffering redemptively models the courage that can grow us strong, caring, and supple as we face adversity.”

Robert Corin Morris

Youngsters' Social

After the service on Sunday 7th February
Lunch at the Windsor Castle Pub



The next of our bi-monthly 'Youngster's Socials' will be at the Windsor Castle pub on Campden Hill Road after the service on the first Sunday in February. To read more about the venue see: www.windsorcastlepub.co.uk

Natasha Drennan provided the following pictures from the December outing to the 'Sun in Splendour' pub. If you would like to know more about these social events please contact Natasha: tash_drennan@hotmail.com.



A Forthcoming Adult RE Course at Essex Church

'Soul Poetry'



22nd, 29th April and 6th, 13th, 20th May
Downstairs in the Library from 7-9.00pm

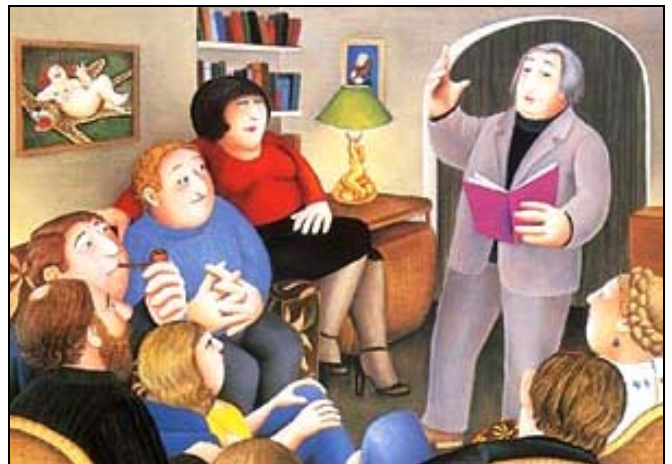
Poetry speaks to the soul for so many of us and we often have a favourite piece that speaks to us and I hope that these evenings will give us an opportunity to share some of these.

There will be five Thursday evenings when you can come along to share, by listening to others or reading your poems aloud. I believe that spirituality is experienced in many different ways and with a surprising range of feelings so I have structured these sessions around love, anger, joy, grief and hope:

Thursday 22nd April, 7-9.00pm – Love
Thursday 29th April, 7-9.00pm – Anger
Thursday 6th May, 7-9.00pm – Joy
Thursday 13th May, 7-9.00pm – Grief
Thursday 20th May, 7-9.00pm – Hope

I was thrilled to run a similar workshop at Summer School last year and it left a lasting impression on me of a beautiful multi-coloured kaleidoscope which changed and fell into new patterns whenever I looked at it. Do ask me questions about these sessions and I hope to see you in April.

Carole Grace





A Beginner's Guide to Permaculture

In the late eighteenth century European settlers made the first attempt to found permanent communities in Australia. They planted their usual staple crop – wheat – and enjoyed a successful harvest. Only in their second year the harvest dwindled to a poor fraction of the first crop. Why? Because the soil was shallow and poor in minerals, and without the expertise

to understand this, they used up the entire store of minerals in the first year. Two Australians studying this phenomenon in the 1970's took this episode as the springboard to launch the concept of 'permaculture', or permanent culture. At the time 'culture' was used in its original sense, as meaning 'cultivation of the land'; but as time has passed, the concept of permaculture has come to have much wider applications.

The basic concept is that we should live in a sustainable manner, not using up all the available resources and leaving behind a sterile desert; this applies not only to agriculture, but equally well to urban life, community life, the world of work, and our own inner resources.

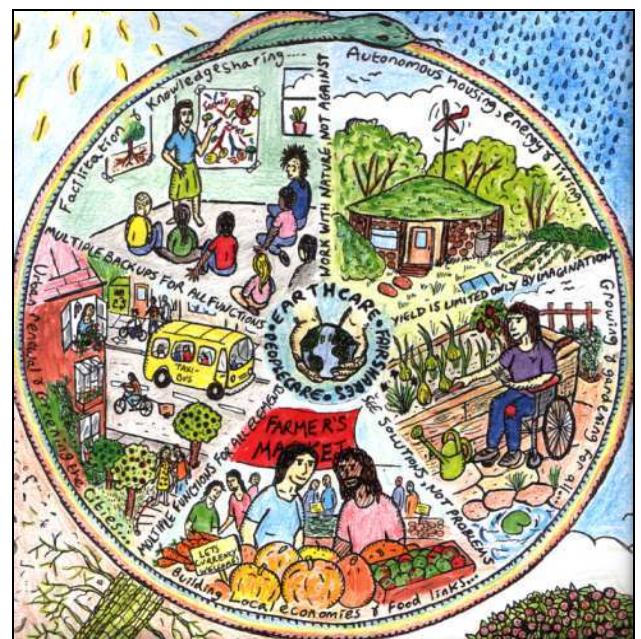
Jim, Iona and I have just returned from a weekend course on a farm in Essex which is aiming to live according to permaculture principles; while we were there we were given a brief introduction to the theories and practises of permaculture, and shown examples of the principles in action. These varied from the very extreme: a farm in the Czech Republic which allowed no use of animal products at all, and no use of fossil fuel, so all crops had to be hand-sown, cut with scythes, dragged on manual trolleys etc; to the small projects: a strip of garden in the middle of a housing estate, a carefully tilled allotment etc.

The basic approach, whether you are dealing with a farm or a social group, is to observe and assess what you start with, and make careful, minimal interventions to bring about the result you desire. So you do not, for example, try and force land to grow the most profitable mono-crop, with a huge and constant need for artificial fertilizers, pesticides etc: you observe the physical conditions natural to that land and design a mixed crop pattern that makes the maximum use of the conditions that exist. Crops that may flourish under small trees may have to be changed for different ones as the trees get bigger and cast more shade. Some plants (in a phenomenon called 'companion planting') positively benefit each other – a gift of nature that will never be seen as long as we grow identical rows of plants in 50 acre prairie fields. We were introduced to the permaculture word 'guild': a small, self-sustaining natural community, for example a tree and its accompanying shrubs, ground-cover plants, climbers, birds, insects and fungi. Our host was thrilled to find that one oak tree in his ground had over 100 species of moth (he was an enthusiast). How you apply this intuitive, sensitive agricultural approach to social and personal issues is a matter beyond the scope of a weekend course, but we did get an inkling of the kind of mind-set that would be involved.

As a Londoner, I was particularly drawn to the urban projects. The words that stuck in my mind were 'neglect proof' and 'vandal proof', because they are realistically two environmental factors that must be taken into account, just as much as the sun and the wind. Enthusiastic groups making an urban garden will drift away and lose interest, and passers by will throw rubbish, break bits off plants and trample tender young shoots underfoot. Instead of hoping for a better class of human being, it is surely better to follow the permaculture path of least resistance: factor in neglect and vandalism from the start, and plant accordingly, just as you allow for frost, flooding and drought if the area is prone to them. Our farmer host was having to factor in hungry squirrels raiding his nut orchard, muntjac deer eating his bark, seasonal flooding, strong winter winds, Dutch Elm Disease, a sixteenth century listed barn with no identifiable use, large spoil heaps where earlier buildings had been demolished, frost pockets, a row of pylons and possible pesticide drift from a neighbouring farm. But he was approaching every one of these problems from a permaculture angle, trying to work out how he could work with them, and find permanent, sustainable solutions.

Jim and I have only scratched the surface of the subject so far, but feel that it is an exciting area that we are looking forward to learning more about.

Caroline Blair



☪ **2nd February - The Presentation of the Lord**
/ The Presentation of Christ in the Temple - Christian

The presentation of Jesus in the Temple at a few weeks old, as recorded in Luke's gospel, is celebrated today. The day is often known as Candlemas from the tradition of congregations holding lighted candles during the celebration in church.

☸ **2nd February - Imbolc - Pagan/Wiccan**

Imbolc was one of the cornerstones of the Celtic calendar. For them the success of the new farming season was of great importance. As winter stores of food were getting low Imbolc rituals were performed to harness divine energy that would ensure a steady supply of food until the harvest six months later. Like many Celtic festivals, the Imbolc celebrations centred around the lighting of fires, which celebrated the increasing power of the Sun over the coming months.

☸ **8th February - Parinirvana - Buddhist**

Mahayanists mark the final passing away from this world of Gautama Buddha at Kushinagara, India, at the age of 80. Pure Land Buddhists refer to it as Nirvana Day.

☸ **12th February - Mahashivratri (Great Shiva Night) - Hindu**

Every night of the new moon is dedicated to Shiva but this one is particularly important, being the night on which Shiva is said to perform the cosmic dance from creation to destruction. Many Hindus will fast and prayers are focused on Shiva and his shrines and statues.

☸ **14th February - Losar - Buddhist**

This New Year festival is celebrated in Tibet, and often Nepal, and includes the rededication of the country to Buddhism. The miracles performed by the Buddha at Sravasti are celebrated.

☪ **15th February – 3rd April - First Day of Lent**
/ The Great Fast - Orthodox Christian

Eastern Churches start Lent on the Monday before the first Sunday of Lent, and as many Eastern Orthodox Churches still use the Julian rather than the Gregorian calendar the dates of the whole Lenten period can differ from the Western Churches. The Lenten fast involves abstinence from meat, fish and dairy products until Easter.

☪ **16th February - Shrove Tuesday - Christian**

Commonly known as Pancake Day, this is the day before the start of Lent. Traditionally, it is a day for repentance and absolution in preparation for Lent ('shrove' means to receive or make confession). Pancakes were originally made to use up all the rich foods, such as butter and eggs, before Lent. In other parts of the world people celebrate Mardi Gras by holding carnivals.

☪ **17th February - Ash Wednesday - Christian**

Ash Wednesday marks the first day of Lent, the forty days (not counting Sundays) that lead up to Easter. On Ash Wednesday some churches hold special services where Christian believers are marked with a cross of ash to show their desire to correct the wrongs in their lives.

☪ **17th February – 3rd April - Lent - Christian**

Lent is a time of fasting and discipline in preparation for Easter. As early as the second century CE many Christians were to be found spending time fasting before Easter, and over the next few centuries the time spent fasting increased; this was probably connected to remembering the forty days Jesus spent fasting at the start of his ministry. The word comes from an Anglo-Saxon word for Spring. It is also related to the word 'lengthen'.

☸ **18th February - Birthday of Sri Ramakrishna - Hindu**

Sri Ramakrishna, Hindu teacher and mystic was born in 1833, and founded the Ramakrishna Mission and the Ramakrishna Vedanta movement. Swami Vivekananda, his disciple, formalised his teachings into a philosophical structure.

☸ **19th Feb - Vasanta Panchami / Saraswati Puja - Hindu**

Widely celebrated in India, and by Hindus around the world, this festival is usually linked with Saraswati, the goddess of knowledge and learning. Yellow is a predominant colour in the celebrations, to indicate the onset of spring and because of its associations with Saraswati.

☸ **26th Feb - The Prophet Muhammad's Birthday - Muslim**

The Prophet Muhammad's Birthday is celebrated on the 12th of Rabi-ul-Awwal, the third month of the Muslim calendar. In the UK Muslims celebrate at the mosque. Processions are held in some cities in the Muslim world, and in some countries the celebration starts with readings from the Qur'an, followed by poetry and songs in praise of the Prophet.

☸ **28th February - Magha Puja - Buddha**

This day commemorates the occasion when the Buddha predicted his death and recited a summary of his teachings and a code of discipline (which monks are expected to recite every fortnight) to 1,250 enlightened followers on the full moon of Magha. The day is observed with meditation, chanting and listening to sermons.

☸ **28th February - Purim - Jewish**

Purim commemorates a troubled period of Jewish history, and how the community was preserved. The story is recounted in the Book of Esther (The Megillah), which is read in the synagogue, on the eve of Purim and also on Purim itself. Colourful costumes and masks are sometimes worn and there is lots of noise as the name of Haman (the villain of the story) is drowned out with boos and rattles (graggers).

☸ **28th February - Holi - Hindu**

Holi is the Hindu festival that welcomes the Spring and celebrates the new life and energy of the season. Although Holi has religious roots, not much religious activity is involved in its celebration. Holi is the most energetic Indian festival, filled with fun and good humour; even the strict rules of separation between castes are abandoned. Holi is also called 'The Festival of Colours', and people celebrate the festival by smearing each other with paint, and throwing coloured powder and dye around in an atmosphere of great good humour.

'This I Believe'

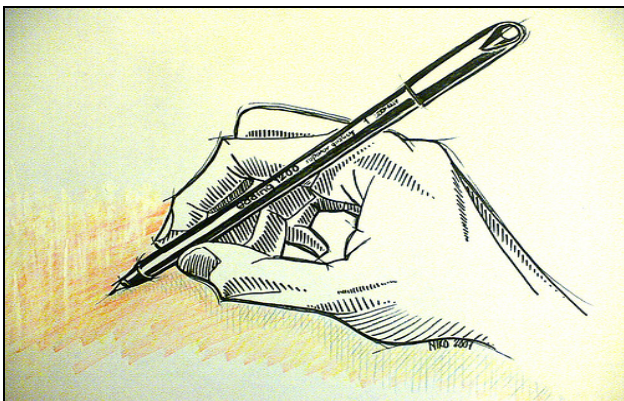


We're going to ask everyone involved with the congregation here at Essex Church if they would like to write a statement of their beliefs, with the possibility of perhaps publishing them all in a booklet some time later in the year. A group that studied the Building Your Own Theology course back in the 1980s did just that and published their statements in a booklet called 'Kensington Quest'. You can find a copy of this on our Kensington Unitarians website (in the section headed 'Publications') and it makes fascinating reading. Several people who attended that course are still part of our community today. Will they stick by their original statements, or have their beliefs changed?

You might also find it interesting to look at a website called 'This I Believe', which contains over 60,000 short statements of belief (www.thisibelieve.org) and an associated podcast. The organisers of this website give various guidelines to potential writers - such as be brief, specific, positive, perhaps stick to one key belief rather than covering everything, be personal - perhaps tell a story to bring your statement to life.

We want people to have as wide a brief as possible for this task but here are some other possible guidelines. We suggest that you aim to write between 200-500 words. The 'Building Your Own Theology' course deals with some specific issues which you might want to consider, such as our own religious and spiritual experiences, human nature, God / Ultimate Reality, our religious heritage, liberal religion, ethics, the meaning of life and faith in action. Do get in touch if you want any guidance or if you want help in formulating your statement of belief.

Rev Sarah Tinker



A Unitarian Event You Might Be Interested In:



**Rosslyn Hill Unitarian Chapel,
Hampstead, London NW3 1NG**

A number of Unitarian chapels in North and West London are coming together this February for an evening of home-grown entertainment - a talent show with the theme of love, romance and St Valentine.

Join fellow Unitarians for a very special night of songs, poetry and musical interludes, and help to raise funds for worthwhile Unitarian causes!

Tickets: £6 (includes light refreshments)

**For ticket information please contact
Kate Buchanan: kateboo@gmail.com**



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

**Second Sunday of the Month from 2-3.00pm
(14th February, 14th March, 11th April)**

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

Cost £7 (£5 to Essex Church members)
Contact: Sonya Leite on 0207 371 1674

'How to get Your Congregation Noticed'



Friday 19th – Sunday 21st February 2010
The Nightingale Centre,
Great Hucklow, Derbyshire

The latest conference of the Unitarian Communication Coordinators Network (UCCN) takes place in February. There will be opportunities to network and share ideas and the week-end will include sessions/workshops on:

- Having an effective visibility strategy
- Creating a congregational leaflet: design, contents, layout, construction
- Hints and Tips from a professional website designer on how to refresh and keep your website attractive, accessible and relevant

Optional Extra Workshop: On the Friday afternoon there will be a session on creating your own congregational video. The session will start with explaining how to plan your video, then go into constructing it on Powerpoint and then help you record a soundtrack.

You could ask your congregation, society or district association to sponsor you to attend.

For information visit the website:
www.uccn.org.uk/Feb10.htm

or please contact:
Valerie Walker, 15 Station Road, Stoke Mandeville,
AYLESBURY, Bucks HP22 5UL
Tel: 01296 613501 E-mail: vawalker55@gmail.com

The basic cost of the weekend is £91 inclusive.



Songs and Silence for the Soul

Chanting and Stillness at Essex Church



Sundays 14th February, 14th March,
11th April from 3.30 to 5.00pm

Suggested Donation: £2.00

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

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

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



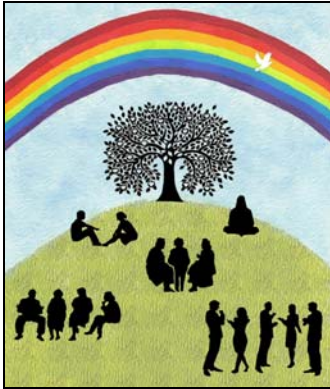
"Compassion is the basis of connection, intimacy, openness, kindness, hospitality, and joy. It is an expression of human freedom, flowing from a sound intuition of the unity of life and all living things. Our connection to others does not negate our aloneness. We are simultaneously separate and in relation, and these two truths are ultimately revealed as coexistent and non-contradictory. We are, in the very midst of our aloneness, inextricably connected to others. This dimension of being does not derive from external factors. We are by nature embedded in relationship with the world, in all its sorrow and beauty. Compassion is at once both deeply personal and thoroughly social. It is the finest expression of our relationship to self and others. It begins with a willingness to open to ourselves and to life as it is."

Aura Glaser

Hucklow Summer School 2010

Speaking of God:

Unitarian Adventures in Theology



21st – 28th August 2010
The Nightingale Centre
Great Hucklow, Derbyshire

Theme Talks: “Speaking of God”

With Dr. Mel Prideaux and Friends

A Choice of Morning Engagement Groups:

“Experiencing God”

With Rev Margaret Kirk and Winnie Gordon

“Exploring Prayer”

With Dr Jane Blackall and Dr Mel Prideaux

“Icons: Windows to the Divine”

With Rev Linda Hart and Caroline Blair

“Building Your Own Theology”

With Joyce Ashworth and Rev Maud Robinson

Children’s Programme

With Peter Teets and Jim Blair

Basic Cost for Adults (shared room): £340

Some bursaries are available to help with the cost.

The core purpose of Hucklow Summer School is religious education: we focus on matters of religion and spirituality and intend to draw out and develop the potential of all participants. We aim to provide a balanced programme, offering a rich mix of activities for both the heart and head, and a variety of optional sessions showcasing a range of worthwhile activities which participants might “take home” and try out in their own congregations and communities. We also ensure that there are plenty of opportunities for relaxed fellowship and fun during the week. Summer School brings fellow Unitarians together and allows them to get to know each other deeply and form lasting connections.

More information and application form on the website:

www.hucklowsummerschool.org.uk

Deadline for applications: 1st April 2010

Sunday Services at Essex Church

7th February – “The Gift of Life” – Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

This service will be a celebration of the gift of life in music, words and prayer. How have artists throughout the ages shown their gratitude for life and how do we celebrate in our own lives? There will also be a naming ceremony today for Connor and Sophie, two of Jo Ridgers’ grandchildren.

14th February – “Love in Plain Clothes” – Service led by Jane Blackall

Our very own Jane Blackall will be leading the service on Saint Valentine’s Day. Jane says: “In this service I will try to go beyond the usual romantic greetings card sentiments of the occasion to celebrate some aspects of love which are maybe not so glamorous... but are potentially just as transformative.”

21st February – “Heart to Heart” – Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

‘Heart to Heart’ is the title of our next adult education programme which starts in March. It offers a simple structure to help people speak with, and listen to, one another. In this service we will focus on this sort of communication, which allows us to open our hearts to one another and to share something of our lives. Such sharing is a simple yet deep experience for us and a church community can help to provide more opportunities for this kind of communication. This service will be followed by a repeat of the recent workshop on ‘Growing Our Congregation’.

28th February – “Sing Your Faith” – Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

This is the title of the new purple hymn book and our service will be an exploration and a celebration of hymn singing. Come and find out more about the history of hymns in Christianity and other faiths as well as some of the stories behind this new collection. This service will be followed by a community potluck lunch which is being coordinated by Doris Campbell.

