



Kensington Unitarians

Newsletter: May 2014

What's On...

Thursday 1st May, 7-8pm
'Heart and Soul' Spiritual Gathering
'On Fertile Ground'
Led by Jeannene Powell

Sunday 4th May, 11am-noon
'To See the World as Others See It'
Service led by David Francis Darling

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

Thursday 8th May, 7-9.00pm
Creativity Group: Photography
(or bring your own craft project)

Sunday 11th May, 11am-noon
'How Free Can Speech Be?'
Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 11th May, 12.30pm
Small-Group Communion
Led by Tristan Jovanović

Sunday 11th May, 2.00-3.00pm
Nia Technique with Sonya Leite

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

Sunday 18th May, 11am-noon
'Making a Difference'
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 18th May, 12.30-1.15pm
'Finding Your Voice'
Singing workshop with Margaret

Sunday 18th May, 3.00-5.30pm
'Our Living Stories'
True Heart Theatre Workshop

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

Sunday 25th May, 11am-noon
'All Who Wander Are Not Lost'
Led by Caroline Blair

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

Thursday 29th May, 7-9.00pm
Management Committee Meeting

Sunday 1st June, 12.30pm
Essex Church AGM

A Message from our Minister:

Making a Difference

You've probably heard the spiritual teaching story about someone walking along a beach, picking their way amidst hundreds of starfish stranded by the tide. Further along they come across a child who is patiently, one by one, throwing the starfish back into the sea for them to be taken out to deeper waters by the receding waves. The walker sees only the futility of the task and asks the child why they are bothering. "There are so many starfish stranded here. Nothing you can do will make any difference." The child smiles, bends down to pick up another stranded starfish and throws it back into the sea. "Well, I made a difference for that one" the child replies, turning to find the next starfish to return to the water.



Like many such moral tales I've probably heard this story once too often and my hearing of it has forever been tainted by listening to it once at the back of a large conference hall whilst sitting next to a friend renowned for his wicked sense of humour. He raised the obvious issues: are we sure the starfish are still alive, can we ever know if an individual starfish even wants to live? What if they as a group had decided to end their lives together on the beach that day? Is it right to interfere in other lives without being asked for assistance? There's a lot we don't know about starfish. And might the story have taken a different direction if the beach had been covered in jellyfish?

Making a difference in other lives is a moral minefield so in our service on 18th May I'm going to be asking people in our congregation a simpler question, about the ways in which being part of Kensington Unitarians has made a difference in their own lives. I've asked such a question in other Unitarian communities and have received a delightful variety of responses: from the 'finding this community saved my life' kind of answer to the 'I now sometimes get up before noon on Sunday mornings'. If you can't be with us on that particular Sunday then send me an email or a letter and I'll include your thoughts in the service. It's worth reflecting from time to time on the ways our lives have been changed by the communities we belong to, not least because when we can articulate such influences clearly for ourselves then we can also share them with others. Despite having excellent newsletters, webpages, music, preaching, coffee and the like, in truth most people join a church because someone they know has recommended it to them. We will expand our community most effectively through our own speaking of what we value about it.

So do let me know how Kensington Unitarians has made a difference in your life and do make a note in your diaries for 1st June when we will be holding our AGM, when we will have more time to consider this, our spiritual community, and what we can offer both individuals and the world.

Rev. Sarah Tinker

In this month's newsletter...

* Iona's New Arrival * Reflections on the General Assembly (GA) Annual Meetings *
'Some Thoughts on Communicating' by Sarah Tinker & Sonya Leite * Poem by John Hands
* 'We Shall Overcome' by Annette Percy * 'A Weekend Away' by Veronica Needa *
'Redressing the Balance' by Roy Clark * Appeal for SOS Children's Villages * 'I'm Late!'
* 'Communicate and Connect' 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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Essex Church AGM

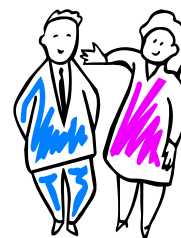
A date for your diary: Sunday 1st June 2014

(cartoon by Dave Walker – www.cartoonchurch.com)



CHURCH MEETINGS ARE BRILLIANT

Volunteering Rotas: Stewarding, Coffee and Greeting



Stewarding:

4 th May	Mike Eichler
11 th May:	Natasha Drennan
18 th May:	? (can you volunteer?)
25 th May:	? (can you volunteer?)

Coffee:

4 th May	Liz Tuckwell
11 th May:	Annette Percy & Friend
18 th May:	Juliet Edwards
25 th May:	Sue Smith

Greeting:

4 th May	Jeannene Powell
11 th May:	Gina Bayley
18 th May:	Veronica Needa
25 th May:	Carol Sheppard

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

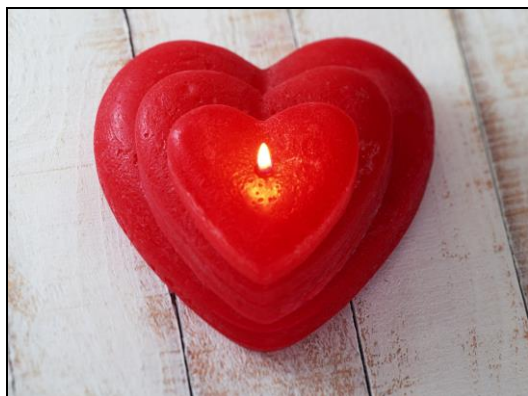
rotas@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

'Heart and Soul'

Midweek Spiritual Gatherings

Thursday 1st May from 7-8pm

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



Our May gathering will be led by Jeannene Powell on the theme 'On Fertile Ground'. Jeannene says: "We'll explore how the unpleasant experiences of our lives can provide the fertilizer for something new." All are welcome.

If you would like to know more about these gatherings please contact jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk.

'Spiritual Life Skills'

Forthcoming Workshops



'Counter-Culture:

Resistance, Rebellion & Responsibility'
with Symon Hill and Jane Blackall
Saturday 21st June, 11am-4pm

In this workshop we will be considering ways in which our church communities have the potential to challenge some of the dominant values of today's society and model a different way of being in the world. How can we help bring about greater justice and peace? Cost: £5 / £10 / £15 (pay what you can afford). To book, email: jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk.

Symon Hill is a left-wing Christian writer, activist and trainer who has written on issues including religion, ethics, current affairs, media and sexuality. To date, he has published two books: *The No-Nonsense Guide to Religion* and *Digital Revolutions: Activism in the Internet Age*. Symon campaigns on issues including religious liberty, sexuality, peace and economic equality and is also an associate of the Ekklesia thinktank.



'Enlivening Worship'

with Sarah Tinker & Jane Blackall
Saturday 19th July, 11am-4pm

A workshop for all those interested in creating enlivening worship in Unitarian and Interfaith settings. Aimed at those new to worship leading as well as for those with experience, this workshop will cover music, choice of materials, themes, prayers and meditations, as well as presentation styles and ways to appeal to all our senses. Cost: £5 / £10 / £15 (pay what you can afford). To book, email: jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk or phone 020 7221 6514 and leave a message with your contact details.

Iona's New Arrival



We were delighted to hear the news from South Africa that Iona Blair, Caroline and Jim's daughter, gave birth to Amber Skye, pictured above, on 5th April. We had a card at church the next day for members of the congregation to send congratulations to Iona and Mark. Congratulations to the proud grandparents and new auntie Jennie too!

Reflections on the General Assembly (GA) Meetings



Jane Blackall, Annette Percy, David Darling and Gill Hague.

One of the best things about the GA meetings, for me, is the opportunity for good conversation with fellow Unitarians. I have made a lot of friends in the movement over the last fifteen years and there are many I only get to catch up with once in a blue moon at GA or Hucklow Summer School. As a delegate I attended all the main business meetings but I decided not to go to so many of the fringe sessions this year. Instead I spent time hanging out in the lounge, hearing about various new initiatives that people are trying out in other congregations, and telling people all about some of the projects we are proud of here at Essex Church. I got talking to someone in a smaller congregation who was really excited to hear about our 'Heart and Soul' spiritual gatherings and she went away enthused to talk to her committee about starting something similar. This kind of cross-fertilisation is what the GA is all about.

One of the trickier aspects of the annual meetings is dealing with the inevitable disputes and disappointments that arise within a movement such as ours where there are diverse and strongly-held views on almost any subject you care to name. However, rather than getting too bogged down in frustration about this, I had a few encouraging conversations with friends about the possibility of focusing our energy elsewhere – developing ideas and projects we *do* feel passionate about within the movement – instead of just reacting to what we *don't* like.

I couldn't entirely relax until the meetings were nearly over as I had been invited to lead morning worship (a communion service) on the very last day. I was simultaneously honoured – delighted! – to be asked and also very anxious about doing a good job. I wanted to do something that reflected our regular small-group communion services back home in Kensington... but with about fifty participants! I got a lot of great feedback after the event, both from experienced ministers, and from those who had never taken communion before and who were perhaps a bit wary about participating. The fact that it all seemed to go off well meant the GA ended on a high for me!

Jane Blackall

I went to the GA Meetings as an Associate Member of the General Assembly. My badge showed London Kensington but as I was not a delegate I could choose what I attended, and there was as usual a lot of choice of special interest meetings.

The Anniversary service was given by David Usher and I especially enjoyed a lot of hymn singing, his description of his young life in Australia and his much more recent involvement in ICUU projects in Kenya and worldwide. The evening spent on looking at our Unitarian communities was wide-ranging and interesting and I was glad that the Simple Gifts project was included.

I attended the IARF (International Association for Religious Freedom) meeting to hear more about the international interfaith conference which will be held in Birmingham over the August Bank Holiday period, the Penal Affairs meeting on the Emmaus Community, the Youth Panel meeting at which we played games and the Ministerial Strategy meeting which started in an amusing way and concluded with serious discussion of how ministers were perceived to spend their time. The Keynote Speaker on Liberal Judaism, Rabbi Danny Rich, was interesting and loveable.

The business meetings were run in a good-humoured fashion by now ex-President Bill Darlison and at the last session the Resolution to join our Transylvanian Unitarian friends in protesting against a multi-national company which could potentially cause devastation by gold mining and thus destroying a Unitarian community was of special interest to me. I didn't go to the Social Evening because I was too busy sitting in the lounge catching up with friends and then moving to the bar to chat with more. I attended Jane Blackall's early morning Communion Service and this was a perfect contemplative start to the final day of the conference.

At the final session Marion Baker was installed as President and this had considerable significance for me because I have known Marion since she was a member of the Unitarian Young People's League when I worked for the Unitarian Youth Department in the 60s.

Annette Percy



In the conference hall during a presentation by the Red Cross.

Reflections of a GA Delegate

Before I start reflecting on being a GA delegate I should explain what one is! In a nutshell, you the congregation through the management committee delegated myself and Jane Blackall to attend the 85th annual meetings of the General Assembly (GA) of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches at the lovely Hotel Spa of Whitebury Hall near Milton Keynes. Having attended several GA meetings held in University Campuses this felt like luxury and, even better, it was cheaper than we have paid in the past.

Attending GA is reminder to me that we here at Essex Church belong to a wider movement that is held together by the GA's small but hard word working paid staff based at Essex Hall, just off the Strand, here in London, headed up by the Chief Officer Derek McAuley, and by the numerous volunteers throughout the country that serve on the Executive Committee and the numerous groups that provide a national focus and support for various strategies. It is the GA, for example, that is responsible for selecting and training ministers, for providing learning resources for worship leaders and for running weekends and day events for children and young people, and reports on all these activities were presented at the GA. I always find the various stalls in the exhibition centre fascinating and a reminder of the breadth of different interest groups in our movement from the Unitarian Christian Association to the Unitarian Psychological Association.

The first event of the meetings is the John Rely Beard lecture sponsored by the Ministerial Fellowship. This year's lecturer was Alan Ruston, from Watford Unitarian Meeting, and chair of the Unitarian Historical Society. The title of his lecture was "200 years of Being Legal". 2013 was the bi-centenary of the Act that stopped it being illegal to not profess a belief in the Trinity. It's hard in our secular society to believe that such things were once very important and to realise that being a Unitarian could land you up in jail! In his excellent lecture Alan showed that it was this act that enabled a Unitarian denomination to evolve, though he did question whether being legal had made us more cautious and less likely to radically challenge the status quo.

The Anniversary Service was held on the first evening and I always find it heart-warming to be in a room of over 300 Unitarians worshipping together. The guest preacher was our own District Minister, Revd. Dr David Usher. During his thought provoking sermon he told us that as a 19 year old jackaroo on an Australian sheep farm he had had to learn to see sheep that were simply dots on a vast landscape. He suggested that we need to train our spiritual eyes to see the religious experiences that are all around us.

There could be the danger that these annual meetings turn simply into business meetings or strategy planning sessions (important though these are) but I, for one, am grateful that all the talking and planning is undergirded with times of worship and reflection and despite the early hour of 7.30am, it was good to worship with 50-60 people each morning before we started the business of the day. The Communion service led by our own Jane Blackall was particularly moving and it was good to see over 50 people with different theological perspectives all finding this simple service of remembering and sharing so nourishing.



L-R: David Darling (Kensington), Katie McKenna (Norwich), Jane Blackall (Kensington), Jef Jones (Brighton).

As well as the plenary sessions at which the motions are voted on and reports are presented, there are a number of smaller meetings organised by groups or societies. These are often the most interesting part of the event though because three or four are held at the same time it is difficult to choose between them and there were times when I wished I had the power of bi-location!

I did attend the Unitarian Historical Society and heard a fascinating talk by Dr Stephen Burley on "William Hazlitt, Joseph Priestly and the Origins of Unitarianism in America" that argued that despite many scholars saying that American Unitarianism was home grown and developed from congregationalism there is strong evidence that British Unitarianism heavily influenced the American congregations.

I also attended the annual meeting of the Unitarian Renewal Group who hosted a session entitled "Where is your God?" at which the Revd. Sheena Gabriel, Minister with Godalming Unitarians and the Revd. Cliff Reed, Minister Emeritus at Ipswich spoke of their understanding of the concept of God. Both said that they found poetry more helpful than theology in understanding the concept of God. Cliff read from some of his own poems and Sheena quoted Carl Jung who when asked whether he believed in God, replied that he didn't believe, he knew. That is, God is experienced, rather than known about. Both speakers gave much food for thought.

On Tuesday morning the keynote speaker was Rabbi Danny Rich, the Chief Executive of Liberal Judaism in the UK, who had become a good friend of our own Chief Officer, Derek McAuley in their work along with the Quakers in giving a liberal religious perspective on Equal Marriage. Rabbi Rich spoke of the development of Liberal Judaism over the last hundred years and their desire to be a "thinking" version of Judaism that stood between the secular Jew and the literalist orthodox. He also was very generously giving out free copies of the latest history of Liberal Judaism and I have put a copy in our Library if you are interested in reading more.

It is said that where there are two Jews there are three opinions and that could also be said of our Unitarian community so the GA is certainly not a "love in" and there were moments when there was discord rather than harmony but overall it was good experience and a reminder that irritation is what produces the pearl in the oyster!

David Francis Darling

GA Annual Meetings *(continued)*



The luxury surroundings of the lounge at Whittlebury Hall.

I can't remember the exact year I attended my first 'GA' as these Annual Meeting are affectionately called. It could have been 1996 but it was definitely held in Glasgow and I remember how exciting I found it to be with hundreds of other Unitarians for a few days of intense meetings, conversations and activities. My daughter Kelly came too and had a great time in the Seniors programme, sleeping on a church hall floor and getting involved in lots of great activities.

Some of the folks I met that year have remained good friends and it's always a pleasure to meet up with them again and hear their news. In truth, the intervening years have somewhat dulled my enthusiasm and I often ask myself 'should I give it a miss this year?' but once I arrive and meet people, both old friends and newcomers, it feels both worthwhile and important all over again. The Business Meetings start each morning with a short act of worship and I was touched by an image my colleague Andy Pakula, minister with our London New Unity congregation, used in the worship he led this year. He described us as a flotilla of sailing craft, our individual congregations like ships on our shared journeys of faith. Our General Assembly of Unitarian & Free Christian Churches has been in existence since 1928 and joins all our congregations together in one organisation, one flotilla. By meeting up each year we can support one another, share best practice and get inspired once more by the possibilities of a liberal religious community here in 21st century Britain. Like any organisation we have our high and low points and this year's GA was no exception. Every act of worship was inspiring this year. The Unitarian Young People's group asked us to connect more with the natural world, to be sure to pay attention to the beautiful surroundings we were in. That evening I stared up at the nearly full moon with some friends and reflected on both the importance and the complete insignificance of our presence here on earth. All ministers, we ended up laughing, wondering which of us would use the moon as a service theme first. Watch this space. Another pleasure was to spend time catching up with Howard and Gill Hague who have recently moved to the Midlands.

Next year's Annual Meetings are going to be held in the same luxurious venue at Whittlebury Hall and it would be very pleasing to have a new person attending from our congregation. I hope the experience will be as life enhancing for that person as it has turned out to be for me. So have a think and let me know if this possibility might appeal to you.

Rev. Sarah Tinker



A Fitness Fusion of 9 Movement Forms

**Second Sunday of the Month from 2-3pm:
11th May, 8th June 13th July**

Also each MONDAY lunchtime from 12.30

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.



*Jane Blackall at the end of the final GA business meeting.
Photo courtesy of Diane Bennett (Rochdale congregation)*

Creativity Group: Photography



**Second Thursday evening of each month
continuing 8th May from 7-9.00pm**

Whether you are a cautious clicker, a seasoned snapper ...or a David Bailey wannabe, come along to our Photography Creativity Group this spring. On the second Thursday of each month between April and June you can learn some simple and fun ways to improve your picture taking skills. With a little guidance and some practice anyone can take consistently good photographs.

As well as tips and techniques, there will be plenty of opportunities to practice and a regular "show and tell" spot where those that wish to can compare and discuss their latest digital or indeed filmic efforts. We will also be looking at the work of some of the masters of the art to inspire us.

Zero previous experience necessary; just bring yourself, your enthusiasm... and your camera.

If you are not a photo fan and life through a lens is not your thing, come along anyway and bring with any other portable hobby or craft you enjoy. Or, just come for the conversation and fellowship of the group. Basically just come along! Looking forward to seeing you.

Roy Clark



Our creativity group meets once a month to focus on a particular art or craft medium or a certain project for each quarter of the year so that we can go deeper into it during that period. 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. If you don't fancy the art or craft we are 'officially' focusing on then you are always welcome to bring along whatever you're working on and do your own art/craft whilst enjoying the good company of the group.

Jane Blackall



'Our Living Stories'

Playback Theatre, 18th May, 3pm-5.30pm



Come for tea and storytelling of a special kind: an afternoon of surprise and delight with Playback Theatre at Essex Church led by our own Veronica Needa. 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 service to the community.

True Heart Theatre's 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.

You can view a film about True Heart Theatre (including clips from their last visit to Essex Church) online here:
www.propellertv.co.uk/content/telling-true-tales

Cost: this event is free of charge (*donations welcome*).

Contact for more information: info@trueheart.org.uk

'Tell Us Your Death & Dying Stories'

Tuesday 13th May, 7.30pm

The Pirate Castle, Oval Road, NW1 7EA

To mark 'Dying Matters Awareness Week', True Heart Theatre are also performing for the Conscious Ageing Trust, presenting an evening of sharing and reflection through improvisational theatre with a focus on stories about death and dying.

How do we feel about death and dying? Let's talk about it. For some it is too close and very fearful. For others it is time to face its inevitability. There are many different stories to tell...

Cost: this event is free of charge (*donations welcome*).

Redressing the Balance



It is hardly a new or original observation, but seemingly every time we open a newspaper, turn on the TV or check the news online these days we find a bad news story waiting to assail us. The news media is top heavy with reports detailing intolerance, cruelty and deadly violence.

All too often the terrible acts we read about are done in the name of religion. For example I was dismayed to read of Father Van der Lugt a Catholic priest who when the civil war broke out decided to stay with his parishioners in Homs Syria. Fr van der Lugt a deeply humane man has appeared in several news reports and articles recently. In one he was asked why he continued his work amongst the poor and ministered to their needs regardless of their religious affiliation. He said "I don't see people as Muslims or Christians. I see a human being first and foremost" He had lived and worked in Syria since 1966. Tragically a couple of weeks ago, he was taken from his home by a gunman, made to stand against the wall outside and shot dead.

Then there is the inter-religious strife unfolding in the Central African Republic (CAR) where neighbour has turned on neighbour and unimaginable horrors are forcing whole communities to flee for their lives.

Of course these are important stories and have been sensitively and sympathetically covered by the BBC, the Guardian and other news agencies. Indeed, it could also be argued that without worldwide global newsgathering and modern telecommunications technology, these stories would not reach the public at all. Nevertheless the relentless drip-feed of stories like these appearing in the media is dispiriting (in a very literal sense) and does I feel add to a growing pessimism about the human race being at heart selfish and destructive and increasingly dividing itself along religious lines.

So it was with delight that I read about Ray Coe, a London teacher, who recently donated one of his kidneys to a seriously ill Muslim pupil at his school. I repeat the basic facts here in case you missed the article. Although Ray didn't know her, when he found out that pupil Alya Ahmed Ali was seriously ill, he undertook tests and found that he was a compatible match. Consequently he underwent the procedure to donate his organ. Both donor and recipient have made a full recovery. Alya was seriously ill. She has hydrocephalus, which has left her with severe learning difficulties. She also suffered from renal failure.

Mr Coe said "I realised the implications and knew what I was doing. When we told Alya, she just gave me a big squeeze and her face lit up. It brings tears to my eyes whenever I think of that." The school's head teacher Wendy Bower commented "Mr Coe has gone above and beyond the call of duty with this selfless and noble act. He is a very humble and modest man. The whole staff are in admiration for his kindness. He has given a new life to Alya and her whole family."

The reporting of news involving acts of kindness and goodness is both informative and a more accurate and balanced recording of our world. In addition it also serves to renew our faith in our fellow human beings and in our innate capacity to love and care for each other. Good news is no news? I beg to differ.

Roy Clark

'The Testament of Mary'



I thought people may be interested in a play on at the Barbican from 1st to 26th May. 'The Testament of Mary' is adapted from Colm Tóibín's book of the same name.

Taken from the Barbican website, the play is described:

"One of the most versatile and commanding stage actresses in the English-speaking world" (Los Angeles Times), Fiona Shaw portrays the Virgin Mary as a mother struggling with the loss of a son. More familiar to us through images than words, Mary is given a powerful voice, her story becoming a bold and subversive dramatic tour de force."

More information, including booking information, can be found on the Barbican website: www.barbican.org.uk

Jeannene Powell

I'm Late!

*I'm late, I'm late
For a very important date.
No time to say "Hello."
Goodbye.
I'm late, I'm late, I'm late.*

Thanks to everybody for making such an effort to improve the start of services here at Essex Church. Various people have told me about setting off from home 10 minutes earlier on Sunday mornings, our stewards are now empowered to ask late arrivers to wait at the door until a suitable time to sit down arrives, and we have 'Reserved' notices placed on some of the back seats so people can slip into them without disturbing others. So that requires a thank you to the people who have relinquished their favourite back seats for others. And I'm grateful to everyone who comes and fills the front row so it looks a bit cosier at the start of the service. As this great cartoon (below) shows, we are all different when it comes to timekeeping as well as with any other aspect of being alive. Let's keep working on ways to tell each other about what's important to us – I really appreciate the person who first brought up the issue of how the start of our Sunday service was affected for them by noisy late arrivals.



Of course people will continue to arrive late for church sometimes. But the various conversations we've been having about timekeeping show something important – that we want to set a certain atmosphere for people from the very start of our time together. It's a precious time for all of us and we care about the quality of this time. Let's keep talking about ways that we can make Sunday mornings really special for everyone who comes through our doors. And please don't ever be put off coming into church just because you're late. Just choose a time to come in quietly, ideally when we are singing. Nobody has ever come close to our much loved Gordon Deaville's record for late arriving of 11.55 and when he did come in that day we were all pleased to see him. I guess that highlights an important aspect of being in community for me – that we make space for each other's faults and foibles and we also find ways to communicate clearly and lovingly when someone else's behaviour affects us personally.

Rev. Sarah Tinker

PUNCTUALITY

THE GRUMPY EARLY
 DOES NOT TOLERATE THE TARDY

THE CHEERFUL EARLY
 SHOWS A WARM WELCOME TO THE DELAYED

THE 'JUST IN TIME'
 CUTTING IT A LITTLE BIT FINE

THE GUILTY LATE
 ASHAMED BY THEIR LACK OF PROMPTNESS

THE SHAMELESS LATE
 SEES NO REASON TO APPEASE THE PUNCTUAL

SPACE FOR YOU TO BRING TO MIND (AND NOTE DOWN) THE NAMES OF THOSE KNOWN TO YOU WHO BELONG TO EACH CATEGORY

Cartoon by Dave Walker

CartoonChurch.com

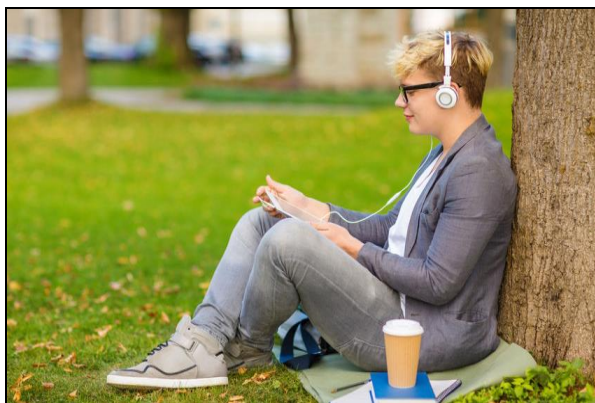
Supposing...

When we first meet, instead of mindless chatter we
Just smile and say 'Shall we dance?'
And instead of smothering a landscape with inconsequential talk
We danced around the parks and city squares, laughing
Perhaps, or simply gaze first at one another then
At the world around us, as if seeing it all
For the first time. Or we might suggest a game –
I don't mean a suggestive 'come-on' or anything like that – but again
Something simple like 'throw an imaginary ball
In any of several original ways' or 'describe
What we like doing best in dumbshow, with
Possible sound-effects.' Nothing to
Overwhelm, embarrass or immediately impress,
Just playing as people can play
Just laughing as people can laugh
Or smile, or listen with compassionate interest. Supposing
We tried this just for once, just for once, with a view
To a permanent venture.

John Hands
Munich, May 2003



SpiritualPULSE Podcast



I'm pleased to announce that the latest 2 episodes of the SpiritualPULSE podcast have been published. The March issue features interviews from the FUSE festival and an extended interview with Beryl Payne. It's less than 20mins long so it will easily fit into your coffee break. The April issue features thoughts and meditations on Spring. You are sure to hear some of your friends (or yourself!) in the recording. The easiest way to listen is via the LDPA (London District) homepage: www.ldpa.org.uk

However, if you like it, I encourage you to subscribe to future episodes: www.ldpa.podbean.com and click the 'feed' icon next to the 'share' button for various options OR via iTunes Store - search "spiritual pulse" and click the subscribe button

Please do share this information with your networks and feel free to leave a (sensible) comment/review on either Podbean or iTunes to encourage more listeners!

Kate Buchanan

'Finding Our Voice'

Singing Workshops with Margaret Marshall



Sundays 18th May, 29th June,
27th July from 12.30 to 1.15pm

PLEASE NOTE DATE CHANGE IN MAY!

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.

Small Group Communion



**Sundays 11th May, 8th June, 13th July
at 12.30pm Down in the Church Library**

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

11th May – Led by Tristan Jovanović
8th June – Led by David Francis Darling
13th July – Led by Jane Blackall

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



“Once I heard Dean Sperry in a lecture at the Harvard Divinity School say this: There had been times, he said, when he scarcely knew what he believed or whether he believed anything at all — times when he was baffled, confused and dismayed—as, no doubt everyone is sometimes. And at those times, he found great good in the Communion. For here was something which generations of people has said and done over the centuries. And somehow, regardless of doctrine, that gave him a thread of continuity, a kind of steadying. In that service, it was as if he felt himself one with the age-long movement of humanity, together, through thick and thin.”

W L McKinstry (from *uuchristian.org*)

Spirituality and Sexuality Group for Women



**Tuesday evenings 7 to 9pm:
17th and 24th June and 1st July**

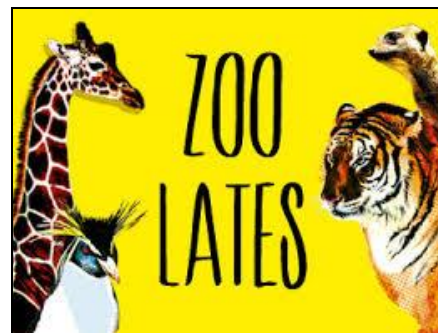
facilitated by Jeannene Powell and Sarah Tinker

Together we will create a safe space for us as women to consider both the connections and the disconnections between our spiritual and sexual lives. Our explorations will include issues of identity, history, changes through our lives and the messages we have received from family, religion and society. Using simple exercises in writing, art work and meditation we will seek imagery to heal the rifts between these important aspects of ourselves. As places will be limited do let us know if you would like to join this small group and ensure that you can commit to attending at least two sessions and ideally all three.

(Men interested in joining a men's course / group are invited to contact Jim Blair on jim_blair_rhino@hotmail.com)

Cultural Outing: Zoo Late

Friday 27th June, 6-10pm – BOOK NOW



We tried to organise an outing to one of the London Zoo late openings last year but these events always sell out in advance and quite a few people found that by the time they tried to book it was too late. We have picked a date nice and early this year in the hope of avoiding this problem and will be going on 27th June. Zoo Lates are for 18+ only and as well as the chance to appreciate the animals it includes cabaret, comedy, and a street food fair.

If you book right now there are some half price tickets available at the special rate of £14. You can book via the Zoo website:

www.zsl.org/zsl-london-zoo/whats-on/zoo-lates-0

One Light Spiritual Gatherings 'Present Moment'



Friday 9th May 2014
6.30-8.15pm – Here at Essex Church

The gatherings are led by graduates of the Interfaith Seminary.

Information from One Light: 'Come and enjoy as we gather for deep healing and loving connection to Spirit. Come help us create a sacred space, bringing in the One Light, One Love for which we all long - with silence, music, meditation, and eternal inspiration from all faiths and none. Bring your beloved eternal self, your family, children and friends'

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

For further information contact Interfaith Reverends Pamela Ramsden 07966 478 980 / Kathryn Reynolds 07976 739 286

**Future Meetings: 9th May – Present Moment,
13th June – Appreciation, 11th July – The Soul**

Good Cause Collection of the Month

Christian Aid



Collection on Sunday 25th May

Christian Aid is an organisation that insists the world can and must be swiftly changed to one where everyone can live a full life, free from poverty.

We work globally for profound change that eradicates the causes of poverty, striving to achieve equality, dignity and freedom for all, regardless of faith or nationality. We are part of a wider movement for social justice. We provide urgent, practical and effective assistance where need is great, tackling the effects of poverty as well as its root causes.

Our essential purpose:

- to expose the scandal of poverty
- to help in practical ways to root it out from the world
- to challenge and change structures and systems that favour the rich and powerful over the poor and marginalised.

For more information visit: www.christianaid.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:

Feb – War Child (UPF Lent Appeal) – £197.72 + Gift Aid

March – Red Cross Syria Appeal – £174.13 + Gift Aid

**FOY Conference - 2nd to 5th May 2014
At the Nightingale Centre, Great Hucklow**

The War on Drugs

Do we need a new approach?



The War on Drugs will be the study subject for this Conference. We will be addressing questions including "Is the War on Drugs:

- Causing deforestation
- Undermining Human Rights
- Costing too high a price
- Creating crime & enriching criminals?"

We will be led in our discussions by David Barrie CBE, Chair of "Make Justice Work" and members of the Unitarian Penal Affairs Panel. We will also be looking at how we can make a difference as individuals, as members of The Foy Society and as members of our other communities local, national and international. The Conference begins on Friday evening and ends with lunch on Monday.

Standard adult rate for this long weekend is £180.
There is a special half-price rate for people aged 17-35.

General Conference enquiries should be made to Joan Partington:
Phone 01228 670 565, Mobile 07729 142 642
email: partingtons@gmail.com.

The Foy Society is a fellowship of women and men who, in a spirit of free inquiry, seek to understand the nature of present issues and problems - political, social and religious. It was founded in 1924 as The 'Fellowship of Youth'. In 1957 it became known as the Foy Society as it had gradually taken on the role of an inter-generational group. Most of our members are Unitarians. You are welcome to join and participate, whatever your religious background.

What's Going on in Our Busy Building?



The first unusual event in the building this month is the "Homegrown" sale on Wednesday 7th May 12-7pm and Thursday 8th 10am-4pm. Items on sale include Indian cotton clothing, Ethiopian scarves & French lavender bags - all sourced through personal relationships with the producers.

Then at 5pm on Sunday 11th, Illumina a singing duo who have brought their music to several Sunday services here are offering "Tantra Mantra" – an opportunity to explore masculine and feminine energies through dance and chanting (more information can be found on Meetup: www.meetup.com/illumina/events/177967762/)

On Monday 12th May, Tom Norrington-Davies who teaches the regular Ashtanga yoga classes here is running a pre-work taster session from 6.30-8.30am (I've just found out that Tom is also a celebrity chef with several yummy sounding books to his name, which for some reason makes me feel I should go to his class more often!)

On Saturday 17th, Judith Harris from the Guild of Pastoral Psychology is giving a lecture on the connection between Psyche & Body and on Thursday 1st their regular monthly lecture is on "The Satanic State" (more details at: www.guildofpastoralpsychology.org.uk/index.php/lectures/2014-programme)

On Sunday 18th, our very own Veronica Needa is facilitating a session of "Playback Theatre" (more information elsewhere in this newsletter) and on Monday 26th there's a free introduction to Vedic meditation with the London Meditation Centre at 7pm (more information: www.londonmeditationcentre.com/vedic-meditation)

Two courses from the Independent Group of Analytical Psychologists round off the month – "Gawain & the Green Knight" by Carmen Reynal at 7.30pm on Thursday 29th and "Hermes" by Hans van der Hoof, Friday evening & all day Saturday (more information can be found at: www.igap.co.uk/igapjungiansemic.html)

Jenny Moy, Essex Church Warden

Lewisham Unitarians & SE London LGBTQ & Friends Social Club

'Make Your Pride Banner'

Saturday 3rd May, 5pm-8pm
Bromley Road, Catford, SE6 2TS



Unitarians with Pride banners at Cross Street, Manchester

In preparation for the upcoming London Pride (on Saturday 28th June) you are invited to create your unique artistic sign to represent your community identity, values or beliefs. We will explore creative ways of designing the outstanding signs we will unveil during the parade.

Our spontaneity will be encouraged by good music, BBQ, and delicious bring and share food. Just bring your creative powers and we'll bring the hardware. Special paper, markers, plastic boards, poles and other materials will be provided.

For more info email: contact@danieltoth.eu

Accommodation Request from SimpleGifts



This summer SimpleGifts will have two new interns visiting from the Unitarian Universalist College of Social Justice. Their stay will be from the 16th June to the end of July and we are looking for hosts for all or part of their stay. Our students from last year were very bright, polite and all-around good people and we expect nothing less from this year's duo. These are young students used to bare-bones accommodations, so nothing fancy is required! If you have a pull-out sofa or a spare room and would be willing to come to the aid of our dwelling-deprived visitors, please get in touch with us ASAP. Even a space for 2 weeks would be a big help! Thank you. (info@simplegiftsucsa.org.uk or Ann on 07400873541)

Reflections on 'Calvary'



On Maundy Thursday I went to see the film 'Calvary'. It begins very powerfully and dramatically with a confession. Father James, magnificently played by Brendan Gleeson, is hearing confession from an unknown person. We learn that the person had been repeatedly sexually abused as a child by the local priest. Not this priest, another priest. But the victim issues a warning. And the warning is that, in seven days' time, he or she will kill this priest as a kind of atonement for the terrible things that were done. The reason given for this is that it would be far too easy to kill a bad priest (indeed it could be said that there are many of them and what good would it do anyway, it would be very old news) but to kill a good priest, a man who cares for his flock and is seen to be a force for good in the world, now that would be a real statement - that would really be saying something.

And so begins a rather intriguing puzzle. Father James thinks that he knows who the person making the threat is but, of course, he is bound by the laws of the confession into being unable to reveal the person's true identity. What he is able to do is to visit all the people in his parish and to begin to put his house in order. Which is what he does. And what he discovers is that there are potentially many suspects. It would seem that all are troubled souls. From the wealthy businessman who has everything but feels nothing to the married woman who has no direction in her life and merely drifts through her days on a sea of alcohol, drugs and sleeping around, Father James finds a level of cynicism and disregard for human life that is deeply depressing and troubling.

And it is not just his flock either. Father James is undoubtedly portrayed as a good man but he has his own difficult past to contend with. In a previous life he was married and indeed has a grown-up daughter with troubles of her own. After the breakdown of his marriage, he discovered a true vocation which led him to train for the priesthood. As such, it would seem that his own past helps him to understand the 'moral' failings of all those he cares for. But his is no weak and woolly faith. Indeed, he is willing to confront and challenge his parishioners with their failings. However all he receives in return is mockery of his faith and betrayal of his trust. At one point his daughter asks him "Do you have to put up with this rubbish every day?"

'Calvary' is a darkly comic film with moments of utter poignancy and heartfelt emotion. It shows both a crisis of faith and an absolute belief in the beauty of life and the good in people. The sins of the world are clear to see but as Father James says at one point 'Perhaps there has been too much emphasis on sin and not enough reflection on the virtues of faith - a willingness to forgive being one of them.' The film has a powerful ending but, to me at least, it seemed that some measure of real peace had been gained at the end.

Later that same day I attended the Tenebrae service which focuses on the last moments of Christ's life here on earth. With its universal themes of loss, fear, loneliness and betrayal, I found an interesting link with the film I had seen earlier in the day.

Carol Sheppard

Tenebrae Service



For the fourth year running Sarah and Tristan held a small Tenebrae service on the evening of Maundy Thursday.

I attended because I want to acknowledge the crucifixion and think of Jesus as a man, dying on the cross. This is so well encapsulated in the music of Bach and Handel which expresses the "passion" of Jesus. The Tenebrae service, because it uses music, and also readings from the gospels telling the story from different viewpoints of the gospel writers has the same moving quality. The readings from the Old Testament emphasise a sense of prophecy and continuity.

I felt it was a movingly dramatic experience, both because of the quality of the reading as the candles were gradually extinguished. The room was indeed full of shadows. We were asked to consider shadows of betrayal, denial, fear, injustice, death and despair ending with darkness and silence. It gave me an opportunity to think of these things in our present day world.

I was hungry and thankful for some very delicious food and a time of shared friendship when we all came together again after leaving in silence. The Middle Eastern food fitted the day well.

Juliet Edwards

"The challenge, then, is to recognize that the world is about two things: differentiation and communion. The challenge is to seek a unity that celebrates diversity, to unite the particular with the universal, to recognize the need for roots while insisting that the point of roots is to put forth branches. What is intolerable is for differences to become idolatrous. No human being's identity is exhausted by his or her gender, race, ethnic origin, national loyalty, or sexual orientation. All human beings have more in common than they have in conflict, and it is precisely when what they have in conflict seems overwhelming that what they have in common needs most to be affirmed. James Baldwin described us well: 'Each of us, helplessly and forever, contains the other — male in female, female in male, white in black and black in white. We are part of each other.'"

William Sloane Coffin, Jr.



We were pleased to welcome GA President, Rev. Bill Darlison, to lead worship (and stay for a chat afterwards) on 30th March.

‘We Shall Overcome’

Sarah’s service on 23rd March celebrated the life of Pete Seeger and the protest songs he wrote. Singing ‘We Shall Overcome’ invokes special memories for me.

In the summer of 1965 the International Religious Fellowship (IRF) conference took place in Scotland. It was the largest ever gathering of young Unitarians from Western Europe, the United States and Canada. We had two guests, one from Prague and one from Warsaw, and our Study Leader was Orloff Miller, a Unitarian Universalist minister from the States. Orloff taught us to sing ‘We Shall Overcome’ and it became an important part of our repertoire.



In March 1965 Orloff along with two other Unitarian Universalist ministers, Clarke Olsen and James Reeb, had joined the Civil Rights March from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, responding to a call to the clergy from Martin Luther King Jr. The historic March was first conceived as a protest following the death of Jimmie Lee Jackson, shot by a black trooper during a nighttime demonstration for voting rights in nearby Marion, Alabama. The march from Selma to Montgomery began on March 7th and was initially turned back by a sheriff’s posse backed by state troopers but without violence. That night outside a soul-food restaurant in Selma the three UU ministers were attacked and James Reeb died from his injuries two days later. Orloff Miller and Clarke Olsen survived. The original march had been a protest about the death of a black man but now a white clergyman had been killed and the world took notice. On March 9th the march for voting rights was resumed, this time under federal protection, limited to 300 persons for most of the 50 plus miles, it grew to 25,000 by the time it reached the capitol steps in Montgomery.

In Washington DC on August 6th 1965, seated in the same room off the Capitol Rotunda where 104 years earlier Abraham Lincoln had signed the Emancipation Proclamation, President Lyndon Johnson made the Voting Rights Act the law of the land. On January 20th 2009, forty-three years later, Barack Obama, an African-American was inaugurated as 44th President of the United States and Orloff Miller wrote to me and other friends to say he believed that the march from Selma to Montgomery in 1965 had been one of a series of very early ballots cast on behalf of Obama.

Orloff Miller was not only interested in emancipation in the US, he was also concerned about the situation in communist Czechoslovakia, so he kept in touch with the Czech guest at our 1965 conference and it was the latter who invited me to Prague for the first time since my mission for IRF was to contact young Unitarians "behind the Iron Curtain". In 1967 the political situation in Czechoslovakia was a little more relaxed and five of our young Unitarian friends from Prague and one, Gád Vojkúvka, from Brno joined us at our IRF conference in Switzerland. We taught them to sing ‘We Shall Overcome’.

On 21st August 1968 Gád was doing his military service in the Czech army and was stationed at an airfield. He and the other conscripts watched in horror as Soviet planes touched down and unloaded hundreds of tanks in the middle of the night. The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia had begun and Gád Vojkúvka taught his fellow conscripts to sing ‘We Shall Overcome’.

Annette Percy

Some Thoughts on Communicating

It was good to welcome Jill and Richard Broadbent once again to Essex Church. This was the third time I've attended a course based on Nonviolent Communication (NVC) and even now it feels like I have much to learn in using this method in everyday life. It does not come naturally to slow our communicating down and to encourage myself and the other person to focus on how we are feeling or to reflect on what another person might really be yearning for as they speak to me. In Compassionate Communication they suggest a four stage process.



Something happens: e.g. 'someone just shouted at me for bumping into them on the street'

1. Firstly we might react by blaming someone or by thinking that something is wrong: e.g. 'people shouldn't be so rude, what is the world coming to'.
2. Or secondly we might react by blaming ourselves: 'oh no, I've done it again, why am I so clumsy all the time?'
3. At a third stage we can take time to turn our attention inwards and to reflect on what is happening for us: eg. 'I am feeling upset, my tummy feels tight, I am thinking that everyone is cross with me again'.
4. At a fourth stage we can reflect on what the other person might be yearning for: e.g. 'I wonder if that person wanted to feel safe.'

I wonder what useful guidelines other people use with regard to communicating. Some of my favourite reminders have come from assorted personal growth courses over the years.

One is that 'it's never personal' when someone gets upset with me and that the more personal it feels then the less personal it actually is. This is a saying that can drive people up the wall with irritation so I rarely say it to anyone unless I know they will be able to laugh about it. But I have found it to be a very helpful reminder that when we are triggered in a reactive way by something that someone says or does then the depth of our upset is because it links in with some past experience of ours, it touches a wounded place in us that yearns to be healed.

Another potentially annoying reminder comes from *A Course in Miracles*, which teaches that 'We're never upset for the reason we think'. Again this teaching is an encouragement for us to dig deeper – to engage in an enquiry when we find ourselves irritated or disturbed, emotionally reactive to something that has occurred. What has happened has triggered off a reaction, linked to our past. It is easier to blame the present occurrence but it's far more fruitful to look within and to honour the painful experience that we may have been unconsciously reminded of.

A third rule that has stayed with me for years is one that states that 'blame is always off the track' meaning that if I find myself blaming someone else or blaming myself then I need to stop and take time to think what's really going on. Do I need to take more, or less, responsibility in a situation perhaps or am I using blame as a way to avoid more potentially painful feelings. These are just a few of the sayings I use to help me stay conscious in the complex world of communicating.

Hopefully later in the year we'll be able to hold a Compassionate Communication practice group here at Essex Church and help one another to make some of these methods part of our everyday communicating.

The Compassionate Communication model arose out of the Nonviolent Communication (NVC) model devised by Marshall Rosenberg. As with any communication model, the more it's practiced, the more confident and effective you become when using it.

Jeannene Powell has been using NVC for some years now in her life and recommends these two websites which give more information about Marshall Rosenberg's method. She writes "If you'd like to learn more about Nonviolent Communication, the following page from the NVC website gives a brief overview and has useful links, including lists of 'feelings' and 'needs': www.cnvc.org/learn/nvc-foundations.

Also, this website: www.nonviolentcommunication.com/aboutnvc/4partprocess.htm clearly describes the NVC model of communicating. As with any communication model, I've found that the more it's practiced, the more confident and effective you become when using it."

Rev. Sarah Tinker

On Compassionate Communication *(continued)*

Unfortunately I could not make the last workshop given at Essex Church a few weeks ago, as I love the work of Compassionate Communication. When Jill and Richard come to West London, it's such a treat for me, as I don't have to travel so far.

I originally experienced Compassionate Communication in 2010 at a Buddhist Retreat centre. This setting grounded the work for me and was just the beginning. To release reactive thinking and judgmental attitudes is a lifelong practice. To cultivate empathy as a way of Being is a Spiritual path for me. This has been essential to healing the conflict and disharmony in myself. This way has helped me to be present to others, with compassion and understanding to all grievances.

Being in a group and in retreat brings up those judgments, as it would with any group. That is the nature of group dynamics. The opportunity it brings to look at our own fears is uncomfortable and rewarding. Realizing that I am the cause of my own discomfort and learning to cultivate loving kindness is the core of any Self-inquiry. It's my thoughts that create the upset. Being triggered in this world is a common occurrence. Learning that I have a choice in how I respond is invaluable and often tested! Ultimately the group bonded and we could see each other without our masks, pain and projections. We accepted the collective truth... We have all been hurt and we all long for peace.

I have introduced this work to my close friends and we practice this way of empathic listening for each other. It has deepened our friendship no end. When conflict or triggering does come up between us, we have been able to get to the root cause so much quicker and clear it.

I continue to attend courses with Jill and Richard Broadbent. The practice groups they run have been so useful. There is always more to learn and the exercises we do together our fun, deeply moving and transforming. There is also homework from week to week (optional of course) and it's so helpful to hear how we all did with our assignments from week to week. I particularly appreciate the silence and meditation aspects to these gatherings. It's provides the grounding, rest and guidance that I seek and long for every day. Direct questions engage the Mind; the questions we explore in a Compassionate Communication engage the Heart.

My request is that we start a group at Essex Unitarian soon and deepen our own personal Spiritual journeys together. After all that is what communities are for and I am so grateful for Essex Church. My request is that if you are also interested in starting a group that we let Sarah know.

Sonya Leite

'In every moment the universe is whispering to you. There are messages for you carried on the winds. There is wisdom for you in the morning songs of the birds, outside your window and in the soft murmurs of an ebbing sea. Even ordinary, everyday events in your life carry communications from the realm of spirit.'

Denise Linn

Foodbank Update



Thank you to everybody for their continuing contributions to our Foodbank collection. We recently received the following message of thanks:

I just wanted to say thank you for the recent donation of food to Ealing Foodbank. You might be interested to know that we have fed 933 people, 378 of them being children, and have given away 8.2 tonnes of food since we opened in October last year. We now run 3 centres, in Acton, Greenford, Southall and will be opening our fourth in Hanwell at the end of this month.

We are very grateful for all the food donated, and each month this year so far, we have given away more than we have received - which is really good news, and shows to indicate just how important every delivery of food is to us. Please would you pass on our thanks to all those involved? All the best, Janet Fletcher

Juliet Edwards kindly transported the last batch of food and reports that the food bank are particularly grateful for donations of fruit juice, instant mashed potatoes, tinned meat, tinned veg (particularly potatoes, carrots and veg other than peas/baked beans) & cup-a-soups.

An UPDATED wish-list of items:

- Milk (UHT or powdered)
- Sugar (500g)
- Soup
- Fruit squash / juice
- Tinned meat pies
- Tinned veg (e.g. sweetcorn)
- Pasta Sauces
- Sponge Pudding (tinned)
- Cereals
- Rice Pudding (tinned)
- Instant Coffee
- Instant Mash Potato
- Rice
- Tinned Meat / Fish
- Tinned Fruit
- Jam
- Biscuits or Snack Bars

If you would like to donate any of these items please bring them along to church next time you come.



A Weekend Away



I met Mac many years ago. He was doing leadership training for businesses. I also knew that he was engaged with Native American wisdom and spirituality. We kept in touch and then I heard that he had been gifted the custodianship of a piece of land. He tells the story of how this happened. He had coached a company over 5 years to such success that they became listed on the stock exchange, and the owners made many millions of pounds. "What's your dream, Mac?" they asked him. He replied "a place to grow people." They wrote a large cheque and told him to go and make his dream come true. That was the beginning of Embercombe.

I was on his mailing list, so I received information about its development, and my first visit was in 2005. I was touring in a play that had just finished its performances in the West Country. We were driving home and I persuaded my colleagues to make a small detour to Embercombe. I couldn't persuade them to stop any longer than to drop me off. But I was warmly welcomed and immediately fell in with a whole clutch of volunteers doing whatever needed doing. Painting the walls of the huge hangers, it was at that time. The previous owner was a pilot, and so there were two enormous hangers there. The next day I had to leave for London, but had a deep sense of the potential of this place. And saw how people were being magnetised there to help Mac manifest his dream. It wasn't quite my time yet. My own journey took me far afield and across the world with Playback Theatre.

But I was on his mailing list. So over time I saw photos and read about the events that were being hosted there. I had been feeling a kind of yearning to know how to live more simply in nature. And I had a growing sense that I was due to return to Embercombe.

I grew up in a metropolis – Hong Kong – and now live in another. I am more familiar with pavements and skyscrapers than with footpaths and trees. I love being invited to walk in the countryside, but it would never normally occur to me to do so. I love my little garden, but I struggle to learn the names of trees and plants around me. When I visit my friends in Europe, I have brief immersions into their earthy world. Nadia, on her permaculture farm in the mountains of northern Italy, lets me brush her horses, and talk to her donkeys. Andras takes me into the forests of Pecs and teaches me to eat 'bear onions' (wild garlic) pulled from the ground. Tapsa teaches me to harvest from his garden at his Finnish summer house, and make soup. Little wondrous experiences of our precious relationship to nature.



Last weekend I returned to Embercombe on a Friends Working Weekend. I met some wonderful people, many of them young, and all passionate about life and nature and community. There were many children there, running free, playing together. I shared a yurt with 3 others, and in the dark of the night, we listened to the field mouse scuffling up and down our wall looking for materials to build his nest in our roof.

I weeded, and got sunburnt mowing the lawn. It was such an old lawn mower. I really enjoyed negotiating my relationship with it and managing it effectively on uneven ground and up and down the grassy banks. I planted sunflowers in the Sacred Well Garden. I cleaned the toilets and showers. I chopped vegetables and peeled potatoes. And had many conversations with good people.

One of the hangers has been well insulated for warmth and has become an enormous and beautiful living room, meeting space, indoor playground for the children. The other accommodates an enormous yurt (the community dining space), as well as kitchen, office and tool shed.

Mac is still there. He has written his story [Finding Earth, Finding Soul – The invisible path to authentic leadership] and is writing his second book. He travels frequently to speak about all this - waking us up to the urgency of remembering and treasuring our relationship to this earth. Our blue boat home.

I recommend you to visit Embercombe. You can stay as a volunteer. Families are welcome. There are courses for young people, adults, businesses. I am going back soon. Embercombe - Touching hearts, stimulating minds and inspiring committed action for a truly sustainable world: www.embercombe.co.uk

Veronica Needa



'Communicate and Connect'

Sermon by Rev. Sarah Tinker – 6th April 2014

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

One of the things that they teach you in ministry training is the importance of speaking clearly. You can have the most wonderfully crafted sermon, every word a gem, and if they can't hear you on the back pew then you might as well be reading from the Argos Catalogue. You have to be loud enough, and you have to use language that other people can understand, language that speaks to them of their own lives and experiences. Another interesting aspect of leading worship is the number of times people come and thank me for what I said, but when they explain what they heard, in reality it was not what I said. It's a good reminder of how much human communicating goes on within our own heads and hearts – and how communicating isn't quite as straightforward as we sometimes wish it could be.

The Mulla Nasrudin who we heard about early on was said to be a marvellous preacher and so it's hardly surprising that a Unitarian group asked him a while back to be their keynote speaker at their summer school conference. When the day came, Nasrudin arrived at the reading desk and spoke: "O people! Do you know what I am going to tell you?" And the congregation, used to audience participation, replied enthusiastically, "No, we do not know". "Then you are clearly not ready to hear it," said the Mulla. He descended from the pulpit and went home. The Unitarians were taken aback but it made them all the more curious and so they asked him back to speak to them again. Nasrudin started his sermon the same way as he had before. This time, the congregation answered as one: "Yes, we know." "In that case," said the Mulla, "there is no need for me to detain you any longer as you clearly don't need me. You may go." And he returned home. Having been prevailed upon to speak for a third time, he started his address as before: "Do you know what I am going to tell you?" The congregation was ready. "Some of us do, and others do not." "Excellent," said Nasrudin, "then let those who know, communicate their knowledge to those who do not." And he went home.

When it comes to communicating of any sort most of us have much to learn and that's why some of us are attending a course in Compassionate Communication here at Essex Church this weekend. Using methods developed by Marshall Rosenberg a clinical psychologist and the founder of the Center for Nonviolent Communications (CNVC), an international non-profit organization that offers workshops and training in 35 countries. He has initiated peace programs in war-torn areas including Rwanda, Nigeria, Malaysia, the Middle East, Serbia, Croatia, and Ireland.

Marshall Rosenberg's methods are just as useful in everyday life relationships and communities such as ours because when it comes to communicating we all do a lot of it, but what we say may not be heard and much of our seeming communicating takes place in our own minds where we busily interpret what we think other people mean. We humans struggle at times even to communicate clearly with ourselves. I doubt that I'm the only one of us who finds it difficult sometimes to understand my own motivations and concerns. How many of us I wonder have had conversations in our heads – that go something like, 'why did I say that?', 'what's the matter with me?', 'why did they say that?', 'what did they mean?' or 'why am I this angry / upset / irritated etc. etc. etc?'. It takes effort

and courage to take communication to a deeper and more authentic level where we feel safe to be who we truly are and where we can allow others to reveal themselves authentically to us.

In Marshall Rosenberg's book 'Nonviolent Communications' he quotes a poem by Ruth Bebermeyer called *Words are Windows (or they're Walls)* that conveys the problems and the possibilities of our communicating:

I feel so sentenced by your words,
I feel so judged and sent away,
Before I go I've got to know
Is that what you mean to say?

Before I rise to my defense,
Before I speak in hurt or fear,
Before I build that wall of words,
Tell me, did I really hear?

Words are windows, or they're walls,
They sentence us, or set us free.
When I speak and when I hear,
Let the love light shine through me.

There are things I need to say,
Things that mean so much to me,
If my words don't make me clear,
Will you help me to be free?

If I seemed to put you down,
If you felt I didn't care,
Try to listen through my words
To the feelings that we share.

And it is the universal human feelings, the longings, the needs, the yearnings, that allow us to connect with one another – because they are shared, because they are universals. Our words then can provide a window into our own being and the being of another, a window to the soul if you like. Words can also create a bridge that can link us to another human being as we slowly find ways to share our inner lives with one another, 'building bridges between our divisions, I reach out to you will you reach out to me' – as we sang in our chant earlier on. But to speak of our yearnings takes practice and that's what NVC offers people – the opportunity to practice the skill of deep and compassionate communication.

Marshall Rosenberg writes that "NVC is a powerful means of communication but it goes far beyond that. It is a way of being, thinking and living in the world. Its purpose is to inspire heartfelt connections between ourselves and other people – connections that allow everyone's needs to be met through compassionate giving. It inspires us and others to give from the heart. It also helps us to connect to our inner divinity and to what is alive in us moment to moment."

These skills of deep communication do not come naturally to us, we need to learn them and practice them, and make space in life for real communication to take place. But I think most of us at some times in our lives will have had the experience of being truly, deeply listened to, a sense of being really heard by someone who trusts us and accepts us just as we are. Christian writer Mindy Caliguire describes this as 'sacred listening on holy ground' because she sees us as honouring the divinity in another human being when we really listen to another, when we really listen to ourselves.

Such listening requires us to be patient and curious, to explore in a spirit of 'not knowing' – creating a compassionate flow at a heart level between us. At that deeper level I do believe we enter sacred space, where we begin to overcome the illusion of our separateness and isolation, a sacred space where true connection is possible, a very beautiful place to be. So may it be. Amen.

Sunday Services at Essex Church

4th May, 11am –

‘To See the World as Others See It’

Service led by David Francis Darling

David says this service will be ‘a reflection on the value of seeing life from another’s perspective’.

11th May, 11am –

‘How Free Can Speech Be?’

Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Unitarians have long supported ‘civil and religious liberty the world over’ but what limits might we choose to place upon free speech in our modern world.

18th May, 11am –

‘Making a Difference’

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

In this service we will take time to think about the ways a religious affiliation can help us create a better life for ourselves and for others. Does joining a spiritual community like ours really matter? Join us this Sunday and you’ll be helping to show that it does.

25th May, 11am –

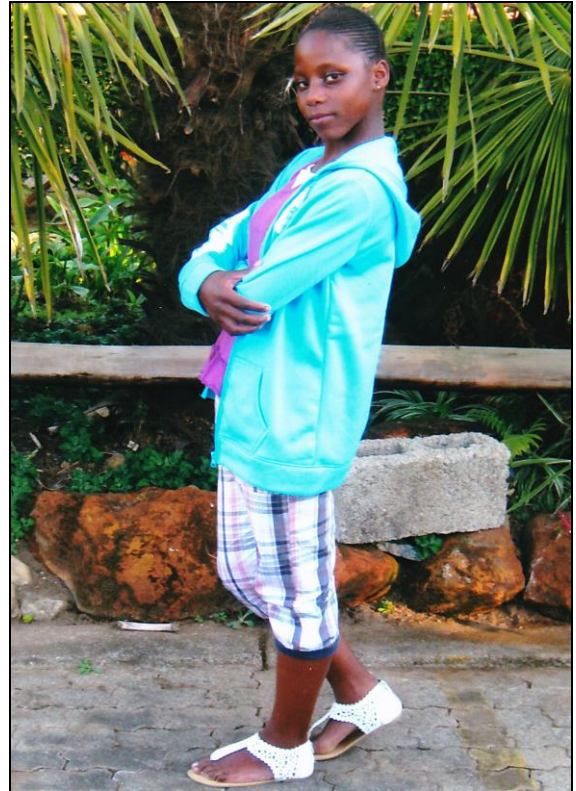
‘All Who Wander Are Not Lost’

Service led by Caroline Blair

Caroline says: ‘hold on to your uncertainties; they will be your best approach to the big truths’.



SOS Children’s Villages



As treasurer I often seem to be asking people for money and I’m really grateful for all the generous giving that goes on here at Essex Church. But it’s that time of year again when I encourage you to be as generous as you are able so that we can raise the £1,000 we have pledged towards the education of Fortunate and Patience who are living and being educated in an SOS Village in Swaziland. We’d be grateful for cheques made payable to Essex Church but with Swaziland Education Project written on the back or the top corner of the cheque. Any additional money we raise will go to support other SOS projects for children affected by warfare, poverty or illness. I’m very aware that a good education will give these two girls a chance in life and your help with giving them that chance, living as they do in one of the smallest African countries where life expectancy is 50 years, is much appreciated.

Caroline Blair

Some excerpts from the update letter on our sponsorship of Fortunate Qiniso & Patience Qinisile received a while ago:

During the Christmas holidays Qiniso visits her paternal family. She helps with domestic chores and enjoys being with them. Qinisile visits her paternal relatives who usually visit her during the year to check on her progress. She enjoys spending time with her blood relatives but is not matured enough to perform many chores. The Mbabane Programme children and staff send warm greetings in appreciation of the continued support you extend to the children. There are currently 1197 children that the programme provides for.