



Kensington Unitarians

The Newsletter

December 2007/January 2008

What's On at Essex Church

- Sunday 2nd December, 11.00am
"Waiting, Hoping" - *Rev. Sarah Tinker*
- Sunday 2nd December, 12.30-3.30pm
"Advent Art and Craft Fair"
- Monday 3rd December, 7.00-9.00pm
Kensington Community Singers (11/11)
- Thursday 6th December, 7.00-9.00pm
RE: "Christmas with Daniel" (part 1/2)
- Sunday 9th December, 11.00am
"Festivals of Light" - *Rev. Sarah Tinker*
- Sunday 9th December, 3.30-5.00pm
"Songs and Silence for the Soul"
- Thursday 13th December, 7.00-9.00pm
Creativity Group: "Creative Potluck"
- Sunday 16th December, 11.00am
"Carol Service" - *Rev. Sarah Tinker*
- Sunday 16th December, 12.30pm
Congregational Christmas Lunch
- Thursday 20th December, 7.00-9.00pm
RE: "Christmas with Daniel" (part 2/2)
- Sunday 23rd December, 11.00am
"Winter Solstice" - *Congregation Service*
- Monday 24th December, 5.00pm
"Contemplating Christmas"
Candlelit Congregational Service
- Sunday 30th December, 11.00am
"Out of Ordinary Time"
Service led by Daniel Hughes
- Sunday 6th January, 11.00am
"The Wise Ones" - *Rev. Sarah Tinker*
- Monday 7th January, 7.00-9.00pm
Kensington Community Singers (1/10)
- Tuesday 8th January, 7.00-9.00pm
Science & Religion: "Dawkins Factor"
- Thursday 10th January, 7.00-9.00pm
Creativity: "Watercolour Mandalas"
- Sunday 13th January, 11.00am
"Unitarians & Science" - *Sarah Tinker*
- Sunday 13th January, 12.30pm
Adult RE: "A Sharing Circle"
- Sunday 13th January, 3.30-5.00pm
"Songs and Silence for the Soul"
- Thursday 17th January, 7.00-9.00pm
Adult RE: "Writing for Our Lives" (1/2)
- Sunday 20th January, 11.00am
"Post-Christianity with Heart"
Service led by Daniel Hughes
- Sunday 20th January, 12.30-2.00pm
"The Review" Rehearsed Play-Reading
- Thursday 24th January, 7.00-9.00pm
Reading Group: "Waterlog"
- Sunday 27th January, 11.00am
"Stories We Live By" - *Rev. Sarah Tinker*
- Thursday 31st January, 7.00-9.00pm
Adult RE: "Writing for Our Lives" (2/2)

A Message from Our Minister...

Winter Rituals



Ritual is one of those words, a word with baggage attached. Much used by theologians and anthropologists, it has sometimes negative connotations in everyday speech – a sense of activities repeated pointlessly, without conscious thought and given undeserved importance.

But if we free the word ritual of this negativity we can I think remind ourselves of something valuable. We are creatures of habit. Our bodies, our minds, our emotions, our spiritual lives all seem to work better when we follow a certain rhythm. Repetition helps to hold us safe in a sometimes chaotic world.

Not that there's anything wrong with chaos either, with its ability to shake us up and bring new perspectives. (Mind you, most of us prefer the chaos that we choose rather than that which life just throws our way!) But at this time of year particularly I think it's good to take a look at the rituals of our lives. What are our rhythms, what do we repeat? What meaning do these rituals have for us? Are we conscious in what we are doing or have our actions become habitual and lost some of their original sparkle and purpose?

Think of an ordinary day perhaps. What do you do and why do you do it? Is there an underlying message in that first cup of tea or coffee of the day or in the way you look out of a particular window or use a special bowl for your cereals? When you put on gloves before braving the winter chill outside, what does this say about how you take care of yourself? What message do your Christmas decorations or lit candles or warm fires shine out to the world?

As the winter takes hold, this can be a time for us to turn inwards, literally and metaphorically. It's a chance to explore ourselves and our inner lives a bit more and to re-assess what is important for us. Are we getting enough of what we truly need to nourish us? Can we find some sense of meaning and purpose in what we are doing, however challenging or mundane it may appear to be?

Here at Essex Church there's lots going on in December and January as we celebrate Christmas and other winter festivals and then start thinking about the year ahead. I look forward to hearing about your winter season rituals.

Season's Greetings!

Rev. Sarah Tinker

In this Month's Newsletter...

** Advent Art and Craft Fair – Sunday 2nd December * Christmas Potluck Lunch and Restaurant Dinner * Christmas RE with Daniel Hughes * Preview of RE Programmes: "Writing for Our Lives" & "The Quest" * Essex Church Membership Forms * Accessible Building Fund – The Story So Far * Multifaith Calendar * Movement Workshops at Essex Church: Yin Yoga and Nia Technique * "The Review" Rehearsed Play-Reading * Creativity Groups: "Creative Potluck" and "Watercolour Mandalas" * Reading Group: "Waterlog" * Science and Religion Group: "The Dawkins Factor" * The Executive Committee Roadshow * and much more!...*

Kensington Unitarians

At Essex Church (founded 1774), Notting Hill Gate

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.

We meet for worship each Sunday at 11.00am. The format of the service varies, and usually includes music, singing, meditation, an address, an opportunity to share joys and concerns, and a programme for children. Our activities also include religious education and spirituality workshops, engagement groups on a variety of themes, meeting for fellowship, a regular chanting session, and quiet meditation. All are welcome to come and join us.

Contact our minister to discuss our unique ceremonies, including child naming services, weddings, blessings, and memorials, which are available to all. Many other groups share our church building. If you are interested in hiring one of our rooms for your own organisation or event please contact our wardens 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

Christmas Potluck Lunch

Sunday 16th December, 12.30pm



We will be having our traditional congregational potluck lunch after the Christmas Carol service on Sunday 16th December. Please put the date in your diary and plan to come along!

Patricia Walker-Hesson will be coordinating the lunch arrangements – and wielding a sign-up sheet – so please think about what food or drink you can offer to provide.

Stewarding/Coffee Rotas



Stewarding:

2 nd December:	Howard Hague
9 th December:	Devika Joshi
16 th December:	David Krisman
23 rd December:	Michael Pritchard
30 th December:	Heidi Ferid
6 th January:	Daniel Hughes
13 th January:	Devika Joshi
20 th January:	Christine Joshi
27 th January:	Christine Joshi

Coffee:

2 nd December:	Gill Hague
9 th December:	Christine Joshi
16 th December:	Heidi Ferid
23 rd December:	Yasmin Pritchard
30 th December:	John Hands
6 th January:	Jo Tye/John Marrow
13 th January:	Christine Joshi
20 th January:	Julia Alden
27 th January:	Juliet Edwards

Please speak to Christine in January if you would be willing to help out with stewarding or coffee duties.

Christmas Eve Dinner

at the Mediterranean Kitchen

Monday 24th December, 7.00pm



After our congregational service on Christmas Eve there will be an opportunity for those of us who are in London for the festive season to go for dinner together.

We have a tradition of going to the Mediterranean Kitchen on Kensington Church Street. The set menu for three courses costs about £25 but there is also an à la carte menu which you could choose from instead. Juliet Edwards will be booking our table (for about 7pm) so please contact her soon so she can count you in.



Advent Art and Craft Fair

Sunday 2nd December, 12.30pm – 3.30pm



Our third Annual Art and Craft Fair is upon us so please do enthuse about it to your family and friends and encourage them come along to our big day on **Sunday 2nd December**.

There will be lots of high-quality hand-made goodies to buy: jewellery, toys, scarves, bags, cakes, greetings cards and more! We will also have refreshments throughout the afternoon.

All the funds raised will go to the building accessibility fund to enable renovation of our church toilets in summer 2008.

Essex Church Membership Forms

Look out in the New Year for Essex Church membership forms, which now need to be completed each year. We will be sending these forms out to everyone who was a member last year or who has asked to join the church during the last year. But if for any reason you do not receive a form in the post by mid January please ask for one when you come along on a Sunday. People usually think about becoming a member after they have been attending Sunday services or other groups for a few months and it is a way of showing that the church is important to you and that you want to support what we do here.

Membership brings a few tangible benefits. It means that I and other people will care about your well-being even more than we do now! You will be able to borrow books from our church library. You get to vote at our AGM or for any other congregational matters that require a vote. There are less tangible benefits too which come with membership of Essex Church. It is good to belong in this sometimes fragmented world of ours. You get to care about people who are different from you and to hear more about their lives. There are opportunities to become involved in the running of the church, if you want to do that. You get to practice saying, "No, not at the moment, thanks" when someone asks you if you would like to join the gardening group or to make the tea on a Sunday morning or to take part in worship. Or you might surprise yourself by saying, "Yes!" to an opportunity to develop new skills or interests.

We Unitarians cannot guarantee that your soul will be saved or that angels will forever keep you safe just because you joined our religious organisation but we can offer you interesting, thoughtful exploration of what it is to be human. If that appeals, do fill in that form.

We suggest an annual membership donation of £36, most of which goes towards our annual quota payment to our national Unitarian General Assembly. Our congregation's management committee is keen to let people know that nobody should be prevented from joining because of financial concerns. If money is an issue, we simply ask people to pay what they can afford. Don't worry either about not being able to attend church regularly. People have busy lives and many commitments. It is good to see people on a Sunday but there are many other ways to keep in touch.

So if you are considering membership of Essex Church but have some questions, do give me a ring or arrange to have a chat sometime so that I can answer your queries.

Kensington Unitarians Becoming a Member of Essex Church



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.

Rev. Sarah Tinker

December Multifaith Calendar



✠ 2nd December –
Advent Sunday – Christian
Advent is the time when Christians prepare for celebrating the birth of Jesus at Christmas. The four Sundays of Advent are often marked with the lighting of candles on an advent crown, culminating with the Christmas candle on 25th December, symbolising the light of Christ coming into the world.

✪ 5th – 12th December – Hanukah – Jewish
Hanukah is the Jewish celebration of the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem, after it was recaptured from the Syrian Greeks in 165 BCE. Candles are lit, one for each of the eight evenings of Hanukah and food cooked with oil is eaten, to remember the miracle with oil that kept the Temple lights burning.

✠ 8th December – Immaculate Conception
of the Blessed Virgin Mary – Christian
The Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, is mainly marked by the Roman Catholic church, to celebrate the doctrine that Mary herself was born free from original sin, leaving her sinless to bear Jesus.

✪ 8th December – Bodhi Day – Buddhist
On Bodhi Day some Buddhists, for example those in the Pure Land tradition, celebrate Gautama's attainment of Enlightenment under the Bodhi tree in Bodhgaya, India.

✪ 20th – 22nd December Eid-ul-Adha – Muslim
This major Muslim festival marks the end of the Hajj. Animals are sacrificed by pilgrims at Mina, on the way back to Makkah from Mount Arafat, in commemoration of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son, Ishmael. Muslims around the world share in the celebrations, sacrificing an animal if they can afford it, the meat being distributed to the poor and shared with family and friends.

✠ 25th December –
Christmas Day – Christian
Christmas Day celebrates the birth of Jesus who Christians believe to be the Son of God. Gifts are reminders of the offerings brought to the infant Jesus in Bethlehem.



February Newsletter Deadline



The deadline for submitting items for the next double-issue is **Sunday 13th January**. Please send items (such as poems, artwork, quotes, articles, notices, etc...) to Jane Blackall or any committee member before this date.

Thank you!!!

Healing Our World

In September we held a healing evening for our world here at Essex Church. It was very moving to hear people's hopes and fears for our planet. We ended by speaking about things we particularly appreciated about planet earth and here are some of the responses:

*trees and all those plants that
 break up asphalt runways*

loving kindness

*clean water and all those wonderful
 spreading expanses of water on our planet*

*humanity's ability to work together when the chips
 are down - love, kindness and caring for one another*

I love the sunlight

*how delicious it is to swim in the sea
 and float on my back*

Here's a poem that Bert Clough, a member of the Unitarian congregation at Godalming, wrote about the evening. Thank you Bert.

Rev. Sarah Tinker

Healing the World

we
 sit together
 within a
 sacred circle
 to
 heal
 our
 fractured
 world

handslinkinghands
 thoughtslinkingthoughts

our
 eyes
 so s l o w l y open
 our
 hands
 so s l o w l y part

the
 world
 is
 still
 broken

but
 ourpainourjoy
 are
 one

Bert Clough

A New "Choir-for-All" Initiative at Essex Church

Kensington Community Singers

Mondays: 3rd December, 7-9pm
and from 7th January in the New Year



We have recently launched a new community choir here at Essex Church. This choir is open to all – you don't need any qualifications except enthusiasm – and we're actively striving to welcome in local people alongside members of the congregation.

The sessions are great fun. Jen Hazel, our choir leader, has been teaching us a wide selection of songs from diverse sources. We will be giving our first public performance in the Sunday service on 2nd December

Donations to cover the cost of running the choir are invited (£3/£6/£9 per session – a sliding scale according to your income). Contact Jen or Sarah T to find out more...

Bankside Frost Fair

Outside the Globe Theatre and Tate Modern



Weekend of 14th – 16th December 2007

This will be the fifth annual Bankside Frost Fair. It celebrates when Londoners took to the ice as the River Thames froze over during the winter hundreds of years ago. This year is the 400 year anniversary since the first ever Frost Fair in 1607.

The Frost Fair will be opened by a spectacular lantern parade on the Friday evening and on Saturday there will be a display of livery men aboard their boats. There will be fun activities including "hug a husky", watch as ice sculptors bring blocks of ice to life, enjoy a variety of street theatre, participate in workshops, warm up with food and mulled wine and do some ast minute shopping at the winter market.

Our Accessible Building Fund: The Fundraising Story So Far



Back in July, at the 30th birthday party for our building, we officially launched our Accessible Building Fund. The aim is to raise enough money to re-design our toilets so that a wheelchair user can access them easily. At present the doorway and corridor are too narrow and there is no turning space. As the current toilets are coming to the end of their working life this is a good opportunity for us to improve them. There is also some discussion about the wisdom of renovating our kitchen, which is showing its age, at the same time.

The church building is so often in use, it makes sense to aim for building work to happen in August 2008 when rental income dips anyway. We have yet to seek up to date quotes for this building work but rough estimates suggest we need to raise around £30,000 for the toilet project, increasing to £50,000 if we include the kitchen. This is a very large sum of money but the good news is that progress on fundraising has already begun.

The church management committee decided to put 10% of our lettings income towards the project as well as all the proceeds of gift aiding of donations. We raised money at the 30th birthday party, the photo exhibition, and concerts given by our musicians. Several people occasionally donate their preaching fees to the fund and our minister is donating all her fees for extra services and ceremonies. We have also received two very generous individual donations of £1,000 each and a further £200 donation. We are putting the cash collection given at services on the last Sunday of each month towards the Fund.

The total raised so far amounts to over £7,000! Many thanks to everyone concerned for their generosity of both time and money.

Our next two fundraising events are the Arts and Crafts Fair on 2nd December and our Silent Auction which will be running until the 16th December. Every donation, small or large will make a difference. The Management Committee is keen to find people with ideas and expertise to see this project progressing well – so do get in touch if you have experience of fund-raising, building work and project management. In the last two years we raised the money to renovate the church front garden, which is now looking so lovely. Wouldn't it be good to have those wheelchair accessible toilets by autumn 2008?

Juliet Edwards, Treasurer

Our Wardens' Column

What's On in Our Busy Building...

Throughout November the Groundworks team were renovating the front of the church. They spent three weeks here, losing only one day to rain (so thanks to all those who responded to Sarah's request to pray for good weather!). We're very grateful for all their hard work and look forward to getting the full benefit of it next spring when the new planting starts to get established.



Our most unusual booking in November (possibly ever) was from the TV company next door to audition a monkey. This enabled David to say the immortal line "if it's a real monkey, I'll have to check with the vicar". Thankfully all went smoothly, and we're glad to say the monkey did get the part.

The yoga group continues to meet in the Hall four mornings a week and didn't seem worried by the musical (and unmusical) offerings from next door while we hosted the AMB Music exams in November. On Sunday 20th January their teacher, Lynne Pinette, is offering a free workshop for a gentler form of yoga which is suitable for all ages, Yin Yoga. If there is sufficient interest we hope to offer a weekly class in the New Year.

There's another concert from the Piano Circle on Monday December 3rd. Friday 14th December is the Interfaith Ministers Christmas Service (6.45-8.15pm). They've booked the Hall as well as the Church to serve mince pies and other refreshments, so it should be quite a festive event. Their first service of 2008 is Friday 25th January.

The Guild of Pastoral Psychology are holding a winter celebration on Thursday 6th December and on Tuesday 11th December a Russian Community group will be celebrating here.

Regular bookings also carry on in December, but take different breaks over Xmas and New Year so do check before coming in. The meditation group that started here last month, Bhakti Marga (www.bhaktimarga.org) has been filling the church with beautiful chanting every Thursday evening from 6.30-7.30pm. This group draws on both Hindu and Christian traditions, practicing Om chanting and silent meditation. Listen out for them if you're here for a Thursday night engagement group.

Good Wishes at the turning of the year

David Berridge and Jenny Moy



Yin Yoga - Free Introductory Workshop Sunday 20th January, 2.30-4.30pm, at Essex Church

Lynne Pinette, an experienced Yoga teacher who has been running self-practice Ashtanga classes at the Church for several months would like to start a small Yin Yoga group, possibly on Sunday or Friday afternoons.

Yin Yoga gently stretches and rehabilitates the connective tissue in our bodies, especially around the joints of the hips, pelvis and spine which tend to shorten as we age - our joints become 'shrink-wrapped'.

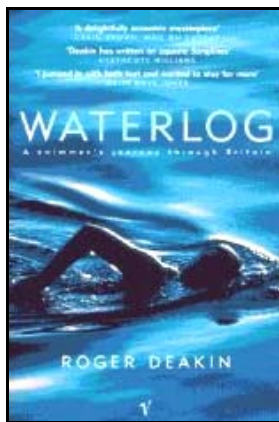
Yin Yoga stretches the connective tissue around the joints through holding single yoga poses for several minutes. It is suitable for people of all ages and all levels - yes, even complete beginners.

For more general information about Yin Yoga see www.yinyoga.com

Reading Engagement Group

“Waterlog” by Roger Deakin

Thursday 24th January, 7.00-9.00pm



The reading engagement group's next topic of discussion will be “Waterlog” by Roger Deakin. This book was chosen by Sarah Tinker and will be the focus of our next reading group meeting on **Thursday 24th January**.

Information from Amazon UK:

“The British Isles are blessed with a whole variety of waterways often encompassed within beautiful valleys, rolling hills, green fields and rugged coast lines. The presence of a flowing stream, waterfall or an idyllic pond can enhance a picturesque landscape. While swimming in the moat located in his own back garden, inspired by thoughts of his son's current quest travelling in Australia and John Cheever's classic short story, The Swimmer, Roger Deakin decided he would undertake his own adventure and swim across Britain. ‘Waterlog’ is Deakin's account of his journey. He seeks out tarns high in the hills of north Wales, swims with salmon in Somerset and eels in the Fens. He describes the nature he sees around him from his unusual perspective inches above water level. His love of swimming away from the confines of a swimming pool comes through strongly in his writing. Wild swimming is an unusual hobby in modern society as we are constantly told how our rivers and lakes have become polluted by large industries disposing of waste via waterways and chemical fertilisers washing off farmers fields into our rivers. Deakin has produced a deeply personal account of his journey. He informs us of any cultural, historical or geographic points of interest in a highly descriptive style.”

All are welcome to join the book group. Please do try to read the books before the meeting if you're planning to come along. It would also aid discussion if you pick out favourite passages to share. Members of the group take turns in choosing books so we read a wide variety of material.

The book group will be having a break in December.

If you want to read ahead... February's book choice will be “Year of Wonders” by Geraldine Brooks

Creativity Engagement Group

“Creative Potluck”

Thursday 13th December, 7.00-9.00pm



“Watercolour Mandalas”

Thursday 10th January, 7.00-9.00pm



In December, the creativity group will be holding a “Creative Potluck” evening, at the suggestion of Patricia Walker-Hesson. Everyone is invited to bring along bits and bobs of craft materials - paper, foil, pens, paint, glue, embellishments - whatever you like! Then we'll spend the evening playing with whatever materialises and create something quite unexpected...

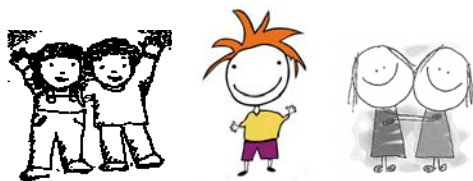
In January, Patricia will be introducing a method of painting watercolour mandalas, so if you have your own paints/brushes and so on it'd be very helpful if you could bring whatever you've got along for the evening. However, we will try to have some spare sets of watercolours on hand, for everybody to use.

As usual, if these particular activities don't take your fancy, you are most welcome to bring your own craftwork along, and simply sit with us in good company for the evening. There are usually biscuits and various other goodies to be eaten too...

If you would like to know more about the creativity engagement group please do talk to Jane Blackall or Patricia Walker. Photographs of work from several of the projects we've worked on over the last few years can be found on our website: www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk/creativity.html

A forthcoming Unitarian Youth Event in our District

BLAH Unitarian Fun Day for 7-14 year olds



Saturday 8th December, 10.30-4.00pm
at Meadow Chapel, Godalming

This will be a day of Fun, Friendship, Art and Drama for 7-14 year olds, led by the denomination's Youth Officer, Rev. John Harley.

Arrivals: 10:30 for 11:00 am. Finish 4:00 pm.

*Drinks and biscuits provided;
please bring a packed lunch.*

The day will include an opportunity to participate in creating shared worship for the Family Service at 11am on 9th December at Meadow.

Contact John on 020 867 09280 or email
jharley@unitarian.org.uk to reserve a place,
or speak to Louise Baumberg (01483 537 206).

Songs and Silence for the Soul: Chanting and Singing at Essex Church



9th December, 13th January,
10th February, 9th March, 13th April
from 3.30 to 5.00pm

Suggested Donation: £2.00

An opportunity to sing chants from the world's faith traditions and to sit together in candlelit silence. All are welcome, no experience is necessary. A space in which to re-connect with yourself, one another and with whatever you hold to be divine.

Phone 020 7221 6514 for more information
or email sarah@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Winter Silent Auction



This winter, we will be holding a silent auction here at Essex Church, to raise money for the building accessibility fund. Not sure what a silent auction is? Well read on with these FAQ's!

So, what is a silent auction?

A silent auction is a place where people can bid donated goods and services in a written book. You can always revisit the book anytime before the auction closes to bid higher if someone else has outbid you.

What kind of items can be donated?

Well, you can donate anything you think would sell in an auction. You can donate things such as handmade items, baked goods, or items of value that you have that might be searching for a better home, such as a picture or set of books. If you have a special skill you could donate that.

Services? Such as what? I don't really have any professional skills to donate.

Oh, you'd be surprised what kinds of services people would like to have! Here are some examples of services you could donate:

- Cooking a dinner for somebody
- Being a chauffeur for an evening
- An evening of babysitting
- A day of garden work
- Computer advice or repair

Those are just some examples of what you could donate.

So keep an eye out for the auction and be ready to donate and bid when it opens! Donations and bidding opened on Sunday 29th October and will close on Sunday 16th December (the day of the Christmas Carol Service).

Happy bidding all!

Jen Hazel

**STOP PRESS!!! Listen out for important
announcements about the auction:
the closing date may be extended...**

Dark Spirits, Shadow Dancers

Eight of us spent a Saturday here at Essex Church exploring our shadow selves. Through music, movement, art, sound and writing we delved into the aspects of ourselves that usually remain hidden. We expressed some of the richness, creativity and power that lie within us.



Here are some brief written responses to the day:

*I don't know the answers
I will never know the answers.
There are no answers,
There are only more and better questions.*

Tell me a story. I love stories.

Courage is learning to TRUST that the outcome doesn't matter.

Not knowing where the brush is going next.

*Moving bodies, drum beat guides us, artists sway, colours swirl.
Watch this space where shadows are emerging.*

*Moving into the depths and back into the light.
Sometimes just turning up is all it takes.*

*Although I often hide it, I embody a free and
creative spirit that loves to come out and play.*

Inner and outer freedom.

What if it's all allowed?

Spontaneous laughter out of the darkness.

I love being able to experience this space.

We really enjoyed reading this poem, written by Jewel Mathieson, a Five Rhythms teacher. Gabrielle Roth created Five Rhythms as a dance and meditation framework through which people could express themselves more fully and deeply. Gabrielle has written a number of fascinating books including *Sweat Your Prayers*.

Rev. Sarah Tinker

We Have Come to be Danced

We have come to be danced
not the pretty dance
not the pretty, pick me, pick me dance
but the claw our way back into the belly
of the sacred, sensual animal dance
the unhinged, unplugged cat is out of its box dance
the holding the precious moment in the palms
of our hands and feet dance.
We have come to be danced
not the jiffy booby, shake your booty for him dance
but the wring the sadness from our skin dance
the blow the chip off our shoulder dance
the slap the apology from our posture dance.
We have come to be danced
not the monkey see, monkey do dance
one, two dance like you
one, two, three dance like me dance
but the grave robber, tomb stalker
tearing scabs & scars open dance
the rub the rhythm raw against our souls dance.
We have come to be danced
not the nice invisible, self conscious shuffle
but the matted hair flying, voodoo mama
shaman shakin' ancient bones dance
the strip us from our castings, return our wings
sharpen our claws & tongues dance
the shed dead cells and slip into
the luminous skin of love dance.
We have come to be danced
not the hold our breath and wallow in the
shallow end of the floor dance
but the meeting of the trinity; the body,
breath & beat dance
the shout hallelujah from the top of our thigh dance
the mother may I?
yes you may take ten giant leaps dance
the ollie ollie oxen Free Free Free dance
the everyone can come to our heaven dance.
We have come to be danced
where the kingdoms collide
in the cathedral of the flesh
to burn back into the light
to unravel, to play, to fly, to pray
to root in skin sanctuary
We have come to be danced
WE HAVE COME

Jewel Mathieson

Snow Falls

*In memoriam, Corporal Edward Dyer V.C.
Killed in action, The Somme, 1916, Aged 20.*

Snow falls
on graves concealed
snow falls
on new landscape revealed

Snow falls
no birds sing
snow falls
no bells ring
Snow falls

he lies beneath
snow falls
twenty years of life
Snow falls
eighty years of death
snow falls
on unending strife.

Snow falls
on wintry heath
snow falls
on each withered leaf
Snow falls
after summer's heat
snow falls
on the lovers seat
Snow falls
where did she go when he left?
snow falls
on their hopes bereft.

Snow falls
snow falls
'The march from Mons was a nightmare'
Snow falls
snow falls
Just his voice still brisk
snow falls
snow falls
from a twig-scratched disk.
Snow falls
snow falls
on four generations
snow falls
snow falls
on still-warring factions.



John Hands



*"The world does not hold thee;
thou thyself art the world which
so strongly imprisons thee."*

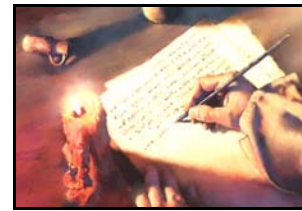
*Angelus Silesius (1624-77)
Sent in by Diana Ward*

Exciting New Year Activities to make a note of in your diaries:

Adult RE at Essex Church in 2008

"Writing for Our Lives"

Thursdays 17th and 31st January, 7-9pm



A 2 session workshop in which we will look at some popular readings used recently in worship here at Essex Church and then have a go at writing short passages about our own experiences that may form useful readings or meditations to be used in the future here and elsewhere. These workshops will be ideal for anyone who has ever had anything happen to them and then reflected upon it. No writing skill or experience is needed - just a willingness to tell your story.

Adult RE: "The Quest"

7th, 21st Feb, 6th, 22nd Mar, 3rd, 17th April, 1st, 10th May



Some years back when our old friend Simon John Barlow and I were visiting the spiritual community in Findhorn we met some people who were about to publish a course called The Quest, which they described as:

*"A unique guide to the spiritual journey
designed to help you find your own answers"*

I have used many of its exercises in my own life as well as in other workshops and indeed worship, but this is the first time that we will have run this course in its original format here at Essex Church.

Our plan is to hold 6 Thursday evening sessions with 2 Saturday afternoons, starting in February and running through to May. In order to deepen the process we will make this a closed group so have a look at your diaries now and see if you can commit to attending at least three-quarters of the sessions. If so, book your place and we will let you know how to order the accompanying book (cost around £10). The Quest involves regular spiritual practice and self-reflection and is a great way to deepen your exploration of your life.

Rev. Sarah Tinker

Glory of Geese

Viewed from above or afar, like rice strewed over the burial ground,
The church withdrawn, not foremost in appearance, the bridal pair long since
Swept away in the dark cars. Or like a thousand crumbs of discarded white bread
Scattered over the field, after the famished multitudes have sauntered on.
Amazingly unaggressive, lurching from side to side, or hobbling like
Elderly veterans flocking together to talk of old times. Or
Launching into the muddy brook, with scarcely liquid enough to submerge
Their orange-yellow feet. But not minding, not complaining at all:
No arrogant pecking or hierarchical shoving, affable in the extreme; just
Wading or splashing, or calling and cackling, everywhere assuming
Life is a benefice, just an open field, with amazing opportunity to flock
Neighbourly together, between no perceptible boundaries. Blissfully they
Maunder and trundle, assuredly free-ranging, with not the smallest consciousness
Of hour or day, or month or year, or time, or Christmas.



John Hands

“The Review”



**A Rehearsed Play-Reading at Essex Church
with John Hands and Harold Lorenzelli**

Sunday 20th January, 12.45-2.15pm

John Hands says of his play, “The Review”:

“The play is about two elderly theatrical knights who, after death, meet in a limbo between life and after-life. They find they are faced with a review of their past lives, both of which contain dark episodes they had hoped to conceal. In the process of doing this, they progress from being just drinking chums to a deeper level of relationship and religious awareness... The reading lasts for about 1 ½ hours and it is hoped there may be a short period afterwards in which the audience can put questions or make comments if they wish.”

John Hands

Nia Technique

Holistic Movement Sessions:

Introductory Session led by Sonya Leite

Sunday 13th January, 2.00-3.00pm

Nia is holistic movement for body and soul. It is an expressive movement practice promoting fitness, creativity and wellbeing. Fusing dance, yoga, tai chi and martial arts, Nia provides a holistic workout and leaves you feeling energised, relaxed and centred. It suits any level of fitness, age and experience, working from where you are now.

Nia's barefoot, grounded approach maximizes body efficiency and teaches you to move consciously in a gentler way. Dance movements are mixed with subtle therapeutic suggestions and visualization techniques that help you develop awareness and heighten sensation. The result is a fusion of movement styles that is incredibly free and liberating. Moving between simple choreography (form) and freedom of movement (freedance), Nia classes combine the grace and expressiveness of dance, the power and explosiveness of martial arts, and the wisdom and stillness of yoga and tai chi.

Sonya knows Essex Church well because of her training with the Interfaith Ministry starting back in 2002.

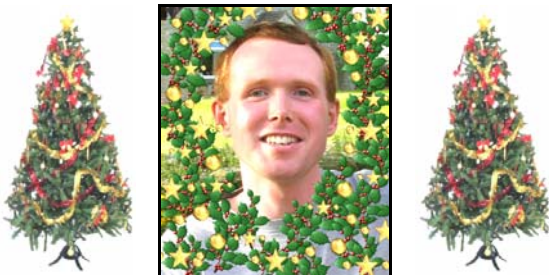
We are holding this introductory session to see how many people might be interested in a regular Nia class here at Essex Church so do book your place now or let us know if you want further information about future classes. The cost will be only £5.00



A tiny colouring picture for Hanukkah (5th-12th December).

Christmas with Daniel

Thursdays 6th and 20th December, 7-9.00pm



Christmas is the one traditional festival none of us can avoid. Are you a lover or a loather of Christmas? Would you welcome the chance to expand or renew your understanding of the festival? Can Christmas be more than biblical literalism on one hand and soulless consumerism on the other?

These are just some of the questions we shall explore together during our two gatherings. To aid us we shall reflect upon personal experience, diverse philosophical interpretations, the contemporary role of myth and native folk customs. By creating a safe and warm community we should come to discover what the Christmas session can contribute to our spiritual quest.

Sharing and learning together to make Christmas a truly insightful festival for Unitarians. Expect to eat one (or two) mince pies or other Christmassy treats as we relax together.

Daniel Hughes

Emperor Ashoka's Edicts



Several people asked to be reminded of the conclusion to Sarah's address in November, which was about the 3rd century BCE Emperor Ashoka and about our own inner tyrants, so here it is:

In conclusion then, I wonder what we can learn from Emperor Ashoka and his Edicts. I wonder if the story of a tyrant who turned to peace and brought religious tolerance and herbal medicine and free resting places for the weary and who reminded his people to look after wildlife and preserve forests – I wonder if this story has a message for us today.

And I wonder how well we all know our inner tyrants. I wonder how much the harsh parts of us have been softened, or hardened, by our life experiences. I wonder what our world could be like if all our tyrants were softened; if instead of pursuing bullying and frightening ways, they devoted themselves to carving benevolent messages to one another, and to themselves, on the rocks along the roadside.

I wonder what your carved messages might say?

Rev. Sarah Tinker



Cartoon inspired by the story of Emperor Ashoka - Nathan Miller



Cracked Healers

A Message from our Student
Assistant Minister, Daniel Hughes

Have you ever met someone who has lived life safely wrapped up in tissue, kept at the back of the shelf and only occasionally brought out, always in perfect condition? – I am guessing not. From the day of our birth we are all being chipped, our glaze is slowly beginning to fade and from time to time, we fall over, acquiring some damage. This came to mind after recently visiting the Doris Salcedo installation, ‘Shibboleth’, at the Tate Modern. Salcedo has created a long, snaking crack across the vast length of the old Turbine Hall. Martin Herbert interprets this fracturing of the concrete floor as Salcedo encouraging us to ‘confront discomforting truths about our world and about ourselves with absolute candidness and without self-deception.’ No matter the analogy, the observation is an instructive one.

Over the past few months, I have suffered some heavy cracks – principally the death of a close family member. It is events such as these that split open a void within our hearts. Gratefully, the void is absorbed over time and the pain we experienced can become illuminating rather than a prolonged darkness.

Towards Repairing the Cracks: From my experience, it is healthy to acknowledge the cracks in our past. I have found the discipline of contemplation crucial in steadily enlightening the wounds of my heart. It is also clear to me that our emotional pain can affect us physically through illness. One suggestion I have found useful is to initiate the expression of pain through dialogue and creativity rather than burying it away. This opportunity to put our pain ‘out there’ releases the stress that clouds the mind and scares the body. We need to be loving and patient with ourselves, remembering this is a process of a lifetime not a project for a free afternoon.

Community of Healing: My vocation to the Unitarian Ministry is somehow located within my passionate belief that personal healing comes about through a spiritual practice of self-awareness, within a community. The Kensington Unitarian community is our place to contemplate, express ourselves through creativity and by walking alongside one another become mutual healers of the heart and mind. Our worship is the opportunity to bring forth in sound and symbol some of our painful cracks. It provides the opportunity to heal ourselves through the hope that our lives can burst forth with joy.

Whether you go to the Tate Modern or not, remember, be attentive to the cracks, you don’t want to fall all the way down.

Daniel Hughes



“The spiritual life is one of constant choices. One of the most important choices is the choice of the people with whom we develop close intimate relationships. We have only a limited amount of time in our lives. With whom do we spend it and how? That’s probably one of the most decisive questions of our lives.

To whom do we go for advice? With whom do we spend our free evenings? With whom are we going on vacation? Sometimes we speak or act as if we have little choice in the matter. Sometimes we act as though we will be lucky if there is anyone who wants to be our friend. But that is a very passive and even fatalistic attitude. If we truly believe that God loves us with an unlimited, unconditional love, then we can trust that there are women and men in this world who are eager to show us that love. But we cannot wait passively until someone shows up to offer us friendship. As people who trust in God’s love, we must have the courage and the confidence to say to someone through whom God’s love becomes visible to us: “I would like to get to know you, I would like to spend time with you. I would like to develop a friendship with you. What about you?”

There will be no’s, there will be the pain of rejection. But when we determine to avoid all no’s and all rejections, we will never create the milieu where we can grow stronger and deepen in love. God became human for us to make divine love tangible. That is what incarnation is all about. That incarnation not only happened long ago, but it continues to happen for those who trust that God will give us the friends we need. But the choice is ours!”

Henri J. M. Nouwen

Engagement Groups Training Day

At Essex Church we have several groups described as 'engagement groups', the most regular of which are the book group and the creativity group. 'Engagement Group' is the term used for a group which meets at the church not just to share an activity but to encourage closeness, mutual support and communication. Whatever attractions are on offer – other churches have music groups, hiking groups etc – engagement groups have a structure, even a bit of ritual attached. Every aspect is there for a purpose, from the chalice lighting which acts as a little punctuation mark, separating the hurriedness of the day from the island of serenity in the group, to the emphasis on quiet listening. 'Point scoring' debates are not encouraged.



In large congregations engagement groups allow smaller groups to get to know each other better and gain more sense of intimacy. In small churches engagement groups are a good way of attracting, supporting and retaining new members, and of making existing members feel more involved in the life of the church.

This type of slightly ritualised gathering takes a bit of getting used to. Even the fact of being listened to in silence is disconcerting at first. So on 10th November The Rev. Jim Robinson from the Hampstead congregation and Jane Blackall from ours led a training day at Rosslyn Hill Chapel for those with an interest in running or helping with engagement groups. As always, it was fascinating to hear the experiences of those from different churches and to compare notes on what has worked well and what has uncovered problems.

As is only fitting for a training session about engagement groups, this one was run as an engagement group, with periods of quiet contemplation, readings and invitations to contribute one at a time while others listened. We discussed the intentions behind setting up engagement groups, the 'covenants' that should be adhered to, which are the nuts and bolts of how to treat everyone with respect, and how to deal with problems that might arise. We also discussed exactly what 'listening to others' entails, and what makes the experience of being listened to feel supportive.

As one of the readings, from Margaret Wheatley's 'Turning to One Another' said, "*Today we are more fragmented and isolated from one another than ever before. We seek consolation in everything except each other. We've forgotten the source of true contentment and well-being. As the world becomes more complex and fearful, we need each other to find our way through the darkness. We need time to sit together, to listen, to worry and dream together. I hope we can reclaim conversation as our route back to each other and as the path forward to a hopeful future.*"

This is what we hope engagement groups can achieve. I know I speak on behalf of those from our church who went to the training session if I thank both Jim and Jane for a very thoughtfully put together and valuable day. I promise it was not a negative reaction that made almost everyone walk out smiling at the end then rush into the nearest pub.

Caroline Blair

"We All Come from the Goddess"

We all come from the Goddess
and to her we shall return
like a drop of rain
flowing to the ocean.

Hoof and horn, Hoof and Horn
all that dies shall be reborn
Corn and grain, Corn and grain,
All that falls shall rise again.

Rowan and Willow Songsmith attended "Songs and Silence for the Soul" at the end of October 2006 and taught us this chant. I remembered it when the season came round again and wanted to say thanks for teaching it to us.

Sara Frith



*"Spirit of winter rest, help us to enjoy your peace in this quiet place.
Remind us to pause during this season.
Grant us awareness; keep our gratitude fresh each day.
May the songs in our heart be blessings and insights to us and to others
and may compassion always shine forth from the depths of our hearts."*

Christine C. Robinson, UUA Worship Web

An important Unitarian event in London this month...

Meet and Question the GA's Executive Committee

London Road Show at Essex Hall
Saturday 15th December, 12 - 4pm



All Unitarians are invited to attend a series of regional 'Road Shows' in the coming weeks and months.

These open forums have been organised by our General Assembly to give the membership a chance to come and hear - and question - the Executive Committee. Members of the Executive are expected to briefly outline what's been achieved since the new structures were introduced in April 2006, and to explain their priorities. Members will be encouraged to raise concerns and questions about all matters affecting our denomination and its work.

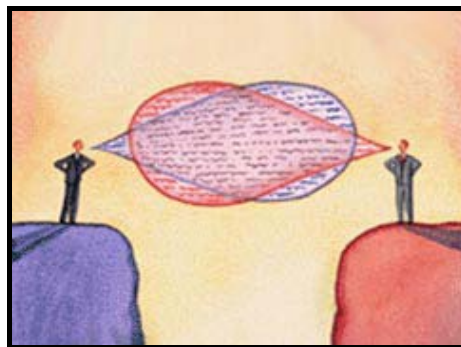
The General Assembly hopes this will not only provide lively debate, but will lead to greater clarity and a stronger sense of purpose at all levels of our Unitarian and Free Christian movement, so that the ambitious goals set by our Annual Meetings can be achieved.

Please put this event in your diary and come along to get more involved in our Unitarian denomination.

Science and Religion

A Continuing Engagement Group at Essex Church

An engagement group started here at Essex Church back in the autumn. Each month we will explore a key contemporary issue in which science and religion are actively engaged. There have been three sessions so far.



The sessions are led by different facilitators who will present the issues for further exploration by the group. Through study, listening and speaking we consider some of the challenges that science and religion bring to our society and its varied responses to the rapid developments we are living through. Forthcoming sessions are:

Tuesday 8th January, 7.00-9.00pm
"Religion and the Dawkins Factor"
Led by Howard Hague

5th February: "Cosmology"
Led by Will Lyons

4th March: "The Psychology of Prejudice"
Led by Caroline Blair

Albert Einstein: *"Science without religion is lame.
Religion without science is blind."*

What do you think?

God Rest Ye Unitarians...

Gods rest ye, Unitarians, let nothing you dismay;
Remember there's no evidence there was a Christmas Day;
When Christ was born is just not known, no matter what they say,
O, Tidings of reason and fact, reason and fact,
Glad tidings of reason and fact...

Our current Christmas Customs come from Persia and from Greece,
From Solstice celebrations of the ancient Middle East.
This whole darn Christmas spiel is just another pagan feast,
O, Tidings of reason and fact, reason and fact,
Glad tidings of reason and fact...

Sent in by Patricia Walker-Hesson



Sunday Services at Essex Church in December and January

Services led by Rev. Sarah Tinker except where otherwise stated.

2nd December – “Waiting, Hoping”

In this service, which marks the start of Advent, we shall be considering themes of anticipation, hope, patience (and impatience!) and the part they play in our lives, both material and spiritual. We will be joined by some members of the newly formed Kensington Community Singers who meet in our building on Monday evenings. This will be their debut performance. The service will be followed by our Advent Arts and Crafts Fair. ***This will be a special service so do bring your friends.***



9th December – “Festivals of Light”

This week our worship will focus on religious festivals with a theme of lights that shine in the darkness – Hannukah, Bodhi day, Diwali, the Feast of St Lucia. At this dark time of the year how can light help us along the way? What myths do the world’s religions tell to enlighten us?

16th December – Christmas Carol Service

Come and enjoy a good sing as we celebrate the festive season together with carols old and new. We will be welcoming our regular quartet of singers who will help us raise the roof at this traditional Christmas celebration.

23rd December – “Winter Solstice”

Service led by Daniel Hughes and the Congregation.

We will mark the solstice with this midwinter service.

24th December – “Contemplating Christmas”

Service led by Daniel Hughes and the Congregation.

We will gather for a service crafted from material offered by congregation members. You are invited, towards the end of your preparations, to be apart of this community for reflection and grounding. Begin your Christmas mindfully with this intimate Christmas service.

30th December – “Out of Ordinary Time”

Service led by Daniel Hughes

In this service we will be exploring the value of having a period within the year to reconnect to our spiritual heart and mind. The period between Christmas and New Year can be such a time.

6th January – “The Wise Ones”

The Feast of Epiphany commemorates the visit of the wise men to the infant Jesus. The Sikh community celebrate the birth of their last Guru, Guru, Gobind Singh, on January 5th. What can we learn from the actions of wise beings throughout the ages? What messages do their stories bring to humanity?

13th January – “Unitarians and Science”

Linking in with our science and religion engagement group, this service will be looking at the importance of science to Unitarians and the links between scientific exploration and our liberal faith. Can science and religion sit together harmoniously in both a lecture theatre and a church or does one of them have to wait outside in the foyer?

20th January – “Post-Christianity with Heart”

Service led by Daniel Hughes

In this service we will be considering the relevance and insights around understanding Unitarian philosophy and community as a distinct spiritual path; getting beyond the ideological debates and returning to the heart of the matter.

27th January – “Stories We Live By”

At the start of National Storytelling Week we will consider the importance of narrative in human lives and the way storytelling shapes our existence and our very identity. Is it true, did we make it up? Does it matter? Come and decide for yourselves.

Bodywork Sessions:

Available on Mondays here at Essex Church between 10.00am - 4.00pm

Using a combination of massage, aromatherapy and craniosacral therapy, Fiona Watson (ITEC dip.) can provide individual sessions to meet each client's unique requirements. For full details please phone Fiona on 07960 758068.

