



Kensington Unitarians

Newsletter: December 2010 / January 2011

What's On in Dec/Jan:

Wednesday 1st December, 7pm
Committee Meeting

Thursday 2nd December, 7-9pm
'Soul Poetry for Advent'
Led by Carole Grace and Sarah T

Sunday 5th December, 11am
"I Wish I Could Speak Like Music"
Led by Rev. John Harley

Thursday 9th December, 7-9pm
'Soul Poetry for Advent'
Led by Carole Grace and Sarah T

Sunday 12th December, 11am
"Animals and Christmas"
Led by Rev Sarah Tinker

Sunday 12th December, 12.30pm
Small-Group Communion
Led by Jane Blackall

Sunday 12th December, 12.30pm
'A Christmas Miracle'
A short story by Truman
Capote read by Scott Varland

Sunday 12th December, 2-3.00pm
Nia Technique
Class led by Sonya Leite

Tuesday 14th December, 7-9pm
Creativity Group:
'Christmas Decorations'

Thursday 16th December, 7-9pm
'Soul Poetry for Advent'
Led by Carole Grace and Sarah T

Sunday 19th December, 11am
"Christmas Carol Service"
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 19th December, 12.30pm
Congregational Potluck Lunch

Thursday 24th December, 5pm
Candlelit Christmas Eve Service

Sunday 2nd January, 11am
**"Honest to God:
Promises We Can Keep"**
Led by Congregation Members

CONTINUED ON BACK PAGE...

A Message from our Minister: Intangible Heritage

It was only this week that I found out that UNESCO (the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization) has a special committee which decides each year what should be added to their List of Intangible Cultural Heritage In Need of Urgent Safeguarding. The committee met in November and discussed such cultural treats as the scissors dance from Peru, a Turkish oil wrestling festival, falconry from the Middle East, flamenco dance from Spain, an end of winter bread and fire festival from Belgium, gingerbread craft from Croatia, musical instruments made from black bamboo in Indonesia and a hopping procession from Luxembourg. Their website is a veritable feast for anthropologists and all of us who are intrigued by human creativity and diversity, as each entry has a written description with accompanying slides and videos. Trawling through their photos cannot fail to raise a warm smile or an intrigued question.



As we move towards the Christmas season I am aware of how few rituals and traditions we still have here in Britain. The Christmas lights in Oxford Street probably do not deserve listing as an Intangible Cultural Heritage. Yet to be without traditions is indicative perhaps of a less grounded and rooted way of life. Traditions give us a sense of continuity and belonging. They are 'the things that we do' and we are identified by them.

Many traditions are indeed traditions; their origins are lost in the mists of time. But at some time or another they must have been celebrated for the first time. And that perhaps gives us permission to start something new. It's in that spirit that we are holding a 'Celebration of Animals' service on December 12th this year. At the time of writing we have had positive responses from a Labrador called Buster and a spiky African hedgehog but even if you don't have an obliging pet to bring along there will be time to talk about animals you love and appreciate.

Some of our other Christmas activities here at Essex Church already have a traditional feel to them – the Carol Service with bring and share lunch afterwards, the candlelit Christmas Eve service, followed by a meal in a local restaurant. In our own lives I wonder if some simple traditions can help us to find a spiritual depth at this time of year. It is so easy to become wearied by the insistent consumerism of this so-called festive season or to feel in some way lacking because our lives do not match the rosy pictures of happy families that we see in endless commercials on TV. Yet the simple rituals of sending cards to distant relations and friends, greeting neighbours, singing along to carols on the radio, putting up lights or a long loved decoration, buying mince pies or baking a cake – all these can make a difference to our own lives and the lives of others.

This year I have at last remembered to write in the newsletter a thank you to everyone who might give me a Christmas card and an explanation that instead of giving cards to people at church I will make a donation to our Swaziland Education project. Season's greetings to you all and if things get a little dull over the holiday time I can suggest the Cultural Heritage of human tower building from Spain as a lively alternative to watching The Great Escape on television.

Rev. Sarah Tinker

Kensington Unitarians

At Essex Church (founded 1774), Notting Hill Gate

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

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

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



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

Office Telephone: 020 7221 6514

Email: info@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Web: www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk

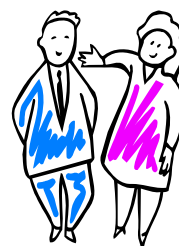
"Just as the best present is often not the one you were hinting about but the one you didn't know you wanted until someone gave it to you, the best gift of a friendship will often be the friend's ability to know what you need even before you do. Ralph Waldo Emerson put it this way: 'The glory of friendship is not so much in the outstretched hand or even in the kindly smile. It is in the spiritual inspiration that comes when you discover someone else believes in you and is willing to trust you with his friendship.'

When Martin Buber, the great Jewish philosopher and theologian, was asked 'Where is God?' he was wise enough not to give the cliché answers: God is everywhere; God is found in churches and synagogues. Buber would answer that God is found in relationships. God is not found *in* people; God is found *between* people.

When you and I are truly attuned to each other, God comes down and fills the space between us so that we are connected, not separated. Both love and true friendship are more than a way of knowing that we matter to someone else. They are a way of mattering to the world, bringing God into a world that would otherwise be a vale of selfishness and loneliness."

Rabbi Harold S. Kushner

Volunteering Rotas: Stewarding, Coffee and Greeting



Stewarding:

5 th December:	Howard Hague
12 th December:	Maire Collins
19 th December:	Caroline Blair
24 th December (5pm):	Michaela von Britzke
2 nd January:	Michaela von Britzke
9 th January:	Mark Tribe
16 th January:	Gina Bayley
23 rd January:	Christine Joshi
30 th January:	Natasha Drennan

Coffee:

5 th December:	Ruth Okine
12 th December:	Kate Brown
19 th December:	Margaret Darling
24 th December (5pm):	Heidi Ferid
2 nd January:	Kate Brown
9 th January:	Gill Hague
16 th January:	Caroline Blair
23 rd January:	Margaret Darling
30 th January:	Jo Ridgers

Greeting:

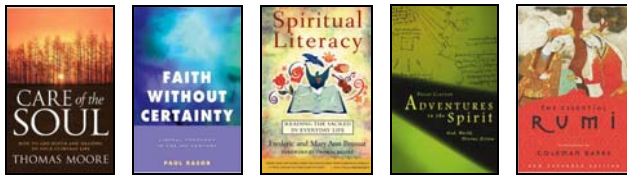
5 th December:	Sue Smith
12 th December:	Kathryn Reynolds
19 th December:	Mark Tribe
24 th December (5pm):	Kathryn Reynolds
2 nd January:	??????
9 th January:	Natasha Drennan
16 th January:	Jim Blair
23 rd January:	Karl Askew
30 th January:	Gina Bayley

In recent months, we have been circulating the rota list via email, and this seems to be working well.

Please contact Jane with your email address if you are willing to receive this email once a month.

rotas@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

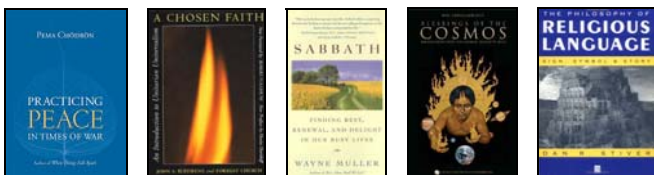
Books for the Library



First of all, a reminder that we now have a congregational books wish list that you can access online if you feel an urge to buy the library a present this Christmas.

You can go to amazon.co.uk and search for the wish-list with the name 'Essex Church' or go via the link on the library page of the church website. Or have a look in case you have a copy at home of one of the books we've listed and would like to pass it from your shelves to ours.

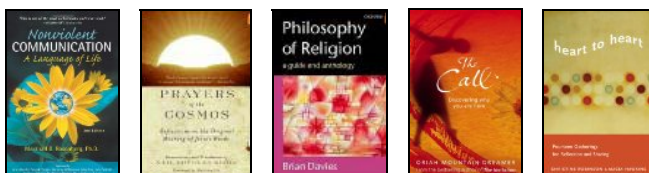
We don't have much free shelf space so we're not generally accepting people's unwanted books unless it's a title we know we want and need.



Thanks to Sheila Ramage (who runs Notting Hill Books and has been warmly supporting Essex Church and its ministers for the last 40 years). Sheila has donated some interesting titles for us including Karen Armstrong's very readable *'The Bible'*, *'Being Reasonable about Religion'* by William Charlton and a biography of Judas. She has also given us a copy of *'Martyrs and Mystics'* by Ed Glinert which tells the extraordinary untold story of Britain's spiritual heritage. The book is arranged as a journey around Britain and promises to answer such intriguing questions as: what were the true reasons for the executions of martyrs such as Ridley, Wycliffe and Cranmer? Did Joseph of Arimathea really bring the Holy Grail to Glastonbury and is London actually built according to a secret plan based upon the Bible? It's a very readable popular history that leaves you reflecting on the diversity and strangeness of many of our human beliefs and behaviours.

Look out as well for another generous gift from Jo Mirov who has donated a copy of Deepak Chopra's *'The Spontaneous Fulfilment of Desire'*.

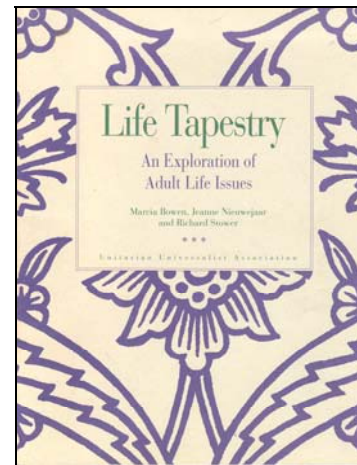
Rev. Sarah Tinker



A New RE Course at Essex Church:

'Tapestry of Life'

Beginning Thursday 20th January, 6-9pm



'Tapestry of Life' is an exploration of adult life issues from a spiritual perspective. It includes sessions on values, dreams and realities, ageing, intimacy, loss and grief, sources of joy. The course involves individual and group exercises to help us reflect on issues in life and encourages us all to keep a learning journal during the time we are on the course.

There will be nine sessions and we would like people to commit to attending at least 5 of them. All sessions are on Thursday evenings from 7-9pm except where stated:

Thursday 20th January, 6 to 9pm

Thursdays 27th January, 3rd, 10th February

Saturday 26th February (11am-3pm with shared lunch)

Thursdays 3rd, 10th, 17th, 24th March

'Tapestry of Life' will be co-facilitated by Sarah Tinker and Jane Blackall. There will be no cost to attend, but places on the course will be limited to keep the group to a comfortable size, so please contact Sarah or Jane soon to sign up if you would like to take part or if you would like to know more about the course content.

This course will be partly based on the well-regarded UUA book 'Life Tapestry' developed by Marcia Bowen, Jeanne Nieuwejaar and Richard Stower.

Audiobook Library

The literary classic 'Mary Barton' by Mrs. Gaskell, has been added to the library. It is on four double-sided cassettes which can be played on the equipment in the library or borrowed for home listening.

Will Lyons

A Forthcoming Event at Essex Church...

Poetry for Advent:

An Antidote to Christmas Shopping
led by Carole Grace and Sarah Tinker



Thursday Evenings at Essex Church:
2nd, 9th and 16th December from 7-8pm

Downstairs in the Library – All Are Welcome

An opportunity to bring along some favourite poems and to enjoy the gift of listening to one another's chosen words. There are so many poems about this time of year to choose from, with themes such as Christmas, winter, and expectations. These evenings will give us chance to turn away from the season's demands and focus instead on something deeper and more nourishing.

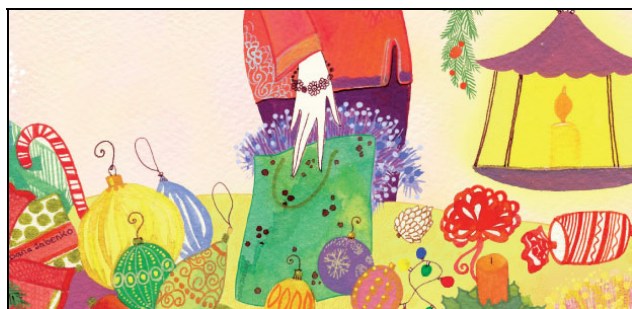
Come to as many of the evenings as you can – no need to commit to them all in advance, though it would be helpful if you could let us know if you plan to join us.

Rev. Sarah Tinker

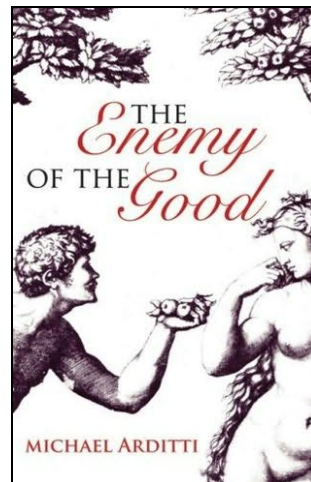
Shopper

I am spending my way out
of a recession. The road chokes
on delivery vans.
I used to be Just Looking Round
I used to be How Much, and
Have You Got it in Beige.
Now I devour whole stores –
High speed spin; giant size; chunky gold;
de-luxe springing. Things.
I drag them round me into a stockade.
It is dark inside; but my credit cards
are incandescent.

by Connie Bensley



Essex Church Reading Group 'The Enemy of the Good' by Michael Arditti



Tuesday 25th January 2010, 7.00-9.00pm

The reading group's January session will be based on 'The Enemy of the Good' by Michael Arditti. This was chosen by Jane Blackall.

Information from Amazon UK:

"The Glanvilles are an extraordinary family. Edwin is a retired bishop who has lost his faith. Marta, a child of the Warsaw Ghetto, is a controversial anthropologist. Their son, Clement, is a celebrated gay painter traumatized by the death of his twin. Their daughter, Susannah, is a music publicist recovering from an affair with a convicted murderer. Over three remarkable years, the family goes through a sequence of events that causes it to reassess its deepest values and closest relationships."

Information from the Independent:

"Arditti is to be applauded for tackling a subject that is so often ignored. A large proportion of Britons do hold religious beliefs, and fiction mostly ignores that. Arditti has identified that in our multi-cultural society, faith is not only private but increasingly political, shaping culture and making life all the more complex for it. As he shows, the search for redemption and meaning is at the heart of belief."

The group takes special care to ensure that everybody gets an equal opportunity to speak and be listened to. Members come together to share our diverse views and appreciate our differences in a spirit of curiosity and respect. The group has a relaxed and easy-going atmosphere and newcomers are always most welcome to come along to any session. The group has been meeting monthly since 2003. We take turns in choosing a book for everybody to read so we tackle a wide variety of material. For more information see:

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

“Not causing harm obviously includes not killing or robbing or lying to people. It also includes not being aggressive – not being aggressive with our actions, our speech, or our minds. Learning not to cause harm to ourselves or others is a basic teaching on the healing power of nonaggression.

Not harming ourselves or others in the beginning, not harming ourselves or others in the middle, and not harming ourselves or others in the end is the basis of enlightened society. This is how there could be a sane world. It starts with sane citizens, and that is us. The most fundamental aggression, the most fundamental harm we can do to ourselves, is to remain ignorant by not having the courage and the respect to look at ourselves honestly and gently...

Not causing harm requires staying awake. Part of being awake is slowing down enough to notice what we say and do. The more we witness our emotional chain reactions and understand how they work, the easier it is to refrain. It becomes a way of life to stay awake, slow down, notice.”

Pema Chödrön

Walking Group: Enjoying the Royal Parks



**Saturday January 22nd – Regent’s Park
Meet 10.30am at Baker Street Tube**

The Royal Parks are sometimes described as London’s lungs, their green spaces giving a much welcome respite to both humans and animals. Come and enjoy them in their winter and spring splendour and learn a bit about their history and interesting features.

We will meet at 10.30am (at Baker Street tube station entrance foyer on January 22nd) and will probably walk around 4 miles with a stop for lunch in one of the cafes.

You’ll need to let us know if you plan to come along and we’ll confirm the meeting places and a mobile number for last minute contact. We try to start promptly so nobody has to wait around in the cold.

Email info@kensington-unitarians.org.uk or phone the office on 020 7221 6514 or to let us know you are coming.

Essex Church Creativity Group ‘Christmas Decorations’

Tuesday 14th December, 7.00-9.00pm



This month we will be making simple decorations for the church ahead of our carol service and congregational lunch. As usual you are welcome to come along to the group even if you are not particularly interested in the activities on offer – bring along your own craftwork – or simply come along to relax and enjoy the good company.

‘Bring Your Own Crafts’

Tuesday 18th January, 7.00-9.00pm



Changes to the Creativity Group

Regular members of the creativity group have recently considered the plans for the future sessions and decided to try a change to the group starting in the New Year.

Instead of having a specific organised activity every month, which takes quite a lot of planning, we have decided that (most months) participants will simply be invited to bring their own art and craft projects along and enjoy the support and fellowship of the group. We are still intending to offer a specific activity once a quarter and will work on projects for the church from time to time.

Congregational Writing Project: 'This I Believe' Essays



The challenge is on. We need at least twenty members or friends of Essex Church to write a short statement to be included in a pamphlet we hope to publish next year.

We want to create a collection of statements of people's beliefs, which could be based on writings from the 'Building Your Own Theology' course or from the 'This I Believe' project. Feel free to tackle this in any way that you want. You may want to sum up your faith, or describe how your beliefs have evolved. You might want to write about what is most important to you in life or about lessons that life has taught you. The important things are that your words come from your heart and are true for you, that they are interesting for others to read or hear, and that you stick to a word count of under 500 words - around 350 would be ideal.

Don't worry about the quality of your writing as there are people who are willing to help with the writing task and to do some editing. Why not have a go at a first draft and let someone read it and give you feedback? Or ask someone to interview you and write your piece for you. Why should footballers be the only ones to have ghost writers?! So don't be left out - get writing and make sure you are part of this project.

The deadline for entries is 1st March 2011 as we hope to have the booklet published in time for Easter and for the denomination's Annual Meetings where we will be able to sell copies. We also plan to have a launch event at the church after the service on Sunday 3rd April 2011. Any profits made from this exciting publishing venture will go to our Swaziland Education Project. Contact our minister for more information.

Rev. Sarah Tinker



"In this moment, this blessed moment – this advent afternoon – the solstice is still yet to come. Christmas is still yet to come. Yule logs are still yet to burn. Presents are still yet to open. The celebration is still yet to come.

It is dark now, the darkest time of the year. Though the lights and our preparations for the holidays and the excitement of children fix our gaze forward to the returning sun, let us not pass through this advent time without availing ourselves of the blessings of darkness.

Let us be mindful: not the arriving but the journeying is a blessing of the dark. Not the finding but the seeking is a blessing of the dark. Not the knowing but the unknowing is a blessing of the dark. Not the opened present, but the present still wrapped is a blessing of the dark. Not the clarity but the mystery is a blessing of the dark.

The mystery of these dark days quiets us, stills us, moves us, stirs us, inspires us to look inward, brings us to that gut place, to that moment before words can be formed; to that place where words cannot go; to that place where heart, feeling, intuition and spirit lead us if we let them. Not festivity, not celebration but quiet and stillness are blessings of the dark. Not the stable and the manger, but the road to Bethlehem is a blessing of the dark. Not the birth, but the womb holds the blessings of darkness.

The advent words of the poet-minister Francis Anderson ring in our ears: *"It is a lonely road to Bethlehem that must be walked slowly and untalked / Where no bright light or angel song intrudes ahead of cue to wrongly claim arrival of the dawn before the night is walked by each of us one through."*

UU Minister, Rev. Joshua Mason Pawelek

‘Reclaiming the Bible’



As someone who read the Bible a great deal in childhood and then turned away from it, I have found our four-session course on reclaiming this important text very helpful. Though I have now been reminded that we can say texts rather than text because the Bible of course is a collection of books written down over a long time period by many different authors, most of whose names we only think we know.

Each Thursday a group of us has been meeting in the library poring over our Bibles, all with different translations, which in itself uncovers some intriguing issues. I personally still love the King James version, which contains so much of the poetic imagery that seems so much part of our cultural heritage. But the NRSV (new revised standard version) is the most scholarly and up to date. We were intrigued by the Bible for Teenagers that seemed to have left out all the juicy bits. How unfair is that!

Like all the best stories we began at the beginning and read the two quite different accounts of creation found in the early chapters of Genesis. Then we moved on to morality and rules for behaviour. We learnt the value of reading verses on either side of a famous text and considering the historical times in which the text was written. When it comes to bible studies, context is everything – the context in which it was written and the context in which it is read. The many demands for ritual cleanliness outlined in Leviticus can be seen as an oppressed minority’s successful attempt to remain separate from their oppressors. If you don’t wear clothes made of more than one material and you don’t sow two different sorts of seed in one field then you are bound to stand out from the crowd.

Perhaps most revealing was discovering the way that later writers used earlier texts and oral traditions as the basis for their own writings. This gives the texts a feeling of coherence and justification. Karen Armstrong writes in her book *The Bible: The Biography* that there is “scarcely a verse in the New Testament that does not refer to the older scriptures”. We read verses from the prophet Isaiah, sometimes described as the Fifth Gospel, so often was it referred to by the later gospel writers. The links between Jesus’ birth narrative, as told by Matthew, and Isaiah, are so very close because the gospel writer used Isaiah’s imagery to bring weight and authority to his account. All very interesting and confusing and fascinating – as befits a work that has so influenced our culture and indeed our history.

Let’s do more of this!

Michaela von Britzke

Caroline and Jim Blair shared the following YouTube link – Bible Studies via a clip from West Wing: <http://bit.ly/bkPWit>

Small Group Communion



**Sundays 12th December
and 9th January, 12.30pm
Downstairs in the Church Library**

On the second Sunday of each month we will be holding a small-group communion, after the main service, downstairs in the church library. A number of members of the congregation have expressed interest in having a regular communion and so we are going to try this out for a few months (on the second Sunday of each month).

We hope that different people will take turns to lead the small-group communion services so that we can experience a number of different approaches. The line-up for the next few months is as follows:

12th December – Jane Blackall
9th January – Sarah Tinker & Stephanie Saville
13th February – David Francis Darling

If you would like to find out more about these small-group communions then please feel free to speak to Jane or Tristan.

Jane Blackall and Tristan Jovanović

“The great religious prophets have all recognized that beyond the intellectual realm lies a numinous oneness that transcends all differences; call it the Holy, the divine Spirit, God — it doesn’t matter. This kinship extends to the Heavens. The mystic oneness of person to person, which we may capture in lovemaking, or deep listening, or true empathy is but a simple expression of the greater mystical oneness of all existence. The great prophets have preached cosmic oneness not only because it makes good metaphysical sense, but also because it answers a profound human need — to be one within ourselves, reconciled to our neighbours, and at home in the cosmos. Human feelings of friendship and empathy are but a faint reminder of the essential mystical oneness of all creation. Theologians may reason their way to oneness, but mystics experience it — as we all do in magical moments of connection — when we set aside the intellect and connect our souls to the great chain of being.”

UU Minister, Rev. Forrest Church



“Advent is so much more than just waiting. Advent is an invitation to religious growth, to experience life at a deeper level. The meaning of this invitation depends on the meaning of Christmas for us.

Christmas is so many things. It is, for most of us, a time of gathering with family and friends; a time of feasting; a time of gift giving, and of decorating; a time for concerts and parties and shopping for all these things. It is also, inevitably, a time of remembering. Like Scrooge, we remember our Christmases past, remembering those no longer with us, even as we celebrate new arrivals in our families. Each Christmas marks the passage of the years for all of us.

But Christmas, like Advent, is so much more. I want to suggest a metaphor, one that requires us to see them as linked. I want to suggest that the period of Advent, culminating in Christmas, can be a time of gestation and giving birth to that which is new in our lives, that which is of God. We could look at our whole lives as a succession of such periods. We could look at all the great religious holy days as invitations to such gestation and giving birth. But the metaphor is obviously suited especially well to Advent, which culminates in the birth of the Christ child.”

UU Minister, Rev John Parker Manwell

The Winter Face of Trees



The winter face of trees is spare, translucent,
When lovers meet beneath their naked boughs
There is no foliage to obscure the pleasure of their greeting.
Stern winter trees have form, have character
Which summer's easy green conceals.
Through the interstices of their twigs new forms
New possibilities emerge we had not seen.
Sure, summer's leafy paradise protects us
With the pleasures and deceptions of the green.

John Hands

Painting by Heidi Ferid

The Esterhazy Singers Charity Carol Concert

In aid of Richard House Children's Hospice

Featuring our own Natasha Drennan



Friday 17th December, 7.30pm

St Bartholomew the Great

West Smithfield, City of London EC1A 7HW

Featuring the Esterhazy singers and Vox Angelica vocal trio performing Christmas classics with audience carols.

Tickets £12 on the door, £10 in advance
(tickets for students are half price).

Available from www.esterhazysingers.com or contact
07958 699 422 or sales@esterhazysingers.com

“Consider what a contemporary prophet might do. I believe that a true prophet looks at the conditions of one's culture and sees clearly what needs to change to improve the situation in which she or he lives. A true prophet has to have a sense of being deeply grounded in a value or values that are not being followed in her or his culture. In addition, such a person needs to feel support and energy from a Source beyond one's self...

One of the things that bothers me most about this is that every one of our Unitarian Universalist prophets has had to endure strong negative feedback, not only from society in general, but from within our own movement. Being a prophet is not a guarantee of appreciation – far from it... We seem to appreciate prophets best when they are dead and no longer a threat to the status quo.

What are the conditions about which we as Unitarian Universalists are called to be prophetic, to challenge the powers and structures of evil of our lives? Start with the degradation of our planet; the dissipation of our civil rights; the institutional racism and classism; the possibility that we may go to war with people who are already starving under their own leaders; skewed economics that puts the fortunes of corporations over education, services to the elderly and impaired, and health care.

We can speak up, write letters, organize coalitions of resistance... no one of us can do this alone.”

UU Minister, Rev. Gretchen Woods

"As I follow the path of my Spirit,
great Joy comes to me.
Because I see everything is necessary – indeed,
I am often permitted to see the meaning
and the holiness in everything,
even that which we call evil and depraved.
When I am in tune,
everything is a miracle to me;
everything is a message bearer;
there is meaning in each moment;
every bush is a burning one;
every leaf is aflame;
each instant is from heaven –
guiding, wooing, instructing me,
leading me through my astonishing life."

Gene Knudsen Hoffman

Christmas at Essex Church



Carol Service and Potluck Christmas Lunch

This year we will be having a Carol Service and Congregational Christmas Lunch on Sunday 19th December. Please put the date in your diary now and plan to come along – maybe invite a friend! Heidi Ferid is co-ordinating the potluck lunch so please think about what food or drink you can offer to bring and let her know.

Candlelit Christmas Eve Service and Dinner

As has become the tradition at Essex Church, we will be having a special candlelit service at 5pm on Christmas Eve, followed by tea and mince pies. Juliet Edwards is organising a meal at a local restaurant (hopefully the Persian restaurant, Hafez, in Bayswater) after the evening service. We need to book soon so please let Juliet know if you would like to be counted in.

No Service on Boxing Day

There will be no service on the last Sunday in December as it falls on Boxing Day this year and public transport will be quite limited.

Membership of Essex Church



If all goes according to plan, current members and friends of our congregation will soon be receiving a letter and form to fill in about our annual membership. It's good practice to ask people to renew their membership in this way each year and we'd be grateful for your feedback on how our re-vamped form feels to receive and fill in. We'd also be grateful if you could return the forms speedily to the church office.

Membership is a really valuable way to show that you support our congregation and are in accord with its liberal religious ethos. If you want to know more about what membership entails then do get in touch with our minister.

Rev. Sarah Tinker

Dates for your Diary

Some Forthcoming Events at Essex Church

A new flyer listing congregational events from January-April has just been released – pick up your copy from the new leaflet rack in the church foyer or download a copy from our website.

Thursday 10th February, 3.00 pm

Alister Hardy Society Talk:

'What Near-Death Experiences can Teach

Us about Everyday Life' by Dr. Ornella Corazza

Further details from John Franklin: johnfranklin35@hotmail.com

Saturday 12th February, 12.30pm:

'Who Needs Sacraments?'

Unitarian Christian Association Workshop – all are welcome.

Sunday 13th February:

Congregational Potluck Lunch

Saturday 19th March:

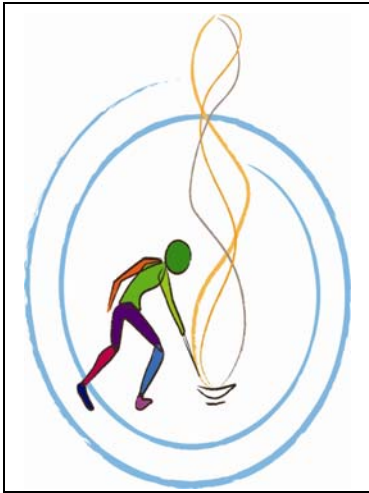
London District Quarterly and AGM

Thursday 31st March, 3.00 pm

Alister Hardy Society Talk:

'A Journey to the Centre' by Margaret Rizza

Further details from John Franklin: johnfranklin35@hotmail.com



'Light the Fire!' Discovery Weekend

**"A time to dream, scheme,
and build our future"**

**28th – 30th January 2011
in Aylesford, Kent**



A message from the Leaders of the 'Light the Fire' Weekend: If your Unitarian faith is a rich part of your life, and you would like others to be able to experience it too, then we really hope you will come to this unique district event.

It will be a weekend full of new ways of looking at ourselves as we are now and hope to become in the future. There will be inspiring music and innovative worship. There will be times for quiet personal reflection and lively group discussions, and the sharing of fun and fellowship in a truly beautiful setting.

Together we can explore a vision of strong and vibrant congregations with inspiring worship and a social justice witness which makes a real difference in people's lives and the world. We encourage you to - make the decision now and commit a weekend of your time, a little of your resources, your passion and energy to help Unitarianism evolve to meet the need of London and the South East.

You will leave this weekend event with tools to enliven your congregation and a renewed enthusiasm to doing so. You will have discovered others who share your excitement, and will have formed coalitions for mutual encouragement and support. Unitarian congregations can make a difference, they can grow, they can attract more people, and they can truly be transformative for how we live our lives and how we impact the world.

We are confident you will enjoy Light the Fire if you come. More important, by coming you can make a real difference - for yourself, for your congregation and for our shared future. Register now by going to www.ldpa.org.uk or by contacting Louise Baumberg at louise.baumberg@googlemail.com.

Sincerely, Kate Buchanan, Louise Baumberg, Jennifer Hazel, Miriam Lahage, Rev. Andy Pakula, Rev. David Usher

Purpose: The LDPA is bringing together lively and committed members of the London District to conceive and create our future together. The weekend will be an opportunity to explore new ways of experiencing Unitarianism, through worship, discussion, music, laughter, networking and imagining. The weekend is open to everyone who wants to dream about our future together and to join in the work of making those dreams a reality.

Programme: A unique programme has been devised for this very special weekend with the help of creative facilitators and musicians. You'll join other Unitarians in the District to dream, scheme and plan our future together. The main elements of the programme will be: Introductions and getting to know your 'Spark Group', an opening ceremony, 'Dreaming the Dream', discussion groups, creating a mini act of worship, socialising, networking and fun.

Venue: The Friars is the home of a community of Carmelite friars, first established in 1242 and offering beautiful accommodation just three miles north of Maidstone. A shuttle service from Maidstone train station is planned. It is a truly beautiful setting. The bedrooms are charming and comfortable, and the dining room has a lovely beamed ceiling and a library in the mezzanine gallery above. The grounds are expansively landscaped, and will be shared by the resident ducks and geese who live in the large pond. This is the perfect place for us to come together and discover something new!

Cost: £160 full adult, £100 concessions for under 35s and new Unitarians (including full board). Grants are available!

Note: Our congregation will also be offering subsidies to anyone who wants to attend this event – speak to Sarah Tinker for more information about this – you will need to book VERY soon!

Winter Events at the Nightingale Centre

Our Unitarian Conference Centre
in Great Hucklow, Derbyshire



3rd - 5th December:

Christmas Walks and Hucklow Village Lights

Turning on the village lights is an annual event in the village, accompanied by entertainment. As in many of the Derbyshire villages, along with the summer well-dressings, this is an event not to be missed. If you enjoy walking there will be the opportunity for a group walk during the day. If you prefer to visit Castleton or Bakewell to finish your Christmas shopping this would be an enjoyable option. Or you might just like to relax in front of the open fire in the lounge! Cost from £102.

10th - 12th December:

Christmas at Hucklow

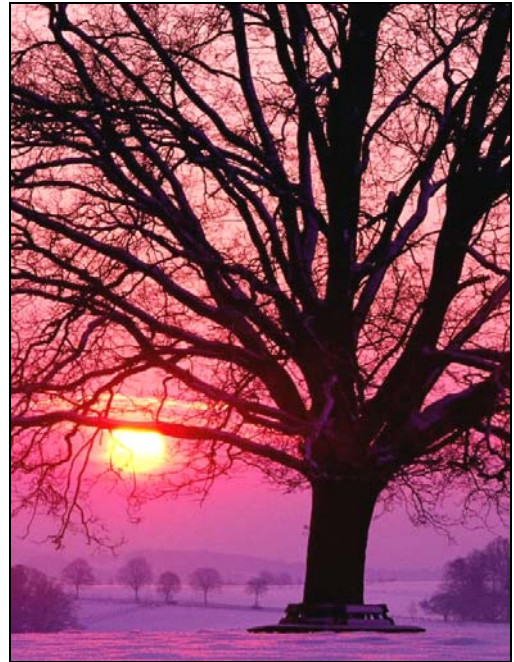
This successful weekend house-party is now in its third year. A lovely start to Christmas, there will be carols in the lounge on the first evening followed by a Fete and Christmas dinner on the Saturday. On Saturday evening there is also a welcome return of 'Flash in the Pan' who will be providing music for the Ceilidh. For those who wish to, there will also be time for walking or sightseeing. Cost from £117.

14th-16th, 21st-23rd, and 26th-28th January
Winter Walking at Hucklow

For more information visit: www.thenightingalecentre.org.uk
email info@thenightingalecentre.org.uk
or telephone 01298 871 218



Advice from a Tree



Dear Friend,

Stand Tall and Proud

Sink your roots deeply into the Earth

Reflect the light of a greater source

Think long term

Go out on a limb

Remember your place among all living beings

Embrace with joy the changing seasons

For each yields its own abundance

The Energy and Birth of Spring

The Growth and Contentment of Summer

The Wisdom to let go of leaves in the Fall

The Rest and Quiet Renewal of Winter

Feel the wind and the sun

And delight in their presence

Look up at the moon that shines down upon you

And the mystery of the stars at night.

Seek nourishment from the good things in life

Simple pleasures

Earth, fresh air, light

Be content with your natural beauty

Drink plenty of water

Let your limbs sway and dance in the breezes

Be flexible

Remember your roots

Enjoy the view!

Ilan Shamir

(Sent in by Rachele Wolfe)



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

**Second Sunday of the Month from 2-3pm
on 12th December, 13th February**

(Please note: there is no class in January)

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 £7 (£5 to members). **Contact: Sonya Leite on 0207 371 1674**

‘Finding Our Voice’

Singing Workshops with Margaret Marshall

**Sundays 16th January, 20th February,
27th March & 17th April from 12.30 to 1.15pm**



Margaret Marshall has worked as a professional singer all her adult life and is also a very experienced singing teacher. Along with Harold Lorenzelli she has been singing in our choir here at Essex Church for over thirty years now and we're delighted that she is now offering to lead a monthly session to help us all find our voice.

These sessions are for anyone who is prepared to open their mouth and make a sound and 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.

At Home Care Service



A new initiative from Age Concern Kensington and Chelsea

Age Concern Kensington and Chelsea, a well-known local charity known for its works in promoting independence and well being among older people, has launched a new social enterprise to provide homeware for residents in the Royal Borough.

For several years Age Concern Kensington and Chelsea has been providing a Home Bathing Service to older people in the Royal Borough. New services now on offer help at home with personal care tasks such as bathing, dressing, shaving, toe-nail cutting as well as domestic tasks such as cleaning, laundry, shopping and meal preparation – in fact most of the services that older residents may need to allow them to continue to live in their own homes and enjoy a satisfactory quality of life. Age Concern Kensington and Chelsea has an excellent reputation for services in the Borough and a long history of providing support and assistance to older people and their carers. We are fully committed to offering high quality services that meet the needs of individuals in the area.

A high level of satisfaction is already reported by users of the Home Bathing service: "I look forward to my weekly visit and could not do without the service" said one resident. Friends and family have also been able to rely on the service and the regular contact it has provided to their older relatives: "I have felt truly supported by Age Concern" said Miss L whose frail mother has recently started using the service, "and I was confident that whilst I was away you could be relied on to report any concerns about my mother".

Trusting relationships are the hallmark of our service and thus we ensure that all the care staff we employ are carefully selected, vetted and trained in order to deliver the best quality service.

For further information or to arrange a home visit, contact Raquel or Susan on 020 8960 8137. You can also email athome@ackc.org.uk or visit us at 1 Thorpe Close, London, W10 5XL.

The NHS White Paper:

The way forward or a high risk strategy?



You may be aware that I have recently lit two candles of concern about the government changes planned for the NHS. I am a retired NHS physiotherapist and during my working life I had to frequently adapt to the changing face of the NHS. Now the planned changes are so far reaching and will happen so rapidly that there is serious concern, by the medical professionals delivering the service, that patient care is going to be seriously compromised.

Some of the concerns are about the:

- Increasing privatisation
- Commercialisation and profit ethos
- Lack of public scrutiny and accountability
- Efficiency versus patient care and clinical outcomes concept
- Market place competition
- Restructuring costs and financial waste
- Formation of untested GP consortia and their commissioning services
- Service fragmentation involving inequality and unfairness.

All these are sound arguments supported by evidence that can be found on the website: www.nhscampaign.org

When I worked in the NHS I was part of a service organisation that was paid for and appreciated by the very customers I was serving. The NHS should always offer a broad range of care and organise itself to reach patients throughout the country in an equitable way. I think healthcare provided through a national network is highly beneficial to our society and this "ownership" felt by staff and patients is a great motivator.

There continues to be some very serious failings in the NHS and the public enquiry into the management of Stafford Hospital is a sharp reminder of this. The time it takes to resolve litigation issues and the failure of NHS whistleblowing policies remind us that everything is far from perfect. However, there is no evidence to suggest that such problems do not exist in the private sector.

So here's a "Thought for The Day". A NHS where one county's healthcare is delivered by an American company and another county's healthcare is run by a Spanish organisation; how does that sound to you? In the decades to come when we are all required to subscribe to private health insurance, will the government be reducing our income tax contributions, to compensate for the health premiums? – I don't think so.

If you want to find out more and familiarise yourself with the facts go to the website, discuss this with your friends and family, voice an opinion, sign the petition against the white paper, write to your MP (a template letter is on the website), send a letter to your local newspaper; participate in whatever way you feel is best for you. The government has not done enough inform the public about this proposed legislation.

For more information and ways to get involved see: www.nhscampaign.org

Sue Smith

Charity Collections: SOS Villages and Trinity Hospice

It's good to know that as treasurer I've been able to pay our promised £1,000 donation for this year to the SOS Village in Swaziland where our two sponsored children, Patience and Fortunate, live. We pay for their educational and living expenses as well as making a more general donation to the running of the village. Thank you to everyone who made a donation this year – there are some children receiving an education and better living conditions because of you.

We have also sent a cheque for £125 to Trinity Hospice after our collection in the service on 31st October. The collection on a fifth Sunday of the month will go to a charity chosen by congregation members so do let us know if there is a charity you would like us to support.

Juliet Edwards



Multifaith Calendar



☆ 2nd - 9th 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.

☪ 7th December – Al-Hijra –

New Year's Day (1425 AH) – Muslim

This day commemorates the Hijra, or migration of the Prophet Muhammad from Makkah to Medina in 622 CE. Muslim years are dated from this event and termed AH (After the Hijrah).

✚ 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.

☪ 16th December – Ashura – Muslim

Ashura is a day of mourning for some Muslims, particularly the Shi'ite communities, because of the martyrdom of Husain, the second son of Ali and Fatimah, the Prophet's daughter. The festival is celebrated by the Shi'ite communities in Iraq, Iran and the sub-continent of India.

☼ 21st December – Winter Solstice/Yule – Pagan/Wiccan

Yule is the time of the winter solstice, when the sun child is reborn, an image of the return of all new life born through the love of the Gods. Within the Northern Tradition Yule is regarded as the New Year.

✚ 24th December – Christmas Eve – Christian

On Christmas Eve churches hold evening carol services and Midnight Masses to herald the arrival of Christmas Day and celebrate the birth of Jesus.

✚ 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.

☞ 26th December – Zartusht-no-diso – Zoroastrian

Indian Parsi Zoroastrians commemorate the death of Zarathustra according to the Shenshai calendar.

✚ 1st January – Circumcision/Naming of Jesus – Christian

The Christian Church celebrates the circumcision or naming of Jesus at eight days old in accordance with Jewish custom, as recorded in Luke 2:21.

☪ 5th January – Birthday of Guru Gobind Singh – Sikh

Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Sikh Guru, formed the order of the Khalsa on Vaisakhi (Baisakhi), and instituted the Five Ks. Important anniversaries associated with the lives of the Gurus are referred to as Gurpurbs, and are marked with an akhand path, an unbroken reading of the Guru Granth Sahib.

✚ 6th January – Epiphany – Christian

The twelfth day of Christmas, celebrates the visit of the wise men, or magi, to the baby Jesus. It is particularly important in the Orthodox church, where the baptism of Jesus and his first miracle at Cana are remembered.

6th - 7th January – Christmas Eve and Day – Eastern Orthodox and Armenian

Many Eastern Orthodox and Armenian churches still use the Julian rather than the Gregorian calendar. This means that they celebrate Christmas and other fixed festivals thirteen days after the Western churches, so the 6th and 7th January in the Orthodox calendar equates to 24th and 25th December in the Western calendar.

14th January – Makar Sankrant / Lohri / Pongal

Makar Sankrant / Lohri is a day for almsgiving and putting right disagreements and quarrels. The festival is called Lohri in Panjab, and Pongal in Tamil Nadu and celebrated with special food. Panjabi families (including some Sikhs) celebrate Lohri following the birth of a son.

☸ 16 January – Shinran Memorial Day – Buddhist

The day is celebrated by some Buddhists in the Mahayana tradition. Shinran Shonin (1173 - 1263 CE) founded Jodo Shin-shu, one of the schools of Pure Land Buddhism.

✚ 18th - 25th January – Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity has become ever more widely celebrated with the growing commitment to ecumenism among churches. Special services and other events are held. The 2011 theme is 'All things in common' (Acts 2:42).

☆ 20th January – Tu B'Shevat – Jewish

Tu B'Shevat is a minor Jewish festival celebrating the New Year for trees. Jewish tradition marks the 15th of Shevat as the day when the sap in the trees begins to rise heralding the beginning of Spring. It is customary to plant trees and eat fruit from Israel.

☸ 25th January – Honen Memorial Day – Buddhist

Honen is one of the outstanding figures in the history of Japanese Buddhism, and the founder of Jodo-shu, one of the schools of Pure Land Buddhism.

☆ 27th January – Holocaust Memorial Day – Jewish

A remembrance day for all those who suffered at the hands of the Nazis during World War 2 (1939-45). It aims to help ensure that no such atrocity happens again, by keeping fresh the memory of all who suffered and died at that time.

Adult RE: 'LifeSpirit'



**Sundays 30th January
and 6th February from 12.30-2.00pm**

This DVD based course has been created by our District Minister the Rev David Usher (pictured) is another way to encourage people to explore their spiritual lives. The whole course of 12 DVDs can be found online at present and accessed for free (see <http://go.podia.net/?c=1445>).

We are going to try two of its sessions after our Sunday services in January and February so do bring along a sandwich and join us on Sunday January 30th and Sunday 6th February from 12.45 pm to 2pm.

The course is based partly upon conversations between David Usher and Father Adrian Smith, a well known writer and group facilitator on contemporary spirituality. Do join us as we trial these useful and interesting course materials.

Rev. Sarah Tinker

"Rabbi Marcia Prager tells a story about a couple who had financial problems and argued about money. Prager ended up counselling the couple to adopt a traditional Jewish practice called tzedakah, which involves allocating a certain portion of one's income to helping the poor.

'My assignment to them was to become givers – even if they could only give \$2,' she recalls. Prager says that assignment was a turning point for the couple; over time, they came to feel that they had enough, reduced their spending, and didn't fight so much about money. Prager thinks that giving changes our thinking: we shift from thinking of ourselves as consumers to thinking of ourselves as guardians of the social welfare of our community.

Prager's story illustrates an important point. Whether you give time, money, or both, focusing on helping people with difficulties tends to put your problems in perspective. That can make you feel more fortunate and grateful."

Martha Mangelsdorf

Newsletter Deadline



The deadline for submitting items for the next issue is **Sunday 16th January**. Please send items (such as poems, quotes, articles, notices, rotas, etc...) to Jane Blackall or a committee member before that date.

Thank you!!!

A Story for Christmas



Sunday 12th December, 12.30pm

Being read to is one of life's great treats so come and join us for this reading of Truman Capote's short story 'A Christmas Memory' read to us by Scott Varland. Scott is an attorney who has lived most of his life in the southern states of the USA. Having attended some of the Universal Spiritual Worship gatherings on Friday nights here at Essex Church he thought it would be a perfect venue to read one of his favourite seasonal stories.

Truman Capote was born in New Orleans, Louisiana in 1924 and raised in various parts of the South. His most famous works are: '*A Christmas Memory*', '*Breakfast at Tiffany's*', and '*In Cold Blood*'.

Truman Capote's empathy with the marginalised is made manifest in '*A Christmas Memory*'. The protagonists are distant cousins: an unnamed woman of sixty-something and a seven year old boy she calls Buddy. They live together in poverty and are best friends. One cold November morning, they set off with their rat terrier Queenie in search of revelation.

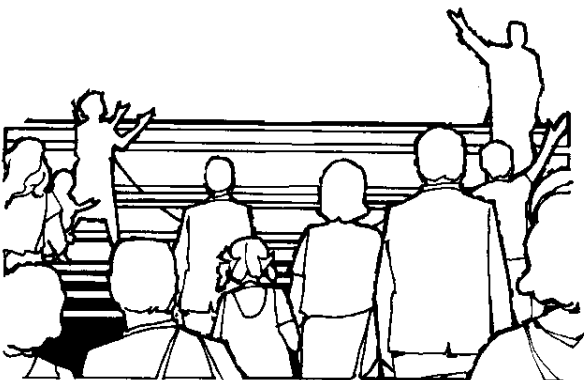
Bring your sandwiches and seasonal specialities will be provided. The reading should take around 40 minutes.

A Christmas colouring picture for you to enjoy!



London District Winter Quarterly

at The Friars, Aylesford, Kent
Saturday 30th January, 2.15pm



The Winter Quarterly meeting will form part of the 'Light the Fire' weekend. If you have not been able to attend the whole event, you will have a chance to share in the vision for the District created by the participants, as well as taking part in a special service led by the 'Spark Groups'.

Unitarians to Sing Carols in Trafalgar Square

Tuesday 7th December, 7-8pm



Rosslyn Hill Chapel Choir and friends will be singing carols in front of the Christmas tree in Trafalgar Square. We'll be raising money for the Kampala Music School. Please come and support us! We have chosen a selection of well known carols so you can sing along even if you can't fit onto the stage!

For more information contact
Kate Buchanan: 07870 322 519

All Souls

Sermon by Jane Blackall – 31st October 2010

In the world outside these walls, it's very much Hallowe'en that's getting top billing this weekend... but over the next ten minutes or so we're going to put all the pumpkins aside for a bit, and take our cue from the actual Pagan and Christian festivals that are coming up over the next few days.

For pagans, today is Samhain – in the old Celtic traditions this was apparently considered to be the time of year when the veils between this world and the Otherworld were at their thinnest, and when the spirits of the dead could mingle more freely with the living. In the Christian church calendar, tomorrow – November the first – is All Saints Day. This is a day when Christians are called to celebrate the lives of all the saints and martyrs who aren't high-profile enough to have a dedicated day all to themselves. The day after – All Souls Day – is when the mainstream church remember the 'faithful departed' and pray for the souls of those in purgatory. To take a liberal religious tack, though, and make it our own, I'll quote a Unitarian Universalist minister, Carl Seaburg, who puts it like this:

"[All Souls] Day is set apart in many churches for the commemoration of those 'holy souls' who have graced our lives and passed from our living circle. Their radiance, their works, their memories, are still with us – and on this day we meet to celebrate them fondly. And thoughtfully too, remembering that we also some day shall follow where they went."

These words from Carl Seaburg put me in mind rather more of the Day of the Dead, as celebrated in Mexico, when (as I understand it), whole families will visit the graves of their beloved dead, taking picnics and decorations... as well as the sorrow of loss, there is a kind of joyful remembering, and a sense that the loved ones are still very much amongst us and included in the ongoing circle of community.

My hope is that today's service will have that kind of tone – honouring and celebrating the lives of those we have loved and lost – but at the same time I don't wish to simply brush aside the pain and despair that we may feel when a loved one dies. It may well be that some people here in the congregation today are recently bereaved, and are right in the midst of the raw grief this very moment... if this the case for you, today, I hope that we can gently hold you in the warmth of this community during your time of deep sorrow.

It occurs to me that there may also be some present here today who haven't ever experienced the death of anyone who they were particularly close to. Just over two years ago I was in that position myself. In October 2008, Sarah and Michaela were running a short course here at Essex Church, looking at issues around death and dying. I clearly remember coming along to one of the sessions and saying that I had no particular fear of my own death, but that the thought of losing a loved one was quite unbearable, and reflecting on the fact that up to that point I had never known the death of anyone I'd been close to.



Within a week of that conversation, my beloved friend Simon John Barlow died suddenly, without warning. He was out shopping, he collapsed, and never regained consciousness. He had been the absolute centre of my life for five years – I had thought we would grow old together – then he was gone.

It was with Simon John in mind that I particularly wanted to lead the service on this theme today and indeed I used a prayer he wrote earlier on as I wanted include him in today's service somehow.

I want to own up to a certain cowardliness at this point. I made a conscious decision not to wrangle with the usual questions of the afterlife in my sermon today. Instead, I'd like to offer a few words on that subject from Forrest Church, a much-loved Unitarian Universalist minister, author and theologian who himself died just over a year ago. He says:

"Whatever happens to us after we die, life doesn't end in oblivion. It continues in love, our own love, once given, everlasting. After death our bodies may be resurrected. Our souls may transmigrate or become part of the heavenly pleroma. We may join our loved ones in Heaven. Or we may return the constituent parts of our being to the earth from which it came and rest in eternal peace. About life after death, no-one knows. But about love after death, we surely know. The one thing that can never be taken from this world, even by death, is the love we have given away before we die. Love, I swear it, is immortal."

In those words from Forrest Church there are echoes of the message in the May Sarton poem we heard earlier:

"Dear child, what has been once so interwoven / cannot be raveled or the gift ungiven."

And also of the silent verses from Henri Nouwen on the front of your order of service:

"You have to trust that every true friendship has no end... those you have loved deeply and who have died live on in you."

That's at the heart of what I want to say today. Each time we deeply connect with another – truly meet a friend or lover at soul level – we are changed by the encounter. We learn and we grow. And this process doesn't end, even after our loved one has died.

(continued on opposite page)

All Souls – Sermon (continued)

In any true, authentic, relationship there's bound to be an element of tussle and grit – we are challenged by each other, we move apart and come together again, our worldviews are shifted and hopefully enlarged by the interchange – all this is in the very nature of letting down our defences and being real with each other. Of course, I hope, there's joy too – pure delight in each other's company, the unique, beautiful, manifestation of the divine spark that we have recognised and met in another – but any real-world relationship is bound to contain light and shade. And, I'll say it again, this doesn't end with death. Here are some words from another Unitarian Universalist minister, Victoria Weinstein, on the matter:

“There is no need to end our relationship with our dead, for they are still ours: still ours to struggle with, to learn from, and to love. There is no timeline for grieving them and there is no finitude to loving them. Through time – as long a time as it takes – we take their dreams and their desires and their issues and integrate them into our own; we make use of whatever hard-won wisdom they were lucky enough to gain while they lived. We continue to forgive them, if forgiveness is called for. We continue the work of their hands.”

So says Victoria Weinstein. And, for me, that's what we're called to do on All Souls Day: to cherish and keep alive the gifts we have been given by our loved ones. We may have memories, photographs, mementos – and, if we're lucky, our loved ones might have left behind something they have created, maybe art or writing, in which they've expressed something of themselves, their wisdom, their message for the world – but whether or not these artefacts remain, we who have truly known and loved them can carry something of them onwards. We might take on particular projects in their name, as a memorial, or we may simply let their influence continue to guide our steps in more subtle ways.

The other side of All Souls Day, though, is to bring into awareness the prospect of our own ending – one day it will be our time to go. What will we leave behind in our turn? People who have had a brush with a life-threatening illness often speak of how it has focussed their mind – they resolve to live and love without holding back, to do whatever good they can while there's still time, to create and express themselves, and share whatever wisdom they have gained with others – to live more boldly so they don't die regretting those things unsaid or undone. We don't have to have been to the brink ourselves, though, to try and live this way. Reflecting on death and loss, as we're called to do on this day, can remind us to truly live more deeply now.

Today, then, let's remember the lives of those who have given us inspiration, strength, comfort, and love. Let us give thanks for those whose presence is always with us and honour their memory with a ceremony of remembrance. I invite you to come up and light a candle – or several, if you wish – to remember beloved friends and family who have died, or maybe those people who have touched our lives through their work, teachers and inspirational figures from across the generations.

I ask you to simply come up and speak the name of the person you are remembering, or to light the candle in silence if you wish, and perhaps leave just a little pause between each of the names to honour their memory.

(time for lighting candles)

All of these holy souls live on, in us. To close our ceremony of remembrance, I'd like to offer some words from the senior minister of All Souls Unitarian Church in Washington DC, Robert Hardies:

“Every year, All Souls Day affords us the opportunity to remember the dead, and to remember also that one day we will join them, that one day people will sit in this very sanctuary - or perhaps another - and call out our names. In death, all borders are erased, and our souls return to that one soul from which we all have come. This is death's lesson, that what unites us is far greater than what divides us. The great challenge for us is not to wait until death is knocking on our own door to discover this, but to see it now... and, with that vision, to live into the promise of the great family of all souls.”

Amen

Jane Blackall

‘All Souls’ by May Sarton

*Did someone say that there would be an end,
An end, Oh, an end, to love and mourning?
Such voices speak when sleep and waking blend,
The cold bleak voices of the early morning
When all the birds are dumb in dark November -
Remember and forget, forget, remember.*

*After the false night, warm true voices, wake!
Voice of the dead that touches the cold living,
Through the pale sunlight once more gravely speak,
Tell me again, while the last leaves are falling:
“Dear child, what has been once so interwoven
Cannot be raveled, nor the gift ungiven.”*

*Now the dead move through all of us still glowing,
Mother and child, lover and lover mated,
Are wound and bound together and enflowing.
What has been plaited cannot be unplaited -
Only the strands grow richer with each loss
And memory makes kings and queens of us.*

*Dark into light, light into darkness, spin.
When all the birds have flown to some real haven,
We who find shelter in the warmth within,
Listen, and feel new-cherished, new-forgiven,
As the lost human voices speak through us and blend
Our complex love, our mourning without end.*



What's On in January:

Sunday 9th January, 11am
"Geography of the Holy Lands"
 Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 9th January, 12.30pm
Small-Group Communion
 Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker
 and Dr. Stephanie Saville

Wednesday 12th January, 7pm
Committee Meeting

Sunday 16th January, 11am
"Sinfulness for Unitarians"
 Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 16th January, 12.30pm
Singing Workshop
 Led by Margaret Marshall

Tuesday 18th January, 7-9pm
Creativity Group:
'Bring Your Own Crafts'

Thursday 20th January, 6-9pm
Adult RE: 'Tapestry of Life' (1/9)
 Led by Sarah T and Jane B

Saturday 22nd January, 10.30am
Walking Group: Regent's Park
 Meeting at Baker Street Tube

Sunday 23rd January, 11am
**"Humour as a
 Spiritual Resource"**
 Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 23rd January, 12.30pm
Social Action Group

Tuesday 25th January, 7-9pm
Reading Group:
'The Enemy of the Good'

Thursday 27th January, 7-9pm
Adult RE: 'Tapestry of Life' (2/9)
 Led by Sarah T and Jane B

Sunday 30th January, 11am
"Now Let Us Sing"
 Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 30th January, 12.30-2pm
Adult RE: 'Life Spirit' (1 of 2)
 Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Services at Essex Church

5th December, 11am – "I Wish I Could Speak Like Music"

Service led by Rev. John Harley

'I wish I could speak like music' – Hafiz, the Sufi poet. How useful are words to describe the mysteries of this life? John will explore the way lazy language wars can distract us from the real heart of religion. Rev. John Harley is youth officer for the Unitarian GA.

12th December, 11am – "Animals and Christmas"

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

This service will celebrate the part animals play in our lives and the starring role they have always held in the nativity story. Bring your animals along if they are prepared to travel or bring a photo or poem or reading – anything that you would like to contribute to this different way of celebrating Christmas. After the service there will be a choice of activities:

12.30pm - **Small-Group Communion**, led by Jane Blackall (lasting ~30 minutes)

12.30pm - **'A Christmas Memory'**, a short story by Truman Capote,
 read by Scott Varland (lasting ~40 minutes)

19th December, 11am – "Christmas Carol Service"

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

This service will be followed by a congregational bring-and-share lunch.

24th December, 5pm – "Candlelit Christmas Eve"

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Please Note – there is no service on Boxing Day, Sunday 26th December.

2nd January, 11am – "Honest to God: Promises We Can Keep"

Service led by Members of the Congregation

At this time of renewal and resolutions, we explore the challenges of promises and ask what it means to keep our word. Coordinated by Jane Blackall and Tristan Jovanović.

9th January, 11am – "Geography of the Holy Lands"

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

How does landscape shape religious belief? What are the connections between the geography of our planet and our spiritual paths? This service will be followed at 12.30pm by a small-group communion created by Rev. Sarah Tinker and Dr. Stephanie Saville.

16th January, 11am – "Sinfulness for Unitarians"

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sin and evil are concepts that Unitarians speak little of. Rejecting as we do such concepts as original sin how can liberal religious people then come to terms with the nastier aspects of human existence?

23rd January, 11am – "Humour as a Spiritual Resource"

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

The ability to laugh in the face of life's difficulties is a great gift. This service will help us to explore the role humour can play in helping us along the spiritual path.

30th January, 11am – "Now Let Us Sing"

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

At this dark time of year what better way to cheer our spirits than to have a really good sing. We may also explore the spiritual and physical benefits of conducting music.

*Do let our minister know if you would like to take an active part in any of these services – why not choose a favourite hymn or carol, or suggest a reading?
 In particular we will be looking for people to read in our
 Carol Service, on Christmas Eve and on January 2nd.*