



# Kensington Unitarians

Newsletter: February 2014

## What's On...

Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> February, 11am-noon  
**'Sacred, Holy, Divine'**  
Service led by Kate Buchanan

Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> February, 1pm-4pm  
**'A Sense of the Sacred'**  
Workshop led by Jane Blackall and  
Kate Buchanan (book in advance)

Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> February, 12.30-1.30pm  
**Nia Technique** with Sonya Leite

Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> February, 7-8pm  
**'Heart and Soul' Spiritual Gathering**  
'Slow Down... and Connect'  
Led by Roy Clark

Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> February, 11am-noon  
**'Love in All its Manifestations'**  
Service led by Jeannene Powell  
and Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> February, 12.30pm  
**Small-Group Communion**  
Led by Tristan Jovanović

Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> February, 2.00-3.00pm  
**Nia Technique** with Sonya Leite

Monday 10<sup>th</sup> February, 12.30-1.30pm  
**Nia Technique** with Sonya Leite

Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> February, 7-9.00pm  
**Creativity Group: Feltmaking**  
(or bring your own craft)

Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> February, 11am-noon  
**'Being Open to Spirit'**  
Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker  
and Kate Whyman

Monday 17<sup>th</sup> February, 12.30-1.30pm  
**Nia Technique** with Sonya Leite

Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> February, 11am-noon  
**'Across the Pond'**  
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> February, 12.30-1.15pm  
**'Finding Your Voice'**  
Singing workshop with Margaret

Monday 24<sup>th</sup> February, 12.30-1.30pm  
**Nia Technique** with Sonya Leite

Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> February, 7-9.00pm  
**Management Committee Meeting**

## A Message from our Minister:

### Eyes Soft and Hard

I met a shoplifter a few weeks ago. We were both looking at a display of woolly hats in a sports shop, when I saw him pick up half a dozen hats, put them under his jacket and turn towards the exit. As he turned we caught each other's eyes. I have no idea what I looked like – probably somewhat bemused at this unexpected occurrence. But he, well, he looked hard. You probably need to look a bit tough if you're going



to steal something and he was perhaps warning me with that look not to get all heroic and shout 'stop thief'. His hard stare stayed with me for the rest of the day. I wondered if he always looked like that or if he might go home that night to family or friends and soften his gaze and have a laugh and a cuddle with someone perhaps.

Now you might well imagine that as a minister of religion I'd spend most of my time looking softly upon others and upon life generally. And maybe it's just here in central London that I find all sorts of situations where I have to look quite steely. Within a few days of the encounter with the woolly hat thief I was needing to encourage a group of lager drinkers to leave the benches in front of the church and then I cleared the rubbish that they'd left, including the mess where one of them had been sick.

To pass the time I experimented by looking at the scene with soft eyes and hard eyes, with compassionate thoughts and annoyed thoughts. Do try it sometimes and see if it works for you. Changing the nature of my gaze and the nature of my thoughts changed the whole event from one of irritation and tedium to one of gentle musing. I wondered about the lives of those lager drinkers and found it difficult to imagine what had led them to that moment on our benches. I wondered what they thought of me, this solitary woman trying to look tough, who told them to go away. I wondered where they would go next to sit and drink and laugh together.

We really know so little of each other's lives and thoughts. In the year ahead lots of new people will find Kensington Unitarians, perhaps passing through London or looking for somewhere to put down roots. Let's practice looking with soft and compassionate eyes upon all the strangers who come our way. Who knows what stories they might have to tell?

**Rev. Sarah Tinker**

## In this month's newsletter...

\* BOOK NOW for Special 'Compassionate Communication' weekend course in April \*  
'Embracing the Shadow' workshop report \* 'The Silent Minute' by Jeannene Powell  
\* 'Staying First' by Roy Clark \* 'Normal & Supernormal' by John Hands \* Foodbank Update \*  
A Round-Up of the 2013 Worship Studies Course \* 'Philomena' Review by Liz Tuckwell  
\* 'A Path of Self-Compassion' – sermon by Rev. Sarah Tinker \* and much much more...

# Kensington Unitarians

At Essex Church (founded 1774), Notting Hill Gate

Kensington Unitarians are a community of kindred souls who meet each week at Essex Church in Notting Hill Gate to explore, reflect, converse, be still, share joys and sorrows, and support one another on life's journey. We are proud to be part of a worldwide and historic liberal religious tradition.

Our main activity is Sunday worship and we hold a service each week at 11am. All are welcome. Services are usually themed and include readings from a variety of sources, prayers, music, singing, stillness, and a short sermon. Our children's leaders provide an alternative programme of activities for younger people.

Small-group activities are another key part of our programme. We offer courses and one-off workshops exploring spiritual and religious matters and considering life's meaning together with others on the spiritual journey.



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

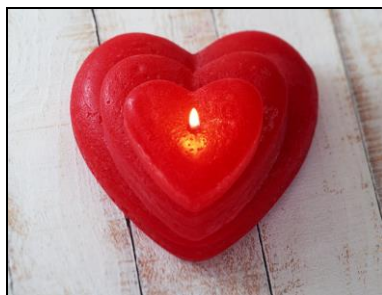
Office Telephone: 020 7221 6514

Email: [info@kensington-unitarians.org.uk](mailto:info@kensington-unitarians.org.uk)

Web: [www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk](http://www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk)

# 'Heart and Soul'

## Midweek Spiritual Gatherings



**Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> February from 7-8pm**

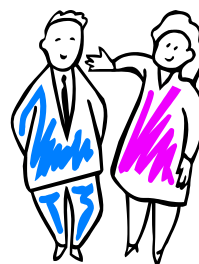
*Gathering at 6.45pm downstairs in the library*

*Followed by social time and refreshments*

Our February gathering will be led by Roy Clark on the theme 'Slow Down... and Connect.' There will be cake!

If you would like to know more about these gatherings please contact [jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk](mailto:jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk).

## Volunteering Rotas: Stewarding, Coffee and Greeting



### Stewarding:

2 <sup>nd</sup> February:	David Darling
9 <sup>th</sup> February:	Gina Bayley
16 <sup>th</sup> February:	Niall Doherty
23 <sup>rd</sup> February:	Veronica Needa

### Coffee:

2 <sup>nd</sup> February:	Sue Smith
9 <sup>th</sup> February:	Juliet Edwards
16 <sup>th</sup> February:	Mike E
23 <sup>rd</sup> February:	Sam Boyero

### Greeting:

2 <sup>nd</sup> February:	Ellen McHugh
9 <sup>th</sup> February:	Sam Boyero
16 <sup>th</sup> February:	Carole Grace
23 <sup>rd</sup> February:	Carol Sheppard

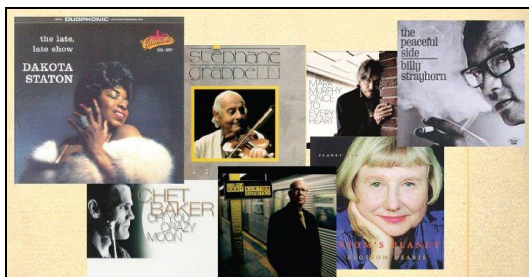
We circulate the rota list each month by email. Please contact Jane if you are willing to be on the rota mailing list.

**[rotas@kensington-unitarians.org.uk](mailto:rotas@kensington-unitarians.org.uk)**

## Pop-Up Jazz Café

### The Terri Quaye Trio

Remember our LGBT Jazz Heroes



**Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> February, 6.45pm for 7pm**

**at Lewisham Unitarian Meeting House  
41 Bromley Road, Catford, London SE6 2TS**

**Terri Quaye – vocal pianist**

**Greg Gottlieb – bassist**

**Giovanni Cacioppo – guitarist**

Door £10 – includes live music and refreshments.

For more info: [office@lewishamunitarians.org.uk](mailto:office@lewishamunitarians.org.uk)

# Report from the Church Management Committee



The management committee met for the first time this year on Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> January. This was the first meeting since Howard Hague resigned from the committee after over thirty years' service. Howard and Gill have recently moved to Sheffield. Howard has been a great servant of the church and we will miss his knowledge of the history of our community and his eye for detail and we are therefore grateful that he has agreed to stay on as a Trustee. Jo Ridgers has also resigned from the committee and we acknowledged, with thanks, her contribution to our life and witness.

Thanks to Jenny and Sarah's attentive care the building remains in a reasonably good state of repair though we had to call in the man from dyno-rod and the recent torrential rainfall has caused some damage due to leaks from the roof. Jenny reported that the building continues to be well used and provides a necessary source of income. A couple of groups for children have started to rent some space on a regular basis.

Jane reported on the numerous workshops, events and courses that have been organised which are advertised elsewhere in the newsletter. I would also urge you to take leaflets/flyers about these events and to invite friends who may want to have an opportunity to safely explore their spiritual journey.

Sarah reported that a member of the congregation has kindly offered to run a children's programme which we hope will encourage more families with young children to attend. If you would like to help with our children's programme do have a chat with Sam Boyero or our minister. We continue with our monthly collection for a charity suggested by members of the congregation. We try to alternate these with a Unitarian charity one month and a non -Unitarian charity the next. We are also continuing to collect non-perishable food items for a local food bank.

We are very fortunate in the quality of our Sunday worship but Sarah spoke of her desire to ensure that we build on what we have and is keen to have contributions from members of the congregation and wants to encourage members who would like to share some of the leading of worship with her. Mindful of the vagaries of public transport on Sunday mornings and of our wish to maintain a peaceful place for worship we are asking the stewards to invite those who are late to wait outside the worship space until there is a suitable time, usually when there is a hymn being sung. We are also planning to put out more chairs so that it is easier for people who are late to find a space and feel welcomed.

Essex Church is not only well known for its worship and workshops but also for the regular cultural activities whether it be visits to museums, concerts or walks in the country and we are grateful to Natasha who has agreed to co-ordinate these events. Please speak to her if you have any suggestions. As always please contact myself or any member of the committee if you have any comments or suggestions about how we can continue to grow as a loving, searching, worshipping community.

**David Francis Darling, Chair of the Congregation**



*Members of the congregation sitting peacefully in candle-light during our meditative carol service on Christmas Eve.*

# ‘Spiritual Life Skills’

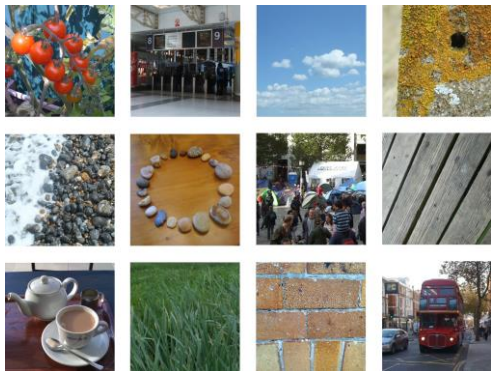
**A new workshop series for 2014  
Hosted by Kensington Unitarians**

Throughout 2014 we will be holding a series of ‘Spiritual Life Skills’ events here at Essex Church. Open to all, these groups will take many varied paths in exploring what it is to be human. The full programme is now available in our new leaflet. We strongly encourage you to **put the dates in your diary and book ASAP** as we will be advertising widely and places will be limited.

We would very much appreciate if you would help us spread the word about this series by taking copies of the special leaflet and recommending it to any friends who may be interested.

# ‘A Sense of the Sacred’

**Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> February, 1pm-4pm  
Facilitated by Jane Blackall and Kate Buchanan**



In this workshop we will be exploring our sense of the sacred in all dimensions of life, in unexpected places, and our day-to-day existence. We will consider ways in which we can develop greater awareness of the sacred, honour what is most precious to others, and practice reverence. This workshop is free of charge (though donations are welcome). To book your place, email: [jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk](mailto:jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk).

**Jane Blackall**

*‘Life is a sacred adventure. Every day we encounter signs written in the texts of our own experience that point to the active presence of Spirit in the world around us. And we can learn to read these signs; we can become spiritually literate. Whether viewed as a gift from God or a skill to be cultivated, this facility enables us to discern and decipher a world full of meaning. Spiritual literacy is practiced in all the world’s wisdom traditions. Medieval Catholic monks called it “reading the book of the world.”’*

**Frederic & Mary Ann Brussat  
Curators of [www.spiritualityandpractice.com](http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com)**

# ‘Death Café’

**Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> March, 1pm-4pm  
Afternoon facilitated by Clare Slaney**



At a Death Café people, often strangers, gather to eat cake, drink tea and discuss death. A Death Café is a discussion group about death rather than a grief support or counselling session. The objective is 'to increase awareness of death with a view to helping people make the most of their (finite) lives'. The Death Cafe model was developed by Jon Underwood and Sue Barsky Reid, based on the ideas of Bernard Crettaz.

Death Cafés are always offered:


- On a not for profit basis
- In an accessible, respectful and confidential space
- With no intention of leading people to any conclusion, product or course of action
- Alongside refreshing drinks and nourishing food – and cake!

The idea of hosting a Death Café has now spread quickly across the globe. By 2013 it was estimated that some 482 Death Cafés have been organised for over 3,000 participants in Europe, North America and Australasia. Death Café has no staff and is run on a purely voluntary basis by Jon Underwood in Hackney, East London. The first Death Café in the UK was offered in Jon’s house in Hackney, East London in September 2011. It was facilitated by psychotherapist Sue Barsky Reid, Jon’s mum, and was a wonderful occasion. They have gone on to offer Death Cafés in a range of places including funky cafés, people’s houses, a yurt and the Royal Festival Hall.


And so we are offering a Death Café here in Essex Church from 1pm to 4pm on Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> March. We’ll provide drinks and snacks, bring your lunch, and come to the service earlier if you would like. We’d appreciate it if you could let us know if you plan to come for the afternoon by contacting Sarah our minister on [info@kensington-unitarians.org.uk](mailto:info@kensington-unitarians.org.uk).

We’re grateful to psychotherapist and counsellor Clare Slaney who will be facilitating the afternoon for us.

**Rev. Sarah Tinker**



**Spiritual Life Skills  
Workshop Series 2014**



Throughout 2014 we will be offering a series of spiritual and personal development workshops and other events. The workshops are open to all and you are welcome to come along to as many or as few of them as you like. However, places are limited, so please book in advance.

112 Palace Gardens Terrace, London, W8 4RT  
[www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk](http://www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk)

## Compassionate Communication: A Personal Recommendation



# BOOK NOW!!!

## ‘Compassionate Communication’

**Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> April, 10.30am-4pm &  
Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> April, 1pm-4pm (must attend both)**

Compassionate Communication is a practical exploration into how and why others hear us as they do, and how and why we hear others as we do. This understanding helps us choose differently in the way we listen and how we express ourselves; and so helps us toward a more compassionate and enriching understanding both of others and ourselves.

We are delighted to be joined by Jill and Richard Broadbent who will be offering their ‘Compassionate Communication’ training over a whole weekend this spring (this is a two-day course). Some long-standing members of the congregation will remember that the Broadbents led a six-week course with us back in the autumn of 2010. We cannot recommend this training highly enough, and would encourage members of the congregation to sign up, even if you took part in the previous course as there is always more to learn and considerable benefit to be had from practising with others.

There is a sliding scale of £20 / £40 / £60 for this training (pay what you can afford) which is a considerable saving on what you would pay to do an equivalent training course elsewhere. **We would appreciate it if you would sign up for this course as soon as possible so we can be sure it is viable.** Please book your place soon by emailing [jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk](mailto:jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk) or contact Jane if you would like to know more.

I was delighted to hear that Jill and Richard Broadbent are to return to the church and run a second Compassionate Communication course with us on the 5<sup>th</sup> / 6<sup>th</sup> April.

Having attended their previous course, I have found the model, often described as Non –Violent Communication by Marshall B Rosenberg, as both easy to understand and very helpful. The theories are clear and uncomplicated, but can have profound outcomes. In my case it helps me be more compassionate initially towards myself and then toward others. Generally I find non-judgmental listening difficult, but this model has helped to reframe how I see things.

Two years ago, a day after a workshop with Jill and Richard, I walked into bedlam at London tube station. A young man had totally lost his temper and was violently kicking the door to gain entry to a ticket attendant. I approached him and asked if he was OK and then told him that I observed that he appeared very upset and wondered what had happened. The fact that I wanted to listen and had not judged him seemed to transform him. I could almost feel the anger evaporate, he seemed to deflate and regain his composure and eventually the outcome was positive. It could have been very different. I felt privileged, but also bemused that applying the model that I had practiced the day before could have such a profound impact.

This is a model that becomes more effective with practice. I am aware that some members of the church have already attended a workshop with Jill and Richard, if you are one of them I believe that you will get even more from the process the second time around. As a group we also have the on-going opportunity to develop our skills within the church community.

**Jim Blair**

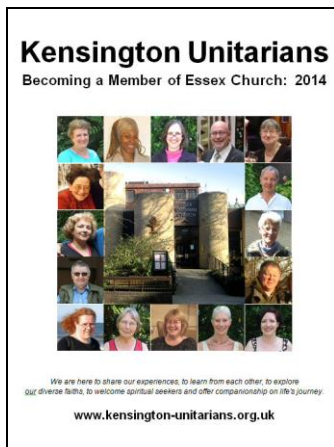
## 'Twelve Steps to Spiritual Health' – Group Catch-Up

Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> February 2014 from 7-9pm  
Downstairs in the Library

A one-off catch-up for those who attended the 'Twelve Steps to Spiritual Health' course last autumn. An opportunity to share how you've been getting on since the course ended: Have you started or kept up any spiritual practice? Noticed any long lasting impact from doing the course or changes in perspective or lifestyle? We'll have plenty of social time for thoughtful discussion and refreshments.

Please let Sarah know if you're able to attend. Email [sarah@kensington-unitarians.org.uk](mailto:sarah@kensington-unitarians.org.uk) or phone 0207 221 6514.

## Church Membership 2014



In January current members and friends of our congregation will (hopefully) have received their annual letter and form to fill in for membership. Its 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 form feels to receive and fill in. We'd also be grateful if you could return the forms speedily to the church office – or even fill them in straight away on a Sunday morning – as this makes it much easier to administer.

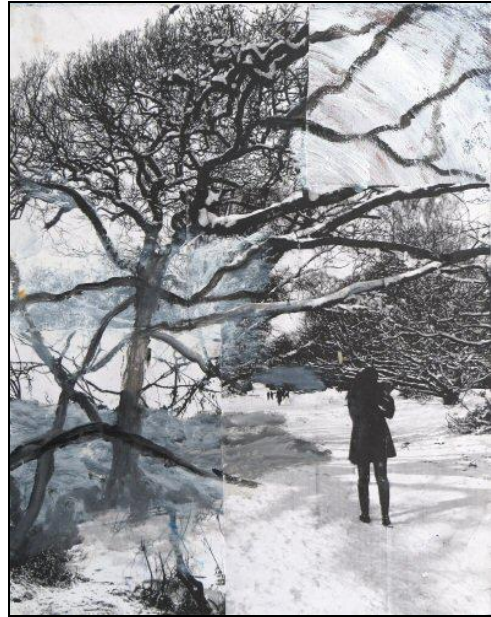
Our annual suggested subscription remains at £40 for members and £16 for friends. This payment is not a requirement but it in some way covers the cost of newsletter production and mailing and the annual quota payment we make for each member to our central General Assembly. Some people pay with a cheque, others put money in the collection during the year to cover this cost, or pay by standing order.

Please don't let finance stop you from filling in the form but also do ask yourself what you can afford to contribute to the running costs of the church, or other ways that you might contribute to our community through your time or enthusiasm.

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 me and have a chat.

Rev. Sarah Tinker

## February Sunrise



Clear frosty days are here again,  
wake up, wake up,  
be amazed by this glittering sunrise.

For a few minutes the blue sky is covered in pink clouds.

There is a smile on the face of every house in our street.

Heidi Ferid

## Bare Trees on Primrose Hill

I've said it before, but I'll say it again,  
The winter face of trees is lovely to look into.  
No longer bowed down by their leafy offspring  
They are free to fling their naked branches in all  
Directions the wind propels them. They can be  
Calm when snow and frost subdue their landscapes  
They can be wild when the northeast wind  
Rampages o'er their abandoned fields: they  
Can creak and mutter, they can shriek like  
Party girls when the pawky breeze  
Tickles their private apertures.

O winter trees!

Enjoy these perturbative pleasures while ye may, for  
Spring and Summer are furtively approaching: then it will be  
Birth birth birth and birthing up to and well beyond  
Your longest day.

John Hands  
Regents Park, December 18<sup>th</sup> 2013

# Creativity Group

Second Thursday evening of each month  
continuing 13<sup>th</sup> February from 7-9.00pm



I am very pleased to announce that our creativity group has just re-launched for a new start in 2014. This previously ran very successfully for 10 years (2002-2012) before taking a break in 2013 and was responsible for many of the art and craft creations that you will see around the church. This was the very first group that I started up here at Essex Church and so it has a particularly special place in my heart.

The plan is that we will meet once a month and will focus on a particular art or craft medium or a certain project for each quarter of the year so that we can go deeper into it over that three-month period. The provisional line-up is as follows:

**January-March: Felting**

**April-June: Photography**

**July-September: Printmaking**

One of the particularly enjoyable features of the creativity group is the space it offers for fellowship and conversation while we are each working on our individual projects alongside one another. If you don't fancy the art or craft we are 'officially' focusing on then you are always welcome to bring along whatever you're working on and do your own art/craft whilst enjoying the good company of the group.

There were ten of us at the first session and we are keen to get a group of at least half a dozen people to commit to regularly attending the first six sessions to help get the group re-established. If you would be willing to support the group with your presence in this way I would be very pleased to hear from you (email [jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk](mailto:jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk)).

**Jane Blackall**



# The Silent Minute



I came across this recently. And due to having fallen into the habit of my life (and mind) becoming increasingly busier day by day, thought it may be a way to bring a small bit of silence and peace into my life.

The original Silent Minute was begun by Major Wellesley Tudor Pole during the Second World War. He said that: *"There is no power on earth that can withstand the united cooperation on spiritual levels of men and women of goodwill everywhere. It is for this reason that the continued and widespread observance of the Silent Minute is of such vital importance in the interest of human welfare."*

On 10th November 1940, as the 9pm chiming of Big Ben sounded out over BBC radio, people around Britain and the Commonwealth countries began their first Silent Minute. For this 1 minute, people, regardless of their religion or none, would pray, meditate or consciously will for peace to prevail.

This Silent Minute was supported by the King, King George VI and Winston Churchill amongst other famous people and carried on nightly, throughout the war. After the war though, the Silent Minute was virtually forgotten.

In 1994 Dorothy Forster revived the Silent Minute by starting a London based, worldwide supported charity, calling for people to focus their Silent Minute prayer or attention on peace coming to areas in the world where wars are currently ongoing.

Often I've read in blogs, heard international speakers or had thoughts myself, that working on creating "peace without" also involves working on creating "peace within".

I think this is summed up so nicely and succinctly in the charity's Silent Minute Prayer on their website, which reads:

**Source of my being,  
Help me to live in peace,  
And save my home the planet Earth.**

To find out more you can visit their website:  
[www.thesilentminute.org.uk](http://www.thesilentminute.org.uk)

**Jeannene Powell**

# 'Embracing the Shadow' Workshop – Report



*'How can I be substantial if I do not cast a shadow? I must have a dark side also if I am to be whole'. - Carl Jung*

Over the years I have done quite a lot of counselling / therapy type work so I came to this day with a fair understanding of the concept of the shadow but I had no idea of how varied, challenging, funny and informative a day of encountering, exploring and embracing the shadow this would be.

It was quite a large group and I did at first wonder if that would be an issue but there was such a good mix of working either alone, in pairs, within small groups or sharing with the group as a whole that it turned out to be a non-issue so far as I was concerned. Sarah and Sonya worked hard to create a safe space for all to participate as much or as little as they wanted. And as always with groups such as these, there is the comfort of the opt-out clause if that is what is needed.

I found the day to be a wonderful mix of reading, journal writing, breathwork, movement and creative arts. There was a long creative session in the afternoon and we were all invited to draw or paint, make masks, create peg dollies or puppets, exploring and expressing our shadow selves in a multitude of different ways. I found this session the hardest to participate in. I know that I am a creative person but for me there are very negative thoughts and feelings around the idea of producing and creating art, so I can find it hard to get going on a project. That's part of my shadow stuff! However in the last quarter of an hour or so I had a burst of creative energy and produced a marionette representing the dark and light aspects of my character, as well as a peg dolly that gave expression to my 'inner diva'.

My favourite part of the day was when Sonya played two pieces of music – *Zadok the Priest* and *O Fortuna* from *Carmina Burana* – and invited us firstly to express our inner king or queen and then the 'child lurking in the murk' who definitely did not want to come out and play! The *O Fortuna* piece enabled this process so beautifully. For me one of the most valuable lessons of the day was to be reminded that the shadow not only represents the dark and difficult aspects of ourselves that we would rather not look at but also some of the wonderful and powerful aspects of our character that we feel unable or unwilling to express. Coming to know and accept all of ourselves allows our creativity to flourish and allows us to be whole.

Carol Sheppard

## New Congregational Mugs - Available to Purchase for £5



Our fancy new congregational mugs got their first outing at the church management committee meeting last October, as you can see (right), and they are now on sale from the church for £5 each. The fine porcelain mugs feature the 'Community, Spirituality, Conscience' chalice logo. We hope they will provide a talking point when you share a cuppa with your friends!

**There will be an opportunity to buy mugs during coffee hour. Speak to Jane or Sarah if you'd like to buy one.**





## Small Group Communion



**Sundays 9<sup>th</sup> February, 9<sup>th</sup> March, 13<sup>th</sup> April  
at 12.30pm Down in the Church Library**

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

**9<sup>th</sup> February** – Led by Tristan Jovanović

**9<sup>th</sup> March** – Leader to be announced

**13<sup>th</sup> April** – Led by Sue Smith

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



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

**W L McKinstry** (from *uchristian.org*)

## Unitarian GA Annual Meetings

13<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> April 2014 at Whittlebury Hall



The Keynote Speaker will be Rabbi Danny Rich, Chief Executive of Liberal Judaism. The Anniversary Preacher will be Rev. Dr. David Usher. Entertainment on the last evening will be from comedian Robin Ince. There also the chance to meet up with old friends, make new ones, share ideas, good food, good company, and get your views heard by taking part in the debates and decisions on the future of UK Unitarianism.

Whittlebury Hall is a four-star Hotel and Conference Centre located amidst the rolling Northamptonshire countryside with excellent meeting room facilities and high-quality bedrooms and meals. There is an adjacent golf course and a spa on the premises with a 19-metre swimming pool with bubble jets, sauna, steam room, whirlpool spa and a fully-equipped gym.

For more info see [www.unitarian.org.uk/ga](http://www.unitarian.org.uk/ga)  
or ask a committee member for details.



**A Fitness Fusion of 9 Movement Forms**

**Second Sunday of the Month from 2-3pm:  
9<sup>th</sup> February, 9<sup>th</sup> March, 13<sup>th</sup> April**

**Also each MONDAY lunchtime from 12.30**

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

Cost £10 (£7 to concessions / church members).

**Contact: Sonya Leite on 0207 371 1674.**



## ‘Normal and Supernormal’

Originally given as an address by John Hands back in 2005

Perhaps at once you may feel that I have inevitably begged the question. The question; Is there such a thing or state of being we can reasonably call the supernormal? And if so, how can we know anything about it - firmly situated, as we feel ourselves to be - in the security and limitations of the evidence of our five senses? Of course there are many other words I might have used. Both Roget's Thesaurus and the OED reveal a plethora of synonyms, as they seem mostly to be. But the definition of supernormal seemed the most satisfactory: 'phenomena of an extraordinary kind, involving a higher law or principle than those ordinarily occurring, but not necessarily supernatural'...

So I've settled for supernormal, not because I do not want to have to deal with the supernatural - quite the contrary in fact - but because "supernormal" helps us to include at least some reference to the extraordinary results which have been occurred in more recent experiments in atomic physics. I refer to the experiments which now appear to demonstrate that under certain conditions particular particles can be recorded in more than one place at the same time. Or how, in experiments with light particles called photons, if you observe them with a particle detector you find you are dealing with a particle, but if you look at the same particles with a wave-detector you find you are dealing with a wave. Results of experiments such as these confound the ideas of physical normality which were current when I was a student in the fifties.

Of course, none of these remarkable experiments could be carried out by laypeople such as you and I. We would need special training – and immense mathematical ability. And we would of course need the facilities of a modern physics laboratory. All of these requirements we take for granted – only certain kinds of people using particular kinds of equipment under particular sorts of circumstances could attempt such experiments and hope to produce convincing results. But – if I may now refer to what is ordinarily understood to be the supernatural - it has been my experience in particular kinds of meditation group, with a particular mix, as it were, of participants, I have both witnessed in one or two others, and experienced in myself a state of exultation and spiritual insight which it seems we are ordinarily incapable of attaining. My reading and experience as a poet and also a former dramatherapist convinces me that such paranormal or supernormal are more 'ordinary' or common or 'normal' than we usually allow ourselves to suppose. Experiences which were taken to be normal for all generations prior to about the latter part of the eighteenth century, were thereafter deemed to be abnormal and aberrant. Quite suddenly in the experience of most people other than 'men of science' (as they were called then) beliefs long taken for granted were called into question, even ridiculed. It seems to me undeniable that the word "normal" is what philosophers of the fifties primly termed "pormanteau terms". By this they meant that like some of those delightful words invented by Lewis Carrol (such as 'slithy' a combination of slimy and slippery) our word "normal" can combine with the meanings of other words to mean different things or experiences in different societies, cultural traditions and historical periods.

For example Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, (1871- 1944) a Japanese Buddhist, became the first president of a Buddhist society dedicated to reawakening us to the intimate relationships between human beings and natural objects. In a passage in a monograph by one of his more recent disciples entitled 'The Environmental Problem and Buddhism', dealing with the element of sympathy in the relation between a mountain and a human being Makiguchi says: 'The mountain which until now has towered as something different and apart, is recognised as part of the world, like the self with which it exists in a mutual relationship. The mountain becomes a sentient being and relations with it become sentient too. The self becomes one with the mountain, sharing its sorrows and joys and experiencing its fate. Ultimately this feeling extends to the whole of society protected by the mountain'...

In this connection too I am irresistibly drawn to think of poems by Buddhist poets of nature, ancient and modern; and inevitably too I think of particular poets of nature in our own cultural tradition such as Wordsworth, John Keats, Shelley, and John Clare. For example think of one of Shelley's most famous poems – "Ode to the Wild West Wind". In this poem the poet addresses the autumnal wind as if it were a living, frolicking entity. And in doing this I feel Shelley is recognising it as more than a phenomenon of Nature, but more like a demoniacal being from another dimension which it embodies.

Those of us who are familiar with the work of Eileen Caddy and the remarkable relationships which many of those living in Findhorn have achieved with plants and the natural world, can see this as further examples of the benefits of an intense and sympathetic relationship with the natural world; as opposed to dealing with it collectively as unresponsive, soulless objects which we are at liberty to exploit and misuse.

Inevitably however, in a civilisation such as ours, which is still heavily influenced by mechanistic scientific criteria of normality which were so firmly established in the nineteenth century and consolidated throughout most of the twentieth, most of us will want to focus attention upon the question of evidence. What evidence is there you may ask for any kind of belief in the supernormal or supernatural - whatever you want to call it? To this question I think it is best to say straight out that if you are looking for evidence such as is accumulated by the so-called 'hard sciences' such as physics, geology, chemistry and biology, supernatural experiences can be neither acquired nor verified under the laboratory conditions appropriate to these sciences.

## **'Normal and Supernormal' – an address by John Hands** *(continued)*

This was the view, with which I concur, of my late friend and author on psychic experiences Paul Beard. He spent many years of patient listening in what he preferred to call Communication sessions with gifted psychics and mediums, and he was not in the least inclined to accept as evidence insincere, or casual application to the task of attempting communication with those we ordinarily call 'dead'. He worked hard at accumulating as much evidence of personal survival as he could, and he wrote about his experiences in a small number of books which many of those who are concerned with such experiences have felt to be exemplars of their kind. I would like to read to you the conclusion of one of his last books entitled 'Living On'...

*'In terms of spirit, there is all the time in the world for the development and spiritualising of mankind to come about. In terms of earth, a speeding up of individual consciousness in this century is vitally necessary. It becomes extremely urgent to overcome the retardments brought about by many generations of selfish, materialistic thought and action. The consequences threaten man on every side with pollution, economic chaos and economic destruction. It is necessary to learn to respond to the more speedy spiritual pace seemingly now planned for – planning which is the fruit of beings in the higher worlds whose intentions gradually percolate through minds on earth. Oliver Lodge, after his death, (speaking through a medium) emphatically declared: 'There is only one world, and we must take down these....barriers of illusion that compelled us to think there must be two, because through our limitations and ignorance we are unable to look over the self-erected barrier, or to look through it. It must come down. It is your work, it is our work'.....*

This is the most important of all the implications of survival: (Paul Beard continues) *' that the spiritual task which lies before men and women on earth and those who have passed through death is a shared and common one, and not separate and distinct. Parts of it have to be performed individually and parts in collaboration. The collaboration is always there, even when it is not consciously accepted by those on earth. This task is the regeneration of the world by regeneration of the individual, and bringing on earth of the Kingdom of Heaven which, as Jesus said, is within and awaits there its finding by every man and woman'...*

Finally I would like to say that in what I have written I am not trying to persuade you to take on board my own personal conviction in the reality of human survival of death. As a Unitarian I know of course that this would be inappropriate and presumptuous. We all need to make our own enquiries, and our own assessment of whatever evidence we manage to accumulate. But I do urge you to move towards some re-evaluation of the possibility of what I will call dimensions of being beyond what is still in our culture, thought to be normal. This is a direction in which several men and women I have known in my life have moved, and it is perhaps an appropriate one for Unitarians, since it is a path of enquiry and assessment of evidence in a field which many of us feel is increasingly vital, as Paul Beard felt, for our continuing survival and welfare. It is a path of enquiry which inevitably leads us to reassess and realign the paradigms of what for most of the past three centuries has been deemed to be 'normal' and 'rational'. And it also I believe a path which leads us to a greater access of compassion and love for each other and all other living things.

**John Hands** *(written in 2005)*

*John adds: 'I have referred to the psychic-spiritual books of Paul Beard, and would recommend any of them to our congregation. They can all be obtained from the College of Psychic Studies, South Kensington.'*

## **FUSE 2014: Festival of Unitarians in the South East**

**A weekend by the sea filled with Celebration, Inspiration, and Education**

**BOOK NOW!!! 21<sup>st</sup> -23<sup>rd</sup> February 2014 in the Chatsworth Hotel, Worthing**

For Unitarians and other seekers with a passion for the future. Sponsored by the London and Southeast district and open to all. More than 20 workshops on personal spirituality, congregational health, and worship. 'Short Fuse' programme for children and youth and special pricing for weekend! Bursaries available to make this event accessible to all, regardless of distance or financial circumstances. Pre-conference ministerial workshop and main worship service led by Rev. Bill Darlison, GA President for 2013-14. The programme for the weekend promises to be as exciting and varied as the previous two years. There will be time to meet with others from throughout the District and beyond, time to socialise and time to relax. Some of the workshops will be live-streamed, an intriguing new development for the District as we keep up with developments in modern technology.

**Prices:** £235 for a single room / £185 for a shared room / Day visitors on Saturday are £49; £69 including dinner and entertainment / Day visitors on Sunday are £39 / Those under 18 are only £50 / Children under five are free! / The Friday Seminar is £30

**For more information and to register visit the festival website at: [www.fusefest.org.uk](http://www.fusefest.org.uk)**

# Warden's Report

I've been working here for quite a while now and it seems like every two years or so I make a really spectacular double-booking. I think the very worst of these was when hundreds of children from Lloyd Williamson turned up to rehearse for their school concert but the church was in use that day for music exams. More amusing, was the time a few years ago when Beit Klal Synagogue had reserved the whole of the upstairs to celebrate Rosh Hashanah and I forgot to cancel the regular Monday morning children's music classes. Thankfully, the music teacher, Anat, actually turned out to be Jewish & offered to fit groups of up to 20 children into the library instead – so I spent the rest of the morning in the foyer apologising to parents as they arrived and directing them down the stairs. Everyone was most understanding, except the few members of the synagogue who arrived with toddlers and were sent down to Monkey Music!



Anyway, last week I was shocked to get an email from a local parent finalising the details for their child's birthday party on Sunday afternoon when I knew the church was also booked for a charity fundraiser – panicked negotiations ensued. Sunday was the child's actual birthday (which was why we'd agreed to host the party then) so there was no chance of changing the date and there were too many children to fit into the Lindsey Hall. I suggested the fundraiser – a yoga marathon to raise money for the Philippines – could use the Hall, only to be told they had 60 people registered. Aaaaargh! In the end it proved possible to put back the start of the fundraiser by a couple of hours and I had a hectic time between 5 and 5.30 clearing the building of children & balloons & popcorn and opening the partition to make room for everybody's yoga mats. Thankfully, despite this hitch, the fundraiser was hugely successful and raised over £2,000 (see next month's newsletter for some wonderful photographs).

I'd like to think I'll never make such a mistake again – and of course I do try to be completely systematic about entering bookings in the diary before I confirm them – but I guess in reality I will slip up again at some point: hopefully not for another couple of years though!

What saved the day on Sunday, and every time I make a slip up big or small, is how wonderfully flexible and generous almost all of our user groups are – willing to take time to understand the problem and make their own suggestions about how to make the best of it for everyone. So thank you Zohra – for gathering all the children in the Hall to sing to Alex so I could frantically clean up the Church - and thank you Jaqui for rescheduling 9 guest yoga teachers at 2 days' notice without saying a reproachful word and thanks also very much to Sarah, who's had to put up with quite a few mistakes from me over the years and unfailingly responds with reassurance that no-one is perfect and as much practical help as she can to put things right.

Jenny Moy

## 'Finding Our Voice'

Singing Workshops with Margaret Marshall

Sundays 23<sup>rd</sup> February, 23<sup>rd</sup> March,

27<sup>th</sup> April from 12.30 to 1.15pm

Please Note – now on fourth Sunday!



Margaret Marshall has worked as a professional singer all her adult life and is also a very experienced singing teacher. She is leading monthly sessions to help us all find our voice.

These workshops are for anyone who is prepared to open their mouth and make a sound. Margaret will show us how to improve the quality and strength of our voices. Using a few simple exercises we'll gain joy and confidence in our singing by learning how to produce and develop the voice, something everyone can do.

We'll work with the breath and overcome unconscious blocks that can prevent us singing with our true potential. Fun and achievement are guaranteed and these sessions are designed for everyone, whatever your experience or ability. All are welcome.

## Billion Stars: One Planet



When the crankshaft goes down and takes the piston with it  
You could say – "There's a new possibility: or when  
The crankshaft rises up and brings the piston with it – here's  
Another possibility! But if the pistons revolve and no one  
Ever stops to consider those who will breathe in oil and  
spit out saccharine" – but here you will exclaim:  
"If there's no oil, then there'll always be electricity; and  
If there's no electricity then – back to wind and sail or  
Basic pedalling – there's always a way for the dedicated optimist.  
Or– you may add – 'When Gaia starts sending back its 3D survey  
Of the billion stars and their trillion planets surely  
Surely to God there'll be one on which someone, somewhere  
Is bound to be saying: 'when their piston came up  
It was their one opportunity to change direction – but they  
Blew it forever – and now there they are  
Those piddling handful of survivors  
Blaming us – their stars!"

John Hands

Primrose Hill: 20<sup>th</sup> December 2013

## Worship Studies Course (Foundation Step) – Round-Up



During 2013, we held a series of four linked Saturday workshops here at Essex Church, for Unitarian Worship leaders to work towards the GA-certified Worship Studies Course (Foundation Step) certificate. Sarah and I led the sessions with help from a number of guest tutors who had special expertise in particular areas of the subject.

This course brought together 30 people from all over the district and beyond. There were participants from Unitarian congregations in Golders Green, Hampstead, Stratford, Richmond, Brighton, Horsham, Maidstone, Billingshurst, Hastings, Oxford, Bridport, Norwich, York, and Bangor (as well as a sizeable contingent from Kensington, of course!). To the best of my knowledge the Worship Studies Course (WSC) had not been offered in the South of England in the last fifteen years and so there was quite a build-up of demand. Some of the participants had already been leading worship for years and simply wanted to develop their skills. Others might be described as ‘aspiring worship leaders’ and were yet to take the first step of doing a reading in a service.



In the first session we went right back to basics, asking ‘What is Unitarianism?’, and getting a sense of the diverse expressions our faith takes in our various congregations. We asked what worship should always do (and never do!) We reflected on the art of holding sacred space, with the help of Elizabeth Birtles, and began to consider thematic worship. In the second session we looked at presentation and voice projection. With the help of Danny Crosby, we looked at prayer, considering its pastoral role in some depth. We went on to start looking at various elements of the service in turn and asking ‘what is it there for?’ This was a way of deepening our understanding of each element and what purpose it might have for others even if it is not a particularly important part of the service for us personally. In the third session we focused on preaching with help from Patrick O’Neill and also considered the use of ritual. In the final session, Lindy Latham introduced us to the art of storytelling, and David Usher (our district minister for London and the South East) gave us an overview of the practicalities and perils of being a travelling preacher. Music was a vital element woven throughout the course.



To complete the WSC and obtain the GA certificate participants must have attended all the sessions and have two services observed and assessed. To date, seven people have completed their assessment process, and a few are planning to go on to the next (intermediate) level. At least eight others have started the assessment process and will be working to complete the foundation step in 2014.



I am really proud of the part we have played in putting this course on and am delighted that this group of new service leaders made the effort to turn up and do the homework as part of their commitment to excellence in Unitarian worship. I wish them all the very best as they continue to reflect on their craft and develop further in this rewarding endeavour.

**Jane Blackall**

# Staying First: A West London Success Story

In October last year, my friend Nigel Lucas, Director of Residential Services at Walton on Thames, asked me if I would consider joining the board of a local Social Enterprise called *Staying First* of which he is chairman. At the time I knew little about this organisation, but after doing some research decided to accept.

**A Brief History:** *Staying First* started life about 30 years ago, primarily to help people remain living independently in their homes through the provision of housing advice, home improvements and a small repairs service. In recent years however its scope and outreach has grown enormously. A new and major part of its current operations is called *Furnish*.

*Furnish* collects and supplies quality re-use furniture. We run a shop in Shepherds Bush, a commercial centre and warehouse in Greenford and our vans are collecting and delivering furniture in partnership with London Re-use Network. Having collected the unwanted furniture we repair and refurbish and make these items available to at low cost to local residents and organizations.

## Key Activities:

- » offer discounts to enable low income households to furnish their homes
- » help reduce greenhouse gas emissions
- » help local people and organizations donate, source and exchange furniture sustainably
- » provide paid employment & volunteering opportunities

Working with offenders, ex-offenders and so called “neets” (not in work education or employment) we provide full and part time employment opportunities in the warehouse and shop, skills training and rewarding volunteering opportunities aimed at people gaining experience and establishing a work routine. Last year we saved more than 1,300 tonnes of furniture from landfill. Each tone of furniture saved from landfill saves nine tonnes of carbon monoxide emissions. Our ethical business activities impact on people, the economy, and the environment is significant. In 2012, (latest figures available) *Furnish* created £2.1 million of social, economic, and environmental value and a £2.70 return on every £1 invested.



In December I was fortunate to attend as a guest *The Social Enterprise Awards* at the LSO in Central London (the Oscars of the community based business world) for which we were shortlisted for an award. The very next evening we were awarded *The West London Business award for Green Business of the Year*. Pretty impressive stuff. My own involvement includes developing a new website to make it easier for customers to book and arrange deliveries and pickups and to develop our social networking and marketing reach to include both potential partners and a variety of folk who may benefit from the services we offer. It's great to see a small idea that actually benefits everybody becoming such a commercial success, and it is so rewarding to be involved. From fairly humble beginnings we are now the biggest furniture recycler in London. Thanks Nigel!

**Roy Clark**

P.S. Next time you are in Shepherds Bush why not pop in to see us... you might even find a nice new sofa! For more details and a very fun informative short video visit: <http://www.sbhg.co.uk/media/video/versions/vid68djmhq2n1823.mp4>

'What we hate in ourselves, we'll hate in others. To the degree that we have compassion for ourselves, we will also have compassion for others. Having compassion starts and ends with having compassion for all those unwanted parts of ourselves, all those imperfections that we don't even want to look at. Compassion isn't some kind of self-improvement project or ideal that we're trying to live up to.'

**Pema Chödrön**



## One Light Spiritual Gatherings

### 'Love, Love, Love'



Friday 14<sup>th</sup> February 2014  
6.30-8.15pm – Here at Essex Church

*The gatherings are led by graduates of the Interfaith Seminary.*

Information from One Light: 'What would your life be like if you were able to turn toward the world without discrimination or prejudice and embrace it with the care and tenderness you would naturally extend to the person you most love? In our transformation journey this evening we will connect directly with the boundless loving presence of the One who loves us thus.'

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

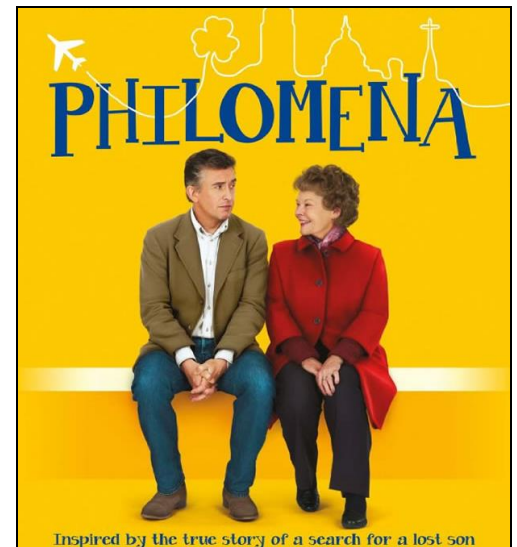
For further information contact Interfaith Reverends Pamela Ramsden 07966 478 980 / Kathryn Reynolds 07976 739 286

**Future Meetings: 14<sup>th</sup> March - Wonder, 11<sup>th</sup> April - Modern Life, 9<sup>th</sup> May - Present Moment, 13<sup>th</sup> June - Appreciation**

## Film Review: 'Philomena'

**SPOILER ALERT: This review does discuss the plot of the film so if you have not yet seen the film, please do not read beyond the first paragraph, which is a summary of the film.**

Philomena is based on the true story of an elderly Irish woman, now living in England, who wants to find her long lost son, adopted as a baby. Philomena, (Judy Dench), was a young, unmarried mother who was sent to one of the infamous convent laundries in Ireland. After receiving very little help from the convent, her daughter arranges for her to meet Martin Sixsmith (Steve Coogan) who then helps her to investigate the mystery of what happened to her son. It is an interesting and thought provoking film. It also has some very funny scenes between Philomena and Martin, especially when they travel to the USA that reflect the differences between their education and social circles. Philomena is based on the book, 'The Lost Child of Philomena Lee' by Martin Sixsmith.



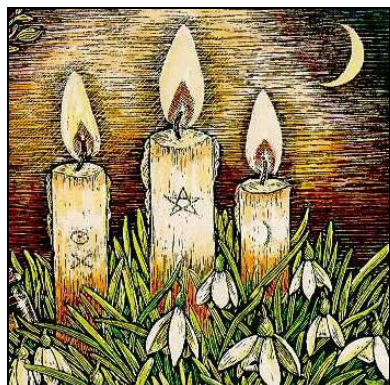
The themes of the film are injustice, persistence and forgiveness. The scandal of the Magdalene Laundries is well known but Philomena points out the emotional impact that the cruelty of an inflexible and dogmatic creed has had on one individual. Philomena's baby son is sold to wealthy Americans. The convent pockets the money and insists that Philomena work in the laundry for four years to cover the cost of looking after her during the pregnancy and birth. Many years later, when she tries to find out where her son is now, the convent is obstructive and unhelpful. The film accuses the convent of deliberately burning all paper records of adoption. Even worse than that, Philomena and Martin discover that her now dead son actually tried to find her. He travelled to the convent in Ireland several years before his death but again, the convent was deliberately unhelpful even though Philomena had already been in contact with them. The Irish Catholic Church does not appear well in this film, to put it mildly.

A very emotional scene in the film is the one where Philomena forgives the nuns who had treated her so badly in the past and who are continuing to do so in the present. Martin comments that he would be unable to forgive the nuns but Philomena says that because she has faith (unlike Martin who is an ex Catholic), she is able to forgive them. I have to say that was the one part of the film that I found difficult to swallow. How could Philomena forgive the nuns? Especially when it was not just appalling actions in the past but continuing on in the present. I agreed with Martin. I thought that the past and present behaviour of the nuns was unpardonable.

The more I thought about it, I realised what was bothering me. Does it mean because you forgive those who have wronged you, that you should not then take any further action against their wrongdoing? Could it then be considered revenge rather than as justified action if you did so after forgiving them? Then I thought about the much quoted example of the late Nelson Mandela, who was famous for forgiving his enemies who had persecuted and imprisoned him, preferring reconciliation to recrimination. However, he refused to grant legal absolution to the perpetrators of apartheid's crimes until they publicly confessed their guilt. The film made me think more deeply about the nature of forgiveness, reconciliation and recrimination.

**Liz Tuckwell**

# Multifaith Calendar



## ☉ 1<sup>st</sup> February – Imbolc - Pagan

Imbolc, also called Oimelc, celebrates the awakening of the land and the growing power of the Sun. Snowdrops, which appear at this time of the year, are seen as the heralds of spring.

## ✝ 2<sup>nd</sup> February – Candlemas / Presentation of Christ in the Temple / Presentation of the Lord – Christian

This is often called Candlemas from the custom of congregations holding lighted candles during the celebration in church. It records the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple and his recognition by the aged Simeon, expressed in the words of the Nunc Dimittis. The festival was formerly known as the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary – reflecting Mary's following of Jewish tradition after the birth of a son. Luke 2:22-38.

## ☪ 3<sup>rd</sup> February – Setsubun / Bean Scattering – Japanese

The day for the Bean Scattering ceremony, performed both in homes and in temples, a special ritual to cleanse away all the evil of the former year and drive away disease-bringing evil spirits for the year to come

## ☪ 4<sup>th</sup> February – Basant – Sikh

Widely celebrated in North India, this festival marks the beginning of spring. For Hindus it is usually linked with Saraswati, the goddess of knowledge, learning and the arts. Yellow is a predominant colour in the celebrations to indicate the onset of spring and because of its associations with Saraswati.

## ☪ 4<sup>th</sup> February – Saraswati Puja/Vasant Panchami – Hindu

Widely celebrated in North India, this festival marks the beginning of spring. For Hindus it is usually linked with Saraswati, the goddess of knowledge, learning and the arts. Yellow is a predominant colour in the celebrations to indicate the onset of spring and because of its associations with Saraswati.

## ☸ 8<sup>th</sup> February – Parinirvana - Buddhist

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

## ☸ 14<sup>th</sup> February – Magha Puja – Buddhist

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

## Good Cause Collection of the Month

# Unitarian Peace Fellowship Lent Appeal: War Child



## Collection on Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> February

I'm writing this in the run-up to Christmas, and this morning's paper tells me that in Britain we'll be spending £40 billion over the Christmas period, £5 billion of it in on-line shopping alone. Much of this, if my own experience is anything to go by, will be on presents for people who already have everything they need (and a good deal besides), and on luxuries for ourselves. Just a small fraction of this frivolous expenditure would make an enormous difference to the lives of those children who have been robbed of their childhood by war. For example, according to the War Child website, just £30 (the price of a video game) could provide education for a girl for one year in countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, or Iraq. The benefits of such schooling are immense: a child born to a literate mother is twice as likely to live beyond the age of five as the child of an illiterate mother.

Relatively small amounts of money from the developed nations can make a big difference to the lives of young people in the developing world, and so I am very happy to recommend this year's Unitarian Peace Fellowship appeal on behalf of War Child, a charity which last year was able to make a difference to the lives of over 55,000 children and their families world-wide.

**Rev. Bill Darlison**  
President of the General Assembly

For more information visit: [www.warchild.org.uk](http://www.warchild.org.uk)

## Previous Charity Collections:

Thank you for your generosity in contributing to recent charity collections. I am pleased to let you know that we will be sending the following donations to good causes:

**November – Lotus Centre, Southall – £186.86**

**Special Collection for the Philippines – £222.16 + \$100**

**December – SimpleGifts Unitarian Centre for Social Action – £582.59 + Gift Aid (total from two collections)**



# Foodbank Update



Thank you to everybody for their continuing contributions to our Foodbank collection. By the time this newsletter is published we will have taken our fourth car boot full of food to help those who find themselves struggling to feed themselves and their families.

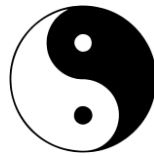
The Trussell Trust runs foodbanks all round the country for people finding themselves in poverty. People have to be referred by a social worker or similar and generally are only given vouchers to use for up to three visits. At our local Foodbank in Chelsea they have a table laid out with odds and ends of food and drink that they can't put in the actual Foodbank for some reason. People can help themselves to things on that table for free and can also have a cup of tea and a slice of cake whilst they are there. I found it all quite heart-warming until I remembered that we didn't need Foodbanks until a few years ago. Are you as angry as I am that our welfare state provision is I suspect being eroded for ideological rather than financial reasons?

Rev. Sarah Tinker

## A reminder of the wish-list of items:

- Milk (UHT or powdered)
- Sugar (500g)
- Fruit Juice (carton)
- Soup
- Pasta Sauces
- Sponge Pudding (tinned)
- Tomatoes (tinned)
- Cereals
- Rice Pudding (tinned)
- Tea Bags / Instant Coffee
- Instant Mash Potato
- Rice / Pasta
- Tinned Meat / Fish
- Tinned Fruit
- Jam
- Biscuits or Snack Bars

If you would like to donate any of these items please bring them along to church next time you come. The church committee will need to arrange regular transport of the food we collect so if you might be able to help with this then let Sarah or a committee member know.



When people see some things as beautiful,  
other things become ugly.  
When people see some things as good,  
other things become bad.

Being and non-being create each other.  
Difficult and easy support each other.  
Long and short define each other.  
High and low depend on each other.  
Before and after follow each other.

Therefore the Master  
acts without doing anything  
and teaches without saying anything.  
Things arise and she lets them come;  
things disappear and she lets them go.  
She has but doesn't possess,  
acts but doesn't expect.  
When her work is done, she forgets it.  
That is why it lasts forever.

From the Tao Te Ching, Chapter 2  
by Lao-Tzu, as translated by Stephen Mitchell

## Question Time – The Religious Perspective

Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> February from 6:30-8:30pm

Brahma Kumaris, Global Co-operation House  
65-69 Pound Lane, London NW10 2HH

This event will be broadly based on the popular BBC TV programme 'Question Time' that has been on air for 34 years.

Individuals coming to this event are asked to send questions to the organisers. Questions that meet the criteria will be sent to panellists to prioritise, and will be raised during the event.

The event will cover the practical solutions arising from interpretation of various faiths, to address concerns with regard to topical issues in the news, and how the solutions might be better implemented through dialogue and cooperation amongst people of faith and no-faith. Even though a limited number of faiths can be represented on the panel, it is intended that the audience will represent such diversity and able to collaborate with panel members.

Your emails on these topical issues are welcome until 28<sup>th</sup> January. Please contact [pejman\\_khojasteh@btinternet.com](mailto:pejman_khojasteh@btinternet.com)

**This event is sponsored by the following organisations:**

Brahma Kumaris - [www.brahmakumaris.org/uk](http://www.brahmakumaris.org/uk)  
International Association for Religious Freedom - [iarf.net](http://iarf.net)  
World Congress of Faiths - [www.worldfaiths.org](http://www.worldfaiths.org)

# 'A Path of Self-Compassion'

Sermon by Rev. Sarah Tinker – 12<sup>th</sup> January 2014

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

*'No amount of self-improvement can make up for a lack of self-acceptance'. Robert Holden*

You have perhaps heard of a project called Letters of Note. Now published as a book by Shaun Usher, this started life as an Internet collection of 'correspondence deserving of a wider audience'. It's a great idea, collecting letters written by many interesting and sometimes famous people over the centuries. Many of the letters can be seen online in their original form and they are also transcribed for ease of reading. I went to this website to check the quote I wanted to start this address with – Aldous Huxley, writer and philosopher, did indeed say in his last few days (according to a letter written by his wife Laura) *"It is a bit embarrassing to have been concerned with the human problem all one's life and find at the end that one has no more to offer by way of advice than 'Try to be a little kinder.'"*

And that's what this address is all about – the value of us trying to be a little kinder, starting with ourselves. Kindness and compassion could be described as core human values that help form the moral foundation of human relationships and human society. I'm going to explore today the idea that if we discover within ourselves a lack of self-compassion then there is vital repair work to be done, because if we cannot be kind to ourselves then how can we hope to create a compassionate society. And even if we ourselves are radiant examples of self-compassion then perhaps we can turn our loving attention to those around us, because I believe we live in a world that is shaped and distorted by damaging self-criticism. It is not easy to probe into each other's minds so I do not know if all of us have this inner judging dialogue running through much of our day. But over the years I've heard enough from others to suspect that there's 'a lot of it about'.

I remember being with a friend in her car when she reversed into a lamp post. It was a minor bump – we, the car and the lamp post all lived to tell the tale. But what we talked most about afterwards was her reaction: at the moment of impact, the harsh words 'You stupid woman' came out of her mouth. It didn't sound like her and I had never heard her speak about herself in such a way. But it was a voice she knew well as part of her self-talk – the inner voice that provides so many of us with an inner running commentary on our lives. On reflection, my friend remembered how often she had heard her mother say a similar thing. We wondered where her mother had learnt to speak so harshly to herself and what effect that must have had on her life and on the life of her family.

Working with troubled teenagers years ago I came to realise that beneath the bravado of some of the youngsters who behaved most badly was a terrible sense of their unworthiness. Deep inside they were deeply ashamed of themselves and their behaviour, deep inside they regarded themselves as worthless. We started to work with what at the time was called self-esteem, encouraging them to think more highly of themselves and to build up more positive self-images.



Looking back I'm not sure how successful we were – because I now realise, that one of the problems about people's lack of self-compassion is just how deep its origins lie. Another friend spoke to me recently about a Biblical passage that has stayed with her since childhood. It is the origin of the saying 'the writing on the wall', meaning that a doom laden future is foretold and cannot be escaped from. The Jews have been captured and taken into exile in Babylon. At a drunken feast the Babylonian ruler Belshazzar commits the sin of using the stolen sacred cups from the temple to drink alcohol from. A finger appears and writes on the wall but only the righteous Daniel can interpret the writing as saying 'weighed and found wanting'. Belshazzar has been judged by God and indeed found wanting, not up to the mark. He does not live to tell the tale but rather meets an unfortunate end that very night. How often do we judge ourselves harshly for far more minor misdemeanours? How often do we act as both judge and jury in our own lives? How often do we weigh our own life and find ourselves wanting?

I felt moved by this passage written by Henri J.M. Nouwen:

*"Over the years, I have come to realize that the greatest trap in our life is not success, popularity, or power, but self-rejection. Success, popularity, and power can indeed present a great temptation, but their seductive quality often comes from the way they are part of the much larger temptation to self-rejection. When we have come to believe in the voices that call us worthless and unlovable, then success, popularity, and power are easily perceived as attractive solutions. The real trap, however, is self-rejection. As soon as someone accuses me or criticizes me, as soon as I am rejected, left alone, or abandoned, I find myself thinking, 'Well, that proves once again that I am a nobody.' ... [My dark side says,] I am no good... I deserve to be pushed aside, forgotten, rejected, and abandoned. Self-rejection is the greatest enemy of the spiritual life because it contradicts the sacred voice that calls us the 'Beloved.' Being the Beloved constitutes the core truth of our existence."*

How can we learn to look with eyes of loving compassion upon ourselves and upon our lives? Derek Walcott's poem 'Love After Love', that we heard in full as a reading earlier on, describes this possibility:

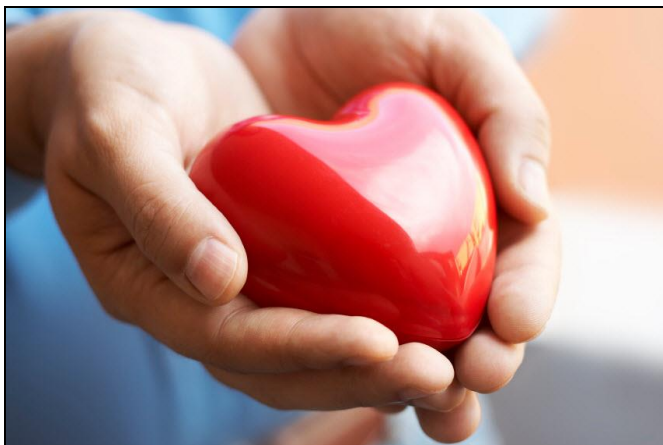
*'The time will come  
when, with elation,  
you will greet yourself arriving  
at your own door, in your own mirror,  
and each will smile at the other's welcome'*

# 'A Path of Self-Compassion'

Sermon by Sarah Tinker (*continued*)

Last autumn I had the good fortune to spend a day at a conference on Compassion and Empathy in Society here in London. There were many good things about that conference and the organisation that hosted it. But my favourite is that the talks given by various speakers are now all freely available on the Internet – I've written the website details at the end of this address. The day was introduced by Karen Armstrong, whose book '12 Steps to a Compassionate Life' we studied here at Essex Church a couple of years ago. One of the steps in that book is Compassion for Yourself. The chapter starts with a moving true story of Rabbi Albert Friedlander who explained the importance of the Biblical injunction 'love your neighbour as yourself – first found in the Book of Leviticus. He emphasised the importance of the second part of this - 'as yourself', because if we cannot love ourselves we cannot love others. As a Jewish child in Nazi Germany he was deeply affected by the anti-Semitism that surrounded him. One night he lay in bed and started to list all his good qualities to counteract the terrible negativity that he was experiencing. At that young age he vowed to use those qualities to help create a better world.

In recent years, developments in neuroscience have helped us to understand more about how our brains work. When we are judging ourselves or others harshly it is because an ancient reptilian part of our brain is being activated – the amygdala, which deals with our most basic of needs, the need to survive. Our harsh inner critic is trying to help us avoid making dangerous mistakes but it is not as useful in the modern, complex world we now live in. The more we can temper that basic survival response with a more measured thoughtful reflective response – based here in our pre frontal cortex, the more compassionate we can become. At the University of Derby, Professor Paul Gilbert is working on what he calls compassion focused therapy, having long studied the negative effects of shame. Increasingly we are coming to understand that being ashamed of our behaviour does not always encourage us to behave better, it can oft times make us feel worse and that can have a brutalising effect. Shame can lead to worse behaviour when we feel unable to stop ourselves doing something wrong. This week here in Britain three care workers were jailed for gratuitously tormenting patients with dementia and throughout the National Health Service there is a growing concern that greater compassion needs to be encouraged in patient care.



The other speaker at the conference who impressed me was Professor Kristin Neff who has created an excellent website on self-compassion, complete with a test for you to find out just how self-compassionate you truly are. Her website also includes meditations, articles and videos, all freely available. Kristin Neff writes about three aspects of self-compassion - self-kindness, an awareness of our common humanity – a sense that we are all in this thing called life together, and mindfulness. She works from a Buddhist perspective and encourages people to develop a practice of mindfulness to counter-balance our human tendency towards reactivity. She emphasises that self-compassion is not self-pity and nor is it self-indulgence, but rather a healthy and loving way to live in relationship with ourselves, with others and with our world.

I already knew Kristin Neff's name because she is mum to an autistic child whose life changing journey to Mongolia is written about in an inspiring book and a film, both called *The Horse Boy*. At the conference Kristin told us how self-compassion had helped her to parent her child. On one occasion the two of them were on a long-distance flight and her son would not stop screaming. This kind of tantrum like behaviour might be understandable in a toddler but her son was a large four year old, who kicked as he screamed. Kristin felt embarrassed that she was unable to calm her child on this night flight where people were trying to get to sleep. In desperation she carried him to the bathroom, hoping a change of scene might distract him but it only made things worse and after the long walk down the aisle of the plane clutching the screaming child she found that the bathroom was occupied. As she stood in the cramped vestibule waiting, she suddenly realised how powerless she was and how truly dreadful she felt. At that point she turned her attention from her son to herself and started to inwardly soothe herself. She changed her own self-talk from a message of blame and desperation to one of calm and hope. And slowly her son calmed down and they got through the flight. There was no miracle in this story, but what impressed me when I heard it was that realisation for all of us that the quality of our inner dialogue does have an effect – it has an effect on us, it has an effect on others and it has an effect on our world. It is clearly worth becoming more aware of, and reflective upon, what is going on most of the time in most of our heads.

Within this story is I think another important lesson for us all. Just as Kristin at that moment was unable to do anything to soothe her troubled child, so we in life need to understand the limits of our powers. We are not in charge of most things in life as we would oft times like to be. We are frail, wounded, imperfect beings living less than perfect lives in a less than perfect world. But what each of us can do is strengthen our relationship with our self through loving compassion and acceptance of *how* we are and *who* we are. And knowing that we are all in this together, perhaps we can all benefit from being a little kinder to ourselves and then to others.

## Useful Links for Further Reading:

**Kristin Neff:** [www.self-compassion.org](http://www.self-compassion.org)

Her website has many articles, meditations, exercises and a test you can take to show how self-compassionate you are

**Empathy & Compassion in Society 2013 Conference Talks** – particularly recommend talks by Chris Irons and Kristin Neff  
[www.compassioninsociety.org/videos-main](http://www.compassioninsociety.org/videos-main)

## Sunday Services at Essex Church



### 2<sup>nd</sup> February, 11am – 'Sacred, Holy, Divine'

Service led by Kate Buchanan

It has been said that Unitarian theology is 'the study of God by the light of human reason' but it is also about what we believe, personally, within the framework of the Unitarian movement. What does it mean to experience the sacred, holy and divine?

### 9<sup>th</sup> February, 11am – 'Love in all its Manifestations'

Led by Jeannene Powell and Rev. Sarah Tinker

Today we will be celebrating the power of love in our lives and considering the many ways it manifests through us and to us.

### 16<sup>th</sup> February, 11am – 'Being Open to Spirit'

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker & Kate Whyman

This will be Unitarian ministry student Kate Whyman's first visit to Essex Church and in this service we'll be considering our sense of a connection with something greater than ourselves, however we might name that.

### 23<sup>rd</sup> February, 11am – 'Across the Pond'

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Our minister has just returned from a working visit to a UU congregation in the States. Come and hear what's inspiring about liberal religion in the USA - past, present and future.

## Next Newsletter Deadline

The deadline for the February issue of the newsletter is Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> February. Please send your contributions to our editor, Jane Blackall, jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk.

We would be particularly interested if any newcomers to the congregation would write a 'How I Came to Essex Church' article to introduce themselves. If you have any other ideas for items we might run in future please do get in touch.

'Unitarian Universalism saved my life... and that statement is only *partially* true. "-isms" don't really have the power to save lives. So, allow me to clarify. My peers and friends, who were Unitarian Universalists, saved my life. My ministers, who would later become my colleagues and friends and peers, saved my life. The church saved my life. And, I don't just mean the people who were there. And, I don't just mean the programs. I mean the institution that was there: dependable, present, solid, a visible entity signifying a set of enduring values, offering reassurance by the sheer fact of its existence. I'm talking about sanctuary, not just a fancy theological term for the room where people gather to worship, but the feeling of security and protection that the place emanates. As the hymn goes, "By peace made strong, the rafters will withstand the battering of the storm. This hearth, though all the world grow chill, will keep you warm."

When I say that it saved my life, what do I mean, exactly? I do mean at least two different things. I do mean life as opposed to death. And, I do mean living as opposed to something that is less than truly living. I mean what Thoreau meant when he wrote, "I wish to learn what life has to teach, and not, when I come to die, discover that I have not lived. I do not wish to live what is not life, living is so dear."

Rev. Thom Belote

## Hucklow Summer School The Authentic Self: Discovering the Real You

Week of 16<sup>th</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2014  
Nightingale Centre, Great Hucklow, Derbyshire



**A week of living, learning, and spiritual development.**  
Activities for all ages, theme talks, engagement groups, and fun! Join us to celebrate the 20<sup>th</sup> Hucklow Summer School!

Cost: Adult (sharing): £480; Children 3-4 years: £130;  
5-11 years: £300; 12-16 years: £365.

For more information contact Kate: 07870 322 519  
or info@hucklowsummerschool.org.uk

More information will appear on the website shortly:  
**[www.hucklowsummerschool.org.uk](http://www.hucklowsummerschool.org.uk)**