



# Kensington Unitarians

Newsletter: August / September 2018

## What's On...

Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> August, 12.30pm  
**'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite**

Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> August, 6.45 for 7-8pm  
**'Heart & Soul: Be Here Now'**  
Led by Sarah Tinker

Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> August, 11am-noon  
**'What's Going On?'**  
Led by Jane Blackall

Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> August, 12.30pm  
**'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite**

Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> August, 11am-noon  
**'Noticing the Good'**  
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> August, 12.30-1pm  
**Inclusive Communion**  
Led by Jane Blackall

Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> August, 12.30pm  
**'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite**

Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> August, 6.54 for 7-8pm  
**Our Favourite Poems:**  
Poetry Evening with Sarah & Brian

Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> August, 11am-noon  
**'The Art of Awakening'**  
Led by Sarah Tinker

Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> August, 12.30-1.15pm  
**'Finding Your Voice'**  
**Singing Class with Margaret**

Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> August, 2-3pm  
**'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite**

Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> August, 12.30pm  
**'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite**

Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> August, 11am-noon  
**'Our Sources of Delight'**  
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker and  
Members of the Congregation

*Note: There will be no 'Sunday  
Conversation' in August due  
to the Notting Hill Carnival*

Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> September, 11am-noon  
**'Other People's Lives'**  
Led by Jane Blackall

Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> September, 12.30pm  
**'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite**

*(listings continue inside back cover)*

## Pay Attention

### A Message from our Minister

*(Our minister first wrote this article 13  
years ago as she was about to leave  
home to join us here in London.)*



In the garden, this has been a marvellous year for strawberries, the wild strawberries that grow in the borders, nestled in amongst other plants. They've been there for years and each year I'd pick a few in passing whilst tackling the weeding.

But this year I've picked them properly, deliberately, appreciatively. I've noticed their scent, their colour, their sweet-sharp taste. I've searched out the plants that are hidden at the back of the borders and discovered that it's in the nature of strawberry plants to spread. They are gradually taking over but in doing so they have given a most wonderful crop – several bowlfuls of little berries that sing of summer and warmth and nature's gifts to us. How interesting that it is this year, when leaving is imminent, that I have at last appreciated these little plants that have always been here, that it takes an impending departure to bring me fully into the here and now.

I wonder what you would particularly notice and appreciate if you knew you were going to leave? Below are some writings that have inspired me this summer. Some of them mention death and I suppose any change in our lives is like a death; it's an ending, a change, a letting go, a step out into the unknown.

Stephen Levine's book 'A Year to Live' describes his experiment in living as though he had only a year left to live. It's a rich and inspiring book detailing the insights he gained through living with the awareness that all of life is temporary. He examined his life, his thoughts, his relationships, and started to appreciate existence as it is, with its dark aspects as well as the light. Levine recommends staying in the loving present, living a life that focuses on each precious moment, knowing that all must end.

Alan Watts writes of death as the "whole secret of life. It means that the past must be abandoned, that the unknown cannot be avoided, that the 'I' cannot be continued and that nothing can be ultimately fixed." When we know this, Watts says, we live fully for the first time in our life. John Morgan writes of the value of becoming more 'soulful', of increasing our awareness of the hidden and deeper meanings that reside in our everyday moments. He incorporates this in a prayer:

*May I become aware of those moments of joy residing in a small child's hand in mine, in the play of sunlight through leaves, in an understanding friend, in each and every instant. May this awareness and joy make my life a dance!*

I invite us all in these summer months to rest in awareness of the present moment, the only moment there is. And do join us here at Essex Church, where we'll be exploring what it means to 'pay attention', our latest ministry theme.

**Rev. Sarah Tinker**

## In this month's newsletter...

\* Eulogy for Stephanie Saville \* Poems by Carolyn Appleby, Brian Ellis, and John Hands \* Unitarian Actors in Action \* Sunday Afternoon Tea Dance \* 'Magical Thinking?' by Richard Levy \* 'Liberation Theologies' by Jane Blackall \* Opera in the Meantime's 'Hansel and Gretel' \* Warden's Column: News of New Church Bookings for the Summer \* Defibrillator News \* London Playback Theatre \* 'Cultivating Kind Communities' by Sarah Tinker \* and 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.

If you are aware of any member of our community who is unwell or suffering in some way and who would welcome contact from others in the church, please contact our minister.



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

Office Answering Machine: 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

Thursdays 2<sup>nd</sup> August, 6<sup>th</sup> September,  
and 4<sup>th</sup> October from 7-8pm

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



Come and join us for our monthly alternative spiritual gathering, with music and silence, words and prayers, and a chance to explore the evening's topic in relation to your own life. In August, our theme is 'Be Here Now'. This will be a deeply meditative exploration of the present moment. In September our theme will be 'That's Not Fair!' We will be asking how we personally respond to life's injustices – towards ourselves and others. The contemplative hour will be followed by time for refreshments and fellowship. All are welcome to join us. If you would like to know more please email [jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk](mailto:jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk)

# Volunteering Rotas: Stewarding, Coffee and Greeting



## Stewarding:

5 <sup>th</sup> August:	Juliet Edwards
12 <sup>th</sup> August:	Brian Ellis
19 <sup>th</sup> August:	Michaela von Britzke
26 <sup>th</sup> August:	Richard Levy
2 <sup>nd</sup> September:	Michaela von Britzke
9 <sup>th</sup> September:	Brian Ellis
16 <sup>th</sup> September:	Michaela von Britzke
23 <sup>rd</sup> September:	Julia Alden
30 <sup>th</sup> September:	Juliet Edwards

## Coffee:

5 <sup>th</sup> August:	Sue Smith
12 <sup>th</sup> August:	Helena Coope
19 <sup>th</sup> August:	Richard Levy
26 <sup>th</sup> August:	Liz Tuckwell
2 <sup>nd</sup> September:	Sue Smith
9 <sup>th</sup> September:	Liz Tuckwell
16 <sup>th</sup> September:	Maureen Cummings
23 <sup>rd</sup> September:	Richard Levy
30 <sup>th</sup> September:	Helena Coope

## Greeting:

5 <sup>th</sup> August:	Roy Clark
12 <sup>th</sup> August:	Maureen Cummings
19 <sup>th</sup> August:	Maureen Cummings
26 <sup>th</sup> August:	Michaela von Britzke
2 <sup>nd</sup> September:	Brian Ellis
9 <sup>th</sup> September:	Sue Smith
16 <sup>th</sup> September:	Abby Lorimier
23 <sup>rd</sup> September:	Juliet Edwards
30 <sup>th</sup> September:	Liz Tuckwell

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)

# Stephanie Saville

Stephanie Saville died on 30<sup>th</sup> June after a short spell in hospital following a stroke. Aged 91, Stephanie had a long and distinguished connection with the Unitarian community. She joined Essex Church in 1954 and served for many years as a trustee and as chair of trustees. She worked as a highly regarded consultant anaesthetist in the NHS, mostly here in London.

Our harvest festival service on Sunday September 30<sup>th</sup> will include a celebration of Stephanie's life and be followed by lunch and drinks in her honour. Everybody is welcome to join us that day.

Do let us know if you would like to write something about Stephanie for our next newsletter or for our September service. Here is the eulogy our minister Sarah gave at the burial service in the Church of St Mary the Virgin, Burpham, the beautiful Sussex village where Stephanie lived for over fifty years.



## Eulogy for Stephanie

What an impossible task it is to sum up another person's life in just a few words, especially when someone has lived as full and as long a life as Stephanie Saville. But I hope these few words touch on some of your memories of Stephanie and that we will have time after today's service to tell further stories of her living. Aged 91, Stephanie was in many ways ready to die. She found the limitations of ageing a great source of frustration and I am not alone in wanting to thank Clive and Lin for making these later years as pleasant a time as they could be for Stephanie up in Durham. I also want too to thank Jean Tester for her many years of care for Stephanie and for the cottage here in Burpham. Some of us are very aware of the care these people have given.

So Stephanie's last year was spent up north but her heart was still here in Burpham, where she had lived for some 50 years. She loved this village. She loved her cottage. She loved this church. And she loved her garden, a source of such pleasure for her, and a place she really enjoyed sharing with others. Some of you her neighbours will remember garden open days with Jean's cream scones being served. Neighbours and village life were important for Stephanie. She'd enjoy supporting the village fair, bringing potted plants to sell. And she was an avid reader and member of the local book group where she could generally be relied on to have a different opinion about a book from everyone else. After her retirement from the National Health Service where she worked as a highly regarded consultant anaesthetist, she spent increasing amounts of time down here in Sussex, but so often she would drive up to London for the weekend to be with us at Essex Unitarian Church in Kensington. She would arrive clutching bunches of flowers from her own garden to delight us city dwellers. And she would arrange them herself because that was one of her many skills.

Stephanie was indeed a person of great skill, with a working life that included hospitals in Dublin, Bath, London, the United States and Greece. Anyone who knows about the medical world knows that the task of an anaesthetist is not an area of work for the faint hearted. It's work for the courageous and Stephanie was indeed courageous, strong hearted, determined in all she tackled in life. Born an only child to a Protestant family in Dublin in Ireland, Stephanie was sent to boarding school at the age of 9 and proceeded to shine academically, gaining a place to study medicine at Trinity College Dublin and fully qualifying as a medic by the age of 22, moving into a medical world still primarily led by men. But Stephanie could more than hold her own in competitive spheres. One story that I'd not heard until last week was of a time when surgical gowns for women working in operating theatres were in short supply. Rather than don the male attire of trousers

Stephanie arrived for the operation wearing her mink coat. And possibly only her undergarments beneath. She was a feisty character, a woman of great spirit, hugely inspiring in so many areas of life. She knew her own failings, her sometimes critical nature, her need always to be in charge and the difficulties she had in letting go of any painful issues. Over the years Stephanie read a great deal about the power of forgiveness. She admired those who did manage to forgive the unforgiveable. And she knew her own inner struggles.

But these were counter-balanced weren't they by her great generosity, her encouragement of younger people, in the church and in the medical profession and in education generally; by her delightful laugh and her twinkling eyes and sense of humour – that mischievous, fun loving Stephanie and the Stephanie who adored foreign travel, theatre, exhibitions, trips to Glyndebourne, meals out, meals at home, meals at church. She loved to tell me that she had never been bored – that she always found something to interest her – be that people or the world around her. She really did appreciate this world as a beautiful and truly remarkable place. She regarded life as a great blessing. And she had so many happy and fascinating memories to share of her travels particularly adventures around the middle east, where archaeological remains captivated her. Happy memories of holidays with husband Tom and later with Clive and Lin in North Cyprus which became a special place for you all I know. There may be several of you here today who shared those holidays with Stephanie.

At a difficult point in Stephanie's life I asked her to tell me about some of life's highlights. The list was long. She mentioned

*'Working to relieve people's pain and the satisfaction when we got that right for someone. Gaining such pleasure from visiting beautifully built houses and churches and carefully designed and cared for gardens, working until I was 60 in a profession I loved, cycling and youth hostelling in Ireland in my younger days. The simple pleasure I gain from watching birds in my garden.'*

She wanted this service to be a celebration of her life and a celebration of life itself. Brought up in the religiously complex world of Ireland, Stephanie's own religious explorations were important to her. She really enjoyed the small groups we ran at church on topics like Building Your Own Theology, A Life of Prayer – listening to one another speak deeply about our faith. She accepted that there are mysteries beyond our imaginings and valued deeply the beauty of this world and the potential of human creativity. Stephanie appreciated music and we are now going to hear the piece she requested for this service – Felix Mendelssohn's *O Rest in the Lord* – a chance for us to think our own thoughts and hold our particular memories of Stephanie in our hearts.

**Rev. Sarah Tinker**

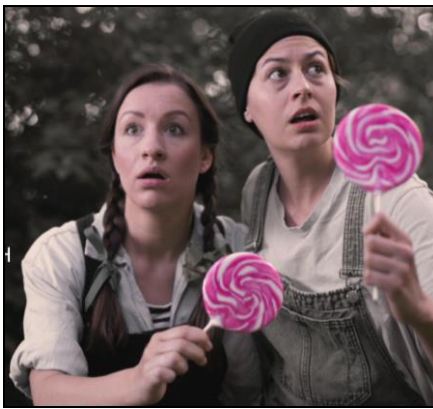


## Children's Group Summer Break

We may not have a children's leader on July 30<sup>th</sup> or on 12<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> August. We suggest you email [info@kensington-unitarians.org.uk](mailto:info@kensington-unitarians.org.uk) or text Sarah on 07960 057567 to check if there'll be a leader on any of those Sundays. Children are always welcome to stay in the service with parents and to bring a book or something else to get on with. Best wishes to leaders Nadia and Jen as they take well deserved breaks.

## Opera in the Meantime Presents: 'Hansel and Gretel'

24<sup>th</sup> August in St. Alfege Church, Greenwich;  
26<sup>th</sup> & 31<sup>st</sup> August: Rose & Crown, Walthamstow;  
29<sup>th</sup> August: Christ Church, Enfield, all shows 7.30pm



This opera will be directed by Lucy Elston who regularly sings with our choir. It is conducted by Robert Brooks with piano by Laurence Panter.

**Tickets are £10 from [buytickets.at/operainthetime](http://buytickets.at/operainthetime)**

## Flower Service



We never know our impact,  
one on another.  
You, whoever you are,  
brought to Church  
one poppy head, dry and solid,  
old in its body but  
pregnant with seeds.  
The tiny blessings could not bear to wait  
to spread and find their way anew.  
They tumbled floor-ward, scattering.

Dustpan in hand, I swept them up.  
Black specks flowed in to orange plastic.  
I took them to my home,  
the garden being theirs.  
They're settling in.  
You'll never know their future,  
though you know something  
of their past.

**Carolyn Appleby**  
24<sup>th</sup> July 2018

## Unitarian Actors: Summer Special



Here is our very own Antony Bunsee appearing as Titania in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as part of the RSC's summer season in York. We hope he'll be wearing this costume in church before too long. Thank you to the RSC for allowing us to use this marvellous photo.

And welcome to Denis Conway from Dublin Unitarians who's staying here at the church this summer whilst he's appearing in a West End play *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*. It's by all accounts a very funny play, but Denis himself describes it as 'not one for the faint-hearted'. Denis brings us warm greetings from Dublin Unitarians and an invite to join them if ever we're in Dublin's fair city on a Sunday morning.

**Sarah Tinker**

## Sunday Afternoon Tea Dance

Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> September from 2-5pm  
with a dance lesson for beginners  
at 2.15pm led by Rachel Sparks  
Here at Essex Church



Rachel Sparks Dance returns to Essex Church this autumn so please save the date and plan to join us for another tea dance, with social dancing, actual tea and plenty of cake in September when we will be learning the rumba! Enjoy a gentle afternoon learning some basic social dancing steps with Rachel who can teach even the most left-footed people. These tea-dances are inclusive events for anyone including LGBTQIA+ people and we ask that everyone is respectful to each other. The partnering at these tea dances is gender-neutral, meaning anyone can lead and anyone can follow, and we are completely body positive. We ask you not to wear high heels as we need to protect the floor.

You are invited to bring your own home-made cakes (clearly labelled), to raise money for our nominated charity for 2018: 'Opening Doors London', a charity providing information and support services specifically for older Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans (LGBT) people over the age of 50.

**Tickets: £10 on the door**

*(free entry to members of Essex Church)*

**For more information contact:**

rachel@rachelsparksdance.co.uk /  
www.facebook.com/rachelsparksdance

**Save the Dates:** Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> December 2018,  
Sundays 10<sup>th</sup> February & 5<sup>th</sup> May 2019



## 'How to be a Unitarian'

Sunday Afternoon Workshop led by  
Jane Blackall and Sarah Tinker



Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> October 2018 from 1.00-5.00pm  
Here at Essex Church – **SAVE THE DATE**

For those who missed our recent course we're offering another (somewhat abridged) opportunity to find out 'How to be a Unitarian'! Of course there are many varied ways to go about it and we'll explore just a few of the possibilities together in this Sunday afternoon 'taster' workshop.

Reasons why you might want to come to the workshop:

- Because you like coming to church... yet you feel a bit hazy about what it means to be Unitarian.
- Because you want to reflect on your own spiritual journey and moral values together with others.
- Because you want to explore the experience of being both spiritual *and* religious in community.
- Because you want to connect more deeply with fellow congregation members in a small group.
- Because you value Unitarianism and you want to play a more active part in helping it to thrive.

Whether you've been coming to church for 3 weeks or 30 years there will be something for you. Even if you don't yet consider yourself a Unitarian, but you appreciate what we do here at Essex Church, and want to come along anyway to find out more, please do sign up – the more the merrier! We need at least eight people to sign up for this event to run and numbers will be limited so **please do register for the workshop ASAP**. Email Jane (jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk) if you would like to sign up or if you have any queries.

## Our Favourite Poems



**Poetry Evening: Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> August**  
6.45pm for a 7.00pm start, finished by 9pm

Do bring a favourite poem or two to read to the group and let Sarah know a few days beforehand what you plan to bring so we can have copies available for everyone. A special invite goes out to people who write poetry – do bring one of your own poems along to share with us. There'll be seasonal refreshments to enjoy too.



# Thematic Ministry



Our ministry theme for August is 'Paying Attention'. One of the aims of thematic ministry is to encourage people to get involved, to make the theme part of your own focus for the month. Below are some ideas of ways to explore our theme over the next month. Do get in touch if there's a particular reading or song you'd like to suggest for a Sunday morning gathering or maybe there's a piece you'd like to write for a future newsletter. Let us know. Themes coming up in the near future: September – 'Advantage / Disadvantage', 'Living our Faith' in October and 'Peace' in November. Here are some ways you might engage with this month's theme of 'Paying Attention':

1. Write this Buddhist prayer in calligraphy and keep it with you all month.  
'May I meet this moment fully; May I meet it as a friend.' -- Buddhist prayer  
What special messages does this prayer hold for you, especially in life's difficult moments?
2. Use this conversation from The Tao of Pooh by Benjamin Hoff as a meditation this month.  
What do you notice when you stop and listen, when you notice more in life?

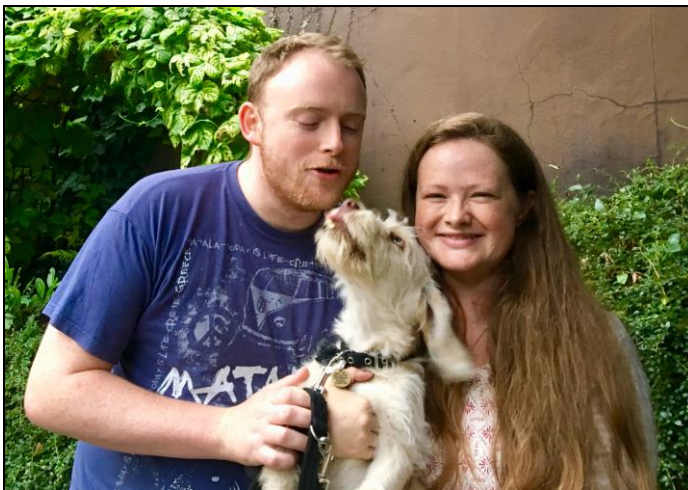
*"Say, Pooh, why aren't you busy?" I said.  
"Because it's a nice day," said Pooh.  
"Yes, but ---"  
"Why ruin it?" he said.  
"But you could be doing something important," I said.  
"I am," said Pooh.  
"Oh? Doing what?"  
"Listening," he said.  
"Listening to what?"  
"To the birds. And that squirrel over there."  
"What are they saying?" I asked.  
"That it's a nice day," said Pooh.  
"But you know that already," I said.  
"Yes, but it's always good to hear that somebody else thinks so, too," he replied.*

Stop and take time to listen today! It's a beautiful day!

Every spiritual tradition has its unique way of affirming it, but all agree: being present to what's in the moment is one of the most precious and powerful ways we connect to what's sacred. So what 'sacred thing' do you need to connect to in a deeper way? What 'holiness' is life asking you to pay more attention to? There is such value in using the here and now to re-connect to something needed, something precious, something sacred. The calm of nature. A connection with children, plants, animals. Unity with a partner. Acceptance of oneself. Openness to risk. The feeling of security. The need of another. The guilt of something done wrong. A freedom from the past. Simple astonishment. Healing beauty. Forgiveness. The realization that I am good enough. The realization that what's here right now is good enough. Simply put, there is a gift waiting for each of us in the here and now. What might the gift be for you?

With thanks to the UUA Soul Matters group for these suggestions of ways to explore August's theme.

Sarah, Jeannene, and Jane



It was good to meet up with Jennifer Blair and Jordan McCrindle at the recent Migrants Organise party here at church. Jordan and Jennifer ran our children's group some years ago and now have Arthur the dog to look after. Thanks to Arthur we now have a very useful hole in our flower bed.

## Beech Tree

Your girth expands	Each year
Your branches thrust the sky A little further from the earth. We hurry past in multitudes	Each year
	Running Walking Rejoicing Sorrowing Whilst you
Silently, imperceptibly	
Upholding Nature.	Grow and grow

John Hands

## London Playback Theatre



London Playback Theatre came to Essex Church this year with three performances on the congregational themes for that month: 'Love and Kindness' in February, 'Grace' in April, and 'Creativity and the Arts' in June. It's been a privilege for myself and my London Playback Theatre team to come to Essex Church with these performances. We have offered several in past years too ("Let's Talk About Refugees" on 29<sup>th</sup> October 2015, and on 13<sup>th</sup> September 2012 as part of The Forgiveness Project). And then my other Playback Theatre team – True Heart Theatre – came here for regular performances until I retired the True Heart team in June 2016.

The original purpose of Playback Theatre is in direct service to the community, and many of my Playback Theatre colleagues in the USA are Unitarians too. So creating these opportunities here feels in absolute alignment with our mutual commitment to taking practical action for generating personal/social/political transformation in this troubled world we live in. We do this by inviting us all to remember our own selves – in our wholeness: our experiences in everyday life as well as our special moments never to be forgotten or even memories hidden until that time with us. And by listening deeply as a performing team, we use the power of theatre art as a way to mirror back – and honour – those stories which have been shared in the public space. So as an audience member you are not in the spotlight unless you choose to put up your hand to share something. And if you just come to watch you will anyway be engaged in the whole experience as friendly witness. Oh... and there is always the lovely tea/coffee and yum yums (biscuits and savouries tidbits) that is available after the performance to encourage everyone to stay and have on-going friendly conversations!

London Playback Theatre returns to Essex Church from the Autumn on third Fridays of October, and in 2019, January, April, May & June. We offer our performances free of charge and welcome donations.

### **London Playback Theatre Return: 'Living Our Faith' on Friday 19<sup>th</sup> October, from 7.30pm - here at Essex Church**

**In October we'll explore 'Living Our Faith':** 'How do we choose to live in alignment with our values and beliefs... especially in those times when we are not living the life which feels right for us?'

**Web:** [www.londonplayback.co.uk](http://www.londonplayback.co.uk) / **Email:** [londonplayback@gmail.com](mailto:londonplayback@gmail.com)

## Sunday Conversation

**Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> September: 12.45-1.45pm**

In September we will have our regular conversation on the theme of 'Advantage and Disadvantage'. There will be no Sunday Conversation in August as we are as usual letting London Transport and the Metropolitan Police use our building as a rest place for their staff working extra hours because of Notting Hill Carnival.

**LDPA Autumn Quarterly: Save the Date**

### **'Circles of Connection' An Introduction to Engagement Group Facilitation Skills**

**Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> September 2018 - 11am  
arrivals for an 11.30am start until 3pm  
(followed by worship and refreshments)**



The term 'Engagement Groups' is given to a particular style of Unitarian small-group activity which has the intention to enrich the spiritual life of participants, cultivate right relationship, create community, and deepen participants' connection to each other and to their congregation. In this taster session, led by our own Jane Blackall and Godalming's Sheena Gabriel, we will explore the thinking behind Engagement Groups, consider the diverse forms they can take, introduce some basic principles of facilitation, and give pointers to further training opportunities and resources, in the hope that participants will be inspired to set up new Engagement Groups in their own congregations.

You'll need to book in advance by 31<sup>st</sup> August (though the training is free of charge) so the organisers know how many people to prepare for, but you are also welcome to arrive at 3.00pm to attend a special circle-style worship service connected to the day's overall theme. This will be followed by refreshments and time to socialise with everyone. Finish time will be around 4.30pm. To book a place on the workshop or find out more, email [jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk](mailto:jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk) or phone the church office and leave a message for Jane on 020 7221 6514.

# Magical Thinking?

Some people in the church have asked me about what I get up to as a 'magician'. Those who attended the recent Energy Work Workshop I ran with Sarah here at the church will perhaps have a sense of what this work means to me.

The word magician is more known as a term used for illusionists but it is also used by practitioners of the occult. The 19th and 20th centuries saw various magicians becoming famous. The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, formed in the Victorian era, have left a legacy of magical knowledge. Aleister Crowley was a sensationalist who liked to play with how people saw him. He sought publicity and was thought to be the great beast by some!

Dion Fortune practiced magic against the Nazis who were practicing it themselves. Some have described this as an occult war going on beneath the surface in Europe during the Second World War. Another deep source is the witchcraft traditions such as Wicca and many others. I do not practice the way of ceremonial magicians myself, involved in deep rituals, though they certainly influence me. I am far more drawn to the workings of witchcraft which is essentially earth magic and does not deserve the bad reputation it received, largely from the scare-mongering of the established churches centuries ago and from deep-rooted misogyny in our society, present to this day.

There are many definitions of magic. I would describe it as our ability to stretch, move and alter our consciousness as well as shifting and moving power. Magic can be used to commune with power and the spirit world, to elicit change and in divination, the seeking of truth. Many people today still use magical arts but may change the vocabulary, so they will see a medium for a 'reading' or an energy healer. But it's all from the same source. Writer Clive Barker explains that 'Magic is the first and last religion of the world'.

Most of the magic I use concerns healing but this can be to heal people, the land and even on a more sociological level. It takes many forms. A magician works with and engages with magic which is in all things. Divinity is within us, part of the earth and the planet and on other planes of existence. I sometimes work with herbs and plants in various ways from making oils and incense to communicating with the land and working with them as they live. I work with power to help heal people and divination to understand what is needed from a divine perspective on my part in this world. Being a magician is about being your own Priest (which is to work in service). It is about being a co-creator and working with divine power.

Here is a glossary of some terms which might help understand, and I am happy to discuss this further if you would like to know more.



## Glossary:

**Results magic:** this is the most famous kind of magic where you want something and look to influence things to make those changes specific to what you want. Most would say not to use this for trivial ends but we human beings are so often 'trivial' in our yearnings aren't we. There is a place for results magic but it's not something I take lightly.

**Service:** Magic done in service; when you give healing to the land you do not decide what it needs but your magic is a catalyst for what it needs, for the highest good not what you think is required.

**Spells:** the juicy part! A spell is a formula that shapes power to a specific purpose; this can be done using words, herbs and candles but incantations are generally the key ingredients of a spell; weaving words into power to create the pattern you seek.

**Astral Magic:** To use your imagination as a bridge of communication with the inner workings of this world, yourself and other worlds. It is here you can communicate and connect with power and understand how the power you work with operates.

**Ritual Magic:** this does not have to be grand ceremonies. Ritual is the externalised action from inner work. You create a strong inner connection and bridge it physically through ritual. A ritual may be expressed through words, gestures, symbols etc.

**Prayer:** To a magician prayer is not a passive act. It's there to build a communication between yourself and divinity, prayer is building a bridge of active communion.

I hope you've found this introduction to the work of a magician illuminating and I look forward to further conversations.

Richard Levy

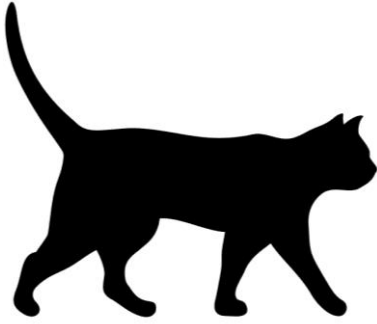


## Defibrillator News

With gratitude for a number of generous donations, we have now raised the £2,000 needed to place a defibrillator here at Essex Church. We're now seeking advice from the London Ambulance Service about the best position for this life-saving machine. We'll be arranging a training course on its use in the early autumn so let us know if you'd like a place on that course.



## Sonnet to Cassius the Cat



I have a cat called Cassius  
he 'has that lean and hungry look'  
likes to be cast in character  
a sleek and lone assassin  
who will not play it by the book  
of the theatre's feline roles  
he'll be seen to act off stage  
his cue the lights going down  
needs no dress rehearsals  
suffers no first night nerves  
and if his deed's successful  
he'll not pause for curtain calls  
    instead I'll stroke his soft warm fur  
    hand praising his serene purr

Brian Ellis

## Warden's Column: What's On in our Busy Building



Traditionally, the school summer holidays have been the quietest time at Essex Church. Sing and Sign finished on the 3rd of July, Wednesday morning yoga on the 4<sup>th</sup>, Ballet and Babybop on the 9<sup>th</sup> July, Pregnancy Yoga on the 10<sup>th</sup>, Streetdance on the 12<sup>th</sup>, osteopathy based yoga on the 17<sup>th</sup>, the last psychology lecture is 19<sup>th</sup> July, Ashtanga stops on the 27<sup>th</sup> and Monkey Music on the 30<sup>th</sup>. Generally August is a virtual desert, punctuated only by the oases of Sufi chanting on Monday night, Nia on Wednesday lunchtime, Tai Chi on Wednesday evening & Friday morning & the two Al-anon groups on Tuesday and Wednesday. Even Saturdays go quiet, with no confirmed bookings between 14<sup>th</sup> July and 8<sup>th</sup> September.

However, this year all that has changed – as we were approached by not one, but three groups wanting to run educational summer holiday clubs here. One was Lingo Brothers language teaching – who will be renting the library every weekday from September. We would therefore have given them preference, but they found out at the last minute that they'd be able to use their old venue for one more summer. Then there were "Creativity Art Workshops" who sounded absolutely wonderful and ran workshops with names like "Origami Fashion" and "Love Street Art – with Basquiat", but having recently redecorated, we were a bit worried about our walls and floors. So in the end we went with "Cypher Coders" who also run the largest number of camps and wanted to book the largest number of weeks. I expect you can guess their focus from the name – they want to help kids become "future ready" by teaching IT skills for creative collaboration.

They're using the Lindsey Hall, every day from 9 July to 31 August and bringing in a handy extra £4,000 for the church finances. There are 2 teachers and about 20 children and they've been a very low stress group so far – apart from the day Brian noticed they'd all gone out for lunch leaving 20 laptops in the in Hall and the main church door wide open! The regular hirers who store their equipment in a conveniently lockable cupboard have now kindly agreed to let the Cypher Coders have an extra key – so that laptops can be safely locked away at lunchtimes and overnight.

If you're curious to know more about any of these groups, here are their websites:

[www.creativityartworkshops.com/creativeartcamp](http://www.creativityartworkshops.com/creativeartcamp)  
[lingobros.com/kids-french-holiday-club](http://lingobros.com/kids-french-holiday-club)  
[www.cyphercoders.com/notting-hill](http://www.cyphercoders.com/notting-hill)

Jenny Moy



### Fitness Fusion of 9 Movement Forms

**Third Sunday of the Month from  
2-3pm: 19<sup>th</sup> August, 16<sup>th</sup> September 2018**

**Midweek class on Wednesdays - 12.30-1.30pm**

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 for drop-ins** (£8 to concessions / church members) or a block of 5 classes for £40 to use within a three month period.

# ‘Liberation Theologies’

From the service on 8<sup>th</sup> July 2018

The service is also available online as a podcast.

## The Story of Óscar Romero

Some of you will probably already know something of the story of Óscar Romero. For others, this will be the first you’ve heard of him. The story of his life – and death – provides a window into the circumstances in which liberation theology emerged, and briefly flourished (though Romero wasn’t exactly a liberation theologian himself). The picture on your order of service – see opposite – is a mural by the Chicana artist Juana Alicia, a tribute to Romero, entitled ‘No One Should Comply with an Immoral Law’.

Óscar Romero was born in El Salvador, just over 100 years ago, in 1917. He grew up in a Catholic household and at the age of thirteen he told his family he wanted to be a priest. He excelled in his studies, and in fact had to wait a year after he’d finished with seminary training before he could start work, as he was still slightly too young to be ordained. His ordination eventually took place in Rome when he was 25. He returned to El Salvador to serve first as a parish priest, and then as rector of a seminary, before he was appointed Bishop of Santiago de María, a poor, rural area, in the mid-1970s. A few years later, in 1977, he was appointed Archbishop of San Salvador. At this time, he had a reputation as quite a conservative, and his appointment was welcomed by the government. However, the more radical and progressive priests – those who were influenced by liberation theology, and who considered the government to be violent and oppressive – would, at this point, have been disappointed by the appointment of a figure like Romero.

But then everything changed. Less than a month after his appointment as Archbishop, a close personal friend of Romero’s, the Jesuit priest Rutilio Grande, was assassinated. Grande had been working with the rural poor and marginalised, encouraging them to organise and work for social transformation, for land reform, and worker’s rights. He spoke out about injustices and abuses carried out by the oppressive government at that time. Rutilio Grande was, in a modest but courageous way, doing the hands-on work of liberation theology (and we’ll hear more about exactly what this is in the sermon later on). And he was shot dead by government security forces for his trouble, for his work trying to empower the nation’s poor. Grande’s assassination had a profound impact on his friend Archbishop Romero, who later stated: *‘When I looked at Rutilio lying there dead I thought, “If they have killed him for doing what he did, then I too have to walk the same path.”’*

This dramatic turn of events seemed to shake him out of his naturally cautious temperament. Romero urged the government to investigate his friend’s death, but they ignored his pleas, and the censored press remained silent. From this point on Romero began to speak out against the oppression he saw all around: social injustice, poverty, assassinations and torture. In 1979, a military dictatorship came to power, bringing a further wave of human rights abuses by paramilitaries and the government. During these tough years Romero built up an enormous following of listeners to his weekly radio sermons and speeches. Each Sunday he listed the latest violent events and disappearances of ordinary people which were not publically acknowledged anywhere else. In 1980, speaking to an international conference, Romero attempted to capture the world’s attention, saying:



*“There have been threats, arrests, tortures, murders, numbering in the thousands.... That part of the church that put itself on the side of the people and went to the people’s defence, [has been persecuted]... and the key to understanding the persecution of the church [is]: the poor.”*

On 23rd March 1980, Romero delivered a sermon in which he called on Salvadoran soldiers, as Christians, to obey God’s higher order, and to stop carrying out the government’s repression and violations of basic human rights. The following day, as he was celebrating Mass with the patients of a small hospice, a car pulled up outside the chapel, and a gunman got out. Romero was shot in the heart and left to die.

A quarter of a million mourners attended his funeral (and at least 30 people were killed in shootings of the assembled crowds). If you want to know more about his story, and the situation in El Salvador at that time, you might want to watch the eponymous feature film, ‘Romero’.

Óscar Romero has been recognised as a martyr of the Catholic Church and will be canonised as a saint this October.

## Sermon: ‘Liberation Theologies’

This is the second service in our monthly ministry theme of ‘Freedom and Liberation’. And I’m going to do my best, in the next ten minutes or so, to give you a whistle-stop tour through the origins and evolution of the movement known as Liberation Theology. I’ll also try to tell you a little about where it’s at in the present day and why we should care.

Liberation Theology emerged in the 1960s, in Latin America, and although that was its ‘moment’ – in the 60s and 70s, perhaps into the 1980s – to understand its origins and popularity at that time and in that place we need to bear in mind the context: best part of 500 years of suffering that preceded it. There was horrendous treatment of the native population by the colonial powers (Spanish and Portuguese) that had arrived from Europe: exploitation of the people, their land, and resources, and the suppression of their native culture and religion, as the various settled societies were converted (largely by force) to Christianity. By the mid-20th-century there were a number of military dictatorships in the region, and civil rights and human rights were curtailed or at least under threat in a lot of places. Poverty was widespread (though there were aristocracies who were doing very alright for themselves; the contrast between the ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’ was increasingly stark). This is the backdrop, the context, to the emergence of Latin American Liberation Theology.



## ‘Liberation Theologies’ (continued)

There are a few theologians who are collectively credited as its founders: Gustavo Gutiérrez of Peru, Leonardo Boff of Brazil, Juan Luis Segundo of Uruguay. Gutiérrez in particular though is often called ‘The Father of Liberation Theology’ so I’ll focus on some of the influential ideas that he was best known for. A concept that Gutiérrez popularised is known as ‘the preferential option for the poor’. This phrase – which you could almost say is the slogan of Liberation Theology – springs out of the idea that God was revealed throughout the Bible as favouring the poor and powerless of society – those people who are marginalized in various ways – people seen as insignificant, unimportant, needy, defenceless, sometimes despised. Even outside of Liberation Theology this is a major theme in the Christian church’s social teaching: that the moral test of any society is how it treats its most vulnerable members.

You can point to the words of the prophets to back this up; indeed the hymn we just sang, ‘What Does the Lord Require?’, is based on the words of the Old Testament prophet Micah: *‘True justice always means defending of the poor, the righting of the wrong, reforming ancient law. This is the path: true justice do, love mercy too, and walk with God.’* And Jesus himself taught that God will ultimately ask what each person did during the course of their life to help the poor and the needy, famously saying: ‘whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.’ Think too of the Beatitudes: *‘Blessed be the poor: for yours is the kingdom of God.’* Within the Christian tradition, this emphasis on concern for the marginalised is well-grounded. And yet... this hasn’t always been reflected in the conduct of the church, the institution itself. Too often the church has cosied up to money and power and turned a blind eye to injustice. So: Liberation Theology might be thought of as a reaction against a church which had, in some sense, gone astray as an institution, and departed from this core principle. It focuses on this notion that care for the poor, powerless, and marginalised should be at the very heart of the Christian mission. And it focuses on praxis – putting theory into practice – putting tradition in dialogue with hands-on action instead of simply pontificating about theology in ivory towers while people go hungry. I should say – that’s not to dismiss the value of theology, of tradition, of scripture – one of the key activities of Liberation Theology was to organise what were called ‘Christian Base Communities’. These were grass-roots gatherings of ordinary people, not specialist scholars, often set up in neglected rural areas, where people were encouraged to study the gospel in the light of their own experience, and see how it spoke to their own – disadvantaged – condition. It was contextual; reading the stories and parables, they began to ask themselves: *‘How does the Christian message speak to the harsh realities of my life?’*

The intention was that lay people should get to grips with the Bible, and read it through the lens of liberation, so that it would strengthen and inspire them to get actively involved in bringing about social change. This is the work that Oscar Romero’s friend Rutilio Grande was doing when he was assassinated (note: we heard the story of Oscar Romero, former Archbishop of San Salvador, earlier in the service). It helped ordinary people feel that they were justified in resisting the oppression they faced instead of just accepting their lot, fatalistically, because in some sense God was *on their side* – on the side of the oppressed. And these grass-roots communities helped them to practically structure and organise that resistance – this was liberation theology in practice. At last count, about a decade ago, it was reckoned that something like 80,000 of these ‘Christian Base Communities’ still exist in Brazil alone, and they’re credited (by some, at least) as having helped the transition from military to democratic rule, in part by contributing to public health and education projects.

What’s not to like? Well... the rise of Liberation Theology was not universally welcomed. Conservative theologians, in particular, questioned the extent to which it was theologically justified. People in power, unsurprisingly, didn’t like it much, and argued that the church should butt out of politics altogether and stick to purely spiritual concerns. The ‘upstairs neighbours’, in the United States, certainly didn’t want this Marxist-influenced movement taking hold on their doorstep, and the hierarchy of the Catholic church at that time were very wary of endorsing Liberation Theology too. Pope John Paul was seemingly worried about the whiff of communism and Joseph Ratzinger, who went on to become Pope Benedict, acted as the ‘enforcer’ in a drive to crack down on Liberation Theology’s influence in the Catholic church. Prominent figures such as Gutiérrez were barred from attending key church conferences, though they had their allies and defenders, who tried to keep the spirit of his message alive.

Over time, the profile of Liberation Theology has faded somewhat, and you might say that its decline in influence occurred in parallel with the decline of communism, after the fall of the Berlin wall, in the late 1980s... though it seems that the current Pope, Francis, who hails from Argentina, has taken a more conciliatory tone, having been quoted as saying: *‘The option for the poor comes from the first centuries of Christianity. It’s the Gospel itself. If you were to read one of the sermons of the first fathers of the Church, from the second or third centuries, about how you should treat the poor, you’d say it was Trotskyist. The Church has always had the honour of this preferential option for the poor.’* Words from Pope Francis (a few years before he became Pope). And that’s one way of looking at Liberation Theology: as an attempt to return to the ways of the small, decentralised, agile, and adaptable, early church communities. Have a read of the book of Acts... a lot of those accounts of the early church sound a little bit communist to me too! Yet over the centuries, as Christendom has evolved away from this original form, and biblical interpretation has become entangled with matters of power and control, these early expressions of the faith have come to seem very distant from the church institutions of today.

Up to this point I’ve mainly spoken about Liberation Theology as something that arose in a certain place (Latin America), at a certain time (the 60s/70s), and largely within the context of the Catholic Church. So – you might wonder – what can Unitarians learn from this, here and now? Well, there’s a hint in the title that I’ve given to today’s service: it’s not ‘Liberation Theology’ (singular) but ‘Liberation Theologies’ (plural). In the years since Gutiérrez and his comrades came to prominence there has been a proliferation of different forms of Liberation Theology all around the world. Each one of these Liberation Theologies addresses a particular form of real-world oppression, an instance of power imbalance between the ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’, and lifts up the voice of this particular group which has been marginalised in our society. Each ‘flavour’ of Liberation Theology focuses on the shared lived experience of suffering and disadvantage that this particular group has been subjected to, and works out a viable theology in that context, as seen through the eyes of each era’s downtrodden and oppressed, rather than leaving society’s dominant groups to have a monopoly on interpreting the text and tradition in their own interests. The religious tradition that was handed down – the theory, if you like – has to be put into practice ‘where the rubber hits the road’, as the saying goes, if it’s to have any real meaning for people – particularly those who are poor, powerless, struggling – exactly those people that Christians are meant to care about the most.

*(sermon concludes overleaf)*

## 'Liberation Theologies' (continued)

For example: Black Theology was a form of liberation theology which arose in the States. Influential theologians such as James Cone (who sadly died earlier this year, in his 80s) applied the Christian message to the context of racist segregation, civil rights, and the political, social, and economic subjugation of African Americans. Writing in 1970, he said this: *'Black theology cannot accept a view of God which does not represent God as being for oppressed blacks and thus against white oppressors. Living in a world of white oppressors, blacks have no time for a neutral God. The brutalities are too great and the pain too severe, and this means we must know where God is and what God is doing in the revolution.'* These are strong words. And they illustrate how Liberation Theology works in another setting. In the context of 1970s America – this book was published two years after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. – Cone was working out a theology that made sense for people whose entire lives were shaped by their experience of racism: both everyday personal prejudice, and structural biases built into the very fabric of society. Black Liberation Theology, written by black theologians, was intended to support other black people in overcoming oppression.

And the same goes for Feminist Theology, Asian Theology, Disabled Theology, Queer Theology. An equivalent story could be told for each of these distinct communities and concerns (and that's without considering intersectionality – the way that people belong to more than one of these disadvantaged groups at a time – but that's an issue for another day). Each of these theologies is working on finding new ways to put theology, scripture, and tradition in context with the real lived experience of groups that have got a rough deal in society, so that the church becomes a genuine, live, practical force for good in their lives. The original Liberation Theology, as it arose in Latin America, was focused largely on socio-economic oppression – the deprivation of money, land, and resources. But there are numerous other axes of oppression in our world and, it seems, with each year that passes we have our attention drawn to new instances of people being marginalised, exploited, and disadvantaged in ways too numerous to count.

The core religious messages which have been handed down to us – whether it's the scripture and tradition we have inherited from our Christian forebears – the calls from Jesus and the prophets to attend to the poor, the powerless, the marginalised – or the principles and values of our more recent Unitarian and Unitarian Universalist history – the commitment to justice, equality, and 'the inherent worth and dignity of every person' – Well, Liberation Theologies show us how these familiar religious messages can truly come alive.

In any situation we can ask: 'Who is being unfairly treated here? Who is the underdog? Who is getting a rough deal in our society these days through no fault of their own?' And perhaps our answers will reveal another strand of Liberation Theology just waiting to happen.

Amen.

## Flower Dreams



Here we are again – another hopeful summer,  
The music, the flowers, the languid days in the garden  
Almost nearly the same; and those flower-dreams  
Which return to rankle us as soon as we stretch out  
Upon the leafy-shadowed grass. The chances  
We might have made or taken – weren't we bold  
Brave, ruthless enough to grasp them?  
Or were we simply afraid, too timid  
Too considerate? And those who think they know  
Rarely knowing enough to fairly guess.  
Shall we be young again? Young in some other life  
Well beyond our telescopic vision? Will the odds there  
Be more even? Shall we do it all then  
What we tell ourselves and others  
We almost nearly did? Across the lawn the piano ripples  
The piano in the parlour 'chink-chinks' like old pennies  
We were mostly too fearful, too miserly to spend  
Before they fell from circulation – O flower-dreams!  
Must you always seem more rare, more beautiful  
Than flowers we still could cherish  
Still reach out and tend?

John Hands

## The Last Ste

p

p

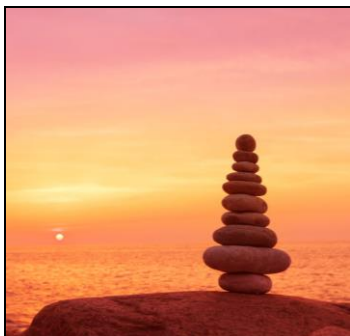
when you reach the end of the  
" road only once travelled "   
shadowed in the dusk by  
your life's final light  
before stepping into  
" the night that  
awaits us all "   
consider, it's  
a chance of  
Paradise  
Oblivion  
Recall  
or The  
Aby-  
ss  
?

Brian Ellis



## OneLight Gatherings:

### 'Stillness: A Ceremony of Song, Silence & Poetry'



**Fridays 10<sup>th</sup> August & 14<sup>th</sup> September  
6.45 for 7pm-8.30pm here at Essex Church**

Led by Interfaith Ministers Rev Alison Trower and Rev Amy Firth this service will include music, prayer, reflection, silence, community connection and the beautiful Threshold Choir. Suggested donation: £5. You are welcome to arrive from 6:45pm and the gathering will be completed by 8:30pm with tea and treats. For more information see the OneLight website which helpfully includes all the resources they use in their gatherings:

[www.onelightgathering.co.uk](http://www.onelightgathering.co.uk)

## 'Finding Our Voice' Monthly Singing Workshops

**Sundays 19<sup>th</sup> August, 16<sup>th</sup> September  
from 12.30pm to 1.15pm**



Margaret 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 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 sessions are designed for all, whatever your experience or ability.

## Gathering the Waters

In the service on Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> September 2018



Please collect a small amount of water from any summer travels you go on, or from your balcony or garden, or from your tap at home to contribute to our gathering the waters ceremony in the service on Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> September.

## Unitarian Women's Group Conference:

### 'Empty Pockets'



**19<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> October 2018**

**at the Nightingale Centre,  
Great Hucklow, in the Peak District**

Join us for another weekend of friendship and feminism. We'll consider how the negative impacts of austerity measures have fallen disproportionately on women and how we can respond to it. This is a weekend where women learn from each other, share with each other, and nurture each other – and we would love you to be there with us. The programme will be led by Jo O'Sullivan, Sue MacFarlane and Kate Dean. The basic cost for the weekend (accommodation and meals included) is £124.

**A free place on this weekend may be available  
- contact our minister for more details.**

**Contact Margaret Robinson to book:  
margaretrobinson81@gmail.com**

# 'Cultivating Kind Communities'

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker in February  
*The service is also available online as a podcast.*

Today's address has a simple message.

Here it is: Let's be kind to one another. And let's work to cultivate kindness in communities, in our Kensington Unitarians community here in London – and in all the other communities to which we belong – neighbourhoods, friendships, families, schools and universities, GPs waiting rooms, hospitals, clubs, shops, on the streets, buses and tubes, workplaces, sports centres, parks – and anywhere else where human beings gather together. Kindness makes life a bit better for everyone. That's today's message – with a warning added later to 'not overdo it'.

I hope somebody has been kind to you this week and that you've had chance to be kind to someone else. It doesn't have to be a big thing does it – kindness can be as simple as a door held open for us, a seat offered on a bus, a phone call made, a smile as we pass in the street. After today's service we're holding one of our monthly Sunday conversations about this month's ministry theme of love and kindness – and there'll be chance there to share some simple examples of kindnesses shown to us.

Roy Clark our congregation's chair, mentioned earlier some of the ways people show kindness in our community and he used the term Beloved Community. This term has a long and distinguished history and I'm grateful to Cathal Courtney, one time Unitarian minister here in London for his book *'Towards Beloved Community'* in which he writes about the American philosopher Josiah Royce from the late 19th century. Royce identified one of the problems of his age as having too great an emphasis on individualism in ethics and wrote extensively of the need to balance individualism with the needs of community. Cathal writes that *'Royce was one of the first people to use the term beloved community to describe the form of human society that seeks to honour both individual identity and its collective context.'*

The term Beloved Community was brought further to life by the powerful oratory of Martin Luther King Junior who saw it as an expression of a world community which celebrated differences and embraced all people - the possibility of creating God's Kingdom here on earth. Father Henri Nouwen, Dutch Catholic priest and theologian, urged us all to create communities where people could know themselves to be loved and accepted just as they were. Such communities do not exist just for themselves alone – kind communities, beloved communities have open doors and open arms – to welcome others in. They are outwardly focused – reaching out and welcoming in. That might sound a bit obvious but it needs regular re-stating in order to counter-balance our human tendency to build barriers, to draw up the drawbridge in order to give an illusion of safety. But we'll never be safe as long as we're alive, because life is fraught and dangerous and we never know what's going to happen next. How much better though, to face life's uncertainties in good company with others.

We need kind communities to resist prevailing trends in our society. Being part of a kind community resists personal fragmentation, counter-balances our individualism, helps re-align our vision away from capitalism's self-centred materialism to a wider vision focused on the greater good of all.



Kindness in a community does not mean we're all nicey nicey all the time. It doesn't mean we fall over one another in our attempts to rescue one another. I can have a bit of a tendency to overdo that myself sometimes so I keep in mind a character from the TV sitcom *Father Ted*. It's based around three Catholic priests living on Craggy Island off the west coast of Ireland and their over-helpful, over-kind housekeeper Mrs Doyle. Mrs Doyle, some of you will recall, wants everybody to have a cup of tea and will continue to push one upon you however much you protest. "Ah go on," she says, "will you have a cup of tea? It's nice and hot, ah go on, just a drop and what about a slice of cake to go with it?"

The world does not need more Mrs Doyle's, however much she makes us laugh. She is serving her own needs to be useful rather than other people's genuine needs for hot beverages and slices of cake. We all do well to keep an eye on our own inner Mrs Doyle, our own unconscious motivations in life - because the more conscious we can be of what is driving our own behaviours the more alert we can be in relationship with others.

What kind communities require of us is honesty. By acknowledging our own weaknesses, our own vulnerabilities, our own mistakes, the fractures in our own sense of self, our imperfections, we are making space for other people to do the same. This is what it is to be human - we are re-assuring one another – this is what it is to be human and we are loved and accepted as we are – not as we think we ought to be.

I've always treasured the imagery Jesus uses when he asks people why are they so busy commenting on the speck of dust in someone else's eye whilst there's a great big plank sticking out of their own eye? That's a carpenter's son talking isn't it. I'm grateful to a religious education teacher in primary school who encouraged us all to illustrate this image as graphically as possible and to the friend who drew a large tree trunk coming out of someone's eye. Never to be forgotten.

Kindness requires honesty. It does not mean that we ignore bad behaviour or ignore our own needs. On the contrary, it's a sign for me of a healthy community when people speak up sooner if something doesn't feel right. If someone says or does things that we don't like or we don't understand let's speak about it. Kindness does not mean sweeping discomfort under the proverbial carpet. It does mean being curious rather than blaming. It does mean cutting the other person some slack and reining back our reactive tendencies. Our quickness to judge is a throwback to ancient, even reptilian times. An instantaneous sense of threat may have saved a dinosaur's life but we are no longer dinosaurs. We are beautiful, complex beings – both fragile and strong and it's one of life's many pleasures to get to know one another better. Cultivating kind, and resilient, communities helps us connect. And connection is what beloved communities are all about. Let's explore what we Kensington Unitarians can do to help people connect in the months ahead. Amen.



## Good Cause Collection of the Month:

# Animal Free Research UK

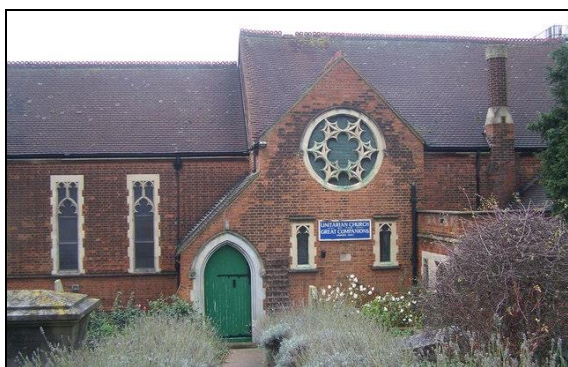


## Collection on Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> August

An internationally known breast cancer specialist, Dr Valerie Speirs, professor of experimental pathology and oncology at the University of Leeds, is leading a three-year study, jointly sponsored by Animal Free Research UK and Breast Cancer UK, which will focus on the potential causes of breast cancer. It will specifically examine the impact of endocrine disrupting chemicals (EDCs), found in materials like pesticides, metals, additives and contaminants in food and personal care products. By supporting this appeal funding vital humane breast research by Professor Valerie Speirs you will help save human and animal lives.

For more details see: [www.animalfreeresearchuk.org](http://www.animalfreeresearchuk.org)

# Chatham Unitarians Appeal



## Collection on Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> September

Last year, Chatham Unitarians had their building and electrical system surveyed, and found that both need attention. The insurance company instructed them to turn the electricity off and they had to meet in the cold throughout the winter as another condition of the insurance is that services are still held at least once a month! The wiring is so old that it has to be replaced and the heating and lighting brought up to modern standards. The congregation are trying to get grants to help but with so many organisations also applying, they cannot to rely on that alone. A fund-raising team started work in January and by the spring they had already raised £5,000 in donations and pledges. However, their aim is £30,000, so there is still a long way to go. Please support this appeal to help maintain the Unitarian presence in the Medway Towns and continue to provide a place where folk can worship free from dogma.

## Recent Charity Collections:

May 27<sup>th</sup> – International Rescue Committee – £154.95

June 24<sup>th</sup> – Unitarian General Assembly – £137.62

# What's On...

Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> Sept, 6.45 for 7-8pm

**'Heart & Soul: That's Not Fair!'**

Led by Sarah Tinker

Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> September, 11am-noon

**'Justice Like Water'**

Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> September, 12.30-1pm

**Inclusive Communion**

Led by Sarah Tinker

Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> September, 12.30pm

**'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite**

Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> September, 7-9pm

**Management Committee Meeting**

Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> September, 11 for 11.30am-4.30pm

**LDPA Quarterly District Meeting / Workshop:**

**'Circles of Connection: An Introduction to Engagement Group Facilitation Skills'**

Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> September, 11am-noon

**'Addressing Inequality'**

Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> September, 12.30-1.15pm

**'Finding Your Voice'**

**Singing Class with Margaret**

Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> September, 2-3pm

**'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite**

Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> September, 12.30pm

**'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite**

Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> September, 11am-noon

**'Living Invisibly'**

Led by Jeannene Powell and Sarah Tinker

Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> September, 12.45-1.45pm

**Sunday Conversation:**

On the month's theme of 'Advantage/Disadvantage'.

Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> September, 2-5pm

**LGBTQIA+ Inclusive Tea Dance**

including rumba class for beginners

Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> September, 12.30pm

**'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite**

Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> September, 11am-noon

**'Harvests'**

Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> September, 12.30-1.30pm

**Congregational Lunch**

'We hurry through our day giving little attention to all the "little" things we are receiving. But are these things really little? They only seem so because, while we are being supported, our attention is elsewhere.'

**Gregg Krech**

# Services at Essex Church in August/September



## Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> August, 11am 'What's Going On?'

Service led by Jane Blackall

As we begin our month of 'Paying Attention' this service will focus on the virtue of sensitivity: the ability to read 'what's going on' in any given situation, to be aware of other people's feelings and experiences, and care about helping others to feel at ease.

## Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> August, 11am 'Noticing the Good'

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

In this service we will consider how consciously choosing to notice the positives in life can have a remarkably uplifting effect.

## Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> August, 11am 'The Art of Awakening'

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Many spiritual traditions emphasise the value of focusing on the present moment. In this service we'll explore how this insight can enrich our own everyday lives.

## Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> August, 11am 'Our Sources of Delight'

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker  
and Members of the Congregation

Today we will be celebrating our passions and enthusiasms. Please note that Notting Hill's children's carnival today means public transport will be plentiful but it's **no parking on single yellow lines**. Parking in residents' spaces is fine.



## Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> September, 11am 'Other People's Lives'

Service led by Jane Blackall

It can be quite tempting to judge people's life choices based on what we can see at face value... but there's often a lot going on beneath the surface: context that we may be blissfully unaware of, that we will struggle to imagine, because the circumstances of other people's lives are sometimes very different from our own. In this service we will consider the effect of chance circumstances on people's subsequent opportunities in life and ask how we can be more aware of the advantages and disadvantages others face.

## Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> September, 11am 'Justice Like Water'

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Examining the importance of fair water distribution and including our annual Gathering the Waters ceremony – bring some water from your summer to join together with others in our community

## Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> September, 11am 'Addressing Inequality'

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

In this service we will be looking at the effects of inequality and there will be a chance to hear of Unitarians who made a difference in their own day, working to close gaps between rich and poor.

## Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> September, 11am 'Living Invisibly'

Service led by Jeannene Powell  
and Rev. Sarah Tinker

As we continue to explore advantage and disadvantage this month, we'll explore some of the pros and cons of living invisibly, and having parts of our life and identity unseen. This service will be followed by a Sunday Conversation on our monthly theme of 'Advantage and Disadvantage' and then a Tea Dance from 2pm.

## Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> September, 11am 'Harvests'

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

A service to celebrate the life of Stephanie Saville alongside our annual harvest celebration, with great choral music and followed by a food and drink reception in Stephanie's honour. All welcome.

