



Kensington Unitarians

Newsletter: April 2018

What's On...

Sunday 1st April, 11am-noon
'Easter: What is Grace?'
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 1st April, 12.30-2.00pm
Congregational Easter Lunch

Tuesday 3rd April, 7-9pm
'How to be A Unitarian' Course
(#3, for continuing participants only)

Wednesday 4th April, 12.30pm
'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite

Thursday 4th April, 6.45 for 7-8pm
'Heart & Soul: Grace in Our Lives'
Led by Jeannene Powell

Sunday 8th April, 11am-noon
'It's a Sin'
Led by Jane Blackall

Sunday 8th April, 12.30-1pm
Inclusive Communion
Led by Sue Smith

Tuesday 10th April, 7-9pm
'HTBAU' Course #4 (continuing)

Wednesday 11th April, 12.30pm
'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite

Sunday 15th April, 11am-noon
'Unjust Desserts'
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 15th April, 12.30-1.15pm
'Finding Your Voice'
Singing Workshop with Margaret

Sunday 15th April, 2-3pm
'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite

Tuesday 17th April, 7-9pm
'HTBAU' Course #5 (continuing)

Wednesday 18th April, 12.30pm
'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite

Friday 20th April, 7.30pm
Playback Theatre on 'Grace'

Sunday 22nd April, 11am-noon
'Noticing'
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker
and Jeannene Powell

Tuesday 24th April, 7-9pm
'HTBAU' Course #6 (continuing)

Wednesday 25th April, 12.30pm
'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite

Thursday 26th April, 7-9pm
Management Committee Meeting

Sunday 29th April, 11am-noon
'Second Chances'
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 29th April, 12.45-2pm
Sunday Conversation:
On the month's theme of 'Grace'.

Grace

A Message from our Minister

I have a Marxist university lecturer to thank for first introducing me to the concept of the 'Protestant work ethic' and for encouraging us all to think long and hard about complex inter-relationships between religion, economics and social class. It was first described by German sociologist Max Weber in 1905 in his book, 'The Protestant Ethic & the Spirit of Capitalism'. This work ethic is summed up as 'God helps them who help themselves', a message still prevalent in western society to this day.

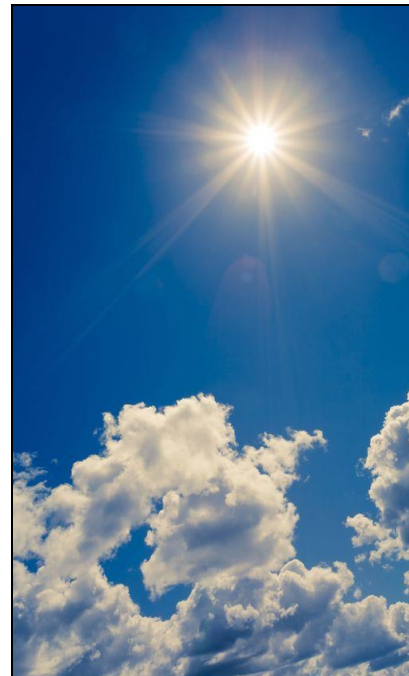
Interesting to compare this with Jesus' message to the worried people of his day - to look at the lilies of the field and the birds of the air, that neither toil nor spin, yet their heavenly Father

feeds them, and clothes them in all their glory. Revolutionary stuff – and not the kind of message intended to keep the stock market buoyant and commodity prices elevated.

As we start our monthly ministry theme of 'grace' here at Essex Church, perhaps we can all explore our often unconscious attitudes towards spirituality and economics. Grace can be defined as the unearned gift of life itself, as a momentary awareness of good fortune. How might we respond to the presence of grace in our lives? We can accept it with gratitude, or we may find ourselves with an aching sense that 'it is not enough'. We may need to consider our sense of entitlement, and to examine ideas that leave us always yearning for 'more'. Being grateful for what we have is a peaceful way to be in this world. Reminding ourselves of our relative position of privilege in relation to most other people alive today helps bring perspective.

To be alive is truly remarkable. Our planet earth home is unbelievably special. The universe in which we spin is unimaginably vast. How then shall we live? Theologian Frederick Buechner explains the message of grace as 'There's nothing you have to do'. There's nothing we *have* to do. But I hope in the month ahead that you'll *choose* to come to church and engage in deep conversations with one another and admire the spring bulbs that are at last starting to emerge in the garden. Oh – and help with the washing up is always welcome!

Rev. Sarah Tinker



In this month's newsletter...

* New Wall-Hanging Unveiled * 'How to be a Unitarian' Course Underway at Essex Church * Defibrillator Funding and other Committee News * Sunday Afternoon Tea Dance in May * Poems by John Hands and Brian Ellis * 'Combatting Transphobia' by Jane Blackall * Climate Change Art by Heidi Ferid * Reflections on 'Singing for the Spirit' with Corrina Dolso * 'Health and Healing' sermons and reflections by Sarah, Jane, Tristan and Jeannene....

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
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Notting Hill Gate
London W8 4RT

Office Answering Machine: 020 7221 6514

Email: info@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

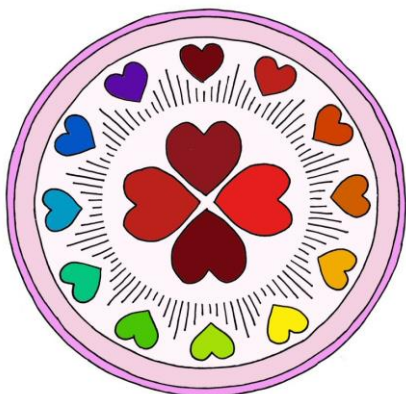
Web: www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk

'Heart and Soul'

Midweek Spiritual Gatherings

Thursdays 5th April, 3rd May 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. April's Heart and Soul will be led by Jeannene Powell on the theme of 'The Grace in Our Lives'. This will be followed by refreshments (including cake!) and fellowship. All are welcome to join us. If you would like to know more about our 'Heart & Soul' gatherings at Essex Church email jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Easter Lunch after service on 1st April



After the service on Easter Sunday (1st April) we will be holding a congregational bring-and-share lunch. If you're in doubt about what to bring check with Jane or Sarah as we have been circulating a sign-up sheet to try and ensure a mix of offerings. To avoid chaos in the kitchen we encourage you to think about bringing items that are ready-to-serve from the containers you bring them in. As ever we will be grateful of any offers of help with clearing up on the day!

Volunteering Rotas: Stewarding, Coffee and Greeting



Stewarding:

1 st April:	Erica Zaiser & Bobby Rebeiro
8 th April:	Brian Ellis
15 th April:	Carole Grace
22 nd April:	Julia Alden
29 th April:	Juliet Edwards

Coffee:

1 st April:	Heidi Ferid
8 th April:	Helena Coope
15 th April:	Sue Smith
22 nd April:	Richard Levy
29 th April:	Helena Coope

Greeting:

1 st April:	Brian Ellis
8 th April:	Annie Fowler
15 th April:	Juliet Edwards
22 nd April:	Sue Smith
29 th April:	Gina Bayley

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

'How to be a Unitarian' Course at Essex Church



Our new evening course, 'How to be a Unitarian', has got off to a great start. Eighteen of us have signed up which means the library is going to be full-to-bursting over these six Tuesday evenings when we have committed to gather and explore our faith. Prior to each session all the participants ponder a question and send in their response to be (anonymously) read out by someone else in the group so that we can get to hear everybody's perspectives without anyone feeling too self-conscious about giving their opinion. Here is a small selection of responses to the question we considered in week one: 'What is Unitarianism?'

Unitarianism is a global movement, which although Christian and non-Trinitarian in its roots, embraces knowledge and wisdom from all faiths, philosophies, pop cultures and science. Part of what's important in Unitarianism, is that people use their minds, reason and life experience in assessing and deciding what they believe and what's true for themselves. And in this way Unitarianism is non-dogmatic. Another factor of Unitarianism is that it has a strong focus on social justice and encourages people to demonstrate their values and beliefs in the world, by the way they live their lives.

Unitarianism for me has a proud history of heresy and of brave people who stood up for freedom in religion and thought in repressive times. Today, we Unitarians are holders of so many useful resources that people need - buildings, space to meet, funds and most importantly - communities - of people with lives to share and wide ranging spiritualities to explore together. Together we affirm that all people are equal, each life matters.

Unitarianism is a meeting of hearts and minds that puts religious freedom and freethinking at the forefront. It's a community of souls. Of believers, non-believers and seekers. An inclusive, non-judgemental approach to religion where we are free to walk our own path. Where we are reminded of our own connectedness to the universe and are able to realise our innate goodness.

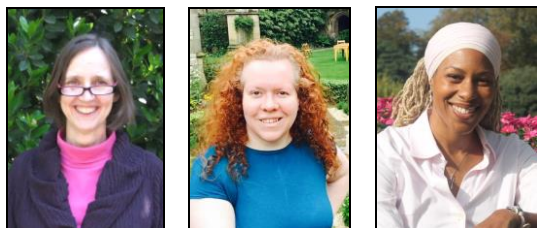
Unitarianism is a set of beliefs that encourages people in their search for meaning and truth in life... Unitarians peer under the surface of what they are told because they are astutely aware of the role of human interpretation in scholastic and spiritual endeavours and they are keen to expand their own faculties. They encourage change and growth throughout the individual spiritual journey and find value even in life's challenges and hardships.

Unitarianism is a religious tradition within which people are supported and encouraged on their own spiritual journey. It is a community where seekers come together to reflect on the deepest questions of life and explore their responses, in a supportive yet gently challenging environment, without a pre-determined set of answers being imposed upon them. It is a container within which people can learn, develop, and grow spiritually, and share their wisdom with others of like mind (and be supported and comforted during life's ups and downs). Individual Unitarians may be Christian (or not) – indeed a few may even be Trinitarian! – for me the term 'Unitarian' primarily refers to the spiritual community and approach to religion rather than particular shared beliefs.

To me Unitarianism is a modern way of being religious. In a world of the internet, astrophysics, psychoanalysis, stem cell therapy there is still the deep human need to be religious. Religion for me expressed and reinforced at a church, where a congregation use a ceremony as a way to share and think deeply about being human and what purpose we have. Unitarianism takes the best from the New Testament Christian tradition of love, charity and compassion, and mixes it with the best from other faiths and philosophy, to support me to live a life worth living. The services have a profound effect on me and are an important part of my life. I am proud of being a Unitarian, even though sometimes I do not feel worthy of the name.

Unitarianism is a religious movement which welcomes people with a wide range of spiritual beliefs and practices who want to worship in an inclusive environment, with open-minded others, while practising an attitude of love, acceptance and understanding towards each other.

Thematic Ministry



Our ministry theme for April is 'grace'. 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: May – 'Natural World / Earth', June – 'Creativity & Arts', July – 'Liberation & Freedom'.

Here are some ways you might engage with this month's theme of 'Grace', each connected with a quotation. How would you describe the concept of grace to someone? What does it mean for you?

Brian Doyle writes that "We think of grace arriving like an ambulance, just-in-time delivery, an invisible divine cavalry cresting a hill of troubles, a bolt of jazz from the glittering horn of the Creator, but maybe it lives in us and is activated by illness of the spirit. Maybe we're loaded with grace. Maybe we're stuffed with the stuff. Maybe it's stitched into our DNA, a fifth ingredient in the deoxyribonucleic acidic soup".

Are there times in your life where you've had a sense of grace within you being activated?

Sobonfu Somé writes that "In the Dagara tradition, Spirit brings the lessons of life through falls from grace. Crisis comes as an instigator of change; it takes you to somewhere new, where you find a higher meaning and purpose. If you are going to learn and grow, you can't just be stuck in a particular place. Crisis breaks you out and creates the space for Spirit to teach you. This breaking away from a place of stagnation, a place of comfort, and moving forward to a more perfect way is what we call a spiritual life."

Have you experienced times of crisis that eventually helped you move forwards in your life? What did you learn in these difficult times?

"The winds of God's grace are always blowing, it is for us to raise our sails." — Ramakrishna

Have there been times when you have been blown far from a course you planned for yourself? How much do you now think we have control over our own destinies in life?

Sarah, Jeannene, and Jane

Unitarian Women's Group Conference: 'Empty Pockets'

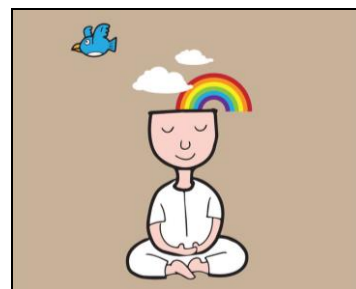


**19th-21st October at the Nightingale Centre,
Great Hucklow, in the Peak District**

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. Contact Margaret Robinson for information: margaretrobinson81@gmail.com.

The Meditation Fellowship

was formed in 1985 and has run retreats ever since!



**24th-26th April in Salisbury with Richard Bober
and 23th-15th July in Grasmere with Kate Dean**

The meditation fellowship holds two retreats per year. They are suitable for beginners, long-term meditators and those seeking to renew their practice. They include a blend of quiet meditation, insight meditation, and practices intended to cultivate kindness, compassion, and joy. They weekends are designed for spiritual refreshment and fellowship with like-minded friends. They include a variety of sessions, from guided meditation, quiet meditation, compassion meditation, circle dancing, music, walking and sharing of spiritually nourishing guidance in the form of reading stories, poetry and music. The basic cost of the Salisbury retreat is £170 and the Grasmere retreat is £180.

Contact alfwithington@gmail.com or call 01942 733553.

Sunday Afternoon Tea Dance

Sunday 6th May from 2.00-5.00pm
with a dance lesson for beginners at 2.15pm
at Essex Unitarian Church, Notting Hill Gate



Join us for a tea dance with social dancing and actual tea and cake! Come and enjoy a gentle afternoon learning basic social dancing steps with Rachel who can teach even the most left-footed people. There will be a lesson for beginners from 2.15pm (in May we'll do the samba). This is an inclusive event for LGBTQI+ people and allies and we ask that everyone is respectful to each other. There's no need to bring a partner or dress up specially for the event (but you can if you like!) All our partnering is gender-neutral, so anyone can lead and anyone can follow, and we are body positive. The venue is wheelchair-accessible and has gender-neutral toilets. We ask you not to wear high heels as we need to protect the floor!

Tickets: £10 on the door (free entry to members of Essex Church)

You are invited to bring your own home-made cakes (*clearly labelled*), to raise money for our nominated charity, Opening Doors London.

Future Tea Dances – Save the Dates:
23rd September and 9th December 2018

For more information contact: rachel@rachelsparksdance.co.uk
www.facebook.com/rachelsparksdance



'All the absurd little meetings, decisions, inner skirmishes that go to make up our days. It all adds up to very little, and yet it all adds up to very much. Our days are full of nonsense, and yet not, because it is precisely into the nonsense of our days that God speaks to us words of great significance — not words that are written in the stars but words that are written into the raw stuff and nonsense of our days, which are not nonsense just because God speaks into the midst of them. And the words God says, to each of us differently, are "be brave... be merciful... feed my lambs... press on toward the goal."

Frederick Buechner

Defibrillator Fundraising and Other Committee News



At our April committee meeting we decided to fundraise for a defibrillator to be sited in our church building. The British Heart Foundation explains that if someone collapses from a sudden cardiac arrest, their chance of survival can go from 6% to 74% if a defibrillator and CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) are used immediately. It will cost just over £2,000 to buy what's known as a Public Access Defibrillator (PAD) and train 12 people to use it. We'll work with the London Ambulance Service to ensure we choose the best model for our building and get the best training we can.

Let's see how quickly we can raise this money. Our monthly good cause collection on 29th April will be going towards our defibrillator and we would gladly accept cheques made payable to Essex Church or we can give you bank details for an online transfer. Thanks to Sue Smith for suggesting we find out more about defibrillators. The church management committee and trustees are always glad to hear suggestions of ways we can be useful to our wider community.

It was good to welcome new committee member Bobby Rebeiro to our meeting. When we were discussing future good causes to support, Bobby told us of an organisation called Effective Altruism. They use reason and evidence to find the most effective interventions to make in situations of need. Their website is interesting and informative and we'll be considering church fundraising for good causes in the light of their findings.

Our next committee meeting will be on Thursday 26th April.

Good Cause Collection of the Month

Red Cross Syria Appeal



Collection on Sunday 1st April

With the conflict in Syria now in its seventh year, over 13 million people are in need of help. More than 11.6 million people have fled their homes because of fighting and over five million now live as refugees. Your support of the Syria Crisis Appeal will help the Red Cross and our partners the Syrian Arab Red Crescent provide food, shelter and vital services. We will also work with our partners to reach Syrian refugees living in nearby countries. Together with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, we can deliver emergency aid across front lines to reach people most in need. Food, water, blankets, soap and other essentials are all included.

For more info see: www.redcross.org.uk

Recent Charity Collections:

January – **Water Aid** – £169.74

February – **Kensington & Chelsea Mind** – £202.61

March – **Diversity Role Models** – £200.00
(including £59 from the inclusive tea-dance cake stall)

Inclusive Communion

Sundays 8th April, 13th May at 12.30pm



Once a month we hold a small-group communion, after the main morning service, downstairs in the library. A team of volunteers take turns in leading the services so we experience a variety of approaches. Sue Smith will lead our communion service in April. All are welcome to participate. If you would like to find out more about these services then please feel free to speak to Jane or Tristan.

'Grace'

Your Stories in a Performance of Playback Theatre

Friday 20th April, 7.30pm at Essex Church



What does **GRACE** mean to you?

How have you experienced **GRACE** in your life?

It's not such an often-used word now as it was 200 years ago... The dictionary says 'elegance of movement', 'courteous good will', 'a divinely given talent or blessing', and 'the free and unmerited favour of God, as manifested in the salvation of sinners and the bestowal of blessings'.

We have heard the saying "there but for the grace of God go I..." to acknowledge one's good fortune in avoiding another's mistake or misfortune. And something done 'with good grace, or bad grace' means something done in a willing and happy as opposed to resentful or reluctant manner.

So what is a story you could tell about **GRACE**?

We look forward to you joining us for a surprising and soul-satisfying evening of Playback Theatre. And do stay for refreshments afterwards for more conversation and convivial sharing on this rich topic.

This performance is free of charge / Donations are welcome.

London Playback Theatre Company is a team of internationally experienced professional theatre practitioners, consultants, educators, and therapists. We work with audiences in the telling and re-playing of their stories. We offer performances and workshops that provide a safe space for individual voices to be heard and collective themes to emerge. Through the spontaneity and vibrancy of improvisational techniques, we create theatre that engages audiences – body, mind and spirit. Our work offers opportunities for participants to deepen their understanding of each other and to develop authentic ways of communicating. We honour the multiplicity of voices in any group or context.

www.londonplayback.co.uk / londonplayback@gmail.com

Sunday Conversations

29th April and 27th May, 12.45-2.00pm



Thanks to our friend Redwood who enjoyed our 'Dimensions of Health' service but wanted to correct Prof Stephen Hawking on his advice that we look to the stars rather than to our feet:

'Remember to look up at the stars and not down at your feet. Try to make sense of what you see and wonder about what makes the universe exist. Be curious. And however difficult life may seem, there is always something you can do and succeed at. It matters that you don't just give up.' – Stephen Hawking

Redwood suggests we keep an eye on both the stars and the ground on which we walk our days. One of Redwood's favourite pictures from the Buddhist tradition is this carving of the Buddha's feet – used as a reminder to all Buddhists that they follow in the Buddha's footsteps. We welcome feedback on all our activities here at Essex Church and there's chance to discuss our ministry themes at one of our monthly conversations on the last Sunday of every month. All views welcome!



'Singing for the Spirit'



Here are some responses from participants in Corrina's recent Thursday-night 'Singing for the Spirit' sessions:

'The series of monthly Thursday evenings' "Singing for the Spirit" led by Corrina Dolso have just ended. Chants and rounds, some composed by Corrina, were sung together; the experience of the repetition of simple but meaningful words to easy harmonies and rhythms progressed, from a conscious understanding of what we were singing, to a more spiritual and unifying voicing that lead naturally into times of quiet togetherness. A good voice and a musical ability were not needed to gain from a prescription for wellbeing, easily administered and totally free from side effects.'

'You'd have thought I'd know by now that simply opening my mouth and making a sound with other people is a life enhancing activity, but I forget. Every time we came together for Corrina's *Singing for the Spirit* group I'd really enjoy myself and go home glowing. Hope we sing together again soon. And thank you Corrina for travelling such a long way to be with us and for bringing some of your own compositions for us to sing.'

'I came to this singing group because I want to strengthen my brain's pathways and singing really helps that. And I so like the silence after each chant. That strengthens my spirit. Thank you everyone, thank you Corrina.'

'What a lovely idea of Corrina's! Each month she has travelled in from Suffolk bringing with her manuscripts of five different chants and we spend an hour learning them and singing each one for five to ten minutes. Then there is a silence followed by Corrina teaching us another one. I persevere to hold the original tune but occasionally someone will break away and start the tune again at the end of the first line (singing in canon). It can be quite mesmerising and also a lot of fun. Several people who are not usual Sunday attenders have come along to join the small group of us who have become regulars. I hope Corrina will find the time to lead some more sessions later in the year. You might like to give it a try?'

'Springtime and Creative Renewal' Intuitive Collage Workshop with Sandra Vigon



Saturday 14th April, 9.30-4.00pm - Cost: £100
Held here at Essex Church (external event)

In Greek myth Persephone is the Queen of the underworld. When she emerges each Spring she brings with her renewal, emergence of new life, potential and hope. Using the SoulCollage process participants will begin to create a personal set of cards depicting and symbolizing aspects of the personality, inner guides and significant figures. This is a fun and introverted way to mine inner resources creatively and develop a relationship to that source. No prior skills or knowledge necessary. For more information and to book contact Sandra Elsdon Vigon: svigon@sandravigon.com / 07913 821 626

'Kindness is a gentle form of love. When kind to others, we demonstrate the very best of what it means to be human. It takes practice, persistence, patience, and wisdom, and seldom comes without a price. But it has a big payoff. It is truly a full life that kind and caring people live. Kindness nourishes the mind, the body, and the spirit of both the giver and the receiver. It is an opportunity to act in a way that is essentially and ultimately Divine.'

Harold G. Koenig

LDPA Autumn Quarterly: Save the Date 'Circles of Connection' An Introduction to Engagement Group Facilitation Skills

Saturday 15th 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 at Essex Church, led by Jane Blackall, we will introduce some basic principles of Engagement Group facilitation, and give some 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 for this workshop (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 worship service on the day's theme of 'Circles of Connection'. This will be followed by refreshments and time to socialise with everyone. Finish time around 4.30pm.

To book a place on the workshop or find out more, please contact Jane Blackall on jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk or phone the church office and leave a message on 020 7221 6514.

New Wall-Hanging Unveiled



Many thanks to Sue Smith for all her work, initiative, and persistence in making the latest addition to our church wall-hanging project a reality. The new spring/summer hanging went on display at the end of March. Seven people contributed to the piece (Gina, Sue, and Juliet are pictured). See next month's newsletter for more detail on how it was made and some close-up photographs of their beautiful embroidery.



Warden's Column

One of the bookings I'm most excited about this April is the "SoulCollage" workshop with Sandra Vigon. It will be the sixth workshop she's held here and I've been lucky enough to attend two of them. You can find more information about the workshop – including one of Sandra's SoulCollage images – on the opposite page.

The SoulCollage process was created by Seena Frost, a psychotherapist who had originally studied theology at Yale Divinity School. The

following account of the process is taken from an article by Sandra Nelson, a trained SoulCollage facilitator:

"Have you ever wondered why certain colours, shapes and images make your heart sing while others don't? They are messengers, hoping you will listen, asking you to pay attention to some aspect of your life."

Attending a SoulCollage® Retreat, you will be inspired to create a deck of collaged cards to use as a visual journal of your life.

- *Silence the inner critic as you free the inner artist.*
- *Learn to interpret and consult your cards.*
- *Use your cards to heal aspects of your life.*
- *Incorporate your cards into your personal spiritual practice.*
- *Keep a written journal as your personal story unfolds.*
- *Manifest the life you desire and more.*

We create the cards from images we are drawn to. Then by consulting the cards, we listen as answers hidden somewhere deep within are made known. Each card in the deck represents one archetype or aspect, or theme. Often compared to a customized tarot deck, a SoulCollage® deck consists of one Source card and at least four suits.

- *The Committee Suit is the psychological suit. This suit acknowledges the inner parts of one's personality. The Committee Suit gives voice to the unspoken, light on the unseen, and acknowledgement to the unheard.*
- *The Community Suit represents people or animals that have previously, or are currently influencing one's life.*
- *The Companion Suit holds the animal totems, or power animals that correspond with the seven major chakras or energy centres.*
- *The Council Suit holds the Spiritual aspects and archetypes influencing one's life. This suit honours the journey that guides and shapes each person.*

I often tell people that once they try SoulCollage®, they will be hooked, and they will never look at another magazine, flyer, or catalogue as they did before."

I can only agree with that last comment. Both of the workshops I attended have been hugely enjoyable - and also very revealing about my emotional & spiritual process. I treasure the image cards I made at them.

If you're free on Saturday 14th April, I highly recommend this workshop. Sandra has previously said she would be open to offering a discount to congregation members if price is a barrier to participation. I also wonder whether at some point it might be possible to invite her to give a workshop just for congregation members - as part of our RE programme. So talk to me, Jane or Sarah if you think that's something that might interest you.

Jenny Moy

Four Seasons - Four Quatrains



across summer's long horizons
swift shredded skies watch
leaf alive shadows scatter light
over the ripening earth

a threnody in autumn colours
murmurs through the fading year
condemned leaves return to earth
believing in resurrection

winters' days slide from dawn
down behind the dusk so slyly
their low light struggles to lay
glistening veils over frosted land

spring's impatience breaks
young and urgent greens
strive in brightness to capture
the promise of the next future

Brian Ellis

Essex Church AGM

Sunday 20th May 2018, 12.30pm



Please save the date for our congregational AGM which will take place after the service on Sunday 20th May. Signed-up members of the congregation will receive a copy of our annual report in late April or early May so you can read it before the meeting. We appreciate it if as many people as possible come along to support the work of the church and discuss our activities and plans for the future.

'Finding Our Voice'

Monthly Singing Workshops

Sundays 15th April, (no class in May),
17th June 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.

Hah, Beethoven's Gone Into Hashtag#

Oh, the seething, lack of breathing
has me gasping for more---
What?
air, needed to cool me down, from the heaving within the
bed-sheets, trying to find calm in my Eardrums, feeling,
already, they might
explode,
from beating out these thudding tunes on my bouncy piano,
composing, singing,
Again.....the only noise to drown out that persistent old owl
in my cochlea, that thinks it's wiser than I am,
I suppose:
hooting and twittering
Over these arpeggios and
crescendos of
mine:
threatening the night, hoping to find a persistent place in my
afterlife, where then , I should have to listen on, to the
electric guitars of my inheritors, the B. Boys, and the
screaming of their various girls.

Eliz Beel



Dame Cicely Saunders, who's considered to be the founder of the modern hospice movement, understood that there was so much more to a dying person than just being a patient, with medical symptoms which needed treating and controlling. She had a more holistic vision of supporting the emotional, spiritual, practical and social needs of each person in her care. That, combined with, what we Unitarians may identify as "the inherent worth and dignity of every person" underpinned the work she did in palliative care. She said, "You matter because you are you, and you matter to the end of your life. We will do all we can not only to help you die peacefully, but also to live, until you die"

Our physical health, as identified by Dame Cicely, and other philosophical and spiritual traditions is not separate from our state of mind and emotional wellbeing. The ability to make small and big choices when in a powerless situation, such as at the end of one's life or even just when we feel poorly, can allow us to take back some agency. And that self agency is not only a really powerful thing, it's also essential to the quality of the life that we live.

So whether affected by a winter cold, or something more enduring, my hope is that you'll gain an awareness that there are ways to maintain a sense of wholeness, a sense of quality of life every day, no matter where in the seasons of your life, you may be.

Jeannene Powell, from the 18th March
Service on 'Dimensions of Health'



Fitness Fusion of 9 Movement Forms

Third Sunday of the Month from
2-3pm: 15th April, 20th May 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.

Daffodil Poems



I Childe Daffodils

Ding dong bell!
Sing out, shine out
Childe daffodils!

Your lusty time springs from the earth
O Lift us from our winter's dearth
On hill and heath, round lake and stream
From gardens, parks, and pastures gleam

Make haste! Make haste! scorn delay
Soon will sound the bells of May,
Soon your lustrous time will cease
Nor can this year extend its lease.

See! how your golden gifts release us
Captives in storm-sodden soil:
Though dark days may cloud your coming
None can dull your gleaming spoil

Ding! Dong! lusty bells
Spring out – shine out
Childe daffodils!

II Daffodils

Parasols to win the sun
Trumpets to proclaim a better way
Yellow fronds of light to test the stars
Celestials in ordinary, green for enlightenment
Returning tribute and light: daffodils!
Apotheoses of better times to come!

John Hands

Combatting Transphobia

I lit a candle in the service on 25th March to express my deep concern about the transphobia which seems to be on the increase in our society at the moment. In my view, the current media panic being whipped up about transgender people is frighteningly reminiscent of the campaign gay, lesbian & bisexual people endured thirty years ago, during the time of Clause 28, and it is upsetting and painful to see people I care about suffering once again as a result. I urged everyone to inform themselves by listening to trans people's own testimonies instead of being misled by the often malicious and fearmongering mainstream press coverage. Sarah recommended people read an article that I'd shared to get an insight into the everyday reality of many trans people's lives at present. I thought I would include some excerpts from that article, by Jay Hulme, in the newsletter so that his words would reach a wider audience. Unitarians generally pride themselves on being LGBT+ welcoming but I feel that there's still quite a bit of work for us to do in terms of educating ourselves on trans issues. We Unitarians have often been ahead of the curve on social justice issues and I would like to see us collectively step up and do whatever we can to help combat transphobic attitudes in our society.

Jane Blackall

Selected Excerpts from an Article by Jay Hulme

If people are wondering why I'm talking so much about transphobia in the UK at the moment, here are some events you may not have heard about that have all happened in the past few months, and some medical facts:

Under pressure, the government backed down from their promise that trans people could self-identify instead of having to spend hundreds of pounds to send a complex dossier to a panel of judges who've never met you, who decide what gender you "really" are.

A group of transphobic "feminists" are touring the country, holding meetings where they sit around and denigrate trans women in the name of "debate". These meetings often include a speaker who just goes through a powerpoint full of images of transgender women and insults them (there's footage). The same group were invited into the Palace of Westminster (Parliament) on the 14th of March and held a meeting there, a meeting where transgender people were (illegally) banned, and, in the heart of our democracy, dead named, misgendered, and called trans women "parasites" and not only did no newspapers report it, nothing has been done to oppose or condemn it, despite complaints made to MP's and Parliament itself.

Trans people, and trans children, are being doxxed, and their information shared with the intent of targeted harassment and hatred. The CEO of the UK's biggest charity that supports trans and gender non-conforming children and their families has had to call in the police because of the amount of hate crimes and threats she has received. The national press publish a transphobic article almost daily now, and despite having to print retractions, continue to do so. There's a huge trend in hatred, and it's not going anywhere.

One in five GP's will still refuse to prescribe hormones to a transgender person, despite being told to by specialists. Many trans people are scared to move GP's as they may suddenly be refused treatment after many years, catapulting their health into disarray. Current NHS wait times between a referral and a first appointment at a Gender Identity Clinic (necessary to get any treatment) are a minimum of 9 months, rising to 4 years at some clinics. It takes about 6-9 more months before any medical intervention, and a minimum of three years for any surgery, unless you go privately.

So, how can you help? Any time you encounter transphobia, make it very clear you find it unacceptable, be that online, or in person, there are only so many fights we can fight, and constantly justifying our existence is exhausting. You can also report it if it's on social media. Inform yourself on transgender issues, I'm happy to answer questions from friends on complex issues, but some trans people just don't want to talk about it, and none of us want to spend our lives explaining the basics when google exists. Stop buying newspapers which publish outright transphobia - currently the most notable are the Daily Mail, the Times, and the Sunday Times. Remember, trans people are just people trying to exist in this world, just like you. We eat and read and sleep, and waste too much time on Netflix, just like you. Being transgender isn't all we are, and we shouldn't be discriminated against and hated because of it.

'Inside Illness'

by Jane Blackall

From the service on Sunday 4th March

The service is also available online as a podcast.

This month at Essex Church we're taking on the theme of 'Health and Healing'. And, ever the ray of sunshine, I thought I'd get us started with a service on what it's like to be ill. In our society, talk of illness is often about symptoms, diagnosis and treatment – the medical side of things – which is of course an extremely important aspect of trying to keep us well. But I've called today's service 'Inside Illness' because I want us to focus on the inner experience. I reckon that giving a bit of attention to that inner dimension of illness – *what it's like to be ill* – might help us reflect on how best to respond to some of challenges that ill-health brings, both when we ourselves are unwell, and when people we know and love are suffering in this way.

I feel pretty confident in my starting assumption that everybody here at church this morning has got some first-hand experience of illness. If you have made it to adult life without ever being ill in any way... then perhaps you should be up here, instead of me, telling the rest of us your secrets!

I will resist the temptation to stand here and tell you about every one of the numerous minor ailments I've had in the last few years but you can rest assured that I too have some insight on what it's like to be ill. And, not to put too fine a point on it: being ill sucks. It can be really miserable when our body, or our mind, malfunctions suddenly.

Even if you're only afflicted with something relatively minor (in the great scheme of things) – a cold, a cough, an upset stomach, hay fever, cystitis, earache, backache, toothache, – all of these illnesses and injuries have the potential to disrupt our everyday lives, at the very least they interfere with our ability to focus, to work, to socialise, to sleep.

However... There is illness... and then there is *illness*.

And I want to acknowledge at this point that there are going to be people in this room (some I know about and some I don't) who have got more serious illnesses to deal with. If that applies to you: I particularly hope you find something helpful in this service – if only that it acknowledges your suffering, your worries, the ways in which you have been affected – and perhaps it will open up an opportunity to talk to others about your experience or to ask for help. I do want to acknowledge that even so-called minor illnesses have a noticeable impact on people's lives, but at the same time I don't mean to be flippant about those not-so-minor-illnesses which are, in some cases, deeply serious, life-changing, even life-threatening. And it feels important to note that I make no distinction between physical and mental illnesses. Both are real, and significant, and can throw an unwanted spanner or two in the works of our lives.

Our first reading this morning gave us a glimpse into the life of Professor Havi Carel, a philosopher, a phenomenologist, someone whose day job is to reflect on the inner world of lived experience. She is particularly well-equipped to give us some insight into what it's like to be ill and her story highlights some of the experiences commonly associated with illness. Carel was young and active – an academic, and a fitness enthusiast, in her early thirties – when she came to realise that something was going very wrong with her body. Basic abilities that she had previously taken for granted – to run, to walk, to breathe – were being lost one by one. She got a scary diagnosis and was stunned to hear there was no cure.



This was the 'new normal' and she would have to adjust to her 'reduced circumstances'. It sounds – quite understandably – as if Carel railed angrily against her fate for a time. At first she tried to carry on as normal, to resist the changes, as if she could defeat the illness by sheer force of will. Yet she found that her world rapidly shrank. Her illness interfered with her ability to work, to travel, and perhaps most upsettingly it interfered with many of her personal relationships. She lost a lot of friends who no longer knew how to relate to her. Many just disappeared. Strangers, acquaintances, even medical professionals were sometimes quite careless and crass. However, in time, Carel acclimatised to the change – you could say she reinvented herself – she lived within her new physical means and valued those friendships that had weathered the storm. She changed the focus of her philosophy and now mainly works on the phenomenology of illness. She has been working with medical professionals, to help them relate more compassionately to people who are ill, and with ill people, to help them with the process of meaning-making in such difficult circumstances. Since she wrote her book, medical advances have halted the progression of her disease, though – as I understand it – the damage it has already wrought to her lungs cannot be undone.

So: what can we learn from Havi Carel's experience?

Firstly, perhaps, that we need to listen to ourselves – our bodies, our feelings – and not try to ignore, suppress, or outrun anything we notice that 'isn't quite right'.

And secondly, that if we are suffering, it is OK – it is necessary, and healthy – to lament. When something really horrible, like illness – minor or major – is happening in our lives, lamentation – expressing our misery, distress, frustration, and anger – is all part of the process of getting through it and (hopefully) out the other side. What this looks like will vary – if things are really serious, maybe you will just need to lie on the floor and howl – maybe you'll bend the ear of a willing friend, or a therapist – maybe you'll let it all out in writing in a journal. There can be a bit of social pressure, I find, not to 'feel sorry for ourselves', or to dwell in self-pity... but why shouldn't you regard yourself with *at least* as much kindness and compassion as you would anybody else – a friend, say – who was suffering? Let yourself have your feelings. Name your pain. Be a good friend to yourself. It may be that such heart-felt lamentation helps us avoid getting 'stuck' in our sorrow, long-term. And if you're the person whose ear is being bent by a friend who is ill: Havi Carel advises that you don't have to say anything too complicated in response. Say 'I'm sorry. This sucks.' Sometimes, that's all you can say, and all that needs to be said.

And a third thing we can learn from Havi Carel's story: Sometimes you just have to STOP. Abandon all your important plans and prior arrangements. Take time to rest and regroup. When we're ill, we can sometimes feel huge pressure to carry on as if nothing has changed, and Just Keep Going. There's a great internal resistance – quite understandably – to this rude interruption to business-as-usual.

'Inside Illness' (continued)

Our culture often seems to imply that if we're ill then it's somehow our fault – we've not looked after ourselves enough – or it's a moral failing: we're not tough enough to shrug it off. Think of all those adverts selling cold and flu remedies to keep us in the office come-what-may (when arguably we really ought to be recovering at home and keeping our germs to ourselves). In this rather brutal capitalist age it can seem as if we are only valued for our economic productivity – think of the ugly rhetoric in certain sections of the media where people who are ill, or disabled, and needing support in times of crisis are dismissed as 'scroungers'... Whereas we Unitarians, I'm proud to say, often speak of the 'inherent worth and dignity of every person': this ultimate worth which is not dependent on our ability to get up off our sickbed and make money for 'the man'.

To recap: If something's not quite right in your body or mind – listen to what it is telling you – allow yourself to feel your feelings, and lament, rage, and wail about your suffering if you need to – and take the time you need to just step off the conveyor belt of life and STOP. Rest. I realise that sometimes the circumstances of our life make this hard to do... but I suspect that it might be possible more often than we think – at least to some degree – we can disengage from the world for a while without anyone or anything coming to harm.

The Buddhist writer Jean Smith has this to say on the ways in which we react to getting ill:

'When we become sick, we often take the illness personally and feel that our happiness is conditional upon getting rid of it. We forget that illness — along with aging and death — is a hallmark of our human existence, and we get angry at our bodies for "letting us down." Sometimes, out of fear, we generate horrendous stories about our illness that may cause us more suffering than the illness itself. When we realize that illness is inescapable, that stress around illness increases our suffering, and that being sick is not a shortcoming, only then can we be at ease with, and even empowered by, illness.'

And she offers this wish, this prayer, which is on the front of your order of service:

'When I experience the unavoidable illnesses that are part of my human condition, may I be mindful of impermanence, free from fear, and grateful for the blessings that also arise and pass away.'

Jean Smith's words hint at what is, perhaps, the most significant lesson we can learn from all these writers and thinkers on illness. It's there in Havi Carel's story, and echoed by Mark Nepo, the poet who gave us our second reading today. Both Carel and Nepo, and many other wise people, speak of the importance of trying to make some kind of sense out of it all, distilling a deeper meaning, from their experiences of illness: an experience they did not choose, but which they had to endure. Finding solid ground within themselves, perhaps, and putting their suffering in a cosmic context.

Mark Nepo talks of how his brush with life-threatening illness pushed him to places where he would never willingly have gone... but because he engaged with his experience, and tried to find the meaning in it, that illness changed his way of seeing the world and deepened his way of living. At the very least you might say that it concentrated his mind and clarified what mattered most. He's not romanticising his experience – at least I don't think he is – not at all. It was a terrible time for him, and his family. He isn't saying 'oh isn't it spiritually enriching to be really, really sick'. He's saying something more like 'this is the flow of the universe passing through us – we're all going to go to these hard, hard places to some degree, whether we like it or not – and if we approach it this way then those experiences can ultimately be meaningful or even transformative'.

Think about those illnesses that you have endured – that you are enduring still, perhaps – What has helped you through those tough times? What meaning have you made of it all? And what would you say to someone else who was going through what you went through? Each one of us is likely to have some wisdom we have gleaned along the way that we could share.

I'd like to close with an excerpt from a poem – a blessing, really – by the Irish poet and philosopher John O'Donohue. It's from his poem 'For a Friend, on the Arrival of Illness'.

*May you use this illness
As a lantern to illuminate
The new qualities that will emerge in you.*

*May the fragile harvesting of this slow light
Help you to release whatever has become false in you.
May you trust this light to clear a path
Through all the fog of old unease and anxiety
Until you feel arising within you a tranquillity
Profound enough to call the storm to stillness.*

*May you find the wisdom to listen to your illness:
Ask it why it came? Why it chose your friendship?
Where it wants to take you? What it wants you to know?
What quality of space it wants to create in you?
What you need to learn to become more fully yourself
That your presence may shine in the world.*

*May you keep faith with your body,
Learning to see it as a holy sanctuary
Which can bring this night-wound gradually
Towards the healing and freedom of dawn.*

*May you be granted the courage and vision
To work through passivity and pity,
To see the beauty you can harvest
From the riches of this dark invitation.*

*May you learn to receive it graciously,
And promise to learn swiftly
That it may leave you newborn...*

May it be so for each of us and for all. Amen.

'I saw that one of the most important lessons Jesus delivered was that of authentic grace — a grace that doesn't take the place of agonizing spiritual work, that doesn't do away with a demand for holiness and purity; and that doesn't excuse us from taking on the tasks of social justice issues, caring for the poor, and taking up the fight to ensure equality and reasonable living conditions... The grace that Jesus taught first of all had much to do with offering it to others. . . . Jesus also taught that we should extend grace toward ourselves. While we're working to open our hearts to God's divine light, engaging in spiritual disciplines, learning what it means to always keep God in remembrance and struggling to drive out impurities from our hearts and replacing them with God's divine attributes, an awareness of God's grace is indispensable.'

Mary Blye Howe



Accommodation Needed

Our landlord is returning from overseas this summer so we have to move (on the 1st August). We are looking for a new place and would love to have a Unitarian landlord! We need 1-2 bedrooms with a back garden, and good transport links, and a landlord who will accept our dog, a 15 kg labrador mix (fully housetrained). We are professionals, with good references, and non-smokers. Please get in touch if you can put us in touch with someone. My email address is: revmarkbowen@gmail.com.

Mark Franklin-Bowen

‘Reflection on Reiki’ by Tristan Jovanović

From the service on Sunday 11th March
The service is also available online as a podcast.

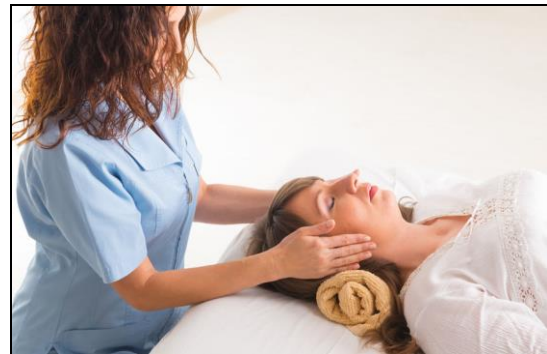
One of my main spiritual practices is Reiki. It first came into my life when I was very young: a friend of my mum’s practiced it and just the name captivated me. Then, years later, Jane offered me a treatment when I was struggling with long term vertigo. I was hooked. It took me a long time to get to being a practitioner myself but, with Sonya’s help, I found two wonderful teachers to guide me. I don’t want you to think that Reiki energy is anything ‘special’. It’s all around us. Being a practitioner just means that I am, like a radio, on the right station to feel it. You can feel it too though.

Reiki means ‘universal energy’ – at least on the surface. One fascinating thing about the practice is its layers. It is perfectly possible to skate along the surface and use it primarily as a hands-on healing technique with the fixed hand positions taught in Western Reiki by the lineage going back through Madam Takata, who brought Reiki to the West from Japan. However, as my teachers and the teacher and writer Frans Stiene advocate, one can develop a much deeper practice by looking at Reiki’s more esoteric teachings as they point to esoteric teaches in the Japanese spiritual traditions.

Stiene argues, quite compellingly, that Reiki is a kind of stripped down Buddhism, developed to give ordinary people in Japan access to the basic and esoteric teachings of Buddhism, which in Japan was blended with Shinto and other traditions, as they were often hidden from the ordinary people. And if we look at the core of the practice, the precepts or Gokai, we can hear echoes of the Eightfold Path:

- Just for today, do not be angry
- Just for today, do not worry
- Just for today, be grateful
- Just for today, work hard on becoming your true self
- Just for today, be kind and compassionate to all beings

But why does this matter? It’s just a new age touch technique, isn’t it? No. It’s much more than that. It’s healing from beginning to end. Reiki practice is made up of five parts: the twice daily recitation or chanting of the precepts, which I just set out. There are numerous meditation techniques at each level of practice to help the practitioner focus. Hands-on healing is a big part of course. There are the symbols and their corresponding mantras,



which are kind of like coloured lenses. They help the practitioner focus in a particular way. We might scribble them in the air or just imagine them. Each has, as you might expect, a surface meaning but each also has lots of layers to explore. Finally, there’s reiju – spiritual blessings – which also includes transmission because you don’t actually learn Reiki; your teacher transmits it to you through spiritual connection. There’s a short ritual that your teacher performs whilst you sit in meditation. My experience of transmission was very powerful: I felt that my teacher cracked my head open and was pouring light through my body; it’s almost painful. I saw flashing lights and, when I was given the symbols, I could see them in my mind’s eye.

Let’s return to the main teaching: to remember deeply the precepts every morning and evening was the only instruction left by Mikao Usui, the founder of the system. It sets your mind on the right path. If we don’t become angry, what is left? Compassion. If we don’t worry, what is left? Compassion. When we work on being who we truly are, what happens? Compassion. When we’re grateful? Compassion. And then, compassion. The precepts build on each other: our greatest stumbling blocks in life are anger and fear; when we suffer those we cannot see the goodness in our lives and our true self is hidden beneath layers of defences. It becomes difficult to be kind to ourselves, never mind anyone else.

Reiki is about revealing our inner light so that we can shine brightly in the world. When we give a hands on treatment, either to ourselves or someone else, we can only do so from a place of compassion, removing our small s self from the picture and being in Oneness. The symbols aren’t magic spells, they’re tools to help us focus on our inner being, to become the Great Bright Light. Reiju and attunement help open us to Reiki but they’re not the teacher’s doing. The teacher’s ‘small s’ self has to stand aside to let us become open too. Reiki is a path: we start by doing Reiki and we strive to become it. Following a spiritual path can lead to healing. It’s inner healing that brings outer healing and inner healing that can heal the world. We can’t heal each other, I believe, unless we can heal ourselves.

'Connections Lost & Found'

by Rev. Sarah Tinker

From the service on Sunday 25th March

The service is also available online as a podcast.

Today is the last Sunday in March; it's the last week of our monthly ministry theme here at Essex Church where we've been thinking about the weighty topics of health and healing this month. I've called this address 'Connections Lost and Found' – and it has two simple messages:

- we live in a society where many people are experiencing a loss of connection
- as a church we are creating a space in which people might re-discover a sense of connection in life

Lots has been said and written about people's increasing loss of connection in modern western societies. Family members are more likely to move away for work, people are more likely to live on their own, and there has been a steady decline in the traditional ways people gathered together – in pubs, in clubs, and in churches, for example. Although one activity that has apparently bucked that trend is the joining of choirs – so let's hear a round of applause for our musicians here today. Thank you for all you're doing to re-build a sense of community!

Along with the decline in what's known by sociologists as associational activity – the ways we join up with others in social activities – there has been a significant decline in the amount of physical touch we give one another. Some quite understandable concerns about touch becoming abusive and a heightened awareness of the need to respect personal boundaries – all this has led to a reduction in our physical touching of one another. This is a topic to explore more another day, but when we speak of connections lost and found, it might be an idea for us all to think about physical touch in our own lives, maybe we need to explore what unspoken rules we have about touch here at church.

Journalist Johann Hari recently published a book with the title 'Lost Connections: Uncovering the Real Causes of Depression - And the Unexpected Solutions'. Apologies to him and you for the fact that I have merely skim read this important book. Hari has experienced periodic bouts of depression since his teenage years and has wide experience of taking various medications for his illness. Reviewers have emphasised a point he makes himself – that he is not advising anyone to suddenly stop taking prescribed medicines. But his research uncovers some important reminders for us all when we consider issues of health and well-being – the need to acknowledge someone's social circumstances, their ways of creating a sense of meaning and purpose in life, the value of meaningful and fairly rewarded work, and the role trauma plays in disturbing someone's equilibrium in life.

Hari and other social commentators express concern about the increasing use of digital technology and social media, which may help us gain a sense of connection, but at a physical distance. I wonder what your view of this is? My own personal concern about particularly teenagers connecting only through their digital devices rather than actually getting together – is tempered by more than one friend who has a particular illness and has made some really supportive friendships with fellow sufferers around the world. That has shown me that digital friendships and support groups can work – I guess we'd hope that most people could also form connections where they actually meet.



And that's the point made by the reading we heard earlier on, written by Guardian journalist George Monbiot – about the discoveries in Frome of the value of social prescribing in reducing people's sense of isolation and thereby increasing the success of medical treatments. This simple yet revolutionary idea that doctors can usefully pay attention to a person's social life is spreading across the NHS here in Britain.

I read an interesting description of an Anglican church here in central London the other day. They wrote about the 'London churn' and explained that they lose about one third of their congregation each year because people move about so much. Most ordinary people can't afford London rents for long, jobs are on short contracts, relationships come and go. Here at Essex Church we reckon on a 20% turnover of membership each year. People come, people move on, new people arrive – and Jane our Outreach Officer makes a valiant effort to keep up with us all with her green membership forms and the photoboard in the foyer. If you haven't filled out your green membership form yet today may be the ideal opportunity – and let us know if you want your photo up on the board or if you'd like a new photo taking.

So here at church I reckon those of us who can stick around have an important job to do – and that's to be here to welcome newcomers, to maintain a sense of continuity in community – to be holders of the stories and the traditions of Essex Church. And we have to be prepared to let go – of people who have to move on; to let go of old ways of being that perhaps no longer serve us and instead allow new people to get involved, to engage with us all and to bring fresh ideas and energy. Someone made a suggestion to me a few weeks ago and then said they felt they didn't really have the right to make such a suggestion for change as they'd only been coming here a couple of years. I was able to re-assure them that two years membership makes you an old timer.

Here at church we have resources that can help all of us to find connections once more – and not just social connections with other people – important though those are. Here we can also find ways to re-connect with ourselves and encourage one another to re-connect with the earth on which we live; here we can strengthen our sense of meaning and purpose in life – and here I hope we feel safe enough to ask someone for a hand hold when we need it. And to let one another know that we matter, we really matter, each and every one of us.

Closing Blessing:

"Do stuff. Be clenched, curious. Not waiting for inspiration's shove or society's kiss on your forehead. Pay attention. It's all about paying attention. Attention is vitality. It connects you with others. It makes you eager. Stay eager." — Susan Sontag

In the week ahead, let us nurture our connections, one with another. Let's give thanks for those who care for us and let's reach out and let another person know we care about them. Let us pay attention to the world in which we live and find small, simple reasons to be joyful, and let us share our joy and our gratitude for life with others, amen, go well and blessed be.

Services at Essex Church in April



Sunday 1st April, 11am – ‘Easter: What is Grace?’

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

What is grace? How do we recognise it? Our Easter service will be followed by a congregational bring-and-share lunch from 12.15-1.45pm.

Sunday 8th April, 11am – ‘It’s a Sin’

Service led by Jane Blackall

‘Everything I’ve ever done, everything I ever do, every place I’ve ever been, everywhere I’m going to... It’s a Sin...’ - so said the Pet Shop Boys in their 1980s number one hit of the same name. In this service we’ll be looking at sin and grace from a range of alternative perspectives and considering why Unitarians may want to re-imagine and re-claim these tricky concepts as part of our own theology.

Sunday 15th April, 11am – ‘Unjust Desserts’

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

You don’t need us to tell you that life isn’t fair. What is a sensible way to use the word ‘deserving’ or indeed ‘undeserving’?

Sunday 22nd April, 11am – ‘Noticing’

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker
& Jeannene Powell

In this service we will consider the value of paying attention to small glimpses of grace and allowing them to guide us towards meaning in life.

Sunday 29th April, 11am – ‘Second Chances’

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Jacob famously wrestled with the angel. What struggles have helped us find new ways of being? This service will be followed by our regular Sunday Conversation on the theme of ‘Grace’ from 12.45pm.

OneLight Gathering:

‘With Eyes Anew – Allowing Discovery’

Friday 13th April, 7pm – 8.30pm - Here at Essex Church



“Innocence is the crucial element in a person’s spiritual nature” - James Grotstein

When Tim Lott said, “I am unlearning all the things I have been taught in life,” he echoes many people who feel that habits of thinking and behaving somehow limit their experience rather than expand it. Dylan Thomas might have added to the conversation, “our innocence goes awfully deep, and our discreditable secret is that we don’t know anything at all...” With Eyes Anew is a ceremony tenderly asking about how innocence and discovery fits into our spirituality and our lives. At this time of new growth we will consciously hold the relationship between experience, simplicity and allowing, exploring where our newness and innocence lies and what gems we can gain from it. We will come together in song, reflection, creative exploration, meditation and prayer, and, as always, you are welcome just as you are, to take part in whatever way feels right. Suggested donation: £5.

Climate Change Art by Heidi Ferid



Climate change is one of the most pressing issues of our time. As an artist I want to appeal to people’s emotional intelligence to promote awareness of these issues. I am currently working on a series of paintings and small sculptures relating to climate change and they will be exhibited next year.

Heidi Ferid