



Kensington Unitarians

Newsletter: December 2012 / January 2013

What's On...

Sunday 2nd December, 11am-noon
'The Pros and Cons of Relying on My Experience'
Service led by David Francis Darling

Thursday 6th December, 7.00-9.00pm
'Step Into Christmas' Course (1/3)

Sunday 9th December, 11am-noon
'Both Fragile and Strong'
Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 9th December, 12.30pm
Small-Group Communion
Led by Tristan Jovanović

Sunday 9th December, 2.00-3.00pm
Nia Technique with Sonya Leite

Monday 10th December, 7.00-9.00pm
'Rediscovering the Bible'
Bible-reading with David and Jane

Wednesday 12th December, 11.30am
Meditation for World Healing

Thursday 13th December, 7-9.00pm
'Step Into Christmas' Course (2/3)

Sunday 16th December, 11am-noon
'Christmas Carol Service'
Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 16th December, 12.30pm
Congregational Christmas Lunch

Thursday 20th December, 7-9.00pm
'Step Into Christmas' Course (3/3)

Saturday 22nd December, 10.30am
Winter Solstice Walk

Sunday 23rd December, 11am-noon
'A Midwinter Celebration'
Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Monday 24th December, 5.00-6.00pm
'Candlelit Christmas Eve'
Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 30th December, 11am-noon
'The Old and the New'
Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

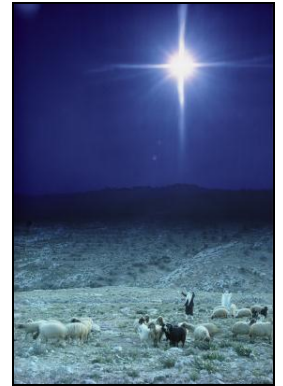
See back page for January events...

A Message from our Minister:

Truth Revealed

It's Christmas time again and I could write the usual, gentle front page piece for our newsletter. Here are some of the topics Unitarian ministers might choose to reflect upon at this time of year:

- A suggestion that simple gifts are best, not least of which might be the gift of our presence for one another.
- A reminder that we need to take care of ourselves and one another at this dark time of year.
- A reference to ancient midwinter celebrations and how we can trace their transfer to Christian traditions about the birth of Jesus.
- A reading of the Biblical narrative of Jesus' birth as mythic, rather than literal, truth.
- The value of accepting both light and darkness in life.



Why not choose your favourite Christmas message from the list above or decide what you would like to say to everyone at this time of year, perhaps a simple yet heartfelt 'Happy Christmas to All Our Readers'.

But as yet another disturbing piece of news about the abuse of children in care hits the headlines and as we consider suggested changes in the regulation of our news media, following revelations about phone tapping and corruption, it seems that there are deeper issues for us to consider. It's not that I think people have behaved any more badly in recent times than at any other time in history. Some people in power have probably always abused their position. But what seems to have changed in our society recently is that secrets keep on being uncovered; it's as if the truth insists on being revealed. In years gone by, the powerless members of society were not generally heard or believed. Vulnerable children in care did not have a voice. Hopefully that is starting to change now.

Perhaps we are also a little more capable of dealing with highly complex and even contradictory issues. We rely on our press to help uncover the truth, yet some of these reporters and news editors have infringed individuals' privacy and offered bribes to government officials. How do we curb such excesses and yet also preserve press independence? How can we condemn the abhorrent behaviour of some individuals and yet also acknowledge our own frailties and failings? And how can we work together to create communities that care for everyone, and include everyone, especially the marginalised, the disadvantaged, the despised or feared? This is not the easiest Christmas message to put into action but it says something true about what it is to be human, with all our flaws and all our potential. If you appreciate a deeper exploration of life in all its complexity, then come and join us over the next few months for worship or for one of our small group activities. It may not be cute or fluffy but hopefully it will feel real.

Rev. Sarah Tinker

In this month's newsletter...

- * 'Heart and Soul' – new midweek spiritual gatherings at Essex Church from January
- * Worship Leaders' Practice Group
- * 'Art Meditations' course
- * Congregational Growth
- * 'A Charity I Support: Azafady' by Alice Lambert
- * 'Memory, Teach Me' by Sue Smith
- * 'Those We Have Loved: Brinkley the Labrador' by Annie Fowler
- * Poems by John Hands
- * 'Say Cheese!' – Collecting Photos
- * 'Advent Time' by Rev. 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.



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

Office Telephone: 020 7221 6514

Email: info@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Web: www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Christmas at Essex Church



Carol Service and Congregational Lunch Sunday 16th December, 11am

We will be having our carol service and festive lunch on 16th December. This is always a most enjoyable occasion so why not invite a friend to come along? All are welcome. Annie Fowler is coordinating the lunch and she would be glad to hear what you are planning to bring: anniefowler@mac.com

Candlelit Christmas Eve Service Monday 24th December, 5pm

As is our tradition here at Essex Church we will have a special candlelit service at 5pm on Christmas Eve.

A small group are also planning to go for dinner at a local restaurant after the service. Please speak to Jane (or email jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk) ASAP if you would like to come along as we will need to book a table.

Volunteering Rotas: Stewarding, Coffee and Greeting



Stewarding:

2 nd December:	Tristan Jovanović
9 th December:	Gina Bayley
16 th December:	Sue Smith
23 rd December:	Natasha Drennan
24 th December:	David Darling
30 th December:	Michaela von Britzke
6 th January:	John Hands
13 th January:	Gina Bayley
20 th January:	David Darling
27 th January:	Natasha Drennan

Coffee:

2 nd December:	Gisela Boehnisch
9 th December:	Juliet Edwards
16 th December:	Kate Brown
23 rd December:	Caroline Blair
24 th December:	Diana Ward
30 th December:	Annie Fowler
6 th January:	Juliet Edwards
13 th January:	Margaret Darling
20 th January:	Caroline Blair
27 th January:	John Hands

Greeting:

2 nd December:	Annie Fowler
9 th December:	Jo Ridgers
16 th December:	David Darling
23 rd December:	Gina Bayley
24 th December:	Estelle Pataki
30 th December:	Jo Ridgers
6 th January:	Sue Smith
13 th January:	Jo Ridgers
20 th January:	Veronica Needa
27 th January:	Jane Blackall

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

rotas@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

News from the Church Management Committee



First of all, apologies for the absence of this column in the last couple of issues, but the fact that at least a few people missed it encourages me in the knowledge that somebody read it! I plan, therefore, to write a short piece for each newsletter about what the management committee do at their monthly meetings.

We met last on Monday 26th November. The heart of our agenda as usual can be summed up as mission and maintenance. In order to do either, of course, we need to take a realistic view of our finances so it was agreed that Sarah and Jenny would look at how much it actually costs to keep the building open (several years ago it was £1000 per week!) and to draw up a realistic budget for the coming year. In another article, Jenny writes about the proposed changes to our letting fees, the source of most of our revenue.

Having a reasonable income allows us to look after the building and recently the radiators have been flushed and the drains unblocked as well as having new toilet windows installed and the annual resurfacing of the kitchen floor.

Good stewardship also allows us to be generous and recently we received letters of thanks from SOS villages for the £1000 we gave for the education of the two girls we have sponsored in Swaziland, and for the £82 we gave to the Unitarian Peace Fellowship. We have also just given a cheque for £100 to West London Churches Homeless Concern and we would also encourage members to give individual donations to this worthy cause.

As well as maintenance, good stewardship enables us to look at mission, in our own unique Unitarian way. Stimulating Sunday services with good music, as well as our many midweek activities, has helped to draw more people in to our community – and the recent LDPA census has shown us that there has been a 6% increase in attendance at services since this time last year. We have also agreed to buy two public music licences that will ensure not only that we are keeping within the law when we play recorded music but we will also be contributing to the income of the artists and musicians who produced the music.

We also spend some time at each meeting sharing pastoral concerns with Sarah and looking at ways in which we can support her in her care of the congregation.

Please do not hesitate to contact any of the committee if you have any questions or concerns that you would like us to address.

Best wishes,
David Francis Darling
Chair of the Congregation

A short course at Essex Church for Advent...

'Step into Christmas'



A three-part course to help us move towards Christmas in community with others...

Thursday 6th December, 7-9.00pm:

'Build your Own Christmas': for the majority of us who do not fit the advertisers' ideal images Christmas may not be a 'jolly holly' filled time. In this session we will consider how to create a Christmas that works for us, the pitfalls we had best avoid, and other good ways to take care of ourselves at this time of year.

Thursday 13th December, 7-9.00pm:

'Telling the Old Stories': biblical narratives, other legends, and the stories of our own lives – come and join us for an evening of fellowship and storytelling, with mince pies and candles.

Thursday 20th December, 7-9.00pm:

'Entering the Myth': in the final session we will play with elements of the Nativity Story and explore ways in which the characters and symbols might have a special meaning or message for us this Christmas.

Winter Solstice Walk

Saturday 22nd December, 10.30am



Continuing our series of quarterly walks, have a think about joining us on 22nd December, for a gentle winter walk to celebrate the solstice and to get some fresh air at this dark time of year. We're planning to meet at Warwick Road tube at 10.30am and will then walk towards the east to Regents Park, along the Regent's Canal towpath. There we might have a welcome cup of tea and even an accompanying Honest Sausage, which proved popular on a previous walk. Please let Sarah or Caroline know if you plan to join us, just in case we have to change plans at the last minute.

Caroline Blair

Say Cheese!

A Photographic Archive of Life at Essex Church



It's been a while since we've taken a photograph of the congregation so we're planning to take a picture after the Christmas Carol Service on Sunday 16th December (just in case you want to dress up for the occasion...)

We would also like to refresh our collection of congregational photographs so that we have a record of our events and activities that we can use in the newsletter, on the church website, in our leaflets and so on. And also for posterity!

I would like to encourage you to take your own photos (when it is appropriate to do so, and with consent) of church events and activities throughout the year and to share them with me and the rest of the congregation. Perhaps you could post them on the church Facebook page so that the rest of the world can see what a jolly bunch we are! Or alternatively just email them to me and I will make use of them in our publications. I am particularly keen to get pictures of small group scenes, showing people engaged in activities or chatting, though of course posed individual or group photos would be welcome too.

Some of you may have your own collections of photos going back many years – I'd be very interested in seeing selected highlights – and ultimately, with your permission, scanning them to add to the congregational archive.

Please do get in touch if you have any photos to offer. My email is jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk – thank you!

Jane Blackall

'It is likely that the most profound religious and spiritual truths have [a] paradoxical quality to them. The God we await, is already here, already present and awaiting birth in our lives. Advent is a season that is about waiting, about gestation, about expecting and hoping about what is coming, but it is also, profoundly, about what is already present, what exists within us all the time and needs not wait for an appointed time in order to emerge, but only needs our attention. As is said in the gospel of Luke, 'The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, "Lo, here it is!" or "There!" for behold the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.'

Rev. Linda Hart

Twentieth century theologian Paul Tillich framed the human dilemma as having two dimensions, the horizontal and the vertical. The horizontal might also be called an "unreflective" life. This life is one driven day to day by compelling urges. This is a life ordered around getting by and following the herd. It is driven by the daily grind of working, eating, chasing pleasures and avoiding pain, care giving, then collapsing at the end of the day in sleep. Tillich posited another dimension to existence, the vertical. He called it the depth dimension, concerned with meaning, value, and ultimacy. Religion primarily addresses itself to this depth dimension of existence. It asks the big questions – questions those living a horizontal life would rather avoid thinking about.

UU Minister, Rev. Samuel A. Trumbore

'Rediscovering the Bible'

A monthly bible-reading group at Essex Church



**Meeting on the 2nd Monday of each month at 7pm:
10th December, 14th January, 11th February**

Throughout this year there has been a bible-reading group in the London district, organised by Jim Corrigan of Golders Green Unitarians, which we have enjoyed being a part of. Sadly, this group has now come to an end, as Jim has taken up a new post as minister of Ipswich and Framlingham.

We thought that we would like to continue the good work of the Golders Green group here in our own congregation, and so are proposing to offer something similar at Kensington, for a trial period of six months beginning in November 2012. We will simply read through the bible together, pausing to reflect, and to share our own thoughts and feelings on what we read.

We are starting with the Acts of the Apostles and were very pleased to welcome eleven people to the first session.

Do contact us (email jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk) if you have any questions or just to let us know you're planning to come along. The bible-reading group is open to all who share a spirit of goodwill and curiosity about discovering the text anew – no particular theology will be presumed – please bring along a bible (any translation you like) if you have one.

This group is offered in conjunction with the Liberal Christian affinity group of the district association (LDPA) and we hope to see friends from throughout the region at these meetings.

David Darling and Jane Blackall

Essex Church Membership 2013



In January current members and friends of our congregation will be receiving their annual letter and form to fill in for membership. Its good practice to ask people to renew their membership in this way each year and we'd be grateful for your feedback on how our form feels to receive and fill in. We'd also be grateful if you could return the forms speedily to the church office – or even fill them in straight away on a Sunday morning – as this makes it much easier to administer.

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

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

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

Rev. Sarah Tinker

A New Venture Here at Essex Church for 2013...

'Heart and Soul' Midweek Spiritual Gatherings



Thursday 3rd January 2013 from 7-8pm

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

From January 2013 we will be holding midweek spiritual gatherings, on the first Thursday evening of each month, for new and alternative forms of Unitarian worship.

The impetus to hold midweek worship came, in part, from a recent inquiry from someone who always works at the weekends and is therefore unable to attend Unitarian worship anywhere in London. This seemed a real shame so we are going to try and rectify the situation... and it's all coming together remarkably quickly!

These services will be led by members of the newly-formed Worship Leaders' Practice Group. If you feel enthusiastic about the prospect of midweek services and experimenting with different forms of worship then please do come along and support us or get involved.

The theme of the service on 3rd January is, appropriately, 'A New Start', and I will be coordinating it but plan to involve a team of worship leaders in the service. I am personally very excited about what we might create together!

Jane Blackall



Worship Leaders' Practice Group

This autumn, regular worship leaders, and several others who have expressed an interest in leading services at Essex Church, were invited to an initial meeting of the Worship Leaders' Practice Group (WLPG). In our first meeting eleven of us considered the question 'What is Worship?' and talked about things we felt that worship should always do (and things it should never do...)

You may have noticed that a few Sunday services have been filmed over the last few months. This is for those brave members of the WLPG who are going to use the footage to reflect on their service with a view to improving their skills and sensitivity in worship. When we are going to film someone this will be drawn to your attention in the printed order of service. The camera will be fixed facing the lectern so if you do not wish to be seen on the recording you might like to choose your seat so that it is out of the line of sight. However, the footage will not be made publicly available, and will only be viewed by the worship leader and possibly a small number of others who are invited to offer feedback on their service.

If you would like to be involved in worship in any way, or have any thoughts or suggestions about worship you'd like to tell us about, please do get in touch with Sarah or Jane. The WLPG will next be meeting again in February.



A tiny nativity scene for you to colour in this Christmas!

A local event you might be interested in:

‘Searching for the Sacred in Hard Times’

Sunday 9th December 2012, 10am-5pm

**St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace
78 Bishopsgate, London EC2N 4AG**

Exploring the essential human search for the sacred. Using an appreciation of metaphor in scripture, myth, story and poetry, and crossing the boundaries of religions and cultures.

This workshop explores pathways to finding meaning in contemporary life. Aimed at anyone who feels a sense of an authentic search for the sacred that may be experienced both within and beyond traditional forms of spirituality and religion. We will use both religious and non-religious sources to bring alive an expression of this search for the sacred. We will cross the boundaries of separate religions and cultures through an appreciation of the deep meaning of metaphor - in scripture, myth, story and poetry. We will examine what it means to bring these metaphors alive in a way that is relevant and meaningful for our lives in this place, and in this moment in time.

Phone: 02074961610 / Email: simon@stethelburgas.org
Event Fee: £ 30 (£15 concessions)

For more information see: www.stethelburgas.org

‘Reflecting with God’



**A 5-Part Theological Reflection Group
Begins Thursday 14th February, 7-9.00pm
Continues 21st, 28th February and 14th, 21st March**

PLEASE SIGN UP EARLY FOR THIS COURSE

This spring at Essex Church we will be offering a small group for personal and shared theological reflection. This is similar to the ‘God in Daily Life’ course that Jane and Jenny ran back in 2008 which some of you may remember.

The group will be based on creative listening and draw on ideas from the book ‘Reflecting with God’ by Abigail Johnson. Members of this group will be asked to make a commitment to attend all five of the sessions and to give a 15-minute presentation at one of them on the theme “How is ‘God’ present in my daily life?” (*please feel free to interpret the word ‘God’ in any way that is meaningful to you*). Please don’t be intimidated by this task! It is not intended to be an intellectual exercise, though it will hopefully be a deep one, more like personal journaling on an experience or issue in your everyday life. We also ask that all commit to offering others respectful attention and confidentiality.

Places on this course are strictly limited and we strongly encourage you to commit to all five sessions to take part. For these reasons we would like to encourage you to sign up as soon as possible if you would like to come. Please contact Jane to sign up or to have a chat about what the course involves: jane@kensington-unitarians.org

Jane Blackall and Sarah Tinker

‘We may have good intentions to reflect on the many layers of our lives, but the busyness of our existence tends to take priority over quiet time. Typically we reflect on issues by letting them rattle around in our heads...’

‘We reflect theologically when we pray, and in the midst of crisis when we ask, “Why me, God?” We do it when we ask, “Is that all there is?” We do it when we try to bring justice into the decisions we make. Although such theological reflection takes place, it can often be random and unstructured.’

‘In this group, we will offer a structured process for engaging in theological reflection by looking at real-life events through a series of questions, which are designed to help individuals to think through situations with the eyes of faith.’

Abigail Johnson, in ‘Reflecting with God’

Avebury Stone Circle



Friday 15th March 2013
Meeting 9.30am at Essex Church

We're organising a visit to Avebury, just as the first signs of spring appear, and would love as many people as possible to come.

The plan is that we'll be leaving from the church early enough to arrive late morning, when you'll be able to purchase tickets to visit Avebury Manor and Gardens (£6.75) if that's what takes your fancy. Additionally, there's the Alexander Keiller museum (£4.40; English Heritage Members: free) which is made up of two galleries. One with fun interactive things to do and the other displaying artefacts found when the stones were re-erected.

Of course there'll be the opportunity to walk around the stone circle and henge itself (which is free) whether in a group or by yourself. This day aims to be flexible enough for people to follow their interests.

For lunch there's the Circle Café which serves a range of homemade organic hot and cold food and hot drinks, or if the weather's warm enough and you fancy bringing your own food, there are great picnic facilities.

Our trip to Avebury will not be complete without a visit to the onsite shop. So whether just to look around at the local crafts or to buy a memento of your outing, there'll be time for that before we head home.

We're currently exploring the option of car-pooling to drive to Avebury, with the church covering petrol and parking costs. We've already got one volunteer driver, so if you've got a car and would be prepared to drive to Avebury, please let Jane or Sarah know.

To book a place or/and to offer to drive, please contact Jane by 24th February at jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Jeannene Powell



'Art Meditations'

Thursdays 10th, 17th, 24th January 2013
7.00-9.00pm in the Church



In January we will be holding three 'Art Meditation' sessions here at Essex Church (upstairs in the worship space itself). Each of these sessions are stand-alone but of course it would be lovely if you could make it to the whole series.

In each session we will reflect on spiritual themes using visual art, sometimes by responding to images, sometimes by playing with various media (paint, collage, etc) ourselves. No particular artistic skills are required – the emphasis is on exploration and expression rather than technical merit!

A good portion of each evening will be spent working in meditative silence and we will come together in the second half of each session to share our responses and insights.

It would be helpful to know if you are coming so we know how many tables to set out. Please get in touch if you are planning to come along: jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Jane Blackall

'Life's Ultimate Questions'

Sunday 27th January, 12.45-2.30pm
Workshop at Essex Church



On 27th January we will hold the next of our 'Life's Ultimate Questions' sessions at which we consider issues of a theological, philosophical, or ethical nature together.

At this session we will be considering life and death concerns in connection with the Unitarian General Assembly's project to explore the topic of assisted dying (ahead of a discussion on the subject at the denomination's annual meetings in April).

Please put the date in your diary now and let Jane know if you intend to be there: jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Congregational Growth Meeting



Thanks to everybody who stayed behind after the service and lunch in October to talk about growing our congregation. It's impressive that over twenty people were prepared to give time to this topic, including several visitors, who gave us really helpful insights from their newcomer's perspective. We asked people to think about what it was that they appreciated about being part of a liberal religious community such as ours and what we would like to tell the world about us. It's an exercise that's always worth considering so why not put your feet up over Christmas with a warmed mince pie and jot down your responses to the following:

- List 7 specific ways in which your life is / could be better for being part of a Unitarian community (and which of these is most important for you?)
- List 7 specific ways in which Unitarian communities make / could make the world a better place (and which of these is most important for you?)
- Think of a friend who is not part of a religious community who you think would benefit from being part of a community like ours. What could you say to them to convey what Essex Church means to you?

Do give us any thoughts you come up with and let us know if we can use your words perhaps on our website or in a poster.

Churches grow primarily by word of mouth so it's well worth thinking about how we speak about our community. In October our London Unitarian District (LDPA) conducted a census of worship attendance, repeating the census exercise they'd conducted in 2011. Our average attendance has increased from 32 to 34, not a dramatic increase but at least a move in the right direction. Our task of course is not to count seats filled but to offer people a meaningful and spirit filled Sunday morning and the chance to be part of a warm, loving and soul filled community. One of my favourite comments at the growth meeting was when several people decided we were a church for people who like to think, rather than people seeking easy answers to life's dilemmas. But our challenge then perhaps is to ensure we appeal to people's hearts as well as their rational minds.

At our next growth meeting after the service on Sunday 3rd February from 12.30 to 2pm, we'll be looking in more detail at ways we can reach out to the world, so do put that date in your diary and come along with your ideas and willingness to explore (as well as a sandwich) We'll provide a bowl of soup to warm us.

Rev. Sarah Tinker

Worship Studies Course

Foundation Step at Essex Church in 2013



We are planning to run the Unitarian Worship Studies Course (Foundation Step) in the district during 2013. The course will take place here at Essex Church over four full Saturdays:

16th March / 13th July / 21st September / 30th November

The course is for anybody who would like to be involved in leading worship in their own congregation or in churches around the district. It would also be useful for people who already lead worship and who would like to develop their skills and share hints and tips with peers. The course covers reflection on the meaning and purpose of worship; issues around speech, presentation and communication; the process of crafting a high-quality service; and other practical matters that worship leaders need to consider.

This is a nationally recognised course which will be run in cooperation with the GA's Local Leadership Training Action Group and utilising a variety of tutors. There will be a registration fee of £15, and a fee of £10 per session, and to receive the WSC foundation step certificate involves successfully completing an assessment process and attending at least three of the training days. It will also be possible for people not wanting to work towards the certificate to attend these training days.

We would like to hear from you by the end of December 2012 if you think you would be interested in taking part in this course so that we can decide whether we have a viable group of participants. Please contact jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk to register your interest or with any queries you may have.

Rev. Sarah Tinker and Jane Blackall

'Our church exists to offer anyone who enters our doors an invitation to transformation. Spirituality is about being open to the processes that lead to growth, maturation, and change. Religion, at its best, can never be adapted to the status quo, can never be content to stay within the well-worn grooves of any tradition. Whether we know it or not, we exist to unleash amazing powers and incredible energies, and the directions that this energy takes us is not always systematic, predictable, or linear.

However, there is a paradox at work because this kind of transformation rarely happens without some element of stability. We need some level of security in order to feel open to the possibilities of change. Occasionally, you will hear someone say, "I don't believe in organized religion. I am a Unitarian Universalist." And there is an element of truth to this, but it can obscure the reality that without stability of some kind, we tend to resist change rather than embrace it.'

UU Minister, Rev. Chris Buice

Good Cause Collection of the Month:

Sightsavers

Collection on Sunday 23rd December



Sightsavers believes that no one should be blind from avoidable causes, and that people whose sight can't be saved should live with dignity and independence. All of our work can be divided into the areas of health, social inclusion, education and community development. We tackle the main causes of avoidable blindness including cataract, and a group of diseases that have been coined 'neglected tropical diseases' such as river blindness and trachoma. People with disabilities, such as blindness, are often isolated and excluded. Sightsavers works to make sure children who are blind or have low vision get the chance to go to school.

Trinity Hospice

Collection on Sunday 27th January



Trinity provides skilled, compassionate end of life care to individuals and support for families in our central and south west London community. Many of our patients will have cancer but others will have long term conditions such as heart failure, lung or neurological conditions including motor neurone disease or multiple sclerosis. It's the needs of the patient and their family that matter to us, not the diagnosis. Sometimes people think that by 'end of life' we mean the last few weeks of a person's life. This simply isn't the case – we encourage early referrals so that we can get to know our patients as individuals and help them to live life to the full for whatever time is left – that might be a year or more, months or weeks.

Recent Charity Collections:

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

September – 'The Forgiveness Project' – £159.60
October – 'Unitarian Peace Fellowship' - £82.50
November – 'Freedom from Torture' – £157.42

Warden's Column



Given the difficult economic climate, we didn't put our charges up at all last year or this year, but we've decided to do so from 1st January 2013. The hourly rates will go up from £15 to £20 in the Library, £35 to £40 in the Hall and £50 to £60 in the Church, with the day, half-day and evening rates increasing accordingly.

We're hoping that for most groups this won't be a problem – but we'd really hate to lose anyone, or make their activities non-viable, so I've written personally to all the groups, explaining what the impact will be for them and encouraging them to tell us if it causes them difficulties. Where I know groups have been struggling financially, or where the weekly increase is quite large, we're willing to phase it in. It's been quite an interesting process to think about each group's situation in this way and a reminder of how many different activities the building supports. So in order of how much extra they'll be paying next year – here's a list of who uses our building.

Eritrean cultural support group – no increase
Sufi worship group – no increase
Chinese children's choir - £2 per week
Michal Levin meditation - £10 per month
Buddhist meditation - £10 per month
Alistair Hardy Society - £20 per lecture
Non-duality lectures - £20 per month
Catherine James yoga - £5 per week
Zumba dance - £5 per week
Self-development Group - £5 a week
Guild of Pastoral Psychology lectures - £30 per month
Westminster Pastoral Foundation lectures - £30 per month
Taiji self-practice group - £10 per week
Pre-school Monkey Music - £10 per week
Independent Group of Analytical Psychologists - £55 per month
Beit Klal Yisrael synagogue - £15 per week
John Stirk osteopathy yoga + Lolly Stirk pregnancy yoga - £15 pw
Analytical Psychology Club - £20 per week (2 terms only)
Ashtanga yoga - £20 per week
Seicho no Ie worship group - £20 per week
Tse Qigung - £20 per week
Meditation - £100 per month
Associated Music Board – £20 per day

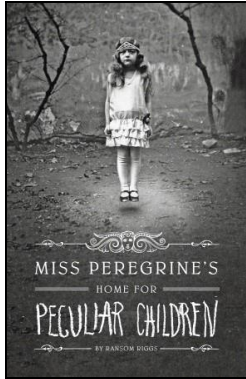
When I was explaining the proposed increases at the Church trustees meeting, the question came up of how much the congregation would have to pay if they were hiring the building on Sunday morning. The half-day rate for the whole of the ground floor is currently £200 and will be going up to £225 + an extra charge to use the library for Sunday School. Average Sunday collections are less than £100 with about £80 a week extra coming in from people who give by standing order. So even allowing for the bonus money we receive from gift aid on those donations, we couldn't quite afford to rent our own building for services at our current hire rates – a slightly daunting thought! And we also spend nearly £200 a week on music – not to mention the need to pay a minister. Luckily, because we are able to rent out the building, we don't need to rely on congregational giving to cover those costs. How lucky we are to have such supportive tenants – and how lucky they are that we need to share our lovely building with them.

Jenny Moy

Essex Church Reading Group

'Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children'

by Ransom Riggs



Tuesday 22nd January 2013, 7.00-9.00pm

The reading group's January session will be based on 'Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children' by Ransom Riggs which was suggested by Caroline Blair. This will be the 98th title discussed by the reading group since it started up nearly ten years ago.

More information from Amazon:

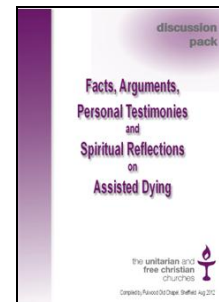
"A mysterious island. An abandoned orphanage. And a strange collection of very curious photographs. It all waits to be discovered in Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children; an unforgettable novel that mixes fiction and photography in a thrilling reading experience. As our story opens, a horrific family tragedy sets sixteen-year-old Jacob journeying to a remote island off the coast of Wales, where he discovers the crumbling ruins of Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children. As Jacob explores its abandoned bedrooms and hallways, it becomes clear that the children who once lived here - one of whom was his own grandfather - were more than just peculiar. They may have been dangerous. They may have been quarantined on a desolate island for good reason. And somehow - impossible though it seems - they may still be alive. A spine-tingling fantasy illustrated with haunting vintage photography, this will delight adults, teens, and anyone who relishes an adventure in the shadows."

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

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

Assisted Dying

Following Up on GA 2012



At last year's General Assembly meetings UK Unitarian congregations were asked to explore the complex subject of assisted dying. A resource pack has been written to help us in considering these matters and you can find this online at

www.unitarian.org.uk/pdfs/Assisted_Dying_Discussion_Pack.pdf

or ask Sarah or Jane for a copy. Our service on Sunday 16th will have the end of life as its theme and our 'Life's Ultimate Questions' workshop after the service on Sunday 27th January will be based on life and death concerns.

Our next General Assembly Annual Meetings are taking place from April 11th to 14th in Nottingham and our delegates may be asked to vote on this topic of assisted dying. Let's take some time to find out more about the subject and about our own responses to it.

Rev. Sarah Tinker

Our own Veronica Needa's 'True Heart Theatre' present:



'Living Stories'

Workshop/Performances of Playback Theatre

Sundays 20th January & 17th March, 3 - 6pm
at Faraday House, 48-51 Old Gloucester St, WC1N 3AE

A warm welcome to everyone for an afternoon of multicultural connection through playfulness, improvisational theatre, true stories & music.

This is for everyone. All welcome! Book your FREE place by emailing truehearttheatre@gmail.com

Bring something to share at teatime...

True Heart Theatre - www.trueheart.org.uk

A Charity I Support - Azafady



Next April I plan to travel to Madagascar to volunteer for a month with Azafady, an award-winning British registered charity partnered with an independent Malagasy NGO. I discovered Azafady through Peter Lynch's book *Wildlife & Conservation Volunteering: The Complete Guide* (2012)* when I was researching organisations with which to undertake conservation volunteering abroad. I was looking for an organisation that prioritised the expressed needs of the communities in which it worked above everything else, and Azafady appeared to fit the bill.



Azafady's mission, as stated on its website, is 'to alleviate poverty and conserve unique and biologically rich but greatly endangered forest environments in south east Madagascar by empowering some of the poorest people to establish sustainable livelihoods for themselves and improve their well-being'.

Azafady (which means 'may it not be taboo to me' in Malagasy) recruits volunteers from around the world to work with the 60 local Malagasy staff members on projects in four integrated areas: community health (including sanitation initiatives), sustainable livelihoods (including offering training in improved agricultural techniques), construction (including well and hygienic latrine construction and maintenance) and the environment.

The projects with which I will be involved are those relating to the environment. They are likely to include some the following: collecting data as part of research into the impact of forest fragmentation on lemur, reptile and amphibian populations, helping with environmental education in local schools, building fuel-efficient stoves and planting a type of critically endangered palm.

Volunteers make donations rather than pay fees, and around 90% of all volunteer donations go directly to the projects in Madagascar. Azafady does not spend money on commercial promotions and, as such, has a relatively low profile. It also does not spend much money on pampering volunteers, who camp for the duration of their stay and do not have access to running water or electricity while camping in the more rural areas.

For more information on Azafady, please visit its website: www.madagascar.co.uk

- Azafady has given me a number of raffle tickets to sell to help fund my donation. These cost £1 each and need to be sent back by the 20 March 2013. The first prize is £600 worth of holiday vouchers donated by EXPLORE! I will bring the tickets with me when I come to church, so if you would like one, please ask!

Alice Lambert

*If you would like to borrow the book *Wildlife & Conservation Volunteering: The Complete Guide*, please let me know. It's useful if you are considering volunteering abroad as it assesses a range of volunteering organisations under various criteria, such as 'money', which gives you an idea as to what percentage of your fee/donation is actually going on the projects abroad, and 'outcomes', which lists the organisation's achievements (e.g. scientific papers published etc.). Some of Azafady's demonstrable outcomes include, since 2008, the installation of 122 fuel-efficient (forest saving) stoves, and the planting of 50,000 trees and thousands of endangered palms.



Unitarian Christian Association Autumn Meeting at Brighton Unitarian Church

Five of us from Essex Church made the journey down to Brighton in October to attend the Unitarian Christian Association (UCA) autumn meeting. Others had come from as far afield as Oxford, Lancashire, and even Wales for the event which shows an impressive level of dedication! We had a beautiful service of Taizé chanting and later listened to a talk from Rev. Jim Corrigan.

For more information about the UCA you can visit their website (www.ukunitarians.org.uk/christian) – it costs £12 for annual membership.

Dancing Satyr

Poised, like a puppet on a stick
I fly from my detention here: from every
side you may see my beauty fly,
like geese from an archer's arrow
like pigeons when a hawk descends
like flames from a forest fire I leap
I fly!

My arms fly from me: my right leg flies,
only one punctured leg and prominent heel
stay here to testify: and my exalting head,
my airborne, enraptured body.

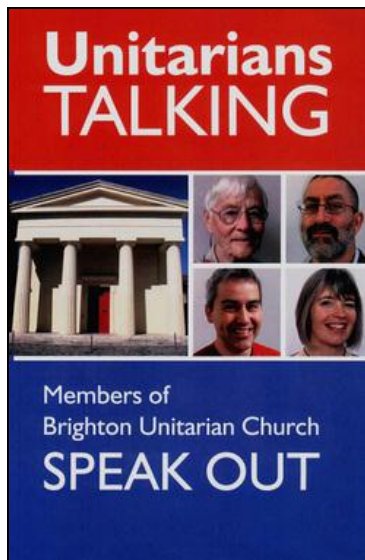
Whatever you decide: from whatever angle
you appear, absorbed in my ecstatic dance
I fly blissfully before you:
loving my life! my life!
My dying light.

John Hands
Royal Academy, October 2012

A new Unitarian publication you might be interested in:

'Unitarians Talking'

Members of Brighton Unitarian Church Speak Out



Brighton Unitarians have just launched their own book, consisting of a collection of contributions to services and newsletters by members of the congregation. All profits will go towards their Building Appeal Fund and help to maintain their historic church building right in the heart of Brighton.

The 112-page book is £7.50 per copy plus £1.70 P&P.
Cheques to be made payable to 'Brighton Unitarian Church'.

Brighton Unitarian Church, New Road, Brighton BN1 1UF.
Email buc@brightonunitarian.org.uk or call 01273 696 022.



8th-10th February 2013

Chatsworth Hotel, Worthing

Information from the District Association (LDPA)

The inaugural Festival of Unitarians in the South East (FUSE) 2012 was a great success. Were you one of the 129 people who came together from throughout the South East, plus others from as far afield as the West Country, East Anglia, the Midlands, the North West and Scotland for a weekend of inspiration, education and celebration? If so, you will probably be keen to come again. If you missed the first one, you will not want to miss FUSE 2013.

FUSE 2013 will be held again at Chatsworth Hotel, Worthing, over the weekend of 8 – 10 February. Rev. Bill Darlison will be the preacher for the Main Service, and will also present an optional workshop on the Friday afternoon. His workshop is titled 'The Celestial Journey of the Soul' and will be based on his book "The Gospel and the Zodiac" in which he propounds his theory that Mark's gospel is astrologically based. Robin Ince will again be the Keynote Speaker, this time giving a presentation on "The Importance of Being Engaged", a timely tribute to one of his heroes, Charles Darwin.

Planning is already well under way, with a full programme of Workshops, Worship, Presentations and Contact Groups, as well as time to relax and network. Attendance is expected to be even higher, so book early at fusefest.org.uk/registration-form.

Registration closes on 15th January 2013 so be sure to book in good time if you would like to attend.

FUSE website: www.fusefest.org.uk

Or speak to Sarah or Jane for more information.



'Those We Have Loved...' Brinkley the Labrador

This year, late one night, I found myself sobbing uncontrollably in front of my laptop because the news had reached me that my best dog friend in the world, Brinkley, had passed away. Brinkley was a senior citizen and I reckon we had been friends for over ten years. My heart was broken.

Brinkley lived in Florida and was quite simply the kindest creature I have ever known. He was his dad's best companion until Tim finally met his lovely partner, Jose. Brinkley then had two adoring fathers. Brinkley suffered with Diabetes and Epilepsy. He knew when he was going to have a fit and would always alert Tim.

We saw each other maybe once a year; sometimes once every other year and each time I could walk into Tim's house unannounced and say 'where's my Brinkles?' to be greeted like an old friend by an old friend.



I last saw Brinkles in January 2011 and of course told him how much I loved him before I left. This year I am due to visit Florida in November and found myself praying that he would still be around. Sadly this was not to be but the words from Tim when he died brought me so much comfort: " I know how much he loved you".

As with every tale of loss, there is a wonderful upside and in this case it is Maggie, a rescue labrador who has moved in with Tim and Jose and completely stolen their hearts. She is even allowed to sit in Brinkley's Chair and I have a very strong feeling that he won't mind!

Annie Fowler



Alpajarros Mountains

I love you mountains – but you to me are like
My undaunted ego which shields and protects me yet
Blocks my view of sky-worlds immeasurable within.

At night time I am perfectly unshielded! I
Throw back my head, and gaze into regions where
More remote than I can conceive there are perhaps
More mountainous Egoes, who if distance were less kind
Might threaten to invade and colonise us.

I know nothing of this: but wonder-full I here reflect
There is that crammed inside our craniums can
Conceive and calculate the immensity of space, the
Density of particles and stars – the possibility of external
And interior worlds.

Yet immeasurable as we are I know
Immensity of ego blocks our view. Mountains you are
Our parents, we do need you to protect us, yet
I long for plains – even deserts from which I can marvel at
The awesome immensity of space: the beauty of both
Our eternal and internal stars.

John Hands
Andalusia & Hampstead



A Fitness Fusion of 9 Movement Forms

**Second Sunday of the Month from 2-3pm:
9th December, 13th January, 10th February**

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 (£5 to members of church congregation).

Contact: Sonya Leite on 0207 371 1674.

One Light Spiritual Gatherings

'Gifts of Light'

Friday 14th December 2012

6.30-8.15pm – Here at Essex Church



The gatherings are led by graduates of the Interfaith Seminary. All are welcome.

A glorious candlelight celebration of Light in Darkness with Seasonal Treats before and Vegetarian Supper after. Join with us in healing connection to Spirit.

5.30pm – Seasonal Treats

6.30pm – Celebration

8.15pm – Vegetarian Supper

There will be music, chanting, Spiritual Transformation Journey and inspiration from all faiths and none. Bring your beloved, self, your family, children and friends.

Our own Rev. Sarah Tinker says: "The Annual 'Gifts of Light' service is always a delight."

These events are free. Donations for expenses are welcome. Any surplus will go to Childline.

For further information contact service hosts:

Rev. Pamela Ramsden - 07966 478 980

Rev. Kathryn Reynolds - 07976 739 286

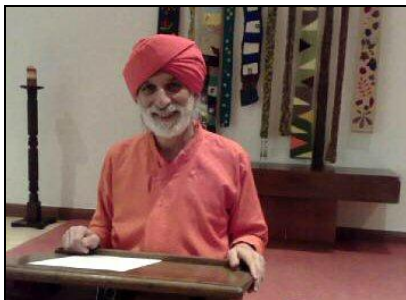
Rev. Suzanne Cohen – 07944 767 274

'In loving connection with Essex Unitarian Church'

Upcoming Gatherings and Themes for 2013

11th January – Blissful chanting with Illumina

8th February – Nourishment for the soul



Dada Jyotirupananda - a meditation teacher for over 25 years, working with Ananda Marga, a global spiritual and service society. Dada is the author of the book, "Meditation: Searching for the Real You" and took part in a previous Universal Spiritual Gathering.

'In order to overcome the pain of transience we must learn the difference between loneliness and being alone. Unless we can be alone with ourselves, unless we can recognize and accompany ourselves, be at one with the changes life entails, no matter how many are with us, we will always remain lonely.'



This is not to suggest we become a recluse or a hermit, or someone who has rejected companionship. Just the opposite. We must simply learn to become whole and complete within ourselves, free to be with or without a companion, free to depend upon ourselves, know who we are, not be led around by others, but walk freely on our own two feet on this precious earth.'

Brenda Shoshanna

An event you might be interested in...

'The Gnostic Way'

following the call of Jesus to "know yourself"
an experiential day with Martin Nathanael

Saturday 26th January, 10.00 am – 5.00 pm

**Top Room, Grove Neighbourhood Centre,
7 Bradmore Park Road, Hammersmith, London W6 0DT.**

The Gnostic Christians followed the teachings of Jesus, performed the same rites of initiation, and used many of the same sacred writings as those who are now seen as orthodox. From the fourth century CE, once Christianity became the state religion of Rome, diversity was discouraged, and this eventually led to severe persecution, along with the destruction of "non-canonical" writings.

Eventually, the profound Gnostic stream of Christianity disappeared – or did it? Martin will show how the experiential approach of the ancient Gnostic Christians was kept alive over the centuries, how the same ideas and practices kept re-emerging and would not go away... because they answered a deep spiritual need that was not otherwise being addressed.

This is a Christianity which is not afraid of diversity, acknowledges both masculine and feminine expressions of the transcendent Godhead, is equally open to men and women, encourages enquiry and points to the way of realising the divine nature or Christ-Self within.

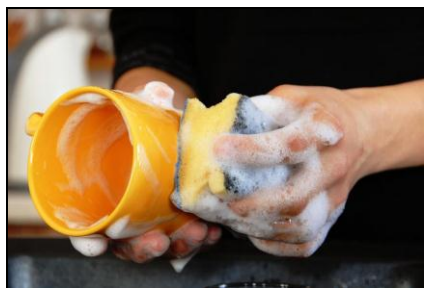
The day will provide an opportunity to meet teachings and practices which nurture the soul's journey into Oneness.

The cost of attending this workshop is £40

To book your place, make out cheque to Martin Nathanael and send to 43 Morehall Close, York YO30 4WA who will confirm your booking and provide further details.

For more information, contact Martin
01904 691201 / martin.nathanael@btinternet.com

Memory, Teach Me



Way back in my 20s, in the 1970s I was working with children in care as a residential social worker. I completed the relevant training which involved some placements around the south east of England in Local Authority Children's Homes and other residential establishments.

One of these placements involved staying and working in a Home for Children between the ages of 0 – 16 years. It was an Edwardian type of large house in Sussex. Some staff came to work daily in the home and others like me stayed "on site". I was due to work there for 6 weeks. My memories of this placement are very vague now, except for one incident. The Home was run by a married couple who lived in a flat within the Home. The woman I remember as a constant "nagger". From the moment she appeared in the morning until she said goodnight she would nag her husband, nag the staff (especially me it seemed) and nag the children continuously. The tradesmen would also "get a tongue lashing".

By the end of about the second week I had decided to do a "runner" and jeopardise my success on the course but I just didn't care, I wanted to get away from this woman.

One morning, after breakfast, it was my turn to do the washing up with Michael, one of the children, who had lived at the Home for several years. He must have been about 10 years old. Mrs ???? positioned herself behind me and then got into full swing about what was wrong with my washing up, the ironing I had done the previous day wasn't good enough, I wasn't making sure the children were in bed on time etc etc – you get the picture? By the time she was walking out the kitchen I was thrashing around in the washing up bowl, making a mess, and on the verge of walking out there and then. Michael was wiping up beside me and very quietly he said "don't mind her Miss, it is just her way". I looked at him, which immediately calmed me down, Michael carried on wiping but I just stood and looked at his face and thought that this young boy had the wisdom of Job. He had lived with this nagging for years and had to live with it for a good few more years, he did not have the option of quitting; he had sorted out a way of dealing with it.

I stayed the full six weeks. At no time was I able to conjure up the generosity of spirit that Michael had, but I stayed. Throughout my life there have been plenty of situations when I have thought of quitting but each time I have recalled that moment at the sink with Michael and his words which have had such a lasting effect.

Sue Smith

Next Newsletter Deadline



The deadline for the February issue is **Sunday 13th January**. Please send your newsletter contributions to Jane Blackall or any committee member by then. Thank you!!!

Email your articles to:
jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

'Finding Our Voice'

Singing Workshops with Margaret Marshall

**Sundays 20th January, 17th February, 17th March
12.30 to 1.15pm, at Essex Church**



Margaret Marshall has worked as a professional singer all her adult life and is also a very experienced singing teacher. Along with Harold Lorenzelli she has been singing in our choir here at Essex Church for over thirty years now and we're delighted that she is 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 and Margaret will show us how to improve the quality and strength of our voices. Using a few simple exercises we'll gain joy and confidence in our singing by learning how to produce and develop the voice, something everyone can do. We'll work with the breath and overcome unconscious blocks that can prevent us singing with our true potential.

Fun and achievement are guaranteed and these sessions are designed for everyone, whatever your experience or ability. All are welcome.



Small Group Communion



**Sunday 9th December and 13th January
at 12.30pm Down in the Church Library**

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

9th December – Led by Tristan Jovanović

13th January – Led by Jane Blackall

10th February – Led by Sue Smith

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

News of our National Unitarian Organisation:

GA Executive Committee Election



Our General Assembly has an Executive Committee that all members of congregations can vote to elect.

We have distributed voting forms and information about the candidates to everyone who is on our list of members and we are encouraging everybody, in the interests of democracy, to cast their vote.

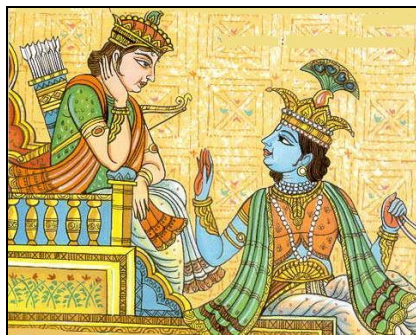
There are seven candidates standing for election, and they have each written a short description of themselves which is included in the leaflet which accompanies the ballot paper, but if you would like more information from people who know the candidates then do arrange to have a chat with our minister, outreach officer or committee members.

Papers must be returned by 14th December 2012.

**It is expected that the results will
be available on 17th December 2012.**

Bhagavad-Gita Study Group

**Wednesday 5th December, 7.30pm
Golders Green Unitarians,
31½ Hoop Lane, London, NW11 8BS**



A group to read and reflect on the Bhagavad-Gita, the most important Hindu scripture, will meet monthly on first Wednesdays at 7.30pm at Golders Green. Next meeting: 5th December 2012.

For those who've never looked at the Gita, this is an opportunity to discover one of the great holy books of the world, and in friendly Unitarian company. For those who have, it's a gateway to fresh wisdom and insights from the Gita's eternal treasure-trove.

You are welcome to come to any or all of these meetings and brighten a dark evening.

Wade Miller-Knight

For more info see the GGU Website: www.ggu.org.uk

Christmas Stamps for Charity



Please save the stamps off your Christmas post – I am collecting them for charity again this year – they can be used to raise money for Cancer Research.

Juliet Edwards

‘Those We (Might) Have Loved...’

In the early 1930s my Mum, aged around 20, came South to Brighton from Consett, Co.Durham where she spent her childhood years from the age of 4 in a children's home. She was the 4th of 5 children -William, Charles, John, Harriet and Christina born in Jarrow between 1910-1916. Their mother died having Christina who was promptly given to a family living nearby aged 10 days and informally adopted. They were taken into care when their father remarried and the new (wicked) stepmother didn't want the first family. They went on to produce 7 children between 1919-1935, all of whom were neglected and taken one by one into the same children's home as the stepmother's mental health broke down. What a legacy!



Mum stayed in the South, met my Dad and had 5 children one of whom died at birth 20 months before me. So there we were the six of us. Mum and Dad plus a sister, a brother, a brother who died, me and a brother ranging in large age gaps from 1939 - 1956. Just us. No-one else. Both sets of grandparents and my parent's siblings were either dead or unknown to us. Mum talked a lot about her early life so I knew her family existed though I didn't know where exactly and nor did she. Dad's life was a mystery though he alluded to two sisters but couldn't be persuaded to talk about them or his life even to very persuasive me!

By the time I reached 21 I was indignant at having an invisible extended family and set off on my travels to find them. I hitch-hiked to Newcastle and thus to Jarrow determined to find someone... anyone!... related to me (providing I could make myself understood and able to interpret the answers given as I'd had no instruction in speaking Geordie!) I found my Mum's half-siblings and they then enjoyed decades of visits North and South.

Mum had come South to Brighton to join Charles and John who fled to escape the probability of being sent to Canada. William had died aged 8 and Christina had been adopted but Charles, John and Mum had been raised together, albeit in different houses, in the Medomsley Cottage Homes (near to where the Phileas Fogg crisps are made!) The war interrupted their connection and they lost touch. Mum longed to find her brothers but died in 2009 never having that wish fulfilled even though I had done as much as I could to find them. We had no idea whether they had died during the war or had lived to a ripe old age like Mum. She was 94 when she suddenly died without warning or physical illness after about 8 years of progressive dementia where she slowly lost touch with reality. I felt sad knowing she'd never had that wish fulfilled but knew too I had done my best to make it happen. I felt sad but closed that chapter.

Fast forward now to a month ago. I was luxuriating in bed listening to Radio 4 surrounded by notebooks, various things to read, drawing materials and my iPad (bought with my share of the tiny sum Mum left behind after everything had been paid for after her death). There's a small irony here. I don't recall what programme I was listening to but they mentioned rickets. Mum had rickets as a child and didn't walk properly until she was 9. I checked it out on my iPad. I wanted to remind myself of how it is caused and the effects of the condition. Interesting stuff. I was in no hurry that day and surfed the Internet. I was having a lovely morning doing nothing very much. My surfing took me to a website about workhouses which included an account written by one of the residents of Medomsley Cottage Homes. My interest perked up when I saw it had been written by Charles Harrison in 1997. It's a very common name so I didn't read too much into it.

What happened next though was shocking. I read the first sentence of his account:

"There were four of us. William, Me, John and Harriet our little sister."

I stopped in my tracks and felt my breathing change.

"We went into the Home after our mother died just before Christmas 1916."

It couldn't possibly be any other family! The coincidence was too great. I was REALLY shocked. I then heard a strange wailing sound coming from my body and realised I was crying. Really sobbing not just a little trickle of a tear. What an odd experience. It was completely out of my control. When I calmed I asked myself what was wrong. I didn't really know at first but later realised it was grief. Compounded grief.

I had tried my darnedest to find my uncles for my dear sweet Mum and had failed then given up trying. I did find other members of her family but there was always a gaping hole where Charles and John had been, particularly Charles. It was devastating to know that Charles had been alive until 1997 and that they could've been in touch. I emailed the owner of the website and asked him to forward my email to Charles' daughter who had posted the account on his website. My cousin. My first ever whole cousin! The wait made me antsy. I couldn't keep still.

We're now in touch along with a whole army of new relatives dotted all over the country but the vast majority of whom still live in and around Jarrow. When we met at the end of October she brought me a copy of a studio photograph of Mum taken in 1938 which Charles had kept pristine in an envelope all of Sonja's life hoping he would see his little sister again. That wasn't to be, so I mourn the loss of the uncles I could have known. Mum would've been SO happy to meet them again so I shall take her in my heart when I go North to visit them in the Spring... if that doesn't sound too mushy! It sounds like something out of that programme about finding long lost families with Davina McCall doesn't it?! Awww.

Jo Ridgers

December/January Multifaith Calendar

✠ 2nd December – Advent Sunday – Christian

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

✠ 8th December – Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary – Christian

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

✠ 8th December – Bodhi Day – Buddhist

On Bodhi Day some Buddhists, for example those in the Pure Land tradition, celebrate Gautama's attainment of Enlightenment under the Bodhi tree in Bodh Gaya, India.

✠ 9th - 16th December – Hanukkah – Jewish

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

✠ 24th December – Christmas Eve – Christian

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

✠ 25th December – Christmas Day – Christian

Christmas Day celebrates the birth of Jesus who Christians believe to be the Son of God. Gifts are reminders of the offerings brought to the infant Jesus in Bethlehem.

✠ 25th December – Zartusht-no-diso – Zoroastrian

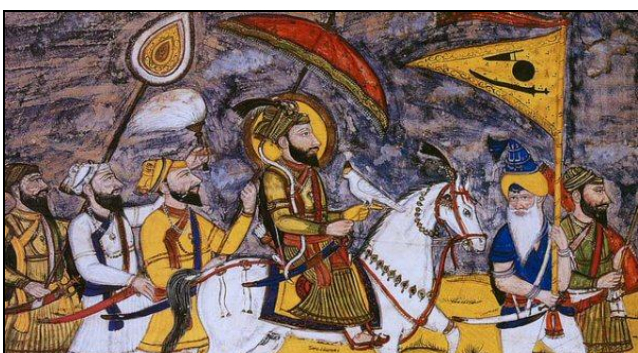
Indian Parsi Zoroastrians commemorate the death of Zarathustra according to the Shenshai calendar.

✠ 1st January – The Circumcision or Naming of Jesus – Christian

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

✠ 5th January – Birthday of Guru Gobind Singh Ji – Sikh

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



✠ 6th January – Epiphany – Christian

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

✠ 6th-7th January – Christmas Eve and Day – Orthodox

Many Eastern Orthodox and Armenian churches still use the Julian rather than the Gregorian calendar. This means that they celebrate Christmas and other fixed festivals thirteen days after the Western churches.

✠ 14th January – Makar Snkranti / Lohri / Pongal – Hindu

Makar Snkranti / Lohri is a day for almsgiving and putting right disagreements and quarrels. The festival is called Lohri in the Punjab, and Pongal in Tamil Nadu and celebrated with special food (Tamils eat a rice dish - pongal). Punjabi families (including some Sikhs) celebrate Lohri following the birth of a son.

✠ 18th January – The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity has become ever more widely celebrated with the growing commitment to ecumenism among churches. The theme of the week for 2013 comes from an ecumenical group in South India. They have reflected upon their own context and offer a theme (from Micah 6.6-8) that calls us to respond to the obligations to act justly in the world.

✠ 24th January – The Prophet Muhammad's (pbuh) Birthday / Mawlid an-Nabi – Muslim (Sunni)

The Prophet Muhammad's (pbuh) Birthday is celebrated on the 12th of Rabi al-Awwal, the third month of the Muslim calendar. In the UK Muslims celebrate at the mosque. Processions are held in some cities in the Muslim world, and in some countries the celebration starts with readings from the Qur'an, followed by poetry and songs in praise of the Prophet. Shia Muslims celebrate this 5 days later. Some Muslims do not approve of celebrating the birthday, and regard doing so as a religious innovation.

✠ 26th January – Tu B'Shevat – Jewish

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

✠ 27th January – Holocaust Memorial Day

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

'Advent Time'

Sermon by Rev. Sarah Tinker – 27th November 2011

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

You can tell a lot about someone by how they behave with Advent calendars, the calendars that take you through the month of December one day at a time, with a little door to open each day. It wasn't so bad when I was very young because the Advent calendar doors only opened to reveal a picture for each day, culminating with baby Jesus smiling in a manger for the 25th, often with an accompanying donkey. The pictures were nice enough and there was little incentive to cheat. But half way through my childhood and presumably some of yours, my problems began, when manufacturers realised that an Advent calendar was much more fun, and therefore much more marketable, if each door hid a chocolate.

Here suddenly was a test of character for children everywhere – would they dutifully and patiently open a door each day in December or would they not. I can't remember at what age I first decided not to wait till the 25th to eat what was always a slightly larger piece of chocolate, marking the special nature of the day. Nor do I now recall in which years I started to eat the days backwards, or randomly, or ate them all in the first week. Nor, worst of all, what prompted me to start eating my brothers' and sisters' chocolates from their Advent calendars – carefully opening the door, removing the chocolate, then closing the door again so it looked as though it had never been touched. Yes you can tell a lot about someone by the way they eat their Advent calendars – and sometimes by the way they eat other people's.

Well we can eat all the advent chocolates we like but we can't make time go any faster than it is already going. December starts on the 1st and Christmas Day is on the 25th and Advent marks the time leading to that day. It reminds us that life has a certain pace of its own, which we can fit in with or push against, but it's a pace that will unfold of its own accord. There is that pertinent Buddhist saying – that you can't push the river. Time has its own flow and momentum, just like the river, and we do well to accept that and flow with it.



And the times when I've understood that most clearly have been the most profound times – at the start and at the end of someone's life, for example – the experience of awaiting the death of a loved one or of waiting for a child to be born. Those are the times when we are called to wait, and wait patiently, for life to unfold as it will. For St. Augustine, patience was the companion of wisdom for it is the wise who know how to wait - wait in hope, in expectation even, but wait patiently nonetheless. It is in waiting that we may learn to 'slow down to the speed of life'.

This is not the waiting that we most of us probably know - from the traffic jam or the bus stop, from the queue in the post office or bank. This is not the impatient drumming of our fingers, feeling irritated kind of waiting. No; this is the kind of waiting that is a spiritual act – an acceptance of what is and what will be, a willingness to allow life to unfold, to poke its tender shoots up above the earth in its own time, reaching for the light. This is the faith that allows us to maintain hope and possibility when nothing is certain. Attached not to our preferred outcomes, nor to our expectations or our intentions, but with faith in the idea that life does unfold, does come to pass and that we have the strength and the wisdom to work with whatever may emerge.

This is the mystic's message throughout the ages and through all religious traditions – stop, turn inwards, focus on the here and now, let go of the past and of the future, for now is the only time there is. It may be that the here and now requires action of us, for there are times to move, to struggle, to make determined efforts to improve our lot and the lot of all those we share our world with. But there are also times to wait. My hope for us all in this time of Advent is that we be blessed with the ability to discern when to wait and when to take action – for knowing which is which is said to be a true mark of wisdom.

12.12.12 World Healing Meditation

12th December 2012 from 11.30am to 1.30pm at Essex Church

Everyone is invited to join us here at Essex Church at 11.30am on Wednesday 12th December to create together a meditation which will focus on our world community and what is most needed at this time. We will speak both of our hopes and our fears and then join together at noon for half an hour of silent meditation, followed by a celebration of all that we hold dear about life on earth and our planet home, using art work, collage, music and gentle movement – whatever ways we wish to express what we feel. If you find it easier to meditate in the company of others and would like to concentrate on this particular issue, then do join us on this special date and at this special time. Led by Kathryn Reynolds, Interfaith Minister and Co-Host of the One Light Spiritual Gatherings held monthly here at Essex Church, and by our minister Sarah Tinker.



What's On...

Thursday 3rd January, 7.00-8.00pm
'Heart and Soul' Spiritual Gathering
followed by social time & refreshments

Sunday 6th January, 11am-noon
'In Praise of an Orange'
Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Thursday 10th January, 7.00-9.00pm
'Art Meditations' workshop (1/3)
Led by Jane Blackall

Sunday 13th January, 11am-noon
'Life Ending'
Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 13th January, 12.30pm
Small-Group Communion
Led by Jane Blackall

Sunday 13th January, 2.00-3.00pm
Nia Technique with Sonya Leite

Monday 14th January, 7.00-9.00pm
'Rediscovering the Bible'
Bible-reading with David and Jane

Thursday 17th January, 7.00-9.00pm
'Art Meditations' workshop (2/3)
Led by Jane Blackall

Sunday 20th January, 11am-noon
'Is it All My Fault?'
Service led by Harold Lorenzelli

Sunday 20th January, 12.45-1.30pm
'Finding Your Voice'
Singing workshop with Margaret.

Monday 21st January, 7.00-9.00pm
Management Committee Meeting

Tuesday 22nd January, 7-9.00pm
Reading Group: 'Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children'

Thursday 24th January, 7.00-9.00pm
'Art Meditations' workshop (3/3)
Led by Jane Blackall

Sunday 27th January, 11am-noon
'The Gift of Knowledge'
Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 27th January, 12.45-2.30pm
'Life's Ultimate Questions'
Workshop led by Sarah and Jane

Dates for your Diary:

Sunday 3rd February, 12.30-2.00pm
Congregational Growth Meeting

Sunday 24th February, 12.30pm
Worship Leaders' Practice Group

Sunday Services at Essex Church

2nd December, 11am – 'The Pros and Cons of Relying on My Experience'

Service led by David Darling

The first service in Advent will be led by our very own David Francis Darling, chairperson of the congregation.

11th December, 11am – 'Both Fragile and Strong'

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

There can be a strength in admitting our vulnerabilities and a great comfort in finding a community where we can truly be ourselves.

12.30pm - **Small-Group Communion**
led by Tristan Jovanović (~20 minutes)

16th December, 11am – 'Christmas Carol Service'

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Join us for a good sing at our traditional Carol Service. Why not invite a friend along? This service will be followed by congregational Christmas lunch – all are welcome – please bring along some food or drink to share with others if you can.

23rd December, 11am – 'Midwinter Celebration'

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

From earliest times people have celebrated at the darkest time of the year, with music and storytelling, in community with others. Whatever the weather, come and lift your spirits with Kensington Unitarians.

Mon 24th December, 5pm – 'Candlelit Christmas Eve'

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

As has become our tradition, we will be holding an atmospheric candlelit service at Essex Church on Christmas Eve, which will be followed by an opportunity to go out for dinner at a local restaurant. Please contact Jane for information.

30th December, 11am – 'The Old and the New'

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

With a simple yet effective ritual we will bid farewell to the old year and welcome the new.



6th January, 11am – 'In Praise of an Orange'

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

As oranges from Seville arrive in our shops for marmalade makers, in this service we will celebrate oranges and explore their spiritual connections.

13th January, 11am – 'Life Ending'

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

A gentle exploration of current social issues on death and dying, with reflections on our own concerns about mortality.

20th January, 11am – 'Is it All My Fault?'

Service led by Harold Lorenzelli

An exploration of personal morality and responsibility. How much control do we have over our circumstances that help define us?

27th January, 11am – 'The Gift of Knowledge'

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

'Vasant Panchami' is a Hindu festival linked with Saraswati, the goddess of knowledge and learning. Our service will celebrate learning in all its forms.

