



## What's On In April:

Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> April, 7-9.00pm  
**Adult RE: 'Heart to Heart' (5/5)**  
Session Theme – 'Friendship'

Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> April, 10am  
**Walking Group:**  
Rainham Marshes RSPB  
Meeting at Fenchurch Street Stn

Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> April, 11am  
**"Easter Sunday"**  
Led by David Francis Darling

Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> April, 12.30pm  
**Congregational Potluck Lunch**

Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> April, 11am  
**"The Things We Hold Dear"**  
Led by Juliet Edwards and  
Members of the Congregation

Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> April, 12.30pm  
**Youngsters' Social:**  
**Lunch at The Hillgate Pub**

Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> April, 2-3.00pm  
**Nia Dance: Holistic Movement**

Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> April, 3.30-5pm  
**'Songs and  
Silence for the Soul'**

Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> April, 11am  
**"A Sense of Mission"**  
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> April, 1.00pm  
**Growth Group: Action Meeting**

Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> April, 7-9.00pm  
**Creativity Group:**  
'Marbling / Surface Decoration'

Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> April, 7-9.00pm  
**Adult RE: 'Soul Poetry' (1/5)**  
Session Theme – 'Love'

Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> April, 11am  
**"A Charter for Compassion"**  
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> April, 12.30pm  
**Gardening Sunday**

Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> April, 7-9.00pm  
**Reading Group:**  
'A Book of Silence'

Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> April, 7-9.00pm  
**Adult RE: 'Soul Poetry' (2/5)**  
Theme – 'Anger'

## A Message from our Minister

### Gardening Tips...

Gardeners tell us that plants need certain things to ensure healthy growth – light, warmth, water, nutrients – in roughly the right amounts for the particular conditions and type of plant. We could say this about ourselves as human beings – we too need certain conditions in order to grow and develop – and this can apply to our emotional and spiritual lives as well as to our physical selves. Just as a good gardener knows that certain plants prefer a shady spot or thrive in peaty soil so it is part of our life's work, I believe, to get to know ourselves well enough so that we find the spot that's right for us. Then we are able to create the optimum conditions for our personal growth and development. For most of humanity through most of human history there has been little choice in the matter but here in England in the early 21st century some of us are able to look beyond the basic needs of survival and seek a deeper sense of fulfilment.



### ... and Growing People and Congregations

These tips from the gardening world do not only apply to us as individuals. We can use the same principles in considering our communities as well. If our congregation is like a plant what is helping it to grow?

People bring warmth to our congregation by sharing their life stories with one another and by the level of care we show for one another. People bring light to our congregation with their new ideas and by joining in with all the tasks that need tackling. People bring the refreshment of water to our community in their shared search for spiritual meaning in life, their commitment to the oneness of spirit that Unitarianism offers the world.

Our congregation is nourished by all the activities we offer and by our togetherness – not just through our worship on Sunday mornings but also by our many small group activities, our walks, lunches and other events.

Do plants have a sense of purpose I wonder? A clear purpose, a compelling sense of mission, is said to be the vital extra ingredient that can help to make both an individual and a congregation feel vibrant, fully alive and fulfilled. We are not here just for ourselves and the more clearly we convey our purpose to the wider world the more useful we can be. That's why we're holding a workshop after worship on Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> April so that everyone can pool their ideas about our mission here at Essex Church and help to establish our shared purpose. So do put that date in your diary and join us on the day.

Rev. Sarah Tinker

## In this month's newsletter...

\* 'How I Came to Essex Church' by Nicolas Holzapfel \* Adult RE: 'Soul Poetry' \* Building Update \* 'On Gratitude' – Report from 'Heart to Heart' by Julia Alden \* 'How to Deal With Stress' by Arthur Krebbers \* Chelsea and Battersea Walk \* 'Elizabeth Gaskell' by Gordon Deaville \* Cut-Out-And-Keep Guide to Volunteering \* 'Life Changes in the Instant' by Mary Spurr \* 'New U' RE Course \* and more...

# Kensington Unitarians

At Essex Church (founded 1774), Notting Hill Gate

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

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

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



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

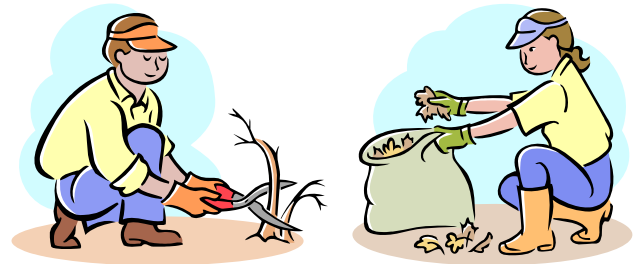
Office Telephone: 020 7221 6514

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

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

# Gardening Sunday

After the Service on 25<sup>th</sup> April 2010



We will be having our first gardening session of the year after the service on Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> April. As usual, our very own gardening expert, Michaela von Britzke, will take the lead so please let her know if you are planning to help out.

It would be a good idea to bring along some old clothes and possibly bring gardening gloves and tools if you have them (but don't worry if you don't have any equipment as there is bound to be enough for us to get all the various tasks done).

It may be helpful for some people to bring along compost and plants but please do consult with Michaela before you spend any money to ensure it all fits in with the garden masterplan!

## Volunteering Rotas: Stewarding, Coffee and Greeting



### Stewarding:

4<sup>th</sup> April: Geoffrey Olans  
11<sup>th</sup> April: Will Lyons  
18<sup>th</sup> April: Christine Joshi  
25<sup>th</sup> April: Arthur Krebbers

### Coffee:

4<sup>th</sup> April: Caroline Blair  
11<sup>th</sup> April: Margaret Darling  
18<sup>th</sup> April: Julia Alden  
25<sup>th</sup> April: Erin Lockwood

### Greeting:

4<sup>th</sup> April: Michaela von Britzke  
11<sup>th</sup> April: Natasha Drennan  
18<sup>th</sup> April: ??????  
25<sup>th</sup> April: ??????

Please speak to Jane or Sarah if you are willing to help with any of these tasks. Thanks!

## A Date for Your Diary: Congregational Lunch

Easter Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> April from 12.30pm



We will be having another congregational potluck lunch after the service on Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> April (Easter Sunday).

Please put the date in your diary now and look out for a sign-up sheet in late March so you can offer to bring along some food or drink to share.

A Forthcoming Adult RE Course at Essex Church

## 'Soul Poetry'

22<sup>nd</sup>, 29<sup>th</sup> April and 6<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> May  
Downstairs in the Library from 7-9.00pm



Poetry speaks to the soul for so many of us and we often have a favourite piece that speaks to us and I hope that these evenings will give us an opportunity to share some of these.

There will be five Thursday evenings when you can come along to share, by listening to others or reading your poems aloud. I believe that spirituality is experienced in many different ways and with a surprising range of feelings so I have structured these sessions around love, anger, joy, grief and hope:

**Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> April, 7-9.00pm – Love**  
**Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> April, 7-9.00pm – Anger**  
**Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> May, 7-9.00pm – Joy**  
**Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> May, 7-9.00pm – Grief**  
**Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> May, 7-9.00pm – Hope**

I was thrilled to run a similar workshop at Summer School last year and it left a lasting impression on me of a beautiful multi-coloured kaleidoscope which changed and fell into new patterns whenever I looked at it. Do ask me questions about these sessions and I hope to see you when they commence in April. Please contact me on [caroleg2001@googlemail.com](mailto:caroleg2001@googlemail.com) to reserve your place.

**Carole Grace**



## How I Came to Essex Church



My arrival at Essex Church is down to my partner Alice. She discovered it and I started tagging along. I decided to keep attending after I discovered it amounted to receiving free tickets to an opera performance. Also I found that the radically open-minded approach to communal worship, in the context of a warm and laid-back atmosphere, fitted snugly with where my own 'spiritual journey' had brought me.

That journey first become interesting after I attended an 'alpha course' - an introduction to Christianity - while at university. Growing up amongst atheists, agnostics and indifferents, my own view of religion at that point was something like 'it'd be nice if it were real but it seems extremely unlikely'. The alpha course represented an opportunity to be convinced otherwise. To my surprise, it convinced.

The difference it made was that all those nice-sounding, but very distant and theoretical, concepts like grace, a personal god and 'living water' were suddenly things that felt very real to me. Belief was no longer just a matter of theoretical metaphysical concepts, but of tangible experiences. I was aware that 'experiences' don't amount to evidence but felt that, if intuition meant anything, they were authentic pointers to a wider reality.

Of course intuition does not necessarily mean anything and in spite of getting baptised and spending three years attending and appreciating a lively Anglican church, I remained in a constant state of uncertainty about my newfound beliefs. I grew tired of fruitlessly wrangling with theology and made a conscious, surprisingly successful, effort to stop thinking about it. My beliefs settled on a liberal, extremely vague version of Christianity, qualified by great uncertainty about everything. This contributed to my decision to not actively search for a church when I moved to London four years ago.

Because what faith I have remains rooted in it, and because of a kind of loyalty, I continue to call myself a Christian. But I'm not sure that I should because I'm not actually trying to live by Christ's principles of selfless devotion to God, strangers and enemies. That ethos pulls on my mind but the final arbiter tends to be what's considered 'good-enough' by people I respect.

Whether that will evolve into something more coherent I don't know. For now I'm happy to avoid dogmas, remain optimistic about the reality of God and all the rest of it, and feel my way around all the confusion in-between. Essex Church seems like the perfect community to do that in.

**Nicolas Holzapfel**



## Youngsters' Social

After the service on Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> April



Seven younger members of the congregation went out for lunch after the service on the 7<sup>th</sup> February and squeezed round a tiny table at the Windsor Castle pub (where we soon got stuck into a great and wide-ranging conversation!)

The next of our bi-monthly 'Youngster's Socials' will be on the second Sunday in April. We are slightly deviating from the usual pattern this time around so as to avoid a clash with the church potluck lunch on Easter Sunday.

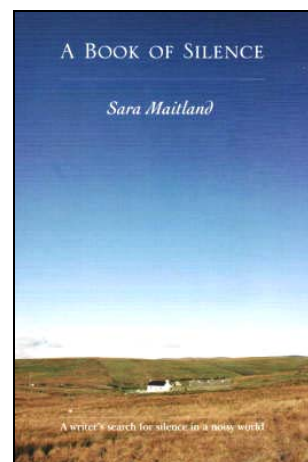
We will be investigating another lunch venue, The Hillgate (a nearby pub on Hillgate Street, W8 7SR), which was found by Natasha Drennan. Natasha will be able to lead the group over to the pub on the day.

If you would like to know more about these social events please email [social@kensington-unitarians.org.uk](mailto:social@kensington-unitarians.org.uk).

## Essex Church Reading Group

### 'A Book of Silence'

by Sara Maitland



**Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> April, 7.00-9.00pm**

The reading engagement group's next conversation will be about "A Book of Silence" by Sara Maitland. This book will be introduced by Sarah Tinker at our April session.

Information from Amazon UK:

*"After a noisy upbringing as one of six children, and adulthood as a vocal feminist and mother, Sara Maitland began to crave silence. Over the past five years, she has spent periods of silence in the Sinai desert, the Australian bush, and a cottage on the Isle of Skye. Her memoir of these experiences is interwoven with the history of silence through fairy-tale and myth, Western and Eastern religious traditions, the Enlightenment and psychoanalysis, to the ambivalence towards silence in contemporary society. Maitland has built a hermitage on an isolated moor in Galloway, and the book culminates powerfully with her experiences of silence in this new home. This is a deeply thoughtful, honest and illuminating memoir about a phenomenon too often neglected in the contemporary world."*

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. Regular members take turns in choosing a book for everybody to read and talk about so we tackle a wide variety of material. Please pick up a flyer or check our forthcoming selections online:

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

## Compassionate Communication Course

**Advance Booking for Special Autumn Course**

**Thursday Evenings Here at Essex Church**

**9<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup> September, 7<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> October**

We have made arrangements for trainers in compassionate communication (or 'non-violent communication') to come to Essex Church and teach a five-session course this autumn.

You may already have read the article I wrote about my own experience of an introductory weekend on this subject, with Jill and Richard Broadbent who will be teaching this course, in the February newsletter. I found the training to be very inspiring and worthwhile and would highly recommend it.

**If you are interested in taking part we would very much appreciate it if you would register your interest and put the dates in your diary now as places are limited and we will be advertising the course widely across the district.**

Jane Blackall

## Essex Church Walking Group Report: Chelsea and Battersea



Few walks have started more slowly in the short history of the church walking group, as we walked all of 50 yards and scurried into a coffee shop for our first refreshment break. It seemed doubtful whether we would actually manage to traverse the whole of Sloane Square at that rate. Fortunately we speeded up, and walked quite briskly through the grounds of the Royal Hospital, where we admired the very handsome seventeenth century buildings and the drifts of snowdrops in the gardens.

Walking along the embankment and through a few of the back streets of Chelsea, we passed the houses – most sadly not labelled – of Mick Jagger and Keith Richards, George Eliot, Lloyd George, Ralph Vaughan Williams, D G Rossetti, T Whistler, Henry James, Elizabeth Gaskell, Hilaire Belloc, George Best, Lawrence Olivier and Thomas Carlyle. If only they had lived at the same time, what a neighbourhood watch meeting that would have been. We also stopped to admire David Wynne's sculpture 'Boy with Dolphin', probably the closest bronze has ever come to flying. Discussing his sculpture, he said that, 'The boy is being shown that if you trust the world, the thrills and great happiness are yours....If one meets a dolphin in the sea, he is the genial host, you the honoured guest.'

We crossed the Albert Bridge and entered Battersea Park, where I tried to encourage the by now rather chilly group by telling them that there would be a lovely cafe in the park where we could get warm. Sadly it turned out to be nothing more than a tea stall with a few seats outside, but we found the sunniest spot we could and became such good friends with a passing spaniel that we started discussing who should take it home.

We walked back towards the river to admire the Peace Pagoda, constructed in the mid-1980's by Japanese Buddhist monks and nuns. Gilded Buddhist sculptures face in all four directions, and the whole structure feels loved and looked after. Standing on the pagoda and looking down at the tree-lined river must be one of London's pleasantest experiences.

**Caroline Blair**

## Essex Church Walking Group: Rainham Marshes

Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> April - 10am at Fenchurch St



The Essex Church Walking Group has made provisional plans for its activities over the next few months so please put these dates in your diary and plan to come along:

### **Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> May**

– Lee Valley Country Park –  
*(meeting 10am at Liverpool Street Station)*

### **Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> June**

– Richmond Park / Isabella Plantation –  
*(meeting 10am at Richmond Station)*

### **Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> July**

– TO BE ANNOUNCED - LOOKING FOR A LEADER –  
*(please speak to Jane or Caroline if you have an idea!)*

We usually walk at a rather leisurely pace, chatting as we go, and stopping to admire the scenery and take photos. The route should not be too strenuous and is likely to be no more than 5 miles in length.

If you are intending to come please let Jane Blackall or Caroline Blair know or email [walks@kensington-unitarians.org.uk](mailto:walks@kensington-unitarians.org.uk) to let us have your mobile phone number so that we can let you know if there is any last-minute change of plan. Any suggestions of future walking routes are also welcome.





## Essex Church Creativity Group

# 'Marbling and Surface Decoration'

Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> April, 7.00-9.00pm



'Marbling' is a way of making patterns on paper or fabric. It was a particularly popular craft in Victorian times and is often used on the inside covers of old books.

Caroline will be showing us how to make marbled patterns at the next session of the creativity group. We expect that there will be a suggested donation of £2 towards the cost of the special paints which we will need to use. Please let Caroline know if you are planning to come so that she knows approximately how much equipment to bring along.

As usual you are welcome to come along to the group even if you are not particularly interested in the activities on offer – bring along your own craftwork – or simply come along to relax and enjoy the good company.

## New Audio Library



With thanks to Will Lyons we now have some welcome additions to our library. Will has donated a sizeable collection of audio recordings for people to listen to in the church or to borrow and take home. There is also a CD player for use in the library. CDs include works by writers such as Richard Dawkins, BBC recordings such as Melvyn Bragg's In Our Time and various courses such as An Introduction to Western Philosophy. There'll soon be a list of titles for you to browse through.

"If everything is connected to everything else, then everyone is ultimately responsible for everything. We can blame nothing on anyone else. The more we comprehend our mutual interdependence, the more we fathom the implications of our most trivial acts. We find ourselves within a luminous organism of sacred responsibility."

Laurence Kushner

## Latest News from the Management Committee



1. We continue to be concerned by the leaks that happen every time there is heavy rain. Since the leak in the foyer seems the most acute, we are focusing initially on getting that repaired; but any work looks like being quite a major undertaking. We are sorry that Jenny and Sarah, after months of disruption while the new kitchen and toilets were fitted, and further disruption while the asbestos was stripped, look like being faced by noise and disruption yet again. Perhaps one day it will all be done, and they can sit back and relax.

2. Jenny and Jane are re-organising storage all over the building. At the moment, for example, hymn book storage is poor, with one complete set of hymn books being stored behind another. They are also planning to brighten up the foyer so it looks more welcoming and professional.

3. We are grateful to Jane for taking on (for the time being) the organising of the rotas (coffee, steward and greeter); we hope that new people will continue to volunteer for these jobs as it has been so pleasant to see a selection of new faces recently.

4. Patricia's memorial, Jo Ridgers' grandchildren's naming ceremony and the two recent church lunches have all gone very well. Thanks to everyone who contributed either food (at the lunches) or their cheerful presence (at any of them).

Caroline Blair

*The next meeting of the management committee will be on Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> May from 7.00-9.00pm.*

## Growth Group: Our Mission and Purpose

Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> April, 12.30 to 2.00pm



Bring your sandwiches and your ideas along to this workshop about growing our congregation here at Essex Church.

We've made great progress over the last year in meeting our congregational goals for growth. As part of this project we now want to look more closely at what it is that Kensington Unitarians offer the world.

Having a clear and compelling sense of purpose and allowing that sense of mission to shape all we do in the world is an important next step and it's one that we can all take part in.

*Forthcoming Events from the Art and Spirituality Network*

### 'Art and Prayer'

Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> June, 10-4.00pm

St. Laurence's Church, Catford, London

Sara MacVane and Sarah Liebert lead an exploration of how artistic creation can give expression to our spiritual life.

### 'Acorns and Oaks'

Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> July, 10.30 – 4.30pm

Deen City Farm, Merton Abbey, London

An all age workshop on a summer's day led by Marianne Zeck and Alison Wallace. Further information about both these events and booking forms will shortly be posted on the ASN website.

**Website: [www.artandspirituality.net](http://www.artandspirituality.net)**

*The Art and Spirituality Network aims to provide a supportive and challenging space for people to find spiritual fellowship and nourishment through making art. The network welcomes people from any religion or none; experienced artists and beginners alike.*

## Some More Statistics...

Have you noticed how the numbers are growing for worship on Sunday mornings recently? We keep running out of chairs and hymn books and there's a wonderful sound when we're singing together. Here are the average weekly figures attending for the last eight weeks with the comparable numbers for 2005 and 2009.

Year	Average Weekly Attendance Jan - March
2005	26.5
2009	35.5
2010	45

Here are the growth goals that were agreed at our 2009 AGM.

- Increase membership to 75.
- Increase average worship attendance to 50.
- Have a paid children's leader and thriving children's group.
- Have new people on the committee and more people actively involved in running the congregation – its programmes, worship and building matters.
- Improved systems for greeting visitors and encouraging them to return and to join the congregation.
- Increased publicity for the congregation and its activities – completing a review of our outreach, communications, notice boards etc.
- Broadened range of activities offered – as another way for people to access our congregation; increased attendance for groups.
- Completing the 5 year building programme started in 2006 so that our building is a positive and vibrant advert for our community.
- Holding a congregational residential event.
- Lowering the congregation's age profile and having a more balanced gender ratio.
- Creating a congregational covenant together / or utilising more what is already written.

**Rev Sarah Tinker**

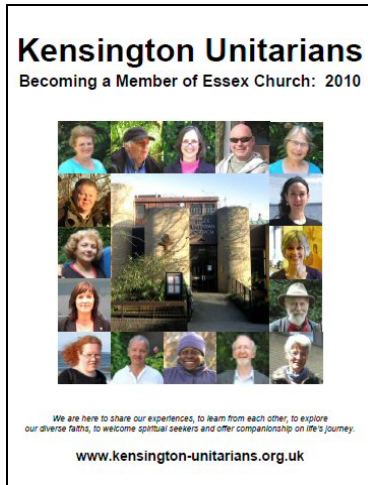
## May Newsletter Deadline



The deadline for submitting items for the next issue is **Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> April**. Please send items (such as poems, quotes, articles, notices, rotas, etc...) to Jane Blackall or any of the committee members before this date.

**Thank you!!!**

# Membership Forms



Thank you to everybody who has filled in and returned their membership form for 2010. It's lovely to see new names on the list and to hear from people that they want to show their commitment to our congregation. We'll be gently encouraging everyone to get their forms back to us soon so do let us know if you have not received one or if you would like another copy. You can also find the form on our Kensington Unitarians website and print out a copy for yourself.

Make a note in your diary of our Membership Service on May 16th when we will welcome new members in a simple ceremony and celebrate our community. This service will be followed by our congregation's AGM.

*An opportunity for local residents in Kensington and Chelsea*

## Are You Ready to Make Healthy Changes?

**Health Trainers are here to help you step by step**

Health Trainers are local people who act as buddies, supporting their peers to improve health and wellbeing. They support people in Kensington and Chelsea to make healthy change in their lives. They offer 1-6 FREE and confidential sessions to help with motivation and achieving health goals, supporting people to make the best use of the range of excellent services and opportunities available across the borough.

The Health Trainers service is run by the Westway Development Trust and commissioned by the NHS Kensington and Chelsea. For more information or to arrange an appointment leave a message on 0208 962 5730 or email [healthtrainers@westway.org](mailto:healthtrainers@westway.org)

**– be more active – find local services –  
feel more confident – quit smoking – join in activities  
– make new friends – eat healthily –**



*Photograph of Daffodils by Heidi Ferid.*

## 'Discover Yourself'

**17<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> September 2010**

**St Denys Retreat Centre, Warminster, Wiltshire**



Some enterprising Unitarians from the south are holding a weekend retreat, 'Discover Yourself', this autumn, at the St Denys Retreat Centre, in Warminster. Their leaflet says: "Come and join us for a weekend of self-discovery!"

There will be lots of varied activities including:

Creating A DIY Unitarian Service

Introduction to the Enneagram

Dances of Universal Peace

Some Optional Creative Activities

**The cost of attending is £115:**

(£20 conference fee – £95 accommodation)

Speak to Jane or Sarah for a leaflet/booking form or contact the organiser, Kathy Beckett, for information:  
email - [kathy@kpb.gotadsl.co.uk](mailto:kathy@kpb.gotadsl.co.uk) / phone - 02380 273420



# 'Life Changes in the Instant. The Ordinary Instant.'



I had gone to Heathrow to fly to Munich. I'd had my wallet at Heathrow. It was no longer in my purse when I arrived in Munich. And it changed the course of things. It could have been worse, much worse. It was only cards and money, but it completely altered what I could and couldn't do. And it changed what I had intended to do next.

So, finally back in London, heading to the library to print off an insurance claim form, my mind was on what I needed to do next. Standing there, near the desk where I was waiting to pay for my printed copies, I saw a display of books on Religion and Spirituality. I picked up one book that looked intriguing, and then another, reading the blurb to get a taste of what it was about. I wanted to choose one of the books here, to embark on a different journey.

Then I saw a title that sounded intriguing, 'The Year of Magical Thinking', by Joan Didion. I wondered what quest she'd sought or experienced, and picked it up to read the first page.

*"Life changes fast. Life changes in the instant. You sit down to dinner and life as you know it ends."*

With those few words, she had me. I found myself plunged into the aftermath of shock, when loss has left you without bearings, when reason and the heart cannot understand each other. My journey and hers are so different, yet I recognize that path. It's where my own feet searched for stable footing... testing and placing one foot on a rock, to start fording a wide stream. You have little choice. You can't stay where you were, can't go back, but the way across is precarious.

I hadn't heard of Joan Didion, I'm embarrassed to say. I hadn't heard of this book. And life changed, yet again, in that instant. I'd gone looking to print claim forms, I found a voice that gave shape to the journey I now look back on. Joan Didion writes far better than I could. She researches so well, too, deftly weaving in other perspectives, and reason, and the ludicrous, with her own heart's truths, with the cry that can't let go. Not yet. Maybe not ever. Some don't understand. Hearing "It's too late" doesn't mean you now can let go. Nor does reason help. Nor does the promise that it'll get easier in time.

I hadn't been in that place for a while, had known I was getting better as each quarter year passed. Reading Joan Didion's words recalled the odyssey, back when Future only represented surviving, finding a way through a dark night. We can, but no one could have told me, back then, that I would reach light again. You have to find those rocks in the stream... the ones you test with one foot, while still safely anchored.

Many years ago I found myself trying to comfort a friend who was dying. Oddly enough he was feeling happy, thankful. I was the one needing comforting, and hadn't recognized it... because, after all, we were 'only' friends.

Our teachers come to us in experiences of gift and loss, of people, or art or nature, in books or travels. Each is alone in this journey, each alone on a path, but like the marathon runner... there are people and experiences, encountered along the way, holding out precious water to replenish, or a lighted flame to help guide along the way.

There's a song from Cape Breton, Song of the Mira. The singer, having wandered so far from home, recalls the good souls of the fishing community he's left behind to make his way. In verse after verse he remembers them, finishing with:

*"Out on the Mira the people are kind. They'll treat you to home brew and help you unwind.  
And if you come broken, they'll see that you mend. And I wish I was with them again."*

From Albert Schweitzer:

*"At times our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us."*

I remembered you when I was invited to light the chalice this Sunday at the Halifax church. I have returned from where I started out, have returned from three years of wandering, a time of mourning, a time of heartsick, of being lost, trying to find my way 'home' again.

It became a journeying of discovery. I will never forget. I will remember. With gratitude.

Mary Spurr



# A Cut-Out-And-Keep Guide to Sunday Volunteering

*In recent times increasing numbers of new people have been volunteering to help out with the Sunday morning roles, and several have asked for information about what the jobs entail, so here is a handy cut-out-and-keep guide.*



## The Role of the Tea/Coffee Maker:

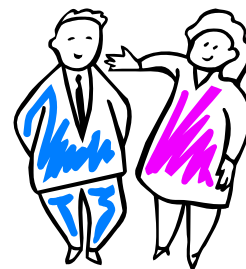
The person making tea/coffee should arrive quite early (by about 10.30am) to get the cups and saucers out of the cupboard and start preparing for the inevitable rush for refreshments which will come straight after the service.

Since we committed to being a 'Fairtrade Church' we take care to stock up on fairly traded tea, coffee, and biscuits, and we generally buy these in bulk to ensure there are always supplies in the cupboard.

The only thing that the tea/coffee maker needs to bring along on a Sunday morning – unless you are feeling particularly keen – is some fresh milk (and you can claim back for the cost).

It is usually a good idea to slip out of church during the final hymn to put the kettle on so you're ready for the stamped.

After coffee-time you finally need to wash up (clearing all the cups and washing up can take a while so do ask people to help) and put everything away before you go.



## The Role of the Steward:

The steward should usually arrive quite early (by 10.30am at the latest) to ensure that the chairs in the church are laid out properly, the sound system is plugged in and switched on, and that the seasonal wall-hangings at the front of the church are all neat and tidy.

The steward also makes sure that one of the office keyholders (Sarah, Jane, Juliet, Howard, Harold, Caroline) has brought the chalice upstairs and places it on its stand.

The candles for joys and concerns need to be brought out of the cupboard and the steward also ensures there are matches/tapers available.

As people start to arrive, the steward hands out service sheets/hymnbooks, which is the most visible part of the job. There are large print hymnsheets for those who need them.

The steward is responsible for helping latecomers to come in quietly and find a seat (and also brings extra chairs in from the hall if the church is unexpectedly full!).

It is also useful if the steward can keep an eye on the foyer in case anyone comes in and wanders off elsewhere in the church during the service.

Finally, the steward hands round the offertory bags during the collection, then places them on the central table, and counts the loose cash collection after the service.

We keep a record of how much is received and also count how many people are attending each week as these statistics are an important part of the congregational growth project (all recorded in the 'Steward's Blue Book').

The money is handed to Juliet, Sarah, Jenny, or a member of the committee to put away for safekeeping. The steward has quite a lot of little tasks to remember... but we will soon put a copy of this checklist in the church for future reference!

## The Role of the Greeter:

This new role of 'greeter' is an important part of our commitment to make Essex Church a welcoming congregation as it makes such a difference for newcomers to be greeted by someone friendly who can give them any information they need. So we ask the greeter to arrive by 10.30 and to open the door. Full training will be given in finding the key and in how to open the door on both sides to let wheelchairs and mobility scooters into the building.

Greeting is a subtle skill because we don't want to overwhelm people when they first arrive. But people do appreciate a welcome and some simple information, such as where the toilets are and where to get a drink of water.

We usually guide visitors into the coffee room where people sit and chat before the service. As greeter it's a good idea to introduce newcomers to at least one other person so that they have someone to talk to if they want.

It's helpful to find out a bit about visitors, without being too intrusive. Is this their first visit to Essex Church, their first time at Unitarian worship? Are they here on holiday? Do they live nearby? Without overwhelming people with paper, possible things to give them are

- The latest newsletter
- The 'What's on at Essex Church' leaflet
- The 'First time at a Unitarian Service' leaflet

Ask people if there is anything they particularly want to know and be observant about any particular needs they may have, such as large print hymns.

Let people with children know that there is a programme for them and that it is fine for little ones to stay in the service.

And finally, let our minister or a committee member know if there is any information about a newcomer that it would be helpful to pass on to someone.





## Warden's Column

It's Sunday evening, about 8pm, but I'm not in the Church office, I'm on a train somewhere north of Peterborough, hurtling towards Leeds at well over a hundred miles an hour. Yet because I'm writing this on my iPhone, as soon as I'm finished I can send it to Jane for inclusion in the newsletter and once that's finished she can also transmit it instantaneously from her home on the Isle of Dogs to a printshop near the church. I originally got the iPhone because it supports the church diary program - so I could deal with booking enquiries etc. when I wasn't in the office - but it's found plenty of other unforeseen uses: I'm amazed by how much me and Sarah text each other, even when we're both in the Church, and how useful that is.

I'm reading a book at the moment about this sort of thing, how increasingly easy transmission of information changes working practises and increases productivity. However the downside is that it makes it harder and harder for specialised skills and knowledge to guarantee you employment once you're in competition with everyone else who has access to a fibre optic cable.

Thinking about how this might affect the Church someday (as a small business raising 100k a year by renting space in its building) in theory almost all the office based part of my work (managing the diary, invoicing, financial record keeping, dealing with post, phone, and e-mail queries) could all be offshored to a call centre in Bangalore. The parts of my work which would have to stay local are those that involve interacting with the physical fabric of the building: repairs, cleaning, deliveries, stacking chairs etc. Even so, there are obvious efficiency savings in splitting those parts of the job up and outsourcing them to specialists and we've already done this to some extent by employing Gitana the cleaner & Frazer to help with the building.

So, what's the point of having a Warden? Or as my book would put it "the unique added value"? I guess if there is any, it probably relates to the fact that the Church is not just a small business renting out meeting space in central London, but is also in the business of being a spiritual community. As such, its only other full time employee is the Minister, and as her area of expertise is human relationships she may well prefer to work with one semi-efficient person face-to-face than manage many more efficient ones remotely. I hope so anyway, because although this job may be an anachronism in the global marketplace, there are many things about it which make it a pleasure to do - not least the chance to live in Central London with no near neighbours and no commute!

Hmm . . . as often happens when I leave this column to the last minute, it ends up being much more about the process of writing the column than anything else - but looking back towards March & forward to April, here is a roundup of the 'news' headlines for events in and around the building:

Leaking roof, new Hall curtain too short ☹, MUSIC EXAMS, *budget for 2010*, *Hall redecoration*

(Hellebore, Crocuses, DAFFODILS, *Tulips*, *Allium* ☺)

**Jenny Moy**

## 'A Personal A-Z of Unitarianism'

We would like to recommend a very good article on the Unitarian GA website: 'A Personal A-Z of Unitarianism' by Matthew Smith.

He says: "Many inquirers ask 'What do Unitarians believe?' This is a difficult question to answer since we reject creeds and are not bound to accept a common set of theological beliefs as a condition of membership. We gather together as separate souls, each on an individual spiritual quest but keenly aware of the strength and nurture that derives from sharing in celebration and fellowship with other seekers. In describing our liberal religious stance each Unitarian will have his or her own perspective and emphases. The attitudes, values and practices I have selected here are inevitably a personal choice."

It includes 'A is for Acceptance', 'B is for Beliefs', 'C is for Community', and goes on to 'L is for Love', 'N is for Nature', 'O is for Openness', 'P is for Prayer', 'Q is for Questioning', 'R is for Reason', 'S is for Spirit', all the way to 'Z is for Zest'.

To read the whole article visit: [www.unitarian.org.uk/intro/a2z.shtml](http://www.unitarian.org.uk/intro/a2z.shtml)

**Sarah Tinker and Jane Blackall**



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

**Second Sunday of the Month from 2-3.00pm  
(11<sup>th</sup> April, 9<sup>th</sup> May, 13<sup>th</sup> June)**

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

Cost £7 (£5 to Essex Church members)

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

*A forthcoming course here at Essex Church*

## **Adult RE: 'New U'**

**Thursdays 10<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup> June, 7-9.00pm**



This summer there will be another opportunity to take part in this three-session course, which will be led by our minister Sarah Tinker, and is open to everyone who is a member here at Essex Church or is thinking of becoming one. It is designed primarily for people who feel new in some way - new to Kensington Unitarians perhaps, or new to Unitarianism or new to liberal religion or new to London or Britain. But anyone is welcome to come along as the course is mostly about getting to know one another better through conversation and activities.

How do we run Essex Church? What links are there with the wider Unitarian movement? What other activities are happening here in the UK and how do we find out more? What is important to us as liberal religious people? These are just some of the areas we will consider.

The course is free to attend but we ask people to book a place in advance by ringing Sarah on 0207 221 6514 or emailing [sarah@kensington-unitarians.org.uk](mailto:sarah@kensington-unitarians.org.uk).

## **Church Building Update**



The leak that has spoilt some of the new ceiling tiles in the foyer is coming from the flat roof balcony at the front of the manse flat. Fraser Jackson, who is helping us with building work, has consulted half a dozen roofing contractors who all say much the same. The asphalt roof has deteriorated due to hot summers and a frozen winter. It's impossible to spot the leak and the only sensible thing to do is take it all up and re-surface it.

This, alas, is nothing to do with our major leak that so disfigures the corner of the worship space. We have asked all the roofing companies to propose strategies for resolving this long-standing problem and they have suggested different ways forward that now need studying carefully.

The new hall curtains should soon be arriving, hopefully now with the right length. Before that we hope to be visited in the dark of night by a team of Russian decorators who have been recommended by Gitana, our cleaner. They will just tackle the hall walls and cupboards for now and in the summer, when the building is quieter, we will get the foyer and stairs decorated and all the varnished doors renovated.

In the midst of these seemingly never-ending tasks it's easy to forget how much progress we've already made. At a recent staff meeting Jane, Jenny and I looked through the five year building renovation programme I created back in 2006. It was a cheering read and here are some of our best achievements to cheer us all on.

Since 2006 we have renovated our warden's flat with a new kitchen and new wiring. We secured funding to re-design our front garden and what used to be euphemistically described as a 'wilderness garden' is now a tiered series of beds, full of colour. We have a completely new kitchen and re-designed toilets, including one that is fully accessible and one with a place to change nappies. We have new lights and ceilings in the hall and foyer. Surely a congregation that can achieve all this will also be able to sort out a leaking roof?!

**Sarah Tinker**

☪ **1<sup>st</sup> April – Maundy Thursday – Christian**

On Maundy Thursday Christians reflect on The Last Supper, when Jesus celebrated the Passover meal with his disciples. In blessing the bread and wine he told them to continue to do this to remember him. Known variously as Holy Communion, the Eucharist, the Mass, or Breaking of Bread, depending on the church tradition, this is a central act of worship for most Christians. Some churches also remember Jesus washing the feet of the twelve disciples, as the feet of twelve members of the congregation are washed.

☪ **2<sup>nd</sup> April – Good Friday – Christian**

Good Friday commemorates the crucifixion of Christ - special services are held to mark the time that Jesus spent on the cross. Christians call this 'Good' Friday because of the greatest example of God's sacrificial love, in Jesus giving up his life for the sins of the world.

☪ **3<sup>rd</sup> April – Holy Saturday (Easter Eve) – Christian**

This is the last day of Lent, and in the evening many churches will have special services when the Paschal Candle is lit, and baptismal vows are renewed in preparation for Easter.

☪ **4<sup>th</sup> April – Easter Day – Christian**

Easter Day is the most important festival of the Christian year, when the resurrection of Jesus is celebrated. Many Easter traditions, for example Easter eggs, symbolise new life.

☪ **4<sup>th</sup> April – Easter Day / Pascha – Orthodox**

The date of Easter is calculated on a lunar calendar, but as many Eastern Orthodox and Armenian churches still use the Julian rather than the Gregorian calendar the calculation of dates differs from the Western churches, so at present there is no consistent relationship between the dates of the Orthodox and Western Easter.

☆ **6<sup>th</sup> April – Passover (final day) – Jewish**

This is the eighth and final day of Passover. Note that Passover lasts for seven days in Israel.



✨ **8<sup>th</sup> April – Hanamatsuri – Buddhist**

Mahayana Buddhists celebrate the Buddha Shakyamuni's birthday with this flower festival. Tradition has it that the Buddha was born in a garden, so floral shrines are created with an image of the infant Buddha. Theravadins celebrate Buddha's birth, enlightenment and passing away all on the same day, at Wesak - at the full moon in May.

☆ **12<sup>th</sup> April – Yom Ha-Shoah (Holocaust Day) – Jewish**

Jewish people remember the six million Jews, including one and a half million children who were victims of the Nazi holocaust. Memorial candles are lit and people attend special services.

☪ **14<sup>th</sup> April – Vaisakhi (Baisakhi) – Sikh**

The Sikh New Year festival celebrates the founding of the Order of the Khalsa, by the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, in 1699. On this day the 'Five Ks' were instituted and the amrit initiation ceremony was introduced. Sikhs visit the gurdwara and parades are held. Many Sikhs choose to be baptised into the Khalsa order on this day.

☪ **21<sup>st</sup> April - 2<sup>nd</sup> May – Ridvan – Baha'i**

Ridvan is the most important Baha'i festival. It is named after the garden outside Baghdad, in which Baha'u'llah was staying when he declared himself as the Promised One prophesied by the Bab. The first, ninth and twelfth days, being particularly significant are celebrated as holy days, when no work is done. During these twelve days Baha'is elect their local, national and international governing bodies.

☪ **23<sup>rd</sup> April – St George's Day – Christian**

Although he lived and died in the Middle East, St George is the patron saint of England. All that is known for certain about St George is that he was martyred for his Christian faith and was a soldier. His red cross on a white background was adopted as a symbol after the Crusades.



# “How to Deal with Stress”

## Main takeaways from a Buddhist course

The Heruka Centre – the main Kadampa Buddhist Centre in London – recently ran a course on “How to deal with stress”. Here are some key takeaways, covering both the origins of stress and ways to deal with it.

### Stress and its Origins

- Stress is one of society's biggest problems: majority of people experience it in a range of situations (be that relationships, work, shopping, dealing with technology etc.)
- Though stress can be triggered by difficult situations, the fundamental cause of stress is internal: it is the result of our busy mind.
- Ultimately, stress arises from your own anger: you are angry about a given situation, and that causes stress. You want the situation to be different.
- Our society focuses a lot on the physical: our bodies, appearance and so on. Yet there is no focus at all on the mind. This is very surprising: your experience of life is ultimately mind-dependent!

### What Stress Does to You

- Stress and general negativity does not solve any situation – it only lays the foundation for more bad experiences for you in the future.
- If we truly understood what anger can do to our bodies and mind, we would never dare to be angry again!

### How to Deal with Stress

- Key habit to practice is to ‘Wholeheartedly and Patiently Accept the situation’ – be that a traffic jam, a troublesome boss, a broken pc or whatever it may be.
- Not just grudgingly accept – but be happy and OK with the situation. Don't reject or withhold your anger and don't project it either. Accept the anger, and let it dissolve.
- Acceptance does not mean that you don't act to resolve a situation – but action comes after acceptance.
- Realize how egotistical you're thinking: a bit of a bad thing for one person on the entire earth isn't really that bad... and you'll probably not even remember why you were angry a day later!
- The more you practice this, the more you can deal with ever more difficult situations. At one point, you'll actually start enjoying difficult situations!
- Seek inspiration from enlightened beings (those free from suffering) – they can help you.
- Some situations may be simply too difficult to deal with and accept. It may, in those cases, be best to get away from these situations.



### How to Deal with Stress at Work

- With work, try not to be too focused on your own image or what type of work you do. That's often the main cause of stress.
- Focus on how to best serve those around you – and do work in a way they will like.
- This leads to more positive relationships, where your work will become easier, and you'll become happier doing it. And even gain more recognition.

### How to Deal with Stressful Relationships

- Don't blame someone else for your stress. Someone who is enlightened (=stressfree) will never find anyone stressful!
- Focus on the good sides of other people – and they will want to show more of them.
- Focus on wanting to help other people, not judging them.

### How to Deal with Difficult Situations

- Accept the situation, don't seek to change it.
- Don't worry about the consequences: i.e. if in a traffic jam to the airport for a holiday trip – don't worry about missing the plane or not going on holiday. So what if it doesn't happen? Don't let it ruin your happiness.

### Short-Term Reprieve of Stress: Meditations to Practice

- Conscious breathing.
- Conscious breathing & Imagining pure white air flowing into your body and all negativity flowing out.
- Conscious breathing & imagining to be full of pure, white light – not a problem in the world.

### The Goal: A Stressfree Life...

- Not needing anything from anyone to make you happy – realizing the external won't make you happy.
- Ending your own problems & wanting to help others and be enlightened

For more information about the Heruka Centre and Kadampa Buddhism, you can visit [www.meditateinlondon.org.uk](http://www.meditateinlondon.org.uk)

We are planning on running a discussion group on stress, and various ways people have found of dealing with difficult situations in their life. If you are interested in joining in, please contact me on [arthurkrebbers@gmail.com](mailto:arthurkrebbers@gmail.com)

Arthur Krebbers

## Unitarian Email Lists

If you are interested in receiving regular email bulletins containing news and information from the Unitarian General Assembly then you can sign up on this website:

[www.unitarian.org.uk/info/email-subscribe.shtml](http://www.unitarian.org.uk/info/email-subscribe.shtml)

The basic option is to sign up for the GA-LIST which consists of notifications, information and news from the Unitarian General Assembly. Announcements are batched together to create UNI-NEWS. Includes events, ministerial vacancies and executive committee reports.

There are also five separate themed lists on social responsibility, ecumenical/interfaith matters, worship, youth, and religious education.

## Universal Spiritual Gathering

Friday 9<sup>th</sup> April, 6.30-8.15pm  
Held at Essex Church



The Universal Spiritual Gatherings are led by graduates of the Interfaith Seminary. This month's theme is 'Spiritual Joy'. Join us for contemplation, wisdom and inspiration from many faiths and none, including joyful spiritual practice from the Hindu Krishna Consciousness tradition shared by Jai Nitai das, president of the Krishna Temple in Soho. We will also lose ourselves in blissful chants from different spiritual traditions led by our wonderful musicians Sean, Lila & Jan. All are welcome

**14 May:** Theme of Spiritual Practice incorporating wisdom from earth based Feri tradition

**11 June:** Walking with the Divine with guided meditation "As I walk"

**9 July:** Beacons of Light – with wisdom from 100 great spiritual leaders

For further information contact service hosts:  
Reverends Danielle Wilson - 07802 898 252,  
Pamela Ramsden - 07966 478 980,  
Kathryn Reynolds - 07976 739 286  
Grace Morgan - 07931 132 890

*'In loving connection with Essex Unitarian Church'*

The British Teilhard Association  
and Alister Hardy Society

## Future of Humanity: A Cosmological Vision



Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> April at Essex Church

This day will seek to explore the subject from various viewpoints, each speaker bringing his or her own perspective on the subject. The day will include a debate between the speakers on the implications of the subject and where this might be leading, this will be followed by questions from the floor.

10.00am – Arrival/Doors Open

10.45am – Welcome and Introductions

11.00am – The Future Evolution of Humanity on Earth:  
A Gigantic Task, a Dream or a Nightmare?  
Prof Ursula King, Bristol University

12.00pm – Evolution and Spiritual Experience –  
An Eastern Christian Perspective  
Dr. Christopher Knight, Eastern Orthodox

1.00pm – Lunch (bring your own – tea/coffee provided)

2.00pm – Cosmos, Creation and the  
Culmination of Consciousness  
Prof Bernard Carr, University of London

3.00pm – Panel and Open Discussion

4.00pm – Departures

Cost: £18.00 for AHS/SMN members and students;  
£25.00 for non-members.

Email [peterjohncox2@btinternet.com](mailto:peterjohncox2@btinternet.com) to register.

*The Alister Hardy Society supports the work of the Religious Experience Research Centre at the University of Wales, Lampeter, and provides a forum for the discussion of spiritual/religious experience. It welcomes all people interested in the subject.*

*A Forthcoming Event Organised by 'Faiths in Sussex'  
with the World Congress of Faiths and Worth Abbey*

## **'The Present and Future of Faith' with Peter Owen-Jones**

**Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> June, 2-6.00pm  
Worth Abbey, West Sussex**

Horsham Interfaith is organizing this event for 'Faiths in Sussex'. Keynote speaker will be the Rev. Peter Owen-Jones, Anglican Vicar, and presenter of the TV Series, 'Around the World in Eighty Faiths'. THE FUTURE OF FAITH by Harvey Cox or any book by Peter Owen-Jones is suggested as background reading. There will be circle discussions, a tea break, and a panel on the same theme.

In his late 20s, Peter Owen-Jones gave up his career in advertising to follow a calling to be an Anglican Priest. He currently serves near Lewes at Glynde, West Fittleham and Beddington. Recruited by the BBC to front a series of Religious Programmes, his books include 'Around the World in 80 Faiths', and 'Letters From The Moon'. The event will be held at the Performing Arts Centre, Worth Abbey. To reserve your place please email Rosemary Sanders at Worth Abbey: [toc@worthabbey.net](mailto:toc@worthabbey.net).

The Abbey is located about 5 miles south of Three Bridges, which is the nearest rail station. See the abbey website [www.worthabbey.net](http://www.worthabbey.net) for full details. If you have questions, please contact Richard Boeke on 01403 257 801.

## **Acting Workshops**



Arjuna AAttore is planning to start up an acting workshop on Sunday afternoons in the church library from 3-6pm. We hope to have more details in the next newsletter.

In the meantime, Arjuna is running Introductory Acting Classes on Tuesday nights (6-9.00pm) at the Drill Hall, Chenies Street, London WC1E 7EX, in a course which began on 23<sup>rd</sup> March. The cost of attending is £10.

Please contact Arjuna for more information: 07538 561 052 or email [greatactormoviestar@yahoo.com](mailto:greatactormoviestar@yahoo.com).

## **Nora Hague (1912 - 2010)**



*Nora Hague in March 2008, aged 95*

Gill and I would like to thank members of the congregation for their cards and expressions of sympathy on the death of my mother on 25 February 2010. She was 97, and had been in a nursing home in Sheffield for the last eighteen months or so, once she could no longer be looked after in her own home. Her dementia was gradually getting worse, but it is good to know that her passing was peaceful.

My mother's home congregation was Fulwood Old Chapel in Sheffield (where our own minister Sarah herself first 'discovered' Unitarianism, as it happens). Mum had been very active in the local Women's League branch (where her lemon curd at the monthly coffee mornings was legendary!), in the annual chapel concerts, and also as flower secretary. My parents were occasional visitors to Essex Church when they came to stay in London. This was particularly so during the ministries of Rev Frank Claburn (1977-1981) and Rev Francis Simons (1981-1993). They always enjoyed their visits to the church, perhaps in part because the style of service was a bit different to what they were used to at Fulwood, which had a more 'liberal Christian' ethos at that time.

My mother's funeral took place in Sheffield on 10 March, with the service at the crematorium followed by a service of thanksgiving for her life at Fulwood Old Chapel. Both services were conducted by the Rev June Pettitt, who knew my mother well, and is currently the minister at the Stannington chapel in Sheffield. We were pleased that mum's brother was over from Canada (at the age of 91), and he was able to take part in the service, giving reminiscences of their early family life in Rotherham.

**Howard Hague**



# Congratulations Mrs. Gaskell, "A Habit of Stories" (1810 – 1865)

*'God has made us so that we must be mutually dependant.'* - Mrs. Hale in 'North and South'

In 1848 a first novel by an unknown author took Britain by storm, *Mary Barton*, a tale of love, murder and industrial misery. Its anonymous writer was Elizabeth Gaskell and written, when aged 38 with 4 small girls, out of her experiences as a Unitarian minister's wife in the black and pestilential alleys of industrial Manchester. It shocked her contemporaries, with its portrait of families living in foul, damp cellars, where many a penny that would have gone little way enough in oatmeal or potatoes, bought opium to still the little ones and make them forget their uneasiness in heavy troubled sleep. In private she had been writing for years. Publishing stories was the way she exposed the truth of her world.



*Mrs. Gaskell by Samuel Lawrence, 1854.*

In her life time Elizabeth Gaskell preferred to be and was called Mrs. Gaskell. Congratulations, as at long last she is to be honoured with a window in Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey in this bicentenary year of her birth. It's about time, after resistance by the Abbey authorities as she was a Unitarian. Her works have achieved fresh popularity since 2007 when the BBC broadcast an adaptation of her *Cranford* stories, starring Dame Judi Dench.

She was born in London, the daughter of a Unitarian minister, and brought up in Knutsford, Cheshire by her aunt, also a Unitarian, after her mother died when she was 2 months old. In 1832 she married William Gaskell a Unitarian minister and they lived in Manchester with their children. Elizabeth Gaskell may have had national fame, but members of her husband's congregation were furious at the harsh picture of their life in *Mary Barton* and of an unmarried mother (Ruth) recorded by their minister's wife.

The death of her only son inspired her to write her first novel, *'Mary Barton'*, mentioned above, earning the praise of Charles Dickens and Thomas Carlyle. She went on to write for Charles Dickens, who called her his "dear Scheherazade", in the magazine *'Household Words'* where the comedy of manners that is *Cranford*, her next major work, appeared from 1851-3. This was followed by *Ruth* mentioned above. Her output also includes numerous short stories, tales of mystery, murder and the supernatural, her famous biography of her friend, *'Life of Charlotte Bronte'* (1857), a pioneer work of literary biography, and a further three novels, *'Sylvia's Lovers'* (a historical novel about Whitby), *'Cousin Phyllis'*, a love story set in the Cheshire countryside, and *'North and South'* (1854) set in Manchester, she had almost completed *'Wives and Daughters'* when she suddenly died of heart failure in 1865.

Mrs. Gaskell's works of fiction do not include any mention of Unitarianism by name, but its values are there in both her life and her writing. She influenced much by the theology of Joseph Priestly, another celebrated Unitarian, and her insistence on promoting compassion for suffering was part of her faith, as was the sense of charity that kept her working in the slums until she reached near breakdown point. Her message still speaks to us today. She continues a central figure in the development of the Victorian conscience, not least as a militant person whose authority is based on internal conscience. [That she said she was not a humanitarian referred to her not regarding Jesus as only human and should not be taken to refer to her attitude to the whole human race (Ann Peart).] Her friendships with other "celebrities" of her day remains a pointer to the significance of her work in the context of British intellectual history.

At a time when literacy by ordinary folk was regarded as an impertinence, Mrs. Gaskell speaks through a reforming estate manager: *"We are all born knowing nothing and we can die that way should we chose, ignorance is not a crime but it is a waste and waste is sinful"*.

**Gordon Deaville**

*Thanks to Gaskell Bicentenary Pack by the GA, edited by Rev. Ann Peart for inspiration and information, the calendar of events of The Gaskell Society for the picture, and any others I've missed out.*

## Some Events in the Mrs. Gaskell Bicentenary Year:

**Now Until 29<sup>th</sup> April:** Gaskell Exhibition.

at the Portico Library, Manchester M2 3FF - 0161 236 6785 or [www.theportico.org.uk](http://www.theportico.org.uk)

**14<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> May:** Flower Festival & Victorian Victuals!

at Brook Street Chapel, Knutsford, Cheshire - 10:30am - 5:30 pm except Sunday 1pm - 5:30pm.

Free (donations welcome). Contact Beulah Cornes for more information: 01565 632 673 or [beulahcornes@ntworld.com](mailto:beulahcornes@ntworld.com)

**25<sup>th</sup> September:** Dedication of window in Poet's Corner, Westminster Abbey.

# The Joy of Twitter...

If you were at the service on 14<sup>th</sup> March 2010 then you will have witnessed a first for Essex Church when our visiting speaker, Rev Kathryn Reynolds, tweeted from the pulpit as part of a reflection on the spirituality of technology.

I was very pleased to hear her speak so positively about Twitter as I too have found it to be a wonderful invention and I thought I would write a little something to evangelise about its merits.

In case you haven't heard of Twitter, the basic facts about it are:

- it is a free 'microblogging' service where you can post text messages which are limited to just 140 characters in length.
- by default, these messages are visible to everybody, so (unlike Facebook which is more about staying connected with people you already know) it is like joining in an entirely open worldwide conversation. You can offer your own opinion or reply to others.
- you can search Twitter to find 'tweets' (these short messages) about subjects that you are interested in and then 'follow' any people with whom you have a common interest to automatically view all of their subsequent tweets.

When I first signed up for Twitter, about two years ago, I knew nobody on there and wasn't entirely sure I could see the point of it... however, I stuck with it, and in time I began to make connections with others which made it rather more fun. I 'follow' a number of fellow Unitarians in the UK and around the world, for example, and various people of faith who tweet a few short inspirational quotes each day.

The most joyful experiences I have had on Twitter have occurred since I linked up with a group of lovable eccentrics who are fellow enthusiasts for the Adam and Joe radio show (collectively, we go by the name of 'twitsquadron'). One of the group was inspired to initiate a creative project – and dozens of us who have never actually met collaborated on making a real-world scrapbook of messages for our hero Adam Buxton – which was presented to him in mid-March. (You can see a picture of it online here – I'm so proud! <http://bit.ly/cXWDLr>) Although the 'twitsquadron' group originally connected around a particular interest, Twitter has given us some insight into each other's everyday lives, and over time a few of us have come to celebrate and commiserate with each other about real life's ups and downs as well.

On a more serious note, when it recently came to light that the BBC were threatening to close down their 6Music radio station (home of Adam and Joe and also, in my view, the most diverse and intelligent music station), supporters of the station were quickly mobilised via Twitter. It is a great way to disseminate information and organise campaigns and a real-world protest (of about 500 people) was quickly called and held outside Broadcasting House on 27<sup>th</sup> March.

I sense that a lot of people tend to think that Twitter must be rather a waste of time so I wanted to tell the story of my own experience with Twitter to illustrate how it is possible for worthwhile connections to be formed online and that these virtual relationships can spill over into the 'real world' in all sorts of positive ways. Why not give it a go?

**Jane Blackall**

twitter



## The Spirituality of Twitter

I enjoyed reading a recent article by Frederic Brussat on the Spirituality and Practice website entitled '25 Reasons why Twitter is Spiritual'. Here are a few of the reasons he lists:

- 1) Twitter challenges us to pay attention to what we are doing, to stay awake and totally alert.
- 3) Twitter provides opportunities to connect with others around the world so we can sense how self and world are linked in ever-expanding circles.
- 6) Twitter prods us to find the divine energy of joy in our daily lives and to share it with others.
- 8) Twitter draws out our playfulness and celebrates, in a variety of ways, the holiness of savouring pleasure and the lightness of being.
- 10) Twitter allows us to probe on a daily basis the significance of what we are feeling and thinking: it makes meaning makers of us all.
- 13) Twitter reminds us to share the stories of our lives with other companions on the journey.
- 19) Twitter taps into the enthusiasm that lights up our lives and spreads it around.
- 21) Twitter gives us opportunities to bless others through our affirmations of who they are and what they do.
- 22) Twitter challenges us to be mindful of every word we write and to honour others as best we can.
- 24) Twitter, like koans, mantras, and flash prayers, teaches us that brevity can be a path of rich communication.

I recommend the full article which is available on the website: [www.spiritualityandpractice.com](http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com).

## For More Information on the Save BBC 6Music Campaign:

To add your name to the petition or – more importantly – email the BBC Trust please visit: [www.bbc6music.info](http://www.bbc6music.info)  
For the latest information about the save BBC 6Music campaign: [www.love6music.com](http://www.love6music.com)

## Songs and Silence for the Soul



### Chanting and Stillness at Essex Church

**Sundays 11<sup>th</sup> April, 9<sup>th</sup> May  
13<sup>th</sup> June, from 3.30 to 5.00pm**

**Suggested Donation: £2.00**

We've been running this monthly Songs and Silence group here at Essex Church for over two years now and one of its delightful features is how the group varies from month to month, depending on who comes along.

We always meet on the second Sunday of each month from 3.30 to 5pm. We sing a wide range of chants from the world's faith traditions and sit together in candlelit silence. It's a gentle and healing, group-led space in which everyone is welcome to join. No particular singing skills are needed.

Phone Sarah via the church office on 0207 221 6514 or email [sarah@kensington-unitarians.org.uk](mailto:sarah@kensington-unitarians.org.uk) if you would like more information.

"To be hopeful in bad times is not just foolishly romantic.

It is based on the fact that human history is a history not only of cruelty, but also of compassion, sacrifice, courage, kindness. What we choose to emphasize in this complex history will determine our lives. If we see only the worst, it destroys our capacity to do something.

If we remember those times and places — and there are so many — where people have behaved magnificently, this gives us the energy to act, and at least the possibility of sending this spinning top of a world in a different direction. And if we do act, in however small a way, we don't have to wait for some grand utopian future. The future is an infinite succession of presents, and to live now as we think human beings should live, in defiance of all that is bad around us, is itself a marvellous victory."

**Howard Zinn**

## Sunday Services at Essex Church



### 4<sup>th</sup> April – “Easter Sunday”

**– Service led by David Francis Darling**

Our very own David Francis Darling will be leading the Easter Sunday service at Essex Church this year. This service will be followed by a congregational potluck lunch – come along and bring some food or drink to share – all are welcome.

### 11<sup>th</sup> April – “The Things We Hold Dear”

**– Service led by Members of the Congregation**

This service will be coordinated by Juliet Edwards. Juliet says: “When Jane asked me if I would lead this service I replied that I would be happy to if she wrote/designed it for me. She has come up with the idea of linking it to *“A History of the World in 100 Objects”* in which Neil MacGregor, the director of the British Museum, retells humanity’s history through the objects we have made. Please would you bring to the service an object which is special to you. There will be an opportunity to talk about the item you have brought perhaps to the whole congregation, or maybe in a smaller group. If you don’t feel in the mood for talking just come along and listen.”

### 18<sup>th</sup> April – “A Sense of Mission”

**– Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker**

What does a sense of mission mean for Unitarians? We have no particular creed to offer, no single ‘truth’ that we believe can save our world. Yet through the pursuit of justice and through dialogues of faith we have the wherewithal to transform our lives. This service will link in with the congregational growth workshop that we are holding afterwards.

### 25<sup>th</sup> April – “A Charter for Compassion”

**– Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker**

In November last year Karen Armstrong launched a Charter for Compassion, created by a multi-national and multi-cultural group of thinkers. They describe the Charter as “a summons to creative, practical and sustained action to meet the political, moral, religious, social and cultural problems of our time”. What message might this have for our individual lives and the life of our church community?