



Kensington Unitarians

Newsletter: March 2013

What's On...

Sunday 3rd March, 11am-noon
'Necessary Desires'
Service led by David Francis Darling

Tuesday 5th March, 12.30-1.30pm
Nia Technique with Sonya Leite

Thursday 7th March, 7.00-8.00pm
'Heart and Soul' Spiritual Gathering
'Circles' – led by Sarah Tinker

Sunday 10th March, 11am-noon
'Know Thyself'
Led by Rev. Frank Walker & Sarah T

Sunday 10th March, 12.30pm
Small-Group Communion
Led by David Francis Darling

Sunday 10th March, 2.00-3.00pm
Nia Technique with Sonya Leite

Monday 11th March, 7.00-9.00pm
'Rediscovering the Bible'
Bible-reading with David and Jane

Friday 15th March, meeting 9.30am
Outing to Avebury Stone Circle

Saturday 16th March, 10am-4.30pm
Worship Studies Course (1/4)

Sunday 17th March, 11am-noon
'Writing it Down'
Led by Sarah T & Rev Elizabeth Birtles

Sunday 17th March, 12.30-1.15pm
'Finding Our Voice'
Singing Workshop with Margaret

Sunday 24th March, 11am-noon
'Evolutionary Spirituality'
Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 24th March, 1pm – 4pm
Equinox Walk:
London Wetland Centre

Tuesday 26th March, 7.00-9.00pm
100th Reading Group:
'Leaving Alexandria'

Thursday 28th March, 7-8.00pm
Tenebrae Service
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 31st March, 11am-noon
'Easter Sunday'
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 31st March, 12.30-2.00pm
Congregational Potluck Lunch

Date for Your Diary:

Sunday 19th May - **Essex Church AGM**

A Message from our Minister:

Chance to Be Helpful...

"Give someone a chance to be helpful to you today" said the poster in the new age book shop. The illustration showed an angel helping an overloaded shopper with her shopping bags and in the background someone was changing a flat tyre on someone else's bicycle. It got us talking about all the people who'd helped us out in life – paying a bus fare, stopping to help when I'd tripped over in the street, a steady stream of people over the years who've helped to push cars that wouldn't start. What about you? Are there particular times when people have helped you that come instantly to mind? Such times may be the dramatic moments of life – the accidents and incidents, missed transport, lost children, wallets, suitcases and the like. But even on the ordinary days there are people surprisingly willing to help out – carrying heavy cases up the steps in the Tube station, holding open doors, stopping to let you cross in a queue of traffic. Some people in some circumstances are remarkably swift at spotting that help is needed. But most of us are not mind readers and most of our needs are not immediately obvious to outsiders. People may be willing to help, but most of us need to be asked.



...Chance to Be Helped

It isn't easy to ask for help. We don't want to be a nuisance. We perhaps fear people saying 'no' to our request. But if we overcome these hurdles we become part of a wondrous circle of reciprocity, where people help and are helped, according to their needs and their resources at that time. The person helping out gets to feel useful. And if we allow people to help us we are admitting that sometimes we are needy and vulnerable – a real human being, just like everybody else.

There's a poster outside the church at the moment that says "church is a place where you get to practice what it is to be human" and I reckon that our Kensington Unitarians community is a perfect place to practice asking for helping and offering it. It's also a great place to get more involved in community, at a level that's right for you. So keep filling our rotas for greeting, stewarding and making drinks, have a think if there's a particular project you'd like to organise – a social event maybe, collecting for a charity you support or taking part in leading our small group worship. Come and have a chat if you've thought of a good way to be helpful to others and remember Essex Church's resources are here to help you as well as our wider world.

Rev. Sarah Tinker

In this month's newsletter...

* 'One Hundred Books – Celebrating Ten Years of our Reading Engagement Group' *
Equinox Walk – Wetland Centre * FUSE – Festival of Unitarians in the South East
* 'Assisted Dying & the Advance Directive' by Stephanie Saville * 'Fated' by John Hands *
'Winter Walking Weekend' by Carol Sheppard * Responses to our 'Art Meditations' Course
* 'A Sound for Sore Ears' by Mark Tribe * Hucklow Summer School 2013 * 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.



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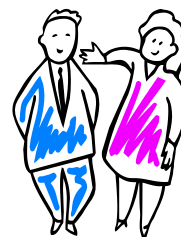
Congregational Lunch

Easter Sunday 31st March, 12.30pm



Our next congregational lunch will be after the service on Easter Sunday. Annie Fowler will be wielding a sign-up sheet over the next few weeks so you can let her know what food or drink you are planning to bring along to share. Thank you!

Volunteering Rotas: Stewarding, Coffee and Greeting

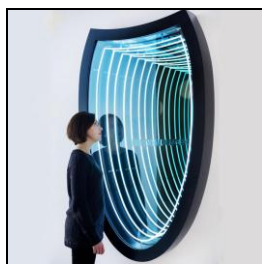


A Kensington Unitarians Cultural Outing:

'Light Show'

Friday 5th April, 6.00-9.00pm

Hayward Gallery, Southbank Centre, London SE1 8XX



Natasha Drennan is organising an outing to this popular exhibition at the Hayward Gallery. Please get in touch with her if you plan to come along or would like to know more: tash_drennan@hotmail.com / 07551 250 049.

It is essential to book in advance as the exhibition is very popular and selling out each day. It would be advisable to get tickets (£11) for the last slot of the day, 6-7pm, if you want to come along and then we can all go round together.

To find out more visit the Hayward Gallery website:
www.southbankcentre.co.uk/whatson/light-show-69759

Stewarding:

3 rd March:	Gina Bayley
10 th March:	Natasha Drennan
17 th March:	Heidi Ferid
24 th March:	David Darling
31 st March:	Michaela von Britzke

Coffee:

3 rd March:	Ann Mamak
10 th March:	Margaret Darling
17 th March:	Caroline Blair
24 th March:	Sue Smith
31 st March:	Liz Tuckwell / David Talbot

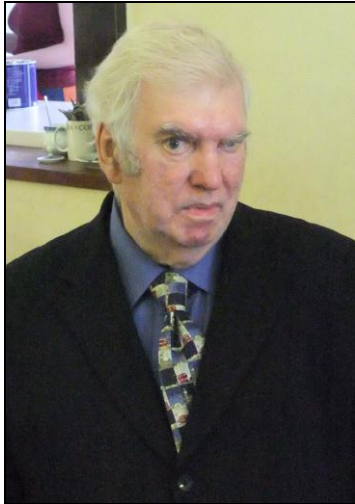
Greeting:

3 rd March:	Jo Ridgers
10 th March:	Veronica Needa
17 th March:	Carol Sheppard
24 th March:	Gisela Boehnisch
31 st March:	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

Gordon Deaville



We are sorry to let people know that Gordon Deaville, member of our congregation and known to people throughout our movement, died in February after a long period of poor health and having to be in and out of hospital.

Gordon moved to Caterham a few years ago and so had not been able to join us on Sundays as often as he wanted to, but he had kept in touch by phone and email. Gordon was a keen member of the Unitarian Christian Association and would always try to get to the General Assembly meetings each year, where he enjoyed meeting up with old friends from around the country.

In many ways an intensely private man, Gordon nevertheless enjoyed communicating with others, especially through his writing. His annual Christmas letters were always packed with interesting information about what he'd been up to in the previous year. He was a founder member of the Kensal Rise youth drama group and theatre was always one of his passions. He also enjoyed history and literature and was a supporter of the George Eliot Society.

We are sending our condolences to Gordon's brother John and his wife Jacqui and his much loved nephews and nieces, whose careers he followed with much interest. Our thoughts also go out to Gordon's loyal friends Judith and Davyd.

Rev. Sarah Tinker

Funeral Arrangements

Gordon Deaville's funeral will be held at 1.30pm on Monday 4th March in the "Dissenter's Chapel" in Kensal Green cemetery. Rev. Alex Bradley and our own Rev. Sarah Tinker will be leading the service. Please let Sarah know if you are planning to attend in case there are any last minute changes.

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

'Heart and Soul' Midweek Spiritual Gatherings



Thursday 7th March 2013 from 7-8pm

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

*"Somewhere a circle of hands will open to receive us,
eyes will light up as we enter" – Starhawk*

In January 2013 we held the first of our 'Heart and Soul' spiritual gatherings, which will take place on the first Thursday evening of each month, for new and alternative forms of Unitarian worship. They are going well and we are looking forward to the next one!

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 decided to try and rectify the situation... and it all came 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 service on 7th March will be coordinated by Sarah Tinker and has the theme 'Circles'. With words and music, body prayer and stillness, do get in touch if you would like to take an active part in leading this evening.

Circles

*The moon is most happy When it is full.
And the sun always looks Like a perfectly minted gold coin
That was just Polished And placed in flight By God's playful Kiss.*

*And so many varieties of fruit Hang plump and round
From branches that seem like a Sculptor's hands.
I see the beautiful curve of a pregnant belly Shaped by a soul within,*

*And the Earth itself, And the planets and the Spheres
I have taken the hint: There is something about circles The Beloved likes.
Hafiz, Within the Circle of a Perfect One There is an Infinite Community
Of Light.*

HAFIZ, the Great Sufi Master

Worship Leaders' Practice Group



The second meeting of the Essex Church Worship Leaders' Practice Group took place after the service on 24th February. Eight of us spent a couple of hours looking at each of the elements of our Sunday service and asking 'What is it for?'

We had a very enjoyable meeting and a deep conversation about these aspects of worship. The following notes will perhaps give you a flavour of just a few of the things we talked about.

Opening Words:

- First point of connection
- Introduce who we are
- Establish safety of space
- Helping others to feel explicitly welcomed
- Acknowledge diversity of how people are as they arrive

Chalice Lighting:

- Links us to other Unitarian communities worldwide
- Metaphor for the one light shared by all faiths

Candles of Joy and Concern:

- Builds relationship and sense of community
- Group praying in support of people and issues named
- A momentous step when someone first decides to light one
- We are all human and this lets us connect with the divine

Time of Prayer and Reflection:

- A moment of public pastoral prayer
- Comforting and holding those in need / reflecting on life
- Going deeper (a sense that 'worship starts here')

Musical Interlude:

- Healing vibration
- A sung prayer – more explicitly spiritual – not performance

Sermon:

- Conveys a message
- Stimulates expanded thinking
- Teaching, preaching, prophecy – a call to action/transformation
- Inspires – connects with another's passion
- Food for the soul – a spiritual experience
- A sense of giving to the congregation
- Builds connection to self and divine

The WLPG will be meeting again in a few months and many of our regular worship leaders will also be participating in the Worship Studies Course, which begins in March, along with over 30 others from throughout the district and beyond.

Jane Blackall

Research into Spiritual & Religious Experience

Call for Participants by Niall Doherty

Are you interested in participating in research into spiritual and religious experience? If so, read on...

I am conducting a small-scale research project, the purpose of which is to investigate spiritual and religious experience and belief, particularly in relation to God and the transcendent, within the Unitarian community.

The project is entitled: 'Exploring the borderland between religion and spirituality in relation to God and the transcendent in the Unitarian Church: individuality in fellowship.' The project is part of my studies on the MA Psychology of Religion programme at Heythrop College, University of London.

To participate please answer the following 3 questions:

1. Please select one or more from a list of theological 'labels' that you feel best describes you (e.g. Unitarian, Christian, humanist, New Age etc.)
2. Please elaborate on your choice(s) in the context of 'religion' and 'spirituality' (as you understand these terms). Please include details of your religious/spiritual upbringing/background.
3. Have you ever felt or been conscious of a presence or power, whether you call it God or not, which may have appeared to be either beyond your individual self or partly, or even entirely, within your own being? Please write an account of your feelings and experience.

If you would like to have your voice heard then please contact me for full details (nialldohe@hotmail.com) or speak to me after the service at Essex Church on Sunday. **Completed responses must be in by 15th April 2013.**

All responses will be treated confidentially and anonymously. I would be most grateful for your participation in this research. Many thanks, **Niall Doherty**

District Association (LDPA) AGM

**Saturday 23rd March, from 1.30pm
Mansford Street, Bethnal Green**

The Annual General Meeting of the London and South East District Association of Unitarian Churches will be held in Bethnal Green so as to offer a chance to visit this historic chapel and to celebrate its new use as base for the Simple Gifts social action project. This meeting will also include an important discussion and vote on proposed changes to the objects section of the district constitution. All are welcome.



A Fitness Fusion of 9 Movement Forms

Second Sunday of the Month from 2-3pm:
10th March, 14th April, 12th May 2013

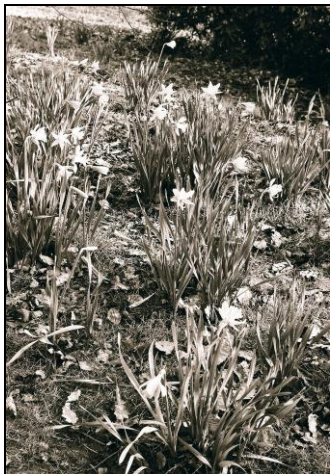
Also a weekly class each Tuesday
lunchtime from 12.30-1.30pm

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

Cost £10 (£5 to members of church congregation).

Contact: Sonya Leite on 0207 371 1674.

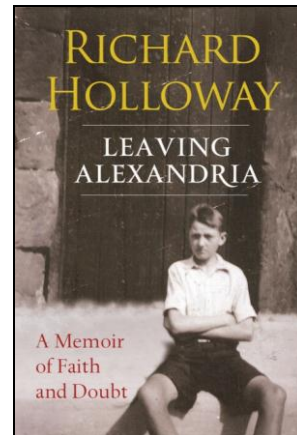
Fated



"I love them so much!" you used to say
Smiling at those we met on our way;
Then with a laugh you quickly turned:
"Y'know, I'd like these to grow from my urn."
Naturally I remonstrated
Dreading you might be so fated.
Now decades later far from home
I trudge past daffodils on my own.

John Hands
(photograph by Heidi Ferid)

Essex Church 100th Reading Group 'Leaving Alexandria' by Richard Holloway



Tuesday 26th March 2013, 7.00-9.00pm

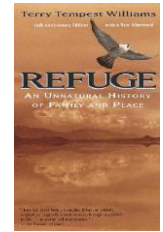
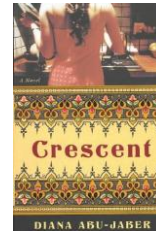
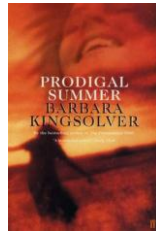
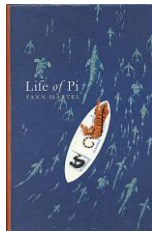
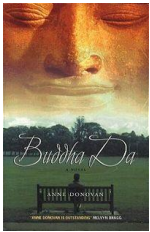
The reading group's February session will be based on 'Leaving Alexandria' by Richard Holloway which was suggested by Jane Blackall. This will be – amazingly – the 100th title discussed by the reading group since it started up nearly ten years ago.

More information from Amazon:

"In one of the most remarkable memoirs of recent years, the acclaimed writer, respected thinker and outspoken former bishop Richard Holloway takes us back through a life defined by the biggest questions: Who am I? And what is God? At the tender age of fourteen, Richard Holloway left his home in the Vale of Leven, north of Glasgow, and travelled hundreds of miles to be educated and trained for the priesthood by a religious order in an English monastery. It was an intense, cloistered education for an impressionable young man. By twenty-five he had been ordained and was working in the slums of Glasgow. Throughout the forty years that followed, Richard touched the lives of many people in the Church and in the wider community. But behind his confident public face lay a restless, unquiet heart and a constantly searching mind. How can anyone claim a complete understanding of the mystery of existence? Why is the Church, which claims to be the instrument of God's love, so prone to cruelty and condemnation? And how can a man live with the tension between public faith and private doubt? In his long-awaited memoir, Richard seeks to answer these questions and to explain how, after many crises of faith, he finally and painfully left the Church. It is a wise, poetic and fiercely honest book. As a portrait of an inner life plagued by doubt, it is unsurpassed."

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



One Hundred Books – A Celebration

Ten Years of our Reading Engagement Group at Essex Church

Looking back at the 100 books we have tackled over the last ten years, I feel proud of our reading group, which I founded with support from our much-missed friend Patricia Walker-Hesson back in 2003. This was one of the first engagement groups set up in the UK – from day one it was our intention that this would be more than just another book group – and to this day we do our best to keep it a safe and gentle space where participants commit to careful speaking and listening in a spirit of curiosity and respect. One thing I particularly love about these sessions is the way in which participants get to know each other more deeply as we find ourselves talking about matters raised in the books which wouldn't necessarily come up over tea after the Sunday service. It has been quite a commitment to read a book and attend a session (almost!) every month, but this regularity has its own rewards, and I am glad that we have stuck at it all this time. I hope to welcome more new people to join us as we begin our next hundred!

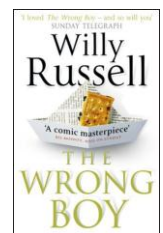
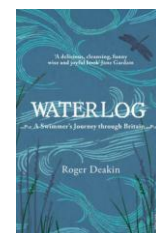
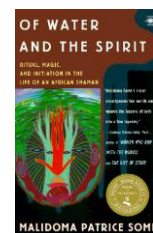
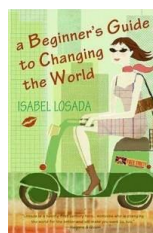
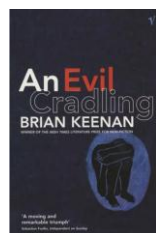
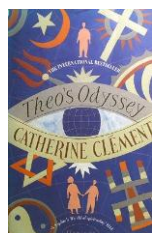
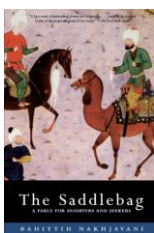
Jane Blackall

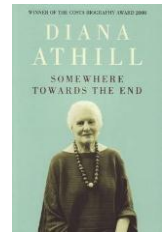
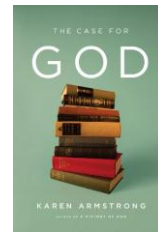
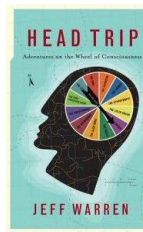
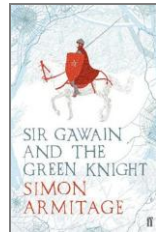
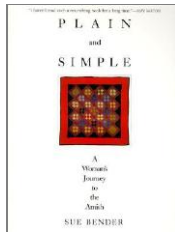
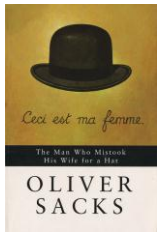
I've attended the reading engagement group almost from its beginning in 2003. I haven't read all the book choices but I have read a good many of them. There is a tension between finding time to pursue one's own book choices and the desire to read the book group selection. For this reason we have recently agreed to select shorter books – around the 300 page limit. I do also feel that I have benefitted from reading books that I thought would be interesting but that I was glad to have an extra push to get into. There was one summer holidays when we selected Philip Pullman's 'His Dark Materials' trilogy. It wasn't really my kind of book but I was pleased to read it and find out what its fascination was. Another book that I was glad to be guided towards was Hilary Mantel's 'Wolf Hall'. It takes quite an effort to be aware of all that is going on in that manipulative period of history. I learned a whole new point of view when I read 'Quiet: The Power of Introverts' by Susan Cain and I often hear it referred to on the radio or in the press. I loved Simon Armitage's poetic translation of 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight'. Two novels that I chose were 'Saturday' by Ian McEwan and 'The Namesake' by Jhumpa Lahiri, both engaging stories that I would still recommend.

Juliet Edwards

For someone who reads a lot, I am not 'a great reader'. I like an easy read: 'The Week' magazine; newspapers; light non-fiction; Harry Potter. I have often looked with dismay at the reading group choices, reflecting that they might involve some effort, or even some discomfort. Perversely, this even applies to my own choices. Faced with the prospect of offering three choices to the group, I groan internally and force myself to read three books that may not at all be what I would normally be reading. But often, not always, but often enough to be worthwhile, this has led to me reading something genuinely memorable and engrossing. Particular mention to: Brian Keenan's 'an Evil Cradling', which I thought looked depressing, but turned out to be beautifully written and full of hope and courage; Carol Ann Duffy's collection of poems 'The World's Wife', which was funny, touching and beautifully written; Simon Armitage's 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight', which proved that fourteenth century poetry can still be riveting; Karen Armstrong's 'The Case for God', which I would NEVER have tackled, but which I read out loud to my family over a couple of weeks in Swaziland, so that it became almost a daily meditation; Hilary Mantel's 'Wolf Hall', which looks (and is) long and dense, but which blazes with cinematic intensity; and Barbara Demick's account of life in North Korea, 'Nothing to Envy', which, like Brian Keenan's book, looks too depressing to appeal to me after a day's work, but which led me to introduce the subject of North Korea into (it seemed) every conversation for the next month.

Caroline Blair





At the age of 7 I started work as a volunteer at my local library and I've been a bit of a book obsessive ever since. I can feel all tingly just walking into a library or book shop and browsing an online retailer's website (who shall no longer be named until they start paying their taxes like the rest of us) is one of life's guilty pleasures. So it is with some delight that I skim through the list of 100 book titles on our church website, chosen by our reading group's members over the last 10 years. I've read 49 of those 100 books, though not all of them with the book group. It's noticeable that most of my favourites from that list, and most of my choices for the group, are non-fiction titles and are written by men. Here's a list of 6 favourites:

'Waterlog' by Roger Deakin – who comes across as a thoroughly intriguing and warm person with a love of swimming in Britain's wild places. He writes so fondly of the open air pool at Hathersage in the Peak District, a most glorious setting for an outdoor, swimming pool, swim

'An Evil Cradling' by Brian Keenan – in which he tells of over four gruelling years spent as a hostage in Beirut and describes the joys of friendship with fellow captive John McCarthy

'The Diving Bell and the Butterfly' by Jean Dominique Bauby – an account written by someone who could move only one eyelid and who tells us of his experiences with 'locked in syndrome' after a brain haemorrhage

'The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat' by Oliver Sacks – a writer whose work I have long appreciated as he introduces neuroscience so compellingly to everyday readers

'Of Water and the Spirit' by Malidoma Patrice Some – a member of the Dagara tribe of Burkina Faso, given a Western education by Jesuit missionaries and now working as a mediator between these two cultures. In this, his biography, he writes of the Dagara's fascinating spiritual beliefs and practices and his journey to understand his own role in life.

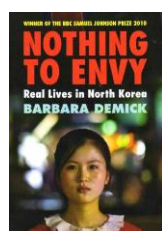
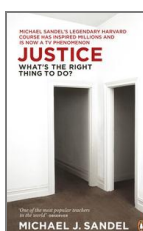
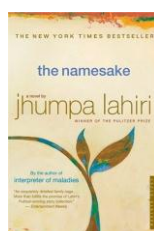
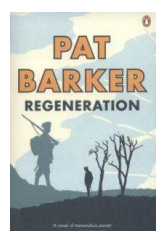
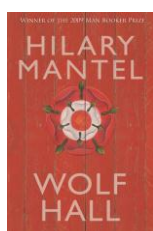
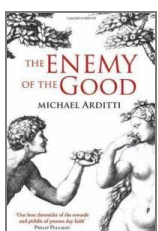
'Touching The Void' by Joe Simpson – in which he recounts a ghastly mountaineering accident where he is left for dead in a crevasse in the Andes, but lives to tell the tale.

If I try to find a link between these books it's perhaps that they are all well written and all deal in some way with extreme experiences in life that most of us will never have to face. I've used extracts from all of them at some time in services, because they convey something of the human spirit's ability to transcend suffering and find meaning and purpose in the most grim of circumstances. Ultimately I'd say they all celebrate life as an amazing and unpredictable adventure.

But looking again at the list of 100 titles, if I had to choose just one favourite book, it would be a novel written by a woman – **'Silas Marner' by George Eliot**. This is such a touching story of wrongful accusation, misery and loneliness, misunderstood illness, attachment first to the wrong thing, gold, and then to the right thing, love of another. Silas awakens at last to that which is of true value in life and is rewarded, whilst at least some of the baddies get their just desserts. George Eliot returns again and again in this novel to images of darkness and light and at the end Silas says: "Since the time the child was sent to me and I've come to love her as myself, I've had light enough to trusten by; and now she says she'll never leave me, I think I shall trusten till I die." A happy ending – what can be more satisfying than that!

Rev. Sarah Tinker

Why not give the reading group a go in 2013? Our hundredth book, 'Leaving Alexandria' by Richard Holloway, is a cracking read on the themes of faith and doubt. Come along and join us on Tuesday 26th March for conversation and celebration of this milestone.



Equinox Walk: London Wetland Centre

After the service on Sunday 24th March, 1pm



Continuing our series of quarterly walks, have a think about joining us on Sunday 24th March, for a gentle walk to celebrate the spring equinox. We will head off after the service to the London Wetland Centre in Barnes. Please note that there are entry fees to access the nature reserve. For more information see www.wwt.org.uk/visit/london

Please let Sarah or Caroline know if you plan to come.

‘Kanjoos – The Miser’ at Stratford Circus from 7th-9th March



Our very own Antony Bunsee is on tour in this production at the moment and there will be a chance for us to see him in action when it returns to Stratford Circus in East London for a few days in early March.

Moliere’s classic comedy Kanjoos (Hindi for “miser”) is transported from 17thC France to modern India. In the money-mad maelstrom of modern Mumbai lurks Harjinder makhi choos (“flea-sucking miser”) - a man obsessed with hoarding his wealth according to Gandhian principles of relentless self-sacrifice. He hates spending money, whether on his household or his children, who are desperate for marriage and the fashionable Bollywood life-style of Mumbai.

A few of us are going along on Friday 8th March. Seating is unreserved so if you want to come you can book your ticket independently and we can sit together on the night. Tickets are £12. To book visit www.stratford-circus.com or call 0844 357 2625.

Jane Blackall



*An afternoon of delight & surprise!
A performance of improvisational theatre on the theme of*

Our Living Stories

Sunday 21st April here at Essex Church



Programme:

12.30pm	Bring Lunch to Share
2pm	Welcome to the Performance
4pm	Tea Time! And then goodbyes...

Since its beginnings in 2006, London’s own Chinese-led True Heart Theatre has been regularly performing Playback Theatre on the third Sunday of each month in a variety of venues as our service to the community. Our events have created an opportunity for people from all cultures, across generations and languages, to meet each other through a heart-full exchange of real-life stories and experiences.

Today we invite you to join us here at Essex Church for another afternoon of surprise and delight! You are welcome to come for lunch from 12.30pm... or come just for the performance from 2pm. And of course, stay for tea!

Cost: By Donation. Email: truehearttheatre@gmail.com for more info and to let us know to expect you.

Veronica Needa

‘Sometimes I feel overwhelmed. But I try to work one day at a time. If we just worry about the big picture, we are powerless. So my secret is to start right away doing whatever little work I can do. I try to give joy to one person in the morning, and remove the suffering of one person in the afternoon. That’s enough.

When you see you can do that, you continue, and you give two little joys, and you remove two little sufferings, then three, and then four. If you and your friends do not despise the small work, a million people will remove a lot of suffering. That is the secret. Start right now.’

Sister Chân Không, Vietnamese Buddhist

One Light Spiritual Gatherings 'Divine Revelation'

Friday 8th March 2013
6.30-8.15pm – Here at Essex Church



The gatherings are led by graduates of the Interfaith Seminary.

Join with us in healing connection to Spirit.

A central part of the service will be a profound meditation based on the universal teachings of Dr. Susan Shumsky author of *How to Hear the Voice of God*. After spending 20 years in the Ashram of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, practising deep Transcendental Meditation Susan says that she woke up one day and realised that she was not a spiritual i.e. kind, loving, generous person. What was missing was the experience of God's beloved presence and God's "still small voice." She then discovered a form of meditation she calls Divine Revelation which allowed her to make contact with the personal God of her understanding and to have experiences of Direct Guidance from the Divine Source of All. Our meditation will take us on a similar transformative journey completed by sharing our experiences with another.

Come and enjoy as we gather in healing and loving connection to Spirit. Come help us create a sacred space, bringing in the One Light, One Love for which we all long - with silence, music, spiritual transformation journey, and eternal inspiration from all faiths and none. Bring your beloved eternal self, your family and friends.

Forthcoming Gatherings:

12th April - Gaia; 10th May - Fr/Enemies; 14th June - Symbolism

*These events are free. Donations for expenses are welcome.
Any surplus will go to Essex Unitarian Church*

The Inquirer and Unitarian Please Take a FREE Copy!

As a congregation we have a subscription for the fortnightly Inquirer newspaper and the monthly Unitarian newsletter and are happy for members, friends and visitors to take a copy for free from the table in the foyer. These publications are a good way to keep in touch with our national movement and to find out more about Unitarian activities and issues.

2020 Congregational Development Programme

The 2020 Congregational Development Programme aims to bring Unitarianism to lots more people across Britain.

We are the lucky ones – we know about the joys of being a Unitarian. There are so many out there who should have the same chance. There are so many out there who would like to know what Unitarianism has to offer. There are so many out there who would love to be a part of this faith, its community, its social action.

2020 hopes to bring a vibrancy to the Unitarian message. We have a purpose and a movement to be proud of. We should share this far and wide. We can grow.

The 2020 Congregational Development Programme 2020 supports locally-initiated efforts to create new and to renew existing congregations.

The 2020 website has just been launched and gives people a chance to sign up as supporters. There are already some Kensington names on the list - why not have a look and add yours? www.2020unitarian.org

Small Group Communion



**Sunday 10th March, 14th April, 12th May
at 12.30pm Down in the Church Library**

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

10th March – Led by David Francis Darling

14th April – Led by Tristan Jovanović

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

FUSE 2013 – Festival of Unitarians in the South East



A weekend in a hotel in Worthing in early February with 95 Unitarians may not be everybody's cup of tea but it felt a real treat to me. From our first walk on the sea front, watching a beautiful sunset, to the cold and wet departure back to London on Sunday afternoon, I'd been inspired and warmed by the company of others. Many were old friends but it was good to see new faces too and to hear new stories over the meal tables. The workshop schedule was more relaxed than last year and there was plenty of time to sit and chat in the lounge. Jane Blackall and I ran a workshop on Ritual, which 32 people attended. I think we did Kensington Unitarians proud – several people told me it was a workshop that really got them thinking about worship in their congregations, which was what we'd hoped to achieve. The workshop's main point was that everything that we do can be considered as ritual and that it is valuable to be aware of the, oft times unconscious, symbolism of what takes place in worship. Jane talked about our monthly small group communion services and gave people an example script to take away with them.

Early on Sunday morning I ran a session of Songs and Silence for the Soul, 15 people came to sing and we achieved some impressive three-part harmonies. Sunday morning was my favourite part of the weekend. After chanting before breakfast I went to a workshop on Being and Breath led by ministry student Jo James, who is originally from our Brixton congregation. We were in a room overlooking the wild grey sea and could feel the wind battering at the windows as we concentrated on breathing and connecting with ourselves and one another. Reading a poem aloud in unison was remarkably moving. Later that morning, and in the same room, a small group of us were given a lovely experience by Ashley Jones who led a session of her Rest Stop yoga, which involved some gentle stretches followed by a long guided visualisation. Ashley runs similar sessions at our Islington, New Unity, congregation on Monday evening, open to all. FUSE stands for a Festival of Unitarianism in the South East and is organised by our London and South East District Association (the LDPA). Its main purpose is to bring people together and to share our inspiration with one another. Thanks to the hard working organisers, who deserved their rounds of applause, I think this third annual weekend away was a success. We'll let everyone know when another similar weekend is planned and encourage even more Kensington Unitarians to join us.

Rev. Sarah Tinker

Even at the best planned functions, there can be unexpected moments of serendipity. The FUSE team had arranged a good mix for the Saturday night: we would walk over to the pleasant Methodist church across the green, watch Robin Ince's talk - part stand-up comedy, part polemic, part lecture, part self-revealing moral appeal; then The Rev Bill Darlison would bring the focus back to his unique take on passionate spirituality in an evening service. No one would have guessed that they would use the exact same reading as a centrepiece. But there we were, with Dennis Potter's near-death interview, reflecting on how his terminal prognosis affected his view of the world:

That nowness becomes so vivid to me now, that in a perverse sort of way, I'm almost serene, I can celebrate life. Below my window, for example, the blossom is out in full. It's a plum tree. It looks like apple blossom, but it's white. And instead of saying, 'Oh, that's nice blossom, looking at it through the window when I'm writing, it is the whitest, frothiest, blossomiest blossom that there ever could be.

Things are both more trivial than they ever were, and the difference between the trivial and the important doesn't seem to matter -- but the nowness of everything is absolutely wondrous.

As Bill pointed out, outliving his own terminal diagnosis by many years (to the great benefit of the world at large) has inevitably led to a reversion to the ordinary. It is probably not possible for many of us to see spring blossom with the intensity of someone who knows he is seeing it for the last time, and then to do the same next year, and the year after that. But as Robin Ince tried to persuade us, we can certainly try. And (although the weather was challenging) it was good to receive that combined message by the Sussex coast and not just before returning to work: I was able to walk along the beach (huge, with the tide far out, under a grey and turbulent sky) and see that the stones were the stoniest stones, the waves were the splashiest waves, the occasional dogs were the doggiest dogs and the salt spray was the saltiest and coldest spray in the world. How easy it is simply to stop observing the world round us, and how important it was to be reminded.

Caroline Blair



FUSE 2013 – Festival of Unitarians in the South East



I was encouraged to attend FUSE by a friend from the Unitarian Women's Group who said that it would be fun and that quite a lot of my UWG friends would also be attending. And so it was on both accounts.

First though I should explain how delighted I was by Worthing in the winter time. The Chatsworth Hotel where we stayed was about 100 yards from the sea front and having found my room I went out for a walk, along the pier and then stopped off at the pier café for tea. The tide was out and the remaining puddles in the sand reflected a sunset full of nostalgia.

After dinner we were welcomed to FUSE by Rev. David Usher. This was my least comfortable time as the hymns were projected onto a screen which was too low for those of us at the back of the room to see. The rest of the evening was spent in talking with friends and meeting with new folk.

On Saturday I attended Heidi Ferid's Drawing as a Spiritual Practice class and painted an icon of the Virgin Mary – I've never tried that before! After that I went to Acoustic Spirit which was about using music in the folk tradition in worship and in particular about how holding concerts has kept Billingshurst chapel open.

I went for a longer walk on Saturday afternoon, finishing at another excellent café – I wish I had kept its name! In the evening we had a talk/performance by Robin Ince, who had been the keynote speaker last year too. The talk was delivered with lots of enthusiasm and a great many digressions from the topic, which was Charles Darwin and how he was constantly fascinated by nature and how it all worked (especially how he tested to see if earthworms responded to the sound of the bassoon and when they didn't he thought perhaps they would prefer the sound of the flute?) This was followed by a full worship service led by the Rev Bill Darlison. I remember especially how touching it was in the sermon to hear him refer to his own experience of being close to death from cancer (ten years ago).

We heard from Bill again on Sunday morning when he spoke about the elements – earth, air, fire and water and also our signs of the zodiac and how we show aspects of these in our personalities. I didn't necessarily agree but it was fun filling out his questionnaire. The conference finished after lunch. I had enjoyed myself and met people from other congregations as well as meeting with old friends. I think a lot of credit is due to David Usher for initiating FUSE which has become a lively and well attended event.

Juliet Edwards

My sister suggested to me that we go to the FUSE weekend and I counter suggested that we should go for the day to dip our toes in the water rather than jump in at the deep end. So we ended up going for Saturday.

My first workshop was Drawing as a Spiritual Practice. This was a practical and very enjoyable session. Some of the participants, myself included, hadn't painted or drawn for years but we were all encouraged to have a go. It was really fascinating seeing what people produced and the time went all too quickly.

The second one was Eco Spirituality, which was obviously a popular topic. It was made even more enjoyable by an interesting PowerPoint presentation and a lively debate.

The last workshop I attended was Unitarianism Plus. This looked at a suggested framework for practising your faith. It was a very interesting topic and gave me much to think about.

I enjoyed my first experience of FUSE and think I will try to go for the whole weekend next year as I realise that you do miss out on a lot if you only go for the day.

Liz Tuckwell

A weekend in a comfortable hotel and a room overlooking a patch of green in Worthing by the sea, among ever so compatible people, all bent on showing how tolerant and inclusive they are, it was all very relaxing. Maybe too much so. Great influx from North America. Instructive, stimulating, fiery – I leave that to others to comment. Needless to say our own dear members Heidi, Jane, Sarah excelled. And Bill Darlison, whose suggestion that folk attending his pre-conference on the Zodiac actually read Mark's gospel in preparation only reached listeners when they arrived at the lecture. Some of us need to do some preparation and reading around the subject under discussion. But. Joy unconfined! Thanks to the Hibbert Trust who paid for them to attend – YOUNG PEOPLE. Not school leavers, but already holding qualifications, Ministerial Trainees, the hope of the future, mature and professional. Even if we do have to sell a few buildings the Quakers always make us welcome and with the help of recorded music small groups find great satisfaction in coming together and perhaps forming the nucleus for a church of the future.

Stephanie Saville



Photographs by Jane Blackall (1) and James Barry (2-4)

Tenebrae Service

Maundy Thursday 28th March at 7pm
in the library downstairs at Essex Church



This small group worship focuses on the themes of Holy Week and the events leading to Jesus' death on the cross. Tenebrae means shadows or darkness in Latin. We will meet in candle light and hear a series of readings taken mainly from the Gospels.

Readings will be interspersed with music, including a Taizé chant, and the candles are extinguished one by one until we are left in darkness and slowly and silently leave the room. The themes of Easter-time – betrayal, confusion, anguish, despair, humiliation, death – are often avoided or hidden in our modern society. Yet there is strength to be found in sitting with the unpalatable, as witnesses to that which is.

It would be good to have a number of people actively involved, so do get in touch if you would like to be one of the readers. There is a chant from the Taizé community that people might like to practice beforehand – “bleibet hier” – based on Jesus' moving request to his followers in the Garden of Gethsemane “stay here and keep watch with me”. If you have access to the Internet you can listen to many chants from Taizé in their separate parts and all together. It's an easy way to learn a new chant – this link should take you directly to “bleibet hier”.

www.taize.fr/spip.php?page=chant&song=254&lang=en

Rev. Sarah Tinker

Good Cause Collection of the Month:

Send a Child to Hucklow

Collection on Sunday 24th March



‘Send a Child to Hucklow’ is a Trust to arrange and administer holidays at the Unitarian Holiday Centre, Great Hucklow, Derbyshire for groups of disadvantaged children, having no regard to religious, political, racial and other considerations.

“SACH” offers Monday to Friday holiday breaks for groups of up to about 25 children within about a 4-year age-spread, and aged between 8 - 15 years, together with 4 or 5 Leaders. The children are selected from various agencies such as the Family Service Units, Women's Refuges, Social Service Departments, Schools, Community Associations, Congregations. The only condition is that the children selected would not otherwise have a holiday.

Although this charity was chosen some time ago, we have just heard that Gordon Deaville requested that his friends make donations to Send a Child to Hucklow instead of sending flowers to his funeral, so perhaps you might like to make a special donation in Gordon's memory.

For more information see: www.sendachildtohucklow.org.uk

Previous Charity Collections:

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

December – ‘Sightsavers’ - £182.47
January 2013 – ‘Trinity Hospice’ – £117.14
February – ‘Azafady’ (Madagascan Charity) – £157.36



‘Painting the Spring’

An Art Workshop with Heidi Ferid
Sunday 28th April, 12.30-2.30pm

This will be a fun workshop. No previous experience or special skills are required. As a source of inspiration I will bring spring flowers and some paintings by different artists. You will be encouraged to paint or draw your own personal impressions of spring. Painting and drawing materials will be provided. All are welcome – speak to Heidi Ferid for more information.



Art Meditations

Responses to our January Course



What a great idea, Jane! I came for two sessions. What I liked most of all was the timed silence and of working, in community, with a huge range of art materials. Heavenly! It was so good to see new faces too so something has really hit the spot I think. I found the sessions incredibly soothing and calming. Meditative, in fact!

In the first session I chose two cards, from a pile, with a picture on one and a word on the other and was then set free to work in any way I wanted to with a vast range of paper and art materials for a whole hour. The only real rule was to not speak. I chose to make my own interpretation of the picture on the card but I could've used it in any way I wanted to; as inspiration or not used to have it at all. I liked the image and as I didn't have any clear ideas of how I wanted to work that day it was really useful to be given some guidance.

In the second session I attended the task was to make a mandala. It was silently interactive. I saw the size of the circular piece of paper we were being invited to work on (about 3/4 feet in diameter) and immediately divided it up (in my mind) into thirteen segments (there were 13 of us!) That's not a lot of space. I tend to work quite big so I could see I'd have to restrict myself. Then I had an idea, which amused me AND solved the space problem. If the flat space was limited then I'd go upwards and make the piece... well, my part of the piece anyway!... 3D. What fun that turned out to be! Others followed me and soon parts of the mandala looked like a playground. I wanted my work to be recognised as mine, but I also wanted to connect with my fellow meditators. The word we were working with was 'interconnectedness'. I gave each person a dot around the centre of the circle and made a long stretched out spiral cut from paper to touch each segment. Another stretched out cut spiral touching the ground and another pointing to the ceiling represented our connection with the earth and with spirit.

I loved this new way of meditating and connecting silently while we worked and then having a small amount of feedback at the end of the session. There was a minimal amount of talking and I really enjoyed that. A powerful experience. More please! Jane was the holder of the space and the time-keeper. Thank you, Jane x

Jo Ridgers

The Art Meditation evening was an incredible experience of how a spiritual centre can welcome a newcomer to London. I loved meeting people on such a deep level, along with the incredible creative energy that it unleashed. This experience has definitely created a desire to do more at Essex Church. – **Mickey Rogers**

I came to art meditation with no expectations but found a wonderfully peaceful space to get in touch with inside my head - wonderful exploration and playtime – **Jacqui Thomson**

It felt like creating a garden together in silence - planting a flower here - pouring some water there. I was in the 'here and now', once in a while stepping back and just observing, letting things unfold. A lesson in letting go of preconceived ideas, working with 'what is'. – **Rita Woditsch**

Excellent and rewarding sessions – **Araba**

Jane - Your Art Meditation Classes at the church were for me a time to be totally at peace and absorbed in my own thought. Your kind regard of all participants needs was wonderful... each of us absorbed in this delightful creative process. Working together on the final Circle of Creation was truly fascinating each of us contributing to the final piece. I have to say this for me was 'better than therapy!' Believe me I am awaiting with beautiful calm breath the next sessions whenever they are do let me know and I'll be first off the chair to grab my scissors and create! Thank you for the opportunity to participate and kind regards to all my fellow Art and Meditees it was wonderfully healing to share the evenings with you. – **Kathy Sherlock**

My favourite Art Meditation was the second one when we were given four cards to make into our own post cards. The meditation happens as we are all concentrating hard on making our cards. That silence is intense. In the end I have used one of my cards to send to a friend who is ill with cancer. I hope she likes this especially personal card. – **Juliet Edwards**

The Art Mediation course series at Kensington-Unitarian Church was one of the best experiences I have had since traveling in London. I was looking for a way to connect with a like-minded community in a spiritually creative context, and was not disappointed. Jane held a safe and welcoming space, where all could create without criticism. The process she designed, the activities suggested and materials provided all combined to create an inspiring atmosphere perfect for personal reflection and expression. I am so grateful to have had the experience and look forward to the next opportunity to attend one of these courses. – **Robbyn McGill**

There will be another series of Art Meditations this summer - Thursday evenings from 7-9.00pm - on 23rd/30th May, 20th/27th June, 18th/25th July.



News from the Essex Church Management Committee

It's an indication of how well our building is used and how we should be thankful to our warden, Jenny for her good stewardship of the building that we sometimes find it difficult to find a room free for our committee meetings. Jenny often, kindly, hosts them in her own flat but our last meeting was held in the staff room of the Nursery in the Church basement. This also gave us an opportunity to see how well the nursery is used and to get a glimpse into the highly professional world of child care.

On the subject of child care it was noted that our excellent Sunday children's group leader, Jordan, has now left. The committee were very grateful for all the hard work he had done with the (small number) of children over the past few years and wanted to formally acknowledge his contribution to the life of Essex Church. However, the Lord (or at least Caroline Blair) has provided again! For the time being Glenn van Lint will be providing activities for any youngsters that come along on a Sunday morning and we are very grateful for his support.

We were very grateful for the suggestions that have been received from members of the congregation for charities that you would like us to support in our monthly collections. We have now selected and allocated them throughout the year. Jane has reported that quite a few of you have completed the annual membership renewal forms but I'm sure that there are still a few sitting in peoples' pending trays so please get them back to Jane as soon as you can. This isn't just a bit of bureaucracy; it's also a good opportunity to renew our commitment to our Kensington Unitarian community. As always the committee was grateful to Jane and Sarah for organising a host of events/courses that helps to challenge and nurture us, please try to make the most of what is on offer and also contact any of us if you have any suggestions for future events. We also discussed the fabric of the building which is in fairly good nick and pastoral concerns but if you notice any brokenness in either the building or the congregation do let us know!

David Francis Darling - Chair of the Congregation

'Rediscovering the Bible'

A monthly bible-reading group at Essex Church



Meeting on the 2nd Monday of each month at 7pm:
11th March, 8th April, 13th May, 10th June 2013

We started a monthly bible-reading group at Kensington in November, for a trial period of six months, following on from a group which was held at the Golders Green church last year. In the sessions we simply read through the bible together, pausing to reflect, and share our own thoughts and feelings on what we read. We started with the Acts of the Apostles which we have now nearly finished. Our plan is to go back to the beginning and tackle the Book of Genesis next. We were very pleased to welcome eleven people to the first session and a core group have continued to gather each month since then. There has been a lot of laughter and fun in these sessions as well as exploration, discovery and learning.

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



Current members and friends of our congregation should have received their annual letter and form to fill in during January. 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 and have a chat.

Rev. Sarah Tinker

Assisted Dying and the Advance Directive

There was a motion on Assisted Dying at last year's annual meetings of the Unitarian General Assembly (the GA). After much discussion it was referred back for congregations to think about and brief their representatives. It is a hugely complex subject with too many aspects to consider here. But let us be clear what is meant by Assisted Dying and what is not. I find the following information from the Campaign for Dignity in Dying to be very clear and cannot better it myself:



The safeguards outlined below are the minimum that an assisted dying law should provide. These would offer protection to all individuals requesting assistance, not just potentially vulnerable adults.

- The individual must be a terminally ill adult who is a resident of the UK. People with a chronic illness or disability (unless they were also terminally ill) would not be eligible. There are several definitions of terminal illness currently used in the health service and by Government which could be incorporated into the legislation.
- The patient must have mental capacity to make the decision, and be referred to a psychiatrist for assessment if there is any doubt about this.
- The process must be entirely voluntary and initiated by the patient — a doctor could not suggest assisted dying.
- Two doctors, a consultant doctor and an independent doctor, must agree that the patient meets the eligibility criteria set down in the legislation (terminally ill, mentally competent, making a voluntary request and so on).
- The doctors must inform the patient that they can revoke their request at any time.
- There must be discussions to explore why the patient wants an assisted death, and what pain and symptom relief is available, as well as other palliative and supportive options. All patients who request an assisted death must have been offered palliative care.
- A 'cooling off' period between the request for assistance being formally accepted (i.e. after all the safeguards have been met) and receiving the life-ending prescription (e.g. 14 days) to ensure that patient has further time to consider their actions.
- The patient must self-administer the life-ending medication, ensuring that they make the decision and are in control of the final act. The doctor does not end the patient's life directly; rather the patient controls their own death.
- Data would be recorded to ensure the process was effectively monitored and reported.

Meanwhile there is something you can do for yourself. You have made a will, though it probably needs updating, you have set down to whom you'd like your possessions to go. And your own most valuable possession? Your life. You have the right to determine what happens. You and you only. But you must make it known. If you believe life is God's gift and only God can take it away, then say so. If to you, suffering is alien to a loving God, and in a terminal illness you would prefer not to be kept alive, again, put it in writing. It is best to have a solicitor do it but this is not strictly necessary. And have a thought for your relatives in their distress if, as a result of an accident, they learn that two doctors are convinced there is no possibility of surviving as a thinking living creature, and 'they' are asking you as next of kin to make the decision – keep him alive artificially or allow him to slip away. Oh yes, the doctors could be wrong, miracles are all about us, but this is what they genuinely believe here and now. Is it fair to ask your next of kin to accept such responsibility?

You know the answer. It is called an Advance Directive. Compassion in Dying (www.compassionindying.org.uk / 0800 999 2434) will send you a copy for free and Dignity in Dying (www.campaignfordignityindying.org.uk / 020 7479 7730) will provide details of what is proposed. The object is not to bring 'Dignitas' to England but rather to make it unnecessary. Palliative Care and hospices give wonderful relief but to know that beyond them there is help often means the need never materialises.

Dr. Stephanie Saville

Women of the World (WoW) Festival

6th – 10th March 2013
at the Southbank Centre

Two years ago, Jude Kelly, the director of the London Southbank Centre, launched the first WOW Festival on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day. It has been a very successful event ever since with satellite festivals happening in a number of countries by now. The festival showcases the best of female talent in all areas of life, from business to arts, sport, politics and science. The programme of talks, debates, music, workshops and performances is diverse and caters for all ages, with the youngest group probably being the participants of the 'Under 10's feminist corner'. There are also exhibitions and free speed-mentoring sessions for women (sign up in advance) on offer as well as a marketplace where visitors can find out about various organisations supporting women locally and worldwide.

I discovered this festival last year and after trying it out for a day ended up spending the whole weekend there. I was blown away by how friendly everyone was and how much I learned about others and myself in the many formal and not so formal workshops and discussions. Sounds like it could be run by Unitarians? My thoughts exactly. WOW turned out indeed to be a place where women - and of course men too - can ask important questions about all aspects of life and why equality is important to all of us, exchange thoughts with like-minded people and feel supported and heard. If you are interested in attending I would suggest getting your day or weekend tickets in advance as they tend to sell out quickly and to turn up early on the day in order to get into the workshops you are most interested in.

Details for all events taking place from 6th until 10th March as part of WOW Festival 2013 at Southbank Centre in London can be found here: wow.southbankcentre.co.uk

Find out more about International Women's Day events on www.internationalwomensday.com

Gisela Boehnisch

Accommodation Request

Ellen McHugh, who is known to many members of the congregation, and who wrote about adventures so far during her year out in Malta in the last newsletter, will be returning to London to continue her studies in the autumn. She is looking for a room to rent from September 2013 until at least July 2014, ideally situated in Kensington, Notting Hill, Westminster, Richmond, Ham, Barnes, or similar locations.

If you have a room available, or might be able to put Ellen in touch with somebody who does, please email her directly on ellenaquarising@hotmail.com or speak to Jane Blackall.

'Finding Our Voice'

Singing Workshops with Margaret Marshall

Sundays 17th March, 21st April
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.

An external event taking part at Essex Church

'Breath of Fire'

Intuitive Collage Workshops
Friday 5th April, 9.30-4.00pm

*'Mystery is at the heart of creativity.
That, and surprise.'* – Julia Cameron

This hands-on workshop will be an introduction to intuitive collage using Seena Frost's SoulCollage process. Participants will begin to create a personal deck of collaged cards depicting and symbolising aspects of the personality, inner guides and significant archetypal figures. This is a unique and fun way of engaging the unconscious, accessing inner wisdom and enhancing personal awareness.

Cost: £100 (all materials included)

For info/reservations contact: Sandra Elsdon Vigon
Jungian Psychotherapist/Certified SoulCollage Facilitator

svignon@sandravigon.com / www.sandravigon.co.uk
or telephone Sandra on 07913 821 626

Winter Walking Weekend

Whilst I was at Summer School I picked up a leaflet about future events at Great Hucklow - one of which was a Winter Walking Weekend - and was intrigued by the idea of seeing the place in winter. It seemed like a wonderfully different thing to do and also a lovely little break in the midst of the long winter gloom. Of course the whole idea seemed like a very good one in the middle of summer but, as the time approached to make the journey northwards, the idea seemed more and more like a bad one. I had asked a small group of friends to come with me in order to finish off my month-and-a-half-long 50th birthday celebrations in style. But I must admit that, as the weekend drew near (18th-20th January), I began to have more and more misgivings.

To say that the signs did not look good for the little trip to Derbyshire was an understatement and no mistake. Ominous, more like! I think I can safely say that all four of us had doubts and those doubts were compounded by the fact that we had all experienced a rather tense and difficult week in the run-up to our trip. And of course the weather looked extremely ominous too. So it was a rather subdued gathering at St Pancras Station for the train to Chesterfield. And I definitely had the feeling that I had asked people to join me in a completely 'bonkers' idea. Still we were there and there was a flurry of excitement as we met up, relieved that we had all made it to the station in one piece, and took our seats on the train.

The train journey was a good one and I took great delight in seeing the snow-covered fields and general winter wonderland as we passed by. As the journey progressed we began to relax and chat and look forward to the weekend ahead. There was a slight concern as we began to realise that there might be an issue with regards to getting from the station to the Nightingale Centre as the local buses were being cancelled due to the adverse weather conditions. However, a guardian angel was watching over us in the form of a big, jolly taxi-driver named Steve who told us that he could offer us a special deal in delivering us to the centre as he was already making a journey that way in order to pick up a young lad from school. So we all arrived in great style.



So all in all a remarkably straightforward journey from London to Great Hucklow and there we all were at the place I had come to love so much during my summer retreat. We quickly settled ourselves in and then proceeded to enjoy the most wonderfully restorative and peaceful of weekends. It was a weekend full of raucous laughter, witty banter and heartfelt conversation.

We took brisk walks in snow that was deliciously "deep and crisp and even". We spent time in peaceful meditation as we watched the snow fall gently on the surrounding hills and dales. We drank glasses of bubbly and ate food of the most warming and comfort-inducing kind. We played board games and read books. We even sat by a log fire as we ate lunch at the local pub on Saturday. The weekend stretched ahead in a wonderful sense of 'we don't actually have to go anywhere or do anything - unless we really, really want to'.

There have been many redevelopments at the centre and I think, on the whole, they work really well. It is a shame that the lounge has lost its old-fashioned charm with its rather minimalist and neutrally-toned makeover. However, they have extended the seating area out onto what used to be the terrace and this has created a lovely little space. An extra special part of the weekend for me was being able to sit with a friend in this newly-developed room - we were all by ourselves and the light was slowly fading, we sat by the window, looked out onto the sparkling snow-covered fields and reminisced about our experiences at Summer School - a treat indeed.

All in all I must say that the Winter Walking Weekend turned out to be a wonderfully different and refreshing break from the usual routine. I would recommend the weekend and the centre to anyone. It is a magical place and it most definitely worked its magic and charm on me once again. I came back to London feeling peaceful and restored and with a renewed sense of purpose. Magic indeed.

Carol Sheppard

A note from Sarah T: Winter Walking Weekends happen each year and there are many other delightful things to do at the Nightingale Centre throughout the year, open to everybody.

Visit the centre website: www.thenightingalecentre.org.uk

'The Good and the Bad'

Sermon by Rev. Sarah Tinker – 24th January 2013

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

On my first week at theology college I showed myself up, just a little bit. One of our lecture rooms was called Vashti and I thought this must be the name of a Hindu god. Saying that to a Baptist fellow student brought a smile to his face – “Ah yes”, he said, “you Unitarians aren't the keenest of Biblical scholars are you”. The truth was out. I'd clearly never read the Biblical Old Testament Book of Esther – because Vashti, I subsequently learnt, plays a pivotal role in the first chapter of that book. What happens to her tells us something of the precarious position of women in that era. The scene is set. We are in the Persian empire ruled by King Ahasuerus and at a drunken banquet the king demands that his queen appears before his guests wearing her royal finery. Some interpreters consider this as a demand for Vashti to appear naked, naked that is apart from her royal crown. She refuses to demean herself in this way and the king is advised to banish or even execute her and to find instead another queen. Not surprisingly, Vashti has been viewed as an early feminist, her disobedience being described by Harriet Beecher Stowe as the “first stand for women's rights”. She stood up for herself and in so doing lost her royal position and possibly even her life. These are the lengths you have to go to in order to have a theology college room named after you.

The Book of Esther is not generally considered to be a historical text. I doubt that Vashti, or her impossible to pronounce husband Ahasuerus, ever really existed. But the background to the Book of Esther is a situation that the Jews have known repeatedly in their long history as a people. For this is a story of diaspora, of exile in a foreign land, of struggling to survive and longing to maintain a separate identity as a people. It's also a story of sexual politics, of power and seeming submission. After Vashti is banished, the kingdom's most beautiful young women are gathered together and given what seems to amount to a year-long spa treatment before being paraded before the king for him to choose his next queen. In the royal harem the young women receive “cosmetic treatment, six months with oil of myrrh and six months with perfumes and cosmetics for women” and only after the completion of these treatments are the girls taken, one each night, to spend time with the king. Esther won the king's “favour and devotion” and was duly selected to replace Vashti as queen. With a plot full of sudden turnarounds and secrets at last revealed, the Book of Esther is as good as any 21st century soap opera. For we the readers know that Esther is a Jew, one of the people subjugated by the Persians, and we know that her uncle Mordecai has advised her to keep this detail of her race hidden from her new husband the king. What will happen next? What will be revealed? And what happened to Vashti? That we shall never know.



Now the twists and turns of this tale start to emerge. King Ahasuerus is shown to be a vain buffoon who cannot hold his liquor. But for really evil behaviour we are introduced to Haman the king's senior minister, the villain of the piece. So evil is he that in Jewish gatherings all around the world today, when his very name is mentioned, people are encouraged to shake rattles and stamp their feet so that his name cannot be heard. Because today is the Festival of Purim (24th February 2013) and on this day the Book of Esther is recited in synagogues, as it has been for millennia. We have a few rattle shakers here today.

Young Esther had been brought up by her uncle Mordechai, an astute man, who had guided Esther into her role as the new queen and who tells her of a plot to kill the king by two of his closest advisors. Once that plot is revealed and the plotters are hanged, Haman is announced as the new minister. Haman expects everyone to bow down before him now that he has such a powerful job, but Mordechai refuses, for the Jewish law does not allow him to bow down before any man. Haman is furious and vows to take his revenge, not just on Mordechai but on all the Jewish people. The name of this festival Purim comes from the word for casting lots – or dice – for this is how Haman decides on the date for his intended massacre. A royal edict is issued for all the Jews to be slaughtered on the 13th day of the 12th month. Mordechai hears of this and promptly dons sackcloth and ashes, mourning the impending fate of their people. Esther finds out and although as a woman she is not allowed to petition the king her husband, even though she is married to him, yet she bravely approaches Ahasuerus, and asks if he and Haman can attend a banquet she will provide. There she reveals Haman's plot and he is taken to hang on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordechai. Justice seemingly is done, though this is not quite the end of the story.

It's no wonder that the festival of Purim is the most joyous of Jewish festivals. It involves a great story with many twists and turns in its plot, feasting – including the eating of little three cornered sweet biscuits in the shape of Haman's hat known as 'hamantaschen'. And Judaism, which is generally quite abstemious as a religion when it comes to the consumption of alcohol, on this day Jews are encouraged to drink so that they can no longer distinguish between "Blessed is Mordechai" and "Cursed is Haman". There are also requirements to give to the needy, to provide food for friends and to fast the night before the festival.

'The Good and the Bad' *(continued)*

– Sermon by Rev. Sarah Tinker

We could probably leave the story at this point, but The Book of Esther ends much more harshly. The royal edict requiring the slaughter of the Jews cannot be revoked but another edict can over-ride it. So King Ahasuerus, having hanged Haman, now allowed Mordechai to write an edict giving the Jews permission to defend themselves. This led to an almighty slaughter in which thousands of Persians lost their lives, some 75,000 it is said.

So this story of Esther and her people is no longer a straightforward tale of good and bad, right and wrong. The people who were oppressed are now the oppressors. We could simply accept this as a story from thousands of years ago. Yet it has resonances in modern life. Hitler famously spoke of his 'Final Solution' as bringing another ending to the story of Purim. And I am perhaps not alone in finding painful mirrors in this story with the problems faced by Palestinians and Israelis today. The Book of Esther is the only biblical book that makes no mention of God. This story is a human story, a story of the powerful and the powerless, a story of a woman standing up for her rights and another woman using all her charms in order to save her people. And whilst it is always pleasurable for us to scapegoat someone, surely this story reminds us that the Hamans of this world are rarely all bad, nor are the world's Mordechais usually all good, once you look below the surface. Isn't that what it is to be human? To hold the potential within us for the greatest good and the greatest bad and to work with the tension between the two? Few of us turn out to be complete saints or sinners, and yet we are given the free will to choose, each and every day of our lives, which character we're going to play today. So on this festival of Purim my hope for all people is

that our life circumstances allow us the freedom to be who we truly are,

that we allow others to be fully themselves and do not force them to fit narrow roles prescribed by society or our media

and that when we find ourselves demonising or idolising anyone, we remember the story of Haman and Mordechai, Esther and Vashti, and how hard it can sometimes be to decide who are the good and who are the bad.



Hucklow Summer School

For Personal and Leadership Development

'Living At the Edge'

How do we find meaning in the margins where we find ourselves?



17th to 24th August 2013
Great Hucklow, Derbyshire

Theme Talks by a Team of Speakers:

Kate Buchanan, Jim Corrigan,
Winnie Gordon, Rob Gregson, John Naish.

A Choice of Four Engagement Groups:

'On the Edge of Nature'

with Nancy Crumbine and Julie Dadson

'Postcards from the Edge'

with Sheena Gabriel and Stephen Crowther

'Recovering Who You Are'

with Michael Dadson and Alison Thursfield

'An Odyssey for the Soul'

with Jim Blair and John Harley

The basic cost for an adult in a shared room is £465.

However, please do not let a shortage of money prevent you from attending summer school, as bursaries are available to help with the cost. Contact the organising team for details: info@hucklowsummerschool.org.uk (or ask Caroline Blair)

Applications are due by 15th April 2013.

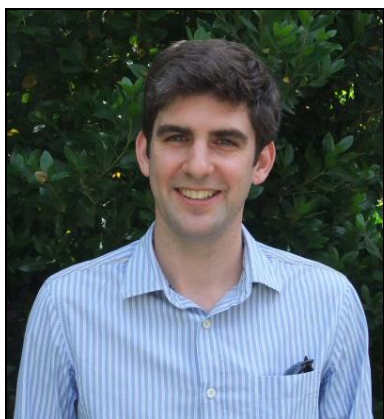
For more information and an application form:
www.hucklowsummerschool.org.uk

'Perhaps the most important thing we bring to another person is the silence in us... the sort of silence that is a place of refuge, of rest, of acceptance of someone as they are.'

Rachel Naomi Remen



A Sound for Sore Ears...



Some say that smell is the most evocative of the senses – one whiff transporting you in time and place, perhaps a perfume conjures up an old lover or fresh grass an idyllic summer. Others point towards music – one particular song summarising an entire person or period in one's life.

For me recently, the most powerful sound has been "rustle...scrape...rustle...Well good morning everybody and welcome". Those words are said in the particular lilt of our minister Sarah. For the sounds I describe are the start of each service at Essex Church, as recorded by the good offices of Jane Blackall and made available for anyone to download via the internet.

As an ex-Londonite and Kensington Unitarian, the recordings give me the chance to hear the services that I am no longer able to attend. Each recording (sadly stripped of what I know will have been excellent hymns and music) is roughly 30 minutes, but for me the most powerful part is those first few seconds. A wave of relaxation and calm comes over me, and in my mind I'm transported inside Essex Church, sitting, looking up at Sarah as she says those opening words of welcome. The power of the feeling surprises me, for I generally think of myself as swayed by thought, rather than emotions or mood. It's all the more odd, as my typical memory of those first few minutes when I was actually there, was of my blood pumping through me having sprinted in late.

But calm me it does. It also brings back a flood of memories of the different people and occasions that I've had at the church, and I think it is these thoughts that provide the real calm. Whether it was the joy of listening to the Hallelujah chorus, the challenge of being on the Compassionate Communication course, or the sadness of sharing the news of the death of a family member; throughout all these thoughts I can recall the sense of contentment and community that I felt during my time at Essex Church.

Thank you to all those regulars and visitors that I met at Essex Church, and to all those who work hard to keep things flowing. Here's hoping I have a chance to pop back soon (if only to see how things look after a lick of paint!).

A loyal listener,

Mark Tribe

Sunday Services in March

3rd March, 11am – 'Necessary Desires'

Service led by David Francis Darling

In this service our very own David Darling will look at the Jewish idea that our "evil" influences can be a necessary evil and are in fact what makes the world go round!

10th March, 11am – 'Know Thyself'

Service led by Rev. Frank Walker and Sarah Tinker

Perhaps the greatest spiritual injunction is for us to explore who we truly are, beyond the pressures to conform to other people's expectations and society's rules. In this service we will also mark the occasion of Mothering Sunday. We are pleased to welcome Rev. Frank Walker, minister emeritus of our Cambridge congregation, as our preacher.

17th March, 11am – 'Writing it Down'

Service led by Rev. Elizabeth Birtles & Sarah Tinker

As our book group celebrates reading its 100th book this month, this service celebrates the human urge to write things down – from diaries to shopping lists, great literature and graffiti on walls, we'll appreciate this wondrous ability to communicate in writing. We are pleased to welcome Liz Birtles, one time minister of our Croydon congregation and founder member of the Bangor Fellowship, who will lead our meditation today.

24th March, 11am – 'Evolutionary Spirituality'

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

The theory of evolution in biological terms is one that most Unitarians accept, yet delve a little deeper and some may also have a sense of a spiritual evolution fuelling our existence. We won't be giving any answers in this service but will make space for people to explore their own ideas about this fascinating topic.

31st March, 11am – 'Easter Sunday'

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

In music and silence, words and prayer, we will mark the Christian Easter festival and consider the ways in which its powerful imagery and narrative have inspired writers and artists over the last two millennia.

April Newsletter Deadline



The deadline for the April issue is **Sunday 10th March**. 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