



Kensington Unitarians

Newsletter: March 2020

What's On...

Sunday 1st March, 11am-noon
'Relationship with Self'
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Wednesday 4th March, 12.30pm
(and every Wednesday in March)
'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite

Thursday 5th March, 6.45 for 7-8pm
'Heart & Soul' Spiritual Gathering
'Me, You and the Others' with Brian Ellis

Sunday 8th March, 11am-noon
'Intimacy and Solitude'
Led by Jane Blackall

Thursday 12th March, 7.00pm
Playback Theatre Taster Session
Hosted by Veronica Needa & Andy Yau

Sunday 15th March, 11am-noon
'Plural Selves'
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 15th March, 12.45-1.15pm
'Finding Your Voice' with Margaret

Sunday 15th March, 2.00-3.00pm
'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite

Tuesday 17th March, 7pm
Management Committee Meeting

Sunday 22nd March, 11am-noon
'Relating Beyond Duality'
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 22nd March, leaving at 1pm
GreenSpirit Spring Equinox Walk
Led by David Carter & Sarah Tinker

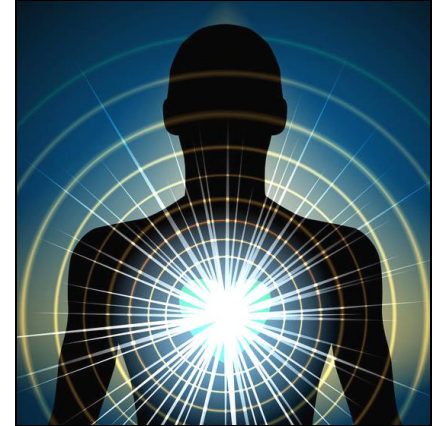
Thursday 26th March, 6.45 for 7pm
Spring Poetry Evening
Please send your poems in advance!

Note: Clocks go forward on 29th March!

Sunday 29th March, 11am-noon
'The Same But Different'
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 29th March, 12.45-2.00pm
'Sunday Conversation'
on the theme of 'Self and Other'

Self and Other: Expanding the Circle of Love A Message from our Minister



I'm grateful to sacred activist Andrew Harvey for a beautiful meditation of love for all, described in his book *The Direct Path*. Andrew was taught this practice by a Jewish mystic and scholar of the cabalistic tradition. When I first experienced it as a practice it reminded me of Buddhist metta meditation, of loving kindness for all, including ourselves.

The meditation begins in attunement with the divine, establishing a calm and steady focus. We state our yearning to experience fully our interbeing with all things and all life forms, in the unity that is Divine Consciousness. We imagine ourselves at the centre of a large circle and all around us are silently gathered our family members and friends, both living and dead. We conjure each of them up one by one and we face all aspects of their being and our relationship with them, acknowledging their complexities and our own, all embraced in compassion and honesty. We expand the circle to include workmates, colleagues past and present, all those we have met in life for good or ill. We greet each face, each being with acceptance and if we feel some resistance we can offer this to a higher power that knows us all and can accept us as we are. If someone particularly disturbs us we can ask to see them bathed in God's own unconditional love, which in time may help free us from our reactive ego and allow us to view everyone with enlightened wisdom instead.

We continue by expanding our heart circle to embrace all people of the earth, especially those we know to be suffering and those we are generally opposed to because of their politics or religion or social attitudes. If the divine can love everyone, can we? We move then to the animal kingdom and include all living beings from the greatest to the smallest in the compassionate warmth of our hearts. Towards the end we move from the centre of the circle to the periphery, choosing one being to stand by and experience the whole interconnected circle of all that is.

Our Unitarian faith emphasises the oneness of all existence. This spiritual practice of expanding the circle of love can help us remember that we are indeed all one, with all living beings who share this planet earth home. Now how shall we live, encircled together as we are with all those we love, those we hate, those who frighten us and those we feel superior to, those we completely disagree with and those who we have wronged? Only loving compassion can overcome our sense of separateness and help us stay awake to the oneness which contains us all. Shall we give it a go?

Rev. Sarah Tinker

We invite you to join us after the last service of March when our monthly Sunday conversation will start with the full fifteen minute text of this meditation to expand our circle of love. It's an experience made all the more special when practiced in a circle with others.

In this month's newsletter...

* Thanks from Our Treasurer * Church Membership and Photoboard * 'Q&A' with Billy Jackson * Abby our Music Scholar * Spring Poetry Evening * Sunday Tea Dance Photos * Committee News * Adventurous Hymn Book * The Big Relax * Poems from Brian Ellis, John Hands & Eliz Beel * GreenSpirit Group: Outings to Holland Park and the Rollright Stones * OneLight Gatherings * District AGM * 'Proudly Heretical' address by Rev. Sarah Tinker * and much more ...

Kensington Unitarians

At Essex Church (founded 1774), Notting Hill Gate

Kensington Unitarians are a community of kindred souls who meet each week at Essex Church in Notting Hill Gate to explore, reflect, converse, be still, share joys and sorrows, and support one another on life's journey. We are proud to be part of a worldwide and historic liberal religious tradition.

Our main activity is Sunday worship and we hold a service each week at 11am. All are welcome. Services are usually themed and include readings from a variety of sources, prayers, music, singing, stillness, and a short sermon. Our children's leaders provide an alternative programme of activities for younger people.

Small-group activities are another key part of our programme. We offer courses and one-off workshops exploring spiritual and religious matters and considering life's meaning together with others on the spiritual journey.

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



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Sunday Conversation

'Self and Other' Sunday 29th March, 12.45-2pm



Our Sunday conversation on this month's theme of self and other will start with a 15 minute guided meditation on 'expanding the circle of love', written by sacred activist Andrew Harvey. It's a beautifully deep and loving heart practice and we'll have copies of the script for people to take home and use again.

Volunteering Rotas: Stewarding, Coffee and Greeting



We need lots of lovely people to muck in to make the church a hospitable place so if you haven't taken on one of these volunteering tasks before please consider giving it a go (you might consider 'shadowing' a regular to get trained up). We realise that it can be hard to commit in advance but you could always ask someone else to stand in if it turns out you can't come.

Stewarding:

1 st March:	Heidi Ferid
8 th March:	Guy Gschwendtner
15 th March:	Brian Ellis
22 nd March:	Niall Doherty
29 th March:	Juliet Edwards

Coffee:

1 st March:	Maureen C & Marianne H
8 th March:	John H & Pat G
15 th March:	Liz Tuckwell
22 nd March:	Hannah King
29 th March:	Brian Ellis

Greeting:

1 st March:	Liz Tuckwell
8 th March:	Maureen Cummings
15 th March:	David Carter
22 nd March:	John Newton
29 th March:	Michaela von Britzke

We circulate the rota list each month by email. Please contact Jane if you want to sign up for one of the forthcoming slots.

jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Church Membership and Foyer Photoboard



Let Jane or Sarah know if you would like to renew your membership of Kensington Unitarians in 2020. This year we won't be asking people to fill in a form to renew membership – just let us know so we can tick your name on our list. And if you are new and we have failed to ask you if you would like to become a member, please ask us. Membership is a good way to show that that you are in accord with our congregation's ethos and that you want to be part of this church. And we invite anyone who attends our church, member or friend of this congregation, to have their photo taken for our photoboard as it is such a simple way for us to learn each other's names.

Thanks from our Treasurer



Jenny Moy our warden and I have just posted our documents to the accountants. This is the first year we have not driven down to Tonbridge to see them in person. Later we can take a look at our church budget for 2020 against our 2019 expenditure. We think our income is keeping pace with our expenditure, just, although we won't have the full picture until the accounts are prepared for our Annual Report and AGM on 10th May. It would be great if you could attend the meeting. It's thanks to Jenny that our lettings income remains so positive and that we have such a well-used building.

Over the last year a number of you have taken out standing orders on behalf of the church, given us donations, and given ever more generously to our Sunday collections, as well as to the monthly collections for chosen charities. Those collections have shown a pleasing increase in the last year.

A BIG THANK YOU TO EVERYONE.

As church Treasurer I no sooner say thank you than I start asking for money once again. We are hoping to increase our level of donations in 2020. Please ask us for information about taking out a standing order to Essex Church, which is an alternative to giving money in our Sunday collections and helps us form a clearer sense of our monthly income.

Please don't feel awkward if this is not possible for you. We also know that invaluable support is given by our volunteers, in terms of energy and enthusiasm. Many thanks to all our volunteers.

Juliet Edwards



Brian on a recent trip to the tip! Thanks Brian for all you do for the church including your care of our building.

Night



what smith beat
the polished moon on to the sky
whose sparks flew
from an anvil to light the stars
in the backcloth of the night
when did hands weave
a cloth so blue so dark
in asking I do not seek an answer
I do not wish to cease to wonder

Brian Ellis

A Playback Theatre Taster

Thursday 12th March, 6.45 for 7pm here at Essex Church



Come join us to see the power of Playback Theatre. An evening of fun and connection. Bring something to share at the tea break if you can. Hosted by Veronica Needa and Andy Yau of the School of Playback Theatre UK.

The Wonky Bowl

wooden bowl, well used,
turned out of true,
unobtrusive on the table;
"wonky, but I love it", she said.
were it pristine, untouched,
grained to perfection,
carved to enslave the eye,
would her love engage;
not to share a life,
but just to accompany
what has already arrived.

Brian Ellis

Q&A with Billy Jackson

#5 in a new series where congregation members answer a range of questions so we can get to know each other better.

Who are you?

I am Billy Jackson (officially William). I'm now a professional musician and recording artist and also involved in renewable energy projects for Native Americans. Have worked in marketing and computers before. Born in Dublin, I'm the son of a US fundamentalist evangelist and also a former preacher briefly myself.

When did you first come to Essex Church?

I believe it was about 7 years ago although Sarah would remember better – a few years are a bit of a blur to me.

What brought you to this congregation?

I had started going to a Unitarian church in Dublin in 2012. I also found some UU churches when I was in the US. When I moved to Romford I started going to the Stratford congregation which was a bit too small for me so I began commuting to Essex Church before moving up near there.

What roles or tasks have you taken on at Essex Church so far (or which are calling to you)?

I have done greeting and stewarding. I've made the tea and coffee. And people say my piano playing during and after services has lifted their spirits.

What other religious communities have you been connected to (if any)?

I was brought up in the American "Born again" Fundamentalist church and in England was involved many years in the Baptist church (where I preached and was a youth pastor). I went to Bible College in LA and have also been in Pentecostal churches.

What difference has belonging to this congregation made to your life?

Absolutely everything. This church and congregation has literally saved my life and sanity. I have been able to share the details with Sarah over time and she has personally helped immeasurably, as have many other people. Thank you all. Just to say I have been through several years of physical and mental trauma that I don't know I could have survived without the Essex Church. From being in and out of hospital to overcoming issues with alcohol to coping with the death of my mother in August. I called KU my oasis at the end of some traumatic weeks, that gave me the energy to keep going.

What do you tell friends and acquaintances who ask you 'What's Unitarianism'?

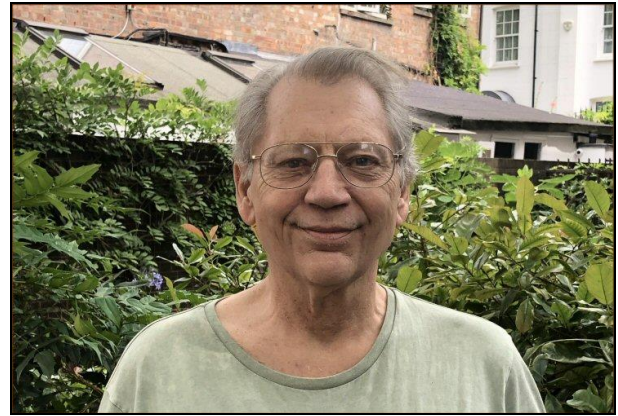
What I say is that while Unitarians do not preach Jesus overtly, they actually practice what I believe is the true un-distilled message of Jesus – to love each other, to help the disadvantaged, care for our fellow humans, accept diverse cultures, to support equal rights for all regardless of race, gender and sexual orientation. And most of all to be a true community.

What is your favourite hymn (and why)?

For the music only it is "How Great Thou Art". I hope there are some Unitarian words for it! Simply the melody is wonderful.

What memorable ideas, readings, or stories have you been introduced to at church?

There is nothing more inspiring than the stories of everyday life victories from regular individuals.



Would you like to recommend a spiritual/religious book which has influenced you?

The Dhammapada

Would you like to tell us about someone who has been a spiritual/moral inspiration to you?

Early on Larry Norman and George Harrison as they incorporated their spirituality into their music. Global figures like Nelson Mandela, Benazir Bhutto, Jimmy Carter have been inspiring too.

Would you like to tell us about a social justice issue / good cause which is close to your heart?

Homelessness and world hunger. Both are caused solely by greed and can be solved in our lifetimes. I have so much I could say! So much I have learned. It's a travesty.

Do you have any hobbies, pastimes, passions or enthusiasms you can tell us about?

I am back playing football (soccer) and tennis regularly and enjoy the theatre, films, many ethnic cuisines and dancing. But most of all just an interesting conversation with a fun, witty or intelligent person.

How is creativity expressed in your life?

Through writing my music, plays and poetry. And through how I now try to encourage the creativity in others.

How do you like to 'treat yourself'?

I play sports or go for walks in the park or on the beach. And I go to comedy clubs and concerts.

What would you do if you won a fortune on the lottery (with your time as well as the money)?

I would self-finance my own movies and stage musicals. I would create the super band that is already arranged and orchestrated in my head complete with horns, strings, percussion and cow bell!

What one piece of advice for life or pearl of wisdom would you like to offer newsletter readers?

Love, love and love some more. That is the only meaning of life.

What makes you laugh?

Off the wall humour – Monty Python, Fawlty Towers, AbFab, Mr. Bean, the Goons.

What would you like to have been asked?

What is the air speed velocity of an unladen swallow?

Thank you to Billy for keeping in touch with us from Australia and for letting us know what it has been like in Sydney during the recent dreadful bushfires. We hope to see you again before too long – we miss your great voice here in church.

Sunday Tea Dances in aid of Stonewall Housing

We had a lovely time at our latest tea dance in February as you can see in the photos below. Our next tea dance will be on 3rd May – save the date! – and please get in touch with Jane if you're willing to join our volunteer team on the desk. Thanks to Jennifer, Jeannene, Carolyn and Chloë for your help on the day (and Juliet for baking!)



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

Abby our Music Scholar



Thanks to an offer of a bursary we have been able to invite congregation member Abigail Lorimier to be our music scholar this year and play in services once a month. It's great to have Abby playing alongside our pianists on Sundays. Let us know if there is a cello piece you'd like to hear her play. Here are some details from her professional biography:

Abigail Lorimier is an American cellist in her final year of studies at the Royal College of Music with professor Alastair Blayden, associate principal cello of the London Symphony. At RCM, Abigail is a member of the Symphony, Philharmonic, and Opera Orchestras. She also plays in several chamber music ensembles including the Eumelia Piano Trio, which aims to promote piano trios by women composers of the 20th and 21st centuries. Abigail was a member of the 2013 NAFME US National Honors Orchestra, the 2014 BU Tanglewood Institute, and the 2016 Orchestra of the Americas, to which she was the youngest member admitted for their Baltic and Nordic European tour. Abigail has additionally been a string fellow with the National Symphony Orchestra Summer Music Institute in Washington DC for two summers and a member of the 2019 Irish Chamber Orchestra Academy. Passionate about music education, Abigail works as a cello tutor with the Tri-Borough Music Hub, where she teaches individual lessons and co-leads the Youth Folk Ensemble, and as a youth orchestra mentor and creative workshop leader with the RCM Sparks Community Programme. In September, Abigail is excited to begin postgraduate studies at the Royal Academy of Music with professor Benjamin Hughes.

Thematic Ministry



Our monthly ministry themes shape our activities here at Essex Church, with the aim of deepening our own spiritual explorations and strengthening our community life. Everyone is invited to bring their own ideas so do have a look at the themes planned for the months ahead and let us know if you'd like to suggest a reading or a piece of music. Or you could contribute your thoughts to one of our Sunday morning gatherings, lead an outing or an activity, or write something for the newsletter. And do come and join us for the last Sunday of each month when we have an after-the-service conversation about the theme.

Thanks to all who've been giving readings in services or writing pieces to deliver. Get in touch if there's something you'd like to speak about.

Here are the monthly themes for 2020. What ideas do they spark in you? 'God & the Divine', 'Desire & Wanting', 'Bodies & The Material World', 'Seeking Paradise', 'Conflict & Harmony', 'Change & Continuity', 'Limits & Boundaries', 'Legacy, Inheritance & Looking Back', 'Nurturing & Nourishing'. Our theme for March is 'self and other'. Here are some ways we might explore this theme:

- No relationship stays the same. How has your relationship with your self changed over the years?
- Poet Robert Bly in his poem *The Third Body* describes a relationship as a third body with a unique perspective. Think of any friendship, family member or partnership that you care about and imagine what the third body would tell you if it could. A relationship develops its own particular identity over time but it does not have a voice. It needs us to speak for it and not just for ourselves.
- Canadian academic and environmental activist David Suzuki writes "I see a world in the future in which we understand that all life is related to us and we treat that life with great humility and respect." Imagine a relationship with 'an other' that you are finding difficult at present – a politician you dislike perhaps, a work colleague who annoys you, a neighbour whose behaviour drives you up the wall, a family member you find yourself clashing with, a group whose ideology you deplore. How might the relationship feel different if approached from the perspective of our inter-relatedness? How can we treat those we disagree with, with the greatest humility and respect?

Sarah, Jeannene, and Jane

OneLight Gatherings



Take Root: A Ceremony for Grounding!
Friday 13th March, 7 - 8.30pm at Essex Church
gathering from 6.50pm – followed by refreshments

There may be times when all we have in the midst of events are our inner resources. In times of uncertainty, for instance, we can support ourselves and one another by being connected with the breath, the body and the present moment. In this circle we will be supported to co-create a sense of rootedness, or anchoring - collectively 'landing' and connecting with the present.

You are welcome in this gathering whatever your degree of faith or faith path. Whatever your unique journey, we share the fact we have a body, we have breath, we are vulnerable, human and we are showing up in a complex life, rubbing shoulders with others. This is a circle that acknowledges complexity and all the inner contradictions of being alive! We will have space to reflect and to share in song with The Threshold Choir.

Good Cause Collection of the Month: 'Shelter'



Collection on Sunday 29th March

Shelter helps millions of people every year struggling with bad housing or homelessness through our advice, support and legal services. And we campaign to make sure that, one day, no one will have to turn to us for help. Our advice and support services across the UK give people one-to-one, personalised help with all of their housing issues. Our free emergency helpline is open 365 days a year and is often the first port of call for people facing a housing crisis. Our solicitors provide free legal advice and attend court to help people who've lost their homes or are facing eviction.

Website: www.shelter.org.uk

Recent Charity Collections:

December – **Glass Door** – £305.38 *(plus a further £430 donated on our behalf by OneLight Gatherings)*

January – **Camp Jojo** – £283.78

National Unitarian Events

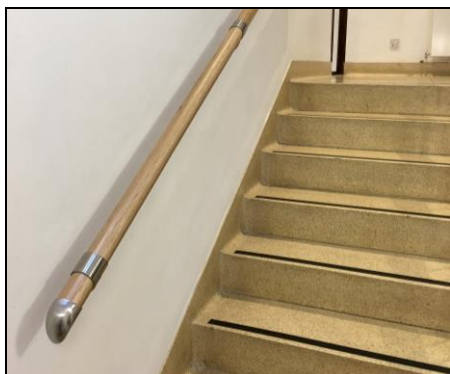
FOY Conference 1st to 4th May at the Nightingale Centre – ‘Plants and Us’

All ages welcome, chance to explore this theme indoors and out – in the beautiful Peak District countryside. Ask Jane or Sarah if you would like more details about the conference or about the FOY Society, a friendly and welcoming group, open to all.

The Findhorn Unitarian Network Experience Week from 16th to 23rd May

A few places remain for Unitarians to join an Experience Week at Findhorn from 16th to 23rd May. Have a chat with Sonya or Sarah if you would like to know more about Findhorn – an environmentally aware spiritual community and learning centre on the Moray Firth in Scotland. Cost ~£550 but some bursaries may be available to assist with attendance or travel costs.

Church Committee News



The church committee held its first ever Sunday meeting after church on February 9th. We had full attendance and all appreciated not having to come out to meet on a dark evening. But the rest of our meetings will be on Tuesday evenings in 2020, the next on 17th March. Do let us know if there are matters you would like us to consider.

Much of our meeting was taken up with issues about lettings and the problems of our precious building. Three toilets were blocked in the first month of the year, but only one of them needing a professional to unblock the old Victorian drains by jetwashing. We're delighted with the new stair rails fitted by Fraser Jackson, to assist people in reaching the basement. Sadly, the new side lights on both sides of the church have a mystery fault which neither Fraser who fitted them, nor Harry our electrician, can currently resolve. Further investigations will happen in March but if major work is needed there may not be time in our lettings schedule to do the job until the Easter holidays.

We explored some of the issues with our current lettings and encouraged Jenny and Sarah to have conversations with various groups about their work, the timings of their meetings and storage issues.

The committee were pleased to see the professional reprint of our church history leaflet, which visitors often like to receive. Thank you Jane.

Hucklow Summer School 2020 For Personal and Leadership Development ‘Speaking the Truth in Love’ Having the Courage of our Convictions in a Post-Truth Age



22nd-29th August 2020 at the Nightingale
Centre, Great Hucklow, Derbyshire

How can we discern the difference between truth and lies, in a world which increasingly seems beset with malicious forces intent on sowing confusion by spreading disinformation, propaganda, and ‘fake news’? How can we ensure that our openness to multiple truths does not leave us vulnerable to manipulation by people of ill intent or unwilling to ‘take sides’ in matters where justice is at stake? How can we be sure enough of what’s right and wrong to stand up and speak out boldly about our moral convictions? How can we cultivate the qualities of honesty, integrity, truth-telling, and good judgement in our own everyday lives? And how might we best articulate our shared Unitarian values, and focus our collective action, in order to help bring about a better world? We’ll consider how we can summon the confidence and courage to ‘speak the truth in love’ as individuals, communities, and as a denomination.

Theme Speakers: Linda Hart, Mel Prideaux,
Ann Peart, Louise Baumberg, and Stephanie Bisby

Engagement Group Facilitators:

Lindy Latham and Nicola Temple
Claire MacDonald and Marta Pacini
Daniel Costley and Cody Coyne
Kate McKenna and Catherine Coyne

Children and Young People’s Leaders:

Claire Maddocks and Jim Blair

Visit the website to download an application form
and/or speak to Jane Blackall for more information:

www.hucklowsummerschool.co.uk



Congratulations to Roy Clark and Heidi Ferid Hands on their recent exhibition at Burgh House. Seven of us braved the dark wet night to attend their cheery preview evening and have entertaining conversations.

The End of School - Aubade (To Catherine Jervis: died c. 1952)

I have called you back Kate, will it be for the last time
I shall tremble at the rattle of the latch, witness your martial air
On entering, your soft decisive tread upon the boards? No actress
Could have timed it better, could have stood momentarily poised
Compelling your audience, or could have spoken your line
More punctiliously – after we had chorused our dutiful greeting –
Whilst ever so slightly bowing: 'Good morning children, be seated'.

I have summoned you dear Kate, because I want to be free of you,
Free of your burdensome obligations, free of your responsibilities of empire,
Free of your deference to Authority, free of your insistence upon obedience,
Free of your manners, your will, your overpowering perfectionism:
'This One Thing I Do' – but not in everything I do, not in every minutest respect
Punctilious, because of your proudly professed fears of an omnipresent deity.
Kate, I will be free of flags and battle songs and necessary wars, and
I will be free even of your 'young ladies' – and above all,
Above all will be free of your intimidating 'young men'. Even
In my most revengeful fantasy I will fight with them no more.
Now I am bigger and fitter and more knowledgeable than
Cecil Hollier, Desmond his brother, Barry their tout, Vernon their
Hanger-on; and despicable Leonard who ran with them and tortured me
For sake of their sneering approval. I am finished with them
and with you, dear Kate, although I freely, willingly confess
I love you still, and will continue to love you in this
Your living omnipresence.

I am finished with steam locomotives, Lancaster bombers, maps of wars and
Interminable army convoys; I am through with records and films and copies of

'War Illustrated',

With transport which was seldom on time, with troop-ships hooting sorrowfully out between
White waving avenues of fluttering hands. I too am sailing, but under no foreign commission,
Exploring, but never again with Cook or with Livingstone, and I
Am faring forth on my own – not even with Beowulf. Eternally
Yet in the present I pay respect to my dear country, that
Undivided country of compassion where live all whom my heart
So lovingly embraces; and that unfettered empire of spirit to which
I offer my allegiance stretches beyond your diminutive desk to the stars
Upheld by fathomless depths of being, deeper
Far deeper than this grave in which your coffin resides.

John Hands

LDPA AGM & District Quarterly: Could You Be a Delegate?



**Saturday 14th March, 1.30 for
2pm at Croydon Unitarians,
The Croydon Flyover, CR0 1ER**

The AGM of our district association the LDPA (the London District and South Eastern Provincial Assembly) will be held at Croydon Unitarians on 14th March.

Rev. Celia Cartwright, the General Assembly president, will be leading worship before the business meeting and there will also be a featured presentation on Camp Jojo (the charity we supported in our January collection).

We are looking for delegates to represent our congregation at this meeting and can cover travel costs to attend. Please get in touch with Sarah if you are interested: sarah@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

'When we haven't learned how to love ourselves well, we keep getting stuck on the simple first rung of the ladder.

We don't know how or how well to treat others and we have problems with what we call boundaries. We stumble through the swamps of low self-esteem and thickets of self-loathing that derail us in our efforts to *"love others as ourselves."*

In order to walk this path we must first understand that self-love is not narcissism. Nor is it egotism, greed, self-righteousness, self-involvement, stubbornness, or conceit, all of which have given real self-love a bad name. Rather, it is the singing spring from which each of us can become our most authentic self.'

Daphne Rose Kingma

'Proudly Heretical'

Address by Rev. Sarah Tinker

From the service on Sunday 9th February

I hope you realise that by sitting here in this Unitarian community this morning or by listening in to this service as a podcast, you will be considered a heretic by some people in this strange world of ours.

The word heresy comes from a Greek word that means 'to choose'. In Roman times the word was used to describe a philosophical group or sect and eventually it was used to describe those who deviated from the mainstream, from the dogmas of the established religion of the time. So it's a description I use with pride because I'd like to have more people in this world thinking for themselves, rather than following the crowd unthinkingly.

But heresy and heretics have had a tough history the world over, haven't they? And their individual histories make for moving accounts - of individuals coming up against the power of the state. There are two cases here in Britain that I never want us to forget. The first is Edinburgh student Thomas Aikenhead, hanged in 1697 for blasphemy - the last person in this country to be executed for this crime. He was only 20 years old and was exploring his own beliefs - including the idea that God might not exist.

The last person to be burnt at the stake in this country as a heretic was Edward Whiteman in 1612 in Lichfield - a radical Anabaptist - who spoke against the Trinity - the Christian creed of one god expressed by three elements of the father, the son and the holy spirit. Whiteman held the view that Jesus was a man rather than God. These are the views that eventually became foundation stones of Unitarianism - of which this congregation of ours is part - and it's worth remembering that Unitarian worship was not made legal until 1823. People didn't lose their lives for Unitarian beliefs, specifically identified as Unitarian here in Britain but like other non-conformists they were unable to attend universities and some people lost their jobs for refusing to conform to Anglican creeds. And it's disturbing to remember that a number of countries to this day have heresy as a crime punishable by death. We have a long way to go in establishing freedom of thought and freedom of belief in this world, don't we?

In a minor way we Unitarians are still excluded for our faith today as we are not allowed to join the national ecumenical group of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland - and membership of this group is still required for some chaplaincy roles. This hurts some people but I hear that in some parts of the country local groupings of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland break the rules and invite Unitarians to join their meetings and activities. And a few Unitarian chaplains are being invited to work in health, prison and university settings.

I want to mention three requirements that I think accompany us if we want to be proudly heretical. We need to be:

- Grateful for our freedoms and never take them for granted - this gratitude really being what today's service is all about

- We need to be passionate about helping to secure freedoms for other people rather than turning away from the realities of other people's oppression

- We need to be thoughtful about this use of the word freedom. Because freedom has to go along with responsibility as Nelson Mandela reminded us in that reading from his autobiography *The Long Walk to Freedom* that we heard earlier on. Some freedoms are not ok. It's not ok if our freedom - to say whatever we want to say - for example - oppresses others. And this is not at all straightforward in the complex and remarkably diverse societies we live in today. We need to encourage open dialogue, careful listening and the ability to express ourselves and our feelings.

Back in the 17th and 18th century non-conformists fought for the right to hold their own beliefs here in Britain, to break away from the restrictions of the established church. Some people were either forced to leave this country because their beliefs were not accepted, or they chose to leave and to step out bravely in a new land. This year will see celebrations of the 400th anniversary of the sailing of *The Mayflower* that took pilgrims to the Americas. I hope those celebrations bring to mind the realities of many people in the world today who feel they must leave their homelands and seek freedom in other lands - freedom to be who they know themselves to be, economic freedom and freedom of belief. I hope the celebrations of the so-called Pilgrim Fathers' brave journey also recognise the terrible changes that Europeans brought to the lives of indigenous peoples.

And the bits of our Unitarian faith I'm proud of? Being the first church in England to train and appoint a woman minister.

Unitarian congregations that held blessings of same sex relationships back in the 70s and brought gay and straight people together in small groups to hear more of each other's lives and attitudes. I'm also proud that Unitarians took such an active part in the campaign for equal marriage here in Britain, along with the Liberal Jews and the Quakers.

Our Kensington Unitarians congregation is still the only building here in the borough of Kensington and Chelsea to be registered for same sex marriage ceremonies.

After today's service we invite people to join us for our inclusive communion down in the library - a quarterly small group communion that can be led by anybody who wants to take part - no roles in a Unitarian congregation are limited to just the minister.

And we are still the only religious grouping here in Britain that have nationally voted in support of assisted dying legislation. Some Anglican colleagues who support this cause envy our ability to make such a move.

At the end of our service we will hear one of the great African American spiritual songs of yearning for freedom - 'go down Moses and let my people go'. Let's all hold such yearnings in our hearts, that all people of this world might be free and hold their freedom in sacred responsibility - knowing that if one person is still enslaved or oppressed, then none of us is truly free.



Earth Hour

WWF Earth Hour is on Saturday 28th March at 8.30pm. Many London buildings will switch off their electricity for one hour in solidarity with our natural world and as a rallying cry for its greater protection.

'The willingness and courage to be aware of and experience the dark side of life, and the consequent despair we feel when we do so, is what distinguishes authentic faith from wishful thinking and denial. Despair is faith's darker handmaiden. There is no faith without doubt and despair, just as there is no good without evil, no day without night. To be authentic, faith must be all-inclusive.'

Miriam Greenspan



Heart Meditation Classes



INTRODUCTORY COURSE

Using ancient rhythms to bring about an ever deeper state of inner peace through the development of the heart and its innate capacities. This is part of a larger course called the Alchemy of Inner Silence.

*Drums provided

Classes every other Tuesday
6.30pm - 7.30pm

Essex Church, Kensington Unitarians,
London W8 4RT

For more info & bookings email:
infoheartmeditation@gmail.com

School Play



Pulled out of great trunks and
Cardboard boxes
Left shut up in the school attic
Came old, flimsy
Cloths –
Caught with faded streaks
Generated by the forgotten suns
Of the uncertain months.

Only use being fancy-dress;
What else –
the Queen of the Fairies
is covered in the shimmering gauze
of a full costume,
and sits in the centre of the lawn:
A fair-haired child, naturally.

Darkly,
Behind a clump of trees
I and one or two others
Are getting dressed by two teachers
Into green-dyed underclothes and paper wings.
One lady runs a red lipstick
Over my mouth
And I am mystified
As to why she's laughing
Noiselessly
At me.

Eliz Beel

West London GreenSpirit Group



Our shared ritual of darkness and light to honour Imbolc and Candlemas at the end of January included this chant: 'Be still and know that day and night, be still and know that dark and light, are one ... holy circle.' We blessed candles for each other and shared our feelings about the increase of light as spring arrives.

Some future GreenSpirit dates for your diaries:

Sunday 22nd March: A Spring Equinox Walk in Holland Park, learning more about the trees and plants and spring growth. We will be setting off at 1pm from church, bring some lunch to eat before we go. Most of us will walk on back streets to the park but we'll take one car so book in if you'd like a lift. Or meet us at 1.30pm at the Kyoto Garden. We hope this will be a 'whatever the weather' walk but let us know in advance if you plan to join us and then we can let you know if Plan B is happening – an afternoon's celebration of trees, back at Essex Church.

Thursday 30th April: A Beltane visit to the Rollright Stones in the Cotswold Hills, after first visiting Harris Manchester College, which has a proud history of training Unitarian ministers as well as now being the top Oxford College offering courses for mature students. The college has a fine organ which might be played that day and some much loved Burne Jones stained glass windows. Travel arrangements are still to be sorted. Let us know if you'd like your name to go on the list for this trip as places will be limited.

GreenSpirit are a body of people who believe that human life has both an ecological and a spiritual dimension. Together we celebrate all existence as deeply connected and sacred. We seek a more just, sustainable and peaceful way of life in harmony with the Earth. If this interests you, do come and join us at one of our meetings soon and have a look at the national GreenSpirit website which is full of inspiring earth based spirituality materials and ideas. Everyone is welcome to join our activities.

David Carter and Sarah Tinker



Fitness Fusion of 9 Movement Forms

Third Sunday of the Month from
2-3pm: 15th March, 19th April

Midweek class - Wednesdays - 12.30-1.30pm

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

Cost £10 for drop-ins (£8 to concessions / church members) or a block of 5 classes for £40 to use within a 3-month period.

Spring Poetry Evening

Thursday 26th March, Here at Essex Church
6.45 for a 7pm start, finish by 8.45pm



Bring a favourite poem or two to read to the group, perhaps about spring or Easter or any subject of your choice. Maybe it'll be a poem you have written yourself, or one you've just discovered or a poem you've known for many years, like an old friend. Let us know in advance that you plan to come and send a copy of your poetry choices to info@kensington-unitarians.org.uk so they can be included in a handout for everyone. There'll be seasonal refreshments and music too. All welcome.

Brian Ellis & Sarah Tinker

'Finding Our Voice' Monthly Singing Workshops



Sundays 15th March, 19th April from
12.30pm to 1.15pm at Essex Church

Margaret has worked as a professional singer all her adult life and is also a very experienced singing teacher. She is leading monthly sessions to help us all find our voice. These workshops are for anyone who is prepared to open their mouth and make a sound. Margaret will show us how to improve the quality and strength of our voices. Using a few simple exercises we'll gain joy and confidence in singing by learning how to produce and develop the voice, something everyone can do. We'll work with the breath and overcome unconscious blocks that can prevent us singing with our true potential. Fun and achievement are guaranteed and sessions are designed for all, whatever your experience or ability.

'Feeling is the bedrock of intimacy... Many are strangers to themselves. How can they hope to be intimate with another being? We cannot bridge the apparent gap between ourselves and others as long as we have not found access to the secret chamber of our own inner being.'

Georg Feuerstein

Adventurous Hymn Book

When we bought 50 copies of the new purple hymn book, some years ago, we wrapped them in protective jackets, stamped them with our Kensington Unitarians book stamp and numbered them. This act of care means that an adventurous hymn book may soon be returned to us. Our Unitarian friends at Stand Chapel in Whitefield, Manchester were wondering whether to buy a set of these purple hymn books and looked on an online seller's website for a second hand copy. On arrival it was clearly labelled as ours, so they got in touch to let us know just how far #46 had travelled.

Now some congregations might be annoyed that one of their hymnbooks had been borrowed and then shipped off to a bookseller but we know that such things happen and we applaud anyone who passes a book on to be sold rather than just putting it in the bin. A further online search revealed that new copies of the purple book can also be purchased quite cheaply so we're offering Stand Chapel two new books in return for our old one and may both congregations enjoy singing hymn #18 with its final verse that starts:

Glory to the cosmic comic
Source of laughter, source of fun,
Who delights in heavenly frolic
With the planets, stars and sun.

And let's take this opportunity to declare an amnesty for anyone who has one of our hymn books of any colour sitting on their shelves where it is no longer needed. We'd be glad to have them back and will reward you with a book from our recent library cull. There are some gems to choose from.

'Heart and Soul' Spiritual Gatherings



Thursdays 5th March and 2nd April, 7-8pm
gathering at 6.45pm down in the Essex Church library

Come and join us for our monthly alternative spiritual gathering, with music and silence, words and prayers, and a chance to explore the evening's topic in relation to your own life. In March Brian's theme will be 'Me, You, and the Others'.

The contemplative hour will be followed by time for refreshments (home-made cake) and fellowship. All are welcome to join us. If you'd like to have a go at co-leading a Heart and Soul session in the coming months, or doing a reading, please get in touch with Sarah to find out more: sarah@kensington-unitarians.org.uk.

The Big Relax Yoga + Restorative Yoga



Friday 6th March, 6-7pm or 7.30-8.45pm

An Immersive relaxation session encouraging Deep Rest. Uncover your natural sense of wellbeing through gentle yogic practices in a warm and beautiful space. No previous experience required, just relax into yourself. This will include breath-work with gentle standing or floor-based movements, restorative poses and a final relaxation with a creative visualisation, whilst cocooned in warm blankets. The emphasis is on 'letting go'. You will find bolsters and soft blankets ready to settle into. We encourage you to wear/bring comfortable clothes or just come as you are. If you have never tried yoga before, this is a simple way to start for people of all ages and abilities, including anyone recovering from illness or wanting a space to rest.

Cost: £15-20 (contact warden@kensington-unitarians.org.uk for information if you'd like to come but money is an issue). Advance tickets via Eventbrite: <https://bit.ly/39OkdkN>

Services at Essex Church



Sunday 1st March, 11am
'Relationship with Self'
Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

How we can strengthen our relationship with ourselves, a crucial foundation stone in life.

Sunday 8th March, 11am
'Intimacy and Solitude'
Service led by Jane Blackall

Martin Buber once wrote: *'When two people relate to each other authentically and humanly, God is the electricity that surges between them.'* How might our longings for intimacy and human connection – and for solitude and retreat – relate to a bigger spiritual picture? In this service we will also honour International Women's Day.

Sunday 15th March, 11am
'Plural Selves'
Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Walt Whitman famously wrote, *'Very well, then I contradict myself. I am large, I contain multitudes'*. How shall we relate to these multitudes, contained with our selves and others, and encourage fuller expression of all our many selves?

Sunday 22nd March, 11am
'Relating Beyond Duality'
Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Non-dualism lies at the core of mystic teachings. What might relationships be like if we surrendered to all that is and stepped beyond our ego-based concerns about the 'other'?

Sunday 29th March, 11am
'The Same But Different'
Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

How shall we best honour both unity and diversity in human existence? Please note the clocks go forward this weekend!

