



Kensington Unitarians

Newsletter: June 2014

What's On...

Sunday 1st June, 11am-noon
'A Community of Spirit' led by
Rev. Sarah Tinker & Jeannene Powell

Sunday 1st June, 12.30pm
Essex Church AGM

Monday 2nd June, 12.30-1.30pm
Nia Technique with Nefra Canning

Thursday 5th June, 7-8pm
'Heart and Soul' Spiritual Gathering
'Honouring Our Imperfections'
Led by Sarah Tinker

Sunday 8th June, 11am-noon
'Choose to Bless the World'
Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 8th June, 12.30pm
Small-Group Communion
Led by David Francis Darling

Sunday 8th June, 2.00-3.00pm
Nia Technique with Nefra Canning

Monday 9th June, 12.30-1.30pm
Nia Technique with Nefra Canning

Thursday 12th June, 7-9.00pm
Creativity Group: Photography
(or bring your own craft project)

Sunday 15th June, 11am-noon
**'Flower Communion
and Solstice Preparation'**
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Monday 16th June, 12.30-1.30pm
Nia Technique with Nefra Canning

Tuesday 17th June, 7-9pm
Women's Spirituality & Sexuality
(n.b. advance booking is essential)

Sunday 22nd June, 11am-noon
'Friendship' led by Rev.
Sarah Tinker & Veronica Needa

Sunday 22nd June, 12.30pm
Congregational Lunch

Monday 23rd June, 12.30-1.30pm
Nia Technique with Nefra Canning

Tuesday 24th June, 7-9pm
Women's Spirituality & Sexuality
(n.b. advance booking is essential)

Sunday 29th June, 11am-noon
'Our Favourite Things'
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 29th June, 12.30-1.15pm
'Finding Your Voice'
Singing workshop with Margaret

A Message from our Minister:

Just Because We Think It...



Years ago, my life took a little turn for the better and all because of a few words that someone said to me. I was on a supposedly silent Buddhist retreat and after a few days had come to the conclusion that silence wasn't an ideal state for me to be in. Comfort levels weren't helped by the cold damp weather, sleeping on a thin mat on the floor, austere vegan food and four hours of sitting meditation each day. If I found myself in such discomfort nowadays I'd be straight off to the nearest luxury B&B but back then I was made of sterner stuff. I knew that the practice of meditation will itself bring up anything in us that is ready to be healed. In attempting to clear our minds we are of course assailed by all sorts of tedious, yeuky, thoughts – about ourselves, about others, about life. A Buddhist approach would be to cultivate a gentle acceptance of all such thoughts – allowing them to arise, not engaging with them and thus allowing them to float on like clouds in the sky. But then, as now, I was at the beginner's stage of meditation practice and when a thought floated in, all I could do was... well, think the thought. And not just think the thought but believe it as well.

...Doesn't Mean It's True

Which is why one Saturday afternoon, when I should have been cleaning the walls of the monastery kitchen, I was found by the Abbot having a good cry. They were tears of self-pity and self-loathing. A relationship ending unexpectedly had left me feeling upset and vulnerable and as the Abbot gently questioned me I came to realise that at the core of the upset was the thought that I must be useless at relationships. And once I'd discovered that thought and told the abbot all about it, she smiled gently and said the words that have stayed with me ever since: "Just because we think it, doesn't mean it's true".

You have probably all known this since the year dot but to me it was a complete revelation. Up until that moment I had considered my mind and my thoughts to be my identity and had of course believed my thoughts to be true. Suddenly a new possibility had been presented – the idea that thoughts are just bursts of energetic activity in the brain, which can be sparked by all sorts of memories, cultural resonances, bodily sensations and the like. Enquiring deeply into the possible origin of each of our thoughts is a fascinating process if you have a lifetime to fill but even just reminding myself when a thought takes a strong hold on my mind that it may not actually be true has made a real difference in life and particularly in how I relate to others. Maybe not so useless at relationships after all!

Rev. Sarah Tinker

'You know what we are guilty of? Believing our thoughts; that's all...that's all.'

-Byron Katie

In this month's newsletter...

* 'Making a Difference' – responses to our service on 18th May * Heidi Ferid Art – Update *
'Life Enhancing' – Reflections from Juliet Edwards, Roy Clark and John Hands
* 'Bringing God Home' – Book Review by Caroline Blair * Spirituality & Sexuality Group *
'To See the World as Others See It' by David Francis Darling * Unitarians at London Pride
* Committee News * 'A Community of Spirit' 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.



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Congregational Lunch

After the Service on Sunday 22nd June



We will be having a bring-and-share congregational lunch after the service on Sunday 22nd June. Please put the date in your diary and plan to bring some food or drink to contribute to the table. It is likely that you will be approached with a sign-up sheet over the next few weeks so we can get a sense of what people are bringing and ensure we have a reasonably balanced offering.

Carol Sheppard has kindly offered to coordinate the lunch and organise a team to set out the meal and clear up after so please consider offering to lend a hand on the day.

Volunteering Rotas: Stewarding, Coffee and Greeting



Stewarding:

1 st June:	Mike Eichler
8 th June:	Gina Bayley
15 th June:	Veronica Needa
22 nd June:	Natasha Drennan
29 th June:	Veronica Needa

Coffee:

1 st June:	Eliz Beel
8 th June:	Kate Brown
15 th June:	Margaret Darling
22 nd June:	Veronica Needa
29 th June:	Jane Blackall

Greeting:

1 st June:	Ted Nist & Runa Alam
8 th June:	Carol Sheppard
15 th June:	Billy Jackson
22 nd June:	Annette Percy
29 th June:	Roy Clark

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

rotas@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

'Heart and Soul'

Midweek Spiritual Gatherings

Thursday 5th June from 7-8pm

Gathering at 6.45pm downstairs in the library

Followed by social time and refreshments



Our June gathering will be led by Sarah Tinker on the theme 'Honouring our Imperfections'. Sarah says: How often do you find yourself slightly dissatisfied with yourself in one way or another? It might be our bodies, our families, our friendships or lack of them, our basic characteristics – most of us find it hard to love our imperfect selves. Come and join us for our monthly alternative spiritual gathering, with music and silence, words and prayers, chance to explore the topic in relation to your own life. 'With refreshments afterwards.'

If you would like to know more about these gatherings please contact jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk.

Making a Difference

If you were at our service on May 18th you'll remember being asked the question, 'How has this community changed your life?' and because all our circumstances are so varied I broadened that and asked people to complete any of these sentences if they wished:

Finding Kensington Unitarians has made a difference to my life because ...

Being a Unitarian has changed my life because ...

I'm grateful to this community for ...

Coming to church has ...



Below you'll find the responses people gave that morning and if you weren't there but would like to add your response to these then do email or write your own answer and give them to me. I think they give a really interesting and heart-warming sense of what can be gained in joining in a spiritual community with others.

Coming to church here has provided me with a spiritual home where I can meet like-minded liberal seekers of their own truth and feel accepted and valued just as I am, with my own doubts and fears.

Finding the Unitarian movement all those years ago now has given my life a meaning and a purpose it would not otherwise have had. I am so grateful. And I really care that there are communities like ours that encourage us to explore life's spiritual dimensions without insisting that we all think the same way. Thank goodness for freedom and respect and a genuine honouring of our diversity.

Coming to church makes my soul happy. Listening to the music and singing fills me with emotion. Being Unitarian reminds me of who I am and how I fit into the larger community. Coming to church is like being in nature, inside.

I am grateful to this community for welcoming me, showing me kindness and giving me a sense of comfort and connection during a very difficult period of my life.

Coming to church has given me a space for reflection, inspiration, meditation, healing and a sense of connection to all the world's joys and concerns and that my own joys and concerns are recognised and held and somehow helped. And I love singing the hymns!

Finding Kensington Unitarians has made a difference to my life through the new friends and music it has given me.

I'm grateful to this community for the love my friends give and receive here. Coming to church has opened doors for me that I thought shut forever.

Finding Kensington Unitarians has made a difference to my life because I have found a wonderful place to be and to belong to as I make a life for myself here in London. This community has helped me in so many ways that I can't even begin to explain. Warmth and friendship and connection!

This community has changed my life by giving me an on-going discipline of spiritual and meaningful focus in my life.

Coming to church helps nourish the part of me that cares for others, thinks bigger and thinks positively. It has helped to balance all that steers me toward greed, selfishness and short sightedness. Oh and I love the singing.

I am grateful for this welcoming community. Thank you for a spiritual and uplifting service and for making us part of it.

Coming to church has helped me develop my spiritual practice outside of traditional church life and given me a community of like-minded people to share this journey with in London. I am grateful to share this with this group of lovely people!

Here I can come to church without having to believe things that in all good conscience I cannot say that I believe.

Coming to church enables me to reflect on matters that concern me and focus on possible solutions. Our worship is always inspirational.

This community has changed my life by giving me a good reason to get up on a Sunday and come out and meet a variety of people I would never otherwise have met in life. Coming here reminds me to live more mindfully, and to think of others as well as myself.

Being a Unitarian has changed my life because it helped me to get in touch with my spiritual side. I'm grateful to this community for friendship and support.

Coming to church has given me the feeling of belonging and being part of a spiritual community. Church is an oasis of calm. I feel I am accepted here and do not have to worry about judgement.

It's so nice to see Unitarian principles being carried out in another part of the world as we visit you today.

Coming to church gives me wise words, music and a sense of peace.

This community has changed my life in a million ways! I have been introduced to new ideas and practices. My whole way of thinking and being in the world has been transformed. I have been supported by others and my confidence has increased hugely. I have come to think that I have got an important contribution to make and the church has enabled me to have a go at making a difference.

Being a Unitarian has changed my life because of being a part of a community of shared values. Receiving and growing and sharing our mutual hopes, joys, concerns.

Coming to this church rebalances my week, which in turn rebalances my inner life and spills over into my outer one! A huge thank you.

Making a Difference *(continued)*



I'm grateful to this community for the silent spaces, the pertinent, perspicacious (timely wisdom) reminders of what is important in life; the variety of people who come here. Comfort, insights, beauty, goodwill, kindness, space and silence and resonant words; singing, lovely music. Openness and possibility.

Coming to church helps take me to a place of calm and quiet where I can leave behind day to day concerns and focus on things that are bigger and more important.

I'm grateful to this community for creating and allowing a clear and open space for me to come to where I can experience community and reflection. Where there is no dogma and I get in touch with truth and love. Thank you.

Finding Kensington Unitarians has made a difference to my life because it has helped me to find and consolidate my spiritual centre. Being a Unitarian has helped me to continue my sense of the importance of human fellowship and coming to church helps me to feel in good contact with others.

It hasn't changed my life, yet. I remain hopeful. In the meantime, I enjoy sharing the world with other hope-filled travellers.

Coming to church anchors me into a contemplative place weekly – I enjoy the discipline that it brings to my life. Praying and singing with others nurtures my soul. The variety of sermons gives great food for thought.

Finding Kensington Unitarians has made a difference to my life because I can relate to others with the same willingness to grow.

Being a Unitarian has changed my life because I can see unity in diversity. There is room for everyone to be the way they / we are. And I'm grateful to this community for welcoming everyone.

Coming to church has the value of being and the space to just be.

Being a Unitarian changed my life by giving me a community where I can fully participate without guarding my thoughts and comments. It gives me a group of people with whom to work on racial justice, environment and social justice. It gives me friends on whom I can test my ideas, can be both challenged and affirmed – and where I can contribute both talent and resources.

I'm grateful to this community for the spirit and the memory of its life over many years.

Spirituality and Sexuality Group for Women



**Tuesday evenings 7 to 9pm:
17th and 24th June and 1st July**

facilitated by Jeannene Powell and Sarah Tinker

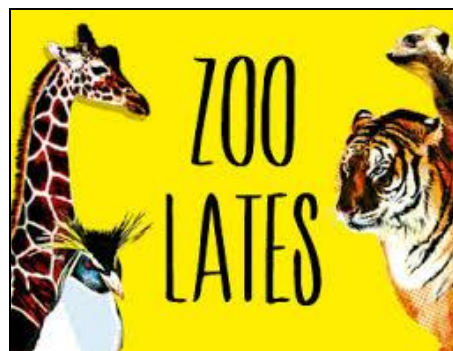
Together we will create a safe space for us as women to consider both the connections and the disconnections between our spiritual and sexual lives. Our explorations will include issues of identity, history, changes through our lives and the messages we have received from family, religion and society. Using simple exercises in writing, art work and meditation we will seek imagery to heal the rifts between these important aspects of ourselves. As places will be limited do let us know if you would like to join this small group and ensure that you can commit to attending at least two sessions and ideally all three.

To book a place, please contact Sarah:
sarah@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

(Men interested in joining a men's course / group are invited to contact Jim Blair on jim_blair_rhino@hotmail.com)

Cultural Outing: Zoo Late

Friday 27th June, 6-10pm – book ASAP



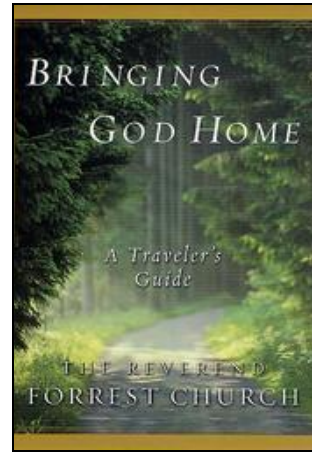
We tried to organise an outing to one of the London Zoo late openings last year but these events always sell out in advance and quite a few people found that by the time they tried to book it was too late. At the time of going to press there were still some tickets available at the special rate of £17.50 (usual rate £28). Zoo Lates are for 18+ only and as well as the chance to appreciate the animals it includes cabaret, comedy, and a street food fair.

www.zsl.org/zsl-london-zoo/whats-on/zoo-lates-0



'Religion is our human response to the dual reality of being alive and having to die. Knowing we are going to die not only places an acknowledged limit upon our lives, it also gives a special intensity and poignancy to the time we are given to live and love. The fact that death is inevitable gives meaning to our love, for the more we love the more we risk losing. Love's power comes in part from the courage required to give ourselves to that which is not ours to keep: our spouses, children, parents, dear and cherished friends, even life itself. It also comes from the faith required to sustain that courage, the faith that life, howsoever limited and mysterious, contains within its margins, often at their very edges, a meaning that is deceptive.'

Forrest Church



'Bringing God Home' by Forrest Church – Book Review

Finding myself unwell recently, I had great difficulty choosing anything to read. I felt uncomfortable and grumpy, and had the concentration span, as a friend put it, of half a gnat. I picked up Forrest Church's book because it was the only one I could reach from my bed, and to my surprise found it was the ideal book to read when you are feeling rather low and unable to focus.

The Rev Forrest Church was a much loved UUA minister in the US, and author of several books, some of which I had already read, but this is the one I would recommend if someone was going to read one. It is subtitled 'a Traveller's Guide', and intrepidly examines the whole journey of life and death, asking the most difficult questions, theological and secular: Where were we before we were born? Where are we after we die? What can we do if we hate ourselves, and how does that fit with loving others as we love ourselves? What is the right thing to do if someone says they want to kill themselves? How do we believe in any religion when they all contradict each other and claim to be the only true one? Do we have to be either a theist or an atheist?

The reason that the book is a good one for those feeling under par is that it is very gently, approachably, often humorously written. It is very anecdotal. Church uses incidents from his own life, but in a clear-eyed, calm, unjudgmental way: he discusses the fact that he was simultaneously a popular and well-regarded minister and an alcoholic without excuses or excessive regret; he feels that it made him a poorer minister, but not a poorer human being. It is unexpectedly warming to see someone applying the same kindly lack of judgment to himself as he does, invariably, to others.

The answers he offers to the hard questions are not of the kind where you exclaim, "Brilliant! I would never have thought of that!" They are more the kind of answers where you think, quietly, "I'm glad he said that. It feels right." Beneath the breezy, anecdotal style is someone exceptionally well-read, thoughtful, and with a highly skilled ability to use language. One of the short reviews on the back of the book – by American theologian John Shelby Spong – describes it as 'intensely human and mystically profound'. I like that phrase very much. It sums up the way the book lulls you into confronting the kind of questions we tend to avoid, and holds your hand as you do so.

Caroline Blair

District Unitarians Celebrate London Pride

Saturday 28th June from 11.30am



Our denomination having been in the forefront of the religious efforts in support of equal rights for same-sex marriage, Unitarians from throughout the District are urged to attend London Pride so that we have an excellent representation.

The parade begins at 13:00, so you are asked to gather as a group no later than 11:30 on the portico of St Marylebone Church, 17 Marylebone Road. It is between Baker Street and Regent's Park Underground stations. This was where LDPA gathered two years ago. This follows a very successful and well-attended Pride Banner Making Party at Lewisham Unitarian Church, with Unitarians and others from around the District enjoying each other's company while making banners to display in the parade.

Life Enhancing

Deepening our Involvement in the Congregation and Enhancing our Experience of Essex Church



Juliet Edwards and John Hands – Christmas Eve 2013

Last month I sent round an email inviting members of the congregation to write a reflection on some aspect of their involvement with the church which has deepened their experience and enhanced their church life in some way.

Here are the first few contributions, from Juliet, Roy, and John. I hope this will be the first in a series of such articles and encourage others to come forward with their own offerings. What has helped you to feel a greater sense of connection to, and ownership of, the congregation? It might be something relatively small, like helping with the washing up on Sunday, or volunteering to be a steward, greeter, or making the tea. Maybe you have attended a regional or national Unitarian event which has strengthened your sense of being part of a wider community. Maybe going on a cultural outing or joining a small group has helped you to get to know other people at a deeper level. In my experience, actively participating in church life in these many and varied ways is of benefit to each of us as individuals, and also the congregation as a whole. We would love to hear from you!

When I first came to the church back in 1999 I was incredibly shy and hardly spoke to anybody. I didn't have much confidence. One of the first ways I got involved was to offer to make the tea. I found this more appealing than stewarding as it was a way of interacting with people, and making a helpful contribution, without having to make small talk! I just had to ask 'tea or coffee?' Soon after this, I noticed that the church didn't have a website, and offered to set one up. This was a good match of my skills to the congregation's needs and the then minister, Rev. Art Lester, was quick to take me up on the offer. I still look after our website today. Before long I became a very keen member of the congregation and wanted to come along to everything that was on offer. In those early days I especially appreciated the midweek adult religious education groups and occasional in-depth Saturday workshops. When we were without a minister this led me to start up engagement groups and over the years I have become more confident as a facilitator. The list of ways in which getting involved in congregational life has enhanced my own life is almost endless. The more I have put in, the more I have got out, in terms of personal development and support on life's journey. Perhaps this accounts for my slightly evangelical zeal in encouraging others to do likewise!

Jane Blackall

'It was the start of my becoming a more confident person.'

I've been attending Essex Church since 1983, during which time I've done practically all the tasks the church requires – coffee maker, steward, reader, service leader, committee member and trustee, wedding registrar and treasurer and I've been a delegate at the Unitarian General Assembly Meetings. Now I only do the first three and I still am a trustee and a committee member. I like being a committee member because I like to know what is going on at the church, the initiatives that are being proposed and how we are involved with the national and international Unitarian movement and what facilities we can offer to them and to the public at large. The Charity Commission automatically regards committee members as trustees but in Essex Church there are specific trustees whose main responsibility is hiring the minister and members of staff. We think we have done a pretty good job in approving of Jane Blackall, Jenny Moy and Sarah Tinker and I hope we don't have to make any further decisions for a long time to come!

I was treasurer for eight years. Before I took it on we'd been lucky enough to have treasurers who were involved in banking or the world of business. I, as it were, slid into the task. First I'd taken on writing a few cheques when the treasurer wasn't in church and later when I found that he wasn't interested in collecting Gift Aid I said that I'd take responsibility. I found that this makes about an extra £2,000 for us every year which is well worth having. In 2003 Chris told us he would no longer be able to be treasurer and we all sat in the committee meeting looking at our shoes. I cracked first! I said I would take it on and William Featherstone, a previous treasurer, offered his support. At this stage I was filling in all the monthly spread sheets by hand. I asked for and got a lot of help from our accountant. Now our accounts are all on Excel and that programme does the adding and subtraction and I know it still isn't easy, because the monthly incoming and outgoing figures don't always balance – I would say, though, that it's almost worth the frustration for the feeling of joy and relief when it does balance! For the latter part of my time as treasurer Jenny Moy worked with me and that was immensely helpful and more enjoyable. Two years ago Caroline Blair kindly took over from me. It was time I gave up, but I would say it's one of the most interesting church jobs and it also relates to the everyday world of finance and Charity law. I wasn't seeking work when I took it on, but I think that being Church treasurer could be a useful thing to mention on a C.V.

I meant this article to begin much further back in my life, when I first began to attend Essex Church. I already was a Unitarian but I was starting out again after a divorce and didn't think much of myself. It was when Francis Simons was minister and I cannot remember how it occurred, but he asked me to do a reading the following week. I was very anxious about it. But what was so remarkable was that when I began I felt that the whole congregation was rooting for me. It was a marvellous feeling after having anticipated criticism. It was the start of my becoming a more confident person.

The people who come here know what it's like to be vulnerable and they're not looking for faults. I think it's always been true of this community and they are very supportive.

Juliet Edwards



Jane Blackall, Roy Clark and Caroline Blair – June 2013

‘Giving and Receiving, and Mutual Support on the Spiritual Road’

I suspect that for many people their first contact with Unitarianism is at a Sunday morning church Service. For me however it was the midweek Heart and Soul Service held the first Thursday of the month here at Essex Church, that gave me my first taste of what the faith is (and isn't) and what it had to offer.

Perhaps this says something odd about my personality though, as for many people the idea of entering a small room in the basement of a building they had never visited before to meet with a group of people they didn't know would have hardly been a "toe in the water" approach to religion. Sitting quietly at the back of a well-attended service in the church would probably serve most people better in this regard. Actually in many ways, Heart and Soul can be looked at as a regular church service in miniature. It retains a religious form and structure contains many of the same elements of a Sunday service. However it is different. Being a smaller gathering, it has an intimacy, a sense of connectedness and a stillness which create a more immersive and for me often a more intensely contemplative experience.

A few months back, I was asked if I would like to lead an H&S service. In truth this is not something I had ever given much thought to doing, or for that matter felt any great urge to do. However giving and receiving and mutual support on the spiritual road are one of the reasons that I am attracted to the Unitarian way, so I was more than happy to take on this role.

It turned out to be a very rewarding experience and an opportunity to share and explore with fellow seekers some ideas and themes that are very important to me. A simple but accurate analogy of Heart and Soul is as a table laid out for a meal to which we can all bring good things. Another key feature of this particular form of Unitarian get-together is that coming as it does midweek; it serves as a little island of tranquillity, a welcome break from the busy world of work. This "spiritual intermission" gives my soul refreshment and my mind the opportunity to recalibrate to the wholeness of my life.

Ultimately all Unitarian activities regardless of their outward forms and formal or informal structures have a role to play in personal inner growth. I have attended a number of courses and events during the last year or so and the Sunday Morning Service is an important mainstay and indeed anchor my life. That said though, I have a special fondness and need for our little Heart and Soul gatherings. Why not try one for yourself?

Roy Clark

‘Grace in All that we Undertake’

I have been a Unitarian for about twenty-seven years, starting as a member of Rosslyn Hill Chapel then Essex Church. During this time I have initiated or taken part in quite a number of events and groups within both churches – but more, now, at Essex Church. I am a poet and writer, so I was keen to try starting poetry-reading groups for poets and those interested, and also verse-speaking groups. This I did, with varying amounts of success, at both churches. I also attended groups on Building your own theology/philosophy, and other similar groups with related topics. I was a dramatherapist until the late sixties, and tried out one or two groups of this kind. But I have the impression that the word "therapy" is something of a "No No!" amongst my fellow Unitarians, so have not persisted in this.

I have written articles and poems for both the Newsletter of our church and for 'The Inquirer' when it was edited by the late Keith Gilley. I have also taken Services in our church, and formerly at Rosslyn Hill. I have attended a few Conferences and Workshops throughout my time at both Churches, and particularly enjoyed staying at The Nightingale Centre in Great Hucklow, Derbyshire, which can - and does - offer enriching experiences to us all. I have also been a once-active member of the Unitarian Society for Psychic Studies, including being its president for three years.

I have been also a Committee member of both Rosslyn Hill and Essex Church, and taken part in Minister selection committees at both churches. Throughout this period of time I have continued to write poems, plays and novels and articles, and am sure that the sense of a supporting and friendly community – from which several good friends have emerged – has benefited my writing a great deal. And of course I want to add that the support and encouragement of my loving wife Heidi Ferid has been foremost in this sense of being helped and supported by other people.

I have the uneasy sense that what I have just written sounds like a sort of CV. I hope you will understand that I have listed my activities in this way partly for economy of reading-effort, but also to convey to you that I believe that none of this could have been done without my sense of divine Grace in all that we undertake, provided that we recognise this and thank our Pure Source. Without this sense our efforts and enterprises can so easily founder – or simply never emerge at all. Of course I am not saying that we should allow ourselves to lean back, muttering "I've acknowledged my Source – so it will happen now".

I believe that our concern for others and for the quality of whatever we undertake is made possible only if we are always alert to our need to act out of love and not ego. Undoubtedly Ego if resolutely applied, can take us a long way. But because our secular awareness of what can or may be done is bound to be limited, our acknowledgment of this opens our hearts and minds to help and perhaps good fortune, because we have opened ourselves to the fact that as individuals our strength and vision is limited, and that so many events which affect our lives our beyond our capability and understanding.

John Hands

'To See the World As Others See It'

Sermon by David Francis Darling – 4th May 2014

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



The great Scottish poet Robert Burns, in one of his poems asks for the gift to see ourselves as others see us. That can be quite a scary thought. The first time I saw myself on a television recording (on a training course, not on the BBC) I was shocked at my delusion of being a slim 25 year old was shattered. When I mentioned this to a friend he said. Don't worry we've seen you as you really are for years. We're quite used to it. A gentle reminder perhaps, that our friends often accept us as we are more readily than we accept ourselves.

Yes, seeing myself as others see me can be a challenge but it can be equally challenging and helpful to see the world as others see it.

Recently, over a six week period I did a three day workshop on the Enneagram, a useful psychological tool that reminds us that we all experience the world in different ways and that we all react to our experiences in different ways. I was particularly struck on the final day to learn about the sub-types, that is that within each of the nine groups or ways of seeing the world there are three sub groups, a reminder that even people who apparently see the world from my viewpoint can react to it in different ways. These subgroups are the "self-preservers" who major on safety and security, the kind of people that you can drop in on at anytime knowing that their cupboard will be full, I'm not one of those! The second group are those who work well in teams or groups; after 17 years in a religious community, I discovered I'm not one of them either! The third group are those people who work best on a one to one basis, that's me!

What I found particularly revealing was that in discussing various situations with different groups we all found it difficult to appreciate why other people would react as they did. Each group thought that their way of dealing with things was the obvious and right way. We all thought initially that our perspective on life was the only perspective.

For me the joy of the workshop was not finding out my type and using that as an excuse for the way I see the world but in realising that my way was only one way and that I needed to learn to see the viewpoint of others as well as share my viewpoint with them. No perspective is better than another, all are needed if we are to look at an issue or problem from every angle.

In our reading from Brent Michel we heard the Native American prayer "Oh Great Spirit, grant that I may not judge my neighbour before I have walked for a day in his moccasins" Two things struck me about that prayer, First I realised that if I am to walk in another's shoes I first need to take off my own shoes! It's no good trying to his viewpoint through the prism of my own. I need to step out of my comfort zone, my comfortable slippers, and slip into his. Secondly, I need to walk for a **day** in his shoes, not for 5 minutes or a couple of hours, I need to see the whole of what life throws at her.

You may have wondered why I chose the second reading from Mathew's gospel. We all have our own viewpoints on the gospel that can filter the message. This is one of my favourite passages, not because I necessarily believe in the healing of demons but because, for me, this is a wonderful example of the humanity of Jesus in which he was challenged by a foreigner and a foreign woman at that, to change his mind, to see the world from a different perspective.

It is interesting that it is in Matthew's gospel. When I was looking for this story; I'm not one of those people who can remember chapter and verse of every part of the bible, when I was looking for it, I naturally went to Luke's gospel where most of the "women" and "outsider" stories are recorded. Luke could be considered to be the first feminist theologian! But to my surprise this account wasn't there, so I did what every good biblical scholar would do. I googled it!

And found it in Matthew's gospel, it is also in Mark's. Then it dawned on me that, of course, it needs to be in Matthew's gospel. Matthew was writing for a Jewish audience but a Jewish audience that beginning to have to face the fact that non-Jews were following the message of Jesus.

So here in this story, the author of Matthew's gospel is saying. "Don't worry folks, even Jesus had to be persuaded that his message was meant for everyone. Matthew is also being a little bit naughty in the way he places the story. In the previous passage, Jesus has been challenging the scribes and Pharisees by saying that in keeping the laws of the Lord they have ignored the spirit of God's message. Jesus is portrayed as the challenging radical liberal but when Jesus is challenged by the woman, the outsider, he reverts to the conservative position. When she asked for healing for her daughter, he simply ignores her; she is not in his line of vision, not part of his world view. But he is not going to get away with it that easily and so she kept on asking. Jesus says " I was only sent to the lost sheep of the House of Israel and then rather rudely says. "It is not right to take the children's bread and feed it to the dogs." But the woman comes back at him, with a touch of sarcasm. "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs from the Master's table"

Then, I believe, Jesus' eyes were opened and he saw life from the woman's perspective, and healing took place.

Matthew is reminding his readers and us that we all need to welcome the unfamiliar, to be challenged by people with views different from our own. His positioning of the story is also a challenge to us, especially those of us who see ourselves as liberal religious people that there is a danger that we can limit our openness and inclusivity. We think that we have arrived and we don't need to be challenged anymore.

'To See the World As Others See It' *(continued)*

I was struck by a comment that Alan Ruston made at the end of his John Rely Beard Lecture this year on 200 years of Unitarians being legal after the passing of what is usually referred to as the Trinity Act, when it was no longer illegal to not believe in the Trinity. Alan suggested that once Unitarians were legal they quickly became part of the establishment and no longer wished to risk upsetting people by challenging the status quo! Though he did admit that we have challenged the status quo on many issues we need to be aware of being too comfortable, simply walking in our own shoes!

In a recent blog article by the American psychologist, Myrko Thum, he gave a quote by Wayne Dyer who said "If you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change"

Thum looks, in the article, at the times when we argue with someone about a particular position and we can't figure out why he or she didn't agree with us. It seemed so obvious, can't they see that I'm right!

But, Thum points out, the other person is looking at the problem with her pair of glasses that filters her personal beliefs, motivations and concepts just as I will see the problem through my filter.

I'm also reminded of the story of the two philosophers walking along a street of Tenements in Glasgow. They see two women hanging out of the window of their flats on either side of the street having a blazing row. This was the days before twitter! One man turns to the other and says. "Of course they are never going to resolve their dispute". "Why is that?" says the other. "Well, it's obvious", he replies. "They are arguing from different premises!"

In the film *Dead Poets Society* the inspirational and eccentric teacher Mr Keating encourages his pupils to climb up onto his desk to look at the classroom from a new perspective.

If you see the bigger picture it is often possible to get a perspective that is able to solve a problem that seemed unsolvable. Albert Einstein said that "Problems cannot be solved by the same level of thinking that created them!" We need to think in a different way.

One of the curses of our liberal religious community is that we are made up of people with different views, different ways of looking at the world, of different ways of addressing issues of spirituality.

In order to claim it as a blessing and not a curse we need to listen to one another, to examine our own shoes, to take of our own shoes for a while and walk in the shoes of another, so that together as fellow pilgrims we can embrace one another and bring healing to our world.

Small Group Communion



**Sundays 8th June, 13th July, 10th August
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:

8th June – Led by David Francis Darling

13th July – Led by Jane Blackall

10th August – Led by Sue Smith

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



"Once I heard Dean Sperry in a lecture at the Harvard Divinity School say this: There had been times, he said, when he scarcely knew what he believed or whether he believed anything at all — times when he was baffled, confused and dismayed—as, no doubt everyone is sometimes. And at those times, he found great good in the Communion. For here was something which generations of people has said and done over the centuries. And somehow, regardless of doctrine, that gave him a thread of continuity, a kind of steadying. In that service, it was as if he felt himself one with the age-long movement of humanity, together, through thick and thin."

W L McKinstry *(from uchristian.org)*

A Unitarian Sunday



The May event as part of our Spiritual Life Skills series was organised by our very own Veronica Needa who directs the remarkable theatre company True Heart Theatre. With Playback Theatre of this kind, the audience is fully involved because the performance is created there and then through people's own personal stories. There seemed to be something special something in the air that afternoon because the stories people shared were particularly moving and all credit to Veronica and the actors for bringing out strands that touched us all so deeply. It's an experience you really need to have for yourself. Perhaps some of these images might spark something in you. A garden with fox clubs playing; a contrast between endless birdsong in the woods and a beach where a body was washed up; a Chinese family tradition where the most important person is the first to taste the fish, yet who is the most important? Perhaps it's the quietest family member who does not seek praise but quietly protects others. We heard of a Polish teenager courageous enough to leave Poland alone and to jump from a train, the only one in her family to survive the Holocaust. After the performance the actors talk together about the 'performance' and try to discern the 'red thread' that has run through all the stories shared. They noted courage and resilience, families and mothers in particular, how to make decisions. True Heart Theatre help people to tell the tales of their lives and bring together a wonderfully rich mix of cultures. So many different countries were represented that afternoon – well over ten I think. A big thank you to Veronica and do make a note in your diary now of the next Playback session here at Essex Church – Sunday 21st September – all welcome.

A big thank you also to the five people who came to Richmond Unitarian Church that same evening to support a concert given by Cris Law. Cris works as assistant director of music for the Unitarian Universalist Church of Long Beach, California and has spent the past three and a half months putting together his very first mini-European Tour/ recording project.



Cris has a remarkable countertenor voice although he was thoroughly challenged that evening by a throat infection. Despite that we still gained a glimpse of a remarkable voice and a really interesting blending of classical and modern music. Soprano Fé Avouglan was the featured guest artist in this concert and gave a beautiful rendition of Summertime, along with an operatic piece by Vincenzo Bellini. Cris ended the concert with his intriguing pop re-mix of Twinkle Twinkle Little Star – you can see and hear this on You Tube and have a dance to it. Thanks to Richmond Unitarians for hosting this concert, which they hope will be one of many as they explore ways to better use their building, which looked so lovely in the evening sunshine.

All in all, a rather full and rather lovely Unitarian Sunday.

Sarah Tinker

True Heart Theatre: 'Our Living Stories'



What a magnificently-moving experience participating in the True-Heart Workshop at Essex Church, was for me!

Being a fan of 'Improv Theatre', over the years I've attended quite a few professional and amateur performances, in several countries. True-Heart is definitely a league apart - its genuine quality is what makes the powerful difference! I found myself transported to the special worlds brought to life by the performers, as tears freely rolled down my cheeks.

As the afternoon progressed, the connection with one another was palpable... I look forward to attending many more sessions with this talented troupe, headed by Veronica Needa - TRUE HEART indeed!!

SC

'Finding Our Voice'

Singing Workshops with Margaret Marshall

Sundays 29th June, 27th July
from 12.30 to 1.15pm

Margaret Marshall 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 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.



In Appreciation of Voice Workshops

I must express my gratitude to Margaret Marshall for giving me the confidence after only two group sessions (courtesy of this Church), to have a go at singing fairly effortlessly and somewhat in tune (at least that's what I think :-)

The care Margaret puts into these sessions, her enthusiasm and individual attention, have encouraged me to break into the odd song...not just in the bathroom...

SC

Templeton Prize awarded to Monsignor Tomáš Halík

The Templeton Prize is awarded each year to "a person who has made an exceptional contribution to affirming life's breadth of spiritual dimensions, whether through insight, discovery, or practical works". Among previous winners of the prize have been the Dalai Lama, Desmond Tutu, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, and of particular interest to Unitarians and members of IARF respectively, Sir Alister Hardy and Nikkyo Niwano. This year's prize was awarded to Monsignor Tomáš Halík, a Czech Roman Catholic priest who defied Soviet rule to support the underground church in Czechoslovakia and who has become an advocate for interfaith dialogue.



Halík spoke at a meeting in the Czech Embassy in 2002 and all of us who heard him then were deeply impressed by his story and his determination to support human values and respect for human rights, the development of civil society, and encouragement of religious, cultural and ethnic tolerance. He became one of my contemporary heroes so I was delighted to be invited to the presentation ceremony at St Martin in the Fields on 14th May.

Halík grew up in a secular family but was first drawn to Catholicism by reading English writers such as Cardinal Newman and GK Chesterton. He then saw priests in his own country who had spent years in prison under the Communist regime "but they were not broken, they were mature people and very ecumenical". He became a believer and decided to study for the priesthood but the only official seminary in Czechoslovakia was controlled by the secret police. Halík had already been labelled an 'enemy of the regime' so he had to go underground to study theology, and even his mother did not know when he was eventually ordained in secret in East Germany. He spent nearly two decades organizing and building an extensive secret network of academics, theologians, philosophers and students dedicated to cultivating the intellectual and spiritual underpinnings for the democratic state he and others envisioned.

After the 1989 Velvet Revolution Halík began to travel and to write. Besides serving as an advisor to many of the Czech Republic's political and religious leaders, he is at the forefront of engaging in and encouraging dialogue and understanding between religions and cultures including Muslims, Jews, Christians and non-believers. He has introduced unorthodox approaches to long-running conflicts, suggesting, for example, that the intellectual diligence prized by both Muslims and Catholics may help bridge relations among diverse Western secularism, traditional religions and Islamic culture.

Annette Percy

One Light Spiritual Gatherings 'Appreciation'



Friday 13th June 2014
6.30-8.15pm – Here at Essex Church

The gatherings are led by graduates of the Interfaith Seminary.

Information from One Light: 'Come and enjoy as we gather for deep 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, meditation, and eternal inspiration from all faiths and none. Bring your beloved eternal self, your family, children and friends'

***This event is free. Donations for expenses are welcome.
Any surplus will go to Essex Unitarian Church***

For further information contact Interfaith Reverends Pamela Ramsden 07966 478 980 / Kathryn Reynolds 07976 739 286

For those who weren't able to be with us at our last gathering on the theme of Present Moment - here is the invocation for contemplation, inspired by a Christian prayer from the Philippines:

May I know that you, Divine Beloved
give each day one moment at a time.
May I know that this is all I have, all I ever will have.
Let me have the faith which knows that
each moment contains exactly what is best for me.
Let me have the love which trusts You enough
to forget past failings and future trials.
May I have the love for You
to live each moment as unique and whole.

Our guest at the next gathering is extraordinary singer and yoga teacher - Mohinini Chatlani . Mohini came to the last Gathering and graciously accepted our spontaneous invitation to sing a beautiful version of the Buddhist Metta prayer of loving kindness at the end. Her spellbinding voice filled the room and our hearts with glorious sound. Mohini's rapturous music which has been described as gentle, tranquil and enchantingly inspiring, shifts one into inner ancient dimensions where all religious realms converge in the heart. Our guests share wisdom, worship and meditation from their dearly beloved faith or tradition. Here are our upcoming guests and themes:

11th July – 'The Soul' with Rev. Razia Aziz: Razia seeks to vocalise her sense of connection to the Divine through remembrance. Her voice reaches through the music for the soul. Remembrance of God exists in every nation, culture, language and tradition. As such, Razia is equally happy to sing songs and chants from a range of traditions and sources.

8th August – *Simplicity*; 12th September – *Safety*; 10th October – *Art*; 14th November – *Wisdom*; 12th December - *Gift of Light*

Celebrating Sanctuary

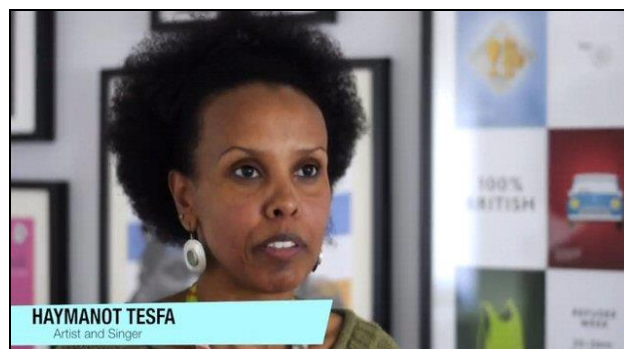


Arts Events on the South Bank and Beyond – To Mark Refugee Week

15th-22nd June 2014 at Various Venues

Celebrating Sanctuary is a landmark event that plays a crucial role in promoting Refugee Week to London and the whole of the UK. Because of the sheer size, variety and vibrancy of the events, the breadth of refugee cultures, communities and art forms that it promotes and its locations, Celebrating Sanctuary London does a huge amount to promote the key objectives of Refugee Week. It helps to counter negative opinions about refugees and educate the general public about the contribution that refugee communities make to life in the UK.

By bringing together people from refugee and host communities, we offer a unique shared experience, a chance to see, hear, taste, smell, and partake of the cultural riches of refugee communities from across the globe in one place. Better understanding of where refugees come from and how they contribute to London is essential in making those strong communities we all want to live in.



Our own Roy Clark says: "My friend Haymanot is a singer and painter who is performing this year's Celebrating Sanctuary Festival on the South Bank Celebrating Sanctuary London showcases the music and arts stemming from refugee and migrant communities. To raise money for this Counterpoint Arts a charitable organization involved with supporting the rights and welfare of refugees has started a kickstarter campaign."

Counterpoint Arts are aiming to raise £2000 and need to get this sum pledged by 15th June for the money to be released. At the time of going to press they had raised £425. Please visit: www.kickstarter.com/projects/counterpointarts/celebrating-sanctuary-london to make a donation and support this project.

To find out more about the festival please visit:
www.celebratingsanctuarylondon.org.uk

What's Going on in Our Busy Building?



We've just received our 2013 accounts back from our accountants and they show a gratifying rise in lettings income – from about £65,000 in 2012 to £75,000 in 2013. This is mainly due to an increase in letting charges at the beginning of 2013 rather than an increase in the number of lettings, but over the 7 years I've been here, there has been a slow and steady increase in the number of daytime bookings and I've been wondering for a while what share of our income they now represent.

I've therefore spent a few hours today analysing our 2013 lettings income to see how it's spread across the week and also between daytimes and evenings.

Here are the rough results (I may go into them in more detail in a subsequent column):

- Over the course of the year, Monday, Tuesday and Friday earned almost exactly £10,000 each, with Thursday only managing about £8,000 and Wednesday a cracking £14,000.
- Although Monday is our busiest day in terms of number of bookings, it was our second lowest earner. This is because the evening income is relatively low compared to Tuesdays and Wednesdays where we have a regular weekly booking of the main church.
- There's a clear pattern to the income earned in different months: the average is about £4,000 pcm with a low of £2,000 in August; Jan & Feb come in around £5,000 with a peak of nearly £7,000 for the music exams in March and another mini-peak of £5,500 in November.
- The highest earning month/day was November Wednesdays at £2,015.
- The lowest earning month/day was August Thursdays, when we didn't earn anything at all!
- Over the course of the week, we make twice as much from evening bookings as daytime ones.

I suspect all of this is more interesting to me than it is to anyone else, but it's been fun to confirm some of my hunches about the weekly/yearly patterns – and to disprove others. I expect the patterns will be much the same this year – although I was pleased to see that August Thursdays have managed to break their duck with a £150 booking in the diary already ☺

Jenny Moy, Essex Church Warden

Foodbank Update



Thank you to everybody for their continuing contributions to our Foodbank collection. We recently received the following message of thanks:

I just wanted to say thank you for the recent donation of food to Ealing Foodbank. You might be interested to know that we have fed 933 people, 378 of them being children, and have given away 8.2 tonnes of food since we opened in October last year. We now run 3 centres, in Acton, Greenford, Southall and will be opening our fourth in Hanwell at the end of this month.

We are very grateful for all the food donated, and each month this year so far, we have given away more than we have received - which is really good news, and shows to indicate just how important every delivery of food is to us. Please would you pass on our thanks to all those involved? All the best, Janet Fletcher

Juliet Edwards kindly transported the last batch of food and reports that the food bank are particularly grateful for donations of sugar, fruit juice, instant mashed potatoes, tinned meat, tinned veg (particularly potatoes, carrots and veg other than peas/baked beans) & cup-a-soups.

A basic wish-list of items (note highlights):

- Milk (UHT or powdered)
- **Sugar (500g)**
- **Soup (e.g. cup-a-soup)**
- **Fruit squash / juice**
- Tinned meat pies
- **Tinned veg (e.g. potatoes, sweetcorn, carrots, preferably NOT peas/baked beans)**
- Pasta Sauces
- Sponge Pudding (tinned)
- Cereals
- Rice Pudding (tinned)
- Instant Coffee
- **Instant Mashed Potato**
- Rice
- **Tinned Meat / Fish**
- Tinned Fruit
- Jam
- Biscuits or Snack Bars

If you would like to donate any of these items please bring them along to church next time you come.



'Counter-Culture: Resistance, Rebellion and Responsibility'



June Workshop Cancelled

We are sorry to have to let you know that we have decided to cancel the June workshop in our 'Spiritual Life Skills' series as bookings were too low for it to be viable.

If you are thinking of coming along to any of the future workshops in the 'Spiritual Life Skills' series I would strongly encourage you to book early to support this initiative and ensure that the activities go ahead as planned.

Jane Blackall

Do you know about 5W?



It is a British-based travel group for women, consisting of over 2,500 women worldwide in 80 countries who offer free accommodation to members. If they have room, you can take your husband, partner and even children too.

It costs £35 a year to be a member and you can stay 3 nights. They feed you and show you the sights; in return you give them gifts and take them out for a meal.

You can make many good friends; I know. I stayed with 29 hosts when I travelled at age 74, solo around the world for eight months visiting England, Holland, Belgium, Finland, Russia, China, Japan, Hong Kong, Australia and Tasmania.

Have a look at their website:
www.womenwelcomewomen.org.uk.

Start planning today. You will have fun.

Jo Bellett visiting from Sarasota, Florida

World Congress of Faiths

5pm, Thursday 12th June 2014
Here at Essex Church



The Annual General Meeting of the World Congress of Faiths will take place at 5pm on Thursday 12th June 2014 at Essex Church. At 6.30pm Rabbi Dr Jackie Tabick will be leading a text-based discussion entitled 'Greed is Good!?' with texts from a variety of scriptures.

About the WCF: A member of WCF is typically a person who is committed to one or other of the world faith traditions, but who nonetheless expects to benefit from the challenges and enrichments offered by engagement with diverse traditions of faith and belief. The World Congress of Faiths publishes the leading journal on interfaith matters Interreligious Insight. It arranges a variety of conferences, meetings, retreats, visits and group travel. All these provide occasions to learn what others believe, what they think about life today and how they pray, meditate and worship. The World Congress of Faiths believes that understanding between people of different religions is important for good community relations, for moral and spiritual renewal and for world peace. A principle is respect for those of differing faith. WCF by its educational work encourages interfaith understanding and co-operation at all levels of society.

For more information see: www.worldfaiths.org

Flat-Share in Spain



A visitor to our church is renting a flat in Spain from June 21 to July 29. The flat has a single room which she will use and also a double bedroom and a couch. She is wondering if anyone would like to share with her at any point. Please let me know if you are interested and I will put you in touch.

Sarah Tinker

Report from the Church Management Committee



A small group of the management committee met on the 29th May prior to the congregational AGM on the 1st June. As usual we looked at mission and maintenance. Sarah reported that the Manse balcony had been cleared of plants prior to the builders coming to repair the roofing over the foyer. Unfortunately the wet weather has slightly delayed this work. It was reported that the sound system is to be improved and the heaters in the church and foyer are to be repaired.

Jane reported that people were slowly returning their membership renewal forms and that we estimate that we have around fifty signed up members of the congregation. We are aware that some people wonder why we have to ask you to sign up every year when you have been a member of the church for years. This is partly so that we have a "live" membership list (some churches have people on their membership list who haven't been near the church for years) but it is also an opportunity once a year to renew our commitment to our church community. A chance to say, "Yes, I believe in this community, and I want to continue to align myself with it". I'm also aware that some members don't live in London or even the UK but are still committed to the church and engage with it through the newsletter and by listening to the podcasts and we rejoice in that.

And speaking of commitment we are keen to encourage people to be more involved in the life of the congregation by volunteering to greet people when they arrive at church, be a steward at the service or make coffee afterwards. These are all ways not only of giving something to the community but also of becoming a more integral part of it.

The committee noted with thanks some of those who have given of their time and talents. We were grateful to Roy Clark for giving another slant to the creativity group by sharing his passion and talent for photography, to Jeannene for leading Heart and Soul worship and to Carol Sheppard for organising the congregational lunch.

As usual the building continues to be well used and we are pleased that 83% of our income comes from letting rooms. That does mean however that only 17% comes from congregational giving. If we didn't have the rooms to let we would be a very different congregation with no minister, musicians or outreach officer! We are aware that many of you are very generous and have standing orders set up and that many are struggling to make ends meet but have a think about how much you value our congregational life. We can now claim gift aid on money in the general collection so every little helps and your offering ensures we get some money back from the government!

As part of being a welcoming and inclusive church Sarah reported that she has been in contact with the local Registry Office so that we can be registered for same sex marriages as well as opposite sex ones.

And finally, please remember that the management committee is here to serve you so if you have any questions about our church life or suggestions for worship or building up our community life please speak to one of us.

David Francis Darling
Chair of the Congregation

Cultural Outing: The Proms

Thursday 14th August at 7.30pm



Juliet and Sarah have organised a cultural outing to prom 38: Sibelius, Bridge and Sir Peter Maxwell Davies on Thursday 14th August at 7.30pm starting with Sibelius' ever popular tune Finlandia. We have six seats booked in the choir stalls, costing only £18 each, so check your diaries and let Sarah know if you would like one of the tickets. Please email: sarah@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Faith and Assisted Dying

Wednesday 11th June, 6.30-8.00pm

Emmanuel Centre, 9-23 Marsham Street, SW1P 3DW

A discussion examining the challenging issues surrounding assisted dying when approached from a position of faith. This event will bring together faith leaders and religious commentators on both sides of the debate on assisted dying. There will also be the opportunity for questions from the audience, followed by a drinks and canapé reception.

Our Unitarian General Assembly is the first religious organisation to make a public commitment to supporting people's right to choose assisted dying. There is a pack of information about this topic in the library and there will be lots more publicity about this important issue for our society as Lord Falconer's Bill receives its first reading in Parliament in June. Sarah has two free tickets for the first people to get in touch and ask for them.

‘Spiritual Life Skills’ Forthcoming Workshops



‘Enlivening Worship’ with Sarah Tinker & Jane Blackall Saturday 19th July, 11am-4pm

A workshop for all those interested in creating enlivening worship in Unitarian and Interfaith settings. Aimed at those new to worship leading as well as for those with experience, this workshop will cover music, choice of materials, themes, prayers and meditations, as well as presentation styles and ways to appeal to all our senses. Cost: £5 / £10 / £15 (pay what you can afford). To book, email: jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk or phone 020 7221 6514 and leave a message with your contact details.

Good Cause Collection of the Month

GA Sunday General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches



Collection on Sunday 22nd June

For our next charity collection we will be supporting the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches (often referred to as ‘the GA’). This is the organisation which connects our individual congregations. Through the efforts of a handful of paid staff, and a great many volunteers up and down the country, the GA provides a number of vital services for Unitarians in the UK, including:

- Training Unitarian ministers
- Training Lay Worship Leaders
- Training religious education leaders
- Providing grants to help churches pay ministers
- Providing information and publicity about Unitarians
- Providing worship material, hymn books etc.
- Representing a Unitarian perspective on national, governmental, church, and social responsibility bodies (such as the recent campaign for marriage equality).
- Organising special events such as summer school
- Organising a national youth programme
- Acting as trustees of the Nightingale Centre, our denomination’s conference centre in the Peak District.
- Supporting congregations through times of change

The GA is largely reliant on donations from individuals and local congregations to carry out all these tasks on our behalf. Please give generously, if you can, to the collection on Sunday 22nd June.

For more information visit: www.unitarian.org.uk

Previous Charity Collections:

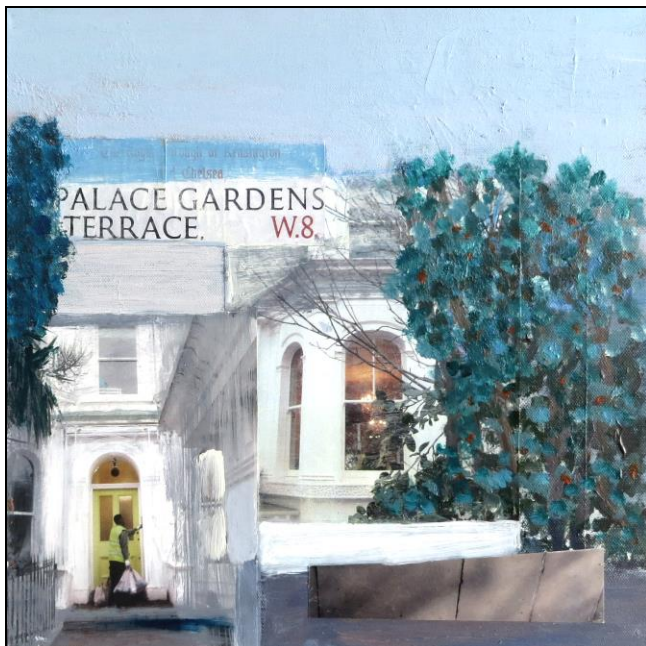
Thank you for your generosity in contributing to recent charity collections. I am pleased to let you know that we will be sending the following donations to good causes:

March – Red Cross Syria Appeal – £174.13 + Gift Aid

April – Send a Child to Hucklow - £116.48

May – Christian Aid - £115.03

Heidi Ferid Art: New Works



Our very own Heidi Ferid has recently added some new artworks to her website, including several in the ‘Imagined London’ series, including ‘Kensington’ (pictured above).

To see more please visit: www.heidiferidart.co.uk



‘Spirit in Action’

Saturday 28th June, 10am-5pm

Colet House, 151 Talgarth Road, W14 9DA

Spiritually minded people and organisations coming together in celebration of the One Spirit. Speakers on the day include Dr. Serge Beddington-Behrens, author of ‘Awakening the Universal Heart’, and Anthony Russell, author of ‘Evolving the Spirit – from Democracy to Peace’. The day aims to honour the unique contribution each individual and organisation has to make whilst recognising that by working together collaboratively we are all enriched and strengthened.

Suggested donation of £25 for the day to cover costs.

For more information visit www.onespiritalliance.net info@onespiritalliance.net or telephone 07771 701 031

Spirituality Forum – Open Meeting



Being Mindful with People with Profound Disabilities Learning About Spirituality through Learning About Mental Health

Thursday 19th June from 2-4pm
Here at Essex Church

The speaker at this event is Dr. Pia Matthews who lectures in theology, philosophy and bioethics at St. Mary’s college Twickenham. Pia’s particular interest lies in the interface between profound and complex disability and spirituality.

There is a £5 attendance fee (£1 for unwaged).

Attendance certificate available. Contact Brian Bingham: brian.bingham@mhspirituality.org.uk / 07500 352 158.

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

CHURCHGOERS THE DIFFERENT SORTS

	THE KEEN	THE MILDLY JADED	THE APATHETIC	THE BACKSLIDER
WHAT TO DO ABOUT THEM →	GIVE THEM ANOTHER JOB TO DO	ENCOURAGE THEM - PERHAPS WITH A FREE GIFT, OR CAKE	MAKE A LOUD AND UNEXPECTED NOISE	IF I KNEW WHAT TO DO IN THIS CASE I WOULD WRITE A BESTSELLING BOOK (WITH STUDY GUIDE)

Creativity Group: Photography



**Second Thursday evening of each month
Concluding on 12th June from 7-9.00pm**

Whether you are a cautious clicker, a seasoned snapper ...or a David Bailey wannabe, come along to our Photography Creativity Group this spring. On the second Thursday of each month between April and June you can learn some simple and fun ways to improve your picture taking skills. With a little guidance and some practice anyone can take consistently good photographs.

As well as tips and techniques, there will be plenty of opportunities to practice and a regular "show and tell" spot where those that wish to can compare and discuss their latest digital or indeed filmic efforts. We will also be looking at the work of some of the masters of the art to inspire us.

Zero previous experience necessary; just bring yourself, your enthusiasm... and your camera.

If you are not a photo fan and life through a lens is not your thing, come along anyway and bring with any other portable hobby or craft you enjoy. Or, just come for the conversation and fellowship of the group. Basically just come along! Looking forward to seeing you.

Roy Clark



Our creativity group meets once a month to focus on a particular art or craft medium or a certain project for each quarter of the year so that we can go deeper into it during that period. One of the particularly enjoyable features of this group is the space it offers for fellowship and conversation while we are each working on our individual projects alongside one another. If you don't fancy the art or craft we are 'officially' focusing on then you are always welcome to bring along whatever you're working on and do your own art/craft whilst enjoying the good company of the group.

Jane Blackall



A Fitness Fusion of 9 Movement Forms

**Second Sunday of the Month from 2-3pm:
8th June, 13th July, 10th August**

Also each MONDAY lunchtime from 12.30

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.

Sonya says: 'Nefra Canning will be teaching my classes in June as I will be away. Nefra's background is Temple Dancing and Tango, I love her style of teaching. Check out her website niawithnefra.com. Some of you already know Nefra and I do hope you continue to support her and the Nia classes in June.'

Cost £10 (£7 to concessions / church members).

Contact: Sonya Leite on 0207 371 1674.

Creativity Group: Printmaking

**Second Thursday evening of each month
10th July, 14th August, 11th September, 7-9.00pm**



Our next project in the creativity group will be printmaking. If you would like to try making block prints using lino or speedy-carve you will need to have the appropriate materials and tools. The pictures above show some prints that were made in the group a few years ago when we last did block printing (prints by Jane Blackall, Juliet Edwards and John Carter). Please contact Jane (jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk) by Sunday 22nd June if you would like us to order materials on your behalf.

'A Community of Spirit'

Sermon by Rev. Sarah Tinker – 1st June 2014

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

This is the address from our June 1st service in which we recognise new members and celebrate our community on the day of our Congregation's AGM.

I love travelling – all sorts of travelling – driving a car, going by train, getting on a bus. But I have to be a cautious traveller because over the years it has come to my attention that despite having all the right maps, despite being armed with useful directions, I'm somebody who is more than capable of getting lost. I come from a family of people who can get lost. One much loved family story involves my parents driving to the south coast only to find themselves in Minehead in north Devon and my mum saying comfortingly – "well, the sea is the sea isn't it, whichever coast you're on".

My 10 year old grandson has been staying with me this week for half term as he has done every holiday since he was quite small. My flat is not a huge place but when Zak was about 3 it was still quite unfamiliar to him. He had set off to explore and all had gone quiet when we heard a plaintive Zak shouting anxiously – "granny, granny where am I?" Getting lost does seem to be part of the human condition, doesn't it – be it in other people's homes or driving round unfamiliar roads or, at a deeper level, perhaps knowing what path to take next in life or how best to deal with life's challenges and setbacks.

Where am I? What are we doing here? How can we find meaning and purpose in life? Who am I? These are the existential questions of life that we creatures of the 20 and 21st centuries get to ask at times, living as we do on a tiny dot of a planet floating in the midst of an unimaginably vast and possibly meaningless universe. These are the questions posed by existential philosophers such as Sartre and Camus. And as often seems to be the way with philosophers – the questions they raised became the questions of their era. Their complex works were read only by the intelligentsia yet the concepts filtered through to us all and to some extent have shaped our thinking and our ways of living. You could say that existentialism has set an agenda for our time – how shall we best live in a potentially meaningless world?

Some of the best answers we humans can come up with to such dilemmas seem to involve fostering a sense of belonging; somehow, somewhere - we find ways to put down some roots, stretch out our tendrils, touch the lives near to us, listen and observe, ask questions, find things to do with other people, create some meaning and purpose where they might well otherwise be none. Margaret Wheatley who has written extensively about ways to create a sense of community, says that "human beings need each other; we cannot exist in isolation". We can then turn that around and say that the communities we create of course need us – how fortunate – we need to belong and communities need us to belong in order to exist. I'd take that further and say that the world itself needs our communities because it is by joining together with others that we have enough power to make a difference here on planet earth.



Now we can wax lyrically about the joys of belonging in a community but it would be wrong not to mention the other side - that joining a community is like stepping into the swimming pool or river, or standing up and getting off the spectator's bench and joining the game on the playing field. When you join in any activity you enter the flow and you cannot entirely predict or shape the outcomes. But you can guarantee you'll get wet in the river – and if you've joined a game of football it's an almost certainty that you will fall down or get kicked or at least get a bit muddy before the game comes to an end. Life in communities is real life and real life sometimes hurts and at some point anyone who really belongs in any grouping will find themselves rather wishing they didn't. Theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer described it like this in his book called *Life Together* – "only that fellowship that faces such disillusionment, with all its unhappy and ugly aspects begins to be what it could or should be in God's sight, begins to grasp in faith the promise that is given to it. The sooner this shock of disillusionment comes to an individual and a community, the better for both."

Our congregations are communities of spirit but they are like any other community – they thrive on open and deep and caring communication. And what can help such a process develop in a community? Here are some words from our very own Michaela von Britzke's essay on *Fostering Spiritual Growth in Unitarian Communities*:

"Many unexpected processes of spiritual unfolding follow naturally once we learn to make the mystic's assumption that everything that lives is holy, as part of our formal spiritual practice. If we could learn to truly meet each other in this spirit, in the groupings that make up a church and its weekly processes, we would be well on the road towards a greater awareness of the holiness of the conversation. Once we learn to adopt the view that everything that lives is holy, we don't need to turn church into a place where we have to be careful and 'nice' to each other. We can start to face our conflicts together and begin to develop a sturdy intimacy with each other – the basis and goal of our longing to belong."

"Sturdy intimacy" – what a pleasing description for any healthy relationship and what a useful reminder of the work that's need if we are to create a true community of the spirit. For we all know the challenges of attempting to conduct our lives from the position of 'everything that lives is holy' – an easy path when all is sweetness and light – a seemingly impossible task when life is tough and we come up against the wall of our dislikes, our sensitivities, our disapproval, our irritations and even our disgust. If we stick around any community for long enough we come up against those barriers in ourselves and others – and then we have a choice – do we stay and deal with our discomfort or do we back off, retreat, return to a comfort zone of our own creating.

'A Community of Spirit'

Sermon by Rev. Sarah Tinker (continued)

For me a healthy community of spirit needs to be created in such a way that people feel safe enough to stick around, to work through discomfort, to create opportunities again and again for healing – be it our own individual healing or the healing so urgently needed out there in the wider world. And one way of sticking on that path is to recognise something of God in everyone we meet and something of ourselves – this too is me. We are all connected and that connectedness helps us to work through the barriers, to clamber over the divisions, to seek health and healing and wholeness for one and for all.

A community of spirit also needs to be serving something larger than itself. Yes we are as individuals important, yes this congregation and this church building are important too, but we have to perceive ourselves as part of something greater. As the Buddhist teacher and writer I quoted from earlier Jack Kornfield puts it in his book delightfully entitled *After the Ecstasy the Laundry*, "If people gather in community primarily to alleviate their own isolation and loneliness, to have their needs fulfilled by others, they become like a group of needy children, and the community is likely to fail. But if their vision and creativity is in service to the sacred, to God, to the larger common good, there is a better chance for a healthy and wise community to grow."

When we serve one another or our wider world, we are connecting I believe with the divine, with the sacred, helping to create heaven here on earth. Our ways of serving may be large or small – the huge sacrifice or the tiniest act of generosity and kindness – all are ways to say 'yes, I am part of something greater than my self, yes, I want this to be a better world for all, yes, yes, yes to life.

Finding a Unitarian community to belong to all those years ago now made a profound difference to my life. My hope is that all people might find such a community in which to put down roots and flourish – because it is within a community that we can be ourselves and use our gifts for the betterment of all – as Starhawk describes so beautifully in this piece printed on today's hymn sheet:

"Community. Somewhere, there are people to whom we can speak with passion without having the words catch in our throats. Somewhere a circle of hands will open to receive us, eyes will light up as we enter, voices will celebrate with us whenever we come into our own power. Community means strength that joins our strength to do the work that needs to be done. Arms to hold us when we falter. A circle of healing. A circle of friends. Somewhere where we can be free."

As a community of spirit I believe we are making a bridge between the material and the spiritual elements of life. We are faced with never ending practical tasks of governing ourselves and our financial and other assets, taking care of the fabric of our buildings, taking care of one another, playing our essential part in the life of our wider community. My hope for our Unitarian community here at Essex Church and for our whole Unitarian General Assembly is that we play our part well, with fun and efficiency, in right relationship with one another and with the world. And that we remember always that we do this for the greater good of all. Amen.

Sunday Services at Essex Church

1st June, 11am –

'A Community of Spirit'

Service led by Sarah Tinker & Jeannene Powell

This service will include a welcome ceremony for new members and will be followed by the Essex Church AGM.

8th June, 11am –

'Choose to Bless the World'

Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

How best can we live as a beneficial presence in our world, a blessing to all, creating lives of beauty and possibility?

15th June, 11am –

'Flower Communion and Solstice Preparation'

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Bring a flower and join in our simple, moving flower communion ritual, which celebrates the strength of diversity within a church community We'll also explore ways you might like to prepare for the summer solstice in the week ahead.

22nd June, 11am –

'Friendship'

Service led by Sarah Tinker & Veronica Needa

Today we will celebrate what friendship means to us and the service will be followed by our midsummer bring and share lunch. An ideal opportunity to invite a friend to come to church with you.

29th June, 11am –

'Our Favourite Things'

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

A congregational service for which you are invited to choose a hymn or song, a prayer or reading, or bring along something that is special to you to talk about.

