



Kensington Unitarians

Newsletter: October 2013

What's On...

Thursday 3rd October, 7.00-8.00pm
'Heart and Soul' Spiritual Gathering
– coordinated by Sarah Tinker

Sunday 6th October, 11am-noon
**'Changing Ourselves,
Changing the World'**
Service led by Jane Blackall

Monday 7th October, 12.30-1.30pm
Nia Technique with Sonya Leite

Friday 11th October, 2-9pm
Open Studios Art Exhibition

Saturday 12th October, 11-6pm
Open Studios Art Exhibition

Sunday 13th October, 11am-noon
'Sacred Activism'
Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

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

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

Monday 14th October, 12.30-1.30pm
Nia Technique with Sonya Leite

Thursday 17th October, 7.00-8.45pm
'Twelve Steps to Spiritual Health'
RE Course with Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 20th October, 11am-noon
'Unitarian Peace Sunday'
Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 20th October, 12.30pm
Congregational Lunch

Monday 21st October, 12.30-1.30pm
Nia Technique with Sonya Leite

Monday 21st October, 7-9pm
Management Committee Meeting

Saturday 26th October, 11am
Cultural Outing: Horniman Museum

Sunday 27th October, 11am-noon
**'Getting over the Auschwitz Test:
My Journey from Atheism
To Process Theology'**
Service led by Alex Warleigh-Lack

Sunday 27th October, 12.30-1.15pm
'Finding Your Voice'
Singing Workshop with Margaret

Monday 28th October, 12.30-1.30pm
Nia Technique with Sonya Leite

Thursday 31st October, 7.00-8.45pm
'Twelve Steps to Spiritual Health'
RE Course with Rev. Sarah Tinker

A Message from our Minister:

Sacred Activism

'The one hope for the future lies, I believe, in Sacred Activism – the fusion of the deepest spiritual knowledge and passion with clear, wise, radical action in all the arenas of the world, inner and outer.' – Andrew Harvey



In the first session of our 'Twelve Steps to Spiritual Health' group, here at Essex Church, we explored what spiritual well-being means to us. Some people spoke of times in their life when what had seemed like a breakdown, a time of crisis, had later revealed itself as a time of breakthrough and re-birth into a new phase of life. I wonder if you have ever experienced such a time in your own life. Writer and mystical scholar Andrew Harvey views the many crises facing our planet – from racial, religious and political conflicts to environmental depletion, from poverty and hunger to economic uncertainty – as similar to the crises we go through in our individual lives. Such crises and breakdowns might be viewed as disasters, towards which we can respond only with despair. Or they can be seen as the birth pangs of a potentially new way of being, holding hope and possibility for our own lives and for the life of the world.

It can be exhausting simply witnessing all that is wrong in our world, and this is why Andrew Harvey recommends that we take action, if only in the smallest of ways. Doing something can provide a counter balance to cynicism or despair. Here are some of his 10 steps towards sacred activism:

- Write down now one thing that today has made you feel grateful to be alive.
- Think of someone who has hurt or betrayed you and make a commitment to work on forgiving them.
- Read a short text from any of the world's spiritual traditions that inspires you with the love and wisdom of those prophets and mystics that know God directly.
- When the text you have chosen starts to light up your spirit, pray a short prayer that aligns you with the "pure deep love" that is longing to use you as its instrument in the world.
- Make now a real commitment to spiritual practice, however simple.
- Strengthened by prayer, practice and inspiration, turn now to your life and the people in it. Connect with someone you know and offer some help and support.
- Make a commitment today, even if you are in financial difficulties, to give a regular amount to good causes, however small.

Ten steps, twelve steps – the numbers don't matter but the actions do. If every time we find ourselves troubled by the state of our world we take a positive action, I do believe we will help to create a better world.

Rev. Sarah Tinker

In this month's newsletter...

- * A Tribute to Will Lyons
- * Open Studios Art Exhibition
- * District Meeting on Ministry
- * 'Volunteering at a Foodbank' by Carolyn Appleby
- * 'Shards' by Carol Sheppard
- * 'Digital Life, Digital Soul' by Tristan Jovanović
- * Report from Hucklow Summer School
- * 'Outsider Art' by Roy Clark
- * 'A Letter from Malta' by Ellen McHugh
- * Summer Ceremonies
- * 'Money Makes the World Go Round' sermon 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 for Unitarian Peace Sunday

12.30pm on Sunday 20th October 2013



We will be having a congregational lunch after the special Unitarian Peace Sunday service on 20th October – as usual it will be a bring-and-share meal so please plan to bring some food or drink and let us know via the sign-up sheet what you intend to contribute so that we can be sure we've got a good balance of offerings. Why not plan to bring along a friend? All are welcome.

'Heart and Soul' Midweek Spiritual Gatherings

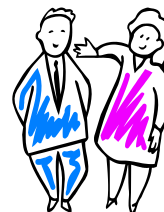


Thursday 3rd October 2013 from 7-8pm

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

Heart and Soul: 'Holding On, Letting Go' – come and join us for our monthly alternative worship, which this month will focus on an autumnal theme. As migrating birds get ready to leave for warmer climes and others arrive from the north, as leaves start to turn in colour and begin their own journey towards the earth, we will be contemplating on our own lives and the importance, both of holding on and letting go. This gathering will be led by Sarah Tinker. If you would like to know more please contact sarah@kensington-unitarians.org.uk.

Volunteering Rotas: Stewarding, Coffee and Greeting



Stewarding:

6 th October:	Sam Boyero
13 th October:	Natasha Drennan
20 th October:	Juliet Edwards
27 th October:	Gina Bayley

Coffee:

6 th October:	Kate Brown
13 th October:	Sam Boyero
20 th October:	Sue Smith
27 th October:	Liz Tuckwell

Greeting:

6 th October:	Roy Clark
13 th October:	Sue Smith
20 th October:	Carol Sheppard
27 th October:	Sue Smith

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

Report from the Church Management Committee



The management committee meeting on Monday 16th September was preceded by our annual meeting of Trustees. The Trustees are responsible for the building and staff and the management committee for the day to day oversight of church life. In reality, and under the new charity law, there is no real distinction between the responsibilities of both groups and we are fortunate at Essex Church in that all but one of the Trustees is a member of the management committee. As chair of the Trustees, Howard Hague informed us of some of the work he had been doing on the Church archives. A black box had recently been discovered that contained some interesting accounts of the move from Essex Street in the Strand to the present site. There was also a "Mission Statement" from a "Free Christian" congregation that appears to predate the Kensington Unitarian Church that merged with Essex Church. Howard is hoping to produce a full report of the archival finds.

Our warden Jenny commented at the beginning of her report that that day had been one of the busiest of her time with us when nine different groups had met in the church building during the day. Its easy for those who only see the church on a Sunday morning to forget how busy it is during the week and what a resource it is to the local community as well as a source of revenue. Jenny also reminded us of all the hard work that Gitanna our cleaner does behind the scenes to keep the building clean and welcoming and the pride that she takes in looking after "her" church.

Jane reminded us that part of our mission to the wider district and denomination was organising the Worship Studies Course which was proving to be a great success and greatly appreciated by the participants. Jane also spoke about the religious education programme for the congregation and said that the timing of events was being reviewed with the possibility of reducing the number of evening events and organising more half day or whole day one off events on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon. These sessions could also be an opportunity to invite people who might be interested in exploring their spiritual journey. We have had several people who have joined us after seeing some of our previous events on the website and testing the waters of Unitarianism by attending a non-Sunday morning programme.

As usual we looked at building issues and finance including our charitable giving as a congregation but it was good to also spend time looking at the mission of the building (a resource to many) and the mission to the congregation, the wider denomination and the wider world through the various religious education programmes. Do look out for information about all the events that are available and feedback to any member of the management team if you have any suggestions for developing our life as a community of spiritual seekers.

David Francis Darling
Chair of the Congregation

Autumn is Upon Us

Autumn is upon us

In summer we were not released: winter rain and darkness
Drove us indoors. So far this century too labours
In wintry darkness; from the world's dark cellars
Cries of the afflicted thinly emerge; and Maltheus' monster
Stalk through beleaguered lands.

Autumn is upon us, what may it offer us?

More than fruits, more than decaying vegetation?
Think of all it may owe us – then cancel each other's debts
Into the winter take neither summer's loss, nor
Autumn's desolation. Generation after generation
We plough into our lives the harvest we have gathered;
The fruits, the seeds, the seasons themselves
Are all of our making.

John Hands

St Stephens Churchyard, Marylebone, September 28th

District Autumn Quarterly Meeting

Saturday 19th October 2013 - 1:30 PM

**Hosted by Golders Green Unitarians,
31 ½ Hoop Lane, London NW11 8BS**



The theme will be Ministry. The service will be co-led by Jo James and Matthew Smith, both ministry students at Harris Manchester College, Oxford who hail from our District.

Our own Rev. Sarah Tinker, Chair of the Ministry Interview Panel and a member of the Ministry Strategy Group, will give a presentation, "Why Leadership Matters" about some new directions in ministry – its training, its credentialing, its deployment and other pertinent issues. It will be an opportunity to learn more about the work of the Ministry Strategy Group and the Interview Panel, with time to think about the kinds of leadership our Unitarian communities need in the 21st century.

One of the District's primary goals is to enhance access to trained leadership within the District. This will be an opportunity for you to learn more about how that might be achieved. The Golders Green congregation will kindly provide hospitality. See the Golders Green Unitarians website for further details: www.ggu.org.uk



A Fitness Fusion of 9 Movement Forms

**Second Sunday of the Month from 2-3pm:
13th October, 10th November 2013**

**Also each MONDAY lunchtime from 12.30
(PLEASE NOTE CHANGE OF WEEKDAY)**

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

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

Contact: Sonya Leite on 0207 371 1674.

Small Group Communion



**Sundays 13th October, 10th November
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:

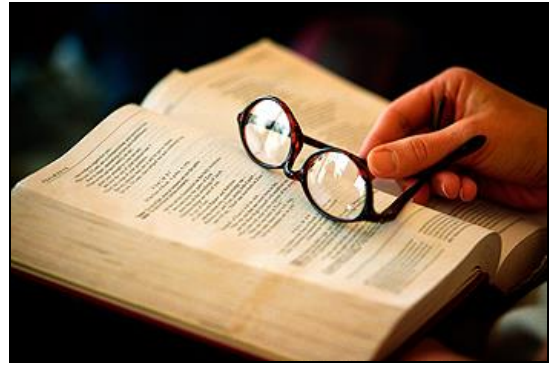
13th October – Led by Jane Blackall

10th November – Led by Tristan Jovanović

8th December – Led by David Francis Darling

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

‘Rediscovering the Bible’



Our bible-reading group has been running for a year and we have decided to bring it to a close (for the time being, at least). Thanks to all those who have participated during this run.

Some years ago now a senior minister I much admired, the Rev. Judith Walker Riggs, was minister with our Hampstead congregation. She told me once that if there were only activities going on in my church that I personally liked then there was a problem. Churches, she explained, need to cater for as wide a range of people and their interests as possible. If we like everything that’s happening in our community then we have simply created a type of club, a single interest group that will only attract people like us. And that is not what a church ideally would be.

I remembered this bit of advice when Jane and David suggested that we host the District’s monthly Bible Group here at Essex Church. ‘Not my cup of tea particularly, but let’s give it a go’ was my immediate response. I couldn’t have predicted how pleasing an activity it is to sit in a group and read to each other. We read Acts of the Apostles, the earliest account of early Christianity, a book I’d studied for ‘A’ Level Religious Studies some forty years ago. Reading it together was like re-discovering an old friend. It’s full of passion and fervour and improbable occurrences. Not to mention the strangely detailed travel arrangements, as Paul and the other leaders brought their good news to settlements throughout the Mediterranean.

The bits I find particularly touching are the humorous elements, where Luke the author gives minute details that bring his account to life. Two particularly dramatic stories caused considerable mirth when we read them aloud – Acts 20:v.7-12 when young Eutychus (a Greek name meaning ‘fortunate’) becomes drowsy after listening to Paul preaching for some hours. Falling from an upper window he appeared dead but was revived and Paul went back to preaching till dawn. And Acts 5:v.1-11 when Ananias and Sapphira lie about giving all their possessions to the community and meet a tragic end. It was good to be free to laugh at this sacred text and to imagine the circumstances in which such accounts would have been heard about and written down.

Thanks to Jane and David for providing an experience I wouldn’t otherwise have had and thanks to everyone who joined in and brought both respect and good humour to our very Unitarian approach to reading the Bible. And if anyone else has an idea of an activity they’d like to get going here at Essex Church then do let me know, particularly if it’s something I don’t like the sound of!

Rev. Sarah Tinker

A Tribute to Will Lyons - from his brother Graham

It's an honour and a privilege for me to share with you all some family reminiscences of dear Will, as we say goodbye to him for the time being. Will was born a long way away from his resting place, and looking at his successes and enjoyment of life it is easy to forget how tough a start he had. He was raised in a poor area of Wigan, Lancashire and had a childhood of cramped living conditions, shared facilities and rudimentary schooling. I am too young to have gone through this but Will's contemporaries and other brothers have brought home to me down the years how hard childhood and adolescence were back then. But what he did have were loving parents and they were immensely proud, and remained so for the rest of their lives, that Will gained a scholarship to Grammar School. An abiding memory for Derek and John, both slightly younger than Will, is that he always had his head in books. For myself I know that he regarded us as the "bookends", typical of him to choose that metaphor for the youngest and oldest of five boys. I was fascinated to learn a few years ago that despite the enormous enjoyment he was getting out of life in London and a much more comfortable age, he had contributed several fond comments about early life in Wigan to a website for memories of the old town.

Will's daughter Julie's first memories are his love of books, and she remembers bus trips to Wigan public library every Saturday when he would help her to choose a week's reading, and also mooching around the second hand bookshop in town to see what they could find. She also remembers his love of food, cooking and travel. He took her on her first trip abroad as an 11-year-old, across to France to try the French cuisine - although she wasn't very impressed at the time! Also lots of memories of different restaurants in London during many lovely visits to him and Carole. Emma reminded us of the time he took them to the millennium dome and how fast he walked. It was then they realised he was a "proper Londoner" as he raced on to the tube focused on where he was going, they couldn't keep up with him and lost him for about an hour! Kerri remembers the time she spent with him when she moved to London and how he told her how proud of her he was. He supported and encouraged Julie and the girls all through their education and careers and they all know how much he loved them.

Although illness dominated his last few years Julie always saw him as a strong, determined man who wouldn't give up. She felt privileged to help Carole to care for and spend time with him in the last few days of his life when she had chance to tell him how much she loved him and how proud she was of him as a dad. His thirst for knowledge continued throughout his life. Impressively he spent a huge amount of time and effort gaining a degree during one of the busiest periods of a successful career. As is often the case with large number of scattered siblings, none of us were very good at keeping in really regular touch. Communication has become easier down the years but even in the days before mobile phones and email we were in touch enough to know how much Will loved his neighbourhood, and of course how much he absolutely adored Carole.

He was always considered as someone with real presence. I have a picture here which is very dear to me, the only picture I have of all my brothers together, at my wedding twenty-five years ago. I think it really gives the impression of the big persona that he had. To us Will was a man of strong opinions. To us he was actually called Arthur. Although this was his middle name, throughout his childhood and way beyond - this is how he was addressed. But Will never liked it - so he simply changed it - bringing all his friends and family over to the use of his first name, that of his father, William. The determination and effort needed to do that in mid-life speaks volumes about his character and resolve. He leaves behind a beautiful, successful daughter and granddaughters, and a reputation as a strong, bold elder statesman. His fight against illness, even in his last days, showed enormous inner strength. That will still be within him now. Just before his passing Julie, John, Celia, Jean and I were able to tell him that we would always be with him. So would mam and dad, Derek and David, and all those here. And we are all with you. Rest in peace, Will.

An extract from Sarah Tinker's words of tribute for Will

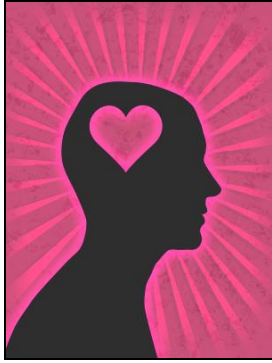
Will Lyons is a man that I am glad to have known and I'm glad that Will and Carole found our church some eight years ago now. Every church community should have its resident atheist and Will became ours. As some of you will know, he had been active in church communities for many years but in more recent times had become deeply disillusioned by man's inhumanity to man and could not accept that a loving God would allow us to behave so cruelly. And yet he loved to be part of a community and luckily, for us, he found us Unitarians. He was someone with a deep interest in life and a deep interest in people and he always had something interesting to tell us, as well as being a good listener for people who needed to be heard. He made us laugh and he touched us with his passion and his concern for life's deep issues.

When someone dies after a long and difficult time of ill health we do well to think back to earlier times and I know that's what many have been doing these last few weeks. People have reminded me just how helpful and supportive Will was to them - willing to lend a hand and go that extra mile. Having made such achievements in his own life he was always proud of other people's achievements too and wanted to hear all about them. It's not surprising that a man as independent as Will would find illness a struggle and be so frustrated by hearing aids that wouldn't work and spectacles that kept disappearing. Yet only a month or two before his death Will was still busy looking information up on the Internet. I think he would want us to remember him as the active, kindly, deeply intelligent and engaged-with-life person that he was and to treasure our many memories of the ways his life touched ours. Our thoughts are particularly with his wife Carole and daughter Julie.

A Message from Carole Grace

I haven't had chance to thank everybody individually for all their cards and kind messages over the last few weeks and months. Thank you also to Sarah and to the congregation for all you did to make Will's funeral and memorial service a fitting tribute to him. The church looked so lovely, thanks to Michaela's flower arranging talents and Will's family were impressed by the music arranged by Harold, Margaret and Peter. With food and drinks for everyone, I think we gave people a sense of the warmth of this community and what an important part of it Will was. At a time like this it's impossible to get back to everybody individually so do please accept my appreciation in this way.





'The ideal religion is a combination of the head and the heart. If your religion is only a rational construction, it will stiffen into a dry, meatless and unappetising bone. Faith without sensation is arid. If your religion is only a spiritual perception, it will degenerate into a muddy swamp of obscure gibberish. Faith without reason is mush.

The proper balance is what William James described as "the union of the mathematician with the poet, fervour with measure, passion with correctness, this surely is the ideal."

David O. Rankin

Autumn Colour Walk

Wednesday 6th November, Epping Forest



Come and join us for a walk in Epping Forest. We will be leaving the church at 10am or meeting at Loughton station (on the central line) at 11am. Put the date in your diary.



Volunteering at a Foodbank

You may recall either seeing a call in the last newsletter or have been at the church when money was collected for the South African Foodbank in August and the Trussell Trust Foodbank in September. You or the institution you work in, may also be donating food, thank you.

Last November, the church managers of my local Foodbank in the London Borough of Hillingdon appealed for help via other local churches. As I am a member of Uxbridge Quaker Meeting I went along. Money was requested, preferably as monthly donations, and so was practical help.

I gave money and made a choice about the help I could offer. I put myself forward to be at my most local of the 4 food distribution centres in my Borough. I could have gone to the warehouse to sort the food in to bags. However, as I have skill in listening to people this is what I offer. It gives me the opportunity to show real people care, those who are living with little money day in and day out, so I do not just read about anonymous statistics and feel frustrated. I also greatly enjoy conversations with the other volunteers, most of go to the Parish Church in Hayes, where our Foodbank is held for two hours each week.

Not everyone who comes to the centre for 7-10 days of groceries, wants to divulge their personal story. However, many take the opportunity to talk and have a free hot drink and biscuits, when we are not too busy, which is usually the case. They hand over their voucher (or letter when the forms have run out) and once their details are briefly checked, bags of non-perishable food are handed to them. They are invited to remove anything they won't use so nothing is wasted. We do our best to swap these items for something they like. So, the system is not entirely standardised. It bends to the individual. There is a list of required food set down by the Foodbank but donors often give items of their choice, some the best and some the cheapest brands. Everything is welcome. I must say though, bags of pasta and rice are sometimes rejected because they are already in clients' cupboards. Requested substitutes are often a substantial sauce to heat up. I am sorry fresh food is not handed out so I pass around fresh fruit to whoever comes.

A lot of the people who come in are young, single people from a local hostel. Childless couples also come in and so have parents with as many as six children to feed. Some punters are drug addicts. It can be obvious but they are often open about this. Happily, 2 separate people have come in and said how the Foodbank helped them last year and are now off the drugs. One handed over £100 in cash, to show his appreciation. Fellow volunteers remembered those individuals when they came in need. A few homeless people come too but they need to be able to get to cooking facilities. The food bags are supposed to be emergency rations only but people are rarely turned away empty-handed. They mostly abide by the rule to only come 3 times.

People come for various reasons. Some literally have no money for food. I heard a woman say she fills herself up with tea so she can give food to her children. It can be because Benefit has been stopped, be it after leaving hospital or for no apparent reason. For others their money has gone to pay off debts or on other bills. Some have lost their job and can't find another.

I have taken on a mission to get the facility more known and used. There is an excess of food available. The general public are very generous. If you, or anyone you know needs food make use of the Foodbank and please spread the word.

Carolyn Appleby

Our Local Foodbank



Do think about bringing some items to put in our Food Bank box, which will then be taken to the Trussell Trust Foodbank nearby. This organisation has stepped into the void created by increasingly harsh rules about welfare payments in this country. They generally give an individual or family just a few days' worth of food to tide them over until they sort out the immediate crisis, but will also help guide people to appropriate sources of advice. I am personally troubled that as a country we have slipped so quickly into needing such an organisation at all, but having spoken both to organisers and clients of the scheme I can see that it is well run and much appreciated.

If you would rather not travel through London clutching some tins then the Foodbank will happily receive cheques made payable to the Trussell Trust, as that enables them to buy staples like rice in bulk.

Rev. Sarah Tinker

A reminder of the wish-list of items:

- Milk (UHT or powdered)
- Sugar (500g)
- Fruit Juice (carton)
- Soup
- Pasta Sauces
- Sponge Pudding (tinned)
- Tomatoes (tinned)
- Cereals
- Rice Pudding (tinned)
- Tea Bags / Instant Coffee
- Instant Mash Potato
- Rice / Pasta
- 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. The church committee will need to arrange regular transport of the food we collect so if you might be able to help with this then let Sarah or a committee member know.



'Spiritual Health'

At the first meeting of our 'Twelve Steps to Spiritual Health' group we thought of how it feels to be spiritually healthy or unhealthy. If you were making such a list would it include some of ways of being we listed below?

When we feel spiritually healthy we might feel some of these qualities:

- Trusting
- Flowing
- Belonging
- Connected
- Growth
- Breakdown as breakthrough
- Gratitude
- Acceptance
- Able to ask / pray
- Openness
- Structure
- Holistic / involves whole self, all aspects of myself
- Sense of something 'more' / something greater than me
- Doing something practical / getting involved

When we feel spiritually unhealthy we might feel:

- Cynical
- Busy
- Avoidance
- Destructive behaviours / addictions
- Unforgiving / bitter
- Off course
- Burdened
- A void / emptiness
- Lost
- Anxious / worried

Rev. Sarah Tinker

Invitation to a Service from BKY Liberal Jewish Community on Friday 15th November at 7.00pm

We have recently received the following message from Jon Burden of BKY - Beit Klal Yisrael – a liberal Jewish community which has been meeting in our building here at Essex Church for many years. Jon says:

'I understand the Church collects food for the Kensington Food Bank. British Jewry holds Mitzvah Day (loosely translated as Good Deeds day) on Sunday, 17 November. We have a service on Friday, 15 November. Our Council would like to make our Mitzvah Day project a community contribution to the Kensington Food Bank. We would also be happy to formally invite your members to join us for the service (as Interfaith Week starts on the Monday) if you think anyone would be interested and would want to come.'

For more information about BKY see: www.bky.org.uk

Digital Life, Digital Soul



I work in cafés because I find it difficult to concentrate at home. There's always something that needs to be done. I need to escape so that I can write and enjoy doing so. Sometimes I go for a walk, wander for a few blocks, browse in a bookshop and then find another café in which to settle for a few more hours. But what about this lot around me? They're on their breaks, not here for the purpose of working. One woman I can see has a bag of crisps in one hand and her iPhone in the other, barely able to put her phone down to eat. The man across from me is holding his phone directly before his face. I don't think he's even blinking. Another man has his laptop and his iPhone on the go at the same time.

Why can't we switch off? This question has been asked with increasing frequency over the last few years by gurus, neuroscientists and psychologists. It's good that they're looking into it because I think it's eroding who we are. This damage manifests itself in countless ways but I want to address three of them, all of which conveniently begin with the letter c: conversation, concentration and collecting.

Try having a conversation with someone who is under thirty and/or employed by a large corporation. One of my colleagues answered a call in the middle of a meeting the other day. I even had a person in one of my fitness classes fiddling with his phone whilst I was giving instructions. When I asked him to put it away and pay attention, he looked as if I had just taken away his toys. Maybe I had. Mobile phones have become a method to maintain childhood. We are entertained by pretty flashing boxes, tinkling sounds and vibrations. They remind me of the boxes I had as a toddler where pressing a squeaky yellow button would pop open a door revealing Sesame Street's Big Bird. Imagine you're at the café with me and I get up to go to the loo. What's the first thing you do? Look at your phone (which has been in your hand throughout our chat).

It's so hard to concentrate these days, isn't it? At home I worry about housework getting in my way but there's also the Internet, email, Twitter and texts. If I turn my phone onto 'do not disturb' so that only designated people are able to call or message me, others think that I'm ignoring them rather than creating space to work. If you're still reading, you're doing quite well. You've reached about a quarter of what most people are currently able to read in one sitting. Emails, texts and 24-hour news (there is excellent work on this topic by the philosopher Rob Wijnberg) have robbed us of our capability to read much more. We are falsely trained to digest even complex information in two minutes or less.

Forcing thoughts and detail into shorter time spans allows for them to be collected easily and shown off. 'Infotainment' and tech culture is turning its products (you and me) into collectors of sound bytes, canned opinions and flashing, buzzing things of all kinds. This is perhaps the most abstract of the angles I've chosen so I'd like to make it more concrete with a very modern example. On smartphones, one can download small programmes known as apps. They do many things, from allowing us to read email to helping us find Mecca. Apps usually have attractive icons on the screens to activate them and can be collected into folders so that our digital lives are like nicely organised cutlery drawers.

The collection of these apps is one way to disconnect by connecting. The virtual stores in which they exist are as easy to get lost in as a bookshop, full of items claiming the potential to enrich one's life. Once organised by purpose or colour or whichever system the user prefers, they may never be touched again. By downloading them, you have helped define your digital existence, cementing the second-soul in your own second-life. Your catalogued memory functions in the same way. You file information into categories such as 'good' and 'bad' and 'things I don't care about' or 'too far away'. Sometimes this process is aided by the news itself. When it stops being repeated, you know that you can stop paying attention.

Back to the people in the café around me. They differ now but they're doing the same things. Even the couple across from me are using their phones rather than talking to each other. Is this a new kind of prayer? Are we forming a connection between our second-life's second-soul to the digital heaven (and hell?) of the Internet? Does @G_d (how G-d would be called on Twitter) have the same lack of concentration or is she able to read more than four pages and digest our long and rambling prayers? Or would he maybe prefer to sit in silence for a while to ponder? Or just have a conversation? Your two minutes are up.

Tristan Jovanović

Next Newsletter Deadline



The deadline for the next issue of the newsletter is 13th October. Please send your newsletter contributions to our editor, Jane Blackall, by then. Thank you!!!

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

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

Laurence Kushner

'Finding Our Voice'

Singing Workshops with Margaret Marshall

Sundays 27th October and 17th November
(NOTE IRREGULAR DATE IN OCTOBER)
12.30 to 1.15pm at Essex Church



Margaret Marshall has worked as a professional singer all her adult life and is also a very experienced singing teacher. She has been singing in our choir here at Essex Church for over thirty years now and we're delighted that she is leading monthly sessions to help us all find our voice.

These workshops are for anyone who is prepared to open their mouth and make a sound. 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.

Cultural Outing to the Horniman Museum

Saturday 26th October, 11am at the Museum



Our next cultural outing will be to the Horniman Museum in Forest Hill, South London. There is a new exhibition entitled 'After Life' focusing on extinct and endangered species. We can also celebrate the return of the famous 'Horniman Walrus' which has just come back from its summer holidays in Margate. Please let Jane know if you plan to come along: jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk.

For more information / map: www.horniman.ac.uk

World Congress of Faiths (WCF) Interfaith Celebration of Animals

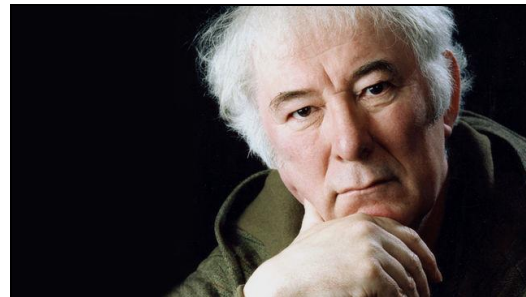


Saturday 5th October at 3pm
Golders Green Unitarian Church

This is the tenth WCF Interfaith Celebration of Animals. This year the guest speaker will be Gavin Grant, Chief Executive of the RSPCA. All are welcome.

Please email Michael (mallured@aol.com) for more information.

Seamus Heaney



It is with great regret we would remind readers that Seamus Heaney died on August 31st last. We are among those many people who feel that Ireland particularly and the English-speaking world at large, has surely just lost one of its finest living poets.

John Hands

When Francis preached love to the birds
They listened, fluttered, throttled up
Into the blue like a flock of words

Released for fun from his holy lips.
Then wheeled back, whirred about his head,
Pirouetted on brother's capes,

Danced on the wing, for sheer joy played
And sang, like images took flight.
Which was the best poem Francis made,

His argument true, his tone light.

Seamus Heaney



Art Exhibition at Essex Church

A celebration of the creativity of our congregation and other people who use our beautiful building



Pocket Arts is organising a new artists open studios festival for the Kensington & Fulham area this autumn. We have signed up Essex Church to take part displaying artworks in various media by members and friends of Kensington Unitarians and other groups which meet at Essex Church. The exhibition will be open to the public from 2-9pm on Friday 11th October and 11am-6pm on Saturday 12th October, the congregation will also be able to see most of the pieces on Sunday 13th October.

Each participant is invited to show up to three art or craft works in the exhibition and we plan to produce an illustrated booklet to accompany the event. We've had a wonderful response already, but there's still space for a few more people to exhibit if you get in touch with us straightaway. Artwork of any size is welcome, 2D or 3D – so far we have drawings, paintings, photographs, collage, embroidery, felt, patchwork, ceramics and glass – see the opposite page for a preview of some of the exhibits.

The absolute deadline for inclusion in the exhibition and booklet is this Friday – 4th October – and what we need is:

- A photograph of yourself
- Up to 150 words mini-biography or 'artist's statement' saying who you are, what art/craft you do, and what your connection to Essex Church is
- A photograph of each of the works (up to three) you are exhibiting
- A title and up to 80 words of text about each artwork and its dimensions

Please send the above by email to jenny@kensington-unitarians.org.uk and whether or not you want to exhibit, please put the dates in your diary and try to get to the church sometime while the exhibition is on. During the public sessions, Jane is setting up a drop-in "Creative Corner" where you'll be able to play with art materials or try out felt-making. Heidi Ferid (painter) will be here to advise and inspire us throughout Saturday, and on Saturday afternoon, Roy Clark (photography lecturer) will also be on hand to offer tips on 'How to Take Better Pictures with your Smartphone' and help out with any other photography queries.

For more information about the Kensington & Fulham Open Studios pick up a leaflet in the church foyer or see: www.pocketarts.org



'The process of spiritual discernment has to do with getting in touch with what matters most to us. This is the point. It's a process of setting life priorities, spiritual priorities. This is not the same as creating a big to-do list or making New Year's resolutions. It isn't even really about setting goals. It has to do with listening to life, to what is stirring beneath the surface of things, to the voice of God, to uncovering what inspires and motivates us. It asks: what breathes life into your day-to-day living? What creates meaning and purpose? What makes you happy?'

I take time regularly to try to figure this out. I consider what I already feel most passionate about and the activities that are feeding and nourishing my spirit – as well as those that are draining me. When I am completely overwhelmed and busy, which is when I feel I have the least time for it, I step back and ask myself whether I am using my time in a way that is in line with my own values and espoused commitments. The discernment process is a way of figuring out what can wait, what can be eliminated, and what to commit to. There are large and small yeses and nos. And there is a balance we need to strike between living out our most heartfelt desires – our big yeses – and meeting our responsibilities.'

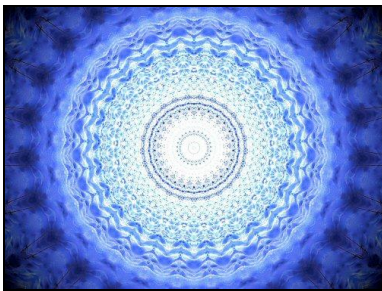
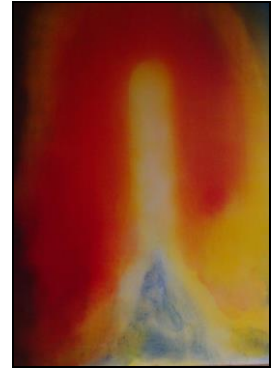
Unitarian Universalist Minister, Rev. Sandra Fees

A Few of the Participants in our Open Studios Art Exhibition:



← Sandra Vigon has been a Jungian Psychotherapist for 25 years and runs Soul Collage workshops at Essex Church: each soulcollage card represents and honours one theme, archetype or essence of self – this one is titled "One Soul Many Selves"

Khaled Hakim is a member of the Ansari Sufi group who practice Zikr chanting here each Monday evening: 'The Bab' is a central figure in the Ba'hai faith. →



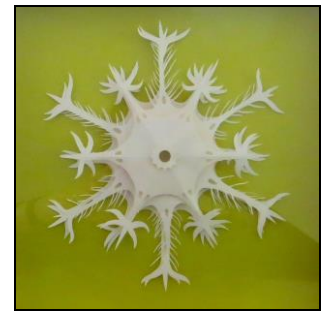
← Pamela Ramsden co-curates the monthly interfaith service at Essex Church on Friday evening. This snow mandala was created from a photo of the gate at the end of her lane.

Iona Blair was a member of Essex Church until she went to live in South Africa, this bag is made of wool from local sheep & the picture is of Mount Kilimanjaro with Baobab trees. →



← Heidi Ferid is a member of Kensington Unitarians and a painter. She is interested in the spiritual and emotional aspects of art, and is inspired by nature and the parallels between visual art and music, and visual art and poetry.

Gill Hague is a long-standing member of Kensington Unitarians who has a particular personal interest in the art of papercutting. →



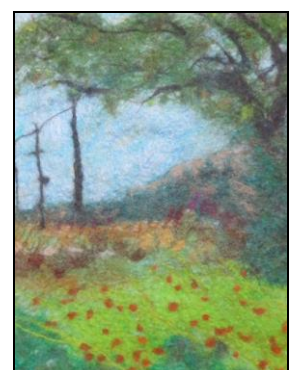
← Caroline Blair has been a member of Kensington Unitarians for 12 years. A few years ago she was given a copy of Photoshop as a present, and ever since then she has intended to take some classes 'when she has time'.

Jim Blair says "I have always felt an affinity with bears: this bear at Whipsnade zoo was sitting quietly until I came up, when it started rolling about like this; it was impossible not to wish I could hop over the fence and join in." →



← Juliet Edwards is a long-standing member of Kensington Unitarians with varied art and craft interests, including photography and, in recent years, a focus on watercolour painting.

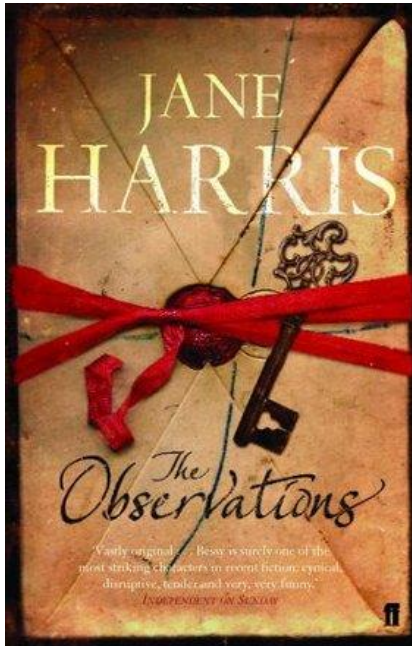
Jane Blackall has been a member of Essex Church for 14 years and is the congregational Outreach Officer. She dabbles in many arts & crafts with a special interest in felt-making. →



Essex Church Reading Group

'The Observations'

by Jane Harris



Tuesday 22nd October 2013, 7-9.00pm

The reading group's October session will be based on 'The Observations' by Jane Harris. This was chosen by Liz Tuckwell and will be the 106th title discussed by the reading group since it started up ten years ago.

More information from Amazon:

"Scotland, 1863. In an attempt to escape her not-so-innocent past in Glasgow, Bessy Buckley - the wide-eyed Irish heroine of The Observations - takes a job as a maid in a big house outside Edinburgh working for the beautiful Arabella. Bessy is intrigued by her new employer, but puzzled by her increasingly strange requests and her insistence that Bessy keep a journal of her most intimate thoughts. And it seems that Arabella has a few secrets of her own - including her near-obsessive affection for Nora, a former maid who died in mysterious circumstances."

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

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

Shards

During the Cultural Revolution in China, people were ordered to destroy any pieces of precious porcelain that they might have in their possession. Bits and pieces of this precious china ended up on rubbish tips, in rivers and discarded in the countryside. After the madness of all the destruction died down, a young man decided to start collecting the bits and pieces together. He opened a shop in Beijing and named it the Shard Box Shop. He made new things out of the old and sold these objects on to his customers. The story of the Shard Shop inspired me to write this poem about my own life experiences.

Jagged edges. Sharp, painful places. Rough bits. Like cloth being ripped in two. Smashed china. Broken glass.

Shards are painful. They cut. They hurt. They draw blood.

Images of precious porcelain being smashed. Something beautiful and delicate and precious. Smashed against the wall. It doesn't fit. Doesn't match our ideas or ideals. We can do this.

Something in me died that day. Was destroyed that day. Something that can never be reclaimed. That innocent, curious, trusting child. The grief of that is so vast that I can barely breathe.

But breathe I must for I am still here. Still alive. I survived.

The grief of that is immense. I have not known how to contain and control it. I've cut and harmed. Myself and others. Courted danger. In order to feel. Something. Anything. For I have felt numb for most of my life.

I do not yet know how to forgive.

I will never forget.

But beautiful things can be made out of those broken bits and pieces. Precious things. Equally precious. The lid of a silver box, a ring, a pendant.

And so I gather the broken pieces of my life and re-imagine them. Re-cast them. Make something new. Deeper, richer. Tempered in the fire like steel. Stronger. Re-fashioned. Made new.

The grief still takes up the same amount of space in my body and in my life. But I am growing and expanding around that grief. My world is expanding. I wish for a life of richness and beauty and I must grow into that life. Push against the smallness. Push up and out. Heal.

And then I realise that the life of richness and beauty I crave is already within. With all my broken-ness and sharp, jagged edges I hold that in my heart and move on.

Carol Sheppard

Inspired by the 'Recovering Your True Self' morning engagement group at Great Hucklow Summer School 2013

Hucklow Summer School 2013 – Carol's Reflections



My second year at Summer School. To be honest I went with some real doubts and concerns about how the week would be. Last year had been such an amazing experience that I was worried about making comparisons and finding that this year was left wanting. But then I tried to gently remind myself that each experience is different, unique and valid in its own right and that the best thing would be to approach this year with both an open heart and open mind. So that is what I tried to do.

Journeys to and from Hucklow are proving so far to be a bit of an adventure and this year was no different. More about the journey back to London in a moment! The journey to Hucklow contained some interesting detours before we began to see the beautiful countryside around Sheffield which began to make me feel more relaxed. And then we arrived. There was a flurry of meetings and greetings with old friends and new as well as an acknowledgment that perhaps the dormitory experience with 5 other women was going to be **the most challenging** aspect of the week. And to sit in the Peach Room with 59 other eager and expectant pilgrims seemed daunting to say the least.

I think it took me until halfway through the Sunday morning service in the beautiful Unitarian chapel to finally feel at home in the space. Until then I had been feeling rather out of sorts and unsure of just how the week would unfold. But then something clicked and I knew that all would be well.

For me this year's experience of Hucklow was much richer, deeper and more powerful. I took greater risks in my daily engagement group entitled 'Recovering Your True Self' and indeed allowed more of my true self to be present in my encounters with others. I so appreciated the time and space we were given in the group to write and reflect and share our innermost thoughts, troubles and difficulties as well as all our hopes and dreams for fuller, richer lives from now on.

Highlights of the week for me were choosing to attend a drama workshop rather than to take the safer option of going on a silent meditation walk with Sarah. Listening to the wonderfully varied choices of music offered by other people in the 'Notes from a Desert Island' session. The deliciousness of an afternoon off on Wednesday when a group of us visited Tideswell and the plague village of Eyam. And, as last year, the beautiful simplicity of walking to chapel with lantern in hand for the daily evening epilogue.

However, the greatest highlight of all was going to the edge... quite literally... on Friday afternoon when a large group of my fellow travellers and seekers went in convoy to Carver in order to make the climb up a steep and rocky path to look down and out over the beautifully rolling hills of the Derbyshire peaks. It was awesome and totally freeing in some way.

There were so many wonderful experiences and fleeting moments of beauty and joy that it would be impossible to write about them all. Suffice to say that I left on Saturday with a very full heart and in eager anticipation of returning again next year. And so to the journey back. The car we were travelling in was involved in a minor road traffic accident. Thankfully we were all OK - just very shaken up and emotionally rather wobbly - and I only mention the incident to say that I am so grateful that we were able to be of support and comfort to each other and to be thankful that it hadn't been much worse. I felt very protected and looked after in that moment and for that I give much thanks.

Carol Sheppard (photo courtesy of Jim Blair)



'Faces of God may include a grandfather and a lake, a mother and a garden, a sister a forest, a brother and a dog, a father and a farm, a cousin and a mountain, a friend and a cat, a lover and a star. Whatever our chosen channels, they are holy icons for us.'

Jay McDaniel

Outsider Art

In recent years there have been several high profile exhibitions of so-called "Outsider Art" here in London. Outsider Art is usually defined as being by creators who have no formal art training and often little concept of any other forms of art other than their own. They include extreme individualists and people choosing to live in isolation as well as psychiatric patients.

One category of Outsider Artist consists of those who find themselves behind bars. A couple of years ago an exhibition of UK prisoners work in the foyer of the Royal Festival Hall was very well received and rightly so. The verve and dynamism of many of these works on paper was astonishing. The cumulative effect of the exhibition for me and many others was both thought provoking and deeply moving.



This year's *Souzu: Outsider Art from Japan* at the Wellcome Trust featured untrained artists from Japanese mental health institutions and day-care centres. They created diverse bodies of work including ceramics, textiles, paintings, sculpture and drawings. A particular point of interest for me was the vast array of materials employed by the artists to realise their ideas in graphic and plastic form. From scraps of fabric to old cardboard boxes nothing was too humble or ill-suited to be a creative medium.

Another recent exhibition *Alternative Guide to the Universe* has just finished at the Hayward Gallery. As Ralph Rugoff Director of the Hayward said "We live in a culture of experts, we tend to take things for granted and the curiosity we had as children gets stifled as we grow older." How true, this work is truly refreshing, displaying an intellectual and emotional freedom free of the constraints of academia or tradition.

The rise in popularity in Outsider Art can in part be ascribed to the belief by some influential art theorists and critics that for art to be important it must always be different or break the mould of what has gone before. There is little doubt that the work described in this article is different, so I can see how for some in the art *cognoscenti* Outsider Art ticks all the right boxes in terms of fashionable theory. However, I disagree with this fixed viewpoint in as much as great art sometimes, indeed often, builds on the art of the past and is a progression or development rather than a revolution. For example, one of the most important artists of our time Lucien Freud, for all his freshness of vision was ultimately working in the classical tradition of figurative art. There is also a commercial imperative at work with Outsider Art as dealers create a marketable easily packaged and labelled genre.



Nevertheless whatever the reasons for this upsurge in interest, if the end result is more exposure and a wider audience for these artists on the fringes, who have such a distinct and disparate take on the world, then that can only be a good thing. Should you get the chance to see some of this work, fresh, expressionistic, deeply personal and sometimes it has to be said shocking, you will I believe be amply rewarded.

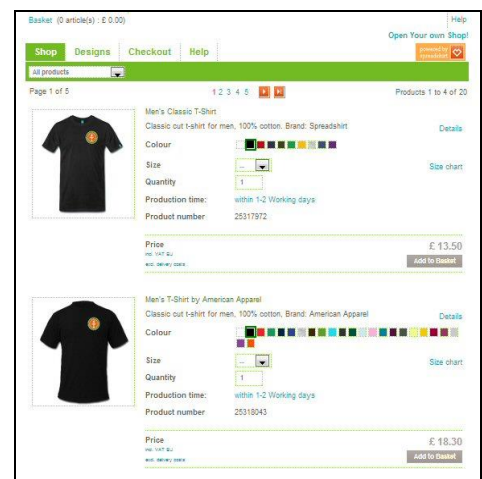
Roy Clark

Kensington Unitarians: T-Shirts

T-shirts and sweatshirts with the new Kensington Unitarians logo (a green/orange chalice disc surrounded by the slogan 'community – spirituality – conscience') are now available to buy online via kensington-unitarians.spreadshirt.co.uk.

The 'virtual shop' is set up with 20 different customised items, including short-sleeved and long-sleeved t-shirts, tank tops and sweatshirts in men's, women's and children's fitting, some with a large central logo and some with a smaller off-centre logo. They are displayed by default on a black t-shirt but for some of the items there are over 20 different colours you can choose from. Take care to check the size chart for the item you purchase as sizing can be quite variable! Please note that if you order items through this site you will be dealing directly with a company called 'Spreadshirt' and the church does not have any involvement with the transaction.

Jane Blackall



Ellen's Last Letter from Malta

21st September - Malta's Independence Day

Dear Kensington Unitarians,

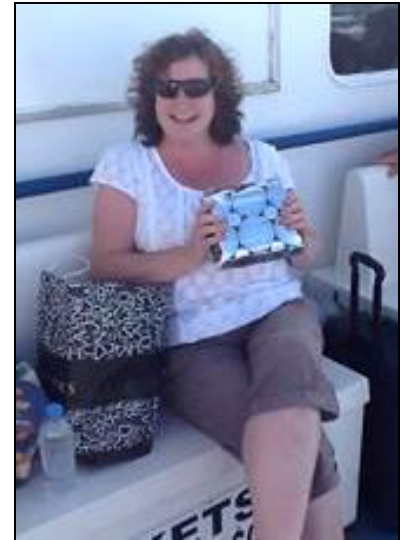
Greetings from a sunny and hot Malta! By the time you get my letter, I should be back with you in the bosom of Essex Church. I am looking forward to returning to London for the last year of my studies at Heythrop College, and I feel very fortunate and blessed to have had the educational opportunity to study abroad as an Erasmus student, to experience the Maltese lifestyle for a period longer than a typical tourist.

Living here for a year has given me the chance to explore the underbelly of Malta and Maltese society. Despite the fact there are so many churches here to choose from, I have found it difficult to find one where I have felt completely at home. So in my year abroad, I have visited many churches, but the one where I was a regular attendee was the Quaker church in Sliema. Trying to find this church was initially difficult, until I came across an advert in the Times of Malta newspaper highlighting the times of their meetings and location. When I turned up for my first meeting, I was told by American Annie that I had cost them 56 Euros, the price of their advert. My quick reply was I was worth every euro and more!

Before I embarked on my adventure to Malta, I knew nothing about the country, the people or even where it was on the world map. Coming to a new country without any preconceived ideas or prior knowledge has been a really good, but at times challenging experience. Being a foreigner in a new land, resulted in my search for a community where I could feel at home. This leads me back to Essex church, on my reflections of what it means to be part of a community, I remember my first ever visit here, at the invitation of my fellow student Jane Blackall, I felt very welcomed by the congregation on that very first visit and on my many others visits to Essex Church. The 'welcome' was one of the main reasons I liked attending, of course the interesting and thought provoking sermons, the west end quality singers and musicians, the friendly ambience, the Nia classes all conspired to pull me through the door.

In Malta I have gone into many churches alone, had no interaction with anyone whatsoever whilst in the church, even though I have tried to engage with others, I have walked out alone, this did not make me feel validated in anyway, or that I was part of something greater. Since I have been in Malta, I have read various articles about people in England seeking a spiritual connection or just a place to gather with others on a regular basis for a shared communion such as the Sunday Assembly or the Filling Station. It does not matter, if you're a believer, an atheist, or agnostic, it seems people, myself included are looking for some deeper nourishment that normal everyday life is unable to provide for us. I am very pleased to be returning to Kensington to study, to live in Notting Hill Gate and to be part of a very unique community that is Essex Church.

Ellen McHugh



Golden Child 2nd-12th October at the New Diorama Theatre, London NW1 3BF

The London premiere presented by our own Veronica Needa's True Heart Theatre, *Golden Child* tells a gripping and entertaining tale about a Chinese family caught between traditional values and the modern world. Written by the Tony Award-winning playwright of *M. Butterfly*, *Yellow Face*, and Broadway's *Chinglish*, *Golden Child* examines the politics of cultural conversion at the dawn of an intercultural world. Award-winning Ng Choon Ping directs a strong team of East Asian talent led by Jacqueline Chan. Designer Moi Tran creates a poignant contemporary set which brings early 1900s China right into the 21st century.

Wed 2 – Sat 5, Tue 8 – Sat 12 October - evenings @ 7:30pm
Sat 5 / Wed 9 / Sat 12 October - matinees @ 3:30pm

Tickets £15.50 / £13.50 (concessions)

Book online at newdiorama.com or call 0207 383 9034.

For more information visit www.trueheart.org.uk

Good Cause Collection of the Month:



Unitarian Youth Programme

Collection on Sunday 27th October

In October we will be holding a collection for the Unitarian Youth Programme. This programme does some great work with the next generation on behalf of the General Assembly and we are pleased to support it as our latest good cause.

Some information from the Unitarian Youth website:

The youth programme follows the Unitarian ethos that we are all free to explore our own beliefs and views on life. Our values of respect, tolerance and compassion towards others are reflected in the activities we offer. Our youth leaders aim to create safe spaces where young people can explore their identity and direction in life. Participants are encouraged to celebrate diversity and difference in each other whilst cherishing all that binds us. We enjoy seeing our young people relaxing, laughing and having fun together. Everybody's thoughts and opinions join together helping to create a rich and inspiring atmosphere. Our activities are open to those who want to join a welcoming and encouraging community. The participants who attend our weekends come from Unitarian and other religious traditions, while others do not adhere to any faith. Most of our events are held at The Nightingale Centre, Great Hucklow in the heart of the Derbyshire countryside.

For more information see: www.unitarian.org.uk/youth

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:

July – Unitarian General Assembly - £238.88 + Gift Aid

August – Foodbank Foundation SA - £122.62

Review: 'About Time'



While there are a few romantic dramas about time travel; "Somewhere in Time", which starred Christopher Reeves and Jane Seymour, "The Lake House", which starred Keanu Reeves and Sandra Bullock, and "The Time Traveller's Wife" which starred Eric Bana and Rachel McAdams all spring to mind, "About Time" is the first romantic comedy I have ever seen unless you count "Groundhog Day", which I don't.

Richard Curtis gets great mileage out of the time travel concept and the part where Tim (Domhnall Gleeson) is trying to manipulate events so that Mary (Rachel McAdams) becomes his girlfriend is very funny. Interestingly, when Tim tries to manipulate events for the benefit of other people, the end results turn out badly for him whereas when he manipulates events to help himself, he gets the results he wants, which I am not sure is a good subliminal message to be sending out to people. I felt that the relationship between Tim and his father, played by Bill Nighy, was just as important as the relationship between him and Mary, which is interesting in a romantic comedy as they usually focus on the relationship between a couple.

"About Time" is an easy to watch, enjoyable film and you can't argue with its central premise that you should enjoy and treasure every day. However, to me, it felt a little stale. I recently watched "Notting Hill" on the TV, and watching "About Time" in the cinema soon afterwards, it struck me just how similar the two films are, They are both about very comfortably off people, and usually there are a few eccentric friends or family for comic relief, a hero who is not great at relationships with women, and an American heroine (presumably to keep the studio investors happy). You may have noticed that Rachel McAdams was also in "The Time Traveller's Wife". She clearly likes acting in time travel films.

Liz Tuckwell



'A spirituality that is only private and self-absorbed, one devoid of an authentic political and social consciousness, does little to halt the suicidal juggernaut of history. On the other hand, an activism that is not purified by profound spiritual and psychological self-awareness and rooted in divine truth, wisdom, and compassion will only perpetuate the problem it is trying to solve, however righteous its intentions. When, however, the deepest and most grounded spiritual vision is married to a practical and pragmatic drive to transform all existing political, economic, and social institutions, a holy force - the power of wisdom and love in action - is born. This force I define as Sacred Activism.'

Andrew Harvey

Multifaith Calendar

1st October – Jashn-e Mehergan – Zoroastrian

Jashn-e Mehergan is an early autumn festival, and like NoRuz its origins have been lost in antiquity. Mehergan is dedicated to the divinity Meher or Mithra, who is associated with the sun and with justice. The ripening of the crops and fruits at this time of the year is seen as symbolic of the ripening of the world into fullness, before the moment of the ultimate victory over evil. It evokes the physical resurrection of the body along with its immortal soul, as promised by Ahura Mazda. It is customary to visit the Fire Temple to offer thanks to the Creator God, to participate in a jashan or thanksgiving ceremony, to listen to stories of King Faridoon's triumphant capture of the evil Zohak and to share in a community meal that includes dry fruits and nuts, along with a drink, dancing and merrymaking.

5th – 13th October – Navaratri – Hindu

While it is known by different names in different areas, this is one of the few festivals celebrated across India. Navaratri means 'nine nights', which is how long the festival lasts. The final three days are the most important. In North India the performance of the Ram Lila during Navaratri commemorates Rama's victory over Ravana, the demon king of Sri Lanka. In Northern India the goddess Durga is worshipped on the eighth day (12th October – Durga Puja). Some Panjabis mark this day by giving food and other items to young girls.

13th October – Picnic in a High Place /

Climb a High Mountain Festival / Ch'ung Yang – Chinese

This Double Ninth festival is the day for hill climbing or 'going up on a high place'. It reminds of an ancient seer who foretold an imminent natural calamity and escaped by going into the hills. The rest of humanity ignored his warnings and perished. Kites are flown, family graves visited, and a 'golden pig' is shared by large families with fruit, wine, tea and rice.

13th October – Hajj / Pilgrimage to Makkah – Muslim

All Muslims who can afford to do so, and are not prevented through ill-health, are required to make this pilgrimage once in their lifetime (although there is no prohibition on making the pilgrimage more than once). A series of ritual acts are performed by the pilgrims during the first two days of Hajj, prior to the three day festival of Eid-al-Adha which is celebrated in Makkah by the pilgrims

15th October – Eid-ul-Adha / Festival of Sacrifice – Muslim

This major festival (al-Eid al-Kabir) marks the end of the Hajj (Pilgrimage to Makkah) on the tenth day of the twelfth month of Dhul-Hijja. The Hajj is one of the five pillars of Islam. Pilgrims sacrifice animals at the village of Mina on their way back to Makkah from Mount Arafat (where they have spent the first day of the festival) in commemoration of Ibrahim's (Abraham's) willingness to sacrifice his son, Ismail. Muslims all over the world sacrifice an animal if they can afford it. Much of the meat is distributed to the poor, and some is shared with relatives and friends.

16th 23rd October – Interfaith week of Prayer for World Peace

Prayers from the literature of several different world religions are published each year in a special leaflet for use in this week. This custom receives the support of members from many different religious communities.



19th October – Pavarana – Buddhist

The last day of the Rains Retreat (the Vassa) is known as Pavarana Day or 'Leaving the Vassa'. Pavarana means 'to invite' and on this day monks who have completed the Retreat invite their fellows to admonish them for any failings. It is also known as 'Sangha Day'.

20th October – Conferring of Guruship on the Guru Granth Sahib by Guru Gobind Singh 1708 CE – Sikh

In 1708, shortly before his death, Guru Gobind Singh declared that, instead of having another human Guru, from now on Sikhs would regard the scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib, as Guru.

20th October – Anniversary of the Birth of the Bab - Baha'i

The Bab (the title means 'the Gate') was born in Shiraz, Persia in 1819. He was the prophet-herald of the Baha'i community and called people to religious renewal and to await the coming of a new messenger from God – 'the one whom God shall make manifest'. Baha'is believe that this latter figure was Baha'u'llah (the title means 'Glory of God'). Baha'is observe this holy day by abstaining from work. Their gatherings normally involve prayers, devotional readings, music and fellowship.

23rd October – The Festival of the Pool / Eid ul Ghadeer – Muslim (Shi'a)

This is a festival observed by Shi'a Muslims, for whom it is an extremely important day. It commemorates an event shortly before the death of the Prophet. When returning from Makkah to Medina after his final pilgrimage, the Prophet, who was travelling with many thousands of his followers, stopped at an oasis (the pool of Khumm) to deliver a sermon. While preaching he is believed by Muslims to have raised the hand of Ali, his cousin and son-in-law, and proclaimed, 'For whoever I am his leader, Ali is his leader. O God, love those who love him, and be hostile to those who are hostile to him'. Immediately after this statement the Prophet revealed an ayah (verse) of the Qur'an: 'Today I have perfected your religion and completed my favour upon you, and I was satisfied that Islam be your religion' (Qur'an 5, 3.) For Shi'a Muslims the 'perfecting' of the religion of Islam was the announcement concerning Ali, which they understand to be his clear appointment to be successor to the prophet as the spiritual and temporal leader of Islam.

31st October – Samhain – Wiccan/Pagan

The wheel of the year is seen to begin at Samhain. This is the Celtic New Year, when the veil between the worlds of life and death stands open. Samhain is the festival of death when Pagans remember and honour those who have gone before. Fires are lit and 'dead wood' is burned before stepping into the darkness of winter. Pagans celebrate death as part of life. This is not a time of fear, but a time to understand more deeply that life and death are part of a sacred whole.

'Money Makes the World Go Round'

Sermon by Rev. Sarah Tinker – 11th August 2013

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



Some thoughts about God and Money...

Finance is a great concern in any religious establishment – every mosque, temple, church and cathedral, synagogue and chapel – has bills to pay, wages to cover, buildings in need of mending, never mind the needy to care for. So it's not surprising that money is high on the agenda whenever religious leaders get together. And so it was that a rabbi, a priest and a Unitarian minister were talking together one day about this thorny issue of money and the divine. Not surprisingly they all took a collection in their worship time each week and the discussion centred on how to decide what portion of this money belonged to God and what portion to the leader themselves – wages in the religious world being somewhat slim. The rabbi explained that after the collection each Shabbat he would draw a circle on the ground, throw the money from the collection high up in the air – what lands in the circle belongs to him and what lands outside is for the most Holy One.

"What a coincidence" said the priest – "I do the same, or similar. I throw the money in the air and whatever lands in the circle belongs to God. That which falls outside the circle that is for me." "Well, fancy that" said the Unitarian minister. "We're similar too. Each Sunday after we've taken the collection, we take the money from the collection bags, I make the circle on the floor and throw the collection up in the air – then whatever God wants God takes and whatever falls back down to the ground – well that is clearly for me."

When I used to teach religion to teenagers there would come a point with most classes where the young people, and especially the thoughtful ones, would turn against religion. They'd see it as the cause of all the world's problems, the cause of wars, and many other forms of conflict. If we didn't have religion, they'd say, the world would be alright. And gently I'd have to guide them to the realisation that religion isn't the problem with the world – its people. The world would be a far more peaceful place without us humans.

At some point I think that many of us reach a similar realisation about money – money isn't the root of all evil – humanity is. Money and religion are merely vehicles for human expression and interaction – which is not to say that they are not worthy topics for consideration – but we do not need to blame them for our own struggles. We invented them I think to carry our needs and our yearnings. The question then is how does a global community use money for good and not as a means of exploitation.

It's always interested me that Jesus, as recorded in the Gospels, spoke more of money than he did of heaven and hell. And we find the same in most of the world's religions – they are seeking to guide us humans through the challenge of living in a material world with a spiritual orientation. They tackle the essential ethical questions of existence. It is inevitable that life is unfair, that the resources we need to exist are distributed inequitably. How then must we live? Many such teachings centre on our anxiety, on our

so human trait of clinging on – for safety, for power perhaps, for control. But the voice of the spirit beckons us onwards to a place of potential where we realise the true values of life. There's nothing wrong with money until we cling in fear to it. Both the rich and the poor and all those placed somewhere in between can be liberated or enslaved by finance. Jesus' marvellous image, of the rich man hoping to enter heaven being as easy a task as a camel making its way through the eye of a needle, is pointing out that the more we have the more we tend to cling to it. It all depends what we truly value, what we hold to be of worth.

I was sharing a meal with some friends the other night and asking their views about this topic for today's service of money. The conversation quickly degenerated into a telling of jokes and a singing of songs – all of which you are mercifully to be spared. But what became clear was our interest in the topic and perhaps our equal measure of discomfort about it – money is not a comfortable subject to discuss and most of us have our secret prides and shames around this subject. No wonder really – for unless we live in a completely sheltered community, withdrawn from the world, money is the currency of life, it does indeed make the world go round – and go round in ways that many of us who care about justice find difficult to accept. Henri Nouwen, the Dutch born Catholic priest writes movingly of money when he describes it thus: "Money has something to do with that intimate little place in your heart where you need security and don't want to give that away".

However well off we are and however much personal exploration we have engaged in, that insecurity is there – perhaps it is symbolic of the very insecurity of life itself.

The history of the development of money is a fascinating one. Our need for a system of exchange – the use of symbols like shells or iron rods to represent that exchange, the use of clay tablets in early civilisations to mark what has been earned through labour. Coins were developed quite late in human history – by the Lydians it seems in what is now modern Turkey – perhaps around 500 BC. And there on one side of many coins and notes is a picture of someone powerful – for finance and power are close companions in our world.

If any of you picked up the £5 note (*at the start of the service people were invited to pick a note or a coin from a plate*) – it has written on 'I promise to pay the bearer on demand the sum of five pounds'. Notes and coins, and indeed the whole of our financial system, all are based on interesting concepts like trust. When you hear a Chancellor of the Exchequer speaking of 'confidence in the market' you may remember that the whole of our financial system is based on such a nebulous idea – confidence: that a house is worth so much, that someone's labour is worth this amount whilst someone's else's is worth hundreds of times more. The more we look at money the more we may marvel or shudder at its power and at its fragility.

'Money Makes the World Go Round'

Sermon by Rev. Sarah Tinker (continued)



So many words are connected with money – wealth, poverty, ownership, charity, competition, loans, trade - both fair and otherwise, generosity, tips, gifts, presents, exchange, transactions, independence and inter-dependence, hoarding and circulation. But in the end money really is a vehicle for human living and it can help us make a link between the spiritual and material realms. When Jesus picked up that coin and said “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s” he cleverly avoided a trap set for him by his questioners. He was not going to lead a rebellion against the Roman powers. But he was going to remind people again and again and again that they themselves had the power, however rich or poor they might be, to do something to redress the injustices of this world.

When I heard Justin Welby, the new Archbishop of Canterbury, speaking out against so called pay day loan companies, that charge poor people interest rates in their thousands of percent, the other week I was impressed. I was even more impressed a few days later when he responded to news reports that the Church of England’s own pension fund had some investments in just such a company. He didn’t wriggle or deny it, he simply expressed once more his commitment to seek an alternative – to help set up credit unions which could lend money at a reasonable rate of interest not an extortionate one. And he usefully pointed out that the complexity of our financial institutions means that most of us do not know what uses our money is being put to nor the true sources of our wealth, in the past or to this day. There is no doubt that money makes the world go round but I wonder – is it too late for us re-assert that we are in charge of our finances and not anonymous investment banks – then we might truly start to use money for the good of all, and to establish ways of living that promote justice and love. I hope I live to see that day. Amen.

Money and Spirituality



After attending Sarah's service about Spirituality and money, I was reminded of an experience I had about a year ago.

I'd gone to my local cash point and taken out money, as I normally do, and when I checked the amount, I noticed that there was something written on one of the notes (pictured) - "Trust in God".

I still have this note, and have vowed not to spend it. In fact, I think I may frame it and put it somewhere in my home as a symbol and reminder that money and spirituality can be integrated or at least co-exist.

Jeannene Powell

One Light Spiritual Gatherings 'Spirit in Politics'



Friday 11th October 2013
6.30-8.15pm – Here at Essex Church

The gatherings are led by graduates of the Interfaith Seminary.

Information from One Light: 'I have never been particularly politically minded but the theme of this Gathering has stirred me to contemplate more deeply how we can connect with the political world in a truly healing and beneficial way. Our guest will be Scott Varland. Scott has spent more than 20 years working with and advising politicians. He has a deep appreciation of the practical problems and temptations of power and a profound understanding of spirituality in politics.'

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

These events are 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

Some Summer Ceremonies



It was a delight to conduct a wedding at Richmond Unitarian Church this summer for Daniel Volovsek and Lorena Sanchez Gonzalez. Danny and his sister had been christened in that very church as young children and their parents and aunt and uncle were married there. Here are the happy couple with Danny's grandmother Joyce O'Rafferty who is still a member of the Richmond congregation.

Another Unitarian link was made at the recent ceremony to welcome Hector Fletcher into his family and his wider world. Hector's brother Fergus had his naming ceremony here in November 2010. The Fletcher family now live in Singapore but wanted to hold their ceremonies here at Essex Church because it was here, back in 1979, that their father Ewan Fletcher was blessed by our then minister Frank Clabburn. Ewan's brother Robert was named in 1980 – ceremonies from the earliest days of our new church. Ewan and Robert's mother Damaris wrote an email and thanked us for our warm welcome that allowed everyone to feel at home on this special occasion.

Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday Services at Essex Church



6th October, 11am – 'Changing Ourselves, Changing the World'

Service led by Jane Blackall

Many of us harbour a wish to 'make the world a better place' but may feel helpless and frustrated at the scale of the task and the obstacles we face when trying to bring about change. In this service we will be considering the process of change in our own lives – how we have changed our habits, our mind, and our heart – and what we can learn from this when striving to change the world.

13th October, 11am – 'Sacred Activism'

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

A chance to find out more about the work of mystic author and teacher Andrew Harvey who uses the title Sacred Activism to describe his commitment, both within ourselves as individuals and out in the world, to align ourselves with the power of love. What difference might such an alignment make in your own life?

20th October, 11am – 'Unitarian Peace Sunday'

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

We will be taking part in the GA's 'Unitarian Peace Sunday' by holding a special service in association with some of the faith groups who share our church building. This service will be followed by a bring and share lunch. Come and celebrate our wonderfully diverse world of faith.

27th October, 11am – 'Getting over the Auschwitz Test: My Journey from Atheism to Process Theology'

Service led by Alex Warleigh-Lack

Alex is a member of Richmond and Putney Unitarians. We will be welcoming him to Essex Church to lead a service this October. Alex says: 'How is it possible to believe in something called 'god' in the face of great suffering and wrongs that go un-righted? For many people, this reflects what Karen Armstrong calls the 'Auschwitz Test': how can I believe in a god who was either powerless to prevent atrocities like those of the Nazis, or who chose not to do so? In this service I use ideas from Process Theology to propose one solution to this problem: the idea of a divine mystery present in creation, whose own manifestation and evolution is linked with our own, and indeed that of the universe.'