



Kensington Unitarians

Newsletter: June 2011

What's On in June:

Sunday 5th June, 11am
'Thankfulness and Generosity'
Service led by David Francis Darling

Wednesday 8th June, 7-9pm
Management Committee Meeting

Thursday 9th June, 7-9pm
**Adult RE: 'Karen Armstrong's
12 Steps to a Compassionate Life'**
Led by Sarah Tinker & Jane Blackall

Sunday 12th June, 11am
'Pentecost for Unitarians'
Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 12th June, 12.30pm
Small-Group Communion
Led by David Francis Darling

Sunday 12th June, 2-3.00pm
Nia Dance with Sonya Leite

Thursday 16th June, 7-9pm
**Adult RE: 'Karen Armstrong's
12 Steps to a Compassionate Life'**
Led by Sarah Tinker & Jane Blackall

Sunday 19th June, 11am
'Broken Gifts'
Service led by Rev. Linda Hart

Sunday 19th June, 12.30pm
**'Finding Your Voice'
Singing Workshop**
Led by Margaret Marshall

Tuesday 21st June, 7-9pm
Creativity Group:
'Bring Your Own Crafts'

Thursday 23rd June, 7-9pm
**Adult RE: 'Karen Armstrong's
12 Steps to a Compassionate Life'**
Led by Sarah Tinker & Jane Blackall

Sunday 26th June, 11am
'A Love Universal'
Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 26th June, 12.30pm
Midsummer Lunch Party

Tuesday 28th June, 7-9pm
Reading Group:
'The Help' by Kathryn Stockett

Thursday 30th June, 7-9pm
**Adult RE: 'Karen Armstrong's
12 Steps to a Compassionate Life'**
Led by Sarah Tinker & Jane Blackall

A Message from our Minister:

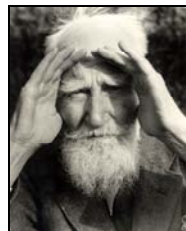
Rice on the Carpet

It was another busy Sunday here at Essex Church. After the Sunday service there was our monthly Nia dance class and then the performers arrived for a charity concert to raise funds for the Japanese earthquake and tsunami relief effort. In no time at all there was a queue of people waiting to get in and we were searching for extra chairs.



The church was packed and we were treated to a selection of beautiful classical pieces for piano, violin and voice. There were so many people that they held a raffle to choose people to take part in the Sushi demonstration during the interval and I had a winning ticket. That's how I learnt that the secret of successful Sushi making comes down to the quality of the rice. It has to be sticky. White, sticky rice. It was supposed to stick to the sheets of dried seaweed that were laid before us but it stuck much better to our fingers. And when we tried to get it off our fingers quite a lot of sticky rice fell to the floor, where it was soon trodden into the carpet. Meanwhile, in another part of our worship space, generous measures of vodka were being served alongside steaming cups of tea. Before long quite a lake of liquids was swilling about the parquet floor and I left the Sushi rolling to find floor cloths and the like.

These are the moments when I can lose my composure and start that inward rant – perhaps you know it too? It goes along the lines of 'this shouldn't be happening etc etc etc'. And then I remembered George Bernard Shaw's oft quoted words about wanting to be "thoroughly used when I die, for the harder I work the more I live". It must apply to buildings as well. We could try and keep our building safe from harm but what would be the point? It's here to be used and if that use involves sticky rice being trodden into a lovely orange carpet, well so be it. The parquet floor survived the vodka, the carpet cleaned up well and, best of all, was the email that arrived later that evening from the concert's organiser, Eriko Shimada, letting us know that they had already raised over £2000, with more still to come. When all of us have left this mortal coil, when this church crumbles to the ground, (hopefully after we've all gone), people will be able to say that it was thoroughly used up. I reckon that's what a church, and a life, is for.



Rev. Sarah Tinker

"I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work the more I live. I rejoice in life for its own sake. Life is no 'brief candle' for me. It is a sort of splendid torch which I have got hold of for the moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations." – George Bernard Shaw

In this month's newsletter...

* 'Embracing the Shadows: Our Tenebrae Service' by Michaela von Britzke *
'A New Congregation in Bangor' by Rita Woditsch * Poems by John Hands *
'Stratford Bound' by Howard Hague * A New Exhibition of Art by Heidi Ferid *
'A Great GA at Swansea' by Gordon Deaville * UU Minister to visit the District *
* Adult RE Course: 'Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life' * and much more...

Kensington Unitarians

At Essex Church (founded 1774), Notting Hill Gate

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

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

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



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

Office Telephone: 020 7221 6514

Email: info@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Web: www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Kindred Pilgrim Souls Congregational Book on Sale



Our congregational book, 'Kindred Pilgrim Souls', has been selling very well since it was launched at the Unitarian annual meetings ('the GA') in Swansea this April, and celebrated at our membership service in May.

Copies are still available from us at £5 (plus £1 P&P if you would like us to send them to you). Speak to Sarah or Jane if you would like to buy one. It is also possible to buy direct from the publishers online: www.lulu.com. Why not buy copies to give to your friends and family members? It is a good way of explaining what our theologically diverse Unitarian community is all about.

Midsummer Lunch Party

Sunday 26th June, 12.30pm



We will be having a bring-and-share lunch after the service on Sunday 26th June. Please bring along some food or drink to contribute (there will be a sign-up sheet nearer the time so you can let us know what you're planning to bring). Why not bring a friend along too? All are welcome.

Volunteering Rotas: Stewarding, Coffee and Greeting



Stewarding:

5 th June:	Howard Hague
12 th June:	Christine Joshi
19 th June:	Natasha Drennan
26 th June:	?

Coffee:

5 th June:	Gill Hague
12 th June:	Caroline Blair
19 th June:	Margaret Darling
26 th June:	Jo Ridgers

Greeting:

5 th June:	Gina Bayley
12 th June:	?
19 th June:	Jo Ridgers
26 th June:	Susan Smith

In recent months, we have been circulating the rota list via email, and this seems to be working well.

Please contact Jane with your email address if you are willing to receive this email once a month.

rotas@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

District Quarterly Meeting

of Unitarians in London and the South East



**Saturday 18th June from 1pm
at Meadow Chapel, Godalming GU7 3JB**

The afternoon will start at 1pm with a 45-minute service led by Rev. Martin Whitell, minister of John Pounds Memorial Church in Portsmouth, and Convenor of the GA Executive Committee.

Following the service there will be an opportunity for people to get to know each other a little better and then an early tea at 2.30pm. Following this there will be a variety of activities for people to choose from including visiting Winkworth Arboretum, Loseley House, and a circular ramble.

Winkworth Arboretum

Established in the 20th century, this stunning natural landscape houses more than 1000 different shrubs and trees, many of them rare. Entrance £5.60 (free to National Trust members).

Loseley House Gardens

Comparable with gardens considered national treasures, the Walled Garden covers 2.5 acres and is divided into 'rooms' each with its own unique planting scheme. Entrance £3.50.

Guided Walk along the River Wey

The River Wey runs along the back of Meadow Chapel and offers a delightful walk into the town less than two miles away. A chance to view narrowboats and learn of inland waterways.



Nearest station is Farncombe (about 10 minutes walk).

Directions can be found on the Meadow website:

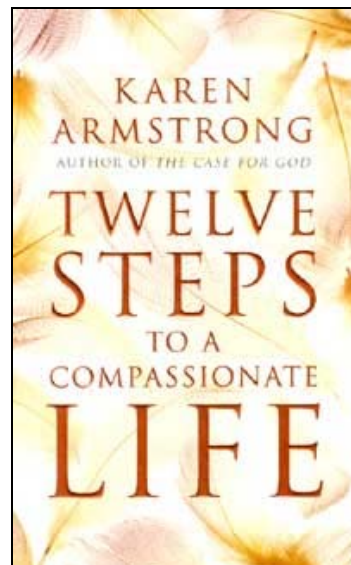
www.unitariangodalming.org.uk

London/SE District Website: www.ukunitarians.org.uk/pulse

New Adult RE Course for the Summer:

'Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life'

Thursday Evenings from 9th June, 7-9pm



Based on Karen Armstrong's book, this course will help us to explore how to live more compassionately with ourselves, with others and with the world. The course will run weekly on six Thursday evenings, starting on June 9th at 7.00pm.

Participants will be given a copy of Karen Armstrong's book to study and places will be limited to 10 – so check your diaries and see if you would like to join us for this new course. Contact Sarah or Jane to sign up.

The Charter for Compassion

The Charter for Compassion is a document that transcends religious, ideological and national difference. Supported by leading thinkers from many traditions, the Charter activates the Golden Rule around the world. It was a project initiated by Karen Armstrong in 2008. The book 'Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life' was written in response to requests for a step-by-step guide to help people put the charter's principles into practice.

At the 2011 meetings of the Unitarian General Assembly (GA) a resolution was passed to affirm the Charter for Compassion, to urge Unitarians everywhere to reflect on the Charter's humanitarian message and act in its spirit, and to resolve to become a partner organisation. This involves actively taking practical steps to promote the message of the Charter for Compassion. Groups such as the one we will be running here at Essex Church in June will help to spread the practice of compassion.

You can read more at and affirm the charter at:
www.charterforcompassion.org

American UU Minister in London this Summer



Rev. Victoria Weinstein is a Unitarian Universalist minister currently serving a congregation in Massachusetts. She is also on the Adjunct Faculty of Andover Newton Theological Seminary on the outskirts of Boston, where she teaches a very popular course in Worship. She will be in London for a month, 8th July - 10th August, staying in the manse flat at Bethnal Green. In addition to taking services in London churches (including one here in Kensington on 24th July) she will lead two workshops and a residential retreat for ministers.

Sunday 17th July, 2.30-5.30pm + “Moving Through the Liturgy”

This will take place at Hampstead from 2.30 – 5.30pm, with the participants then leading the evening service at 7.00pm. An evening meal will be shared between the workshop and the service. Publicity about this is being sent to all Lay Worship Leaders in the District.

Saturday 23rd July, 1-5.00pm “Nurturing a Ministry of Activism”

This will take place at Unity Church, Islington. This workshop will address the challenge of involving congregational members in the work of social activism.

**For any of these events, please book through
Danielle Wilson at danielle@daniellewilson.com**



“What do you first do when you learn to swim? You make mistakes, do you not? And what happens? You make other mistakes, and when you have made all the mistakes you possibly can without drowning – and some of them many times over – what do you find? That you can swim? Well – life is just the same as learning to swim!

Do not be afraid of making mistakes, for there is no other way of learning how to live!”

Alfred Adler

Rev. Victorian Weinstein ‘In Conversation with Unitarian Christians’



**Monday 11th July, 7.15pm
Golders Green Unitarians
31 ½ Hoop Lane, London NW11 8BS**

Rev. Victoria Weinstein, an American Unitarian Universalist Minister who is coming to the district in the summer, will be holding a ‘Conversation with Unitarian Christians’ at Golders Green Unitarians on Monday 11th July. All are welcome to this event, although it’ll be of particular interest to Christians.

Victoria Weinstein is a parish minister in Massachusetts and she teaches a popular course on liturgy at Andover Newton Theological School near Boston. She is a leading figure in the Unitarian Universalist Christian Fellowship.

Victoria has suggested the Conversation could focus on: how we nurture our spiritual lives as Christians within the Unitarian church; serving a Unitarian church when one has a fairly high Christology; and how to lead Bible study with Unitarians.

Rev Weinstein has quite a ‘high Christology’ herself. She has written: *“Who is Jesus Christ to me? He is both a teacher of the Way, and the Way itself. For one who has always had a hard time grasping the concept of God ... Jesus both points me toward a definition of God and then lives that definition ... Jesus is my soul’s safety from all harm. He is the avatar of aloneness, a compassionate and unsentimental narrator of the soul’s exile on earth, and proof of the soul’s triumphant homecoming at the end of the incarnational struggle... I call myself a Christian because I am a disciple of Jesus Christ — not just Jesus-that-great-guy-and-teacher-with-the-long-hair-and-sandals but Jesus the living avatar of the great God and Jesus the Christ of Easter morning ...”*

This essentially mystical approach to Jesus is shared by several leading UU Christians – as well as by many Hindus and Buddhists. It could also be a trend among Christians in our diverse denomination in the UK, but perhaps difficult to acknowledge for fear of being labelled ‘not Unitarian’.

The event is organised by the London District Liberal Christian Affinity Group. Do come and join the conversation! The church is 5 mins walk from Golders Green tube (Northern line, Edgware branch). For directions see: www.ggu.org.uk

Jim Corrigan
Co-convenor of the District Liberal Christian Group

Aunt Jessie's Rosebowl



It's thanks to Stephanie Saville that we remembered to fetch Aunt Jessie's rose bowl out of the safe for our AGM and Membership Service and that it was filled with sweet smelling roses. Jessie was a long time member of the congregation who went out of her way to get things done, the kind of congregation member that every church yearns for! The rose bowl was thought to be lost but then turned up in the safe at our Unitarian headquarters in Essex Hall, just off the Strand. In remembering Jessie we can remember all the other people whose efforts have kept this congregation in such good fettle over many years.

Essex Church Creativity Group 'Bring Your Own Crafts'

Tuesday 21st June 2011, 7.00-9.00pm



We have been experimenting with a new format for the creativity group in early 2011 and so far it is going well.

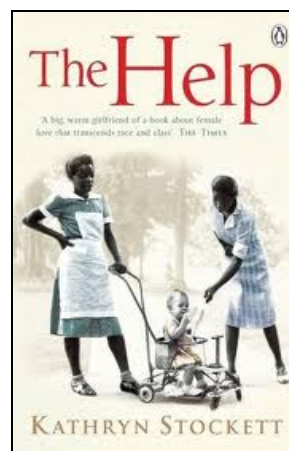
Instead of having a specific organised activity every month, which takes quite a lot of planning, we have decided that (most months) participants will simply be invited to bring their own art and craft projects along and enjoy the support and fellowship of the group. We are still intending to offer a specific activity once in a while and will work on projects for the church from time to time.

As ever, all are welcome, and the sessions are sociable and encouraging (with plenty of snacks to share).



Essex Church Reading Group

'The Help' by Kathryn Stockett



Tuesday 28th June 2011, 7.00-9.00pm

The reading group's June session will be based on 'The Help' by Kathryn Stockett. This title was chosen for us by Sarah Tinker. Description from Amazon UK:

"Jackson, Mississippi, 1962. Black maids raise white children, but aren't trusted not to steal the silver. Some lines will never be crossed. Aibileen is a black maid: smart, regal, and raising her seventeenth white child. Yet something shifted inside Aibileen the day her own son died while his bosses looked the other way. Minny, Aibileen's best friend, is by some way the sassiest woman in Mississippi. But even her extraordinary cooking won't protect Minny from the consequences of her tongue. Twenty-two-year-old Skeeter returns home with a degree and a head full of hope, but her mother will not be happy until there's a ring on her finger. Seeking solace with Constantine, the beloved maid who raised her, Skeeter finds she has gone. But why will no one tell her where? Seemingly as different as can be, Skeeter, Aibileen and Minny's lives converge over a clandestine project that will not only put them all at risk but also change the town of Jackson for ever. But why? And for what? The Help is a deeply moving, timeless and universal story about the lines we abide by, and the ones we won't. It is about how women, whether mothers or daughters, the help or the boss, relate to each other – and that terrible feeling that those who look after your children may understand them, even love them, better than you . . .?"

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

'Cycle for Youth' Unitarian Bike Ride



**Saturday 11th June, 9am – 5pm
London to Brighton**

On Saturday 11th June a small group of determined (or reckless?) young people and youth leaders will be cycling from London to Brighton – a journey of around 50 miles. These superfit sportspeople (er... well, that remains to be seen) will be taking on this challenge in order to raise funds for the Unitarian National Youth Programme. The more funds we can raise the easier it will be for us to keep our youth weekend charges low for all families and the more we can develop and widen our initiatives across the country.

We are encouraging people to sponsor the whole Cycle for Youth Team, rather than an individual - in order to highlight that this is a team event (like Team GB!). So far the Olympic-style outfit are Liz Hills, Annabel Kramer, Lori Winters, John Harley and others.

If you would like to sponsor the team let me know at jharley@unitarian.org.uk or contact any of the team. The starting line will be Croydon Unitarian Church at 9am and finishing point will be Brighton Pier (at around 5pm - God/greater power/inner power willing) with a rest along the way at Ditchling Old Meeting House.

If you are a young person aged 14 and above or a youth leader connected with the Youth Programme and you would like to cycle with us do let me know. Or if you would like to help on the day with marshalling, organising, first aid, refreshments etc do get into contact. Thanks for helping us to gear up for this event.

John Harlev – Unitarian GA Youth Coordinator



“Compassion is not a relationship between the healer and the wounded. It's a relationship between equals. Only when we know our own darkness well can we be present with the darkness of others. Compassion becomes real when we recognize our shared humanity.”

Pema Chödrön

Warden's Column

What's Happening in Our Busy Building

A few days ago, Jennie Blair contacted me to say she wanted to run a feminist craft workshop after the service on 29th May – would we have a room free? I was happy to be able to say that all the rooms would be free – as we don't generally take bookings on Sundays.

That reminded me that I'd also been very glad that last week, 8th May, that we'd been able to offer that free Sunday slot to a local Japanese woman, Eriko Shimada, who wanted to hold a fundraising concert for survivors of the earthquake/tsunami. I wasn't able to attend the concert, but Sarah did and said it was wonderful. It certainly looked like it was going to be good as they were setting up: they put the chairs in a beautiful arcing pattern – fanning out from the grand piano in the corner - that was perfectly practical (I instantly checked you could still get to the fire exit :-)) but very elegant. They set up tables loaded with delicious home-made sushi and also (somewhat randomly) free vodka – I think this had been donated. I think about 100 people attended and they raised a substantial amount of money – the organisers were also very grateful for our donation of over £100 from the collection after the service.

Then I remembered that this Sunday (15th May), the Interfaith Seminary Ministers, who do a regular service here on the second Friday of each month had requested a bi-annual Sunday slot as being more convenient for some people who'd like to attend.

Hmm . . . that's quite a lot of busy Sundays this month, given that it's meant to be a rest day for the staff and building – but looking through the diary for the rest of the year, I was reassured that these were the exceptions that prove the rule and generally we find a good balance between having a much-needed "Sabbath" and using the opportunity to support events we couldn't otherwise accommodate. In fact the only other Sunday use there's been so far this year was for a Contact Dance jam with live music which I organised here on 29th January (the acoustics & particularly the grand piano being greatly appreciated :-)).

Looking onward through the diary – later this year we've offered the Beit Klal Yisrael synagogue, who meet here regularly on alternate Fridays and Saturdays, an extra Sunday slot to hold a fundraiser for Israel/Palestine on 7th August; then on 14th August a member of the congregation has booked in a baby-naming ceremony; on 23rd October one of our long-term user groups asked if they could hold a memorial celebration for one of their members and on 11th December another member of that group has asked if she could celebrate her 70th birthday here.

These are all bookings which we'd have struggled to accommodate on a Saturday or a weekday evening because our building is so well-used now and busy with regular groups - so it feels good that because of our policy of only taking Sunday bookings at the Minister's discretion (i.e. if we really want to) we were able to fit them in.

Jenny Moy

July Newsletter Deadline



The deadline for submitting items for the next issue is **Sunday 12th June**. Please send items (such as poems, quotes, articles, notices, rotas, etc...) to Jane Blackall or a committee member before that date.

Thank you!!!

Small Group Communion



Sunday 12th June, 12.30pm
Downstairs 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 church library. A number of members of the congregation expressed interest in having a regular opportunity for communion here so, since the autumn, we have been experimenting with services led by a variety of different people, and we have been very encouraged by the experience so far.

We hope that different people will take turns to lead the small-group communion services so that we can experience a number of different approaches. The line-up for the next few months is as follows:

12th June – David Francis Darling

10th July – Jane Blackall

14th August – John Hands and Sarah Tinker

If you would like to find out more about these small-group communions then please feel free to speak to Jane Blackall or Tristan Jovanović.

Embracing the Shadows

Tenebrae Service on Maundy Thursday



To hear the Easter narrative read in this way was incredibly moving. In some ways it was as though we were hearing these well known words as if for the first time and with an underlying awareness that Jesus is all of us, 'every man'. The Easter themes of triumph and despair, friendship and betrayal, cruelty and kindness, are played out in all of our lives. Eight of us gathered in the library on the evening of Maundy Thursday for this service. We started by listening to the first part of Pergolesi's 'Stabat Mater'.

The Latin word 'Tenebrae' can be translated as 'shadows' and in this service, the first I think that we had here at Essex Church, it was the shadows we were entering into. So often in life we are drawn towards the positive, towards light and good cheer. But Easter perhaps more than any other festival encourages us to stay awhile in darkness and face the unpalatable. Life is not always cheery, there is not always a happy ending, truly dire things occur in this world of sensation.

The structure of a Tenebrae service comes I think from the Anglican tradition and began with a table of candles before us. As each reading was completed a candle was extinguished, until we were left with one lit candle. In the final reading, the story of Jesus' death on the cross and burial in the tomb was told and that last lit candle was hidden from view. We sat in darkness and silence together. What a powerful moment. The silence was broken once more by Pergolesi's poignant evocation of the expression and containment of despair.

Then slowly, quietly, the light of that one candle was returned and we spoke together the words of the 23rd Psalm: the lord is my shepherd. At the end of the service we left the room in silence, not talking to one another, maintaining a truly holy and respectful stillness that came home with me that evening.

Michaela von Britzke



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

Second Sunday of the Month
from 2-3pm: 12th June, 10th July
(note: there will be no class in August)

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 now £8 (£5 to members). **Contact: Sonya Leite on 0207 371 1674.**

"Why join a congregation?... In a congregation you get exposed to people who aren't you. You get challenged by ideas you couldn't think up on your own. You get challenged by ideas that wouldn't appear in the books you would choose for yourself at the bookstore. You're forced to mingle with people who aren't your age, or sex, or race, or family situation. People who aren't you ask you tough questions about your beliefs and force you to look more deeply into your beliefs in order to explain them. You get a congregation with a history and a tradition older than you that both grounds you as well as gives you the advantage of building on the best ideas and insights of previous generations. You find comrades outside yourself sharing your commitment to the social justice causes that inspire you. You have a sacred space where people who aren't you will listen with sympathetic ears to your stories of success and failure, joys and sorrows, your unseemly pride, and your embarrassing disappointments. You have in the congregation, through the very act of covenant and membership, a reason outside yourself to keep going in your spiritual life, to show up again week after week, to not lose yourself in mild complacency, or in the arrogance of thinking you've got it all figured out. This congregation because it isn't just you, keeps you honest, keeps you focused, keeps you working, keeps you challenged and comforted; it questions our private revelations, and it shares its revelations with us when our own spirit becomes uninspired.

These ideas of the importance of joining a congregation can help us imagine the congregation we want to be, sustain our own involvement in the forming congregation, and provide incitements to encourage our friends and neighbours to join us."

UU Minister, Rev. Ricky Hoyt



A Great GA at Swansea

Every year delegates and others from Unitarian and Free Christian congregations in the UK meet for a General Assembly (GA). This year it was at Swansea University in an attractive part of South Wales. Once again, thanks to John Crosskey taking my NHS food and "drink" in the van from Essex Hall (GA Headquarters) - many thanks to John - I was able to attend. I'm still "Nil by Mouth" and both my food, "drink" and pump for them are too heavy together for me to carry on foot and train. Once again there was glorious weather and I did not need to adjust the hours of taking my food in order to get to the sessions. Just taking my medication at prescribed times prevented my attending parts or some of them, but that's much better than not going at all.

There were extra delights from having the GA at Swansea University – choirs, being those of Welsh children with delightful Welsh singing, some events being in the splendid Brangwyn Hall with superb murals by Frank Brangwyn (1867-1956) on its walls, and from the front of the main building, Fulton House a splendid view – over a big lawn, then some trees and beyond them the sea. We frequently passed this grand view on the way to sessions and often also saw a Herring Gull perched proudly on a stone balustrade in the foreground. Some went to the beach, but for me my way was blocked by a footbridge whose steps would have taken me far too long to negotiate at that time.

One other extra delight was an exhibition of the work of 20th century artist, John Piper in the public Oriel Ceri Richards Gallery. This is situated under the Taliesin Theatre where the GA main business sessions took place. Piper celebrated the British landscape and its architecture. Sensing the threat of war and possible destruction Piper made a shift from modernism to more naturalistic scenes, focusing on a sense of place, identity, belonging and memory, all elements which have come to be synonymous with his work, which is well worth seeing. The exhibition at Swansea University was in association with the Goldmark Gallery in Swansea.

Once again I found the GA very interesting and mostly uplifting and inspiring. Even the business sessions had their humour. In the pick from a selection of optional sessions, I was attracted by Rev. Bill Darlison's explanation of the thesis behind his book, 'The Gospel and the Zodiac: the Secret Truth about Jesus' in the Unitarian Christian Association's slot. Bill Darlison contended that St. Mark's Gospel is a mystical text, with the signs of the zodiac representing stages on the path to spiritual enlightenment. It was most fascinating and plausible. If you'd like to know more, I suggest you read the book.

Most uplifting was towards the end of the GA was a report about the new Bangor congregation. Our friend Rita Woditsch of the Bangor congregation, previously of our community here in Kensington, has also written about this elsewhere in the newsletter. Although small, as a result of that report the meeting voted to make it a member of the General Assembly... there was loud applause. After several years of successful Ministry in SW England and London, one of the most inspiring Unitarian women, Rev. Elizabeth Birtles, moved to Bangor in North Wales in 2006. Being the woman she was, she soon got to know like minded people seeking a spiritual community. They gathered for the first time in 2008, the report said, and from these beginnings a truly caring community developed with worship at its heart. Four people, present and applauded at the GA, gave enthusiasm to set up and keep that congregation going. One of those present [Nia Roberts], on finding there was a parade of banners at the Welcoming session, got the materials together and made a banner in a very short time. When the Bangor congregation was welcomed into the GA the new banner was carried to the stage to join the others which had been brought from all over the UK.

Why not come to the annual meetings yourself next year?

Gordon Deaville

New Congregation in Bangor

The final day of the GA Annual Meetings in Swansea was a very special day for Undodiaid Bangor Unitarians, as we were formally recognised as a small congregation. Four of us had made our way from North Wales for the occasion.

I wasn't quite sure what to expect, not being familiar with GA business meetings and certainly not having been involved in setting up a new congregation before! So many people were excited about us joining the fold. The ceremony was an overwhelming experience, which brought tears to many eyes (certainly mine). Lis Dyson Jones gave a moving speech, which summed up our story. Afterwards some people came over for a chat and asked: "How do you actually go about setting up a Unitarian congregation?"

Looking back now I still marvel about the process. What I know for sure is that we were privileged to have been guided by two wonderful people, Liz Birtles and Maggie Davies, who were (and still are) a huge inspiration for all of us. Their wisdom, experience and 'trust in the process' have been invaluable. Most of us were novices when it came to leading worship. From the beginning we have taken turns leading worship, which means it can take very different forms. Some of us prefer 'experiential' services, in which meditation, poetry and reflection feature more, whereas others give addresses more weight. There is also often an interactive element, i.e. people are encouraged to discuss an issue or share something about themselves. Our group is culturally diverse and we have a lot of children, young as well as older people, all this adds colour to our services. I think that really is the beauty of our congregation. There is a strong sense of democracy, which is reflected in our steering group meetings and in the way we share responsibilities throughout. I don't think practicalities presented us with major problems – 'help' was certainly 'at hand' from Essex Hall and the GA (see their publication bearing this title), for which we are very grateful. And not having a church building to maintain can also be an advantage - it has kept our administration simple.

I am not denying that setting up a new congregation has its challenges. Each of us has their own hopes, expectations and needs, which we have to compromise on to make it work. As elsewhere in life, trust and respect are essential. We also meet socially on a regular basis, have been on a short retreat together and are running an engagement group (Heart to Heart) - all of which has helped us to grow together as a group.

For all of us it has been a unique learning experience, for which I am deeply grateful. I have also been offered many enriching learning opportunities within the Unitarian movement, such as engagement group and facilitation training, and summer school. All this has in one way and another benefitted my congregation.

Each of us in Bangor has their own story to tell. The 'spark' for my own involvement has come from Kensington Unitarians. I stepped into Essex Church one Sunday in January 2008 and had a chat with Sarah and Juliet. I instantly knew this was where I belonged. Over the next few months I made some lasting friendships. In the autumn of 2008 I decided to move to Wales to join my partner. One thing dampened my joy somewhat: there wasn't any Unitarian congregation in North Wales. Shortly before I left London, Patricia Walker (who I was fortunate to know) invited me to a restaurant in Chiswick, along with some other Unitarian friends. This was when Patricia mentioned her friends Liz and Maggie on Anglesey and gave me their address. Liz and Maggie had been hoping to find some like-minded people to set up a Unitarian group or fellowship...

Rita Woditsch



Tales of the Middle Sea

This photo gives a flavour of this magical evening of storytelling that we were treated to on Good Friday by Sef Townsend and Raphael Rodan. Full of energy and life, the tales wove seamlessly into one another, yet all with a theme of the possibility of peace and love and redemption. Both Sef and Raphael use stories as a way to bridge divides and give voice to the silent. We were glad to give them use of the church without charge so that any funds raised could go towards peace projects supported by our resident synagogue, Beit Klal Yisrael, who provided delicious Pesach nibbles for the evening. One such project is Jisr al Adam, working to bring young people of different communities together. Thanks to Zofia Hockin for the photo.

Stratford Bound

If you were to mention Stratford to most people, they would probably still think of the town in Warwickshire and Shakespeare first. However that may change over the next year or so in the run-up to the Olympics, which – as London's residents are well aware – will take place in Stratford, East London in 2012. In addition a new Westfield shopping centre is due to open in the same area later this year. I'm not really a huge fan of the Olympics in terms of sport, but I was generally in favour of the games coming here because of the potential benefit to a very run-down part of the capital, which does concern me. It's good to know that some of the accommodation being built in the Olympic Park for the athletes will be used for social housing after the games have finished. It's surely very important for the local community to feel a part of what is happening on their doorstep. There has been real concern that few of the jobs on the Olympic site seem to have gone to local people.



Did you know that it is possible to visit a special viewing area to watch progress on the Olympic site? It's called the 'View Tube' and is easily reached from Pudding Mill Station on the Docklands Light Railway (which itself is only one stop from Stratford Station with its numerous transport links now). At Pudding Mill Station just follow the signs for the View Tube. Two men in high visibility jackets will guide you safely across the site access road. From the viewing platform you get a very good panorama of the main Olympic site. I've been there a couple of times in recent months and it's fascinating to see the progress being made in all directions. There's even a café which serves a reasonable latte and an education centre up on the first floor for local schools which is being well used. The View Tube is actually made from recycled shipping containers and is itself billed as a 'community enterprise' - more details will be found at www.theviewtube.co.uk

Can we make any Unitarian links here? Well not to the actual Olympic site as far as I am aware, but we have a congregation meeting in the newly rebuilt church in Stratford (on West Ham Lane – just a five minute walk from Stratford Station, via the present shopping centre). The new church opened in 2007, replacing a 19th century building that had served its time. It's fairly small but offers good modern facilities for today's needs. There's a small garden out the back where you can sit and reflect on our busy world. The lay leader, Julian Meek, is very active and keeps the church open on Tuesday mornings for any passers-by or visitors to look in - mention Kensington and he's sure to put the kettle on! In addition to the usual Sunday service at 10.30 they have a mid-week meeting on Wednesday afternoons at 3.30 pm – for further details see their website at www.ukunitarians.org.uk/stratford. There's also a staff restaurant in the office block next door to which church members and visitors have access (Monday to Friday). One hopes that Julian and the congregation will benefit from all the attention that will be focussed on Stratford over the next year.

I'm a great fan of the Docklands Light Railway with its driverless trains and remarkable views of the developments that have taken place in the area over the last twenty years, such as Canary Wharf and the continuing transformation of the old dock areas. Perhaps on another occasion I'll share with you another favourite destination of mine on the DLR – Pontoon Dock and the Thames Barrier Park. We do live in a remarkable city, even if its size and busyness sometimes get us down.

Howard Hague



One Light Spiritual Gatherings

Friday 10th June, 6.30-8.15pm - Held at Essex Church

The gatherings are led by graduates of the Interfaith Seminary. All are welcome.

Peaceful and Joyous connection with the Divine, the One Light at the Heart of All through music, meditation and inspiration from many spiritual traditions. Bring your beloved self, family, children, friends. All are welcome.

For further information contact service hosts:

Reverend Pamela Ramsden - 07966 478 980

Reverend Kathryn Reynolds - 07976 739 286

Joint Day Conference: The Alister Hardy Society World Congress of Faiths

Saturday 11th June 2011 at Essex Church

*"How might spiritual/religious experience
help towards understanding & compassion?"*

The conference will begin with registration at 10am and will conclude at 4.30pm. It will include the following:

'Fellowship of Faiths: A Communion of Spirit'

Rev. Dr. Marcus Braybrooke
President of the World Congress of Faiths.

'Faith and No Faith: The Contribution of Atheism to the Spiritual Quest'

Dr. Gregory Barker
Director of Alister Hardy Religious Experience Centre

'From Contemplation to Compassion'

Eley McAinsh
Director of the Living Spirituality Network.

Cost £25; AHS/WCF members £20; students £12

Info: John Franklin, 21 Park Vista, London, SE10 9LZ.
0208 858 4750 e-mail: johnfranklin35@hotmail.com

...an event you might be interested in...

The United States Constitution: Blueprint for a Republic

**Monday 27th June, 12 noon
Benjamin Franklin House, WC2N 5NF**

During the summer of 1787, fifty-five men, including Benjamin Franklin, convened near his Philadelphia home for the purpose of designing a government. On September 17 of that year, they published their handiwork: the four page United States Constitution. What had they wrought? Scott Varland, an American lawyer and author (and friend of this congregation), will speak on the Enlightenment ideas that permeate the Constitution, as well as its ongoing centrality to American law and politics. The lecture, including Q & A, will last approximately one hour. A ticket costs £5 or £3.50 for friends and concessions. To order a ticket, phone Benjamin Franklin House on 020 7839 2006.

Website: www.benjaminfranklinhouse.org

Heidi Ferid Exhibition

Friday 10th and Saturday 11th June
Space Studios, Vauxhall, SE11 5RH



'Peter Pan and Butterflies' by Heidi Ferid

Our very own Heidi Ferid will be having an exhibition of her latest paintings at the Space Studios this June.

You are welcome to attend a private view on Friday 10th June from 6-9pm. There will be a further viewing on Saturday 11th June from 12 to 6pm. This will be held at Space Studios, 149 Vauxhall Street, SE11 5RH (the nearest underground stations are Vauxhall or Oval and parking is available nearby).

'Finding Our Voice'

Singing Workshops with Margaret Marshall

**Sundays 19th June, 17th July
and 21st August - 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. Along with Harold Lorenzelli she has been singing in our choir here at Essex Church for over thirty years now and we're delighted that she is now leading monthly sessions to help us all find our voice.

These workshops are for anyone who is prepared to open their mouth and make a sound and Margaret will show us how to improve the quality and strength of our voices. Using a few simple exercises we'll gain joy and confidence in our singing by learning how to produce and develop the voice, something everyone can do. We'll work with the breath and overcome unconscious blocks that can prevent us singing with our true potential.

Fun and achievement are guaranteed and these sessions are designed for everyone, whatever your experience or ability. All are welcome.

Waste



Hear it shake the empty station
The fearful mid-night haul
Its fearful deep-throat elation
Should every heart apall.

No time-table proclaims the hour
When it stealthily steals through
But the stuff that sags its carriage springs
Should frighten me and you.

No-one awaits to climb on board
It never stops to see
But what it drags like burglar's swag
Should nightmare you and me.

But since we can't or won't prevent it
Let's turn again to sleep
Where it's buried or sunk at its nether end
Is no secret of ours to keep.

John Hands

World Congress of Faiths (WCF) Forthcoming Events

WCF Annual Meeting
Wednesday 1st June at 5pm
London Interfaith Centre
125 Salusbury Rd, London NW6 6RG

WCF Youngusband Interfaith Service
Sunday 24th July at 6.30pm
St Martin-in-the-Fields
Trafalgar Square, London WC2N 4JJ
If you wish to attend please send
an e-mail to smartin@worldfaiths.org

WCF Interfaith Celebration of Animals
Sunday 4th September at 3.00pm
Golders Green Unitarian Church
31 ½ Hoop Lane, London NW11 8BS

Multifaith Calendar

✠ 2nd June – Ascension Day – Christian

The 40th day after Easter, commemorates the last earthly appearance of the risen Christ. According to the Bible, Jesus ascended into heaven in the presence of many witnesses.

✧ 8th - 9th June – Shavuot / Festival of Weeks – Jewish

Shavuot, also known as Pentecost or the Festival of Weeks, comes seven weeks after Pesach. The festival celebrates the revelation of the Torah to Moses on Mount Sinai and the early harvest season in Israel. Synagogues are decorated with flowers, and dairy foods are traditionally eaten.

✠ 12th June – Pentecost / Whitsuntide – Christian

Pentecost, also known as Whitsuntide, is often thought of as the 'birthday' of the Church. Christians remember the first disciples of Jesus receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, and first proclaiming the Gospel, fifty days after Jesus' resurrection. Called Pentecost after the Jewish festival day when the event took place, the name Whitsuntide comes from the custom of people presenting themselves for baptism on this day, dressed in white.

✿ 15th June – Saga Dawa – Buddhist

This Tibetan and Nepalese festival, on the full moon day of May, celebrates the birth, enlightenment and death of the Buddha. The festival is a day of strict observance, with fasting. It is also a festival of lights, as lamps are lit everywhere. When Saga Dawa is celebrated in the UK the emphasis is on the joy associated with the Buddha's birth and enlightenment.

☪ 16th June – Martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev Ji – Sikh

This festival commemorates the fifth Guru who made the first compilation of the Sikh Scriptures, the Adi Granth, and supervised the completion of the Golden Temple in Amritsar. Guru Arjan Dev Ji was executed on the orders of the Moghul Emperor in 1606 for refusing to pay a fine arising from a charge of treason. Sikhs hold a gurburb on this day, including an akhand path, a non-stop cover to cover reading of the Guru Granth Sahib Ji.

✠ 26th June – Corpus Christi / Day of Thanksgiving for the Institution of Holy Communion – Christian

The festival of Corpus Christi in the Roman Catholic Church, or the Day of Thanksgiving for the Institution of Holy Communion in the Anglican Church, occurs 60 days after Easter and celebrates the Eucharist. In the ancient world it was customary to scatter flowers in the path of important people as a sign of respect and reverence. This custom was adopted by the Church to honour the Blessed Sacrament, carried in procession on the festival of Corpus Christi.

☪ 29th June – The Prophet's Night Journey and Ascension (Laylat-ul-'Isra wal Mi'raj) – Muslim

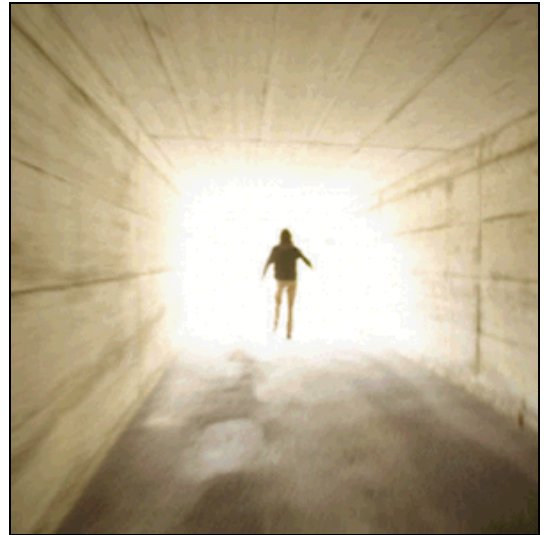
In the tenth year of his prophethood, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) journeyed from Makkah to Jerusalem and through the heavens to the presence of God, all in one night. The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem marks the rock from which Muhammad (pbuh) ascended. On the journey the Prophet received the command to pray five times a day.

Home Cinema

The door opens and two souls step out – maybe
Another, and another, then the door is closed.
“Two souls! – precious philosopher – you mean of course
People: two or more people.” No, I mean souls:
People they have to be, else how could we know them?
Souls are their vital part: bodies simply their manifestation.

Doors open and close: souls clothed in bodies step into the sunlight
Smile, frown, wave, or perform some hilarious antic, then
The door closes behind them. Where they were going
Where they are now we neither know or have forgotten;
Caught by the camera: fixed in an eternal Now.

John Hands



Improvements to the Church Garden



Thanks to the determination of Michaela and Caroline our back garden improvement project is well underway. Three new planters have been purchased and have proved the important life lesson that ‘flat pack’ assembly is rarely as easy as you hope it will be. Eventually we needed Fraser and his electric screwdriver to force them into submission. But they are now built, and stained green, and ready to be filled with soil and plants.

The plan is to reduce the number of tubs at the back of the church and simplify the planting so that watering is less demanding. We hope that someone will water the tubs each Sunday so do ask if you want to know how to work the new hosepipe. Most of the old containers will be discarded so get in touch if you could find a home for any of them.

We now have Paul, a professional gardener, for one day a month but he can't fit in any extra hours so he is going to focus mostly on maintaining the front garden. So if you feel a green fingered urge there's plenty to have a go at and thanks to everyone who already quietly gets on with the endless tasks that need doing outside.

Rev. Sarah Tinker

A new initiative in the London District:

‘Rainbow’ LGBTQI Unitarians in London and the South East



Draft Calendar of Events, 2011

Saturday 18th June: Formal Launch of Rainbow; service by Rev Ant Howe, New Unity Church, Islington, 4pm. For location details, see: <http://www.new-unity.org/>

July: No Meeting.

Saturday 6th August: Social Trip to Brighton. Meet Victoria Station or in Brighton itself; details TBC.

Saturday 10th September: Building a Welcome for LGBTI Unitarians. Meeting here at Essex Church.

Saturday 15th October: LGBTI social event and karaoke – New Unity Church, Islington, 5pm.

Saturday 19th November: Planning meeting: goals and objectives for 2012, Richmond Unitarian Church, 5pm.

Saturday 10th December: Yule service. New Unity Church, Islington, 5pm. Service leader: TBC.

'Sabbath'

Sermon by Jane Blackall – 1st May 2011

The last month or so has been unusually busy here at Essex Church, with the publication of our new book, as well as our annual report, and a trip to the Unitarian Annual Meetings in the middle of it all... and in the midst of all this business – in a change to the previously advertised theme (it was originally entitled 'Up the Workers!', to coincide with May Day, and was all about work) – all I really wanted to think about was rest.

As I mentioned earlier on in the service, I am very fond of the book 'Sabbath', by Wayne Muller, and I will draw on it a great deal during the course of this sermon. But first, let's go right back to the bible, Exodus 20:v8-11:

"Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work – you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and consecrated it."

Putting it very simply, the underlying principle of Sabbath is that by saying "no" to some activities, we allow ourselves to say "yes" to other things. In his book, Muller says:

"When we cease our daily labour other things – love, friendship, prayer, touch, singing – can be born in the space created by our rest. Walking with a friend, reciting a prayer, sharing bread and wine with family and neighbours – those are intimate graces that need precious time and attention."

Jewish texts prohibit thirty-nine specific acts during Sabbath – these are mainly activities that were traditionally associated with the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem – including spinning, weaving, hunting, building and transporting. Later, the Sunday Sabbath was officially recognised, when the Emperor Constantine declared it a day of rest for Christians throughout the Roman Empire. In both Judaism and Christianity, however, the Sabbath laws soon became overly legalistic and restrictive. Muller devotes a whole chapter to this unfortunate turn: he calls it '*Legalism and the Dreary Sabbath*'. In Judaism, at one time, laughter and play were forbidden on the Sabbath, sucking the joy out of the experience for everyone. In Christianity, there came to be an emphasis on long, arduous, Sunday services, and ever more stringent restrictions to stop anyone from enjoying themselves too much.

Muller quotes Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi:

"Lots of people will swear allegiance to the Sabbath and criticise those who do not keep all the Sabbath laws. But their inner experience is not one of spaciousness. It is easy to talk of prohibition, but the point [of the Sabbath] is the space and time created to say yes to sacred spirituality, sensuality, sexuality, prayer, rest, song, delight. It is not about legalism and legislation, but about joy and the things that grow only in time. We need to remove the grimness from it."



In a similar vein we can recall the words of Jesus as a warning against interpreting the practice in such a way that it suffocates us: *"the Sabbath is made for man, and not man for the Sabbath."*

So, as long as we can dodge these legalistic traps, there's something of great worth in the tradition of Sabbath-keeping, and I reckon we would do well to reclaim it and make it our own. Here are some words from the Christian writer Kathleen Casey on how we might look at it afresh:

"Sabbath rest can mean different things to different people. It can be four or twenty-four hours. It can be daily, weekly, or monthly. The important thing is to take the time. For the ancient Hebrews it was a time to break the cycle of physical labour and allow for rest. For me and many others today, work is not particularly active, so physical rest is not a break in the cycle of days. I need a mental rest. I need a period of time to stop planning, stop problem solving, stop searching for answers."

Our modern lives are often so busy and for any number of reasons it can be hard to say "no" to yet another obligation. Society demands ever more of us and there's a sense that whatever we do it will never be enough. Often our sense of self-esteem and self-worth is entirely dependent on feeling useful or productive. And I'm not just thinking of paid work (for those of us of working age who are lucky enough to have a job in the current climate), but also voluntary, domestic and social responsibilities.

All these forms of work can end in burnout. If we don't take steps to claim the rest we need, then we might just find that we simply get sick, and are unable to carry on at the high pace that is expected of us. If we are unable or unwilling to resist the overwhelming pressures of society we may find that our body will simply take the decision for us and refuse to carry on. Wayne Muller, who wrote the book, was working at full stretch running a charity, serving on dozens of committees and projects, seemingly unable to say "no" to anyone, until the point at which he got seriously ill and was hospitalised (in fact he nearly died). This proved to be the catalyst for a lot of changes in his life and gave rise to many of the insights he offers in the book.

I would say that Sabbath-keeping is really countercultural and it would seem that it was ever so. Maybe that's how it gets its somewhat surprising place up there among all the other commandments in the bible. The pressure to "keep on keeping on" is, and always has been, so great that we humans really need to be commanded to stop once in a while before we'll sit up and take notice.

'Sabbath' - Sermon by Jane Blackall *(continued)*

For a Unitarian take on the key aspects of the Sabbath I'm going to turn to UU minister Krista Taves:

"So what makes a Sabbath? Is the Sabbath simply about sitting and not doing? Well, it is, and it is also about much more. Taking the Sabbath is a covenant that we make with ourselves, with those we love, and with the God of our understanding. The Sabbath is what some would call 'holy leisure.' A good Sabbath has four principles: The cessation of work. Rest. Fellowship. Worship."

I like the simplicity of that description. Let's underline those four key principles of a Unitarian Sabbath:

- 1. Stop Work** (i.e. work in its widest sense - even if you love your work, change of scene is beneficial)
- 2. Rest** (i.e. go slow, relax, sleep – don't go in for strenuous pursuits or other forms of work in disguise)
- 3. Fellowship or Connection** (i.e. spend Sabbath time with people you love)
- 4. Worship or Making Sacred** (i.e. do something which marks the day as special, celebrate what is holy)

Unitarians are free to learn from our forebears, and our brothers and sisters in other faith communities, and make traditions our own so that they work for us... though we always need to be mindful that we don't do any disrespectful appropriation, or cherry-pick in a way that loses the power of the tradition altogether.

A characteristic I associate with the Jewish Sabbath is that it's a practice which is very much supported by its central place in the family and the wider religious community. As with so many things in life, it's harder to do it alone. Which brings us to the little handout in your orders of service... the 'Sabbath Manifesto' (see www.sabbathmanifesto.org).

Tristan [Jovanović] brought my attention to this project, and we ran something about it in the newsletter earlier in the year, and though you can read more about it on this yellow sheet in your own time I'll give you a very potted history. This project was initiated by a group of secular Jewish artists attempting to renew the Sabbath for themselves (though they welcome people of all faiths and none to join in). They've set up a website, sabbathmanifesto.org, on which they have posted ten principles which they suggest you explore and observe to help you take a Sabbath rest in the modern world. They positively encourage people to interpret and play with the principles in a way that works for them. In their promotion to date, they've put quite a lot of emphasis on the first principle, 'Avoid Technology', and held a "day of unplugging" back in March when they particularly encouraged people to turn off their phones and log out of email, facebook, twitter etc. for 24 hours.

I was intrigued enough to give it a go. The challenge of avoiding technology was especially challenging for me, as one who practically lives on the internet, but for that very reason I suspected it would be worthwhile. I must admit I've been a bit variable in my observance so far, but on those occasions where I have managed a full 24 hours (using the Jewish Sabbath, from sunset on Friday to sunset on Saturday) I have found it to be a very good experience

which completely changed the quality of the day – I spent the time reading, cooking, and pottering in the garden – and was able to completely forget my the ever-looming to-do list for a while. I'm still trying to make little adjustments to make it work better for me but the experiment is ongoing. I'd like to invite you to consider giving the practice of Sabbath-keeping a go yourself and maybe even set your intentions right here and now. Consider now what might work for you...

How long could you realistically imagine carving out for Sabbath time in your life – a day a week? Half a day? An evening? Or, given the particulars of your life, would it be more feasible to do something little and often – an hour a day set aside? Or alternatively a weekend each month?

For you, what would it mean to stop working? Would it be as simple as unplugging the computer, or switching off the phone, and walking away? Putting all your paperwork back in a box until Monday? Or do you have domestic responsibilities that you couldn't set aside without getting someone else to cover (for example, getting a babysitter, or respite care). Is that something that you could imagine doing?

What would it mean for you to rest? Once you've stopped working, what will you do with that time? Is it as basic as needing more sleep: having a lie-in, or an afternoon nap, or an early night? Are you going to get outside into nature and have a walk? Will you put your feet up and read a book, do some knitting or a crossword?

What would it mean for you to connect with loved ones? Could you get into the habit getting together with friends or family for a simple gathering? Or maybe keep in touch with old friends with a letter written in longhand – a suitably 'slow' form of communication? Or even set the intention to cultivate new friendships and reach out to form new connections.

How would you make it sacred? This is something that diverges from the more strictly secular rules of the 'Sabbath Manifesto' and returns to its religious roots. Could you introduce some form of ritual into your Sabbath time: light candles and pray at the start and end of the Sabbath day, or spend some time in silent meditation?

And finally, who else could you do this with? As with so many practices I reckon it helps if you're not doing it alone. Are there perhaps friends or family members you could share this practice with – even if it's just to check in with each other about how it's going and compare notes – or maybe you could even make a habit of getting together for a Sabbath meal?

I'd be very interested to hear of your intentions and indeed how you get on with it if you do give it a go. To close, just a few more words from Krista Taves:

"Keeping the Sabbath says something about us. It says something about our values, about our self-worth, and about our way of being in the world. It says that we take seriously the covenant of care. Take care of yourselves. Take care of each other. Find a time to withdraw, even if for a short time, from the demands of your days. Rest, as fully as possible. Be with those you love. And celebrate the holy any way you can."

Amen.

Ministry Inquiry Day



**Saturday 11th June 2011
11.30am-3.30pm at Essex Church**

Want to know more about training as a Unitarian and Free Christian minister or lay pastor/leader and about working with our congregations? The Ministry Commission is holding Inquiry Days for people who are at an early stage of considering this possibility as well as for those who are almost ready to make an application for training.

**Booking deadline: 1st June 2011.
Advance booking is essential.**

Contact: Mary-Jean Hennis
Phone: 020 7240 2384
Email: mhennis@unitarian.org.uk

"When you joined this congregation you signed up for the resistance. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote: 'we are called to be people of conviction, not conformity; of moral nobility, not social respectability. We are commanded to live differently and according to a higher loyalty.'

As Unitarian Universalists we too are called in this way. We are not called to be respectable among the other religions; we are not called to be palatable or popular or within any proximity of prevailing opinion. We are called upon to be radical, to be a community of resistance, to be the light of the world, the salt of the earth. Indeed most churches are somewhat counter cultural, much of what goes on is against the grain of the pervasive culture: loving one another rather than competing with one another, giving yourself away rather than spending money to gather things to you, *the first shall be last and the last shall be first*, and all that sort of thing. But Unitarian Universalist churches are both counter to the pervading culture as well as counter too much of standard protestant 'church' culture, too. We strive to be to be not only counter cultural but radically transformative of culture as well.

Welcome to the resistance: here we insist that all are welcome, all are inherently worthy and equally filled with human dignity. Here we buck conformity and call each to live as a human being, not as a market niche, not as a label, not as an illness, not as a stereotype. Stand up and be counted among those who are human in community. Together we can change the world."

UU Minister, Rev. Douglas Taylor

Sunday Services at Essex Church

**5th June, 11am –
"Thankfulness and Generosity"**

Service led by David Francis Darling

Do we receive gifts graciously and then have the courage to risk using them? When we give a gift, do we truly give it or do we still try to own the gift we have given?

**12th June, 11am –
"Pentecost for Unitarians"**

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

"Pentecost is the creation myth of Unitarian Universalism" – so says UU minister Rev. Robert Hardies – in this service we will look afresh at the story of Pentecost and consider its meaning for our theologically diverse community.

12.30pm - **Small-Group Communion**,
led by David Francis Darling (lasting ~30 minutes)

19th June, 11am – "Broken Gifts"

Service led by Rev. Linda Hart

On the 19th June we will be welcoming Rev. Linda Hart, minister with Richmond and Putney Unitarians, to lead our service. Linda says: "Father's day isn't much noted in a religious context, if it's noticed at all. Using one father as a starting point, this service explores the often complicated love we have for each other."

26th June, 11am – "A Love Universal"

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

UNESCO is this year celebrating the 150th anniversary of the birth of Indian poet and playwright Rabindranath Tagore. This service will explore his Universalist message and his Unitarian links.

