



Kensington Unitarians

Newsletter: June 2018

What's On...

Sunday 3rd June, 11am-noon
'Express Yourself!'
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Wednesday 6th June, 12.30pm
'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite

Thursday 7th June, 6.45 for 7-8pm
'Heart & Soul: Creativity and Art'
Led by Brian Ellis

Sunday 10th June, 11am-noon
'Look Closer'
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 10th June, 12.30-1pm
Inclusive Communion
Led by Tristan Jovanović

Wednesday 13th June, 12.30pm
'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite

Thursday 14th June, 7-8.30pm
Management Committee Meeting

Sunday 17th June, 11am-noon
'Living Creatively'
Led by Jeannene Powell
and Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 17th June, 12.30-1.15pm
'Finding Your Voice'
Singing Class with Margaret

Sunday 17th June, 2-3pm
'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite

Wednesday 20th June, 12.30pm
'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite

Sunday 24th June, 11am-noon
'Creation Spirituality'
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 24th June, 12.45-1.45pm
Sunday Conversation:
On the month's theme of
'Creativity and the Arts'.

Wednesday 27th June, 12.30pm
'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite

Sunday 1st July, 11am-noon
**'Liberal Religion:
Anything Goes?'**
Led by Jane Blackall

Creativity as Spiritual Practice

A Message from our Minister

What does creativity mean to you? For some of us creativity is an essential aspect of our way of being in the world. Others still bear the scars from early negativity about our creativity. Do any of these chime with your experiences – being told we can't sing, or write or draw? It's taken me a long time to forgive the teacher who rapped the 7 year old me on the knuckles because my sewing wasn't neat enough or the one who mocked my struggles to draw a straight enough line in my maths book.

But nowadays I understand that to be human is to be creative and that creativity can be expressed in a multiplicity of ways. Our cooking, our choosing of clothes to wear, our gardening, our arrangement of cupboard shelves, our mending of broken crockery, our writing of lists – all of these are acts of creativity, expressions of who we are in the world.

When we work creatively we may lose ourselves in the task. In those precious moments we are the task, our usual awareness of separation is gone. It doesn't usually last long. All too quickly we're back in the land of judgements. Will they like what am I doing? Is this good enough? But every moment of absorption is precious and with regular practice, just as in meditation, we can lose ourselves through creativity. By paying full attention we allow something to emerge from within ourselves and paradoxically may experience a channelling of some creative source beyond us.

Anyone who engages regularly in creative projects knows the flipside to all this. For all the times of creative flow there are counter-balancing times of stuck-ness and blockage. We make mistakes. We lose inspiration. We may be tempted to give up and sometimes giving up, at least for a while, may be the best thing to do. When you think of your own paths of creative expression, have you ever experienced a sense of a piece of work having a life of its own – as not simply the product of our own imaginations but channelling some source greater than ourselves? Let's treasure these experiences, glimpses perhaps of our co-creativity with the source of all that is.

Here at Essex Church, our Kensington Unitarians community has long encouraged people to try new forms of creativity. In singing groups and dance classes, in worship leading, in our creativity group projects, in preparing food and sharing poetry we create spaces for people to try something new, knowing that we are safe here from judgements or comparisons. If you have a project that you'd like to introduce in the next year, let us know. As Maya Angelou reminds us, "We cannot use up creativity. The more we use, the more we have."

Rev. Sarah Tinker



In this month's newsletter...

- * 'How to be a Unitarian – Feedback from our Recent Course' by Jenny, Mike, Roy and Sue *
- Essex Church Men's Group Relaunch by Jonathan *
- Poems by John Hands and Brian Ellis
- * 'Biography Notes on the Spring/Summer Wall-Hanging' by Sue Smith *
- Unitarians at Pride *
- Playback Theatre: 'Creativity and the Arts' *
- Photos from our Sunday Afternoon Tea Dance
- * 'What Nature Means to Us' reflections by Sarah, Niall, Heidi, Annie and Richard * and more

Kensington Unitarians

At Essex Church (founded 1774), Notting Hill Gate

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

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

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

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



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Essex Church Annual Report



The Essex Church annual report for 2017 is now available online (see our website: who we are > resources > annual report) or please do get in touch if you would like us to post you a hard copy.

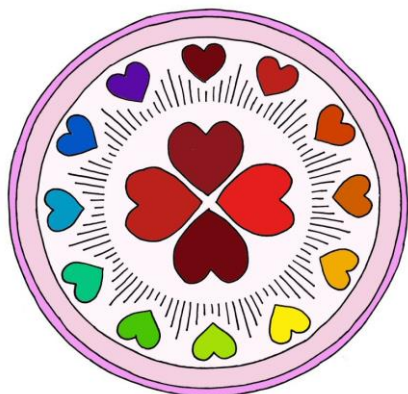
'Heart and Soul'

Midweek Spiritual Gatherings

Thursdays 7th June, 5th July from 7-8pm

Gathering at 6.45pm downstairs in the library

Followed by social time and refreshments



Come and join us for our monthly alternative spiritual gathering, with music and silence, words and prayers, and a chance to explore the evening's topic in relation to your own life. June's 'Heart and Soul' will be led by Brian Ellis on the theme of 'Creativity and Art'. This will be followed by time for refreshments and fellowship. All are welcome to join us. If you would like to know more about our 'Heart & Soul' gatherings at Essex Church email jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Volunteering Rotas:

Stewarding, Coffee and Greeting



Stewarding:

3rd June: Gina Bayley
10th June: Julia Alden
17th June: Brian Ellis
24th June: Annie Fowler

Coffee:

3rd June: Heidi Ferid
10th June: Richard Levy
17th June: ??? (*can you help?*)
24th June: Helena Coope

Greeting:

3rd June: Annie Fowler
10th June: Sue Smith
17th June: Roy Clark
24th June: Gina Bayley

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

'How to be a Unitarian': Feedback from our Recent Course



I signed up to Jane's 'How to be a Unitarian' course as a newcomer to Unitarianism (and still keeping an eye out for a "catch" that I haven't spotted yet...!) There was so much to think about and reflect on from each session, and a focus on the practical meant we all committed to taking further steps (big and small) to broaden our experiences of Unitarianism. One of the themes that had a big impact on me was the commitment implicit in being a Unitarian: engagement with a congregation / community, responsibility for working out your own theology, and living your life in a way that shows your values. And of course the fact that no-one has to do this on their own, which fits with the support, challenge and encouragement that I've already experienced at Essex Church (and not just on this course). Thank you to everyone on the course for their honesty, care and openness, and of course to Jane and Sarah for such well-run, thought-provoking evenings!

Jenny Clough

I have been attending Essex Church for 15 years and regard it as an important, if infrequent, part of my life. I have had my children's naming ceremonies at the Church, and we borrowed Sarah for our wedding at Richmond Unitarian Church. I have had the chance to reflect and pray and meditate on the really serious issues in my life during these services, and the services have really helped me find a path to a spirituality that I feel very comfortable with. But with all this positive experience I never felt a fully paid up Unitarian. There were many reasons for this. I did not come regularly enough, I wasn't a decent enough person, I was different to many others who attended and many other reasons. Most importantly, and probably most embarrassingly, I did not know what a Unitarian was, but just knew it felt right attending. I, like many, dreaded the question 'what is a Unitarian!' So when I saw the course advertised on 'How to be a Unitarian' I thought this could really help. My wife encouraged me to attend as she knew how important I find my association with Essex Church.

The course was for 6 weekly 2 hour sessions, and I turned up with a slight trepidation to a packed room in the downstairs library. Aha, obviously I was not on my own in wanting to know what this Unitarian thing was all about. It was led by Jane and assisted by Sarah, in very structured but very Unitarian manner, with plenty of time for reading, discussion and reflection on the topics we covered each week. Well, what can I say, but that all my suspicions about Unitarianism were confirmed. It appears that

Unitarianism is a religion, which I was quite relieved to hear, as I wanted to belong to a religion. It appears that Unitarianism is about searching for truth wherever it can be found, it is about using reason, it is about accepting others. It is about not being given easy answers, it is about learning and evolving your beliefs, and most importantly it is about community and a wider community of Unitarian churches. These churches are kept alive by their congregations, who may have different ways of being Unitarians, but all commit to keeping their community alive and strong.

So I was right to feel at home, as Unitarianism is about people who believe in the power of the human spirit, but not in their own superiority or smugness. I really enjoyed the time to think and discover over the 6 weeks what Unitarianism means to me and to others. It has really renewed my faith in my belief that Unitarianism is for me, and I hope for the rest of my family. Now I need to find out, how I can do my bit for Essex Church and all the wonderful people in it. Thank you Jane you did an amazing job leading us through the course and I am sure many others will find it useful and enriching over the coming years as the course evolves.

Mike Pritchard

Before the course I was still unsure that Unitarianism and Essex Church was the right place for me. Over the course of at least a decade I have finally settled peacefully into a theistic stance re my beliefs but all along I have been unsure whether I have been attending Essex Church without truly belonging; there are several other spiritual practices, away from Essex, that interest me. Judaism, Islam, the Bible, visiting other places of monotheistic worship and education, visiting the British Museum and of course my t'ai chi group. I believe my theistic stance is readily integrated and accepted by Essex Church and I now feel an authentic member of the Church. I walked through the Essex Church doors all those years ago because I felt troubled by not honouring the message in Matthew 18:20 of worshipping with others.

I have always been aware that I should have been embracing the wider Unitarian experience and I'm committed to doing this in some small measure this year because of the Course. I have no desire to venture north but I will visit at least two other Unitarian gatherings in the London area, attend an LDPA and a GA meeting. Use the podcast to listen to services I have and have not attended throughout the coming year.

Being unable to attend all of the meetings (due to meetings associated with the Grenfell tragedy that I was attending and which took priority for me) I have felt that the continuity for me was badly interrupted. I would happily do the very same course again next year. There is always opportunity to gain a different perspective as I change and move on.

Sue Smith

For me the biggest highlight of the recent 'How to be a Unitarian' Course was the self-evident spirit of pride in our Unitarian culture and history. There was a genuine spirit of discovery permeating many of the sessions and a sense of ownership. More specifically the reading out anonymously of the homework responses each week wherein group members wrote of the ways in which they would seek to advance, expand and extend their spiritual practices was inspiring.

Roy Clark

'Creativity calls us to confront our fears and anxieties and it calls us out of our habits. In order to let a new future emerge—in order to be creative—we need to be willing to set a piece of our frightened, anxious, comfortable, habitual selves aside and listen deeply for new connections, new relationships, new visions. To do this we need to be able to recognize and suspend our assumptions, to hold them out in front of us so they have less influence over our thinking, so we can encounter new ideas without being judgmental towards them, without saying "No, this will never work." Only when we set a piece of our fearful, anxious, comfortable, habitual selves aside can we create space for new ideas to take hold in us.'

Unitarian Universalist Minister Rev. Josh Pawelek

'Creativity and Well-Being'



Your Stories in a Performance of Playback Theatre

Friday 15th June, 7.30pm at Essex Church

When have we last felt nourished and flushed with creativity? Have we ever felt this way? What does Creativity mean for you? Is it arduous labour? Is it freedom to play? What supports us to feel WELL? When have we not felt so well? What kept us there? What changed? There is so much to share this evening through our own treasury of thoughts, feelings, memories, moments and stories on this rich theme.

We look forward to you joining us for a surprising and soul-satisfying evening of Playback Theatre. And do stay for refreshments afterwards for more conversation and convivial sharing on this rich topic.

This performance is free of charge / Donations are welcome.

London Playback Theatre Company is a team of internationally experienced professional theatre practitioners, consultants, educators, and therapists. We work with audiences in the telling and re-playing of their stories. We offer performances and workshops that provide a safe space for individual voices to be heard and collective themes to emerge. Through the spontaneity and vibrancy of improvisational techniques, we create theatre that engages audiences – body, mind and spirit. Our work offers opportunities for participants to deepen their understanding of each other and to develop authentic ways of communicating. We honour the multiplicity of voices in any group or context.

www.londonplayback.co.uk / londonplayback@gmail.com

Good Cause Collection of the Month: The General Assembly (GA) of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches



Collection on Sunday 24th June

This month we will hold a collection for our national Unitarian organisation. With your support the General Assembly will: develop professional ministry and local leadership, represent Unitarians nationally and internationally, organise our annual meetings, produce publications, posters and leaflets, provide training and development programmes, support church growth, advise on buildings, legal and governance issues, promote religious education and provide a national youth programme, and more...

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

Recent Charity Collections:

March – **Diversity Role Models** – £200.00
(including £59 from the inclusive tea-dance cake stall)

April 1st – **Red Cross / Syria** – £307.71

April 22nd – **Defibrillator** – £210.34

Inclusive Communion

Sundays 10th June, 8th July at 12.30pm



Once a month we hold a small-group communion, after the main morning service, downstairs in the library. A team of volunteers take turns in leading the services so we experience a variety of approaches. All are welcome to participate. If you would like to find out more about these services then please feel free to speak to Jane or Tristan.

Essex Church Men's Group

Tuesday 29th May, 7-9pm, down in the library



The men's group is going to be relaunched at the end of this month. It's an opportunity for men to discuss the highs and lows of men's experience on matters such as family, love, spirituality, finance, health etc. Please speak to Jonathan Crawford if you have any questions or would like more information about what to expect. Even if you can't make it to this first meeting it's worth getting in touch to register your interest. You can email Jonathan on jayci75@yahoo.co.uk.

LDPA Unitarians Marching at London Pride

Saturday 7th July 2018 – Book Your Place



For many years now members of our LDPA (London District) and other UK congregations have walked in the PRIDE march. This is always a great occasion when the streets of the West End are packed with people celebrating love and equality. Participation in the march itself requires a wrist-band. The LDPA only has 30 wrist-bands this year as demand is so high. This means you will need to commit to coming and to making our colourful group as impressive as ever. We usually meet between 12:00 and 12:30 on the afternoon. Or you may prefer to form a Unitarian Group in the crowd to cheer and chat when we walk by. Please book a place with the District Minister, Rev. Martin Whitell: email revdmart@aol.com or mobile 07976 839 299.

Sunday Afternoon Tea Dance

Future Dances – Save the Dates:

Sundays 23rd September and 9th December 2018

Thanks to everyone who helped out with the most recent dance on 6th May and who made it such a jolly occasion!



Thematic Ministry



Our ministry theme for June is 'Creativity & the Arts'. One of the aims of thematic ministry is to encourage people to get involved, to make the theme part of your own focus for the month. Below are some ideas of ways to explore our theme over the next month. Do get in touch if there's a particular reading or song you'd like to suggest for a Sunday morning gathering or maybe there's a piece you'd like to write for a future newsletter. Let us know. Themes coming up in the near future: July – 'Liberation & Freedom', August – 'Paying Attention', September 'Advantage / Disadvantage'. Here are some ways you might engage with this month's theme of 'Creativity & the Arts':

1. Perhaps we sometimes limit our ideas about creativity to painting pictures or making some craft item. But consider the idea that every aspect of life can be approached creatively. Why not start a 'creativity inventory' of your life and make a list of all the many ways your creativity is expressed. From cooking with flair to gardening with love, from approaching relatedness in imaginative ways to using your body in fun and frolics – let's bring creativity into more areas of our lives this month.
2. Most of us have quite fixed ideas about our likes and dislikes when it comes to the arts. But, this month, why not challenge yourself to try something new. Find a genre of music you've previously rejected and have a listen. Better still, ask someone who likes that music to play their favourite tracks for you. Go to an art gallery and linger longer over artwork you'd usually hurry past. Watch a TV programme that you'd usually avoid or listen to a radio station you've never heard before. Find something new that you like in the arts and tell someone about it.
3. One of our favourite hymns uses an image of humanity as co-creators with God. The inter-weavings of creativity and spirituality are found in all the world's religious paths. How do creativity and spirituality connect in your life?
'All the arts we practice are apprenticeship. The big art is our life.' - M.C. Richards

Sarah, Jeannene, and Jane

'Wasp': A Haiku from Liz

Rose petals blush pink
Black and gold venomous stripes
Crawl on leaves dark green.

Liz Tuckwell

LDPA Summer Quarterly Meeting:

'Building Effective Interfaith Bridges'



Saturday 30th June, 10.30 for 11am-5pm
Brixton Unitarians, 63 Effra Road, SW2 1BZ

This meeting will include talks, a workshop and discussion time, featuring Dr. Taj Hargey, progressive theologian and liberal imam, and Dr. Jacky Woodman, LDPA council member. The meeting will look at issues relating to the Middle East, the Qu'ran, and more. Bring lunch. Drinks & buffet tea will be provided.

Memories of a Picnic



I came across this photo recently, probably taken in the late summer of 2004, when a group of us went for a picnic at Kenwood House, in Hampstead. It shows Patricia Walker-Hesson and Doris Campbell, both special people and both now deceased.

Juliet Edwards

"God is creating the entire universe, fully and totally in the present now," said Meister Eckhart, a thirteenth-century mystic. The world is a work-in-process, and we are partners with God in its ongoing creation. In this sense, every human being is an artist, creating beauty out of the present moment.'

Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat

Conifers



When I first encountered them the conifers on the Lickey Hills
Squatting upon the ground like gypsies over campfires;
A few could still be seen pulling a dark horse or two
Behind their gold and scarlet caravans: but I
Not knowing Romany, and like my parents suspicious of them
Coolly eyed them from a respectable distance. Meanwhile
Stretched upon moss and fir-cones I read 'Macbeth' Romeo'
And 'The Merchant' whilst Cologne and Hamburg burned;
I read, 'Lycidas' and 'Hyperion', Shelley, Byron, Hopkins whilst
The panzers battered Arnhem; and 'Tintern Abbey' when
The Belson pictures jerked across pale cinema screens.

Meanwhile the crouching conifers
Grew to pubescent stature and I – though faster- with them,
The foresters came back and showed their scars to gasping children;
I earned my keep in my father's radio and electric shop
And like Hiawatha wrestled with his derision. Later in 'forty-seven
Snow fell upon the hills and crusted them like Christmas icing.
Like spitfires we shot down through clouds of mist on homemade Toboggans,
Whilst Europe's Destitute stonily picked their way through ruins,
my dreams were of renewal and restoration
Theirs of bleak survival in shattered cities,
and food enough to feed their children.
The conifers grew into telephone poles, newspaper pulp and
imitation antique furniture. Occasionally revisiting them I marvel
At their mist-scarved peaks. Their fates are sealed and others
Soon will follow. My fate too is sealed, but I remain unsure
That others soon like me will surely follow.

John Hands

Summer Lunch

After the service on Sunday 22nd July



We will be holding a bring-and-share lunch after the service on 22nd July. Please save the date and look out for the sign-up sheet so you can let us know what you plan to contribute. As ever we'll be glad of help in the kitchen & clearing up on the day.

we are the trees...



though in leafing
we take your horizons,
shade your skies,
hide the birds
that you saw singing;
trust us.

we gift you serenity
in our shadows,
ease in the heat of day,
we nurture other worlds
that seek our embrace.
with the fall we will fruit
to sustain you through winter.

trust us;
we will leaf again.

betray us; then you
might not leaf again.

a pointless revenge
we would not seek.

Brian Ellis

Fundraising: Can You Help?



We are still seeking contributions towards our Swaziland Education Project and towards the cost of installing a defibrillator here in the church. Please contact Sarah, or our treasurer Juliet Edwards, to contribute to either of these causes.

Congratulations to the Fodor Family...



...whose twin daughters, Barbara and Vanessa, Sarah recently christened up in Watford at the family home. Proud parents Katy and Zoltan have promised to have any future children blessed before they start walking as it was impossible to keep the live-wire twins (aged 18 months) still for more than ten seconds. But they loved to play with the balls they were given as a christening gift. The family celebrated with a meal after the christening and Barbara and Vanessa ate nearly all the pineapple from the salad bar!

'Finding Our Voice' Monthly Singing Workshops

Sunday 17th June from 12.30pm to 1.15pm



Margaret has worked as a professional singer all her adult life and is also a very experienced singing teacher. She is leading monthly sessions to help us all find our voice. These workshops are for anyone who is prepared to open their mouth and make a sound.

Margaret will show us how to improve the quality and strength of our voices. Using a few simple exercises we'll gain joy and confidence in singing by learning how to produce and develop the voice, something everyone can do. We'll work with the breath and overcome unconscious blocks that can prevent us singing with our true potential.

Fun and achievement are guaranteed and sessions are designed for all, whatever your experience or ability.

Penny & Pat's Wedding



Congratulations to Penny Halnan and Pat Woodhouse, whose wedding Sarah our minister will be conducting early in June at Richmond Unitarian Church. Sarah has known Pat's family since teenage years up in Sheffield. Much later in life she discovered that Pat's parents Joe & Kathleen Woodhouse were well known Unitarian lay preachers and organisers of many Unitarian activities in the Sheffield District. Joe & Kathleen were so encouraging of Sarah when she embarked on ministry training so it's lovely she is now conducting this wedding ceremony.



Fitness Fusion of 9 Movement Forms

**Third Sunday of the Month from
2-3pm: 17th June, 15th May 2018**

Midweek class on Wednesdays - 12.30-1.30pm

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

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

Biography Notes on the Spring/Summer Church Wall-Hanging 2017/18



Idea Born:

Sometime in late 2016 in the Creativity Group of Essex Church.

Stitchers:

Juliet, Gina, Sue, Barbara, Liz, Annette. Started in the creativity group and then became a “remote” project being worked at home by the individual stitchers in collaboration. There was never any finish deadline set.

Specialist Contributor

Tyler from Essex Church Children’s Group. Some of the flowers stitched – tulips, daffodils, pansies, geranium, daisies, carnations, sunflowers, camellias, and violets.

Animals on Board

Butterfly and birds worked by Tyler at home from his craft set (hoping for the odd stitched bug or two at a later stage from Jane). Not going to let her off the hook. She has the most fabulous silk embroidery book of insects at her home so she’s not short on inspiration – gorgeous work. No pressure, her contribution can be added anytime!! We had Liz starting her stitching career! with satin stitch and seeding. Barbara, a Royal School of Needlework student, over 70 years ago, getting to grips with a new stitch, for her, called straight spider’s web stitch which was used in the pansies. The tulips I did were the first design I had taken from a paper notelet and transposed onto fabric. Juliet had a brilliant idea to make use of her embroideries completed many years ago and integrate them into the hanging.

Final Completion

Was about Easter this year 2018. I liked telling people “don’t worry it will be finished when it is finished”. Being able to say that was a real tonic and I hope all the stitchers are as happy with it as I am. Now I’m back completing my own stitching projects, learning something new each time I pick up the needle. Thank you, everyone, for being such good companions. I hope Barbara would be pleased with the result, but I’m not sure - her stitching bar was set very high.

Sue Smith



‘Do we [Unitarians] experience a tension between our religious values and the values of the secular world? It seems clear that there should be tension — enormous tension. Until the world is as it should be, until war and hunger are abolished, until we are living gently on the earth, until power is shared and all voices are heard, we should not be able to fit comfortably into this culture. We should feel this tension in every decision we make: when we shop, when (and if) we watch TV, when we go to work, when we speak to a child. The questions of to what extent and in what ways we should participate in the dominant culture should keep us up at night. If we’re doing it right, it should be hard to be a [Unitarian] in this world.’

Unitarian Universalist Minister Rev. Ana Levy-Lyons

‘What Nature Means to Us’

From the service on 20th May 2018

The service is also available online as a podcast.

Leaping Lemmings

Watching programmes about nature on the BBC was a special part of childhood for me. I used to watch them with my dad, curled up on the sofa and often hiding behind cushions when some ghastly attack occurred. Lionesses bringing down a baby water buffalo or leaping on the back of a flagging zebra, left behind by the herd – such scenes would leave me sobbing, whilst my dad patiently explained why it just wouldn't be sensible for the camera crew to rescue one particular baby buffalo. He'd point out that lion cubs need feeding and that the lionesses were simply doing what lionesses have to do. But even my dad, who seemed then to know everything, was at a loss to explain the behaviour of thousands of lemmings leaping off a cliff to their deaths. That scene was so distressing that I had to leave the room.

My response to the natural world can still be over-sentimental. Jenny our warden reckons I'll only be truly enlightened when I can calmly watch the baby birds in our church garden being attacked by predators. Last year baby blackbirds, wrens and robins were eaten by jays, magpies and crows. This year like last, I reckon I'll be seen hanging out of the window waving a futile tea towel and shouting at the magpies to get lost. There's so much other food for magpies to eat – even if they too have chicks to feed.

Despite my own sentimentality about animals I can still see it as a fault in our society. We raise money to save some animals but at the same time allow factory farmed animals to live short lives in grim conditions. We went to see the lions recently at the Yorkshire Wildlife Park, rescued from an Eastern European zoo, where they were living in cramped concrete cages. Public fundraising allowed the lions to be brought to a spacious parkland where they now live healthy outdoor lives. Yet just down the road from that immaculately run wildlife park there is an especially unpleasant farm with thousands of battery hens living short lives in appallingly small cages laying eggs for us to eat. But then so much of life here on earth contains contradiction and paradox. Why would I expect our human responses to nature to be anything different? And as for those self-destructive lemmings – our seeming inability to respond to the threat of global warming now seems quite lemming-like. But the lemmings destroyed only themselves, whilst we are endangering all life on earth. It might be time for the BBC camera crew to intervene.

Sarah Tinker



Nature and Me

Encouraged to think about this topic I found myself realising that Nature played a huge part in my childhood and I am transported back to my Grandma's garden in Patcham or to my parents' garden in Hove. Nanny watched the seasons change daily and we knew all the garden birds by name; Blacky the Blackbird and Bobby the Robin. The years came and went in a cycle of apple picking and apple storing; the spotting of the first snowdrops and primroses and the subject of the garden was never far from anyone's lips. There was too the occasional rescued bird or mouse that required a night in a shoe box and a lot of tears the next morning when I discovered they had not survived.

My father, like his father before him, was a keen gardener and I would spend hours following him about in the garden asking him endless questions before I went off to make some kind of mud-pie concoction. Yet I knew every plant and smell in that garden. Without realizing it we watch the passage of time marked out by flowers, leaves, grass. What better than being up close and personal with a daisy?!

Dad served in the RAF during WWII and I am told that after the war he had a nervous breakdown. My Grandma was a regular church-goer and was keen to send my father to seek ecclesiastical help. The story goes that Dad wasn't too keen on this idea and had understandably lost any faith he might have once had especially as his best friend had just been killed in a car accident on his way home from war. So Dad instead took up river fishing and would head off regularly with one of his pals to the beautiful river banks of Sussex and there he found his peace once more; his faith in Nature's healing balm. I too am still healed by the sights and smells of nature in every possible form though these moments can be rare in London. Yet there is nothing so tremendously evocative as the scent of flowers to place us once more in a 'holy' place.

Sweet peas are my very favourite flowers because Dad grew them religiously every year in our garden and he would pick the first blooms and put them in a small glass vase in my bedroom. I seek them out every season just for that one precious moment when, with eyes closed I am filled with the loving connection that Nature can make between a father and his daughter.

Annie Fowler

Nature

In nature I escape the clamour and uproar of the modern world. Estranged in the city, I decamp to the country. Being in nature instils a sense of peace. Tension drains from my body, knotted feelings loosen, and I observe natural form. In a place beyond the confines of society, free from mode and manners, I am at once a part of and apart from the natural world. A native on foreign land. Surrounded by the elements, I walk. Sight, sound and sensation filter past. Blue agate sky, cirrus cloud, sharp outlines and crisp shadow. Sunlit forest: canopy and floor aglow with natural warmth - vivid green and earthy black. Each step instructive, each instant a lesson. Matter and spirit meet. Grounded yet uplifted, I sound my depths in search of a principle on which to found my life. A law encoded in the heart. A strut to brace my inmost self. Wild profusion in divine disarray, I cannot make sense of the chaos. Benighted, I cross strange country. Philosopher and poet portray nature as emblem and glyph. A manifestation of an elusive ideal that can only be intuited. Possessed of like conviction, I pass beyond myself in pursuit of that of which I have lost sight.

Niall Doherty

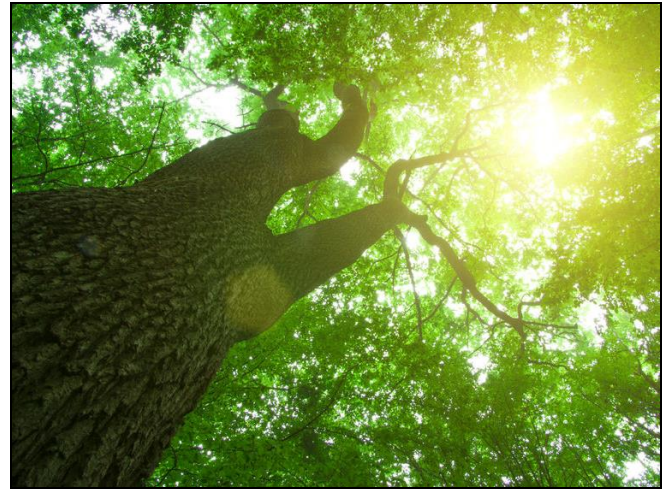
What Nature Means to Me

Like most people in this congregation I am a city dweller. Does that mean my contact with nature is limited to planting the odd geranium in my window box? I have done that just now. It was fun and I hope to see the flowers all summer, but no there is of course much more. Nature is always around us and in us.

As an artist nature is an important source of inspiration to me, however I rarely work directly from nature in the time honoured fashion of 19TH century landscape painting. I like to remind myself of the abstract expressionist painter Jackson Pollock who, when asked by a critic 'why do you not paint nature?' said 'I am nature'.

At this point in time I am aware of the fact that we as part of nature are also very destructive of nature. The dangers of global warming and damage to the environment caused by humanity are becoming more and more evident. I have never been to the Arctic or Antarctic, but from press reports and photographs I have strong images of melting ice and I feel strongly that we need to take action to prevent further damage. I am currently working on a set of paintings and sculptures on this theme, hoping to raise people's awareness of global warming. I know this is a controversial topic and I would like to invite you to share your views.

Heidi Ferid



A Magician's Fieldguide

I call myself a magician but I'm well aware what loaded terms words like magic and the occult are. They lead to many misunderstandings as to what practitioners like myself get up to. Perhaps it can be best understood in how we approach the earth and the natural world. Magic is primarily a way of actively engaging with divinity and working in service with it. When a magician walks the land we are aware of the thrumming flow of water and life under our feet, even when the trees are cold and barren in ebbing winter or stirring and rousing in the spring. We live in a state between the worlds – between the physical, material world and the world of spirit.

This may sound esoteric and special but it is not: to me, it is natural. In many ways magic is simply doing what leaf and bird and beast and stream do naturally: just be. Just be: be-ing in balance with the shifting dynamic of divinity, reflected in the seasons of the earth and the elemental, alchemical dance that brings transformation. We are simply tuning and attuning to the world of nature of which we are an intrinsic part - remembering the knowledge in our blood, mind, bones and spirits. Magic and service is as much a part of the ordinary: I see magical service when I pick up litter in a nearby park to help my local bat conservation group.

I have been asked by people of other religions how we view the cruelty of the natural world with its destructive storms and earthquakes - where is morality in a nature-based spiritual path? I would gently argue that a deity that would have someone stoned to death for not keeping the Sabbath is not exuding a morality I can get behind. We do not look to divinity as much as humanity for morality, for ethical behaviour. But I did hear a Druid explain it beautifully. Her paraphrased words were: *What we see from nature are balanced relationships. If we submit to the ocean, we drown, if we try to control the ocean we are delusional. So we find ways to float and swim and build rafts. Balance is a key element to the magician in relationship with the earth.*

In magic and paganism ritual tends to precede theology; we share a common vocabulary in ritual but will have varying theologies. What we have in common is that we are earth based, we are like a tree: rooted to the earth but reaching to the heavens. This is what nature means to me – a magician.

Richard Levy

Services at Essex Church in June



Sunday 3rd June, 11am 'Express Yourself!'

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

How creativity can express our imaginative selves, bringing our inner life out into the world.

Sunday 10th June, 11am 'Look Closer'

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

The arts encourage us to pay attention and can take us beyond the intellect to a deeper, richer realm.

Sunday 17th June, 11am 'Living Creatively'

Service led by Jeannene Powell
and Rev. Sarah Tinker

Living creatively may involve breaking rules & stepping beyond society's limitations in order to be fully ourselves. What might creative living mean for you?

Sunday 24th June, 11am 'Creation Spirituality'

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

How might an emphasis on the gift of life enhance our ways of being in the world? This service will be followed by our monthly Sunday conversation. Do bring your lunch and stay for a conversation about this month's theme of 'Creativity and the Arts'.



Essex Church Committee

Next Meeting - Thursday 14th June from 7pm



Gina



Roy



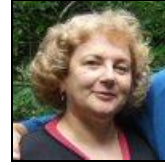
Juliet



Bobby



Brian



Heidi



Harold

Please do let a committee member or member of staff know if there are any issues you'd like us to consider at the next committee meeting.

migrants organise

migrants and refugees acting for justice

'Migrants Organise' is holding an evening at Essex church this June to honour their volunteers. We are glad to be offering this important charity space for free to run this event. Roy Clark, our chair, will be there to welcome them as he volunteers as a mentor for the organisation and Jennie Blair will also be attending as she works with their legal team.

OneLight Gathering

Friday 8th June, 7pm – 8.30pm – Here at Essex Church



Led by Interfaith Ministers Rev Alison Trower & Rev Amy Firth this service will include music, prayer, reflection, silence, community connection & the beautiful Threshold Choir. Suggested donation: £5. You are welcome to arrive from 6:45pm and we will be completed by 8:30pm with tea & treats.