



# Kensington Unitarians

Newsletter: December 2017 / January 2018

## What's On...

Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> December, 11am-noon  
**'Welcoming the Other'**  
Led by Jeannene Powell

Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> December, 12.30pm  
**'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite**

Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> Dec, 6.45 for 7-8pm  
**'Heart & Soul: Hospitality - In or Out?'**  
Led by Jane Blackall

Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> December, 11am-noon  
**'Radical Hospitality:  
Welcoming the Difficult'**  
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> December, 12.30-1pm  
**Inclusive Communion**  
Led by Mark Franklin Bowen

Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> Dec, 12.30pm  
**'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite**

Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> Dec, 11am-noon  
**'Christmas Carol Service:  
Christ the Stranger'**  
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker  
**Includes a charity collection:  
'Glass Door' Homeless Project**

Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> Dec, 12.15-1.45pm  
**Congregational Christmas Lunch**

Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> December, 2-3pm  
**'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite**

Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> Dec, 12.30pm  
**'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite**

Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> Dec, 7-8.30pm  
**Winter Solstice Gathering**

**NO MORNING SERVICE ON 24<sup>th</sup>!!!**

Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> December, 5-6pm  
**'Candlelit Christmas Eve:  
The Light of the World'**  
Led by Jane Blackall

Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> December, 11am-noon  
**'Nourished by Good Company'**  
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> December, 1-4pm  
**'The Year Compass'**  
Special workshop for New Year's Eve

Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> January, 6.45 for 7-8pm  
**'Heart & Soul:  
I'm Only Here Because of Chance...'**  
Led by Brian Ellis

(see overleaf for January what's on)

## Hospitality

### A Message from our Minister

Winter is nearly with us. The daylight is diminishing, chill winds are blowing and we live in a part of London where 47% of householders live alone. Many of us are well used to our own company and rather enjoy our privacy and independence. But we are social beings and the forced jollity of Christmas advertising can heighten the isolation experienced by the most committed of hermits. So here's a suggestion. Let's be radical in our hospitality this winter. What might radical hospitality look like?



Well, it'll probably demand that we reach out more than we usually do. It'll suggest we connect with others, to ask questions maybe or offer invitations. It might involve a simple offer of a cup of tea or the gentle suggestion that we sit down and have a chat for a while. Radical hospitality might heighten our awareness of habitual ways of being. It's normal to gravitate towards those who are similar to us. That feels safe and familiar. But it can be far more invigorating if we get to know people who are different from us. We don't have to become close friends. We really mustn't cross boundaries that keep us safe. But surely our common humanity requires us to move towards others rather than away from 'the other' and to imagine that their life experiences could so easily be ours.

As Unitarians we're perhaps more drawn to a flesh and blood Jesus than a miraculous one. I am happy to accept his birth as mythic, but I must also hear the real life imperative in his call for justice. Jesus' guidance on how to treat a stranger could be written for 21st century Londoners: *'For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.'*... *'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these people, you did for me.'*

In their inspiring book *Radical Hospitality*, Benedictine Father Daniel Homan and Lonni Collins Pratt write that, *"Unless we find a way to open ourselves to others, we will grow even more isolated and frightened. If we do not find and practice ways of hospitality, we will grow increasingly hostile... We need to connect and feel the deep acceptance of another human being, and that will make the world feel safer. Locks and firewalls can never do for our tired souls what friendship and companionship do."*

I wish you all a very Happy Christmas, a fulfilling New Year, and most of all I hope that you will both give and receive some warming hospitality in the days ahead: simple ways to create a better world.

Rev. Sarah Tinker

Many thanks to Howard and Gill Hague for sponsoring this colour issue!

## In this month's newsletter...

\* Remembering Barbara Ballantyne \* 'The Year Compass' – Workshop on New Year's Eve \* 'Singing for the Spirit' \* 'Theophilus Lindsey's Essex Street Chapel' by Howard Hague \* Sunday Afternoon Tea Dances \* Unitarian Theology Conference: Videos now Online \* 'Celebration! The Sacred Way to Save the Environment' by David Talbot \* Committee Update \* Poems by Brian and Eliz \* 'The Mystical Art of Unsayings' sermon by Jane Blackall \* 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.



Kensington Unitarians at Essex Church  
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Notting Hill Gate  
London W8 4RT

Office Answering Machine: 020 7221 6514

Email: [info@kensington-unitarians.org.uk](mailto:info@kensington-unitarians.org.uk)

Web: [www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk](http://www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk)

## What's On in January *(continued)*

Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> January, 11am-noon

**'The Prodigal Son'**

Led by Tristan Jovanović

Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> January, 12.30pm

**'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite**

Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> January, 11am-noon

**'There Is No Plan'**

Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> January, 12.30-1pm

**Inclusive Communion**

Led by Tristan Jovanović

Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> January, 11am-noon

**'The Hand You're Dealt'**

Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker and Jane Blackall

Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> January, 12.30-1.15pm

**'Finding Your Voice' with Margaret**

Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> January, 2-3pm

**'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite**

Sunday 28<sup>h</sup> January, 11am-noon

**'Beating the Odds'**

Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> January, 12.45-2.00pm

**Sunday Conversation:**

'Chance, Luck and Randomness'

# Volunteering Rotas: Stewarding, Coffee and Greeting



We are still looking for a few volunteers to help with stewarding, coffee, and greeting in December and January (we would be particularly glad to find someone to make drinks and warm up mince pies after our special Christmas Eve service - can you help?)

## Stewarding:

3 <sup>rd</sup> December:	Julia Alden
10 <sup>th</sup> December:	Veronica Needa
17 <sup>th</sup> December:	Brian Ellis
24 <sup>th</sup> December (5pm):	Veronica Needa
31 <sup>st</sup> December:	Heidi Ferid
7 <sup>th</sup> January:	Abby Lorimier
14 <sup>th</sup> January:	Brian Ellis
21 <sup>st</sup> January:	Juliet Edwards
28 <sup>th</sup> January:	Juliet Edwards

## Coffee:

3 <sup>rd</sup> December:	Rebecca Hope
10 <sup>th</sup> December:	Sue Smith
17 <sup>th</sup> December:	Kate Brown
24 <sup>th</sup> December (5pm):	??? <i>(can you help?)</i>
31 <sup>st</sup> December:	Jane Blackall
7 <sup>th</sup> January:	Liz Tuckwell
14 <sup>th</sup> January:	??? <i>(can you help?)</i>
21 <sup>st</sup> January:	Sue Smith
28 <sup>th</sup> January:	Helena Coope

## Greeting:

3 <sup>rd</sup> December:	Jo Tye
10 <sup>th</sup> December:	??? <i>(can you help?)</i>
17 <sup>th</sup> December:	Annie Fowler
24 <sup>th</sup> December (5pm):	Brian Ellis
31 <sup>st</sup> December:	Jane Blackall
7 <sup>th</sup> January:	Sue Smith
14 <sup>th</sup> January:	Annie Fowler
21 <sup>st</sup> January:	Brian Ellis
28 <sup>th</sup> January:	Liz Tuckwell

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

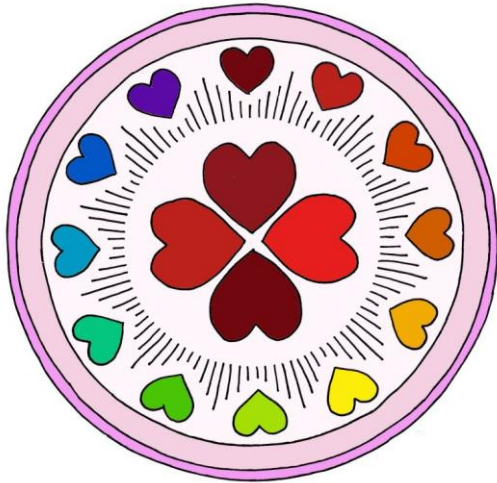
[rotas@kensington-unitarians.org.uk](mailto:rotas@kensington-unitarians.org.uk)

## 'Heart and Soul'

### Midweek Spiritual Gatherings

Thursdays 7<sup>th</sup> December and 4<sup>th</sup> January 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.

December's Heart and Soul will be led by Jane Blackall on the theme of 'Hospitality: In or Out?' while January's will be led by Brian Ellis on the theme of 'I'm Only Here By Chance...' The contemplative hour will be followed by refreshments (Jane's home-made cake!) and fellowship. All are welcome to join us. If you would like to know more about 'Heart & Soul' gatherings at Essex Church email [jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk](mailto:jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk)

## A Solstice Gathering

Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> December, 6.45pm for a 7pm start,  
followed by refreshments, completing by 9.00pm



Join us around the hearth for a winter solstice evening of readings and chants, stories and silence, ritual and music. As people have gathered from the earliest days, let us join together in warmth and good company to cheer one another on the longest night and celebrate both the dark times and the light. All welcome and let Sarah know if you would like to bring something to our evening – a reading, a song, some food or drink? All will be welcome.

## Christmas Services and Potluck Lunch

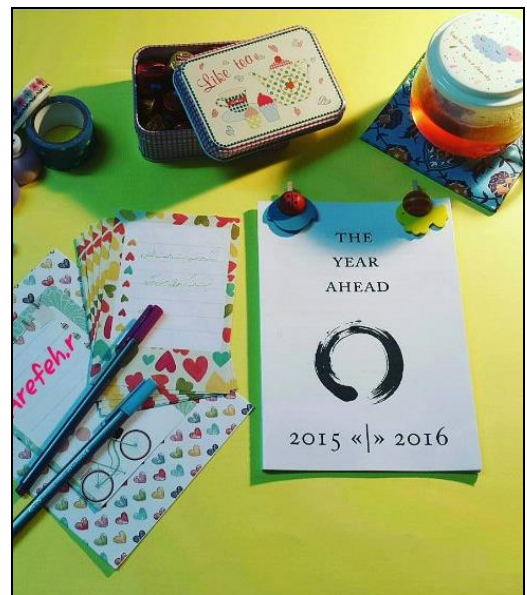


We will be having our traditional Christmas carol service and bring-and-share lunch on Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> December. Please do plan to bring some treats to share (and why not bring your friends! It's a good one to invite newcomers along to.)

Please note that on Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> December there will be no morning service. Instead we will have our traditional Candlelit Christmas Eve service from 5-6pm, followed by refreshments (mince pies!) in the hall until 7pm.

## 'The Year Compass'

Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> December 2017, 1-4pm  
New Year Workshop: Booking Essential



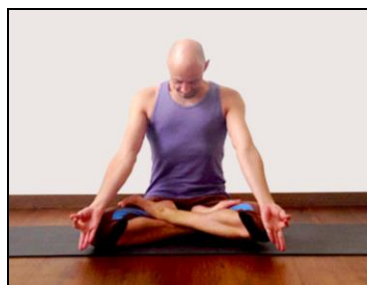
Come and join us after the service on New Year's Eve for a gentle workshop which will allow us all an opportunity to reflect on the year that is now past, to look ahead to 2018, and consider what qualities we might wish to bring into the New Year. This will be a meditative session, with music playing in the background, mostly spent on our own but with opportunities to share some insights. We'll be using the 'Year Compass' workbook to structure our private reflection. Please book your place with Sarah or Jane if you are intending to come so that we can make sure there are enough resources for everyone who wants to take part.





'Arctic Sunset' – new painting from a series on climate change by Heidi Ferid

## Warden's Column: Early Mornings at Essex Church



For nearly 10 years now, there has been an Ashtanga Yoga self practice group meeting here at the church most weekday mornings in term time.

Originally it was a closed group of mothers - who'd all taken pregnancy yoga together and wanted to continue practicing - they'd come and practice from 9-11am after dropping their children off at school. However, following a change of teacher a few years ago it has gradually opened up to a greater variety of participants and its latest incarnation is as 'Kensington Yoga Therapy': [www.yogawithtom.london](http://www.yogawithtom.london).

Since this September, the group have been meeting in the Hall from 6.30 - 10am every morning except Tuesday. We only charge 2 hours per day for that - as 6.30-8am is not exactly a high demand booking time! They've been very much appreciating our new heating system, which means the room can be programmed to already be toasty warm when they arrive.

The teacher, Tom Norrington Davies, has a real passion for sharing with others the benefit of a yoga practice which 'truly changed his life'. He doesn't stress religious dimensions of the practice during class, but his website has links to texts on the Bhagavad Gita and Upanishads as well as more practical 'How To' yoga books.

It's lovely to have them here warming up the building for the day - both physically and spiritually!

The one day we don't have early morning yoga here is Tuesdays - when Tom teaches elsewhere. However this week, we had an enquiry from someone wanting to start an early morning Chi Gung class 8-9am on Tuesdays and Thursdays from January. So most days per week, our 'busy building' may soon be booked for upwards of 12 hours a day!

Jenny Moy

## 'Singing for the Spirit'

Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> January, 22<sup>nd</sup>  
February, and 22<sup>nd</sup> March from  
7.15-8.15pm here at Essex Church



Singing for the Spirit will resume in the New Year with a gathering on 25<sup>th</sup> January. I've been using music from the Taizé tradition and other western music prayer chants, some with sacred texts accompanied on keyboard, and other simple acapella chants and rounds. The idea is to create a mild meditative state through the repetition of the songs followed by a short period of silence providing an atmosphere which is both informal but reflective. I provide the sheet music and I aim to keep the melodies simple enough to pick up instantly allowing room for people to add harmonies if they choose. There is no charge to attend, and if you'd like to come in November, and have a favourite chant then please bring it to share with the group! Please email me if you have any specific questions: [corrina.dolso@btopenworld.com](mailto:corrina.dolso@btopenworld.com)

Corrina Dolso

## Inclusive Communion

Sundays 10<sup>th</sup> December and  
14<sup>th</sup> January 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. Mark Franklin Bowen will lead our communion service in December and Tristan Jovanović will lead in January. 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.

# Sunday Afternoon Tea Dances at Essex Church



We had our fourth tea dance in September and as you can see from the photos these occasions are going from strength to strength. Our dates are now confirmed for next year so please save the dates and plan to join us for more tea dances, with social dancing, actual tea and plenty of cake, throughout 2018! Enjoy a gentle afternoon learning some basic social dancing steps with Rachel Sparks who can teach even the most left-footed people. These tea-dances are inclusive events for anyone including LGBTQIA+ people and we ask that everyone is respectful to each other. The partnering at these tea dances is gender-neutral, meaning anyone can lead and anyone can follow, and we are completely body positive. We ask you not to wear high heels as we need to protect the floor. You are invited to bring your own home-made cakes (clearly labelled), to raise money for our nominated charity, Diversity Role Models.

**Tickets: £10 on the door (free entry to members of Essex Church)**

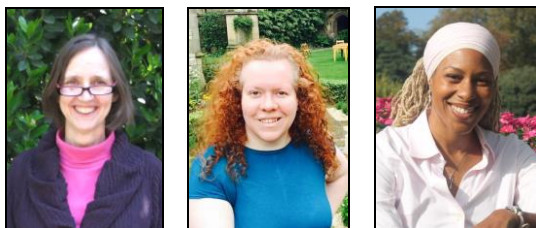
For more information contact: [rachel@rachelsparksdance.co.uk](mailto:rachel@rachelsparksdance.co.uk) / [www.facebook.com/rachelsparksdance](http://www.facebook.com/rachelsparksdance)

**Save the Dates: Sundays 11<sup>th</sup> February 2018, 6<sup>th</sup> May, 23<sup>rd</sup> September, 9<sup>th</sup> December 2018**





# Thematic Ministry



Our ministry theme for December is 'Hospitality' and that will be followed by a theme of 'Chance, Luck and Randomness' in January. 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 themes over the next two months. 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: February – 'Love and Kindness', March – 'Health and Healing', April – 'Grace'.

## Hospitality

- What does hospitality mean to you? What are some of the simple ways we can be hospitable to others in everyday life?
- Was there a time when a stranger welcomed you in – perhaps to their home or their life, their group or activity? How did it feel to be welcomed?
- Hospitality, or its absence, is very much part of the Christian Nativity tradition. A pregnant teenager, a refugee family, a tyrannical leader, poor farm labourers, love shown by animals, rulers bowing before a helpless child, guidance from a star, long journeys, detours and nights spent in stables – how might these powerful symbols shape the way you celebrate Christmas this year?

## Chance, Luck & Randomness

- The British Museum exhibition *Living With Gods: Peoples, Places & Worlds Beyond* is on until 8th April 2018 and connects with a Radio Four 30 part series, narrated by Neil MacGregor. Highly recommended, this exhibition makes an interesting connection between human anxieties and our beliefs in higher powers. What do you think? Are we still trying to appease the gods, to bring good fortune, to avert disasters? What role do superstitions play in your life?
- Have your ideas about human agency changed over the years? How in charge of our own destinies do you think we are? Do you think there is a 'plan' for your life?
- Have you experienced Carl Jung's concept of synchronicity in your life? Wikipedia describes synchronicity as *'the experience of two or more events which occur in a meaningful manner, but which are causally unrelated. In order to be synchronous, the events must be related to one another conceptually, and the chance that they would occur together by random chance must be very small'*.

Sarah, Jeannene, and Jane

## Rumi Concert at Essex Church – The Soveida Ensemble



It was a pleasure to welcome back musicians of the Soveida Ensemble to Essex Church this autumn, playing traditional Persian instruments, and singing ancient chants of the heart. The evening raised £350 for the United Nations fund for refugees.

## Autumn in Kensington



high I hear the truth  
of autumn's calling,  
shivering sounds in  
the last leaves singing  
out this year's story,  
voices swept by the  
brooms' long shadows  
into the rhythms of  
earth's arcane lore,  
a tale lost in its telling  
and to its future  
should we not listen,  
as the ancients on  
the edge of wisdom  
listened, to the earth's  
mysterious songs.

Brian Ellis

## Coronet Theatre, Notting Hill

I watch  
and hear  
then join  
the actors  
to share  
their space.  
with my  
imagination  
unconfined  
I wander  
to learn  
new lines  
for my  
life's play.  
I take  
my cue  
with the  
final curtain  
I leave  
and enter  
my stage  
to act a  
new part  
I have  
just rehearsed.

Brian Ellis

## Unitarian Theology Conference at Mill Hill Chapel, Leeds, in October: Videos Now Available Online



In October I was one of the speakers at a two-day Unitarian Theology Conference held in the rather grand surroundings of Mill Hill Chapel, Leeds. It was an enjoyable event with a good turnout (see the photo below, which slightly under-represents the numbers, as it was taken after quite a few had dashed off to catch their trains on Friday evening). I spoke on 'Models of God and the Meaning of Love', the topic of my recent dissertation, and this seemed to be well-received. There were also interesting talks from Ann Peart on Theology from Women's Experience, and Stephen Lingwood on Unitarian Evangelism, amongst others, plus challenging Q&As and panel discussions exploring the issues raised.

To watch the conference videos visit [www.ukunitarians.org.uk/tv/](http://www.ukunitarians.org.uk/tv/) and choose 'Unitarian Theology Conference' from the right-hand menu.

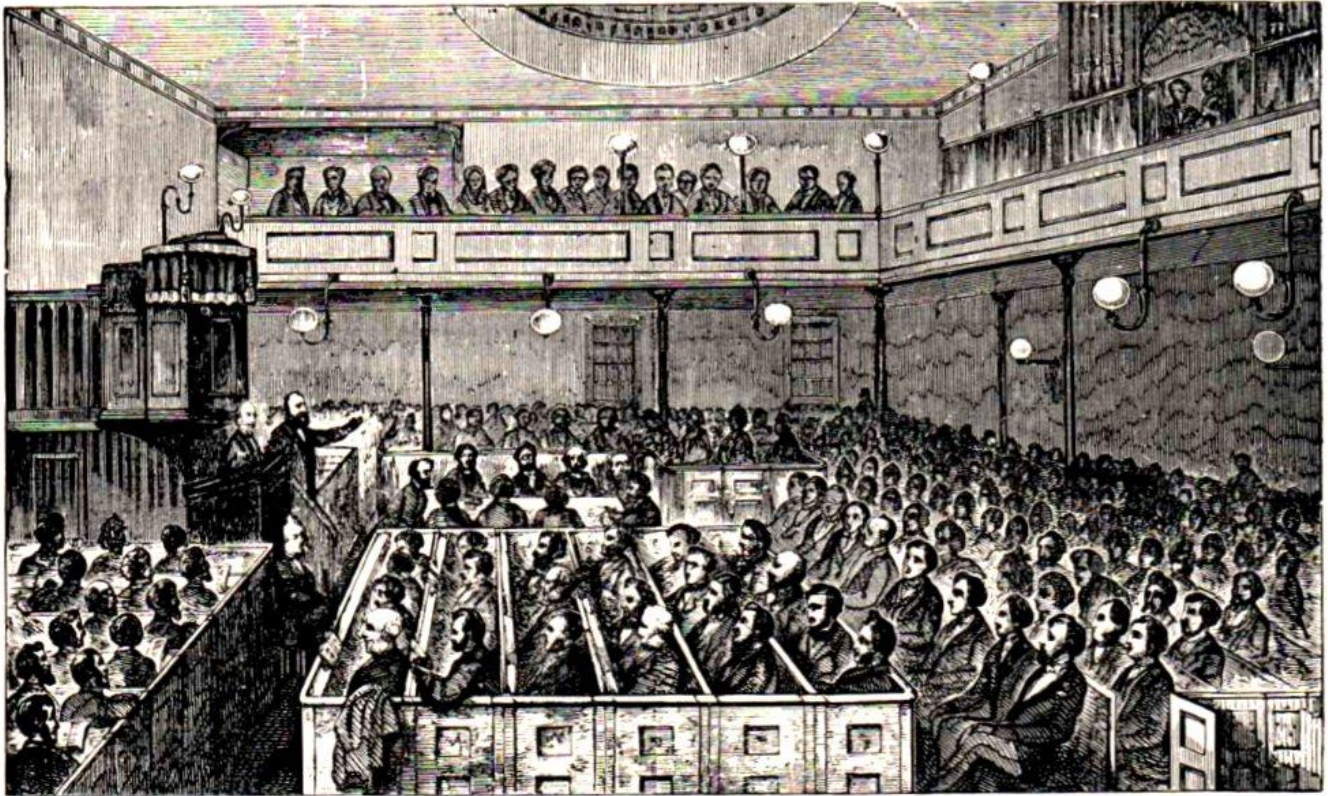
Jane Blackall



Photograph from the Friday afternoon panel taken by Ed Fordham.



# Theophilus Lindsey's Essex Street Chapel



ESSEX STREET CHAPEL: CENTENARY SERVICE, 1874

It was a great pleasure to take part in the 40th anniversary celebrations of the present-day Essex Church building at the service on 23rd July, and to be able to read Theophilus Lindsey's letter to his friend John Jebb about the opening of the original Essex Street Chapel in 1774. This contained the wonderful sentence "Some disturbance was apprehended, and forboded to me by great names – but not the least movement of the kind". Lindsey was able to report that the 'respectable audience ... behaved with great decency'. After the service in July I was asked by what designation the Essex Street Chapel would have been known at the time. I had to admit that I wasn't sure, other to say that it definitely wouldn't have been called 'Unitarian', since the open expression of such views remained illegal until the repeal of the Trinity Act in 1813. I have since been in touch with Professor Grayson Ditchfield of the University of Kent who is a specialist in the political and religious history of eighteenth century Britain and an expert on Lindsey. He tells me that when Lindsey first opened the chapel in April 1774 he had sought a certificate under the Toleration Act of 1689 for its registration as a place of protestant dissenting worship. This application was made to the Middlesex justices, and a certificate was promised. However, either through administrative delay or, possibly, distrust of the theological purposes of the chapel, the certificate was not issued and the chapel opened without it. Lindsey does not seem to have been unduly concerned about this omission, and Grayson suggests that this could be partly because of Lindsey's hope that the chapel might one day become a reformed Anglican place of worship, rather than part of a Dissenting denomination. Whilst still vicar of Catterick in North Yorkshire he had been part of the petition to Parliament for relief from subscription to the Thirty-Nine Articles (known as the Feathers Tavern Petition of 1772). However Parliament rejected this petition decisively and in due course Lindsey resigned from the Church of England.

This lack of a certificate does not seem to have been a problem to begin with, but it became so in 1783 when Samuel Horsley, at the time archdeacon of St Albans and a severe critic of unitarianism and especially the writings of Joseph Priestley, pointed out that the chapel was unregistered under the Toleration Act and therefore illegal. Recognizing the seriousness of the position, Lindsey acted to remedy it. A letter in July 1784 from John Lee, who had served as Solicitor-General in Lord Rockingham's government and was a keen supporter of the chapel, had the desired effect. The certificate was granted to the trustees of the chapel, and they were described as 'protestant subjects dissenting from the Church of England'. The previous year Lindsey, who was approaching sixty years of age, had conveyed the chapel and minister's house to thirteen trustees by a 'Deed of Bargain and Sale' dated 7 January 1783. This conveyance remains the founding document of the congregation, albeit modified by later Charity Commission Schemes to take account of the change in location from Essex Street to Kensington. It states that the chapel is to be used "for the public worship and Service of Almighty God". As far as I can see it says nothing of any other theological position, and I am sure that this was deliberate on Lindsey's part. He wanted to leave the form of worship at the chapel as open as possible. The transcribed deed of 1783 runs to six pages and contains no punctuation, as I believe was common for legal documents at the time, so it does not make easy reading!

If anyone wants to read more about Essex Street and its chapel I would recommend the small but fascinating book *The Story of Essex Hall* by Mortimer Rowe (Lindsey Press, 1959). There should be a copy of this in the congregational library, or it is on the GA website ([www.unitarian.org.uk](http://www.unitarian.org.uk) – look for 'Resources' at the bottom of the home page, then look for 'Document Library' and search for the title).

Howard Hague



# FUSE 2018: Festival of Unitarianism in the South East

16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> February - Horsley Estate, Surrey

**FUSE**  
FESTIVAL of UNITARIANS in the SOUTHEAST  
16TH - 18TH FEBRUARY 2018  
HORSLEY ESTATE  
East Horsley, Surrey KT24 6DU

A weekend full of great opportunities to deepen your Unitarian experience!

FIND TIME FOR YOUR SOUL  
INSPIRING WORSHIP

EXPLORE, DISCUSS, CREATE  
MEET LOTS OF NEW PEOPLE

Enjoy good food and relax in beautiful surroundings

The 2018 Festival of Unitarians in the South East (FUSE) promises to be a weekend filled with great opportunities to deepen your Unitarian experience, find time for your soul, meet lots of new people, enjoy good food, sing with great music, and relax in beautiful surroundings! Rev. Jim Robinson, former minister at Hampstead, will be the keynote speaker on the theme of 'Fostering the Beloved Community'. There will be workshops on spirituality, our community, social action, creativity and music. The venue has extensive grounds, impressive architecture and an indoor pool. Booking is now open and the deadline for registrations is 26<sup>th</sup> January 2018. Some bursaries are available. Standard cost for a single room is £240. Please see the FUSE website for more information:

**For information / to book:** [www.fusefest.org.uk](http://www.fusefest.org.uk)

## Thanksgiving at Essex Church



Our very own Rev. Mark Franklin Bowen led a Thanksgiving Service here at Essex Church using the American Episcopal Book of Prayer and some traditional American Thanksgiving hymns. Followed by a delicious slice of traditional pumpkin pie, this was a good reminder of the power of gratitude in our lives.

If you've not bumped into Mark before, he has an interesting career path to tell you about, spanning assorted continents. Currently working as the University and Careers Advisor at Halcyon London International School, he also continues a ministerial connection with the Unitarian Universalist congregation of Puerto Rico where he ministered for 3 years. Were you at church on the Sunday when Mark spoke movingly of the struggles Puerto Ricans are facing in the aftermath of the recent, devastating hurricane? Originally trained in the Episcopal tradition, Mark was recognised by the UUA in 2013. Whilst working in education here in London he says he's been rather enjoying 'sitting back in the pews'. But he's offered to lead our communion on 10<sup>th</sup> December so do come along and meet him then. Perhaps he'll use the 'Unitarian prayer book' from King's Chapel Boston....

## 'Quinoa Treat' Recipe

### INGREDIENTS \*

1. Quinoa  
(2 ounces/50g per serving uncooked. Purchase cheaply in Aldi. A bit more in Holland & Barrett.)
2. Fresh or Dried herbs 🌿
3. Walnut oil (sold in supermarkets.)
4. Kefir or natural yogurt  
(Kefir is fermented yogurt and has 5 times as much good bacteria as yogurt. Buy it in Polish shops.)
5. Chopped apple or cooked peas
6. Turmeric powder  
(proven to work on inflammation in the body.)

### METHOD

1. Boil the Quinoa with the herb/s. Allow enough water to be soaked up while it cooks 15-20 minutes. Stir occasionally. If you're using peas add them part way through to cook and save on electricity/gas and washing another pan.
  2. Meanwhile clear the table, if you're untidy like me! Lay it with extra ingredients.
  3. Put what you have cooked in a pretty, shallow dish.
  4. Drizzle over as much oil and Kefir/yogurt as you want.
  5. Sprinkle on a teaspoon of Turmeric or less. Try and have one teaspoon of it daily. Sprinkle it on anything.
  6. Plop on the chopped apple.
  7. Get munching! Chewing food thoroughly aids digestion
- \* Have fun adapting this recipe with your own choice of ingredients.

Carolyn Appleby

## Celebration! The Sacred Way to Save the Environment



*St Catherine's Chapel, Abbotsbury, West Dorset*

I recently attended this workshop at Othona, a Christian community on the coast near Bridport in West Dorset. The workshop was led by Martin Palmer, someone who I had always wanted to meet, having heard some of his radio broadcasts and read some of his many books. He is an authority on China and Taoism and has translated the Tao Te Ching and Chuang Tzu. Over a long weekend we had sessions on Sacred Land and Sacred Cities and were encouraged to look for our own sacred places. We created and presented a short service to celebrate sacred land. A highlight for me was our trip out to the nearby village of Abbotsbury, a former monastic centre. We were shown how to read the landscape. Why was the abbey built in a certain place? Why are there tumuli on the surrounding hilltops? We walked up the hill to the ruined chapel of St Catherine with its wonderful acoustics and looked for medieval graffiti on the columns of church of St Nicholas.

Martin is involved with many environmental organisations. He works with royalty, religious leaders, the United Nations. He is passionate about including the major religions in environmental renewal. There is so much good work going on all over the world that we never hear about. For example, in China the Taoists have over seven hundred gardens attached to their monasteries that are growing organic plants and herbs for use in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). They have also pronounced on illegal wildlife trade using body parts of endangered species in TCM for example tiger bones. How can someone expect to be cured by using a product that involves the suffering of an animal? It has made a big difference. Buddhism is protecting trees in Thailand. Islam has issued fatwas against the illegal wildlife trade and burning forests in Indonesia. Christianity is involved in Farming God's Way in Africa. They are all looking for the sacred in their own traditions and adapting it to the current situation. We should try and do the same. I left Othona feeling uplifted and much more positive about the future of our planet. Thanks to everyone who was there, together we made a memorable weekend.

If you would like to visit Othona either for a course or some quiet time all of the details are on their website: [www.orthonawestdorset.org](http://www.orthonawestdorset.org).

**David Talbot**

## Remembering Barbara Ballantyne



It is with sadness that we report the death of Barbara Ballantyne, aged 95. Barbara was married in our previous church building, in a service conducted by her father in law Rev John Ballantyne, then minister of Essex Church. Barbara had fond memories of the old church where her daughters were baptised and her daughter Debby was also married. She also recalled the old manse next door, with its special iron gate that eventually found its way to Barbara's garden.

Her daughters Jane and Debby invite congregation members to join them on Friday 15th December to mark Barbara's passing and to celebrate her long and happy life. Her funeral service of thanks will be held at 12.45pm at the West Chapel, Kensal Green Cemetery, Harrow Road, W10 4RA. This is accessed through the West Gate entrance opposite Hazel Road and there is plenty of parking and good public transport. Do let our minister Sarah know if you would like to have a lift there from the church. There will be a brief committal ceremony at the graveside at 1.45pm. We are then invited to join the family at 5.30pm at Leighton House, 12 Holland Park Road, London W14 8LZ. Donations in lieu of flowers are requested for Kensington & Chelsea Music Society, Registered Charity 291038.

'The paradox of hospitality is that it wants to create an emptiness, not a fearful emptiness, but a friendly emptiness where strangers can enter and discover themselves as created free; free to sing their own songs, speak their own languages, dance their own dances; free also to leave and follow their own vocations. Hospitality is not a subtle invitation to adopt the lifestyle of the host, but the gift of a chance for the guest to find his own.'

**Henri J.M. Nouwen**



Good Cause Collection of the Month

## Glass Door

Collection on Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> December



Glass Door partners with churches to provide shelter and support to people experiencing homelessness. Our services are open to all. As London's largest emergency winter night shelter, Glass Door provides a safe, warm place to sleep for at least 100 men and women every night in winter - from November to April. They are able to do this thanks to partnerships with churches across the boroughs of Hammersmith & Fulham, Kensington & Chelsea and Wandsworth. Guests of these shelters also receive a hot supper and breakfast in the morning, cooked and served by volunteers. These services are a life-line to those who would otherwise be sleeping on the street.

For more info: [www.glassdoor.org.uk](http://www.glassdoor.org.uk)

## Water Aid

Collection on Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> January



Let's help provide clean water, decent toilets and better hygiene for all the world's people. All our donations to Water Aid are being doubled by the government. Water Aid say: 'Everything we do is about getting clean water, sanitation and hygiene to everyone everywhere by 2030. We deliver services and make change happen. We tackle the reasons why millions of the world's poorest people live without these most basic human services.'

For more info: [www.wateraid.org/uk/](http://www.wateraid.org/uk/)

### Recent Charity Collections:

September – Refugee Children – £305.13

October – London Air Ambulance – £91.03

## Hucklow Summer School

### 'How, Then, Shall We Live?'

Living, Dying, and Considering our Legacy'

18<sup>th</sup>-25<sup>th</sup> August 2018, The Nightingale Centre

Great Hucklow in the Peak District



Hucklow Summer School brings fellow Unitarians together and allows them to get to know each other deeply and form lasting connections. The core purpose of summer school week is religious education: we focus on matters of religion and spirituality and intend to draw out and develop the potential of all participants. We aim to provide a carefully balanced programme, offering a rich mix of activities for both the heart and head, and a wide variety of optional sessions including country walks, poetry, discussions and crafts, which participants might 'take home' and try out in their own congregations and communities. We also ensure that there are plenty of opportunities for relaxed fellowship and fun during the week!

At the time of going to press we are still finalising our line-up for 2018. However, we can announce that our Engagement Group facilitators will include Jef Jones & Danny Crosby, Dot Hewardine & Katie McKenna, Claire MacDonald & Mark Stewart, and Kate Dean & Elizabeth Harley.

Our programme of speakers and engagement groups will be officially announced towards the end of December so do keep an eye on the summer school website for details: [www.hucklowsummerschool.co.uk](http://www.hucklowsummerschool.co.uk)

Some bursaries are available to help with the cost of attending and if you are likely to need financial support in order to attend we would appreciate it if you would get in touch ASAP (ideally by early January) for further funding advice. Please speak to Jane Blackall or email [info@hucklowsummerschool.co.uk](mailto:info@hucklowsummerschool.co.uk).





## Fitness Fusion of 9 Movement Forms

**Third Sunday of the Month from  
2-3pm: 17<sup>th</sup> December, 21<sup>st</sup> January**

**Midweek class on Wednesdays - 12.30-1.30pm  
(last 2017 class on 20<sup>th</sup> Dec; resumes on 10<sup>th</sup> January)**

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.

## ‘Finding Our Voice’ Monthly Singing Workshops

**Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> January from 12.30pm  
to 1.15pm** (please note - no class in December)



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.

## The Last Christmas



*Christmas is not everybody's favourite time of the year and there's no divine decree that says we have to celebrate it at all. Here's Eliz Beel's poetic take on the so-called festive season.*

I saw the mistletoe roll to the ground like  
So many marbles,  
But ghostly and greenish-white.  
I saw the holly wither to seaweed  
And its poppy-red berries fade.  
I saw cards fall from dining-room shelves like  
The Fall of the House of Playing Cards.  
Doom! Struck the note of every mishap and disaster.  
Oh, how the paper flew from parcels and the  
Christmas-tree fairy actually wept.

On the Eve itself I looked out of the window,  
For the sound of an uproarious clamour  
Had attracted my attention from the hanging  
Of a stocking.  
The sky was full of Santa's reindeer,  
Their horns locked in strife,  
The Morning itself I clutched in my hand  
The still-empty stocking.

And they say Santa himself has  
Quietly disappeared from the scene in order  
To avoid a welter of publicity  
About his encroaching obscenities.

And then of course the Feast itself,  
Great Aunt Jane choked on the sixpenny piece  
Put into the plum pudding  
That tasted remarkably like a mixture of treacle,  
Tar and rotten fruit,  
And every cracker I pulled burnt my hand.  
Then in the midst of this direful orgy  
An angel descended from God  
And dismissed us all.

Oh, I'll never sing another carol,  
Nor roll out another barrel;  
Neither deck my rooms with Chinese lanterns  
Nor nibble a succulent tangerine  
For this is the last Christmas, now.

**Eliz Beel  
February 1973**



# Church Committee Update

The next committee meeting dates are 30<sup>th</sup> November and 18<sup>th</sup> January 2018.

Phil of Classic Roofing spent two chilly days up on the roof hopefully sorting out some residual damp problems and leaks. Dan of MrStat has wired in some booster buttons for the heating systems in the hall and worship space, enabling user groups to increase the temperature or switch off the heating if they are too warm. Wording the sign to explain this may prove to be as tricky as the sign on the accessible toilet door. But signage around the building, and particularly on the sound system, is on the list of jobs needing tackling.

If you visit the church during the week, you may well find committee member Brian Ellis quietly tackling 101 'jobs that need doing'. Highlights have included a clean front window in the worship space, a painted patch high on the partition wall and the steady removal of all clutter. Planned winter projects include an overhaul of our 'oh so comfortable' church chairs, which are over 40 years old, and the long awaited 'key project'. Every building has its own special collection of problematic keys, but our ambitious aim is to have every key identified and labelled before springtime. If this is achieved we will be giving guided tours of the new key system.

Some of us remember the exciting Sunday when Sarah lost her keys, only to find them a week later in a box of candles that had been previously searched by at least two of us. Spooky!?

## WHERE ARE MY KEYS?

A GUIDE FOR CLERGY AND CHURCH OFFICIALS



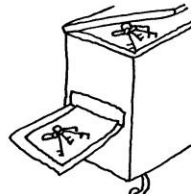
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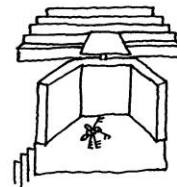
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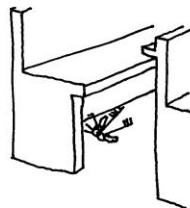
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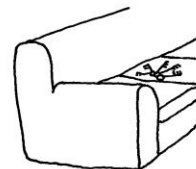
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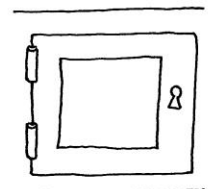
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ON THE HOOK



ON THE SOFA OF THE BAPTISM FAMILY



IN THE SAFE



IN THE DOG'S BASKET



UP THE TOWER



IN THE CHILDREN'S MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS BOX



WERE THERE EVER REALLY ANY KEYS?



IN YESTERDAY'S CASSOCK



WHEREVER YOU LAST SAW THEM

Cartoonchurch.com

## Finding Gold in Dark Places: Insight Through Creativity

Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> February, 9.30am-4.00pm at Essex Church – led by Sandra Vigon

The dark of the year is an especially rich time to dip into the well of creativity that is life affirming, informative and insightful. Join Sandra Vigon – a Jungian Psychotherapist and SoulCollage Facilitator – for this hands on workshop using the SoulCollage process. You will begin the creation of your own personal deck of collaged cards that symbolize aspects of oneself as well as the archetypal and transpersonal. This is a fun and introverted way to mine inner resources creatively and develop a relationship to that source. No prior skills or knowledge necessary. The cost of this workshop is £100.00 All materials are included. Contact Sandra for more information or to book: 07913821626 / svigon@sandravigon.com / www.sandravigon.co.uk

# 'The Mystical Art of Unsayings'

## by Jane Blackall

Adapted from service on Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> November

*The service is also available online as a podcast.*

It's up to me, once again, to kick off our new theme for the month here at Essex Church. Throughout November we're going to be looking into 'The Unknown', and today, in particular, we're focusing on the concept of God – the idea that God is, in some sense, unknown – and ultimately unknowable – that God is so unlike anything else we humans have experienced or gained knowledge of, so utterly beyond the limits of what we can understand, that we can never really hope to grasp whatever it is we mean by 'God'. On this view, it could be said that when we speak of God, as we do most weeks at church, we literally *do not know what we are talking about!* None of us. Certainly not me, anyway.

Not an especially reassuring thought to be bringing to you from the pulpit, but there it is. As the UU minister Robert Walsh put it (in our first reading), *'God is a mystery – [a creating, transforming, sustaining mystery] – and is always and forever beyond every mortal attempt to figure God out and settle God once and for all.'*

And yet, as Victoria Safford wrote (in our second reading), she – and we – still use God-language *'because sometimes there is no other metaphor, no other symbol, no other poetry, no other offering'*. There's something in us that draws us – regardless – towards religious language, to try and talk about the deeper things of life, to speak of things we don't fully understand.

So what are we talking about when we talk about God? Well, it depends. It seems that some people are, fairly straightforwardly, talking about a supernatural being – not exactly the old man with a beard up in the sky that we think of from child-like caricatures, generally – but a supernatural person, a cosmic mind, we might say – out there, somewhere. However, many of us don't exactly believe in a supernatural being of that sort, so we use religious language more symbolically, perhaps to refer to some sort of underlying metaphysical reality, something a bit more nebulous, which is harder to grasp. Another possibility is that when we talk about God we're playing a sophisticated 'language game' and not really talking about any objective reality – whether that's a supernatural being or the underlying metaphysical workings of the universe – at all. Instead we might be using God-talk as part of a whole system of religious language and ritual which affirms our commitment to a certain set of shared values and way of looking at life.

When we talk about God, it is not always obvious which of these we are engaging in. Are we being literal and speaking directly about a supernatural being? Are we being symbolic and speaking metaphorically about an underlying cosmic reality? Are we playing a non-realist language-game which has got nothing to do with either a supernatural being or an underlying reality but which is instead intended to support us in living out our highest values in the world? It's possible that – as individuals, and as a community – we're doing any or all of these things, even switching between them from time to time. In truth, I suspect for many of us, we're not always totally clear about this ourselves. In fact, this question was the topic of my recent dissertation, and even after spending months and months thinking and writing about it, and talking to other people, I'm still not *entirely* sure what I'm doing with religious language myself...



Perhaps it will be something of a comfort to us all to know that we're in good company – good and faithful religious people of all stripes have been struggling with such questions forever – there is a (reasonably) reputable strand of theology that may be particularly useful to reflect on. Apophatic theology, sometimes also known as negative theology, or the *via negativa*, can be traced way back through Christian history, to the Fathers of the Early Church, through key thinkers such as the marvellously named "Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite" [*As an aside: the reason he is not just called Dionysius the Areopagite, but Pseudo-Dionysius, is that this was just a pseudonym, somebody adopted the name of "Dionysius the Areopagite", a character in the Acts of the Apostles, from a much earlier era, and as far as I can make out he did this to piggy-back on a biblical character to gain credibility and get his works more widely read, which by all accounts worked, so good on him*]. Apophatic theology is particularly connected to the mystics, most notably Meister Eckhart, but there are also a number of Jewish and Sufi mystics who were thinking along similar lines (including our old friend Maimonides, who cropped up in a service a few weeks back, and also the likes of Sufi poets Rumi and Hafez).

So – after all this preamble – what is apophatic, or negative, theology? Well, apparently, the root of the word, apophasis, originally meant 'denial', so that's our first clue. Apophatic theology attempts to speak of God only in terms of what *cannot* be said about God. As you're probably already realising, apophatic theology is paradoxical through and through. William Franke sums it up in one mind-bending phrase (which is on the front of your order of service today):

*'Only the unsaying of language can "say" what cannot be said.'*

And we'll return to that idea of 'unsaying' a bit later on.

Megan Foley, a Unitarian Universalist minister, has her own particular take on apophatic theology. She says:

*'There is no shortage of voices shouting out what they think God is. And it's important for people who are spiritually curious to be able to articulate what they are sure God is not, while they are on their way to finding out what God might be, so that they don't get unduly misguided, or hurt, by all that's already out there. It can't all be true. And I'm not the first to declare it important to know what God is not; that tradition goes way back, and was particularly notable in the 9th century. That's when theologian John Scotus Erigena [a fan and translator of Pseudo-Dionysius] made this statement [note: please excuse the gendered language - bear in mind it was written about 1200 years ago]: "We do not know what God is. God Himself does not know what He is because He is not anything. Literally God is not, because He transcends being."'*



## 'The Mystical Art of Unsayng' (continued)

Megan Foley continues with her interpretation. She says:

*'I would translate that to say that a creator God is bigger than creation itself, and also bigger than anything any human being can understand or describe. God is not definable by any human conception and therefore no human language can capture what God is. Kind of mind boggling, isn't it? It kind of blows my mind, but back in the day, this was more than a mental exercise; a theology was born to describe God in terms of what God cannot possibly be, what God is not, so as to help people understand that [when we're talking about God] we're talking about something really outside the ordinary here. And that theology was called apophatic theology.'*

There are several interpretations of how apophatic theology works, but today I just want to tell you about one that I'm particularly drawn to, based on the thought of Michael Sells, who wrote a book on the 'Mystical Languages of Unsayng'. [Sells is a Prof of Islamic History and Literature in the Divinity School of the University of Chicago] Now, pay attention, this bit may need to commit all of your brain cells – and it's still going to be confusing anyway – because it's meant to be! In a nutshell, according to Michael Sells, apophatic theology is a never-ending dialectical process, and it requires that every time you try to say something about God, you must immediately 'unsay' what you've just said, as a sort-of correction. The idea is that – what with God being unknowable and all that – whatever we might say about God is going to be a bit wrong. Or a lot wrong. Utterly inadequate, at least – even if it is our very best effort at pronouncing theological wisdom. But it doesn't stop there. Once you've said something, and then you've 'unsaid' it, this apophatic process requires you to 'unsay' the thing you've just 'unsaid' as well! And this goes on and on forever. It's not as if you're going to arrive at a final destination where you'll find a neat and tidy conclusion! That's not what it's about. It's nothing like other modes of theological or philosophical reflection. And that's why it's often been associated with the mystics. Going through this process of 'unsaying' is somehow supposed to disrupt your everyday ways of thinking and have a transformative effect. Mark McIntosh, a writer on Christian spirituality has said that: *'Apophatic speech might take the form of a quieting down, a stilling into hushed silence. But it might also take the form of an explosion of speech, a carnival of self-subverting discourse, language tripping over itself in paradox or fantastical repetition as it comes undone in the whirlwind of divine superabundance.'*

And if you read some of the mystics, like the sermons of Meister Eckhart, you'll get a sense of that. Apparently he had a kind-of apophatic formula for his sermons (and it sounds like they were quite long!)... He'd start out by saying something uncontroversial, maybe a well-known bible verse. For example, in his 87th sermon, he begins with the quotation: 'blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' This opening gambit would have been well-known to his congregation, and would have put them at ease, you might even say it lulled them into a false sense of security! Then he would have talked about how 'poor' in this sense – in the saying 'blessed are the poor' – didn't mean a lack of material wealth but instead a sort of internal poverty – of 'wanting, having, and knowing nothing'. This is his first 'unsaying' – he's telling his listeners 'aha! It doesn't mean what you think it means'. But then he 'unsays' that too, saying 'aha! It doesn't mean internal poverty in the way you think either!' And as he goes on and on, forever unsaying what he just said, the whole sermon gets ever stranger. At one point he famously cries out 'let us pray to God that we may be free of God!' (and while that kind-of makes sense in context it's no wonder he got in trouble with the Pope).



Meister Eckhart (1260-1328)

It almost becomes a kind of mystical frenzy of contradictions and provocations. And I think the idea is that instead of trying to reason with his congregation, by attempting this process of 'unsaying', he is trying to evoke some direct experience within them, which is beyond reason and which pushes them towards their own mystical encounters with God.

There might be a temptation for people (including us Unitarians) to 'settle' on a certain theological understanding or model of God – especially if we've worked hard to get our head round it – and to dig in and defend a particular position which we find appealing or convincing. But apophatic theology insists that we *never* settle – that we stay conscious of our unknowing. It insists that we keep these big questions alive and that we avoid settling for easy answers. Whatever you say about God – it *can't* be the final word – we cannot grasp the ungraspable. But you might say that through this never-ending dynamic and dialectical process of course-correction we can, perhaps, better stumble in a zig-zagging path towards God.

Whatever our current theological understanding, collectively or as individuals, I think we can benefit from the insights of apophatic theology, and the process of 'unsaying' – even if only to put a little asterisk in our minds next to any theological pronouncements we might make – to remind ourselves that (as the theologian Keith Ward puts it): *'God is beyond all human concepts. The most that they can do is to point, very inadequately, towards God.'*

I want to close with an echo of today's opening words, by Patricia Shelden, which I think affirm the apophatic aspect of all we do together here each week. She says:

*'Here is where we gather in the presence of the Sacred.  
Here is where we gather to experience the Holy  
Here is where, together, we face the unanswerable questions  
and acknowledge that not knowing  
is as sublime as it is frustrating...'*

*'Here we gather to worship, to experience something happen –  
perhaps something different  
for each of us according to our beliefs,  
something unnamed, uncategorized, and unusual  
yet absolutely necessary.  
Here we are so gathered: our minds, our hearts, and our souls.'*

May it always be so. Amen.

# Services at Essex Church in December and January



## Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> December, 11am 'Welcoming the Other'

Service led by Jeannene Powell

As we begin this month's theme on hospitality, we explore the blocks to welcoming those we see as "other". And address how we can welcome those we deem to be different?

## Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> December, 11am 'Radical Hospitality – Welcoming the Difficult'

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

How might concepts of acceptance and surrender help us deal with situations and people we find particularly difficult?

## Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> December, 11am 'Christmas Carol Service – Christ as Stranger'

Carol Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

A great opportunity to invite your friends to join us in a traditional feast of carols and readings, with a shared lunch to follow.

## Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> December, 5pm 'Candlelit Christmas Eve – The Light of the World'

Candlelit Christmas Eve led by Jane Blackall

Join us for an atmospheric evening service of readings and carols reflecting on the symbolism of the Nativity and in particular the notion of 'The Light of the World' incarnated in human form.

## Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> December, 11am 'Nourished by Good Company'

Carol Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

As we bid farewell to the old year and prepare to welcome in the new, how can we best nourish one another through the quality of our welcome and how can we avoid unconscious barriers for a newcomer? This will be followed by an afternoon workshop reflecting on the past year and the year ahead, 'The Year Compass', led by Sarah and Jane from 1-4pm. Booking essential!

## Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> January, 11am 'The Prodigal Son'

Service led by Tristan Jovanović

What happens when we turn a parable on its head? Do we discover the steadfastness of God, the randomness of life or do we trade traditional places and realise that God is everywhere we look?

## Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> January, 11am 'There Is No Plan'

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Progressive religious communities have long rejected any idea of 'God's chosen people'. But as individuals and groups we may still be unconsciously grappling with pre-destination one way or another.

## Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> January, 11am 'The Hand You're Dealt'

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker and Jane Blackall

Our experience of this life – the particular set of challenges and opportunities each of us will face as we make our way in the world – will be in large part shaped by the random set of characteristics we are born with and the circumstances we happen to have been born into. In this service we will reflect on the hand we've been dealt and consider our own position using a 'checklist of privilege'.

## Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> January, 11am 'Beating the Odds'

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Our very own existence is, in a sense, remarkably unlikely. As the author Bill Bryson puts it: 'you have also been extremely – make that miraculously – fortunate in your personal ancestry. Consider the fact that for 3.8 billion years... every one of your forebears on both sides has been attractive enough to find a mate, healthy enough to reproduce, and sufficiently blessed by fate and circumstances to live long enough to do so.' In this service we will consider the ways in which our lives and our society may sometimes be enhanced by flying in the face of probability and attempting to 'beat the odds'. This service will be followed by a Sunday Conversation from 12.45-2.00pm on the month's theme of 'Chance, Randomness, and Luck'.

