



Kensington Unitarians

Newsletter: February 2019

What's On...

Sunday 3rd February, 11am-noon
'Changing Stories, Changing Lives'
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

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

Thursday 7th February, 6.45 for 7-8pm
'Heart & Soul' Spiritual Gathering
Led by Brian Ellis

Sunday 10th February, 11am-noon
'Teaching Stories that Changed Our Lives'
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker
and Jeannene Powell

Sunday 10th February, 2.00-5.00pm
**Festive Fundraising Tea Dance
in aid of Stonewall Housing**

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

Sunday 17th February, 11am-noon
'The Story of Religion'
Led by Harold Lorenzelli

Sunday 17th February, 12.30-1.15pm
'Find Your Voice'
Singing Class with Margaret

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

Saturday 23rd February, 11.30am:
Outing to Tate Britain
Led by Heidi Ferid-Hands

Sunday 24th February, 11am-noon
'Our Stories, Our Memories, Our Lives'
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 24th February, 12.45-2pm
Sunday Conversation

Thursday 28th February, 7-9pm
Management Committee Meeting

A Date for Your Diary:
Sunday 12th May, 12.30pm
Essex Church AGM

The Stories We Tell

A Message from our Minister

'To be a person is to have a story to tell.' - Isak Dinesen

It was past 11pm at night as I stood alone on a bleak platform at Manchester Piccadilly Station, waiting for a train that would connect with the Night Sleeper service to the far north of Scotland. A man who'd clearly had a few drinks wandered up to me and started to make conversation. I felt a bit

uncomfortable but didn't want to appear rude so I joined in and had a chat, told him where I was heading, heard about his night out. (A note for London readers – this behaviour is quite normal 'up north'!) But I was quietly relieved when he wandered off again. The train seemed to be late, nobody else was around, the display was broken, there were muffled announcements that I couldn't hear properly. And then I saw that man again, stumbling towards me and waving his arms. My heart dropped to see him heading my way but as soon as he got close I heard what he'd come to tell me: 'Quick; you're on the wrong platform. Your train's leaving in two minutes from platform 12.'

I caught that Night Sleeper train, all because someone listened to my story on a cold, dark station platform. Someone had bothered to hear and remember what I'd said. I felt ashamed of my judgements and remembered just how easy it is to 'judge a book by its covers'. And it still makes me smile, a bit ruefully, to remember that I was the sober one standing on the wrong platform. He was the one who, despite having downed a fair few drinks, still managed to hear the announcements and remember where I was heading.

This month's ministry theme is 'Story and Imagination' here at Essex Church. I wonder if you've had an experience similar to mine, where your judgements of another human being turned out to be quite wide of the mark. Or have you found yourself at the receiving end of judgements that did not fit? Let's tell each other some of the stories of our lives this month.

Jack Kornfield writes: *'The things that matter most in our lives are not fantastic or grand. They are the moments when we touch one other, when we are there in the most attentive or caring way. This simple and profound intimacy is the love that we long for, these moments of touching and being touched can become a foundation for a path with a heart, and they take place in the most immediate and direct way. In this life most of us cannot do great things. We can only do small things with great love.'*

Thank you to all people here on earth, who do small things for others with great love. You make life so much more beautiful by your kindness.

Rev. Sarah Tinker



In this month's newsletter...

* Volunteer Coordinators Needed: Can You Help? * New Church Events Flyers * Heart & Soul * Last Chance to book for FUSE * Photos from Christmas Events, Midwinter, and Osterley Outing * Poems from Brian Ellis * Sunday Afternoon Tea Dances * Outing to Tate Britain with Heidi * Committee News * Looking for Delegates to Unitarian 'GA' Annual Meetings * Heart Meditation * Sermons on 'Choices and Decisions' by Jane Blackall and Sarah Tinker * and much more ...

Kensington Unitarians

At Essex Church (founded 1774), Notting Hill Gate

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

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

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

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
112 Palace Gardens Terrace
Notting Hill Gate
London W8 4RT

Office Answering Machine: 020 7221 6514

Email: info@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Web: www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Sunday Conversation

Sunday 24th February from 12.45 to 2.00pm



Why not bring your lunch and stay behind after the service on 24th February for our regular Sunday Conversation in connection with this month's ministry theme of 'Story and Imagination'. All welcome.

Volunteering Rotas: Stewarding, Coffee and Greeting



Stewarding:

3rd February: Gabby Chanteloup
10th February: Brian Ellis
17th February: Juliet Edwards
24th February: Niall Doherty

Coffee:

3rd February: Liz Tuckwell
10th February: Pat Gregory & John H
17th February: Abby Lorimier
24th February: ?????? (can you help?)

Greeting:

3rd February: Maureen Cummings
10th February: Maureen Cummings
17th February: John Newton
24th February: Annie Fowler

We circulate the rota list each month by email. Please contact Jane if you want to sign up for one of the forthcoming slots.

jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Volunteer Coordinators Needed: Can You Help?

Kensington Unitarians: Stewarding and Coffee Rotas			
	STEWARDING	COFFEE	GREETING
Jan			
6 th	Alice Lambert	Pat Gregory	Michaela von Brinke
13 th	Niall Doherty	Liz Tuckwell	Estelle
20 th	Estelle	Sue Smith	David C
27 th	Juliet Edwards	Maureen Cummings	Rebecca Hope
Feb			
3 rd	Gabby	Liz T	Maureen
10 th	Susan	PAT GREGORY	Maureen
17 th	Sue Smith	Abby	JOHN N
24 th	Niall D		ANNIE F.
		COFFEE	GREETING
			ROY

We are looking for a few reliable people who are at church fairly regularly to form a congregational team of 'Volunteer Coordinators'. Can you help? Jane is normally the person who goes round with the rota sheet after the service to sign up prospective volunteers to steward, greet, and make coffee. However, now that Jane is involved in ministry training, she is going to be away a lot more on Sundays and won't be able to keep such a close eye on this. We are hoping to get a small team who are willing to take responsibility for making sure the list gets circulated and updated on Sundays. It needn't be an onerous task, especially if it is shared between a few people, but it could potentially make things run more smoothly. Contact Jane if you could help: jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

'Heart and Soul' Midweek Spiritual Gatherings

Thursday 7th February and 7th March, 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. This month Brian Ellis will be leading the session on the theme of 'Story and Imagination'. The contemplative hour will be followed by time for refreshments (home-made cake) and fellowship. All are welcome to join us. If you'd like to have a go at co-leading a Heart and Soul session, or doing a reading, please get in touch with Sarah to find out more.

Thanks from our Treasurer



Jenny Moy our warden and I are busy sorting out our end of year accounts for the accountants, along with a church budget for 2019. We think our income is keeping pace with our expenditure, just, although we won't have the full picture until the accounts are prepared for our annual report and AGM in May.

I do know that over the last year a number of you have given us one-off donations, taken out standing orders on behalf of the church and given ever more generously to our Sunday collections, as well as the monthly collections for good causes. A BIG THANK YOU TO YOU ALL.

As church treasurer I no sooner say thank you than I have to start asking for money once again and we will be hoping to increase our level of donations in 2019. Enclosed with this newsletter you will find a leaflet explaining more about church finances and asking you to consider taking out a monthly standing order this year. This is an alternative to giving money in our Sunday collections and helps us form a clearer sense of our monthly income. But please don't feel awkward if this is not possible for you. We also know the invaluable support given by our volunteers, in terms of time and energy and enthusiasm. Essex Church could do so little without its volunteers!

Juliet Edwards

Updated Church Leaflet: Input & Suggestions Needed – Especially from Newer Unitarians

Kensington Unitarians
Essex Church, 112 Palace Gardens Terrace, London W8 4ET

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www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk

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, address, and a short sermon.

Unitarians offer special ceremonies to mark life's stages - wedding, bereavement, blessing, naming ceremonies and dedications, funerals and memorials. Each ceremony is unique and people are supported by our minister or other celebrants in designing a ceremony that reflects their own outlook on life. Our church building is registered for wedding ceremonies and has space for you to offer refreshments afterwards.

Our children's leaders provide an alternative programme of activities for younger people on Sunday mornings. Other special services take place throughout the year including a monthly small-group communion.

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

The congregation are glad to share their church building with many other religious and local community groups including a Liberal Jewish synagogue, Buddhist meditation classes, Sufi, the One Spirit Interfaith Foundation, yoga classes, psychology organisations, music groups for children, fitness programmes, and local residents' associations.

Other activities include a long-running reading group, singing workshops, No doubt classes, while within London and further afield, and a strong tradition of creativity and community art projects. Our activities are open to everyone.

There are plenty of social activities too - time for tea and coffee after each Sunday service, potluck lunches and shared meals for special occasions. Cultural outings and fun events are organised from time to time.

Kensington Unitarians are committed to making this world a better place and support many good causes. We raise funds, share information, promote awareness of key issues and get involved with specific projects in a local, national and international level. Individual congregation members can use our building and other resources to promote projects they support.

I'm about to start work on an updated leaflet which will give newcomers and visitors a basic introduction to Essex Church. The intention is to let people know what they can expect if they were to come to one of our services and to give an overview of all our other activities and the Unitarian ethos more generally.

In order to do a good job of anticipating/answering the questions of newcomers and visitors I would like to get some input from members of the congregation – particularly those who are relative newcomers themselves – and who can still remember what it was like to come here for the first time. What was it that you most wanted to know before your visit? What were you unsure about? What would have been helpful or reassuring to hear? Please do email me with comments/suggestions and I'll do my best to take them into account: jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk. Thanks!

Jane Blackall

New Church Events Flyers



You may have noticed that we have recently started to produce some high-quality promotional flyers for our regular events here at Essex Church. At the time of going to press we have made them for 'Heart and Soul', 'Find Your Voice', and Afternoon Tea Dances. Flyers for Nia Dance and Playback Theatre are on the way too. Please take them to save the dates for the year ahead and feel free to take a few extras from the dispensers in the church foyer so you have something in your bag to share with friends or anyone else you meet who might be interested.

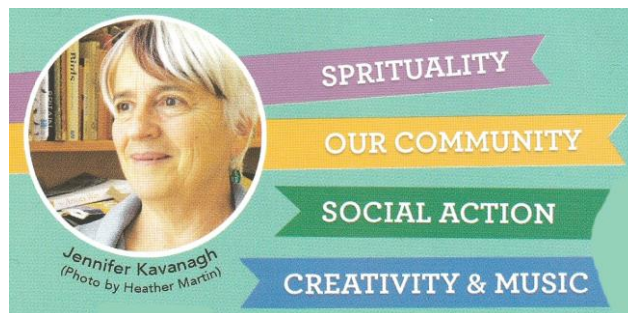
Jane Blackall

FUSE

FESTIVAL of UNITARIANS in the SOUTHEAST

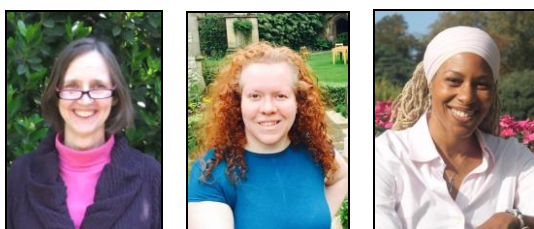
15th-17th February 2019 by the Seaside
Chatsworth Hotel, 17-23 The Steyne, Worthing, BN11 3DU

find time for your soul – experience inspiring worship
 explore, discuss, create – meet lots of new people
 enjoy some good food and relax by the sea



The Theme Speaker is Quaker author Jennifer Kavanagh: who will be sharing thoughts on 'Sustaining the Beloved Community'. Basic cost per adult is £275 (single occupancy full board). There are some bursaries available and reduced rates for double occupancy. Children under 12 cost just £64 in a shared room. It is possible to come as a day delegate. **To register see: www.fusefest.org.uk (deadline 31st January).**

Thematic Ministry



Thematic ministry needs you! We three meet regularly as a team to plan services and other activities around our monthly themes and it's always more interesting when other people have made suggestions too. So do have a look through the themes for the year ahead and let us know if there's a particular poem or other 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 or an outing you'd like to organise. Or perhaps you would like to read in a service or play an instrument or lead a meditation. Let us know.

Here is a list of our remaining themes for 2019:

Story and Imagination (February); Forgiveness and Redemption (March); Great Lives (April); Relating and Relationships (May); Coping and Flourishing (June); Curiosity and Wonder (July); Hopes and Dreams (August); Moving On and Staying Put (September); Religious Life (October); Time and Transience (November); Scarcity and Abundance (December).

Here are some ways to explore this month's theme of 'story and imagination', making the theme a focus for your month:

Draw your lifeline, which does not need to go in a straight line. What have been your life's high and low times? How would you draw your turning points? Have there been some dead ends or circular times? What colours will you use and what images come to mind?

Do some daydreaming and think of ways that you would like to improve life here on earth. Imagine you are in charge of everything: what changes would you introduce and why?

Sarah, Jeannene, and Jane

Old St Pancras Churchyard

a wall surrounds
the mystery of life

each has a door
for entry at birth
and return at death

between times
each is privileged
to be enclosed
and embraced

Brian Ellis

'Some people get the idea that living with kindness is a mistake. Kind people always get walked over, they claim, and so they harden their hearts so that nobody can reach them. The same defensive call also stops them from reaching deep within themselves. There are risks in kindness. The most obvious one is being taken advantage of by the selfish and the unscrupulous. Yes, that happens, but authentic kindness, tempered with equanimity, will not wither under such exploitation. Our kindness is then a public statement of personal dignity. Furthermore, a good conscience makes for a soft pillow.'

Christopher Titmuss



'Faith as imagination unifies not only the outside world but also the inside world. Head and heart no longer need to be at odds with each other, but as mutually illuminating when it comes to personal knowledge. Faith, of course, will not add directly to our knowledge of physics or chemistry, but neither will it detract. Faith adds the poetic dimension, the dimension of meaning.'

Gerald J. Bednar

Sunday Afternoon Tea Dances

Latin, Ballroom and Line Dance for All!

Sunday 10th February, 2-5pm – in aid of Stonewall Housing
Starting with a dance lesson for complete beginners at 2.15pm



We invite you to our special Sunday Afternoon Tea Dance in aid of Stonewall Housing. There will be tea, cake, partner dancing and a few line dances from 2-5pm. All are welcome - complete beginners to life-long dancers alike - and even if you think you have two left feet this will be a relaxed and welcoming space for all to enjoy. The afternoon will begin with a social dance lesson led by Rachel Sparks.

Book now to come to this fun event in aid of a good cause (£5 of the door price goes to Stonewall Housing, a charity providing safe spaces for LGBTQ+ people fleeing violence, harassment and abuse). There's no need to bring a partner so just come as you are - do tell your friends though - the more the merrier! We encourage gender neutral partnering which means anyone can lead/follow during the partner dances. We are also family-friendly so children come for free with any paying adult. Tickets are limited and cost £12 in advance (£15 on the door). Book online: www.rachelsparksdance.co.uk/book-online. **Members of the congregation get free admission.** You are invited to bring your own home-made cakes (clearly labelled), to help raise money for our nominated charity and of course donations to this good cause are very welcome. If you have any questions do email Rachel on hello@rachelsparksdance.co.uk



A Message from Rachel Sparks:

We are celebrating two years of Sunday Afternoon Tea Dances at Kensington Unitarian Church! It has been our intention to help build bridges between communities and this has only been made possible by the hospitality and support of the church. My aim as a dance teacher is to create safe social spaces for people to enjoy the benefits of dancing, particularly the LGBTQ+ community and others that can feel isolated; and I feel that the Unitarian ethos really supports an atmosphere of compassion and acceptance. For those enjoying learning to dance, on the other side of London I'm also working with Simple Gifts Unitarian Centre for Social Action in Bethnal Green and delivering regular group classes - details of all my offerings can be found on www.rachelsparksdance.co.uk. I look forward to dancing with you again on 10th February!

Tickets: £12 in advance, £15 on the door (*free entry to members of Essex Church*)

For more information contact: rachel@rachelsparksdance.co.uk / www.facebook.com/rachelsparksdance

Save the Dates: 10th February, 5th May, 22nd September and 1st December 2019



Osterley Park Outing



Thanks to Estelle Pataki for encouraging us to visit the National Trust property of Osterley Park, with its Georgian house designed by John Adams and extensive grounds, on the edge of west London. Estelle volunteers at Osterley Park and knew lots about the exhibition that was on display, of antique and contemporary silverware owned by the Goldsmith's Company. 'Made for the Table' was such a beautiful collection of items for meal times, including this modern dining table with handmade glassware, cutlery and crockery. We enjoyed our own more modest, but still very tasty lunch, in the stable café and then walked around the wintry kitchen garden with its collection of multi-coloured kale plants. Let us know if you'd like to plan an outing to somewhere special.

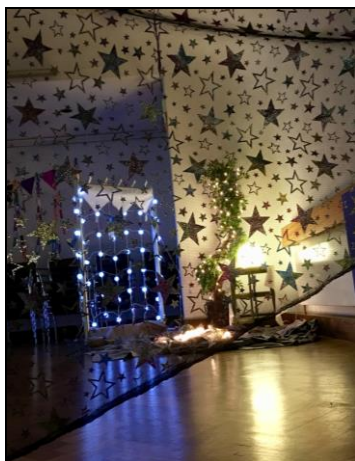


Outing to Tate Britain Saturday 23rd February, 11.30am



I am organising an outing to the Tate Britain on 23rd February. The nearest tube station is Pimlico. There is a collection of British art from 1540 to the present day, ranging from Turner and Blake to Chris Ofili, and entrance to the permanent collection is free. I suggest we meet at 11.30am in the Djangoly Cafe downstairs. There will be a guided tour at 12 noon. I can offer two free entrances to the Burne-Jones exhibition. If you have any questions, contact me on 07855842070.

Heidi Ferid



Midwinter Gathering

'Moving Towards Midwinter' was an atmospheric evening of exploring our responses to the dark times. With music and poetry, movement and stillness, we used every space in the church, magically created by Jenny Moy our warden, who acquired a large Himalayan salt lamp to add to the occasion. The church looks so special if you lie on cushions under the piano and stare through a starry cloth. Hopefully we'll be able to create something similar next year and perhaps borrow an idea from the One Spirit Ministers who in January managed to almost darken the church space completely. The roof-lights looked most intriguing that evening.

Brian and Sarah

Some Photos from Christmas at Essex Church



A bumper congregation gathered for our Christmas Carol Service, led by Sarah and Jeannene, on 16th December 2018.



Left: Our steward, Juliet, was kept company by Arthur (the Blair Family Dog) as he snoozed under the Christmas tree; Middle: Julia and Sue doing a sterling job in the kitchen during Christmas lunch; Right: All hands on deck to move the grand piano!



Our collected congregation dutifully posed for a group photo after the service and before they were allowed to go and enjoy lunch.



Fitness Fusion of 9 Movement Forms

**Third Sunday of the Month from
2-3pm: 17th February, 17th March,
21st April, 19th May 2019**

Midweek class - 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 3-month period.

‘Exploring What Matters’

**An External Course Held at Essex Church
8 Weeks starting Wednesday 30th January 2019**



A new course called Exploring What Matters will start on 30th January 2019 to help people discover how to live a happier and kinder life. It will be run by volunteers and will cover questions like: ‘What really matters in life?’ and ‘What actually makes us happy?’ The course has been developed by Action for Happiness, a UK-based movement of people taking action for a happier world, which has over 100,000 members. It is secular, science-based and open to people of all backgrounds. Analysis of the course has found that it leaves people both happier and more pro-social, with participants reporting increases in levels of life satisfaction, mental wellbeing, compassion and social trust. Many say the course is life-changing.

Cost on a donation basis £0-£90. Sessions 7.30-9.30pm.
Email Nic@urbanflora.co.uk or marylouise@btinternet.com

Good Cause Collection of the Month:

‘Unitarian Youth Programme’

Collection on Sunday 24th February



The Youth Programme is a national programme of residential activities which follow the Unitarian ethos that we are all free to explore our own beliefs and views on life. The values of respect, tolerance and compassion towards others are reflected in the activities we offer. The youth leaders aim to create safe spaces where young people can explore their identity and direction in life. Participants are encouraged to celebrate diversity and difference in each other whilst cherishing all that binds people.

The aim is to see young people relaxing, laughing and having fun together. Everybody's thoughts and opinions join together helping to create a rich and inspiring atmosphere. Activities are open to those who want to join a welcoming and encouraging community. The participants who attend the events weekends include Unitarians and those of other faith traditions and none. Most of the events are held at The Nightingale Centre, Great Hucklow in the heart of the Derbyshire countryside. With Jim Blair as one of the many capable volunteer leaders and a new youth leader Gavin Howell, it's not surprising that youth events are very popular with those who attend.

We'll be collecting for the Youth Programme's bursary and travel fund, designed to ensure that everybody can attend Unitarian youth events whatever the state of their family's finances.

Website: www.unitarian.org.uk/pages/youth-programme

Recent Charity Collections:

Nov 25th – **Toilet Twinning** – £169.28 + £726 other donations

December 16th – **Send a Child to Hucklow** – £271.60

Extra Donation: Thanks to the One Light Ministers who sent £193.45 to Glass Door on our behalf – a group doing vital work with homeless people here in West London.

‘Feeling that life is meaningful is oddly related to having a developed imagination. If you can see in your mind one thing that your eyes have never seen, you can give design to your own life.’

Carol Bly

Volunteering at Essex Church: How You Can Help

Updated Guidance for Greeters, Stewards and Coffee-Makers



This congregation relies on the help of a team of volunteers to make sure things run (more-or-less!) smoothly on Sunday mornings. We are always looking out for new people to lend a hand and from time to time we revise the 'job descriptions' which give guidance to anyone taking on the tasks of greeting, stewarding, or coffee-making at church for the first time. None of these tasks are particularly onerous, but if you haven't done it before and would like some support, we can nearly always find a 'buddy' for you to shadow first time around.

The Role of the Greeter (the greeter should arrive by 10.30am at the latest as visitors often arrive earlier than this):

- Unlock the door by 10.30am and stand in the foyer ready to welcome people, particularly newcomers, as they arrive.
- You might encourage new arrivals into the hall where people gather to chat before the service (explaining that the musicians rehearse in the church until at least 10.45) and introduce them by name to another person, especially someone similar to themselves if possible.
- If you identify any newcomers, it may also be helpful to point out where the toilets are, mention that there is a coat rack in the church, and so on. You could also ask them what brought them here today, where they are from or if they have any questions.
- If visitors are entirely new to Unitarianism then the greeter might offer some leaflets or a copy of our newsletter to help them get a sense of who we are. Make it clear it is fine either to take the leaflets away with them after the service or to leave them here once read.
- Try to find out a little about newcomers, remember their name and any key details, and help them to connect with other people (unless they give a strong impression that they want to be left alone – in which case leaving them alone is the most hospitable thing to do!)
- Encourage people to fill in a 'green slip' (which can be found in the foyer) if they'd like to join our mailing list for more info.
- Keep an eye out for new people during coffee time to ensure they are not ignored or left trapped in an awkward conversation. A simple 'hope to see you again next week' can also make a difference to a new person and encourage them to return.

The Role of the Steward (the steward should arrive by 10.30am to help set up):

- The choir/musicians will usually be rehearsing until at least 10.45am so keep the door closed and do not allow people in to the church until you get the nod from the musicians. You can prepare the service sheets, hymnbooks, and any other items that are to be handed out.
- There are some slips saying 'seat reserved for latecomers' in the stewarding folder. Put these notes on some seats near the back.
- The steward should check whether there's a glass of water on the reading desk for the person leading the service.
- Once you have opened the door, hand out hymnbooks and service sheets and offer large print hymn-sheets to those who need them.
- The steward is responsible for helping latecomers to come in quietly, and find a seat, without disrupting the service.
- If it is unexpectedly busy and there aren't many spare seats then be prepared to bring in extra chairs from the hall well before we run out.
- The steward should keep an eye on the foyer in case anyone comes in late and wanders off elsewhere in the church during the service.
- Count the number of people attending the service (including the choir and musicians; and keep a separate note of children).
- Finally, the steward hands round the offertory bags during the collection, and – *with the help of a friend* – counts the amount of cash in the collection after the service. New regulations now mean that we must ask two people to count the collection together.
- Record the amount in the collection, the number of people attending, and the service title/leader in the 'Steward's Blue Book'.
- The amount of collection money needs to be noted down on the A5 slips in the steward's folder, and the collection put in a brown envelope from that folder, and marked with the date.
- The collection money is handed to Juliet, Jenny, Sarah, or a member of the church committee to lock in the office.

The Role of the Coffee-Maker (it is a good idea to arrive by 10.30am to give yourself time to set up before the service):

- You can put the urn and kettles on to boil before the service, get the mugs out, and prepare a few plates of biscuits ready to serve.
- The church buys fairly traded tea, coffee, and biscuits, and we generally buy these in bulk to ensure there are always supplies in the bottom right-hand cupboard. However, you are welcome to bring some extra biscuits or treats, if you so wish. If you notice that supplies of something are running low please leave a note to draw it to Jenny's attention so she can re-order as needed.
- The only thing you need to bring along on a Sunday is fresh milk as we do not generally keep the fridge stocked (you can claim back).
- It is usually a good idea to slip out of church during the final hymn to put the kettle on so you're ready for the stampede.
- After coffee-time you finally need to wash up (hopefully with help from your friends) and put everything away before you go.

Hucklow Summer School 2019 For Personal and Leadership Development

‘Theology in the Flesh’ How Might our Embodied Experience Shape our Answers to Life’s Ultimate Questions?



17th - 24th August 2019 at the Nightingale Centre,
Great Hucklow, Derbyshire

Theme Speakers: Winnie Gordon, Eleanor Chiari,
Robin Hanford, Jen Hazel, Bob Janis-Dillon

Engagement Group Facilitators:

John Harley and Mark Stewart
Sheena Gabriel and Catherine Coyne
Sarah Tinker and Danny Crosby
Celia Cartwright and Sue Woolley

Children and Young People’s Leaders:

Claire Maddocks and Jim Blair

See the website to download an application form and find out more
about what’s on offer or speak to Jane Blackall for more information:

www.hucklowsummerschool.co.uk

‘Bless those who surrender to sincerely seeking the centre of heart in the hands of imagination. For these shall make the playful children who will set us free. Christian shamans play in order to release the creative forces within. They stop the habits of overly serious mind so that their inner light may shine. Consider making a vow to bring more frivolity and nonsensical play into your life. Imagine if 50% of your daily experience was absurd and playful. This is your goal: you need half of your life to hold the holy play while the other half is reaching for the serious visions. This is one of the secrets to entering the shamanic mysteries of Christ’s children.’

Bradford Keeney

London Playback Theatre: ‘Forgiveness & Redemption’

Friday 15th March from 7.30pm
Here at Essex Church



Playback Theatre came to Essex Church several times in 2018 and we are delighted to welcome them back in 2019. Veronica says: ‘It’s been a privilege for myself and my London Playback Theatre team to come to Essex Church with these performances. We have offered several in past years too. And then my other Playback Theatre team – True Heart Theatre – came here for regular performances until I retired the team in June 2016. The original purpose of Playback Theatre is in direct service to the community.... So creating these opportunities here feels in absolute alignment with our mutual commitment to taking practical action for generating personal/social/political transformation in this troubled world we live in. We do this by inviting us all to remember our own selves – in our wholeness: our experiences in everyday life as well as our special moments never to be forgotten or even memories hidden until that time with us. And by listening deeply as a performing team, we use the power of theatre art as a way to mirror back – and honour – those stories which have been shared in the public space. So as an audience member you are not in the spotlight unless you choose to put up your hand to share something. And if you just come to watch you will anyway be engaged in the whole experience as friendly witness... and there is always the lovely tea/coffee and yum yums (biscuits and savouries tidbits) that is available after the performance to encourage everyone to stay and have on-going friendly conversations!’

London Playback Theatre returns to Essex Church in March, May, June, & beyond. They offer their performances free of charge and welcome donations. For more information see:

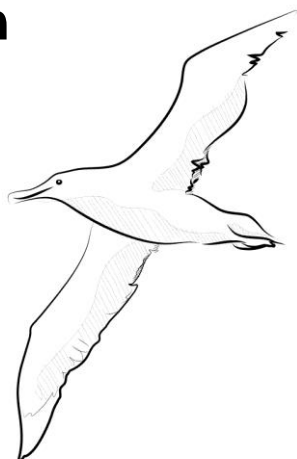
Web: www.londonplayback.com/

Email: londonplayback@gmail.com

Margate Beach

sand anchored
spindrift swept
with the wind
I stand and watch
a lone bird wheel
over a ghosted sea
where every ancient
bird soul blown
by history’s storms
weaves in timelost
a fragile web
of unseen legacy

one bird sails
wings ruling
a soaring realm
crowned above
the withheld might
of the dark
and ceaseless water



Brian Ellis

Inclusive Communion

Sunday 10th March, 12.30-1.00pm



Once every two months 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 speak to Jane Blackall.

LONDON Heart Meditation



Using ancient rhythms, played on a frame drum, the classes will help you focus on your heart beat, enabling you to start on a journey of self-discovery, to uncover your true potential.

Beginners Course in Heart Meditation

Classes Held on Various Tuesdays
Next: 5th and 19th February from 6.30-7.30pm
Downstairs in the Library Here at Essex Church

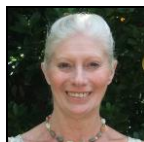
If you're interested in tapping into a lasting source of inner-peace, and beginning a journey of self-discovery then come and join this Heart Meditation course for beginners. Using ancient rhythms played on a frame drum, the teacher will guide you on a step-by-step process for quietening your mind and truly 'listening to your heart'. Held on various Tuesday evenings, from 6.30pm-7.30pm, first class is free and donations are welcome thereafter.

Beverley Eve

To confirm course dates and book a place email:
infoheartmeditation@gmail.com

For more information visit: www.heartmeditation.eu

Church Committee News



Gina



Roy



Juliet



Maureen



Brian



Heidi



Harold

The church management committee met on Thursday 17th January and will next meet on 28th February. As always, do let us know if there is anything you'd like us to consider at these meetings.

We heard news of the parquet floor sanding over Christmas, some of which was well done, though an error was made in the hall and that will have to be re-done, probably in early February. The work was very disruptive and Jenny, Brian and Sarah were thanked for all the effort they put in to making everything run as smoothly as it could. Thanks also to Gitana our cleaner who is still cleaning up the dust that was left. The piano lifting turned out to be a task to remember and we are now thinking through the pros and cons of the piano remaining on the stage area, where we have now removed the old 'altar' which was looking rather battered. Shall we replace that or enjoy having more space?

Heidi has created a loose leaf book of remembrance, a project long discussed. We invite people to include photos and written memories of congregation members who have died. We also invite people to sponsor a hymnbook in someone's memory so do let us know if you would like to have someone's name placed in a book with some simple message of remembrance. Quite a few hymnbooks are already dedicated in this way so do have a look at the front of your hymnbook next time you're here in church.

Juliet our treasurer explained that we are now at the year end and the accounts must be made ready for inspection by our accountants. Our finances are in a healthy shape, but church expenditure inevitably increases, as staff and building costs in particular have a tendency to rise. So along with our annual membership drive we will be distributing our annual fundraising letter and will gladly receive donations towards the work of the church, especially if people can donate by monthly standing order instead of putting money in the collection. It's easier to process standing orders rather than cash in these days of online banking. But we're not getting a card reader just yet!

The committee was glad to welcome Maureen Cummings to the committee and to officially bid farewell to Bobby Rebeiro as a committee member. It was lovely to see Bobby and Erica at a recent service with their baby son Atticus and we wish them all the best for their new life in Kent. The committee talked about how we can all be welcoming to new people, simply by asking their names and finding out a bit about what has brought them to this Unitarian congregation. Try and introduce them to someone else and let ministry staff or committee members know something about them if you can. Apparently if a newcomer is spoken to by at least three people (other than the minister) they are more likely to come back next Sunday.

‘Finding Our Voice’ Monthly Singing Workshops

**Sundays 17th February and 17th March
from 12.30pm to 1.15pm at Essex Church**

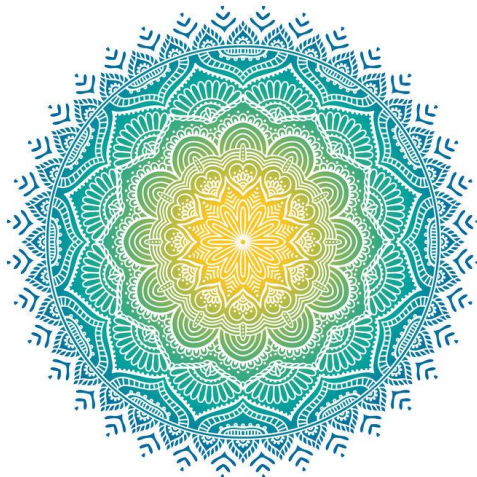


Margaret has worked as a professional singer all her adult life and is also a very experienced singing teacher. She is leading monthly sessions to help us all find our voice. These workshops are for anyone who is prepared to open their mouth and make a sound.

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.

OneLight Gathering

**Friday 8th February 6.45 for 7pm-8.30pm
Monthly Here at Essex Church**



Led by Interfaith Ministers Rev Alison Trower and Rev Amy Firth this service will include music, prayer, reflection, silence, community connection and the beautiful Threshold Choir. Suggested donation: £5. You are welcome to arrive from 6:45pm and the gathering will be completed by 8:30pm with tea and treats. For more information see the OneLight website which helpfully includes all the resources they use in their gatherings:

www.onelightgathering.co.uk

General Assembly Annual Meetings

Seeking a Congregational Delegate



**April 16th - 18th 2019 at the
Birmingham Hilton Metropole**

We still have space for one other person to be our official delegate at these meetings. So do get in touch speedily if this interests you. It's certainly a good way to get a sense of our wider Unitarian movement. There are also remarkably generous 90% discounts available for anyone who is coming for the first time or is under the age of 39 – but the discounts can't be used by official delegates. There'll be other Kensington Unitarians there and you'll have two nights staying in a 'luxury' hotel, complete with swimming pool and sauna. Let me know if you want a booking form or more information.

Rev. Sarah Tinker

Health and Relaxation Treatments with Estelle

Feel better and look better with gentle, energetic treatments! Release stress, reduce negative inner chatter and improve sleep, or reduce wrinkles, increase the firmness and toning of the facial muscles, have a younger-looking, radiant face with gentle energetic treatments that activate and improve the energy flows in your body, the immune system and the self-healing abilities of your body.

During a session of 30-60 minutes you lay fully dressed on a comfortable bed while the therapist lightly touches different points on your head, or your head, neck and neckline, depending on the type of treatment. You don't have to do anything, just relax and be open to receiving all that an energetic treatment can give to your body. I am happy to offer energetic treatment sessions every 3rd (or 4th) Sunday of the month, when I'm at church, in the afternoons. Do get in touch by email estelle.pataki@gmail.com to book a session or talk to our minister Sarah. Your first session can be for a donation only, to see if this treatment suits you.

Estelle Pataki

‘Choose Your Own Adventure’

Sermon by Jane Blackall

From the service on 6th January 2019

Here we are then: it's the start of a new year. An opportunity to re-focus. And it's also the start of a new monthly ministry theme at Essex Church. Throughout January we're going to focus on the topic of 'Choices and Decisions'. And this morning I'm going to offer just a few thoughts on one possible way that we might approach our everyday decision-making; for, after all, our days and lives are filled with countless small choices and decisions (and perhaps a few of these choices and decisions turn out not to be quite so small, in the end).

On the front of your order of service today is a quote from Kent Nerburn. He says: *'Life is an endless creative experience and we are making ourselves every moment by every decision we make.'* Now, depending on what mood you're in, that quote might strike you in one of several different ways. Like (excitedly): *'Life is an endless creative experience and we are making ourselves every moment by every decision we make.'* That might sound, to you, like a wonderful gift – life is an adventure of infinite opportunity! We can – at least in part – invent ourselves through our own choices, through our own volition. On the other hand... (in a downtrodden voice): *'Life is an endless creative experience and we are making ourselves every moment by every decision we make.'* ...this notion might instead strike you as rather weighty, and burdensome. Rather tiring! There's a certain pressure that comes with the thought that every choice we make will end up having a bearing (even if only a tiny one) on who we will become – a bearing on our very self.

It's a bit like the phrase we heard in the first reading today, from Robert Walsh: 'Nothing is settled. Everything matters.' As he puts it: *'It is true that you cannot escape the consequences of your actions or the chances of the world. But what is not settled is how the story turns out. What is not settled is what the meaning of your life will be... As long as you are alive the story of your life is still being told, and the meaning is still open.'*

If we are aware of this – and it's possible to almost be too aware of it – that too can go either way: If we're a bit disappointed in how our life has gone up to this point then it can sound liberating. While there's life, there's hope. There's still time to turn again, make new and different choices. Any day can be 'the first day of the rest of your life' (though, as an aside, I read recently that there's evidence that it can be beneficial to choose special days such as new year's, birthdays, anniversaries, or the first day of the month, or even the first day of the week to initiate lasting change).

Alternatively, though, this notion that *'everything matters'* – that the meaning of our life is still open – if we take that seriously, take it to heart, it puts a lot of pressure on our future decision-making. We can find ourselves worrying endlessly about every life choice, every small fork in the road, agonising over which way is 'right' and which is 'wrong' (and what it says about our life's meaning). I know this is something I've been prone to. And this attitude to decision-making can be paralysing. The weight of unforeseen and unforeseeable consequences weighs heavily on us.

Like Kathleen McTigue, in the second reading we heard today, most of us can't rely on delegating our decision-making to someone else, a mysterious diviner, in the hope that they will intuit the right way to go – we generally have to make our own call regardless of how 'huge, portentous, and muddled' the life issues in question might be – though we might draw on the



advice of wise friends or take it to God in prayer, as the saying goes. But, in the end, as Kathleen McTigue says: *'We all come to some decision points when every option seems ambiguous, and we don't have a clue which way to go. We arrive at a turn in the road that we can't see around until we take the next steps forward, and we take those steps not knowing whether we've made the right choice.'*

'The right choice'. It is easy to fall into this way of thinking – to imagine that we're always choosing between distinct options – this way is definitely right, that way is definitely wrong. I remember reading about this phenomenon many years ago in Susan Jeffers' classic (and very helpful) self-help book 'Feel the Fear and Do it Anyway'. Susan Jeffers talks about this view as 'No Win' decision making. If you tend to think about your life choices in this way, you are more likely to approach them with feelings of heaviness and dread, and spend a lot of energy and stress over them... and, whatever you decide, you are likely to look back at your decision thinking 'what if?' – forever wondering about the road not taken (and comparing your reality with an imagined alternative universe, where everything turned out better, that never came to pass because of your decision).

Susan Jeffers suggests that we try to switch to a 'No Lose' decision-making outlook instead. More often than not the options we're choosing between won't really be a clear 'win' and 'lose'. Much of the time there's not a distinct and unambiguous 'right' and 'wrong' to choose between. There's no trapdoor that's going to open beneath us, no sirens or flashing lights proclaiming 'GAME OVER' if we pick badly. As Jeffers puts it, whichever way you go, there will be 'goodies' that come to you: *'opportunities to experience life in a new way, to learn and grow, to find out who you are, and who you would really like to be, and what you would like to do in this life'*. And inevitably, whichever way you go, there will also be challenges, and other effects you could never anticipate. Sometimes decisions aren't final – you might have an opportunity to retrace your steps – but other times life will just keep rolling on and the road not taken will indeed disappear from view. Opportunities will open up (and close down) depending on your decision... and that might well be OK. Now this is not an argument for not taking decisions seriously – after all, *'everything matters'* – and of course there will be some situations which truly do come into the category of 'life or death' and where you would be well advised to give the weighing-up process maximum care and attention. But if you choose to accept – and adopt – this 'No Lose' attitude to decision-making, you might find yourself free to take your choices a little more lightly, to be more playful, experimental, in your attitude to life – you may find yourself saying more often: 'why not?'

'Choose Your Own Adventure'

(Sermon by Jane Blackall - Continued from Previous Page)

Are you familiar with 'Choose Your Own Adventure' stories? I've asked a few people about this in the last week and it seems they're not as well-known as I'd thought so let me explain, just in case: When I was a kid you could buy 'Choose Your Own Adventure' books, aimed at young people, which would start off like any other adventure story, but typically written in the first person, with you, the reader, in the place of the hero. After a few pages you would be faced with a choice. Something like: are you going to (a) try to fight the villain or (b) run away? So you'd either turn to page 10 to find out what happened if you fought or page 20 to see what happened if you ran. And the story would divide, and divide again, every time you made a choice of some sort, into many different timelines resulting in completely different endings to the story. It seems to me that many Choose Your Own Adventure authors used to relish sending you to numerous different disastrous fates but only gave you one shot at weaving your route through all the choices to find a happy ending. I used to love these interactive stories, usually about plucky crime-fighting teenage sleuths, and remember saving up my book tokens for special trips to WHSmith in the summer holidays. Since then, technology has moved on, and there is a whole genre of 'Choose Your Own Adventure' video games too. Completely coincidentally, it's been in the news just last week, the hit TV show 'Black Mirror' has released the first ever feature-length 'Choose Your Own Adventure' film, 'Bandersnatch'.

In these stories – whether books, games or on TV – a lot can seem to hinge on a little decision (What did you choose for breakfast – Sugar Puffs or Frosties? It can have drastic consequences, apparently). For the sake of maximising tension, 'Choose Your Own Adventure' stories tend to be written from a 'No Win' perspective, playing up the dramatic dilemmas and disasters that await our protagonist at every turn. But real life need not be like that. And a 'No Lose' attitude can help us dial down the everyday drama.

This service is called 'Choose Your Own Adventure' because I had a playful, frivolous, thought: Why not adopt it as a little motto, or maxim, for the New Year? Choose – Your Own – Adventure. A reminder to bring lightness and play to our everyday decisions. Let me unpack this a little...

Firstly, 'Choose': to remind us that, whatever our circumstances, we almost always have some choices available to us, even if it is just the choice of internal attitude we bring to a situation, such as 'No Win' versus 'No Lose'. Of course we are each constrained in various ways – physical, practical, and financial constraints are just a few that might be hard to overcome – and we mustn't deny those factors which limit our available options and our ability to act entirely freely. But some *apparent* constraints are a mirage – rooted in the stories we tell about ourselves, or that society tells about us – who we think we are, who others think we are, or who we used to be – and we can still choose to throw off some of those constraints, to reinvent ourselves, discover surprising aspects of our personalities, and maybe do things that we thought were beyond us.

The second part of the motto, 'Your Own' – as in 'Choose YOUR OWN Adventure' – reminds us that our adventure should truly be our own rather than somebody else's. Wherever we look there are glossy images portraying lifestyles of the rich and famous – those whose lives are successful by the standards

of the rampantly capitalist society we happen to live in – and which implicitly set the template for what the 'good life' looks like, what we should aspire to. If you're a more spiritually-minded type – let's assume you are, seeing as you're here this morning – you might be more interested in the lifestyles of the saintly, the creative, the inspired – great moral exemplars, we might call them. We might well be inspired by other people's lives – that's a good thing, I think – but it's probably not so wise to compare our unfolding stories, our messy work-in-progress lives, to someone else's 'highlights reel' held up as an ideal. Let's identify OUR OWN highest values and make them the guiding principles that give our lives purpose and direction.

And thirdly, the last part of the motto, 'Adventure': 'Choose your own ADVENTURE'. Adventuring doesn't have to mean a trek to the South Pole, or up a mountain, or down a cave, or anything terribly perilous involving those hobgoblins or foul fiends that we just sang about in the Pilgrim's Hymn (unless they're metaphorical ones). An adventure is, according to the dictionary, '*an exciting or remarkable experience that is typically a bold, sometimes risky, undertaking*'. Another way of putting it might be to say: '*an adventure is a new experience that broadens our horizons and enlarges our experience of life*'. For you, an adventure might be learning to dance, internet dating, public speaking, travelling solo, volunteering as a warden of a nature reserve, or a night shelter, dying your hair purple, wearing silver shoes – why not?

So as we step out into 2019, and brace ourselves for whatever it may throw at us, I invite you to play with the idea of Choosing Your Own Adventure (even if it's still a fairly modest, cautious sort-of of adventure, at least to start with...) And I'll close with a blessing for all of us everyday adventurers, to go with us on the journey, adapted from words by Jean M. Olson:

*As you take the next step on your life's path now,
setting your intentions, choosing your direction,
as you boldly venture into another new year,*

*May you speak your deepest truths,
knowing that they will change as you do.*

*May you sing the music within you,
composing your own melody,
playing your song with all your heart.*

*May you draw, paint, dance, sculpt and sew,
showing the world your vision.*

*May you write letters, poetry, biography,
slogans, tweets, graffiti, the great novel,
laying bare your words to love and hate.*

*May you be brave enough to expose
your aching woundedness
and reveal your vulnerability.*

*May you love even though your heart
breaks again and again.*

*And until the end of your days,
may your life be filled
with possibilities and courage. Amen.*

'The Unfolding Path'

Sermon by Rev. Sarah Tinker
From the service on 13th January 2019

Here at Essex Church as you may know, we follow monthly ministry themes and this month's theme is choices and decisions. Each week in our services we'll be approaching this theme from another angle and the reading and thinking about this topic that I've done so far is revealing a very interesting subject indeed. Because of course we humans are having to make decisions many times every day. You've chosen to get out of bed, to have, or not have some breakfast, what to wear, who to speak to or smile at as you've arrived here, where to sit, whether to join in singing hymn words when you perhaps don't know the tune.

If you're listening to this service via a podcast – you could switch it off – right now. That's how powerful we humans are! And if you're sitting here in church you could now decide – 'do you know, I've heard Sarah say all this half a dozen times before – at least – this is a Unitarian community – they won't think badly of me if I close my eyes and have a little snooze – as long as I wake up in time for the collection and coffee afterwards!'

I listened to my ministry colleague Jane's podcast of last week's service – if you weren't here I highly recommend it to you – called *Choose Your Own Adventure*. What struck me as I listened to last week's service is how our age and our stage of life, and indeed our cultural and economic positions, play a big part in how we view this topic of choices and decisions. I seem to have lived quite a long time now and looking back on the map of my life it's now more apparent than it was at the time – the significant part played by chance, by fortune good or bad, on the unfolding path of my life. I wonder how you see the relative influence of choice and chance in your own life's journey. Two sayings often pop into my mind these days:

John Lennon's 'Life is what happens as you're busy making other plans' – which I find particularly poignant as his was a life cut far too short. I've always wondered what creativity there was still to emerge from the post-Beatles John Lennon. The other saying that stays with me is 'If you want to make God smile, tell her your plans' – which provides a useful check for my own scheming mind – a helpful reminder that there's more going on in this complex world than my own little projects and dramas – precious though they may seem to me.

I think a lot about the strengths and the limitations of the human will, with its remarkable ability to 'get things done' alongside an equally remarkable ability to fool itself, to think it knows best, to over-reach itself, to lead us into messes of our own creating. And I wonder if this is a particular problem of our age and our culture – that we have an over-inflated sense of our own abilities and find ourselves from time to time "willing what cannot be willed".

I've been reading about the work of psychoanalyst Dr Leslie Farber this week and his idea that we live in an 'age of disordered will' – where we confuse what we have power over and what we do not. Some small examples – we can use our willpower to go to bed, but that doesn't mean we'll get to sleep; we can read a book but it doesn't mean we'll necessarily understand what we read; we can seek pleasure but it may not bring us happiness; we can start a conversation but it may not go the way we want. Our busy minds think they can control all sorts of areas of existence by worrying, by what's sometimes described as 'over-thinking' but of course we can't. And our worries bring us the gnawing condition of anxiety, which is so prevalent amongst so many of us today. So as an antidote to anxiety here are a few teachings – some ancient, some modern, that can help us on life's path.

Last week Jane mentioned Susan Jeffers and her suggestion that instead of a No-Win approach to decision making you develop a No-Lose view instead. Whenever we find our self at a decision making, trust that whatever we decide will be ok. It will be a path we can work with, a path we can walk along and develop as we go. Another teaching I appreciate Susan Jeffers for is one she learnt from Ram Dass, a remarkable spiritual teacher – that when we find ourselves agonising over a decision to be made that we take a step back in our thinking and say 'I wonder what Susan is going to do?' This simple trick of thought makes us step back from the drama – and be the observer rather than lead actor. It can help in life's ghastly moments too – to ask ourselves 'I wonder what's going to happen next?' And the truth for most of us most of the time – is that we really don't know. The future hasn't happened yet. It's unfolding, it's emerging, as we go.

Another approach to decision making is to sit with not knowing for a while and instead of thinking 'I must now decide' in a very conscious way, instead simply wait and let a choice emerge. This is a process of discernment and it appeals to me greatly because its underlying principle is that there are many more factors and interests in play than simply my own little world view. If we truly believe that we are all connected and that all life is one, then it's helpful to align ourselves and our interests with something greater than ourselves.

This is similar to the Taoist teaching of unfolding that's so well expressed in the quotation from the Tao Te Ching on the front of today's order of service:

*The master allows things to happen
She shapes things as they come
She steps aside
And lets the Tao do its work.*

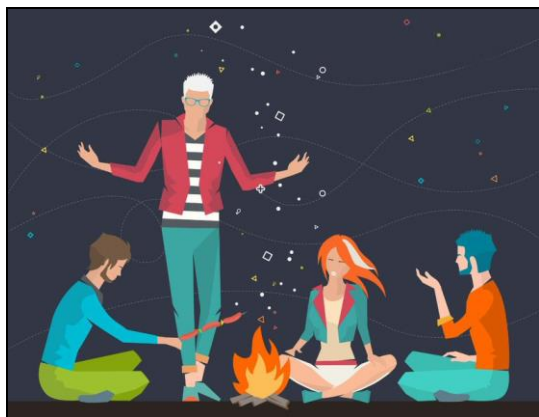
The Tao is the way, the journey and the travellers, all who are flowing along the way, some of us floating serenely with 'that which is' and some of us furiously paddling our way back upstream or trying to reach a particularly nice bit of riverbank that we've just felt attracted to.

This is similar to the Buddhist teaching of *dukkha* – that our suffering in life comes from our attachment to preferred outcomes and our resisting the inevitable. I've known people find great ease in learning to *choose* 'that which is', to move *towards* the inevitable rather than kick against it. Of course we have our preferences, our opinions, our likes and dislikes. We're human! But acknowledging, facing, accepting 'that which is' can be a gift of great peace.

And as we travel the unfolding paths of our lives, I hope we'll be open to life's surprises, be willing to be amazed, and delighted by the unexpected. And I hope we'll have chance to tell our stories to the companions who we walk alongside, for though we walk the path together yet our experiences and perspectives are uniquely our own – and when we share our stories we're celebrating and honouring the great mystery that is life itself. Thank you my fellow travellers.

Blessing: There are many ways to step into the unknown and all of them are ok. We can step trepidatiously, audaciously, with a flourish or a whimper, with a roar or a song. In the week ahead let us find the courage to make the steps that need to be taken, to embrace the inevitable changes that are rolling towards us, and to do what we can to support one another along the way, knowing in our deepest core that we can indeed all walk in the warming light of love, even on the greyest of days. Amen, go well and blessed be.

Services at Essex Church in February



Sunday 3rd February, 11am 'Changing Stories, Changing Lives'

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

How the narratives we tell about ourselves can shape our lives, and how we might start to change the story if it no longer serves us.

Sunday 10th February, 11am 'Teaching Stories that Changed our Lives'

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker and Jeannene Powell

Hearing the right story at the right time can make a big difference to our lives. What stories have helped to shape you?

Sunday 17th February, 11am 'The Story of Religion'

Service led by Harold Lorenzelli

In the service we will explore the idea that just as we tell each other stories in order to live so religion offers us a narrative for life.

Sunday 24th February, 11am 'Our Stories, Our Memories, Our Lives'

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Writing the story of your own life, your memories, your perspectives, can be healing process for yourself and those who love you.

Warden's Column



From this autumn we're hoping that a local choir, 'Kensington Singers', will be relocating to the church. Here's some text from their website: www.kensingtonsingers.co.uk

Think you would like to sing in our friendly community choir? Everyone is welcome; our youngest member is 19 and our most senior is a young at heart 77, so we have a really great mix of experience and energy. The choir launched in January 2011 and is now established with around 50 singers. There are no auditions and you don't need to have any previous experience to join in – you'll be amazed at how quickly you can start making a brilliant sound. If you're not used to singing regularly you'll see a huge improvement in your voice after your first month or so. We always spend 15 minutes at the start having a good vocal warm up which will also include things like a bit of sight-reading practice, some rhythm games, vocal techniques and ear training.

Kensington Singers is led by Hannah Brine and the songs that we sing are carefully selected to offer something for everyone; from pop to gospel, classical to musical theatre, jazz to folk. Hannah writes: *'Kensington Singers is the first choir I started in London, having moved down from Leicester where I established a similar choir; Fosse Singers, back in 2007. I was extremely honoured in 2015 to be named a BBC Unsung Hero for my work with community choirs, as it's something I really love to do. In 2011 & 2013 I studied with the Association of British Choral Conductors and in 2014 I received my LRSM in musical directing with a distinction.'*

We meet on Mondays during term time from 7-8.45pm. The choir performs roughly 3 times per term and there are a number of social events throughout the year, including weekly drinks in the pub afterwards. We have performed at the Royal Brompton Hospital, for the Chelsea Pensioners, at the Southbank Centre Christmas Market and enjoyed joint events with the London Contemporary Voices, the Buzztones, Singology Gospel Choir and Kitsch in Sync.

Choir membership normally costs £100 per term, but as we're offering them the room here at a discounted rate, they've agreed that any member of our congregation can join for free. Why not come along and try them out?

Jenny Moy

Essex Church Membership and Contact Forms

It's that time again! Each year we ask members to re-affirm their membership and confirm their contact details by filling in a form (this year it will be golden yellow – please look out for it at church on Sundays – it's easy to fill in and hand back during coffee hour). Membership does not depend on you making a financial contribution to the work of the church, though of course we are very grateful for your regular donations, which make possible the ongoing work of the congregation. Membership is instead about affirming your personal commitment to this community and to the Unitarian ethos. Each member is a vital and valued part of this church and its work in the world. If you are new to the congregation, we ask you to attend for three months before applying to join, so that you can get a feel for what the church is about. If you have any questions about membership do have a chat with Sarah, Jane, or a member of the church committee to find out more.