



Kensington Unitarians

Newsletter: December 2013 / January 2014

What's On...

Sunday 1st December, 11am-noon
'Advent Expectations'

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Monday 2nd Dec, 12.30-1.30pm
Nia Technique with Sonya Leite

Thursday 5th December, 7-8pm
'Heart and Soul' Spiritual Gathering
'...Not Yet' led by Jane Blackall

Sunday 8th December, 11am-noon
'My Precious, Spotless Pearl'
Service led by Caroline Blair

Sunday 8th December, 12.30pm
Small-Group Communion
Led by David Francis Darling

Sunday 8th December, 2.00-3.00pm
Nia Technique with Sonya Leite

Monday 9th Dec, 12.30-1.30pm
Nia Technique with Sonya Leite

Thursday 12th December, 7-8.45pm
'The Spirit of Christmas'
Workshop with Sarah and Jane

Sunday 15th December, 11am-noon
'Christmas Carol Service'
Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 15th December, 12.30pm
Congregational Christmas Lunch

Monday 16th Dec, 12.30-1.30pm
Nia Technique with Sonya Leite

Thursday 19th December, 7.30pm
Cultural Outing: Esterhazy Singers
Christmas Concert with Brass Band

Sunday 22nd December, 11am-noon
'Joyful is the Dark'
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Tuesday 24th December, 5pm
'Candlelit Christmas Eve'
Service led by Jane Blackall

Sunday 29th December, 11am-noon
'Quiet Times'
Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Thursday 2nd January, 7-8pm
'Heart and Soul' Spiritual Gathering
'Resolutions! Resolutions!'
led by Jeannene Powell

Sunday 5th January, 11am-noon
'What Calls You?'
Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

'What's on' continues on page two...

A Message from our Minister:

Playing our Parts

As primary school teachers across the land brace themselves for their annual Christmas nativity plays, here at Essex Church we're fetching the decorations down from the loft and choosing a Christmas tree. There is something comforting about these traditions, connecting us as they do with stories of Christ's birth that

we will first have heard, and perhaps enacted, in childhood. As parents will tell us, the choosing of parts for children to play is often a fraught process. There are never enough starring roles. Every year somebody has to be the back end of the donkey or wear a sheep mask and only say, "Baa". Most of us will have missed out on the part we longed for at some point in our lives. That's perhaps why the joke about the little boy who wasn't picked to play Joseph raises a smile. He was given another key part to play as the innkeeper and behaved perfectly in every rehearsal. But on the night of the performance, in front of all the assembled families, he responded to the line, "My wife is going to have a baby. Is there any room for us in your inn?" by throwing the door open wide and warmly inviting the holy couple in.

One way of exploring the story of Jesus' birth is to consider each of the characters as part of ourselves. We're bound to have our favourites. Are you drawn to the mysterious magi, trusting enough to follow a star, who bring their gifts and are not fooled by the oily Herod asking them to pop in to Jerusalem on their way home? Does Mary's quiet love for her child touch your heart? Or maybe Joseph's sturdy care for his family appeals to you, with his resolute response to a warning received in a dream, prepared to travel even further away to the land of Egypt in order to keep them safe. There are simple shepherds who hear the voices of angels, angels singing from the realms of glory and animals that worship the infant child and share their humble stable with this young family, who find themselves so far from home. And let's not forget that along with all these attractive characters we also have within us a whole Roman state, so obsessed with bureaucracy that it will uproot people in order to gather statistics, and a Herod who would slaughter

all the innocents if one baby potentially posed a threat to his power. We all have parts to play in the narrative of life and they change through time and circumstances. And there's a part for everyone to play over the coming few months here with Kensington Unitarians as we work together to create a loving liberal religious community in the midst of busy London. Come and join us over the next few months and we'll let you put a tea towel on your head and play at being a shepherd, but only if you really want to!

Rev. Sarah Tinker



In this month's newsletter...

* 'Spiritual Life Skills' workshops * 'Celebrating the Reformers' by Howard Hague * 'Casper David Friedrich: Winter Landscape' by Roy Clark * Thought for the Day * 'Twelve Steps to Spiritual Health Course' – responses by Jo Tye and Tim Carter * 'The Old Manse' by Mrs B. Ballantyne * 'A Texas State of Mind' by Gisela Boehnisch * Poems by Carolyn Appleby & John Hands * 'Fresh Starts' - sermon * 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.



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

Office Telephone: 020 7221 6514

Email: info@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Web: www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk

What's on in January *(continued)*

Thursday 9th January, 7.00-9pm

'Creativity Group: Feltmaking (1/3)'

Saturday 11th January, 11am-4pm

'Exploring the Shadow' workshop

with Sonya Leite and Sarah Tinker

Sunday 12th January, 11am-noon

'A Path of Self-Compassion'

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 12th January, 12.30pm

Small-Group Communion led by Jane Blackall

Sunday 12th January, 2.00-3.00pm

Nia Technique with Sonya Leite

Thursday 16th January, 7-8.45pm

Management Committee Meeting

Sunday 19th January, 11am-noon

'Comfort and Cheer'

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 19th January, 3-5.30pm

Playback Theatre with Veronica Needa

Sunday 26th January, 11am-noon

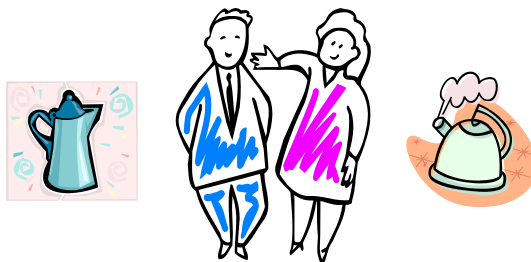
'The Art of Forgetting'

Service led by Jane Blackall

Sunday 26th January, 12.30-1.15pm

'Finding Your Voice' - Singing Workshop with Margaret

Volunteering Rotas: Stewarding, Coffee and Greeting



Stewarding:

1st December: Tristan Jovanović

8th December: Gina Bayley

15th December: Juliet Edwards

22nd December: Sam Boyero

24th December: Veronica Needa

29th December: Annie Fowler

5th January: Natasha Drennan

12th January: Liz Tuckwell

19th January: Veronica Needa

26th January: Natasha Drennan

Coffee:

1st December: David Talbot

8th December: Liz Tuckwell

15th December: Eliza and Mike

22nd December: Sue Smith

24th December: Heidi Ferid

29th December: Sam Boyero

5th January: Sue Smith

12th January: Caroline Blair

19th January: Roy Clark

26th January: Liz Tuckwell

Greeting:

1st December: Liz Tuckwell

8th December: Ellen McHugh

15th December: Carol Sheppard

22nd December: Annie Fowler

24th December: Billy Jackson

29th December: Gina Bayley

5th January: Gina Bayley

12th January: Ellen McHugh

19th January: Liz Tuckwell

26th January: Carol Sheppard

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

'Spiritual Life Skills'

A new workshop series for 2014
Hosted by Kensington Unitarians

Throughout 2014 we will be holding a series of 'Spiritual Life Skills' events here at Essex Church. Open to all, these groups will take many varied paths in exploring what it is to be human. The full programme is now available in our new leaflet. We strongly encourage you to **put the dates in your diary and book ASAP** as we will be advertising widely and places will be limited.

We would very much appreciate if you would help us spread the word about this series by taking copies of the special leaflet and recommending it to any friends who may be interested.

'Embracing the Shadow'



Saturday 11th January, 11am-4pm
Facilitated by Sonya Leite and Sarah Tinker.

In this workshop we will learn more about the shadow sides of ourselves and the rich creativity that such an exploration can uncover. Through sound and silence, movement and art work, we will find new ways to make connections with hidden aspects of ourselves, unleashing new energy and insights to inspire us in the year ahead. Based on Jungian ideas, this is an experiential workshop.

There is a sliding scale of £5 / £10 / £15 for this session (pay what you can afford) and please bring lunch to share. Places will be limited so book soon by emailing info@kensington-unitarians.org.uk or contact Sarah if you would like to know more.

"Our task is to become conscious of the contents that press upwards from the unconscious." Carl Jung

'A Sense of the Sacred'

Sunday 2nd February, 1pm-4pm
Facilitated by Jane Blackall and Kate Buchanan

In this workshop we will be exploring our sense of the sacred in all dimensions of life, in unexpected places, and our day-to-day existence. We will consider ways in which we can develop greater awareness of the sacred, honour what is most precious to others, and practice reverence. This workshop is free of charge (though donations are welcome). To book, email: jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk



Spiritual Life Skills Workshop Series 2014



Throughout 2014 we will be offering a series of spiritual and personal development workshops and other events.

The workshops are open to all and you are welcome to come along to as many or as few of them as you like. However, places are limited, so please book in advance.

112 Palace Gardens Terrace, London, W8 4RT

www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk

'Compassionate Communication'

**Saturday 5th April, 10.30am-4pm &
Sunday 6th April, 1pm-4pm** (*must attend both*)

Compassionate Communication is a practical exploration into how and why others hear us as they do, and how and why we hear others as we do. This understanding helps us choose differently in the way we listen and how we express ourselves; and so helps us toward a more compassionate and enriching understanding both of others and ourselves.

We are delighted to be joined by Jill and Richard Broadbent who will be offering their 'Compassionate Communication' training over a whole weekend next spring (this is a two-day course). Some long-standing members of the congregation will remember that the Broadbents led a six-week course with us back in the autumn of 2010. We cannot recommend this training highly enough, and would encourage members of the congregation to sign up, even if you took part in the previous course as there is always more to learn and considerable benefit to be had from practising with others.

There is a sliding scale of £20 / £40 / £60 for this training (pay what you can afford) which is a considerable saving on what you would pay elsewhere. **We would appreciate it if you would sign up for this course well in advance so we can be sure it is viable.** Please book your place soon by emailing jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk or contact Jane if you would like to know more.

Our Autumn Colour Walk



The most colourful part of the Epping walk was probably our waterproof jackets, much needed on this rather soggy day. But the day proved that even in the most inclement of weather it's still great to get out in nature. Would you like to lead a walk sometime? Let us know.

'Heart and Soul'

Midweek Spiritual Gatherings



**Thursday 6th December and
Thursday 2nd January from 7-8pm**

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

Our December gathering will be led by Jane Blackall. As we enter into advent, a time of waiting, our theme will be '...Not Yet'. January's gathering will be led by Jeannene Powell. Fitting with the New Year, the theme, 'Resolutions! Resolutions!' is all about promises and commitments we make to ourselves and others. There will be cake!

If you would like to know more about these gatherings please contact jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk.

New Congregational Mugs Available to Purchase for £5



Our fancy new congregational mugs got their first outing at the management committee meeting in October, as you can see below, and they are now on sale from the church for £5 each. The mugs feature the 'Community, Spirituality, Conscience' logo.

There will be an opportunity to buy mugs during coffee hour.



The Old Manse

I was delighted to see the photograph in last month's newsletter of the old manse. It encouraged me to come along to a service and meet some of you, which was a great pleasure. My surname of Ballantyne shows me to be a relation of a one-time minister of your church, the Rev. J. C. Ballantyne. I married his son in 1945, the ceremony being conducted by my soon to be father in law in the old Essex Church. If you look closely at the photograph you will see a gate, half hidden by the motor car. I know a lot about that special gate as it stands now in my garden in Holland Park, not so far away. It was made especially for my mother in law by a lady blacksmith who had a forge in Pembroke Place. Your current minister now has a copy of an article I wrote for The Kensington Review about my experiences in the war, which you may find interesting to read. The magazine contains other articles about the ways in which our neighbourhood was affected by the two World Wars, including the trenches dug in Kensington Gardens.

Mrs B. Ballantyne

(Editor's notes: You can read more about the history of our church in 'Essex Church in Kensington 1887-1987' by Raymond Williams, Published by Essex Church, 1987 – a copy of which can be found in our library or can be downloaded from the 'Library and Publications' section of our website)

Creativity Group

Second Thursday evening of each month
starting on 9th January from 7.00-9.00pm



I am very pleased to announce that our creativity group will be re-launching at Essex Church in 2014. This previously ran very successfully for 10 years (2002-2012) before taking a break in 2013 and was responsible for many of the art and craft creations that you will see around the church. This was the very first group that I started up here at Essex Church and so it has a particularly special place in my heart.

The plan is that we will meet once a month and will focus on a particular art or craft medium or a certain project for each quarter of the year so that we can go deeper into it over that three-month period. The provisional line-up is as follows:

January-March: Feltmaking

April-June: Photography

July-September: Printmaking

One of the particularly enjoyable features of the creativity group is the space it offers for fellowship and conversation while we are each working on our individual projects alongside one another. If you don't fancy the art or craft we are 'officially' focusing on then you are always welcome to bring along whatever you're working on and do your own art/craft whilst enjoying the good company of the group.

We are keen to get a group of about half a dozen people to commit to attending the first six sessions to help get the group re-established. Four people have committed to this so far and if you would be willing to support the group with your presence in this way I would be very pleased to hear from you (email jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk).

Jane Blackall



Christmas Events at Essex Church



'The Spirit of Christmas'

Thursday 12th December 7 to 9pm

Come and join us for this seasonal group where we'll take time to consider what Christmas means for us, make a simple gift for everyone to take home and enjoy mince pies and mulled wine together. Led by Sarah and Jane.

Christmas Carol Service & Congregational Lunch

Sunday 15th December, 11am

We will be having our carol service and Christmas lunch on 15th December. Please do invite your friends to this festive occasion and sign up to bring food and drink to share.

Outing to Esterhazy Singers Christmas Concert

Thursday 19th December, 7.30pm

We will be having a cultural outing to this concert of Christmas carols with a Brass Band at St Andrew's Holborn. Our own Natasha Drennan is part of the choir. We are still waiting to hear the final details regarding timing and tickets. The Esterhazy Singers website: www.esterhazysingers.com

Candlelit Christmas Eve

Tuesday 24th December, 5pm

We will be gathering for a special candlelit service of readings and carols on Christmas Eve once again this year. Do stay afterwards for mince pies if you can. All are welcome.

Christmas Eve Dinner

Tuesday 24th December, 7pm

It has become a tradition that a small group from the congregation goes out for dinner at a local restaurant after the service on Christmas Eve. If you would be interested in joining us then please let Jane know as we will need to book a table in late November: jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk.

Thought for the Day

I know it's not just me that enjoys listening to Thought for the Day on Radio Four's Today programme and there are several good reasons to switch on our radios early on Boxing Day this year. All that week there will be guest editors on the programme and the Boxing Day edition is to be edited by Tim Berners-Lee, the lovely man who invented the World Wide Web and who insisted that the Internet be a free resource for the people of the world. Tim has long been a member of a Unitarian Universalist congregation in the States and rumour has it that he may well be allowed to invite a Unitarian to give their thought for the day. This is generally beyond our reach because speakers are chosen according to the size of the group they represent and we Unitarians aren't numerous enough to get a look in. But on Boxing Day we just might. No name has yet been announced but I can relax because it won't be me!

Rev. Sarah Tinker

Creatives' Christmas Fair

Sunday 15th December, 1.30-6.30pm

Here at Essex Church

Organised by Pocket Arts



Come along to this Creatives' Christmas Fair to peruse and purchase handmade gifts, cards and jewellery, paintings, prints and ceramics, fashion, festive food and drink, and to enjoy music and merriment.

This event is organised by 'Pocket Arts', the team behind the recent Kensington and Fulham Open Studios. They have offered a free table to anyone from the congregation who has craftwork they'd like to sell. There's more information about how to take part on their website www.pocketarts.org.



'Our Living Stories'

19th January, 18th May, 21st September 2014
from 3pm- 5.30pm here at Essex Church



Afternoons of surprise & delight with Playback Theatre!

Since its beginnings in 2006, London's own Chinese-led True Heart Theatre has been regularly performing Playback Theatre on the third Sundays of most months in a variety of venues as our service to the community. Our events have created an opportunity for people from all cultures, across generations and languages, to meet each other through a heart-full exchange of real-life stories and experiences.

Come for tea and storytelling of a special kind. If you'd like to know more please speak to Veronica Needa. Admission is by donation. To book, please email info@trueheart.org.uk.

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

'Patience, capacity, or tolerance is the helpful attitude toward accepting and working with the difficulties of existence. Basically, patience is simple; it means waiting. No matter how good our conduct or practice, expecting or grabbing at some reward or result is a hindrance. When we do our best without any particular expectation, we can actually be ready for whatever happens. Patience is flexible, open, and ready to respond to the world before us.'

Taigen Daniel Leighton

Casper David Friedrich: *Winter Landscape*

"God is everywhere, in the smallest grain of sand."

- Caspar David Friedrich

During the winter months you may like me sometimes take refuge from the elements and spend an hour or so immersed in art in a museum or gallery. In keeping with the season, there are many wonderful winter landscape images to enjoy in public collections including in the National Gallery a little known gem in this oeuvre; *Winter Landscape* by Casper David Friedrich (1774–1840)

It is perfectly permissible to enjoy this picture as a "straight" winter landscape painting, beautifully and delicately rendered. However, it can also be interpreted as a paean to Pantheism. Friedrich was an artistic visionary who set out convert the previously secular category of landscape painting into a new form of spiritual art. His landscape paintings, whilst exhibiting none of the standard biblical scenes of neoclassical painters, all allude to a mystical unity dwelling within nature.

A close examination of this particular painting for example, reveals a small human figure who having discarded his crutches is propped against a rock, praying before a crucifix on the side of a towering pine tree. The scale of this figure which appears tiny in the vast landscape around him invites the viewer to meditate on our place in the universe.

In the distance a Gothic castle or cathedral is just discernible through the mist, perhaps symbolically suggesting the promise of spiritual redemption? The outline shape of the building is echoed in the soaring perpendicular form of the evergreen tree in the foreground, itself a symbol of life from pagan times. The green shoots of grass poking through the snow could also be taken to represent renewal, everlasting or new life.

Born in Greifswald, Pomerania in what is now Germany; the young Friedrich was deeply influenced by the liberal religious ideas of the leading non-conformist theologians of his time, often espoused by them in open-air sermons. Not least among these ideas was that of the inseparability of God and nature.

Another important and abiding influence on the artist was that colossus of German Literature and letters Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Friedrich was actually born in the year of publication of Goethe's famous novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther* which was a Europe-wide best seller of its day. Just like Goethe's character *Werther*, Friedrich believed that the divine nature of God could be detected everywhere in the natural world around us.

So, what technique does Friedrich approach his art to create these spiritual communions with natural phenomena? Well, the art historian in me is dying to tell you, but for lack of space I leave will that to the artist himself...who in any case encapsulates it so very well.

"Close your physical eye, so that you see your picture first with the spiritual eye. Then bring what you saw in the dark into the light, so that it may have an effect on others, shining inwards from outside a picture must not be invented, it must be felt".

Enjoy your winter viewings.

Roy Clark

New Children's Leader Needed



Kensington Unitarians are looking for someone to lead a separate group for children during our Sunday service in Notting Hill Gate. Hours 10.45 to 12.15. Pay £30 plus travel expenses.

You'll need to be reliable, fun, confident with children of varied ages, flexible, and committed to a liberal approach to children's spirituality. We'll help with programmes and planning.

For more information contact our minister Sarah Tinker info@kensington-unitarians.org.uk or phone 07960 057567.

Essex Church Membership 2014

In January current members and friends of our congregation will be receiving their annual letter and form to fill in for membership. Its good practice to ask people to renew their membership in this way each year and we'd be grateful for your feedback on how our form feels to receive and fill in. We'd also be grateful if you could return the forms speedily to the church office – or even fill them in straight away on a Sunday morning – as this makes it much easier to administer.

Our annual suggested subscription remains at £40 for members and £16 for friends. This payment is not a requirement but it in some way covers the cost of newsletter production and mailing and the annual quota payment we make for each member to our central General Assembly. Some people pay with a cheque, others put money in the collection during the year to cover this cost, or pay by standing order.

Please don't let finance stop you from filling in the form but also do ask yourself what you can afford to contribute to the running costs of the church, or other ways that you might contribute to our community through your time or enthusiasm.

Membership is a really valuable way to show that you support our congregation and are in accord with its liberal religious ethos. If you want to know more about what membership entails then do get in touch with me and have a chat.

Rev. Sarah Tinker



A Texas State of Mind

This November I spent some time in Texas attending an industry conference and, naturally, before heading out, I had a look online if there was any Unitarian Universalist congregation nearby. There was: the First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Antonio. After a few friendly emails exchanged across the pond I was lucky to be able to spend a wonderful 24 hours with one of the church members, attending a service together, being shown around their impressive 'campus' and spending a night at April and her family's home.

Even at the beginning of my US trip I had already been looking forward to meeting my hosts and learning all about another, as it happens, much larger congregation in the south of Texas. It turned out to be an absolutely wonderful time! My host family was incredibly welcoming (which actually made me slightly homesick for my own family back in Bavaria), we had lots of intriguing conversations, took their adorable dogs for a walk and had dinner in an English pub. We also headed to a local western wear store as I was very keen to add to my growing cowboy boot collection.

The church and its members also impressed me greatly. I learned that the congregation had gone through considerable growth and changes in the past few decades. I loved that they had a big choir, there was a very moving sermon on the topic of Veteran's Day the day I attended and there was even a fabulous book store.

Thank you very much to April and her family for being such fantastic hosts and Julie, the church office administrator, as well as Maureen, the current interim minister, for putting us in touch. I am really looking forward to welcoming you to London in future if you are heading our way (which you should!).

More information about the First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Antonio can be found at www.uusat.org.

Gisela Boenhisch



American Journeys

Thanks to long-time friends of our congregation, Lee and Julian Minghi, I shall be visiting their home congregation of Columbia in South Carolina for two and a half weeks from January 20th. As well as experiencing Unitarian Universalist worship and small group work I hope to visit Charleston and Savannah and make a trip into the Blue Ridge Mountains. As Gisela has discovered, UUA congregations are remarkably welcoming of visitors so if life ever takes you across the other side of the pond then do find out if there's a congregation nearby for you to be in touch with.

Rev. Sarah Tinker

FUSE 2014: Festival of Unitarians in the South East

A weekend by the sea filled with Celebration, Inspiration, and Education

21st -23rd February 2014 in the Chatsworth Hotel, Worthing

For Unitarians and other seekers with a passion for the future. Sponsored by the London and Southeast district and open to all. More than 20 workshops on personal spirituality, congregational health, and worship. 'Short Fuse' programme for children and youth and special pricing for weekend! Bursaries available to make this event accessible to all, regardless of distance or financial circumstances. Pre-conference ministerial workshop and main worship service led by Rev. Bill Darlison, GA President for 2013-14. The programme for the weekend promises to be as exciting and varied as the previous two years. There will be time to meet with others from throughout the District and beyond, time to socialise and time to relax. Some of the workshops will be live-streamed, an intriguing new development for the District as we keep up with developments in modern technology.

Prices: £235 for a single room / £185 for a shared room / Day visitors on Saturday are £49; £69 including dinner and entertainment / Day visitors on Sunday are £39 / Those under 18 are only £50 / Children under five are free! / The Friday Seminar is £30

For more information and to register visit the festival website at: www.fusefest.org.uk

'Finding Our Voice'

Singing Workshops with Margaret Marshall

Sundays 26th January, 23rd February,

23rd March 2014 - 12.30 to 1.15pm

Please Note – now on fourth Sunday!



Margaret Marshall 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 our singing by learning how to produce and develop the voice, something everyone can do.

We'll work with the breath and overcome unconscious blocks that can prevent us singing with our true potential. Fun and achievement are guaranteed and these sessions are designed for everyone, whatever your experience or ability. All are welcome.

Don't Take Life for Granted

The light dawns on me,
I sleep no more; I am awake,
blessed to be alive still this day.

I sit me up,
then move my lower limbs from bed to floor.
I feel the ground –
soft carpet on bare skin –
walk slowly to the bathroom.
The ligaments of my feet extend and flex to get me there.

My ablutions done I look around,
the plant looks dry.
Now jug of water in my hand,
the green hard surface presses my soft fingers.
Again I feel my feet from wool to lino
padding about, sure of the ground.

Replenishing dried up soil,
I know I love each plant
and my awareness of being here, now.

Carolyn Appleby,
6th November 2013

One Light Spiritual Gatherings

'Gifts of Light'

Candlelit Celebration of Light in Darkness



Friday 13th December 2013

7.30-9.15pm – Here at Essex Church

(with potluck supper/festive treats from 6pm)

The gatherings are led by graduates of the Interfaith Seminary.

Information from One Light: 'A central part of the gathering will be a beautiful candle lighting ceremony where we become a great wheel of light and say a powerful mantra to the Seven Rays - Seven colours in the spectrum of white light - symbolising all diversity - glorious aspects of the one light. We will begin our celebrations with a communal meal - a Pot Luck supper rather than a catered meal as originally mentioned. So bring the light of your (or your favourite food store's) culinary skills to the service. Please bring food, to share - sweet or savoury (or both). Please mark if vegetarian or vegan, or not suitable for allergies (eg. nuts) or religious observances eg. pork/ham. Also bring cool drinks to share, fizzy, juice, lassi etc. We are providing teas and festive treats - yum!!! There is a microwave and an oven available to heat food.'

'The Unseen'

with beautiful chanting from Illumina

Friday 10th January, 6.30-8.15pm

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

***This event is free. Donations for expenses are welcome.
Any surplus will go to Essex Unitarian Church***

For further information contact Interfaith Reverends Pamela Ramsden 07966 478 980 / Kathryn Reynolds 07976 739 286

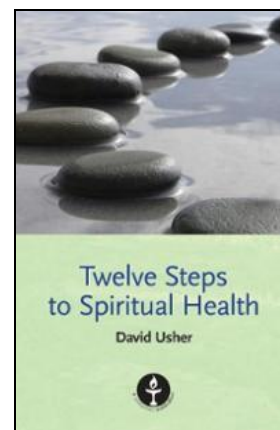
'A very powerful question may not have an answer at the moment it is asked. It will sit rattling in the mind for days or weeks as the person works on an answer. If the seed is planted, the answer will grow. Questions are alive.'

Fran Peavey

Twelve Steps to Spiritual Health Course

Twelve people signed up for our 12 Steps to Spiritual Health group and several others bought a copy of the book even though they were not going to be able to attend the evening sessions. Here's a response from Tim Carter who lives in Malvern and who attends services here at Essex Church when he's in London. He'd be glad to get together with others who are interested in the issues raised, especially the topic that the group has kept returning to – what constitutes spiritual health and well-being and is anything to be gained from separating it from other aspects of our being – our mental, physical and emotional well-being?

Tim writes: This kind of book is probably not the kind of book that I would choose to read normally but it has certainly raised many interesting issues. I'm a bit of a sceptical recipient of the approach outlined, as it seems to fall into the genre of self-help and lifestyle regimen guides, though written from a minister's perspective rather than that of the all-pervasive pop-psych. At times it's rather prescriptive for my style and leads me not to look inwards but rather to ask 'why is the writer saying what he does, and what is in it for him?' I have to admit that is perhaps a response that I have become infected with from trying to see through campaigns of interest and pressure groups over the years of my career, and it is now reinforced by the historical work I am doing.



One of the issues for me was that the book is not grounded in the features of human consciousness. To me consciousness is the engine that leads all of us to seek explanations, linkages and causes. Spirituality seems to be a consequence of this feature. It has explanatory value for the unknowable. One of the attractions of the Unitarians for me is the high status they give to reason and knowledge and what I take to be the view that belief has to fit within and not contradict the best available evidence. The unknowable has shrunk over the years but it still remains, both as regard the extinction of individual consciousness with death, and as a subjective feeling: Wordsworth's "sense sublime" and the hymn-writer's "when I survey in awesome wonder...". Having this capability is at the centre of my view of the spiritual.

What is 'on the other side' is the other big unknowable. I recently spent a very meditative time in a splendid new museum in Antwerp where they had organised their ethnographic collections to show what was the same and what was different about interpretations of the spiritual dimensions of death and causation in various world belief systems, from animism to all the major religions. The consistency of these dimensions in all belief systems reinforced my feeling that the human consciousness holds a spiritual focus at its core as the engine needed to come to terms with what is both emotional and unexplainable.

Earlier in my working life I did a spell of clinical work in New Guinea. Here I saw both the best - and the worst - of mission work: 'we have a better belief system than you because we are better endowed than you are with goods and books - so believe our version'. The local belief was that the missionaries had taken the first page out of the bibles they made available because this contained the secret formulae for material success. It was also easy to see how local people, on viewing an airport, thought that if they built something the shape of an aircraft on a hilltop they could attract other aircraft, just as they had seen the expatriates doing, and that all sorts of desirable goods would then be delivered to them.

I also became a strong advocate of sorcery there. If you believe in it then it works! We had a tiny health budget and it did not stretch to mental illness. But there was a highly regarded sorcerer nearby who would do the magic and effect a cure. Unfortunately this was sometimes at the expense of someone else who was identified as the person who had worked the harmful magic.

A final aspect: 'Health' is by definition holistic. The separation of physical and mental health over the years has led to the latter being stigmatised and to sufferers being unwilling to accept explanations for somatic symptoms based on psychological insights. Can and should spiritual health be looked at separately or should it be seen as just one of a continuum of facets of the human condition that all interact with one another to produce wholeness/well-being/health?

Tim Carter

P.S. from the church library – we have a copy of this book in the library along with many other interesting reads – have a read of it and let us know what you thought of it.

'We are players, but we do not direct the play. Crucial decisions were made for us before we were even born. Did you decide to be born in Wichita? Was being a girl your first choice? Did you plan on growing up with three brothers, or none, to one parent or two? Even the decisions we make for ourselves seldom take us where we meant to go. I meant to stay married to the same person all my life. I meant to leave the South. I meant to give myself to the service of God until all my sharp edges were worn away.

None of those things happened. Other things happened instead, many of them against my will. Some of them turned out better than I could have planned and others of them much worse. So far there is nothing that I would make un-happen, if that were within my power. While I pray daily to be delivered from the most awful things that can happen to human beings — land mines, wasting illness, killing poverty, civil wars — I give thanks for even the semi-terrible things that have happened to me, since they have shown me what is really real. They have made me tell the truth. They have quashed all my illusions of control, leaving me with no alternative but to receive my life as an unmitigated gift.'

Barbara Brown Taylor



Twelve Steps to Spiritual Health Course

We are coming to the end of this course and it's been a mixture of discussion, individual reflection and guided visualisations. I haven't been chastised for not actually reading most of the working text; we have shown respect and empathy to each other and had our fair share of laughs. However what strikes me most about this course is that through the guided visualisations, while lying on the floor with lights dimmed, I went on a journey to find my own spiritual truths from within. I observed with interest that, in line with Unitarianism itself, each of us consulted our source of wisdom and found our own spiritual truths which we gently shared with each other.

There was one step of the 12 Steps that I didn't need to ponder: 'Belong to a Religious Community'. I told the group that I have an almost visceral connection to Essex Church. My mother, Rosalie, was an active member for over 60 years and I was very fortunate to grow up as a Unitarian although there have been years, perhaps decades, when I did not attend church. I have vivid childhood memories of the old church with its wooden pews and font and having Sunday School with little tables and chairs perched on the stage in the cavernous basement. I know the Lord's Prayer because Auntie Jessie, the Sunday School teacher, taught it to us.

My various rites of passage have involved Essex Church. I am sure there was a service for my own arrival which might have been called a Christening in those days. There was a service of Thanksgiving and Welcome for my son Sam then aged 6 months and both my parents' funerals have been conducted here. I did not know what to do with my mother's ashes and then the right location dawned on me. A year after she died, her ashes were interred in the church garden. Through the trauma of my mother's death I was supported by the stalwarts of the church – you know who you are! You will always have my gratitude.

When I returned to church earlier this year after a period of absence I told Sarah that I was reconnecting with my roots: - my personal history, my relatedness with my parents and my connection with all the members of the Essex Church community I have known. It is definitely good for my soul and something I cherish. .

David Usher who wrote the Twelve Steps puts it as so:

"The ancient parable of the sticks, easily snapped in two when apart but strong when bound together, illustrates the value of being part of something greater than oneself. Being part of a community not only has practical value. There is a significant theological reason why community is important. Spiritual experience is the experience of connection, whether with the divine, with nature, with others, or with oneself."

Jo Tye

Warden's Report

The congregational carol service is on Sunday 15th December and this seems to be a popular time for Christmas events as there are several booked in by outside users a few days before and after.

Friday 13th December is the monthly Interfaith Service. Every year around this time, they do a celebration of light inspired by midwinter festivals in many religious traditions. This year's title is "Gifts of Light: candlelit celebration of light in darkness". The event begins at 6pm with a bring and share supper and the service follows from 7.30-9.15pm – later than their usual times. There's more information on the One Light Spiritual Gatherings Facebook Group.

On Sunday 15th December from 1.30pm - after our Carol Service and while some of you will probably still be here finishing the shared lunch in the hall - there will be a sale of Christmas Crafts in the Church organised by Pocket Arts. This is a West London Community Arts organisation who initiated the Kensington & Chelsea Open Studios Event we participated in in October: they were so impressed with our venue they asked if they could hire it for their Xmas event. As a thank you for us letting them use the space on a Sunday - when we don't usually take outside bookings - they've offered a free table to anyone from the congregation who has craftwork they'd like to sell. There's more information about how to take part on their website: www.pocketarts.org.

The following week, on Tuesday 17th December, we're host to the London Piano Circle Christmas Concert. This is a members organisation for keen amateur pianists who generally meet in each other's home about once a month to share pieces they're working on. Once a year they have a public concert here and all the performances are at a very high standard. If you'd like to come, please arrive at 6.30pm for a 6.45pm start and bring drinks and finger food for post-concert socialising. More information about the group can be found on their website: www.londonpianocircle.com.

All the above events are free and open to members of the public – so if you feel like an extra dose of seasonal cheer, do come along to one.

Jenny Moy



Celebrating the Reformers

Reflections by Howard Hague

*Originally offered as a two-part reflection
in a service at Essex Church on 18th August 2013.*

Members of the congregation will remember our good friend Gordon Deaville, who sadly died in February this year after a long and courageous struggle with ill-health. Gordon had requested that his funeral service should take place at the Dissenters' Chapel in Kensal Green Cemetery in London. Arriving a little early for the service on 4th March, I wandered around part of this vast cemetery, and was pleased to find again the Reformers' Memorial which I had first seen some years ago whilst researching various Unitarian graves. The Memorial was erected in 1885 and part of the inscription reads: "Erected to the memory of men and women who have generously given their time and means to improve the conditions and enlarge the happiness of all classes of society .." It includes the names of some seventy people, including Elizabeth Fry, Joseph Priestley, William Morris, Thomas Paine and Harriet Martineau. This tall obelisk stands next to a similar memorial for Robert Owen, who is described as a philanthropist and is probably best known for his efforts to improve factory conditions and reduce working hours in industry.

Owen was born in Newtown, Montgomeryshire in 1771. His own education finished at the age of ten. After serving in a draper's shop for some years and then working in London, he moved to Manchester. By the age of 21 he was manager of the Chorlton Twist Mills. He was elected a member of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society, where the ideas of reformers and thinkers of the Enlightenment were discussed. He also became a member of the Manchester Board of Health which had been set up to promote improvements in the health and working conditions of factory employees. During a visit to Glasgow he fell in love with Caroline Dale, the daughter of the proprietor of the New Lanark Cotton Spinning Mills. In due course he became manager and part owner of these mills, and it is with the name of New Lanark that Owen is most associated. During his lifetime he tried to improve the health, education, well-being and rights of the working class. Although he encountered much opposition at the time, he influenced those reformers who came after him, and New Lanark became a place of pilgrimage for social reformers, politicians and even royalty.

While the name of Robert Owen is still relatively well-known today, the same cannot be said of Major Cartwright. John Cartwright was born in 1740 in Nottinghamshire and became an English naval officer with a successful career at sea. However in the 1770s he disagreed with the government's policy towards the American colonies and resigned his commission. He believed the colonists had right on their side and he supported their cause. This led to his interest in English radical politics. In a pamphlet in 1776 called 'Take Your Choice' he examined the English electoral system and found it wanting. He proposed the introduction of universal manhood suffrage without any property qualification, and also promoted the idea of the secret ballot at elections. Many of his ideas formed the basis of the 19th century Chartist campaigns



for political reform. His religious views were similarly non-conformist, and there has been some debate about whether he was a Unitarian. I have no doubt that he was. He was a member of the Society for Promoting Knowledge of the Scriptures, which had been founded in 1783 by the Rev Theophilus Lindsey and other associates at the Essex Street Chapel in central London (the congregation from which we are of course descended). Lindsey refers to the work of Cartwright in several of his letters, and probably agreed with many of his ideas. There is a fine statue of him in Cartwright Gardens off the Euston Road, not far from St Pancras Station.

As we saw in our second reading, Mary Carpenter had become aware of the extreme poverty and squalour of the slums in Bristol. She believed that education was the way forward for children and young people, and this at a time when compulsory education was still a long way off. As a Unitarian she would have been familiar with the work of the Portsmouth cobbler John Pounds, and she had read reports of the Ragged School Union. She proceeded to establish several schools in Bristol for the education of the deprived and destitute, including Red Lodge, which is regarded as the first girls' reformatory school in England. Mary Carpenter was not only a fine teacher, she was a social visionary and woman of great courage. Her critique of society seemed revolutionary in her day and is even remarkable today. She denounced the 'vindictive theology' of most Christian churches and the inhuman attitudes to young people of most contemporary officials. She did not believe that punishment could ever be the ultimate deterrent. What children needed was love and care. For more than thirty years in books and pamphlets, in lectures and speeches all over the country she preached her gospel of reform and spiritual renovation. She was very much guided in this by her Unitarian faith.

Among her other concerns were the abolition of slavery and the raising of the status of Indian women. She visited India four times, braving not only the climate but the disapproval of the Indian authorities. The last five years of her life included visits to fellow-workers all over the world. There is a plaque to Mary Carpenter in Bristol Cathedral which reads 'Sacred to the memory of Mary Carpenter, foremost among the founders of reformatory and industrial schools in this city and realm.' The remarkable work of Mary Carpenter deserves to be better known today.

'Celebrating the Reformers' (continued)



Another name on our Reformers' Memorial with which you may not be so familiar is that of Frances Power Cobbe. Born into an upper-class Anglican family in Ireland in 1822, she experienced a crisis of faith in her late teens. By chance she came across the writings of the American theologian and minister Theodore Parker, and this set her on a Unitarian path. After travelling in the Middle East, she settled in Bristol and soon started to assist Mary Carpenter in her work, though finding it a great challenge. In due course she became a great champion of women's education, and pleaded for the admission of women to university degrees. She also campaigned for women's suffrage and chaired a committee on this subject. If she is remembered at all today, it is probably for her fierce criticisms of vivisection, and eventually the protection of animals became one of the central purposes in her life. She is considered to be one of the most able and prolific writers of the mid-Victorian feminists. There is a memorial tablet to her in Manchester College Oxford in which she is described as 'Writer in Philosophy and Religion, a Pioneer of Social Reform'.

This has been a very brief resume of the lives of four of the men and women whose names appear on the Reformers' Memorial. I reckon that at least eight of the names there – out of the seventy or so listed – were Unitarians or had strong Unitarian connections. I had hoped to look also at the Rev William Johnson Fox, minister for many years at the South Place Chapel in Finsbury, and at Harriet Martineau, the prominent writer and novelist. But these will have to wait for another occasion.

Howard Hague



Good Cause Collection of the Month:



SimpleGifts – Unitarian Centre for Social Action

Collection on Sunday 22nd December

Our charity for December is SimpleGifts. There is an ever expanding range of programmes now being offered at our church in Bethnal Green and to all congregations in the District and beyond. The free meals on Thursday, bringing together new and old neighbours while they share healthy food together, is attracting more and more people each week. The After School Club now runs twice a week, offering homework help, crafts and games, classes in English as a second language, mentoring and volunteering opportunities, a self-esteem workshop for young Asian girls, and much more. The budget for the current financial year is £48,000. Your financial support would mean a great deal.

For more information: www.simplegiftsucsa.org.uk

West London Churches Homeless Concern

Collection on Sunday 26th January

Our charity for January is West London Churches Homeless Concern. This local charity provides life-sustaining food and shelter, and dignity-restoring support to help men and women find solutions to their homelessness. Their busy casework team is available to everyone that comes to them. WLCHC relieves poverty among street homeless people by providing accommodation, advice and support. Each winter since 1999, churches of different denominations in West London provide the venues for the night shelter (up to 100 beds per night).

For more information: www.wlchc.org

Previous Charity Collections:

Thank you for your generosity in contributing to recent charity collections. I am pleased to let you know that we will be sending the following donations to good causes:

September – Trussell Trust Foodbank – £181.72

October – GA Youth Programme – £106.10

November – Lotus Centre, Southall – 186.86

Special Collection for the Philippines – £222.16 + \$100



A Fitness Fusion of 9 Movement Forms

Second Sunday of the Month from 2-3pm:
8th December, 12th January, 9th February

Also each MONDAY lunchtime from 12.30
(please note no classes on 23rd/30th December)

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 (£7 to concessions / church members).

Contact: Sonya Leite on 0207 371 1674.

Small Group Communion



Sundays 8th December, 12th January
at 12.30pm Down in the Church Library

On the second Sunday of each month we hold a small-group communion, after the main morning service, downstairs in the library. These services are led by different members of the congregation. A team of volunteers take turns in leading the services so we can experience a variety of different approaches. The line-up for the next couple of months is as follows:

8th December – Led by David Francis Darling
12th January – Led by Jane Blackall

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

Unitarian Youth Overnight & Circus Fun Day

Help spread a little joy at a 'Circus Saturday' for low income East London kids aged 4-13!



Friday 17th - Saturday 18th January 2014
SimpleGifts - Garrett Hall, 117 Mansford Street, Bethnal Green, London, E2 6LX

You are warmly invited to 24 hours of fun, hanging out, good eats, sleepover and a professionally led "Circus Afternoon." A great opportunity to make not only new Unitarian friends, but also hang out with youth from London Buddhist and Quaker groups! Together we will help kids in need and develop leadership skills at this SimpleGifts/ Unitarian/ Buddhist/ Quaker Youth social action project.

Arrive from 7pm on Friday, with a meditation session led by Buddhist minister Srivati Skelton from the London Buddhist Centre. Takeaway meal at 9pm. Please bring a sleeping bag and a sleeping mat/mattress. On Saturday morning there will be breakfast followed by a guided tour of East London/ Bethnal Green. On Saturday afternoon there will be a Circus Fun Day with CircArts: stilt walking, clowning, juggling, tumbling, face painting and more! The circus tent comes down and we wave goodbye by 5pm Saturday.

This event is FREE to all who register by sending in the booking form ahead of time (17 year olds and under please complete the Personal Information Form and get it signed. 18 year olds and older you don't need to get this signed but it would be helpful for us to have this information). Take a look at www.circarts.com for more about the Circus workshop.

See the SimpleGifts website: www.simplegiftsucsa.org.uk



108 Sun Salutations for the Philippines

Sunday 12th January (time TBC) at Essex Church

Jaqui Wan will be holding a fundraising event for DEC Philippines on 12th January. The idea is to do 108 sun salutations to show our empathy, sympathy and our solidarity to people of the Philippines who are the victims of typhoon Haiyan. We hope to invite London Yoga teachers to teach a set number of Sun Salutations each, sharing the responsibility of completing 108, an auspicious number in spiritual, healing art, as well as mathematical traditions.

If you are interested in participating please get in touch with Jaqui. This is a personal challenge that can take two and half hours or more. We would encourage a minimum donation of £40 per participant or you can ask for sponsorship for each sun salutation.

To find out more visit: www.jaquiwan.com

Concepts of God



Alex Warleigh-Lack of Richmond and Putney Unitarians came to lead worship at Essex Church on 27th October. As part of that service on he asked us all to reflect on the following questions and write down our responses:

For theists - What forms and ideas of god(dess) are meaningful to you, and why?

For atheists - What takes the place of god in your spiritual life, and why?

Here are just a few responses from the congregation:

'The mysterious essence of life itself.'

*'God is everything. God is nothing.
God is love. God is. God is not.'*

*'God/dess as a primary driving energy force,
within and without all existence.'*

'I have a process-type understanding of God – and I do use the name 'God' most often – but also see God-ness expressed through Buddha, Jesus, and in an unmediated mystical way in everyday life.'

'God is a verb.'

'I have no problems with the phrase "Spirit of Life" or something similar. To my mind religion is very largely symbolic. What unites us is our common humanity.'

"God" is beyond our puny understanding but in my life is an undeniable force. GB Shaw said "God created man in his image and man has returned the favour".'

'Nature. Compassion. The God-within.'

*'God as the creator of the universe.
There is no other way to explain its existence.'*

'Trust in the inexplicable. The magic in words. Comfort.'

'Inexplicable, even shocking moments of beauty, courage, generosity or kindness that seem to transcend any "selfish gene" concept.'

'God is that which allows me to live with serenity amidst seeming chaos, cruelty and confusion, because it contains the larger wholeness and goodness of life.'

The service is up on the website for you to listen again and includes all of the congregation's responses:

www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Life Lesson

Typical of the period

My mother wore a black and grey-striped skirt, green top, and a black basin-hat with a grey goose feather and I held her hand. We were apparently waiting for the solid-rubber wheeled bus with outside stairs which we never climbed together. Then it happened.

The bus came, but before we got on a terrific bang and crash as a saloon car tried to muzzle past it but for no explicable reason rose up like a camel on its front wheels then turned over and over from stem to stern.

Then total silence: as everyone watched and waited

For the occupants to struggle out like beetles from under a stone; pushing open recalcitrant doors. A bystander ran over to help them: I think another helped a woman crawl out, then, so wonderful for me to see, two other people hopping like frogs round and round picking up scattered coins – mostly silver. The woman stooped too, studying the blood streaming down her leg. The bus stopped waiting, and with a heavy cough of its engine, as if to indicate it needed to move on drove haughtily away.

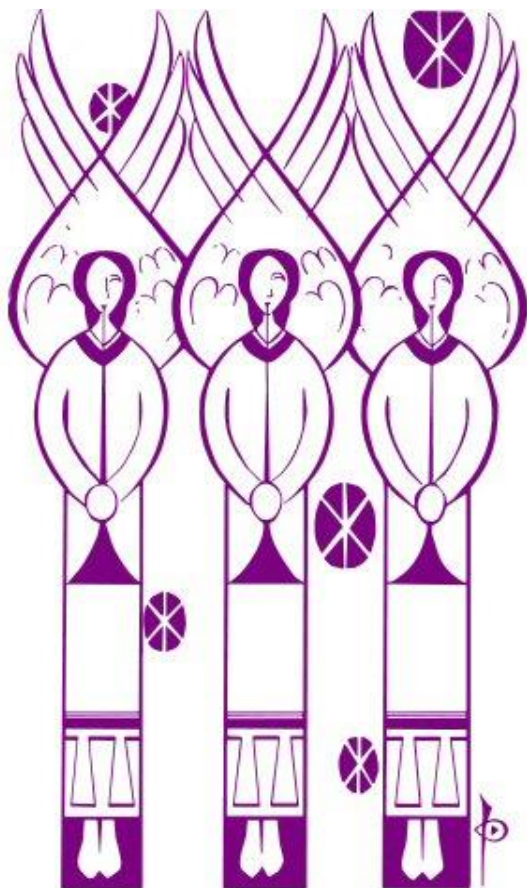
Not yet at

school

it was for me a life-long lesson: always remember cars are a comfort, and cars can maim, even kill. So be ready to sit back, or suddenly take off.

John Hands

Multifaith Calendar



✠ 1st December – Advent Sunday – Christian

The beginning of the ecclesiastical year on the Sunday closest to November 30. Advent is the season before Christmas - In Western Christendom, four Sundays are included. In Eastern Christendom, the season is longer and begins in the middle of November

☸ 8th December – Bodhi Day – Buddhist

On Bodhi day some Buddhists celebrate Gautama's attainment of enlightenment under the Bodhi tree at Bodhgaya, India.

✠ 8th December – Feast of the Immaculate Conception - Catholic Celebrated by Roman Catholics who remember Mary's conception as being without sin, therefore, immaculate.

✠ 12th December – Our Lady of Guadeloupe – Catholic

Celebrated by Roman Catholics throughout Central and South America who honour the Empress of the Americas.

☼ 21st December – Winter Solstice - Yule – Pagan

Yule is the time of the winter solstice, when the sun child is reborn, an image of the return of all new life born through the love of the Gods. Within the Northern Tradition Yule is regarded as the New Year.

✠ 25th December – Christmas Day – Christian

Day when Western Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ.

☪ 5th January - Birthday of Guru Gobind Singh – Sikh

Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708) was the tenth and last of the Sikh Gurus. He instituted the Five Ks and established the Order of the Khalsa.

✠ 6th January – Epiphany – Christian

Celebrates the visit of the wise men (the magi) to the infant Jesus. In the East, where it originated, the Epiphany celebrates the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist in the River Jordan. (Catholics and Episcopalians celebrate this separately: see Baptism of the Lord) Also known as Dia de los Reyes (Three Kings Day).

✠ 6th January – Theophany – Orthodox Christian

Orthodox churches mark the baptism of Jesus on this day.

✠ 7th January – Christmas Day – Orthodox Christian

Most Orthodox churches use the Julian rather than the Gregorian version of the Western calendar. As a result, they celebrate Christmas 13 days later than other Christian churches.

✠ 12th January – Baptism of the Lord – Christian

Commemorates the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan by John the Baptist. Occurs on the first Sunday after Epiphany. Catholics and Episcopalians celebrate this holy day, but Eastern Christianity celebrates the baptism of Jesus at Epiphany.

☪ 13th January – Milad un Nabi

(Birthday of the Prophet Muhammad) – Muslim

Shia Muslims celebrate this 5 days later. Some Muslims do not approve of celebrating the birthday, and regard doing so as a religious innovation.

☸ 14th January – Makar Sankranti – Hindu

Makar Sankranti is one of the most important festivals of the Hindu calendar and celebrates the sun's journey into the northern hemisphere.

☪ 15th January – Seijin Shiki (Adults' Day) – Shinto

Japanese who have reached legal adulthood (20 in Japan) in the previous year attend a shrine to give thanks.

★ 16th January – Tu B'Shevat – Jewish

The Jewish New Year for trees - For religious accounting purposes all trees have their anniversaries on this festival, regardless of when they were planted.

☪ 18th January – Milad un Nabi (Shia) – Muslim

Birthday of the Prophet Muhammad. Sunni Muslims celebrate this 5 days earlier. Some Muslims do not approve of celebrating the birthday, and regard doing so as a religious innovation.

✠ 18th-25th January - Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

First celebrated in 1908. The days of 18-25 January (regardless of the days of the week involved) were originally chosen because they covered the days between the feast of St Peter and the feast of St Paul. Some churches and regions use a different week.

✠ 25th January – St Paul's Day – Christian

Anglicans and Catholics celebrate St Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus.

☪ 31st January – Chinese New Year – Chinese

Chinese New Year 2014 will herald the Year of the Horse.

☪ 31st January – Birthday of Guru Har Rai –Sikh

Guru Har Rai (1630-1661) was the seventh of the Sikh Gurus.

Our Local Foodbank



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

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

Rev. Sarah Tinker

A reminder of the wish-list of items:

- Milk (UHT or powdered)
- Sugar (500g)
- Fruit Juice (carton)
- Soup
- Pasta Sauces
- Sponge Pudding (tinned)
- Tomatoes (tinned)
- Cereals
- Rice Pudding (tinned)
- Tea Bags / Instant Coffee
- Instant Mash Potato
- Rice / Pasta
- Tinned Meat / Fish
- Tinned Fruit
- Jam
- Biscuits or Snack Bars

If you would like to donate any of these items please bring them along to church next time you come. The church committee will need to arrange regular transport of the food we collect so if you might be able to help with this then let Sarah or a committee member know.



The Plane-Tree Leaf's First and Last Flight for Freedom



All summer long I've longed for this moment:
 All summer long I've tugged at my moorings
 My mother is a jailor – Oh! how can this be?
 No more questions – nothing else matters.
 My cord is cut – I'm flying flying!

Whirling

skirling

twisting

turning

yes!

yes!

flying

flying

flying

flying free!

John Hands

Busy Yourselves, Butterfly Leaves...

Busy yourselves butterfly leaves!
 brown, pale green, orange, purple, red:
 whirl round and round, bounce up and down
 whisk like coffee-grinders, spin like tops.
 These are your long-awaited celebratory days;
 to the harsh accompaniment of road-drills
 street vacuum cleaners and children
 leaping to kick at you like coloured balls – hustle! – whirl!
 vortex! pirouette! – flop down. Bustle leaves!
 rejoice when the acrobatic winds
 leap to scoop you up: swing round and round – don't
 dally, enjoy each pixel dot of time before
 blinding authoritarian ice of winter
 strides in to nail your pretty pleasures down.

John Hands

'Fresh Starts'

Sermon by Rev. Sarah Tinker – 8th September 2013

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

(This service was from back in September, but with some references to the new year, so we thought people might enjoy reading it in our December/January newsletter.)

When people ask if I like my job as a minister of a church I usually point out that I'm being paid to sit upstairs in my flat and read books and think deep thoughts – and that's a pretty fortunate sort of a job to have. But not all deep thoughts are comfortable thoughts and one of the tricky subjects that I find myself coming back to again and again is how we humans come to terms with our failures, our having done wrong in life. Christianity offers redemption through the death of Jesus Christ – but whether such a doctrine speaks to us or not as Unitarians – we still, I think, have to live with ourselves and with one another – in an imperfect world where we all continually make mistakes – be those deliberate or not.

That story we heard earlier on of the Magic Peach Seed – tells of a thief who turns his life around, through his own deep thinking. He asked the king and all his courtiers if any of them could honestly say that they had never committed a wrong or made a mistake. Did it remind you of the story of Jesus forgiving the woman caught in adultery and saving her from being stoned to death? Such a simple but powerful command: 'Let he who is without sin cast the first stone'. We'll never know what happened to the woman after that. But Jesus' intervention saved her life that day, gave her another chance, the possibility of a fresh start.

And fresh starts are being offered to young people and students of all ages all around the country this autumn as new school and college years begin. Stepping into a local stationery shop nearly induced a shopping frenzy in me the other day – the sight of all those stationery items designed to bring order to our lives – new pencil cases, new pens, new files and folders – all displayed in honour of the new college and school year. For me these items represent hope – the hope that I will learn how to file things in a way from which they can be easily retrieved, hope that buying a new set of folders will bring order to the chaos of paper work which threatens to engulf my desk. There's a different message for all of us I suspect. I liked school when I was young and so September still holds a positive feeling for me even today. A friend who hated school described how the trip to buy a new satchel, pencil case or new item of school uniform filled him with dread at the end of each summer holiday and how September has left him feeling anxious ever since. I wonder what meaning a new year has for you. Do you remember a particular favourite pencil case or pen, do you remember, with joy or fear perhaps, opening up a new exercise book with all its pages as yet unwritten on?

One of the deep thoughts that I return to periodically is such a simple one – and it's that life isn't easy. It's really quite demanding being alive. No wonder then that we humans look for ways to bring order to the chaos so that we have some sense of where we stand. We create times in which we can stop and reflect, look back at where we have been and forward to where we want to be going. In our culture we have our new year celebrations on January 1st, the Chinese celebrate their new year on the full moon that falls at the end of January or early February. The Jewish



New Year festival of Rosh Hashanah festival occurs in the early autumn. This festival celebrates the creation of the world and marks a time of judgement by God. That is why Jews make their new year a time for remembering the hurt that they may have caused family and friends, or their community. They remember and they do their best to make amends, to heal fractured relationships, to restore and re-create. Rabbi Steven Katz writes this about the Jewish New Year: "at Rosh Hashanah we are encouraged, urged, mandated to play back the video of our year's contact with family, friends and community and to express our honest regret, sincere contrition for the times we failed to reach our own expectations of moral conduct and those of our tradition". For Jews this is a time of reflection and repentance in which all relationships are to be considered, including the relationship with one's self and with one's world. Rosh Hashanah represents a wake-up call, a time to disrupt the ruts that we may have slipped into, a time to reflect honestly and start anew. That's why traditionally the rabbi sounds the ram's horn or shofar to awaken people from the slumbering ways that they may have slipped into during the year that has passed. Rosh Hashanah marks the start of a ten day period of atonement in which Jews seek to make amends for any wrongs they have done in the last year. This 10 day period is known as The Days of Awe – a name that suggests the seriousness with which it is regarded and it ends at Yom Kippur – the most sacred day of the Jewish year.

In the life of our world community, it would probably be very healthy if we could create a new year and a new page, wipe the slate clean, come to the world's issues refreshed once more, with new eyes and ears and ideas. But the world, as they say, is always with us – all we can do is to keep rededicating ourselves to the tasks of making things better as best we can. That's why it helps to be guided by inspirational people, people who are seemingly able to rise above the messy complexities of life and remind us of the hope and possibility that come through commitment and determination. Back in the eighties I met the South African archbishop Desmond Tutu when he was touring Europe to gain support for the campaign to end apartheid in his country. What a warm and loving man he is, able on a grey November day in Sheffield, in a small and dingy community hall, to bring the campaign against apartheid to life for us. He convinced us that it was worth boycotting South African fruit and vegetables, worth writing letters to our MPs, worth demanding that the world community take action against a regime based on a frightening belief that some people deserve to be treated differently from other people. And Archbishop Tutu has never stopped campaigning for one cause or another. He spoke recently, as did the pope, Pope Francis, against a military intervention in Syria. Tutu said that the crisis in Syria can only be resolved by 'Human intervention not military intervention' and that 'we need to talk to avoid further bloodshed not to fight'.

'Fresh Starts' *(continued)*

In the face of such major global crises it's easy to feel despair – to give up almost. I think the challenge for us is to hold the possibility of a fresh start always in our hearts and minds. We may have little influence over world events but we have a great deal of influence over our own lives. Each of us has this potential to view each moment as a new beginning – Arnold Bennett writes that

'The chief beauty about time
is that you cannot waste it in advance.

The next year, the next day, the next hour are lying ready for you,
as perfect, as unspoiled,
as if you had never wasted or misapplied
a single moment in all your life.

You can turn over a new leaf every hour
if you choose.' – Arnold Bennett

If we can hold this possibility for ourselves, then we hold the possibility for the whole of humanity and indeed for our entire world. May each moment be a fresh start for us all and may our world experience a Happy New Year.

Rev. Sarah Tinker



Conflict Resilience Tools for Religious Communities

Monday 9th December, 12.45pm for 1pm – 5pm
St Ethelburga's, 78 Bishopsgate, London EC2N 4AG

A practical workshop exploring tools and resources that can be used to tackle difficult issues in a faith community setting.

Could your faith community improve the way it responds to conflict? Does your community need to be more adept at tackling difficult issues? Are you interested in bringing the principles and practices of your faith into your responses to conflict?

This workshop will: Explore the faith principles and practices from individual faiths that can be brought to bear on issues of conflict within religious communities. Provide a working definition of Conflict Resilience that can be applied to a faith setting and give time for a discussion of this in small groups. Share a number of tools that can be used by faith communities in tackling difficult issues.

Phone: 07973 446846 / Email: angharad.thain@stethelburgas.org
Event Fee: £ 10.00 / £ 7.00 (concession)

A day workshop with the Art and Spirituality Network

Exploring Conflict Through Art

led by Linda Murgatroyd, with Elaine Giles

Saturday 18th January, 10.00am – 4.30pm
at Wandsworth Quaker Meeting House
59 Wandsworth High Street, London, SW18 2PT

A day exploring aspects of conflict using simple playful experiments with paint, paper and other materials. You may gain new insights into how conflicts can arise and our emotional responses. We will also experiment with a method of bringing our deepest values to bear in addressing a conflict.

We will work alone and with others, mostly in silence, with some opportunities for sharing. No particular arts experience is needed and all materials are provided. All are welcome, from any spiritual tradition or from none.

Cost: £ 25 - reductions available if needed.
Advance booking is essential.

Please bring some simple vegetarian food to share for lunch. Drinks provided. Please wear clothes you are comfortable to paint in. Further enquiries: telephone 0794 908 9031 or email artandspirituality@gmail.com

Website for more info: www.artandspirituality.net

'When we say "yes" or "no" without taking the time for deep listening, reflection, and discernment, we fail to heed our own deepest needs and longings. We can miss out on the very opportunities for which we are best suited. We're not talking about things like whether you want cream and sugar in your coffee. We're talking about what will make your spirit come to life.'



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

Rev. Sandra Fees

Sunday Services at Essex Church



1st December, 11am – 'Advent Expectations'

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

On this first Sunday in Advent, join us to sing some favourite Advent carols and to consider Advent's themes of waiting, preparation and expectation. With a candlelit meditation in support of World AIDS Day.

8th December, 11am – 'My Precious, Spotless Pearl'

Service led by Caroline Blair

This enigmatically beautiful fourteenth century poem shows us a different way to look at those we love.

15th December, 11am – 'Christmas Carol Service'

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Come and enjoy a good sing at our traditional Carol Service. Why not invite a friend along? This service will be followed by a congregational Christmas lunch – all are welcome – please bring along some food or drink to share with others if you can.

22nd December, 11am – 'Joyful is the Dark'

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Celebrating the winter solstice and finding joy and inspiration in this time of short days and long nights.

Tuesday 24th December, 5pm – 'Candlelit Christmas Eve'

Service led by Jane Blackall

Join us for this peaceful and meditative candlelit service of readings and carols on Christmas Eve which has become our tradition. You are welcome to stay afterwards for a mince pie.

29th December, 11am – 'Quiet Times'

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

A service in praise of life's quiet times, encouraging us to stop for a while. "Don't just do something, sit there!" writes Richard Gilbert.

5th January, 11am – 'What Calls You?'

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

As we enter the New Year we will ask what is calling to us in the year ahead; new ways of being perhaps, issues to resolve or fresh vistas to move towards. We will also hold a simple ritual to let go of the year that has passed.

12th January, 11am – 'A Path of Self-Compassion'

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

We are often harder on ourselves than we are on others. We act as both judge and jury and put ourselves on trial. Let's start the year with greater kindness and decide to take a compassionate path.

19th January, 11am – 'Comfort and Cheer'

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

At this potentially gloomy time of year let's gather together for a cheering survey of our many sources of comfort and delight.

26th January, 11am – 'The Art of Forgetting'

Service led by Jane Blackall

Spiritual traditions often place great emphasis on the value of remembering. Could it also be important that we are able to forget? In this service we will consider the art of forgetting.

'Enlightenment, or liberation, is not realized in a matter of days, weeks, or months. We must be willing to commit to an entire lifetime of yogic practice. There must be a basic impulse to grow, regardless of whether or not we will achieve liberation in this lifetime. It is one of Yoga's fundamental tenets that no effort is ever wasted; even the slightest attempt at transforming ourselves makes a difference. It is our patient cumulative effort that flowers into enlightenment sooner or later.'

Georg Feuerstein

Next Newsletter Deadline

The deadline for the February issue of the newsletter is Sunday 12th January. Please send your contributions to our editor, Jane Blackall, jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk.

We would be particularly interested if any newcomers to the congregation would write a 'How I Came to Essex Church' article to introduce themselves. If you have any other ideas for items we might run in future please do get in touch.