



Kensington Unitarians

Newsletter: April 2015

What's On...

Thursday 2nd April, 7-8.30pm

Tenebrae Service

Led by Sarah and Tristan

Sunday 5th April, 11am-noon

'Rolling Away the Stone'

Easter Service led by Sarah Tinker

Sunday 5th April, 12.30pm

Congregational Lunch

Tuesday 7th April, 12.30-1.30pm

Nia Technique with Sonya Leite

Thursday 9th April, 7-8pm

'Heart and Soul' Spiritual Gathering

'Being Known' led by Jane Blackall

Sunday 12th April, 11am-noon

'Singing Our Faith'

Led by Members of the Congregation.

Sunday 12th April, 12.30pm

Small-Group Communion

Led by Tristan Jovanović

Sunday 12th April, 2-3pm

Nia Technique with Sonya Leite

Tuesday 14th April, 12.30-1.30pm

Nia Technique with Sonya Leite

Thursday 16th April, 7-9.00pm

Creativity Group: Bring Your Own

Sunday 19th April, 11am-noon

'Our Wider Faith'

Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Tuesday 21st April, 12.30-1.30pm

Nia Technique with Sonya Leite

Tuesday 21st April, 7-8pm

Singing Meditation with Sarah

Thursday 23rd April, 7-9pm

Women's Group

Led by Jeannene, Liz and Carole

Sunday 26th April, 11am-noon

'For All Our Relations'

Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 26th April, 12.30-1.15pm

'Finding Your Voice'

Singing Workshop with Margaret

Tuesday 28th April, 12.30-1.30pm

Nia Technique with Sonya Leite

Wednesday 30th April, 7-9pm

Management Committee Meeting

A Date for Your Diary:

Sunday 21st June 2015

Membership Service & AGM

Safety and Challenge: A Message from our Minister

We rightly talk about creating a safe space here at Essex Church. We have a legal 'duty of care' to all who walk through our doors and we do our best to keep up to date with the latest Health & Safety and safeguarding requirements. Within our church activities we encourage one another to be respectful of other's views and beliefs, to try always to see a situation from another's point of view. Our Unitarian emphasis on embracing diversity means that we offer a welcome to people of all genders, all sexual orientations, all colours and races, all ages, all beliefs that are in keeping with our liberal religious ethos. But there are limits to the safety we can provide, limits caused by the nature of life itself.



If you are in any community and stick around long enough I can just about guarantee that at some time or another each of us will be annoyed, offended, irritated, even enraged. Our toes will probably be stepped on both figuratively and literally. We will hear things we don't like, we will be misunderstood, we will feel hurt. Welcome to life. Welcome to Kensington Unitarians. Let's notice our tendency to back away when things become uncomfortable, to disengage, to complain, or harbour grudges perhaps. We all have our ways of dealing with the challenges of living alongside other people. Life is not always comfortable and we cannot claim any space or group as 100% safe, not least because we can never fully know one another's sensitivities.

Real life is not all sweetness and light. All life experiences are in some way balanced by their opposites. This month we mark the Christian festival of Easter. It commemorates the tough story of Jesus' path towards death, a real life story with classically tragic elements of betrayal, mockery, deliberate cruelty, loss and despair. It reminds us that some life experiences cannot be avoided. But sometimes, out of the challenge they bring, something new may emerge.



So let's not try and avoid challenge. Let's not attempt to sanitise everything in human relations. Let's be real and trust our abilities to cope. Let's trust mutual respect, clear communication and an orientation towards something more important than ourselves to keep us truly safe, together.

Rev. Sarah Tinker

In this month's newsletter...

* 'Words for Worship': Join in with our new Writing Project * Essex Church Activists' Group * True Heart Theatre's 'Our Living Stories' by Veronica Needa * A Message from David Darling * 'Some Issues of Ageing' – Workshop Reflections * 'Can We Enjoy Getting Old?' by John Hands * 'The Blue Dress' – Reflection by Jennifer Blair * 'Exhibition: Scarcity Waste' by Roy Clark * LDPA Report by Annette Percy * 'What We Need' sermon by 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.



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Web: www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk

'Heart and Soul'

Midweek Spiritual Gatherings

Thursday 9th April (note irregular date),
7th May, 4th June, 2nd July from 7-8pm

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



Come and join us for our monthly alternative spiritual gathering, with music and silence, words and prayers, and a chance to explore the evening's topic in relation to your own life. This will be followed by refreshments and fellowship.

Our April gathering will be led by Jane Blackall on the theme of 'Being Known'. If you would like to know more about these gatherings contact jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk.

Singing Meditation

Tuesdays 21st April and 19th May at Essex Church
7 to 8pm with time for refreshments afterwards



An opportunity to join together in singing simple chants from the world's spiritual traditions, interspersed with candlelit silence. Easy to learn chants bring a deep connectedness and a great sense of well-being. These sessions will be led by Sarah Tinker.

"A song is a thing of joy; more profoundly, it is a thing of love."

St. Augustine

Tenebrae

Thursday 2nd April, 7pm

Led by Tristan Jovanović and Sarah Tinker



This small group worship focuses on the themes of Holy Week and the events leading to Jesus' death on the cross. Tenebrae means shadows or darkness in Latin.

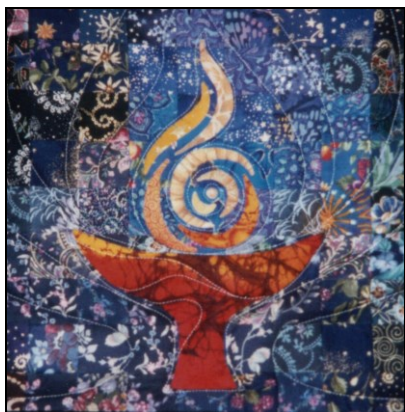
We will meet in candle light and hear a series of readings taken mainly from the Gospels. Readings will be interspersed with music and the candles are extinguished one by one until we are left in darkness and slowly and silently leave the room.

The themes of Easter-time – betrayal, confusion, anguish, despair, humiliation, death – are often avoided or hidden in our modern society. Yet there is strength to be found in sitting with the unpalatable, as witnesses to that which is.

This Tenebrae gathering will be followed by a simple Middle Eastern meal here at the church, £4.00 per person, please let Sarah know if you would like to eat together.

Words for Worship

Join in with our new Writing Project!



I would like to invite readers of this newsletter to join in with a new writing project and help us create 'Words for Worship'.

Every other month I will put a little something in the newsletter about a certain element of our regular Sunday service (such as the opening words, closing blessing, prayer, meditation, etc.) and ask you to try and write something along those lines.

The hope is that we would publish them in the next newsletter and perhaps ultimately collect them online or in a little pamphlet as a resource for worship leaders in our own congregation and the rest of the denomination. We often make use of resources from the Unitarian Universalist 'Worship Web' from the USA but there is not, to the best of my knowledge, such a substantial collection of work by UK Unitarians in existence... wouldn't it be nice to do our bit to get something started over here?

I'm going to suggest that we start with **Chalice Lighting**. This is the only regular element of our service that is specifically Unitarian and it symbolically connects us with other Unitarian and Unitarian Universalist communities around the world. UU minister Erik Walker Wikstrom writes: '*Some congregations use the chalice lighting as a time for testimonials about the meaning of the congregation in the lives of its members. Others reflect on the image of the chalice and the flame — the beacon of hope, the light of truth, the warmth of love, the container of community, and more. Why are you lighting your chalice?*'

I invite you – whoever you are, reading this newsletter, including members of other congregations – to send in chalice lightings which reflect your understanding of our Unitarian community and the values you would like to invoke for our Sunday gatherings. Tristan has offered a lovely chalice lighting (*below*) to get us started. Feel free to get in touch if you would like more guidance.

Jane Blackall

*We light this chalice to rekindle the fire of faith.
It is a sign of love,
and a beacon of hope.
We light it as a reminder that we are never alone
and we stand with the oppressed,
reach out to the abandoned,
and give refuge to the distressed.
We light this chalice to rekindle the fire of our lives.*

Tristan Jovanović

Good Cause Collection of the Month

Simple Gifts

Unitarian Centre for Social Action



Collection on Sunday 26th April

Simple Gifts: Living Unitarian values through social change and community empowerment. Simple Gifts runs community programming from premises in Bethnal Green, East London. Their programmes - including an After School Club, New Neighbours / Old Neighbours Lunches, and ESOL classes - are all run by a team of dedicated volunteers. For more information see the website: www.simplegiftsucsa.org.uk

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:

February – Down's Syndrome Association - £138.03

Emergency Collection for Cyclone - £205.16

March – Home Farm Trust - £163.57

Congregational Lunch

After the service on Easter Sunday (5th April)



We will be having another bring-and-share lunch after the service on Easter Sunday (5th April). You might like to invite a friend!

Please look out for the sign-up sheet circulating on Sundays in late March and let us know what food or drink you are offering to contribute for the occasion. We would also be very glad to hear from anyone who is willing to offer practical assistance (such as setting out and clearing up on the day).



Getting More Involved at Essex Church – Dates for Your Diary:

Activists' Group & One-Day Congregational Workshop

Tuesdays 16th June, 21st July, 18th August, 7-9pm
& Saturday 12th September from 10.30am-4.30pm

Throughout 2015 we are making an effort to help people get more actively involved in congregational life here at Essex Church. The life of our congregation depends on us all participating and contributing to the life of this community, and our denomination, in whatever ways we feel able to (and perhaps stretching ourselves a little bit and doing new things we didn't know we could!)

'Activists' Group': This summer we are going to experiment with setting up an 'Activists Group' for anyone who is already actively engaged in the life of this community or anyone who wants to be more involved than they are already. This will be a fairly relaxed monthly get-together on a Tuesday evening, open to all, where we can discuss congregational projects and things that we need help with. People will be able to share ideas, offer their services, highlight any training needs, make practical plans of action, and find mutual support. There will also be a simple bring-and-share meal at these evenings to make it more enjoyable for everyone who comes along.

One-Day Workshop: We would like to encourage anyone in the congregation who can make it to set aside a day this autumn – Saturday 12th September to be precise – to come and spend the day together, for a mixture of worshipful moments, exploratory conversations about what we each might like to do for the good of our community, some practical training, and a shared meal.

I would encourage you all to put these dates in your diary now and make a personal commitment to be there and get stuck in! ☺

Jane Blackall



True Heart Theatre's 'Our Living Stories'

It was the first week of the new Chinese Year of the Sheep and our event coincided with the celebrations in London's Trafalgar Square & Chinatown. So True Heart brought our own kind of good cheer and warmth to Essex Church. This afternoon, for a change, we performed in the cosy Hall rather than the large Church space. The red curtains made a perfect backdrop for us, being a particularly auspicious colour in the Chinese culture.

Our guests learnt a Chinese New Year greeting song... and a dance to go with it. And tea-time included yummy oriental offerings. When it was time for us to perform for our audience, we had 'safe' stories of curtain rails and views from the window, and also stories of leaving 'safe' money-making work for doing work that the heart is called to do. A not-so-safe option. And then our final story of a divorce mediation that could mean losing a home. A very unsafe and impending likelihood. It was an afternoon of acknowledging the sweet ordinary things in our lives, as well as experiences that take us right to the edge. An opportunity for all of us to hold each other in the spirit of community as we share our living stories.

Our last teller messaged me the next day with a quote from Susan Sontag - "The only story that seems worth writing is a cry, a shot, a scream. A story should break the reader's heart." Our friend wrote: 'I am so grateful to you and the Playback group for playing back to me my story on Sunday. It was so faithfully and skillfully done and it was very healing for me to tell and for it to be witnessed. There is an element of truth in what Susan says although for me not everything. My gratitude to you all. Thank you.'

We are back on Sunday 21st June 3-5.30pm. It will be mid-summer and I wonder what stories will emerge from our gathering on that day. Come... listen or tell - as you feel moved. Playback Theatre holds a space for all our stories - of joy as well as of concern - and a place for us to experience our sense of community in a surprising and creative way.

Veronica Needa



'A Circle of Seekers'

Sharing our Insights, Challenges and Wisdom

Collected Theme Talks from Hucklow Summer School 2011-2014

In 2015 we will celebrate the twentieth anniversary of Hucklow Summer School. Each August since 1995, a group of Unitarians has gathered at the Nightingale Centre in the Peak District, for an intense week of religious education and spiritual reflection. The Summer School organising panel chooses a different theme every year, to be explored in depth through daily talks and intimate week-long engagement groups. Many of those who participate speak of summer school as a life-changing experience.

Each year a team of Unitarian thinkers are invited to offer an hour-long talk connected with the over-arching theme of the week. This extended format allows our speakers to delve deeper into their topic than they might typically be able to in a sermon or journal article. This volume collects theme talks from the last four summer schools (2011-2014), on 'Walking the Talk', 'Sacred Living', 'Living at the Edge' and 'The Authentic Self'. We are delighted to be able to share some of the treasures of Hucklow Summer School with a wider audience... and we hope that readers of this collection will be encouraged to come along and get a first-hand experience of what all the fuss is about!

The book can be purchased for £10 from Jane Blackall with all profits going to the Hucklow Summer School Bursary Fund. If you are unable to get to Essex Church in person copies can be purchased via mail order for £10 + £2.50 P&P (cheques payable to Essex Church) from Jane Blackall, c/o Essex Unitarian Church, 112 Palace Gardens Terrace, London W8 4RT.

Jane Blackall

Edited by Jane Blackall and featuring the following contributors:

2011: 'Walking the Talk: Living a Life of Greater Integrity'

Linda Hart, Gillian Peel, Jef Jones, Sarah Tinker, Jim Corrigan.

2012: 'Sacred Living: Encountering the Holy in the Everyday'

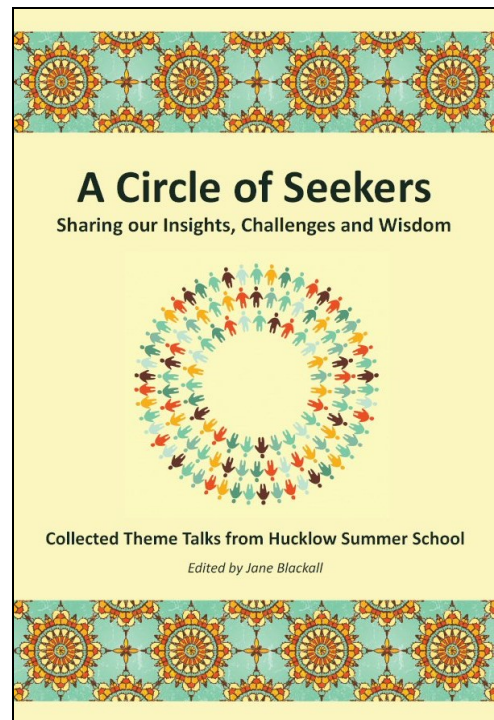
Margaret Kirk, Bill Darlison, Sue Woolley, Danny Crosby, Kate McKenna

2013: 'Living at the Edge: Finding Meaning in the Margins'

Rob Gregson, John Naish, Kate Dean, Jim Corrigan, Winnie Gordon

2014: 'The Authentic Self: Discovering the Real You'

Jane Blackall, Maria Curtis, Michael Dadson, Ralph Catts, Celia Cartwright



'Many of us religious liberals have not given sufficient thought to what we believe. We recite no dogmatic creed. We have no finished faith, once revealed and now neatly packaged and sealed.

Are we in danger of going to the opposite extreme – of being hopelessly vague about what we believe?

Perhaps we should realise that our need is not to "find something to believe" – but rather to discover what our lives indicate that we believe right now. This is the place to start.

What did we enjoy most in the day just past? How did we spend our time? How do we wish we might have spent it? How do we feel about ourselves at the end of the day? Do we like the kind of person we are? What do we worry about? What are we afraid of? What do we hope for? Whose lives did our lives touch during the day? Was it for better or worse? How do we feel about our parents, spouse, children, neighbours, the school, the town? Are we aware of the natural universe? Do the arts influence us and feed our spirits?

To bring our attitudes, our convictions, our practices, out into the open and to look at them systematically is to find out what we actually believe.'

Edith Hunter, Unitarian Religious Educator



Daffodils
from the darkness
and quick of winter
from the black soil of your roots
from the singeing frost of the air
your modest
awesome beauty
Shines

John Hands

A Message from David



Dear Friends

As you will have read in last month's newsletter I have moved on after 11 years at Essex Church. I have talked to some people but thought that I would write something about my move for those that I haven't had the chance to speak to. (I also realise that there are many new members who may have never met me!)

As many of you know I was ordained as an Anglican priest almost twenty years ago but went through a time of doubt and questioning and found a welcoming community here where I had the freedom, love and support to explore some of these questions, and for that I will always be grateful.

However, over the last couple of years I have felt drawn back to my more orthodox Christian roots and explored the possibility of resuming my ministry as a priest. This has also coincided with retiring as an HIV specialist nurse and looking at new forms of work and ministry. I therefore wrote to my local Bishop about the possibility of returning to active ministry and he has welcomed me back.

After a couple of months holiday when I will also move house I will be helping out in local C of E parishes providing cover for holidays and sickness and also exploring new opportunities for more informal ministry.

I am immensely grateful for the last 11 years as a member of Kensington Unitarians and for my involvement in the wider Unitarian community and pray that I will continue to demonstrate the qualities of openness, inclusivity and questioning in my new ministry.

I will, of course, continue to be connected to Essex Church through my parents Margaret and Joe who continue to be members here and I also hope to visit occasionally. So this is more an au revoir than a goodbye.

Sending you all sincere thanks and good wishes,

David Francis Darling

Can We Enjoy Getting Old?



The recent workshop we held at the church on the experience of ageing seemed like an opportunity which for me at (nearly) eighty-five I really shouldn't miss. I feel I have been discovering a good many things about getting old on my own account, but I felt sure there might well be some unique factors or aspects of it all which I could learn from other people's experience.

One of the aspects of the ageing process which soon became apparent was how many of us more or less quietly and sadly resent it! Becoming older seems like some dire unavoidable fate which we have somehow to learn to courageously live through. Some of us seemed to see it as primarily a state of loss, like a bereavement. A slowing down, and eventually a loss of the attributes which our more youthful selves had so enjoyed acquiring.

Well, I can't say I share this view. In youth and early middle age most of us want to do things and get things done – Quickly! We are impatient with processes, products, routines, tests which don't show satisfactory results in what we call a reasonable period of time. For most of us our workday occupations depend upon this. Our emphasis is upon REASON, rather than contemplation and reflection; and the pressure to get work done – whether in our occupations or alterations around house and garden is unremitting. So it's no surprise that so often all of this pressure is at the expense of our health. *IT'S GOT TO BE DONE!* we exclaim. This is a key mantra which most employers, team-leaders, managers, supervisors bow down to. Our technological and scientific societies require it – but perhaps our lengthening lives afford us an escape into the slower pace of age: to really consider the virtues of relaxation and meditation which we have hitherto ignored or neglected.

In my work as a dramatherapist one of my favourite themes was that of urging my clients to take up one of the arts or crafts – painting, model-making, ceramics, making rugs or tapestry, woodwork, cooking, writing poetry or short-stories for example. I used to preach that all of us have some creative capacity which we need to develop for the sake of our health. As we become absorbed in improving our style and facility in our chosen art or craft, we are no longer so preoccupied with our moods and illnesses. In fact it may be that our neglect of our creative capacities has actually led to our unwellness.

All of these activities I have referred to call for quiet (relatively) slow, somewhat detached contemplation. Now we are retired we have the time to observe and consider, take account of our breathing and how we move; and these are psycho-spiritual activities. Regular meditation, yoga, tai chi, vipassana (there are many others of course) all require us to slow down, observe and consider what we are doing and the way we are going, encourage us to grow more spiritually. I will add – to become more whole, more religious beings.

To conclude. Letting go of some of our youthful vigour and activities can be seen as an opportunity to grow more inwardly: to become more complete as persons: to see more clearly the way ahead.

John Hands

'Some Issues of Ageing' – Reflections from Our Recent Workshop

Spending an afternoon contemplating the issues of aging is not everyone's idea of fun. I tend to focus on the positives of my advancing years so it was useful to sit back and explore some of the deeper aspects.

What came to me was loss. Whilst becoming older has some advantages it is also full of loss. Loss of one's identity as an attractive female as the skin wrinkles and bits sag, loss of energy, loss of clarity about the direction forward in life now the children are grown and full time work is no longer necessary as a pension covers basic needs and, for many, loss of physical health.

For my mother at nearly 90 it is an almost daily loss of friends and acquaintances as they succumb to dementia, illness and death.

It was good to be re-acquainted with an old favourite of mine, Ram Dass, amongst the readings and quotations we reflected on. He suggests that we need not either deny or milk this experience of loss as we grow older but give ourselves space and time to accept loss as inevitable and to grieve all that is passing. But then we can move on, realizing that who we truly are does not change. That's the spiritual path I shall be exploring a bit more after this workshop.

CF

It was good to share our feelings about modern society's emphasis on youth. Some of us feel a compulsion to hide our age rather than celebrating it as something to be proud about. I also appreciated people being honest about their fears of being left behind with regards to technology. It isn't comfortable not fully understanding how things work – my phone, computer, even TV – they are all a bit beyond me. But it was clear from this afternoon that I'm not the only one feeling left behind. People encouraged me to ask for help – an old pattern of mine to try and go it alone. Maybe there are people in this church who can explain how my phone works!

And we found things to laugh about too. That is a comfort, to realise that we share this process of ageing. Isolation is another part of growing older I find difficult at times so it was comforting to share our issues in this group.

RH

I came away from this session counting my lucky stars. Life has been good to me overall and I'm enjoying my later years a lot more than my parents did, for example. Being economically safe is a great blessing and one I try not to take for granted. And as for my Freedom Pass! If any politicians are reading this – you can take the winter fuel payments, the TV licence, even those new pensioners bonds – but we beg you – let us keep the Freedom Pass. It encourages us to get out and about and makes such a difference to my way of life. It really does give me freedom to explore London which has so much to offer to people of all ages.

BG

We, a diverse group of Over 50's, gathered in the Church library that afternoon. Organised by Rev. Sarah Tinker, this workshop had been advertised as "an opportunity to explore in gentle conversation some of the issues we face as we grow older..."

In her introduction Sarah stated that we would not attempt to "fix" each other's issues - refreshing! Confidentiality being our common understanding, candid answers and comments, to the heart-searching exercises, revealed feelings and emotions ranging from experiencing freedom (in my case, no longer having dependents), to apprehensions and worries about becoming a burden to others - a recurring theme in our shared humanity... I was not surprised by the fact that, notwithstanding our varied trajectories and lifestyles, as well as a couple of decades' age difference between some of us, feeling isolated/not needed/alone, formed an integral part of, let's face it, one's modified identity!

A quote from C.G. Jung: *'amongst all my patients in the second half of life ... There has not been one whose problem in the last resort was not that of finding a religious outlook on life.'*

If, like me, you would like to pursue this far-from-strictly intellectual conversation, do contact me via this Church. Together let's attempt to gently modify our public younger world, some members of which don't realise that attitudes ranging from patronising platitudes, generalised judgements, contempt, bestowed at times upon we, the older crowd, does boomerang! More importantly, in a spirit of co-operation and camaraderie, let's gently explore how we can improve our personal world.

Melody



Men's Group

Conversations are still underway about setting up a men's group here at Essex Church. It would be really helpful if anybody who is interested can contact Jim Blair ASAP so he can judge whether there is sufficient interest for the group to be viable. Please email: jim_blair_rhino@hotmail.com

More Scam Warnings

Watch out for a card posted through the door from a company called PDS – Parcel Delivery Service telling you to beware. When you ring the number it will instantly charge you over £300, which will appear on your next phone bill. And there is no parcel, nor a real delivery company. It's a scam. Watch out if in doubt and think before you ring any phone numbers starting with 09.

And if someone rings you and says they are from Microsoft and that they have received reports that your computer is running slowly, don't believe a word of it. They can easily take charge of your computer from afar and demand lots of money from you for nothing. If in doubt say you need time to think about it and ask a friend what they think.

Loop De Loop



I am a user of an NHS hearing aid and have been for several years so I do know that the loop system in public buildings is far from being consistently effective and user friendly. Our system in Essex

Church is no different and I can find it very frustrating at times. Stephanie Saville and I are frequently swapping comments as to how good or bad the reception was on that particular day.

I have just discovered a place in the room where the loop facility is "firing on all cylinders" and reception is fabulous. Sit yourself down in the area which is at the back of the room on the right hand side, as you walk in the door, where about 2-3 chairs are placed close to the wall and if your hearing aid is anything like mine you should get an excellent reception.

What is amusing, if I'm doing coffee, the reception is excellent in the kitchen as well while I'm getting the tea and coffee set up!!

Happy listening.

Sue Smith

Warden's Column

2015 has already brought many changes in the garden - and not just caused by Spring. Our regular church gardener Mark relocated to Scotland at the end of last year, so we employed a local garden centre Rassells to give us a spring clean which amongst other things has included

- wiring the Wisteria at the front of the church & clearing other climbers to give it space to grow
- poisoning various saplings & tree stumps, notably those growing out of the leading on the back garden wall
- tidying up the fire escape route to the right of the building & laying weed suppressant matting
- rationalising the smaller tubs in the back garden and transferring useful plants into troughs or beds
- removing ivy from the front of the church & trimming it elsewhere: apparently this is known in the trade as a "haircut"
- and last but by no means least, cutting back all the undergrowth in the wild patch beyond the church back garden

We've also had all the paving around the church pressure washed - which took 3 days of intense work: making Sarah wonder if some parts have ever been cleaned since the church was built. The next step is carefully weeding out the rampant wild garlic from the terraced beds to the left of the church - quite a challenge as it's so mixed in with crocuses, daffodils etc. that we'd like to keep. We're so lucky to have this precious green space in the midst of central London and the garden gives so much pleasure to everyone who uses the church - that it's felt very satisfying to invest in it a little.

A generous donation inspired us to get some of this more major work done in the garden. Do let me or Sarah know if you would like to sponsor a plant or some further work, perhaps to give thanks or to remember someone.

Jenny Moy

'Finding Our Voice' Singing Workshops with Margaret Marshall



**Sundays 26th April, 24th May and 28th June
after the service from 12.30 to 1.15pm**

Margaret Marshall has worked as a professional singer all her adult life and is also a very experienced singing teacher. 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.

A possible date for your diary:

'The Art of Saying No' Saturday 18th April at Essex Church



A half day workshop about the Art of saying, "No", is being planned, here at Essex Church for 18th April. If you may be interested, please speak with Jeannene or email at: jeannene@innerworldouterlife.com for more information.

Small Group Communion



**12th April, 10th May, 14th June
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:

12th April – Led by Tristan Jovanović

10th May – Led by Elisa Melgosa & Mike Eichler

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



A Fitness Fusion of 9 Movement Forms

**Second Sunday of the Month from 2-3pm:
8th March, 12th April, 10th May**

Midweek classes on TUESDAYS - 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 (£7 to concessions / church members).

Contact: Sonya Leite on 0207 371 1674.

Creativity Group: Bring Your Own Crafts

**Thursdays 16th April (note irregular date),
14th May and 11th June from 7-9pm**



Our creativity group meets once a month and is open to all. You are welcome to bring along whatever art or craft project you're working on and do your own thing whilst enjoying the good company of the group. Participants are often happy to share their skills and recently we have been helping each other learn to knit, to make lino prints, and to do crewel embroidery.

One of the particularly enjoyable features of this group is the space it offers for fellowship and conversation while we are each working on our individual projects alongside one another. Alternatively we have some basic art materials available if you would just like to play with pens, pencils, and paints during the evening. If you know anyone who might enjoy coming along to these sociable evenings then please do help us spread the word.

During early 2015 we are inviting group members to make some new textile panels to add to our ever-changing seasonal wall-hanging which is displayed at the front of the church. Panels should be 150cm long and have a loop at the top to go over the pole they hang from. Contact Jane if you need more details: jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk.

Jane Blackall



Exhibition: 'Scarcity Waste' At Somerset House until 10th April 2015

Sometimes in art just as in life you expect one thing and get quite another. In truth I visited this exhibition under the illusion that it was an art photography exhibition focusing on the interaction between the natural and the built environment, a topic I tackle in my own artistic practise. In fact it was a very different thing, an exhibition of the winning entries for an environmental photojournalism competition, the Syngenta Photography Award.



Our demands on nature are ever increasing, in fact they have doubled in the last 50 years. We are rapidly eating into our natural capital, making it more difficult to sustain the needs of the future. With this as the backdrop, entrants for this photographic competition were asked to interpret the issues raised by the tensions between scarcity and waste on our planet's fragile and stretched eco-systems.

The environmental impact we have on our planet is no longer a local issue of course... it's global. The effect of a growing human population will multiply the pressure we place on natural resources. This aspect was addressed by several of the photographers on display but I was particularly struck by Carlos Cazalis' aerial view of an intensely packed neighbourhood of Mexico City. Seen from above *Iztapalapa* Stretches like the world's biggest container park across a vast valley for as far as the eye can see.

Riadul Islam's *We Had a River Named Tisa* graphically illustrates our despoliation of the natural world we depend on all too well. Pollution and urban expansion has reduced a once majestic river and vital resource in rural Bangladesh into a stagnant and poisoned water hole.

The food we eat, the clothes we wear, the products we buy and the waste we generate use up vast amounts of natural resources and affect our environment, and as affluence increases so does our footprint. Noteworthy in this regard is Gregg Segal's *7 Days Of Garbage*, a pictorial representation of a single middle class family surrounded by the colossal amount of rubbish they generated in a week.

The message conveyed by all these works was stark but not entirely depressing. The challenge of course is to turn the questions posed by scarcity and waste into opportunities. How do you enable economic growth while creating a sustainable future through technological progress? It can be done; in 2013 renewable energy met a fifth of the world's energy demands. This was showcased in Janey Stilling's #3549, a beautiful image of the vast Crescent Dunes solar complex in Nevada.

The award itself has an active environment element in that the entrants of the professional commission category of the competition were also required to submit a proposal for a project linked to the theme. The winner, Mustafah Abdulaziz, being given financial and other resources to carry out his proposed idea concerning the issues of water, sanitation and infrastructure in his native California.

All in all, a thought provoking, sometimes disturbing experience of powerful, technically brilliant photography. Yet another wake up call to us all.

Scarcity Waste is at Somerset House until 10th April. Admission free.

Roy Clark

A forthcoming cultural event recommended by Claire MacDonald:

'The English Channel'

Friday 24th April, 8pm at The Place, 17 Duke's Road, WC1H 9PY

After 60 years, Liz Aggiss finally gives herself permission to do what she damn well pleases. Better late than never! She's reached an age where doing the right thing is optional. Should she please you, or should she please herself? *The English Channel* is the story of a career forged in the heady waters of dance, performance art and film. It vividly depicts Liz Aggiss resuscitating herself back into the on-stage limelight. In the process, she becomes an unwitting channel for wilful women and forgotten archives; a conduit for hidden histories and buried truths. She is your cunning connection to 'the other side'; a witty commentator on life and death; on the pain, pleasure and paradox of the stage. On a stage of chaos anything can happen, nobody can leave, everyone is present.

For more information see: www.theplace.org.uk/liz-aggiss



What if we were to be together and listen to each other's comments with a willingness to expose rather than to confirm our own beliefs and opinions? What if we were to willingly listen to one another with the awareness that we each see the world in unique ways? And with the expectation that I could learn something new if I listen for the differences rather than the similarities? ... What might we see, what might we learn, what might we create together, if we become this kind of listener, one who enjoys the differences and welcomes in disturbance?

Margaret Wheatley

One Light Spiritual Gathering 'Celebration of Life' through prayer, music, meditation and invited guest Elementus



**Friday 10th April, 6.15-8.30pm
– Here at Essex Church**

Elementus started as a fundraising performance event produced by the current second year at the One Spirit Interfaith Foundation. After the joy and success of the event, the core creative group decided to keep the name. Elementus now is a collective of soon-to-be-ordained Interfaith Ministers who create ceremony through the performance arts - dance, music, drama, spoken word - as a way of expressing powerful human themes and stories. As the name would suggest, Elementus explores and embodies the myriad qualities of the different elements and how this exploration brings each of us closer together in a profound human experience. The Elementus team are adaptable for each ceremony and look forward to sharing music, song and movement with the theme of Celebration to the One Light Gathering on April 10th. To get a taste of the energy behind the original fundraising event and some of the group who will be there to share a magical celebratory evening in April, see www.elementus.org.uk

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

For further information contact:

Interfaith Reverend Joanna Ryam 07929 836 935
or email onelightlondon@gmail.com

Forthcoming One Light Gatherings:

*8th May – Contentment; 12th June – Patience;
10th July – Presence; 11th September - Risk*

LDPA Meets at Kensington



The Kensington congregation played host to the LDPA (London District and South-Eastern Provincial Assembly Inc. – what a mouthful!) on the afternoon of Saturday 21st March. Forty Unitarians from congregations and Fellowships as far away as Worthing and Watford joined in a service led by the Rev John Carter of Lewisham.

The service was followed by the LDPA AGM ably presided over by Sarah Benfield, Chair of the Council. and daughter of former District Minister Rev. Peter Godfrey. John Carter was thanked for his work as interim District Minister since the departure of David Usher last August. John remains in post until 28th March and it was good to welcome our new District Minister, Rev Martin Whitell, who was also present.

The usual AGM business was dealt with efficiently and then Leigh Engeham (Council member) presented proposed new Articles of Association and Constitutional Amendments which he had painstakingly prepared with reference to the Charity Commission, Companies House, etc., hopefully bringing up to date documentation dating back some 50 years. The meeting agreed to the Oxford congregation's request to move from their present affiliation with the Midland Union to join us in the LDPA.

There was no necessity for an election of Council members since all remained in post and were joined by one more member: the Rev Feargus O'Connor.

Rob Gregson of the Simple Gifts Social Action Project at Bethnal Green was asked to give a very brief update of activities. Of particular interest to us all was the fact that Dr Anvita Madan-Bahai, who has been working with Simple Gifts as the Teen Girls Group facilitator for the last year and a half will be presenting a course designed specifically to help Year 7 and 8 girls at Bethnal Green Academy to discuss issues of concern around identity and self-hood beginning in April.

The meeting concluded with a short ceremony at which LDPA President, Beryl Payne of Chatham, welcomed members of Council to a new year of office. The business over we moved swiftly towards a lavish spread of refreshments conjured up by Melody, Carole, Heidi and Amber, ably assisted by Juliet.

Annette Percy

LDPA Council sent a special message of thanks to our team of helpers who provided refreshments throughout the afternoon.

'The Blue Dress'

A Reflection by Jennifer Blair
from the service on 1st February 2015

As many of you will know, my sister lives in South Africa. I have been out there to see her, but my connection with South Africa in fact goes back a bit before she moved there. While I was studying – and I did a lot of that converting from Classics to Law – I studied South African post-apartheid jurisprudence. At the same time I set up and ran a youth project. This Church was kind enough to support the youth project and in 2011 the Church helped fund me to visit South Africa – my first visit there - to set up video-link interviews between the young people here and lawyers and activists in South Africa. I have quite fallen under the spell of the unique legal and political climate in South Africa. There are such huge divides between people in terms of race, wealth and education, but due to and in spite of this there is a constant focus on equality. Their legal system and their transformative constitution is influenced by the law of other countries and so it sometimes doesn't feel explicitly 'South African', yet there is an emphasis on accessibility – on having a legal infrastructure owned by the people it rules.

Perhaps you are familiar with the African concept of 'ubuntu' – a humanist concept loosely translated as 'people are people through others'? Taking a leaf out of my mother's book I'll also quote Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who said: *"one of the sayings in our country is Ubuntu – the essence of being human. Ubuntu speaks particularly about the fact that you can't exist as a human being in isolation. It speaks about our interconnectedness. You can't be human all by yourself, and when you have this quality – Ubuntu - you are known for your generosity"*.

There is a close relationship between this cultural virtue of ubuntu and the way that South Africa grapples with, internalises and remembers apartheid. A fascinating space for witnessing this relationship is the South African Constitutional Court. The main court house is built from the bricks of the men's apartheid prison – the one where, along with many others, Gandhi was held. The walls of the courtroom go from bare bricks on the right to plaster in the middle to fully painted walls on the left, showing the progress and healing that needs to take place within the court, without ever forgetting the past. When I was there I was told that an American tourist had donated a chunk of money to the court when they had seen the walls on the basis that it was such a shame they had obviously not had the money to finish their decoration!

The Constitutional Court is chock-full of powerful symbolism: from the entrance hall architecture in the style of a tree (evoking traditions of wise village elders dispensing wisdom in the shade) to the Court letterhead, based off lettering above the front door. Above the entrance the first 11 judges each wrote a message in a different one of the 11 national languages. One of the Judges – Judge Yacoob – was blind and he learned to write in order to leave his message of welcome above the door. It is his handwriting that is used on the court's letterhead.

My trip to South Africa's Constitutional Court has been one of the highlights of my life so far. I went there to meet an inspiring Judge – Edwin Cameron, who was given his first appointment as a Judge by Nelson Mandela; he was also the first public figure to come out as being HIV positive and he



was an HIV and gay rights activist. Having the chance to sit down and drink tea with someone like him is literally my idea of the best trip out possible – I VERY nearly burst with excitement. I also felt proud of myself for getting there. So thank you to the Church for making that possible.

In any event, the story I particularly want to share with you – the one symbol that stands out most for me from the Constitutional Court and brings ubuntu, generosity of spirit through interconnectedness to life is the story of the Blue Dress.

When the Constitutional Court was being designed the Judges were given a budget for art. It was a small budget and in the end they spent the lot on one painting. After this South African artists and galleries began to lend or give the Court works of art and so now, despite not having much hard cash, the Court has a fantastic gallery of what I would describe 'art with a conscience'.

The Blue Dress is a piece of art by South African artist Judith Mason. It looks exactly like its name, a kind of patchwork blue summer dress hanging on a thin wire coat-hanger. The artist was inspired to make it when she was listening to accounts of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on the radio.

As a quick aside – in case some of you haven't come across Truth and Reconciliation Commissions before – in South Africa the TRC (as it's known) was the system they used at the end of apartheid to avert civil war. They didn't want to gruelingly drag every perpetrator under apartheid through the courts – particularly since some atrocities had been committed on both sides, so they could face the prosecution of anti-apartheid fighters too – but they couldn't let the abductions, torture and extra-judicial killings go without recognition. The solution was an amnesty. You could have amnesty from prosecution on the condition that you came clean and told the TRC, in detail, what you had done. No more silence.

There were problems with the TRC, but the focus on forgiveness, emphasising interconnectedness and reconciliation – transformation together as a country – was a powerful response to apartheid. A famous anti-apartheid fighter who was killed – who was in fact shot 12 times in the head by police - was Christopher Piet, his mother Cynthia was asked about the TRC and she said: *"This thing called reconciliation.. .if I am understanding it correctly.. .if it means the perpetrator, the man who has killed Christopher Piet, if it means he becomes human again, this man. So that I, so that all of us, get our humanity back.. .then I agree, then I support it all"*.

‘The Blue Dress’ *(continued)*

So back to the Blue Dress. The artist Judith Mason was listening to accounts of the TRC’s proceedings on the radio and she heard an account given by the killer of Phila Ndwandwe. Phila was a black anti-apartheid activist. One day she was abducted and tortured to find out the names of the people she was working with. As a part of this she was stripped naked and left naked in her cell. Eventually she was shot dead and her body thrown in a shallow grave. She never gave up the names of her comrades.

Her killer told the TRC about his role in her death and told them where her body was buried. He told the TRC that after Phila was stripped naked, she had made herself a pair of knickers out of rubbish, out of a plastic bag, and her killers had not stripped her of this when she was killed. When Phila’s body was found and taken away for proper burial, she was identified because she was still wearing knickers made from a blue carrier bag.

Judith heard Phila’s story on the radio and she collected blue plastic bags, which she made into a dress. On the dress she wrote a message for Phila, she wrote:

“Sister, a plastic bag may not be the whole armour of God, but you were wrestling with flesh and blood, and against powers, against the rulers of darkness, against spiritual wickedness in sordid places. Your weapons were your silence and a piece of rubbish. Finding that bag and wearing until you were disinterred is such a frugal, common-sensical, house-wifey thing to do, an ordinary act...At some level you shamed your captors, and they did not compound their abuse by stripping you a second time. Yet they killed you. We only know your story because a sniggering man remembered how brave you were. Memorials to your courage are everywhere; they blow about in the streets and drift on the tide and cling to thorn-bushes. This dress is made from some of them. Hamba Kahle. Umkhonto.”

If we are human through each other then the darkness of Phila’s killers is in us all, but also her bravery. When others are humiliated we are all diminished. An act of kindness, of generosity from any of us lifts all of us. We do not need to be threatened by the talent of others, because we are part of that greater whole. Feelings of powerlessness can make us hate, but I am inspired by the Blue Dress to remember Phila Nwandwe and repeat Judith Mason’s reaction of love.

The Constitutional Court later commissioned two additional paintings of the Blue Dress – showing it flying or dancing – depending on your view – in the face of oppression. These commissions were probably in part a kindness to Judith Mason, who had not been paid anything for donated iconic Blue Dress and she is far from a wealthy artist. Albi Sachs – the judge most responsible for South Africa’s transformative constitution – uses a picture of the Blue Dress on his autobiography. It has become a symbol for post-apartheid South Africa.

I invite you to remember Phila Nwandwe and all those others who face horror with dignity and I ask you to love them.

‘How Are You Today?’



In my youth, the customary greeting was “How do you do” to which the reply was “How do you do”. Now replaced by “How are you”, or “Are you well”, which does seem to call for an answer. How do you reply if you are all too aware of deficiencies in hearing, seeing, walking? Smiling sweetly, do you offer a lie, or several?

Stephanie Saville

‘Freebies’



Carolyn Appleby’s article ‘An Experiment with Money’ (February Newsletter), reminded me of something somewhat similar. A few years ago I was heading to Central America, via Canada, for a volunteer stint.

Having to spend one night in snowed-under Toronto, my outer layers consisted of a favourite anorak, insulated hat and gloves - items I had carefully chosen with the purpose of giving them to ‘somebody’, the next day, my winter garb being superfluous where I was going to be working.

24 hours after arriving, I approached a cleaning lady at the airport. With her broken English she explained that they weren’t allowed to accept any gifts whatsoever. I pointed to a clean rubbish bin, a question mark on my raised eyebrows. She burst out laughing, as she vigorously shook her head, in the negative! Hmm... Should I just relinquish my cast-offs to the Lost Property Office?

While I was reflecting on my predicament, I spotted a shop assistant, alone in a tiny Newsagent. I rushed there to propose my offerings. She longingly looked at them, looked at me, and sighed. I didn’t waste any time. I pulled out my writing pad, and said “If I give you a handwritten letter with my name, street address, phone and flight numbers, plus a full description of the items I freely giving you, would you accept?”

It worked!

Melody

'What We Need'

Sermon by Rev. Sarah Tinker – adapted from service given on 15th April 2015

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

I'm only going to allow myself one rant this morning and I've decided to get it out of the way early on. If I ruled the world I'd ban all advertising on TV that was directed specifically at children. Everyone should have the experience of sitting watching TV with a child here in the UK sometime and then I think you'd join my campaign. It would be an unusual child who could see through the cynical methods used by advertisers to convince them that their only path to happiness is to possess the latest toy or game or to take their entire family out for a day at an over-priced theme park or to eat the latest frozen food or chocolate bar stocked by every local supermarket. I've been complaining about advertising aimed specifically at children ever since my children were young and during this time the governments of Norway, Sweden and Greece have banned such adverts on TV but not yet here in Britain. I live in hope.

And what does this have to do with the subject of today's address? Well I'm probably not the only parent and grandparent to have had to listen to a child explaining to me that they really **need** the latest ... (fill in the gap) to be followed by my reply 'you think you need ... But really you just **want** it'. This is not a response that would ever convince any determined youngster.

And it needn't convince any of you today because for simplicity's sake I am merging the meaning of various words – *want, need, long for, yearning* – today let them all converge into one feeling. And it's a feeling, a life experience that most of us know only too well. We know what it is to want, to yearn for, to need, to long for – something. We know it on a biological level for we have bodies that send us clear messages – our physical selves send messages to our brains telling of our needs for water, for food, for sleep, for safety, for a breath of fresh air. Yet even at a biological level our needs can become masked and it takes time and effort sometimes to sort out what it is we really need. That's all part of growing up – getting to know ourselves better, learning to explain ourselves to ourselves as well as to others. I foolishly took a child to Hamleys toy shop just after Christmas – a trip that ended in tears because he didn't have enough money to buy the toy he really needed. Only later was he able to explain his tears by telling me he was tired.

As adults as well as in childhood it's valuable to develop our ability to assess our own biological and emotional state and to learn to dig a little deeper. Yes I feel as if I really need a slice of pizza but really I could do with some fresh air and a good chat with someone I trust. Of course for the spiritually enlightened amongst us there is another level – expressed beautifully by Wendell Berry in the poem we heard earlier on – "clear in the ancient faith: what we need is here." All that we need is here, now. On a good day probably many of us know that to be true.

It's the message of the hymn we sang earlier, with its verse

*Drop Thy still dews of quietness,
Till all our strivings cease;
Take from our souls the strain and stress,
And let our ordered lives confess
The beauty of Thy peace.*



Our hymn book doesn't include the hymn's final verse that starts with the line

*Breathe through the heats of our desire
Thy coolness and Thy balm;*

For me that line expresses something of what it is to be human – we are creatures of desire. We move towards sources of pleasure, and if we wish to be spiritually aware creatures living in a material and sensory world then it might be helpful to develop ways to assess our desires, to consider them as messages from ourselves to ourselves, as well as from the world in which we live. Today is not the day to explore the nature of our addictions but most of us carry an addictive streak one way or another – be that for the traditional addictions of tobacco, alcohol, drugs prescription or otherwise, or addictions that hide in other forms – for work or exercise or certain foods or being right or having to do things in a certain way. Swiss Psychiatrist Carl Jung wrote extensively about addiction, about human desire as ultimately a spiritual yearning, a longing for another dimension beyond the material plane. He wrote about one of his clients

"His craving for alcohol was the equivalent on a low level of the spiritual thirst of our being for wholeness, expressed in medieval language: the union with God."

A thirst for wholeness. That touches something important for me – I wonder if it does for you – the sense that perhaps many of our yearnings are an expression of a perceived lack. A sense that something is missing, that we are experiencing an emptiness. And that there is a possibility for fulfilment if only we can become clear what the lack is really all about. I'll be forever grateful to the therapist who in my twenties encouraged me to express my envy of another – an emotion that had been discouraged in my family when I was growing up. He taught me that envy is a useful signpost, telling me of a place I'd like to strive for in life; no longer an emotion to hide or feel ashamed of, merely a message about a path that might be calling to me. Simply a sensation, waiting to be explored.

I think everyone was given a sheet of paper as you came in today – containing a mighty list of possible needs. For those of you listening on a podcast you can find this list online by searching for the Center for Non-Violent Communication or NVC as they are also known. NVC does not claim that this list is complete but they list possible human needs under seven headings: a need for communication, for connection, for physical well-being, for honesty, for play, for peace, for autonomy, and a need for meaning. Within all human interactions NVC would say, are needs and the more we

'What We Need' *(continued)*

explore these needs both in ourselves and others then the more authentic and effective will be our communication. It is so very human to seek to meet an unmet need in a roundabout sort of way that may end up causing more difficulties, resulting too often in a greater sense of estrangement. As a teacher I'll always remember the children who sought attention through challenging behaviour and in doing so caused more disturbance and then received less of the love, care and acceptance that they were really yearning for. It is painful to watch this in children. It's even more poignant to realise that the unmet needs of our childhoods are affecting most of our adult lives. For me, the greatest gift that NVC's list of possible needs offers is the realisation that just as I have needs so do other people - and the more we can use conversation to express and explore our needs the more potential we have for true dialogue, true understanding, true love.

At the bottom of the sheet of paper is a version of Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which again can be found online (or do ask me for a copy if you are interested). This was a theory that he developed over decades. In this, its later version, Maslow developed his idea that we are all ultimately seeking what he described as self-actualization – realising our fullest potential and experiencing life's peak experiences, and took this one stage further. He recognized that we also have needs for transcendence, for going beyond the limitations of self – to a stage in which we seek the fulfilment of others – an acknowledgement of our responsibilities to help others. I don't think I'm the only one here today that believes if we live for ourselves alone our lives lack meaning – for we are bound one to another in a circle of caring – we are called to care for others and for ourselves and for this beautiful and troubled world of ours on which we live our days. So let's choose to live well, to live deeply and authentically, and to support others in doing the same.



'When we behold a wide, turf-covered expanse, we should remember that its smoothness, on which so much of its beauty depends, is mainly due to all the inequalities having been slowly levelled by worms. It is a marvellous reflection that the whole of the superficial mould over any such expanse has passed, and will again pass, every few years through the bodies of worms. The plough is one of the most ancient and most valuable of man's inventions; but long before he existed the land was in fact regularly ploughed, and still continues to be thus ploughed, by earthworms. It may be doubted whether there are many other animals which have played so important a part in the history of the world, as have these lowly organised creatures.'

Charles Darwin

The Death of Anthropomorphism



The cat washes himself with exquisite precision
Settling his soft white fur enticingly around his body
He knows that he is beautiful and loved
All he has to do is beseech some food or fondle
To furnish all his needs. He gives pleasure as a by-product
Of his own comfort this ruthless lover.

Carole Grace

Unitarian Discovery Holiday

Monday 13th July to Friday 17th July
at The Nightingale Centre, Great Hucklow

Think ~ Relax ~ Talk ~ Walk

'Birds of a Feather Flock Together'

This is a holiday with some intellectual and spiritual content. We aim to attract both people new to Unitarianism and long standing members and friends. Everyone is welcome and participation in any activity is entirely voluntary. There will be time to relax, sing, worship and walk or explore the beautiful Derbyshire countryside.

People, nature, animals: Why do they flock together? This is our very flexible theme. We will look at some aspects of the theme from a religious, arts and personal point of view. We aim to get some outside speakers for the Theme talks but the activities and spiritual input are in-house i.e. prepared and run by those attending. You make the week what it is. Unitarian Discovery Holiday will run from dinner on Monday 13th July 2015 (You can arrive any time after 14:00 hours on that day) until after lunch on Friday 17th July 2015. A programme will be sent to you nearer the time.

Costs of the holiday:

Unitarian Discovery Holiday Conference Fee: £47.00
Basic accommodation (single or shared twin): £232.00

For more information and booking forms see:
www.ukunitarians.org.uk/discovery/

Services at Essex Church this April



5th April, 11am – ‘Rolling Away the Stone’

Easter Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Today we will explore some of the key themes of the Easter narrative and the many ways we can take steps towards new life.

12th April, 11am – ‘Singing Our Faith’

Service led by Members of the Congregation

In this service some members of the congregation will select their favourite hymns and say a little about how these hymns articulate their perspective on our Unitarian faith and values. Featuring reflections from Natasha Drennan, Sonya Leite, Jonathan Crawford, Roy Clark, Liz Tuckwell and Jane Blackall.

19th April, 11am – ‘Our Wider Faith’

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Today we will be bringing back news from our recent Annual Meetings and appreciating our world-wide liberal connections.

26th April, 11am – ‘For All Our Relations’

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Come and join us in celebrating all creatures with whom we share this planet. Chance to nominate your favourite animal and to recognise the gifts they bring to our world. Why not bring a friend, furry or otherwise.



Volunteering Rotas: Stewarding, Coffee and Greeting



Stewarding:

5 th April:	Juliet Edwards
12 th April:	Natasha Drennan
19 th April:	Heidi Ferid
26 th April:	Gina Bayley

Coffee:

5 th April:	Kate Brown
12 th April:	Kate Brown
19 th April:	Liz Tuckwell
26 th April:	Sue Smith

Greeting:

5 th April:	Mike Killingworth
12 th April:	Billy Jackson
19 th April:	Annette Percy
26 th April:	Becca Farnum

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

‘So much religious conversation begins and ends with “Do you believe in God?” or, more commonly in our churches, “I don’t believe in God.” If we could get rid of the “believe in” part, these conversations would be more interesting and relevant. For years now, when asked this question, I have tried to deflect it, to turn the conversation toward a richer and more fruitful path – a conversation about faith.

Faith, more than belief, requires language with depth and resonance, language of the heart. It needs intentional kinds of conversation, framed in ways that invite us to express not just ideas but qualities of being. We need to shape the questions and the conversation so that they truly reflect and respond to that which is most meaningful. Do I believe in God? No, I personally do not “believe” in God. I do not have an idea of a God who is active in my life, but I do have a deep and sustaining faith, a felt sense that life matters, that my life matters, that it is woven into the larger fabric of life with all its beauty and its suffering. I have a felt sense that I am not alone. I feel love and longing and connection and compassion. I don’t “believe” in God, but I find the word *God* to be useful as I try to talk about this faith.

Although belief is only a small piece of the spiritual and religious life, it is an important one. It is challenging to capture even that small piece in the limits of language. It is more challenging still to write or speak of the vast realms of faith beyond belief. As we rise to that challenge, we find ourselves growing in heart, soul, spirit, trust, and in our connections with one another. We open ourselves to deep heart soundings of truth – our own and those of the ones who enter into conversation with us.’

Unitarian Universalist Rev. Jeanne Harrison Nieuwejaar