



What's On in May:

Saturday 1st May, 10am
Walking Group: Lee Valley
Meeting at Liverpool Street Stn

Sunday 2nd May, 11am
"Sacred Sounds"
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 2nd May, 12.30-1.15pm
'Finding Your Voice' Workshop
Led by Margaret Marshall

Sunday 2nd May, 1.00pm
Youngsters' Social

Tuesday 4th May, 7.00-9.00pm
Committee Meeting

Thursday 6th May, 7-9.00pm
Adult RE: 'Soul Poetry' (3/5)
Session Theme – 'Joy'

Sunday 9th May, 11am
"Sculpture: Expression of Life"
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 9th May, 2-3.00pm
Nia Dance: Holistic Movement

Sunday 9th May, 3.30-5pm
**'Songs and
Silence for the Soul'**

Thursday 13th May, 7-9.00pm
Adult RE: 'Soul Poetry' (4/5)
Theme – 'Grief'

Sunday 16th May, 11am
"Spiritually Strong People..."
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 16th May, 12.30pm
Essex Church AGM

Tuesday 18th May, 7-9.00pm
Creativity Group:
'Totem Animals'

Thursday 20th May, 7-9.00pm
Adult RE: 'Soul Poetry' (5/5)
Theme – 'Hope'

Sunday 23rd May, 11am
"Ageing"
Service by Sarah, John & Heidi

Sunday 23rd May, 12.00pm
John's 80th Birthday Buffet

Sunday 30th May, 1.00pm
Social Action Group

Tuesday 27th April, 7-9.00pm
Reading Group:
'A Book of Silence'

Sunday 30th May, 11am
"The Man Who Was Nothing..."
Led by Caroline Blair

A Message from our Minister

Encounter at the Car Wash

I should have known that it was going to be one of those days. Do you know the kind of day I mean? It was a day when I noticed things keenly, a day when small encounters made a deep impression. On those days it can feel as if the top layer of protective coating has been stripped from me, and I'm touched at a deeper level by life's beauty and poignancy. The clue had been there in the cherry tree. It's a tree I often pass but on that day it was as though I'd never seen a cherry tree in flower before. How could anything be so delicate, so cheerful, so determined to brighten an otherwise unremarkable London street? It was a chilly spring day - too cold to risk getting wet by washing the car myself and so I went to the hand car wash.



Each car washing method has its particular features. For an enjoyable car wash at home experience you really need easy access to a tap and a pair of wellington boots. If you use the garage jet wash you can have a lot of fun but you are bound to get wet. If you use the drive through machine wash you can have even more fun pretending that you are in the jaws of a monster that is about to eat you. You can make very loud noises and no-one will hear you. If you go to the hand car wash you will have an encounter with other human beings. The people who work in these car washes are nearly always from abroad. They work hard and get wet in order to clean cars for £6.00 per car. They work in teams and always do a good job. It's a slightly strange experience having at least four young men busily cleaning the car whilst you sit inside it. The only conversation generally concerns whether or not you want the floor vacuuming.

But on this day it was different. The car in front needed so much attention that only one person cleaned my car and we started to talk. He came from Afghanistan, near Kandahar. When I told him how well he did his job he shrugged and said that it was all he could do because he had no education. I told him that my education meant that I spent much of my day in front of a computer, and then wished I'd not said it because I had the car, the computer and the choice and he did not. He said that he missed Afghanistan but "sometimes we just have to leave places we love." His name was Kasim. He was glad to be in England but it would never be home. I hoped that it might one day feel like home to his children.

I paid and said goodbye, drove round the corner, stopped the car and wept. I wept for all people who come to this country in search of freedom and opportunities because they do not feel safe at home. I wept for the politicians and civil servants who are harangued for not controlling immigration properly and so become more draconian and unfeeling. I wept for all those who carry out small and repetitive tasks with dignity and high standards and for the poignant beauty of our world. Has anyone else had one of those days?

Rev. Sarah Tinker

In this month's newsletter...

* Karl Askew writes about the new Kensington Unitarians Social Action Group *
"Treading Lightly on the Earth – Freeganism" by Kathleen Bright * News from Iona
* Reflections on the Unitarian (GA) Annual Meetings * 'This I Believe' Course *
Growing Our Community * "Spirit on Screen: Wild at Heart" by Nicolas Holzapfel
* 'Finding Our Voice' Singing Workshops with Margaret Marshall * and more...

Kensington Unitarians

At Essex Church (founded 1774), Notting Hill Gate

Kensington Unitarians meet to share experiences, to learn from each other, to explore our diverse faiths, to welcome spiritual seekers and offer companionship on life's journey.

The community meets for a service each Sunday at 11.00am. The format varies, and usually includes music, singing, meditation, an address, an opportunity to share joys and concerns, and a children's group. Our wide range of activities includes religious education courses and spirituality workshops, meeting for fellowship, engagement groups on a variety of themes, community arts projects, regular chanting and dance sessions, and opportunities for quiet meditation. All are welcome to come and join us.

Many other groups share our church building. If you are interested in hiring one of our rooms for your own organisation or event please contact our warden by telephone or email.



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"There is a tendency to think that what we see in the present moment will continue. We forget how often in this century we have been astonished by the sudden crumbling of institutions, by extraordinary changes in people's thoughts, by unexpected eruptions of rebellion against tyrannies, by the quick collapse of systems of power that seemed invincible. To be hopeful in bad times is not just foolishly romantic. It is based on the fact that human history is a history not only of cruelty, but also of compassion, sacrifice, courage, kindness. What we choose to emphasize in this complex history will determine our lives. If we see only the worst, it destroys our capacity to do something. If we remember those times and places — and there are so many — where people have behaved magnificently, this gives us the energy to act, and at least the possibility of sending this spinning top of a world in a different direction. And if we do act, in however small a way, we don't have to wait for some grand utopian future. The future is an infinite succession of presents, and to live now as we think human beings should live, in defiance of all that is bad around us, is itself a marvellous victory."

Paul Rogat Loeb

80th Birthday Celebration for John Hands



Sunday 23rd May, 12 noon

Buffet lunch after the service at Essex Church

Everybody is invited to a buffet lunch on Sunday 23rd May in celebration of our very own John Hands' 80th Birthday.

Please let Heidi Ferid know as soon as possible if you plan to come by emailing her at: heidiferid@btinternet.com.

Volunteering Rotas: Stewarding, Coffee and Greeting



Stewarding:

2 nd May:	Will Lyons
9 th May:	Howard Hague
16 th May:	Gina Bayley
23 rd May:	Alice Lambert
30 th May:	Louisa Bird

Coffee:

2 nd May:	Margaret Darling
9 th May:	Gill Hague
16 th May:	Caroline Blair
23 rd May:	Jo Ridgers
30 th May:	Christine Joshi

Greeting:

2 nd May:	Geoffrey Olans
9 th May:	Susan Smith
16 th May:	Arthur Krebbers
23 rd May:	???????
30 th May:	Jim Blair

Please speak to Jane or Sarah if you are willing to help with any of these tasks. Thanks!

...an exciting new initiative here at Essex Church...



Kensington Unitarians Social Action Group

First Meeting: Sunday 23rd May at 1.00pm



We Unitarians can be justifiably proud of our history of involvement in social change. Famous Unitarians such as Josiah Wedgwood and the Weston sisters were prominent figures in ending slavery. Susan B. Anthony and Mary Wollstonecraft were key to the success of securing universal suffrage and rights for women. Florence Nightingale and Clara Barton demonstrated a humanity which lives on in the shape of modern nursing and the American Red Cross.

These people saw a social injustice and put themselves forward to bring change. This legacy survives today. Congregations such as Newington Green are making a stand against an injustice they feel strongly about, by campaigning for marriage equality. The Croydon congregation even operate a sheltered housing scheme.

Our own congregation are a lifeblood to a multitude of diverse local organisations, many of which may not be able to exist without our support. We also sponsor the Swaziland Education Project which makes an enormous difference to the lives of AIDs orphans in the SOS Children's Village. This contribution of our community should not be understated. In addition many of us also give a vast amount of our time and money to those causes that we hold personally important.

But can we do more? As a congregation we are a group, rich in both talents and resources. Perhaps more importantly we share a common sense of compassion and a desire for social justice. This concern for humanity and the wider world is evidenced each and every week during the lighting of candles of joy and concern. We would like to provide the opportunity for people to get together and use these talents and resources to affect a positive change. To help do this we are setting up a Social Action Group. The group will be an informal way for us to get together, to share the causes that are important to us and to develop ways to make a change. This could be through campaigning activity, through fundraising or perhaps through something more practical. We are hoping to meet up together after the service on 23rd May to talk through how we should take this forwards.

We all have commitments and even with our resources and skills we are small. But with creativity and enthusiasm we can make a difference. Edward Everett Hale, the 19th Century Unitarian minister and social activist put it well when he said that "I am only one, but I am one. I cannot do everything, but I can do something. And I will not let what I cannot do interfere with what I can do".

We are more than one. Please come along on the 23rd May or contact me at karl.askew@yahoo.co.uk if you some ideas or would like to be involved.

Karl Askew

Youngsters' Social

After the service on Sunday 2nd May

The next of our 'Youngster's Socials' will be after the service on Sunday 2nd May. Until now these events have been bi-monthly but we are going to experiment with having some sort of get-together on the first Sunday of every month. Please put the dates in your diary now!

As this is a last-minute addition to the programme we have not yet worked out where we are going for lunch so do get in touch with Jane if you're planning to come so that we can choose somewhere that suits us all reasonably well.

If you would like to know more about these social events please email social@kensington-unitarians.org.uk.



Essex Church Walking Group: Lee Valley Country Park

Saturday 1st May - 10am at Liverpool St



The Essex Church Walking Group has made provisional plans for its activities over the next few months so please put these dates in your diary and plan to come along:

Saturday 5th June

– Richmond Park / Isabella Plantation –
(meeting 10am at Richmond Station)

Saturday 3rd July

– Blake's London with Will Lyons–
(meeting 10am – starting point to be announced)

Saturday 7th August

– LOCATION TO BE ANNOUNCED –
(please contact Caroline or Jane if you have any ideas)

We usually walk at a rather leisurely pace, chatting as we go, and stopping to admire the scenery and take photos. The route should not be too strenuous and is likely to be no more than 5 miles in length.

If you are intending to come please let Jane Blackall or Caroline Blair know or email walks@kensington-unitarians.org.uk to let us have your mobile phone number so that we can let you know if there is any last-minute change of plan. Any suggestions of future walking routes are also welcome.



A Forthcoming Adult RE Course at Essex Church

'Soul Poetry'

22nd, 29th April and 6th, 13th, 20th May
Downstairs in the Library from 7-9.00pm



Poetry speaks to the soul for so many of us and we often have a favourite piece that speaks to us and I hope that these evenings will give us an opportunity to share some of these.

There will be five Thursday evenings when you can come along to share, by listening to others or reading your poems aloud. I believe that spirituality is experienced in many different ways and with a surprising range of feelings so I have structured these sessions around love, anger, joy, grief and hope:

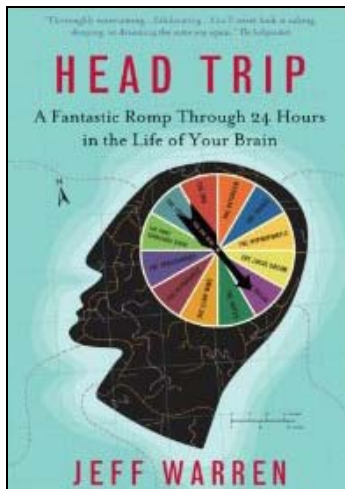
Thursday 22nd April, 7-9.00pm – Love
Thursday 29th April, 7-9.00pm – Anger
Thursday 6th May, 7-9.00pm – Joy
Thursday 13th May, 7-9.00pm – Grief
Thursday 20th May, 7-9.00pm – Hope

I was thrilled to run a similar workshop at Summer School last year and it left a lasting impression on me of a beautiful multi-coloured kaleidoscope which changed and fell into new patterns whenever I looked at it. Do ask me questions about these sessions and I hope to see you when they commence in April. Please contact me on caroleg2001@googlemail.com to reserve your place.

Carole Grace



Essex Church Reading Group 'Head Trip' by Jeff Warren



Tuesday 25th May, 7.00-9.00pm

The reading engagement group's next conversation will be about "Head Trip" by Jeff Warren. This book will be introduced by Jane Blackall at our May session.

Information from Amazon UK:

"This book will change the way you think, sleep, and dream for good. It is a book of psychology and neuroscience, and also of adventure wherein the author explores the extremes to which consciousness can be stretched, from the lucid dream to the quasi-mystical substratum of awareness known as the Pure Conscious Event. Replete with stylish graphics and brightened by comic panels conceived and drawn by the author, "Head Trip" is an instant classic, a brilliant and original description of the shifting experience of consciousness that's also a practical guide to enhancing creativity and mental health. This book does not just inform and entertain - it shows how every one of us can expand upon the ways we experience being alive."

The group takes special care to ensure that everybody gets an equal opportunity to speak and be listened to. Members come together to share our diverse views and appreciate our differences in a spirit of curiosity and respect. The group has a relaxed and easy-going atmosphere and newcomers are always most welcome to come along to any session.

The group has been meeting monthly since 2003. Regular members take turns in choosing a book for everybody to read and talk about so we tackle a wide variety of material. Please pick up a flyer or check our forthcoming selections online:

www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk/book.html

Membership Ceremony & Essex Church AGM

Sunday 16th May 2010

If you are still holding onto your membership form now is the time to get it back to us. In return you will get that warm rosy glow that comes from knowing you belong to such a wonderful bunch of people, a copy of our Annual Report and the chance to be welcomed as a member or friend of Kensington Unitarians in a special service on May 16th. That service will be followed by our AGM which is a remarkably painless and positive meeting where everyone has a chance to have their say about how we've been doing in the past year and where we want to go in the year ahead.

The Annual Reports have been sent out by post to anyone who did not pick one up last Sunday. Let us know if you have not received your copy and we will get one to you.

Rev Sarah Tinker

'Finding Our Voice'

Singing Workshop with Margaret Marshall

Sunday 2nd May, 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. Along with Harold Lorenzelli she has been singing in our choir here at Essex Church for over thirty years now and we're delighted that she is now offering to lead a monthly session to help us all find our voice.

This session is for anyone who is prepared to open their mouth and make a sound and 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 singing experience or ability. All are welcome.

Treading Lightly on the Earth – Freeganism

The media tends to present freeganism as all about "skipping" or "dumpster diving", i.e. finding food in supermarket bins. There's so much more to it than that.

"Freegans are people who employ alternative strategies for living based on limited participation in the conventional economy and minimal consumption of resources. Freegans embrace community, generosity, social concern, freedom, cooperation, and sharing in opposition to a society based on materialism, moral apathy, competition, conformity, and greed."

- http://freegan.info/?page_id=2



I think of freeganism as an anti-consumerist way of life that revolves around minimising waste. One of the areas where it's given me insight is the importance of not just appreciating my food and being thankful for it, but of thinking about where it came from and all the products and processes that went into producing it. Giving time to acknowledge and explicitly giving thanks is something I'm struggling to incorporate into my life - it's so easy to just eat without thinking.

It's not just about food though but about reducing all kinds of waste. So many practices come under the freegan banner, e.g. FreeCycle and Freegle, where people who have stuff they don't want can let other people claim it for free, thus saving items from the tip, as well as saving people money and reducing the demand for products. Free shops work on the same principles - they're like charity shops, but with no money involved. The brilliant free shop on Commercial Road was recently evicted but you might be able to find some smaller ones. Or maybe start your own with some friends. The seed swap parties my friends have are freegan, as is fixing something instead of throwing it away and buying a new one.

Community & Sharing

Food Not Bombs is an initiative where people collect vegetables that would otherwise be wasted, cook hot meals and share them with their local communities. There are groups all over the world - I think our nearest is Hackney, East London. Sometimes people squat unused properties, sometimes coming to an agreement with the landlord. I know a few that are flourishing community centres, offering free use of the space for events, such as concerts to raise money for good causes and free schools - where people come together to swap skills and learn from each other. There's a vast array of creativity: One of them recently started hosting clown workshops!

It's often really easy to get involved - just turn up and let people know you're interested. You can find out about things on the internet and/or by hanging out with anarchists. Do feel free to ask me if you're interested. :)

Other freegan practices listed on Wikipedia include foraging, veganism, working less and humanure composting.



Sustainability & Spirituality

For me, being freegan is about trying to lead a radically more sustainable and holistic life and it's very much connected to my spirituality: It's trying to live out my love for life, seeing divinity in everything around me... in animals, trees, myself. It's trying to more fully appreciate the harm of the endless drive towards excessive consumption promoted by capitalism. It's challenging myself when I say I "need" something. It's remembering how amazing it is to be involved with communities trying to make things better. I fall short all the time, but trying to be mindful is one way I get closer to achieving it. Interested in finding out more? Feel free to ask me or write to me at inspirewithhope@gmail.com. Plus, there's lots of info at <http://freegan.org.uk/>

Kathleen Bright

A forthcoming course here at Essex Church

Adult RE: 'New U'

Thursdays 10th, 17th, 24th June, 7-9.00pm



This summer there will be another opportunity to take part in this three-session course, which will be led by our minister Sarah Tinker, and is open to everyone who is a member here at Essex Church or is thinking of becoming one. It is designed primarily for people who feel new in some way - new to Kensington Unitarians perhaps, or new to Unitarianism or new to liberal religion or new to London or Britain. But anyone is welcome to come along as the course is mostly about getting to know one another better through conversation and activities.

How do we run Essex Church? What links are there with the wider Unitarian movement? What other activities are happening here in the UK and how do we find out more? What is important to us as liberal religious people? These are just some of the areas we will consider.

The course is free to attend but we ask people to book a place in advance by ringing Sarah on 0207 221 6514 or emailing sarah@kensington-unitarians.org.uk.



A Fitness Fusion of 9 Movement Forms Sessions led by Sonya Leite

Second Sunday of the Month from 2-3.00pm
(9th May, 13th June, 11th July, 8th August)

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 £7 (£5 to Essex Church members)

Contact: Sonya Leite on 0207 371 1674

Growing Our Community



As part of our goal to encourage our congregation to grow, a group of us met after the service one Sunday in April to explore our mission and purpose. As part of this exploration we talked about metaphors that might help us describe Kensington Unitarians. One of the people who contributed to my dissertation research described us as *"more of a lake, which attracts birds and creatures of many species to come together for refreshment and enables them to be together in ways which without it they might not do."* It sometimes feels as if we are indeed an oasis which many people visit in the midst of their travels, either literally as they travel the world or symbolically on their spiritual journey through life.

Here are some images we came up with in the group:

- A home with a view, somewhere I have arrived and have the sense of being at home once again. It's an outward looking and open place, with lots of windows pointing in many directions.
- A plant pot. I was a dormant seed, and now I'm watered and have become a window box, with shoots growing everywhere.
- The body where different parts can change their function through time.
- A plant like a vine with many white flowers and intricate patterns of growth.
- A heart to represent the depth of feeling that is here, to which we each bring different thoughts and concepts and to which we are all connected.
- A background which is always there; I might read a book or listen to music and I relate everything to this Unitarian background – we are in it always.

We had a wide ranging discussion and generated lots of good ideas which have been added to the 'to do' list. A key area was our yearning to raise our profile locally, to ensure that people actually know we are here, who we are and what we stand for.

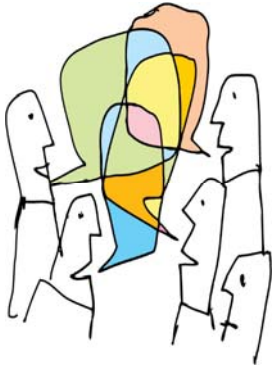
We are always glad to hear people's ideas and even happier when people have an idea they want to put into action. Just have a chat with a committee member after a service or send us an email. We are so fortunate to have this community with all its resources – and most valuable of all are **you**, the people who are this church.

Rev Sarah Tinker

This I Believe – New RE Course Here at Essex Church

‘What Do You Believe Anyway?’

Thursdays 8th, 15th and 22nd July, 7.00-9.00pm



Have you ever been asked that question when someone discovers that you are Unitarian and they don't quite understand what that means? A few months ago in the newsletter we had a selection of statements that Kensington Unitarians had written about their faith – people sometimes call these statements 'Elevator Speeches' or 'Lift Pitches', with the idea that you might only have a minute or so in a lift to tell someone about Unitarianism.



But the question of what you believe is a somewhat different matter. There are all sorts of beliefs that shape the way we are in the world, all sorts of things that we've experienced or learned that affect what we do and how we do it.

In the 1950's Edward R. Murrow, a journalist, asked famous individuals to write 500 word essays about what they believe and broadcast them on the radio. Four years ago, a radio producer began it again. He describes the reason they took this up again:

“The goal is not to persuade Americans to agree on the same beliefs. Rather, the hope is to encourage people to begin the much more difficult task of developing respect for beliefs different from their own.”

I think this work is the kind of thing that we can be doing here in our community. Whilst we say that we respect each other's beliefs, and that we are a diverse group of people, we don't often explore those differences. It's not always easy to talk openly about what you believe. And more often than not, when asked what we believe, the answer has to do with God and Jesus, with life after death or the virgin birth. It isn't about those daily moments that truly define what you believe. But our small groups here at Essex Church do give us a chance to explore at a deeper level with one another, to speak and to listen in a way that's different from everyday life. A number of us completed the Building Your Own Theology (BYOT) course at the end of last year and this new 'This I Believe' course is another way for us to explore our beliefs with one another. BYOT did what it said on the packet, or rather the course booklet; it encouraged us to share with one another our theological beliefs. 'This I Believe' is more about the smaller, intensely personal ideas and commitments that you seek to live out and that you hold to when the world gets tough perhaps or when you are making changes that challenge your identity.

You are each and all invited to join in reflecting upon what it is you believe, and to express it in a short essay. I will be leading a three week course at the church on the 8th, 15th and 22nd July where you can come and do some exercises to help clarify what you'd like to say, and where you can share with others in the process. If getting to the church isn't going to work for you, there is a workbook that you can use to create your own statement of belief, and we can email that to you or give you a paper copy.

Let's give it a go and try to say what we believe, and listen to each other that we may strengthen what it is that gives our lives meaning, and that we build the bonds between us. Our hope is that eventually we will put together a collection of statements that people have written for the BYOT course and / or the This I Believe course.

Rev Sarah Tinker

With many thanks to the Rev Linda Hart, minister with Richmond and Putney Unitarians, who has already run this course and has passed on all her materials for us to use.

“When I hear the term [Unitarian] evangelism today, it often has to do with *how* to grow rather than *why* we want to grow in the first place. Personally, I find this disconcerting - not because I'm opposed to efforts to attract and nurture new members (hardly!) but because when the *how* is divorced from the *why*, we might as well be selling vacuum cleaners or encyclopaedias. At the risk of oversimplification, I can think of only two legitimate reasons for liberal religious evangelism: 1. to minister to those whose spiritual journey and values would be enhanced by participation in a [Unitarian] community; and 2. to build a stronger [Unitarian] community in the service of those same religious principles and values. Why should we seek to promote our way of religion? Because there are those who, like ourselves, seek a *corporate* expression of the things they value most in life - a religious community, which at its best, is shot through with tolerance, reason, compassion, laughter and love. Often as not, people seek us out because they simply want a place where they belong.”

Don Rollins, from the website of Oberlin Unitarian Universalist Fellowship

Reflections on Unitarian Annual Meetings (GA) 2010

There are 175 congregations and fellowships that are members of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches (known affectionately as the GA). Each spring 300 or so people get together for the GA's Annual Meetings. The ministers meet a day earlier for their own pre-conference and it's always a treat to meet up again with friends and colleagues. This year they'd asked me to run a session of chanting and meditation, a bit like our own Songs and Silence for the Soul, and it proved to be a very gentle way to begin our time together. We went on to a discussion of small group ideas that have worked well with our congregations in the past year.



The Meetings provide space for groups to present their work and I especially enjoyed the Worship Panel's session. The Worship Panel has been in existence in one form or another for forty years this year and in that time it has done much to develop alternative forms of worship for Unitarian communities. They have published ten meditation manuals and the latest one, called 'With Heart and Mind 2', contains over forty essays with accompanying prayers, meditations or reflections on a wide range of subjects. It includes an essay by our very own Mary Spurr as well as pieces by London ministers Linda Hart, Feargus O'Connor, Andy Pakula, and David Usher.

Here's part of a prayer written by Sheena Gabriel, student lay leader with our congregation at Meadow Chapel in Godalming:

*Spirit of all that is,
We give many thanks for beauty unnoticed,
For the many miracles of nature,
Which lie like un-opened love letters,
Strewn about our feet,
Awaiting a response.*

Books are another highlight of the Annual Meetings for me. The staff from Essex Hall, our denomination's headquarters, run a small but gem-filled bookshop and it is hard to leave without an armful of new titles. But this year I didn't buy a single book and that's because I was so busy buying our new mugs that so perfectly match our new church kitchen and proclaim our Unitarian message of *freedom, reason and tolerance*. The mugs are in the kitchen and some new books are in the library, including the meditation manual *With Heart and Mind*, editions 1 and 2.

Sarah Tinker

This was my third time of attending the Annual Meetings of the GA. I realised that over the last two years I had made many more friends in the Unitarian world and it was good to meet and be able to spend time with so many at this year's meeting. The venue, the Jubilee Campus of the University of Nottingham was one of the best we have used. We were fortunate with the weather and so were able to spend much of our (limited) free time sitting by the lake watched by a very tame Heron and some rather aggressive Canada Geese!

My highlight of the meetings was the opening John Rely Beard lecture given by Brian Kiely, President of the International Council of Unitarians and Universalists (ICUU). The theme of the talk was 'The Centre and The Circle: The Challenge of International UU Ministry' and in it he explored (with some very good photographs) the different expressions of Unitarianism throughout the world and the importance of not having a uniform expression of Unitarianism but expressions of liberal religion consistent with the local context. It was encouraging to see evidence of thriving liberal religious communities that identify themselves as Unitarians in India, Africa and the Philippines.

One of the other memorable events was the opening act of worship presented by the children and youth of the Movement. It started with an amazing drum and percussion performance and we were then presented with a series of meditations, reflections and amusing but challenging sketches reminding us of the importance of being ourselves, comfortable in our own skin and living in the present moment. I was struck by both the maturity of the young people and the way they interacted with one another. It was great to see so many young people who were passionate about liberal and inclusive religion and gave me hope for the future.

David Francis Darling

More GA Highlights...

For the last few years I have attended the Annual Meetings as a part-time member of staff at Essex Hall (Unitarian Headquarters), with a specific responsibility to help staff the GA Bookshop. We travelled up to Nottingham the day before the meetings actually started to get everything ready. There is a tradition that the staff go out for a meal that evening. As it happened the restaurant we went to was in the Lace Market area of the city, close to where the former Unitarian chapel is located. The congregation left the very grand and gothic High Pavement Chapel (built 1876 to seat a thousand) in about 1983, no doubt finding its upkeep too great. For a time it became the Lace Museum, but is now a bar and restaurant, the 'Pitcher and Piano'.



We went in for a quick drink after our meal. Perhaps we should be horrified that a chapel has turned into a pub, but it has been treated very sympathetically and the stained glass windows by Morris and Co. are still magnificent. Even the pulpit is still there. Better a bar than a ruin. There is a good description of it in the Pevsner Architectural Guide to Nottingham.

Because I was in the bookshop all day, I was only able to attend events in the evening. The opening celebration presented by our young people with the theme 'Living in the Now' was excellent (I'll long remember that drumming). There was a special focus on youth at the meetings this year, and Gill and I are pleased to have been able to sponsor the colour cover on the issue of *The Inquirer* dated 17 April, featuring recent youth activities. Let us hope we can keep them interested and involved in the future. It's rather a shame that recently our Anniversary Services at the annual meetings have had to be held in a lecture theatre, since they tend to be lacking in atmosphere and 'ambience', especially this year (ask me about the Chester Cathedral controversy some time!). What I will especially take away from the service this year is Stephen Lingwood's marvellous story about God's hat, assisted by two of our very young participants. Was the hat red or was it blue? The village was divided. In fact it was both.

On the last evening the social took place in the campus dining room with a Beatles tribute band who were very good (if very loud). What a shame it couldn't have taken place in our former chapel in Nottingham, but that might have come a bit expensive. As for other meetings and events, I have had to read about them in the overnight newspaper *GA Zette*, which is produced (mainly) by our young people and is a very good record of what has gone on.

Howard Hague

I was rather under the weather for a large chunk of April and so experienced most of this year's annual meetings through the mental fog of an unidentified lurgi... but I managed to attend almost all of the sessions anyway and there was much to enjoy.

At the very first business session, within hours of our arrival, the GA's Executive Committee made a detailed presentation on 'Difficult Choices'. In brief, they listed a number of denominational projects that they (and, I think/hope, most people present) would like to see happen, in an ideal world (i.e. maintaining a part-time Youth Officer, funding ministerial students, employing a Director of Ministry, employing an Information Officer, employing a Social Responsibility Officer, etc). Next, they gave us an overview of the denominational finances, and estimated costings for the 'Shopping List' of projects that they had just detailed. Essentially this was designed to give us a 'reality check'. If we want to go ahead with ambitious projects then we are going to have to pay for them somehow. If we can't (or won't) find the money then some things are simply not going to happen and, collectively, we need to work out our priorities and make some difficult choices about how our limited resources will be spent.

It may seem slightly masochistic to say that this presentation (and a follow-up feedback session on the final day) was a highlight of the meetings for me but I was personally glad to see the Executive Committee begin to spell out the fine detail of these tricky issues for everyone to properly consider. It is all too easy for delegates at these meetings to pass resolutions urging them to appoint extra staff – as happened last year – or take on other new projects, and then go home for another year, without offering any realistic proposals about where the money to make them happen is going to come from. Over the course of the meetings there was a preliminary consultation of those present to get some idea of our priorities (1. to maintain the Youth Officer post; 2. continuing to fulfil statutory and legal requirements; 3. to raise the denomination's media profile; 4. to support ministerial students through training) and our feelings on whether more money could be raised through increases in donations from individuals or through an increase in the GA quota payment (the amount that churches pay to the denomination on behalf of each member of their congregation – a small majority indicated support for a small increase – but there was widespread concern that congregations might simply 'lose' members and thus there would be no financial gain to the denomination if a large increase was imposed). We were informed that there will be further consultation on these matters with congregations in due course, which is right and proper, but I felt that the sessions at the annual meetings were a good start.

I would encourage newer members of the congregation to consider coming to the annual meetings next year. It is a real eye-opener: a chance to get a better sense of the workings of the General Assembly, to meet activists from other Unitarian communities up and down the country, and (even if it is just in a modest way) to help shape the future of the denomination.

Jane Blackall

GA: Do We Need a Catchier Name?



The official name of our denomination is The General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches. This has never been mistaken for a snappy exercise in branding, and indeed will hardly fit on a cheque if you ever have to pay for something from our Essex Hall headquarters. Perhaps it is not surprising that the Yorkshire Union, in 2009, proposed that the denomination should adopt a shorter, catchier 'working title' that could run alongside the full, legal name. One of the meetings in Nottingham last weekend was a discussion on whether this should be done, and if so what the shorter title should be.

The two suggestions thrown into the pot to start the meeting were 'UK Unitarians' and 'Unitarians in Britain'. These two have the advantage of being short, and also of including a geographical reference, as for example the Australian and New Zealand Unitarian church does. It also, you will notice, excludes the words 'Free Christian'. How many people, it was asked, would really miss it if the words 'free Christian' were quietly dropped from the title?

The answer, it became clear, is 'some'. The General Assembly includes a wide variety of churches, chapels and fellowships. Some, for example Flowery Field Church in Hyde, call themselves 'Free Christian Churches' in preference to using the word 'Unitarian' in their title. This particular church says on its website: 'We are a Free Christian (nondenominational) Fellowship observing all the festivals of the Christian calendar, including regular Services of Holy Communion. We uphold the right of everyone to practise the Christian faith in their own personal way.' (www.floweryfieldchurchhyde.co.uk). At least one Unitarian fellowship follows the pagan (Celtic) calendar: www.leicesterunitarians.org. It might be argued, as some did, that the word 'Unitarian' is a sufficiently capacious umbrella to include both organisations, and all the others; but others argued that the word 'Christian' was not only vital to their identity, but also brought people into the church who would not otherwise have crossed the threshold. On the one hand were people suggesting that excluding the word 'Christian' from the working title was 'building a wall between us and other churches'; on the other hand were people saying that HAVING the word 'Christian' was building a wall between us and other religious faiths.

The concept of a 'working title' was that it would formalise what is happening anyway: churches simply do not use the full denominational title on strap-lines and publicity material; they shorten it as they see fit. Even the Essex Hall website itself has a nice chalice logo with the words 'the Unitarians and the Free Christians' and does not clutter it all up with the words 'General Assembly of'. There was concern that if each church uses its own form of words we lose our 'common identity'. But perhaps the use of a chalice as our 'logo' is enough of a common identity, and as long as people don't start suggesting outlandish words the exact words used to describe ourselves could be varied without the world coming to an end.

In the end the most encouraging facet of the meeting was the calm good-will of everyone concerned. The General Assembly is not the Anglican Church, with the unfortunate Rowan Williams trying to keep a friendly relationship with bodies who want to introduce the death penalty for homosexuality. The very worst that anyone could fear is that they may feel a little over-looked; and, overwhelmingly, people did not want to risk even that. The outcome was as gently woolly as one might expect from an organisation committed to tolerance and openness: churches will continue to use whatever form of words works for them. Perhaps in an increasingly international world we may need a geographically related working title for the denomination – something along the lines of 'UK Unitarians and Free Christians' would seem reasonable to me – but no rush, no one wants to cause unhappiness and division, and we are happy to let this proceed organically and see what time brings.

Caroline Blair



Warden's Column



As I write this, Kensington & Chelsea MIND are holding a public consultation upstairs, while a yoga group are meeting in the library. Later this evening, the Tse Qi Gong Club will hold classes in Tai Chi, Chi Gung and Kung Fu in the Church while the Analytical Psychologists listen to a talk in the Lindsey Hall. Of those groups, only the Psychologists were already meeting here when I started as Warden three years ago, a good reminder that while change sometimes seems glacially slow while you're trying to make it happen, the cumulative effects can be substantive.

Similarly with the building - since I got here, we've transformed the front garden and the toilets; refurbished the kitchen, the parquet floor and the lighting in the Hall & Foyer; redecorated the Library and Hall and replaced the Hall curtains. The next major project is sorting out the leaks in the roof and there are also plans on foot for the library storage.

Small changes are also satisfying: a reorganisation of how storage is allocated to our user groups has freed up one of the Hall cupboards to store some of the armless chairs from the library, making it seem much more spacious down there. We're also having a determined effort to declutter the sides of the altar area at the moment – and the space behind the sofa.

Of course, as you fix one thing another thing breaks, one of the toilet seats cracked recently and we can't seem to source any urns that last longer than six months. However, on the whole, there seems to be an upward trend – both in the appearance and in the use of the building. Long may it continue and many thanks to everyone who's kept Essex Church going over the years and makes it possible for us all to enjoy it.

Jenny Moy

A Palm Sunday Ritual



Here's a photo from our ritual in the service on Palm Sunday where we wrote down some of the successes and failures of our lives on coloured sticks and planted them in this bowl of sand in a ritual of letting go. A visitor that day said in an email: "I must say that the service was incredibly impressive, moving and uplifting. I'm always a bit wary of new-agey talk of 'energy' but, in this case, it seems the best way to express what I discerned this morning: a positive energy arising from and enfolding a community of souls."

Rev Sarah Tinker

The Trees



The trees are coming into leaf
Like something almost being said;
The recent buds relax and spread,
Their greenness is a kind of grief.

Is it that they are born again
And we grow old? No, they die too.
Their yearly trick of looking new
Is written down in rings of grain.

Yet still the unresting castles thresh
In fullgrown thickness every May.
Last year is dead, they seem to say,
Begin afresh, afresh, afresh.

Philip Larkin

Essex Church Creativity Group

'Totem Animals'

Tuesday 18th May, 7.00-9.00pm



In our next session the group will be using animal-related imagery to make our own personal inspirational pictures. Our activity will be loosely related to the idea of 'totem' animals, a concept which is most widely associated with Native American culture, but which is found in various forms around the world, and has been adapted somewhat by the New Age movement in recent years.

To prepare for the group, please think about any animals that you feel a particularly strong affinity with, or that have a spiritual or symbolic meaning for you. It would be helpful if you could bring photos/drawings to work from (perhaps you could research significant animals online) or to use as collage material. We will simply spend the evening making inspirational pictures, using any method we choose, and maybe talking about the meanings we attribute to them.

As usual you are welcome to come along to the group even if you are not particularly interested in the activities on offer – bring along your own craftwork – or simply come along to relax and enjoy the good company.

...an event in the district that you may be interested in...

Kent Garden Party



Sunday 22nd May from 3.00pm
High Halden, near Ashford, Kent

Each year David Embry (chair of the Dover congregation and designer of the Famous Unitarians posters) hosts a Garden Party at his farmhouse home in High Halden, near Ashford. In addition to refreshments there are lovely walks in the gardens and nearby countryside, rare-breed rabbits and other animals, an extensive art collection and boating. This year's party will be on Saturday 22nd May from 3pm, and all are welcome. The postcode is TN26 3JP.

...a forthcoming event here at Essex Church...

Compassionate Communication Course



Advance Booking for Special Autumn Course
Thursday Evenings Here at Essex Church
9th, 16th, 23rd September, 7th, 14th October

We have made arrangements for trainers in compassionate communication (or 'non-violent communication') to come to Essex Church and teach a five-session course this autumn.

You may already have read the article I wrote about my own experience of an introductory weekend on this subject, with Jill and Richard Broadbent who will be teaching this course, in the February newsletter. I found the training to be very inspiring and worthwhile and would highly recommend it.

Participants will be encouraged to make a small voluntary donation to help cover the cost of providing this training course. It would be highly beneficial if participants could attend all five of the sessions but this is not compulsory.

What is Compassionate Communication?

A response from Jill and Richard's own website:

"Everyday communication is often characterised by reactivity, misunderstanding and a lack of the connection we long for in relationship."

Compassionate Communication is a means of exploring how we make choices in our communication. It supports a greater understanding of how others may hear us and how we may hear others and so provides a pathway to the compassionate and empathic understanding of others and ourselves."

If you are interested in taking part I would very much appreciate it if you would register your interest and put the dates in your diary now as places are limited and we will be advertising the course widely across the district. Please contact me to sign up: rebelrebel@clara.co.uk

Jane Blackall



Spirit on Screen:

David Lynch's 'Wild At Heart'

This is the first in a new series of articles where members of the congregation write about films which have a special meaning to them...

Way back in September a sermon was given at Essex Church on 'Spirit on Screen' – the spirituality found within apparently secular films. With this in mind, perhaps this month's Multifaith Calendar should mention the Cannes Film Festival, towards which the eyes of the film world will shortly be turned. Any film awarded Cannes' Palm d'Or is likely to be a worthy object of interpretation from a spiritual perspective and I take a particular interest in the recipient of that award exactly twenty years ago: David Lynch's 'Wild At Heart'.

On one level 'Wild At Heart' is the very American tale of two lovestruck youths, Sailor and Lula, who, in defiance of their family and the law, take to the road in search of freedom and adventure. However, this is a film directed by David Lynch, which means nothing quite makes sense, that there are scenes which were traumatic enough to prompt mass walk-outs during the film's first screenings and that the disjointed plot is finally resolved by the miraculous intervention of Glynda the Good (of Wizard of Oz fame).

Does this strange and obscure film have anything to say about life to make it worthy of a mention in a church newsletter? Its critics (of which there are many – during the Cannes award ceremony the applause was almost drowned-out by the booing) would certainly say not. Their charge is that, underneath all the explosive energy and mesmerizing, dreamlike visuals lies only empty gratuitousness, signifying nothing more than artistic self-indulgence.

Rightly or wrongly, this isn't anything like the reaction I had to the film, nor, if he is to be taken at his word, does it reflect David Lynch's own vision of it. Lynch summarized this vision as 'finding love in hell'. The hell-world he portrays consists of extreme, relentless passion and extreme, relentless carnage. Unsettling secrets and irrepressible malevolent forces ensure that calm and certainty are eternally absent. The best this hell-world's inhabitants can hope for is to just ride out its endless waves of chaotic forces. At its most Lynchese, it is a world where the yearning for something better is all-too-easily crushed by the grotesque, meaning-destroying absurdity of the world – a fertile source of laughter and despair in all Lynch's work.

For the critics, Lynch's signature surreality, self-satirising melodrama and abundant pastiche show that he lacks sincerity and compassion. To me, these elements are a key part of the sincere trauma which Lynch expresses. If they weren't present, his stories would bear the comforting presence of a compassionate, all-knowing narrator telling a coherent story. Lynch's style deprives his world of that presence, plunging his creations into the ultimate hell of not only pain and loss but also senselessness.

Above-all, Lynch's hell-world is filled with wildness. After one particularly disturbing and traumatic scene Lula bitterly declares that 'this whole world is wild at heart and weird on top'. Wildness defines Lula and Sailor. It seethes through their defiant, limitless romance and is what renders them charismatic. At the same time this very wildness threatens, at times, to betray and undo them. And it is wildness which rules the scene which prompted the mass audience walk-outs. This scene, heavily cut by the time of the final release, isn't violence for violence's sake. The horror and anxiety which it provokes is in fact a key part of what the film is about.

This is encapsulated by another scene, which finds Sailor and Lula driving through the Texan desert. Lula is depressed by a news story on the radio. She switches through the stations from one horrendous news report to another. The whole world seems to be announcing an endless succession of horrible, disorientating news stories of violence and twisted heartlessness. There is simply no escape. Lula stops the car and demands in anguish that Sailor find some music to blot it out. Miraculously the tuner runs straight into their song: a wild, wordless heavy metal ballad which has previously appeared in the film at moments of extreme violence and passion. The two of them yell with pleasure and half-kick, half-dance a mad, anarchic dance of release and exultation which slowly transforms into the sumptuous harmony of Richard Strauss' Im Abendrot and a tender embrace as the sun sets. The violent wildness of the world is around them and it is in them, and yet they find a real and sincere love with each other. Laura Dern, who plays Lula, considers this to be the key scene of 'Wild At Heart', and I agree with her.

For most people, the real world is not as relentlessly violent and weird as the world Sailor and Lula inhabit, but that extreme violence and weirdness really is a part of our world. For all its twisted cartoonishness, 'Wild At Heart' rings true to me as a convincing story about how a genuine bond of acceptance, respect and unbounded intimacy can exist between two fraught, haunted individuals in a fraught, hostile world.

Nicolas Holzapfel

News from Iona in South Africa

Iona Blair, a member of our congregation, is currently studying in Cape Town...

I've returned from a week on the East coast where I bobbed about in a warm ocean and slept in a 'rondavel', which I decided was a very good kind of home - made of mud and dry grass, thatched with reeds and painted gentle fresh colours.

Mixed feelings to be back in the city - which has its charms and comforts but where I have also felt a bit lost and frustrated at times, missing the good company I have at home.

I'm finding time for all my homework somehow and have taken courses I can be passionate about - I've made the anthropology department my second home and it is populated by very interesting people. I'm doing a course in 'Traditional knowledge, science and the environment' which compliments and challenges and transforms my learning about environmental policy, which is all biomes and scientific democracy and little frogs poisoned by alkaline cement.

Now and then I remember myself by attending afternoon gardening sessions in the Ecovillage community gardens; though I do miss the more holistic organic living that I've experienced at times back home, and I feel a little homesick. How nice it would be to pop home for a few days and catch up with old friends. I have met some nice and friendly people who have looked out for me in various ways, but of course real enduring knowledge and friendship takes years and I'm realising just how bound and committed to my family and friends and home places I am. How I miss having friends to dance and roam with.

I am doing a fair bit of roaming though and having significant encounters and challenging times, and the opportunity to explore academically in a supportive environment, even if I get distracted by all kinds of crazy ideas like trekking off to the rainforest and learning innumerable languages.

When reading much on the Amazon and current political struggles there I think much of those friends who have shared their passion for South America with me. I recommend a book 'Crude Chronicles' to anyone interested in the area. I keep finding myself longing for old community activities like growing, cooking, dancing, singing, sewing and reading with others. It is difficult to keep these creative energies alive and flowing just for oneself or among strangers.

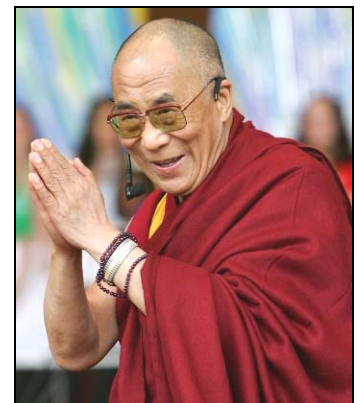
Iona Blair



International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF) Conference

"Beyond Conflict to Reconciliation: The Challenge of the 21st Century"
September 4th—7th 2010, in Kochi, Kerala, India

It has just been announced that the Dalai Lama will give the inaugural address at the opening ceremony of this year's IARF conference in Kerala, India, on 4th September 2010. More details of the conference can be found at www.iarf.net.



For participants intending to stay at a hotel: the Congress Fee will be \$300 before 31 May (\$350 after 31 May).

Please make your own Hotel Reservations, stating you are attending the IARF Congress.

Hotel Rates are \$27 to \$119 a night with breakfast.

For list of hotels and a registration form, Google: IARF Congress 2010

For participants staying at the Catholic Renewal Centre (the conference venue) it will be \$368 US (\$50 extra after 31 May).

Cost for Young Adults (ages 18-35) including IARF Congress (4th – 7th September) and Pre-Meeting (1st - 3rd September) contact Morse Flores at flores.mores@gmail.com.

The International Association of Liberal Religious Women (IALRW), the world's oldest women's international interfaith organization, will hold their Centennial Congress (100th Anniversary) in the Gokulam Park Hotel, Kochi, preceding the IARF Congress. For more information on this conference please go to: www.ialrw.org.

London Fairtrade Festival 2010

7th – 9th May, Potters Field Park



To celebrate World Fairtrade Day, there will be a festival of Fairtrade fun from Friday 7th to Sunday 9th May.

On London's Southbank (in Potters Field Park, next to Tower Bridge) there'll be tons to do, from meeting special guests and tasting Fairtrade wine to enjoying movies and being part of an interactive kids' opera.

Universal Spiritual Gathering

Friday 14th May, 6.30-8.15pm
Held at Essex Church



The Universal Spiritual Gatherings are led by graduates of the Interfaith Seminary. All are welcome.

14 May: Theme of Spiritual Practice incorporating wisdom from earth based Feri tradition

11 June: Walking with the Divine with guided meditation "As I walk"

9 July: Beacons of Light – with wisdom from 100 great spiritual leaders

For further information contact service hosts:
Reverends Danielle Wilson - 07802 898 252,
Pamela Ramsden - 07966 478 980,
Kathryn Reynolds - 07976 739 286
Grace Morgan - 07931 132 890

'In loving connection with Essex Unitarian Church'

Unitarian Women's Group Autumn Weekend Conference

'Times of Change In Our Lives'



29th to 31st October 2010
The Nightingale Centre, Great Hucklow

You are warmly invited to participate in the annual autumn weekend conference of the Unitarian Women's Group, to be held at The Nightingale Centre, Great Hucklow, near Tideswell, in the wild and wonderful Derbyshire countryside. Non-members are welcome also. The Conference will begin with supper on Friday and finish with lunch on Sunday. Attendance as a day visitor is also possible.

The title of the weekend is 'Times of Change In our Lives'. Through Workshops and discussion we will look at how we cope and thrive as women.

Accommodation is mainly in twin-bedded rooms with wash basin, though some have en-suite facilities, for which a supplement is payable. A further supplement is payable for single occupancy of a twin room. There are facilities for those with physical disabilities. There are a limited number of discretionary grants available for women on low incomes.

**For further information contact Anne Bodman on
01753 889431 bodmana@hotmail.co.uk**

Full-Time Attendance (Cost per person inc. meals):

Shared room with wash basin	£102.00
Shared room with en-suite	£117.00
Single room with en-suite	£132.00
Single room with wash basin	£117.00
Conference fee	£10.00

Please send your application, with a non-refundable deposit of £25 payable to Unitarian Women's Group, to Stephanie Ramage, 122 Bond Street, Macclesfield, Cheshire, SK11 6RE by 31st July 2010 at the latest. Those requiring a receipt, please enclose an s.a.e.

How I Came to Essex Church

Since the summer of 1990, the end of my first year as a university professor, I have been bringing students to London for three weeks each summer to enjoy the theatre, learn about the city's history and literature, and experience a bit of the world outside Greenville, North Carolina. As I prepare for my twentieth anniversary, now accompanied by three other faculty members and twenty-five students rather than the handful I escorted by myself in the early years, I dust off an article I wrote for the local Unitarian Universalist newsletter in the Summer of 2003. To my fellow UUs in Greenville I wrote about discovering Essex Church and the Kensington Unitarians.



My father left the Christian ministry and the faith when I was young. I nevertheless attended Sunday School with the same relentless enthusiasm and curiosity that irritated my primary school teachers. The minister told my mother I was "his little skeptic." I knew I would never be a Christian, and the minister's challenge to me—that living a life outside of faith (presumably Christian faith) would prove too hard—pushed me towards the sort of independence I've tried to maintain. I sampled various religious traditions throughout my youth—most, I confess, corresponding to romantic interests rather than pure spiritual seeking. My wife happens to be Buddhist, and I've found sharing her practice moving and comforting, although I've kept arm's length. When I became a father, I wanted to find a way to help introduce my children to the world's religious traditions, and we stumbled upon the Greenville UU church, which we found welcoming and endearingly quirky.

The article I wrote described the physical layout of the building, my impressions of the Reverend Mark Shiels, and the kindness of members like Patricia Walker in welcoming me. I was struck then, as I have been ever since, by the extraordinary power of the music. I was overjoyed to learn that everyone was celebrating the imminent service of commitment between two men in the congregation. And I waxed ecstatic over the strawberry tea after the service and boasted about helping with the dishes! From then on, three wonderful Sundays a year would be spent at the Essex Church: a breather from my teaching and chaperoning, although increasingly curious students started to accompany me to services. One of them subsequently became the student leader of the campus UUs at my university and is still actively involved.

In 2005, I was lucky enough to hear Sarah's first sermon and participated in a "building your own theology" workshop she led. She was the only candidate I heard, but I was hopeful she would be the choice and delighted to read the announcement in the newsletter. Since then, her wisdom and spiritual presence have been a great joy, in the long wait each year, the experience of the services themselves, and then in the remembering.

Sadly, I've stopped worshipping with my local congregation, although I loved it very much—too much, perhaps. In both my work life and home life, I get passionately involved and overcommitted. I'm still and forever the "A student" with his hand always in the air--and still the skeptic. The Essex Church is close to my heart and a safe space in my life. Three weeks isn't long enough to be asked to serve on committees or to argue with anyone about how things should be done! I must listen to the words you speak, the beautiful music you make, the prayers and wishes you send--and share in the power of this community for the short time allotted each year.

Rick Taylor, Greenville, North Carolina



District Quarterly Meeting

Saturday 19th June 2010

Brighton Unitarian Church, New Road, BN1 1UF

1.30 – Service led by Jef Jones

2.15 – Presentation by Kate Whyman

3.15 – Tea and Refreshments

The service will be led by Jef Jones, Lay Leader of Brighton Unitarians, and Kate Whyman will be speaking on Unitarians at the World Parliament of Religions. Kate was the official British Unitarian representative at the recent World Parliament of Religions, held in Melbourne Australia. She will speak about the experience, and what role Unitarians do and should have within such international organisations. There will be time in the day to enjoy the Brighton seaside.

Chelsea Flower Show – Special Offer



It is not often that someone in a bright red coat comes up to you and offers you two tickets to Chelsea Flower Show. But that's what happened to us.

Chelsea Pensioner Ken Rogers has donated two tickets to the congregation for the flower show on Sunday 23rd May and we are now offering them to the people who can give the best reason to have the tickets. Now it might be that you are prepared to give us a large sum of money to pay for one or both of them and we will put the proceeds to our church garden fund. Apparently the tickets can be sold in shady corners of Chelsea streets for £100 or more each. But perhaps you have no money and have always wanted to go to the show. The ticket(s) will go to whoever puts in the best request for them – just get in touch by phone, email or have a word on a Sunday and the gardening group will make a decision by May 10th.

Thank you Ken for this generous gift and we look forward to hearing from everyone who would like to go to the show. It could be you!

Rev Sarah Tinker

Tempus Fugit

"There is still no cure for the common birthday."

John Glenn, U. S. Senator, at age 75

"Eternity is not something that begins after you are dead. It is going on all the time. We are in it now."

Charlotte Perkins Gilman

"We come from the earth, we return to the earth, and in between we garden."

Anonymous

"What is life? It is the flash of a firefly in the night. It is the breath of a buffalo in the wintertime. It is the little shadow which runs across the grass and loses itself in the sunset."

Crowfoot

Submitted by Will Lyons

June Newsletter Deadline



The deadline for submitting items for the next issue is **Sunday 16th May**. Please send items (such as poems, quotes, articles, notices, rotas, etc...) to Jane Blackall or any of the committee members before this date.

Thank you!!!

...an announcement from the London district...

'Light the Fire' A Gathering for 'Forward Looking Unitarians'



Are you excited about the future for Unitarians in London and the South East?

Do you want Unitarianism to grow and prosper?

Are you open to exploring new ideas for making Unitarianism not only more relevant and meaningful in our own lives, but for others seeking a vibrant, progressive spiritual community?

Then plan to attend "Light the Fire", 28 – 30 January 2011. The weekend will be an opportunity to explore new ways of experiencing Unitarianism, through worship, discussion, music, laughter, networking and imagining.

The exciting and innovative programme looking at our future is being planned by Louise Baumberg, Kate Buchanan, Miriam Lahage, Andy Pakula and David Usher. The weekend is open to everyone who wants to dream about our future together and to join in the work of making those dreams a reality.

Generous subsidies are being offered to those under the age of 35, or who have become Unitarians within the past 3 years.

Cost (including full board): £160 full adult, £100 concessions for under 35s and new Unitarians. Significant discounts also offered for children.

Venue: The Friars, Aylesford, Kent.

The Friars is the home of a community of Carmelite friars, first established in 1242 and offering beautiful accommodation just three miles north of Maidstone.

More information and booking details will follow in summer...



1st May - Beltane – Pagan/Wiccan

Pagans celebrate Beltane with maypole dances, symbolizing the mystery of the Sacred Marriage of Goddess and God. Beltane is a Celtic word which means 'fires of Bel' (Bel was a Celtic deity). It is a fire festival that celebrates the coming of summer and the fertility of the coming year.

2nd May - Lag B'Omer – Jewish

The Omer lasting from Pesach to Shavuot, is a period of 49 days of sadness in the Jewish calendar. On the 33rd day, Lag B'Omer, this is relieved in memory of the end of a plague in Roman times. This is also the one day in the Omer when weddings are allowed to take place.

9th – 15th May - Christian Aid Week – Christian

Many churches devote this week to fund raising for Christian Aid, often through house to house collections. Christian Aid works in nearly 60 countries helping people, regardless of religion or race, to improve their own lives and tackle the causes of poverty and injustice.

13th May - Ascension Day – Christian

Ascension Day, the 40th day after Easter, commemorates the last earthly appearance of the risen Christ. According to the Bible, Jesus ascended into heaven in the presence of many witnesses. It is one of the four most important dates in the Christian calendar, coming after Christmas and Easter but before Pentecost.

19th May - Shavuot/Festival of Weeks/Pentecost - Jewish

Shavuot, also known as Pentecost or the Festival of Weeks, comes seven weeks after Pesach. The festival celebrates the revelation of the Torah to Moses on Mount Sinai and the early harvest season in Israel. Synagogues are decorated with flowers, and dairy foods are traditionally eaten.

23rd May - Pentecost / Whitsuntide – Christian

Pentecost, also known as Whitsuntide, is often thought of as the 'birthday' of the Church. Christians remember the first disciples of Jesus receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, and first proclaiming the Gospel, fifty days after Jesus' resurrection. Called Pentecost after the Jewish festival day when the event took place, the name Whitsuntide comes from the custom of people presenting themselves for baptism on this day, dressed in white.

23rd May - Anniversary of the Declaration of the Bab - Baha'i

The Bab was the co-founder of the Baha'i faith. Having first declared his mission in Persia in 1844, he heralded the arrival of Baha'u'llah and inaugurated the Baha'i calendar which numbers itself from the year of this declaration.

26th May - Zartusht-no-diso – Zoroastrian

A commemoration of the death of the prophet Zarathustra when special prayers are recited and the fire temple visited. Services focus on Zarathustra and the Fravashis - spirits of the dead.

27th May - Saga Dawa – Buddhist

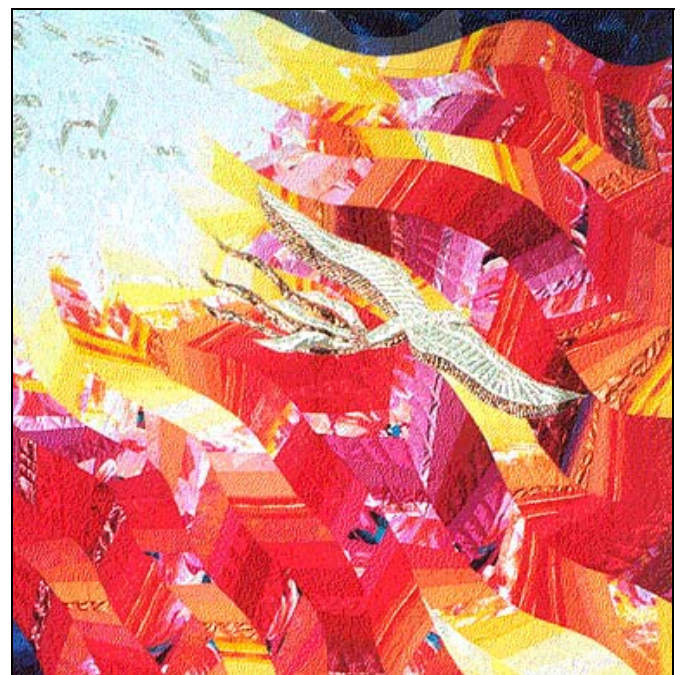
This Tibetan and Nepalese festival, on the full moon day of May, celebrates the birth, enlightenment and death of the Buddha. The festival is a day of strict Buddhist observance, with fasting. It is also a festival of lights, as lamps are lit everywhere. When Saga Dawa is celebrated in the UK the emphasis is on the joy associated with the Buddha's birth and enlightenment.

27th May - Vesakha Puja / Wesak / Buddha Day – Buddhist

Buddhists celebrate Wesak, or Vaisakha Puja, or Buddha Day, according to their tradition. This is the biggest of the Buddhist festivals, with lay people coming together at monasteries. Houses are decorated with lanterns and garlands, and temples are ringed with oil lamps. Theravadin Buddhists celebrate the life of Gautama Buddha on Wesak: his birth, enlightenment under the Bodhi Tree in Bodhgaya, and his final passing away.

29th May - Anniversary of the Ascension of Baha'u'llah - Baha'i

This day commemorates the death of Baha'u'llah in 1892, at Bahji, near Acre, in northern Israel. Baha'u'llah's Shrine there is the holiest place on earth for Baha'is, and the place which they turn towards in prayer each day.



Songs and Silence for the Soul



Chanting and Stillness at Essex Church

**Sundays 9th May, 13th June, 11th July,
8th August from 3.30 to 5.00pm**

Suggested Donation: £2.00

We've been running this monthly Songs and Silence group here at Essex Church for over two years now and one of its delightful features is how the group varies from month to month, depending on who comes along.

We always meet on the second Sunday of each month from 3.30 to 5pm. We sing a wide range of chants from the world's faith traditions and sit together in candlelit silence. It's a gentle and healing, group-led space in which everyone is welcome to join. No particular singing skills are needed.

Phone Sarah via the church office on 0207 221 6514 or email sarah@kensington-unitarians.org.uk if you would like more information.

A Date for Your Diary:

Congregational Picnic

After the service on Sunday 4th July



Please put the date in your diary now – we will be having a big congregational summer picnic on Independence Day – after the service we will head off to a local park. Please bring food and drink to share. All are welcome!

Sunday Services at Essex Church

**2nd May – “Sacred Sounds”
– Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker**

Today we will celebrate humanity's ability to make music and the wondrous sounds that have been created through our yearning to connect with, and express, the divine. The service will be followed by a singing workshop led by our very own Margaret Marshall who has sung so beautifully for us here at Essex Church for many years.

**9th May – “Sculpture: An Expression of Life”
– Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker**

London's galleries are full of impressive sculptures. The life sculptures from Nigeria are on show at the British Museum and Henry Moore's work is displayed at the Tate Britain. What can we learn about the human condition from these magnificent three dimensional works of art?



**16th May – “Spiritually Strong People,
Spiritually Strong Communities”
– Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker**

In readiness for our congregation's AGM which follows the service, and linking in with a welcome ceremony for our new members, we will be considering what spiritual strength means and how it is expressed through our oh so human vulnerabilities.

**23rd May – “Ageing”
– Service led by Sarah Tinker, John Hands,
Heidi Ferid and other congregation members**

Come and join us in this exploration of ageing; celebrate wisdom and foolishness, the pain and joy of this inevitable process, the importance for society in honouring our elders.

**30th May – “The Man who was Nothing at All”
– Service led by Caroline Blair**

The last service in May will be led by the chairperson of our congregation, Caroline Blair. Caroline says: “Is there any sense in which we can love everyone? Should we even try?”