



Kensington Unitarians

The Newsletter

March 2008

What's On at Essex Church

- Sunday 2nd March, 11.00am
"A Circle of Care"
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker
- Sunday 2nd March, 12.30pm
Seed Swap and Shared Lunch
- Monday 3rd March, 7.00-9.00pm
Kensington Community Singers
- Tuesday 4th March, 7.00-9.00pm
Science and Religion Group:
"The Psychology of Prejudice"
- Thursday 6th March, 7.00-9.00pm
Adult RE: "The Quest" (3/8)
Closed group – pre-registering is essential!
- Sunday 9th March, 11.00am
"Books We Cherish"
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker
- Sunday 9th March, 2.00-3.00pm
Nia Technique with Sonia Leite
Holistic Movement Class
- Sunday 9th March, 3.30-5.00pm
"Songs and Silence for the Soul!"
- Monday 10th March, 7.00-9.00pm
Kensington Community Singers
- Thursday 13th March, 7.00-9.00pm
Creativity Engagement Group:
"Photography and Planning"
- Sunday 16th March, 11.00am
"One Hundred Blessings"
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker
- Monday 17th March, 7.00-9.00pm
Kensington Community Singers
- Thursday 20th March, 7.00-9.00pm
Reading Engagement Group:
"The Wrong Boy" – 50th Book!
- Saturday 22nd March, 11am-4.00pm
Adult RE: "The Quest" (4/8)
Closed group – pre-registering is essential!
- Sunday 23rd March, 11.00am
"Easter Sunday"
Led by Daniel Hughes
- Sunday 23rd March, 11.00am
Adult RE: "Easter for Unitarians"
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker
- Sunday 30th March, 11.00am
"Going for Growth"
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

A Message from Our Minister...

One Hundred Blessings

"If the only prayer you said in your whole life was, 'thank you,' that would suffice."

Meister Eckhart



Someone once told me of a Jewish practice of listing 100 blessings in your life, identifying things that you are grateful for, that bring you joy and lift your spirits. It was such a lovely idea that we decided to start a 100 Blessings Project with the children's group of the chapel I belonged to at that time. The children designed a question sheet that asked everyone who came into the building to list their personal blessings. In total we collected 160 responses yet when we read through them nearly a third of people had put, in one form of words or another, 'the love of family and friends'. The second largest category of responses mentioned the natural world and the third group of blessings mentioned pets or wildlife. We realised that when it comes to gratitude, we humans have much in common with one another.

I was reminded of this project again recently when reading a magazine article that suggested making a list of 10 unusual things you are grateful for. A conversation with friends helped to create the following eclectic mix:

- Stamps and envelopes that don't need licking
- Heinz baked beans
- The word 'qi' when used in Scrabble
- Foot massages
- Standing by a waterfall
- The smell and feel of freshly laundered sheets
- The inspiring ending of the last Harry Potter book
- Leap years having an extra day
- Dogs' enthusiasm and cats' coolness
- Long, slow, incomprehensible Russian films

Do any of these appeal to you I wonder... or what might you put in their place? What unusual, or usual, things are you grateful for in life? If you are inspired to start creating your own list, bring it along to our service on 16th March, which will be focussing on gratitude for the blessings in our lives.

Rev. Sarah Tinker

In this Month's Newsletter...

* "The Quest" * New Unitarian Youth Programme for Teenagers in the South East * Easter for Unitarians * Fundraising News * Report from LDPA Conference: "Helping Your Congregation Grow" * "Seedy Sunday" * Unitarian Women's Group - One Day Gathering at Rosshyn Hill * "What do we really see?" by Will Lyons * Science and Religion: "The Psychology of Prejudice" * Creativity Group - Planning Meeting * LDPA Quarterly * Book Group - "The Wrong Boy" by Willy Russell * Free Recitals from Brian Parsons and Sandra Smith * Kensington Community Singers - Choir-for-All * Local Lectures * Multifaith Calendar * and much more!...

Kensington Unitarians

At Essex Church (founded 1774), Notting Hill Gate

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

We meet for worship each Sunday at 11.00am. The format of the service varies, and usually includes music, singing, meditation, an address, an opportunity to share joys and concerns, and a programme for children. Our activities also include religious education and spirituality workshops, engagement groups on a variety of themes, meeting for fellowship, a regular chanting session, and quiet meditation. All are welcome to come and join us.

Contact our minister to discuss our unique ceremonies, including child naming services, weddings, blessings, and memorials, which are available to all. 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 wardens by telephone or email.



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

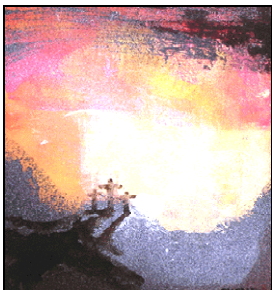
Office Telephone: 020 7221 6514

Email: info@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Web: www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Easter for Unitarians

Sunday 23rd March, 12.45-2.00pm



Come and join us after the service for hot cross buns and a conversation about what Easter does and doesn't mean for us as Unitarians. In the Christian calendar it is the most important festival of the year. But what about you?

Do you mark Easter in any particular way? Was the Easter of your childhood very different from your Easter now? Do the themes of loss, betrayal, despair, faith, renewed hope, resurrection hold a message for you?

We will meet from 12.45 to 2pm; bring your lunch, hot cross buns will be provided.

A New "Choir-for-All" Initiative at Essex Church

Kensington Community Singers

Mondays 3rd and 10th March, 7.00-9.00pm



We have recently launched a new community choir here at Essex Church. This choir is open to all – you don't need any qualifications except enthusiasm – and we're actively striving to welcome in local people alongside members of the congregation.

The sessions are great fun. Jen Hazel, our choir leader, has been teaching us a wide selection of songs from diverse sources. Donations to cover the cost of running the choir are invited (£3/£6/£9 per session – a sliding scale according to income). Contact Jen or Sarah to find out more.

Stewarding and Coffee



Stewarding:

2 nd March:	John Hands
9 th March:	Will Lyons
16 th March:	Angela Gasparetto
23 rd March:	Doris Campbell
30 th March:	Devika Joshi

Coffee:

2 nd March:	Heidi Ferid
9 th March:	Julia Alden
16 th March:	Howard Hague
23 rd March:	David Darling
30 th March:	Christine Joshi

Please speak to Christine Joshi if you would be willing to help out with stewarding or coffee duties. This is a really easy way to get involved and help to support the life and work of our community.

Songs and Silence for the Soul: Chanting and Singing at Essex Church



9th March, 13th April, 11th May, 8th June
from 3.30 to 5.00pm

Suggested Donation: £2.00

An opportunity to sing chants from the world's faith traditions and to sit together in candlelit silence. All are welcome, no experience is necessary. A space in which to re-connect with yourself, one another and with whatever you hold to be divine.

Nia Technique

Holistic Movement Sessions:

Sessions led by Sonya Leite

Sunday 9th March, 2.00-3.00pm

Following the success of the introductory session back in January, a regular Nia class will be starting here at Essex Church, on the second Sunday of every month from 2-3pm (usually the same day as "Songs and Silence for the Soul"). The cost will be only £5.00 to attend the March session.

Nia is holistic movement for body and soul. It is an expressive movement practice promoting fitness, creativity and wellbeing. Fusing dance, yoga, tai chi and martial arts, Nia provides a holistic workout and leaves you feeling energised, relaxed and centred. It suits any level of fitness, age and experience, working from where you are now.

Nia's barefoot, grounded approach maximizes body efficiency and teaches you to move consciously in a gentler way. Dance movements are mixed with subtle therapeutic suggestions and visualization techniques that help you develop awareness and heighten sensation. The result is a fusion of movement styles that is incredibly free and liberating. Moving between simple choreography (form) and freedom of movement (freedance), Nia classes combine the grace and expressiveness of dance, the power and explosiveness of martial arts, and the wisdom and stillness of yoga and tai chi.

The Quest



Sixteen people have signed up for our now fully booked latest adult RE course, which is based on a course called The Quest, now published as a book and designed by people from

Findhorn. We had to turn away a further ten people who would have liked to join the course and as it is a closed group we thought it would be a good idea to put a few of the course activities in our newsletter for other people to read about and perhaps try out at home. The Quest is designed for individual study as well as in a group and it is full of interesting ideas for ways "to experience your sense of soul". The book is available from book shops and there will be a copy in our church library so you can read more about it if you want. Here is one of the exercises that the group has explored.

Who am I? In reaching towards your own authenticity, you need to expand your picture of yourself, to include your ideas about the kind of person you know yourself to be from the inside. What makes you unique? What do you most value in who you are and what you do? Where do your particular skills and talents lie?

Read through the whole activity that follows. You may find it easier, or more effective, to complete the sentences out loud and record them or, if you feel more comfortable with a listener, you could ask someone else to jot them down for you.

Close your eyes and relax briefly. Then try completing the following phrases by writing the first five things that come into your head for each phrase without allowing your "critic inside" or "inner judge" to censor them before you get them onto paper.

- *What I like about myself is...*
- *The things I am good at are...*
- *My best personal qualities are...*
- *What other people like about me is...*
- *The qualities I most admire in other people are...*
- *The image of myself as I most like myself to be is...*

Read back the statements you have written.

- *Do they reveal any unexpected sides of you?*
- *What, if any, new insights do they give you?*

Finally, ask a friend or your family what they like, respect, and value about you; their response may give you another perspective on who you are.

'The Quest: Exploring A Sense of Soul' is written by Joycelin Daves, Janice Dolley and Ike Isaksen, is published by O Books and costs £9.99. It was described in Caduceus magazine as "an Aladdin's cave of personal and spiritual growth springboards and can be dipped into for inspiration and returned to again and again. It is a life-long companion on the spiritual path and an outstanding achievement."

Sarah Tinker

...a forthcoming event organised by the (Unitarian) London Spirituality Network...

'Touching Wholeness: The Way of Silence'

Weekend of 18th-20th April – Arrivals from 5pm Friday

In our searching for a sense of wholeness in our lives, learning to be quiet and to find a stillness within is a powerful tool. Join with others in this mindful retreat where we will explore silence in a variety of ways. We will walk a labyrinth, use art materials and creativity, employ movement, and experience the power of our presence to each other in our search.



The retreat will be held at Duncton Mill Retreat Centre, a highly rated, lovely site located in West Sussex. The centre is spacious and beautiful. Co-leaders John Harley, Linda Hart and Andrew Pakula will guide the time with reflections, meditation and instruction. All are welcome to participate in this weekend of exploration and rejuvenation.

Accommodation: Twin bedrooms only. Linens and towels are provided. For more details, please see Duncton Mill's web site.

Cost: £190 postmarked before 18 March. £200 postmarked after 18 March. All meals are included in the price of the retreat. All retreat supplies and materials will be provided, including meditation cushions and yoga mats.

Registration: Only 17 spaces are available. Participants will be booked on a first-come, first-served basis. Please download and print the registration form (PDF) and post with a cheque payable to 'The London Spirituality Network' for payment in full to:

Touching Wholeness, 66 Thelton Avenue, Broadbridge Heath, Horsham, West Sussex, RH12 3LT.

Website (for downloadable form and more information): www.ukspirituality.org/Programmes/TW-The_way_of_silence.htm

"Silent spaces invite us to go to the inner room - the room inside ourselves. By making room for silence, we resist the forces of the world which tell us to live an advertised life of surface appearances, instead of a discovered life - a life lived in contact with our senses, our feelings, our deepest thoughts and values."

Gunilla Norris

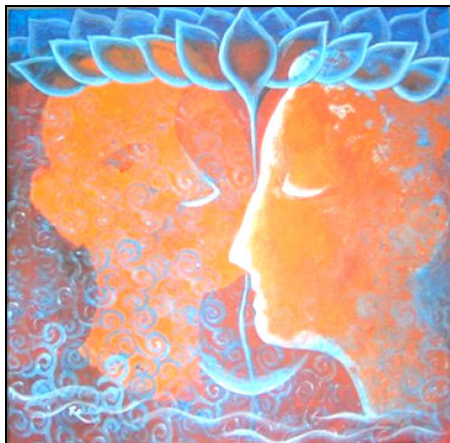
...a forthcoming event which you might be interested in: from the Art and Spirituality Network...

'Art from the Inner Light: Creating Art from the Dance of Life'

Saturday 8th March, 10 am – 4pm (arrivals from 9.30am)

At the London Interfaith Centre, 125 Salusbury Road, London NW6 6RG (Queen's Park)

"How can we connect to our creative source and move in the Light that gives us inspiration through our sorrows and joys?"

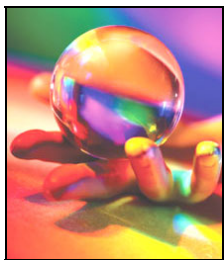


John Harley and Angela Schütz invite you to explore ways of getting in touch with your Inner Light using silence, meditation, movement / dance and art. There will be opportunities for getting out from your head and into your body, connecting with what moves you and expressing it creatively, working individually and making art together, sharing insights and experience. The day will involve some movement, but people of all levels of mobility are welcome. Please wear comfortable clothes and shoes that you don't mind getting messy.

Cost: £20 including art materials and drinks. Tea and coffee will be served from 9.30am. Bread and cheese will be provided for lunch; please bring something else to share.

Enquiries: on 020 7604 3053 or at info@londoninterfaith.org.uk

A Unitarian Day in 2025



At the recent committee vision day, members were asked to imagine how they would like the church to be in 2, 5 and 10 years' time. This reminded me of an item which I wrote in the year 2000 about the Unitarian movement, looking ahead 25 years.

It is a Saturday afternoon in June 2025. The place is the Community Meeting House in Sunderland, a building shared by Quakers, Unitarians and other liberal religious groups. Some thirty people have gathered together for the weekly meeting of this now well-established fellowship, one of forty new Unitarian groups to have been started this century, others being in Milton Keynes, Peterborough and Carlisle. Some of the members have already been together for the morning, taking part in the latest adult RE course 'Saving Spaceship Earth', which has recently been devised by a team meeting at Unitarian Headquarters in Cross Street Chapel, Manchester.

There is a special buzz of excitement at the meeting this afternoon. After the initial period of quiet meditation, readings and music, the group is to take part in a live video link-up with hundreds of other Unitarian-Universalist congregations and fellowships around the globe. The highlight of this will be the address by the President of the World General Assembly, who is a member of the Barcelona fellowship, currently visiting newly-established U-U groups in South America. She is to take as her theme the message of peace received last month from an intelligent life-form in one of the distant galaxies. It is hoped that this contact from deep space will have a positive effect on the continuing conflicts around the world between various nation-states and religious groupings.

The breakthrough in the establishment of new fellowships in Britain occurred after 2008, when the Unitarians – after many years of lobbying – finally managed to achieve a regular slot on BBC Radio's 'Thought for the Day'. In the years following, ministers Cliff Reed and David Usher became familiar voices to radio listeners throughout the country. Although now both retired, they are still occasionally interviewed on the popular inter-faith television show 'Spirituality Challenge'.

Howard Hague

The above piece was originally written during an exercise at the Foy Society annual conference held in April 2000 at Great Hucklow and entitled 'Mutating into the New Millennium'. Participants were invited to 'think creatively' about some aspect of living in the year 2025. It has been slightly amended. The Foy Society is a fellowship of men and women who, in a spirit of free enquiry, seek to understand the nature of current issues and problems: political, social and religious. It is affiliated to the Unitarian movement.

At the End of the Day - A Mirror of Questions



What dreams did I create last night?
Where did I linger today?
Where was I blind?
Where was I hurt without anyone noticing?
What did I learn today?
What did I read?
What new thoughts visited me?
What differences did I notice in those closest to me?
Who did I neglect?
Where did I neglect myself?
What did I begin today that might endure?
How were my conversations?
What did I do today for the poor and excluded?
Did I remember the dead today?
Where could I have exposed myself to
the risk of something different?
Where did I allow myself to receive love?
With whom today did I feel most myself?
What reached me today? How deep did it imprint?
Who saw me today?
What visitations had I from the past and future?
What did I avoid today?
From the evidence – why was I given this day?

From John O'Donohue's "Benedictus, A Book of Blessings", published shortly before his death, in January 2008.

Sarah says: *"We were very sorry to hear of the recent and untimely death of John O'Donohue, writer and poet, whose gentle, gracious and wise words often have a place in worship here at Essex Church. His writing conveyed the heights of possibility to which we can aspire alongside the vulnerabilities that we all carry. He was a kind and compassionate man. I think this piece demonstrates his ability to speak to us as individuals and to reach to the heart of what it means to be human. Many of us here have at Essex Church have been touched, moved and inspired by the words of John O'Donohue".*

Our Wardens' Column

What's On in Our Busy Building...

February has been a good month for daytime bookings, with a couple of TV companies holding auditions here. At the end of the month, we're going upmarket with a whole week of rehearsals for a physical theatre interpretation of Macbeth! There will be a showing of work in progress at 7.30pm on Friday 29th February.

In March we will be busy again with the next round of Associated Board Music Exams. Thankfully, our one regular daytime booking (the Ashtanga Yoga Self-practice group) are very tolerant of out of tune violins etc. from the room next door - so the two co-exist quite amicably.

Last month we said the lettings income last year might be over £40,000. In fact the final figure was close to £50,000. There is a constant stream of new enquiries, often from people who have come to the church for one of our existent groups. There is still space available on some evenings and during the day.

Outside, the daffodils we planted last year outside the nursery are about to bloom again. Groundworks have been back to finish off some of the renovations of the front garden, including repainting the front railings; next month they aim to relay some of the paving to reduce puddling. Daniel has polished the sign at the front of the church with metal polish, further enhancing our public face.

At the back of the church we've cut back the ivy which was about to go over the top of the wall, but sadly Michaela, who has been taking wonderful care of the garden, has had to go back to Germany for a while – we miss her.

Also, this month a group of six of us hoisted the grand piano in the church off its base, in order to fix the wheels. It should be much easier to move around from now on.

The Interfaith ministers will be meeting on Friday 14th March, and the Temenos Academy have more lectures on the 4th and 11th March. Details of these and all forthcoming events are on the noticeboard in the hall, or contact the office for more information.

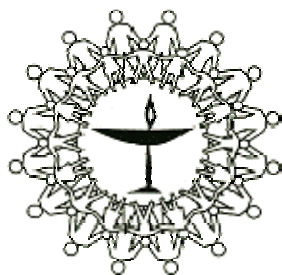
Bhakti Marga (www.bhaktimarga.org) continue to fill the church with beautiful chanting every Thursday evening from 6.30-7.30pm. This group draws on both Hindu and Christian traditions, practicing Om chanting and silent meditation. Listen out for them if you're here for a Thursday night engagement group.

David Berridge and Jenny Moy



Essex Church AGM

Sunday 18th May, 12.30pm



A date for your diary: our church AGM will be held on Sunday 18th May this year. It is very important that members attend this meeting if at all possible so please do put it on your calendar now and plan to come along.



"Each person... has an inner face which is always sensed but never seen. The heart is the inner face of your life. The human journey strives to make this inner face beautiful. It is here that love gathers within you. Love is absolutely vital for a human life. For love alone can awaken what is divine within you. In love you grow and come home to your self. When you learn to love and to let your self be loved you come home to the hearth of your own spirit. You are warm and sheltered. You are completely at one in the house of your own longing and belonging. In that growth and homecoming is the un-looked for bonus in the act of loving another. Love begins with paying attention to others, with an act of gracious self-forgetting. This is the condition in which we grow."

John O'Donohue

Creativity Engagement Group

Photography, People and Planning

Thursday 13th March, 7.00-9.00pm



In this session we will be planning for our 3rd photography exhibition, on the theme of “Everyday People”, which is due to take place in early summer (provisional launch date for this year’s event is Sunday 25th May).

If you are thinking of getting involved then please do come along on the evening. We will be informally sharing our ideas and potentially arranging future dates when we might go out to take pictures or photograph each other. You might like to bring your camera along.

Planning Future Creativity Group Sessions

Some of the March session will be given over to planning our creativity group activities for the next few months. This will be – I think – our 59th session so we’re on the lookout for new ideas. Ideally, art and craft projects should be reasonably easy and inexpensive to do, and something that we can make a reasonable go of completing in a 2-hour creativity group slot... any suggestions???

As usual, if these particular activities don’t take your fancy, you are most welcome to bring your own craftwork along, and simply sit with us in good company for the evening. There are usually biscuits and various other goodies to be eaten too...

If you would like to know more about the creativity engagement group please do talk to Jane Blackall or Patricia Walker. Photographs of work from several of the projects we’ve worked on over the last few years can be found on our website.



“Withdrawal from the world is something we can, and perhaps should, do every day. It completes the movement of which entering fully into life is only one part. Just as a loaf of bread needs air in order to rise, everything we do needs an empty place in its interior... Anything is material for a retreat — cleaning out a closet, giving away some books, talking a walk around the block, cleaning your desk, turning off the television set, saying no to an invitation to do anything. At the sight of nothing, the soul rejoices.”

Thomas Moore

...a new event for Unitarian teenagers in the South-East...



Come along to a brand new monthly youth group for 13-17 year olds on Sunday 30th March from 6-8pm

The group will meet at Unity Church, which is accessed through the gate entrance located between 277 and 278 Upper street, Islington, London N1 2TZ, next to the Islington Fire Station. A map link is available on the Unity/Newington Green web site at www.new-unity.org.

This will be an evening of fun, games, a drumming workshop and time to work out where we go from here.

If you want to join, contact Rev. John Harley at Unitarian Headquarters or by phone on 020 8670 9280.

Essex Church Book Swap

After the service on Sunday 27th April



To link in with celebrations surrounding our landmark 50th book group we will be holding a book swap after the service on Sunday 27th April.

If you would like to take part, please think about a favourite book which you would like to recommend to others, and bring a copy along to the service to swap for something that another person has offered. You might wish to write a little note saying what it is you like about the book and put it inside...



“Seedy Sunday” Seed Swap and Shared Meal



Sunday 2nd March, 12.30-2.00pm

As we move toward spring it's time for gardeners to think about planting flower and vegetable seeds for the year ahead. On “Seedy Sunday” we invite you to take part in a community seed swap at Essex Church.

Please bring along any seeds you have to swap. It might be that you have saved seeds from your own garden or window-box or perhaps you have bought a packet of seeds from a shop and have ended up with more than you need for your own personal use.

If you are new to gardening and don't have any seeds to swap then do come along anyway. We're likely to have some spares. As an added incentive we are going to have a shared meal on the same day so that there's a little extra encouragement to stay behind...

Potluck Lunch: Doris Campbell will be coordinating the lunch arrangements for our shared meal. There will be a sign-up sheet so you can let us know what food or drink you're planning to bring along.

Jane Blackall

Free Recitals at Essex Church

Featuring Brian Parsons and Sandra Smith

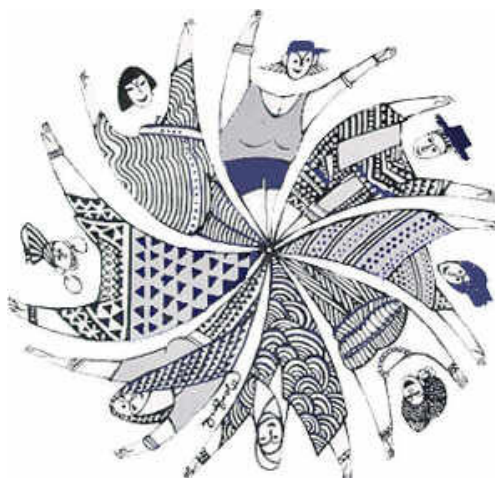
Sundays 9th and 30th March, 12.45-1.30pm

Singer soloist Brian Parsons and pianist Sandra Smith invite us to a free recital on Sundays 9th and 30th March here at Essex Church from 12.45pm to 1.30pm. Bring your sandwiches and sit back and enjoy the music, which Brian is rehearsing for a forthcoming concert.

Donations will be welcomed towards our Accessible Building Fund. Tell your friends - all are welcome.

Unitarian Women's Group

One Day Gathering – Saturday 8th March
10am-5pm at Rosslyn Hill Chapel, Hampstead



WHAT?

There will be...

- Powerpoint presentation on “Images of Female Divinity” presented by Hillary Ratna.
- Peace Dance and Chants led by Ingrid Tavkar.
- Group work on accessing the Divine within each of us.
- Fun & laughter & community

WHO?

Any member of the Unitarian Women's Group (UWG) or any woman interested in joining the Unitarian Women's Group is welcome to come along to this event.

WHY?

This is an interim get-together as the next annual gathering of the UWG is not until September 2008.

WHERE?

At Rosslyn Hill Unitarian Chapel, Rosslyn Hill, Hampstead, London NW3 1NG. The nearest tube station is Hampstead (Northern Line, Edgware Branch). Come out of the tube station, turn left down Hampstead High Street. Stay on the same side of the street. The Chapel is located between Willoughby Road and Pilgrim's Lane, just after the Rosslyn Hill Deli and before Bar Room Bar and Giraffe.

For an exact location map, go to:

<http://www.rosslynhillchapel.com/findus.html>

WHAT ELSE?

- Bring food to share OR we can order in some pizzas and have salad things available. Coffee/teas will be available. If anyone in London can offer overnight accommodation, please contact Danielle: danielle@daniellewilson.com or ring on 020 8348 6313.
- If you have any favourite images/icons/statues/etc of the Divine Feminine, please bring them along.
- If you have something you would like to contribute to the day, please contact Danielle.

“Helping your Congregation Grow”

A Report from the Recent LDPA Conference on Growth

On Saturday 16th February, 46 Unitarians from almost every congregation in the District gathered at Croydon Unitarian Church to explore strategies for membership growth within the District. Daniel Hughes and I attended as representatives of Kensington Unitarians.



The day was led by our District Minister, the Revd David Usher who was delighted at the turnout and the obvious enthusiasm for this topic amongst congregations and reminded us that one of the targets set by the LDPA council was a 50% growth of membership over the next 5 years. The current membership of the District stands at 600. He also reminded us, however, that this was not just about numbers, not just about having more people to pay the electricity bills or go on the coffee rota but because we believed passionately that Unitarianism had something to offer the world. We don't offer safety from “the fires of hell” or even guarantee a place in heaven but we can provide a forum where people can ask real questions and explore in an open and tolerant community their own spiritual longings. We discovered that almost ninety percent of us had become Unitarians rather than being born into a Unitarian family. We had obviously discovered something of value and we should share that with others. David told us of his recent trip to Kenya for a meeting of the International Council of Unitarians and Universalists and of the increasing interest in Unitarianism in Africa. In Kenya alone 30 congregations have been founded in the last 5 years. In a continent where there is increasing fundamentalism both in Christianity and Islam there is a need for an open, tolerant, inclusive spiritual community.

The first workshop was led by Tanya Morrison from Hampstead Unitarians and a member of the LDPA council who helped us explore reasons why we might not want to grow and the obstacles to growth. There seemed to be no problems finding reasons for not growing ranging from British reserve in sharing our beliefs to congregations that were so small (sometimes only four people) that it was difficult for interested newcomers to slip in unnoticed! Later in the day we re-looked at these obstacles and explored ways of addressing the problems. In the discussions one participant shared a quote from the Portsmouth Unitarian newsletter: “It's easy to be born again but harder to grow up.” The fact that we don't have a creed can make it harder to sell Unitarianism but that is also our strength. We don't provide answers but we do help people to ask questions.

These themes were picked up by Andy Pakula, Student Minister at Newington Green and Islington, who helped us to explore “What is so great about Unitarianism?”

The third workshop was led by John Lawrence from Hampstead Unitarians who introduced us to some of the theories of Church growth based on the work of the Alban Institute in the USA who described congregations as belonging to three main groups depending on size, Family with up to 20 people attending, Pastoral with 20 - 50 people and Program with 50 -100 people attending. Studies of these groups show that the infrastructure of a group will vary for each group but that it is impossible to grow into the next size with the infrastructure of the smaller group. For example a small congregation might not need formal management meetings as the four members discuss matters over coffee but if they want to grow there may be a need to formalise matters so that they can better plan for the future. Or a congregation without children may appoint a “Sunday School Teacher” to look at ways of attracting children.

We divided into small groups according to size of our congregation and explored the five areas that need to be addressed to varying degrees in any congregation, Worship, Community Engagement, Facilities, Governance and Finance and Administration. Those of us from larger congregations realised how fortunate we were when we heard some of the problems being experienced by smaller congregations and there was some discussion about how we might help one another and looked at the possibility of twinning congregations.

Despite being made aware of the obstacles to growth and hearing of the struggles of smaller congregations this was a very positive conference and I was aware of a real passion amongst participants to share what we had with others. David Usher told us of the evangelical church near his UU church in New Hampshire that had on the reverse of its Welcome Notice outside the church, so that you read it as you left, “You are now entering the mission field.” That may be a bit over the top for reserved Unitarians but if we do have a message that we think is worth listening to then we owe it to others to allow them to hear it.

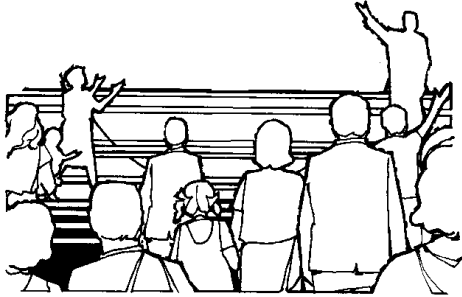
David Francis Darling

Some Forthcoming Events in the Local London District

LDPA District AGM

Saturday 15th March 2008

At Essex Hall, Essex Street, London WC2R 3HY



The next LDPA quarterly meeting will start at 1.30pm with a service led by Julian Smith, lay person in charge at Brixton, and following tea the LDPA AGM will start at 3.00pm.

Course in Congregational Leadership

This is a forthcoming four-session course designed for London and South East Unitarians interested in assuming a more active leadership role in congregational life.

The four sessions will cover:

17th May

– Worship with David Usher at Sevenoaks

7th June

– Congregational Life with David Usher at Godalming

28th June

– Rites of Passage with Jane Barton at Brighton

19th July

– Leading Groups with Jim Robinson at Hampstead

The course is sponsored by PULSE (the London and South East District) and is free of charge to participants.

For further information or to register contact David Usher:

District Minister:

Address: 5 Westerham Road, Sevenoaks, TN13 2PX.

Telephone: 01732 465248

Email: dusher@sevenoaks-unitarians.org.uk

Newington Green Tercentenary: 1708 to 2008



The Newington Green Unitarian congregation in North London will be celebrating the tercentenary of its building in 2008. It is believed that the church is the oldest nonconformist building still in use for worship in London, though the present pedimented facade dates from 1860. Various events will take place from May to November, including:

Saturday 21st June

Celebratory service, to which member congregations from the London District are invited (this event will replace the normal LDPA summer quarterly meeting)

Thursday 13th November

Richard Price Lecture, to be given by Evan Davis, the BBC's economics editor. Richard Price is probably Newington Green's most eminent minister, though these days he is better known for his pioneering work in life insurance and actuarial science.

The congregation's website is at:

www.new-unity.org

Richard Price, like Theophilus Lindsey, is buried in Bunhill Fields Cemetery, off City Road, EC1. If we are able to arrange a 'pilgrimage' to Lindsey's grave in November 2008 to mark the bicentenary of his death, it will be possible to see Price's tomb as well (though last time I saw it, some years ago, it was not in very good condition).

Howard Hague

Bodywork Sessions:

Available on Mondays here at Essex Church between 10.00am - 4.00pm

Using a combination of massage, aromatherapy and craniosacral therapy, Fiona Watson (ITEC dip.) can provide individual sessions to meet each client's unique requirements. For full details please phone Fiona on 07960 758068.



What Do We Really See?

or 'a telescope is no good to a person who keeps their eyes shut!'



Daniel Hughes, in a recent address, related a story about the Buddha. The Buddha went to give a sermon to some of his followers. Instead of speaking to them he sat in silence for a long time before quietly producing a single flower which he held which he held up and just admired it saying 'this is the way'. But what did the Buddha mean his followers to see and what did they actually 'see'? A flower with long slender stem and a crimson red bud symbolizing the beauty of nature? Or was it more than the surface appearance? As Unitarians we are committed to a search for 'truth' and meaning and while we can appreciate the spiritual teachings of other traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature at the same time humanist teachings lead us to follow the guidance of reason and the results of science.

Richard Feynman, the late Nobel Laureate in physics, relates the following story - 'I have a friend who's an artist and he takes a view I don't agree with. He'll hold up a flower and say 'Look how beautiful it is' and I'll agree. And he'll say "I, as an artist can see how beautiful it is but you, as a scientist, take this all apart and it becomes a dull thing" And I think he's kind of nutty. First of all, the beauty he sees is available to other people as well and, although I might not be as refined aesthetically as he is, I can appreciate the beauty of a flower. At the same time I see more about the flower than he sees. I can imagine the cells in there, the complicated actions in there which also have a beauty. I mean it's not just beauty at this dimension of one centimetre, there is also beauty at a smaller dimension: the inner structure. Also, the processes, the fact that the colours in the flower evolved to attract insects to pollinate it.

What is reality? When light from an object enters the eye and falls on the retina it is transmitted by the optic nerve to the area at the back of the brain which provides the sensation of sight. But in fact the image 'projected' on to brain is upside down. Our brain compensates for this by processing the image so that we perceive the world around us the 'right' way up and enables to walk about without bumping into the furniture!

At the atomic level at which the elements are composed, nuclei with their orbiting electrons are of such a scale that if the nucleus were a table tennis ball its electrons would be one kilometre away – so what we call solid material is in fact practically empty space. It is only the strong nuclear forces which stop us falling through the floor.

Although the Greeks had the notion that the Sun was central and that the earth was spherical these ideas were forgotten through the Middle Ages, Giordano Bruno was deemed by the Church to be a heretic and burnt at the stake for proposing an infinite universe. Copernicus resurrected the idea of an heliocentric solar system in his book 'De Revolutionibus' just before he died and it was not until about seventy years later that Galileo again published the proposition. He was considered heretical and summoned by the Inquisition, forced to recant and was silent on the subject until he died. The Earth-centred universe was Catholic dogma until 1835. It is surprising, however, that on a terrestrial scale, all our methods and measurements of navigation still apply in an Earth-centred solar system as in the heliocentric one.

Until the beginning of the twentieth century and the discovery of atomic theory and quantum physics reality was 'Newtonian' that is to say all natural phenomena were seen in terms of matter and forces. Newtonian epistemology is based on the reflection-correspondence view of knowledge: our knowledge is merely a reflection of the particular arrangements of matter outside of us. No other fundamental categories of being such as mind, life, organization or purpose were acknowledged. As physicists in the twentieth century conducted further experiments with subatomic phenomena, they found that the photons of light displayed an ambiguity, light seemed to exhibit the characteristics of a wave and a particle which has come to be known as 'wave-particle duality'. Also at the atomic level it is not possible to know the position and momentum of a particle: the act of observing affects the measurement. These ambiguities were not easy to accept. The most fundamental principles of science seemed to be disobeyed by these results: the notion that we are dealing with, and can know the details of, the objective world. It is perhaps one of the greatest achievements of physics that in spite of this shock, a very successful mathematics was developed that not only allowed physicists to predict the results of the above experiments but also produced one of the greatest scientific and technological success stories in recorded history. It doesn't make 'sense' but it works – all modern electronics: radio, TV and computers use the principles of quantum mechanics.

So where does this leave us with our perception of religion? William James; in his 'Varieties of Religious Experience' says that there is a spectrum of 'reality'. Alongside the world of sensing such qualities as heat, colour, and sound, and such 'forces' as life, chemical affinity, gravity, electricity, and the the world of science, 'or of physical things as the learned conceive them' are 'the various supernatural worlds, the Christian heaven and hell and the world of the Hindu mythology. Each of these is a consistent system, with definite relations among its own parts. Neptune's trident, e.g., has no status of reality whatever in the Christian heaven; but within the classical Olympus certain definite things are true of it, whether one believes in the reality of the classic mythology as a whole or not. The various worlds of fable may be ranked with these worlds of faith – the world of the Iliad, that of King Lear, of the Pickwick Papers, etc.' He concludes that reality is as numerous as individual opinion. What do you think?

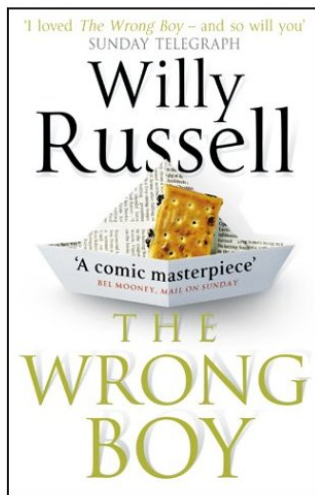
Will Lyons

50th Reading Engagement Group

“The Wrong Boy”

by Willy Russell

Thursday 20th March, 7.00-9.00pm



The reading engagement group's next topic of discussion will be “The Wrong Boy” by Willy Russell. This book was chosen by Jane Blackall and will be the focus of our next reading group meeting – the 50th meeting of our book group – on **Thursday 20th March**. We will doubtless have some goodies on hand with which to celebrate this landmark occasion.

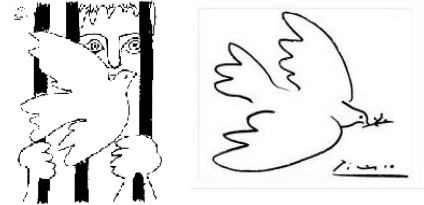
Information from Amazon UK:

“The Dewsbury Desperadoes are on their way to Pontefract for a gig at the Allied Butchers' & Architects' Club. The Girl with the Chestnut Eyes is on her way to somewhere. And Raymond is heading for Gulag Grimsby. Raymond Marks is a normal boy, from a normal family, in a normal northern town. His dad left home after falling in love with a five-string banjo; his fun-bating grandma believes she should have married Jean-Paul Sartre: 'I could never read his books, but y' could tell from his picture, there was nothing frivolous about John-Paul Sartre.' Felonious Uncle Jason and Appalling Aunty Paula are lusting after the satellite dish; frogs are flattened on Failsworth Boulevard; and Sickening Sonia's being sick in the majestic cathedral of words. Raymond Marks is a normal boy, from a normal family, in a normal northern town. Until, on the banks of the Rochdale Canal, the Flytrapping craze begins and, for Raymond and his mam, nothing is ever quite so normal again. In Raymond, internationally acclaimed playwright Willy Russell has created an unforgettable character to rival his Shirley Valentine and educated Rita. The Wrong Boy is his extraordinary first novel.”

All are welcome to join the book group. Please do try to read the books before the meeting if you're planning to come along. It would also aid discussion if you pick out favourite passages to share. Members of the group take turns in choosing books so we read a wide variety of material.

Unitarian Peace Fellowship Annual Appeal 2008

This year, the Unitarian Peace Fellowship has chosen to support Amnesty International as the charity to benefit from its annual appeal (*formerly Lent Appeal*).



Amnesty International is a worldwide movement of people who campaign for internationally recognised human rights to be respected and protected for everyone. They believe human rights abuses anywhere are the concern of people everywhere. So, outraged by human rights abuses but inspired by hope for a better world, they work to improve people's lives through campaigning and international solidarity.

The mission is to conduct research and generate action to prevent and end grave abuses of human rights and to demand justice for those whose rights have been violated. Ever since they started campaigning in 1961 they have worked around the globe to stop the abuse of human rights.

Unitarian Peace Fellowship: Founded in 1916, the Unitarian Peace Fellowship is for all those within our denomination who witness to the belief that war and preparation for war are sins against God and failures of Humanity. We believe that right relationships can only be established through understanding and love. We therefore pledge ourselves to the promotion of goodwill, justice and peace between peoples and nations.

Our congregation has already donated £100 to this year's appeal. If you would like to make a personal donation directly, either to the Annual Appeal or to the Unitarian Peace Fellowship, please send donations to Rev. Geoff Usher, c/o Upper Chapel, Norfolk Street, Sheffield S1 2JD.

“Peace, in the sense of the absence of war, is of little value to someone who is dying of hunger or cold. It will not remove the pain of torture inflicted on a prisoner of conscience. It does not comfort those who have lost their loved ones in floods caused by senseless deforestation in a neighbouring country. Peace can only last where human rights are respected, where the people are fed, and where individuals and nations are free.”

The Dalai Lama

...we have been sent this information to circulate as widely as possible!...

“You Deserve a Medal!”



“All of us know someone in our street or someone in our community who spends all their spare time helping others. They are always raising money for charity, running errands for elderly neighbours, coaching kids, or doing something to bring the town together. And how many times do we say to each other: ‘That person deserves a medal’. Well I think it is time they got what they deserved. And that is why I want us to see more of our local heroes presented with an MBE or an OBE.”

Gordon Brown

In this year's New Year's Honours List, more than 4 in 5 of all the OBEs and MBEs awarded went to people who have carried out valuable charitable or voluntary work, either as a career or in their own spare time. The honours presented by The Queen are highly-valued. There are only around 2,000 awarded each year.

The government wants local communities to help identify the unsung heroes who have made the best contributions so that they can be put forward for consideration. These will not just be the people who have raised the most money or achieved the most prominence, but also the quiet, modest individuals who have given up huge amounts of time and energy over many years to help the people around them. To find these people, the government wants the involvement of organisations across the country - from charities and voluntary organisations to local councils and health authorities, sports clubs and youth clubs to church groups and old people's homes.

Nominations are considered by the independent Honours Committees, and their recommendations on who should be honoured are announced twice a year in the New Year's Honours and The Queen's Birthday Honours. The nomination process is very rigorous and can take some time. And unfortunately, because receiving an honour is rare, not everyone can succeed in achieving this special recognition, but that should not stop them being considered, and your local hero has the same chance as everyone else.

Anyone can nominate someone for an honour. Download a nomination form from the internet (address below) or call 020 7276 2777. You will need two or more letters endorsing your nomination from other people who know about what the person has done or have been directly helped by them. It helps if you provide some accompanying evidence of the impact your local hero has had. There might be press cuttings from the local paper, or the local school or hospital newsletter. Do not tell your local hero that you have nominated them. Honours are rare, and this avoids disappointment if they are not successful.

Website for more information: www.direct.gov.uk/honours

...a local event which you might be interested in...

‘Why Is That Important To You?’

Tuesday 18th March, 4.00-5.00pm
Richard Hoggart Building,
Goldsmiths College, New Cross, SE14 6NW

A lecture by Dr Dorothy Rowe (Clinical Psychologist and Writer) on issues relating to matters of belief and control.

We all like to think that we have chosen our beliefs for sensible, logical reasons, be they reasons associated with science or with a special relationship with God. However, the reasons behind our beliefs have more to do with how we see ourselves than with science, reason or God. This is why we cling to certain beliefs even when they are shown to have no basis in fact.

Tickets are free and there is no need to book in advance. The lecture will be held in room 308 of the Richard Hoggart Building, Goldsmiths. For further information, contact Sally Marlow, email: ps604sm@gold.ac.uk.

Website: www.goldsmiths.ac.uk/apru

... an event run by the Art and Spirituality Network...

‘Growing in Spirit: A Celebration of Gifts’

Saturday 12th April, 9.45am-4.30pm
St George’s Church, Forest Hill, SE23 2AG

A workshop to explore our personal gifts and give thanks for the gifts in our lives. The event will be led by Paul Cave and John Harley.

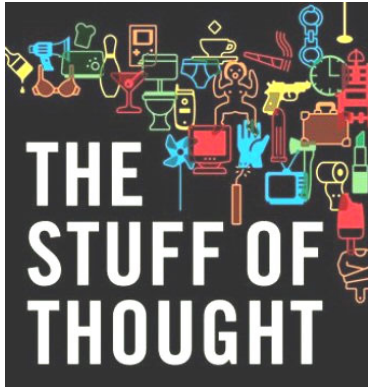
Come for a day of art-making, creativity, silence, discussion and fellowship. You are invited to bring an object or symbol with you that represents a gift you appreciate in yourself. All materials are provided and no prior experience is needed. There will be opportunities to work privately and to share with others.

Cost: £25 including art materials and drinks.
Please bring some simple vegetarian food to share.
Please let us know in if you have any special needs.

For info: Email artandspirituality@gmail.com or telephone John Harley on 020 8670 9280

...a forthcoming event which you might be interested in...

'The Stuff of Thought: Language as a Window into Human Nature'



Wednesday 12th March, 7.30-9.00pm
Royal Geographical Society, Kensington Gore

Steven Pinker will be giving a lecture on his recently published book at the Sixth Douglas Adams Memorial Lecture:

Language is the main channel in which human beings share the contents of their consciousness. It thereby offers a window into human nature, revealing the hidden workings of our thoughts, our emotions, and our social relationships. Steven Pinker will explore an example of each: everyday metaphor as a window into human cognition; swearing and taboo words as a window into human emotion; and indirect speech—veiled threats and bribes, polite requests, and sexual come-ons—as a window into human relationships.

Steven Pinker is the Johnstone Family Professor of Psychology at Harvard University, and has taught at Stanford and MIT.

This event is organised by: Save the Rhino International.
Tickets cost £12 and are available from www.savetherhino.org
Alternatively call the RGS on 020 7501 3000.

Lilac Time



Constellations

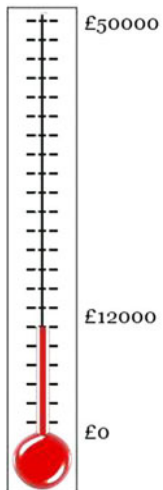
Flower tidal waves, great cathedrals of blooms
Rising in tier upon tier of monumental violet
Purple, pink, red and white; candelabras diffusing
Light within light; intensity of being seen
Almost too violently, almost a firefight of
Ebullient light; an aggressive beauty stationed amid
Superlative excess of green. How
Heart fires and inspires longing to vault
Higher towards heaven! - a concept, a light
No other word knowing -
Heaven's light - high above houses
Tirelessly, dauntlessly ascending.

It is

What we hoped to see, and heart of all
Worship; pyramids and ziggerats
Cathedrals and cairns of flesh-pink bloom.
What life, what largess God gives us
Unasked for, freely bestowed
Opportunity ourselves to blossom
And if we will abide here even though
Light and life passes, and nighttime
Always returns.

John Hands

Essex Church Fundraising News



We're making steady progress with our epic fundraising campaign... total funds raised for our accessible building project are now around the £12,000 mark. We are very grateful to everyone who has helped with the fundraising so far and all who have made such generous donations.

It is our hope that we will be able to get going on the building works this summer but - as you can see from the fundraising thermometer - we've still got quite a long way to go... if you would like to make a donation, please contact our minister, or our treasurer Juliet Edwards.



"We can do all the 'right things' but sooner or later we have to live for a while in that tomb-like experience of waiting and wondering if the light will ever reappear. It always seems quite amazing to me how readily nature accepts this dark passageway of life. Snakes shed their skin, birch trees say goodbye to their bark, lobsters leave their shells behind at least seven times, caterpillars spin their own dark homes and polar bears crawl into their caves for hibernation for a long season of inactivity. But we humans scream out against this 'leaving behind' and 'letting go.' Sitting in the darkness and waiting doesn't come naturally for us even though we 'sat' for nine months in our mother's womb, a development which is as mysterious and marvellous as that of a caterpillar metamorphosizing into a butterfly."

Joyce Rupp

Sunday Services at Essex Church

2nd March – “A Circle of Care”

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

On this day which is marked as Mothering Sunday, what might we learn from old traditions that will help us create a caring community in the 21st century? How can we strengthen the ‘circle of care’ in our lives?

9th March – “Books We Cherish”

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

As we celebrate the 50th book group here at Essex Church, in this service we shall explore the gift of reading and the books that we particularly cherish.

16th March – “One Hundred Blessings”

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

A Jewish tradition recommends that from time to time we should make a list of the blessings in our lives. Why is gratitude so important, what do we value in life and what does it mean to be blessed? In this service we will be joined by some members of the Kensington Community Singers along with their leader Jen Hazel. They will be singing some beautiful new pieces for us.

23rd March – “Easter Sunday”

Service led by Daniel Hughes

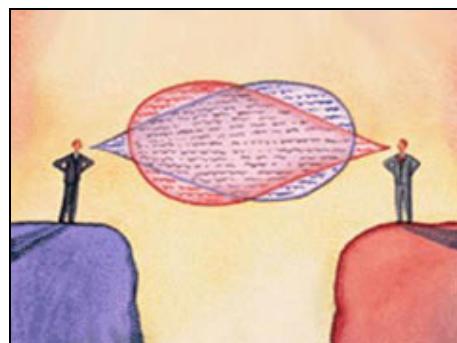
30th March – “Going for Growth”

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

After our Unitarian General Assembly Meetings have focussed on growth in our communities, this service will take up that theme and apply it to our community here at Essex Church. What is that we offer the world, how are we getting our particular spiritual message across to others, what can we do, individually and collectively, to encourage growth of our congregation? Is there more to growth than just a simple increase in the number of hymn books we need to hand out?

Science and Religion

A Continuing Engagement Group at Essex Church



One more session of the group is planned. Please do come along to join us in exploring this fascinating issue in a friendly and relaxed atmosphere. All are welcome.

Tuesday 4th March, 7.00-9.00pm: “The Psychology of Prejudice”

Led by Caroline Blair

“Prejudice is the child of ignorance.”

Is it just human nature to divide people into convenient categories? When do we start doing this? Why? Where do we get the categories from? At what point does categorization turn into prejudice? Is there such a thing as justifiable discrimination? What would this mean? Has the strength of prejudice in society got stronger or weaker over time? How can we tell if we are prejudiced ourselves? What can we do about it if we are?

These are important questions, and this workshop will endeavour to make some simple sense of the mass of research and discussion around this topic.

In a safe space, people will be invited to share their own thoughts and experiences and look together at solutions. There will be space for people to introduce their own specific concerns, and some helpful ammunition to take home at the end of the evening. A variety of sources will be used, including the book “The Psychology of Prejudice” by Todd D Nelson.

April Newsletter Deadline



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

Thank you!!!



“One of the greatest needs this planet has for healing is blessing. It is underblessed... A blessing enhances possibilities for good. Like an enzyme for growth, like a catalyst in a chemical process, blessings serve to help a living process surmount the barriers that obstruct it.”

Zalman Schachter-Shalomi