



Kensington Unitarians

Newsletter: November 2013

What's On...

Sunday 3rd November, 11am-noon
'Remembering All Souls'
Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Monday 4th November, 12.30-1.30pm
Nia Technique with Sonya Leite

Wednesday 6th November, 11am
Autumn Colour Outing
Meeting at Theydon Bois Station

Thursday 7th November, 7.00-8.00pm
'Heart and Soul' Spiritual Gathering
– coordinated by Jeannene Powell

Sunday 10th November, 11am-noon
'Remembrance Sunday'
Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 10th November, 12.30pm
Small-Group Communion
Led by Tristan Jovanović

Sunday 10th November, 2.00-3.00pm
Nia Technique with Sonya Leite

Monday 11th November, 12.30-1.30pm
Nia Technique with Sonya Leite

Thursday 14th November, 7-8.45pm
'Twelve Steps to Spiritual Health'
RE Course with Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 17th November, 11am-noon
'Zoroastrianism'
Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 17th November, 12.30-1.15pm
'Finding Your Voice'
Singing Workshop with Margaret

Monday 18th November, 12.30-1.30pm
Nia Technique with Sonya Leite

Thursday 21st November, 6.30pm
Cultural Outing: 'The Everlasting Flame' Exhibition at Brunei Gallery

Sunday 24th November, 11am-noon
'Good Vibrations'
Led by Sonya Leite and Sarah Tinker

Monday 25th November, 12.30-1.30pm
Nia Technique with Sonya Leite

Tuesday 26th November, 7-9.00pm
Farewell to the Reading Group:
Bring a favourite reading to share

Thursday 28th November, 7-8.45pm
'Twelve Steps to Spiritual Health'
RE Course with Rev. Sarah Tinker

Saturday 30th November, 10.30-4.30
Worship Studies Course (4/4)
(for continuing students only)

A Message from our Minister:

Remembering

November is a month for remembering in our church community. We hold our Annual Remembrance Sunday service in recognition of those whose lives have been lost or blighted by war. And in recent years, on the Sunday nearest to All Souls' Day, we have held a simple ceremony of remembering our loved ones who have died. A friend looked at our calendar last year and half jokingly remarked that perhaps it was a bit gloomy of us to hold two such services in one month, but her comment left me thinking about our society's attitudes towards death, grieving and loss. One of the few certainties about our lives is that they will come to an end, yet most of us rarely speak of this. In our recent *Twelve Steps to Spiritual Health* group we mused upon the question: 'Given that we humans know we must die, how then shall we live?' Our answers varied but there was a certain thread of similarity that ran through our responses – an emphasis on living fully and living with awareness. I wonder how you might answer that same question.

Anyone who has lost someone they love knows the reality that death and grieving are not something to 'get over' and move on from. They are part of life and those we have lost will stay with us, if we allow them to – in our memories, in our love, in our speaking of them. Our relationships with those who have died are changed by their death but our relatedness continues. Acknowledging such a continuation allows us time and space more fully to explore the contribution a loved one has made to our lives. We don't need to be afraid of being gloomy because such a state won't last anyway. The more we speak of the dead the more varied are the stories, and the emotions, that can emerge. November weather in Britain will probably prevent us from introducing Mexican Dia de los Muertos, Day of the Dead customs, where lively picnics are held in graveyards to honour departed souls. But whatever the weather we can take this opportunity, and hopefully many others, to speak with warmth of those who have died. Together let's engage in heartfelt acts of remembering.

"As long as we live, they too shall live; for they are now are a part of us; as we remember them." – A Jewish Prayer

Rev. Sarah Tinker



In this month's newsletter...

* 'Community, Spirituality, Conscience' – members respond to our new church slogan *
Autumn Colour Walk in Epping Forest * New Congregational Mugs Available for Purchase *
Farewell to the Reading Group * Report from our Open Studio Art Exhibition in October *
'Spiritual Life Skills' Workshop Series * Creativity Group Returns * The Old Church Manse *
'Malala' by Annie Fowler * 'Thankfulness' sermon by David Darling * and much more...

Kensington Unitarians

At Essex Church (founded 1774), Notting Hill Gate

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

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

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



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

Office Telephone: 020 7221 6514
Email: info@kensington-unitarians.org.uk
Web: www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk

'Heart and Soul'

Midweek Spiritual Gatherings



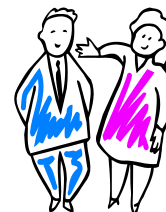
Thursday 7th November 2013 from 7-8pm

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

Heart and Soul: With Remembrance Day close by, this month's theme, "Lights Of The Past, Lights For The Future", gives an opportunity to acknowledge those who've died, who've touched our lives in a special way before turning our minds to what we wish to prosper in our future. Jeannene Powell will be leading this month's 'Heart and Soul'. If you would like to know more please contact sarah@kensington-unitarians.org.uk.

Volunteering Rotas:

Stewarding, Coffee and Greeting



Stewarding:

3rd November: Alice Lambert
10th November: Niall Doherty
17th November: Tristan Jovanović
24th November: Carol Sheppard

Coffee:

3rd November: Juliet Edwards
10th November: Sam Boyero
17th November: Caroline Blair
24th November: Sue Smith

Greeting:

3rd November: Gina Bayley
10th November: Carol Sheppard
17th November: Carole Grace
24th November: Roy Clark

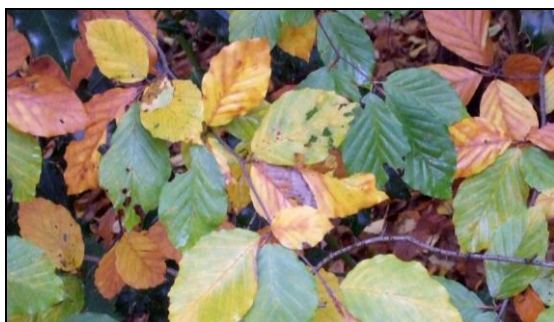
We circulate the rota list each month by email. Please contact Jane if you are willing to be on the rota mailing list.

rotas@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Autumn Colour Walk

Wednesday 6th November, Epping Forest
Meeting at Theydon Bois station, 11am

N.B. CHANGE OF MEETING LOCATION



Come and join us for a walk in Epping Forest. We will be meeting at Theydon Bois station (on the central line) at 11am. The terrain may be a bit muddy and uneven so do come prepared. We will have lunch at a local hostelry. Please let Sarah know if you plan to come (email: sarah@kensington-unitarians.org.uk).

'Take Better Photos'

A Workshop with Roy Clark

Sunday 24th November, 1.00-2.30pm



This fun practical class will examine some simple and effective techniques to help you get the most out of your digital camera. No previous experience necessary.

Roy Clark is a professional photography lecturer.

New Congregational Mugs Available to Purchase for £5



We are pleased to report that the new congregational mugs (featuring our 'Community, Spirituality, Conscience logo) have arrived and look rather splendid. They got their first outing at the management committee meeting in October, as you can see below, and will be on sale from the church for £5 each.

Join us for our next Essex Church cultural outing:

The Everlasting Flame: Zoroastrianism in History and Imagination



Thursday 21st November, 6.30pm
Brunei Gallery (SOAS), Russell Square

On Thursday 21st November we'll be taking a trip to the Brunei Gallery in Russell Square to visit this exhibition. We'll meet at the exhibition entrance at 6.30pm. It's open until 8pm, so you're welcome to join us later if that suits.

The SOAS website describes it as: *'The Everlasting Flame: Zoroastrianism in History and Imagination is the first exhibition of its kind to provide a visual narrative of the history of Zoroastrianism, its rich cultural heritage and the influence it has had on the major world religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam.'*

For more information visit the website:
www.soas.ac.uk/gallery/everlastingflame

Contact Jeannene or Jane if you plan to come along or have any questions: jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk



Farewell to the Reading Group



Tuesday 26th November, 7.00-9.00pm

After ten years and over a hundred books we have decided to wind down the Essex Church reading group this autumn. We will have one last meeting on Tuesday 26th November to celebrate the decade spent exploring books together.

All are welcome – please bring a reading from a favourite book to share with others – it doesn't necessarily have to be one that we've tackled as a group but if you want to look back at the list it can be found on the church website:

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

Many thanks to all those who have participated in the book group over the last decade and made it such an enjoyable experience!

Jane Blackall

Invitation to a Service from BKY Liberal Jewish Community on Friday 15th November at 7.00pm

We have recently received the following message from Jon Burden of BKY - Beit Klal Yisrael – a liberal Jewish community which has been meeting in our building here at Essex Church for many years. Jon says:

'I understand the Church collects food for the Kensington Food Bank. British Jewry holds Mitzvah Day (loosely translated as Good Deeds day) on Sunday, 17 November. We have a service on Friday, 15 November. Our Council would like to make our Mitzvah Day project a community contribution to the Kensington Food Bank. We would also be happy to formally invite your members to join us for the service (as Interfaith Week starts on the Monday) if you think anyone would be interested and would want to come.'

For more information about BKY see: www.bky.org.uk

Report from the Church Management Committee



The management committee met on Monday 21st October, again kindly hosted by the warden Jenny Moy as all the rooms in the church building were being used by various groups. We continue to be fortunate for the income that is generated by room rentals but in order to be able to rent out the rooms as well as use them for the needs of the congregation it is important that the building is in a good state of repair. We are grateful to Sarah (our Jill of all trades, Minister) and Jenny for keeping an eye on any repairs that are needed. Currently there are no major problems, just a few difficult to solve minor plumbing issues such as the dripping tap in the toilet!

It was reported that the recent Art Exhibition, part of the local Open Studios event, at which not only several members of the congregation but also some of our user groups exhibited their work, was a great success but also a lot of hard work for Jenny and Jane. We were grateful to all who contributed or took part in the event which also helped to raise awareness of our Unitarian congregation in the local area.

It was noted that there had been a good response to our request for items for the local food bank. The committee also agreed to donate £500 to the West London Churches Homeless Project for their work in providing overnight accommodation for the homeless during the winter months. Further from home we also agreed to give £100 to the Dublin Unitarian congregation for their Organ appeal. One of only two Unitarian congregations in the Republic of Ireland this spiritual community provides a much needed liberal home for the many who have felt alienated from the church of their birth.

The committee was sorry to hear that Esther, our Sunday School teacher, has had to move from London for work reasons. We will be advertising for someone else experienced in working with children but if anyone knows of any possible candidates (preferably with CRB clearance already) please speak to Sarah or a member of the committee.

Sarah, in her Minister's report, commented that there had been an increase in attendance at Sunday worship and that people had reported that there was a "good feel" to the worship. However, she also encouraged people to let her or any of the committee know if they had any suggestions for any variations in the content of the Sunday service.

David Francis Darling
Chair of the Congregation

Christmas Events at Essex Church



'The Spirit of Christmas'

Thursday 12th December 7 to 9pm

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

Christmas Carol Service & Congregational Lunch

Sunday 15th December, 11am

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

Outing to Esterhazy Singers Christmas Concert

Thursday 19th December, 7pm (TBC)

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

Candlelit Christmas Eve

Tuesday 24th December, 5pm

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

Christmas Eve Dinner

Tuesday 24th December, 7pm

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

Creativity Group

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



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

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

January-March: Feltmaking

April-June: Photography

July-September: Printmaking

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

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

Jane Blackall





Photographs of the Art Exhibition by Jane Blackall and of the 'Creative Corner' by Roy Clark.

Getting Creative at the Art Exhibition...



I popped to the Open Studios Art Exhibition at the church on Saturday and was pleasantly surprised by the variety of artwork on display, from quilting to felting, ceramics and pottery to black and white photography.

The creative corner got busy towards the end of the afternoon, with people painting on canvases and Jane showing a couple of people how to create felt squares. Although I was feeling tired, after a little encouragement from Jane, I gave it a go myself.... and I'm so glad I did.

I hadn't made a felt square before so was quite apprehensive, but Jane took time explaining and demonstrating how to gently tease the pieces of wool away from the roll and where to lay them to make the pattern or design of my choice. By the time I had planned my pattern, wet it with soapy water and was vigorously rolling it, I was engrossed in the creative process. I'd forgotten how much fun making things were and how invigorating it can be. I was no longer tired, but full of energy and smiling from ear to ear.

When I'd finished the rolling, and looked at my felt square, I felt really proud of my creation and very glad that I'd joined in the felt making fun with others that day. I'd definitely recommend people try out the creative corner at future Open Studios Arts Exhibitions, as they may get much more from it than just a piece of art.

Jeannene Powell

"Many of us overvalue autonomy, the strength to stand alone, the capacity to act independently. Far too few of us pay attention to the virtues of dependence and interdependence, and especially the capacity to be vulnerable."

William Sloane Coffin



Warden's Column: Our Open Studio Art Exhibition



On 11th/12th October Essex Church took part in Kensington & Fulham Open Studios (KFOS). Twelve members of the congregation showed their work, along with nine representatives of groups who use the building. We had a lot of textiles - including felt, tapestry & patchwork - and several sculptures in clay & paper as well as a huge range of 2D images: paintings, photos, drawing, monoprint, collage etc. Jane Blackall produced a beautiful illustrated guide to the exhibition and there's a copy in the library you can look at if you didn't manage to see the real thing. Jane also ran a "creative corner" while the exhibition was open, with opportunities to try painting and felt-making.

I particularly enjoy events like this which open our doors to new people and strengthen connections between the different users of the building. Thank you to everyone who gave so generously of their time and creativity to make it possible.

Here are some comments from our visitors' book:

"You have a very talented congregation."

"Beautiful to see everyone's creative expression, wonderful & different. Great inspiration – have art around more often!"

"Impressed at the quality! Enjoyed creating a mini-masterpiece in the 'crafts' section. Thank you all."

"I am so touched by this exhibition. So many voices of the soul – the one soul we all share. Thank you."

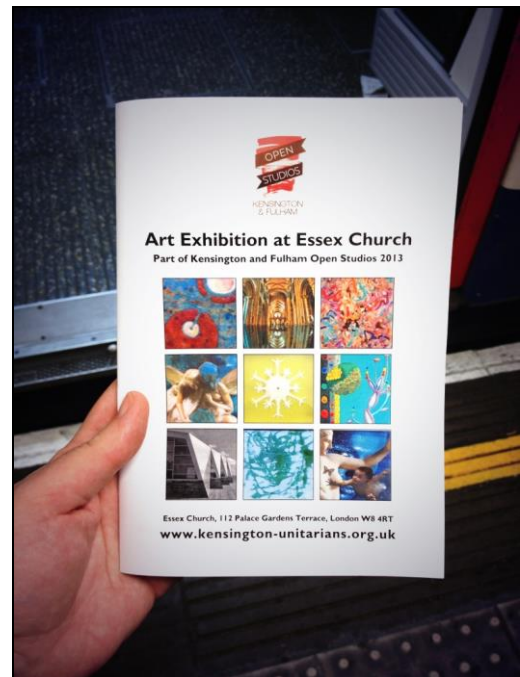
"Very interesting to see the different backgrounds, spiritual paths and creative expression of the various exhibitors. Thank you very much – a heartwarming & uplifting experience"

"I've enjoyed this exhibition more than RA, Tate, National Gallery . . . no jockeying to get a view – was a real joy. The peace was marvellous – a class act."

"Very nice – interesting art and lovely atmosphere + coffee!"

"I think it's all marvellous, yes, ALL!"

Jenny Moy



'Learning how to love is the goal and the purpose of spiritual life — not learning how to develop psychic powers, not learning how to bow, chant, do yoga, or even meditate, but learning to love.'

Lama Surya Das

'Spiritual Life Skills'



A new workshop series for 2014 Hosted by Kensington Unitarians

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

'Embracing the Shadow'

Saturday 11th January, 10.30am-4.30pm

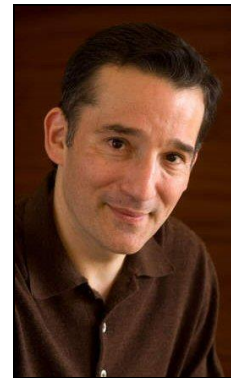
In this first session facilitated by Sonya Leite and Sarah Tinker we will learn more about the shadow sides of ourselves and the rich creativity that such an exploration can uncover. Through sound and silence, movement and art work, we will find new ways to make connections with hidden aspects of ourselves, unleashing new energy and insight to inspire us in the year ahead. There is a sliding scale of £5 / £10 / £15 for this session (pay what you can afford) and please bring lunch to share. Places will be limited so book soon by emailing info@kensington-unitarians.org.uk or contact Sarah if you would like to know more.

'Compassionate Communication'

**Saturday 5th April, 10.30am-4.30pm and
Sunday 6th April, 1pm-4.30pm (exact times TBC)**

We are delighted to be joined by Jill and Richard Broadbent who will be offering their 'Compassionate Communication' training over a whole weekend next spring (this is a 2-day course). Several members of the congregation will remember that the Broadbents led a six-week course with us back in the autumn of 2010. We cannot recommend this training highly enough, and would encourage members of the congregation to sign up, even if you took part in the previous course as there is always more to learn and benefit to be had from practising with others. There is a sliding scale of £20 / £40 / £60 for this training (pay what you can afford) which is a considerable saving on what you would pay elsewhere. **We would appreciate it if you would sign up for this course well in advance so we can be sure it is viable.** Please book your place soon by emailing jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk or contact Jane if you would like to know more.

"A great religious tradition does not deny the pain of loss. In the words of the Kotzker Rebbe, 'The only whole heart is a broken one.' No awake spirit can move through this world without enduring a broken heart. There is nothing real that makes life painless. Accepting the pain of living, knowing one's heart will — and should — be broken, is the beginning of wisdom."



Rabbi David Wolpe

'New U' Workshop



I and about a dozen other people attended the New U event on Sunday, 29 September 2013. This had been organised to introduce new members to Unitarianism and the way Essex Church works as a congregation. Jane, Sarah and David led the workshop.

Sarah gave a short history of Essex Church and explained the organisation. We also had a tour of the church building. We were split into sub groups and were asked to answer the question – 'What Brought You to This Church?' The answers were many and varied, ranging from 'I got on a bus and went round looking for a Unitarian Church' to 'I came to keep my sister company'.

The sub-groups were also asked to provide a list of questions about Unitarianism for a Q & A session. Again, the questions were many and varied. They included 'What makes Unitarianism really different from other liberal Christian churches?' to 'What are we doing for social justice?' Jane also explained the background to the new, church slogan 'Community, Spirituality, Conscience' and asked us to put down in writing what those words meant to each of us.

The day finished with a bring and share dinner. Our contributions, although very tasty, did not smell as nice as the Eritrean Support Group's hot dinner next door. By the end of the day, I had learnt a lot more about the history and philosophy of Unitarianism and as an added bonus, had got to know some members of the church better and tasted Jane's famous scones for the first time!

Liz Tuckwell

'Finding Our Voice'

Singing Workshops with Margaret Marshall
Sunday 17th November, 12.30 to 1.15pm



Margaret Marshall has worked as a professional singer all her adult life and is also a very experienced singing teacher. She is leading monthly sessions to help us all find our voice.

These workshops are for anyone who is prepared to open their mouth and make a sound. Margaret will show us how to improve the quality and strength of our voices. Using a few simple exercises we'll gain joy and confidence in our singing by learning how to produce and develop the voice, something everyone can do. We'll work with the breath and overcome unconscious blocks that can prevent us singing with our true potential. Fun and achievement are guaranteed and these sessions are designed for everyone, whatever your experience or ability. All are welcome.

William Board Associates Present:

Auguri Signor Verdi!



Friday 29th November at 7.30pm
at Rosslyn Hill Unitarian Chapel
Pilgrims Place, Rosslyn Hill, London NW3 1NG

Come and celebrate the Maestro's 200th Birthday with us in a concert of some of his best and lesser known works. This concert features our own Peter Crockford on piano.

Hannah Kirk – Soprano
Nadine Mortinmer-Smith – Soprano
Dominic Natoli – Tenor
Trevor Alexander – Baritone
Peter Crockford – Pianoforte

Tickets £10, £7 (concessions) available at the door

One Light Spiritual Gatherings 'Service'



Friday 8th November 2013
6.30-8.15pm – Here at Essex Church

The gatherings are led by graduates of the Interfaith Seminary.

Information from One Light: 'Sometimes it seems there is so much pain and need in the world around us - always more than we could possibly hope to influence or satisfy. I am reassured by the words of Caroline Myss. She reminds us that - "Everything we do counts. There is really no such thing as a small act of service or goodness... Every day we are called to perform large and small acts of courage and grace. And the effects of every small action are multiplied a thousandfold."

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

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

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

Channing Lecture 2013 by Rev. Dr. Patrick T. O'Neill

Saturday 23rd November at 3pm
Golders Green Unitarians, Hoop Lane, NW11 8BS

This year's Channing Lecturer is the Rev. Dr. Patrick O'Neill, minister of Rosslyn Hill Chapel in Hampstead. The title of his lecture will be "...More than Merely Christian: Emerson's Wider Vision for Unitarianism."

While William Ellery Channing was the acknowledged founder and leading voice of early Unitarianism in America, it was the second generation of American Unitarians that took Unitarianism beyond the confines of traditional Judeo-Christian theology to a wider vision. That wider vision drew inspiration and spiritual sustenance from many different theological sources. Ever since that time Unitarian faith has been shaped by what might be called a 'Trans-Christian' eclectic vision that reveres religious truth wherever it might be found.

Tickets are £5 and can be bought on the night or reserved in advance. For more information please contact Rev. Feargus O'Connor on 0207837 4472 or ggunitrev@aol.com.

'Community, Spirituality, Conscience'

I'm touched by the responses people have made to our new slogan 'community-spirituality-conscience' and how these words relate, both to their own lives and to their connection with Kensington Unitarians. Thanks to Jane Blackall for taking the plunge and choosing these words to represent us and then creating the logo that now appears on our lovely new mugs. For me, spirituality is an individual exploration that is greatly enhanced by being in community with others. It can't be something remote or ethereal – it's real life involving real people, seeking to make sense of life and to enjoy the absurdities of being human. I want to encourage us all to enjoy life as much as we can – conscience reminds me that happiness is better shared rather than selfishly pursued, conscience reminds me that this world is horribly unfair and that there is always something to be done about such injustice.



Sarah Tinker



Community - the services are always important to me as they give me comfort, make me think and inspire me to live my life in a more authentic way. And, of course, it is always more easy to do this within a community of like-minded people.

Spirituality - there is a wonderful sense of peace and calm within the building and the little rituals, such as Candles of Joy and Concern, the time given over to meditation and the wonderful emphasis on such beautiful and inspiring music, makes a spiritual occasion of the whole event on a Sunday morning.

Conscience - for me the Candles of Joy and Concern represent the personal and the political, the joining together of my inner and outer worlds as we focus on those issues of concern to ourselves, others and the wider world.

Carol Sheppard

Community: Worship and spirituality need to be rooted in community which for me is mainly experienced on a Sunday morning. The community helps to hone my conscience. At Essex Church I am challenged by the different views of other members. I would like everyone to think like me but it wouldn't be good for me!

Spirituality: I understand spirituality, rooted in the weekly Sunday service, as that which unites me to other people, the universe and that which I call God. Apart from Sunday I occasionally find that the mid-week groups help as well but to be honest the main source of my non-Sunday spirituality is through my personal reading and reflection.

Conscience: I have a slight aversion to the word as it reminds me of guilt and what I ought to do but at Essex Church I understand it to be that which opens me up to the truth of other people and encourages me to engage in what the Buddhists call "right action"



David Darling



Spirituality is a somewhat nebulous concept, yet it abides. The contemporary definition is to set 'spirituality' apart from 'religion' whereby the former refers to an inner dimension of consciousness and feeling, and the latter to the Church, authority and dogma. However, it cannot be overlooked that, historically, there has always been a current of spirituality running through the world's religions. Even so, spirituality ultimately slips the bonds of religion and expresses itself in art, music, poetry and nature. **Conscience**, to me, is living according to one's own nature as revealed through self-reflection, yet also as negotiated in **community**. And the Unitarian community has provided a lifeline of sorts enabling me to feel more integrated and involved with Life and others.

Niall Doherty

Community, to me, means you're not alone! There are others around who can make you feel you belong to a shared, bigger, supportive network that is always available for you to call upon when the need arises.

Spirituality seems to be the modern buzzword that is more appropriate to use than the less cool word 'religious'! Whilst at Hucklow summer school this year, one of theme speakers, Winnie Gordon, mentioned we must 'make time for spirituality' so for me this word means being still, centred, reflective, meditative, aware of the beauty and goodness around me, and finding a time to pause and be aware of my breathing, my thoughts in these quieter moments to get in touch with myself, to prayer, to ask for guidance from a higher power.

Conscience is my moral compass! If I have done wrong, nobody need tell me, my conscience alerts me to this fact.

Ellen McHugh



Community, Spirituality, Conscience (continued...)

Community: For me, Essex Church is my main community in London, particularly with family some distance away. As I moved around the country in my earlier career – in Sheffield, Norwich, Brighton and then in London - I was always lucky enough to find a Unitarian community where I found a warm welcome and the support of people who became friends. And talking of community here at the church, let us not forget the many other groups who use our premises on a regular basis and who enjoy our wonderful space (I know – they've told me!).



Spirituality: I have always found spirituality to be one of the most difficult of terms to define, and am still looking for a satisfying explanation. Certainly it is not the same as religion, which suggests an organised form of belief involving rules and institutions, not what I want at all. And to talk of the 'non-material' aspects of life isn't altogether satisfying either, though it's in the right area. Perhaps it's just something you know or feel when it comes along. I still remember the evening in 1986 down in our church library when the participants read out their own statements of belief at the end of a 'Building Your Own Theology' course. That was some spirituality.

Conscience: Another difficult concept. I see two aspects to it. One is the great draw of the Unitarian approach to religion in that it can help people to work out their own beliefs according to reason and conscience, without being encumbered by the restrictions of dogma and creed. We do not expect people to believe the unbelievable, but only accept what is right for them. The second aspect is the challenge of what our church community can and should be doing in relation to society in general and our own neighbourhood in particular. We have always given as generously as we can to many charities over the years, but I have felt that perhaps we should be supporting a local charity or organisation on a more regular basis, both with money and with time. As it happens this is something which our management committee has been discussing recently.

Howard Hague



Community: Welcoming and recognising each individual in our uniqueness, and also knowing that we have an acknowledged togetherness - our connection to each other through this place. This sense of togetherness may not always be regular attendance at Sunday services, but somehow, even remotely, we are held in remembrance as members of the human family that has a warm association/affiliation to this space. And particularly when we light our candles of Joy and Concern, we throw our arms and hearts out to encircle our global community.

Spirituality: Reaching beyond our little selves to the larger SELF. Together breathing; listening inwardly and outwardly; making song together, dwelling in the vibrations of sound and music. Quietening and lifting the soul with sweet remembrance of Oneness.

Conscience: That we all have a responsibility and contribution to make towards the greater evolution of consciousness on this planet. Each of us make a difference. Every action towards ourselves or in the world. There is plenty to do. And there is an urgency to bring our planet back from the edge of oblivion.

Veronica Needa

"Community" in my life means those groups that I am part of:-

1. Estate where I live.
2. Family members past and present.
3. Church where I worship.
4. Friends who I play with.

These communities/people support me and I support them. I see my relationship with these communities as very loving and enriching and it is within these communities that I learn the most about coping with life. The nature of my communities change over the years as I change over the years. I don't see any one of my communities more important than any other. I am aware that my family and friends have noticed a change in my outlook on life but I am not sure whether that is the influence of Unitarianism or whether the life changing event of retirement is more significant.



My **spirituality** starts with acknowledging what I call my "Spiritual Building Blocks", it then moves on to embracing my "Spiritual Practices" and finally being able to list my "Spiritual Treasures" as I move through life. I'm a great list person - always have been - but it is only since attending Kensington Unitarians that I have been able to see this as a journey that, I suspect, may have no destination and come to terms with that idea. Of course all these Blocks, Practices and Treasures have been nurtured into existence within my Communities.

Personal "**Conscience**" I have most difficulty with because of such concepts as contrition, sin, guilt, repentance, forgiveness etc etc. I do know what profound guilt feels like and I was quite unable to deal this by myself and sought help. I was attending Kensington Unitarians at that time and was very happy to do so during this time of such turmoil; it was a gentle, loving place to be. I find that attending Essex has heightened my awareness of the "collective conscience" although my only form of protest would be "silence" or "to walk in the opposite direction". At this moment in time I think the collective conscience needs to pay more attention to ballot box democracy and when given the opportunity I encourage the non-voters in "my communities" to vote and understand the abstention vote. Perhaps Kensington Unitarians has heightened my awareness of how I feel.

Sue Smith

Community, Spirituality, Conscience (continued...)



Community: I always think that a good community is like a well-run communal bank account: that those who have a little to spare – time, money, energy, love – can pay in, and those who need something (which may of course be the same people, at a different time) can draw out. At times – when washing up the coffee cups, or wrestling with the accounts, or even greeting visitors with a friendly smile – I might be paying in. But at other times, when I turn up feeling hurt or confused or angry about things I can't change, and realise that the building is full of friendly people wishing me well, I have been grateful to make a withdrawal. And to know that if things ever get much worse, there is a community of people willing to give whatever they can to make things easier for me.

Spirituality: If I had to sum up the single factor that is most valuable about going to Kensington Unitarians, it is the feeling of an hour a week being completely 'out of' my normal, day-to-day life. For that hour I am sitting still and participating in the kind of experience I would never normally get otherwise: a mixture of silent thought, music to listen to, music to join in with, thought-provoking and sometimes beautiful readings and an address that acts as a spoken guide as to how to look at something with new eyes. It is very easy to get bogged down in minutiae, and I am always grateful that I have the opportunity, on a regular basis, to look at the wood instead of the trees.

Conscience: on the same lines as 'spirituality', it is valuable to have an hour a week when I sit and think more deeply about things. It is easy to think, in an indolent kind of way, that I am a 'good' person if I don't drop litter or embezzle the Revenue and Customs. But it is sometimes very valuable to look at your actions in a deeper, perhaps more critical (though not negative) way: to consider whether there are areas where I could be giving more to the world, or to any part of it; to ponder on concepts such as equality, responsibility, charitable listening and judging, giving in all its forms.

Caroline Blair

Community: Coming together on a Sunday with fellow travellers has become an essential part of my life. Our inclusive church community gives me a sense of balance and belonging amongst the bustle of city life that nourishes, replenishes and heals.

Spirituality: The wide range of interpretations of spirit is one of the joys of our Unitarian congregation. For me Spirituality is about being tuned into the frequency that connects everything in the universe, using love as the dial

Conscience: Reinforcing and stimulating the promptings of the inner voice to put love into action amongst kindred spirits (see community).



Roy Clark



For me, Kensington does represent a sense of **community** that is separate and safe from any other areas of my life. The space it provides for people to express their feelings is, I believe, vital to well-being.

I prefer to think of myself as more **spiritual** than religious and Essex Church allows me this privilege without any pressure to be anything other.

I like to think of **conscience** as more of an awareness than something associated with guilt. For even that one hour, now and again, I am reminded of things in life that quite often evade me in the weekly hubbub of living.

Annie Fowler

Community, spirituality and conscience are a remarkable trinity of words to describe our Unitarian community. To me, they are like a Venn diagram, each distinct but with a shared core; one cannot exist without the other. As Sarah often says, our **community** is made up of all who come through our doors. But even when we're absent, we are connected though the spirit of friendship we have. **Spirituality** comes into my life because I am open to it and I dare to be vulnerable in our community. I can do this because I know it's safe and I can lay out my **conscience** before all. We also share a conscience. I that in our community we have a meeting of our minds as we light candles, as we chat, as we listen to each other and to the Great Spirit.



Tristan Jovanović

Our Local Foodbank



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

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

Rev. Sarah Tinker

A reminder of the wish-list of items:

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

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



'Changing Ourselves, Changing the World'



In early October I led a service on the theme 'Changing Ourselves, Changing the World' and asked people to consider the following questions. Everyone was invited to write their responses on post-it notes and put them up in the hall for everybody to read. Just a few of the responses are below.

Jane Blackall

Something you've *already* done to make the world a better place:

- I made some posters for raising awareness in my school.*
- Organised a 'Take Back the Night' march.*
- Volunteering to teach for free.*
- Mental health appeal panels.*
- My job is about greater poverty alleviation.*
- Helping people with disabilities to live independently.*
- I try to take every opportunity to treat other people with kindness.*

A specific issue /cause you particularly care about:

- Elderly sometimes do not get appropriate care and are left alone .*
- Burn-out through overly long working weeks.*
- Interpersonal violence. / Climate change.*
- I worry about spiritual and religious intolerance.*
- Access to good medical care is limited by one's financial status.*
- Poverty / I'd like everyone to get a good education.*
- Injustice towards gay people in Africa and Russia.*

Concrete long-term goals / changes you'd like to help bring about:

- Equal distribution of power and money throughout the world.*
- Modify driving habits to increase courtesy and safety.*
- To be more aware and accepting of myself.*
- To change the justice system from one that concentrates on punishment to one that offers therapy and opportunity for offenders to change themselves.*
- To be the greatest teacher.*
- An increase in compassion and awareness of the needs of the world and others.*
- That life will be worth living for our grandchildren when they grow up*

Something you will do towards your goal in the next 24 hours:

- I will look around for groups/campaigns that are already working towards this goal*
- Talk about the issue and donate to medical research.*
- I can look up online and find out where the nearest 'Age UK' is to where I live and find out what their needs are.*
- Practice compassion. / Join the 'IF' campaign.*
- Remember the person next to you may be even more nervous than you are: reach out!*

The Old Church Manse



For the last year or so I have been going through the church archives. At one point I came across a rather mysterious 'tin box' in one of the hall cupboards. When we eventually managed to get this open we found it contained a number of interesting items, including the church marriage register for 1887 to 1917 (I will produce a fuller list of these items in due course). Also in the box was an old printing block labelled as 'Essex Church Manse', an image I had not seen before. This is a block produced from an original photograph and then transferred onto copper using an electro process, prior to its use in printing, perhaps for a magazine article or annual report. According to a note on the reverse of the block the photo was taken by a 'St John Cadet', but the circumstances of this are not known.

We are extremely grateful to Roy Clark for his skill in re-capturing the image for us, using a modern scanner. The picture shows the old Essex Church (built 1886/87), and then the manse which was presumably built at the same time. Also in the picture on the left is the 'Boy Monument'. This was erected in 1880 as a tribute to the various originators of Sunday Schools, including Robert Raikes in Gloucester (1780), our own Theophilus Lindsey (1764) when he was still vicar of Catterick and the Methodist Hannah Bell (1769). The monument, which was of white Sicilian marble on a red-granite pedestal, originally stood in front of the Essex Street Chapel and was transferred to Kensington when the congregation moved there.

The old Victorian church was demolished in 1973 prior to the redevelopment of the site (our present building opened in 1977). Although the Boy Monument was sent away for safe-keeping (I believe to a mason's yard), it apparently did not survive the interim years, which is very sad. A fuller description of the monument will be found in Raymond Williams's history of the church Essex Church in Kensington 1887-1987 (on our website), pages 49-50. Also in Raymond's book is a photo (between pages 28 and 29) of the church just prior to demolition which enables you to locate where the picture would have been taken from. What amazes me is how such a large church and the manse fitted on to our present site. I guess the photo dates from the 1920s or 1930s – can anyone who knows about old cars date it more exactly? I wonder if the car belonged to the minister at the time, a nice thought.

Howard Hague



Twelve Steps to Spiritual Health

What I like about Essex Church is that it provides a space and ethos that allows us to come to our own conclusions and our on-going 12 Steps course does not disappoint. There is such a warm acceptance in it that I feel freed to speak my mind and heart. And I'm inspired by others on their spiritual journey of life – it feels that we travel together.

It is a simple format. We are encouraged to read a few chapters in our spare (!?) time. Then in pairs and threes we talk an issue over and then come back to the larger group with some insight we've gained, sharing as we want. No-one has to do anything. Sometimes we explore through creativity or in meditation as well as through conversation. I find it surprising that a gentle group, with so little pressure or expectation, can accomplish so much.

Carole Grace

'Giving, not because we have to, but for the sheer sake of giving, just out of love, is something really beautiful — out of this world! This kind of gratuitous goodness — a lavish kindness — makes our world a better place in which to live, and makes us better people.'



Everyone benefits from kindness. We are so deeply touched by it that we are transformed. In the holy of holies of our being, we feel connected, centred, involved, engaged, and deeply bonded to others, regardless of our divisions due to ideology, religion, race, gender, ethnicity, nationality, economic status, or other factors. After all, we are all made of flesh, bones, and blood. We belong to one human family. We all have the same basic needs. We are one. We are whole. We are human together. We are in the same boat of destiny.'

Jean Maalouf



**A new play by Ayndrilla Singharay
Inspired by Rabindranath Tagore's Shasti**

**Monday 18th November, 7:30pm - 8:40pm
Wilton's Music Hall, London E1 8JB**

Two brothers. Two wives. One family. Ash and Rana are brothers but whereas Ash and his wife Joy are happy and spirited newlyweds, Rana and his wife Megh are struggling to tolerate one another. When a seemingly innocent meeting leads to devastating consequences, there are painful sacrifices to be made by all. Set in modern day London, *Unsung* is a re-imagining of *Punishment*, one of Rabindranath Tagore's most haunting short stories and is a reminder of just how far we will go to protect those we love. Ayndrilla Singharay has worked with South Asian women in refuges and it is their stories which have deeply informed the telling of this story. The intimate portrayal of the family in *Unsung* is specific but the underlying human issues resonate across cultures.

**Prices: £12.50 full price, £10 concessions
To book: www.wiltons.org.uk / 020 7702 2789**

The Big Issue – Small Gestures

In a previous newsletter I read an article recommending we engage with *The Big Issue* vendors. For those sellers who are vulnerably housed, as opposed to being homeless, I would like to suggest that, instead of, or in addition to, giving some cash/buying the magazine, we offer them some of the basic items we - in more permanent homes - often have in duplicate.

Ideas - radio, alarm clock, hair dryer, thermos flask, insulated sealed mug/cup, rucksack, saucepan, net curtain, and not least, warm clothing.

Bearing in mind that vendors also carry the magazines they've purchased on Mondays, Thursdays and Fridays tend to be lighter days for them to carry extra items.

Over the last few years I've come across many vendors who travel miles to their allocated spot. How about giving them an Oyster Card...with credit?

SC



SOS Children's Villages Swaziland Sponsorship Update

The congregation has sponsored twin girls in Swaziland for some years now: Patience Qinisile Zeeman and Fortunate Qiniso Zeeman. We need to raise funds each year to keep up this support until they complete their education. We have recently received an update from the sponsorship coordinator in Swaziland:

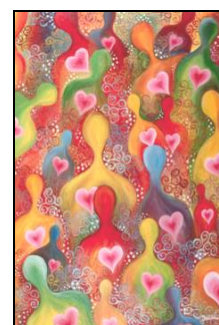
Qinisile and Qiniso celebrated their 13th birthday in July.

Qinisile is energetic and spends most of her time playing with friends yet has shown maturity in every side of life. She is caring and loving towards her twin sister. She is responsible in performing chores around the house. She is good at dancing and a very active member of the African Dance Group. Qinisile has progressed to grade 4 and her performance is constantly improving.

Qiniso is in good health. She relates well to every house member and is friendly towards everyone in the village. She is very supportive to her twin sister. She is fully responsible in the house, is respectful and humble. Qiniso attends church services and is a member of the Praise and Worship Team as she is good at singing. She has good leadership skills and is always eager to learn new things. Qiniso has progressed to grade 5 and is amongst the best performing pupils in her class. When she finishes school she wants to be a Doctor.

**Please speak to Sarah or Caroline if you are
able to donate towards this worthwhile project.**

'Respect is love in plain clothes, someone once said, and so is acceptance and understanding and really being known. And when someone really understands what makes you who you are, they've made a friend for life. And so does someone who values you just the way you are.'



Merle Shain

Malala



On Friday 6th September I was privileged to attend the annual International Children's Peace Prize at the Ridderzaal in The Hague, Holland and witness this year's prize being awarded to Malala Yousafzai. Malala was targeted by the Taliban in 2012 in Pakistan; she was shot in the head and neck because of her determined campaign to encourage all the children in her village to go to school. The Taliban described her campaign as an 'obscenity'.

Thanks to the miracles of modern medicine in the UK Malala made a steady recovery and undeterred she continued with her world-wide crusade to speak on behalf of the silent millions of children who are denied any form of education. There are 57 million uneducated children in the world and 32 million of these are female. Girls are kept at home, made to work, sold into marriage sold as slaves and used in battle.

The prize, created in collaboration with the Nobel Peace Prize Laureate was handed to Malala by Tawakkol Karman, the winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011 for her unfailing work as an activist for Human Rights not only in her home country of Yemen but across the globe. She spoke eloquently in English and Arabic.

Also in 2011 a beautiful strong young lady from South Africa won the Children's Peace Prize for her determination to create more equality for disabled children. Chaeli, who suffers from Cerebral Palsy, spoke with passion about her concerns and she used an African word that resonated with me afterwards. 'Ubuntu' means humanity of others and I think it is a word we can all remember and treasure.

Annie Fowler



Good Cause Collection of the Month:



For better
mental health

The Lotus Centre

Collection on Sunday 24th November

Our Charity for November is the Lotus Centre in Southall.

The Lotus Centre, 48 Hartington Road, Southall is a "drop in" centre for people who experience mental health issues. It is a multicultural community and works with people of all backgrounds and is open from 12 until 4 on weekdays. There is a home cooked meal available for just £2 a head and a range of activities during the afternoon includes yoga, zumba dancing, gardening, board games, a discussion group, talks on life skills, healthy living and a ladies coffee morning (at which women can feel free to talk about their particular concerns). There is a paid Manager and Assistant Manager as well as an advisor on legal matters and I know that all of them give much more of their time than they are paid for.

The centre is funded by Mind in Ealing and Hounslow, Ealing Borough Council and the Lottery but as with many organisations the funding has been reduced. The Centre is a valuable resource for people in the area, including my son, providing a place where they feel welcome and at ease.

Juliet Edwards

Previous Charity Collections:

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

July – Unitarian General Assembly - £238.88 + Gift Aid

August – Foodbank Foundation SA - £122.62

September – Trussell Trust Foodbank - £181.72

Next Newsletter Deadline

The deadline for the next issue of the newsletter is Sunday 17th November. Please send your contributions to our editor, Jane Blackall, jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk. This will be a double issue for December and January.

We would be particularly interested if any newcomers to the congregation would write a 'How I Came to Essex Church' article to introduce themselves. Further contributions on the theme 'Community, Spirituality, Conscience' are welcome.

Multifaith Calendar

1st November – All Saints' Day – Christian

This day provides a chance to offer thanks for the work and witness of all Christian saints, recognising that not all are known or specially celebrated. Many churches stress this day rather than Hallowe'en, which falls the day before, by holding events especially designed for children.

2nd November – All Souls' Day – Christian

On this day in particular the departed are remembered and prayers on their behalf are offered. From earliest times Christians have prayed for the souls of the dead. In the year 998 All Souls, 'the faithful departed', began to be remembered in the Church calendar on this day.

2nd November – Anniversary of the Crowning of Haile Selassie I – Rastafarian

One of the holiest days of the Rastafarian year, it celebrates Haile Selassie's accession to the Ethiopian throne.

3rd – 7th November – Divali / Deepavali – Hindu / Sikh / Jain

For Hindus this is a New Year festival lasting from one to five days, during which lights are hung out and fireworks are exploded. It is a festival of light, coinciding with the darkest night of the lunar month. Various interpretations are given to the festival in different parts of India, but it is generally associated with Lakshmi, goddess of wealth and prosperity or with the victorious return of Rama and Sita to the kingdom of Ayodhya after their exile.

Sikhs also celebrate Divali since Guru Hargobind, the sixth Guru, was released from Gwalior prison on this day. The Guru refused to accept release when it was offered him by the Emperor Jehangir unless 52 imprisoned Hindu princes were also given their freedom. To meet the Emperor's condition that only those who could hold on to his cloak could leave the prison, the Guru had a coat with long tassels made. The Golden Temple in Amritsar is illuminated at this time and firework displays take place there. It is a time for new clothes, presents and sweets.

Divali has a special significance for Jains, as on this day in 527 BCE Mahavira gave his last teachings and attained ultimate liberation. Today lamps are lit and children are given sweets by their parents. Some devout Jains fast for the two days of Divali, following the example of Mahavira.

5th November – Islamic New Year / Al-Hijra / Ra's ul 'Am (Muharram 1) – Muslim

This day commemorates the Hijra or migration of the Prophet Muhammad from Makkah to Medina in 622 CE, which led to the establishment of the Muslim community there. The day is not universally celebrated amongst Sunni Muslims but is notable as Muslim years are dated from this time and are marked AH (After the Hijrah). In 2013 CE the Muslim year 1435 AH begins. For some Muslim communities this is a day of celebration at the mosque, where stories are told of the Prophet and his Companions. For the Shi'a community the more important significance is that this is the first day of the period of fasting, mourning and remembrance leading up to Ashura.

10th November – Remembrance Sunday – National

The Sunday nearest to Armistice Day, devoted to remembering the dead of the two World wars and subsequent wars.

12th November – The Birth of Baha'u'llah – Baha'i

Founder of the Baha'i faith, he was born the eldest son of a Persian nobleman in Tehran, Persia, in 1817.

13th November – Ashura (10th Muharram) – Muslim

For Sunni Muslims this is one of the two days of a minor fast that the Prophet kept in his lifetime. The second day of the fast may be observed either on the day preceding or the day following the 10th of Muharram. For Shi'a Muslims this is a day when they recall a great tragedy that took place on Muharram 10, AH 61 (680 CE). The Imam Husayn (son of Ali and Fatimah and therefore grandson of the Prophet) travelling with his family and many followers, was attacked by the troops of the Caliph Yazid. After eight days without water Husayn was killed and his family and followers massacred at Karbala (now in Iraq). Shi'a Muslims remember the events in the days leading up to Ashura when they fast and recall these terrible events. The importance of this holy day can be judged from a popular Shi'a saying which some attribute to a Muslim poet and some to the sixth Imam, Jafar al-Saadiq: "Live as if every day is Ashura, every land Karbala!"

15th Nov – Shichi-go-San (Seven-Five-Three) – Japanese

Girls of 7, boys of 5 and girls of 3 are dressed up in new clothes and taken to a Shinto shrine to pray for their future well-being.

17th November – Anapasati Day – Buddhist

This is the last day on which the Kathina may be held. On the final day of the three months long Rains Retreat, or at some time during the month that follows it, it is observed by monks in the Theravada tradition. Cloth is presented to the Sangha by members of the lay Buddhist community, and this is then transformed into a Kathina robe, made up by sewing patches of cloth together. This is then presented by the monks present to one particular monk, often an especially deserving or virtuous one, in a special ceremony conducted by four of his colleagues. The laity are able to gain merit for themselves by watching the ceremony.

17th November – Birthday of Guru Nanak 1469 CE – Sikh

Nanak was the first Sikh Guru, and to celebrate significant birthdays such as his, an akhand path, a complete uninterrupted reading of the Guru Granth Sahib, is begun about two days earlier, so that it will be finished on the morning of the festival. Sikhs gather at the gurdwara to hear sermons and lectures (katha) and sing hymns (kirtan) about the life of the first Guru. The congregation will share a free meal (langar). The gurdwaras are usually illuminated and there are firework displays.

24th November – Martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur – Sikh

Under orders from the Moghul emperor, the ninth Guru was executed in public opposite the Red Fort in Delhi, for upholding the right of Kashmiri Hindus to worship in the manner of his or her choice. In so doing he sacrificed his head rather than his faith, on behalf of individual Indians who had turned to him for help.

28th November – 5th December – Hanukah – Jewish

Hanukah celebrates the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem after it was recaptured from the Syrian Greeks by the Maccabee brothers in 165 BCE. For the eight evenings of the festival, candles are lit from right to left in a hanukkah, a nine-branched menorah – one candle for each evening. The ninth candle is the shamash (the servant candle) from which the other candles are lit. Foods cooked with oil – such as doughnuts and latkes (potato cakes) – are traditional to remember the miracle with oil that kept the Temple lights burning so many years ago. A game of dreidel, a special small spinning top, is popular with children to commemorate 'the great miracle that happened there'.

'Thankfulness is Good for the Soul'

Sermon by David Francis Darling – 1st September

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

Today's thoughts were inspired not by a trip to my famous cafe but by one of my other obsessions, radio 4!

The Chief Rabbi, Lord Sacks was speaking on Thought for the Day on the Today programme and he referred to a recent BBC Horizon programme on "The Truth about Personality". Part of the findings of a recent study discussed in the programme showed that "Optimists" on average lived seven and a half years longer than pessimists. Which only goes to prove joked Rabbi Sacks that the pessimists were right to be pessimistic!

The programme had apparently also shown that there are two practices that help people have a more optimistic view of life. One is meditation and the other having a sense of gratitude or thanksgiving or what the psychologists called "cognitive bias modification" – seeing the positive on life.

Lord Sacks reminded his listeners that both meditation and thankfulness were central to most religions.

I was reminded, however, of a story that I heard possibly from Rabbi Sacks himself of the difference between the Jewish and Christian attitude to saying grace at meals. At an interfaith gathering the local rabbi was invited to say grace at the beginning of the meal. Now, and this may symbolize the different theological understandings of Judaism and Christianity, while Christians are happy to give thanks for what they are about to receive, Jews only give thanks for what is already on the table! The Rabbi was in a bit of a quandary. How could he give thanks when the table was bare, then he spotted that in the midst of the table decoration was a small bunch of grapes. *Thank you Lord*, he whispered under his breath, and then in full voice recited the Hebrew prayer.

Baruch atah adonai eloheinu melech ha'olem boray pri ha gofen

Blessed are you Lord God, King of the Universe, you bring forth fruit from the vine.

A good example of the fact that we have to keep our eyes open to recognise the things we should be thankful for.

In our reading from Thich Nhat Hahn we see how the spirit of mindfulness meditation nurtures a deep sense of gratitude. Meditation and thankfulness are linked. As we heard

"We feel grateful throughout the meal and throughout the day and we express this by being fully aware of the food, and living every moment deeply. This is how I try to express my gratitude to all of life."

That idea of gratitude flowing out of deep attentiveness to the world and my part in it is also reflected on by Anne Lamott as we heard in our second reading.



"You can look at what was revealed in the latest mess, and you say thank you for the revelation, because it shows you some truth you need to know.... You say thank you for lifting this corner of the curtain so I can see the truth, may be for just a moment, but in a way that might change my life forever."

The great Christian mystic Meister Eckhart said that if the only prayer you ever uttered was "Thank You", that would be sufficient. So it seemed that it might be good for my spiritual development to explore further the idea of gratitude as a spiritual practice and the benefits that might flow from being grateful.

When I searched the literature I must confess that I did come across a few slightly flaky pseudo psychology articles about the importance of being nice to people but I also came across a fairly weighty peer reviewed article published by the American Psychological Association in 2001 by McCullough and others. It begins with a quote from Cicero who said that:

"Gratitude is not only the greatest virtue but the parent of all others"

And one by Seneca who succinctly said

"Ingratitude is an abomination"

The authors describe how across nearly all cultures and through most of human history, gratitude has been treated both as a normal and a normative aspect of personality and social life. Gratitude is a highly prized human disposition in Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist and Hindu thought. The quotation from Cicero "Gratitude is not only the greatest virtue but the parent of all others" suggests that people who are grateful for benefits they have received are expected to act in ways that would be beneficial to themselves, other individuals and perhaps society at large. Conversely, as Seneca's quote exemplifies, ingratitude has been considered a moral failure.

McCullough and his colleagues relate how one of the first in depth psychological treatments of gratitude was by the 18th century Scottish philosopher Adam Smith who deeply influenced by Christian writers and the Roman stoics maintained that human emotions were put in place to provide individuals with guidance for moral judgements and moral behaviour. In this context Smith proposed gratitude to be one of the most basic social emotions and that feelings of gratitude are crucial to maintain a society based on goodwill.

‘Thankfulness...’ (continued)

by David Francis Darling

One of the studies referred to in the paper by McCullough, a study by Ortony and colleagues caused me to think about my own sense of gratitude. Ortony suggested that gratitude is determined by three aspects of how people perceive kind acts or gifts. Gratitude is more likely when a benefactor's action is judged as praiseworthy i.e. I approve of the action. That might seem a bit obvious! The second aspect, and it was this that made me stop and think, is that gratitude is more likely when a benefactor's actions deviate from role based expectations. That is you didn't expect them to do you a favour. But does this mean that we are less likely to be thankful if I expect someone to do me a kindness. Is there a danger that I can then simply take people for granted?

The third aspect is that gratitude is more likely when the outcome of the benefactor's actions is judged as personally favourable. Again this might seem obvious but again it made me stop and think. How often have I thought that someone's action was not favourable when I later discovered that it was. Am I truly thankful to people who try to protect me from myself. And are there times when in my eagerness to be thanked by another I avoid giving them the help they need and give them the help they want.

Robert Emmons, one of the co-authors of McCullough's paper and one of the leading psychologists studying the subject of gratitude argues that gratitude had two key components.

"First" he writes "it's an affirmation of goodness. We affirm that there are good things in the world, gifts and benefits we have received, and secondly we recognise that the sources of this goodness are outside ourselves. We acknowledge that other people – or even higher powers, if you're of a spiritual mindset – gave us many gifts to help us achieve the goodness in our lives.

Emmons also stresses the social dimension of gratitude. He describes it as a relationship-strengthening emotion because it requires us to see how we have been supported and affirmed by other people.

Studies by Emmons and McCullough have looked at the benefits to our physical, psychological and spiritual health when we practice gratitude. As was referred to by Rabbi Sacks gratitude has been shown to boost feelings of optimism, joy, pleasure and enthusiasm and has also been shown to reduce anxiety and depression.

Emmons has also show that being grateful is also good for our physical health, strengthening the immune system, lowering blood pressure and reducing symptoms of illness.

Being grateful has also been shown to make us more forgiving and to pass on acts of kindness to ourselves, by being more helpful, altruistic and compassionate to others.

Now at this point I need to confess that my Scottish genes predispose me more to pessimism than to optimism and after all pessimists are the real optimists for we expect nothing and are therefore always pleasantly surprised and grateful when things go well! There is a bit of my cynical pessimistic side that is slightly wary of all the benefits of gratitude. Will I start being

very grateful only so that I benefit? No I don't think that that is what Emmons and others are saying. The positive effects on my body and mind are not a reward for me being grateful they are the natural consequence of me being grateful. If I fake it, it's not genuine gratitude and I will therefore not experience the benefits of being thankful.

Is the ability to practice gratitude innate or can I cultivate it? Well its obviously not innate or parents and teachers would not have to utter those immortal words "What do you say?" when a child is given anything!

Emmons agrees that feeling grateful is a skill we can develop with practice, reaping its rewards along the way. He suggests the following effective ways for cultivating gratitude.

- Keep a gratitude journal, recording three to five things for which you are grateful every day or week.
- Write a "gratitude letter" to an important person in your life whom you've never properly thanked.
- Savour the good in your life- don't just gloss over the beauty and pleasures that come your way.

And try to focus on intentions. When you receive a gift or when something good happens to you in general consider how someone tried on purpose to bring that goodness into your life, this goes a long way to cultivating an attitude of gratitude in your life.

Useful tips in developing our thankfulness muscle. But in encouraging you all to be thankful I might be causing another problem. How do you feel about being thanked? Do you generously accept the thanks or get embarrassed dismissing the thanker by insisting it was nothing! (though clearly the thanker feels otherwise).

Susan Kraus Whitbourne, an American psychologist, gives a few tips on receiving thanks.

If someone thanks you, accept the thanks graciously. Let the person know that you appreciate being thanked.

If you find that difficult, think about why gratitude makes you uncomfortable. Is it because you don't feel worthy of being thanked.

I began by quoting from Lord Sacks and the recognition of the link between meditation and thankfulness. Meditation may seem like cutting ourselves off from the world but in truth it is about enabling us to be more attentive to the world and when we are more attentive we are more aware of the innumerable things we should be thankful for.

[David concluded his sermon with a further reading from Anne Lamott's book on attention and thanksgiving].



A Fitness Fusion of 9 Movement Forms

Second Sunday of the Month from 2-3pm:
10th November, 8th December 2013

Also each MONDAY lunchtime from 12.30

An hour of whole-body conditioning, done barefoot to diverse music. Delivering a cardiovascular workout for any level of fitness. Specific routines allow you to experience - the power of the martial arts, the stillness of the healing arts and the joy of movement through dance.

Cost £10 (£7 to concessions / church members).

Contact: Sonya Leite on 0207 371 1674.

Small Group Communion



Sundays 10th November, 8th December
at 12.30pm Down in the Church Library

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

10th November – Led by Tristan Jovanović

8th December – Led by David Francis Darling

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

Sunday Services at Essex Church



3rd November, 11am
– ‘Remembering All Souls’
Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Join us for this simple ceremony of remembering for which you are invited to bring a photo of your loved ones.

10th November, 11am
– ‘Remembrance Sunday’
Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

2014 will be the 100th anniversary of the start of the First World War. How should our society mark such an important event?

17th November, 11am
– ‘Zoroastrianism’
Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Linking with an exhibition at SOAS about this ancient Persian religion, our service will explore some of its teachings and practices, especially its ethical approach to life.

24th November, 11am
– ‘Good Vibrations’
Service led by Sonya Leite and Sarah Tinker

An opportunity to join together in a celebration of sound and silence. Could vibrating strings of energy be the basis of all matter? We can't promise to answer that but we hope you'll leave this service enlivened and inspired.

