



# Kensington Unitarians

Newsletter: August / September 2019

## What's On...

Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> August, 6.45 for 7-8pm  
**'Heart & Soul' Spiritual Gathering**  
'Hope' led by Sarah Tinker

Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> August, 11am-noon  
**'Dream Boldly'**  
Led by Jane Blackall

Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> August, 12.30pm  
**'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite**

Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> August, 11am-noon  
**'Dreaming of Justice'**  
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> August, 12.45pm  
**Greeters' Training Workshop**  
**PLEASE BOOK YOUR PLACE NOW!**

Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> August, 12.30pm  
**'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite**

Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> August, 11am-noon  
**'Hints for Dreaming a Bigger Life'**  
Led by Jeannene Powell  
and Members of the Congregation

Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> August, 12.30-1.15pm  
**'Find Your Voice'**  
Singing Class with Margaret

Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> August, 2.00-3.00pm  
**'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite**

Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> August, 12.30pm  
**'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite**

Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> August, 11am-noon  
**'Defying the Dreamcrushers'**  
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Wednesday 28<sup>st</sup> August, 12.30pm  
**'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite**

Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> September, 11am-noon  
**'Travellers' Tales'**  
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> September, 12.30pm  
**'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite**

*Continued on back page...*

## Moving On & Staying Put

### A Message from our Minister

It happened quite suddenly, as these moments often do. The glass was securely in my hand. Then it was not. It was on the floor, in pieces. I've been on courses about impermanence. I know that nothing lasts. But does that help the feelings of annoyance when you break a favourite glass? Not really. That glass had started life as a set of six, been whittled down to two – and now there's only one left, because the other one is waiting to be swept up from the floor.

In September our monthly ministry theme is 'Moving On & Staying Put'. It's a theme with so many different meanings and potential approaches. I find myself thinking of potters I have known, their joy in creating as strong as their pleasure in any finished product. So many pots don't make it through the firing process.

In the British Museum recently I marvelled at a display of Mesopotamian glass bowls, created some 2,700 years ago, so delicate that it's remarkable they have survived all that time. How come a glass lasts only a few years in my kitchen? Well we're all moving on. None of us is staying put. But along the journey we may well discover our creative urges that can lead to the emergence of great beauty, great art. *'Buildings fall; even the earth perishes. What was yesterday a cornfield is today a bungalow. But words, if properly used, seem able to live for ever'*, writes Virginia Woolf. But we know that even words are temporary, dependent on the medium in which they are held. I think of the two Voyager Spacecraft launched in 1977, still travelling, each holding a Golden Record of humans speaking their greetings to unknown life forms that may one day discover them. We can only hope they have just the device to decode this now obsolete technology.

What conclusions can I draw from this rambling? Well if you are a glass with hopes of immortality then aim for a place in a British Museum display case rather than my kitchen cupboards. If you're seeking personal immortality, try writing something for the church newsletter. Let's encourage one another to enjoy living creatively, moment by moment, knowing that the process of creation is just as precious as any finished product. Let's keep raising awareness of humanity's need to change our way of living on our planet earth home so future generations have a planet to live on. And let's share with each other our hopes and dreams, along with our fears of moving on and staying put – all part of what it is to be human.

Rev. Sarah Tinker



## In this month's newsletter...

\* 'Q&A' with Roy Clark \* Kensington Singers come to Essex Church \* New Coffee Machine \* Congratulations to Grace and Nial \* 'A Course In Miracles: My First Round' by Tristan Jovanović \* 'The Importance of Nothing' by Billy Jackson \* 'Responding to Tinnitus' by Eliz Beel \* GreenSpirit Group \* 'Summer Poetry Evening' by Jenny Moy \* 'Goodbye—ee' by John Hands \* Poems by Brian Ellis \* 'Why? Why Not?' mini-sermon by Rev. Sarah Tinker \* and much more ...

# Kensington Unitarians

At Essex Church (founded 1774), Notting Hill Gate

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

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

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

If you are aware of any member of our community who is unwell or suffering in some way and who would welcome contact from others in the church, please contact our minister.



*Kensington Unitarians at Essex Church  
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Notting Hill Gate  
London W8 4RT*

*Office Answering Machine: 020 7221 6514*

**Email:** [info@kensington-unitarians.org.uk](mailto:info@kensington-unitarians.org.uk)

**Web:** [www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk](http://www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk)

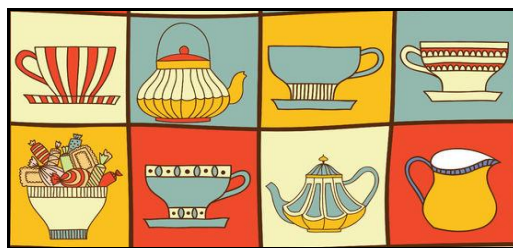
## Harvest Service and Congregational Lunch

Save the Date – Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> September



We will be holding a congregational bring-and-share lunch after the harvest festival service on Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> September. We are experimenting with ways to make the organisation and clear-up less burdensome for our kitchen volunteers. In order to reduce the stress we ask you only to bring food which can be served at room temperature from the container you have brought it in. We want to avoid using the cooker or having a big crowd of people in the kitchen doing last-minute preparation. We will have a self-service tea stand in the church to make things easier and this will continue for the tea dance later on. Please let Sarah know if you'd like to help out in some way.

## Volunteering Rotas: Stewarding, Coffee and Greeting



It's always a bit trickier to fill the rota over the summer months and as you can see we're still looking for a few stewards, coffee-makers, and greeters to cover August / September. If you're not a regular volunteer this is the perfect time to give it a go! We need lots of people to muck in to make the church a hospitable place so if you haven't taken on these tasks before please consider giving it a go (you might consider 'shadowing' a regular to get trained up). We realise that it can be hard to commit in advance but you could always ask someone else to stand in if it turns out you can't come.

### Stewarding:

<b>4<sup>th</sup> August:</b>	Billy Jackson
<b>11<sup>th</sup> August:</b>	Michaela von Britzke
<b>18<sup>th</sup> August:</b>	Juliet Edwards
<b>25<sup>th</sup> August:</b>	Brian Ellis
<b>1<sup>st</sup> September:</b>	Gabby Chanteloup
<b>8<sup>th</sup> September:</b>	Billy Jackson
<b>15<sup>th</sup> September:</b>	Juliet Edwards
<b>22<sup>nd</sup> September:</b>	Brian Ellis
<b>29<sup>th</sup> September:</b>	?????? (can you help?)

### Coffee:

<b>4<sup>th</sup> August:</b>	Maureen Cummings
<b>11<sup>th</sup> August:</b>	Billy Jackson
<b>18<sup>th</sup> August:</b>	?????? (can you help?)
<b>25<sup>th</sup> August:</b>	Marianne H & Maureen C
<b>1<sup>st</sup> September:</b>	Billy Jackson
<b>8<sup>th</sup> September:</b>	?????? (can you help?)
<b>15<sup>th</sup> September:</b>	Helena Coope
<b>22<sup>nd</sup> September:</b>	SELF-SERVICE during lunch
<b>29<sup>th</sup> September:</b>	Marianne H & Maureen C

### Greeting:

<b>4<sup>th</sup> August:</b>	David Carter
<b>11<sup>th</sup> August:</b>	?????? (can you help?)
<b>18<sup>th</sup> August:</b>	Billy Jackson
<b>25<sup>th</sup> August:</b>	?????? (can you help?)
<b>1<sup>st</sup> September:</b>	Maureen Cummings
<b>8<sup>th</sup> September:</b>	Annie Fowler
<b>15<sup>th</sup> September:</b>	Maureen Cummings
<b>22<sup>nd</sup> September:</b>	Juliet Edwards
<b>29<sup>th</sup> September:</b>	Alice Lambert

We circulate the rota list each month by email. Please contact Jane if you want to sign up for one of the forthcoming slots.

**[jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk](mailto:jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk)**

## New Coffee Machine!



Welcome to our new 'commercial quality' coffee machine with two coffee pots and measured sachets of coffee to add to the filter container. Several people now know how it works and instructions are on the kitchen wall with supplies nearby. Training sessions on offer!

## Gathering the Waters

During the service on Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> September



Please collect a small amount of water from any summer travels you go on, or from your balcony or garden, or from your tap at home to contribute to our gathering the waters ceremony in the service on Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> September.

## Greeters' Training:

### A Short Workshop on How We Can Better Welcome Newcomers

Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> August from 12.45-2.00pm



At the recent AGM it was suggested that we should hold a 'Greeters' Training Workshop' in order to help people be better prepared to take an active role in welcoming newcomers to our congregation and to share hints and tips about best practice.

This workshop is intended both for people who are already regular volunteers on the greeting rota (for which we are very grateful!) and for those who haven't yet taken on the task! Greeting is something that we should all ideally play a part in, to some degree, even when we are not the 'official' greeter on the rota, in order to make our church as friendly and welcoming as we like to think it is. Please email Jane ASAP if you plan to attend: [jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk](mailto:jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk).

## Cultural Outing: 'Smoke and Mirrors: The Psychology of Magic'



at the Wellcome Collection  
Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> September, leaving at 1pm

After the Service join us for a viewing of a free exhibition at the Wellcome Collection in Euston Road, 'Smoke and Mirrors: The Psychology of Magic.' We'll have our cup of tea as usual and then set off by public transport.

Any problems on the day text me on: 07790862238.

Carolyn Appleby

# Q&A... with Roy Clark

*#1 in a new series where congregation members answer a range of questions so we can get to know each other better.*

## **Who are you?**

Roy Clark - Chair of the Congregation, Kensington Unitarians. Retired University lecturer in Media.

## **When did you first come to Essex Church?**

A little over 6 years ago.

## **What brought you to this congregation?**

I was going through a very difficult time in my life and felt quite isolated and somewhat alone. Prior to attending my first service at Essex Church (which was a Heart and Soul midweek service) I had visited a Quaker Meeting House on a couple of occasions. I found some solace in the silence and contemplative atmosphere I met there but found the lack of structure and participation in the services less inviting. Somehow...(am not sure how) I knew something of Unitarianism and the ideas and beliefs that inform and underpin it. So, I had a look online and found the Kensington Unitarians website. Having discovered that I had a church almost on my doorstep I came along.

## **What roles or tasks have you taken on at Essex Church so far (or which are calling to you)?**

I have done a bit of everything over the years. These include coffee making and greeting, readings in Sunday services as well as Heart and Soul. Leading and co-leading worship. Running a photography class as part of our arts and crafts workshop sessions and leading a walk and talk on public art. I was invited to join the church committee and trustees several years ago and am currently Chair.

## **What other religious communities have you been connected to (if any)?**

I don't have a formal religious background, that is to say I have not been a member or an affiliate of any religion or Faith group. My parents were non-religious, although they both came from Christian backgrounds. On the other hand I did for a time attend a Church of England School and attended services through this connection as well as being a keen Boy Scout which also... in those days, involved some church attendance. So I guess "culturally Christian" might cover it. As an adult I attended some services and courses at various Buddhist communities.

## **What difference has belonging to this congregation made to your life?**

I have found a place... a space where whatever or however I am feeling, I can come and find some inner peace or at least take emotional and spiritual stock. Through listening, contributing and participating in services and events I have deepened my connection to life in all its mystery. I feel part of a community where nothing is demanded of me, where there are no vested interests at work just a welcome from fellow travellers. I value deeply all of the important and abiding friendships I have made here.

## **What do you tell friends and acquaintances who ask you 'What's Unitarianism'?**

We are a community of spiritual seekers who welcome all who seek meaning and truth in life. We explore all possible truths from all possible sources. We have respect for the Christian tradition from which we grew coupled with a modern liberal religious outlook which encourages freedom of individual thought and belief. We follow no creed or dogma just the journey created by an open and enquiring mind. Our group is made up of people with different views, beliefs and values. We celebrate Unity in Diversity - many beliefs, one faith. My answer might also depend on available time. On several occasions when there is only a minute or less for a short succinct answer I have said "We are a bit like the Quakers in general outlook and beliefs but with hymns readings and sermons ...and in most congregations a Minister!"

## **What is your favourite hymn (and why)?**

Voice Still and Small. Such a simple but deeply moving song for me. I feel it touch me every time we sing it at church. I think this is partly because it resonates with my own experiences in life. Many times over the years I have listened to that little voice that speaks quietly, humbly, seemingly from my being. Sometimes it just says "you can do this" or just "you're ok" There is a voice, "still and small," the hymn says, "deep inside all." It may fade at times, but it does not vanish. I have talked on occasion of this inner voice (as I have experienced it) to others who are suffering or struggling. I hope it has helped.

## **Would you like to tell us about someone who has been a spiritual/moral inspiration to you?**

This is a difficult one because there have been quite a few. I think I will choose a moral inspirer on this occasion, Aneurin Bevan, Minister for Health in the post war Labour government. He was the architect of our beloved (and sadly increasingly threatened) National Health Service. I believe the creation of the NHS to be among the greatest achievements of this country, providing universal healthcare for all on the basis of need, free at the point of use. It was his tenacity, humanity and belief that we are here ultimately to help others that drove Bevan on to work for the common good. To quote the great man himself "No society can legitimately call itself civilized if a sick person is denied medical aid because of lack of means".

## **Would you like to tell us about a social justice issue / good cause which is close to your heart?**

There are a few but I would have to choose SimpleGifts, our own Unitarian good cause, based in East London. SimpleGifts is a community charity that aims to expand and strengthen community relationships, reduce social isolation and increase physical and emotional health and wellbeing. It does this by creating a welcoming space for local residents from all cultures, faiths and backgrounds to come together at an 'Old Neighbours New Neighbours' lunch, an After School Club, ESOL classes, Sewing Club and 'Tea & Tech' sessions. Based in Tower Hamlets, Simple Gifts serves some of the most deprived and marginalised people in the country. I am privileged to Chair this very special organisation.

## **How is creativity expressed in your life?**

I am an artist. My medium is photography. I make work that derives from with my interactions with the natural world and the intersections of nature and the built environment. Much of my work could be termed semi abstract as whilst employing generally recognisable subject matter it is often isolated from its context or viewed from an unorthodox perspective or angle. I am very interested in form, and how it is perceived according to the play of light and shadow. Mass, volume, space and light intrigue me. On a deeper level, the small compositions I work on are a reflection or statement describing in a visual form my states of mind, my thoughts and feelings.

## **What would you do if you won a fortune on the lottery (with your time as well as the money)?**

I should like to spend more time developing my artistic practice. Making art is an expensive business as any artist will tell you. Having the money to be more expansive in my creating: perhaps working with other artists and media to make larger more immersive work which would be immensely rewarding. I exhibit on average once a year: but I would like to increase this and show work internationally too. I would also produce books and related printed matter. Actually I am actively developing all these things anyway, but significant funds would oil the wheels and hasten the process. I would also buy myself a quiet country retreat somewhere by the sea. Possibly on the south coast or perhaps East Anglia... with a studio attached naturally!

## **What one piece of advice for life or pearl of wisdom would you like to offer our newsletter readers?**

Be kind and love one another.

# Kensington Singers:

Join the Choir! New to Essex Church  
From Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> September, 7-8.45pm



From this autumn a local choir, 'Kensington Singers', will be relocating to the church. Here's some text from their website:

Think you would like to sing in our friendly community choir? Everyone is welcome; our youngest member is 19 and our most senior is a young at heart 77, so we have a really great mix of experience and energy. The choir launched in January 2011 and is now established with around 50 singers. There are no auditions and you don't need to have any previous experience to join in – you'll be amazed at how quickly you can start making a brilliant sound. If you're not used to singing regularly you'll see a huge improvement in your voice after your first month or so. We always spend 15 minutes at the start having a good vocal warm up which will also include things like a bit of sight-reading practice, some rhythm games, vocal techniques and ear training.

Kensington Singers is led by Hannah Brine and the songs that we sing are carefully selected to offer something for everyone; from pop to gospel, classical to musical theatre, jazz to folk. Hannah writes: *'Kensington Singers is the first choir I started in London, having moved down from Leicester where I established a similar choir; Fosse Singers, back in 2007. I was extremely honoured in 2015 to be named a BBC Unsung Hero for my work with community choirs, as it's something I really love to do. In 2011 & 2013 I studied with the Association of British Choral Conductors and in 2014 I received my LRSM in musical directing with a distinction.'*

We meet on Mondays during term time from 7-8.45pm. The choir performs roughly 3 times per term and there are a number of social events throughout the year, including weekly drinks in the pub afterwards. We have performed at the Royal Brompton Hospital, for the Chelsea Pensioners, at the Southbank Centre Christmas Market and enjoyed joint events with the London Contemporary Voices, the Buzztones, Singology Gospel Choir and Kitsch in Sync.

Fees are normally £100 per term if you book before the end of the first week of term and are non-refundable. However, as we're offering them the room here at a discounted rate, they've agreed that **members of our congregation can join for free**. Commitment is required: singers are expected to attend 70% or more rehearsals in order to be prepared enough to sing in the end of term concert. E-mail pa@hannahbrine.co.uk for info.

[www.kensingtonsingers.co.uk](http://www.kensingtonsingers.co.uk)

# Heresy in Music



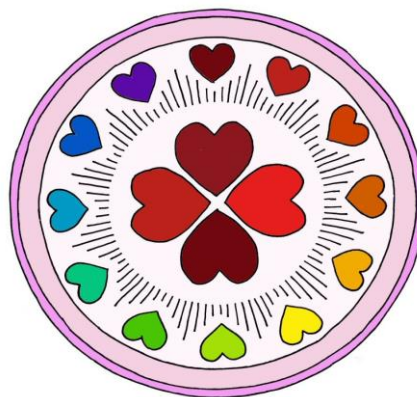
now I shall admit  
for long I've held apart  
what I feel about  
the music of Mozart.  
but today I have to say  
to Wolfgang Amadeus  
the music that you gave us  
though I appreciate its art  
affects my head  
but not my heart.

Brian Ellis

## 'Heart and Soul' Midweek Spiritual Gatherings

Thursdays 1<sup>st</sup> August and 5<sup>th</sup> Sept, 7-8pm

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



Come and join us for our monthly alternative spiritual gathering, with music and silence, words and prayers, and a chance to explore the evening's topic in relation to your own life. Sarah Tinker will lead in both August and September.

August's H&S is on the theme of 'Hope'. Is hope 'but a timid friend' for you, as described by Emily Bronte, or a tiny yet resilient creature as in Emily Dickinson's poem: 'Hope is the thing with feathers. That perches in the soul, And sings the tune without the words, And never stops at all'. Do join us for a spiritual exploration of hope's meaning for us, followed by refreshments and good company.

September's H&S will be on the theme of 'Walking Away' - recognising the times in life when for our own good we have had to turn and walk away. The contemplative hour will be followed by time for refreshments (home-made cake) and fellowship. All are welcome to join us. If you'd like to have a go at co-leading a Heart and Soul session, or doing a reading, please get in touch with Sarah or Jane to find out more.



# LONDON PLAYBACK THEATRE



## ‘Moving On and Staying Put’ Friday 20<sup>th</sup> September, 7.30-9.30pm

London Playback Theatre is a team of internationally experienced professional theatre practitioners, consultants, educators, and therapists. We create spontaneous, improvised theatre through a unique collaboration between performers and audience. We encourage people to share their real life stories – through the magic of theatre – we bring those stories to life. Our work offers opportunities for participants to deepen their understanding of each other and to develop authentic ways of communicating. As an audience member you are not in the spotlight unless you choose to put up your hand to share something – you will be engaged in the whole experience as friendly witness – and you can stay for conversation afterwards. Playback returns on 20th September, and 15th November. They offer performances free of charge (donations welcome).

[www.londonplayback.com](http://www.londonplayback.com) /[londonplayback@gmail.com](mailto:londonplayback@gmail.com)



## Fitness Fusion of 9 Movement Forms Third Sunday of the Month from 2-3pm: 18<sup>th</sup> August, 15<sup>th</sup> Sept 2019

### Midweek class - Wednesdays - 12.30-1.30pm

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

**Cost £10 for drop-ins** (£8 to concessions / church members) or a block of 5 classes for £40 to use within a 3-month period.

## Congratulations Grace and Nial!



Rites of passage ceremonies are something Unitarians do well, giving couples and families the freedom to mark a life event in way which is meaningful and personal to them.

So when the search for a wedding venue first brought congregation members Grace and Nial through our church doors, our Sunday service about celebrating key life moments turned out to be a truly serendipitous encounter. Liking what they heard, the idea of a wedding ceremony which would include elements they could choose, we soon met up to start making plans.

All prepared and ready to go, I travelled to Aylesbury to officiate their outdoor wedding last month. Being outside, the ceremony drew on the theme of being connected to the nature around us. Many family and friends were involved in various ways and the sun shone as they said their “I do”s.

It was a very special and happy occasion for them and their guests, and I wish them a very happy future life together.

**Jeannene Powell**

## Apollo 11

dim shaped clouds  
tides of moonlight  
break across the sky  
hide the stars  
in the black ocean  
hide men sailing  
below the sun  
our soul seeking  
a blessing

**Brian Ellis**

# Sunday Tea Dances in aid of Stonewall Housing

Next on Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> September, 2-5pm  
Starting with a dance lesson for complete beginners



We invite you to our next Sunday Afternoon Tea Dance in aid of Stonewall Housing! There will be tea, cake, partner dancing and a few line dances from 2-5pm. All are welcome - complete beginners to life-long dancers alike - and even if you think you have two left feet this will be a relaxed and welcoming space for all to enjoy. The afternoon will begin with a dance lesson led by Rachel Sparks.

Save the date now to come to this fun event in aid of a good cause (£5 of the door price goes to Stonewall Housing, a charity providing safe spaces for LGBTQ+ people fleeing violence, harassment and abuse). There's no need to bring a partner so just come as you are - do tell your friends though - the more the merrier! We encourage gender neutral partnering which means anyone can lead/follow during the partner dances. We are family-friendly so children come for free with any paying adult. Tickets are limited and cost £12 in advance (£15 on the door). Book online: [www.rachelsparksdance.co.uk/book-online](http://www.rachelsparksdance.co.uk/book-online). Members of the congregation get free admission. You are invited to bring your own home-made cakes (clearly labelled), to help raise money for our nominated charity and of course donations to this good cause are very welcome. If you have any questions do email Rachel on [hello@rachelsparksdance.co.uk](mailto:hello@rachelsparksdance.co.uk)

**For more information contact: [rachel@rachelsparksdance.co.uk](mailto:rachel@rachelsparksdance.co.uk)  
or visit [www.facebook.com/rachelsparksdance](https://www.facebook.com/rachelsparksdance)**

Volunteers will be needed to help with the reception desk / tea stall  
– please email [jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk](mailto:jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk) if you can help!



## Good Cause Collection of the Month: 'Kew: Feed the Future'



### Collection on Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> September

Can you help us find plant-based solutions to humanity's most critical challenges? From climate change to biodiversity and food security, we're working across the planet for a future where we can all thrive, but we need your support. The world's staple food crops are at risk. Since we first started farming over 10,000 years ago, humans have been selectively breeding our food crops to make them taste and grow better to meet our needs. But today, just 12 crops provide about 80% of the world's plant-based food. These plants are increasingly vulnerable to diseases and climate change, just as even greater demand is put on them by the world's growing population. That's not sustainable. But hope is at hand. Donate today and you can help us feed the future.

**Website:** [support.kew.org/donate/feedthefuture](http://support.kew.org/donate/feedthefuture)



### Collection on Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> September

Inspired by Unitarian values, SimpleGifts strives to enhance the lives of people in East London, and to empower Unitarians in the work of social action. It is a welcoming, friendly, and warm space where people from all walks of life can come together and have a cup of tea. SimpleGifts is committed to building and maintaining bonds of community. Social action exists in the everyday connections between people and in acts of care and love. The centre aims to create a space that alleviates the struggles and stresses of life, that combats isolation and loneliness, and that empowers people to be themselves. The centre depends on donations and help from volunteers so please contact them or speak to our own Roy Clark if you'd like to get involved.

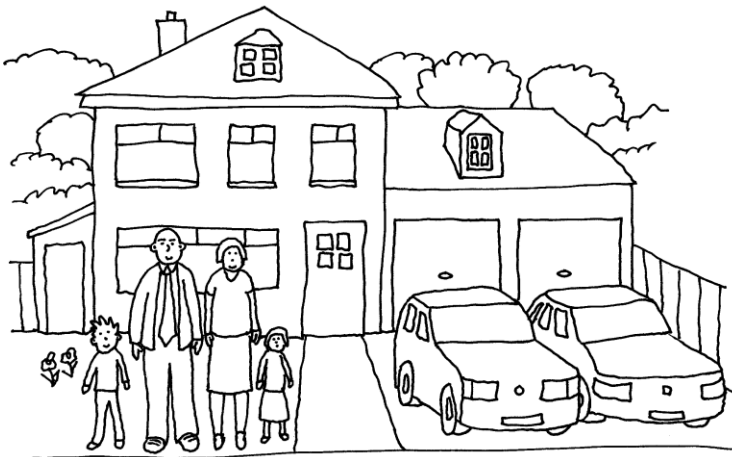
**Website:** [simplegiftsucsa.org.uk](http://simplegiftsucsa.org.uk)

### Recent Charity Collections:

June 30<sup>th</sup> – Unitarian GA Sunday – over £150

July 28<sup>th</sup> – Hammersmith and Fulham Foodbank –  
over £300 (donations still coming in!)

# CLIMATE CHANGE



MOST RESPONSIBLE

LEAST VULNERABLE



LEAST RESPONSIBLE

MOST VULNERABLE

CartoonChurch.com

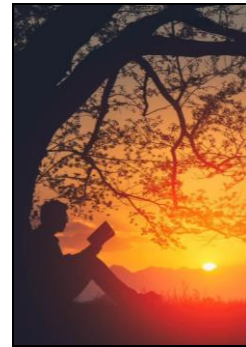
## BedZED Sustainable Housing



Thanks to David Carter for organising such an interesting visit to the BedZED sustainable housing project in south London. We were given a thorough and informative look round and had chance to visit one of the studio flats, which impressed us with its neat design, and feeling of light and space. Every property at BedZED has its own garden as well as joint use of a meadow and allotment area. We enjoyed meeting people from other religious groups including St James Piccadilly and hearing of their projects to raise environmental awareness. The project was built 16 years ago, the first of its kind and scale. They've learnt a great deal about the use of cutting edge technology in the meantime and are applying their knowledge to new housing schemes around the world. Have a look at the BedZED website if you'd like to know more: [www.zedfactory.com/bedzed](http://www.zedfactory.com/bedzed)

John, Sarah and Tayo

## Time's Road



in the dawn  
of one day's journey  
slip your sounded footfall  
step off the narrow  
gravelled path of time  
circle barefoot on lawns  
in gardens of silence  
watch the dew rise  
be patient as buds unfurl  
dance with the leaves  
rest under trees  
on the seats of shadows  
conspire with the dusk  
to confuse those who ask  
'why evade a day  
of your allotted time?'

Brian Ellis



# Car Free London

Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> September



Look out for more information nearer the time about the many events planned for this Clean Air Day – including 30kms of streets in Central London closed to traffic and plenty of play streets, guided walks, cycling and roller blading activities. It will make access to the Totally Thames Festival much more pleasant and may help us all realise how very polluted our streets usually are. Aiming to have all buses running on clean fuels would make a big difference and is worth campaigning for. Twenty hydrogen fuel buses are scheduled to arrive in 2020. Let's hope they work well and are quickly followed by many more.

# Laundry Balls and Eggs



I gave up using detergents to wash my clothes a year ago and instead now use an EcoEgg. It's far cheaper, it's better for the environment and nobody's complained about my clothes looking muckier. If there are serious stains to deal with I spray them with an oxygen based stain remover before washing. The laundry egg contains two types of mineral balls and the makers claim that these help lift dirt and odours, leaving far less residue than conventional laundry powders and liquids. They are recommended for people with sensitive skin and those who care what the detergent industry is doing to our rivers and seas. A quick look online found a remarkably negative article about these products on Wikipedia. It did leave me wondering if I was being foolish using this EcoEgg or if the article had been written on behalf of the detergent industry. Cutting down on detergent use is an important way to treat our planet responsibly. At an average cost per wash of 4p I think these alternative laundry products are worth using. Let me know if you'd like to borrow mine and give it a try before you purchase one.

Sarah Tinker

# West London GreenSpirit Group



**First meeting: Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> September 2019**

**Here at Essex Church, 6.45 for a  
7.00pm start, finishing by 8.30pm**

This first meeting will combine a simple earth based attunement to prepare for the autumn equinox with an opportunity to explore the kind of group we want this to be. How often shall we meet? Shall we meet regularly or occasionally? Can we move between evening and afternoon meetings? How can we advertise our group to wider groups within and beyond Unitarianism? How shall we share the organisation of the group? How can we best support one another in living more sustainably?

Here is a description of the national GreenSpirit organisation and we are free to choose how our local group works: GreenSpirit is a network of people who celebrate the human spirit in the context of our place in the natural world and Earth's own evolutionary journey. Our radical vision brings together the rigour of science, the creativity of artistic expression, the passion of social action and the wisdom of spiritual traditions of all ages. Attracting those of many faith traditions, we are a body of people who believe that human life has both an ecological and a spiritual dimension. Together we:

- \* celebrate all existence as deeply connected and sacred
- \* understand humanity as integral to the planetary landscape rather than its distinguishing feature
- \* find inspiration in the traditions of Earth-based peoples and Celtic spirituality
- \* are exploring the unfolding story of the Universe and promote common ground between people in the context of this vision
- \* seek to redress the balance of masculine and feminine and befriend darkness as well as light
- \* create ceremonies and celebrations which connect us more consciously with the cycle and seasons of the Earth
- \* seek a more just, sustainable and peaceful way of life in harmony with the Earth

Do make a note of this date in your diary, let us know if you plan to join us and pass information about this initiative on to any friends you think might be interested.

David Carter & Sarah Tinker

# 'The Power of Questions: Why? Why Not?'

Reflection by Rev. Sarah Tinker

From the service on Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> July

*This formed part of Sarah's offering in the last service in July, part of our monthly theme on curiosity and wonder.*

As part of my reading for today's topic I searched online to find out how many questions children ask each day. I discovered that many different surveys have been done over the years on this subject and I doubt any of them are entirely reliable, most having been conducted by toy retailers as a marketing tool it seems. But then we don't need a so-called 'scientific' survey to tell us what we already know. Children are naturally curious. And if they are allowed the freedom to question they will ask hundreds of questions every single day. Curiosity, according to one survey, peaks in four year old girls – said to ask some 390 questions every day. It is a feature of parenting both delightful and exhausting. I can't be the only parent to have answered the question 'why' with a short sharp – 'because' – and often with a – 'because I say so'.

Our powers of questioning diminish as we age, at least for some of us. The ability to ask searching, and probably unanswerable, question is sometimes said to be a particularly notable feature of the brightest of minds, whose owners' ability to ask questions, continues throughout life. 'Never lose a holy curiosity' wrote Einstein.

In this short piece I want to focus on social conditions and why we have a tendency to accept what is, the status quo. I'm grateful to what I've learnt over the years from systems theory that all systems tend towards what is known as homeostasis, a state of balance or equilibrium. This is not a bad thing, it is simply a feature – that any system – a family, a factory, a school, a forest, a church, will seek a state of balance. This is how it is. What we need to stay awake to are the dangers of systems, of situations, that are not for the greatest good of *all* concerned. A school that excludes children who do not get the best grades for example – because the skill of the teachers, and the reputation of the school, are judged by the number of top grade students the school has; the factory that pollutes a nearby river – because that's what we've always done with our waste products; the church that does not welcome certain people because its holy books says some people are loved by god and some are not; a family that rejects someone because they are not like all the other people in the family or the tribe.



We are living in times when we need brave people to stand up against the status quo and ask searching questions, questions that may make our society uncomfortable. Brazilian Archbishop Helder Camara will, I think, always be remembered for stating: "When I feed the poor they call me a saint. When I ask why so many people are poor they call me a communist."

It can be easy to live with blinkers that stop us looking to one side or another, that keep our perspective to the centre, to our own limited viewpoint. But in our global world we are given a remarkable opportunity, and one which is still relatively new in human development, the opportunity to see the world from billions of other viewpoints. Let us take the opportunity that gives us, even if it does force us to ask uncomfortable questions. Can it be acceptable for loving people to live lifestyles that harm many other people, the poorest people of our world? Can it be acceptable for us to live in relative luxury when other people do not have access to enough food, or to clean drinking water? How can we live harmoniously alongside cultural differences that disturb or challenge us?

I remember that some changes in human society came about because a few brave souls dared to question the status quo: the ending of state condoned slavery, the ending of laws against same sex relationships, the end of the feudal system where the powerful ruled the lives of the powerless, the removal of laws that made women and children the property of men. I wonder what changes in human society you are most grateful for? I wonder what changes in human society you most yearn for now?

May we be the people who keep asking questions, the people who raise our voices and shout together that 'it does not have to be like this. There are other ways to live'. May our attention always be upon the 7.7 billion people and the myriad other life forms with whom we share this, our one planet home.



'This spring, I took on the role of Chief Officer of the UK's General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches, a hub in the national network of congregations. I took on the role because I see that what Unitarian practice, theology and ethos can offer has the potential to improve the spiritual welfare of so many more communities. Baked into its centuries of history is the idea of each person finding the way to meet their spiritual needs in the way that works for them, and doing so in community, not in an individualistic way. The structure of the church is non-hierarchical, with autonomous, democratically run congregations. There have been female ministers for over a hundred years, and same sex marriages in churches as soon as they were legal (which Unitarians campaigned for heavily). There's no sense of being told what you should believe, or what your ideas of God should look like, or that your godlessness is unwelcome. There is unity in the sense of interconnection, community, love, justice, and wisdom-seeking.'

**From our new Chief Officer Elizabeth Slade's first monthly blog post.**



Our visiting musicians on 28<sup>th</sup> July: pianist Stephen Rose and French horn player Elizabeth Baumberg

## Worship that Works:

Equipping Unitarians to lead High-Quality Services through Reflective Practice



**Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> September – 10.30am until 3pm**  
**Rosslyn Hill Unitarian Chapel, Hampstead**

This autumn's London District (LDPA) quarterly meeting will feature a whole-day training session introducing participants to best practice in Unitarian worship. This will be particularly beneficial for anybody who would like to be involved in leading worship in their own congregation or in churches around their district. It would also be useful for people who already lead worship and who would like to develop skills and share hints and tips with other Unitarians. We'd love to get more appropriately skilled people involved in leading worship so please think about coming along to learn more. However, all who enjoy Unitarian worship and would like to think about it more in a structured way are also welcome to attend. The workshop will have a particular focus on reflective practice and the meaning and purpose of the worship we do together. The workshop will also act as an introductory session for anyone wishing to undertake the Worship Studies Course (Foundation Step), a nationally recognised GA course. Email [administrator@ldpaunitarians.org](mailto:administrator@ldpaunitarians.org) ASAP to book a place.



## Beginners Course in Heart Meditation

**Classes Held on Various Tuesdays**  
**10<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> September from 6.30-7.30pm**  
**Downstairs in the Library Here at Essex Church**

If you're interested in tapping into a lasting source of inner-peace, and beginning a journey of self-discovery then come and join this Heart Meditation course for beginners. Using ancient rhythms played on a frame drum, the teacher will guide you on a step-by-step process for quietening your mind and truly 'listening to your heart'. Held on various Tuesday evenings, from 6.30pm-7.30pm, your first class is free and donations are welcome thereafter.

**Beverley Eve**

**To confirm course dates and book a place email:**  
[infoheartmeditation@gmail.com](mailto:infoheartmeditation@gmail.com)

**For more information visit:** [www.heartmeditation.eu](http://www.heartmeditation.eu)

## 'Finding Our Voice'

**Monthly Singing Workshops**

**Sundays 18<sup>th</sup> August and 15<sup>th</sup> Sept**  
**12.30pm to 1.15pm at Essex Church**



Margaret 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 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 sessions are designed for all, whatever your experience or ability.



# Happy Café Comes to Our Church

15<sup>th</sup> September, 20<sup>th</sup> October, 17<sup>th</sup> November,  
15<sup>th</sup> December 2019, 19<sup>th</sup> January 2020 from 3-7pm

In September this year our church will be hosting West London's first Happy Café which will be open for the whole community and is free to visit. It will run here at Essex Church between 3-7pm on the 3rd Sunday of the month and we hope our members and friends will want to get involved.

Happy Cafes are part of the Happy Café Network which is being set up by members of the Action for Happiness network. A Happy Café provides a warm welcome for anyone interested in happiness and wellbeing and encourages them to meet together for a drink and a friendly chat. In a Happy Café you can find inspiring and informative material, participate in events and meet people to discover new ways to improve wellbeing and help make others happier too.

This Happy Café will be run and organised by two local residents of the Notting Hill area Nicola Webb and Mary Louise Morris. In January they ran a course at the church called Exploring What Matters, which was open to the whole community. Over a period of 8 weeks 20 people came to the church to reflect on what contributes to a happier and more meaningful life. Following excellent feedback about this course, Nicola and Mary Louise realised that there was a need for a regular place for people to meet and so the idea of setting up the café was born.

"We are really over the moon that the church has offered us this space. We want to make this Café a space where everyone feels welcome, all ages and all backgrounds. We will be providing tea and cakes, leaflets and information, friendly conversation, as well as a range of talks and activities, aimed at improving wellbeing. We are both passionate about and teach well-being and we will be offering our skills, talents and expertise. There will be some gentle movement classes, art, creative workshops for adults and children, introduction to mindfulness meditation and relaxation classes. We will be sharing a lot of things that make us feel happy with anyone who comes."

## About Action for Happiness

Action for Happiness is a charity based in the United Kingdom. It aims to increase the happiness in the world by bringing together like-minded people from all walks of life and supporting them to take practical action to build a happier and more caring society, drawing on the latest scientific research and sharing knowledge through inspiring talks by experts. The organisation has over 1 million followers world-wide. Following the successful launch of the first café in Brighton, Stan Rosenthal a volunteer has since supported the roll-out of more than 100 Happy Cafés across the UK and internationally. Stan has now been recognised with a Prime Minister's award for his inspirational work pioneering the concept of Happy Cafes. We will publish a schedule of events in the café in future newsletters and on church notice boards and we look forward to seeing you there. For more information about Action for Happiness see: [www.actionforhappiness.org](http://www.actionforhappiness.org)



## Unitarian Christian Association @ Stratford Unitarians



Sarah, Jana, and Tristan all went along to attend the recent gathering of the Unitarian Christian Association at Stratford Unitarians.

# My Time with Kensington Unitarians



I was glad to accept Sarah's invitation to come and visit your congregation, when we first met at the Czech Academy in Telc last autumn. I am studying with the Academy to be a lay minister and part of my training is a placement practice abroad. I used to live and work in London some years ago so it was my first choice of a place to study. I like London a lot!

At your church I was quickly working, helping with flowers, meeting people, putting out the rubbish bags, preparing the service for Sunday with Sarah your marvellous minister. My visit happened to be at a time when your cleaner and warden were both away so Sarah seemed glad to have an extra pair of hands! That first afternoon I was pleased to visit Stratford Unitarians for a meeting. I met many different people from around the country and we had an interesting workshop in small groups, passing religious items round and discussing how they were used. It was a good way to get to know people and to hear everybody's opinions. The objects came from many different religious traditions and that fitted the afternoon as it was led by the Unitarian Christian Association – part of your tradition. People were very friendly and the food was great! And they have a lovely new building, small but with lots of light and a garden.

My first Sunday was a long day: I helped with the service at Kensington, attended Margaret's singing class, went to the Nia dance class with Sonya, then Sarah and I drove up to Hampstead and joined the Rev Kate Dean at Rosslyn Hill Unitarian Chapel for a meditation and then a service on rituals. A very different worship space to Kensington. During the week I have been practicing my English (in shops!) and preparing another service, this week a guided meditation. I have had useful meetings with Jeannene Powell about ceremonies and with Martin Whitell your district minister and with Mark Shiels who is my mentor in the Prague English-speaking Unitarian congregation. Please come and visit us when you are in Prague and thank you for making me so welcome in your congregation.

This link will tell you more about the Czech Academy:  
[www.unitarska-akademie.cz/?lang=2](http://www.unitarska-akademie.cz/?lang=2)

Maybe you could come and study with us as it is all bilingual.

**Jana Raskova**

'Hope is the basis for taking responsibility; for claiming our capacity to create, to make a genuinely new thing. It is also the springboard for trying to act justly; and for accepting absolutely our incorporation into each other. It is not simply that we share with each other a common humanity, but that individually we have no humanity without each other.'



**Sara Maitland**

## Church Committee News



Roy



Maureen



Brian



Heidi



Harold



Jennifer

The trendy Tuscan look of the back garden wall is thanks to Arda and Brian who quietly prepared and painted it one quiet summer week. We're hoping that its smart new appearance will inspire us to find suitable builders to tackle the leading problem higher up. Meanwhile the two Buddhas have been joined by a bell and we are still waiting to find out who planted the flowers in the 'wilderness slope'. They look so cheerful.

Long ago Jenny and Sarah introduced a policy to help them stay strong when people beg at the church door. We never give anyone money because it is so hard to know which requests are genuine and which are not. But we can offer to go and buy someone food, a ticket or some clothing – with a nominal budget of £5. And that amount has been increased when we know a request is genuine. Please don't give any money to anyone as there has been an increase in such requests lately.

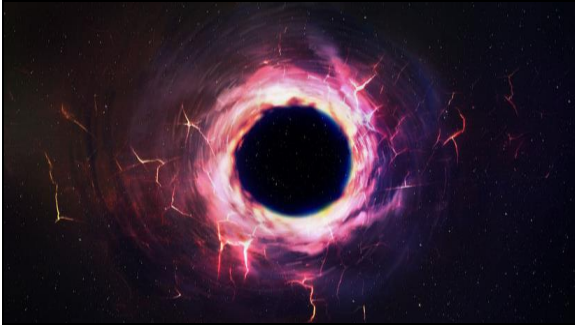
We now have an agreed budget for the year and spending is on track. The costs of running Essex Church are interesting so do ask if you would like a copy.

We plan a new hardwood garden bench for next year in Stephanie Saville's memory and honouring her love of gardens.

We agreed the next two charity collections on 1<sup>st</sup> September (for Kew Gardens' 'Feed the Future' Appeal) and 22<sup>nd</sup> September (for 'Simple Gifts', the Unitarian Centre for Social Action, based in the old Mansford Street Church in Bethnal Green).

Your committee meets next on Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> September. Do let us know if there is anything you'd like to raise.

# The Importance of Nothing



## IN THE BEGINNING...

Whether you are a creationist, evolutionist, big bang theorist, quantum physicist, ancient astronaut theorist, Multiverse adherent or belong to any other religious group, these three words are key to the foundation of your belief system. For no matter where you start, your explanation begins with how something came from something else. The heaven and earth were created by God, man evolved from a single cell amoeba, the Universe exploded into being from a single speck and then rapidly expanded in the "singularity". None of these address how something ever came from absolutely nothing.

Let me say first up that I am not a biologist or physicist, but a mathematician driven by logic. I have heard and read many different explanations for this; all delivered with the zeal of a bible thumping preacher, and all contradicting the other's hypotheses. Great minds such as Copernicus, Newton, Einstein and Hawking have postulated but still to this day leading scientists debate whether the Universe is flat or curved, finite or infinite.

Creationists assume an omnipotent God spoke the earth, sun, moon and stars into existence as set forth in Genesis 1, and main stream fundamentalists go further in insisting it took place in 6 days around 4004BC (October 23rd to be precise according to scholar James Ussher in 1650 who counted backwards using the "begats").

However, the passages in Genesis 1, if taken literally are full of seeming contradictions and scientific anomalies not just about creation but in the traditional interpretation of the Adam, Eve, Cain and Abel story. Like the Biblical flood story, my main problem with the literal interpretation is purely one of mathematics – and logistics. So accepting the "young age" of the earth poses one conundrum and then there are those pesky dinosaurs! This is a whole other topic which for those who adhere to the young earth theory brings a whole level of creativity devised by apologists. I have a nephew who worked at the Creation museum in Kentucky where they have exhibits featuring men and dinosaurs cohabitating. Many believe they were created at the beginning with man but died out during the flood (possibly too big for the ark). I have also heard preachers explain with a straight face how God put dinosaur bones in the ground to test our faith. And I reiterate, I am not talking about Christians in general – just the extreme fundamentalist types such as those with whom I was raised, who insist that the Bible is the "word for word" infallible dictation of God himself as copied, edited and finally consummated as the KJV.



Evolutionists, on the other hand, explain broadly how through natural selection life began in the ocean with a single celled amoeba, possibly deposited by a passing comet, and over billions of years evolved into the life we know today. However although radical changes within species are well documented over time, there is still no instance of one species evolving into another completely different species no matter over how long. Again, I have looked at all the arguments and that is my own logical conclusion. Bacteria don't become fish and fish don't turn into mammals even in a trillion years. Many scientists may disagree with me and point to the magical Galapagos Islands as some sort of real life iteration of "Jurassic Park". Again, perhaps valid conclusions for them but still based on initial leaps of faith.

With the advent of the quantum world we have learned more about how things are not what we have always assumed. That for instance as famously demonstrated, observation in itself, can affect whether a photon acts as a particle or a wave. As Spock would say - Illogical! The Chinese have even succeeded in what is termed "quantum teleportation". Beam me up Scotty! What we must end up realising is that no truth is final in science. New theories often disprove old theories that intelligent people have believed for decades or centuries.

The truth of the matter is that I don't know, but nor does anybody else for sure. Whatever your belief; be it based on science, religion, or the Great Pumpkin in the sky, there is no basis for anyone to be dogmatic. In the end what I am saying is that whatever you choose to believe requires some faith.

And you are free to take whichever leap of faith you wish and no one can ultimately prove you wrong. It is just that personally I have chosen to have faith in what I feel is the most empowering assumptions and beliefs for me and that makes me happiest about my life. Sure some may call me deluded but in this world of mystery those people will in turn be considered deluded by others. The great epiphany is that we are all free to assume what makes us most contented and free – that is the real importance of nothing.

**Billy Jackson**

'The radical is deeply committed to justice, which finds expression in moral outrage when people's rights are violated. It is this vision and the outrage that give birth to a just and compassionate existence. We seek a world in which the worth of the individual is recognized . . . the creation of the kind of society where all potentialities could be realized; a world where people could live in dignity, security, happiness, and peace — a world based on a morality of humankind.'

**Saul Alinsky**

# Thematic Ministry



Theme-based ministry is happening in more and more congregations throughout our movement both here in the UK and over in the States. It's designed to energise the life of a congregation through monthly themes - used in worship, small groups and other activities. It gives everyone an opportunity to get more involved so do have a look at the themes planned for the months ahead and let us know if you'd like to suggest a reading or a piece of music, bring your own thoughts to one of our Sunday morning gatherings or write something for the newsletter.

Here is a list of our future monthly themes for you to be thinking about:

Religious Life (October); Time and Transience (November); Scarcity and Abundance (December). Here are some ways to explore August's theme of 'Hopes and Dreams' and September's theme of 'Moving On & Staying Put':

- Hopes and dreams tend to change through our lives. Some come to fruition, some have to be released. Spend time thinking of the dreams you have accomplished, the hopes you have had to let go of, the possibilities that you still want to pursue. How might you picture them – in words or artwork or movement perhaps? What would help you fulfil some of your current hopes and dreams?
- Think of the times you've stayed put in your life and the times you've moved on. Has it been hard to make the decision to move or stay? What helped you know what was best for you? Do you have similar decisions to make soon? Is there a simple statement or mantra that could help through the time of 'not knowing'?
- A time and space of not knowing, of uncertainty, is sometimes described as liminal space. Liminal space lies between 'what was' and 'what is next'. It may be a crossing place in life, a threshold. Theologian Richard Rohr describes it encouragingly as the place 'where we are betwixt and between the familiar and the completely unknown. There alone is our old world left behind, while we are not yet sure of the new existence. That's a good space where genuine newness can begin. Get there often and stay as long as you can by whatever means possible...This is the sacred space where the old world is able to fall apart, and a bigger world is revealed. If we don't encounter liminal space in our lives, we start idealizing normalcy. The threshold is God's waiting room. Here we are taught openness and patience as we come to expect an appointment with the divine Doctor'. Liminal times are not always comfortable or easy, so we may try to avoid them. But useful insights can emerge from these experiences of change and uncertainty, and comfort may come from enlisting the support of others so we do not face our life thresholds alone, unless we prefer to do so.

Sarah, Jeannene, and Jane

## Swing Dance Fundraiser to help immigrants and oppose concentration camps in the US



**Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> September, 2-5pm**  
**Here at Essex Church – Save the Date!**

Come and swing dance to support RAICES ([www.raicestexas.org](http://www.raicestexas.org)), a group working to oppose concentration camps in the US and help immigrants -- including children -- detained at the US border with Mexico.

Johanna and their friends are bringing Lindy Hop to Essex Church in September for this special fundraising event. Never danced lindy hop before? There will be a fun taster lesson at the beginning to get you moving!

## Billion Stars: One Planet



When the crankshaft goes down and takes the piston with it  
You could say - there's a new possibility: or when  
The crankshaft rises up and brings the piston with it - here's  
Another possibility! But if the pistons revolve and no one  
Ever stops to consider those who will  
Breathe in oil and spit our pollution - here you may exclaim  
"If there's no oil, then there'll always be electricity; and  
If there's no electricity then - back to wind and sail or  
Basic pedalling - there's always a way for the dedicated optimist.  
Surely - you can add - "When Gaia starts sending back its 3D survey  
Of the billion stars and their trillion planets  
Surely to God there'll be one on which someone, somewhere  
Is bound to be saying: 'when their piston came up  
It was their one opportunity to change direction - but they  
Blew it forever - and now there they are, a handful of scarred survivors  
Blaming us - their stars!"

John Hands

# A Course in Miracles: My First Round

Over the last eighteen months or so, I have been working with *A Course in Miracles*. It's a whopper of a book that came into my life several years ago when I saw an Elder at my Quaker meeting reading from it. I bought a copy and started looking at it but it didn't really speak to me at the time. As my interest in the inner traditions of Christianity and in the Advaita Vedanta mode of thought began to grow, the book came back into view and this time, I was ready.

What is ACIM? It's a kind of thought therapy. In short, it helps you move from thinking with fear to being with love. It lifts a veil: it's not trying to add anything. The ultimate goal is inner peace. In the introduction, the summary of the Course is said to be that 'Nothing real can be threatened. Nothing unreal exists. Herein lies the peace of God.' It all comes in book form: a Textbook of thirty-one chapters, a Workbook with 365 lessons, a Manual for Teachers, and two supplementary pamphlets: one on prayer and one on psychotherapy. This forms the framework for a profound shift in thought, but it is not the curriculum itself. The curriculum is our very lives.

Each of us has a curriculum. Indeed, the Course teaches us that each day, our encounters with others and with our own selves are the classroom in which we are to learn its lessons. We might find the Course to be the path but it admits itself that it is not for everyone; however, we all have to learn its essential lessons: they are not optional, only the time we learn them is up to us. Who is the teacher? We are told to abandon our ego-self as a teacher – it's a bad teacher – and to rely instead on the inner guide, which the Course describes in traditional Christian language as the Holy Spirit, although the meaning is more nuanced than in typical Trinitarian thought. Jesus, who is thought to be the voice of the Course, is an elder brother, a friend, a teacher, and a guide.

My first year of being a student of ACIM has been somewhat haphazard. I made the mistake of starting to read the text and do the workbook at the same time. At one point, this slowed my progress because of the volume of reading and meant that I didn't pay as much attention as I should have to some passages. Working with supplementary materials from teachers of the course (Marianne Williamson, Ken Wapnick, and the lovely people at the Circle of Atonement) has helped to clarify some things that I missed. Learning more about Vedanta has helped me understand the Course better too. It is a non-dual thought system, meaning that there is no separation between individuals or between people and God. Indeed, to use the Course's language, it's the tiny mad idea that we are separate from each other and from God, and somehow special and superior to God that has driven us into our insanity.



Has it changed my thinking? Yes, but I know that it hasn't changed me completely. I spend a lot of time in fear and my ego voice chides me often about my failures. I am aware of when it starts though and I can turn to it with an idea from the Course, for example, 'I am as God created me', or simply, 'There is nothing to fear'. It's also helped me by teaching me what doesn't exist, that my projections have a huge influence on my perceptions. All that comes of God is of love, anything that is not of God cannot exist. If we can categorise all emotions as either love or fear, then the latter does not exist. In reality, there is nothing to fear. After I've silenced my ego with a good word, I can dismantle the hold it's had over me for those minutes and ask the Great Spirit to help me choose again so I invite love instead.

Now, the Course, as I said, is not for everyone. I think it is brilliant. When I talk about it to my partner, I face the raised eyebrow of scepticism. Others describe it as either plainly awful or satanic. Some scoff at the idea that it was given to Helen Schucman, a psychologist working at a university in the 1970s, by Jesus, whose voice persistently told her, 'This is a course in miracles. Please take notes,' until she picked up her pen and started writing what she heard. By my lights, scoffing suggests that the revelation of God is closed. How can that possibly be? We are alive.

If you're interested in finding out more about the Course, I'd love to share about it with you. If you've already been a student and want to work on it together, that would be amazing – maybe we could even form a study group. The paradox of the Course is that its lessons can be learned in an instant, even though it takes years to study. I've got a couple of months left with the workbook and then I'm going back to page one.

**Tristan Jovanović**

'If your goal is to find a centre, a focus, a gathering place within your life, then you would do well to practice fidelity. By slowing down, abiding in relationships, staying in place, remaining faithful to a calling, we create the conditions for paying attention, for discovering depths, for finding a purpose and a pattern in our days. Fidelity enables us to orient ourselves, to know with some confidence where we are. It provides continuity, enabling us to see how things change, what is endangered, what persists.'

**Scott Russell Sanders**

'There are two kinds of people. One kind you can just tell by looking at them at what point they congealed into their final selves. It might be a very nice self, but you know you can expect no more surprises from it. The other kind keep moving forward and making new trysts with life, and the motion of it keeps them young. In my opinion, they are the only people who are still alive. You must be constantly on your guard against congealing.'

**Gail Godwin**



# Summer Poetry Evening



I attended my first of these on Tuesday 30th July & enjoyed it very much. It's a great format, each person introducing their poem and saying a bit about what it means to them before reading it aloud to the circle - then time for reflection together. The poems seemed to flow very naturally into each other:

- Hafez admires the artistry of wind rippling the fields & then Carolyn admires the fields from the top deck of a bus between Cambridge & Ely
- that road becomes "a long, supple bolt of cloth" for Sheenah Pugh & then Robert Frost's road less travelled
- before Robert Grave's Cabbage White lurches off the road altogether to navigate by "guess & God & hope & hopelessness"
- hopelessness was also the theme as Roy read "Not Waving but Drowning" by Stevie Smith
- and then Marc read a poem he'd written about the tragedy of addiction & we heard Billy's beautiful love song at the piano

I'd brought a poem with a special meaning for me at the moment, because my mother died a few weeks ago & for several years I'd been using it as a touchstone for our changing family relationships. The poem is "Snow & Dirty Rain" by Richard Siken and I introduced it saying it was a love poem, but really it's about the failures of love - though in a hopeful way. I was already working with it two years ago, when I spent the summer at an Arts Residency in France. We were invited to write significant quotes onto large sheets of paper and display them in the space. I wrote many lines from this poem (and a few others - including one by my mother) onto long strips of wallpaper & hung them from the trees in the garden. That was at the beginning of the summer & two months later many had blown down & blown away - but I collected up the remainder and brought them home.

One line that survived from Richard Siken was "Here is the river and here is the box and here are the monsters we put in the box to test our strength against". When I took it down, I saw that someone had written on the back "but I think it better to love my monsters . . . and then they disappear". I wanted to know who - and it turned out to be a woman who'd been paralysed from the waist-down several years before. She'd driven herself to the event in a specially adapted car, which she also slept in & that enabled her to live independently. The kind of dance I practice, Contact Improvisation, can be danced seated, or rolling on the floor as much as standing and I'd had several lovely dances with this woman - hand to hand & head to head & back to back. When she wanted to dance, she could get out of her wheelchair to the floor herself & then move around by rolling - but she couldn't get back into the wheelchair without someone who could lift her, so she had to trust that help would be available when she needed it.

After I came back from the hospital. I took the remaining poem lines and hung them in the church garden as prayer flags for my mother. Reading the whole thing in the circle was also a memorial & it felt good to feel it take its place next to Marianne's poem about loving her daughter and Derek Walcott's poem about loving yourself - amidst Maureen's Wild Geese, Juliet's memories of an inn, the Craft & Sullen Art of Dylan Thomas and Tessimond's "need at times of each for each, direct as the need of throat and tongue for speech". All these were welcomed into Rumi's Guest House of being human - where Jennifer reminded us that If You Want to Be a Bad-Ass "You will not be rewarded for remaining long the same". My poem ended with the same sentiment "We are all going forward. None of us are going back". I look forward to many more such times of sharing - thank you all.

Jenny Moy

# Sunday Conversation

Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> September, 12.45-2pm

(there will not be a 'Sunday Conversation' in August due to the Notting Hill Carnival)



Why not bring your lunch and stay after the service on Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> September for our conversation in connection with this month's theme of 'Moving On and Staying Put'.

## Our July Conversation on 'Curiosity and Wonder'

Sixteen of us stayed behind for a conversation about this month's theme and we touched on some deep concerns. Our closing circle was chance to raise 'questions we'd like to ask' - an idea introduced in Jana Raskova's 'plane meditation in the service, when we had chance to question a higher power. Here are a few of the topics we raised - with apologies to any we have left out.

- I'd like to know if there will be a human civilisation here on earth in 100 years' time.
- Curiosity seem to be a very different impulse to me from wonder - with curiosity having a restless, searching quality and wonder being the moment when we are stopped in our tracks. Does one lead to the other?
- I think we have the ability and knowledge to maintain life here on earth but can we find the political and individual will to ensure this?
- Would we want to see the future if we could?
- What's falling in love all about?
- Why don't we learn from history?
- Why doesn't our curiosity about the future strengthen us to look further forward and change our behaviours individually and collectively?
- Does synchronicity really exist as something more than the randomness of chaos?
- After enjoying watching the Portrait Artist of the Year TV programme I'm fascinated by how artists convey the reality they see before them into artistic form.
- And what is reality anyway?
- Is there a plan to all this and would I want to know it if there was?

# Your Chance to Share Your Vision for the Unitarian GA



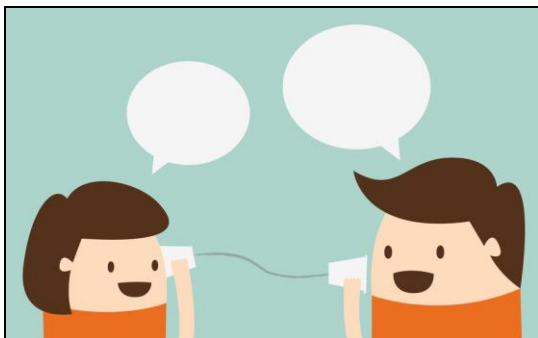
When work happens most easily and effectively, it is usually because it is aligned to the passions of those carrying it out. In my travels and meetings so far, I have heard the passions of some in the denomination, and I am keen to hear more as I work with the Executive Committee on reviewing the General Assembly's strategy.

I am hosting a series of calls over the summer, and I hope many of you will be able to join. You will be able to do this via video or dial in with a regular phone, depending on your preference. We will have a small group of people on each call, so we will hear each other's perspectives. We won't be making decisions about future direction in these calls – just listening.

To join in, please email Audrey Longhurst (alonghurst@unitarian.org.uk) by **Friday 9<sup>th</sup> August**, letting her know your first and second choices of which of the following calls you would like to join. We will then let participants know which call to join, and the dial-in details. Calls will last an hour.

- Tuesday 13th August, 6.30pm
- Thursday 15th August, 10am
- Monday 19th August, 1pm
- Thursday 22nd August, 1pm
- Wednesday 28th August, 7pm
- Thursday 29th August, 11am
- Tuesday 3rd September, 7pm
- Wednesday 4th September, 5pm

Liz Slade



'If there is a major problem in spirituality today, it may be that we do not do enough to form Christians for resistance to evil. We form them for patient endurance and for civil conformity. We form them to be "good" but not necessarily to be "holy." In the doing of it, we make compliant Christians rather than courageous ones, as if bearing evil were more important than confronting it.'

Joan Chittister



## Responding to Tinnitus

*We thought newsletter readers would be interested to read Eliz Beel's piece explaining some artwork she created in response to the experience of tinnitus. I wonder how any of us would express a particular bodily issue in art, music, movement or writing.*



Many years ago, when I was a young art student up in the North, I got involved in creating art pieces of imaginary landscapes/inner-scapes; even incorporating into these pictures strange objects emitting high pitched noises. I chose to display one of these in a recent exhibition: 'My Magic Fan, with noisy machine'. It was completed in 1973. It must have been something of a dark age I was occupying doing these musical paintings. I don't think I got any comments on what I thought I was doing, either from the tutors, or other students in the art department.

However, recently, looking back at the work myself, I was intrigued to see that the various lines I'd created, dividing and carrying lights and colours, had been an effort to create a visually pulsating world of imaginary sounds... but, further on, accepted into the Royal College of Art, for a time I moved on into more peopled-landscape work, and musicality moved a step into the background. Then, in 1979, I was looking for work in the field of illustration. With this I obtained a commission from the editor of the RNID's 'Soundbarrier' magazine. The commission was for the newly-formed British Tinnitus Association. It was to create a series of drawings illustrating the effects on sufferers of Tinnitus. This group was campaigning for new research to be made into newer treatments for inner ear Tinnitus. A variety of maskers for Tinnitus have been invented, and it's even possible to devise your own, but sadly the drug treatments for these conditions, after so many years, remain stuck in development.

Eliz Beel

'Be patient with life itself. those who love life are tolerant of its ups and downs, its reversals and leaps forward. Those who love life enjoy playing it by ear, engaging life without a printed score, simply flowing with its melody. By keeping our agendas flexible and minimizing our demands, life can be a melodic song. Whenever circumstances interrupt the normal rhythm of life, those who cultivate patience and inner freedom are able to improvise with a life situation like jazz musicians, making up music as they go along. The emphasis in playing it by ear is on playfulness. Those who use that gift of the Holy Spirit make their way gracefully through life.'

Edward Hays

# Goodbye-ee...

Almost unbelievably, for years now— from my early adolescence onwards I have been carting around with me, from one address to another, piles of personal letters I have received. Mostly from friends, but also even a few official notifications and playbills. Of course I HAVE managed to throw some of these away – or perhaps more precisely they have simply left me; dropping by the wayside, like rags from a scrap-iron dealer's horse and cart; or in an unguarded moment thrust into a nearby wastebin. Of course from time to time I've also done a little perfunctory sorting, filing them into envelopes and bundles. Then quite recently, seeking for confirmation of a rather painful incident in my life from years ago, I met again three old friends whose few letters to me I never want to be parted from.

They are from Don, one of the very few friends I made in the rural Elementary school I attended during the war. Don lived in an ancient half-timbered house deep in the Worcestershire countryside. Then there are those from Bill I met in the College for Working Men On the Bourneville Estate in 1951. Finally there are letters from Pamela, who I met while on holiday in The Rhineland in 1958. Don's letters are the oldest, and the most entertaining. Did we REALLY talk and think about things in THAT way?... *'When I come over to your place I should start out early so that I could get to your place early then we could perhaps go to Brum and have a "gas and a mooch". I am very interested in those Ex US army implements and I should like to get a gas-mask as a war souvenir. I have got already a waterbottle – a helmet and a bottle tunic...'*

Re-reading Don's letters to me from just after the war in the mid-nineteen forties, prodded a number of memories which I'm sure neither of us would have been likely to mention again in our letters. For example a few years earlier, in touring around the Worcestershire lanes on our bikes, he told me about the Facts of Life in a way which made it all seem weird, almost incredible, and even now somewhat fearful and disturbing. Apparently he had got these vital details from an older "Kid" who had been recently married, and who made it all sound like a peculiar form of stock-breeding.

Bill Wootton, about four years older than me, was born into a Quaker family, and was a Conscientious Objector during the war. From the Working-Men's College we both went on to become part of the second and third intake of Keele University in the Potteries. Bill was a very fine poet, whose work I have been trying to promote ever since his death in 1999. I was always aware of what a lonely life he lived – even more so when he retired from his work as a teacher of English at a neighbourhood Comprehensive School. He seemed to retire more and more into himself, and after the death of his sister, his only sib ling, he became partially-sighted, and slowly descended into domestic squalor.

Pamela was one of the most learned young women I had ever met at University or elsewhere (that is – until I met my dear wife Heidi much later on). Pamela was Head of a small department of German, at what was seemed to be an exclusive girls' school in or near Lincoln. As we steamed sedately down the Rhine she



gave me an absorbing account of Goethe's life and work. I also learned from her a good deal about English Middle and Upper-middle class life from the lengthy letters which, after our return from Germany, we continued to send each other. Occasionally we met in London, and one or two cathedral cities in the south-east. But it became increasingly clear to both of us that ours had been a decorous holiday encounter, not quite a romance, which could not be grounded in the worlds we were both living in.

There is something about each of these letters from friends who have long since left the stage of my life, without much indication of when we left off, which haunts me still. No doubt this is why I have not been able to dispose of them, or re-read them until now. And perhaps there is another explanation for this too. Our personal letters are evidence of what I will call our unofficial, informal lives, which like poetry testify to our particular human capacity for elaborate, complex feelings. And more than this: to feel inspired, uplifted through particular aspects of our experience, and our struggle to give satisfactory expression to this. I suppose I am simply drawing attention to my advancing years when I say that the fewer gadgets or electronic appliances we have to interfere-even intervene with this delicate process of relating to others through our written (or indeed spoken) words, the more satisfactory we are likely to feel our efforts to do this. But however this may be, if e-mails are likely to be our only or main source and evidence of our personal lives, let's make sure they are not heedlessly discarded. Let's print them out, fold them up, and file them carefully away. Each one of us needs to share our memories and feelings with other people, and in the course of time re-discover what it was to be a human being in relationship with others in our particular time and place in society.

Finally I would like to add: Not only what we feel to be great Art, but also ballads, ditties, the popular songs of a period are also a testimony of personal feeling, sometimes even more so. At this time our society is much captivated by the experiences, thoughts, and feelings of those who lived through, and often lost their lives in the first world war. Often the simple words of a soldier's song from that period say it all for me. Let them too sing on their way all of those dear friends we once loved, and shared some portion of our lives with.

Goodbye-ee goodbye-ee  
Wipe the tear baby dear from your eye-ee  
Though it's hard to part I know  
I'll be tickled to death to go.  
Dont cry-ee, don't sigh-ee  
There's a silver lining in the sky-ee  
Bonsoir Old Thing cheer-i-o chin-chin  
Nahpool! tidley-boo! goodbye-ee!



John Hands

## What's On...

(...continued from front page)

Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> September, 6.45 for 7-8pm  
**'Heart & Soul' Spiritual Gathering**  
'Walking Away' led by Sarah Tinker

Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> September, 11am-noon  
**'But I Don't Want to Move!'**  
Led by Jeannene Powell

Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> September, 12.30-1pm  
**Inclusive Communion**  
Led by Tristan Jovanović

Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> September, leaving at 1pm  
**Cultural Outing: 'Smoke & Mirrors'**  
Led by Carolyn Appleby

Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> Sept, 12.30pm  
**'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite**

Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> September, 11am-noon  
**'Pilgrims All'**  
Led by David Talbot & Sarah Tinker

Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> September, 12.30-1.15pm  
**'Find Your Voice'**  
Singing Class with Margaret

Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> September, 2-3.00pm  
**'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite**

Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> September, 3-7.00pm  
**West London Happy Café**

Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> Sept, 12.30pm  
**'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite**

Friday 20<sup>th</sup> September, 7.30-9.30pm  
**Playback Theatre:**  
'Moving On and Staying Put'

Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> Sept, 11am-noon  
**'Seasons of Change: Harvest'**  
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> Sept, 12.15-1.30pm  
**Congregational Lunch**  
See inside for important information!

Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> September, 2-5pm  
**Sunday Afternoon Tea Dance**  
in aid of Stonewall Housing

Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> September, 7-8.45pm  
**Kensington Singers – New Choir!**

Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> September, 11am-noon  
**'Staying Put'**  
Led by Jane Blackall

Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> Sept, 12.45-2.00pm  
**Sunday Conversation**  
On 'Moving On and Staying Put'

## Services at Essex Church in August and September

**Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> August, 11am - 'Dream Boldly'**  
Service led by Jane Blackall

'Whatever you can do, or dream you can, begin it! Boldness has genius, magic, and power in it.' This famous quotation, by W.H. Murray (oft misattributed to Goethe) urges us to dream boldly, and risk committing ourselves to high aspirations, even in the knowledge that success is not guaranteed and we might well find ourselves crashing down to earth again with a bump. In today's service we will ponder the potential risks and rewards of having high hopes.

**Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> August, 11am - 'Dreaming of Justice'**  
Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Using stories both ancient and modern we will consider the imperative to keep moving towards a better world for all.

**Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> August, 11am**  
**'Hints for Dreaming a Bigger Life'**

Led by Jeannene Powell and Members of the Congregation

In this congregational service, members share stories of achievements despite the limits others have set for them. Through sharing how they overcame others expectations we can gain hints on dreaming a bigger life for ourselves.

**Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> Aug, 11am - 'Defying the Dreamcrushers'**  
Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

How might we hold on to hopes and dreams when our world systems, other people, and even we, are trying to crush them?

**Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> September, 11am - 'Travellers' Tales'**  
Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Do bring some water for our annual Gathering the Waters celebration.

**Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> Sept, 11am - 'But I Don't Want to Move!'**  
Service led by Jeannene Powell

Freedom of movement is something many celebrate. For some though, moving is not a choice, but an unwelcomed necessity due to outer circumstances. We'll explore some of these circumstances and effects of forced movement in this service.

**Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> September, 11am - 'Pilgrims All'**  
Service led by David Talbot and Sarah Tinker

The place of pilgrimage in all the world's religious traditions as well as in our lives today, with a walking meditation

**Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> Sept, 11am - 'Seasons of Change'**  
Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Our annual harvest festival service followed by a bring-and-share lunch and our inclusive tea dance

**Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> September, 11am - 'Staying Put'**  
Service led by Jane Blackall

Much is made of the virtues of moving on and embracing change, but in today's service we will celebrate the potential virtues of staying put and cultivating stability, in a world which increasingly seems designed to stop people putting down roots of any kind.