



Kensington Unitarians

Newsletter: June 2017

What's On...

Thursday 1st June, 7-8pm

'Heart and Soul':

'Everyday Courage' led by Jane Blackall

Sunday 4th June, 11am-noon

'Courageous in Faith'

Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Wednesday 7th June, 12.30pm

'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite

Sunday 11th June, 11am-noon

'Not Just Bystanders'

Led by Jeannene Powell & Sarah T

Sunday 11th June, 12.30-1.00pm

Inclusive Communion

Led by Sue Smith

Sunday 11th June, 1.00-2.00pm

John Hands' Book Launch

Wednesday 14th June, 12.30pm

'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite

Saturday 17th June, 11.00-4.30pm

'Working on Our Welcome: Improving Our Hospitality to LGBTQ+ People' –

Training Event and LDPA Quarterly with Fred Langridge & Jane Blackall

Sunday 18th June, 11am-noon

'Loving when the Going Gets Tough'

Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 19th June, 12.30-1.15pm

'Finding Your Voice'

Singing Workshop with Margaret

Sunday 19th June, 2-3pm

'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite

Wednesday 21st June, 12.30pm

'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite

Sunday 25th June, 11am-noon

'Resilient Communities'

Led by Sarah Tinker & Jane Blackall

This will include a charity collection for the Unitarian GA

Sunday 25th June, 12.30-1.30pm

Essex Church AGM

Wednesday 28th June, 12.30pm

'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite

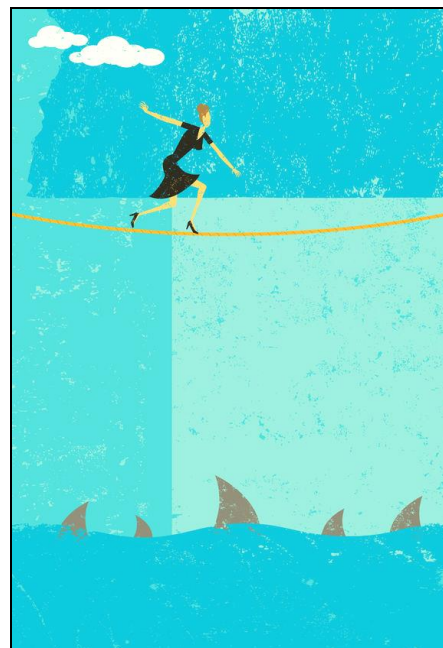
A Date for your Diary:

Sunday 23rd July – 40th Anniversary of our church building – service & lunch – followed by Afternoon Tea Dance

Courage and Resilience

A Message from our Minister

Many are the folk tales telling of youngsters brought up by families and communities other than their own. They're powerful stories about our human need to discover our true selves, to be who we truly are. And that process of individuation takes courage along with good fortune. Folk tales generally end well. The ugly duckling turns out to be a beautiful swan. The lion brought up by the goats eventually meets an uncle who shows him his true nature. The eagle raised with the chickens learns at last to soar high above them.



But real life isn't always so kind. And happy endings don't always turn up when you need them most. In the real world some people never have the freedom or the encouragement to discover and develop their inner identity that might be longing to emerge. How often in human history have individuals had to hide their true nature even from themselves for fear of discovery by those who would oppress them?

We are living in turbulent times. Here in Britain we are living through the disturbances caused by terrorist actions and by election campaigning. Such events can bring out both the best and the worst in human nature. It takes courage to choose a path of love and hope in the face of hatred and fear. It takes resilience to withstand the pressures that could lead to growing oppression and repression. In tough times, those who suffer most are often those for whom life is already challenging. The poor, the disabled, the homeless, the young, the old, those who are ill, immigrants, people of different faiths and colour, LGBT people – these are the people we need to be aligning with. Let's make our message loud and clear: we celebrate our diverse world, we stand for the rights of one and all to be themselves, we commit ourselves to supporting all people of goodwill.

The real world is messy and imperfect and there are no happy endings. Life is a series of moments and possibilities, within which we have, both as individuals and as communities, a variable amount of choice. At every opportunity let's choose love, perhaps the most courageous choice we can ever make, and speak up for those who may otherwise be silenced.

Rev. Sarah Tinker

In this month's newsletter...

'Working on our Welcome' Training Day and LDPA Quarterly * Unitarian Women's Group * Film Review by Liz Tuckwell * 'Jason's Pilgrimage' - John Hands' Book Launch Event * Photographs from the Sunday Afternoon Tea Dance * 'Sphinxes of the Night' by Eliz Beel * Poems by Brian Ellis and John Hands * Cultural Outing to a Late Night Prom with Carolyn * Playback Theatre on 'Coffee' * Reflections by Roy Clark and 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
112 Palace Gardens Terrace
Notting Hill Gate
London W8 4RT*

Office Answering Machine: 020 7221 6514

Email: info@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Web: www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Facebook Page for Kensington Unitarians

A new way to spread the word about our church!



We have recently set up a new Facebook page where we will post podcasts of our weekly services, reminders of forthcoming events, and photos of our activities. If you are active on Facebook please 'Like' the page and 'Share' some of the things we post to help us gain a bit more visibility. We think that there are lots of people out there who would appreciate our podcasts so if you've particularly enjoyed a service share it with friends!

www.facebook.com/KensingtonUnitarians

Essex Church AGM

After the service on 25th June, 12.30-1.30pm



Our congregational AGM will take place after the service on Sunday 25th June. We encourage members to save the date and come along to hear more about all the work that goes on behind the scenes to keep our church community running smoothly (and to hear about the many and varied ways you can help our congregation continue to thrive). Members will receive a copy of our annual report in mid-June so you should all have plenty of time to read it before the meeting.

Volunteering Rotas: Stewarding, Coffee and Greeting

Stewarding:

4 th June:	Heidi Ferid
11 th June:	Gina Bayley
18 th June:	Julia Alden
25 th June:	Brian Ellis

Coffee:

4 th June:	Helena Coope
11 th June:	Juliet Edwards
18 th June:	John Hands
25 th June:	Liz Tuckwell

Greeting:

4 th June:	Maureen Cummings
11 th June:	Brian Ellis
18 th June:	Niall Doherty
25 th June:	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



A Date for Your Diary: LDPA Quarterly and Training Course

Working on our Welcome: Improving Our Hospitality to LGBTQ+ People

**Saturday 17th June - 11am arrivals
for an 11.30am start until 3pm**

(will be followed by worship and refreshments until 4.30pm)

Unitarians are rightly proud of our historically progressive views on gender and sexuality issues, particularly our part in campaigning for equal marriage, but there is so much more work still to do. As a wider range of voices from across the LGBTQ+ rainbow (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer people) begin to make themselves heard, some of us may find ourselves confused by new terminology, and by seemingly conflicting messages about how best to respond to people's needs. In this half-day workshop, co-facilitated by Quaker activist Fred Langridge and Jane Blackall from our own Kensington congregation, we will explore some practical ways in which our communities can offer a better welcome to visitors who identify as LGBTQ+ and highlight areas where we could improve our awareness and sensitivity around issues of gender, sexuality and relationship diversity.

You'll need to book in advance for this training (though the training is free of charge) so the organisers know how many people to prepare for, but you are also welcome to arrive at 3.00pm to attend a special worship service connected to the workshop's themes. This will be followed by refreshments and time to socialise with everyone. Finish time around 4.30pm.

To book a place on the workshop or find out more, please contact Jane Blackall on jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk or phone and leave a message on 020 7221 6514.

It would be lovely to have a good turnout from our own congregation and we are likely to need some volunteers on the day to help with refreshments so please do let Jane or Sarah know if you might be willing to assist in some way.



A Date for your Diary: Anniversary Service

Sunday 23rd July 2017 at Essex Church



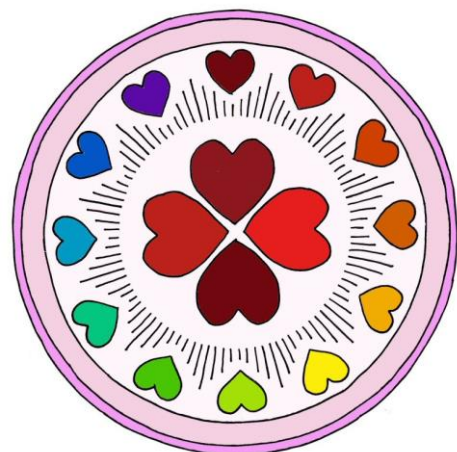
We will be holding a special service on Sunday 23rd July to mark the 40th anniversary of our church building's opening. The service will be followed by a simple shared lunch. We hope that friends old and new will join us to mark the day.

'Heart and Soul'

Midweek Spiritual Gatherings

**Thursdays 1st June, 13th July (irregular date),
3rd August, 7th September from 7-8pm**

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



Come and join us for our monthly alternative spiritual gathering, with music and silence, words and prayers, and a chance to explore the evening's topic in relation to your own life. This month's gathering will have the theme of 'Everyday Courage' and will be led by Jane Blackall. This will be followed by refreshments (Jane's home-made cake!) and fellowship. All are welcome to join us. If you would like to know more about 'Heart & Soul' gatherings at Essex Church email jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

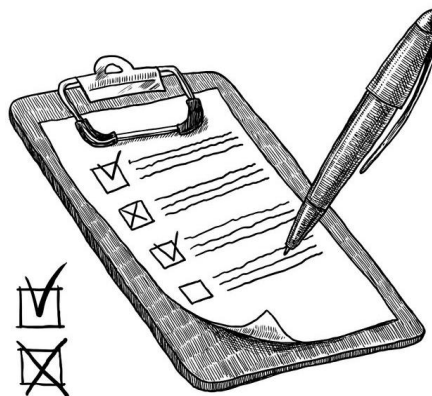
John Hands' Book Launch 'Jason's Pilgrimage'

Sunday 11th June at 1pm
Here at Essex Church



Jason's Pilgrimage, a novel by John Jarvis Hands, is now in print. There will be a book launch at Kensington Unitarians after the service on 11th June and refreshments will be available. The book is set in 1973, Jason Holliday is in the grip of a midlife crisis, he plans to find solitude in the French countryside, but he is dragged into a series of eccentric encounters and his journey becomes a pilgrimage which will change his life forever. More will be revealed on the 11th of June.

Not Only, But Also... A Survey of 21st Century Unitarian Beliefs & Spirituality



Unitarian minister, Rev. Sue Woolley, is currently conducting a survey of UK Unitarians, looking into our religious beliefs and spirituality, with a view to publishing a book on her findings. It will cover themes including beliefs about Unitarianism, Unitarian ethos and values, beliefs about the divine, beliefs about Unitarians' relationships with Christianity, beliefs about Unitarians' relationships with other faiths; beliefs about people; and Unitarian spirituality and activities. She is hoping to find at least 150 people to complete the survey and her research would of course benefit from sampling a wide range of Unitarian perspectives. Copies of the survey can be obtained directly from Rev. Sue Woolley (revsuewoolley@gmail.com).

The Alister Hardy Trust
and British Teilhard Association

'Ecology, Science and Spirituality – Friends or Enemies?'



Saturday 3rd June, 10.30-4.00pm
Here at Essex Church

The Alister Hardy Trust and the British Teilhard Association are holding a joint conference here at Essex Church on Saturday 3rd June.

Entitled 'Ecology, Science & Spirituality – Friends or Enemies?' this promises to be a worthwhile event with two highly regarded speakers – Professors Keith Ward and Ursula King.

Look out for booking forms in our foyer or see:
www.teilhard.org.uk/teilhard-association/events

UNIFEST: Play, Create, Explore, Believe

A Long Weekend of Unitarian Family Fun
26th-29th October 2017, Great Hucklow

Unifest will take place from Thursday 26th until Sunday 29th October 2017 – two whole days deep in the countryside at The Nightingale Centre, Great Hucklow, Derbyshire. It is family-friendly and **kids go free**:

- Workshops for adults on the spirituality of parenting, creative sessions for children, and activities for all ages
- Intergenerational worship
- Time to explore Unitarian values and ethics
- Trips out to local attractions
- Enjoy the great outdoors
- Opportunities to share our talents and gifts

The cost per adult for 3 nights and all meals is £140 (reduced fee due to generous grants from the Hibbert Trust and Foy Society). If you have any questions contact John Harley, Unitarian Youth Officer: jharley@unitarian.org.uk. To book your accommodation for UNIFEST please contact Stella at the Centre: info@thenightingalecentre.org.uk.

Sunday Afternoon Tea Dance – A Great Success!

Save the date for our next tea dance on Sunday 23rd July

'The tea dance was great fun, it took me right back to my youth, and even now I managed a few steps and enjoyed the company of my dance partners. The tea and cakes were also brilliant! Please can we have a waltz next time? Many thanks to Rachel and Jane and everybody who took part.' – Heidi Ferid

'It was tremendous to learn the Rumba this session of the Tea Dance at Essex Church! Lots of dancing, lots of cakes - lots of companionship! The dancing instruction was so inspiring that Brian and I decided to book a ballroom dancing class to be slightly more fluid in our movements next time around when the Tea Dance comes to bless us again! Thanks to Jane and Rachel and everybody who made this such a joy!' – Michaela von Britkze



Unitarian Women's Group 'Our Stories'



20th – 22nd October 2017

The Nightingale Centre, Great Hucklow

A weekend of interactive sessions on Unitarian women in history, placing ourselves in the story and a look at the UWG itself and its development over the course of nearly four decades. Serious and hilarious by turns and always warm and friendly. Led by Ann Peart and Celia Midgley. Further details of the weekend programme will be sent out with the confirmation of registration.

Join us at the annual autumn weekend gathering of the Unitarian Women's Group, to be held at The Nightingale Centre, Great Hucklow, near Tideswell, in the wild and wonderful Derbyshire countryside. Non-members are welcome too. Book early to ensure a place!

Accommodation costs start from £124 with supplements for ensuite or single occupancy. A UWG conference fee of £10 is also applicable.

Accommodation Booking: Stella Burney
info@thenightingalecentre.org.uk or 01298 871218

Conference Registration: Margaret Robinson
margaretrobinson81@gmail.com or 01642 782219

Affirmation

There is only one religion
The religion of love

There is only one language
The language of the heart

There is only one race
The race of humanity

There is only one God
And He is everywhere.

*(On the walls of Stephen Turoff's Healing Sanctuary
in Chelmsford – sent in by John Hands)*

Inclusive Communion

Sundays 11th June, 9th July, 13th August
at 12.30pm down in the Church Library



Once a month we hold a small-group communion, after the main morning service, downstairs in the library. A team of volunteers take turns in leading the services so we experience a variety of approaches. All are welcome to participate. If you would like to find out more about these services then please feel free to speak to Jane Blackall or Tristan Jovanović.

11th June – led by Sue Smith / 9th July – led by Jane Blackall

Good Cause Collection of the Month

General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches

Collection on Sunday 25th June



This month we will hold a collection for our national Unitarian organisation. With your support the General Assembly will: develop professional ministry and local leadership, represent Unitarians nationally and internationally, organise our annual meetings, produce publications, posters and leaflets, provide training and development programmes, support church growth, advise on buildings, legal and governance issues, promote religious education and provide a national youth programme, and more...

For more information see: www.unitarian.org.uk

Recent Charity Collections:

February – **Generation. Education. Period.** - £250

March – **Women's Federation for World Peace** - £221.80

April – **Migrants Organise** – £226.82

Thematic Ministry in June: Courage and Resilience



This month our focus will be on 'courage and resilience', with all their possible meanings. One of the aims of thematic ministry is to encourage people to get involved, to make the theme part of your own focus for the month. Below are some ideas about this month's theme for you to think about and do have a look at the themes for the months ahead in case there's a particular reading or song you'd like to offer on a Sunday or maybe a piece you'd like to write for the newsletter. Let us know. Thanks to everyone for the interesting conversations that we're having about these monthly themes. Our Sunday conversation on good and evil was certainly one to remember.

July – 'Identity' / August – 'Triumph/Disaster' /
September – 'Purpose/Mission' / October – 'Generosity'

Here are some ways to explore this month's theme.

Looking back on your life so far, are there particular times of courage and resilience that you remember. What did you learn about yourself in those times and how have they shaped your life since?

Parker J. Palmer sensibly reminds us to *'Avoid the bad habit of domesticating the prophet of your choice, turning him into a cheerleader for your way of thinking and way of life. Remember that all the great prophets were courageous and outrageous folks who railed against the powers-that-be, challenged self-satisfied piety, threatened the prevailing social order, and would find you falling short in some significant ways.'* Yet it's very natural for us to feel inspired by certain individuals who dare to stand up against prevailing norms and frightening regimes when they know them to be wrong. Make a list of people whose courage inspires you.

Resilience is sometimes described as the ability to bounce back from adversity. What helps you to feel strong and resilient in life, whatever comes your way? How do you take care of yourself when you feel vulnerable?

Sarah, Jeannene, and Jane

'A gentle person treads lightly, listens carefully, looks tenderly, and touches with reverence. A gentle person knows that true growth requires nurture, not force. Let's dress ourselves with gentleness. In our tough and often unbending world our gentleness can be a vivid reminder of the presence of God among us.'

Henri J. M. Nouwen

'Remember - what hurts you, hurts others too. What irritates you, irritates others too... No one likes to be talked about behind her back. No one likes to be ignored when he says hello, or to be talked down to, or to be interrupted... Everybody is hurt by rudeness, irritated by an angry word, agitated by being rushed or pressured.'

Ekknath Easwaran



'Sphinxes of the Night' - Artwork by E.L. Beel



Film Review: Collateral Beauty

Collateral Beauty is a film about a man, grieving over the death of his six-year-old daughter who has written letters to Love, Death and Time whom he blames. His co-workers stage an intervention with the aid of three actors pretending to be Love, Death and Time. I went to see the film because I thought it would be interesting. **There are several spoilers in this review so please don't read if you want to see the film.**

The film starts with a charismatic Howard (Will Smith) giving a motivational speech to the staff of his ad agency. In his speech, he says, 'Time, love and death. These three things connect every single human being on Earth. We long for love. We wish we had more time. And we fear death.' Which sounds great but he is talking about how to manipulate consumers and that all ads should be based on this. The film then moves on to two years since the death of Howard's six-year-old daughter from a rare disease, and he has returned to work in body if not in spirit or mind. His business partners, Whit (Edward Norton), Claire (Kate Winslett) and Simon (Michael Peña), are understandably nervous because Howard was the charismatic force driving the agency and is the majority shareholder. With sliding profits, they want to buy him out, but he refuses to discuss such details in his withdrawn state. Whit has hired a private investigator (Ann Dowd) to spy on Howard, and she reports on his activities including him looking through the window at a grief support group, which he never goes to. She also manages to retrieve three letters Howard has posted, from a mailbox (clearly, neither she nor they have any scruples about performing this illegal act). They discover he has written bitter, ranting letters to Time, Love and Death, blaming them for his misery.

Then Whit meets three struggling actors from the 'Hegel Theatre Company' (a nod to the 19th century German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel) and decides to hire them to pretend to be physical manifestations of Amy, Love (Keira Knightley), Raffi, Time (Jacob Latimore) and Brigitte, Death (Helen Mirren). The plan is for them to deliver personal responses to the letters of Howard and jolt him out of his depressed stupor, hopefully prompting him to sell his share of the company. And if that doesn't work, they plan to film the encounters and then digitally remove the actors to make him appear unhinged so they can have him declared mentally incapable.

I found it quite shocking that neither the actors nor his friends have any ethical dilemmas about what they are doing. The actors at least don't know Howard, but Whit, Simon and Claire are supposed to be his close friends and colleagues. I can understand why they want him out of the agency but this seems a particularly underhanded and cruel way to try to achieve it. Claire colludes with Raffi/Time by pretending to Howard that she cannot see the young black man, which seems a real abuse of trust and friendship.

I thought it was interesting how the film portrays society's reaction to grief, characters comment on the fact that it's been two years since his daughter's death and imply that he should be over it by now.

The actors also help the three colleagues with their own problems. Whit's philandering killed his marriage and alienated his daughter. Amy/Love shows him that he needs to persevere with trying to win back his daughter's affection. Claire has focused on her career and ignored her biological clock for so long she may have left motherhood too late. Raffi/Time encourages her to try and Simon, a new father, is dying from a terminal illness but has not shared this with his wife. Brigitte/Death encourages him to be honest with her. The actors stalk Howard and have two encounters with him, which he does not react well to. However, he does go to the grief support group although he leaves early. He begins a connection with the leader of the group, Madeleine, who has also lost a child. He is shown to be gradually get better and begin to move on.

There are two plot twists at the end, which annoyed me. One was that Madeleine (Naomie Harris) turns out to be his estranged wife but Howard treats her as a total stranger when he meets her at first. There is a scene where he visits Madeleine's house and she asks him to look at a video of her child. He refuses, which at the time, I thought was rude and unkind and made me dislike the character. Of course, afterwards I realised that it was a video of his child too. The other is that the three actors turn out to be Love, Death and Time. This is shown by Howard seeing them on a bridge but not Madeleine. I felt the film was playing games with the audience and using a plot twist to try to justify the behaviour of Howard's co-workers, they weren't doing anything bad because the actors were those concepts.

For a film that deals with death and grief, there is surprisingly little discussion of faith or what happens after death. It is only mentioned fleetingly at the grief support group. The issue of Howard's faith or lack of, and how it might have affected his viewpoint is never brought up. You might have expected Howard to be angry with God rather than Time, Death or Love.

I feel that "Collateral Beauty" wanted to say profound things about grief, love, death and time but didn't manage it. It has soundbites like Love saying 'I am the reason for everything, I am the only why,' and Death, 'Nothing's ever really dead if you look at it right,' which sound great but don't provide much real help to a grieving person. Perhaps the fact that many of its characters work in ad agency influenced the film.

Liz Tuckwell

Palais de Danse

ancient memories tell we danced
to drum and pipe and string,
rhythms beating time with earth
swift with day and night
recurrent with the moon
slow with seasons' change,
harmonising other life
swirling in one sharing soul.

now we choose to step alone
unpartnered on the floor,
dance our hedonistic dance
to music loud and fast
willing it to never end,
ignoring earth's gentle voice:
piano: 'it cannot last, it cannot last'
pianissimo: 'it cannot last'....

silence....

Brian Ellis

London Playback Theatre 'How do you take your coffee?'



**Thursday 6th July, 7.30pm at The Trunk,
The Artworks, Elephant Road, SE17 1AY**

A performance of Playback Theatre welcoming stories on this theme. What is your relationship to coffee? For some their first coffee is the essential kick-start to the day. For others the aroma is irresistible but its effect on the nervous system is intolerable. Others won't buy it unless it's fairly traded. How has coffee ... searching for it, drinking it, avoiding it ... held stories of meaning and significance for you?

Entry by donation - See londonplaybacktheatre.eventbrite.com

Veronica Needa

'Finding Our Voice' Monthly Singing Workshops



**Sundays 18th June, 16th July and
20th August after the service
from 12.30pm to 1.15pm**

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 everyone, whatever your experience or ability.



Fitness Fusion of 9 Movement Forms

**Third Sunday of the Month from
2-3pm: 18th June, 16th July, 20th August...**

Midweek class on 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 three month period.

Contact: Sonya Leite on 0207 371 1674

'The Art of Conversation'

Address by Roy Clark

Address from the service on 14th May 2017.

This address is also available online as a podcast.

On a sunny day, Taylor Baldry set up a card table and three folding chairs on a street corner in Minneapolis. He positioned a sandwich board nearby that announced "Free Conversations." Almost immediately, a couple joined him, and they spent the next 20 minutes discussing ghost stories, a topic they had chosen from Baldry's menu of conversation options, which on this day included the weather and dinosaurs to "things you can do with an egg."

When the couple left, others arrived, and Baldry spent the afternoon chatting amiably with a steady stream of passers-by, doing his bit in a small way to restore the practice of conversation. Baldry, a performance artist, has since taken his Conversationalist project to parks, theatres and other venues in his city, and has learned something about his fellow citizens: People are starved for authentic interactions. He says "Most people think it's a trick at first — that I'm selling something. When they realize there are no strings attached, they'll really start talking."

As we increasingly turn to our mobile phones and computers to communicate, we are... it seems to me, steadily losing touch with face-to-face talk. We have arrived at the extraordinary position in which we have more digital conversations than "real" ones. Smartphones and the rest have an important place and connect people in ways unimaginable before the digital revolution but nevertheless they can be extremely isolating and can never replicate the human connection of a face to face conversation.

There are endless possibilities of conversation and when it works we experience a true connection with another human being, a space of communion understanding and empathy that technology however intuitive can never reach. Conversation is an expression which is important in many ways. It lessens pain and suffering, multiplies joy, enjoyment and exaltation and enriches experience on an intellectual, emotional and spiritual level. Conversation as a vehicle of expression of ideas, emotions and experience is of great importance. A person to person exchange gives us the opportunity to see and be seen by others, a seemingly small detail with significant consequences. Body language and facial expressions allow for a more nuanced understanding of a person's tone and overall message, which is key to building trust. Visual cues also engage the brain's mirror neurons, which fire when we express an emotion or when we see someone else do the same. This process, commonly referred to as empathy, helps us forge closer, more meaningful relationships, and learn more about others and ourselves.

True face-to-face conversation is as I say, something that is rapidly becoming a lost art and I sometimes wonder as I sit on the tube watching my fellow travellers plug into their alternative realities whether future generations will even engage in real conversations at all. And yet, according to many experts face-to-face conversation are critically important to our well-being.

Conversations are also important for our children. "Conversations with each other are the way children learn to have conversations with themselves, and learn how to be alone," says Sherry Turkle, a professor of science, technology and society at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. "Learning about solitude and being alone is the bedrock of early development, and you don't want your kids to miss out on that because you're pacifying them with a device."



A conversation is also a participation, cooperation and interaction. This is one of the best means of communication and expression and also one of the richest. Our oldest and most cherished religious and spiritual works were originally in the form of oral communication, conversation and dialogues. Historically, the periods when conversation was most revered have been among the most fruitful for reason, invention and respect for the individual. Conversation breaks down barriers and works on so many different levels. While face-to-face communication is essential to human intimacy and development, we are slowly presented with fewer and fewer opportunities to converse. As aforementioned We're all too busy emailing each other emoticons and using our iPhones to update our Facebook statuses to bother with the old-fashioned practice of everyday chat. It might well be that this shift away from the human interface to the computer one will continue but I for one am an advocate of resurrecting the simple joys of talking to each other.

As Unitarians we have a proud tradition of Social Action. Our ideas and ideals for justice and equality have been made manifest not just in our deeds but in how we engage with the world in an open and inclusive dialogue. Over the last few months I have had the opportunity and privilege to work with our Unitarian charity Simple Gifts. Based in Bethnal Green in East London, it has been a joy to witness people from very different backgrounds come together over activities and shared meals and become friends through mutual understanding. This is an example, if one were needed, of the power of conversation to bring healing and understanding. Through understanding comes empathy and through fellow feeling loving kindness can flow.

In the wider world too as ethnic, religious and political groups become more polarized and the disconnect in our societies ever more apparent, conversation is needed more than ever. So many social ills at a domestic and international level are created at least in part by a failure to talk or at least create meaningful dialogue, which includes that key component of any real conversation, active listening. To see and understanding an alternative viewpoint and thus establish a connection is how we see and know each other. In short we cannot identify with what we cannot understand and conversation dissolves these conceptual barriers. As Margaret Wheatley puts it in our order of service "It takes courage to start a conversation. But if we don't start talking to one another, nothing will change. Conversation is the way we discover how to transform our world, together."

So whether it be sharing a joke with a stranger, sparking a new idea, discussing art or literature or just letting off steam with a friend, there are infinite adventures to be had and benefits to accrue if you just break the ice and say hello . . . Everyone wants to be heard... everybody has a story to tell. So as David Whyte said "Put down the weight of your aloneness and ease into the conversation." I look forward to continuing this conversation and embarking on others over coffee after the service. Care to join me?

'Some Thoughts on Digital Spirituality'

by Rev. Sarah Tinker

From the service on 21st May 2017.
This is also available online as a podcast.

Our overarching theme this month here with Kensington Unitarians is connections. And digital connections are now such a significant part of many people's lives that we had to mention them. But it probably wasn't wise to give me the task because when it comes to using digital technology I'm still a beginner. I posted something on Facebook for the first time ever yesterday and then texted various friends and even rang someone to ask them to 'like it'.

But I hope some of my feeble stumblings around this subject will give us all things to talk about, think about, maybe encourage us all to share our skills a bit more and to ask for help when we need it. And to show you how slow my take up on digital technology is – here's my favourite relaxation device – a very old taped recording of the practice of Yoga Nidra – which I've been using for 25 years and it's still ok. I've recently been introduced to an app called Insight Timer, for use on a smart phone. It helps people to meditate with a bell timer. Imagine my delight when I discovered that it also allows me to access for free over 5,000 guided meditations – covering every circumstance imaginable – going to sleep, staying awake, calming anxiety, increasing motivation, listening to natural sounds or computer generated music to regulate your heart beat. I've already found at least 20 Yoga Nidra recordings on this app. Perhaps this one example gives us a glimpse of the abundance that is now available to more and more people around the world, through digital technology.

The Internet has made a difference to shopping, it's made a difference to the world of spirituality too. It allows people to connect and engage in ways previously unknown to us. One downside is the 'too muchness' of it all. There is something comforting about the one relaxation tape I listened to over so many years. But it's exciting to realise how much there is now available to access and explore. Parents and grandparents may express concerns about younger generations spending so much time on video game consoles and smart phones. In our service last week Roy Clark was reminding us all of the value of real, face to face communication. But perhaps digital communication feels just as real to some. It's certainly a valuable way for people who might otherwise feel isolated to connect with others in similar circumstances and to support one another through sharing stories and information.

Up at Durham University there is now a Research Centre for Digital Theology. They and many others are exploring the connections between digital culture and theological conversation; because technology has an effect on faith. Think back to the effects of the printing press in the 15th century, making the Bible available to many people, no longer just the priests. Printing had a powerful part to play in the Protestant Reformation and the growth of non-conformity, in which Unitarianism had its own small part. Some scholars at the time were warning of the dangers of information overload. Respected Swiss scientist, Conrad Gessner described printed books as 'confusing and harmful to the mind'.



A reminder of a much-loved media format from pre-digital times.

Socrates warned parents to guard their children against writing because it would 'create forgetfulness in the learners' souls, because they will not use their memories.'

So now let me give you just 3 examples of spiritual organisations using digital media to get their messages to more people.

Spirituality and Practice: This multifaith and interspiritual website, founded by Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat, is devoted to resources for spiritual journeys. The website's name reflects a basic understanding of *spirituality* and *practice* as the meeting place of all the world's religions and spiritual paths. The website provides both resources and learning opportunities through online courses and sharing circles. Book and film reviews, quotations and particular spiritual themes are available freely to all.

Digital Nun: Sister Catherine Wybourne is a British Benedictine nun 'with a difference', She codes, she tweets, she vlogs - and apparently has a large following online. She's a web and app developer with 15,000 followers on Twitter. She produces podcasts, YouTube videos and e-books. She's based in a small Herefordshire monastery where she lives as a Catholic nun along with one other sister and a dog called Brother Duncan. Benedictines have a long history of providing hospitality and Sister Catherine now provides hospitality in a digital form. Sister Catherine explains: 'We describe the internet as being the fourth wall of our cloister, and it's open to everybody.'

The UUA Worship Web: This is a curated collection of worship materials and articles about Unitarian Universalist worship, all given freely by hundreds of different authors for anyone to use. This website is such a valuable resources to worship leaders all around the world.

We sometimes describe life here on earth as an interdependent web, in which everything is connected. What happens to one part of the web affects all other elements in some way. It's a powerful image. Way back in the 60s cultural theorist Marshall McLuhan famously told us that 'the medium is the message'. He also coined the term 'global village' and predicted the invention of the world wide web. Could it be that the Internet and the world wide web that passes messages around our globe, are indeed creating a whole new web to connect us all? Might it be that the internet, and all the forms of digital communication which it facilitates, heralds another era for humanity, an era of connectivity and truth telling and deep sharing, an altogether more joy filled and just way of living? I'd like to think so.

Services at Essex Church in June

Sunday 4th June, 11am
 – ‘Courageous In Faith’

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Bring a flower to our annual flower communion as we honour those who stood courageously for their faith and for freedom.

Sunday 11th June, 11am
 – ‘Not Just Bystanders’

Service led by Sarah Tinker and Jeannene Powell

How can we put faith into action when we witness wrongdoing?

Sunday 18th June, 11am
 ‘Loving when the Going Gets Tough’

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

A celebration of our human capacity to love through the tough times and set clear boundaries when needed.

Sunday 25th June, 11am
 – ‘Resilient Communities’

Service led by Sarah Tinker and Jane Blackall

What qualities do spiritually resilient communities need in turbulent times? This service will be followed by our congregation's AGM.

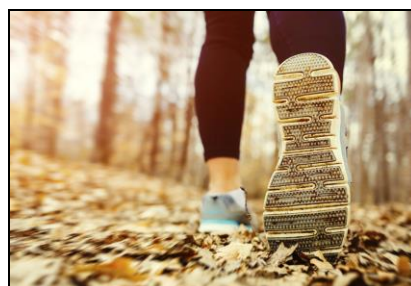
Unitarians Marching at London Pride

Save the Date: Saturday 8th July 2017



There will be a Unitarian group marching once again at London Pride this year (Saturday 8th July). It'd be great to have a few of us from Essex Church to join with fellow Unitarians from across the district and represent our LGBTQ+ inclusive religious community. Sarah and Jane are planning to attend this year and we will pass on further details as and when we get them.

Jogging Down the Beech Grove



Arched ecclesia, soaring nave, tall trees
 traced in teguments of lapidary lace
 grey-buttressed, stone-chased
 bare as bleached bones
 incise pale blue sleek
 autumn-crocus sky
 through which exulting in the first
 keen winter's frost |
 Run

Run

Run !

like pop-corns sea-weed sere leaves
 crackle beneath my battering boots – and laugh!
 laugh! to be leaping, joy to be deep
 inhaling- glad to be one with
 green of grass with stolchy
 Squelch of mud, with
 multi-dimensional
 Carnival of expiring autumn.

John Jarvis-Hands
 St Albans (1982)

Cultural Outing: Proms Late

Tuesday 15th August, 10.15pm
 at the Royal Albert Hall



We have two tickets available for a very special Proms concert on Tuesday 15th August starting at 10.15pm. It's for the first ever live performance of Passages, written by Ravi Shankar and Phillip Glass. It lasts for 65 minutes and our stalls tickets are only £15 each and close to the stage so do let Sarah Tinker know if you would like to come along with us. There will be London Transport buses home afterwards.

Carolyn Appleby