



Kensington Unitarians

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Annual Report 2009



Essex Unitarian Church

Annual Report for the year ended 31st December 2009

Name of Charity

Essex Unitarian Chapel and Minister's House and Other Charities, as shown, known locally as Kensington Unitarians, 112 Palace Gardens Terrace, Kensington, London W8 4RT.

Charitable Registration

The church is registered as Charity number 230789. The original governing instrument is a conveyance dated 7th January 1783 and modified by schemes dated 9th December 1884, 15th January 1973 and 18th April 1986, which last incorporated the remaining eight charities.

Trustees

Howard Hague (*Chairperson*), Caroline Blair, Juliet Edwards, Heidi Ferid-Hands, Harold Lorenzelli, Roy Parnell, Patricia Walker (deceased 2nd October 2009),

The Custodian Trustee is the British and Foreign Unitarian Association Incorporate.

Management Committee

Caroline Blair (*Chairperson*), Louisa Bird (from June 2009), Doris Campbell, David Francis Darling, Albert Dolan (until May 2009), Juliet Edwards, Heidi Ferid-Hands, Angela Gasparetto (from June 2009), Howard Hague, Harold Lorenzelli, Patricia Walker (deceased 2nd October 2009).

Minister

Rev. Sarah Tinker
The Manse Flat, 112 Palace Gardens Terrace, London W8 4RT

Treasurer

Juliet Edwards
6A Essex Road, Acton, London W3 9JA

Warden

Jenny Moy
Warden's Flat, 112 Palace Gardens Terrace, London W8 4RT

Secretary

Jane Blackall
20 Manchester Grove, London E14 3BG

Independent Examiners and Accountants

Lindeyer Francis Ferguson
North House, 198 High Street, Tonbridge, Kent, TN9 1BE

Investment Advisers

Citi Quilter
4th Floor, The Pinnacle, 73 King Street, Manchester, M2 4NG

Bankers

CAF Bank Ltd.
25 King's Hill Avenue, King's Hill, West Malling, Kent, ME19 4TA

Restriction on Funds

All Funds/Trusts under the control of the Trustees are for the benefit of the Church other than the Carlisle Fund (income may be expended at the sole discretion of the Minister) and Stock Bequest (income must be used for Church music).

Essex Unitarian Church

Annual Report for the year ended 31st December 2009

The Charity's Purpose and Objectives:

Charitable Purpose and Policies

The purpose of the charity is to perpetuate public worship and to celebrate divine service every Sunday in the Unitarian manner. There have been no material changes in the policies since the last report.

Public Benefit

The Trustees have had due regard to the guidance issued by the Charity Commission on public benefit when reviewing the charity's objectives and planning future activities.

Aims and Activities of the Charity

We are here to worship, to share our experiences, to learn from each other, to explore our diverse faiths, to welcome spiritual seekers and to offer companionship on life's journey. We advance Unitarianism in West London for the benefit of the public through: the holding of open Sunday services; celebrating rites of passage and multi-faith festivals; sharing our experience and learning from each other in religious education and social activities. We welcome spiritual seekers and offer companionship on life's journey (including visiting the sick and comforting the bereaved) and producing and distributing Unitarian literature.

Organisation

The running of the church is under the control of the management committee with the trustees having overall responsibility for finance and staff employment. Trustees are appointed by invitation with a maximum number of 9 trustees to serve. They manage the charity by means of monthly meetings. The management committee is elected at the AGM with casual vacancies filled during the year.

Trustees

The trustees who have served during the year are listed, with other key personnel, on page 1.

Review of Activities

Details are given in the reports that follow.

Risks

The major risk is generating enough income to finance the charity's occupation of the building. The trustees have reviewed the risks to which the charity is exposed and systems have been established to mitigate those risks.

Policy on Reserves

The trustees are now satisfied that they have achieved a reserve of three months running costs. We have completed the fourth year of the five year programme of repair and renovation that our thirty year old building requires. This year we finished installing a disability access toilet, refurbishing the adjoining toilets, and refurbishing the kitchen. We have begun to make improvements to the lighting in the foyer and the Lindsey Hall and to replace both ceilings. The trustees are mindful of the need to continue to build further reserves through a variety of fundraising initiatives.

Investment Performance

We feel that we are fortunate to have invested with CAF Bank who have maintained 1% interest on our deposit accounts. The performance of our investments reflects market conditions. The trustees are holding funds for the long term.

Approval

On behalf of the Trustees:

Howard Hague, Chair of Trustees

Date: 28th March 2010

ESSEX UNITARIAN CHURCH

INDEPENDENT EXAMINER'S REPORT TO THE TRUSTEES

I report on the accounts of the Charity for the year ended 31 December 2009, comprising a statement of financial activities, balance sheet and accompanying notes.

Respective responsibilities of trustees and examiner

The charity's trustees are responsible for the preparation of the accounts. The charity's trustees consider that an audit is not required for this year under section 43(2) of the Charities Act 1993 (the 1993 Act) and that an independent examination is needed.

It is my responsibility to:

- examine the accounts under section 43 of the Act;
- follow the procedures laid down in the General Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 43(7)(b) of the Act; and
- state whether particular matters have come to my attention.

Basis of independent examiner's report

My examination was carried out in accordance with the General Directions given by the Charity Commissioners. An examination includes a review of the accounting records kept by the charity and a comparison of the accounts presented with those records. It also includes consideration of any unusual items or disclosures in the accounts, and seeking explanations from you as trustees concerning any such matters. The procedures undertaken do not provide all the evidence that would be required in an audit, and consequently no opinion is given as to whether the accounts present a "true and fair view" and the report is limited to those matters set out in the statement below:

Independent examiner's statement

In connection with my examination, no matter has come to my attention:

- (1) which gives me reasonable cause to believe that, in any material respect, the requirements:
 - to keep accounting records in accordance with section 41 of the Act; and
 - to prepare accounts which accord with the accounting records and comply with the requirements of the 1993 Acthave not been met; or
- (2) to which, in my opinion, attention should be drawn in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

John Francis FCA
LINDEYER FRANCIS FERGUSON
Chartered Accountants

North House
198 High Street
Tonbridge
Kent TN9 1BE

ESSEX UNITARIAN CHURCH

**STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2009**

Income and expenditure	2009 Unrestricted Funds £	2009 Endowment Funds £	2009 Restricted Funds £	2009 Total Funds £	2008 Total Funds £
INCOMING RESOURCES					
Voluntary income					
Grant income	-	-	-	-	6,910
Collections and donations	19,514	-	1,010	20,524	16,591
Income Tax on Gift Aid	1,431	-	-	1,431	2,215
Investment income					
Dividends and interest	1,023	-	4,558	5,581	10,896
Lettings	105,003	-	-	105,003	105,681
Other incoming resources					
	2,575	-	-	2,575	100
Total incoming resources	129,546	-	5,568	135,114	142,393
RESOURCES EXPENDED					
Costs of charitable activities					
Donations and grants	828	-	-	828	764
Projects	8,963	-	2,098	11,061	51,844
Ministry	42,453	-	-	42,453	39,334
Church running	27,849	-	-	27,849	27,591
Premises	29,835	-	-	29,835	14,787
Fixtures depreciation	-	8,061	-	8,061	7,804
Support costs:					
Accountancy costs	1,791	-	-	1,791	1,778
	111,719	8,061	2,098	121,878	143,902
Governance costs					
Independent Examiner	1,810	-	-	1,810	1,715
Legal and Professional fees	-	-	-	-	1,011
	1,810	-	-	1,810	2,726
Total resources expended	113,529	8,061	2,098	123,688	146,628
Net incoming/(outgoing) resources before transfers	16,017	(8,061)	3,470	11,426	(4,235)
Transfers between funds	3,716	423	(4,139)	-	-
Net incoming/(outgoing) resources before other recognised gains and losses	19,733	(7,638)	(669)	11,426	(4,235)
Realised gains on disposal of assets	-	-	(311)	(311)	-
Unrealised gains/(losses) on revaluation of investments	-	794	7,977	8,771	(34,920)
Net movement in funds	19,733	(6,844)	6,997	19,886	(39,155)
Balances brought forward	57,151	1,398,993	76,921	1,533,065	1,572,220
Balances carried forward	76,884	1,392,149	83,918	1,552,951	1,533,065

**ESSEX UNITARIAN CHURCH
BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2009**

	Notes	2009 Unrestricted Funds £	2009 Endowment Funds £	2009 Restricted Funds £	2009 Total Funds £	2008 Total Funds £
Fixed assets						
Tangible assets	3	-	1,347,340	-	1,347,340	1,353,928
Listed investments	4	-	11,299	83,388	94,687	86,233
		-	1,358,639	83,388	1,442,027	1,440,161
Current assets						
Cash held for rent deposit	5	25,396	-	-	25,396	26,113
Debtors and prepayments		7,057	-	-	7,057	4,365
Due from Stockbroker		-	-	368	368	287
Cash at bank and on deposit		78,511	33,510	162	112,183	113,706
		110,964	33,510	530	145,004	144,471
Creditors : Amounts falling due within one year						
Creditors and accruals		8,684	-	-	8,684	25,454
Rent deposit		25,396	-	-	25,396	26,113
		34,080	-	-	34,080	51,567
Net current assets		76,884	33,510	530	110,924	92,904
Net Assets		76,884	1,392,149	83,918	1,552,951	1,533,065
Capital and reserves						
Endowment funds	6	-	1,392,149	-	1,392,149	1,398,993
Restricted funds		-	-	83,918	83,918	76,921
General funds		76,884	-	-	76,884	57,151
		76,884	1,392,149	83,918	1,552,951	1,533,065

Approved by the trustees on
and signed on their behalf by:

S M Tinker (Minister)

H Hague (Chairman)

ESSEX UNITARIAN CHURCH

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2009

1 Accounting policies

a) Basis of preparation

The accounts have been prepared under the historical cost convention, modified to include investments at market value and in accordance with the Statement of Recommended Practice - Accounting by Charities. The accounts also comply with the requirements of the Charities Act and relevant Accounting and Reporting Standards.

b) Grant income

Grant income is recognised on a receivable basis.

c) Collections and donations

All congregational giving and donations are included on a cash received basis.

d) Legacies

Legacies are recognised on a receivable basis, once the conditions for the receipt have been satisfied and the amount can be measured with certainty.

e) Tangible fixed assets and depreciation

Freehold property is included at the balance sheet at an historic valuation plus the cost of subsequent improvements. The trustees consider that the market value of the property is not less than the amount at which it is stated in the balance sheet. Fixtures, fittings and works of art are depreciated at 10% on cost per annum. Computer equipment is depreciated on a straight line basis over 3 years.

f) Resources expended

Resources expended are included in the Statement of Financial Activities on an accruals basis.

g) Investments

The investments are held in a variety of investment funds see note 4 and these are valued at the market value in the balance sheet. All movements in the valuations of the investments are taken to the statement of financial activities as they arise.

h) Pension costs

The charity contributes to the Ministers Pension Fund. The assets of the scheme are held separately from those of the charity in an independently administered fund. The pension cost charge represents contributions payable by the charity to the fund totalling £2,850 (2008: £2,313).

i) Fund accounting

General funds are unrestricted funds which are available for use at the discretion of the trustees in furtherance of the general objectives of the charity and which have not been designated for any other purpose.

Designated funds comprise unrestricted funds that have been set aside by the trustees for particular purposes. The aim and use of each designated fund is set out in the notes to the financial statements.

Restricted funds are funds which are to be used in accordance with specific restrictions imposed by donors or which have been raised by the charity for particular purposes. The cost of raising and administering such funds are charged against the specific fund. The aim and use of each restricted fund is set out in the notes to the financial statements.

Endowment funds represent those assets which must be held permanently by the charity, principally the church building and the investments. The income arising on The Carlisle endowment fund can be spent at the discretion of the minister. The income arising on the other endowment funds can be used in accordance with the objects of the charity and is included as unrestricted income.

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NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2009

2 Employee costs

There was an average of three employees in the financial year. The significant volume of voluntary contribution to the life of the Church by members of the congregation is not quantified in these accounts.

	Ministry £	Church Running £	2009 Total £	2008 Total £
Minister	20,176	-	20,176	19,533
Warden and Outreach Officer	-	16,709	16,709	18,106
Social security costs	1,860	1,081	2,941	2,688
Pension contributions	2,850	-	2,850	2,313
Employee costs	24,886	17,790	42,676	42,640
Locum Preachers	480	-	480	280
Total staff costs	25,366	17,790	43,156	42,920

The trustees are not remunerated. Fees are paid to trustees for officiating at services and preaching. During the year the following fees were paid to trustees for such services: wedding fees £80 (2008 £70), choir fees £1,280 (2008 £1,280). One of the trustees was reimbursed £67 (2008 £71) for travelling expenses incurred on the business of the charity.

3 Fixed tangible assets

	Freehold Property £	Fixtures & Fittings £	Total £
Cost or valuation			
At 31st December 2008	1,322,709	78,043	1,400,752
Addition	-	1,473	1,473
At 31st December 2009	<u>1,322,709</u>	<u>79,516</u>	<u>1,402,225</u>
Depreciation			
At 31st December 2008	-	46,824	46,824
Charge for the year	-	8,061	8,061
At 31st December 2009	-	<u>54,885</u>	<u>54,885</u>
Net Book Value			
At 31st December 2009	<u>1,322,709</u>	<u>24,631</u>	<u>1,347,340</u>
At 31st December 2008	<u>1,322,709</u>	<u>31,219</u>	<u>1,353,928</u>

The Freehold property relates to the Essex Church building in Palace Gardens Terrace.

4 Listed investments

	The Stock Bequest £	The Carlisle Fund £	Endowment funds £	Total £
Market value at 31 December 2008	75,728	7,024	3,481	86,233
Add: Additions at cost	7,681	-	-	7,681
Less: disposals at carrying value	(7,998)	-	-	(7,998)
Net gain/loss on revaluation	7,977	486	308	8,771
Market value at 31 December 2009	<u>83,388</u>	<u>7,510</u>	<u>3,789</u>	<u>94,687</u>

5 Cash held for rent deposit

This balance represents a rental deposit received from Lucy Williamson under a revised Rent Security Deposit Deed dated August 2007. According to the revised terms of the Deed, the deposit represents half of the revised annual rent and must be held in an interest bearing account in the name of the trustees. All interest earned on this account is payable to Miss Williamson on written request.

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NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2009

6 Analysis of funds	Brought forward £	Income & expenses £	Transfers £	Unrealised gain (loss) £	Carried forward £
Endowment Funds					
Permanent Endowment	1,350,787	(8,061)	423	-	1,343,149
Carlisle Capital Fund	7,024	-	-	486	7,510
Theophilus Lindsey	2,378	-	-	-	2,378
Percival North	535	-	-	-	535
Harriet Pearson	1,464	-	-	-	1,464
Thomas Scott	2,162	-	-	-	2,162
Mrs M L Whyte	2,825	-	-	-	2,825
Lindsey Hall	31,818	-	-	308	32,126
Total endowment funds	1,398,993	(8,061)	423	794	1,392,149
Restricted Funds					
A E Stock Bequest	76,022	4,187	(4,187)	7,666	83,688
Carlisle Fund Income Fund	-	371	(371)	-	-
Africa Education Project	460	(230)	-	-	230
Community Arts Project	439	(858)	419	-	-
Total restricted funds	76,921	3,470	(4,139)	7,666	83,918
Unrestricted Funds					
General Fund	46,191	21,980	716	-	68,887
Designated funds:					
Repairs & Building Fund	10,960	(5,963)	3,000	-	7,997
	57,151	16,017	3,716	-	76,884
Total Funds	1,533,065	11,426	-	8,460	1,552,951

With the permission of the Charity Commission, in 2003 the Trustees realised £33,000 of investments held in endowment funds, for expenditure on the Minister's flat. It is a condition of that permission that the Trustees set aside one sixth of that amount for each of the next six years (ending in 2009), in order to reinstate the value of the investments. The funds are held in a CAF deposit account. To date, £30,600 has been transferred into this account and the balance stands at £34,983 at 31 December 2009.

Endowment Funds:

The endowments listed above comprise the original charity, known from 1793 as the Essex Unitarian Chapel and Minister's House, together with a number of other charities founded between the 19th and 20th centuries. These have been brought together by a number of Schemes of the Charity Commissioners, the most recent dated 18 April 1986. Under the terms of the Scheme, these charities are administered as a single charitable body. The smaller charities are accounted for as Endowment Funds, with the exception of the Stock bequest (for the Choir Fund).

Designated funds:

During 2007 the trustees set up a 'designated fund', 'Repairs and Buildings Fund', to set aside income to cover the costs of adding a Disability Access toilet which together with work relating to the kitchen was completed in 2009. The balance on the fund is now being utilised to pay for rewiring and ceiling work to the Lindsey Hall and foyer during 2010

Restricted funds:

During the year, the Church received a number of Restricted Grants and Donations for the following projects:

Africa Education Project: a fund set up in 2008 to receive donations and money raised through fund raising efforts to help support educational projects in Africa, as agreed by the management committee.

Community Arts Project: a fund set up in 2008 to support the provision of arts activities for the benefit of Unitarians and the wider community, receiving individual donations and grants from funding bodies.

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NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2009

7 Capital Commitments

	2009	2008
	£	£
At 31 December 2009 the charity had capital commitments as follows:		
Contracted for but not provided in the financial statements	13,598	12,500

8 Legacy

Prior to the year end the trustees received notification that a recently deceased member of the congregation had bequeathed a share of her residuary estate to the Church. The Church is unlikely to receive the legacy until June 2010 and is unable to quantify the value of the legacy at the year end.

Treasurer's Report

During 2008/9 we worked hard to fund raise for a disability access toilet and to refurbish our thirty (plus) year old kitchen. Now it is all complete and looking very attractive we can feel very pleased with ourselves and the whole project. There were many holdups along the way and the congregation owes a lot to the tolerance, tact and downright dogged determination shown by Jenny and Sarah in getting the builders to complete the job to the standard we required. The total cost was just under £50,000. We were very fortunate to receive two grants totalling £6,000 towards it from the Stamford Street and Hackney Trusts.

In November the committee agreed to make improvements to the lighting in the foyer and the Lindsey hall and to replace both ceilings. The Lindsey hall will also have new curtains for the windows and new sound-proofing curtains across the partition wall. This project will overlap into 2010 and forms part of our on-going programme to renovate our church building

The committee decided to renew Jane Blackall's contract for a further year. We are very grateful to her for all the work she does which is well beyond the one day per week for which we pay her. Jane also led the creativity project, which was largely funded by the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. The very attractive, resulting, "Fabric of Diversity" wall-hanging and booklet went on display at the same time in June as we celebrated the "opening" of the kitchen and toilet block. We continue to welcome funding for our Community Arts projects.

People have also given generously to SOS Africa, a fund-raising effort which has been spearheaded by Caroline, Iona and Jim Blair. Our congregation now sponsors the care and education of two youngsters in Swaziland. Jim spoke to us evocatively about his visit to the village in the autumn. Caroline made and sold Christmas cards raising £170. We also took part in the Macmillan coffee morning for which we raised £99.07 and continue to make monthly contributions to St. Mungo's for their work with the homeless

Patricia Walker, a much loved member of Essex Church, died unexpectedly, on 2nd October 2009. People were deeply moved and her family asked that any donations in her memory should be given to Essex Church. £600 has been donated and will be shared equally between SOS Africa and our Community Arts projects. Patricia also left money to Essex Church in her will.

The congregation's membership has increased and this is shown in the increase in live giving too.

Our investments have improved in value during the year in line with the stockmarket though the interest income was less than last year. Our money with CAF Bank has gained only a little interest during the year.

Thanks to Jenny Moy and Sarah Tinker lettings have kept up well and the Lloyd Williamson School secured funding of £2,500 towards the cost of a "buggy park" under the church entrance bridge.

I would like to add my personal thanks to William Featherstone for continuing to keep an eye on our investments and to Jenny Moy for working with me on the banking spreadsheets each month. It's wonderful how happy a reconciliation sheet that balances can make us feel!

Juliet Edwards
Congregational Treasurer

Minister's Report

As I look back on 2009 in our community of Kensington Unitarians here at Essex Church I realise once again what a very busy place this is. Notting Hill itself seems to be constantly on the move and an element of that is reflected in our church. We must have the busiest building amongst Unitarian congregations in the UK, with so many different individuals and groups stepping over our threshold each week. It is a rare Sunday service that does not have newcomers joining us, many of them tourists or students or people visiting London on business. As a congregation with such a central location we provide a valuable place for Unitarians on the move to link in with a spiritual community. As a congregation with an open and diverse approach to spiritual exploration we provide an important space in which people can continue their own individual search for meaning and purpose, a place in which they can settle and belong. In the dynamic and even restless society that is 21st century London it is important that communities such as ours can offer people an opportunity to discover continuity and permanence in the midst of a changing world.

One of the many interesting features of our work in 2009 was for me the particular enthusiasm shown for our small groups that explored theology and our own spiritual practices, especially the 'Exploring Prayer' and 'Building Your Own Theology' groups. It is lovely to think that similar groups have been run here at Essex Church for so many years now and are still so popular. Small group ministry, as it is now often known, is one of the corner stones of what we offer here and I think their on-going popularity reflects people's yearning to be in deeper relationship - with themselves, with one another and with that which they hold to be divine.

The increased attendance for small group activities has been matched by our regular Sunday worship, for which we now have to put out more chairs and print more orders of service. Having bought fifty of the new purple hymnbook Sing Your Faith we have now ordered another twenty copies to cater for our growing congregation. Encouraged by our national denomination's commitment to growing our Unitarian congregations as well as by the London District's Growth Group to which we belong, congregational growth was discussed at our last AGM and various goals were agreed upon for the next three years. These goals can be found in the minutes of our meeting at the end of this Annual Report and it is cheering to see how many of them are already becoming a reality. In 2009 we welcomed the Rev Jane Dwinell from the United States to lead a workshop for us on how to develop our congregation, which gave us helpful guidance on ways to make further progress.

I would particularly like to mention what a pleasure it is to have Jordan McCrindle and Jennie Blair running our children's programme and making such good links with church projects such as the Swaziland Education Project where we have committed ourselves to funding the education of AIDs orphans at an SOS Children's Village, which Iona and Jim Blair have both visited and worked at. Another positive to report is the steady improvement we are making to the fabric of our much loved building – not always straightforward but ultimately a very pleasing sense of 'putting our house in order' and ensuring that Essex Church appears a well loved, well ordered and professional centre for spiritual exploration. This professionalism is seen in our new format newsletter and website and matching stationery and will continue into 2010 when we start work on our notice boards and the entrance foyer. In 2009 we could finally hold an official opening for our new toilets and kitchen and unveil the beautiful 'Fabric of Diversity' wall hanging which now holds pride of place in the Lindsey Hall. I remember sitting in a committee meeting a few years ago and wondering how we would ever manage to create an accessible toilet for wheelchair users. Yet only a few years later we have achieved this and so much more. Our five-year building improvement programme started in 2006 can now really be said to be progressing well. Will the leaking roof be tackled one day? Only time will tell!

Building improvements are important but mainly perhaps because they reflect something deeper – a sensible stewardship of the resources we have been bequeathed and an awareness of our responsibility to maintain a liberal religious witness here in Notting Hill Gate. It is something that we mention regularly but rightly so – the fact that we provide meeting spaces for so many different user groups. It is, I think, probably one of the most useful services we provide for our local community and I am regularly surprised, when out and about, by how many people know our church building well because they have attended various groups and meetings and lectures here over the years. From these encounters I receive positive feedback about what we offer and a reminder that our ministry spreads so much more widely than the community that meets together for worship on a Sunday morning.

2009 had many highlights but a fairly random selection of my favourite moments and achievements during the year would have to include: our congregational outing to the Stained Glass Museum in Ely especially to see the window bequeathed to the museum from the previous Essex Church building, sitting down to watch a film in the library using our new data projector for our 'Spirit on Screen' group, achieving fair trade church status and eating all those delicious stem ginger biscuits, our Christmas lunch which fed at least 53 of us, singing in candle light at our monthly 'Songs and Silence for the Soul' group, hearing from people around that world that they enjoyed listening to the podcasts of our services, sitting in the peaceful oasis of the back garden in the sun whilst everybody else did the weeding.

Ministry has both a public and a private aspect. It is a privilege to be consulted, confided in, asked to walk alongside congregation members as they deal with life's ups and downs. I am grateful to be involved in people's lives in this way and it is also very touching to realise how many other people are quietly offering a supporting hand, a kindly word or a listening ear where they are needed. This shared aspect of pastoral care is so vital if we are to expand further our membership and honour our commitment to care for one another and I thank everybody who has become involved in this vital task. A church cannot exist without volunteers so thank you to everyone who has been involved in our work in any way during the last year, especially our loyal and committed trustees and committee members who perform such vital functions. It is lovely to see new people taking on some of the myriad tasks that need doing in any voluntary community and of course we encourage everyone to get more involved as and when they can. It is impressive to note how many members we now have who are able and willing to lead our Sunday worship, so allowing me to take much appreciated holidays! A growing congregation will offer an ever-widening range of activities run by a variety of people and we do now have more members who are organising groups and other activities for us. Of note in 2009 have been Jen Hazel's work with our Kensington Community Singers, Heidi Ferid's 'Joy of Drawing' and Sonya Leite's Nia Dance classes. I want to give special thanks to our staff team here at Essex Church. Gitana Kleinaitiene is so efficient and committed and leaves the church spotless for us each and every Saturday night. Jenny Moy, Jane Blackall and I make for a well-balanced working trio, able not only to change light bulbs but also to make exciting plans for the future and bring them to reality. I really appreciate Jane and Jenny's support and determination; we would not be in nearly such a positive position without them and their involvement in running small groups has broadened our programme considerably.

Hanging on the wall of our worship space is our seasonal wall hanging made by the Creativity Group. It is made up of separate pieces that are rotated to reflect the changing seasons of the year. These fabrics represent also for me the nature of our religious community – individuals gathered together in community, sharing the on-going cycle of the seasons of our lives. Other reports have mentioned the deaths in 2009 of congregation members Betty Allan and Patricia Walker. My hope is that in our work here at Essex Church we continue to honour those who have gone before us, whose hard work and commitment to liberal religion have helped us to be the vibrant and forward-looking spiritual community we are today. Thank you to everyone for sharing our life in community during the past year and for making Kensington Unitarians a place of welcome for those who have yet to find us.

Rev. Sarah Tinker
Minister with Kensington Unitarians

Warden's Report

The big achievement of 2009 in terms of the building was the opening of the new toilet and kitchen block. Work on this started in August 2008 and was only meant to take a month – however, it dragged on and on, eventually finishing in June 2009. Amazingly, despite this, it came in more or less within our budget allowance of £50,000.

Another big improvement to the appearance of the building was having the parquet floor sanded and varnished over New Year. This has attracted a lot of favourable comments and made the room feel much lighter.

Another major change has been blocking off the area under the ramped entrance as a buggy store. This was partly a response to the nursery's need to store pushchairs etc. outside rather than have them obstructing their corridors and also an attempt to prevent the use of this area by rough sleepers. This has been successful: our long-term residents were given notice of the intended change and time to remove their belongings and the Police Liaison Officer even helped one of them to get a replacement passport at our expense. Kensington & Chelsea now has a zero tolerance policy on rough-sleeping, so there are less street homeless people in this area in general. We continue to give a monthly donation to St. Mungo's, a local charity that works with this population. The Lloyd Williamson nursery obtained a grant of £2,500 towards the cost of creating the buggy store and we have given them permission to let the children play in their part of the basement area now it is a contained space.

Sadly we had two burglaries in 2009: on each occasion we think an opportunistic thief entered the building when the front door was left open by a group and then broke into a locked cupboard and stole a laptop. In general we discourage user groups from storing valuables here, but the group in question use a projector as part of their service - so we eventually offered them the Green Room as a more secure storage space and were able to reclaim their other cupboards for our own use. We are planning to make it easier to open the window above the front door so that groups feel less tempted to hook the door open for ventilation.

Throughout the year we had several different problems with the Church heating: including discovering that it is on a programmable timer that none of us knew existed (above the fuse-box in the kitchen cupboard). On the plus side, the office radiator, which we've thought for years was broken, turns out just to have been switched off – so glad we discovered that in time for this long cold winter!

When our electricity contract with EDF came up for renewal we decided to swap to a green tariff and to get both gas and electricity from the same supplier. Foolishly, we thought this would be simpler – instead it has resulted in our getting three electricity bills (one for each meter) instead of one – and an ongoing struggle to get our direct debits working properly. Oh well, at least we're saving the planet!

We welcomed several new groups this year, in particular another psychological group, IGAP, who used to meet here a long time ago, and several yoga classes – notably John Stirk, who teaches osteopathy-based yoga here on a Tuesday night, and whose wife Lolly will also be moving her classes here in 2010.

Lettings income for 2009 was a healthy £54,730. Having done an analysis of which groups were most important to us financially (or otherwise) and which were most trouble to manage, we decided that in future we would try to focus on regular weekly or weeklong bookings from quiet groups who could afford our standard rates and had a consistent contact person. We would aim to keep the annual income at least £50,000 and feel free to make exceptions for activities we strongly wanted to support.

June 2009 marked the end of the first three years of time as Warden here and after a review process with Sarah and Caroline, we recommended a change in my job description giving greater responsibility for building matters to Sarah and reducing my hours to 3 days a week. The Church also entered into an ongoing relationship with Fraser Jackson as a building consultant. This has worked very well, but in practice I still have a lot of hands on involvement in the care of the building, so from 2010, I will go back up to a 4-day week to acknowledge this.

Another useful reduction in my workload has been the removal of the photocopier from the office, after its lease came to an end in November, and the outsourcing of newsletter production to a local printshop. This has resulted in higher quality and a quicker turnaround. We have bought an all-in-one printer/scanner/copier for the office to cope with small copying jobs.

The most exciting technological change, however, has been the purchase of an iPhone so that I can deal with enquiries and make entries in the Church diary even when I'm not in the building. This has vastly increased my responsiveness to e-mails and improved the speed with which bookings can be arranged.

Finally, I'm very grateful that the Church committee gave me permission to have an international gathering of contact improvisation dancers here over New Year. This was a great success and many people who'd never heard of Unitarians were very impressed that there are such things as churches which welcome people from different faiths and have a positive attitude to the body. Four participants even came back for the Sunday service on January 3rd to share their experience and show their appreciation. What a perfect way to end the year!

Jenny Moy
Essex Church Warden

Outreach Officer's Report

One of the main elements of my role as outreach officer is production of the Essex Church newsletter. As well as being the primary means of communicating news and announcements within the congregation it is an important outreach tool – visitors to the building often pick up a copy and visitors to the website can read it online – and so its contents represent our community to the world at large. In the past year I have been attempting to develop another aspect of the newsletter, by asking members of the congregation to contribute personal articles, telling the stories of how they came to Essex Church, recommending favourite books for the 'Spiritual Bookshelf' strand, offering their 'elevator speeches', or writing about other issues they feel passionately about. My hope is that articles such as these help us to get to know each other better and find points of connection. I am intending to compile this material into booklets which will be made available in the foyer for visitors to read. Many thanks to all those who have contributed articles to the newsletter in the past year - and please keep it up in the years to come!

Anecdotally, it seems like a large proportion of newcomers to the church come to us after checking our website, and we have got a lot of positive feedback about the site this year. We continue to develop the site with extra content where possible and a major innovation was to start audio recording Sunday sermons (most weeks since summer 2009) and making them available online as a podcast. These files can be downloaded directly from the church site, where they are archived, or listeners can subscribe to the podcast using iTunes or similar software.

In the past year I carried out some preliminary research into our options for revitalising the noticeboards and display throughout the church (and particularly the foyer) but implementation of this plan has been delayed while we have been occupied with various more substantial building projects. I anticipate that we will make these long-awaited improvements to the foyer in 2010 as part of our ongoing congregational growth project.

We attempted to raise funds for community arts and education projects from a number of sources but found it to be very difficult to get grants in the current economic climate. A bid to the National Lottery to support a year-long community arts project was unsuccessful. We received some positive feedback from the Hibbert Trust regarding an application for a liberal religious education project but at the present time we are not taking this any further.

However, we were very pleased to be awarded an arts grant from the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, to partially support a substantial community arts project which took place at Essex Church throughout the spring. This was supplemented by a generous donation from a member of the congregation for which I am very grateful. The project, entitled 'The Fabric of Diversity', was open to all and took place over fifteen three-hour sessions. Participants were given some basic instructions in feltmaking, then let loose with a big bag of wool, and each person was invited to make three squares: one representing themselves, one representing their connection to the local community, and one representing their connection to the wider world or cosmos. The squares were then gathered together and assembled into a wall-hanging, which was unveiled at our summer celebration on Sunday 28th June, and is now on permanent display in the church hall. We also produced a small colour booklet in which each of the contributing artists wrote about the meaning of their squares. The booklet can be viewed on the church website at www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk/publications.html. An article on the project was published in the international feltmaking journal 'Felt Matters' in autumn of 2009 and an article on this project and other creative activities at Essex Church is being prepared for The Inquirer. Plans for another community arts project are in an early stage of development and, of course, donations towards our arts programme are most welcome!

Jane Blackall
Outreach Officer (Arts and Education)

Engagement Groups Report

Small groups have continued to be a key part of the programme of activities at Essex Church throughout 2009. It is not always straightforward to draw a distinction between Engagement Groups and adult RE courses because all of our sharing groups tend to be facilitated using Engagement Group principles, which help to create a safe space, and support careful speaking and listening. These three were specifically billed as Engagement Groups:

'Exploring Prayer' Engagement Group

"Exploring Prayer" was a new time-limited engagement group for summer 2009, facilitated by Jenny Moy and Jane Blackall, which took place over six Thursday evenings. The group was based on the excellent book 'Simply Pray' by Unitarian Universalist minister Erik Walker Wikstrom. The group examined four types of traditional prayer which are shared by all the major world religions: naming, knowing, listening, and loving. There were opportunities in each session for participants to directly experience various different forms of prayer and to share their personal reflections on the theme. Fifteen people signed up for the group and whilst not everybody was able to attend all of the sessions the attendance kept up well for the duration.

Reading Engagement Group

Our reading engagement group has been running since 2003 and, once again, tackled a diverse selection of material in 2009: *"The Maytrees"*, *"Touching the Void"*, *"Driving Over Lemons"*, *"Period Piece"*, *"Plain and Simple"*, *"Artemis Fowl"*, *"Hitchhiking to Heaven"*, *"The Other Hand"* and *"Sir Gawain and the Green Knight"*. By the end of the year we had read our 66th title and we maintain a full list of all our past choices on the church website and also on the 'LibraryThing' website (see the impressive range of covers from our book group 'library' on www.librarything.com/catalog/ec_bookgroup). Attendance at the reading group continues to be fairly steady: we have about six regular members who take their turn to nominate books for the group to tackle and we are occasionally joined by other members of the congregation who are drawn in by a particular title or passing visitors from further afield who have found out about us through the website. Individual sessions are facilitated by whoever selected the book for that month. The group has a relaxed atmosphere and newcomers are always welcome to drop in and join at any time.

Creativity Engagement Group

Our creativity engagement group has been running once a month since 2002. Attendance at this group seems to be fairly steady, with attendance averaging at around six people, though we often get new visitors dropping in for sessions that are of particular interest to them. We had a number of fun one-off sessions during the year at which we tried out various different craft activities: *"Designing a Book Cover"*, *"Fimo Beads"*, *"Paper Cut Home Blessings"*, *"Easter Mosaic"*, *"Making a Scarecrow"*, *"Seasonal Wall-Hangings Revisited"*, *"Personal Prayer Beads"*, *"Mixed-Media Self-Portraits"*, *"Felt Beads for Patricia"*, *"Autumn Leaves"*, and *"Christmas Paper Chains"*. Members take turns to lead sessions as they are able. We are always on the lookout for new art and craft activities to try and would welcome any suggestions.

In addition, our minister led a number of adult RE courses: 'New U' – an introduction to our congregation and to Unitarianism for newcomers; 'Spirit Body' (with Jenny Moy) – exploring the idea of humans as spiritual beings that are embodied; 'Spirit on Screen' (with Jane Blackall) – watching and talking about films on religious themes; and 'Building Your Own Theology' (with Howard Hague) – a classic Unitarian course that was very well-received.

A pleasing development this year is that two new social groups have sprung up thanks to grassroots enthusiasm: Doris Campbell and Juliet Edwards started up our new monthly walking group back in January 2009; Louisa Bird, Angela Gasparetto, and Mark Tribe took the initiative and arranged the first of our bi-monthly youngsters' socials in the summer (more recently these get-togethers have been organised by Natasha Drennan).

At the moment there are still only a few trained facilitators within our congregation who are regularly leading Engagement Groups. Mary Spurr and I attended a 24-hour facilitator training event for Unitarians at Great Hucklow in October 2009. If you would be interested in finding out more about facilitator training, or getting involved in other aspects of our small group programme, please speak to me or Sarah for more information.

Jane Blackall
Engagement Groups Coordinator

Chairperson of the Congregation's Report

It is one thing to be told that Essex Church has doubled in size over the last few years, and another thing to feel it. It has only recently hit me that the church is actually full on Sunday mornings, in the sense that more chairs have to be put out; the singing suddenly sounds better; the coffee sessions after the service seem livelier. I think what makes a good community is the sense of ownership by the members of it, and it is always a small but real joy to see different faces actually getting involved: appearing at small group sessions, helping in the kitchen, volunteering to act as steward or greeter; putting forward ideas and suggestions.

We have faced two major challenges over the past year, with ongoing building work (meaning that the church actually had to close for a couple of weeks – the first time for many years) and the death of Patricia Walker-Hesson, one of our longest-standing and most faithful and supportive members. The burden of the first fell disproportionately on the minister and warden, but many of us felt distressed by the second. As one would expect of a good, healthy community, we have come through the challenges and still feel strong.

Thanks, as always, to those who keep the show on the road. To Sarah, our Minister, who has put up with our peculiarities for another year without going mad; to Juliet, who suggests from time to time that she might step down as Treasurer, then takes pity on us and does another arduous year; to Jenny, the Warden, who probably never dreamed that so many things could go wrong with a building, and who has given valuable help over the finances and administration; to Howard, the Chair of the Trustees (and librarian) for taking on so many of the legal and administrative tasks; to Jane for our enviable (and indeed, much envied) newsletter and website, and for so much energy and enthusiasm over the small group work; to Harold, again, for a year's lovely music (and to Sandra, Peter, Margaret and everyone else who has contributed to it); to Michaela for our lovely gardens; to Gitana, whom most of you will never see, but who keeps the building clean; to Jennie and Jordan for keeping our tiny but valued Sunday School going; to Daniel Tinker for all the useful 'odd jobs'; to Christine for organising, for many months, the rotas, a thankless job which Jane has courageously taken on for now; and to everyone who has contributed their time, their money, their enthusiasm and/or their love and support.

Thanks also to everyone who has contributed to services over the past year. These have included old-Essex-Churchian Rev Jopie Boeke, student minister Dan Costley, Joyce Ashworth, Rev Jane Dwinell, Rev Joy Croft, Peter Teets, and our own David Darling, Patricia Walker, Heidi Ferid, Angela Gasparetto, Jo Ridgers, Jane Blackall, Howard Hague, Louisa Bird and Michaela Von Britzke. Oh and me. Should I thank myself?

If I could make three wishes about the next year, I would wish: first for a year with no major crises, so we can focus on the spiritual and pastoral side of church life rather than on things like drains and floods; second, for even more people to come forward and volunteer to take on small tasks; and third, for perhaps a small increase in our customary Sunday School group of, on average, 1.5 children. (I should emphasise that that is a mean average and not an actual representative week). But overall, my mood is one of celebration, for another excellent year.

Caroline Blair
Chairperson of the Congregation

Church Music Report

The Church continues to employ a regular pianist to lead the hymns which are an integral part of the morning service. In addition to this there is the contribution of the singers who provide a back-up for congregational singing as well as contributing individual items of a vocal or instrumental nature to reflect the service theme. Their contribution includes solos, duets and when the occasion demands, and funds permit, a full quartet. All this comes at a price and the Church is grateful for the legacy which provides about half the necessary funding, the rest coming from other Church income.

Harold Lorenzelli
Church Music Coordinator

Chairperson of Trustees' Report

It is right that I should begin this trustees' report by paying tribute to our much-loved colleague and friend Patricia Walker, who died on 2 October 2009. Patricia was a very active member of the church committee and the trustees for many years. We all valued her advice and common sense, not least when it came to matters affecting our building, but also wider matters relating to the congregation. She was often the first person I turned to for her sound counsel, and she will be missed more than I can say. Indeed I still expect her to come through the door when we are settling down for meetings of the management committee in the library. Her funeral service and a service of thanksgiving for her life took place on 22 October 2009, with a memorial service at the church on 30 January 2010, all conducted by our minister Sarah. Tributes were also paid to Patricia in the November and December/January issues of the newsletter.

During the year the 'formal' trustees were: Caroline Blair, Juliet Edwards, Heidi Ferid, Howard Hague, Harold Lorenzelli, Roy Parnell and (until her death) Patricia Walker. Of these all except Roy were members of the church committee, a system which seems to work well. I use the word 'formal' here because the Charity Commission website in fact lists all members of the committee as trustees. The trustees are responsible especially for the fabric of the building, the employment of staff and for finance and investment matters. Jane Blackall was re-appointed as our Outreach Officer: Arts and Education on 1 September 2009 for a further one-year contract. Our warden Jenny Moy went from full-time to three days a week from July 2009, though this was later increased to four days a week from January 2010.

As ever our lovely but sometimes ailing building has taken up much of our time during the year. In my report last year I referred to the decision to replace the toilets to include an accessible toilet and to refurbish the church kitchen. Perhaps inevitably this all took longer than expected, with the work lasting until Easter or so. We all enjoyed the lunch on 28 June to celebrate the completion of the work! One of our neighbours in the flats at 110 Palace Gardens Terrace approached us in March seeking permission to put scaffolding in our back garden to enable some building work to go ahead next door. In the end her builder was able to do the work without this scaffolding. On the whole this was probably a good thing, though as part of the deal he was offering to level some of the very steep ground in that part of our back garden, something I have wanted us to do for a long time. In June the committee agreed to a proposal to create a buggy store in the space underneath the church entrance (the 'drawbridge') to enable parents at the nursery school to leave their prams. This has worked well, and has not taken light from the office as we feared.

One very positive development during 2009 is that we have appointed Fraser Jackson as our buildings and maintenance advisor. He is already greatly assisting our minister and warden in the care of our building. At the time of writing we are expecting quotations from firms for our leaking roof. As well as the roof over the church itself causing long-term problems, there has recently been a further leak into the entrance foyer, probably caused by excess water collecting on the balcony outside the manse flat during heavy rain. It would be good if we can report progress on these matters next year. Towards the end of the year we decided to renew the lighting and ceilings in the hall and foyer as our next project, with the work starting in January.

Although not strictly trustees' business, I feel we should also mark the passing of our long-term member Betty Allen in August 2009. Betty had not been able to attend services for a number of years, so will not be known to newer members. She had been an active member of the old church. An appreciation appeared in the December 2009/January 2010 issue of the church newsletter. Finally I would like to thank colleagues for all their work for the church during the year.

Howard Hague
Chairperson of Trustees

Essex Church Congregational Library and Archives: Librarian's Report

This should be seen as something of an 'interim' report, as major changes are likely for both the library and church archives over the next few months. At the time of writing the committee is considering plans to replace the shelving in the library, which should enable the stock to be arranged in a more helpful way, and also allow new material to be added for which at present there is little room. Similarly a cupboard in the basement has recently become available which it is hoped will provide a home for at least some of our archives. These have had to be stored in a rather inaccessible top cupboard for some time, which made their use rather difficult.

Following Patricia Walker's death in October 2009, we were advised that she had wished to pass on to the church such books and papers as we would find useful, a very kind offer for which we are most grateful. The papers were subsequently brought to the church. In December 2009, by arrangement with her sister Marion, Jane Blackall and I visited Patricia's former home in Chiswick to look through her library and pick out those titles that we thought would be of interest to the congregation. These are now awaiting cataloguing and re-shelving.

During 2009 I did not spend funds on buying new books, partly because of a lack of space for them, and partly due to a lack of time on my part, caused by other commitments. However we were fortunate to receive a number of items through donation, and as ever we are grateful for this generosity. It is good to report that members of the congregation are borrowing books from the library regularly – if you would like to do this, just put the details in the loans book provided. Some of the latest titles will be found in a bookcase at the side of the church, with the main collection downstairs. I am currently considering how our library stock can be better listed so that members know what we have got, and I hope to report progress in due course.

Howard Hague
Honorary Librarian

Minutes of the AGM Held at Essex Church on Sunday 17th May 2009

Present: Julia Alden, Karl Askew, Louisa Bird, Jane Blackall (*minutes*) Caroline Blair (*chair*), Jim Blair, Cassandra Britton, Anthony Bunsee, Doris Campbell, Bert Clough, David Francis Darling, Jo Darling, Margaret Darling, Juliet Edwards, Heidi Ferid, Angela Gasparetto, Carole Grace, Gill Hague, Howard Hague, John Hands, Debra Hinton, Jill Inskip, Christine Joshi, Sonya Leite, Harold Lorenzelli, Will Lyons, Deborah Moran, Geoffrey Olans, Jo Ridgers, David Saunders, Stephanie Saville, Susan Smith, Heather Suckling, Mary Spurr, Sarah Tinker, Mark Tribe, Michaela von Britzke, Patricia Walker, Diana Ward, Daffyd Young-Finch

1. **Opening:** Opening words were spoken by Sarah Tinker, Harold Lorenzelli, Carole Grace, John Hands.

2. **Welcome and Apologies:** Caroline Blair welcomed everyone to the meeting.
Apologies had been received from our warden, Jenny Moy.

3. **Review of 2008 AGM Minutes:** The minutes were accepted as a correct record and signed by Caroline.

4. **Review of Reports:**

a. Treasurer:

Juliet Edwards recommended that members donate to the church by standing order – either for their regular donations or for their annual membership subscription – as it makes life easier for the church.

Kassandra Britton suggested that money could be saved by folding the newsletter in half to save postage costs. Sarah Tinker explained that this had been investigated but that when folded in half the envelope was then too thick to be sent at the cheaper postage rate.

Carole Grace asked whether the standing order method of donation was more tax efficient. Juliet replied that it is important for everyone who is eligible to do so to sign a Gift Aid form and that if you have done this then it is equally tax-efficient whether you donate by standing order or through the envelope scheme.

Juliet drew attention to the special funds listed in the report. The fund for sending Iona Blair to Swaziland had been entirely used up, as had the fund for the 'Fabric of Diversity' community arts project, by this point, but the 'Africa Education Project' was still ongoing. £660 had been raised at the time of the meeting but Juliet encouraged people to make more donations to this worthwhile project. Caroline Blair explained that it would cost £240 to support one student in Swaziland for a year and that any extra money would go towards general health and education of orphans in the village.

Mark Tribe stated that he would like to commend those who responsibly look after church finances.

b. Minister:

Sarah Tinker thanked the committee for allowing her some time off work to complete her dissertation. She also commented that the task of raising £50,000 for the building project had been relatively easy thanks to people's generosity and Juliet's careful stewardship.

Patricia Walker asked Sarah to inform the congregation about other issues relating to the building that the committee are concerned about dealing with in the future. Sarah drew attention to the need to rewire the building and tackle the problem of the leaking roof.

c. Wardens:

Our warden, Jenny Moy, was not present at the meeting. Caroline mentioned that it could not have been easy for Jenny, as there had been builders around since the previous August, and that her good humour in dealing with this ongoing situation was much appreciated.

d. Engagement Groups and Secretary:

Jane Blackall reported that attempts to seek extra funding for small group work, including applications to the National Lottery and the Hibbert Trust, were ongoing.

Michaela von Britzke asked if there had been any effect of our advertising efforts as yet. Jane replied that it was difficult to tell but that we had lots of positive feedback. Jane added that it would be helpful if any congregation members would be willing to help with local leafleting to promote special events.

e. Chair of Congregation:

Caroline Blair reported that at the recent annual meetings of the Unitarian General Assembly (GA) she heard from lots of people from other congregations who said how lucky we are at Essex Church – not in terms of the building – but the people in our community.

f. Chair of Trustees:

Howard Hague commented on the building work as the major event of the past year. He reminded people of the celebration of the completion of the work, along with the unveiling of the new community wall-hanging, due to take place on Sunday 28th June. Howard mentioned that the building is now over 30 years old and, although we have finished one project, there is still a lot of work to do on it.

g. Music:

Harold Lorenzelli informed the meeting that the choir plan to sing the Hallelujah Chorus on the 28th June to celebrate the completion of the building project!

At this point, Will Lyons commented that though in many ways we have an excellent building, with level access, there is still a major problem with acoustics. Will stated that he cannot hear anything from the speakers. Carole Grace agreed that this may exclude some people. Sarah Tinker answered that one possibility that had been considered was to have a lapel microphone for the main speaker and a roving microphone for use during the candles of joy and concern. Will suggested that he would prefer a more permanent system than that such as with suspended microphones. Sarah stated that we would commit ourselves to addressing the issue of the sound system in the coming year.

h. Librarian:

Howard Hague stated that he was conscious that the church library hasn't had a very high priority and that he would like to consider ways it could be better publicised. Howard and Jane will work on this. Juliet stated that there could be some money in the church budget for the church library.

Michaela asked if funds could also be made available for gardening supplies.

Stephanie asked what progress had been made with sorting out the archives. Caroline explained that an 'archive day' was planned but had been put off many times due to the church building work. Stephanie asked if the archiving project was also deserving of its own church funding. Caroline stated that this would probably become clearer once it was possible to have a better look at them as the archive is currently stored in quite an inaccessible place for safekeeping during the building work.

5. Acceptance of 2008 Reports and Accounts:

Patricia Walker proposed, and Michaela von Britzke seconded, the acceptance of the Annual Report and Accounts, and this was agreed.

6. Election of Management Committee

Jane stated that eight of the present members of the management committee had been put forward for re-election (Albert Dolan had decided to step down as he had now moved away):

Caroline Blair, Doris Campbell, David Francis Darling, Juliet Edwards, Heidi Ferid, Howard Hague, Harold Lorenzelli, Patricia Walker.

Louisa Bird and Angela Gasparetto had also been nominated to join the committee.

Stephanie Saville proposed, and Julia Alden seconded, that all these names should be elected en bloc and this was agreed. Caroline gave particular thanks to the two new committee members for standing.

Sarah Tinker followed this up by pointing out that those members who are not on the committee can also get involved in church projects as we are looking at setting up short-term working parties for particular tasks – for example working with Will to improve the church sound system – so if anybody would like to help out with this they should talk to a member of the committee.

7. Congregational Growth

Sarah Tinker read through a list of congregational growth goals (shown below). Copies were available:

*The following goals have been set by the management committee and the minister.
Over the next 3 years (from the date of the 2009 AGM):*

- *Increase membership to 75.*
- *Increase average worship attendance to 50.*
- *Have a paid children's leader and thriving children's group.*
- *Have new people on the committee and more people actively involved in running the congregation (its programmes, worship, and building matters).*
- *Improve systems for greeting visitors and encouraging them to return and join the congregation.*
- *Increase publicity for the congregation and its activities – completing a review of our outreach and our communications.*
- *Broaden range of activities offered – as another way for people to access our congregation – and increase attendance for groups.*
- *Complete the 5-year building programme (started in 2006) so that our building is a positive and vibrant advert for our community.*
- *Hold a congregational residential event.*
- *Lower the congregation's age profile and have a more balanced gender ratio.*
- *Create a congregational covenant together (or utilise what is already written).*

Sarah pointed out that current church membership is 52 and the average worship attendance is 37.

Mark Tribe asked how many children were currently attending. Sarah stated that there were none at present but that a classic way of starting a children's group is to commit to having a paid leader and that we would need to find a leader, keep them enthused while the numbers build up, and get a team of volunteers together for support.

Sarah mentioned the importance of greeting and welcoming and stated "there is a science to this!" She also made reference to the 'elevator speeches' (brief statements of why you come to Essex Church or why you are a Unitarian) that Jane was asking people to write for the newsletter. Mark asked if there was anything else that members can do. Sarah stated that the review of 'marketing' is ongoing.

Angela Gasparetto queried the mention of a 'congregational residential event'. Sarah explained that we would like to have some time away for members of the congregation at a retreat centre, probably the Nightingale Centre, at Great Hucklow in the Peak District, a Unitarian holiday and conference centre.

Sarah mentioned that we were going through a process of gathering congregational statistics and that we are aiming for diversity amongst our number. Mark mentioned that younger members of the congregation could get together and go for a pub lunch after the service. Sarah commented that people tend to return if they are spoken to by 2 or 3 people on their first visit and see at least one person who is like themselves.

Will Lyons asked whether we could have a weekly insert in local newspapers as part of our outreach. Sarah mentioned that Gordon Deaville from our congregation had recently been featured in a local paper and that if you offer a good photograph and an article then it may well be used. Louisa Bird suggested that we could advertise in Time Out magazine. Sarah replied that advertising in Time Out is too expensive, but that we had successfully got events into their free listings once or twice. Sarah added that local libraries are happy to take our posters but they take them down every 2 or 3 weeks so we need to get into a routine to replace them. Patricia suggested that a much easier way to get something into the papers is to write a letter to the editor. Mary commented that we could have got something into the paper in the aftermath of the recent 'atheist bus debate'.

Angela mentioned the possibility of running a 'Bright Lights' intergenerational engagement group, pioneered in Bristol, as an alternative to the conventional children's programme. Jane explained that this is an all-age event, it can be themed, and it is run in the same way regardless of who turns up, even if there are no children. It could be opened up to a number of congregations in the district.

Carole commented that if we do increase our numbers significantly we need to do something about the number of tables and chairs in the hall during coffee time.

Sarah returned to the idea of having an assigned 'greeter' on Sunday mornings. Jo Ridgers suggested that the greeter should actually be outside the church, on the street, welcoming people as they come up the path. Jo also commented that when she was first looking for someone to go on a Sunday it would have been very helpful to see a service sheet. Heidi Ferid suggested we could display one in the foyer.

Mary Spurr mentioned that it is common to use 'wayside pulpits' in the United States as people read the quotes and see something that resonates with them. Sarah explained that Jane was finalising a design and getting ready to print out 12 wayside pulpit posters at A2 size for use in rotation.

Debra Hinton reminded everyone that it is a big step for people to come into the church for the first time and that visitors generally won't just have 'popped in' so it is important to help them feel comfortable. She also suggested that if visitors do not stay for coffee afterwards then we have probably lost them. Sarah mentioned that not everybody would want to be invited in and it is a difficult balance to strike. Angela mentioned that before her first visit she emailed the church to ask questions about what the service was like and got a response from Jane which she had found reassuring. It was suggested that we could have a specific link for people to email a contact if they have any questions before their first visit.

Christine stated that she would rather that we did not have another rota for people to sign up as greeter and that she would prefer for people to just volunteer on the day. David Darling suggested a compromise, where the steward could turn up at 10.30am to start greeting, and then find someone on the day to take over the greeting at 10.50am when they need to start handing out hymnbooks. Louisa suggested that we should have the front door propped open as it is more welcoming. Sarah said that these views would be noted and that we would continue to work on this issue.

Jim Blair commented that on several occasions last year a group from church went to the park after the service, this would attract lots of attention, and people would come up to ask who they were.

Sarah mentioned that there had been a suggestion that we could have a quiet space in the church from 10am on Sunday mornings. Michaela commented that we could even have meditation but acknowledged that it would be intensive in terms of staffing the meditative space.

Sarah concluded this discussion on growth by inviting anyone who has views on the subject to contact her by email or phone.

8. **Votes of Thanks:** Were given by Caroline Blair. Caroline did not wish to single anybody out, but instead thanked everybody who supported the church community, in any way. Patricia added a special thank-you to Rev. Sarah Tinker, our minister, to thank her for holding us all and making it such a caring community.
9. **Adjournment:** The meeting was adjourned at 2.00pm. The closing words were read by Sarah.

Minutes taken by Jane Blackall