



Kensington Unitarians

Newsletter: April 2017

What's On...

Sunday 2nd April, 11am-noon
'A Transformative Faith'
Led by Jane Blackall

Wednesday 5th April, 12.30pm
'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite

Thursday 6th April, 7-8pm
'Heart and Soul':
'Ways of Being' led by Roy Clark

Sunday 9th April, 11am-noon
'Another Path'
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 9th April, 12.30pm
Inclusive Communion
Led by Tristan Jovanović

Wednesday 12th April, 12.30pm
'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite

Sunday 16th April, 11am-noon
'Easter Day'
Led by Sarah Tinker & Jane Blackall
This will include a charity collection for Migrants Organise

Sunday 16th April, 12.30pm
Congregational Potluck Lunch

Sunday 16th April, 2-3pm
'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite

Wednesday 19th April, 12.30pm
'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite

Sunday 23rd April, 11am-noon
'Pain and Transformation'
Led by Jeannene Powell

Sunday 23rd April, 12.30-1.15pm
'Finding Your Voice'
Singing Workshop with Margaret

Wednesday 26th April, 12.30pm
'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite

Sunday 30th April, 11am-noon
'Life Changes'
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker
and members of the congregation

Sunday 30th April, 12.45-2.00pm
Conversations on Transformation

Transformation In Springtime

A Message from our Minister



Look outside. It's happening right now. The natural world is unfurling before us, new shoots are pushing their way through dark earth to the light above, birds are building nests, bumble bees are awakening from their hibernation. It's spring, a time when 'form' alters, a season of transformation. The trees breaking into leaf probably don't have much say in the matter. Spring just happens for them as external changes trigger internal processes of growth and renewal. But for us conscious beings change can be more problematic. Some of our times of change may feel liberating and welcome. Sometimes we know we're ready for a change, the opportunities present themselves and the transition is smooth. I hope we've all known that kind of transformation.

But we've also probably known the necessary changes that we avoid or ignore, in the hope that they might just leave us alone. We might know full well that we're stuck in a rut yet it's a situation we're used to and feel safe in. To step out into the unknown is a scary prospect. And most of us will also have experienced changes that we'd much rather not have known. The sudden end of a relationship or job; an unexpected death or illness that shook the landscape of our heart and altered the shape of our life; a painful realisation that once considered could never be erased – many are the reasons life's pattern may alter and, once altered, never return to old and well known ways of being.

To be transformed may often require a letting go, a shedding of the familiar, a taking on of new ways of seeing the world. Transformation may arrive in a moment or be a slow unfolding. It can be likened to awakening. The world no longer appears quite as it did. A shift has occurred in our perception, we are no longer as we were. As a spiritual practice, some people like to use springtime in nature as a catalyst for changes in their lives. So many traditions from the world's faiths encourage us to embark on an annual cleansing of our homes, our bodies, our habits and routines at certain times of year.

Let's use the energy of springtime to encourage us all on a path of transformation. Invite change into our lives, be aware of our own resistance, and create each day as a new possibility. Each day we could make a deliberate change in a routine to symbolize our willingness to be transformed in life. Let's remind ourselves and one another that though we cannot control our destiny, yet the small decisions we make day by day can have a remarkably positive effect.

Rev. Sarah Tinker



'The great metaphors from all spiritual traditions — grace, liberation, being born again, awakening from illusion — testify that it is possible to transcend the conditioning of my past and do a new thing.'

Sam Keen in Hymns to an Unknown God

Thanks to Stephanie and Sarah for sponsoring our special colour issue!

In this month's newsletter...

* 'Another Chapter in the Saga of Old Age' by Stephanie Saville * London District AGM Report * Natasha and Darren's Wedding * Training Day: 'Working on our Welcome to LGBTQ+ People' * Inclusive Sunday Afternoon Tea Dance this May * News from the Church Committee * A Poem from Brian * 'Sinners and Saints' address by Rev. Sarah Tinker * and much more...

Kensington Unitarians

At Essex Church (founded 1774), Notting Hill Gate

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

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

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

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



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'Heart and Soul'

Midweek Spiritual Gatherings

Thursdays 6th April, 4th May, 1st June 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 will be followed by refreshments (Jane's home-made cake!) and fellowship. All are welcome to join us. Roy will lead the April gathering on the theme 'Ways of Being'. If you would like to know more about 'Heart & Soul' gatherings at Essex Church email jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Easter Sunday Lunch

After the service on Sunday 16th April



We will be having a potluck congregational lunch after the service on Easter Sunday (16th April). Please plan to bring along some food to share. Melody is happy to co-ordinate serving lunch but we would appreciate everyone helping with the clearing up and it would be useful if anyone planning to bring something that needs heating up could take charge of that in the kitchen. Cold food would be easier. Could you make a sign, to help vegetarians and those avoiding certain foods, explaining what ingredients are in your dish. We're not having a sign-up sheet this time – let's bring what we like and enjoy a true potluck meal together. We promise there'll be Easter Eggs.

Volunteering Rotas:

Stewarding, Coffee and Greeting

Stewarding:

2 nd April:	Michaela von Britzke
9 th April:	Veronica Needa
16 th April:	Brian Ellis
23 rd April:	Gina Bayley
30 th April:	Juliet Edwards

Coffee:

2 nd April:	Sue Smith
9 th April:	????????? (can you help?)
16 th April:	Melody Chapman
23 rd April:	Liz Tuckwell
30 th April:	Julia Alden

Greeting:

2 nd April:	Maureen Cummings
9 th April:	Roy Clark
16 th April:	Veronica Needa
23 rd April:	Niall Doherty
30 th April:	Brian Ellis

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



Rachel Sparks Dance Presents Sunday Afternoon Tea Dance

Sunday 14th May, 2-5pm
Here at Essex Church

with a dance lesson for beginners at 2.15pm

Join us for a tea dance with social dancing and actual tea and cake! We had a lovely time at the inaugural tea-dance back in February so come and enjoy a gentle afternoon learning some basic social dancing steps with Rachel who can teach even the most left-footed people. This is an inclusive event for anyone including LGBTIQ+ people and we ask that everyone is respectful to each other. The partnering at this tea dance is gender-neutral, meaning anyone can lead and anyone can follow, and we are completely body positive. The venue is wheelchair-accessible and has gender-neutral toilets. We ask you not to wear high heels as we need to protect the floor! You are invited to bring your own home-made cakes (clearly labelled), to raise money for our nominated charity, Diversity Role Models.

Tickets: £10 on the door (*free entry to members of Essex Church*)

For more information contact: rachel@rachelsparksdance.co.uk
rachelsparksdance.co.uk / www.facebook.com/rachelsparksdance

**Save the Dates: Future tea dances are planned
for 14th May, 23rd July, and 22nd October!**



"There is within you a lion and a lamb," wrote Henri Nouwen. "Spiritual maturity is the ability to let lamb and lion lie down together." The lion is the image of the part of yourself that is strong and resourceful and responsible. The lion makes choices, acts quickly, and is wise in the ways of the world. The lamb is the vulnerable part of yourself that is afraid, dependent, in need of love and support. The lamb knows what it is like to cling to God. To live in only the lion or the lamb denies the important gift of the other.'

Jane Vennard

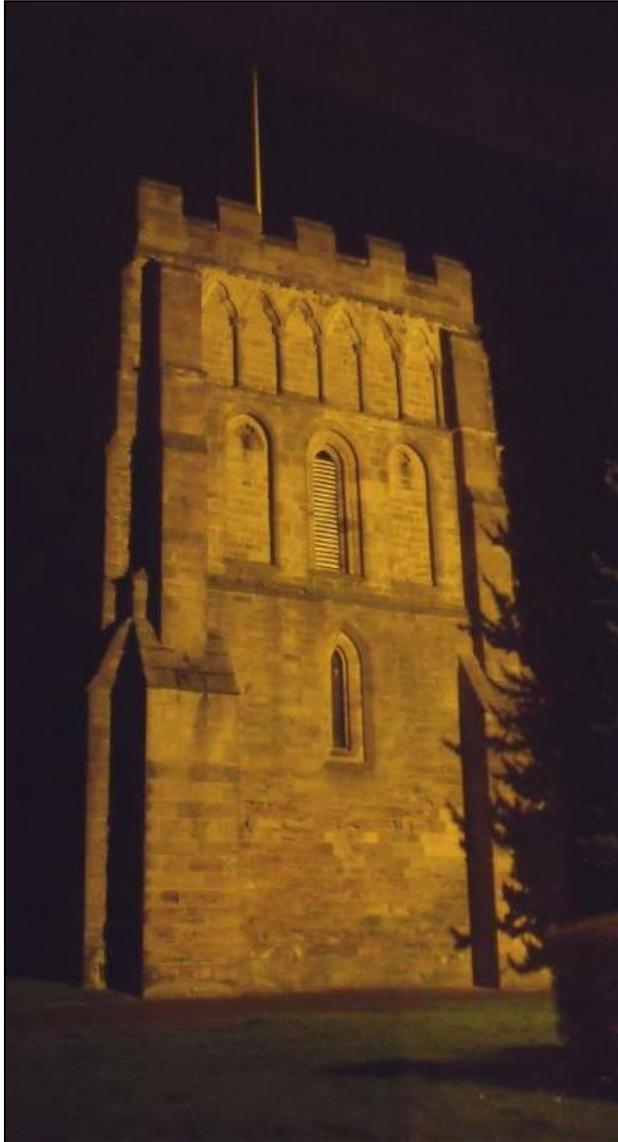
Natasha and Darren's Wedding



It was a delight to be asked to conduct Natasha and Darren's wedding ceremony, held at Newland Hall, a beautiful Tudor manor house in Chelmsford, and celebrated by family and friends. Their legal wedding had been a quieter ceremony the day before, held here at Essex Church and conducted by Sarah. My training as a registrar came in handy as I was able to assist Sarah in the necessary form-filling. Marriage registers and certificates have to be filled in using special ink that will not fade. When we came to try the church fountain pen it wasn't working properly. Luckily I'd brought a spare! We're keen to conduct more weddings here at the church so if you've been thinking about making this next step in life, or would like a ceremony to renew your vows, come and have a chat with us about the possibilities.

Jeannene Powell

‘Another Chapter in the Saga of Old Age’



The view from Stephanie's window - taken by Juliet Edwards

Personal, you understand, not everyone has my good luck. And as I say every time Thank God for a sense of humour not just in you the reader but in me too.

When Tom's (the architect of the new church) son and his wife were advised that I need some care and should not be living alone, I gave up driving and shopping and cooking for myself and came to stay with them in Durham... They brought me to see a physician. Various medical tests followed.

Meanwhile, respite was arranged [well, wouldn't you appreciate relief if you had been looking after the likes of me for a month or two?] So they are having a little holiday and I am luxuriating in an 11th century Leprosy Foundation. That is the view out of my bedroom window any time after it's dark because it is illuminated all through the night. Looking out on a holy place. Let me share it with you. Juliet has taken a photograph. It comes with greetings to you all.

Love from Stephanie Saville

‘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. More details next month and look out for booking forms in our foyer.



‘The word "heart" appears well over a thousand times in the Bible. Most often, it is a comprehensive metaphor for the self. It covers much more than does the metaphorical meaning of "heart" in contemporary English. In our usage, the heart is most commonly associates with love, as in Valentine hearts; courage; as in brave hearts; and grief, as in broken hearts. But in the Bible, the 'heart' includes these and more: it is a metaphor for the inner self as a whole... The heart is an image for the self at a deep level, deeper than our perception, intellect, emotion, and volition. As the spiritual centre of the total self, it affects all of these: our sight, thought, feelings, and will...’

The condition of the heart matters. The heart, the self at its deepest level, can be turned toward God or away from God, open to God or closed to God. But its typical condition is that it is turned away from God and "closed."...

When our hearts are closed, we live within a shell. To extend the egg metaphor: the shell needs to be broken open if the life within it is to enter into full life. What we need is the 'hatching of the heart' - the opening of the self to God, the sacred - is a comprehensive image for the individual dimension of the Christian life.’

Marcus J. Borg

London District AGM



Here's the chalice from our recent London District (LDPA) AGM, held in March in Brighton. There are 27 congregations in our District and all those present at the AGM had brought some soil to join in a simple ritual of celebration, marking the Colchester Fellowship joining us this year. We all placed soil from our congregation's garden in the chalice and placed flowers from around the District to decorate it. Later on we drank a toast to the Colchester Unitarians with some delicious wine they'd brought us from an Essex vineyard. It was a really enjoyable afternoon with high quality worship led by Jef Jones, lay leader at Brighton, and brief annual reports from our fellow congregations. Let me know if you'd like to read these reports as they make interesting reading and show the range of activities offered and issues faced by others.

We'll be hosting the next quarterly meeting of the LDPA here at Kensington Unitarians on June 17th. We're offering a training on welcoming the LGBTQ+ community, which is open to everyone but we'll all need to book a place. After that, at 3.00pm onwards, there'll be a short worship service followed by refreshments – open to all.

Sarah Tinker

'We can't avoid the news, the war, the terror alerts, the fear. We're doing what we can to change the world in our own small way, but new ideas and more compassionate forces seem overwhelmed by their opposites. A few things seem to be getting better, but many things seem to be getting much worse. Just when love seemed to be the hot new topic, hatred sounded its clarion call. And the entire world could not but hear.

The most important thing to remember during times of great change, is to fix our eyes anew on the things that don't change...

Eternal things become our compass during times of rapid transition, binding us emotionally to a steady and firm course. They remind us that we, as children of God, are still at the centre of divine purpose in the world. They give us the strength to make positive changes, wisdom to endure negative changes, and the capacity to become people in whose presence the world moves toward healing.'

Marianne Williamson



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.



Good Cause Collection of the Month

migrants organise

migrants and refugees acting for justice

Collection on Sunday 16th April

Migrants Organise is a platform where refugees and migrants organise for power, dignity and justice. We develop leadership and open up spaces for relational, organised participation of migrants and refugees in public life. From two decades work as the Migrant and Refugee Communities Forum, we know that migrants and refugees make a positive contribution to our country. Migration is fact of life, instead of resisting it – let's organise it.

Migrants Organise are based locally to the church (in Ladbrooke Grove) and we are hoping we might strengthen our connection to them in future.

For more information: www.migrantsorganise.org

Recent Charity Collections:

December – **Refugee Council** - £289.03

January – **Inclusive Church** - £121.70

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

A Big Thank You!



Recently the congregation gave the morning offering to a project I have been involved in called Generation Education Period (GEP). I was very appreciative to receive £250 to send to the project. I have since then, received another generous donation of £100 to add to the previous amount. Thank you so much Kensington Unitarians. That provides as many as 50 kits for girls in Cambodia and Laos!

Julia Alden

Website: www.generationeducationperiod.com

Church Membership 2017

Introducing the new 'ChurchApp' System

We are a bit later than intended in getting started with the membership process this year – apologies for the delay with this – but you should hear from us in the near future. We will be getting in touch with all members, friends, and regular attenders to check your contact details and confirm membership renewals.

Keeping track of the contact details and communication preferences of church members is a more complicated business than most people would probably imagine! In the hope of making it a bit more manageable we are going to try out a new online church database system for 2017 called 'ChurchApp'.

If you are not yet a member but would like to be then please speak to me or Sarah and we will give you a form.

Jane Blackall

Foyer Photo-Board



I am pleased to report that at long last the new photo-board is up in the church foyer. The idea behind this is to make it easier for newcomers to the congregation to learn everybody's names. I managed to get photographs for most people (a few of you have been preserved in perpetual youth because I couldn't get hold of you for an update) but if I didn't get a picture of you and you'd like to be included next time we refresh the photo-board then please do find me on Sunday and I'll take a picture or email me a photo (jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk).

Jane Blackall

Warden's Column



This is the time of year when Quaker Meetings get "daffodil ministry" - someone whose heart is so touched on their way to meeting by those patches of condensed sunshine that they have to stand up and give thanks for it. I guess the Unitarians equivalent might be "daffodil candles". I definitely notice my own tendency to a "daffodil column" around this time.

So this is what I feel very thankful for in our garden at the moment

- The mini Tete a Tete daffodils (Juliet's suggestion) in the newly planted bed in the back garden
- The Jeffire daffodils that return faithfully every year in the front beds
- The tree by the carpark just coming into leaf
- Random hyacinths the nursery plant by their stairs
- 20+ small figs that made it through the winter and should ripen this summer
- Red-leaved Photinia bush beside the benches - planted when I first arrived & huge now
- Wisteria tendrils ready to sprint to the end of their wires this year
- Foxgloves from the farmer's market in the back garden planters
- Maple tree in the tub & everlasting sweet pea ready to grow up it
- Ivy sprawling generously down the walls - despite its brutal haircut
- Michaela for the many years of love & care she's put in here
- Jackie our Gardener for her expert assistance
- Brian for tackling the seemingly endless job of repainting all the railings
- and last but never least, the wren that just built a nest in the guide for the hosepipe reel (guess we'll need to manage without that this year ☺)

Jenny Moy

Church Management Committee Report



We were pleased to welcome Brian Ellis to his first meeting since agreeing to join the committee.

We were fascinated to hear of the complexities of the controls for modern 'smart' heating systems and are grateful that Jenny and Sarah continue to pursue the ideal solution for our busy and variably used building.

We're delighted with the work done in our gardens front and back, which are looking a picture now that spring is here.

We heard that Fraser has replaced some stained ceiling tiles and will be checking to see if there are signs of any further leaks.

We agreed to pay for new carpeting in the manse flat, which will be a better colour choice than the previous cream, given the dustiness of central London. It was pleasing to note that the previous carpets had lasted 12 years. Thanks to Giuliano, the flat has now been fully re-decorated.

Melvin who works on our sound system will be returning soon to make some adjustments.

David of Albany Furnishings will be fitting a new curtain track in the library and re-hanging the curtains that he made so beautifully. A new track was necessary because IKEA had discontinued their fancy Kvarter range, which we installed with such optimism only a few years ago. Let this be a warning to us all when making home furnishing decisions!

The church accounts are on the way to completion for the annual report. Thanks to Natasha and Jenny.

The national Unitarian Annual Meetings are being held from 10th to 13th April and so we will not be holding our usual Tenebrae Service but will look forward to one of our church shared lunches on Easter Sunday.

Everyone was pleased to see our new photo-board up in the foyer and noted how much work it had been to finalise and produce.

Our next meeting will be on Thursday 27th April. Do speak to a member of staff or committee member if there are matters you would like to raise.

The Nightingale Centre

Our Unitarian Conference Centre in the Peak District



Our Unitarian holiday and conference centre is nestled in the beautiful Peak District village of Great Hucklow. There are lots of Unitarian and other events happening there during the year and attending a national Unitarian event is a great way to meet like-minded people from around the country. We've a copy of their brochure for 2017 if you'd like to know more or you can check their website. But here are some events that might interest you:

Summer Walkers Weekend - 14th to 16th July

Fun Days Away for 12 to 17 year olds - 7th to 11th August

Unitarian Music Society - 11th to 14th August

Women's Group Conference - 20th to 23rd October

Unifest – a Unitarian holiday for families
– no charge for children – 26th to 29th October

Website: www.thenightingalecentre.org.uk

LEAP Course: Unitarian Leadership Skills



A course for any Unitarian who wants to deepen their leadership skills, LEAP consists of two residential weekends at the Nightingale Centre on 1st to 3rd September 2017 and 1st to 3rd June 2018 with assignments to complete between the two weekends. Ask Sarah if you would like more information about this training.



Fitness Fusion of 9 Movement Forms

**Third Sunday of the Month from
2-3pm: 16th April, 21st May, 18th June...**

**Midweek classes on Wednesdays
from 22nd February, 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**

Inclusive Communion

**Sundays 9th April, 14th May, 11th June, 9th July
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.

9th April – led by Tristan Jovanović

14th May – led by Tristan Jovanović

11th June – led by Sue Smith

9th July – led by Jane Blackall

Thematic Ministry in April: Transformation



We've reached month five of our first year of thematic ministry and this month our focus will be on 'transformation', which seems a most appropriate focus for spring time and Easter. 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 or maybe a piece you'd like to write for the newsletter. Let us know. Thanks to everyone for the deep conversations that we're having about these monthly themes.

May – 'Connection' / June – 'Courage and Resilience'
July – 'Identity' / August – 'Triumph/Disaster'
September – 'Purpose/Mission' / October – 'Generosity'

Transformation is a word oft used by management consultants and 21st century spiritual gurus. It's another word for change, but it generally implies a change that is radical and profound. I wonder if it's a word you have used to describe your own life.

- If you look back over your life so far, are there some notable times of transformation? A reflective exercise some people find helpful is to draw a time line noting times of change. Have there been times of sudden change in life? Transformation is not always comfortable or welcome. But perhaps over time these difficult times brought new learning, new possibilities that had not been apparent at the start. Are there times in your life when you've made a deliberate move towards a new way of being? What helped you make that first step? As you look back, do you notice slower passages of time, during which change was happening in you, almost imperceptibly – perhaps an alteration in attitudes or areas of interest and involvement?

- Poet Ellen Bass writes that "there is a part of every living thing that wants to become itself, the tadpole into the frog, the chrysalis into the butterfly, a damaged human being into a whole one." Have a think about the times in life when you feel most whole and complete. Are there steps you could, and would like to, take towards greater wholeness?

- Sometimes transformation can be an inner process for us humans, a turnaround in our thinking perhaps, a change of heart, or an emotional shift to another level. Is there a particular issue in your life at present that you might be able to view in a different light? We sometimes get so caught up in our thinking, imagining that because we've thought something – about ourselves or others or the state of our world – then it must be true. Whenever you find yourself having a fixed thought about something this month, try thinking the opposite and see how that feels.

- Have a look at these quotations about the power of human thought. Do you agree with them? Do any of them feel particularly relevant to your life situation at the moment?

'If you don't like something, change it. If you can't change it, change your attitude. -Maya Angelou

'The mind is its own place and in itself, can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven.' -John Milton

'The greatest weapon against stress is our ability to choose one thought over another.' -William James

'You have power over your mind - not outside events. Realize this, and you will find strength.' - Marcus Aurelius

'It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it.' -Aristotle

'As a single footstep will not make a path on the earth, so a single thought will not make a pathway in the mind. To make a deep physical path, we walk again and again. To make a deep mental path, we must think over and over the kind of thoughts we wish to dominate our lives.' -Henry David Thoreau

'We are what we think. All that we are arises with our thoughts. With our thoughts, we make the world.' – Buddha

Sarah, Jeannene, and Jane

'Feeling unworthy goes hand in hand with feeling separate from others, separate from life. If we are defective, how can we possibly belong? It's a vicious cycle: The more deficient we feel, the more separate and vulnerable we feel. Underneath our fear of being flawed is a more primal fear that something is wrong with life, that something bad is going to happen. Our reaction to this fear is to feel blame, even hatred, toward whatever we consider the source of the problem: ourselves, others, life itself. But even when we have directed our aversion outward, deep down we still feel vulnerable.'

Tara Brach

'Crossing the boundary of our own consciousness into that of the stranger gives us a perspective we do not normally have. As we move through some of the barriers that divide us — our fears and our prejudices, mostly — we discover that the stranger is not so very strange after all. The stranger, writes Marilyn Sewell, is really just someone else like you or me: "We are not separate; we are one. No strangers, really, just part of our lost selves reclaimed."

Sarah York

'Sinners and Saints'

Address by Rev. Sarah Tinker from 12th March

This reflection is also available online as a podcast.

We're following monthly themes in our worship and other activities here at Essex Church and this month we're working with the juiciest of topics – good and evil. I guess when most of us think of terms like saints and sinners – we'd place ourselves somewhere between the two. We know that no-one is all good nor even all bad, we know that to be human is to carry potential within us, and depending on our circumstances and our personalities, the times in which we live, even the people we meet along the way – all these factors shape the ways in which we live our lives.

We also know that it is a rare human being who is brought up in such a way that they feel fully accepted in the world, just as they are. This is the process of socialization, through which we internalize certain messages. I wonder what kinds of messages you were brought up with? I come from a big family and was told that I had to share, that I mustn't be selfish. Maybe you were told you had to work hard, that you couldn't be lazy? Or you sensed that your anger was not acceptable? Or that in your family everybody was tough and didn't cry or admit to being frightened? Or that you must be grateful for what you have and not ask for more? Or that it's not OK to make mistakes or to say you don't understand? Do any of these sound like messages you might have internalised as a child?

And there's also something quite punitive in human nature isn't there. In many parts of the world, including here in Britain and in the States, we have legal systems that punish wrong doers severely – with an emphasis on retribution rather than rehabilitation. Even though simply locking people up for breaking the law tends to lead to more criminal activity once they are released. The issue of good and bad behaviour is a concern for us all.

Our service title 'a house for all' comes from the work of an American Lutheran priest Nadia Bolz Weber. Her quotation that we've used on today's order of service speaks to me. *"Whenever people annoy me beyond reason, I can guarantee it's because they're demonstrating something I'd rather not see in myself."*

She's a Lutheran priest from Denver Colorado and has become popular around the world because she's a powerful communicator and because of the inclusive message she brings from her church community. They are called 'a house for all sinners and saints'. Most church communities say that they welcome everyone, whoever you are, wherever you have been or whatever you have done – but the reality sometimes doesn't quite match the advertising. It can actually be quite uncomfortable to welcome people who are very different from ourselves, can't it? It's more comfortable to stick together with birds of a feather.

What Nadia Bolz Weber does so well is to take Christianity back to Jesus' life and say – look who he was hanging around with – the down and outs of an occupied land in the far outreaches of the Roman Empire: *"I've never fully understood how Christianity became quite so tame and respectable, given its origins among drunkards, prostitutes, and tax collectors."*

Now what does that tell us about the kinds of communities we could be creating today?



Nadia Bolz Weber is worth finding on YouTube and having a listen to because she has a strong presence and a strong message. She swears a lot, she has some amazing tattoos and she challenges us all to consider the ways we limit our love and acceptance of others. She's also delightfully frank about her own shortcomings.

In one of her books, called *Accidental Saints: Finding God in All The Wrong People*, she describes a day in her church where they make gingerbread saints to honour special people. She knows she must write the name *Alma White* on her saintly biscuit and she describes her struggle to do so. Alma White had set up a church in Denver in the early 1900s, she'd campaigned for women's equality and access to education, she was the first woman bishop in the United States. (So far so good.) She was also known for her support of the Klu Klux Klan, her anti-Catholicism, anti-Semitism, as well as being quite hostile towards immigrants. Nadia tells a fellow priest of her dilemma and that priest says *'email me her name and I'll add her to the litany of saints along with all the other broken people of God'*.

Bolz-Weber explains further: *'Personally I think knowing the difference between a racist and a saint is kind of important. But when Jesus again and again says things like the last shall be first and the first shall be last, and the poor are blessed and the rich are cursed, and that prostitutes make great dinner guests – it makes me wonder if our need for pure black-and-white categories is not true religion but maybe actually a sin.'*

Now I hope that all of us here today have had moments of knowing we are accepted in our entirety – *warts n all*, as the old saying goes. I hope we have people we can be honest with about our failings and our foibles, I hope we don't feel we have to act like someone we're not in order to be accepted. But let's not pretend this is easy; or that for most of us this is a regular feeling of being accepted, just as we are. It's *not* easy, even in a loving friendship group or family or neighbourhood. It's *not* easy in a church setting like this.

To want to create a house for all sinners and saints is a worthy aim. But you can't build a community just with words, or just with high ideals. It's real work with real people. And it's messy, uncomfortable work at times. The work starts with ourselves when we catch ourselves behaving in ways we would rather we didn't behave and we pay attention. We don't pretend it didn't happen. We acknowledge the truth – OK I've had that nasty thought about so and so – again: I've just avoided talking to again; I'm not telling people how bad I'm feeling again; I've had a problem with so-and-so this Sunday – maybe I won't bother coming to church next Sunday.

'Sinners and Saints'

(continued from previous page)

I wonder if it's happened to you yet. Have you been disappointed by our community in some way? Have I let you down or said something that riled or rattled you? Because it happens everywhere doesn't it. We get disappointed by others. And we ourselves behave in ways that we feel awkward about. This is what it is to be human, we stumble and fall, we make mistakes, we pretend to be something we're not because we can't quite imagine that we'll be accepted in our entirety. We back away, we retreat – in shame, in rage, in fear, or an all-masking feeling of boredom or sense of 'it's time to move on'. And we live in the kind of society where we can always move on. But if we stick it out, if we endure our discomfort and explore our difficulties rather than hiding them – I promise you a more authentic way of being in the world and a deeper sense of connection with others. This all takes practice – we are amateurs in the task of encouraging ourselves and one another to be all of who we are. It'll be the work of our lives if we choose to take it on. And we'll gather some emotional knocks and bruises along the way. Our egos will be dented, our ideas of 'how people should be' will be shaken up. Diversity takes on a whole new meaning when we really start to get to know one another beneath our socially acceptable veneers. But isn't that what love's all about? Can we truly speak of love if we can only love and accept a small part of one another rather than the whole of who we are and who we might be? We recognise good and evil as extremes – as ends of a dualist continuum of human behaviour. And most of us are shuffling around somewhere between the two. I think we can be called to be our best selves through recognising our *whole* selves and I hope our Kensington Unitarians community here at Essex Church can help each of us in that task. Amen.



'The Other Beatitudes'

These alternative beatitudes came from Nadia Bolz-Weber's talk at the Greenbelt Festival. After our 'sinners and saints' service we chose the blessings that best applied to us. Here they are:

'Blessed are the agnostics. Blessed are they who doubt. Those who aren't sure, who can still be surprised. Blessed are they who have buried their loved ones, for whom tears are as real as the ocean. Blessed are they who have loved enough to know what loss feels like. Blessed are they who can't fall apart because they have to keep it together for everyone else. Blessed are the parentless, the alone, the ones from whom so much has been taken. Blessed are those who 'still aren't over it yet'. Blessed are they who laughed again when for so long they thought they never would. Blessed are the losers and the parts of s that feel so small. The parts of ourselves that don't want to make contact with a world that only loves the winners. Blessed are the forgotten and the hidden. Blessed are the unemployed, the unimpressive, the underrepresented.'



'Dancing Butterflies' by Heidi Ferid
(for more paintings see www.heidiferid.co.uk)

'Finding Our Voice' Monthly Singing Workshops



Sunday 23rd April *(note irregular date)*
21st May and 18th June 2017
after the service from 12.30 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.

Services at Essex Church in April



Sunday 2nd April, 11am – ‘A Transformative Faith’

Service led by Jane Blackall

Many of us might say that our life has been changed by one way or another by the twists and turns of our faith journey down the years. In this service we will be looking at the ways in which being part of a religious community can truly transform our lives... if we are open to it.

Sunday 9th April, 11am – ‘Another Path’

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

On Palm Sunday, join us for this exploration of responding to life changing events, both those we can and cannot control.

Sunday 16th April, 11am ‘Easter Day’

Service led by Sarah Tinker and Jane Blackall

Today's service, marking Easter Day, will include a special charity collection for Migrants Organise, and will be followed by a congregational bring-and-share lunch. All are welcome.

Sunday 23rd April, 11am – ‘Pain and Transformation’

Service led by Jeannene Powell

Pain is something we can all experience, and encounter in different forms. In this service, we'll look at how we might transform our own experience of pain, and be of service in the transformation of the pain of another.

Sunday 30th April, 11am – ‘Life Changes’

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker and Members of the Congregation

An exploration of the many ways we've been changed by life. Stay after the service if you'd like to join us for our monthly Sunday Conversation about this month's theme of 'Transformation'.

Riverside Graveyard, Wapping

'a time to be born'
beside
the flooding tide
green grey washing
the river's dark water
new over
old wharves and steps
from
peace hiding
in the isolation of
an old walled
graveyard untouched
by the city's irreverence
when
changing light
slashing between winter
and spring slides
bright and greening
from young grass
as
snowdrops shyly
grow where god's
dancing footsteps fall
potential white
bursts and shines
to
unknown rhymes
pure drifting down
from a bird's steeple
high in still bare
sentinel trees
so
that I who knew
these moments
almost a life ago
might understand
'and a time to die'

Brian Ellis

'I'm really curious about what it would look like for us as Unitarians to open ourselves to having a transformational experience in our religious life. I don't mean feeling like you got a new idea, or feeling motivated to do a little better this week. I mean what would it take for us to come to church open to the possibility of leaving a different person, transformed by the sacred, filled with a new spirit of love, justice and compassion, so much so that you couldn't help but make changes in the rest of your life?'



Kent Doss