



Kensington Unitarians

The Newsletter

February 2009

What's On at Essex Church

Sunday 1st February, 11.00am

"Our Favourite Readings"

Led by Patricia Walker-Hesson

Sunday 1st February, 12.45-2.00pm

Kensington Community Singers

Sunday 1st February, 12.45pm

Adult RE: "A Sharing Circle"

Sunday 1st February, 2.00-5.00pm

Community Arts Project:

"The Fabric of Diversity"

Thursday 5th February, 2.00-5.00pm

Community Arts Project:

"The Fabric of Diversity"

Saturday 7th February, 10.30am

Walking Group: Greenwich

Meet at Cutty Sark DLR Station

Sunday 8th February, 11.00am

"The Origin of Species"

Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 8th February, 12.45-2.00pm

Kensington Community Singers

Sunday 8th February, 2.00-3.00pm

Nia Dance: Holistic Movement

Sunday 8th February, 3.30-5.00pm

"Songs and Silence for the Soul"

Thursday 12th February, 2.00-5.00pm

Community Arts Project:

"The Fabric of Diversity"

Thursday 12th February, 7-9.00pm

Creativity Group: *"Fimo Beads"*

Sunday 15th February, 11.00am

"Ouch! The Body as Temple"

Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 15th February, 12.45-2.00pm

Kensington Community Singers

Thursday 19th February, 2.00-5.00pm

Community Arts Project:

"The Fabric of Diversity"

Sunday 22nd February, 11.00am

"Make it Happen: Choose Fair Trade"

Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 22nd February, 12.45-2.00pm

Kensington Community Singers

Thursday 26th February, 2.00-5.00pm

Community Arts Project:

"The Fabric of Diversity"

Tuesday 24th February, 7.00-9.00pm

Management Committee Meeting

Thursday 26th February, 7.00-9.00pm

Reading Group: "The Maytrees"

A Message from our Minister

In an Unjust World...

Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.



When I listen to people talking about how they are feeling at the moment, I am reminded of these words from Martin Luther King Jr. We are assailed with difficult news from around the world and from closer to home; we hear of people suffering in troubled places; we listen to reports of economic downturn. We are affected by what we know of other people's struggles, even if our own lives are relatively peaceful. In the midst of such gloom we can feel powerless and out of control. How easily despair can creep in to our individual and collective psyches. I find myself thinking at times *'oh what's the point, the world's in a mess, nothing ever improves.'*

It's at those moments that I need to be reminded of the improvements that have been made over the centuries and the possibility of further improvements ahead.

... let us hold on to the possibility of improvement

The future lies at first in our imagining and, by choosing to turn away from despair and to remain hopeful and committed to change, we make an important first step. We may not be able to make huge changes in our world but let's remember all the ways that we can make a difference and, whenever we can, make choices that will cause the least harm to others, choices that might even do some good.

Elsewhere in the newsletter you will read about our latest fundraising efforts that will be helping to improve educational provision for young people in Swaziland whose lives have been affected by HIV/AIDS. Essex Church has also become a Fairtrade Church, committed to buying fair trade products whenever they are available. These are small steps but looking at the smiles of farmers who are being fairly paid for their crops and of children who are getting the chance to attend school for the first time is remarkably cheering.

Rev. Sarah Tinker

In this Month's Newsletter...

* "New-U" course for new members at Essex Church * Launch of a new monthly walking group * "The Spiritual Bookshelf" – members recommend favourite spiritual books * GA Annual Meetings * "How I Came to Essex Church" - Deborah Moran * LDPA Congregational Leadership Course * "Thinking of India" by Gordon Deaville * Fairtrade Fortnight – Church Awarded Fairtrade Status * "Othona – the Sequel" by Jo Ridgers * "Epiphany?" by Will Lyons * GA election * and more...

Kensington Unitarians

At Essex Church (founded 1774), Notting Hill Gate

We are here to share our experiences, to learn from each other, to explore our diverse faiths, to welcome spiritual seekers and offer companionship on life's journey.

We meet for worship each Sunday at 11.00am. The format of the service varies, and usually includes music, singing, meditation, an address, an opportunity to share joys and concerns, and a programme for children. Our activities also include religious education and spirituality workshops, engagement groups on a variety of themes, meeting for fellowship, a regular chanting session, and quiet meditation. All are welcome to come and join us.

Contact our minister to discuss our unique ceremonies, including child naming services, weddings, blessings, and memorials, which are available to all. Many other groups share our church building. If you are interested in hiring one of our rooms for your own organisation or event please contact our wardens by telephone or email.



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Notting Hill Gate
London W8 4RT*

Office Telephone: 020 7221 6514

Email: info@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Web: www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk

GA Annual Meetings

Chester, 15th-18th April 2009

The 2009 Annual General Meetings of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches will be held at University College Chester, from Wednesday 15th April to Saturday 18th April.

The Annual Meetings are your opportunity to:

- Meet Unitarians from all over the UK
- Participate in decision-making
- Learn more about our community
- Join in worship and celebrations
- Share good times together

If you are interested in attending then speak to a member of the church committee for more information.

...a forthcoming course for new members at Essex Church...

“New-U”



**Thursdays 5th March, 19th March
and 2nd April from 7.00-8.45pm**

This 3 session course will be led by our minister Sarah Tinker and is open to everyone who is a member here at Essex Church or is thinking of becoming one.

It's designed primarily for people who feel new in some way - new to Kensington Unitarians perhaps, or new to Unitarianism or new to liberal religion or new to London or Britain. But anyone is welcome to come along as the course is mostly about getting to know one another better through conversation and activities.

How do we run Essex Church? What links are there with the wider Unitarian movement? What other activities are happening here in the UK and how do we find out more? What is important to us as liberal religious people? These are just some of the areas we will consider during these sessions.

The course is free to attend but we ask people to book a place by ringing Sarah on 0207 221 6514 or emailing sarah@kensington-unitarians.org.uk.

Stewarding and Coffee



Stewarding:

1st February:	Sachin Joshi
8th February:	Michaela von Britzke
15th February:	Debra Hinton
22nd February:	Doris Campbell

Coffee:

1st February:	Christine Joshi
8th February:	Julia Alden
15th February:	Juliet Edwards
22nd February:	John Hands

Please speak to Christine Joshi if you would be willing to help out with stewarding or coffee duties. This is a really easy way to get involved and help to support the life and work of our community.



“The Fabric of Diversity”

Sharing our Stories through Fibre and Stitch

Sunday 1st February and every Thursday
until 26th February (*inclusive*) from 2.00-5.00pm

Community Arts Project at Essex Church

A new community arts project will be taking place in Notting Hill Gate this winter. A series of textile art workshops will be held at Essex Church starting on the 7th December 2008. All are welcome - no prior knowledge or experience is required - and there will be a chance to get some basic instruction in felting at each session. It is not essential to commit to all of the sessions. However, you will probably benefit from planning to attend at least a few, so that you have enough time to make your own contribution to the project.

The intention is that we will make and decorate felt squares which represent our place in the local community and our varied connections in the wider world. At the end of the project these squares will be joined to make a large wall-hanging, which will be displayed as a public artwork, and an accompanying booklet will detail all the people who took part in its creation.

Please let us know if you are intending to come
as workshop places will be limited:

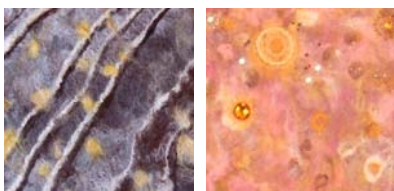
email arts@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

or leave a message with the church office: 020 7221 6514.

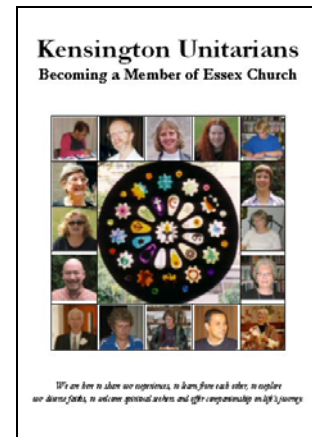
**There will be no charge to attend the sessions; however,
donations to help cover our costs are invited.**

*(suggested donation £3/£6/£9 per session
– a sliding scale according to your income)*

*This project has been generously supported by the
Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea's Arts Grant Scheme.*



Essex Church Membership



It's that time again... We have recently sent out Essex Church membership forms. The subscription rate remains unchanged for 2009 at £36 per year for full membership. We ask all members to re-affirm their membership annually by filling in this form and returning it with their subscription to the minister.

Feel free to speak to Sarah for more details about the Essex Church membership process or the benefits and responsibilities that membership entails.

Kensington Community Singers: A Friendly Choir-for-All

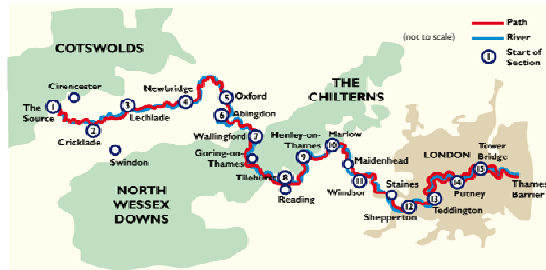


Sunday afternoons from 12.45-2.00pm

Our community choir is open to all – you don't need any qualifications except enthusiasm – everyone is welcome to come along and take part!

The sessions are great fun. Jen Hazel, our choir leader, has been teaching us a wide selection of songs and we are aiming towards a performance.

Donations to cover the cost of running the choir are invited (now £2/£4/£6 per choir session - a sliding scale according to your income).



Walks along the Thames Path

One of the pleasures of living in London is walking along the Thames Path. I am able to walk from Westminster to Windsor in one direction or to Tower Hill in the other direction. Although I have never attempted to walk all the way to Windsor, I have walked from Westminster to Putney, Kew to Richmond and Westminster to London Bridge and Tower Bridge in the other direction.

Although the River Thames has played an important role in the development of communities; such as Oxford, Windsor and London, it was only ever accessible to pleasure cruisers, narrow boats and barges used as transporting cargos to these communities. It was not until 1996 that the Thames Pathway was “inaugurated as a National Trail”, thus making it accessible to members of the general public. Now anyone can take a stroll along the Thames Path, on a summer’s evening or the more adventurous can walk the entire length of the Thames, (winter or summer) enjoying nature, buildings and the numerous cafes and restaurants along the path.

Sometime ago I acquired a book which outlined 25 circular walks along the Thames Pathway, from the Thames head to Greenwich. I have always wanted to explore some of these walks, but did not want to do this alone. So towards the latter part of November 2008, I discussed with Juliet, the possibility of doing one of these walks after Christmas. This seemed like a good opportunity to explore as well as walking off some of the excesses of Christmas. She suggested the January 3rd, this being her first available Saturday following the Festive Season. While Juliet and I were discussing the walk, Mary, Caroline and Deborah also expressed an interest. Thus seven members of Essex Church: Caroline, Jim, Michaela, Juliet, Deborah, Mary and I met at Hammersmith Station at 11.00am on the 3rd January, where we set out to explore Barnes and Fulham. This was a 6.5 kilometres (4 miles) walk with attractions such as Hammersmith Bridge, Wetland Centre, Fulham Palace Gardens and numerous pubs. However, arriving at Hammersmith Bridge, we failed to cross to the north side but continued along the west side, as it was such a beautiful sunny day and Michaela thought it was a good idea to walk in the sun. Although we did not follow the route outlined in the book, we did eventually arrive in Barnes where we duly had lunch in one of the pubs by the by the River. From Barnes, we walked to Kew which was a further 2 miles away, At Kew, Juliet, Mary and Deborah decided to stop for tea in the rather lovely cafe by station while Michaela, Caroline, Jim and I made our way home.

Although we did not follow the planned route we did however, manage to walk about 6.5 kilometres (4 miles). Overall it seems a good time was had by all and we have agreed to make this a regular monthly activity.



Walking Group: As a result we have agreed that this offers a good opportunity to start a monthly walking group. The plan is to explore Greenwich on our next venture. This is 6.5 kilometres (4 miles) starting and finishing at the Cutty Sark Gardens, beside Greenwich Pier (2 ½ hours depending how fast we walk). There are various attractions along this route such as; the Royal Naval College, Observatory, Maritime Museum, and riverside views. **We will be meeting at Cutty Sark DLR Station (Docklands Light Railway) at 10.30am, on the 7th February 2009.** It would also be helpful to know who will be joining us, so as to ensure that no one is left behind; in the likely event that someone is late. So do contact me or Michaela and let us know.

Doris Campbell

Photographs by Mary Spurr, Jim Blair and Caroline Blair



Songs and Silence for the Soul:

Chanting and Stillness at Essex Church



Sundays 8th February and 8th March
from 3.30 to 5.00pm

Suggested Donation: £2.00

An opportunity to sing chants from the world's faith traditions and to sit together in candlelit silence. All are welcome, no experience is necessary. A space in which to re-connect with yourself, one another and with whatever you hold to be divine.

Phone 020 7221 6514 for more information
or email sarah@kensington-unitarians.org.uk



Shatterbox Theatre Company

A play that uncovers the reality of sex trafficking
Movement directed by our own Angela Gasparetto

Four performances:

4th -7th February at 19:30-20.30

Pleasance Theatre, North Road, Islington

'Fair Trade' bears witness to the remarkable lives of two very different female survivors of the sex slave trade. The story of their journeys – from their separate home countries to London – is told in a powerfully honest and unsentimental way.

Tickets £10/£8 concessions
Box Office: 020 7609 1800

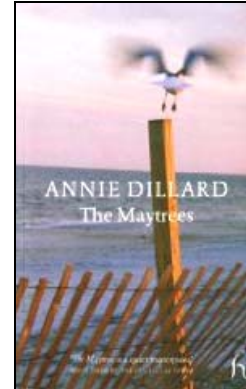
For more information: www.pleasance.co.uk

Reading Engagement Group

“The Maytrees”

by Annie Dillard

Thursday 26th February, 7.00-9.00pm



The reading engagement group's next conversation will be about “The Maytrees” by Annie Dillard. This book was chosen by Jane Blackall and will be the focus of our next group on **Thursday 26th February**.

Information from Amazon UK:

“It began when Lou Bigelow and Toby Maytree first met. He was back home in Provincetown after the war. Maytree first saw her on a bicycle. A red scarf, white shirt, skin clean as eggshell, wide eyes and mouth, shorts. She stopped and leaned on a leg to talk to someone on the street. She laughed, and her loveliness caught his breath. In 1940s Provincetown, on the tip of Cape Cod, poet Toby Maytree falls in love with Lou Bigelow at first sight. His slow courtship gradually wins her over, and so begins a love story that lasts decades. Surrounded by bohemian friends, living in Toby's shack on the dunes, the two marry, have a child. But when a friend first comes between them, then unexpectedly propels them back into one another's lives, they must each renegotiate what it means to love.”

Information from The Observer:

“Annie Dillard is best known for her nature writing, in particular the influential Pilgrim at Tinker Creek. Now in her sixties, she has returned to fiction with the story of Lou and Toby Maytree, a bookish, eccentric couple who retreat to a shack on the dunes of Cape Cod, united in their search for a place beyond 'the dim world of time and stuff'. When an unexpected turn of events disrupts their peaceful existence, they are forced to reassess their notions of love, with extraordinary consequences. Toby's staunch determination to die with dignity, and his rueful realisation that his new-found theory on beauty 'required - like most, he suspected - more thought' makes a profound case against complacency. A ravishing, understated exploration of the complexities of love and the inevitability of death.”

All are welcome to join the book group. Please do try to read the books before the meeting if you're planning to come along. It would also aid discussion if you pick out favourite passages to share. Members of the book group take turns in choosing books so we read a wide variety of material.

Creativity Engagement Group

“Fimo Beads”

Thursday 12th February, 7.00-9.00pm



This month we will be ‘playing’ with Fimo. This is a material, a bit like plasticine, that can be moulded into small items. After moulding it has to be baked in the oven and can be decorated. We have found that if they are strongly patterned the rubber stamps used for stamping can be used for decoration. If you have any rubber stamps please bring them along. We are planning to make beads and brooches but those with lots of imagination are welcome to try their hands at other small objects. The cost for the evening will be £2 each.

Patricia Walker-Hesson

As usual, if this particular activity doesn’t take your fancy, you are most welcome to bring your own crafts along, and simply sit with us in good company for the evening. There are usually biscuits and other goodies to eat too...

If you would like to know more about the creativity engagement group please do talk to Jane Blackall or Patricia Walker-Hesson about our activities. Photographs of work from several of the projects we’ve worked on over the last few years can be found on our church website: www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk/creativity.html



March Newsletter Deadline



The deadline for submitting items for the March issue is **Sunday 15th February**. Please send items (such as poems, artwork, quotes, articles, notices, etc...) to Jane Blackall or any committee member before this date.

Thank you!!!

Ageing Well Group

Tuesday Afternoons at Essex Church



Starting on Tuesday 27th January, and running every Tuesday afternoon, the local borough's Sixty Plus Group is running an ageing well group here at Essex Church, which will focus on memory skills, as well as on wider issues of keeping well in later years. The sessions will be fun and sociable and everybody is welcome.

Phone Lak on 020 8969 9105 to book a place or to find out about other Sixty Plus health and well-being activities.

Sixty plus website: www.sixtyplus.org.uk

Nia Technique



Holistic Movement Sessions:

Sessions led by Sonya Leite

Sundays 8th February and 8th March
from 2.00-3.00pm

A regular Nia class is continuing here at Essex Church, on the second Sunday of every month from 2-3pm (*usually the same day as “Songs and Silence for the Soul”*). The cost to take part will be £7.00 per session (£5.00 concessions and members of the congregation).

Nia is holistic movement for body and soul. It is an expressive movement practice promoting fitness, creativity and wellbeing. Fusing dance, yoga, tai chi and martial arts, Nia provides a holistic workout and leaves you feeling energised, relaxed and centred. It suits any level of fitness, age and experience, working from where you are now.

Nia's barefoot, grounded approach maximizes body efficiency and teaches you to move consciously in a gentler way. Dance movements are mixed with subtle therapeutic suggestions and visualization techniques that help you develop awareness and heighten sensation. The result is a fusion of movement styles that is free and liberating.

The Spiritual Bookshelf

#1: 'Simple Abundance' by Sarah Ban Breathnach

This is the first of a new series of articles in the newsletter where members and friends of the congregation tell us about a spiritual or religious book which has special meaning or value for them. Look out for future book recommendations throughout the course of 2009.

There is a bookshop called Watkins situated in a small courtyard in St. Martin's Lane. When you walk in for the first time you will probably be overwhelmed by spiritual books take from all religions or none. In our monthly Thursday evening Book Group we have often, unwittingly, read many spiritual passages from novelists, biographers, poets, travellers and others – Terry Tempest Williams and Barbara Kingsolver are but two who come to mind and these are the kind of books I mostly enjoy reading.

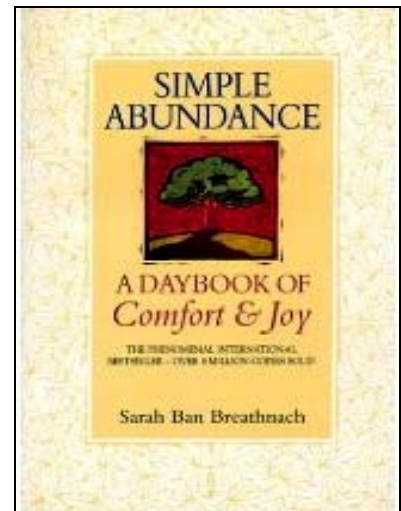
Over the past years I've wandered down many spiritual paths, predominantly Buddhist, Sufi and Christian, all of which I have loved and learnt from, but too many do tend to give me spiritual indigestion and it was with sheer joy that I came across the book I want to say a few words about here.

The book is called 'Simple Abundance' by Sarah Ban Breathnach, a book that I return to time and time again. Whilst sitting in a restaurant the author suffered an accident which left her disabled and unable to continue her highly successful career for many months and during this time she took stock of her life and discovered that what she truly wanted was to live differently and search for her true authentic self. One of the people who greatly inspired her was Helen Keller, especially this paragraph –

“Use your eyes as if tomorrow you would be stricken blind ... hear the strains of voices, the song of the bird, the mighty strains of an orchestra, as if you would be stricken deaf tomorrow. Touch each object as if tomorrow your tactile sense would fail. Smell the perfume of the flowers, taste with relish each morsel as if tomorrow you could never smell and taste again ... Make the most of every sense; glory in all the facets of pleasure and beauty which the world reveals to you.”

Sarah Ban Breathnach's book does all these things and I hope you will find as much pleasure in reading it as I did.

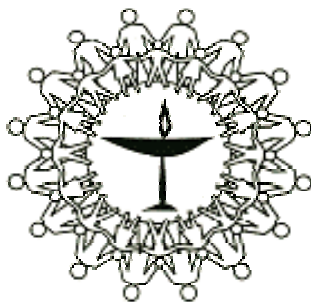
Betty Evans



Sharing Circle

Sunday 1st February, 12.45-1.45pm

Sunday 1st March, 12.45-1.45pm



Come and join us after the service, on the 1st Sunday of each month, for a sharing circle facilitated by Jo Ridgers. Bring a sandwich to eat and something for us to enjoy together - some music, a poem, a picture, a photograph, or a beautiful object - something that you would like to tell others more about. All are welcome.

Yoga Classes at Essex Church

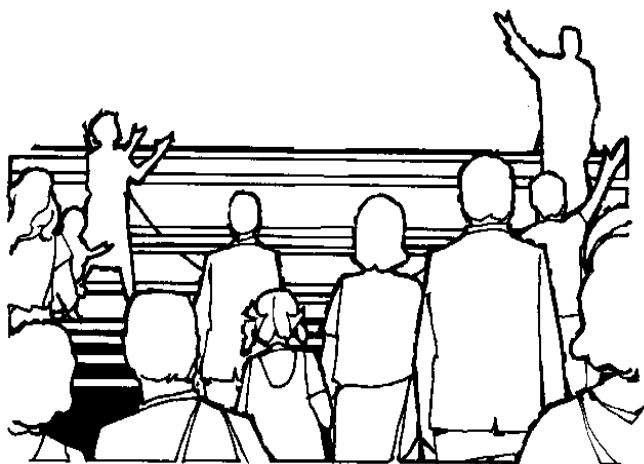


Well known yoga teacher and osteopath John Stirk is starting new classes here at Essex Church on Tuesday evenings from 5.15 to 7.00pm and from 7.30 to 9.15pm.

Contact John on 01323 422 049 / john.stirk@tiscali.co.uk for more information and to arrange to attend a class to see if it is right for you. Cost £15 per class.

Lynne Pinette continues to run her Astanga yoga classes here at Essex Church on weekday mornings. Contact Jenny, our warden, for more information.

LDPA Courses in Congregational Leadership



Following the success last Spring when this course was offered for the first time the Course in Congregational Leadership will be offered again in Spring 2009. This four session course is designed for anyone who wants to develop their involvement in their local congregation at whatever level - in leading worship, in running courses, in organisational development, or in just deepening their own understanding of church life.

Each session will gather at 10:30 am and run until 4:00 pm and ideally participants will attend all four sessions. There is no charge. To register, please contact the District Minister, Rev. David Usher on (01732) 465248.

Saturday 14th March

Leading Worship, Sevenoaks, led by David Usher

Saturday 4th April

Congregational Life, Sevenoaks, led by David Usher

Saturday 25th April

Rites of Passage, Croydon, led by Jane Barton

Saturday 16th May

Leading Small Groups, Islington, led by Jim Robinson

Graduates from the first course who happened to miss any of these four sessions, or who want a refresher are welcome to attend. So popular was the first course, and so inspired by learning from each other were its participants, that there is to be a two session Graduates' Course in the Spring. The sessions are:

Saturday 7th February

Understanding Unitarianism, Horsham, led by David Usher

Saturday 30th May

Any Questions, Lewisham, led by David Usher

'Found on the Web'

Poems from the National Alliance for
Mental Health, Santa Cruz, California

Arguing

Arguing is oh,
such a tedious task.
It leads nowhere,
And does so quite fast.

Revenge

Revenge does not,
belong to any man.
When one thinks it's his,
It returns back again.

Inspiration

Inspiration is fleeting,
Catch it while you can.
Take it were it leads you,
Before you grasp at sand.

Pain

Pain is my constant companion,
It goes where ever I go.
It very rarely leaves me,
Even when I go to and fro.

Loneliness

I am a lonely man.
Lonely for the feminine touch.
I need loving and affection,
I wish I had too much.

Lotus Love

My heart leapt three times today
I wonder if she noticed.
My heart leapt for a beautiful woman today,
I wish I drove a Lotus.

Love is a Reason

Love is a reason to live,
It's makes ones life full.
Love gives purpose to life,
when nothing else will.

Giving Love

Love when little comes back,
'Tis better to give than receive.
If everyone was full of love,
None would be in need.

by David Hacker
submitted by Will Lyons

Thinking of India and Those Who Live There:

Our thoughts go out to victims of violence.

My thoughts have been with the people of Mumbai, after the violence that recently took place there. I had stayed at the Taj Hotel near the end of two City Lit study tours of India in the early 1970s. We toured by train and stayed at less salubrious places, coming to the Taj Hotel to "recover", as well as make it our base for Bombay as Mumbai was called then. The Hotel itself was very beautiful and destroying it is an act of absolute vandalism.

The Indian study tours are highlights of my life. Studying India I was hit by the cacophony of sounds, visual chaos and the bipartition of urban and rural, rich and obvious poverty, old and new, all coexisting beside a diversity of religions, many languages and a powerful heritage from diverse ruling classes. I was attracted by the peaceful coexistence at that time.

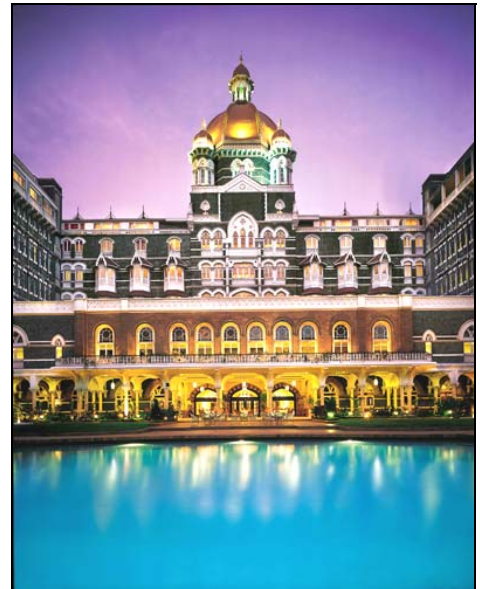
We viewed majestic temples, mosques and palaces including; at Varanasi, The Sankatmochan - shrine of Monkey God Hanuman, with monkeys on the loose inside; at Khajuraho, 22 spiral structured Hindu (and some Jain) temples not destroyed when the Muslims came in c. 11-1400, with statues on the outside showing the way of sexual life in mediaeval times - and the highlight of the buildings at Agra, the superb Taj Mahal - of which no picture can do justice.

We viewed many Hindu and other festivals, traditional Indian dramatisations involving heroes, villains, gods and demons, all with a tabla, sometimes sitar, and soloist accompaniment and the highlight down south in Kerala, the Kathakli spectacular dance drama characterised by a complex language of mime and highly stylised and colourful make up that resembles a mask. If Kathakli dancers come to the UK and perform near you, I commend them to you. At the time of the tours I was Business Chair of Puppet Theatre '74, an international festival at London's Cochrane Theatre, and delivered in person the invitation to the Puppet Theatre in Madurai, then Madras to take part.

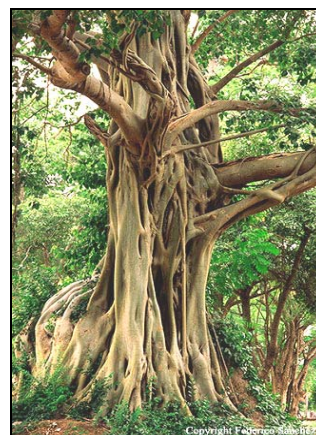
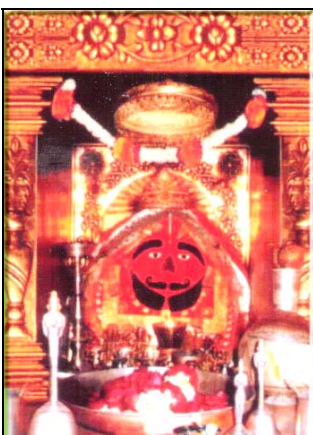
We visited Samarth where Gautama Buddha was enlightened and gave his first sermon - explaining the Four Noble Truths about the cause and cessation of suffering and the eight fold path of right understanding - and saw in a temple amongst the buildings there beautiful frescoes of the Buddha's life and his temptations beneath the Bodi tree under which he was enlightened. We also saw the Bodi tree, Bodi meaning enlightenment, itself, or is it a tree grown from a sapling of the original tree (?), below which the Buddha was enlightened. I was sorry to read in The Guardian in 2007 that this tree was decaying. Hopefully, the Buddhists are doing something about it. And we took in much, much more.

Wherever we went in India nearly all the people had a smile for us and we were made most welcome under our Hindu tutor, Mr Adwita Ganguly. Today there are many quality photographs of and much information about India on the Worldwide Web, which did not exist when I went there. Naturally, my thoughts go out to all people affected whenever violence occurs anywhere in the world. But when they come from places I know, they are fortified by my experience.

May candles be lit and other action taken for the people of Mumbai.



Gordon Deaville





Multifaith Calendar



❁ February – Losar – Buddhist

This New Year festival is celebrated in Tibet, and often Nepal, and includes the rededication of the country to Buddhism. The miracles performed by the Buddha at Sravasti are celebrated.

✝ 2nd February – Presentation of the Lord (Catholic) / The Presentation of Christ in the Temple (Anglican)

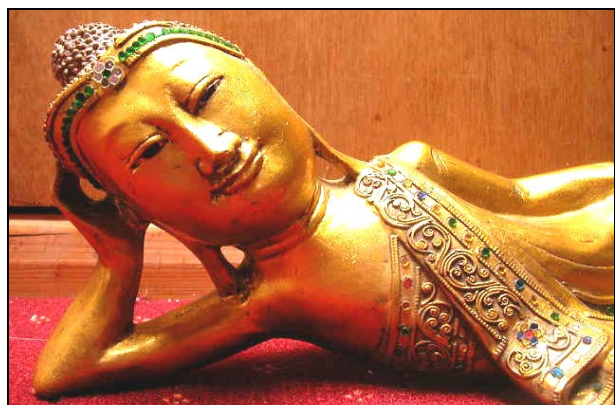
The presentation of Jesus in the Temple at a few weeks old, as recorded in Luke's gospel, is celebrated today. The day is often known as Candlemas from the tradition of congregations holding lighted candles during the celebration in church.

2nd February – Imbolc – Pagan/Wiccan

Imbolc (pronounced Imolk), also known as Oimele, was one of the cornerstones of the Celtic calendar. As winter stores of food were getting low Imbolc rituals were performed to harness divine energy that would ensure a steady supply of food until the harvest six months later. Imbolc is still a special time for Pagans. As people who are deeply aware of what is going on in the natural world they recognise that there is strength in cold as well as heat, death as well as life. Rituals and activities might include the making of candles, planting spring flowers, reading poetry and telling stories.

❁ 8th February – Parinirvana – Buddhist

Mahayanists mark the final passing away from this world of Gautama Buddha at Kushinagara, India, at the age of 80. Pure Land Buddhists refer to it as Nirvana Day.



❁ 9th February – Tu B'Shevat – Jewish

Tu B'Shevat is a minor Jewish festival celebrating the New Year for trees. Jewish tradition marks the 15th of Shevat as the day when the sap in the trees begins to rise heralding the beginning of Spring. It is customary to plant trees and eat fruit from Israel.

❁ 23rd February – Mahashivratri (Great Shiva Night) – Hindu

Every night of the new moon is dedicated to Shiva but this one is particularly important, being the night on which Shiva is said to perform the cosmic dance from creation to destruction. Many Hindus will fast and prayers are focused on Shiva and his shrines and statues.

✝ 24th February – Shrove Tuesday – Christian

Commonly known as Pancake Day, this is the day before the start of Lent. Traditionally, it is a day for repentance and absolution in preparation for Lent ('shrive' means to receive or make confession). Pancakes were originally made to use up all the rich foods, such as butter and eggs, before Lent. In other parts of the world people celebrate Mardi Gras by holding carnivals.



✝ 25th February – Ash Wednesday – Christian

Ash Wednesday marks the first day of Lent, the forty days (not counting Sundays) that lead up to Easter. On Ash Wednesday some churches hold special services where Christian believers are marked with a cross of ash to show their desire to correct the wrongs in their lives.

✝ 25th February – 12th April – Lent – Christian

Lent is a time of fasting and discipline in preparation for Easter. As early as the second century CE many Christians were to be found spending time fasting before Easter, and over the next few centuries the time spent fasting increased; this was probably connected to remembering the forty days Jesus spent fasting at the start of his ministry. The word comes from an Anglo-Saxon word for Spring. It is also related to the word 'lengthen'.

❁ 27th – Birthday of Sri Ramakrishna – Hindu

Sri Ramakrishna, teacher and mystic was born in 1833, and founded the Ramakrishna Mission and the Ramakrishna Vedanta movement. Swami Vivekananda, his disciple, formalised his teachings into a philosophical structure.

Our Warden's Column

What's On in Our Busy Building...

2009 started very cold, so naturally the church heating decided it would be a good moment to get temperamental, with 4 out of 6 not working at one point. Luckily, a silver-lining of still having builders on site, was that they were able to repair them for us: first temporarily, now we hope permanently.



Despite these problems, Christmas still felt like a magical time, with the Church filled with fairy lights and candles for the Christmas Eve service and a beautiful tree that Sarah had brought down from Sheffield. Even decorated the half-finished framing in the disabled toilet had baubles hanging from it.

Apart from August, Christmas & New Year is the other quiet time of year for the Church in terms of outside bookings, so we took the opportunity to have the wooden floor sanded and re-varnished. This has really brightened the upstairs spaces and we hope to keep it in good condition as long as possible by being very careful to lift furniture rather than drag piles of chairs and tables over it.

A new yoga group has started in the Church Worship Space on Tuesday evenings. It's run by John Stirk and based on osteopathy and psychology. Classes start at 5.15 and 7.30 and there's more information on his website: www.johnstirk.com. Another new group is being run by Sixty Plus, a charity that works with older people. It's on Tuesday afternoons, 2-3pm, starting on 27th January and has a focus on exercising memory. Our long-standing groups are also continuing their regular activities, with the Alister Hardy Society "Interpreting Religious Experience" at 3pm on the 29th January, and the Beit Klal synagogue celebrating Tu B'shvat on Sunday 8th February.

I was away over New Year at a dance retreat in Germany which I enjoyed very much, but it's also nice to be back and continuing to wrestle with the practical difficulties of running such a well-used (and well-loved) building.

May 2009 be as full of positive change as 2008 – and of valued continuity. Happy New Year to all.

Jenny Moy



"I don't think we have to believe in 'God' to lead a healthy, happy, spiritually fulfilled life. But we do have to pay attention to the reality which the 'word' God has traditionally pointed to. You know, my colleague, Forrest

Church, at All Souls Unitarian in Manhattan, always likes to say, "God is not God's real name." God is a nickname for a reality far beyond our naming. For our experience of being sustained and transformed by something larger than ourselves. The word God is shorthand for the values we hold dear. Love. Life. Freedom. God is the answer our ancestors gave to some of life's important questions. Where did I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going? As people of faith, we can choose to use a different word, but we can't afford to ignore the experiences, the values and the answers that God has traditionally stood for.

A lot of people believe that because Unitarian Universalism places a heavy emphasis on religious freedom that here, God is optional, that anything goes. I know this because people come up to me and sometimes they'll say: "The thing I like about being a Unitarian is that I can believe whatever I want." Now most of us, when we let that phrase slip, don't really mean it the way it sounds. After all, would we really want to belong to a church where anyone could believe whatever he or she wanted? Is religious belief so unimportant that anything goes?"

Rev. Robert Hardies (UU Minister)

Read the rest of the sermon online at:
www.all-souls.org/sermons/20020303.htm

Religion on the BBC

'Around the World in 80 Faiths'



This is an 8-part series currently showing on BBC on Friday nights at 9pm. Anglican vicar Peter Owen Jones explores the astonishing diversity of the world's religions as he travels around the globe, observing and taking part in the most important rituals of 80 of the world's faiths. It is a rather rapid whirl around a selection of religious practices but I have been enjoying it so far. All episodes will be viewable via the BBC iPlayer online until the end of February 2009. See www.bbc.co.uk/80faiths.

'Belief' with Joan Bakewell

There has also been an interesting series of programmes on Radio 3 in which Joan Bakewell explores areas of belief with artists, thinkers and other public figures. Although the run has now finished it is possible to read transcripts of all the interviews online:

www.bbc.co.uk/religion/programmes/belief/

The final programme of the series featured Tim Winter (alternatively Abdal Hakim Murad), a lecturer in Islamic Studies and chaplain at Cambridge University, whose journey from Christianity to Islam was via Unitarianism.

Universal Spiritual Gatherings at Essex Church



Run by graduates of the Interfaith Seminary these monthly Spiritual Gatherings are worship with a difference and this year feature guests from particular faiths. Hosted here at Essex Church, it is lovely to see our beautiful worship space put to such good use, with chanting, silence, music, prayer and inspiration.

Here are some dates for your diaries:

Friday evenings 6.35 for 6.45 to 8.15pm

13th February with Hindu puja

6th March with the Beit Klal group,
the Female Presence in Jewish Sabbat

10th April with Dances of Universal Peace

8th May (theme TBC)

12th June with Sikh tabla player and chants

10th July with Jason Chan,
Master of Taoist Sacred Arts

Donations are asked for, to cover costs.



Taking Liberties

The British Library's free exhibition on the
900-year struggle for Britain's freedoms and rights



Runs every day until 1st March 2009

We take our rights for granted. Free speech. A free press. The rule of law. The power to vote in those who make the laws and spend our taxes. And the power to vote them out.

These rights didn't simply happen. They were hard won, the product of hundreds of years of debate, struggle, bloodshed and war. Many people died for them: heroes, villains, and some who were both. Nor are these rights ours forever. They can be changed or removed, and at various times in our history, they have been.

The British Library's exhibition uncovers the roots of British democracy over a period of more than 900 years.

- See iconic documents that paved the way for liberty and democracy, many of them rarely displayed, from Magna Carta to the Good Friday Agreement.
- Engage with lavish computer interactives that compare your views on liberty and freedom with everyone else's.
- Take part in our series of outstanding events with top speakers who address today's hottest political debates, such as human rights, ID cards, and detention without charge.
- Inspire your students with learning workshops on history and citizenship.

For more information see the website: www.bl.uk

Exhibition recommended by Betty Evans

Bodywork Sessions:

Available on Mondays here at Essex Church between 10.00am - 4.00pm

Using a combination of massage, aromatherapy and craniosacral therapy, Fiona Watson (ITEC dip.) can provide individual sessions to meet each client's unique requirements. For full details please phone Fiona on 07960 758068.



Fair Trade Fortnight

23rd February – 8th March 2009



Two billion people – a third of humanity – still survive on less than \$2 a day. Unfair trade rules keep them in poverty, but they face the global challenges of food shortages and climate change too. Fairtrade is a people's movement for change that aims to tip the balance of trade in favour of poor producers. We all need Fairtrade more than ever and we all have the power to create positive change for people and planet.

Website for more information: www.fairtrade.org.uk



'Fair Trade Church' Status

What it means for members of Essex Church

We have just been awarded the status of Fair Trade Church. This means, amongst other things, that we have pledged to take the following steps as a congregation:

- Use Fairtrade tea and coffee after services and in all meetings for which you have responsibility.
- Move forward on using other Fairtrade products such as sugar, biscuits and fruit.
- Promote Fairtrade during Fairtrade Fortnight and during the year through events, worship and other activities whenever possible.

We will also ask other groups who share our church building to support these steps as much as possible.



A Unitarian Viewpoint in the Guardian



You might be interested to read this letter, from Unitarian minister Rev. John Harley, which appeared in the Guardian in late December...

Polly Toynbee declares (*Comment, 23 December*) that each of the world faiths "believes it has the one and only divinely revealed truth and often fights to the death to prove it". Yet I understand that one main teaching of Sikhism is respect for all the world religions; that

an important principle of Buddhism is non-violence; and that Jainism upholds a reverence for all living things. She says "there is no emotional or spiritual deficiency in rejecting religions that infantilise the imagination with impossible beliefs". I agree, yet many mystics, from a variety of religions, encourage full exploration of the imagination, which they see as being deeply rooted in the human soul. Jesus's parables were beautifully crafted to enable the listener the space to find their own ethical signposts.

Maybe it is more valuable to observe the actions of real people and to try and make a distinction between those who use religion to oppress, discriminate and control others; and those countless individuals across the globe who approach religious ideas and stories with all their humanity intact as a way of making sense of this strange and inspiring life, and in finding meaning and the vision to live.

Instead of polarising secularists and believers, let's focus on the difference between those who apply open-minded curiosity and love in understanding this world, and those whose closed and fearful minds, religious and non-religious, believe that their truth is God-given or scientifically superior.

Rev John Harley
(Unitarian minister), London

In the Guardian on 27th December



"I am convinced that the universe is under the control of a loving purpose and that in the struggle for righteousness man has cosmic companionship. Behind the harsh appearances of the world there is a benign power. To say God is personal is not to make him an object among other objects or to attribute to him the finiteness and limitations of human personality; it is to take what is finest and noblest in our consciousness and affirm its personal existence in him..."

Martin Luther King



Epiphany?

'Remember your epiphanies on green oval leaves, deeply deep, copies to be sent if you died to all the great libraries of the world,

including Alexandria? Someone was to read them there after a few thousand years....'

'Stephen Daedalus' in Ulysses by James Joyce

If you consult your Mulifaith Calendar, you'll see that Tuesday 6th January is the Feast of the Epiphany (Twelfth Night), a Christian holiday celebrating the visit of the Magi to the infant Jesus. James Joyce, the Irish author, defined 'epiphanies' in secular terms as sudden, dramatic and startling moments which seemed to have heightened significance.

My epiphany as such a moment was in a hotel in the suburbs of Budapest. I was watching BBC World on satellite TV when the news came over about the lifting of the school siege in Beslan. A group of armed militants, demanding an end to the Second Chechen War, took more than 1,100 people (including some 777 children hostage on September 1, 2004, at School Number One in the town of Beslan, North Ossetia-Alania, an autonomous republic in the North Caucasus region of the Russian Federation. On the third day of the standoff, Russian security forces stormed the building using tanks, rockets and other heavy weapons. A series of explosions shook the school, followed by a fire which engulfed the building and a chaotic gunbattle between the hostage-takers and Russian security forces. Ultimately, at least 334 hostages were killed, including 186 children. Hundreds more were wounded or reported missing.

My belief in a deity, which had always been fairly tenuous, completely dissolved in that instant and since then (I subsequently left the Anglican Church) I have classed myself as a humanist and sceptic. If there is a 'God', how is this sort of atrocity permitted by him/her/it? I refuse to accept that there is some ethereal, all powerful, all-loving 'being' who created this wonderful universe in we find ourselves, quite accidentally.

This year marks 150 years of Charles Darwin's publication of 'The Origin of Species' and I am afraid that the human race still has a great deal of evolving to do before it sees that many of our divisions are based on spurious religious ideas and adherence to (man-made) dogma.

Will Lyons

Have a Laugh...

Betty Evans writes: "I know this is a church newsletter. I know it's not quite the usual thing you might expect to find on these erudite pages. I know I may be excommunicated for such frivolity. But hang on – it is funny (isn't it?) and it is a dark and gloomy time of the year so I'm risking it. Well it made me laugh!"

This comes from the City Spy section of the Evening Standard.

"Last week was my birthday. I went downstairs for breakfast, hoping my wife would be pleasant and say happy birthday, and possibly have a small present for me. As it turned out, she barely said good morning, let alone happy birthday. I thought 'well, that's marriage for you, but the kids, they will remember'. My kids came bounding downstairs to breakfast and didn't say a word. So when I left for the office, I felt pretty low.

As I walked into my office, my secretary Jane said 'Good morning boss, and by the way happy birthday.' At least someone had remembered. I worked until one o'clock when Jane knocked on my door and said 'You know, it's such a beautiful day outside, and it is your birthday, what do you say we go out to lunch, just you and me?' I said 'Thanks, Jane, that's the greatest thing I've heard all day. Let's go!

We went to lunch. But we didn't go where we normally would go. She chose instead a quiet bistro with a private table. We had two martinis each, and I enjoyed the meal tremendously. On the way back to the office, Jane said 'You know, it's such a beautiful day. We don't need to go straight back to the office, do we?' I responded 'I guess not. What do you have in mind?' She said 'Let's drop by my apartment, it's just around the corner.'

After we arrived at her apartment, Jane turned to me and said 'Boss, if you don't mind, I'm going to step into the bedroom for a moment. I'll be right back.' 'OK,' I nervously replied. She went into the bedroom and, after a couple of minutes, she came out carrying a huge birthday cake... and followed by my wife, my kids and dozens of my friends and co-workers, all singing Happy Birthday.

And I just sat there. On the couch... naked."

Howard Hague sent in the following item which he spotted in the Dover Newsletter:

An elderly man wanders up to the White House on a sunny day in late January. "I would like to go in and meet with President Bush" he says to the marine on duty. "Sir, Mr Bush is no longer president and no longer resides here," the officer tells him. "Okay", says the elderly man, and he walks away.

The following day, the same elderly man approaches the White House and says to the same marine, "I would like to go in and meet with President Bush." The marine is patient and replies, "Sir, as I said yesterday, Mr Bush is no longer president and no longer resides here." The elderly man thanks him again and walks away.

On the third day, it happens again. The same man approaches the same marine. "I would like to meet with President Bush," he says once more. This time the marine is agitated. "I've told you already that Mr Bush is no longer the president and no longer resides here. Don't you understand?!"

"Oh, I understand," says the elderly man, "I just love hearing it!" "See you tomorrow," says the marine.

Hucklow Summer School

For Personal and Leadership Development

“The Journey”



15th to 22nd August 2009
Great Hucklow, Derbyshire

The core purpose of Hucklow Summer School is religious education: we focus on matters of religion and spirituality and intend to draw out and develop the potential of all participants. We aim to provide a balanced programme, offering a rich mix of activities for both the heart and head, and a variety of optional sessions showcasing a range of worthwhile activities which participants might “take home” and try out in their own congregations and communities. We also ensure that there are plenty of opportunities for relaxed fellowship and fun during the week. Summer School brings fellow Unitarians together and allows them to get to know each other deeply and form lasting connections.

Theme Talks: “To Be a Pilgrim”

with Rev. Sarah Tinker and Fellow Travellers

A Choice of Morning Workshops:

“Gems for the Journey”

with Linda Hart and Patricia Walker-Hesson

“In Whose Shoes...? Finding Your Own Feet”

with Michael Dadson and Alison Thursfield

“Travellers’ Tales: Harvesting the Stories of our Lives”

with Sheena Gabriel and John Harley

“Sole to Soul: Walking as Spiritual Practice”

with Mel Prideaux and Maggie Davies

Children’s Programme

with Claire Maddocks and Eloise Williamson

Basic Cost for Adults (shared room): £290

Applications are due by 10th April 2009

Please speak to Patricia Walker-Hesson or Jane Blackall for more information and application forms.

National Nest Box Week

14th – 21st February 2009



The aim of National Nest Box Week is to encourage everyone to put up nest boxes to help our breeding birds and other wildlife. It is organised by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO).

The natural nest sites on which many of our bird species depend, such as holes in trees and buildings, are fast disappearing as gardens and woods are ‘tidied’ and old houses are repaired. Since National Nest Box Week was launched in 1997 thousands of enthusiastic naturalists across the UK have put up boxes to compensate.

The BTO provide free advice about building or buying nestboxes and choosing an appropriate spot to site them.

For more information: www.bto.org/nnbw/



“I live in the countryside, and often when I am out walking I am struck by the country practice of waving. Car after car passes me on the road; the occupants wave and smile. I wave and smile back. Whether we think about it or not, this little practice of waving on a country road is a way of building spiritual connections and spreading love. Don't we feel good about the mini-relationships we build with our little waves? How nice and kind that family looked smiling at me. How lovely the kids in the station wagon seem with their faces pressed against the back window, waving and smiling. Even the family dog is waving his tail. We feel seen and acknowledged by these little rituals; we feel connected to our fellow travellers.

The great Indian sage Shantideva, whose name means "Gentle Master," lived in the 7th and 8th century. He spent his life teaching others how to see the equality of self and other, and to act from this belief. He said that if you raise even one hand in a gesture of reverence to anything or anyone, all the Buddhas clap, rejoice, and rain down blessings. Shantideva lived in a world where people regularly put two hands together and bowed. Yet he taught that even one hand could make a difference. In a practical sense, raising a hand in reverence means that we must put down our weapons.”

Lama Surya Das

Othona: The Sequel

Thursday 23rd December

Well, here I am again!

The journey this year wasn't at all difficult; in fact it was easy. However, it wasn't all plain sailing. I spent the early part of the day feeling quite anxious. I came down to Bridport yesterday, and stayed over with a friend I hadn't seen since the sudden and tragic death of my friend/her ex-lover. Without Margaret we were into new territory, making a new friendship, one that doesn't include Margaret. Challenging stuff. I slept on her brand new drop-down-arms-at-both-ends sofa and had a strange night, waking every couple of hours so I began the day feeling a bit weird. Marion left at 10am to travel to Derby leaving me to wait for the 4.50pm bus to Burton Bradstock, to Othona, to my second Christmas 'retreat'.

I loved being here last year so I couldn't quite put my finger on why I was feeling anxious. I concluded it was a case of... "can the magic be reconstructed?" mixed with the Margaret factor and not least the lack of good rest. I'm hopeless if I don't sleep! Also, I didn't fancy that long walk from the wrong bus stop again, however uplifting it turned out to be last year! (I wasn't certain I would remember where to get off the bus.)

I left Marion's gorgeous little one-up-one-down cottage (so dinky...so contained and cosy) at 4pm and walked the short distance to the main street in Bridport. My main intention to be there so early was to buy chocolate! Dark chocolate! I LOVE it! I stocked up at Woolworths. I can hardly bear to buy things there; it's too sad. 99 years of Woolies. I worked on the sweet and gardening counters as a teenager in Rye, East Sussex in the late 1960's. The wooden floors- the counters with the glass dividers- the metal price stands which fitted neatly on the top and the uniforms! Remember the green nylon (I think!) wrap-over one-size-fits-all dreadful uniforms?. We stood in the middle of 4 counters, able to serve people on any one of the display areas. It's all high-tech now of course... high tech that can't save it from the chop! Sad, yes, but not enough to stop me from buying the chocolate! Nope! Harlot that I am, I bought TWO bars... to last the duration AND what's more I've already eaten half a bar! (I'm nervous remember!!).

At the bus stop outside the Nationwide (I'm sure it was called The Portman last year) I was fascinated to see a woman looking at the bus timetable... for the X53 at the very top of the board, the same as me...with a TORCH!! It was 4.40pm and the light had gone. How incredibly forward thinking and practical I thought. I was full of admiration, I'd never have thought of that. I told her. We struck up a mini bond and had a conversation that lasted from the bus stop to her stop half an hour later. Isn't it just amazing how much you can hear and tell in those connections! I learned that she's funny, very quick-witted, that's she's 74 and thinks Burton Bradstock should be renamed Boring Bradstock and that she's tempted to go out at the dead of night with a can of red paint and a paintbrush to tell this to the world. When the magistrate reprimands her s/he will realise just how right, how accurate she is and will let her

A Christmas Diary from Jo Ridgers in Bridport



off! I LOVE feisty women... the ones who will certainly wear a red hat with a purple coat and spend her pension on butter! (thankyou Jenny Joseph) She doesn't like Christmas carols because they make her feel very lonely. Singing in big groups has that effect on her because it reminds her of what she hasn't got and would like to have i.e. a community of friends and a feeling of belonging. She doesn't 'fit' anywhere because she doesn't do small talk, she finds it a complete waste of time. I sympathise. She needs things to have some meaning she said. Indeed! I tell her about KU and Othona. A visit to Othona is far more likely and I tell her the phone number which I'm certain she'll remember even though she has no pen or paper!

So here I am... Othona a year later.

I climb down from the brightly lit bus with my bag-on-wheels into the heavy traffic of the coast road from Bridport to Weymouth. I take advantage of a temporary lull and quickly cross the road. It's very dark indeed so I have to wait for my eyes to adjust, to become accustomed to the change in light. It happens quite slowly. As I stand in the driveway the lights from the chapel slowly make their presence felt in my eyes and my heart. I can feel the warmth of the smile of recognition filling me. Awwwwww! The nervousness is already diminishing as I approach the house, the twinkling lights giving the buildings form. My eyes have adjusted so I push open the front door. Last year the building was lit by candles which I thought was for the magical effect but it was actually because there was a power cut! This year the door is held open for me by a little boy who I recognize as Thomas. Here he is... here indeed are we!... a year older, both of us. We spent last Christmas together and will do the same this year. Two people... strangers... having a shared experience.

My nervousness has gone now. I'm fed, with food and with warmth; we've had a 'welcome' in the beautiful chapel... the one that captured my heart and imagination 18 months ago... lit with candles and the 'circle of friends' pottery ring with a candle in the middle. A wonderful warming start. What else I wonder? What else indeed. Before I forget this...I wasn't the only anxious one! Ruby the guide dog threw up in the hallway by my feet as I chatted with Geof ("with one P") who had recently had his kidney stone removed at Guy's and could just about appreciate the view but "wouldn't want to live there thanks" Action stations! The carer of Ruby's owner Judith and the Warden found a shovel and tissues and Ruby was dispatched outside. This is life. This is Othona.

This Christmas retreat will be hosted by Yarek and his wife Dagmara. We will have a 12 course Polish meal tomorrow, Christmas Eve. What delights are in store I wonder? Wow!

I'm in my own room... LUXURY! Others are sharing but as I booked way back in August I've struck lucky. I find it difficult to share a room so I'm very happy to be on my own. Lucky me!

Wednesday 24th December

I was woken by a whoop of joy. I had to work hard at being joyful too! Hmm! Not easy. I very much like living alone and waking, fairly much, when I want to. I find it hard to wake early in the dark, winter mornings so when I don't have to.... I don't. But Jo! It's Christmas! Oh yes...okay, away with you Scrooge! While I'm here (we are told) I must rise in time to be at breakfast even if I don't want to eat (I do!!) because that's when the notices for the day will be given out.

We have a choice of tasks today: Preparation of veggies, making mince pies, making decorations for the tree and the tables, or making a bonfire for the barbeque and mulled wine for Christmas Day evening. I'm very keen to make angels with Michael and birds with Barbara. The art-room, a prefabricated building in the grounds, is cold so we only manage an hour of angel making before we retreat to the warmth of the log-fire in the sitting room! Barbara got into a paper-weaving muddle so couldn't show me how to make the birds. I'm a bit disappointed but make another angel instead. There's always room for another angel!!

The kitchen smells wonderful! People are chopping fruit to make the mincemeat for the mince pies and the veggies for the Polish meal. The children, Thomas (7) Hannah (10) and Flo (12 - "I will be 13 in 3 months' time") are hanging some already-made decorations. The bonfire is built... I can see it from my window as I write. That will be fun! I LOVE bonfires.

I have a catch-up talk with Nick who was also here last year but I haven't met everyone yet. I want to know peoples' names. Will we have a 'go round' soon? Yes please! Last year that happened on the first evening. This year feels much more chaotic. Three of the core members are away to spend Christmas with their families and Tony, the Warden, will leave very early on Boxing Day like he did last year. Christmas this year is being 'held' by people who are not so experienced. It shows. I will have to work with this feeling of slight disappointment and accept this for what is here... now... and not keep harking back to last year. Last year was last year Jo! Let it go! Be in the NOW! Be in 2008! Okay 'Wise Voice' I will try to listen!

A light lunch and then an afternoon of making an origami bird! I really do mean an afternoon! Have you ever had a go at origami? It's an exact skill! Make one wrong fold and it mucks up the finished... if you get that far!... product! A bit like karma I suppose! Ha Ha!

From the positive approach my wise voice has advised me to adopt I can see that everything feels familiar this year; I'm not exploring for the first time so I'm noticing things I missed last year. This year too I'm resident so I'm more a part of the community than last year when I stayed at Marion's house in Bridport and was collected/delivered back every day so that a family were able to have the room I had booked. This year I'm in a single room. Heaven!! I, Ms 'Princess-and-the-Pea' Jo, need to have good sleep.

8.45pm

WOW! We just had the Polish feast. Wigiliaa 12 course meal. I knew it was to be 12 courses and thought some of them would be nibbles but no... there was a VAST amount of absolutely delicious food and I now can't move because I've eaten so much!

We started with Beetroot or mushroom soup plus tortellini stuffed with potato and cheese. Then...pancakes stuffed with mushrooms and onions and deep fried in a sausage shape. Then... Polish dumplings stuffed with potato and cheese. Then... white fish cooked with onions, carrots and tomatoes. Then... (local) jellied trout with peas, and carrots in little ramekin dishes. Then... a 'trifle' of herrings (at the bottom) beetroot and hardboiled eggs in mayonnaise on the top. Then... A cooked salad (which sounded unappetising but was delicious) of peas potatoes, carrots and onions chopped very small. Then... Poppyseed cake in a pastry base and coconut topping. Then... Chocolate cake. Then... local apple juice and wine. Oh my goodness me!

The meal began with a prayer and was interspersed with readings and blessings. How incredible that this generous Polish couple could cook and present this fabulous spread as well as to do it all in English!! I'm very impressed and ashamed that I only speak English.

Afterwards I washed up with Michael and Robert. David isn't sure if he likes this whole thing or not. It's his first time at Othona though he has been to other Communities. He's reserving his judgment for the moment. We still haven't had that 'go round' so I'm having to do my own reccy work with finding out peoples' names. Perhaps that's not so bad... for the likes of me since I have no difficulty with making a connection with strangers. I'm sad for those who find it hard. There's a bit of a 'flat'/unconnected feeling around this year. I think it's because more than half of the regular core members are away and the people working here are not used to working together. It shows.

10.30pm

I'm just back from the gorgeous chapel. Lovely carol singing. Not polished like the one Alison led last year but lovely in it's own right. Hannah played guitar and Jane played the flute. It has a strong feel of 'family' about it. Intimate and warm.

The plan was to have Secret Santa too, in the European style, on Christmas Eve but it didn't happen. We ran out of time because most people (not me!) wanted to have a rest before going off to Burton Bradstock for Midnight Mass.

The chapel is the first part of Othona that I fell in love with. This is an Open Christian Community; there are no crucifixes with Jesus looking plaintive, just a lovely plain chapel, adjoined to the main house, which oozes silence, peace and tranquillity with the 'Circle of Friends' on a low table in the middle.

Christmas at Othona *(continued)*

Thursday 25th December – Christmas Day

A slow waking! Hooray! I'm not good at waking early so it was lovely to have a slow start to the day. Eating in community is wonderful. I love it.

Notices, including our tasks for the day. I'm washing up after the Dorset-style lunch of roast local organic beef, root veggies one roast potato each (uh!?) then Christmas pud with local organic double cream for 30+ people. Fortunately I like washing up! I do it with Nick this time so it's a great opportunity for us to catch up from last Christmas. There are a LOT of pots and pans so we have a long time to natter. Lovely! We don't know each other; we didn't keep in touch last year and won't this year either but it feels familiar to be with him again. After the notices there's veg preparation again. It's done in a flash with so many people to help.

Next is the Christmas Day service in the chapel led by Tony, the Warden a long time member and very experienced leader so I know this will be more 'slick'. It is. It's very satisfying. He brings with him some Nativity scenes from Peru and entertains us all with his stories and explanations.

There's a lot of time to hang around and relax in this delightful place. The pace is slow and the emphasis is on peaceful connection with people, God (whatever that means for you) and nature. There is no pressure to do anything other than take part in the task allotted to you and to eat! Pretty simple requirements really! Several people played games like Charades but it's not my cup of tea so I watched from the comfort of a big squashy armchair by the log fire. What more could I ask for?

Indeed... what more? I got it! A HUGE bonfire made by the Bonfire-making Group yesterday. With a small group I watched the bonfire blaze and slowly die down (over several hours) in an ancient, never changing way. I love the excitements of the 21st century (computers, mobile phones etc.) but there's something wonderful about a bonfire. The glow; the warmth; the slow disintegration and changing shape of the branches (and the logs in the sitting room before I get carried off into poetic fairyland!) that makes me feel grounded and safe.

To bed, feeling very blessed, and grateful for the gifts of company.

Friday 26th December

A cooked breakfast and a packed lunch to take on our walk to Abbotsbury. We'll be out for a few hours. I'm so very happy to be able to do the walk; last year I wasn't up to it. It's clear how well I am now and I'm so very grateful and happy.

Back for tea and cake. Rest. Dinner at 6.30 and then a final service led by one of the Quaker visitors who leads us with a dance and a Taize chant. How fab is that!?

Saturday 27th December

Goodbye until next time. Will I come again next year? I'm not sure about Christmas but I will certainly be back for something! There's a brochure packed with alluring courses... so many to choose from.

Jo Ridgers, 14th January 2009
For Louisa

Election of the GA Executive Committee:



The result of the recent ballot to elect the executive committee of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches was announced in December:

1726 valid ballots were received (of 3933 sent out).
Votes were counted using the Single Transferable Vote method.

The following candidates were elected:

Joan Cook
Jim Corrigall
Lis Dyson-Jones
Dot Hewerdine
Andy Pakula
Ann Peart
Peter Soulsby
David Usher

Unitarian GA - Junior Weekend for 7-11 Year Olds

“All the Fun of the Fair”

6th-8th February 2009

Great Hucklow, Derbyshire

venue: www.great-hucklow.org.uk



Calling all 7-11 year olds: why not come along to the next fun-filled junior weekend? We always love to see new faces, as well as those who've been before. Over the weekend you'll meet lots of new friendly people, play games, make crafts, and all sorts of other things.

Contact John Harley at Essex Hall for more booking details on 020 7240 2384. For non-admin enquiries contact Louise Shatliff on 0161 280 3577.

Vanessa, Sue, Louise, Ella and Ches X.

An event organised by the Art and Spirituality Network

“Weaving Ourselves Together with the Yarn of Life”



Saturday 28th February, 10am - 4pm

**At Wandsworth Quaker Meeting House,
59 Wandsworth High Street, London SW18 2PT**

In this Art and Spirituality Network workshop Rob Burton will lead us in working with a range of materials we encounter every day and reflecting on our changing identity and relation with the universe around us.

Cost of attending: £25.

Details and booking form on website or 07787 550 927.

**Website: www.artandspirituality.net
Email: artandspirituality@googlemail.com**

“We can do all the ‘right things’ but sooner or later we have to live for a while in that tomb-like experience of waiting and wondering if the light will ever reappear. It always seems quite amazing to me how readily nature accepts this dark passageway of life. Snakes shed their skin, birch trees say goodbye to their bark, lobsters leave their shells behind at least seven times, caterpillars spin their own dark homes and polar bears crawl into their caves for hibernation for a long season of inactivity. But we humans scream out against this ‘leaving behind’ and ‘letting go.’ Sitting in the darkness and waiting doesn’t come naturally for us even though we ‘sat’ for nine months in our mother’s womb, a development which is as mysterious and marvellous as that of a caterpillar metamorphosing into a butterfly.”



Joyce Rupp

‘Outreach, Opportunity & Optimism’ Unitarian Communication Co-ordinators Conference

**27th February – 1st March 2009
The Nightingale Centre, Great Hucklow**

Sessions will include:

Building a Website: Case Study – *John Wilkinson*
Unitarian Outreach – *Rev David Usber*
A Journalist’s Journey – *Jim Corrigan*
Communication Commission Achievements – *Diane Bennett*
Opportunities to network, pick up practical tips and ideas

**Basic cost is £75. Deposit of £20 required.
Phone Marion Baker on 0114 2661070 for information.**

How I Came to Essex Church



Sometime in 2008, I was looking for the farmers market in Notting Hill, but had taken a wrong turn and then found Essex Church... which was a bit of good luck, as I had been looking for a Unitarian church to attend for a little while. I had been doing a little bit of church hopping, going to a couple of Baptist churches, mostly for their singing, and thought I would just add on Essex Church onto my religious roundabout. A year earlier I had heard about the Unitarian movement for the first time, at a dinner party, hearing about it from someone who like me was raised a Catholic.

I remember being told with great relief that it was not at all similar to a Catholic service, but I was a bit tentative about the description of lighting candles around a circle as, being an ex junior teacher, I had attended many thousands of school assemblies and it sort of sounded a lot like a school assembly. The thought of attending something similar in my free time didn't exactly thrill me.

Fortunately I was proven wrong, and from the very first service I attended, I connected very much with the words being said. Over the last six months I have felt very grateful to have finally found a religious service where I feel welcome and have this connection. Of course, many thanks to Essex Church’s very inspiring minister Sarah Tinker, who week after week keeps coming up with such inspiring and heartfelt services. Thanks too for all the beautiful music filling the air each week - how lucky that wrong turn was for me!!!

Deborah Moran



“One of the rituals that I've made part of my life is the celebration of my birthday once a month... On the twenty-eighth of every month I make a special effort to spend more time in prayer, to have a greater awareness of others, to spend some time with beauty, to reflect gratefully on my birth. It is a celebration of what is important in life. Even when I'm travelling and can't take a day off, I still find ways to make this day unique. For me it's not a day to receive presents. It's a day to be present. I also try to give a little gift to someone on this day.”

Macrina Wiederkehr

A Seasonal Recipe

Bean and Bacon Soup



At this time of year, I like nothing better than a thick, hearty soup served with crusty bread.

Ingredients:

- 175g (6 oz) smoked bacon cubes
- 4 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 large red onion, finely chopped
- 1 stalk celery, finely chopped
- chopped fresh sage (*or dried, if fresh not available*)
- salt
- freshly ground black pepper
- 1L (1.75 pints) chicken stock
- 2 x 400g tins cannellini beans, drained and rinsed
- 200g soup pasta (*stellate or ditali*)
- minced fresh parsley

Method:

1. In a large pot, sauté bacon in olive oil until soft. Add onion and celery; sauté, stirring, for about 5 minutes. Stir in sage, salt and black pepper. Add chicken stock, cover, and bring to the boil. Add beans and pasta, cover, and simmer for 30 minutes.
2. Stir in minced parsley before serving, and sprinkle with grated Pecorino or Parmesan cheese if desired.

Will Lyons

Bike



Dawn in progress

Shimmer of glittering wheels flickering through hawthorn lanes
Soft swish of tyres on rain-rinsed tarmac,
An idyll of contentment, still cheered by
coffee and yesterday's bread primed over
a fitful stick-fire. Fresh day in front of us
detached from distractions of customary living
propels us forward. My fleshly urge married to your
unconscious movement: your untiring alloy joined
to my exhaustable joints, aging sinews and muscles
of severely limited capacity.

For a short time only

Something akin to friendship animates our union: then
You will be sold or scrapped, and I shall be burnt.
Companion of my labours, participator in my pleasure
Let us abandon the past and ignore the future. Small
Inconspicuous things fill us with contentment;
Through generations passed over
A plenitude attained.

John Hands

Taoist Healing Sounds and Deep Relaxation



Saturday 14th March, 11.30am to 2.30pm

Cost £5.00 / 2.00 (concessions)

On this workshop we will be learning ancient Taoist healing sounds and movements that were created to encourage the flow of chi energy round our bodies. This energy can become blocked; freeing it allows us to feel alive and invigorated once more. These gentle exercises are suitable for any level of fitness and are an ideal way to prepare for spring. After lunch we will practice some deep relaxation techniques. Bring lunch to share and a blanket. Please phone Sarah Tinker on 0207 221 6514 to book your place.

Recycling at Essex Church



As part of our commitment to reducing the impact we have on our planet, we are offering a new recycling service here at Essex church. In the foyer there is now a box for you to put your old light bulbs and batteries and we'll take them to a recycling facility.

Every time we throw old light bulbs and batteries in our ordinary rubbish bags we are throwing away precious metals that are worth money and are also toxic if incinerated or placed in landfill sites. In most European countries they are regularly recycled but in Britain we are lagging behind. Ryness Electrical Stores are now offering to be collection points - and that's where we'll be taking our collected batteries and lights. So bring them to church and get a warm, rosy glow from knowing you are helping to preserve valuable resources.

Swaziland Education Project Update

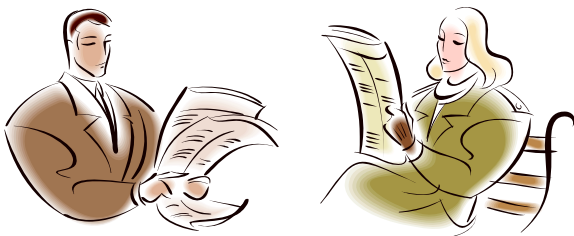


Our aim is to raise £1,000 a year to help educate young people in Swaziland whose lives have been affected by HIV/AIDS. This year's total has already reached over £500 but there is still time for you to contribute. Make your cheques payable to Essex Church (Swaziland) and pay what you can afford.

Contributions so far have varied between £5 and £100 - and in a place where £100 can educate a child for a year, complete with books and uniform, every penny you donate will be of value. You can put your cheques in our Sunday collection bags or hand directly to any member of the committee. Thank you.

Rev. Sarah Tinker

Good Publicity



You might have missed some of the good publicity we have been receiving lately here at Essex Church. The Christmas issues of *The Inquirer*, our national Unitarian newspaper, ran a three-page article about Kensington Unitarians. Photocopies of this very positive piece are available in the foyer.

The Inquirer is published fortnightly and members are entitled to a free copy so let Juliet Edwards know if you would like to receive one regularly. A present we order 25 copies which are put in the foyer for people to pick up. Or you can contact *The Inquirer* directly to order a copy to be delivered to you at home. We also have copies of the monthly 'Unitarian' newsletter.

The latest Unitarian Christian Association newsletter has a lovely write up of the celebrations they helped us organise here at Essex Church to mark the 200th anniversary of the death of Theophilus Lindsey, founder of our Essex Church congregation, the first Unitarian congregation in England. Again, copies are available in the foyer.

Essex Church Craft Fair



At a recent committee meeting we discussed the question of whether we will be having an art and craft fair in 2009.

In previous years - we had successful events in 2005/6/7 - when we have had an art and craft fair we have tried to muddle through without too much of a masterplan but we are thinking that if we are to go ahead and do it again this autumn then it would benefit from a bit more organisation (and possibly even setting up a committee fairly soon to start planning and publicity well in advance of the event).

If you would be interested in helping to organise a craft fair and you could make a definite commitment to contributing your time and creativity to the event then please speak to me before the end of February so that we get a sense of whether or not there is sufficient enthusiasm to go ahead. Thank you.

Jane Blackall

