



Kensington Unitarians

Newsletter: December 2016 / January 2017

What's On...

Thursday 1st December, 7-8pm
'Heart and Soul': 'Winter Legends'
Led by Jennifer Canfield & Sarah Tinker

Sunday 4th December, 11am-noon
'Traditions of Home'
Led by Jeannene Powell

Sunday 11th December, 11am-noon
'Christmas Carol Service'
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker
This service will include a charity collection for the Refugee Council

Sunday 11th December, 12.30pm
Congregational Christmas Lunch

Thursday 15th Dec, 6.30-8.30pm
A Celebration of Seasonal Traditions
with Carole Grace and Sarah Tinker

Sunday 18th December, 11am-noon
'Cold Days, Warm Spirits'
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 18th December, 12.30pm
Inclusive Communion
Led by Tristan Jovanović

Saturday 24th December, 5-6pm
'Candlelit Christmas Eve'
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 1st January, 11am-noon
'Deep Listening'
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 1st January, 1.00-4.00pm
**New Year Workshop:
'A Chance To Reflect'**
with Sarah Tinker and Jane Blackall

Thursday 5th January, 7-8pm
'Heart and Soul':
'Understanding, more than Tolerance'
Led by Jeannene Powell

Sunday 8th January, 11am-noon
'What Does It Mean?'
Led by Jane Blackall

Sunday 8th January, 12.30pm
Inclusive Communion
Led by Sue Smith

(listings continue inside front cover...)

Tradition

A Message from our Minister

Welcome to the first of our monthly themes, shaping our ministry here at Essex Church in the year ahead. Tradition is our theme for December, chosen partly because this month is one where our worship is at its most traditional. Attend one of our Sunday services in December and you'll be in no doubt of Unitarianism's Free Christian origins. It's the ideal month to appreciate the comforting nature of many traditions. Hearing the stories of old once again, singing carols we might remember from childhood, eating festive food together and perhaps sending cards or simple gifts, are shared experiences. They help to connect us, one with another, and with our past. This season also offers us an opportunity to reclaim older traditions, the pagan religious roots of our northern isles. Winter festivals will have been important to ancient people and their traditions live on to this day in the evergreen leaves and trees we bring in to our homes. As our hemisphere tilts away from the sun we are reminded us of our interconnectedness with our planet earth home.



Christmas traditions also remind us how powerful symbols can be. We might question the historical likelihood of the Nativity but we sense the atmosphere change when we sing of a baby in a manger, of escape from tyranny, of ox and ass worshipping on bended knee. In at least one December service each year we sing the carol In The Bleak Midwinter. Its gentle, mournful tune and words have always affected me. Written by Christina Rossetti, they remind me of the power of love, and of the divine spark within all that exists.

*Once more child and mother / Weave their magic spell,
Touching hearts with wonder / Words can never tell:
In the bleak mid-winter, / In this world of pain,
Where our hearts are open / Christ is born again.*

I look forward to celebrating Christmas with you all and finding ways to bring new meaning to old traditions. And perhaps the story below can bring a counter-balancing message – that eventually traditions lose their meaning and become empty habits.

When the wise abbot and his disciples began their evening meditation, the cat who lived in the monastery made such noise that it distracted them. So the abbot ordered that the cat be tied up during their evening service. Years later, when the abbot died, the cat continued to be tied up each evening. And when the cat eventually died, another cat was brought to the monastery and tied up at the same time.

Centuries later, learned descendants of this particular spiritual tradition wrote scholarly treatises about the religious significance of tying up a cat before the evening service begins.

Rev. Sarah Tinker

In this month's newsletter...

* Thematic Ministry begins at Essex Church * Christmas Cards and Unitarian Merchandise *
New Year Workshop: 'A Chance to Reflect' * 'Darkness as a Metaphor' – Reflection by Roy Clark
* Sunday Afternoon Tea Dance with Rachel Sparks * Poems by Brian Ellis and John Hands *
FUSE: Festival of Unitarians in the South East * Winter Coat Collection * Nia Dance Returns
* Heidi's Open Studio and Party * 'Elargissez Dieu' sermon by 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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What's On in January...

Sunday 15th January, 11am-noon

'Inclusive Church'

Led by Rev. Alex Gowing-Cumber
and Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 15th January, 12.30-1.15pm

'Finding Your Voice'

Singing workshop with Margaret

Thursday 19th January, 7-9pm

Management Committee Meeting

Sunday 22nd January, 11am-noon

'Language of Spirit'

Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker
*This service will include a charity
collection for Inclusive Church.*

Wednesday 26th January, 7-9pm

Creativity Group

Working on Seasonal Wall-Hanging
or Bring Your Own Craft Work

Sunday 29th January, 11am-noon

'Points of View'

Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

'I could not be leading a religious life unless I identified myself with the whole of humanity, and that I could not do unless I took part in politics. The whole gamut of humanity's activities constitutes an indivisible whole. You cannot divide social, economic, political, and purely religious work into watertight compartments. I do not know any religion apart from human activity. It provides a moral basis to all other activities which they would otherwise lack, reducing life to a maze of "sound and fury signifying nothing."'

Mahatma Gandhi

Volunteering Rotas: Stewarding, Coffee and Greeting



Stewarding:

4 th December:	Liz Tuckwell
11 th December:	Michaela von Britzke
18 th December:	Gina Bayley
24 th December (5pm):	Veronica Needa
1 st January:	Melody Chapman
8 th January:	Gina Bayley
15 th January:	Julia Alden
22 nd January:	Brian Ellis
29 th January:	Alice Lambert

Coffee:

4 th December:	Kate Brown
11 th December:	Kate Brown (& Sue)
18 th December:	Kate Brown
24 th December (5pm):	Deborah
1 st January:	Deborah
8 th January:	Juliet Edwards
15 th January:	Liz Tuckwell
22 nd January:	Melody Chapman
29 th January:	Deborah

Greeting:

4 th December:	Julia Alden
11 th December:	Roy Clark
18 th December:	Carole Grace
24 th December (5pm):	Brian Ellis
1 st January:	Jo Tye
8 th January:	Brian Ellis
15 th January:	? (can you help?)
22 nd January:	Gina Bayley
29 th January:	Juliet Edwards

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

Thematic Ministry



This December we're starting our new year of thematic ministry. Each month has a theme that we'll be exploring in our Sunday gatherings as well as in other group activities. One of the aims of thematic ministry is to encourage people to get more involved – giving everyone a particular focus for the month and asking for your thoughts, favourite songs, hymns and readings, and inviting newsletter contributions. So do look at the themes for the months ahead and have a chat to one of us and let us know if you have ways you'd like to be more involved. Each month in the newsletter there'll be some simple suggestions of ways to engage with the theme.

Here are the themes we've planned for the year ahead:

December – 'Tradition' / January – 'Understanding' / February – 'Wisdom' / March – 'Good and Evil' /
April – 'Transformation' / May – 'Connection' / June – 'Courage and Resilience' / July – 'Identity' /
August – 'Triumph/Disaster' / September – 'Purpose/Mission' / October – 'Generosity' / November – 'The Unknown'

Tradition: Traditions are beliefs and customs passed to us from previous generations, in a family or a wider society or group. They help to hold a group together and give people a shared sense of identity and belonging. They may also sometimes prevent change and development: a 'but we've always done it this way' attitude. Some areas you might like to consider: Winter traditions of your past and traditions you would like to develop now. Have a think about the Christmas of your earlier years. What traditions do you miss now and what aspects are you glad to be freed from? What is important to you now? Which Christmas traditions give you pleasure and would you like to continue or deepen? Thinking more widely about traditions in general: what societal traditions are you glad to have let go of and which do you miss? Are there new traditions that you would like to develop in your own life, in our church community and in our wider circles?

Understanding: Understanding means to comprehend, to know, and implies a relatedness between the one who understands and that which they understand – be that a person or an area of knowledge. If we are truly to understand other people we have to find ways to listen deeply to them. Understanding between people comes through communication. Have a think about a group or an individual you find hard to understand. Imagine having a conversation with them and feeling safe enough to ask them about their lives and their realities. Who would you speak to and what might you ask? You might choose to set yourself a goal this month of talking with someone different and finding out more about them. And give yourself time to find out more about yourself. Next time you have a strong thought or feeling, ask yourself where that might have originated. Why am I thinking this, why am I feeling this way? Find a safe person to talk your discoveries over with.

Sarah, Jeannene, and Jane

Essex Church Christmas Cards and Unitarian Merchandise



Our Essex Church Christmas Cards (featuring a Lino Print of the church in winter created by our own Jane Blackall) will be on sale after the service every Sunday until Christmas. Cards are available singly or in packs of five or ten at a discount. Please speak to Melody for more information.

There are also church mugs on sale, featuring the words 'Community – Spirituality – Conscience', and our chalice logo. You might also be interested in a copy of our congregational book 'Kindred Pilgrim Souls', or the book of collected theme talks from our Unitarian summer schools, 'A Circle of Seekers'.

Christmas at Essex Church Dates for Your Diaries

Carol Service & Congregational Lunch Sunday 11th December, 11am onwards

Invite your friends and join us for a rousing carol-singing service and a shared Christmas lunch afterwards on 11th December.

Christmas Dinner in a Local Restaurant Thursday 22nd December, 7pm onwards

This year a small group are planning to go out to eat together a few days before Christmas (instead of Christmas Eve). Please let Jane know ASAP if you would like to come so we can book a table.

Candlelit Christmas Eve Gathering Saturday 24th December, 5-6pm

We will be holding our traditional, rather meditative, carol service on Christmas Eve once again this year (followed by mince pies).





John and Sonya deep in conversation through the kitchen hatch at coffee-time after a recent Sunday service.

'Heart and Soul' Midweek Spiritual Gatherings

Thursdays 1st December
and 5th January 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.

Jennifer Canfield and Sarah will be leading in December on the theme of 'Winter Legends'. Sarah says: 'Jennifer is a member of our Sevenoaks congregation and has been helping us with church cupboard clutter clearing. (Thank you!) Jennifer will be bringing some chants from the Sevenoaks' congregation's Singing Meditation group for us to join in with.'

Jeannene Powell will be leading in January on the theme of 'Understanding, more than Tolerance'. She says: 'We're often told to be religiously and culturally, "Tolerant". However what if we go deeper than this, to a place of true understanding?'

Additionally, Rosslyn Hill Unitarian Chapel in Hampstead are now also offering monthly 'Heart and Soul' gatherings, on the third Monday of every month (19th December, 16th January). If you would like to know more about 'Heart & Soul' gatherings at Essex Church email jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Inclusive Communion

Sundays 18th December, 8th January
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.

18th December (*irregular date*) – led by Tristan Jovanović

8th January – led by Sue Smith

12th February – led by Sarah Tinker

Creativity Group

26th January, 23rd February, 7-9pm
Down in the Library at Essex Church



Our once-a-month creativity group will continue to meet monthly in the New Year. However the regular date will change to Thursday evenings from 7-9pm and we will move down into the library. Sue Smith is encouraging people to participate in making another embroidered wall-hanging for the church, this time to represent the seasons of spring/summer. Alternatively you can bring along your own art/crafts and simply spend an evening being creative in good company. We will be meeting in the hall. Please do speak to Sue or Juliet if you have any questions.

Blessed Be Those Who Value Old People



Blessed be those who show understanding
For my stumbling foot
For my feeble trembling hand.

Blessed be those who understand
That I need to strain my ears
To catch everything that is being said to me.

Blessed be those who appear to know
That my eyes are dim
And my thinking has become
Lethargic and dulled.

Blessed be those who never say
'You've told me that story
At least twice before'.

Blessed be those who know
How to prompt my thoughts
Of earlier years.

Blessed be those who allow me to feel
That I am loved and cared for,
And have not been left all alone.

Blessed be those who out of the kindness of their hearts
Lighten the days which still remain
On my way to my everlasting home.

Stephen Kreber

(Translated from the German by John Hands)



Rachel Sparks Dance Presents Sunday Afternoon Tea Dance

Sunday 12th February, 2-5pm
with a dance lesson for beginners
at 2.15pm here at Essex Church

Join us for a tea dance with social dancing and actual tea and cake! 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 LGBTQI+ 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.

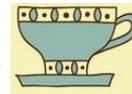
Tickets: £10 on the door

(free entry to members of Essex Church)

For more information contact:

rachel@rachelsparksdance.co.uk
www.rachelsparksdance.co.uk /
www.facebook.com/rachelsparksdance

With thanks to the management committee of Kensington Unitarians for supporting inclusive dance.



New Year Workshop: 'A Chance to Reflect'

Sunday 1st January 2017, 1-4pm – Booking Essential

Come and join us on New Year's Day for a gentle workshop which will allow us all an opportunity to reflect on the year that is now past, to look ahead to 2017, and consider what qualities we might wish to bring into the New Year. This will be a meditative session, with music in the background, mostly spent on our own but with opportunities to share some of our insights. We'll be using the 'Year Compass' workbook to structure our private reflection.

Please book your place with Sarah or Jane if you are intending to come so that we can make sure there are enough resources for everyone who wants to take part.

From the Riverbank



dancing with the wind
above the ebbing water
hovering soaring
diving stalling
spirals climbing
unknown movements
calling
I saw a soul
hiding
in a hawk
revelling
in its own perfection

Brian Ellis

Decent Hardy Men

Decent hardy men – let's begin with that. Tall, good-looking brothers
Both in uniform- the one a vet, the other an engineer.
Don't know their rank, nor does it matter. One his hand gently
Resting on the pommel of his ceremonial sword, the other
His hands clasped behind his back: both calmly gazing into the
Camera's lens, waiting for the magnesium flash, and the chance
To smoke, or continue their placid stroll to the neighbourhood beer-garden.

Both in the Kaiser's uniform – does that matter? Does it matter
They were both calmly gazing into the Abyss? that the most appalling fate
Might await them? That life which can be lovely, death
Which can be distant is about to explode in all of their faces.
Their comrades my kinsmen, their wives, mothers and sisters
The very same who, as they stared at the casualty lists wildly
Shrieked in Moscow and Dresden Huddersfield and Hiroshima –
Decent, hardy men and women: let's all begin,
And end with that.

John Hands

Perhammer Strasser Laim, Munich, July 2nd 2009

Real and Less Real

(1914: Christmas Day in the Trenches)

No-one can be quite sure – i mean
Scientifically sure, the way we have to be sure if we want to be sure –
If the Angel of Mons was anything more than a wishful image in the
Eyes of exhausted boys – little more than boys – mostly between
Eighteen and thirty-five, cajoled by geriatric predators to abandon
Their homes, their parents children and wives for the sake of squatting
Knee-deep in blood-spattered, muddy trenches, to squint long and anxiously
By the light of a pock-marked moon, over the edge of a parapet
At risk of their lives. Because it was Christmas. And they could hear –or
Thought they could hear – the sound of bagpipes and Heilige Nacht and
Come all ye faithful, sung in English French and German.

But these were not illusions: these were real sounds from some still real
Still Living voices. And the champagne, brandy or beer they
Quaffed, and the sausages they shared and the bread and bully-beef were
Real, scientifically real, and eagerly swallowed down into shortly-to-be
Decayed, paper-thin stomachs. And the stories they shared, and the songs
they sung
And the games they played, from Schacht to football, and the photographs
They shared by the light of the candle or flares – were real – yes real All
Scientifically real, Yes! you can say it did all happen.

And what happened
Afterwards, you can say that too was scientifically real and certainly happened.
When the little-more-than –boys struck down, machine-gunned, and bombed
each other to pieces
can you say now what was more cogently real – their hatred or the fears
their compassion or their loving-kindness? Could this be scientifically felt
scientifically proven?

And the long years which followed of more bombing
More killing, more dismemberment, more total destruction: would you say
All these were more real than the affability they shared
And the gifts they gave, when it was possible, still just possible
To abandon their trenches and arm-in-arm, shoulder to shoulder
March back to their applauding homesteads, their exalting towns and cities?

John Hands

Nine Thousand Plus

Yesterday
I read this is the number
of warheads we could use
to annihilate ourselves
if we should choose
to touch the simultaneous fuse
Today.
with flash mobs everywhere
our greatest party ever
going with a bang
forget the morning after
since it won't be there
Tomorrow.
when the gods
archiving our evolution file
might ponder for a while
why we didn't try to end us by
the option of a whimper in the
Future.

Brian Ellis

Warden's Column



Jenny with the splendid new purpose-built office cupboards.

I'm disappointed to say that nobody took up the "secret cupboard" challenge in my last newsletter article & came to show me where they are. If you tried to find them but couldn't - or if you're just curious now - I'm willing to show them to the next three people who ask (after that my lips are sealed again :-)

As I write, the builders are putting finishing touches to the new cupboards in the office and then they'll be back on Saturday to adapt the white cupboard to the right of the altar for the sound system (and add some boxing to protect the central heating pipes). Feels like we're finally getting to the end of the marathon of building work this year - although I still need to find a company to sand the wooden floors during the Christmas holidays.

As many of you know, I took several months of sabbatical leave this summer to participate in a dance project in a Spanish Monastery. This involved people from many different countries: Germany, Portugal, Switzerland, Belgium, Italy, Austria Denmark and France - as well as Spain and the UK. Some of us wanted to have a New Year re-union and I'm very grateful to say the trustees have given permission to hold this at the church, during our quiet period before regular classes restart after the Christmas break.

This isn't the first time there's been dancing at the church over New Year - I was also given permission for a jam here in 2009, 2013 and 2014. It's a great gift to be able to bring something so spiritually important to me into this space. New Year's Eve falls on a Saturday this year - so maybe you'll still feel some dancing energy in the space on Sunday morning (or even meet a few dancing friends at the service if they stay with me overnight :-)

Jenny Moy



Fitness Fusion of 9 Movement Forms

Sonya's Nia Classes Return from February 2017

**Third Sunday of the Month from 2-3pm:
19th February, 19th March, 16th April,
21st May, 18th June, 16th July, 20th August**

**Midweek classes on WEDNESDAYS - 12.30-1.30pm
from Wednesday 22nd February 2017**

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.



Jane with the new stewarding cupboard - six years in the planning!

Winter Coat Collection Here at Essex Church



Bring any coats in good, clean condition to church by 9th December and they'll be distributed by the Calling London charity. They already have thousands of coats they've collected and are very grateful that we're providing free space for two days for them to sort the collection and to ensure they go to the places they're needed most. Have a look at their website if you'd like to get involved as a volunteer next year.

Sarah Tinker

Refugee Blues

Carole Grace has asked that we include an excerpt from WH Auden's 'Refugee Blues' (we cannot include the whole poem for copyright reasons but please do look it up).

Say this city has ten million souls,
Some are living in mansions, some are living in holes:
Yet there's no place for us, my dear,
yet there's no place for us.

Once we had a country and we thought it fair,
Look in the atlas and you'll find it there:
We cannot go there now, my dear,
we cannot go there now.

...

Went to a committee; they offered me a chair;
Asked me politely to return next year:
But where shall we go today, my dear,
but where shall we go today?

Came to a public meeting; the speaker got up and said:
'If we let them in, they will steal our daily bread';
He was talking of you and me, my dear,
he was talking of you and me.

Thought I heard the thunder rumbling in the sky;
It was Hitler over Europe, saying: 'They must die';
We were in his mind, my dear, we were in his mind.

Join Amnesty International You Can Make a Difference



At a recent meeting of the Hillingdon Amnesty group, which is held at Uxbridge Quaker Meeting House, at 7.45pm on every 4th Monday, relatives of two people currently detained in prison in Iran brought home to me the reality of the people for whose release we campaign. They are not just names on a piece of paper. To boot, we were given names of equally real people who have been released, thanks to ordinary folk like you and me bothering to write to Governors of countries and embassies, as well as letting detainees know they are not forgotten.

CASE STUDY - Nazanin Zaghari Ratcliffe

Nazanin had been detained since 3 April 2016, when she was attempting to board a flight home to the UK after visiting her parents in Iran, with her two-year old daughter Gabriella. She was arrested by officials believed to belong to Iran's Revolutionary Guard, who did not explain why they were arresting her. Her toddler daughter – a British national – had her UK passport confiscated and was handed to her grandparents who had accompanied them to the airport, while Nazanin was taken away by the authorities. Nazanin was subjected to 45 days in solitary confinement after she was arrested. She was denied access to a lawyer, and barred from meeting her family until over a month into her detention. Now, any contact with her family in Iran and the UK is limited and controlled. On 6th September, Nazanin had been sentenced to five years in prison – though the charges she was convicted of had still not been revealed to Nazanin, her family or her lawyer.

CASE STUDY - Kamal Foroughi

Kamal Foroughi is a 77-year-old British-Iranian man serving an eight-year prison sentence in Evin prison, Tehran, for charges of espionage and alcohol possession. He was arrested in 2011 and kept in solitary confinement before being convicted at an unfair trial of charges he did not know about until the day before the court hearing. Iranian officials have barred Kamal from legal advice and contact with his family at various points throughout his five-year incarceration. He was denied access to a lawyer from the day of his arrest until the day before his trial. Now, in prison, he has only very limited access to a lawyer. He has not been allowed British consular assistance. According to Iranian law, a prisoner may be released after serving a third of their sentence (Article 58 of the Islamic Penal Code). Kamal is over five years in to his seven-year sentence; it is time for him to be freed and reunited with his family in the UK. As a matter of urgency, Iranian authorities must also guarantee Kamal medical care he desperately needs but is being prevented from accessing.

Consider joining your nearest Amnesty group. More information on these cases is available here: www.amnesty.org.uk/actions

Carolyn Appleby

A Search for Virtues – see if you can find the 36 listed virtues in the wordsearch grid!

E	C	I	T	S	U	J	S	T	R	E	N	G	T	H	I	N	T	T	W
N	O	I	T	A	I	C	E	R	P	P	A	Y	O	S	O	B	C	M	Z
C	R	E	S	I	L	I	E	N	C	E	R	N	S	I	U	V	A	S	F
P	O	F	A	I	R	N	E	S	S	J	E	E	T	N	K	P	T	N	E
T	W	M	L	O	Y	A	L	T	Y	S	N	O	D	G	C	E	E	E	V
T	H	M	P	E	R	C	E	P	T	I	V	E	N	E	S	S	C	N	I
S	C	O	G	A	L	C	K	Y	H	E	R	Y	Y	A	O	H	N	T	T
Y	S	Q	U	S	S	I	A	T	D	S	W	T	E	R	L	U	A	H	A
Y	Q	E	C	G	N	S	R	R	T	C	I	I	C	I	M	R	U	I	
T	T	A	N	D	H	O	I	A	I	L	U	R	N	G	D	I	E	S	T
C	O	I	N	I	W	T	N	O	I	N	G	E	E	H	A	L	V	I	I
B	O	E	R	T	L	D	F	B	N	E	G	C	I	T	R	I	E	A	N
Y	S	U	S	G	I	D	A	U	N	F	W	N	T	E	I	T	S	S	I
S	C	U	R	N	E	I	N	E	L	I	K	I	A	O	T	Y	R	M	E
O	R	R	G	A	L	T	R	E	S	N	V	S	P	U	Y	X	E	M	M
T	B	I	E	E	G	O	N	D	I	M	E	V	F	S	P	W	P	I	P
V	I	A	R	M	S	E	O	I	A	R	S	S	E	N	N	E	P	O	A
C	O	M	M	I	T	M	E	N	T	O	F	B	S	E	K	F	X	N	T
Y	E	T	T	S	S	E	N	E	L	T	N	E	G	S	H	Y	R	D	H
R	L	Y	E	D	U	T	I	T	A	R	G	H	B	S	X	Z	K	V	Y

APPRECIATION
 CARING
 COMMITMENT
 COMPASSION
 COURAGE
 DEVOTION
 EMPATHY
 ENTHUSIASM
 FAIRNESS
 FRIENDLINESS
 GENEROSITY
 GENTLENESS
 GRATITUDE
 HONESTY
 HUMILITY
 INITIATIVE
 INTEGRITY
 JUSTICE
 KINDNESS
 LOYALTY
 MERCY
 OPENNESS
 PATIENCE
 PERCEPTIVENESS
 PERSEVERANCE
 RELIABILITY
 RESILIENCE
 RIGHTEOUSNESS
 SINCERITY
 SOLIDARITY
 STRENGTH
 TACT
 THOUGHTFULNESS
 TRUSTWORTHINESS
 UNDERSTANDING
 WISDOM

An Address to Dead Leaves

Was it to make him grow you struggled forth?
 In springtime, burgeoning in the warmth
 Of larger suns, revelling in the fresh winds,
 Delighting in the longer day, the calmer night.
 Released from winter's cold you felt
 The sex sap surge through you like a young man's lust,
 You waved and antic'd on the spring boughs,
 Such clownish zest was in you – young
 To resist the pain of rain, obstreperousness of storms, and
 Love's long protracted night-times, turbulent and grave.
 Now look at you: you're dead and down,
 A skeletal host entangled on a stolchy field:
 I see you, like men you are, you lie
 A decimated host, sprawled in tattered heaps
 Caved in upon each other: one lifts his arms imploringly,
 One seems to cry aloud for light or air:
 Another propped upon his arm sucks in
 His last of life, abruptly proved intractable and vain.
 Was it for this you lived your life
 You sufferers? Was it for this you laboured to grow tall, you young trees?
 For one brief summer you put forth,
 Were briefly looked upon, decked out, admired,
 And now your end is this: breeze which once caressed you
 Tears you down: and frost, and fog, and wind, and rain,
 Harry you to death.

John Hands (*Highbury Fields: Islington*)





'Jeffrey Sachs commented that if we "spent more time and money on mobilizing Weapons of Mass Salvation in addition to combating Weapons of Mass Destruction, we might actually get somewhere in making this planet a safer and more hospitable home."

Poverty and gross inequality throughout the world waste human potential, weaken the entire community, and put the whole human family at risk. On the most basic level, development is a necessary condition for justice and peace, and the first step toward a safer world is to help those who are most in need.'

Daniel G. Groody

Heidi Ferid & Louise Whittles

Open Studio and Party

Friday 9th December. 6-9pm
Studio 109, First Floor, The Triangle Studios
19 Warburton Road, London Fields, E8 3RT



Please call 07793565335 to be let in to the studio.

Websites: www.heidiferid.co.uk / www.louisewhittles.com



One Light Spiritual Gatherings



'Gifts of Light'

Friday 9th December - 6.45 for 7pm start

'A Time for Reflection'

Friday 13th January - 6.45 for 7pm start

Here at Essex Church, Notting Hill Gate

A OneSpirit Interfaith Service for people of all faiths and none. This One Light Spiritual Gathering is offered by Christopher, Bernd and Alison.

The Onelight End Of Year Celebration "Gifts Of Light" in December will feature songs by the Threshold Choir. Mince pies and chat afterwards. The Onelight New Year celebration "A Time for Reflection" in January will also feature the Threshold Choir. Tea and treats afterwards. All are welcome.

For further information contact: admin@osif.co.uk

Brothers

For quite a long time a corpse has been lying in front,
of our barbed wire
The sun gleams upon it, the wind and dew cools it.

Everyday I look into his face: and more and more
I am sure he must be my brother.

Throughout each hour I see how he lies in front of me
And hear his voice sing joyfully from a peaceful cemetery.

Often in the night a sound of weeping drives me out of my sleep:
"My brother, my dear brother – don't you love me any more?"

Until, in spite of the bullets, I crawl near to him in the night
And haul him back for burial – a foreign comrade.

My eyes must be deceiving me - no Heart, you don't deceive yourself:
Every dead corpse has the features of your brother.

Heinrich Lersch
(translated by John Hands)

The Naked Voice Advent-ure



December Evening London Course
Mondays 5th and 19th December from 7-9pm
To Be Held Here at Essex Church

A two evening course with Chloe Goodchild at The Unitarian Church in Notting Hill. A dynamic field in evolving with the Naked Voice Adventure London. We have had nearly 60 people coming to the first two evenings in November. The Adventure continues in December and restarts in January. Discover the essential Sound Keys to ignite your true voice, your self-confidence, your feelings and your true purpose at this critical time on Earth. You can come to one or both of these sessions and it is not necessary to have come to the first three sessions in November. Everyone welcome!

Monday 5th December, 7-9pm – ‘Self-Love’

“What we mean by love, is its sound coming in”

In this session we'll focus on the many ways we give language of Love in all its forms, instinctual, intuitive and insightful. We will experience and deepen our expression of the Seven Sounds for Love as inspired by the musical chakras, from the root to the crown. Working with spontaneous and structured vocal practices we will move, and be moved, let go and express our own of voice of love dissolving old boundaries around the heart, and revealing a new language of consciousness sourced from unconditional loving presence.

Monday 19th December, 7-9pm – ‘Symphony of Love’

**“So the darkness shall be the light
and the stillness the dancing”**

A Winter Solstice gathering. This final evening session before the Christmas break is an opportunity for you to join forces with your new vocal buddies and friends, to celebrate the darkest moment of the year, through sacred sound, devotional chant and love song, wild prayer, spoken and sung. It will be an opportunity for you to consolidate everything that you have learnt so far about how to explore, express and embody your authentic voice, and its transformative role in wakening and evolving consciousness, ‘sound consciousness’, within ourselves, in our communities, personally and globally. It is also a chance for you to introduce the Naked Voice field to your friends and families to this special sound gathering.

Costs: £35/£30 concessions per session
(£60/£50 if you book for both sessions)

For details & to book see: www.thenakedvoice.com

A Celebration of Seasonal Traditions

Thursday 15th December, 6.30-8.30pm
led by Carole Grace and Sarah Tinker



Come and join us for this festive gathering, a celebration of seasonal poetry, readings, music and other treats. Let us know if you plan to come and if you have a favourite wintry poem or reading or piece of music you would like to bring to this evening's festive gathering. We'd appreciate people booking in for this event in advance so we know the numbers to cater for. And let us know what you'd like to read so we avoid duplication. But if you suddenly get the urge on the day to come and join us, you'll be welcome.



‘The Kite Runner’
At the Wyndham’s Theatre
Charing Cross Road, London, WC2H 0DA
for a limited season from 21st December

“There is a way to be good again”

Our own Antony Bunsee features in this West End production of ‘The Kite Runner’ which several members of the congregation were lucky enough to catch on tour in Brighton a few years ago.

Based on Khaled Hosseini's international best-selling novel, this powerful story has now been adapted into a stunning new stage production. A haunting tale of friendship which spans cultures and continents, it follows one man's journey to confront his past and find redemption. Afghanistan is a divided country on the verge of war and two childhood friends are about to be torn apart. It's a beautiful afternoon in Kabul and the skies are full of the excitement and joy of a kite flying tournament. But neither Hassan nor Amir can foresee the terrible incident which will shatter their lives forever.

Good Cause Collection of the Month

Refugee Council



Collection on Sunday 11th December

The Refugee Council is one of the leading charities in the UK working directly with refugees, and supporting them to rebuild their lives. We offer practical support and advice throughout their journey in the UK. They have been helping refugees for more than 60 years and have a thorough understanding of the difficulties facing people arriving in the UK, having fled war, rape, torture and with unimaginable stories to tell. Many refugees have lost everything and their lives will never return to normal. The Refugee Council offers a helping hand to support and empower them to rebuild their lives. The charity delivers a range of specialist projects that support refugees, including: employment and move on advice; therapeutic support; destitution services; support for separated children whose special needs are not covered by mainstream services; and work to achieve a fairer and more humane asylum system. This charity was nominated by Carolyn Appleby.

For more information: www.refugeecouncil.org.uk

Inclusive Church



Collection on Sunday 22nd January

Inclusive Church is a group of Christians uniting together around our statement of belief: "We believe in inclusive Church - church which does not discriminate, on any level, on grounds of economic power, gender, mental health, physical ability, race or sexuality. We believe in Church which welcomes and serves all people in the name of Jesus Christ; which is scripturally faithful; which seeks to proclaim the Gospel afresh for each generation; and which, in the power of the Holy Spirit, allows all people to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Jesus Christ." Although originally Anglican in origin, Inclusive Church works with churches of different denominations. Alex Gowing-Cumber of Inclusive Church will be coming to visit our congregation and co-leading worship on Sunday 15th January.

For more information: www.inclusive-church.org

FUSE 2017: Festival of Unitarians in the South East



**A weekend of inspiration and fellowship
in serene, natural surroundings
17th -19th February in Horsley Park, Surrey**

This year FUSE is at a new venue – the lovely Horsley Park in Surrey. The accommodation includes modern rooms, pool & sauna, and 70 acres of parkland. Whether you are looking for an energising and inspiring conference with fellow Unitarians, a relaxing, spa-like weekend, or a spiritually enriching retreat, you will find it at FUSE 2017! A fantastic line-up of workshops, social activities and spiritual practices to nourish the mind, body and soul. Join the 100 or so Unitarians and friends who come together for an enriching weekend that will leave your batteries recharged and fun, inspiring memories to fire your imagination for months to come. The cost is £235 for a single room or £189 per person in a double room. Grants are available to support attendance. Speak to Sarah, our minister, for further details.

For more information and to register: www.fusefest.org.uk

'Finding Our Voice' Monthly Singing Workshops



Sunday 15th January and 19th February 2017

(please note there is no class in December)

after the service from 12.30 to 1.15pm

Margaret Marshall 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 our 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 these sessions are designed for everyone, whatever your experience or ability. All welcome.

Darkness as a Metaphor

some autumnal reflections

The service on October 23rd *Living with Darkness* raised a number of interesting issues concerning how we experience, react to and interpret the dark, particularly in reference to the use of visual metaphor.

As an artist and image maker, how pictures work on different levels of our consciousness has been central to my practice and in my work as a photography and media lecturer I often taught courses in semiotics and visual communication.

Even a cursory study of the psychology of seeing reveals that how objects operate as signs and symbols is totally dependent on one's cultural influences and understanding.

For example to the Japanese the sun is always red. In fact if a Japanese was to tell you that somebody thinks the sun is yellow what they are really suggesting is that the person in question may perhaps be a little mentally disordered. Similarly in Japan, white is the colour traditionally worn to funerals rather than weddings. Closer to home, white only became the default colour for the bride during the early Victorian era undoubtedly chosen for its adopted cultural connotations of purity. Until that time purple had been the more usual bridal choice.

The interpretation of visual metaphors based on cultural factors is a key way in which we all read and interpret images, a fact not lost on advertisers or politicians.

This tendency affects our choice of words too. As the Jacqui James opinion piece *Dark and Light, Light and Dark*, read during the October service reminded us, we sometimes ascribe connotations to words like dark and black which can stray into negative or even implicitly racist territory. Being aware of the way we process imagery allows us to question and challenge the messages we are exposed to as well as those we send out or perpetrate. That being so however it is also perfectly reasonable to employ expressions such as "shining a light into dark corners" as metaphors ... although that example is perhaps more in cliché territory!

Iconography is the study of the symbolic meaning contained in works of art. The word "iconography" is derived from the Greek words "eikon" meaning "image" and "graphos" meaning "to write." The traditional icon image as used in the Orthodox faith is a visual symbol of the invisible. Icons express in images the spiritual concepts that are inexpressible in words and inaccessible to our rational mind.

It wasn't until the late eighteenth century that, in the Western Europe at least, the beauty of the dark months of autumn and especially winter was fully expressed in painting. In fact, until that time, landscape painting was generally not seen as a fit subject in its own right but as a backdrop for a historical or biblical scene as well-being useful behind a portrait. When landscape does appear it is almost invariably spring or summer.

However In the late 18th century, the growing Romantic movement in literature, philosophy and art intensified interest in landscape painting, including winter landscapes.

A leading practitioner was the German artist Caspar David Friedrich. Although based on direct observation, his landscapes did not reproduce specific scenes from nature but were composites painted to illustrate a dramatic or emotional effect. In other words their content is symbolic. His aim was a reconnect with the spiritual self through the contemplation of nature.

Almost invariably Friedrich portrayed winter scenes as solemn and still, often dark, barren even desolate. So at first sight his nature studies may seem an example of a negative use of symbolism, but not so, In Friedrich's hands the winter landscape is an expression of religious mysticism.

Whilst this idea is relatively new to the West, in the East this idea is well established. To give just one example, in Persia the winter solstice is called Yaldā (meaning: birth) and has been celebrated for thousands of years. Deriving from pre-Islamic cultures it is referred to as the eve of the birth of Mithra, who symbolised light, goodness and strength on earth.

Roy Clark



'Time Does Not Rest' - Casper David Friedrich

'On an ultimate level, basic goodness is the principle of nonduality or open space that is always in the background, whether it manifests or not. Rinpoche called it diamond-like or indestructible, because basic goodness in itself doesn't have any bias toward good or bad and therefore you can't destroy it. It is unchanging. You can't wound it or slash it. You can't destroy it. It isn't changed by your realization of it or lack of realization of it. Basic goodness is in you and in the cosmos. It's not particularly mystical. If you want to grasp it, it is simple and open.'

Cynthia Kneen

'Singing Our Faith'

Reflections from Congregation Members
from our service on 4th September 2016.

This service is also available online as a podcast.

In this service a few members of the congregation were invited to choose a favourite hymn, one which had special meaning for them, and say a few words about their choice and how it aligns with their own world-view and their Unitarian values.

Alice Lambert – 'We're Gonna Sit at the Welcome Table'

I've chosen this as my favourite hymn because of its jolly, exuberant, uplifting tune and its lyrics that celebrate inclusiveness, equality, diversity and unity. I see the hymn both as a description of what it will be like in heaven – with the 'welcome table' as a metaphor for heaven – but also, of course, as a description of the example that churches should set now in terms of embracing diversity and inclusiveness. Seeing that the hymn is included in the 'Communion' section, I assume that the 'welcome table' also refers to the taking of communion.

I understand that this hymn, with different lyrics, was originally a Spiritual. It was also adapted during the Civil Rights era in the United States. In the Civil Rights protest song the 'welcome table' referred in an ironic way to literal tables – the tables or lunch counters in public facilities where Black people were refused service – and at which they held sit-in protests. There is a verse in the Civil Rights version of the song that explicitly refers to this: 'I'm gonna sit at the Woolworth counter', alluding to the famous sit-in at a Woolworth store in North Carolina in 1960.

Interestingly, all versions of this hymn other than the Unitarian version seem to state 'I'm gonna sit at the welcome table' rather than 'we're'. I like the sense of unity that 'we're' conveys. My favourite verse of our hymn is 'No fancy style at the welcome table', which I like to interpret in a sartorial sense; namely, it doesn't matter what you wear, or how good you look, or how fashionable you are – you will be welcome. As a teenager I always felt woefully deficient in the fashion department – including at church! – so I get a kick out of this verse. 'We're Gonna Sit at the Welcome Table' never fails to lift my spirits. It's a simple hymn with an important message and powerful history.

Jeannene Powell – 'The Fire of Commitment' (AKA 'From the Light of Days Remembered')

The hymn I've chosen was written and composed by Reverend Jason Shelton, with help from Mary Morn, and he is the Associate Minister for Music at the first Unitarian Universalist Church in Nashville, Tennessee, who also wrote 'Standing on the Side of Love'. Over the years, I've heard and sung this hymn, enjoying its energetic and motivating tune. However it wasn't until I attended FUSE last year, that it gained deep significance. It was during opening worship with approximately 100 others, singing its message of deep integrity, Integrity of mind and soul's passion and hunger, being manifested into action, that I felt confirmation that I was in the "right" place. That being a member of the Unitarian movement was truly right for me. Reverend Shelton's biography page states that, within his ministry he starts with the premise that "What we sing, is who we are." And I think that this is why this song's chorus resonates so deeply with me - it goes:



*When the fire of commitment, sets our mind and soul ablaze,
When our hunger and our passion, meet to call us on our way,
When we live with deep assurance, of the flame that burns within,
Then our promise finds fulfilment, and our future can begin.*

These words sum up my own journey from stumbling across Essex Church 8 years ago, to my unfolding path of Lay Preaching and beyond. Which has been an ongoing journey of committing to and trusting in the flame inside me, allowing my hunger and passion to call me forward. And my mind and soul being truly aligned to a deeper purpose manifesting in my life. And I think it's an inspiring message that many can connect to, about finding and trusting something deep within themselves, and following that passion to bring fulfilment to a dream, desire or to live their deepest purpose.

Sue Smith – 'Weaver God Creator'

I've chosen this hymn because it reminds me of my niece living in Canada learning to weave within the group of other weavers. Up until that weaving group we had been a family of stitchers. Mum, Dad, Aunt, sister, nieces and myself stitched our way through family life, making and repairing clothes, shoes, toys, furnishings, table linen until, when the dressing up box got made redundant it was recycled again.

Now as a regular embroiderer there are lots of words in the hymn that resonate with me and I can make many connections between embroidery, the hymn and Unitarian values. It comes down to what I understand to be the essential relationship between the *needle*, the *thread*, the *fabric*, the *stitch*, the *colours* and the *design* and when I'm lucky enough to get that right then maybe stitching can be, for me, a meditative craft.

In the Unitarian hymn, weaver, god, creator, spirit are just a few of the words that can be used by Unitarians to name their divinity. Having this *freedom* do I think of the needle as being that creator or maybe it is the design that shows us the way to the Unitarian path we take. Love, *justice*, wisdom, and teaching, all these words used in the hymn are familiar to Unitarians and frequently used in our Sunday services and suggest the values of *tolerance* and *acceptance* but I had trouble finding where in my stitching relationship I could put these words. I could put these in fabric. Fabric is also mentioned in the hymn. Certainly the warp and weft threads in weaving seem to resonate with me of acceptance.

For me true *equality* comes from personally understanding my interdependence with others. If we depend upon others surely we have to be of equal worth. This stitching relationship is an equal one. The needle is redundant without the thread and fabric, the thread needs the stitch to find its purpose and the stitch needs the fabric to demonstrate its function. The hymn also talks of co-weavers which brings us to the Unitarian value of *community* where we can demonstrate our open mindedness, our acceptance of change, our tenderness and inclusivity. Which brings me round nicely to a quick reminder that the creativity group has started again this autumn and we want to complete another hanging representing Spring/Summer – *everyone* is invited to come and contribute to the hanging or bring their own crafts to work on.

'Singing Our Faith: Our Favourite Hymns' (continued)

Juliet Edwards – 'To Mercy, Pity, Peace and Love'

The words of this hymn are by William Blake, poet and engraver. It comes from his poems called "Songs of Innocence" I have known this hymn since my secondary school days and we used to sing it in this church too but haven't done so recently. When Jane asked me for a favourite hymn it immediately came to mind because its first lines are so direct – "To Mercy, Pity Peace and Love, All pray in their distress."

I hear in the news so much about Syria where Assad is prepared to inflict chemical warfare on his own people, mercilessly and the seemingly endless fighting in which buildings and towns are destroyed. Likewise ISIS kill innocent holidaymakers and show videos of beheadings – no mercy there. Interestingly, following the coup in Turkey, the West was concerned that mercy should be shown to the more than 6,000 who were imprisoned. World leaders do not want the death penalty to be reinstated in Turkey and they state the importance of following the rule of law.

Blake says in the hymn that Mercy has a human heart and since I've been thinking of this hymn I have also been thinking of Portia's speech "The quality of Mercy" in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. She says "it (Mercy) is enthroned in the hearts of kings, It is an attribute of God himself, And earthly power doth then show likest God's, When mercy seasons justice." As you sing this hymn you may or may not believe in Blake's "God our Father dear" but I'm pretty sure you will go along with his belief that Mercy, Pity, Peace and Love all show themselves through human beings. I like the thought of Pity having a human face. When people show compassion it shows in their face and especially their eyes. And Love has the human form divine. Not just in the face but may be a caring hug or the whole of our body when we feel and want to express erotic love. "Peace has the human dress". I'm not sure what Blake means by this but there is, after all a lot of pleasure to be had from sitting drinking coffee, may be with a friend and watching people as they pass by. When there was a temporary cease fire in Syria many families went to the parks together to picnic. You cannot do these things unless there is peace. The hymn has a powerful conclusion, that when we pray in our distress for Mercy, Pity, Peace and Love, or in reality for help, we know that in the end it will come through human beings.

Sonya Leite – 'Sacred the Body'

When I heard this Hymn for the first time here at this church I was surprised and grateful, as I am with any hymns, from any tradition - acknowledging the BODY. I did some research on this hymn and was fascinated with what I found. This hymn has received some controversial responses and approval from those in religious communities. Dr. Michael Hawn is a professor of sacred music at Perkins School of Theology and he writes;

"This hymn demonstrates the ability of current hymn writers to address the social circumstances of our day in a biblically based, theologically coherent and poetically sensitive manner. Dr. Ruth Duck (who wrote this hymn) never "preaches" to the singer. Discussions of the human body within the history of Christianity have often been negative as Christians often considered the soul to be pure and superior to the "lusts and passions" of the body. This perspective has led to a neglect of a wholesome look at the body in theology and a denial in the church of issues related to physical abuse in its many forms."



Ruth Duck, who wrote this hymn, is a Professor of Worship at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, Illinois. She says:

"I was called to ask if I knew of a congregational song that spoke to issues of abuse using Paul's concept of the body as the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16-17)." This request came as a result of a conversation among students planning for a seminary worship service who needed a song on this theme. None was to be found. "I didn't know of any existing hymn texts on that theme, but the idea inspired 'Sacred the Body.' Writing the text was a source of healing for my distress over these issues."

I find the tune and melody very sweet, like a children's song. The music is easy to follow and the words are simple and clear about acceptance and differences. I hope that we can all sing this in the Spirit of Healing and that we honour the powerful message that the writer wanted to serve.

Antony Bunsee – 'Lord of the Dance'

I like this hymn. Obviously. I had a teacher in Salisbury who held that to like something was an act equal to, and sometimes exceeding love, where heart and mind both coalesce. Back in Salisbury in the 60s, at the local Methodists, this was mine and my sisters' favourite, along with the Reverend Ernest Dover, an occasional preacher there. We liked the humour and wit he brought to his sermons, and I think it is also true of this hymn, the melody, like the lyric twists turns and dances lightly, and was to me, and still is, a celebration. For this brief encomium, of course I did some research on the author, Sydney Carter. Taking a traditional Shaker hymn, *Tis The Gift To Be Simple*, he developed lyrics from the English carol, *Tomorrow Shall Be My Dancing Day*, which is written as a first-person song of Jesus, describing his Mission as a true love dance. More interestingly to Unitarians, ...well, let me quote Carter:

I see Christ as the incarnation of the piper who is calling us. He dances that shape and pattern which is at the heart of our reality. By Christ I mean not only Jesus; in other times and places, other planets, there may be other Lords of the Dance. But Jesus is the one I know of first and best. I sing of the dancing pattern in the life and words of Jesus.

Carter was influenced by a statue of Siva as Lord of the Dance that sat on his desk, thus the hymn is a dramatic account of Christs' mission, as well as a depiction of Dance as a universal, ascendant Harmony. I don't think that occurred to me when I was 10 at Sunday School, but I knew there was something light-spirited in this hymn, which stood out from the more grandiose Victorian standards we sang. To my simple, young mind, the drama and melody were uplifting, and that response to the hymn has never left me. As Nietzsche said, "I would never worship a God who could not Dance". This is the hymn for Philosophers and Children....

Hucklow Summer School

For Personal and Leadership Development

19th - 26th August 2017

At the Nightingale Centre,
Great Hucklow in the Peak District

'Walk Your Path with Joy'

Finding Hope and Resisting
Despair in Turbulent Times



*'Help us fulfil what lies within the circle of our lives
– each day we ask no more, no less.
Untangle the knots within, so we can
mend our hearts' simple ties to others...
Free us to walk your path with joy!
Neil Douglas-Klotz – 'Prayers of the Cosmos'*

As we march, mosey, and muddle our way through life, each of us will encounter all sorts of personal challenges on our travels. In addition, we may feel increasingly overwhelmed and powerless in the face of current world events, political currents, and environmental crises. How can we keep our heads up in hard times, without turning away from the world's woes, and stay engaged to do our bit for the common good? This week at summer school we will explore the ways in which we can find fulfilment, connection, hope and joy along life's meandering path.

Hucklow Summer School focuses on matters of religion and spirituality and intends 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. Hucklow Summer School brings fellow Unitarians together and allows them to get to know each other deeply and form lasting and meaningful connections. It is our hope that participants will be inspired and challenged to develop and promote high-quality religious education activities when they return home.

We anticipate that the full programme and application details will be released in mid-December. Our team of group facilitators includes Elizabeth Birtles, Stephen Crowther, Lindy Latham, Janet Costley, Sarah Tinker and Michael Allured. Our team of theme speakers will include Nancy Crumbine and Margaret Kirk and our Minister for the Week is Danny Crosby. Keep an eye on our website for more info:

www.hucklowsummerschool.co.uk



I would like to draw people's attention to this campaign which aims to oppose and halt the incitement of hatred, discrimination, and demonization which many consider to be disturbingly prevalent in some sections of the British media. The primary tactic of 'Stop Funding Hate' is to put pressure on large advertisers – particularly those who claim to have some kind of ethical dimension to their business, such as John Lewis and the Co-Op – to withdraw their advertising from these publications until they stop inciting hatred. Details of their latest letter-writing campaigns can be found on the FB page: www.facebook.com/stopfundinghate

Details from the 'Stop Funding Hate' Facebook page: 'this campaign aims to tackle the culture of hate, demonisation and division that is poisoning our political discourse. It was started by an online community horrified by the upsurge in media hate speech that accompanied the referendum. Last year the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights raised concerns about the "vicious verbal assault on migrants and asylum seekers in the UK tabloid press", which he said followed "decades of sustained and unrestrained anti-foreigner abuse, misinformation and distortion".'

Jane Blackall

Worship Studies Course Foundation Step At Hampstead in 2017



Thinking about leading a service but not sure how? Looking for new ways to enliven worship for your congregation and beyond? Next year, the LDPA is offering a four-part course, leading to a GA-recognised qualification, the Worship Studies Course Foundation Step. This will be based on the very popular version run here at Essex Church in 2013. Group sessions will take place on the following dates at Rosslyn Hill Chapel in Hampstead:

**4th March, 15th July, 30th September,
and 25th November 2017**

To register and for more information contact the District Minister, Rev. Martin Whitell: revdmart@aol.com



Insight on Old Age

A friend made a very wise remark to me when we talking to each other a few evenings ago: "You have been 50 and 60, and 70, even 80, so you know what it's like." They don't. And they can't until they have experienced each phase for themselves. Age does have its compensations. Howlers that were so embarrassing when we were young pass off with a laugh. Indeed, the invaluable gift is a sense of humour. At the other end of the scale, fatigue, gross.

Speaking for myself, what I learned when I was young comes easily, like the alphabet. This modern form, on a keyboard, where b can be between v and n rather than between a and c, is beyond my comprehension.

In stature of course I think we all lose height. So much so that we find it necessary to have clothes-rails and hooks lower down in our wardrobes. Meanwhile, one's visitors (welcome as they are) thinking to be helpful, set about tidying the kitchen. Up to the top shelf go plates and glasses in constant use, with a jug on top perhaps. Trying to manoeuvre one forward, standing on tiptoe, risks a fall – of me, or plates, or both.

The various teas are back in the right cupboard, and the front of each cupboard filled with things seldom used. Funny thing is the window sill. Home to pots of herbs. Here I must stop, or you might think I'm complaining. But I regard windows as a source of light, and chop back anything that gets in the way, be it rose stems or branches outside, or ornaments inside. A creature of habit, I have bought a Royal Horticultural Society pocket diary for many years: slim, small, light and fits nicely in my handbag. Sunday is on the top left of each page, after a space for notes and the whole month at a glance, set out in small but visible print, finishing on the right hand page with Saturday. That is until a year ago, when Letts stopped printing for the RHS. Now the page of my replacement diary begins on Monday (throwing me completely) and there is not space for reminders or monthly outlines, much less the alphabetical list of one's friends and telephone numbers at the back.

Age UK rents out Alarm devices. Given a power cut, or telephone problem, these devices let out a shrill "check your telephone, check your telephone" (or "mains power supply") all through the night. Loud enough to be heard all through the house. And does Age UK do anything about it? Like sending help? No. Their response? "It is not our problem." Apparently they are unaware of any electrical problems and rely on a working telephone. Unfortunately, where I live, these technical faults are not unusual. Being without a telephone is not so unacceptable, it's the disturbed nights and time spent trying to find someone in customer services who cares about your predicament, made all the harder by being all too quick to get irate when I can't hear the person at the other end of the phone speaking too quickly.

And as for when you are told to ring a help line and you get through to someone speaking perfect English but with a strong accent and speaking so quickly that you can't understand a word they are saying. It's so embarrassing to keep having to ask someone to repeat themselves. Slow down and speak clearly everyone. Help the aged!

Stephanie Saville

Committee Report



The church management committee last met on November 17th and will next meet on January 19th. Staff were thanked for their hard work in steering all the recent building projects, which are now just about complete, although there will always be more tasks to be tackled. We've listened to complaints about the difficulty in using the press button flushes on two of the church toilets and are finding out how best to replace these with ordinary handles. The library carpet will hopefully be cleaned before too long.

A minister's pay is based on recommendations from our General Assembly's Stipend Review Committee and the committee agreed that all staff should receive the 4% pay rise recommended for ministers from January 2017. The Review Committee aims to bring Unitarian ministers' pay into parity with the Baptists within the next few years. Despite the expense of all the building works in 2016, our church finances are in a healthy state, largely because of rental income remaining buoyant. We are very fortunate to have a building which is in such demand. The committee agreed a donation of £250 towards the local homeless charity GlassDoor, which is run by West London churches and does such important work with those who have nowhere to live.

Overall we are delighted with our new heating system and appreciate Jenny and Sarah's efforts in trying to sort some inevitable teething problems. They now know a great deal more than they once did about 'intelligent' heating control systems and appreciate being able to control temperatures in our building's various zones even when they're hundreds of miles away. We're hoping that a new home can be found for our organ before the church floor is sanded and re-finished. Any ideas anyone?

'Keep your thoughts positive
because your thoughts become your words.
Keep your words positive
because your words become your behaviour.
Keep your behaviour positive
because your behaviour becomes your habits.
Keep your habits positive
because your habits become your values.
Keep your values positive
because your values become your destiny.'

Mahatma Gandhi
(sent in by Varinder)

‘Elargissez Dieu’

Address by Sarah Tinker from 9th October 2016

This sermon is also available online as a podcast.

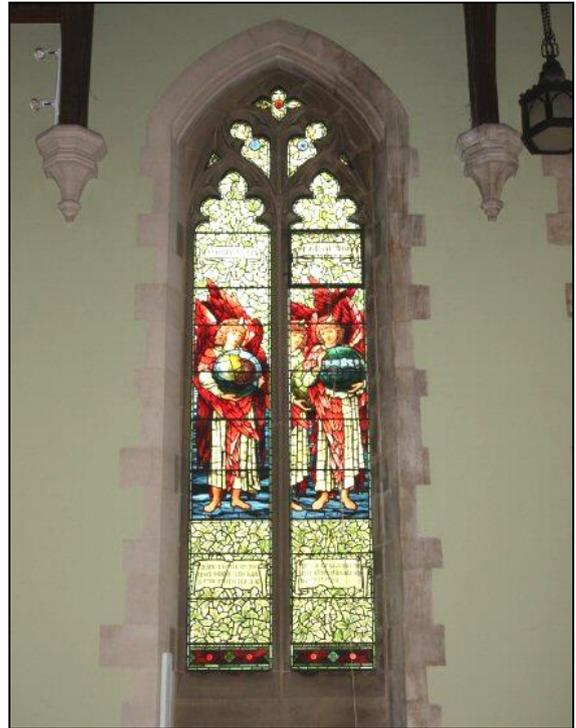
I don't know how many of us have visited the chapel of our Unitarian congregation in Oxford. It's an impressively grand late Victorian building with beautiful stained glass windows, all designed by Burne Jones and the William Morris Company. We could arrange to go and visit one day. The windows that always catch my eye show the six days of creation, with the earth cradled in the arms of Pre-Raphaelite angels. And on one of those windows is inscribed the motto 'elargissez dieu', which you may sometimes find translated as 'magnify the Lord' but is far better translated as 'broaden your ideas of God'. These are words of Denis Diderot, French 18th century philosopher and playwright. Today's orders of service show various photos of these windows and you can also find photos of them online.

Diderot was a key figure of the Enlightenment and was brave in his explorations about faith. He had a healthy disrespect for authority – one of his famous quotes, '*Man will never be free until the last king is strangled with the entrails of the last priest*', is a clear expression of the frustration many of his time felt at the political entanglement between church and state, a connection of power which of course we still experience to this day in Britain. Diderot's own faith position could be described as atheist - meaning not theist in his beliefs. He did not believe in a super-natural God, a being, a separate entity who could and would intervene in human affairs. And this is a view held by many people today, including some Unitarian ministers.

It was one such minister, back in 1990, who helped me start my own journey towards ministry. Trevor Jones was leading a course called *Building Your Own Theology* and when we reached the section on *Definitions of God* he said he didn't believe in God. That was such a refreshing moment for me – to have discovered that there was a religious community called Unitarians whose ministers didn't have to believe in God. I was intrigued.

Trevor then went on to say the line that Unitarians sometimes laugh about – 'but of course, it all depends what you mean by God!' What Trevor explained is pretty much my own faith position today. He, like Diderot, did not believe in a being, a separate entity, with a name and an identity, looking down on the earth as his creation. Such a view is held by many Unitarians. There are also plenty of Unitarians who hold theist views and that's absolutely fine – we are a non-creedal community – we do not have to hold the same theology as one another in order to belong here. We do have to respect one another's faith and we are committed to an exploration of our varied faiths and to supporting one another in putting that faith into action in meaningful ways.

My ministerial colleague from Cambridge Andrew Brown writes well about the difference between God as A BEING and BEING: *"the whole religious landscape changed whenever one stopped thinking about God as A BEING and started thinking of God as BEING ... to be a (conventional) theist is to believe there exists a supernatural being who is God; to be a (conventional) atheist is to believe that such a being does not exist. But, if God is thought of as BEING, this is still not to believe in A BEING called God (so you are still, conventionally speaking, an atheist) but it IS to understand God as the mysterious "no-thing" which gifts every actual thing with existence and life. Such a move allows the mystery of why there is something not nothing to be given a name (either BEING and/or GOD) and for it to remain creatively at play in our everyday language."* (You can read more of Andrew Brown's writing on his blog, <http://andrewjbrown.blogspot.co.uk/>)



A stained-glass window in Harris Manchester College, Oxford

I sometimes envy the sure faith of those who experience God as a being, able and willing to assist them. As we listen to a couple of verses of an old hymn, let's imagine such a faith:

Eternal Father, strong to save,
Whose arm does bind the restless wave,
Who bids the mighty ocean deep
Its own appointed limits keep;
O hear us when we cry to Thee
For those in peril on the sea.

O Saviour, whose almighty word
The winds and waves submissive heard,
Who walked upon the foaming deep,
And calm amid the rage did sleep;
O hear us when we cry to Thee
For those in peril on the sea.

Just in those two verses there are enough theological issues to keep us thinking for quite a while.

- The idea of a God powerful enough to save us from the storms, yet so often not intervening to save the most vulnerable and needy.
- The male gender that is so often assigned to God.
- The Christian message of God in the human form of Jesus, coming to earth to share human suffering; strength and weakness combined; a saviour who does not save himself.

I have to broaden my ideas about God in order to make sense of any of this. And because language is so limited in its ability to describe the indescribable no wonder many of us avoid the topic. But it's such a fascinating topic to explore. We could also say it's an important topic, that it will be useful to be more religiously literate as our world seems to lurch towards more extreme right wing views. Let's not leave religious language solely for the use of extremists. If I use the term 'God' I mean - containing all that exists. Nothing left out. You'll find a post it slip stuck to your hymn sheet and I do invite you to jot down what God means for you or let me know some other time. Let's keep this conversation going.

'Elargissez Dieu' (continued)

Any description, any definition in this community is provisional – it has meaning for you and that meaning is for now. Let's not concern ourselves with how others might react to our ideas. There was a time for me when gendered descriptions of God enraged me. The mere mention of 'Lord, King, Father' and the like would have me buttoning my proverbial lips and refusing to sing. Now I find them quite comforting metaphors, religious symbols, not realities – to be used along with many other describing words, none of which can ever get close to a 'true' description of God as being.

So if I use the term 'God' I mean: that which contains all that is and that which is beyond human comprehending. If there is then, as I like to imagine, a spark of divinity within each and every one of us, some imperatives follow:

- An imperative to be who we truly are – as unique expressions of the divine.
- An imperative to allow and encourage others to be truly themselves, for they too are an expression of God.
- An imperative to attempt to understand that which is 'other', even that which we dislike or fear. We are all in this together.

The God that we may pray to is then within us all, we are the co-creators of all that is – both in our thinking and in the work of our hands. In the same stained glass window in Oxford as '*elargissez dieu*' there is another motto – '*thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*'. In a world where everyone is in effect our neighbour, that is an injunction worthy of serious thought. It's the work of a lifetime, truly to learn how to love all our neighbours even where their behaviours and beliefs may be so very different from our own. One of our aims for the year ahead here with Kensington Unitarians is to deepen our understanding of, and use of, religious language. My hope is that such an exploration will help us find ways to live in stormy times, times that clearly need to hear a message of inclusivity and love. Amen

Here are some of our answers from our congregation to the question: **What Does God Mean To Me?**

God is love

God means to me both more and less as I get older

A source of strength, love and hope. Outside of us, inside of us, inspiring us to be our best selves.

God is when I am truly present to / accepting of whatever I encounter. God is the capacity to empathically identify with what is 'other' / what is similar.

God – the universe – all-that-is – discovering itself as it unfolds – and an underlying pull towards justice and love.

God is a hugely important concept to me but I try to find other words to describe that concept.

Awareness, life force, grace.

God for me is in you and me and everything and often my delight and pain to consider

Buddha asked 'if God is all powerful and entirely beneficent and created the world, why is the world and ocean of evil and suffering?' Bertrand Russell called Buddha the 'greatest atheist' and Julian Huxley said much the same thing. Another topic to explore – 'what does atheism mean for us?'

God is inside me, outside me, and around us.

God is no-thing.

God is both the known and the unknowable.

Mother and Father God. 'Thou shalt love the lord thy God with all thy ... might'. God is when I have an idea.

God is the life force of the universe.

God is the spirit in all that is and something beyond our comprehending.



Farewell from Sofie

Hi everyone,

I have loved being a regular visitor and a member of the congregation. Now it's time for me to move back to Sweden, my mother country.

During spring I spent more time back home, and I bumped into a man who I really like. Now I will continue to explore life with him, his cat Lakris, and two sheep.

I am keen to start a small Unitarian fellowship just south of Gothenburg, and if anyone has any tips feel free to share.

My contact details are sofiesandell@gmail.com, and you find me on all social media channels.

Thank you for being such an inspiring community and lovely group to get to know.

I will be back every time I'm visiting London.

Sofie Sandell

Services at Essex Church in December/January



Sunday 4th December, 11am – ‘Traditions of Home’

Service led by Jeannene Powell

With the Christmas narrative establishing certain traditions at this time of year, we'll explore our own home traditions and how they do or don't serve us at this time of our lives.

Sunday 11th December, 11am – ‘Christmas Carol Service’

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker
and our Quartet of Singers

Come and enjoy a good sing at our Carol Service. We may be visited by St Lucia, a tradition in many parts of Europe. This service will be followed by a congregational Christmas lunch – all are welcome – please bring along some food or drink to share with others if you can.

Sunday 18th December, 11am – ‘Cold Days, Warm Spirits’

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker
and Congregation Members

Focusing on winter spirituality and ways to keep our spirits lifted, both ancient and modern. With a simple ritual to welcome the winter solstice.

Saturday 24th December, 5pm – ‘Candlelit Christmas Eve’

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Join us for our traditional, contemplative Christmas Eve service. You might like to invite a friend along on this special evening. There'll be mince pies and mulled wine afterwards.



Sunday 1st January, 11am – ‘Deep Listening’

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

It is only through deep listening that we might gain an understanding – of one another, and also of ourselves and our wider world.

Sunday 8th January, 11am – ‘What Does It Mean?’

Service led by Jane Blackall

When we attempt to understand a text, particularly a sacred text, its meaning may not always be immediately obvious to us. The process of understanding things that other people have written down, particularly in a different time and place, invariably involves some sort of interpretation. In this service we will dip a tentative toe into the world of hermeneutics – the theory of interpretation – and consider how its insights can potentially enrich our religious life.

Sunday 15th January, 11am – ‘Inclusive Church’

Service led by Rev. Alex Gowing-Cumber
and Rev. Sarah Tinker

How we can make our church communities ever more welcoming of difference, through understanding one another's lives and experiences

Sunday 22nd January, 11am – ‘Language of Spirit’

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Join us for an exploration of religious language and how we might make it our own and share our unique understanding with others

Sunday 29th January, 11am – ‘Points of View’

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

How might an understanding of another point of view help in times of conflict and uncertainty? Followed by a Sunday Conversation from 1 to 2.30pm with structured conversations to help us understand one another more deeply.