

Kensington Unitarians

community – spirituality – conscience



NEWSLETTER
SUMMER 2026



Part of Something Greater than Ourselves

Connecting with our Wider Unitarian Movement



How Can
I Help?



Each Child
a Light



Our Hurting
World

www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Coming up...

June

Wednesday 3

7pm Poetry Group with Brian (in-person)

Friday 5

7pm Heart and Soul with Rita (online)

Sunday 7

11am Sunday Service led by Jasmine Cooray (hybrid)

7pm Heart and Soul (online – leader TBC)

Thursday 11

7pm How to Be a Unitarian #1/6 (online)

Friday 12

7pm Heart and Soul with Jane (online)

Sunday 14

11am Sunday Service led by Rev. Dr. Jane Blackall (hybrid)

12.30pm Community Yoga with Hannah (in-person)

1pm Art Play Crafternoon (in-person)
7pm Heart and Soul with Jane (online)

Wednesday 17

7pm Heart and Soul with Jane (in-person)

Thursday 18

7pm How to Be a Unitarian #2/6 (online)

Friday 19

7pm Heart and Soul with Jane (online)

Sunday 21

11am Sunday Service led by Rev. Dr. Jane Blackall (hybrid)

1-3.30pm Summer Solstice Labyrinth Mini-Retreat (in-person)

7pm Heart and Soul with Jane (online)

Tuesday 23

11am Walking Group (details TBC)

Thursday 25

7pm How to Be a Unitarian #3/6 (online)

Friday 26

7pm Heart and Soul with Jane (online)

Sunday 28

11am Sunday Service led by Rev. Dr. Jane Blackall (hybrid)

12.30pm Find Your Voice: Singing with Margaret (in-person)

7.30pm Better World Book Club: 'Just About Coping' (online)

July

Wednesday 1

7pm Poetry Group with Brian (in-person)

Friday 3

7pm Heart and Soul with Jane (online)

Sunday 5

11am Sunday Service led by Rev. Dr. Jane Blackall (hybrid)

1-3pm Indian Head Massage Workshop with Vita Kay (in-person)
7pm Heart and Soul with Jane (online)

Friday 10

7pm Heart and Soul with Jane (online)

Sunday 12

11am Sunday Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker (hybrid)

7pm Heart and Soul with Jane (online)

Wednesday 15

7pm Heart and Soul with Jane (in-person)

Friday 17

7pm Heart and Soul with Jane (online)

Sunday 19

11am Sunday Service led by Rev. Dr. Jane Blackall (hybrid)

12.30pm Community Yoga with Hannah (in-person)

1pm Art Play Crafternoon (in-person)

1pm 'Each Child a Light' Memorial Quilt Project (in-person)

7pm Heart and Soul with Jane (online)

Friday 24

7pm Heart and Soul with Jane (online)

Sunday 26

11am Sunday Service led by Rev. Dr. Jane Blackall (hybrid)

12noon Congregational Lunch (coordinated by Liz)

7.30pm Better World Book Club: 'Calling In' (online)

Friday 31

7pm Heart and Soul with Jane (online)

August

Sunday 2

11am Sunday Service led by Rev. Dr. Jane Blackall (hybrid)

12.30pm Find Your Voice: Singing with Margaret (in-person)

7pm Heart and Soul with Jane (online)

Wednesday 5

7pm Poetry Group with Brian (in-person)

Friday 7

7pm Heart and Soul with Jane (online)

Sunday 9

11am Sunday Service led by Rev. Dr. Jane Blackall and Dr. Patricia Brewerton (hybrid)

7pm Heart and Soul with Jane (online)

Friday 14

7pm Heart and Soul with Jane (online)

Sunday 16

11am Sunday Service led by Rev. Dr. Jane Blackall and Congregation Members (hybrid)

12.30pm Community Yoga with Hannah (in-person)

1pm Art Play Crafternoon (in-person)

7pm Heart and Soul with Jane (online)

Wednesday 19

7pm Heart and Soul with Brian (in-person)

Sunday 23

11am Sunday Service led by Roy Clark (IN-PERSON ONLY)

Sunday 30

11am Sunday Service led by Rev. Dr. Jane Blackall (ONLINE ONLY due to Carnival)

7.30pm Better World Book Club: 'Upstream' (online)

Please keep an eye on our website for last minute additions to the programme. Visit kensington-unitarians.org.uk and see www.youtube.com/@kensingtonunitarians for our Sunday Service archive.

'JUST ONE THING':

Ask Yourself 'How Can I Help?'

In each edition of the church newsletter we suggest 'just one thing' you might do for the benefit of our community. This time I'd like to pick up on something from our recent membership service (see mini-reflection, 'We Belong to One Another', on page 4).

It's so heartening to notice members of the congregation taking the initiative to step up and help out with all the basic tasks which help keep the show on the road at church. That might mean looking out for newcomers on a Sunday morning and making friendly conversation before and after the service, both in-person and online, and helping build connection (even if you're not the official greeter or co-host). It might mean keeping an eye out in case extra chairs are needed, if latecomers arrive during the service and the church is full, and getting up quietly to put out chairs and hymn books. It might mean offering to join the regular volunteering team to greet, or make coffee, and being willing to step in and cover one of those tasks at the last minute if someone calls in sick. It might mean keeping in touch with others and reaching out if you haven't seen someone for a while.

There's a limit to what we can achieve as a congregation if we are leaning too heavily on just a small handful of people to take responsibility for these key tasks. So let's cultivate a culture where we're all ready to do our part. I encourage you to regularly ask yourself: 'how can I help?' Of course each of us will have differing capacities, and preferences regarding the sort of activities we feel able to join in with, but there is always some way in which we can contribute



to cultivating community, and showing up to services and small group activities (ideally on a regular basis) is perhaps the most significant contribution of all. Being present is the foundation of building those relationships which bind together a community. So why not sign up for one of the forthcoming groups, such as our 'How to be a Unitarian' course which starts on 11 June, or join us for a walk or a crafternoon?

WhatsApp Group

Our InTouch WhatsApp Group is a gentle space for checking in and encouraging each other. If you're a member or friend of the congregation and would like to be added to the group just get in touch with Jane (see details, right)



YouTube Channel

Our Sunday services are all archived on our YouTube channel (www.youtube.com/@kensingtonunitarians) so you can catch up on any you've missed or search through the archive (going back to summer 2020) to find services on a particular theme. Maybe you could share the link with friends who are curious about our community and the Unitarian approach to faith.

Contact Us

(Jane/Ramona/Patricia/Liz/Office)

Kensington Unitarians at Essex Church,
112 Palace Gardens Terrace,
Notting Hill Gate, London W8 4RT

The best way to get in touch with us is by email:

Minister: Rev. Dr. Jane Blackall
jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Admin Team (for bookings)
office@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Chairperson: Liz Tuckwell
chair@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Treasurer: Patricia Brewerton
treasurer@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Warden: Ramona Cristea
warden@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Minister's Reflection: 'We Belong to One Another'



From the service on 26 April 2026

Last week I put a call out to members of the congregation and asked them to say, in just a sentence or two, what being a member means to them. Thanks to everyone who responded – I've put all those responses in the service text that is up on the website (scroll to the bottom of the page) – they're more-or-less anonymised but some have identifying features! We're just going to share a few fragments of those responses now to give a sense of the variety of things people said about their sense of belonging as members of this community.

'Essex Church has been a home for me for since 1983. It has given me a sense of continuity in my life throughout its ups and downs. I have made many friends, sadly some are now deceased. The Church has been through ups and downs too and it still remains my home.'

'It's important to me to have a place where I have the time and space to work through how to be a better person and to be encouraged to do that, and to think more of others and how to make the world a better place.'

'This church and the Unitarian faith is a place of refuge and stability in my life. I can relax, breathe and belong, knowing I am in a community of openness and care.'

'I'm grateful for the opportunity to come and share spiritual community with people in a gentle, simple way. I can be joyful, tearful, exhausted, open or closed, and know I still have a place.'

'Sundays are reserved for Kensington Unitarians; they're how I start and end that day each week, and I look forward to them all. Pitching my tent in the virtual space of Essex Church, sitting around our chalice flame, singing loudly, reflecting quietly, and laughing together.'

'Each service has given me food for reflection afterwards and a sense of kinship with everyone there. It's been by joining other activities like the weekly H&S online that I feel closeness to individuals and the group.'

'The Sunday service has become an anchor in my week, a reminder that belonging travels across oceans and time zones, carried by shared values and the company of people who care about the same questions.'

'I come to church not to be told what to believe but how to explore ideas behind and beyond words. I value the connections in our congregations that operate on many different levels but are based on our shared values of community, spirituality, and conscience.'

'Participating nourishes my soul and fosters my spiritual growth. I find wisdom from spiritual leaders and from members of the congregation on the big questions of life, and care and support for navigating life's highs and lows.'

'Being a member means I feel at home in a loving community of curious, kindred souls, where we value free spiritual exploration and share a commitment to bettering our external and internal worlds. It's a space of solidarity and sanctuary for me.'

'It took me a long time to commit to membership. I am not much into joining anything, especially a church. However, Essex Church won me over as I knew it would, because, quite simply, it is a place when I do not have to pretend to be anything or anybody other than who I am. I feel valued and loved for the person who goes around dressed in my skin.'

'There are so many things I love about being a member of Essex Church that I think you could call it my happy place!'

'Being a member means that I am willing to commit wholeheartedly to my church community.'

Thanks again to everyone who contributed. Hopefully those few excerpts have given a flavour of what belonging is all about though. A few common themes emerge: there's a sense of stability, continuity, and commitment; support and solidarity; care and companionship; shared values and purpose; a sense that we're exploring and joining in something that's bigger than ourselves.

Earlier in the service, I asked another question: if we truly belong to one another – as members of this congregation, Kensington Unitarians, aka Essex Church – then what does that require of us in terms of responsibility and mutuality? What do we owe to each other? This is, after all, our church, nobody else's. As Unitarians, we're very proud of our independence – but that means it's entirely up to us and we need to take ownership – we are the grown-ups that have to keep the show on the road – this community's existence and flourishing requires us all to be invested in showing up and doing what we can – so this community is still here for us next month, next year, and for future generations. Don't forget, we only have this church now, we can only rock up on a Sunday morning and join this community, because a continuous line of people have pitched in over centuries – since Theophilus Lindsey founded the original Essex Church back in 1774 – so many people have done their bit to keep it going.

And now it's our turn. We haven't all got the same capacities, skills, or aptitudes. We won't all be able to contribute in the same way (and that's a good thing! In this ecosystem there are many niches, and diversity is an asset). But I ask you to ask yourselves: 'how can I help?' If you're here on a Sunday morning (whether in person or online) that might mean looking out for newcomers and striking up conversation, asking what brought them here, showing interest and nurturing connection. It might mean noticing if extra chairs need putting out after the service has started or helping with cleaning tables or washing up. It might mean letting Liz know that you're ready to step up and

volunteer as greeter or coffee-maker, or letting Charlotte know you might be willing and able to help out with the co-hosting online. It might mean taking responsibility for some of the work of church governance or perhaps being a representative for our community at national Unitarian events. Crucially, it might mean signing up and showing up for our small groups, which is where a lot of the spiritual deepening happens, and where supportive and nurturing connections grow.

“If we truly belong to one another then what does that require of us in terms of responsibility and mutuality? What do we owe to each other? This is, after all, our church, nobody else's.”

Showing up for each other and for this community is a truly vital aspect of belonging. And it's how we're going to grow this congregation and make a difference in this world. And speaking of growing this congregation... today we welcome eleven new members – ELEVEN! – who have officially joined in the past year: Aisha, Sally, Teresa, Lili, Harvey, Linda H, Vita, Mussy, Akiko, Linda R, and Margaret. That brings us up to 65 members in total. We're growing! And if anyone who attends regularly (in-person or online) would like to officially join – it's not too late. Membership isn't about money, not here, there's no subscription fee. It's about showing your support for this congregation, and what we stand for, and it's good for morale for those of us who are keeping the show on the road when people sign up.

We have a tradition of sharing in a responsive affirmation each year at our membership service. So I'm going

to invite you to inwardly affirm your membership, or if you're not a member affirm your good wishes for the work of this church, by joining in a responsive prayer for this ministry. This is the prayer written for my Induction Service, based on the collectively sourced congregational values, which set out our intentions for this ministry and all that we do together here; we revisit it each year as a reminder of our mutual commitment.

Spirit of Life, God of All Love, we ask for your blessing on this congregation and our shared ministry and mission. Help us to flourish and thrive; empower us to fulfil our calling.

May this be a community of spiritual commitment; somewhere we go to reconnect with what matters most in life. Encourage us to seek your daily guidance; inspire us to pray all ways.

May this be a community of care and compassion; a safer, softer, kinder space; a holy house of sanctuary. Grant us the spirit of generosity in our listening and speaking.

May this be a community of authentic connection and realness where we can show up as our true selves and share our stories. Help us open our hearts to each other; reveal our common humanity.

May this be a community of learning, growth, and transformation; in which we are encouraged to use and develop our own unique gifts. Guide us toward new horizons; call us onward to greater heights and depths.

May this be a community of resistance and liberation; a church where we speak and act for equality and justice. Awaken in us the insight, strength, and courage to serve the greater good.

Spirit of Life, God of All Love, we commit ourselves to this shared ministry. Bless the work of our hearts, minds, and hands in the years to come. Amen.

'How to be a Unitarian'

Online Course: Six Thursdays from 11 June, 7-9pm

You are invited to sign up for this six-part online course, led by Jane Blackall and Charlotte Chanteloup, which is intended as both an orientation for those who are relatively new to Unitarianism and a chance for longer-standing Unitarians to reflect on their faith, in the context of the wider movement and our historic religious tradition. Sessions will include some input from the course leaders and plenty of time for conversation and sharing to explore the various questions and issues raised.

Participants will be asked to send in their responses to a few preparatory questions about their own experience and understanding of Unitarianism before the course starts. There will be a short article to read before each session (and some not-too-strenuous 'homework' to do each week). Over the six weeks we will touch on the following topics:

11 June: Introduction to Unitarianism: Reflection on our Experience

18 June: Unitarian Theology: Sources, Values, Principles

25 June: The Unitarian Denomination: Our Wider Movement

2 July: Being Unitarian in Community: Commitment to a Congregation

9 July: Deepening Your Unitarianism: Doing Our Own Spiritual Work

16 July: Being a Unitarian in the World: Living Your Faith Every Day

Please sign up ASAP as places are limited. Even if you've participated in the course when it was run in 2018 and 2022 you're welcome to join as there is always more to learn and new people to meet and exchange ideas with. Email jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk to sign up and we will send out preparatory questions in early June.



Each Child a Light: Memorial Quilt for Children Killed in Gaza

After the service on Sunday 19 July at 1pm

After church on Sunday 12 April, we met for the second time in the library to continue our work, creating squares for this memorial quilt. We were pleased to be joined by the project's creator, Fiona Bailey, who told us that as we stitched and chatted in Kensington another group were starting the very first project workshop in the Netherlands and she was able to share a video of these women as they worked on their squares, each of us honouring a child killed in Gaza whose name we would embroider on our square.

From the time when as children we take home that very first picture of mummy with her arms and legs sticking straight out from her head, we want to show off our creative efforts. And it is nice to know that when our squares are finished, they will appear sometime in an

exhibition somewhere. Sadly, we have missed the deadline for the exhibition which opens on 9 May in St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral in Edinburgh at the same time as an exhibition in the Palestine Museum in the same city. At the opening event there will be poetry and a choir.

Fiona already has over 1000 squares. She organises these into panels of sixteen and hopefully we will have some ready for the next exhibition she is planning in Birmingham. You don't need to be good at sewing to join us – everyone can push a needle in and out of fabric and it's one way of showing that you care about the suffering of the Palestinian people.

We're meeting on 19 July after church and coffee. Why not come and join?
Patricia Brewerton

Reflections on this year's Annual Meetings of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches

Aisha Animashaun:

When I signed up as a delegate for my first General Assembly, I was unsure what to expect, but excited to finally experience this annual event I'd heard so many Unitarians speak of fondly. The beautiful descriptions of the venue, along with the lineup of events and workshops, drew me in too. As the weekend drew closer, it dawned on me I'd also be meeting Kensington Unitarians in person for the first time, and I felt a flutter of nerves.

My travel was smooth, and being greeted by Jane on arrival helped me settle in straight away. Three words sum up my experience: community, enriching, and inspiring.

Community: From the moment I walked through the gates of the Hayes, I felt a refreshing sense of community. Meeting Sarah, Roy and Heidi in person left me with a warm feeling, and it was lovely to see familiar faces from the engagement groups alongside many new ones. I enjoyed talking, eating, laughing, singing, and praying with people from congregations across the country. Participating in the shared decision-making, and seeing the care taken to honour different perspectives, stood

out for me. At the opening and closing sessions, I joined the banner parades carrying the Kensington Unitarians' banner and felt a sweet sense of belonging.

Enriching: It was truly a weekend of many firsts. I experienced my first Hindu Satsang and my first Pagan Earth ceremony celebrating Ostara. From meditation and worship sessions to craft and seminar workshops, the keynote and anniversary service, I left each one having learnt something new, gained a fresh perspective, or been prompted to reflect on important parts of life.

Inspiring: A common thread ran through many of my conversations. Whenever I mentioned I was from Kensington Unitarians, people would light up: "That's Jane's church!" This happened especially with those involved in ministry or running engagement groups themselves. They'd share stories of Jane's great work and generosity, how she'd offer without hesitation to jump on a call and help them with their own groups. On the last morning at breakfast, someone said it must feel very nice to have a connection to Jane, and it crystallised what I'd been quietly noticing all weekend. Watching Jane



lead the anniversary service with the same grace she brings here, with over 300 people gathered, was a joy to witness and the perfect exclamation mark to those conversations.

Thank you for the invitation to represent Kensington Unitarians at the General Assembly. It was an honour, and an experience I'll treasure.

[More reflections ▶](#)





Sarah Tinker:

I've been to a lot of General Assembly Annual Meetings over the years and can sometimes it can feel as if I've been to one too many! But not this year. This year had an energy about it, helped for me by the many new faces of people I'd not met, people who had interesting stories to tell

of how they'd found their Unitarian community and what had attracted them to it.

There was a buzz for me in the resolutions the meetings passed.

The first resolution gives our Chief Officer Liz Slade freedom to issue statements on our behalf, so we Unitarians can be seen to be responding speedily when some serious issue that we care about is suddenly on the front page of the news.

The second resolution speaks against legislation here in England and Wales that limits people's freedom to protest. You'll perhaps be aware of recent protests, the most recent one here in London, where hundreds of people were arrested simply for holding up placards in protest against acts of genocide and in support of a proscribed organisation. This resolution strongly affirms that protest is a fundamental Unitarian spiritual practice.

The third resolution that was passed at the Annual Meetings asks us to stand in solidarity with all people who are suffering from the effects of warfare in the Middle East, to advocate for peace and to help fund medical and other humanitarian aid.

These resolutions strongly connect our current movement with our history of non-conformity and dissent. Unitarians have long insisted on freedom to speak out, freedom to protest, and the importance of standing alongside those who are oppressed and marginalised and I was proud of us for speaking out so clearly this year. I also really appreciated the way that administrative tasks, at what is our national Unitarian movement's AGM, were interspersed with worship and with reminders that we are part of something greater than our selves. It's worth coming to these Annual Meetings just for the singing - 300 or more of us make a very fine sound indeed!

Roy Clark:

I was particularly impressed by the new venue for the Annual Meetings in rural Derbyshire which provided a comfortable base for our yearly gathering. As well as our Minister Jane who amongst other things led worship at the Anniversary Service, Kensington was wonderfully represented by our two delegates Heidi and Aisha, and our former minister Sarah. As for me, It was a pleasure as usual to represent Simple Gifts: Unitarian Centre for Social Action. The GA is a vital opportunity for Simple Gifts to reconnect with the wider Unitarian community, especially as many were surprised... and glad to learn, we are still going strong!

Beyond the official business, I cherished catching up with friends old and new. I'd like to give a special mention to the ministers and congregational representatives from Lancashire; their keen interest in developing local social action initiatives was lovely to learn about. The formal business aspects of the GA are often not the most exciting of ways to spend a long weekend, but this year there was a new vibrancy, a positivity in the air that I think sent many of us home recharged and reinvigorated.

Heidi Ferid:

The Hayes conference centre was a very pleasant venue – we were welcomed by lots of golden daffodils. For me, Sarah Corbett's keynote speech on 'Craftivism' was a highlight, and a very important reminder that social action and creativity can be combined forces for the cultivation of compassion and positive change. I also liked the story of the hungry caterpillar transforming into a beautiful butterfly in the Anniversary Service by Rev. Daniel Costley. It was encouraging to see so many new ministers and ministry students. I feel the annual meetings of the General Assembly are always a great opportunity to connect with our movement and meet up with friends from different congregations.



Prayer for our Unitarian Movement
by Rev. Dr. Jane Blackall
(from the Anniversary Service)

Spirit of Life, God of All Love,
in whom we live and move and have our being,
we call on you to bless our endeavours as activists and stewards
of this General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches,
and of all the many groups and congregations that we represent.

We are living through troubled and troubling times;
we each have a part to play in the world's healing.
Spirit of Preparation, equip us, that we may
gather our resources to fulfil what life is asking of us.

We know struggle and suffering in our own lives, our communities,
and in the life of the world, which can sometimes feel
overwhelming.

Spirit of Consolation, comfort us, as we face tough realities,
wrestle with life's complexities, and mourn our losses.

We ache for something better, something more; we are
so ready to see a realm of love and justice made real.
Spirit of Liberation, embolden us, that we may break free,
get unstuck, and let go of that which holds us back.

We pledge our gifts in service to the greatest good,
striving to live well and faithfully in our places.
Spirit of Contemplation, guide us, as we discern
the way forward, directed by our spiritual purpose.

We face change and uncertainty with courage, acting boldly
in the midst of the mess, and daring to try something new.
Spirit of Transformation, revitalise us, that we may
discover and embrace fresh possibilities as they emerge.

We claim our place in the unfolding story of this movement,
affirming our belonging to it, and our responsibility for it.
Spirit of Perpetuation, strengthen us, as we uphold
our beloved tradition and shape it for future generations.

We are called to join in imagining a world transfigured;
and commit ourselves to making that dream a reality.
Spirit of Co-Creation, inspire us, that we may
bring diverse and wonderful things to life, together.

May it be so for the greater good of all. Amen.



Getting to Know You...

Abby Lorimier

My name is Abby and I've been attending Kensington Unitarians since 2017. I first went looking for a Unitarian church in London as I had grown up Unitarian Universalist in the USA and wanted to find more community here in the UK outside of the other young people on my university course.

Growing up in Northampton and Needham, Massachusetts, my Unitarian Universalist church was a big part of my childhood. I have two moms and they found the UUs in the mid-90's as it was a welcoming spiritual space for same-sex couples who had often faced discrimination or exclusion from other Christian denominations. Unitarian ministers also officiated many of the first same-sex weddings, even before it was legalised. They wanted my sister and I to grow up in an environment where we could learn about lots of different types of spirituality and come to our own conclusions about life.

I was lucky to experience a great Religious Education programme, including two especially memorable years. In Year 7, we learned about a wide variety of world religions whilst visiting local places of worship and meeting people who practice those faiths. We were guests at a Jewish synagogue, a Hindu Temple, a Catholic mass, and a Wiccan outdoors ceremony to name just a few. This year gave me a wonderful sense of the world as a place full of people who are much more similar than they are different, all seeking out human connection and meaning. Then in Year 8, we spent a year working with a 1:1 adult mentor from the congregation, discussing our own understanding of the world and writing a statement of our faith as it was in that moment. These credos were presented in a special service run by the young people, all sharing a piece of who they are in that snapshot of time. In high school, I

was heavily involved in our church's youth group, participating in service trips to volunteer in National Parks, at soup kitchens, and in New Orleans helping to repair buildings damaged by Hurricane Katrina.

From a young age, I loved to play music in our church services. I played the cello and my whole family got involved as well, playing the flute, piano, and violin. When I moved to the UK to study a degree in cello performance, I felt a bit isolated as many international students do. It's a strange thing to be in a new country and to only really know other 18-year-olds who are all still figuring out who they are away from home. I remember researching Unitarian churches in London and worrying for several weeks about turning up to one alone and whether it would feel too different from what I grew up with. I first visited Kensington Unitarians during a Sunday that Sarah Tinker was leading and immediately felt at home. It was so lovely to hear the same hymns I grew up with and especially to chat with people with lots of different life backgrounds and stories at the tea time. I soon became friends with the church musicians and offered to play sometime if they would be open to it. This turned into a wonderfully grounding routine and I have played at the church roughly once per month now for about 9 years. During some of the more stressful points in my degree and especially when my mum became ill in my 4th year, the church was such a comforting place to come and be in community with others.

I feel very lucky to have been able to bring lots of my musician friends to join in at the church as well with a lovely ever-changing rota performing for us each week! Kensington Unitarians definitely has some of the most diverse and interesting musical programming of any church I know. My family has enjoyed getting to know the church as well, visiting when they are in the UK and also following along via the YouTube videos and podcast from afar. I also



join via Zoom when I can't make it in-person and there is such a wonderful community of congregation members living far and wide who stay connected in lots of different ways.

Nowadays, I don't have a super specific spiritual outlook or set of beliefs. I think I believe most in the value of community, being with others who are different from ourselves, and sharing in our joys and sorrows together. Beyond the church, I have become a participant in a variety of community groups in London including the West London Queer Choir, St John Ambulance, and the charity Over the Wall with puts on camps for children with long-term health conditions. These close interactions within my local community feel like an extension of my faith, building on the foundation that I first started with Kensington Unitarians when I was so new to this country.

I would encourage absolutely anyone, regardless of their religious background, to visit Kensington Unitarians. There are so many lovely events to get involved with - favourites of mine include the LGBT inclusive tea dances as well as the walking/bird watching group! I always feel much calmer after attending a service, taking some time for reflection in this busy modern world. Thank you Kensington Unitarians for welcoming me all those years ago!

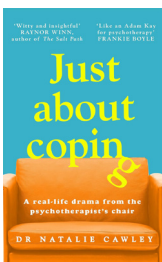
Better World Book Club



The fourth Sunday of each month, 7.30-8.45pm on Zoom

We've been running the 'Better World Book Club' since the beginning of 2024. The books have been chosen to cover a range of social issues we might do well to be more informed about, interleaved with books on spiritual and ethical matters, on living well in hard times. In order to make this as accessible as possible we aim to choose titles that are available in print, e-book, and audiobook formats, and we will buy a few copies for the church library for people to borrow. Although it's great to have people joining the group on a regular basis you are also most welcome to 'drop in' for a particular book that appeals to you.

Please email Jane to let her know if you're planning to join and for further details. See contact details on p3



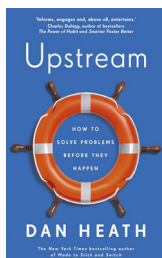
Sunday 28 June, 7.30pm:
Just About Coping by Natalie Cawley

At the psychologist's clinic of an NHS hospital, Noah needs help with procrastination, Bill compulsively lies, Steph is coping with rejection and their therapist, Dr Natalie Cawley, is dealing with her own emotional crisis, breathing into a paper bag between patient sessions. In this honest, often poignant and frequently funny memoir about training to be a psychotherapist, we meet the patients grappling with mental health issues. From OCD and addiction to self-deception and toxic relationships, Dr Natalie helps them understand and change these attempts to self-soothe. Full of lightbulb moments, *Just About Coping* is a journey into our inner worlds, where the drama of our break-ups, breakdowns and breakthroughs takes place. In times of stress and suffering, Dr Natalie reveals, we are all just about coping. None of us is immune – not even your therapist.



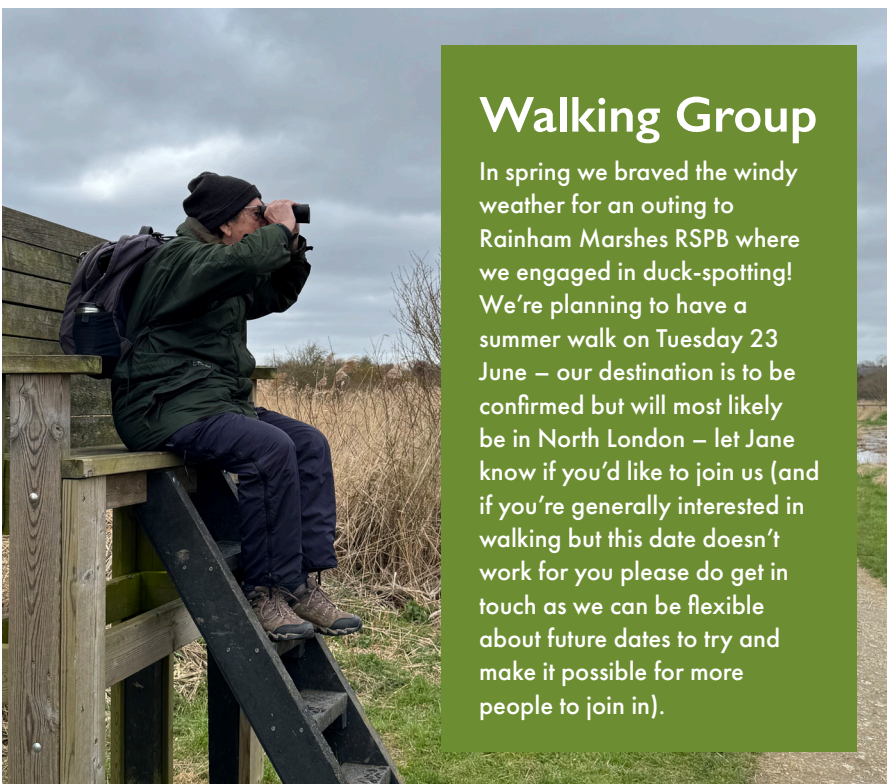
Sunday 26 July, 7.30pm:
Calling In by Loretta J. Ross

Calling In is at once a handbook, a manifesto, and a memoir—because the power of Loretta Ross's message comes from who she is and what she's lived through. She's a Black woman who's deprogrammed white supremacists, and a survivor who's taught convicted rapists the principles of feminism. With stories from her five remarkable decades in activism, she vividly illustrates why calling people in—inviting them into conversation instead of conflict and focusing on your shared values over a desire for punishment—is the more strategic choice if you want to make real change. And she shows you how to do so, whether in the workplace, on a college campus, or in your living room. *Calling In* is a practical new solution from an extraordinary change-maker—one anyone can learn to use to transform frustrating and divisive conflicts that stand in the way of real connection with the people in your life.



Sunday 30 August, 7.30pm (note irregular date):
Upstream by Dan Heath

What happens when we take our thinking upstream and try to prevent problems before they happen? We all have a tendency to work around problems. We are resourceful. We improvise. We're so accustomed to managing emergencies as they strike that we often don't stop to think about how we could prevent crises before they happen. Why 'solve' crimes when we could stop them being committed? Why treat chronic diseases when they could be prevented from developing? Why provide shelter for the homeless rather than working to keep people housed in the first place? Why do our efforts skew so heavily towards reaction rather than prevention? *Upstream* is a book for sceptical optimists - across all sectors - who know it's not going to be easy, but who believe that we have the capacity to solve some of our thorniest issues, if only we start to think about the system rather than the symptoms.



Walking Group

In spring we braved the windy weather for an outing to Rainham Marshes RSPB where we engaged in duck-spotting! We're planning to have a summer walk on Tuesday 23 June – our destination is to be confirmed but will most likely be in North London – let Jane know if you'd like to join us (and if you're generally interested in walking but this date doesn't work for you please do get in touch as we can be flexible about future dates to try and make it possible for more people to join in).



The People's Emergency Briefing

On Sunday 24 May, we hosted a screening of 'The People's Emergency Briefing', organised by our own Jasmine Cooray. This is an eye-opening film featuring nine leading UK scientists and experts, updating us on the latest in the climate and nature crisis and its impacts on everyday national life. The film touches on key themes like extreme weather, food security, health, and cost of living. It is based on the National Emergency Briefing event held in Westminster late last year.

'The People's Emergency Briefing' is very powerful expression of the severity and seriousness of the predicted impacts on every aspect of our life on earth. Being faced with the true scale of the consequences of the changing climate, and the reality that we are already feeling their effects, is quite frightening. At the same time the film offers some hope, as it shows us potential solutions, which could be implemented right now if political leaders would step up to make the right choices.

The people behind this film are asking everyone who sees it to respond with action. In the first instance we are encouraged to host screenings – maybe in workplaces or other community groups – so that more and more people will see the film which packs so much into its short (50 minute) run-time. They are also encouraging us to lobby our MPs in support of a Parliamentary Call for an emergency briefing to be screened to the general public on mainstream TV.

For more information visit www.nebriefing.org/peb

The Open Circle: Finding Hospitality in Rublev's Trinity

by Roy Clark

Your first thought on seeing this might well be: why is there an article about the Trinity in our newsletter? We are Unitarians! Historically, our tradition emerged from a bold break with 16th-century orthodoxy, choosing to emphasize the singular unity of God over the complex, often litigious definitions of "three-in-one" found in the creeds. For many Unitarians, the doctrine of the Trinity can feel like a closed door – a mathematical riddle that obscures the simple beauty of the Divine.

However, when we look at Andrei Rublev's 15th-century masterpiece, the Icon of the Trinity, we aren't presented with a logic puzzle. Instead, we are offered a seat at the table.

The Genius of Weightless Harmony

Before we can understand the theology of the icon, we must appreciate the artist. Andrei Rublev was a genius of the highest order. We often celebrate masters like Michelangelo for the muscular grandeur of the Sistine Chapel, or Picasso for the fragmented, visceral power of Guernica. Rublev was every bit as revolutionary, though he worked within the strict, ancient parameters of religious icon-making. In 1411, while Russia was fractured by bloody conflict and Mongol invasions, Rublev created an image of radical, internal peace. He moved away from the heavy, shadowed, and often stern figures of the Byzantine past toward a "weightless" harmony.

Rublev's mastery is most evident in his use of inverse perspective. In standard Western art, lines vanish into a distant point inside the frame, making the viewer a mere observer. Rublev flips this: his lines widen as they approach the viewer. The vanishing point is you. The table and the footrests are angled to pull you physically and spiritually into the scene. Furthermore, his use of "Rublev Blue" – a luminous lapis lazuli – creates a visual bridge across the three figures. This colour doesn't just represent the sky; it represents a shared essence, suggesting the Divine is not a solid, heavy object, but a radiant flow of light.

The Divine Dance (Perichoresis)

The Franciscan teacher Richard Rohr often speaks of this icon using the ancient Greek term perichoresis. Literally translated, it means "to dance around." In Rublev's vision, the figures are not static or hierarchical. They are inclined toward one another in a circular flow. If we stop trying to define God as a 'substance' or a 'noun' and start seeing the Divine as a verb – as the very act of relationship itself – this image becomes less of a dogma and more of a description of how love works. God, in this sense, is the communion of being that breathes through the universe.



The Open Space at the Table

If you look closely at the base of the table, there is a small, rectangular opening. It is the most important part of the composition. While the three figures share a mutual, eternal gaze, they do not form a closed circle. The circle is open at the front, directly facing the viewer.

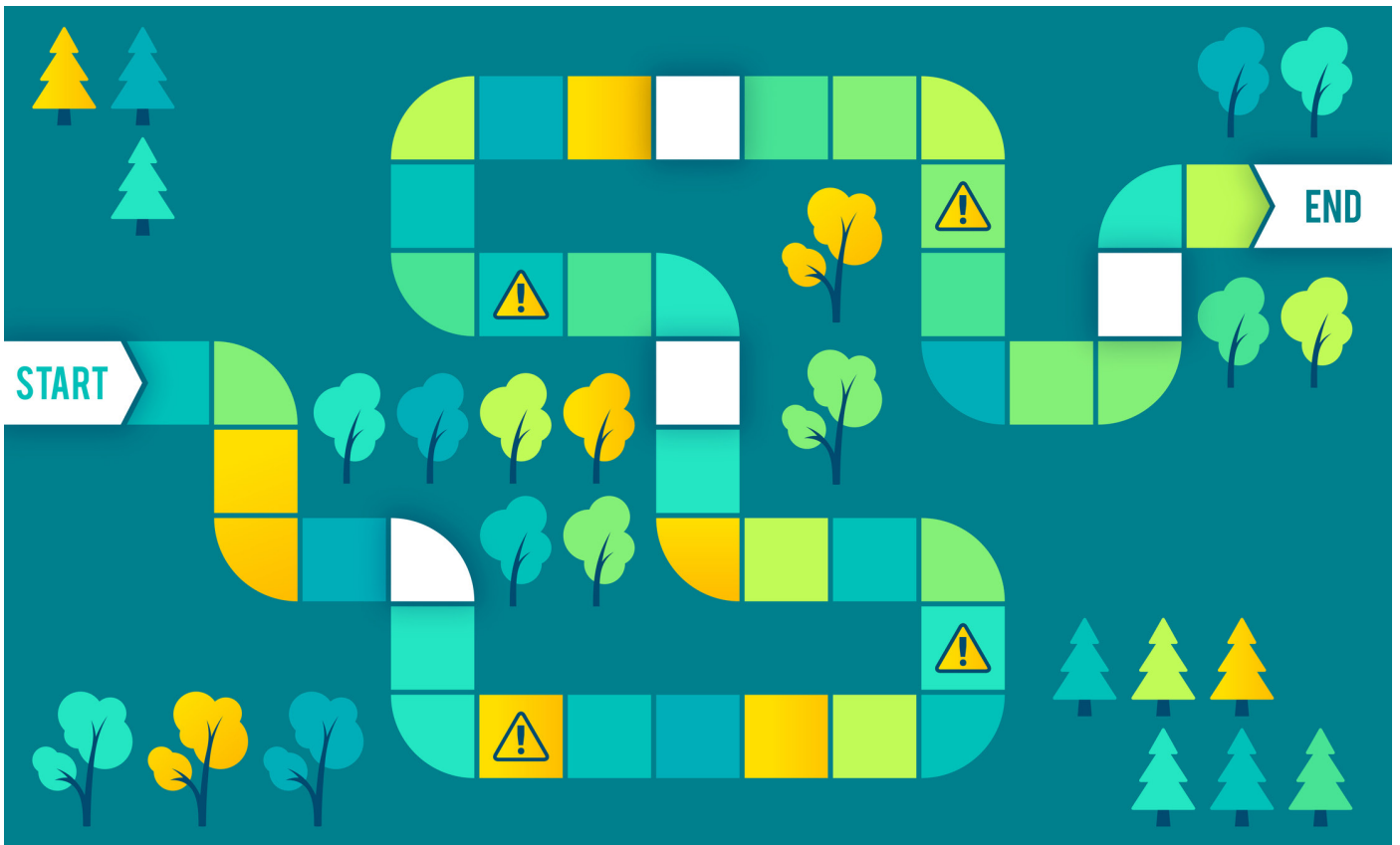
Rublev's greatest invitation is this "empty chair." Some art historians even suggest that a small mirror was once attached to the front of the icon, so that as you stood before it, you would literally see your own face at the table. He suggests that the inner life of the Divine is not a private club, but a permanent state of welcome. We are not meant to watch the dance from the sidelines; we are invited to join it.

The Unitarian Twist

But here is the final twist: This image was not originally intended to be a literal depiction of the "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" Trinity at all. Rublev was painting a story from the Old Testament – the "Hospitality of Abraham" – where three mysterious travellers visit a tent in the desert.

For the Unitarian mind, this is a powerful concept: the guest as an "angel in disguise." It suggests that we encounter the Divine not in creeds, but in the face of the stranger and the act of hospitality. The value of this icon is not in its "three-ness" but in its relationality. It suggests that the Divine is not a point of singularity that remains distant and solitary, but a community of love that is constantly expanding to include us.

In a world that feels increasingly fragmented the Icon of the Trinity offers a different architecture for the soul. It tells us that at the very heart of reality, there is no loneliness. There is only a table, a conversation, and an empty chair waiting for you to take your place.



Minister's Reflection: 'We Live and Learn'

from the service on 11 January

'We live and learn' – that's how the saying goes – but do we? Do we always, inevitably, learn as we live? Unfortunately, I don't think it's entirely guaranteed... it seems to be perfectly possible for us poor humans to bumble our way through life in a fairly unreflective and oblivious manner, and miss a lot of the lessons that come our way. But by the very fact you're here this morning, I guess that you aspire to lifelong learning – not primarily the sort that you might pick up by going to evening classes or the U3A – but the learning that comes by being open, attentive, and curious in the face of whatever new, potentially challenging, experiences life brings our way.

I came across a blog post by Adeola Odubajo exploring the phrase 'we live and learn'. She says: 'Life doesn't come with a syllabus. There are no structured semesters, no final exams, and no degree at the end. Yet, life is the most complex, enriching, and brutally honest school we'll ever attend. Every experience – whether triumphant or tragic – becomes a life lesson. The phrase "We live and learn" captures this beautifully. It's simple, almost cliché, but behind those few words lies

a profound philosophy that defines the essence of human growth. It suggests that mistakes, missteps, and even mundane moments all carry lessons. It's a reminder that perfection is not the goal – progress is. Living is not just existing. It's engaging with the world, making choices, taking risks, falling down, and getting back up. And in doing all this, we learn – not just about the world, but about ourselves. Every success teaches us what works. Every failure teaches us what doesn't. Both are essential. To live and to learn means embracing failure not as a setback, but as a crucial step forward. It's understanding that you may fall, but you're not meant to stay down.'

Words from Adeola Odubajo, Now, she said 'life doesn't come with a syllabus', but several of my friends often speak of the spiritual notion that each of us humans has our own particular 'curriculum' to tackle during our time here on earth – a phrase I associate with our own Sarah and Michaela especially – and that idea can be a helpful way of framing the various ups and downs we face in the course of our lives. Whenever we encounter a bump, or get knocked back, whenever we

find ourselves engaged with something or someone we find challenging, we can ask 'what is the lesson for me here?' As Pádraig O'Tuama said, we may learn most from situations we did not choose.

But we can't take it for granted that we will learn from our life experiences. Learning doesn't happen automatically; we need to work at it, and we mustn't be complacent. When we say, 'we live and learn', it's often provoked by being confronted with a new way of seeing things, it's an acknowledgement of something we didn't know before. Or it can be an acknowledgement that we've taken a wrong turning (and we won't do it again). Sometimes it's just a general reflection on our perspective changing as we get older. John Shea, a Jesuit theologian, made this wise observation: 'It is harder to learn from life than you think. Life is a series of fragmented activities. We need to pay attention in order to learn from life. For there is more going on than you know.'

I know many of us in the congregation do make an active effort to engage with the world in such a way that we are exposed to new ideas, new ways of

seeing things, perspectives that will open up new understanding of ourselves and what is possible for us in our time here on earth (as individuals, as a community, as a species). For example, we make a point of engaging in meaningful conversation with people in different age brackets (that's one of the very good things about being part of a church community), or we read testimonies from people with very different life experiences to our own (and in fact we're going to hear more about that in next week's service). Perhaps we also have spiritual practices – prayer, meditation – to hone our attention and awareness. All this helps prevent us from getting too fixed and stuck in our ways.

Despite our best efforts, though, in life we sometimes find ourselves butting our head up against the same issues – making the same mistakes – again and again. We seem to be stuck in a loop, or a rut, hopelessly drawn back into the same old familiar patterns. Falling down the same hole. I wonder, how many of you are familiar with the poem by Portia Nelson, 'Autobiography in Five Short Chapters'? A dear friend introduced me to this at summer school over twenty-five years ago and I had a very strong reaction to it at first hearing – it was too close to the bone – I felt 'called out' by it – all these years later I have warmed to it somewhat... which feels like part of my own process of living and learning. I recognise its truth.

'Autobiography in Five Short Chapters' by Portia Nelson

I
I walk down the street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk
I fall in.
I am lost ... I am helpless.
It isn't my fault.
It takes me forever to find a way out.

II
I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.

I pretend I don't see it.
I fall in again.
I can't believe I am in the same place
but, it isn't my fault.
It still takes a long time to get out.

III
I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I see it is there.
I still fall in ... it's a habit.

my eyes are open
I know where I am.
It is my fault.
I get out immediately.

IV
I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I walk around it.

V
I walk down another street.
'Autobiography in Five Short Chapters' by Portia Nelson – written back in 1977. Hopefully hearing that wasn't as ouchy for you as it was for me, all those years ago, but also hopefully it will have had some resonance. I reckon we all have these key issues and patterns of behaviour we wrestle with over the course of a lifetime. Progress can be slow. Maybe we start out with no awareness of the problem. Then, perhaps through our own self-reflection, perhaps with the help of trusted others who can shed light on our situation and offer alternative perspectives, we can begin to see more clearly. It might take longer still to turn that awareness into a change in our behaviour or our circumstances. Eventually – there's hope – learning can bring transformation.

But we only 'live and learn' if we take the raw material of our life experience and look at it honestly and – lovingly, compassionately – engage with the reality of it. The good, the bad, the mundane, the marvellous. Owning it. The whole mess of it. It's not fun to acknowledge our mistakes. Sometimes it's tempting to try and brush them off, pretend they didn't happen, cook up some justification, blame others, avoid looking at our own stuff, what's our responsibility, where we've fallen short. Or we might be tempted in the other direction, to self-recrimination, seeing ourselves as an irredeemable wrong'un, taking it all on ourselves, and assuming it's inevitable that we'll keep falling down the same hole forever, that there's no hope of change.

It's not just about learning from our mistakes though, and dwelling on the tough stuff. For some of us it's just as hard to own our triumphs, our achievements, our growth. But it's equally important to notice and learn from the things that went well. In our prayers each week we offer up 'our beauty and our brokenness'; we need to hold both tenderly. These are the lessons hinted at by Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer:

'Eventually we learn to laugh when we drop the glass and it shatters all over the floor'/'What freedom then. We can listen to the sound of our own voice without cringing. Can dance in front of anyone.'

Hazrat Inayat Khan once said: 'The real learning is unlearning all that one has learned.' And it's true that sometimes – particularly in our early years – we can learn lessons which we'll spend the rest of our lives trying to unlearn. We might have drawn the wrong conclusions or misinterpreted our early life experiences; we might have been misinformed or led astray by others; we might be in denial about the impact of all this. Sometimes in the aftermath of neglect or trauma we learn lessons which might serve to protect us in the short term but which inhibit our full human flourishing in the long term. Unlearning such lessons – liberating ourselves from this burden – requires a great deal of courage, and appropriate support, and even so it can still be the work of a lifetime.

So what have we learned (about living and learning (and unlearning))? Perhaps to realise and remember there will always be more to learn. The task is never done. And in order to keep on learning it kind-of helps to be dissatisfied! To keep wondering, questioning, even returning to the same questions, and going round again, deeper each time, as Parker J Palmer said. We need to remain open, attentive, curious – and honest – our whole life long, reflecting on both our best and our worst moments. And to face our life's 'curriculum' with all the courage and self-compassion we can muster.

I want to close with a very short prayer-poem from Deb Cannon. It's written in the first person but perhaps you can take the message and inwardly make it your own.

I have made mistakes
and some I have even learned from.
I am wiser today than I was yesterday
and hopefully tomorrow
I will be even better informed.
May I speak from my learning
and not from my habit.
If I speak from my habit,
may I interrupt my words to start again.
And if I don't know, may I be silent and listen.
May it be so, for the greater good of all.
Amen.

Hucklow Summer School: 'Doing Our Best?' Online

Although this year's Hucklow Summer School is fully booked for in-person participation there are still places available for the online programme. This consists of live Zoom access to daily theme talks (9am-10.15am) and engagement groups (11am-1pm) from 22 to 27 August 2026. There are two alternative online engagement groups to choose from (see details below). The cost is £100. See www.hucklowsummerschool.co.uk for more information and to book.

Engagement Group Option #1: 'How Do We Change the Things we Can and Accept Those We Cannot?' with Lizzie Kingston-Harrison and Jennifer Sanders

How do we discern a way to live with ourselves, as we really are and live out our own way in the world? In this online group Lizzie and Jennifer invite you into the space of the 'examined life', to explore parts of ourselves using the gentle grace of self-acceptance. We may find things we are uncomfortable with, along with those we hold dear and can celebrate - and even our deepest shadows are places where light can lead us into growth. This warm, and accepting group will use music, poetry, creative time, meditation, self-reflection and group sharing to help you find a comfortable balance between change and acceptance.

Engagement Group Option #2: 'Compassion & Connection: Being with Self, Others and the Spirit of Life' with Kate Dean and Kieren Mardle-Moss

'Those who do the most growing in this life are those who offer the most compassion to the parts of themselves that have not yet grown.' – Andrea Gibson

In a world that calls us to 'do our best,' how do we hold ourselves with kindness while still growing into the people we long to be? In this online engagement group we'll explore the interplay between self-compassion and having accountability within each of the communities that we're involved with. Together, we will reflect on how making personal covenants and group agreements can guide us into right relationship with others. Through reflection, small group sharing and simple creative exercises we will explore: what supports us when life feels uncertain; how do we stay in a healthy relationship with others; and how our choices connect us with something larger than ourselves. Throughout the week, you will be guided in shaping a personal 'credo' or affirmation that supports your daily life. We'll also experiment with easy online tools to gather our shared insights and learn from one another.



'Finding Our Religion' Study Group Report

Through the first few months of this year we offered this online group as a joint venture with Mill Hill Chapel in Leeds. It was a chance to take a look at the theme talks from last year's Hucklow Summer School on 'Finding our Religion: Being Unitarian in the 21st Century' and to explore the theme in community with others from across the UK. Our own Jane Blackall co-facilitated with Raj Savarapu (and as the group was much bigger than expected, with nearly 50 sign-ups, we enlisted the help of half-a-dozen friends to facilitate breakout groups). Here's some feedback from a few of the group participants:

'I found the group to be a meaningful blend of ritual, information, reflection and sharing. The way the sharing was done was also important to me, and I was glad for the reminders of how we would do that. I was both touched and challenged, as well as given food for thought and spirit.' – Terry

'I appreciated the opportunity to talk with and learn from other like-minded people who grapple with similar or different issues to me, and have thought about them in divergent and helpful ways. I learned that having a coherent well thought out set of beliefs is less important to me than I thought at the start of the study group. I'm more comfortable with not knowing, with being values-led rather than beliefs-led, and with accepting that my life can be lived within a process of continual growing and searching.' – Aryanne

'Attending this study group has helped me feel more OK to question, for example, how we collectively and individually contemplate the relationship between religion and spirituality in practice? Would this help in how we (because of our conflicts/differences) get on with ourselves, neighbours, nations? My hope is not only saying "peace within without" but walking the daily mundane walk together in Unity.' – Josie

The talks from last year's Hucklow Summer School (and previous years) are available for everyone to view on YouTube: www.youtube.com/@hucklowsummerschool8933

Music at Essex Church



We are very lucky to have so many excellent musicians playing for us at Essex Church. One particular treat we've enjoyed recently was when Abby Lorimier invited her friend Grace Cross to bring her concert harp!

A poem by Eliz Beel

Wisdom

In a market-place, this time, I saw,
demonstrating their need for conservation,
owls stood on leather-gloved arms of
falconers waiting to show off
tortoise-shell coloured plumage
and traffic-beaconed eyes.

As I stood watching in the audience
a proud falconer lifted up a hawkbird
level with the heads of the bystanders.
From this position the owl
commenced to scrutinize its surrounding;
finally resting its gaze on a large
library building set behind.

On the bird facing me again
the falconer outlined to me how,
within its heart-shaped face
ears lay deeply buried, one on
each side of the head.

Then, it had been before I left the crowd,
I saw the owl sweep down its
mighty head, as if to acknowledge
my presence, and say a goodbye.

Ministry Student Placement: Eva Kortekaas

Ministry student Eva Kortekaas, from the Netherlands, spent three weeks on placement with the Kensington congregation at Essex Church and the Hampstead congregation at Rosslyn Hill Chapel this spring. She will return in the autumn for another three-week stint when she will get more involved in leading services and other activities. Here she reflects on her first impressions.

Has someone ever handed you a bowl of puzzle pieces from all kinds of places and asked you to assemble them into a



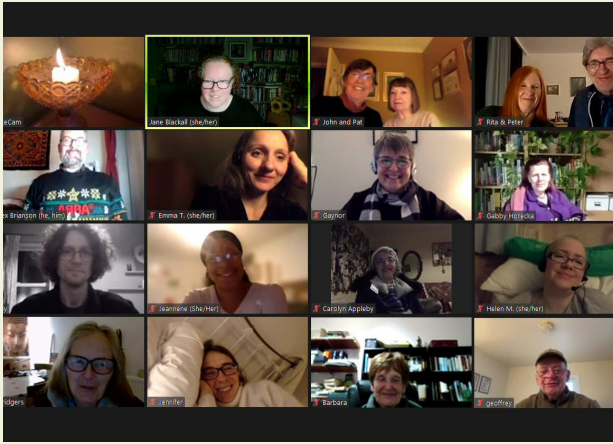
three-dimensional puzzle? This is what training to be a minister can feel like sometimes. It is not just about learning knowledge and skills, but you're working on the level of heart, spirit and soul. And training in a different country, in a second language (no matter how fluent), adds a whole other layer and brings different challenges.

Along the way you discover some pieces that easily fit together in larger sections, though not all of them. The elements of a service or different ways of working in small groups. Some pieces will remain in little piles to the side. One of the biggest challenges becomes figuring out how those sections and the smaller piles might come together into a complete whole. Can they come together in different ways? Maybe there are pieces I haven't fully discovered yet? For the first three weeks of my placement, I had two major goals, namely exploring how different pieces might make up a

community and how they can make up a ministry.

Looking back, this really summarizes so much of my learning over these past few weeks. I've explored how those sections and small piles can come together in very different ways to shape a community. Both Kensington and Rosslyn Hill have shown me two very different ways. It's been very similar in the area of ministry; I've been exploring how pieces might come together to shape a ministry. Here I've especially discovered pieces I was aware of, but hadn't fully understood: especially the quiet behind-the-scenes work, like the different ways administration can be handled or the logistics behind a rite of passage.

I've really enjoyed my learning so far and I'm grateful to everyone who made this possible. I look forward to seeing everyone in October, and I hope to pop in online where I can.



Heart and Soul Contemplative Spiritual Gatherings

Heart and Soul is a contemplative spiritual gathering in which you can take time to reflect on life in the company of others. These gatherings have been running for over a decade in-person at Essex Church and also more recently online via Zoom. Sessions follow a reassuringly regular pattern, with readings and music from a range of sources, time for guided prayers of gratitude, compassion for others, self-reflection, and silent meditation. Each session closes with refreshments, relaxed conversation, and an opportunity to get to know others at a deeper level.

In-person gatherings will be on 17 June, 15 July and 19 August at 7pm. We ask that if you have symptoms of respiratory illness (e.g. sore throat, runny nose, coughs) you stay home to help keep everyone safe and well. Do email Jane or Brian to let them know you're planning to attend (jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk or brian.ellis@outlook.com)

Online gatherings are every Friday at 7pm and on Sundays at 7pm (except on the last Sunday of the month when we have the 'Better World Book Club' instead). Email jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk for more information and to sign up for a session.



One Light Gatherings

Second Tuesday of the month
7.30pm, meeting at Essex
Church. Upcoming: 9 June,
14 July, 11 August



OneLight Gathering is a welcoming circle whose sacred lineage is heart and soul connection, open to any faith or none. It is an offering from the compassionate heart to nourish and restore you. There is singing, readings, sharings, and a creative altar-building ceremony on universal themes that touch all lives. You will find warmth, sustenance, kindness, inspiration and encouragement. Free (donations welcome to cover costs of materials used, snacks and to offer half to the church). For more information contact Alison: contact@onelightgathering.co.uk

Finding Your Voice Monthly Singing Classes

Sunday lunchtime, once a month, 12.30-1.15pm.
Upcoming: 28 June, 2 August, 23 August (note irregular dates)

These relaxed and fun singing classes are for anyone who is prepared to open their mouth and make a sound. Using a few simple exercises you'll gain joy and confidence in singing. Classes are led by Margaret, an experienced and encouraging teacher, who has worked as a professional singer all her adult life. Drop in to one of these free and friendly sessions at Essex Church.



Nia Dance – Summer Break

Sonya's Nia classes will be taking an extended summer break. The last session before the break will be on Friday 5 June at 12.30pm and classes will resume on 11 September.

Nia is holistic movement for body and soul. It is an expressive movement practice promoting fitness, creativity, and wellbeing. Nia classes combine the grace and expressiveness of dance, the power and explosiveness of martial arts, and the wisdom and stillness of yoga and tai chi. 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.

To find out about Nia see: www.nianow.com
For more info contact Sonya Leite on 020 7371 1674
or email sleite@hotmail.co.uk



Art Play Crafternoons

Sunday afternoons, once a month, 1-3pm. Upcoming: 14 June, 19 July, 16 August (note irregular dates)

All are welcome to join us for at this relaxed art-and-craft hangout which

takes place after the service once a month (the dates will be somewhat irregular over the summer). We'll get some basic art materials out to play with or you can bring your own craft project to work on in good company. It's not about showing off your amazing artistic skills – it's about having fun – and experimenting with colour, line, and form. Please let Jane know if you're planning to come along to any of the dates: jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk



Community Yoga with Hannah

Provisional dates: 14 June, 9 July, 16 August (TBC – contact Hannah to be kept informed)

Come along for a gentle and relaxing, one-hour Hatha yoga class to help reduce stress and get your body moving. No prior experience is necessary, no advance sign-up required, and all levels welcome. Mats are provided, but do wear comfortable clothing that you can move in. Interested, but not in London? Hannah also teaches free, virtual yoga sessions on Mondays (5:30-6:30pm via Zoom). Contact Hannah for further details: yoga@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Poetry Group

Wednesday evening, once a month, 7-8.30pm. Upcoming dates: 3 June, 1 July, 5 August

Our poetry sharing group meets in-person on the first Wednesday in each month. Bring along a favourite poem to read on any subject. Maybe it'll be a poem you have written yourself, one you've just discovered, or a poem you've known for many years. Let us know if you plan to come and send a copy of your choices to Brian (brian.ellis@outlook.com) so they can be printed for all.



Heartspaces at Essex Hall

Heartspaces at Essex Hall is a new programme of weekly spiritual gatherings led by Unitarian ministers and volunteers across London. Through this initiative we aim to re-establish a Unitarian community presence in central London (Essex Hall is on Essex Street, off the Strand, and the closest station is Temple on the District/Circle lines). Join us for a series of regular events from the monthly Wednesday Lunch Break sessions to weekly Thursday evening spirituality gatherings (and keep an eye on the Heartspaces website for the latest announcements: www.unitarian.org.uk/heartspaces)

Mindful Lunch Break

First Wednesday of the month, 1-2pm

Mindful eating and connection. Led by Rev Kate Dean and Tatiana Kassessinoff

Spiritual Jukebox

First Thursday of the month, 6.30pm

Sharing songs that move and inspire. Led by Rev Kate Dean, Rev Julio Torres and Adam Slate

Lucky Dip

Second Thursday of the month, 6.30pm

Gatherings to explore aspects of spirituality, different each month. Led by various London ministers.



Heart & Soul gathering:

Third Thursday of the month, 6.30pm

Informal Unitarian service of ritual, poetry and music. Led by Rev Kate Dean and Rev Michael Allured.

Mystic of the Month:

Fourth Thursday of the month, 6.30pm

Discover the spiritual practices of mystics from East and West. Led by Rev Kate Dean and Rev Simon Ramsay.



Community Lunch

Sunday 26 July, 12 noon

We've got a congregational potluck lunch coming up after the service on Sunday 26th July so please do save the date and plan to bring along some food or drink to share. Liz Tuckwell will be coordinating the lunch so please keep an eye out for a sign-up sheet nearer the time.

Events with Vita Kay:

Conscious Café (Notting Hill)

2nd Wednesday of the month 7-9pm, meeting at Essex Church

Expect a warm, welcoming vibe where you can meet like-minded people, share ideas, and explore life's bigger questions — no pressure, no judgement. Whether you're into personal growth, curious about consciousness, or just fancy a different kind of evening out, you're very welcome to join us. Cost: £10. www.consciouscafe.org/group/notting-hill-london/

'From Conflict to Freedom'

4th Wednesday of the month 7-9pm, meeting at Essex Church

We'll discuss the possibility of transition from struggle to joy; share wellbeing advice and tips; stretch, relax and breathe together. Cost: £20. For booking please email or phone Vita Kay on surrender2theflow@protonmail.com (mobile: 07868580143) www.surrendertothe.flow.today

Equinox Labyrinth Mini-Retreat

Sunday 21 June, 1pm-3.30pm

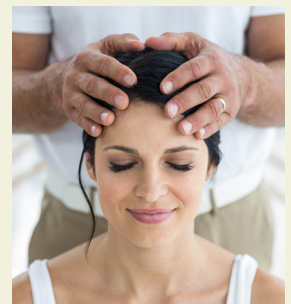
Join Jane and Sarah for this summer solstice mini-retreat where we will use our labyrinth to meditate on the turning seasons and the seasons of our lives. We will need you to take off your shoes to walk the labyrinth so please bring socks with you! Sign up with Jane (jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk) to participate as spaces will be limited.



Indian Head Massage Workshop with Vita Kay

Vita Kay will be offering a one-off workshop to members of the congregation on Sunday 5 July from 1-3pm. Vita writes: 'Indian Head and Back Massage is a treatment that focuses on massaging acupressure points along the head, neck, and shoulders, often using circular massage strokes to improve hair and scalp condition. It originates from Ayurveda ('Science of Life'), whereby it is believed that the mind and body are intricately connected and thus influence one another. Through this notion it is believed that Indian Head Massage does not only have many physical health benefits, but can also improve mental and emotional wellbeing.'

Vita Kay earned her certification in Swedish Massage, Reflexology, Indian Head & Back Massage and Ayurvedic Massage in London in the early 2000s and has been offering these modalities and Transitional Guidance internationally. She also teaches Indian Head & Back Massage to individuals and groups. Please email Vita to book your place for this workshop: surrender2theflow@protonmail.com



News from the Committee

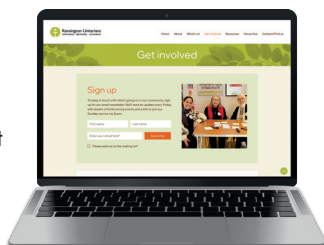
We circulated our annual report, reviewing last year's church activities and finances, in mid-April (prior to our AGM on the 26th).

If you haven't yet seen the 2025 report you can still access it via the church website (www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk) under 'Resources' -> 'Annual Reports'. It contains reports from our chair, treasurer, and minister, reflecting on our progress during the year. At the AGM we drew attention to the ongoing project to become a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) which will take some time as we review all our policies and do all the necessary preparatory work behind the scenes. We also drew attention to the ways in which we have been able to support some other congregations and denominational projects with donations in the past year.



Sign up for weekly updates...

If you would like to be kept informed about upcoming events we encourage you to sign up for our weekly email bulletin. Every Friday afternoon we send out an update with a Zoom link for the Sunday's service and reminders about what's on in the week ahead (and forthcoming events you might like to sign up for). Sign up via our website: www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk



Two poems by Brian Ellis

Two Blackbirds

here in a tree somewhere
somewhere high
high a blackbird sings
sings through
through the city's clamour
there with you somewhere
somewhere can you hear
hear a blackbird sing
sing a similar song
song to remember
how we
we would sing
sing our song together
together everywhere
everywhere

The Old Church

walls and roof of the old
church
stand company with the
abandoned graveyard
unlocked for the curious
visitor
bereft of the furniture of
worship
space still welcomes
sunlight
leaning through narrow
windows
to touch dust that's dreamt
here for a thousand years

Introducing Jane – Our Minister

Rev. Dr. Jane Blackall (she/her) was appointed Minister with Kensington Unitarians in May 2023. She has been connected to the congregation since April 1999, first as a congregation member, then as an active volunteer, before joining the staff team as part-time Outreach Officer in 2008, and becoming full-time Ministry Coordinator in 2021, to steer the church community through a time of transition.

Jane is positively evangelical about the transformative power of engagement groups and created 'Heart and Soul' circles as a form of contemplative spiritual gathering where people can share deeply about their lives. Jane is increasingly energised by the potential of online spiritual gatherings to make our activities more accessible for those who find it hard to participate in traditional in-person services due to factors including disability, ill-health, neurodivergence, geographical isolation, work commitments, or caring responsibilities; she has first-hand experience of several of these issues.

Jane has been very much involved in organising Hucklow Summer School, the annual Unitarian residential for adult religious education and spiritual development, since 2005. In recent years she has co-developed and co-facilitated LGBTQIA+ training on the theme



of 'Working on Our Welcome', to improve the levels of awareness and sensitivity in our denomination around issues of gender, sexuality and relationship diversity, and to help make our congregations ever more hospitable. Jane also serves as a spiritual director working with people from various Christian denominations, and those who are on the fringes of faith, or outside of the mainstream religious traditions altogether.

Prior to ministry training with Unitarian College (2018-2021), she gained a first-class BA in Philosophy, Religion and Ethics, at Heythrop College (2011-2017). Jane previously worked in academic research, in the field of medical imaging and radiological sciences, gaining her PhD in the Computational Imaging Sciences Group at Guy's Hospital, King's College London. When she is not working (or glued to the internet) Jane loves gardening, birdwatching, baking, listening to podcasts and audiobooks, and making art, and she is a fanatical follower of bike racing on TV.

To contact our Minister, email: revjaneblackall@gmail.com



Kensington Choir

Monday evenings 7-8.35pm at Essex Church, Notting Hill Gate

The choir is a 30+ strong SATB four-part harmony choir based in West London. The singers all share a passion for singing and enjoy all the aspects that come with being a part of a choir; well-being, improved breathing, focus on musicality, friendship, delving into historical music periods and singing soulful music. Kensington Choir repertoire is vast and varied and sometimes includes classical pieces, spirituals and Christmas music. Join us to sing an eclectic mix of music, meet new people, and have fun!

Try a FREE taster session! Term dates and membership information on the website (www.kensingtonchoir.com) or email roseanna@kensingtonchoir.com

Brian Ellis: I've sung with Kensington Choir, the community choir that rehearses here in Essex Church, for seven years. A search gives the definition of a community choir as: 'an Inclusive, non-auditioned singing group focused on bringing people together to enjoy music, boost well-being, and foster community spirit, regardless of skill level or ability to read music, singing a wide variety of music from

classical to pop'. Exactly what we are, and for me, in my seventies with no musical experience or much confidence in singing, joining the choir was a late entry to active participation in music rather than just passive enthusiastic listening. I've always enjoyed and gained satisfaction from being in teams in sport and at work, moving together to a shared goal, and now in retirement I have this in a leisure activity with the choir. No complex gear or equipment, just bring your voice along, practice diligently and enjoy hearing how everything comes together as each term progresses to that nervous evening of 'The Concert'. To anyone feeling apprehensive about singing but wondering whether to try I would recommend a community choir – I just regret not joining years before I did!

John Humphreys: I happily sang every day when I was a boy at school and never sang again until I saw a flyer for a community choir at the Foundling Museum in Bloomsbury close to where I was working at the time. I must have been around 60 years old and I just thought I would give it a try. I was warmly welcomed and found I could

just about follow a score after all those years staring at a hymn book. After coming to the Unitarians, I soon realised that Essex Church has a wonderful tradition of music and singing. We are fortunate to have an opportunity to have an informal singing session monthly with Margaret and she helped me find my voice. Soon after joining the congregation, the Kensington Singers (now called Kensington Choir) started to use the church for weekly rehearsals, and I was pleased to be able to join. We are a friendly group and are fortunate to have an excellent choir director. Roseanna consistently motivates us to grow through practice, and she selects a diverse range of music for our choir to perform. This ranges across classical, sacred, gospel, folk, musical theatre, and pop songs. Each term we have a concert for charity and sometimes sing with other community choirs in various settings. Singing has become an important part of my life, and I would recommend it to anyone. When I sing I feel connected, not just with my fellow choir members, but to that same energy that first brought me to the Unitarians.



Getting to Know You...

Mussy Marcus

Hello, I'm Mustafa Marcus, though most people call me Mussy! I found Kensington Unitarians completely by accident. I was searching for a church for my nan, who is Protestant, and ended up finding one for myself instead. I think that counts as serendipity. I grew up in a Muslim household on my mother's side so faith has always been part of my life in more than one form, but finding a spiritual home that felt truly mine has been a longer journey.

I had been attending online for a few months before finally making it in person for the Easter Sunday service this year. There is something special about meeting faces you have only ever seen on a screen. Everyone felt both familiar and new at the same time. I had to leave a little earlier than I'd have liked as twelve people were coming for a roast dinner that evening, but even in that short time I felt something genuine in the room.

The faith I grew up with remains part of who I am, but over time I found myself in a kind of spiritual in-between, holding a real and personal relationship with God while not feeling fully at home in institutional religious spaces. Unitarianism resonated immediately. The monotheism, the openness, the freedom to believe in a God of one's own understanding or to find meaning in your own way, and the refusal to be prescriptive about belief all felt less like a compromise and more like a homecoming.

Something that matters enormously to me is that I have found a faith that doesn't simply tolerate difference but actively celebrates it. For a long time I wondered whether I could ever feel truly at home in a faith community. Finding a space that wholeheartedly welcomes and celebrates LGBTQ+ people changed that for me and it is something I hold very dear.

My faith in everyday life looks like prayer, reflection and trying to show up with honesty and kindness even when life is complicated. This past year has brought a lot of change and my faith has quietly been the thread running through all of it. The values I encounter in our services are ones I carry with me into the rest of my week.

What I have most valued about this community is the sense that nobody needs to have everything resolved to belong. Questions are welcome. Doubt is welcome. That is rarer than it should be.

I am still very much at the beginning of my journey with Kensington Unitarians but every service leaves me with something to sit with. Whether a thought, a feeling, or a new perspective I hadn't considered before. That kind of gentle challenge is exactly what I was looking for.

To everyone in this congregation, keep being exactly as you are. The welcome you extend whether through a screen or in person is more powerful than you might realise. For anyone on the outside wondering whether there is a place for them here, there truly is! Come and see.



How to Become a Member

Membership is about affirming your personal commitment to this community and the Unitarian ethos. Each member is a vital and valued part of this church and its mission and its work in the world.

Membership does not depend on your financial contribution to the work of the church (though of course we are very grateful for your regular donations, which help to make possible the ongoing work of the congregation, particularly during these economically challenging times).

If you are relatively new to this community, we ask you to attend and engage with our Sunday services or other activities for three months (in-person or online) before applying to join, so that you can get to know the congregation, develop a sense of belonging, and discern whether it is right for you. New members are formally approved by the committee and personally welcomed by the minister and chair at our annual membership service. Please contact our minister if you would like to join.

How to Make Donations

Your donation will help us continue our work and keep our progressive religious message out in the world. Our annual budget is around £180,000. That's around £3,500 running costs each week to pay for our staff team, run our programme of activities, and maintain our building.

A monthly standing order is the simplest way to support the church. A one-off donation by cheque or bank transfer is always most welcome. You can also set up regular payments via PayPal. Perhaps you might consider leaving a legacy donation in your will. Further details, including a Gift Aid form, are available on our website: www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk/get-involved

Thank you to everyone who has made a donation or taken out a standing order to support the work of this church. Your generosity is much appreciated! Your contributions will help keep our progressive spiritual message out in the world.

‘Our Hurting World’

Minister’s Mini-Reflection, from the service on 8 March

About a year ago, I was invited to speak at a OneLight gathering, when the topic of exploration was ‘Universal Themes’. I offered the reflection that for me the most significant universal themes are suffering and struggle. I’m guessing you are familiar with Buddha’s parable of the mustard seed? A woman comes to the Buddha, desperate, as her son has died, and she begs him to bring the boy back to life. The Buddha says that he can help her if she can bring him some mustard seeds from a household where no one has died. She searches high and low, but eventually realises that every house has been touched by loss, and she is not alone in her suffering. She understands that death and suffering are unavoidable; while she is still in great pain, she is no longer in denial, and comes to accept reality as it is.

Whenever I lead a service or a small group one of the things I’m most conscious of is that on any given day at least one of us (sometimes it’s me) has turned up in distress, in pain, carrying the weight of the world on their shoulders, somehow burdened by the trials of life. They might have had a recent bereavement or a breakup. They might have got a scary diagnosis, or perhaps they’re caring for someone who’s sick and they’re not coping, maybe they’re struggling to make ends meet to feed their family. Perhaps they’re dealing with addiction and on the verge of relapse. Maybe they’re autistic and on the brink of a meltdown from sensory overload. And we may not always be able to tell that by looking at them. We humans can be surprisingly skilled at pretending to be OK even when we’re really not.

Each week in our Sunday service here we have time for lighting candles and sharing our joys and concerns – and sometimes that gives us a little window into each other’s lives – the sort of things that each of us carry. Even more so in our Heart and Soul contemplative gatherings where people are a bit braver about sharing how things really are for them. Each time we open up like this and share authentically, although the particulars of our situations differ, there are always deep resonances.

This sharing of how things really are for us – even when it’s messy – even if we

think we’re failing at being a competent grown-up (and imagining that everyone else is managing better than we are) – this honest sharing reveals how universal this experience of suffering and struggle is – and that can be a source of comfort, insight, importantly, deeper connection with others who have been there too. I came across these wise words by Bryan Stevenson, a human rights and justice activist, which spoke to me – he said: ‘We are all broken by something. We have all hurt someone and have been hurt. We all share the condition of brokenness even if our brokenness is not equivalent. The ways in which I have been hurt—and have hurt others—are different from the ways others have suffered and caused suffering. But our shared brokenness connects us.’

And I would add that there’s often something we can learn from hearing others’ stories – especially in ongoing communities like this where we come back and reconnect again and again and we get to hear how the story unfolds – how others overcome their own difficulties, how the wheel turns, how the tough times often do eventually pass. It gives us hope. As the UU minister David Rankin says: ‘I have learned to trust those who are witnesses rather than gurus, those who express their confusion as well as their knowledge, and those who share their suffering along with their joy.’

I’ll close with words of blessing from Tim Haley: We walk this earth but a brief moment in time. Amid our suffering and struggles, great or small, let us continue to learn how to celebrate this life, together. Let us continue to grow in our capacity to love ourselves and each other. And let us continue to move toward renewal: building a world of love, justice and peace. Amen.



A poem by Marianne Harvey-Bertrand

Maybe

I need to slow down
rest for a while,
let the pulse soften,
notice small things.

Maybe

I carry more than my own,
the weight of generations,
voices folded into mine,
worries like fragile heirlooms
handed down through time,
some too heavy,
some too sharp to hold.

Maybe

I need to stop the chatter
the constant voices,
what people say,
what I imagine
echoes from a past
still shaping my days.

Maybe

I need to sit with the noise
not silence it
just let it pass
like wind through an open
window,
or birdsong drifting in
before the dawn.

Maybe

I need to let go of worry
though I don’t know how,
maybe that’s the point:
not knowing,
holding the not knowing
like a fragile seed
quietly waiting to grow.

Maybe

I need the weather to change,
the world to soften,
guns turned into ploughs,
and a day spent turning earth,
hands deep in the garden soil,

planting something new
among roots tangled deep
in yesterday’s shadows,
learning to carry less,
make space for light,

until I’m tired enough
to sit at night,
thinking of nothing,
listening to birds
still singing.