

# Kensington Unitarians

community – spirituality – conscience



NEWSLETTER  
WINTER 2025/26



## A Spiritual Home for All Souls

We gather together to remember  
the things that matter most in life

**Midwinter  
Mini-Retreats**



**Finding Our  
Religion**



**Potluck  
Lunch**



[www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk](http://www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk)



# Coming up...

## December

### Wednesday 3

7pm Poetry Group with Brian (in-person)

### Friday 5

7pm Heart and Soul with Jane (online)

### Sunday 7

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

7pm Heart and Soul with Mandy (online)

### Thursday 11

7pm Committee Meeting (online)

### Friday 12

Heart and Soul with Jane (online)

### Sunday 14

11am Sunday Service led by Members of the Congregation (hybrid)

12.30pm Community Yoga with Dr. Hannah King (in-person)

7pm Heart and Soul with Jane (online)

### Wednesday 17

7pm Midwinter Labyrinth Mini-Retreat with Jane (in-person)

### Friday 19

7pm Heart and Soul with Jane (online)

### Sunday 21

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

12.30pm Community Lunch (in-person)

7pm Heart and Soul with Jane (online)

### Wednesday 24

5pm Candlelit Christmas Eve led by Rev. Dr. Jane Blackall (hybrid)

### Friday 26

7pm Heart and Soul Festive Special with Jane (online)

### Sunday 28

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

1-4pm New Year Mini-Retreat with Jane (in-person)

7.30pm Better World Book Club: 'Listen' by Kathryn Mannix (online)

## January

### Thursday 1

1-4pm New Year Mini-Retreat with Jane (online)

### Friday 2

7pm Heart and Soul with Jane (online)

### Sunday 4

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

12.30pm Congregational Meeting: Introduction to CIO Project (hybrid)

7pm Heart and Soul with Jane (online)

### Tuesday 6

7pm Finding Our Religion with Jane and Raj (online)

### Wednesday 7

7pm Poetry Group with Brian (in-person)

### Friday 9

7pm Heart and Soul with Jane (online)

### Sunday 11

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

7pm Heart and Soul with Jane (online)

### Thursday 15

7pm Committee Meeting (online)

### Friday 16

7pm Heart and Soul with Jane (online)

### Sunday 18

11am Sunday Service led by Jane and Congregation Members (hybrid)

1pm Art Play Crafternoon (in-person)

7pm Heart and Soul with Jane (online)

### Tuesday 20

7pm Finding Our Religion with Jane and Raj (online)

### Wednesday 21

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

### Friday 23

7pm Heart and Soul with Jane (online)

### Sunday 25

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: 'Don't Forget We're Here Forever' (online)

### Friday 30

7pm Heart and Soul with Jane (online)

## February

### Sunday 1

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

7pm Heart and Soul with Jane (online)

### Tuesday 3

7pm Finding Our Religion with Jane and Raj (online)

### Wednesday 4

7pm Poetry Group with Brian (in-person)

### Friday 6

7pm Heart and Soul with Jane (online)

### Sunday 8

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

7pm Heart and Soul with Jane (online)

### Friday 13

7pm Heart and Soul with Jane (online)

### Sunday 15

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

1pm Art Play Crafternoon (in-person)

7pm Heart and Soul with Jane (online)

### Tuesday 17

7pm Finding Our Religion with Jane and Raj (online)

### Wednesday 18

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

### Friday 20

7pm Heart and Soul with Jane (online)

### Sunday 22

11am Sunday Service led by Jane Blackall and Jasmine Cooray (hybrid)

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

7.30pm Better World Book Club: 'What We Don't Talk About When We Talk About Fat' (online)

### Friday 27

7pm Heart and Soul with Jane (online)

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

## Introducing our Minister

For those who haven't yet met our Minister here's an introduction to Rev. Dr. Jane Blackall.



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: [jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk](mailto:jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk)



'JUST ONE THING':

## A Potluck Congregation

In September we had our last potluck lunch, splendidly organised by Pat and Anna, and with a bonus treat from Azita who had baked her own spectacular birthday cake to share. We hold these lunches about once a quarter, and our next one is coming up after the Christmas carol service on 21st December, so do make sure to let Patricia know what food or drink you can bring along to share ([patriciabrewerton1@mac.com](mailto:patriciabrewerton1@mac.com)). They're always enjoyable occasions and you're welcome to bring your friends.

I like to think that we can apply the principles of the potluck lunch to the way we 'do church' together all year round. The life of this congregation is made up of the gifts that we all bring to the table – and we've all got our own specialities to offer! Some of us are able to show up in-person and help out in a hands-on way with greeting, coffee, or tasks around the building. Others have the skills and capacity to get involved with governance and finance

behind the scenes. Some are great listeners, or good at striking up conversation, and their ability to make newcomers feel welcome (both in-person and online) is a great gift to us all. A few are keen writers and offer occasional mini-reflections for our services or write poems and articles for the newsletter. Maybe you have hidden gifts that you haven't even told us about yet! Simply showing up with whatever you've got to offer – and being present for each other on a regular basis – is what will make this potluck congregation thrive and grow.







## Hucklow Summer School 2025: Finding Our Religion

Latest

Popular

Oldest



Hucklow Summer School 2025 – Theme Talk #6 – Sheena Gabriel and Friends  
130 views • 2 months ago



Hucklow Summer School 2025 – Theme Talk #5 – Lizzie Kingston-Harrison and Fiona...  
117 views • 2 months ago



Hucklow Summer School 2025 – Theme Talk #4 – Danny Crosby and Arek Malecki  
242 views • 2 months ago



Hucklow Summer School 2025 – Theme Talk #3 – Winnie Gordon and Sarah Tinker  
109 views • 2 months ago

## ‘Finding Our Religion’ Study Group

All are welcome to join this new online study group which will take place over six alternate Tuesday evenings in the New Year (6 & 20 Jan, 3 & 17 Feb, 3 & 17 March) from 7-9pm. This will be co-led by our own Jane Blackall and Raj Savarapu of Mill Hill Chapel in Leeds. We hope to bring together members of both congregations, and indeed other Unitarians from across the country, to watch and reflect on the theme talks on ‘Finding Our Religion: Being Unitarian in the 21st Century’ from Hucklow Summer School 2025. In each session we’ll watch an edited talk together (around 40 mins) and then we’ll interactively explore some of the issues raised.

As per the original billing of the talks: ‘We will turn our attention to the question of what it means to be religious, as progressive people of faith, at this moment in history. we will have a chance to examine, explore, reclaim, and affirm our religious identity as Unitarians and Free Christians, in this historic and radical faith tradition which upholds unity and embraces diversity. What would it look like for us – individually and collectively – to move beyond the spiritual ‘pick-n-mix’ and take our religion more seriously? How might we deepen our spirituality, develop theological and philosophical literacy, engage wholeheartedly with tradition, and allow ourselves to be

transformed by our personal and communal religious practice? Can we discern and articulate a way of being unapologetically religious that helps us to live well, here and now, and build a better world for future generations?’ Speakers include Sheena Gabriel, Mel Prideaux, Jane Blackall, Sarah Tinker, Winnie Gordon, Danny Crosby, Arek Malecki, Fiona Owen, and Lizzie Kingston-Harrison.

Sign up in advance with Jane ([jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk](mailto:jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk)) to receive the link. It is not essential to attend all six sessions but we encourage you to come along to as many as possible in order to get the most out of the group experience.

## Midwinter Labyrinth Mini-Retreat

17 December 7-9pm

Join us for this midwinter mini-retreat where we will gather after dark, in a contemplative candlelit space, using 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](mailto:jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk)) to participate as spaces will be limited.







## Christmas and New Year

As usual we will be holding a number of special events for Christmas and the New Year including a potluck community lunch. These are always lovely festive occasions so why not save the dates and bring your friends! The more the merrier.

### Christmas Carol Service

with our Quartet of Singers – followed by Congregational Lunch – Sunday 21 December at 11am.

### Candlelit Christmas Eve Service

with the Wigfield Brass Quintet  
– Wednesday 24 December at 5pm.

### New Year Mini-Retreat

– In-person on Sunday 28 December at 1pm and online on 1 January at 1pm (see below for details)



## News from the Committee

All members of the congregation are invited to attend a hybrid meeting after the service on Sunday 4 January at 12.30pm when we will introduce a new project that the committee are working on behind the scenes. Following the example of several other Unitarian congregations in London, and indeed our General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches, we are taking the first steps towards becoming a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO). This process is intended to improve our governance and ensure that our organisational processes are up-to-date and in line with best practice. There's a huge amount of work to be done over the next year or two in order to make this happen and we intend to hold congregational meetings on Sunday lunchtimes, approximately once a quarter, to give informal catch-ups on progress. Please do try and come along to the first meeting in January to hear more about the plans and offer your support to the volunteers who are working on your behalf.

## New Year Mini-Retreat

**In-person: 28 December, 1-4pm**

**Online: 1 January, 1-4pm**

Advance booking is essential if you would like to take part in one of our always-popular New Year's mini-retreats. We will take a few hours to look back on 2025 and look forward to 2026. Bring along your diary or calendar to remind you of the past year's events and spend some quiet time in gently guided personal reflection before coming back together to share with others at the end of the afternoon. The session will be run in-person on Sunday 28 December (subject to sufficient sign-ups for the group to go ahead) and repeated online on Thursday 1 January. Please email [jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk](mailto:jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk) to book.





## Getting to Know You... Azita Chellappoo



I'm Azita and I've been coming to Kensington Unitarians for about 8 months now. I was raised Bahá'í, but left the faith as a

teenager, which led to me turning away from religion for a while. In the past few years I started to feel an increasing need to nourish the spiritual side of me. Growing up I had a friend at school whose family was Unitarian, so I had heard of Unitarianism before but didn't know that much about it. When I looked up Unitarianism online it sounded like it could be a good fit for me, in terms of aligning with my personal values and being a community that is welcoming to those who are still questioning and working through their beliefs. So, I had wanted to go to a Unitarian service for a while, but I was nervous about showing up somewhere new all by myself, and didn't know what to expect, so I kept putting it off. After my

grandmother passed away in February of this year, my need for spiritual connection overcame my fear and I showed up at Essex Church.

I remember that the first service I went to was about 'kinds of minds' and neurodiversity. I was diagnosed with ADHD 2 years ago, and that diagnosis really changed my life in terms of understanding the difficulties I'd faced and feelings of not being good enough that had been with me for my whole life until then. Before attending my first service I didn't know what to expect as I hadn't been to a church since Christmas and Easter services at school, but I was surprised and moved to hear things that felt like it spoke to my experience so directly. I was glad that I plucked up the courage to stay for coffee after the service as everyone was very friendly and welcoming. I remember going home and calling my husband to tell him that I didn't know what I had been so nervous about!

I've come to appreciate more and more the value of spirituality and religion in my life. I feel the difference that attending the Sunday service,

having that space for reflection and connection, makes to me throughout my week. As a philosopher by profession, I've valued the opportunity to step away from the stresses of everyday life to reflect and contemplate the fundamental. And, as someone who's still in the process of figuring out my faith, beliefs, and religious identity, it's reassuring to be part of a community where uncertainty and asking questions is accepted and welcomed. That's also why I'm glad to have joined the online engagement group that Jane and Charlotte are facilitating. I'm looking forward to exploring deeper my relationship to God, faith, and religion.

I also appreciate how supportive and inclusive the community is. I've enjoyed getting to know members of the congregation over coffee, at the community lunches, and the crafternoons – hearing different perspectives and life experiences. As the world around us seems to be becoming more disconnected, exclusionary, and alienated, I am very thankful to have found a space of solidarity, care, and connection.



## Help Needed with Streaming our Hybrid Services

Do you know of anyone who can help us out with running the tech for our hybrid services? We are still looking for someone to help out with hosting for our hybrid services and take on the role of tech host approximately once a month. Most weeks this is done by our warden Ramona but we need someone to cover for her once every four weeks so she can have some well-earned time off (the precise dates are negotiable).

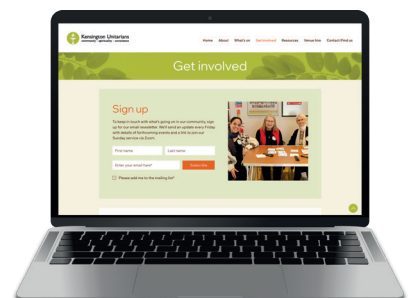
As a minimum this involves turning up early to church (in-person) to run the zoom meeting from 10am, adjust the sound and vision, and share hymn words on screen. Ideally the tech host would also set up and take down all the streaming equipment.

We pay £80 per session for tech hosting and we can also pay for the time it takes to train someone up with our particular hybrid system. As well as being reasonably at ease and capable with the technology (including Zoom hosting on Windows), the candidate would need to be reliable, punctual, conscientious, and showing attention to detail; they would also need to be able to work collaboratively with the church team, in sympathy with our inclusive Unitarian ethos, and showing sensitivity to the church context.

If you or anyone you know might be interested in this role please get in touch: [jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk](mailto:jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk).

## 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](http://www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk)







## Vigil for Palestine

In October we held a special candlelit vigil for Palestine in which members of our congregation, and friends from other Unitarian congregations in London, shared readings and poems from Palestinians speaking of their oppression and suffering. Many thanks to Marianne and Patricia for taking the initiative to make this happen and for all their hard work in putting together this very moving event. A collection was held on the night in aid of Medical Aid for Palestinians which raised £290.

## Together in Meditation

Together in Meditation is a national, weekly, online, meditation circle – open to all – on Thursdays at 7.15pm for a 7.30pm start.

As a collaborative venture between Richard Bober (from The Meditational Fellowship), Lizzie Kingston Harrison (Congregational Connections Lead), Rev. Sheena Gabriel and Rob Oulton (who led weekly meditations for Godalming Unitarians for 13 years) we offer a regular space for people to practice meditation in a mutually supportive environment.

Open to everyone, both Unitarians and non-Unitarians, those with no experience of meditation are invited to join alongside those with an established practice. We aim to create an open, loving, and inclusive space for all to find tranquility and insight in an increasingly challenging world, with the hope that participants might feel enabled to take back the benefits of meditation into their own spiritual communities. Each session provides basic instruction in well-established meditation methods, and offers formal guided practices, including 15-20 minutes of silence. In keeping with the Unitarian ethos, sessions are not orientated towards any single religious, spiritual, or psychological system, but freely draw on the wisdom of different traditions.

After the time of meditation those who wish to, are invited to stay on for the sharing of insights and for mutual support, as we deepen our practice together.

For more information and to sign up for the Zoom link, email Lizzie Kingston Harrison: [ekingston@unitarian.org.uk](mailto:ekingston@unitarian.org.uk)

## Annual Meetings of the General Assembly

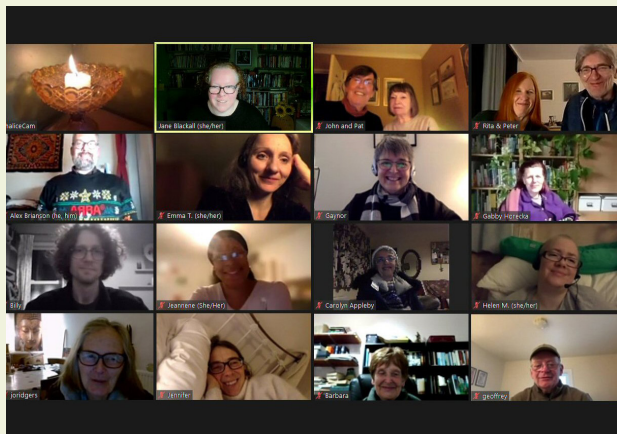
Details have just been announced for next year's annual meetings of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches. In 2026 the gathering will take place from 27-29 March at the Hayes Conference Centre in Swanwick, Derbyshire. This is the biggest Unitarian get-together of the year and a great opportunity to meet others from across the denomination and get a sense of what's going on in the wider movement. If you are a member of the congregation who would be interested in attending please do have a chat with Jane or a member of the committee to find out more.



## New Unitarian Beginnings In-gathering (NUBI)

Are you new to Unitarianism? Would you like to find out more? Maybe ask questions and meet other newbies? New Unitarian Beginnings In-gathering (NUBI) gatherings are small online groups hosted by Lizzie Kingston-Harrison and Kieren Mardle-Moss. These gatherings are open to anyone who is new to the Unitarian movement or would like to find out more. They are relaxed events with plenty of time for questions and discussion. NUBI (or Newbies) meets monthly on alternating Fridays and Saturdays. Contact Lizzie for more information: [ekingston@unitarian.org.uk](mailto:ekingston@unitarian.org.uk)





## 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 20 January, 17 February, 17 March at 7pm (please note there is no meeting in December as we are holding our Midwinter Labyrinth mini-retreat on the third Wednesday instead). 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 to let her know you're planning to attend ([jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk](mailto:jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk)).

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



## One Light Gatherings

Second Tuesday of the month, meeting at Essex Church

9 December, 13 January, 17 February (note special date), 10 March, 14 April



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](mailto:contact@onelightgathering.co.uk)

## Nia Dance

**Holistic movement and Dance at Essex Church. Rediscover the joy of movement and the meaning of true fitness!**

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.

Weekly on Friday at 12.30pm. £10 per session (or £40 for 5)  
Online sessions on Wednesdays at 12.30pm

N.B. Sonya will be taking a break from mid-December to mid-January – please contact her directly to check dates.

To find out about Nia see: [www.nianow.com](http://www.nianow.com). For more info contact Sonya Leite on 020 7371 1674 or [sleite@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:sleite@hotmail.co.uk)

## Kensington Choir

Monday evenings 7-8.35pm, Essex Church

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](http://www.kensingtonchoir.com)) or email [roseanna@kensingtonchoir.com](mailto:roseanna@kensingtonchoir.com)





## Community Yoga with Hannah

**Sunday 14 December, 12.30pm**

(New year dates are 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 full details: [yoga@kensington-unitarians.org.uk](mailto:yoga@kensington-unitarians.org.uk)

## Poetry Group

**Wednesday evening, once a month,  
7-8.30pm 3 December, 7 January,  
4 February, 4 March**

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](mailto:brian.ellis@outlook.com)) so they can be printed for all.



## Finding Your Voice Monthly Singing Classes

**Last Sunday of the month,  
12.30-1.15pm 25 January, 22 February,  
22 March (no meeting in December or April)**

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.



## 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](http://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.





## Art Play Crafternoon

Forthcoming dates: 18 January, 15 February, 15 March  
(no session in December due to community lunch)

All are welcome to join us for at this relaxed art-and-craft hangout which continues on the third Sunday of each month. 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.

Or you might just like to keep it simple and do some colouring in (we'll bring some geometric colouring pages and we have felt tips you can use). Please let Jane know if you're planning to come along to any of the dates. Email: [jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk](mailto:jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk)





# 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 start of last year. 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.

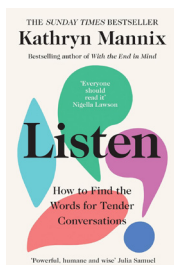
Please email Jane to let her know if you're planning to join and for further details. See contact details on p20

### Sunday 28 December:

#### Listen

by Kathryn Mannix

This is a book about the conversations that matter and how to have them better – more honestly, more confidently and without regret. A child coming out to their parent. A family losing someone to terminal illness. A friend noticing the first signs of someone's dementia. A careers advisor and a teenager with radically different perspectives. There are moments when we must talk, listen and be there for one another. Why do we so often come away from those times feeling like we could have done more, or should have been braver in the face of discomfort? Why do we skirt the conversations that might matter most? By bringing together stories with a lifetime's experience working in medicine, and the newest psychology, Mannix offers lessons for how we can better speak our mind and help when others need to.

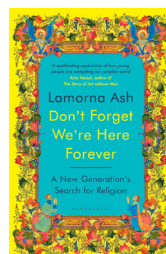


### Sunday 25 January:

#### Don't Forget We're Here Forever

by Lamorna Ash

Why are young people in Britain today turning to faith in our age of uncertainty? Lamorna Ash was raised with about as much Christianity as most people in Britain these days: a basic knowledge of hymns and prayers received via a Church of England primary school education... But once she started writing about her two friends' unexpected conversions, she began encountering a recurring phenomenon: in an age of disconnection and apathy, a new generation was discovering religion for itself. Through interviews and her own deeply personal journey with religion, and from Evangelical youth festivals to Quaker meetings, a silent Jesuit retreat along the Welsh coastline to a monastic community in the Inner Hebrides, she investigates what is driving Gen Z today to embrace Christianity. This is a reminder of our universal need for nourishment of the soul.

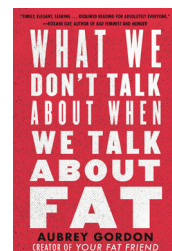


### Sunday 22 February:

#### What We Don't Talk About When We Talk About Fat

by Aubrey Gordon

Anti-fatness is everywhere. Aubrey Gordon unearths the cultural attitudes and social systems that have led to people being denied basic needs because they are fat and calls for social justice movements to be inclusive of plus-sized people's experiences. Unlike the recent wave of memoirs and quasi self-help books that encourage readers to love and accept themselves, Gordon pushes the discussion further towards authentic fat activism, which includes ending legal weight discrimination, giving equal access to health care for large people, increased access to public spaces, and ending anti-fat violence. As she argues, "I did not come to body positivity for self-esteem. I came to it for social justice."



# Minister's Reflection: 'Hope Not Hate'

From the service on 7 September 2025



A couple of weeks ago, I was on my way back from Hucklow Summer School, which is in some ways – for me, at least – a little slice of heaven. For one week a year we create this little bubble in which we try to live like we wish the world would live. Fifty-odd Unitarians (and Friends) squashed together in one place and doing their best to build beloved community – looking out for each other – attempting to work around each other's foibles and accommodate each other's needs as best we can. We often speak of affirming 'the inherent worth and dignity of every person' but in this setting we really try to intentionally embody that key principle and put it into action. We try to practice right relationship. It's hard work, and we don't always get it right, but it's a space that brings me hope. It's a little glimpse, a vision, of how things could be.

At the end of the week, inevitably, we all have to step out of the Summer School bubble and brace ourselves for re-entry into the world outside. It can be a shock to the system. Summer School nearly always finishes on the bank holiday weekend, and on many occasions in the past my dream-like post-Hucklow glow has been abruptly wrecked by the experience of stopping off in a motorway service station on the way home. The noise! The weight of humanity! The rudeness of people bumping and barging (after a week of people holding doors open for you – that was the thing I always used to notice – the lack of small courtesies – humanity is not generally seen at its best in a motorway service station on the August bank holiday).

This year, it was something different that burst my bubble. Sarah kindly gave me a lift home, and in the last few minutes of the journey, just as we drove over the Blue Bridge onto the Isle of Dogs I noticed there were a load of flags flying from lampposts. And someone had painted a red cross on the mini-roundabout. 'What's all that about?', I wondered out loud. The week in Hucklow had been so full-on I hadn't really been keeping up with the news. So Sarah filled me in. And my heart sank. We've been here before.

Back in the 90s the Island was at the centre of very unwelcome attention when a member of the British National Party unexpectedly won a seat on the local council. And for those who weren't around at that time, the BNP were a splinter party from the National Front, an out-and-out fascist and white supremacist organisation, whose supporters were associated with racist violence and intimidation in the 70s and 80s. For my beloved Island, my home, to be suddenly associated with racists, was devastating. Repulsive. I was only a teenager but my instinctive reaction was clear: Not in my name.

After the BNP councillor was elected, the far-right became more visible in my area, including suddenly seeing skinheads in bomber jackets hanging around on the street, like a fascist cosplay convention. I don't think they were locals, in the main – my impression is that lots of them were travelling from other areas to strut about the place – coming for a day out as if the Island was some kind of racist theme park for them to play in. But also, thankfully,

anti-fascist organisations turned their attention to the area too, and a good number of previously indifferent people woke up, lent their energies to resisting this menace. Membership of the Anti-Nazi League and Anti-Fascist Action grew rapidly. And the councillor was voted out again within a year – though the number of votes he got increased, troublingly – but people who might otherwise have been apathetic about local elections got the vote out and voted to get rid of him. And many of us celebrated. That particular battle had been won. The 'silent majority' mostly wanted the racist out. The skinhead away-days fizzled out and they weren't so visible on the streets any more.

But of course, sadly, that wasn't the end of the story. Those attitudes are clearly still very much around. As an aside, when I went to check my facts about this historical event, on the BBC 'On This Day' website, the headline was: '1993: Shock as Racist Wins Council Seat'. That headline caught my attention as, it seems to me, reporting these days wouldn't put it quite so plainly. Somehow it seems that much media coverage nowadays is complicit in normalising such views. The article also reminded me that part of the context for that electoral win was other, mainstream, parties – notably, at that time, the Liberal Democrats – playing with racist dog-whistles and anti-immigrant rhetoric in their own campaigning and helping to establish false and damaging narratives about the local Asian community in particular. As the mainstream parties and the media pander to these racist, xenophobic, anti-immigrant



attitudes, it shifts the Overton Window – that is, it shifts the range of ideas that are considered politically acceptable – and in recent years that window has been hurtling to the right. And the poem we heard earlier, ‘I Sometimes Fear...’ from Michael Rosen, reminds us of where that can ultimately lead.

But where are we now? And what is ours to do at this moment in time? This moment when a small minority of individuals are spraying red crosses on anything that stands still long enough and weaponizing this nation’s flag to galvanise the forces of hatred. It’s worth acknowledging, I think, that this country’s flag does not actually belong to the far-right – though for many of us they have indelibly tainted it by association – but some anti-racists are trying to reclaim it. This week Billy Bragg, for example, has been giving away little stickers for people to stick on lampposts with the flag of St. George and the words ‘No to Hate – It’s Our Flag Too’. Others are changing their social media profiles to this image. Billy Bragg voiced his concern that ‘the people responsible for the recent spate of flag-flying are seeking to divide our community into Us and Them’ and said he hoped that his stickers would ‘make it clear that the flag belongs to all of us and should not be used to stoke hatred and division.’ And with a little ironic nod to the bad-faith claims of some protestors, he concluded: ‘Given that those who put the flags up claim this is not their purpose, I’m sure they will welcome this clarification.’

When I read accounts of anti-immigrant protests – including one on the Isle of Dogs just last week (which ended with a police officer being punched and four being arrested) – I am sorry to admit that I felt frightened. Which, I think, is what they want. When I see social media dominated by the voices of bullies, I am scared of being abused. It makes me want to keep my head down. Which, I think, is what they want. Simultaneously, I knew what this week’s service had to be about, and I was nervous about speaking out in this public setting.

What finally nudged me into action was this: An old friend from my schooldays, Ajanta, lives in Epping, and she’s lived there happily for many years. She doesn’t post a lot on social media but she shared something from a local group called ‘Epping for Everyone’ who describe

themselves as ‘group of residents from Epping who are deeply committed to building a community rooted in respect, compassion, and facts not fear.’ It lifts up the voices of locals – of all races and origins – whose lives are being blighted by the so-called protestors. These seem to be, in many cases, trouble-makers travelling in from afar to harass and intimidate not just the refugees that are the focus of their blame, but anyone who gets in their way. It is racially-aggravated antisocial behaviour, and drunken disorder, and the majority of Epping residents want nothing to do with it. And that’s where this group, ‘Epping for Everyone’ comes in, as it aims to give voice to this ‘silent majority’.

**“It's no good being  
a 'silent majority'...  
The world is already  
moving in certain  
directions. And to be  
neutral, to be passive,  
in a situation like that,  
is to collaborate with  
what is going on.”**

One simple but meaningful gesture they have initiated is to invite supporters, people of goodwill, to tie colourful ribbons to railings on the high street, as ‘a reminder that our town chooses love, hope and community over hate.’ This visible symbol of unity matters. If all we can see, if all that is portrayed in the media, is images of rage and intimidation, we might be tempted to think this is the majority view – it can normalise extremism. If this goes unchallenged, even more people might be tempted to give credence to the lie that immigrants and asylum-seekers are the cause of all our country’s problems, rather than seeing that they are being cynically manipulated into making scapegoats of them.

If this is not the world we want to see – then we need to do something about it – and what that looks like might be different for each of us according to our circumstances. It’s no good being a ‘silent majority’, disapproving behind

closed doors, and hoping it will all blow over without us having to get involved. I find myself thinking of the saying from Howard Zinn: ‘you can’t be neutral on a moving train’. He clarifies: ‘The world is already moving in certain directions. And to be neutral, to be passive, in a situation like that, is to collaborate with what is going on.’ Saying or doing nothing is, functionally, complicity.

As we heard in the reading that Julia gave for us earlier, from Meagan Henry, some of us are called to direct action and political engagement. We do need people who are courageous enough to put their bodies on the line, who will turn up at counter-protests, or go on the March Against Fascism which is taking place in London next Saturday. But this is not the only way to make a difference. We can speak up in our personal lives – and this also takes courage – if people in our circles are spreading misinformation, or scapegoating, or engaging in hate speech – we must not let it pass without comment. Sometimes social awkwardness is an obstacle to doing the right thing. Be brave. I’m not suggesting you should get drawn into bad-faith arguments on social media – I suspect most keyboard warriors are not especially susceptible to reason or compassion as the motivation, the psychological entrenchment, is more about belonging to a group – and getting embroiled in the culture wars is a demoralising, exhausting, distraction.

Instead of being reactive we might be proactive – positively articulating our own vision of how the world could be – re-affirming our values – building beloved community. And doing that out loud – as an embodied example and an encouragement to others – ‘being the change we want to see in the world’ as the well-worn saying goes. And I think that’s what we’re doing here, together, as a congregation, week-in-week out.

I want to close with an echo of the words we heard earlier from Victoria Safford: ‘Our mission is to plant ourselves at the gates of Hope... a different, sometimes lonely place, the place of truth-telling, about your own soul first of all and its condition. The place of resistance and defiance, the piece of ground from which you see the world both as it is and as it could be... and we stand there, beckoning and calling.’ Amen.

# Poems by our Members

## By Brian Ellis...

### Reclining Mother and Child by Henry Moore

caught in an instant  
of affection  
she and her child  
lie bronzed forever  
in one moment.  
watching us  
passing by  
each an infinity  
of moments  
yet limited  
by birth and death  
their one moment  
will outstay all ours.  
until by neglect and  
overgrowing nature  
they rejoin us  
waiting in earth's  
only grave.

### A Summer's Night

slow sea-beats from the  
beach below  
draw in moonlight through  
the dark.  
my arm around you feels  
you drift  
to sleep; warmth, scent of  
hair,  
borne away to waiting  
dreams.  
do you hear my whisper?  
I am with you, wait,  
wait....

## By Eliz Beel...

### Post Exam Fever

I still have it with me,  
A cherished bundle of past  
Failures;  
Too, there's thoughts about  
what might have Worked:  
How it could better have  
happened  
or maybe it's just  
indulgence in wishful  
Thinking.....  
Probably.....  
Playing that instrument in a  
school lunch hour;  
It's tunes salvaged from  
Classical music albums:  
Their titles and ornate  
scripts inspiring  
One to a relentless vista of  
strings  
playing in an orchestral  
concert;  
taking up the larger part of  
an afternoon  
Somewhere.....

Maybe, perhaps I could  
find a more promising  
Entry into this somewhat  
overcrowded  
thoroughfare, I daresay

Be bright, enthralled, not  
quite so many weak tunes  
to be endured,  
as one hopes.

## By Marianne Harvey-Bertrand...

### The flag of St George

You lift it,  
high, deliberate.  
The flag of Saint George,  
not a banner, but a blade,  
the saint's cross reborn in  
anger.  
Go home, you say.  
Your voices split the air,  
pride polished into venom.  
Home?  
Home is ash.  
Home is hunger.  
Home is the waves that  
swallowed their names.  
They did not come for  
pleasure,  
nor for the work you scorn.  
They came because there  
was nothing left,  
only disease, and bullets,  
and graves.

Go home, you say,  
waving, waving, waving the  
cross,  
once a wound of mercy,  
now a mark of warning.  
And they,  
quiet among the echoes,  
wonder if the ocean was  
kinder,  
if the bombs were softer,  
if staying, even in death,  
was less cruel  
than this.  
But remember this:  
your saint was not from your  
shores,  
and his flag trembles in your  
hands,  
knowing that one day you  
-the dragons-  
may be slain,  
and carted out of the city.

### Still Me

When my hair grows white  
like frost across winter fields,  
and my cheeks bloom dusk-  
rose,  
when my ankles swell  
from the weight of all my  
days,  
When I set my bags down,  
and lean on the railings,  
feeling the wind steady me,  
as my heart steps softly  
between memory and now,  
When I fumble for my keys,  
and the lock drifts from sight,  
when I don't make it in time,  
as the body forgets its hurry,  
When I fall,  
and the floor greets me  
harshly,  
when sound turns soft,  
and my voice becomes a  
whisper  
meant only for me,  
When names thin like old ink,  
and faces shine  
at the edge of forgetting,  
when sleep comes and goes  
like a capricious tide,  
When I trace the blue roads

on my hands,  
each one a story  
of holding,  
and letting go,  
When sunlight lays itself  
across my lap,  
I close my eyes  
and wander back  
to everyone I've known.  
Remember this:  
inside, I am still flame,  
the same girl  
who whirled in her billowing  
dress  
praying for her heart to  
explode  
who longed to disappear  
into the mystery of rain,  
who dreamed of skies  
beyond,  
too wide to name.  
So, when I slow down,  
speak softly.  
Hold my hand if it trembles  
and look, look closely,  
I am still here,  
still me,  
still burning quietly  
beneath the skin of time.



## 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 think you would like to join.

If you are already a member of this church, we ask you to re-confirm your membership each year, ahead of our membership service and AGM which takes place in spring. Thank you for your support!

## 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 on the back page)



## Hucklow Summer School: 21-28 August 2026

Planning for next year's Hucklow Summer School is well underway and we hope that booking will be open before Christmas. Save the dates if you're interested in coming along and have a chat with Jane or Charlotte (who are on the panel organising the event) or any of the other congregation members who have been to summer school in previous years to find out more.

### Doing Our Best?

*'Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better.'*

Maya Angelou

In aspiring to live well and make a positive impact on the world around us, we often find ourselves caught between the desire to hold ourselves to the highest standards, and do our very best, and the need to accept our human limitations, and our propensity (both as individuals and communities) to screw up and fall short. In 2026, through daily talks and in-depth engagement groups, we will explore various aspects of this dilemma and the ways in which it plays out in our inner lives, personal relationships, church communities,

and social action. How can we rise to the challenges we face in the 21st century, respond faithfully to the needs of a rapidly changing world, and courageously meet the call to learn, grow, and do better – without falling into self-recrimination at our own shortcomings? How might we move beyond 'good intentions' and pay closer attention to the impact that our action (and inaction) has on others? How can we gently hold ourselves and each other to account in a compassionate way which aligns with our core values? How might we dream a new world into being while being pragmatic about our individual and collective capacity? Join us at Hucklow Summer School 2026 to consider all these questions and more together.

Next year's facilitation team will include Danny Crosby, Tina Gandhi, Mel Prideaux, Arek Malecki, Raj Savarapu and Jane Blackall (in-person) and Lizzie Kingston-Harrison, Jennifer Sanders, Kieren Mardle-Moss and Kate Dean (online). Our theme speakers will be announced in the new year. Keep an eye on the summer school website for further info: [www.hucklowsummerschool.co.uk](http://www.hucklowsummerschool.co.uk)



## Getting to Know You...

# Roy Clark



Hello everyone, my name is Roy. Until my retirement, I was a university and college lecturer. These days, I spend my time working as

an artist and, when I'm not doing that, supporting community groups and organisations to improve mental health care in West London.

The first time I crossed the threshold of Essex Church was on a wet and windy night over 12 years ago, when I attended a 'Heart and Soul' midweek spiritual gathering. It was always an in-person event in those days. I came because essentially I had reached a crossroads in my life at that point. It was a time of turmoil and deep personal anguish. From where I am now I can see that my struggles were a necessary part of my 'dark night of the soul' as St John of the Cross so memorably puts it. Back then all I knew was that I was in trouble. I was tentatively seeking more meaningful, authentic interactions with others, as well as an opportunity to discover—or perhaps rediscover—a spiritual perspective.

That first night, I was met with quiet friendliness and a warm welcome. I soon started attending Sunday services and over the intervening years, I served for a time as a member of the church

committee and chaired it for a couple of years too. I am currently a Trustee and Board Member of 'Simple Gifts,' the Unitarian Centre for Social Action.

When Jane asked if I would contribute this article, I thought it might be interesting to revisit a piece I wrote for the newsletter back in 2013, as part of a series by members of the congregation entitled "How I Came to Essex Church." Rereading what I wrote then allowed me to reflect on where I was at that time and where I am now. Intrinsically, my reasons for joining are the same as those that keep me coming today. Unitarianism, in my experience, and put simply, is a religion that doesn't dictate, insist or coerce, it just gives one a sacred space to 'be'. Life is, after all, a journey full of twists and turns—and who says we are not allowed the freedom to develop and refine our beliefs, or even change our minds, without being bound and tied by dogma, doctrine, or creed?

I have found in Unitarianism an openness to ideas and wisdom from all religious traditions and humanistic philosophies, which encourages us and gives our being room to grow. Ours is a church that informs our heads certainly, but also—and crucially—feeds our hearts. I am proud to be part of a community built on social justice and inclusion, fuelled by kindness, generosity of spirit, and service to others. Another value I have found that I shared with other Unitarians is a belief in the interconnectedness of all beings and nature. This informs my

artistic practice and cultivates a holistic attentiveness to my inner landscape.

If there has been any change over time since that older newsletter article, it is that the spiritual perspective I thought I needed as an adjunct to my life—an added dimension if you like—has become intrinsic and indivisible from my life. My faith continues to deepen through personal practices of meditative prayer and service, embracing the not knowing and mystery of the ineffable. Increasingly over the last few years I have experienced a shift in consciousness away from myself — that is my egoic self – towards a greater reality that some, including me, call God.

In our former minister Sarah and our current one, Jane, we are blessed with wonderful guides who are also fellow travellers as we make our journeys of faith, individually and collectively.

These days, due to changes my wife and I have made in our work/life balance, I attend on Sundays less often than I used to. Often on weekends I enjoy spending time with my daughter and granddaughter in Sussex, as well as doing more traveling here in the UK and further afield. However, Essex Church remains a beacon—a homing beacon, one might say—and in some ways my connection to it is stronger than ever. I am deeply grateful for all that I have learned and continue to learn here and for all the friendships and love that I have found.

## How to make a donation to our church

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](http://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.

## YouTube Channel

Our Sunday services are all archived on our YouTube channel ([www.youtube.com/@kensingtonunitarians](http://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.



# Public Art: A Private View by Roy Clark

A few years ago, we had a service at Essex Church wherein members of the congregation chose their favourite public art and talked about their choices and why they enjoyed looking at them. I thought it might be worth revisiting this topic as a newsletter article.

If like me you enjoy a good wander, then art is a good walk enlivened. London is awash with public sculpture, inviting wonder, reflection, and connection, transforming urban spaces into open-air galleries. However very often they are ignored. Most folk rush past, heads buried in phones, missing the stories etched in stone or metal. Why is this? I think a major part of the reason is encapsulated in an old Joni Mitchell song 'Playing for free'. Caught in traffic the singer notices a musician playing his clarinet in the street. He plays so beautifully but nobody stops to listen because "he is not famous or on their TV"

In many ways public art suffers the same fate, not withstanding some works are by major artists. If sculptures such as Henry

Moore's 'Arch' in Kensington Gardens or Barbara Hepworth's 'Winged Figure' in Oxford Street were in a major art gallery exhibition people would queue up and pay to see them. But because they are just sitting there in plain sight unheralded, they are overlooked and often not noticed at all. Some sculptures, like Rachel Whiteread's 'House' (1993), once attracted many visitors and sparked debate but were demolished before their impact settled. Vandalism and neglect also threaten these works, graffiti obscures details, and budget cuts limit maintenance.

Another reason public art is under appreciated is location and setting. Rachel Whiteread herself addressed this in a recent edition of Gagosian Quarterly: "Memorials tend to be very serious, while outdoor sculpture can often be very playful. But they can both be plopped in places where they're completely inappropriate, and for me, the placing of memorials and sculptures is very important. It's something that I do. It's part of my language. It's how I think. I've

always been interested in urban planning and architecture and things like that—in why things get put where they are and what decisions informed the choice. And often it's just a bunch of red tape".

This is very true. Also as locations change over time, as for example new buildings go up, the effect of the setting of the artwork changes and often not in a good way. A few months ago Brian Ellis and I visited Broadgate behind Liverpool Street station to view 'Fulcrum' by Richard Serra, a sculptor we both greatly admire. In memory his huge corten steel girders precariously balanced, soared into the sky majestically. However over the last decade a nearby shopping centre had been developed and raised by two storeys. The sculpture was surrounded and swamped, its girders left sticking through a hole in the floor of the mall totally nullifying its effectiveness and indeed its purpose. No longer monumental and imposing but squat and lumpen.

That said, there is an abundance of beautiful, intriguing and sometimes challenging artwork to be found in almost every corner of the metropolis. Next time you encounter one don't just walk past; connect, slow down, touch where permitted, and let the art provoke. London's sculptures aren't just decor; they're invitations to see our city anew.

To get you started, here, in no particular order, are my personal favourite public artworks in West London. All are either walking distance from the church or 30 minutes or less away by public transport.

Barbara Hepworth 'Winged Figure'  
John Lewis, Oxford Street

Henry Moore 'The Arch'  
Kensington Gardens

Anthony Gormley 'Alert'  
Imperial College, Kensington

Eduardo Paolozzi 'The Head of Invention'  
Design Museum, Kensington

Yinka Shonibare 'Wind Sculpture'  
Howick Place, Victoria

Andy Goldsworthy 'Slate Wall'  
Montrose Place, Belgravia



Eduardo Paolozzi: The Head of Invention - Roy Clark © 2025





# Minister's Reflection: 'We Need Each Other'

From the service on 26 October 2025

## **Meditation: 'Who Needs You? And Who Do You Need?'**

I invite you to reflect on two simple but profound questions: Who needs you? And who do you need? Maybe jot these two questions down on paper and note down your responses too.

First, I encourage you to reflect on the question 'who needs you?'. Start close in, with the answers that seem most obvious, and work outward. Maybe you have traditional 'dependents' – people you care for in a practical and material way – children, or parents, spouses or partners – where you are helping meet their basic survival needs. You might think of friends or neighbours for whom you provide social and emotional support. You see them and know them. They rely on you for encouragement, good listening, wise counsel. Perhaps there are community groups (like this one!) who need you to show up and join in, or help out, volunteering or donating, or simply to be present on a regular basis and build supportive connections. Think about this question really broadly. There are artists that need you to be a receptive audience. Oppressed peoples or good causes that need your advocacy. Businesses that need your custom. You

could even say humanity – or God – needs you to speak up for Goodness in this world.

Now let's shift to the other side now, to reflect on the question 'who do you need?' Again, maybe start close in, acknowledging the people who are already very present in your life, very evidently supporting you from day to day, or being the ones you know you can call on in a crisis. Family, friends, neighbours, community. Then think about it even more broadly. So many people are involved in meeting our needs for food, for health, for education, for inspiration, for delight. And this question might make us aware of needs we have that are not currently getting met. Maybe you need someone to hang out and keep you company. Maybe you need someone to listen. Maybe you need someone to help you get your life in order. Maybe you need to be more wholeheartedly embedded in community to feel a sense of belonging. Or you to engage in a good cause or a project which gives you a sense of meaning and purpose.

I invite you to reflect on these questions, and see what response arises in you this day: Who Needs You? And Who Do You Need?



### Reflection: 'We Need Each Other'

We need each other. It seems such an obvious thing to say, doesn't it? But when I look at the world around me it sometimes seems to be a truth we have collectively forgotten.

Remarkably it's 30 years now since Robert Putnam's famous essay 'Bowling Alone' was published (the book that sprang from it came along a few years later). There was a time where this was being referenced left, right, and centre – the essay looked at the decline in 'associational life' in America in particular – but I think the same is true in the UK: we just don't hang out with each other so much these days. And, I would guess, that trend has only accelerated in recent years, firstly as a result of austerity policies and public cuts, secondly due to the pandemic. A one-two punch that it's hard to pick ourselves up from.

So many people are struggling. The cost of living is high and our margins are squeezed. Work, for many, is precarious. Many people are putting in long hours, or working multiple jobs, with unpredictable shift patterns, to make ends meet – this makes it hard to have much of a social life or regular commitments outside of work – there's just not much time, energy, or money left for old-fashioned recreational activities at the end of the day. Many ordinary people have had to pick up more caring responsibilities too, or take on volunteering roles in the community, to try and make up for some of the lost support we might once have expected to get from our ailing public services. And almost everything is monetised these days; unbridled capitalism has robbed us of many of our public spaces.

When I look at the people around me, it is clear to me that too many are carrying too much. And they no longer have the capacity to nurture or maintain those crucial social connections that might actually help them to cope with everything they are carrying. I'm witnessing this personally – there's a support group I'm part of – increasingly people are struggling to turn up to it, to give and receive the support that they crave, because life is just too demanding. It can feel impossible to set aside just an hour a week to care for self-and-others.

Increasingly we're too far gone to access the support we need. And as some crack under the strain, those who are still upright take on more responsibilities, which will likely push them further into overwhelm and isolation. It's a vicious cycle.

Additionally, since Covid has been in circulation, it seems that people have (on average) become still more reclusive. The lockdowns left a lasting legacy. Far more of us are able to work from home these days, at least some of the time, and that's feels like a good thing. I'm not knocking it! But it is another factor in increasing social isolation. This is not the only lasting effect of Covid though. Some of us are more conscious than we used to be about infection and managing risk – so we think twice about social gatherings. Some of us are still feeling the after-effects of infection and the chronic illness that results. Some of us have got out of the habit of socialising, or we're in the grip of inertia, or we've fallen out of touch with old friends and feel awkward about reaching out to reconnect.

**"Life doesn't make any sense without interdependence. We need each other, and the sooner we learn that, the better for us all. So let's not be frightened to reach out to each other – to ask for help – and offer help."**

For a time it seemed as if social media would at least partly compensate for the decline in face-to-face interaction – people were migrating from in-person hangouts in the pub or club or café to Facebook and Twitter – but now these networks are regarded by many as toxic. They are no longer the virtual town squares that, for a time, they seemed to be. More and more people I know are walking away from social media for the sake of their sanity – it's completely understandable – but that's another channel of connection gone.

Research conducted this year, here in the UK, by 'More in Common' confirmed some of this picture. They reported that 'the rise of social media and technology, the impact of the pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis and political fragmentation have all had lasting impacts on people's relationships with those around them. [A] sense of distrust is particularly strong among young Britons, and those who feel economically insecure.' People are feeling socially disconnected; they feel a loss of shared spaces and rituals. And all this yields a context ripe for populist voices to sweep in and sow further division.

As Sean Parker Dennison warned, in the reading we heard from David earlier, it's all too easy to get into a negative feedback loop. He wrote: 'The danger of hopelessness is that we can lose each other. In times of hopelessness, it's easy to get scared of everything and everyone. It's easy to start believing that your neighbour is the problem and that hoarding is a better strategy than generosity. The problem is that when community starts to break down, we lose the most important source of hope we have: each other.'

So far I've mainly been stating the problem – describing the situation we find ourselves in – but how might we go about resisting this dispiriting state of affairs – and pushing back on this trend towards isolation? I'm just going to highlight two actions that we might focus on – one requires a bit of inner work – the other we can only do together.

The first is to embrace our own neediness (and our capacity to help meet other's needs). Both/And. In the game of give-and take, perhaps some of us tend to lean more one way or the other (or we might veer between the two poles at different times in our lives). And that's OK; we've all been dealt different hands in life and some of us will just have more needs – will require more support – and others will have more resources to give. As Benjamin Zephaniah says, 'people will always need people, to talk to, to cry and rely on'. Yet some of us will shudder at the thought that anyone would think of us as 'needy'.

These days we hear a lot of warnings about codependency – this word is mainly used in the context of enmeshed personal relationships where there is a distinct ►

'giver' and a distinct 'taker'. The giver routinely sacrifices their own needs and well-being for the other – they can end up exhausted and resentful – and their care and attention can end up harming the one on the receiving end too. What I hadn't heard so much about until recently though was counterdependency – this is a dynamic where someone has a desire to be hyper-independent, self-reliant, apparently invulnerable – and such people won't acknowledge they have any need of others and they won't ask for help.

There has got to be a way between these two extremes – enmeshment on the one hand and determined isolation on the other – and that middle way is interdependence. Something we come back so often – it's a key spiritual insight in many religious traditions. We can acknowledge our own needs, and acknowledge the needs of others too, and accept that there will be a life-long dance of give-and-take, where we will sometimes need to reach out and ask for help, and sometimes need to respond when others call on us, in turn. Remember, as Erik Erikson said, 'Life doesn't make any sense without interdependence. We need each other, and the sooner we learn that, the better for us all.' So let's not be frightened to reach out to each other – to ask for help – and offer help.

I wonder what came up for you in the meditation. Who needs you? Who do you need? I wonder if one side of that question came more easily to you than the other. Maybe you could share your reflections with a trusted friend to see if you're missing anything.

It's not always possible for us to meet another's needs – or for someone to meet ours – maybe our needs are incompatible – maybe life is so overwhelming that we need to attend to our own survival and we haven't got any capacity to help others right now (think of the well-worn analogy of putting your own life-jacket on first – that's valid). But we can tend to all our varied relationships – 'nurture supportive connections' as we often say – so that we are more securely embedded in a network of mutual caring when the going gets tough. We need to show up for each other in good times and bad.

And that brings me to my final point (you may have seen this coming). We need you. I need you. The existence of this congregation is dependent on the

presence and the efforts of each and every one of us. Though I'm the one who gets paid to stand up here on a Sunday morning (and do all the other things that are on my job description) there is only so much I can do without the active engagement of other people who care. It's not just about the obvious volunteering roles – greeting, making coffee, co-hosting, putting the chairs away – but the decision making and the paying of bills – turning up to support events, welcome newcomers, look out for people who are struggling. For this church to be here when you need it – it needs you – we need you – to get stuck in. To make a commitment to the community and show up in whatever ways you can.

Churches like ours are a wonderful place where we can practice give-and-take, hopefully get some of our own needs met, and help meet the needs of others. Given all that we've said about the rise of social isolation it seems vital that we do all we can – together – to increase our capacity to be a space of welcome and connection.

I am going to close this reflection with an echo of the words of George Odell.

Perhaps we can use them as a guide for the sort of space we're co-creating here, and the needs we might hope to meet for each other, in this beloved community.

*We need one another when we mourn and would be comforted.*

*We need one another when we are in trouble and afraid.*

*We need one another when we are in despair, in temptation, and need to be recalled to our best selves again.*

*We need one another when we would accomplish some great purpose, and cannot do it alone.*

*We need one another in the hour of success, when we look for someone to share our triumphs.*

*We need one another in the hour of defeat, when with encouragement we might endure, and stand again.*

*We need one another when we come to die, and would have gentle hands prepare us for the journey.*

*All our lives we are in need, and others are in need of us. Amen.*

## Now is Not a Time for Rushing Past Joy

Some words from our Harvest service by M Barclay: 'Now is not a time for rushing past joy. Do not move too quickly from any good thing: not laughter nor a sight of beauty, not a taste, a feeling, a companion, or a truth. These are gifts, not to be wasted. Be generous in sharing. Linger and give thanks. Be excessive in awe. Just, do not hurry through them as if they are not precious in this season of grief.'



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