

Kensington Unitarians

community – spirituality – conscience



NEWSLETTER
AUTUMN 2026

Join Our Flourishing Community

Our flower communion
service celebrates diversity
and affirms the varied gifts
every one of us brings



**New
Ministry
Assistant**



**The
Language
of Faith**



**Just One
Thing:
Hospitality**

www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Coming up...

Please keep an eye on our website for last-minute additions to the programme: kensington-unitarians.org.uk

September

Wednesday 2

7pm Poetry Group with Brian (in-person)

Friday 4

7pm Heart and Soul with Jane (online)

Sunday 6

11am Sunday Service led by Rev. Dr. Rory Castle-Jones (hybrid)
7pm Heart and Soul with Jane (online)

Friday 11

7pm Heart and Soul with Jane (online)

Sunday 13

11am 'Gathering the Waters' Service led by Rev. Dr. Jane Blackall (hybrid)
7pm Heart and Soul with Jane (online)

Wednesday 16

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

Friday 18

7pm Heart and Soul with Jane (online)

Sunday 20

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)

Tuesday 22

11am Walking Group (details TBC)

Wednesday 23

1-3.30pm Autumn Equinox Labyrinth Mini-Retreat (in-person)

Friday 25

7pm Heart and Soul with Jane (online)

Sunday 27

11am Harvest Service led by Rev. Dr. Jane Blackall (hybrid)
12noon Congregational Lunch (coordinated by Julia)
7.30pm Better World Book Club: 'Lowborn' (online)

October

Friday 2

7pm Heart and Soul with Maud (online)

Sunday 4

11am Sunday Service led by Congregation Members (hybrid)

12.30pm Find Your Voice: Singing with Margaret (in-person)
7pm Heart and Soul with Charlotte (online)

Wednesday 7

7pm Poetry Group with Brian (in-person)

Friday 9

7pm Heart and Soul with Maud (online)

Sunday 11

11am Sunday Service led by Eva Kortekaas (hybrid)
12.30pm Community Yoga with Hannah (in-person)
7pm Heart and Soul with Mandy (online)

Friday 16

7pm Heart and Soul with Pat and John (online)

Sunday 18

11am Sunday Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker (hybrid)
1pm Art Play Crafternoon (in-person)
1pm 'Each Child A Light' Memorial Quilt Project (in-person)
7pm Heart and Soul with Eva (online)

Wednesday 21

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

Friday 23

7pm Heart and Soul with Eva (online)

Sunday 25

11am Sunday Service led by Jane Blackall and Antony Bunsee (hybrid)
12.30pm Find Your Voice: Singing with Margaret (in-person)
7.30pm Better World Book Club: 'Worn' (online)

Tuesday 27

11am Walking Group (details TBC)

Friday 30

7pm Heart and Soul with Maud (online)

November

Sunday 1

11am 'All Souls' Service led by Rev. Dr. Jane Blackall and Eva Kortekaas (hybrid)
1pm Hospitality Workshop (in-person)
7pm Heart and Soul with Jane (online)

Wednesday 4

7pm Poetry Group with Brian (in-person)

Thursday 5

7pm Course: The Language of Faith #1/4 (online)

Friday 6

7pm Heart and Soul with Jane (online)

Sunday 8

11am Remembrance Service led by Rev. Dr. Jane Blackall (hybrid)
12.30pm Community Yoga with Hannah (in-person)
7pm Heart and Soul with Jane (online)

Thursday 12

7pm Course: The Language of Faith #2/4 (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)

Wednesday 18

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

Thursday 19

7pm Course: The Language of Faith #3/4 (online)

Friday 20

7pm Heart and Soul with Jane (online)

Sunday 22

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: 'Dear Life' (online)

Tuesday 25

11am Walking Group (details TBC)

Thursday 26

7pm Course: The Language of Faith #4/4 (online)

Friday 27

7pm Heart and Soul with Jane (online)

Sunday 29

11am Sunday Service led by Rev. Dr. Jane Blackall (hybrid)
1pm 'Each Child A Light' Memorial Quilt Project (in-person)
7pm Heart and Soul with Jane (online)

'JUST ONE THING':

Hospitality

In each edition of the church newsletter we suggest 'just one thing' you might do for the benefit of our community. This time I want to focus our attention on the idea of 'Hospitality'.

I've recently been reading a book titled 'Unreasonable Hospitality' (by the successful restaurateur Will Guidara) which tells the behind-the-scenes story of how the team behind a high-end New York restaurant won the award of #1 'Best Restaurant in the World'. They know the food is great already, so they focus their attention on hospitality, and imagine creating an atmosphere which feels just like they are welcoming guests into their own home. Over the course of a few years, they instil a culture of 'extreme thoughtfulness, inclusion, and generosity' in their whole team (and this includes looking after all the team members just as well as the clientele). They go the extra mile to make sure that everyone – staff and guests alike – feels 'seen and welcomed and appreciated'.

Of course, as I was reading, I found myself wondering how we could apply these insights to our church community. I like to think we already have a very welcoming vibe, with a culture of 'thoughtfulness, inclusion, and generosity', but there's always scope to pay a bit more attention to how we're doing hospitality and what it might look like for us to do it even better. Although we have our official 'greeters' on the door at church each Sunday, and our co-hosts online, it's not just one person's

job to be welcoming! And if we have several people coming through the door at once it can be difficult for the greeter to give everyone the individual time and attention they deserve.

If you've been coming for a while, and you consider this church your spiritual home, I'd encourage you to share the responsibility for creating this welcoming atmosphere (and I know many of you already do this naturally!) Consider how you can act as a 'host' on behalf of the congregation, looking out for the next person who comes through the door and making a connection, even if you're not officially taking on the 'greeter' role. It's a tricky balance to strike, as we don't want to scare new people away by leaping on them as soon as they come through the door (and some people just want to be left alone!), but there's

a lot to be said for asking newcomers what brought them to the church, and how they heard about us, to get the conversation started. You can encourage them to stay behind for tea and cake and maybe connect them up with one or two others for a chat.

We'll be holding an in-person 'Hospitality' workshop after the service on 1 November, to have a conversation and share our insights on how we might improve our welcome, and maybe even grow our congregation. Please save the date and let Jane know if you plan to come along.



Introducing our new Ministry Assistant: Jasmine Cooray

I'm Jasmine, I've been a regular at Kensington Unitarians for about 18 months now. I've loved coming to Sunday service and also to Heart and Soul Online as well as seasonal events. I particularly love the quarterly labyrinths! The community has become a very important cornerstone in my life and I'm glad of the friends I've begun to make here.

I'm very pleased to be starting in the role of Ministry Assistant this autumn. I'm looking forward to being part of the team that keeps everything running smoothly, and getting to know everybody better. I'll be taking on Treasurer duties, and also will be part of pastoral care and Sunday Service support, among other things.

I'm hoping to find ways to serve the community and also to welcome more people into it; we have such a good thing going on, it would be wonderful for others to discover and benefit from it. I have some ideas in the pot for new projects we could run, but also will be waiting to see what naturally arises within the Ministry Assistant Role – it'll be a journey of discovery!

News from the Committee

New Ministry Assistant: We are delighted to announce that Jasmine Cooray will join the staff team at Essex Church from 1 September 2026 in the newly created role of Ministry Assistant. In this new part-time (16 hours a week) role Jasmine will support the Minister and Trustees in building and developing our congregation to meet the needs of a changing world. Among other responsibilities, she'll be contributing to services and small groups, getting involved with pastoral care and rites of passage, helping to revitalise our organisational processes, and engaging community members in furthering our Unitarian message and mission. Jasmine will also take over the role of Congregational Treasurer from Patricia Brewerton this autumn (though Patricia will retain a supervisory role as our designated 'Finance Trustee').

CIO Project and Church

Constitution: The preparatory work towards becoming a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) continues. The committee have agreed to bring in Mel Prideaux of Mid-Wales Unitarians to help us with drafting a new constitution and updating all our policies and procedures. Our constitution has not been updated since 1991 so this work is long overdue and we hope to make good progress this autumn.

Foyer Photo Board: It is time for us to update the photo board in the church foyer which includes photos of all our members and friends. This makes it easier for newcomers to the church to learn everybody's names. It also helps make a connection between our mostly-in-person members and our mostly-online members (and it



gives a more lively impression of our community to visitors and user groups who are passing through the church building during the week). If you have a reasonably up-to-date photo of yourself – showing at least your head and shoulders and looking more-or-less straight to camera – please send it to jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk (or Jane can take a quick and painless photo of you in the church garden next time you attend a service in-person). We hope to complete the process of collecting photos by the end of September at the latest.

In-Person Events: We would be interested to hear your feedback about in-person events during the week. Would you like to see events at different times of day? Or on different days of the week? Our regular Wednesday night activities have mixed fortunes: the poetry group is going strong but we could do with more support for our in-person Heart and Soul as numbers have been a bit low over the summer. Are there different sorts of events you would regularly attend and support if we put them on? We need to know what sort

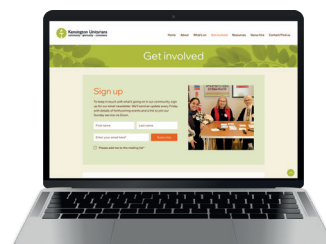
of activities would have enough interest to be viable. Or are you happy for us to offer the majority of our in-person activities on Sunday afternoons?

Hot Weather Protocol: Following this summer's heatwave, and anticipating the ongoing impact of climate change in the years to come, the committee have been thinking about how best to adapt our operations when the weather is extremely hot. We have decided that on days when a red weather warning is forecast we will cancel in-person services and revert to an online-only service. At the time of going to press there had been three days this summer (24-26 June) with a red warning for extreme heat in London (luckily none of them coincided with a Sunday). There have been numerous amber warnings issued in June, July, and August; for now we expect to open as normal in amber conditions but we appreciate that it may be wiser for people to stay home when it is so hot.

New Committee Member: We are very pleased to let you know that Azita Chellappoo has agreed to join the committee. Welcome aboard, Azita!

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 at: www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk





Special Services this Autumn

Gathering the Waters and Congregational Lunch – Sunday 13 September, 11 am

Our annual 'Gathering the Waters' service will take place on 13 September. You are invited to bring along a small container of water, either from somewhere you have visited over the summer, or simply from your own kitchen tap at home. In this special service, representing the gathering of our community, we will pour all the offerings into a common bowl and bless the waters.

Harvest Festival Service featuring our Folk Ensemble – Sunday 27 September, 11 am

Our Harvest Festival service will take place on 27 September. If you grow your own fruit or veg please do bring some along to show off! Even if you don't grow your own you're invited to bring something along for the harvest table display. We'll be joined by our regular folk ensemble for this special occasion. This service will be followed by a congregational potluck lunch. Let Julia know what food or drink you are planning to bring.

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.

News from Our Ministry Student on Placement: Eva Kortekaas

In some ways it's strange to already be thinking of October, that time of year when all the leaves turn brown. I mean, this week I was at the little fair in the town where I live and they had a little Ferris wheel there. Looking over the roofs of the houses, I could see the air shimmering in the heat over the pastures outside the village, the fields yellow from the lack of rain over the past month or two.



Yet both my past and upcoming adventures in London are never far from my thoughts. Almost no day goes by without me thinking about them and the phrase 'Please put me on a plane back to London' might have been uttered once or twice. The past few months have been busy, with my studies continuing alongside the summer season at the restaurant where I work. But I have also been able to continue reflecting on everything I saw and learned in April. Sometimes it is simply a matter of questions that continue to simmer in the back of my mind, which I pull out and examine when something offers a new perspective. Like how being a minister has a very strong element of being a jack-of-all-trades, and what that means for me. Or even what we call in Dutch 'being a sheep with five legs', having many skills and being expected to be good

at all of them. Other times it's a little more concrete or practical. One small example: after seeing the different ways administrative tasks can be handled during my placement in April, I realised this wasn't one of my strongest areas. So when I had the chance to take short online courses in Management Skills and Coaching Skills, I grabbed the opportunity with both hands.

But let's look ahead a little bit. When I return in October, I'll be taking a more active role. I'll be leading a service on 11 October and taking on a few Heart and Soul sessions, designing my own programme as well. I also hope to get to know the community a little better, so I may well be reaching out to a few people to join me for a cup of coffee or tea and tell me a little about their involvement in the community, as well as their hopes and dreams for its future.



Reflections on 'How to be a Unitarian'

This summer, Unitarians from across the country (and beyond) joined together on six consecutive Thursday evenings on Zoom, to consider 'How to be a Unitarian'. We read and responded to essays by Unitarian and Unitarian Universalist thinkers, which were chosen to provoke new ways of thinking about our religious tradition, and generate lively conversation about Unitarian theology, history, organisation, activism, spirituality, community and more. Here's what some of the participants had to say.

Marianne Harvey: The 'How to Be a Unitarian' course, led by Jane and Charlotte, helped me feel much more connected to our Unitarian community. Although I have been attending services for many years, it gave me a deeper appreciation of our history, values and traditions. What I enjoyed most were the small group discussions. They gave us the opportunity to get to know one another better and to explore ideas openly and honestly. We did not always agree with the reflections proposed during the course, but everyone felt able to express their views, knowing they would be listened to with respect. I realised how important it is to belong to a community where questioning is encouraged, reason and conscience are valued, and where disagreement need not diminish mutual respect. The course also affirmed something that has always mattered to me: that a faith is measured not only by what it believes but by what it does. The Unitarian emphasis on "deeds, not creeds" and its commitment to social justice made me feel even more at

home. Although we are a relatively small movement in the UK, I was struck by the warmth, commitment and diversity of those taking part. It was especially encouraging to see younger people on the course, giving me confidence that Unitarianism will continue to flourish in the years ahead. The course has left me more introspective. I ask myself more questions than I did before, yet I also have a quiet reassurance that I am trying to live as a good human being alongside others who are on a similar journey. I still hesitate to tell people that I go to church. Perhaps that's because the word carries assumptions that don't reflect my own experience of Unitarianism. Yet, after taking this course, I feel more comfortable with that description. I'm getting there. If you are thinking of taking the course yourself, don't let the homework put you off. It was very light and entirely manageable. My thanks to Jane and Charlotte for creating such a thoughtful, welcoming and engaging course.

Emma Roberts-Jones: This course has fundamentally shifted my perspective on what it means to be a Unitarian. It was so refreshing to have relevant and challenging Unitarian texts as guidance, from living Unitarians who are still very active within the movement. I have come to understand Unitarianism more as a discipline, or a way of being. This course brought to light some of my assumptions about our tradition. It challenged the wider culture's attitudes to spirituality and introduced me to some challenging but accessible theology. I discovered over the course that perhaps "being a Unitarian" was not so much imparted from the texts we were examining, but somehow being modelled and practiced in real time through what the structure was inviting us into. I found myself critically engaging with the readings, reflecting on their resonance (and sometimes, discomfort) with my own experience and encountering others' perspectives which deepened my reflection even further. I feel we need more spaces and courses that provide opportunities like this across our movement. I'm eagerly awaiting "How to be a Unitarian 2". Sign me up on the early bird list please :)

Harvey Ellerby: I came to Unitarianism looking for community, and what the course gave me was a clearer sense of what that community is actually built on. Not shared beliefs, but a shared seriousness about the big questions and a shared way of treating each other while we disagree. The idea that has stayed with me is that religious freedom comes with religious responsibility. Nobody hands you a creed, so the work of figuring out what you think is yours to do. I finished the course wanting to give something back rather than just show up, which I suspect was rather the point. Thank you to Jane and Charlotte for putting it all together. I took part from Thailand, joining each session at 1am, and I'd do it again!

Maud Robinson: As a Unitarian for over 30 years, I attended the course thinking I may be able to add some perspectives from my long experience. In fact, I learned a lot. As our faith stands open to new truths that pass the tests of reason, justice, and compassion, it's good to join in conversation with newer Unitarians to glean new strands of thinking which are opening up within our communities. The course was very well structured, giving enough history and context for completely new Unitarians and lots of opportunities for sharing personal experience and thinking, in both small groups and in plenary sessions.

Bradley Kelly: I had a brilliant time on the course. I felt safe and cared for. I was able to learn, share and develop ideas, with also the value of being challenged and uncomfortable in order to help me delve deeper. I appreciated the courage, vulnerability and honesty of my peers. It's always sad when a course, and space like that has to end. It's so fulfilling to be around people I identify with and, in many ways, aspire to be like. It makes me realise I wish I could have conversations like this all the time. The world out there, doesn't always accommodate that but being given the tools and practice to shape my ideas, my beliefs and identity gives me a fighting chance of being able to raise my voice when called to – whether in joy or passion or kindness or necessity. Huge thanks to Jane and Charlotte, and to our wider Unitarian movement.

Mussy Marcus: I really enjoyed 'How to be a Unitarian', and one of the best parts was how it brought so many congregations together. The breakout sessions gave me the chance to meet Unitarians from all over the country who I'd otherwise never have crossed paths with. The structure was informative and engaging, and the questions made space for genuine reflection. I found myself challenging a few of my own misconceptions along the way. The course deepened my understanding of the Unitarian tradition and its religious roots, while still leaving room for us to express what being a Unitarian means to us now. Learning about the wider networks and events was particularly useful, especially the opportunities to meet other congregations in person. Overall it opened up my understanding of Unitarianism and strengthened my faith. The insight that has stayed with me is a sobering one: there are only an estimated 2,500 Unitarians in the UK. It has left me thinking we all have a part to play in spreading the message and growing that number.

Raj Savarapu: I came to Unitarianism sideways, as many people do. Through relief rather than conviction, grateful for a tradition that wasn't the one I'd left. Is that a good enough reason to stay? For a while, it felt like it had to be. This course has given more weight to the sentence "I am a Unitarian." Not just confidence, but a sense of what I'm saying when I say it: that I stand in a line of people who held freedom of conscience at real cost, and that my own voice has something to add to that line rather than merely borrow from it. What I hadn't expected was God, or whatever we reach for when that word falls short. How readily the course went there. How much I'd missed that. Not as a settled answer, but as something this tradition has always been willing to approach without needing to arrive. What's changed most is how I understand our tradition's openness. I used to hear it as an absence. A space cleared of demands so that everyone can feel welcome. But is that really what it is? I now think it's closer to the opposite: a very specific demand to remain in genuine relation with people whose beliefs, background or politics I don't share, without smoothing the difference into something more comfortable, and without needing anyone to arrive where I am. That's not easy. But it has stopped feeling like a limitation of the tradition and started feeling like that might be the point. Did I learn how to be a Unitarian, or do I have more questions than when I started? Both/And.



Community Lunch

Sunday 27 September, 12 noon

We've got a congregational potluck lunch coming up after the harvest festival service on Sunday 27 September so please do save the date and plan to bring along some food or drink to share. Julia Alden will be coordinating the harvest lunch so please keep an eye out for a sign-up sheet nearer the time.



Getting to Know You...

Margaret Whitehead

I am Margaret Whitehead, resident in Notting Hill. Over the years I have often passed by Essex Church, liked the look of the building, and if the bus took off slowly from the stop had time to read the noticeboard. It took some time for the message to fully speak to me and find the resolve about a year ago to enter the doors. It was also a momentous year in that I reached 90. So, a long life, not started in London but in the country's second city, Birmingham.

After this it was easy. I was greeted in such a friendly manner and offered a name label which came ringed with a choice of colours. Entering the light and airy hall and settling in, my eye was caught by art in the form of textile wall-hangings. The service sheet was

clearly set out to show the order of the music, prose pieces, hymns, a period of silent meditation and of course the main talk. Turning to the last page and the list of activities I saw 'Art Play', a monthly event after service. As an amateur artist all my life I was beginning to feel very much at home.

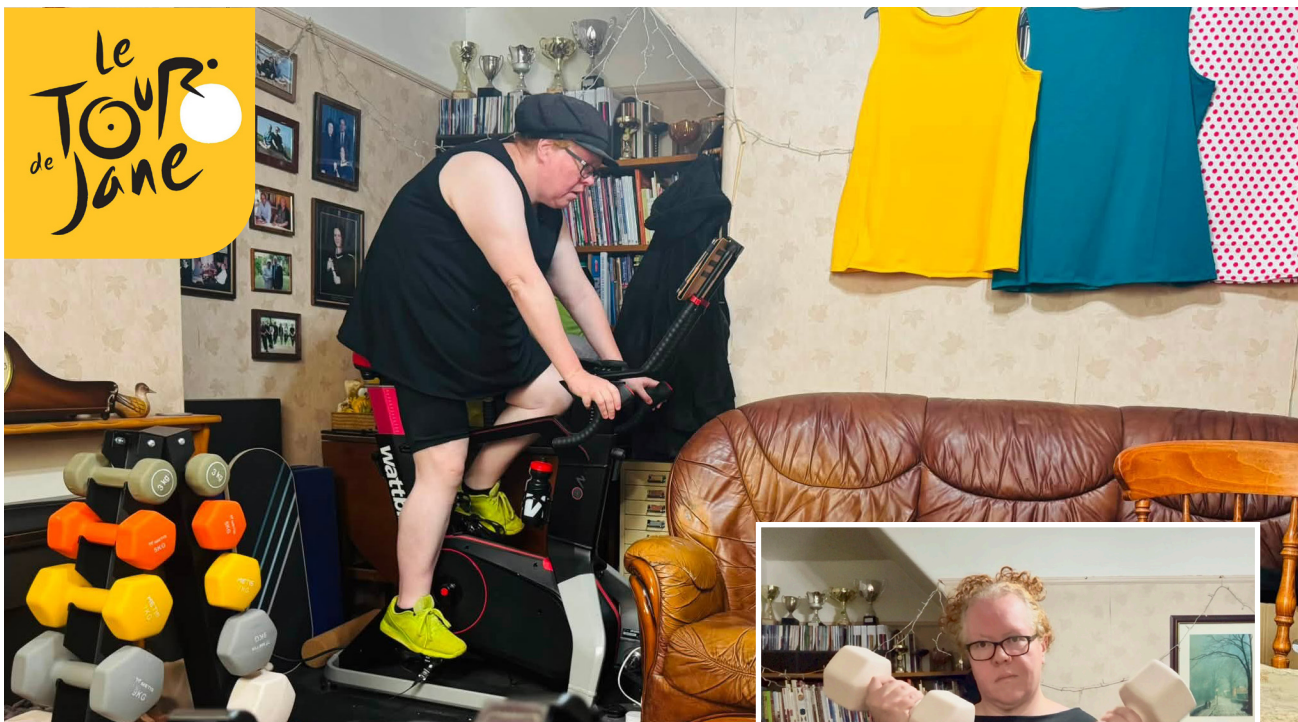
For a good part of my life, I have been searching for a place to park my faith which is hard for me to pin-point and compared with some a bit vague but can't help feeling it is somehow related to art and the visual world. We were not a church-doing family, except for christenings, marriages and funerals, but it seemed the custom for parents to send their offspring to Sunday School. Here we were read Bible stories and taught hymns and awarded prizes for good attendance. The other kids were those I went to junior school with, so there soon came a time when I said I didn't want to go any more. There was then a gap until late teen when my best friend discovered the Quakers where spiritual belief was practised in silent meetings unencumbered by ritual. This started a new phase I am still inhabiting.

More recently though, having retired from my office job, I needed a community and, facing operations for joint replacements, somewhere local. The choice was St Peter's, Notting Hill where Anglicanism with a modern

touch had been established by a group who had broken away from the high St John's. So I found myself enjoying some of the rituals in this beautiful Victorian church. In the course of services I would look at the artworks especially the outstanding stain-glassed windows (here I go again, can't get away from art). Hymns were accompanied by a band and groups of singers, sermons enlightened and atmosphere friendly. However, I had to skirt around Christian teaching and my inability to accept the Trinity, and more. In fact, I felt I was not truly a Christian. However, all was to change with a new vicar and the pandemic.

Going back to my middle years, I have to go back to Quakerism. I spent a time working for Quaker Centre office in Geneva. On my return to live in London I failed to connect to a Meeting, but I did work for them briefly at Friends House and two years at their international hostel. I kept in touch with many people I met during these times including the friend who first took me to a Meeting for Worship in Birmingham.

So I am ending up with Unitarians. As an example of my confidence, I took the opportunity of 'Candles of Concern' to say how pleased I am pleased I am to join you, only regretting it has taken me so long.



Le Tour de Jane – Fundraising for Hucklow Summer School Bursaries

This July our minister Jane took part in the 'Tour de Jane' – her own fitness challenge in parallel with the Tour de France – to raise much-needed funds for the Hucklow Summer School Bursary Scheme. Summer School is, for many, a transformative experience which makes a lasting impact; it energises our Unitarian denomination and forges connections between people in different congregations. This fund offers financial support to people from all over the country who would not otherwise be able to afford to attend.

Over the 21 days of the challenge, Jane had to do a 21-minute bike ride daily, and also some other fitness activity which depended on what the riders were doing in the real Tour de France. On sprint days she lifted weights (21 reps of 3 different weightlifting exercises), on hilly days she did 21 minutes of hooping, on mountain days she did 21 minutes of step-ups, and on time trial days she matched the pro riders' distance on the bike.

The fundraising total has already passed the £2,500 barrier which

is fantastic! Many thanks to all who have already chipped in. However, the bursary fund needs to find £5,000 each year in order to meet the needs of everyone who applies for help, so if anyone would like to sponsor Jane and contribute a donation to boost the fund that would be fantastic (but no pressure whatsoever!) The crowdfunder will be live until mid-September: www.crowdfunder.co.uk/p/hssbursaryfund (if you would like to contribute after this date please do get in touch with Jane directly: jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk).



Equinox Labyrinth Mini-Retreat

Wednesday 23 September, 1pm-3.30pm

Join Jane and Sarah for this autumn equinox 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.

Congregational Reflections: ‘Words of Wisdom’

from the service on 26 July 2026



From time to time we hold services where congregation members can share ‘Words of Wisdom’. Lochlann, David, Pat, and John share their reflections on some wise words that have helped to guide them – a quote, a saying, a proverb – something that has given them insight or helped them find a new perspective on how to live. Arguably that’s what we’re always doing together at church – reflecting on how we should live well and serve the greater good – and sharing whatever hard-won wisdom we have gleaned. I encourage you to think about the wise people you know or have known – perhaps family members or friends, spiritual teachers or guides – or perhaps the wise voices that have influenced you aren’t people you know personally. They might be authors, or artists, or activists, who have inspired and challenged you. Allow their words of wisdom to bubble up in your mind – the ones you carry with you – and give thanks for the wisdom they shared.

‘We Shall Not Turn Back Here...’ by Lochlann Binney

My words of wisdom are about hope, but maybe not in the way that you'd expect. In February, Jane spoke to us about the temptation of despair, "in the face of the world's troubles, or [our] own personal struggles", and the need to resist it, to at least wrestle with it. What people often say in the face of despair at the rising tides of fascism and racism and everything else is that you have to have hope for a better, fairer world, that you need to believe that the arc of the universe bends towards justice – even if recent evidence doesn't bear this out. Personally, I find this advice difficult and even counterproductive. The idea that we should always be striving to feel that buoyancy and optimism that things can get better is exhausting to me: it feels like a lot of pressure to put my energy into feeling the right thing, rather than in actually doing something, and it usually ends with a lot of self-recrimination for not feeling hopeful enough instead of with action. When I'm despairing at the state of the world, it doesn't help me to be told I just have to hope, even less to be told that hope is a moral imperative.

Instead, I think about J R R Tolkien. His epic The Lord of the Rings is full of characters who give in to the temptation of despair and as a result, make choices that make everything worse. There is also a lot about finding hope in the darkness, about trusting that a higher power will come through for you despite the dire straits you find yourself in. Neither of those

touch me as deeply as the thread running through the book of, let's just keep going, regardless of how you feel, or of how much hope you can muster. When one character despairs at a serious setback, saying, 'This is a bitter end to our hope and to all our toil', his friend doesn't say, keep up your spirits, we can still have hope! Instead he says: 'An end to hope, maybe, but not to toil. We shall not turn back here.' I find this very comforting, and galvanising, too. It makes me feel that it doesn't matter if my feelings are 'correctly' hopeful or not, or if I really believe a positive outcome can be achieved, because there's still a way forward, regardless of what the ultimate outcome will be. There's still a next right thing to be done. As that same character says a little later: 'Come! With hope or without hope we will follow the trail.' Even when we've lost hope we can still find the next right thing to do, we can still follow the paths our conscience sets us, and keep going. I find this a much deeper consolation than exhortations to hope, and much more likely to spur me on to useful action, which is the only thing that really counts in the face of despair.



‘Always Leave Something...’ by David Brewerton

Wise words. Words of wisdom. There have been so many. From parents, teachers, friends, blokes leaning out of the windows of their vans advising me how to ride my bike.

Now. One of the many beats I had as a journalist was covering the commercial property, real estate, scene during the boom of the early 1970’s and the bust that inevitably followed. A highly successful property developer, worth millions, said to me one day, “I always leave something for the next person”.



What he meant was, if he was selling a building he reckoned was worth a million pounds, he’d be happy to accept nine hundred and fifty thousand. That way, he gets a quick deal and the buyer believes he’s got a bargain. Smiles all round.

I’ve thought about this from time to time. Although simple it is a piece of advice that, like bread dough, can be expanded in all directions. In one of the books of the Old Testament, Leviticus, we have God telling Moses: ‘when you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest’

Patricia and I frequently holiday on a little French island, the Ile de Re, where this seems to be followed, well, religiously. One of the island’s products, alongside wine and salt, are potatoes deemed to be so special that in the early spring you can pay ten euros or more for a one kilo box in one of the smartest food halls in Paris. The famous “pommes de terre de ile de re” grow in the earth just like any other potatoes. And despite the spuds’ significant value

in the posh shops, the farmers do not bother picking up the ones that remain on the ground when the harvesting machine has passed through. Those gleanings are for anyone who wants to pick them up. The farmer has been generous, the gleaners are happy. Again, smiles all round. But the advice from that property developer can be applied equally to the philosophical. The recounting of journeys, for instance. It is more usual to want to boast of the best or the worst travel experience than to invite somebody else to “top” your story.

Most of us at some time want to command the moral high ground. “Oh, we don’t fly we take the train”. Yet a few weeks ago I took an aeroplane three times in the course of ten days. Do some of us want to be the most virtuous, to claim we go on more demos for Palestine or the environment? Never tell lies? Or give to charity, whatever. When telling others what we do, why not leave a little space for them to do better? We’ll probably have more interesting conversations as a result.

‘The Finger Pointing at the Moon...’ by Pat Gregory

When I was asked for a contribution on this theme I agreed because I have heard numerous words of wisdom from many incredible teachers. I have attended countless workshops, sat for hours on retreats, read what seems like hundreds of books and every time I go online there are always more wise quotes or motivational kicks to show me the way. So I felt well equipped for this task.

So here are the wise words that brought me back to God: “THE FINGER POINTING AT THE MOON IS NOT THE MOON”

When I heard this incredibly simple Zen Buddhist quote it felt like the most important message that I could receive. I saw that my external searching was disconnecting me from who I truly am, I had followed so many paths and in so doing had forgotten my own heart. My addictive thinking had kept me in the outward search mode and was never going to lead me within. Of course, I feel privileged to have been with so many wise teachers who helped me to realise that I do not need to do or be anything because I am already whole, but I still did not believe this was true. I needed to embody this truth, to be fully present in my body. I gave myself

space and learnt to stop thinking my feelings and started to really feel them in my body. I found myself naturally slowing down and lightening up. I began taking myself less seriously and I felt calm and open. There’s more ease and laughter. I don’t deny there are problems, sorrows and upsets but if I catch myself trying to “fix” them I now find that I can mostly surrender and wait for guidance from within. The more I can trust my heart the more I go direct to Source and learn to know myself as Love.

As time went on I felt guided to be part of a community where truth, justice and freedom were sacred, where shared experiences are encouraged and space is given to discuss different spiritual practices. So on a Sunday morning in 2018 I found myself attending this Unitarian Church where everyone is welcomed whatever their beliefs, their gender or race and in this Church I feel that together we can grow in Love.



[More Words of Wisdom overleaf](#) ►



Save the Dates for Christmas & New Year

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

Carol Service and Congregational Lunch – Sunday 20 December at 11 am
 Candlelit Christmas Eve Service – Thursday 24 December at 5pm
 New Year Mini-Retreat In Person – Sunday 27 December at 1pm
 New Year Mini-Retreat Online – Thursday 31 December at 1pm

Two poems by Brian Ellis

Team Photo 1966....

a moment
 sixty years ago;
 colour faded
 detail blurred.

the back is noted:
 Brian Gwyn Terry Trev
 Barry me Mike John
 Steve Cliff and goalie Ron.

they'll now be faded
 details blurred too;
 whistle blown for some.

a moment captured,
 our season's triumph
 in the league
 finishing bottom but one.

Eng. Society XI 1966;
 'we few, we happy few,
 we band of brothers'...

The Twilight Church

light
 changing
 almost
 imperceptible.

presence
 outline
 shadow
 certainty

fading to
 awareness of
 impenetrable
 night.

Music at Essex Church

We continue to be blessed by a fantastic range of musicians playing in our services at Essex Church. Here are just a few events and projects that our regular musicians have got coming up this autumn which you might be interested in:

Abby Lorimier is playing in a BBC Prom happening in North Wales with Sinfonia Cymru. Whilst people may not be able to attend in-person, they can listen on BBC Radio 3 on 29 August at 4pm or afterwards on BBC Sounds.
www.bbc.co.uk/events/ezn4mb

Tara McCarthy and her folk group Mná have a trad session at The Old White Bear (Hampstead NW3 1U) on the first Friday of each month from 8-10pm.

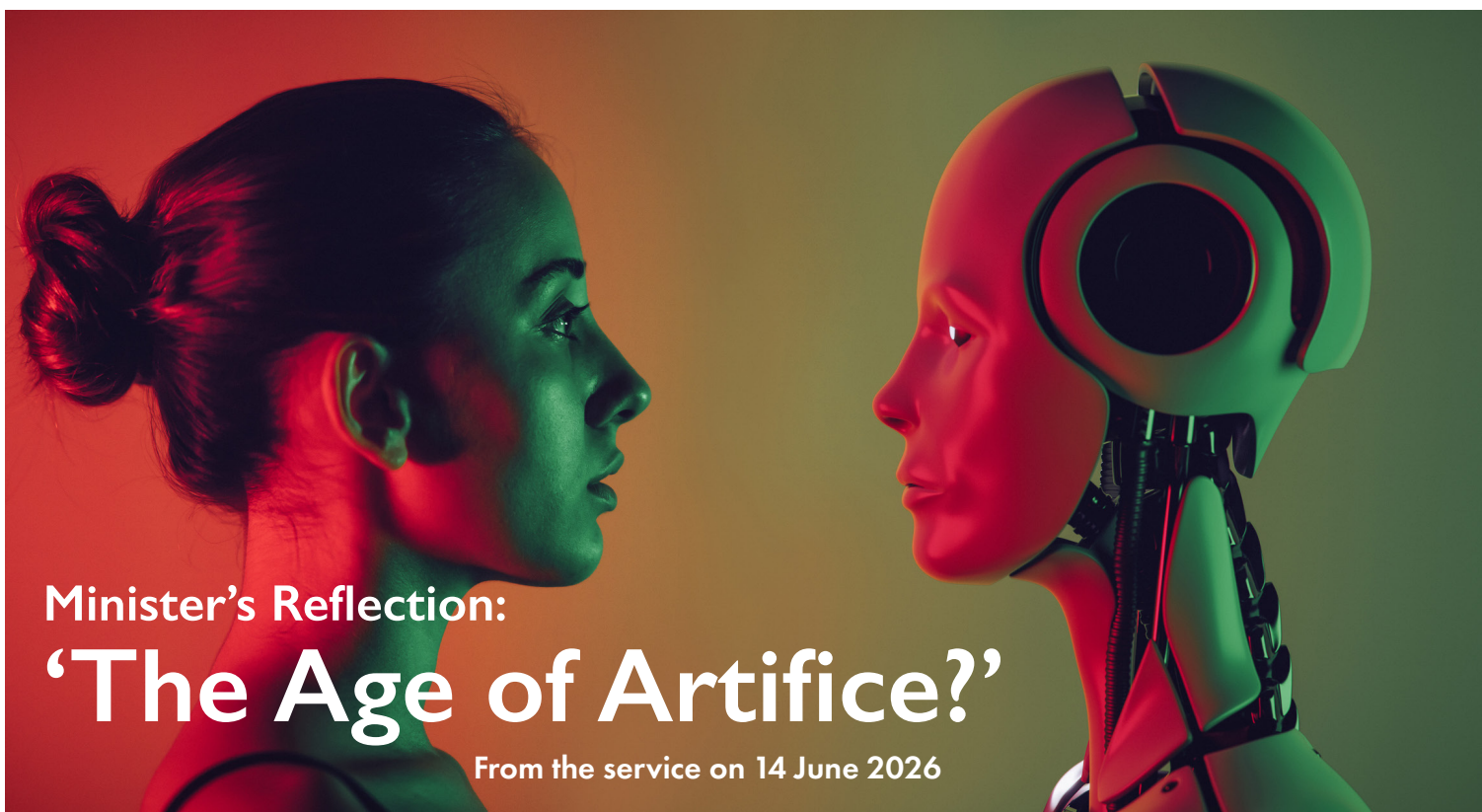
For more information see:
<https://theoldwhitebearhampstead.co.uk>
 They will also be appearing as part of the 'Return to London Town' festival of traditional Irish music taking place over the weekend 23-26 October. Events take place at various venues in Cricklewood and Kilburn. For more information

including festival tickets see:

www.returntolondontown.org.
 Mná's next concert is on Wednesday 9 December at Heath Street Baptist Church in Hampstead. For details visit:
<https://folkandroots.co.uk/mna>

George Ireland: Those of you who are fond of George's piano playing will be pleased to hear that he is releasing an album of English Song with tenor Guy Cutting in February 2027. This was recorded in the Garsington Studios last November, and George and Guy are fundraising for it. If this is a project you'd like to support, please contact George on georgeirelandpianist@gmail.com





Minister's Reflection:

'The Age of Artifice?'

From the service on 14 June 2026

I feel some trepidation in setting out to speak on this subject! AI is a hot topic, in a developing area, which requires some degree of technical sophistication to grasp, and which people seem to have very strong and diverging opinions about! So I feel I'm stepping into a bit of a minefield here but I'll give it my best shot... My one, flimsy, credential for speaking on such a topic is that I did take a module on AI and machine learning as part of my MSc in medical engineering down the road at Imperial – I even coded my own tiny little neural network! – but that was nearly 30 years ago. And the landscape has changed so much since then that it might as well have been 1000 years ago. But with all those caveats out of the way, let's dive in.

On Friday night I went to a seminar on 'The Spirituality of AI' hosted by the London Jesuit Centre and one of the useful things I picked up there was a definition of artificial intelligence that was a bit broader than the one I went in with. One of the speakers, John-Clark Levin, stated that AI is any machine or a piece of software that performs functions that human intelligence would otherwise do. Historically, that includes things like calculators, where humans worked out the algorithm to do a particular task and then encoded it into a machine. But AI as

we know it today is based on machine learning, and one key characteristic of this is that modern AI learns by itself, we don't exactly instruct it; it finds patterns in data, in a way which is beyond our human ability to grasp, and functions like a 'black box'. By this, I mean, we train AI on a bunch of inputs and it will give us an output that feels plausibly like the sort of thing human intelligence could have come up with, but we can't reverse-engineer it to understand its reasoning, so we don't know exactly how it got there.

A couple of years ago, in 2024, our Unitarian General Assembly passed a resolution on the subject of AI. It was put forward by Andi Phillips, minister with Upper Chapel in the centre of Sheffield, who's been one of our strongest voices on this matter, and she has an academic background in engineering and maths so she knows what she's talking about, she speaks the language. I'm going to share an abridged version of that resolution so you know what the official 'party line' is (in as much as Unitarians ever recognise such a thing). The resolution says: 'This General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches recognises the rapidly growing significance of automation, algorithms, and artificial intelligence, and encourages a balanced response mindful of both substantial benefits and threats.

In particular it calls upon individuals and congregations to learn about AI, algorithms and their societal impact (whether good or bad), encourages Unitarian bodies to host and/or facilitate wider societal and philosophical conversations; and recognises that injustices, often affecting the already disadvantaged, are occurring through automation, and calls upon Unitarians to challenge such injustices.'

So, that was the first collective Unitarian pronouncement on AI, from a few years ago. Personally, I think the tone of that resolution is about right – it reflects my own mixed feelings with its talk of 'benefits and threats' and 'impacts (good or bad)' – the tone is not that of the Luddite or the dinosaur – it's not a knee-jerk anti-AI reflex in opposition to the new – but it is a call to be appropriately cautious and critical.

Let's start with some of the positives: I think it's fairly self-evident that AI has tremendous potential to do good. There are undoubtedly many tasks that it can be useful for – and maybe in a way that could be positively transformative for humanity – this technology could be harnessed for the good. It can be used to synthesise complex information and make it more digestible; I've certainly heard people speak convincingly of AI as being a tool for accessibility.

Because of my background in medical imaging I immediately think of the ways in which it could be used to assist with diagnosis, drug development, treatment planning and so on. There are applications of AI in materials science which apparently open up possibilities for more efficient sources of green energy. It seems likely that there are many scientific and medical conundrums, where the obstacle to finding a solution is the sheer complexity and scale of the data, and in these cases AI could provide the support to enable significant breakthroughs. There are many ways in which AI could be used to support human flourishing.

But. Is that how we are collectively actually using AI right now? It seems – and I am trying not to get on my Victor Meldrew type soapbox about it – but it does seem that AI is being pushed onto us willy-nilly by tech companies and incorporated by default into all sorts of settings where it doesn't seem necessary and may not be beneficial. It's seamlessly integrated into Google searches, social media feeds, and any number of apps that many of us use all the time for work and play. And it's becoming very apparent that AI isn't a value-neutral technology – there's so much scope for biases to be built in – and at the same time, the advent of Large Language Models like ChatGPT means that interacting with an AI these days feels much like talking to a human. This makes it too easy to be lulled into a false sense of security, to be charmed, to assume benevolence. Indeed, one of the recognised issues of AI is the problem of 'sycophancy'. Even if there's not someone of ill intent behind the AI (and that's a big if), even if nobody is consciously trying to build in bias and use it for misinformation or propaganda, it seems that – by default – AI wants to tell us what we want to hear. And that in itself can be a dangerous thing. It can reinforce and radicalise people's worldviews in an increasingly extreme way. And there's even a known phenomenon of 'AI delusion' where people gradually come to trust what the (sycophantic) AI tells them in preference to the more complex, diverse, nuanced, or challenging voices they might hear in the world outside. There seem to be quite a number of cases where this has led people to lose touch with reality and behave in disturbing ways which cause great harm to themselves or others.

There are some less serious ways in which this plays out too. If you use Google to search the internet, you'll be aware that these days you are by default presented with an 'AI overview' before your old-fashioned search results, and if you look carefully, at the bottom of this answer to your query, there is a bit in very small print which says 'AI responses might include mistakes'... But it can be a bit more than a mistake. This week I was listening to my favourite podcast, Three Bean Salad, and one of the hosts, Ben Partridge, described something that had happened to him on a recent holiday in Italy. As he travelled around, each day, he asked AI what events were going on locally. When he got to Rome, AI told him that there was a brass band competition

“even if nobody is consciously trying to build in bias and use it for misinformation or propaganda, it seems that – by default – AI wants to tell us what we want to hear.”

going on in a public square, which is just exactly the sort of thing he would like, so he walked 40 minutes to get to the piazza where this brass band event was meant to be happening, only to find... there was no such competition. It was a complete fabrication. Fictitious. AI just made it up. Told him what he wanted to hear. And in such a confident and articulate way that he wouldn't think to question it. Now that's not a very consequential mistake. But what about when people ask AI for medical advice? Or use AI as a stand-in for a therapist? Then such 'mistakes' – where the AI just makes something up, confidently says what it thinks you want to hear, regardless of whether it has any basis in reality – they could be disastrous.

There are of course many ethical objections to AI too – I suspect most of us are pretty familiar with the sort of thing I'm talking about – the first ethical

problem I became aware of was when the firms developing various AI models were instructing them to scrape (i.e. steal) various creative works – art, music, writing – and indeed our own personal data and even our likenesses – in order to use them to generate 'new' works. And then people use these 'free' AI-generated models to churn out images or words instead of paying creative workers, so they are exploited twice over. And this is a repeated pattern of getting humans to train AI models and then sacking them and replacing them with AI. Putting huge swathes of people out of work. And accelerating the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few.

Then there's the environmental cost – the power and water needed for these enormous data centres – which we might think is worth it if the AI is being used for scientific or medical purposes that benefit humanity – but is it worth it in order for a billion people to generate an AI avatar of themselves as an action figure to share on Facebook (or whatever the latest meme doing the rounds might be)?

And what about the use of AI to create realistic photos and videos which are used maliciously to spread misinformation? We are accustomed to relying on such footage as 'proof' on which we base our opinions about what's going on in the world. But it is getting increasingly difficult to tell what's real and what's made up. We've got a harder job on our hands to be discerning about what we see – can we believe our own eyes? – and that can drive us to be distrustful across the board. I suspect that such a climate, where people can't reliably tell what is real, helps to drive people towards conspiracy theories and creates a distorted worldview.

All this may seem relentlessly negative. But it's important to be clear-eyed about what we're facing and the impact it is already having on human flourishing. The genie is out of the bottle now – there's no going back – so how do we respond?

Unusually, both the resolution from the Unitarian GA, and the Pope's encyclical, seem to be coming from a similar place. They say: we have to recognise that AI, like any human invention, can be used for good or ill. We can't really escape it, or the effects of it, as it is being woven into all aspects of our lives. So let's try and engage critically with it, harness it, ►

► shape it for the good, or at the very least learn what it is we're dealing with, so that we can mitigate some of its harmful effects. It's a question of discernment: when and how is it wise to make use of AI? I've been reminded of the concept of 'epistemic hygiene' – very useful in this day and age – the idea that we should take responsibility for protecting ourselves from misinformation and bias – being alert to the source of any information we're presented with and not taking it at face value – and using our critical faculties (rather than being seduced by the sycophantic voice which mirrors our desires).

The spiritual imperative is for us to live our life, to pay attention, and reconnect with what's real, rather than escape reality or fall into delusion. To use our unique gifts in the service of love, justice, and peace – as we so often say – rather than delegating the tasks of life to AI – it is for us to wrestle with these creative tasks, which help give us meaning and purpose, and grow and deepen our souls, over the course of a lifetime. We are called to express what's authentically within us, as a basis on which to connect meaningfully with others. I came across a poem by Joseph Fasano, 'For a Student who Used AI to Write a Paper' which includes these lines: 'I hear you. I know this life is hard now. I know your days are precious on this earth. But what are you trying to be free of? The living? The miraculous task of it?'

As our opening words today reminded us, 'sometimes the only thing we can do is be still for a moment to remind ourselves what is real'. Perhaps that's the thing we should hold onto, and keep bringing ourselves back to, in this 'age of artifice'. Like James Crews said, let's write our own sentences, make cake, walk in the woods, have wild encounters. Or as Jo Atkins-Potts hinted, in our poem for meditation, let's embrace the slow and messy human processes of love and loss, and be fully present to each other. May it be so, for the greater good of all. Amen.

Getting to Know You... Jeannene Powell

Hi, my name's Jeannene, I've been coming to Essex Church for nearly 18 years, and during that time I've been involved in congregational life in many different ways. You may have seen me and my little family joining services mostly on Zoom in recent years. Outside church, I work as a celebrant.

I first came across Kensington Unitarians after attending a different event, run by the Interfaith Seminary, that was taking place in the Essex Church building. It took me a bit of time – over a year – and looking up the congregation online, to pluck up the courage to attend a service.

My first impressions of the church were very positive. That first service I attended was led by members of the congregation, including Patricia Walker-Hesson and Doris Campbell, and I really liked the inclusive approach which valued different people's contributions and input. Back in those days, the chairs were laid out in a semi-circle, and I valued people being able to see each other's faces during the service; I'd only seen fixed rows of pews in a church before. I used to sit right at the back, and had to dash off before the end of the service, as I had a part-time job and my shift started at lunchtime – so I would leave straight after the sermon.

As a child, I attended a Catholic church, and as a young adult I'd looked into other religions and faith paths – including Eastern philosophies, and Earth-centred traditions – and began to notice overlaps and similarities between them. When I came to Kensington Unitarians, I was at a point in my journey where I realised I needed to take my spiritual explorations further within a community, but I was a bit ambivalent and even scared, because my previous Catholic community hadn't been very welcoming.

At this time in mid-life, my spiritual outlook is in flux, and evolving; it's still mostly Earth-centred. My faith



is expressed in many different ways which are integrated into my daily life: I regularly write a gratitude journal; meditation practice is very important; I do small rituals every day which have a cumulative effect; and I try to be helpful wherever I can.

Over the past 18 years I've taken on various roles at church: leading services and small groups, being an authorised person for weddings, and I was chair of the congregation for a couple of years. I am currently a Trustee, and a regular co-host of online services, having helped to set up the church for hybrid worship when we restarted in-person activities after the lockdowns. I've found it very fulfilling to be involved in the church at this level – though it really stretched me to take on the role of chairperson during a tricky time of transition. It is gratifying to know that I have helped to shape the community. It makes me think of the saying "be the change you want to see in the world". Showing up is a key part of supporting our community.

For each of us, our capacity to contribute will vary, according to what's going on in our life at different times, but it can be quite fulfilling. I encourage congregation members to know that their presence is valued – whether by simply attending or putting themselves forward to offer practical help in some way – we all play a part in making this community. As church isn't something that happens to us; it is something we grow together.

Better World Book Club



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

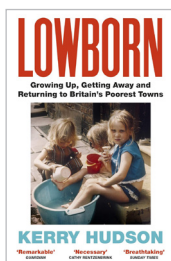
We've been running the 'Better World Book Club' since the start of 2024. The books have been chosen to cover a range of social issues we might do well to be more informed about, interleaved with books on spiritual and ethical matters, on living well in hard times. In order to make this as accessible 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 p24

Sunday 27
September,
7.30pm:

Lowborn by Kerry Hudson

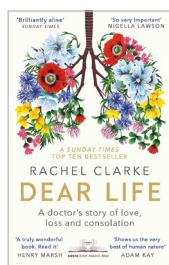
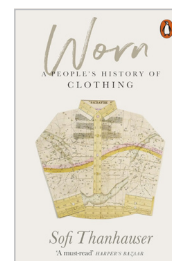
Kerry Hudson is proudly working class but she was never proudly poor. The poverty she grew up in was all-encompassing, grinding and often dehumanising. Always on the move with her single mother, Kerry attended nine primary schools and five secondaries, living in B&Bs and council flats. She scores eight out of ten on the Adverse Childhood Experiences measure of childhood trauma. Twenty years later, Kerry's life is unrecognisable. She's a prizewinning novelist who has travelled the world. She has a secure home, a loving partner and access to art, music, film and books. But she often finds herself looking over her shoulder, caught somehow between two worlds. *Lowborn* is Kerry's exploration of where she came from. She revisits the towns she grew up in to try to discover what being poor really means in Britain today and whether anything has changed.



Sunday 25 October, 7.30pm:

Worn by Sofi Thanhauser

Linen, Cotton, Silk, Synthetics, Wool: through the stories of these five fabrics, Sofi Thanhauser illuminates the world we inhabit in a startling new way, travelling from China to Cumbria to reveal the craft, labour and industry that create the clothes we wear. From the women who transformed stalks of flax into linen to clothe their families in nineteenth century New England to those who earn their dowries in the cotton-spinning factories of South India today, this book traces the origins of garment-making through time and around the world. Exploring the social, economic and environmental impact of our most personal possessions, *Worn* looks beyond care labels to show how clothes reveal the truth about what we really care about.



Sunday 22 November, 7.30pm:

Dear Life by Rachel Clarke

As a specialist in palliative medicine, Dr Rachel Clarke chooses to inhabit a place many people would find too tragic to contemplate. Every day she tries to bring care and comfort to those reaching the end of their lives and to help make dying more bearable. Rachel's training was put to the test in 2017 when her beloved GP father was diagnosed with terminal cancer. She learned that nothing – even the best palliative care – can sugar-coat the pain of losing someone you love. And yet, she argues, in a hospice there is more of what matters in life – more love, more strength, more kindness, more joy, more tenderness, more grace, more compassion – than you could ever imagine. For if there is a difference between people who know they are dying and the rest of us, it is simply this: that the terminally ill know their time is running out, while we live as though we have all the time in the world.

Minister's Reflection: 'Little by Little'

from the service on 28 June 2026

This idea we're exploring today – the notion that modest, consistent, actions can bring about positive change, and enable us to achieve great things over the long term – it's a well-worn idea. There are so many proverbs and sayings to remind us of the fact. Eric Zimmer reminds us of a few, in his book 'How a Little Becomes a Lot', which inspired today's service: Rome wasn't built in a day. Slow and steady wins the race. How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time (that one's not my favourite – I feel sorry for the elephant!).

The sayings continue – and they come from all over the globe – there's the Tanzanian proverb 'Little by little, a little becomes a lot', and the similar Peruvian prover which translates to 'Little by little, one walks far', and from China the saying of Confucius 'It doesn't matter how slowly you go as long as you do not stop.'

Self-help and productivity books talk about the 'compound effect' of establishing modest but consistent habits. Sports scientists – especially in my favourite sport of cycling – have in recent decades spoken about chasing 'marginal gains' to optimise performance (and, while not uncontroversial, that has transformed the entire sport). It's a central tenet of the 12-step recovery movement as well: 'One day at a time'. We see people turn their entire lives round, in the long term, by taking it day-by-day. Zimmer is in long-term recovery and that experience has shaped the book he wrote.

And the faith traditions all have something to say about it too. In the reading we heard earlier, we were reminded of the parable of the mustard seed, and a couple of other scriptural encouragements to start small and keep at it. In Islam, the Prophet Muhammad apparently taught: 'The most

beloved of deeds to Allah are those that are consistent, even if they are small.' And the Buddha, in the Dhammapada, is recorded as saying 'Drop by drop is the water pot filled.' That last one is particularly interesting, actually, as in context he's saying that it can go either way; little by little you can make positive change OR you can go astray and it can all go wrong.

**"I am only one, but
still I am one. I cannot
do everything, but still
I can do something;
and because I cannot
do everything, I will
not refuse to do the
something that I can do"**

I'll share the two verses from the Dhammapada so you get both sides of the picture: Think not lightly of evil, saying, "It will not come to me." Drop by drop is the water pot filled. Likewise, the fool, gathering it little by little, fills himself with evil. Think not lightly of good, saying, "It will not come to me." Drop by drop is the water pot filled. Likewise, the wise man, gathering it little by little, fills himself with good.

So it's important for us to remember that, as with more-or-less everything in life, this 'little by little' approach is something that can be put to use for good or ill. We can intentionally set out to establish

good habits – to make those small, unspectacular, but sustainable changes in our lives or the life of the world – and crucially not try to change a thousand things at once, but just focus on one thing we can stick at... until it's stuck. But at the same time we have to be wary of unthinkingly picking up bad habits – we can slide into behaviours we know aren't in our or anyone's best interests – and on any given day perhaps it doesn't seem too serious yet 'little by little, a little becomes a lot'. We can end up – in our own lives, or as a community, a society – somewhere we don't want to be. The Buddha gives us a warning that we should harness this insight wisely.

I want to invite you to consider where in your life you could apply this insight today. Let's make it real and practical. Think about where you are at, personally – your context, your circumstances, what you're dealing with right now – your stage of life. Perhaps also about the communities you're embedded in. Your place in the world.

Maybe, like me, you have an absurdly, oppressively, humungous to-do list weighing you down – consisting not only of basic adulting and life maintenance, and responsibilities towards others – but also social and cultural engagement, learning, activism, creative aspirations. This is what we're like, isn't it? It's good! We care about a lot of things, we're interested in a lot of things, we like to get involved. And it can be overwhelming.

So perhaps, for you, the way to use this approach is to identify one tiny step that you could take to move closer to where you want to be in life – or who you want to be – just one extremely modest action, in one domain of your life, that you could even do today. Remember

what Zimmer said: 'Here's what I mean by "little by little": low-resistance actions, done consistently over time, in the same direction. "Low-resistance" is all about choosing actions we'll actually do, while "consistently" is all about repetition. In the same direction means that all the little steps are headed toward the same thing. These qualities, resistance and consistency, are at the heart of creating momentum and overcoming the roadblocks in our way.'

When you think about your life right now – you could also take a moment to look back – and think about how far you've already come. All the little-by-littles that have already compounded in your life to date, the ways in which you've grown and developed, the metaphorical mountains you've already climbed (or indeed chiselled your way through as we heard in the story of Mountain Man that Chloë read). Perhaps past-you had a dream, an aspiration, and present-you is that dream made real. Well done! You've most-likely already achieved a lot and accumulated fair bit of wisdom along the way.

But let's also take a moment to think about future-you. Maybe even imagine a time when you are nearing the end of your life and looking back over the span of it all. What modest step could you take today that future-you would look back and thank you for? What metaphorical mustard seed could you sow, and faithfully tend, one day at a time, trusting that it will grow into something really worthwhile? There was that quote from Zephaniah in the first reading, 'Do not despise... small beginnings, for the Lord rejoices to see the work begin.' And the reminder that 'By embracing small beginnings, we allow God to multiply our efforts, and turn our seeds of faith into trees of blessing.'

This is not just about personal growth, or optimising our lives, for our own benefit. That first reading spoke about the Kingdom of God – also known as the Beloved Community – that better world, that realm of justice, that we're forever striving towards, yet is also mysteriously always 'at hand'. Little by little we can each chip away – we **MUST** chip away – at all that we know is wrong in this world, and help build something better instead.

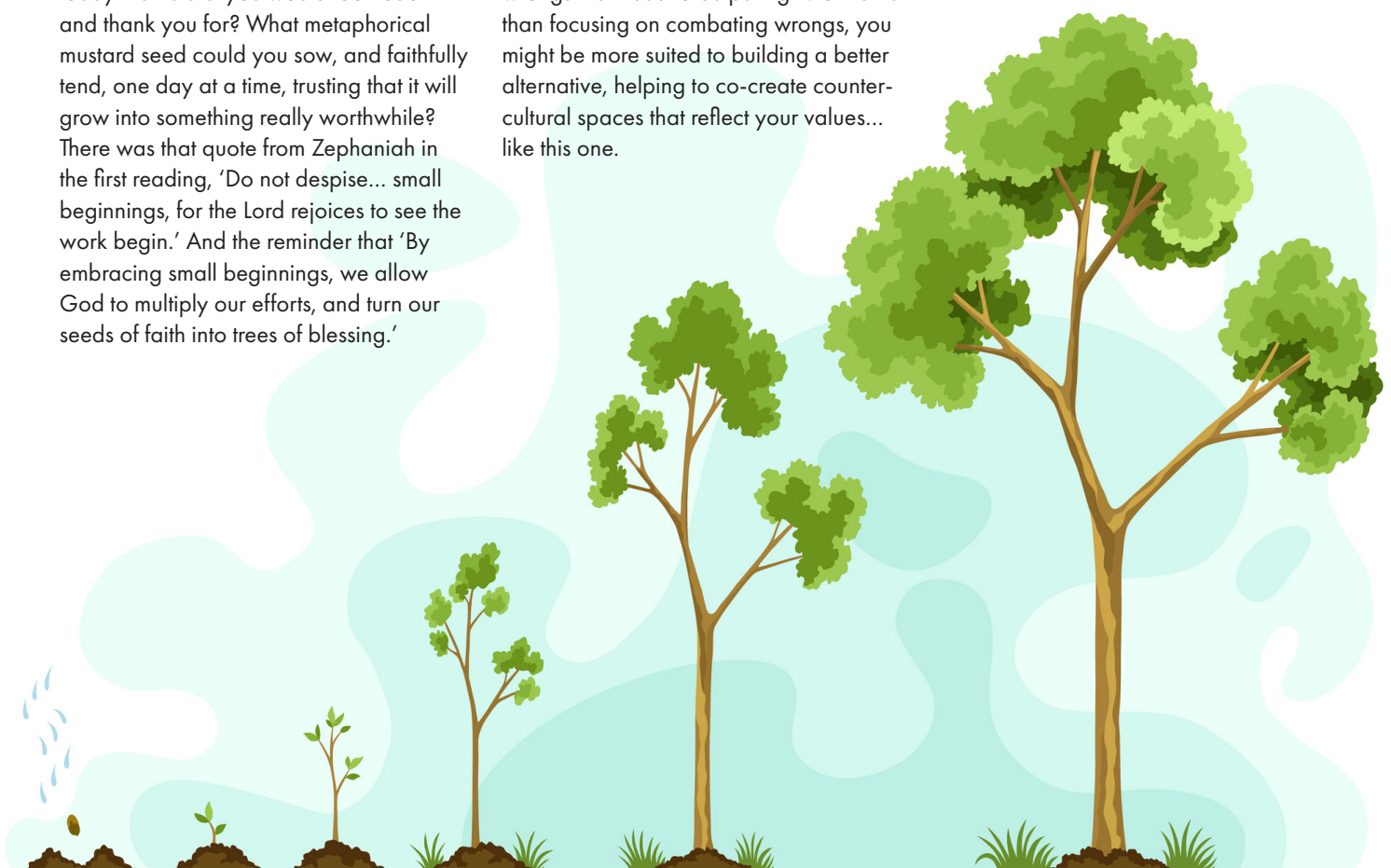
It's a well-worn quote in Unitarian circles, but I feel obliged to share the wise words of Edward Everett Hale, which encourage us to play our part in whatever small way we can: 'I am only one, but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something; and because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do the something that I can do.'

Think about what it is you want to give your energies to, and then intentionally focus them, so that your efforts stand the best chance of making an impact in the long run. Perhaps you are particularly motivated by wanting to combat the climate emergency, or fight the concentration of wealth in the hands of the few, or stand up for trans rights, whatever you feel particularly called to concentrate on. There are many worthy causes. Many wrongs that need to be put right. Or rather than focusing on combating wrongs, you might be more suited to building a better alternative, helping to co-create counter-cultural spaces that reflect your values... like this one.

At our 'How to be a Unitarian' class on Thursday we were talking about how we could collectively turn around the fortunes of our Unitarian denomination and reach more people. That's a worthy project too! And if we want our community to thrive, to be there for us and others, we all need to engage.

You cannot do everything, but still you can do something... and no matter how modest your contribution seems, if it's one that you can show up and do consistently, day after day, week after week, until months become years... little by little, a little becomes a lot.

I want to close with an echo of those words from Zimmer that we heard right at the beginning of the service. He said: 'No matter where we find ourselves – whether life feels generous or stripped bare – there is always some small step available to us. Not always the one we want. Not always the one that changes everything. But something. A movement toward meaning. Some of us are given more room, more freedom, more choices; others, fewer. But even in the narrowest of places, a choice still waits. Small, positive steps worth taking, choices worth making.' May we take those steps, and make those crucial choices, for the greater good of all. Amen.





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

Quilting workshops after the service on Sunday 18 October and 29 November at 1pm.

Because pride is a sin, I will not say I felt proud to see some of the squares I have contributed to the memorial quilt on display in a cathedral, but I will say I was thrilled to have contributed to such a beautiful exhibition. Unfortunately, I couldn't make the opening night where there had been music and poetry, but I did manage to find a couple of days to go up to Edinburgh to St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral where the quilt was displayed beneath the stained-glass windows.

I am now collecting squares made by other members of Essex Church who join in the quilting workshop to send to Fiona Bailey to be added to the panels she so carefully collates, putting together squares of similar colours to create something beautiful where even the most rudimentary stitching looks wonderful.

You may wonder what effect this project has in bringing about change in Palestine, it seems so futile when so many children have been killed. The media report deaths in Palestine, including those of children, merely as numbers but these numbers relate to much-loved sons, daughters, brothers, sisters and grandchildren. The quilts are one way of bearing witness to the genocide. It is a way of making sure

that people know and understand what is happening to families in Gaza and perhaps will then urge our government to act. St Mary's Cathedral attracts tourists who wander in just to admire the architecture and are then confronted with the reality of young lives, real children, wiped out before they have had a chance to live and fulfil their dreams.

When I was on the way to my very first quilt-making workshop I picked up a book in Waterstones called *WE ARE NOT NUMBERS* a collection of writing by the young people of Gaza. Ahmed Alnaouq, one of the collators of the collection, began mentoring young writers after his own brother was killed in the 2014 war on Gaza. I recently attended an event where Ahmed was talking about the book. During the conversation he said that he feared that Palestine would not survive the present onslaught which, despite a ceasefire, continues in Gaza and also in the West Bank. But he went on, you cannot kill the writing and that will live on. And maybe the quilt will also live on and like the Bayeux tapestry continue to tell the story into the future.

There is plenty of room at the table for anyone who would like to express their solidarity with the Palestinian people. Our next workshops will be after the services on Sunday 18 October and 29 November.

Patricia Brewerton

Poem by Eliz Beel

A Midsummer's Nightmare

Pulled out of great trunks and
Cardboard boxes
Left shut up in the school attic
Came old, flimsy
Cloths –
Caught with faded streaks
Generated by the forgotten suns
Of the uncertain months.

Only use being fancy-dress;
What else –
The Queen of the Faries
Is covered in the shimmering
gauze
Of a full costume
And sits in the centre of the lawn:
A fair-haired child.

Darkly,
Behind a clump of trees
I and one or two others
Are getting dressed
Into green-dyed underclothes
and paper wings.
One lady runs a red lipstick
Over my mouth
And I am mystified
As to why she's laughing
Noiselessly
At me

Poem by Marianne Harvey-Bertrand

Where Time Rests

Some mornings time stays still.
I stand in the garden while clouds drift
beyond my world.

So often lost in thought,
I return through small things:
the bamboo lifting its leaves,
the apple and pear trees
breathing together.

I do not know their language
yet I love their presence.
I think that the ground beneath me
may remember more.

The flowers open without asking
who I am. They were born free
of me.

Every day has its song, but
thoughts of death
move gently through stems and
grasses.

I spend too long looking beyond
what is already an abundance.
Today I listen. Today, I stand still
until stillness stands inside me.



Walking Group

We are planning to try again with the walking group this autumn if there is sufficient interest to go ahead (hopefully we will not be thwarted by extreme weather or tube strikes this time!) Provisional dates are Tuesday 22 September, Tuesday 27 October, and Wednesday 25 November (destinations TBC). Please let Jane know (jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk) if you plan to come and we'll assess whether or not we have enough interest to go ahead.

Unitarian Networks and Online Events

A number of networks and regular online events for Unitarians have been established over the last few years. They are a great way to connect with Unitarians from all over the country and to focus on particular issues of concern to us. Here are just a few of them (with details of key organisers in case you would like to contact them and get involved):

Unitarian Facilitators' Network

with Jane Blackall and Lizzie Kingston-Harrison
Meets the third Monday of each month, 7-8.30pm
contact jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Unitarians for Climate Justice (U4CJ)

with Rob Oulton
Meetings irregular – join the WhatsApp group for details
Contact robert.oulton@btinternet.com

Together in Meditation

with Lizzie Kingston-Harrison, Richard Bober, Sheena Gabriel and Rob Oulton
Meets every Thursday from 7.30pm
Contact ekingston@unitarian.org.uk

NUBI (New Unitarian Beginnings Ingathering)

with Lizzie Kingston-Harrison and Kieren Mardle-Moss
Meets the first Saturday of each month, 10.30-11.30am
Contact ekingston@unitarian.org.uk

Unitarians of Colour

Contact Shana (shana@yara-luna.com) for details

Unitarians for Justice for Palestine

Contact Shana (shana@yara-luna.com) for details

Social Justice Network

Contact Ann (ahowell@unitarian.org.uk) for details

Unitarian Hindu Connections

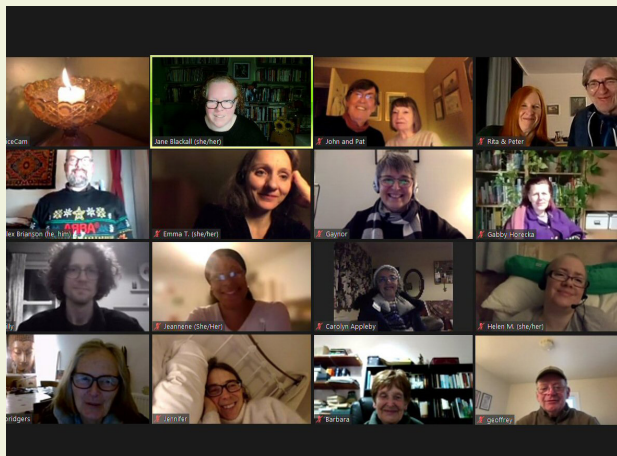
with Tina Gandhi
Meets the second Wednesday of each month, 7-8pm
Contact ti_gandhi@hotmail.com

Unitarian Christian Bible Discussion

with Donald Jacobs and John Carter
Meets on Monday evenings 7.30-9pm (irregular)
contact donrayjay@yahoo.co.uk or
revjohn.ukuni@gmail.com

Unitarian Christian Association Sunday Evening Services

Meets fortnightly on Sunday evenings, 6-7pm
Visit their website to join www.unitarianchristian.org.uk/
live-worship



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 16 Sept, 21 Oct, and 18 Nov 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,
at Essex Church

8 September, 13 October,
10 November, 8 December

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



Heartspaces at Essex Hall

Thursday evenings, 6.30pm, in Essex Street
WC2R 3HY (Nearest tube: Temple)

Heartspaces offers a welcoming spiritual community in a constantly changing world. Based at the home of the Unitarians, Essex Hall, and open to all spiritual seekers.

Join in with a programme of regular events from regular Pagan Celebrations to weekly Thursday Evening spiritual gatherings.

1st Thursday: Spiritual Jukebox

Sharing songs that move and inspire us, led by Rev Adam Slate

2nd Thursday: Heart and Soul

Informal Unitarian service of ritual, poetry and music led by Roy Clark

3rd Thursday: Soul Fuel – a Spiritual Open mic

Bring a song or a poem to share led by Rev Kate Dean

4th Thursday: Mystic of the Month

Discover the spiritual practices of Mystics from East and West led by Rev Kate Dean

More info: unitarian.org.uk/heartspaces
heartspaces@rosslynhillchapel.org.uk



Art Play Crafternoon

Sunday afternoons, once a month, 1-3pm.

20 September, 18 October, 15 November

All are welcome to join us for at this relaxed art-and-craft hangout which takes place after the service on the third Sunday of the 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. Please let Jane know if you're planning to come along to any of the dates: jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Nia Dance

Friday lunchtimes, 12.30pm, from 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. In person classes at Essex Church are £10 per session (or £40 for 5 classes). Online sessions on Wednesdays at 12.30pm

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

Community Yoga with Hannah

Provisional dates: 20 September, 11 October, 8 November, 13 December (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

Kensington Choir

Monday evenings 7-8.35pm, at 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 available at www.kensingtonchoir.com or email roseanna@kensingtonchoir.com

Poetry Group

Wednesday evening, once a month, 7-8.30pm.

2 September, 7 October, 4 November, 2 December

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 everyone.

Finding Your Voice Monthly Singing Classes

Sunday lunchtime, once a month, 12.30-1.15pm 4 October, 25 October, 22 November (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.





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.

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.

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.

Contact Us

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

Ministry Assistant: Jasmine Cooray
jasmine@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