



Kensington Unitarians

Newsletter: June 2019

What's On...

Sunday 2nd June, 11am-noon
'Learning from Gardening' led by Sarah and Congregation Members

Sunday 2nd June, after the service
Outing to Southend Unitarians

Wednesday 5th June, 12.30pm
'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite

Thursday 6th June, 6.45 for 7-8pm
'Heart & Soul' Spiritual Gathering
'Coping & Flourishing' with Brian Ellis

Sunday 9th June, 11am-noon
'Achieving Our Potential'
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 9th June, 12.30-1.00pm
Inclusive Unitarian Communion
Led by David Carter & Sarah Tinker

Wednesday 12th June, 12.30pm
'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite

Sunday 16th June, 11am-noon
'Act Justly, Love Mercy'
Led by Rev. Mark Franklin-Bowen
and Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 16th June, 12.30-1.15pm
'Find Your Voice'
Singing Class with Margaret

Sunday 16th June, 2.00-3.00pm
'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite

Wednesday 19th June, 12.30pm
'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite

Saturday 22nd June, from 2pm
District Quarterly Meeting on 'Active Hope' hosted by Horsham Unitarians
Speak to Sarah to plan travel together

Sunday 23rd June, 11am-noon
'What Do We Need?'
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Wednesday 26th June, 12.30pm
'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite

Sunday 30th June, 11am-noon
'Just Coping'
Led by Sarah T & Jeannene Powell

Sunday 30th June, 12.45-2.00pm
Sunday Conversation
On Coping and Climate Change

Human Flourishing

A Message from our Minister

June seems an ideal month for us Kensington Unitarians to consider our latest ministry theme of *'flourishing and coping'*. Nature is at her late spring best here in London. Trees have their fresh new leaves, roses are blooming, and the grass is still green. The natural world demonstrates what it means to flourish. Or we might use the word 'thriving'. Words like 'thriving' and 'flourishing' appear in official documents these days, though their roots trace back to both Greek and Confucian philosophy.



In modern positive psychology human flourishing might be defined as 'the reaching of one's potential' alongside a sense of well-being. Flourishing is a dynamic state not a fixed end point and our optimum conditions vary throughout life. Not all people will agree on what it means to flourish – we are all different and seek different conditions in life. I wonder what you'd include in your list of requirements for your own flourishing. Economic security, access to adequate food and clean water, readily available mental and physical health care, supportive social connections, satisfying work and other activities, feeling safe in the society in which you live, freedom to be oneself, access to education, fresh air and space to be outdoors, physical exercise, a comfortable and secure home, peace and quiet, cultural stimulation and space for our own creative expression, a sense of meaning and purpose in life, free to explore the transcendent in life – this was a list of requirements for flourishing that a small group of us came up with. What might you add or change in that list? What really matters to you?

Living on our crowded planet earth home requires us to consider not simply our own flourishing. We share the earth not only with some 7.7 billion other human beings but with a still remarkably diverse and precious array of other life forms of plants and animals, and indeed landscapes. As our awareness of the totality and inter-connectedness of all global life grows, our task becomes finding ways to flourish for us all, for all life. My own flourishing cannot be to the detriment of others – and yet it sometimes is. Western lifestyles and expectations are adversely affecting everyone and everything. We have allowed an economic system to elevate acquisition and consumption into a measure of social status and our governments struggle to regulate global corporations. But grassroots movements are encouraging us all to think again and to take back control over our individual lives and our human societies. This month I invite us all to find ways to support our own flourishing, the flourishing of others and the flourishing of our wider world – with a simple mantra 'do no harm', helping us to reflect on how our living affects others. May all we do be for the greater good of all.

Rev. Sarah Tinker

In this month's newsletter...

* Welcome and Integration of Newcomers at Church – What Do You Think? * Trip to Southend * Walking on the Chiltern Hills * London Playback Theatre Returns * Photos from our Tea Dance * Statement of Ecological Concern and Action * GA Annual Meetings Report from Our Delegate * 'Covenanting Community' by Jane Blackall * First Thoughts on a Congregational Covenant * Poems by Brian and Eliz * 'Sturdy Intimacy' address by Rev. Sarah Tinker * and much more ...

Kensington Unitarians

At Essex Church (founded 1774), Notting Hill Gate

Kensington Unitarians are a community of kindred souls who meet each week at Essex Church in Notting Hill Gate to explore, reflect, converse, be still, share joys and sorrows, and support one another on life's journey. We are proud to be part of a worldwide and historic liberal religious tradition.

Our main activity is Sunday worship and we hold a service each week at 11am. All are welcome. Services are usually themed and include readings from a variety of sources, prayers, music, singing, stillness, and a short sermon. Our children's leaders provide an alternative programme of activities for younger people.

Small-group activities are another key part of our programme. We offer courses and one-off workshops exploring spiritual and religious matters and considering life's meaning together with others on the spiritual journey.

If you are aware of any member of our community who is unwell or suffering in some way and who would welcome contact from others in the church, please contact our minister.



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

Office Answering Machine: 020 7221 6514

Email: info@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Web: www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk

At the Lido Bus Stop - Northfield Avenue

pavement bound we gather
each the sum of past journeys
waiting to breach the future
two hawks above drift and circle
in the warp and weft of time
weaving an invisible cloth
of here and now against the sky

Brian Ellis

Volunteering Rotas: Stewarding, Coffee and Greeting



Stewarding:

2nd June: Maureen Cummings
9th June: Alice Lambert
16th June: Juliet Edwards
23rd June: Billy Jackson
30th June: Brian Ellis

Coffee:

2nd June: Billy Jackson
9th June: Liz Tuckwell
16th June: Pat Gregory & John Humphreys
23rd June: Helena Coope
30th June: Marianne Harvey & Maureen C

Greeting:

2nd June: John Newton
9th June: Brian Ellis
16th June: Roy Clark
23rd June: Liz Tuckwell
30th June: David Carter

We circulate the rota list each month by email. Please contact Jane if you want to sign up for one of the forthcoming slots.

jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk



Fitness Fusion of 9 Movement Forms

Third Sunday of the Month from
2-3pm: 16th June, 21st July 2019

Midweek class - Wednesdays - 12.30-1.30pm

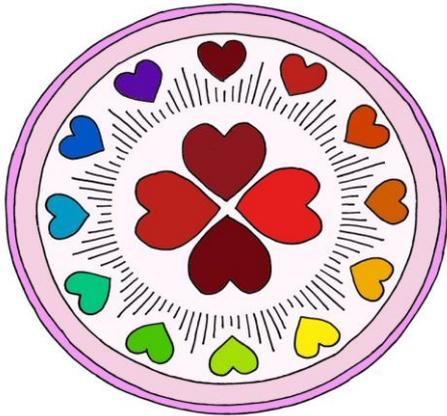
An hour of whole-body conditioning, done barefoot to diverse music. Delivering a cardiovascular workout for any level of fitness. Specific routines allow you to experience - the power of the martial arts, the stillness of the healing arts and the joy of movement through dance.

Cost £10 for drop-ins (£8 to concessions / church members) or a block of 5 classes for £40 to use within a 3-month period.

'Heart and Soul' Midweek Spiritual Gatherings

Thursdays 6th June and 4th July, 7-8pm

*Gathering at 6.45pm downstairs in the library
Followed by social time and refreshments*



Come and join us for our monthly alternative spiritual gathering, with music and silence, words and prayers, and a chance to explore the evening's topic in relation to your own life. This month Brian Ellis will be leading Heart & Soul on the theme of 'Coping and Flourishing'. The contemplative hour will be followed by time for refreshments (home-made cake) and fellowship. All are welcome to join us. If you'd like to have a go at co-leading a Heart and Soul session, or doing a reading, please get in touch with Sarah or Jane to find out more.

Walking on the Chiltern Hills



Nine of us plus Ashford the dog had a beautiful spring walk on the Chiltern Hills in May, all managing to meet at Marylebone Station for the 9.27 train that took us out to the small market town of Wendover. After a restorative cup of coffee we climbed Coombe Hill and enjoyed spreading views below us, including a glimpse of Chequers, the Prime Minister's country residence. The ancient beech forest in this area is really worth a visit. The plan to offer walks of differing lengths worked well, the pub lunch was delicious and we all agreed we'd like to go out walking again before too long. Any suggestions as to where?

Sarah Tinker

Church Trip to Southend

After the Service on Sunday 2nd June



Late notice but do join us on a trip to visit Southend Unitarians for their Sunday afternoon service on 2nd June, which we'll help to lead. And there'll be time to look round Southend, take a train ride along the pier or have fish and chips on the sea front. We'll set off for Liverpool Street Station after our service in Kensington. Send Sarah a text message on 07960 057567 if you plan to come along.

Brian, Carolyn & Sarah

London Playback Theatre



Thank you to everyone who came to our May Playback evening. Over fifty people turned up to explore our church's monthly theme of relating and relationships. Many heart-touching and amazing stories were told and reflected back by our Playback Team. Do come and join us in June for a theme connected to 'flourishing and coping'. Everyone is welcome.

Monday 17th June, 6.45-9pm at Essex Church New Event: 'A Taste of Playback Theatre'

This is a chance to 'have a go' and learn about Playback Theatre in a safe and guided experience. Building community through personal stories, Playback Theatre creates a ritual space where any story - however ordinary, extraordinary, hidden or difficult - might be told, and immediately made into theatre. And where each person's uniqueness is honoured and affirmed while at the same time building and strengthening our connections to each other as a community of people. Free entry to congregation members, £11.25 otherwise.

Friday 21st June, 7.30-9.30pm at Essex Church Regular Event: On 'Survival and Growth'

Playback Theatre returns on 20th Sept and 15th Nov. They offer performances free of charge and welcome donations. Contact: www.londonplayback.com/ londonplayback@gmail.com

Thematic Ministry



At our recent ministry theme meeting we realised how much we enjoy service preparation when someone else has offered to contribute in some way. So thank you to David Talbot for leading meditations, to Billy Jackson and John Newton for playing the piano for us and to all who give a reading or write something on a particular topic. Studies suggest that far more of a congregation stay awake in a church service when more people are involved, so do keep offering to get involved and let's keep Kensington Unitarians awake and alert on a Sunday morning. Why not have a look through the themes for the year ahead and let us know if there's a particular song, poem or other reading you'd like to suggest for a Sunday morning gathering. Here is a list of our future

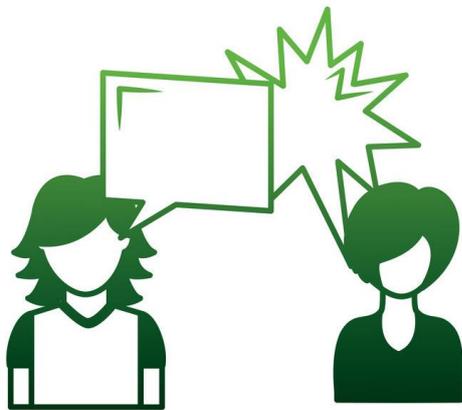
monthly themes: Curiosity and Wonder (July); Hopes and Dreams (August); Moving On & Staying Put (September); Religious Life (October); Time and Transience (November); Scarcity and Abundance (December). Here are some ways to explore June's theme of 'Flourishing & Coping':

- Looking back on your own life so far, are there particular times when you have flourished? What conditions help you to flourish in life, what impedes you? Are there steps, however small, that you could take now to improve the quality of your living? Are there some simple requests that you could make of others, that would improve your sense of well-being?
- What qualities make 'a good life' for you? This is a fascinating topic to discuss with someone else. What differences and similarities are there in your views of the good life?
- We know that many people around the world, and even in our own relatively well-off society, are barely coping in life. Is there a particular issue or area that you would want to improve and is there a small step you could take that could make a difference?

Sarah, Jeannene, and Jane

Progressive Christianity Network Conference:

'Religion and Atheism - Beyond the Divide?'



Saturday 8th June 2019, 11am-4pm

French Protestant Church of London,
Soho Square, London W1D 3QD

This conference offers an opportunity to engage with four speakers in a conversation about religion, atheism, seeking ways to dialogue and to search for meaning. It is hoped that, in our increasingly tribalistic world, this day will offer possibilities to go beyond the divides which separate us and to seek out areas of mutual agreement and understanding.

The speakers at this day conference are Julian Baggini, Fiona Ellis, Harriet Harris and Richard Holloway.

Tickets are £20 (PCN members £15, full-time students £5)
Book via the PCN website - www.pcnbritain.org.uk – or email info@pcnbritain.org.uk / call 01594 516528 for more info.

Inclusive Communion

'The Spirit of Pentecost'

with David Carter and Sarah Tinker

Sunday 9th June, 12.30-1.00pm



Once every few months we hold a small-group communion, after the main morning service, downstairs in the library. A team of volunteers take turns in leading the services so we experience a variety of approaches. All are welcome to participate. David Carter and Sarah Tinker will be leading in June and the service will be themed on 'The Spirit of Pentecost'. If you would like to find out more about these services do please speak to Jane Blackall.

'To care for another (person, animal, forest, river), appropriately one must learn what *they* need to flourish. Care means "planning with care," giving serious attention and thought; it means "handling with care," avoiding damage and loss; it means "leaving in the care of," protecting and guarding; it means "feeling care for," being concerned about.'

Sallie McFague

Sunday Afternoon Tea Dances at Essex Church: Some Photos from May 2019 - Latin, Ballroom and Line Dance for All!



We had a great time at the tea dance in May! We will be taking a break over the summer but the tea dances will return in the autumn.

For more information contact: rachel@rachelsparksdance.co.uk / www.facebook.com/rachelsparksdance

Save the Dates for Tea Dances in the Autumn: 22nd September and 1st December 2019

Statement of Ecological Concern & Action

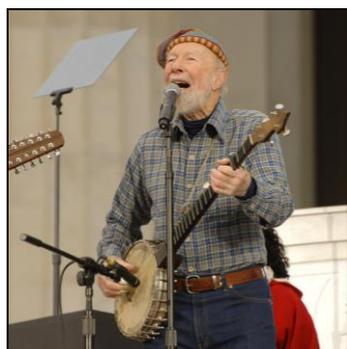


Our church trustees have now agreed the statement below and hope that it will encourage us all to share good ideas, sources of information and practical actions we can take to raise awareness of the climate and ecological emergency our world is facing. Let's all do what we can to live more fairly and more sustainably here on our planet earth home.

Kensington Unitarians join with organisations across Britain and our wider world to declare a climate & ecological emergency.

We commit ourselves to

- Learning more about climate change and loss of species and the actions we can take to redress these emergencies through changes in our own lifestyles and in how our church building is used and run.
- Forging alliances with other groups working towards sustainable living and using our resources to support their work.
- Encouraging national and international governments to reduce Greenhouse Gas emissions as a matter of urgency, with justice for those affected by climate change as a prime concern.
- Reflecting environmental concerns in our worship and other group activities.



'If it can't be reduced, reused, repaired, rebuilt, refurbished, refinished, resold, recycled or composted, then it should be restricted, redesigned, or removed from production.'

Pete Seeger

Sunday Conversation

Sunday 30th June from 12.45 to 2.00pm



Why not bring your lunch and stay behind after the service on Sunday 30th June for our regular Sunday Conversation in connection with this month's theme of 'Coping and Flourishing' (with a particular focus on environmental issues). We'll be showing a 17 minute video which explains Climate Change and exploring in conversation the small steps we can make that make a difference. All are welcome.

LDPA (London Unitarian District) Summer Quarterly Meeting 'Active Hope'

**Bringing About the Great Turning
Saturday 22nd June at Horsham Unitarians**



The theme of the day is 'Active Hope – Bringing about the Great Turning' inspired by American Buddhist and eco-warrior Joanna Macy. Tea/coffee will be available from 11.00am. You are free to bring your own lunch or pick something up in the cafe in the park or at the Saturday market or any of the many eateries in Horsham town centre. You can eat your lunch in the church garden.

The service will start at 2.00pm, followed by a workshop and discussion, with tea at approximately 3.30pm. Please let us know if you would like to attend so we have a rough idea of numbers for catering purposes. Email horsham.unitarians@gmail.com

Horsham Unitarian Church, Worthing Road, RH12 1SL is a 15 minute walk from the train station and is situated opposite the bus station. Limited parking at the back of the church. Some Kensington Unitarians plan to go to this so let Sarah know if you would like to travel together.

Good Cause Collection of the Month:

The General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches: 'GA Weekend Appeal'



Collection on Sunday 30th June

From the GA Website: 'Please support the GA Weekend Appeal! With your financial support, the GA will: develop ministry and local leadership education and training, raise our profile nationally, organise the Annual Meetings, promote religious education and develop the national youth programme, provide resources and advice for congregations, support The Inquirer, support the Derby Unity growth project, assist congregations in improving Safeguarding, promote social justice and a sustainable and fairer world.'

Website: www.unitarian.org.uk

Recent Charity Collections:

March 24th – Steiner School Trip – £198.48

April 21st – Red Cross Yemen Appeal – £417.55
(including additional donations from Heidi and John's poetry book launch and Sandra's recent concerts)



Our very own Sarah Tinker speaking from the podium at this year's GA Annual Meetings (photo by Daniel Costley)

The General Assembly (GA) Annual Meeting Report (from a new first timer!)

I felt very privileged and somewhat apprehensive when asked to be our congregation's delegate last month at the 2019 General Assembly Meetings held in Birmingham (where I originated from). I discovered there were 363 attendees, many of whom like me were there for the first time. Proceedings opened with worship and the parading of banners (many and varied), with me hoping I could keep the Essex Church banner aloft!



It was fascinating to understand a little of how the movement with its many and varied congregations is centrally guided. Some ministers have a group of churches to look after. Some congregations have members in single figures and many struggle financially, with no chance of paid leadership. People at the meetings were very friendly and keen to share their stories. Each morning worship was available prior to breakfast. I joined the meditational format and greatly enjoyed the experience. Five plenary sessions were held during the two day assembly and we voted on various issues put forward by congregations prior to the assembly. Many views were expressed prior to voting and it seemed very democratic.

The rest of the time we had numerous choices of sessions to attend. I particularly enjoyed the one put on by 'The Earth Spirit Network' and the other by The Unitarian Penal and Social Affairs Panel taking the form of their Annual Lecture. The first looked at connecting us to 'The Earths Calendar' - with the wheel of the year turning through eight points, each heralding a change and new beginning. We participated in group work leading to lively and illuminating discussion. The annual lecture of The Penal and Social Affairs Panel was given by Patrick Hall (a research fellow on the sustainable care programme at the University of Birmingham). He spoke of 'The Problems of Social Care in Society and Possible Solutions'. It would seem that Germany and Japan are countries which are more successful than most in coming up with workable solutions, not only because of more funding but also much more long term planning, varied care settings, innovative use of peers and volunteers. These countries place a great emphasis on the prevention of problems. In the UK successive governments have only looked at these complex issues in the short term (i.e. the long awaited green paper still yet to be published), almost as if they imagine the issues will go away!

Accommodation at the Annual Meetings was good with plentiful food choices and friendly staff. Before we returned home the assembly ended with the Anniversary Service, where we looked at our place in the universe and how we can nurture our world. The service was called 'Knowing our Place' and reminded us that we humans are just one part of the greater whole. We were also introduced to our new Chief Officer Elizabeth Slade. An amazing few days.

Maureen Cummings

The Great Exhibition Road Festival 2019

Various Venues from 28th to 30th June



Organisers describe this as a celebration of curiosity, discovery and exploration in the spirit of the Great Exhibition of 1851. Look out for more details of the many and varied events being organised by museums, the university and the National Geographic Society, all in the South Kensington area. For more information visit: www.greatexhibitionroadfestival.co.uk

OneLight Gathering

Friday 14th June 6.45 for 7pm-8.30pm
Monthly Here at Essex Church



Led by Interfaith Ministers Rev Alison Trower and Rev Amy Firth this service will include music, prayer, reflection, silence, community connection and the beautiful Threshold Choir. Suggested donation: £5. You are welcome to arrive from 6:45pm and the gathering will be completed by 8:30pm with tea and treats. For more information see the OneLight website which helpfully includes all the resources they use in their gatherings:

www.onelightgathering.co.uk

LONDON Heart Meditation



*Using ancient rhythms,
played on a frame drum, the
classes will help you focus on your
heart beat, enabling you to start on a
journey of self-discovery, to uncover your true potential.*

Beginners Course in Heart Meditation

Classes Held on Various Tuesdays
11th, 25th June, 9th, 23rd July from 6.30-7.30pm
Downstairs in the Library Here at Essex Church

If you're interested in tapping into a lasting source of inner-peace, and beginning a journey of self-discovery then come and join this Heart Meditation course for beginners. Using ancient rhythms played on a frame drum, the teacher will guide you on a step-by-step process for quietening your mind and truly 'listening to your heart'. Held on various Tuesday evenings, from 6.30pm-7.30pm, your first class is free and donations are welcome thereafter.

Beverley Eve

To confirm course dates and book a place email:
infoheartmeditation@gmail.com

For more information visit: www.heartmeditation.eu

'Finding Our Voice' Monthly Singing Workshops

Sundays 16th June and 21st July 2019
from 12.30pm to 1.15pm at Essex Church



Margaret has worked as a professional singer all her adult life and is also a very experienced singing teacher. She is leading monthly sessions to help us all find our voice. These workshops are for anyone who is prepared to open their mouth and make a sound.

Margaret will show us how to improve the quality and strength of our voices. Using a few simple exercises we'll gain joy and confidence in singing by learning how to produce and develop the voice, something everyone can do. We'll work with the breath and overcome unconscious blocks that can prevent us singing with our true potential. Fun and achievement are guaranteed and sessions are designed for all, whatever your experience or ability.



Heidi Ferid's artwork 'A Memorial for Dead Trees' is a reminder of the ongoing climate change challenge

Challenge



The Stones are wide, and high, high:
Their Earth beneath is long and low,
and beyond, wide, wider still
through the bare green grass
you may stand and see the Neolithic
Sun arise.

Treasure it! For, later;
looking up at the Sun's zenith;
dimmer now: fading;
you'll see through a great megalith
it's lengthening shadows,
and a new Light reflecting
from the Chalice rested
up in front of you.

Eliz(abeth) Beel

Worship that Works: Equipping Unitarians to lead High-Quality Services through Reflective Practice



Saturday 21st September – 10.30am until 3pm
Rosslyn Hill Unitarian Chapel, Hampstead, NW3 1NG

Save the Date: This autumn's LDPA quarterly will feature a whole-day training session introducing participants to best practice in Unitarian worship. This will be particularly beneficial for anybody who would like to be involved in leading worship in their own congregation or in churches around their district. It would also be useful for people who already lead worship and who would like to develop their skills and share hints and tips with other Unitarians. However, all who enjoy Unitarian worship and would like to think about it more in a structured way are also welcome to attend. The workshop will have a particular focus on reflective practice and the meaning and purpose of the worship we do together. The workshop will also act as an introductory session for anyone wishing to undertake the Worship Studies Course (Foundation Step), a nationally recognised GA course, which we are intending to run once again in the LDPA at Rosslyn Hill Chapel, Hampstead, between autumn 2019 and spring 2020. The remainder of the course will be run over three further Saturdays, by a variety of expert tutors, and we would be glad to hear early expressions of interest from any who might wish to sign up.

Haiku

bark gnarled and twisted
chestnuts lean towards old age
but fruit with vigour

what if snow were black
would we prefer that to white
a grey area

Brian Ellis

'It is no coincidence that the Greek word for house, *oikos*, is the source of our words for economics, ecology, and ecumenical. The three belong together: in order for the whole household of the planet to flourish, the earth's resources must be distributed justly among all its inhabitants, human and earth others, on a sustainable basis. The three basic economic rules for all to thrive in this household are: take only your share; clean up after yourself; and keep the house in good repair for those to come. These rules should be pinned up on the planet's "fridge" for all members to memorize and follow. They are necessities, not suggestions, that constitute the basic economic laws for long-term planetary well-being.'

Sallie McFague

‘Sturdy Intimacy’

Sermon by Rev. Sarah Tinker

From the service on Sunday 19th May

‘Once we learn to adopt the view that everything that lives is holy, we don’t need to turn church into a place where we have to be careful and ‘nice’ to each other. We can start to face our conflicts together and begin to develop a sturdy intimacy with each other – the basis and goal of our longing to belong.’ - Michaela Von Britzke

We’re exploring a monthly ministry theme of relating and relationships during May. So far we’ve celebrated friendship on the day of our inclusive tea dance. Last week we considered relationships in community – linking in with our church Annual General Meeting. And now we have the subject of Sturdy Intimacy. A couple of friends with one track minds asked me if this would involve removing of clothing – please be assured this is not the case. We will all be keeping our clothing on throughout today’s service. I come from the north of England and we are all brought up with the saying ‘N’er cast a clout till May be out’.

There are many ways to express intimacy in human relationships; there are many ways to feel a sense of closeness and connection. I’ll not be asking you to take your clothes off and I’ll not be telling you anything you don’t already know. But perhaps some new thought will emerge for you on this old topic of how we relate to one another. We humans are social beings. Most of us, but not all of us, yearn to relate more closely with others. We don’t always find relating with others easy. But usually it’s worth making the effort.

I’ve often thought of relating with other people as a form of free therapy. There’s always something new to learn isn’t there – about ourselves and about the other. We just have to stay awake, stay conscious, take some time to reflect on each encounter. And just occasionally in life we may meet someone who we can go deeper with – someone who’s prepared to explore with us – ‘what did you mean when you said ...’ ‘Can I tell you what I felt after our conversation yesterday ...’ ‘Could you listen to me for a while and not respond, just listen’.

I said that it’s usually worth making the effort with relationships. And the ‘usually’ is there to remind us that some relationships may not be healthy for us, may not bring the best out in us. Some relationships may damage us – and sometimes in ways so subtle that we don’t quite realise that damage is being done. We may be damaging others in similar ways, sometimes with the best of intentions. Any exploration of human relationships brings up the subject of boundaries – the spaces between people, areas of meeting, of encounter. This is the space in which we learn to state our needs and preferences and hear the needs of another; this is the space in which we negotiate and deepen understanding – ‘this works for me’ – ‘this is too much or not enough’. Boundaries require us to maintain a healthy sense of self don’t they – in our core, whilst retaining a clarity about the other as ‘other’ – the one with whom we are relating – for they too must maintain their sense of self.

Today I want to bring a spiritual perspective to this place of encounter in relationships with others. And I start by acknowledging our very own Michaela Von Britzke who in an essay contained in this little Unitarian book, *Prospects for the Unitarian Movement*, used the term ‘sturdy intimacy’ to describe the sorts of relationships we could be fostering in our Unitarian communities. This idea of ‘sturdy intimacy’ delighted me when I first read it and I’ve been exploring its possibilities ever since. Michaela suggests two spiritual practices to bring to every encounter, every relationship.



The first is the idea that everything that lives is holy. The second is to bring the idea ‘this too is me’ to everything and everyone that encounters us. These practices come easily in life’s simple moments of relatedness – but their real power is to be found in the difficult times, the challenging relationships, a counter-balance to our disapproval or disgust perhaps – whatever would have us back away from another.

This is the message of sturdy intimacy – teaching us how to stay connected with that which is difficult for us – without losing our boundaries, our sense of self. Michaela suggests that we ‘engage with attention at the unsafe edges of experience, of encounter with self and others and the worlds we are part of’.

This week I’ve been asking myself – what gets in the way of me seeing each person as holy and remembering that ‘this too is me’? I wonder if you recognise any of these habitual ways of being from your own life?

- When I start viewing people as unequal – thoughts of superiority or inferiority
- When I find myself taking things personally, being reactive
- When I’m doing too much scheming and dreaming about the future rather than resting in the present moment
- When I’m stuck in the past, repeating old patterns of behaviour perhaps, repeating old stories about someone
- When I’m distorting reality in some way and believing my own thoughts about what is ‘true’ rather than remembering that as many different versions of reality exist as there are people
- When I’m failing to check something out with another person, losing a sense of curiosity about another person because I’m thinking too much about myself
- When I’m neglecting or losing my inner sense of self, forgetting who I am because I’m so busy thinking about someone else

We heard a story earlier on about a pious woman who longed to connect with God and yet failed to recognise that God was all around her in every aspect of everyday life. Whatever our religious beliefs, that story carries a valuable message – pay attention to those we are with and there we will find our meaning and purpose. There we will be given ample opportunities to develop relationships based on sturdy intimacy. There we will find scope for developing the resilience that will support us in living fully, living deeply, living lovingly. This is a path both mystical and profoundly practical. And a church community like ours is a great place to strengthen ourselves, to build our resilience in relationships with others. If you stick around this church congregation long enough I can well-nigh guarantee that you will at some point find yourself confused, upset, irritated, even downright furious, in relationship with others and that’s a golden opportunity to explore further what’s going on. Work to understand what’s got under your skin. You might choose to reflect alone, or with others – gently untangling the string of Christmas lights we heard of earlier on, that represent our connections one with another, together exploring the precious gifts of life that we bring – one to another.

'Covenanting Community'

Reflection by Jane Blackall

From the service on Sunday 12th May



One of the best things about being in community – especially a community like this one – is, as Sarah's already said, the opportunity it gives you to meet and get to know people who aren't like yourself and who you might not ever get to mingle with in other settings. Here, people of different generations, different socio-economic groups, different backgrounds, can become friends, hear each other's stories, and learn from one another's varied perspectives. We Unitarians often speak with pride of celebrating diversity and being enriched by it.

However... as well as being a source of delight, differences can sometimes be... difficult. When we first chance across a community like this one, there can be a temptation to idealise it, and imagine that everybody's chosen to be here 'cos they think in much the same way as we do – with broadly similar theology, politics, ethical values, *manners* even – but that's not quite true. We can't take it for granted that we're all pulling in exactly the same direction on every single issue. So when we bump up against people who see the world in a different way than we do – whose life experiences have given them a different outlook, temperament, or habits of behaviour – well, that can sometimes cause a bit of friction. We might rub each other up the wrong way.

Sometimes people seem to think of Unitarianism as a kind of 'anything goes' religion – but that really isn't the case – there are definitely behaviours and even beliefs that are not-OK. To state it more positively, there is *something* at the centre which gathers us together in community, some common religious cause, even if we sometimes struggle to say what it is. Our Unitarianism is based around certain core values and principles which lead us to conduct ourselves – and to organise our communities – in certain ways. But it's probably fair to say that we Unitarians are not always as clear as we might be in articulating our purpose, aspirations and expectations of each other.

As today's service is all about 'Relating in Community' I thought we might do well to look at one possible way to address the challenges of relating to each other in a diverse community. Quite a number of Unitarian congregations, both here in the UK and around the world (especially in the United States) have composed their own congregational covenants. A covenant is a promise, a pledge, a commitment between members of the congregation. And congregational covenants can take a variety of forms. A covenant can be quite a short, poetic statement, designed to be spoken in unison, repeated often, and even memorised. Alternatively it can be a longer statement, more like a charter, which you might pin up on the wall. Importantly, it would be worked out collaboratively, with the input of community members. And although you would hope such a covenant would stand the test of time, they are generally open to revisiting and revising, so as to remain 'alive' rather than becoming ossified relics.

The Unitarian Universalist Association have an adult RE programme called 'Faith Like a River', written by Alison Cornish and Jackie Clement, which includes a covenant-creation-workshop. And in this programme they explain why covenant is hugely important in a non-creedal faith. They say: *'The free church tradition of which we are a part does not offer up a creed, a certain set of beliefs, that everyone must accept in order to belong to the community. Instead, the boundaries of our community are determined by commitment and participation. Our central question is not "What do we believe?" but rather "What values will we uphold and how will we do this together?" Our covenant, the promises we make to each other in regarding how we will be a community of faith, is at the heart of what it means to be Unitarian.'*

So a covenant is very definitely NOT a creed! It's not about what we believe theologically. The UU minister Victoria Safford says a covenant should respond to a question more like: *'To what larger love, to what people, principles, values, and dreams shall we be committed?'* The focus is on how we are with each other, how we behave, what we aspire to, and what our shared purpose is as a congregation. It's not a trivial task to put this into words!

But congregational covenants can really help us, in a variety of ways, to relate in community. They can be helpful to newcomers, giving them a clearer sense of what they're coming into, rather than leaving them to suss out the congregation's values and norms by themselves. Covenants can add focus to the church's activities and mission, and taking time to articulate a collective vision might help enthuse more people to get stuck in to the church's work, and to feel part of a team pulling together on something bigger than any one could achieve alone.

Importantly, covenants can help provide a sense of continuity in times of change, something that I'd say is especially relevant to a congregation such as ours in the heart of London where the population is quite transient and we see a lot of people come and go from the church each year. And covenants can help to support congregations through times of challenge and conflict. They can set clear limits, boundaries, to acceptable behaviour which we pledge to abide by and which we can come back and refer to if things seem to be going awry in any way. It is really helpful if the congregation can compose their covenant when times are good, so that is well-established, and everyone feels ownership of it, ready for when it's needed most.

You might find it hard to imagine quite what a covenant looks, or sounds, like if you've not encountered one before, so I thought I'd read you someone else's, as an example. This is a short covenant in a poetic style from Cross Street Chapel in Manchester, which everybody speaks together in their service every Sunday as part of the prayers: *'We gather here in sacred fellowship, to witness the fullness of our lives and all life; To hold and be held, tell stories and listen, to be renewed and renew the world. We speak with care and patience, we act with gentleness and compassion, we forgive each other and ourselves. In faith that we build beloved community, we renew our covenant today.'*

Or here's another one which was composed by the Unitarians of St. Mark's Edinburgh: *'We commit to help and care for each other and to contribute to the spiritual and practical well-being of this our beloved community. We aspire to be open to learning, to be open to new ways of connecting with each other and with Ultimate Reality and to be sensitive to the needs of our fellows. We aspire to speak our own truth and to be tolerant when that spoken by our fellows does not correspond with our own. We commit to reach out in love to the wider world and to share what we have found here with others. Recognising that we each have different skills we commit to give as we are able and to receive the gifts of others. We aspire to bring enthusiasm, joy and humour to all that we do together.'*

(continued overleaf)

'Covenanting Community' *(continued)*



There's a lot more to say about covenanting than we have time for today but I wonder if this is something we might explore further as a congregation in the future. On the back of the cream slip in your order of service I've put a few questions/prompts to try and gather your first thoughts: If we were to have a congregational covenant, what might you want to see included in it?

Consider the questions –

- What is our purpose as a congregation?
- What do we gather here for?
- Why do we come together?
- What do we aspire to as a community?
- How do we hope to embody our values in the world?
- How do we want to be with each other?
- What attitudes and behaviours could we all commit to?

Perhaps you could jot some notes down under those headings and bring your responses through to the hall when it's time for coffee after the service. And after today's AGM we'll collect them in and ponder what our next steps might be (a selection are included in the newsletter on the opposite page).

For the time being, the closest thing we have to a covenant is the 'Statement of Commitment', on the back of that same cream-coloured slip of paper. These are words which we speak every year in the service on the day of the church AGM. They look very official, as if they've been around forever, but in truth were written 'on the back of an envelope' thirteen years ago. There's hardly anyone left who will remember it being written but just a few committee members and Sarah sat around a table at coffee time in early 2006, a week or so before we were due to hold a 'Service of Welcome and Commitment' to install Sarah as minister. The words were written in haste and without much consultation but people seemed to like them enough that we still say them once a year (even if we don't think about them much between times). So perhaps it's time for us to think again about composing an 'official' congregational covenant!

But in the meantime, I invite members and friends to stand as you are able, to speak these words together and re-commit ourselves to the work of this community known as Kensington Unitarians. Let us affirm our statement of commitment:

It is with pleasure and love that we commit ourselves to this shared ministry.

With caring and open hearts we pledge to join in making our community an inclusive and welcoming place for all people of goodwill.

We shall continue to uphold our liberal religious tradition and to encourage the many spiritual seekers who meet in our church building.

We trust the power of honest communication, creativity, and kindness, to heal and hold us always.

Amen.

'Meaning is a form of strength. It has the power to transform experience, to open the most difficult of work to the dimension of joy and even gratitude. Meaning is the language of the soul. Few works of service can endure unless they are sustained by a lived sense of their meaning and purpose.'

Rachel Naomi Remen

Flower Communion In the service on Sunday 23rd June



We will be holding our annual flower communion as part of the service on Sunday 23rd June. This is an annual ritual, originally created by Norbert Čapek, that celebrates beauty, human uniqueness, diversity, and community. Please bring a flower along with you to this service if you can.

Greeters' Training

Save the Date! After the Service
on Sunday 11th August 2019



At the recent AGM it was suggested that we should hold a 'Greeters' Training Workshop' (in a similar fashion to the successful 'Readers' Training' we recently held) in order to help people be better prepared to take an active role in welcoming newcomers to our congregation and to share hints and tips about best practice. Please email Jane if you plan to attend: jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk and we will give out some more details in the next newsletter.

First Thoughts: Imagining a Congregational Covenant



In the service on Sunday 12th May we introduced the idea of creating a 'Congregational Covenant' - a simple, somewhat poetic, statement of the congregation's purpose, aspirations, and how the members pledge to be with each other, which is collectively composed – this can help to create a more welcoming and respectful space where there is clarity about the culture and expectations. We asked: If we at Kensington Unitarians were to have a covenant what sort of things might you like to see included in it? Here are a selection of the responses. Please do ponder these questions yourself and send your thoughts to jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk.

What is our purpose as a congregation?

What do we gather here for? Why do we come together?

'To know we're not alone in living and life events. To help us connect with deeper values and ideas of how to live them in the world.'

'Creating sacred space and time. Sharing love, joy, and pain. Counterbalance to institutional power/values.'

'Spiritual fellowship, community, tea, nice hymns.'

'As a single person I come to be part of a group that stops me being egocentric and allows me to revere the unknown higher power. I value the peace and calm and music of the services.'

'To share space, time, and thoughts with like-minded people.'

'We come together to decode the map *together*. None of us can dictate to anyone else. But we all hold the truth for ourselves and each other.'

'Friendship, support, to remember to be thankful for all that we have'

'To listen, love, and care.' / 'Fellowship and friendship.'

'To gain strength from each other and share kindness.'

'To listen and learn about each other and the world.'

What do we aspire to as a community?

How do we hope to embody our values in the world?

'To have different ways to help people and the earth and stand up against injustice.'

'Welcoming those neglected by mainstream culture.'

'Peace, caring for people and planet, breaking down barriers of language and culture.'

'To suppose those who are struggling and remain educated about social/world/environmental issues.'

'To be an inspiration to our neighbours.'

'We should be – and are – an open community of faith. We are here for all who feel called to our church. We need to embody our values even more visibly to the wider world.'

'To be aware.' / 'New ideal – it's peaceful.'

'Always welcoming to new ideas and diversity.'

'To reflect positive values with a coherent voice.'

How do we want to *be* with each other? What attitudes and behaviours could we all commit to?

'Kind, caring, honest, friendly, supportive, present, accepting.' / 'Warm, emotionally aware of others' needs and behaviour, accepting.'

'Open and honest.' / 'Being able to listen to each other, and being accepting of the fact we have different opinions, beliefs, and ways.'

'Humility. Wonder. Listening. Curiosity. Welcoming. Space. Open.' / 'Love, peace, loving-kindness, compassion, faith, hope, joy in God.'

'Welcoming and encouraging.' / 'Sensitivity, kindness, trusting.' / 'To listen, love and care, have fun and play, share knowledge.'

'To be patient and kind and take a real interest in each other. To listen.' / 'Respectful consideration.'

'We best begin by defining "peace" not simply as the absence of violence but more deeply as the presence of the fullness of life. And let us also recognize that this fullness can be felt in varying degrees and ways....

Peace is not simply inner serenity; it is also the give and take of mutually enhancing relationships. Of course, some of these rich relations are intimate and personal... but peace also includes rich relations of a more public and political kind, and politically concerned people rightly resist a reduction of the world to strictly intimate terms. Peace is what happens when people participate in the decisions that affect their lives. It is *democracy*. Peace is also what happens when people's basic needs for food, clothing, shelter, health care, and education are met and when they have opportunities for meaningful and satisfying work. It is *justice*. And peace is what happens when people live in harmony with the earth and other living beings, making space for the whole of life to flourish. It is *ecological well-being*. This more political side of peace is like a three-legged stool. Its platform is respect and care for the community of life and its three legs are justice, democracy, and ecological integrity.

Many people in our world today are working hard for this kind of peace in one of its three aspects. They speak of peace as a just and sustainable world.'

Jay McDaniel

UniFEST presents

PEACE

you, me and the universe

a family event with adult workshops, a kids programme and intergenerational worship

Nightingale Centre

25th - 27th October 2019

kids go free!

(sponsored by the Nightingale Centre)

adults £75 per person



BOOK NOW to avoid disappointment! Deadline - 06/10/19
info@thenightingalecentre.org.uk

kids programme is for participants aged 0 - 11 years of age

Unitarian Women's Group Conference Weekend of 18th to 20th October 2019 The Nightingale Centre, Great Hucklow

'Women and Ageing'



Women of all ages are welcome to this weekend of friendship. We will be looking at the joys and concerns of ageing through workshops, discussion, story-telling and women's experience. The conference will be facilitated by Cathie Masztalerz and Sara Wilcox. Alongside exploration of the issues raised, there will be fun and laughter!

Single or shared standard room	£132
Single occupancy of standard room	£142
Shared or single en-suite	£142
Single occupancy of twin en-suite room	£152

Conference fee (payable on arrival): £10

Booking: Stella Burney: info@thenightingalecentre.org.uk
 or 01298 871218 (accommodation) and register with
 Margaret Robinson: margaretrobinson81@gmail.com

'You can argue all day about whether one person not using straws or going vegan makes a global difference. The point is the mindset. We need to change our thinking from this idea that the earth is a bottomless pit of resources and start acting like what we do matters. Changing the philosophy of cultures and societies starts with individuals changing their own hearts and minds. That's the importance of grassroots action. It's not that my composting will empty landfills of food waste but my changed mind and heart may influence others. And that could spread and change the world.'



Olga Evans

Essex Church AGM Conversation on Welcome and Integration of Newcomers: What Do You Think?



At the church AGM on 12th May we presented the following 'discussion paper' on various issues relating to the welcome and integration of newcomers into our congregation. This led to a brief initial conversation which we would like to continue throughout the year ahead. Please do have a read of the talking points below and consider the three questions that we explored on the day. We would like to hear from congregation members on these issues and we are even wondering about setting up some kind of 'focus group' to take this further later in the year. Feel free to email me (jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk) or Sarah to give your input into this ongoing conversation.

Jane Blackall

Introduction to Discussion Paper:

In recent years we have noticed that the turnover of people at church seems to be getting faster and faster. People may come to London to study or work for just six months or a year and then move away. Many younger people in particular have irregular working hours (including Sunday shifts) or other commitments which make it difficult/impossible to come to church every Sunday (and tricky to say for certain when you're going to be here). These and other economic and social changes are having an impact on our church community which we'd like you to reflect on.

Welcoming People and Making Connections

It can be harder to make meaningful connections with people in this 'high turnover' environment. On any given Sunday we might see faces we don't recognise and it's hard to be sure if it's their first visit (or perhaps we just haven't been here on the same weeks). We want to make newcomers feel truly welcome without feeling 'jumped on' the moment they come through the door. Although we have a nominated 'greeter' each week this is something we'd like everyone to be alert to and to help out with as they are able. Ideally we'd like to think that anybody who comes in will be personally welcomed by someone who will find out their name, something about them, and introduce them to one or two others. Sometimes people can 'slip through the net' and be left standing alone and feeling awkward in the foyer before or after church (though be sensitive - some people might prefer to be left alone). If someone is welcomed well and stays for a good conversation we think that they are more likely to come back (and keep coming). More generally a community is built of such connections and taking care to nurture these connections helps us thrive as a community.

Q1: How can we get more people to take an active part in making sure the quality of our welcome is high, week-in, week-out?

Getting People Involved as Volunteers

The church depends on volunteers to function: taking on Sunday tasks such as stewarding, greeting, and coffee-making; writing items for the newsletter; helping with pastoral support; reading and helping to lead services such as 'Heart and Soul'/communion; serving on the management committee, etc. In the past we've waited until people have been attending quite a while before encouraging them to help with such tasks but due to high turnover people might have come and gone before we get round to asking! Also it's got to be OK for a proportion of those attending to come and go without being roped into tasks if that's what they need. There's a dilemma about when/how much to ask people to help.

Q2: How can we get more people involved in volunteering roles more speedily (without unduly pressurising those people who aren't in a position to take on such tasks for whatever reason)?

Orientating People within Unitarianism

It is easy for people to come to church for quite a long time whilst still being a bit uncertain about what Unitarianism is! We think it is important for congregation members to know at least a little about the wider Unitarianism – for their own understanding – and so they are able to better communicate what we're about to others. This deeper understanding may also be important in getting people to feel a sense of ownership and belonging within Unitarianism. Last year we ran a six-part course called 'How to be a Unitarian' (and followed this up with a half-day condensed version) which was well-received but not everybody can/will spend time on a course. We are unlikely to run courses more than once a year at most so some people will miss out given the high congregational turnover.

Q3: How can we help newcomers (and existing members) to be better informed about Unitarianism and help them feel a greater sense of ownership & belonging within the Unitarian movement?

Services at Essex Church in June



Sunday 2nd June, 11am

'Learning from Gardening'

Service led by Sarah Tinker and Congregation Members

Exploring what we've learnt about life from plants and growing them.

Sunday 9th June, 11am

'Achieving Our Potential'

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

How can we heighten awareness of the differing conditions needed to help each of us flourish in life?

Sunday 16th June, 11am

'Act Justly, Love Mercy'

Led by Revs. Mark Franklin-Bowen and Sarah Tinker

We'll be marking the start of Refugee Week and hearing more of Mark's experiences in Puerto Rico and the benefits for all in creating a more equal world.

Sunday 23rd June, 11am

'What Do We Need?'

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

How can sustainable living help ensure human flourishing?
With our annual flower communion to celebrate our community – please bring a flower if you can. With a summer solstice meditation.

Sunday 30th June, 11am

'Just Coping'

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker and Jeannene Powell

How people get through the tough times by supporting one another.



Warden's Column: Let there be Light - Round 2!



In last October's newsletter, I waxed lyrical about the thrill of nearly managing to get all of the overhead lights in the church on at the same time. Imagine my excitement then when a few weeks ago Brian and I got the ladder out to replace all the bulbs which have failed since with LEDs - and somehow succeeded in also getting halogen lights working in the two problem sockets.

Interestingly, LED bulbs placed in those sockets hummed and flickered - and having consulted Google, that now makes a bit more sense to me.

Dimmer switches work by rapidly switching the electricity circuit to the bulb on and off which reduces the overall amount of energy flowing through the circuit and to the bulb. This is why the voltage sometimes has gaps in it which causes buzzing (and flickering) as the bulb effectively switches itself on and off very quickly. This only affects LED bulbs because others like halogens and incandescent maintain enough heat to cover brief gaps in voltage. LEDs don't.

Standard dimmer switches are designed to operate with incandescent or CFL bulbs of 40 watts or more. The halogen bulbs in the church are even higher wattage than this. However a 40w incandescent bulb is equivalent to a 9w LED bulb, so when you fit a LED into the fitting the wattage is far below the minimum for the fitting which can cause problems. It's therefore important to fit a dimmer switch that's designed for LEDs. Unfortunately none of this actually explains why the LEDs work fine in all the other sockets, but buzz and flicker in two - and yes, we had bought dimmable LEDs.

If anyone reading this has more light to shed on the matter than I've been able to cut and paste from lampshopenline.com, I'd love to hear from you - but in the meantime, let's enjoy complete illumination in the church as long as we can :-)

Jenny Moy