

Oscailt



January 2021

IRELANDS UNITARIAN MAGAZINE

Vol. 17 Nº 1



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Oscailt

Oscailt since January 2005 has become the monthly magazine for Irish Unitarians. Originally it was the calendar for Dublin but due to popular demand by non members this new format was born and continues to grow and flourish.

Oscailt is Published by the
Dublin Unitarian Church
112 St. Stephen's Green, Dublin D02 YP23.

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Front Cover: Screen shot from the WebCam in the church.
(photo P.Spain)

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Oscailt

Our magazine title, *Oscailt*, is inspired by the account of the **Healing of the Deaf and Mute Man** in St. Mark's Gospel, Chapter 7. Jesus commands the man's ears to open up with Aramic word "Ephphatha" - open ! The Irish word *oscailt*, (from the verb *oscail*, to open), means an opening, or, metaphorically, it could mean a revelation or a beginning.

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PodCast of the church service is available on the church website.

LOVE IS THE DOCTRINE OF THIS CHURCH
THE QUEST OF TRUTH IS ITS SACRAMENT
AND SERVICE IS ITS PRAYER.

TO DWELL TOGETHER IN PEACE

TO SEEK KNOWLEDGE IN FREEDOM

TO SERVE MANKIND IN FELLOWSHIP

TO THE END THAT ALL SOULS SHALL GROW IN HARMONY

WITH THE DIVINE

THIS DO WE COVENANT WITH EACH OTHER AND WITH GOD.

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Webcam

Type in www.dublinunitarianchurch.org into the search box of your web browser.

When the list opens, click on **Dublin Unitarian Church**

Below is the title page that will open, on the church website.

Dublin Unitarian Church

Home News About **Services** Life Events Publications Recordings Restoration Events Contact Links

Webcam

**** Update ****

For the latest update on our situation regarding Co-Vid 19 pandemic, please see our [blogpost](#).

To view a webcam of church services, click [here](#)

WELCOME !!

We are a vibrant and lively congregation of people of all backgrounds and ages who worship together in a beautiful 19th century church on St. Stephen's Green in the heart of Dublin city.

Services Life Events Publications

Webcam

see next page →

If you look along the black bar just under the picture of the glass, select 'Services' (one left click). As you can see on the picture it opens a dialogue box titled **Webcam**, (one left click), opens this to a live picture from the church.

The picture on the front cover of this magazine is a screen print of what you will see, open the cover flat to see front and back.

When I opened the initial picture I clicked on the small cross at the bottom right of the picture. By selecting this the picture opens to occupy the full screen. To get back to your web screen press 'Escape' key, its at the top left side of your keyboard, marked '**Esc**'.

Tony Brady sent this picture he took in his back garden.

Last year there was only one, this year there are five.

Bridget said they are the 4 Calling Birds !!



Calling

In the Convent schools I attended the nuns were always hopeful that some of the students might join their convent. Students were regularly encouraged to “pray for a vocation to religious life.” For girls religious life had just one possibility and that was to become a nun. I never joined in that prayer – just in case I got a vocation- I knew that I didn’t want to be a nun.

I remember one lovely nun who used to joke that in Kerry where she came from, there were two marks of a successful family. One was to have a pump in the yard and the second was to have a nun or a priest in the family. This nun grew up in an Ireland that sent priests and nuns to work in every corner of the world.

When the nuns told us to pray for a vocation to religious life; they would add the remark that “marriage” and the “single life” were also vocations; **we** read the message clearly - a vocation to marriage or single life was infinitely inferior to a religious vocation.

Today in Ireland vocations to the religious life have almost vanished. *I was fascinated to hear that for the first time that students joining the seminary at Maynooth dropped in numbers, was in the year that free secondary education was introduced.*

Ireland is now a secular country. We ask our young people “what do you want to be?” We encourage them with advice such as “get a good education and you can be whatever you want”. We don’t tell our children that they were born to find and fulfil their calling and that they should try to discern that they are called to do in life.

In John O’Donohue’s reading it is clear that he believes that every individual has a destiny that is preordained by God. This is a belief that is very strong in the Islamic tradition. Muslims believe that however events transpire; that its God’s will and humans fulfil their religion by submitting their will to the will of God.

There are other theories about human destiny. There is an ancient Greek myth - called the Myth of Er - this myth says that before we are born **we** choose our future life; according to this myth you chose the life you have.

Eastern philosophies teach the Laws of Karma. Karma says that our experiences are the fruits of our actions in the past. We are experiencing the results of all **our** past actions; we have the life we deserve.

Another view is that everything that happens is simply a matter of chance. Are our lives designed according to God's plan, did we choose our life before birth, is our life governed by the laws of Karma, or are we simply at the mercy of chance events? We can't know with certainty; but we all have our personal theory.

We know that this life is important. How we live, our thoughts and our actions have consequences for other people, they affect our planet and most importantly how we live affects our sense of living a fulfilled life.

Irrespective of our beliefs about who, what or how our life is determined; we have all had experiences that demonstrate that we do not control events. We plan for something and for umpteen reasons that plan fails; no matter how hard we work or how we tweak it the plan fails; we console ourselves by saying "it just wasn't meant to happen" At other times things just fall miraculously into place and we comment "it was just meant to be."

This experience of knowing that we are not in control is told in the familiar Bible story in the book of Jonah. Jonah was called by God to go to the city of Nineveh. Jonah **took a ship going in the opposite direction**. God sent a great storm; eventually Jonah is thrown overboard, he is swallowed by a whale and after three days the whale spat Jonah up. Jonah then went to Nineveh and fulfilled his mission. In the Bible stories it is the small details of the story that are important. I will come back to this point later.

The word vocation sounds presumptuous and it is out of date but to be born is to be called. A few are called to assume important positions in the world; most of our callings are mundane but they **are vital**. The overarching and most challenging call is the call to be our authentic self; our greatest challenge is to be true to ourselves. Understanding and then accepting our authentic self is a lifelong calling.

We are called many times in our lifetime these calls are generally temporary nature. We may be called to do certain work, called to be someone's partner in life, called to parent a child. We are **all called to work** to create a more just and fair world. We are called to volunteer and to contribute to the needs of our community and the world. The challenge is to recognise the roles we are called to. To fulfil what we are called to and to know when it is time step back from that calling.

An African American writer called Howard Thurman has advice for how to recognise the work you are called to do. Thurman wrote "Don't ask yourself what the world needs, ask yourself what makes you come alive, and then go and do that because that's what the world needs, people who have come alive."

"Do what makes you come alive" This image of calling is positive; our calling is not a burden. Fulfilling a calling will involve hard work and commitment however the work will not drain us it will energise and enliven us. When we fulfil our true calling we are working with – not against - the current of life's great energy.

Does what you spend your energy doing make you feel alive? If it does the chances are that you are fulfilling your calling. If not it is time to discover what would make you feel alive.

Earlier I said that in Bible stories small details are important. In the story of Jonah when the storm struck Jonah told the sailors that he was the cause of the storm and that they should throw him overboard and the storm would quieten. The sailors tried to avoid throwing Jonah overboard. They worked harder and they prayed. It was with reluctance that they threw Jonah overboard.

When we assume a calling that is not ours; we can be a hindrance to other people and their work. As Jonah endangered the sailors; we can even be injurious to others. Look at the damage caused to children and to Christian churches by clergy who were never called to ministry. Think back to your school days; the difference between the person who had a calling to teach and the one who was teaching just for a job. The real teacher inspired, the jobbers at best bored us, at worse they quenched our imagination and interest in learning.

Jonah spent "three days in the belly of the whale" this detail is important. Three days is not a long time - unless the days are inside of a whale. When we are unfulfilled our world is miserable and

featureless; like the inside of the whale. Sometimes we need to experience the darkest place before like Jonah we are able to begin to think about changing.

The first positive step Jonah took to change his situation was a heartfelt prayer to his God. Prayer, quiet reflection and meditation it is in these quiet moments that we discern our calling. We must never underestimate the need for reflection.

When we identify our calling then we do what we feel is the correct thing and we let it go. When we fulfil our work we must never hold on to the fruits of that work. For example members of this congregation feel called to work with refugees. We look at the need and we do what we can. We hope that we have helped and we let it go. It would be a travesty if we were to use our good deed to inflate our ego.

Dag Hammerskjold said. Do what you can - and the task will rest lightly in your hand, so lightly that you will be able to look forward to the more difficult tests which may await you.

As long as we live we are called for some purpose. The needs of the world are great. The enormity of the world's needs should not deter us from doing what we can to make the world a better place. And in the process of answering our calling we may well find that we have come alive in the process.

Rev. Bridget Spain

Minister Dublin Unitarian Church

Dublin 11th October 2020

ADVENT:

A Time of Hope and Expectation.

According to the Christian calendar we are in the season of Advent.

Advent comes from the Latin “ad-venire”, to come to, arriving, which is a translation of the Greek word “Parousia”

Today is the second Sunday (6th December 2020) of four, leading to celebration on Christmas day. Each Sunday has its own name and symbolism.

The first Sunday is called Prophecy in remembrance of the prophets, particularly Isaiah who foretold the birth of Christ. ch 7; v14 “The young woman is with child and shall bear a son and shall name Him Emmanuel”

The second Sunday is Bethlehem. A reminder of Mary and Joseph's journey to that town. In bygone times Irish people expressed their devotion to Mary in Advent by aiming to say four thousand Hail Marys by Christmas day. It is also associated with John the Baptist who baptised Jesus in the desert. He led the way for Jesus announcing His arrival.

The third is called Shepherd's Sunday, also known as Gaudete Sunday. Gaudete meaning “Rejoice ye”. It reminds us of the joy of the world at the birth of Jesus just as the shepherds were overjoyed on that first Christmas night.

The fourth is Angel's Sunday and honours peace, as sung by the angels: Peace on earth. Goodwill towards men.

On their website the Jesuits tell us:

“It was in Spain and Gaul that the earliest form of Advent appears. The Council of Saragossa in Spain in 380 refers to a three-week period of preparation extending from the 17th December to the Epiphany. It urged the faithful to attend church daily. The Epiphany, like Easter, was a time for the conferring of Baptism. The weeks before were a time of preparation”. Over time its connection to Baptism was lost. It became four weeks of preparation for Christmas – a time of waiting and expectancy for the coming of the Lord. A time of penance encouraged by the preaching of Irish monks. “It is now consid-

ered a season of joyful and spiritual expectation and is no longer a penitential season.” according to the Jesuits.

They also tell us that “The origins of the Advent wreath go back to pre-Christian times. To the sun-worshipping tribes of northern Europe. It was one of the many symbols of light which were used at the end of November and early December, that time of year when our pagan ancestors celebrated the month of Yule by lighting torches and fires. To appease the sun god and to ensure his return in the darkest time of the year, they took what may have been a cartwheel, wound with green and decorated with lights, and offered it to the deity. The wreath itself, which is made of evergreens, signifies continuous life. The circle of the wreath, which has no beginning nor end symbolizes the eternity of God, the immortality of the soul and the everlasting life we find in Christ. It was in the 16th century in eastern Germany that the custom was Christianised and the wreath made its appearance in people’s homes as a religious symbol of Advent”.

Five candles adorn the wreath, three purple, one pink and one white. On the first Sunday a purple candle signifying Hope is lighted. Another purple on the second Sunday is Love. The third Sunday is the pink candle reminding us to be joyful. We light the third purple candle on the fourth Sunday to symbolize Peace and the white one is lighted on Christmas day.

“Advent is concerned with that very connection between memory and hope which is so necessary to man. Advent’s intention is to awaken the most profound and basic emotional memory within us. To awaken the heart’s memory so that it can discern the star of hope. It is the beautiful task of Advent to awaken in all of us memories of goodness and thus to open doors of hope”. (Pope Benedict XVI.)

One of my memories of Advent is, as a child I was unable to send or receive letters from my beloved auntie Kitty. From the time I learned to write I enclosed a letter to her whenever my father, her brother, sent her one. She always replied and I got my very own letter. She was a nun in Bristol in England. The congregation observed the penitential rules of Advent. So, she could neither send nor receive post. Unfortu-

nately, I don't have any of my letters nor hers from that time. We stayed close exchanging many letters and visits over the years until her death at the age of 95.

In lockdown, it feels as if we are in a protracted season of the old Advent with different austere conditions. In fact, a good number of us are a testament to the good life, bemoaning the shrinkage of our clothes. But our deprivations are very real, particularly not being able to meet friends or not having close contact with our loved ones. It takes advertising to "Get" the sentiment as in the SuperValu ad. The young boy Conor is living in hope, anticipation and preparation and constantly asking "is he really coming"? What joy, we all feel when he welcomes and hugs his grandad.

And yet there are positive aspects to our confinement. We have more time for reflection and sharing news and memories on the phone or via zoom. Particularly about people, events and places that made an impression and difference in our lives. Taking up crafts, gardening, reading, baking and finding time to cross off items on long lists. We are spending more time in nature. Nature and wildlife are renewing itself and we are grateful for that. One thing that is particularly noticeable is the way in which most of us are aware of others taking care to respect their space. People are more thoughtful and pleasant, helping to ease our transition through this pandemic. We are all in this together. We must be aware of the other. A great number of people are living very differently from what was the norm particularly those working from home.

Penitential Advent ends in celebration on Christmas day. We have no idea when Covid 19 will end. But the human race is resilient. Hopefully the manic life in which so many are caught up will ease. We live in hope and expectation that we will experience a better way of life, where peace and joy abound and where we all live in harmony with nature and the Devine.

"Life is a constant Advent season: we are continually waiting to become, to discover, to complete, to fulfil. Hope, struggle, fear, expectation and fulfilment are all part of our advent experience. The world is not as just, not as loving, not as whole as we know it can and should be. But the coming of Christ and his pres-

ence among us – as one of us – give us reason to live in hope: that light will shatter the darkness, that we can be liberated from our fears and prejudices, that we are never alone or abandoned. May this Advent season be a time for bringing hope, transformation and fulfilment into the Advent of our lives”.

Monica Cremins .
Dublin Unitarian Church

December 2020

No Pope No Party

I like listening to music from a jazz album entitled *Joy in Spite of Everything*, composed by the Italian jazz pianist Stefano Bollani. I find it upbeat and uplifting music. One of the compositions in the album is called, intriguingly, *No Pope No Party*. This refers to a tradition in papal elections. White smoke emerging from the Sistine Chapel in Rome signals the election of a new Pope and a cause for celebration by the cardinal-electors, if not an actual celebration party. Conversely, black smoke emerging means no Pope as yet and presumably, no party.

My address this morning is about the white smoke. It is, unapologetically, about celebration, a celebration of celebration. The topic, I hope, is timely given that this Sunday is the first Sunday in Advent. Advent is the season of the liturgical year observed in most Christian denominations as a time of expectant waiting and preparation for the celebration of the Nativity of Christ at Christmas. Advent means 'coming' in Latin - the coming of Jesus into the world. Christians generally use the four Sundays and weeks of Advent to prepare and remember the real meaning of Christmas.

But remembering the real meaning of Christmas is a daunting task, particularly during Advent itself, when commercial and material pressures can cloud our understanding and celebration of the religious and spiritual dimension. The high street collides with the Nativity crib. The secular and the sacred comele in sometimes stressful ways. Workaday human tasks can submerge a connection to the transcendent and the divine.

I have been attending Sunday service at this Unitarian church for some ten years. During my early years of attendance I was somewhat taken aback when, in her address one Sunday, our minister Rev. Bridget Spain, suggested that Jesus may have taken, even enjoyed, a glass of wine. The God, and Son of God, of my familiarity were stern, disciplined, and at times given to retribution. Drinking wine, worse taking pleasure in it, were not part of my understanding of the divine. Drinking wine, for good or bad, was a human pursuit.

But as the years moved on, so my reflection on the divine. I

came to accept that the human and the divine are inextricably entwined. Metaphors, as explanations of meaning, only work when they resonate with our daily, at times messy, lives. My delight with the metaphorical richness of the Bible stories and parables, linked over time to *my* understanding, however fallible, of what it is to be human, led me to see the secular and the sacred, the worldly and the spiritual, the human and the divine, as imperceptibly interwoven. This interwovenness is expressed beautifully in the words of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, the French idealist philosopher, Jesuit priest and paleontologist. I quote: ‘You are not a human being in search of a spiritual experience. You are a spiritual being immersed in a human experience.’ (End of quote.) Balancing and navigating the human and the divine – *in whatever you perceive the divine to be* – is an ongoing process, even struggle, that finds resolution, however temporarily, on occasions. But the struggle provides reward in giving meaning and insight into how to lead a worthwhile life in a spirit of Unitarianism.

My address is about celebration. A fascinating celebration is recounted in The Gospel according to John – the wedding feast at Cana. There is certainly divine intervention here. Jesus converts water to wine, a generous 150 gallons at least. But most other aspects of the story are very recognisably everyday human concerns. I quote John (2: 1-5). On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ²Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. ³When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”

The fear and possible shame of a host running out of food or drink at a celebratory occasion is very real. Jesus’ action enables the feast to continue merrily, indeed with the added plus that the new wine is of first-rate quality. The chief steward at the wedding feast says to the bridegroom, ‘Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.’ (John 2:10).

The changing of water into wine at the wedding at Cana is generally regarded as the first miracle in Jesus’ public ministry. He will go on to perform at least six other such miracles or ‘signs’ of his divinity, in order, in the words of John, ‘to reveal his glory’. These

others are about healing, raising the dead, feeding a multitude, and walking on water. Why did Jesus choose the wedding at Cana as the first sign of his public ministry? Granted his mother did ask his help. But John detects a reluctance initially on the part of Jesus to intervene. Perhaps he came to the view that a wedding celebration, a great family and communal get together, with a couple about to face the challenges of life ahead, and the possibility of new human life being created together, was indeed a most suitable occasion to interweave the divine and the human. The miraculous and the eternal might co-evolve with mere humanity in all its impermanence.

The wedding feast at Cana is much imagined in paintings, particularly those of the Renaissance and early Enlightenment. A cursory look at a number of these confirms a joyful scene but also a surprisingly inclusive one. Women fully partake in the festivities. It is, after all, the entreaty of Mary, mother of Jesus, that ensures the celebration continues. The great Venetian painter, Tintoretto, depicts the feast with women seated at the table, in the centre of his painting, highlighted in a wonderful white luminosity — and actively engaged in distributing the new wine.

Let us turn to a more recent celebration. When our Church reopened with mandatory limited attendance in summer, a goodly number of the congregation, usually a dozen or so, went across to St Stephen's Green afterwards. They, or rather we, sat on the grass or on fold-up chairs, suitably distanced, drank coffee, ate cake, and talked for an hour or so. The conversation was easy and funny, but as with Unitarians, it often got serious, even philosophical. The French have the concept of the *café philosophique*, or *café-philo*, where those present can enjoy their coffee or glass of wine while earnestly discussing the existential meaning of life. Well, for a glorious couple of summer months we had our *jardin-philo*. And the time is memorably celebrated in a poem by the one of the *jardin's habitués*, the redoubtable Maeve Edwards. Entitled 'Coffee in the Time of Covid', it was published in the September edition of *Oscailt*.

Coffee in the Time of Covid

Who would have thought we'd be sprawled on the grass, Picnicking?
Jane in a fold up chair,
The August day warm, a gap between the showers.
Passers-by smile as wisps of conversation waft on the breeze:

- *The Apostrophe Preservation Society*;
- *Transubstantiation*;
- *Gaia*;
- *Ruby Wax*;
- *Lemon Soap and Blazes Boylan*.

Who are these people making daisy chains and talking of semi colons with such ardour?

CÁ ACHAS ORM!

The Unitarians are on fire in Stephen's Green!

The Damer Hall never had it this good.

We have lost two great poets this year, Eavan Boland and Derek Mahon. Evan Boland's beautifully elegiac poem 'Quarantine' reminds us how the memory of the Great Hunger still resides within the DNA of each Irish person. Derek Mahon's determinately optimistic poem 'Everything is Going to be All Right' has captured our national mood in the face of Covid.

So, I would like to tell you a story about mere poets, the gods, and happy coincidence. This story takes place at the first International Writers' Conference, held in Dun Laoghaire in June 1988. The three-day conference, which coincided with Bloomsday, was sponsored by the Irish Arts Council as one of the highlights of the then Dublin Millennium Festival. The theme of the conference was 'Literature as Celebration'.

An International Writers' Conference was not my usual stomping ground. I attended because of a chance street encounter with a longstanding friend from childhood, Lar Cassidy, then the literature officer of the Arts Council, and the organiser-in-chief and director of the conference. He sold me on it, I went, and what a three days I had! Some 30 authors, mostly international, participated – the great and the good from the world of literature as far as I could see. Poets were well represented, including the Russian American poet, Joseph Brodsky, the Caribbean poet, Derek Walcott, and our own Seamus Heaney. There was lots of lively debate. Brodsky, for example, declared during his address, 'If the priests can't take a stand for the Ten Commandments, at least a writer can.'

At the morning coffee break on the final day, Friday, I found myself, in an absolute coincidence, in the company, of Brodsky, Walcott and Heaney, with just two other attendees, while Brodsky

was giving forth on the beauty of Venice. What I did not know at the time, was that Brodsky had just been awarded the Nobel prize for literature. Derek Walcott would be awarded the same prize in 1992, and Seamus Heaney in 1995, just seven years later. Thus, in retrospect, I would come to see myself, albeit immodestly, as being in the company of the gods that Friday morning. Even today, it seems an incredible and happy coincidence. But it does lead one to respect and celebrate coincidence. As someone once said, 'Coincidence is God's way of remaining anonymous'.

Returning to Advent. This Christmas will be different, other than for children for whom it will remain as wondrous as ever. Myself, I like Christmas time, but find it goes on too long and too relentlessly. I often feel caught up in a whirlwind. Is an alternative possible?

Slow Food is a global, grassroots movement, founded in Italy in 1989 to prevent the disappearance of local food cultures and traditions, counteract the rise of fast life, and combat people's dwindling interest in the food they eat, where it comes from, and how our food choices affect the world around us. The Slow Food movement believes food is tied to many other aspects of life, including culture, politics, agriculture, and the environment. In sum, it seeks to resist the McDonaldization of civic society.

So, I dream of a Slow Christmas, less frenetic, and less frantic. A Slow Christmas (Slow with a capital S) might allow us to enjoy our family, friends, food, drink, and partying in a more measured way a more mindful celebration that gives us a chance to reflect on Christmas' deeper meaning. That meaning is inevitably bound up in the Nativity and the story of the birth of Jesus Christ in a stable in Bethlehem. Whatever meaning we each choose to find in the Nativity, whether profoundly religious, or metaphorically rich, or just a Biblical tale of migration and birth, it remains a truly great story.

Again, not surprisingly, many painters have sought to depict the Nativity scene in the stable, including the great Italian painter, Caravaggio. His painting 'Adoration of the Shepherds' recounts, after the Gospel of Luke, that 'when the shepherds went in haste, they found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger' (2:16). Caravaggio, in his typical style, paints the scene with realism, dramatic colour, and profound emotion. Its breath-

taking beauty enables the viewer to witness the traditional holiness of the Nativity scene, being enriched with a narrative of ordinary human persistence.

I conclude with the Nigerian-American writer and art historian, Teju Cole, describing Caravaggio's canvas. 'The painting is a pool of burnt umber, swirling around the placental red of the robes worn by the Virgin and one of the shepherds. This is no sweet family scene, but rather a document of roughness and need. Why should a newborn and his mother be in such a dirty place, barely protected from the elements? What corner of a refugee camp is this? Why do these people not have a home?

I wish you all a Slow and peaceful Advent.

Aidan O'Driscoll

Dublin Unitarian Church

PEN-PAL

Possible Connection with Unitarian from United State

Dear Rev. Bridget Spain,
I hope this email finds you safe and well during this tumultuous time in all our lives.

I am writing with an unusual inquiry. But first, I should provide the story behind my request.

About 15 years ago, I took my parents on a trip to Ireland, a place very near and dear to our family ~ deep Irish roots. I have traveled to Ireland for a variety of reasons, both personal and professional, more than 10 times. While on our trip, I surprised my parents by taking them to the Unitarian Church in Dublin.

We attended as a family, the First Unitarian Church of Chicago, Illinois. When my parents relocated to Bloomington, Indiana, they joined the University Unitarian Church.

This morning, while talking by phone to my 98-year-old mother, she asked me if I could research the address for the Unitarian Church in Dublin. She shared that she is hoping to connect with a senior member(s) of your congregation. In her words, “I would love to have a pen pal” with a member of the Dublin Unitarian Church. My mother is not computer literate so all correspondence would have to be the old-fashioned way of communicating through letter writing. Both of my parents (98 and 99 years young) are incredibly sharp with wonderful life experiences to share and exchange.

If this is something you believe is possible, then we can communicate further about the logistics.

I appreciate in advance your consideration of my request and look forward to hearing from you.

With deep respect,

Paula Gardner

Contact details from Rev.Bridget Spain

Brian Friel

In my final year at UCC, I played the part of S.B.O'Donnell in Brian Friel's early, brilliant and ground breaking play *Philadelphia Here I Come*. Although only in my early twenties, it was somewhat ridiculous for me to be playing 'Screwballs' but this is what happens in University: somebody has to play the old people.

After qualifying I toured Germany with a company visiting gymnasiums in a Culture through theatre project. To address the emotional cost of emigration in Ireland we used an extract from *Philadelphia Here I Come* and this time I played Screwballs son Gar(public).

I eventually left Ireland to teach chemistry in recently independent Zimbabwe and as a going-away present, my friends gave me *Selected plays of Brian Friel* and appropriately wrote messages on the fly leaf. One said "Promise me you won't try and do any of these with the Zimbabweans. It wouldn't work." Thankfully I didn't follow that advice and in a production of *Philadelphia Here I Come* I played Gar(private). In fact it did work and was intimately understood by our Zimbabwean audience, a country with a similar colonial history and familiar with emigration.

Back in Ireland in 1995 I went to see *Philadelphia Here I Come* at the Abbey and that night I met my now wife of 23 years. Philadelphia strikes again.

Although Philadelphia was the play that introduced me to Friel's work it was his play *Making History* about the life of Hugh O'Neill and the Flight of the Earls that introduced to Friel himself some 12 years later in 2007.

That year was the 400th anniversary of The Flight of the Earls. I wrote to Friel asking for his permission to stage *Making History* in site specific locations associated with O'Neill's journey. To my great delight he was supportive of the idea. This started an almost two year tour with Ouroboros theatre company from the battle site in Kinsale throughout Ireland, and then through France, Belgium, Switzerland and finally ending with a production of *Making History* in the Irish College in Rome. A visit to O'Neill's grave in The Church of St Pietro de Montorio completed an extraordinary journey. O'Neill's grave lies hidden under a carpet at the Gospel side of the altar and it was very emotional when the beautiful ornate gravestone embedded in the floor was finally revealed.

All along the way Friel kept in touch to see how it was going,

mentioning that he had a particular grá for this play. Unfortunately around that time he had suffered a stroke so couldn't join us anywhere along the way much as he wanted to. However, we were invited to do the play one last time at the MacGill summer school in Glenties, Donegal in 2009.

I was delighted that Brian was going to be there. Walking out on stage as Hugh O'Neill I sneaked a look into the audience. Sitting in the front row were three of the most iconic Irishmen of my lifetime. Brian Friel, Seamus Heaney and John Hume. I took a deep breath and reminded myself to 'Be careful what you wish for'. Thankfully the show went very well. Most importantly Friel was pleased and I and the other actors spent most of the rest of a long night with him and getting to know him. There was much laughter and gossip and general craic. From that point, until he died in 2015 I had many more meetings and correspondences with Brian. I have a folder of letters in his inimitable style, typed and then corrected by hand, which I treasure.

Shortly before he died I went to see him and Anne at their home in Greencastle. I sat on the side of his bed, Brian lying there with his dog and although he was dying, we still had the gossip and the craic in so far as you do under these circumstances. I knew when I left him that it was goodbye.

During the ease in lockdown this summer I went back to visit Friel's grave in Glenties. His gravestone lies flat, like O'Neills's and the beautiful black marble reflects Brian's treasured Donegal sky. It is a fitting place for him to rest among his people.

Sleep well old friend.

Denis Conway

Dublin Unitarian Church

Read on RTE1 'Sunday Miscellany' 13th December 2020.



**Dublin Unitarian Book Club's
choice for November 2020.**



The Long Petal of the Sea

by
Isabel Allende

This book could be described as an historical novel, one of the most remarkable I have read. It will appeal to anyone interested in the human condition, politics, love affairs, religion, and history.

The author adopts the Dickensian technique of starting with a group of people and their concerns, and then switching to another completely different group in a different place. These two are gradually and inevitably drawn together to become inextricably linked, and this is the story of the book in essence. The characters are fictitious but modelled on real people. Historical figures are recognisable and very real.

The horrors of the Spanish Civil War, and later of the Pinochet regime in Chile figure largely in the history of these two countries. In my opinion the opening section set in Spain is unrivalled and sets the scene for the rest of the book; it is followed at inordinate length by the adventures of a wealthy Chilean family wandering around Europe, who suddenly had to get back to their own country at the outset of war in 1939. They returned to their Santiago mansion filled with servants.

Soon, immigrants began to appear, mainly from Spain, including our first group, who are given refuge by the wealthy Chilean family, and who figure as main characters from now on. (This is just too coincidental, and would hardly happen in reality.) The picture of Chile as painted here is one of gross inequality in the reign of money and privilege. We are given an insight into the shanty towns, where later, during the Pinochet regime, the doctor, a renowned cardiologist, insisted on setting up a consulting room in the shantytown near him.

The pampered and beautiful daughter – you guessed it - becomes involved with one of the immigrants from our original group, with bizarre results. The lives of these people were ruled by fear of divine reprisals and of purgatory, and by slavish devotion to the clergy, who were not exactly squeaky-clean: but that didn't stop them. Not to be giving away too much, one might say that "the truth will out."

There are aspects of the book that seemed rather unbalanced, in

terms of what was described and what was omitted, and the amount of time given to relatively unimportant actions, and maybe a little padding. A translation from Spanish or any language will always suffer mis-interpretation.

Dorene Groocock

Dublin Unitarian Church

If you know little about the Spanish Civil War or the military coup in Chile under Pinochet then this family saga is an OK introduction. The family at the centre of the story are the Dalmaus who were on the republican side in the Spanish Civil War pitched against Franco's right wing army. The main protagonist is Victor Dalmau and Allende based him on a real person she had met in Venezuela when they were both in exile from Pinochet's dictatorship in Chile. The fictional Victor and his family endure not only the civil war in Spain but also the horror of concentration-like camps set up in France to cope with the thousands of Spanish refugees who came over the border. The Dalmaus then emigrate on the 'Winnipeg', a boat chartered by the poet Pablo Neruda to rescue selected Spanish refugees and take them to Chile. They embark on a new life in Chile until Pinochet's take-over in the 70's when they are again faced with being exiles in Venezuela. Despite these epic events I found the characters were not drawn to their full potential and were at times lacking a certain amount of depth, which is unfortunate as they were certainly interesting people living out extraordinary lives. Perhaps it was Allende's matter-of-fact and flat prose style which didn't bring the characters alive for me or the descriptions of the events they were living through. The plot was a bit too neat and predictable for such momentous times. Despite some of its disappointments it was a good read.

Alison Claffey.

Dublin Unitarian Church

Dublin Unitarian Church

112 St.Stephens Green Dublin D02 YP23.

Service 11.00a.m.

Sunday Rota for January 2021

3rd January

Service	Rev.Bridget Spain	<i>“Stop being so Religious” (Hafiz)</i>
Reader	Gavin O’Duffy	

10th January

Service	Rev.Bridget Spain	<i>A fresh approach to Christianity</i>
Reader	Denise Dunne	

17th January

Service	Rev.Bridget Spain	<i>Holocaust Memorial Day</i>
Reader	David Heap	

24th January

Service	Tony Brady	<i>Sorry Wrong Number</i>
Reader	Andy Pollak	

31st January

Service	Rev.Bridget Spain	<i>The Old Religions</i>
Reader	Jennifer Buller	



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BLESSED
ARE THE
POOR
IN SPIRIT
FOR THEIRS IS
THE KINGDOM
OF
HEAVEN

BLESSED
ARE THEY
THAT MOURN
FOR THEY SHALL
BE COMFORTED
BLESSED
ARE THE MEEK
FOR THEY SHALL
INHERIT THE
EARTH

BLESSED
ARE THEY
THAT HUNGER
AND THIRST
AFTER
RIGHTEDOUSNESS
FOR THEY
SHALL BE
FILLED

BLESSED
ARE THE
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FOR THEY SHALL
OBTAIN MERCY
BLESSED
ARE THE PURE
IN HEART
FOR THEY SHALL
SEE GOD