

# 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.

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**Front Cover:** Our minister holding Blue and Yellow flowers representing the colours of Ukraine.  
(photo P. Spain)

## CONTENTS

**War in Europe**  
*Rev. Bridget Spain* 2

**Unitarian Refugee Welcome Committee**  
*Sheila Hanley* 7

**Book Club's Review**  
*Alison Claffey* 9

**AGM notice** 12

## 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 mans 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.

# War in Europe

The title for 20<sup>th</sup> March address was published as “Irish Missionaries to the Continent”. I intended to explore the stories of Colmcille, Columbanus, Gall, Virgilius and other Irish monks who went to the Continent as Christian missionaries between the 6<sup>th</sup> – the 8<sup>th</sup> Centuries.

These monks left a legacy that is still visible. The great Cathedral in Salzburg is dedicated to Virgilius. St.Gallen in Switzerland is named for Gall. In the sixth century Columbanus founded an Abbey in Bobbio in Northern Italy which survived until the Nineteenth century when it was closed by Government decree.

The monks left Ireland with a burning ambition to bring Christianity to Europe. Some left because of family disputes perhaps even under a bit of a cloud. No one asked them for passports, residency permits or a work visa. When I came to write the address looking back into a Golden Period of Irish history seemed unimportant in the face of what is now happening in Europe.

At the end of the Second World War the European Union was established to prevent conflict in Europe. Since 1945 Europe has enjoyed a prolonged time of peace with a corresponding growth in prosperity. Europe has ensured a reliable supply of cheap food. Living as we do on the Western Fringe of Europe our membership of the EU has made us a more open, outward looking people. Individual personal freedoms have flourished since we joined the European Union.

For the first time in almost eighty years Europe is experiencing war. It is a war where one of the combatants has a nuclear arsenal. It is being fought in a country that has nuclear power stations. Thirty six years ago the world’s worst nuclear accident occurred in the Ukraine.

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Towards the end of the last millennium scientists intensified their warnings of the dangers posed by increasing world temperatures. The first international conference on climate change was in 1995. During the following quarter of a century Governments made many promises of change; few if any fulfilled the commitments made; because changing how we live will cost money. Perhaps it was Greta Thunberg's taunt of "more Blah, Blah, - blah" but in 2021 there seemed to be a dawning realization that change was imperative. The developed countries began to take action; the world seemed united in their commitment to lessen our footprint on a stressed planet.

The first twenty odd years of the new millennium have been eventful. There was 9/11. The financial crash. America went to war with Iraq and sent troops into Afghanistan. The Arab spring blossomed briefly but was defeated with great brutality. A de-stabilised Middle East, the return to power of the Taliban in Afghanistan, poverty caused by Climate Change all these events came together and created a tsunami of refugees seeking refuge in Europe. And of course 2020 brought the Pandemic.

Just over two years ago members of this congregation joined a Government scheme to provide support for refugees. Under this scheme Groups agree to sponsor a refugee family for a period of two years. Within a short few weeks we were ready to welcome and support a Syrian family based in a refugee camp in Lebanon. The sight of Syrian homes bombed into dust evoked widespread sympathy.

Covid put the scheme on hold – but we did continue to work with the Irish Refugee Council. Late last year a refugee fleeing from the Taliban in Afghanistan was allocated to our group. She is making progress in settling in Ireland. Now war has broken out in the Ukraine, millions of refugees have left Ukraine for safety and Irish people have rightly opened their hearts and their homes to these women and children.

This latest flood of displaced people means that refugees from Afghanistan are forgotten, Syrian refugees have taken a step down the ladder of our concern and this does not even consider the situation of refugees in Palestine, or the victims of war in Yemen.

We Humans are such a contradiction. We are social beings. We need one another. Yet we fight war after war. Why is that we can't learn that war is futile. Almost three thousand years ago the Jewish Prophet Micah wrote longingly of what peace could look like "they shall beat their swords into plough shares and their spears into pruning hooks". The Buddha taught. "Never does hatred cease by hating in return. Only through love can hatred come to an end. Victory breeds hatred. The conquered dwell in sorrow and resentment".

When an army goes to war very often it is with Prayers to God to bless the endeavor; soldiers march to war to the beat of music. What an insult to God. What a travesty of Christ's teaching.

The Chinese philosopher Lau Tzu understood the implications of war. He said that the mark of a great leader is that he **"Goes to battle gravely, with sorrow and great compassion as if he were attending a funeral"**.

*(re-read these words)*

Modern leaders certainly ignore the words of Lau Tzu. They go to war with a television broadcast or address a stadium packed with people who are not allowed to speak the truth. The adage that Truth is the first casualty of war still holds true.

America began the second Iraqi war with "operation shock and awe" It sent its troops into Afghanistan with a promise to support the people of Afghanistan "for however long their support was needed". They stayed until it was politically expedient for them to leave.

Russia of course is not involved in a war. Their troops are on "special military manouvers" they are assisting the local citizens. Anyone who dares to contradict this lie will at

best end up in jail. Silenced as all political opposition has been silenced in Russia for the past twenty two years.

The Jewish prophet Micah's wish was that soldiers would "I beat their swords into plough shares and their spears into pruning hooks". If only it were that simple. it's impossible to beat a cluster bomb into a plough share and anti- aircraft artillery is not very useful for pruning vines"

In November in Glasgow – less than four months ago. World Leaders committed themselves to being more caring of the Earth. The time had come when the developed world would wean itself form the use of fossil fuels.

During the past month Planes and artillery has pounded the land of Ukraine with bombs. There is constant black smoke as homes burn unchecked. Nature and life, human and animal are being destroyed, the land poisoned. Last week Mr.Boris Johnston, the host of the COP-26 summit on climate change, visited the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia requesting an increase in oil production.

How are we to live through these difficult days? We can't bury our heads in the sand. We must take care of our mental health. Don't binge watch reports from the war zone. We must work not to become bitter or give into despair.

We remember that Russian soldiers are being killed in a war that is not of their making. Russian mothers and fathers are losing their children. Russian tears, Ukrainian tears, Afghan tears, Syrian tears are the same. They are the outward sign of intense pain. The only people who win in war are the manufacturers of arms.

We must help the victims of war in any way we can. We welcome refugees and continue to welcome them in the long term. We must be generous in providing aid for refugees.

Fifteen hundred years ago Europe was in the dark ages. Ireland was a centre of Christianity and learning. Irish Monks brought the light of Christianity to a Europe in turmoil. I hope that once again Ireland will live it's Christian values in how we care for the people who come to us for sanctuary. And

those in need from war.

It is important to make time for a spiritual practice. Come to church, pray, meditate and reflect. Try not to let war blind you to the good in the world.

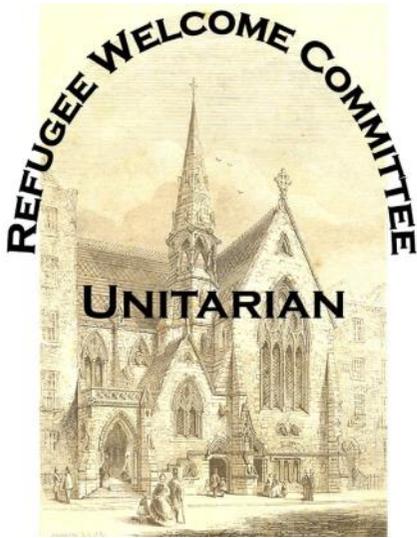
More than ever we need to care for the earth; caring for the earth is a two way process. If we care for the earth it cares for us. Never underestimate the restorative power of nature. In this spring time the earth is coming back to life. Plant something, watch it grow and blossom this is the only antidote to the destruction of war.

These days will pass we pray that peace will soon return to Europe and the world. We pray for peace beginning with ourselves and spreading out to all humanity

*Rev. Bridget Spain*

Minister Dublin Unitarian Church

© Dublin 20<sup>th</sup> March 2022



Dear Friends

At a time of great international distress it gives me enormous pleasure to share some excellent news with you. The Managing Committee gave our Unitarian Refugee Welcome Committee the go ahead to designate February as refugee month in the church, to address each of the four Sunday services on our work and to benefit from each of the four Sunday service collections. Our committee knows this community and we did have high hopes for a decent influx of

much needed funds. However your generosity has really blown us away. The total amount collected at the four services and from envelopes left in the box is an astonishing €4,461. That is more than 11 hundred euros a week for 4 consecutive weeks. It really is wonderful.

In addition we set up a Go Fund me page which was publicised through the weekly newsletter and circulated to our wider network. Again this received great support from members and their friends and through this we raised a further €3,155.

That brings the total raised to an astonishing €7,616 in a single month of generosity.

You might be avidly watching the arrival of the Ukrainian refugees and the promises of Government support for them and you might be wondering what our welcome committee needs all the money for. It is primarily to bridge the gap between the immediate needs of our young Afghan refugee, whom we call in public Hajira to protect her privacy, and the coming on stream of Government supports. Suffice it to say that there is a huge amount of red tape and delays in delivery. For example Hajira's housing need has just been recognised officially five months after she arrived. Without our financial support she would not have been living in her comfortable small flat in North Dublin. She would have been in the emer-

gency centre in Mosney and not getting the opportunities she now has like : night classes; orientation visits around Dublin city; the opportunity to help the Irish Refugee council with interpretation services for other Afghan refugees and an internship in an accountancy firm. You will gather from this list of her activities that she is a very special young woman and is keen to strive towards independence and self-development.

One of the saddest things we had to witness was her intense anxiety on behalf of her family members who are still stuck in Afghanistan in dire circumstances. We are trying to secure a visa on humanitarian grounds but it is very difficult. So we decided to take on the task of trying to secure family admission for her mother. This requires the refugee to show that they are able to support the family member for a year. Thanks to your generosity we were able to make that pledge on her behalf. We have also decided to make a small monthly contribution to enable her family members to feed themselves. We hadn't anticipated these demands and without your support it would not be possible to meet them.

Finally, while supporting Hajira is wonderfully rewarding, it can also be very stressful trying to do our best for her and to get over the red tape and paperwork. Your beyond generous response to our appeals in February is a great morale boost for our group and really makes us feel that we have a whole community behind us cheering us on in deed as well as in word.

If you wish to make a donation to our Go Fund Me page, please go to <https://gofund.me/49cd60c8> (see back cover)

*A thousand thanks from all of us.*

*Sheila Hanley.*

On behalf of the Unitarian Refugee Welcome Committee



Dublin Unitarian Book Club's  
choice for February 2022.



# LILY

by

*ROSE TREMAIN*

## ‘A TALE OF REVENGE’

Lily's story is set in 1860's Victorian England with all its high moral values laced with hypocrisy and double standards. From the outset we know that Lily has committed a murder for she tells us so. She is haunted by her crime and she persecutes herself to the point of illness as she fears discovery and subsequent punishment by hanging.

The reader has to wait before finding out who the victim is and why a young girl of sixteen would be driven to commit such a heinous act but when we do find out the circumstances it is hard to condemn her, there are no moral certainties in this book.

Lily's beginnings read like a folktale. Abandoned at birth and left in a sack at a park gate in London she is rescued by a young constable, Sam Trench. He takes her to the Coram Foundling hospital where she is nursed back to life and as was the policy of the hospital Lily is fostered out for the first six years of her life.

Lily's foster home is the idyllic Rookery Farm in the Suffolk countryside run by Nelly and Buck Perkins with their three young sons. While farm life was hard with animals to tend to, fields to be cleared of stones and endless domestic chores, it was a happy home mostly due to Nelly's loving nature. Nelly and Lily form a close bond and Nelly teaches Lily how to sew as she knows she is going to need skills for the future.

This happy life is shattered for Lily as she has to return 'by law' to the Coram Foundling hospital. It is a very moving description of the separation of Nelly and Lily at the orphanage as both are heartbroken and Lily cannot understand why she has to live there. She is angry and rebellious, she runs away with her

friend Bridget, is caught and returned where punishment awaits them both.

But it is Lily's defiance and disobedience that singles her out for particular cruelties by one of the upstanding members of staff, nurse Maud. She tells them "they were evil and that all through their lives this evil would be in them". Yet it is nurse Maud who is evil and subjects Lily and some of the other girls from when they are about ten years old to her own form of punishment she calls absolution.

Many of our readers found this part of the book very hard to read as it dealt with childhood cruelty and abuses. The book could easily have descended into misery literature but the author has Lily retain an essence of goodness as she goes out into the world at sixteen.

Lily starts working for Belle Prettywood at her Wig Emporium and because of her sewing skills she becomes one of her best workers. Belle is a very successful businesswoman and socialite. She has many paramours and knows the value of connections, especially in a male dominated world. She favours Lily and becomes a sort of mentor, taking her to the opera where their wigs are on show and offers her lodgings in her home, but Lily refuses knowing she must live alone with the guilt of her crime. However, Lily nurses Belle when she is ill with shingles and half confesses her crime to her, saying that she had been violated and suffered but had put an end to it, but Belle cannot believe Lily could ever kill anyone.

During this time Lily becomes reacquainted through her church with Sam Trench the constable who rescued her. He has been keeping an eye on her all through the years and is now a superintendent and a married man, his wife Joyce tells Lily "he says it is the most important thing he ever did in his life". Strong feelings develop between Lily and Sam and although nothing has happened between them she fears he will find out her crime and bring her to justice. She has decided that she will only confess the fullness of the murder to him and so when he comes to her flat one night she thinks he has found her out and so tells him the full story. But Sam did not suspect her and his reason for calling was to confess his love with the hope of a liaison. He is stunned and in shock but he does not arrest her. He gives her one day to disappear and never to return to London.

With Belle's help Lily returns to the only place she loves, Rookery Farm. It is only Nelly living there now with her son Jessie and they welcome her back like a long lost daughter. Lily knows she cannot ever

be totally at peace as she still has the guilt of her crime and the fear of being caught hanging over her. But in the meantime she will care for her beloved Nelly in her dotage and help Jessie rebuild the farm, while always looking over her shoulder for the long arm of the law.

Most of the book club readers found it a good read despite the harshness depicted of childhood cruelty and the poverty of the times.

*Alison Claffey*

Dublin Unitarian Church

## **Calling all Volunteers**

Community Connect is a non-profit organisation that is run by volunteers and aims to support pregnant women and new mothers in a tangible way.

We need helpers to sort and pack items such as cloths, cots and buggies to be delivered to women and families.

In Tallaght, Tuesday, Wednesday morning  
and one Saturday a month.

Contact:- [admin@communityconnect.ie](mailto:admin@communityconnect.ie)  
[www.communityconnect.ie](http://www.communityconnect.ie)

# **DUBLIN UNITARIAN CHURCH**

## **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

The 2022 A.G.M. of the Congregation will take place  
in the Church after Sunday service.

**Sunday, 24<sup>th</sup> April 2022.**

Members will be able to join via ZOOM,  
the meeting will not be on the WebCam.  
A link to ZOOM will be circulated to members  
closer to the date.

Send nominations, motions, and any  
other items for the Agenda to the:

[secretaryunitarianchurch@gmail.com](mailto:secretaryunitarianchurch@gmail.com)

The closing date for the receipt of nominations etc.

**Sunday, 27<sup>th</sup> March 2022.**

*Denise Dunne*  
Madam Chairperson