

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: 'selfie'
Andy Pollak & David Ward.
(see page 5)

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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 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.

Climate Cardinals

Climate Cardinals, an online network of student volunteers who translate climate change research into more than a hundred languages, was established during lockdown by Sophia Kianni, a young environmental activist, based in America. While on a trip to her parents' home country, Iran, Sophia was shocked that the air pollution was so bad she couldn't see the stars at night. She was astonished that her relatives knew almost nothing about climate change or other environmental problems. Aware of the devastating effect pollution was having on Iran she began translating climate information into Farsi to educate her aunts and uncles about climate change. Sophia, saw how this helped her relatives become eco-conscious and take steps to lessen their carbon footprint. They conserved water, turned off lights, recycled, composted, reduced car use, shopped more sustainably and undertook a myriad of other environmental actions. What if this scenario had a ripple effect and spread through an entire community, across nations, and around the global community. Politicians and legislators might be influenced to act.

Language is a significant barrier to the global assimilation of environmental knowledge. Sophia had worked with several different climate organisations, including Fridays for Future, and realised that environmental literature was mostly available in English. People everywhere need to know the reality of climate change and loss of biodiversity. Otherwise the number of people who know about serious environmental problems is restricted to a white, affluent population. The dissemination of translated materials on environmental protection and sustainable development would play an important role in transforming local culture and societies. *Translating and Communicating Environmental Cultures* a book edited Meng Ji brings important research on environmental translation and cross-cultural communication to a wide readership, especially across academia. There is a great need for widespread cross cultural communication of environmental concerns. Sophia Kianni recognised that need when she visited her relatives in Iran. This awareness led her to launch Climate Cardi-

nals as an international youth-led non-profit programme to make scientific knowledge of environmental problems accessible to non-English speakers and thereby spread awareness of the climate movement around the globe. The aim of Climate Cardinals is to educate and empower people to tackle the climate crisis. This is accomplished through the volunteer assistance of now over 6,000 young volunteers in more than 40 different countries who translate climate information documents into more than 100 languages.

One of the earliest promotional videos was a TikTok. It encouraged people to volunteer and make a difference. In addition to recruiting volunteers on social media, Climate Cardinals' work was published and promoted through partnerships with like-minded organizations, including Radio Javan in Iran who has 11 million Instagram followers and also publishes articles in their magazine. Another associate is the Arab Youth Climate Movement, while **Translators without Borders**, a global community of over 80,000 members, helps people get vital information and be heard, whatever language they speak. Through collaboration with the International Student Environmental Coalition, Sophia also connects with students from around the globe to help her translate climate science into languages such as Hebrew, Turkish, Urdu, Mandarin and Hindi. By translating climate information into so many languages, Climate Cardinals can raise eco-awareness all around the world. The mission is to make accurate, reputable climate change information accessible to as many people as possible worldwide. Language Leads are responsible for supervising all of the Student Translators within their chosen language. This includes distributing documents to be translated, reviewing translated documents, and hosting weekly calls between their Student Translators.

The movement transcends geographic, cultural, and language barriers. The relationship with volunteers is mutually beneficial as many of the volunteers who have no prior translating experience are improving their language skills since they got involved with Climate Cardinals. Volunteers can earn community service hours while translating in their

own homes. The growth in demand for remote community service opportunities has increased since the pandemic and will continue to increase as young activists look for ways to improve the world with the power of the internet.

Sophia hopes that many more volunteers will join Climate Cardinals and translate information so that every person, regardless of the language they speak, can do their part to help save the world.

www.climatecardinals.org

Fran Brady

Dublin Unitarian Church

REBEL CORK TO ORANGE ANTRIM

A CYCLIST'S JOURNEY THROUGH THE GORGEOUS HEART OF IRELAND

In the first eleven days of July I cycled with my friend and neighbour David Ward from Mizen Head in west Cork to Fair Head in north Antrim to raise money for Concern Worldwide's work for girls' education in Afghanistan. The journey confirmed me in my belief that we live in one of the most beautiful, peaceful and friendly countries in the world (I have been privileged to be able to visit over 60 countries in every continent except Australasia).

I started with an initial fund-raising target of €3,000, but ended by raising an extraordinary **€10,600** for Concern. A significant contribution – including some incredibly generous individual donations - came from members of the St Stephen's Green congregation. I thank you all from the bottom of my heart – it is wonderful to be part of such a generous and caring community.

In this article, I try to describe my impressions of our 640 kilometre trip through the gorgeous heart of Ireland. Our route took us from Mizen Head through Bantry, Macroom, Mitchelstown, Templemore, Tullamore, Mullingar, Cavan, Monaghan, Armagh, Ballymena and Ballycastle to Fair Head. We traversed 12 of Ireland's 32 counties. The greatest part of the journey was along secondary and minor roads (and occasionally bog roads and cart tracks) since when you click on the 'cycle' icon on Google maps you are inevitably led away from main roads. So it was eleven days spent largely crossing the Irish countryside.

And much of it was in the unfashionable countryside of the midlands: from north Cork, through Limerick, Tipperary, Offaly, Laois, Westmeath, Meath, Cavan, Monaghan and Armagh. This is not any kind of tourist trail, evidenced by the fact that we did not meet a single other cycle tourist in our passage across those counties. Yet even in the flat centre of Ireland, on the Offaly-Westmeath border, a yellow field of mown hay against a background wall of dark green deciduous trees is a thing of beauty.

There is plenty to marvel at in those relatively unfrequented parts of the country. We passed Ballydoyle stable in south Tipperary where Nijinsky, possibly the greatest European flat racehorse of the

20th century, was trained by Vincent O'Brien. We walked around the 'handsome and almost totally unknown King's Square in Mitchelstown, a little gem of a tree-lined Georgian mall built by the extravagant (and eventually insane) Earl of Kingston for the local Church of Ireland community in the 1780s, where we met a builder from Kilkenny who was taking time off from his holidays to help convert six of the houses into accommodation for Ukrainians.

We rode up the wonderfully scenic Glen of Aherlow under the Galtee Mountains, looking across to the rich pasturelands of the Blackwater valley and the Golden Vale. There is good tillage here too - wheat, barley, oats and even maize - which makes an environmentally conscious 'townee' like me wonder if this shouldn't be the future of Irish farming on fertile lands like these in an age of potentially catastrophic climate change. Certainly a world expert like Professor John Sweeney believes that Irish farmers must very soon reverse a process which has seen the size of the country's dairy herd, its biggest agricultural polluter, increase by almost half over the past decade (Ireland's 135,000 farms produce 37% of national greenhouse gas emissions).

We visited Belvedere House on the shores of Lough Ennell outside Mullingar. Here the extremely wicked Robert Rochfort, 1st Earl of Belvedere, locked up his beautiful young wife for 31 years, accusing her of adultery with his brother, until she went mad. He hated and envied another brother so much that he built a folly called a 'Jealous Wall' between their adjoining stately homes so that he wouldn't have to contemplate his property. A better example of an aristocratic 18th century waster it would be hard to find. A 20th century relative and occupant of the house was Charles Howard-Bury, who led the first British expedition to try to climb Mount Everest in 1921 (on which the lead climber was the astonishingly glamorous George Mallory, who was to die on the mountain three years later).

We skirted the Slieve Blooms in Offaly and Laois, stopping for lunch at a charming small cafe (Peavoy's) in the equally charming village of Kinnity. It is marvellous how the new prosperity of rural and small town Ireland has led to the appearance of excellent cafés and coffee shops in the tiniest of places. In Toon's Bridge near Macroom in Cork we had a vegetarian lunch of the highest quality in the Dairy, whose primary business is making Mediterranean-style cheeses from unpasteurised buffalo, sheep and cows' milk and selling them in markets and shops across Ireland. In Ardboe in County Tyrone on a Sunday morning we had coffee and cookies at the High Cow Bagel takeaway coffee shop in a formerly derelict shed at a remote

crossroads above Lough Neagh. An hour later we had lunch in a flower-bedecked lock-keeper's cottage cum café on the banks of the River Bann at Toomebridge. 30 years ago - in violent and Sabbatarian Northern Ireland - such lovely places would have been simply unthinkable.

It is not only the village cafés which are a revelation, but the villages themselves. Places like Kinnity, Castlepollard in Westmeath and Redhills in Cavan are as neat and bright and colourful as any village in rural England or France. Modern bungalows and re-decorated farmhouses are surrounded by immaculately-tended gardens. I'm sure there are still pockets of rural poverty, but to the passer-by this looks genuinely like a 'new Ireland.' It is a very far cry from the picturesque scruffiness, miserable housing and widespread rural poverty I witnessed when first cycling around Ireland as a teenager in the mid-1960s. For me, this is a sign of a successful country: when ordinary people in humble places traditionally neglected by the metropolis are clearly living in comfort and prosperity.

Our en route Bed and Breakfast accommodation varied widely. If you are in Durrus in west Cork, I highly recommend Ballycommane House, an old farmhouse converted by two German garden enthusiasts, Ingolf and Andy, into an exquisite guest house on four acres of exotic and exuberant gardens, with plants from as far away as the Azores. At the other end of County Cork, in Mitchelstown, I also recommend the luxurious Ballinwillin House with its rare farm animals and delicious breakfasts (Ballycommane's breakfasts - with their continental touches - are pretty special too). These splendid guest houses cost around €85 per person per night for a single room.

On the other hand in Templemore in Tipperary we stayed in what is possibly the worst B&B in Ireland: unprepared rooms, dangerous electrical wall sockets and a DIY breakfast (we had to go to the local shop to buy bread and marmalade!). I won't name it because I don't want to get in trouble with lawyers, but if anyone is travelling to that neck of the woods, please ask.

Another thing that struck us throughout the journey was the ubiquity of the Gaelic Athletic Association in out-of-the-way places. Every village in Ireland, north and south (outside the traditionally unionist areas of Northern Ireland), seems to have an immaculate GAA pitch, usually with adjoining training pitches, bleachers and often floodlights. It is little wonder that Ireland's national identity is

so strong in rural areas, with such a formidable, island-wide amateur (but superbly and professionally run) sporting organisation at the centre of community life everywhere. The Catholic Church in Ireland may be in sharp decline, but the organisation promoting gaelic football, hurling and other 'national' pastimes is stronger than ever.

For of course the great divide on the island is still only too apparent. Cycling through 'rebel' west Cork, the memories of the long struggle against British rule are as vivid as ever. At the Pass of Keimaneigh on the road from Bantry to Macroom there is a monument to four 'Whiteboys' who died in a clash with the British Army as long ago as 1821. Every few miles along that road there is a memorial to men who died in the 1919-1923 War of Independence and Civil War. In Inchigeelagh in the west Cork Gaeltacht there is a plaque commemorating the local 'glebe house' (the residence of the Church of Ireland minister) "burned down by Irregulars to prevent it falling into the hands of the Black and Tans (1922)" - a little rewriting of history there, since the Black and Tans were disbanded in 1922, and the anti-Free State 'Irregulars' were actually fighting the new Free State army.

It was a surprising (and welcome) change also to see a plaque at Kilbarry National School to a former pupil called Michael O'Leary who won a Victoria Cross in the First World War. Apparently his nationalist father was not impressed. "I am surprised he didn't do more. I often laid out twenty men myself with a stick coming from Macroom Fair, and it is a bad trial of Mick that he could kill only eight, and he having a rifle and bayonet," he was reported as saying.

At the other end of the island, we rode into Ballymena (my birthplace) two days before the 'Twelfth'. Across the street in Harryville (which made headlines for the wrong reasons back in 1996 when local Catholics were forced to run a hostile loyalist gauntlet on their way to Mass) was a traditional Orange arch bearing the message 'Hold Fast to the Good; God Save the Queen.' Holding fast to the British government's internationally discredited legislation to overturn the Northern Ireland protocol after agreeing it with the EU doesn't have the same ring to it!

As we rode towards Ballycastle on the final day, through the beautiful countryside skirting the Antrim Hills, past Cloughmills (stronghold of my mother's Gaston family) and Loughguile (birthplace of the late Cardinal Cahal Daly, whom I got to know and admire when I was Irish Times religious affairs correspondent in the 1990s), I felt some sadness in the middle of a perfect summer's day. The regular Orange halls we passed were testimony to the fact that this is one of the

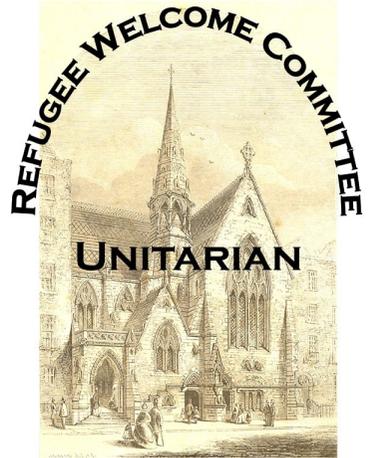
heartlands of Protestant Ulster. What is going to happen to these Ulster Protestants as events outside their ‘wee North’ turn against them? As the Tory grandees squabble over who is going to succeed the clownish and incompetent Boris Johnson; as the United Kingdom’s stock in the world falls again as it cuts itself off from its closest and most important allies and markets in Europe; as its economy further declines for the same reason; as Scotland, so close to Northern Ireland over the centuries, goes its own way; as Sinn Fein, now the largest party in the North, also becomes the largest party in the Republic after the next election?

Please forgive me for bringing in Northern Ireland politics at the end. Those who know me will tell you I find it hard to avoid them. Overall, however, this was a marvellous trip. Anyone who knows the joy of cycling through this lovely country of ours should give it a try. The prevailing south-westerlies are very much in the cyclist’s favour, and if you do it in early July, you might even be lucky enough to avoid most of the rain!

This is an extended version of Andy Pollak’s blog on
www.2irelands2gether.com

Andy Pollak

Dublin Unitarian Church



"The Unitarian Refugee Committee is desperately seeking a pledged home for a refugee family of a man (the brother/son of our two sponsored refugees), his pregnant wife and their 2 year old child. With the generous help of the community we are sponsoring them in place in Afghanistan but their circumstances are very perilous there and we are anxious to have them accepted to the Irish refugee protection programme and be reunited with their Mum and sister.

Our only realistic hope of that is to be able to produce evidence of an accommodation pledge for 6 to 12 months. If any of the community has a big enough home and heart to do this it would be an amazing humanitarian act. Due to the urgent need to rescue them we are prepared to consider holiday homes and property in any area of the country.

We will continue to actively seek rented accommodation with a guarantee of rent payments until the rental support comes on stream and we will act as guarantor for the tenants. However a pledge now would enable us to start lobbying intensively for their admission.

We can be contacted at unitarianrwc@gmail.com or Bridget can introduce you to any of the committee members in church.

Thank you".

All lives matter

Where do our prejudices lie?

The idea for this address originated from several sources. The first is words of Juginder Kaur. Joginder's family are of the Sikh tradition so her husband Balbir wore a turban; Balbir was shot dead in retaliation for the attacks of 9/11. Juginder responded to the murder of her husband with the words "we have to love more." Twenty years later Juginder continues to pose the challenge "who do we not yet love?"

The second source for the idea is a documentary on Racism I watched on television. The setting was an inner London Secondary School. The school has in excess of fifty nationalities among its pupils it was an excellently run school where students did well academically. The school seemed to be a model of a well integrated, multicultural community.

The school agreed to take part in a study of racism. The students and staff answered questions from a computer programme that was designed to highlight unconscious racism. The results were a shock to the school community. More than 90% of students and staff were deemed to have unconscious racist bias.

None of us would ever like to think of ourselves as being "racist". We Unitarians take pride in being an open welcoming community for everyone. The first principle of Unitarianism is "We believe in the inherent worth and dignity of every person" But Unitarian congregations are predominantly made up of white middle class well educated people.

The impetus to create the computer survey is the belief that the starting point for equality and respect between people is that we actively and regularly examine our attitudes towards people who are different than us.

It is easy to be oblivious to our racist tendencies when we only ever have **limited** experience of interacting with people of different races and backgrounds. When we recall the words of Jesus that we must "love our neighbour as ourselves" do we think of our neighbour as being like us but maybe a bit awkward or disagreeable? Do we ever envisage the neighbour we are meant to love as ourselves as being a member of the travelling community, or the boat loads of migrants who cross

the Mediterranean from Africa? Do we see the neighbour we are meant to love as the refugee who is in receipt of social welfare and has access to housing?

Race riots and “Black Lives Matter” protests swept the world during the pandemic. In Ireland these protests were peaceful. Is this because Ireland does not have a problem with racism? Or is it that Ireland is still largely a mono culture? A good indicator of Irish attitudes to peoples who are different is how we treat travellers. Travellers are natively Irish. They look like us, they speak the same language. But there is an ocean of difference between the lives of travellers and the settled populations.

In 2018 average life expectancy for settled people was 82years. Life Expectancy has increased remarkably over the past one hundred years. The increase is due to access to better food, health care and housing. In 2007 the Irish Times reported that 50% of travellers died before the age of 39 and 70% die before the age of 59. The markers of good health in a population have not improved for travellers during the past twenty years. In 2019 ten members of one traveller family died in a fire in Carrickmines. Attempts to re-house surviving family members were met with protests. There is negligible interaction between the communities.

When children are born they are unaware of difference. We adults teach them to judge, they learn prejudice from us. Of course the lessons are not delivered in a formal setting – parents rarely overtly teach prejudice. These subtle lessons are totally effective. This was demonstrated by the computer programme. Remember how we learned to think of other faiths as children.

Paul, my husband, had a conversation with his mother, who at the time was 100 years of age. Every Friday in National school there was a collection for the “black babies”. One student would go from class room to class room with the collection box, everyone was lined up around the wall and made to put their penny into the black baby box. She had sponsored the missions, as a family they sponsored the training of African men to the priesthood. But when a black priest arrived to say mass in her local church there was consternation, “we can’t hear him, we can’t understand him”, and “why is he here”. Paul pointed out that this is one of the black babies we supported while we were in school.

I had my own eureka moment when I watched the recording of the woman with the dog in Central park. A bird watcher asked this

woman to put her dog on the lead. She responded by phoning the police and saying she was in fear of her life by an African American man. The unspoken insinuation was that the man's ethnicity was an added danger for her. My personal moment of insight was that I noticed myself thinking "he was a University Lecturer!"

We go back to the television documentary. The students were divided up into groups based on ethnicity this was to allow them to have an open discussion about their experiences and feelings on racism. They were invited to bring to the meeting something from their family that represented their roots.

Among the group of English students the symbols of their tradition were, to say the least, poor. One had brought in a picture of a thistle to represent her Scottish heritage the other offering was a picture of the Queen. The English group were largely silent; the other groups could be heard roaring with laughter. Then with some insight one girl said "they are having much more fun than us". These were the students who probably always lived with some sense that they were privileged. I'm English part of an empire. All of them felt impoverished.

This was a telling moment. Living in a multi-culture, is not to be feared, as herbs and spices add flavour to a dish, differences enrich they don't impoverish. Irish emigrants have enriched other cultures; our culture will be enriched if we welcome other people to be part of our tradition.

The first essential step is honesty. It is natural to be mistrusting of people we don't know. I expect that few people pass that computer test. We do not own a country; we are temporary residents of this place we call home. Ireland has a history of emigration. Irish people went in search of opportunities that were not available to them at home. They didn't go to scrounge from the system. They did of course entice family members to join them.

The second step is to cultivate empathy. One peace activist has a simple but effective way of doing this. She recommends wherever you see someone who is different; maybe just on a bus or passing on the street; in your mind send love to that person. The person will not be aware of this but mentally sending compassion changes your mindset.

When we meet someone new listen to their story. When we listened to the stories of residents who are in the direct provision system they became real to us. Then we opened our hearts (and purses) to them. In their stories we saw our shared humanity.

The experiment in the school in London had a telling ending. The school announced that they would have a race. The winner would be presented with a generous prize. The students stood with toes to the start line. The teacher had unusual instructions. Students whose parents were immigrants were to take a step backwards. Students whose parents were English took a step forward. Students whose parents' first language was English took a step forward. Students whose parents did not have English as a first language took a step backwards. You get the picture.

Eventually the students were spread throughout the field – the teacher shouted go. The privileged students had only to go a few steps forward to pass the winning line. The end of a race is always greeted with shouts, cheers and clapping. There was silence. The teacher said to the winner are you not delighted to have won – The young man said but that race wasn't fair! The entire class now understood the subtlety of racism how it confers privilege on some and disadvantage on others.

We are born equal. Every life matters. Inequality begins from our first breath. The teaching of Jesus and all the great sages is that it is our duty to work to make the world more just for everyone. We live privileged lives; as in the school race we are well in front. The question for us is do we move onwards or do we reach out a helping hand to those left behind?

If we are to achieve equality we begin by examining with honesty our attitudes to those who are different.

Rev. Bridget Spain

Minister Dublin Unitarian Church

Dublin November 2021

**Dublin Unitarian Book Club's
choice for June 2022.**

THE LUCKY COUNTRY

by

ROSE.M CULLEN

The book club were delighted to welcome the author Rose Cullen to join us at our book club meeting in June to talk about her wonderful semi-autobiographical novel called 'The Lucky Country', a term often used to describe Australia.

Australia, a country so full of promise for so many people over the centuries and in this story particularly of those who emigrated during the 1950's and 60's from post war Europe.

This story centres on the Glendon family, Patrick, Maeve and children Niamh, John John and baby Patsy. After a failed harvest and near ruin they leave Ireland for a fresh start in Australia. Patrick goes out first to Sydney to set things up and Maeve follows six months later with the children by boat. We travel with them all and feel every emotion that they feel on their rollercoaster journeys. The author has a wonderful mastery for dialogue so all her characters have a very authentic voice which gives great credence to their many experiences.

Sydney does'nt work out and so Patrick decides that they should go west to Perth. Maeve and the children are to go by train and await Patrick who is crossing the Nullbar desert by car while pulling their caravan which holds much of their possessions. This is the second journey that Maeve has to undertake alone with the children and her fears and anxieties and those of the children are deeply felt by the reader. It seems that it is Patrick who is calling the shots and having the adventure and his naivety and misplaced faith in his own abilities are at times enraging, yet you also sympathise with him as he is trying so hard to make things work, yet at what cost?

Perth does'nt work out either and they end up in the outback on an enormous sheep station called Inverness which is owned by Jack Anderson, a hard nosed sheep rancher and employer just as his

father was before him. Here the Glandons meet other migrant workers and the author's descriptions of the outback and the working conditions are not just very real but you could say that the landscape itself is like a character of the book.

They meet Tom Pom, a young English emigrant. He is the child of a WW2 US GI from Chicago and his mother Lily. Unfortunately Tom's father is killed and Lily's family disown her as they never married but eight years later when she becomes terminally ill they take charge, move Tom into a home and eventually at the age of ten send him off to Australia with ten shillings in his pocket. He works at the Fairbridge Farm School in Pinjara until, when his time is up at age fifteen he goes to work for Jack Anderson at the Inverness sheep station.

We encounter the indigenous people of Australia and the author shows how cruel and shocking was the treatment they received at the time and how institutional racism along with barbaric government policies tried to eradicate their culture and peoples. Much of this is shown through the story of Ben Down and his wife Maali and son Binny as they try to live peacefully on the settlement and work on the ranch while constantly encountering racism and hassle from the police and authorities. The author does'nt shy away from any of the harshness or realities of the time and through her wonderful descriptions of the landscape , how the workers and their families lived, even how the children coped with school and of course the lives of the Aboriginees you get a real sense of a time and place of what was an unforgiving Australia, a place not for the faint hearted and probably only 'The Lucky Country' for some.

All of the readers thought it was a great book and that the writing and particularly the dialogue was wonderful. A book recommended by all.

Alison Claffey
Dublin Unitarian Church

Trip to Kylemore Abbey 21st August 2022

The Benedictine Community at Kylemore Abbey have kindly agreed us to hold a Service in the Gothic Church in the grounds of the Abbey. Our connection with Kylemore is that the Abbey was built by Mitchel Henry who was Unitarian.

The service will take place at 3.00. We will be joined by members of the Cork congregation and some Unitarians from Northern Ireland. This will be a gathering of Unitarians from many parts of the island of Ireland.

Travel

Car

Some people intend to make a weekend of this trip and intend to travel on Friday or Saturday. Others will travel down on Sunday. Several drivers have offered lifts so it may be possible to get a lift on Saturday or the Sunday. If anyone would like to avail of a lift by car please let me know.

Train

Sunday 8.00am a train leaves Heuston for Westport arriving at 11.30. There is one change at Athlone. We will arrange transport from Westport to Kylemore Abbey and back to Westport Railway Station.

If there is anyone travelling by train and needs transport between Westport and Kylemore please let me know. We will hire a bus or taxi depending on numbers.

Gratitude

It has been said that religion is primarily an affair of gratitude. You may have always thought that religion is primarily an affair of believing, and if you are not sure how a person goes about “believing” you may have thought that you are not a religious person. Gratitude, on the other hand, is something that all of us can practice and that makes us all religious.

Whatever one’s beliefs about faith or grace, gratitude is basic. Like hope, trust and love gratitude is both a feeling and a **spiritual practice**. Though we have little control over our immediate feelings we can decide to cultivate the ground in which those feelings thrive.

We are taught as soon as we can speak to say “thank you” when we are helped or given something.

Words of thanks signal acknowledgement of another’s part in benefiting our lives. “Thank You” adds a human connection. It says “I noticed you were there, and I am glad”.

Our Thank You reminds us that we are dependent on those around us. The words acknowledge the web of relationships in which we live. To neglect to say thank you is not only rude; it is out of touch with reality, an implicit claim of independence and **privilege**. The practice of saying “Thank You” is good for our souls and a reality check on our tendency to think we don’t need others. This is not only important in our relationships with other people, it is important in our relationship with God, the universe, our life.

You don’t have to believe that there is a Divine Someone out there collecting praise to experience gratitude. The important thing is to notice your gratitude and express it, if only to yourself. “Thank You, Universe” you might say if “Thank you, God” doesn’t work for you. We notice our full hearts when a grandchild rushes into your arms when we are struck by the beauty of a sunset, or when we experience one of those wonderful moments when we connect deeply with someone. There

may be nobody in particular to thank, but we can practice gratitude all the time.

When times are awful. Sometimes we are suffering too much to feel honestly grateful. There are days, weeks, months when we are overwhelmed by problems or pain, tragedy or disappointment. It is at this time that the practice of thankfulness is most worthwhile and healing. For example in the midst of grieving a loved one, we can be grateful for the care of friends, for the flowers that are still blooming, for the kindness of strangers. We can express our thanks for the gift of having know and loved the deceased.

Our busyness is the greatest impediment to remembering to express gratitude. We are simply too busy to notice all the wonderful things and people and relationships around us. We neglect to notice our gratitude. It is important to build gratitude into our routine. The poet W. H Auden wrote that we should practice gratitude as regularly as a musician practices scales. The practice of gratitude will sustain us through all of life events.

Dublin 18th October 2020

Do Not Ask Your Children to Strive

Do not ask your children
to strive for extraordinary lives.
Such striving may seem admirable,
but it is the way of foolishness.
Help them instead to find the wonder
and the marvel of an ordinary life.
Show them the joy of tasting
tomatoes, apples and pears.
Show them how to cry
when pets and people die.
Show them the infinite pleasure
in the touch of a hand.
And make the ordinary come alive for them.
The extraordinary will take care of itself.

- *William Martin*