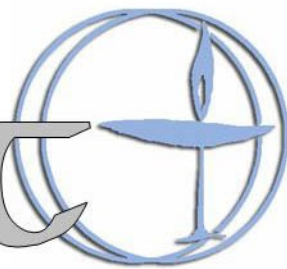


Oscailt



February 2023

IRELANDS UNITARIAN MAGAZINE

Vol.19 Nº 2



YOU ARE ALL INVITED ...

I owe a debt to the Unitarian Church on St Stephens Green. This Church has provided me with the only solid link in Dublin to my past. My grandmother Margaret McKay (née Minnis) was the schoolteacher in the Damer school below the Church. She was a Non-Subscribing Presbyterian from Ballygowan, Co. Down while my grandfather John Wallace McKay was a Unitarian from Ballymoney, Co. Antrim.

As a child I never knew my grandparents. In the year they died I was twenty years old. At that age I didn't care. I had other priorities. It is only now when I have grandchildren of my own that I am conscious of my loss. Wallace and Margaret form a link with my past that was broken long before I was born. The source of the rupture between my mother and her parents belongs to a different era in Ireland but the years have not lessened its impact. In 1908 Catholic canon law required, for the first time, that for a marriage between a Catholic and Protestant to be valid the children must be raised as Catholics. Over the sixty-two years of its imposition the *Ne Temere* decree did untold damage to Protestant/Catholic relations.

It divided families. Mine included.

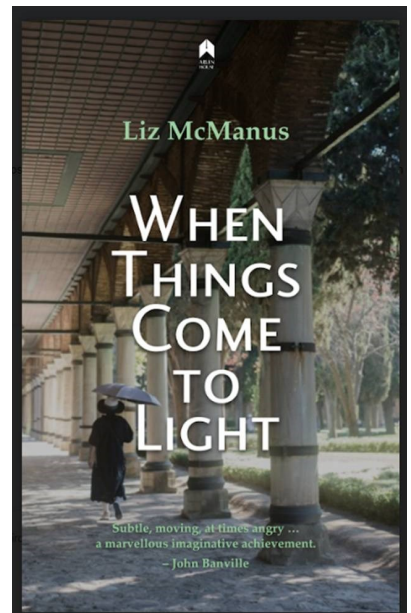
No-one can relive the past but anyone can write about it. And so I have written a book about Wallace and Margaret McKay: about their time in India and their return to a newly Independent Ireland. Even the Unitarian Church itself is a character in the book and so is the school room where we meet for coffee after the service.

I hope you will join me in celebrating with a glass of wine and Ukrainian cake at the launch of :

When Things Come to Light.
On Sunday 19 February
at 2.30 pm.
in the Damer school.

Publisher : *Arlen House.*

With thanks to
Rev. Bridget Spain and the Committee.





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: Doireann,
pictured at the cake sale on
Sunday 18th December.
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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 the 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.

Only the Lonely

Roy Orbison, Only the Lonely

Have you ever been lonely, have you ever been blue, *Patsy Clyne,*

Ah look at all the lonely people, *Beatles,*

Don't wanna be all by myself any more. *Celine Dion*

Songs which have echoed down the decades, and not just for the attractive music but because they touch something deep in human nature, the loneliness which at some time in our lives affects us all, and often at Christmas.

Loneliness, of course, is a constant topic in all types of literature and in philosophy. The Existentialists say that life has no intrinsic meaning, that we have to make our own meaning, that we are on our own (1001 Ideas That Changed the Way We Think). This has, it is said, left a lasting impression on Western culture “reinforcing the individualism and moral relativism that have become prevalent”.

In literature even the titles of so many books and films will tell us how loneliness is so much part of what we are. At random a number of works come to mind, *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (Alan Sillitoe), *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud* (Wordsworth), *The Well of Loneliness* (Radclyffe Hall), *No Drinking, No Dancing, No Doctors* (Martina Evans’s novel which highlights the loneliness of being reared in a strict Protestant sect, and of course Austin Clarke’s evocative *The Planter’s Daughter*, where the daughter’s house which was “known by the trees” excludes the men who in the pub “drank deep and were silent”. *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* (Carson McCullers) and of course our own John Boyne’s *A History of Loneliness* are others.

Emma Donoghue’s recent novel *Haven* in which a priest and two monks seek to find a remote spot to escape from a sinful world is more about solitude than loneliness and the distinction is carefully made by all writers. For the philosopher A.C. Grayling, solitude is the antidote to the world when it is too much with us, while loneliness is the “unwelcome psychological absence of others”.

And, of course, being alone should not mean necessarily that we are lonely. Francesca Specter in her book *Alonement, How To Be Alone and Absolutely Own It*, makes the point that our relationship with ourselves is the most important one we will ever have. Our romantic partners, family and friends may come and go but our monogamous partnership with ourselves is the only unalterable relationship status we will have. And she warns against staying in intolerable relationships in order to

avoid future loneliness.

According to the experts, loneliness can severely damage our health. TILDA, the Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing, tells us that it is a critical public health issue. Its health danger is the equivalent of smoking 15 cigarettes a day, is worse for our health than not exercising, as harmful as being an alcoholic and twice as harmful as being obese.

In her wonderful book, *The Lonely Century*, which I've largely relied on, Noreena Hertz, describes how the Haredi in Israel, an ultraorthodox Jewish sect, make up 12% of the population, and rising to 16%.

They have a huge appetite for a buttery, creamy, salty cake, a diet with little fruit and fibre, and deficiency in vitamin D because their skin is hardly exposed. They also have more children than the national average and over half of them are below the poverty line. Yet their life expectancy is higher than the national average.

And most relevant for our theme, is that they play and pray together and help each other in time of need with only 11% of them saying they feel lonely compared to 23% of the total Israeli population. So, on this example, and there are others, if loneliness can kill you, a lack of loneliness can increase your life span.

And we don't have to be alone to be lonely. Not so long ago someone I know well felt he was inexplicably lonely at coffee after our Sunday service, and that was, if I may flatter us all, when he was among the gentlest, most sociable, most pleasant people on this earth.

That someone was me. And it brought back memories of 40 years ago when on a work junket to Bulgaria I was lonely because, at 36, I was so old compared to my co-junketeers who, to make matters worse, were playing the mating game forbidden, of course, to me as a husband and father.

Or the rush in London to Sunday Mass fuelled, largely, by a desire to see Irish faces and hear their voices.

Or this year's Halloween revelation when shepherding grandchildren around from door to door that I didn't know many of my neighbours. We live in parallel universes, me a retired single oldie, they upwardly mobile with young children.

Small incidents, no doubt, and nothing compared to the momentous loneliness arising from divorce, bereavement, or loss of home or job.

But significant enough to help us understand that loneliness can visit us all, even those who are fortunate to have happy or at least contented lives. Tilda finds that almost 33% of 50+ people in Ireland experience emotional loneliness at least some of the time, and 7% often feel lonely. Intriguingly loneliness does not increase in a linear pattern with age but steadies or decreases from 50 to 67 before increasing again in older age.

Some international figures are salutary. Three in five US adults con-

sider themselves lonely; in Germany two-thirds believe loneliness to be a serious problem; one-third of Dutch adults admit to being lonely, 10% severely and in Sweden up to 25% of the population say they are frequently lonely. One in eight Britons do not have a single friend they can rely on, three-quarters do not know their neighbours' names and 60% are lonely at work.

So, it is part of what we are, whoever and wherever we are. Michael Seighart in the Poetry Pharmacy tells us that in his experience "the busiest and most popular people can often be trying desperately to paper over the loneliness they feel inside".

Dr Andrew Magee, a Dublin psychotherapist (quoted by Geraldine Walsh in *The Irish Times*, September 27, 2022) tells us that at least 10 % of the population feels lonely, but that figure is likely to be much higher. Loneliness, he says, is distinct to everyone and has no common cause. He then dispels some myths about loneliness.

1. Having friends, a spouse and family means you can't be lonely.
2. Loneliness and isolation are the same thing.
3. Loneliness does not affect your health.
4. Loneliness is an older person's problem.
5. Loneliness is no big deal.

Answering just one of these myths, that Loneliness isn't a result of being on one's own, he says loneliness stems from not having the kind of relationships within which we feel able to communicate our needs, beliefs, or feelings.

In the words of Dr Rina Bajaj, a London psychologist, the lonely person may:

- Appear withdrawn or isolate themselves,
- Be more anxious or stressed,
- Struggle to connect in social relationships,
- Have more of a negative view of life,
- Distract themselves from their emotions or keep overly busy,
- Find it hard to understand and express their emotions,
- Be more self-critical than usual and lack confidence.

Noreena Hertz in *The Lonely Century*, brings us on an absorbing journey around the lonely world. She analyses why loneliness is endemic and with some graphic vignettes focuses on the breakdown of community, the insidious inroads of social media into our domestic and private lives and the scary new world of robots which have become crutches to lonely people as they lose real human contact.

A world where you can Rent-a-Friend, buy a robot to cater for

your domestic, health and sexual needs, and on screen, for a price, watch someone else, a mukbang, eat to accompany you during your meal. All of this stemming from the deep loneliness of people who may be unduly shy or have neither the time, opportunity, education, personality, or physical health to form real human attachments.

When we talk about loneliness, we tend to think of it as being that we feel excluded, isolated or misunderstood by family, friends or perhaps colleagues, but Hertz adds another dimension to the definition.

For her any consideration of loneliness has to take into account relationships with employers, fellow citizens, politicians and the State and how a person might be lonely because s/he is excluded politically and economically.

Hence, she blames neo-liberalism as a cause for loneliness, a world of:

“free” choice, “free” markets and freedom from government or trade union interference,

Brutal competitiveness with ever expanding rewards for CEOs and board members widening the wage gap with their employees.

Microchipping of employees, hot-desking, noisy open-plan offices with supervisory overload and constant disruption, and time scanning with toilet visits recorded as “idle” time.

She highlights that in an increasingly greedy world words like “together”, “share” and “duty” have been replaced by “achieve”, “own”, “personal” and “special”. The word “I”, has replaced “we” and “us”. And how we have become consumers rather than citizens.

How 85% of workers globally feel disconnected from their company and their work, and how only 30% of US citizens feel that most other people can be trusted, down from 50% in 1982. And in the years before Covid, 66% of people in democracies did not think their governments acted in their best interests.

She blames social media for having played a pivotal role in stealing our attention away from those around us, fuelling the worst within us and eroding our ability to communicate effectively and empathetically.

In the mix, too, of the drivers of loneliness, is migration to the cities, fundamental changes in how we live (people are not there for their neighbours and don’t even know their names) and radical reorganisations of the workplace.

Loneliness, as touched on earlier, has some startling effects on behaviour. In Japan, crimes by people over 65 have quadrupled over the last 20 years. Hertz says it’s a life choice for many as they commit offences in order to be sent to prison, as a way to escape loneliness. As one woman said, there is a community in jail, “there are always people around, I don’t

feel lonely”.

Hertz tells us of the “loneliness economy” “to support and in some cases exploit” those who feel alone. The Rent-a-Friend company is now in dozens of countries around the world with its website having over 620,000 platonic friends for hire.

Why do people hire such a company? And what type of people are they? We are told of a soft-spoken woman who doesn’t want to show up at a party alone, a techie from Delhi who doesn’t know anyone in Manhattan, and the typical clientele, surprisingly you may think, is a lonely 30 to 40- year-old professional, the type of person who works long hours and doesn’t have time to make friends.

In a sense, as social animals, we are losing the skill of being human. We are putting on the earphones to keep the noise out as we scroll through our mobiles on the way to work, in some countries we are obliging road authorities to put pedestrian crossing lights at ground level so walking phone users will not get killed, and emasculated by our screens we have often lost the art of interpreting facial expressions when seeking to communicate.

In the US some college students, who had lost the ability to “read a face” sought advice from a relationship academic, not on sex or the intricacies of love, but on how they could ask someone for a date in person, something, I think, we all had to learn by trial and error.

“Reading a face” is vital in all areas of life, particularly in transnational situations. One of the five reasons Walmart, the US store conglomerate, had to retreat from Germany was because the Walmart chiefs instructed their staff in Germany to smile at the customers. Germans, not the most smiley of people perhaps, did not take too kindly to this as they regarded the smiles as flirtatious.

Teachers report that children are increasingly deficient in fundamental personal skills, and language for their age. Hertz writes that at one nursery the teacher gives scripts to parents to help them communicate with their kids!

The warning from Hertz is that all the time we are on our devices we are not present to others, even with couples the empathy level drops the minute a mobile phone is placed between them.

What does it do to humanness when we turn on our phones the minute we wake up and check them 90 or a few hundred times a day? When we stop having lunch with colleagues, because of work pressures, stop going to church, or join parent-teachers’ associations or trade unions, when as Robert Putnam, in *Bowling Alone* wrote, stop doing things together. As has been reported before, too, younger people are having less sex (with a person): people in their early twenties in the US are 2.5

times more likely to be abstinent than ten years ago.

Togetherness, indeed, or more accurately a need for it perhaps explains much of the Trump phenomenon, and the rise of far Right in Italy and other European countries. Hannah Arendt has said that totalitarianism is based on loneliness, from isolation and lack of normal social relationships. “For those who feel they have no place in society, it is through surrounding their individual selves to ideology that the lonely rediscover their purpose and self-respect.”

Hertz writes that in the US Republican primaries the Trump supporters were twice as likely as those of Ted Cruz to have seldom, if ever, participated in community activities. And his rallies are community affairs involving extended families, people to whom Trump appears to be listening, people who he says are true patriots, who are beautiful, who have been undermined by immigrants, democrats, liberals, take your pick, all tactics similar to those of the Far Right in Germany, Belgium, France and Italy.

So, what of the next century, will it be even lonelier? Hertz seems certain of one thing. Robots will have a role in alleviating individual loneliness, and not just from older people. “For those who, for whatever reason, find standard human relationships hard to forge, robots may also play a valuable role.”

People, she says, with no typical social skills, including those with extreme social anxiety or autism spectrum disorder, have already been shown to benefit from robot-mediated therapy and group activities. Older Japanese women knit hats for their robot carers, and there are transgender sex robots.

We are probably a few decades away, though, from a robot being able to appear as empathetic as the most caring and kind of humans, a world indeed in which robots may be given “rights”.

This is the challenge our children and grandchildren will face, one in which they will have to be increasingly discerning, a world in which already one survey shows only 18% of Facebook users admit to posting accurate profiles, where human contact is decreasing, and Artificial Intelligence is displacing human-to-human relating.

Noreena Hertz’s book has perhaps given us some forewarning of what is to come. In the meantime, besides being alert to the issues surrounding robots we might take advice from the HSE for when we are lonely.

Be assured Loneliness is normal,
Everyone goes through lonely periods,
Boost self-esteem by finding achievable things to do,
Keep busy, volunteer,

Enjoy your own company,
Take care of yourself,
Start a hobby,
Be wary of what you see on line.

To end, some thoughts on loneliness.

The soul that sees beauty may sometimes walk alone, *Goethe*.

All great and precious things are lonely, *Steinbeck*.

The greatest thing in the world

is to know how to belong to oneself, *Montaigne*.

A season of loneliness and isolation is when the caterpillar gets its wings.

Remember that the next time you feel alone, *Mandy Hale*.

And, although the HSE left this out, if you are lonely when downstairs drinking Unitarian Free Trade coffee, don't let yourself be lonely any more. Let someone quietly know.

Paul Murray

Dublin Unitarian Church



A place of worship since 1717

UNITARIAN CHURCH

Prince's Street, Cork.

Registered Charity Number 0000246

Service: Sundays at 11a.m.

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Secretary : Colm Noonan : e-mail : colm.noonan@gmail.com

www.unitarianchurchcork.com

**Jazz Vespers,
first Friday of the month @ 6pm.**

An ecumenical service with the Methodist church.

Please Note

If you are aware of any member of our community who is unwell, or who has suffered a bereavement, and who would welcome contact from others in the church, please e-mail Rev.Bridget Spain.

Vestry 01 - 4780638

e-mail: revbspain@gmail.com

For any queries about Sunday Club, or to volunteer as a leader, please email Denise at sundayclub@dublinunitarianchurch.org

DUBLIN UNITARIAN CHURCH

Lunch-time service every Wednesday from 1.10 to 1.40 p.m.

Each week Eileen Delaney sends an e-mail circular as to what is happening in the church and the other activities associated with the church.

If you would like to receive this information you should send your details requesting your name be added to the list to:-
eileendelaney76@gmail.com



Dublin Unitarian Church

112 St. Stephens Green Dublin 2.

Service 11.00a.m.

Sunday Rota for February 2023

5th February

Service

Reader

Flowers

Welcomer

Coffee

The Journey to Ithaka

Rev. Bridget Spain.

Liz McManus

Seán Lenihan

Paula Mills

Janet Mulroy, Catharine Cook, Will O'Connell

12th February

Service

Reader

Flowers

Welcomer

Coffee

Waiting for God

Rev. Bridget Spain

Gavin Byrne

Denise Dunne

Denise Dunne

Máire Bacon, Peter White, Madeline Stringer

19th February

Service

Reader

Flowers

Welcomer

Coffee

Radical Acceptance

Will O'Connell

Paul Murray

Paula Mills

Paula Mills

Michael Robinson, Trish Webb Duffy, Paula Mills

26th February

Service

Reader

Flowers

Welcomer

Coffee

St. Paul

Rev. Bridget Spain

Denise Dunne

Trish Webb Duffy

Frank Tracy

Paul Murray, Frank Kelly, Lis Ramirez

Services are broadcast live from the church each Sunday at 11a.m.
On our WebCam, click and connect at www.dublinunitarianchurch.org

Recordings of previous services are also available on the 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.

DUBLIN UNITARIAN CHURCH

112 St.Stephen's Green, Dublin D02 YP23, Ireland.
Unitarian Church - Dublin Registered Charity Number 20000622

Service: Sunday at 11a.m. Phone: Vestry 01-4780638

Managing committee:- Madam Chairperson: Denise Dunne;
Vice Chairman: Dennis Aylmer; Secretary: Trish Webb-Duffy; Treasurer: Rory Delany;
Tony Shine; Andy Pollak; Peter White; Will O'Connell;
Paul Murray; Madeline Stringer; Gavin Byrne; Tony Brady.

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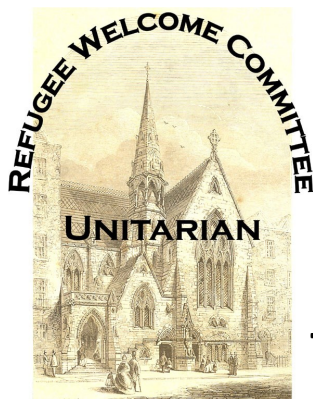
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Organist: Josh Johnston Pianist 086 892 0602
Caretaker: Kevin Robinson Telephone: 4752781

Recordings of the church services are available on the church website.



Thank you Everyone

It is my great pleasure to thank the congregation for it's extraordinary generosity.

After the Carol Service on December 18th 2022, we descended to the Damer Hall for coffee and beautiful Cakes, (see frontcover) Chutney, Jams and Honey sale organised by Alison Claffey.

Thank you to so very many people who made and donated everything that made it a great success.

Thank you especially to Alison for organising the sale and making the wonderful Christmas decorations and also to Cathal Duffy and Paul Spain for their fantastic honeys from their four different hive locations.

(- he has had it analysed and it's as good or better for you than manuka honey!).

And – most especially – thank you to everyone who donated so very generously to the Refugee fund.

We raised €1,000 at the sale!!!!!!

Due to the amazing generosity of church members we now have over €1,700 which was raised at the charity collection in church, sufficient funds for the current needs of the Afghan refugee family that we are sponsoring as a church.

You are great. Thank you.

Emer O'Reilly

How the Dublin Unitarian Church brought an Afghan refugee family to safety in Ireland

In October 2021 Hajira (not her real name), a 23 year old Afghan student, stepped off a plane at Dublin airport and was taken to the Mosney Direct Provision Centre in County Meath, a former holiday camp which is one of the country's largest accommodation centres for refugees and asylum seekers. She had flown from Kabul under a UN scheme to evacuate Afghans at risk after the ultra-Muslim Taliban army had swept through the country and overthrown its then pro-Western government, imposing cruel new laws and restrictions on that country's people, and particularly its women.

A couple of weeks later members of the Dublin Unitarian Church's Refugee Welcome Committee (URWC) met Hajira at Mosney. The URWC had been formed two years earlier by a group of people in our church who had come together to set up a 'Community Sponsorship Group' under a government-supported scheme, modelled on one used in Canada since the 1970s, under which refugees fleeing war and persecution are sponsored by Irish community, church and other grass-roots groups. These groups undertake to provide refugees and refugee families with housing, social welfare, medical and education support, job-seeking opportunities, language classes and other supports for two years. They have to raise at least €10,000 to fund this support and are answerable to and supported by intermediary bodies: in our case the Irish Refugee Council (who proved to be a big support to our group throughout the project).

The first thing the URWC did in March 2020, in the month that the Covid pandemic struck Ireland, was to find a house for a South Sudanese refugee family – a mother and four children – in Mulhuddart. Then a plan to sponsor a Syrian family fell through due to the Covid lockdown.

In the current housing crisis in Dublin, finding accommodation for refugees is particularly challenging, and many embryonic Community Sponsorship Groups find this initial obstacle particularly difficult to overcome. But what happened in the autumn of 2021 was a small miracle: a couple from Raheny, Fiona and Simeon, came in off the street to a service one Sunday, and it turned out that they had a lovely one-bedroom apartment adjacent to their house (a converted garage) which was for rent.

Hajira is a highly educated and very smart young woman. She

adapted quickly to her life in Dublin, being helped by URWC members to negotiate the labyrinthine bureaucracy required to settle as a refugee in Ireland: getting a Garda National Immigration Bureau card; endless visits to the local Intreo office for income support and to seek employment; applying for a PPS number and the Housing Assistance Payment; getting a medical card; visiting the doctor, dentist, optician and podiatrist. Mary O'Brien's leadership and project management skills, Trish Webb Duffy's indefatigable minding of Hajira and visiting offices, Sheila Hanley's huge knowledge of the Irish public service and Dr. Emer O'Reilly's of the Irish health system were all particularly helpful here.

Hajira started English and German lessons (her Afghan fiancé was living and working in Germany); did driving lessons; and went hill-walking with a couple of the group members. She succeeded in obtaining a six-month internship with the management consultants Ernst and Young. Jennifer Buller, a language teacher, was a huge help in coaching her to pass the necessary English exams to return to third level education, while Aidan O'Driscoll, a retired lecturer at Technological University Dublin, tirelessly researched college courses and helped her apply successfully to do an MBA at a private Dublin college (the group raised nearly €8,000 to cover her fees, some of which will be repayable by her when she is able to do so).

With Hajira relatively settled (she married her Frankfurt-based fiancé in the spring of 2022), it was time to try to get her mother out of Afghanistan – this was to take six months of constant writing to TDs and government ministers and lobbying of Department of Justice and Department of Children, Equality and Integration officials. Setara (not her real name) had been a prominent writer and journalist before the Taliban takeover, but she was beaten up by party militants while trying to report on events shortly after they seized power. Her escape was complicated by a new law from the Taliban banning women from leaving the country without an accompanying man. At the end of May 2022, she was finally able to leave for Tehran in neighbouring Iran, accompanied by her son Abdul as far as the Iranian capital, and from there to fly as part of an Irish government refugee assistance programme to Dublin. She was to pay tribute to her new Unitarian friends in a beautiful poem, which began: 'My blue eyed angels. You have saved me from the smoke and fire of death and destruction... Your kind looks teach me humanity and compassion.'

The final piece in the jigsaw was to get Abdul, Hajira's brother (not his real name), his pregnant wife and their two year old son to Ireland. This happened at the end of September 2022 after another concerted campaign of lobbying and letter writing. Senior officials in the Irish Refugee Protection Programme were particularly helpful in his case, which at the outset looked hopeless. At one point he was forced to hide in a relative's house after he was badly beaten up by his Taliban-supporting father. Paul Murray took a lead here and was indefatigable in Abdul's cause (Paul's exceptional hosting and inter-personal skills were in evidence throughout the project).

On 30th September 2022 Abdul and his small family arrived in Dublin airport after a hair-raising journey via Tehran and Istanbul. They were held up overnight at Tehran airport after a name was missing on one of their air tickets, while riots and shootings convulsed the Iranian capital outside. Friends of a member of the URWC had offered them their holiday house on the County Wexford coast as a temporary home (this offer of accommodation was key in getting them accepted as refugees to Ireland), but it was decided that, because of serious complications in the young woman's pregnancy, she should go straight to the Rotunda hospital, with Abdul and his son generously put up by Jennifer Buller's family.

After two months in an apartment in Stillorgan owned by a Catholic religious order, Abdul's family were able to move to a refurbished house in Mullingar offered by the Catholic diocese of Meath at a very modest rent. Members of a Community Sponsorship Group in Ballynacargy, a village 15 kilometres outside that town, agreed to take over much of the 'minding' of the family. As the pre-Christmas move approached, the URWC group were in a frenzy of buying and moving furniture and household goods, children's clothes and toys (Eanna Ó'Muire and Ciara McChárthaigh were particularly active in sourcing these), finding local doctors and government offices, and planning the move.

So this often difficult and painful saga had a happy ending, as the family settled successfully into Mullingar. I would like to pay tribute to the huge efforts and skills of the UWRG group of church people who made it happen: Mary O'Brien, Sheila Hanley, Trish Webb Duffy, Emer O'Reilly, Paul Murray, Aidan O'Driscoll, Jennifer Buller, Ciara McChárthaigh, Éanna O'Muire, and Robin Ward (particularly for all the driving). It has been a real privilege to work with such an extremely

hard-working, efficient, compassionate, generous, patient and good-hearted group of people. I hope they all get their reward in heaven (if there is a Unitarian heaven)!

The final word should be about the extraordinary generosity of the St Stephen's Green congregation. When you consider that refugees arrive usually with little more than the clothes on their backs, no household goods and unmet medical, dental and optical needs (and then have to wait some time for social welfare payments), you can see how vital it is to have money quickly available to assist them. In this the refugee committee relied heavily on the congregation. One member anonymously donated €10,000, and there were other individual donations of €1,000, €600, €500 (several) and numerous smaller donations. Alison Claffey organised plant, cake and honey sales which raised over €1,700 after two services. February 2022 was designated 'refugee month' by the managing committee and between Sunday collections, box donations and individual donations the bounteous sum of €4,461 was raised in that month. A GoFundMe page raised another €3,450 from supporters outside the congregation. A place in heaven for all those people too!

Andy Pollak

Dublin Unitarian Church

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

The Enchanted April

by

Elizabeth Von Arnim

This might seem like just another romantic novel set in the 1920's when four English women rent a medieval Villa on the Italian Riviera . But it is more than that as Von Arnim explores the themes of love, loss, loneliness, friendship, class, prejudice, self-fulfilment and also how the human spirit responds to a beautiful environment and nature.

It begins on a cold rainy day in London when Mrs. Wilkins, Lottie, is in her ladies club and she sees an advertisement in the paper for the rental of an Italian Villa for the month of April, it says "Those who appreciate wisteria and sunshine". She spots Mrs. Arbuthnot, Rose, whom she knows vaguely from her church, who is also reading the advert. Spontaneously Lottie approaches Rose and convinces her that they need to rent the Villa as they are both unhappy, she says "I'm sure it's wrong to go on being good for so long 'til one gets miserable, and I can see you've been good for years and years because you look so unhappy". Rose denies her unhappiness but she agrees to answer the advert. She then goes to meet Mr. Briggs the owner of the villa who agrees to let it to her, he becomes besotted with Rose due to her likeness to a portrait of the Madonna in the villa, her mystique is enhanced as he also thinks she is a war widow.

Lottie and Rose decide to help alleviate the cost of the rental by advertising for other ladies to join them. They get two replies, Mrs. Fisher and Lady Caroline Dester.

Mrs. Fisher is a widow in her sixties, she is stuck physically in her dark Victorian relic of a home and stuck mentally in the past. She uses a 'stick' in more ways than one to negotiate her way in life. She wants to go to the Villa to reminisce on the past and to read her old books.

Lady Caroline, aka 'Scrap', is a very beautiful upper class 'flapper' socialite who lost her fiancé in the war. She's tired of the noise and tawdriness of her life and longs to be understood and accepted for her-

self. She is cynical of people and their motives, the ‘grabbers’. The Italy trip offers a refuge from it all, somewhere to be alone and to think.

This satire on British society after the First World War is witty and peppered with wonderful dialogue. There are some great comedic episodes due to miscommunications and misunderstandings not just between the four ladies but also between them and the local Italians who staff the villa. There are meal time dramas, exploding bathroom boilers and discussions on inappropriate subjects such as bedroom etiquette.

Von Arnim is great at characterisation and even the villa San Salvatore comes alive with her descriptions of the gardens and their flowers and the beautiful terraces and balconies overlooking the Italian Riviera. Who would not be transformed by such an enchanted place?

Lottie succumbs immediately. In suburban Hamstead she is portrayed as a drab mousey housewife with very little self-esteem. She is cowed by her ambitious solicitor husband Mellersh, who is always looking for a business opportunity. Lottie immerses herself into this heavenly environment and lets go of her life before. She radiates happiness and love so much so, that she wants to share it with everyone and so invites Mellersh to join her. She is convinced that the enchanted villa will work it’s magic on him too. She also encourages Rose to invite her husband Frederick.

Now Rose is very reserved and religious. She dutifully serves the parish and it’s poor. She has drifted apart from her husband Frederick of thirteen years as she cannot reconcile how he earns his living as a very successful celebrity writer of salacious historical novels, even if it is under the pseudonym of Mr. Arundel. However, San Salvatore unhinges Rose, she is less inclined to pray and finds herself reflecting on her marriage and their lost baby, she longs to have love back in her life. She takes a leap of faith and sends Frederick an invitation, she also feels very guilty as she didn’t tell him exactly where in Italy she was going and with whom.

Mrs . Fisher is not impressed and says to herself “ Another husband, was there to be no end to them”? But even Mrs. Fisher comes under the San Salvatore spell, she finds herself less intolerant of the impertinent young women, she hasn’t read her books or used her stick as much as before and finds she wants to be with people more and that the present and the future are more important than the past.

Mr. Wilkins does come and is delighted with Lottie’s new found friends, especially Lady Caroline and Mrs. Fisher, two prospective wealthy clients. He starts to see more to Lottie and expresses this by affectionately pinching her ears!

The plot has some twists and turns, firstly with the arrival of Mr. Briggs whose infatuation with Rose quickly evaporates when he meets the beautiful Lady Caroline. She initially ignores him but San Salvatore has made her less cynical and so she opens up more to his affections and finds that when he is quite sincere in his interest in her it renews her faith and trust in her fellow human beings.

The second twist comes with the arrival of Mr. Arbuthnot but not at Rose's letter of invitation, which he missed. He has come under his pseudonym Mr. Arundel and has sought out Lady Caroline by wheedling out her location from her mother, but he doesn't know Rose is also there. Rose and Frederick come across each other alone in the drawing room before the others come down for dinner. She thinks he is there because of her invitation and embraces him lovingly and affectionately kisses him, he is shocked but filled with renewed love and responds to Rose's lovemaking, it is a very moving reunion and reconciliation. When the others do join them for dinner Lady Caroline is introduced very rapidly by the intuitive Lottie to Frederick as Rose's husband. Caroline diplomatically feigns ignorance of knowing Frederick and so all is well and the story for everyone ends happily. They leave for England changed and renewed.

The book club readers really enjoyed this book even if the ending was predictable and too good to be true, but considering the time of it's writing post WW1 combined with the Spanish Flu Epidemic, the overall sense of positivity to the book is very understandable. Not everyone got the humour but all agreed the writing was wonderful.

A 9 out of 10 recommendation.

Alison Claffey

Dublin Unitarian Church

Managing Committee Notice

Membership Renewal 2022/23

The Managing Committee would like to thank all those who responded to the email regarding Membership Renewal that was circulated in November 2022. If you are a Member of the congregation (*i.e., if you signed the Membership Book at some stage between 1999 and 2022*) and you did not receive a communication regarding the renewal of your membership it is because either

- (1) the email address that we have on record for you is defunct, *or*
- (2) we don't have an email address on record for you.

If you have an email address and didn't receive your copy of the Membership Renewal Form that was sent out in November, please contact us via treasurerunitarianchurch@gmail.com so that the form can be sent to you.

If you don't have an email address the Membership Renewal Form can be sent to you by post or you can pick one up in the church. To have a form sent out to you by post please write to:

The Treasurer
Unitarian Church
112 St. Stephen's Green
Dublin D02 YP23

Completed forms can be returned to the treasurer by email or post, or by dropping them into the locked Donations Box in the church.

**The closing date for receipt of renewal forms
is 31st January 2023**

Rory Delany
Treasurer St Stephen's Green Unitarian Church

During May 2023 we will be having our plant sale.

We need Butter boxes
to plant bedding seedlings into.

Large pots - not the small ones.



We hope to have a bigger and
better selection than last year.

If you want particular plants let
Alison or Bridget know and
they will endeavour to help you.