

# Oscailt

May 2024

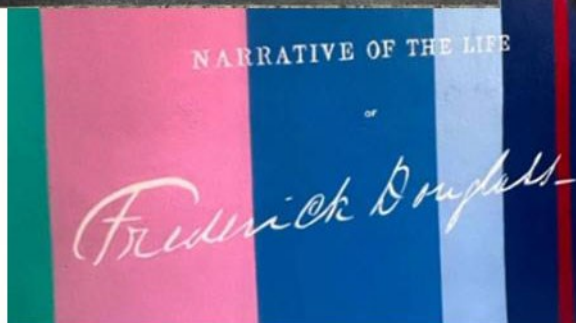
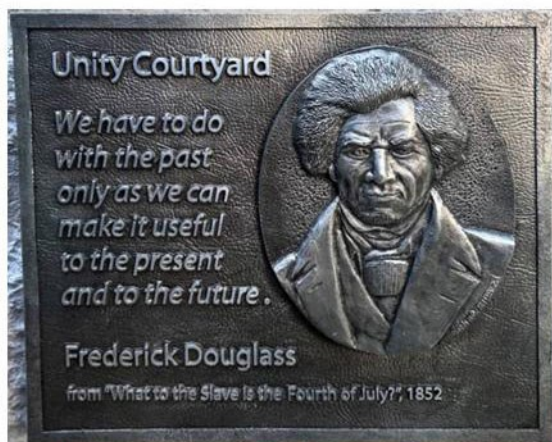
**IRELANDS UNITARIAN MAGAZINE**

Vol.20 Nº 5





The Lord Mayor of Cork cllr. Kieran McCarthy and Frederick Douglas great, great, great grandson in the courtyard of Cork Unitarian Church celebrating the opening of the mural of Frederick Douglas.





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

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

Minister: Rev.Bridget Spain  
e-mail: revbspain@gmail.com  
Rev.Bill Darlison *Minister Emeritus.*

hellounitarianchurch@gmail.com  
www.dublinunitarianchurch.org  
www.unitarianchurchcork.com

**Cork Unitarian Church**  
Princes Street, Cork  
Minister: Rev.Mike O'Sullivan

Editor: Paul Spain

**To Subscribe**  
Annual subscription 12 monthly issues.  
€35 Posted for Ireland  
£35 Posted for England & Scotland  
Cheques and PO should be made payable to: *Dublin Unitarian Church.*

**Deadline**

The deadline for articles to be included is the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the month.  
Unsolicited articles, news items, letters, poems, etc are always welcome, however there can be no guarantee of publication. Copy should be sent by e-mail or at least typed, photographs should be 300dpi.

e-mail: oscailtmagazine@gmail.com

**Advertising**

Advertising rates available on request. e-mail: oscailtmagazine@gmail.com

**Front Cover:**

Rev.Bridget Spain, Tara, Bella, Lena, three girls in the coming of age programme.  
(photo P.Spain)

**CONTENTS**

**Coming of Age**  
*Rev.Bridget Spain* 2

**Daria Ostrowski**  
*Daria Ostrowski* 5

**Turning the tide  
of the Loneliness Epidemic**  
*Tony Brady* 9

**Book Reviews** 14



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.

# Coming of Age

This church does not have a creed, members are not required to believe particular articles of faith. Our services do not follow a liturgical calendar. We regularly dip into the wisdom of other faith systems and we tailor them to suit our needs. This Coming of Age service is an example of this. It is directed towards young people as they begin secondary school. Family members, friends and our community come to celebrate young people who have grown up in the community. The service marks the beginning of their journey to becoming independent adults.

While the girls may choose to sign our membership book as a memento of today. They are not signing up as members of this church. Becoming a member of this church is reserved for adults.

In the months leading up to the service we try to tell the participants something about other faith systems. This is to give them an appreciation that people are different, people hold different beliefs about religion, we don't all think alike. We believe that diversity should be not just tolerated but respected, welcomed and celebrated.

We tell them about Unitarianism, but this information is not heavily emphasised, because we believe that our job is not to fill their minds with facts about any particular religion and never to try to impose beliefs on others. Our role as educators of our children was beautifully stated by William Ellery Channing when he created one of the first children's catechisms in the early 19th Century. Two hundred years ago Channing wrote:

*The great end in religious education is not to stamp our minds upon the young. But to stir up their minds.  
Not to give them a definite amount of knowledge but to inspire a love of truth.*

*Not to bind them with prejudices to our ideas but to encourage them to impartial, conscientious judging of whatever subjects they encounter.*

*Not to impose religion on them but to awaken their conscience and their moral discernment. In a word the great end is to awaken the soul.*

Our wish for Lena, Tara and Bella is that you live a life that is thoughtful, honest and respectful of others. That you don't follow the crowd, that you always remain true to yourself and to what you believe is true.

The service is an opportunity for the parents to speak to their child; to share with us something of their journey as parents. This is always beautiful for us adults – Tara, Bella, Lena believe me in later life -you will appreciate your parents' words to you this morning!

For the wider church community there is a tinge of sadness because we know that this service marks the time when the young people leave the world of coming to church with parents to build their lives outside of church. While we will miss them we hope that we have given them roots in our community.

Earlier in the service I presented the girls with kites. These kites are to symbolise how family life develops and changes. Young children constantly need the help and guidance of parents. As the child grows it is the job of parents to allow their child to become independent. The process is a difficult but necessary balancing act for parents. Its like letting a kite fly.

In order for a kite to reach its potential the Kite must be allowed to take the wind and reach for the sky. To remain in the air the kite must be held by hands that are sensitive, strong and most of all wise.

The owner of the hands must judge when to keep a firm hold and when to loosen the strings. They are likely to need the art of gathering back the kite when it takes a tumble and finding the courage to let the kite fly once again. They will need to develop the art of knowing when to speak out and when to stay silent.

Older parents will want to wish younger parents luck in this process. We remind the parents that they can and must trust in the roots they have provided for their child. In the end everything will work out. Eventually that is!

Sometimes the kite falters, sometimes it takes a tumble; as we all stumble from time to time, this too is part of life. When we tumble we need three types of bones to help us recover. We need backbone, an elbow and a funny bone.

Throughout our lives we need backbone, to live up to our ideals and do what we know is right. We need backbone to get us through difficult times, we need a backbone to stand up for what we believe is

right. We need backbone to resist going along with ideas that are popular but unkind or unjust. It takes backbone to stand up for what you believe.

We need lots of elbow grease. The most worthwhile achievements succeed by hard work and “giving it elbow” rather than inspiration or natural talent. Little is ever achieved just by talking. Remember that the greatest and most daunting projects come to fruition by taking the first step and seeing the project to completion. Whatever you decide to do give it plenty of elbow!

Throughout life one of the most useful bones to have is the funny bone. Life is ridiculous, absurd, challenging, daunting and wonderful. Life is always better when there is laughter and fun sometimes seeing the funny side is often the most useful thing we can do.

I will end with words from the wonderful philosophy of Dr.Zeus

Lena, Bella, Tara

You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself any direction you choose.

You're on your own. And you know what you know. And YOU are the one who'll decide where to go.

And when you're alone, there's a very good chance you'll meet things that scare you right out of your pants. There are some, down the road between hither and yon, that can scare you so much you won't want to go on.

So be sure when you step, Step with care and great tact. And remember that life's A Great Balancing Act. And will you succeed? Yes! You will, indeed! (98 and  $\frac{3}{4}$  percent guaranteed) Kids, you'll move mountains.

O the places you'll go today is your day. Your mountain is waiting so get on your way.

Congratulations to Lena, Tara and Bella, today is your day, enjoy it.

*Rev.Bridget Spain*

Minister St.Stephen's Green Unitarian Church

Dublin 14<sup>th</sup> April 2024

# Daria Ostrowski

## Reading on Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> February 2024

Hello everyone!

My name is Daria Ostrowski and last month was my first year anniversary of attending this church. The unique spiritual experience of worship in this church is something I look forward to every Sunday.

Let me share with you a little bit about myself, so this noble and gracious congregation should know who I am. It will also allow me to make a connection to the subject matter of my reading.

I was born and raised in Poland, and although I call it my home country, I have close ties to the United States, where I also lived. After that, life brought me to Ireland and Ireland has been home for some time now.

The Poland I grew up in and lived in was the Poland behind the Iron Curtain. I vividly remember the country's fight for civil freedoms, political sovereignty and independence; the martial law, a steel hand of a communist repressive totalitarian regime governing - it seemed - all aspects of one's todays and tomorrows. Economic hardship, repression of basic freedoms, the constant fear of persecution were an everyday experience of millions of people.

However, in the midst of it all, one of my most cherished memories is of my Dad tuning each night in to the radio station "Free Europe" broadcast from Luxembourg to listen to the news of recent political developments not curated or skewed by the



Myself and my son Luke who also attends this church.

government media, an activity punishable by imprisonment by state secret police.

As one could imagine, growing up, and living, in such turbulent times only underscores in one's life a profound belief in the critical importance of the freedom of thought of expression, of having open platforms for debates and reasoning.

In celebration of everything that these basic freedoms made possible in this native country of mine and elsewhere, I would like to invite you today to remember one of its seminal fruits – a book that is regarded as the first codified statement of the Non-Trinitarian faith, called the Racovian Catechism, authored and published at the turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

What follows is various interesting factoids from the following websites: Unitarian Universalist Association, [BiblicanUnitarian.com](http://BiblicanUnitarian.com), Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, Wikipedia and the Hungarian website of the Unitarian Repository of knowledge.


On 22<sup>nd</sup> of January 1556, a Polish Calvinist priest Piotr of Goniądz, spoke out against the doctrine of the Trinity during the general synod of the Reformed Calvinist churches of Poland. He found several supporters of his ideas and later became a spiritual leader of the anti-Trinitarian minority, which became known as the Polish Brethren.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, Poland was a haven for religious dissidents, attracting various groups seeking refuge from persecution elsewhere in Europe.

The Racovian Catechism was the confession of faith of the Polish Brethren and it took its name from the town of Raków, where they had established a university, which became a renowned centre of learning, attracting scholars from all over Europe, and the only town in the world where Unitarians were in the religious majority.

The Racovian Catechism was published in 1605 (although some sources claim that the first recognised version dates back to 1574). Because of its systematic exposition and comprehensive articulation of Unitarian beliefs, it is often considered one of the earliest and most significant statements of Unitarianism. It addressed such theological topics as the nature of God, Christology, salvation, the authority of Scripture, and ethics.





## We Bid You Welcome To This Church

**I**s a place we love, & which we tend with care. We do not ask what you believe or expect you to think like we do, but only that you try to live a kindly life with dignity proper to a human being.

Preachers here, have the task of presenting religion freely, fearlessly & faithfully. Hearers here, have the responsibility of testing what they hear, not only with a critical mind, but also in the living of everyday life.

The Members of this congregation welcome the support of all who believe that religion is wider than any sect & deeper than any set of opinions. We welcome all who might find in our friendship strength, & encouragement for daily living.



— Attributed to Unitarian Church, Dublin, Ireland  
Calligraphy, Marion Hoffman

Attributed to Unitarian Church Dublin, Ireland

Several authors had a hand in drafting the Catechism: Valentinus Smalcius, Hieronim Moskorzowski, Johannes Volkel and others. It is likely that part of the text had been prepared by the Fausto Sozzinni, an Italian theologian and exile who had settled among the Polish Brethren in 1579, without ever formally joining, and who died in the year before the Catechism was drafted.

The Catechism was translated into German in 1608, and Latin, with a “dedication” (actually, more of a challenge) to James I of England, in 1609.

In the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, influenced by the writings, teachings, and migrations of Polish Brethren and other theological thinkers, Unitarian communities emerged in countries such as Transylvania, Hungary, England, the Netherlands, and eventually North America, with roots tracing back to the Polish Unitarian tradition.

Sadly, the flourishing Unitarian community, including its publishing arm, was nearly completely destroyed in 1638 due to political and religious changes in the country. Subsequently, Catholicism was re-established as the dominant religion in Raków, a part of the counterreformation efforts.

Even after the devastation of Poland's Unitarian community, the Catechism continued to be printed in new translations. In 1651, a new edition in Latin was published in London, only to be followed in 1652 by a resolution of the British Parliament that required the Sheriffs of London and Middlesex to seize and burn all known copies. Later that same year, the first English translation, likely the work of John Biddle, was published.

No printed original publication copies in the Polish language survived, but there are a couple of the original 17<sup>th</sup> century published first edition copies in Latin and German, actually available for purchase from an antiquarian and rare bookseller shop in London for around 8,000 £stg.

(<https://sokol.co.uk/stock/socinianism/>) (for rare book collectors among us).

More readily available is the English translation of Thomas Rees of 1818 under the title THE RACOVIAN CATECHISM, WITH NOTES AND ILLUSTRATIONS, TRANSLATED FROM THE LATIN: TO WHICH IS PREFIXED A SKETCH OF THE HISTORY OF UNITARIANISM IN POLAND AND THE ADJACENT COUNTRIES – downloadable from the Internet.

*Daria Ostrowski*

St.Stephen's Green Unitarian Church



**A place of worship since 1717**

## **UNITARIAN CHURCH CORK**

Registered Charity Number 0000246

**Due to the fire in the church in January 2024**

**The service will be broadcast on  
Facebook until further notice.**

**Service: Sundays at 11a.m.**

*Minister:* -Rev.Mike O'Sullivan Telephone:023-8842800

e-mail:- osullmike@gmail.com Mobile 087-9539998

Further information from 087-9539998

**Treasurer :** Brian Cluer e-mail: bmcleur@gmail.com

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

**[www.unitarianchurchcork.com](http://www.unitarianchurchcork.com)**

## **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

### **Childrens Programme - Sunday Club**

Takes place on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of each month

For any queries about Sunday Club, or to volunteer as a leader, please email Denise at [sundayclubunitarianchurch@gmail.com](mailto:sundayclubunitarianchurch@gmail.com)

### **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](mailto:eileendelaney76@gmail.com)



# Dublin Unitarian Church

112 St.Stephens Green Dublin 2.

**Service 11.00a.m.**

## **Sunday Rota for May 2024**

5<sup>th</sup> May                      *Song of the Summer*  
Service                      **Rev.Bridget Spain**  
Reader                      **Jennifer Flegg**  
Flowers                      **Janet Mulroy**  
Welcomer                      **Catharine Cook, Andrew Connolly-Crangle**  
Coffee                      **Janet Mulroy, Maeve Edwards, Doireann Ni Bhriain**

---

12<sup>th</sup> May                      *Scapegoating, Our National Sport*  
Service                      **Rev.Bridget Spain**  
Reader                      **Rory Delany**  
Flowers                      **Alison Claffey**  
Welcomer                      **Janet Mulroy, Catharine Cook**  
Coffee                      **Michael Robinson, Alison Claffey, Colette Douglas**

---

19<sup>th</sup> May                      *Living & Loving the Question*  
Service                      **Rev.Bridget Spain**  
Reader                      **Janet Mulroy**  
Flowers                      **Jane Nolan**  
Welcomer                      **Malachy Hevehan, Colette Douglas**  
Coffee                      **Malachy Hevehan, Catharine Cook, Grainne Carty**

---

26<sup>th</sup> May                      *Faith Journey*  
Service                      **Rev.Bridget Spain**  
Reader                      **Paul Murray**  
Flowers                      **Paula Mills**  
Welcomer                      **Michael Robinson**  
Coffee                      **Paula Mills, Lorraine Doyle**

Services are broadcast live from the church each Sunday at 11a.m.  
On our WebCam, click and connect at [www.dublinunitarianchurch.org](http://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:-** Chairperson: Denise Dunne;  
Vice Chairman: Dennis Aylmer; Secretary: Trish Webb-Duffy; Treasurer: Rory Delany;  
Tony Shine; Andy Pollak; Peter White; Will O'Connell; Collette Douglas;  
Malachy Hevehan; Paul Murray; Madeline Stringer; Gavin Byrne.

[www.dublinunitarianchurch.org](http://www.dublinunitarianchurch.org)

e-mail: [hellounitarianchurch@gmail.com](mailto:hellounitarianchurch@gmail.com)

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

Minister: **Rev. Bridget Spain:** Telephone: 01 - 8388 808  
Vestry 01 - 4780638 e-mail: [revbspain@gmail.com](mailto:revbspain@gmail.com)

Rev. Bill Darlison (*Minister Emeritus*)

Chairperson: Denise Dunne:- Tel: 087-2450660

Secretary: Trish Webb-Duffy:- Tel: 087-9346720  
e-mail: [secretaryunitarianchurch@gmail.com](mailto:secretaryunitarianchurch@gmail.com)

Treasurer: Rory Delany: 087-2217414,  
e-mail: [treasurerunitarianchurch@gmail.com](mailto:treasurerunitarianchurch@gmail.com)

Musical Director: Josh Johnston :- 086 892 0602

Caretaker: Kevin Robinson Telephone: 4752781

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

# Turning the tide of the Loneliness Epidemic

The idea for this address came to me from an article in the New York Times on the subject of loneliness. It said 57% of residents felt lonely often or some of the time and 67% felt socially isolated in the prior four weeks. Only a third of respondents said they could count on someone for emotional support, and at the same time, one in five respondents reported symptoms of depression.

Now you might say this is New York and this is the USA. But according to a 2023 Meta-Gallup survey which was carried out in over 140 countries, nearly one in four people worldwide feel very or fairly lonely.

This state of feeling lonely has to be bad for our well-being. Now we should say many people are very comfortable living a life of solitude and there is no suggestion that they should try to artificially turn themselves into people who are life and soul of the party. That won't work for them. We are all different.

What we are concerned with here today is loneliness which is a state-of-being which is not chosen by the person. It is a situation of feeling alone while at the same time not wishing to feel alone. This feeling of loneliness does not necessarily require that we be physically alone. If we lack a sense of companionship and connection we can feel lonely even if we are among a crowd of people.

The World Health Organization has declared loneliness to be a pressing global health threat. The US surgeon general tells us that its effect on our mortality is equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes a day. In older adults, loneliness is associated with a 50% increased risk of developing dementia and a 30% increased risk of coronary heart disease or stroke.

But loneliness also affects young people. Young people are reported as lonely in the same research.

So, what is causing this epidemic of loneliness in our time?

Well, we have seen major and rapid social changes. These situations can contribute to feelings of isolation, not to mention several years of semi-isolation we have all experienced due to Covid.

We have more urbanization, increased mobility, a higher population density, more apartment living and we are living more remotely from our neighbours than we did in times gone by.

Many people today don't know the names of their next-door neighbours. Just think of the loss of casual neighbourly encounters as we come and go each of us hermetically sealed in our own cars.

And there are other factors as well:

People having to relocate for work reasons.

More frequent new beginnings in new places doesn't help us create connection.

Technology and social media have also played a part. We have less face-to-face, less person-to-person, contact. Yes, technology can connect people and we can videocall people across the world. This is a great bonus – wonderful – even magical. But on a day-to-day basis technology has reduced our face-to-face contact. We see people, faces stuck in their telephones, in buses and trains and trams. Even in restaurants people can be seen scrolling through their phones even though they are in the company of other people

And there is the loneliness-inducing effect of social media which allows us to make comparisons with others, leading us to feel a sense of inadequacy. We must remember that on social media we are presented with a sanitised and a highly edited version of the other person. That leave us with the impression that the other person is more confident and more desirable than we are. Not good for our feelings of connection.

Economics are at work as well:

We may find ourselves with less time to develop and retain friendships and less time for regular social interaction with other people. There are so many factors, all of them leading to one common feeling of isolation.



And notice how we have developed an increased Individualism with less communal living and communal sharing. People in more prosperous situations can live within their own bubble, with their own bedrooms, their own televisions, computers and headphones, all these gadgets reducing the possibility of interaction with even family, never mind other people.

Several countries have recognised the problem of loneliness and social isolation. The UK established a Minister for Loneliness in 2018. I believe the idea is also under discussion in Australia. Japan appointed a Minister of Loneliness in February 2021 in response to Japan's increasing levels of suicide.

It is good to see that loneliness and isolation are recognised as societal problem not just a weakness on the part of the individual person. But having said that, the solution is very much in the hands of the individual. It does require an effort on all our parts. Social connection is not going to present itself to us on a plate. We must make a move. And there's no need for us to feel exceptional or odd or strange at having to make this move. Everyone must do it and very few of us find it easy.

So let us look and see what we might do to break this cycle of loneliness and isolation. There are many opportunities for connection.

We can take part in activities that we already enjoy. And we can try new hobbies that bring us into touch with like-minded people. And speaking of other people it is important that we work to maintain the relationships we already have by keeping in regular contact with friends and family. Working to develop and maintain meaningful relationships requires some effort. That is part of the price we pay for connection, and it is well worth it.

For connection to operate someone must make a move and we shouldn't just leave it to the other person to make that move. We will find that once we have broken out of our shell - even a little - we will gain confidence and find it easier to break out even more.

It is very important to remember too that friendship is not a one-way traffic. To have a friend we have to be a friend. We make friends by being friendly and by being interested in the other person.

And as for not knowing the names of the people next door, we need to get to know our neighbours. It is easy to do this without getting in anyone's way. It costs nothing to welcome new people into our apartment block or into our street. Fundraising events such as a coffee morning for a hospice or a community clean up provide an opportunity for people to come together as well as working for a good cause. And there are simple things too. People like to be asked for help so we shouldn't try to live so independently. Make an excuse to ask for help in some way. Even a friendly "good morning" helps to create a feeling of community.

And then there is the opportunity for volunteering. There are so many organisations looking for helpers. We join to help other people, but we find in a roundabout way that we benefit by making connections and friendships. We gain more than we give.

In 9/11, Scott Heiferman was living in New York City. After 9/11 he and his neighbours came together to meet each other for the first time and to offer support. Scott realized that there had to be a way to connect neighbours with one another outside of a tragedy. He founded an organisation called Meetup which now exists in more than 190 countries.

Meetup hosts thousands of online and in-person events each day bringing people together who share a common interest. Anyone can contact people with similar interests by joining Meetup even today, I am in regular touch with people across the world because of Meetup.

All of us - and especially men - can find it difficult to establish new connections as the years pass. We don't find the same opportunities as we had when we were in school or college. The Men's Shed movement originated in Australia around the 1980s. The movement has spread to many countries across the world. It reached Ireland in 2,009 and at this stage there are 400 sheds up and down the country where men can meet to socialise and to work on projects. A year ago, a near neighbour invited me to join a local shed. I protested that I'd be no help beyond putting a nail in a wall. He explained that this was a social shed, no work, just getting together for talks and outings. It turned out to be a great friendly supportive community of 30 people, everyone with some-

thing different to share. I couldn't recommend it highly enough.

In short unless you are someone who really enjoys solitude there is no reason to be alone or to feel alone. There are so many opportunities to break out of isolation.

The simple fact is people need people. And we all have it in our power to help turn the tide of the loneliness epidemic that is affecting our world.

*Tony Brady*

St. Stephen's Green Unitarian Church

10<sup>th</sup> March 2024

**Dublin Unitarian Book Club's  
choice for February 2024.**

# **My Father's House**

*by Joseph O'Connor*

The author's caveat , "While real people and real events inspired the work of fiction that is *My Father's House*, it is first and last a novel. Liberties have been taken with facts, characterisations and chronologies. Incidents have been concentrated, characters amalgamated, renamed, adapted or invented... they are my versions and are not to be relied upon by biographers or researchers."

With this in mind O'Connor manages to transport the reader to the city of Rome when the German Nazi occupation took place in 1943 under the command of the SS. Officer Paul Hauptmann. He rules with a cruel and iron fist and has a mandate from the very top to clear Rome of Jews, Communists, escaped P.O.W's and any other undesirables. He comes up against resistance as safe houses are set up and escape lines organised to hide the fugitives and help them escape the Gestapo torture and certain death. One of these escape lines is organised by Monsignor Hugh O'Flaherty, a proud Kerryman from Ireland and senior official of the Roman Curia who resided in the Vatican. The Vatican City held the position of being a neutral independent country which was very tenuous in 1943 under the German occupation, but the Nazis held back and did not enter. Those who lived within the Vatican and those that sought protection within it's walls such as Diplomats, refugees and escaped Allied prisoners could not leave for fear of the risk of capture.

O'Flaherty forms a choir with seven others which is the cover they use to carry out their missions or Rendimentos. The choir consists of the Contessa Giovanna Landini a young widow befriended by O'Flaherty. Marianna De Vries a freelance journalist. Delia Kiernan, wife of the Irish Diplomatic Consul. Enzo Angelucci, a native Roman and newsstand owner. Sir Francis D'Arcy Osborne, a British Diplomat to the Holy See and his 'Security Guard' John May, and last but not least Lieutenant Colonel Sam Derry of the British Army who escaped from the Italian Concentration camps. These characters are well fleshed out mostly because the author intersperses between two time lines, one in December 1943 when a mission is planned, the Rendimento, and the second time line is around 1962/1963 when the transcripts of BBC research interviews of the Choir members are recorded for the TV Programme 'This is Your Life' , the recipient of the Programme is to be Monsignor O'Flaherty. (There was a 'This is your Life' programme done for Sam Derry but not O'Flaherty who had

suffered a stroke and was not able to travel, so here is one of the artistic licenses used by the Author.)

It is a clever way to flesh out these characters as they each give a first hand account and background to their lives before the war and then how they met O'Flaherty and subsequently how they became members of the Choir and their roles in the Escape Line plans.

SS Officer Hauptmann suspects one of the escape lines is being operated from within the Vatican. He knows of Monsignor O'Flaherty and his outspoken criticism of the Nazis especially their treatment of British P.O.W's whom he visited in the camps outside Rome during 1942 as being inhumane and cruel in the extreme. In this narrative a personal vendetta is developed by Hauptmann against O'Flaherty.

He is determined to capture him or one of his agents outside of the Vatican on one of their missions. This cat and mouse scenario adds to the atmosphere and tension as the Choir plan their Rendimento or mission scheduled for Christmas Eve 1943. This is also aided by the author starting each chapter of the 1943 timeline with an hourly countdown to the mission. We are also aware from the start that there is a major problem to the operation as their key agent to carry out the mission becomes gravely ill. So will the mission go ahead and who will carry it out and will it succeed.? ( No spoilers ).

Six months later Rome is liberated by the Allies and Hauptmann is captured, tried and imprisoned. He makes a special request to be ministered by O'Flaherty, and as it is his duty as a priest he does so reluctantly. There are ten visits and in as many years. Hauptmann converts to Catholicism and is contrite in the extreme but O'Flaherty doubts his sincerity to the end.

Most of the book club readers enjoyed this book once read with the author's caveat in mind. The writing was good and the dialogue flowed. The descriptions of Rome and the Vatican were very vivid and gave a great sense of the time and place. There is an overall recommendation for the book as it is the story of how so many ordinary people did the extraordinary during the horrific time of war, they put their lives at risk to save others who would most probably have died if captured by the Gestapo. Monsignor Hugh O'Flaherty's Escape Line saved 6,500 people made up of escaped soldiers, Jews and other refugees. A story well worth the retelling.

*Alison Claffey*

St.Stephen's Green Unitarian Church

**Dublin Unitarian Book Club's  
choice for March 2024.**

**Marzahn Mon Amour**  
*by Katja Oskamp*

Marzahn is a suburb of East Berlin and is made up of prefab concrete tower blocks. Like so many similar developments built in the 1960's and 70's throughout Europe it was seen as the new way forward for modern living and many people went to live there in the hope of a better environment. Many of the original occupants remained living there after the Berlin Wall came down and subsequent reunification with West Germany.

This book is part memoir and part social history and was published in 2007 by the author Katja Oskamp who at the time had hit a mid life crisis. Her latest work was rejected by her publishers, her husband was gravely ill and her daughter had moved away to college, she feels lost and invisible and makes the brave decision to change careers by training as a chiropodist much to the dismay of family and friends. She embarks on this new career by joining Tuffy , her former gym instructor who now owns a beauty salon in Marzahn along with Flocke , a feisty nail beautician and former barkeep. Katja forms strong friendships with these women as they work in the salon together treating their mostly aging clients to massage, foot care and nail care. It is not just through her forming strong bonds with Tuffy and Flocke that Katja reconnects with herself and life but through her interactions with her diverse array of mostly elderly clients.

Each client is given a chapter of their own and as Katja tenderly treats their old misshapen feet she also listens to their stories of the past and their worries and concerns of the present. We get to know them as their characters are very well written some of whom include the stoical Herr Paulke, Frau Blumeir the queen of affirmation in her wheelchair, Heir Pietch a former arrogant bureaucrat who still organises everyone, old Frau Noll and her bossy daughter, Frau Janusch who sports pink hair, loves shopping and cares for her house bound hubby with great

efficiency. Behind these very alive, sometimes quirky and humorous and colourful characters are also stories of hardship, pain and sadness such as Gerlinde Bonkat, a refugee from East Prussia after World War Two.

Even now she faces each day stoically with her brittle bones but still doesn't see herself as a victim as her faith has kept her going. As she works on their feet which she describes in all their varieties Oskamp listens attentively and with great empathy and respect as she genuinely tries to understand what drives her clients on despite all their hardships. The reader is also drawn into their worlds and is curious and interested about how their lives will turn out.

Marzahn may be perceived as a grey concrete jungle but it is transformed into a colourful place where there is a community of people who are not downtrodden but are proud of their neighbourhood that has survived through enormous social change just as they have.

The book club readers enjoyed the book (bar one) and thought it well written and translated from the German and a worthy winner of the Dublin Impac Literary Award 2023. The readers really liked the personality of the narrator as she was humorous, generous, kind and empathetic which showed in her writing as she managed to capture the essence of her clients so well. A 9/10 recommendation from this group.

*Alison Claffey*

St. Stephen's Green Unitarian Church

Live  
the

Golden

Rule

Treat others the way  
you want to be treated

[www.dublinunitarianchurch.org](http://www.dublinunitarianchurch.org)

From an original design by Lena Dunne participant in the Coming of Age Programme

