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IRELANDS UNITARIAN MAGAZINE

Vol.20 Nº 7





Rt.Rev.Lena Cockroft Moderator, presents Bridget with a memento.



L-R

Denise Dunne (chairperson), Rev.Bridget Spain and Madeline Stringer, who made the cake.



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.

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Editor: Paul Spain

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The deadline for articles to be included is the 15^{th} 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.

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Front Cover: Denise Dunne (chairperson) & Rev.Bridget Spain and the congregation, on 26th May 2024. (photo P.Spain)

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Our magazine title, *Oscalt*, 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 *oscalt*, (from the verb *oscalt*, to open), means an opening, or, metaphorically, it could mean a revelation or a beginning.

A Word of Thanks

On Sunday 26th May I took my final service as Minister of St.Stephen's Green Unitarian Church. I knew the day would be an emotional day for me and it was!

I was bowled over by the efforts everyone made to make the day so memorable. Thank you to everyone for being there at the service. A big thank you to those who made the journey from Northern Ireland, The Moderator Rt. Rev. Lena Cockroft and the Moderatorial handbag carrier Rev.Brian Cockroft. The Clerk of Synod Rev.Robert McKee, Rev.Brian Moodie and his wife Wendy, Rev.John Herron. Thank you to the congregation for the cakes, gifts, cards and most especially for all the good wishes.

As I attempted to say in church, I am humbled by the trust the congregation put in me when I was appointed Minister to this church. I hope I have repaid that trust. Thank you all for your support over the years, especially the support of the Managing Committee. That support made the work a great deal easier.

I am lucky that I can still be part of this wonderful community and I will continue to contribute to the church in the future.

Once again, thank you everyone.

Rev.Bridget Spain Minister Emerita St.Stephen's Green Unitarian Church.

Rev.Bridget Spain and the N.S.P.C.I.

The group of churches to which we in Dublin belong is the United Presbytery and Synod of Munster. In 1935 it joined with the Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church of Ireland, consisting of the Presbytery of Antrim, and the Presbytery of Bangor, a liberal group of Presbyterian churches in Northern Ireland which had refused to subscribe to the Presbyterian code known as the "Westminster Confession" and had broken away from the Presbyterian denomination. It consisted of 31 churches. Our Synod of Munster consisted of just two churches, Dublin and Cork, bringing the total to 33.

In fact, following the resignation of Rev.Kenneth Wright from our Church, when I was Chair of the Managing Committee, I found there was very little contact with the northern churches, and to my astonishment, when I made contact, found that they had not the faintest clue as to what we were about "down there" in the Republic! To remedy this, they co-opted me onto the General Purposes Committee of the General Synod in the North, and for many years I was the lone representative of the Synod of Munster at their regular meetings.

To my relief, all this was to change when Bridget Spain was ordained in our Church in February 2007, and in a very short time she was accompanying me on the long drives up to the meetings in the North, attending the General Synod and its General Purposes Committee, and most of the other meetings of the Denomination including the Christian Ministries Committee. The latter Committee was responsible for the training of new ministers into the Denomination, which Bridget chaired for a time. The fact that she was able to find the time to do all this on top of all her work in Dublin, weekly Sunday services, Baptisms, Funerals, Weddings, memorial services etc, etc, and, until the ordination of Rev.Mike O'Sullivan, was Minister-in-Charge of Cork Unitarian church as well, is amazing. Her quiet influence on the Denomination cannot be understated, and before long two of the Belfast Churches, All Souls and Rosemary St., who obviously liked the way we did things down in Dublin, decided to join our Synod of Munster. So we now have four churches in our Synod, two in the North and two in the South, and Bridget continues as its Moderator.

Until Bridget was ordained, our relationship with the northern churches was tenuous and remote.

All that has changed. Thank you, Bridget.

Dennis Aylmer St.Stephen's Green Unitarian Church

General Synod Non Subscribing Presbyterian Church of Ireland

St.Stephen's Green Unitarian church is affiliated to the Non Subscribing Presbyterian church of Ireland. The NSPCI held its AGM on the 10th/11th June in Banbridge Co.Down. The Dublin Church was represented at the meeting by me and our Treasurer Rory Delany. At the service the Rt.Rev.Lena Cockcroft retired as outgoing - Moderator. Thank you, Lena for all your work over many years of service to the Denomination. We wish you and Brian many years of happiness in a well earned retirement. Lena is replaced as Moderator for 2024/2025 by the Rt.Rev.Alister Bell.

Rev.Alister Bell is a Member of the Presbyter of Munster - this is our Presbytery. Alister trained for Ministry under the auspices of the Presbytery of Munster; he is Minister in Charge of the Moira church and combines Ministry with work outside of Ministry. He married his longtime partner Colin on a beautiful sunny day last September in a memorable Unitarian Service held in the couple's garden.

The NSPCI is a non-creedal liberal affiliation of churches, and like all liberal groups we have a wide variety of groups within our family. Like every family we have our disagreements. Alister takes up the position of Moderator with a vision of reaching out to all the Churches in the denomination and working with people who may hold different opinions. However, we are united in the believe that provided we respect these differences, we can work together sharing a common vision of creating a loving community. This will happen when we follow Jesus' teaching to Love One Another.



Rt.Rev.Alister Bell moderator of N.S.P.C.I. *Rev.Bridget Spain* moderator of synod of Munster Minister Emerita St.Stephen's Green Unitarian Church.

Alister, we send you our congratulations on your appointment, and our good wishes as you take up the role of Moderator and we look forward to welcoming you to preach in Dublin during your term of office.

With our love and good wishes

Rev.Bridget Spain Minister Emerita St.Stephen's Green Unitarian Church. Two of numerous e-mails sent to the magazine.

To Rev.Bridget Spain

I just wanted to pass on some positive feedback on your wonderful podcast and audio sermons. I've been a long-time listener but was taken by surprise when Bridget announced that this was her last service. She is retiring; I hope that she will still give services and addresses to keep our minds alive.

All of your services in their respective way were always informative, enlightening, uplifting, revealing, humanizing, challenging and uniting. I always came away with so much to think about and to try and incorporate into my personal spiritual journey. I for one; will miss your wonderful voice, cadence and delivery of your addresses.

Thank you for all that you have done! May you have a fruitful retirement.

(The above e-mail has a url of '@va.com' (Vatican City ! ! !))

To Rev.Bridget

I was disappointed to hear on Sunday 26th May that this was your last service. I have been listening to your services first on the pod cast then live on the web. I will miss your wonderful calm reassuring voice. Over the years I listened to you, I first fell across one of your pod casts while researching something entirely different. I went back to listen to the different addresses and became hooked on the lessons you so smoothly put forward. I had no following in any religion, if anything I had no interest in anything religious. But over the years of listening to your very logical arguments and there is no way to say this but I am definitely Unitarian now. Your addresses need to be archived along with Bills, both of you have an insight into the human psyche that gives one something very special, wholesome and reassuring to digest.

From Montana USA.

Dromore Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church

Dear Bridget

I am writing to you in my capacity as Clerk of the Presbytery of Bangor.

Last week the Presbytery of Bangor met for our quarterly meeting. At the end of the meeting John Herron had shared how some of us had been able to join you for your last official service as minister of St.Stephen's Green Unitarian church on Sunday 26th May. He spoke of what a wonderful occasion it was and what a privilege it had been to be present. He also noted what an important role you have played in the denomination over the past 17 years and how you have in fact been a blessing to all of us in the NSPCI.

The meeting asked me to write to you to convey the good wishes of the Presbytery of Bangor to both you and Paul on your official retirement. If I had more time I would have gone to the shop to find an appropriate card to post to you. But unfortunately with some pressure with a looming Synod to be held in Banbridge next week I am only just keeping my head above water at the moment and thought it better to write an email to you now, rather than delaying until things settle down.

Wishing you every blessing and look forward to seeing you next week at Synod. (10th&11th June)

Kind wishes

Rev.Brian Moodie Minister Dromore NSPCI



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

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 2nd Sunday of each month

For any queries about Sunday Club, or to volunteer as a leader, please email Denise at 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



Dublin Unitarian Church

112 St.Stephens Green Dublin 2.

Service 11.00a.m.

Sunday Rota for July 2024

7 th July	Jesus 's Testament.
Service	Dr.Martin Pulbrook
Reader	Tony Roche
Flowers	Paula Mills
Welcomer	Paula Mills and Janet Mulroy
Coffee	Gráinne Carty, Maeve Edwards, Janet Mulroy
41	
14 th July	The Whole Self with welcome and love
Service	Rev.Will Humphrey
Reader	Andy Pollack
Flowers	Will O'Connell
Welcomer	Gráinne Carty and Will O'Connell
Coffee	Catharine Cook, Daniela Cooney, Gavin Byrne
21 st July	The Four Ps.
Service	Will O'Connell
Reader	Paul Murray
Flowers	Fau Muray Karen O'Connor
	And a second
Welcomer	Karen O'Connor and Paul Murray
Coffee	Paula Mills, Doireann Ní Bhroinn, Emer O'Reilly
28 th July	Insist that you forever begin.
Service	Aidan O'Driscoll
Reader	Will O'Connell
Flowers	Karen O'Connor
Welcomer	Karen O'Connor and Emer O'Reilly
Coffee	Paul Murray, Alison Claffey, Will O'Connell

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; Andy Pollak: Peter White: Will O'Connell: Collette Douglas: Malachy Hevehan; Paul Murray; Madeline Stringer; Gavin Byrne.

www.dublinunitarianchurch.org

e-mail: hello@dublinunitarianchurch.org oscailtmagazine@gmail.com

Rev.Bridget Spain (Minister Emerita) 085-7180599

e-mail: revbspain@gmail.com

Vestry 01 - 4780638

Rev.Bill Darlison (Minister Emeritus)

Madam Chairperson: Denise Dunne:- Tel: 087-2450660

Secretary: Trish Webb-Duffy:- Tel: 087-9346720

Treasurer: Rory Delany: 087-2217414, e-mail: roryjdelany@hotmail.com

Musical Director: Josh Johnston :- 086 892 0602

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

Faith Journey

The Sufi poets Rumi and Hafiz are famous for how they depict God in their poetry. Both poets wrote love poems to God. In one poem Hafiz wrote of God:

> "Every child has known God, Not the God of names Not the God of don'ts Not the God who ever does Anything weird, But the God who knows only 4 words And keeps repeating them saying: "Come, Dance with Me, Come dance""

I wonder about Hafiz's faith journey. When he was a child did he hear God invite him to dance? Was his God joyful? If Hafiz's childhood experience of God was joyful - a God who wanted us to dance - then Hafiz attended a very different type of religious school than the school of my childhood.

My local school was run by the Sisters of St.John of God. Religion was woven into the fabric of school life. We recited prayers at set times through the day. We didn't have Sunday School, thirty minutes of every school day was devoted to religious instruction. The God we learned about did not dance - in fact the priests patrolled the local dancehall to keep the wickedness of dancing under some control.

The God of my childhood was male, God was a curious combination of young man, old man and a bird. I had to believe that despite the "three distinct beings" God was one. My childhood god was a vigilant accountant, a vengeful god of rules and names.

As many teenagers do, I left religious practice, it was many years later before I first fest the need of a religious community. I began my search by listening to the Sunday services on the radio. This led me realise that the differences between the Christian denominations were minimal. These differences were in emphasis on particular points of scripture and of interpretations.

There is an adage that says "When the pupil is ready, the teacher will appear". Two teachers arrived for me in quick succession. The first teacher was an article in the newspaper about this church. The writer said that "Unitarians know that they do not have all the answers". This was like a bolt of lightning – here was an honest church. That Sunday I attended my first service here I knew I had found my spiritual home and my tribe.

At that time the services were conducted by members of the congregation. I loved the wisdom each person shared at Sunday Services. I was in awe of their insight into the nature of existence. The input by members of this congregation to our services here is remarkable and invaluable.

About two months later my second teacher arrived with the appointment of Bill Darlison as minister. When Bill came the old Service book was still in regular use. The Service book was devised by Ernest Savil Hicks in the 1920's it was showing its age. It contained a prayer for the head of State (The word "King" was crossed out and "President" written in by hand.) Under Bill's leadership gradually the congregation began to encompass wisdom beyond the Christian tradition.

Some people may regard this as being unacceptable - that we are abandoning our roots. I believe that this change not as diminishing the Christian faith, its more an opening the windows to let in more light. Reason demands that we are honest about religion. Above all books, the Bible must withstand scrutiny. The Bible is a divinely inspired book but one that was written by human beings. The words of Jesus come to us through multiple translations. We know that in the second century that the writers of the New Testament had their agenda.

Jesus never taught beliefs. When Jesus spoke of "The Kingdom of God" - this kingdom was to be here and now. Jesus did not preach "pie in the sky when we die"! He wanted people to transform their lives now. This message of Jesus is not original. It is found in all religious traditions. Once the Buddha was asked "which religion is the best religion?" He replied "The best religion is the one that works for you." Perhaps the best religion is a combination of many religious traditions.

The only criteria to be met is that your religion – whether that is in one faith tradition or your own pick and mix version of faiths- it should transform you into the best version of you that is possible. It should make you more loving, more kind. Over its two thousand year history Christianity had created an ocean of words in an attempt to define god and what constitutes orthodox faith. Unitarians are particularly guilty of trying to define God.

The Chinese book the Tao Te Ching sings to my heart. Verse 25 begins:-

There was something formless and perfect before the universe was born It is serene empty. Solitary, Unchanging. Infinite, Eternally present It is the mother of the Universe For lack of a better name I call it Tao.

I find thinking of God as an eternally present energy more helpful than the image of "God my father who lives in heaven."

We live in mystery, it is more useful to concentrate on and live in awe of this mystery than to define God with words. Each person is part of the energy that initiated the universe, so too is every living entity. Humans are part of the universe. We are not superior than the rest of nature - we are part of it.

Western culture encourages self- reliance- self-reliance leads us to isolation. We harm our wellbeing when we distance ourselves from other people and the living world of nature.

So far, my journey of faith has brought be from a remote, god whose attributes were fashioned by humans exactly in human image. This god even looked human and he even had a residence. Men then tried to define their God with words, rules and threats of punishments. This god was to be feared.

Now my idea of God is Mystery and amazement. The mystery of my existence, amazement at the wonder of being alive. God is to be experienced not to be proven as we prove a geometry theorem. Those dreamy words of Lau Tzu resonate with me.

There was something formless and perfect before the universe was born

It is serene empty.

Solitary, Unchanging. Infinite, Eternally present It is the mother of the Universe For lack of a better name I call it Tao.

My God is more joyful than the God of my childhood. My God is less remote and more present. God is still not dancing for me But perhaps in time God will dance for me and maybe even with me.

Rev.Bridget Spain moderator of synod of Munster Minister Emerita St.Stephen's Green Unitarian Church

Dublin 26th May 2024

Request for Help

My husband is Hugh James, a retired cleric of the Church in Wales: <u>https://www.facebook.com/hugh.james.18</u>.

I am currently teaching English online to a young Afghan married couple with legal backgrounds, who have escaped (to the USA) from Afghanistan. Both my students' immediate families are still in hiding in Afghanistan, where the Taliban have been actively seeking them.

The Irish Government has a limited scheme to award refugee visas to Afghans while they still live in Afghanistan. One of the conditions of the Irish scheme is that we have to have secured a promise of housing for them.

The two families have submitted applications for asylum to the Government Committee (IRPP), as have other people. Many of those have not yet found housing. The IRPP assesses applications in 2 stages: (1) based on risk and (2) based on fulfillment of ancillary matters, such as housing.

I have found housing for one of my students' families, but am still searching for housing for the second family. The Irish Government would help with rent and welfare benefits.

If you would like further information, Anna or I would of course be very happy to provide it. I understand that you cannot promise anything, but I am very grateful to you for at least being willing to give this some consideration.

Kind regard Susan James

Contact Rev.Bridget Spain at:- revbspain@gmail.com

St. Stephen's Green Unitarian Book Club choice for May 2024.

FREE Coming of Age at the End of History by Lea Ypi

Lea Ypi is a professor of Political Theory at the London School of Economics. She was born in 1979 in Albania and *FREE Coming of Age at the End of History* is her personal memoir recalling her childhood growing up in Communist and post Communist Albania.

As a young child Ypi believed her country to be free. She was taught in school to worship Stalin and the Albanian dictator 'Uncle' Enver Hoxha. Her teacher, Nora, was hard core Communist Party and disliked intellectuals like Ypi's parents who had both gone to university, but under the communist regime they were not allowed to study what they wanted because of their 'biography'. All Albanians had a biography and this destiny shaping word dictated what you could do in your lives.

The young Lea was not enamoured with the fact that she shared the surname with Xhafer Ypi the former politician who, according to teacher Nora was a traitor as he had handed over the Albanian Nation to the Italian Fascists in 1939. It was not until after the collapse of the communist regime in 1990 that Lea discovered that Xhafer was her great grandfather, a secret kept by her parents in an attempt to protect her in a world of secret police, imprisonments and executions. Lea's grandfather was the opposite to his father Xhafer and wanted to join the antifascists in Spain but his opposing politics did not stop him paying for the sins of his father and he spent 15 years in prison. Lea's 'biography' was also marred by her mother's side as they had owned lands, factories and properties all which were expropriated by the state. Her maternal grandfather, an alleged enemy of the state had shouted 'Alluha Akbar' before throwing himself out of the fifth floor window of a building he owned in 1947, he was escaping imprisonment and torture. This building now housed the party's Head Quarters.

Despite this hidden secret history and Lea not understanding her parent's lukewarm attitude to 'Uncle' Enver, Lea's recounts of this time before the collapse of communism are full of insights and humour. It was her home, there was community, solidarity in adversity, neighbours helped each other and chatted for hours in shopping queues, it was equally bad for everyone. Like so many of her childhood friends she was oblivious to the realities of living under Hoxha's regime. Her parent's used coded language, when they spoke of the graduation of relatives from university it meant they were released from prison. Different subjects represented different charges such as studying 'International relations' meant being charged with treason. Being expelled from a university meant a death sentence, and dropping out meant killing yourself.

This world came crashing down in 1990 with the collapse of Communism and Albania was declared a multiparty state. There would be 'Free Elections', which confused the young Lea who asked "What do you elect in unfree elections"? Her parents declared they had never supported the party and that they had to recite the slogans just like everyone else. They said their country had been an open air prison for half a century. For Lea it was a time of fear and confusion, everything changed. Albania embraced the West and underwent structural reform. Within seven years it experienced huge emigration and social disintegration, there was gangsterism alongside military rule. It seemed like Albania had swapped one dire creed for another. Thousands of people lost their savings through pyramid schemes including Lea's Parents. In 1997 the country descended into anarchy and civil war. Lea recounts that during that time she became very depressed, she was studying for her final school exams amid electricity blackouts and gunfire. She was not just in turmoil but she had also lost hope for the future. Yet Lea knew she had to act as if there was a future and so she left her homeland, her father and grandmother and she joined her mother in Italy. She says she "left the shore and travelled to Italy on a boat that sailed over thousands of drowned bodies, bodies that had once carried souls more hopeful than mine, but who met fates less fortunate. I never returned."

This is a very thought provoking book and Ypi makes the reader contemplate the meaning of freedom. She is honest in her recollections which are neither nostalgic or embittered. She tells how real people like her family and neighbours are caught up in history and manage to survive.

The book club readers all enjoyed reading this book and found it not just informative about Albania, which most of us knew nothing about, but very readable, humorous and poignant. We would highly recommend it for all readers of all ages.

Alison Claffey St.Stephen's Green Unitarian Church

St. Stephen's Green Unitarian Book Club

At the Book Club Meeting on 29th May the members said a big thank you to Jennifer Flegg, the Club's co-ordinator extraordinaire as she stepped down from the role. Jennifer was presented with a token of the members thanks and esteem on the night with what else but a book token!

Jennifer is one of the founding members of the book club which is going since 2010/2011 and she has steered the group with great dedication, skill and kindness.

The book club will be continuing on with Alison Claffey stepping into the role of coordinator (claffeyali@gmail.com).

Alison said that she is looking forward to the role and that the club has read many great and varied books over the years all drawn from members recommendations. The meetings are full of lively discussion finishing off with a friendly social cup of tea and biscuit.

Meetings take place on the last Wednesday of every month in the church Vestry at 7.30pm. All are welcome.

Book Club List for the next 6 months is as follows:

Julv : Gilead Aug: The Marriage Portrait by Maggie O'Farrell Sept: No and Me Oct: The House of Doors Nov: Tom Lake Dec: Hotel du Lac

bv Marilvn Robinson by Delphine deVigan by Tan Twan Eng by Anne Patchett by Anita Brukner

EDUCATION GRANTS FOR CHILDREN OF CHURCH MEMBERS

Every year the St Stephen's Green church offers grants to the children of voting members of the church for educational purposes. These grants are administered by two committees named after the trusts which were set up for this purpose. The Damer Committee administers grants for boys; the Singleton Committee for girls.

These grants can be used for school fees, although they do not usually cover the totality of school fees. They can also be used for school uniforms, sports and other equipment required at school, schoolbooks and even necessary items of clothing like shoes. They can also be used for college and university fees, and other third level expenses.

The next meeting of the Damer and Singleton committees will take place on Sunday 1st September 2024.

Sunday 25th August is the deadline for applications.

Applicants should write or email a letter to the chair of the committees, Dennis Aylmer (aylmerd@gmail.com), outlining why they need the financial support, with details of school fees and other payments that are required. The details of this letter are completely confidential to members of the committees, who are all church members.

These grants are for children of voting members of the church only.





L-R Trish Webb Duffy, Bridget Spain and Alison Claffey who organised the plant sale that raised €525 for Cork Church.



Picture of the congregation that were present at the last official service of Rev.Bridget Spain on Sunday 26th May 2024.

Rev.Bridget Spain moderator of synod of Munster Minister Emerita St.Stephen's Green Unitarian Church.

