

# Oscarito

December 2024

IRELANDS UNITARIAN MAGAZINE

Vol. 20 Nº 12



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.**

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**Front Cover:** Moisie flower arrangement from Christmas 2023.  
(photo P.Spain)

**WE WISH ALL OUR READERS**

**Happy Christmas**

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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 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.

# Managing Committee Notice

## Annual Registration of Voting Members (2025)



*For the Attention of Members*

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If you are a Member of the congregation (*that is, if you signed the Membership Book during any year up to and including 2023*) and you wish to have your name included as a **Voting Member** on the **Register of Voting Members** for **2025**, you should complete and return a **Voting Registration Form** by not later than **31<sup>st</sup> December 2024**.

Voting Registration Forms are now available for collection in the church. If you are a Member who can't attend church often, or who usually listens in online, a form can be sent to you on request by post or email.

Requests for **Voting Registration Forms** should be sent to  
(*by post*)

The Membership Secretary  
Unitarian Church  
112 St.Stephen's Green, Dublin D02 YP23.

or

(*by email*) [membershipunitarianchurch@gmail.com](mailto:membershipunitarianchurch@gmail.com)



# Solstice & Christmas

So this is Christmas and it is Solstice. Two events, which have very similar messages that are profoundly meaningful.

But first I want to ask you: from where does your Christmas spirit come from? Is it from the nativity stories in the gospels, is it more Charles Dickens' Christmas Carol, who in life identified with Unitarianism, where the message is tenderness for the past, courage for the present, and hope for the future? or perhaps, you are solstice centred, more pagan than traditional Christian.

I like all three: Christmas tends to bring out in us acts of kindness which I think emanate from the divine spark within us all.

It is no accident that the new Christian sect chose this time of the year to celebrate the birth of the Messiah. It is the time when the sun shines the least, in the northern hemisphere at least; it is the time when the coldest and darkest season is coming to an end. Warmth is slowly returning - the sun sets ever later and rises ever earlier. Despite the darkness, this time of year is full of hope and promise, for it heralds the coming spring, the promise of brighter days and new life spouting from the earth. The light is indeed overcoming the darkness. How blessed are we to have such dramatic change in our seasons.

So it is fitting that we celebrate at this time and we mark it with songs and gatherings, rich food and gifts, family and friends. But at the same time we may feel unbearable sadness when not everyone we love is near to us. Christmas can bring with it pain, loneliness, and regret - so much so that many wish it away trying desperately to avoid those ads on the telly depicting perfect family joy and singing I wish it could be Christmas everyday. Also, many will spend these days in grinding poverty, unable to give or receive joy.

We should acknowledge that there are two different accounts of the birth of Jesus in scripture. Never mind: I was taught that what is important is that it is the story of God coming into the world to save us from sin? The two accounts are told in Matthew and Luke's Gospels. And Matthew has the holy family going from Bethlehem to Nazareth, whereas Luke has them starting out in Nazareth and ending in Bethlehem. Matthew has the magi, the three kings, while Luke makes no mention of them but does tell us about the shepherds. And there are other significant differences.

The nativity is not told in either Mark or John. What is common in both is that Jesus has a mam and dad, who were poor and struggled with the rest of their community with the inequalities and oppressive Roman



empire that ruled them. It is suggested that Jesus was a brown skinned, undocumented immigrant. His community struggled against the ungodly and oppressive religious authorities of the time. And Jesus came to know these people very well - and in the end, they presided over his death.

At the centre of the Christmas season is the birth of Jesus. Is this what you are celebrating today? The puritans outlawed this festival. They are a part of our Unitarian history. They objected to the singing and dancing, the drinking and the rich food that became synonymous with Christmas. Is there an elephant in the room for Unitarians - or better to say 'baby' in the room; born of a virgin, spoken of by the prophets, God incarnate - hosanna in the highest? I don't think so. The story of the birth of Jesus is theology, not history. We honour the story and we do so at this most special time of the year; which is also the time when we watch for the returning warmth of the sun, and the slow emergence of wild flowers. I hold that it is a celebration of the birth of a rebel, a trouble-maker, a man spoken of by the prophets whose lyrics and stories are in the Old Testament. It is widely claimed, taught and believed that Jesus's birth, his life and teaching, indeed his death was foretold in the Old Testament and that Joseph, Jesus father, was a direct descendant of King David. Of course, Jesus was the adopted son of Joseph, not his biological son.

The bible is of course a library of books, written over the course of some 2,000 years by people as diverse as the people of the earth itself. That library of books were chosen as an account of God's relationship with this planet and all that live upon it. The library was agreed at a number church Councils at the end of the 4th century.

The council of Nivea in 325 was the first gathering of Christian leaders in order get consensus about belief. And it famously dealt with the widespread belief, and called a heresy, that Jesus was human and not divine, or rather that he did not have a divine nature identical with that of the Father. It also dealt with the other heresy - that god was unity rather than trinity. Unitarian ideas go back a long, long way. So at Nicaea, we have the very first uniform Christ

ian doctrine called the Nicene creed - and it is spoken in both Roman Catholic and many Protestant churches every Sunday. It begins, we believe in one God, the father almighty maker of heaven and earth, of all things seen and unseen. It affirms the divinity of Jesus and the trinitarian nature of God. One of the arguments was that the invisible and unknowable god had to reveal himself in a man, in the baby Jesus, so that we might receive an idea of god. And once this was accepted by the civil authorities and monarchs, it dominated all theology for centuries. Despite this and the persecutions over the centuries, our belief in the unity and

oneness of God and in the humanity of Jesus remains. And we don't concern ourselves with dogmas or doctrines, but honour the stories and wisdom that continue to emerge in our search for the truth.

So this Christmas and it is Solstice - we can celebrate joyfully like the fairies who came to witness the death and rebirth of the Sun. We celebrate the story recounted in Luke, as read by Denis at our Carol service, the birth of a rebel and trouble-maker who took on the religious authorities of his time and who serves as an inspiration for us on how we might love. He was born into poverty and killed like a common criminal. We don't have any eye witness accounts in the gospels, the gospel authors did not write history - but I suspect if there was, they would say: His love was so powerful, it gifted the most maligned in society with healing, dignity, hope and faith that life does indeed have meaning and purpose. He also taught us that God is neither bound by tradition nor impressed by protocol. Islam believes Jesus was a prophet and a messenger from God. The error we hold, is that we need to develop a complicated set of dogmas and doctrines, rules and confessions in order to be worthy of the creators love.

Finally. There is one piece of wisdom, common among all the great philosophies and theologies ever uttered since the beginning of time: the golden rule spoken first by Confucius.

Love one another.

Do unto others what you would have them do to you.

Refrain from inflicting pain on one another.

All the rest, is commentary.

*Gavin Byrne*

St. Stephen's Green Unitarian Church

Christmas Day 25<sup>th</sup> December 2023.



**A very happy Christmas to you all.**





# Advent

The word Advent is like a pleasant but distant echo from the world of childhood. Advent heralded good news that Christmas was at last on the horizon. In mainstream churches this is the first day of a new liturgical year. It is a time when Christians prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus. In the world of commerce Advent is when Christmas shopping moves up several gears.

Theologians say it is a time of watching and waiting. The idea of watching and waiting resonates with me. I know that our ancient ancestors waited and watched what was happening in the world of nature. Their attentive watching gave them the knowledge that allowed them to build the tumultus at Newgrange. With pin point accuracy they measured the journey of the rising sun through the seasons.

At the darkest days they channelled the light of the sun so that it illuminated the deepest recesses of Newgrange. Five thousand years later we still marvel at the honey gold rays of the winter sunshine. Like our ancestors we rejoice in the rebirth of the sun. Christians appropriated the motif of the rebirth of the sun by celebrating the birth of Jesus. Christianising these ancient festivals is perfectly understandable because these celebrations emerged from lived experience.

In the Roman Catholic tradition Advent is a time of fasting. Catholics fast as penance; Protestants dismiss fasting as being Popish. In the Protestant tradition penance appears to question the salvation Jesus earned for humanity. Even within the Catholic tradition fasting is a thing of the past.

The old spiritual guides understood human nature. They appreciated the value of fasting. Not as a penance for sin; voluntary fasting enhances life. The ancients knew that we appreciate everything in terms of opposites. If I am full I will not appreciate even the best food however when I am actually hungry the simplest food will taste wonderful. Loneliness



highlights the value of relationships; too much company makes us crave solitude. In our pursuit of instant gratification; we ignore one of the surest paths to enhanced pleasure.

In the weeks leading up to Christmas we will eat drink and party- after all it is Christmas. By the twenty fifth of Dec. our senses are blunted, our stomach is bloated. We are like tired over indulged children on Christmas night. Instead of celebrating twelve days of Christmas we want to go to the sales and tidy Christmas away.

If instead of over indulging day after day we were to fast for four weeks imagine how we would savour the celebration of Christmas day and the following days. This has nothing to do with penance for sin; it is simply a fact. Fasting from food so that we feel hunger enhances our senses it also brings us directly to empathy with people who experience hunger not through choice but because they do not have food.

Adopting a wait and watch approach to these days will quieten the noise that is such a part of Christmas. Christmas should not be about spending hours in crowded shops. We have made Christmas a shopping festival! Often we give gifts as habit from year to year and though kindly meant mostly these are things we do **not** really need. They are a drain on our finances and come at a huge cost to the environment. Can we change our gift giving this year? Substitute donations to worthy charities instead of a fancy soap and aftershave.

If we were to replace shopping and eating with attentive observation of the world we will be rewarded by the beauty of nature as we move into winter. The last leaves are hanging on the trees in a final blaze of glory. The trees are now showing their structure. Notice how the branches grow so that the tree is balanced so that it grows straight and upright. Notice the flash of colours as birds come into the garden to feed. See how the low lying sun casts long shadows that outline the shape of the earth. Watch each day as daylight grows shorter and shorter content that after the solstice the process will reverse. These are just some of nature's gifts of winter.

The Advent wreath is a tradition that developed in the Lutheran Church in the sixteenth century. The wreath is a way of

marking the days of waiting and watching. In the Jewish tradition today is also the beginning of the festival of Hannukka which is celebrated by lighting candles.

The evergreen circle of the wreath represents the circle of life that is supported by the infinite love of God. The wreath has four coloured candles and one white candle. One candle is lit on each of the four Sundays in Advent. The white candle represents the Christ it is lit on Christmas Day.

The wreath originated in the Protestant tradition but only gained popularity when it was adopted by the Catholic tradition in the 1930s. The candles represent hope, peace joy and love. Hope, peace, joy and love these are the things we really want particularly at Christmastime.

The motivation for all our frantic activity in the lead up to Christmas is our craving for hope, peace joy and love. We can get every conceivable present at Christmas but if hope, peace, joy and love are missing from our lives we feel empty.

The first candle is dedicated to hope. Living through the pandemic, seeing the effects of global warming, being confronted by the misery of war- all of these are beyond our control over the past twenty months they have eroded our confidence.

Hope is not optimism. Optimism is the attitude that “things will work out well”. Hope is a process. It is proactive. It involves seeing a problem identifying a solution and working to implement the solution. The moment we begin to do something to solve a problem hope comes alive. Hope thrives when people work together. Lighting the candle of hope today is a reminder of our resilience and that we are stronger together.

The second candle represents peace. In a world of conflict lighting a candle to represent peace seems useless. Our candle will not make a peaceful world. The Chinese philosopher Lau Tzu said pointed out that creating peace in the world begins by creating peace within the self. If I am peaceful that peace will touch others. The reverse is also true. If I am angry my anger will affect others.

We begin with peace within. Am I at peace with the people in my life? As in this morning's reading I can forgive someone who doesn't deserve it. Remember forgiveness, the letting go of anger is the greatest gift you can give yourself. Anger hurts the self most.

The third candle represents Joy. Christmas is the most joyful celebration. It is the one time of the year when we seem to care for others. This is when most charities get their funding. At Christmas we want everyone to have a home, warmth and even a gift. Remember that as with peace we need to nurture joy in ourselves. Self care at the darkest time of the year is vital for our wellbeing.

The final candle represents love. As always the world needs love. In a world of strife it is love that grounds us and gives meaning to everything we do. Christmas will come. Commerce will put fancy lids on boxes, double the prices and invite us to spend!

We have the freedom to decide what our Christmas will be. Will we jump on to the commercial band wagon or will we look for deeper meaning in the celebrations. Will we be Scrooge or his Nephew? Will we see the wonder of solstice? Marvel at and rejoice that in a few weeks the sun that sustains life on earth will once again be reborn. The darkest days will pass and this is surely a reason to celebrate.

*Rev. Bridget Spain*  
Minister Emerita

Dublin 28<sup>th</sup> November 2021





# Hark & Hallelujah

Today's Dubliners would rightly think of the centre of the city as running along a spine stretching from St Stephen's Green down through Grafton Street, around by Trinity College and into Westmoreland Street, and then across to O'Connell Street and up to Parnell Square. However, for most of the city's history, the centre of town was further west in the streets that converge in the area around Christ Church Cathedral. That area was the centre of commerce and civic administration, containing markets, guildhalls, and the law courts.

Apart from Christ Church Cathedral and St Audoen's Church, there is very little physical trace of the Medieval City of Dublin but the history of the area lives on in many of the street names. A lot of the streets bear the names of saints associated with parish churches. Inside the old city walls there's Werburgh Street, Nicholas Street, John's Lane, Michaels Hill and Audoen's Terrace, and just outside the old walls are Patrick Street, Bride Street and Dame Street

Other streets bear the name of physical features such as High Street, Castle Street and New Row, and there are streets with more colourful and evocative names that remind us of the activities that were associated with streets such as Winetavern Street and Cook Street.

Of the four original Dublin congregations that the Stephen's Green congregation descends from, two were located close to Christ Church. The New Row congregation had a meeting house just outside the city walls in the 'new row' of buildings that ran from Thomas Street down towards the river. The other congregation met in a house called the *Magazine* in Winetavern Street for a few years before moving to a newly built meeting house in Cook Street in 1667 where it remained for 120 years. (*The communion silver that was gifted to the Cooke Street congregation by Rev Thomas Harrison in 1687 is still in our ownership and is currently on loan to the National Museum*)

Another old street that still bears an evocative name is Fishshamble Street. For hundreds of years fish brought in up the Liffey from Dublin Bay was offloaded at the quay at the bottom of the street and brought up to be sold from stalls or 'shambles' in the open-air market on the street.

Fishamble street has a significance in the history of this congregation. Joseph Damer, a member of New Row Congregation, operated a banking business in the London Tavern, an inn which was situated in this street. Damer, who was a very wealthy man, was by reputation a miser, but we know through our church records that he was actually a generous philanthropist. On his death in 1719 he left a substantial sum to the New Row congregation to build a new meeting house, a widows' alms house, and a school. The new meeting house was opened in 1728 in Eustace Street in Temple Bar, an area that was then

developing as the new docklands, with the girls' school and the boys' school close by. Damer's name and his benevolence live on to the present day in this church through the *Eustace Street Meeting House Fund*, *The Damer School Fund* and the *Damer Hall* below the church. But the street where Damer conducted his money lending business has a significance that goes far beyond the history of this congregation. For, as we all know, Frederick Handel's great choral work, *Messiah*, was first performed in Fishamble Street on 13<sup>th</sup> April 1742

*Messiah* has been described as a reflection on the life of Jesus but, although the nativity forms only one section of the Oratorio, it has become associated with Christmas or, to be more precise, the weeks of Advent leading up to Christmas.

The late Jonathan Bardon was a historian of distinction. A Dubliner, he wrote not only of the history of Dublin but even more so of the history of Ulster and Belfast where he had lived since the 1960's. In addition to being a historian, Jonathan Bardon was a very good storyteller. His delightful book *Hallelujah*, which was published in 2015, paints a wonderful description of Dublin in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century and leads the reader through the story of how Handel's *Messiah* came to be performed in Dublin. For this avid collector of publications about Dublin, *Hallelujah* ranks as one of the best histories of the city that I've ever read. (Jonathan Bardon's name rang a bell with me and for some reason I felt that I had met him. It was only after his death that I learned he was a member of All Souls, our sister church in his adopted city of Belfast, and that his book *Hallelujah* was launched in that church).

When Handel arrived in Dublin in November 1741 he was already, in today's terms, a mega star. He had been invited to come across from London by the then Lord Lieutenant, the Duke of Devonshire for the purpose of performing six concerts between December 1741 and February 1742. The fish markets had long since moved across the Liffey (where they still are today) and Fishamble Street had become a fashionable location containing several concert venues

The venue for Handel's concerts was the newly opened *Great Music Hall* which had been built to accommodate concerts for the benefit of *The Charitable and Musical Society for the Release of Imprisoned Debtors*. (A charity that had many calls upon its resources). It was agreed that one of the concerts would be performed for the benefit of that charity. The concerts were so popular with Dublin audiences that a second run of performances was put on. The composition of *Messiah* hadn't yet been completed and it wasn't included in these performances but Handel was sufficiently impressed by the reaction of the Dublin audiences to his concerts to decide to complete the composition and to give it its premiere in Fishamble Street. Handel received permission to use the choir of Christ Church and also (after some resistance by Dean Jonathan Swift) the choir of St Patrick's Cathedral.

A preview of the concert in the Dublin Newsletter described the oratorio as *far surpassing anything of that nature which has been performed in this or any other Kingdom*. To conserve space for the anticipated large audience at the first performance of Messiah, ladies were asked not to wear hoops in their dresses and Gentlemen were requested to remove their swords before entering.

The performance was a huge success on every level. The performance of one of the soloists so impressed Rev. Patrick Delany that he leapt to his feet and cried: "Woman, for this be all thy sins forgiven thee!" (Rev. Delany was the husband of the famous artist and diarist Mary Delany – Obviously I claim them as relations!) The £400 in takings was split three ways and distributed to Mercer's Hospital and the Charitable Infirmary (Jervis Street) and the fund to relieve prisoners' debts. The donation to the latter secured the release of 142 indebted prisoners.

Now a seasonal favourite, and over 280 years since it was first performed in Fishamble Street in Dublin, Messiah is performed by choirs every year in the month of December in cities and towns across the world.

History doesn't record what the different groups of 18<sup>th</sup> century Dissenters in Dublin thought of all fuss about Messiah being performed in the city. But, if they lived up to the reputation of their 17<sup>th</sup> century puritan ancestors, it is likely that they would not have approved.

The puritans took the spoken word very seriously and didn't welcome anything at church that might distract from listening to it. Their buildings were simple, their sermons were long and wordy, and their singing was confined to psalms. (At this point it should be noted that this Stephen's Green Congregation is the direct descendant of the first congregation of Puritans in Dublin. The singing of Psalms was still a central feature of services here up to the late 1990's)

But, by 1742 their attitudes had relaxed and their outlooks had evolved. At that time protestants still made up the majority of the population of Dublin but they mainly belonged to the established Anglican (Church of Ireland) churches. The dissenting protestants weren't the force that they were in the previous century but their estimated numbers of 4,000 made up about 7 or 8 % of the total population of the city (think 40,000 in today's city) and they were still a significant and important group. History tells us that the dissenters were by no means a dull group.

A few years ago, the Royal Irish academy produced a book to accompany the republication of Rocque's 1756 map of Dublin. Each section of the book zooms in on a selected area of the map and provides a commentary on the details shown in that area. One of the sections is titled *A Protestant Suburb* and focuses on a small area bordered by Aungier Street, Whitefriar Street, Bishop Street and Peter Street. Clearly identifiable buildings on the area map include the Church of Ireland Parish Church of St Peters, our origi-



nal Meeting House on Wood Street, and the Meeting Houses of the Moravians on Bishop Street and the Huguenots on Peter Street

When we speak of Wood Street nowadays it is usually in connection with Rev Thomas Emlyn, the minister of our original congregation who was imprisoned for blasphemy. However, if online archives are anything to go by, it would appear that during his ministry the name of his co-pastor, the older Rev Joseph Boyse, was then much better known in Dublin than Emlyn's. Boyse's son Samuel was also quite well known but not always for the best of reasons. He was a poet and, like most artists, he was impoverished. It written that he all but managed to impoverish his father too. Samuel achieved some notoriety for submitting his own death notice for publication with a plea for readers to send donations to his widow. And he then repeated the exercise a while later in a different publication.

Boyse probably got his aptitude for writing verse from his father. There are lots of written works by Rev Joseph Boyes available in online archives. They include eulogies for some of our former ministers, exchanges of views with the Bishop, and his hymn books, the very successful *Sacramental Hymns* of 1693 and the more modestly successful *Family Hymns* of 170. Fifty years on, the Puritans of the 1640's had obviously lightened up a lot as in his intro to one of his Hymn Books Boyse described 'The delightful duty of singing' as *having the genuine tendency (even above the other duties) to engage the people's attention, to quicken their devout affections, to raise and vent their spiritual joys and give them some relish of the inward pleasures of serious religion.*

Did the hymn books of Boyse include any Christmas Carols? That I don't know, but there is a Christmas Carol that has a connection with this area. The 1756 map shows another building in the selected area that was used for religious purposes. The Methodists had recently opened a new hall on Whitefriar Street within a few yards of the Wood Street Meeting House. Strictly speaking the Methodists weren't dissenters from the established church but more of a religious revival group within it. The two people most closely associated with methodism, the brothers John and Charles Wesley, were ordained Anglican ministers and there is a memorial to John Wesley in St Patrick's Cathedral where he assisted in the celebration of a service.

The Wesley brothers, more so John, made many visits to Dublin and left interesting accounts of their visits here. Interestingly, when the Methodists left Whitefriar Street and built a new place of Worship they built it on the south side of Stephen's Green just around the corner from here. A few years later our own congregation built this church on Stephen's Green and the two congregations became close neighbours again for another 100 years.

The Wesley name lives on in Dublin through Wesley College in Balinteer, and Wesley Road in Rathgar. (For many years I delivered the

post to the 25 houses on that little road and around this time on Christmas Eve each year I was dropping off the last of the Christmas Greetings)

The Wesley name also lives on in our hymnbook but, alas, only just about. Charles Wesley was a prolific writer of hymns and our old hymnbook, sadly now very seldom used, contains eleven Wesley hymns, nine by Charles and two by John. Our current hymnbook contains only one (number 268 - an Easter Hymn by Charles)

Strangely, Charles Wesley's best-known composition, *Hark the Herald Angels Sing*, is not in our current hymnbook. Nonetheless, we sing it over Christmas almost every year and I'm sure we'll sing it again tomorrow. If we do sing it tomorrow it will be to the standard well known melody by Mendhellson. But there is another version.....This afternoon I'll be in St Patrick's Cathedral for the Christmas Eve Carol Service. I won't know until I get there what the full selection of carols will be but I know that the service will commence with the singing of *Once in Royal David's City* ( a hymn written by the Dublin born Irishwoman CF Alexander), and that it will be brought to a close by the sounds of kettle drums and trumpets joined by the congregation singing Wesley's *Hark the Herald Angels Sing*. It will be sung to the less well known air of "*See, the Conquering hero comes*" a melody composed by none other than the man who left such a great legacy to Dublin, Frederic Handel.

Sure what more could a Dubliner ask for ? !

*Happy Christmas*

**Rory Delany**

St. Stephen's Green Unitarian Church

Christmas Eve 2023





Dublin Unitarian Book Club's choice for October 2024



# The House of Doors

by  
*Tan Twan Eng*

This novel is set in Penang, Malaysia, when it was under British Administrative rule and the story is told between two time lines , one in 1910 and one in 1921.

The main character is Lesley Hamlyn who is now living in South Africa in the late 1940's. She receives a book by Somerset Maugham of his short stories called 'The Casuarina Tree' which sends her back in her memories to Penang in 1921 when Maugham, a friend of her husband Robert from their college days is visiting them. Maugham travelled widely throughout the world and it served as an escape from an unhappy marriage and allowed him to conduct an affair with his secretary Gerald Haxton in relative safety at time when homosexuality was illegal.

Maugham based many of his stories on the people that he met on his travels. On the one hand he was courted and admired as the famous writer by the ex-pats of this dying colonial world and yet when he published his stories his hosts were outraged at his depictions of their closed insular class ridden society filled with hypocrisies, secrets and lies.

One of the stories in The Casuarina Tree is called 'The Letter' and is based on a real historical person Ethel Proudlock who was arrested and tried for murder in 1910. In this retelling of the Proudlock affair Lesley is Ethel's friend and confidante and she recounts the story to Maugham of her arrest and trial for the murder of William Steward who allegedly sexually assaulted her.

Lesley's marriage is also compromised as her husband hides behind his own bi-sexuality just as Maugham does. Marriages of convenience provide a semblance of respectability while fostering feelings of neglect, lovelessness, resentment and loss of self agency.

Lesley also recounts to Maugham her meeting with Dr. Sun Yat-Sen, the Chinese revolutionary when he was in Penang raising support and funds among the Chinese Strait's community. Lesley empa-

thises with Sun Yat-Sen and supports his cause which feels a bit out of character for a Colonial wife to do, but Lesley is on her own journey of self discovery and empowerment. The book club readers felt the shoe in of Sun Yat- Sen a bit superfluous to the story but it did add some historical interest and context to a time when Empires were falling. It is through her connection to Sun Yat-Sen that Lesley meets Arthur whom she has an affair with. Arthur is the owner of The House Doors. A house left to him by his grandmother who was an emigrant from China. The Doors are purely ornamental and hang on the walls as pieces of art in the house. It is in this house that Lesley and Arthur meet and the doors serve as an apt metaphor for what is hidden in this seemingly civil society which clings on to Empire. A society that Maugham plunders for his stories.

The descriptions of Penang and the hot sultry equatorial environment are atmospheric but are a bit repetitive at times and tended to slow the story down. Some felt the writing was a bit flat when the author went into Sun Yat Sen's history and politics and also the ins and outs of Maugham's failed marriage to Syrie Wellcome. The author also mimics the style of early twentieth century English authors such as Maugham and P.G Woodouse which jarred with some of our readers.

Overall our readers would give this book a 5 out of 10. Some liked it more than others and it did give us much to discuss with it's recurrent themes of hidden lives, perceived 'respectable' society, loneliness, personal identity and the struggle for national freedom.

*Alison Claffey*

St. Stephen's Green Unitarian Church





# Dublin Unitarian Church

112 St. Stephens Green Dublin 2.

**Service 11.00a.m.**

## **Sunday Rota for December 2024**

1<sup>st</sup> December      *Dante's Purgatory : inspiration into Hope*  
Service              Rev. Mark Hutchinson  
Reader              Andrew Crangle  
Flowers             Paul Murray  
Welcomer           Emer O'Reilly - Catharine Cook  
Coffee               Gráinne Carty, Mary O'Brien, Malachy Hevehan

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8<sup>th</sup> December      *Hope in a hope challenged world*  
Service              Andy Pollak  
Reader              Janet Mulroy  
Flowers             Margaret Leeson  
Welcomer           Orla Griffin - Doireann Ní Bhriain  
Coffee               Janet Mulroy, Thérèse Fontana, Peter Fontana

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15<sup>th</sup> December     *Annual Carol Service.*  
Service              Rev. Bridget Spain  
Reader              Various  
Flowers             Maire Bacon  
Welcomer           Valerie Shanley, Emer O'Reilly  
Coffee               Peter White, Maire Bacon, John Leeson

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22<sup>nd</sup> December     *Jesus Wept*  
Service              Aidan O'Driscoll  
Reader              Doireann Ní Bhriain  
Flowers             Emer O'Reilly  
Welcomer           Alison Claffey, Lorraine Doyle  
Coffee               Emer O'Reilly, Michael Robinson

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25<sup>th</sup> December     *Christmas Message*  
Service              Rev. Bridget Spain  
Reader              Doireann Ní Bhriain  
Flowers  
Welcomer           Paul Spain

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29<sup>th</sup> December     *FAVOURITE READINGS*  
Service              Will O'Connell  
Reader              Various  
Flowers             Daniela Cooney  
Welcomer           Michael Robinson, Gráinne Carty  
Coffee               Paula Mills, Daniela Cooney, Catharine Cook



# **Christmas Craft & Cake Sale**

on  
**Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> December 2024**

The proceeds will go to charity

**Christmas Tree Decorations -  
Jams - Chutneys - Raffle - etc, etc,**



If you wish to volunteer.

Contact Alison Claffey 086-3884943

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 complete the Weekly e-mail form available at

[https://dublinunitarianchurch.us9.list-manage.com/subscribe?  
u=520442759bc8abadb1b0b3818&id=295c346bce](https://dublinunitarianchurch.us9.list-manage.com/subscribe?u=520442759bc8abadb1b0b3818&id=295c346bce)

or visit <https://www.dublinunitarianchurch.org/>

and follow the link at the top of the screen  
– *Sign up to Weekly e-mail* – to complete your details.