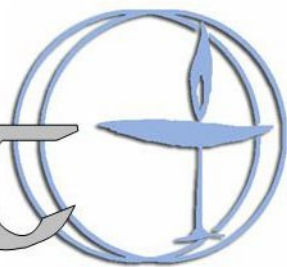


Oscailt



January 2025

IRELANDS UNITARIAN MAGAZINE

Vol.21 Nº 1



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 sundayclub@dublinunitarianchurch.org

DUBLIN UNITARIAN CHURCH

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

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

If you would like to receive this information you should complete the
Weekly e-mail form available at

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

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

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Rev.Bridget Spain (*Minister Emerita*)
e-mail: revbspain@gmail.com

Rev.Bill Darlison *Minister Emeritus*.

hellounitarianchurch@gmail.com
www.dublinunitarianchurch.org

Editor: Paul Spain

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Front Cover: The church in the early morning sun light.
(photo P.Spain)

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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.

WANDERING WONDERING

In our church today we are celebrating thanksgiving Sunday. Today we honour gratitude. In former times we gave thanks for the bounty of the earth. Members of the congregation brought in produce from their gardens and dishes of food. On other occasions homemade handcrafts were displayed, thereby, giving thanks for the materials, the imagination for the designs, the tools with which the articles were made and the hands that did the work.

In their everyday lives people are constantly giving thanks to another person, to a deity, to the universe for a diverse number of gifts. It can be anything such as thanking an angel for finding a parking space, one of my favourites, to keep family and friends safe, for finding lost things, a safe journey and all the times we prayed as children that our mother wouldn't kill us when we disobeyed her. Someone must have heard us. We are still here. We are constantly praying and lighting candles for a return to health of someone in need. Unfortunately, the outcome isn't always what we want. When it is, we are very happy to say thank God.

So here we are gathered today. This lovely, friendly group of people in this beautiful church to pray and give thanks for all the goodness and support we have received, over time.

Usually we come for spiritual nourishment, to meet friends and socialise. But, what about our spiritual life and beliefs. I believe we are spiritual beings with a body. We come from God. We return to God. As such we can give thanks for our spiritual gifts. We each have our own story. Not everyone believes in the continuation of the soul in another place when we die nor do they believe in a God or higher being.

As Catholics we believed Heaven was up in the sky, somewhere above the clouds. Hell was down below. Purgatory was somewhere in between and a step to Heaven. At Bap-

tism original sin was washed away and life started with a clean slate. It was easy to believe in God and follow the rules of the church. Most of the friends, relations and neighbours did too. God was in the church, where we went to Mass on Sunday and holydays and to say a prayer except when we were in dire need and looked towards Heaven.

Long after I left school and home, I began to question my religion. Then the wandering and wondering and searching began. It was a life giving and challenging experience, meeting interesting and helpful people with different faiths and beliefs. The genie was let out of the bottle. And of course, once opened, the wonderful thing is, that genie can never be put back inside the bottle again.

One day some young women and I were discussing Jesus's visit to his friends Mary and Martha. Mary was chatting with Jesus while Martha had to do the work and look after the food. She was complaining about Mary not helping as she chatted with Jesus. One woman said "Of course Martha was not happy. She fancied Jesus herself." I was utterly taken aback. Such a disrespectful thing to say about Jesus. I thought. Of course she was right. Because he was the son of God, I had never seen him as the charismatic and human man he was.

Looking around it is easy to see God's hand in the beauty in the world. The variety of species of animals and birds, the vegetation in different areas, the vastness of the universe. No two persons are the same. Looking closer at the minutiae of a flower there is shape, colour, texture, stamens and it's alive thriving in the right environment. One can only marvel at all this and believe in a higher power.

Then there are times when it's hard to accept God exists, particularly when in pain and trauma. We pray to the Divine and nothing improves. Where is the God whom we are told loves us? Or is He all a myth and we are totally responsible for ourselves. We have a body wherein there's, a mind, senses, limbs, instinct and organs which function to keep the body in working order. What more could we need.

Yet there is the need to seek and search for something deeper.

We move more towards Spirituality. In his book: Finding God in All Things, Brian Grogan S.J. says; “Spirituality is concerned with the person in relation to God. It concerns our experience of God. Not our experience of ideas, rules or regulations. What differentiates it from theology is its focus on the actual, living moment by moment relationship between the person and God in real life situations”.

We look to friends and family for help and support. Often help arrives unexpectedly through what Brian Grogan S.J. calls Escorts of Grace. Some would call them angels. They are people who come and make a positive difference to a life. They could be a relative or a random person helping to fill out a difficult form.

We tend to see God as male, depicted as an elderly bearded man in the Heavens and always referred to as HE.

In her book *She Who Is*, Elizabeth Johnson says: “Spirit—Sophia, friend, sister, mother and grandmother of the world builds relationships of solidarity, not antithesis between God and human beings and among human beings with each other and the earth. Held in her affection, human beings are called to be genuine companions of all creatures, advocating justice and partnering life, while not being diminished or overpowered by a dominating will”.

She goes on to say: “A Puerto Rican woman named Inez, when, after noting that God is to her above all a dark mystery, she observes: But if they would ask me to draw God, I would draw my grandmother smiling. Because she is the only person that I believe has filled me or filled me so much that I can compare her with God. I would draw a picture of my grandmother with her hands open, smiling, as if to say, “Come with me because I am waiting for you” God is strength for the struggle, strength to keep going, to encourage.

Love and friendship are among the greatest gifts given and received. The word and hand given in comfort and celebration are highly valued and connect us to one another in a spe-

cial way. Marianne Williamson in her book: *The Mystic Jesus* says: “God is an infinite ocean of love, not figuratively but literally, of which we are part and from which we cannot be separated.”

So, in essence God is love. Love is difficult to define. Yet everyone has a sense of what it is and what it means to them. Even text messages can be used to send love with the variety of emojis. Love brings energy and joy, peace and creativity, compassion and healing and an end to segregation. It must be meaningful when it is given. Love and respect are the basis of relationship, leading to ongoing harmony in the wider surroundings.

In these terrible wars at the moment, where we see such destruction, death, poverty and hate, the lack of love is very evident. It is only through love, respect, negotiation and trust that all wars and divisions will cease. There has to be a willingness and desire for peace and to keep that peace.

Similarly, there has to be a desire to restore our planet to a habitable and secure home for all beings. When we do the required work nature will follow. We need to give thanks to a higher power, whether HE or SHE and ask for help in bringing peace and harmony to our home.

I will finish with Patrick Kavanagh’s words:
“Men build their Heavens as they build their circle of friends.
God is in the bits and pieces of the everyday.
A kiss here, and a laugh again and sometimes tears.”

Monica Cremins
St.Stephen’s Green Unitarian Church

October 2024

My version of the Lord's Prayer

Eternal spirit, wellspring of the divine in us all, whose presence brings heaven within us and around us; you are known by many names of holiness.

Let our world become a place ordered and ruled by your creative spirit.

May the bounty of the earth generously and fairly fill the needs of all creatures.

May we have the humility and strength to forgive those who have wronged us, without rancour, that we may become worthy of forgiveness. Give us understanding of the anguish and desperation behind the worst offences of our time.

Give us the discipline and strength to resist evil influences, to avoid cruelty and malice, and order our lives with kindness.

For all things, all power, and all glory ultimately belong to you for ever.

D. Grocock

St.Stephen's Green Unitarian Church

What is, is.

Eighteen months ago, I arrived at my eightieth birthday.

Although, if truth be told, I didn't actually arrive. It kind-of snuck-up on me. Since then, I have found myself reflecting on the many twists and turns in my life-journey that have brought me to where I find myself today, and the realisation that wherever I thought I was going in life, I have, apparently, arrived!

I have arrived at the understanding that my life has not been a single unbroken journey but a series of interlocking journeys e.g., childhood, education, career, marriage, parenthood, grand-parenthood, great grand-parenthood, retirement.

In addition, I believe that throughout my life there has been, and still is, a non-visible but ever-present, spiritual reality accompanying me on my journey.

In the words of the Jesuit scientist and theologian, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin;

*“We are not human beings having a spiritual experience;
We are spiritual beings having a human experience.”*

I grew up in the Dublin Liberties in a typical Irish Catholic working-class family.

In the 1940s and '50s the influence of the Catholic Church in Irish society was all pervasive and impinged on every aspect of daily life. Conformity with the moral tenets of the Roman Catholic Church, was the order of the day, even, on some issues, for non-Catholics e.g. divorce, contraception. From the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922 up to the visit of Pope John Paul II in 1979, the Irish Catholic Church held a pre-eminent and, indeed, dominant role in Irish society.

Public displays and expressions of religious fervour and piety were everywhere. Marian Grottos and other religious shrines, were to be found in virtually every town and village. Novenas, Triduum's, Parish Retreats and other devotional practices were regular occurrences. I can vividly recall the monster Corpus Christi processions that were held annually in the Liberties. Many houses had window-shrines and celebratory buntings hung across the streets. It was a time when Irish Presidents and Taoisigh knelt to kiss the rings of Catholic bishops.

That was the religious environment of my youth. As a young man I was attracted to the simplicity of the Franciscan way of life and, in 1965, I joined the Franciscan Order. It was at a time when Catholic seminaries

abounded throughout Ireland and were bursting at the seams. The Second Vatican Council had just concluded and a whole new and exciting era beckoned for the Catholic Church in Ireland.

Or did it?

Slowly, but surely, it became clear that apart from some superficial changes e.g., vernacular liturgy, and the priest facing the congregation while celebrating Mass, there would be no fundamental change within the Catholic Church.

However, in July 1968, a major religious occurrence took place when Pope Paul VI, against the advice of a commission of experts that he himself had established, decreed in an encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*, that there would be no change in the position of the Catholic Church on the issue of artificial birth control.

That decision had a seismic impact on the everyday lives of ordinary practising Catholics and, moreover, it became the trigger for a significant and ever-widening chasm between the Catholic Church and its flock. Millions of practising Catholic couples ignored the papal decree and, for the first time in their lives made their own personal decision on a major moral issue.

Another sign of unfolding problems for the Catholic Church was the increasing number of men leaving the priesthood and a dramatic reduction in religious vocations. Seminaries, which up to then had experienced extraordinary growth, were steadily emptying of seminarians (including myself) and the number of new entrants was reduced to a trickle.

The visit of Pope John Paul II to Ireland in 1979 was heralded at the time as a triumph which would consolidate the pre-eminent position of the Catholic Church in Ireland well into the future. In fact, as we now know, it was the prelude to a dramatic decline in church attendance, compounded by a deluge of clerical abuse allegations, the consequences of which are still unfolding today.

But that's another story.

During my time with the Franciscans, I became very interested in the writings of the Jesuit priest and palaeontologist, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.

De Chardin had developed a new vision of human evolution, Christianity and the cosmos. So advanced was his thinking that he was to spend almost his entire adult life under interdict from the Vatican. Prohibited from preaching or lecturing in Catholic churches and academic institutions, his writings were not published during his lifetime, and then, after his death in 1955, were published by his academic friends to great inter-

national acclaim.

I was particularly attracted to De Chardain's vision of the origin and purpose of human life: -

*"We are not the result of a single, long past, act of creation.
We are participants in an ongoing process of creation".*

Unfortunately, this capacity for human beings to participate in the ongoing process of creation, has also empowered humanity to engage in the most heinous acts of depravity and barbarity. We human beings have murdered billions of our own species. We are, by far, the most cruel, depraved and vicious creature that has ever lived on this earth.

From my Celtic studies, I became aware of, and greatly interested in, Celtic spirituality. I was drawn to the Celtic concept of the interwoven relationship between the natural world and the supernatural world.

In the words of St. Columbanus.

"All of life, all of nature,
Pulsates with the life-force of a creation,
And there is nowhere, where the Creator is not".

I became increasingly attracted to the Celtic concept of the co-existence of "this world" with a non-visible, but equally present, "otherworld".

I also embraced the Celtic concept of "thin places" i.e., places where the veil between "this world" and the "otherworld" is very thin.

When Jesus was asked where the Kingdom of God was, He replied: -

"No one will say, "See here" or "See there" For behold, the Kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17 – 20;21)

By the early 2000's I had withdrawn from the Roman Catholic Church and began searching for some other spiritual home. And then, in 2008, I stumbled upon the Unitarian Church in St Stephen's Green and I was attracted to its core tenet of communal worship in a spirit of freedom, reason and tolerance. Since then, I have found in the Unitarian Church a spiritual home where I can explore and develop my spirituality without having to conform to pre-ordained rituals and dogmas. It is also a place where I can listen to, respect and be enlightened by the diverse spiritual views of others.

The past fifty years have seen a massive expansion of human consciousness and understanding. Human participation in the ongoing

process of creation has progressed well beyond the physical to the intellectual. Education and travel have greatly expanded our knowledge of ourselves and our surroundings. Computers, the internet, and iphones, for example, have brought us to a level of knowledge and understanding we could not conceive of just 50 years ago.

And who can say what further developments lie ahead. Each of us here today is at a different place in our personal life-journey. We are in the company of some 7 billion other human beings living on this earth in many diverse geographic, political, religious and cultural settings. Indeed, as we will sing in the great Sibelian anthem following this address,

“Other hearts in other lands are beating, with hopes and dreams as true and high as mine.”

It is conservatively estimated that since the emergence of human life on this planet some 140 billion people, over twelve thousand successive generations, have lived and died on this earth. Each and every one of these 140 billion human beings faced the challenges of everyday life, however long or short; many in circumstances that would be regarded today as appalling. Indeed, even today, over one billion people live in truly sub-human conditions.

Every generation has experienced, joy, tragedy, grief, war, brutality and injustice. In each generation individuals have striven to understand the meaning and purpose of human life.

Who are we? Where are we going? What is it all about?

It has been said that we Unitarians do not know where we are spiritually because we do not subscribe to a common creed. In past times, people generally lived and died within the religious beliefs and social norms of the society into which they were born.

While, historically, social and religious conformity has been the norm and most people have conformed to the status quo of their time, there were in every generation non-conformists and pioneers, whether in the field of geographic exploration, science, or religion, who strove to attain a deeper understanding of the true meaning of things, often at a great price to themselves – indeed sometimes at the cost of their lives. These people had an insatiable thirst for deeper knowledge, understanding and truth. They are the true heroes of history.

The fact that we Unitarians do not subscribe to a common

creed does not give us an easy opt-out card but confronts us with the challenge of exploring and deepening our own personal beliefs. It is the road less travelled. It is a very challenging and often lonely spiritual road.

In the words of De Chardain;

“We are not spiritual defenders.

We are spiritual explorers in pursuit of greater spiritual
Knowledge and understanding”.

Recently, I experienced a significant medical episode which prompted me to focus on what I really believe in regard to this life, and the afterlife.

This medical episode coincided with the launch of the James Webb Space Telescope. The Webb telescope enables us humans to observe the cosmos to a depth and degree of clarity never possible before now. We now know that our planet, Earth, is but one of billions of planets in our galaxy, the Milky Way, and that the Milky Way is but one of billions of galaxies in the cosmos. The cosmos is vast and complex and is still evolving and expanding. It is in an ongoing process of creation. If there is an overarching structure and order to it, it is beyond our current level of human comprehension.

We can but “gaze in awesome wonder”. (Recently I read an interview with an astronaut who spent time on the surface of the moon. He spoke of the endless panorama of planets and stars and how by simply putting up his thumb he could obliterate the earth without any noticeable effect on the wider picture).

De Chardain believed that humanity is actively participating in an “ongoing process of becoming”; that is, an ongoing process of growth in human consciousness and understanding. He believed that each generation has the potential capacity to learn from, build upon and further advance the overall level of human knowledge and understanding of previous generations until ultimately, in the fullness of time, humanity will reach the Omega point where human and supernatural comprehension will coalesce and the meaning of all things will become known.

It is almost unbelievable to recall that just over 100 years ago the Director of the United States Patents Office, Charles Duell, recommended the closure of the US Patents Office, in a letter to President McKinley, on the grounds that “everything that can be invented, has been invented.”

The enormous scientific and social advances of the past century in education, travel, medicine, telecommunications, space exploration, etc, all bear witness to the ongoing growth of human consciousness and comprehension, which continues each and every day despite Mr Duell's prediction.

In light of future, as yet unknown, developments, the only thing we can predict with absolute certainty is that humanity is "participating in an ongoing process of becoming" and we have absolutely no idea what developments lie ahead.

To quote from Desiderata "Whether or not it is clear to you, no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should" or as Jesus put it; "Eye has not seen nor ear heard nor has it entered into the heart of man the things that God has prepared for those who love Him". (1 Corinthians 2:9)

Since my eightieth birthday I have been pondering on what do I really, deep down, believe.

I am repeatedly drawn to a simple phrase expressed by the French philosopher, Jacques Maritain,

"What is, is".

Essentially, this means that regardless of what views or beliefs individuals or religious groups may hold about the meaning and purpose of human life and of the cosmos, there is a reality to everything, which exists in itself, and which is not dependant on what any of us believe.

"What is, is".

If we consider the spiritual beliefs of the many religions in the world e.g., Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Shintoism, Judaism, Hinduism, Sikhism, etc, etc, they cannot all be correct.

I find myself drawn more and more to Maritain's view that

"What is, is".

And so, in the twilight of my life, after a lifetime of spiritual searching, I can visit my "thin places" unencumbered by profound theological dogmas or convoluted philosophical ponderings and simply rest, relax and reflect, surrounded by nature, in the sure and certain knowledge that

“What is, is”.

I would like to conclude this address by reciting a verse by Jonathon Swift which I say aloud every morning when I arise from my bed to the dawning realisation that I am still here.

*This day, whate'er the fates decree,
Shall still be kept with joy by me:
This day then let us not be told
That you are sick and I grown old,
Nor think of our approaching ills
Or talk of spectacles and pills.
Tomorrow will be time enough
To hear such mortifying stuff*

FRANK TRACY

St.Stephen's Green Unitarian Church

FORGET CHRISTMAS FORGET EASTER

December is always an exceedingly difficult month for me, because of the theological implications of Christmas. As I suggested in my reading at my last Dublin Service on 7th July 2024. Unitarianism properly tends in a direction where neither Christmas nor Easter forms any part of the theological baggage. But since the time of Theophyllus Lindsey 225 years ago, who envisaged these important omissions from traditional Christianity, Unitarians have regressed badly. Does any Unitarian Church now use Lindsay's "Improved Bible" of 1808, which proposed the secondary nature of Luke's Nativity, a downgrading subsequently supported in recent times by computer-aided analysis of Luke's text, which has proved the Nativity to be a later addition?

We have lost our capacity for real Dissent, and have re-absorbed ourselves too readily into the fallacies of the mainstream. In fact all the theological and biblical developments of the last 75 years support the essence of the Unitarian position, and form the strongest possible case against the conventions of the Trinitarians.

But Unitarians have signally failed to argue their case in this forum. Advent is a good example of this failure. According to the very earliest Spanish liturgies, Advent ran through to and culminated in the Epiphany on 6th January, the real original start of the theological year, as the beginning of Jesus's mission. The substitution of Christmas for the Epiphany was a 4th-century "bending" to accommodate the new feast of Christ's birthday (Mithras's birthday in new guise), first celebrated in Rome in 354 and Antioch in 388.

We should not be afraid of history. For the truths which flow from history, properly understood, are on our side as Unitarians; and should give us courage going forwards, if we are brave.

Dr. Martin Pulbrook
Enniscoffey, Co. Westmeath,

10th December 2024

Christmas 2024

This has been an eventful year in the life of our community. I retired during the summer and in the autumn the search for a new Minister began. It amazes me that this will only be the sixth appointment of a Minister here since the Church moved to St. Stephen's Green in 1863.

Since my retirement Sunday services have been led mainly by members of the congregation. I want to thank everyone who has taken on that responsibility; I am humbled when I consider the talent that is within our congregation. At the same time as my retirement our caretaker Kevin moved to his new home in Bray. Kevin's absence has meant that members have been asked to take on even more responsibilities. A sincere thank you, to each and everyone who has contributed to keeping the doors open. Not only has the work continued but we welcomed 11 New Members to the church community.

Charitable Giving:

For many years it was the practice in the church that the offertory taken on the last Sunday of the month was donated to a charity. Covid created new ways of donating to the church. These make it more difficult to identify funds intended for the church and those intended for charity. To maintain our charitable giving in Spring we held a sale of plants and cakes the funds (€550) were donated to the Cork Church. In October a Harvest Thanksgiving Lunch was held which raised the sum of €1,232 in support of Christian Aid. In December the Offertory at the Carol Service (€1,100) and the funds raised at the sale of Crafts (€600), Cakes and the raffle (€600) as well as the offertory on Christmas Day will be donated to the Capuchin Day Centre. Rather than toys the Capuchin Day Centre, they have asked for donations of vouchers (Smyth's Toy Shop) as well as pyjamas, hats and gloves. 2025 may be the year we appoint our new minister so there is much to look forward to in the New Year. In the meantime thank you to everyone for all the work on behalf of the church and for the support you have given me during the year. I wish everyone a happy, peaceful and healthy Christmas and New Year.

Bridget

Minister Emerita

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

oscailltmagazine@gmail.com

Rev. Bridget Spain (*Minister Emerita*)

Tel: 085-7180599

Vestry 01 - 4780638

e-mail: revbspain@gmail.com

Rev. Bill Darlison (*Minister Emeritus*)

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

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

e-mail secretaryunitarianchurch@gmail.com

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

Musical Director: Josh Johnston :- 086 892 0602

Caretaker: Kevin Robinson

Telephone: 4752781

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



Dublin Unitarian Church

112 St. Stephens Green Dublin 2.

Service 11.00a.m.

Sunday Rota for January 2025

5 th January	<i>Judge Not</i>
Service	Pamela McCarthy
Reader	Tony Roche
Flowers	Paula Mills
Welcomer	Paula Mills - Janet Mulroy
Coffee	Alison Claffey, Paul Murray, Maeve Edwards

12 th January	
Service	Paul Murray
Reader	Emer O'Reilly
Flowers	Denise Dunne
Welcomer	Paul Murray - Emer O'Reilly
Coffee	Jennifer Buller, Janet Mulroy, Trish Webb-Duffy

19 th January	<i>Pilgrimages</i>
Service	Elaine Harris
Reader	Alison Claffey
Flowers	Emer O'Reilly
Welcomer	Trish Webb Duffy - Catharine Cook
Coffee	Gráinne Carty, Daniela Cooney, Jennifer Buller

26 th January	<i>Cracked, not Broken</i>
Service	Tony Brady
Reader	Andrew Connolly-Crangle
Flowers	Janet Mulroy
Welcomer	Janet Mulroy - Gráinne Carty
Coffee	Maeve Edwards, Doireann Ní Bhriain, Alison Claffey

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.



Some of the new members that signed the membership book on Sunday 8th December 2024