

Oscailt

May 2025

IRELANDS UNITARIAN MAGAZINE

Vol.21 Nº 5



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.

Contact : - e-mail: revbspain@gmail.com Vestry 01 - 4780638

Sunday Club - Childrens Programme Take 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

Childrens Educational Trust Funds The Damer and Singleton Trusts

Our congregation has two funds dedicated to supporting the educational needs of our voting members' children.

For further information please contact any member of the committee if you want to know more,

or

write to Dennis Aylmer c/o aylmerd@gmail.com

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DUBLIN UNITARIAN CHURCH

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



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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Our magazine title, *Oscailt*, is inspired by the account of the **Healing of the Deaf and Mute Man** in St. Mark's Gospel, Chapter 7. Jesus commands the man's ears to open up with 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.

Front Cover: The Walking group that paid a visit to Kilmacurragh House on Saturday 12th April. Kilmacurragh House is run by the National Botanic Gardens and has a fine collection of conifer and rhododendrons suited to that part of the country. There is a very nice café there that serve very generous portions of everything.
(photo P.Spain)

CAN DUBLIN UNITARIANS POINT THE WAY TOWARDS A NEW IRELAND?

Almost as soon as I suggested the title for this address to our chairperson, I regretted it as both far too ambitious and rather naïve. But I'm going to plough on regardless in the hope that I will provoke a little thinking. What I was thinking was that our core Unitarian values of freedom, reason and tolerance might have something to teach people in this country as we are probably moving - more slowly than most people think, but nevertheless the direction is clear - towards some form of Irish unity - probably achieved through the narrowest of majorities in a referendum.

Northern Ireland is still a society deeply riven by mutual mistrust and sectarian hatred, and that will continue whatever the eventual constitutional destination of the island. I believe this Republic is utterly unprepared to incorporate maybe 7-800,000 alienated and betrayed Northern Protestants and unionists (because that is how they will feel) into its body politic. In the words of *Irish Times* political editor Pat Leahy, commenting on this month's opinion poll in that paper on attitudes to unity, and the necessity for a 'new Ireland' to become a little bit more British to accommodate those Protestants and unionists: "Don't like the sound of any of that? Don't fancy a state that's a bit more British? Figure that we fought a war to get rid of the British (two wars, the Provisional IRA might say) and to hell with the idea of changing the Irish identity of the Republic in order to accommodate unionists? That unionists can like it or lump it and if they don't like it, well, they know where the door is?" An *Irish Times* editorial put it equally bluntly when commenting on Southern Irish people's reluctance to consider measures that might take account of the identities and concerns of unionists: "There remains a strong strain within Irish nationalism that sees unification in crudely assimilationist terms."

I believe such an attitude would be disastrous for a country which - in the words of the new Article 3 of the Constitution, inserted after the 1998 Good Friday Agreement - has pledged that unity will come about through "harmony and friendship" to peacefully unite the people of the island "in all the diversity of their identities and traditions."

Which is where our Unitarian values of freedom, reason and tolerance come in (as well as our position as a Southern congregation allied to the Northern Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church of Ireland, the great majority of whose members are unionists). Because whereas very few Northern Protestants want to see a united Ireland, many - perhaps most -

of them would have no objection to a closer relationship with the now prosperous, economically dynamic and culturally liberal Republic. Could a 'new Ireland' come to mean an island where these core Unitarian values flourish, whatever its constitutional status? A commitment to freedom, reason and tolerance could surely help us come together around the values of peace, democracy, equality, a strong sense of community, the Christian tradition in all its forms and even a sense of being European (since a majority in Northern Ireland voted against Brexit and it is still connected to the EU through the NI Protocol and the Windsor Framework)?

20 years ago the prominent sociologists and political scientists Tony Fahey, Bernadette Hayes and Richard Sinnott wrote a book based on the Irish data from a series of European Values and Social Surveys. They concluded: "The two societies and the two traditions are characterised by major similarities as well as by self-evident differences. Put another way, the grounds for consensus within and between the two societies are almost as extensive as the grounds for conflict."

Five years later Jennifer Flegg of this congregation gave an address in which she said that a rational, spacious religious philosophy like ours could make a big contribution "both an individual and a societal one, to enable us to direct and manage our future in a fair, constructive and enriching way." She said the need for this extended to the whole island, not just to any one part of it. Irish society, north and south, needs what she called "the Unitarian rope, not just as a cross-border religious link but as a lifeline." She stressed that "if Unitarianism is to be strong enough to be of use in both parts of the island, it is essential that its two components should plait together and form a single rope."

She said we are a small but unique church in that we combine the ethical striving and drawing wisdom from all the world's religions of the Dublin congregation – the liberal Unitarian wing, if you like – with what I would call the conservative radicalism of the Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church in the North, with its Presbyterian emphasis on digging deep into human experience using Christ and the Bible as a guide.

Recently I visited the Dunmurry church outside Belfast and its genial and knowledgeable minister David Steers, who is also the historian of the Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church. This is a beautiful

church, built in 1779, which I strongly recommend members of this congregation should take time to visit. It is surrounded by charming gardens laid out by its former minister Bill McMillan, an internationally recognised horticulturalist and floral artist, who also had strong links with this church. It was the church of Henry Montgomery, a seminal figure in the history of Irish Presbyterianism, who led the early 19th century breakaway by the Non-Subscribers from that church and its Westminster Confession of Faith, which laid down that all Christians must believe in the Trinity, all non-Christians were going to hell and the Pope was the Anti-Christ.

Steers pointed to the historic liberal current in the Non-Subscribing Church. Montgomery himself was an admirer of the United Irishmen of the 1798 rebellion although not of their revolutionary methods. Other leading liberal Non-Subscribers mentioned by Steers included David Maginnis, the minister of the Belfast working class York Street congregation in the 19th century, who preached the celebrated American Unitarian Theodore Parker's message of 'God our Father and Mother'; the socialist (and strong supporter of the Spanish Republic during that country's civil war) and later unionist cabinet minister Harry Midgely; other early 20th century socialist ministers like Arthur Agnew and Edgar Fripp; and the founder of the short-lived Ulster Liberal Party in the 1950s, Rev. Albert McElroy, who made no secret of his preference for a united Ireland that was part of both the Commonwealth and the European Economic Community.

Steers stressed that Non-Subscribers in the North were now broadly unionist, and there was little open discussion of politics in the denomination - a characteristic they share with Northern Protestants in general. He warned that some Non-Subscribers would be suspicious of an all-Ireland discussion about common values, seeing it as part of some hidden nationalist agenda. [Remember that the most famous Non-Subscribers of the past century were Northern Ireland's second unionist prime minister, John Miller Andrews, and his brother Thomas, the designer of the *Titanic*, both descendants of a leading Dublin Unitarian family].

However Steers said a discussion around the shared Unitarian and Non-Subscribing Presbyterian values of freedom, reason and tolerance and how they could inform opinion in Ireland would be much easier now than during the past 50 years of conflict, division and uneasy peace. This renewed liberalism was shown by the more open atti-

tudes to gay people and gay marriage, which is in sharp contrast to the mainstream Presbyterian Church. “It’s a good idea that we should begin to discuss the values that unite us rather than the politics that divide us”, he told me.

Maybe I am a dreamer. Maybe my family background - a liberal Northern Presbyterian mother and a Czech socialist father - predisposes me to be too idealistic about the flexibility of that notoriously stubborn and often anti-Irish community, the Northern Ireland unionists. But when I look at the statement of beliefs in the back of our hymnbook, and I change one word, replacing ‘church’ with ‘country’, I see a perfect starting point for a discussion about common all-island values.

‘Love is the doctrine of this *country*
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 we do covenant with each other and with God.’

Similarly, the mission statement of the Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church says: “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is Freedom, Faith guided by Reason and Conscience.”

In his recent column, the *Irish Times* journalist Joe Humphries suggested that the Taoiseach, Micheal Martin, should draw inspiration from Ireland’s history of Christian scholarship when he visits President Donald Trump in Washington on St Patrick’s Day. “He should use the opportunity not to lecture Trump about his policies, but to speak about the shared Christian values underpinning Irish and American societies.”

If we can talk to the mad Trump about shared Christian values, surely we can talk to Northern Protestants and unionists about the same thing!

Andy Pollak

St Stephen’s Green Unitarian Church, Dublin,

16 February 2025

Jesus Wept

My address this morning offers some thoughts on compassion *and* on the importance of compassion in the human and divine life of Jesus Christ. Compassion is a fundamental tenet of religious teaching and practice. Being compassionate is a force for much that is positive in humankind. Compassion, along with love, shapes our relations with one another, helps to build a sense of community, trust and civil society. In the words of Karen Armstrong, the English theologian best known for her book *A History of God*, compassion is ‘the key to our religious and social perplexities’. In short, we cannot thrive without the practice of compassion.

My inspiration for this address was a wonderful reading by our fellow church member Jennifer Flegg on the 18th of August last. In that reading, Jennifer draws on the work of Karen Armstrong to highlight the centrality of compassion in all religious faiths and spiritual belief systems over the last 3000 or more years. I quote from the opening lines of her reading: ‘I don’t think it matters what you believe – and most of the great sages of religion would agree. If conventional beliefs make you compassionate, kind and respectful of the sacred rights of others, this is good religion. If your beliefs make you intolerant, unkind and belligerent, this is bad religion, no matter how orthodox it is.’

Compassion and a good religion are one and the same. Being compassionate becomes the touchstone of any meaningful spirituality. To quote again from Jennifer’s reading, ‘Of course, compassion does not mean feeling sorry for people. It means feeling *with* them. It is a spirituality of empathy and sympathy which makes us dethrone ourselves from the centre of our world and put others there.’

Some people seem to be naturally compassionate. Perhaps they have the gift. But the giving of ourselves to others is often very difficult. Dethroning our own selves and neutralising our egos are challenging. The adage ‘there but for the grace of God go I’ is forgotten. As indeed is the central principle of all religions, the so-called Golden Rule, to ‘Do unto others as you would have them do unto you’.

Being compassionate involves an emotional engagement with

the other. It also involves a rational engagement. A decision to intercede, to help another, entails action and cognition. There are consequences to be considered. In the Parable of the Good Samaritan, the Samaritan does not just feel compassionate towards the injured man, he takes concrete steps towards healing the man's injuries. Thus, the phrase 'the practice of compassion' is helpful, I think, when considering this human quality.

But is compassion just a human quality or is it something more? Karen Armstrong contends that, for all world religions, compassion seems to transcend the mere human. The practice of compassion brings us into what monotheists call the presence of God, introduces us into Nirvana in the case of Buddhism, puts us in harmony with the Tao in Confucianism, and unites us with Brahman in Hinduism.

So there seems to be something uplifting, transformational, even transcendent, possibly divine, in the practice of compassion. We may have difficulty believing that the gods of wrath, of anger and of judgement pay much attention to compassion. But they are the gods of bad religion. For the gods of good religion, compassion is central.

Peter Wehner is a distinguished American essayist and author, a senior fellow of the Trinity Forum, and attends McLean Presbyterian Church in Virginia. He contends that compassion is central to the Christian understanding of God. Compassion implies the capacity to enter into places of pain, to 'weep with those who weep', in the words of the Apostle Paul. And Paul was central both to the *early* conception of Christianity and to the idea of its underpinning in compassion. Peter Wehner wrote a very thoughtful essay about a year ago entitled 'This is why Jesus wept' (<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/12/24/opinion/christmas-jesus-wept-compassion.html>). I draw substantively from this essay to tell the story of Lazarus.

In chapter 11 of the Gospel of John, we're told that Lazarus, the brother of Mary of Bethany and Martha, and a friend of Jesus', was sick. By the time Jesus arrives in Bethany, Lazarus has died and been entombed for four days. Both sisters are grieving. Mary, when she sees Jesus, falls at his feet weeping, and saying 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died'. We're told

Jesus is ‘deeply moved in spirit and troubled’. And according to verse 35 of the chapter, ‘Jesus wept’. ‘Jesus wept’, with just its two words, is the shortest verse in the Bible. The verse is also profound and complex.

And understandably so. Earlier in John 11, we’re told that Jesus *knew* he was going to raise Lazarus from the dead, which he did. So Jesus wasn’t weeping because he wouldn’t see Lazarus again; it was because he was entering into the suffering of Mary and Martha. Jesus was present with them in their grief, even to the point of tears, all the time knowing that their grief would soon be allayed.

Psalms 34:18 tells us that God is always ‘close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.’ Peter Wehner points out that Jesus, the embodiment of God on earth, doesn’t just care for the broken-hearted; he joins them. (I quote) ‘Their grief becomes *his* in a remarkable act of love.’

If you Google the four words, ‘Jesus Wept, Brooklyn Museum’, you will find a wonderfully evocative painting by the French painter James Tissot entitled *Jesus Wept* (*Jésus Pleura*), completed in 1896. It depicts the event of Jesus weeping at Bethany. He covers his face with his hands. His self-emptying love is palpable. Mary and Martha stand by soulfully. The painting deftly captures the narrative complexity of the story.

Peter Wehner also recounts in his essay the story of how Jesus heals the leper. People at that time would avoid contact with those afflicted with leprosy. They were seen by many as the object of divine punishment, the disease understood to be a visible mark of impurity. Yet in the account in Mark, Jesus not only heals the man with leprosy; he also touches him. In doing so, Jesus defies Levitical law. He himself became ‘unclean’. And he provided human contact to a person whom no other human would touch and who had very likely not been touched in a very long time. Jesus’ touch was not necessary for him to heal the man of leprosy, but the touch may have been necessary to heal the man of feelings of shame and isolation, of rejection and detestation.

Jesus often identifies with and expresses compassion for outsiders, especially those deemed unworthy, unclean or unfit. Peter Wehner concludes ‘that in taking on their “outsider status” with them, Jesus reflected his deep love and solidarity with them, and his willingness to suffer with them. Jesus not only healed them, but he also took on their alienation.’

As I move towards conclusion, let us return to our own everyday

lives and ask a question. Can we be overly compassionate? Is there such a phenomenon as showing too much compassion? We see people who are manifestly kind and empathetic become deeply upset, even distraught, in the practice of their compassion. Self-emptying love and care become just too emptying. A kind of ‘compassion fatigue’ comes evident. People affected like this become troubled and tired in ways that are often unhelpful to themselves or indeed to the subjects of their compassion. They likely need to step back and ‘switch off’ for a while.

Writing the 1930s, the poet T.S. Eliot said, ‘humankind cannot bear very much reality’. He implied that in nurturing the growing soul in the face of vast overwhelming reality, there is sometimes need for a temporary withdrawal, a slowing down, to allow what he called a ‘shaft of sunlight’ to appear, a spiritual illumination to take place. For Eliot this was a journey towards God.

In practice, there will be occasions when it is necessary to develop a sense of self-compassion. Self-care and being kind to ourselves are the antidotes to compassion fatigue. But we are often not very good at doing this. It makes us feel selfish even guilty. But in order to care for others, we need also to care for ourselves.

A place where compassion, care, and kindness abide in abundance is in a hospice. In this setting, palliative care teams help patients, and their loved ones, deal with the sadness of facing death. A recent article I read about Our Lady’s Hospice in Dublin describes this sadness while also speaking in a wonderfully life-affirmingly way about the human condition (Irish Times, 25 September 2024). But how, we must wonder, do the hospice staff cope with the emotional toll of being so close to dying people? Here is Dr Lucy Balding, a palliative care consultant, speaking. ‘Really, it’s about sharing a little of yourself but not so much that you unravel. The biggest truth of this work is that one can’t do it alone. We shoulder it as a team. We look after each other, debrief, laugh and share. And then it’s important not to bring work home, to get fresh air and exercise, and, most especially, I hug my children and my husband every chance I get.’

Aidan O’Driscoll

22 December 2024

St Stephen’s Green Unitarian Church, Dublin,

On the readings rota?

Some useful tips...

Preparing to read

We have all been that person who has suddenly remembered on a Sunday morning that we are due to do a reading in church, but haven't chosen anything. The mad dash to the computer and the bookshelves usually solves that problem, but not always effectively, which is why, as with so many other things in life, preparation makes all the difference. I have been delivering text in public and on radio and TV in my personal and professional life for many years now and have been training others to do so as part of my job, but even after all those years of practice, I would always try and avoid reading a piece of text without rehearsing **aloud** in advance. Even if it's a last-minute choice, make the 5 minutes it takes to read it aloud before you come to church.

If you have time, I would suggest you photocopy or better still, type out your text in largish font with double or at least 1.5 spacing. Reading tightly spaced small print directly from a book means you have to peer down at your text rather than look out and address your listeners. Having it on a separate sheet allows you to put helpful marks on it for your reading. If you're reading it from a book, mark it, as indicated below, using a pencil, and you can rub it out later. I'm not an advocate of reading from a phone. You can get away with it, but it won't sound as meaningful or as clear as it will if you've printed it on a page. Ipads or tablets are a bit better, though it takes more time to use the marking system I describe below. At least you can increase the size of the font, which can be very helpful.

Mark up your text (using a pencil, and not a biro, so that you can make changes later, if you need to) with forward slashes where the meaning dictates a beat, and underline key words. If you have what is a very common habit of dropping your voice every time there is a full stop, mark in an arrow pointing upwards above those final words of each sentence to make sure you don't do that every time. Of course you can let your voice go down at the end of a paragraph.

Mark your text with slashes. Below is an example of a piece of 'marked' text using an extract from a piece Paul Spain wrote a few years ago in *Oscailt*. Some of the slashes have been placed

where there were already commas or full stops. The slashes are more clearly visible to the eye as it glances up and down from the text, and give a more natural cadence to the voice. They have been placed where the meaning has dictated they should naturally be placed. Where to place them becomes obvious as you read aloud. You don't have to grab a breath at every slash; it's more that they encourage your voice to be more expressive.

The meaning has also dictated where words have been underlined. You don't have to over-emphasise these words, but if they're underlined your voice will stress them a little to add meaning to your delivery. You may feel I have overdone the underlining, but if your voice has any tendency towards monotone, I think you will find this very useful. If you are a naturally good reader, you may not need to bother with the underlining, though I still do it when I'm recording narrations.

Modern agriculture is not about feeding people / or about car-ing for the environment. / It is about wealth creation for a small minority. / Every minute / 11 children under the age of five die from hunger related diseases / while it is predicted that by 2020 / there will be 5 million deaths every year attributable to over-weight and obesity. / Food has become a commodity provided by anonymous producers / processors / and retailers to anonymous consumers / who in turn expect convenience / and con-stant variety / at a cheaper and cheaper price. / Through stand-ardisation and exploitation, / the global food system has en-sured that there is a perennial supply of cheap, / convenient food available to those who are able to travel to mega super-makets.

Why not choose a text of our own and give this system a try? Now read the text **aloud** several times; reading it in your head does not have the same value at all. If there are any words or names in it you find hard to pronounce, slow down as you reach them and pronounce every syllable (of course, you should first take them out and practice saying them aloud 4 or 5 times). Imagine the congregation in front of you, and address yourself to an imaginary hard of hearing person in the back row of the church. (Actually, there are several hard of hearing people in our congregation, who often complain about not hearing readers). Get comfortable

with the sound of your own projected voice. If yours is a light voice, practise throwing it to the other end of the largest room you can find, or the bottom of the garden, or the park.

Try reading more slowly than you normally would and record yourself on your phone as you do the slow reading. When you listen back, you will probably realise it's not too slow at all. Remember, you've had the benefit of reading the piece a few times, but the congregation will only hear it once, and they need time to take in the content. Listening to yourself read will also unmask the habit mentioned above of dropping your voice at the end of every sentence – or of raising it on every new sentence. If you find this is the case, make sure to put in marks that will stop you doing this, as it sounds unnatural.

Timing

Make sure you time your reading. Some of the best readings I've heard have been well under the 5 minutes maximum suggested by the management committee. Indeed, a 2- 3 minute reading is plenty in my book, and often more impactful than a 5-minute one. Most people underestimate how long it will take to read a piece, so, it is important to time yourself in advance. If you are planning some additional remarks before or after you do the actual reading, write these down and time them as part of the overall piece. It is very easy for a few extempore explanatory remarks to last longer than you intended, precisely because you have not rehearsed them in advance. Make sure you tell us who wrote the piece (and if they're not particularly well-known, explain who they are) and what text of theirs it has been taken from. Sometimes, it may be useful to give that information again at the end of your reading.

Delivery and using the microphone

If you have prepared well, then this will be much easier than you think. Having said that, it's always a bit of a shock to mount the podium and look up to see a sea of expectant faces. I haven't mentioned breathing yet – I will do so in a moment – but this is where you give yourself the luxury of a few deep breaths to steady the nerves and focus your concentration. Don't forget to do this!

If you're reading from the podium where the service is given, check that the microphone is in alignment with your mouth and readjust it during your reading, if you need to. We are lucky to have such an easily adjustable microphone, and we should use it more.

If you bend your head too far into the text, for example, we won't hear you. If on the other hand, you're reading or speaking using the portable microphone, be aware that you need to speak directly into it, and stay quite close. Better than either of the above is the clip-on microphone now used for the children's story. A nice big smile and a greeting to the congregation will relax them and you, and make that first important connection. And off you go! Remember to take little pauses between sections or paragraphs. This makes it much easier to edit for the podcast.

Breathing

I have mentioned breathing above, and I'd like to suggest you teach yourself to do what I call abdominal breathing. It has nothing to do with the abdomen, but it does involve expanding the diaphragm, allowing your abdomen to extend a little as you breathe in (the diaphragm is a muscle that sits beneath your lower-to-middle rib cage; it helps you breathe by lowering when you inhale, allowing your lungs to expand). If you suck in the air through your mouth or nose, not allowing the shoulders to rise, but letting the air fill up your lower rib cage and diaphragm, and let it out slowly, it will give you a feeling of well-being you will not get by breathing in the upper chest area and lifting up your shoulders. And you will have more air with which to speak. I'm a great believer in doing a few of these breaths before any activity I may find stressful. Good breathing is at the heart of any good performance, and, as any actor or singer will tell you, your voice will sound more sure and true if you are breathing well. It will certainly help calm any flutter of last-minute nerves you may feel when you first look out at that sea of faces.

I hope you find these tips helpful, not only for your readings in church, but for other areas of your life, too. We have many fine readers in our congregation, so we can all learn from each other.

Doireann Ní Bhriain

St Stephen's Green Unitarian Church, Dublin,

April 2025

Sundays at 2

Classical Musicians Network

Cezar Oranski, *clarinet*

Liezl-Maret Jacobs, *piano*

Sunday 25th May 2025 at 2pm
(duration approx. 50 minutes)



Music by Robert Schumann, Saint-Saens and Poulenc

At the Dublin Unitarian Church - - - - - Tickets: Free

donations towards the church's Restoration Fund. RSVP's via [Eventbrite.ie](https://eventbrite.ie).

Further information from Shari McDaid, shari_hello@yahoo.ie

Report from the Synod of Munster

Some people may be unfamiliar with the Synod of Munster, the Synod is part of the governing process within the Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church of Ireland. One of the duties of the Synod is to oversee the training of Ministry students.

Gavin Byrne is a Ministry Student under the care of the SOM. When Gavin's training was organised we arranged that his placements would be with churches in Northern Ireland and in Cork. Since last autumn Gavin has worked in churches in Banbridge and Dromore under the Mentorship of Rev.Brian Moodie. Due to the fire in the Cork Church and the resignation of Rev.Mike O'Sullivan from Ministry, Gavin will now have his second placement in the Dublin church.

During this placement the student takes on more Ministerial responsibility. Gavin will now be part of the team involved in officiating at rites of passage such as Baby Welcomes, Baptisms, Funeral and Memorial Services. So we will see much more of Gavin in the months ahead.

We wish Gavin every success as he works towards the completion of his studies.

Rev. Bridget Spain
Moderator Synod of Munster

Dublin Unitarian Book Club's choice for March 2025.

SO LONG, SEE YOU TOMORROW

by

William Keepers Maxwell Junior

The narrator is frustratingly never named in this book but as it is written in the first person the reader cannot but link the narrator's voice to that of the author Maxwell himself.

The narrator is an old man looking back on his childhood and youth in a place called Lincoln Illinois, a small rural town surrounded by farmland. He is remembering events of his own life in the 1920's and of a particular event that happened in the community, the murder of a tenant farmer named Lloyd Wilson by his best friend and neighbour Clarence Smith.

He says that he would have forgotten about the murder except for the fact that the murderer was his friend Cletus' father and just as Clarence was betrayed by Lloyd so too was Cletus betrayed by the narrator, and it is this event that has haunted him for over fifty years.

Clarence and Lloyd were tenant farmers with families, they were best friends and neighbours and were in tune with each other when working the land. The author describes this friendship with great feeling and empathy. Then Lloyd fell in love with Clarence's wife, Fern, who was unhappy in her marriage and they started an affair. When this betrayal is discovered it leads to the two families breaking apart. The writer describes the two family breakups with great feeling and insight and it's repercussions on all involved. Clarence and Fern went through a public divorce, the farm was sold right down to the poor loyal farm dog. The betrayal was so incomprehensible that when Lloyd's wife Marie who had left him and then later came back to collect some things said to him 'I understand that you don't care about us but how could you do this to Clarence'. Clarence, who was a volatile character with a temper sought revenge, he murdered Lloyd and then committed suicide. Betrayal is a key theme in this book. So what betrayal did the narrator perpetrate on his friend Cletus that could overshadow that of adultery which led to murder?

The narrator tells us of his childhood which was dogged by family tragedy culminating in the death of his mother from the Spanish Flu epidemic in 1918. He describes how the grief was dealt with at

a time when emotions were not talked about. His father would walk from room to room and the young sensitive ten year old narrator would walk with him with his arms around his waist in silence. His father eventually remarried and they moved into town to live with his step-mother's family while their new house is being built. The narrator is a bit of an outsider and he likes to visit the construction site of his future home and play in the skeletal building. One day another young boy around the same age joins him in his play, it is Cletus who has also recently moved into town with his separated mother. They play every day on the building site and part company saying "So long, see you tomorrow". Yet this friendship ends when the house is finally built and when Cletus and his mother leave town following the murder of Lloyd by his father Clarence. The narrator also leaves town for Chicago as his father gets a new job and they have to relocate. Our narrator attends the local high school which is enormous and much more cosmopolitan which suits him much better than the small town schools. One day in the corridor of the school the narrator and Cletus encounter each other, he says 'It was as if he had risen from the dead, he didn't speak, I didn't speak. We just kept walking until we had passed each other'. He regrets that he never said anything but now as an old man he acknowledges that his younger self didn't know what to do or say and as he never saw Cletus again he felt he betrayed him that day.

Maxwell is a great writer as he manages in such a short novel to recreate a time and place that is full of recognisable characters. It is a book about memory, regret and loss, and what the effects of our actions can have on others, especially children.

The book club readers enjoyed this book and some of us thought it a master class in writing as he conveyed so much with so few words. However, not everyone liked it and some found it a bit confusing and lacked tension as we knew about the murder from the start. A worthwhile and memorable read.

Alison Claffey

St Stephen's Green Unitarian Church, Dublin,



Dublin Unitarian Church

112 St. Stephens Green Dublin 2.

Service 11.00a.m.

Sunday Rota for May 2025

4 th May	<i>The case for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.</i>
Service	Tony Brady
Reader	Jennifer Flegg
Flowers	Emer O'Reilly
Welcomer	Janet Mulroy - Gráinne Carty
Coffee	Janet Mulroy, Emer O'Reilly, Maeve Edwards

11 th May	<i>Let the Divine Assail you.</i>
Service	Aidan O'Driscoll
Reader	Janet Mulroy
Flowers	Therese Fontana
Welcomer	Paula Mills - Doireann Ni Bhriain
Coffee	Therese Fontana, Peter Fontana, Malachy Hevehan

18 th May	<i>Social Action</i>
Service	Gavin Byrne
Reader	Alison Claffey
Flowers	Trish Webb Duffy
Welcomer	Trish Webb Duffy - Andrew Connolly-Crangle
Coffee	Janet Mulroy, Lorraine Doyle, Catharine Cook

25 th May	<i>The Theology of Joni Mitchell</i>
Service	Jennifer Buller
Reader	Josh Johnson
Flowers	Rita O'Driscoll
Welcomer	Aidan O'Driscoll - Alison Claffey
Coffee	Trish Webb Duffy, D. Ni Bhriain, Andrew C.-Crangle

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.

A photograph of a butterfly with orange, black, and white markings on its wings, perched on a dense cluster of bright yellow flowers. The background is a clear blue sky.

In aid of Christian Aid

**FLOWER AND PLANT
SALE**

Sunday 11 May 2025

Bedding plants, shrubs, etc.

Tell your friends !