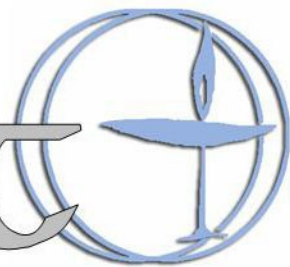


# Oscailt



September 2025

IRELANDS UNITARIAN MAGAZINE

Vol.21 Nº 9





# CULTURE NIGHT

Friday 19<sup>th</sup>  
September 2025

5.30pm | **The Dawson Chorus**

6.30pm | **The Classical Musicians Network**

7.30pm | **Olesia Borsuk, Organ Scholar**

8.30pm | **The Classical Musicians Network**

9.30pm | **MindTravels with Josh Johnston &  
Mark Hutchinson**

Dublin  
Unitarian  
Church





**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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**Front Cover:** (photo P.Spain) In the Wilson Memorial Window at 'Work' on the fold at each end of the ribbon is a bee. Bees were held up as the ideal workers and organisers particularly in the church. Because this is where the best light was given off by 'BeesWax' candles. Most monastery's and friary's cultivated honey bee hives not for the honey but for the more lucrative wax. Bees wax candles burned without giving off any smoke or fumes, they only exuded a smell of honey.

## Seeking Paradise, an invitation...

What does the future hold for this, our beloved Unitarian Community? How will we nourish it, grow it and hold it together and contribute to building the beloved community in the world? I believe our community has much to offer the contemporary spiritual seeker; it did for me.

In *Seeking Paradise*, Stephen Lingwood asks; Why? Why should we grow? Is it simply self-preservation? Is it because Unitarianism is a good thing? We are a nice group of people and we do some very good work. But what is it that is uniquely valuable? Stephen Lingwood is the author of *Saving Paradise - A Unitarian Mission for Our Times*. Stephen is a Unitarian theologian and a pioneer Unitarian minister in Cardiff. Much of his work takes place on the street. He is also chaplain in the university. His book is intended for congregations like us who wish to look to the future and understand what might be uniquely valuable about our presence in the city. He suggests our core purpose is to seek out *Paradise* within ourselves, our community and the world.

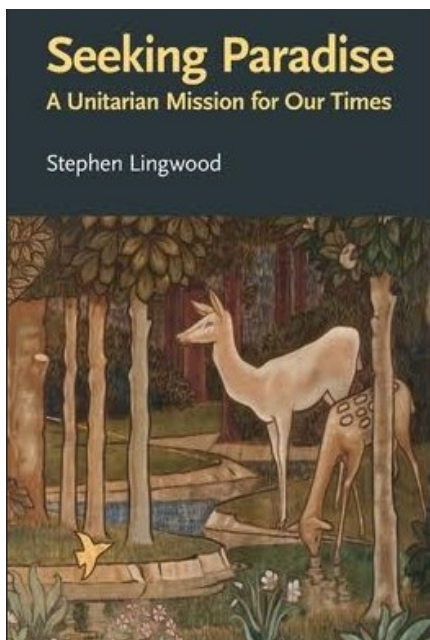
Stephen outlines that we have a clear theological tradition that we can reinvigorate - ours is a dissenting liberal Christianity - a belief in the inherent and natural goodness of all which rejects the notion of original sin; we speak about the religion of Jesus, rather than religion about Jesus; we seek salvation in this life rather than the next, and a belief in the unity of God, however understood. We also hold that revelation is not held alone in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, rather revelation is ongoing and made know to us as we participate in the sacred thread that connects us all to each other and all of creation. Also within our tradition is an unbelief, an a-theism and agnosticism that is, or should be, celebrated and respected. Stephen, commenting on this reality in modern Unitarianism suggests that we might remain open to the possibility of transcendence; this means that we keep our minds and hearts open to that which might be beyond our ordinary physical experience of our lives.

**I am inviting you to consider these questions by joining with me to read Stephen Lingwood's book together and answer the questions he poses at the end of each chapter.**

Out of this process, we may understand what we can do to make real our clear Unitarian tradition of speaking and acting against injustice as well as offering an open, liberal spiritual home for searchers from many traditions. We may also come to know how to work towards bringing more and more people into our beloved community and ensure that our church remains a vibrant and constant witness to liberal and dissenting religion in this city and country.

Stephen writes: “What is our Good News then, our message for the world? It’s this: We already live in Paradise; it’s here, but it’s being destroyed by forces of which we are part. We need to take responsibility for changing both our world and ourselves, in whatever ways we can, but above all by creating outposts of love in our communities, outposts of Paradise. The work is and will be hard, but know we can find rest from our labours, from our fears and worries, in the greater holding of the Divine, in God, however understood”.

**Our Seeking Paradise reading group will begin on Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> September and every Thursday until 4<sup>th</sup> December. We will meet from 7pm-8.30pm in the church. You will have the opportunity to buy the book for €10.**



*Gavin Byrne*  
*St.Stephen's Green Unitarian Church*

# ALBERT SCHWEITZER

4<sup>th</sup> of September 2025 will mark the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death. The 14<sup>th</sup> of January 2025, marked the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth, a polymath of extraordinary and wide-ranging talents, a Nobel Laureate, once seen as an influential world figure.

A search of biographies due to be published in 2025 failed to unearth any reference to Schweitzer. Yet for many, including the late President Jimmy Carter, who called him his hero, he is seen as a significant independent thinker, and humanitarian.

Schweitzer developed a philosophy called Reverence for Life that was a profound insight into the human condition. This philosophy proposed a practical solution to overcome the conflict and division in the world, yet has been largely ignored. Schweitzer believed that his philosophy of Reverence for Life was his most important achievement, in spite of his success in other areas.

Schweitzer, the son of a Lutheran minister, was born in Alsace, on the French, German border. It was predictable that, as a young man, having received a sound education, including organ tuition, he should opt to study theology and music.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century there was much debate among biblical scholars, relating to the life of Jesus. Schweitzer's critical study of these writings in his widely read: *'Quest of the Historical Jesus'* was published in 1906.

While working on 'The Quest', Schweitzer obtained a complete edition of the works of JS Bach. By this time he had gained some notoriety as an organist, and exponent of Bach's music. This led to a detailed study into the life and works of Bach. His book, when published, met with wide approval. Baroque music, in Schweitzer's view, reached its ultimate expression in the masterpieces of JS Bach.

As a humanitarian, Schweitzer was deeply troubled by accounts of the appalling treatment of African peoples by the European powers. Although a brilliant career lay ahead as: organist, musicologist, theologian and philosopher, he shocked his family and friends by declaring his intention to work in Africa as a missionary and serve people there in small reparation for the horrors visited upon them by their colonial masters.

Against all advice, he applied to study medicine, and after qualifying as a doctor in 1912, he married a young nurse: Helene Bresslaw, who shared his values and objectives. In 1913, the Schweitzer's set sail for Africa, their destination Lambarene, on the Ogooue river, where they set up a hospital. It was here they spent a large portion of their lives, treating the endless stream of patients who flocked to the hospital from an area where medical care had been non-existent.

Schweitzer became extremely critical of European civilization. He saw a decline from the high ideals of the Enlightenment and immersed himself in the study of the great philosophers. He was also influenced by Eastern religions. But

to him, no philosophy addressed a way of living that incorporated the spiritual, ethical and practical. He concluded that the will to advance civilization must be ethical for all to reap the benefits of material progress. The ethical approach was lost if it consisted of ‘feeling and experience’, without a foundation of thought. He believed that the progress of mankind was illusory. Inhumane solutions were being approved of, and practical solutions took precedence over moral and ideological solutions. The outbreak of The Great War served to confirm his views.

He recounts that on a journey up the Ogooue river to visit the sick wife of a missionary, he spent hours on the long slow excursion, struggling in his mind to discover an all-embracing ethic, something, if adopted, all could live by.

He recounts that in the evening as the boat edged its way by a herd of hippopotami bathing in the river, the phrase Reverence for Life came to him. As he said later: ‘the iron door had yielded’ - he could see a way ahead for civilization.

He asserted: ‘I am life that wills to live in the midst of life that wills to live, from the smallest insect and plant to all animals and human beings.

By putting all life first, it completely changes the perspective.

*‘The circumstances of the age do their best to deliver us up to the spirit of the age, and we treat other life as if it were not life, making all plants and animals subjects for our gratification.’* said Schweitzer.

He accepted that we live and have always lived at the cost of other lives, and are inheritors of our ancestors’ survival, but he believed that caring for all life makes us more aware of the value of human life.

Schweitzer was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1952 and received many accolades. He said: *‘we must extend our compassion to include all living things, until this is done mankind will never find peace.’*

Against the current background of hideous suffering, pain and misery we hear of each day, the circumstances that impelled Schweitzer to seek a philosophy that is essentially one of love, is equally relevant today, and worthy of our consideration.

*Colin Mackenzie*

September 2025

*St.Stephen’s Green Unitarian Church*

Retired teacher, Mount Temple School  
Former National Chairperson, Irish Kidney Association  
Long time study of the life and work of Albert Schweitzer

# Still a Dissenting Chapel?

(Anniversary Service address – 16<sup>th</sup> June 2024)

The first Service held in this building took place on Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> June 1863, which makes today, as the nearest Sunday to the 14<sup>th</sup> of June, the 161<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the opening of the Stephen's Green church. The 14<sup>th</sup> of June is also the anniversary of the commencement of the trial of Rev. Thomas Emlyn in 1702 and next month marks the 180<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passing of the Dissenters Chapels Act through parliament 15<sup>th</sup> July 1844. I considered a few titles for this anniversary address including 'What's in a Name'? and, 'Don't Mention the P Word', but I have opted for the title 'Still a Dissenting Chapel'?

In March 2020 I received a letter from solicitors acting on behalf of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. The PCI had recently submitted a legal application for permission to restructure their widows pension fund and the Attorney General for Northern Ireland asked their solicitors to write to us in connection with the restructuring. You might ask, 'what did it have to do with us'?

An 1838 Dublin City Directory informs its readers that '*there are Four Presbyterian congregations in Dublin, Ushers Quay, Mary's Abbey, Strand Street, and Eustace Street – The first two are Trinitarian and the latter two are both Unitarian*'. Similar trinitarian / unitarian branches of Presbyterianism existed in quite a few towns in southern Ireland.

While there were differences within and between all the Presbyterian congregations they had coexisted and cooperated with each other for almost 200 years. However, upheavals in Presbyterianism in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century led to the trinitarian and unitarian branches eventually going their separate ways. Part of the separation was the legal division of the assets of the Southern Association Widows Fund between the two parties. This division was finalised through the courts in 1849 and the separation appears to have been a fairly civilised affair. Some 170 years later, when the PCI sought permission to restructure their share of the Southern Association Fund, the Attorney General in Northern Ireland thought it would be prudent for the PCI to get confirmation that the Unitarians didn't wish to be heard in court in relation to the application. We didn't seek an input into the proceedings and we haven't since been made aware of any issues arising for the PCI

Other legal proceedings that this congregation has been involved in haven't gone so smoothly. We frequently refer here to a famous legal case involving Rev. Thomas Emlyn, a minister at Wood Street, who was jailed in 1702 when he was 'outed' as holding Unitarian views. The defining Unitarian or Anti Trinitarian view (and where name Unitarian comes from), is that there is but one god and that, whatever his other many qualities, Jesus wasn't divine and shouldn't be worshipped as a god. The holding or preaching of such views



was blasphemous and illegal and would remain so up to 1813 in Britain and 1817 in Ireland. The Emlyn case and its outcome would have great personal consequences for Emlyn, but the case was taken against him alone and the resulting hardships were suffered by him in isolation and at no real cost to his congregants or fellow ministers.

In the decades following the Emlyn case Unitarian views gradually took hold in some of the Dublin congregations. I have heard it argued that, as unitarianism remained illegal in Ireland until 1817, unitarians hid themselves inside Presbyterianism. However, that argument doesn't stack up.

Unitarians weren't in hiding. In *Donnybrook Fair An Irregular Ode* a lengthy rhyme published in 1790, every occupation and every religion is mentioned as being in attendance at the fair and contains a line mentioning *Antiquarians, stubborn Arians, Unitarians.....* So, they were well known in the city long before legality in 1817.

If they had been reluctantly hiding behind the Presbyterian label they would surely have dropped that label after 1817. But they didn't. For decades after 1817 the Unitarians and others continued to apply Presbyterian to the titles of their ministers, to their meeting houses, to official documentation, and even to engrave it on their collection plates.

The other notorious legal case, the one with which we are particularly concerned with this morning, had huge ramifications for the two Unitarian congregations in Dublin in that an adverse outcome would have resulted in the loss of all their properties and funds. It proceeded at a time when cases had been taken against sister congregations in Ulster and against Unitarian congregations in England. If you really wish to understand the history of this congregation you should look up the *Eustace Street Case (The Attorney General v Hutton)* and set aside plenty of time to read the submissions, the arguments, the judgement, plus the reports and commentary in connection with the legal proceedings.

### **Eustace Street Case**

From the first advertisement, right up to the Sunday before they moved here, the notices for Sunday services published in the Irish Times were always announced as services of the Protestant Dissenting Congregation of Eustace Street. Its meeting house was listed in street directories and shown on maps as a Presbyterian Meeting House. The congregation was also listed as a founding member of the Association of Non-Subscribers and Eustace Street Meeting House was the correspondence address for Irish Unitarian Christian Society. Confused? That's understandable but there were no contradictions! Simply, they were Protestants who dissented from Church of Ireland, they had a Presbyterian form of governance, they were Non-Subscribers as they refused to impose subscription to any creed, and they held a Unitarian theological outlook.

The Eustace Street congregation was wealthy. Many of its members were from the emerging commercial class and it had accumulated significant funds, opened schools and a widows alms house and made financial provision for the widows of its ministers. Much of its wealth was bequeathed by Joseph Damer and Arthur Langford and these funds were supplemented by several later bequests. Also, it had access to an older General fund for the support of Protestant Dissenters. The General Fund was administered by trustees from the group of Presbyterian congregations. (Unitarian and Trinitarian) and operated for over 130 years without disturbance. However, there was trouble on the horizon

### **Lady Hewley Case.**

In England Lady Hewley had left a substantial legacy for the protection and promotion of Protestant Dissent. By the end of the eighteenth century all the trustees and a majority of the Presbyterian recipients were Unitarian. Independents from Manchester objected to this controlling influence, and in 1830 they brought a lawsuit concerned with the enforcement of the terms of Lady Hewley's will. One of the issues in contention was the funding of the Manchester Academy. The initial legal ruling sustained the view that a Trinitarian commitment was necessary from those with benefits from the endowments. This judgement was twice appealed, but was upheld by the Lord Chancellor in 1836; and again by the House of Lords in 1842. As a result, the unitarian trustees of the fund were removed and, in their place, three Congregationalists, three orthodox Presbyterians, and one Baptist were appointed as trustees of the fund. A similar issue arose here in Dublin. Joseph Damer and others had bequeathed funds to Christians for promotion of Protestant Dissent. This fund had come to the attention of a 'George Mathews' who had recently joined Fermoy Presbyterian Church. He applied to be Trustee of General Fund and sought a grant for Fermoy. His applications were refused. George Mathews of Fermoy was actually Duncan Chisholm of Inverness, a former solicitor and trader and a fugitive from justice in Scotland where there was a reward of 50 guineas for evidence that would lead to his apprehension and prosecution. He made his way to Dublin leaving debts and an impoverished wife behind him. In Dublin he secured a position as a low ranking clerk in the castle where he worked his way up from a low ranking clerk to become a person of great influence. Through his access to documents held in the castle he became aware of the funds belonging to the Dublin Churches and opportunistically joined in Fermoy congregation to take advantage of the legal suits then in train against unitarians. Following the refusal of his

application for a grant for Fermoy he filed a lawsuit with the Irish Court of Chancery on 13<sup>th</sup> April 1840 for Breach of Trust (*Attorney General v Drummond*) and a lawsuit against the Trustees of Eustace Street Congregation (*Attorney General v Hutton*) was filed on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1842. A further lawsuit was in the offing against Strand Street.

First Case Heard by Lord Chancellor Sir Edward Sugden and it was submitted to him by the plaintiff that;

*'the said congregations of Strand Street and Eustace Street, lately abandoning their ancient faith, had adopted the opinions which are commonly called Unitarian, and that the Rev. Joseph Hutton and Rev. Dr. Ledlie, ministers of Eustace Street, and Dr. Drummond, minister of Strand Street, respectively taught and preached Unitarian doctrines, and that the lay elders and members of the said congregations belonged to the sect of unitarians, but that the ministers, elders and congregations of Mary's Abbey and Ushers Quay still maintained their faith, being Trinitarian Presbyterians'.*

(Note of interest – the Mary's Abbey congregation later built the church on Parnell Square commonly known as Findlater's church. Usher's Quay moved a few times and are now I understand located in Clontarf. Neither of these trinitarian congregations were party to the case against the unitarians.)

It was further submitted that,

*'according to the true construction of the trust deed, it was inconsistent with the trusts to apply any portion of it to the teachers of doctrines at variance with belief in the Trinity as held by the five Protestant Dissenting congregations at the time of the execution of the deed'.*

(The time of the execution of the deed was 1710. Of the five congregations referred to, three, Wood Street, Cook Street and New Row, were by 1840 non-subscribing and religiously liberal. By 1767 these three had evolved into Strand Street and Eustace Street and in 1867 these two had amalgamated into our present Stephen's Green congregation)

The plaintiffs leaned heavily into the Emlyn trial of 1702 – pointing out that when Emlyn was jailed, his Unitarian beliefs were refuted by other Dublin dissenters and by his fellow dissenting ministers.

As part of their defence the defendants submitted that;

*Evidence cannot be received to restrict or cut down the signification of the words 'Protestant Dissenter' in this deed. Now, Unitarians are, beyond all question, Protestant Dissenters and they are so to a peculiar degree, for the imposition of creeds is a mode of popery. The defendants are Christian, are Protestants, are Dissenters, and these are*

*the only characteristics which the word of the deed require. This court has no right to qualify these words by adding as a requisite, belief in the Trinity.*

In summary, the plaintiffs submitted that Unitarians were not Protestant Dissenters (and probably not Christian at all) and that the funds were donated by people who were trinitarian for the benefit of trinitarians.

The defendants argued that the donors were members of congregations that *'have always been non subscribing Protestant Dissenters whose distinguishing principles have ever been the rejection of human creeds, articles and confessions'* They added, *Unitarians most definitely are Christians, most definitely are Protestant Dissenters and indeed are the most Dissenting Protestants of all'*

The Lord Chancellor had a lot of evidence to consider and his judgement ran to 35 Pages. In it he said, *"Questions he had to ask himself were who are Christians, who are Protestant Dissenters"?*

*The court must put two different constructions on similar instruments, one being the foundation of a Unitarian, who when he speaks of Christianity means Unitarian Christianity; and when he speaks of Protestant Dissenters, means, what I am told are the best of all Protestant Dissenters Unitarians".*

The Lord Chancellor had a very difficult task. For example who today would be awarded the benefit of a fund left 130 years ago for promotion of socialism?? Can you imagine the weeks of arguments such a case would tie the courts up in? .....

The judge made references to Emlyn's own account of his trial and how he was 'left alone'. The events of 1702 had come back to haunt Unitarians. The Lord Chancellor found against the Unitarians, but in my opinion he acted fairly. He complimented the Unitarian representatives for their evidence and eloquence of their arguments. He commented on his own judgement *"it may be necessary and legal to do so but it is not very just"*. The outcome was devastating for the two Dublin congregations. Because of existing law, even funds subsequently donated by avowed Unitarians would be lost. It meant that all assets - meeting houses, congregational funds, schools, widows house and pension funds would go out of Unitarian ownership..

However, impending events in Parliament led Lord Sugden to defer his final decision until the next law term. As a direct consequence of the legal ruling in the Hewley case, a group pressed for legislation to halt the expected flood of litigation. A campaign commenced in support of this legislation supported by petitioning, lobbying and fundraising here in Dublin. Rev George Armstrong (later to be the first minister of the St. Stephen's Green

church) was despatched to London to represent the interests of the Dublin congregations to the legislators.

The campaign resulted in the Dissenters' Chapels Act being passed into law. Under the act it was established that after a period of 25 years the right of possession of a chapel could not be challenged on doctrinal grounds. Baron Cottenham added a clause to protect the two chapels in Dublin over which litigation was already active. Despite extensive opposition from religious groups, the bill passed through parliament on 15<sup>th</sup> July 1844.

In its report on the passing of the bill, The Bible Christian (a Unitarian Publication) said that

*'This Bill, which we may call our Bill of Rights, has at length obtained the royal assent. We mean to publish it at at length in our next number so that our readers may preserve a document so interesting to our denomination, and so important in the history of religious liberty.*

*We are glad to observe that, at the last meeting of Non Subscribing Presbyterians in Dublin, it was resolved, in connection with this subject, that Sunday August 25<sup>th</sup>, be observed as a day of special thanksgiving, and we trust that the occasion will be used to enforce the great principles of truth, freedom and charity. Let us hope that the discord and strife, which unjust aggressions on our religious property engendered, shall now cease, and that the efforts of our church shall be zealously directed to the promotion of pure and undefiled religion.'*

The cases taken against the two Dublin congregations caused occasional ripples in later years. Our records show that the case was still a concern when the Eustace Street congregation merged with St. Stephen's Green in 1867 and it was again a concern in 1910 when the various group of Irish non subscribers founded the NSPCI. At that time the Privy Counsellor, The Master of the Rolls and the future Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland were all members of the Managing Committee of this church. Although they were all northerners and non subscribers they advised Rev S Hicks that the constitution of the newly formed NSPCI could leave the southern churches open to further claims against their property and funds. The Synod of Munster only joined the NSPCI in 1935 after a freedom of conscience clause was inserted into the constitution of the denomination.

What relevance does any of this have today, 180 years on? Our refusal to have creeds imposed upon us (or to impose them on others) provides us with an intellectual freedom that has allowed us to seek knowledge and inspiration from sources beyond our christian roots.

However, it appears to me as though, in order to absorb some new knowledge we somehow feel that we have to forget (or deny) something old. So much so that there are some rather strange notions as to what Unitarianism is.

Enquiries about weddings occasionally cause my eyebrows to arch, especially when the couples say that they are from different religious backgrounds and that they wish to marry here because it is a 'multi-faith' church. If that's the case you'd have to say any catholic party to a wedding ceremony must feel that they are getting a pretty raw deal when they enter the building. There's a distinct absence of any features one would expect to find in a Roman Catholic church. There's no holy water font, no confession boxes, no stations of the cross, no altar, no tabernacle. They will however, in stark contrast to a catholic church, encounter a female celebrant and, if it is said, they will hear the protestant version of the Lord's Prayer. (And the whole ceremony will be conducted under the window prominently displaying Martin Luther as the representative of truth). Also, until the recent changes to marriage laws, couples signed a marriage register in which it is recorded that they were married in accordance with the rites and customs of the presbyterian church. However, if they had checked the Catholic encyclopaedia they would have found that Unitarians are described as *'A Liberal Protestant sect which holds as it distinctive tenet the belief in a uni-personal instead of a tri-personal God.'*

Our freedom loving, creedless congregation only enjoys this beautiful building because our Unitarian ancestors were prepared to vigorously defend our freedoms in the Court of Chancery in Dublin and in the corridors of power in London. What if someone antagonistic to unitarianism took a similar case against us in 2024?

This congregation still manages and benefits from funds that were bequeathed to Protestant Dissenters. What if our right to the ownership of these funds was challenged. Would we accept the charges that we are not christian and that we not protestant dissenters and meekly relinquish the church and its funds? Or, like the people who built this church, would we strenuously assert that *'Unitarians most definitely are Christians, most definitely are Protestant Dissenters, and indeed, are the most Dissenting Protestants of all'*.

*Rory Delany*

*St.Stephen's Green Unitarian Church*

# The Baltic Way

Some years ago, I came across a poem written by the father of a young child. In it he talked about walking the boy to school. Day after day, father and son followed the same path, chatting, sharing, holding hands, until one day as they approached the school gate, the child loosened his hand so his friends wouldn't think him babyish for holding hands with his father. The description of the loosening of the fingers, the withdrawing of the hand struck an emotional chord in me and brought sudden and unexpected tears to my eyes.

Holding hands is such an intimate human gesture. It's one of the first a mother makes when her newborn child is placed in her arms. She hooks her index finger into the baby's tiny hand, and on cue, the fingers curl around it. We hold hands throughout our childhood, in play and for comfort. Then, as teenagers, holding hands can be a first step into grown up love.

When a friend shares a sadness, your hand instantly reaches for theirs in a gesture of sympathy, and they in turn grasp yours in thanks. We greet friends, old and new, with a clasping of hands. We take the hand of our loved ones in their final hours, and cling to it as their life slips away.

The singing of a favourite song, particularly by a choir of many voices, can also trigger those same sudden and unexpected tears. Sibelius's Finlandia always does it for me. When I hear the opening words:

"This is my song, O God of all the nations,

A song of peace for lands afar and mine"

my emotional well is breached and I'm off again.

And so it was that I found myself in Riga, Latvia, this summer with my choir, Bray Choral Society.

We sang our hearts out on that trip. We sang in the Golden Hall, with the Irish Ambassador in attendance. We sang in St. Saviour's Anglican church at their service on Sunday morning, and we had many sing songs in the local Irish pub, Paddy Whelan's, under a balmy Rigan sky.

But it was on our visit to the Occupation Museum in Riga that we were reminded of a happening when both these actions, singing and holding hands, dovetailed in an historical event that overwhelmed even the most stoical of us.

On 23rd August 1989, over one and a half million people from the Baltic States of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania formed a human chain that stretched from the capital cities of Tallinn to Riga to Vilnius, a distance of over 600 km. Holding hands across their three nations, this human chain raised their voices in song to protest at the continuation of Russian

rule and demanding independence from Soviet occupation.

The Occupation Museum has a section dedicated to the event and shows continuous footage of this singing human chain.

It is profoundly moving to see these men, women and children, some dressed in their national costumes, all of them holding hands, and all of them singing. The skies were filled with their national songs that day, songs of peace and songs of joy, songs of love and songs of independence. This peaceful protest came to be known as the Baltic Way. It paved the way for independence from Soviet rule. The Berlin Wall fell two and a half months later in November 1989.

The following morning, with these images still playing in my head, I awoke early and went alone to the centre of Riga.

Outside St. Peter's church, sat a lone busker, with a keyboard balanced on a stand in front of him. He tried to engage me in conversation, but there being no common language between us, he smiled, put his hands on the keys and began to play. The opening bars of Sibelius's Finlandia came so sweetly that those same sudden and unexpected tears sprang instantly to my eyes.

I stood in that quiet square in the centre of Riga, while Sibelius's song of freedom echoed around the cobble stoned streets. When he'd finished, I gave him all the coins I had in my pocket. He reached out his hand to mine and we clasped hands, just for an instant, in that early morning Rigan light.

And as for the poet who wrote about his son's hand loosening in his, I was never able to find that poem again. It's just the memory and my emotional response that lingers.

*Maeve Edwards*

*St. Stephen's Green Unitarian Church*

(First broadcast on RTE's Sunday Miscellany on 10th August 2025.)



# Unitarian Music Society

On the weekend of 9th August 2025, I made my way by ferry and train to the small village of Great Hucklow for the 2025 meetings of the Unitarian Music Society.

For almost 100 years, members of the UMS (as it is abbreviated) have congregated for a weekend to play lots of music, as well as eating and drinking and, well, meeting with friends old and new. In recent years, the Nightingale Centre in Great Hucklow in Derbyshire has become the preferred venue due to our familiarity with the venue and the local chapel, and the excellent service provided by the venue.

Pre-pandemic, the events of the weekend were masterminded by our president, musician and composer David Dawson. Since David passed away from CoVID in 2020, the dynamic of the event has changed with more people being called upon to lead sessions, conduct the choir and the orchestra, and compose or arrange music for us to perform. This year, I took on the task of conducting a choral arrangement (by Darmon Meader) of “Shenandoah” to fit in with our chosen theme “Folk Music From Around The World”.

Due to a perfect storm of illness, delayed recoveries, clashing commitments and other distractions, we had a smaller attendance this year but all participants were eager and enthusiastic. One of the challenges and benefits of having more people leading sessions is that the choir got to experience many different teaching and conducting styles along with the varied repertoire different leaders would bring to the party. The orchestra also had enjoyable rehearsals under the baton of recent new member, clarinetist Ben Appleqvist. Ben and Marcie McGaughey (who ended up not being able to attend) wrote or arranged a variety of pieces for the orchestra to perform. Ben also created a sympathetic arrangement for “Shenandoah” to allow the choir be accompanied by the orchestra for the final number of the Sunday concert. Indeed, as is tradition, all the choral and orchestral music was performed for our friends and neighbours from the town at that concert. It is amazing to arrive at Hucklow with very little idea of what we’ll be doing, often unfamiliar with the music we are handed, and perform it on the Sunday evening. And the level of enthusiasm and “can-do”, even when the task is challenging, is very exciting to see in this group of people. Great work.

As well as our choral / orchestral rehearsals, we also enjoyed breakout sessions in madrigal singing, recorder ensemble, a music table quiz, a listening session to folk music from the UK and USA on records, a singsong of folk songs from Britain and Ireland, and an illustrated piano recital introducing us to the compositions of Francis Edward Bache, a British composer and son of a Unitarian minister. There was a second less formal concert where

people were encouraged to perform party pieces and other breakout groups performed what they had practised in their sessions. There were also three services of worship of which the Sunday morning service in the chapel, led wonderfully by Ed Fordham, is particularly worthy of note. When one also factored in meals, free time, and an AGM of the society, it is easy to tell it was a very busy weekend.

But also a time of great fun and community and one I look forward to every year. Although the proceedings have to be kept to a schedule, the whole programme was very relaxed and punctuated by laughter and stories, history and looking to the future as well. Plans are already afoot for what we might spend time at the 2026 meetings and initial soundings hint at an exciting weekend next year. There is definitely room for new members to both join the society and / or to attend. If you are a church musician, interested in church music, or even just music, or just fancy a music-tinged break in the countryside, this weekend comes highly recommended.

*Josh Johnston*

*St.Stephen's Green Unitarian Church*



# Harvest Thanksgiving Lunch

Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> October 2025

On Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> October 2025 we will have our second Harvest Thanksgiving Lunch. It is an opportunity to sing Hymns of thanksgiving for bounty of the earth at harvest-time. Afterwards we will sit together to share food and enjoy company and conversation.

Diners are expected to make a donation which will be sent to Christian Aid. This is to support Christian Aid in their efforts to support farmers in poorer developing countries.

Volunteers are needed to provide food, prepare the room, serve and clean up afterwards.

Names please to Bridget.

**Bridget Spain**

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



## ***City Walks 2025***

*Our two City Walks will take place a little later than usual this year, both walks will commence directly after Sunday Service.*

*The themes of the walks are*

### ***Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> September***

*Non-Conformist Roots – Tracing the early history of our congregation in the area between St Patrick's and Christ Church Cathedrals*

### ***Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> September***

*A Trip on the Tram - A short Luas journey to Ranelagh Luas Station followed by a walk through Ranelagh Village and across to Upper Rathmines Road.*

***All Welcome***

***Rory Delany***



## ***Invitation***

*Members of Dublin congregation are cordially invited to attend the service of installation,  
of Rev. Brian Ammons*

at First Church Rosemary Street. Belfast  
on Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> September 2025 at 4.00p.m

## Dublin Unitarian Book Club's choice for July 2025.

### James

by

*Percival Everett*

The James of this novel has a double identity. He is Jim, an escaped black slave on the run because his owner is going to sell him on to a new owner in New Orleans which will separate him from his wife and daughter. He is also James, a black man who has been enslaved with his wife Sadie, and daughter Lizzie. James and the other slaves on Miss Watson's estate speak standard English to each other when alone. They can read and write and they teach their children at night in their shacks. But this is no ordinary education of the three R's, it also incorporates lessons on how to be a slave. How to speak the dialect of a slave and how to behave as a slave. This role play is necessary so as to avoid suspicion of the white masters, to keep them in the dark as to their true identity. It is a matter of survival. The basics are not to make eye contact, never speak first, never address another slave in their company, play to the white's superior attitude because as the children mantra says "the better they feel, the safer we are". Translated as "Da mo' betta dey feels, da mo' safer we be". I'm not sure if I bought into this part of the story as it seemed a bit contrived to make the point that the slaves were human beings who knew their self worth but were caught in the horrors of slavery. Education gave them some autonomy and control and lessened the feeling of victimhood. Their lives were so precarious and full of risk that even having a pencil or paper could mean punishment, torture and even death. I wonder if this form of resistance would have been worth the risk if at all feasible under the circumstances?

James escapes to nearby Jackson Island on the Mississippi River where he comes across Huckleberry Finn who has faked his own death and run away from his violent father. James puts two and two together and knows that he will be blamed for Huck's death so now he will also be hunted as a murderer. The stakes are high for him if caught, certain torture and death. The two runaways set out on the Mississippi on a makeshift raft and a stolen boat. At times they can hear the hounds in the distance and the sense of being chased and the fear of being caught is palpable. This is not Mark Twain's more light hearted satirical story of the adventures of Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer.

Violence and fear are always to the fore in this story as the two runaways meet many nefarious characters on their treacherous river journey. They become reluctantly embroiled with two vagrant charlatans, the Duke and the King who hatch up a plan to sell James to any willing buyer and then to free/kidnap him in order to repeat the scam in another town. Their plan goes askew and James bizarrely ends up being sold on to a black and white minstrel show where he has to pretend to be a white man who pretends to be a black man by blacking up. The hypocrisy and irony is not lost on the reader but the underlying reality is always there that if this charade is discovered then it is James who will suffer and not the troupe's leader. James makes another escape from this indentured slavery as he realises that he will never be free to earn enough money to buy his wife and daughter. Their freedom can only be achieved through escape, he must return to Miss Watson's and liberate them. The American Civil War has just begun and with it perhaps the hope of freedom if they can get to the North.

The last chapters of the book pick up the pace even more reflecting James' urgency to find his family who have been sold on to a ruthless owner of a 'breeding' farm, not of animals but of human beings ie slaves. James has witnessed tremendous cruelties and atrocities on his journey. He has been the victim of violent assaults and betrayals which has deepened his anger but also his resolve to take his fate into his own hands. Not surprisingly violence meets violence in his form of retribution as he metes out his version of justice on some despicable people he had encountered. He is no longer Jim the slave and at the end of the last chapter when asked by a white man to state his name he replies "Just James".

The book club readers found this book to be a page turner as you were swept along the Mississippi with James and Huckleberry and you lived through their many escapes and life threatening situations. The author laid bare how it felt to be a slave before the American Civil War in the deep south with all it's cruelties and fears. It was not easy reading but central to this re-telling of the Huckleberry Finn story from Jim's perspective. A book worth reading but not for the faint hearted.

*Alison Claffey*

*St.Stephen's Green Unitarian Church*



# Dublin Unitarian Church

112 St. Stephens Green Dublin 2.

**Service 11.00a.m.**

## **Sunday Rota for September 2025**

7<sup>th</sup> September      *Favourite Readings*  
Service      Will O'Connell  
Reader      Various  
Flowers      Therese Fontana  
Welcomer      Lorraine Doyle - Margaret Leeson  
Coffee      John Leeson, Daniela Cooney, Alison Claffey

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14<sup>th</sup> September      *With My Body, I Thee Worship*  
Service      Madeline Stringer  
Reader      Mary O'Brien  
Flowers      Mary O'Brien  
Welcomer      Paula Mills - Gráinne Carty  
Coffee      Lorraine Doyle, Paul Murray, Robin Ward

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21<sup>st</sup> September      *Silence, Stillness and Simplicity*  
Service      Gavin Byrne  
Reader      Doireann Ní Bhriain  
Flowers      Paula Mills  
Welcomer      Frank Tracey -  
Coffee      Gráinne Carty, Andy Pollak, Charlie Kinch

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28<sup>th</sup> September      *Why this House Is Important*  
Service      Peter White  
Reader      Alison Claffey  
Flowers      Jane Nolan  
Welcomer      Emer O'Reilly - Gráinne Carty  
Coffee      Malachy Hevehan, Máire Bacon, Emer O'Reilly

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Services are broadcast live from the church each Sunday at 11a.m.  
On our WebCam, click and connect at [www.dublinunitarianchurch.org](http://www.dublinunitarianchurch.org)

Recordings of previous services are also available on the website.





The walking group on Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> August went on the Skerries loop walk.  
All picture taken by Therese Fontana

