

# Oscailt



March 2026

IRELANDS UNITARIAN MAGAZINE

Vol.22 Nº 3



## **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](mailto:revbspain@gmail.com)

### **Childrens Programme - Sunday Club**

Takes place on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of each month

For any queries about Sunday Club, or to volunteer as a leader, please email Denise at [sundayclubunitarianchurch@gmail.com](mailto:sundayclubunitarianchurch@gmail.com)

### **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

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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.

**Oscailt** is Published by the  
**St. Stephen's Green Unitarian Church**  
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**To Subscribe**

Annual subscription 12 monthly issues.  
€35 Posted for Ireland  
£35 Posted for England & Scotland  
Cheques and PO should be made payable to: *Dublin Unitarian Church*.

**Deadline**

The deadline for articles to be included is the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the month. Unsolicited articles, news items, letters, poems, etc are always welcome, however there can be no guarantee of publication. Copy should be sent by e-mail or at least typed, photographs should be 300dpi.

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**Front Cover:** The new RCSI building contrasts with the church. December 2025 (photo P. Spain)

**CONTENTS**

**118 St. Stephen's Green**  
*Frank McDonald* 2

**Many Gods - Many Creeds**  
*Gavin Byrne* 6

**Remembering Eva Schloss**  
*John Haskins* 12

**Book Review** 15



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.

After several years of having a building site next door, we in the church were delighted to see the recent completion of the RCSI's striking new building next to our church. There are mixed views about its suitability for the site, as there always are when contemporary buildings are inserted in an older urban landscape, but most people like it! This article by Frank MacDonald, first appeared in *The Irish Times* on 8<sup>th</sup> December 2025, and reprinted here with his permission, gives an interesting insight into the thinking behind the design and the uses to which the building will be put.

## 118 St.Stephen's Green

The Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland has maintained an imposing presence on St.Stephen's Green for two hundred years, with a palatial neoclassical facade befitting such an august institution. By comparison, its new building further along the west side of the Green is so startlingly cubist in style that it conveys an instant sense of shock and awe.

Interposed between W.H.Lynn's modest Gothic-style Unitarian Church (1863) and a fine pair of mid-18<sup>th</sup> century houses designed by Richard Cassels, one of which was occupied by Shanahan's restaurant, the new RCSI building replaces Block A of the Ardilaun Centre, an early 1980s office complex that used to be Telecom Éireann's headquarters.

The college, which now styles itself as RCSI University of Medicine and Health Sciences, needed more space as student numbers expanded. It had already developed a superb new building at 26 York Street that deservedly won several awards for Peter McGovern and his team at Henry J Lyons, Dublin's biggest and busiest firm of architects.

The brief for that project was extremely complex and involved shoe-horning a diverse range of facilities — including a library on three floors and a tiered lecture theatre and sports hall below ground level — into a tight site on a relatively unimportant side street. Much more challenging was the conundrum of doing something similar on the Green itself.

This was seen by the RCSI's chief executive, Prof Cathal Kelly, and its architects as an opportunity to create a new “front door” onto St.Stephen's Green and also project a contemporary image of the college as a progressive institution that aims to be one of the world's top medical universities, educating eager students from every continent.

“Making a building on St.Stephen's Green is a rare privilege”, McGovern says. So one of his early moves in designing the new block was to “fold back” the upper levels of its multi-layered, multi-planed elevation to

reveal more of the Unitarian Church's slender spire, at least in close-up views; from the Fusiliers' Arch, only the tip is visible.

Exploiting the jagged building line on the Green's west side, the RCSI's latest addition was intended to have "a presence that isn't demure and recessive", in the words of its architect, but rather to be "both striking and respectful to its context, expressing itself boldly on the streetscape while at the same time folding to reveal and recognise its neighbours".

This deference is not obvious in its relationship with the adjoining Georgian houses, as the facade rises above their parapet height, although it does avoid crashing into Cassels' chunky cornice. Indeed, An Taisce complained that it "breaches 60 years of planning policy in maintaining a uniform parapet height around St. Stephen's Green".

But Dublin City Council senior planner Garrett Hughes believed the "distinctive contemporary design [would] make a positive contribution to the subject site and Dublin's urban fabric". An Bord Pleanála agreed, saying it "would not detract from the visual amenities of the area or the character and setting of the adjoining protected structures".

The board's February 2020 order, signed by then deputy chairperson Paul Hyde, upheld DCC's decision to omit an eighth storey at the rear. A subsequent application to reinstate it was rejected by both DCC and ABP, with the latter ruling that it would have a "significant and detrimental impact on a number of important views and vistas".

The extensive use of fritted glazing gives the building an "ephemeral quality", McGovern says as we view it from within St. Stephen's Green, noting its "lightness through the trees". He points out that the building's appearance "changes throughout the day as sunlight falls on the vertical fins [on its facade], and this creates texture and shadow".

There's also a tall rectangular clear-glass window, framed concavely in Portland stone and facing southeast; it provides excellent daylight for two floors, including the RCSI's new boardroom. Above and beyond, set back from the parapet, are the upper levels of this 12,000 sq. metre building, also visible through a narrow gap beside the Unitarian Church.

The double-height angular facade above the ground floor projects over part of the footpath to create a modernist portico, as if to invite people in. And indeed, the airy foyer has been branded "Humanarium" — an aquarium for humans, perhaps — where there's a cafe open to the public and a set of screens for regular health-themed exhibitions.

Behind the foyer is an expansive room that's designed to be used for public functions such as evening lectures as well as for teaching. Everything else in the building is accessible only by swipe cards, including a double-height "learning studio" and breakout space in front, with lounge-style seats looking out towards the Green's tree canopy.

Peter McGovern has got to know that RCSI students spend more time on campus than those in other universities. “It’s a kind of a home from home, so they can almost hang out here in a way”, he says. There’s even a Spás Meabhrach/Mindfulness Zone, with soft furnishings and circular curtains that can be drawn for more privacy to meditate.

It’s probably needed because of “the intensity of medical studies and the pressure on young students”, and he sees it as part of the RCSI’s “strong pastoral element” in looking after them — particularly those who are a long way from home. Over half of the college’s 4,500 students have come to Dublin from more than 60 countries.

“The collaborative nature of learning in medical courses is really important”, he says. So there are lots of spaces to encourage peer-to-peer interaction. A small south-facing amphitheatre opens into the college’s first outdoor space, a landscaped garden bordered by Block B of the Ardlauin Centre, with an art installation by sculptor Rachel Joynt.

The Dispensary, a cafe dedicated to serving the students, is ready to go when they move in after Christmas (2025). And naturally for a €90 million development called “Project Connect”, there’s a direct link to the three-floor library in 26 York Street — so seamless, indeed, that it’s hard to tell when you’ve actually moved from one building to the other.

The lower floors are connected by two white-painted spiral steel staircases, one of which is visible from York Street as you look down Proud’s Lane. A set of gates, currently padlocked, are to be opened up to provide another route into the new block. There’s a pair of mews on the dog-legged lane, dwarfed by what’s been built around them.

Apart from a bronze perforated mesh screen on the south-facing rear elevation of 26 York Street, the materials used in the latest building are quite similar — white brick and metal work, white-dot fritted glass for reflectivity — with the introduction of Portland stone, which McGovern prefers for its fossilisation, rather than using Portuguese limestone.

There’s a clear view of the large pointed arch window, with decorative stone tracery, on the side of the Unitarian Church from several levels of one of the main circulation areas inside the new block. This is largely due to an old legal covenant requiring that its right to light had to be respected, and serves as a reminder of the sensitive setting.

Nearly half of the RCSI building is given over to post-graduate research and laboratory work, with the college’s Graduate School of Medicine moving in from Sandyford. The top-floor laboratory has glass-screened “fume cupboards” for conducting experiments with potentially toxic chemicals, and there are extra-large ducts to take the fumes away.

On every floor, lift shafts are faced in board-marked concrete, adding texture to the generous circulation areas where everything is clearly signposted. Functions can also be catered for in a big room on the fifth floor of the St.Stephen's Green frontage with a "finishing kitchen"; it opens onto a terrace with commanding views of the city centre.

Peter McGovern is happy about what he has achieved with Project Connect, which was part-funded by a €40 million loan from the European Investment Bank. He rejects criticism that the new block fails to show sufficient respect for its historic context and looks forward to replacing what's left of the Ardilaun Centre "whenever that happens".

As for the historic parapet line of buildings around St.Stephen's Green, it was first breached back in the 1860s when the Shelbourne Hotel was dramatically rebuilt and embellished by John McCurdy. Dublin's quintessential grand hotel has long been a landmark in the city, but the RCSI's new "front door" on the Green is now in contention for that title.

### *Frank McDonald*

former environment editor of The Irish Times.

He is an Honorary Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland.



# Many Gods - Many Creeds

## Exploring Unitarianism Part One.

**The title for my address is: Many Gods, Many Creeds, What Is True? And it's part one of a two parter. In November at the membership service, I'll deliver part two, entitled What Do These Unitarians Believe.**

When we ask, "*What is true?*" we mean something absolute, final, and complete. In our affirmation, we name "the quest of truth" as our sacrament — but is there such a thing as *Truth* with a capital T? Plato suggested that what we call truth is only a shadow of an idea that exists on a perfect realm - we can't ever know it. So instead of chasing some final, absolute truth, I ask: is there any reality that sustains meaning and goodness for you?

I've confessed before that I have a deep desire to know God. This is a personal and ongoing process, guided by my mind — by questioning and searching — which in turn gives my heart and soul direction, and insight and one day, perhaps wisdom.

There are indeed many gods and many creeds. The one I grew up with is the God of traditional Christianity, described by Rev. Savell Hicks. But do you agree with this statement: "*The ultimate authority in matters of religion is your own mind, given your capacity to question, think, and reason.*"

Freed minds are restless and fearless. We ask people to be reasonable. We say to our friends, "Think about it." Savell Hicks suggests to us that many churches limit divine inspiration to one age, one book, one creed. A Unitarian community holds an imperfect, yet powerful conviction...there is no one book or institution which is superior to your conscience and intellect, your capacity to think for yourself.

The great questions of life cannot be confined to one set of answers. The Christian doctrine of salvation through Christ — that humanity's disobedience required God to become human, die, and rise again — is one such answer. Unitarians find this deeply prob-

lematic. Hicks suggests that its a direct contradiction to, for example, the sermon on the mount. I can just see him, standing here pointing to these stone tablets. These words, he says flow pure and free, devoid of the mud, grit and pollution that a rigid doctrine brings to Christianity. Besides, what of those who have never and will never hear this message of salvation. And what of those who have heard it do not accept it? It's not reasonable he says.

Incidentally, the Gospels of Matthew and Luke writes that the man who said these words was constantly challenging orthodoxy and he lost his life because of it.

In his pamphlet elsewhere, Savill Hicks quotes Ella Wheeler Wilcox's short poem which inspired the title for this address:

*"So many gods,  
so many creeds,*

*So many paths  
that wind and weave,*

*And all the truth this world needs  
Is just the art of being kind."*

Set beside the Golden Rule — *"Do unto others"* — it may be all the doctrine we need.

Peter White, in his address recently said that for him, kindness was something this church attempts to focus on, and that acts of kindness, no matter how small, have ripple effects we cannot foresee. Members of our community often say this is a *safe* place — safe to explore, to question and to grow spiritually. And like all sincere adherents of a spiritual community, we seek to live an authentic and responsible life.

A few weeks ago, at Culture Night here in the church, a visitor to asked me "what do you have to believe in order to be a minister in this church?" I was 'on the spot' - it was a busy night in the church, with lots to do. I answered without giving it too much thought: 'a belief in the inherent goodness of humanity'.

The visitor seemed unimpressed. I needed to introduce the next performance, we didn't speak again. Now, I am always willing to engage people for as long as it takes, but this night, I just couldn't. Perhaps I should've said, "drop in on Sunday because you'll have to ask everyone gathered for an answer to that question".

This belief in human goodness has deep roots in Unitarianism. Our movement rejected the doctrine of original sin and affirmed the oneness of God. We are not the product of one founder or one revelation, but of many minds in many lands, evolving over centuries. We have no central authority; our unity lies in shared freedom. And that freedom includes not believing in God.

The word *tolerance* appears on a plaque on the front of this building. And it has been the subject of discussion. Some find that word unsatisfying, as if it means "putting up with" something. But perhaps it means something deeper — living with disagreement or better still, **accepting** disagreement and what we perceive as 'opposing beliefs'. Perhaps acknowledging that other people are just as complicated as me, as us.

There are, indeed, many gods and creeds — even within Christianity itself. Savell Hicks imagined three Christians from different denominations reading the Bible together: the Anglican highlights in green, the Methodist in blue, the Unitarian in yellow. Their task is to teach each other the veracity of their particular expression of faith. Each comes to different conclusions and claims a different truth. When we do that, we have limited all that can be said about life to one book. And even with that one book, we can't agree.

Different religions, philosophies, beliefs are chapters in a single story - the story of humanity. Ideally, we would move from from debating difference to seeking shared meaning. I think, we aspire to do that here; imperfect and challenging as that is. Diversity is as natural as gravity.

And so our congregation strives to celebrate diversity. I was challenged by two visitors not long ago who were perplexed by our lack of a creed...how can you have unity? I have to say, ever since I have become a ministry student, I have my fair share of challengers, (and not just from members of the congregation!)

Some people need an anchor of fixed rules, creeds and doctrines; others can't live that way. Dissenters and nonconformists throughout history fought for this freedom — the right to follow conscience - “we pay religion the compliment of thinking about it”.

We have a tradition of an open pulpit here. That means it is not just the minister who leads services here. Visitors sometimes ask me: ‘with your open pulpit, I assume you vet what the person is going to say’ .No, we don't. They will share their ideas and thoughts which we don't have to agree with. They talk on a topic important and meaningful to them. And sometimes our conscience and assumptions are challenged. But always, it's talked about afterwards when we gather after the service.

Two centuries before Savell Hicks, Charles Wesley, co-founder of Methodism, wrote a hymn (1758) entitled, “Son of Unclouded Righteousness”. This is verse three: "Assert thy glorious Deity, Stretch out thine arm, thou triune God, The Unitarian fiend expel, And chase his doctrine back to hell.” The doctrine he despised was our rejection of original sin, our belief in humanity's inherent goodness and the oneness of God. That hostility reminds us that “cancel culture” is not new. But it also highlights the radical nature of our faith: to affirm that goodness is native to humanity.

So, with many gods and many creeds, I settle here. I begin with human goodness, expressed through kindness. I believe there is a living presence of goodness in people. When kindness is absent — in words, ideologies, or politics — my tolerance comes under severe pressure.

Scott Alexander, a Unitarian minister in Maryland, writes that we offer no absolute truths, but a space to search for them. “No one will try to remake you religiously,” he says. “You are free to discover the best that is in you. We affirm that your spiritual well-being is yours to determine.” Does that describe this place for you?

Religion, for us, is not a hobby or regular ritual we attend. It's the space where we explore our ultimate concerns — where we wrestle with meaning and ethics. This is certainly not a “low-participation, low-expectation, low-commitment religion.” The Unitarian path is demanding — disquieting and lifelong. It takes

courage to step into it. For me it is the courage to keep our eyes and our minds open.

With all this rationalism, where is wonder and mystery because there is so much we can't just explain? Perhaps it lies *in* our freedom. When we free ourselves from rigid belief, we open ourselves to mystery. We commit to the search for truth — to ongoing revelation — without claiming to possess the final word. We do not confine the sacred. I think a mind free from certainties is open to revelation, to mystery and wonder.

James Luther Adams was a Unitarian theologian. He said he could not belong to a religion that relieves him of the responsibility to think. “An unexamined faith,” he said, “is not worth having. A faith worth having is worth testing.” Our world, he noted, is “full to bursting with faiths contending for allegiance.” He spoke not only of religions, but of political ideologies. I think our world is still bursting with faiths, and not just religious faiths, battling for our allegiance, all vying for our attention from these small but powerful devices in our hands. There's a 21st century battle of gods and creeds being played out.

Pope Pius IX, 8<sup>th</sup> December, 1861, condemned the following proposition as heresy: “Everyone is free to adopt and profess that religion which, guided by the light of reason, they hold to be true.” But for us, that freedom is sacred. The reformers who first put scripture into the hands of ordinary people also gave us the right — and the burden — to think for ourselves.

And when we read, we find both cruelty and compassion, vengeance and forgiveness. We choose which parts speak truth to us — just as the three Christians with their coloured highlighters did. Many of us came here after examining the faith we inherited and finding it lacking in kindness, or logic, or soul.

Savell Hicks celebrated this diversity: “We all differ from each other mentally, physically, and spiritually — and it's inevitable we shall differ religiously.” The world would be dull if we didn't. Diversity, he said, is as much a law of nature as gravity itself. And that diversity is alive and well here.

The Protestant Reformation sought to raise scripture as the sole source of truth. The Catholic Church balanced scripture with tradition. And today, new movements like Christian nationalism

twist scripture to justify racism, misogyny, and hatred of the queer community.

Against that, we offer another vision — one rooted in conscience, kindness, and the freedom to think. We believe that goodness and love are not bound to any single creed or book, but are alive in human hearts. Unitarianism values *freedom, reason, and conscience*. So we read sacred texts — lots of them — not to develop and follow a creed, not to obey a set of rules, but to understand, question, and reason.

There are, and always will be, many gods and many creeds. But if kindness, freedom, and reason guide us — if we can see the divine spark in one another — then perhaps we are closer to truth than we think. You are the narrator of your faith.

*Gavin Byrne*

St.Stephen's Green Unitarian Church

October 2025

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# Remembering Eva Schloss

## Lest we forget

Sadly, the phrase “Lest We Forget” has become a cliché in a world of alternative facts where truth itself is now open for negotiation and the impetus to forget about the reality of the last atrocity has become a global preoccupation. Helped by the filters of our modern digital world of misinformation and disinformation, we are being urged to forget so many fundamental aspects of why we have managed to survive as a species: To forget the minimum standards of morality needed to respect the self-determination of nation states: To forget the deeply ingrained reality that intolerance inevitably leads to polarized societies: To forget the spirituality of interconnectedness which is the bedrock of human survival: To forget that victims can become aggressors and that aggressors can become victims: To forget that the tides of inequality constantly surge to drown the dignity of the dispossessed. To forget that history keeps repeating itself and that we ignore such repetition at our peril.

Indeed, we have now reached a point where we are often asked to forget the evidence of our own eyes. Truth has become the sole possession of those with the strongest political and economic power. Ownership of digital technology facilitates the creation of narratives which “forget” inconvenient truths and which determine how emergent and historical facts are to be perceived. To quote George Orwell's famous lines - The Party told you to reject the evidence of your eyes and ears. It was their final, most essential command.”

When you reflect on the totality of what we are being asked to forget, it covers many of the core moral principles enshrined in our own Unitarian spiritual community. It is in this general context, therefore, that I offer this Holocaust-related contribution to the general memory of the murder in Auschwitz of almost a million Jews and to the special memory of a dear friend, Eva Schloss. A memory which slips into forgetfulness for yet another year as Eva and all the survivors gradually yield to the passing of the years.

I think I was around seven when I first heard of Auschwitz. My father had told me the Holocaust story at a time when I was too young to understand the concept of evil. I was in my teens by the time I read the “Diary of Anne Frank” and only then did the millions of murder victims become real people. If we're unwilling, or indeed unable, to personalise death, it's

easy to become emotionally detached from mass tragedies of war, famine, genocide or natural disasters. We need a personal story – a face on which to position the horror. Incredibly, we can adjust to mass slaughter as long as they are faceless millions. But the death of a single identifiable person is a different matter.

And so it was with the effect of reading Anne’s diary. Each of the Holocaust victims suddenly had yearnings, dreams, strengths, frailties, longings, ambitions. Each had brothers, sisters, parents, neighbours, friends. I could now see the indelible stain of the Holocaust on the tapestry of human existence. Though I never anticipated that fifty years after reading about Anne, I would meet and become friends with her posthumous stepsister, Eva Schloss.

The lives of Anne and Eva have some heartbreaking similarities and differences. They were both born in 1929 and arrived in Amsterdam in the ‘thirties. They lived near each other in the same apartment complex but were more neighbours than friends. Anne was outgoing and a typical teenager, whereas Eva was shy and reserved.

Both families were forced into hiding and both were betrayed. Anne was routed through Auschwitz but died in Bergen-Belsen, whereas Eva spent about nine months in Auschwitz-Birkenau before it was liberated. Anne’s father, Otto, survived, but he lost his wife and children. Only Eva’s mother survived – unlike her father and her much-loved brother, Heinz. In what seems to have been a “relatively” happy few years in the Amsterdam apartments, neither Anne nor Eva could have ever dreamt of the horror and tragedy which would unfold. Neither could they ever have thought that, one day, Anne’s father would marry Eva’s mother.

As a well-known Holocaust survivor, Eva’s life is well - documented through her books and her global appearances. Like many survivors, wounds were slow to heal and the challenge of returning to “normality” weighed heavily on the young sixteen-year-old. While life, or lack of it, was beyond words in the horrors of Auschwitz, Eva often talked about the huge psychological challenges of survival in a post-Auschwitz world and felt that few understood those challenges. People, she said, simply didn’t want to talk about the Holocaust after the war and it was many decades before she herself decided to tell her story. She often emphasised that Anne’s story, while uniquely precious and influential, was essentially just one in a vast ocean of such stories.

I had always maintained a huge interest in Holocaust history and became particularly absorbed in Eva’s books and public appearances. By a stroke of luck, I was able to get her personal email, and to my surprise, she contacted me almost immediately. We corresponded for many years but

only met face to face for the first time in 2016. She had travelled from London to speak at a conference in Tralee, and while we only had a short time together, we agreed we'd meet again later that year, when she was due to appear on the Late Late Show. Some might remember that appearance and the impact of her harrowing account. We spent that weekend touring the beauty of Wicklow and for once, the weather had smiled generously.

Holocaust survivors are the living, pulsating, heartbeat of a lesson we forget at our peril. In that context, Eva was my hero though they say you need to be wary of meeting your hero. I had no reason to be wary. From the moment we made contact, we chatted endlessly about the small things in life - likes, dislikes, pastimes, interests. She always told me to fully live my life. I understood what she was saying, and I knew where it came from.

On general matters, she did, however, often speak of her concerns over what she saw as the world's unwillingness to welcome the stranger. History, she felt, had failed to teach us the lesson that evil prospers when people fail to speak on injustice. How ironic and prophetic her words have been.

By the middle of last year (2025), Eva was almost 96 and predictably, her health was deteriorating. She had stopped corresponding and I began to doubt if we would ever meet again. One of her daughters eventually told me that she was no longer able to use the computer and that she was now in specialist care. I was watching CNN News one evening in early January when a small line of breaking news slowly crept across the screen. The Holocaust survivor Eva Schloss died today, aged 96. (3<sup>rd</sup> January 2026) It was such an odd way to get the news of the death of a friend.

Apart from one single conversation with Eva, I had kept my passionate interest in Holocaust history to myself. I always felt, strangely perhaps, that it would be a kind of intrusion. I don't recall the context, but I remember telling her on this one occasion about my first visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Our guide had explained at the end of the tour that no birds had ever flown over the camp since it had closed. Hardly had the words been spoken, than a flock of birds flew noisily overhead. I told Eva how I had been so struck by what I saw as a symbol of hope. I'd love to say that she gave me a wise and reflective reply. But she said nothing. She simply smiled. I still wonder what she was thinking. Though on reflection, I think I know.

*John Haskins*

St. Stephen's Green Unitarian Church

| TITLE                       | AUTHOR           | Month     |
|-----------------------------|------------------|-----------|
| Lessons in Chemistry        | Bonnie Garmus    | January   |
| Camarade                    | Theo Dorgan      | February  |
| Orbital                     | Samantha Harvey  | March     |
| Dear Life                   | Rachel Clarke    | April     |
| My Brilliant Friend         | Elena Ferrante   | May       |
| You Are Here                | David Nicholls   | June      |
| The Door                    | Magda Szabo      | July      |
| All the Beauty in the World | Patrick Bringley | August    |
| Three Men in a Boat         | Jerome K. Jerome | September |
| The Correspondent           | Virginia Evans   | October   |
| Intermezzo                  | Sally Rooney     | November  |
| Fathers and Sons            | Ivan Turgenev    | December  |

**Dublin Unitarian Book Club's choice for January 2026.**

## **Lessons in Chemistry**

by

*Bonnie Garmus*

In *Lessons in Chemistry* we meet Chemist Elizabeth Zott whose journey through the 1960's is anything but ordinary. She faces the many challenges of women of the time such as misogyny and sex discrimination, but one of the biggest injustices she experienced was when she is forced to leave college without her PHD because she refused to apologise for stabbing her Professor with a 2b pencil during a sexual assault. She reported the rape but was not believed. With only her degree in her pocket she gets a job as a Lab Technician in the Hastings Research Institute where her all male team recognise her brilliance but plagiarise her work. She meets Calvin Evans at Hastings, a brilliant researcher and they embark on a most unconventional relationship for the time. They live together unmarried and their deep unrestricted love for each other also incorporates a deep respect for each other's work and intelligence. At this point you might be thinking this is a formulaic Chick/Lit book but I assure you it is so much more than that. Both Elizabeth and Calvin have complicated unconventional back stories with themes of cult religious corruption, suicide, family loss and grief and betrayal. It is alluded to that perhaps both Elizabeth and Calvin are neurodivergent as in the way that they navigate the world and interact with people. The author is a good story teller and writer and the dialogue is full of wit and humour. This acts as a counterbalance to the very serious themes of the book but does not detract from them in my opinion but adds to their poignancy.

This is also a quirky story with quirky characters such as a rescue dog called Six Thirty (that's when they met) whom Elizabeth is teaching

words to (698 at last count). An Obstetrician who is obsessed with rowing as is Calvin and then so too is Elizabeth who Calvin taught to row. And then there's Mad, short for Madeline, their precocious matter of fact genius five year old daughter and best friend of Six Thirty, who protects her with a vengeance.

A tragic accident leads to Calvin's death and Elizabeth discovers she is pregnant and subsequently fired from Hastings as she is deemed an unsuitable employee as she is now a single mother. Her male associates are lost without her and privately seek out her input to their research so she earns money through this rogue secret consultancy. The hypocrisy and injustices continue as she will never be recognised for her contribution and work.

When Madeline is in kindergarten Elizabeth meets one of the parent's, Walter Pine, another single parent. He is a Television producer and offers Elizabeth a job as a TV Cookery host. The programme is called 'Supper at Six' and Elizabeth stamps her own personality on it by wearing a white lab coat and by treating the cookery demonstration like a chemistry lesson as she explains how the ingredients of the recipe interact with each other to create the dish. It is a run-away success as through her platform she encourages women to believe in themselves and to chase their dreams, which is poignant as she cannot fulfil her passion of being Scientist.

There are other happenings in the story which leads to it's conclusion. Madeline recruits the help of a former pen pal of her Father's, Reverend Wakely, to unearth Calvin's history involving a mysterious rich donor to the orphanage where he was placed. Then, an investor to Hastings Research Institute discovers the fraud and plagiarism perpetrated by the head of the company and sacks him. Elizabeth is offered the job as it was her research that drew the initial investment. There is another twist to the end of story which some of our readers found too coincidental and neat to be believed, but you'll just have to read the book to find out.

The book club readers enjoyed this book as it was a good story with interesting characters and it dealt with many themes such as gender roles in society, discrimination and family relationships. It also tells the story of difference and how through Elizabeth's experiences and story we see a person grow and find the resilience to face the many challenges of life. It is a story of friendships and connections between people of different genders and ages. We would recommend this book.

*Alison Claffey*

St. Stephen's Green Unitarian Church



# Dublin Unitarian Church

112 St. Stephens Green Dublin 2.

**Service 11.00a.m.**

## **Sunday Rota for March 2026**

1<sup>st</sup> March                      *Milestones*  
Service                      **Gavin Byrne**  
Reader                      **John Haskins**  
Flowers                      **Peter Fontana**  
Welcomer                    **Paula Mills - Janet Mulroy**  
Coffee                      **Therese Fontana, Alison Claffey, Doireann Ni Bhriain**

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8<sup>th</sup> March                      *A Woman's Case For God*  
Service                      **Andy Pollak**  
Reader                      **Janet Mulroy**  
Flowers                      **Janet Mulroy**  
Welcomer                    **Janet Mulroy - Emer O'Reilly**  
Coffee                      **Janet Mulroy, Lorraine Doyle, Catherine Cook**

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15<sup>th</sup> March                    *Laetare Sunday*  
Service                      **Gavin Byrne**  
Reader                      **Jennifer Buller**  
Flowers                      **Emer O'Reilly**  
Welcomer                    **Paul Murray - Doireann Ni Bhriain**  
Coffee                      **Jennifer Buller, Gráinne Carty, Emer O'Reilly**

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22<sup>nd</sup> March                    *Celebrations: Hope or Optimism?*  
Service                      **Rev Mark Hutchinson.**  
Reader                      **Paul Murray**  
Flowers                      **Peter Fontana**  
Welcomer                    **Daphne Dunkin - Paul Murray**  
Coffee                      **Therese Fontana, Shari McDaid, Madeline Stringer**

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29<sup>th</sup> March                    *Remembering Rev.E.Savell Hicks*  
Service                      **Elaine Sisson.**  
Reader                      **Aidan O'Driscoll**  
Flowers                      **Mary O'Brien**  
Welcomer                    **Alison Claffey - Catherine Cook**  
Coffee                      **Gráinne Carty, Paula Mills, Doireann Ni Bhriain**

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.

# **Annual General Meeting**

## **Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> April 2026**

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### **NOTICE**

The Congregational Annual General Meeting will take place in the church after Sunday Service on Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> of April 2026. The meeting agenda and related items will be included in the Annual Report which will be available to all Members one week prior to the AGM.

Voting Members may submit motions for inclusion on the AGM agenda and may nominate other Voting Member(s) for election to elected position(s).

Motions or nominations for submission should be sent in writing to the Secretary, Trish Webb Duffy, at The Unitarian Church 112 St. Stephen's Green Dublin D02 YP23 or at:-  
secretaryunitarianchurch@gmail.com

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The closing date for the receipt of motions, nominations, and other items for inclusion on the AGM agenda is Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> April 2026.

*Denise Dunne*  
Chair