

# Oscailt



June 2026

IRELANDS UNITARIAN MAGAZINE

Vol. 22 Nº 6



## **Please Note**

*If you are aware of any member of our community who is unwell, or who has suffered a bereavement, and who would welcome contact from others in the church, please e-mail Rev.Bridget Spain.*

Vestry 01 - 4780638

e-mail: revbspain@gmail.com

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

Takes place on the 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

write to Dennis Aylmer c/o [aylmerd@gmail.com](mailto:aylmerd@gmail.com)

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

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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  
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112 St. Stephen's Green, Dublin D02 YP23.

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### **To Subscribe**

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### **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.

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

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**Front Cover:** Detail from the Wilson Memorial Window, right side top.  
(photo P. Spain)

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

# Life & Dignity

Dignity is something that I was always keen to promote when I worked with vulnerable young people. I always had a sense that if I could treat them with the dignity that is uniquely theirs, they would in some way respond and begin to believe and express their own dignity. That meant rolling with the challenging behaviour, leaving gaps, understanding that many were living very difficult lives which often guided their behaviour and contributed to their lack of self esteem. But there's much more. It also meant understanding that trauma experienced by people at a young age can have a profound effect on a person's future happiness and fulfilment. The challenging behaviours, as we call it, are often coping strategies developed to make it through and survive adversity. So we had to create safe and trustworthy environments. It meant being prepared to be let down and be disappointed - but get over it. This might at first hearing sound a bit middle class - and I made that charge myself in the early days of my youth work career. But evidence consistently teaches us that early childhood adversity and trauma is deeply injurious to a person's healthy development. But what of those we come across in the course of our lives, whose life and dignity are at risk? And what might our response be?

I am often drawn to the story of the good Samaritan. The Good Samaritan is a parable told by Jesus about compassion and kindness. It's recorded in Luke's gospel and represented in many Unitarian churches, including our own. A traveler is beaten and left for dead by the side of the road. Several people pass by without helping, including a priest and a Levite. Finally, a Samaritan stops to assist the injured man, tending to his wounds and taking him to an inn for care. It is a story of being surprised by a person's compassion. Because the Samaritan is not the type of person one would expect to help; especially help the beaten man who is Jewish. Samaritans and Jews were not, let us say, on speaking terms - think of republican and loyalist, Democratic and Republican, Palestinian and Israeli, Celtic and Rangers. Incidentally, Jesus, suggesting a Samaritan helping a Jew was shocking to his audience.

But when we look to one another with hope and expectation, we will be surprised. We will understand what dignity looks like. We care

within, in order to care without. The point is that this Samaritan is no more compassionate or caring than the others. It's just that this Samaritan responded with love and compassion. It was love and compassion plus. The priest and Levite, (who was an assistant to the priest), didn't help because touching what they thought a dead or dying man would render them unclean. There were well developed ritual purity laws and the man did not want to bring the wrath of God upon himself for transgressing these laws - fear. Jesus was once more asserting his opinion that God is unimpressed and unconcerned with ritual or dogma. And finally, in fairness to the priest and Levite, it was a dangerous road - the injured man could well have been a decoy, with more bad intentioned robbers hiding in the bushes. It's always important to name the excuses for not helping; whether or not they are good or honest excuses.

One interesting aspect of this story is that the Samaritan doesn't seek a 'thank you', he doesn't care how much it will cost to save the beaten man's life. This man is not impressed with his own goodness. (I am certainly guilty of congratulating myself for good deeds I have carried out). No, the Samaritan simply moved on with his business. I'm speculating here - but I reckon he didn't even tell his friends how good he was that day. His left hand knowing nothing of his right hand's charity. Do you identify or recognise yourself in this parable - the priest, the levite, the beaten man, the innkeeper, the Samaritan. Perhaps you can place yourself in the group of people hearing this story for the first time?

The beaten man had his life and dignity blessed by the simple care given to him by the Samaritan.

Remember, the question asked out of which this parable was spoken - a smart lawyer, trying to test Jesus. 'What must I do in order to inherit eternal life?' The story is also about the assumptions we make about people - we judge them on which version of God they believe in or don't believe in. We judge them based on their social status, ethnic background, religious affiliation, skin colour, accent. I was judged by the young people I worked with and had to work extra hard to gain their trust. I was at a community development conference once and a worker who worked in an inner city community development project declared, 'you don't need people coming from Rathmines and Rathgar coming in to save our kids'. I politely put my hand up and

said: 'I'm from there'. My job, incidentally was not to save kids, it was simply to facilitate their education and development and ensure there was at least one good adult in their lives.

We don't know the backstory of this particular Samaritan man - but we can guess that he was badly treated, judged and not given the dignity that is inherently his as a member of the human race. It's no accident that Jesus chose a Samaritan as the hero of this parable. They were considered ethnically impure, their lands were given wide berth by mainstream Jews; they suffered all kinds of prejudice. If Jesus was the 'urgent voice of God', what does this tell about the God that Jesus believed in?

Is the story of the Samaritan's love an example of humanity's complete measure of compassion?

War is probably the biggest threat to life and dignity - and we see it played out not on our streets and neighbourhoods, but on our screens and newspapers. The war in Iran, Lebanon is a moral outrage - a needless assault on life and dignity, that is causing extraordinary pain not only to people, but to the planet itself. This billion dollar war is claimed as a righteous cause, blessed by God who is daily beseeched for aid and succour. The devil has found willing acolytes to bring destruction and suffering to the people. I never thought I would ever bring up the devil at a Unitarian pulpit. It is important to add that the regime upon whom war is raged is no better - it murders and assaults life and dignity, particularly the life and dignity of women. But we know, it is the people, the beautiful people of Iran who suffer the most. Richard Haas is an influential US diplomat. He was US envoy to the Northern Ireland peace process. He was speaking at the weekend; he said that what the people of the Middle East want is not for their land to be turned into a palm beach, awash with wealth and opportunity. No, what they wish for and have always wished for is dignity and a peaceful life. They feel they've been humiliated by the US and Israel.

But to what end, my moral outrage about this particular episode in history? It's all very well to stand here and moralise. What am I doing about it? Should I flood heaven with prayer? I think about what St Paul urged his friends to practice in his letter to the Hebrews: don't neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some

have entertained angels without knowing it. And at its purest form, hospitality is a simple personal gesture of warmth towards another. And the Samaritan went beyond hospitality into the realm of love. He was not just good, but good for something. And it was an example of extending life and dignity to a stranger. It was an example of humanity's complete measure of compassion.

But it is not just the great acts of selfless charity that ensures we have a dignified life. It is the little things. And somehow, we know that. We're always telling stories of the small acts of kindness we have either been graced with ourselves or those we have seen in our lives. And that is something I can do. I can do more than just turn up at a protest - I can extend the goodness that is inherent in my soul to others and do nothing to assault the dignity of others. We can use powerful words to assert what we hold; we may suffer prejudice and assault. Fine, may I have the strength to endure it.

Jesus, in Rumi's poem I read, says that even though I am known to bring the dead back to life, heal blindness and all kinds of physical ailments, even though I can perform all manner of amazing and unbelievable miracles, it is the stubborn stupidity and arrogance of people I cannot manage - I feel the need to flee their foolishness. They are like solid rock upon which nothing can grow or flourish. My spirit cannot endure such as these.

The Sufi tradition, like Jesus of Nazareth, was concerned with the big stuff - Justice, mercy, and compassion. Where I get caught up with the little things, I am called back by the great spiritual teachers to the big stuff. Life and dignity is big stuff - essential if we are to achieve justice, mercy and compassion in our lives. Extending our goodness to those whose life and dignity is under threat is an example of humanity's complete measure of compassion. We can do it; we know we can do it.

*Rev. Gavin Byrne.*

Minister St. Stephen's Green Unitarian Church Dublin.

# Freedom, Reason and Tolerance.

Outside this Church there is a plaque which states that we welcome all who wish to worship in a spirit of freedom reason and tolerance.

The words describe the philosophy of Unitarianism without any equivocation. I am not sure how old the plaque is but I imagine if it were erected today it would also include the word love.

After all, Love is central to our ethos : ‘ Love is the doctrine of this church.The quest for Truth is its sacrament.’

So we stand for Love, Freedom, Reason and Tolerance.

In times of chaos and war these words, these principles, can comfort and inspire us. But they can also raise some questions for us.

I will start with the central one: Love.

Last November my partner and I hosted, in our home, a Kurdish writer, Ilhan Sami Comak and his partner Ipek Ozell for a few days. Ilhan is a poet who at the age of 23, was tortured and then jailed in a Turkish prison. He has always declared his innocence but he remained in that jail for 30 years. He was only released in 2024. Remarkably during that time he had 8 books of his poetry, a play and an autobiography published. The writers organisation Irish PEN/PEN na hÉireann – of which I’m a member - had campaigned for years for his release so, last year, we invited him over to speak at the Dublin Book Festival. Ilhan has hardly any English but Ipek is his interpreter as well as his partner, translator and former prison visitor. Her English is perfect. It was a great for us to be in their company and they enjoyed their time here. One evening, over dinner, Ipek asked me how often my partner and I say we love each other . Oh, very often, I said, about once every seven years, and we all laughed. But when we do say it, my partner said, it is invaluable.

When it comes to loving someone close to them, psychologists will say that people find different ways of expressing their love, by using words, or by their actions, or by giving presents, sometimes all three. In our case, love is expressed by acts

of thoughtfulness and kindness but we wouldn't dream of ending a phone call as many young people do, with the words *Love you..*

Back to the poet Ilhan. He is an extraordinary person, gentle, humourous and calm. Someone asked him how come he was so serene and his answer was simple: because he had seen so much violence. Torture and repression were a constant in his life and when the political prisoners in his prison protested about their conditions, 40 of them were killed by the soldiers.

It was an honour for all of us when Ilhan and Ipek were received by the then president Michael D Higgins in the Aras. Ilhan presented the President with two of his books whereupon Michael D presented him with some of his.

The president's parting words to Ilhan were :“ We poets must write new poems for these terrible times.’

After we left the Aras, Ilhan was on a high. It was the first time in his life, he said, when the State had not been hostile towards him.

Ilhan and Ipek's visit came to an end, all too quickly. It was such a pleasure to get to know the two of them over the short time we had together. I drove Ilhan and Ipek to the airport and we said goodbye. We hugged and then, to my astonishment, Ilhan said to me in English:

*‘I Love you.’*

It was not a declaration of romantic love but of something bigger: it was a statement of a Universal love. In that moment I understood that Love transcends all boundaries, whether they are generational, social, national, local, racial, linguistic, political or cultural. All the boundaries that are designed to separate us, simply evaporate into thin air when we love.

Love, the Bible says, is patient and kind, it does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way. It is not irritable or resentfu. It does not delight in evil but rejoices in the truth. Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes , always perseveres.

This is a high bar for us to reach but, at least, we can depend on Love to make worthwhile, the effort of trying to achieve that goal.

It is only, I suggest, when it comes to the other three principles: Freedom, Reason, and Tolerance that things become complicated. Unlike Love, they have their limitations.. They are open to abuse. For example Freedom means different things to different people. In the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, Article 1 states that All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.

Twenty-nine freedoms are outlined in all, but Article 30 outlines an important caveat . It states : Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any state, group or person any right in any activity aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms set forth herein.

This is an important safeguard particularly in today's world when the idea of one's individual liberty is used as a weapon to deny the rights of others. For ultra-Libertarians, freedom is the catch cry for laissez faire economics, small government, low taxes, privatisation of public services and curtailment of regulation and of workers rights. The misuse of social media has further exacerbated the abuse of free speech. Very often we can no longer tell what is true and what is propaganda. But, as the creator of the word *Doublethink*, George Orwell wrote 'However much you deny the truth, the truth goes on existing.'

I mentioned the PEN organisation already. It was set up to promote the freedom to write. Recently we had to define our goal further. We now stand for the promotion of the *responsible* freedom to write. Regardless, we continue to support writers who face persecution across the world and for whom freedom, responsible or not, is an impossible dream.

In his prison cell the Kurdish poet I mentioned earlier, Ilhan Sami Comak, wrote in a poem about what freedom, or the lack of it, meant to him. And I quote:

*Still I piece all that I miss into a single picture.  
Into that wounded bird called freedom.  
I must do it, so I won't forget.  
Life is severe, defiant and all walled*

*because I'm here. I say: the blossoms  
of the first cherry tree, breaking into air,  
How do they smell? Can you tell me this  
and what their colour is?  
I seem to have forgotten.*

Now we come to Reason. The power of the mind to think, understand and form judgements logically. Historically, the thinkers of the Enlightenment, Unitarians included, embraced reason as a bulwark against superstition and against fanaticism. Since then, it is argued that these thinkers, in fact, elevated Reason into a new kind of faith, an absolute faith in science and mathematics.

The journalist, Joe Humphries in a recent Irish Times column gives an example of the limits of reason when he writes 'It has been inspiring to see Irish school communities showing solidarity with students facing deportation . A hard-nosed , rational approach states that rules are rules but the rational answer isn't always the right one.'

Acts of courage, as we have seen in the passive resistance against ICE agents by the people in Minneapolis who use singing to make their point are not always purely rational but they can be effective. In 1912 when women textile workers went on strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts they demanded not just bread but roses too. They were striking for decent wages but they were also striking for beauty and fairness in life. When Jewish and Arab mothers linked arms and walked barefoot for Peace through the streets of Rome, as they did recently, their action transcends Reason. In the same way, in 1976 Catholic and Protestant women linked arms and marched for Peace along the streets of Belfast.

A theologian Reinhold Niebuhr once said 'Nothing which is true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history so we must be saved by faith.' He meant faith in God but faith in humanity is just as valid in terms of his statement.

Which brings us on a natural segue to Tolerance. Who could possibly question the idea of tolerance ? Well, the philosopher, Carl Popper did when he wrote about the paradox of tolerance. He said “ Unlimited tolerance must lead to a disappearance of tolerance. If we extend unlimited tolerance even to those who are intolerant, if we are not prepared to defend a tolerant society against the onslaught of the intolerant, then the tolerant will be destroyed and Tolerance with them.”

Tolerance is an important virtue nonetheless. Any community based on tolerance is one that accepts difference and promotes peaceful co-existence. Such a community has legal safeguards against xenophobia and hatred. Our primitive instinct to fear the other is transcended by a desire for collective harmony.

All the same, if Ilhan had said to me, I tolerate you rather than I love you, I think I would have been offended. For me tolerance is only a base line, it is the rule by which we interact with one another. To enrich our lives we can go further. To dig deeper. To understand others, at times to forgive others and be forgiven by them.

A poem by Christine Daniels begins:

*We remember the Mahatma,  
Not because of what he said,  
But what he did.  
Tolerance is not you,  
Standing on a mountain,  
Banging your chest,  
Proclaiming to the world,  
“I am tolerant.”  
That is,  
Aggressive arrogance.  
Tolerance is,  
Lived in our lives,  
Every day.  
How tolerant will I be today?*

When I look around me, I see an Ireland transformed since my childhood. As a country we are rich beyond our parents' dreams albeit in a society that is not equal in many ways. Our prosperity and multi-culturalism are interlinked. Amazon is an important element in our economy and so is the work of the Filipino carer working in our health service. That fact was brought home to me recently. During the two years of her severe illness, a friend of mine wanted - and was enabled - to live at home. After she died, her husband told me that, during all that time, numerous HSE carers came in to help him to look after her. In total, he counted, they came from 15 different countries.'

'I could not have managed without them,' he said, with tears in his eyes. None of us could manage without such people. They come here to our windy, wet island and make it their own. They give of themselves and we are truly in their debt.

Please don't get me wrong: I believe, as I think we all do, in the great tenets of Freedom, Reason and Tolerance. Without them, our society would be an authoritarian one, but I think that we need to be aware of their limitations, their vulnerability in a world where news manipulation, propaganda and worse have become weapons in the war against Truth.

So, in a time of chaos and war, to paraphrase the Bible, these four remain : Love, Freedom, Reason and Tolerance. But the greatest of these is Love.

*Liz McManus*

12 April 2026

**Do you have a spare room that you would be willing to accommodate a single woman in her 40s a Ukrainian refugee**

She is in an actively searching for both a job and accommodation. The main challenge is to find a place to live first, as her future workplace will depend on that location.

She can provide recommendations from her current host, with whom she has lived for more than 3 years.

She says: I have a Level 5 in Business Administration and a Level 6 in Merchandising, Buying, and Styling from Dublin. In Ukraine, I studied fashion design and worked as a clothing technologist. My second degree is in Accounting and Audit, and I worked in financial planning. I am looking for a retail job because I enjoy organizing sales areas. I am good with computers and MS Word. I can send my CV or a link to my LinkedIn profile if you want more details.

Contact Maud Robinson if you can help



Unitarian College provide various courses for those interested in leading worship or other leadership roles within the Unitarian movement. There will be a Unitarian Leadership Inquiry Session on Wednesday, 3rd June 2026, 7pm-8:30pm on Zoom.

To book your place, please contact us at:  
**admin@unitarian-college.org.uk**

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

## **Dear Life**

by

*Rachel Clarke*

Dr. Rachel Clarke is a specialist in palliative medicine. In this book she gives a very personal account as to how she came to be a consultant in this area. The first half of the book covers her childhood in rural Wiltshire where she lived with her father who was the local GP, her mother who was a nurse and her brother and sister. After attending University, she embarked on a very successful career in T.V making documentaries, but she decided this was not for her and she retrained as a doctor first working in acute and emergency medicine and then as a consultant in palliative care.

The author shares many of the stories of the people that are in the hospice which you would imagine would be very depressing but instead their stories show the hospice as a place of love, kindness and human connection. It is a place which helps people and their families face death with dignity,

‘ Our job is to help you live until you die’.

This might give the impression that Clarke romanticizes the role of palliative care. On the contrary ,she has many difficult conversations with patients regarding their death and their individual fears. For one person she explains the science behind death and what the person may feel when the time comes. For another she has to help them accept the reality of their death. She writes thoughtfully about these encounters and with matter of factness.

It is this balance where a hospital caregiver can manage professional detachment with basic human kindness and compassion that Clarke says must be strived for. She witnessed some cold callous incidents during her training as a junior doctor such as when a patient did not respond to chemotherapy the consultant's attitude was to ‘send her to the palliative dustbin’.

It was this that led her into palliative care as she thought ‘We can do this better’.

Interwoven with the stories of her patients in the hospice is the personal account of her father’s decline following a cancer diagnosis and the months of chemotherapy which were eventually to no avail, and to his final months at home before he died. She writes very movingly about this experience for her and her family and is devastated with grief when her father dies. She writes ‘All those years of medical training I now know, have singularly failed to equip me with proper insight into the magnitude of other people’s grief’. She says she went back to work ‘ a better doctor’.

Clarke also raises broader questions about end-of-life care, particularly the distress caused by prolonging life through invasive interventions when death might otherwise have come naturally. She argues that this can carry a significant human cost for patients, their families, and medical staff alike, and that these consequences must be considered. With this in mind, she includes a chapter as a Post-script discussing related issues such as Advance Care Plans, funding, Power of Attorney, and making a will.

The book club readers found this book very poignant and relevant. The writing was thoughtful and meditative. It is a book that you might not recommend to everyone due to its sensitive nature but that aside it is a very worthwhile read.

*Alison Claffey*

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

LOVE IS THE DOCTRINE OF THIS CHURCH  
THE QUEST OF TRUTH IS ITS SACRAMENT  
AND SERVICE IS ITS PRAYER.  
TO DWELL TOGETHER IN PEACE  
TO SEEK KNOWLEDGE IN FREEDOM  
TO SERVE MANKIND IN FELLOWSHIP  
TO THE END THAT ALL SOULS SHALL GROW IN HARMONY  
WITH THE DIVINE  
THIS DO WE COVENANT WITH EACH OTHER AND WITH GOD.

## **DUBLIN UNITARIAN CHURCH**

112 St. Stephen's Green, Dublin D02 YP23, Ireland.

**Service: Sunday at 11a.m. Phone: Vestry 01-4780638**

**Managing committee:-** Chairperson: Malachy Hevehan ;  
Vice Chairman: Shari McDaid ;  
Hon. secretary: Trish-Webb-Duffy; Hon. treasurer: Rory Delany;  
Dennis Aylmer ; Colette Douglas ; Paula Mills ; Madeline Stringer ; Peter White.

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Organist: Josh Johnston Pianist 086 892 0602

PodCast of the church service is available on the church website.



# Dublin Unitarian Church

112 St.Stephens Green Dublin 2.

**Service 11.00a.m.**

## **Sunday Rota for June 2026**

7<sup>th</sup> June                      *Sacred Listening .*  
Service                      **Rev.Gavin Byrne**  
Reader                      **Tony Roche**  
Flowers                      **Margaret Leeson**  
Welcomer                      **Daniela Cooney - Margaret Leeson**  
Coffee                      **Alison Claffey, Paul Murray, John Leeson**

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14<sup>th</sup> June                      *Threads Across the Pond*  
Service                      **Amy Panetta**  
Reader                      **Alison Claffey**  
Flowers                      **Janet Mulroy**  
Welcomer                      **Sheila Hanley - Doireann Ní Bhroinn**  
Coffee                      **Janet Mulroy, Daniela Cooney, Freda McDonald**

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21<sup>st</sup> June                      *Giraffes Can't Dance*  
Service                      **Robin Ward**  
Reader                      **Maeve Edwards**  
Flowers                      **Peter Fontana**  
Welcomer                      **Frank Tracy - Emer O'Reilly**  
Coffee                      **Maeve Edwards, Lorraine Doyle, Therese Fontana**

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28<sup>th</sup> June                      *Pride: One Story, Many Voices.*  
Service                      **Rev.Gavin Byrne**  
Reader                      **Emer O'Reilly**  
Flowers                      **Gavin O'Duffy**  
Welcomer                      **Robin Ward - Gavin O'Duffy**  
Coffee                      **Gráinne Carty, Amani Greene, Paula Mills**

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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.



This photograph was taken in First Church Belfast I think in 2003, when the Dublin church were invited to take part in a service.



# Love is the doctrine of this church

Pride Service, Sunday 29th June, 11am

