

As we begin the New Year Here are a few highlights of what has a busy time since our last newsletter

### English Classes

Our English classes continue to be popular and at the end of term we had a lovely and lively party where our students sang songs, shared stories and enjoyed seasonal refreshments.

It's at times like this that we are reminded that what we do here is more than simply offer basic English. Friendships are made, people from different countries and different cultures learn more about each other and perhaps most of all we are reminded that offering hospitality is a key to helping new migrants find their place in the city.

During the year we made some great contacts with other services providing English classes in the city. It is very valuable to have places where we can direct some of our students. The particular value of our service is that people can walk in off the street where they will be guaranteed a warm welcome and more often than not immediate access to an English class.

One of the things we have noticed is that the number of older people looking for classes has increased. In some cases these are people who arrived some years ago and are now finding that that in order to get employment they need to improve their English. Another significant group are parents of migrants who have come to Ireland in order to help with child care and to support their family.





## Interfaith

A very significant event for the Dublin City Interfaith Forum happened in the week before Christmas. Leaders of all the faith communities represented on the forum met in the Mansion House to sign The Dublin City Interfaith Charter.

The Charter sets out a vision of how faith communities, who with all their diversity share so much, can work together to build a more tolerant and welcoming city.

The Charter captures the spirit of the work undertaken by the Forum in recent years. By formalising this in a public statement and with the endorsement of the Mayor it now becomes a public commitment by all involved to continue and to indeed enhance that work.

We also met with two visiting interfaith groups from Israel and Palestine. The first was a group of Christian, Muslim and Jewish peacemakers who attended a conference on Religion and Violence organised by the Irish School of Ecumenics with the help of the Forum. Over two days we explored together issues of religion and identity in what was a very humbling and sensitive process. The event ended with what is believed to be the first interfaith prayer service held in the medieval St Patrick's Cathedral.

The second group was a very dynamic group of younger people, again from the three faiths, all from Jerusalem. Their engagement and commitment to interfaith work in a place where it might put your life at risk was hugely impressive. The forum arranged for a civic reception for the group, and then organised meetings with other young people and a visit to Glencree Reconciliation Centre. There they had a chance to meet and talk with people who had been involved in the Irish peace process.

There was also an unplanned but very successful visit by some participants on the last IMU Faith and Mission course to the Al-Madinah mosque in the centre of the city. The intention was to drop in and say hello for ten minutes - but the very gracious and hospitable Imam Jameel of the Sufi community gave us over an hour of his time to show us around, gave us refreshments and answered all our questions.

We recently marked World Religions Day with an interfaith prayer service hosted by the Baha'i community.





## Ecology

In September the participants on the 2016 Faith and Mission course run by the IMU had guided tours to Tara and Boyne Valley as part of their initial induction to Ireland.

Both the tours were themed and followed the development of Spirituality in Ireland beginning in pre- christian Ireland at Newgrange (Stone age and Bronze Age ) then Tara - (Iron Age and Celtic ). Next came a visit to Slane the site associated with the arrival of St Patrick.

We then went to the early monastic settlements at Monasterboice, with examples of magnificent High Crosses and finally to Old Mellifont Abbey which was the first Cistercian abbey in Ireland.

In October we hosted the Meath Field Club for a day of wild food foraging and identifying Fungi. 40 people turned up and it was a lively and informative day with an opportunity to learn and experience the often hidden wild life of the woodlands at Dalgan.

Through our links with Bobbio we have a established link with an ecology group from Italy. They have visited Dalgan several times and recently invited Ger to go to visit them in the region of Liguria. There are many churches and schools named after St Colombano and foundations associated with Columban in that region.

In autumn Ger visited schools and met with the teachers and local Heritage and Community leaders in the area who are who are interested in working with us in the development of the Turas Columbanus.

In Dalgan the work with the school groups continues. Primary schools visit for a nature walk while older students come for ecology days and increasingly in relation to project for certificate exams on Religion. By Christmas time nearly 300 students from 10 different schools had a chance to visit the Visitors Centre and Chapel, hear the story of the Columban Missionaries and enjoy a guided Eco walk in the woodlands

We ended the year and marked the festive season with our annual Christmas coffee morning for all staff and community in Dalgan. It is always a lovely occasion and way to end the year.





## Inner City Pilgrim Walk

Following on our reflections for the development of a pilgrim walk in the city we organised an Inner City Pilgrim Walk on 26th November to mark the end of the Year of Mercy and the beginning of Advent.

We selected 5 Pilgrim stops all within walking distance of the Columban Centre and at each stop our prayer encompassed and acknowledged the past and the present situation of migration, famine, violence, addiction and trafficking of peoples

Starting out from Centre our first stop was the city bus station Busarus where we reflected on the constant movement of migrants and immigrants.

The second stop was the Famine Memorial on the quayside where our thoughts and prayers were for those who were experiencing famine past and present. It also marks the site where many Irish boarded ships on a journey of migration.

Our third stop was the Memorial for the 27 victims of the Dublin and Monaghan Bombings of 1974, and here we remembered in particular the victims of acts of politically motivated violence.

The fourth stop was the Drug Memorial sculpture in the local parish where we prayed for all those who are caught in the spiral of addiction and crime. This area in particular has suffered from this scourge.

Finally we returned to the Columban Centre where we lit the first candle of the Advent Wreath, reminding ourselves that we are called to be people of hope and compassion.

It was a moving experience for all who participated. We hope to hold a similar event with the participation of members of some of the diverse faith communities that are our neighbours here in the city.

