

Mission Connect Article for February 2019 Herald

Christmas at the International Meeting Point

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The International Meeting Point (IMP) continues to open its doors to asylum seekers, refugees, international students, local women and men; it truly is a place where everyone is welcome. The reasons why people come in are as varied as the nationalities they represent – some need help to get their children into school, some are struggling to support their families, and some just need a warm place to sit and friends to chat to. Every day over 80 people get a hot, tasty lunch, and what a joy it is to hear the buzz of conversations around the tables. What a privilege to turn the conversations to Christ and his love for us.

In the run-up to Christmas, IMP was particularly busy. It is a hard time of year as fuel costs increase, warm clothes are needed and the pressure of the celebrations is felt by everyone, even those who are not Christians. The team and our resources often feel like an over-stretched elastic band. However, in the midst of planning for the IMP Christmas dinner we were challenged by a comment from a teenager who escaped the war in Yemen. A number of months ago Houthi rebels arrived at their door to conscript the teenage boys into the militia. The boys and father fled and there followed a long and difficult journey to Belfast. However, not all of the family escaped and they worry for their mother's safety: they still don't know if she's alive. As one of the boys looked at us planning the dinner he said in his broken English that what was important was not the menu, they were coming for the company.

On Christmas day we served up a four-course Christmas dinner for 130 people and it was an amazing day. Yes, by the end of the day we were shattered, but it was more than worth it. It showed the centre for what it truly is – one big international family. We could not have pulled it off if it were not for the overwhelming generosity of churches and the team of wonderful volunteers. Surely this is what Christmas is all about – people from various parts of the world coming together and remembering the coming of Christ.

Through all that we do in the centre, our aim is to witness about Jesus and it has been a joy to see a few come to faith and deepen in their knowledge of Scripture through one-to-one conversations and the daily Bible studies. Recently, through the women's Bible study that I lead, we were looking into John 10. Round the table the number of nationalities was the same as the number of women – truly amazing. As we started to discuss about Christ being our Good Shepherd some of the women shared a little of their stories, their journey to Ireland but more importantly their journey to faith. In all of the heartache of life, truly Jesus knows us, and what a joy it is to know him.

Please pray:

- For a number of families that I visit who have yet to get refugee status. This uncertainty is very stressful.
- For strength, wisdom and grace as we seek to help people in great need.
- For the many opportunities to witness and pray with people who come into the centre.
- For the daily Bible studies, especially for those who attend but who have yet to come to faith in Jesus.