

An 
Tairseach

NEWSLETTER

*All of us at An Tairseach wish you a joyful
Christmas & Peaceful New Year*





From the Editor's Desk

In January many businesses were closed again for another period of 'lock-down' or in the words of the Tanaiste Leo Varadkar a time of 'cocooning'. The former phrase suggestive of a prison-like experience, the latter an invitation to pause, contemplate and perhaps be transformed. We are living in-between times, between old ways and 'new norms'; wanting to return to the way things were and allowing ourselves to be transformed by what we are learning from Covid-19. The virus is not going away. We are learning to live with it.

In Europe we witnessed rioting when governments imposed more restrictions and people protested for civil liberties; tension between the common good and individual freedom. Also, in Europe, during the summer, we witnessed catastrophic flooding in Germany and devastating fires in Greece. At COP 26 in Glasgow, torrential rains.

In spite of the difficulties of Covid-19, the farm manager Ms Janice Codd and her staff kept everything open, running safely and smoothly. Sales in the shop increased and there was a big rise in the demand for the box scheme. Mr Martin Dyer gave us a great insight into life on the farm in his contribution to this newsletter.

In the Centre many of the bookings were cancelled including the Spring programme. As we planned for events during the year we constantly had to revise and adapt the scheduling. Goal posts kept changing and the word 'fluid' became part of the new norm.

We held our first on-line course entitled 'Easter Conversations'. For six weeks we engaged in a series of conversations with inspiring people who, following in the footsteps of Thomas Berry, have animated expressions of the 'dream of the earth'

Integrating the living cosmology - Covid 19 and the Anthropocene

Diarmuid O' Murchu is a regular presenter in the Centre. His conversation focused on the pandemic and its long-term ecological and spiritual implications. "Covid 19 is an urgent call to reclaim our status as earthlings, creatures with a seven-million-year evolutionary story, now fixated on a new wave of human domination, (named by some as the Anthropocene), proving to be perilously dangerous for our future on this earth. What will it take for us to heed this global wake-up call?"

Good Bye

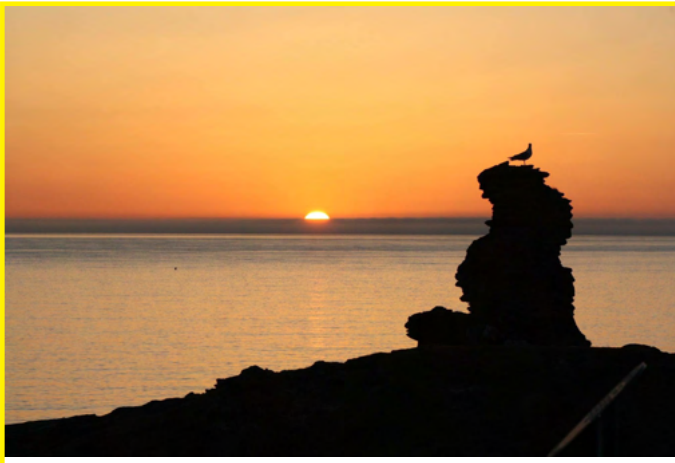


In March, our Centre Manager Kate Duggan decided to move on from An Tairseach and follow her desire to develop her own business as she is a fully qualified acupuncturist and naturopath therapist. She is sorely missed and we wish her all the best on her new path.



From the Editor's Desk

We were all delighted when we could finally open the doors on the first of June, albeit tinged with some apprehension. Sr Sharon Zayac OP led us in our first 'hybrid' retreat. Participants stayed in the Centre, enjoyed the accommodation, organic food from the Farm and listened to Sharon in the Conference room (live streamed). 'Virtual' participants tuned in from different parts of the world. One person tuned in from Peru at 4:00am for morning prayer. On 4th June, for the feast of St Kevin, the group met with Fr. Michael Rodgers in the Monastic city of Glendalough. I



'tethered' my lap-top to a phone signal and managed to live stream from the ancient place of pilgrimage. Bird song and bleating sheep made their contributions too which was enchanting.

In July, during our retreat entitled 'In communion with the sacred Universe', Ms Niamh Brennan helped us to ponder on many amazing facts including the Universe is made up of 70% dark energy and 25% dark matter. These mysterious forces cannot be 'seen' by scientists however their effects can be observed which proves their existence. Niamh posed the following questions "What happens in the darkness of you? What holds you together in your 'innermost' being, hidden, working beneath the surface? What dreams in you of expanding, going beyond your limits but barely dare to come to light?" Surely, this is something to ponder on continuously, especially during this time of mid-winter in the Northern hemisphere.

Ecological Summer School

An Tairseach and the Columban Ecological Institute presented: "Every Bush Aflame - God and the Natural World" lead by John Feehan. The Summer School consisted of lectures, discussions, reflections, recognition of species and work with microscopes. There was also time for meditation and prayer, to

ponder on the miraculous in the everyday. This course was booked out within two days of being advertised and we hope to co-host another summer school in 2022, so be sure to book early if you are interested. Ms Elizabeth Mc Ardle of the Columban Ecological Institute, Dalgan wrote about her joy at attending the Summer School.

Toni Pyke, Justice Peace and Ecology Coordinator for AMRI, shared her *blog* with us on her experience of staying for the first time in An Tairseach during the Autumn Sabbatical programme.



Sr Helen Mary Harmey (Chairperson) has helped keep the 'show on the road' enabling a capacity review and driving the strategic plan. You can read some snippets from her report to the AGM in October on page 11.

On behalf of the community and staffs of the Centre and the Farm I would like to express our sincere gratitude to the Dominican Sisters of the Cabra Congregation for their encouraging support for this most needed ministry.

Deep Peace of the Son of Peace to you and all your beloved.

Sr Colette Kane, Director of Programmes



ECOLOGICAL SUMMER SCHOOL

An Tairseach and the Columban Ecological Institute present

Every Bush Aflame, God and the Natural World

With John Feehan

Elizabeth McArdle of the Columban Ecological Institute reports on the Summer School with Dr John Feehan, which took place between 28th June and 3rd July 2021 at An Tairseach.

It was with a sense of adventure that I headed south from Dalgan to County Wicklow with my car packed with microscopes, books, waders, sampling equipment and all the paraphernalia required for a 6-day long summer school. For the first time, we (The Columban Ecological Institute) were working in partnership with An Tairseach, in Wicklow Town, which is managed by the Dominican Sisters. The previous year, Covid had prevented us from hosting a summer school, so it was no wonder that I was filled with anticipation and with Dr John Feehan as course director we were assured that the coming week would be one of learning, new experiences and many moments of wonder and awe.

Each day began with a ritual in the Cosmic Garden which was beautifully guided by Sr Colette Kane. Breakfast was followed by a lecture and after coffee we headed out for a field work session. In the afternoon, with the aid of a microscope, the participants settled down to study their samples and biological findings.

Day one and two were dedicated to the study of the wildflowers which grew in the organic gardens and vegetable fields of An Tairseach. We encountered many wonderful wildflowers along with some of their pollinators. Among them were corn spurrey, field violet, goosefoot, field poppies, purple foxglove, red deadnettle and the beautiful moon daisy. Our appreciation of wildflowers increased as the participants studied them with the new eyes of the microscope. It helped them to see that they are created with the same loving care as we are and they are biologically, chemically and physically as unique as we are, each in their own way.

On day four we headed up to the organic pastures of An Tairseach to sample a small stream fed pond to establish its water quality based on biological sampling alone. Waders were donned by the people going into the pond and with sampling nets, the pond creatures were gently removed from their watery environment and placed in buckets, held at the ready by the assistants on the banks. Back in the centre, with the aid of the microscopes, great experiences were had by all, especially the first timers, who were in awe of the incredible complexity of the creatures we had sampled. These included mayflies, iridescent water beetles, larvae of non-biting midges, horse leeches and exquisitely coloured water fleas.

With a simple Water Pollution Test Kit, we established that the water was of good quality. Later in the evening, the creatures were returned to their pond. On Thursday evening a moth trap was placed in the long grass of the wild garden. As we drifted off to sleep, we mused on the treasures that the morning might bring, and we were not disappointed. Wonderful moths with equally wonderful names had been trapped. Among them were the Powered Quaker moth, the Dingy Skipper, the Yel-





Ecological Summer School

low Underwing and the Garden Tiger. When viewed under the microscope their hidden beauty was revealed and the room was filled with “Ohs!” and “Wows!” and many other favourable exclamations.

In the afternoon, after a geological lecture, a walking tour of Wicklow Town revealed that we were among the mica schists of the Ordovician geological era. These rocks date back 580 million years when Ireland was part of the small continent of Avalonia. During a mountain building episode called the Caledonian orogeny, the parent rocks of mudstones and sandstones (which are still visible on the few beaches along the rocky shoreline) were overturned and folded. Very hot granite magma was injected into these older rocks which baked them and in the remaining spaces and voids, mica schist was sweated into them. We are planning to study this subject further in a future summer school, maybe 2022.

Among the many people to thank for the success of the summer school are the Dominican Sisters, especially Sr Colette Kane. Their genuine kindness was evident everywhere from the spotless accommodation to the nourishing organic food grown in their fields and gardens. Deep appreciation also goes to Thierry and his team for the love and care in which our food was prepared and served. To the participants: I could not even begin to document their dedication and open-minded approach to the very complex subject matter. Without them, the summer school would not have been possible. Lastly, our appreciation goes to Dr John Feehan, who skilfully guided us through the wonder of seeing God

in the natural world. We are deeply grateful to John for his life-changing insights, and we hope that for many years to come he will continue to inspire us and deepen our awareness of the role of the natural world in God’s unfolding plan.

On behalf of Fr Sean McDonagh and myself in the Columban Ecological Institute in Dalgan, thank you to everyone who helped to make the Summer School 2021 so memorable.

“A walking tour of Wicklow Town revealed that we were among the mica schists of the Ordovician geological era. These rocks date back 580 million years when Ireland was part of the small continent of Avalonia”



Above: happy participants Liam prepares to take the plunge and wade into the pond.



Left: Teresa helps Fionnuala into the large waders



Left: John Feehan Course Director, Elizabeth Mc Aardle, Sean Mc Donagh , the Columban Ecological Institute working in partnership with An Tairseach and Colette Kane OP



Seeds of Hope - Organic Farm

Seeds of Hope: Reflections from a Year at Our Organic Farm and Farm Shop

At the An Tairseach Organic Farm and Farm Shop it is impossible to escape the uniqueness of our working environment. The centre of the town is within walking distance, but we enjoy something very close to a rural setting.

We are flanked by tall trees and the historic grandeur of the convent. The views of the sea and the mountains that are part of life in Wicklow become a true panorama as you rise through the sloped fields of the farm itself.

Our gardens, which retain much of the peace and orderliness of former times, are not only a place where organic fruit, vegetables, herbs and flowers are cultivated, both openly and in polytunnels; they are also a living extension of the retreats and courses that are central to the work of the Ecology Centre. If there is labour in our work (organic practices are by definition more physical) there is meaning too, along with daily reminders of a long tradition, one that remains a strong draw for visitors, students, and customers alike.

The farmyard to the rear of the shop is a traditional one in appearance. A set of high barns and clustered sheds, built cleverly into the hillside, gives the sense of the yard as a village unto itself. An old wheel or an antique harrow resting on the margins, the sturdy quaintness of the pig pens, or the sight of a window frame catching the sunlight high on the granary gable, are reminders of the continuity of farming in this very place for more than a century.

In many ways, the high environmental standards required to achieve and retain an organic certification, while they represent the need to work towards mitigating the looming crises of climate change and habitat loss, also serve as a connection to the past, and as a reminder of what it means to be a custodian of the land. This past year, as the pandemic has maintained its hold on all of our lives, we have been privileged to be able to continue our own work.



The sounds of the animals in the farmyard, which are a renowned feature of the atmosphere of the farm shop, have increased recently with the birth of three new calves in our suckler herd. Herefords and Anguses are widely regarded as the best for sustainable Irish farming practice, for their temperament, strength and independence. Through 2021, our reputation locally and in the region as a producer of organic beef and pork continued to grow. We know from customer feedback that the increased demand in the build up to Christmas

reflects the special variety of our meat products, and their remarkable flavour.

It has also been gratifying to observe the effects of our contribution to the organic sector in the region. Many of our customers have discovered a passion for organic, seasonal and locally produced food options through having the opportunity to sample and explore our produce. Our dialogue with our customers makes us conscious of an expanding community, and gives us encouraging evidence of a national turn towards more ethical, more informed and, ultimately, healthier choices.

In November, the COP26 summit in Glasgow included powerful restatements of the fact that mainstream agriculture, despite its dominance, is no longer viable.

For all organic food producers, the urgent publicity granted to this message, and the stirrings of political change that have followed it, are an endorsement of two fundamental facts.

Firstly, in meeting our own needs, we must not compromise the needs of future generations. The diversity of wildlife on the An Tairseach Farm, and the innate quality of the food we produce, which stems directly from the deliberately restored health of our soil, are key reminders of what we receive from the land, and what we are endeavouring to pass on.

Secondly, we need a more widespread understanding of ecosystems. Human error with respect to the interconnectedness of life, has led to a tragic diminishment of the natural world and the possibilities for producing sufficient and nourishing food. But while the prospects might appear to be bleak, it is clear, today, that nature needs to be nurtured. On our farm and in our shop, we are motivated by what is possible, and by the knowledge that we are not alone in valuing a diligent, patient and reflective approach to farming.

In the fields above the town, our new inter-row weeder has led to a quiet revolution in our yields this year, allowing our staff to concentrate their energies on other parts of the farm. While remaining within the organic framework, with no herbicidal input, we have gained an important advantage over the weeds.

This welcome labour saving has allowed us to cultivate an additional field, and the results have been seen on the shelves in the shop, and at our busy Saturday market stalls at Killruddery House in Bray, and St Andrew's Resource Centre in Dublin. Our potatoes, kale, turnips, broccoli, romanesco, cauliflower and carrots have been wonderfully consistent this year, their distinctive flavours bringing customers from far and wide. Brexit and the pandemic continue to have knock-on ef-

fects in terms of product supply. Where certain whole-food and eco-friendly household products have been difficult to source, we have persisted this past year in our engagement with multiple suppliers, and we have managed to diversify our range. It has been a pleasure to be able to meet our customer's needs despite increased uncertainty with regard to imported goods.

We have continued the box order scheme that we started in 2020, which began as a way to ensure the safety and confidence of customers who preferred to avoid public spaces in the context of the pandemic. Every week we continue to take online orders and prepare boxes of fruit, vegetables, household products and whole food for customers across the region, who then collect their box from the An Tairseach van at Killruddery Farmer's Market.

We remain dedicated to this personal service, and the sense of novelty and appreciation that customers experience on receiving their orders is a source of special satisfaction for us all. This

is another reminder of the extent of the An Tairseach customer base and the genuineness in the relationships that organic produce can create.

This year, the Dunbur Wood Tree Sponsorship initiative has represented a similar sense of purpose. Week to week, we are contacted by people across the country and around the world, many of whom wish to sponsor a tree in honour of a loved one. Our individual birches, alders, and ash trees now have roots in Liverpool, London, Boston, Galway, Cork, Dublin, Donegal, and beyond.

Our global problems are enormous. But through a shared joy in the wonder of nature, and a shared a commitment to positive changes in agriculture, human connections are thriving at the local level. At An Tairseach, we see it firsthand.

Martin Dyer (Farm Staff Member)





Living Laudato Si

Living Laudato Si: Rediscovering My Space in the Everyday

My life has been fully committed to raising awareness of global injustices and in taking action, where I am guided, to ensure that the voices of those denied their fundamental human rights are represented. In recent years, that awareness has included climate justice and the rights of our environment. It is only lately that I have awakened to the realities of the impact of biodiversity loss and its critical role in sustaining life on this planet.

Recently, I had the privilege of experiencing first-hand the exquisite beauty and tranquillity of An Tairseach Organic Farm and Ecology Centre nestled within Wicklow Town in 'The Garden of Ireland', County Wicklow. My timing in visiting An Tairseach was informed by wanting to also experience the prophetic wisdom of the popular geologist, botanist, author, and broadcaster John Feehan. John was facilitating a 4-day workshop entitled, "Every Bush Aflame. God and the Natural World" (see also John's book with the same title). During one of the Autumn short courses at An Tairseach, John explored the essence of our understanding of creation as intimately connected with nature and biodiversity, as emphasized in Pope Francis' 2015 seminal encyclical, *Laudato Si*. Meticulous in his empirical evidence and analysis, John animated the core principles of *Laudato Si* and critically, our shared responsibilities in responding to and caring for 'our common home'.

An Tairseach, 'threshold' in Irish, is the creative initiative of the Dominican Sisters who have been established educators in Wicklow for more than 150 years. Today, their charism as educators lives on in their commitment to raising awareness of and care for 'our common home'. More than 2 decades ago, the sisters had already heard and recognised the 'cry of the earth' and responded directly to its call. Beginning in the 1990s, long before *Laudato Si*, their dream was to establish an ecological project that would incorporate sustainable organic farming and farming methods, wildlife conservation and an ecological education Centre that would be reflective of Christian spirituality. That vision became a reality as An Tairseach.

I spent two peaceful days at An Tairseach (re)discovering my connection within the intricate web of life

and my existence and role within this. Each morning, this began with a grounding through reflective prayer meditation in the magnificent cosmic garden, designed to imagine the experience of the 13.7-million-year story of our universe, and ourselves within this. I was awakened to my connection with nature and biodiversity and my responsibility to nurture this relationship. Critical in this awareness was exploring the surrounding beauty at An Tairseach, as embodied



through its organic farm, and the farm produce hosted in the Organic Farm Shop on site. The stunning location of the Ecology Centre just steps away from the Irish Sea strengthens our connection to the vastness of our oceans and the realities of its cries.

Unfortunately, I was only able to stay for one night in the Centre's welcoming accommodation and homely culinary delights. However, this short experience was just enough to recalibrate my ecological consciousness and to remind me of my responsibility as custodian of God's creation.

***Toni Pyke, Justice, Peace and Ecology Coordinator
AMRI (Association of Leaders of Missionaries &
Religious of Ireland)***





Archbishop Launches Pastoral Letter

Archbishop Dermot Farrell was in An Tairseach, Wicklow Town on Tuesday, 12th October, for the launch of his very important pastoral letter, *The Cry of the Earth – The Cry of the Poor*. The document was launched by Dr Lorna Gold in An Tairseach Ecology Centre and was



Sr Margaret Purcell addresses the Archbishop

attended by a small number of guests but was zoomed to a large audience who had signed up with the publishers, Veritas. Dr Gold, an author and climate specialist who has travelled widely in the course of her work, gave alarming examples of the suffering already being experienced by people in many parts of the world because of wildfires, which have caused the deaths of

millions of animals and the loss of plant biodiversity. Other parts have experienced droughts requiring hours and hours of labour by mostly women and girls trying to find water, while others have seen their island homes inundated and made uninhabitable.

In his reply Archbishop Farrell challenged people of faith to imitate the Good Samaritan who, not only had compassion for the victim of violence but he also took action to relieve his suffering. Archbishop Farrell's letter deserves to be widely read not only in the Archdio-

cese of Dublin to whom it is addressed but by all who care about the planet that we are handing on to our children and our children's children.

Sr Marian O Sullivan OP

The Climate Catastrophe – Creation Urgent Call for Change

I ask you to join with me in reflecting on the threat, posed by the climate crisis, to the existence of our world as we know it. More than that, I ask you to join with me in wondering what people of faith and communities of faith – the people and parishes of the Archdiocese of Dublin – might do to mitigate this disaster. I ask you to join with me in reading our world – the 'Book of Nature', as the ancients called it. Alongside the Book of Nature, I also ask you to join me in reading the Scriptures, the Word of God – the other great book of our faith – in a quest for insight, inspiration and strength so as to live in a new way on this earth, our common home. Nothing less is called for. The earth cries out to us. And God, the Lord of Life, calls us to embrace a new culture: a culture of care – for the earth and for each other, especially the poor, the invisible and those left behind.

Archbishop Dermot Farrell



Above some members of the Laudato Si Working group: L-R Jane Mellet, Fr Dermot Lane, Lorna Gold who launched the pastoral letter with the Archbishop



Left: some members of the Dominican Community with the Archbishop



Farm to Fork – Tour

Organic Food Demonstration and Dinner

Visitors gathered in the Centre and saw a short visual presentation on the origins of An Tairseach. This was followed by a guided tour of the gardens and growing area in the farm. The participants met Nancy and the other pigs, they could smell the lush growth of the vegetables and simply enjoyed being in a beautiful garden, a hidden gem in Wicklow town. For over 20 years organic farming has been practised here, quality food has been produced that is beneficial to the land and the wildlife and employed many people. A great example of sustainable living that will benefit future generations in Wicklow Town.

Following the walk about on the farm the participants were treated to a food demonstration by award winning French chef Thierry Peurois and owner of Wicklow based Le Paysan, who has vast experience as a chef in



Michelin starred restaurants. Thierry demonstrated the preparation of a three-course meal using seasonal produce from our organic farm, all with his unique finesse and style. Everyone enjoyed the meal.



In September An Tairseach hosted an in-service day for Ms Cynthia O'Reilly, Principal of St. Catherine's Primary School Dublin and her staff. The day included input on the Dominican charism, the work of An Tairseach, a very tasty lunch, a tour of the farm. They heard of the benefits of organic farming from two members of the farm staff, Donna and Thelma, as they show the teachers around the organic farm.



Below: A group of Italian agriculture students visited the Centre and Farm in November. They were very interested in all aspects of the project.





Chairperson's Report at AGM

An Tairseach AGM 21st October 2021

- some snippets from Sr Helen Mary Harmey's Report

This year from January 2021 to the present has been as Dickens wrote long ago "the best of years and the worst of years".

As we began, we were still in the grip of Covid 19 which had its effects and implications on all of us, families, staff and business. As we know no one was untouched by this virus. From the business point of view, we have suffered and gained during Covid 19. Covid affected the Farm and Centre in different ways.

A debt of gratitude is due the farm staff who kept the show on the road. Thank you, Janice, who with courage and care kept everyone safe and increased the income in the farm shop and kept the produce supplied.

It was a different story for the Centre as we had to close which meant the cancellation of courses, especially the Spring Sabbatical and the closing of accommodation and renting of rooms for other activities like the Bridge, Art class, Knit and Stitch, Drama, Wicklow Dementia group, Failte Isteach, therapy and training days that Liz Dunne sent our way.

Staff -this year we are blessed with the staff we have at present, those whom we have had over the years and our newcomers. We appreciate your commitment to the Project and your personal contribution, however small or big. All contributes to highlighting the plight of the Planet. We were sorry to lose Ms. Kate Duggan in May and missed her great management skills, hard work and belief in the work of An Tairseach. Our deepest gratitude to Ms. Helen Maher who stepped into the breach for us.

Our own Dominican Congregation were very generous to us this year providing money for maintenance and improvements for Farm and Centre. As it is they give a subvention for salaries each year.

Due to continuous hard and accurate recording of work accomplished and furnished on time, POBAL, our Government Funder has been happy to renew our Grant Agreement and accepted and approved our six monthly returns. Well done to all.

I am very happy with the work done on the finances in the Farm Office. Congratulation to Kathe who has managed to re-organize the Office and update the financial programmes.

We hope to have honey for sale in the shop soon, now that we have purchased all the necessary equipment. Thank you to Helen Maher for the lovely labels she designed for the jars and also for the new logo sign for the refrigerated van.

Work of refurnishing and planting was done in the Cosmic Garden and is on-going. Plans for a Labyrinth in the garden are in hand.

We are grateful to Sister Marian who brings in income from promoting the sponsoring of Trees and is involved in the work of handling this enterprise.

Meetings - Events

One of the big challenges to us especially in the Centre was to find creative ways to open up, to provide courses safely, use technology such as zoom and develop hybrid courses. Some of the events organised during these difficult months were:-

Easter Conversations with a number of people; a hybrid retreat – residential and virtual with Sharon Zayac OP, USA; a summer school with John Feehan entitled 'Every Bush Aflame' in collaboration with the Columban Ecological Institute, Dalgan Park; Celtic Spirituality with John Scally and Helen Maher; Climate Crisis with John Sweeney, Raoul Empey and Jane Mellet; the Universe Story with Colette Kane OP.

We were delighted to host the Autumn Sabbatical. We hosted Wicklow Naturally, October Fest where our Chef Thierry used the demonstration kitchen to cook a meal with most of the produce from the farm.

My thanks to all of you members of the Board, staff and the community here whose constant support, work, contributions and encouragement is unequalled. To conclude I quote Archbishop Farrell:

"The climate crisis is a profoundly human crisis with deep ethical, spiritual and religious dimensions. It will only be solved if we change: we need an inner change of heart... a change in lifestyle" (pg 25)

Sr Helen Mary Harmey (Chairperson)



Our Afghan Guests

On the 12 November our Autumn Sabbatical ended and our participants left. We are always sad to see them go but hopefully they go as ambassadors for our Planet. We then got ready to welcome our new guests. On Tuesday 16th November, ten young Afghan women arrived! We were expecting five! It was an emotional and moving experience for them. They were delighted to be coming to a safe place, yet it was bittersweet. They had left parents, siblings, relatives and friends behind, behind to an unknown and scary future. They also carry with them trauma, memories and experiences that are difficult for us to comprehend.

They have a wonderful back up of volunteers who arrived with extra beds, food, provisions, equipment, bicycles and clothing. Due to COVID 19 we have not met them yet as a whole group but will in time. Margaret Purcell is acting as contact person with Ms Andrea Martin who is the co-ordinator for the young women. There are ten other Afghans in Galway and they will meet up with them at some point.

We have received many offers of help for them including the Principal of DCW, Ms Lorraine Mynes who will welcome three of them into the school. As a community we decided that we would not send Christmas gifts this year but will use the money for our guests. All requests, donations and volunteering are

negotiated through Andrea. It is early days yet and a learning curve for all of us.

The community discussed the request sent out by AMRI. Ms Toni Pyke, who is the new Justice person for AMRI also got in touch with us. The community discussed it and agreed that we would like to help out in any way given the horrific situation in Afghanistan, especially for women and young girls. Ms Andrea Martin and Mr Bill Scott then came to explain how their group got involved and to give some background information to us. They belong to an International group called ASCEND whose headquarters is in the USA. It is a cross -cultural leadership development company that facilitates the building of relationships between today's leaders and tomorrow's emerging leaders. They believe in encouraging a global community and offer to young people opportunities for intellectual, emotional and social skills that transcend cultures and creates connections for life mentoring. This is mainly done through athletics and mountaineering activities.

We see it as a privilege to have these beautiful young women here and we pray that it will be a healing and peaceful place for them.

Helen Mary Harmey, OP



Michael Rodgers SPMS and Breda Ahern CP from Tearmann Spirituality Centre join members of the Dominican community for lunch during Diarmuid O Murchu's three day course in November.



Covid-19, Justice & Spirituality

The following notes are from lectures given by Fr Diarmuid O Murchu given during his recent course here. Used (gratefully) with permission.

1. Background Context for Covid-19

a) Zoonotic Spillover, possibly from Bats: When a bat is stressed -- by being hunted, or having its habitat damaged by deforestation -- its immune system is challenged and it finds it harder to cope with pathogens than it would otherwise do in a natural way. As the infection becomes more activated in the host (mammal or animal), it gets more readily transmitted to other creatures, including humans.

b) Our Failure to Acknowledge and Respect Nature's Interdependence

It seems that the covid-19 virus originated in the so-called wet-markets of Wuhan, China where wild animals were held in captivity, alienated from their natural habitats, and often held in appalling conditions, extremely stressful for the animals and the birds.

Additionally, the mass transportation of such animals increases the risk of spreading such viruses.

c) Our Ignorance of Ecological Equilibrium: the problem, it would seem, is not the bats (or other animals and birds) but money-driven human exploitation, and an appalling ignorance of the ecological equilibrium upon which all life flourishes. Maybe, the most cost-effective way to protect humans is not by new vaccines but by humans themselves learning to protect all life-forms within their authentic ecological niches.

2. Covid 19 - An Ecological Call to Conversion?

In a matter of a few weeks, in the city of Wuhan, the smog lifted and people could see the blue sky again; birds returned to favoured habitats, and fishes to old streams. Now that humans had to recede from their anthropocentric driven-ness, earth could once more reclaim its innate organicity! Have we become a maverick species holding to ransom the womb of our becoming and the source of our daily sustenance?

3. The Covid 19 RESET according to the World Economic Forum (June 2020)

(<https://www.weforum.org/focus/the-great-reset>)

a) Change our mind-set – build creative, proactive consciousness.

b) Create new metrics – GDP measures human-driven wealth, lacking eco-systemic health.

(Success – Desire – Sustainability – Investment – Universal Basic Wage).

c) Design new incentives – Think globally, act locally. Reward creativity.

(Virtual communication – New work ethic – Interdependence).

d) Build genuine connection – bioregionalism – networking – empowering information.

4. Health Immunity:

Essentially, we build up our immunity-resistance by wholesome diet, daily exposure to nature's nurturance, healthy exercise, fulfilling relationships, empowering work, good stress management, avoidance of toxins (e.g., smoking). Additionally, a medical practitioner who adopts a holistic approach can be an invaluable resource. (Without a healthy planet and healthy ecosystems, we will not have healthy Humans)

5. "We are now at a crossroads. One path will take us to a better world: more equitable and more respectful of Mother Nature. The other will take us to a world that resembles the one we have just left behind – but worse and constantly dogged by nasty surprises. We must therefore get it right. The looming challenges could be more consequential than we have now chosen to imagine, but our capacity to reset could also be greater than we had previously dared to hope." (Klaus Schwab & T. Malleret, Covid-19: The Great Reset, 2020, 250)

6. Challenges for Eco-justice – Elements for a more Empowering Spirituality:

a) Living convivially with all other creatures

b) Renewed calls for Economic Justice

c) Justice and Health Immunity

d) Towards a New Work Ethic

e) Economic and social responsibilities for sustainable living

f) Reclaiming a culture of people's empowerment.

7. Rethinking the meaning of Conversion/Repentance

- From individual to community

- From the human to creation

- From the God above to the Spirit here

- From repentance to reparation

- From abandonment to contemplation

- From sectarian to integrated consciousness



Covid-19, Justice & Spirituality

Some salient quotes:



a) “Science is informing us that as we invade forest ecosystems, destroy the homes of species and manipulate plants and animals for profits, we create conditions for new diseases. Over the past 50 years, 300 new pathogens have emerged. It is well documented that around 70% of the human pathogens, including HIV, Ebola,

influenza, MERS and SARS, emerge when forest ecosystems are invaded, and viruses jump from animals to humans. When animals are cramped in factory farms for profit maximisation, new diseases like swine flu and bird flu spread.”

Vandana Shiva

b) “If humanity is to endure, the coming months must hold healing, not just of populations across the globe from the coronavirus, but of the Earth herself. As is true of many zoonoses (diseases that jumped from animals), this virus emerged from pressure humans put on a global ecosystem. A lack of healthy, natural habitat weakens the immune systems of animals, and the resulting sicknesses pass rapidly through them. Birds, prairie dogs, pigs, bats. With each infection, a chance for a virus to mutate into one that can sicken humans, and sometimes, global livelihoods.

As such, a vaccine alone, no matter how effective, will not tip the balance toward health because COVID-19 is not a disease; it is a symptom of an exhausted planet. The renewal of a healthy relationship to our one shared mother, planet Earth, is the cure.”

James Maskalyk & Dave Courchene,
The Winnipeg, Globe & Mail, Dec., 18, 2020

Being an adult Christian in God's Household

1. Jesus said to them, “Which of you, if you go to a friend at midnight, and tell him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, for a friend of mine has come to me

from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him,’ and the householder within will answer and say, ‘Don’t bother me. The door is now shut, and all my children are sleeping. I can’t get up and give it to you’? I tell you, although he will not rise and give him bread because he is his friend, yet because of the friend’s shameless audacity, he will get up and give food for the friend’s journey. (Lk.11:5-8).

2. The Story - The Allegory - The Parable (focussing on the scope of Jewish Hospitality)

(In the Parable there is a hidden, subverted meaning that the Adult hearer must discover for oneself).

3. Background to the Parable:

- a) I belong, therefore I am
- b) My identity is interwoven with the “oikos”
- c) Every household belongs to the village
- d) In each village, the bioregion is encapsulated
- e) The bioregion is sustained by Planet Earth
- f) Earth is sustained by the Universe.

(A Bioregion is an area constituting a natural ecological community with characteristic flora, fauna, and environmental conditions and bounded by natural rather than artificial borders).

4. Significance of Gospel Household (Oikos):

From Oikos we derive Ecology, Economics, Ecumenism. “The basic definition of Economics is the ordering of (scarce) resources among (competing) persons. In the first century Mediterranean world of Jesus, the house was not so much the building itself, but the ordering of relationships taking place within it among persons and their resources.”

Michael Crosby

5. Laudato Si

“It cannot be emphasized enough how everything is interconnected. . . . It follows that the fragmentation of knowledge and the isolation of bits of information can actually become a form of ignorance, unless they are integrated into a broader vision of reality.” (no.138).

“Nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live. We are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it.” (no.139).

6. Incarnation Revisited: Thus, Christianity's manner of making contact with the most basic physical, biological processes, is through an inclusive radical interpretation of its doctrine of the Incarnation, not now merely in one human being, Jesus of Nazareth, but in the world as God's body. . . . God is always incarnate, always bound to the world as its lover, as close to it, as we are to our own bodies, and concerned before all else to see that the body, God's world, flourishes.

Sallie McFague, 2013

7. Ecological Christianity in the 21st Century. "A flourishing humanity on a thriving planet, rich in species in an evolving universe, all together filled with the glory of God: such is the vision that must guide us at this critical time of Earth's distress, to practical and critical effect. Ignoring this view keeps people of faith and their churches locked into irrelevance while a terrible drama of life and death is being played out in the real world. By contrast, living the ecological vocation in the power of the Spirit sets us off on a great adventure of mind and heart, expanding the repertoire of our love"

Elizabeth Johnson, Ask the Beasts, 2014, 286



The Autumn Sabbatical 2021 group above.

Sr Cecilia displays one of her beautiful creative productions.

On the right, Sr. Josephine gives thanks in true African fashion



An Tairseach

Events 2022

Monday 6th March to Friday 13th May

10 Week Sabbatical:

Exploring Spirituality in the Context of an Evolving Universe,
an Endangered Earth, in the Christian Tradition

Monday 6th June to Saturday 11th June

Cosmic Celtic Camino

The Story of the Universe through the Prism of Celtic Spirituality
Presented by John Scally and Colette Kane OP

Monday 20th June to Saturday 25th June

Ecological Summer School

God's Old Diaries - A Geological Exploration
Presented by John Feehan

Monday 4th July to Friday 8th July

Department of Education CPD Teacher's Course
Knowing our Place: From Stardust to Sand

Monday 15th August to Saturday 20th August

In Communion with the Sacred Universe

Presented by Arlene Flaherty OP

"The entire material universe speaks of God's love, his boundless affection for us.
Soil, water, mountains; everything is, as it were a caress of God." - Laudato Si 84

Monday 4th September to Friday 11th November

10 Week Sabbatical:

Exploring Spirituality in the Context of an Evolving Universe,
an Endangered Earth, in the Christian Tradition

