

WFWP Ireland, SFP Interfaith Gathering at Synagogue in Dublin

Doris McCann
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WFWP Ireland supported the Sisters of Faith for Peace (SFP) visiting the Jewish Orthodox Congregation in Dublin on 10 June 2015. It was an invaluable and engaging Women's Interfaith Gathering, bringing together about 25 women of the Muslim, Christian as well as Orthodox and Progressive Jewish faiths in a social interfaith exchange.

Estelle Menton, former President of the Jewish Representative Council of Ireland, and honorary member of the SPF, welcomed us very warmly on behalf of the Hebrew Community. She read out a welcome message from Maurice Cohen, Chairman of the Jewish Representative Council of Ireland. Doris McCann, WFWP Ireland President, then introduced the Sisters of Faith for Peace Initiative and highlighted the need for such interfaith dialogue in today's adverse times that are marked by mounting fear, hatred and religious genocide.

We then went around and introduced ourselves. Between the ladies of the different communities, there was such a spirit of excitement and enthusiasm about this opportunity to get to know like-minded women and build bridges for the sake of peace.

After this, Cantor Alwyn Shulman gave us a tour of the Synagogue which we were all very intrigued by and learned so much. Many of the ladies were amazed learning about Jewish traditions and practices and realised how many similarities there are between the three Abrahamic faiths. We couldn't help stop feeling how we are so similar after all!

(We were not able to take pictures inside the Synagogue though.)

Following this, Nora Tillman, Community Officer of the Office of the Chief Rabbi of Ireland, then took us to the bathhouse, called the 'Mikveh' and explained about the purification and immersion rituals in orthodox Judaism. She also shared her understanding very enthusiastically and responded to our many questions.

Finally, SFP officially handed over the 'Unity Tree' to the Hebrew Community. This tree is a tree with an intertwined trunk, representing the unification of our faiths. We had symbolically planted it back in March 2015 on the occasion of the official launch event of the SFP which was hosted by the Islamic Cultural Centre of Ireland. Since then, the tree had remained in the Islamic Centre. Having now been officially handed over to the Hebrew Community, it will be taken care of by our Jewish sisters, for the time being.

The evening flew by and was so enjoyable that we forgot about time.

We finally parted in the spirit of gratitude and new-found friendship. As one lady said 'We arrived as strangers and left as friends.' And we are looking forward to seeing our friends again!

Doris McCann
President, WFWP Ireland