

LINKS Ladies from Tralee parish have enjoyed yet another busy season of meetings and activities. This year's highlight was when we invited a group of ladies from the local Muslim community to join us for an informal discussion on faith and culture. What transpired was a truly memorable occasion where both groups shared ideas, asked questions and generally learned about each other's beliefs and lifestyles. Eight ladies joined us, representing five countries so there was much to discuss. During the course of the meeting, a break was taken to facilitate prayer time for some of the Muslim ladies. This in itself was a learning experience for our members. If asked to describe the atmosphere in the room, one would have to say it was one of joy and friendship.

From our discussions, we learned that our faiths have much more in common than we had previously thought. The experience also helped to bring us to a new awareness of our own spirituality, this being all the more relevant as the meeting was held during Lent.

Following on from that occasion, our Muslim friends then invited us to join them for their Iftar Feast, when they break their sun-up to sun-down fast during Ramadan. This proved to be a totally different but equally enjoyable experience. On arrival, we received a warm welcome and were shown into a large room to join the children and ladies, some of whom, of course, we now knew. The men congregated in a separate room. Having removed our shoes we settled ourselves comfortably on the floor as we chatted happily with our new friends and met some of their families. Calling it a feast was not an exaggeration! Bowls of wonderful homemade food came from all directions and we gladly tucked in. There was much to sample and plenty to share as bowls and plates were passed in all directions. It was interesting to see the manner in which prayer, while being a hugely important part of the evening, just seemed to happen naturally. Conversation continued to flow, while a number of the ladies simply gathered at one side of the room and gracefully said their prayers as they stood and bowed as they faced towards Mecca.

While for us this was a very enjoyable occasion, one couldn't help feeling that for these ladies who have come to make their homes and raise their families here in Tralee, even small gestures of friendship must hold such significance.

We look forward to many more meetings with our new friends in the future as we continue to learn from each other in a spirit of good humour and mutual respect.

Olive Flynn
LINKS