

Fatima House:

An Advent Update



Christmas Message: Waiting in Hope

'He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth..'

Isaiah 10,4

As we come to the end of 2019 I feel grateful for the generosity and good will of so many people who –in diverse ways - contribute to offer hospitality and welcome to destitute asylum seekers here at Fatima House. Over the past there and a half years 30 women have benefited from staying here while they get ready for the next stage in their journeys of integration in the UK. Offering hospitality and welcome is a powerful countercultural prophetic gesture in the midst of the hostility and the political and social exclusion that many migrants experience in this country today.

This year we have been able to offer a safe place to ten women asylum seekers. Each one of them has been provided with her own bedroom and access the good common facilities that the house offers. They have also had access to counselling sessions delivered by an experienced professional and wellbeing sessions delivered by a volunteer nurse. Our valued volunteers have provided them with daily support and accompaniment as well as with practical help in those uncountable challenges faced by them routinely.

The Society of Saint Vincent the Paul has again fully funded the 'destitution fund' which provided women in the house with the weekly £20 to cover for their food and transport needs. All the resident have expressed enormous gratitude to the SVP for this allowance which has help them recover their independence and to make progress in their asylum claims. Over the past three year SVP has contributed £26,840 towards this fund.

Earlier in the year we learned that 2 of our former residents were granted refugee status, and over the past year 4 residents have moved on to asylum support. All of this represents a big achievement for the project, but above all at the top of our list of successes we count the blessing of providing them with a safe place and the journeying with these resilient destitute women who little by little overcome the challenges of the asylum process.

In the quote above the prophet Isaiah expresses the longing of God's people for a 'righteous ruler who can give decisions for the poor of the earth'. Jesus's words and deeds are guided for that same longing, the Gospel of Luke for instance tells us that the first witnesses of Jesus' birth are shepherds, a group considered unclean and outside the law. Jesus' followers therefore should make their home among those who are rejected, despised and made destitute.

Pope Francis in his 2019 message for World Day of Migrant presented his diagnosis of the problems faced by migrants in the so-called first world. He says 'the most economically advanced societies are witnessing a growing trend towards extreme individualism which, combined with a utilitarian mentality and reinforced by the media, is producing a "globalization of indifference". In this scenario, migrants, refugees, displaced persons and victims of trafficking have become emblems of exclusion'. May the work of Fatima House and other organisations supporting destitute people in the UK today constitute a prophetic antidote against social indifference and individualism.

Happy Christmas to all our current and past residents, the Columban Missionaries, Father Hudson's Care, the Archdiocese of Birmingham, The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, the communities of St Anne's and English Martyrs and to each one of our numerous supporters. May 2020 be the year in which destitution among asylum seekers ends!

Mauricio Silva

Co-ordinator- Fatima House

Volunteer Reflections

Fatima House relies on the time spent by volunteers who offer friendship and support to the women who live here as well as practical support which help the daily running of the house. As we reach the end of the year, two volunteers at Fatima House, both Columban Lay Missionaries, share reflections of their experiences here.

Shared Meals

By Jonah Jane Beddall

Ever since I volunteered at Fatima House, I always look forward to celebrations. You know why? Simply because I love to be in the company of the ladies and volunteers in an atmosphere of joy and happiness. There is something special about gatherings and sharing times together especially during Christmas. Through all the celebrations we have in the past, may it be Eid, Open House events,

Christmas, I learned so much from the ladies. They are so generous and willing to share their talents through cooking their cultural dishes. Not only will I learn how to cook their special dishes but also an opportunity for me to hear their stories. I know that these ladies are going through a lot in their lives but I always find them so amazing in holding on to their faith that God will help them every step of the way.

I believe that even in the midst of challenges and trials that they face, I find them very courageous, faithful and strong. One day, when I was checking their rooms making sure all is OK and that they are comfortable in their own space, what struck me the most is the little "Altar" beside their beds. It is evident that they have a personal relationship with God. I know that they have the trust in the Lord. It is clear that the God they know will be there for them. Times can be rough but these ladies always come forward with their strength and resilience whatever comes their way.

Next week, we will soon celebrate the birth of Jesus here at Fatima house. It will surely be a happy day of another shared meal. We will not be only full of delicious foods, but full in the knowledge that we have each other to share our lives, giving each other encouragement in times of unpleasant roads and most of all being together in thanksgiving, being grateful still that we are alive and well and that is the HOPE we always bring with us.



A farewell dinner for long-standing Columban volunteer, Tom O'Reilly

At The Door

By Gertrudes Samson

Fatima house rely on donations; throughout the day, someone would ring the door and bring something to donate out of their generosity. Sometimes they are individuals donating whatever little things that they could give out of their limited resources. Sometimes they are representative of a certain group or organization donating what their members pitch in together and contribute to come up with bountiful hampers or several bags of donations. Some of them are people that I knew before, some are total strangers and some even want to keep their names anonymous. Many times I never see them again, so sometimes I wonder if some of those people are angels, because even in the Bible there were stories wherein God sends his angels to help for various reasons. Maybe that is why it is also said in the Bible, we shall welcome strangers for you never know if you have entertained one. All in all, God knows who they are and I am thankful to God for each and every one of them. As a volunteer they give a warm smile in my heart each time I meet them at the door. I am sure God will return to them the blessings they share by many thousand folds.

Let us pray that the Christmas period offers a time of joy and celebration to all residents, volunteers and supporters of Fatima House.

We pray also that the New Year provides hope for the residents as they face the varying challenges and trials to come; may Lord grant them peace and solace.

Amen



*Fatima House
volunteers*



*Archbishop Longley
paying a visit to Fatima
House in September*