

GREETINGS TO EACH AND EVERY ONE OF YOU OUR FRIENDS AND FAMILIES,

Its spring and all is well in our world. We see signs of new life everywhere and it is little wonder that we declare that the next stage of our journey as a community is **'Growing Together'**.

This continues to be our time of plenty and we are grateful. We have many new friends, enough money, new support workers and assistants, a new Board Member, new projects, new possibilities, new hope and new life.

In our conversations in the past few months we have been marvelling at the way our community has been growing organically over the past 7 plus years. We have pondered how much death and breaking open of our hearts we have gone through to create such abundant new life.

In the beginning we had a plan and enough will and commitment to try to force grow the community that we wanted. Despite our very best efforts it didn't work that way. For a number of years we wrestled with the failure, the guilt, the frustration, the shame and the fallibility in it all. Now that we have lived through a few more seasons we are learning that our call is to be organic gardeners – preparing the earth, sowing seeds of love and waiting and watching, tending and nurturing as the little shoots of community begin to emerge. We love what we are finding.

We have watched our garden through the different seasons to see where sun and the shade are. We have learned about the plants that manage to survive the wind and the plants that need warm moist soft and tender care every day. In the waiting and the watching the garden itself has been breaking us open too and teaching us how to be good gardeners. We are learning to grow food, friendship, community and LOVE in an organic way in our world. We have much more to learn and we have all of our lives to learn it so there's no need to hurry.

A Good Friday Tale: For our Helen, last Friday was a hard day. She arrived home from work het up. A cup of tea and a chat did little to calm her and the best she could do was roam from room to room looking for a place or a person to rest in. Faythe was in the office preparing the envelopes for this letter when Helen blustered in un-announced. **'I am so busy Helen I could really do with some help – will you give me a hand?** That was all it took to transform the day. Helen was so overjoyed to be needed that she spent 30 contented minutes sticking labels on envelopes with Faythe.

On Monday I was less than pleased to find a bunch of envelopes on my desk labelled every which way but straight. My immediate reaction was – It's all very fine to let Helen help out but really - **WHAT WILL PEOPLE THINK OF US?**

That's me - I often confuse approval for love. Faythe and Helen, on the other hand, already seem to know that love is messy and wild and wonderful. It shows up in the most unexpected places like wild flowers in a meadow on a sunny summer's day. Love will not be tamed and will never look ordinary. Its seeds are tiny and refuse to grow in straight rows. Even from the tiniest seed Love grows tall and spreads wide. I have a lot to learn about growing love but Thank God I have the very best teachers. Thank you Faythe and Helen for this week's lesson.

I hope that those of you who get the envelopes welcome them in the spirit in which they leave here today and I hope that you have a very happy Easter. Until the next time.

Love, Maria

Growing Friendships: This **Good Friday** we will be sowing new seeds of friendship from South to North Belfast as we walk from our house to the 174 Trust in Duncairn Ave. off the Antrim Road. We hope to leave the Ember about 10 a.m. and stop at City Hall for a picnic lunch. Some of the folks from the Trust will come down a ways to meet us and then we will walk together to Duncairn Ave. where we will all have a rest and a wee cup of tea. We are not sure how we will get home but it won't be on foot! ***We would love it if you were free to walk with us for a little part of the way. If you can, just give us a ring in the office at 028 90 221337 and we will tell you the route we will be taking.***

Other Events for your Diary:

Holy Thursday – Our annual celebration of community in the Giant's Causeway. Leaving the Ember at 10 am and returning at 6 pm, If you want to join us please let us know in advance and we will include you in our packed festive lunch.

L'Arche Accompaniment Visit - Anne O Sullivan, (L'Arche Ireland) Donie Hurley, Katie Pek (L'Arche Cork) and John Redmond from L'Arche Edinburgh will be joining us for our annual accompaniment visit from April 20th to April 22nd On the evening of Monday 20th we will gather with them in 'The Ember' at 6 pm for a bite, a sup and a bit of fun! All are welcome – It's a pot luck so whatever you bring will be added to the feast.

Thanks: Our thanks to everyone who helped to make 'Music in March' such a wonderful event.

Welcome: To all of our new volunteers, assistants, support workers and friends. It is great to have you aboard. There is so much to do that we are delighted to have so many more hands aboard our little vessel.

A Plan: We recently received £5,000 from Seedbed Funding towards Our Field Project with only one stipulation – that we use it for planting and propagating the seeds of community. We will be hosting a '**Growing Together Harvest Festival**' in Corrymeela in the Autumn to celebrate our friendships, new and old, and to harvest new seeds for the next season of our lives here in Belfast. It will be a soft space and a slow pace as always. There will be music, art, drama, gardening, and lots and lots of just 'Being Together' and fun. All ideas welcome at this stage and we will keep you posted as the arrangements get firmed up.

New Connection Details:

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