

## **Our Ember Experience.**

“As Ember leaders, we are called to take the actions necessary so that our schools can become communities where each person feels welcome, cared for and fulfilled.”

A motto first introduced to me on the 6<sup>th</sup> of September 2014, when my classmates and I officially began our journey as Embers in Ovoca Manor. Established only two years ago by the Archdiocese of Dublin Education Secretariat and Scripture Union, the Ember team has had abounding success. In May of 2013, fifty students from five schools in the greater Dublin area gathered together to pilot this faith leadership programme. One year on, more than 80 students from 7 schools came together to continue this tradition and even more have undertaken the role for 2015

While in Ovoca, under the appropriate name of the “Sister Smurfs”, the Mount Sackville girls met with students in other schools, who had accepted their position as Ember leaders, and formed long-lasting friendships. We learned a great number of skills, including: working as part of a team, mentoring younger students, how to support those in difficulty and planning fun and effective activities for our school community. A perfect balance was struck during our 3 days training, between early mornings and rock climbing, co-operation exercises and creating a short play and mastering the best methods of decision making and relaxing at the end of the day with meditation or a liturgy.

At the end of our three days’ induction, we truly understood what it meant to be an Ember leader. We were mentors, in both our faith and school communities, we were role models for younger students, we were responsible for maintaining a good spirit and atmosphere in our schools, but mostly we were “ordinary people, doing extraordinary things.” And so the school year began, and, though still slightly hesitant, we were ready to finally put our newly acquired skills to work.

The term commenced with the team’s first endeavour- Welcoming the new first years. We were assigned to show them around, make them feel comfortable in their new environment and with their peers and give them a lasting first impression of the school. We ran ice-breakers, a fun quiz, a question and answer session with Ms. Flanagan, our guidance counsellor, and a guided tour of the school.

The girls really enjoyed the day and were significantly less anxious about this next step in their education.

At the end of our Christmas term, the team set our minds to raising money for those less fortunate. We organised a Christmas jumper day in aid of the Cluny Missions in Sierra Leone. The event was a great success with substantial funds raised for the sisters and a greater awareness created for the work of the missionaries in countries experiencing unconceivable conditions.

Coming into the start of the New Year, we decided to plan our activities closer to home. Many of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny are resident in the convent adjoining our school and we were determined to concentrate on something particularly for them. And so we organised morning coffee with the Sisters. Cakes, buns, brownies and muffins were baked, bread was cut and tea and coffee was served. The girls sat down and chatted to the sisters about school, friends, the Ember team, working with the poorest people in society, rebuilding communities and serving God. It was an amazing experience, one which we hope to repeat many times over the next year. Though we knew we had to make it back for double English, we were sorry to leave the fun and comfort of the convent.

During the mock examinations, we created a personalised prayer space in the school, in which the third and sixth year students could take time to relax from exam stress and other students could wish them luck. This was an idea given to us from a reunion with the other Ember teams. We were shown different ways in which people could pray and cool off and used a combination of them and our own ideas to recreate our own prayer space.

The final task we tackled as a team was the establishment of a link with Mount Sackville Primary School. We initiated a four week "Faith Friends" programme with the sixth class students in the primary school prior to their Confirmation mass. Each week we invited the pupils over to discuss their faith and what Confirmation was, make pieces of art to be displayed during the ceremony and play games.

Over the past two years, the Ember team has proved to be a great addition to our school community and will only continue to prosper and from an ember we will "Fan into Flame, the gift of God that is within you."

By Claire Diffley