

Bunclody Students Show their Caring Side

Monday 16th November saw the culmination of the Team Hope Christmas Shoebox Appeal at FCJ Secondary School Bunclody when 1349 Christmas shoeboxes were delivered to the Wexford depot.

There is a long tradition of involvement in the Christmas shoebox appeal at FCJ Secondary School Bunclody. Each year the Transition year students take on the role of co-ordinating the project under the guidance of Sr. Madeleine Hayes (FCJ) and Ms. Una Osborne (T.Y. co-ordinator). In the current year over fifty students participated in this project.

Next month millions of children over the world are preparing for Christmas and the coming of Santa Claus. Families gather to celebrate the greatest gift of all, the gift of a baby born in a stable. It is a time of being together and for the children of great excitement, giving and getting love and presents from family and friends. But for many children across Europe Christmas Day is like any other day in the year. Nothing special just a struggle to get through the day, with temperatures as low as -20 degrees Celsius. There are no warm fires, no trees, no Christmas pudding, no Christmas presents just struggling to get through. It is a bleak, cold day, with little hope for the future.

One Irish charity called Team Hope has made a practical response to the plight of needy children. Inspired by the Gospel stories of helping others, Team Hope is a Christian relief and development organisation that specialises in meeting the needs of victims of war, poverty, natural disaster and disease while sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ. It provides critically needed aid such as food, water, clothing, shelter and medical care, all in Christ's name. It has surpassed all expectations in distributing over three million gift-filled boxes throughout Europe, the Middle East, Africa, South America and Asia. The charity has been supported by top Irish sporting personalities like Katie Taylor and Paul O'Connell.

The idea began in England, years ago, at the height of the crisis in the Romanian orphanages. A family were watching a news report of the absolutely horrific conditions these children were living and asked themselves the question: what can we do? They filled a shoebox with little gifts and sent it to a child in Romania. This year about two million shoeboxes filled with Christmas presents will go from Ireland and Britain mainly to the former Eastern Europe region.

As fifteen/ sixteen year olds the majority of our Transition Year group grew up with the Christmas shoe box appeal. From a very young age we filled shoeboxes. Each year Transition year students from the FCJ had visited our schools to tell us about the project, provided us with leaflets and then returned a few weeks later to take away our collection of shoe boxes as they began their journey from our school to a child in some far flung part of the world. Now it was our turn.

It was only October and we were asking students to think about Christmas presents already. But this would be no ordinary present. It wouldn't be stacked under a tree with countless other gifts. This gift would travel thousands of miles and bring a smile to the face of a child who might not receive any other present this year, children who are the victims of war, disease and poverty. We were asking students to get a shoebox, decorate it and fill it with gifts for less fortunate children.

In early October lists were compiled of all of the primary schools that our TY students had attended. Team hope leaflets and posters were ordered. We then set about contacting these schools and inviting them to participate in the Christmas Shoebox Appeal with FCJ.

Students from FCJ co-ordinate the delivery of leaflets to these schools and the collection of completed shoeboxes. They also ensure delivery of the boxes to a central depot in Wexford from which they will be packed on to a lorry destined for Eastern Europe. Students in our own school are also invited to donate a shoe box/gift.

Following the Halloween break boxes began to arrive. A team of ten students checked, counted and secured boxes with elastic bands.

The beauty of this project lies in its simplicity – a gift from one child to another.

This project would not be possible without the help and support of so many, and to that end we thank school management and staff of FCJ Bunclody, school management and staff of participating schools, parents who have provided transport, FCJ students, Sr. Madeleine Hayes FCJ, David Raleigh, Liam Martin, Liam Kavanagh, Ivan Byrne (transport of boxes to Wexford depot) and Lorna Burt (Co-ordinator – Wexford depot). But above all we thank all those who so generously donated Christmas shoebox gifts. Your gift will make a difference.