

Dublin Visit 2014: Sr. Marcia Sichel

Ruhama: Sisters Anti-Trafficking Ministry

Ruhama was established 25 years ago as a center that works with women affected by prostitution and sex trafficking. There are 13 on staff, including 3 sisters and 40 volunteers, including 10 sisters. We met together and discussed the history of trafficking and prostitution in this area. Sr. Gerardine, a Good Shepherd sister, explained to me that after 2000, and the brief era of the “Celtic Tiger,” when the economy boomed in Ireland, the European borders opened up. Many immigrants came to Ireland seeking work and a better life. Because there were no laws in Ireland related to trafficking, the exploitation of women greatly increased.

Ruhama serves women who are seeking asylum or are referred to the center. Their mission spreads through word of mouth on the streets, from ER staff in hospitals, and even the local police, the *Gardai*, with whom the staff has a good relationship. At night, staff travels around the Dublin area in a van, offering food and letting women know of the services they provide. The center offers the women programs that they hope will rehabilitate the women and offer them the opportunity for better lives. They offer programs that prepare them for independent living, one-on-one support, advocacy and counseling. In addition, they help women find housing, health care and legal services. Ruhama’s resettlement program, for which they are seeking a grant from the FFS, teaches them budgeting and financial planning, liaison and advocacy with landlords, support with social welfare forms and practical support in setting up a home. Ruhama provides the first month’s rent for women who are ready to live on their own. This gives them a better chance of finding a job and of being able to live with greater human dignity. The staff continues to be active in promoting legislative change in Ireland.