

## **WELCOME BY THE SECRETARY OF THE EMBASSY OF IRELAND TO SWITZERLAND**

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**Embassy of Ireland to Switzerland**

Bhí áthas mór orm a bheith ann i Lausanne, in éineacht libhse, chun an Siompóisiam faoin Staidéir na hÉireann a oscailt.

It was a great honour for me to participate in the discussions of the Irish Studies Symposium, held in the University of Lausanne, an event where Irish culture was on display and the strong links of friendship between the people of Ireland and Switzerland were celebrated.

This has been an important time in the Irish-Swiss cultural calendar. In 2012 we celebrated the journeys made around 1,400 years ago by a number of learned Irish monks who were passing through Central Europe and brought their teachings, art and customs with them, from the shores of the Atlantic. The great Irish Saint Columbanus passed through these lands and his colleague Gallus, famously stopped in the area where a city and canton bearing his name were founded. He and other lesser known disciples of this early Irish tradition spread their influence around this whole region, returning the favour of those Celts that had earlier brought their culture and language from the area around Lausanne, to the islands on the fringe of Europe, centuries beforehand.

All those who attended this symposium were sure to have found a fulfilling programme, with themes from this ancient past and today's interconnected world all features of the discussions.

I would like to thank all of those who have assisted at putting this exciting symposium together, including those who travelled from other parts of Switzerland and directly from Ireland to share their knowledge of Ireland's rich culture with us all. I would especially like to thank Patricia Ronan for her enthusiastic approach to organising the symposium, as well as the Department of English and the Dean of the *Faculté des lettres* for offering the beautiful space at the University as a space to share and enjoy each other's cultures. The University of Lausanne continues to be a welcome friend of Ireland and has consistently shown its support of the teaching of Irish language and culture, as well as the deepening of understanding between our two countries. Finally I would like to thank the students and friends of Ireland in Lausanne and the rest of Switzerland for taking such an interest in Irish and Celtic traditions and culture.

I hope the result of the symposium will be that your interest has been sparked and that you get to travel to Ireland soon to discover its wild and energetic culture for yourselves, especially in this, the year of the Gathering!

Go raibh míle maith agaibh et merci beaucoup.