

# Pastoral Renewal and Adult Faith Development

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## Communion and Co-Responsibility in the Church – Nourishing the seeds of Renewal at the National Pastoral Conference

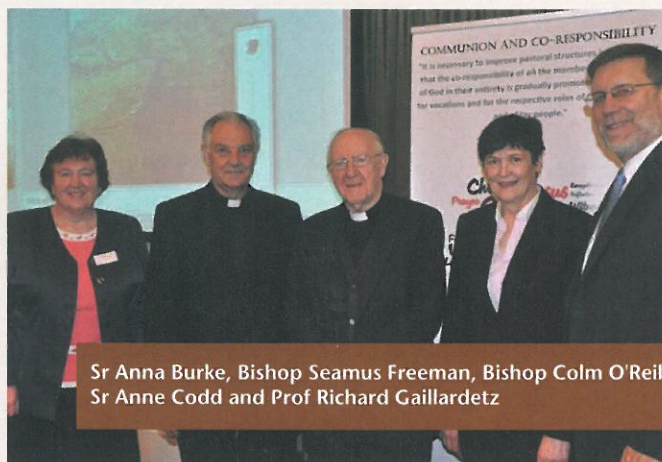
Where do we begin? At the time of writing our National Pastoral Conference, 'Communion and Co-Responsibility in the Church,' has just ended. Hosted by the Council for Pastoral Renewal and Adult Faith Development in partnership with the Council for Justice and Peace, this three-day gathering had over 230 participants from all across the country.

Following almost two years of planning, the conference became a space of meeting, prayer, dialogue, listening and learning. Those that gathered were from parish teams and PPCs, diocesan teams and faith development ministries. There were youth and young adult ministers, ACCORD staff and volunteers, members from the Lay Pastoral Workers' Network together with members of ecclesial movements and associations of lay faithful. The institutes of theological and pastoral education and training were represented along with CORI and IMU. There were liturgical ministers, Justice and Peace ministers, theologians, members of the *Share the Good News* Committee, teachers in the faith, and concerned Catholics. Participants included over 125 lay faithful, 50 priests, 40 religious and 8 bishops. As one participant commented, 'It was very inspiring to see such a representative group of the Church in the same room and in dialogue together on the very important topic of shared communion and co-responsibility.'

The theme for the conference emerged over the last two years, beginning with reflections on Pope Benedict XVI's *Pastoral Letter to the Catholics of Ireland* which led to an invitation to further dialogue, our national convention with diocesan faith development personnel, other national forums and the Bishops' interest in deepening the ecclesiological basis of renewal and reform in keeping with the vision of Vatican II, all alongside the experience of the Eucharistic Congress.

One of the primary aims of this conference was to support the work of renewal and reform in the Church in Ireland at this time. In particular, the conference sought to help participants work together in their own situations and contexts as lay, ordained and religious, towards becoming a Church of communion and co-responsibility. It was designed in such a way as to be of benefit to people who are actively involved in this renewal and reform, as well as to all who are seeking ways to promote development. Our gathering marked the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council as well as the forthcoming launch in Rome on 11 October by the Holy Father of the universal 'Year of Faith'.

We were welcomed to the Diocese of Ardagh and Clonmacnoise by Bishop Colm O'Reilly and Sr Anna Burke. Our keynote speaker was Dr Richard Gaillardetz from Boston College who offered theological underpinnings for the work of renewal and reform. His presentations were integrated into processes of reflection and dialogue throughout the three days and were based on Vatican II as a conciliar way of being Church, Communion and Co-responsibility in the Church after



Sr Anna Burke, Bishop Seamus Freeman, Bishop Colm O'Reilly, Sr Anne Codd and Prof Richard Gaillardetz

Vatican II, Baptism, Discipleship and Mission and Structured Ministry in Service of Mission. The event was described by one participant as 'enlightening, enlivening, energising, educating and encouraging' and, by another, that it had been a 'terrific opportunity to engage meaningfully with each other anew, whatever our respective roles'. Others felt that it had been 'wonderful to bring the Vatican II documents to life'.

Sr Colette Stevenson, well-known facilitator, ensured that the event proceeded through reflection on experience in light of Richard's presentations, through themed break-out groups, and through a marathon three-hour structured dialogue between the lay faithful, religious, clergy and bishops. As another participant commented, 'the event had great energy and was marked by a dialogue the likes of which I have not seen in a Church context in a long time'. The process of the first two days culminated in the celebration of the Eucharist at St Mary's Church in Athlone, where Bishop Colm O'Reilly presided.

Evening workshops were offered by individual participants and, while optional, were very well attended on both the Thursday and Friday evening. Themes for the workshops included Youth and Young Adult Ministry, Introduction to *Share the Good News*, Eucharist Marriage and Family, *Share the Good News* coming to life in practice, Communion and Co-Responsibility in Parish, Justice and Peace 'essential to Communion and Co-responsibility' and the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

Pope Benedict XVI refers repeatedly to the 'co-responsibility of all the members of the People of God in their entirety' and considers the recognition and promotion of this co-responsibility as an essential corollary to 'renewed efforts to understand the true nature of the Church, this People of God in the Body of Christ'.

A few more comments from participants can help us share with you some of the experience, the energy and the hope of being together as Church in a renewed way in Athlone last week: 'All ways of seeing were in the room and in open conversation.' 'I have no doubt it is just the seeds of something greater to come.'