

Pastoral Renewal and Adult Faith Development

Anne Codd PBVM and Julieann Moran are the Executive Staff of the Commission for Pastoral Renewal and Adult Faith Development, Columba Centre, Maynooth
Email pastoralrenewal@iecon.ie

A time to be still, a time to talk...

Regular readers will know that significant time and energy was invested in designing the pastoral conference which took place at Marino Conference Centre in September under the auspices of the Council for Pastoral Renewal and Adult Faith Development [PRAFD].



us wonderfully to sing praise during the liturgical celebration.

The final afternoon provided opportunity for considering the implications of our time together in terms of ongoing work in our various pastoral settings, including the emerging Council for PRAFD.

Feedback, reflections

The tone of the feedback from the conference was very hopeful - good work had been done which would continue. Many were encouraged by the voices from the context. Their honesty allowed participants to feel that they were in a 'safe space' where people were free to speak truthfully and were given the time to really listen to the Spirit speaking within them and in others around them. Naturally, this was credited in feedback to the ability and skill of Colette Stevenson, as facilitator, in persuading the participants to allow the process to be their guide.

Participants were unanimous in their affirmation that Robert Schreiter was enlightening and inspiring, and that his theology was very accessible. Bob's way of presenting a theological framework of the baptised, incorporated into Christ, constituted as a holy priesthood and called to be priest, prophet, and king was greatly appreciated by everyone.

One participant commented that the whole conference could be seen as sacramental while another suggested that the tone of the conference was truly invitational - all were welcome to contribute in an active way. Overall, participants felt that the event was very experiential. It had a clearly structured process that appropriately blended this experience, the theological framework, and the time for reflection and sharing.

The conference was an inclusive and inspirational capacity-building experience, which we hope will both encourage and enable those who came to create similar safe spaces, plan listening meetings, and invite others into honest conversation in their own dioceses and parishes.

Anne Codd and Julieann Moran

The voice of experience

In regional meetings of diocesan personnel in early Spring, recurring themes were: there is no point in heaping content on our already fractured context; there is need for space in which we can talk together as Church here and now; the conference should equip participants for honest conversations about faith, Church and culture in their own local communities.

An idea is born

At the Advisory Group meeting in February it became clear that the kind of conversation-space being envisaged would need strong and sensitive framing in a vision of Church for today, soundly based on contemporary theology. There the decision to invite Robert Schreiter (Catholic Theological Union, Chicago) was generated. It was providential that Robert was free to come and willing to collaborate with this venture. During the conference (and since) there was wide consensus that we were indeed blessed with the responsiveness and freshness of Schreiter's contribution to the process. Summaries of his reflective presentations are available on www.catholicbishops.ie (go to PRAFD).

A plan begins to emerge

The conference planning team - Mary Connell, Tuam; Fr La Flynn, Clogher; Noreen Lynch, Limerick and Joe Tynan, Meath - brought to the table an invaluable mix of connection with the regions and enormous personal creativity. This group identified the kind of facilitation which the conference needed, and were unanimous in selecting Sr Colette Stevenson, well

known for her work in relation to safeguarding children, and also a very skilled process facilitator.

The team, including Colette and ourselves, were gifted (we believe) in our early conversations with the central motif of 'tent of meeting', and our colleague Bernie Martin located the image, which resonated wonderfully with our hopes for the conference and was reflected in the décor and ambience of the event itself. (See www.catholicbishops.ie).

What happened?

The 2-day event, involving 72 participants from 20 dioceses (many in diocesan-sponsored teams), fell into three parts. It was opened by Council chair, Bishop Seamus Freeman. The first morning was dedicated to clarifying the process and exploring the context. Bairbre Cahill, Raphoe; Bishop John McAreavey, Dromore; Joe Tynan, Meath and Sr Clare Slattery, Nenagh Parish spoke of the impact of our present situation on them as believers, as members of the Church and as persons in active ministry. Each one was admirably personal and honest, and helped establish a tone for the whole two days.

For the next 24 hours the conference was well and truly 'in process'. In plenaries and small groups, in prayer and liturgy, at table and even in sleep, as well as in the in-between times, the recurring questions were: In response to what you are hearing what do you think and how do you feel? Small group time was carefully structured in listening mode and ably facilitated by 'volunteers' from the conference. Musicians Fr Liam Lawton and Ms Julieanne Woods helped