



Facilitated Event Summary

Vicariate: Vicariate: Group III-Bangor, Portaferry (Ballyphilip), Newtownards & Comber,
Holywood, Ballygalget, Kircubbin (Ardkeen)

Vicar Forane: Fr. Joseph Gunn

Date: 29th May 2012

Venue: St. Patrick's Parish Hall, Newtownards

Speaker: Fr. Eamonn Fitzgibbon

On Tuesday 29th May 2012 people from all of the Parishes of this Vicariate gathered in the St. Patrick's Parish Hall, Newtownards for a Living Church event. The purpose for the evening was set out and agreed as follows:

- To raise awareness of Living Church
- To begin a process of discernment for our Vicariate
- To pray together and take inspiration from the words of our guest speaker
- To prioritise areas of actions for the Parishes gathered

After introductions the evening began with a period of relaxation and guided prayer using Psalm 126 as our guide. The facilitators encouraged the people gathered there to reflect on the fact that God was, indeed, in the work that they were doing and to ask of themselves, 'why am I here'?

At this stage we invited the people to gather in groups of two's and three's to discuss their answers to that question. We further asked the people to attempt to summarise their motivation in one word which could be shared with the group. There was great energy in this task and in feedback we heard a range of reason why people had gathered. Some are recorded below;

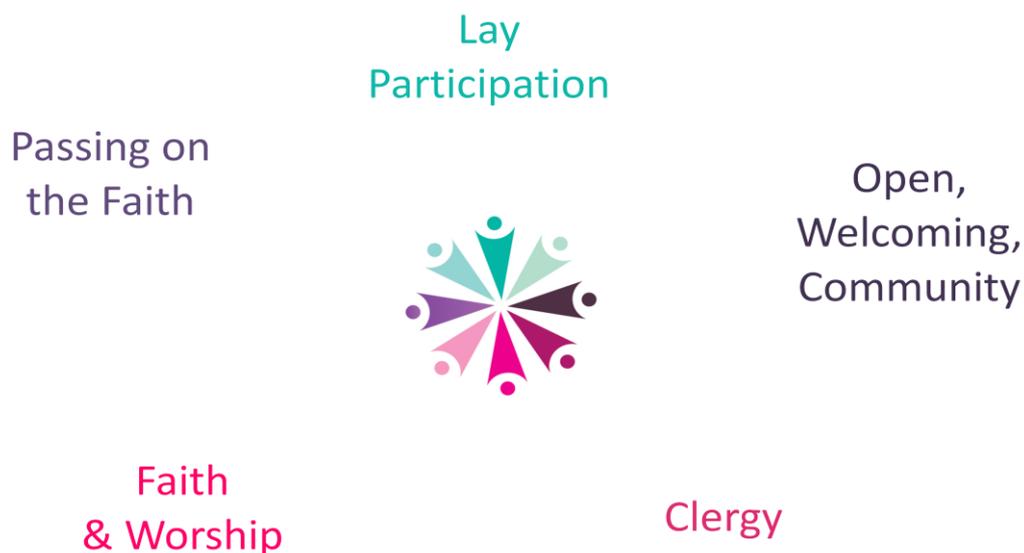
Hope	Love	Concern	Care	Commitment
Eagerness	Loyalty	Present	Interest	Duty
Belonging	Change	Sharing	Clarity	Invited

We acknowledged each word as it was said and agreed that these words would act as our motivation for moving forward tonight and in the time to come.

The Living Church Team then introduced themselves and spoke about the agenda for the evening. Paula McKeown spoke about the Living Church project to date. She spoke of the Listening Events, the Living Church Report and gave a sense to those gathered that **‘Living Church seeks to release the energy of the Spirit at work within each and every one of us and listen to what the Spirit is saying to us. In this way, we will not create a Living Church but reveal it’.**

We reminded the people of the five core areas of Living Church as called for by the people in the Listening Events:

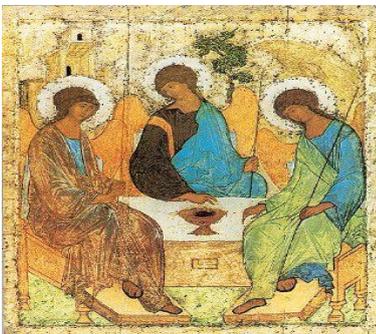
The 5 Themes of Living Church





A this point, we introduced the guest speaker for the evening, Fr. Eamonn Fitzgibbon. Eamonn introduced himself as a priest from Limerick Diocese and began by letting us know that there were similarities between what we had done in our Listening Days in Down and Connor Diocese and events they had held in Limerick a few years ago. Both had listened to the views of the people. In Limerick, their process has led to a lot of action, particularly in terms of Lay Participation. Eamonn told us there had been a particular focus on the

forming of Parish Pastoral Councils, the clustering of Parishes to work closely together and the development of Church Leadership skills. He told us that in the Pastoral Centre where he works they had learned a lot from Youth Ministry. Youth Ministry tends to have a dynamic approach and their learning was that the approaches taken by Youth Ministry teams also worked for adults. He challenged us all from the outset to think about the development of our theological knowledge and experience. Reminding us that for many their theological growth stops after Confirmation, he quoted Dermot Lane, *Vatican II: The Irish Experience*, Pg. 76 saying that the Church of the future would need **“mature, critically informed faith among the people of God”**. In the absence of this mature faith he told us that the Church runs the risk of being surrounded by ‘relativism or fundamentalism’. He offered that both of these can be seen in the Irish Church today. Instead, he told us, we should adopt a spirituality of communion. This, he said, would be central to working towards the future and is at the heart of all ministry. He told us that the Church needed to meet people where they were at in their lives and take account of the changing nature of the lives we live.



In this way Eamonn was heartened that we had identified an Open Welcoming Community as one of our core themes for Living Church. He told us that we had, in our Trinitarian vision of God a perfect example of communion. He quoted from Leonardo Boff who said,

“The trinitarian vision produces a vision of the Church that is more communion than hierarchy, more service than power, more circular than pyramidal, more loving embrace than bending the knee before authority.”

He challenged us to think that if we believe in the Trinity, then this we need to develop the type of Church Boff speaks of. He told us that one way to do this was to revisit the teaching of Vatican II. The failure to implement the Priesthood of the laity as envisaged by Vatican II was a serious neglect by the Irish Catholic Church he felt. He said that during and since the Reformation the Ordained Priesthood was elevated in importance while the Lay Priesthood was seen as being a thing for the ‘reformed’ and not privileged in our Church. However, we are all baptised to be Priest, Prophet and King and we are all equal members of the Church. He said that lay people had been kept passive but that the vocation and skills of all (religious, lay and clergy) needs to be recognised and given an opportunity to be fulfilled- we all share in the ministry of Christ. He quoted Pope Benedict when he said of lay people,

“They must no longer be viewed as “collaborators” of the clergy but truly recognized as “co-responsible”, for the Church's being and action, thereby fostering the consolidation of a mature and committed laity.”

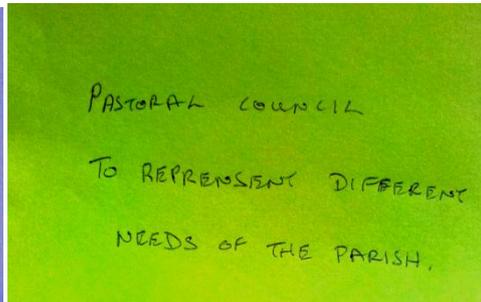
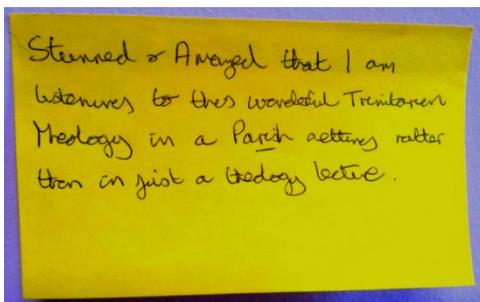
Eamonn recognised that there was a crisis in ministry for clergy in Ireland. He spoke of vocations to the Priesthood and Religious life 'drying up'. However, he did not accept that there was a shortage of priests in Ireland. Rather, he said, we have a structure that does not work for the amount of priests we have. He argued that there needs to be structural change. One strand of this will be to recognise the vocation of all and to embrace co-responsibility. This will require a change of mindset from both priests and lay people. He reminded us that the majority of priests in ministry have been trained for a different context than that in which they now work. Priests need to 'let go' of some of their tasks and facilitate lay people to step up to those tasks. Lay people need to understand that they are not just 'helping Father', but are doing the jobs for which they have been baptised.

Eamonn finished by telling us of some of the developments he feels need to happen in the future in our Diocese:

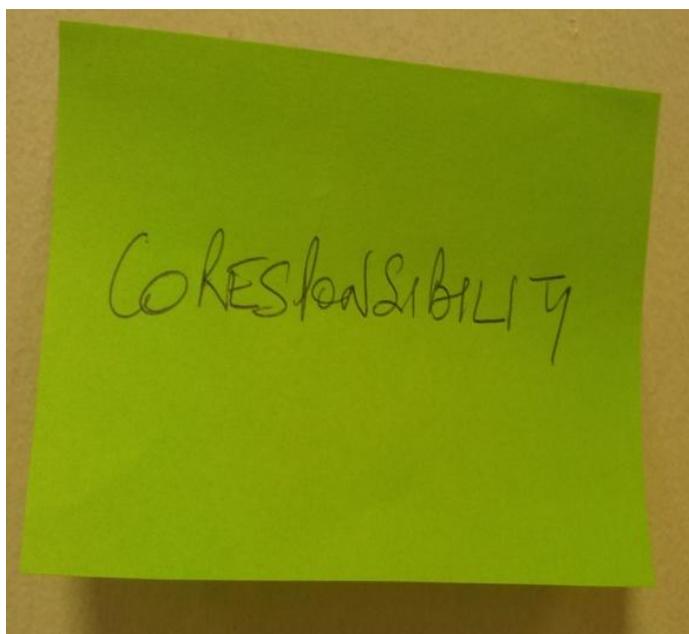
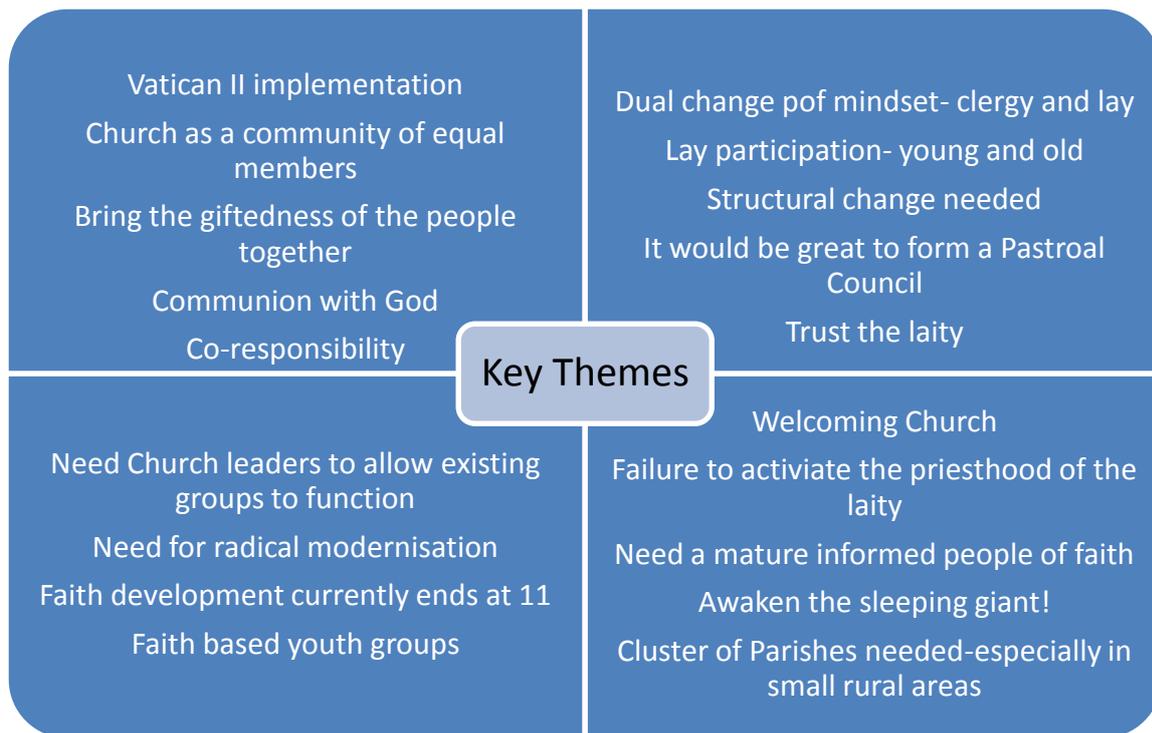
- Clustering of Parishes- to facilitate sharing of talents, skills and resources
- Formation of Pastoral Councils
- Formation of Liturgy Groups
- Visitation Teams
- Youth Ministry
- Rationalisation of Masses



Following Eamonn's talk, we moved on to ask the people to gather in groups of two or three and to ask, 'what struck me about the talk?' They then wrote their answers on paper provided and stuck them in a 'gallery area'. They made for a very colourful, interactive and interesting way to gather feedback. There were many themes and thoughts that struck the people and some of the key themes are recorded over.



Just two of the many thoughts from our Gallery



There was an overwhelming sense of people being drawn to reflect on the word 'co-responsibility'. Some reflected the frustration of never having been 'allowed' to be co-responsible. Others reflected that there is a need for a mindset and structural change on the part of clergy and lay people in order to see co-responsibility work. However, no matter what the perspective taken there was agreement that co-responsibility was needed now in our Church- with some reflecting that the creation of Pastoral Councils in Parishes would go some considerable way to achieving this.

Following a short break for tea and coffee, we re-convened for the second part of the evening where we set the task of seeing how we can create action points for Parishes to manageably move towards achieving some of the above. The people were asked to break into their Parish groups and then to take part in a two part task:

1. To arrange themselves into appropriate Parish groups and discuss the 5 themes of Living Church. They were then asked to vote for their 'top two' themes in terms of how they felt their Parish needed to develop.
2. To set action points for each of these two areas- providing a contact name for Living Church and some suggestions of how Living Church could help.

We encouraged the people to hold the ideas they came up with 'lightly'. We acknowledged that, once back in the Parishes, the people may decide to go with these areas and action points or not, according to what they felt was best. As such, it is important to note that the following plans do not (necessarily) represent definitive Parish plans. The important point is to have gained the experience of what the process of Parish planning is like.

The people from Portaferry and Ballygalget (having voted for the same two areas) decided to action plan as one group for the two Parishes. All the people took to the task with great energy and the results of the exercise are recorded below:

Portaferry and Ballygalget:

Living Church Area	Points for Immediate Action	Request from Living Church
Passing on the Faith	Target youth through youth ministry team Youth participation in the liturgy of the Church etc...	Support from Living Church Office to set up an area co-ordinating group in all 3 Ards Parishes

Newtownards and Comber:

Living Church Area	Points for Immediate Action	Request from Living Church
Passing on the Faith/Faith and Worship	Ongoing development of baptismal team Ministry of Welcome Providing opportunities in terms of outreach to the age groups that seem hidden in terms of Parish	Advice and support re; reaching out to young adolescents and what are the models of good practice we can tap into Understanding re the theology of Priesthood and what it means to be called in baptism to be 'Priestly' Youth Ministry- re-energising our young people

Bangor:

Living Church Area	Points for Immediate Action	Request from Living Church
Lay Participation	Pastoral Council Communication Group Welcoming new people (eg the Indian Community) Welcoming Pack What do we do well? What do we do badly? Grand Parents Assn Youth Festival of Faith (Part II)	Best means of communication Selection and forming of a Pastoral Council Team Meeting Skills Interpersonal Communication skills How to encourage lay people to volunteer
Passing on the Faith		

Kircubbin (Ardkeen):

Living Church Area	Points for Immediate Action	Request from Living Church
Passing on the Faith	Faith based youth groups Catechesis for parents Opportunities to get involved- make involvement accessible Pastoral Councils- get up and running; get people involved	Training for adults wanting to work with youth Material for parental catechesis and suggested trainers/presenters Pastoral Council training
Lay Participation		

This was a very lively and prayerful evening which saw a sizeable group of God's people come together to help move this Vicariate forward. In terms of the purpose of the evening we can say that we achieved what we set out to achieve. It is our hope that the evening was a realistic and hopeful glimpse into the work that lies ahead. Our guest speaker, Eamonn Fitzgibbon, added to the evening with his inspirational talk and the people participated enthusiastically in the group work. The Living Church Team offer sincere thanks to all those involved in organising the event.

Jim Deeds

Training and Facilitation Officer, Living Church