

**“Together, we can learn from one another, warm hearts, inspire minds with the light of the Gospel, and lend new strength to our hands”** (Christus Vivit, 199)

On Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> November, over 40 young adults actively involved in Catholic Youth Ministry gathered in Sacred Heart Parish in North Belfast, in the Diocese of Down and Connor, for the 5<sup>th</sup> Encounter Network Conference.

Encounter is a grassroots Catholic Youth Ministry Leader’s network that was established in 2016 after World Youth Day in Krakow. This initiative has been developed in response to a lack in collaboration, connection and creativity across the Church in relation to youth ministry. The primary aim of the Encounter Network is to develop a relational, collaboration and missional approach to youth ministry that is Christ-centred. It is a space for those involved in youth ministry to come together to recharge the batteries, reflect and spend some time with like minded people to renew their vocation.

*“Relationships are key with young people and between different youth ministers. We need to move with great energy into genuine relational youth ministry so we can share in our collective responsibility to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ”* (Tony Silcock, Diocesan Pastoral Council)

The Encounter Network may not seem like a revolutionary idea of gathering those involved in youth ministry but many of those engaged in pastoral ministry work in isolation with little support from those around them. Pope Francis highlights *“We can learn from one another, warm hearts, inspire minds with the light of the Gospel”* (CV, 199). This is exactly what we are about as a group of youth ministers. The methodology is simple, we have nice coffee, enriching conversations, tasty lunch and inspiring workshops in which we encourage and learn from each other. Each gathering is centred on Christ with Prayer, Praise and Worship and many clergy and religious have been joining us at Encounter.

At our recent gathering, Tony Silcock reflected on ‘Gods Call in our life’, Niall McNally (Cast Ireland) creatively explored ‘Dreams & Dream killers’, Fr Conor McGrath & Fr James O’Reilly (Lourdes Youth Co-ordinators) led a teaching on ‘greatness in the small things’ and Dierdre McNally finished proceedings with a challenging call moving us from ‘Maintenance to Mission’. Overall, the day was a huge success with many youth ministers involved commenting on what they enjoyed about the day.

“Today has really helped me to discern my call to the priesthood and the first talk struck me” (Damian, St Louis House)

“As I travel back to Ohio, USA; one of my highlights is the craic and conversation at encounter (Eddie Cotter, Dead Theologians Society)

“This is my first time at an Encounter Gathering and I have really been inspired and encouraged in my role in at ADYC” (Anne-Marie, Armagh Diocese Youth Commission)

“This is my 5<sup>th</sup> time at the gathering and I enjoy the relationship building and learning from one another” (Noel, Youth 2000)

Those engaged in the Encounter Network are representative of those engaged at youth ministry at the grassroots. They include parish volunteers, retreat teams, teachers/chaplains, youth movements/organisations and Diocesan Youth Directors. We also have several religious and clergy that join us in our common mission with and for young people. Please join us for the next gathering.

The next Encounter Network gathering will be on May 16<sup>th</sup> 2020 and the theme is Creativity. We will explore several areas including: Being Architects of New Cathedrals / Making Information Beautiful /Creating Environments that Minister to the Head and the Heart / Working More Creatively with Young People / Music - the Quickening Art. For more information, check out <https://www.encounternetwork.com/> or email us at [admin@encounternetwork.com](mailto:admin@encounternetwork.com)