

Report on “Faith Development; Learning from Experience Gathering”

Monday 15th October, Irish Institute for Pastoral Studies, MIC St. Patrick’s Campus, Thurles.

Martin Hayes (Cashel and Emly)

This event was organised as many dioceses are currently engaged in consideration of roles such as lay pastoral worker and lay catechist, either voluntary or professional.

Presenters were asked to tell a story of a missionary initiative they were involved in that attempted to connect with young parents or young adults. The details and the key learning are outlined as follows;

- Ian Brabazon and Laura Duff told the story of a weekly family mass in Esker church, Dublin. It is termed a ‘digital family mass’ due to the use of child-friendly digital resources and this Mass has high levels of attendance and participation by both children and parents.
 - It is possible to find child friendly ‘animations’ of the Sunday Readings
 - Investment in technology, screens etc is essential
 - Involvement of self-funded choirs of all age groups is key
 - It relies upon the elements of scriptural content, a Gospel message group, coordination of Readers by parents and hospitality afterwards.
- Julie Kavanagh, Pastoral Resource Person for the Diocese of Kildare and Leighlin and Francis Monaghan, who chaired the Working Committee told the story of the Family Picnic Day organised by Kildare and Leighlin Diocese which took place in Punchestown racecourse on 27th August 2017 in preparation for WMOF.
 - Engage with media, especially social media, local councils, ethnic communities, cultural groups, civic bodies with no agenda other than to celebrate family life.
- Fr Harry Bohan, a priest of the Diocese of Killaloe, who is Parish Priest of Sixmilebridge/Kilmurry, recognising that the Church is experiencing very significant rates of disengagement especially among families, and that even though parents may still present their children for the sacraments of initiation this is increasingly against a background of non-practice and disengagement from the local Christian community. Harry and Maureen Kelly, (Killaloe Pastoral Worker) told the story of a local response which involved young parents responding to artwork prepared by their children on the theme of ‘how they felt loved by their parents’.
 - The young parents who gathered did not want to begin with ‘talk about God’. However, they did gain a deeper appreciation of the value of time spent with their children and they were able to reflect upon the meaning of their lives in the (‘hurried’) culture of today.
 - Parents are out of touch with the language of faith, however, they are open. The key is to begin with the reality of their lives.

Conclusions;

- Our Mission is not about trying harder rather it is about ‘letting go’. Work from the perspective of the parents – ‘connect and see’, provide a welcome, ‘the human experience first and then the divine experience can grow out of it’.
- The Skills needed are those of public relations and organising so as enter the reality of family life today while the particular skill of a pastoral worker in ‘unlocking the skills of the parents’ is key.
- The Pastoral Worker, with a theological formation and a sufficient understanding of our tradition, has to be able to facilitate, relate to people, listen, identify reflective people with Gospel conviction, enter into the reality of family life, take risks so that a community can discover itself and create something new.
- We have to step outside of our ‘Church culture’, of ‘trying to get them back’, rather, enter into the lives of families and believe in their skills so that they become willing to offer their skills.