

Marist Family Gathering Swanwick - April 13th - 14th 2013.



The beautiful Hayes Conference Centre, in Swanwick, was the setting for the Marist Family Gathering last week-end. Four of us, from Ireland, flew to East -Midlands, on arrival, we were met and warmly greeted by Fr. Michael Coleman. He drove us to the Centre where we were joined by twenty-seven members of the Marist Way: lay men and women, religious sisters, and fathers. Again, we were warmly welcomed and quickly gathered in to the family circle.

The formal proceedings of the Gathering began after dinner, with a reflection, led by Maureen Meatcher, on those who first encountered the Risen Lord; The joy of Mary Magdalen, the doubt of Thomas, the restoration of Peter, and on the response of Mary, our Mother, to God the Father's request that she become the Mother of His Son. Several members were involved in the various readings, we all responded to the prayers and Sr. Olivia led us in song, on the piano.

Saturday morning proceedings began with Morning Prayer, led by Pam Kershaw.

The final line of the concluding prayer: "Enable us to hold open the door of faith, with its promise of salvation, for all humanity." provide a fitting lead-in to the opening session of the day: "Why am I still a Catholic?" presented by the key-note speaker of the day, Eileen McCann from Dundalk, Ireland.



Eileen McCann

Eileen began with the question "Why am I still a Catholic?" She suggested we must look back to our roots to understand the influences that made us who we are and what we have become. In her own case she recalled her maternal great-grandfather, who carried a scar on the back of his hand, the imprint of a Bailiff's heel as he evicted the family from their home. Her paternal grand-mother who struggled to raise her family after her Husband died, and finally, the impact on her own family when her father was struck down with Tuberculosis as a young man. All of these situations are part of her and she carries the effects of them within in her. They belong to her and shape who she is and who she has become.

Eileen went on to say, I cannot deny who I am! I belong wherever God places me. Whatever God's plan is for me - it is for me to be in the Catholic Church. It is a Church that is never dull, full of colour, consisting of different types or approaches; Dominicans, Redemptorists, Secular, and Marists. It really doesn't matter who the priests are, who the cardinals are, even who the pope is. What matters is my relationship with God.

Too often, when we look for answers for Church we look up, we should be looking within - the reflection of Church is within each of us. I must go where I am fed. Jesus said to Peter, "Will you too leave me?" Peter replied, "Where would I go?" I am on the lowest rung of the ladder in my Church; I'm a woman, single, childless, not a religious. What keeps me in the Church is the Marist gentleness. The Church that I love is in my heart, in my blood, in my soul. I love what it stands for - wanting to bring and to be Jesus. People learn if they are addressed heart to heart. We must learn to listen not with the ear of the body but with the ear of the heart. The reflection of the Church is in each of us. Following Eileen's talk and coffee we broke up in twos or threes, found a quiet spot where we shared our own Faith Journey with each other. We then came back to the larger group where, those who wished shared their discussions.

The second session of the Day entitled "What difference has Vatican II made?" began with a brain storming of words which came to mind when one thought of Vatican II.

From a long list of words recorded on the flip chart a discussion occurred which led to the following conclusions;

1. Many changes were made without any explanations as to why, e.g. the removal of some devotions.
2. The emphasis on Christian community is extremely important. People are searching; they need to have a sense of belonging.
3. Changes to the Liturgy enable people to participate. Mass and other liturgies need to become an experience. It was noted the importance of the homily as a means of explanation and instruction.
4. We are the Marist Response to Vatican II.

The Sunday Liturgy was celebrated on Sat. evening by Fr. Michael Coleman. Sr. Olivia provided the music on the piano.

Following Mass and dinner we retired to the Bar for a social time together. What a revelation that evening was! We enjoyed singing, poetry, and stories. Many of us cried with laughter at our very own comedienne, Patricia Glave. Talk about hidden and unknown- not any more!



Fr Michael preparing for Mass



After breakfast on Sunday Maureen Meatcher gave us a report on her United Nations Experience. There she had the opportunity to attend a Catholic Women's forum where she was able to participate in discussions on women's issues such as, equality, world hunger, human trafficking, and lack of education.

Maureen Matcher

At our final Liturgy Sr. Magdalene delivered the homily on the Mystery of the Trinity.

Our time in Swanwick ended with a final delicious lunch and fond farewells.

This report can't begin to capture the richness of the week-end. We, the Irish branch of the family, say THANK YOU! We hope we can return your hospitality sometime in the near future. God Bless each of you.

Reena McDermott.

