

PRACTICAL STEPS FOR PARISHES AND PARTNERSHIPS

YOUTH MINISTRY CONFERENCE 12TH MAY 2018

CONFERENCE THEME

The feedback from 'The Way We See It' Conference in 2017 had been positive and practical in its hopes and suggestions but it had also raised challenges to which we need to respond in our parishes and partnerships if we are to grow as a missionary Church. 'Practical Steps for Parishes and Partnerships' was very much a follow-up day and offered workshops to enable and resource youth ministry and make a practical response to the needs of young people whilst inviting and affirming them to become young leaders.

Partnerships provide a new opportunity for youth ministry and this Conference delivered a wealth of possible ways that partnerships could engage with young people. Over 150 people gathered at St Joseph's Catholic Academy, Hebburn for the event travelling from every direction and representing 17 Partnerships.

WORKSHOPS

Youth ministry can take many forms and pathways and the eleven workshops aimed to give a glimpse of some of these ways while reflecting a holistic approach: exploring how we share faith and prayer with young people, how we develop a sense of belonging to the church community and how we foster growth as people of justice and service. Workshops included ideas on 'Where to start', Mini Vinnies and Youth SVP, Award Schemes, Prayer, Music, Dance, Discipleship Formation and the power of using our own story. The annual training day for Confirmation catechists was incorporated into the programme, reminding us that Confirmation preparation is an integral, and not separate, part of our youth ministry.

The Conference had a positive and vibrant atmosphere and the market-place and varied workshops provided much food for both thought and action.

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

A keynote address from Fr Dominic Haworth, Episcopal Vicar for Pastoral Formation and Youth Services in the Diocese of Brentwood and Chair of the Flame organising committee, gave the day an inspiring start.

Fr Dominic shared many stories from his own youth ministry experiences, one of the most moving about a young boy he met in France who came into the church with a knotted fishing line but, like all young people, needing more than anything else, a welcoming encounter: *'I hope that all churches, always, will be open for a Guillaume who wants to come in and sort out his fishing line. Who knows what brings anyone through the doors of a church, and who knows what effect it will have when they are inside. You could push it a bit*

further and say, all of us arrive with tangles and knots that need sorting out, cutting away so that we can make a fresh start.' Fr Dominic encouraged everyone that, while we focus on Partnerships, we remember all the 'Guillaumes' who have never heard of Partnerships and who 'just need a welcome, a smile and a chance to belong'.

Fr Dominic spoke also about the potential of our Partnerships to share the truth about Jesus Christ with our young people. He described how the real needs of our young people and the truth about Jesus give us the context for our youth ministry. Our focus should not be on the challenges and anxieties of the structures but on witness. Using the Gospel stories of the calming of the storm and, after the resurrection, the disciples netting a huge catch of 153 fish, he emphasised that we are about 'radical inclusion' where everyone is welcome. With reference to initiatives like The Source and the National Flame Congress, Fr Dominic encouraged Partnerships to risk 'putting out into the deep' as they give opportunities generously to young people.

LAUNCH OF TWO NEW INITIATIVES

Two new and very practical initiatives were launched during the programme. The CYMFed Faith in Action Award for School Years 6 to 11 was officially introduced with follow-up training for this national Catholic Award being offered by YMT for schools and parishes.

Also launched was the much-anticipated Youth Ministry Toolkit, an online resource for Partnerships providing both ideas and practical help (hnyouthtoolkit.org.uk).

Ronan Johnston, celebrated song writer and musician from Dublin, led the opening and closing liturgies and Bishop Seamus rounded up the conference with affirming words about the role of young people in the Church and in society and with great encouragement for all those who work with them.

Some comments from participants captured the flavour of this very significant conference:

'Wonderful, affirming, informative, spiritual, inspired!'

'Excellent day! My mind and spirit are full ... the future looks good!'

'I have found this day practical, encouraging and prayerful. The Youth Toolkit looks excellent! Thank you!'

