

Second Annual Conference of Education for Parish Service

The Church: A Sign of Unity in the World

7th April 2011

Once again the theme of the Day Conference, chaired by Bishop Pat Lynch ss cc, was connected with Catholic Social Teaching, and...



Once again EPS was delighted to welcome more than forty enthusiastic participants who entered into lively discussion on issues to do with multiculturalism.



The Nature of the Church

In order to lay some groundwork for what was to come, Dr. Anne Inman began the day with a reflection on the theology of the Church in relation to its mission as a sign of unity for humankind. Drawing on John Fuellenbach's book: *Church: Community for the Kingdom*, she insisted that the church's mission is the transformation of all social and political realities toward the kingdom that Jesus came to preach. Quoting from Pope John-Paul II's *Dominus Iesus* § 19, Dr. Inman stressed that the kingdom of God is to be found outside the Church as well as inside, and then explored the practical implications of the fact that the kingdom is not coterminous with the Church. 'Without in any way condoning those things in secular society that run counter to the Kingdom, it is quite in keeping with Church teaching to recognize in the secular certain underlying values that will provide a platform for fruitful dialogue, and for future collaborative action in the building up of the kingdom.'



Professor Ian Linden sets the wider social and cultural context



Professor Linden, Director of the Faith in Action Programme at the Tony Blair Foundation and former director of the Catholic Institute for International Relations, set the wider social and cultural context in which the Church must carry out its mission. He noted that the world has gone through three epochs: the agrarian, the industrial, and now in our own time, the information epoch. We are currently in a situation where 'the touch of a keyboard can shatter an economy', and we have moved into a century which is likely to be characterised by overlapping crises, as economic environmental systems break down. One of the major consequences of globalisation, noted Prof. Linden, has been growing migration. Tracing similarities in the way that Catholics in this country had been treated in the last century and the way in which Muslims are treated today, he saw the contemporary 'good Samaritan' as the one who stops to care for the Muslim in difficulty. It is to Jesus in the gospels that we must look for our guide as to how to treat the other in our society, and Jesus spent an awful lot of time offending people.

Human trafficking

Professor Linden pointed to the shocking statistic that 90 per cent of street prostitutes in the United Kingdom have been trafficked from abroad. Many have been duped into believing they were coming to a respectable job, and many have come to escape from extreme poverty. Professor Linden spoke of the important work being done by religious sisters to counter the trade in human beings, since they are able to use their various networks abroad. Bishop Pat made reference to the work of the Medaille Trust, Women at the Well and the Good Shepherd sisters, and pointed out that human trafficking will be the focus of Racial Justice Sunday later this year.



Racial Justice

Margaret Ann Fiskien, Chair of the Catholic Association for Racial Justice, pointed out that the Church had never been monocultural. At the time of Christ, for example, there were Jews, Romans and Greeks. The Church itself is a model for integration. As children of God we are multi-ethnic.

Mrs. Fiskien went on to talk about the background to the Advocacy Paper on the Integration of Migrants and Refugees, produced by Caritas Europa, called 'Integration: A Process Involving All'.

Bishop Pat Lynch ss.cc

The conference was chaired by Bishop Pat, who skilfully drew out the main points made point made by each of the speakers. He spoke of the role of the Church as leading to knowledge of Jesus that also involved building communion. Without that element of communion-building between peoples, when a person sees



their membership of the church in totally individual terms, there is a problem. There is a disconnect between the mission that Jesus came to inaugurate and individual's understanding of their role in the Church. One of the reasons for this disconnect, said Bishop Pat, can be a lack of formation. In today's circumstances of globalisation, he saw the big challenge for the Church today to make a reality the communion between peoples.