

open

Christianity

an occasional newsletter
of hope for Christianity in Ireland

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Open to change

Friends –

We are grateful to all of you who responded to our questions about the function of the Open Christianity Network, and about this newsletter. As a result of that consultation, the steering group has decided that this newsletter, which has been called ‘*Le Cheile – Together –*’ for 38 issues, should have a name change. Thanks to all who made suggestions, which we considered at our December meeting. We hope the new name will indicate more clearly the nature of the contents, as well as being more mind-catching.

More and more christians in Ireland – theologians and academics, amateurs and professionals – are speaking and writing more and more openly of their concern for their churches but also of the new opportunities before us, and of their consequent hopes for the future. Journals such as ‘The Furrow’ increasingly present challenging material to readers, but all within a Roman Catholic arena. We do not know of any printed publication which is committed to a wider-ranging progressive readership. Might ‘Open Christianity’ become such a publication? Finding good writers is not difficult, nor is finding a printer: as usual with publications, distribution is the key. Let us know what you think.

God bless.

Hilary

An urgent plea

Excerpts from a paper called ‘Towards a Church with a Future’, addressed to Roman Catholics, from the Provincial and Council of the Dutch Province of the Dominicans, 2007.

The present shortage of priests is frankly unnecessary and therefore unreal. In many present-day parishes men and

women are active in a heartwarming and stimulating way as persons who initiate and inspire communities in a way adapted to our time, as christians people can identify with. Many members of these communities would have every confidence to ‘ordsain’ then as their official leaders and their official ministers to preside in the liturgical celebrations. For such a function we think first of all of the pastoral workers, male and female, who have been officially appointed, but also of the many volunteers. These men and women are at the heart of their local community, often more so in fact than the ordained priests. These priests have been appointed – often in more than one parish – to preside at sacramental celebrations, mainly the Eucharist. Inevitably, to their own frustration and discouragement, they become more and more ‘strangers’ for the faithful they celebrate for in the church.

In his opening speech at the Second Vatican Council Pope John XXIII called on the church to open its windows to the world. A church which wants to be up to date should have the courage and take the liberty to abolish laws that stifle the vitality of church communities and the celebration of the Eucharist in many places. Often before in the past ‘illegal’ practices at the grassroots have convinced church authority that it is sensible and meaningful to change the existing legislation. New experiments can be valuable pointers towards changes in the shape of the church which are adapted to our time. Is it true to say that in our Western society unmarried people are per se more suitable to lead and inspire a christian community than women are? Our answer, and that of very many fellow faithful, to both questions is an unequivocal ‘no’.

*Eco-congregation
encourages churches
to audit their impact
on the environment,
says Maire O’Donohoe*

Co-operating in caring for the planet

The Eco-congregation programme was set up to help churches, within their own religious denominations, to enrich and extend their religious experience by being more active in caring for God’s Creation. It so happens that this is also a very good platform on which to co-operate with other churches, and here in Ireland, five Christian communities so far, are involved in supporting and encouraging one another on the environmental front. (The programme is also up and running in the UK.)

A prime objective of the programme is that of working together to raise awareness of the pressures that the typical Western lifestyle is putting on the limited resources of the planet: these are the resources that we, and our children, and indeed other species need, and will need, to sustain life and delight.

According to the Lambeth Conference of 1988 there are five marks which should characterise the mission of a gospel church which seeks to model itself on Jesus:

1. Preaching;
2. Teaching and nurturing the faith;
3. Service;
4. Transformation of unjust structures;
5. Safeguarding the integrity of the earth.

In terms of this last, Eco-congregation Ireland has many resources which offer inspiration, and practical ways of making a difference as a Christian community. It makes available "modules" which consider, and offer resources for, worship, theology, scripture, young people, children, adults, finances; use and maintenance of church buildings. Its ideas have spiritual, practical and community dimensions.

Eco-congregation Ireland recommends that, prior to their accessing all its (free) online resources, local communities, with the agreement of their formal leadership, do an environmental audit of their church community. This allows them to have baseline information on what their current environmental impact actually is. On the basis of this data, the community will be in a good position to identify issues for consideration and action as it moves forward on its journey of change.

Eco-congregation Ireland is about creating awareness so that we can

- decide new priorities in how we live our lives, *and*
- know the cost of our lifestyle decisions to the environment, to our children, our sisters and brothers who are less cushioned than we to cope with the challenges to our environment.

Most notable of these (the Bali Conference is on as I write) is that of climate change.

The hope is that we Christians, called to recognise the earth as "good" and ourselves as its stewards, can use our gifts of imagination and intelligence in managing resources, and creating a balanced, simpler, more creative lifestyle than the one to which we've become accustomed.

Change is always a challenge! But responding to challenge is how the human person grows! There is a rising tide of awareness and caring that lifts the hearts of those of us who care about the environment.. The Eco-congregation programme offers inspiration and ideas that stir new hope and energy.

Further details on: www.ecocongregationireland.org

Maire O'Donohoe is an Ursuline sister living in Blackrock. She is a member of the Ursuline congregation's Justice and Peace group, which is currently focussing on climate change as the issue of greatest urgency to our planet, and to succeeding generations.

Church bells ring for action

As the conference involving world leaders took place in Bali, the Stop Climate Chaos alliance asked ordinary people to make their politicians wake up to do something about climate change.

They were asked to take action at 2pm on December 8th in their local communities, towns and cities to sound the alarm for action on climate chaos by making as

much noise as possible - getting churches to ring their bells, setting mobile phone alarm to go off, banging drums, kettles, etc.

In Dublin, Stop Climate Chaos supporters gathered at 1pm for live music and entertainment. At 2pm the bells of Christchurch in Dublin and churches all over Ireland rang out to sound the alarm for action on climate change.

Supporters then made their way from the Civic Offices amphitheatre to the Customs House. Twenty-five thousand signatures had been collected, to be presented to the Government, from people demanding strong political action to stop the planet burning.

Members of Stop Climate Chaos include Action Aid, An Taisce, Christian Aid Ireland, Concern, Eco-congregation, Eco-UNESCO, Friends of the Earth, Gorta, Methodist Church in Ireland Council of Social Responsibility, Oxfam Ireland, Students Against Climate Change, Sustain West Cork, and Trócaire.

www.stopclimatechaos.ie

No explanation, but an answer

Sometimes it all seems too much
 The beauty and the pain, the stuff
 We have to handle. The hushed sea's
 Salty calm may surge and gulp away
 The simple land, those trees, that child;
 The bird whose summer song flew me
 Into bliss stiffens in thin feathers
 And yet frost casts its hushed spell
 On snowbud twigs and jewelled grass.
 Like a diver on the highest board
 Each moment waits tensed to spring
 Into the beauty or the pain.
 Nor rhyme nor reason can explain
 The mystery we live each day.

Listen now to the voice quieter
 Than silence and closer than breath
 It answers our stress and distress
 In heartbeats it speaks of the seed
 In our being, of its birth in our ways,
 Of Love.

Heather Hawkins

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, January 15 - 23, 2008

In order to unite with one another,
 we must love one another;
 in order to love one another,
 we must know one another;
 in order to know one another,
 we must go and meet one another.

Benedictine Community, Rostrevor

Worth reading

The latest issue of Living Spirituality News contains an article by Sr Cecilia Goodman, CJ, called 'Deeper into God', which deals with the crisis of faith which can leave us feeling abandoned, confused and uncertain, but is actually a time of movement into a deeper relationship with the divine.

Also in this issue is a poem by Kenneth Steven titled 'Clonmacnoise' ('...We came to Clonmacnoise/ Fifteen hundred years too late...'). There are brief reviews of books by Marcus Borg and others. The Living Spirituality News comes out three times a year and always contains a comprehensive listing of talks and events, concerning spirituality, in Britain and Ireland.

Although an annual donation of £10 or more is welcomed for a regular subscription to the News, a sample copy can be had free of charge from The Living Spirituality Network, The Well at Willen, Milton Keynes MK15 9AA, England, or from spirituality@ctbi.org.uk Tel. (from Ireland): 0044 1908 200675.

What it's all about...

Progressive Christianity isn't about what we aren't, what we don't believe, who we aren't and what's wrong. It is about seeing ourselves in all, about what we can do to progress, to grow, to evolve. It is about making change. It is about opening doors, it is about spreading love and acceptance. It is about respect and compassion for ourselves, our human sisters and brothers, and our home earth. It is about striving to experience and co-create a culture of peace and prosperity. This year, we invite you to join us on the path that Jesus taught, the path that many wise people have walked, the path of peace and compassion in which we see ourselves as each part of the Sacred Mystery.

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