

Teams of Our Lady & Serving the Youth

In July, three Bishops, three Priests, one Married Couple & ten Lay Faithful all gathered at the Bishops Conference Centre, London, for a meeting entitled 'New Movements and Communities'.

David and Anne-Marie Fletcher were attending as a married couple representing 'The Teams of Our Lady Movement'. Meanwhile, their team members, Bernard & Susan Kelly, who have been working hard for 3 years as Southern Regional Couple, were away in Fatima at the International Gathering. The Kelly's had formed fruitful links with Bishop Mark of Plymouth Diocese, who was chairing the meeting, so the ground was already fertile.

Standing in as advocates of 'Teams', David, who had taken a day off work, diligently prepared his brief on the train to London whilst declaring to Anne-Marie "Don't worry, I am used to meetings..." Anne-Marie was subsequently delighted that 'The Holy Spirit' had other plans than the usual reading of reports and briefs as the following testimony shows!:

As the meeting opened we were all surprised by being asked to primarily focus discussion around how each movement was helping our 'Youth'. The Bishops were already thinking ahead to October 2018 when Pope Francis is gathering Bishops from around the world to discuss 'Youth, Faith and Vocational Discernment'.

The big question was, "How were we accompanying young people where they are at ? And, how were we bringing them into a close personal relationship with Jesus?"!

So, basically, no statistics, no historical accounts, required - just - how are we in our 'movements & communities' serving the youth & how might we better serve the youth to come to know Our Living God? The meeting was grounded, real & rippled with energy.

Some of the sharing involved common themes and this, I believe, is worth all of us thinking about.

Firstly, accompanying young people through the transition stages in their lives was seen as very important. Several movements, through prayer, were spirit-led to re-focus resources at the University stage. This stage was seen as an exciting but vulnerable time (when God's voice might easily be drowned out). Some even talked of 'Mission schools' as gap year options or even as alternatives to University. Secondary School was seen as a key time to help the young in discernment (Discernment meaning the hearing of God's voice above all other voices, to help one make good life choices).

Assisting young people to discern the voice of God & commit to taking bite size steps in making choices were seen as very important life skills and an area that many struggle with, often unable to make any choices at all. Allowing the naming of personal desires and working out the origins of those desires (good or not good) through the St Ignation Spirituality model came up a few times as an important tool. Transition from University to Professional Life was also identified as a vulnerable time, requiring accompaniment. The Called & Gifted Process, introduced by Bishop Philip to the Portsmouth Diocese, was mentioned as a way of accompanying a young adult in mission, vocation and gifts discernment.

Giving young people time & space to review their life stories, to understand themselves better and to find hope along with other young people in a retreat or pilgrimage setting was brought into clearer focus.

Connecting young people to others their own age & involving them in mission early on was a theme. The need to trust our young people with responsibilities & involvement in worthwhile projects through formation centres and summer camps was highlighted. Young people naturally evangelise other young people when enthused by what they experience.

A bedrock of prayer & surrendering our lives and our work to the Lord - "Letting Him be Boss" - & being sensitive to the Holy Spirit's promptings was refreshingly present in each movement as the representatives spoke! This was picked up as a key theme by Bishop Phillip when delivering the plenary. The foundress of the 'Mothers Prayers' movement, Veronica Williams, really raised the status of the power of mothers prayers with examples of the conversion & protection of children & grandchildren. Our 23year old son was used as a real-life example of the importance that parental prayer had played in the stages of conversion on the journey of a young person today - linking with all the themes and making the testimonies of each movement relevant and immediate.

Veronica Williams additionally talked about serving the Church by offering individual priests a 'spiritual mother' - praying for them through the Mothers Prayers Movement. Our priests as well as our youth need support and protection. We in 'The Teams of Our Lady Movement' similarly offered Our Teams as a source of spiritual nourishment for priests, seminarians, and young engaged couples. Teams of Our Lady was seen as an umbrella of prayer covering families under the protection of Our Lady and The Holy Spirit as we journey together. Research into the success of YTOL, 'Youth Teams', as piloted in countries outside of the UK was mentioned as something for TEAMS GB to follow up on. As more of our young people are journeying through life as singles until late 30's and beyond, this may be an important area for Teams GB to look at piloting?

[The other Movements and Communities represented were Antioch; Sion; Catholic Charismatic Renewal; Focolare; Chemin Neuf; Jesus Youth; Schoenstatt; Youth 2000 and Mothers Prayers as already mentioned.]

Praying for our young people,

Anne-Marie and David Fletcher, Team Westbourne 1, Wessex Sector Couple.