

Report on Dublin South ACI Meeting

21st January

We had our second ACI Dublin South Gathering in Kimmage Manor Parish Hall on Tuesday Jan 22nd.

Welcome, and Introduction

Jo O' Sullivan welcomed us all to the gathering. From her place within the circle of the twenty two people present, Jo reminded us of the aims of ACI.

She then recalled our choice of Family Life as focus for this session, in keeping with our ACI aims and Pope Francis's appeal to all of us baptised members of the Church to engage in Church renewal through contributing to the preparation of the Synod on Family Life.

A Flipchart page with the following questions was in place throughout the evening.

- What does "family" mean in 21st Century?
- What are the issues around which families need the support of Church and of society?
- How can we, at parish, diocesan, national and international levels contribute to bringing about the kind of change called for in Church teaching, decision making and practice in this 21st century so that no family is alienated or marginalised?

Jo then handed over to Noel McCann, chairperson of the ACI Steering group for a short presentation and reflection on the Aims Objectives and structural underpinning of the Association of Catholics in Ireland.

ACI Aims and Objectives

The ACI was set up as an umbrella group, committed to working collaboratively with other reform and renewal groups in Ireland and beyond who share our vision. [*See Statement of Objectives at the end of this report]

The following emerged from Noel's presentation as major issues contributing to the large scale exodus from the Institutional church:

Ø Lack of openness and opportunity for engagement on the part of the People of God. This was particularly evident in the failure to consult with the local Church in regard to the new version of the Missal.

Ø The undervaluing and marginalisation of large sections of the Church community including the female half, homosexuals, people in second marriages, etc.

Noel stressed that we now have a window of opportunity due to the fact that Pope Francis has asked for the voice of the laity to be heard. He mentioned that there is no recent history of meaningful consultation between the Irish Bishops and the laity so the laity now need to take the initiative in response to the encouragement from Pope Francis.

Teresa Mee led us in the next part of the evening.

Opening up to the Spirit speaking within

Before considering ways of speaking out in the Church in word and action, and recognising that 'the Spirit speaks through the voices of all the baptised' we began with a listening pause in deep inner silence.

Opening up to the reality of our 21st Century social context

Having sat in silence listening for what the Spirit of God is saying within, we then listened in silence for what God is saying to us through other people, other families as, conscious of our theme 'Family', Teresa directed us through an exercise which led us to identifying the following broad issues around Family in the 21st century.

- The need for Inclusion and belonging - eg. .between the different generations within family, for families from other cultures and other religions etc.
- The need to recognise types of families other than the traditional family - same sex families etc.
- The isolation and loneliness that can be experienced by those lacking family
- The injustice and inequality experienced by some - the structures that leave some families living in poverty and the disabled being denied basic rights.
- The importance of appreciating the restorative powers of Nature

During the general discussion which followed the reflected feedback, further questions arose and challenge to action was suggested relating to:

- passing on to succeeding generations dishonest financial/banking practice
- the seriously damaging sexual practices and their cover-up by Church leaders.

Planning for the Way Ahead

We were reminded of what we said at the beginning of this session about aim of ACI & of this meeting: 'All the baptised to have their voices heard in the formation of church teaching and to participate fully in the life of the Church'.

Summary of where we stand now

We envisage three more monthly meetings to address the issues that surfaced, by the end of which we should be ready to make a final statement for onward delivery to Synod Bishops through ACI. That would take us to the end of April, after which we would close down, temporarily or permanently, depending on the group's decision.

Evaluation of this meeting

The general consensus seemed to be that this was a worthwhile beginning.

The next meeting is scheduled as follows:

Date: Tuesday, February 25

Venue: Kimmage Manor Parish Hall

Time: 7.30pm - 9.00pm

*** ACI Statement of Objectives**

Based on the letter and spirit of Vatican II, the ACI is committed to the renewal and reform of the Catholic faith in the changed and changing circumstances of 21st Century society and to the reform of the institutional Church which, at this time, is experiencing conflict, crisis, and lack of credibility. We will work towards a Church that is inclusive, compassionate, accepts the equality of all believers by virtue of their baptism. We are committed to helping to re-build a united Church based on the life

and teachings of Jesus, with full participation of women in every aspect of Church life, recognising that the Spirit speaks through the voices of all the baptised.