

**Article taken from the Society of Catholic Priests - Europe Province website**

*From the Vice Rector –*

## ***Evangelism:***

Recently I witnessed a Facebook spat, in which some of our conservatives were laying into a prominent inclusive Christian because one of her / his churches had a Sunday attendance of 30. Their argument was “look, inclusive Christianity doesn't work. Try it and you will drive everyone away and end up with empty churches”

Now there are so many flaws in that argument. Our inclusive vicar would not get to be vicar of a multi church benefice in an urban setting if the individual churches had been put together already because they were struggling before s/he arrived.

And then there is the way we tend to play the numbers game. A vicar who grows their Sunday mass attendance from 25 to 30 is still seen as something of a failure. While a vicar with a church of 400 - well he (and it usually is a “he”) is seen as an “important vicar” and a “success” even if Sunday attendance was 450 when he arrived there and he has grown the church by a massive minus fifty.

Then there are other factors like changes in demographics in the local area. And then there are (too sadly) many who have been hurt by the behaviour of conservative evangelicals and say “If evangelism comes as part of THAT package, I want nothing to do with it.”

Yet - despite these flaws - I want to suggest that this argument of our conservative sisters and brothers is worth engaging with. A surprisingly effective way of convincing them that there is something in inclusive catholic Christianity is to show them that we too are interested in introducing people to Jesus and his body.

Of course that is not why we do evangelism. We do evangelism because we believe in a liberating and loving God who cared so much about every single person on this planet and particularly about the marginalised and rejected. We tell people about God's love, because, (despite the ways sometimes the institutional Church has so sadly proved the opposite) we believe a relationship with

God is good news for people. It brings life in all it's fullness.

So it is not to prove a point to our conservative colleagues that we do evangelism. Yet is a surprisingly effective way of demonstrating to them that inclusive Christians are worth listening to. Take Bishop Cottrell for example, a member of this society, someone who is utterly uncompromising in his commitment to inclusivity. Yet huge numbers of evangelicals - however conservative their views on sexuality - read his books, listen to him and pay attention to what he says. Or take Revd Sally Hitchiner - openly gay - yet widely respected in more conservative circles because of her very public commitment to evangelism.

People's hearts change slowly - but if we can convince them that we are not of the devil, and that we are worth listening to in other areas, perhaps eventually and one by one we can also persuade them we are worth listening to on the issue of inclusivity.

In the meantime there are a number of events on the subject of Catholic Mission and Evangelism coming up:

### **Mission in the Catholic Tradition**

The Diocese of Monmouth together with the Diocese of Gloucester are holding two connected one day conferences on Mission in the Catholic Tradition on Friday 4th March and Saturday 5th March. The Friday conference has a more parish focus and the Saturday conference a more pioneer focus. Speakers include Bishop Rob Whickam, Fr Ian Mobsby and Mthr Jo Wetherell. Subjects range from Messy Mass to community engagement in the catholic tradition. Price £5 per day. Contact [lindaward@churchinwales.org.uk](mailto:lindaward@churchinwales.org.uk)

### **Song of Creation**

Annual Conference organised by On Fire, an anglo-catholic charismatic group committed to inclusivity. 18th to 21st April. High Leigh conference Centre. Key speakers are Mthr Sue Wallace, precentor of Winchester Cathedral and Michelle Moran, a Roman Catholic lay writer and speaker on the subject of evangelism. Only a very few places remain so book fast.

### **Sharing the Joy of the Gospel**

An event organised by our friends at Anglican Catholic Future. April 21st. 11am to 4pm in London. Cost £10. It will consider 'Evangelii Gaudium' - an important recent papal document, which suggests a distinctive new focus for evangelism and church growth and which is as relevant to Anglicans as it is to Roman Catholics. This day will be led by Fr Alan Moses, Vicar of All Saints' Margaret Street. Book

via <http://anglicancatholicfuture.org/events>

### **Parish Development Workshop**

An event organised by our friends at Anglican Catholic Future. With Fr Peter Bradley and Fr Christopher Woods. June 7th 11am to 4pm. Cost £15. "There are very few parish revitalization programmes targeted at Catholic parishes and fewer still that are practical and effective. The REBUILT programme offers at least a new basis for discussion and strategy. It considers what Catholic parishes can, and cannot, adapt from the church growth movement. The REBUILT programme might offer an immediate way forward for parishes which seek a new vision for growth and re-evangelization. This day will introduce participants to the REBUILT programme as a springboard for perhaps adapting it locally. Book via <http://anglicancatholicfuture.org/events>

### **Walsingham Youth Pilgrimage**

1 to 5 August at the Anglican Shrine. Different members of our Society will have different views about going to Walsingham because of its stance on women at the altar. For those able in conscience to go this is an excellent event to take your youth too. There are not many youth events of high quality in the catholic tradition. Anecdotal evidence also suggests that at least half the groups coming to the youth pilgrimage are from inclusive rather than traditionalist parishes and that number is rising. It is certainly encouraging to see many women priests there in their collars. Book via The Youth Missioner, The Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham, The College, Knight Street , Walsingham, NR22 6EF.  
Tel: 01328 824203 [s.gallagher@olw-shrine.org.uk](mailto:s.gallagher@olw-shrine.org.uk)

### **Sanctum**

A gathering exploring alternative worship in catholic tradition. 9 to 11 August at the College of the Resurrection Mirfield. Booking has not yet opened but to find out more go to the facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/groups/595715013865179/>

A reminder that I would love to hear from local SCP groups to engage with you on the subject of mission and evangelism. Do contact me on [father.edmund@gmail.com](mailto:father.edmund@gmail.com)

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