

Over 170 lay people, religious and priests from around the country and beyond were joined by the bishops of Galloway and Limerick to explore new directions for the Catholic Church in Scotland on 1<sup>st</sup> June. Over a dozen others who had not booked a place had to be turned away because of lack of space.

Inside the conference hall, rows of seats had been rearranged around round tables covered in white tablecloths, each set with flowers, pens and menu cards. Welcome to the world café.

The world café is a whole group interaction method focused on conversation. It creates a relaxed, informal atmosphere in which people feel free to bring the best of themselves to achieve a common task.

The assumption is that the knowledge and wisdom needed for the task is already present and accessible in the room. Collective insights evolve from honouring each unique contribution, connecting ideas, hearing the collective and noticing deeper patterns and questions.

The day took the form of a series of round table conversations, prompted by contributions from Bishop Brendan Leahy of Limerick and members of parishes from Galloway, Glasgow and Edinburgh. After each 20 minute contribution from speakers, participants were given a question to help focus their discussion and invited to jot down thoughts and ideas on their paper tablecloths. After 15 minutes, they were asked to write headlines from their conversation on large sheets of paper which were displayed around the room before moving on to new tables and new conversations.

Menu cards summarised café etiquette. Focus on what matters; contribute your thinking and experience; listen to understand; listen together for patterns, insights and deeper questions; speak your mind and heart. Take ideas/reflections as seeds of conversation to new tables.

The quiet murmur of over 170 people talking and listening carefully to one another was testimony to their concern for the future of the church. It was also an affirmation of the process by which they were able to listen and share.

Bishop William Nolan of Galloway said:

‘It was a very positive experience. How encouraging to see so many faith inspired people listening and learning from one another, honestly acknowledging the difficulties and problems we face, and looking with hope to the future. A sure sign that the Spirit is active in the Church’.

The unobtrusive but expert facilitation of the day was provided by Ronnie McEwan from the Kinharvie Institute with support from fellow Marist brother Brendan Geary.