

Autumn  
2004

# A D V E N T

## Distinguished speaker for our annual meeting

This is only the second Advent bulletin in eighteen months, and it is so late that it has ended up as little more than a vehicle for distributing the minutes of the last AGM and a notice of the **2004 AGM on 30<sup>th</sup> October**. Tongue in cheek, we suggest that the date being so close may bring along some more participants who would otherwise have forgotten about this opportunity to meet!

Professor James O'Connell is our distinguished guest speaker for the AGM. Professor O'Connell spent 15 years as head of the peace studies department at Bradford University, after teaching in Nigeria, the United States and Ireland. In addition to his current role as Professor Emeritus, he is President of the Partnership for Theological Education in Manchester. He was a priest in the Society of African Missions from 1952 to 1974. He will speak on the Church since Vatican II and on future scenarios for the Church. He will reflect on the role of former clerics. So please do make the effort to come along.

One reason for the infrequency of the bulletin in recent times is that it is very much a one-way communication, although we do appreciate the occasional suggestions or comments that come in. Another factor is the impact of the Advent website and email network. Those who belong to this electronic community have much less need of a printed bulletin than in the past.

When we reflect on Advent's relevance to the Church today, it seems that fewer priests who are considering resignation feel the need to contact us. Undoubtedly the reception of such priests (and their partners if any) in the general Catholic community has become much easier, especially as there are now many married priests in official ministry. Yet Advent remains a valued network of friendship and support for some of us. And some priests at the point of resigning, or women who want to talk to someone about their relationship with a priest, do still find us a useful point of contact. To keep that network going the printed bulletin seems likely to continue at least for the time being.

### The question of cost

We have all too often had to refer to our costs - our subscription to the international federation, the expenses of those who represent us at the NCP and at regional meetings, and the production of the bulletin. The 2003 annual meeting discussed the idea of making a subscription obligatory, but were unwilling to cut off communication with anyone who cannot afford to pay. Their decision is this: **all recipients of the bulletin are invited to make a standing order (form on back page) to help with ongoing costs, and £5 per month is suggested.**

**ADVENT Annual General Meeting 2004**  
**Saturday 30 October, 11.00 am - 5.00 pm**  
**St Chad's Cathedral, Birmingham**

*This year London / South East take over the Chair of Advent, so elections will be held.*

**Guest speaker: James O'Connell**

*Emeritus Professor of Peace Studies, University of Bradford*

*Other agenda items include: European Federation & report on recent meeting, National Conference of Priests report, Review of the year.*

**Bulletin Editor:** Pat Olivier (*contact details on back page*). *Readers' submissions are very welcome.*

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# ADVENT AGM 2003

**St Chad's Cathedral Centre,  
Birmingham, 18 October 2003**

Present: Alex Walker (Chair), Cathy & Philip Smith and Andrew, Peter Cunningham, Maire & Basil Potter, Joe Mulrooney, Sue & Gerry McCann, Mike Hyland, John Challenor, Rufen, Nicola & Pat Olivier.

As Alex Walker was delayed by rail engineering works, Mike Hyland was asked to chair the first part of the meeting.

## National Conference of Priests

Basil Potter reported on the NCP meeting in September at Trinity & All Saints College, Leeds, where Archbishop Vincent Nichols was the principal speaker.

The issues raised included these:-

- a concern that priests should continue with learning
- the view that seminaries are doing a brilliant job. Someone pointed out that all the present bishops in England and Wales were trained in Rome
- it was reported that in the USA 15% of priests leave in the first five years after ordination, and 75% favour optional celibacy
- voices in debate argued that everyone should have a say in considering closing a parish
- a US representative, referring to discussion of parish workers here, said that in the States they are all paid
- a call for residential therapeutic centres specifically for priests with mental breakdown
- some suggestion that former Anglican priests serving as parish priests could meet to discuss their job and financing (not all agreed)
- child protection measures should be sent to Rome and thereby imposed as obligatory on all bishops
- discussion of asylum seekers
- some wanted a national coordinator for the ongoing formation of priests

Basil said he talked with many delegates and thought more now knew of Advent. He told people that Advent are available and in favour of optional celibacy. Three observers were invited to speak about a consultation among women around the world about priesthood, entitled 'Healing Priesthood'.

Basil thought the general outlook of the NCP is forward-looking, but there was a general feeling that nothing will move during the present Pope's lifetime.

## Treasurer's Report

The Treasurer, Mike O'Kane sent his apologies, indicating that he may be moving abroad and wished to stand down. Joe Mulrooney as the second signatory to the Advent account agreed to hold the fort if Mike moved before the next AGM. Gerry McCann was appointed second signatory.

Mike O'Kane reported that Advent's subscription to the International Federation (which had risen from

\$200 to 300 Euros) was still to be paid. Other outstanding expenses were the costs of our observer at the NCP and costs of our delegates to the European meeting in the south of France, which were now agreed at c. £200 each for basic travel, accommodation and expenses.

To meet these and other costs such as the bulletin (c. £250 per issue), Mike Hyland suggested that a subscription of £5 a month should be introduced. That would provide enough for other developments such as newspaper advertisements. There was a reluctance to cut people off from communications, but the majority agreed that a letter should be sent to those on the mailing list explaining that Advent's costs have been subsidised out of people's own pockets; and that the bulletin costs about £1 and would not be sent in future to those who did not make a payment. The cost of production should be printed on the bulletin as a reminder and a contribution of £5 per month by standing order should be recommended.

Alex Walker now arrived and took the chair. He brought apologies from Bruce Kent, Mike O'Kane, Gerry McGarvey, Jan Walker, Peter Hull, John Echevarria, Conrad Charles and David O'Neill.

Minutes of last AGM as published in the previous bulletin were agreed. There were no matters arising that were not covered by the agenda.

## International developments - European Federation

Joe Mulrooney gave the background to the development of a European regional federation: prior to the international meeting in Madrid in 2002 the pattern was a triennial meeting of the International Federation with executive council meetings interspersed. South America had previously started a regional federation - without any threat to the international one - and this model was proposed for additional regional gatherings, to ease travel and costs in international contacts. Europe as an existing community seemed an obvious grouping, but the North Atlantic group, including some European countries as well as North America, was launched within weeks of Madrid with a proposed constitution, running counter to the object of regional grouping - especially as it has now been extended to India!

In addition, the periodical *Ministerium Novum* legally belongs to the International Federation but has been taken over by the North Atlantic group. Further, Anthony Padovano and the Argentine Clelia were never elected to the Executive Council of the International Federation but continue to serve on it. When the President is absent one of these two unelected people ends up taking the chair. It was agreed that Joe and Mike Hyland should write protesting at the presence of unelected people on the Executive Committee.

Joe explained that the intention was for an elected administrative body with proper officers to take on the role of the General Assembly, and meetings of the

Federation would be more in the nature of seminars. They could become very small, with perhaps a representative from each region (and ultimately subscriptions might be paid to regional groups which would then contribute to the international body). No regional federations will exist properly until ratified in 2005 by the international assembly.

### **Review of the Year**

After a lunch break Alex Walker reviewed the past year, mentioning the scandal of paedophilia by clergy and the Anglicans' struggle with the gay priest issue. There had been some **contacts with the media** but fewer than before. He asked people to make use of the smartgroup on the **Advent website**, and the meeting thanked him warmly for keeping the website going. Many contacts now come that way. Alex reminded us to get Advent into **diocesan directories**, using the wording from the national directory. He also suggested contacting our diocesan bishops to enquire what provision is being made for **priests' pensions**. Referring to the new **North Atlantic Federation** which had been strongly contested, he said that he had not and would not commit Advent to membership. Asked about the progress on achieving **charitable status**, Alex said he would try again - if modifying the constitution would help he would refer that to members. He noted that the NCP had discussed clergy morale and the influence of secularisation. He challenged members to consider what their response would be if a future pope invited them to return to ministry. Finally he asked for prayers for John Davis and Frank O'Leary who had died during the year.

### **Basic Ecclesial Communities – Gerry Proctor**

Alex welcomed the guest speaker, Gerry Proctor. Gerry said he was a trade union member as it was clear that there was no support for any priest in difficulties.

He had been six years in Ecuador and Bolivia on loan from Liverpool Diocese and then a parish priest in Knotty Ash. The church of the future was being prepared in Latin America where the faith was handed on by people in their homes not by clergy, and a priest would call only occasionally. He had found it very difficult to bring that experience to the UK parish - he aimed to put power into the hands of the people through house groups and support materials, but nothing continued.

Four years ago he went to experience the work in continuous formation of the Adelaide Archdiocese which had been developing small Christian communities for ten years, then tried to put it into practice in Liverpool. Adelaide had resisted 'intentional' groups which risk becoming too exclusive, and went for **geographical neighbourhood groups**. They have neighbourhood pastoral teams, and Gerry now has eight of these in his parish. There are units of 100 Catholics which also make contact with

non-Catholics in their area. The whole process addresses the question of the 85% who do not come to church. There has been an extraordinary impact. Many years of hurt and damage (usually by priests) have been taken away, and the stress is on friendship. This is a Church of relationships, very subversive of the institutional Church. Around 'the table of the kitchen' everyone shares. People are gaining confidence, being challenged, being renewed. The parish faces for the first time some of the reasons people do not go to church. A theology for the neighbourhood approach is found in Walter Bruggemann – the neighbourhood is at the heart of God's plan, it is where God is interested and is found.

Gerry said he was now going to work with a Brazilian priest who had worked some years with small communities, incorporating adult formation, drawing theology out of God's people. The poor are where God is and have ability within themselves to do theology and pastoral work. The people were now getting to know the mood of a neighbourhood after knocking on every door to find the Catholics. The population can be expected to change every five years, he said.

Neighbourhood teams meet monthly and the visitors feed back to the core. The parish pastoral team, made up of full time staff and people from essential parts of parish life, takes all the decisions. First Communion meetings are in neighbourhood groups, and the catechetical coordinator meets one-to-one with everyone in the programme. Almost everybody is brought 'on board' through telling their story, and it helps the catechists understand people's difficulties and helps them in turn feel valued.

Some 60 people, mostly older, are visitors, covering 12 to 15 households each, and about 600 homes were now receiving visits. Befriending is the motto – not 'bringing the Gospel / God' but gradually helping people recognise God there in their lives. There is a monthly team meeting with the neighbourhood team leaders who keep in touch with and support each visitor.

### **A Pakistani Experience**

Rufen, from Pakistan, gave a brief review of his experience. His country is 97% Muslim, and 1½ % Christian (mostly Catholic). The hierarchy is traditionalist and very difficult. He was ordained priest in 1996 and is now married and has a son. Priests there are leaving at the rate of about 5 a year, and they are rejected in their own country, although Sri Lankan priests who marry are allowed to teach in Catholic schools. As soon as Pakistani priests marry they have to leave the country. The culture does not permit even discussion of gays and lesbians. Rufen had started community work in his parish and people said that was Protestant! He was now studying in London. He said there were five Pakistani married priests in the UK and five or six in the USA. They were gradually forming their own group.

## USEFUL CONTACTS

### Advent:

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**Advent website – [www.adventgroup.org.uk](http://www.adventgroup.org.uk)** - is maintained by Alex Walker. Links include sites of special interest to Advent members.

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### Other contact addresses:

**Coping with Change – Life-skills trainer, giving practical help for those dealing with times of change:**

Mary-Jo Radcliffe, 97 Altenburg Gardens, London SW11 1QJ. Tel: 020 7223 2917.

**We Are Church UK – Valerie Stroud, We Are Church UK, P.O. Box 124, Rochester ME2 1PE. Tel: 01634 713396. [wacuk@we-are-church.org](mailto:wacuk@we-are-church.org)**

*We Are Church* international spokeswoman, Elfriede Harth: [IMWAC@aol.com](mailto:IMWAC@aol.com)

**Catholics for a Changing Church – 1 Carysfoot House, 14 West Halkin Street, London SW1X 8JS. Tel: 070 1070 2068. [ccc@vialucia.freemove.co.uk](mailto:ccc@vialucia.freemove.co.uk)**

Website: [www.c-c-c.freemove.co.uk](http://www.c-c-c.freemove.co.uk)

**Seven-Eleven – a support group for women in relationships with Catholic priests. Anne Edwards, Seven-Eleven, PO Box 521, Coventry CV5 6ZH.**

**Sonflowers – for women who have had children by Catholic priests. Adrianna Alsworth, 01327 301344.**

**Abuse in Therapy and Counselling Support**

**Network – for people abused by priests in pastoral situations. 152 Chiltern Court, Baker Street, London NW1 5TB.**

**Cara Network – for former Religious women. c/o 2 All Saints Mews, Uxbridge Road, Harrow, Middlesex HA3 6DY.**

**Movement for Married Clergy (MMAC), c/o Michael Winter (chair), 13 Foxham Road, London N19 4RR.**

**Roman Catholic Caucus - Lesbian & Gay**

**Christian Movement - includes access to support for active and resigned clergy and women religious. PO Box 24632, London E9 6XF. Convenor: Mike Egan. Tel: 020 7226 0847. [lgcm\\_rccaucus@hotmail.com](mailto:lgcm_rccaucus@hotmail.com)**

Website: [www.lgcm.org.uk](http://www.lgcm.org.uk)

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