

## FAMILY

# The Gospel of the family

## joy for the world



**Sarah and Declan O'Brien** report on the World Meeting of Families held in Dublin in August this year.

**The World Meeting of Families** is held every three years. In August 2018 it was hosted by Dublin. Three years ago it was in Philadelphia USA, and in 2021 it will be held in Rome.

It is an event where participants from all around the world come together and bear witness to the crucial importance of marriage and the family to the Church and to society.

As there is no stereotype of the perfect family these world meetings have become a very interesting and challenging mosaic.

The recent meeting in Dublin took as its theme: 'The Gospel of the Family – Joy for the World' reflecting the recent exhortation by Pope Francis on the family, 'Amoris Laetitia' (The Joy of Love).

### Rain and shine

All visitors to the recent World Meeting of Families were provided with ponchos in their pilgrim packs, as even though much sunshine was expected, there was also likely to be some heavy showers.

For many, that summed up their experience of the five-day event in Dublin: there was a wonderful and very positive experience of family and Church, but there was also much focus on the terrible abuse and crimes of some members of the Church in Ireland and around the world.

So this world event was a very complex experience for pilgrims, and each participant could contribute and receive on many different levels. In fact the whole event was so broad that no two people seemed to have had the same experience.

### Hope for the family

Ann, who was part of the Focolare stand which had hundreds of visitors from all over the world, and who also attended the Festival of Families in Croke Park, said: 'It was like coming into an oasis of positivity. It left me with great hope for the family, for the Church, for the world.'

It was like building a beautiful garden.'

In fact, many from the Focolare Movement did actually build a garden as part of the event. Lorna Gold described the creation of an ecological garden as 'a phenomenal experience!' She said its aim was to 'bring the message of families caring for our common home out into the world.' They also built a Holy Well as part of this Eco Garden, which was possibly the first Holy Well built in Ireland for hundreds of years!

Many members of the Focolare Movement, from Ireland and other parts of the world, made strong contributions as speakers covering a wide range of topics on the family. One person commented: 'There was a really strong presence of the Holy Spirit enlightening our contributions giving us something that was beyond our human limitations.'

A unique event on the fringes in which the Focolare Movement had a big contribution was an inter-faith evening vigil which had inputs from members of the Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, Muslim, Christian and Native American communities. It was held at the Anglican Cathedral in Dublin. Mr Elvis Paul N. Tangem, representing the African Union, underlined how meaningful this moment was: 'To get all these religious leaders to talk about the need for environmental sustainability is absolutely important. You cannot ask for more.'



The interfaith service 'Our common home' held within the Anglican Cathedral in Dublin.



### A moment of penitence

When Pope Francis arrived on August 25th the media focused a great deal on the shameful situation of the abuse of children. Many Catholics in Ireland have distanced themselves from the Church because of the abuse and its cover up by some.

The Irish Prime Minister, Leo Varadkar, welcomed Pope Francis with a very affirmative contribution recognising the positive role the Church played in Ireland. He also spoke about the abuses, defining them as 'stains on our state, on our society, and on our Church.'

Pope Francis, who seemed to come to us as a penitent, met with eight victims each of whom made a deep impression on him. At the start of the final Papal Mass Pope Francis asked for forgiveness, naming the sins committed to many victims.

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### Celebrating the family at Croke Park

On the previous evening Pope Francis attended the Festival of Families in Croke Park, Ireland's biggest stadium. It was a great celebration of the beauty of the family created with the richness of Irish culture. One person commented: 'I felt so proud to be Irish! Pope Francis has brought out the best of us as a people.'

Pope Francis also spent time visiting a centre for homeless people, and also took part in a beautiful event for newly-married and engaged couples, listening to their experiences and responding with great wisdom. He also visited the Marian shrine in Knock.

Eileen was particularly moved by these days, especially at the final Mass when Pope Francis said that 'like Columbanus and the Irish missionaries who faced challenges in spreading the Good News, we too face the icy stare of indifference and the stormy waters of hostility.' But at this closing Mass of the World Meeting of Families, Eileen felt 'we were receiving together the gift of the Spirit to renew our families and the Church.'

### Being Church together

'We need to recognise the darkness, while trying to rebuild communion,' said Bishop Brendan Leahy. 'A new chapter has opened up where faith and hope are important.'

'I realised more deeply how much the world meeting of families (WMOF) has been a gift in helping us all live an experience of Church, being Church, and going out as Church,' he added.

Chiara Lubich wrote in a meditation: 'The countenance of the Church, with its areas of transparent light and also of clouds and shadows, should be reflected in every Christian, in every group of Christians.'

This, then, is what we experienced during those precious five days in Dublin. We felt as our own the Church's joys and hopes. But we also felt as our own her pain and anguish.

Again Chiara: 'If the love for Christ has not enlarged our hearts enough for us to feel the pain of these wounds, we are not what God calls us to be today.'



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