

TOGETHER FOR A BETTER WORLD!

FEEDBACK FROM THE INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS FOR THE LAITY 2006

First I would like to thank FRS David, Bernard and Ben for inviting me to attend this inspiring congress. Irene Lally and I were very aware we were the eyes and ears of Clare parish there and so would like to report on what occurred: in fact the whole purpose of the conference was that its content should be fed back to the parishes for their response and comment.

Rome was beautiful and St. Peter's magnificent but what struck me was that the unity, friendship and common purpose of the 180 lay people and 20 or so Friars from all over the world was more beautiful than the buildings. It was exciting to hear of the many projects in different countries that were making real the theme of the conference 'Together for a better world' – too many to list here but so many ideas we could work on. There were lots of opportunities over the meals and late into the evenings to enjoy each others company in true Augustinian good humour

The talks by Fr Hanvey 'An Analysis of our Times' and Fr Dodaro 'Augustine on Politics and Society' showed clearly how Augustine's insights on the gospel, his spirituality, can answer the needs and questions of our restless, challenging and 'externalised' society. 'We should have enormous confidence that we can engage with and shape society – by our life together we can show it the beauty and attractiveness of God.' The talks will be available on the Augustinian website.

The final day was an historic invitation by the Friars to all lay people connected in whatever way with them to participate in a much more concrete way with their mission. They asked us to consider 'Would this be useful?' and 'How we wished to organise ourselves as 'lay Augustinians' at local, national and international level?'. A committee was elected with representatives from every region to find out the views at local level and feed this back to the next General Chapter in 2007. Web addresses were exchanged so all of us can communicate at every level and will be available soon.

It was an inspiring conference and I know Clare will have a great contribution to make in this lay initiative we have been invited to formulate!

Paul Bethel