

Mercy~Presentation Speakers Forum - A Collaborative Initiative

“Bringing it home, Coming home ...”



More than two decades ago, in response to a need and strong desire for ongoing spiritual formation in the wider community, our two NL Canada Congregations, the Sisters of Mercy and our Presentation Sisters, collaborated on creating the Mercy~Presentation Speakers Forum. Our planning and coordinating team comprises Associates and Sisters from both our Congregations. It is now a highly anticipated and well attended annual Fall happening, incorporating engagement from within the wider community as well.

The initial focus was on the weaving together of spirituality, justice, ethics and Christianity for the 20th and 21st centuries. Over the years we have sponsored annual weekend Forums spanning Friday evening to Saturday afternoon, bringing in world renowned speakers that everyday people could now have easy access to, addressing emerging, critical issues for our time. Speakers have included Bruce Sanguin, Diarmuid O’Murchu, MSC, Jose Hobday, OSF, Jan Phillips, Maureen Wild, SC, Judith King, (Ireland) and Denise Boyle, FMDM, Paula D’Arcy, Robert Wicks, Ilio Delio, OSF, Joan Chittister, OSB, and numerous others.

This year our speaker was John Philip Newell, poet, peacemaker, minister and scholar, internationally acclaimed for his work in the field of Celtic spirituality. Based in Edinburgh, Scotland, with his wife and four children, he teaches and preaches internationally on themes related to the sacredness of the earth and the oneness of the human soul.



On early arrival John Philip was welcomed to our Newfoundland shores amidst much thunder and lightening! In a quieter way, we would all be “struck” by his simplicity and depth. Sister Elizabeth Davis, Mercy Congregational Leader, representing both Leaders, offered a true NL welcome and blessing on behalf of us all.

On Friday evening John Philip engaged us with his own story, inviting us to see the face of “Godness” in the face of a tiny baby, sparked by his experience of his own newborn granddaughter. He, in turn, invited us to see that “Godness” in each other, forever glimpsing the Divine in one another, forever expecting to find the Light in each other. He constantly reminded us that we are “of” God, God’s very essence, rather than made “by” God. In our quiet reflection, he had asked us to ponder, “What would it look like if our “of Godness” came to light again and again with new depths?” Becoming what we already are! A powerful invitation now as we approach the season of Christmas, celebrating a 2000-year-old birth and being called to continually give birth to that first great love in our own living each day.

In our Saturday morning prayer we were reminded of John, the Beloved Disciple, and his stance of “listening to the heartbeat of God”, in the earth, within us, in each other. In the same breath he also reintroduced us to St. Brigid of Kildare, a true woman “of God”, who embodied that. John Philip spoke of how St. Brigid is rising in our Consciousness in modern times because we are so in need of her!

Often spoken of in Gaelic tradition as “Mary of the Gaels”, Brigid has so much to teach us of weaving together heaven and earth, grace and Nature, recovering those deep connections, including in our rituals, of “birthing” God ever anew in our world, and how both our world and our Church are in such need of all of that.

Worthy of note as well, history attests to Brigid as being the founding Abbess of a Monastery, a mixed community of men and women, and under the leadership of a woman! In addition, Tradition attests to her being “mistakenly” consecrated as a Bishop rather than an Abbess because the Bishop prayed the wrong prayer. Notably, he stood by what he had said!

John Philip also wove in stories of people in history like Pelagius, Augustine, Irenaeus, St. Columba, Hildegard, and more modern-day figures like Teilhard de Chardin and Thomas Berry, all of whom, and some surprisingly, invite us to see in a way like never before.

Weaving together the threads of the two days, John Philip, with those before him, urging us to rediscover the intimate relationship between humanity and earth, for our children! He reminded us, with Thomas Berry, to dream a new way forward, again, like never before, highlighting how we are made “of” the Divine Dreamer.



Awed and grateful!

Special Thanks to the Planning Committee ...

(L-R) Kim Kelly, PBVM Associate, Marilyn Stack, RSM Associate. John Phillip Newell, Betty Morissey, RSM, Bernadette Doherty, PBVM. Missing from the photo is S. Helen Martinez, PBVM.