

## **Assisi2012: Where We Dwell in Common and “Thinking Outside the Box”**

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“Where We Dwell in Common: Pathways for Dialogue in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” was the theme for the Assisi2012 conference which brought together more than 220 scholars and practitioners of ecumenical and interfaith dialogue from 55 nations to the hometown of St Francis in April 2012.

The gathering was organized by the Ecclesiological Investigations International Research Network, a network of scholars across several continents including Georgetown University, Trinity College Dublin, the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) and the Australian Catholic Theological Association. The ambitious project was coordinated by Professor Gerard Mannion from the Center for Catholic Thought and Culture at the University of San Diego.

During the meeting we were warmly welcomed to Assisi by Archbishop Domenico Sorrentino, Bishop of Assisi, who was very much part of the event, and members of the Franciscan Community who led us in reflections on the life of Francis and Clare as part of the “Soul Food” dimension of the program.

The aim of the gathering was to encourage ecumenical thinking “outside the box,” to reignite the ecumenical flame by an interactive process which would identify and shape, as well as put into practice, productive pathways for dialogue in these times.

As Gerard Mannion pointed out in his opening address, the dividing lines between the two “tracks” of official and unofficial dialogue are not as clear as once thought and there are new types of practices emerging where the traditions meet. He identified a “track one-and-a-half” where people are engaged in bridging the “two tracks” of dialogue to advance the dialogical cause. Many of the presentations reflected this process, with the conference facilitating an enormous range of perspectives and a rich conversation. The aim was to learn from past successes (day 1), to address present concerns (day 2) and to look creatively to the future (day 3).

Topics of papers were widely varied e.g. “Cross-currents in African Theology,” “Overcoming Ecclesial Exclusion,” Globalization and Migration and World Christianity,” “The Future of Conciliar Ecumenism,” “Ethics in a Multifaith Society,” “Inventing a New Time and Space for our Common Dwelling,” “Wounded Christianity and the Heart of the World.” There was much discussion around the challenges of interfaith relations in areas of the world as varied as South Africa / India / Australia / Greece / Turkey / Korea / Palestine / United States. Some presentations broached topics such as “The Indian experience of living in a pluralist reality,” “Gains in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Jewish-Christian Dialogue,” and “Spirituality for Seekers.”

In his concluding address Professor Mannion expressed the hope that Assisi2012 would be part of an ongoing process of renewal and re-energizing of the ecumenical and interfaith movements. Certainly, as an Australian involved in promoting positive interfaith relations in

my own context, I found this opportunity to network and to gain new ideas and ways of thinking invaluable in making this hope a possibility.



**Sr Trish Madigan op (Australia) in Assisi**



**Srs Geraldine Smyth op (Ireland) and Trish Madigan op (Australia) at the Assisi2012 conference.**