



CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE

ENGLAND AND WALES

Mental Health Project

Bishop Richard Moth's address

AMIGO HALL, THURSDAY 3RD FEBRUARY 2011

You are all very warmly welcome here today for this celebration to mark the Launch of the Catholic Bishops' Mental Health Project. We gather in Amigo Hall – built to mark the Jubilee of Archbishop Peter Amigo, Bishop of the Diocese of Southwark for 45 years and who is well remembered for his care for every person in the society of his own day.

A little over six years ago, the Bishops' Conference of England & Wales launched "Listening 2004: My Family, My Church" and this project is one of the fruits of that initiative.

This project is timely. We live at a time when there are many stresses and strains on people at every level in our society. Our young people face the stresses and strains of examinations, which place huge pressures on some. Our elderly live at a time when services are often stretched. The present economic climate – to name one factor – has brought challenges to many and, for some, these challenges will bring stress and difficulty. The number of people seeking refuge in substance abuse shows no sign of decline. When a loved one lives with mental stress, those who care for them find themselves sharing a burden that is often a heavy one.

Speaking personally, I feel privileged to have been asked to be involved with this project. Having been appointed as Bishop of the Forces some 18 months ago, I have become more conscious than ever of the demands placed upon our servicemen and women and their families who await their return from deployments, especially in Afghanistan. These men and women – most of them young – carry the hidden scars of conflict. They are required to live with these difficulties for many years after return, continuing into the years after they leave the Armed Services. These men and women – and their families – are members of our communities, members of our dioceses and parishes.

Today, we have much for which to give thanks:

For the great generosity shown by the parish communities of England & Wales. That generosity in the "Day for Life" collections in 2008 and 2009 has enabled this project to take place. £70,000 has been distributed to eleven projects, through a small grants programme.

For the members of the Mental Health Reference Group, gathered with us today: Elizabeth Davies, Maggie Doherty, Paul Famer, Julia Head, Helen O'Brien and Sheila Hollins. Their expertise has brought much to the project and, on behalf of the Catholic community right across England & Wales, I thank them for their commitment.

I also wish to mention Laurence Fenton and the financial team at the Bishops' Conference. Sadly, Laurence died very recently and we remember him and we remember his family today. Thanks go, too, to the Catholic Communications Network for all their help and advice.

Special thanks must go to Gail Sainsbury, the Project Worker, who has brought enthusiasm and sensitivity to this important area of pastoral care. Thank you, Gail, for all you have done – and for all you will do as this project progresses.

Thanks go to all those who have submitted applications. It will be up to them and those with whom they will work to ‘put the flesh on the bones’ of the project. I shall be inviting them to speak, briefly, about their projects. The very fact that these initiatives touch so many aspects of life bears witness to the importance of the dignity and well being of the human person that is at the heart of the Gospel message.

This initiative will enable the Catholic communities of England & Wales to develop the Church’s response to those who, in our own time, seek the wholeness and healing that Christ gives as he says to us “Come to me, all you who labour and are overburdened and I will give you rest.”