

## CATHERINE MCAULEY



### WOMAN OF GOD

### WOMAN FOR GOD'S PEOPLE

On the 7<sup>th</sup>. September, '09 Sunderland Stadium of Light was the venue for a Catherine McAuley Conference attended by Sisters, Associates and Friends of Mercy from many parts of England, Scotland and visiting guests from Ireland. In all, over two-hundred-and-fifty people gathered in the Banqueting Suite to be enthralled and inspired as Sr.Brenda Dolphin unfolded Catherine's Story: "Woman of God. Woman for God's People" .

In her inimitable and gentle 'telling' Sr.Brenda brought Catherine before our minds and into our hearts

For some, hearing the story for the first time, was inspiring, stirring and challenging and they expressed amazement that one woman's response to human need, her faith and absolute trust in God, should have such vibrant, far-reaching consequences stretching across the world and across three centuries!

For the rest, more familiar with Catherine's story, there was renewed excitement, togetherness and sense of identity.

Catherine's legacy of Mercy, highlighted in her "Sayings", was the focus of the opening reflection – "As Catherine would say.....".

The day was facilitated by Professor Paul Murray of Durham University who rejoiced in his long association with the Sisters of Mercy in different parts of the world. His latest and very exciting involvement is a partnership with the Sunderland Mercies and the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle in setting up the Chair of Catholic Theology in Durham University. This is the first Catholic Theology Chair in an English university. Professor Murray leads this new venture which, he said, would not have been possible without the financial support and far-seeing commitment to education of the Sisters of Mercy.

In October Sister Elaine Wainwright rsm will present a paper in the new Department of Catholic Studies, Durham University, before returning to New Zealand. Worldwide Mercy links in themselves are amazing!

The presence at the Conference of the full staff ( almost a hundred teachers) of St. Anthony's Girls' Secondary School ,Sunderland Mercy School now under lay management, was remarkable. The Head used the Conference as part of staff training at the beginning of the new school year. The following day I am told, staffrooms were buzzing about the charism of Catherine as staff continued their Curriculum preparations for the year ahead. The school's Pastoral staff and Religious Education Department recently followed a short programme in Baggot St. A symposium on Catherine is planned for the sixth form pupils in December.

Reference to the international Mercy Prayer Line by Professor Murray, whose terminally-ill father, he reports, is experiencing deep peace and consolation through the intercession of Catherine McAuley brought a new dimension to

the gathering. There was an immediate opening of hearts to intercede with Catherine on behalf of their loved ones. Anne Hannon invited people to write prayer intentions on pieces of paper provided. For me it was indeed a moving experience to see many approach Anne and other sisters in tears begging intercession for sick or troubled relatives. The hidden weight of suffering was suddenly visible and being shared. I was reminded of Catherine's own words: "Let us pray well and never grow weary". I am sure she saw their tears and that her tenderness reached them.

There was no doubt in the minds of these people about Catherine's saintliness and some queried why the Church was so ponderous and slow in its process towards canonisation. I received a letter a few days later suggesting that the whole Mercy World should sign a petition to be sent to Rome as the people of England did to expedite the canonisation of St. Thomas More!

What next? A delightful story!

The day after the Conference, a few people who had attended were in the cathedral cafe discussing their experience. They were joined by a lady who overheard their conversation and showed interest in what they were talking about. Much to their surprise she told them that her great grandmother had been found by the "Walking Nuns" in the 1800's as an abandoned baby on the streets of Cork. The sisters were on their way to France but somehow because of bad weather the boat docked at Liverpool. Her great grandmother was sent to a Carmelite orphanage in Darlington in the north of England. This lady herself is a convert to Catholicism in recent years. From her Prayer Book she produced a tattered copy of Catherine's *Suscipe* which she has prayed most of her life. Another amazing Mercy link