



**Pontiac Area Vicariate Assembly
March 11, 2010
Hosted by St. Paul Albanian Parish**

Welcome

At 7:00 PM, Fr. Dave Buersmeyer, Vicar of the North Macomb Vicariate, welcomed everyone to the assembly. He thanked the Pontiac Area and North Macomb Vicariates for sponsoring the assembly, St. Paul Albanian parish for hosting, and the St. Paul Knights of Columbus for working and helping with the site arrangements. A short prayer and song service followed, planned by the North Macomb Vicariate.

Jim Kiefer, Director of We Are The Church Conferences, took the podium to introduce Fr. Timothy Radcliffe. He thanked the members of the planning committee: Colleen Burke, Denise Donaldson, Dila Dusovic, Judy Gordon, Art Seidler, Bridget Theodoroff, and Fr. Stan Ulman for their work. (Note: Jim was also a key member of the assembly planning committee.)

Jim began his introduction with these facts: Fr. Timothy Radcliffe is a Catholic priest and Dominican friar of the English Province. He served as Master of The Dominican Order from 1992-2001. He is the only member of the English Province of the Dominicans to have held the office since the Order's foundation in 1216. He entered the Dominican order in 1965, was ordained a priest in 1971, and taught Scripture at Oxford University. He was elected provincial of England in 1987, prior to serving as Master of the Order. Fr. Radcliffe has an international reputation thanks to his analyses of contemporary society, Christian life, religious life, and the life of the Catholic Church. He was the 2007 winner of the Michael Ramsey Prize for theological writing.

The facts don't tell the whole story, however. Jim gave a brief account of an incident from two days earlier that happened on Fr. Radcliffe's flight from London to Chicago involving a distraught passenger who was removed from the plane, causing a considerable delay of the entire flight. What Jim highlighted, and saw as a window into the spirit of Fr. Radcliffe, was the compassion for the passenger and his wife that Fr. Radcliffe felt, rather than concern over his schedule.

Keynote Address "The Christian in the 21st Century"

Fr. Timothy Radcliffe began his presentation by recounting his Catholic upbringing in England. He said now as then, we believe people whose lives give witness to what we believe. His hope for the 21st Century Catholic Church is one that has a culture that is strongly Christian but not closed off to what others believe. He gave an example of how a tree thrives because it is open and receptive to all that surrounds it -- wind, rain, sun, birds, etc. He suggests that the Catholic Church must also be open to what is in the world, including other cultures and religions.

There are three elements that are key to being a Christian – Community, Doctrine, and Moral Vision. Community is non-controversial and generally accepted. The remainder of Fr. Radcliffe's presentation focused on doctrine and moral vision.

Western Europe is generally against doctrine, taking the view that doctrine is for children and that adults are free and capable of thinking for themselves. Christian morality is viewed as suffocating and taking away individual's freedom. The challenge for the Catholic church is to have a doctrine and moral vision that leads people to freedom, rather than away from it.

Fr. Radcliffe explained how the doctrine of the Trinity is fundamental to our lives as Catholic Christians. It is relevant everywhere and for everyone. Using examples from the Gospel of John, and stories from his life, he developed the idea that life is a series of conversations. True conversation leads to conversion – of everyone. We need to engage in dialogue with people in our society, especially those who most need and least understand love. Real doctrine is fresh, relevant and exciting. The challenge is to capture the imagination of the young and to have the courage to accept new ideas and be faithful questioners.

Moral Vision was the next area presented. The Church is often seen as an island of control in a free society. Control is profoundly secular in nature, for if you believe God provides then you don't need to control everything.

Fr. Radcliffe proposed that the Church should be an oasis of liberty. He used examples from the recent worldwide financial crises. Many key players hid behind statements that they “didn’t break any rules,” even though their behavior was wrong and immoral by any rational standard. A morality based on rules is not sustainable, since good decisions must be based on an understanding of right and wrong.

The importance of friendship was put forth, acknowledging that any worthwhile friendship is demanding. He quoted a Sufi poet, “Beyond ideas of right and wrong there is a field. Let’s meet there.”

A fourth area that Fr. Radcliffe feels is essential is beauty and art. We need beauty in our lives and in our churches. He is developing this idea in his next book.

(Note: The audio recording of Fr. Radcliffe’s presentation is available on the PAV website at <http://www.pontiacareavicariate.org/vpc/vpcmeetings.htm>. Audio CDs are also available by sending \$6.50 (\$5.00 if picked up at Christ the Redeemer) to Fr. Joe Dailey, 2700 Waldon, Lake Orion, MI 48360.

Conclusion

Denise Donaldson, Chair of the Pontiac Area Vicariate Pastoral Council, thanked Fr. Radcliffe for sharing his wisdom. She directed attendees to two questions in their programs: “How can we have better conversations in the Church?” and “How can the Church be more a place where people encounter Christ’s loving, demanding friendship?” People discussed these at their tables for fifteen minutes, followed by a brief question and answer session with Fr. Radcliffe.

Fr. Stan Ulman, Vicar of the Pontiac Area Vicariate, thanked Fr. Radcliffe for his insightful presentation. He also thanked everyone involved in organizing the evening. The program concluded at 9:05 PM with a closing song sung by Allison Minando, accompanied by Cliff Wilkins from St. Irenaeus.

Attendance

Approximately 340 people