



THE NEW ECCLESIAL MOVEMENTS

Pope John Paul II described the new ecclesial movements and communities in the Catholic Church as 'a promising springtime.' Hundreds of them were born in the 20th century, at a time when some said, "God is dead." In this series, we look at some of these movements, each of which constitutes a gift from the Holy Spirit for the world of today..

HONOURING MARRIAGE

The first Cana retreat in Ireland



THE CANA COMMUNITY CHANGES THE WATER OF MARRIAGE INTO WINE

BY SUSAN GATELY

Evelyn and Mick had been married seven years, but things were a bit flat. "We had little time for each other. The kids were the whole scene," says Mick.

"I was settling for an alright marriage," says Evelyn. "The kids were happy, we were getting by. I thought that was what marriage was."

The couple had met at university, fallen in love, lived together and married in church, although Evelyn admits it didn't "have any part in our life." They went through the motions of being Catholic – baptisms, first confession and communion, though by the time their third child, Isla, was born, Mick did not want her baptised. Finally, he agreed, but kept silent

in response to the question about raising her Catholic.

He was on his own search for faith, exploring "everything and anything, as long as it was not associated with my origins as I had developed serious barriers over the abuse scandals in the church."

In 2010 Mick came home energised from a work training week. "It's an awful shame there isn't something like that for couples," Evelyn remarked. The following day at work, a colleague handed him a brochure for a 'couples retreat.' "Is our house bugged?" he thought! His dismay at discovering the retreat in the UK was run by a Catholic organisation did not put him off.

NEW UNDERSTANDING

The retreat in Langford, Somerset, run by the Cana Community, catered for children too. They were apprehensive on arrival, but when they met the others, their apprehensions melted away. The six-day Cana retreat was a journey, punctuated by surprises, for Evelyn and Mick and the other 11 families on the course. Other

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Some of the activities of the children's programme

**C H A N G E D
C H E M I S T R Y**

Tim and Sally Phalan from Wicklow brought Cana to Ireland. An old friend in England invited them to a UK retreat. Although married 31 years, the retreat "changed the chemistry between us," says Tim. They became determined



Fr Laurent Fabre, founder Chemin-Neuf

families worked in the background, looking after the children, anticipating their every need. The programme involved prayer and worship, discussions, activities for couples and teachings. Meanwhile, the children had their own special programme of teaching and fun.

The couple don't want to tell me too much about the content of the retreat so as not to spoil it for others, or to create too high expectations, but by the end they had a totally new understanding of marriage and a new joy in their relationship.

"We were astounded at the realisation of how important the family is to society and what a phenomenal part we have to play in the church," says Mick. "I remember thinking 'This is what the early Christian community must have been like.'"

The weekend brought a freshness to their love and to their family. "Society tells you to constantly expect more of our spouse. In Cana it is about being selfless, being in service to your spouse, but it is impossible to do this without the Holy Spirit," says Evelyn. They immediately began to attend local retreats, and re-engaged with their parish community.

Prayer became an integral part of their family life. "If we had issues we'd park them, and then pray together in the presence of God," recalls Mick. They used to pull up a third chair to remind themselves that they were in the presence of God. After a while they joined a Cana fraternity, and began to meet monthly with a few other couples. In 2010 there was just one fraternity, but today there are three, each with three to four couples.

to spread its spirituality here. "The potential for growth in marriage is huge," says Tim. "Life isn't long enough to explore that potential."

Cana is part of a larger international movement called Chemin Neuf. This Catholic ecumenical community, founded by Jesuit priest, Fr Laurent Fabre, grew out of a prayer group in Lyons, France, in 1973. The community focuses its action on the principle of unity: unity of Christians, unity of people, of couples and families.

Those who go on the Cana retreats can, if they wish, join a Cana fraternity, and from this over time the Chemin Neuf community grows up, involving couples, families and men and women who give their lives to God in celibacy. Currently, the community has around 2000 members in

over 30 countries. An experienced priest from Chemin Neuf visits Ireland regularly to help form the couples in its spirituality.

"Cana changes the water of marriage into wine," says Eugene Smith. He and his Czech wife Maruska are co-ordinators of Cana in Ireland. After their first retreat in 2010 they started to talk more, and put time aside for prayer. "Before it seemed we always had something on. We used to pray, but not together," says Maruska. Praying together re-ignited the sacrament of their marriage. "It was like we had a cheque and we hadn't cashed it," says Eugene. "We were falling in love again." Now the pair are passionate about bringing their experience to others.

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Mick and Evelyn Burns with their children, Kate, Daniel and Isla



Eugene & Maruska Smith

FIRST RETREAT

Last year Cana held its first retreat in Ireland. Among those on the course were Jim and Helena from Roscrea. They met in their thirties as they both began second careers in the field of psychotherapy. They loved each other, and expressed their commitment by moving in together. Helena became pregnant and they got engaged, but it never went any further.

After the birth of their daughter, Helena became very ill. They were both involved in new age philosophies (anything with an 'ism' or 'ology,' as Jim says), but suddenly these seemed empty. "When Helena became ill, I was powerless," says Jim. One night when he feared that he would lose her, he turned to Jesus in prayer.

Shortly afterwards, a student approached him at the end of a class he was giving. She said she had been guided by the Holy Spirit to tell him something. Ultimately, the woman proved to be a vehicle to bring the couple back to their Christian faith. Helena, whose health improved dramatically, began to go to Mass each day.

They decided to live as brother and sister for six months and then marry.

The grace of God literally swept their lives clean but it was also difficult. "Our unity was under attack. Our commitment to each other was solid, but our ability to actualise it was missing," says Jim.

One day as he prayed in church, he spotted the Cana leaflet. The six-day course they attended last July, accompanied by their seven-year-old daughter, turned out to be their pre-marriage course.

"The fruits of the Spirit were evident in the people we met and bore fruits in us after. Cana became the linchpin," says Jim.

In August, they married; Helena wearing her

best dress, Jim his best suit. Fifteen friends were present. "We were like two different people," says Helena. "I had completely fallen in love all over again. I looked at our marriage as a covenant with the Lord."

Praying together re-ignited the sacrament of their marriage. "It was like we had a cheque and we hadn't cashed it"

A year on from their retreat, everything is changed. Their daughter is "blossoming," their conjugal love is different. "He [the Lord] shows me how to be a father and lover. When we're together, for me it's about her, not about me. That is what real love is like," says Jim. [®]



The young artist, Kate Burnse

The Cana retreat 2013 will take place from **21-27 July** at **Esker Retreat Centre, Esker, Athenry, Co. Galway.**

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Tim and Sally Phalan