

SHOWING ANOTHER WAY

by GERARD KELLY



THREE YEARS AGO, THE ROBED, SHAVEN-HEADED AND BEARDED FRANCISCAN FRIARS OF THE RENEWAL MOVED INTO IRELAND'S MOST NOTORIOUS NEIGHBOURHOOD: LIMERICK'S MOYROSS ESTATE. THE FRIARS ARE A NEW MONASTIC MOVEMENT, FOUNDED IN THE LATE 1980'S IN THE BRONX, NEW YORK. FROM THEIR THEIR NEWEST FRIARY, THE BROTHERS HAVE WON THE HEARTS OF THE LOCAL POPULATION, PLAGUED AS THEY ARE BY VANDALISM, DRUG CRIME AND JOY-RIDING.

Journalist Rory Fitzpatrick describes succinctly the appeal of these unexpected local heroes:

“In an age of celebrity, they practise humility; in an age where everything is sexualised, they vow chastity; in an age of consumerism, they vow poverty. They walk through the world showing us there is another way.”

Like most European nations, Ireland has seen the congregations and credibility of its churches implode in recent years. The Catholic church is rocked to its core by scandal. Recruiting new priests has become all but impossible. In this crisis situation the Friars, Fitzpatrick writes, “provide hope that, against the odds, a better church might emerge”.

What do these New York monks serving the poor of Ireland teach us about hope in our times?

They teach us, I believe, that hope is about the possibility of change. In a time of prosperity and growth, when all is well with the world and life just keeps getting better, the best we can hope for is more of the same. But in harder times, when our TV screens tell us daily that all is not well in our world, hope is about finding another way. For the rich, hope and change are mutually exclusive. For the poor they are inseparable. The Friars of the Renewal speak hope because they physically and visibly embody a different way. They connect with a young European generation who

are not looking for a new religion so much as for a new way to be human. If we are to speak a word of hope into the future in Europe, we will need to recover this powerful thread of the Gospel—as an announcement of the possibility of change.

How does our ancient faith meet this new and thoroughly post-modern challenge?

Firstly, by giving us power to deal with the most persistent enemy of all—the self. Consumer markets are built on the intentional creation of dissatisfaction, out of which human beings are persuaded to see wants as needs and spend for self-fulfillment. The resulting spiral of hunger and fullness has become, for many in the rising generations, an empty roller-coaster ride. Young Europeans have a deep and abiding hunch that there is something wrong in this system. But where can they turn to overcome the twin forces that trap them—their inward selfish drives and the outward promise of unlimited fulfillment? It is not enough to want to be different—someone has to offer us the power to be different. Enter the Christ of Philippians 2, the self-emptying King who glories in giving and rules to release. Christ who offers the power to forgive and be forgiven; who invites us into a journey of living for others. Christ who answers the deepest longings of those who know that they don't need to be overcomers so much as to be overcome. Secondly, the message of Christ invites us to stand tall in the dignity of being loved. As the late Henri Nouwen often said, we can only love others when we know ourselves as loved. To a fatherless and rootless generation, as unsure

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of their history as they are of their future, the message of Christ invites us to participate in a meaningful story. Rooted in the depths of history; looking to the future's far horizon, this story positions human beings not as accidental tourists in a universe of chaos and collision, but as created beings, God-breathed in their dignity and task. It was a humanist rebellion against this message that forged the new European worldview of the past two hundred years. But it did not bring us freedom. It brought us Auschwitz, Hiroshima, Darfur and melting ice caps. Humanity free of the creator's grasp has not fared well. Might a humanity freed in the creator's love fare better? God's offer is to bathe us in the light of his love. His call to us is, in the same way, to love others.

Thirdly, this message offers hope because it reframes the human will to power. Christ the Messiah, Son of God, by definition the most powerful figure in history, becomes pathetic; twisted; humiliated—and offers not a word in protest. The God who empties himself to the

point of death turns inside out the meaning of power. Here it is those who serve who lead the way. Those who give, gain. The meek inherit. Post-modern culture revolves around questions of power, highlighting its every abuse with the zeal of an inquisition. For many, the will to power is the root of all our woes. The search is on for a way of handling power that resists such abuses; that places responsibility above reward; that links leadership to love and seeks status in servanthood.

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What would happen if a generation were gripped by a story that called them to serve, gave them an example to follow, equipped them with servant skills and motivated them to multiply acts of love and kindness? Would such a generation not be a sign of hope in the Europe of the 21st Century? Is there a political party, an industrial corporation, a bank or an office or a hospital anywhere on the planet that could not benefit from a generation schooled in such an understanding of power? Meekness is not weakness, it is a strength derived from the certainty that selfless love will

ultimately win. To overcome the drives of self; to know myself as loved and so love others; to redirect the power I am given towards the blessing of the poor—these are qualities of life our European cultures cry out for. And buried deep in our shared memory is a story that carries just these qualities. Renewal is remembering. Will we continue in the aimlessness of our amnesia, or remember who we are and find our hope?

Gerard Kelly is the founder, with his wife Chrissie of The Bless Network, an agency offering young Europeans the opportunity, through short-term experiences of mission, to learn what it means to 'live for others'.

Read more at www.blessnet.eu

ReSEARCH

PAUL
DZUBINKSKI

VISUALIZING WHERE TO START THE NEXT CHURCH: APOSTOLIC ACTION MAPS

Call it an Apostolic Action Map. It brings together relationships, the obvious movement of God and strategic thinking all displayed on a Google Earth map.

In Portugal they regularly keep track of people who become believers using the internet site [ConhecerDeus.com](http://conhecerdeus.com) (<http://conhecerdeus.jesus.net/>).

In the Apostolic Action Map they put those people on a map together with the locations of the closest churches. That identifies a priority area based on the ratio of conversion interest and available follow-up resources.

Then they then identify the strategic cities based on criteria important for Portugal and put this together with the church locations and the towns where there are new believers. The map then shows clearly where they should mobilize to start a new church.

The Apostolic Action Map visually displays information and the obvious movements of God. Church planters can use the map in prayer before God asking for His leading and wisdom.

If you are interested in knowing more about Apostolic Action Maps we would be happy to help you do this same kind of thing in your area.

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