

counterparts: ICMDA WEC 2022

Julien van der Does reports on the Western European ICMDA Conference

In late October 2022, CMF and ICMDA organised a wonderful joint conference. It lasted three days, offering us main talks, seminars, worship, activities, sightseeing and many new friendships.

It happened in Castledaly Manor, next to a little town called Athlone, in the geographical centre of Ireland, and was attended by medical and dental students, junior and young doctors from all over western Europe, including the Netherlands, France, Portugal, Belgium, Spain and Great Britain. There were also many Irish students from Galway, Dublin, and Belfast, making a very nice mix.

The weekend's theme was 'A Living Hope in an uncertain world' from 1 Peter 1:3: *He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.* It was presented by Paul Coulter, a former medical doctor from Northern Ireland who studied at Queen's University in Belfast. Paul is now working in different ministries that involve developing networks across the UK and Ireland.

Paul spoke on the first three chapters of 1 Peter. In the first chapter, the apostle encourages us to see the hope that is in the gospel, and in the second chapter, how to hold onto that hope in times of uncertainty. In the third chapter, Peter urges us to give a reason for our hope and to share it.

Seminars included a group sharing experiences in global health and mission, with reference to time spent in a missionary hospital in Egypt; coping with high stress and burnout; difficult questions about transgenderism and advocacy; and choosing our calling in the midst of so many opportunities that sometimes seem to compete with each other



instead of working together for the glory of our Lord.

In between these thoughtful discussions, we were able to have some time off that included pumpkin carving and outside sports. We had

wonderful weather on Saturday afternoon that deconstructed many stereotypes from southern Europeans! One group went to visit one of the oldest monasteries in Ireland at Clonmacnoise, one of the Irish historic 'seven churches'. It was founded in AD 544 by Saint Ciaran as a small wooden chapel which soon became an inspiration to many monks to go across the country to share the gospel. Even Pope John Paul II visited Clonmacnoise during his trip to Ireland in 1979.

Our guide at the site heard about the purpose of our conference and volunteered to give us a tour of the place. He explained the meaning of the different carvings on the famous Irish crosses, and about the different buildings. But he also shared about his personal life, and the fact that his daughter was a medical student at Trinity College in Dublin. I have to admit it became a little bit emotional when we prayed together in front of the beautiful Irish crosses and peaceful historic chapels.

We hope and pray for the conference to be repeated, as it was a great way to connect the Irish students with one another and with students from other countries. ■

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