



THE CREATION OF LISTENING 2004

The origins of Listening 2004: My Family, My Church can be traced back to 2002, when the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales (CBCEW) set aside funds for the development of diocesan family ministry. Initially intended to be a two or three day national conference, Listening 2004 transformed over the course of 2002 and 2003 into a year-long series of diocesan-centred conversations which coincided with the tenth anniversary of the U.N. Year of the Family. Twenty dioceses and 15,000 families engaged in the process which enabled the church to listen to the lived reality of families and better understand the pastoral needs of today's marriages and family homes. These testimonies would act as a catalyst for the bishops' collaborative work from 2005-2008 in the pastoral care of marriage and family life.

Our records show that in 2002 a reference group whose members included Bishop John Hine, Terry Prendergast (Executive Director of Marriage Care), Martin Harpham (Diocesan Family Ministry Coordinator, Hallam) and Charles Wookey (Assistant General Secretary of CBCEW) proposed a 2004 Year of the Family initiative which would centre on a two or three day conference, highlighting the importance of marriage and family life issues. The group also created the post of National Coordinator for Marriage and Family Life to provide administrative support to the bishops as they travelled through the dioceses of England and Wales, gathering information from Catholic families, in order to develop diocesan family life ministry.

As planning progressed, the project began to grow in scope. In addition to the conference, Canon Frank O'Sullivan suggested that a national conversation-driven consultation with families should take place. The reference group met again in February 2003 and agreed to a consultation process for 2004 which would coincide with the tenth anniversary of the United Nations Year of the Family. This would be followed by a national conference in 2005. At the same time the reference group consulted the International Academy for Marital Spirituality (INTAMS) in Belgium who had agreed to help organize the project. INTAMS applauded the idea of a series of diocesan conversations about marriage and family and the reference group subsequently decided to abandon the idea of a national conference and focus on a series of diocesan conversations conducted through a supportive listening process.

The project proposal was presented to the Bishops' Conference in the spring of 2003. The bishops welcomed the idea of bringing greater focus to marriage and family life in order to identify the unmet needs for families in a time of economic, social, and cultural instability. They also agreed with INTAMS that family ministry was currently under-resourced and that there was *'a certain lack of clarity in the current scope of this ministry, due to its informal and unacknowledged character.'*



To assist with the development and implementation of the diocesan conversations CBCEW appointed Elizabeth Davies as the national Project Officer. Throughout the summer of 2003, Bishop Hine and Elizabeth Davies liaised with individual dioceses and a working group was appointed to drive the project forward. Working group members included Charles Wookey, Terry Prendergast, Martin Harpham, Breda Theakston (Diocesan Family Ministry Coordinator, Leeds), Margaret Rogers (Diocesan Family Ministry Coordinator, Liverpool), Martin Coyle (Diocesan Family Ministry Coordinator, Brentwood), Jo Trask and Rebecca Jackson (Administrators for the Department of Christian Responsibility and Citizenship, CBCEW). By September, the group had set dates for most of the conversation days and agreed that each event should focus on three broad talking points: Family at Home, Family in Society and Family in the Church.



In the final months of 2003 the working group also decided that the conversation days should focus on the theme of “listening” and should serve as community building exercises within the dioceses rather than solely fact finding missions. The project was finally launched on

January 26, 2004 at a press conference at 39 Eccleston Square, London, SW1V hosted by the President of the Bishops' Conference, Cardinal Cormac Murphy O'Connor, accompanied by Bishop John Hine and Elizabeth Davies. The project was called Listening 2004: My Family, My Church.