

Argyll & The Isles Diocesan Retreat, College of The Holy Spirit, Isle of Cumbrae, November 2011

## **JOURNEYING TO THE BANQUET -**

Attitudes to Food, Fasting and Feasting, examined through Scripture, Poetry, Music, Film and Silence.

Guided by Rev Anne Tomlinson,  
Ministry Development Officer, Diocese of Glasgow and Galloway

On a very wet Monday afternoon ten of us from the Diocese, representing seven charges, met to explore, under the guidance of Anne, the connection between food and our faith. It was helpful to be in silence for most of the time. Not having to make conversation meant each of us could spend time reflecting on what Anne put before us and consider how to develop our own particular attitude to food and faith

The two fixed points of our retreat therefore were meeting with Jesus around the Refectory table and around the Lord's table in the Eucharist.



Food is central to the Christian Faith. From Adam and Eve being given a Garden in which to grow their food (Genesis ch 2 v 15) through Joseph being made Manager of Food Stores in a time of famine (Genesis ch 41). Jesus Himself was something of a party animal. Making sure a wedding went with a swing, enjoying the hospitality of some unsavoury people, through to the various meals He had with His disciples before and after His death and resurrection. And then looking forward to the Great Feast beyond the End of Time. All these meals being not just food for the belly but food for the soul too.

During this retreat Anne advised us to take little crumbs of the thoughts she was putting before us and “chew” on those. Better chew on a little thoroughly than a lot and get spiritual indigestion.

She asked us how do we view food? Is it something we buy and devour as quickly and cheaply as possible? Are we hooked on instant, convenient food? How much do we follow the biblical pattern and treat our meals as spiritual as well as material nourishment?

Her addresses during the four days invited us to think about -



- **“Just” Food:** Avoid throwing food away; making sure all the peoples of the world had enough food; the Grower, Distributor and Retailer get a reasonable return on their efforts; food is grown, distributed and sold with respect to the world's ecosystems. “Sustainable Development will require a change of heart, a renewal of mind and a healthy dose of repentance” Herman Daly *Beyond Growth* Boston (1996)
- **“Fast” food:** Here Anne showed us the theory and practicalities of Fasting. Fasting reveals the things that control us, helps us to keep a balance in Life and can prevent our cravings becoming our masters. Fasting is a small death which pushes us towards God.

“In a culture driven by endless cries of *'More!'* fasting can simply be a faithful affirmation of *'Enough.'*”

- **A Place at the Table for All:** We were reminded of the tradition of Hospitality which permeates the Bible and the Church through 2,000 years. Hospitality offered, not just to our own social class, not just to those who would return our hospitality but, following the pattern of our Lord, breaking social boundaries remembering that at the last Great Banquet to which all people are invited we will not be able to exclude anyone.
- **Grace Before Meals:** *Gratitude;* Creation, an act by God of Self giving, shows us His character, an extravagant nature. Jesus says to us, not “This is a bit of nourishment for you” but “This is my Body given for you”.



*Gratefulness;* not quite the same as Gratitude. A fundamental thankfulness to God for our food. As we celebrate spiritual world at our meal times, so we celebrate the material world at the Communion.

*Generosity;* we were reminded that we cannot choose our companions. The Christ exists in the people we do not like to enrich, not threaten, our lives.

With *Gladness;* we look forward to that Great Feast beyond the End of Time when, like it or not, all barriers are broken down and no one is forbidden.

In between the sessions we reflected on what had been put before us; discussed with God whether there needed to be any changes in our lifestyle and attitudes; went for walks and in the times when Silence was suspended chatted to our brothers and sisters from other parts of the Diocese.

The food on the table matched the quality of the food offered to us in the sessions. The College was warm, the Library and the Common Room comfortable, (but we needed sweaters and coats for the Cathedral.) This was a very worthwhile opportunity to take stock of our lives and see how we could become better Christian Disciples.

*Revd Andrew J. Williamson*