

Irish HARP Winter Workshop 2013-2014 - Engaging Second-Generation Concerns

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Every year, for the past few years, it has become somewhat of a tradition to hold a workshop for second-generation members in Ireland. Although we have a small community and see each other fairly often, there was always something quite distinctive about these gatherings that allowed us to gain a new sense of camaraderie with one another, and the feeling that we had been given a privileged insight into one another's lives that would often be missed in our usual interactions. Through these workshops, we had the opportunity to step back and see each other from a new angle, from a fresh perspective. These times of retreat also provided a platform for a more open communication among participants and the staff about God, faith, and the big questions of life. Although our numbers were always on the modest side, everyone naturally came together and pooled their skills, talents and resources to contribute to the success of the workshop. Being a small island nation, we wanted to share these experiences with other small communities, so we partnered with Iceland and Malta on separate occasions.

This most recent winter workshop, we wanted to venture a little farther and open our doors to the wider European community, with an emphasis on the smaller nations, particularly those that may not have the numbers or facilities to have their own workshop. This desire sprouted from some of the Irish HARP members, who felt inspired by the European Second-Generation Department summer activities that they had previously attended. After a bit of brainstorming and research, they presented the idea to a few of us older members of the second generation. Although many of us were busy with university and work, those of us who could were very happy to assist in the materialization of these ideas. In this way, the preparation for the workshop was very much a collaboration between the younger and older second-generation members.



Akin to the changes occurring in the movement on the wider international scale, it had become apparent that we, as an Irish community, had also entered into somewhat of a transition stage. Although not intentionally, the preparation for the workshop coincided with the Irish members' entrance into extensive discussion on the progress of our community and the future of the movement as a whole. Within this dialogue, it became evident that we in the second generation often understand and relate to the movement in a different way than those in the first generation. Although we feel value as members of the church and want to contribute, it sometimes felt that there was a slight disconnect between the ideals of the

movement and where we were in our own spiritual journeys. In this sense, those of us on the staff desired to understand and to acknowledge what the HARP members wanted from the workshop, and more importantly what they felt they needed at this stage in their spiritual lives. With this in mind, we held a creative meeting with the HARP members and together with them, decided on the workshop theme, A Guide to Thrive, Principle Living for Dummies. The reasoning behind this theme was that we wanted to provide very practical, real guidelines for them to flourish in their spiritual lives despite challenges that they may face along the way. The sub-theme, Principle Living for Dummies is based off the very well known For Dummies series, which are a range of easy-to-digest, instructional books that present a topic or a skill in a very clear, accessible and non-intimidating fashion. We wanted to take this idea and convey the Divine Principle in a more practical and attainable form that they could translate and apply to their everyday lives.

This year, we held the workshop over the New Year, from December 28, 2013 to January 1, 2014. The workshop venue was held in a scout center nestled in the heart of the Wicklow Mountains, which served as an ideal location to reflect in the final few days leading up to the New Year. We conducted two workshops simultaneously; one for the HARP age group (twelve to eighteen years old) and one for the pre-HARP age group (seven to eleven years old). Although both were held in the same venue, the schedules and education were kept separate to facilitate the needs of the different groups. However, during free time and meal times everyone came together and a very natural and loving bond grew among all participants and staff members. Just over thirty- five participants and staff members came, with quite a few joining us from other countries around Europe. In total, people from seven countries took part -- Belgium, Luxembourg, Iceland, Scotland, England, Portugal and Ireland.



Sending lanterns up to God to welcome in the New Year

We were very fortunate to be able to have Patrick Hanna as the main lecturer. He delivered eloquent talks on our position as second-generation members in the context of the family and the church, our value and purity and character building. From personal observations throughout the workshop, I could see that the audience was engaged, intent on listening, and enjoying the guidance. Patrick approached the daily topics and the theme of the workshop in a very relatable manner and often with a tasteful touch of humor. The content was a varied combination of lectures, personal testimonies, peer guidance, sharing and team activities. When considering how to approach the guidance beforehand, a strong consensus formed that sharing from personal experience in guidance through testimony was a very powerful way of communicating the chosen message. Among the staff members, we felt passionate about the fact that we wanted to be much more personal and real about some of the chosen topics. We all were in agreement that we wanted to actively engage with the younger ones and not just stand back in a distant position. Listening to the ideas and the desires that the HARP members expressed reminded us that many of the challenges they are facing at present are the same things that we went through and indeed still encounter. These include defining our identity as second-generation members and deciding how we choose to express that in all areas of our lives; relating with our parents and trying to understand the true value of their history; connecting with God; choosing the company we keep and the implications of those choices on our spiritual health; comprehending the meaning and value of the blessing and the choices that we make in order to preserve our purity. All of these and more affect us to varying degrees at some point in our lives and often necessitate explanation, guidance and discussion in a candid and non-judgmental manner. Accordingly, each day of lectures was accompanied by one of the staff members sharing some guidance based on the person's own experience of the particular theme or topic that Patrick had already spoken on. In addition, we had an evening of testimony with first- and second-generation perspectives on joining the movement or in the case of a second- generation speaker, making the active decision to accept the movement as his or her own.

The combination of guidance provided a good platform for individual reflection, goal setting and prayer leading up to the New Year. On the last full day of the workshop, on the cusp of midnight, we gathered outside, and in candlelight counted down the last few seconds of 2013. As we celebrated the new beginning, the success of the workshop was palpable in the atmosphere and in the beaming faces all around, and most notably measured by the excited and eager request from one of the participants to "start planning the next workshop" before the ongoing workshop had even ended.