

Keeping the Flame Alive

Peter Devine talks about the plans for Flame 2019

Can you imagine a Catholic youth event which fills Wembley Arena? One in which coaches descend on the capital, jam-packed with teenagers wanting to affirm their faith in God?



Well, this exact scenario happens every two years at Flame, the largest Catholic youth event in the UK. The next one is scheduled for 2 March 2019.

Peter Devine is company secretary for the charity CYMFed (the Catholic Youth Ministry Federation), a member of Chester Circle and joint member of North East Wales Circle. Flame is organised by CYMFed. Peter says he deals mainly with: “the boring legal stuff and the contracts with Wembley,” but he is happy to support the “youth ministers who are inspirational and have a deep vocation”.

He says: “When you see the young people enjoying their faith, it gives you a tremendous lift in terms of the future of the Church. It’s not just the biggest Catholic youth event in the country, it’s regularly the biggest Catholic event in the country.”

A large part of funding for Flame comes from ticket sales; audiences of 10,000-plus (of mostly pre-university age young people) at Wembley Arena are not uncommon.

Catenians around the UK also make a substantial contribution to the event. Previous speakers have included Cardinal Bo from Myanmar and Archbishop Vincent Nichols. Nearly every bishop from England and Wales attends.

Nationally, the Catenians give £10,000 a year towards the cost of Flame. “If it wasn’t for the Catenians’ and the Salesians’ donations, Flame couldn’t happen,” says Peter.

“It’s vital that Catenians get involved with Flame and back it. It’s vital to engage with Catholic youth for the future of the Church and for our own future. Most of the kids who are going to Flame are

immersed in the faith and they will probably go to university. They are our potential members, our long-term future. They will always remember that Catenians were big sponsors of Flame. The young people who attend just love Flame and the message of hope it brings.”

He adds: “I’ve never personally heard a negative comment from a Catenian about Flame, and I’m always asked to talk about it by Circles and they are very enthusiastic, and ask where they can send their cheques. I am grateful for all their support.”

Bob Hussey has been chairman of the Board of Trustees for the Bursary Fund for the past two and a half years, and a trustee for about eight years. He admits that, when he went to Flame 17, he was expecting to loathe the day.

“I don’t like loud music, and frankly, I am a fairly reserved sort of Catholic and not into anything that I would characterise as vaguely happy-clappy. So when I arrived, my jaw was set, and I was quite determined to dislike the whole day.”

However, Bob’s preconceptions were quickly overturned.

“I found so many young Catholics having a party, celebrating the good news. We traditional Catholics, when did we last see ten young people at church, let alone 10,000? And they were there because they wanted to be there, and were in love with Our Lord Jesus Christ, wanted to be near Him and with Him.

“For me it was a sort of Damascene moment. I suddenly realised that whilst it might not be my sort of worship, it was most certainly theirs and it was no less valid because I didn’t understand it. I watched so many young people having a real encounter with Christ and finding Him in the rap, in the hip-hop and in the ear-splitting noise, the commotion and the use of social media.

” During his time at Flame 17, Bob talked to a group from Newcastle and Hexham diocese who had come to Flame in 18 coaches, departing at 3am that morning and returning well after midnight.

“Frankly it was humbling,” he says. “I was in awe of this event which is such an example, such a lesson to us all about how we have to communicate Jesus’ love to our young people.

The foundation of the day was, of course, Holy Mass, but I know that for the whole of that day Jesus had been with us all, sitting in the stalls and having a great party.”



Earlier this year, Peter Devine and David Rowley, who has been instrumental in supporting Flame, asked Bob if the Bursary Fund could provide a stage show at Flame 19.

“Of course I said yes instantly. This is our charity’s opportunity to communicate directly with 10,000 of our target clients from the UK and overseas at one sitting and cannot be missed. And clearly, we wouldn’t have been asked without the sterling efforts of Peter and David. Currently we have our branding and marketing advisers working on what we might do. Their initial thoughts were to produce ‘a wall of sound and colour’, but in the first instance we have to accept the challenge of developing our own social media strategy so that we can connect and engage with our audience, for whatever we produce will have to be multimedia and interactive.”

He continues: “Flame remains for me the single most important and impressive exercise in the communication of God’s love for our young people, and I am just so proud that our association has had the presence of mind to offer it some support, such that it has now developed to be the envy of the world. That’s why young Catholics from overseas come to our youth convention. I don’t know what it costs the association, but it’s worth so much more than every single penny we spend and is something of which we can all be extremely proud.”

For more information please see: www.cymfed.org.uk/flame2019/