

Day One of the Teach-In Concludes

Tim Dulle | Nov. 16, 2012 NCR Today
Washington, D.C.

Following the traditional and much anticipated annual t-shirt swap between student delegations from various Jesuit schools, and most groups' departure to engage in reflection (in the finest Ignatian tradition), the first day of the Teach-In has concluded. After one day at the Ignatian Family Teach-In for Justice, memorable and inspirational moments seem to be the hallmark of the conference. The conference's theme, "Imagination Reform: Moving beyond the margins," has been central to the message of each student and keynote speaker here.

The conference opened with a prayer service in memory of the Jesuit Martyrs of El Salvador, killed in 1989 for their opposition to a civil war in the country. Students processed in bearing roses and portraits of the deceased, while all in attendance commemorated their loss with hymns and petitions. Later, Jesuit School of Theology students Beth Mueller and Natalie Terry reflected on the profound witness and example of Elba and Celina Ramos, a mother and her daughter who were killed along with the Jesuits.

The first keynote speaker of the evening was Sr. Simone Campbell, of recent Nuns on the Bus fame. The Sister of Social Service entered to a standing ovation and spoke to the students about the need to "touch the pain of the world as real and let your heart be broken." Praising the students' energy, she spoke of the work to be done for causes such as immigration reform, and shared her experiences in countries such as Lebanon with the eager crowd.

Sandwiched between student speakers on topics ranging from labor rights for workers on Jesuit campuses to Catholic-Muslim dialogue, former Sudanese Lost Boy Gabriel Bol Deng drew a strong response in the second keynote speech of the evening. He told the crowd of his experiences as a young boy in Sudan where he was forced to walk 1,500 miles to a refugee camp following the destruction of his village. Eventually Deng came to America, where he earned a degree from Le Moyne University in Syracuse, NY, and began a project to build a school in Africa. Following a video chronicling the work at the school and its impact on the community, Deng received an enthusiastic standing ovation and exited the stage to a warm reception.

Tomorrow is sure to be another busy day in DC, featuring a wide variety of break out sessions, and keynotes from JRS Regional Director Merlys Mosquera Chamat and former Catholic Charities President and current head of the Jesuit Social Research Institute, Jesuit Father Fred Kammer.

Stay tuned for updates as the weekend progresses.