

Faith in Action: Engaging, Listening and Leading

Kelley Birmingham

Our final speaker works as the Community Officer at Saint Patrick's Cathedral but she has worked and volunteered in a wide range of roles within the city. Kelley explained that she grew up in a caring family where people were made to feel welcome. Her father founded the charity ALONE and Kelley acknowledged her parents' influence on her value system.

Kelley shared a few key questions which guide her work:

- **How can we offer a true and Christian welcome to those who visit us and those who need us?**

Kelley admitted she likes to use acronyms and it is no accident that the word WELCOME, which was central to our panel discussion, includes the word LOVE.

When

Everyone

LOVES

Connects

Openly

Meeting

Each Other...

- **How can churches and cathedrals, which ARE community spaces effectively support and impact their communities?**

Kelley is involved in several inter-agency projects, often working with more than twenty other organisations. Occasionally, she has been challenged by their representatives, who are sometimes surprised or resentful that the church is involved, even hostile, but Kelley remains determined that the church should engage with current problems and future issues. Indeed, as centres of faith they should lead the way towards a fairer and better society...She has worked with social services, the police and the CPED (Crime Prevention Design and Environment)

Another acronym Kelley shared with us, which captures her approach to working with others, is LEAD

Listen and Lead

Enquire and Engage

Ask and Address

Dream and Do...

Kelley advised us to Dream BIGGER and Do MORE and, using the LEAD model, Kelley explained how her approach can work in practice. She talked about how she deals with highs and lows, identifies easy wins and deals with the practicalities of each project. Admitting she finds policies and form-filling less exciting than working with people, she acknowledged that record -keeping is vital, to provide evidence of impact. She discussed the importance of dynamics in challenging situations and how she has handled risks.

Naturally, budgets and funding need to underpin any venture if it is to succeed but, even when money is limited, she reminded us that we can give in other ways.

Kelley's inspirational talk featured a recent example of her approach. She described how she organises World Refugee Day. Inspired by an Italian model of feeding the homeless, she invites nearly 300 refugees and asylum seekers to St Patrick's Cathedral for a shared meal. To help publicise the first event of this kind, Kelley invited an Irish TV presenter to come along and film the occasion and we watched the film he made. It reminded us all that we can reconcile the tensions we all experience in cathedrals between worship, tourism and events management by using our sacred spaces for the communities we serve.

This Address (Speaker 3) was given at the Cathedrals Plus Conference 2026 at Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin on 15th January 2026 by Kelley Birmingham.

Summary produced by Jackie Holderness, Cathedrals Plus