



International Confederation of Midwives

PRESS RELEASE

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‘Share and nourish together’

Bridget Lynch - independent midwife, university teacher and founder member of the Canadian Association of Midwives from Toronto, Canada – was asked to give a keynote speech on ‘Care for the caregivers’ and she gave midwives that and more.

Many of the 2000-plus midwives gathered in Vienna for the 26th Congress of the International Confederation of Midwives came to hear Bridget speak of the challenges facing midwives which bring stress, exhaustion and burn-out. Midwives are particularly vulnerable to this last because, she said ‘to burn out, you first have to be on fire’.

Midwives and mothers make up the single largest coalition on the planet – yet they are pressured by the dominating forces of medically-based health policies. Midwives work with women who are abused, in poverty, homeless and unsupported. The work is by nature political and they must recognise this - ‘we must shake ourselves loose from a sense of powerlessness’.

Bridget told her audience of the indigenous people of North America who have a strong tradition of honouring their ancestors and preparing for the generations to come. Midwives must learn this lesson and respect the lineage of midwifery. They have become too steeped in the medico-scientific model of care where there is one way, one truth, one answer. The individual context of care has been lost and with this the traditions of midwifery are threatened. The loss of these roots brings the stress that midwives are suffering now.

‘We are working within a wounded workplace’ - midwives are hurt by overwork and lack of recognition. Managers and employers should aim to create a working environment with human values. The worst thing they can do is offer sympathy without action. Midwives must be enabled to take time away from work - to rest, renew and remember.

Bridget spoke of the ancient religions and their recognition of the need for a sabbath – a day away from work – ‘time for the sake of life’. She also referred to the midwife’s role as companion. The meaning of this word is ‘with bread’. She encouraged midwives to take bread together, to share and nourish.

The ICM is a Confederation of 83 national midwifery associations from 70 countries, founded in 1919. It aims to ‘advance world-wide the aims and aspirations of midwives in the attainment of improved outcomes for women in their childbearing years, their newborn and their families wherever they reside’.

Major international congresses are held every three years. The 26th Congress currently taking place in Vienna, Austria, includes over 750 presentations. Keynote speeches are given by leading midwives from every region of the world.

For further information contact ICM headquarters or visit the website www.internationalmidwives.org