

An impression of Manresa

by Aukje Jensma and Jacoline de Koe

The first day



About 60 Spiritual Directors in Europe came together in Manresa, a town north-west of Barcelona on the foot of the Pyrenees. A remarkable place for spiritual directors because of the bond Manresa has with Ignace de Loyola, founder of the society of Jesuits. We were guests of the House of Exercises in Manresa and warmly welcomed by Manuela Casanova sj and Joseph Bullich sj.

After the first meeting of well known and new faces we started with a meal where people came at ease and met together for the first time in the so beloved circle around the centre of all

meetings: the Holy Presence.

The second day



We started as usual with a worship. In this worship The Danish members granted us what appeared to become the refrain in many moments: 'ad majorem Dei gloriam'. Together with a good breakfast a good start for going deeper: in dialogue trying to find the centre of your being as spiritual director and your desire for this meeting. This prepared us for a meeting with Ignatius. in two ways. One way was by a pilgrimage - walk through Manresa along places that learned about Ignatius. The other way was by visiting the cove where – as it is told - Ignatius wrote down his Spiritual Exercises, the church of the Jesuits, and an exhibition with objects connected with the life of Ignatius. These two ways together led us into an impressing meeting with this great man for spiritual direction expressing the actual strength of his thoughts.

Both the walk in the footsteps of Ignatius and visiting the cove and all around gave a new dimension to the importance of his spiritual exercises that means so much to already so many generations Christians longing for a life near God. I never realized it so much until being there and meeting this story of Ignatius in the company of fellow directors. A confrontation with my own way of directing. A rediscovering of the meaning of suffering for signs of life. In these day before Eastern so important and encouraging.



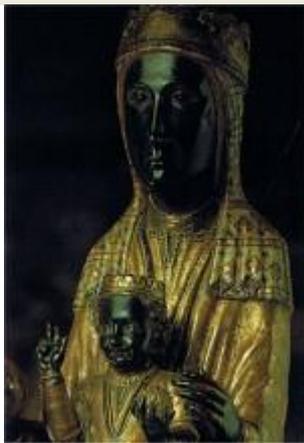
Having met more closely members of the conference and Ignatius of Loyola it was time for business and start the annual meeting. A short meeting. But long enough to accept Tim Noble as new secretary and say thank you to Henry Morgan, who was such a faithful and unique secretary for so many years. Johan thanked him in name of all members for all he did and handed him a gift: a bell.

We ended this second day with a worship in which we listened in silence to the first days of creation. This was one of the ways in which we tried to open up and make space into ourselves and among us to be more sensitive to the creative Spirit, Who is working among us. After this worship there was time for the evening meal and social time with its very special sharing of the goodies that had been brought from the various countries and were so fully satisfied by (S)pirit, food and friendship.

The third day

This day was, as all days, started with a worship celebrated by the Latvian member. A good silence in which we could write in order to prioritize, clarify and ground the day's activities. It was ended by a spoken 'Our Father' each in his or her own language. All those tongues came together in a beautiful clear sound of harmony. A precious moment to start the day.

This day we were invited to join in workshops. Ten members offered to tell something about a method they used in practice or a helpful meaning in spirituality. I chose a workshop about bio-spiritual focusing by Felicity Young. She told with enthusiasm and convincing about the precious meaning of the body for grounded and healthy spirituality and let us feel in our own bodies the difference between positive feelings and negative feelings and encouraged us to listen to our body as we give spiritual direction. A very good workshop. As was the workshop with Paul Booth, 'fingering sand – creative writing'. We were encouraged to express ourselves in haiku's or a poem, or perhaps a small story and experience it as a way to touch the Spirit of God. Many beautiful expressions were heard at the end of this workshop. Some of them are published on the website of the SD-Europe. The remarks from other workshops were as positive as mine. It really helps to share what we discovered as helpful and fruitful in our own practice as spiritual director.



In the afternoon, after the big event of making the group-picture, we visited Montserrat. It is a special place because of its unique natural environment that has been host to a religious centre and monastery for many ages. It is also the Sanctuary of Our Lady. We were welcome guests to the Benedictine monks who are living there. They shared with us something about their spirituality and ways of expressing it. We could enter and see many places of this monastery. And we were told about the secret of the black Madonna: it is supposed to be black because it grew black through the soot of many candles lit by visitors praying for her help. After a needed restoration the restorers decided to paint her black so that the signs of repair could not longer be traced. How earthly holiness can be! After an evening worship in the big church we traveled back. We had supper. Then a day of silence followed, started with a worship. Each of us

received a small thing of someone else with a specific request for prayer.

The fourth day



It was a beautiful day in silence, with a worship, meals in silence, and a nice warm sun: a Gift of stillness and an atmosphere of prayer and friendship. The day was ended with a celebration of the Eucharist, in most sober words and silence: bread and wine for body and soul, eaten in communion. It will be very hard to forget the sound that evening at the end of that quiet day when we shared meal and social time and told and talked.

The fifth day

We met after worship and breakfast again for mutual spiritual direction, now in triads. For many members a moving event, that is strengthening many a one in his or her often lonely going of giving spiritual direction. After coffee the community of Jesuits offered some of their workshops. I chose contemplative and Davidic dancing and so I found myself dancing in a contemplative way. A beautiful experience of love, life and body to meet one another in this specific way. And than feeling the strength that is given by dancing in the line of David. God can be served and met in so many ways!

That afternoon we met for the second part of the annual meeting. The Executive Committee gave their annual report. The applaunds were a grace for all the work the committee has done! After these reports the Committee asked us to help them to look forward. We were asked to answer three questions:

1. What is the one thing you value most about our annual meetings?
2. If you could include one new element in the program, what would it be?
3. If SD-Europe were to do one new thing outside the annual meeting, what would you like it to be?

Many answers were given and some of them greatly supported by other members. We trust the committee will work out all the suggestions as far as possible.



The meeting and the conference were ended by a worship celebrated by the Finnish participants. This worship made us conscious of the importance snow, ice and winter has in the spirituality of Finland / Scandinavia. The melting of snow or ice as a metaphor for melting the inner ice ending up in a warm blessing that melts all the snow and cold freezing of winters in ourselves, our lives as it does in nature. A blessing also for Tim Noble our new secretary and for the other members of the Executive Committee doing their important work for spiritual direction.

Then: the last meal together, the last social time, luggage packed, last words said..... that evening or the next morning. The end of a very impressive conference.

The sixth day

The final farewell, waiting for the flight, tired and confused by all the impressions, conversations, workshops, prayers, meetings.....

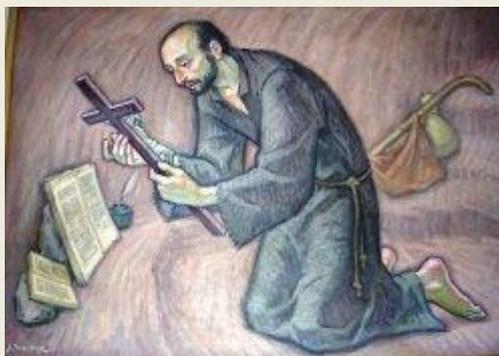
The seventh day

It was good, very good. We feel enforced by the hospitality of Jesuits especially Manuel Casanova and Joseph Bullich and the staff of the kitchen for all the good meals.

Encouraged by all the different ways of being together and how we can meet in all that each another and Christ in the name of God. We are strengthened by knowing that fellow directors in different countries will pray for us as we pray for fellow directors because we brought their names and prayers with us on cards as they brought our names and prayers with us. We are the Executive Committee grateful for all the work they have done.

And the memories of these days will continue sounding.....

Ad majorem Dei gloriam



Together on the journey, united in His Spirit...