

SD-E Malta Report 2013

The meeting followed the pattern which has built up over the years that Spiritual Directors –Europe has been in existence. There are a number of elements. It is a conference; people meet who share a strong interest to learn and to grow in their skills; it has the marks of a retreat in the periods of prayer together and the specially designed liturgies; it is a kind of reunion in which old friends spent time together and new friendships are forged; it is a remarkable ecumenical event in which it seems that denominational barriers are forgotten in the focus on the calling we share as spiritual directors, speaking the same language about the same ministry. The keynotes are welcome, openness and attentive listening.

Seventy people, including a number of Maltese day visitors, from across Europe -- Ireland to Romania and Iceland to Malta -- met at Mount St. Joseph Retreat House in Mosta for four days, April 17th –23rd. fourteen nations were represented; and several other people who could not be there sent their warm greetings.

Following the programme prepared by the Maltese group and the Executive Committee and against the background of warm, sunny weather and the hospitality of the house we prayed together, shared our experiences, and visited impressive ancient sites, all with a strong sense of the values of spiritual direction.

Wednesday April 17th

The meeting began with a welcoming supper and opening worship introducing the conference theme, "The Spirit of Place". Each of us showed a picture or an object connected with a place which for us was a place of healing. These images, placed in a circle in the centre of the room provided a continuing focus for the weekend.

Thursday April 18th

After a time of prayer led by Valfrid from Norway, Edward Warrington SJ took us deeper into our theme with a vivid presentation on Angels as seen in the Bible and met in daily life. We then reflected on the application of this to our practice and experiences in spiritual direction in small groups.

The rest of the morning saw a number of workshops on themes closely connected with the ministry:

- Bereavement and spiritual direction
- Carmelite Spirituality
- Spiritual direction and Psychotherapy
- Direction 'On the Fringe'
- Love the Lord your God with all your heart and ...

We met in the afternoon for the first part of our AGM with reports from our Chair, Maike, on the year's events and the work of the Executive Committee and from the Treasurer, Raili, who told us about the finances. We then broke off for a Special General Meeting to change our procedure in elections away from the English custom when there is only one nomination for one vacancy of simply accepting that person as elected. Instead there is always to be a vote. The process of the meeting was greatly eased by Paul as Moderator guiding us through complex situations...

The evening Eucharist was led by Tytsje and Jacoline from the Netherlands drawing from their Reformed tradition. As on most evenings there was social time offering the opportunity to eat and drink the local specialities that people had brought from home.

Friday April 19th

Today, developing our theme, "The Spirit of Place", was a Maltese day. Edward opened it with an introduction giving the background to the temple at Hagar Qim. We crossed the island by coach to

visit this large megalithic temple, older even than Stonehenge or the Pyramids and wonderfully preserved. There was space here for meditation on the depth of humanity's yearning for the transcendent and the divine 3000 years before Christ.

Back to the house for lunch and then we left by coach for St. Paul's Bay and our boat trip. We paused for reflection as we passed St. Paul's Island on our way to Comino where we landed and took the path to the chapel dedicated to the Holy Family's Return from Egypt. Many of the group then walked further uphill to the hermit's cave. Our return in the boat had the added interest of coming close in to the sea caves on Comino before a chilly arrival at St. Paul's Bay as the wind rose and the sun sank behind the hills.

The Eucharist that evening, led by Tuula from Finland, took the riches of the day into the silence of Saturday.

Saturday April 20th The Silent Day

Morning Prayer was largely in silence, giving space for meditation on the readings offered by Valda and Grazina from Lithuania. In the afternoon those who wanted had the possibility of an Emmaus walk with a partner. The "Festive Eucharist" was led by Elemer with Margit and Magdolena from Hungary. The strong, simple liturgy moved many, particularly with its ecumenical emphasis on diversity and unity.

The evening meal took the form of a Maltese Buffet with generous helping of traditional local dishes.

Sunday April 21st

Today's programme had to be adjusted to meet the needs of people whose journey home was affected by a strike at Lufthansa. The day opened with a very moving Morning Prayer led by Lehel from Romania. Following the reading of John 13 we washed one another's feet in silence and there was an atmosphere of great reverence.

In the second part of the AGM we elected Valfrid as our new Treasurer to succeed Raili from Finland after her six years service in the role, and Juditta from Lithuania as the fourth member of the Executive Committee in place of Josep (Spain). We heard details of the 2014 meeting in Dublin and offered suggestions of venues into the future. An exercise in discernment gave a clear indication that people did not want to change the pattern of one annual meeting with an upper limit of one hundred members. There was strong support for variation of venues between East and West and North and South.

The afternoon was given over to what many think is one of the most important parts of our regular programme, the work in triads. Each person has the privilege of being carefully listened to by the other two within the confidentiality we observe in spiritual direction.

So the meeting closed with a Eucharist prepared and led by people from Malta and from Ireland with music from both host countries. Sadly by this time our numbers had begun to shrink as people had to leave to catch planes earlier than they had hoped in order to avoid the strike.

The times of worship and liturgy were greatly enhanced by the fine singing of the group as a whole, accompanied at some times by Ulla on the guitar and "a capella" at others.

Monday April 22nd

A handful of people stayed on at Mount St. Joseph for a day or two but the majority left in a succession of taxis for the airport. Some of those remaining met for a short review session before a last lunch together.

Report submitted by
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