

EUROPEAN PROVINCE UPDATE

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Group Spiritual Direction Workshop

Over an evening (Thursday, 20/01/17) and a day (Friday, 21/01/17) in the Marino Institute of Education, Margaret Benefiel gave the most wonderful workshop on group spiritual direction. Some 45 to 50 people were present, the majority being Brothers. The feedback at the end of the workshop was extremely positive, participants leaving no doubt as to how much they had benefited.

Margaret's input covered basic listening skills, spiritual discernment, intercessory prayer and some problems that can arise in group spiritual direction. Most of the workshop time, however, was spent in a group process with four people in each group. One member of the group would share something of themselves for 10 minutes and the rest would listen "contemplatively". That was followed by one or two minutes of complete silence. Then the other members of the group would offer affirmation, or some words or images, or seek clarification from the person who had spoken. This whole process for the one individual took nearly half an hour. So when you added in some stretching time it took between 2 and 2 ½ hours for all four people in a group to share.

This process has a parallel in the Quaker tradition of meeting for worship for business. Two hours seems a long time but, in truth, the time flew and, of course, we did have a break midway. In the wrap up to the workshop, people, in turn, said that they had been enriched, inspired, fascinated, amazed and enlightened. They spoke of the wonderful sense of presence and intimacy experienced in the small group of four. They also mentioned the critical value of the silence that was part of the process and it was surmised how such a process could contribute to community life.

The evening and the day had been organized by Jim Donovan and Monica O'Reilly who are members of the Province Spirituality Group. Paul Hendrick very graciously acknowledged both and thanked the excellent Margaret Benefiel at the end of the workshop. And, as we have come to expect, the welcome in the Marino Institute of Education was of the very warmest. Finally, each of the participants came away with the very generous gift of one of Margaret's books.

