

The Margaret Benefiel Workshop in MIE - 19/01/2017

I have rarely experienced such genuine joy in others and myself as I did when the workshop ended at 3.30pm on January 20th in Marino. There was universal positive acclaim from the participants about the experience. One word I heard expressed was 'profound.' This echoed my own experience. What happened? What was the cause of our joy?

I picked up one of Margaret's books after the event, 'The Soul of Supervision', and happened to open it at the page where the author [Martin McAlindin] was comparing the pastoral supervision experience with that of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. He describes the following: 'The disciples were encouraged to tell what is happening in their lives; with Jesus they reflect on the facts; and they return to where they came from with new meaning and enthusiasm.' Margaret encouraged us to tell one another in small groups of four people 'what is happening in our lives'; with the others we 'reflected on the facts' and in the process something happened. In my own small group the scripture quotation, 'Where two or three are *gathered* in my name, I am there among them,' [Mt 18,20] was adapted to read 'Where two or three are *searching* in my name, I am there among them. We were searching together for the meaning, the truth in our lives, and in the process 'our hearts burned within us' [Lk. 24, Emmaus story].

'We are gathered by the Spirit around the Risen Lord present in and among us,' is a sentence in the Constitutions of the Brothers [Cons. 30]. I think the source of our joy was because we experienced the presence of Christ in the small groups, as we shared, as we listened and reflected together. Returning to the quotation from McAlindin above, 'they return to where they came from with new meaning and enthusiasm,' it seems to me that we, too, returned to where we came from with new meaning and enthusiasm. What a gift, to find meaning in our lives and to be enthused!

The extraordinary insight is that what we engaged in was very simple, but something profound happened! We told our stories, were listened to with respect and reverence, and in that experience of being heard discovered something of the truth at the heart of our lives. 'The truth shall set you free.' [Jn. 8,32]. One of the participants mentioned at the end that he felt the need to share the joy. Another participant wrote the following:

'I really enjoyed the company of lots of lovely people, and my sense from the people I engaged with was that today was special and they would like more of it. I can't also help thinking that there is a wider audience that would be delighted to have the opportunity to participate in a workshop like this. If I can be of any help please let me know.'

Jim Donovan

So, it seems as if there is a call to reflect on the experience that we have had and to *discern* a way forward in which our experience might be shared with a wider group [Margaret used the word 'discernment' frequently]. I would be delighted if you were to share your reflections with me.

Colm Kennedy is a business man who attends the cluster in Edmund Rice House and who participated in the Margaret Benefiel workshop.

I wanted to drop you a brief line to say that I thought the workshop today was wonderful. Margaret Benefiel is an excellent facilitator and teacher and she did a great job. Over the years I've been on many (often expensive) programs connected with personal growth and development very few of which came close to matching today.

I hope you see today as a platform and the start of something new as opposed to the end of something. I really enjoyed the company of lots of lovely people and my sense from the people I engaged with was that today was special and they would like more of it. I can't also help think that there is a wider audience that would be delighted to have the opportunity to participate on a workshop like this.

If I can be of any help please let me know. Congratulations, well done, and a big thank you - today definitely helped me a lot personally. Best wishes. Colm

A Chara Jim,

Just wanted to thank you for the invitation to be part of the workshop organized for the brothers last week. It was a very special experience and while I had met and benefited from Margaret's work during my training as spiritual director, there was something very special and sacred about this event and the context of being welcomed and part of the growing work of the spirit in and through us all. I was reminded of the coffee you Monica and I shared in Airfield where there was a conversation about the Brothers and their natural hesitancy in sharing their story openly, especially given the shadow that has moved through the community in recent years. It was a lovely way for me to reconnect with some of the brothers who had been present at the advent reflection. During that evening before Christmas, I was struck by the depth and beauty of their presence and prayer, while also aware of the pain that some of them were carrying for themselves and as members of the Christian Brother Community. It was such a gift last Friday to be part of a group where hearts were opened and listened to with respect, love, care and kindness. What a world we would live in and create if we related to each other and the earth in a similar way!. Well done to both yourself and Monica for carrying a vision and commitment to the brothers that mirrors these qualities in such abundance. May you continue to be blessed in sharing the gift of who you are for your community and the wider world. This beautiful quote from Laudato Si is so hope filled and captures the possibilities and grace of the wonderful day you brought to your brothers and friends.

" The Spirit of God has filled the universe with possibilities, and therefore, from the very heart of things, something new can always emerge"

It already has, and may God continue to guide and nourish the tender intimacy of being courageous enough to share the pain and beauty of our lives journey, knowing that it can be heard and received with great presence, respect and love. Dia Leat. Deirdre

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