



A Lament for Jim

As the 8-day retreat at Loyola House, Guelph comes to a close, I still have not written something about Jim. An endeavour I promised our Life Abundant CLC group I would do, but an endeavor, now that I am here, I have been avoiding. Jim was part of our group; we have been a group for 12 years. My task is to take everything our group shared our first meeting after Jim's funeral and combine it in writing to what my husband had already written to us in an email about him. It seemed simple enough. I thought the perfect place to complete this task would be while I was exactly where Jim had always loved being: on the Land.



Bill Clark SJ opened the retreat talking about the Land, our connection to it and the Blessings it offers to us. He spoke of all that was happening beneath the mounds of snow and that it was such a wonderful time to be on the land because of the silence, the quiet beauty. His words were remarkable because I am sure I have heard Jim talk in just such a way about the Land.

His physical absence has been a deep loss for our group. After his diagnosis, his attendance was understandably sporadic, but we did manage to gather the odd occasion, making the trek to Guelph to share a meal or just visit. Now that he is really physically gone, we have felt his absence more intensely. We were Blessed in so many ways to have Father Jim Profit, SJ part of our group, though he really was just Jim to us and to himself when we were together. As many have already noted, he had a gentle quiet unassuming way about himself.

We are actually an amalgamation of two groups. So Jim was one of 8 Life Abundant members plus our children and spouses on some occasions. He said he wanted to be part of a CLC group to experience everyday life of people not called to ordained life, but it is because he was ordained and connected to Loyola that made our group a little bit different—maybe even special. We became connected to this place, too. We were able to celebrate mass together, which we often did. This was a gift we all recognized. And maybe we could say it was a charism of our group. We usually met in Kitchener where the rest of us live, but we routinely came to the Ignatius farm, retreat house or Red house for our gatherings, which was a good thing because, after meetings in Kitchener, Jim often asked us to pray for him that he did not fall asleep on the drive back to Guelph.

This week, as I walked the grounds, I was flooded with our memories of being with Jim on the Land.

For a while we used to meet at the farm workshop for Eucharist and a meal, and I remember having a conversation about the merits of 'Buddhist' mouse traps versus the more traditional kind as we watched mice scurry across the floor. This was before the Villa was built and sharing a meal there was almost an adventure, improvising coffee filters and imaginative uses for pots and pans and cutlery, or not. Cleaning up was even more creative. That was when

we could still purchase eggs and meat there from Jim that had come from the animals that lived on the farm. I remember one Easter Jim commenting that he had helped a sheep birth her lamb and that seemed altogether as much like Easter to him. Past the farm shop is the pool where we would gather in the summer for a swim and then a meal; the days were often very hot and we would walk past the CSA plots, people would be there attending their gardens. One summer, while swimming I remember remarking to Jim about his loss of weight and how great he looked and he commented that he felt great; there were just these lesions he has that the doctors are looking into...

Another day I followed the road to St Brigit's Villa, where last year there was a prayer vigil for Jim. I was on silent retreat then, too, but I went anyway along with some of our group members. It was so good to see Jim and he was in such good spirits to see us all there. We knew we needed to limit how close we got to him because of the effect of the treatments on his immune system, but when he greeted us at the door, it was difficult not to hug him and wish him well and he seemed undaunted by our need. But we have other warmer memories of being at the Villa or the Red house for meals. It truly felt like family being together and often the sharing was very ordinary yet rich...sharing the human struggles we all face.

Now back at the retreat house, I have been working with my spiritual director dealing with issues of grief. Jim's death is just one loss I have been facing. One night, not knowing what else to do, I decided to go to the oratory to pray. My director had suggested I 'sit' with Jesus in the Garden. I took my bible with me. I was kneeling on a kneeler. I was quite distraught and alone for some time. Then, all of a sudden I had an overwhelming sense of Jim sitting in the chair behind me. Just present and being with me in my grief. At first I was startled; then I doubted what I was feeling. But the experience of his presence was so real and tangible. I felt something shift inside my heart and I felt my body relax.

The experience made me think of our belief in the communion of the saints and of the words my husband wrote about Jim: Jim was always true to me. That's a good word to describe



my relationship with Jim—it was true. Thus I feel the deep loss in Jim's loss because of the loss of a person of truth. Hence Jim is a person of truth, a person of Love. But the thing about love is that it cannot die, so Jim takes love with him; yet, nevertheless, love grows on Earth as a result of Jim's death. This is a paradox of love, a paradox of life. For a while now, we will grieve, but one day—soon I hope—we will grow having known Jim.

And so I wondered if Jim isn't still on the Land that he loved now as Love itself—perhaps now he can be in two lands at once: walking the trails of Loyola and the beaches of PEI.
Christine Morgan for Abundant Life