

Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius in Winnipeg, Manitoba

In the fall of 1998, under the leadership of Fr. John English, St. Ignatius Parish began offering Annotation 19 to groups of retreatants. CLC members Ruth Chipman, Michael Radcliffe and former CLC member Valerie Muzychuk were among the first wave of retreatants and began training as spiritual directors in 1999. Since that time about 10 other directors have been trained and 220 individuals have participated in Annotation 19 at the St Ignatius Education Centre in Winnipeg, Canada. Retreatants have come from all walks of life and have included Protestant & Mennonite Ministers, Anglican Priests, Professors, Doctors, Principals, Deacons, Teachers, Lawyers, Nurses, Students, Housewives & CEOs.

Another way of experiencing the Spiritual Exercises and discovering a spiritual path through film was offered at the Education Centre beginning in the spring of 2005 with the series called "Finding God in the Dark", using Frs. Jon Pungente, sj, and Monty Williams, sj, popular book of the same name. Participants from all over the city are guided through the Exercises while viewing a movie followed by a discussion. Watching and discussing films "the Ignatian Way" becomes an act of contemplative prayer and self-reflection. CLC member Mariette Ternowski, a spiritual director in training at the time, facilitated the first session of "Finding God in the Dark."

In 2007 spiritual directors supported a new addition to the Ignatian family, the Ignatian Lay volunteers. Ignatian reflection times are held monthly. They provide opportunities for volunteers to integrate their experience with their values and concern for the marginalized. The reflection sessions help volunteers grow in their own understanding of what 'a faith that does justice' means when it is put into practice in the real situations they face in their volunteer experiences. Communal reflection supports the possibility of becoming more radically available to others.

In an effort to be more inclusive Fr. Gerry McDougall offered a version of Annotation 18 in the fall and winter of 2007-2008. Fr. Gerry guided the group through a process of taking time to pray, to think, and to share faith. The five weeks of Advent stressed creation, salvation, the Incarnation, and God's presence with us. Participants developed daily prayer habits. The seven weeks of Lent and Easter saw the participants focus on sin and redemption, the work of Jesus Redeemer, and, after Easter Sunday, the transition into everyday life as the first disciples did after His Ascension.

In order to make the Spiritual Exercises even more accessible, as part of the faith renewal in the Archdiocese of Winnipeg in 2008, the Jesuits of Winnipeg together with the St. Ignatius Adult Education Centre, began in Advent a version of Annotation 18 called "Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord". This is a very basic prayer program, with four weekly prayer sessions during Advent and six during Lent. Three teams of qualified directors have been trained to offer Annotation 18 in three parishes throughout the Archdiocese. With this offering directors are hoping to spread the experiences and benefits of the Exercises well beyond St Ignatius parish.

Over the last 10 years directors have developed and been engaged in an active community supervised by Richard Soo SJ. Weekly peer supervision meetings have included role play situations, basic theology presentations, Hebrew and Greek studies. Directors have moved more deeply through Ignatian contemplations using a variety of commentaries. Over the last two years directors have been challenged to teach and facilitate both at St. Ignatius and other parishes. Several directors are working towards developing Ignatian retreats for the homeless and marginalized in Winnipeg's inner city and retreat days for young adults.

September 2011 sees the directors' community working through two significant new developments. Fr. Richard Soo SJ has moved to Guelph taking on new responsibilities at their retreat centre. Fr. Newman will be the Jesuit liaison with the directors' community. Fr. D. Creamer, Jesuit Superior, along with Dr. Denis Bracken, Rector, St. Paul's College, University of Manitoba and the spiritual directors' community are collaborating on developing a Spiritual Directors certificate course through St. Paul's college.

Submitted on behalf of the Spiritual Directors' Community
by Ruth Chipman