

ADVENT RETREAT

Twenty one people gathered at St Alipius Hall Ballarat East on Sunday, December 15 and shared three hours of retreat time for Advent. Together we explored the beautiful advent images by Sieger Köder, priest and painter and words by Magdalen Lawler, a Sister of Notre Dame. Participants came from Christian churches around Ballarat, it was good to be together. The retreat was led by Loreto sisters, Rachel McLoughlin and Natalie Houlihan with the support of Christian Life Community leader and local parishioner Doreen Roache.

It was a time to become still and in particular a time to ponder the Gospel passage of the Annunciation. 'Do not fear, Mary, for God has looked kindly on you' (Luke 1:30). There was time for silence, listening to music, pondering the images, personal reflection as well as a time for sharing our insights in small circles with the practice of guided spiritual conversation. As faith community, we came to grow more deeply in our relationship with Mary, Joseph and ultimately Jesus. Listening to what was stirring in our hearts, our desires and actions that the Spirit is inviting us toward in preparation for the special celebration of the Christmas season.



The latter part of this year has been an exciting time in offering Ignatian Spirituality to our wider Christian Community in Ballarat. During the month of September and October, Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius - Retreat in Daily Life, "Inner Peace in Friendship with Jesus" was co-led by Rachel McLoughlin and Doreen Roache. The retreat held in daily life allows for participants to continue their normal working day and put aside some time each day for quiet reflection, listening and prayer. These seventeen exercitants gathered together once a week in two groups for two hours each session to pray, listen, discern and share the

experiences of their spiritual lives in a reflective, safe and welcoming environment. We then met a sixth time on a Saturday afternoon to reflect on the experience as a whole and explore the life of St Ignatius of Loyola at more depth. Many in the group expressed the desire for more formation experiences of the Spiritual Exercises. A real sense of being in community developed in the group, in fact, recently some of this group and other locals gathered for a home Mass and a shared meal.



Rachel McLoughlin ibvm and Doreen Roache