

Vancouver Island Retreat

By Claire Donovan

Faith and Sharing on Vancouver Island celebrated Christmas at their summer retreat this August. 47 people gathered in Nanaimo, including 6 children who took part in their own program.

We gathered at Bethlehem Retreat Centre where we have been retreating for 26 years. The Centre was for sale this year, and when we began our planning for the retreat we did not know whether it would still be there for us. But we planned our retreat in faith and in mid-July we heard that a group of "Friends" had purchased the Centre from the Benedictine sisters with the vision of continuing to run a retreat centre and expanding their mandate. They welcomed us enthusiastically, their first big retreat since the sale.

Our animators, Carolyn and Geoff Whitney-Brown from Cowichan Bay on Vancouver Island, used the bible stories of the annunciation, Joseph's dream, Mary's visit to Elizabeth, Zechariah's prophecy, the coming of the shepherds and Wise Ones and their returns home, to help us explore "Responding to the Call".

People joined together to make the retreat from Victoria to Campbell River on Vancouver Island. Many regulars, a few returning after several years absence and some first timers, aged from 5 to 89 years old. It truly was a time of sharing, joy, creativity and discovery. We celebrated Roman Catholic, Ukranian Catholic and Anglican services as well as an outdoor reconciliation service using water to cleanse ourselves and our parched earth. Along with the talks and liturgies there was time for silence, art activities, and hikes around or swims in the lake.

Reconnecting with friends and getting to know new ones is always a big part of our retreats. We truly are an extended family living community for 5 days. The experience surely helps us in our attempts to live community in the world. 💜