

A week of kindness Vancouver Island Retreat



*By Carolyn Whitney-Brown
Vancouver Island*

The theme of Vancouver Island's 45th Faith and Sharing retreat was « The Community of the Beloved ». "Let's think of this as 'a week of kindness' – I hope we will come to love each other," suggested Laura J., who has been to most of the 45 retreats on Vancouver Island.

The gift and beauty of Faith and Sharing is the range of life experiences. For the sake of the nine people who had never been to a Faith and Sharing retreat, our animator Michael tried to explain "our people with disabilities are our teachers in this retreat." At this, Susan M. rose and challenged him that yes, she had Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, but did not appreciate being categorized as "a person with special needs" because that label made her feel small and incompetent. As someone with decades of experience at Faith and Sharing, she insisted that she had more to offer than her "disability," a word she did not appreciate. Later, she reminded returnees and encouraged newcomers that sharing is at the heart of the retreat. She called us especially to take time for silence after each sharing: the person might discover something more to say, or need time to let their emotions flow. Silence is part of sharing, she insisted.



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We spent the five day retreat listening to God's words to Jesus: "You are my Beloved, in whom I take delight." We shared our experiences - who takes delight in you? In whom do you take delight? Michael urged us to soak in the Big Love of God, the Big Heart of Jesus, the Big Flow of the Spirit – and let that Big Love flow through each of our big hearts, so that we were all part of God's big flow.



On Monday, Bishop Remi de Roo celebrated a memorable mass with us. In 45 years, he calculated he had missed only one retreat. As we sat in silence after receiving communion, he reminded us to relish that sacred time, as our bodies absorbed the body of Jesus and we thus became the real presence of Jesus to each other.

On Wednesday, our day of silence ended with a liturgy of reconciliation, or as Michael framed it, reconnection – with the earth, with our brothers and sisters, with God.

The collaborative art of the banner by Laura G. and Sue P. captured all this, with two expressive hands holding images representing an abundant variety of life and experiences.

We were a diverse and wonderful group, and we spent the retreat loving each other in a week of kindness. 💜



Laura G. and Sue P. talk about the banner they created