

REPORT ON AIG FOIS, SOUTH-WEST SCOTLAND

It all started about 15 years ago with a fairly random thought, ‘What would I like to do after I retire? Maybe I could have somewhere for friends to come for R&R?’ At the time I was living in a small flat in central London. Along the way, the thought morphed into something more specific which came unbidden, ‘Maybe I could run a retreat?’ I should say at this point that I’d never been on retreat myself, so had no real idea what that was.

And so the journey began. Years later I moved into a flat in Edinburgh which happened to be round the corner from Nile Grove. I enrolled on Growth Through Prayer and Reflective Living and then Faith Accompaniment the following year. By this time I had left London, bought a house in Kirkcudbright (because I liked the area) with a basement (now an art room) and a dilapidated stone building in the garden (now a chapel).

I met both Sarah and Edith through mutual friends. There followed a series of serendipitous meetings – like sitting opposite Celia Matthews at an art workshop, which inspired me to invite Sarah and Edith to work with me – all of which helped bring that first random thought into reality.

So here we are, into our third year of offering Quiet Days in Galloway. We started slowly, introducing ourselves first to the local church leaders, and then offering a series of monthly full or half days of reflection. We continued this format into the second year, on topics suggested through our feedback forms. Gradually, people have started to get to know about us, through word of mouth as well as advertising in the churches, and we have a growing and ecumenical group of over 30 people, some of whom attend frequently and seem to enjoy coming. We can accommodate up to eight people on a Quiet Day.

This summer we took part in the Kirkcudbright Arts & Crafts Trail by opening the garden and chapel as a Quiet Space. We had well over 200 visitors. We provided places to sit and reflect and some activities for visitors to engage in, like writing or drawing their hopes onto a piece of slate and planting it in the soil.

This year we expanded our programme. We feel that we are reaching those who had already been looking for what *Aig Fois* offers and continue to cater for them. Now we want to reach out to those who haven’t yet started looking.

Our 2009-10 programme includes:

- four days loosely based on the four weeks of the Spiritual Exercises, for those who are considering making the Exercises at some point.
- three Reflective Mornings on liturgical themes.
- A course of 3 evenings introducing Ignatian Spirituality. We aimed to reach people with little or no experience of contemplative prayer and hoped that it would attract working men and women. Although we had a number of enquiries, no-one actually booked! After a time of reflection, we came to the conclusion that the timing wasn’t quite right. A chance meeting gave us the idea to offer it as a home group activity. We now plan to run it for one home group that meets in a nearby town and then offer it to local church home groups.
- A Retreat in Daily Life, in collaboration with The Epiphany Group, which we believe is the first in this area. At the time of writing, we have no idea of the take-up, so we’re excited and nervous in equal measure.

- A Quiet Day for 'Interested Agnostics', which came out of a conversation I had with my boss. We were told recently that an agnostic couple who had been very moved by their visit to the Quiet Space in summer are planning to come.

Edith and I are the only Epiphany Group members in this region. We all see some people for spiritual direction, although it is still not in the tradition or mindset of most people in the area to meet with a spiritual director. Also, I can accommodate up to two people to stay for an Individually Guided Retreat.

At the moment, we don't know how *Aig Fois* is going to develop, but we are enjoying the journey of discovery.

Rachel Inglis, Edith Thorp and Sarah Howarth

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