

Epiphany Group - Annual Report

2015: 15 years of Ignatian Ministry

In the year in which we marked 15 years of Ignatian Ministry, we can report that membership of the Epiphany Group rose to a healthy 69 members. As always, we give thanks for the richness of ministries offered by our trained guides across Scotland. However, we are not complacent. Numbers can fall as well as rise. What matters is how much good is done by those who reach out to others through their ministries.

In the thanksgiving, we include all those faith-filled people who, down the years, have contributed to the life and liveliness of a group that continues to take the gift of Ignatian Spirituality to new places and venues, and to offer the people of 21st century Scotland the opportunity of making the Exercises in daily life. 19 EG guides currently accompany directees and more are keen to do so. It is the shared experience of the Exercises that roots our ministries and mission, and connects us to one another.

So, what news do we offer in our 15th year?

On 1st September, we welcomed Judith Irving as our new Training Forum Co-ordinator.

Following a collaborative process, looking afresh at this key role within the Epiphany Group, tutors and members of the Core Group drafted a new 'role description' that recognised the various dimensions of training offered: training to support the ministry of spiritual direction and the giving of the Exercises, but training also that supports personal and spiritual growth. And, recognising the potential for new digital ways to connect the far flung areas of Scotland, new conversations have begun, conversations that may link quite geographically isolated communities so that more people can share what we in the central belt take for granted.

As Rachel Inglis noted in our summer newsletter, in appointing Judith to the role of Training Forum Co-ordinator, we do so knowing that she brings with her such a treasure house of experience. In Aberdeenshire, where she lives, Judith offers spiritual direction, RDLs and weeks of guided prayer, Quiet Days, supervision, has given the Spiritual Exercises (19th Annotation) and guided on residential retreats. She works with Carole Phelan and others in the area to offer a creative mix of Ignatian days and workshops.

Judith writes, "It is exciting to contribute to the life and work of the Epiphany Group, to be asked to build on the good work that has gone before and to lead

and to nurture the work creatively in new ways. It is a great privilege and joy and I look forward to it."

The post is for one year in the first instance but ongoing funding will be sought to ensure that the training opportunities offered by the Epiphany Group can continue to develop responsively to present and future needs. This initial year will help us make a realistic assessment of hours and costings required to ensure the role's sustainability. May all go well for Judith in her new role.

Seeking Spiritual Direction

While training courses are noticeable - they happen in a place, follow a pattern, lead to outcomes - it is not quite so easy to see what are the fruits of this training. For members of the Epiphany Group, having trained for and carefully discerned a vocation to a particular ministry, this usually means committing to accompanying others on a one-to-one basis. In turn, this means observing confidentiality, undertaking a ministry that is largely hidden. **But who seeks such a relationship, how do they hear of this ministry?**

One of the tasks of the Co-ordinator is to pick up enquiries sent by email through the website and also follow up 'word of mouth' requests. This year, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of people seeking direction, and not just in the well populated central belt.

People come from all church groupings and none - and this latter group is certainly growing. Some people arrive confessing an allergy to 'the God word'. Careful and sensitive accompaniment is required.

Over the year, people have been referred to guides in most parts of Scotland. However, it seems, that people are more likely to follow through with their desire for direction when it has been possible for them to talk to someone face to face or by phone. The personal approach matters. And as we grow as a group, we grow richer in the range of personal gifts we can offer to people. Given that this year has been busier with referrals, it would seem that there is indeed 'something afoot in the universe'. And, so we go on training, supporting, supervising and encouraging - what a blessing!

Ongoing Training Opportunities: 2015

Growth in Prayer and Reflective Living, Edinburgh - as the new training year began, the tutoring team of Sharon Laidlaw, Claire Starr and Di Hollow prepared to welcome 17 participants. This entry into ways of praying and into Ignatian spirituality offers people an experience of shared silence that is fruitful and non-threatening.

Spiritual Direction Course, Edinburgh and Aberdeenshire - 12

participants signed up to do this course in Edinburgh and 10 in Aberdeen. Several of the Edinburgh group had participated in the 2014/2015 Spiritual Conversation course. The SD course is being hosted again in the Jesuit parish of the Sacred Heart, Lauriston.

As far as Aberdeenshire is concerned, being one of the more rural areas of Scotland, it takes time to gather enough people to make a course viable. However, thanks to the flexible and creative approach of Carole Phelan and Judith Irving, a small group who completed GPRL in 2014 were guided through the SC material (including written assignments) and enabled to join five people who had completed the SC course in 2012 and had been waiting patiently to do the SD course when numbers permitted.

Other Training Courses offered by EG Members

Spiritual Accompaniment - at Garden Cottage Spirituality Centre, Perthshire. Thanks to the success of last year's course, a new team of Carmel Byrne RSCJ, Bernadette Campbell and Robin Anker-Petersen (from the Bield Retreat Centre) is already in place. Bernadette has had experience of tutoring in Edinburgh (and also tutors at the ISC) while Robin is new to this course.

Other Events Offered by EG Members Around Scotland

2014 / 2015 has seen a wide variety of quiet days, 'taster' days and short, themed retreats offered across Scotland, covering Perthshire, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Kirkcudbright, Inverness-shire, Renfrew, Ayrshire and the Lothians/Borders. Local responses to particular needs continue to emerge and, thanks to the committed volunteers, flourish. The Six Days series in Edinburgh, happening over 2015 - 2016, and the River Days in Aberdeenshire, in 2015, are two such responses.

Day of Ongoing Formation: 'The History Line - Tracking the Graciousness of God'

Presented and facilitated by Gero McLoughlin SJ, at the Lauriston Centre on 30th May, this occasion helped us to focus on where we - as the Epiphany Group - have noticed the presence of consolation and desolation in our collective story as it has unfolded over 15 years. Mindful that we all face the unpredictable nature of change as it affects life and ministry, this process was valuable and necessary as we look to the coming years and prepare to consider our mission and future needs. One of the obvious imponderables is ensuring the efficacy of our Ignatian ministries in the context of a diminishing number of Jesuits in the Society's British Province. While acknowledging the times of consolation and desolation, and life's uncertainties, we emerged from the day more aware of the graciousness of God throughout our 15 years of being the Epiphany Group.

Annual Day of Reflection

This year's Day of Reflection, anticipating the Feast of St Ignatius, was entitled 'Wild Glow of Heaven's Love' - Living Creatively in a World of Beauty and Adversity: reflections on ecology and the Spiritual Exercises'. Elizabeth South was our gifted facilitator and the Orchard and its team, our hosts. And, as always seems the case, the sun shone at the right time and the landscape was glorious. Elizabeth left us lots to ponder and challenged us to think more deeply how we show respect for the world in which we live, the world which is so much a part of us and we of it.

Epiphany Group Annual Conference: 'The Spiritual Exercises in the 21st Century'

2015 saw us returning to Edinburgh, to the Gillis Centre, where we welcomed Gemma Simmons CJ as our guest presenter. Centred on the Spiritual Exercises and the teasing out of some of the challenges of giving and receiving the Exx in each of the 4 Weeks, we gained from Gemma's wide experience and evident commitment to her own Ignatian journey. The exploration of the Third Week, moving into the Fourth, with its powerful meditation on the Passion using the paintings of Sieger Koder, will live long in our minds and hearts.

In 2016, the EG will return to the Burn, near Edzell, to gather and take forward our hopes for our future thriving and development. Look out for more information in late summer!

Links with Ignatian Spirituality Centre, Glasgow

During 2014 / 2015, members of the EG began to meet and get to know David Birchall SJ who arrived in Glasgow, with his voting card, just a few days before the Scottish referendum: a quick immersion in things Scottish that couldn't have been better planned.

Biannual joint meetings between representatives of the EG and the ISC continue to be helpful occasions for collaboration and programme planning. Not all meetings in life are looked forward to but these are experienced as life-giving and mutually supportive. And, EG members continue to enjoy opportunities at the ISC for ongoing formation and participate where they can in other events throughout the year.

And, News from the Coach House, Kilmuir, N. Kessock

We extend our heartfelt congratulations to the team at the Coach House who can finally look forward to seeing the refurbishment and extension of the retreat house. Located on the edge of the beautiful Moray Firth, this peaceful and welcoming space has been a God-send for many. Limited only by space

and not by the team's generous commitment, they can now look to future having purchased the house under joint ownership with the Society of Retreat Conductors.

Ignatian retreats have featured largely in this past year's programme, including the 30 day retreat, IGRs, and outreach ministries by EG members who continue to take Ignatian spirituality to the far flung Highlands and Islands of the north.. With the extension opening next year, further opportunities will no doubt become available. Meantime, let's remember the team and all EG members in and around the Coach House as they grapple with the usual challenges of building work and deadlines! They expect to reopen to retreatants in early summer.

Outreach Funding

In 2015, the EG was able to offer modest financial help to members pioneering new ideas or supporting projects in new places or situations. The Passion Walk - transferring from Edinburgh to Belfast; Sacred Spaces, offering quiet days and retreats in the Lothians and Borders; and Play and Pray, offering spirituality training to parents and careers of the under fives, received small grants to enable them to offer these fruitful and creative ministries.

As a reminder, applications for outreach support should reach the EG Co-ordinator by 1 November each year.

Bursary Support

To all our members who have donated - and continue to donate - to our EG Bursary Fund, a very big thank you from the course participants who are receiving support over 2015 / 2016. Eight people are benefitting, the highest number for a few years and an indication of the times in which we find ourselves. We are delighted to be able to offer this help, thanks to your generosity.

Epiphany Group Funding and Support

As always, we gratefully acknowledge the financial, practical and spiritual support of the Society of Jesus. The annual grant we receive from the British Province enables us to resource and develop our expanding Ignatian ministries and outreach. To Fr Dermot and the Society's Trustees and to Fr Gero, Promotor of Ignatian Spirituality, our heartfelt thanks.

May 2016 be a year of blessing for us all.

Barbara Buda
Epiphany Group Co-ordinator

