

All our Gifts of Love - Faith and Light Retreat at Galong

The Alleluia spirit was very much in evidence when fifty members of the Faith and Light communities of Canberra and the Southern Highlands came together at St Clement's Retreat Centre at Galong on the weekend after Easter. The events of



those days certainly epitomised all that is at the heart of Faith and Light - friendship, scripture and prayer, and celebration.

At the heart of our gathering, as with the fifteen hundred communities throughout the world, were people with intellectual disabilities surrounded by their family and friends. Bonds of friendship, love and support permeated the days. Saturday commenced with a grand procession around

the beautiful grounds of the monastery with mums, dads, siblings and friends all joining in song, together with some unique orchestration, courtesy of our special members.

From the beginning, a sense of bonding was apparent and brought to mind the words of our late Pope John Paul II, 'One of Faith and Light's vocations is to make sure that people with an intellectual disability feel that they are never alone and that they are never useless.' On the contrary, Faith and Light highlights the fact that these people have a unique value, a sacred value and as we walked together we were all touched and blessed by these most cherished sisters and brothers.



As with our monthly meetings, scripture and prayer played a central role in the time at Galong. The beautiful story of Jesus calling Mary Magdalene by name was presented with striking visual and dramatic effects. This provided the inspiration for a workshop whereby each of the participants was called by name and missioned to go forth and announce the Good News as did Mary Magdalene. Miming, prayer, artistic activities and sharing in

small groups enabled each person to express herself/himself in an individual way. Thankfully, some of the most precious moments were captured on film.



The person with an intellectual disability is often less inhibited than others and has a natural capacity to create a joyful atmosphere. This was certainly the case during our stay at Galong, which was characterised by lots of laughter, song, music, dance, games and sharing of meals. The peals of laughter that rang through the monastery on Saturday night at our fiesta were an indication of our capacity to have fun together.

For many of us, the highlight of our time at Galong was the celebration of the Eucharist on Sunday morning. Many of the activities of the previous day were incorporated in the Mass and as such the relationship between our everyday life and the Eucharist was apparent. As Faith and Light is an organisation that embraces people of every faith tradition, all our special members were invited to be involved in a procession, a banner display, to act as an altar server, a member of the choir, a musician, a reader or a liturgical dancer. The reverence and level of participation was quite extraordinary as was the care taken by our celebrant, Father Pat Corbett CSSR.



By Sunday afternoon there were many weary but very happy people ready to head for home. The weekend had indeed been a time of deepening friendships, discovering anew the Risen Jesus in each other and celebrating the riches of our diversity as a Faith and Light community. As we were farewelled by our marvellous hosts, the words that echoed around the monastery were 'We will be back!' Sr Rita Reily

