Columns
Spirituality



Thirty-three sisters from 12 congregations attended the "Be Thou My Vision" retreat at Serra Retreat in Malibu. led by St. Joseph Sr. Carol Quinlivan. One theme of the retreat was the exploration of the images of God and their impact on participants' lives. (Monique Tarabeh)



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July 19, 2024

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Malibu, known for its stunning beaches, surfing culture and celebrity homes, offers more than a picturesque coastal escape. Nestled within Malibu Canyon lies the serene Serra Retreat, a Catholic retreat and conference facility that provides a haven for spiritual reflection and growth. Originally planned as the home of Malibu's Rindge family and sold to the Franciscans in 1942, Serra Retreat is a sanctuary for those seeking tranquility and connection with the divine.

The retreat's location is a significant aspect of its allure. Malibu's Mediterranean warm, dry summers and mild, wet winters create an ideal environment for reflection and relaxation. The retreat grounds, surrounded by lush gardens and overlooking the Pacific Ocean, offer a peaceful escape from the hustle and bustle of daily life.

The welcoming ambiance of Serra Retreat struck me profoundly, particularly the distinctly feminine touch that permeated the space. As we arrived, we were greeted by the gentle presence of sunflowers adorning each corner, their bright, cheerful faces bringing a sense of warmth and joy. This thoughtful detail also extended to our personal spaces; entering my room, I was greeted by more yellow blooms. Their sunny disposition mirrored the nurturing environment cultivated by our retreat director and the Franciscan staff and friars, making us feel not only welcomed but cherished as we began on our spiritual journey.



Sculptures and greenery add to the peaceful ambience of Serra Retreat in Malibu. (Monique Tarabeh)

St. Joseph Sr. Carol Quinlivan led our transformative retreat, titled "Be Thou My Vision." Thirty-three sisters from 12 congregations gathered to explore our inner sacred spaces, confronting our vulnerabilities and fears while seeking to understand God's vision for us. For some sisters, this was their first time attending an inter-congregational retreat, and they were thrilled with the rich discussions and the opportunity to connect with other sisters from different countries. Sister Carol fostered an environment that encouraged us to delve deep into our spiritual journeys. Through guided meditations and reflective sessions, we were invited to envision God in new and profound ways, using the eyes of our hearts to perceive the divine presence in our lives.

A significant theme of the retreat was the exploration of the images of God and their impact on our lives. We were encouraged to consider our favorite images of God and

how these perceptions shaped our spirituality. This introspective process highlighted the importance of evolving our understanding of God to reflect our personal growth and experiences.

One of the retreat's core messages was the concept of friendship with God. This relationship opened our eyes to read Scripture differently, fostering a deeper, more personal connection with the divine. By cultivating this friendship, we were able to engage with our faith on a more intimate level, finding new meaning and insights in our spiritual practices.



A heart is formed with a plant at Serra Retreat in Malibu. (Monique Tarabeh)

The retreat also emphasized the importance of making intentional sacred stops in our lives — pausing to reflect, pray and connect with God. These moments of stillness allow us to see as God sees, understanding the world with greater clarity and compassion. In a society that often values constant activity and productivity, these sacred stops are vital for nurturing our spiritual well-being.

Additionally, Sister Carol highlighted the collective nature of our spiritual journeys, emphasizing that our interactions within the universe reflect a collective mindset of vision. The love of Christ, she explained, manifests itself through our shared vulnerabilities, fostering a sense of community and mutual support among us.

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Throughout the retreat, we participated in various ceremonies and sacraments of reconciliation and healing, not just for ourselves but also for our world. These sacred rituals allowed us to confront and release our burdens, seeking forgiveness and renewal. They were powerful reminders of the interconnectedness of all life and the importance of healing both within and around us.

Another enriching aspect of the retreat was the integration of Celtic spirituality and tradition. The use of Celtic music added a marvelous sense of depth and connection to the ancient rhythms of faith. The melodies and harmonies provided a soothing backdrop that enhanced our meditations and reflections, grounding us in a tradition that celebrates the sacredness of all creation.

The retreat at Serra Retreat in Malibu offered a profound experience for all of us who attended. By exploring the images of God, fostering a deeper friendship with the divine and embracing intentional sacred stops, we left with a renewed sense of purpose and connection. This retreat not only provided a peaceful escape but also a transformative journey into the heart of spirituality, helping each of us to envision God in a way that resonates deeply with our unique spiritual path.