

## Bishop John's Retreat – A review

The blaze of autumn colours in the garden of St Columba's House, Woking, lent a vibrant backdrop to Bishop John's retreat from 6<sup>th</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup> November, which was attended by 16 people from across the country.



The retreat was entitled 'Take off your shoes', from the Exodus narrative of Moses and the burning bush, and Bishop John gently led the participants from the humdrum of the lives they'd left behind, into a deeper and more loving and intimate relationship with God. Lavishly illustrated with a range of colourful and engaging icons, Bishop John also drew inspiration from writers as diverse as St Augustine and the Desert Fathers, St Thérèse of Lisieux, C.S. Lewis and Jean Vanier. His love for the Eastern monastic traditions of both iconography and contemplative prayer shone through everything he said, and in that spirit of contemplation, participants were invited to wrestle with questions such as, 'Are we true friends of God?', 'Do we love God for our sake, or for God's?', and even, 'How often do we tell God, 'I love you?'



Reflecting on St Paul's claim that, 'We are all God's masterpieces', or 'poems' (Ephesians 2.10), Bishop John reminded us that God calls each of us by name (Isaiah 43.1). God calls each of us into a mutually-loving relationship with him; He delights in us, as much as we delight in Him.

The retreat was silent (mostly!) from Tuesday evening until Thursday morning, punctuated with simple services of Morning, Midday or Evening prayer, led by Demelza Henderson. These were quiet services, lit by a single candle flame, with

the atmosphere of stillness enhanced with times of silence, meditative music and psalms.

The hospitality of St Columba's was second to none – none of our requests were too small for Lay Chaplain, Rachel, and receptionist Denise, to solve. The bedrooms were warm, comfortable, and perhaps most importantly, they were all *en suite* too! And all the meals were generous, home-made, and delicious, served with a smile by attentive and friendly staff, not to mention the limitless supply of excellent strong coffee and freshly-baked cakes!

Bishop John's deep faith, alongside his immense knowledge of the Scriptures and engaging manner of delivery, meant that the Retreat was prayerful and Spirit-filled throughout. It was not surprising that the final Eucharist was a joyful celebration of God's love for us, and ours for Him.

