



A woman washes the feet of Anne-Marie Conn, RSCJ, during a Lenten retreat offered by the Centre.

Barat Spirituality Centre

A Place of Welcome, Spirit & Community

By Kimberly M. King, RSCJ, Director of Barat Spirituality Centre

Barat Spirituality Centre in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, began to offer programming in 2016. From the beginning, it has offered programs related to justice, peace, and integrity of creation (JPIC), a variety of contemporary theological topics, and developing one's personal relationship with God. It provides space for groups and individuals to come for days of silent retreat, spiritual direction, or meetings related to these purposes and topics. The work of the Centre is both an on-going outreach born of the Society of the Sacred Heart's mission and charism to discover and reveal the love of the heart of God in today's world and a way that the Society in Halifax helps to meet the spiritual needs of people in the Sacred Heart family and beyond.

Each time a new group or individual comes to stay or meet at the Centre, I explain that there have been Religious of the Sacred Heart (RSCJ) on this property since 1849. The good that has been done here for the last almost 175 years is here for them, and the good that the group or individual brings, discovers, or

reveals, becomes a part of what is offered to those who come in the future.

One of the questions on the evaluation form distributed at the end of programs at Barat Spirituality Centre is, *Overall, how would you describe your experience with Barat Spirituality Centre?*

It's a question that has led to both suggestions for and confirmations of how things are done. During the recent years of "Pandemic Programming" when the offerings of the Centre moved online, this feedback was helpful in knowing how the different Zoom set-ups appeared to participants while we were broadcasting speakers and events from different Centre spaces. Lighting, microphone placement, and camera work all changed in order to enhance the experience of people attending retreats, talks, and workshops from afar.

...a safe and peaceful place for reflection and sharing our life journeys...

The geographic spread of those attending Centre programs has increased significantly as more programming has been offered online and in a hybrid in-person/online model. There have been participants from across Canada from Newfoundland to British Columbia; from Maine to California; Korea, Italy, England, and Northern Ireland. Word of mouth, social media, networks originating with the program leaders, and the publicity created in-house and shared through local channels in and around the province of Nova Scotia and beyond, all help to spread the news about what happens here at Barat Spirituality Centre and invite engagement and participation.

...a resource in my life. I associate it with Truth and Understanding and comfort...

Recent programs that people are responding to include book discussions on works by Richard Rohr and Cynthia Bourgeault, interactive lectures on different theological topics, thematic days of retreat, such as finding hope within the time of the pandemic, and others. These offerings are possible thanks to networks, connections, lay colleagues, and the contribution of the many gifts of those present in the community. Anne-Marie Conn, RSCJ, Donna Dolan, RSCJ, and Mary Finlayson, RSCJ, all work in spiritual direction and accompaniment as well as offer other types of programming, often working with Anne Wachter, RSCJ, and the staff of Sacred Heart School of Halifax conveniently located next door to the Centre.

...I never leave but with increased grace, spiritual energy...

Independent of programming that originates at the Centre, many individual groups use the Centre space for online and in-person gatherings, meetings, times of retreat, or spiritual direction with one of several directors, lay and religious. Groups or individuals seeking the peace of this space include: the Anglican bishop of Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia; women Anglican priests; ordinands with the United Church of Canada; a local university chaplain; a conference of military chaplains as well as other members of the military making individual retreats; groups from the Catholic archdiocese; various congregations of women religious; and student/faculty groups from the Sacred Heart School of Halifax. Associates of the Sacred Heart and Associates of other religious congregations in the Atlantic Region of Canada also gather here. There is also a regular community that comes together for Sunday Mass in the chapel, now that COVID-19 restrictions have been lifted.

...filled with inner peace...

It is a gift to be able to offer this space to others and to know that the cumulative good, the cumulative prayer, the cumulative search for and encounter with the Heart of God in ourselves and in our world, is enriched, extended, and carried forth by each visitor.

Thank you...for creating and sharing this space of welcome, spirit, silence, and community.

I will be back!



(top) A woman quietly journals in the chapel.

(bottom) Junior Primary students from the Sacred Heart School of Halifax plant seeds with Sister Conn (not pictured). The plants would later be given as Mother's Day gifts.