

Sister Eveleen Retreat House Synod Report – May 2022 – April 2023

<https://www.sistereretreat.com>

The Sister Eveleen Retreat House (SERH) operates under the mandate of its Diocesan Statute (2009) which states that 'the aims and objectives of the SERH Board of Oversight and its staff will be to encourage and promote the widest possible use of the SERH in meeting the spiritual needs of people in the Diocese of Christchurch.

During this past year the work of the house has been developed under the leadership of the wonderfully capable Eddie O'Connor as director. Eddie's term as director finished at the end of March 2023 and at the time of writing the Board are preparing to interview candidates to take on this role.

SERH has benefitted immensely from Eddie's leadership as director for the past 2 years. Eddie has brought not only a deep Christian faith, expressed through a contemplative practise, but also a practical, can-do attitude, wonderful cooking and IT skills and an empathic sensibility which has made the wide variety of guests feel welcomed and accepted. We wish him well as he steps away from this space into the next part of his God-called journey.

Chapel prayer times have continued morning and night, with Covid interrupting this from time to time. This contemplative ½ hour is attended not only by guests but also locals. It has become an important part of the daily life at SERH. Average daily attendance for the 10 months to the end of Feb was 16—a total of 943 participants during that time.

Organised retreats of varying length have been held during the year. The Desert Fathers and Mothers, The Spirit of Cinema, and Praying with Julian of Norwich were 7-day retreats. A 5-Day retreat was taken during Holy Week, and 2-day retreat topics included Meister Eckhart, Teresa of Avila, Creative Writing, Mid-Winter, Creative Play to Nourish the Soul, Centering Prayer, Francis and Claire: Saints of Assisi, Breath, Church leaders' refreshment, and Walking the Contemplative Path. Some of these were led by Eddie and others by retreat directors from Christchurch and further afield.

Individuals continue to book in for self-directed retreat time as overnight stays or day retreats, and groups have also booked to run their own retreats. Working with parishes, Eddie has also led contemplative prayer retreats using parish facilities to accommodate more than the 11 which SERH can house.

Although the House was repaired and renovated after the Christchurch earthquakes, there has been continuing work this year to improve and update this elderly building. A new hot water system was installed, the Annex roof and electrics were renewed, and the bathroom refurbished. Work is underway rebuilding the Annex bedrooms. Board member Dugald Wilson has led the property work and I acknowledge with thanks all his work.

Although retreats and individual bookings garner income for the house, we are unable to fully meet the ongoing wages, rates, insurance, and power costs. Unlike parishes, we do not have a permanent base of ongoing financial support. However, we have been blessed and humbled by the gifts which have

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allowed us to employ the director for 25 hours a week for the past 2 years; to effect the much needed upgrade to the Annex; to confidently put together a programme of retreats believing we will be here for the long haul, for the benefit of all who long for the quiet contemplative space. We will continue to apply for funding to trusts and invite contributions from individuals also.

The Board are immensely grateful to the volunteers who spend time each week working in and around the house—gardening, cleaning, sorting laundry and staying at the house when the director has been away. Michael, Kathryn, Jill and Sue—thank you.

In particular we thank Sue Sinclair for being house host during April when we were leading into the month of renovations.

To all those who contribute—prayerfully, financially and in person, we thank you.

Thank you to those who serve on the Board and offer their skills to serve this precious Taonga.

'We invite you to join us for prayer if you are walking up Scarborough Hill during the week.

Consider the space SERH offers for a personal retreat, planning day or time out for your House Group, Parish Vestry, AAW, Archdeaconry or Diocesan meeting. The lounge can comfortably sit 8, max-ing to 12. We'd love to welcome you here, offer you space to be still in your busyness and share in God's beauty, peace, renewal, and revitalisation. Let us not forget that God's first language is silence.' (M. Earle – former SERH Board Chairperson)

Sarah Gardiner (Chairperson)

May 5th 2023