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Issue 15
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- From the Coordinator
- Reflection from Annual Weekend Retreat—by Michael

Upcoming Events:

- 9 May — Surry Hills
- 28 May — Lewisham
- 13 June — Surry Hills
- 25 June — Lewisham

Date Claimer:

23 August — Saturday Workshop
by application

Tree of Hope

The **Tree of Hope** (ToH) is a CatholicCare service which provides emotional and practical support to people living with HIV, their family and their support person. This service is open to people of any faith or no faith.

We are based in Lewisham, with outreach at Surry Hills and Liverpool. The ToH is a place of hospitality and welcome, and offers a space for reflection, support and friendship.



From the Coordinator ...

If I start this newsletter with ‘how fast this year has gone’ you could well think this was last year’s newsletter - each quarter flies by! So I won’t say it, but yes we’ve hit the ground running in this first few months of 2014!

We have enjoyed social gatherings at Surry Hills, Liverpool and Lewisham and it is always great to see the enthusiasm and commitment participants have in attending and connecting with friends.

In March at the Surry Hills gathering, we were pleased to welcome Fr Jim Carty (former ToH manager) back to share his journey of The Camino Trail in Spain, which ranges from south western France across northern Spain. If you’ve seen the movie *The Way* starring Martin Sheen, you will know what a special experience this journey is to so many people. It was clear that the travelling companions Jim met contributed significantly to his very special memories.

On 4-6 April, 13 participants attended ToH’s Weekend Retreat which was held at Mittagong. The theme was *Feeling the Breeze - of connection and support in a spiritual space.*

I am very proud to share that this year the weekend retreat was peer designed and facilitated by a working group of 5 people. They worked tirelessly on content, creativity and delivery. Their collective wisdom was gratefully appreciated by the participants. Michael (participant) has written a beautiful reflection, so please allow him to share his memories with you.

Please note the following:

- » There will be no Surry Hills or Lewisham gatherings in April.
- » I will be on annual leave from 22 April until 20 May 2014.
- » Merrienne and Penny will be hosting the Surry Hills Social Gathering on 9 May. (No RSVP required this month.)

Warm regards,
Marg

THE HERMITAGE, MITTAGONG, 4-6 APRIL 2014

Reflection - Feeling the Breeze - of connection and support in a spiritual space.



The overcast skies and scattered showers did not dampen my spirits as I arrived at the Hermitage nestled in the undulating hills of the Southern Highlands, just outside of Mittagong. The Hermitage would be my home away from home for the next 3 days.

There was excitement and some apprehension as being new to Tree of Hope, many of the participants attending the retreat were unknown to me. My apprehension quickly subsided with the warm welcome received from Marg, Merrienne, Penny, Peter and Denise. It was very nice meeting the other participants as they arrived. Unbeknown to me at the time, some of the participants would become my friends by the end of our retreat.



We started our first lunch with a delicious soup made with fresh ingredients grown on site at The Hermitage. The food throughout the retreat was sumptuous, healthy and plentiful.



Our first exercise was to sit and talk with people who we didn't know. This helped break the ice in getting to know each other. I was very touched by how very open and honest people were from the very beginning.

Each day there was a striking centrepiece, created by Denise, located at the centre of our meeting space. In the middle of the centrepiece was a tall, yellow candle that someone was invited to light and extinguish at the beginning and end of each session. To me, the candle represented our hope. At the beginning of each day, we discussed what the centrepiece meant to us and it meant different things to everyone.

A nicely designed paper "communitree" was attached to the back window of our meeting space. Throughout our sessions, lead by Peter



Thoms, we placed individual paper leaves onto the branches of the communitree with words and phrases describing how we felt, and what we were expecting from our retreat. We discussed what it meant to be part of a community and defined what a community meant to us. We placed our thoughts on these paper leaves and

attached them to the branches of the communitree.





In another activity, one of the participants facilitated the game Petanque, which is a form of bowls that originated in France. The aim of the game was to throw hollow, colour coded metal balls as close as possible to a small wooden ball, while standing inside a starting circle with both feet on the ground. Petanque was fun and created a team spirit amongst us.

I particularly enjoyed the African drumming/musical instruments activity, where we were able to communicate with each other without speaking. We communicated through the instruments. We created our own rhythm and we created music! No prior experience in playing musical instruments was required.

We participated in mindful breathing and meditation exercises that helped us to relax and temporarily forget the outside world.

On our last day, we had an interesting session about the first and second stages of life and discussed what stage we were in, as individuals. This really made me think and reflect as to where I was in life and where I wanted to be. We all had good discussions on this topic with a realisation that some of us move back and forth between the first and second stages of life.



In closing, I have learned a lot from this retreat. I realise that what I have been searching for I have found at Tree of Hope. What I enjoyed the most, was the one on one discussions and walks I had with a number of the participants. I gained strength from them. We shared life experiences, joy and pain. We all caught up together soon after the retreat. The journey continues but I am no longer alone!



Written by Michael
(name and photographs used with permission)

*When there is harmony and stillness within, I can
hear the voice of my own wisdom.*

*When I appreciate others it helps them pass on a
loving attitude to someone else.*

Up Coming Events

SURRY HILLS:

9 May - Social Gathering

13 June - Discussion Group
(speaker to be confirmed)

LEWISHAM:

28 May - Drop in Time
Bishop Terry Brady
will be joining us

25 June - Drop In Time
Light lunch

