

Chair's report 2023

Committee

My first job is to recognise and say 'thank you' to the committee, for it is their hard work and commitment which makes SEN function as it does. At the last 'AGM' (2021) we welcomed several new members onto the committee, and it has been a joy to see how they have grown together, stimulating each other as they each made their particular contribution:

- Natalie Baxter-Strange as vice-chair has been a supportive sounding-board asking just the right questions to clarify our, and my, thinking.
- Judy O'Brien as minutes secretary has produced excellent summaries of some complex discussions.
- Cameron Abernethy has master-minded the newsletters and the liturgy for the conference.
- Charmaine Saunders has led us in quiet reflection as we began each meeting, setting the tone for what followed.
- Julia Sheffield helped us sort out questions around GDPR and membership lists, as well as facilitating this conference's creative space.
- Sue Wilson took on the programme of evenings (more of which below).
- Sarah Young has not only been a valuable link with the Jesuits but valued in her own right.
- Glen Graham and Suzanne Carlsson each made their contributions before personal circumstances meant they each resigned.

I would also like to highlight the contribution of Margaret Sheldon who has faithfully kept track of the SEN bank account for more years than I know of. (It was Margaret's welcome as Conference Secretary which led to my joining SEN back in 2010.) I have been grateful for the speedy way in which she has paid expenses and her unfailing good humour in so doing. Margaret is now handing over the treasurership and we owe her a big vote of thanks.

The committee has met regularly, usually every other month, via Zoom. How else could people so widely dispersed geographically have met together? Each meeting has started with a time of reflection to help us 'tune into' the leading of the Spirit in our discussions.

Membership list and Directory

One of the committee's first tasks was to review the membership list and directory, especially in the light of GDPR and our limited resources of time and finances. We took the decision to discontinue our database and use MailChimp for our membership list. Also, to discontinue our online directory and to direct members to other organisations who were better resourced to offer such a facility. We appreciated the offer by the London Centre for Spiritual Direction to give SEN members an initial period of free membership to their online directory.

Conference

The main task of the committee has been to organise the conference. As our last conference, in 2021, was online, the 2023 conference is the first time we have been physically together since 2018. Aware of this, and still adjusting to the uncertainties of life after Covid, we felt it appropriate to offer a programme which would allow time for people to reconnect with each other, invite them to reflect on their own living of the spirituality of the Exercises and also, as practitioners, to have an apostolic, outward looking focus. We were delighted when Sr Gemma Simmonds CJ and Rev Preb Nick Helm

were both available and willing to be our speakers on the theme 'Living and Giving the Exercises Today'. We were concerned not to pack the programme with busyness and so, instead of workshops, we decided to offer creative time and space as a balance to spoken words.

I acknowledge with gratitude the financial support the Jesuits and the Society of Retreat Conductors have given this conference. Without their generosity it possibly wouldn't have happened.

Programme of online evenings

The minutes from the 2018 business meeting record various ideas for ways in which SEN could develop its ministry to practitioners. What emerged has been the programme of monthly 'Evenings with SEN'. These were envisaged as a way of enabling SEN members to meet each other, albeit in virtual space taking advantage of our Zoom subscription. They started with a couple of evenings using clips from the recordings of the 2021 conference as conversation starters. Then we invited members to zoom in for a pre-Christmas party at 'The Star' in Bethlehem and a meditative visit to the stable. The evenings have developed into a varied programme of helpful input with an Ignatian focus. We are grateful to Sue Wilson who has so successfully persuaded people to freely offer their time and expertise, and to our various presenters who have generously provided such stimulating and thought-provoking content. Numbers attending vary, but average 25-30

Networking

Meanwhile, other organisations have also been developing their use of online and digital technologies to foster networking, and the committee has sought to position SEN as a specifically Ignatian network within the wider networks of spiritual accompaniment.

We have noted and supported the growth of the Spiritual Direction Forum. Using Mailchimp has enabled us to send regular newsletters at relatively low cost, informing SEN members about other opportunities to develop their practice as spiritual directors and Ignatian practitioners.

The future

I have been on the SEN committee for nearly a decade, the last two as Chair. I am now stepping back, though I will continue to offer support in a backroom role. Julia Sheffield is also resigning. We have been grateful for her facilitating the creative space at this year's conference. We trust that God will prompt new people to stand for election to the committee bringing with them fresh ideas as SEN continues its aim of

- facilitating contact between those engaged in the ministry of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius.
- encouraging 'spiritual conversation' and open, relaxed sharing of spiritual experience.
- holding a biennial conference, in which aspects of the Spiritual Exercises are explored in depth, and publicising and promoting a variety of training opportunities, both national and regional.
- making the Spiritual Exercises better known and available in ways that are appropriate to our time.

Janet Bone
July 2023