

# Retreat Into Silence

By Siobhan Kenny

A number of years ago I started undertaking silent retreats – diffusing the external noise, reaching inward and gaining a clarity to return back with a renewed perspective. The onset of COVID-19 meant that it has been some years since I have had the opportunity to go on retreat. I feared I would have lost its essence but thankfully that was not the case.

This Silent Centering Prayer retreat was my first retreat in Catherine’s House. This was something I was very excited about. As Values & Culture Lead at Mercy University Hospital, I spend a lot of time surrounded by Catherine, so it was a wonderful opportunity for me just to be with Catherine in her house. Throughout the retreat all participants had the unique opportunity to fully explore the house and find “our spot” which enabled a fully immersive experience. This aspect I really enjoyed.



The delivery of the Retreat by Fionnuala Quinn O.P. and Suzanne Ryder, RSM, meant my introduction to Centering Prayer was led by someone who had been not only in the company of Thomas Keating but, had learned and developed this practice in a truly exceptional way. Learning from the Masters so to speak! Throughout a retreat, the body, mind and soul are nourished in all sorts of creative and interesting ways. This allows you the space to encounter God’s presence. Indeed meal times can be the most testing, as we are by our very nature sociable creatures. For some people this may be the space where you find if a retreat is right for you!

The literal meaning of the word Retreat is as an act of “moving back” and “withdrawing” and whilst generally a word that is more affiliated with military strategy, this act of resignation, acceptance and preservation is becoming more integral to how we live today. Undertaking a Retreat, especially a silent one, allows space to pause and step out of the busyness of everyday life, deepening your connection with God, encountering others in a new way and providing an anchor that will steady you through the sea of life – the rough and calm waters.

*Siobhan Kenny is the Values & Culture Lead at Mercy University Hospital Cork. Siobhan attended the five-day Silent Centering Prayer retreat at Mercy International Centre in August 2023. This retreat was co-facilitated by Fionnuala Quinn O.P and Suzanne Ryder RSM and included representatives from a variety of congregations including the Presentation, Bon Secours, Sacred Heart and Dominican Sisters as well as members of the Mercy global lay community at large.*