

# First ACU staff retreat a success

Australian Catholic University (ACU) Brisbane Campus staff were invited to relax and unwind at the inaugural overnight staff retreat at the scenic Santa Teresa Spirituality Centre overlooking Moreton Bay, QLD on the weekend.

The Staff Ministry initiative at ACU is a world first and is an important part of the University's work in the area of staff formation and support.

Twenty academic and professional staff gathered after work on Friday afternoon to unwind with wine and cheese as the sun went down over the sparkling waters of the bay.

The retreat was organised by ACU Brisbane Campus Ministry, through Pastoral Associate for Staff Colleen Tracey who said the retreat offered participants the chance to step away from their busy lives.

"It was an opportunity for those who attended to connect with themselves, to their colleagues and to God, to spend time making sense of our sorrows, our joys, our defeats and our happiness".

The retreat was facilitated by Mary Franzmann, whose gentle style lead the group through a variety of topics. The first session was about hope where participants explored the work of Henri Nouwen who spoke of hope as learning to look fully into our losses, not evade them. Nouwen also recommends that by greeting's life's pains with something other than denial, we may find something unexpected.

The following morning began with the session, "breaking through, when life breaks down". The group were invited to let go of that which enslaves them; to let be - something that has ended badly and; to let grow, to attend to places of new life. Participants were then invited to walk the picturesque grounds of the retreat centre, including the centre's labyrinth.

"Walking a labyrinth is a spiritual exercise, it has three stages. First, a time to release and let go of cares and concerns, second, to reach the centre of the labyrinth and stay for clarity and insight, then finally the walk of gratitude and integration into your life as you leave," said Mrs Tracey.

ACU Associate Director of Identity and Mission Mark Lysaght said that retreat was an important initiative.

"I am delighted by the engagement and feedback from staff that attended the retreat. Ministry to staff in its current form is a relatively new development at ACU and a world first," said Mr Lysaght.

"To have staff that are specifically employed for the pastoral and spiritual needs of staff is an ongoing reality that continues to be a fruitful experience for all involved."

"This initiative along with engagement from staff, giving their own time to go on retreat to explore and deepen their experience of God speaks volumes about our staff and their dedication to the mission of ACU."

When asked if she was happy with the retreat, Mrs Tracey said she was overjoyed that staff were able to build relationships within themselves and also with each other.

"After all, relationships are what we are about in ACU Campus Ministry."

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