

## **Cross Border Online Retreat for the IBVM CJ Friends of Mary Ward in the UK and Albania**

In 2005, after a mandate discerned by the IBVM Congregation to open a new mission outside the borders of every Province in the Congregation, the English IBVM mission discerned, with the help of international NGOs in the UK, to open a new mission in Albania. This new mission was one of 7 new missions established by IBVM in different countries of the world at this time. The Bishop of Tirana, in Albania requested that the sisters going from England to Albania would work against human trafficking. This mission has developed over this time and now an NGO Foundation called Mary Ward Loreto is implementing the work against human trafficking in 6 regions of Albania. Mary Ward is well known and a group of Albanians called the Friends of Mary Ward, meet for prayer and reflection to support them in this challenging mission. In the UK, the Friends of Mary Ward was established in both the CJ and IBVM Congregations and over time they have begun to merge as regional groups meeting also for support, prayer and reflection.

In September 2021, at an IBVM regional meeting, a seed was sown to bring these groups of the Friends of Mary Ward together for a three week directed retreat in daily life, across borders, online. The plan was to begin the retreat during the novena of Mary Ward 2022. As Mary Ward week came to an end on January 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022, a group of 21 Friends of Mary Ward from Albania and England began this Retreat in Daily Life. It lasted for three weeks, with each retreatant meeting their own director twice a week. The opening and closing meetings were an opportunity for some prayer and sharing together.



So as to not rush the introductions, a preliminary meeting with all the Friends took place a week earlier, taking the opportunity to celebrate Mary Ward's birthday with prayer and a little sharing.

The retreat directors were all CJs and IBVMs from the Irish and English Provinces, and these had an opportunity to meet together throughout the retreat for some prayer, sharing and companionship.

The last word goes to some of the retreatants:

### **From the Albanians:**

A retreat that crosses borders without a passport even in the times of Covid. With Jesus in our daily life, hearts begin at every distance. Thank you all for this opportunity.

At first, I was a little worried about my English language skills, but after all God knows our hearts and understands all the languages of the world. It was a beautiful experience and an opportunity to meet everyone from different places in the name of God. This happened at a convenient time for me as I am expecting a baby. This retreat made me more grateful and hopeful.

The retreat was a wonderful experience for me. I will continue with it and I plan to make prayers part of my daily life.

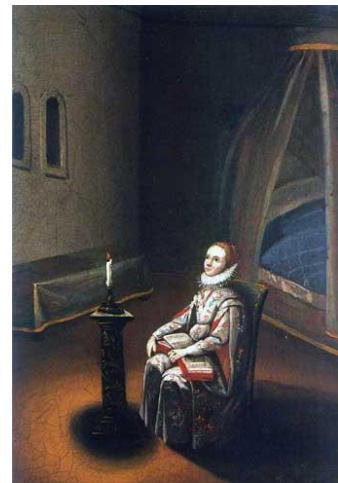
My spiritual experience of retreat was connected, first of all, with rethinking myself. In finding a time of stillness, and in a moment of loneliness, I quickly caught myself thinking that I could not control the flow of my thoughts. I certainly have gained a more personal relationship with Jesus through the highly personal style of the guided reflections.

Taking part in the Retreat in Daily Life enabled me to strengthen my faith while continuing with my daily life activities. Having someone to accompany me on this path helped me to set the commitment to be intentional and reflect on my journey.

The retreat did not only help me personally, but also my family and my students as well. God showed up in every step of my life with my family, friends and students. His presence has developed my self-confidence, has matured me more in my actions and in my understanding how important is to have God in your life.

### ...and the English

For me the retreat was a time of going deeper with God, helped by establishing a manageable rhythm of prayer and the listening, encouraging and discerning ear of my guide.



I had been dissatisfied with my prayer-life for a while, but the Retreat made me focus and let the Holy Spirit, through my Spiritual Director, guide me in ways and depths of prayer I had never experienced before

It was all the more special to know that we were praying alongside fellow friends in Albania and England.

I was grateful for the discernment and encouragement of my guide as God led me on a deep and healing journey.

The retreat opened my mind to different methods of prayer and I experienced a strong sense of inner peace

The retreat was a gift in the middle of a busy time. My guide affirmed in what I do personally as well as in school. I rest gently in having a set time each day for prayer which is so important to me no matter where I am. I feel enriched and enfolded in God's love, more aware that God walks me in my daily life in all the ups and downs.