



SPAIN: Retreat for the Mostoles church, Madrid

Two years ago the Diocese of Spain and the Diocese of Europe (Gibraltar) came together to explore through prayer, study and discussion the future for the Episcopal Church in Spain. Out of that conference came a powerful vision of renewal and revival in the church. Flames of fire spreading from the coast to the centre of Spain, but also a consciousness of oppression which hung over the church in Spain. The praise of Isaiah 25, verse 7 became the focus for our prayers.

"On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations: he will swallow up death for ever."

John and Nympha Dixon, SAMS USA Mission Partners, were at that conference and have invited SOMA teams back to lead the church's annual retreat. They work in the heart of a new suburb of Madrid, Mostoles. During the past nine years a church has been planted, now with a congregation of fifty, and this summer they will be launching out on a new church planting initiative in Alcorcón - their neighbouring suburb.

Our retreat in the beautiful wooded mountains just two hours out of Madrid focused on the pressure of living a Christian life in a secular society and the priorities of the church - the theme 'Walking on water' gave us some idea of the challenges facing us!

As this had originally been planned as a retreat for the ladies, we conducted our sessions in separate groups, with the women's group being led by Sue Woodcock, but the themes we dealt with covered the same ground. Jesus' invitation to Peter is a challenge to us all to walk in the footsteps of the early church who saw Christ's kingdom breaking into a world without hope. 'We walk not by sight but by faith in the son of God who loved us and gave himself for us.' Taking this as our theme we looked at:

The life of a disciple and the pressures of a consumer society: Psalm 37

The life of a disciple and the priority of praise, worship and

thanksgiving: Psalm 105

The life of a disciple and spiritual warfare: Ephesians 1:15-23

The life of a disciple and the priority of love in our relationships: John 15:19, 17:11-16

Our final act of worship on Sunday morning when we came together as a church family took up the challenge once more to follow Christ as we considered Jesus' words in Luke 9:23

'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me'.

The retreat in such beautiful surroundings was a welcome escape from the heat and pressure of life in Mostoles - But I was aware as I spoke of the realities of God's kingdom that there were other pressing realities: earning a decent wage and working long hours were the realities faced by each of the men who made up our small group. One, a long distance driver, regularly worked two shifts to earn enough to provide a decent life for his family, another, a warehouse manager for a supermarket, had to live away from home. Coping with these pressures it's hard not to be ground down and lose sight of the Jesus who asks us to take our eyes off the waves and focus on him.

The challenge and the invitation of Jesus remain but the adventure of walking on water will only begin when we step out of the boat.