

Community Routes

Canterbury Chapters

Desmond Alban writes about the meeting of the First Order Chapters at the Franciscan International Study Centre, Canterbury, at the end of August:

My impression of what to expect at this three-yearly meeting was formed partly from reading what felt like a mountain of minutes from previous such gatherings, but there was much more to our time in Canterbury than simply business. The core meetings did matter greatly, of course, with 'quality time' given to some vital issues that concern us all, as ministers and brothers' and sisters' representatives from the different provinces of SSF met at different sessions in various groupings and combinations. Our Bishop Protector General, George Connor of Dunedin in New Zealand, had given generously of his time to be with us, sharing his wisdom and perspective for the whole two weeks. Our reflections were also enriched by the presence of ecumenical representatives and this year the Inter-Provincial Third Order Chapter was meeting at the same time (there is more on those aspects of Canterbury elsewhere in these pages). It was of great value to live, eat, pray, relax and work together in close proximity with representatives of our diverse Franciscan Family for an extended period of time. In the mornings we reflected together on the scriptures in small groups in our residential houses (*lectio divina*), and our group was a wonderful microcosm of the whole: First order sisters and brothers from the Americas, Europe and the Pacific Islands (the ANZ reps were elsewhere), tertiaries from Zambia and the UK, and Sister Patricia, Abbess of the Second Order sisters at Freeland. The Daily Eucharist too was enriched with liturgies and music from nations and cultures across the world; Korea, Sri Lanka and Sweden being amongst the places one might not first have thought of.

Austin and Colin Wilfred, with John Morrison TSSF and others locally worked tirelessly to keep the practical aspects of our stay running smoothly but also to enrich the programme with events at Greyfriars (the site of the home of the first English Franciscans), the Cathedral and elsewhere. I had complained (tongue-in-cheek) to friends at home that it was just my luck to be elected in the year that this meeting was being held in the UK, and not at some exotic destination at the end of a long-haul flight. But as we prayed together in a candle-lit vigil in the cathedral at the heart of the Anglican Communion, and relaxed, talked and prayed some more in the Study Centre, at the ancient Church of St Martin, at Greyfriars, or on the half hour stroll to or from the city, it was hard to imagine a better place to be together.

Franciscans International

Maureen writes:

Listening to Father John Quigley OFM talking about Franciscans International, I felt excited to realise that this was an organisation which CSF and SSF had supported from soon after its visionary beginning in the early 1980's. The initial objective of being a 'presence' at the United Nations (in New York) had been transmuted into that of being an active body that contributes to discussions held under the auspices of the United Nations, to influence decisions relating to matters of justice, peace and the integrity of creation.

Franciscans International (FI) is among the few religious organizations with non-governmental organization (NGO) status at the United Nations - the Anglican Church is another with this status. Much of the work of FI is carried out in Geneva, Switzerland, for it is there that many multinational companies have their headquarters, government embassies have high-status representatives and it is the meeting place of organizations that make decisions about international issues such as trade, human rights and the environment. One of the main tasks of the Geneva office, therefore, is to gain access to these circles of influence, which it then uses for its advocacy work. This involves bringing to Geneva people who have been identified by Franciscans working at the grassroots level as victims of unjust trade or economic practices. These people are then taught how to present their plight to the international meetings - given the confidence to stand up, speak clearly and respond to questions without being intimidated by the situation - and so present the realities of injustice or human rights violations to those who are inclined to say there is no abuse or need to change the way things are. Thus, little by little, countries are promoting policies that respect people and their environment, because of the collaborative work of FI. Joyce has thrice, now, attended a session of the UN Commission on Human Rights, as an FI observer. FI's current advocacy and support work includes the areas of HIV/AIDS, access for all to clean water, human trafficking, the rights of migrant workers and their families, gender issues, the indigenous people of West Papua, abuse and repression in Togo, and the Dalit and tribal people of India. They also support a Capuchin friar who has begun co-ordinating conflict resolution work in Africa.

The work of FI is so much in demand that there is a movement towards establishing a third office, in South East Asia, probably in Thailand, that will be able to respond more specifically to some of the issues that disproportionately affect the poor and the natural environment in Asia-Oceania. Donald Campbell from the Brisbane friary attended a meeting earlier in 2005, in support of this venture.

Interns at FI

Do you know anyone who is considering a 'gap year' or would like to contribute to work that alleviates the plight of the poor, but has only 12 months available in which to do it?

Franciscans International runs an internship programme, and its work in Geneva, especially, is heavily reliant on the work of interns. Mostly recent university graduates, they are given housing, a grant to cover living expenses, and pastoral support, and in exchange they put to use and develop their skills in advocacy, communications, graphics and administration within a situation that has a Franciscan ethos. The experience also provides the possibility of an impressive addition to a curriculum vitae. It can be an exciting way to 'make a difference'....

More information on FI, as well as access to their publications, can be obtained from their website

www.FranciscansInternational.org

Hilfield Camps

Despite the changes taking place at Hilfield Friary, the summer camps continue to be held. Youth Camp has undergone some changes in style and leadership, and there will only be one youth camp in 2006.

Kevin Fox writes about the Families Camp:

The 2005 camp was again that wonderful mixture of relaxation, laughter, companionship, reflection, activity and prayer, that together make the Families Camp so special and enjoyable. To give a flavour of this year's camp here are a few of the many highlights.

For the young children I expect that high on their list was the freedom to be able to be outside, exploring and playing with their friends.

The first weekend weather was rather unsettled so the barn dance took place inside rather than in the courtyard. The reduced space rather forced the dancers to get quickly re-acquainted (particularly the feet).

For the mid-week trip we went to Seatown on the famous Jurassic coastline. We were blessed with exceptionally good weather, so ideal for a picnic, followed by 30-a-side rounders, then swimming, and for some a walk up Golden Cap (highest cliff on the south coast).

Other highlights were a very dark, dark, dark night walk, and the infamous entertainment evening which included an awards ceremony, a performing flea, comedy acts and wonderful music (who says variety is dead?).

Brother Samuel led the adult morning sessions on the theme of 'Engaging with God', based on lectio divina. This theme was very successfully used in other aspects of the camp, and particularly in the camp eucharist in the courtyard. Samuel's input was much appreciated.

The camp works well because very many individuals contribute time and skills, although there are too many people to mention here. However, we must thank the Clarke and Cocksedge families for their gentle leadership of the camp over the last few years. We are also extremely grateful to the Friary for all the support we receive.

Greystones Revisited

We sometimes wonder what happened to places which have been C/SSF houses. The present owners of Greystones, in Newcastle -under-Lyme, where CSF lived for twenty-five years, recently described their experience of the house.

Steve and Rae Flather live at Greystones, with their young daughter and two teenage sons. The annexe operates as a bed and breakfast facility, which is proving very popular. Rae feels that the reasons for its popularity are twofold: the fact that it continued to be listed as a convent for some time after their move there, and the beauty of its grounds. Just about everyone who comes to stay will pick up a copy of franciscan, and delve into the history of the

Community's time there. Teresa has become a friend of the family, visiting quite often, and filling them in on its history.

Greystones continues to be a 'people place'. Rae says that the house and grounds seem to emit a silent echo of joy when full of people. The legacy of peace left behind has an intriguing effect upon visitors. Often they oversleep and need to be woken up. They say that they have never stayed in such a peaceful environment.

Whilst sometimes it is necessary for the Order to move on from houses, for all sorts of reasons, there are people like Steve and Rae, who feel themselves lucky to inherit, respect and appreciate the love and beauty of what has been left behind.

Round up

Amongst visiting overseas brothers Stephen KFB is at Alnmouth, moving to Canterbury in the New Year, when Jonas Balugna will also move elsewhere in the province from Birmingham where he is currently staying. George Huinodi spent October and November at Hilfield.

Nathanael has moved to Doncaster, Reginald to Canterbury and James William to Plaistow. Following the closure of the Cambridge house, Martin has moved to Stepney, Roger Alexander to Glasshampton and Samuel to Hilfield. Thomas Anthony has been in Assisi since mid-October.

Augustine Thomas has been elected to Life Profession. Lawrence reverted to his Dutch baptismal name, Bart, when he made his First Profession on 30 October at Hilfield. Martin Philip has been granted Leave of Absence. *f*