

Community Routes

Franciscan Presence in Kuching

There have been various attempts made to establish the Religious Life in Borneo. Bishop William Mounsey CR, the fourth Bishop of the then Diocese of Labuan and Sarawak (1909 to 1916) was the first to suggest a missionary Order for Borneo. In 1931, under his successor, Bishop Danson, the Congregation of Jesus the Good Shepherd (CJGS) started in Sandakan and the Community of the Holy Cross in Betong. Presently Sister Margaret is the only surviving member of the CJGS, based in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. The Community of the Holy Cross was short-lived. The Community of the Resurrection went to Borneo from England in 1934 but they had to withdraw in 1937.

In 1952, Fr Eric Scott came to Sarawak. He became the first member of the Third Order of the Society of Saint Francis in Sarawak. In 1962 Donald SSF was the first friar of the Society of Saint Francis to conduct a mission in Kuching, Sarawak and Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. In 1972 Geoffrey SSF, the then Minister General SSF, visited Kuching, and on subsequent visits built up the Third Order. Presently there are nine tertiaries and two companions. In 1973 Brian SSF conducted missions in Kuching and Miri. In 1981 Noel Thomas SSF conducted the Diocesan Clergy Retreat and in 1989 Alfred BoonKong SSF, (originally from Kuching but living in the ANZ Province), became the first Malaysian to make his life profession in SSF. He was invited to teach at the House of Epiphany, Kuching, the theological college, from 1998 to 2003. In 2005 Jennifer Chan, (also from Kuching and a former SSF Tertiary) became the first Malaysian to make her profession in CSF. In August 2006 the then Bishop of the Diocese of Kuching invited Jennifer, (then living in the European Province of CSF), for two years' secondment, generously providing her with accommodation and an allowance.



The Anglican Church in Borneo started on 29 June 1848, Saint Peter's Day, with the landing in Kuching of a thirty-year-old surgeon and priest, Francis Thomas McDougall, with his wife Harriette, and another clergyman, William B. Wright. The group was invited by Rajah James Brooke, through the Borneo Church Mission Institution, and later fully supported by the missionary societies, SPG/USPG, and CMS. From the work of the two priests, and their successors, the Anglican Church has developed to what it is now: Saint Thomas' Cathedral, 27 parishes, over 150 Chapels, about 80 priests, about 120,000 worshippers and over 40 primary church schools and 8 secondary church schools. The four main languages used in Church services are: English, Mandarin, Bahasa Malaysia and Iban. In 1996 the four Dioceses: Kuching and Brunei; Sabah; West Malaysia; Singapore, formed a new Province of South East Asia in the Anglican Communion. The Most Rev John Chew, Bishop of Singapore is the present Archbishop.

At the time of writing Jennifer has been in Kuching for over a year. She is living in one of the units of the Clergy Flats in the vicinity of Saint Thomas'

Cathedral, and her presence creates much awareness of the existence of the religious life in the Anglican Church. Her main ministries are supporting the pastoral needs of the Cathedral: home visits; hospital chaplaincy; leading quiet days; prayer requests; spiritual direction; leading a regular Bible study for a group of teenagers and for the Cathedral Women's Fellowship, and other ad hoc activities. In September 2007 she was appointed as the Chaplain of the Kuching Diocesan Women's Fellowship. In this capacity she hopes to visit all the 27 parishes, comprising about 87 branches of the Fellowship in Sarawak and Brunei. She is excited at this opportunity to learn and to share in the lives of the women in the Diocese. Both Helen Julian and Joyce have visited Kuching this year.

Summer Festivals

For quite a number of years, the brothers and sisters of the First Order have had a presence at various summer music and arts festivals, both secular and Christian. This year, Oswin Paul attended the Glastonbury Festival (a rather muddy event) and Soul Survivor; Beverley and Liz attended New Wine; and Christine James, Hugh, Jenny Tee and Maureen were at Greenbelt.

New Wine

Liz writes:

New Wine is a Christian Conference, its ethos being "to equip churches to see Jesus' kingdom grow". It is attended by individuals, and church and other groups seeking to learn together, to worship together and to be renewed in body, mind and spirit.

Beverley and I attended this year's conference and it's incredible how two people in brown habits can be noticed amongst about 6500 people! It was an amazing opportunity to be a visible witness and presence among so many. We had many fascinating conversations about 'who' or 'what' we were and were able to talk to people about the Franciscan way of life, as we shared a little of our own 'faith' journeys and as we listened and shared in the stories of those we met.

The highlights for me were the opportunities to attend seminars on a wide range of subjects and to be a part of the awesome experience of worshipping with so many people.

One of the themes that emerged for me was that of the need to 'slow down, to be still and to listen attentively to the voice of God'. It was a reminder to hold on to the important witness that our lives rooted in prayer can offer in an increasingly frenetic and secular society. The early morning Bible study on the Exodus was a reminder of how often the refining that takes place in our journey of faith, takes place in those desert places. The main Bible study of the day based on several 'Great Commissions', was led with great passion

and emphasised that our commissioning for service comes from the position of our love for the Lord and from the knowledge that the Lord loves us. The speaker's message reminded us of how easy it was to drift away, to forget our original calling and of the need to "come back to our first love" - to re-root and re-establish our relationship with the Lord.

Finally Baroness Cox, one of the evening speakers talking about the work of the Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust, an organisation that aims to give aid to people suffering oppression and persecution - people forgotten by the West, overlooked by the media and neglected by major non-governmental organisations. She has travelled the world and survived many life-threatening situations. She has been shot at, witnessed scenes of carnage, entered active conflict zones, and crossed restricted borders covertly. Her life over the last 20 years sounds like the script for a James Bond movie - it certainly doesn't sound like the life of a Baroness. "My passion," she explains simply, "is to make a difference." For more see www.hart-uk.org

So all in all it was a pretty good week and there was plenty of evidence of the Lord's work in people's lives.

Greenbelt

Jenny Tee writes : In Heaven in Ordinary. Streams of red balloons in a cloudless sky, expressing the prayers of thousands at the festival communion. Music into the night, from Tavener to Delirious? to Billy Bragg. Visual arts, literature, comedy and circus. A talks programme billed as 'the sound of a better world being born', Visits from new and seasoned campaigners. Worship, with a few, and in a crowd. The surprise of glorious weather after a summer of wet weekends. A festival of tents bathed in moonlight. All this was Greenbelt 07: four days of inspiration and an invitation to find Heaven in Ordinary. Our community of Franciscans and friends, and many visitors, celebrated daily offices and eucharist at our tented home on one of the campsites, our chapel also offering a quiet space throughout the day. The highlights for me? The extraordinary gathering, happening and dispersing of a community of 20,000, and the many conversations that just happened. Morning Prayer with the panoramic backdrop of the day beginning across the festival site.

Unlocking the Black Box

Chris works as a development officer and deafblind manual interpreter. Here she writes about her work:

Some months ago, I visited Ben, a middle-aged man living in sheltered accommodation in a suburb of London. Ben had been deaf for a couple of years, but his sight had decreased suddenly leaving him without communication and totally isolated in what he could only describe as a secure black box.

When I visited Ben for the first time, I quickly discovered there was no point in speaking to him. Touch was the only way to build communication. Having taught him a tactile alphabet spelt on to his hand, I was then able to gain information from him and give him the kind of choices he was entitled to. For Ben, the black box imprisoning him was unlocked within a half-hour. But it had been months before this could happen. In the meantime, Ben had become physically weak through lack of exercise, and thoroughly depressed through lack of stimulation. Thankfully, his Braille reading skills are improving quickly, and he will soon be able to read local and national news in a simplified Braille newspaper.

Edith was in a similar situation. I met her when I was called to one of the London Hospitals. A tiny elderly lady, Edith was sitting in a chair locked away from society in deep gloom and depression. At one time she had been able to lipread, but now with her sight almost gone, she had no idea what people were saying to her, and she felt she was a burden to every human shape she saw coming towards her.

Immediately I met Edith I began spelling in block letters on to her hand; and after 3 or 4 visits, she could recognise just five letters. But this was enough to begin real and meaningful communication, because it meant that the speaker could spell a key word on to Edith's hand if she was not able to hear what was being said. The result was astonishing. Now with two methods of communication available to her, Edith became less anxious and her ability to hear seemed to improve. She was discharged from the hospital and returned home with a lot more confidence.

If a person is severely sight and hearing impaired, the terrifying "black box" can be their own four walls. Doorbells often present a problem to deafblind people. They may keep a vibrating pager in their pocket or clipped to a waistband, but the batteries sometimes stop working unexpectedly, and as a result, many people employ more dependable and inventive means for allowing people into their houses.

One man living in a maisonette advised his regular callers to invest in a room spray. This the caller sprayed through the letterbox, and Herbert - his senses tuned - would arrive quickly at the door knowing exactly who he could expect to let in. I soon discovered it was best to stand back once I had rung the doorbell, because very often a hand - palm upwards - would be thrust through the letterbox. If the caller did not spell his name clearly on the hand, it soon disappeared and the front door would remain firmly locked.

In this last paragraph, I have tried to describe the lighter side of working with deafblind people. If I did not recognise this side, I could never have done the job for all these years. But I would be the first to admit that deafblindness can be life-changing, even life-shattering for the person to whom it happens. Generally, they are remarkable people with great tenacity and a resilience which is hard to understand. Working with them puts my own life in perspective. Working with them is indeed a privilege!

Saint Clare's House, Birmingham

SSF has been in Birmingham for nearly forty years and it was with regret that the Provincial Chapter made the decision to withdraw from the city with the closure of St Clare's House in the spring, as part of a number of moves and changes in the Province. The brothers have moved several times over their ten years on the Ley Hill and Bangham Pit estates, as redevelopment of the housing has gradually begun to take place, but they will be sorry to leave behind their ministry there, particularly among young people: it is hoped that some alternative provision may continue following their departure. The brothers have occupied two houses and expect to leave Pool Field Avenue at Christmas and finally to close the main house at Fourlands Road at Easter 2008.

Round up

Clark Berge has been elected to serve as Minister General of the brothers until July 2012: **Clark** is a member of the Province of the Americas and has most recently served as Guardian of Little Portion Friary, Long Island. Peteris Zeltins was admitted as a novice on St Francis Day, 4 October, and is known in community as **Brother Peter**. **Vincent** attained his Golden Jubilee of Profession on 17 October and a modest celebration for that was held in November; **Elizabeth** likewise celebrated 50 years in profession with a Eucharist at Compton Durville. **John** was expected to be ordained Deacon at Hilfield on 22 December. **Anselm** moves from Birmingham to Glasshampton on 27 December.

In Assisi, SSF has moved to a new address: **Thomas Anthony** now occupies a larger and more suitable apartment in a quiet lane of steps near Santa Chiara. **Kathy OSC** made her life profession in the Community of St Clare at Freeland on 5 November **f**