

Community Routes

Roots and Shoots

This year's C/SSF Formation for Life conference took place at Hilfield from the 8th to the 12th of January and formed part of our commemoration of the approval of the first Rule for Francis and his brothers in 1209. We called it 'Roots and Shoots', wanting to look both at our origins as Franciscans and where the signs of growth are at the present time. To help us in our learning and our reflection, Colin Wilfred gave a talk on a biblical basis for a Rule of Life, Paula Pearce SFO brought alive the context in which Francis founded the movement and was responsible for the Earlier and Later Rules. Canon Christopher Irvine of Canterbury Cathedral drew our attention to the visual side of Franciscanism evinced in the painting of crosses for Franciscan churches in the thirteenth century. Helen Julian and Colin Wilfred helped the conference to understand how a fairly tangled history of Anglican Franciscan development, over the last century or so, has ended up with most Anglican Franciscans living under a rule written for a Christian ashram in India! Paula Pearce SFO introduced us to the contemporary Roman Catholic Third Order Regular Rule and Samuel drew out the practical meaning for us of Francis' Rule for those who Live in Hermitages. In his talk, Colin Wilfred reminded us that 'regular', from which we get our word 'rule' can also mean a signpost or railing to help travel a path or climb a mountain. As we continue to explore how to live a spiritual rule in the twenty-first century we are reminded that the dynamic response of Francis and the first brothers to Christ's call to live the gospel life still has spiritual power and energy as we seek to live it out in a very different context.



Most of the twenty participants in the conference were from the First Order sisters and brothers but we also had two Third Order members. We explored together our different forms of Anglican Franciscan identity: of being confident in being 'counter-cultural' where necessary, of being challenged by the Rules written by our founders, of being willing to take risks and that being an Order of Penitents (as the first brothers were often called) is not a vocation to misery, but a vocation of liberation and of being set free to live under a Rule which is a source of life like a well, not a fence to shut us in or stop us making mistakes!

2008 Novice Conference



Martin John writes: Six fresh-faced novices (combined age 274!) gathered for the Annual Conference, towards the end of October, receiving a warm welcome from the weather and all at Hilfield. Over the three weeks, the time-tabled input was to a very high standard again and the different speakers interlinked beautifully. It was particularly enriching to listen to the professed brothers and sisters talking about their perspective on religious life during the Vows Project. This, combined with the

time for sharing and relaxing together means that we have a strong peer group developing and our thanks are extended to Beverley and Benedict for all their hard work.

Polly writes: One of the delights for me as a sister is just being around the Friary - in another Franciscan house with a wide mixture of people from the brothers, Project members and various guests. I also enjoy the beautiful Dorset countryside as well as the cats, chickens and sheep.

La Piñata

Gerardo explains the origin of a custom he shared at Hilfield before Christmas, and which was concluded during the 'Roots and Shoots' conference.

When the first missionaries arrived in Mexico, they were faced with a very different way of life from the one they were used to. The conquest meant not only taking over territories that had recently been discovered as America, but it was also the imposition of a language, Spanish customs and habits and, among other things, religion. It was not easy for the evangelists to change the ideology of belief in many gods of the many different Indian populations, so they had to invent strategies to teach the mysteries of God to the Indians.

One of the most complicated dogmas was sin and the way in which Satan tempts us. The missionaries had to teach them about how we must be strong to beat the Devil; that that's how we reap the benefits of heaven... how complicated!

It was the Franciscans who found the answer ... a piñata!

They designed a huge ceramic pot covered with coloured paper in the shape of a star, with each one of the points representing one of the seven deadly sins. It was something that would come down from and then rise up to the sky (hence the shape of the star) and it would bother people... touch them... tempt them!

So, you have to hit it hard, overcome the temptation, break the evil, put all your attention into getting rid of evil. But it's not easy! Sin blinds us with a blindfold, and our family and friends and others who surround us are the ones who have to guide us in order to break the chain of evil.



When someone is well guided, the piñata is broken! Then, from heaven, we are showered with gifts... fruit, candy, toys. Evil has been destroyed, God is with us, the missionaries have accomplished their duty and Mexicans enjoy one of our most fun and exciting traditions. (The traditional stuffing of the piñata was cane sugar sticks, oranges, shelled peanuts and jicamas, which are a locally grown juicy tuberous root.)

The usual piñata season is the nine days before Christmas, when Mexicans celebrate The Posadas, a festival that reminds us of the pilgrimage of Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem looking for a place to stay. People sing litanies and canticles on a procession and, knocking the doors of neighbours ask for posada (hospitality) which is denied twice and at the third time, the family who offers the posada, finally allows the procession to get in to the house chanting the traditional canticle. Delicacies are served to the guests and the piñata is broken.

Refugees: Friendship is mutual

During the Kosovo crisis around the turn of the millennium, many refugees from that conflict were dispersed to the Birmingham area. Birmingham Churches Together responded by forming Restore, an organization which aimed primarily to befriend the refugees and provide a source of information for adapting to life in the UK, thus helping to restore their dignity and self-respect. Restore has since expanded its work to include all asylum seekers and refugees in the area, and has also broadened its remit to include some advocacy work.

Various sisters and brothers have been or are involved with assisting asylum seekers in various parts of the country. Maureen befriended Aferdita, an Albanian, through Restore. Here, Aferdita writes of her experience.

July 2001 - The hope for life had come to the end. Political problems were becoming deeper and deeper between us and the Socialist party. My husband was told he had to choose one of two ways: to work for the Socialist Party 'to become a killer', or to be killed by them. I had already lost my parents and my brother as a result of similar problems. The best way for me and my husband was to leave the country and not to be victims of socialist crimes.

One week before we left there were Albanian elections. We were hoping that the PD (Democratic Party) was going to be in power but it didn't happen. Next day after the elections we received a death threat and the children were in real danger as well. To leave Albania wasn't easy but there was no chance to get a visa through the embassies and anyway we had to be hidden because they were looking to kill us because as a family we were very supportive of the PD.

Finally we decided to leave Albania illegally. Life is uncertain in this kind of case but it was the last chance for us so we decided to take the risk. We had to travel for four days hidden in a lorry full of vegetables. We had no idea where the lorry was going, we just wanted to get out of Albania. After four

days there was no more food left and no water. We were all tired, hungry, thirsty and sick. There was no other way than to bang on the wall and tell the driver that we were at the back of his lorry. The driver was very surprised to see us there. Another family was with us, with three children and the year-old baby was nearly dying and as I could speak a little English, I asked the driver to stop the lorry and let us off. The driver called the police, who came very quickly and were very polite and kind. They brought crisps, biscuits and water for us and for our children. We were very impressed with what they did for us. Later on we were taken to the police station where we had to give our details. The very first week we were refused asylum from the Home Office. The situation was very stressful for me and my husband. We were supposed to stay in a house in Handsworth until the Home Office would take the last decision on our case, but we knew no one in Birmingham despite the fact that there are lots of Albanian and Kosovan people there. The closest person to our family was Maureen who used to come to visit us, take us to Christmas parties, and sometimes to the park. Through her and Restore, we met lots of people from Kosovo, Albania and other countries who were experiencing the same difficulties as us. Alison, another person connected with Restore, coached one of the children in the intricacies of the English language prior to his exams, probably a contributing factor to his success in gaining a scholarship to a prestigious secondary school. Restore was the only organization which helped us as asylum seekers and refugees.



Maureen adds:

After seven years of waiting for a date to appeal against the refusal to be granted refugee status, the family was suddenly granted leave to remain in the UK indefinitely. We were all very pleased that the stress of waiting was over. Aferdita and her husband have since saved hard in order for the family to apply for British citizenship, and they received their certificates of naturalization in January. As with many refugees, they provide skills and a richness to this country that is beneficial to the community.

Round up

Jenny Tee made her profession in Birmingham on 24 January, and Gerardo (Gerardo Roma-Garcia) was admitted as a novice at Hilfield on the same day and moved to Canterbury later in January. Larry has withdrawn from the novitiate. Desmond Alban has been appointed Novice Guardian to succeed Benedict from Pentecost. John has moved from Hilfield to Harehills, Leeds. Bart has moved to Brisbane, Australia at the commencement of six months each in the Australia-New Zealand and Solomon Islands Provinces. *f*