

Minister's Letter

Sister Joyce CSF

Minister General of the First Order Sisters, writes:



Dear Friends,

Daniel wrote in the last franciscan about the impending but expected ending of his time as Minister General and the experience of the sadness of the sudden unexpected death of Br Justus in Papua New Guinea, who was most likely to succeed him. Now six months on the brothers are in the midst of a new election process for Daniel's successor and 'Sister Death' has visited the brothers of the European Province with the deaths of three brothers, Geoffrey, Bernard and Roger Alexander. In this instance all three were in failing health and there are tributes to them elsewhere. However for me both Geoffrey and Bernard were significant in the shaping of my own vocation as well as being major figures in the development of SSF beyond the European Province and their deaths represent the end of an era in the history of SSF.

I was in Brisbane, Australia when the brothers first arrived in 1964. But prior to that Br Geoffrey had conducted a mission in St Alban's, Auchinflower, Brisbane which had made quite an impact on the life of that parish, and later (1965-68) when I was a parishioner there the seeds of a Franciscan vocation began to develop within me. The parish maintained a link with the brothers, then at Brookfield, and they were a familiar part of parish life. I often visited Brookfield, where I felt very much 'at home' in this joyful, hospitable, prayerful place and I also became a Companion.

By the end of 1968 after struggling for some time about whether I should 'grasp the nettle' and explore further a vocation to the religious life, I decided to leave Australia for England where CSF had its only house. Previous short experience of the religious life had made me cautious about being too obvious, so I embarked on a 'working holiday' with a sub-agenda known only to a few close friends. Then in January 1969, a few months before I was due to sail to London, the unexpected death of Br Simon, the Guardian of Brookfield, in a climbing accident, resulted in the election of Br Bernard to succeed him. When I arrived in London, one of the first people I visited was Rev'd William Baddeley, then Vicar of St James', Piccadilly and formerly Dean of St John's Cathedral, Brisbane and my spiritual director, who managed to glean from me my sub-agenda and insisted that I should see Bernard, who was still at Plaistow. This I did and he was very encouraging about my exploration.

At around the same time an article in franciscan caught my attention (I still have a copy of it) titled Saying 'Yes' with Integrity written by Bernard. It seemed to raise all the questions I was struggling with: Was the Community the answer to the problem of me being me?; What are you doing with me Lord? Is it really what you are asking, or is it something I have dreamed up,

something I am doing for myself? Also there were some memorable statements about vocation: Coming to grips with who we are and who God is -that is what makes both entry into the religious life and continuance in it a struggle; there is no escape from standing before God and being responsible for who we are; ...though one may flutter like a frightened bird picked up with a broken wing, yet the hand of God is sure. It seems to me that God allows all our flutterings to enable us to give ourselves more fully, but he himself is primary; whatever a religious does, he is witnessing to the fact that God is and that to trust him is the one thing that really matters.

I thank God for the lives of Geoffrey and Bernard, and for using them to help me discover how to say 'Yes' with integrity, and for reminding me that birth and death, endings and beginnings are the very stuff of gospel living in affirmation of the risen Christ.

Pax et bonum,