

Community Routes

Keeping the Sabbath

Helen Julian writes:

In our Rule of Life, we commit ourselves to 'honour the Sabbath principle, at all levels of our lives'. Over the autumn and winter of 2007/8, I had the wonderful opportunity to experience the Rolls Royce of Sabbath - a five month sabbatical. It was a real chance to stand back from my day to day life with all its demands, and to reflect on the future.

I explored various organised sabbatical programmes, before deciding to create my own, giving time to spirit, body and mind. So I began with six weeks in an Irish hermitage, staying with a small community of hermits in northwest Ireland. The purpose built hermitage had everything I needed, including a log burning stove, and a wonderful window seat, and I was able to really slow down, take time to reflect, read and pray, and to explore something of the surrounding countryside.

Next, a complete contrast - San Francisco. I stayed with our sisters there, and experienced a different form of aikido, a martial art which I've been practising for a number of years. A different teacher and different people to practice with was always stimulating, and sometimes confusing. And I enjoyed the city experience.

Finally to a different city - Canterbury, where I stayed with our brothers and was able to use the excellent library at the Franciscan International Study Centre. It was also wonderful to be able to worship in the Cathedral, and in the chapel of Greyfriars, part of the first Franciscan friary in England.

I returned in mid February refreshed and stimulated, with much to think about and much to be thankful for. Not least is a renewed commitment to keeping the Sabbath principle in smaller, more daily ways. If God needed a day off after all his labour, why should I think that I don't?

A Walsingham Friary

Paschal writes:

Despite being situated in a small rural North Norfolk village, the Anglican Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham attracts 36,000 pilgrims and visitors a year. As it's not somewhere one passes through, most people cross the threshold for a reason. People come searching for renewal and healing; for a listening ear or lively worship; for stillness or to be with other Christians in a place of deep faith.

Daily the sacramental life of the Church is available for Christians so there is no shortage of opportunities for pilgrims to encounter Jesus through anointing; confession and absolution; and the quiet or splendid offering of the Mass. At least four times a week individuals "journey" through the grounds in Processions, so witnessing to the pilgrim nature of the Church. There are also opportunities to spend time in prayer, both alone or with other Christians, as the Shrine Church strives to maintain silence at all times.

Since arriving in early April, Brothers Paschal and Maximilian have been sharing with the Shrine Priests, Sisters of St. Margaret and lay shrine-staff in a variety of ministries. Maximilian is often working with children, young people and school groups, in conjunction with the Shrine's education department. Paschal shares fully in the liturgical life of the Shrine and is often employed in the confessional and with spiritual direction. Both of us are preaching regularly at the different liturgies and dealing individually with pilgrims.

Later this year a new Welcome Centre will provide more information on "England's Nazareth", as well as helping people understand the story of Walsingham over past centuries. We, with others, will be part of the team to welcome people. There is also the on-going care for the local staff, some of whom have worked here for years, and the friars have been asked to be "chaplains" to them. We are learning the subtleties between the Northumberland and Norfolk accents!

We were officially commissioned by the Bishop of Norwich during the May Bank Holiday National Pilgrimage, and it was lovely to have some more "brown" around with pilgrim brothers and sisters. Samuel, the Minister Provincial SSF and Mother Mary Clare SSM encouraged us by their presence as we were "sent out" to nourish and care for God's people in this holy place.

We are conscious of the Franciscan friars who ministered here for centuries in the Middle Ages and whose bell still rings out from the Parish church. Alas, the Friary ruins speak of a time of desolation and destruction, but, please God, we might be "living stones" in the building up of Christ's Kingdom in Mary's domain.

Lobbying Parliament, again

Hugh writes:

On 23 April, Christine James, Edmund, Gina, Joyce and Caroline Ugbo TSSF joined me at a CAFOD-organised religious lobby of Parliament, similar to the 2005 Make Poverty History mass lobby for Religious. We were calling on our MPs to strengthen the Climate Change Bill, now going through Parliament. We wanted the Government to cut UK greenhouse gas emissions by 80% by 2050 - not the proposed 60%; to include shipping and aviation, and the government to report annually, not five yearly.

The previous evening, Oswin Paul heard Hilary Benn, the Environment Minister, in Methodist Central Hall. On the day itself we left Central Hall to cross Parliament Square with our banners. It took security some time to allow so many habit-wearing religious into St Stephen's Hall. We Franciscans were the largest Anglican group there. Some Kenyan sisters told us how climate change is affecting them.

I had arranged to meet my MP, Oliver Letwin, and had a good conversation. He agreed to visit us at the Hilfield Project. Some other brothers and sisters also met their MPs. Most were sympathetic, but with rising oil prices, how many will actually vote to strengthen the bill?

Unfortunately despite the success of Cafod and Christian Aid's lobbying, the Government now wants to backtrack. It has dropped an amendment to make businesses declare their emissions. UK businesses fund up to 15% of global emissions, yet it is the world's poor who suffer. We must keep up the pressure on the government to stick to what it had earlier agreed, while showing that we Franciscans are ready to do our part by seeking to simplify our carbon-rich lifestyles.

ACAT(UK)

Anselm, who now lives at Glasshampton, works with Action by Christians against Torture (ACAT) in its campaign on behalf of torture victims world wide and for the abolition of a practice which since 9/11 has gained spurious justification as a means of gaining 'information' on terrorist plans. He is coordinator of urgent appeals on behalf of human rights workers who pose a threat to oppressive regimes and are therefore targets for extra-judicial murder, arbitrary arrest, torture in police custody, 'disappearance' and harassment. In a given month about 30 appeals in such cases arrive by email, each one being forwarded to 2 or 3 writers - there is a team of about 30 - who write letters of appeal to the authorities implicated.

ACAT(UK) has a total membership of less than 300, with about 30 active groups, usually church based. If any readers feel drawn to this unspectacular ministry to courageous and forgotten men and women, they should apply in the first place to:

Margaret Russell, 47 Stoneleigh Road, Knowle Park, Bristol BS4 2RH

Further information is available on the website, www.acatuk.org.uk

Round up

John was ordained priest on 28 June in Salisbury Cathedral. Phillip Bishop will be admitted as a novice on 15 August and be known as Brother Cuthbert. Desmond Alban has been elected as one of the Religious in the House of Laity of the General Synod. Chris was admitted to the College of Evangelists at their celebration at Southwark Cathedral in April. Jennifer Chan will return to the province from her two year period of service in Malaysia in August, and will initially be based at Compton Durville. Nathanael moved to Glasshampton in August. Mark Edmund has been released from First Vows and membership of SSF. **f**