House up-date: Southwark

Gina and Joyce write:

The Brixton household moved to St Alphege Clergy House, Southwark, in January 2009 and since then has experienced a number of changes in personnel, the most recent being the return of Sister Jennifer Chan to Malaysia for a further two years secondment with her home diocese of Kuching.

We currently number four but are looking forward to Sister Sue joining us in the autumn. The constant factors in the Southwark equation have been Joyce and Gina, but Regine has been with us for a year now and Paul joined us in February this year. I will leave them to share some of their experience of living in community with us.

Our large sitting room and library have been in constant demand for meetings for C/SSF First and Third Orders and various other church and non-church organisations, and our proximity to Waterloo has made us a popular choice for accommodation, overnight and longer. Our house guests have come from all over the world, and include four delightful Muslim girls from Malaysia, a Tibetan Buddhist monk who was with us for five weeks while he attended a language school and an aid worker from Haiti who would be returning to life in a tent following the earthquake. When we were full to the gunnels with a brother having to sleep on a futon in the sitting room we gave shelter to a homeless woman who was brought to our door exhausted and wet through. So, life in the house itself is busy quite apart from outside involvements which include Gina's work as a chaplain at Wormwood Scrubs and Joyce's frequent journeys visiting community houses here and abroad.

At the heart of our presence in Southwark is our identity as an "oratory" - a place of prayer - and that continues through thick and thin. Once a week one or other of our local clergy comes to preside at the Eucharist and our bishop, Christopher Chessun, comes faithfully once a month and stays to have breakfast with us. His personal encouragement of our venture and his wise counsel have meant much to us.

We have instituted a monthly evening Eucharist followed by a bring and share supper and this has provided an ideal opportunity to entertain new friends and maintain our links with our old friends from both Brixton and Southwark.
We are constantly delighted by God’s providence in bringing us to this beautiful house through the generosity of the diocese of Southwark and look forward to serving all who come our way in the coming years.

_Regine Nagel writes:_
I joined the community after having left an increasingly stressful job working for an international anti-poverty campaign. I had been interested in community life for a long time and when the opportunity arose in May last year, it felt like the right time to explore this further. Since then I have been temping part-time in administrative roles and enjoying the spare time to do a counselling course and help in the hospitality ministry of the house. I am now getting increasingly keen to find a ‘proper’ job again.

Besides living in a conveniently located house with a beautiful roof-terrace, community life has provided me with a regular rhythm for life and prayer which I have found helpful in my personal time of transition.

_Paul Grinyer writes:_
It was also with a sense of God’s providence that I was led to join the community. Having served as a Baptist minister for 19 years, I sensed God calling me to take some time away from the daily responsibilities of church leadership for recharging and seeking his next steps for life and service. Part of this has been a desire to learn more from the contemplative tradition of the church and to experience something of life in a religious community. Through renewed contact with Brother John SSF, an old friend from Baptist training days at Spurgeon’s College, and wanting to live in central London, I found myself telephoning St Alphege Clergy House to ask if they could advise me as to somewhere I might be able to do this. It turned out one of the rooms here for non-Franciscan members of the community was available, so I moved in in February 2010.

As well as being a peaceful and comfortable place to call home, and a base from which to explore my next steps in Christ’s service, I am particularly enjoying the chance to continue to develop a healthy balance between various traditions of spirituality in the Christian church. For example, as well as the vital centrality of Scripture that my evangelical roots encourages, the charismatic tradition has been pointing me to the need to ever invoke the presence of God the Holy Spirit. Now the Franciscan life of daily Offices, weekly and monthly Eucharists, and sharing fellowship with brothers and sisters from a more Anglo-Catholic part of the body of Christ is increasing my appreciation of sacred rhythms like liturgy, silence and _lectio divina._

So I’m very grateful to God and to CSF for the hospitality and welcome of this community. _f_