



Pilgrims Newsletter



Aylesford

Spring 2017

Dear friend

It was summertime here when I last wrote to you. Thanks to Fr Kevin who kindly wrote the last Winter newsletter as I was on the other side of the world for a month. At the end of October I flew to Indonesia to attend a conference for friars involved in formation and vocations ministries. It is always exciting to visit and experience life in other cultures. Indonesia is the biggest Carmelite province in the world with over 300 friars and 54 novices. It was enlivening to see 'young Carmel' at work. The meeting had over fifty delegates from across the world and it spoke eloquently of the vast cultural and linguistic diversity of the Order worldwide. The conference focused on the contemplative dimension of our Carmelite vocation and how to communicate and share it with others. Each day we had moments of prayer together in different styles and traditions. It also highlighted some common challenges that are facing us. Whilst in the southern hemisphere the Order is experiencing rapid growth, in Europe and North America the Order is facing the reality of a decline in vocations to our way of life. This situation is not particular to the Carmelites but a reality that many Orders and dioceses are facing. I was left with questions unanswered. How do we address the increasing mission we face with a decline in numbers? How do we communicate the fact that our way of life is not a waste of a life but rather a life that can change the lives of others for the better? One of our visitors recently said to me, 'If only you knew how much the community here impacts for the good on the lives of others. You are my haven, my place of peace, being here and listening to the friars always refreshes me.' The community has shrunk in the last few years. We are now five friars. Our staff and volunteers offer tremendous support to the community and those we serve. We are learning to be hopeful and not to give in to despondency. As a community we try to celebrate the successes of each other as well as to love each other through the difficult moments that affect us all - illness, grief, tiredness. We are trying to be a community of encouragement to one another. These are 'Kingdom' values which, hopefully, are more eloquent than words.



One question I have been pondering since my return home is why is it that people seem to be uncomfortable with discernment and vocation. People readily acknowledge that there are fewer priests and religious around but seem to be horrified by the idea that their child might consider such a path. It is ok for someone else's son to become a friar, but 'not mine.' Please pray for us. Pray for your children and grandchildren that they may be open to the voice of the God who calls. Pray that we are blessed with vocations for our mission to continue, and that we are blessed with courage and vision as we look to the future.

Provincial Chapter 2017

With this in mind, we come to a definitive moment in the life of our province. At the end of February we begin our Provincial Chapter. The chapter takes place every three years and all the friars of the province meet to discuss our life and mission. I often think of it as a bit like going to the doctors for a check up. We take the pulse of the province, we look at the places and people that need a bit more care and attention, we strive to strengthen the weak spots and occasionally perform surgery, moving away from those situations that are no longer working or possible.



Early daffodils help to brighten the grounds as the weather begins to warm up



Fr Michael looked resplendent in his graduation robes



Children and adults loved the festive Polar Express at the Christmas Fayre

Christmas Draw Prize winners

1st Prize

Anne Hayden from Maidstone

2nd Prize

Mrs D Chambers from Gillingham

3rd Prize

Miss T Stogdon from Eastbourne

All winners have been notified.

We also look for new possibilities and ways to strengthen our mission. A major part of the work of the Chapter is to elect those who will lead us for the next few years. Chapter time is always a bit disconcerting. You never know what you might be asked to do, but it is also renewing and affirming. Please pray for our province at this time of Chapter and pray for those friars who will be called to leadership.

O God of Light and Hope,
you are the lasting foundation of our lives.
You raise us up through the mystery of the Cross,
opening doors to new life out of our darkness and fear.
So again we entrust our future to you
as we gather for Provincial Chapter.

May we once again echo the 'Yes' of Mary to your call
and the faithfulness of Elijah in being steadfast to your will.
May this Chapter be a time of light, confidence, and hope
in the face of our hesitations and uncertainty
in following your call to bear our gifts to the Church and world.
May our Chapter decisions be a firm foundation
for the life and work of the Carmelites
to be prophetic voices in our world, to breathe hope in hopelessness,
love in fear, and peace in the midst of noise and discord.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Celebrating milestones

In December Fr. Michael Cox graduated with his PhD. It was a lovely day. He was joined by his brother Darren and his sister in law, Susan, together with Fr Kevin and myself. It was a time for us to give thanks once more for Fr Michael and his many gifts. We now have two doctors in the house, although they are both useless in times of medical crisis! I reached the ripe old age of fifty in January and as **reminded in a card, that if you haven't grown up by 50, you don't have to!** Later in the year Fr Francis will celebrate his silver jubilee of Ordination and Brother Paul will celebrate his Ruby Jubilee of profession. Such celebrations give us an opportunity to appreciate each other's gifts and provide a wonderful excuse to gather with friends, family and community to give thanks.

Old Year, New Year

The Christmas Fayre was well attended. Thank you for your support. The whole site was transformed into a winter wonderland with a Polar Express train transporting people between the North Pole (Barns) and the South Pole (conference centre) via the gingerbread house (information kiosk)! The fayre raised over £18,000 which is a great help to us. Thank you to all our helpers and all who supported the Fayre. December is always a busy time for our catering department. **We saw many hundreds of people enjoying a festive meal in the Pilgrims' Hall during December.** Helen, our new catering manager, has been updating our food offering across the Priory to much acclaim. When you next visit Aylesford be sure to **sample a hot meal in the Pilgrims' Hall or a snack in the Barn Café. All are very reasonably priced.** One of the baked treats that always go down a storm over Christmas are the home-made mince pies that abound during December. There always seems to be a tray of them in the oven. I am sure that one of the attractions for the large congregation that gather for Midnight Mass at Christmas is the promise of a mince pie after. It always astounds me how far people come for that Mass. We had people drive down from as far as Peterborough and Southend. At least we sent them on their way with a hot drink and a belly full of happiness for the long drive home.

Over the last few years our Crib offerings have been for the charity **Mary's Meals**. This is an amazing charity that feeds the poorest of the poor in places of education. It always puts our feasting into perspective. It is good to be joyful and to delight in good things, but it is also right that in the midst of our abundance we remember those who are poor. **Mary's Meals can feed a child for a whole year for £12.40. Happily our crib offerings totalled £800.** To find out more about the charity, visit their website www.marysmeals.org.uk

The New Year began with a distinct chill. Sadly, in January we had another break in. This time the Relic Chapel was robbed and vandalised. It is always sad when this happens. That is the risk we take in being open and available to people. We are now revising our security arrangements and looking to install more cameras around the site, especially in our more vulnerable areas. When my anger subsided, I did find a moment to pray for those who had done this, admittedly through gritted teeth! Repairing the damage will cost far more than what they stole. Hopefully with new security future attempts will be futile and those involved caught and made aware of the distress and hurt they cause.

Come away and rest awhile

The Pastoral Team have put together an interesting program of retreats for the year. We have listed those retreats that are coming up both residential and day. The first retreat of the year is already at capacity, which is good. Fr Francis is busy preparing the retreat for Lent and Fr Joseph Chalmers will be leading a team giving input over the Easter Triduum. Holy Week will once again be heralded in by Southwark Catholic Youth Service together with young people from around the **diocese leading us in 'Born for This', a musical reflection on the Stations of the Cross.** The young people will join us for their own retreat during Holy Week.

In the Autumn the Main Shrine and Chapels were granted a 2 star listing. This will enable us to apply for grants to maintain these areas and preserve them for the future. We are currently looking at ways to improve and stabilise the surfaces around the Main Shrine. It is proving to be quite complicated as all the materials used when the Shrine was built were not of the usual dimensions and weights. This means we are going to have to get creative and cast new paving stones ourselves. It is both laborious and expensive. I think that the improvements to the Shrine over the next couple of years will make access easier, especially for those with mobility difficulties. We are also exploring the possibility of live streaming Mass and Pilgrimages online. Maybe some of our distant friends can feel closer to us by sharing in the worship at Aylesford.

Mary, a model for life

Over Advent I decided that I should spend a bit more time with Our Lady. Advent is a natural time for thinking about Mary. About how the **whole of heaven was silent as it awaits her response to Gabriel's message** and how the Word of God finds a home in her womb. In the gospels, we encounter Mary briefly at various points of her journey. My reflection led me to ponder my own faith journey and how, if I follow **Mary's way, it might become more fruitful and fulfilled.** The first encounter we have with Mary is in Nazareth. The dialogue between Mary and Gabriel is astounding. This moment is so full of faith it renders me

Retreats 2017

Lent Retreat Water, New Sight and New Life
24th—26th March, Francis Kemsley,
O.Carm. & Kevin Alban, O.Carm.

A reflective consideration of the main themes of the Lenten Sunday readings that speak to us of water, light and eternal life.

Cost: £160 single, £155 senior citizen, £146 shared.

Easter Triduum Retreat

13th—16th April, Joseph Chalmers, O.Carm.
& Pastoral Team

Come and celebrate the powerful and solemn days of Holy Week and Easter in the beautiful and peaceful setting of Aylesford.

Cost £255 single, £243 senior citizen, £237 shared.

Our Responsibility for the Environment

28th—30th April, Eduardo Agosta Scarel,
O.Carm.

Fr Eduardo, an Argentinian Carmelite, scientist and advisor to Pope Francis, will be looking at Christianity and Ecology in our world.

Cost: £160 single, £155 senior citizen, £146 shared.

Prayer and Poetry

20th May, Elena White

A day of exploration of prayer through the media of poetry.

St Mary Magdalen de'Pazzi

27th May, Kevin Alban, O.Carm.

On the 450th anniversary of her birth, her life and relevance for believers today.

Pentecost—The Holy Spirit in our lives

3rd June, Kevin Alban, O.Carm.

What does it mean to say "I believe in the Holy Spirit"? A day of prayer and reflection as we prepare for the coming of the Spirit.

Summer Fayre 25th June 2017

Plans are well underway for our annual Summer Fayre. You will find enclosed with this Newsletter Draw tickets for the Grand Draw at the Summer Fayre. Please help us raise funds for all the works needed here by returning your tickets to us by 19th June. Thank you for your support.

speechless. She is invited to co-operate with God in a new way. For God to become part of her flesh and blood. Her response is not our why, but a faith filled **'how'**. **Her faith is confirmed when she visits Elizabeth and the life enshrined in her womb is recognised.** *Mary of Nazareth, woman of faith. Pray for us!*

The second encounter we have with Mary is in the humility of Bethlehem. Forced to make a journey by an occupying force, becoming for all intents and purposes a refugee (sounding familiar). We find a mother with a newborn child. No words of hers are reported. She is lost in the wonder of the moment, overwhelmed by maternal love. Nothing will separate her from her child, nothing will eclipse this moment. A moment to be savoured, a moment of peace, *Mary of Bethlehem, woman of silence. Pray for us!*

Our third encounter with the mother of Jesus is at Cana in Galilee. The setting – a wedding. A huge event in the life of a family. The cultural norms of the time tell us that this is a time of feasting and reckless hospitality. The party would go on for days and all were welcome. But the party runs out of wine. It is almost as if life loses its joy and all at the feast are left lifeless. Mary asks Jesus to intervene. To begin his mission among us. She shows her concern for us all. *Mary of Cana, woman of intercession. Pray for us!*

On Calvary we encounter Mary at what would be the most traumatic time of her life. I have been present at many death beds, but Mary is watching her Son being **cruelly put to death. Compassion means to 'suffer with.'** **Mary is alongside her Son** in his moment of sacrifice. Again no words of hers are reported. So often suffering is mute. Words are never enough. *'Be with us now and at the hour of our death.'* *Mary of Calvary, woman of compassion. Pray for us!*

Finally, we encounter Mary in an upper room. Her presence is calming to those who are fearful. She is with us at the dawn of the Church. From the time of the **annunciation she is filled with God's Spirit and is open to a fresh outpouring of that same Spirit.** She is with the Apostles as they are drenched with the Holy Spirit as their **'Yes'** echoes hers and the mission of each of us begins. *Mary of Pentecost, woman of the Holy Spirit. Pray for us!*

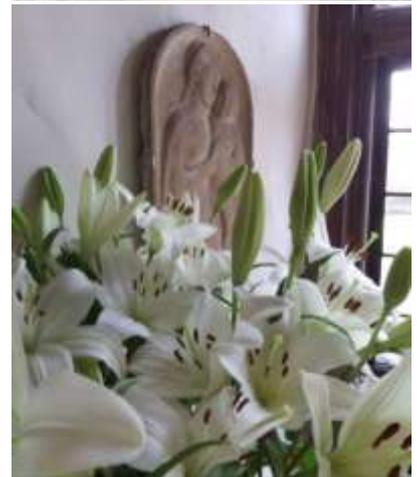
I have in my room a very small beautiful statue of Our Lady that I often sit with. It is on my desk as I write. However, my favourite statue of Mary is our very own sculpture on the Main Shrine. I have often wondered why we have never had a copy available to people. Late last year I commissioned an Italian company to carve a copy of the statue and make them available for sale. We hope to have them at Easter, so later this year you can have your very own copy of our Shrine Statue in your own home. I hope you will join your prayer with ours as we ask Our Lady of Mount Carmel to lead us in the footsteps of her Son.

Until next time, let us hold one another in prayer.

In Carmel,



Fr Damian Cassidy, O.Carm
Prior.



Easter Lily Dedications

Once again the chapels at Aylesford will be adorned with lilies throughout Easter. If you would like to dedicate a lily for yourself, a friend, a relative or a loved one who has died, please fill in the name of the person for whom each lily is dedicated on the Intentions Leaflet. You may also like to send an Easter Lily card to let someone know you are thinking of them. The suggested donation for each lily is £4. All dedications will be displayed in the Relic Chapel during the Easter season and any extra monies raised will go towards various costs at The Friars such as flower displays.

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