



Pilgrims' Newsletter

Summer
2026



Dear Friends,

On the 30th January the Carmelite Order celebrated the 800th anniversary of the recognition of our way of life by Pope Honorius III. This year also see the 100th anniversary of the reestablishment of the Carmelite presence in Britain. On 31st July 1926 Fr John Cogan and Br Franco Hicks from the Irish Province took on the pastoral care of the parish of Faversham. We have much to be thankful for and much to reflect on because Carmel continues. Indeed, Carmel in Britain is constantly growing and changing, with new expressions of the Carmelite Way appearing, as people connect with Carmelite spirituality and make it their own. As friars we have a specific expression of Carmelite life and a fairly structured life, which is shaped by the Rule of St Albert, our Constitutions, and Church law. So every three years we are required to elect our leadership team. So as we entered February we began the first part of our Provincial Chapter, which focused on the election of the Prior Provincial and four Provincial Councillors who assist him in the administration of the Province and the care of the brethren. Fr Brendan Grady was re-elected as Prior Provincial, please keep him and the members of the Council in your prayers.

Below: Fr Michael Cox, Fr Richard Green, Bishop William Kenney CP, Fr Gerard Walsh, and Chapter facilitator Lucy Franks

Right: A sapling from Sycamore Gap, Hadrian's Wall planted at Aylesford



Throughout the Electoral Assembly in February and Provincial Chapter in April, we were expertly guided by our facilitator Lucy Franks. We were delighted to welcome our new Prior General

To preside at the Chapter and the Councillor General for Europe Fr Richard Byrne. During the period of discernment before the election we were led in prayer by Auxiliary Bishop-Emeritus of Birmingham Rt. Rev. William Kenney, CP. Bishop William took as his text the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-10) and I was so drawn to what he said that I thought it helpful to share with you the gist of what he said. He began his reflection by noting that the welcome change in the translation in the lectionary from 'happy' to 'blessed' because being 'blessed' is an objective fact, whereas being 'happy' is a subjective experience. Happiness is an inner feeling or emotion; blessing confirms and affirms a person declared 'blessed' and the blessedness of such people's lives shows us that God is present and active - that God exists. So within a community there will be mourners, people who are pure in heart, advocates for justice and so forth. It would be quite rare to find someone who is experiencing all these states simultaneously but whatever they may be facing God is with them. In living out the vocation of a Carmelite friar, we are called to be in midst of the people - people who so often suffer, but people who are truly blessed because God is with them. Bishop William then reminded us that none of us can solve world poverty or establish justice for all, nor have we the power to banish death and sorrow, but if we are truly attentive to people - then maybe our life in their midst will be of some service to the gospel of hope. The friars in Britain are few in number now but we are not a spent force.

We were shocked and saddened when the famous Sycamore Gap Tree, at the UNESCO World Heritage Site Hadrian's Wall and Housesteads Fort, was felled in an act of vandalism in September 2023. Working with Northumberland National Park, Historic England and Hadrian's Wall Partnership, The National Trust has created the Trees of Hope initiative, whereby 49 saplings – one to represent each foot of the height that the tree was at the time of felling – will be gifted to communities around the country. The Goan Welfare Society UK applied for one and requested that it be planted it on the Rosary Way. It is quite appropriate that it has been placed near the glorious mystery of the resurrection; it reminds us that new life is always possible.

The Men of St Joseph (Mężczyźni Świętego Józefa), was formed in 2012 at the request of Cardinal Stanislaw Dziwisz, of Krakow. At the latest count it now has members in ten countries. Its mission is to build up fraternity among men within the Polish diaspora, to strengthen families, to support priests and to enable a well-informed faith to be present and effective in the workplace. Since 2015 the group's UK-based members have been organizing a retreat at Aylesford. The first retreat attracted a modest twenty participants but since then the numbers have steadily increased. This year a hundred and seven men attended, of whom seventeen newcomers were enrolled in the scapular. We hope to see the group continue to grow.



Newly enrolled members of the Carmelite Family with Fr Ged Walsh and Fr Michael Cox



Damaged Kossowski angels in the shrine canopy

St Francis University Steubenville, Ohio participates in a study abroad programme, thereby enabling US-based undergraduates to spend a semester in Austria. It offers them an opportunity, alongside their academic work, to explore the rich Christian culture throughout Europe. Alongside London, Oxford, and Canterbury twenty students and two professors made Aylesford one of the stops on their itinerary. It was good to welcome them to Sunday Mass and to spend some time chatting with them.

On Friday 20th March we were pleased and privileged to welcome the Most Revd and Rt Hon. Dame Sarah Mullally, Archbishop of Canterbury. As was widely covered in the press and online media, the Archbishop, together with her husband Eamonn and chaplain Revd Richard Braddy walked the 87 mile route from St Paul's Cathedral to Canterbury Cathedral. Over the 6-day pilgrimage the small band met with a host of different people. We felt honoured that the Archbishop chose to visit 2 Carmelite shrines—Aylesford and our sister shrine, the National Shrine of St Jude, Faversham. We incorporated moments of prayer and reflection into a brief tour of Aylesford. It was quite poignant to hear the Archbishop read an extract from the writings of St Thomas Becket in front of his image in the Relic Chapel. She very kindly gifted us a pewter shell which is both a symbol of pilgrimage and associated with the celebration of baptism. We pray that Dame Sarah's ministry will be blessed.

Our own pilgrimage season began on Palm Sunday with a Mass for several hundred members of the Tamil Catholic Association. Bishop Paul McAleenan presided. Later in the week we welcomed a solitary pilgrim in the person of Fr Manu Franco Gomez, a Carmelite based in the USA. Manu came to celebrate the Sacred Triduum with us



Above *L to R*: Fr Gerard Walsh, the Archbishop of Canterbury and Fr Michael Cox

Right: The Archbishop of Canterbury presents Fr Michael Cox with a pewter shell, which is a symbol of pilgrimage and can be used to pour holy water upon candidates for baptism



before embarking on another pilgrimage. Together with Br Matthew Janvier and Mr John Toryusen, the British Province's Young People's and Formation Coordinator, and seven young people, Manu walked a stage of the Camino de Santiago. Beginning in Sarria the group travelled the 70-mile route in five days, arriving at the tomb of St James the Apostle for what was to be a profound experience for them all. The guide said to them "here lies someone to whom Christ said 'follow me' and did." This reminds us that we too have been called and are invited to follow Christ each day.

On the Saturday of the Easter Octave we hosted the Divine Mercy Apostolate. This time, along with Fr Łukasz Mazurek we welcomed Fr Alex Pumphrey, who is the newest member of the community of the Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception (MIC). Originally from Atlanta, Georgia he was ordained in August last year at the National Shrine of the Divine Mercy in Massachusetts. We wish him well in his new ministry in the UK.

On Bank Holiday Monday over six hundred people came to celebrate the Guild of St Stephen's annual Mass for Altar Servers. Bishop Paul Hendricks presided at the enrolment ceremony for new servers into the Guild. A large number received their Guild medal to mark the completion of their probationary year and seven received a silver medal for ten years of faithful service.

Mindful of milestones, this year Fr Pat O'Keeffe celebrates his 60th anniversary of ordination - an impressive record of faithful service. Pat currently ministers at our sister shrine of St Jude, Faversham. On 2nd February, I celebrated my 25th anniversary of ordination. Pat and I would both appreciate your prayers.

As ever, may I assure you all of the continued prayers of the Carmelite Community for all our pilgrims and correspondents. May the God of saving love bless you all.

Michael Cox, O.Carm.

Prior of Aylesford



Emmanuel 'Manu' Franco Gomez, O.Carm.

The Friars Aylesford
Summer Fayre
Saturday 11th July 2026
11.00am-4.30pm

Join us for lots of fun including
 • Local performances • BBQ • Pimms & Prosecco •
 Children's Games & Rides • Cream Teas •
 • Craft & Gift Stalls • Tombola • Cake Stall •

Mass 5.00pm No 12pm Mass
 £6 Adult Under 12s free

SUMMER STILLNESS

Monday 10th—Friday 14th August

Angela Black & Fr Ged Walsh, O.Carm.

A time to listen to the voice of God in silence. This is a personally guided retreat, which involves a daily meeting with a director who has experience in spiritual accompaniment.

Cost: £582.00 single; £542.00 shared. (the cost includes stipends for the directors) Contact Reception to book your Retreat.

****Support The Friars** Monthly Draw (100+ Club)**

New members are welcome to join the new season which begins in August, and this is a fun way to help raise much needed funds for The Friars. Each number costs just £12. The draw takes place every month after the 10.15 am Sunday Mass. Each winning number receives £50 prize with a special prize of £100 in December. Renewal emails/letters will be sent to existing members in July requesting payment prior to 1st August. Please kindly provide your email address if possible. This helps us to save on expensive postage costs. Your details will not be used for any other purpose. Payments by card may be made by phoning Reception on 01622 717272. If you wish to pay by cheque, please make it payable to "The Friars". Cash and cheque payments may be left in Reception. Please put in an envelope clearly marked "The Monthly Draw". THANK YOU!



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