

Contemplative Fire Post

December 2015 – no.9



Wisdom on the Way - Learning, Accompanying and Taking Compassionate Action, 14th November

Susan Hinds writes:

“Contemplative Fire has always valued playfulness, but I didn’t associate Wisdom on the Way with bingo until 14th November! Diane Rutter is a Dementia Champion, trained to spread the word, to increase public understanding and acceptance and willingness to relate compassionately to those with dementia - an initiative of the Alzheimer’s Society. So we played a sort of bingo to help us learn the five key points:

- Dementia is not a natural part of ageing
- It is caused by diseases of the brain – there are over 100 different types of dementia
- It’s not just about loss of memory – it can affect thinking, communicating and doing everyday tasks
- It’s possible to live well with dementia
- There’s more to a person than the dementia.



We learned about the sorts of memory loss that most often characterise dementia, and the feelings which often remain hidden because unspoken and maybe unrecognised by others, but which can be observed in behaviour - in anxiety and fretfulness as well as laughter and smiles. Laughing with the person who has dementia – having fun – is an important component of their quality of life.

Diane is a shining star of a Champion. She led us through an excellent interactive session , where we shared experience, vowed to be more tolerant and loving of those with dementia, agreed to become Dementia Friends – to wear a little daisy badge and commit to some action, however small, in support of those with the disease. Thank you so much, Diane.”

Catherine and Simon Musgrave write:

“We really appreciated how Diane integrated the dementia training with the trefoil:

Learning journey - the information about dementia which was communicated so clearly with good humour (including bingo!)

Still waters - a time on the walk to let us move from our intellectual response and to just 'be' with what we had heard.

Across the threshold - for us this was preparing for the visit the next day to Simon's mum, Prue, who has dementia. We were able to use what we had learned and the result was a restored level of communication as we were able to understand more of how to reach memories which were still there for Prue.

The whole weekend was grace-filled and the training has given us hope for how to make the most of this stage of our relationship with Prue. Thanks so much to Diane.”

Congratulations!

To Hannah and Ben – and to the proud grandparents Jill and Philip – on the birth of Riley Elizabeth Priest, 19th December, 7lbs 1oz.



Review Group 10th – 11th December

The Review Group met on 10th - 11th December at Felden Lodge and agreed a proposal for a new organisational structure for CF at national level. Members of the group have been talking with the Sounding Board group and the proposal will be sent to all Companions in early January, with a proposed timetable.

Sounding Board

Profiles of four of the SB group:



Diane Rutter

“My daily life revolves around working for a local charity and sharing with my brother in the care of our lovely but frail parents. My wonderfully supportive husband gives me hugs in passing, and cooks me ready meals - he too works for a charity and supports his own housebound mother. I find the Contemplative Fire metaphor very helpful as I daily remind myself to travel lightly but to dwell deeply, to appreciate the little tasks that take so long, and to let go of the little frustrations that can loom so large.

I have been part of CF since its earliest days at St Michael's church in Amersham, where Philip was vicar and where I was (and still am) part of the congregation. CF has, quite simply, nourished and rooted me in the years since. I have journeyed with others as a trustee, on retreats, and in the many groups where I have experienced close sharing of lives with other Companions. I've discovered depths within me and within Christian spiritual experience that I never dreamed were there. I love it.”



Jo Howard

“I have been with Contemplative Fire since its early days, finding it a place of openness, acceptance and challenge. Our shared journey and rhythm of life continues to shape the pattern of my being and enables encounter with the mystery of God. In companionship with others I've been involved over the years with the planning of local CF Gatherings in High Wycombe, in various CF 'Way Beyond Religion' groups, for a short period as a Trustee, and in the past with what were then the CF 'Core Team' and 'Development Group'.

I am also a Licensed Lay Minister in the Church of England, my Licence currently being to the CF Community which I regard as my spiritual home. My professional training was as a physiotherapist in the NHS and I now work independently as a manual therapist and bodyworker. I have recently begun volunteering as a speaker for Christian Aid. I am married to Jon and together we have a son, Josh, who is now in his first year at university.”



Peter Wright

“I am married to Charlotte - just past the 40 year mark. Our two children are now married, our son with two gorgeous little girls, and our daughter and her husband expecting their first in

February. I taught in Senegal (W Africa) for my gap year before studying law at Cambridge, where I enjoyed rowing rather more! I have been a barrister for most of my professional life, until I was appointed as a Judge in the Hertfordshire Family Court where I have been for nearly 10 years.

I was brought up as a fairly traditional Anglican Christian - loved the choir and the music, went to a Methodist School in Bath, and played for Mass at the Catholic school where I taught. I met Charlotte in London as a Bar student and we found ourselves in charismatic revival (great!) Many years in the local C of E church in Berkhamsted ended in 2004 when we both found ourselves readily drawn into CF at the Lee Old Church.

My life is mainly across the threshold because of my work, which continually involves the learning journey, as well as a fair bit of dwelling deep when making life-changing decisions affecting other people and particularly children. My home, faith and marriage make the strongest operating base for me. I look to CF for resourcing, depth and meaning in my life and increasingly for the lovely Companionship from those I have travelled with and come to know well."



Soobie Whitfield

"My journey towards the contemplative has been in some ways inevitable. Throughout my life I have been blessed to meet people of many different expressions of Christianity, but those who have made the greatest impact on me have had a stillness and mystery at the centre of their lives. The other influence has been community. On graduating from dance college in the mid 80s, I joined the Lee Abbey Community, at a time when it was particularly diverse in terms of nationality and denomination. I then went on to

live in a small creative household community in High Wycombe. During this time I met Philip at St Andrews church and appreciated his sense of exploration, playfulness and creativity. Several years later, Jo Howard invited me to the church at the Lee for a gathering and I found myself feeling more at home than I had felt since those community days. The community element of CF is important to me and having experienced patterns of community life in the past, I hope I may be able to offer encouragement during this discerning process."

The other Sounding Board group members are Vincent Strudwick, Patricia Claxton, Elspeth Parris and Mike Nutt.

Blessings and prayers as you travel together on our behalf! God is good all the time (as they say in Kenya)!



News from Canada

"Dear CF Companions!

It was a joy to meet you all in the UK. It seems such a long time ago now, yet it was only months. During that time Manu and I have completed our book on the Camino. Copies can be purchased now from: <https://www.createpace.com/5879772>

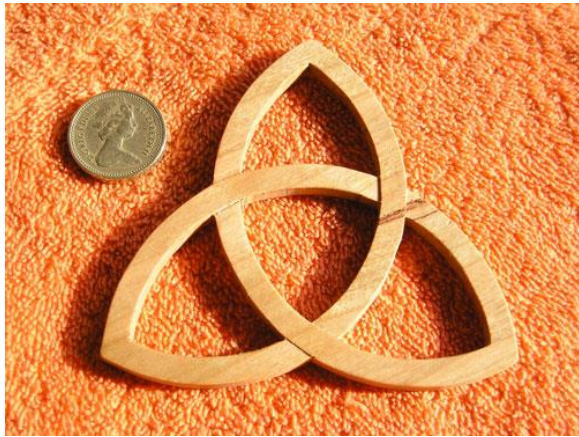
We had our Contemplative Fire monthly gathering last night, and it was great to see new faces there. Anne, Myrna, Hugh and we are all well and anticipating lots of new growth this advent.

We hope that the UK CF review goes well and look forward to hearing what the outcomes will be! Hugs to you all! Phil Cheney"

And Phil has written a track called "My Brother Grace":

http://philcheney.com/gallery2/main.php?g2_itmId=1554

CF Trefoils



Some of you may have seen or may have a small cherry-wood trefoil, made some years ago by Simon Lambert, a Companion who used to live in England and is now in California.

Jane McBane (CF North) has been in touch with Simon and was delighted to hear that he was happy to make a few more at the very generous price of £7 each.

Simon says: "There are no CF groups here in Southern California (yet...), but I do consider it part of my creative 'ministry' to offer these prayerfully made items in support of CF and remain connected, albeit at some distance!"

Contact Gill Greenwood.

CF Leadership Trio - learning

Tom Hinds has undertaken some work on the learning from the venture in threefold leadership in CF from January to June 2014 and has produced thirteen recommendations.

For a copy, contact Tom.



"From Margin to Mainstream"
21st November, Southwark Cathedral

Sarah Burns writes:

"200 gathered in the Cathedral for opening worship led by Jonny Baker. We shared a time of silence which followed on from a reading, focussing on the phrase 'Christ with us'. Jonny shared a quote from a book by Sam Wells: 'A Nazareth Manifesto: Being with God', in which he says 'with' is the most important theological word. During the silence, images of Christ were shown on screens to reflect on the idea of Christ with those at the margins and those at the mainstream.

We were all invited to write prayers on luggage labels with the word hope on one side and grief on the other - and place them in a suitcase to offer prayers for the journey in whichever direction of travel we were heading (margins to mainstream, mainstream to margins). A poem written for the day was then shared:

Margins to Mainstream, Mainstream to Margins Mainstream to Margins, Margins to Mainstream

*Can you hear me?
Lean a little closer.
Let's talk!
Would you like a cup of tea?
We need you and we want you.
Wish you were here!*

Margins to Mainstream, Mainstream to Margins Mainstream to Margins, Margins to Mainstream

*I inhabit both and I don't feel at home in either
One person's margin is another person's
mainstream
One person's edge is another person's centre.
Some of us were made to be edge-dwellers
We are all on the margins of something
Let us do our thing
We are so very much more than a label.
There's enough God for everyone
Come inside and learn from previous mistakes.
Come outside and learn from something new.*

Margins to Mainstream, Mainstream to Margins Mainstream to Margins, Margins to Mainstream

*May we be open to embrace other people's
margins
May we be open to embrace them into our
mainstream
Some of us were made to be edge-dwellers
Some of us are at home in the centre.
Margins to Mainstream, Mainstream to Margins
May we be open to conversation between the
two.*

Following a video address by the Archbishop of Canterbury, the two keynote speakers gave presentations - Dave Male on moving from margins to mainstream, and Karen Ward from the USA on prophetic pioneering, about her experiences of setting up a Community in Oregon.

Mainstream, Whirlpools and Waterfalls

At the end of the day, Bishop Paul Bayes shared stories and experiences on his journey from vicar to Bishop, where he had encountered 'Jesus moments' between people and encouraged us all to multiply Jesus moments that people encounter, to know Jesus and for social justice.

Videos of the presentations can be seen at: <https://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/news/marginsmainstream>

I went to two seminars, the first by George Lings from Church Army, who presented findings from research about Fresh Expressions which will be part of the report Church Army publish in June 2016.

He presented data from dioceses across the country looking at the variety of Fresh Expressions and who was attending. It was interesting to hear how half of the fresh expressions are being led by lay leaders, how groups are approaching discipleship, how many are incorporating steps to a Sacramental life e.g. Baptism and Communion, how they engage with Scripture and how 75% of established fresh expressions have begun to taking on responsibilities for self-financing, governance and reproducing groups.



The second seminar was about New Monasticism led by Gareth Powell from the newly established Community of St. Margaret the Queen in

Streatham Hill: <http://www.stmtg.com> and Ian Mosby, who currently is priest at St. Luke's Peckham and part of small intentional community based there: <http://stlukespeckham.co.uk/new-monastic-community>. They gave historical context and background to the emergence of new monasticism and spoke personally of their experiences of setting up new monastic communities in South London."

Thank you to Susan Blagden for taking over from Philip as the primary contact for Fresh Expressions.



COMPASSION

Tom Hinds writes:

"I write from my experience of the first conference in October 2015 of the newly-launched *Darwin Centre – International Institute for the Study of Compassion*, based in Shrewsbury.

"What is 'compassion'? More than pity? More than feeling sorry for? Feeling more than connected-with? That gut-churning feeling as another, feeling 'I am the other; the other is me?' Feeling the emotion, the pain, instead of the other, substituting for the other? Adam's exclamation, having surveyed the animal kingdoms and waking from sleep: 'This is flesh of my flesh!'"

The meanings implicit in the Arabic and Hebraic words around "compassion" crucially include "WOMB". So 'compassion' means 'mother-love'

in creating, growing from my blood, nurturing, advancing the good of the other, all day and every day, as myself?

In 2009, Karen Armstrong triggered the launch of a document, *The Charter for Compassion*, composed by representatives of six world faith traditions. In every single one of the major world faiths, compassion is regarded as the true test of spirituality. Their coinciding can be summed up in the Golden Rule, *“Always treat another as you would like to be treated”*.



What did I get from the conference?

- a sense of relevance for Companions as we review and rephrase and reshape
- the Darwin Centre as a potentially connecting hub and booster of enthusiasm and energy
- awareness that fear seems to be the biggest obstacle to compassionate action
- the welcome news that neuroscience says that generosity, charity, loving are good for you – for your mental health and your physical health
- the emphasis on “go and do it now! No need to wait for more research. Add your piece of the jigsaw. The picture won’t grow if you don’t!”
- the encouragement of experiencing a conference with steersman-commentator-facilitator alongside the chair and contributors, and a conference structured in an hour and a half of open discussion, no agenda, in groups of 8-10 people – trusting the people to find their own responsibility and the opportunity to offer it.

Perhaps the Objects of Contemplative Fire Ltd should change, to make them more attractive to outsiders, more energising for insiders and to move us beyond ‘the edge’.”

Pilgrimage to Now/here Saltmarshe, 17th October

“Pilgrim? Today? Yes, this very day.

Perhaps not so much to Kailash, Jerusalem, Mecca, Santiago, Nidaros...

As on the invisible path, in the inner landscape.”

Bodvar Schjelderup, in “Pilgrimage” by Ian Bradley



The Machair (raised beach), Iona

Gill Greenwood writes:

“In July, I went to Iona for the first time, visiting some of the island’s places of pilgrimage with reflections, poems and songs from the Iona Community. Drawing on this experience, we were invited to come on the Saltmarshe pilgrimage with a private question or intention for the journey, walking to stopping places for readings and simple songs, and a time of reflection in Saltmarshe Hall, using “Trasna – The Crossing Place” which Elaine Wilkins had offered to the Community Weekend. (Thank you to Jacky Stride and Jeremy Timm for their support).”

Bless to us, O God

The sky that is above us

The earth that is beneath us

The friends who are around us

Your image deep within us (Celtic traditional)



Trefoil at St Columba’s Bay