

## Contemplative Fire Post

July 2017 – no.23

### ARC (Anglican Religious Communities) Conference 4<sup>th</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> July

*Sharon Roberts writes:*

Early in July, Elaine Wilkins and I joined nearly 100 delegates, drawn from religious communities old and new, at the beautiful Christian Centre at Lee Abbey in Devon, for an intensive two days of input and sharing, exploring the theme of “*God, Ourselves and the World*”. The invitation for Contemplative Fire to participate came through our status as an Acknowledged Community (although we are not, of course, part of the Anglican Church).

Although the communities represented were very different – from monks and nuns who have lived under vows for all their adult lives, to new dispersed communities such as ourselves – we all had in common a commitment to a rule or rhythm of life of some sort, based on times of stillness, commitment to learn and compassionate engagement with the world.

A feature of our time together was the sharing of gracious wisdom coupled with complete openness, although what really surprised me was the noise level! When we were not in silence or listening to speakers, there was always an amazing buzz of conversation as we told our stories, or met up with old friends and made new ones. Every age was represented, and the commitment to build relationships and learn from one another across traditions was immensely strong.



As it's always interesting to learn what other dispersed communities are up to, here is a list of some who were present.



The Community of Hopeweavers

<http://www.hopeweavers.co.uk/>

The Community of Aidan and Hilda

<https://www.aidanandhilda.org.uk/index.php>

The Northumbria Community

<https://www.northumbriacommunity.org/>

The Community of St Anselm

<http://stanselm.org.uk/>

Moot <http://www.moot.uk.net/>



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### A few thoughts following my trip to the “Trinity: Soul of Creation” conference in Albuquerque

*Caroline Newton writes:*

It was a rather wonderful moment just before last Christmas, when I realized I could combine a family visit to the USA with Richard Rohr's Trinity conference in Albuquerque. I sold it to myself as a short internal 'hop' - in reality it proved to be another four hours flight from Atlanta - the USA is surprisingly large! But the presenting panel of Richard Rohr, Cynthia Bourgeault and William Paul Young (author of *The Shack*) was a strong attraction, and I needed very little to persuade me it was 'doable'.

The city's convention centre was host to the 1,800 conference attendees. I met a handful from Europe and the UK, but unsurprisingly the majority were from Canada and the USA. What was more surprising was to discover a large woven trefoil on the stage for the duration, and a backdrop containing a dancing Elizabeth the First!

Richard Rohr referred to the trefoil as representing the flow of the Trinity in kenotic love. Cynthia referred to it as 'the three fold reality joining the realms together: Cosmos/World, Theos/God, Andros/Man. The backdrop was part of "The Dancing Saints" icon by artist Mark Dukes, including Sojourner Truth, Malcom X, and Teresa of Avila. This scene came alive for me on the Sunday morning when, after a farewell Communion, all 1,800 of us did a huge circle dance to Lord of the Dance!



Each of the three days we spent together started with Cynthia leading the whole group in 20 mins of silent Centering Prayer. I had been reading her "Heart of Centering Prayer" and found her short verbal explanation helpful - the experience of sitting in deep silence with 1,800 others was very enriching.

The conversations that the three presenters then had on the topic of the Trinity each day were equally mind expanding! Richard spoke about the mystery of relationship and relatedness, and that this is where true power is - a power not just found in the healing force of love, but power found through relatedness in every dimension, even the molecules in our material world. He spoke of the underpinning nature of God and reality as flow, unrelenting affection, every moment in the flow of love, a reality that can only come to wholeness in relationship and community. *"Deny relationship and people flee into religiosity, because when our hearts are broken we run to our heads. God had to descend into religion to save and bring us back into relationship."* Many of the thoughts he shared I had encountered in his latest book "The Divine Dance", which I highly recommend.

Cynthia focused some of her time on expanding the Law of Three. Within this law there is an affirming force (the initiative/push forward force), a denying force (the push back force) and a reconciling force, which allows the two others to come together and create a new beginning. When we understand this law, we see that without what we often perceive as the

'negative' denying force, there can be no new creation. Evolution needs limitation and constriction in all areas of life. I found this concept fascinating and extremely helpful in coping with challenges in life.

The greatest surprise of the conference for me was William Paul Young. The back story to his writing "The Shack" is a powerful testament to how Spirit works through our lives. He has done several interviews sharing his considerable lived experience of challenge and healing and, if you wish, you can find one on YouTube which will tell the story, rather than me filling the next page with it. He spoke of the God of his childhood - a solitary disapproving God, and he spoke of the God he came to know - the God of the Trinity, where "Inside the circle of relationship all of creation matters" and his gradual realization that "Everything about religion that is contrary to relationship has been brought to the table by us". Paul's unique way of explaining concepts with stories had me spell bound, and if you can get to download a copy of his presentation I would highly recommend it.

These talks were wrapped around with space given to chanting, meditative walking, yoga and of course book signings! In addition Richard had given his personal library - some 3,500 books - to charity, and we had a chance to browse these and make donations for them, quite a delight!



Richard, Cynthia and William

I fear these are woefully few words to convey the riches that these three presenters laid out before us, and the experience of the event, but I hope they have given you a flavour of the days. Albuquerque also laid on good food, interesting music and friendly people. So, on my return I can confidently say that if a future Richard Rohr Conference inspires you, don't push the possibility into the 'No' basket too quickly.....it is a long way away, but the experience is unique and very 'doable'.

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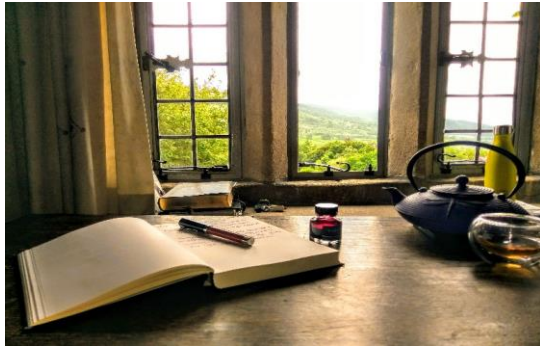


## Reflections on the Contemplative Fire Retreat, Parcevall Hall, 16<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> June

### *Have teapot .....will travel*

*Jeremy Timm writes:*

This year was the second time I joined the Retreat at Parcevall Hall ....and loved it. We all live carrying "To Do Lists", either in our heads or on a post-it note on the fridge, but the retreat allowed me to put mine down and indulge the spirit, without pressure to be moving on to the next task.



I love tea..... In the morning I arose quite early and enjoyed a leisurely cup of tea.... Well actually a chawan of tea. This became a real mindfulness exercise as I started the day, engaging all the senses, in my own quiet tea ceremony. The pleasure of all the senses, the sound of pouring, the beauty of the full cup, the smell of fresh green tea, the smooth touch of the chawan and of course the refreshing taste..... all focussed me on the present moment. This is a simple mindfulness exercise which I regard as a gift from our retreat which I have brought home with me and now forms a part of my morning awakening .....

Before our silent breakfast, we gathered in the chapel for a time of silence together which, together with our evening gathering, became cornerstones in my daily routine. It is hard to explain that as Community gathers in the Presence of Divine Stillness, there is both a community experience and a personal one. It is this centering and settling in silence together that means when we move out of silence at the end of our days together, that people we may have never met actually feel like good friends- a wonderful experience for me. I may not be able to take days of silence with me back into the busy daily round, but I return to that round quietly changed by the experience.

Another pleasure I had in the space provided by the Retreat was the time each day to create a mandala based on each of the seasons, as our daily input, led by Anne Crosthwait from

Canada, was based on the seasonal writings of Parker Palmer.



This is another simple exercise that is hard to squeeze into my normal daily routine, but here in the silence of my lovely room I was able to focus fully on drawing and still all those chattering thoughts about my "To Do List"

After lunch I had a siesta! Now that is a luxury, but it is important to rest the body as well as the spirit, so together with a bath in the huge hundred year old tubs - which could be a training venue for Olympic swimmers! - I left feeling physically refreshed.

For me the retreat was rich because it gifted me space ..... space for tea, drawing, snoozing and bathing. Also the space to settle both alone and in community into the silent stillness of Presence which, in ways we may not recognise, transform us as individuals through the encounter and also enrich community.



### *The Whiff of the Rose Vine*

*Anne Crosthwait writes:*

When I'd step out the door sometimes I'd catch the whiff of roses. The old manor house where Contemplative Fire hosted their annual retreat this year was Parcevall Hall in Yorkshire. There was a beautiful rose vine that grew beside the doorway and over our bedroom windows. It became a friend during the week I stayed there.

## Clean Space and Doorways to the Sacred

The devotional focus for the week was seasonal changes. We walked through the letting go of autumn, the dormancy of winter, the mess and buds of spring and the abundance of summer, only of course to begin again with letting go as summer's abundance fades and the frozen time of winter approaches - the relentlessness of seasons.



The rose vine was a picture of all the seasons for me and the whole picture was beautiful. There are beautiful roses in bloom, and small buds emerging too, but there is also a scattering of rose petals on the ground as blooms finish and of course dead heads that have yet to be cleared away – buds, blossoms, fallen petals and deadheads - spring, summer, fall and winter, an ongoing cycle in front of me, relentless and all beautiful. In its completeness it is beautiful. Yes, there is a part of me that only wants full blooms.... But truly the whole vine is beautiful.

The whiff of the rose vine – may I embrace all the seasons of my life. Am I resisting one of them? Don't want to experience the autumn of letting go of something? Fearful of buds – what will they look like? How messy will it be? Uncertain, tentative to bask in the beauty of abundance? What sustains me in the times of deadheads, times of deep waiting? The relentless turn of seasons. Winter won't last forever, spring will come, but also summer won't last forever either, autumn will come as well. What do I need to be content with the seasonal cycles? Another twist to being a Mystic in Motion.

Love and prayers on our journey,

Anne Crosthwait- Community Leader,  
Contemplative Fire Canada (*taken from Anne's  
blog - Mystic in Motion*)

*"At the edge between the known and the unknown there is a fertile place, full of possibility. Playing at the edge can lead us to experience fresh new learning, creativity, joy and wonder."*

*Philip Roderick writes:*

As I write on 27<sup>th</sup> July, in the space of a couple of days, two books have been posted through our letterbox in Saltdean. The first, entitled *"Insights in Space: How to Use Clean Space to solve problems, generate ideas and spark creativity"*, was written by James Lawley and Marian Way. It expresses in an accessible way the experiential process called Clean Space which I have found to have a profound usefulness, both on my personal journey and in the preparation and leading of worship, in CF and beyond.

At the very front of the book is a one sentence quote with which I totally resonate. What Steven D'Souza and Diana Renner write (see quote above) goes straight to the heart of what draws me; it also, to my mind, expresses cogently some of the key ingredients or threads in the formation and continuing life and work of Contemplative Fire.



This insight bridges with a lovely synchronicity to the second book to pass through my letterbox in a matter of hours - the latest in the *"Ancient Faith, Future Mission"* series published by Canterbury Press. In previous years, the series has contained articles on Contemplative Fire both by Tessa Holland and me. The title of this 'hot off the press' book of essays is *"Doorways to the Sacred"* and it contains an article on Contemplative Fire's baptismal journey with three Companions on the Way, co-written by Susan Blagden and me. Our chapter



is entitled *"In at the Deep End: Transforming Initiation"*.

In this book of sixteen essays focusing on developing sacramentality in Fresh Expressions of Church, you will find in the Afterword by Michael Moynagh an important reflection for Contemplative Fire: "Traditionally, local discretion was highly constrained by liturgies authorized nationally, which reinforced the hierarchical nature of discernment. Recently, however, greater discretion and creativity at a local level have been encouraged....As a growing number of new ecclesial communities in particular push the boundaries of accepted practice, experimentation can be helpfully framed by a policy of generous exceptions." (cf Lindsay Urwin's *'What is the Role of Sacramental Ministry in Fresh Expressions of Church?'* in Steve Croft (ed.), *Mission-shaped Questions*, Church House Publishing, London, 2008, p.35)

This should not be a means to keep new communities at arms-length from the mainstream – 'we'll generously permit them to be exceptions so that we don't have to change.' Rather, generous exceptions can be Spirit-given opportunities to test and learn from innovations. Exceptions enable the Church to ask, 'Lord, is this the direction in which you are now leading us?'.... Through generous exceptions, the Spirit can continually reform the Church and keep it moving towards its ultimate destination." (pp 194,195) Amen to that!



*Dear Bishop Paul,*

*I have learned from Gill Greenwood, our administrator, that you believe the time has come for you to conclude your time with us as Bishop Visitor.*

*I know, without doubt, that the Companions of Contemplative Fire are most grateful to you for*

*your support, especially during our transition time after Philip's retirement as leader. Your humility, sensitivity and creativity, together with your gentle and honest authenticity which at times must have been costly, have been much appreciated and have been an example for us to follow as a way of Christian leadership.*

*On behalf of the Contemplative Fire Trustees and Companions I would like to thank you most sincerely for the gift of yourself to us, especially at our Community Weekends. We will miss you this year, but readily understand the demands on your time, not least in your own diocese.*

*So we say farewell to you, and thank you again - for your time, your encouragement, your generous sharing and everything you have done to help our Community. May God continue to bless you and enrich you.*

*Charlotte (Chair of CF Trustees)*

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### **Pilgrimage to Now/here Longshaw, Derbyshire Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> July**



Jacky Stride and Ruth Iantorno led our day and we were delighted to be joined by Companions from "down south" who had travelled up to Sheffield for the Hub meeting the day before.

We were invited to walk mindfully in the beautiful space of Longshaw, getting in touch with ourselves and our place in wild nature. Then, with the help of an exercise based on the Native American tradition of the Medicine Wheel, we were invited to each seek God's invitation for our journey of life in Christ.

"Jacob, travelling across wild country, wearily places his head on a boulder. Asleep under the night sky, his powerful dream-vision evokes the cry:

*Surely the Lord is in this place – and I did not know it! How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God. This is the gate of heaven. (Genesis 28:16-17)*

In the Sinai wilderness, Moses stands in front of a desert scrub-bush that is burning without being consumed and hears a voice:

*Remove the sandals from your feet for the place on which you are standing is holy ground. (Exodus 3:5)*

In both these stories we see how the natural world reveals God directly, the landscape and everything in it is alive with the presence of the divine; we literally stand under an open heaven. The seasons of the year and the cycles of the moon create spiritual rhythms for our lives. Job's wisdom crumbles in awe of wild nature and the creatures that inhabit it. God appears among oak trees and mountaintops, and is imagined as a roaring lion, nurturing eagle and protective mother bear. For psalmists and prophets hills "skip like lambs", trees "clap their hands" and forests sing along with the rest of creation in praise of God. The earth is seen to be a living entity within itself in its relationship with God – quite apart from human beings."

*Taken from Fingerprints of Fire...Footsteps of Peace by Noel Moules. (pp 87/88)*

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**Wrapped up**  
**Gently, glowing, swaying, bubbling**  
**rustling**  
**A day concerning Children and**  
**Spirituality and the natural world**  
led by Rev Dr Chris Walton



"My magic spot, well that's what it was. Pure magic. I could feel the wind flying by my face. A symphony of different birds rang in my eardrums! Something that really caught my eye was a bed of daffodils. Until I did magic

spots I could never find silence like that before. It really was a life changing experience for me. It was like being in heaven." 10 year old

**Saturday 14th October 2017**

10.30am - 4pm

Arrive at 10am for coffee and 10.30 start  
At Broomhill Infant School Garden, Beech Hill  
Road, Sheffield, S10 2SA

Suitable for all with an interest in children's  
spirituality (including teachers with an  
interest in spiritual development) - cost £50  
Booking is essential: places are limited.

Booking:

<https://godlyplaymutualblessings.wordpress.com/>



This day is for all those who are concerned to facilitate opportunities for children to experience quietness, especially in the natural world and to articulate their relationships with otherness. It will be a mixture of indoor work and outdoor experience, investigating, exploring and sharing our experience of the mystics we are privileged to know, or teach, to accompany and to love.

- Experience Magic Spots for yourself – solitude in the natural world
- Consider the role of adults accompanying children in their spiritual experience
- A looking at the almost impossible concept of 'children's spirituality'
- Breathe in children's imagination, joy and innocence enough to re-evaluate your relationship with them.

