

## Contemplative Fire Post

September 2017 – no.25

### Community Weekend 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> September *Return To The Heart*

The main speaker at the Community Weekend was Vincent Strudwick. Vincent has been a monk, then priest and historical theologian in the Church of England for nearly 60 years, 25 in the faculty of theology of Oxford University. He is an Emeritus Fellow and Honorary Fellow of Kellogg College, Oxford, and is Founding Director of the Oxford Summer School in Theology at Oxford. In 2009, he was awarded the Lambeth Doctorate for his scholarship and teaching ministry by Archbishop Rowan Williams. He is also a Contemplative Fire Companion, having been with the community since its birthing.



Charlotte, Francoise, Ann, Jill, Philip, Vincent, Jo, Beatrice, Gill. (Photo – Peter Wright)

He spoke about people who wanted to explore the mystery of God, but couldn't find the company, who were not served by church, and the need to reimagine what 'church' might be like. Vincent said he was impressed when colleague Philip Roderick began the Quiet Garden Movement and he and Nina became Companions when Philip founded Contemplative Fire, "reaching out to those estranged from 'church'". Vincent said he had been 'wrestling' (like Jacob) with 'God' for 70 years and that it was hard work. The inspiration of the Gospel has been lost. There are more



people now who say they have no religion than those who do – in a recent newspaper article, 71% of 18-24 year olds said they had no religion; but does this mean they are not spiritual? The memory of what lies behind 'religion' has been lost and a new language is needed with which to talk about God.

He spoke about Meister Eckhart (1260 – 1328), the German theologian and mystic: God is Being, God is Being Itself, and quoted a contemporary Spanish nun who said "Putting a name to God often does her a disservice". The clothed God of religion is the one rejected by those with 'no religion'.

In chapter 4 of his book '*Open to the Spirit?*', Vincent speaks about living graciously – living lovingly – learning to kneel. Jesus preached about a 'Kingdom' where we find our home, but we got the Church -the institutional church which in history and today often freezes the experience of those who try to follow him on his 'Way' of living life. We have to learn anew to be open to his Spirit. Our work now is to jog the memory – we and our children need to struggle with the memory and in the waiting, rest in the reality, and have company in which to be quiet. Then, we have to pass this experience on. As Hector says in Alan Bennett's *The History Boys* (in which Vincent appears!) "PASS IT ON". It is YOUR journey, which can be a blessing to others.

*The Naked God* by Vincent Strudwick, ISBN Darton, Longman&Todd, ISBN 9780232532562

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The Vincent Strudwick Lecture 2017

22 November, 17.00 to 18.30

will be given by Professor Linda Woodhead of Lancaster University, who will speak on *The Religion of No Religion: Are the 'Nones' Religious, Spiritual or Neither?* Based mainly on research in the UK and USA, but looking at other parts of the world (like China) as well, this talk will consider the growing number of those who, when asked on a

survey what their religion is, say: 'None' or 'No Religion'. It will profile the 'nones', offer an explanation for their growing number, and discuss some wider implications of this cultural change. This lecture will be held in The Simpkins Lee Theatre at nearby Lady Margaret Hall, Norham Gardens, OX2 6QA.

To book, ring 01865 612000, the Kellogg booking number.

<http://www.kellogg.ox.ac.uk/events/2017-vincent-strudwick-lecture/>

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*Chapel space by Charlotte Wright*

*Ann Worrall, Hub Steward*

"The Hub came into being a year ago, at our last Community Weekend, after proposals from the Review Group, created the previous year, were accepted by Companions. We were to be a means of transitioning, of evolving, after many years of Philip's inspired leadership. We were to evolve, work with Trustees, ensure Contemplative Fire was able to continue to organically foster the strong foundations laid down by so many before.

In a healthy dispersed community full of wisdom, intuition, humour, experience and knowledge, it is important to try and develop a sense of belonging, a sense of responsibility towards the community and to foster the sharing of knowledge with love that I believe we all have within us.

The Hub is the vehicle for a group of Companions to come together to help grow Contemplative Fire into the future through creativity, dynamism and love. Such a task is far too much for one person, particularly in a volunteer role, but perfectly possible when we

follow the words of the Christ, 'When 2 or 3 (or in our case 8 or 9) are gathered together in my name there am I in their midst'.

And it's been a rewarding journey together. We decided on a Steward rather than a Chair, with the sense that the group is non-hierarchical and consensual and we are all able to bring initiatives within our agreed purpose. In our meetings, although making sure outer work is done, we also have been developing our inner work as a group: walking the Trefoil, dancing in a carpark, walking silently to Southwark Cathedral in our lunch break, through the tourists and locals in Borough Market, only a couple of weeks before the terrorist attacks there, and travelling to Sheffield to share a Pilgrimage walk with our Northern companions and to be welcomed into the Whirlow Spirituality Centre.

And as we arranged events, listening for what was needed, aiming to widen our community base, we were constantly reminded of what richness lies at the heart of CF. What surprise sparks of God flare up in the body prayer, the chants, walking in nature, considering the Trefoil, partaking in Gatherings and in the deep stillness in community. And it really, profoundly, lasts. The work that the Development Group did with such dedication still flows through the heart and the hearts of our community.

Vincent recently commented on how exciting and stimulating the times were when these practices were being developed. And now we want to make sure that Contemplative Fire is still feeling some of that passion, that we haven't just dropped into habit. It will be the passion and commitment, and sometimes risk taking, which carries us forward to keep us fresh and alive and enables us to attract new people into our community.

We hope to continue to dip deeper into the heart of Contemplative Fire through the journey of our own hearts and learn to accompany others as faithfully as we know Christ accompanies us."

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Sally Wright and Charlotte Wright were thanked for their involvement with the Hub and Jane Johnston from Sheffield was welcomed.

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## Lord I come

Here, now, as I am.

Weary, dragging the burden of yesteryears,

The weight, slowing, defining,

Pulling me back, holding me to

Almost a standstill as I lean forward, straining,

Straining towards what? The promise of a future?

Yet, I am stuck here, in the counterbalance

Of a precise moment in time, here, now,

Where the clock has stopped.

Washed up on the shore of experience.

Backward glances show yesteryears footprints,

Some light, some heavily imprinted in the sand.

The sand of tomorrow yet to run through the hourglass.

So, here I am, now, at the present moment.

Lord may this be a meeting place,

Hallowed ground on the sun-bleached shore.

Help me to lay down the flotsam of my life.

To lay down the well-worn pieces

That have shaped my identity in

Their refracting, distorting, mirroring light.

The shore stretches to the horizon,

Unmarked as yet, pristine, new.

Lord help me to learn your sense of rhythm,

The dance steps of your Way.

Help me to travel forward lightly

In partnership with You.

Kathy Marsh

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### Claiming Our Own Belovedness



Caroline Newton shared her thoughts on the theme 'Return to the Heart' and began with the question, what if it's true that life is just one great big school to teach us how to love? Or as Richard Rohr puts it, *'The development of love consciousness is the second coming of Christ'*.

"My experience suggested that in learning how to love, we not only discover Christ, but we discover ourselves too. On my fridge door I had a magnet that read 'Bloom where you are

planted'. There was some truth and beauty in this, but there was also deception in these words because they carry a sense of inevitability, of no flow and no creative outcome. And when you live in this mindset you can separate yourself from the flow of love and Grace.

But like in the story of the prodigal son, God is always reaching out to us. And this occurred for me when my heart experienced a very unexpected awakening through an intense love for another. In this magical way, God's Grace through the events of life gave me an opportunity to reconnect with my emotions and my heart space. The Richard Rohr book 'Everything Belongs' fell into my hands.

Standing here today I see that the last seven years my life have been a journey of learning to experience my own heart, of holding this experience in the light shared by others, and through their affirmation and guidance learning that I can trust my own heart. It has been a journey of self discovery, where, in the words of Thomas Merton:

*"We are led on a journey to love and God, in which the self that begins the journey is not the same self that arrives. The self that begins is the self we thought ourselves to be, the self that the world told us we were. But this false self slowly dies along the way – and we discover that hidden is a true self that has been loved by God since before time, and that will be forever loved. On this journey, through love and prayer we discover our own deepest reality from which we had strayed like runaway children, becoming strangers to ourselves."*

I had become separated from the Cosmic flow of love and life because I had subconsciously believed a lie about myself. A lie that said 'Your deepest desires don't matter... in fact God judges you for them..... You will never be truly known....you're on your own'. I subconsciously learnt to close my heart down to numb the pain. But we can't just numb one emotion when we numb pain, we end up numbing all emotions, and we lose the capacity to feel deep joy and happiness too. I think it is a major way that evil enters into the world, as William Paul Young says 'We are such a high order of being that when we turn from our own truth and God we cast a shadow'.

In the words of Richard Rohr *'Your True Self is who you are and always have been in God. At its core your True Self is love. Love is both who you are and who you are becoming, like a*

*sunflower seed that becomes its own sunflower'.*

The circumstances of my life have been painful and made no sense at all, yet all my study was telling me that the nuts and bolts of my everyday life, my 'reality', IS Love in action. I was being called to meet the love hidden within the moment in front of me with love. Not rejecting and fighting against the moment because it didn't meet my ego preferences. And so I slowly came to an awareness that my life in all its complexity is a unique expression of God's love, God breathing His love through me AS me. Your life is God breathing His love through you AS you. What a beautiful discovery.

My life still holds a lot of uncertainty, but despite these challenges I know that I am 'doing what it is mine to do'..... and it is a place of life and energy which genuinely allows me to 'bloom where I am planted'. When we return to the Heart of God, we discover that each interpretation is valued, respected and honored. It's my prayer for each of us that we learn to trust in our own hearts and to claim our own belovedness."

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### Heart Speaks To Heart

*Tom Hinds* spoke movingly about the impact of his wife's illness and the particular closeness that ensued, and linked it with the motto of his old school (founded by Cardinal Newman) 'heart speaks to heart'. He saw Contemplative Fire as a diversity of sparks, noting that a flame doesn't make a fire – what is needed is flame to flame, heart to heart. In this vein, he has proposed to the Trustees, and it has been accepted, that he undertakes visits to Companions, particularly remote and isolated ones, to hear and share their voices.

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### Across The Threshold



*Sally Wright* spoke about her involvement with the Windsor Homeless Project. Set up in 2009, as well as offering food, washing facilities and laundry, they help to guide their Guests through

some of the more challenging aspects of their journeys, which can include treatment services, mental health appointments, housing and employment struggles to name a few, regardless of colour, creed, religion, sexuality or any other social standing.

Sally is a retired teacher who wanted a different challenge. She says her gifts lie in working alongside vulnerable adults, listening to their journey and signposting them in the direction where they may find help. This year alone they have managed to house 28 guests. Her motto in life at the moment is 'together we can make a difference'. The Windsor Homeless project is an amazing place to work and has a great community feel. Guests can come and find a place where they can be heard and accepted, perhaps for the first time.

<http://www.windsorhomelessproject.org>

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### Thank you...

For the two prayer workshops, one led by Beatrice Hillman on *Centering Prayer*, and one led by Jeremy Timm on *Praying With Colour*. For the *Trefoil building* led by Ann Worrall, the *meditation* led by Diane Rutter, the *Body Prayer* led by Soobie Whitfield, the *Night Prayer* led by Ali Dorey, the *Gathering and Recommitment* led by Sharon Roberts and Jo Howard, with recommitment cards by Charlotte Wright – subsequently sent to Companions unable to make the weekend, for the introduction to the *new website* by Helen Fitch-Hunter, which included a forthcoming invitation to the private community discussion area, to Mark Holland for the PA system and to all Hub members.



Photo by Sally Livsey

## AGM 2017

### Trustees' Report

The current Trustees – Charlotte Wright, Elaine, Wilkins, Francoise Pinteaux-Jones and John Marsh – reported on progress in the previous year, including the new invitation to become a Friend of Contemplative Fire produced by Jo Howard (and subsequently sent to 19 interested people); a new Prayer Card held by Charlotte and Elaine; planning of the 2017 Retreat at Parcevall Hall led by Anne Crosthwait (Community Leader, Canada); the start of a growth strategy with the publication of a new leaflet and the commissioning of the new website; exploration of a theological reflectors group; continuing links with the Anglican Religious Communities and the Advisory Council; and the invitation to Bishop Anne Hollinghurst to become our new Bishop Visitor (see below). Gill Greenwood gave a brief outline of the Annual Accounts (to be available on the website) The Trustees were thanked for their service.

The current Trustees then stood down and 6 new Trustees were elected in a ballot by Companions: Caroline Newton, Charlotte Wright, Elaine Wilkins, Francoise Pinteaux-Jones, Hilary Garraway and Jeremy Timm (see website for profiles). Those present then confirmed the continuation of the Hub for another year.

Gill Greenwood said she would be stepping down as Administrator. She was thanked for her work and presented with a bouquet (see below!)



## Reflections on the Weekend

“The time of stillness together at the very start of the weekend was an incredible gift. If nothing else had happened all weekend, that was enough for me! I found I sank deep into the stillness, very at ease in the presence of my Community. I found tears arising, no need to strip away the protective layers that I usually hold, my "being" recognised that this was a safe place and I dived deep, able to be fully myself in the presence of my travelling Companions of many years and new ones. This for me was a sign of how real our Community is.”

*“I particularly appreciated the silence and creativity of the "chapel", the musical moments...the gathering, making the trefoil and learning to live with its irregularity when formed ad hoc by our community - that helped me reflect and continues to do so moving forward.”*

“What music we had was deeply welcome. The singing was beautiful and a very special way to be community. It was lovely to hear the hang drum again. I particularly liked the evening grace. The gathering was beautifully simple.”

*“I thought the fact that so many individuals were involved in leading sessions gave the whole weekend a really positive feeling of community. I loved the chaos of building the trefoil and how it demonstrated that CF is truly a community of diverse individuals, despite our united commitment to exploring a certain spirituality.”*

“I felt that, as has often been the case in the past, we were a community gathered together. That felt very good. There was a real sense of a group of people taking responsibility for their shared Contemplative Fire vision and values and for the unfolding future and direction of the movement.”

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### **New Bishop Visitor**

*“Dear Charlotte  
Thank you for the invitation (to become Bishop Visitor) and my feeling is that I would be pleased to support the community in this way. It would seem a natural follow-on from the interest and contact I've had with CF to date, as well as my interest in encouraging new forms of religious community generally. What you describe doesn't sound too big a time commitment - which is always a question to*

*consider when taking on something further as life is already somewhat full! Anyway, if you and CF colleagues continue to feel it's right to look to me to fulfil the role of Bishop Visitor, then let's explore further. Warmest wishes and prayers, Anne"*



*Bishop Anne Hollinghurst*

And a final word from Bishop Paul:

*"Charlotte, many thanks for this gracious email, which I received today on my return from holiday. It has been a privilege for me to accompany the community, but as you know the other demands on my time and the geographical distance from most of you means that I have not been able to give the quality of attention that you so richly deserve. I am sure that +Anne will be a wonderful choice, and I very much hope that she accepts the invitation. Do please feel free to say to her that if she'd like to talk to me I shall be glad to brief her. Meanwhile this comes with every blessing on you and all our sisters and brothers within CF.*

*With my warmest good wishes, +Paul  
Contemplative Fire Bishop Visitor"*



## Wisdom On The Way Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> November

### LIVING TOWARDS DEATH AND THE TRANSFORMING HEREAFTER



The Woodland Hall, Greenacres Chiltern  
Potkiln Lane, Jordans,  
Beaconsfield, Bucks HP9 2XB  
Led by Tom Hinds and Helen Fitch-Hunter  
Bookings: [info@contemplativefire.org](mailto:info@contemplativefire.org)

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**Weekend Retreat**  
**16<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> Feb 2018**  
**Holland House, Pershore, Worcs**  
**Led by Rae Moyise & Sue Riddell**

*Beyond these shores*



*Invitation to book going out shortly.*

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