

## Contemplative Fire Post

March 2017 – no.20

Wisdom On The Way – 11<sup>th</sup> March

### ***“Understanding the Revelations of Julian of Norwich in the 21st century”***

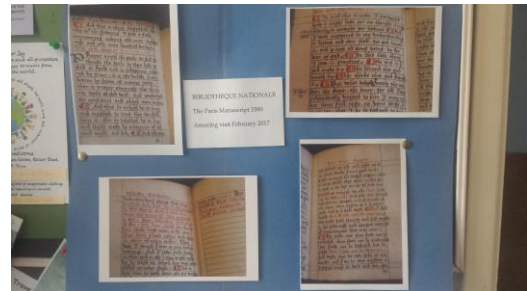


*Helen Fitch-Hunter writes:*

Hope is much-needed in our current times. Sr Pamela of All Hallows Convent was able to bring a little of that to Contemplative Fire Companions and guests gathered for Wisdom on The Way on March 11<sup>th</sup> at Boxmoor Trust. Even those who knew something of the incredible person who was Julian of Norwich – the first woman to write a book in the English language – made fresh discoveries of her history in person and in her writing.



The tale, recently told in the BBC4 documentary fronted by Dr Janina Ramirez, of the saving of Julian's manuscript by repeated copying down the centuries, was brought alive particularly by Sr Pamela's description of her recent trip to Paris. The Paris Manuscript of Julian's Revelations of Divine Love, dated 1580, could be read in clear English in the photographs taken when Sr Pamela was granted the permission to touch the texts earlier this year.



Many encouraging excerpts from the Revelations were shared during the day. Julian's image of the whole of creation gently held by God like a tiny hazelnut in the hand was particularly poignant. During the contemplative walk Sr Pamela shared with us the following excerpt:

*“Our Soul rests in God its true peace. Our soul stands in God its true strength, and is deep rooted in God for endless love. I saw and I understood that our faith is our light in darkness and this light is God our endless day. He is our clothing. In His love He wraps and holds us. He enfolds us for love and will never let us go. He did not say “You shall not be tempest tossed, you shall not be work weary”, but “you shall not be overcome.”*

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*Ann Worrall writes:*

A bird hide looms into view, specially built with three levels of windows. We are reminded that Sister Julian of Norwich lived, after her revelations, in a small room with three windows as her only contact with the world. It's interesting to have the chance to ponder on the effect that framing and separating the world in this way can have on one's meditative process. For me, the view and the feeling of separation yet connection still linger weeks after. This despite the fact that I was in the hide with thirty people on a silent walk.

We had gathered to meet up with fellow Companions and friends, many of whom had travelled for hours to get there, some for whom it was a half hour car journey, and one new visitor who could almost see her house from the venue but who had never known we existed.

Sister Pamela had travelled from Norwich with her books and tapes and shared with us her considerable knowledge of Julian and what we have discovered of her life and times through history and through her Revelations. It's fascinating to see Julian's insight into being human and being female, and remarkably deep considering the limited world view which surrounded her in medieval times.

After Sister Pamela's input we had the chance to walk together in silence in the local landscape, stopping occasionally to hear Julian's words. It was dry and quite warm. Birds sang and curious, now fattening, lambs lined up to stare at us. Everywhere we could see the waiting. The expectancy of nearly Spring. I felt the relief to be outside, to be breathing the freshness. I wonder at the dedication and devotion to prayer which drives a person to stay within four walls for the rest of her life. But the power of her Revelations made it clearly a no brainer for her. She was in the arms of her Source. My small efforts at prayer and meditation are strengthened when I see that her experience of God was overwhelmingly about Love.



After our walk we had the chance to chat together meeting new visitors, some who had purely come for Julian and some who were looking for the Contemplative Fire experience. And it was a joy for me to see so many of our long time Companions from around the country walking through the door. Like coming home. In the afternoon we had the chance to share our personal experiences of the day in Threes, which was well appreciated, especially as there were quite large numbers. And finally we ended with a lovely circle dance and the chance to accompany our dancing with singing The Bells of Norwich! Our final Franciscan blessing to each other was deeply received and brought many a wry smile.

Thank you so much to Helen Fitch-Hunter who made the connections then pulled the day together so well for us.

## Future venues

We are very conscious that our Herts /Bucks venues are a very long way for our Northern Companions to travel, so we are looking to perhaps spread our venues so that we have a chance to meet together as a wider dispersed community. It's difficult because we know that Sheffield is just too far for many of us for a day, as is the reverse journey, but nonetheless I know we would love to see how our Sheffield Companions meet together, so we will be trying to arrange wider venues this coming year.

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## Wisdom On The Way

**Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> May, Waltham Place, nr Maidenhead**

*Led by Companion Jo Rowbotham*



Jesus said, 'I am come that you may have fullness of life'. Life is statistically shorter and harder for people with serious mental illness, whose perceptions and behaviours can present a challenge to social norms. But mental illness – and wellness – can itself be a subjective affair. CF Companion Jo Rowbotham worked with marginalised young people before retraining to practise as a mental health nurse. On this day we will explore what makes and keeps us well, and how integrating spirituality, mindfulness and practical care of self and others can provide fullness whoever we are, and wherever we serve.

*Local Companions are happy to offer a bed for the night for those with some distance to travel.*

## A way of prayer

I find the idea of prayer mysterious. Although many of us pray, there is something about prayer that is difficult to understand or predict. The way I've prayed over the years has changed. My contemplative path has brought me into silence and unknowing, with prayers offered wordlessly. How different to the assertive boldness and wordy prayers I hounded God with in the past. More recently I have needed to find a way of prayer that is

authentic and present. How do I pray in a truly engaged and compassionate way?

Now, I tend to think of prayer as an activity of energy and expectation, 'Holy Spirit' energy and 'human' expectation. I see it as inter-active and relational, holding the other while both are being held in the energy of God. I understand it as potential to bring change.

Tom Hinds recently sent me his writing about an 'energy field'. My understanding from what he wrote is that each of us can be a point of energy, a potential of intending, willing and loving, linked by a field of energy whose action and flow impacts on us directly. For me he was describing prayer. But I don't find prayer easy. Often I simply don't know how.

I remember hearing Sister Julia at the Hidden Houses of Prayer Gathering in 2015 speaking about this remarkable action we call prayer as 'the raw tenderness of now'. She suggested that when we don't know how to, or can't pray, because difficult feelings get in the way, what we might think of as distraction is the beginning of prayer, and that facing the reality of our own brokenness in the face of the world's brokenness can become prayer.

She said,

*'This is prayer for powerful healing. We are not doing it just for ourselves, but for and on behalf of everyone. We don't do the healing. We present the brokenness in consciousness to ourselves and to God (with as little judgement as we can). God is the great whole, the great integrator, who brings perfection in the sense of integrating all of what we call good and bad into one seamless whole.'*

Some years ago, on pilgrimage to the Holy Land, I noticed that stones were placed on the graves in the Jewish cemetery in Jerusalem, apparently as a mark of remembrance with each visit. Small cairns could be seen on many of the graves. I found the idea of leaving stones in remembrance interesting and one I could make my own.



I often walk my dog through the woodland close to my home. Some time ago I discovered a hazel grove which has become my secret place of prayer. Many of the branches have fallen to the ground but, still rooted, have since have produced twigs of new growth. To me it speaks of brokenness and healing. There, amongst the branches, I place flints for those I want to pray for. I don't have words, just a stone and a name remembered. It is profoundly simple and, as an act of trust, meaningful. It is as though the energy of the place connects with my modest action, offering me a quiet sense of expectation and hope.

I wonder how many of us have 'secret' ways of prayer, relevant and real to the raw tenderness of our 'now'?

Charlotte Wright

### **A very warm welcome**

to new Companions Mary and Keith Sutton, Viv and Malcolm Griffiths and Ruth Iantorno, who live in Sheffield.





**Still Waters, Wendover**  
**Star Spangled Mystery**



A nothingness seeded by Love, gestational,  
pregnant.  
Then the Word echoed and reverberated into  
the void.  
Contoured creativity into unfamiliar shapes  
That shimmered in the unknowingness  
Of a world of dreams –  
Which imaginatively imagined and sculpted  
A chalice of beauty.  
Be-gifted, Be-spoken, Be-loved,  
By the radiant desire  
Of an infinitely loving heart,  
That emptied and poured into the vastness,  
Of dark darkness and shadowed gloom.  
A gifting of possibility,  
That stretched the freshly woven fabric of time,  
Across the universal into a  
Star-spangled cloak of mystery, and  
Skeins of flesh, and bone took form.  
Still the unknown creative hands kept weaving  
The intricate threads of life.  
With golden thread co-joining,  
The unbounded darkness of the universe.  
So are we bound by the thread  
That weaves and fashions  
Our unknowingness into the  
Infinite Creative Mystery,  
Crafted and Be-spoken,  
We are woven into  
The seamless garment of Christ.

*Written and read by Kathy Marsh at February  
Still Waters, Wendover, the theme being "Love".*

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*Ali Dorey writes:*

A few people asked whether I might write something for CF Post about the situation in the Diocese of Sheffield, so here it is. I will do my best to translate Anglican (i.e. Church of England) "church-ese" into plain English!

The situation, for anyone who's unaware, is that after due process, Bishop Philip North (currently "suffragan" or assistant bishop in the Diocese of Blackburn) was nominated to be our new diocesan (main) bishop. The problem I and others have articulated is that Bishop Philip is a leading member of The Society, under the patronage of Saint Wilfrid and Saint Hilda, which says, among other things, "*When a woman presides at the Eucharist* [i.e. takes a church service where bread and wine is shared, like our CF Gatherings], *or a female bishop ordains* [i.e. pronounces someone a deacon/priest/bishop], *these can only be a visible sign of the Church's disunity - signs that contradict the nature of the Eucharist as a sacrament of unity*". (<http://forwardinfaith.com/WomenBishopsText.php>).



The problem for us was that we were not sure how Bishop Philip could be the "focus for unity" that a diocesan bishop is supposed to be, holding the theological views that he holds and belonging to The Society, especially considering that about a third of Sheffield clergy are women.

The first thing I want to say is a massive THANK YOU to those of you who found out about the situation and responded in prayer and action. Your prayers, reflections and actions are deeply appreciated by me and by the people of the Diocese of Sheffield. (Also, please keep them coming - we're not out of the woods yet).

The second thing it's important to acknowledge is that Bishop Philip is a very lovely man who

has many good gifts to offer, among them a particular experience of and commitment to mission on outer urban estates and poorer communities (a concern many of us in Contemplative Fire share I know).

In spite of those facts, and the fact that Bishop Philip chose to meet with women priests in the diocese a week after his nomination was made public, a lot of people in the diocese (including said priests) still had questions about how this could possibly work in practice and wanted to engage in further dialogue about it.

We formed Sheffield Action for Ministry Equality (SAME) to help us organise some sort of response, and give voice to the growing numbers of people who were concerned about the nomination. To find out the latest news round-up, or look into this in more detail, do visit the SAME blog:

<https://shefminequal.wordpress.com>

Possibly the most helpful thing on the blog at the moment is Imogen Clout's piece "*Disciples think - they don't just follow*" from a lay (not clergy) perspective.

In response to all the letters and emails he had received from many quarters, and having taken a retreat, Bishop Philip decided to step down from the nomination in the end. We now await the Archbishop of York's reserve nomination bishop, who he'll make public in due course. It would be good to include that person in our praying, especially as they'll have to pick up the pieces from all of this.

In the meantime, I had a very positive lunch with one of my Society colleagues (literally hours before Bishop Philip stepped down), where we each shared honestly both how we felt and our theological points of view. I am going for coffee with another Society colleague soon, too. I, and others, are trying to inhabit a space that puts the love of Christ into action. There is no pretence that we are on the same page, or that we find each other's theology acceptable. But there is enough love between us to motivate us to meet and try to understand each other. The love between us is being put to the test at the moment. Is it really the love of Christ? We shall see...

*Revd Ali Dorey, Companion*

## Mount St Bernard Monastery



photo: OCSO

On 7<sup>th</sup> March, Caroline Newton, Ann Worrall and Gill Greenwood, on behalf of the Hub, visited Mount St Bernard Cistercian Monastery near Coalville, Leicestershire and met with Father Rufus to explore the possibilities of Mount St Bernard as a venue for future Contemplative Fire events. More to follow in the next CF Post!



## CANADA

"We are starting to re-design our website. We realized we need to make it mobile friendly and it will have a fresh new look, using some key search words and possibly have a linking component to other contemplative groups. We're going to look different from you in the UK but still have the same message and show the connections between us.

### *New communities*

We currently have two strong leads for new Contemplative Fire communities.

- One is in Australia. Philip chatted with Meeray about a year ago and we have continued to develop a relationship with her. She is ready to become a Companion and has a small group that appears ready to join her. Phil and Manuela met her in Australia during their trip in January – more in CF Post 21.
- Another is out of Seattle Washington on the west coast. His name is Frank and he is a Presbyterian minister who has trained with Shalem. He has asked to visit our community in Toronto during his sabbatical in May. He is prayerfully discerning if this is the next step for

him. Many of my contacts have been on the west coast and it seems to me the next likely place for Contemplative Fire to land.

■ Other possibilities for growth are in Sri Lanka, and Niagara and Oakville, Ontario. Kingston Ontario under Barbara Watson is definitely a small community (see below).

#### *New developments*

After 8 years leading Contemplative Fire Canada and six of those years working at St John's York Mills as well, I realize that I need some time away and am taking a sabbatical time in 2017. A Contemplative Fire team met to discuss an externally facilitated leadership review session on Feb 4 and all small group leaders and teams were invited (*more to follow in the next CF Post*). And we are spending time talking about leadership models including the one you're currently using.

Much love to you all across the pond."

*Anne (Community Leader, Canada)*

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Dear Diane,

Greetings on this first Saturday of Lent! I have received your Lenten resources from Anne Crosthwait. I am based in Kingston, Ontario, Canada and have been working on beginning a Contemplative Fire community here for the past several years. We are really still just beginning, but slowly progressing, and I'm sure your small group process would be very helpful as we build here. My husband (who is also a Companion) and I visited Sheffield and met with Jacky Stride and Joy Adams in 2015 at the Chapel of the Holy Spirit; we had a delightful visit and their comments were invaluable to my understanding of how Contemplative Fire has grown in the UK.

**"Catching Fire" in Kingston, Ontario, Canada  
Barbara Watson, Companion on the Way**

In the Canadian Diocese of Ontario, Contemplative Fire has developed from its beginnings in 2013 into a slowly growing group of contemplative Christians who thrive on our somewhat irregular meetings at the Cathedral Church of St. George in Kingston, Ontario. We are now a small group of Companions and Friends, all of whom have contributed substantially to our worship from our various backgrounds. Over the years we have offered Lenten Quiet Days along with several Bible and

Book Studies. Most recently I was blessed to facilitate a beginning journey through the Ignatian tradition based on the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, which I have made.

Another Companion, Margaretann Gorham, is facilitating our current Lenten offering, a 6-part series on Tastings of different Contemplative Fire activities that is being conducted in Open Circle format and is entitled "How to Build Your Spiritual Toolkit". Participants are building their own personal toolkits as they sample sacred words, and create devotional poetry and songs, along with mandalas and other tools.

Margaretann is a very creative Companion on the Way, past Chaplain and Church Army Sister, who is also our resident poet. For more information on Contemplative Fire events in our Diocese, please feel free to contact us at [contemplativefire@bell.net](mailto:contemplativefire@bell.net).

*Barbara Watson*



#### **"Soul Space"**

**Contemplative Fire Retreat  
Parcevall Hall, Appletreewick,  
Skipton, N Yorkshire BD23 6DG,  
Fri 16<sup>th</sup> – Wed 21<sup>st</sup> June, 2017  
Facilitator: Rev Anne Crosthwait,  
Community Leader, Canada**

Thank you to the Companions who have already booked – there are currently 13 of us, plus Anne and Hugh Crosthwait, and there are a couple of places left - contact Gill at [info@contemplativefire.org.uk](mailto:info@contemplativefire.org.uk)

## Events

Dear Friend of Douai,

Coming up over the next few months are the following:

*"He is risen!"* Easter Triduum Retreat led by Fr Gervase Holdaway OSB 13-16 April

*Christian Poetry* led by Fr Oliver Holt OSB 28-30 April

*Lectio Divina* led by Fr Gervase Holdaway OSB 23-26 May

*To God through Music* led by Fr Gervase Holdaway OSB 9 - 11 June

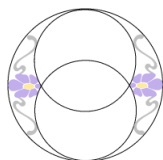
*The English Church Part 1* (Early Church to Reformation) Study Course led by Abbot Geoffrey Scott OSB 23-25 June (Part 2 will be held in 2018).

If you have any questions about these retreats, please get in touch:  
[pastoral@douaiabbey.org.uk](mailto:pastoral@douaiabbey.org.uk),

NB all bookings are made through the Guestmaster  
[guestmaster@douaiabbey.org.uk](mailto:guestmaster@douaiabbey.org.uk)

With kind regards, Gabriel Wilson OSB

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**CANA – from Water to Wine, the Way of Transformation**

[www.christiansawakening.org](http://www.christiansawakening.org)

**A Spiritual Exploration Day with CANA**

**THE SOUL OF HUMANITY AWAKENS  
THROUGH WORLD CRISIS**

**A day of exploration with WILLIAM MEADER,  
an international teacher of esoteric philosophy  
WEDNESDAY 17<sup>TH</sup> MAY, near WARWICK**



William Meader, from the USA, is an international speaker and teacher immersed in the cosmology of the perennial philosophy and the journey of the soul. He is the author of 'Shine Forth - The Soul's Magical Destiny'.

**Venue:** Guy's Cliffe House, Coventry Road,  
Warwick, CV34 5YD

**Time:** 10.30am for 11.0am till 4.30pm

**Cost:** £35 (£28 early booking by March 31)



**Living Spirituality Connections**  
Resources for the spiritual journey

Dear Friend,

We are pleased to announce our first weekend workshop at Holy Rood House in Yorkshire from **9-11 June** on the theme of **Creative Conversations**. More details are in the link below.

On the evening of **26 April** some LSC members will be going to the lecture by Carol P Christ at the University of Winchester on the theme **Goddess and God in the World: Why Feminist Theology Matters**.

If you can reach Winchester for an evening event and would like to join us, please email me. We will no doubt first visit the University's Cosmic Garden and labyrinth. Details about the lecture and the series are given in the events listing linked to below.

We will give details in our April newsletter about the developing relationship between Living Spirituality Connections and the Institute for Theological Partnerships at the University of Winchester.

Here is the link for events across the country from April to June: [www.livingspirit.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/events\\_april-june17.pdf](http://www.livingspirit.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/events_april-june17.pdf).

All good wishes,

**Petra**

Petra Griffiths

**Living Spirituality  
Connections** Coordinator