

## Contemplative Fire Post

January 2019 – no.33

Pilgrimage To Now/here  
Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> January

*Without Winter There'd Be No Spring*



In the middle of January, we had a Pilgrimage to Now/here day based at Longshaw in the Peak District. Our theme was, “*Without winter there'd be no spring*”, a paraphrase of a quote by the Puritan poet Anne Bradstreet (1612-72). Sally Rawthore and Ali Dorey facilitated the day, with additional input from Jo, a Yoga practitioner who taught us some simple breathing exercises, and pointed out the link between ‘breath’ and ‘spirit’ in most ancient cultures and languages. We arrived at Longshaw to find a significant covering of snow, and a wintry wonderland awaiting us when we set out for our short contemplative walk. We were invited to pick up a rock, symbolising our tough/unanswered, wintry questions, emotions or experiences, and to consider placing it en route somewhere, or carrying it with us.

We shared a body prayer about “*Greeting The Day Of Our Passing*” (from Ian Adams *Running Over Rocks*, Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2013), some chants “*Hold fast to love and justice*” (from Hosea 12.6) and “*His way was in the sea*” (from Psalm 77.19) and listened to The Piano Guys rendition of “*O come O come Emmanuel*”. When Sally and I planned the day, we included the wonderful Mary Oliver poem “*When Death Comes*”, without knowing that Mary would die just a couple of days before our Pilgrimage day considering these things. So the poem gathered a tremendous poignancy as we listened to it together. A rich day of breathing, reflections, movement, music and silences. As we shared together, we found grace and beauty even in the cold, hard places.



*I carry the hard, cold stone with me  
Into the white.  
Others stand and stare,  
All eagerness and nerves bundled up with  
layers and scarves, gloves, double knitted hats  
and quilted jackets.  
Will this wintry wonderland be hospitable?  
Questioning the wisdom of our venture, I  
whittle.  
Will anyone slip and fall,  
Warmth, wonder and dignity spent,  
Tumbling into freezing, wet tree-root-foot-trap  
oblivion?*

*Warily, I progress along the track,  
Eyeing a deceptively snow-free bit of rock,  
And several patches of impacted snow,  
Iced up and lurking, just waiting to catch us  
out.*

*We venture, young and old, strong and frail,  
into the white.  
Each with their stone;  
Their risk;  
Their unanswerable question,  
heartbreak.  
Their unutterable pain*

Their fierce anger  
 Their endemic anxiety  
 Their quiet  
 Under fir branches bearing sugar sweet, thick  
 icing;  
 Facing massive, bare rock,  
 Immoveable as death;  
 By the stream sending mysterious wisps of  
 steam into the freezing air;  
 I find an unexpected place to lay my anger  
 On the pine soft floor, carpeted with gloriously  
 orange, dead needles,  
 Sheltered from the snow by low branches of  
 dense foliage,  
 In a nook of the tree root;  
 A shelter from the storm;  
 Warm and inviting.  
 For some reason, this is where I lay my hard,  
 cold rock.  
 And I am surprised by maternal kindness  
 growing towards myself;  
 My grief and pain and anger.  
 I want them to be treasured in this nook;  
 Honest signs of a greater love.

We return, feet stomping off snow  
 To our warm cocoon  
 To savour rich cake and calming tea,  
 To listen and share with grace  
 To breathe once more.

Those who go out mourning with seed to sow  
 Will return with shouts of joy,  
 full of sheaves\*  
 One day.  
 Soon.           \*(Ps 126.6)           by Ali Dorey



Saturday 8 June 2019, 10am - 4.45 pm  
 Brighthelm Centre, Brighton BN1 1YD

## HUMAN FLOURISHING ON A FLOURISHING EARTH

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BY REV ALEX MABBS  
THE GREAT WATER CHALLENGE BY SANDY  
ELSWORTH (GEOLOGIST, HYDROGEOLOGIST)

**Green Grace Workshop.** The practice of presence and the power of pause in the greening of things. An African wisdom saying nudges us: “The best time to plant a tree is twenty years ago. The next best time is today.” This workshop will seek to engage participants with the active- contemplative dimension of garden as microcosm; with the awakening and deepening of the call of the Spirit to quiet change and an integral balance between effort and rest, wonder and wisdom.

**Facilitator: Philip Roderick.**

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**Living Spirituality Connections is a hub for creative ways of exploring spirituality.** It is at the interface between traditional Christian faith and practice, and newly emerging expressions of spirituality. LSC is a resource through which people can find material, groups and people to help deepen their explorations.



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## Report of Trustees' Meeting 14 January 2019

*Chair Francoise Pinteaux-Jones writes:*

We had a lively and productive meeting of the board, now at its full complement of nine members after the formal co-option of Ann Worrall and Sharon Roberts, whom I hereby welcome.

### *Governance*

They seamlessly joined in the business, the first act of which was an update from Jack McBane confirming that our Articles of Associations are being formally enshrined, ensuring the long-sought transparency and democracy owed to Companions.

### *Trustees' roles and responsibility*

Over the past year the Trustees have sought to get an overview of a) the Community's objectives and needs, b) the desirable skills to meet those ends and c) who among us had them. The answers kindly provided by past and present Trustees helped clarify the key issues and the way forward:-

-To improve communication, giving the Board a better grasp of the organization, activities, and events by region. There will henceforward be an agenda item including a report from the local Trustee liaising with the local named contact.

-To review our processes and structures. The aim is to improve consistency and clarity in our practice, literature and communication, while favouring creativity and informal socializing.

-To rationalize national events. A strategic complement to the above, they will be allocated to Trustees with the skills and experience required, drawing on other

Companions as needed. Plans for 2020 will be discussed at our next meeting.

### *Safeguarding*

Peter Wright, our DSP (Designated Safeguarding Person) reminded Trustees of the necessity for Contemplative Fire to comply with Anglican Church requirements in this area, which entails online training for Trustees (and potentially some Companions as required by their roles). More information from Peter in the next issue.

Our links to the Anglican Church were explored, with Sharon accepting the role of ARC (Anglican Religious Communities) Trustee. Diane Rutter, who remains our Representative to the Acknowledged Religious Communities, will also represent us at the ARC conference this year, with a view to determining how best to use our connections to both these organisations.

### *Website*

The website's progress continues to be frustrating for Helen and Tina. Nevertheless, the Trustees decided that the designer's proposed revised schedule should afford more time for client feedback and therefore aim for a later completion than that proposed.

### *Finance*

The management accounts, which will be posted on the private online community page, show a deficit – but do not take into account a number of factors that should help reduce this by the year end (May 31<sup>st</sup>). This said, a deficit had always been envisaged as part of our strategy for growth. Sally will be asked to prepare a Budget for our consideration at the April Board meeting.

The Development Fund attracted many proposals which the Hub filtered through the need for initiatives to meet three criteria: have a clear purpose; nurture and grow the dispersed Community; and fit the ethos of travelling light, dwelling deep.

The upshot was the approval of a proposal for our attendance at Greenbelt. Fully costed and staffed, thanks to Helen's diligence, it fits the bill in every respect: a CF team will run a Takeaway Tent on 24<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup> August 2019.

### *Greenbelt and Communication*

This project highlighted the need to ensure a sound follow up to enquiries arising from our presence. A process will be piloted to become

our standard approach. It calls for a wide geographic spread of Companions willing to be contacted and for templates to produce literature and publicity materials. Contact Companions would need to be equipped with a CF FAQs. More capacity building could be a focus of this year's Community Weekend, deepening our understanding and practice.

### *Membership*

The results of survey ran by Jack indicates that the Friends of CF are happy with their level of involvement and connection to the Community. The Friends include a number who were formerly Companions and have now moved on in their spiritual journey. But they wish to retain their connection with CF and to attend some events; the distinction between Friends and Companions being the commitment of Companions to the Rhythm of Life. In this context a reflection on the membership process was seen as a necessary item on the next board meeting agenda.

### *CF Canada*

With a view to strengthening our relationship with CF Canada, it was agreed that Canadian Companions should be able to be members of the online Community.

It may be judged that this was an extremely productive meeting, where much of the work of the previous years was finally coming together, as did the two groups that had pursued it. Undoubtedly, the outgoing Trustees and members of the Hub who contributed to the experiments and explorations of the past years have richly contributed to all these projects.

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## **Learning Journey – Sweet Water Well**



### *Charlotte Wright writes:*

Perhaps like me, one of the reasons you were drawn to Contemplative Fire was because of its unique, wondering and wonder-filled knowing and unknowing ways of experiencing God and Life in all its fullness.

When Philip Roderick first started Contemplative Fire, he put into place for us some foundation stones and core values that have shaped our Community's ethos and character. From the beginning he used the trefoil to describe our shared Rhythm of Life. Part of this is a 'Learning Journey', a journey involving enquiry and exploration together. The Emmaus road story in Luke's Gospel is significant here, when the disciples, walking with the risen Christ but not knowing him at first, said in realisation to each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?' There is something in this, about the journey of the heart, with Jesus as teacher and accompanier, that can become part of our learning journey, our place of encounter.

With Philip, former Companions Susan Blagden and Tessa Holland shared their particular gifts of spiritual study and experience, contributing a wealth of learning that helped to nurture and grow Contemplative Fire. Since Philip's retirement, the trustees wondered who else might be best able to offer such gifts, to contribute to the spiritual wellbeing and theological journey of our Community. They agreed that it would be useful to consult those Companions with either an understanding of the history of Contemplative Fire, or who had a sound and creative understanding of theology, or who had an awareness and a wisdom for spiritual development - or who had a heart for all three!

In June 2017, a group of Companions and those with close links to our Community were asked to consider if in some way they might contribute their meditative musings to Contemplative Fire. As it evolved, it became clear that the website was to be the forum for this. We are soon to have a page on the Contemplative Fire website for a monthly theological reflection, or to put it another way, for the offering of wisdom, of learning and ideas about God, spirituality and life. Companions will have an interactive webpage with the opportunity to comment on any arising topic which puzzles, concerns or simply intrigues! Space to doubt, question or affirm.

It is hoped that such contributions will help sustain the spiritual nourishment for our Community as others have done so in the past, particularly Philip. We are delighted that he will be one of the writers, and Companion Vincent Strudwick and former Companion Sheila Newman are amongst those who have also agreed to share their learning. We hope that more Companions and Friends of the Contemplative Fire Community will be inspired to contribute in due course. If you have any suggestions regarding other contributors, please let me or Jeremy Timm know.

So we look forward to this page of wisdom offerings for the moment, to shared learning and experience, to generous understanding from the scriptures, and considered discernment from the early church and mystics. We look forward to being offered continuing inspiration from the contemplative wisdom of other faith traditions, and to see how this theology, this godly wrestling and wondering, might unfold in the everyday and ordinary – provision for the journey. It is to be known as 'Learning Journey – Sweet Water Well'.

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### **A Conference for Leaders of New Monastic Communities 31 Oct-1 Nov 2018**



The conference was called by Archbishop Justin Welby as part of his prioritising of prayer and renewal of forms of the religious life within his Archbishopric. The aim of the Conference was *'To support and resource leaders of new monastic communities and to discern how the Spirit is at work in renewing the Church through such communities'*. There were 71 attendees representing some 32 new or emerging communities, both dispersed and residential or

a mixture of both, and set up with varying purposes. Many were Missional, a few Acknowledged (like CF). Francoise, Jeremy and Ann represented Contemplative Fire and over the two days met many others involved in contemplative community.

*Jeremy Timm writes:*

As a part of the healthy dynamic of CF, there is always a point as we try to follow our rhythm of life together, that we turn and face outwards, looking across the threshold to the world around us, and engage with our place of rootedness and the wider world. So with this in mind I joined Francoise and Ann to represent CF. We were charged with looking beyond our own community to engage with other communities, large and small, and the inherited tradition of the Church.

For me the day was full of tensions and challenges. At our fellowship weekend last year at Mount St Bernard in Leicestershire, Philip Roderick spoke of the importance to him of bridging the gap between the emergent and the inherited tradition of being Christian community. This struck a chord with me as someone who has disengaged with the institution of the Church of England, and so I have had to work at unpacking this thought seed sown by Philip.

I have to admit to physically feeling the tension immediately as I waited in the Gatehouse, before being escorted across the courtyard and into the grandeur of the palace where we were gathering under the gaze of Archbishops captured in the large portraits hanging everywhere. We were gathered in the heart of the inherited tradition. In my feedback to the conference organisers I suggested that as lovely as our venue was, if we gather again it would be appropriate to meet in a more neutral space.

A key comment that remains with me from the day was the Archbishop expressing his view that new monastic communities and the energy and growth they represent are of great value to the ongoing life of the church. Hereby lies the challenge for me. Like Philip's comments about bridging between the two traditions, the emergent and inherited, it is tough to see, at the moment, how practically this is going to be worked out. The footfall across the bridge must be two way; the established church with all the problems it is facing must seek a way to support and encourage the new communities on its fringes, and we, as a new community, must in turn cross the bridge the other way and seek ways of sharing our vision and energy with a

declining Church, which after all was the seedbed from which the new communities have evolved.

Perhaps the real value for me of the conference was the sitting around the tables, and buzz groups hearing of the challenges other communities were facing - of leadership, of growing the communities, and keeping in touch with members in a dispersed situation. We are not alone!



*Ann Worrall writes:*

I was surprised at how many communities were attending - many linked with Franciscans, Benedictines and traditional, established monastic communities, but all seeking to find their own way forward from an inner urge to serve God through and with the community they have formed. They all had a Rule/Rhythm/Way of Life and a set of commitments established for the community to follow. I became increasingly aware and full of gratitude for the strength, yet simplicity of our foundations within our dispersed community. The freedom that this gives us, being part of an Acknowledged Community, felt very new and energising. I heard others speaking of their friars and priors, their language full of 'Churchspeak', and I felt truly grateful for the deep wrestling and challenging that our founder Philip and the whole team building our community went through, in order to carve out a genuinely different space to call this contemplative service to Christ to which we are committed. I remembered that we are looking at ways to be welcoming to all, churched or unchurched. I remembered that we need to challenge our assumptions and be prepared to set those aside in order to accompany those who are seeking, often disenfranchised from the church, and to accompany them often to uncomfortable places. So much work was done then and is going on now, but it feels right to move outwards again,

to invite people to events which will feed their curiosity, in places which are not churches, to teach others the power of contemplative prayer and how it is done, the deep peace of Still Waters, the courage of crossing the threshold, the attention to studying, learning and training.

We heard stories of consolation and desolation as part of the programme. The desolation centred round the seeming impossibility of Christians working together coming from different institutions, particularly trying to find common approaches between the Anglican institution and the monastic communities. Archbishop Welby reminded us that those on the edge had been ruffling the feathers of the Church for over two thousand years, starting with Jesus, who was interfering with the control of the then Church and causing problems with their revenues. And we had to consider the work that Phyllis Tickle has done, showing that there have been 8 major crises in the church in the West, where monasticism has been a significant source of help to regrowth. He was clear that prayer is where everything begins. There can be no evangelism or reconciliation until we have a depth of prayer, a regular and continued relationship with God. His hope is that there will be a way for emerging monastic communities to be what is seen by those around them as a way of working together for peace.

There were inspiring stories of consolation too and I really hope that sharing stories becomes more and more possible in our dispersed community, so we may accompany each other more fully along The Way.

*There will be further discussion at trustee meetings and if anyone has an interest in this conference, do contact any of them for a chat, or share your thoughts on the web forum.*

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## Mary Oliver 1935-2019



On Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> January, I was attending my Way Beyond Religion group in Sheffield when I heard that Mary Oliver had died that morning. The news was hard to accept as many a morning I have sat with her words, allowing them to settle into my heart during my moments of contemplation. As I know others have been touched by her poetry too, I wanted to write a few words to recognise her gift to us, which of course will live on and continue to inspire.

Mary Oliver was not only a skilled wordsmith but a prophetess. We live in a world at the moment, where fear is all around - fear of the migrant, the stranger, the asylum seeker, other religions, the street sleeper - but through her poetry Mary Oliver speaks to the world of love and beauty, nature and spirit, always glimpsing the Divine through it all.

She was born in 1935 in suburban Ohio, and began writing at the age of 14. 1963 saw the first publication of her poetry. By and large her writing is inspired by nature and a real sense of awe and wonder in what she saw and felt.

*"When it's over, I want to say all my life I was a bride, married to amazement. I was the bridegroom taking the world in my arms"*

In the late 1950's she met Molly Malone Cooke and fell in love with her, and they were partners for 40 years until Molly's death. In Mary's words: *"I took one look, and fell, hook and tumble"*.

After meeting they moved to Provincetown, New England where the wonderful natural world which surrounded her there inspired most of her work. Of Provincetown Mary says,

*"I too fell in love with the town, that marvellous convergence of land and water; Mediterranean light, fishermen who made their living by hard and difficult work in frighteningly small boats – Molly and I decided to stay."*

Mary walked and walked, and walked - so much of her inspiration, as on foot as she noted birds, snakes, whales and phases of the moon. Her inspiration was so rooted in the outdoors. Once she forgot to take her pencil with her to scribble notes. From that moment onwards she hid pencils in tree around the area, so she would never be caught out again. Would that we had that same expectation of wonder when we venture out.

have a sense that Mary Oliver would have been comfortable to sit with Contemplative Fire, as we often still ourselves in the outdoors, opening our eyes to see the Divine, in that moment, in all we see and hear.

I would like to share a poem of hers with you, and it was such a tough job settling on one. But nonetheless I have chosen one of my very favourites, selfish I know, but perhaps you may feel inspired to share one of your favourites in the next CF Post. Jeremy Timm

### IF I WANTED A BOAT

*I would want a boat, if I wanted a boat, that bounded hard on the waves, that didn't know starboard from port and wouldn't learn, that welcomed dolphins and headed straight for the whales, that, when the rocks were close, would slide in for a touch or two, that wouldn't keep land in sight and went fast, that leaped into the spray. What kind of life is it always to plan and do, to promise and finish, to wish for the near and safe? Yes, by the heavens, if I wanted a boat I would want a boat I couldn't steer.*

(from Blue Horses 2014)



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### Safeguarding In Contemplative Fire - -What You Need To Know

Recent guidance from the Charity Commission has meant that Contemplative Fire has drawn up a new Safeguarding Policy and taken steps to implement the guidance. The Commission has worked with the Church of England to provide particular guidance to Religious Communities (the definition includes CF) on how to identify, manage and report both safeguarding incidents and other serious incidents which cause loss or

damage to the charity's assets, property or reputation.

Peter Wright, as a CF Trustee, has been appointed the "Designated Safeguarding Person" (DSP) which the guidance requires, and has taken on responsibility for examining and reporting back to the Trustees on the detailed documents and forms sent to us. He has emphasised the need for awareness that safeguarding involves us all. He points out that "Safeguarding" involves every member of CF, even if only as an informant and not as an actual or potential victim of physical or emotional abuse, mistreatment or harassment. The formal definition of a "Safeguarding Serious Incident", for completeness, is:

*"an actual or alleged incident which results in or risks significant harm either (a) to the Religious Community's beneficiaries (i.e. members), office holders, employees, volunteers or to others who come into contact with the Community through its activities, or (b) to the Community's reputation."*

As a result, if you think that a "safeguarding serious incident" has occurred it must be reported to the DSP, i.e. to Peter. He will then take the necessary steps, with other appointed Trustees, to see whether it is a significant matter, and if it is, to take the required action. This includes reporting the matter to the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser (DSA), in our case the DSA of the diocese of our Bishop Visitor, Bishop Ann, in the Birmingham Diocese, also to the Charity Commission and others such as the National Safeguarding Team. Peter has already been in touch with the DSA in the Birmingham Diocese to establish the necessary links, and to take advice.

There are similar reporting procedures in place in respect of serious incidents which do not relate to safeguarding, but which result in loss to the Community, i.e. loss of Community money, damage to property, or harm to its work or reputation. It also includes damage or harm to people involved with CF which does not involve safeguarding. A report has to be made to the Charity Commission by the DSP. Peter has 12 pages of guidance on what to do!

The CF Trustees have now approved an amended Safeguarding Policy which incorporates the safeguarding requirements, and also the delegation of decisions on "serious incidents" to two other Trustees with Peter.

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## Love Whispers Quietly

Philip Roderick reviews *In the Stillness: poems, prayers, reflections* by Elizabeth Mills

*In the Stillness* offers the reader a simple yet profound celebration of silence and soulfulness. These meditations provide nudges and invitations, hints and catalysts. They are companions on the interior journey. Each page has a theme and a hidden dynamic, pointing to a daily engagement with the mystery of life in Christ:

*In the stillness  
Is the Pearl of Great Price  
Where the Light shines...  
It is within us all  
But we must dig deep*

There are different sections in the book, which help to give shape and focus to the reflections. A number of poems begin with a question: "What if.....?" Some of these may well get the grey cells working and bring to the surface thought-provoking musings. More recent prayer/poems feature in one section of the book, together with a simple two line refrain. And so:

*Dip into the River of Silence  
Be cleansed, refreshed, renewed  
This day and every day  
Amen*

Elizabeth Mills, the author, is a Quaker and an educator, with whom I have been in contact over a number of years as a prayer friend. She specialises in early childhood education and works with children having special educational needs. She is married with two children and has been a carer for many years. "In the Stillness" can be purchased for £10 from Amazon, from the Quaker Bookshop <https://bookshop.quaker.org.uk/> or from the publisher, Inner Light Books <http://www.innerlightbooks.com/>





