

NEWSLETTER 24 : July - Aug - Sept 2008

Monastery of St. Barnabas the Encourager.

DIARY DATES

Communion (Eucharist) 8.0.am followed by a community breakfast in the Monastery Kitchen.
20th July 17th August 21st September 2008.

ACTING WARDENS REPORT

I must begin this quarter's report by looking back to happenings in March which were not reported because they were not completed by the time that the previous Newsletter was printed.

Late In March. John Hopkins came and stayed with a friend and he built the Library into the newly decorated and rearranged Reception/Library area of the Monastery. The main wood stove, which heats the whole house, is located in this area. It makes a comfortable place to sit and browse through the books.

On the 15th March the Trustees met for the last time in that official capacity and were then disbanded. The Trustees were originally set up in our attempt to register as a charity. It was at a time when the Charity Commissioners were under fire for allowing some people to feather their own nests under a charitable guise. The whole process was bedevilled by bureaucracy, so we continued without them. Our Trustees have been very supportive in some of the practical aspects of the development of the Monastery. We are grateful to them and would like to thank them for their support.

In their place we have set up a 'Core Group'. This continues the supportive role that previously was given by the Trustees but is more 'Hands-On'. It is composed of the key players in the group we call Friends of the Monastery.

The last quarter, April to June, was not too busy at the Monastery. We held most of the four services each day. With communion on the 3rd Sunday, and, of course, on St. Barnabas Day, which was celebrated this year, as always, on the 11th June.

During the three months the guest room and barn have not been heavily used but we have had four members of a Romanian Orthodox choir to stay for two nights during the time they were singing at All Saints Church in Newtown.

We have had a party of three walkers from Liverpool for one night introduced to us by a man who had enjoyed a retreat here earlier.

Although we had few resident guests we had 48 visitors some for the day and others just calling in to join in a service or for coffee and a chat.

Our Guest room has been used on a regular basis by church leaders from Newtown who have come for a day retreat. We are very pleased to have the monastery used by the local churches because that means we are fulfilling one of the aims of the

Monastery, that of being seen as a local resource for the various churches in the Severn Valley.

April saw the Monastery closed for the last week of the month but, of course, the chapel remained open, as it always is, so that anyone can visit, day or night. During that last week of April we went on the holiday which was made possible by the kind donations of Friends of the Monastery, and others, to whom many thanks. It was our only holiday together in the last 20 years or more and we enjoyed the break. (There is a letter of appreciation from Dorothy in this Newsletter)

We have received a donation of energy saving light bulbs and have bought more so that we now have them throughout the premises.

We also had a great trailer load of ready cut logs from our Chaplain, Nicholas Monk and are most grateful for these. Bob Howard, and his Boss, carpenters in Newtown have also kindly donated off-cuts of wood from time to time which have been most valuable in helping to keep the water heated and the guests comfortable.

Maintenance of the house and garden continue but often, these days we have had to call in a little help to carry out the heavier tasks. We are still happy to have some domestic help with the cleaning and maintenance of the guest rooms and rooms used communally. We are keeping the garden reasonably tidy ourselves but need help with the heavier tasks. The garden is just about under control but is of a rather wild nature with a tendency to become a jungle if not worked on regularly, and constantly threatens to run wild. The hedges have been cut drastically but there is still a great deal to be done in the garden.

Our equipment is still going strong. In spite of being hard worked the washing machine, very nearly twenty years old, is still managing well. With the help of our friend, Alan (an electrical engineer) we have given the fridge in the main kitchen a new lease of life with a new thermostat. The very old bread maker continues to make very good bread, much appreciated by visitors, and the rest of the equipment like vacuum cleaners, freezers, cookers and the clothes dryer and irons all seem to be in good order at the moment. Tools like the lawn mower, strimmer and workshop tools are all serving us well and we are grateful to those who have provided us with tools from time to time.

FATHER BRYAN'S LETTER

The issue I am focusing on at present is pushing the various 'Rights of Way' bodies to make good the canal towpath as a negotiable alternative route between Newtown and the rapidly expanding conurbation of Abermule. And, as it is more lucrative to build houses than to provide amenities and infrastructures such provision has not been considered. Abermule is one of those villages



where getting about conveniently is rather dependant on owning a car. Newtown is only 3 miles down the main road, known by some as 'Death row' and there is a bus every two hours until just after 6.0pm. but it is still difficult to have a normal social life without a car with only limited transport available.

The National Government are frequently saying the nation should eat less and exercise more with a view to being healthier. So I am knocking the door of every authority connected with rights of way to get cycle and walking access into Newtown. You may wonder why I am writing about transport but a person with my vocation should be concerned with health of mind body and spirit. I am therefore, promoting the development of cycle and walk ways as well as being concerned with mental and spiritual health.

My major concern, the one which is uppermost in my mind, is my concern for the mental and spiritual health of those for whom I pray. We all need holiness, that health of mind, body and soul which adds up to wholeness. Just as I am concerned about obstacles in the path of walkers and cyclists on the canal towpath so I am concerned about those features in our lives which prevent us on our journey towards wholeness. One of the larger obstacles is smoulder-

ing anger and unforgiveness. The failure to recognise and address this issue of anger and unforgiveness injures us spiritually. It is vital to forgive: we need to confess;

repent and open up to God in order to experience forgiveness and release. This is not only crucial in this life but as many saints maintain, it is also essential in eternity. This is an ongoing process in the Divine relationship. I was going to expand on this vital subject, but realised I had written on this matter in our last Newsletter 24 (April, May, June). So, instead I will write about another issue which is much on my mind.

WORSHIPPING WHERE GOD HAS PLACED US

This other issue is the tendency of people to worship in congregations in which they feel comfortable rather than accepting the body of Christians in the place where they live. Some people travel considerable distances to the 'Right' church on Sundays so that they can feel comfortable. I know of a number of Christians living in both suburbia and villages who travel away from home to go to more 'exciting!' places of worship. This inevitably leads to taking the car when, in many villages and suburbs, the church is within walking distance. I am reminded of a poster I saw in a village shop shortly after the big super markets started moving out into the country towns

and every one had become car dependant.

At that time the little poster appeared, produced by the WI and placed in village shops. This read: *Shop here and my community lives.*

I want to adapt that WI shop Notice to read. 'Worship here in the community in which God has placed you and the spiritual core of the community will live. I wanted to tell every Christian in our village 'Stay in your community to practice your corporate Christian life together and you may see Revival come. This would fire up an awareness of God's presence in the community. When a person gives their life to Christ they "become a new creation". I have heard comments from village folk like: 'My neighbours are a very nice family, but they are religious and go to some church in the local town on a Sunday'

The neighbours of the church-going Commuting Christian's may also go out on Sundays to: Football or Bowls Club or Rambling Group, etc, etc...But these activities take place within the community in which they live. The clubs or club houses are situated in the village. There are, of course, a number of people who are the backbone of the local church or chapel but they tend to be the older residents; they are the remains of when the church and chapel were a much bigger part of village life, in an age when few people possessed cars. The sporting events are played by the village's home teams. The village feels a form of patriotism towards them. They are the 'Home teams' or 'Home Groups' where, at the end



of day, the loyalty lies. But alas to often 'the young and upwardly mobile, evangelistic Christians become Commuting Christians. How many Christians have been challenged by Jesus' injunction to the healed man at Gadara. After his healing and encounter with Jesus he was told to go back home and witness to his community. The healed man said Let me go with you". But Jesus said: Go back to your home and family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you" (Mark.6 v18-19). Even the disciples, thinking that Jesus was belonging to a definite location, wanted to go to the place where it was all happening (John.1 v37) but finished up going back to their homes in Galilee.

Then as we read through the New Testament the churches were named by their locations not their theological flavour or leadership. We Christians are called to be lights, messengers, ministers in the communities in which we live. Spiritually the village church and chapel should be the centre of prayer and care as the village shop is the centre of communication and a place for meeting fellow residents..

I must confess when I first came to Wales I thought it was to be a place to commute back home from. So God put me in company of people like me, missing the Christian activities of our home cities. Rather amusingly, as I cycled round Newtown asking God if

I had got it right I inevitable heard or met someone with a strong Birmingham accent, showing me that here in Wales were many people from the Midlands and confirming that my ministry was here and not back where I came from: I had not left the people behind to whom I was called to serve; they were here on my doorstep.

Consequently I have problems with Christians, who, when it comes to Sunday, get in to their cars and leave their communities to go to some more attractive church in some local town or even distant location. Surely, if God has led one into this rural setting this is where one should live, witness and worship.

REPORT ON THE HOLIDAY:

We were shocked at first when it leaked out that we were receiving money to enable us to go on a holiday. The shock subsided into dazed amazement as we realised what our friends were hoping for us, and just how much money had been collected. Then it began to be exciting as we planned how we might have some time away together and do things we don't normally have the time to do. We had a great deal of pleasure looking at holiday catalogues and eventually decided we would go to Worcester and the surrounding Worcestershire countryside.

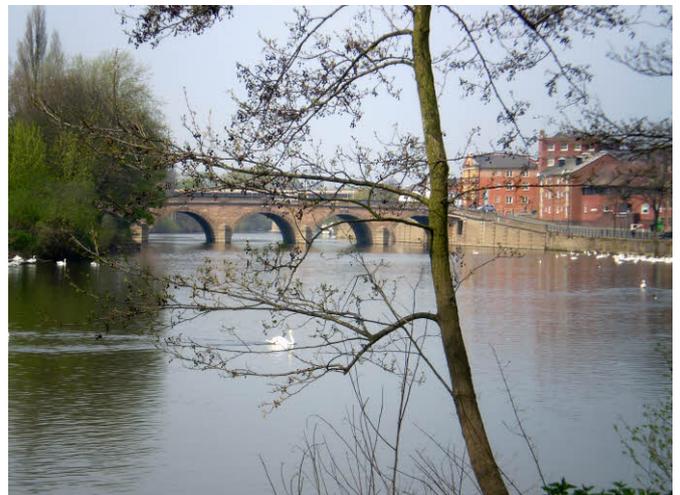
Naturally, Bryan had to take his folding bicycle; no holiday would be complete without cycling, and I had to take sketch books and a book to read.

We decided to book a room in a nice Bed and Breakfast hotel near to the city centre and before setting out each day we indulged ourselves in a leisurely and magnificent breakfast. There was an abundance of fruits of every kind, a wide variety of cereals and a hot trolley laden with all that the hungry person could wish for. Just supposing there was a spare corner left there was ample toast, butter, marmalade and honey and as much fresh coffee and tea as we could imbibe.

After a lovely journey through beautiful countryside we arrived in Worcester in time for lunch and then a tour of the cathedral and sung evensong. We spent some of our time on that holiday sight seeing in Worcester but quite a bit of it enjoying the countryside, Bryan on his bicycle and I sitting and sketching and savouring the time to stop and think. Each evening we ate out in Worcester before returning to our hotel and making our evening drinks in our room.

At the end of the week, although we had not been inactive, we both felt rested and refreshed and returned home feeling that holidays occasionally are a very good idea.

We thank all those who so kindly and generously donated money to this frivolous cause and especially to Stephanie for looking after Pushkin, our cat. We still have some money left and are contemplating another break in the not too distant future.



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