



REFECTORY

“Reading will always accompany the meals of the brothers.” *RB 38:1*

St Benedict clearly sees reading at meals as important, and indeed, down the ages such reading has always been considered a traditional monastic practice. Mediæval monastic ruins often display remains of elaborate readers’ pulpits in their refectories, usually placed high up to assist audibility.

At Douai we have long had reading at supper on weekdays, but reading at dinner was abandoned some thirty years ago, largely because of the demands of running a school. Last autumn, the community voted to restore reading at lunch on weekdays.

The community was undoubtedly influenced by the retreat last August, given by Fr Gregory Collins OSB, of Glenstal Abbey, Ireland. He stressed the importance of the link between eucharist and meals. The monastic meal has a deeper significance than merely feeding the body; it also has a spiritual dimension; as St Basil taught, the soul should be fed as well as the body. We begin and end with

prayer, thanking God for the gift of food. Meals, like the liturgy, need ritual. Reading allows eating to be done slowly; it allows time for reflection and provides periods of stillness in busy days. Attending to reading is an important aspect of St Benedict’s desire that monastics be people who listen. Whether the book is specifically religious with a direct spiritual content, or ‘secular’, it will provide food for the mind and the intellect. The meal thus becomes an experience for the whole person, not just the stomach, an experience which is, in some way, an extension of prayer. At Douai, as in most monasteries, meals follow periods of prayer. Giving a renewed importance to meals is a good way to celebrate our new refectory.

Pictures

Recently, some of our historic pictures have been hung in the refectory. These had previously been in the old monastic or the former school refectories, and have been away for restoration and cleaning. ◇

Guesthouse & Conference Centre

The new and refurbished guest accommodation has been in use for over a year, and, quite apart from the Pastoral Programme events which we organise ourselves, we have welcomed a variety of differing organisations and groups.

On the Saturday before Holy Week, eighty *Knights of the Holy Sepulchre* came for their annual retreat. They processed into church in their full regalia led by their ceremonial sword and banner.



The Knights of the Holy Sepulchre in procession led by the sword and banner.

In Advent the *Knights of Malta* came for a similar day, led by Fr Oliver. Fr Boniface led a day for the Reading Council of the *Knights of St Columba*, and for the Marlow branch of the *Catholic Women's League* and Fr Gervase for Wokingham branch of the *Catenians*.

The Chaplains of the University of Reading brought a group of students for a retreat, in the last weekend of the autumn term, and in Lent we welcomed young members of *Notre Dame de Vie* from London.



A group of Notre Dame de Vie in the guest refectory.

Weekend retreats were given by Br Christopher

for the catechists of the Diocese of Northampton and by Fr Gervase for *Teams of Our Lady* from Fareham, Hants.

During Advent, both the Henley Anglican Deanery and the Reading Anglican Deanery held quiet days here. *The Jubilee River Group*, Anglican clergy from the Henley and Marlow area, continue to come regularly for quiet days.

Some groups come for a mixture of prayer, quiet time and study or planning, such as *The Waverley Group* who visit regularly, as do *The Spirituality-in-the-Workplace Network*. Others in the past few months have included *Regenerate*, an ecumenical planning group of clergy from Reading, *ReSource*, a planning group from St Lawrence's Anglican church, Reading, the *Basingstoke Community Church*, *Catholic Teachers* from Southampton, *Reading Christian Network* and *The Eternity Youth Church*.

The Anglican Diocese of Oxford held a residential training workshop *Post of First Responsibility* for newly appointed vicars. The *Acorn Christian Foundation*, a Catholic organisation from Basingstoke spent a weekend devoted to 'Listening'.

We have also welcomed the *British Association for the Study of Religion*, *The Bridge Pastoral Foundation*, and *The Great Britain and Ireland National Oblate Co-ordinators* for meetings or training sessions.

Not all groups come for religious reasons, *Boehringer Ingelheim*, *Beckett Telecom*, the *West London Mental Health Trust*, the *Organising Committee of the Ramblers Association*, *The Wrekin Trust*, *Reading Borough Council* and a group of local *Head Teachers* meet regularly for seminars or workshops.

There are very few weekends when we are not hosting a group or a large number of individuals. So great is the demand that bookings tend to be made at least a year, and sometimes two years in advance.

St Benedict was right when he said, 'guests are never lacking in a monastery.' ♦

Hiroshima survivor in Japanese Peace Mission

On Easter Sunday evening we welcomed a group of sixteen Japanese, from the Japan Council against A & H Bombs, which included Mr Yoshio Sato, a survivor of the atomic bomb attack on Hiroshima in August 1945. They had been invited by CND to take part in the demonstration celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Aldermaston marches. On Easter Sunday they walked from Greenham Common which had formerly been an air base, to Aldermaston where the next generation of Trident is being prepared. On Easter Monday they joined those who encircled that establishment, holding hands.

On the morning of Easter Monday Mr Sato gave a harrowing account of his experience of the Hiroshima bomb, which members of the community attended. He presented us with copies of a book of drawings of the event and with photographs. A summary of his talk can be found on our website <http://www.douaiabbey.org.uk/hiroshima.htm>



Above, Yoshio Sato speaking in one of the Conference Rooms about his experience of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. He is holding a drawing of his mother and sister as he found them, trapped by fallen debris. Both died of the effects of radiation.

Left, a number of the Japanese party before their departure. They are holding their banners and a collage of peace messages on multi coloured hearts to the people of Japan from members of the monastic community and Douai staff.



Novice

For Aidan Fallon arrived as a postulant in October and was clothed as a novice in December. Growing up in Alcester, Warwickshire, a parish run by Douai monks, he has known the monastic community for many years, and had been a postulant for a short time twenty years ago.

After leaving school he worked in the printing industry, first as a photogravure printer and then in management. Responding to a different call, he entered seminary to study for the priesthood. Following study and pastoral ministry in Spain, Italy, Germany, France and England, he was invited to the U.S.A. and ordained, thereafter working as a priest in rural prairie parishes for thirteen years. ♦

Construction

Since the beginning of the year we have again had workmen on site. They have been engaged in the 'snagging' of the new buildings, completed in November 2006, and of the refurbishing of the north block of the Benet Biscop buildings, completed in March 2007. Minor faults which had occurred during the first year of occupancy have been put right.

In addition, the second stage of refurbishment has been taking place. This involves turning the ground floor of the south block of the Benet Biscop buildings into a properly equipped infir-

mary. The former infirmary was demolished in 2005 to make way for the guest refectory. The area being used for the new infirmary was formerly the abbot's office and the bishop's suite.

There will be four infirmary rooms and a treatment room. The house chapel is adjacent, which will be highly convenient for the sick and elderly. This was damaged in the fire of 2004 and the sacristy burnt out. Both are being restored to their original state. The chapel was designed by Sir Frederick Gibberd and the altar was his gift to the community; its crucifix is by Elizabeth Fink. ♦

Community Notes

Spirituality-in-the-Workplace

Fr Dermot began a new series of six Day Workshops in the Bl Hugh Faringdon Centre on December 1. There were twenty-five participants. He also taught a weekend course on the 'Theology of Work' for the ordinands of the Anglican Diocese of Oxford at All Saints, Pastoral Centre, London Colney, Hertfordshire, and gave another at The Royal Foundation of St Katherine Retreat House, Limehouse, London. In March he gave a day workshop at Douai for the Ministry of Defence Intelligence Staff. He also gave a paper on *Leisure* at the Monastic Theology Conference at Ampleforth.

Lectures

Fr Gervase gave a lecture at a conference *The Psalms in Jewish and Christian Worship* at the Sion Centre for Dialogue, Notting Hill, London on December 10. The Jewish speaker was Rabbi Elizabeth Tikvah Sarah.

Muntjak in the Cloister

After Conventual Mass on Boxing Day, Fr Nicholas discovered one of the south cloister windows had been smashed. On investigation a muntjak was discovered in the east cloister making its way towards the library. It took three monks to usher it out back into the garden. We presume that having been frightened by something it had rushed into the cloister garden and been unable to stop in time.

University of Reading Day-schools

On March 1 a dayschool on *Monastic Writing* took place here. Four monks gave lectures: Fr Alban on *Monastic writing through the ages*, Br Placid on *St Bede and St Bernard; varieties of monastic writing in the Middle*

Ages, Fr Abbot on *Three seventeenth century Benedictine writers, Augustine Baker, Gertrude More and Jean Mabillon* and Fr Gervase spoke on *The modern period*. On May 24, Fr Abbot will give a dayschool on the *Monastic Library*.

The Monastery Library

At the annual conventual chapter in February the community voted to build a monastery library. An appeal had been launched in December 2006, for an account of which see *Douai Abbey Newsletter* no 28, March 2007. An article on the proposed building will appear in *The Douai Magazine*, which has been held over to the summer for this reason.

Fr Abbot's Jubilee

On January 8 Fr Abbot celebrated the silver jubilee of his priestly ordination. He sang Mass in the Abbey Church at 7pm, which was followed by a reception in the guest refectory. There were a large number of invited guests, including Bishop Crispian Hollis. The previous weekend he had had another celebration in his home parish of Birtley, Co. Durham.

Cathedral Prior of Canterbury

During August, the Abbot President, Richard Yeo, appointed Fr Finbar Kealy as titular Cathedral Prior of Canterbury. Fr Finbar said that he hoped the appointment would be of some use ecumenically. We apologise for omitting to record this in our last issue. As some of our readers may be unaware of the significance of the cathedral priories, we intend to include a short article in the next issue of *The Douai Magazine*.

The Guardian

An article on Br Christopher,

our Guestmaster, appeared in *The Guardian Work Supplement*, on January 19; for which he had been interviewed the previous week.

EBC Distance Learning Theology Group

This group met here in early January; those present included two nuns from Dinklage and two monks from St Otilien, Germany.

Postulant

In Holy Week, David Banks, who comes from South Wales, and has visited the community several times, arrived to begin his postulancy.

Easter

This year, Easter on March 23 was almost the earliest it could be. The weather was wintry, so the Palm Sunday procession was unable to take place owing to wind and rain, and it was too windy to go outside for the Easter Vigil fire. We had a full guest house for the retreat, which was given by Fr Romuald. There were twenty-six people resident. The Service of Music and Reflections on Good Friday was particularly well attended.

Correction

In our last issue we stated that the towers of Westminster Abbey were by Sir Christopher Wren. In fact, although Wren prepared a design for them, the towers, as constructed, are the work of his pupil, Nicholas Hawksmore. We are indebted to a reader for pointing this out. ◊

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