



Small Pilgrim Places Network NEWSLETTER May 2020

Do not fret about your empty church.
Silence holds the space holy
And always did
She holds all things and mourns all things
She is in all things
She holds every story but her own
She knows each name, with no need to know her own
Let Silence guard the stillness and the stones
While you care for the bereaved and those full of fear
That is your creaturely task

In these extraordinary times when our movements are restricted and our places of sanctuary closed to us, these are helpful words from "Meditation on the closure of churches" by Gilo, the Co-Editor of Letters to a Broken Church, and applicable to all holy places and spaces.

This meditation was the first thing posted in our new website section "Recent Additions" where we hope to post items of inspiration and information which will be available to anyone visiting the website, whether members or not. We would welcome any contributions that you may have found helpful, especially at the moment - please send them in.

Where do we go from here?

This was the question we were posing last year. Now more than ever it is the question on all our minds, and relates to every part of our lives. We hope that you are all keeping safe and well in these extraordinary times.

We will continue with the annual revision so please keep us up to date so that when in due course Places can open once again our information will be accurate. We will also continue with our thinking about the future.

As the country locked down it became obvious that there was no point in our spring mailing with new leaflets etc. We are presuming that all Places are closed for the time being.

As mentioned above, we are hoping to post items of inspiration and information about resources on the website and the Facebook Page and all contributions welcome.

SPPs - 20 years on

The Core Group have been thinking about how to celebrate 20 years of SPPs, and came up with the idea of producing a booklet to mark this anniversary - it may be 21 years by the time we get it published, so perhaps it will be "SPPs come of age"?!).

It would tell something of the story of SPPs, and so we would welcome contributions - for instance about what makes your Place special, about how it has developed over the years, about how visitors have reacted - anything that you would like to share. Photos also needed. Ideally we would like to include a story from two Places in each Region, but obviously it depends on what we receive from you.

If you think you would like to make a contribution please let us know by 20th May so that we can see how it might come together. Actual contributions can follow later.

National Gathering 2020



It is impossible to say at the moment whether we will be able to hold our National Gathering and AGM at St Michael's Church in Hall Green in Birmingham on **Saturday 24th October**. We had hoped to celebrate 20 years of the Network and, as well as looking back, to be able to see a role for the Network in the future as part of the raised awareness of the value of the pilgrim experience. Please keep the date for the moment in case we are able to go ahead as planned.



News from the Network:

One of our members says her local Coptic Church ring their bells at 8 pm on a Thursday to join in the honouring of NHS and key workers, and wondered whether SPPs with bells could also join in. There may be practical difficulties in the way of this idea - is there a bell? Is anyone allowed into your church or building? Is there anyone who is not self-isolating available to ring the bell? However, it is an idea and worth thinking about. Perhaps if you are able to do this you could let us know so that we can include it in our news.

Welcome to new members: Don and Jill Abbey, Birmingham; Jan Burston, Tanworth-in-Arden; Luke Clasper, Stourport on Severn; Christopher Corps, Rutland; Naomi Gordon-Smith, Petersfield; Dianne Hird, Halifax; Pat Moran, Stocksfield (Northumberland).

R.I.P. We have sadly heard of the deaths of two members who were involved with the Network from the start, both supporting Jim Cotter in his vision.

Averil Swanton died of cancer in December after an abrupt decline in her health – she was in her 80th year. A friend of Jim Cotter's, she was the first Hospitaller/Contact for St Pancras Church in the heart of Exeter, one of the early SPPN locations, and pioneered our thinking about how to be hospitable without there being a hospitaller always physically present. A member of the Parish of Central Exeter for many years, she was a woman of deep spirituality and wisdom, contributing considerably to the life of the parish and to the wider church – as well as her involvement with SPPN she also played a significant role in the Franciscan Tertiary Order.

Bob Hughes supported Jim at Llandecwyn in the early days when Bob was the local vicar, and more recently in retirement served as Hospitaller at Llandecwyn and then was instrumental in bringing the church at Llanfihangel-y-Traethau (Ynys) into the Network. He had also been living with cancer for some years. Their contribution and support is much appreciated and we offer our condolences to their friends and families.

The Core Group - we urgently need more people on the Core Group - both as fresh minds to come in and help with the thinking about the way forward, and also to share some of the tasks. If you are interested or would like to know more, please contact one of the Core Group. Among tasks that could be shared are the note-taker for conference calls and 2 face-to-face meetings during the year (travel expenses are paid), and work on the website and social media. Get in touch for more details.



Korason is a duo of Tim on Guitar and Josh on Kora who play reflective, joyful and calming music. They were recent recipients of a PRS grant which enabled them to set up a tour of churches, chapels and places of worship across Wales (including St Hywyn's in Aberdaron). They comment "We really enjoy the communion we establish with an audience in churches and chapels. The reflective and meditative nature of the music is so suited to spaces that have been blessed by hundreds of years of prayer, and peace. It does feel like a communion of sorts and audiences leave carrying the sense of peace and tranquility with them."

Obviously everything is on hold during lockdown, but their website is www.korason.co.uk, they talk about their music on

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i_NQT_37BcA and you can hear

some of their music on <https://soundcloud.com/user-631498525>

A Facebook message from Sylvia Hope in the North East:

My previous March 8th post has an image of my footpath to Durham City, and I set off a few days ago to find a favourite wildflower, "coltsfoot", which I had seen there in previous years. No luck there but a circular route home, revealed it at a new location, and in a well established group, always a great sign of some undisturbed years. It was superbly open to the sun, and a glorious memory of my mother, who years ago, bent down to show me, saying, "This is not a dandelion. See it's a much finer structure." She did not have a grand garden, but she was a gardener, and a botanist, and I treasure these observations she shared with me. A large river side patch of Butterbur was displaying, on the same walk, and also hedges of flowering blackthorn....all these plants reminding me of years of ground and hedge foraging by past generations, for medicinal and nutritional sources. I want to tell all mums and dads struggling now, with long day's, managing their kids, that some of their precious energy and efforts, will never be forgotten.



Poetry is something to turn to at this time - John O'Donahue, R.S. Thomas, Ana Lisa de Jong are among those recently quoted on the Facebook page. Perhaps now you will have the time to investigate them further and find verses which particularly speak to you.

"Within you is a stillness and a sanctuary to which you can retreat at any time" (Herman Hess)



We cannot visit our Small Pilgrim Places at the moment, but virtual visiting is possible - Ali Green's journal entries are all in the Members' Area of the website and a lot of them are also on the Facebook page.

Most of us now have time to sit and contemplate, to enjoy the sunshine and to watch the spring (though some are finding life quite busy in new ways). Perhaps we all need to echo Thomas Merton's words *"Uncrowd my heart O God, until silence speaks"*.

Pictured left: - Llandecwyn, the first Small Pilgrim Place.



NOTICEBOARD

Please remember to keep us up to date with **changes in your contact details**.

Now more than ever the value of Networks is becoming apparent. We find that at least half our membership has yet to say whether or not they are prepared to have contact details shared within the membership.

Whilst we fully understand that some of you will not want your contact details available to other members, and we will of course comply fully with DRB requirements, we would like to emphasise that SPPN is a network.

Well-functioning networks depend on all sorts of criss-crossing communications, member to member, and are not confined to between core and individual members. To this end we will shortly be contacting those concerned to encourage you to consider making at

least some of your contact details available to the wider membership.

Subscriptions for 2020/2021 are now due. If you have not already paid, please send a cheque to the Membership secretary or pay through the website renewal facility. Reminders will be sent separately to those who are now two years in arrears.

Please do get in touch if you have any comments, contributions or suggestions to make for our newsletters, or the website. A good Network is one that has information and ideas circulating in all directions!