

PRIORY NEWS

Carmelite Priory of St John of the Cross | Oxford | OX1 5HB



Chapter News 2020

With every Provincial Chapter endings bring new beginnings. Friars usually find themselves involved with a cabinet re-shuffling. Oxford lost two and gained one. Fr. Teddy received his new appointment as Prior of Kensington Parish; Fr. Liam as Prior of Avila, Dublin. We welcome Fr. Tony into the community with his different kind of energy. Lockdown has probably helped us all gel much quicker than is usual for the establishing of our new community. We are all looking forward to developing our ministry together with the newly appointed Prior, Fr Alex.

Online - New things

Lockdown challenged our way of ministry. To date our income has become dependent on our online courses and retreats. It is generating new energy and we hope we continue to reach out towards many. One advantage though is discovering new talents we never knew we had among us. Of particular note is the culinary skills - we all take our turns at experimenting on each other. So far, no adverse reactions.

Christmas Greetings

Christmas is a time of pleasant surprises. We receive gifts from loved ones that make us go, 'Wow! What a pleasant surprise!' For our community at Boars Hill, Christmas came too early this year with the many gifts and surprises and all that 2020 now means for us in the context of the pandemic.

It almost feels strange that at a time of great tragedy and sorrow on account of the pandemic, I should be reflecting on the blessings the year has brought to us. However, given the thousands of people that have been supported through our ministry (which had to quickly move online) one cannot but give thanks to God who continues to be present in our midst no matter what life may throw at us.

Our online programmes and events have been a source of support for many during this painful period of loss, fear and anxiety, empowering them with inner strength and resources needed for such a time as this. For one of these events some participants commented:

"Thank you for providing us with the opportunity to continue to grow in our spiritual life during these harsh times."

"Our Lord really encouraged me through the talks."

"I have been spiritually enriched and personally enabled to proceed with more faith and confidence on my earthly pilgrimage, and to encourage others. The reflections ... were very clear and well expressed and will be particularly strengthening as we all go forward through these uncertain times, in Christ Jesus."

Our work in the Lord's vineyard, especially at this time, would not have been possible without the support of our many friends and benefactors. We remain grateful to our dear Carmelite nuns who help us in many ways and who hold us dear in their prayers each day. Thanks, dear sisters.

To all our collaborators who help us to deliver our courses and programmes especially Dr Heather Ward, OCDS, Alacoque O'Reilly, OCDS and Julienne McLean, and many others in the Secular Order I would like to express our deepest gratitude.

All who participate on our programmes are a real source of blessing to us. You generously share your wisdom and friendship and support our ministry through your offerings. And, thanks to our Administrator,

Ruth Preston, we are able to continue offering our programmes. Her experience was pivotal in our quick transition to online ministry when the pandemic hit.

The Lord continues to confirm the unity of our little community here at Boars Hill in his peace. We – John, Tony, Yamai, Kelvin and myself - have been a blessing to each other. May the Lord continue to bless us as we give thanks for our fraternal love for each other.

So, friends, it has indeed been a year of blessings in many ways for which we're grateful even as we carry within us much pain. Like many other retreat and spirituality centres, as well as individuals who have lost jobs and means of livelihood, we too have lost much of our income, but we hope for a brighter tomorrow.

Indeed, we can only cope effectively with the near and long-term consequences of the pandemic only if we embrace solidarity and mutual support. Trying to go it al one isn't an option right now. Pope Francis, sums it up well in his new book, "Let us Dream." In his words: "Sometimes, when I think about the challenges before us, I feel overwhelmed. But I'm never hopeless. We are accompanied. We are being sifted, yes, and it is painful; many of us feel powerless and even afraid. But there is also an opportunity in this crisis to come out better."

May God's presence touch your lives and empower you to embrace your joys and sorrows, hopes and fears this Christmas.

May you be affirmed and sustained in your capacity for trust, faith and love.

May you experience in abundance the inner strength you need to help you through this difficult and painful time.

Be assured that despite the hardships the pandemic demands from us - our essential ministry, what St Teresa of Avila called "a service of love" remains: a praying community praying for you all.

God bless you and your family, your community and friends. Thank you for being ours.

Happy Christmas and a blessed New Year full of promise.

In Carmel,



Fr Alexander of Mary Queen Beauty of Carmel, OCD