

Sisters of Jesus Way

Ring out the Christmas bells



Advent 18

Our dear friends,

This letter gives us the opportunity to thank all of you. Your help has come in many ways, cutting up apples, shredding beans, housework and gifts given to us. Most of all we are grateful for your prayers.



Bethany is the house where the Sisters, our lively dog and our cat, who is usually curled up on a best chair, all live. Most of you will be aware that we are extending it. Work began almost a year ago. The noise is sometimes deafening but this has never, as far as are aware, disturbed the peace of Redacre, our Guest House. So visitors have still come and gone and loved staying. The quietness is a miracle in itself. Our builders have been exemplary in creating as little noise as possible. Our neighbours say that they have never known such quiet builders. A Sister supplies them with tea and biscuits throughout the day. Unexpectedly, we were given a large box filled with packets of biscuits. What does it say in the Bible about the Heavenly Father supplying all our needs? He not only gave us the finance to embark on such a big scheme but he has also supplied biscuits for the builders!



We have been encouraged that professionals who have viewed the work have said, on a number of occasions, that it is 'good'. The Building Control Inspector said the block work was the best she had ever seen. Though we have been discouraged by the duration we know that it is a job being done well. We will have a spacious mother house where we are no longer tripping over each other, not to mention the dog. The extended dining room will enable us to eat comfortably rather than squashed together. There will be a new lounge. At present, we only have what we call 'the middle', where we can relax but all of community life continually passes before our eyes as it is also the only route to the upstairs bedrooms! The clatter of a Sister coming down wooden stairs is not conducive to sitting quietly. Some Sisters have had to use their bedrooms as an office so the door has never closed on their work. We have included a study in the new building where we can work. It will include our community library. Our books are scattered throughout the house. Last but not least, two Sisters lost their bedrooms. We have included a number of new bedrooms in the build.

We are grateful to Peter Hinton from St. Mary's Church. He sat with us and helpfully drew up plans. Once we had some firm idea where we were going we employed an architect, Andrew Banks. He has met with us frequently and been patient with us when we have changed our minds or couldn't make a decision. We have been able to pray together. One day the building boss, Karl, was with us in the meeting. After we had prayed he couldn't wait to get outside and tell his lads, Karl who is his son, Steve and Jimmy that we had prayed for them! If young Karl is in difficulties such as wanting advice from his dad but is unable to contact him, he will ask us to pray.



There came a day when all but two of us had to move into Redacre, our Guest House. We apologise to those of you who wanted to stay but couldn't, as the Sisters almost filled the house. Now most, but not all, of the Sisters have returned to noisy, cold and dusty Bethany with only bedrooms liveable in. We are taking visitors again but have to limit numbers. Sisters and our guests now share Redacre dining room. Meals have to be conducted with almost military precision, one lot out and another lot in!

As you can imagine, this has not been, and is not, easy for us. All communities function on some sort of structure in the day, i.e. set times of prayer, set meal times, set responsibilities. We didn't have to think, just be where we should be in the right place at the right time. The structures collapsed. We are meeting in different places, at different times and it often changes from day to day. This adds considerable strain and it is only the grace of God that has enabled us make the necessary adjustments and keep each of us on board. Yet, as with all difficulties, it is grounding us more deeply in the security of being led by the Holy Spirit.

There have been disappointments, not least the delay in completion. After several wrong dates given by the builders, or worked out from our own calculations, we have given up forecasting. We hope that the end is in sight. The date is written in heaven. Often the disappointment has been more specific e.g. 'the roofers will be here tomorrow'. Tomorrow comes and there is no sign of the roofers! They do come eventually. There is now a roof on the building! Similarly, 'the plasterers will be here next week'. Next week comes and not a single plasterer in sight! When you are longing to be back in your own home, all together again, such delay can be very discouraging. Through it all, the Heavenly Father has been speaking to us about trusting him because he is a good, loving Father and we are his children. Indeed, in most of the crises of life the way through is trust in the love of God.



We are looking a little apprehensively at the work that will have to be done when the builders move out. At the moment, we are on a collision course with Advent and Christmas. There will be carpets, curtains, moving furniture, moving us and cleaning. Jesus said that we were not to worry about tomorrow but take one day at a time. We have to discipline ourselves to do just that! God gives strength for the day, not for our imaginings.

We know that some of you have experienced bereavement, disappointment and difficult circumstances. We have learned through the years that every trouble that we face in life, however trivial, or however disastrous, is also an opportunity for spiritual growth. 'Love is not changed by death. And nothing is lost. And all in the end is harvest', wrote Edith Sitwell.

We are going to love our new Bethany. It will be a precious gift from the Heavenly Father. In just the same way, we face many trials in life but we can anticipate a beautiful home at the close of our pilgrimage.

"In the crucible of suffering,
The master imprints His image
on the humble soul.
Just as the heavenly Potter
fashioned our earthly bodies,
So He will create for us a resurrection body
Along the path of suffering."
Albert Knapp ¹

A blessed Advent, joy at Christmas and the wonder of Epiphany enfold you,

The Sisters of Jesus Way

¹ Quoted by M. Basilea Schlink in, 'Fragrance of a Life for God.'