

Sisters of Jesus Way

August 18

Our dear friends,

First, we must apologise that this letter and the details of our Autumn Programme are so late in reaching you. Since we last wrote to you, in November last year, much has happened here.



Last Advent, our dear friends Mason and Nora Porter were called home to the Lord. We felt their deaths keenly as they had both accompanied us since the early days of the community. Originally, Redacre was Mason's family home. He rejoiced that it was now being used for the Lord. Nora's health had been failing for some time. Mason was able to go to her funeral but died, a few days later, on Christmas Eve. Nora was practical and down to earth. She was known for her good works. Mason, by contrast, could be quite forgetful and not very practical. He was generous to the many who came seeking his help. Yet he lived simply, a humble man who loved God. Mason and Nora formed a wonderful team, complementing each other. Mason longed for heaven. He often said to us that he could not wait for the day to come. His prayer was that they would go together and they almost did. The Lord was merciful to his two beloved servants. Latterly, they had spent each Christmas Day with us, so we were a rather forlorn little band on December 25th!

The building work, a large extension to Bethany, is still ongoing. The builders are looking now to completion at the end of September. We are not so convinced ourselves that they will meet that date. Looking out of the window at the planks, girders, blocks, bricks, sand and machinery, it is difficult to imagine it all coming together! We have, in faith, painstakingly chosen where the sockets, radiators and suchlike will go.

In January, Sister Beatrice was awarded British Citizenship. In the light of Brexit, we felt that to apply for this was the only safe way forward. We are grateful to the heavenly Father, as well as all those who have helped us. It has been a long journey from the days when we were anxiously waiting at the airport, as Beatrice arrived for the umpteenth time fearing that she would be turned back. We have said many times that it has helped us glimpse into the intransigence of immigration rules and the plight of those seeking asylum. We were shocked at the financial cost when applying for citizenship whether the application was successful, or otherwise. We were able to bear the cost, but we fear that many families would not. This is deeply troubling. Nevertheless, it was a happy day when, at a ceremony in Birkenhead Town Hall, Sister Beatrice was formally proclaimed a citizen of the United Kingdom. She travelled recently to Switzerland proudly displaying her UK passport!

Sister Hazel has been out with the Street Pastors in Birkenhead. She has already attended one of the teaching modules necessary in order to become a fully-fledged Street Pastor. For some time, she has felt that the Lord has been calling her to do this. She has gone with our blessing and prayers. For those not familiar with the work of Street Pastors, they are there to assist when clubbers emerge in the early hours of the morning. They also visit the rough sleepers.

One door opens and another closes! Sister Marie and Sister Sylvia felt that the Lord was closing the door on the chaplaincy work at Clatterbridge Cancer Centre. For Sister Marie this spanned decades. She is glad that she didn't realise the last time that she was there that it was indeed the last. Events in December, January and February meant that they were unable to go to the hospital. There were other factors and it seemed right to gently close the door. It has been a huge privilege to be alongside the patients and the nurses, to feel part of the hospital family. We continue to meet here with our Cancer Friends Together and, because of our experience of the chaplaincy, help the occasional visitor who arrives here distraught after a diagnosis of cancer.

Another unexpected door opening for us is that we have been asked to be a link community with the Melanesian Sisters in the Solomon Islands. We hope that we will be a blessing to them and they to us. Their joy and happiness seems to spill over. Yet they are facing huge problems. Climate change is causing sea levels to rise and villages disappear into the sea. Islands have had to be vacated and a way of life that has been adhered to for decades, if not centuries, is slowly being destroyed.

In addition to these changes, both data protection and safeguarding have made extra demands on our time. We have had to contact everyone on our newsletter list. There will soon be a new data privacy notice on our website and it will also be here for anyone who wishes to read it. We can see that it is necessary as some charities, in particular, have been careless

or worse with an individual's data. We have always tried to be careful but we have to comply with the details of the new law.

We have also, rather belatedly, realised that we must have changes in the way we book in guests. With the publishing of our website and the use of emails we have entered a different world from the one we inhabited when we began a ministry of hospitality, many years ago. Then, we knew almost everyone who telephoned asking to stay. That does not apply now. Whereas many of our guests are now our friends after staying with us often, it is also true that almost every week we have a request from someone we don't know. We have for some time asked searching questions on the telephone but this is not so easy by email.

Safeguarding has become an issue for communities, as well as churches. This has not only to do with children but also vulnerable adults. Our guests are sometimes vulnerable because of stress. They badly need rest and space for prayer and reflection. We aim to provide that space for them. A stay here is not suitable for a seriously disruptive person, or the difficult individual who everyone else has tried to help and failed! Similarly it is not our ministry and we are not trained to help victims of substance abuse. We have always said these things but occasionally someone slips through the net. In the light of this, we are proposing a form that every visitor will have to sign. This will probably include space for address, telephone number, church, email address and a contact number in case of accident or illness. We may also ask the reason for someone wishing to stay here, and also how they have heard about us. Sometimes, a guest will ask if they can bring a friend and usually we have said, 'Yes'. But in future, the friend will have to complete a form. Many of our visitors arrive at very short notice. We are still thinking and praying about how to proceed with changes because we don't want to curtail that, but we are certain that changes will have to come and soon.

We are grateful to the friends who have come alongside us and helped in many different ways. Thank you to all of you who returned our forms with loving greetings. It was an encouragement to us. Thank you also for those who realised the cost of postage and sent us cheques. Memories came flooding back as we heard from some of you, whom we had not met for many years, but who still wanted to stay in touch.

We have introduced a ten minute time of silence before our Evening Prayer in the chapel. Most of our visitors join us for this. We have found it a blessing at the close of a busy day to sink into the stillness and find it filled with the Presence of the Lord Jesus. He embraces us with his love.

We feel we are in a time of transition, a new building, new procedures for bookings, new data protection, new links with another community and with the Street Pastors and we also hope to have card readers here soon. It is only time that is holding us back and our complete ignorance about how it will work! A friend is helping us! In all this change, as we adjust there is one constant and that is the love of God. Years ago, at the beginning of our community we came across the words, "He himself, the Father, loves you", from John 14:23. It was in German and the translation must have come from one of the older versions of the Bible. It was so simple. It was as if the Father wanted us always to remember those words. We have! In the quietness and stillness they come back again and again. It is this that holds us steady when the going is tough – that we are loved.

The Lord does not always remove the difficulties in our path but he says to us, as he said to St Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you." 2 Cor.12:9 John Wesley wrote, "He rides easily whom the grace of God carries."

We will let Archbishop Fenelon have the last word. "One day of perseverance under trouble is more acceptable to God and does more for the soul's progress, than many years spent in the intoxication of spiritual sweetness."

Our love in Jesus,
Sisters of Jesus Way.



