



THE
LAY COMMUNITY
OF SAINT BENEDICT

AN INTRODUCTION

WITH QUOTES AND INSIGHTS
FROM MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY



“The Lay Community of St Benedict (LCSB) is dedicated to the Gospel and the spirituality of St Benedict as lived out by lay people across the UK and abroad.”

This is how the LCSB describes itself in its publicity materials and online. This document goes further by using the words and experience of members to explore questions such as: What is it like to be a member of the LCSB? How have people joined it? Why do they stay as members? What are their hopes and aspirations? Our aim is to help people to gain a greater understanding of the nature of the LCSB: we welcome you with Benedictine open arms to discover our community. To help you in this process, we are grateful to the 48 members of the LCSB who responded to an online survey –the quotes and graphs in this document are all taken from that survey.

JOINING THE LCSB

The LCSB has existed in two forms in the 47 years since being founded by the monks of Worth Abbey – from 1971 to 2003 it was the Worth Abbey Lay Community, closely linked to the monastery. Since 2003 it has been an independent association, governed by its own constitution, led by an elected leader, council and appointed trustees.

When the LCSB became independent, a community promise was written around which members unite and which is renewed annually. It is the Community’s way of capturing the spirit of St Benedict, as well as the vision of our shared life in Christ.

COMMUNITY PROMISE

In response to the call of
Christ,
I offer myself to Almighty God,
by the help of the Holy Spirit,
with the love of the Lay
Community of St Benedict:

To live holy communion

Create holy space

And offer holy service

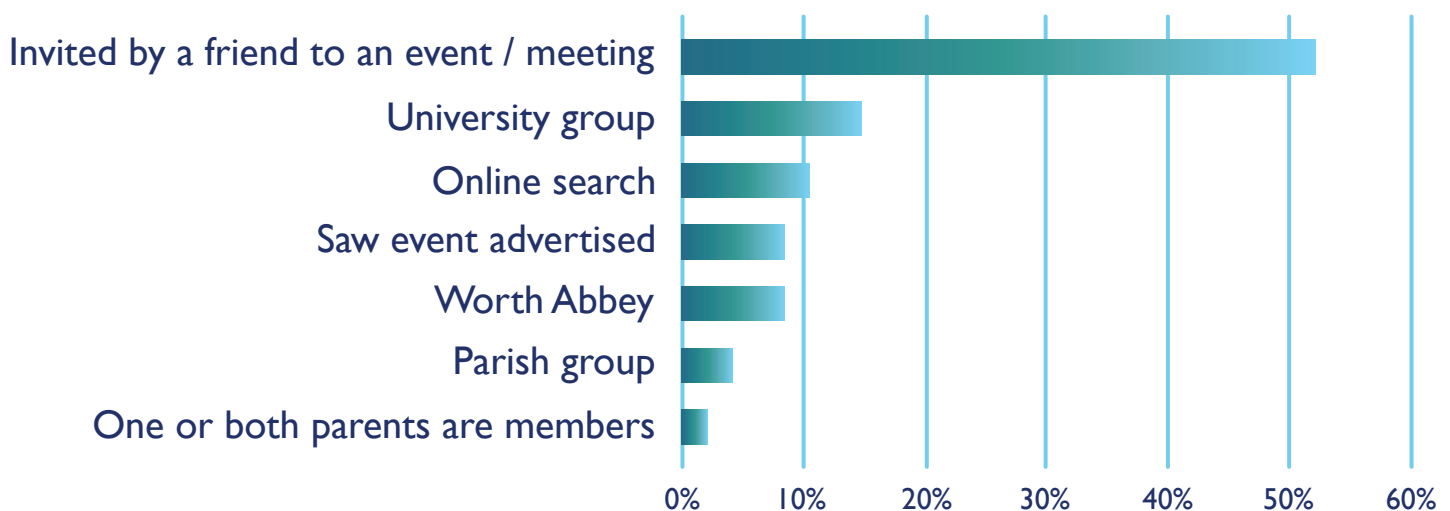
In the ways in which my
circumstances allow.

Most people who joined the community in the early days came for a weekend to Worth Abbey and received hospitality from members of the Lay Community who were resident there. In this way they got to know the monks and their life and worship, had a taste of the rule of St Benedict, and met other lay people who were trying to live their lives in accordance with Benedictine spirituality. This group formed strong bonds as lay people in a common search for deeper prayer and Benedictine community life. The key route to entry, therefore, for those who responded to the survey was being invited by a friend, as the graph shows. "Come and see" was the way in which they discovered these new experiences. A route, which was important in the early days, was the university groups which used to come down to Worth for a Benedictine weekend.



Online is now the main route to the LCSB. If you type "Lay Benedictine" into Google, the first entry you will see is the LCSB. Leaflets left in abbeys and churches also are a source of enquiries. We have a growing number of children of members who when they reach the age of 16 are opting to become full members. Since independence, new members have come through weekends offered by the LCSB – at Worth or in other locations, and also through regional and local meetings organised by the LCSB.

HOW DID YOU FIRST GET TO KNOW THE LCSB?



WHAT DOES IT FEEL LIKE WHEN YOU FIRST ENCOUNTER THE LCSB?

We asked members to share their experience of what it was like to meet the LCSB for the first time. The main themes which emerged were a feeling of welcome and acceptance and a level of interest, even if at the beginning this might be accompanied by a feeling of uncertainty. "I immediately felt at home" said a number of people, or "I found my spiritual home" "my spiritual haven". "Enthused by Benedictine spirituality and yearning to find out more", said another. Some recent members who

have joined in the last 5 years said words like "I felt welcomed by members. I then made up my mind to be part of it", "I was challenged, affirmed, curious, happy" or "I liked the people there and wanted to know more."

"I IMMEDIATELY FELT AT HOME"

BECOMING A MEMBER

The path to membership in the early years was not through a prescribed route. It just happened that people felt that they belonged to the group. Now there is a formal enquiry process and accompaniment which allows both the individual and the community to discern if this is the right place for the enquirer to belong. At the end of this discernment process, the enquirer joins the community in making the LCSB promise – this happens mainly at the Summer gathering, but also may take place in a regional meeting of the LCSB. It is moving to see the whole community welcome new members who join in the promise ceremony for the first time.

We asked people at what moment they felt called to be members of the LCSB and there were a variety of responses. Some said it was almost straight away, many said it was after a year, some related it to the welcome at an LCSB event or a regional meeting. For others it was less determined “Gradually over time - it was part of my journey of discovery of faith.” Someone from the early days said “Back in the 1970s it just happened.” One of the younger

members commented “I’ve always felt like a member as I’ve grown up with the LCSB.” One of our recent members is a United Reformed Minister who said “Fairly soon as I’d been a closet Benedictine for forty years.” The Rule of St Benedict crosses all denominations and is one of the reasons why we are an ecumenical community. One of the founder members, now a Catholic priest, placed his membership in the context of prayer and said “probably in the peace and quiet of church.” Another new member refers to the enquiry process and said “After a couple of sessions with my LCSB mentor whilst I was ‘enquiring’”. Typically, this means that as the mentor was explaining what the LCSB is to the enquirer, this resonated and helped the enquirer decide to pursue membership of the community. This is our ideal – to welcome people, take the time to share the life of the community, and then allow the person to decide with the support of the community if they want to pursue membership or not.

Promise Ceremony of the LCSB at the Summer Gathering in August 2016, Unity Chapel, Worth Abbey





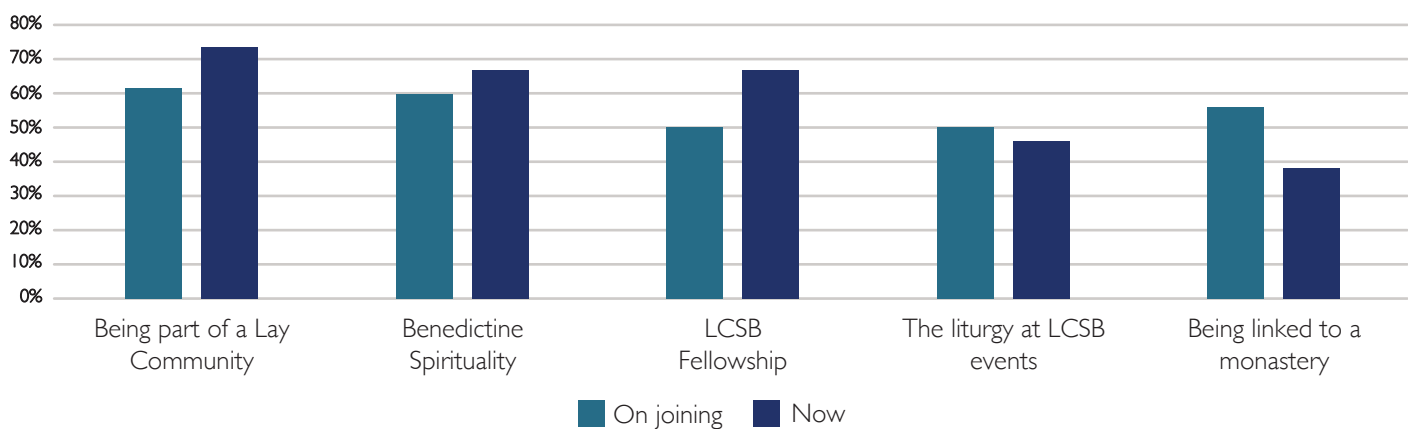
The young families, future of the LCSB, lead the community in worship

WHAT ATTRACTS PEOPLE TO MEMBERSHIP AND KEEPS PEOPLE STAYING IN THE LCSB?

There are three big attractions of membership of the LCSB which are closely linked. The first is to be part of a lay community. The second is the attraction of Benedictine spirituality. The third is LCSB fellowship.

The following graph shows the highest rated experiences which most attracted people to become members, and those which are key to membership today.

**On joining: What part did the following experiences play in your decision to become a member of the community?
Now: And how important are they to your membership of the community today?**



Since the independence of the LCSB, the fellowship of the community has grown in importance, and there has been a drop in the importance of links to a monastic community. This reflects the maturing of the community, in its confidence to live out Benedictine values, which is also reflected in the strength of attraction of liturgy at LCSB

events. Nevertheless, members recognise the importance of our links to monastic communities, starting with Worth Abbey – in the last year community events have taken place at Worth Abbey, Buckfast Abbey, and Douai Abbey and next year, for the first time, an LCSB Lenten retreat will take place at Ampleforth Abbey.

When asked if there was any additional reason people would like to cite for why they became members, the responses reflect the diversity of the community:

“As a Methodist married to a Catholic, we found it difficult to find a spiritual home and the LCSB gave us that, as well as a sense of belonging for our children.”

“I felt supported in my life as a wife and mother by the other families in the Wolverhampton group - these were people living out similar lives to me and managing to find space for prayer and reflection - and people who were committed to married and family life.”

“I found Benedictine spirituality very compelling and I believed that joining the LCSB would help me to try and live the principles in my daily life.”

“A number of members helped me to explore and grow in spirituality. I feel I have a lot to learn and that it is a lifetime journey.”

“Being a member has helped me focus on my prayer life. I have learnt a lot from members about the Gospel at Scripture weekends. This has changed my life from being passive in my faith to being active and wanting to learn more’ (written by a new member)

“I value the online links - prayer hub & quotes”

“I wanted something that would provide a regular pattern of daily prayer”

“I wanted to be part of a wider family within the church which reached beyond the parish”

“It offered an opportunity for our whole family to be involved.”

THE SUPPORT THAT BEING A MEMBER BRINGS TO LIFE AS A CHRISTIAN

This document arose as a result of a discussion which took place at the LCSB Summer gathering. One of the members said “please tell me how you live out your life as a Christian and as a member of the LCSB in order to help me in my journey.”

Many of the members refer to the strength which belonging to a community brings in committing to a deeper prayer life and to living through life’s challenges. The community provides stability to its members. The Rule of St Benedict plays a vital role in providing this strength. One of the core values of St Benedict is to create a balance of prayer, work and community life, and members adhere to this desire with daily prayer and lectio.

Here are some quotes from members:

“Benedictine spirituality acts as a prism through which I see my Christianity.”

“Having discovered the Benedictine way and found it inspirational, it was a great blessing to find that there was a lay group available to encourage me to try and live the principles in a very secular environment”

“I appreciate the more frequent types of links (prayer, quotes...) with other members. Membership also encourages me to pray the Office more. Plus some priceless friendships”

“It feels like a backbone”

“It gives me confidence talk about being a Christian with people I meet and invite them to join me, mainly in parish events, but also to tell them about the grace of God in my life and the support and inspiration I get from the LCSB”

“It has given my spiritual style a more focused view and has enabled me to know what to do in certain circumstances because of The Rule”

“It helps to keep my faith grounded”

“It provides a source of stability at a time when we have been moving about”

“Stability from St Benedict's rule - and to keep a generous heart in sharing what I have”

“The rule of St Benedict is completely in agreement with Jesus teaching so this complements my daily quiet times”

“The rule is my guide to practice”

LIVING THE PROMISE AS A MEMBER OF THE LCSB

Daily life for members of the LCSB is about living holy communion, creating holy space and offering holy service. This takes different forms. Many members say the Divine Office daily, and do lectio divina, though this is not prescribed. One of the guiding principles of the LCSB is to live out our Community promise "in the ways in which my circumstances allow." Some members read the rule of St Benedict daily, and all are affected and inspired by St Benedict's teaching. Some take part in the Eucharist daily or go at some time in the week in addition to Sunday. Many enjoy being part of a daily network of shared quotes, as well as different prayer networks. Many see the hospitality which they offer as a daily living out of the Rule of St Benedict. The Listen magazine, published twice a year by the LCSB, is cited by a number of people as a help in their daily life. Many but not all belong to local and regional groups and gain great sustenance in their daily life from this sharing – it is hard to be Benedictine and not meet in fellowship, which is why the community is currently exploring the possibility of virtual sharing on Skype or the internet, and also increasing the number of regional and local groups. For many members of the LCSB daily life includes service to others.

In the following quotes, different practices of the LCSB members can be seen and will hopefully be of inspiration to others:

LIVING HOLY COMMUNION

"Regional groups are a time for deepening spirituality, community & family gathering, for sharing each others' gifts & talents"

"Spending Easter at Cefn Lea"

"I pray for members of the LCSB"

"I am part of my church's Bible study group"

"Keep in touch with the community by prayer, emails, phone calls."

"We offer lots of hospitality at our home"

"Just be myself, as God made me"

"The Summer gathering and other events encourage my on-going commitment"

"It is the regional and local events which are important for me"

IN THE WAYS
IN WHICH MY
CIRCUMSTANCES
ALLOW...

CREATING HOLY SPACE

"I try to have some periods of silence in the day"

"I use a mantra (the Jesus prayer)"

"I try to use Wednesday Word for individual lectio each week"

"I find it very hard to unravel what I would do as a Christian anyway, as distinct from what I do as a member of the LCSB, though praying for people through the prayer hub is definitely one of the things. I also try to do some part of the office every day."

"Morning prayer and lectio, compline using Universalis"

"I copy the Gospel and the readings of the day into a notebook"

"The heart of my Christian life is personal prayer, which I take to be part of 'creating holy space' "

"I say the Rosary"

"I enjoy regular reflections using Thomas Merton or Sister Chittister"

"I say the morning office most days and evening prayer sometimes (I am not very disciplined, I fear!)"

OFFERING HOLY SERVICE

"I offer holy service in my role as a yoga teacher and therapist - I try to make holy space by practising silence, by meditation and yoga"

"I act as a carer in my family"

"I offer holy service to two churches and two homeless projects"

"I do some voluntary work for my local food bank"

"I visit the sick and infirm - it's a quiet ministry - living out holy communion, holy service and I really appreciate 'as my circumstances allow' "



The teenagers gathered at Cefn Lea for Easter

We close off this section with two beautiful and inspirational witnesses, the first from one of our newer members, and the second from an older member.

"I 'put on' and repeat my Promise every day when I put on my Medal of St Benedict. I try to say the Community Prayer daily and pray for our Community and its leaders. Although I am Anglican, I use Magnificat daily as this is what a lot of my brothers and sisters do. I regularly lead a Lectio Divina Group and try to engage in Holy Service. After my prayers, I try to remember to do some manual work. I tend to have a lot of regular/daily Church/Community work, but there is also the ironing and cutting the grass!"

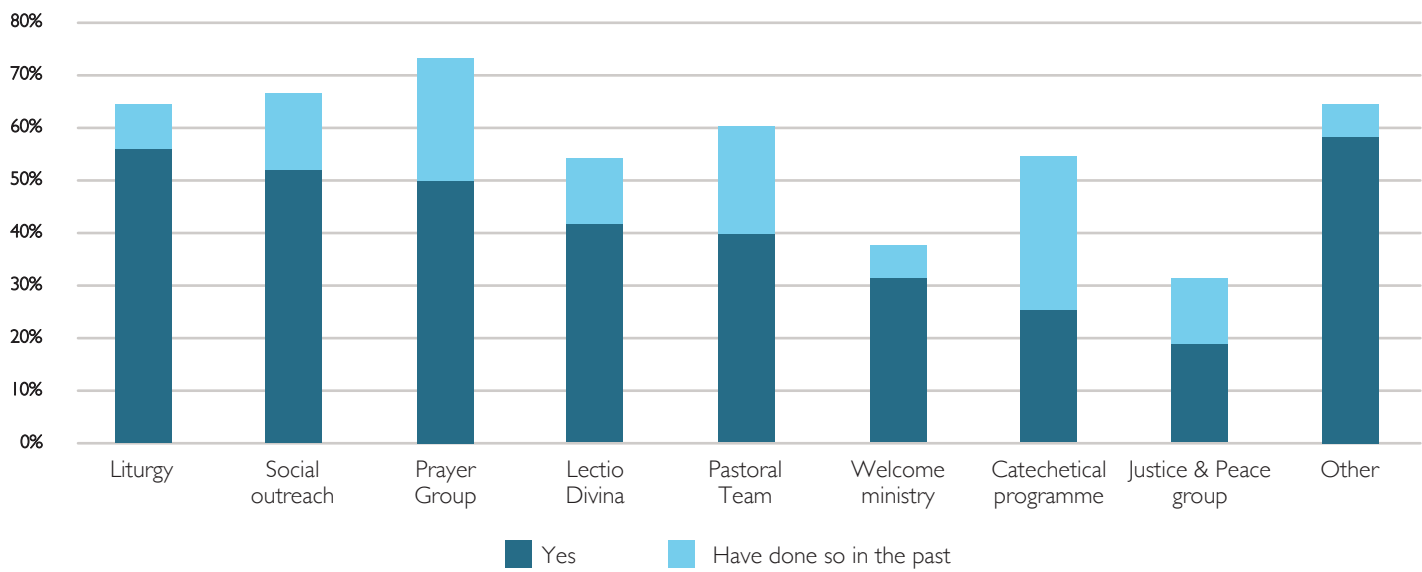
“To live holy communion: I try to behave in a Christian manner towards my family, friends, those I meet at work and casually, with special interest in those potentially marginalised. I try to offer practical or spiritual support when I sense it is needed.

To create holy space: I follow the Rule according to the daily readings, try to have a spiritual book on the go, listen to the thought for the day on the radio, pray alone and with my husband, attend regular mass, listen to the Sunday morning service to add dimension to my own, host a lectio group when possible. I try to share the joy that my faith has given me with people I know and new people I meet.

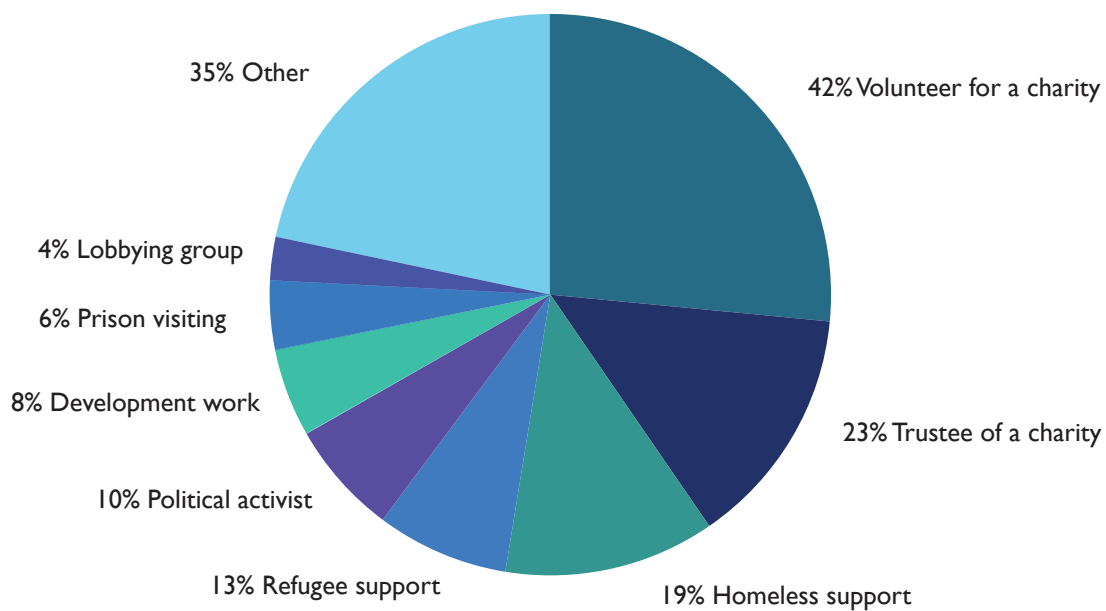
To offer holy service: I run Cafod and parish coffee mornings; volunteer with parish events; do extra-curricular school events in the school where I volunteer as a teacher; run a pen pal club to encourage international bridge-building; tutor EFL students, run a free cycling club for beginners to encourage healthier ways to travel. I try to help create safer streets by volunteering for speedwatch. I help a local corner shop to recycle, and cut waste by using and trying to share out the otherwise wasted food.”

THE OTHER ACTIVITIES OF LCSB MEMBERS

LCSB members are deeply involved offering holy service in parish ministries, as can be seen in the responses in the graph below.



Many are also involved in non-church activities of a social or political nature:



The other category is rich and includes volunteering as Board Director of a Catholic multi-academy; Christian gym where recovering addicts, ex-offenders and those struggling with mental health issues can come together; supporting the Catholic Church in a village in Ghana; choir charity concerts; one of the teams that provides a hot, home

cooked lunch every Saturday for those in need, help with the Winter Night Shelter, mental health first aider, area coordinator for Christian vision for men, funding and awareness for a twinned parish in Cambodia, Barnardo's supported lodging; and support to a life peer.

THE LCSB SUMMARISED

We asked people to say in one sentence what the LCSB means to them, and we conclude here with their responses, as their witness really speaks from the heart about what the LCSB is.

BENEDICTINE

A community trying to help each other get closer to God through Benedictine spirituality

Belonging to a group of God's people who are not tied to one place or one view of 'religion' but who have a common link in the life of Saint Benedict

A fellowship of believers and enquirers rooted in Benedictine spirituality

FAMILY

A loving, supportive family

A wide group of friends who share similar ideals, who I feel comfortable with and connected to.

After about 46 years, the LCSB is like a family to me - a rather wonderful extended family, as varied as my real-life family, with its full share of characters; sometimes uplifting, sometimes exasperating, but always enriching. Or almost always!

It is my extended family within the church.

It gives me support by meeting with local members who help me to develop my spirituality & prayer life

Rootedness

COMMUNITY

A Christian community which respects its members' diverse needs and understandings of what it means to be a Christian

A community of like-minded individuals who share a common belief together in the glory of God.

A community of people many of whom I love very much and feel loved by

Community of encouragers

Inspirational community, supportive prayer and lifelong friends.

Special people helping and supporting special people in all sorts of situations

Fellowship

Focus, community, spirituality and fun

WELCOME

The people who welcomed me in and showed me another way to live.

It gives me a sense of belonging in a Christian community

An accepting diverse group of people who are in it for the long term and welcoming of new people and returners

SPIRITUAL HOME

A challenging and affirming holy home, that feeds and encourages me

Helps to keep me focused spiritually and alive

It supports me in my spiritual journey

The LCSB is where I first encountered God and is my spiritual home.

A spiritual network where, with the help of others, I may grow in God's love.

Spiritually inspirational

Supports me in my quest to know Jesus more personally and to live more closely to the values of the Gospel of Christ.

Living inspiration of people who show me how, stimulated by the gospels, the saints and the Rule they live out their lives.

PRAYER

Prayer and fellowship

It is a prayerful support, and we have a sense of belonging

It's an inspiration to maintain and deepen my relationship with God and to see others with God's eyes

Prayer, study and community

A reinvigoration of the spirit and call to holiness

A lifeline of prayer and support

A help in coming closer to God and our fellow man

It is behind me in my faith journey

OTHER

A God vision of another way

A product of the 1970s trying to operate in a post-Christian age

The new parish

The LCSB Council meets for a quarterly meeting at Douai Abbey in February 2017



FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Please contact Fiona Rae, Administrator of the LCSB, if you are interested in learning more about our community:

laybenedictines@gmail.com

Our website: www.laybenedictines.org

Twitter: [@LCStBen](https://twitter.com/LCStBen)

Facebook: [@LayCommunityOfStBenedict](https://www.facebook.com/LayCommunityOfStBenedict)