



Friends

The Newsletter for Friends
of the Lay Community of Saint Benedict

August 2023

Any guest who happens to arrive at the monastery should be received just as we would receive Christ himself, because he promised that on the last day he will say: I was a stranger and you welcomed me.

RB53

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Benedict Week at Malling Abbey, Kent

Dear Friends of the LCSB

"Why pray when the world is burning?" These words which started and ended Abbess Anne's talk to us on the last evening of St Benedict Week encapsulate the hope which we have as Christians. She moved us into the deep territory of a contemplative life. We are like trees, she said. Growing in a particular place, changing the atmosphere around us, bringing more love into the world. With deep roots we can transform fear into hope. And trees support each other like the body of Christ. This was a deep inspiration for our community and for the work of the Caring for Creation team.

In Mary Hirst's talk we were pointed with incredible beauty and poignancy to the person of Christ. Benedict would never want attention on himself. One particular gift which Mary has brought us is a feel for St Benedict as a person, due in part to the Manquehue spirituality and their devotion to the account of Benedict's life by St Gregory the Great, not a huge part of the EBC tradition.

"It is wonderful to celebrate St Benedict Week - he points us to Christ - he provides a way, a stepladder, a handrail, a map, the tools to walk steadily, not alone, helping each other get to the goal together which is heaven and Christ."
Mary Hirst

Abbot Christopher was fascinating drawing a parallel between the Synod on Synodality and the Rule - "it is a Benedictine moment for the Church". He predicts that one of the key outcomes of the Synod will be a review of the role of women in the Catholic Church, and stressed how much it is a work of the Holy Spirit for us to remain united in such reflections.



If you want to read a beautiful account of the three keynote talks then please fast forward to Michelle Lees's article. And Henrie has covered all the incredible succession of community gatherings which took place during St Benedict Week.

The week started as the inspiration of the Outreach Team - it would be so nice, they thought, for us to get together for the feast of St Benedict and create a space where our families and friends would feel comfortable getting to know us. It looks like even the torrential rain and thunderstorm which impacted the Northern Lights gathering was not going to stop us. Indeed this acted as an encouragement to later groups to brave the weather, showing true perseverance of the type that many of us learnt on Cross walks.

And there was lots more - the podcasts and blogs, a daily ration of thought, prayer and celebration of being a lay or monastic Benedictine. Here is a little digest - all the original writing, recordings, talks and photos can be found on <https://www.lcsb.uk/st-benedict-week>

The launch of St Benedict week was marvellous with a blog by **Esther de Waal** who has now inspired three generations to love and know St Benedict. This blog points to St Benedict and the environment - fresh, insightful and important. And a podcast with **Sarah Morgan** who from her coffee shop in Brighton exudes energy, life and fun while talking about what she likes about St Benedict. We would all love, I am sure, to go into her coffee shop and be greeted by her!

Jane Taylor on time-rich listening "I can make the unstated purpose of my listening a template for exploring the sanctity of everyday life. You are not alone, is what I am always saying (or not actually saying), above all."

Br Aidan Messenger from Douai Abbey on how stability and roots "enable a monk to endure trials of manifold kinds, after which comes the crown of virtue...which lay the ground for true growth in holiness."

Beautiful reflections on the importance of the spiritual way of St Benedict were shared by **Mike Woodward** "My attraction is to the drop out student who felt a call, and went with it...into the darkness of a remote cave, until he was ready to emerge with something to share."

Abbot Mark Barrett led us into one of the most important virtues of the monastic life as he took patience and all that goes with it into the Benedictine toolbox.

"In a divided and divisive world, the voice of St Benedict calls us to come together despite all our differences, to find meaning, purpose and fellowship." **Adam Simon** wrote of the welcome to all which is a key value of the Rule.

The wit and simplicity of **Revd Janet Lees** touches deep - "Once a year the oldies of the church, the revered ones, get a day of celebration and so in July Benedict gets his."

It is enlightening to hear from **Stuart McPherson**, headmaster of Worth School, how the most ancient of Benedictine traditions is brought to life in Worth school - the education of young people.

Fr Aidan Murray talks in his podcast about the new mission in Brighton and rediscovering the missionary soul of monastic living - it is inspiring.

"In our Benedictine community... I encounter Christ. These people provide me with daily experiences that help me to listen to the word of God. No Benedict – No rule – No community – Less listening – a poorer Christian Life." **Peter Firkin**

We even had an AI written blog in the style of Henri Nouwen. "Benedictine living is not just for monastics, but for everyone who seeks a life grounded in purpose, intentionality, and love." **ChatGPT**

We returned to the beginning with the final blog as **Dr Catherine Reid** owned up to her initial inspiration to discover the Rule – Esther de Waal.

"The *Rule* speaks to much of what is common in human experience, bringing a pattern and rhythm to daily living that looks to keep our eyes fixed on Christ, who is the source of all life." Catherine Reid

All in all, I would like to express huge thanks to the community and so many who made this week happen. I would particularly like to thank the writers, podcasters and speakers; the We Team and local convenors of groups; and Mary Hirst for bringing together all the blogs and the podcasts and the social media that went with it. And lastly the nuns of St Mary's Delbarton, New Jersey for their novena which infused the week with prayer.

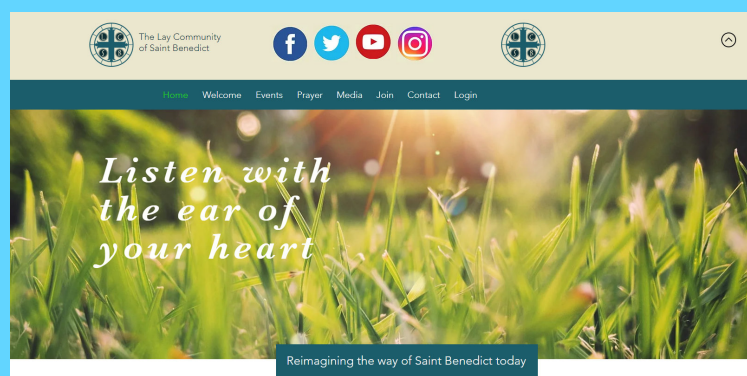
Next stop is the Summer Gathering. We look forward to seeing many of you there. We have a programme of prayer, sharing, friendship and fun. How good to be together. We welcome day visitors but please book now!



Adam Simon - LCSB Leader

[**St Benedict Week**](#)

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lcsb.uk



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St Benedict Week Talks

The three Benedict Week talks were fascinating and are well worth watching again. Themes running through all three talks were climate change, language, and the movement of the Holy Spirit. It was interesting that each speaker drew this out of Benedict's Rule and talked about how we can bring this to our lives outside of the Monastery or Abbey.

Abbot Christopher Jamison -

All Should Be Called to Counsel, discerning together the future of the Church.

We were promised a challenging discourse, and we certainly received an intelligent look at how decisions are made within the Christian faith. Abbot Christopher's premise was that some people within the Church are Dystopian - everything is a disaster, demonstrated through an escalation of language, or Utopian - everything will be fine or Positopian - we will get through this well by being positive and looking for solutions through a problem.

Abbot Christopher then challenged us to think about decision making with a Synodal methodology. I was brought up as a Methodist, later became a Quaker, and now practice Anglican Christianity. I thought the C of E Synod was how every Synod makes decisions, but no. Every Synod system responds to the users' needs. Abbot Christopher started with the Catholic Synod and how the Pope wants a greater openness and discussion from Bishops alongside consultation with the laity. This brings a lot of risk and complexity. He quoted Miriam Willans "*Who speaks on behalf of whom, on what issues, with what authority, binding on whom*" and referred back to this quote as the talk developed into other systems of Synodality. He spoke of the Methodist Connection (Chapter) where preachers discern the movement of the Holy Spirit, the Baptist Covenant (vows) where one enters into the promise of the movement, Quaker Meeting for Business (Mystical) which is a slow wisdom, discerning the movement of the Holy Spirit and Church of England (votes) where solutions are debated and then voted on, like in the UK Parliament.

The talk concluded by outlining how LCSB, as a positopian 'ecumenical new movement'; a laboratory of synodal ways.



Mary Hirst, Discipleship Co-ordinator, LCSB - Pointing to Christ

Mary's talk was a more contemplative discussion about how Benedict points to Christ. Mary used Philippians 3 vv7-11 and contrasted how Benedict supports these verses and how Benedict's rule is fully based on scripture. Prayer being highly important to Benedict reflecting St Paul in preferring nothing more important than the love of Christ.

Benedict demonstrates the way to the Lord with his ladder of humility (BR Ch 7) and draws us to the cross through humility's self-emptying so that the Holy Spirit can fill us with love for Christ. At this point Mary invited us to join her in spending a few moments in contemplation of the cross and to leave our joys and cares there, at the foot of the cross.

Finally Benedict asks us to take care of things, of our resources including the care of creation. He points to the glory of God through our everyday interactions, including the Earth. In putting others first, we put Christ first and so become more like Him. Benedict points us to Christ and implores us to live out your love of Christ.



Mother Anne Clarke, Abbess of Malling Abbey - Benedict's Path of Prayer



'Why pray when the world is burning?' The enclosed Benedictine life is a living out of the gospel in a particularly focussed way. Mother Anne had a very successful career as an IT Software Engineer and had been politically aware of climate change issues and was involved with the Green Party before she realised that all the distractions of the world actually drowned out her ability to listen to God's word and God's world

Her discussion on 'mental furniture' was intriguing. The Abbey's unexciting life and constant repetition of the scriptures, makes them your mental furniture. What is in your mind in the day will influence your thinking and actions, as advertisers know all too well. Mother Anne said that it's important that we are careful about what language and words are influencing us. What do we look at? What do we listen to? How do we speak? Do we engage in love and gentleness? Benedict's Rule challenges us to intentionally grow through silence.

Mother Anne compared us to trees. We can be similar by putting down roots, create a healing atmosphere, being courageous in the face of fears, being channels for spiritual renewal. I felt a link to the Quaker Advice 27 to 'Live adventurously'. The only hope for humanity is to pray for spiritual renewal, and seek to consume less so that the world's resources can be shared and preserved. That is why we should pray when the world is burning.

These summaries do not do the talks justice at all.

Please do watch them again at <https://www.lcsb.uk/talk-videos>

Michelle Lees

St Benedict Week 8th-16th July

Sparked by the positive experience of at least one young adult who was introduced to the LCSB during last year's Saturday Summer Gathering fun afternoon, the Outreach team prayed and thought about how we could recreate more opportunities with such a relaxed atmosphere. We were seeking to create an environment which would make our loved ones who are not members, feel welcome too.

We thought, keep it local, short and sweet; let everyone decide themselves what suited their little locality best and encourage members to invite their special guests along. The exception had to be the Northern Lights who live long distances from each other; their travel would take up most of the day.

Deciding on when, we thought, "What better reason to celebrate than our founder's feast day?" We encouraged members to think up the simplest of ways to meet up on or in the days either side of St Benedict's, even if it were just with one other person. Of course, our amazing resourceful members came up trumps! Teas, coffees, walks, visits to holy sites and beautiful places of nature were all on the agenda, as was of course the cricket¹². I was surprised not to see any visits to the pub. I've seen no record of the online quiz enjoyed by the young adults either, but what a great idea to have one after they had just spent a week in Taizé!

The northernmost members made a fantastic fun-filled weekend of it, complete with a blustery day on Bridlington Beach. Please do enjoy the photo gallery on St Benedict Week under the Events tab to see some of us braving the weather with true LCSB grit.

Our esteemed leader could of course not miss the opportunity to expand this simple concept of meeting up to inviting every Benedictine community he could think of to take part ¹². The idea snowballed into offering three great Benedictine talks offered worldwide on Zoom, blogs, podcasts and the opportunity to pray with monasteries throughout the world. We have Mary Hirst to thank for much of the work, which you shall find if you tap into all there is to see and hear on the [St Benedict page](#).

Henrie Harrington-Vogt

<https://www.lcsb.uk/st-benedict-week-gallery>







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LCSB SUMMER GATHERING 2023

**Come and join our
Summer Gathering for
the afternoon!**

- ➔ Fun & Games on the cricket pitch
- ➔ Meet a Monk
- ➔ Walk
- ➔ Lectio Divina
- ➔ Tea
- ➔ Lay Community Vespers
- ➔ BBQ



**DAY
TICKET!**

Free to attend for the afternoon, from 2pm
£10 if you would like to stay for the barbecue

Worth Abbey
Saturday 26th August
For more info or to book please email:
laybenedictines.bookings@gmail.com

Booklet and Timetable on our website
Join us online - contact email above

www.lcsb.uk/summer-gathering

Reflections on a trip to Taizé - June 2023



At the beginning of July, a group of young people from our community travelled to the Taizé community in France for a week of spiritual retreat. This ecumenical community welcomes young people, and the young at heart, throughout the year to weekly programmes of bible study and community building. You will likely be familiar with the music of Taizé, in which one or two lines from a psalm are repeated in a meditative way. The simplicity of the songs allows for multiple languages to be sung during each service and people visit from all corners of the world.

This was my fifth visit to Taizé, having first visited with my school during sixth form and returning 3 times afterwards. The reason that I go back again and again is that I truly believe the Holy Spirit moves deeply there. The beauty of the services and the community that is formed during the week is unique and

precious. I experience great joy in living together in simplicity and being able to talk to and pray with other young people of faith.

One of my biggest takeaways from the week was the value of silent prayer. During the 3 daily prayers, a silence lasting around 7 minutes is taken. It is a very profound experience when a church that has over 700 people in it falls completely silent. Each person sitting with God and being attentive to the Holy Spirit. The Holy space which has been created in Taizé provides a sacred sanctuary for people to sit in quiet contemplation of the scriptures that have been heard and discussed during the day and to listen to the lord. In chapter 6 of the rule of Saint Benedict it is written "to be silent and to listen beseems the disciple". I hope to have in some small way have deepened my own discipleship during this time and am trying to make a habit of taking a small silence each day to re-centre my attention on God.

I continue to feel extremely grateful to be part of our Lay Community, where we are encouraged to participate in retreats and reflections. I would like to take the opportunity to thank Mary Hirst for the planning and preparation that was done so that the group could all make our little pilgrimage.

I hope that this small piece has given a flavour of the time that we spent away in Taizé and I urge you to try to take a moment of silence in your day to come back to God's presence and allow your heart to be moved in that silence.

Matt O'Donoghue

Reflections on a trip to Taizé - June 2023



Visiting Taizé was a highlight of my year, I had always heard people in the LCSB talking about it and it had piqued my interest but I had never had the opportunity to go. So when I was offered the trip this summer, I thought it was a sign to go for it. My mum had previously been on pilgrimage and only had positive things to say about it. Although I was pessimistic going into it, that was soon overturned and I had an amazing week building new friendships that will last a lifetime and being as close to God as I think I've ever been. It was also extremely interesting to talk to those from other Christian denominations and I feel like I've learnt so much more about how others and myself see the Lord. Overall it was one of the most powerful religious experiences of my life and would recommend it to anyone no matter what their dispositions might be towards pilgrimage.

Will Matthews

I went to Taizé this summer with the Lay community of St Benedict and I would say it is the best decision I have ever made as it was an amazing experience. The Taizé community has gone over my expectations in terms of the sense of unity of individuals from different backgrounds, cultures, ethnicities, nationalities, and faith coming together in communion with the Holy Spirit to worship God. Taizé has a presence of home, oneness, prayer, simplicity, and community helping each other in any way possible. What have I taken home with me from Taizé? LOVE, the love of God is so unmeasurable that God's children come in large numbers to show love but most importantly to search and find out the purpose of their creation.

Anna Gomez



Reflections on a trip to Taizé - June 2023



I had originally heard about Taizé at Cefn Lea a few years ago. When it came up again in Easter 2023 and at the YA retreat in February, I thought that it sounded like a great opportunity - I thought, 'why not?'

In Taizé, I found a community of people from all over the world who had come in search of many answers - but mainly gaining more questions, whilst finding time to think, solidarity in faith, and friendship. Personally, it has been difficult for me to connect with other young people in the church. This is due to a few factors, but the main one being simply a lack of provision for/focus on young adults in my hometown church. Being able to talk to other young people and gather their experiences of the church has been really informative for me; to know others in different countries have had similar struggles connecting with other young people, makes it clearer to me that this is more of a universal experience than I had thought

previously. Although that thought has been somewhat of a comfort, it does shine a light on a bigger issue at hand.

Taizé has been fruitful in a way that has allowed me to connect with my faith, different cultures, and new friends in which I felt able to have quality conversation with. It was a real source of encouragement for me to continue to develop my faith! And to continue to prioritise choosing happiness and life.

It was truly a joy to walk through, and experience everything happening in just a small village in the south of France. It was even more of a joy to be able to take a village home with me too.

Grace



CARING FOR CREATION

Season of Creation 2023

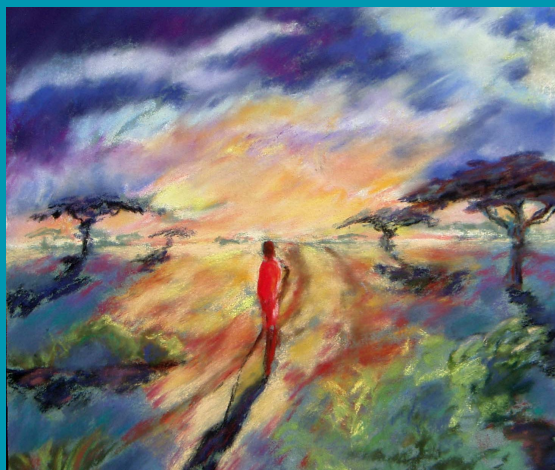
We are approaching the Season of Creation - which begins on September 1st and lasts until October 4th, the feast of St Francis of Assisi. The Community will launch its celebration of the Season at Sunday evening prayer on September 3, and we hope you will join us for that.

As last year, we will be marking the Season by bringing its themes of wonder, joy and thanksgiving for the beauties of Creation, and of repentance for our share in the over-exploitation of the world's natural resources, into the prayer life of the Community, in particular with a specific prayer marking the Season at Morning and Evening prayer each day. We also invite you to celebrate Creation in one or more of these ways:

- Walking with Wonder: Take some time each week during September to walk in nature, and reflect on the wonders of Creation and our responsibility to look after this fragile world
- Taking a Quiet Hour: a time without electricity or any of the devices that depend on it, to be mindful of the need to conserve energy and minimise waste
- Joining us for a community screening (via Zoom!) of The Letter, an 80 minute film in which five people representing groups who are most affected by the climate crisis meet Pope Francis to discuss his encyclical letter Laudato Si'.
- Reading (or re-reading) Laudato Si' and reflecting on the many calls to action it contains.

We hope that you will feel inspired to join in!

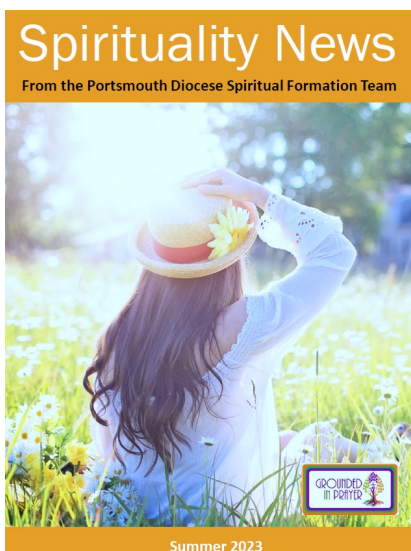
Peter and Catherine Stott, on behalf of the LCSB Caring for Creation group.



The Lay Community of St Benedict



*To be constantly in
the presence of the
Lord*



The heart of Benedictine Spirituality and living as a Lay Benedictine is the balance of prayer and work - ora et labora. In his Rule, St Benedict gives us a simple guide to achieving that balance by saying when his monks should pray each day and how they should pray by reciting the psalms and reading scripture. Benedict set down a daily routine to help his monks live in community - in harmony with each other and the world around them.

How do we translate this into the 21st century and our busy lives outside a monastery? In the Lay Community of St Benedict we meet online up to 6 times a day, with members attending whatever sessions they can manage in their working day. There is a mix of Lauds and Vespers from the Divine Office of the Church, Anglican Compline, 2 periods of silent prayer and an early morning session at 6.45am led by members of the community in their own style.

At our Summer Gathering at Worth Abbey, where the community was founded in 1971, new members are welcomed and, with other members, they say the LCSB promise: 'To live Holy Communion, Create Holy Space and Offer Holy Service in the ways in which my circumstances allow.'

The Benedictine Spirituality of praying together every day, working to build our community and the parishes we find ourselves in, supporting each other on our individual journeys to the Kingdom of Heaven, gives us the foundation to be constantly 'in the presence of the Lord'.

At Lauds and Vespers we say our Community Prayer which ends 'Give me courage to pray each day and work for your kingdom of justice and peace in ways large or small that this community of Saint Benedict may be strengthened and grow in the peace that I seek for myself and for all your creation'.

Visit the website www.lcsb.uk

Peter Agius

Spirit Unbounded Human Rights in the Catholic Church A Lay Synodal Assembly - online and live in Bristol

Root & Branch, with Companions around the world, is organising this event to run in parallel with the Synod of Bishops and Laity in Rome. Headline speaker, Sr Joan Chittister OSB, will be of special interest to members and friends of the LCSB. Mary Ring and Peter Agius are at the heart of the organisation team and can answer any questions you have about it.

Book early for reduced price tickets - live and online.

<https://spiritunbounded.org/event>

<https://www.rootandbranchsynod.org/spirit-unbounded>



HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

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STEVEN NEWCOMB

and
a host of international leaders, thinkers, activists
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to coincide with the International Synod in Rome.

ONLINE
all week
8 - 14th October 2023



LIVE and ONLINE
ROME, IT and BRISTOL, UK
13- 14th October, 2023

[www.spiritunbounded.org/event](https://spiritunbounded.org/event)



From the Scallop Memorial to Benjamin Britten on Aldeburgh Beach. "I hear those voices that will not be drowned" is a quote from Britten's opera, *Peter Grimes*.

Upcoming events

**Summer Gathering at Worth Abbey
Friday 25th August to Monday 28th August**

**Council Meeting at Douai Abbey
Saturday 16th September**

Please send future items for Friends to:
laybenedictines@gmail.com

www.lcsb.uk

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