

CHRISTMAS GREETINGS
FROM
THE COMMUNITY OF OUR LADY OF WALSINGHAM

CHRISTMAS 2011



*Every creature on the face of the Earth receives the proclamation.
In the astonished silence of the universe,
the words which the Liturgy puts on the lips on the Church
take on a cosmic resonance:
Christus natus est nobis.
Venite, adoremus!
Bl. John Paul II*

In this wonderful season of Advent, while living in anticipation of Christmas, we would like to add our own news to the Good News of God's living presence amongst us.

We have been abundantly blessed in the past few months especially with the final profession of Sr Gabi on the 24th September. The day was filled with so many graces and so much joy. Sr Gabi was most appreciative of the fact that she could take her final vows at the shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham. She felt overjoyed at the number of her family and friends who were able to come across from Poland and from all over England for this important day in her life. On this note, she would like to express again her 'thank you' to all of you who have supported her in her vocation. During the stay of Sr Gabi's family, the community was deeply immersed in the Polish language and culture. We had a bit of a crash course in Polish, having Mass celebrated each day by Fr Antoni, Sr Gabi's parish priest. We saw the joys and trials of trying to make ourselves understood and trying to understand Polish as the Lord's way of preparing our community for an eventual expansion to Poland. The rate of our learning the language does not bode well if we suddenly get an opening to go there!

You will be glad to know that our community welcomed a new member. Katherine, who is from Southend, joined COLW on the feast of Christ the King. She loves animals and made a big sacrifice in giving up her own pets in order to join the community. Her example of generosity to God was heart warming for us and we hope that the wildlife e.g. deer, pheasants, moles, living in and around Abbotswick will ease the time of transition. When we do eventually get our house at Walsingham, we hope to be able to keep some animals such as goats, chickens etc.

In September Theresa started her canonical year of novitiate, an important time of deepening her relationship with God in the context of vowed life. Just as well that before that she went to Madrid for World Youth Day together with the youth from our diocese. It was her first experience of such an event and she thoroughly enjoyed it. It was a wonderful opportunity for her to get to know the young people better and vice versa as well as experience the internationality of the Church.

Also since September there have been a couple of people living alongside in order to discern their vocation - possibly to our community. Veronica, from Singapore, spent over two months with us and recently returned home after benefiting from her time with our community. We are lucky in that the

work of Abbotswick and the space here permit us to accompany people in this way and enable us also to facilitate other discernment experiences for them. Interest in the community continues to increase and we are even hosting an ad hoc 'Come and See' weekend just before Christmas. You may remember Jim from the States who spent a month and a half with us last year (he painted the coach house and we have still to find the 'signature' he left behind!). Well he is returning for a further three weeks of vocational discernment with our community and will be spending Christmas with us.

It is a real joy for us to see the Vocations Discernment Group in central London developing. We thank Fr Richard Nesbitt for working with us in the running of the meetings. In fact, this Advent he is leading the retreat for VDG here at Abbotswick. Recently we have noticed a larger/greater number of people attending the meetings. It tells us that the demand for discernment tools and guidance is increasing. This is reflected in the number of such groups developing around the country as well as Samuel Groups many of which receive support from the National Office for Vocation. It was also a joy for us to hear that part of the Bishops recent five-year plan for England and Wales includes a section on promoting the call to holiness and a vocational culture.

Our community, even though it is still so young and gradually developing, had an opportunity to participate in a Congress on new forms of consecrated life that took place in Rome this November. Sr Gabi represented COLW during this event and thanks to the friendship and support of the Franciscan Fraternity of Bethany she could stay with them for the duration of her visit. She found the input given at the conference and the presentations of various communities from all over the world very encouraging. It showed that COLW holds many of the characteristics of the new forms of consecrated life: devotion to Our Lady, contemplative in the world, strong in prayer and community life, centred on the Eucharist and following the teaching of the Magisterium.

Sr Camilla has been busy as always leading retreat days for various groups or giving short inputs for different groups coming to Abbotswick. One of the bonding experiences between the Sion Community (also resident in the Brentwood Cathedral parish) and COLW was the day of retreat led by Sr Camilla for the associates of the Sion community on the theme of 'the importance of surrender and acceptance in the spiritual life'.

As you know our community is passionate about vocational living and we usually try to organise each year a conference that would help enliven ones vocation. We are planning to have a weekend conference entitled 'Knowing, living and transmitting a charism' led by German Sanchez Griese, vice president of the Regina Apostolorum University in Rome. This conference would be of a particular interest to religious, lay consecrated people, priests and anyone who would like to gain a better understanding of how consecrated life can respond to the needs and challenges of today's society. You will find more details about the conference (2nd-4th March 2012), which is being organised in collaboration with the Carmelite Friars, on the events page of our website. Please bring this event to the attention of your friends or anyone you know who could be interested in it.

Coming to the end of this year, we are looking back on the eighth year of COLW as a very fruitful time of our development. There is a greater sense of stability and consolidation on which our hopes for the future are continuously expanding. We are still full of hope for the house at Walsingham and we keep asking for donations for the future house, holding on to God's providence that is so much greater than we can imagine.

We would like to thank you for all the support you have given to our little community by your prayers, friendship and financial means. In whichever way you have been able to help us you have been contributing in a real and effective way to the building up of God's kingdom. May it come throughout this land and beyond for the salvation of all people. Amen.

With love and prayers,



Sr Camilla, Sr Gabriela,

Theresa and Katherine