

Oxon Fourth



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Lay Director's Report

Warm Eastertide Salutations Cursillista Sisters and Brothers!

Well, I'm delighted to report, we have had our first face to face Ultreya which thanks to the dreaded Covid was delayed by two years (to the month!). Despite it being the weekend of Palm Sunday and the start of Easter holidays, it was well attended and joyous to see Cursillistas join in Christian fellowship once again. Our gratitude obviously goes out to Jan at St Mary's Kidlington for being the perfect host and for the warm welcome received, and also to Victoria for a very informative and inspiring Action talk on prison visiting. For those who couldn't attend and would like to find out more about prison visiting please contact our Spiritual Director, who would be more than happy to provide you with the resources you require.

As the echoes of 'He has risen' are still with us, it seems right and proper we reflect on renewal and the way forward for Oxford Cursillo. The Secretariat and I have decided to change tack slightly this year and focus on making Oxford Cursillo stronger before holding any future Weekends. This was discussed at the Ultreya and received broad agreement so, to that end we plan to hold 'Days of deeper understanding', retreats and or, other similar events hopefully in addition to a few more Ultreyas.

My call goes out to anyone who has any experience in these types of events, not to hide your lamp under a bushel but get in touch (laydirector@oxfordcursillo.co.uk) not forgetting we still need volunteers to host Ultreyas.

***Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful, and kindle in us the fire of your love.
Send forth your Spirit and we shall be created.
And you shall renew the face of the earth.***

Look forward to seeing you soon.

ULTREYA!

Stu Vaughan – Lay Director

Greetings! Welcome to our Spring issue. At last we can meet and greet one another in person and already we have held our first post Covid Ultreya, it was lovely to be there at Kidlington with our Cursillo friends. For those who were not there we have featured Victoria Mort's Action Talk about being a prison visitor, see page 7.

We also introduce our new Spiritual Director the Rev Andrew Foran, see article below.

Deadline for our AUTUMN issue is SEPTEMBER 15th.

*Please send articles and ideas to me, Vivien Leeming at
v.leeming05@tiscali.co.uk*



Message from our
new Spiritual Director,
Rev Andrew Foran



Reaching the other side of Lake Lockdown

Hello to you all. It a great honour and a humbling privilege to be writing to you in my new capacity as Spiritual Director, having received the baton from Tony. I am sure you would join with me in expressing our grateful thanks for his words of wisdom and encouragement over these past years. We wish him God's rich blessing as he moves on, but looking forward to seeing and sharing with him at forthcoming Fourth Day meetings.

Vivien interviewed me back in the autumn of 2019 about my ministry as Prison Chaplain at Bullingdon Prison from which I had recently retired. It's all there in OxonFourth issue number 24. At that time I had clear plans and directions for my life in retirement. So I thought! Shortly after the interview I was

invited to take on a Locum for Cherwell Valley Benefice. The seven parishes there were about to go into a vacancy with the outgoing House for Duty Priest retiring and the new Team Rector not arriving until some weeks later. The team has since recovered to full strength with the Team Rector, House for Duty Priest and the Deacon Curate all arriving. I remain there as Assistant Priest.

Tragic times

The big interruption to everything was of course COVID-19. Suddenly all our plans and proposals were thrown into complete disarray, uncertainty, and confusion. We stepped into a vast unknown and it was turmoil for many of us. We lost loved ones to COVID during the following two years – not even being able to say ‘goodbye’ to them, and in the early days unable to attend their funerals. There are so many deeply tragic stories of the effects of the pandemic, and they will remain with us for a very long time. Life changed. Our Church doors were initially shut, and we all had to learn Zoom and YouTube so as to keep some form of worship and fellowship going, including our Ultreyas.

Old and new

Now that we are coming out of the lockdowns we are relieved we can resume some things from before even though the way we do them has had to change, permanently even (for example, effect of social distancing). Other things have been dropped. And we learnt new ways of doing things - for example online meetings avoiding the need to go out in the cold dark evening, taking instead a stroll from the dining table to the laptop by the settee! Our schedules and plans – approach to life even - have changed. Some aspects of the previous have returned even though we’ve settled into new ways of following them through.

Perhaps you like me have been reflecting during the lockdown on what was happening and how it would eventually become. But not all Lockdown experiences are new to us. For our lives to work we all make schedules and plans: how often do they get distracted? How regularly do we get blown off course by some action or incident or situation that happens to us or to those to whom we closely relate? When this happens, I believe we do one of two things – or a mixture of both. We might give up in despair, or we will bravely face the challenge and adapt. We discern through prayer how and where God is in all of it.

Arriving on the other side

The other week we had the Sunday Gospel reading from St Luke’s Gospel of the Storm on the Lake (ch 8, vv 22-25). There is a little parallel here. The 12 disciples set off in their boat to cross from one side of the lake to the other – a simple straightforward enough journey. That is what they had planned to do. But a storm blew up right in the middle of the lake. The boat started to rock violently in the surging sea and the gale force wind, we’re told. The disciples were very aware their boat was liable to capsize and sink. They were suddenly immersed in a life-threatening crisis, and they were panicking with great fear and confusion. But Jesus was asleep! They woke him up and he then commanded the wind and sea to cease and be calm. But they reached their destination as changed disciples, with a deepened awareness of who Jesus of Nazareth was. He rebuked the wind and the raging waves (St Luke ch 8: v 24b). Here was God, not just in our human situations and experiences but in and through the entirety of creation.

From the beginning of April all remaining COVID restrictions are being lifted. We shall be landing on the other side of the pandemic and out of the lockdown. In and through it all some will have had their faith severely challenged and permanently changed, even damaged. We can but pray for them. For others it will have been, and continues to be, a faith-maturing and experience-deepening time. In the Cursillo movement we are encouraged to take this with us as we arrive on the other side of Lake Lockdown.

War in Ukraine

Finally, since I started writing this contribution tragic events have been unfolding daily if not hourly in Ukraine – a severe ‘interruption’ to all those caught up in directly and indirectly, locally and increasingly globally. Our thoughts and prayers are with all the separated families and mothers and children now spread all across Eastern Europe, and with all those who are responding on the front line with the arriving refugees. There will be Cursillistas in the response and help teams, also among the refugees. We continue to pray earnestly and urgently for everyone’s protection and safety, for the end of the war and for ways to find peace between Russia and the Ukraine.

Every blessing,

Andrew

**Cursillo is a movement of the Church
Providing a method by which
Christians are empowered to grow
through prayer, study and action
and enabled to share God’s love
with everyone.**



Ready with the needle at the vaccination clinic

Jan Jeffreys joined the fight
against Covid in her town

A friend of mine, who has a finger in most pies baked here in Kidlington, recruited me as a volunteer at the Covid vaccination clinic serving a large area but based here in Kidlington at the start of the pandemic. Once it became known that I had a nursing background I found myself doing a brief training course the very next day and was then on the vaccinating team starting on the following Monday.



After a few initial misgivings I found all the old skills returned and I was soon up to speed and really enjoying my new role which was just as well. As December came so too did the new variant of Covid and boosters were deemed necessary. This caused something of a panic and the pace of the clinics changed up several gears as people rushed to get vaccinated before Christmas.

I walked to work one morning well before 8am, when the clinic started, and was amazed to see queues stretching around the block, along the road and round the corner causing traffic jams along the main road on both sides. Our stewards were already hard at work directing traffic and helping people to find parking. At one point a fight broke out and the police were called, but this was the only incident of aggressive behaviour. One man told me he had queued for five hours on a very cold day but had actually enjoyed it.

A busker could have made a small fortune and the food outlets did a roaring trade. People had a system going where places would be held while someone went to the coffee shop with orders for coffee and sandwiches. The stewards ensured safe distances were kept in the queue for the loo.

This pace continued for several weeks and all the staff were getting tired but there was a great atmosphere among us. The staff were really great to work with and so supportive of each other, ensuring we all took a break and got a breath of fresh air from time to time. This was quite difficult to do when one saw the line of people patiently waiting for so long.

Once Christmas was over the demand for vaccines slowed right down and the clinics were less frequent and almost leisurely in comparison to the hectic December days. It was good to be able to have a little chat with people instead of just asking the routine questions before giving the vaccine. Who knows what the future will bring but I am really glad to have been of use to my community and loved being a small part of a great team.

Taking time to visit prisoners

Prison Visitor Victoria Mort gives us a glimpse of life "Inside"

I was inspired to start prison visiting when I heard of it from a friend from long ago doing it. I thought: "That's what I want to do". A member of my church is a bereavement counsellor at Bullingdon Prison and she put me in touch with Andrew Foran who was the chaplain at that time).

Lots of people express surprise when I tell them about this activity. They seem to think that one is in danger of being attacked in the Visits Hall. This is hardly likely as there is a table between visitor and prisoner, and each group is distanced by a fair spread of floor. Prison officers are watching everything like hawks. Occasionally a prisoner is banished from the hall and his visitors are escorted out. I presume this is because some illegal activity has been noticed – probably the handing over of drugs.



It's generally not a quick process to get into the Visits Hall. You have to book a visit in advance, Then you have to go through some procedure to clock into the Visitor Centre. At the moment you are called to go over to the Main Gate in groups of two lots. You have to go through security, similar to what you find in an airport, and people wearing trainers and such like have to take their shoes off and put them through the X-ray. I make sure I'm wearing slip-on shoes and that I've not got a belt on so that I don't have to take those off. You go through two airlocks and eventually are allowed through to walk across to the actual prison. There are often sniffer dogs and four people at a time sit on four chairs for the dog to go past.

Once I had what could have been a serious experience: I arrived at the prison to see cars stopped in a long queue and a lot of police. The governor had asked the police to come because there had been a lot of forbidden items being taken in by visitors. The police were extremely friendly, which was just as well because a young pc asked me whether my car was insured because it wasn't showing on his machine! It turned out that our insurance company had got two digits the wrong way round on our number plate. Imagine this happening if I'd been stopped driving somewhere, or after an accident! But they made light of it and I made sure I put it right when I got home.

The next thing was to put our hands through a machine which could detect drugs. Imagine my feelings when I was told I had cocaine on my hands! Again, they were very laid back about it and told me I'd

probably got it from money in Sainsbury's on the way! However I wasn't allowed to proceed to my visit and my car was searched by a very nice spaniel.

To become an Official Prison Visitor (OPV) you have to cite a suitable reference. Then I was visited by one of the other Prison Visitors and then you have to go through a process of DBS to get a pass confirming who you are. In fact you can use your driving licence to confirm who you are when you get to the Visits Centre, which is what many ordinary visitors do.

At the moment masks are required on both visitor and visitee. The Visits Hall is large and echoey and last time I went there were a lot of people, which made for a lot of noise. It's extremely difficult, I find, to hear what your visitee is saying from behind a mask.

Before Covid, and probably after, the Hall is much fuller and hearing can be quite a problem for those of us whose hearing is not as good as it was. The layout has been changed over the last few years so that heavy seats are arranged each side of a low table. This change from higher tables on which you could put your elbows and lean forward cupping your ears, is apparently because drugs etc were being passed underneath those tables. There doesn't seem to be much chance of passing anything with the present arrangements and it's very tiring and uncomfortable. In order to hear one has to lean forward but with head up, which is very hard on the neck. Prisoners, on the whole, don't seem to get how difficult it is and often lean back in their chairs.

I've visited about 30 different prisoners in the last 12 years. The longest I had anyone was two years and he was very charming and also amazingly philosophical considering that as a result of his offence he had lost his wife and two young daughters and had seven years to do in all. He had jobs such as looking after vulnerable older men on his wing – wheelchair users etc – cleaning their rooms and presumably helping them move about. He also did library work and he was a prison Listener, ie someone in whom other prisoners could confide with their anxieties and griefs. He got moved eventually to a C category prison where he would have more freedom. Bullingdon is B category and pretty grim, I always think. There are 1,200 prisoners there and they never seem to have their full complement of staff, which means they are always having difficulty doing everything. Prison Visitors meet about three times a year in normal times and often get one of the governors to speak and answer questions. On one occasion we were told that they are all so hard pressed that sometimes they have to choose between handing out post and other important things. You can't expect a letter to reach your man next day!

I've had a few rather negative visitees – young men who possibly thought they were going to get a young Visitor, or who hoped to get something out of me. You're not allowed to give anything and you have to avoid giving out where you live. I did once order a poster for my visitee – it was from one of David Attenborough's programmes and that was fine. I also ordered a bible from Eden for a man who told me he'd been advised to read Romans but he had absolutely no knowledge whatever of Jesus or anything else. He was about to be discharged so I quickly ordered him what looked like quite a good bible for teenagers with a lot of information and pictures, maps etc. It was just before Lockdown and I was then unable to visit him but I wrote him quite a long letter and he was discharged after Easter. I never heard whether the bible had arrived but in September I had a letter from him forwarded to me. He'd written it before discharge so a long time ago and he didn't really answer my letter or refer to the bible though he was in quite a state of turmoil and thinking about faith. The only thing I could do was ask Susan Cuthbert who was chaplain by then whether she had come across this man and she did meet him but her report was rather confusing. She asked if I could take him to church but that's just the sort of thing you can't really do as a Prison Visitor, so I didn't attempt it. He's still in our prayers, though.

Mainly my visitees have been interesting, touching, grateful, and happy to talk about themselves. They don't usually tell one much about their background but many have been in care or have been sent away to boarding school when they were very young. I think these cases have probably been abused as children and have then ended up on E Wing where sex offenders and other vulnerable people go. I've had a few who have expressed how nervous they felt before our meeting but they are now reassured when they see me. One Muslim Pakistani was in a bad state, with his 12- year sentence, but he would veer from despair to positivity and was very excited because he had been cooking curries which the prison staff had loved and this was his job. In due course he was moved to another prison.

One E-winger was about to be discharged. I encouraged him to keep out of trouble and he said he would be fine provided he could be busy. It was sitting by himself getting bored that led to trouble. Then Lockdown began and I can't imagine how he's managed!

The Covid era has been, and still is, very difficult for prisoners. They've been locked in their cells 23 hours out of 24. Association hasn't happened so no chats with other prisoners. For periods the gym has not been available. There's been no library to visit – normally books are also brought round on a trolley. There have been long periods of no visitors and even now many fewer visits. I'm very sorry for these prisoners and keep them in my prayers. I think they have had more chance to telephone but they can't receive calls and have to have credits to ring out.

I find being a Prison Visitor extremely interesting and rewarding. You don't know exactly what impression, if any, you are making but on the whole my visitees have seemed to be grateful and glad of my visits. I was instrumental in setting up the Gatehouse alternative café for homeless people in Oxford and was closely involved as Trustee and volunteer for 30 years. I still keep in touch with homelessness activities but I wanted to do something different – perhaps not entirely different but different nonetheless.

I think most of us PVs are inspired in particular by Jesus's command to visit prisoners.

The Bishop of Oxford is visiting deaneries in the diocese on the following dates

Abingdon 12 May

Henley 18 May

Chipping Norton & Woodstock 19 May

Aylesbury 15 June

Mursley & Claydon 23 June

Buckingham & Newport 28 June

Oxford TBC

Burnham & Slough TBC

Our Spiritual Director, the Rev Andrew Foran has suggested that any Cursillistas attending these meetings could take the opportunity of introducing themselves to Bishop Stephen and talking to him about the Cursillo Movement in this diocese. It is very important that our church leaders are aware of us.

Cursillo Leaders' Weekend, March 2022, Crewe

Report and Reflections by

Rev Andrew Foran SD

I attended the weekend Workshop Training with Karen and Peter from Oxford Diocese, along with 21 Cursillo representatives from across the UK. In coming away we were invited to reflect on three things we would take back to our diocese. Here are mine.

1 Fourth Day Ministries

Throughout the Weekend all of us became aware we should be making much more creative use (without necessarily creating more work!) in this area and put in as much thought and energy as we do for the Cursillo Weekend. And the Weekend should be presented as the start, not the end, of the Cursillo journey. But also, where a Weekend has to be cancelled why not consider instead a Retreat style event? I was struck with the idea of inviting non Cursillistas to Ultreyas and Group meetings, and Weekend candidates prior to their Weekend - even members of Clergy and Diocesan senior staff. Quiet Days for Cursillistas including online is another thought - or a YouTube recording of an event (controlled access). 'Developing Days of Deeper Understanding' is another area that could be made more use of. There is, of course, the Cursillista supporters resourcing issue here but see further on.

2 Relations with, and Publicity of, Cursillo with the Clergy - established and new/in training

Several dioceses have developed their own Presentations to Deanery Synods and Chapters. One has developed a 'Roadshow' presentation for Church meetings - PCCs and the like, including their Diocesan Synod. We have aired in Secretariat the idea of presentations to our local Theological Colleges, but there are also the non-residential ordination training and LLM schemes and which are cross-border. Another one is the cross-border Clergy First Appointment Conference. There is also the upcoming Diocesan Clergy Conference.... The weekly Diocesan E-News bulletin is another platform for publicity.

Episcopal support seems to vary considerably across the dioceses represented, from the highest to the lowest levels. I am aware we in Oxford Diocese appear to be in the latter. Bishop Steven is currently visiting all the Deaneries through the course of this (and next?) year. This offers us an opportunity to introduce ourselves as Cursillistas. We should consider inviting the Bishop to receive a delegation from the Secretariat represented by a few of us including myself.

My appointment as Spiritual Director should be ratified by Bishop Steven: could there be some sort of commissioning/renewal occasion for all of us Secretariat as with an Evensong at Christchurch, once our support from the Bishop is gained?

3 Development of the Secretariat and seeking renewed commitment by Cursillistas

We share the issues with other dioceses and across the Church generally. Inevitably this means slimming down what we can achieve and how we go about it, and celebrating its success when completed, to help restore confidence and self-assurance. Some dioceses have embarked on up to 5-Year Development plan for their Cursillo. I think a more manageable one would be a 2-year one. The Diocesan Cursillos concerned convened Secretariat Awaydays to air, share and consolidate with prayer, thoughts and ideas and assemble a plan. Some dioceses have embarked on reviewing their list of supporters to reconnect and seek renewed commitment to Cursillo – as we are now exploring.

It was a valuable Weekend, inevitably raising more questions and ideas than answers and achievements. Sharing with others makes you realise you are not alone with your problems and issues, and in discussions with others you gain new thoughts and ideas. Meeting with others and hearing their faith stories was very inspiring as well as humbling and rewarding; I had the delightful surprise of sharing with the wife of a former, now deceased, Archdeacon of Oxford, since her becoming an active and passionate Cursillista elsewhere in the UK.



Tell us about YOUR Group Reunion

Group Reunions are one of the great benefits of the Cursillo Movement. They help us support one another in living a Christian life in an increasingly secular world, and in our efforts to bring more people closer to Christ.

Starting in the next edition of OxonFourth I would like to feature a list of group reunions, where they are geographically, and when and where they meet. Anyone interested in joining them could contact our secretary, Margaret Vaughan, for whom to get in touch with in a particular area.

In future issues I would also like to give space to one of them, perhaps with a photo of its members with a quote from the group or one person about why they like to group.

Our Communications Rep, David Leeming, tells me we have 60 Cursillistas meeting in 9 groups, 37 live in Oxfordshire, 16 in Berkshire and 7 in Bucks.

Let's hear from you!

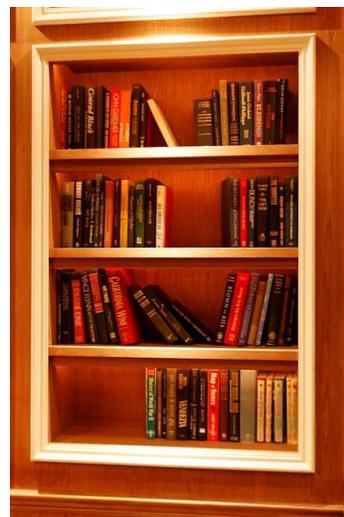
Vivien Leeming, Editor

BOOK REVIEW

Sensible Shoes

By Sharon Garlough Brown

Published by IVP books



Sharon Garlough Brown is a spiritual director and cofounder of Abiding Way Ministries, providing spiritual formation retreats. Her book **Sensible Shoes** was named one of television personality Kathie Lee Gifford's "favourite things". Sharon earned an MDiv from Princeton Theological Seminary. She and her husband, Jack, have served congregations in Scotland, Oklahoma, England and West Michigan.

In *Sensible Shoes* you follow the spiritual journey of 4 female strangers from different backgrounds who meet up at a retreat, to embark on a journey of spiritual formation.

Hannah, Meg, Mara and Charissa arrive at a retreat centre and find themselves drawn out of their separate stories of isolation and struggle and move into a collective journey of spiritual practice, mutual support and personal revelation.

One gets to know them inside out and how God meets them and restores them to who they really are, their true selves. Although this is a novel, it challenges you deeply on your own spiritual journey and into In a busy world with a busy life, it's easy to ignore our inner world where the spirit of Christ dwells within us.

This book for me has been a stark reminder of that and a holy invitation to be aware of the movements of my deepest self and to pay attention to them so that I don't miss out on what God is wanting to accomplish in and through me. It's a book of transformation and enabling God to do it.

Study guides are available too which are extremely helpful.

Anne Nicholson



Song of Creation

*A shimmering ball once circled round the sun,
A planet clothed with air and washed by rain,
With soil to plough and minerals to be won,
Enough all living creatures to sustain.
But then arose a predatory race,
Voracious in its appetite for more
And more of all things good, until the face
Of earth was ravaged like a running sore.
O God, Creator of this fragile earth,
Which we by wanton carelessness have scarred,
Robbed and despoiled in reckless disregard
Of generations yet to come to birth,
Help us to cast the greed and envy from our world
And hand your planet to your children whole.*

Dates for your diary

Cursillo Leaders' Workshops

October 7th – 9th 2022: Shallowfield House, Stone, near Stafford ST150NZ

March 3rd – 5th 2023: Wychroft, Bletchingly, Redhill

October 20th -22nd 2023: Wistaston Hall, Crewe

For more information contact:

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Thank you to all who have contributed to this issue of OxonFourth. The next issue is planned for the autumn and items for inclusion should be sent to: v.leeming05@tiscali.co.uk to arrive not later than September 15th, 2022.

**Please contact me with ideas for articles well before this date.
Telephone 01296 655342**

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