

Society of the Sacred Cross

Cylchlythyr Adfent · 2025 · Advent Newsletter



**Dathlu Creu yn y Gymuned:
Celebrating Creation in Community**

Thanksgiving from the Reverend Mother

This Advent newsletter comes to you at the end of a very full year, for which we give great thanks. Looking out of the window, I can see a groaning pear tree, weighed down with golden fruit - a symbol of this year! But the trauma, terror and suffering of Gaza, Ukraine and Sudan do not mirror the blessings we have received. Therefore, our work of prayer and of witness to God's love in our world remains essential. The love given is not to be hoarded, but like the bread of the Eucharist, must be shared with the whole Body of Christ throughout God's world.

As you will read in the following pages, the community has been living its own disruption – all of which has been life giving - even if disturbing our daily rhythms. With a world crying out for true and just relationships, it was time to act as responsibly as we could to address our large carbon footprint. So, we have invested in solar PV power generation, better insulation and air-source and ground-source heat pumps to heat rooms and water in The Lodge, Michaelgarth and Tymawr. Alongside this work, we upgraded the Convent Guest Wing facilities to make our welcome a little more comfortable. There is more to be done to reduce our use of fossil fuels and we intend to replace our diesel and petrol cars with electric cars and to encourage the use of public transport where possible.

The solemn profession of Sr. Joanna Ruth in early summer was a radiant occasion and a time to renew our own commitment and Vows. A week later, Megan was clothed as a Novice Sister. Today, all the Sisters have come in the last 15 years - seemingly out of a dying old order – **a sign of renewal and hope**. We also welcome the Revd Tony Halton, who has been an Oblate for many years, as a Trustee of the Society. His wide experience will be a great asset as we seek to remain faithful to our calling here at Tymawr.

In July, **the community refocussed** its energy with a wonderful pilgrimage to the Shrine of St David led by +Rowan, centered on the wisdom of the Augustinian mystic Walter Hilton (1340-1396). This was an opportunity to gather with Oblates and Associates and to know again the Body of the Community in its work of prayer, of being one before the Lord.

In August, we again **rededicated our lives to the unity** Christ prayed for and embodied in his life, death and resurrection, by hosting an ecumenical gathering of religious from across Europe. Hidden and out of the way, for a few sunny days, Tymawr was home to people from different Christian traditions. The chapel echoed with praise and the grounds with laughter and dancing in a time of fellowship and joy.

The life of this community is rooted in **the hospitality of the Cross**, a hospitality we wish to share with all who seek to come and drink at the well of God's love. The chapel will be 100 years old in 2029 and it is our desire to celebrate its centenary by achieving **Access for All**. To do this, we must adapt our building. We know that people with difficult mobility cannot come into this holy space. Our target is to raise **£250,000** – a tough target that we trust we can reach with your help. We are applying for grants and are delighted that the new Archbishop of Wales is hosting a Concert in Newport Cathedral next summer to raise funds – see page 26 for details.



Harvest mandala in Chapel

We give thanks for all who have come to live alongside the community in this last year, all who have shared their gifts and talents with us as volunteers especially on the land, all who have served us through their work in the house, on the land and in the administration of the community, and all who have supported us financially. We give thanks for all who have dedicated their lives to the prayer of this Community as Oblates, Associates and Companions and for those who quietly come to pray in the chapel and in the grounds. Our life at Tymawr is enriched by you all.

May the tender and vulnerable love of the Christ Child be made known through each one of you this Christmas, with love and prayers

m. Katharine SSC

Community News

Advent 2024 featured a ring of earth in the sanctuary around a huge bowl of water (a re-purposed fire-pit with a plug in the bottom), created and maintained for us by Beth Forester. The bare earth was covered each Sunday with greenery, the display growing as each new Advent candle was lit. The Advent talks were given over Zoom by Bonnie Thurston, enabling several members of the wider SSC family to join us.

In December, the work to install solar panels was completed and connected to Michaelgarth and the Convent at the end of February, the first effect of our “green energy” work. Trenches were dug across the vegetable garden and the drives (more than once, straight through the mains water pipe: the digger driver became adept at mending it). Then through the first four months of the year, while we lived at Michaelgarth, work went on in the grounds and in the house to instal the pipework and radiators for the ground-source heating. Naturally, the day on which all the radiators were tested was one of the hottest of the first half of the year. Our site workers enjoyed the experience of working at a convent, although they were mystified about our need to use the chapel several times a day - and what did we do in the times in between? They were considerate of our Eucharist time, taking their break then, and became on first-name-terms friends for the duration of the project – see more about the project on pages 6-7.

We lived at Michaelgarth from January. In spite of prior concerns about living much more closely together than usual, the four months we spent there were a time of connection for the community. Megan returned from her Christmas holiday at home in the USA and Canada, armed with a two-year visa, and the next day left for a novice conference at Mirfield: she was made postulante at Candlemas and began her life as a full member of the community.

During the period we lived at Michaelgarth, we were able to spend more time reading, prayer and resting, and felt the benefit. Some of us also appreciated the benefit of having to walk up and down to the chapel. As the Old Print House was unaffected by the building work, we transferred the office equipment there (thanks to Ash, Philip, Neil and Jean) and office work continued almost as normal. Those of us who tend to go back to work in the office after tea discovered some extra spare time, as it was too inconvenient to walk down in the dark. Gregg nobly adapted his cooking skills to a much smaller kitchen and continued to produce amazing meals, which we ate in the small sitting-room, or, as the weather grew warmer, on the veranda and terrace.

Throughout the work we were able to remain open for public as well as private worship. Our visitors (we had no residential guests) became accustomed to entering through the sacristy and joined us for midday Eucharist as usual: we also held Morning and Evening Prayer in the chapel, with Terce and Compline in the

Long Room at Michaelgarth. We had the unexpected (and not totally appreciated) blessing of a major power cut to the OPH in Holy Week, so were unable to use the computers and experienced a peaceful Holy Week. The usual services were held for the Triduum, although only day visitors could join us. Mother Katharine led a new "stations of the cross", drawn from excerpts from Julian of Norwich, around the Michaelgarth gardens, looking at creation around us. At the start of May we moved back home, and welcomed the first guests, who stayed in the community accommodation at Michaelgarth, as the Guest Wing remained closed for its renovation until the end of July. Guests who have come to us since have greatly appreciated the new coffee-point, two new toilets, and two new showers now available to them. Our next major project will be to improve access further, with a lift access to chapel and level access to the front of the convent.

This year has been marked by the major celebrations in June of Sr Joanna's life profession as Sr Joanna Ruth, and the clothing of Novice Sr Megan. Sr Joanna Ruth's ceremony saw the chapel packed with visitors, clergy, monastic and lay. The service was full of light and enthusiastic music. Afterwards an excellent lunch was served and enjoyed. Novice Sr Megan's service a week later was a more private affair, an occasion for joyful thanksgiving.

At the start of July some community members, oblates, associates and friends went on a pilgrimage retreat to St David's, staying in university accommodation at Carmarthen, where we used their chapel for worship. The central day featured a clifftop walk on a new pilgrimage route, led by staff from the Cathedral, after which we had Eucharist in St David's Cathedral, lunch and time to explore the cathedral, before returning to Carmarthen.

In August we had the privilege of hosting the Conference of International Interconfessional Religious - nearly thirty monks and nuns from all over Europe, stayed in accommodation at Haberdashers' Monmouth School and came to us each day for teaching and discussion sessions. Old friends were met and new ones made. We were blessed with very good weather, and one of last year's alongsiders came to help and to teach folk dancing on the front lawn - enjoyed by those who took part and those who watched. On the final full day we had a day pilgrimage to Usk and Abergavenny, celebrating the life and martyrdom of St David Lewis, with input from Bishop Rowan Williams – page 12-13 for more about the Conference..

Last year we were blessed by the presence of numerous alongsiders. With the big closure at the start of this year we have not had so many in 2025, but when we moved back into the convent in May, we welcomed Claire to live with us for the rest of the year. Later in May, Ali came to combine alongsiding with a 30-day retreat; then in August Amanda from Finland came for a month, joined towards the end of August by Sylvia from Northern Ireland who stayed for six weeks. In the autumn, we welcomed Oblates Judy and Pat for their annual visits. All have contributed to the community by their prayer as well as their work. During the year

Mary became ill and has now left us for sheltered accommodation.

The gardens have produced many fruit and vegetable crops, in spite of a very dry spring. For the first time we have harvested our own quinces and medlars, and the Centenary plum orchard finally made fruit, putting us in mind of the parable of the fig tree, with the gardener saying, "Let it alone for one more year...". At one point we were pressing pears on anyone who visited, even sending some down with a retreatant to our friends at Holy Cross Abbey, Whitland. During the year this contact was maintained, with two Sisters going on retreat there, and a day trip to see them in the summer.

As always, we thank those who support us in many ways through the year, especially Chaplain Jean, Bishop Visitor Dominic, and Warden Bishop Rowan; Vijay, Michaela and the volunteers in the garden; Gregg and Jo in the kitchen; Kirstie as the financial administrator; Tony, Peter and Vivienne as Trustees. We couldn't do it without you!

Sr. Janet Ann

2025 - Our year Celebrating Creation in Community: digging trenches, ripping out radiators and capturing the sun

This all started in July 2023 with a joint meeting of Sisters and Trustees seeking long-term answers to two questions: what must we do to reduce our carbon emissions to net zero by 2030? and how can Tymawr Convent remain sustainable as a small community in the future? We could not keep praying for the climate emergency to be addressed (and we weren't going to demonstrate) without doing something to 'put our own house in order' – literally! We knew that Tymawr's consumption of heating oil (5 x 2000 litre oil tanks that were filled and refilled every winter) dumped a lot of CO₂ into the atmosphere. We knew that we must replace our piecemeal heating systems and insulate buildings – an independent Resource Efficiency Report (Owen Callendar) in 2020 found that Tymawr used the energy equivalent of 14 standard homes! For the next 18 months, we researched every option from solar to wind turbine electricity generation, from air-source and biomass to radiant electric heating, discussed, raised objections, discussed again and



finally unanimously agreed to use all available resources to reduce our carbon footprint.

The work started with a ground plan digital buildings survey and a specialist Accessibility survey to identify the physical barriers to accessing Tymawr Chapel (which, of course, also must include an accessible loo). This was followed by heat loss surveys of the Convent and Michaelgarth. Then each working party presented options for heating; insulation; disabled access; and

renewable energy. Then came long-lists of potential contractors; short lists after 'due diligence' enquiries; quotations and presentations; detailed specifications and planning applications. By January 2024 we were ready to put air-source-heat pump heating, cavity wall insulation and solar PV in The Lodge. During August, the oil-fuelled heating in Michaelgarth was replaced with air-source-heating pumps. By autumn, digging in the South Field to lay ground-source-heat pump pipes and in the North-East Field for a Solar PV array and cables to the Convent and to Michaelgarth were underway. In January 2025, the Sisters moved into Michaelgarth for the Convent heating systems to be ripped out and replaced with a thermostatically, Wi-Fi controlled system for heating water and rooms.

The result is that The Lodge, Michaelgarth and the Convent are insulated, five oil tanks have been recycled and solar energy is combatting rising fuel bills – and the old barn has become a home for a young family. Best of all, Tymawr is on target to reduce its CO2 emissions by 90% this year (and for every year to come) and, by God's grace, has every hope of a sustainable future.

We are grateful for the professional execution of the work by our contractors: MJS Heating Services Ltd., Presteigne, and William Powell and Sons (builders) Ltd., Hereford. We also give thanks for the generous and wise support of our architects: Graham Frecknall Architecture and Design, Monmouth.

Jean Prosser, Project Manager

The Big Move.

(A personal experience - we all had very different ones!)

The Big Move (well it seemed big to us, other convents have had ten times more.) Four months in Michaelgarth, with access to the chapel through the side door, the Old Print House became our general office (and the only loo available to chapel visitors.) I was a bit apprehensive, but got on with it. And found it was wonderful.

Highlights: a lovely walk up and down the hill for Morning Prayer, Eucharist and Evening Prayer in chapel, and any other time one felt like it. OPH was an open plan office, but it was There, not Here, so after evening prayer no more office work, that was it! Instead, tea and clearing at Michaelgarth and no going down the hill until 6.15 the next morning. Gradual lightening of the mornings, beautiful sunrises. And TIME. Time to spend in chapel, time. Time to be.

I had planned things, and although people said I was disciplined because I did almost all of them, actually I only did the things I liked! So, planned house-keeping on the computer still hasn't been done. Although I started Welsh, duo lingo, a bit each day, I decided that I would never ever use it - it is not as though I read literature - but I WOULD use French, as we had an international conference coming in August. So, while I had time, I used it to brush up my French. Then Christmas came early, with lovely French books - on gardens, on Mother Teresa; interesting books, stories dealing with racism, culture clash, etc. And with those came little video links as well as links to dozens and dozens of communities. All from my daughter, who works as a translator, I so enjoyed the fun conversations with her! The only snag at Michaelgarth I remember, was the lack of privacy, one-to-one conversations were awkward - I am not a group person. So, I changed.

I had planned to 'use' a biblical passage that had touched me when we looked at it with Bishop Rowan. Colossians chapter 1 vv 13ff. It never had the same effect again, but I sat with it every day for three months. At least now I recognize it and discovered it is one of our much-used canticles - I had only been reading it for 20 years!!

Then we moved back. We were open to guests, but the guest wing wasn't finished, so we put people everywhere. At one point I and two or three guests had to move back up to Michaelgarth. It did still mean the evenings were free, but otherwise work began. And our charism is now prayer and **hospitality**. Today I used a set of intercessions written by our Cathedral Dean which says. '*Draw us deeper into that love that shares of its very self'... the hospitality that shares of its wealth and poverty, that*

welcomes and embraces strangers as unknown friends, as angels and Christ himself'. (Not that I do, but I try!) The guest wing is now finished and open, but I am the only Sister on South Wing, which has become an extension of the guest wing, so we can receive friends, nuns from other communities, alongsiders and others. So, I am living intimately with people I don't know well, or at all sometimes, and this is a gift, but I have to remember to wash up my cup when I have used it!

All in all, things have changed. I am thinner, for one. The kitchen at Michaelgarth is small and unless you can manage breakfast at the proper time, which I don't, that was it! It was a healthier life style for me, but not to be permanent yet. And, finally, just a couple of weeks after she died, I have learned to understand what Sr Meg (Sister Kirsty who wrote 'the Choice') meant when she talked about the life being 'a flight from the alone to the Alone.' It has taken me decades (I read it in the 80s and regularly since,) so I won't try to explain! But it is a different way of being. Freer perhaps.

This all sounds frightfully pious. It isn't. Sr Jane SLG's comment is exactly right for me - 'I plonk myself in chapel and am aware only of distractions.' And then I fall asleep! And I still listen to French, because I love it.

Sr.Elizabeth



A cloak spread over me: reflections on solemn vows

Hidden amidst the heavy books of prophecy and history in the Hebrew scriptures is a rather unusual book. *Ruth* is an unusual story: two poor and marginalised women finding each other and God. The hurtling narrative of the Old Testament slows down for a moment to let us glimpse in detail two precious, tiny lives, and see how God might look at us and call each of us into faithfulness.

My own legal and baptismal name is 'Joanna Ruth', and as the eagle-eyed among you may have spotted, it is now my name in religion. When I applied to the community to make my Solemn Vows I also requested to alter my name here to reflect how the story of Ruth and Naomi has helped me to understand my vocation. Ruth's choice to follow Naomi spoke to me of the decision to entrust my life to this community; her decision to entrust herself to Boaz spoke to me of the greater decision to place my life completely in the arms of Christ. To ask to remain here was to feel the cloak being spread over me, as Boaz did to Ruth. In doing so, Boaz promises to be her next-of-kin, or the one who redeems her: and in that redemption, she is made completely free.

The past seven years have been a tremendous gift, but like Ruth, I have clung to (and fought with) my Naomis through many uncertainties and uncomfortable moments of self-discovery. And like Naomi, the community here has brought me steadily back to the surety of God's love for me and for the whole world. I know the promised land beneath my feet.

We held the profession service itself on the 7th of June, the day before Pentecost. On the day many family and friends were able to come (including, to my delight, my newly-born nieces). There are more people to thank than I can possibly count, but I would particularly like to thank everyone who prayed for me and sent such kind cards. It is a joy and a privilege to be part of this family.

When I joined the community I had thought of Solemn Vows as a final destination, at which point I would somehow be 'complete'. I know how that this is just the end of the beginning, and the real adventure is spreading out before me. I look forward to travelling beside you all, and particularly beside my dear 'Naomis', who have borne my failings with such grace, and said 'yes' to a young stranger seven years ago. Please keep praying for the me and for the community as we continue on the journey – and for the women who will come, as Ruth, to bring and receive God's life in this place.

Sr. Joanna Ruth



Icons: Ruth,
gifted to Sr.
Joanna Ruth
by the Revd.
Cara
Greenham
Hancock;
St. David,
written by
Sara Prosser



Community Pilgrimage to the Shrine of St. David

In July, the community went on pilgrimage to St. Davids, following in the footsteps of many thousands of people who have travelled there over the centuries. St. David (Dewi Sant) is one of the best-known Welsh saints, and the site of his shrine has been an important pilgrimage site since the medieval period. We stayed at the University of Wales, Trinity St. Davids, Carmarthen, and travelled to St. Davids by coach for the day. Led by the cathedral's pilgrimage officer, we walked to St. Non's chapel and well, then on to the cathedral. The views along the craggy coastline were breathtaking. It's not difficult to see why so many people have been drawn to this area in so many capacities - the landscape has an otherworldliness to it, a sense of liminality. Bishop Rowan, who led the Pilgrimage, said that 'holy places often come with this liminality, because they are places where we come to the limits of ourselves. There is a desire to search for something beyond ourselves, a sense of new beginnings, a horizon to which our eyes turn. Pilgrimage offers us a new perspective.' This is helped, perhaps, by making a physical journey, but it is primarily an internal process. Walter Hilton's *The Scale of Perfection* was the basis of Bishop Rowan's talks, especially the metaphorical journey towards Jerusalem. All of us are engaged in a journey, though it takes a different form with each person and each life stage. We are constantly being brought towards the limit of ourselves and this is something which we can welcome. We are meant to be always looking ahead, even with all of the challenges which our journey brings. Through a widening of our perspectives, through sharing with others, and through seeking, we will learn to encounter our horizons over and over again with wonder.

Megan Rasmussen

International and Interconfessional Conference for Religious (CIIR)

SSC was invited in 2023 to be the host community for the bi-annual meeting of the CIIR conference. Started some thirty years ago, these four-day conferences have been hosted by different religious communities across Europe, the last in 2023 was hosted by the nascent Syrian Orthodox community in Sweden. The next will be hosted by a Protestant community at Grandchamps in Switzerland. The goal of these encounters is to enable an ecumenical encounter between religious communities within Europe and north Africa, so the programme is centred around worship, fellowship, learning and exchange. The conference has been hosted by communities within the Lutheran Church, the Reformed Church, the Anglican church, the Roman Catholic Church and various Orthodox Churches. This year, participation was limited by illness and the denial of visas to the UK, so the Sisters who had faithfully attended in the past from the Coptic Orthodox Church were unable to attend.

How could 'tiny' Tymawr host some 30 people and what could we offer? In the event, we offered hospitality in a beautiful environment blessed by dry and warm weather (not always the promise of Wales!). The theme this year was 'The environment and religious life', which dovetailed with seeking to be more responsible stewards of the land we have been gifted and growing in our understanding of the Gospel imperative to love as we are loved and to live humbly, mercifully and with justice through lives shaped by vows of poverty, obedience and chastity. Tymawr was the 'place' to embody these themes. The first day included a tour of the land and an explanation of the choices we have made - the complexities and the surprises.

The conference was structured around the daily Offices and celebration of the Eucharist. This proved a highlight: a chapel full of voices singing praises to God and celebrating the Eucharist in the rite of each tradition with joy and longing. Each day included the presentation of a paper from the perspective of each denomination, which was then discussed in small language groups. Sr. Joanna Ruth wrote and presented our contribution (see our website for the full text). We were continually encouraged to 'go beyond our comfort zone' and to step into the experience and reality of another, whether that be cultural, religious, or linguistic. But all was not serious: we also had an impromptu choir, dancing on the front lawn to Scottish dance tunes, and evenings discovering the heritage and history of church and monastic life in Wales interwoven in its musical tradition, with a wonderful evening with the Welsh harpist, Bethan Coles. On the last day, we made a pilgrimage to Usk to visit the tomb of St David Lewis, the last Welsh martyr of the Reformation. In his

talks, Bishop Rowan invited us to grow in the 'poverty of memory': that is to put down the memory of grievance done 'to us' whilst at the same time remembering the wrong we have done. When we bring the two 'rememberings' together a new space is created for an encounter with the gift of another and a deeper living out of Christ's self-giving love for all.

So, what remains with us now the participants have gone home? New friendships; the remembrance of meeting in the breaking of the bread and in the singing of songs of praise and thanksgiving; and a heightened awareness of the imperative to continue to act and live as good stewards, not only of the earth but of our relationships across denominational borders. The lasting gift of this conference for SSC is the realisation that we are 'one as a community' with the joy that enhanced our call to hospitality at every level. Deo gratias.

M. Katharine



Delegates and SSC volunteers at C.I.I.R.

Throughout the year we update the 'News' section of our website with letters from m. Katharine, updates about events, articles and general news. You can also find the Advent newsletter posted there if you would like to share it with your friends and communities.

www.tymawrconvent.org



On a bluebell walk



Digging trenches to connect the ground-source and solar to the house



On pilgrimage to St. Davids



Prayers at Rogationtide



Guest wing renovations. We now have two shower rooms, two spacious toilets, and a new kitchenette.



L-R: M. Katharine, Sr. Rosalind Mary, Sr. Janet Ann (behind her!), Bp. Rowan Williams, Sr. Elizabeth, Sr. Joanna Ruth and Bp. Dominic Walker at Sr. Joanna Ruth's Solemn Profession

Heartwood

Hospitality

Come with me to Tymawr, where I have found
a spreading olive tree in the house of God—
the ideal secluded tree to hang a hammock.
Two stout branches at the perfect height.
Abeam, a mossy place to rest my head.
Above, a lavish canopy of leaves might
shelter me from sun and God willing
showers, should I ever take the risk.

Two *Leylandii*

This morning I had the strangest sense
the two *Leylandii* beyond Our Lady's Orchard
were about to wake, unfold their arms and shake
their shaggy heads, unbend their knobbled knees,
gird up their skirts, peck a parting kiss
and stump off to their day jobs—
or if they weren't, were simply glad to squat
merged in each others' congenial greenery.

Stations of the Cross

Fifteen tapped from all the trees tell
the winding tale of inhumanity. Grief and fear
the world's daily companions on this long route
around the convent grounds. Just so.
The line separating good and evil passes

right through every human heart.
The *Leylandii* stand too for Station 14
—the Cross of Inhospitallity—
minding all without a place to turn.
The end is close to where it all began.

The stump

Even this mouldering stump may serve
to lift up a crucifix—a small stone frieze.
Jesus is marked out
through the camouflage of moss and weather
by his hands, huge and welcoming.

And the damsons

keep on cropping. Pail upon pail.
How on earth could one small tree bear
such a heavy load of dark
sharp-sweet tears?

© Clare Bryden, 30 September 2025

“I am like a spreading olive tree in the house of God.” — Psalm 52.8a (Common Worship)

“The line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either -- but right through every human heart.” — Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, “The Gulag Archipelago”



Disturbed into Loving: Listening to wisdom in the life, spirit and teaching of Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906 – 1945)

Our series of Quiet Days this year focused on an exploration of Bonhoeffer's conviction that the world and God are united in the crucified and exalted Christ and that this informs the spiritual life of each person of faith:

"... one only learns to have faith by living in the full this-worldliness of life ...living fully in the midst of life's tasks, questions, successes, failures, experiences and perplexities – then one takes seriously no longer one's own sufferings, but rather the suffering of God in the world. Then one stays awake with Christ in Gethsemane" This conviction is even clearer in his poem 'Christians and Heathens':

People go to God when they're in need
plead for help, pray for blessing and bread,
for rescue from their sickness, guilt, and death.
So do they all, all of them, Christians and heathens.

People go to God when God's in need,
find God poor, reviled, without shelter or bread,
we see God devoured by sin, weakness, and death.
Christians stand by God in God's own pain.

God goes to all people in their need,
fills body and soul with God's own bread,
goes for Christians and heathen to Calvary's death
and forgives them both.

(both extracts from Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works Vol 8, Letters and Papers from Prison (Fortress Press 2009).

Bonhoeffer's hope is that people of faith cannot stand apart from the world and its realities – that we are compelled to respond in love:

"Love is always Jesus Christ himself
Love is always God himself.
Love is always God's revelation in Jesus Christ ..." and

“Since there is no love that would be independent, autonomous, and free from God’s love, it is this love of God and none other with which human beings love God and neighbour.”

(Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works Vol. 6, Ethics (Fortress Press 2009)

Bonhoeffer writes this in the context of Nazi Germany and the growing horror of pogroms against Jews. He was murdered in Flossenbug concentration camp in 1945.

We thank our speakers Dr. Eleanor McLaughlin, the Rev’d. Dr. Tim Boniface and the Rt. Rev’d. Martin Shaw for giving us such rich experiences and insights into a truly remarkable pastor and theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

Jean Prosser, Chaplain

The Oblate Fellowship

The fellowship is flourishing and is a great support to the Community. We were delighted this year to welcome Sharon Roberts – you can read her account of the Oblates Retreat below. At the end of the Retreat, Oblates were asked for ideas for a Guide to Being an Oblate of the Society of the Sacred Cross (it turned out that there had been a guide in the past, which I hadn’t heard about). It has been interesting to hear these ideas and a revised draft will be circulated at the November Study Day with Fr. George Guiver, Community of the Resurrection. I am quite excited by it. The group is growing individually and numerically and is an integral part of our Society.

Sr. Elizabeth, Oblates’ Sister

Oblates’ Retreat June 19th – 21st 2025 ***‘Recalibrating the Heart’***

Our retreat this year was led Bishop Robert Atwell (until recently Bishop of Exeter). It was particularly good to reconnect with Oblates who had not come for a number of years. I was admitted as an Oblate at the Eucharist at the end of the retreat and so this was a particularly special time for me.

On Corpus Christi a number of Oblates arrived in time for the midday Eucharist and the Exposition. The atmosphere of prayer during the day, set the tone for the

whole retreat. As we met together on the first evening for the introduction to the retreat, Bishop Robert gently asked us ‘What is it like to sit in the healing presence of Jesus?’. By the time we came out of retreat, we had all experienced sitting in that presence. He is an Oblate at Bec Abbey in France and so understood what it is to be an Oblate. He talked about the importance of communication as we interpret our worlds to each other - Community to Oblates and Oblates to Community – and that, in so doing, there was the potential to be a “crown of friendship” for each other. As we continue to reflect on what it means to be an Oblate, this must surely be an important element. The evening session ended with Bishop Robert encouraging us to listen to God with ‘the ear of your heart’.

The three talks began with a powerful prayer: *Lord, what we know not, teach us; what we have not, give us; what we are not, make us; for your love’s sake. Amen.*

In the first session, Bishop Robert helped us to explore God’s call to a deeper level of living. He took us to the story of the call of the first disciples as described in Luke 5 and the challenge Jesus set to the disciples to ‘push out into the deep’ and to ‘let down your nets for a catch’. He described the new church building at Magdala, which is on the site of the call of the disciples, called ‘Duc in Altum’ (from the Latin “put out into the deep,” Luke 5:4). It is worth taking time to explore images online of the atrium, the church and the crypt to get a sense of each of the spaces. The Crypt is built around an ancient, paved courtyard from 2,000 years ago. The courtyard may have been ancient Magdala’s primary fish market near its wharf. On the wall behind the altar there is a huge and powerful painting which relates to Jesus’ cure of the woman who touched the hem of his robe. She was a deeply vulnerable, yet determined woman - her faith had grit. In healing her, Jesus replaced the politics of ritual cleanliness with the politics of compassion, forgiveness, kindness, love and healing. The session ended with the encouragement to ‘reach out and touch the hem’ and the challenge not to ‘stay in the shallows’.

The second talk - ‘Seeking God’ - explored the phrases ‘Your face, Lord, will I seek’ (Ps 27:11) and ‘Seek his face’ (Ps 105:4) as metaphors for Christian discipleship. We returned to the theme of prayer as learning to be in the company of Jesus, and also about savouring his presence. Bishop Robert reminded us that as we gaze on the Cross, we see God looking back at us and are challenged to ‘seek the face of the crucified God’. He then explored the story of Jacob in Genesis 32 - 33. He noted that Jacob says after wrestling with the angel that ‘I have seen God face to face and yet my life has been preserved’ but that this is not the climax of the story. Instead, the climax comes when Jacob looks at Esau and proclaims ‘seeing

your face is like seeing the face of God'. The session ended with the challenge to consider these questions: Where do we look for the face of God? Where do we fail to see the face of God in others? Where do we need to open our eyes?

The final session, started with the story of the 1914 collision between the steamship *SS Monroe* and the merchant vessel *Nantucket*, which resulted in the sinking of the *Monroe* and the death of 41 people. The *Nantucket* had a faulty compass – it seemed sufficient, but it had not been recalibrated at the start of a new captainship. This led to tragic consequences. The parallel was made with the need to allow God to guide our hearts and the constant need for reorientation through attentive listening to the voice of God in prayer. Bishop Robert then explored the story of the Nazareth manifesto in Luke 4 and how this should shape our own discipleship - our ministry - in making the love of God visible to others so that they are able to respond. He ended with 1 Tim 6:19 and the challenge to 'take hold of the life that really is life' so that our spirituality is authentic and based in the action of God in the world and a life of grace. It is only then that our hearts are continually and truly recalibrated.

It was good to be at Tymawr together and share time with the Community. We were well looked after both physically and spiritually and look forward to next year's retreat.

Oblate Sharon Roberts



Vijay and the volunteer group renewing the rose garden

Obituaries

Mary Brunt-Rolfe

Mary Brunt-Rolfe, an Associate from 1996, died peacefully on November the 21st 2025. Mary lived in the Netherlands with her husband, but had family connections in the U.K. I met Mary in 2007 or 2008 when she said that it would probably be her last visit to Tymawr; she would have been over 70 then. She did keep in touch and sent us a regular annual gift of a Dutch calendar. Her daughter Mary Ann wrote that Tymawr had been a very important place for her mother and that she enjoyed reading the Advent newsletter every year.

Mavis Eccles

Mavis Eccles, an Associate from 2011, died on 1st July 2025. She was a person who was drawn to a regular pattern of prayer. Her parish priest recognized this and encouraged her to lead the weekday Morning Prayer services at the Parish Church. She was very diligent in this, and tried to prepare a few sentences of reflection on one of the readings each day. In her working life she had been headmistress of a primary school in the Midlands. After the death of her husband, whom she grieved deeply, Mavis decided to train as a bereavement counsellor through Exeter Hospice. Her positive attitude was shown in a piece she wrote for the 2024 Associates magazine: *"... Giving thanks for all the good things in life is something I find to be very therapeutic. I am now nearly 90 years of age, am only partially sighted, very deaf and crippled with arthritis, BUT lots to be thankful for...."*

Sr. Rosalind Mary, Associates' Sister

The Garden Update

What a dry growing season this year! It was the driest February to July since the famous summer of 1976 and by August, the Wye area was officially declared to be in drought (thankfully through September and October rainfall was about 20 percent above average) but the rivers and ground water remain very low. This has had an impact. The soft and tree fruit has produced a very heavy crop in response to the water stress. The dry spring was perfect for their flowers to be pollinated by the higher levels of insects. The dry weather also prevented fungus / mold, so all our trees produced a maximum yield. Several of our older pear trees (Conference, Concord, Juliette de Maline) that rarely produce fruit, have this year given an abundance. So the store room and freezers are heaving and there'll be plenty of fruit puddings in the convent this winter!

In the veg garden we had a hard time getting carrots, beetroot and parsnips to germinate, though we got there after several attempts, but significantly less than previous years, despite Srs. Joanna and Megan's valiant watering efforts. The spuds were smaller too, but a good year for beans, greens and tomatoes. The veg garden has been full of flowers and looking stunning.

Along with the volunteers, the garden team planted around 3000 hedge plants along both sides of the new driveway to Tymawr Barn. It was hard going as the bedrock was near the surface, but they all went in and there haven't been many failures despite the dry conditions.

More hedging was planted in the meadow below the barn with Gwent Wildlife Trust help, it is 3 meters wide and bisects that large field, which adds much needed hedgerow on site. It will also help to slow the water that drains to the stream at the lower end of the meadow. It is another aid to increasing the land's water-holding capacity and flood mitigation. With trusty volunteers, we have removed barbed wire from perimeter and field fences, and aim to remove as much as possible, so far 1 km has been removed! With GWT we continue to scythe the meadow and orchard boundaries to keep back the bracken and to coppice the bramble. It's great to have the help of volunteers with the skills to do this non-invasive method of meadow management. More people are interested in learning these skills and came to a 2-day scything course held here this summer by Monmouthshire Meadows group.

We have also offered a half day in drystone walling for a few eager volunteers, working to dismantle and rebuild the wall in Our Lady's Garden. It's been slow going, but we want to do a good job and learn along the way so that the wall will stand for at least another 50 years. Another traditional and sustainable craft that we are introducing into the management of the land is hedge laying. We will start with a short (80m) section that divides the fields below Michaelgarth. I will teach the Midlands style, which is hedge plants laid at 45 degrees, staked every foot and bound with Hazel across the top. It will be a natural stock proof boundary to replace the wire and post fence and will be another contribution to the habitat and biodiversity of the site. We will eventually lay all our internal hedges this way so I need to get the volunteers trained up! GWT have funding from the Wye Valley ANOB for hedge laying training and to plant some in-field specimen trees, build dams in the stream and create dew ponds, through a new stewardship scheme *Ffermio bro / Local farming* that is helping landowners to manage their land more sustainably.

Vijay Rai, Head of Gardens



Access Appeal

We thank everyone who has donated to this Appeal to raise £250,000 over 2 years to fund essential building work to make Tymawr Chapel accessible to all who wish to worship here. Increasingly, residents and visitors are deterred by stairs and steps inside and out – and the lack of fully accessible toilet facilities. Our architects have devised an ingenious plan to overcome these difficulties by creating a car park at the side of the house with an undercover ramp and lift to the level of the Sacristy and Library doors and adapted internal doors. The work will also enlarge, level and equip the loo off the front hall. The plans have received planning approval and we hope to complete these essential changes before the Centenary of the Chapel in 2029. The target to raise funds is tough (we are applying for grants) and with your help we trust that worship for all can become a reality.



An Easier Way to Donate and Pay

When you next come to Tymawr you will see a smart new Card Reader in the front hall. You can use it to donate to the Access Appeal and to general funds, and to pay for accommodation, books and cards, by Debit or Credit card. If you are making a Donation and are able to Gift Aid (which means the Convent receives 20p in the £ at no extra cost to you), you can do this on the Card Reader too. You also have an option to cover the transaction fee, which means the Convent gets all your gift. The Card Reader is quick and easy to use and will make life easier for us and for you.

A Lasting Gift to Tymawr: giving support and encouragement

Legacies

During the last 10 years, nearly £314,000 has been given in Legacies to Tymawr, which has enabled the Community to maintain its life and to continue to offer a warm welcome to guests and visitors. Making a Will ensures that what you leave will go to the people you want it to – and ensures that your gift reaches them more quickly. You may wish to talk to your family or your financial adviser about how to make a lasting gift to Tymawr. Any help you give will be used wisely to sustain Tymawr's life of prayer and hospitality.



Regular Giving

You may also choose to support Tymawr with regular giving each month or annually at Christmas or on a special anniversary. Regular giving enables us to plan and to use our resources wisely.

If you are a tax payer, you may use Gift Aid, which is an arrangement with HMRC that allows charities (including the Society of the Sacred Cross) to reclaim tax on a donation made by a UK taxpayer, at no extra cost to the donor. Gifts can be given by cheque, BACs, debit / credit card and using the QR code on our website:

www.tymawrconvent.org

**We are grateful for every gift, small or large, because
your support and thoughtfulness encourages us and
helps to ensure Tymawr is here in the future.**

Thank you.

Save the Date! – Saturday 13 June 2026

A Gala Concert in Newport Cathedral

hosted by the Archbishop of Wales, the Rt. Reverend
Cherry Vann
to raise funds for Tymawr's **Access Appeal**

Featuring:

Monmouth Male Voice Choir conductor Stuart Babel
and

Cwmbran Baroque conductor Carol Williams

Further information on booking your ticket (or if you cannot come in person, joining us online) will come soon. For further details contact the Chaplain on SSCchaplain@gmail.com

Community Contact Details

General enquiries: community@tymawrconvent.com

Bookings: bookings@tymawrconvent.com

Telephone: 01600 860244/808

Website: www.tymawrconvent.org

*Society of the Sacred Cross
Tymawr Convent
Lydart
Monmouth
NP25 4RN*

Planning 2026

Please check the website www.tymawrconvent.org during the year for confirmation of these dates

COMMUNITY

Young People's retreat (by invitation)	14th - 18th Jan 2026
ACCESS FOR ALL Fundraising Concert:	13th June 2026
Community pilgrimage (by invitation)	8th - 11th July 2026
Quiet Days :	2nd May; 4th July; 5th Sept; 3rd Oct; 7th Nov 2026 (tbc)

Annual winter closed period:	8th Jan – 15th Feb 2026
Easter tide closed period:	11-19th April 2026
Summer closed period	1- 31st August 2026
Autumn Closed Period	14th – 22nd Nov 2026

ASSOCIATES

Associates' Retreat led by Revd. Janet Bone	10th - 13th March
<i>Please book your place with Sister Elizabeth:</i> <i>bookings@tymawrconvent.com</i>	

Associates' Day led by Revd. Canon Dr. Ali Gray **20th June 2026:**
'If you are not disturbed by this, then you are not paying attention' :
transforming eco-anxiety.

OBLATES

Retreat led by Sr. Carol CHN	4th - 6th June 2026
'Ways of Affirmation'	
<i>Please book your place with Sister Elizabeth:</i> <i>bookings@tymawrconvent.com</i>	

Study Day	24th Oct 2026 (tbc)
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*Wishing you the joy and blessings of
Christmas, with love and prayers from
the Community at Tymawr Convent*