



Joy is receiving a new tracksuit



The Franciscan

Trinity /July 2012
St Francis of Assisi Parish Newsletter

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Foreword

Several articles in this issue are about the Environment – they are a sequel to our World Environment Day service and the exhibition on this theme in the parish centre. In reply to the question whether St Francis can really be called an ‘eco-congregation’, we examine Recycling, Worm Composting x 3 and saving Electricity and Water. In his letter, the Rector invites us to enjoy the beauty and richness of God’s creation, but this implies that we do not waste or spoil it. News about the parish and outreach programmes is rounded off by two articles on meditation and prayer, once again reminding us of the beauty and goodness of God’s universe and how we connect to it.

Jill Daugherty, Editor

From the Rector's Desk

My dear Parishioners,



One of the myths of Christianity is that we are expected to be a “miserable” lot. Perhaps this stems from a misunderstanding of the **concept of self-denial**. Truth is, the nervous ascetic who is agitated about every detail of his or her self-denial, who is terrified of the pleasure God has built into existence, is in fact (ironically) a very self-centred individual.

Such “virtuous” persons imagine that God has placed all the good things of the world before them like bait in a trap, and they worry constantly about their own “perfection”. This struggle for perfection becomes a kind of battle of wits with the Creator who made all things good. The very goodness of creation becomes a threat to their “purity”: they would **like** to abstain from everything... but cannot.

Human like the rest of us (surprise, surprise), they too must live daily within the beauty and splendour of God’s created order – there is no other space for daily existence – but rather than glorifying God through the right use of the good things of this life in simplicity and with gratitude, they are almost inevitably miserable and judgemental (the worst possible examples of a vibrant, healthy faith).

They do, in fact, live an “unnatural existence”. God is more glorified by a person who sees and uses the beauty of all He has created in a natural and healthy way, and who reflects that simplicity and gratitude in his or her daily pilgrimage of faith. The world watches and sees normality in this. And, more importantly, like the healthy user of God’s goodness, thinks of God in the process.

The unhealthy ascetic is terrified of the pleasure God has put in things and, in his terror, thinks only of himself – and again the world watches and sees this, and not God.

Where do we find ourselves? Do we rejoice in the sky and the warmth and light of the sun, food and drink, fellowship and love, music and theatre, poetry and literature, and other endless, endless signs of God amongst us – or do we prefer to endure lives of detached, self-righteous asceticism, and judge others who fail to do likewise?

Father Timothy

From the Parish Registers

Baptisms

Date of Baptism	Name of Child	Birth date	Parents
20 May 2012	Caleb Pinkham	8 Sep 2011	Donna Pinkham
20 May 2012	Isabella Barclay	9 Jan 2012	Joe & Michelle Barclay
20 May 2012	Zoé Miles	28 Nov 1994	Geoffrey & Caroline Miles
20 May 2012	Guy Smith	3 Jan 1994	Yolandé Smith

Confirmation 27 May 2012

Zoé Miles
Katherine de Groot
Michael de Groot
Matthew de Groot
Richard de Groot

Guy Smith
Stuart Todd
Courtney Todd
Bryce Anderson
Kuda Musanhu

Marriage

Date of Marriage	Groom	Bride
16 June 2012	Norman Smithers	Win Phillips



Pentecost Flowers

Faithful departed

Date of Death	Name
30 May 2012	Henriette Carle
4 June 2012	Jenny Nesor
4 June 2012	Ida Blignaut
25 June 2012	Doreen Malherbe

WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY

To celebrate World Environment Day, special readings, prayers and a liturgy supplied by the Province were used at both services on Sunday 10 June. Afterwards the congregations were invited to view an exhibition in the parish centre set up by the Environment Committee. This was based on posters and flyers from SAFCEI (Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute): we joined SAFCEI in October 2011, thereby becoming an "eco-congregation".

The SAFCEI documentation was supplemented by pictures provided by Elizabeth Bojé. Guided by her granddaughter Christine, who did media studies at the University of Pretoria, Elizabeth gave structure to the display by dividing it into two sections (God's Creation / Our Responsibility) and used arrows and other devices to highlight various aspects.

Hank Doeg provided a board explaining how a Geyser Management System can save electricity, while Lou Pretorius brought part of his worm farm to illustrate a poster on composting. Recycling through Waste Plan and other facilities was promoted.

Jill Daugherty





The next generation is already asking questions: Megan and Jessica Innes inspect the exhibition with dad David



Lou's Worms

**ST FRANCIS:
AN ECO-CONGREGATION?**

'TAKE ACTION!' Everywhere we hear the call to make sure there is a healthier planet for our children.

BUT - there is such a variety of calls on our attention – and time – that while many of us are aware of the great need, we just haven't the energy to make the kind of life-style changes we would like to. Let us not make Environment Day just a show of pictures!

RECYCLING is perhaps the easiest 'good' pattern to start with. So below are the sites members of the congregation have suggested in their areas. We hope this will help you make a difference to the huge amount of 'waste' which is just 'wasted'.

Elizabeth Bojé

The Franciscan

PAPER	BOTTLES	PLASTIC	TINS/ CANS	GLOBES/ BATTERIES	COMP. STUFF
Sungarden Hospice, Lynnwood Road	Woodlands Shopping Centre: Skip in car park	Bins in Super Spar, Moreleta Park, for plastic, tins, glass, paper & electronic waste		Builders Warehouse, Atterbury Value Mart	Macro Silverton
Ronnie Bag collection Pretoria East Thursdays	Pinaster Street, behind Cynthia's, Hazlewood			Paul's Café Long/Milner Streets	
Ronnie Bag collection Murrayfield - second Monday	Skip in Roper Street, Boys' High entrance			Woolies	
Bags of everything Brooklyn Thursdays	✓	✓	✓	CSIR	
WHPS everything	✓	✓	✓	Any Pick & Pay	
Waterkloof Primary School	✓	✓	✓		
New Hope School Cynthia St					
St Francis	We will soon have a bin for paper in Long Street. The parish will receive payment for the paper collected.				

Waste Plan supplies big plastic bags for all recyclables (paper, glass, cans, plastic, etc.) and collects them in several eastern suburbs in Pretoria on the same day as Tshwane Metro empties the rubbish bins. Ask Jill or Elizabeth for a Waste Plan flyer and your first bag. When that is collected, a new bag will be left in your gate. Visit www.wasteplan.co.za for a map of the Pretoria collection area.

Worm composting is a great way to recycle kitchen and garden waste. No fewer than three articles were sent to the editor promoting this – see below:

Red Earthworm Composting

Our daughter in Heidelberg introduced me to the very special red earthworms. They can turn your weekly vegetable peels into the best compost you can think of. But they are not our ordinary earthworms that we use when we go fishing. Those die when they are buried in the soil! These worms have been with us for a long time. In the 90s the then University of Potchefstroom did a lot of research on them and it resulted in worm farms where manure and waste were turned into enough quality compost from which a good living could be made.

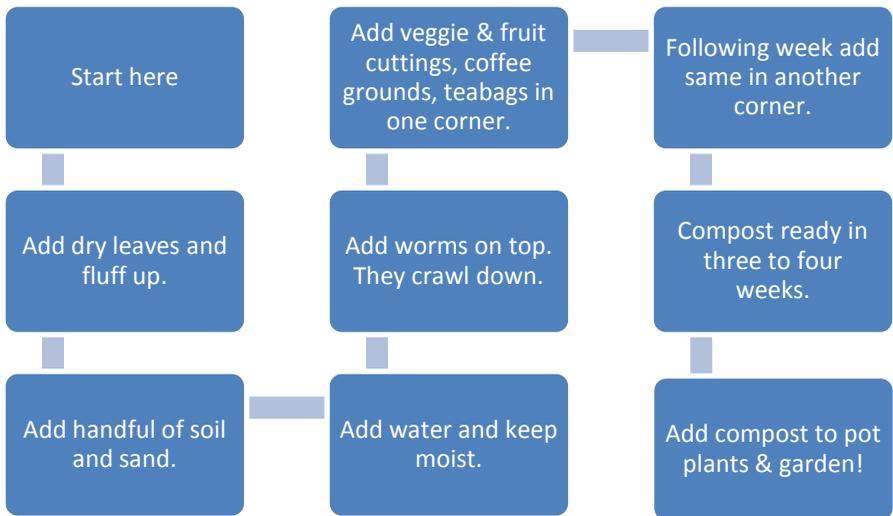
The nice thing about these worms is that you can easily keep them in a plastic container to produce compost for your pot plants and hanging baskets. I used my first harvest for two hanging baskets and I have never before had hanging baskets of pansies that started at the end of September and just did not want to stop producing the most beautiful flowers until March. I started with three big bags of cow manure, added the worms and buried the peels regularly in the heap. By the end of three months everything was changed into compost. Then I harvested the compost and started the process all over again.

I had to learn a number of lessons. Ants are extremely fond of the little worms. To counter them I had to treat the ant heap area with agricultural lime. Ants hate the lime and the worms have no problem with that. Secondly the birds wiped out my first batch of worms. They flattened the heap in search of the juicy worms and the result was that I had to go back to Heidelberg to ask for another 1000 worms. In the end I had to use a net to cover the heap so that the worms could multiply unhindered. And multiply they did. All they need is that the heap stays wet. Not too wet. The reason is that they breathe through their skin - if you can call that breathing. What is more, they survive very cold winters and very warm summer days.

If you do not like the idea of working with cow manure, do have a look at www.redwormcomposting.com for making compost in a plastic container where you make some bedding of newspaper and dry leaves, add a handful of soil and a handful of sand and then your peels in the corner of the container every week. The worms feed on the micro organisms that grow on the waste material and in the process get rid of it.

See chart below for summary:

WORM COMPOSTING CHART



Lou Pretorius

See the following SAFCEI newsletter re our celebrations at St Francis:
<http://safcei.org/how-did-your-congregation-celebrate-world-environment-day/>

If you have an email address, you can send your contact details to communications@safcei.org.za and they will add you to their monthly mailing list.

My Worm Farm

Some years ago, *Carte Blanche* had a programme on a worm farm run at the Mount Nelson Hotel in Cape Town. The management team at Mount Nelson decided to introduce vermiculture (the 'grown-up' term for worm farming) into their operational vision. All the kitchen waste and garden cuttings are fed into large worm bins to provide compost for their hotel gardens.

I later heard that it is possible to run a worm farm on a small scale. I read up about it on the internet, and was also encouraged to investigate further when I visited Margaret and Anton Gouveneur at their home in a retirement complex. They had a small worm-farming system in a circular container on their verandah and their garden was stunning.

On the internet, I read of many firms from which one can buy a worm farming system, but they are usually quite expensive to purchase. I also found sites which tell one how to set up your own system in an economical way.

The worms one uses in a worm farm are not our common and garden earth worms, but 'red wigglers' (*estedia fetida*) from America. When one uses the worm droppings for compost, one must make sure that no 'red wigglers' are left in it, because they are not indigenous to our continent. Introducing them into our environment would not be an 'eco-friendly' thing to do; it would be bad for them and for our own indigenous worms.

The reason I was keen to have a worm farm was to supply compost for my garden by recycling kitchen waste. But the other good aspect of keeping a worm farm is that they produce worm 'tea' (wee, I suppose). The compost comes from the food added to the container and the worm 'castings'. The 'tea' comes from their liquid waste. One uses the worm tea by diluting it one part worm tea to ten parts water, so that it looks like amber-coloured tea. It makes an excellent fertilizer for pot-plants. I apply it to my pot-plants once a fortnight to good effect. One can also soak some worm castings in rain water for a day or so, to make worm tea.

The containers for a worm-farm should preferably be made of dark plastic (or other material such as old car tyres). Mine is made from deep (as in size) black rectangular plastic containers. Holes are pierced in the base of the upper container so that the liquid waste can drain through to the lower box. The upper container has a lid to keep it dark inside. Worms need to breathe, so they need breathing holes in the sides of the upper box, too, but they must be small, so the worms don't crawl out through them.

Old motor car tyres placed on top of each other can serve as a worm farm. Place them on a piece of corrugated iron raised on bricks at the back to help drain off the worm liquid. One can place a layer of pebbles in the base of the lower box to help with drainage, although that is not essential. Place a couple of layers of torn-up damp (not wet) newspaper or cardboard (egg boxes) in the base to make a nest for the worms. Autumn leaves can be used as well. Put in a handful or two of garden soil (not potting soil). Put in the red wigglers and some food. Don't overfeed at first. The worms eat about half their weight in food every day.

The worms are fed on kitchen waste and shells from boiled eggs (or egg shells soaked in boiling water for a few minutes). They don't like acidic fruits and vegetables like pineapple, citrus peels, onions and tomatoes. I add left over crusts of bread or cereal.

I read that one must cut up the food waste very finely before feeding it to the worms, which is a time consuming chore. Another article I read suggested that one put the kitchen waste into a blender and process it that way. My worms have flourished since I began using blender-prepared food, and it's much less of a chore.

Harvesting the compost may cause a problem for the squeamish. Placing the food on one side of the container for a week should encourage the worms to migrate to that side of the box. Then clearing the compost out of the other half should not be too difficult. Clean out the box, renew the nest of damp paper and leaves, and away you go to start your new worm-compost bin. Have fun!

Sheila Cave

Compost-Making, in a Plastic Bag...

For years I bought compost and potting soil from various nurseries, until it became too expensive for my meagre income. Meanwhile *The Gardener* magazine (through its editor Tanya) has constantly encouraged its readers to use home-made compost in their gardens. This is my somewhat modified attempt.

To make the compost, first take a strong plastic bag (I use the white ones previously containing compost or other fertilizer from a nursery). Place a layer of ordinary garden soil or dry leaves or dry grass at the bottom. Add your kitchen peelings, more dry leaves or grass; then a couple of handfuls of top/garden soil (or buy a bag of topsoil from a nursery). Now shred about four pages of newspaper (not shiny paper) to completely cover the soil. Finish off with a torn-up egg box, placing the pieces gently on top of the shredded newspaper, hoping that the unseen earthworms will be happy – apparently they like to hide under damp egg boxes. (I leave my box to soak in a bucket while I'm busy.) Now pour water over the whole heap until you think it has soaked through the dry leaves at the bottom.

Close the bag, punch some small holes around the sides with a small garden fork, and leave it until you have more household peelings. I repeat this process about once a week. Normally my bag will take about four weeks to fill up, after which I close/fold over the top and secure with a weight, usually a stone or brick. After six weeks the compost should be lovely friable soil, with not a sign of any of the “ingredients”, but full of busy earth worms. This is one of God's amazing miracles. I have no idea where the worms come from – maybe in the topsoil?

The secret of making this very quick compost is to chop up your peelings, lettuce leaves, etc. into approximately 1 inch pieces. To make nutritious potting soil, one needs to mix about one part compost with about two parts topsoil and a handful of bonemeal.

Joy Hopking

Energy Optimisation – conserving utilities and household expenditure

Would it be a surprise to you to know that about 50% of the energy and water resources consumed in your household are probably in excess of what you need to consume?

Take water heating for example. Eskom contends that, in the average household, 40% of the electricity is consumed in the household geysers. With minimal expenditure, it is possible to halve this energy usage, recovering the investment within the first year.

The key lies in:

- Replacing the thermostat with an electronic temperature controller, which not only uses the energy more effectively, but actually increases the quantity of usable hot water in the geyser. This can save at least 25% of the electricity usage.
- Reducing the heat loss from the geyser by cloaking it in a high efficiency thermal blanket, enclosed in a reflective aluminium coating, and lagging the pipework from the geyser to the point of usage, which can achieve at least a 15% saving.
- Switching the geyser off using a programmable timer avoiding use of electricity in periods where it is not required. Tests have shown that this can contribute up to 15%. This also allows switching off in peak periods, lightening the demand on the network and assisting in avoiding blackouts. The installed geyser remains and generally the life of the device is extended.

Household heating (in winter) can similarly be managed down by using convection heating devices which operate at lower temperatures, but distribute the warmth more effectively. Cooking is a big user. Manage the usage – think laterally – microwaves can save.

The judicious use of the timer on the swimming pool filter enables the load to be automatically shed in peak demand times, lightening the load on the network – reducing blackout risk. Reducing the run time in winter compensates for additional heating demand reducing overall consumption.

Lighting costs can be significantly reduced by the use of energy saving light bulbs, and more importantly using localised lighting with fewer globes, providing the spot lighting required with much reduced consumption – it is often easier to read in these circumstances.

It has been suggested that a total of 20% saving in power consumption can be achieved by a change in ATTITUDE. Ask the question as to what each element of power consumption contributes on the one hand to household expenditure, or resource use, and how it contributes towards a better environment in which one lives.

Having determined the answers, move to starting thinking of ways of achieving the same effect with reduced energy consumption.

Why not organise a family competition, urging all to come up with ideas?

You can have a small carbon footprint despite having big feet.

Try the same with water usage – the Israelis for example drip feed plants rather than spray irrigating and use 10% of the amount of water. When running a bath, insert the plug before opening the hot tap, and, particularly if you have followed the optimisation described above, you will draw a comfortable bath with less hot water wastage.

You can significantly reduce your utilities expenditure, and contribute to the world environment conservation, without losing out on your lifestyle.

IT'S UP TO YOU

Hank Doeg

Winter Cheer for Tumelong Mission Children

At the start of the winter, the Craft and Fellowship group supplied 57 jerseys to the children of the Tumelong Mission nursery schools. They then decided to buy tracksuits (@ ±R45 each) from Pep Stores for all 114 children aged 1 to 6 years who attend the crèches/nursery schools in Maboloka and Ga-Rankuwa, and appealed to parishioners to help them meet the target amount.

A list of the names of the children with their gender and age was obtained from Tumelong and Shirley prepared 114 envelopes. One Sunday morning members of both congregations were asked to put R45 in an envelope and to write a message to the child whose name appeared on the envelope. The response exceeded all expectations – the envelopes were rapidly filled with the required amount or more. By the following Sunday the target amount had been reached and the tracksuits were bought. They were handed over to representatives from Tumelong (acting Director Albert Mkhonza and Lucas Mthembu) at a meeting of the Group on Thursday 31 May. Photos of the children of the Maboloka Haven receiving their tracksuits were sent to us by Lucas, the Care and Relief Coordinator.



Tumelong Mission also benefitted from the clothes and blankets that were originally intended for Gatang Secondary School in Mamelodi East. Once again the parishioners of St Francis were generous when asked to donate clothes and blankets and to fund 100 blankets that had been bought wholesale. They brought clothes to church and filled envelopes with R55 or more to pay for a blanket. Unfortunately we had left it too late – when Deacon Joan inquired when next an assembly would be held at the school to make the presentation, she was informed that there would be no assembly during the final week of term.

Rather than leave the clothes and blankets that had been donated at the church for the duration of the school holidays, it was decided to ask Tumelong to fetch them and to ensure that child-headed families received the blankets. Tumelong will also see that the clothes are distributed where appropriate. Parishioners are reminded that second-hand clothes that are no longer needed can always be brought to church or to the parish office and are regularly given to Tumelong Mission when they visit St Francis once a fortnight to collect the Fill-a-bag food parcels.

June van der Merwe & Jill Daugherty

Irene Homes Fête 2012

On Tuesday 1 May, the sun shone brightly, the crowds rolled in, so there was every prospect of a highly successful Irene Homes Fête. As you are aware, St Francis was responsible for the pudding stall and met its responsibility in two ways.

Firstly, members of the parish donated a large number of puddings – far more than we expected – and many who did not fancy themselves as pudding makers, or were away on holiday, made very generous donations. Secondly, the help of four ladies made all the difference in the world. Thanks to Jill, Margie, Jeannie and Veronica, we were able to sell over 200 bowls of pudding filled with three spoonfuls from the variety on the table, with a dash of custard on top!

As a result of this joint effort, the stall raised over R3700, thus making a significant contribution to the overall success of the day.

Elizabeth Bojé



Linda Lewis Graduates from the TEE

In 2004, when I first became a lay minister I went to Father Tim and asked him to recommend an Institution where I could become more familiar with the Bible. He recommended the Theological Education by Extension (or TEE) College and thus an exciting, invigorating, frustrating, often regretted relationship began.

All would be well until an assignment was due. No matter how many times I vowed that next time I would be better organised – every three months there would be the stress of getting it in the post, the relief once it was done, the anxiety of waiting for results and the jubilation when they finally arrived. I must confess it was this tension as well as the support of my family, Fr Tim's agitation when I hinted I was going to give up and the space my friends graciously gave me that kept me going. The Morning Glories, my wonderful Bible Study group constantly encouraged me.

I began my studies in 2005 and for the next seven years TV, recreational reading and social life took a back seat. It taught me self discipline, sacrifice and an enormous appreciation of "free" time once all was done and completed from the middle of October until January when the New Year's studies resumed.

Would I do it again? Most definitely. Why? Because through the study of the Bible and other resources I discovered the depth of God's word, the beauty of our liturgy and most importantly the unimaginable Love, Awesomeness, Faithfulness and the undeniable, subtle Presence of God in our lives today.

Also I grew in the realisation that each and every one of us is a unique and amazing person and we all have our own talents and abilities to contribute to a better society. Studying has helped me tremendously in my pastoral work and hospital visiting. It has made me more familiar with the wisdom which is there for the taking in God's word.

Graduation day was an amazing experience. The exhilaration felt when that cap (which made the visit to the hairdresser a useless indulgence) was placed on my head and the certificate and medal received, carried me in a state of euphoria for the next couple of days. I had a wonderful celebration with my family and to top it all the 'Morning Glories' celebrated my Graduation with a champagne tea at our next meeting.

I have decided to continue with studying. I hope I can achieve the same result with my Higher Certificate!

Linda Lewis



Linda with her daughter Angela on Graduation Day

Installation of a Dropsafe

Council has overhauled its approach to handling collections and donations and is implementing improved security measures to ensure that all cash collected is appropriately and safely accounted for.

The sidespeople who count the collection after every service have always done so in the choir vestry. This is not an ideal venue – it is used at the same time by deacons, lay ministers and servers to robe or disrobe, and is also a thoroughfare between the church and the parish centre. All this activity distracted the counters.

After sorting and counting the cash, the pledge and other envelopes and filling in the prescribed form, the counters place all monies and the completed form in a bank bag. They then had to find a clergy person with a key to the safe in order to deposit the money – not always an easy matter!

Council therefore decided on the purchase and installation of a new safe which meets present day safety and other requirements. This is a 'dropsafe' – no key is necessary for a deposit to be made, although two keys are needed (held by two different persons) to open the safe and take out the deposits. The new safe has been installed in the photocopy room, which is now also the venue where counting the collection takes place on Sunday mornings, in peace and security.



Harry Savage and Gillian Hearn make the first ever deposit into the new safe after the 07:30 service on 1 July 2012.

Lasni Millar & Jill Daugherty

***Knowing how much we need prayer,
we seek to make it vital, attractive and accessible.***

In my seeking fresh, old-new, different ways of getting closer to God and allowing more of Him and less of myself, I am often encouraged by other people's journeying in prayer. I have become aware that God-in-everything means that my communication with him is not limited to a rushed quiet time in the morning and a quick review at the end of the day breathing: 'Good night God.'

Kathy Coffey: God in the moment

Jesus once asked two disciples; "What do you want?" and they answered: "Where do You live?" He said: "Come and see..." In re-reading Kathy Coffey's book I am again delighting in her ability to share her prayer experiences that so often resonate and mirror my own. The early Greek speaking Christian theologians coined a phrase to describe the inner life of the Trinity: perichoeresis, *peri* meaning 'around' and *choeresis* meaning 'dancing', hence dancing around. Our word *choir* also derives from *choeresis*. So we need to think of music and dance and words together as a symbol of the inner life of God. At every moment of existence we are drawn by the music of the eternal dance to become conscious participants in it. In her book, Kathy invites us to join her in wanting conscious contact with God, to pray as often as possible in a day that is packed with chores, work, family obligations, frustrations and joys. She is in love with God and the dance of God and shares ways she has found to let God into her life.

"Some people's approach to prayer is like phoning a friend only when we are desperately needing a favour." We feel less guilty about this if we have wasted time with this friend, know her quirky habits, shared lots of meals, run a few of her stupid errands and frequently got lost on the highway together. It's much better if our cries of help, yelps of pain, surprise or grief happen within the context of an ongoing, deepening relationship.

She uses the example of a nurse, deeply involved in her patients and paperwork, who pauses to consider that her work does not just provide a paycheck that feeds her children, but that her work taps into God's unique gifts to her, her gift of compassion contributes to healing suffering human

beings. This pause may only last the length of a coffee break, but it transforms her work. She is centered and reenergized by knowing that God goes with her, into the oncology ward as well as the coffee shop. This is her ongoing relationship with God in an attitude of prayer.

By contrast, some monks and nuns would readily admit, while reading the Psalms, that they may be worrying about a dental appointment or what to cook for dinner. “It’s hard to gauge an inner state by an outward appearance.” Bringing God into daily life means a constant movement between action and reflection.

Genesis 28 vs 16: *Surely God is in this place and I did not know it.*

Cathy tells the story of a Jesuit priest, Richard Hauser, who writes about his struggles to pray when he taught young students. From sheer physical exhaustion he would sleep through morning prayer. But, each night he would walk down the highway. He writes: “I recall being discouraged and lonely and pouring out my heart to God. I would also recall returning from these walks peaceful, feeling close to Christ and wondering how I would survive without these walks.” He had a startling revelation: he wasn’t skipping daily prayer; he was simply doing it at night. “I had discovered a rhythm of being completely open and comforted by God. I had learned to pray.” For Hauser that evening prayer walk had more heartfelt meaning than routinely going to church and reciting rote prayers in the amnesia of early morning.

God initiates the conversation. Our response is being sensitive to His initiative and alert to His activity. St Theresa of Lisieux: ‘For me, prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a simple look turned to heaven, it is a cry of recognition and love.’ (And she admits that for seven years she slept through her formal times of prayer.)

Reflect: Have you ever had an example of a prayer experience like Father Hauser that surprised you with some insight into the nature of your own prayer? How are you ‘being’ prayer in your day?

Monique Winn

A Visit to Sediba Mountain Retreat

A few weeks ago, Monique Winn and I decided to attend the monthly mass at the beautiful Sediba Mountain Retreat overlooking the Hartebeespoort Dam. Sediba is a silent retreat centre founded by Fr Joseph Anthofer out of a need for a more meditative spirituality, an age-old tradition in the Christian Church that he had found lacking in most churches, and which people from all walks of life and persuasions were searching for. At Sediba all are welcome, regardless of their sexual or religious persuasion, as long as they are sincere in their search for a deeper experience with God. At Sediba you mingle with people you would not normally meet.

The buildings at Sediba are built in the African tradition of natural stone walls and thatch roofs, surrounded by natural bush. As we entered the chapel, a big round rondavel, we had to take off our shoes and make our way silently, by way of an outer passage that was lined with icons, into a large round undecorated room without windows. One sat on cushions and mats against the wall or on benches near the entrance. Soft lighting from candles enhanced this hushed and sacred space where Fr Mike Bracken, kneeling on the floor in the centre, was to perform the mass.

We were gently led through the mass in which there were readings, a short sermon, in which he spoke of our “oneness” with Christ, sacred music and times to contemplate what we were partaking in. It was very meaningful to be part in this simple, sacred and uncluttered ceremony.

After the Eucharist, we made our way outside to a delightful dining room with the most stunning view across the Hartebeespoort dam. This is the only space at Sediba where one is allowed to talk. Tea and refreshments were served while we got to know and chat to the 23 people who had travelled here to attend the mass. I had an opportunity to speak to Fr Mike about the retreat centre and how it operated. It can accommodate 8 to 10 people, each housed in their own rondavel and mini chapel, all with a view over the dam. Individual and group retreats can be booked here with meals included or on a self-catering basis, all at a very reasonable price.

The Franciscan

Two sessions of meditation of an hour each were held before and after lunch in the beautiful meditation hall, which also has magnificent views of the dam through large open doors. One was free to meditate as long as one wished and leave at any time. Once one had made oneself comfortable with mats, cushions and blankets, a gong would sound for the start of a time of absolute silent meditation. Here one detaches oneself from distractions and opens one's heart to experience God in silence, which cleanses the mind and soothes the soul.



We came away from Sediba once again aware that there are many ways of praying and connecting with God, and grateful to have spent some time in this beautiful place of peace and tranquility.

For more information on Sediba and a whole gallery of photos, go to: www.sedibamountainretreat.co.za.

Gesine Buiten