



Promoting Retreats

The Newsletter of the Association for Promoting Retreats | Autumn 2026



Letter from our President, the Rt Revd Dr Guli Francis-Dehqani



I'm delighted to be writing my first letter as President of the Association for Promoting Retreats. It's genuinely a pleasure to be associated with the organisation.

It seems to me a strange contradiction that as the number of retreat houses has reduced over recent years, with many finding they were no longer financially viable, there also appears (anecdotally at least) to be a resurgence in the desire and indeed need for people to go on retreat. Retreat houses serve an important purpose, offering the opportunity for time out of the busy lane, for us to reconnect with our essential humanity, to dwell a while in God and drink deeply from the wells of salvation.

There are, of course, those who are disciplined in booking regular retreats, who tend their spirituality well, maintaining healthy rhythms in life and faith. But there are many others who stay on the treadmill, maintaining a frenetic pace for too long before they recognise the need to stop for a while or they crash entirely.

Exhaustion and burn out are an all-too-common feature of life but in truth they are not a

modern phenomenon. The Bible too is full of examples of struggle, reminding us that emotional and physical fatigue are part of being human. We are vulnerable creatures, impacted by our biology and physiology, and our emotions and sense of wellbeing are also subject to the experiences we encounter, prey to the vicissitudes of our existence.

Consider the prophet Elijah as we meet him in 1 Kings 19. The description is of someone who has experienced burnout, is in deep despair and even considering ending his life. And God's response is neither to rebuke and tell him to pull himself together, nor to fuel his feelings of self-pity or provide medication to dull the pain. Instead, God moves to the ordinary things by providing sleep, food and the assurance of his ongoing gentle presence, before speaking in the quietness of a whisper to give Elijah once again a task and a sense of purpose.

Isn't that the task of every retreat house? To provide rest and sustenance and enable us to hear God's voice more clearly.

+ Guli Chelmsford

Cover image: Summer flower displays and produce from Holland House, Crophorne

Letter from our Chair, the Revd Cameron Butland



Encouraging one another

It is very good to welcome our new President, Bishop Guli Francis-Dehqani in this newsletter. We are delighted that Bishop Guli has agreed to work with APR and to support the work of the charity. As you have just read, in her first presidential article Bishop Guli describes the importance of retreats and retreat houses, describing their value as providing 'rest, sustenance and to enable us to hear God's voice more clearly'.

Brother Roger sought to encourage those who came to Taizé to find this rest, sustenance and God's peace. He wrote, 'If only everyone could realize that God remains alongside us even in the fathomless depths of our loneliness. God says to each person, "You are precious in my sight, I treasure you and I love you." Yes, all God can do is give his love; that sums up the whole of the Gospel. What God asks of us and offers us is simply to receive his infinite mercy' *.

That God loves us is a reality that we find hard to comprehend. But when we discover that his love is

forgiveness above all else, our hearts find peace and are even transformed. Then, in God, we become able to forget what assails our hearts: this is a wellspring from which we can draw freshness and new vitality. Our retreat houses are therefore important places of peace; they are signs to us of God's ongoing and everyday love for each of us.



St Mother Teresa of Calcutta (pictured above) says that we should, 'Seek the face of God in everything, everyone, all the time, and discern his hand in every happening. Seeing and adoring the presence of Jesus, especially in the lowly appearance of bread, and in the distressing disguise of the poor'.

* From Brother Roger's Unfinished Letter 2006, www.archives.taize.fr/en_article2964.html

Letter from our Chair, *cont.*



You can access our monthly podcasts on promotingretreats.org/news-events-blog

St. Teresa reminds us that we need each other in the community of faith, that our response to the world can never be individualistic, rather it is essentially what we do corporately. 'What you are doing I cannot do, what I'm doing you cannot do, but together we are doing something beautiful for God, and this is the greatness of God's love for us — to give us the opportunity to become holy through the works of love that we do, because holiness is not the luxury of the few. It is a very simple duty for you, for me — you in your position, in your work, and I and others, each one of us in the work, in the life that we have given our word of honour to God' *.

APR, in this spirit of faith, is therefore a community of people seeking humbling to witness to the love of God in our daily lives, recognising the importance of our unique and distinctive witness. The work of the retreat houses and retreat leaders is at the heart

of all we do in encouraging one another.

Over the past few months, the Trustees of the APR have sought to offer this encouragement in our new monthly prayers on our website. In the two APR retreats each year (see p.5), we seek to show that this is of central importance to our spiritual lives.



As a community, the offer of our bursaries continues to encourage everyone to find that peace for themselves. The Trustees of APR will be meeting this autumn to plan for the future; please remember us in your prayers as we seek to develop and encourage this ministry of retreats.

Cassie Butland

* St. Teresa of Calcutta, *'In the Heart of the World: Thoughts, Stories and Prayers'*, New World Library, 2010

Our **AGM** this year will be held at **2pm on Thursday 5th November**, and will be conducted via Zoom; it should last about an hour.

If you would like to attend, please email us on **promoting.retreats@gmail.com**; we will circulate the Zoom link and associated paperwork nearer the time

Upcoming APR Retreats: Autumn 2026 and Spring 2027



Above: Cameron Butland and Holy Rood House, Thirsk.

Below: Diarmuid O'Murchu and Holland House, Crothorne



Our Autumn retreat this year will be held from 20th – 22nd October at **Holy Rood House, Thirsk**, and will be led by APR Chair, **Cameron Butland**.

Cameron writes, 'As Jesus walks, he meets people, tells stories and teaches, revealing God's presence around him. Our faith is part of a journey. In this retreat, we will rediscover how to travel light and to find in the world around us and within us, the God who meets us in the everyday'.

The retreat will cost £360 per person (and £350 for APR Members); this will include all your meals (please advise us of any dietary needs when you book). Many of the rooms are *en-suite*, and will be allocated on a first-come first-served basis. You can book online (and pay via Paypal) on promotingretreats.org/APR-autumn-retreat-2026, or please email us for a Booking Form.

Our 2027 Spring retreat will be held at **Holland House, Crothorne**, from 16th – 18th April 2027. The retreat will be led by **Diarmuid O'Murchu**, a social scientist, writer and retired missionary, much of whose life has been devoted to Adult Faith Development

across several countries. You can read more about him on diarmuidomurchu.com.

Entitling the retreat, '*Evolving Spirituality for the 21st Century*', Diarmuid writes, 'Across the contemporary world we are witnessing a crisis of religious belief, vacillating between fundamentalism and agnosticism. Over the past 50 years, an alternative spiritual consciousness has been evolving, with a vibrancy and creative potential that makes a great deal more sense; this retreat will explore its cultural and religious significance.'

Holland House is a comfortable retreat house in Worcestershire, with excellent food and a beautiful garden. Many of their bedrooms are *en-suite*; these will be allocated on a first-come first-served basis.

The retreat will cost £340 per person (for APR members, and all bookings made before 1 December), and £350 for non-members thereafter; this will include all your meals. You can book your place online (and pay via Paypal) by visiting promotingretreats.org/APR-Spring-Retreat, or please email us for a Booking Form.

Reflecting on APR's Spiritual Wellbeing Conference in April



Above: An Easter arrangement in Launde's Gallery

Right (top): Cameron Butland and Bishop John Stroyan

Right (bottom): Chris Cook

Since 2014, and in alternate years, the APR has organised a national conference for people from across the country who are involved in all kinds of spirituality work, to network and be resourced. The most recent gathering was held at Launde Abbey in April. Forty delegates attended, representing a wide range of roles from 26 different dioceses. These included Spirituality Advisers and spiritual direction network coordinators, diocesan Well-being officers, Archdeacons and Directors of Ministry and/or pastoral care.

Drawing on themes from Isaiah 55, and aiming to complement the wider Church of England's emphasis on fostering wellbeing among all those involved in ministry, the conference was entitled, 'Come, all you who are thirsty: Resourcing spiritual wellbeing'. The keynote speakers were Professor Chris Cook (from the University of Durham) and Revd Ben Cahill-Nicholls (Director of the Clergy Support Trust), with extra input from APR President, Rt Revd John Stroyan.

The atmosphere throughout the Conference was upbeat,



full of joy and optimism, with many delegates discovering connections in their work of which they were previously unaware. New collaborations were made, and several small groups of people from neighbouring dioceses made firm commitments to meet and work together in future. There was a generous spirit of sharing information and models of good practice





Above (top): Ben Cahill-Nicholls, Director of the Clergy Support Trust

Above (bottom): Launde's sculpture in the full moon

between delegates who were well-established in their roles, and those with less experience or in newly-formed wellbeing roles. Held in a framework of prayer, the programme also included regional and topic-based workshops, as well as time for networking. As always, the staff at Launde Abbey made us feel very welcome; the rooms were comfortable and the food generous.

Bishop John Stroyan opened the Conference, speaking powerfully about how spiritual wellbeing can neither be created by human effort nor result from positive external circumstances, but is offered as a gift from God. Professor Chris Cook spoke about Christian spirituality from his work as a psychotherapist, reflecting on the 'dark night of the soul' from biological, psychological, social and faith perspectives.

Revd Ben Cahill-Nicholls suggested that one should think of 'wellbeing' as a verb, an ongoing action, rather than as a noun, or 'state to be achieved'. He described how the Clergy Support Trust has supported the mental, physical and financial health of clergy, as well as their spouses and families for 370 years, and continues to offer millions of pounds in grants each year.

Reflecting on their experience afterwards, one delegate wrote, 'It was a joy to meet you, your team and so many others involved in this work of Spiritual Direction and Wellbeing. Thank you for your welcome, your kindness, and all the talents that you so humbly share to facilitate such rich exchange. I have come away enriched!' We have already booked Launde Abbey for our next Conference in May 2028.



Demelza's Land's End to John O'Groats Bike Ride: *The start*



From mid-May to mid-June 2026, APR Administrator Demelza Henderson, cycled from Land's End to John O'Groats, raising more than £7000 for the APR's Bursary Fund through sponsorship. Accompanied by her partner, Ben, Demelza covered the 1180 miles in 23 days, stopping at 17 different APR member retreat houses, and meeting three other retreat leaders, along the way.



of many of our days!

We travelled mostly along designated cycle paths – usually small country lanes, disused railway lines or canal towpaths – although our route



Demelza writes: I had cycled the 'End-to-End' about 30 years ago, but this time, we wanted to take it at a more leisurely pace and along a more unusual, meandering route. And the whole experience has been one of the most enjoyable and memorable things I've ever done – I loved every minute!

I particularly enjoyed watching the geology, geography, flora, fauna and industrial heritage of the country change as we travelled north – and it was a joy and a huge privilege to be able to combine this with a kind of personal pilgrimage connecting a network of retreat houses and leaders across the country. Thank you all. Your unfailingly warm welcomes were the highlights



Photos (left, top to bottom): Blessing at Land's End; a brief pause at [Tinhay Retreats](#), Devon; Demelza and Sarah Horsman at [Sheldon Retreat Centre](#); Demelza with retreat leader, [Vanessa Cole](#); with Chris Whittington (of the [School of Contemplative Life](#)).

Above (top to bottom): Meeting Steve, Larissa and Bowie, guardians of [Epiphany House](#), Truro; Demelza outside Exeter Cathedral

... from Worcestershire to Staffordshire



did occasionally have to pass right through the middle of busy city centres, such as Leeds and Edinburgh. Some stretches were hilly too, and over the course of the 3½ weeks, we effectively climbed the height of Mount Everest – twice!



We experienced every kind of weather along the way as well, leaving Land's End in bitterly cold 40mph winds, and then cycling through cloud, drizzle, showers, rain and hail, as well as bright sunshine and a three-day 30°C heatwave. To complete the litany, we even saw snow in the Cairngorms! Mostly, however, the weather was cool and cloudy, with a gentle to moderate tailwind – just perfect, in fact, for a long bike ride!



Not counting the joy of meeting so many wonderful people who lead or host retreats, it's difficult to choose any individual places or events as other highlights of the trip – although if pushed, these might include:



- our windy Ascension Day blessing and send-off at Land's End with Revd Adam Thomas
- our first cooked breakfast (in Newlyn) as the rain hammered down outside

- cycling through the eerie two-mile Combe Down railway tunnel in Bath



Photos (left, top to bottom): Demelza at [Holland House](#), Crophorne, with warden, Helen Stanton; outside the [Greenhouse at Barnes Close](#); a disused railway line; with Chris Polhill at [Reflections Gardens](#) in Staffs.

Above: With Craig Newton and his team at [Shallowford House](#), Staffs.; Caldon canal in Staffs.

... from Staffordshire to Northumbria



- avoiding a crowded Aston Villa victory parade on the streets of Birmingham by cycling along the empty lower-level canal towpaths
- a laughter-filled lunch at Shallowford House in Staffordshire, and an easy and enjoyable supper at the Coach House Kilmuir, near Inverness
- celebrating the halfway mark in the cool of Holy Rood House's garden
- breakfast on Hadrian's Wall
- the vast unspoilt heather-covered moorlandscapes of Northumbria, the Cairngorms and northern Scotland
- being serenaded by cuckoos the length and breadth of Scotland
- our first view of the North Sea (and a very brisk tailwind urging us onwards to John O'Groats on our last day)

There were, of course, lowlights too, such as:

- a broken wheel-spoke on Dartmoor (although we didn't have any punctures)
- arriving at a less-than-adequate AirBnB in the Midlands, drenched from an afternoon's relentless rain
- trying to beat the fading

daylight to reach our accommodation after a hilly 70-mile cycle over the Pennines



Photos (left, top to bottom): Demelza outside [St Chad's House](#), Leek; Demelza and Brother Philip at the [Community of the Resurrection](#), Mirfield; Demelza with retreat leader, [Helen Evans](#); Demelza at [Holy Rood House](#), Thirsk, with warden, Sue Hammersley, on the hottest day of the journey; outside [St Antony's Priory](#), Durham.

Above: Demelza with Jan at [Shepherds Dene](#), in Northumbria; and its garden.

... and through Scotland to John O'Groats



We were both extremely touched by the generous hospitality we received at all the retreat houses we visited – thank you all for making our trip so memorable, and for feeding us and/or hosting us on our ride. It was a particular joy to be able to visit retreat houses I'd never been to before, to put them into context, and meet some of their staff.

And thank you to all of our friends and APR members who kept us in your prayers, or who followed our progress on Facebook; we couldn't have done it without your support and encouragement too.

Although the bike ride was a personal challenge that I had wanted to do for myself for many years, we also chose to use the opportunity to raise funds for the APR's Bursary Fund. Established in the APR's centenary year in 2013, the Fund helps support 60-70 people each year to go on retreat when otherwise they may not be able to afford the full cost themselves. Our goal was to raise £5,000 for the Fund – and in the end we (almost unbelievably) raised more than £7,000 – that's an extra 70 bursaries – Thank you all!



Photos (left, top to bottom): Demelza with Amanda at [Whitchester Christian Centre](#); Demelza with Robin, Gwen, Khulan and Amber at the [Bield at Blackruthven](#), Perth. Demelza at [Kinnoull Monastery](#), Perth; one of many long straight roads in Caithness.

Above: Demelza with Nancy and Ruth at the [Coach House Kilmuir](#), near Inverness; Demelza and Ben, still smiling, at John O'Groats.

Review of APR Events: Spring Retreat, and online quiet day



'This weekend has been an oasis for me. I arrived with a buzzing head; it has calmed me down, thank you'.

'A light-touch intermingling of spiritual and natural in the poems, which were chosen with such knowledge, experience and discernment; and in the worship, which was truly inviting and gentle and beautiful. I feel nurtured and nourished, and am so grateful to have been a part of this group'.



So wrote two of the participants at the **APR Spring Retreat** at Sheldon in March. Entitled, *'Soaring on Wings like Eagles'*, the retreat reflected on birds and bird imagery in both the Bible and in secular poetry, offering people the opportunity to read, write and discuss poetry, as well as space to pray, reflect or simply be immersed in the spring birdsong; more than 25 species were identified.

Poet, Helen Evans, introduced participants to a wide selection of poems in each session (imaginatively entitled *Roosting, Nesting, Singing, Flying and Migrating*), giving writing prompts afterwards to encourage their own creativity; several people shared insightful poems they had written. Each day was punctuated with quiet

contemplative services led by Demelza Henderson in Sheldon's upstairs chapel. As always, the Community welcomed the group warmly, and our accommodation was clean, airy and comfortable.

In response to requests from last year's questionnaire, APR offered its first **Online Quiet Day** in July, gently led by Revd Alison Christian. The day was specifically designed for carers, whose responsibilities might preclude them from attending other in-person events, and a number of people from different (and some quite challenging) situations around the country, joined the day.

Alison opened with a meditation on creation, then offered some suggestions for *Lectio Divina*, helpfully adapted for people with potentially distracting or tiring caring responsibilities. After lunch and a period of sharing experiences, participants were invited to engage in some *Visio Divina* using a varied selection of paintings. These inspired one lady to write a beautiful, if melancholy, poem reflecting her sense of being bound by the exhaustion experienced in her home situation.

All the resources used during the online quiet day are still accessible on our website, promotingretreats.org/online-quiet-day-resources



Wills, Grants, Leaflets and *Retreats* Handbooks



Could you display some of our attractive new APR leaflets in your local church or retreat venue? They can be ordered (for free) in bundles of 10 online, using the link promotingretreats.org/leaflet, or please contact the APR Administrator directly.



As we explained in our Spring newsletter, we are no longer able to offer all our members a free copy of *Retreats* as part of your regular annual subscription to APR, although we will, of course, continue to keep in touch with you via our twice-yearly newsletters and occasional other mailings. Instead, we now invite you to purchase a copy of the 2027 handbook at the discounted price of £10 (inc. P&P), which we will still post to you on its publication in early December. You can pre-order your copy of the book on our website, and pay via Paypal, using the link promotingretreats.org/handbook-preorder, or please contact the APR Administrator directly for a Handbook Order Form and payment options.

You might also wish to consider contacting your bank to increase your regular subscription by £10 each year (ie, to £40 for individuals, £35 for concessions, or to £60 for Friends of APR), which will then *automatically* include a copy of the handbook in future.

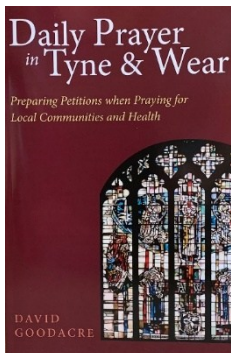
In other news, whilst the APR remains committed to promoting the benefits of retreat by supporting retreat houses and making retreat opportunities more accessible, our accounts continue to show higher expenditure than income. We have therefore created a 5-year business plan to try to develop new sustainable revenue streams, and to increase engagement with both our members and the wider public. To this end, we hope to develop our website to include more resources to encourage individual spiritual growth, and increase our social media outreach.

We also hope to access additional funds from external grant-making bodies to better support our member retreat houses, both through joint initiatives and by extending our Bursary Fund. ***Could you help us in this?*** Do you know of organisations or individuals who could support our work? If so, or if you have other ideas for fundraising to secure our future, please let us know.

Would you like to remember the APR in your Will?

We rely on subscriptions and other donations in order to continue our work, and are very grateful for all your support. If you would like to leave us a legacy, please add a short codicil to your Will, including our Charity Number (222458), with your gift.

Recent Publications by APR members



'Daily Prayer in Tyne & Wear' is available to purchase directly from the author; please email

david.goodacre29@sky.com for your copy

'Daily Prayer in Tyne & Wear', by David Goodacre, is a practical resource for anyone leading intercessions during public worship. Noting that by 'praying for the needs of one, we are praying for the needs of many', and *vice versa*, David suggests that by reflecting this not only in our prayers for the sick, but also in those for the world, a better balance might be achieved.

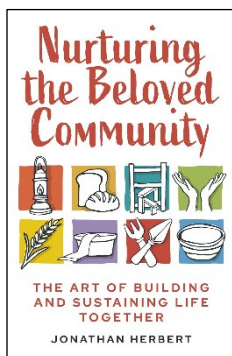
The book is divided into 30 chapters, each gathering material according to a theme, such as peace, justice, truth or purity. Each chapter consists of a short vignette, many taken from the author's experiences of ministry, as well as constructive ideas for prayer topics for the church, the world, the local community and health; each chapter concludes with a pair of carefully-crafted collects. There is a wealth of valuable material in this little book. It will make a useful addition to every pray-er's library.

'Nurturing the Beloved Community', by Jonathan Herbert, is an uplifting and engaging book reflecting on how vision, boundaries, humility, trust, need, work

and gratitude all contribute to sustaining a healthy and resilient community.

Using vibrant anecdotes from his own 30 years of living in Christian communities, Jonathan explains that for a community to be built, to thrive and to be sustainable, its members must 'share a compelling vision... that is communal, regenerative and joyful'. He describes how it is the 'unseen boundaries... that provide structure to the common life of the community', and how these can be maintained by 'nurturing lasting covenantal relationships based on humility, reciprocity and trust'.

The book is divided into eight chapters, each concluding with helpful questions for individual reflection or group discussion, as well as a handful of practical suggestions for exploring each aspect of community life more deeply. It offers a positive, appealing and realistic guide for anyone who believes a better way of living together is possible, and comes highly recommended. It is available to buy [online here](#), or at any good bookshop.



House Profile: The Coach House Kilmuir, Nr Inverness



After a period of discernment the Coach House Kilmuir is once again open for retreats! While remaining true to their founding ethos as *'an oasis of silence and meditation for people of all faiths and none'*, the house is now being offered on a self-catering basis, for small groups to run their own retreat programmes. Nancy, the Coach House's resident Administrator writes, 'We are committed to continuing and expanding our 35-year tradition of hospitality and community. The flexibility of our new self-catering model gives groups freedom to organise the daily rhythm of their retreat programme according to their own spiritual tradition'.



Located on the shores of the Moray Firth, just north of Inverness and with good links by air, road or rail, the house can comfortably sleep 9. Most of the rooms are *en-suite*, and most also have a sea view.



Rental of the house includes a lovely hexagonal sanctuary (pictured left), use of the top floor, which is given over to an art space (top right), and two garden rooms, which can be used as listening rooms for spiritual direction or other 1:1



encounters. The house is surrounded by woodland, with a patio in its garden and a labyrinth in the back-meadow.

The Coach House also offers a cosy glamping pod (below) for independent private retreats. It contains a double bed, *en-suite* facilities with a shower, and a well-equipped galley kitchen with a two-burner hob, microwave, and fridge.

You can find out more on coachhousekilmuir.org, or call Nancy on 01463 731386.



Poem

Shimmering Fern

It was, I guess, to be expected.

The testing of my instinct, of my yearning - and yes of my faith -
that even on the darkest of days, light might be found.

A bleak moment. With the punky poet, *I'm sick of all the sadness.*

And so, a walk in the woods.

Quiet now in early autumn. Little birdsong, just the whooshing of
the leaves in the topmost branches, stirred by the first breezes of
the storm that is coming our way, the occasional crash of a nut
falling to the ground.

We sit for a few minutes on a favourite seat. The sun on our faces,
in the dapple, into *Terra Divina*.

And here it comes. The gift of a fern, dying from the stem, drying at
its leaf-edges, fragile but shimmering, full of light.

Had I ever seen anything so beautiful?



Ian Adams (2025)

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