



Newsletter 2026



**Summer Event • Reports from Member Groups • Retreats Handbook
Patrons • Retreat Association Icon • Spiritual Direction • Archway**



Message from the Chair

Martin Davies

The Retreat Association's Summer Event at Southwark Cathedral was hosted and led by the cathedral's Dean and our patron, Dr Mark Oakley. The day was filled with nuggets of spiritual wisdom for living in 'dark

days' and enhanced by Mark's moving personal story. Those of us privileged to attend were given an abundance of spiritual nourishment for our ongoing journeys.

The purpose of the Retreat Association is to encourage and enable us all to take such spiritual pauses in the routine of life. This can be a vital practice to help us engage with God and to foster inner depth. Mark Oakley commented that a Retreat is not so much an optional 'treat' but a much-needed re-setting of our spiritual compass. The word itself derives from the Latin 'to draw back' and attains its Christian context from times when Jesus withdrew to solitary places to pray.

Another area of ministry that the Retreat Association encourages is that of Spiritual Direction. There is great benefit in having a trained companion to help us pay attention to the Divine and to discern how the Holy Spirit is moving in our everyday life. The RA actively encourages good practice and training for this and we help people to find a spiritual companion. There is a conference being organised for Spiritual Direction Trainers in February 2027.

Our website is a valuable showcase for all our activities, for both the newcomer and specialist. Our annual *Retreats* handbook remains an invaluable guide to refer to on an ongoing basis and continues to be a popular resource.

The Retreat Association is greatly blessed by a dedicated staff team, supported by the Board of Trustees and volunteers. We are indebted to Alison MacTier, our Executive Director, for her excellent hard work and commitment. The day-to-day administrative work is ably done by Clare Lake and much appreciated. We also continue to be blessed by the contribution of Gina Cavanagh who is actively increasing the impact of our website and social media presence.

The involvement of our patrons is also of great significance. The committed support of Abbot Christopher Jamison OSB as an active patron over many years has been very much appreciated and we wish him well for the future. We are very pleased to welcome Dr Mark Oakley who has joined us as a new and enthusiastic patron.

The Retreat Association exists for the benefit of others. Our Icon, gifted to us in 2018, depicts the story of Jesus conversing with the Samaritan woman at the well. This encounter changed the woman's life. May we all experience such life-giving encounters today as the Retreat Association continues to serve as an agency for this to happen.



From the Executive Director

Alison MacTier

The theme of our Summer Event, chosen by our speaker and patron Dr Mark Oakley focussed on 'Going upstream: integrity and hope in dark days' – a very apt title for our times and also one that serves as a helpful reminder of our role as Christians in whatever context we find ourselves.

The core vision of the Retreat Association is to offer a sense of integrity and hope by helping people to discover and deepen their journey with God in a variety of ways. The past year has been no exception, as we continue to offer resources and events that we hope will open up and broaden possibilities for encounter with the Divine.

Our resources bring together the history and ethos of the organisation alongside finding new ways to reach out to people. Our *Retreats* handbook remains popular with members and readers, affirmed by a survey that we carried out during the winter (page 9) and sits comfortably alongside our website – our digital window on today's world.

So much of what we do is only made possible through the generosity of those who freely give their time and talents to the Retreat Association and this is particularly true of our patrons who have enriched our conferences and events over many years. We give thanks for the work of Abbot Christopher Jamison OSB who has challenged and engaged us (page 12) and to Revd Graham Sparkes who has played a key role in all our events. We are delighted

to welcome our new patron Dr Mark Oakley, who led us in such a memorable day at Southwark Cathedral in June (pages 10–11).

In the ongoing life of the organisation, we also give thanks for the team who sustain its activities through their hard work and dedication (page 4) and for our trustees who look at the bigger picture while carrying out the important role of governance (page 2). The Retreat Association is privileged to be ecumenical in its outlook and we celebrate the activities of our Founding Members who work so hard to promote retreat within their denominations (pages 6–8).

The Retreat Association Icon of Jesus and the Samaritan woman continues to travel the length and breadth of the country giving inspiration and encouragement to many people in a variety of contexts (pages 14–15). This timeless gospel story reflects that sense of encounter and transformation which is at the heart of the hospitality of our retreat houses and the ministry of spiritual direction (page 13).

Whatever your activities in the coming months, may you find that sense of encounter and transformation, integrity and hope in many and varied ways.





From the Office Team

Clare Lake

In 2026, as in other years, we produced the *Retreats Handbook*. It is a collaboration between external contributors and staff which starts just a few months after the previous edition has been sent out. Alison steers the publication from beginning to end, with the aid of a trusty team. There are themes to consider; articles and contributors to commission; books to review, retreat centres to contact and mailing lists to manage.

With the world changes that have occurred in recent years we wanted to make sure the handbook was still relevant and valued. So, this year we asked for your views via a survey. The results indicated a loyal following, with most of the respondents subscribing for more than five years and a high percentage of those more than 15. Many commenting that they enjoy reading it every year (see page 9).

The respondents particularly appreciated the retreat centre listings and the articles, the latter of which they described as thought-provoking and inspirational. Every indication was that this remains a cherished resource and one that we are very happy to continue producing. If you would like to have your say, please contact us at info@retreat.org.uk

Now back to the 2027 edition...

Gina Cavanagh

It has been another impressive 12 months for the website. We had 70,682 visitors in 2025 – almost 10,000 more than last year.

Our social media has also reached over 150,000 people in 2025, introducing retreats to a more diverse audience.

This year we have launched a portal for retreat centres on the website. This allows retreat centres to add and update their information, photos and events easily throughout the year, making our Online Directory even more helpful for people looking for retreats.

Supporting the wellbeing of our church leaders through retreat has always been part of the work of the Retreat Association, and since the introduction of the Covenant for Clergy Care and Wellbeing in the Church of England, we have sought to make our specific clergy services easier to find. We've introduced a page for Clergy Wellbeing, highlighting retreats and support that retreat centres offer to clergy and other church leaders. www.retreats.org.uk/clergy-wellbeing

Please tell any clergy you know about this page, and if there is anything that you think we could add, please contact us at info@retreats.org.uk



Welcome to

Our new patron Dr Mark Oakley

In the autumn we were delighted to welcome Dr Mark Oakley as Patron of the Retreat Association. Currently serving as Dean of Southwark, Mark was formerly Dean of St John's College, Cambridge, and Chancellor of St Paul's Cathedral. He is author of several books on poetry and theology and is a popular speaker.

Mark was one of the main contributors at our 2025 Creative Encounters Conference where he explored the central importance of language and poetry in faith, shared some of his favourite prayers and offered workshops on WH Auden and George Herbert.

More recently, Mark was the main speaker at our Summer Event (see pages 10–11), where he spoke about the importance of offering hope in challenging times and encouraged further discussion on what this might mean for us as individuals and in the context of retreat.

Mark joins our team of gifted patrons who generously give their time and talents to support our work.





Founding Members

Association for Promoting Retreats APR



The last year has been a busy time for the APR Board and for the work of the charity. Firstly, we had been looking for our next President. In April we announced that the current Bishop of Chelmsford, Bishop Guli had agreed to become our new

President. We look forward to working with Bishop Guli and for the wisdom she will bring to the work of the trustees. Bishop John Stroyan continues to support us despite retiring. He has been a constant encouragement to our charity and we are immensely grateful.

The trustees have also reviewed the future direction of APR. We recognised the importance of the bursary scheme and the way in which it has helped hundreds of individuals access retreats over the past 10 years. Our priority is focussed on retreat houses, retreat leaders and individual retreatants – this remains our core activity. We were delighted to support Demelza Henderson in her epic fundraising cycle ride from Land's End to John O'Groats in May, cycling the 1180-mile route in 23 days, climbing the equivalent of twice the height of Mount Everest, and visiting 20 different retreat houses and leaders along the way. The funds raised will go into the

bursary fund and through her wonderful efforts the profile of the bursaries have been raised. We also welcomed to the Board in the last year Rosey Feuell, a long standing APR member, and Jason Cottingham from Penhurst Retreat House to help us plan confidently for the future.

In April APR hosted our biannual conference at Launde Abbey. In a break from tradition, the 2026 APR Conference explored the interplay between spirituality and wellbeing. Forty delegates attended, representing 26 different dioceses – spirituality advisers, coordinators of spiritual direction networks and/or training courses, wellbeing officers, archdeacons and directors of ministry and/or pastoral care. The atmosphere throughout the event was encouraging and joyous and the feedback was very positive. We were extremely grateful to Professor Chris Cook for his inspiring keynote addresses, and to all those who led other sessions and workshops. The next conference will take place at Launde Abbey 8–10 May 2028.

Finally thank you to everyone who supported APR during the last year. We are grateful to Bishop John for leading our October retreat at St Columba's House and to Helen Evans and Demelza Henderson for the Sheldon Poetry Retreat in March. For details of our future events please email promoting.retreats@gmail.com

Cameron Butland
Chair, APR



Catholic Spirituality Network CSN



As we celebrate Trinity Sunday, we find ourselves existing in a fractured and fractious world where the imprint of God's compassion can feel deeply hidden. We pray that the Trinity will sustain and inspire us to live with compassion for the greater good.



CSN have been hosting a series of online gatherings to celebrate feasts and festivals as the Church year unfolds. Sister Magdalen Lawler SND enabled us to walk with the women of the Scriptures, including Mary, Apostle of the Apostles and Mary Magdalen during Lent and Easter. The opportunity to immerse ourselves in scriptural narratives, gaze on artwork and welcome new insights created space for enriching encounter.

On the recent Feast of the Visitation, we witnessed Mary being embraced by her cousin, Elizabeth. In their shared encounter we glimpsed the power of being alive to the Spirit's actions and aligned with God's purpose.

Our recent CSN Conference, 'Shorelines – Finding God on the Boundaries' was led by Christine Dodd at the Franciscan Spirituality Centre in Godalming. Using both art and photography of the shoreline, we were drawn into symbolic exploration of our own spiritual boundaries, where change is constant and where God awaits. Our time together evoked depth of conversation, reflection and prayer. The wonderful premises, rich heritage and a warm welcome by staff and community was nurturing. We are delighted to have gained new

members to enhance our journey as CSN in the days ahead.

Last autumn I attended the closing of the Cenacle in Liverpool, with a Mass of Thanksgiving for the mission of the Cenacle Sisters present since 1908. Many will recall the energetic Cenacle religious who have contributed to the growth of the Catholic Spirituality Network, and their co-operation with Retreat Association member groups over many years. Numerous pilgrims are indebted to the Cenacle communities for skilled accompaniment, training and supervision of the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius. We pray for the continuing mission of the Cenacle Congregation as they celebrate their Bi-Centenary this year.

We acknowledge the moments of encounter in all the retreat and spirituality centres who offer space, balance and renewal to our lives. We continue to value our relationship within the Retreat Association and look forward to the Summer Event with Mark Oakley at Southwark Cathedral.

In the spirit of St Augustine we pray for the flourishing of our world and of our communities: *'You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in you.'*

We invite you to visit our website to join us at online CSN events: www.csnretreats.org.uk

Shirley Taylor
Chair, CSN



Reflect – Methodist Spirituality and Retreats



Another year has been and gone! Here's what we've been up to in Reflect.

We have continued to offer retreats in the Spring and Autumn.

I led the retreat in October 2025, looking at the spiritual wisdom of Teresa of Avila. The retreat in February this year was led by the Retreat Association's own Alison MacTier. We have also hosted, led or participated in the leadership of retreats for people in lay ministries and those exploring ordination within the Methodist Church. Plans are underway for retreats in November 2026 and early Spring 2027 and an Executive Committee meeting in 2027.

The online work has continued to attract people. The Executive Committee has accepted that this is our direction of travel. We are not abandoning our commitment to holding retreats but realise that online work has much to commend it. People who are no

longer able to come on retreat appreciate the opportunity to engage in spiritual reflection.

Our Quiet Mornings have increased to four each year. We have a small but faithful group of people who are willing to lead these. It means that we have a variety of styles and content to support people in their spiritual growth. From September, regular online Lectio Divina sessions will be offered by Reflect. Other forms of spiritual practice are available too; people are welcome to join in sessions which I run for other groups.

Earlier in the year we ran a prayer course. This proved a valuable time for people to ponder about prayer and how to practise it, including a consideration of contemplative prayer. There was time to share together in small breakout rooms which added a new feature to our online work. We hope to run the course again before too long.

We held our annual Open Conference with the President of the Methodist Conference as our guest speaker. Although participants enjoyed both the President's talk and the workshops we ran, numbers were small and we are going to take a break from this sort of event and re-assess its place in our 'portfolio' of activities.

We are still on the lookout for a new publicity/media officer. If you feel that this is something you can help with, please do let me know: chair@reflectretreats.co.uk

We continue to value the prayerful support of our ecumenical friends. We extend our thoughts and prayers to you all.

Blessings & Peace,
Judith Jessop
Chair, Reflect



Retreats Handbook

The *Retreats* handbook has been the flagship resource of the Retreat Association since 1991 when it was then called *The Vision*, taking on its current name in 1998. Its origins go back to 1920 when it was first published by the Association for Promoting Retreats.

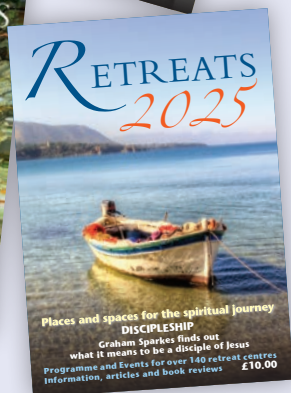
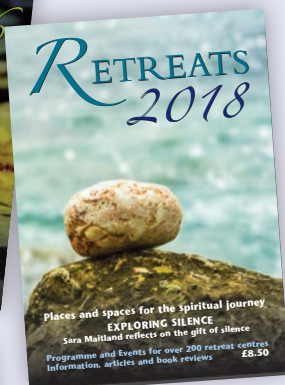
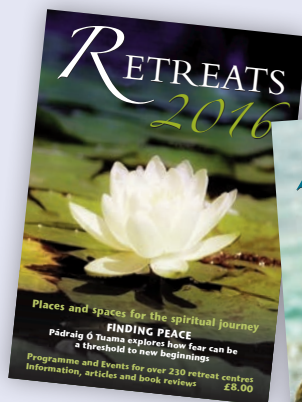
Our readership has always been important to us and so from time to time it is helpful to find out what our members and readers think about this much-loved publication.

During the winter months we carried out a survey of members and handbook readers, from those new to the handbook to longstanding members, inviting their response to each component of the handbook. We're very pleased to say that the response was extremely positive.

The retreat centre listings and articles were the most highly rated, followed by book reviews and map pages. The Articles were described as 'always interesting and inspiring', 'informative and reflective' and 'thought provoking'. Book Reviews were 'well thought out' and 'helpful guidance' and a good way to find out about new books.

Of the listings pages, people most appreciated the general information about each centre, followed by the diary of events and contact details. Over 80% of respondents indicated that no changes to the handbook were needed with a few suggestions for improvement which we will carefully consider for the future.

With our grateful thanks to all who responded to the survey.



Retreat Association Summer Event 22 July 2026

Garry Weston Library, Southwark Cathedral



and is an invitation to love with everything we have. By not becoming a lesser version of ourselves, we hold our own candles, making the horizon warmer and lighter.

Mark then reflected on Jacopo Bassano's *The Good Samaritan* where he does not shy from reality: the man looks very pale whereas the Samaritan has colourful clothes and a purse to pay for the overnight stay; healing oil is at the centre of the painting. The Samaritan will need all his strength to raise the man onto the donkey. The man himself might not welcome being helped by a Samaritan, challenging his whole world view.

Overall, God has given us our 'being'; we give back in our 'becoming' (more of who God calls us to be). We cannot sit on the fence: as Bonhoeffer said, '*Not to speak is to speak; not to act is to act.*'

After coffee we explored in small groups what threatens Christian faith and living now, and how retreats '*speak into today's anxious and divided society*'. In our group, the discussion focussed on areas of contemporary life where we could identify '*Christ on the lips but not in the heart*'. We had different responses to this, varying from drawing back, to struggles to find a common language, to being able to continue with truth in one's own context. We wondered if today's anxieties and divisions were greater or simply different.

Our group welcomed the invitation to walk upstream, giving attention (*'Attention is the beginning of devotion.'*) We agreed retreats are one way of giving time to notice things

My day started badly – the train was so delayed that I missed Mark Oakley's talk and Alison MacTier's opening reflections.

I learned that Mark's theme was 'Going upstream', from the poet Mary Oliver, inviting us to go towards the source of life and faith, which retreats give us an opportunity to do. Too often the world we inhabit is heading 'downstream'.

In contrast, Mary's song (the song of a mother) puts the humane back into human



and to think. We did have other ways to take 'time out', such as a long bike ride, in which our concentration is wholly on the present and sometimes significant things emerge. Although these other times are important, we value the regular rhythm of prayer in many retreat houses, connecting us to the wider Christian tradition and prayer. The ecumenical nature of the Retreat Association was also appreciated, enriching us by the different expressions of Christian faith and practice.

By then I was glad of the delicious buffet lunch. I joined others to chat and we got talking about spirituality and mental health which was both interesting and useful.

Next Graham Sparkes ably led a Q&A session with Mark, based on questions and comments from participants. From the responses, I noted the need to attend both to others and to ourselves. Also, that we need to notice the phraseology of our times: currently, for example, language assumes 'us or them'. We need to remind people of 'honest complexity' rather than simple but untrue answers. In practice, developing empathy is a key task, and we can make



opportunities locally for voices previously unheard. Also, retreats are about human becoming: we have to step out of our context to look at it and to return to our everyday renewed.

Alison MacTier reminded us of all the work of the Retreat Association and Graham Sparkes led us in prayer to finish.

Altogether, a stimulating and friendly day!

Anne Spalding

Opposite left: Revd Graham Sparkes, Dr Mark Oakley and Alison MacTier Summer Event discussion groups. This page: Dr Mark Oakley in the Q & A session.



Giving thanks

We are delighted to celebrate the contribution of one of our most active patrons, Abbot Christopher Jamison OSB, who has given 13 years' service to the Retreat Association.

Abbot Christopher is a Benedictine monk and recently served as Abbot President of the English Benedictine Congregation. He is known for two BBC TV series *The Monastery* (2005) and *The Big Silence* (2010) and he has also worked with a media production company CTVC, specialising in religious and ethical content. His books include *Finding Sanctuary* (2005) *Finding Happiness* (2009) and *Finding the Language of Grace* (2022).

Since first becoming a patron for the Retreat Association in 2013, Abbot Christopher has contributed significantly to the life and work of the charity, both in an advisory role, and also through giving many memorable talks and engaging in lively debates at our Conferences, Summer Events and online gatherings of spiritual direction trainers. At these events, Abbot Christopher has covered subjects as diverse as the Future of Retreats, Benedictine Spirituality and Story Telling. For the lead article in our 2021 *Retreats* handbook, Abbot Christopher offered readers ways to find hope during the pandemic.

We are immensely grateful for all the time, energy, wisdom and inspiration that Abbot Christopher has given to the Retreat Association over the years and wish him all the very best as he begins a sabbatical and a new chapter.



From the top: Our patrons Revd Graham Sparkes, Abbot Christopher, Margaret Rizza & Dr Rowan Williams in 2015, Abbot Christopher & Dr Rowan Williams, Revd Graham Sparkes & Abbot Christopher.





Archway – Association of Christian Retreat Houses

We held our annual conference earlier this year at St Katharine's Parmoor in Oxfordshire. It began with an excellent Retreat Day led by our Chaplain (and former retreat house warden) The Revd Liz Palin. This was followed by Resource Days when we held several practical sessions, as well as an interesting afternoon visiting a neighbouring winery. There were, as always, opportunities for prayer and time to socialise and network with colleagues.

Our next conference will be from 11–14 January 2027 at Launde Abbey in Leicestershire. More details will be available shortly, but please let us know if you'd like to join us.

We've had several new committee members this year: Tristan Owen (Launde Abbey), Revd Graham Dowling (Chelmsford Diocesan House of Retreat) and Stewart McCredie (St Katharine's Parmoor). We're also delighted to announce the appointment of The Rt Revd Adam Atkinson (Bishop of Bradwell) as the new President of Archway.

Archway has been supporting Christian retreat and conference houses for over 30 years. If you'd like to find out more about membership or any of our events you can contact us via our website www.archwaywardens.org.uk or our social media channels.

Jeff Witts, Archway Administrator

Conference for Spiritual Direction Trainers

The Retreat Association continues to support spiritual direction through resources, advice and events to help and encourage those involved in this ministry.

One key area of this support has been through offering regular consultations for those involved in spiritual direction training. As a result of these gatherings and the hard work of a core planning group we published our 'Spiritual Direction Guidelines' in 2016 which is now widely adopted by diocese and individuals across the UK. A few years later, at our 2019 conference, discussions highlighted a need for an additional document to provide guidance on the content of training courses. We published the 'Guidance for Developing Formation Programmes for Spiritual Directors' in 2024.

We are now planning our next Conference for Spiritual Direction Trainers which will be held at Ripon College Cuddesdon on 24–26 February 2027. As well as the opportunity to network, share good practice and review the documents, for the first time there will also be a day of retreat for all gathered before moving onto more practical matters. It is hoped that this time of reflection will be a source of inspiration and encouragement as we consider how best to continue supporting this ministry in the future.



Retreat Association Icon



*The Retreat Association
Icon at the Dupuis Centre,
Birmingham.*

The Retreat Association Icon of Jesus and the Samaritan Woman at the Well has continued to be a source of inspiration at a variety of places across the country in the last year.

During the autumn the icon was on display in the beautiful medieval chapel at Sheldon in Devon, where it was the focus for a quiet day led by Alison MacTier, attended by a number of clergy and those interested in the theme from the local area.

It then travelled to Selly Oak, Birmingham where it was also the focus of a quiet day at the Dupuis Centre, which has recently become a member of the Retreat Association and has some lovely retreat facilities.

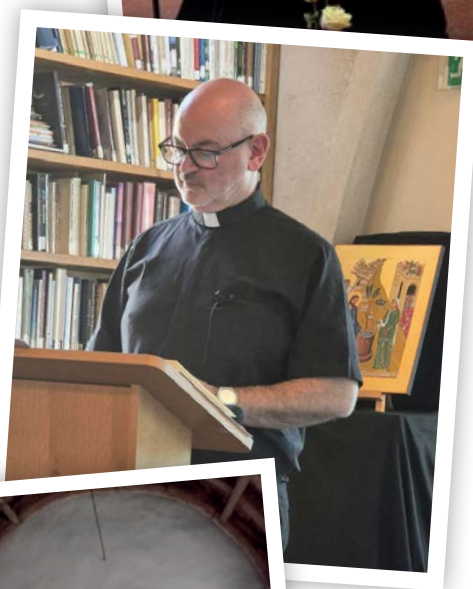
In the spring Wistaston Hall, the Oblate Retreat Centre in Crewe welcomed the icon to its centre for a month where it was on display in the beautiful chapel and the resident community and visitors enjoyed praying and reflecting with the icon.

The icon was on display at three London venues in the late spring and early summer, starting with the London Jesuit Centre, where it was featured in a day on praying with icons as well as a talk for young adults. At the Kairos Centre in Roehampton the icon was the focus for a day led by Cari Bridgen entitled 'Praying with Icons Day: Walk the Well and Meet God'. A local school also came to visit the icon at this venue.

Finally the icon travelled to Southwark

Cathedral where it was on display for our Summer Event where it could be enjoyed by all who attended.

During the next year the icon will be the focus of talks and reflections at venues as wide ranging as the Isle of Man, Aberdeen University and the Julian Shrine in Norwich. There are plenty of gaps in the programme if you would like to offer a venue in 2027. Our website has more information www.retreats.org.uk/displaying-the-icon and we welcome all enquiries.



The Retreat Association Icon at locations across the country

Right, from the top:

- At Wistaston Hall, Crewe.
- At our Summer Event, Southwark Cathedral.
- At Sheldon, Devon.





Dates for your diary

Please contact the relevant organisation for further details of each event.

2026

- **16 and 17 October (event repeated)**
Quiet Morning (Reflect)
Deacon Malcolm Knowles
- **20-22 October**
Walking into Spirituality (APR Retreat)
Rev'd Cameron Butland
Holy Rood House, Thirsk
- **3-5 November**
Creation to Salvation (Reflect)
Philip Hyne
The Briery, Ilkley
- **4 and 5 December (event repeated)**
Quiet Morning (Reflect)
Rev'd Christine Crabtree

2027

- **11-14 January**
Archway Conference
Launde Abbey, Leicestershire
- **24-26 February**
Conference for Spiritual Direction Trainers (Retreat Association)
Ripon College Cuddesdon, Oxon
- **26-28 February**
The Woman at the Well (Reflect)
Donna Worthington
Launde Abbey, Leicestershire
- **17-19 May**
Every Grain of Sand (CSN)
Karen Eliassen
Franciscan Centre, Ladywell, Godalming

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