



Newsletter 2025



**Retreat Association Conference • Reports from Member Groups
Archway • Retreat Association Icon**



Message from the Chair

Martin Davies

The Retreat Association's triennial Conference this summer at The Hayes, Derbyshire, was a rich experience

to be part of and a reminder of its value and vision. The input from the contributors and workshop leaders was inspirational and informative, along the lines of encountering God through creativity. The diverse range of attendees across denominations and spiritual approaches led to healthy interchanges and great fellowship. The value of taking time out to both deepen and widen our spiritual lives was effectively showcased.

Our uniqueness and role is in being a national ecumenical Christian organisation helping people to find ways of exploring and deepening their journey with God through spirituality and prayer. The website is a 24/7 resource with this purpose in mind. It can help people seeking to find a retreat centre and resources for prayer, a spiritual director or companion. The Association's Handbook *Retreats* is a much-valued resource packed full of information and articles.

The role of encouraging and promoting retreats undertaken by the RA is so much needed in today's fast-moving and superficial culture.

A small staff team, supported by the Board of Trustees and volunteers, achieves a great deal in what it produces and enables. We are enormously grateful to Alison MacTier, our Executive Director, for her ongoing hard work and 100% commitment. The day-to-day administrative work so ably done by Clare Lake is very much appreciated. We're also greatly blessed by the contribution of Gina Cavanagh who is successfully increasing the RA's remit through social media and its website.

As we live in challenging times, the RA looks to the future seeking to widen its support base and to create new funding streams. We welcome offers of involvement in order to achieve effective sustainability. Please do contact us if you are drawn towards this.

There were many helpful thoughts that came out of this year's Conference. A number involved the benefit of embracing the creative arts in deepening our personal and corporate walk with God. One basic statement simply said, 'withdrawing is a preparation to enter the world again'. A helpful reminder that the purpose of 'retreating' is not to escape from reality but to deepen ourselves that we may be renewed to re-engage and live more fruitfully as a result. The Retreat Association exists to serve this purpose, to provide and signpost resources and to be a catalyst for ongoing spiritual growth. Please join us and travel with us on this very worthwhile journey.





From the Executive Director

Alison MacTier

It has been a memorable year for the Retreat Association, culminating in our first face to face conference in seven years – where we celebrated all that it means to be creative beings in a created world and in relationship to one another.

With the help of our very gifted contributors we were able to explore art, literature, poetry, textiles and film and to see where these offer an invitation for each of us to use our imagination and to find our own unique path to God. Through talks, workshops, worship and prayer we engaged in the theme more deeply and began to see how closely each strand of creativity is interwoven with the other, helping us to understand more clearly the work of the Divine through the world that we participate in (pages 10–13).

Events like the conference give us the time and space to deepen our journey with God so that we can more effectively re-engage with our world on our return. In the same way our network of retreat centres continue to offer the space and encouragement for anyone seeking time away to find inspiration for the onward journey. For those who live and work in these centres, Archway offers a regular gathering (page 9).

Our conference is also a great opportunity to highlight our beautiful icon, which has been enjoyed so widely since it was hallowed at our last in-person conference in 2018.

We could not have imagined at that point the extent to which it would travel across the length and breadth of the UK and inspire thousands in their own spiritual journey. The story represents so aptly the sense of encounter that remains central to the ministry of retreats and spiritual direction (pages 14–15).

Like many organisations with a long history, the Retreat Association endeavours to move with the times while continuing to engage with the core activities that have supported its members over the years. Our *Retreats* handbook has been a central part of our work that continues to inspire and inform (page 5) while our connection with member groups reminds us of the value of our ecumenical dimension which offers different ways for people to discover the value of taking time out on retreat (pages 6–8). In the same way our website and social media activities enable us to reach out to a new audience (page 4).

We hope that the summer months offer all our members the opportunity to explore imaginative paths to God and that the year ahead will provide the spaces in which to engage with these in new and inspiring ways.



From the Office Team

Clare Lake

Another year has passed, but this year has been different. It is conference year. A year where we hope to see friends, old and new.

Planning a conference is complex but for me this generally starts with helping to design how the booking system will operate, and then I take responsibility for all bookings. I must ensure we have all the information we need; that payments are made and receipts sent out. Next, we send out the requests for workshop selections. From the replies we receive, we try to give as many participants as possible their first choice without exceeding the group capacity.

We now know who has booked, so it's onto the next stage of logistics. I prepare any documentation required, send out information emails, and ensure we have stock for our stall. Liaising with the venue to organise the bedrooms and inform them of any preferences participants may have is my next big task. Once at the venue I am the one who welcomes you and am available to help throughout the event. It is very much a team effort, and the result is rewarding for us all.



Gina Cavanagh



It has been an impressive 12 months for the website. We had 61,000 visitors in 2024 – the most since we began tracking in 2016. We've had 37,000 visitors so far in 2025, so

it looks like the numbers might be even higher this year.

Our social media has also reached over 80,000 people in 2025, introducing retreats to a more diverse audience.

For the conference, we produced an online version of all the conference information in a mobile friendly format, making a step towards a paper-light, more sustainable event.

We've launched a page for Retreat Leaders to introduce themselves and the types of retreats they offer. If you are a Retreat Leader, or know someone is, please contact us at info@retreats.org.uk to find out more.

Over the summer, we will also be launching a Portal for Retreat Centres on the website. This will allow Retreat Centres to add and update their information, photos and events easily throughout the year, making our Online Directory even more helpful to people looking for retreats.



Meet our handbook typesetter!

I am privileged to have been involved in the production of *Retreats* for over 20 years. It is very satisfying to bring together all the parts of the journal, which takes around three months.

The typesetting job starts with the adverts in September collated and supplied by Clare either as finished artwork or text from which I create a design. The second stage is artwork for the articles, working with Caroline, one of the handbook editors. Third stage is to format the listings for each house entry, supplying proofs back to Alison, Managing Editor. Only after these are checked can the house numbers be added and work on the map started. Then I start to bring all the pages together, with cover supplied by Judy. That leaves the map index, editorial and index of houses and advertisers.

Proofing and amendments continue till early November, when the job is signed off as ready to print. PDFs are sent to the printer who supplies proofs back to Alison for the absolute final check. Inevitably there is a last-minute change to be carried out!

So what is my background and how did I get involved with *Retreats*?

As a teenager I had a Saturday job with my then Group Scout Leader who had a small trade typesetting and print business, where the job I enjoyed most was to melt down the used type and cast it into ingots ready for use the following week. I served an apprenticeship as a compositor, attending London College of Print on day-release for 5 years, learning hand composing, linotype and monotype hot-metal typesetting and then film-setting.



In my mid-20s I became manager of an artwork studio at a printers in Henley-on-Thames, then General Production Manager.

It was an exciting period for typesetting, moving on from photo-typesetting, to laser-typesetting of complete pages direct to film, ready for platemaking. Time came to move on and I started my own business in Newbury. In 2008 my daughter Nikkie joined me and she now runs the business.

I am an Elder and Church Secretary at Thatcham United Reformed Church and my link with the Retreat Association came about through a minister who was our Interim Moderator during an interregnum. He was Chairman of URC Silence and Retreats Group and also involved in the Retreat Association. When the designer for *Retreats* emigrated, he introduced me to Paddy Lane, the then Executive Officer, and after submitting prices and meeting the editorial committee both in London and Newbury, I was asked to take on the job! At the time it was an A4 magazine, but when Alison became Director of the Retreat Association in 2008, she brought new ideas with her resulting in the lovely journal you can now refer to all year round.

Since our last minister retired, being Church Secretary takes up a lot of time. However, I am a passionate motorcyclist and last year passed my Masters test for the Institute of Advanced Motorcyclists. Fortunately my wife Gill shares my interest and we tour frequently on the bike in Europe and the UK.

Alan Mossman

Founding Members

Association for Promoting Retreats APR



At our AGM Carol Smith stood down as Chair and Trustee of the APR in order to explore new patterns of ministry in her retirement. I was then appointed as her replacement. Nicholas Buxton

also resigned as an APR Trustee in October to focus on new developments at St Antony's Priory. We are grateful to Nicholas in designing and building our new website and to Carol for her leadership of the APR over the last two years. Bishop John Stroyan has generously offered to return to the role of President until at least the APR conference at the end of April 2026.

In July 2024 the APR opened our Bursary Scheme to applications from both Retreat House Wardens and Headteachers/Teachers in Church of England schools. As trustees we hope that these initiatives will assist those working under huge pressures to access the peace of retreat houses.

The Revd Dr Andrew Mayes led our October retreat at St Katharine's Parmoor based on his book, *Beyond the Edge*. He used the geography of the Holy Land and the

transitional journeys that Jesus made during his ministry as metaphors for our own lives. Fourteen people attend the retreat.

The APR trustees have agreed to support a second annual retreat each year. In March 2025 Demelza Henderson and Helen Evans led a Poetry and Prayer retreat at Sheldon, Devon. The retreat was entitled, 'Dark earth, bright field', and explored the metaphors of light and darkness as expressed through the Bible and secular poetry. The retreat was fully booked, and the trustees are delighted that Helen, Demelza and I are working together next March for a second APR retreat.

In April 2026 the APR will offer a conference at Launde Abbey on the theme of spiritual wellbeing. The conference is being planned to offer a forum for Diocesan Spirituality Advisers, Co-ordinators for spiritual direction training and Wellbeing Officers. Representatives from every diocese will be invited to attend.

The APR continues support those seeking to explore spirituality through taking retreats, the work of retreat houses and retreat leaders, whilst at the same time supporting our ecumenical partnerships with other retreat charities.

Cameron Butland
Chair of APR



Catholic Spirituality Network CSN



During this Jubilee Year 2025 CSN journeys alongside many companions called to be Pilgrims of Hope. As we mark the 60th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council, Pope Francis called us to renew our spiritual lives and to renew hope in a world plagued by conflicts

and the devastating impacts of climate change.

Individuals and dioceses have made spiritual and physical pilgrimages of hope to hallowed sites in the company of martyrs, servants, scholars and missionaries – pilgrims whose lives inspire our own.

Our CSN Conference 2025 was held at the Irenaeus Centre in April, with Lister Tonge of Liverpool Archdiocese. We gathered for 'Listening to our Lives' including taking time for our souls to catch up and we revisited the value of the Examen in shaping our spiritual selves.

With the funeral of Pope Francis taking place as we assembled, our liturgy enabled us to be in union with a global community in celebration of the life of a Pope of compassion, a Pope who was a relentless ambassador for the dignity of the human person and for the dignity of our planet.

We are now blessed in the leadership of Pope Leo with his unique experience of ministry and the wisdom of his Augustinian heritage. We welcome him as a source of hope for the future.

CSN continues to appreciate all of the retreat houses and centres of spirituality offering spaces for us to listen to our lives and to find God's presence, often where we least expect. We recognise all those who support others through spiritual accompaniment, those attentive to the edges of our stories where life and growth abound.

We have just booked and look forward to our 2026 CSN Conference at the Franciscan Centre, Ladywell in Godalming, where we will explore 'Shorelines – Finding God on the Boundaries' with Christine Dodd. <https://www.csnretreats.org.uk/conference.php>

The recent enriching Retreat Association Conference at Swanwick, with broad opportunities to know God in the beauty of language, of image, of movement, of silence, music and the creativity of cultures, leads me to again appreciate the work of the RA alongside the other founding members. I pray that our shared mission will continue to support the growth of many in faith and hope for years to come.

Shirley Taylor
Chair, CSN



Reflect – Methodist Spirituality and Retreats



This last year seems to have flown by. Here's what we've been up to in Reflect:

We have continued to offer two well-supported retreats at places in

Northern England and the East Midlands. Plans are in hand for Autumn 2025 at Minsteracres and February 2026 at Launde Abbey.

Unfortunately, our planned summer 2025 retreat in the South of England has had to be cancelled. We had only received a handful of enquiries at the decisive point in time.

Online Quiet Mornings have continued to be a popular feature. These will be increasing from three to four per year from September. There were a few more sessions last summer of our online 'Take Time' (Ignatian style meditation) and, in more recent months, a few people have joined an existing online group of mine for Lectio Divina sessions.

In relation to the Methodist Church, we have hosted, led or participated in the leadership of retreats for people in lay ministries and those exploring ordination. We continue to lead an annual Open Conference with the President of the Methodist Conference as our guest speaker. We stay alert for other ways in which we can make a contribution to the overall ministry of the Church.

In May, the Executive Committee held a 24-hour meeting followed by a retreat at St Mary's Convent, Wantage. Although our

committee meeting was able to be in a hybrid format, sadly only a small group of us could meet in person and share the retreat, which was a time of blessing.

Moving on into the Autumn, we are on the lookout for a new publicity/media officer. It is a vital role in making our presence known and enabling participation by people both within the Methodist Church and beyond. If you feel that this is something you can help with (regardless of whether or not you are a member of Reflect), please do let me know – chair@reflectretreats.co.uk

Whilst we keep in touch with our membership via our newsletter, we know that numbers are gradually declining and need to make ourselves better known. If you would like to be included and do not identify as 'Methodist', please let me know. If we can serve a community of people beyond our denomination we will be delighted to do so.

We continue to work out who we are, what we can offer, and how we might roll that out in the current age. Our forthcoming AGM (27 September) will include consideration of our future direction. Last year we sent out questionnaires to members which resulted in a handful of replies. The Executive Committee will carry on weighing things up.

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

Blessings & Peace,
Judith Jessop
Chair, Reflect

Archway – Association of Christian Retreat Houses

I've just returned from the excellent Retreat Association Conference at The Hayes. As well as being able to experience all the sessions, Archway had an exhibition stand and held a short reception where we met with colleagues from various retreat centres to tell them more of what we offer by way of support. We take a break from our own annual conference to concentrate on this wider opportunity every 3 years, but last year we met at Whitchester Christian Centre in Scotland.

Our next conference will be at St Katharine's Parmoor in Oxfordshire 19–22 January 2026. Booking forms have already been sent to members, but others are welcome to join us too. Please let us know if you'd like to receive an invitation.

We'll begin with a Retreat Day led by our Chaplain (and former retreat house warden) The Revd Liz Palin. This will be followed by Resource Days when we'll visit a winery and enjoy sessions from Alison MacTier and a consultant in change management & strategic planning. There will also be opportunities for prayer and time to socialise and network with colleagues – and also our Annual General Meeting.

The committee comprises 6 elected members, currently:

- **Barbara Clarke**
(House of the Resurrection)
- **Simon Kimberley**
(Whitchester Christian Centre)
- **Amanda Kimberley**
(Whitchester Christian Centre)



- **Janet Haynes** (Llangasty Retreat House)
- **Rosemary Cage** (Shallowford House)
- (Vacant)
- and ex officio members **Jeff Witts** & **Alison MacTier**

Archway has been operating for 32 years as a support network for all who have responsibility for running Christian retreat & conference houses of any denomination. If you want 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



Retreat Association Conference

Creative Encounters: Exploring Imaginative Paths to God

Impressions from two
of our conference
participants



How might the creative arts enrich the spiritual journey?

This was the central question addressed and answered by each of the speakers at the Retreat Association's 2025 Conference. From 16–19 June people from across the UK gathered at The Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick, to meet, learn, worship and grow. Old friendships were renewed and new ones formed while enjoying the hospitality and beautiful grounds of the Centre.

We heard from speakers who themselves live at the crossroads of faith and art: Mark Oakley (poetry), Glen Marshall (film), Abbot Christopher Jamison OSB (literature) and Joanne Anderson (art history). Each of them gave their unique perspective on why our imagination is a useful and necessary tool that helps us to wrestle with ambiguity, articulate feelings and emotions, offer perspectives different from our own, open up space to appreciate and enjoy beauty and not least of all: join in God's creative process.





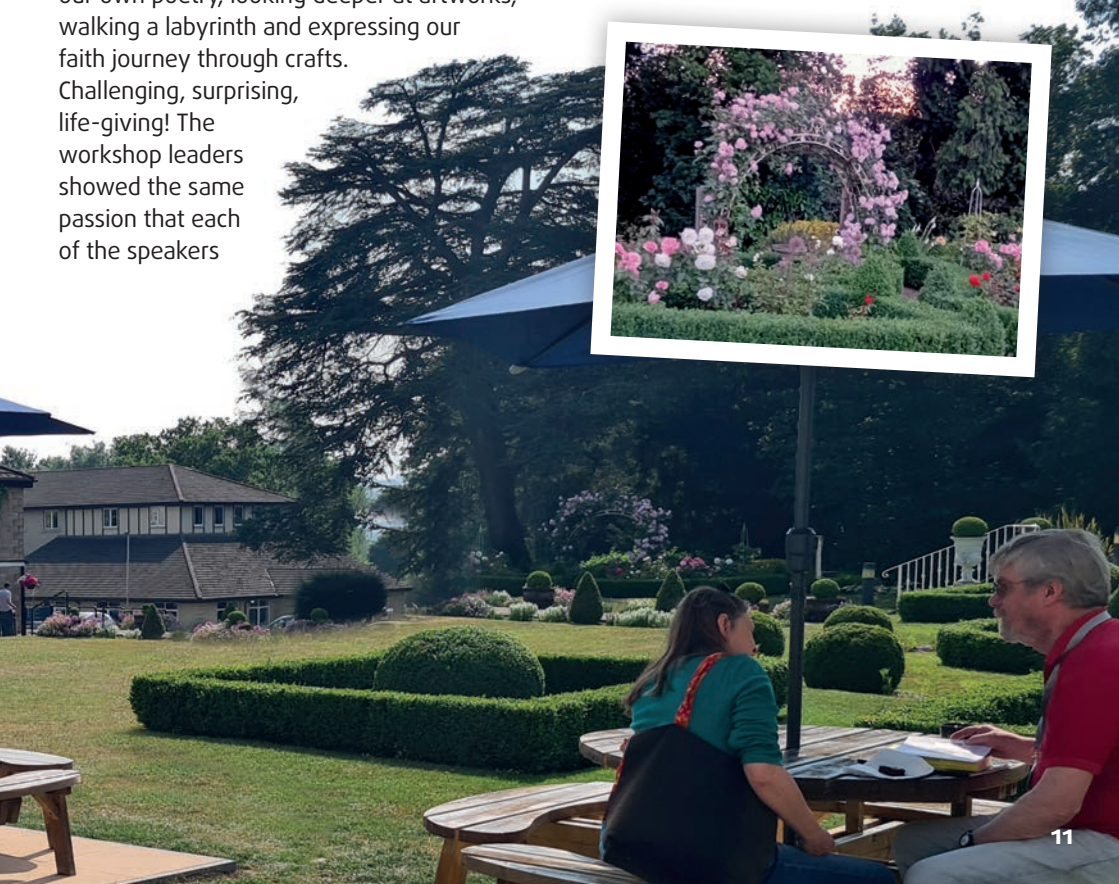
At the panel discussion on the closing day they were joined by Jacqui Parkinson who facilitated a creative and reflective space open to all in the Art Room. A beautiful textile from Jacqui's inspiring national touring exhibition 'Threads Through Creation' formed the central piece at the closing act of worship and other examples adorned the conference publicity.

The worship and evening prayer was led by Gaynor and Simon Shaw who blended reflective practices like the Examen with contemporary Christian worship music.

The workshops offered us the opportunity to be creative ourselves, including writing our own poetry, looking deeper at artworks, walking a labyrinth and expressing our faith journey through crafts. Challenging, surprising, life-giving! The workshop leaders showed the same passion that each of the speakers

brought to their talks: an earnest desire to help others deepen their spirituality and faith by generously sharing of their skills and experiences. It was almost impossible to choose only two workshops as there was such a huge variety of them! They provided much food for conversation and reflection afterwards.

An opportunity to meet other conference participants at a deeper level were the Kindling Groups. Once a day these groups came together to ponder and wonder, sharing insights and silence, journeying together for the duration of the conference.



Before breakfast there was an option for early morning prayer; offerings were as diverse as Celtic prayer, Franciscan guided meditation and Roman Catholic Mass. These worship times together with the time between sessions provided space to breathe and reflect.

Whatever medium feels most appropriate to us: may we all continue to join in God's creative process!

Some closing remarks to take away:

- *'poetry does not answer our questions; it questions our answers'*
- *'good films are like parables'*
- *'it is better to contribute than do nothing'*
- *'when Scripture is read aloud, God speaks to us'*

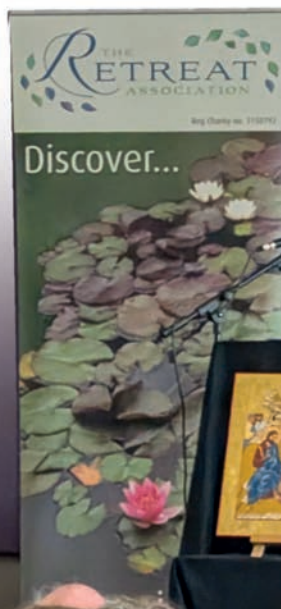
Gerda van Ommeren



Above:
Jacqui's artwork
in the final worship

Below left:
Jacqui Parkinson

Main photo:
Alison MacTier opens
up the conference





'Great Grace Was Upon Them All'

Just as the Knights of the Round Table appeared transfigured to each other, so also the conference participants appeared to me; kind, humble, wise, gifted, battle-worn, real.

The conference itself? Brilliant talks, certainly, but also an intentionally, well resourced, safe space. (It was a great relief to be able to talk about a delicate matter from long ago.)

We who participated are most grateful to the organisers, to the contributors, and to the Hayes staff. We bless you, in the name of Jesus!

Peter Evans



Right from the top:

Martin Davies

Graham Sparkes

Joanne Anderson

Mark Oakley

Glen Marshall

Abbot Christopher

Jamison OSB



Retreat Association Icon



Our icon of the meeting of Jesus and the Samaritan Woman at the Well has continued to be on display at a variety of venues across the UK thanks to the generosity of participating retreat centres and churches. Our hope is always that this beautiful icon is available for as many people as possible to share and we are delighted to receive offers from those wishing to display it.

The icon was hallowed at our conference in 2018 and since then it has been on display at no less than 30 retreat centres, 10 cathedrals, 9 churches or abbeys and 3 educational establishments. Last autumn the icon visited Worth Abbey in West Sussex, The Sisters of St Andrew in Lewisham and St Beuno's Jesuit Spirituality Centre in Denbighshire.

In 2025 the icon travelled to the Loreto Centre, near Conwy in North Wales, then on to St John's Church in Clevedon, Somerset. In June it was featured at our Retreat Association Conference at the Hayes in Derbyshire, where it was the centrepiece for our speakers. It was also the focus for two workshops led by David Wright, which explored what makes an image an icon, a brief history of iconography, and how to look at an icon to see its meaning through its materials, colour, geometry and the image itself.

From Derbyshire the icon travelled to the Dorset coast where it was the focus of a quiet day at Othona West Dorset. Over the next few months it will be travelling to Yorkshire, County Durham, Birmingham, Devon and Cornwall.

The icon comes with a stand, banner and further information. If you have a church or venue where the icon could be displayed in the coming year do let us know!

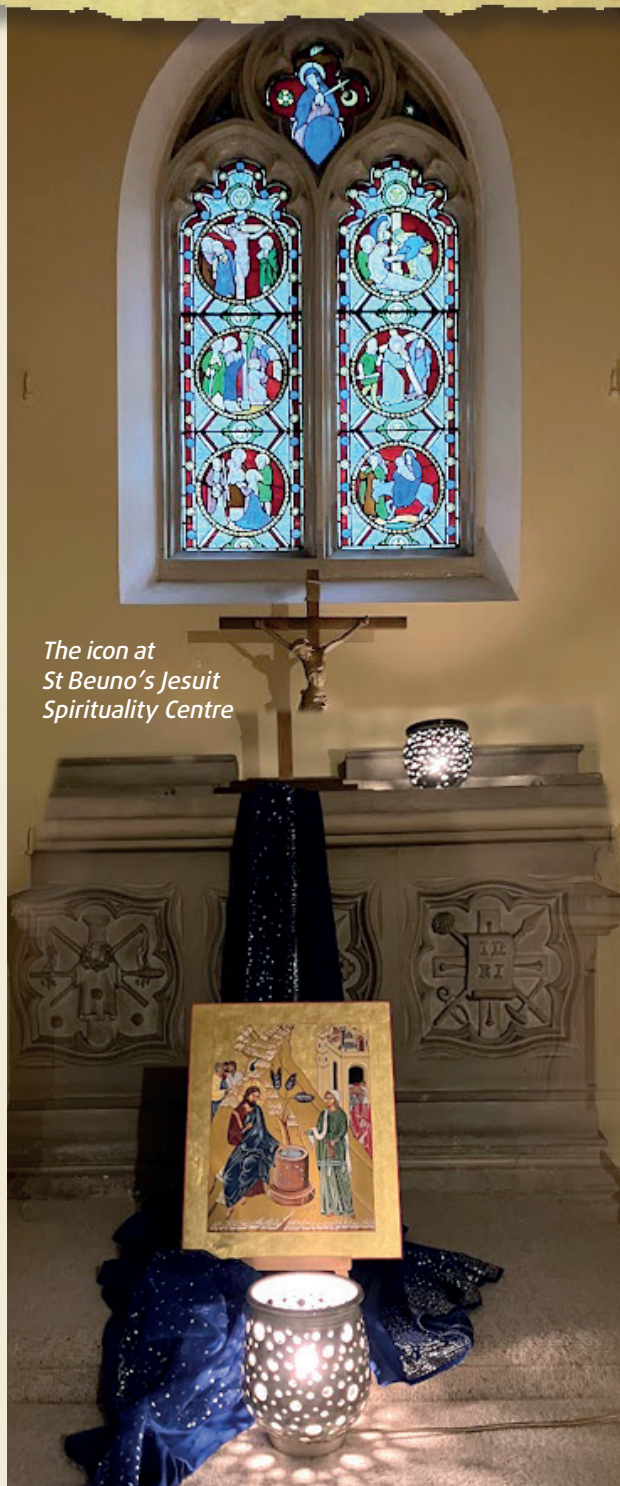


Top: the icon at St Beuno's Jesuit Spirituality Centre

Above: the icon at Othona West Dorset



From the top: the icon at the Sisters of St Andrew, the Ammerdown Centre and (above) Mark Oakley at the Retreat Association Conference



The icon at St Beuno's Jesuit Spirituality Centre



Dates for your diary

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

2025

■ 14-16 October

Let nothing disturb you (Reflect Retreat)
Rev'd Judith Jessop
Minsteracres Retreat Centre, Co Durham

■ 17 & 18 October

'You do not have to be good.' Opening up to God through the poems of Mary Oliver (Reflect Online Quiet morning)
Christine Crabtree

■ 21-23 October

'Behold, I am doing a new thing. Do you not perceive it?' (APR Retreat)
The Rt Rev'd John Stroyan
St Columba's House, Woking

■ 1 November

Reflect Open Day Conference
Rev'd Richard Andrew
Victoria Hall, Sheffield

2026

■ 19-22 January

Archway Conference
St Katharine's Parmoor, Oxon

■ 20-22 March

Poetry and Prayer Retreat (APR)
Helen Evans & Demelza Henderson
Sheldon Retreat, Devon

■ 14-16 April

Shorelines – Finding God on the boundaries (CSN Conference)
Christine Dodd
The Franciscan Centre, Ladywell, Surrey

■ 27-29 April

Spiritual Wellbeing Conference (APR)
Launde Abbey, Leicestershire



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