

Contemplation in Nature

‘ A tree gives glory to God by being a Tree’ Thomas Merton ‘New Seeds of Contemplation’

I live at Hilfield Friary a Franciscan community of Friars and lay people dedicated to a life of prayer, hospitality, and to living simply and sustainably on our 45 acres of land. On the boundary of our land grows a mighty tree we call the Gospel Oak. It was under such trees that people like St Francis or John Wesley would stand to preach. It was under a tree that the Buddha received enlightenment and under the Oaks of Mamre that Abraham received heavenly visitors.

This oak is over 500 years old and began when England was still a Catholic country, will have witnessed the English Civil War, the industrial revolution, two World Wars and perhaps feel most threatened by our oncoming climate emergency. During the first Covid lockdown a group of us decided to pray under the tree every Wednesday for the earths protection. Each week we sat, knelt and lay under the tree’s mighty limbs, admiring its strong skeleton, then slowly watching branches begin to bud and finally move towards full leaf. Each week the light falling on it’s branches and the shadows cast by it’s form revealed something new. As we looked and looked again at it we began to notice some of the 2,000 species of life that an ancient oak supports, and a sense of awe and wondered deepened within us. At the end of our contemplations next to the tree one of our community said ‘I began praying for the tree but eventually began to feel that the tree was praying for me’.

Jonathan Herbert lives at Hilfield Friary and is author of

‘Accompaniment, Community and Nature’

Professor Sir Gillean Prance writes

Quietness is probably even more important for me than it was in the past. I am fortunate to have a nice medium sized garden to work on and to enjoy. In fact, the time I spend gardening is often a time for contemplation along with the many tasks needed to keep the garden in order. This year I have restored the bench in a small alcove in the garden that is enclosed on three sides by hedges and fruit trees and the open side looks out over the lawn to a flower bed. I often sit on that bench and to relax and think. It is a most important refuge for me, but more importantly it is a place where my faith in God is strengthened and where I experience the wonders of His creation. Usually when I sit on the bench a robin appears from somewhere..... foraging on the ground or perches on the tree above me to sing. It is such quiet times as this that keeps me going through my daily life. The reality of Psalm 46 verse 10 becomes more real. **“Cease striving and know that I am God.”**

The world of men has forgotten the joys of silence, the peace of solitude which is necessary to some extent for the fullness of human living. Not all men are called to be hermits, but all men need enough silence and solitude in their lives to enable the deep inner voice of their own true self to be heard at least occasionally.

Thomas Merton - The Silent Life

Providing places for those that need refuge from the pressures of modern life and time to approach God is such an important mission and that is why I continue to take an active interest in The Quiet Garden Movement.

Ghillean Prance is a botanist and former Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens in Kew. Ghillean has travelled and conducted research extensively in South America. His life's work has focused on ensuring global sustainability and management of the environment through increasing our knowledge and understanding of the plant kingdom.

FLOWERS, FRUITS and FABLES of AMAZONIA By Ghillean Prance.

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Founder Philip Roderick visits No 10 Downing Street

The Prime Minister's Points of Light programme, is a daily award which recognises outstanding individual volunteers, charity leaders and community champions. Since it was established 10 years ago, over 2,000 people have been recognised for the positive changes they bring to their communities. Philip attended a ceremony on March 18th to collect his award.

“ What a surprise and such profound encouragement to have been nominated for a Points of Light award - both for me and the Quiet Garden network around the world. The Points of Light programme offers a rich and nurturing environment for initiatives such as the Quiet Garden network: a simple idea releasing and celebrating what I call 'grace in place'. The trustees and staff continue to nurture and spread the word about the Movement and the benefits of time spent in nature.

As my old school motto puts it, 'Towards the Light'. This journey is life enhancing and I look forward to seeing the fruiting of the vision as it takes further shape. “

Philip Roderick

A Pilgrim Path

Working in collaboration with St Winwaloe's who are part of Small Pilgrim Places and Degibna Prayer Garden part of the Quiet Garden Movement we have created a short pilgrim walk. Both share the common vision of offering a space for quiet and stillness for renewal and refreshment of the spirit.

Being near Helston, Cornwall both are linked by approximately 3 miles of public paths and local roads. They can be found on OS Explorer Map 103. You can download the leaflet which describes the collaboration in more detail from the Degibna Prayer Garden page on our website.

From our volunteer Michelle

I'm now in my third year of volunteering with the Quiet Garden Trust; helping to raise awareness about the Quiet Garden Movement and increase the network of gardens.

As part of this work, I've been liaising with UK dioceses and have been delighted that so many have been willing to engage with us about this. Grateful thanks go to the Dioceses of Coventry, Durham, Ely, Gloucester, Lichfield, Hereford, Chelmsford, London, Bristol, Norwich and Southwark for their support and interest.

I've also recently been involved in a joint initiative with the Small Pilgrims Places Network to link a pilgrimage trail between Degibna Prayer Garden (Quiet Garden Movement host) and St Winwaloe's Church (Small Pilgrims Places Network).

The gardener digs in another time, without past or future, beginning or end. A time that does not cleave the day with rush hours, lunch breaks, the last bus home. As you walk in the garden you pass into this time — the moment of entering can never be remembered. Around you the landscape lies transfigured. Here is the Amen beyond the prayer.
Derek Jarman — Artist and Film maker

We have over 250 gardens worldwide; if you are interested in becoming a host or individual affiliate please call or visit our website

<https://quietgarden.org/become-a-host/affiliate/>

Our most recent garden was opened in February. A Sanctuary of Stillness is in the grounds of All Soul's Church in Auckland New Zealand. A place to rest and reflect. We welcome you.



ANNUAL GATHERING

October 2024

This year we will be holding our gathering on 5th October at St John's Church in Notting Hill. Shane Connolly is a leading ambassador for Sustainable Church Flowers and is very proud to hold Royal Warrant of Appointment to HRH The Prince of Wales. Shane will create a display and talk about flower management in churches.

Mike Mullins is a leadership coach and spiritual retreat facilitator. He has established Soul Rewilding. He says:

To reverse biodiversity loss and the effects of climate change, is a spiritual challenge. How do we understand, love and treat all nature as sacred, as an expression of the divine.

The full programme, how to book, where to stay and how to get there will be available on our website in August.

The Quiet Garden Prayer

O Lord Jesus,
true gardener,
work in us what you want of us,
for without you we can do nothing.
For you are indeed the true gardener,
at once the maker and tiller and keeper of your garden,
you who plant with the word,
water with the spirit
and give your increase with your power.

Prayer of the 12th Century Cistercian
Guerric of Igny

DO YOU HAVE TIME TO SUPPORT US ?

Become a volunteer, Trustee or Advisor to the Quiet Garden Trust.

Have you got a passion for Quiet Gardens and our values, and time to help lead and guide the Movement and charity? Might you know someone that might be interested?

There are opportunities for people who are committed to the vision and values of Quiet Gardens to join the board of Trustees of The Quiet Garden Trust. We are in particular looking for folk with IT skills.

If you are interested please call Sarah for an informal discussion

01494 578909 or email sarah@quietgarden.org or visit our website

I love to open up inspiring space in which you can make soulful connections. The Quiet Garden Movement has been gently cultivating and tending an organic network – a flowering! – of set-aside, sensitively curated spaces in which anyone can come, without agenda, to be still. And to be restored. And to be enlivened.

Brian Draper—Patron, author and retreat leader

Church of the Wild by Victoria Loorz

How Nature Invites Us into the Sacred

This book is a wonderful mix of personal experience, theology, a deep love of nature - and a thorough dislike of patriarchy and the damage done by the religious hierarchy. Victoria writes that 'my personal spirituality is rooted in the Christ tradition – a term I prefer over Christian, which is a label I find difficult to swallow these days'. She calls herself an 'edge walker' travelling the narrow space between the religious tradition she credits with having forged her soul and her direct and very personal experiences in nature that have revealed a truth of their own. I believe that many people can relate to that.

Near the beginning of the book, Victoria says that 'I longed for Church to be a place where Mystery is experienced, not explained'. While there is indeed much about her personal experiences, particularly with animals, which are beautifully described, there is also much explanation and guidance. Alongside the experiential Victoria has much to say about the Bible and wilderness, which I found quite exhilarating, and the resources chapter at the end is very useful.

This felt like a very honest and open book, of someone still on the journey, full of wisdom and an eco-feminist passion but with an engaging humility. Victoria Loorz is a spiritual director and co-founder of the Wild Church Network and Seminary of the Wild.

Chris Holmes—Trustee

'I longed for Church to be a place where Mystery is experienced, not explained'.

This book is not about starting a wild church community but 'rather, I hope this book encourages in you a wild spirituality'.

She writes..'My personal spirituality is rooted in the Christ tradition – a term I prefer over Christian, which is a label I find difficult to swallow these days'.

She calls herself an 'edge walker' travelling the narrow space between the religious tradition she credits with having forged her soul and her direct and very personal experiences in nature that have revealed a truth of their own.

Wild Church replaces a human 'kingdom' paradigm of hierarchy, monarchy and inequality with the power systems of Earth, which can be described as a Kingdom of cooperation and kindred reciprocity.

PATRONS

**Rt Revd John Pritchard | Richard Foster | Terry Hershey
The Revd Lucy Winkett | Shane Connolly| Brian Draper**

Suggested reading

The Things You Can See Only When You Slow Down. **Haemin Sunim**

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Sacred Earth, Sacred Soul. **John Philip Newell**

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Sacred Nature - Restoring our Ancient Bond with the Natural World. **Karen Armstrong**

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The Glorious Life of the Oak **John Lewis –Stempel**

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The Almanac - A Seasonal Guide to 2024 **Lia Leendertz**

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"Sacred Habits. The Praise of Slowness in an Accelerating Age.

Enskilda Högskolan Stockholm

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