

CARMEL IN THE CITY

What do 12th century friars and a small Barbican Catholic church have in common? Medieval friars – Carmelites, Dominicans, Franciscans – were a common sight on the City of London's streets, as names like Whitefriars, Blackfriars, Greyfriars still attest. Like the Catholics who now worship at St. Joseph's Church, Bunhill Row, close to the Barbican, these groups of friars tried to meet the challenges of living out Christianity in their own particular time. They found ways to preach the Word of God, simply and in ways that ordinary people would understand, and to offer prayer and worship in spirit and in truth, with a concern for justice.

They started up small communities for prayer and worship, living not in monasteries miles from anywhere, but amongst the people. This led to lay people being involved in the spirituality and prayer life of Carmelite communities from earliest times. In many ways these medieval religious were way ahead of the times, presaging mutually collaborative ministry with lay people, strongly endorsed by the 2007 Carmelite General Chapter.

Carmelite communities tried to do, in their own age, what the reforming 2nd Vatican Council of the Catholic Church tried to do in the 20th century – to reflect the joys and hopes, the sorrows and anxieties of people, and to understand what was going on in the signs of the times. In a world of global violence and fear, poverty, hunger, environmental degradation, oppression and discrimination of all types, this is an even more relevant task.

St. Joseph's Church in Lamb's Passage, a stone's throw from the historic Bunhill Fields, gathers people from a rich diversity of backgrounds and languages into a committed and vibrant Catholic community. It is rising to meet new challenges for the Church in the 21st century. Since August 2006 it has been without a resident, full-time priest. While the sacramental needs of the community are met by Father Peter Newby, from the Catholic Church of St. Mary Moorfields, near Moorgate, a pastoral council drawn from lay members of St. Joseph's keeps the church alive in other ways.

Occasional weekday services are led by lay people who are also involved in assisting with preparation for 1st Communion and Confirmation. The weekly Sunday Masses are celebrated with a warm welcome, enthusiastic participation, and strong singing, using traditional and modern music. People at St. Joseph's give the lie to the myth that Catholics don't sing. Lay volunteers assist with special Sunday morning activities for smaller children, who are then later involved in the Mass. Other lay members visit the house-bound, taking them Holy Communion when needed.

There is strong and generous support for justice and peace activities, such as the Catholic development agency CAFOD. Over the past two years, a church member has been monitoring a treason trial of two other development agency workers in Ethiopia, spending part of each month in Addis Ababa. This has been supported by the prayers of the community on Sunday mornings. The award-winning Basil Hume Garden, a memorial to the late Archbishop of Westminster, also offers an oasis of quiet, refreshment, and growth in our city of towering concrete.

Reinforcing its Ethiopian links, St. Joseph's also boasts the presence of two remarkable icons by the French-born, Coptic icon painter, Stephane Rene. One depicts Mary, Mother of the City, with the River Thames flowing at her feet; the other shows Joseph, of the House of David, the church's patron saint. Both these icons were dedicated at an ecumenical, interfaith service in March 2005 with the involvement of local Anglican, Lutheran, and Methodist clergy, as well as a Muslim Imam. The strong commitment to work with other local Christian churches is evidenced by the presence of the Revd. Jennifer Potter, Associate Minister at Wesley's Chapel, as an honorary member of St. Joseph's Pastoral Council.

Carmel-in-the-City is the latest development to show that St. Joseph's Church is alive and well. The Carmelite Order began on Mount Carmel some 800 years ago. It is one of the Catholic Church's richest spiritual traditions in its commitment to prayer, service and creating community. Its inspiration is to be found in the tradition of prophets like Elijah and Elisha, bringing together both prayer and action, and not least in the Virgin Mary's Magnificat song. ***Carmel-in-the-City*** is an opportunity offered by lay and ordained Carmelites in London to explore spirituality for anyone thirsting for God, or seeking a way of holiness in life's everyday events.

On Saturday, 2 February 2008, The Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, the day will open with the Candlemass Liturgy at **11.00 am**, and then on the 1st Saturday of each month, there will be a celebration of the Eucharist, or Liturgy of the Word, to open the day at 11.30 am, followed by a bring & share lunch. After lunch there will a short talk on a particular theme, and a period of Lectio Divina, a way of praying that draws on scripture and other writings, calling one to study, ponder and listen to God's Word and to apply it in our lives. The day will close at 4.30 pm.

All are welcome and further details can be obtained from Sylvia Lucas 07889 436165 or carmelinthecity@laycarmel.org

www.laycarmel.org

www.carmelite.org

www.rcdow.org.uk/bunhillrow/

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