

# society of the sacred mission

May 2010

## European Province

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## PARLIAMENT OF THE WORLD RELIGIONS

by Colin Griffiths, SSM



*Left to right: Fr Colin, the King of Benin, Fr Laurence, OSB.*

When, in April 2006, I transferred in SSM to the European Province, I joined the Well Community which is based at the old priory buildings in Willen, Milton Keynes. The ministry at the Well is built around five core values: spirituality, hospitality, inclusivity, peace & justice, and sustainability. I chose inclusivity as my particular interest, and that was partly because I felt that

the church was becoming too narrow, suspicious of different points of view and far more dogmatic than what I had known in the past. So, on coming to Willen, I got involved with Interfaith in Milton Keynes and beyond, and I have made contacts with people from a variety of religions.

### The aims of the Society are:

- to help others to give their lives to God's service
- to share in the mission of the Church
- to study and meditate upon the meaning of the Christian Gospel

When attending a number of interfaith functions, I came across Dr Marcus Braybrooke, who was often the guest speaker. Through him, I was invited a couple of years ago to join the World Congress of Faiths and, as a result of that congress, I discovered that the **World Parliament of Religions** was to be held in Melbourne, Australia, in December 2009. Through the Trustees of SSM, I was given the funding to attend the event, and I am glad I did.

There were over 5,000 people attending from all over the world, of most religions, races and creeds, and it was a wonderful event.

The theme of the conference was *Make a world of difference, hearing each other, healing the earth*. And the dedication of the Parliament was this: “to honour all paths as divine”. This is a statement which I find quite challenging in any language. As a Hindu friend said, “We do not want to remain ignorant of each others’ faith and cultures”. What I like about the interfaith movement is that it calls you out of yourself, beyond your levels of understanding. It can be risky and you need to be grounded in your own particular faith. For myself, I feel it has strengthened my Christian faith.

The Parliament ran from December 3rd – 9th, and there were over 700 workshops on offer, so you had to be quite selective about what you chose to attend. Dr Philip Freier, now Archbishop of Melbourne, whom I had worked with when in the Northern Territory, kindly allowed me to stay with him and his wife, Joy, for the duration of the Parliament. Another house guest was the Bishop of Tasmania, the Rt Revd John Harrower, so we were able to attend sessions together. We had a lot of fun and engagement, as we explored our relations with other faiths. I want to share with you three encounters coming out of those sessions.

**1. Calling out to Allah; the role of Dua (supplication).** This first meditation (or morning observance as it was called) has – in Islam – many benefits for inner peace. It was led by Mushin Canbolat, an Islamic scholar from Sydney. In Islam, supplication prayer starts with the understanding that Allah is perfect in every way, and that the Muslim is the servant of Allah. In my limited contact with Islam, I have appreciated this emphasis on the perfection of Allah. I came away from the session with a sense that – from the Islamic point of view – to pray is to worship. Supplication is an incredibly powerful and personal experience. To pray for peace, to pray for understanding, takes you to the very heart of God. It was good being amongst people who had such an intimate understanding of Islam. That was one of the treasures of the many sessions I attended: we were taught by people who had a deep understanding of their own religion. The ‘Calling out to Allah’ is quite transforming (“Oh owner of majesty and kindness. Oh supporter of him who has no support. Oh provider of him who has no provision ... Oh treasure who has nothing in his purse ... Oh he who shows courtesy and treats with benevolence” and so on.) Christians worship in a slightly different way. We do not ascribe things to God. For us, God is Love, but we do not see that as an attribute designated to God.

**2. Towards a Global Ethic.** At the World Parliament in 1993 in Chicago, an important resolution was agreed on, which included having respect for life and commitment to a culture of equal rights and partnership between men and women. The idea was that we should commit ourselves to a common global ethic and a better mutual understanding, as well as a socially-beneficial, peace-fostering and earth-friendly way of life. This global ethic was to be a starting point, a way forward in the new global environment.

For me, it is both a way forward and a point of inspiration, because – if we are to move forward – we need something to give us the momentum to overcome the many hurdles which are sure to come our way when dealing with the global family.

Dr Hans Kung has been one of the driving forces for this ethic, and he spoke at one of the sessions. He mentioned his efforts to try and build a global consensus, to try and present a vision of something which people could relate and respond to. He also talked about a Global Economic Ethic for Business, which he had been developing during the past year. It was a real privilege to be in the presence of Hans Kung, a person who is dedicated to the good of all humanity and who is trying to give a lead to provide a global ethic.

**3. Sharing Wisdom, Fostering Peace.** Recently I had come across a book with an intriguing title: *Without Buddha, I could not be a Christian*. I was delighted when I noticed that the author, Paul Knitter, was to be at the Parliament and would be at one of the sessions, taking part in the discussion. He has had an interesting journey. He was brought up as a strict Roman Catholic, went to junior seminary at thirteen and was eventually ordained a priest. Sometime later, he left the priesthood, taught in various institutions, married a Buddhist, and is now Paul-Tillich-Professor of Theology, World Religions and Culture at Union Theological Seminary in New York.

For me, this is a story about a move away from ‘absolute’ truth and rigidity to inclusivity and enlightenment. From my reading of his book, Buddhism has helped him to understand Christianity more and to discover some real truths, which have transformed his life and made him a more engaging person. In his training, he was taught to believe certain things, but through his interest in other faiths, he has been able to discover the truth for himself. This has certainly been my own experience of inter-religious dialogue; it has strengthened my faith. My particular engagement with Islam has, in a way, led me to rediscover ‘God the Father’. This is because – in Islam – there is an emphasis on the transcendence of God.

I came away from the Parliament feeling very inspired and rather shaken in a positive way. I feel that encountering other faiths with an open heart also engenders peace. I was encouraged to continue my interfaith work, because it is needed so much in our world today. If we can get to know each other regardless of race, language, religion or sexual orientation, we are far less likely to want to destroy each other.

# RECLAIMING THE BODY FOR OUR PRAYER

by Paul Golightly

For the last ten years I have been using body prayer and movement more extensively in my own prayers and when leading retreats and quiet days, as well as a monthly workshop here at St Antony's Priory. The response is usually positive and for one or two in every group it is just what they have been waiting for.

So I was very happy to take up the invitation to write about it for the SSM magazine. It started for me as I prayed the Passion material on a retreat. I felt drawn to express through bodily movement the sense of Jesus falling into the abyss, but ultimately being held in the love of God. I thought this might be a one-off, but began to listen to the music of Margaret Rizza, and her rhythmic chants seemed to beckon me to physical expression.

A few months later I shared one of these movements with a group on a quiet day, and several people said that that was the best thing of the day. From there I developed other movement around chants from Iona, Taizé, etc., and thought through some mantras to movement. I don't claim a particular expertise, but share the fruits of my prayer and exploration of the body in prayer, almost saying: if I can do it, anybody can.

Theologically, the body has had a hard time in Christianity as we have exalted the mind and the spirit, and the body – particularly the female body – has been viewed with suspicion. I think we are emerging from this negativity, as all kinds of dance, movement and embodied prayer are finding expression in all traditions.

What are the things that people find helpful? First of all many find it deeply centring. After the experience of one movement, there is often a great stillness that the group

rests in for a few minutes. People who have struggled for years to sit and pray find great affirmation in developing simple body movement to express worship and adoration, longing and intercession. Few men come to the regular workshop, but on a retreat or quiet day, men will often be as keen as women for more, once they have got over the threshold. One woman says it is good to have a man leading this, as it could be pigeon-holed as 'girlie'.

Probably the best response is to hear of people who are incorporating movement into their daily prayer as a result of a session/day on embodied prayer, or when someone says: I tried that with a group or in a service at my church.

One of the close cousins to prayer and movement is Circle Dance, which is probably more familiar to a wider group. It has been a delight to collaborate with Judy Turner (one of the SSM Trustees), who leads sessions here at St Antony's, and to work with her on a Eucharist that consists solely of gesture, movement and dance. We have shared this in a number of settings, and the group have quickly picked up the necessary steps, etc. They have been very worshipful occasions. SSM Provincial Chapter two years ago shared in such an experience, and it was a beautiful offering.

I continue to develop the movement-centred way of prayer personally, and I am always glad to join in other people's expression of the goodness of the body and its use in prayer and worship.

*(For details of workshops at St Antony's Priory on this form of prayer, plus a day of sacred dance, see back page.)*

# CHRISTIAN PEACEMAKER TEAMS

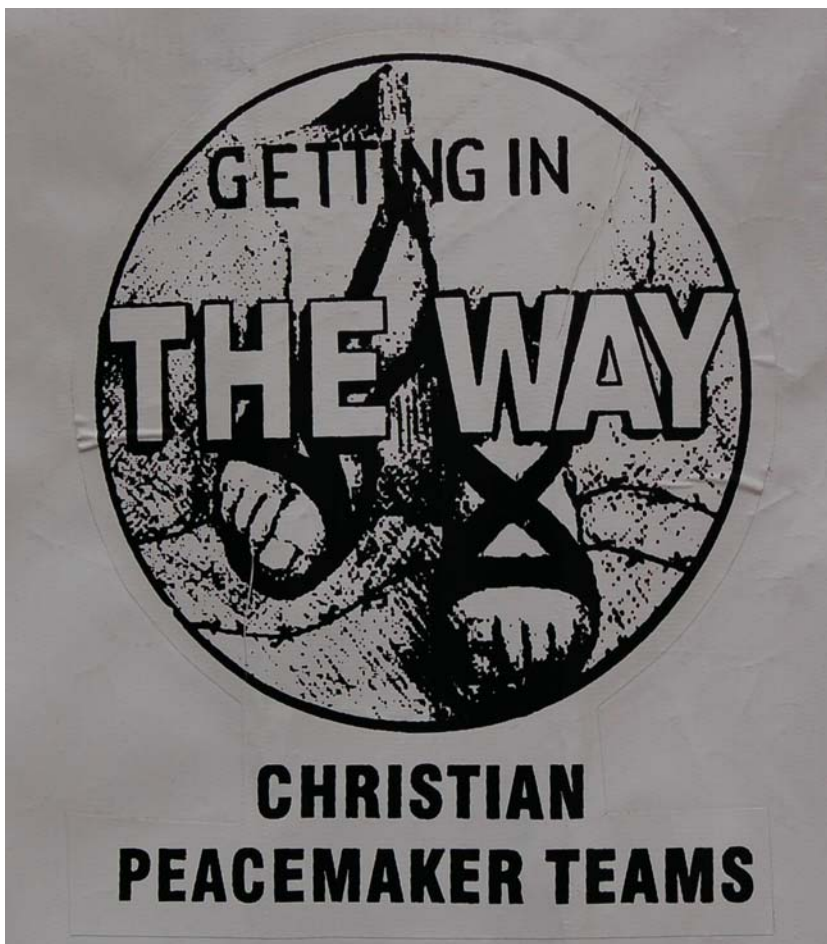
by Marcus Armstrong

I first encountered Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) in Palestine. Their motto is 'Getting in the Way', which I really connected with, as that is exactly what I had been doing with various other faith-based groups around the world while protesting against war and nuclear weapons. I have always been drawn to faith-based groups because the spiritual element helps to keep me grounded and secure in some very painful, confusing and challenging situations. Another element of CPT which drew me in was the people – I felt warm and safe among them and wanted to work with them.

For some years I tried to engage more with CPT. In order to join them and undertake their training, you must

first attend what is called a 'delegation' – effectively an activist trip where you can assess and be assessed. There follows a pre-training interview. It finally came together in late 2009, when SSM generously funded me to attend a 'delegation' in Canada. The action that was happening in this 'delegation' was support of one of the first nation peoples – the Anishinabe – living at Grassy Narrows in Kenora (Ontario), and also work to undo racism and try to more fully appreciate white privilege.

Though the trip really confirmed my desire to join CPT, it was not quite what I expected. My focus for more than 20 years had been on other things, and I naively thought that the days of the brutal and comprehensive oppression



no-one can say when the fish can be eaten again; or the forcing of people onto reservations; or the extreme violence against women; or the fact that the Anishinabe cannot walk freely through their own forests during the hunting season, because they may be shot dead by white men out hunting; or that nine out of ten people in prison are Anishinabe, even though they are small in proportion to the now predominantly white population. The list goes on and on.

What I am going to write about is the residential schools system. In 1867, the British North America Act made Indian (i.e. first nation) peoples' education a federal responsibility. In 1879, the Davin report recommended that industrial schools be established as the most effective means of 'civilising' the Indian population. The authorities, supported by new laws, took young children from their families by force and placed them in these residential schools, often far away from their communities. In 1892, the government and church entered into a partnership to run them. By 1896, forty-five schools were operating. To quote from the Davin report: "the industrial school is the principal feature of the policy known as that of 'aggressive civilisation'. Indian culture is a contradiction in terms ... they are uncivilised ... the aim of education is to

of first nation peoples had largely ended in Canada. I was very mistaken and spent the first few days of the trip in some shock, as I heard first-hand about the situation.

A local Baptist church had given us their facilities and worship space to live, sleep and eat in, so we were very comfortable. We also stayed on the reservation. Our small group of about 12 contained people of all ages and several nationalities, and a full programme had been arranged for us. One part of the programme was hearing talks from local Anishinabe, as they told the stories of their lives and the lives of their people. The land that is now modern Canada was under the control of the British Empire from 1763. This control did not completely end until 1931. So the British Empire is directly responsible for much of what I will relate.

It is difficult to know where to begin. It seems it had been easy to take the land from the Anishinabe. They have a different language, ethic and culture from us. When we talked about the land, I realised that we often see things in terms of power, control and ownership. They spoke in terms of a relationship, respect and sharing – existing with. They had no papers to say they 'owned' the land. Their numbers and the way they lived did not adversely affect the land or nature. They took what they needed to build homes, eat and clothe themselves, no more. Each family would have its own trap-lines where they would hunt, gather, fish according to the season. Sometimes I can be sceptical of such rose-tinted history, but from what I learned, their largely harmonious link to nature is absolutely true.

I could write of the taking and clear-cutting of the forests, leaving nothing behind and no place for anything to live; or the poisoning of the rivers and lakes from mercury dumped from the factories, poisoning so bad that

destroy the Indian".

From 1913, various other laws were passed, including mandatory attendance for all Indian children between the ages of seven and fifteen. Duncan Campbell Scott, of the Department of Indian Affairs, wrote: "I want to be rid of the Indian problem. That is the whole point". In the end, more than 150 schools were established, the last one operating until 1996. Accurate records were not kept, but it is estimated that more than 150,000 children passed through the system. Approximately one-third were dead within their first year at school, mostly because the conditions were so poor, though many were beaten to death.

The lack of concern about these statistics is demonstrated by another quote from Scott in 1907: "It is readily acknowledged that Indian children lose their natural resistance to illness by habitating so closely in these schools, and that they die at a much higher rate than in their villages. But this alone does not justify a change in the policy of this Department, which is geared towards the final solution of our Indian problem". I think this last quote sums things up and requires no comment. Those children who survived were not allowed to talk their own language or speak about their own culture or history in school. Those who returned often found they did not belong to either culture. The horror of the situation continues to reverberate around Canada and the world. In 1986, the United Church apologised for its role. In the 90s, the Anglican and Presbyterian Churches and the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate followed suit. In 2008, the Canadian Government issued a formal apology.

It is hard to relate the consequences. The effect on the first nation peoples has been nothing short of

catastrophic. Their children were taken, their way of life and the heart & soul of their communities (their future) were destroyed from the inside over a period of more than a century. It comes as no surprise that, under these circumstances, the old ways are mostly lost, and there are tragic levels of depression, suicide, criminality, violence and addictions on the reservations and in the local community.

A court case that I witnessed was a result of just such demoralisation. A young Anishinabe man had stabbed a friend to death over a minor disagreement. They had been drinking and taking drugs for more than 12 hours

before the fatal incident. After various family members had given evidence, the brother of the dead man finally offered his forgiveness, despite his huge pain and confusion. Most of the people in court, including myself, were in tears.

This is a taste of my 'delegation' in Canada with CPT. It was one of the most emotional and powerful experiences of my life. I have had my post-delegation interview with CPT and references are being taken up as I write. If I am successful, I hope to go to Chicago this summer for one month of training, then join a team in Iraq next year. So continues my peace and justice work.

## ABBA JOSEPH'S FINGERS

by Christopher Lewis

This carving was given to St Antony's Priory, in memory of Fr Reg Harcus, by his widow, Margaret.



When I was invited to undertake the commission for the chapel, my thoughts turned to the Desert Fathers, among whom St Antony was pre-eminent. I suggested basing the carving on a saying which could offer a message to those who were using the chapel.

*Abba Lot went to see Abba Joseph and said to him, "Abba, as far as I can I say my little office, I fast a little, I pray and meditate, I live in peace as far as I can, I purify my thoughts. What else can I do?" Then the old man stood up and stretched his hands towards the heaven. His fingers became like ten lamps of fire and he said to him, "If you will, you can become all flame".<sup>1</sup>*

Various ways of depicting this saying were considered, settling eventually on what may be seen to represent one of Abba Joseph's hands.

The base of the carving is a slab of copper beech, which grew on a farm near Slaidburn in Lancashire. The fingers, or flames, are cherry from Riding Mill churchyard in the Tyne Valley.

<sup>1</sup> Saying 7 of Joseph of Panephrisis in Benedicta Ward's *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: the Alphabetical Collection*.

*(Christopher Lewis writes that he taught himself to work with wood when he was a missionary in Borneo in the early 1970s. It was not until thirty years later, when he was a residentiary canon in Bradford Cathedral, that he began to take what he did more seriously. He was invited to contribute some of his carvings to exhibitions by local artists in the cathedral. He now lives in Northumberland and, in retirement, is able to give more time both to wood carving and to offering retreats and quiet days using his carvings. In 2009, he published Cleave the Wood and There I am – Meditations with Carvings and Music, which is available through St Antony's Priory.)*

# WILLEN LIBRARY: STAGE 2

by Barbara Merrifield



*Jennifer Bruce-Mitford using Willen Library for study.*

Readers may remember an article in the May 2006 edition of the magazine, which talked about our plans for a Library and Study Centre at the Well at Willen. The library is based on a substantial part of the Kelham collection, together with a collection inherited from the Farncombe Community (which developed into the Living Spirituality Network or LSN). I was subsequently appointed as librarian, and my main task since 2007 has been to amalgamate the two collections and catalogue them onto a computer database. With the help of volunteers, this work is now almost complete. The library has been fully rationalised in its layout, and the work is overseen by a Management Committee comprising members of SSM, LSN and local clergy/interested parties.

You will see from the letter enclosed with this magazine that we are now hoping to embark on the second stage of development. The next important step is to put the catalogue online, so that its contents are available to a much wider constituency. The collection is considered of some importance, complementary to other theological libraries in the wider area at Oxford and Cambridge universities. It is important that the books at Willen Library can be borrowed by those in ministry and training for ministry, as well as people engaged in spiritual direction and exploration, and many others. The collection is continually being updated, as money allows, and in the 21st century, online access is essential.

Willen Library is gradually becoming more widely known in the locality, in particular through our series of *A Look at a Book* events, when an author comes to talk

about his or her writing. In 2009, we hosted Gethin Abraham-Williams, Jenny McIntosh, Chris Cook and Marcus Braybrooke (see first article in the magazine), and already in 2010 we have hosted Jennifer Kavanagh and Adrian Smith, all of whom have works in the library collection. Later this year and in 2011, we are looking forward to contributions from Nicholas Buxton (one of the pilgrims in the programme *The Monastery*), Martyn Percy (Principal of Cuddesdon College) and Angela Ashwin (a good friend of SSM).

There are obviously many overheads in maintaining a library of this size, not least the ongoing costs of heating and lighting, which are currently borne by the Well Community. As we launch our appeal for the next phase of development, we trust that the value of the work we are doing will be widely recognised.

*(Jennifer Bruce-Mitford, whose picture appears above, uses Willen Library for study because of the major text books that are available for her to borrow. Having finished a course at Birkbeck College, she is now studying for a Masters Degree in Christian Theology at Heythrop College, a part of London University. Her course touches on the main theologians from early times right up to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including Aquinas, Barth and Balthasar. She says: "At Willen, there is so much relevant material on the open shelf". For that reason, and because she lives in Milton Keynes, Willen Library is an ideal place to study. If she were always to study at Heythrop, she would be jostling with other students for usage of texts.)*

# WRITING AT THE WELL

by Margaret Moakes

“Betrayal is a short, fat, stumpy little word that seeks to hide behind a veil of innocence.” This attention-grabbing sentence begins a story written recently by a member of the writing group. This is a group that makes regular use of the Willen Library, as an evening meeting venue and as a place of inspiration. The members mostly come together at fortnightly intervals, except when bank holidays intervene. The evenings are lively and often full of surprises, with topics tackled in a variety of ways.

Having been formed by a handful of devotees some five years ago, the group now has a regular attendance of 10 to 12 members. The only qualification needed is an enthusiasm for writing. Whether you are a novice or an experienced writer, you can expect a sympathetic response to what you have written and helpful suggestions if you are uncertain or become stuck. There is an expectation that people will develop their writing skills, and more experienced members of the group can help in that respect.

Writing is stimulated by a topic agreed ahead of each meeting. Topics in recent months have included *Storms*, *Memoirs*, *Colours*, *Fictitious Characters*, *Spring* and *Facing the Shadow Side*. Writers are free to approach the subject in their own way, some choosing short story, some poetry, some essay format and some prayer. The main thing is that they should tap into their creative juices. Some evenings are given over to impromptu writing,

which is a discipline in its own right, requiring attention to a time limit.

The group is also involved in related activities. For instance, in November 2009, a whole-day writing workshop took place, under the title *Roots and Shoots*. Participants were encouraged to look back at their childhood and the growth to maturity. Tasks included writing a mini saga (a complete story in 50 words precisely), and using certain key words in their attempts to recapture times past.

Very recently, some group members contributed to a café-style poetry and music evening in the wider parish, of which Willen Church is a part. This was one event in a Creative Arts week and was very successful. The theme was Easter, death & resurrection, and produced a wide spectrum of reflective material, as well as entertainment.

Sometimes, at the regular fortnightly meetings, works of published writers are given prominence. For instance, on two occasions in the past year, we have chosen start or finish lines from well-known books as focal points for our own efforts. So the short story by Debbie McKinley, the first line of which begins this article, concludes with the words: “You’d better sit yourself down ... this might take a while”, which is, in fact, the concluding line of *Fleshmarket Close* by Ian Rankin.

## STOP PRESS



Left to right: Fr Jonathan, Bishop Tom Butler and Fr Colin at Provincial Chapter at Sneaton Castle, Whitby.

At a recent Provincial Chapter meeting, Fr Colin Griffiths, SSM was elected as the new Provincial. Fr Jonathan Ewer retired after nine years of devoted service to the Province. We also said farewell to our Visitor, Bishop Tom Butler, who has retired as Bishop of Southwark. The new visitor will be Bishop John Pritchard, Bishop of Oxford, who knows SSM well, both from his time in the north-east (as Bishop of Jarrow), where he was in touch with St Antony's Priory, and from visits to the Well at Willen. We are grateful for his care.

One of Fr Jonathan's final visits in his time as Provincial was to the priory in Maseru. He writes: “Early in February I flew out to Maseru. I was straight into preaching, both at the priory and elsewhere, and Robert [Stretton] roped me into doing some teaching with the new postulants. At first I was to teach them the Pentateuch in four lessons ... [but] the original plan was modified, and in fact I worked with them through the Abraham, Isaac and Jacob sagas. ... There are four new postulants”. (For more details, see the *Southern African Newsletter*.)

# SSM PROGRAMMES



**St Antony's Priory,  
Durham**  
[www.stantonypriory.co.uk](http://www.stantonypriory.co.uk)  
Quiet Days and Workshops  
Generally  
10.00 am – 4.00 pm

*Wednesdays, May 12, June 9,  
September 8 and October 13*

**Prayer & Movement Workshops**, to develop the body as a medium of prayer (7.00 to 8.30 pm).

*Saturday, May 15*

**Exploring the Quaker Way.** A quiet day introducing the mystical tradition of Quaker spirituality.

*Saturday, June 5*

**Dancing our Prayers.** A day of sacred dance as the language that unites body, mind and soul. No previous dance experience needed.

Also:

*Friday, June 11, starting 6.30 pm*

**Liturgy for Summertime**

A special night at the priory for friends and regular supporters.

*July 26 – Aug. 1; Aug. 2 – 6; Aug. 9 – 13*

Three separate **Individually Guided Retreats** at Shepherd's Dene, Northumberland. These have proved a popular part of the programme.

*October 15 – 17*

**Nine Doorways to Grace.** An introduction to the Enneagram as a map for your spiritual journey. Non-residential weekend.

*November 5 – 7*

**Biospiritual Focusing Weekend**

Non-residential weekend awakening our ability to allow the gift of our body's wisdom to guide us into greater wholeness. It could be described as 'felt-sensing' more than just thinking or feeling. It helps us to 'let go' rather than needing to be in control. More details are available at [www.biospiritual.org](http://www.biospiritual.org).

**For information and bookings contact 0191 384 3747,  
e-mail: [durhamstant@aol.com](mailto:durhamstant@aol.com)**



**The Well at Willen,  
Milton Keynes**  
[www.thewellatwillen.org.uk](http://www.thewellatwillen.org.uk)  
Quiet Days and Workshops  
Generally  
10.00 am – 4.00 pm

*Saturday, May 15*

**Five Stones and a Burnt Stick**

Ernesto Lozada-Uzuriaga leads a quiet day based around his new book.

*Saturday, 25 September*

**Circles of Prayer**

Praying the circle in a variety of ways, as a symbol of eternity.

*Saturday, 13 November*

**How to Run a Quiet Day**

A day organised at the request of the Retreat Association.

Also:

*Saturday, 12 June, 7.15 pm*

**Mikron Theatre Group**

The annual midsummer theatre performance on the Paddock.

*Saturday, 19 June*

**Stop in the Name of God**

A silent, individually guided retreat day.

*Saturday, 3 July*

**World Music Day**

Annual festival of music, dance and fun. Starts mid-morning. Bring a picnic.

*August 1 - 6*

**Icon-writing retreat.** In writing (painting) a holy icon, one gains insight into the spirituality of the process. (No experience needed.)

*Weds., 23 June & 6 October*

**A Look at a Book**, with Nicholas Buxton & Martyn Percy respectively.

**For information and bookings contact 01908 242190,  
e-mail: [bookings@thewellatwillen.org.uk](mailto:bookings@thewellatwillen.org.uk)**