

## REPORT FROM IPTOC – 2017

“Oh to be in England...” well not April but September with its own special beauty. Imagine: squirrels and molehills, woods and lanes, rows of terraced and semi-detached houses with handkerchief gardens or window-boxes, chimneys against the skyline and pubs with names drawn from history. High Leigh, our venue for two weeks, is a magnificent building that has grown from a Barclay (the Bank) family home to accommodate guests and is set in huge grounds complete with a lake, ducks and a once-spied vigilant fox.

IPTOC – Inter-Provincial Third Order Chapter – had a rhythm of morning and evening prayer and Eucharist. Some sessions were shared with our First Order brothers and sisters. We listened – listened to one another from Africa, America, Asia-Pacific and Europe. Sam Wells lead us from the story of Martha and Mary to the challenge of “working with” compared with “working for”, asking us to consider what it might mean personally to being with – with oneself, and a delight of being with God, attentive and present. One comment stayed with me: “Martha offered food...Mary offered communion.”

A major focus was formation. It was so good that Sam Faga could be there. We discussed flexibility, openness to change (especially thinking of young Franciscans), possible patterns for Postulancy and Novitiate, developing discipleship and a bold new look at the possible format of writing our own personal Rule in line with our Principles. You will hear more about that. Anne is one of the work team.

We listened to a couple of addresses from the Secular Order. It was great that they could share our meetings. A very good presentation on Franciscans International and Franciscan Aid certainly stirred me to enthusiasm for what is happening on our behalf. FI is about building bridges with Franciscan spirituality from 1982 when our representation began in Geneva. From FA we heard some inspiring stories of making our relatively small budget stretch to make a difference in many lives.

We watched the Hillfield film, “Finding St Francis” which many of us have seen here, but presented with an energetic Paul Alexander in person. He wrote the script, directed it and was narrator and actor in the film. He gifted us with a copy, so I have it to lend out. Watch out for the release of the film, “The Sultan and the Saint” in December – a must watch to provoke inter-faith dialogue. Anne and I promoted the books written by Rose Christie-French, set them out on a table for people to browse. There was lively interest. We will talk about the way ahead from here.

We worked after the evening meal on the last night to complete the agenda before departing the next morning. Our new Minister General moved effortlessly into the leadership role as Ken Norian stepped aside. Once again we are blessed that the Minister General of our Order is from our own Province! John has invited Bishop Godfrey Fryar from Brisbane to be Assistant – a wise and gracious man of God.

It was a memorable experience to see the wider vision of being part of an international Order, to see the amazing giftedness of so many wonderful committed Franciscans, to enjoy the laughter and fun, to connect deeply into the rhythm of worship, to be in England in September!

Thank you for the privilege. Blessings to each one of you.

Maggie