

Passio



July 2018

Issue 2

Newsletter of the Passionist family - St. Joseph's Province

www.passionist-uk.org

Inside this Issue

- p3 Reflections from our Provincial /
News from our Passionist Nuns
- p4 “Share the Journey”
- p5 Spotlight on John Thornhill
- p6 A New Special Benefactor /
Thoughts on Blessed Dominic
- p7 Fr Martin Newell: Priest Protester
- p8 Hymn in Honour of Elizabeth Prout
- p9 Talking with Lya Vollering
- p10 Passionist Partners
- p12 The ‘Walton’ Icon
- p13 Passionist Inner City Mission: Part 1
- p16 News from Around the Province

Contact Us

Paschal Somers

John Thornhill

Rich Burley

Congregation of the Passion
St. Peter’s Parish Centre
Charles Street
Coventry
CV1 5NP

T: 024 76 011 620

M: 0740 362 0572

M: 0786 363 0572

E: passionistworker@gmail.com

E: passionistbursar@gmail.com

E: passionistsmedia@gmail.com

Tw: [Jesu@XPIPassio](https://twitter.com/Jesu@XPIPassio)

www.passionist-uk.org



Editorial

Welcome to the second edition of ‘Passio’, our Passionist Family Newsletter. We have been greatly encouraged by the kind comments from readers of the first issue and we sincerely hope that the content of this issue engenders as much interest.

In his book, ‘Beauty: The Invisible Embrace’, the late John O’ Donohue said that the old maps never satisfy the human imagination. It does not want to be trapped in the expected territories but wants to press ahead beyond the accepted frontiers to bring back reports of regions no mapmaker has yet visited.

In producing this newsletter we are attempting to demonstrate that God is doing a new thing within the Church, and within the Passionist Family at the same time, and that the God of surprises can be detected in the most unlikely of places, beyond our exclusionary frameworks.

The renowned scripture scholar Water Brueggemann writes that

“The prophet engages in futuring fantasy. The prophet does not ask if the vision can be implemented, for questions of implementation are of no consequence until the vision can be imagined. The imagination must come before the implementation. Our culture is competent to implement almost anything and to imagine almost nothing. The same royal consciousness that make it possible to implement anything and everything is the one that shrinks imagination because imagination is a danger. Thus, every totalitarian regime is frightened of the artist. It is the vocation of the prophet to keep alive the ministry of imagination, to keep on conjuring and proposing futures alternative to the single one the king wants to urge as the only thinkable one.”

Our hope is that the contents of these newsletters will be an encouragement towards imagining alternative futures for the Gospel, the Church, the world and in amongst all that, the Passionist family.

Paschal Somers

Passionist Development Worker

Reflections from our Provincial



“The Passion of Jesus is the greatest and most overwhelming work of God’s love. It is the most outstanding miracle of God’s infinite love.”

St Paul of the Cross reminds us of what is at the very centre of the Passionist vocation. As we contemplate the infinite love of God our own hearts are able to respond in love. Frail though we are, Love touches our lives and we are able to love in return.

Infinite love has to reach out to others, and reach out in particular to those whose lives are touched by the cross. A heart which has been touched by Crucified Love has to be moved by those who are crucified all around us.

And increasingly we recognise in the harm which is being done to the environment yet another crucifixion and yet another challenge to our love.

Infinite Love! I am delighted that Passio has been launched and that in it we are able to catch glimpses from one another of how God’s love continues to be the greatest reality in our lives and in our world.

Through Passio we are able to encourage one another in our discipleship and in our unity of heart. We welcome contributions, especially from those among the wider Passionist family.

With my warmest regards,

John Kearns CP

News from our Passionist Contemplative Nuns

The Congregation of the Passion of Jesus Christ was founded by St. Paul of the Cross to keep alive the memory of the Passion. St. Paul calls it the most overwhelming work of God’s love.

St. Paul of the Cross also founded the Passionist Contemplative Nuns to do this in a special way by a life of prayer and contemplation. Keeping vigil at the foot of the Cross with Our Lady of Sorrows.

The Passionist Nuns have been in England for 55 years. Last year we settled at Minsteracres. On the 9th July Feast of Our Lady of Holy Hope the new monastery was blessed by Bishop Seamus Cunningham, bishop of Hexham and Newcastle.



The journey to Minsteracres started in November 2014. Thankfully we are now settled in our new monastery. Coming to Minsteracres has really been a journey home, reminding us that we are part of this large and varied Passionist family, which we pray for every day. Please come and see our beautiful chapel the next time you visit Minsteracres.

Mother Monica CP & Mother Regina CP

Sacred Words

“Build an oratory within yourself, and there have Jesus on the altar of your heart. Speak to Him often while you are doing your work. Speak to Him of His holy love, of His holy sufferings and of the sorrows of most holy Mary.”

St Paul of the Cross writing a reply on Jan 9, 1760 to a busy married woman who felt that she couldn't seem to find enough time to pray.

‘I was a Stranger and You made me Welcome’

“Every stranger who knocks at our door is an opportunity for an encounter with Jesus Christ, who identifies with the welcomed and rejected strangers of every age.”

Pope Francis, 104th World Day of Migrants and Refugees

In 2017 the Passionist Provincial Chapter made it a priority of the work of the Congregation to welcome the stranger. In support of this, on Saturday 28th April 2018, Martin Newell CP and two members of the Community of the Passion, Kris Pears and Paschal Somers, joined with 125 other CAFOD supporters to walk the three and a half mile route from Cannon Hill Park to St Chad’s Cathedral, Birmingham, accompanied by Archbishop Bernard Longley as part of the ‘Share the Journey’ campaign. The group walked 500 miles in total.



Fr Martin addressing walkers at St Anne’s Digbeth

Along the way they stopped at Birmingham Central Mosque, St Anne’s Digbeth and St Phillip’s Cathedral. At St Phillip’s they reflected on the challenges migrants, refugees and asylum seekers face when they arrive at their destination as well as their journey to that destination. As they walked they carried the Lampedusa cross with them, which is crafted from the wreckage of migrants’ boats that get washed up onto the shores of that small island. It is a reminder of the risk migrants take and of the fact that many do not make it to their destination.

The ‘Share the Journey’ campaign is part of a worldwide campaign, spearheaded by CAFOD, inspired by Pope Francis’ special concern for migrants and refugees. This is because more people are on the move now than ever before. Every minute, 20 people around the world are newly displaced. Half of the world’s refugees are children, and thousands take flight without the protection of parents or other family members.



Share the Journey ☀
#sharejourney

Three out of four of the world’s refugees are hosted by developing countries.

At the start of his papacy, Pope Francis visited the island of Lampedusa where thousands of migrants have drowned at sea. Ever since, the Holy Father has shown the Church’s concern for this crisis. In 2017, he released a message to nation states, urging them to “welcome, protect, promote and integrate” migrants and refugees.

In response, CAFOD has launched a petition to the UK Prime Minister Theresa May, urging Britain to ensure that the human dignity of migrants and refugees is at the heart of policy-making. Parishes and schools have joined the campaign in 2018 with the aim of walking a total of 24,900 miles – the distance around the whole world – as an act of solidarity with our global neighbours fleeing their homes and in the hope of sending a message to world leaders that they must step up too and act with courage and compassion when they agree ambitious new UN agreements on refugees and migration later this year.

Share the Journey Prayer

God our refuge, you share the journey with migrants and refugees, lightening their footsteps with hope. For you, Lord, are close to the broken-hearted.

Pour out your Spirit upon world leaders. May they see the tragedies of our human family, and be moved to respond with wisdom, compassion and courage.

Open our eyes and hearts to the God-given dignity of all your people. Move us to welcome our neighbours, and so bear witness to your love.

Through Christ our Lord, Amen.

Rachel McCarthy/CAFOD

Spotlight On... John Thornhill

John is the bursar and administrator for St. Joseph's Province. He has been working with the Congregation for three years and is also a member of the Community of the Passion. John was a policy advisor for a social housing charity and was an RE teacher in the distant past.

What is one word that you would use to describe yourself?

Anxious. It's not always a bad thing though. Soren Kierkegaard, on one of his better days, once said "anxiety is the dizziness of freedom": maybe there is something in that. So if you have ever got a fretful email from me, it's just a habit of a lifetime I'm probably not going to shift in a hurry. Sorry!

What one memory do you most treasure?

Arriving in New York in 1997 to do my Master's Degree and looking at the Manhattan Skyline from a boat on the Hudson on a brilliant blue summer's day. I had seen New York in films and on TV but to be "part of it" was the most incredible and energising experience.

Seeing Jerusalem for the first time in 2016 was a heart-stopping moment: the city "aches" with a textured history of desolation, hope, injustice and expectation more than any place I have ever visited. In a very particular way Jerusalem is a city which "images" the human and spiritual dilemmas of our age.

Finally, being with my Dad when he died. After a short illness, surrounded by the people who loved him, his death was prayerful and peaceful: a beautiful end to a human life and a blessing to all of those who were in the room with him.

What advice would you give to your younger self?

Stop being so anxious already!

Which person (living or dead) would you most like to meet and why?

I've got a few: can I have them all to dinner? Andy Warhol: I think he imagined our age with irony and ambiguity more than any modern artist or thinker. Lady "Speranza" Wilde and her son Oscar: it must have been impossible for anyone else to get a word in edge-ways in their home. Blessed Oscar Romero: because the story of his personal transformation is at once fragile, human and heroic. St. Mary Magdalene: because she uses so few words in the gospels, yet her love for Jesus and her trust in His Mercy has been the greatest religious influence on me. Ludwig Wittgenstein: because he was very clever and I probably only understand a fraction of what he wrote. St. Melangell, (the Welsh St. Francis): because of her love for creation; and because her shrine at Pennant Melangell is a place of retreat I return to again and again. Finally, Julian of Norwich: a woman who lived in obscurity and was partially lost to history but who uses language to imagine the love of God in a profound and transformative way.

What is the most important thing you have learnt in the past year?

That the world is incredibly, effortlessly, dynamically and irreplaceably beautiful and that nature is infinitely fascinating;



I have taken to photographing flowers and leaves and recording birdsong and streams: once I try and get beyond the familiarity of these ordinary created things there is something "perfect" to discover about them all uniquely.

Brown sauce or red sauce?

Definitely red.

When did 'God' become more than a word to you?

God has always felt like more than a word to me: but my "images" of God have changed and continue to change. I think all "relationships" are like that; which is why my faith has always felt "surprising"; not always easy, frequently confusing; often argumentative; but "alive" and punctuated by moments of great personal discovery.

How does your faith shape your work?

Loving God through sisters, brothers and creation. That's so easy to type, but so hard to do. So very hard to do!

If you could go anywhere in the world right now where would it be and why?

Japan. Because there is a deep tradition of delight in and contemplation of the smallest and most perfect aspects of the natural world.

If you were about to be castaway on a desert island, what three items would you take with you?

My "Teach yourself French and German" books because finally I'd have the time to do it properly: even if there was no one to talk to in French or German afterwards. The Bible: because with all the time in the world to contemplate, I imagine there are incredible insights still to discover which are so often missed when reading at speed in a pressurised world. My camera: to capture perfect images of perfect things which sometimes last one day only.

A New Special Benefactor



Fr. John Johnson is the Parish Priest of St Mary's Wigan, and a man with a lifelong devotion to the Passion and to the Passionist Saints. He took the name St. Paul of the Cross as his confirmation name and his decision to become a priest was in significant part influenced by his contacts with the Passionists. When I was living in Wigan he was extremely kind not only to me but to various visiting Passionists and members of The Community of the Passion.

On Sunday 18th June, during Sunday Mass, I had the pleasure of presenting Fr. Johnson with the award of being recognised as a Special Benefactor of the Passionists. At the same time he was enrolled as an honorary member of the Congregation. He told me that he was deeply honoured and very grateful for the award. Our thanks go to John Sherrington CP for suggesting that we recognise Fr. Johnson in this way.

John Kearns CP

Thoughts on Blessed Dominic

After Dominic's death, John Henry Newman recalled the vivid impression that this 'Apostle of England' had made on him:

"Father Dominic was a marvellous missionary and preacher filled with zeal. He had a great part in my own conversion and in that of others. His very look had about it something holy. When his form came within sight, I was moved to the depths in the strangest way. The joyfulness and affability of his manner, in the midst of all his sanctity, was in itself a holy sermon."

In his work on the 'Second Spring' of Catholicism in England, the Jesuit writer, Fr John Brodrick said this of Dominic Barberi's arrival in our land:

"The second spring did not begin when Newman was converted nor when the hierarchy was restored. It began on a bleak October day of 1841, when a little Italian priest in comical

attire shuffled down a ship's gangway at Folkstone."

In a recent sermon on the life and ministry of Blessed Dominic, Bishop Marcus Stock said,



"If we, the members of the Church of today, are to engage fully in the challenge put to us in the evangelisation of our society today and to cultivate a new spring for the Catholic faith in our land, we would do well to pay attention to the new ardour, the new methods, and the new expression we find in the mission and ministry of Blessed Dominic Barberi of the Mother of God".

Fr Martin Newell: Priest Protester



We are familiar with the phrase ‘putting your money where your mouth is’ – Fr Martin Newell is an example of someone putting his faith where his mouth is – we met up with him to talk about his courageous witness in standing up against the scandalous and unjust arms trade.

Most Catholic priests who find themselves in prison are there as chaplains. Not Fr Martin Newell, though: he’s been an inmate several times, and is likely to be so again.

Fr Newell, 51, who is based in Birmingham, is what might be called a protest priest: like the Catholic priests and nuns who were arrested in Washington last week after demonstrating in support of US immigrants, he believes his vocation is not only to the religious life, but also to making a stand on issues he believes Christ, if he was on earth today, would have championed.

He’s currently facing legal action over an unpaid fine dating back to an act of civil disobedience at the 2009 London Arms Fair, when he and Sr Katrina Alton CSJP covered a sign near the entrance to the fair in red paint. ‘We did it to symbolise the blood of innocent people,’ says Fr Newell, who was arrested, charged with criminal damage, and later fined £515. He has consistently refused to pay the fine, and was recently recalled to court to explain himself; magistrates have given him another 28 days to pay, although he made clear in court that he will not do so.

If he’s eventually sent to prison, he does at least know what to expect: in 2000-1 he spent six months inside after deliberately damaging a vehicle used in nuclear warhead convoys. ‘We got into the base and used hammers to damage the vehicle,’ he

says. ‘It was symbolic, of course, but it also meant the vehicle couldn’t be used for something that is immoral.’ Fr Newell argues that direct action like this is the 21st century’s version of conscientious objection. ‘In traditional wars, governments needed young men to fight,’ he says. ‘But these days they don’t need men to fight, they just need all of us to stay silent, and to pay our taxes.’

His six months were served mostly in Bedford and Belmarsh prisons, and there were some unpleasant experiences. ‘Being admitted to the prison for the first time was terrible: the reception staff wanted to intimidate new inmates, and they were very aggressive,’ he says. ‘It was a horrible start.’ He also felt unsafe at times, and on one occasion had to intervene when a fellow inmate tried to commit suicide. ‘He’d slit his wrists – he survived, that time, but I’ve no idea whether he’s still alive now,’ says Fr Newell.

Being a priest as well as a prisoner made him a figure of some interest inside the prison. ‘I think the officers thought I was someone they could trust, and that I wasn’t likely to make any trouble,’ he says. There were some unusual situations: at one prison, the chaplain was a priest with whom he’d studied at seminary. And on one occasion, says Fr Newell, he was able to celebrate Mass in the prison chapel; at other times, he said the prayers of the Mass alone in his cell.

Born in Walthamstow and raised in South Woodford, Fr Newell first thought about becoming a priest at the age of 14, having been an altar server from the age of seven. After grammar school he studied economics at Southampton University, before doing voluntary work with, amongst others, the Jesuits, before going to Womersley Seminary. After



Fr Martin protesting at the 2009 London Arms Fair

being ordained in 1997 he spent five years working in parishes in Brentwood diocese, before joining the Passionists in 2001.

But it was an ‘epiphany moment’ when he was a student that put him on the road to life as a protester. ‘I was looking for a way of being more radically committed to the option for the poor, and I had this sudden realisation that justice and peace work was what being a Christian was all about,’ he remembers. ‘I realised that, for me, being a Christian would mean living alongside the poor, being with the poor, working for them; and working for the causes I believe Christ would have worked for. I believe Jesus was a pacifist, and I believe that means I should be one as well. And the implications of that are using non-violent means to work for justice; I’m convinced that non-violent action is a legitimate and positive way of standing up for what I believe in.’

As well as the arms trade, Fr Newell has protested against the use of drones in warfare, and he’s currently directing his energy towards stands against climate change. ‘Climate change is the thing that keeps me awake at night,’ he says. ‘To me, it’s the equivalent of protesting against nuclear weapons in the eighties; in fact, it’s worse than nuclear weapons in one sense, which is that the damage is already being done. With nuclear weapons you could argue that it was about preventing them from being dropped: with climate change, the damage is already taking place. We’re currently sending carbon bombs into the air that will detonate in ten or 15 years’ time – and for some reason, we’re nothing like as scared about the implications as we ought to be.’

Now based in a house where he lives alongside asylum seekers, Fr Newell is part of the leadership team for the Passionists in England and Wales. He helps out in parishes, saying Mass and doing baptisms and funerals: but his vocation, he explains, is about hospitality and resistance. ‘This is my parish, this is my community,’ he explains. ‘The thing I often remember is that Christ was arrested, and so were most of his earliest followers. Should we obey God, or should we obey man? Being arrested isn’t the issue here; the issue is, why have you been arrested? Being a Christian is about being a faithful witness to Christ. We’ve got used to a Church that is part of the establishment, but is that right? Should we be on the side of the establishment?’ That, it seems to him, is one of the biggest questions the Church should be asking itself today.

Shared from the Alive Publishing website with permission.

Hymn in Honour of Elizabeth Prout

By Liam Lawton

Tell the world of God’s great compassion
Fan the flame in brightness arrayed
In God’s love our hearts are re-fashioned
Holy Lord, you call us each by name.

Who would hear His voice
Who would see His eyes
Who would walk His way
Reveal His truth, His life
Who would speak His word
To lift us should we fall
Broken for the Broken
In tender love for all.

Who would bear the light
Where shadows still abide
Lift the weary hearts to
Journey side by side

Who would speak with hope
In words to calm all fear
Broken for the broken
Revealing God so near.



Who will bring to life
The dry and barren land
Feed the homeless poor
So all might understand
What you do to one
You do unto the Lord
Broken for the Broken
To touch the face of God.

Who will dare to dream
Believe ~ beyond all doubt
God had chosen you ~
O bless’d Elizabeth Prout

A woman for all time
Of passion, love and truth
Broken for the broken
We pledge our lives anew.

Talking With...Lya Vollerling



The Passion of the Cosmic Christ

“He (Jesus Christ) is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creatures. In him everything in heaven and on earth was created, visible and invisible... all were created through him and for him. He existed before all else that is. In him everything continues in being. It is he who is head of the body, the Church; he is the source of the body’s life, the first-born of the dead, so that he may be first in everything. It pleased God to make the absolute fullness (of divine nature) reside in him.”

Col 1:15-19

All Passionist religious make a vow to keep alive the memory of the Passion of Jesus Christ. How to do that is open to interpretation, but it is widely accepted that there are two parts to it: To contemplate the passion story as described in the four gospels and to go where people are suffering today. Paul of the Cross understood that Jesus’ passion was God’s greatest gift of love. He gave himself. He became human and shared the human condition, shared our pain but, as St. Paul writes in the letter to the Philippians, he went even further than that – not only did he take on human form, he became a

slave and emptied himself. This self-emptying is life-giving because his love is eternal and has no end. When he died on the cross Jesus said, ‘Father forgive them, because they don’t know what they are doing’.

Indeed, we don’t know what we are doing to the earth, our common home, God’s creation. We act as if the earth is a collection of objects, exploiting it for our own needs and greed, instead of considering it to be a communion of subjects, as Thomas Berry describes it. We have disconnected Christ from the Cosmic Christ. God’s giving of his Son and His giving of creation are not two separate gifts but one. They are two expressions of the same: ‘the first-born of all creatures. In him everything in heaven and on earth was created, visible and visible’. The harm we do to creation we also do to the Cosmic Christ and we do to ourselves. We are part of the Cosmic Christ as we were created through him and for him.

As Christians, but particularly as Passionists, we need to go to where Christ is suffering in the whole of creation. We need to go not only with our bodies, but with our heart and soul and mind. We need to enter into communion with the Cosmic Christ, connect with him in all that is created visible and invisible. Where do we start? As Thomas Berry says in his book *The Great Work*: ‘While we have more scientific knowledge of the universe than people ever had, it is not the type of knowledge that leads to an intimate presence within a meaningful universe. We no longer read the book of the universe.’

At Minsteracres Retreat Centre we are in the process of creating a space where we can start learning to read the book of the universe again. The walled garden is in the process of becoming a contemplative garden, a space to listen to nature, to give thanks for the gift of creation, to restore our relationship with her, to become aware of her suffering as well as her healing powers and to become a conscious and integral part of the Cosmic Christ.



We Preach Christ Crucified

“The God who is revealed to me, as to every creature, in the Christian revelation, is a God of relationships. As this theme of relationships is the definition of the creator, so too is it a definition of creation. Cosmically and personally the world is held together, and can only develop and progress, by way of profound relationships. Whatever structure or institution

humanity creates, it only has value in so far as it prospers such a world of relationships. In all pastoral commitments in life, be they of state or church, there must be activity, but the activity is vacuous without the effort of being committed to the development of relationships. My years in the Inner City have brought this home in a painful way. Though a priest and a religious, my forum of activity has been amongst many who have rejected the institutional Church.”

Passion for the Inner City’ pg. 81 by Austin Smith CP

Walking with the Crucified

St. Joseph's Province provides support for initiatives that expose and resist misuses of power and that deliver practical responses to relieving the effects of poverty and exclusion. This reflects our belief that the death of Jesus resulted from confrontation with systems that oppress and marginalize, and that His Resurrection gives us hope. Here is a report on visits which Passionist development worker Paschal Somers recently made to some of the projects involved.

Just a short walking distance from the Passionist Administrative Office near the centre of Coventry are two organisations, Peace House and Carriers of Hope, which have benefitted in recent years by receiving grants from St. Joseph's Province. Both groups 'fit the bill' when it comes to last year's Chapter resolution of 'Welcoming the stranger' as both provide different services to asylum seekers and refugees.

Peace House

Peace House is a night shelter for destitute asylum seekers. It is ably coordinated by Beth Ash, who welcomed me when I visited there on 19th March 2018. As she showed me around the premises, Beth explained that the shelter has a capacity for twenty-one guests (fifteen males and six females) and that it has been accommodating that number for some months now.



Beth Ash from Peace House

When asked about the greatest challenges facing the shelter at present, Beth explained that cuts in legal aid and to welfare



Peace House in Coventry

support in general have had the most deleterious impact on the lives of guests who come to the shelter. This is happening against the backdrop of a culture that is hostile to shelter-users. Add to this the frequently protracted delays in dealing with asylum support and one realises why as many guests end up repeatedly returning to Peace House as move on.

The hour spent at Peace House was very worthwhile and gave me a helpful insight into what a significant difference that the Passionist support can make to the lives of the destitute.

Carriers of Hope

Carriers of Hope is a remarkable success story within the city. It was initiated by Sue Sampson in 2009 as a response to the number of families in the area who were experiencing real poverty and lacking the most basic personal and household facilities. The vast majority of these were asylum seekers, refugees or recently arrived Eastern European migrants (primarily Roma people from Romania). Since it was established Carriers of Hope has worked with families from fifty different countries.

The charity started by preparing and handing out carrier bags of 'useful things' and by encouraging friends and supporters, mainly from the local churches, to join in and help provide them. These carrier bags gave the name to Carriers of Hope.

When I visited them in early March at their current base in a local church hall, Sue explained that the average weekly attendance is around 130 people who come to have some breakfast and collect food, clothes, shoes, household furnishings, bedding, kitchenware and baby equipment. They currently have 1200 people in the city registered with their service.

Sue is very appreciative of the support given to the charity by the Passionists. She told me that the money received from the Passionist Grant Panel had been put towards furnishing accommodation for asylum seeker families.

Introducing ‘Re-formed’: Our New Passionist Partner



We established Reformed development CIC in 2009, in an effort to challenge the lack of employment opportunity and discrimination we faced as two Black women with criminal records. Through our own experiences and with a dedicated determination, we put our shoulders to the wheel to create resources that would challenge negative images and encourage young people to resist others stereotyping them. Therefore, we hoped we could prevent further criminal involvement and work out of our own personal experience of our need for rehabilitation to give people the confidence they need to take their own steps forward.

That has proved to be extremely successful in supporting and leading some of the most disadvantaged and stereotyped people we have worked with. We approach each person holistically – treating each as an individual – something often ignored in many professional responses – and totally necessary if we hope to work together for a transformation which turns the negative into a positive.

With our personal focus and knowledge of Toxteth – the neighbourhood in which we ourselves grew up – we remain

ambitious for Reformed to promote programmes not only locally, but also within the remit of the wider ill-judged UK penal contexts.

As two Black women we find ourselves uniquely placed to promote initiatives that represent authentic diversity in contrast with more superficial “detached” professional interventions. We are privileged to be affirmed with a credibility that comes from our own people. We know what the young people are experiencing – and the terrible effects it has on their families and our local community.

To be offered help and support as a Passionist partner is a dream come true. This is giving us added confidence in believing in ourselves and in witnessing to our community that we are not alone. Your real and practical support will give to us, and to those we represent, the belief that we are not alone and that the Passionists and the Church supports working alongside those who find themselves marginalised at the edges.

Kemi and Natasha Ryan.

Pope Francis on
Twitter



Pope Francis @Pontifex · Apr 29

Do we really want peace? Then let's ban all weapons so we don't have to live in fear of war.



15K



25K



110K



‘Walton’ St Paul of the Cross

It is said that “icons” should be “read” and “prayed”. They are more than simple pictures to be viewed. The story and provenance of this image of our Passionist Founder St Paul of the Cross deserves “reading” as an icon.

For many years Father Austin Smith was chaplain in Liverpool’s Walton Prison. He would always look out for anyone who seemed to be experiencing particularly the burdens of confinement. One day, visiting a prisoner on the punishment block in solitary confinement – in his small cell barely lit with its single 40 watt bulb, with no opportunity for other interaction - Austin stayed for some time, getting to know him and helping at least to break that day’s grinding monotony. In the course of their conversation he discovered two things – his obvious extreme loneliness and also memories of times when he had been free to indulge his love of art - drawing and painting pictures.

Austin left the cell, but returned a short time later with a piece of brown paper – admittedly not the best art material – and a few coloured pencils he had managed to find; these he left them with the prisoner. As he came out of the cell a nearby prison officer commented sarcastically about “the Padre” putting himself out to encourage someone, who in his opinion, entirely deserved his current confinement!

Visiting again the following day, Austin was amazed to be presented with a beautiful “totally alive” image of St Paul of the Cross – copied from a holy picture left on a previous occasion. It was the prisoner’s gift in gratitude for a friendly word and an act of kindness.

Austin called this his “Walton Paul of the Cross Icon” –it remains special in our Inner City Mission initiated by Austin in 1971 and continuing today nearly fifty years later.

More than a mere picture, this image is a witness to God’s Spirit alive in someone’s creativity who despite – or perhaps rather because of – experiencing human vulnerability –



nonetheless, reaches beyond in search of the sacred.

The Walton icon reminds us of Austin. It recalls the prisoner artist - whose name we were never told. It symbolises also all the stories in the life of our Founder, whose prayerful praxis privileged the preciousness of God’s life revealed at the margins –our continuing inspiration as Passionists today.



Sacred Words

“Do you wish to honour the body of Christ? Do not ignore him when he is naked. Do not pay homage in the temple clad in silk, only to neglect him outside where he is cold and ill-clad. He who said, ‘This is my body’ is the same who said, ‘You saw me hungry and gave me food’ and ‘whatever you did to the least of my brothers and sisters you did to me...’ What good is it if the Eucharistic table is overloaded with gold chalices when your brother and sister is dying of hunger? Start satisfying that hunger and then with what is left you may adorn the altar as well.”

St. John Chrysostom

Passionist Inner City Mission: Part 1



The Passionists began moving to Britain's inner cities in 1971 to be alongside those suffering there from injustice and deprivation and to join them in the struggle for life and justice. They did this believing that this was the most effective way in which to witness to the realities of crucifixion as well as resurrection in our country today.

Nicholas Postlethwaite CP joined Austin Smith CP in ministering in the Toxteth area of Liverpool and shares the first instalment of his reflections on what he encountered in his initial years there.

“Once upon a time...”

This is to tell the story of a journey - begun some fifty years ago and continuing still today.

I choose two events - each very different though connected, as a starting point for all that will follow. The one took place on 25th September 2008 - the other occurred some thirty years earlier in May 1978.

The first event is simply the summary of a conversation:

Father Austin Smith and I had arrived in Liverpool 8 in 1971. By the year 2008 Austin was beginning to need additional personal and supportive care. This was wonderfully provided for him within the Granby Care Home where he spent his last years - just a few hundred yards from where we had first begun our Liverpool journey together. This Care Home, which incidentally Austin himself had helped plan and design, provided Austin's later years with a living personal context where friends from the local Toxteth community he had come to love - and which loved him in its turn, were able to continue sharing conversations with him.

Visiting during his final years before his death in 2011, I enjoyed some of the best of my many “Austin conversations” - sometimes alongside other friends, sometimes with just our two selves. Conversation had always been the heart of our friendship. It is one such conversation that provides this first event to introduce our story: it stands out particularly for its focus on what our journey is about. Immediately leaving him that day, I wrote down the key points Austin had shared to

ensure I would not forget. I will try to share it now.

Austin possessed many outstanding qualities as will testify all who knew him. One quality was his appreciation of philosophy and his imaginative poetic ability to link abstract theoretical principles to concrete realities here and now. On that September day, sitting in the lounge of Granby Care Home, surveying life going on all around him, I asked Austin: “What would you name as the key challenges we have faced since coming in 1971 to live in Liverpool 8?”

Austin did not hesitate: *“To free God from the trammels of unimaginative orthodoxies!”*

And then *“To release human mystery so it can enjoy its rightful limitless historical and cultural heritages.”*

I pressed further: “What do you believe this required from us?” Again came this immediate succinct responses:

“To deconstruct all restrictive linguistics in order to promote authentic human conversation. To “re-found” religious institutions so they liberate imagination and promote solidarity and human freedom on shared Calvary journeys. To integrate art and new poetic beginnings - whether with members of a religious order or with elders sharing life together in our Granby Care Home.”

Evidently on a roll I risked pushing Austin further: “In our Granby home, what do you think has been the energy that has sustained us to keep probing forward together? Again, Austin did not hesitate:

“Our shared meals have been an essential element in it - meals where conversations were allowed to run free and so seldom ended in dead ends! Our initial decision to step into a new reality beyond the realms of theory to meet human mystery in all the multi-faceted realities of this Granby neighbourhood. We learnt perseverance and gained stamina by patiently always allowing the human to speak - before too neatly trying to corral it within structural organisation. We were ready to risk “letting-go” of hallowed certainties if it might lead to learning new ways of listening, speaking and loving.”

The New Testament speaks of the coming time when “... young men shall see visions and old men dream dreams...” (Acts 2.17) Approaching the end of his life, I remember my conversation with Austin as echoing this prophetic insight linking our original vision to the reality of bringing us both to Toxteth - a vision that continued sustaining us now many years later. Stripped back to bare essentials, this summary conversation could perhaps be described as an Austin “Nunc Dimittis”, summarising his deepest convictions about life and his own commitment to it.

A second event is about another shared journey:

In May 1978 nine excited teenagers accompanied by three of us who were rather nervous adults, boarded a mini-bus outside Paddington Comprehensive - our Liverpool inner-city school. The twelve seater was completely full, because we had not anticipated in our enthusiasms the subsequent

problems that can occur through too close proximity throughout long journeys. We set out with high hopes on a long anticipated three week journey taking us through France and Italy and on to our eventual destination of Rome.

Along the way we begged accommodation from religious communities who were prepared to risk welcoming this band of somewhat unusual pilgrims. We were allowed to lay sleeping-bags in monastic corridors, beside chapel altars and even on floors under monks' refectory tables.

One highlight of this journey was an invitation to stay in our Passionist monastery perched high up on Monte Argentario - an Italian mountain peninsula north of Rome. Almost an island, reaching out into the Mediterranean it provides wonderful sea views on all sides. Today it has become a popular holiday resort- perhaps as a result of Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor discovering it as a hideaway from media attention while they were filming in Rome!

More important than celebrity notoriety, historically Monte Argentario is a place of special significance for Passionists – and not least for me. Since my teenage years it has represented a sacred place – the symbol associated with another man of vision who lived there some three hundred years ago.

In the eighteenth century, Paul Danei recognised the beauty of this isolated peninsula. From his earliest years Paul believed God was calling him to a life of prayer and contemplation. To Catholics he is known today as St Paul of the Cross - Founder of the Congregation of the Passion of Jesus Christ - the Order to which I applied to join as a teenager and which subsequently has shaped and supported me since becoming a member of the community of the Passion – or the Passionists as the popular Catholic name given to all members, not least to those of us in St Joseph's

Province in England.

Paul shared his vision and began to attract companions to share commitment to searching for a deepening union with God - and specifically for union with a God revealed pre-eminently in the mystery of the death of Jesus on Calvary. High on this idyllic Italian peninsula Paul and his first companions built their Passionist home. It was towards this now well-established monastery and retreat centre on Monte Argentario, that an over-heating mini-bus with twelve over-heating Liverpool passengers began to wind its way up the road to St Joseph's Retreat.

Memories of Toxteth: An Introduction

I deliberately choose this moment, recalled from nearly forty years ago as a second event to introduce the story that follows. Austin's answers to my questions in the Granby Care Home were situated in terms of the personal journey he and I travelled together. But he would be the first to remind that it was not a journey travelled in isolation. Along the way, we found ourselves accompanied by and accompanying many friends and fellow pilgrims. Many of these for me were the young people of Liverpool 8 with whom I worked for many years, including the nine travelling with me in our minibus in Italy in May 1978.

Recalling that time brings to mind another key question - perhaps it is a somewhat paradoxical question. Is an eighteenth century saint's mystical vision relevant to twentieth century young people from inner-city Liverpool? Can there be some sort of "connect" between such apparently diverse contexts?

These are two contrasting events are foundational markers for me as I begin this story of our Passionist Inner City Mission. They contrast with each other in various ways.

The one summarises the maturing reflections of someone approaching his end of life and specifically about the decades of Austin's life dedicated to becoming part of one relatively small Liverpool neighbourhood known as Toxteth. Austin continued to the end dreaming dreams about the essential in searching the wonder of human mystery.

The other highlights that we do not journey alone. We are all part of an ongoing pilgrimage. It can never be an exclusive "internal" journey of contemplation – or a life of continual "externa" activity. The distinction sometimes used in religious contexts of ministry between contemplation and action, is in my view, a very artificial and dangerous one.

For me the conversation with Austin and the journey with my friends from Toxteth each speak in their different ways to the essential mystery and wonder of our authentic human searching.

This is the story of a continuing search to stay in the presence of the mystery of divine buried in the heart of the human and of the reflections and actions that result from rooting this search in the heart of human praxis - especially in those places where human experience is stripped to its bare essential.

My hope is that in peeling back some of the reasons that brought Austin and me to Liverpool and the experiences we shared over many years there, may help to put flesh on the bones of these two opening stories to demonstrate hopefully

Time Revisited

You've confused our tidiness of time,
Redefining the simple and sublime,
Redeeming earth's space and being,
Gracing deeply our life's becoming,
Sharing secrets of some eternity,
Telling tales about our mystery,
Mapping a journey to a distant shore
Fighting sleep behind a stable door,
Eyes half open on a night star
Blinking brightly from so far,
Way, way up in a cloudless sky,
So we dance, sing, laugh and cry
Away our time of joy and sorrow,
Living today for life's tomorrow,
In every now a not-yet is unfolding
Your babyness the eternal revealing.
Tiny swaddling of time and timelessness
Fast falling asleep in human powerlessness.

Fr Austin Smith CP, Christmas 2000

why we both have always considered that the best decision either of us ever made, was to come to live in the Toxteth neighbourhood of Liverpool.

I am focusing on a specific experience shared between my friend Austin and myself over many years in inner-city Liverpool. Readers will formulate their own reactions and questions in ways that are more appropriate for their specific life experiences. It would be foolish to suggest our particular Liverpool experience could or should be replicated by others. But it could also be deemed foolish to pretend that there are not underpinning principles and values that dovetail into the mystery of the human in all its panoramic possibilities. We tell our stories in order to dig ever deeper to the realities – often unable to be expressed – that sustain them in the depths of silence.

My purpose in writing this book is not to claim our Liverpool experiences have either ethical or universal lessons applicable for others. It is simply a personal story, detailing the search of two friends opting to travel together to help sustain each other in continuing to probe shared questions in the light of a faith that motivated both our lives. It would be arrogant in the extreme to imply this experience has any general or instructional value for others. But encouraged by many friends to tell our story, perhaps it is not unrealistic to hope that some of the challenges we met and the rewards that flowed from facing those challenges, may encourage others travelling similar paths - or perhaps considering whether or not to do so. But not only is this not a morality tale, neither does it pretend to be a firm formula for political or community development programmes. It does however illustrate the many positive outcomes that come when we work together for change from the margins.

Further, though this journey originates and remains within a faith context, I do not present it in any way as a new theological manual able to be read and translated into other situations and contexts. But it is an account of a continuing theological - and philosophical - reflection conducted within the realities of a rich inner city community that generously ensured that Austin and I never risked escaping into unreal ivory towers that can so often be used as protection against stepping out into the wonder - and messiness - of the world that all men and women of good will share together. It is a continuing journey and conversation which opens onto - not a new ministry or pastoral project - but rather explosively reveals new understanding of the call of the Gospel to recognise the presence of the divine shared at the heart of human mystery.

While always remaining focused on our personal experiences, neither Austin nor I hopefully ever forgot how much we owed to the legacy of the institutions that educated and enriched our lives from our earliest years. While never forgetting our role in and need for the institutional identities that had made us, neither did we hesitate to analyse and challenge the interpretation of those institutions which risk inhibiting the merging of human mystery in the transcendent mystery of God. As will be seen as our story unfolds, this sometimes can cause tensions and misunderstandings. But life without tension is surely hardly life at all? Institution is a necessary part of human socialisation and order: but institutions, whether sacred or secular, are there to serve not to dominate

or oppress those who are part of them.

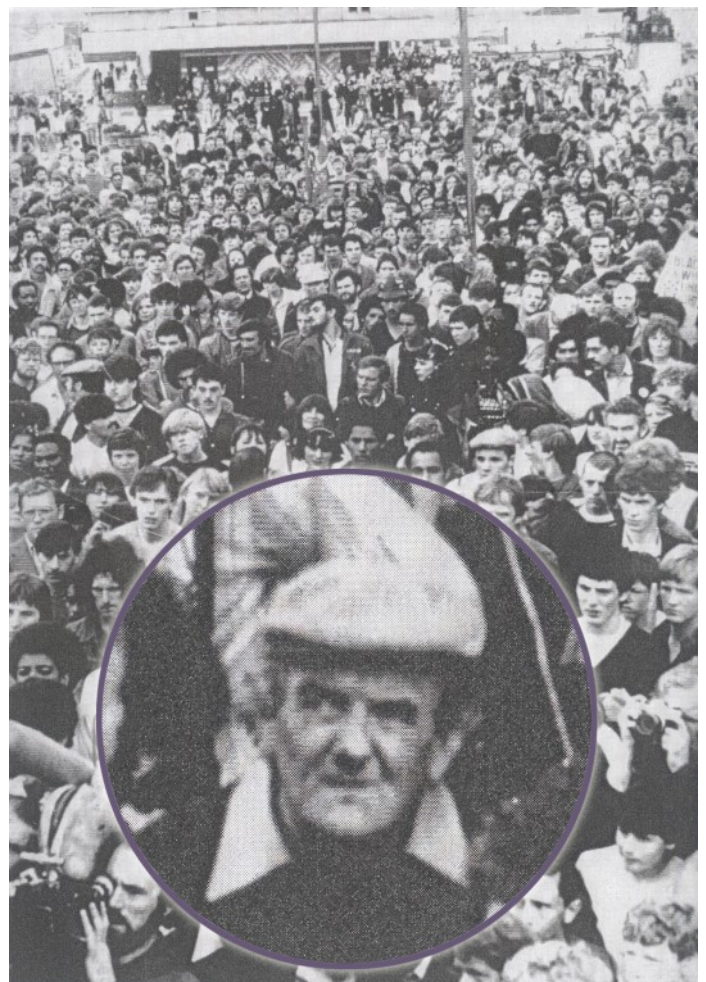
Geographically this story is focused within a very small space - a few streets in inner-city Liverpool. But we often felt this narrow focus was a gateway or entrance into much wider panoramas. Because it has been a long-lasting journey it has enabled us many times to listen in new ways for the “knock at the door” that the Gospel’s speak about and where it is important to stay awake so that opportunities are not missed to open and welcome whoever stands outside.

If you decide to read on, I hope that perhaps our story and discoveries made along the way may resonate with your experiences: are there basic human questions which all our quests risk neglecting today. If what follows helps uncover or throw fresh light on some such questions - questions which sustained many conversations Austin and I shared down the years - then telling our story will have been worth doing.

We two English Passionist priests were gifted with opportunity to explore within the context of a wonderful Liverpool community, and to rediscover our faith integrated within the mystery of a grace filled humanity.

In the next issue of ‘Passio’ I will highlight some of the historical details which led Austin and I to opt to come to live in Liverpool - both on a personal level as well as within a radically shifting national and international background affecting both secular and religious understandings.

The story is divided into sections to reflect some of the key discoveries made along the way on what we call our Passionist Inner City Mission journey.



Austin Smith CP at the Liverpool Protests

News from Around the Province

The Passionist Discernment and Action Group (PDAG)

Arising from the Passionist Family Conversation Day in February, this newly formed focus group held its first meeting in Birmingham on Saturday 5th May. Its eight members, representing the four constituent parts of the Passionist Family, have been commissioned to discern and to propose specific actions in response to the question; 'How do we keep alive the memory of the Passion?'

The group will report back on its work in December 2018.

CAFOD donations to Brazil and Indonesia

Recently St. Joseph's Province gave financial support to two Cafod projects. One of these was an environmentally-focused project in Piaui, one of the poorest states in Brazil, which received £30,000. Here, CAFOD supports rural farming cooperatives to access clean and sustainable energy for farming greatly improving family income and quality of life,



PDAG's First Meeting

as well as protecting the local environment. The other project, based in Indonesia, received £31,462 to help install solar lighting and interactive learning systems for Boafeo Primary School on Flores Island.

New Communications Worker



We are pleased to announce that we have a new Communications Worker for the Passionist Province, Rich Burley. Rich started working with us about a month ago, and will be working for us about one day a week.

Communications is a key part of what we do. As Passionists we have a growing community with a story to tell. Jesus tells us not to hide our light under a bushel, but put it on a lampstand. Rich will be helping us do just that, and will be in touch with members of the Passionist family in the coming months to seek out stories and resources. He may well also ask for photos too.

Dates to Remember

Br. Peter Aspin, diamond (60th) anniversary of profession on 29th June

Mon 27th Aug – Blessed Dominic Pilgrimage, Sutton.
Mass celebrated by Archbishop Malcolm McMahon at 12 noon.

