

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE AUXILIARY VISITOR!

[Brother Owen](#)

I am beginning this reflection in Parménie, which is the most beautiful Lasallian place I know. I have been here half a dozen times, with different groups, and found each trip memorable. It seemed the perfect place for LAMB to holiday together.

There are 14 of us – 5 children and 9 adults. Parménie is the ideal spot for a family holiday – a beautiful and restorative place for the adults and a safe place for children. It was a place of restoration, too, for John Baptist de la Salle, and that was not lost on us.

The Brothers have made us very welcome, spent time with us every day, recounted their experiences in many parts of the world, welcomed us to their sung morning and evening prayers and liturgies, and entertained us at a barbecue of wild boar and venison. We have spent a wonderful week of relaxation and peace, of entertaining and being entertained by the children, of unrushed meals and picnics, of prayer and pétanques. Most of us have not left the site this whole week. – And all for 11 euros per day and 5 euros for children (self-catering).

For some time now I have been wanting to share, personally with the District, what I have been getting up to during my years as Auxiliary. In the beginning I spent most of my time visiting communities and schools, enjoying that very much and then, four years ago all that changed and I was, unfortunately, unable to continue those regular visits.

When Brother Visitor asked me to be his Auxiliary, in a fish and chip shop in Wetherby, he suggested that I 'play to my strengths'. I don't think he asked me because of my gifts as an administrator, which I don't have in abundance but I do think that I can accompany and I like to relate and feel part of a team. This was an interesting challenge – I can't remember being asked to do that before. Although I have always been happy, as well as challenged, in all the positions I have been asked to fill.

Sean agreed that I should visit communities and schools regularly, spending a few days in each. At the same time Brother Ben was visiting communities to discuss 'Vocation' and I was very happy to accompany him on these visits.

At the same time as my appointment, there was the call from the General Chapter to work for 'Association'. I was attracted to that and felt I had some experience of it in Kintbury and in Newcastle. I even felt the need for it in Ipswich over 30 years ago when I was asked to take on the re-

sponsibilities of a teacher/housemaster, asked of some brothers in those days.

I felt that Kintbury would be a good place to focus on Association, among past and present Team Members. So many impressive young people had contributed to that ministry with confidence and dedication. Here was such a great resource for the world and the Church. We had a gathering in Kintbury over 8 years ago, which was well attended. It was felt that such meetings should continue and it was also felt that such meetings could happen in local groups. Some also expressed that some form of ministry might arise out of these meetings. In particular, a group of former Kintbury Team members and teachers set up a community called LAMB (Lasallian Association for Mission in Bristol).

The LAMB community has been in existence for over 7 years now. At first we met fortnightly at the '1b Community' – a Downside foundation, in the centre of Bristol. The pattern of our meetings was: prayer with some faith-sharing, a meal, and some outreach to young people. Our numbers grew, including some students from St. Brendan's College.

In time, the idea of setting up a permanent community arose – A community that would support the Catholic Schools in Bristol. Members of the LAMB Community came to speak to Brother Visitor and his Team and to the District Council. A meeting with Bishop Declan followed and Brother Sean and myself discussed the idea with the four Heads of the Catholic Secondary schools in the city. There was enthusiasm from all parties. A financial plan was agreed and after a search for somewhere to live, a house owned by The Sisters of the Church became available, in Clevedon, and we were able to begin our ministry in September 2004.

Although Brother Visitor and his Council were supportive of the project, it was clear that there were no brothers readily available to move in. I had been part of the community since the start and I was seen as available to move down to Bristol, even though I would not be able to continue with some of the traditional roles of the Auxiliary and give the local personal support I wanted to give to Sean in his demanding role. Sean wanted me to continue as Auxiliary, nonetheless, and I remain on most, if not all, of the Councils and Committees of the District. It is a regret that I am no longer able to visit the communities regularly.

Brother Benet was just completing his sabbatical after 6 years in Kintbury and he was approached and he accepted the invitation to come to Bristol, even though he was considering other possibilities. So Benet and myself were joined by Caroline and we have welcomed a different volunteer every year. Michael, Olly, Helen and now Graham, who was at Kintbury last year. The District Chapter gave its approval to the new ministry the Easter before we started.

We are now well into our fourth year in schools. Our contributions to the schools are wide-ranging – from arranging prayer, liturgies and meditations to classroom support, to workshops, to retreat days, to one-to-one support, to SVP activities and to staff spirituality. Our role in each school is quite different. St. Brendan's 6th Form College has challenges because the students come and go according to personal timetables but we feel we are more and more involved there and Graham's presence with us this year will bring a different dimension to our ministry at St. Brendan's because he knows a good number of students who have been to Kintbury. On the closure of St. Thomas More School,

we were asked to spend a day in St. Augustine's Trowbridge, where Brendan Wall is Head, and we even have a waiting list: St. Gregory's, Bath and St. Ursula's, Bristol.

The needs are great and the opportunities many. I think LAMB's approach to pastoral care and chaplaincy is a good one. It is a community approach with lots of gifts and talents and the fact that we are four gives courage and greater recognition in what can be a lonely ministry.

While we are very committed to the ministry of schools, as a wider LAMB community we are still searching to know what living and working in Association means. It is a big challenge, sometimes a struggle but we are still meeting each Thursday evening, to affirm each other, to look ahead and to give praise and thanks to God. As in a pilgrimage I think the process is as important as the destination.

Our holiday in Parménie has been a blessing and an opportunity to reflect, affirm each other and look ahead. We have made a booking for the same time next year and there are spare places.