



Catholic Spirituality Network

CATHOLIC SPIRITUALITY NETWORK

NEWSLETTER EDITION 18

AUTUMN 2024



LISTENING TO OUR LIFE

**IRENAEUS
CENTRE
SATURDAY 26
APRIL 2025**

We are delighted to announce that Lister Tonge has agreed to be the speaker at our 2025 Day Conference.

Lister is well known for his work in the field of retreats and Christian spirituality over many years. He was recently ordained as a Roman Catholic priest in Liverpool Archdiocese. Mary Nono, Executive Committee member, writes: *'I'm delighted that Lister has accepted the CSN invitation to be our speaker for 2025. A couple of years ago he and I were on the same IGR team at Noddfa. What a blessing it turned out to be! It was a prayerful week, of course, but also joyful and entertaining! It was lovely to get to know him and to be invited subsequently to his ordination in Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral. I look forward to next April with great anticipation.'*

Listening to our Life will draw on what Richard Rohr says about God coming to us *'disguised as our life, which seems to be the last place we want God to be... It is just "me" and just "you" and just daily life. It is both the perfect hiding place and the perfect revelation place for the Holy One'*. (Soul Brothers).

Many of us think that the blessing of knowing God deeply and living fruitfully in God's love is not for us. We don't see or celebrate our holiness because our lives feel too ordinary. Yet discovering ourselves to be the very people in whom God's life flourishes and bears fruit releases joy in us beyond our imagining.

We are called to respond to the rhythms of our living and dying as God's Spirit shapes us along the way. God's Spirit aches for us to see who we truly are, and to be free to love.

Listening to our lives makes it possible us to act in the power of God's Spirit. Alive in God's Spirit, we become those whose hearts sing, giving life to our families, our communities and our world.

The Irenaeus Project is located in Waterloo on the coast of the River Mersey, north of Liverpool City Centre. There is a Merseyrail station a 5-minute walk from the Centre.

www.csnretreats.org.uk/conference.php

Bookings will open soon. Watch out for more information by email or on the website.



Catholic Spirituality Network

CONFERENCE REPORT 2024

Noddfa's welcome starts at the door where a plaque reads *'May this house to every guest be a place of peace and rest'*. Those guests find themselves in a house built with Victorian grandeur, set in majestic scenery overlooking the sea, but welcoming all with homely hospitality.

The theme of the conference was intriguingly titled



Send My Roots Rain, and it was led by Christopher Chapman. I had been in online workshops with Christopher; how

refreshing to meet him in person, underlining the precious gift of bodily presence. Using his own beautiful photographs alongside his talks, Christopher started by encouraging us to think about our own roots and the personal history that had formed us. He reminded us that roots work at depth and hidden from view and that the life of prayer is about rooting ourselves in God. He underlined the importance of relationship.

He used writings of St John of the Cross about the *'always of God'* to illustrate how spring growth rises from winter darkness, resurrection comes from the darkness of the tomb, and Christian hope is forged in and through the darkness of struggles. Moving on to the continuing unfolding of vocation, he encouraged us to explore what might feel unsettled, uncertain, unsafe. As he offered the vivid image of the mixing bowl, he talked of the creative tension between tradition and the radical, asking *'Is the heart of the Church at its edges'?*

From poetry and imagery, Christopher moved to the physicality of our bodies, and the need to take care of them. Jesus' teaching and ministry are grounded in the physical as he uses examples of daily labour in his parables and heals hurting bodies. Prayer, too,

can be a work of the body whether we adopt different postures, use actions, or focus on breathing.

As we become stilled and emptied before God, we are more able to notice the gentle movements of the Spirit inviting us to go with the flow and follow our joy. After all, Jesus said, *I have come 'that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete' (John 15:11)*.

Complementing Christopher's talks, our liturgist, Avril Baigent, led us on a pilgrimage of prayer. She introduced us to new songs along with old, and incorporated video presentations to reflect the themes. On Saturday evening she set up prayer spaces in the chapel for an extended time of personal reflection. Then Sunday morning's Eucharist drew all the threads together, as we joined in open prayer and turned symbolically outwards – refreshed and ready to go into the world.



The chapel at Noddfa

There was plenty of space in the programme to take advantage of the spaciousness of Noddfa – whether that was an early swim in the sea, a strenuous walk up the mountain, or simply a stroll around the gardens and, perhaps, the labyrinths. Conversations buzzed over meal tables as old friends reconnected and new friendships blossomed. The sustainability table attracted donations, and generous raffle prizes encouraged ticket sales.* As I left for the long drive home, I did indeed feel that Noddfa had been a place of peace and rest, and my roots had been refreshed.

Many thanks to Conference participant, Janet Bone, for this vivid and faithful account of a memorable weekend, hosted for the first time at one of our own retreat centres. Thank you, Patrice, Mary Jo and everyone at Noddfa!

**The Sustainability Sale raised £240 for our funds.*



Catholic Spirituality Network



MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

In this season of fruitfulness, I am mindful of the riches of the year for CSN. A highlight was our Conference at Noddfa with Christopher Chapman, offering us insights into the depths of our stories and our rootedness in God's goodness. The warm hospitality of the Noddfa community offered a sense of being at home in one of our own member centres.

Prior to the AGM, members of the Executive gathered at the Dupuis Retreat Centre in Birmingham to explore our Mission and Vision and to stretch our responses to the way ahead through active networking. The AGM was well attended and a time of affirmation, exploration and validation of our direction. In my report, I reflected on the many expressions of CSN until now, where we find ourselves within a Church struggling to participate in the mission of Christ as expressed in the pattern of synodality. What remains evident is the energy for networking creatively. I look forward to continuing the journey with newly co-opted Executive members alongside those who generously support our efforts with their skills and availability. I remain grateful to the many centres, communities and individuals who continue to renew their membership of CSN and ask you to encourage others to join us.

As we draw towards Advent, I invite you to note our online CSN Advent Day, **'Let your face shine on us, O Lord'**, and pray that the season will enable each of us to radiate God's light anew on the path to 2025.



Remembering Canon Patrick Hartnett



We received the sad news over the summer that one of our Executive members had died following a period of ill-health. Canon Patrick Hartnett joined us during the first in-person Conference in

Liverpool following Covid and was very happy to join the Executive at that time. As a priest of Middlesbrough Diocese, he had valuable experience as Episcopal Vicar for Spirituality and Worship and found a home within CSN.

Despite deteriorating health over recent years, Pat's spirit remained buoyant and his gift to us was a deep generosity of presence. We were blessed to have him sit with us, attending whenever possible and freely sharing his thoughts and ideas, and contributing to our validity in becoming a more open, inclusive community. We give thanks for his life, his spirit and his mission. May he rest in God's peace.

Shirley Taylor

UP AND AWAY

Christine Dodd reflects on CSN & our direction of travel



When the government announced on 23rd March 2020 that *'You must stay home'*, I doubt any of us could have imagined just how things would have changed once the pandemic was more or less over. In many ways we now live in a different world. We are beset by concerns about the future, be it climate change, increasing hostility and division across the globe, or how things will work out in our own country. At a



Catholic Spirituality Network

more local level church attendances have dropped, people are used to working from home and are less willing to volunteer or to travel. So much now is uncertain and CSN, like every other organization, is having to deal with the fallout. It all seems a bit depressing but at the same time there are signs of hope everywhere, including CSN, which we ignore at our peril.

If you look at the home page of our website, www.csnretreats.org.uk you will find a couple of paragraphs about what CSN is and what we are about. At the AGM I took some of those statements and asked the question, 'how we might fulfil these better in our new context?' I also made a few suggestions to get us discussing.

I tend to think best in images, so I imaged CSN as a collection of balloons. Each of these balloons holds one thing that we say about ourselves – yet they are all held together by our closing statement: 'It is in sharing our journey that we find our way.' Every balloon is of equal value so there is no order of priority.



Balloon number one is labelled with the first statement from our website, namely that '*CSN seeks to accompany and be accompanied by all called to know God*'. The question is how might we do this better? We all know how important it is to journey with others, both for ourselves and for those we are with, but how are we to do that more effectively in the future? For instance, how might we share with each other more deeply? Are there any innovative and new ways to do this? Or how might we give more support to spiritual companions or retreat houses?



Linked to this first balloon is the second, '*CSN seeks to create opportunities to gather and reflect together*.' How might we do this better? Might we think about something more local? Regional meetings or diocesan networks? Using modern technology more effectively? Might we sometimes have a CSN Retreat instead of a Conference?

The third balloon, '*CSN seeks to listen and respond to the changing times*' is to do with finding innovative ways of responding that we might not have thought of before. There are many signs of growth to tap into, increased awareness of the power of nature to heal and hold, the growth of the need to be present in the now (mindfulness), silent spaces in public places (my local National Trust property now has one) and no doubt much else. Is there anything here we can learn from and make part of our life and work?

Our final statement (and balloon) says that we seek to '*be attentive to the Spirit*'. How might we do this better? What will help us listen more closely to what God is saying?



The poet Emily Dickinson once wrote, '*Hope is a thing with feathers*.' If you have an idea which you think would make CSN soar, the Executive would love to hear from you. You can send your thoughts to catholicspiritualitynetwork@gmail.com



Catholic Spirituality Network

AGM REPORT



I always look forward to CSN meetings and our annual AGM is a great space on Zoom. Far from being an annual event which has to happen, members make it a time of renewed energy and growth. The event involves quite a time of preparation but the responses from members make that time so worthwhile. The email conversations during the preparation time are an opportunity to renew friendships, and the number who put aside time on a Sunday afternoon to join us is amazing. More amazing are the apologies – I feel we are a fortunate network to have so many keen and interested members.

It was good to hear news from the year and to see the new normal for CSN beginning to take shape, particularly in a smaller, more personal Conference in a CSN member retreat centre. An enormous sense of gratitude to the Noddfa team for taking the plunge to host us. We were also happy to have with us Sr Margaret Mattison, Director of the Dupuis Centre in Selly Park, Birmingham, which was used for the first time earlier in the month for a first overnight Awayday Executive meeting. Sr Margaret has been co-opted onto the Executive for the coming year. We are very much looking forward to working with her.

The meeting was full of energy and hope for the future shared in an imaginative reflection led by Christine Dodd, a member of the Executive, to consider more local working initiatives involving retreat centres and individual members and possible ways to build on our growing attempts to really network and signpost the gifts we are and have. Watch the email communications and the website for future ideas... Our financial report shows the results of our careful stewardship, and we are encouraged to dream a little for the future. Growth is not in numbers but in our wisdom to read the signs of the times and make adaptations. Thank you everyone for your constant support and we look forward to another year of generous service.

MAY THEY REST IN PEACE

We were sad to hear news of the death of two key people from our Retreat Centre members during this summer. Sr

Anne Hammersley CP from The Briery Retreat Centre in Yorkshire and Sr Margarita Byron FCJ from the FCJ Centre in Euston, London. Sr Anne had been ill for some time, but Sr Margarita's death was sudden and very unexpected. We pray for them and for their communities as they adjust to the loss of two great women.

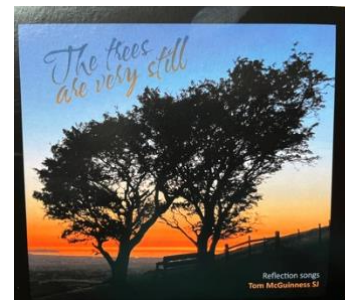
Sr Anne was a member of the Executive for many years, and we benefitted greatly from her varied experiences, good humour and sound advice. Sr Margarita joined us quite a short time ago, but her enthusiasm and hard work were a huge inspiration. Sadly the pandemic meant we no longer use the Euston centre for our meetings, but we all remember the warm hospitality offered by the FCJ team.

Margaret Palladino

THE TREES ARE VERY STILL

New CD available!

Tom McGuinness, former Chair of CSN, has released a new CD of reflective songs. Recent retreatants may have encountered songs which were not previously available on CD. But now they are! New songs include *Lamb, Touching the Water, The Trees are Very Still, A Long, Long Way from Home, And now you let your Servant go in Peace*. Some will recognise the



cover art – beautiful photos of the two trees and the bench high up on the hill behind St Beuno's Retreat Centre, taken as the sun sets and the moon rises. The new CD is available at St Beuno's or on retreat with Tom. It can also be ordered online: www.mccrimmons.com/shop/



Catholic Spirituality Network

EVENTS

CSN ADVENT DAY



LISTENING TO OUR LIFE

CSN DAY CONFERENCE

Saturday 26 April 2025

Irenaeus Centre, Liverpool

Speaker: Lister Tonge

www.csnretreats.org.uk/conference.php

RETREAT ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE

CREATIVE ENCOUNTERS

EXPLORING IMAGINATIVE PATHS TO GOD

16-19 JUNE 2025

HAYES CONFERENCE CENTRE, DERBYSHIRE

www.retreats.org.uk/conference-2025

END-NOTE



Poised upon the edge of evening,
sometimes you can feel
a moment when the silent air
creates a space to breathe again –

... and suddenly the trees are very still.
Suddenly the trees are very still.

Tom McGuinness

Catholic Spirituality Network

Executive Committee: Shirley Taylor (Chair), Eamonn Hamilton (Treasurer), Mary Nono, Fr Chris Thomas (Diocesan rep), Sr Marie Grogan FMDM, Christine Dodd, Fr Tomy Rockey CP (Passionist Spirituality rep), Jo Alstott (Youth rep), Sr Margaret Mattison (*co-opted*).

Many thanks to Ruth Connor who steps down from the Committee this autumn. Thanks also to Chris Thomas, who completed his 6-year term on the Committee but has agreed to stay on as a rep to help us forge closer links with Catholic dioceses, parishes and lay people. We also acknowledge the invaluable contribution made by our Bishops' Conference Spirituality representative, Canon Patrick Hartnett. RIP Patrick.

Membership Secretary: Margaret Palladino.

Newsletter: Jill Keegan. *Please send newsletter contributions to the email below.*

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www.csnretreats.org.uk