

Autumn 2025

Companions Newsletter

A Word from the Companion' Secretary

Dear Companions,

Peace and all good! St. Francis reminds us that the Gospel life is one of *joyful minority*: to serve rather than be served, to rejoice in the gifts of God, and to walk humbly with all people. Let us keep close to Christ, who became poor for our sake, and let our companionship with SSF be a living witness to that same Gospel vision.

Being a Companion is not about great achievements, but about the little acts of faithfulness—prayer for the brothers and sisters, acts of kindness in daily life, and offering support to the Franciscan family. Like Francis and Clare, who discovered Christ in the ordinary, may we also discover Christ in each person and moment entrusted to us.



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Companions Retreat: Br Finnian

The annual Companion's retreat took place this May at Alnmouth friary. Overlooking the North Sea, the friary provided an atmosphere of prayerful stillness and natural beauty—an ideal setting for reflection, fellowship, and spiritual renewal. The theme of the retreat was *Pilgrimage*. A workshop on David Adam's *Aidan, Bede and Cuthbert* invited us to explore the legacy of the Celtic saints and how their witness resonates with Franciscan values of simplicity, peace, and love for creation. Together, we reflected on how these qualities might be lived faithfully amid today's challenges of environmental crisis, social division, and spiritual fatigue.



Led by the SSF brothers, our days followed a rhythm of prayer, Eucharist, silence, and shared conversation. A film produced by Companion Simon Rushton, featuring brothers speaking about their vocation, sparked honest discussion about our own sense of calling and how it shapes our lives. We also watched *The Way*, the moving film about the Camino de Santiago, which opened further reflections on pilgrimage as both journey and metaphor. A highlight of the retreat was a day-pilgrimage to Lindisfarne. There we were warmly welcomed by Sr Tessa, who received us at the Roman Catholic church with hot drinks before we had a guided prayer walk across the island's sacred sites. We also attended Celtic morning prayer at the URC church. After lunch and a Taizé service, we visited Bamburgh Castle and the church where St Aidan is buried—a fitting close to a day steeped in history and prayer. Throughout the week, there was space for coastal walks, silence, and meditation, as well as storytelling and shared meals that strengthened our bonds of friendship. The retreat left us renewed in our Franciscan calling—to live the Gospel with humility and hope, with love for the poor and for the earth.

Companions Retreat Round-up: Wendy Walters

I live in St Alban's Diocese where I have been a Companion for 8 years, during which time I have had little in person contact with fellow Companions. I understand this is a common experience. Initially I was invited to Ely Diocesan Companion's gatherings which I really appreciated. I believe Covid contributed to my link with them ending. So when, in May 2024, Brother Finnian held the first Companions Retreat I was keen to attend but unable to due to other commitments. I was delighted when I was able to join the second one in May this year. Having found

that frequent trains go from Sandy, in Bedfordshire, to Alnmouth with just one change I booked my place.

Imagine my delight when shown my room to find there was, not only a splendid view of the coastline, Bluebells were in flower on the bank outside my room. I have loved Bluebells since I was a child! Brother Finnian had organised an interesting and varied programme alongside the regular worship in the peaceful, prayer filled Chapel. The rhythm of the Worship and meal times shaped the day, there was no pressure to attend either. The warm hospitality provided by the Brothers and a volunteer, in the comfortable surroundings, was very much appreciated. Over the three full days we enjoyed: reflecting on the book 'Aidan, Bede, Cuthbert' by David Adam; watching the film 'The Way'; watching a fascinating preview of a documentary film featuring several Franciscan Brothers giving their own accounts of their journeys to making their Life Professions; our stay culminated in travelling by car to Holy Island.

We were blessed by the generosity of local Companions taking us to Holy Island and providing helpful historical details about northern Celtic Christianity. On arrival we enjoyed the kind hospitality of Sister Tessa FC who lives on the island and looks after St Aidan's RC Church. This was followed by a short walk to the URC Chapel for an informal service led by their Chaplain. We then used a booklet of seven Reflections, written by Sister Tessa entitled 'A Journey', as we made a short 'pilgrimage walk' round part of the island. We then returned to St Aidan's for a welcome lunch of bread rolls, followed by our own Taizé service. We returned to the Friary via a short stop at the imposing church of St Aidan in Bamburgh.

The benefits and blessings of my stay included: meeting and sharing worship with the Brothers and fellow Companions; learning more about the Northern Saints; the experience of being on Holy Island as a Pilgrim rather than a tourist, as I had on two previous occasions. Plus, of course, the Friary's beautiful location bathed in peace and quiet. Would I go again? Yes. Wendy Waters

Jane Robinson: Companion Story

I have been a Companion of SSF for nearly 20yrs. As you know, Companions are encouraged to write a Rule of Life regarding such things as Bible reading, prayer and meditation, community work, finding a Soul Friend, taking time in Retreat, etc. I was once advised that one's Rule should simply be the minimum that one would not wish to drop below. For the occasional day or months when one can manage more – Praise the Lord!!



Another friend also said to me that a Rule should “fit like a glove” not be a tool to beat oneself up. As part of my journey I spent 3 years with the RC Order ‘The Community of Mary, Mother of The Church’ CMMC. As a result of this time I was asked the question “How am I a Mother of the Church”? During a Lent course I heard “At Cana, Mary displayed a motherly attentiveness to human need” – “That’s it!! That’s me!!” I thought. I have no children of my own, but everyone needs attention paying to their needs. “Attention must be paid” is a pivotal line in *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller. Whilst I am not intended to be another Mother Teresa (I am called to Be Me) I had previously discerned my call to ‘accidental ministry’ ie

being aware of and acting upon those moments when one is just ‘accidentally’ in the right place, at the right time, to offer someone a hand with shopping bags, times of buses, or simply a smile. In the C15th – C17th, both here in England and in the Low Countries, there were groups of devout women called Beguines. These lived, worked and worshipped communally (including children), but were not officially a Religious Order, i.e. they took no lifelong Vows. In a secular book about trade around the North Sea at this time I came across a definition of their Rule/Way of Life as :- Work, Prayer, calm and kindness. A model I seek to emulate as a Companion SSF.

Christopher Seddon: A Companion in Australia

I have been a Companion of the Society of St. Francis for a couple of years now. I am originally from Worcestershire (I lived not too far from Glasshampton), although I moved to north-western Austria a few years ago. I now live here in a very rural area, and I might even be the only Companion in the entire federal state. Being somewhat isolated in this respect, this puts me into the role of a Franciscan “lone fighter”, especially since there are no other Companions here with whom I could share or exchange ideas. I have often wondered what St. Francis would have done in a similar situation. To stay connected with my beloved Society of St. Francis beyond reading the “Franciscan”, I have thus embarked, over the past couple of years, on crafting for myself the said daily spiritual routine.

My personal liturgical taste is that I like structured forms of prayer. Since I live “in the world”, I often do not have time for long devotions. On other days, I feel the need for a longer prayer time. Based on these experiences, and using the Book of

Common Prayer, the Companions leaflet and the Daily Office SSF as my primary sources, I designed the text I'm sending you to be flexible, catering to both shorter and longer prayer times as well as to different situations that might arise each day.

While I originally come from a High Church background, I embrace a more Low Church approach these days. In recent months, I have also read the book "This Poor Sort: History of the European Province of the Society of St. Francis" by Peta Dunstan, which has helped me gain a better understanding of the varied sources from which the Society of St. Francis ultimately emerged. I have also been in touch with members of the Third Order in the European Province, who have made me aware of further useful devotional materials. One is the SSF Third Order Rule, which I find particularly valuable for my spiritual formation by reading one paragraph each day as part of my routine.

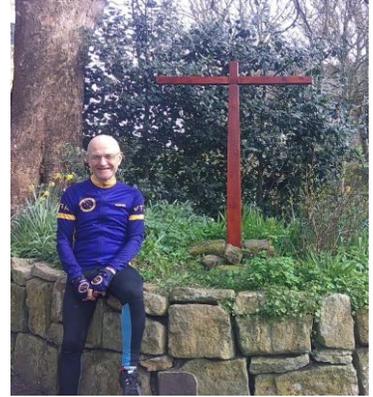
I do not know for sure, but perhaps there are other Companions out there who might benefit from the daily prayer aid I developed as a meaningful way to stay connected to our faith and the Society of St. Francis—in particular those Companions who are in a similar situation as "lone fighters" and might wish for a structured yet flexible form of prayer. I realise that the text I have compiled can only ever be a provisional resource at the most, but if anyone is associated with the Society of St. Francis finds it somehow beneficial, I cordially invite them to use it. I dedicate the text I'm sending you today to you in holy orders and to all brothers and sisters who live in the world as Companions and Tertiaries. With kindest regards, united in prayer. Email: companions@franciscans.org.uk to request the prayer resource Christopher developed.

Ken Thompson: Why I became a Companion

I was encouraged to visit the Franciscans at Cerne Abbas as a young journalist in Manchester because my editor thought I needed to broaden my religious experience beyond Billy Graham's evangelicalism. He himself had been given a lift by one of the brothers in Dorset. I did visit and was taken for walks by Brother Edward. I subsequently made other visits and also went on campaigns with Brother Edward, Donald Soper and others. Brother Edward told me I should join SSF otherwise I would go to university, meet a nice girl and get married. I chose the second option! I did get as far as ordination training at Lincoln Theological College, but took leave to complete a D.Phil at Oxford on 'The Organizational Response of the Church of England to Social Change'. I then became a lecturer at the newly established Open University. Now retired, I sometimes wonder how I would have fared had I taken Brother Edward's first option!

Paul Tyler: A volunteer at Alnmouth friary

In 1978 I went to stay at a Cistercian abbey in Scotland, wondering if God was calling me to the monastic life. Although I came to see that I was not called in this way, not having the gift of chastity, I have been drawn to the contemplative life ever since. I had thought about becoming a Tertiary SSF, but as a parish priest my life has been rather inundated with meetings so I decided against this. A year ago, amidst a late mid-life crisis, I came for a week's retreat at Alnmouth Friary. Here I met Jo Drew. I had never knowingly met an SSF Companion before. I was struck by the fact that she took part in so much of all the life of the Friary, both the rhythm of the worship and the daily domestic and gardening work. This seemed to me to be as near to the life of a monk as I was ever going to get, although I do see that living in community for any length of time has its own particular challenges and blessings. I recently became a Companion and I have been spending the last five days at the Friary, worshipping, doing domestic work and making a wooden Tou cross to welcome folks as they reach the bottom of the drive. I have found this to be a profoundly moving time. To offer practical help has been to offer prayer, with the practical tasks and the work of prayer melding into one. I hope to come to the Friary about three times a year. Thank you to Jo, who is arriving to help at Alnmouth a couple of days after I go home. Peace, love and prayers.



[“On New Roads Together” : Preparing for Francis 800](#)

A Pilgrimage for Everyone. In October 2026, the global Franciscan family will celebrate a remarkable milestone. It's 800 years since the death of St Francis of Assisi. To mark this, The First Order, TSSF and Companions are embarking on a shared journey of mission, reflection, and renewal, guided by the joyful, radical spirit of Francis. Whether you're a long-time Franciscan or simply drawn to his way of peace and simplicity, this is a pilgrimage for you. **The Journey Begins: Autumn 2025.** We begin at Francis-tide 2025, marking Francis's passing from death into life (Transitus) We will provide special resources, events, and prayers. This will be a time to reflect deeply on Francis's legacy and open our hearts to the road ahead. Do share any resources you have with us so that they can be shared with others.

Advent 2025: Creating Space. As we wait for Christ, we'll journey through Advent with a global Franciscan resource titled "Creating Space." It will help us explore how we make

room for peace, justice, and joy both in our lives and in the world around us. Each member of the Order will receive two copies of the booklet...one for themselves and one to give away. **Early 2026: Singing New Songs on the Road:** From January to May 2026, we'll prepare spiritually and practically with: Study materials on the final years of Francis's life. New music and worship resources for pilgrimage and mission. Local mission & sharing workshops launching in February to help communities become more outward-facing and rooted in hope. **Lent 2026: Justice, Joy, and Simplicity.** We'll offer tailored materials for schools, parishes, and small groups exploring Franciscan themes of justice, humility, and joy. These will be easy to share and use in your own community. **Summer 2026: The 70-Day Pilgrimage Begins.** From summer onwards, our shared project "On New Roads" takes to the streets, fields, and quiet paths of Europe. A main pilgrimage route will weave through the UK, linking Franciscan houses and communities with a vision of peace, reconciliation, and hope. We will start at Alnmouth and visit all the Franciscan houses before finally arriving in London. But this isn't just one path. Everyone wherever you are is invited to walk your own 'Franciscan' road wherever you are and however you wish. Walk a mile, Light a candle, Plant a tree, Share a meal, Sing a song, Pray with others. Each act becomes part of the larger pilgrimage. **October 4, 2026: The Celebration.** On the Feast of St Francis, we'll gather wherever we are. In London, in local churches, online and in-person, we will celebrate this time in music, Eucharist, and storytelling, honouring Francis's legacy and stepping boldly into the next 800 years. **Will You Travel With Us?** This is not just a journey across miles. Rather it's Franciscan pilgrimage mission. All ages, all backgrounds, all abilities are welcome. Because Franciscan pilgrimage means walking with open hearts—singing, serving, and hoping for a better world. Stay up to date on all events and resources at: **SpiritofFrancis.com**



[Companions' Cookbook](#)

The '*Companions' Cookbook*' will be a collection of recipes from you, the Companions. The brothers and sisters will use these recipes in our friaries when we welcome guests; and ideally you will also use these recipes in your own lives. Send your contribution to: companions@franciscans.org.uk

The Franciscan Spirituality of the Heart

We hope things are going well with you. You are always welcome to come on retreat at our friaries. Don't be a stranger but stay involved. We will advertise the Companions' Retreat through our Facebook page. Search for '*Companions Franciscan*' and you'll find us. Saint Francis did not begin with lofty theology; he began with a heart wounded by Christ's love. After encountering Christ in the poor and crucified, his heart was set on fire with a desire to live the Gospel in simplicity and joy. He came to understand that to follow Christ is to have a heart that is **poor, open, and free**—free from attachments, power, and fear. The Franciscan spirituality of the heart invites us to follow in that same spirit, surrendering pride, ego, and control in order to receive the love of God and to give it away freely. One of the defining features of this spirituality is **compassion**, born from a heart that is soft and responsive. Francis's love extended not only to people but to animals, nature, and even those who persecuted him. He saw every creature as brother or sister, part of a sacred family created and held together by God's love. A Franciscan heart is a heart that feels deeply—pain, joy, beauty, and suffering—and responds not with judgment or superiority, but with presence, empathy, and action.

Another important dimension is **humility**. Franciscan humility is not about self-loathing or hiding from greatness, but about recognizing one's place in the grand web of life—neither above nor below, but as one among many. It is the humility of someone who knows that all goodness is a gift, and that dependence on God is not weakness, but the source of true strength. A Franciscan heart does not seek status or recognition; it seeks to serve. The **joy** of the Franciscan heart is also essential. Despite his hardships, Francis was known for his contagious joy, born from inner freedom and trust in God's providence. He found joy in nature, in community, in poverty, and even in suffering, when it was united to the love of Christ. The Franciscan heart is one that celebrates the ordinary as sacred and sees God's fingerprints in all things.

Finally, this spirituality leads to **action**. It is not a retreat from the world, but a way of engaging with it more lovingly. The Franciscan heart is moved to care for the poor, to protect the earth, to build peace, and to live simply, trusting in God rather than possessions or power. In essence, Franciscan spirituality of the heart is about becoming fully human—tender, humble, joyful, and free—formed by love and for love, just as Christ was. It calls us not to escape the world, but to embrace it with the compassionate, open heart of Saint Francis.