

The Life of the First Order Brothers of the Society of St Francis

(part of Annual Report of the Trustees, year to 30th June 2025)

'The object of the First Order is to build up a body of men [and women] who, accepting Christ as their Lord and Master, will seek to follow him in the way of renunciation and sacrifice as an act of witness and for the loving service of his brothers and sisters in the world' (The Principles of SSF, Day 2)

Our life is essentially that of fraternity, lived in community in which all share responsibility for faithfulness to the gospel after the example of St Francis of Assisi. There are five community houses (friaries):



Alnmouth Friary in Northumberland is in a wonderful situation overlooking the North Sea coast and where the brothers' hospitality to guests and visitors is well-known and valued throughout the North East of England and beyond. The brothers also minister in the life of the local church and community. The five permanent brothers are joined by novices who spend part of their three-year formation at the friary. They are assisted in their life and work by resident volunteers and local friends.

Glasshampton Monastery in Worcester is a house of retreat and reflection where the four resident brothers offer the hospitality of silence, spiritual renewal and study. Novices spend part of their novitiate here free from outside engagements.



Birmingham Friary at 113 Gillott Road aims to offer sanctuary to those seeking asylum in the UK in partnership with other organisations which support refugees. With a change of brothers during the past year this ministry has been temporarily suspended but is expected to be renewed during 2025-2026.



The House of Divine Compassion, Plaistow



Front of Balaam Street, Plaistow



The Community at Plaistow



Established in 1894, Plaistow offers hospitality to those who are homeless, and in partnership with the charity, Helping Hands, is a place of warmth, welcome and the sharing of food and support in the local community. The four brothers are also involved in ministry beyond the house.

Chalet resurrexit

Hilfield Friary on the edge of the Dorset Downs overlooking the Blackmore Vale, the friary consists of a collection of buildings set in 50 acres of land, home to a large community of brothers together with others: men and women, married and single, children, young people and those who are older. Hospitality is offered to guests, courses on Franciscan life are run and there is a well-established and increasing well-known programme of engagement with the environment.



*Hilfield Community photo 2025
and a rainbow over the Friary*



Assisi

SSF rents an apartment in the city as a base for a succession of priests – brothers of the First Order, members of the Third Order and Companions of SSF – to maintain an Anglican chaplaincy in this city of St Francis and St Clare. They serve the Anglican congregation at St Leonard's church which is made available to them by the Roman Catholic bishop of Assisi. They welcome pilgrims to the city and nurture ecumenical links.

Two brothers live singly: **Br David Jardine** continues a long-established ministry of preaching and teaching in Belfast. **Br Austin** lives at St John's Alms-house in Canterbury with a ministry of prayer and involvement with the local church.

The work and ministry of the brothers

'The brothers [and sisters] seek to serve their Master by the life of devotion, by sacred study and by works' (The Principles of SSF Day 13) These three commitments of prayer, study and work are expressed in various ways.

The daily rhythm of prayer and worship, both individual and corporate, is central to the life of the brothers. Each house has a chapel which is always open to visitors. Visitors often come with little background or experience of a regular spiritual practice, and while no effort is made to proselytise, brothers are available to accompany them in their journey of faith. Some brothers have received particular training for this work and are under regular supervision.

The Chapel at Hilfield



Communicating the Christian faith through preaching and teaching in churches, schools and colleges. Brothers respond to invitations to speak at conferences and to lead retreats and pilgrimages. One brother has a parish appointment and those who are priests are sometimes called upon to cover in churches where there is no resident vicar. Day and residential courses are organised for the public at two of our houses. Over the course of the past year several hundred engagements have been undertaken by brothers, including a visit by brothers to Sweden



SSF Brothers visiting Sweden

where there is a growing relationship with Lutheran Christians.



Br Finnian with visitors at Alnmouth

Interfaith engagement and dialogue



Our two urban houses are set in areas that are strongly multicultural and where the practice of other faiths is prominent. Drawing on a long Franciscan tradition of respect for people of different faiths the brothers in those places seek good interfaith relationships and work with other faith leaders in nurturing the common good.

Br Sam with friends at Plaistow

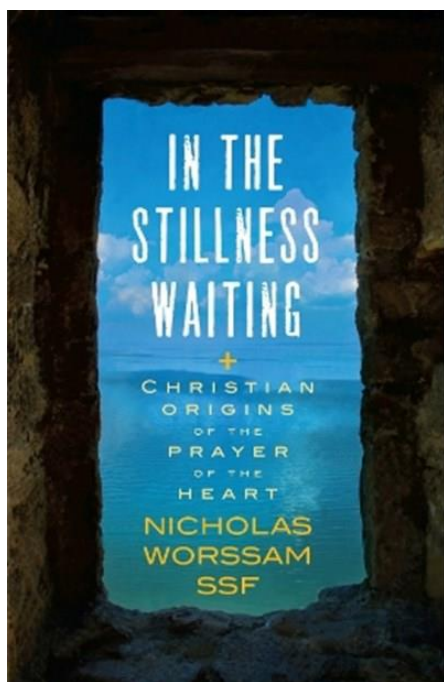
Celebrating Franciscan Life

The first Franciscan brothers arrived in England on the 10th September 1224. To mark this 800th anniversary a celebration was organised with The Community of St Francis and with the Roman Catholic orders of brothers and sisters in the UK. This began with a service on the beach at Dover where the brothers had landed, followed by a pilgrimage to Canterbury with worship in the Cathedral and on the site of the first house of the Greyfriars. Ecumenical friendships play an important part in our life.

Sr Bev and Br Hugh in Canterbury



Publications



Franciscan is a triannual publication sharing news of the Society of St Francis and each issue focussing on a particular subject; this past year on Equality and Justice, Orthodoxy and Praying the Daily Office. During the past year 'In the Stillness Waiting', a book on the Christian origins of the prayer of the heart, by Br Nicholas Alan was published by Canterbury Press. Brothers are sometimes asked to contribute to other publications. The SSF Website: www.franciscans.org.uk advertises events and courses run by the brothers.



Justice, peace and reconciliation



Although the Society itself does not align with any political party or pressure group, our Franciscan calling is to become an 'instrument of peace'. Brothers support those seeking reconciliation between individuals and communities that are divided by conflict, fear and prejudice. They work for the common good and for a more just ordering of society.

Br Hugh and Br Felix at Greenbelt

The Care of Creation

The wisdom of St Francis and of the Franciscan tradition concerning our relationship with the rest of creation plays an important part in shaping our practice. During the past year, a major renovation of a building at

the friary in Plaistow, involved work on insulation, the installation of solar panels and of a storage battery. Energy audits have been undertaken on three of our friaries and there is a five-year programme to reduce our use of fossil fuels towards zero. The conservation programme on the land at Hilfield, working in collaboration with Natural England, the Dorset Wildlife Trust and Dorset County Council, has become a landmark project in the area, with opportunities for groups from schools and other organisations to learn about the foundations of a healthy relationship with the natural world around us.



Haymaking at Hilfield



Solar panels on Leo Guest House roof at Hilfield

Hospitality is an essential part of the brothers' ministry. All our houses welcome guests – those looking for rest, retreat, study and renewal. People come, not to a hotel or conference centre, but



The Shepherd's Hut at Hilfield



Br Micael Cristoffer cooking dinner

to a community where something of the life of the brothers can be shared. Some people seek sanctuary and help from difficult situations in life and are supported with kindness, care and friendship. No charge is made and although people may be invited to make a donation towards the cost of their stay, no-one is turned away on account of an inability to contribute.



Alnmouth's Sitting room and a guest bedroom



The Recreation room at Hilfield

Here are some comments from those who have stayed at one or other of our houses during the past year:

"I visited Hilfield Friary for the first time in November 2024. It is, perhaps, the most authentic Christian community I have encountered in their display of love for others, for the environment and for each other. To spend time with the brothers and the community that resides with them is to witness the gospel in radical action. As an ordinand in the Church of England with a view to parish ministry I am frequently asked to reflect on the nature of my calling. While this has always included a sensitivity for environmental issues, social justice and inclusion, the life of the Hilfield community has given me not only a mandate and model for such pursuits, but a challenge to my own life and witness and the encouragement to take what I have learned back into the parish; to put these issues at the front of my mind, and not secondary to other ecclesiastical work."

"I came away - and still am - very challenged by your way of life, and it was clear to see how the community is a place where people flourish. So many people I know suffer from loneliness, even

though they don't know it. I am surprised that such communities are not expanding or multiplying. I pray that they do!"

"It has been a huge privilege to experience a bit of your community life – the beautiful land that is tended with such care and thought; the quiet faith that underpins everything; the delicious food; and all the kindness offered by so many people, both adults and children."

I had a wonderful retreat at Glasshampton. What a prayerful, relaxed atmosphere, fabulous!
(Graham)

Your kindness is open-hearted, your welcome is peace; through the quietness of God's presence you open your home to those who seek. You give your attention to guide us in the times of prayer, so that a novice such as me doesn't fall into despair. Your service is received with gratitude... My time with you has been such a gift of love, hope and counsel. (Virginia)

Thank you for all your warm and gentle hospitality these past days and especially for keeping this friary a household of God and place in which prayer is given. It has been a marvellous re-set for me.
(Oswin)

We give thanks for all that sustains and nurtures the Franciscan life to which have been called and to which we dedicate ourselves. Laus Deo.

