

A Craft Week at Hilfield

I have recently returned home from a wonderful 5-day craft retreat at Hilfield Friary near Dorchester. It has been a wonderful experience.

My expectations? ... not having been on this type of retreat nor to this Friary I was a little nervous as to what to expect... Would the community be welcoming? Would the food be 'sparse'? Would the bed be comfortable? As a Baptist would I cope with the Franciscan traditions?

The reality..... I hadn't been there half an hour and felt at home. The welcome was genuine and loving, the bedroom very comfortable and everything immaculately clean. I felt that there was a genuine interest in 'me'.

The community is mixed and age-inclusive. They share their lives together in a blended way, serving God, each other and their guests with joy and patience. I loved the way the community were so interesting and interested in talking with us.

The retreat group of 7 ladies and 1 man jelled straight away and the facilities for crafting were amazing- I had never experienced such a well-stocked craft room – the same feeling as being a little girl in a sweet shop! Suzi, the leader, set the tone for the whole retreat – kind, very patient and full of ideas. Everyone did something different each day – all very varied from using paints, wool, glass, fabric, paper and card, threads and learning new techniques throughout.

What did I learn, apart from the new craft skills?

1. My faith and experience of God is not limited by my denomination. I loved the times in chapel which were quiet and reflective.
2. I quite like eating meals in silence! All breakfasts and one evening meal a week are taken in silence. I soon learnt that most people take a book to read over breakfast – a habit I have continued now that I am home.
3. I enjoy sharing time with others who are walking a different spiritual pathway to me. I also enjoy time in solitude and the beautiful grounds of the Friary gave me space to reflect and pray.
4. I like Friary food!! The food was delicious – wholesome and lots of it! Many of the meals are vegetarian, most bread home-baked, most meat raised at the Friary. One huge highlight was being taught, by one member of the community, how to make sourdough. Another practise I have continued after retreat.

Can you tell that I loved every minute of the retreat? I am looking forward to going back again or maybe even going on a different type of retreat.

I hope that these few words will inspire you to 'take the plunge' and book yourself on some type of retreat experience! It really is good for the soul.

(The book I started at Friary breakfasts and am continuing to read is Richard Carter's 'The city is my monastery' – I would heartedly recommend it.)

Pauline Stevens

