

# 'Pastoral Companions'

by Frances Molloy – Pastoral Care Project Charity No 1094766

*"Did not our hearts burn within us" Luke 24:13-35*

Since Easter I have been reading 'The Church of Mercy' by Pope Francis. It has been an inspiration as well as a personal challenge, especially in the area of evangelising, especially where my extended family and friends are concerned. However in my role within the Pastoral Care Project the book rekindles my love and compassion for the spiritual needs of the frail elderly, especially those who are no longer able to attend church. Their carers can often become isolated – what about their faith, and the faith of their family?

Over the years parishes and deaneries who were setting up their own pastoral outreach invited the Pastoral Care Project to lead days of retreats with them. One such retreat comes to mind, 'The Sacredness of the Human Heart', an Ignation based retreat weekend in the Bridgend Deanery, Wales in May 2011. They had a desire to respond to the spiritual needs of carers but needed gain practical support to get going. They also wanted to feel at ease praying and sharing so the scriptures together and support their parishes. As the end of the retreat drew near it was evident that they were more confident in witnessing to their faith and so I invited them to participate in a prayer experience.

## Prayer Experience

As the group were already familiar with the gospel of Luke 24: 13-35, about the two people on the road to Emmaus who were joined by a stranger, they were invited to take on the characters themselves. Each group was made up of the stranger and two disciples. The disciples were invited to walk within the parish grounds and talk about all that had happened to them during the retreat. Meanwhile those who took the role of the 'stranger' remained in the meeting room in prayerful preparation before joining their two disciples asking them, "what matters are you talking about?" On returning to the meeting room everyone willingly shared their experience. The disciples' experiences brought home the importance of praying together and visiting in pairs, whilst those who took on the role of the stranger felt vulnerable until they met with their disciples. What was evident was that everyone found a real presence of the Holy Spirit and how lovely it was being 'pastoral companions'.

This **Prayer Experience** of Emmaus story was incorporated into a day with the Communitas Project as Mauricio Silva, Communitas Project leader wrote:

*"This Day of Reflection was the first time that the Communitas Project volunteers and staff had the chance to meet and reflect together in a respectful and faith-filled atmosphere, with time to explore deeply their desire to serve others, particularly the elderly. To me the most striking feature of the day was the composition of the group, five Muslims and eight Christians talking about caring for others. Another highlight of the day for me was the sharing at the table as we sat together and shared what God has given us. To me it was an image of what God is inviting COMMUNITAS to be: an interfaith initiative which builds bridges among people of different faiths and cultures. The gentle and wise direction of Frances Molloy and Helen Hawley led us into a journey which started with the opening of our minds to the reality of working with elderly and concluded with an invitation to open our hearts to discover the God, who journeys with each of us."*

Each group and individual has different experiences but all with the same vision, to bring God's love alive among the elderly. I pray that the Lord will bring more people together in this area of pastoral care. We are willing to help where we can - we need others to help us too. The Joy of the Gospel: *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis. "In your heart you know that it is not the same to live without him; what you have come to realise, what has helped you to live and given you hope, is what you also need to communicate to others."

The Pastoral Care Project website is [pastoralcareproject.org.uk](http://pastoralcareproject.org.uk) and email address is [info@pastoralcareproject.org.uk](mailto:info@pastoralcareproject.org.uk)