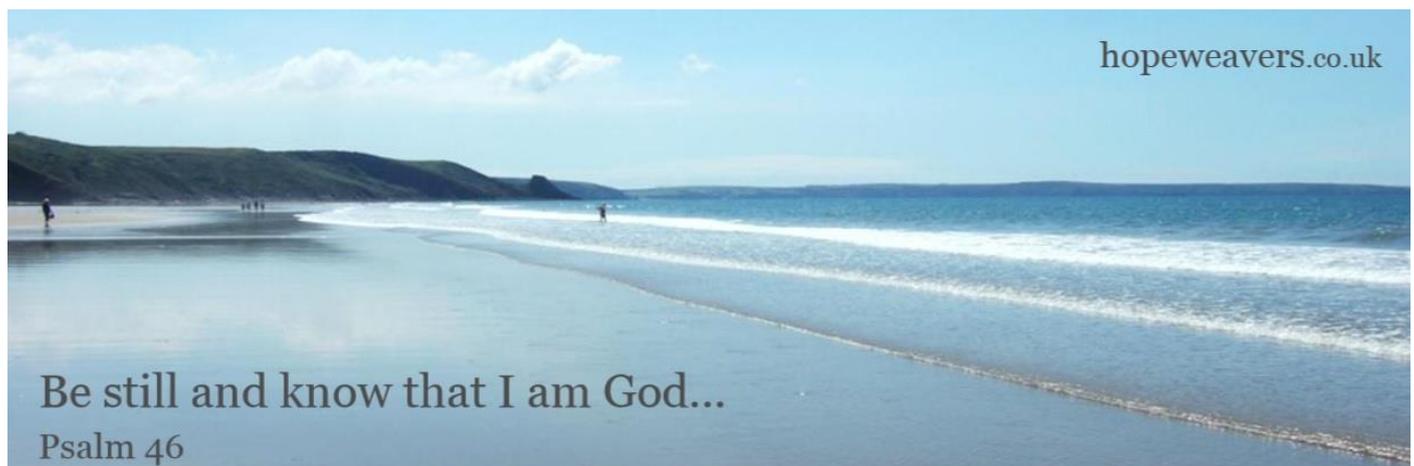


The Community of Hopeweavers – Update July 2016

Based upon a short talk given to the Hopeweaver@Home Leaders Gathering at Wolvesey Palace, Summer 2016



The Hopeweaver DNA

We have been thinking about our DNA in our Team and small Members groups – having being prompted by our Warden, the Venerable Caroline Baston. What is our call?

What distinctive charism, purpose and vision, do we believe we are living through our involvement in the ministry of the Community of Hopeweavers? What does this look like in practice and how may this be changing?

In November 2015 we were welcomed as an Acknowledged Anglican Religious Community and we are blessed with 31 pioneer Members and 10 Enquirers, living to a Rule of Life and responsible for our Daily Rhythm of prayer, stillness and service. Supported by St Luke's Church, Hedge End, since 2007, by our Episcopal visitor the Right Revd Dr Jonathan Frost, our Warden Caroline, our core Team of 13 lay and ordained people, we seek to learn from God and from each other.

So where do we find our DNA – who are our predecessors in our family tree?

Our call and vision – which actually stays unchanged in essence since 2007 and can be found on our website www.hopeweavers.co.uk – invites us to seek wisdom and guidance primarily from God's word and presence received in stillness. We take courage and direction from the words of Jesus, especially the Sermon on the Mount, from the Psalms and from the invitation to 'come and see'. John 1:39. Alongside our mentors in UK Religious Communities, we are fortunate to have guides and teachers from Christian traditions from across the world and over many centuries.

Rich Traditions - Desert Fathers and Mothers

Our contemplative tradition is grounded in a monastic rhythm which offers all, the experience of stillness and space through which to know more of God. We see this tradition as our family tree, a place where our DNA is safely held. We believe that some have been particularly called to establish and then follow this tradition. St Anthony born around 251 is known as the Father of Monasticism. It was he who became best known for his retreat into the desert and the formation of clusters of like-minded disciples. As beginners we draw upon the sayings and practices of the desert fathers and mothers, folks who sought stillness and space, making themselves intentionally available to God through prayer, simple hospitality and service. St Francis of Assisi born in 1181 took the symbol of the Tau cross worn by St Anthony on his cloak and set about living each day alongside others, a simple life offering all to God. St Teresa of Avilia born in 1515 alongside bare foot sisters established houses of prayer and monasteries across Europe. She wrote *'The Way of Perfection'* and her words of guidance to sisters and to the leaders of religious communities, speak powerfully to me today as I attempt to be a good Guardian for the Community of Hopeweavers.

Providing Sanctuary

1660 years on from the death of St Anthony, we find the Community of Hopeweavers offering sanctuary and stillness to all seeking God. Around our kitchen table, in our family home, folks began to explore the journey together in 2007. We offered a series of Quiet Days with the support of the Retreat Association and were rather amazed at the numbers of others who asked to join in. Our history is described in more detail elsewhere, but 10 years on there is a growing network of homes of all types and increasingly other venues across our region, offering similar hospitality and sanctuary as part of the Community of Hopeweavers. We are blessed with an increasing number of Members, Enquirers and Friends who support the ministry primarily through prayer but also financially and practically.

Making Sanctuary Spaces

We are privileged to work alongside others creating their own prayerful sanctuary space. Most recently at the Royal School in Surrey, within the physical area of Guildford Diocese, where we are helping a team of students and staff led by their Chaplain, to reimagine the school Chapel. This invitation came about through knowledge of our work within the NHS at two secure units – Ravenswood and Bluebird House - where multi-faith rooms have been transformed by staff and patients into prayerful places of stillness and rest for all.

The hosts and leaders for Hopeweaver@Home regularly transform their homes into creative spaces for prayer and rest and we are invited to work alongside churches from all traditions to offer space specifically for creative contemplation.

Linking with others

We hear a call to continue to offer sanctuary in our hurting world and have many visitors who share a little of their own experiences and stories. Many who come are not part of churches or other supportive networks so for a few hours, we are able to draw alongside to offer prayerful support and signposting to others. People of all ages and faith positions are welcomed to our days – recently this has included small babies and older people and those undergoing medical treatment of various types. Our away days for teams support organisations offering this ministry directly - through Christians Against Poverty (CAP) and Beyond the Streets for example. Our Soul Days for Leaders remain popular and have a rich mix of disciples from all traditions taking foundational time out to gaze upon God together. Leaders from churches, faith schools, small missional communities and charities share sanctuary space away from leadership concerns for rest and recollection.

We work across several diocesan areas and within all church traditions, supported nationally by the Retreat Association, the Advisory Council for Relations between Bishops and Religious Communities, Anglican Religious Life and Archway amongst others, alongside religious communities like the Sisters of Bethany, the Community of the Servants of the Will of God (CSWG) and the community based at Hilfield Friary in particular.

Relationships with local churches

Our participation as Members, runs alongside our involvement in a local church – our 31 current Members hail from 20 different churches from all traditions. Clear that we are not called to be a church ourselves, our Team aims to offer an enriching and encouraging voice to the wider church. Within our immediate locality we are fortunate to have very good relations with churches of all denominations. St Luke's CofE considers Hopeweavers to be part of their ministry and our local Parish Church St James CofE, alongside Thornhill Baptist Church and the congregation at the Little Green Chapel are firm supporters. We have accepted invitations to work alongside churches and small missional communities from the wider Southampton area, Winchester, Oxford, Salisbury, Portsmouth and further afield. This seems to be a growing area for our ministry and we are currently exploring some exciting possibilities for 2017.

Underpinned in prayer

Our monastic DNA shows us a way of holding all that we do.

A daily commitment to stillness and silence, the regular use of our four-fold Office, a weekly Eucharist, all support us as we walk together as followers of Jesus. As we prepare to open our hearts and our homes to those who come, we recognise our need to turn first to God through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. We were grateful to be part of the Winchester Diocesan Lent Groups in 2015 which encouraged us to explore contemplation and action.

Members, Enquirers and Friends join us in West End for regular times of shared prayer from our Community of Hopeweavers Daily Office and from Common Worship, as we seek to establish a prayerful holding. Over the coming months we hope to increase the frequency of our common times of prayer. We are re-discovering how a Monastic Rhythm can lead us into a way of discipleship based on both contemplation and action. Our favourite prayer from Mother Teresa helps us to make the connection from stillness and retreat to times of action and service:

God give me the gift of silence; Silence that leads to prayer,
Prayer that leads to love, love that leads to service,
And service that is returned in silent praise.

Mother Teresa

A Rule of Life

Our monastic DNA also leads us to take seriously the idea of a commitment to a Rule of Life. Within the Community of Hopeweavers, we have our own model and those interested in becoming Members, take our seven headings and make a rule that reflects their own particular place of calling. One reason for our exploration of the Acknowledgement process, was that folks most involved in the community had expressed a desire to go deeper.

We appreciate the idea described by Margaret Guenther (2006) '*At Home in the World – A Rule of Life for the Rest of Us*', of a Rule being like a trellis, to which a good gardener will lightly attach a plant, to provide a structure and guide so each particular plant can flourish as it is called to be.

Our Rule of Life encourages the creation and living out of a balanced life of Worship, Work, Study, Relationships and Community, Creativity, Stewardship, and Health Rest and Renewal. Members, Enquirers and Friends of the Community of Hopeweavers, seek to support each other – good companions for the road - as we share our different traditions and ministries together.

The Community of Hopeweavers in the future

It is ten years since we began this journey and many of those pilgrims who joined us in the very early days, are still walking with us today. We are aware of Saints and wise ones within our rich Christian traditions who can guide and inform our life as a religious community. We gain much from regular visits and time spent alongside other communities, particularly with our Franciscan friends at Hilfield Friary. My role as Guardian is to listen and to learn, to encourage and to challenge, to protect and to lead. I am so very grateful for wisdom both contemporary and from across the centuries which has given us a strong sense of identity and DNA, upon which to form our decisions.

A wonderful thing about Hopeweavers is that people are still wanting to come and to discover a little of stillness and silence. However as a result, we are finding it tricky to manage the sheer logistics at West End. The little green chapel is a wonderful alternative location but needs some care and attention to its physical fabric over the coming year. So we are currently investigating alternative locations for the programme of larger Quiet Days for 2017. We are grateful to a number of regional locations who are prayerfully considering becoming Hopeweaver Sanctuary Spaces. The Team are working hard to find solutions that best fit the developing ministry and I will be meeting with diocesan Spirituality Advisors from Portsmouth and Winchester in the Autumn, to explore these ideas in more detail.

Geoff and I continue to share the vision of the role of our West End home as a place of monastic prayer and sanctuary. Your prayers and practical support in so many ways, underpin all that we are able to offer as the Community of Hopeweavers. May we all continue to know the presence of God before us, guiding and leading us as we move through our tenth year.

With love, peace and blessings for rest and recollection over the coming Summer weeks.

Jacqui Lea. July 2016
Guardian on behalf of
The Community of Hopeweavers.