

TOWARDS TOMORROW

anything. After two years I returned to England; I wanted to get back to the province, and at that time I had concerns for my family.

On my return the idea came to me of establishing a place that would give others the opportunity for a period of solitude. By the time this proposal had been accepted, and we had found both the property and the funds to acquire it, we were receiving many requests for directed retreats which confirmed our decision. Llannerchwen in South Wales, which we bought in 1979, was an isolated stone cottage, standing in eight acres of land, overlooking the Brecon hills. In the grounds there were two cedarwood bungalows and a chapel constructed from a converted shed.

What distinguishes Brecon from other retreat houses is the possibility for solitude and silence, although it took time for this to become known. Now [1999] Llannerchwen has acquired an international reputation and in addition rscJ from our own Province and farther afield, has welcomed a Benedictine from Stanbrook, assistants from L'Arche and several lay people. There has always been a demand for varying lengths of time for the hermitages, to the point that it became necessary to undertake a modest extension.

Mary Catherine (Mickey) McKay, rscJ of the United States, was a General Councillor, based in Rome from 1970 to 1976. On her return to the States, she was appointed Novice Director of the American Province.

After my time in Rome, I needed to integrate what I had lived, so I went to Israel for six months of prayer and solitude. I found a cave in front of a monastery, but was refused permission to live in it, because it was considered unsafe. Finally I settled in a one-roomed shepherd's hut in the fields of Bethlehem, where I literally went out into the desert to pray. Each night I spent four hours praying by candlelight in what had really become my hermitage. I opened my door around 5 a.m. and prayed facing

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the caves in the fields, where families were tending their fires at the beginning of a new day.

On Christmas Eve I went to Manger Square in Bethlehem to watch pilgrims arriving from all over the world. It was a scene of striking contrasts, with thousands of pilgrims submitting to a military body-search, before being allowed to enter the square. Above us on top of the buildings were Israeli soldiers with their sub-machine guns outlined by the setting sun, while below hymns were being sung in every imaginable language to welcome the Prince of Peace. With a young South African seminarian, I went to the cave of the Nativity where we stayed until dawn, praying for the courage to seek the unity and peace that continues to elude us . . .

During the final decade of the twentieth century, Anne de Stacpoole, rscJ of the Australian-New Zealand Province, became aware of a new and demanding call to a contemplative life.

Our Lord was continuing to say, 'Come apart! I am the living water. I am sufficient.' From the time I entered, my vocation had always been strong; it had carried me through my experience as a member of the founding community of Uganda, it kept me faithful in illness and during the isolating experience of serving in the Central Pacific. As this new call persisted, I did consider transferring to the Trappistines, but this seemed neither desirable nor practical. I was advised to stay within the Society as a solitary. This is possible because our structures are now [1998] flexible and there is no demand to conform to a uniform pattern of living.

My search and discernment lasted for ten years. Finally, overcoming my apprehension (based on the knowledge that I am an extrovert), I arrived in Orewa, which is about an hour's drive out of Auckland. There in the self-contained flat in the retreat and holiday house owned by the province, I began a 'new' life in response to the call to solitude. The rhythm of the hours of Office, meditation and reading provide the framework of each day. In the two or three free hours that I