

Spirituality – is it something you do or something you have?

Phil Aspinall

(Phil Aspinall and Stan Frost attended the 2001 Annual Conference of the Association of Presbyterian Tentmakers (APT). This is the story of their trip).

After a weekend with APT and the Episcopal Self Supporting Ministers (NASSAM), this seems to be the question which is left unresolved.

APT met this year at Mo Ranch – an amazingly extensive collection of residential, recreational and religious resources in the limestone hill country above San Antonio, Texas, on the banks of the Guadalupe River. The huge site – the gift of a former Conoco Oil executive - belongs to the local church synod and is used by many and varied groups.

The theme for the weekend was “Spirituality”. And APT had brought together a wide range of speakers to demonstrate a diversity of approaches – from Celtic earthedness to the worship of Taize, from the discipline of Benedictine Rule to anointing with oils. We learned that there are Diploma courses before you can become a Spiritual Director, that meal times can become a “Sacred Space”, that trapeze artists have to let go of one bar before they fly though the air to the next.

There was a lot – too much – to take in, and all crammed into rather too short a time frame, restricted by travelling times (and the fact that a Texan “just outside San Antonio” means a 2 hour drive). But the kaleidoscope of possibilities led to a very spiritually stimulating weekend. Here are some high spots for me:

- The Celtic sense of connectedness with creation engendered by this beautiful location (and by sitting in the river in the whirlpools created by the rapids)
- The thought that while our minds may distort our recollection of the events of a day, the record of what our hands have touched or handled is always true
- The creative energy released when, in a post-lunch slump, we were asked to make an image of our spiritual journeys
- An anointing with fragrant oils

But, as always, the key joy comes in meeting with so many friends, old and new, and learning of the things that have been happening in their lives, their work and their churches. And especially at this time of crisis: to understand their fears and to learn something of the strong reaction against the current course of war.

This was not a large meeting – perhaps reflecting the anxieties about travelling at this time. But it also highlighted the concern in both APT and NASSAM about the hard core of regulars who attend all the meetings, and the need to grow their active membership. (Now doesn't that sound familiar!). It was also interesting to learn of NASSAM's plan to mail all Episcopalian non-stipendiary clergy to ask them to explore their secular vocation with NASSAM.

May I encourage you to book the date in your diary now for next year – you will be assured of a warm welcome. The conference will be 1st – 3rd November, 2002 in Orange, California – just the time of year to grab a little Californian sunshine !

POSTSCRIPT:

What Phil omits to mention is that he was presented at the Conference with the Dietrich Award for distinguished service in the cause of MSE with CHRISM, notably for his

international work! Our warm congratulations go to Phil, and our thanks to our cousins across the pond for their continued support and fellowship.



Phil being presented with the Dietrich Award by Fred Bunning, APT Moderator for 2001-2.