

The Shantivanam Sangham

February 1996

Dear Friend

This letter is to keep you updated with the progress of the Shantivanam Sangham and to let you know of events that have been planned for this year.

Over the last year the Sangham held a week retreat at the Rowan Tree Centre, a small retreat centre near Builth Wells in Wales. There was a weekend retreat held at Park Place Pastoral Centre, near Fareham, Hampshire in September, and every two months, small numbers of people with an interest in the work and vision of Father Bede met together for as dat to share, meditate, sing bhajans and talk about the life of the Sangham as a way of continuing Father Bede's vision in their lives.

A Recent Visit to Shantivanam

Jane Saunderson, a member of the Sangham who lives in London recently re-visited Father Bede's ashram in southern India and writes:

Last October I and a friend revisited Shantivanam for the first time since the death of Father Bede. It is as peaceful as ever and the measure of the day continues as in Father Bede's time. We received a warm welcome from Brother Martin who was pleased to hear news about the Shantivanam Sangham in the UK. Although it seemed that things hadn't always been easy in the last two years, the ashram was flourishing. They have a record number of visitors in 1994 and many in 1995 coming for the first time. Some of the younger brothers were away studying in India and in Rome. sister Marie-Louise, Sister Valsa and Sister Matilde were all well. The Ananda Ashram had been closed to visitors for a few months to allow for roof repairs but was just beginning to take guest wanting silence.

While we were there, there were about 5 other European visitors and a 'batch' (their word for themselves) of Indian sisters on the 'Ashram Experience.' We all enjoyed the 2 daily talks given by Brother Martin, stimulating, serious but not solemn. There was also yoga led by a German guest.

In the evenings a television was wheeled into the dining hall and we were able to watch the videos about Father Bede. Brother Martin also showed Ben Hur making sure we didn't all get too 'religious'.

Brother Martin showed us around different projects being organised as part of the Ashram social outreach programme. Martin explained that at present it was aimed at creating employment for local women. They were run in the nearby village, Tannirpalli. They included weaving cloth, mending mosquito nets, making nylon fruit bags, producing banana fibre table mats and hand sewing greeting cards.

On Father Christudas' planned return from Australia in early 1996, Brother Martin mentioned his hope to be able to take some time to study and travel in India and Europe. We

have invited him to join us on either of the two Shantivanam Sangham retreats and really hope he will be able to make it.

Future Events

Two Retreats

Sunday May 5th to Saturday May 11th 1996

The Sangham retreat at the Rowan Tree Centre, Erwood, Bulth Wells. Mary Lewis who runs the Rowan Tree Centre welcomed the Sangham for its annual retreat last year. She later wrote, "The time-table based on Shantivanam contained very little teaching. It really was a 'monastic time-table' giving priority to meditation and devotion and silence. The day started with a greeting to the sun, then 30 minutes meditation, then 30 minutes walking meditation, then morning prayer. By the end of this I felt bathed in prayer...I think the retreat achieved a wonderful balance between silence and celebration, between community and time apart, and because of this it worked and actually offered to people, perhaps the things that they most long to find - a group of seekers who genuinely want to worship God but in a new, yet ancient, way"

If you are interested please phone Adrian Rance or Jill Hemmings as soon as possible on 01794 390178. Places are limited to 15 participants. (Price c. £120)

August 1996

The Sangham Desert Retreat will also be held at the Rowan Tree Centre but will be more focused on silence as a way of prayer and meditation.

If you are interested please contact Ria Weyens at the Christian Meditation Centre 29 Campden Hill Road, London W8 7DX. Tel. 0171 912 1371

November 8th - 10th 1996

The Annual Father Bede Griffiths Retreat.

Following the successful weekend retreat held at Park Place, the 1996 retreat will be held at Prinknash Abbey in Gloucestershire where Father Bede spent much of his monastic life. The retreat will be held in the old abbey, now a retreat centre and known as St Peter's Grange.

If you are interested please contact Kim Nataraja. Flat 3, 24 Linden Gardens, Bayswater, London W2 4ES. Tel: 0171 727 6779
(Price c. œ60)

Bi-monthly Sangham meetings

The Sangham is an informal network and regular meetings are held throughout the year, mostly in the houses of members. At present the meetings are held on a bi-monthly basis, but interested people are encouraged to hold meetings to keep interested people in touch, to meditate and to reflect on the vision of Fr Bede.

Meetings have been arranged as follows:

Saturday 30th March. The Grail Centre 125, Waxwell Lane, Pinner, Middlesex. Contact Jessica Hewitt 0181 866 2195

Saturday 27th June. Shirley de Boulay, 180 Woodstock Road, Oxford OX2 7NG. Tel: 01865 310332.

Saturday 28th September. John Careswell, 70 Weymouth Road, Frome, Somerset, BA11 1HJ. Tel: 01373 471317.

If you wish to arrange a meeting in your area please contact John Careswell who co-ordinates the Saturday meetings for the Sangham.]

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