

Promoting Retreats

The Newsletter of the Association for Promoting Retreats | Spring 2026

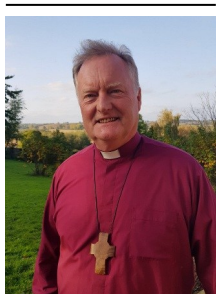
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Letter from our President, Rt Revd John Stroyan: *'I said to the almond tree'*



Front Cover: *The Temple Curtain Rent in Two*: Stained glass by Jenny Joice (see p. 10)

Below and Right: Detail of *'Almond Blossom'*, by Vincent Van Gogh



'I said to the almond tree "speak to me of life" and the almond tree blossomed.'

These are words of the Greek novelist, Nikos Kazantzakis. What we are about, as Christians, is not actually religion but *life*. Jesus came to bring us 'life in all its fullness' (John 10.10). If our religion does not bring us to life, if it does not help us to grow in love for God and others; it is not of God.

Vincent van Gogh, who had an extraordinary capacity to glimpse God's glory in and through creation, painted almond blossoms many times. The almond tree was the first among all trees to blossom and this blossom was a sign and herald of new life and hope. Vincent wrote to his brother, Theo, 'we must admire more, most of us do not admire enough'. What he meant by 'admire', is *wonder*.

Have we lost that sense of child-like wonder? Have we lost the ability, that many artists and poets retain, to see the ordinary as extraordinary? G.M. Hopkins, for example, describes how, despite the way we humans treat the earth, '.... nature is never spent. There lives the

dearest freshness deep down things.' Can we see and affirm, with Elizabeth Barrett Browning, that 'Earth's crammed with heaven.' Do we mean it when we say or sing, gathered around the Lord's table, 'Heaven and earth are full of your glory'?

Have we lost the ability truly to *attend*? To attend to God, to attend to what is going on within us and around us, to attend to God's creation, and to attend to others? Simone Weil writes 'Attention, taken to its highest degree, is the same thing as prayer. It presupposes faith and love.'



This season of Lent, this Spring time, gives us the opportunity to let go of those things and those habits that do not bring us to life. This season, with so much new life around us in God's creation, gives us the opportunity to relearn, to rediscover, the gift of *attentiveness*, the gift of *wonder*. Then, we too can come to life and blossom.

+ John

Letter from our Chair, Revd Cameron Butland: *'Springtime of our souls'*



Brother Roger always encouraged the community at Taizé to look forward to Lent. He used to call this time of the Church's year as the 'springtime of our souls'. Often in our churches we talk about Lent in negative terms. Often we are too serious in trying to give things up and take things on for Lent. Even our Holy Week traditions can appear gloomy and dark.

These spiritual disciplines, though, were positively developed over past centuries to encourage us not to be distracted by the busy world, but rather to know the good news at the heart of the Easter message. The desert fathers and mothers understood the spiritual disciplines as life enhancing and affirming. Personally, I find 'taking a retreat' is a chance to step out of the busy world, to create space, to be still and to enter into silence. As Diarmuid O'Murchu reminds us, a retreat can make our

souls feel 'lighter, leaner and looser'.

This past year the APR Board of Trustees has been busy seeking to encourage people to undertake a retreat. The extension of our Bursary scheme* to school staff is a reminder that retreats are invaluable, and not just for the religious. This newsletter is full of information about how each of us can support the work of retreat houses, retreat leaders and those who are retreatants. We are also looking for new members and for future funding (see p.5). I would ask everyone to support the work of our charity and to help in the wider promotion of the retreat ministry.

We should recognise this time with Brother Roger as a 'springtime of our souls'. These days are a time to create space in our lives, to take a retreat and to reflect upon the spiritual journey of our lives.

Cameron Butland

* Find out more about our Teachers' Bursary Fund on promotingretreats.org/bursary

Below: Spring at Penhurst Retreat Centre in Sussex



What we learned from our 2025 Questionnaire...



APR Administrator, Demelza Henderson, reflects on what our members have told us, and how APR might look forward.

Firstly, a huge thank you to everyone who took part in our Questionnaire last autumn; it was a useful and informative exercise, and, as you will read, has helped us develop the focus of the APR's work for the next few years.

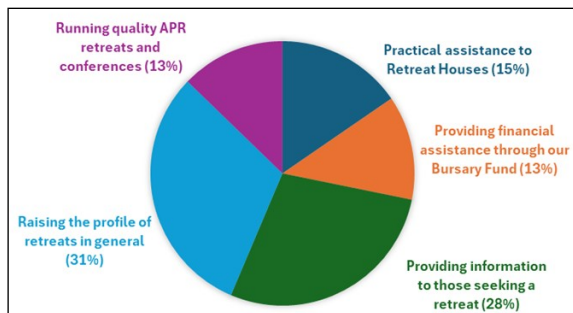
As expected, the survey reflected an older demographic, most of whom have been members of APR for more than 5 years, and attend one or two retreats or quiet days every year, half of which are taken online. Barriers to retreat-taking are predominantly the time commitment and costs incurred, although many people also reported practical problems, such as their (or their spouse's) health, transport, or 'finding the right type of retreat or venue'. Almost all (92%) the respondents supported our current pattern of retreats (ie, two a year, one at a weekend and one midweek), with 42%

asking for an additional annual online quiet day (p.7).

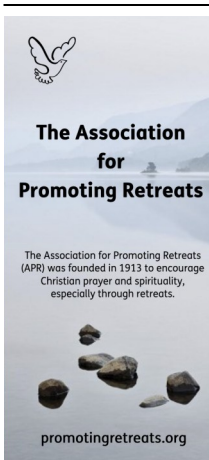
Reasons for joining the APR were equally split between seeking resources for one's own retreats, wishing to help APR promote the benefits of retreat to others, and supporting APR as part of one's own general charitable giving and/or as a donation to the APR Bursary Fund.

Looking at the work APR currently offers (see pie-chart below), there was a well-balanced distribution of responses. These included raising the profile of retreats in general (31%), providing information to those seeking a retreat (28%), practical assistance to retreat houses (15%), providing financial assistance through Bursaries (13%), and running quality APR retreats and conferences (13%). Many people simply hoped that APR will continue prioritising all five of these!

Reflecting on how APR could improve its ministry in future, more than a third of respondents hoped that APR might encourage its members (through their churches?) to help promote retreats at a local level, and to provide resources with which they might do so (see p5). Another



... and how we can go forward together!



Above: You can now order bundles of APR leaflets to display in your local church or retreat venue.

Below: The homepage of our website, promotingretreats.org, showing where you might find the first our new resources; we hope these will continue to grow

quarter wanted to see APR offer online retreats (see p.7), or signposts to other useful online resources (see below).

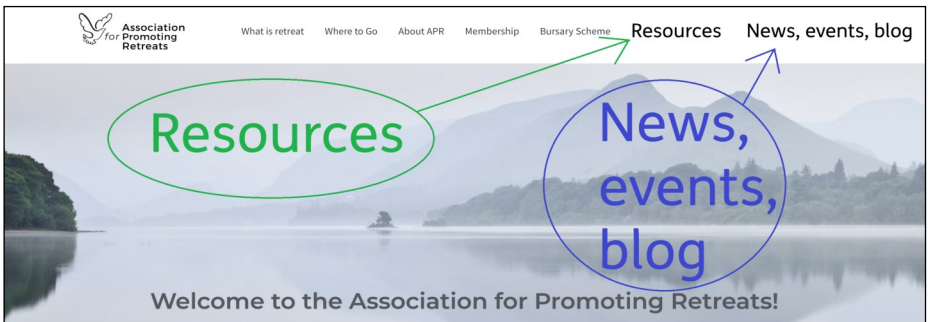
In conjunction with these findings, APR Trustees have developed a 5-year business plan to guide our strategic direction. Our vision is to develop a thriving (and growing) network of retreat houses, leaders and retreatants, as well as to increase APR's financial sustainability. Four practical ways we hope to achieve this is by:

1. Offering an **Online Quiet Day**, in addition to our two residential retreats (see p.7)
2. Increasing both donations and applications to our **Bursary Funds**, and encouraging legacy giving (p8, p9)
3. Encouraging and resourcing members to be more proactive in helping us promote retreats at a local level (we have just printed

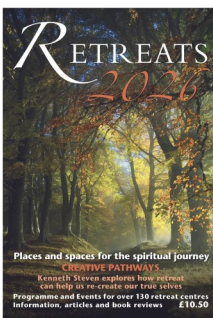
a new **promotional leaflet** for you to display in your church or distribute to your praying friends or house groups. These can be ordered (for free) in bundles of 10 online, using the link promotingretreats.org/leaflet, or please contact the APR Administrator directly).

4. Improving APR's digital infrastructure by adding regular **new resources** to its website to encourage retreat-taking and spirituality in general, and advertising them widely by email and on social media.

We have started implementing all of these: there are already some new resources for prayer and spiritual growth on our website, and we have just released our first monthly practical prayer **Podcast** too. This can be accessed on promotingretreats.org/news-events-blog.

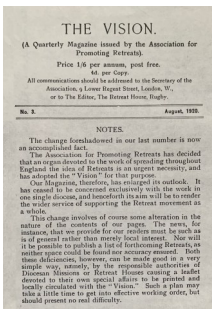


Updating our Retreats Handbook policy



Above: You can always order extra copies of the 2026 Retreats handbook through our website, promotingretreats.org/resources.

Below: 'The Vision', issue 3, from August 1920.



In June 1920, the APR's so-called 'Propaganda Subcommittee' agreed to start publishing a quarterly magazine to promote the value of retreats, which they called 'The Vision'. Once a year, they would also produce a special edition which listed retreat houses across the country. It was distributed to all paid-up APR members, with a cover price for non-members of 4d (for context, this was just 13% of an annual APR subscription, which was invited to be 'no less than 2s 6d'). In 1991, ownership of *The Vision* passed to the newly-formed non-denominational Retreat Association (RA), and seven years later, changed its name to 'Retreats' to widen its appeal in bookshops. The RA still produces the book today.

Back to the book's pricing, and reflecting the effects of inflation, in 1985, copies of *The Vision* had a cover price of 80p, with the annual subscription rate having risen in parallel to £4. By 2012, the cover price of *Retreats* was £6.50, and this year had risen again to £10.50 (now more than a third (35%) of the average annual APR subscription). Indeed, the wholesale cost of *Retreats* to APR,

including its postage, has doubled in the last five years.

Therefore, somewhat reluctantly, we have decided that we can no longer include a free copy of *Retreats* in your regular annual subscription, although we will, of course, continue to keep in touch with you via our twice-yearly newsletters and occasional other mailings. Instead, we invite you to pre-order your copy of the handbook at the discounted price of £10 (inc. P&P); we will still post it to you in on its publication in early December. You can do this through our website, using the link promotingretreats.org/handbook-preorder, or please contact the APR Administrator directly for a Handbook Pre-Order Form (see p.12 for contact details).

You might, of course, simply prefer to contact your bank and increase your regular annual subscription by £10 (ie, to £40 for individual members, £35 for concessions, or to £60 for *Friends of APR*), which will then *automatically* include a copy of the handbook every year.

We hope you understand the reasons for this change, and will continue to support our work of promoting retreats.

APR Retreats in 2026: Online in July and at Holy Rood House in October



Above: APR Chair,
Revd Cameron
Butland

Below: APR Vice-
Chair, Revd Alison
Christian



Find out more about
both our 2026
retreats on
promotingretreats.org



Our next **residential retreat** will be held at Holy Rood House in Thirsk (N Yorks) from 20-22 October. It will be led by Revd Cameron Butland, and is entitled, 'Walking into Spirituality', based on the theme of his forthcoming book. He will be reflecting on the encounters with God that are experienced in our life journeys.

Cameron writes, 'Beginning with the stories of Jesus in the Gospels, together with the experience of Christians such as St Helena, St Cuthbert, St Francis, George Fox, John Wesley and contemporary teachers, we will explore the way in which we can come to discern the Holy Spirit in thin places, and in the people we meet.'

The retreat will cost £350 per person (for APR members and for all bookings made before 1st May), and £360 thereafter. Overnight accommodation is in single or twin rooms, many of which are *en-suite*; these will be allocated on a first-come first-served basis.

This year, for the first time, we are also offering a (free) **Online Quiet Day**, from 10.15am - 3.30pm on Thursday 9 July, and to be led by

Revd Alison Christian. Although it is primarily designed for Carers (of which Alison has recently become one), the event is open to everyone and promises refreshment for all.

Alison writes, 'Whether we have become a Carer unexpectedly after a loved one has a sudden life-changing illness or accident, or whether the situation has developed more slowly, new Carers have to learn to adapt to a new (and evolving) landscape, physically, emotionally, psychologically and spiritually, often without the resources that have supported them before, such as going on retreat.

'During the day we will ask, "What difference is this experience of being a Carer making to my relationship with God – and with myself?" Realising that we are all in different situations, with different demands being made on us, we understand that you may need to dip in and out of the day; the prayer and meditation ideas will be available on our website after the day for you to come back to'.

You can sign up for both retreats on, promotingretreats.org/news-events-blog, or please contact the APR Administrator directly for a Booking Form.

Demelza's Land's End to John O'Groats challenge



Above: Demelza's training took her to Sheldon Retreat Centre, Devon, in May 2025.

You will be able to follow her progress when the time comes on the APR Facebook page, [@promoting.retreats](https://www.facebook.com/promoting.retreats)



In May, APR Administrator, Demelza Henderson will be cycling 1150 miles from Lands End to John O'Groats in aid of the APR Bursary Fund.

She writes, 'I first completed the *'End-to-End challenge'* in 1998, and have always wanted to do it again, but life circumstances have always got in the way, until now.

'Last time, I remember being amazed at how the landscape changes every single day, and how the country is completely linked by a web of picturesque lanes. I also remember enjoying a huge variety of flora and fauna along the way: watching a family of badgers playing in a garden in Somerset, and seeing golden eagles soaring in the Scottish Highlands must be the highlights.

'This time, I will be taking a less-direct route connecting 20 different APR member retreat houses and leaders. It will be an opportunity to support them in their work, and to see for myself some of the wealth of peaceful places of retreat on offer in the UK'.

These will include:

- The Haven, Cornwall
- Epiphany House, Truro
- Tinhay Retreats, Devon

- Sheldon Retreat Centre, Devon
- Vanessa Cole (Petite Retreats)
- Chris Whittington (School of Contemplative Life)
- Holland House, Worcs
- The Greenhouse at Barnes Close, W Midlands
- Reflections Gardens, Staffs
- Shallowford House, Staffs
- St Chad's House, Staffs
- Community of the Resurrection Mirfield, W Yorks
- Holy Rood House, N Yorks
- St Antony's Priory, Durham
- Shepherd's Dene, Northumbria
- Whitchester Christian Centre, Borders
- The Bield at Blackruthven, Perth
- Kinnoull Monastery, Perth
- Coach House Kilmuir, Inverness

I hope to raise at least £5000 in sponsorship from the bike ride, which could fund an extra 50+ retreats for those who need them most.

Will you support me?

You can contribute online through the APR website: promotingretreats.org/cycling-fundraiser (or directly using the QR code), by posting me cash or cheques (made out to the 'Association for Promoting Retreats'), or by BACS (please contact me directly for our bank details). Every donation, however small, will make a difference. Thank you.

News and Reviews from APR



Above: New Trustee, Rosey Feuell

Below: Autumn colours at St Columba's House



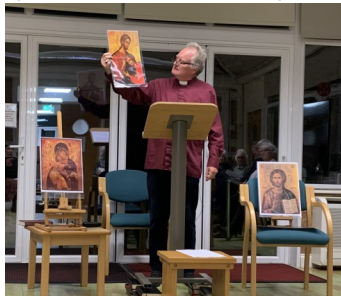
Would you like to remember the APR in your Will?

We rely on subscriptions and other donations in order to continue our work, and are very grateful for all your support.

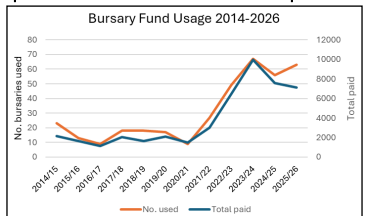
If you would like to leave us a legacy, please add a short codicil to your Will, and include our Charity Number, 222458, with your gift. Thank you!

We are delighted to welcome **Rosey Feuell** as a new Trustee of APR. Rosey is a retired language teacher, and an experienced giver of retreats and quiet days. She is a long-standing Associate of the Community of St Mary the Virgin in Wantage, and comes to us with a passion for enrichment work among older people in parishes and other pastoral settings.

Bishop John's retreat at St Columba's House last October was a real joy. Opening the retreat by describing it as a 'divine date with Christ, an invitation into overflowing life', Bishop John went on to treat participants to an uplifting message of hope, promising that whatever our age or stage in our journey of faith, God always has more in store for us. We were made to feel very welcome by the staff at St Columba's, too, and the autumn colours in their garden were outstanding!

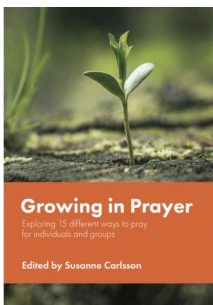


In November, APR hosted an **Online conference for Retreat House staff**. Our guest speaker was Revd Gillian Straine of [GoHealth](#), who spoke of a 'holistic flourishing', wellbeing which incorporates both the physical, emotional and spiritual dimensions. Amongst other subjects, wardens also talked about the challenges faced in maintaining a right balance between running a viable (retreat house) business, and offering a specifically Christian place of welcome and respite.



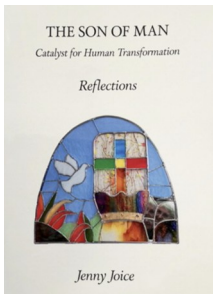
Our **Bursary Fund** continues to receive a high number of applications. One recent recipient wrote, 'My time [on retreat] was one of calm, connection and hope. I arrived feeling rather broken and frazzled, but as soon as I arrived, I felt welcomed and supported to rest in a calming and peaceful place'. We always welcome donations to the Fund, which you can make on [promotingretreats.org/bursary](#), and don't forget we are still offering no-questions-asked bursaries for teachers to go on retreat too.

Some recent publications by APR members



Below: APR Member Jenny Joice's new booklet, 'The Son of Man' offers short thought-provoking meditations alongside her artwork.

Find out more on jennyjoyce.co.uk

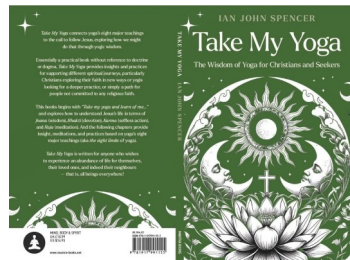


'*Growing in Prayer*' is a valuable and inspiring new resource, edited by Susanne Carlsson, Spirituality Adviser in the Diocese of Rochester, and long-time consultant for the APR's biennial Spirituality Conferences.

The book presents 15 different ways of praying in an easy-to-read and accessible style. These include 'classic' ways of praying, such as *Lectio Divina*, the Examen, or Centering Prayer, as well as imaginative ways, such as praying with the senses, icons, nature, or with music. *Growing in Prayer* can be used at home or in the church community, on your own or in groups. Each chapter offers a brief introduction to a new way of praying and gives space for you to practice, develop and reflect on what you have learned; there are references to extra resources for going deeper at the end of each chapter. It is available to purchase online for just £9.50 from BRF Ministries.

For something a little different, try '*Take My Yoga*', to be published later this year by APR Trustee, Ian Spencer.

Take My Yoga connects yoga's eight major teachings to the call to follow Jesus, exploring how we might do that through yogic wisdom. It has been described as 'a gentle guide full of practical wisdom for a wide range of contemporary spiritual seekers', that 'guides Christians to deepen their relationship with Christ through Yoga, and facilitates those who practice Yoga to discover a Christian meaning'.



You can [pre-order Ian's book](#) from Amazon and Waterstones; it will be published in September.

APR Annual General Meeting 2026

In order to make this year's meeting as accessible and enjoyable for as many people as possible, the 2026 AGM will be a fully-online (Zoom) meeting. It will be held at 2pm on Thursday 5th November. More details will be available in our autumn newsletter, but do put the date in your diary now!

Profile

Holland House, Worcs



Above: One of the sitting-rooms at Holland House

Below: Afternoon teas are always popular!



Holland House is a Christian retreat house and conference centre in Crophorne, in the heart of the Worcestershire countryside. It is set in three acres of beautiful well maintained gardens which slope down to the River Avon.

The oldest part of the House dates from the early 17th century, and contains a comfortable reception area, a library, a drawing room, and a beamed dining room with an inglenook fireplace. Upstairs are a number of bedrooms, and prayer and study rooms for individual and small-group use. The adjacent accommodation block houses 18 more bedrooms, as well as a purpose-built room for guests with reduced mobility. The Conference room can cater for up to 50 people. The chapel was built in 1964; its large clear window looks out across the garden towards an ancient Cedar of Lebanon.



Echoing the house ethos, 'in harmony with creation', the Holland House chefs provide top-quality meals, using homegrown, locally sourced, free-range or organic produce whenever possible.

Holland House has a full programme of retreats, quiet days and other events throughout the year, as well as a regular evening meditation group. It prides itself on offering 'hospitality, good food, beautiful grounds and quiet spaces for reflection, exploration and refreshment to people of all religions and none'. Find out more on their website, hollandhouse.org or telephone (01386) 860330.



Poem

Quiet Day at the Cathedral

I've lost count – overhead, at least a hundred
cackling gulls are struggling for height.
Chaotic shadows flap across the cloister.

Waiting for some unregarded bird
to centre on a thermal core and climb,
I shut out thought. I listen to the fountain.

A gust blows through and I look up again.
Above the nave at noon a seagull soars.
The rising air sustains its graceful turn –

and then another – and then another –

by Helen Evans

First published by Amethyst Review (August 2023)

*(and with grateful thanks for Helen's forthcoming leadership
of the APR Spring Retreat, 'Soaring on Wings like Eagles',
to be held at Sheldon Retreat Centre from 20-22 March)*

