

# the hermitage



fr Malcolm Bell's  
gift to the  
Diocese of Brisbane

*by Godfrey Fryar tssf*

Hermitage is an ancient Christian praxis.

The prophet Hosea describes God "alluring" persons to the desert to speak to their heart. Psalm 46 voices God's invitation, Be still and know that I am God.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition solitude has always been a response to a longing for intimacy with God.

Jesus himself withdrew to deserted places when he had big decisions to make, and for deep prayer after particularly full days of preaching. He invited his apostles to do the same.

The practice of withdrawing into solitude has continued over the centuries as individuals and groups explore ways to engage in this deeply spiritual, yet difficult discipline.

Christian monasticism is said to have begun in Egypt around the 4<sup>th</sup> Century after Christianity was embraced by the Imperial Roman authority.

St Antony is celebrated as one of the first of those who withdrew to the desert to pray and live according to a strict biblical rule of life, in contrast to the comfortable undemanding lives of many new Christians.

Some who were disillusioned by the Church of the time travelled to the desert to seek the teaching of Antony and his company, and a few joined them in the hermetic life.

Though there were others after the time of Antony, the Franciscan tradition made the way of hermitage life known to many people from the 14<sup>th</sup> Century.

*To page 4*

# friends of the hermitage



*Mervyn Langford supervises building maintenance at the hermitage. He has been following Fr Malcolm's "theology, humour, music, and wonderful bonhomie," since 1969. Mervyn is Artistic Director of St Mary Magdalene Community Centre at Bardon.*



*Shybi Thomas M.Sc is from Kerala. She cares for the garden and the chooks. She writes, "For me the hermitage is a special place, surrounded by natural beauty."*



*Adrian Spencer looks after the digital/ technical business of the hermitage, as he has done since 1997. He has created a website dedicated to My friend and "Man of Clothe" Fr M Bell at <http://yoweenterprises.com/fr-malcomb-bell.html>*



*Lusia Swindells keeps the hermitage spotlessly clean and has been a friend of the household for more than six years.*



*The Revd Dr Geoffrey Burn is a friend of the hermitage and author of the book 'Liberating the Will of Australia'. He writes, "I think that you are doing a really important work there, part of restoring Australia's soul."*



*Ajok's children with Ariek (left), Fr Malcolm (centre) and Achan's youngest daughter Akuot (right), all at 'Abuna's' (Father's) 75th birthday party.*

Fr Malcolm has cared for Achan Yom Kot from Sudan and her children since they came to Australia as refugees in 2003. He arranged for daughters Ajok and Awen to attend St Margaret's Anglican Girls' School in 2005.



*Nunukul Kunjeil (archival photo) from left to right, Joshua and Denis (front), Nunka and Ch'e (rear).*

Fr Malcolm has been ministering to the Nunukul tribe on Minjerribah (Stradbroke Island) for more than five decades. For the past seven years he has been building a museum on the Island, to house the work of Oodjeroo and her son Bejam. The building remains unfinished.



*The Revd Sr Gillian SSA (centre) with newly welcomed SSA members the Revd Gillian Moses (left) and the Revd Jan Crombie, in the Sisters' Chapel, Albion.*

## New Horizons for Church Ministry

The Society of the Sacred Advent (SSA) is an Anglican Religious Order for women, operating in the Diocese of Brisbane, and beyond, since the founding Sister was invited by the diocese to come in 1892.

SSA launched a new constitution in 2022 (not a new community) which allows women to take vows in SSA and live a dispersed life in their own homes. The Revds Jan Crombie and Gillian Moses have made an initial commitment to be part of SSA according to this new constitution. Srs Gillian and Sandra continue to live a vowed life according to the original constitution.

There is a world-wide revival in Religious Orders. The SSA is creating groundbreaking directions for Religious Orders in Australia, for people looking for a framework of holy life and promise; reimagining how God is calling people to live their lives in Christ.

Bishop Garry Weatherill, President of the Advisory Council for Anglican Religious Life Australia (ACARLA), stated at the meeting in February this year that the reformation of the church has always been led by the Religious Orders.

SSA has had a connection with Fr Malcolm Bell and Maggie Helass, herself a consecrated single person, for more than thirty years. They have both been living an individual religious life at the hermitage in Shorncliffe, whilst maintaining their fellowship with SSA.

The SSA supports the continuation of the hermitage as Fr Malcolm has requested in his Will, and the development of Maggie's formal association with SSA under the new constitution, whilst continuing her ministry at the hermitage.

Sr Gillian SSA and the SSA Chapter



*Maggie Helass is a qualified Small Business manager, hospitality executive, and spiritual director. She has managed the hermitage at Shorncliffe for nine years.*



*We grow some of our own food.*

The Franciscan hermitage was known as a Carcieri where, according to the rule of St Francis, up to four brothers could live a totally secluded life of prayer that would enrich the mission and life of the Franciscan Order.

In Australia The Anglican Little Brothers of Francis have been living according to this rule since 1987 near Tabulam in NSW.

There the three Brothers built their individual hermitages from stone and some timber found on the site in rough mountainous country, as well as a small community building for cooking and dining, a library and an oratory for praying the seven-fold office together. A small guest hermitage was also built for the occasional visitor who might be invited to share the Brothers' life for a short time.

They aim to be as self-sustaining as possible through their garden and orchard and a small number of livestock, and the sale of honey from their beehives.

A hermitage is a place of solitude for the purpose of drawing close to God, whose presence enriches the lives not only

of those who live the life but of the wider world. Some hermitages offer simple hospitality.

A hermitage however is not simply a dwelling, but a sacred space where people live the life of prayer in simplicity, either individually or in very small numbers.

It is the nature of hermitage life to be "hidden"; that is why we do not hear much about it. Thomas Merton, the famous

Cistercian monk, writing last century, foresaw new horizons for the ministry of consecrated Christian life beyond monastery walls, and today we are seeing a revival of this ministry in the worldwide church, including in our own Society of the Sacred Advent.

**"The dawning of a new Church is upon us and what form this Church will take in the future depends on the depth of our inner freedom to act in new ways."**

Ilia Delio Christogenesis 7/9/18



*Bishop Godfrey Fryar is Episcopal Visitor to the hermitage in Shorncliffe, and Episcopal Advisor to the Little Brothers of St Francis in the Diocese of Grafton. He is a former Visitor to the Society of the Sacred Advent, and former Chair of the Advisory Council for Anglican Religious Life (ACARLA).*