

**TSSF Study & Prayer**  
**Alnmouth Francistide Study Week 1-5 October 2012**

“Oh no, Study & Prayer’s not for me – I’m not an intellectual!” It seems that this, or something like it, has often been the reaction to an invitation to come along to a TSSF Study & Prayer week or weekend. Since all Tertiaries are called to Study as the Second Way of Service - as Bishop Protector Michael Perham puts it on the TSSF website: ‘The Principles of the Third Order encourage all its members, according to their abilities, to study to help to become better Christians in the way of St Francis’ - clearly this is an image problem which Study & Prayer needs to counteract. One very small contribution to this ‘makeover’ is this rather different style of report on the October 2012 Study Week.

Thirteen Tertiaries participated in the week, 11 resident in the Friary at Alnmouth, 2 visiting daily, and were ably led by Lesley Anne Di Marco. The programme was carefully organised to include the special liturgies for Francistide (*Transitus* on Wednesday evening and Mass on the evening of Thursday 4th) and also the regular formation sessions for Alnmouth Postulants on Tuesday, Wednesday & Thursday afternoons. In this way, the week became a very positive cooperation between First and Third Order Franciscans. It was also a significant week in seeing the return after several years of David Swain, one of the founders of Alnmouth Study & Prayer weeks, to see how his ‘baby’ was getting on.

It is quite possible to take a full part in a Study & Prayer week without giving any form of presentation or leading a session. On this occasion, 10 people led sessions on a wide range of topics (there was no set theme) and using a variety of approaches. We discussed papers on Somerset Ward, Spiritual Director to Dorothy Swain; Christian Atheism; New Monasticism; The Occupy Movement and Social Justice/Injustice; Reflections on Richard Rohr’s contribution to a conference in Assisi; we followed up a pair of papers on Francis, Franciscans and the Gospel with an exercise in *Lectio Divina* led by Brother Desmond Alban (who had written one of the papers); we considered more deeply the place of suffering in the development of faith; we heard about and tried out a particular way of prayer and meditation; we were led in Stations of the Cross visualised through a series of photographs of hands; we reflected on a varied collection of images of Francis.

And there was companionship and mutual support, seriousness and humour, time for prayer, for relaxation, and of course the continuum of the Daily Offices in the Chapel and hospitality of the Brothers, all in the beautiful setting of the Friary. Whatever our skills or background, we all had something valuable to contribute to the week and, I would guess, all came away - as I certainly did -having gained new insights and feeling great benefit from having spent time in God’s presence with this diverse group of folk.

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