

# *Christmas Greetings*

**Community of Our Lady of Walsingham  
Abbotswick House  
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[www.walsinghamcommunity.org](http://www.walsinghamcommunity.org)**

**December 2007 Year 4**

*Dear*

Another year has passed and we've been blessed with many graces as usual. God is good and doesn't allow the struggles of starting a new community to be outnumbered by the encouraging gifts along the way, some of which we'd like to share with you.

In our Easter newsletter we had mentioned the release of our own website, thanks to the generosity of a local friend. It certainly generated a lot of interest and continues to do so. The Holy Spirit inspired a benefactor in Northern Ireland to respond to the Tablet article by calling out of the blue and offering us his blue Volkswagen Golf estate car! We were overwhelmed by his generosity as this was something we badly needed, not just for our frequent 'big shops' at Costco for the House of Prayer, but also for our long-distance drives to youth festivals, formation weekends or just for our camping trips.

In June we were invited to spend a week with the seminarians and staff at Oscott. For some years now they have been inviting the top year of primary schools to visit for a day so as to get some idea of what happens to young men training to become priests and to increase vocational awareness generally. It was quite an amazing experience with questions such as 'Can a nun get married?' not being too uncommon. The need for a religious presence amongst children is sorely needed and, even here in Brentwood, our presence at Mass has generated the invitation to visit the local 6<sup>th</sup> formers. We hope to liaise more with schools in the future.

In August a friend from Walsingham discovered an abandoned 2ft stone statue of Our Lady of Walsingham. It appears VERY old, so old in fact that it is quite weather worn and the faces of both Jesus and Mary are somewhat disfigured. Who knows from when it could be dated or where it was once revered. Our friend kindly managed to get hold of it for us and it now stands at our front door entrance on an appropriate pedestal. She looks beautiful as she is so we've decided not to clean her up too much.

Cecilia and Roger, who run the Fiat Association from their Belgium headquarters, came for a two-day visit in September and restocked our supply of Fiat Rosaries and booklets. We hope to collaborate with them as they organise a 4-day retreat at Walsingham one day. More of that to come as and when it materialises.

*Community News...*

Johanna is currently living outside of the community in a flat nearby whilst continuing with her human and spiritual formation work. She is doing a pastoral placement in a nursing home, visits often and sends her regards to all of you. Karen realised after 5 months with the community that her heart's deepest desire was actually to get married and so left COLW in June. This left the two of us to keep things going at Abbotswick from September.

Sr Camilla has taken time out from various national and diocesan committees to be more present and to concentrate on vocational accompaniment and formation work. Sr Gabi has also taken a year's break from doing an MA in Spirituality to do other formation work and will hopefully complete her MA next year. Her culinary skills are multiplying from day to day and she's gaining quite a reputation. With the increasing number of volunteers helping at Abbotswick, we've developed quite a team here and this enables us to keep faithful to our prayer, study and hermit days despite the growing amount of work.

The slow growth of the community needs a bit of explaining in one way, and yet in another it doesn't because the growth of the seed is the Father's concern! All we have to do is sow the seed and remain faithful to his work in our lives. If our poverty of numbers gives glory to God for now, that's fine by us. Yes, we would like to be already larger in number but, at the same time, one of the 'new' aspects or characteristics of COLW is that it takes anything from one to five years for someone to actually be accepted into novitiate. The initial discernment phase is quite long. We also know that we couldn't at present cope with a large number of people in formation because we are still doing our own ongoing formation as well as revamping a House of Prayer!

Currently we have 6 candidates (including Jo) and each one is so unique that we offer a pre-admission formation programme catering to their individual needs. The idea is to help the person grow in sufficient freedom and maturity before even making a choice to try religious life out in the first place. We've been confirmed in this method all along, by our external team of formation advisors and by the canon lawyer who we deal with at The Vatican. We had the privilege of meeting up with her during a flying visit to Rome in September. So rest assured that we both feel in a good place at all levels.

Photos of this Rome trip can be found on Facebook. Yes, after a lot of encouraging requests and reminders as well as the help of someone who set up an account for us we are on Facebook! So please do check us out at SrCamilla COLW and sign up as friends there – we are still looking into a way of using both our names as it is a joint account so please let us know how to do it.

Enclosed is a seasonal Abbotswick card which we invite you to use as you wish. Please check out the site ([www.abbotswick.org](http://www.abbotswick.org)) we have recently launched for the House of Prayer which we hope you'll visit soon.

*And finally...*

Whilst in Rome we also had the privilege of visiting the Trappist monastery at Vitorchiano where the remains of Blessed Gabriela of Unity, one of COLW's patron saints, are kept. There a friend celebrated Mass for past, present and future members of COLW, all our friends and benefactors and for unity amongst all Christians.

This year we'll be spending Christmas with our families for the first time in quite a while. As we do so, with the memory of this visit in mind, we revoke the grace of that day and pray for each and every one of you. May the Christ Child fill our hearts with love and joy so that we will become bridgebuilders and peace makers amongst all peoples.

*We wish you all the best for a Holy Christmas and a Happy New Year*  
*Sr Camilla COLW and Sr Gabriela COLW*

