

Christmas letter, 2025



A budding guest sister? A conversation between Catrin and Lucie:

Lucie: "whyyy do I have to fold up the towels?"

Catrin: "so she feels like we've made an effort to make her feel welcome"

Lucie 10 minutes later: has put out teddies, a little present and a couple of books along with a lovely little welcome note (and the towels are nicely laid out too)!

Picture above, Christmas last year. Most people wanted to carpet the sanctuary but fortunately from my point of view, we can't afford it, I love these creations. This one was built up from the beginning of Advent. And continued to change until Candlemas.

Instead, we have come off oil, in all three properties. Katharine was asked to speak at the diocesan conference and her brief was 'You have used up your resources, moved out of your convent for four months, had endless disruption, - why?' Her reply to us was, we couldn't not.

Some of that was very good, the Michaelgarth stay which meant we had space, fresh air walking up and down a minimum of three times a day, mostly more, and time to pray/read/relearn French. I didn't go away then, being quite content where I was. (The lovely south facing room of this house)



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Now we are back, still have work being done but functioning. When Katharine was asked to speak on the project at the diocesan conference, it was important to outline HOW as well as what, as possibly a guide to parishes, and indeed a priest has just taken the document away so that HIS church can work on it during Lent.

My wing has become a kind of guest wing as all the rest of the Sisters live on the top floor. And I had a message from one of them addressed to 'the silent Sister'! So I live mostly with strangers. We recently had Bonnie Thurston, American theologian and poet, giving us a retreat, and she left a poem with some very pertinent thoughts:

Keep us alive to hope  
that our life together  
will, like the trees,  
shelter migrating birds  
who come, gestate, grow  
in our secure branches.  
May even cuckoos' children  
find here warmth and nurture,  
and freedom to fly -  
here or away.

For all that to happen, fortunately, all we have to do is to keep the place running and the liturgy happening. We don't have to be saintly or anything, just here, and not somewhere else! Even the painter said he hates leaving this place, it is special.

We are incredibly busy, I am working as hard as I have worked anywhere, ever, but it's OK. I am alas also older. Only my internal systems, plumbing etc. have aged, so now I don't really want to stay off the premises, my next retreat will be self catering, precisely, at Michaelgarth. But people come to us, in ones and twos and in droves. Here below the international conference of Religious. 40 for lunch every day and a very full programme.



That was Scottish dancing taught by one of the young people that stayed here last year. They come, and are encouraged, healed, led into a wider deeper spirituality and more contacts, meanwhile we enjoy them and are enriched!

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Mair regularly attends a Scottish dancing week, as a musician. My favourite picture from this year doesn't actually have her in it, it was part of a film, which she is in. In the film the young there are actually 'dancing' in the water and you can hear the movements being called!



I have also, just, watched some wonderful ballet. The Royal now, due to Covid, have set up a system where they show you the performance live, audience and all, in regional cinemas. Gorgeous productions of course and you also get in interval time, interviews back stage, all carefully prepared, costuming, building sets, music, and coaching classes, with students around, so much extra. So provincial children can get to see world class ballet, and the odd lucky nun! It was a birthday gift.

My two daughters actually spent time together, last summer in Portugal when Catrin managed a conference there, and this year Mair went all the way out to Australia.



Pete has bought a three bedroomed flat so the girls have a room each at Catrin's and a room each at Pete's, (and double teddies?) which pleases them. They all meet up at dancing shows and the like.

I am, as I said, staying put, but we have the internet .... Zoom has made a big difference in the world of religious communities too just as it has at Covent Garden and everywhere else. So much good material available to everyone without them having to go anywhere. There are still in-person conferences, we had the internoviciate conference here, nine attending, two facilitators. We are hosting a particular young persons retreat, we had our oblates here and associates, both groups flourishing and deepening. And regular quiet/study days bringing 30 or 40 people to our door, this year's theme, Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

The only 'personal' zoom I do is to our Canadian Companion Sister Marion, otherwise I stick to emails. I don't like saying to guests 'not now, I am going to chat to my daughter!' (Mair doesn't do zoom either.) But oblates and associates have meetings on zoom.

So, I look forward to hearing YOUR news, I had a wonderful e-card, an elderly couple on buggies, going along to the brow, but 'Just remember, once you're over the hill, .... you begin to pick up speed.' (Is that why I am working so hard – definitely the oldest here, although not in national nun terms!)

So, wishing you every blessing for Christmas and next year, *love from Lizzie/Elizabeth*