

Prisca & Aquila at three years old - A communal reflection

It has been a great joy and privilege to participate in our Small Christian Community, dedicated to Prisca & Aquila, over the last three years. But, at the outset of this account it is wise to note that companions say, although this account is true, it does sound rather idyllic. The Holy Spirit works hard in us all.

An account of how we came about – we like to believe by the action of the Holy Spirit, but it might have been a moment of madness - may be found in this video:

<https://youtu.be/LMgikow0AnQ> from 41:46.

We walk together exploring our faith and how it impels us to act. We try to be synodal by each sharing their wisdom, understanding and knowledge, before reaching a consensus.

At the outset we agreed our structure and organisation. It is not set in stone but offers direction and purpose.

- 12 is our maximum number of companions.
- we are women and men, straight and gay and ecumenical
- we meet via Zoom from 7.30 to 9pm each Tuesday evening.
- we reflect on how the Mass Readings for the following Sunday speak to us.
- we celebrate the seasons of the Church's Year.
- we use a Google Group so we can communicate easily between meetings and share personal news, information and items of interest.
- we set up a website – heartofthechurch.org – a work always awaiting update.
- using a Google Calendar, we remember birthdays and significant occasions.
- Once a month we watch a video together about an aspect of our Faith or spirituality by such wonderful speakers as Richard Rohr, Tom O'Loughlin or Diarmuid O'Murchu.

Our membership has remained stable although one or two have tried us out and found that we were not what they were looking for, for example, we are not a Bible study group, or they wanted something far more directive. We seek to understand what the readings are saying to us individually and as a group, and how we might respond.

The wonderful thing, in our estimation, is how the group has developed. From being remote strangers at All Saints 2022, we have become close caring companions rejoicing in the gifts, talents and holiness of each other. There is openness and we are prepared to take risks and trust one another in sharing ourselves.

Nothing is demanded of those who join. We said, "Come as you are, you are welcome", and gradually all manner of skill has emerged. Geoff, with a life-long interest in the history of the ancient world provides us with the background to the readings. Sue offers us theological reflection. Ann advises on music. Debbie uses art as an aid to contemplative prayer, and we use some of her collages, paintings and photography for the presentations. Mary challenges us to greater expertise with PowerPoint. Geraldine has a wonderful way of gentle and supportive listening when we share some of our own stories. Viv, being a fairly new Catholic, keeps us on our toes with searching questions. Helen, with traditional Catholic roots, promotes Richard Rohr's contemplative way of life. Ros impresses us with her calm and gentle wisdom.

There is general agreement that it is very helpful to reflect and pray the readings before hearing them at Sunday Mass, when it is illuminating to hear how the Pastor unpacks them. Some say the Mass has come alive. When we first came together, it is fair to say

we were all looking for the Church God is calling us to be, and many were disillusioned with parish life. Some companions have, as we journeyed together, returned to celebrating Word and Eucharist with their parish and several have become more involved and lead either groups or introduce social justice projects, like *Laudato Si*. A companion pointed out that belonging to P and A leads to positivity about belonging to the Church – Our Church. There is a sense of gathering and going out, an ebb and flow.

We all agree that we have been challenged. To stay together as a group requires, patience, toleration, understanding, wisdom, enthusiasm, commitment, openness, parrhesia, love, care, trust and much more. We do not always agree with one another, but we listen to different ideas and ways of thinking. We accept that each person is inspired by the Holy Spirit and comes with goodwill.

An important aspect of our companionship is appreciating and valuing the involvement each has with taking or reflecting Christ into the wider world. A number have parenting and grandparenting duties, some are counsellors, some accompany the terminally ill, the bereaved and the lonely, some help in food banks, and one volunteers in a large food distribution hub which keeps 33 food banks supplied. Others serve in the liturgy, in music, with catechesis and in teaching, especially children with special needs. Many of us actively seek out courses, often run outside our own dioceses, so we learn more from experts. As we live in different countries and some have heritage elsewhere or have travelled and worked internationally, we share news of what is affecting ordinary people, political activities and of the institutional Church. Our horizons are broad.

In 2025, for the first time, and now planned as an annual event, some of us met face to face for lunch and enjoyed the hospitality of two companions in central England. This was augmented by a Zoom call so those who could not be there could participate.

We move forward into the Church's New Year, trusting the Holy Spirit to lead us and with trust in one another. We are inspired by the Word of God and explore Church teaching. We affirm and empower one another. We look forward to meetings and go away from them energised and thankful. Deo Gratias.

Val Stroud and Companions
15 December 2025

Footnote from Val

However enjoyable and stimulating being a facilitator/anchor is, I believe it is important to be honest about the work involved. There is the regular commitment of time, education and energy. I host the weekly meeting on Zoom and send out the Lectionary Readings with background notes from Geoff. Companions generously facilitate meetings as their time and commitments allow, but one is always thinking about backup, ideas for the future and someone needs to step in when there is no volunteer. We enjoy music, so appropriate sacred songs, of various sorts, need to be selected. I would recommend starting a group but doing so with one's eyes wide open. We are happy to help.

For more information and help with setting up a group contact Val at valeriestroud@gmail.com