

DIocese of Nottingham

THE PERMANENT DIACONATE

ORDINANDS' RETREAT

AT SAINT LAWRENCE'S ABBEY, AMPLEFORTH, YORK

AUGUST 1997

This Retreat is a canonical requirement before ordination. This does not, however, preclude the setting of specific aims, nor does it impose a particular form. The following aims and format are open to modification, and are trying to make the best use of the time we have together. Please let me know if you have suggestions or comments.

- Aims:**
1. To share a time of deep and peaceful prayer
 2. To prepare for the commitment to be made at the Ordination
 3. To experience the life and spirit of the Benedictine abbey
 4. To deepen the sense of community between us as a group of ordinands.

Ampleforth Abbey is by far the largest monastery in Great Britain, having about a hundred monks. Many of these do not work at the Abbey itself, but serve parishes across the north of England. This makes the Abbot a little like a Diocesan bishop in his own right. Many of the resident monks are involved in the School, which is a celebrated private establishment. The Abbey has its own cultural and intellectual life, and a fairly powerful range of influence and involvement both here and abroad: there is, for instance, a pastoral involvement with religious movements in South America. The size of the Community suggests a lively liturgical life, and this we will be able to share; it will provide the rhythm of our retreat, and this will be in the classical idiom of the Western church. So even if there are parts of the retreat that do not instantly appeal to us, the next liturgical office will not be far away!

The Grange is the Abbey's guesthouse, standing across the forecourt from the abbey Church and the north front of the monastery itself. It is a separate structure, but not very far from the community's accommodation. Single rooms. The food has always been very pleasant and served with great kindness.

Arriving From Lincoln and Scunthorpe it may be easiest to come up through York and Easingwold, but the tract after York (B1363, signed for Helmsley) is rather serpentine. From points further west and south, the favoured route is to take the A1 to Dishforth, and then turn right for Thirsk; from Thirsk the A170 to Helmsley has a right turn after some 10 miles, for Oswaldkirk, which leads one directly to the abbey. It will be a good idea, on Sunday, to arrive in mid-afternoon, and if we could be ready to meet at 5 pm you should not be too exhausted. There will be an introduction to the retreat, followed by Vespers (6.30 pm) and supper (7.15). I have never experienced Sunday evening at Ampleforth, but most religious houses have a rather modest collation on Sunday night; so it is not a good idea to have neglected your Sunday lunch with loved ones far away. There will be time to start the good work of reflection before Compline (8.30 pm) and a reasonably early night. I think we should resolve to make the first Office together each morning; it is not proper to arrive for this after the Abbot has risen for the

opening invocation, and as the Ampleforth office is peculiar, it will be necessary for someone to supply you with the necessary books, etcetera.

Three Instructions From the Ordination Rite: (25th, 26th, and 27th August)

1. Understand what you read: the personal apprehension of the Word of God

- We've completed a busy theological course. How much of it has become really personal, experienced at a deep level? The themes of wisdom, indwelling of the Spirit, feeding on the bread of God. We will try to respond peacefully to the Word we have studied, and open ourselves to the deeper meanings of *hear* and *understand*.
- Spiritual exercise: a look at *lectio divina*.
- Theme for discussion: Relating to parishioners/priests/Bishop/other deacons

2. Preach what you understand: the *kerygma* and its demands

- How can we adjust our inner life to the apostolic duties of a deacon? How alert are we to the needs of others? How can we cultivate the grace to respond with the mind of the Gospel, rather than the mind of the world?
- Spiritual exercise: meaning of the Divine Office, the Liturgy
- Theme for discussion: Living in the world, relating to non-Christians

3. Practise what you preach: the personal challenge of the ministry

- A retreat should be the time to examine ourselves most intimately before God. The example of Christ, the evangelical counsels, the commandments call us to action. We can meditate on the ministry of charity. *Metanoia/conversio*; what does God offer to, and ask of, me as a Deacon?
 - Spiritual exercise: A meditation on the call to prayer and the feeding of the inner life, the sacraments, spiritual direction. The sacrament of Reconciliation
 - Theme for discussion: Relating to my family
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Most retreats are too busy. Talks will aim to be short and sweet, and you should be ready to spend time alone, and determined to be at rest with the situation. Get used to the idea of a certain *redundancy* in the tenor of these few days. Make sure that the silent times are not just negative - not talking - but genuine periods of positive *listening*, waiting for God.



I would like us to find room each day for some specifically Benedictine thought; it would be good if everyone could try to bring along a copy of the *Rule of Saint Benedict*.

Please bring along a notebook in which to write down reflections or questions you might want to share with others or ask about or discuss.



Some exercise in North Yorkshire is *de rigueur*! If we have decent weather it would be good to make a pilgrimage up the road to Rievaulx and the tomb of Aelred, whose Cistercian life was so perfect an embodiment of Benedictine monasticism. This can be done by car or on foot. I hope we'll get a walk each day.

Although we hope to fit in as much of the Divine Office as possible, we have a small chapel in the Grange, and it should be possible to arrange a time of eucharistic adoration each evening, so that the themes we discuss may have time to become prayer.

We have to decide about the Mass: do we want to have the liturgy as a group, or do we want to share the monastic community Mass? There are values in either. Perhaps we will do a little of each. Please give it some thought.

There is a modicum of beer lying around in the Grange, but I'm afraid the students found it a trifle thin on the ground. I reckon the stowing in the bag of a few supplies could be all to the good, as I believe in retreats being successful social occasions too.



WEEKDAY TIMETABLE (25th -28th)

Items in bold represent the Abbey's timetable. The rest is at our disposition. The Mass is a moveable feast, and we shall take a provisional attitude to our participation in Midday Prayer/Compline.

(20 30 Compline)

- 6 20 Matins**
- 8 00 Lauds**
- 8 30 Breakfast
- 9 00 Community Mass**
- 10 00 1st talk
- 10 30 Coffee - followed by quiet
- 12 30 Short discussion
- (1250 Midday Prayer)**

- 13 05 Lunch**
- 14 00 Walk or rest or whatever we want
- 16 00 Tea followed by 2nd talk/input
- 16 30 Discussion (*to taste*)
- 17 30 Quiet/Eucharistic prayer
- 18 30 Vespers**
- 19 10 Supper**