

Tributes to Sister Cecilia Goodman CJ 1946-2017

Reflection on Cecilia's Gifts to St Bede's by Geraldine Casswell

I would like to speak as a representative for another part of her life – namely for all those who entered the doors of St Bedes.

I first met Cecilia in 1995 when I attended a course she was leading entitled “Sharing the gospels”. I then had the privilege of receiving spiritual direction from her and later working alongside her in delivering the PSD course.

It was during these times I learnt that Cecilia would often encourage others in their spiritual journey to explore their image of God. This becomes an enlightening exercise to reveal what our sense of God is. So I wondered what was Cecilia's image of God like? Then I noticed the long notice board that runs down the side of the chapel at St Bedes. It is packed with notifications of events, courses and invitations to such a wide variety of things. These groups and events transcend denominations and faith groups.

And then I realized this reflected Cecilia's image of God. It is wonderfully inclusive. As for anyone one of us, Cecilia will have had her questions and doubts but she knew God was so much bigger and as a result she welcomed all. She lived this out beyond St Bedes for instance when her health allowed she would attend a non-denominational Christian leaders prayer group in the city. Many of you will be able to testify to that welcome whatever your faith or belief or lack thereof.

Cecilia would be uncomfortable at hearing some of our tributes – she didn't seek popularity. I remember in a meeting shortly before she died sharing how someone had been profoundly touched and helped by her talk on “Distractions in Prayer”. Her response was to minimize it- but we encouraged her to accept the compliment- the result was that lovely smile!

Cecilia was all too aware of how she needed others to help in the running of St Bedes and was grateful to the admin team and all who enabled the running of the centre to be such a welcoming place. Teams are often a reflection of their leader and this team were, and are, able to reflect that passion and warmth that Cecilia had the vision for.

Finally Cecilia was self-aware. She had the humility to know she sometimes needed a balance to her enthusiastic ideas! Often in planning meetings she would throw out a host of ideas but was ready to listen to other viewpoints, which is what enabled that

wide acceptance and inclusivity. Occasionally that enthusiasm got the better of her! You may not know that Cecilia loved a bargain- one of these recent bargains was a ton load of Batman biscuits- we are still challenged on eating these up but as we do I cant help but remember her mischievous smile and how much laughter we all had and are still able to have. Her generous giving of herself has touched the lives of so many that entered the doors of St Bedes.

Reflection on Cecilia's Gift for Friendship by John Knowles

Cecilia had a genius for friendship. She was genuinely interested in people and cared for them deeply and loyally. She loved to meet people for some catch-up over a coffee in establishments where she was astounded to find herself classed as "a regular". First, on meeting, would appear the big, bright smile that lit up the room and then the warm hug followed by the ordering of her favourite tipple, a macchiato with extra milk. And then, in her inimitable style, would come her own brand of Ignatian spiritual conversation. She had an incredible gift for uncovering the goodness and the movement of God in people's lives and reflecting that back in insightful and inspiring ways. She was quick to see potential in people and to provide encouragement and opportunities for them to become more than they ever thought they might be, through inviting them to serve God in ways they had never expected. To some she might suggest they deliver a course or a talk at St Bede's, train as a spiritual director or help with a retreat in daily life or exercise their gifts in a form they had never previously thought of.

She also expressed her friendship in a very practical sense. One evening when I was tutoring at St Bede's I received a message that my wife had been injured in a car accident. Cecilia immediately arranged for my work to be covered, drove me home to be with my wife and then did a 10 mile round trip to collect the prescribed medication from a late-night-opening pharmacy.

I am sure we all miss Cecilia very much, but she has left a tremendous legacy. She was immensely creative and immensely generous and one of her greatest gifts was her capacity for friendship.

Reflection on Cecilia's Spiritual Gifts by Susan Collier

I wonder what title you would give to Cecilia's life? A couple of months before she died she was asked this question in an exercise at a training course. And her answer? – *Into increasing joy.*

Now Cecilia knew suffering in her life – in childhood with the loss of her parents and the inevitable resulting inner wounds and vulnerabilities which she carried into adulthood. In recent years she lived with chronic ill health. But joy was the abiding characteristic of her life. And she enabled many of us to find the joy in our lives “joy the echo of God’s life within us”.

Here are a few of the contributions from the memory book for her started after her death which witness to that discovery of joy amidst all the differing circumstances of our lives:

Thank you for the kindest welcome to St Bede’s I could have hoped for. Never have I enjoyed working for someone so much as Cecilia. She was always there for advice and support.

Cecilia thank you for your graciousness, courtesy, patience, tolerance and most of all seeing hope and possibility where others might see despair and hopelessness.

I owe Cecilia more than I can express. she helped me to open a window in a very dark time and to embrace life in all its fullness, teaching me to be free. Her ability to be both caring and very direct was a very special skill as was her profound insight.

Cecilia I remember and give thanks for:

Your fabulous warm and welcoming smile

Your honesty in sharing your own faults and failings which made us feel better about our own!

Your wisdom and gentleness as a retreat director combined with the wonderful meals making Whitby retreats so special.

Your generosity and humility in letting go of the reins encouraging others to take responsibility.

Your love and affirmation mirroring the love and affirmation of God.

A source of wisdom and joy whose influence will last for generations.

Personally when I think of Cecilia I am reminded of the words of Isaac of Stella a 12th century monk:

Let the Son of God grow in thee for he is formed in thee. Let him become immense in thee; may he become to thee a great smile and exultation and perfect joy which no man can take away.