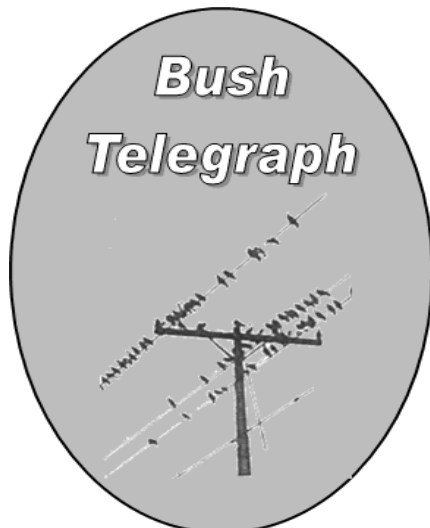


BUSH TELEGRAPH

An irregular newsletter



2025

EMPIRES

and

RULE FOR HERMITAGES

Francis was well aware of war and conflict. He had ridden out with the army of the city of Assisi to war with a neighbouring city of Perugia. The Papacy was at war with the Emperor of Germany. Islam which had arisen in the seventh century and by the sword conquered one Christian country after another, was now threatening Europe. This was an age of 'clashes between Empires.'

In St Francis Rule for Brothers living in a Hermitage, in the centre of the description for the rhythm of prayer, sunrise until after sunset, there is this quote from Matthew's Gospel: *Their first care should be to strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness.* At first glance it seems out of place and should have a separate section of its own, Francis places it here deliberately.

It is in the Liturgy of the Hours, when in worship and particularly the reading of the Gospels, that we place ourselves in the presence of the Risen Jesus to learn from his life and teaching what it means to be his disciple. An essential part of the Liturgy of the Hours is the Lord's prayer, where the

very first request is: *Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*

Francis was inspired by a personal relationship of a King like no other and committed to the values of his kingdom – as we are today, with countless others scattered throughout the nations and earthly empires of this world.

In the rhythm of prayer and business of daily life, we are united with all our brothers and sisters *who 'strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness,'* with Francis and all those down through the centuries.

Our Liturgy of the Hours on Sunday, when we celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead, we have this prayer:

Lord Jesus Christ, you announced that the kingdom of God had come, was to come, and was within us. The glorious splendour of your Kingdom was seen in your acts of compassion and mercy. We praise you and bless your holy name, for you have delivered us from the Kingdom of darkness and brought us into your kingdom of Light and Life. Amen.



St Francis holding the Gospels. Francis was committed to another King and Kingdom.

LIVING SMALL AND FRATERNAL

St Francis: *If a mother has such care and love for her son (infant) born according to the flesh, should not someone love and care for his brothers according to the Spirit even more diligently.*

In the Rule for Hermitages, Francis envisioned a fraternity of three or four Brothers living in solitude: the groups being both 'little' and 'fraternal'. These two aspects of the *Rule* – of being both little and fraternal – have been instrumental on deepening our vision and our life together. We have maintained those principles of littleness and fraternity since our first founding back in 1987.

There is a great strength and energy with a small group of people where the core values are held in common, and who feel called to a particular expression of the Franciscan charism – what is called an intentional community. We have experienced this again and again in our daily life together and what has been created here at Eremophila over the years, in constructing our buildings, land management and looking after our livestock. In formulating our Charism Document, we experienced this again without conflict. Each enriched the document through our individual experiences and our life together. Our diverse experience as Brothers – our age, education, family background and personalities – is a source of community strength. We concur with what Marie Beha writes about life in a contemplative community:

Life in a contemplative (for us, small and fraternal) community is a tremendous source of encouragement. Underneath the obvious differences in personality and ways of doing things there lies a great commonality of purpose. Why have we come here? What is our purpose? In whatever accents the response may be phrased, what is said is the same: 'Love of God and neighbour, realised

in prayer and silence and solitude of this community'. This is what keeps all going in the one direction.

In a Fraternity of three or four Brothers there is a familiarity that can be, if wanted, avoided in a larger organization. The challenge in being small numerically is that if we cannot avoid each other, we must get on with one another. Everyday gives rise for opportunities to depend on one another; to be open and communicative; inviting the grace of God to enrich everyday circumstances. Working out relationships, resolving differences, and smoothing over rough edges will always be challenging for the exercise of charity, forgiveness and tolerance towards our brothers.

All in all, the hermitage must be a place of spiritual honesty and integrity. The life needs to be rigorous enough to challenge the brothers to deepen their life with God, but not so soft as for us to slip into a modest and comfortable lifestyle. No one is left behind. Moving forward and deepening our life as a small eremitical fraternity requires all members to realise the vision and to bear fruit with patience, to the glory of Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour.

'The rule is every stone must lie on two.'
The Prior nods. 'Like us.' 'What's that?'



'Three men, Brother. Each one leans on, two, and each two on one.'

THINKING ABOUT MANUAL LABOUR

The basis of the life of the Little Brothers of Francis, expressed in our Rule, revolves around three principles; living in a fraternal relationship with each other; daily rhythm of prayer centred in the Liturgy of the Hours; and a commitment to daily manual work.

When we first committed ourselves to the vision of a small place of prayer in the bush, the matter of manual labour was implicit in the vision. Certainly, we were aware of it – and found encouragement – in the spiritual practice of the Desert Fathers, whose lives revolved around the twin practices of prayer and work; the early monastic tradition which incorporated manual work into the prayer – centred rhythm of the day; and Francis' own emphasis on the place of manual labour in the early Franciscan movement. In fact, early Franciscans brought their tools of trade with them, so they could continue their skilled labour for the benefit of the community.

In the beginning we were energised by the challenge to do things for ourselves – to be self-reliant. Being self-reliant was an economic necessity. We had very little money and a very limited opportunity to earn it. How we spent money and how we prioritised its expenditure were key to our progress and our day-to-day survival. The property we bought had no improvements on it at all, so whatever we needed in the way of 'improvements' had to be done by us. We can rarely afford to pay people – especially tradesmen – to work for us, so there is an underlying necessity to do as much as we can for ourselves. Looking back on the experience we learned to do concreting, carpentry (with chainsaw and hand-tools), plumbing, fencing, roofing and framing, electrical installation (12V solar power) and much more. Now we can rejoice in having a generator and basic power tools!



Starting again after sheep and goats were decimated by wild and domestic dogs

Daily work for us includes income-producing activities, especially honey production, the carving of holding crosses, marmalade, jams and sauces. Not unlike St Paul's tent-making it has been a commitment to not being dependent on the wider Christian community for our needs. Daily work includes food production; we have a vegetable garden, sheep, meat rabbits, and fruit trees to help contribute to our table. Living as we do in the bush requires much maintenance work on buildings, fences, roads, and firebreaks. Our visitors are always invited to be involved in these activities of daily manual labour. It also keeps us fit and in good health.



Homemade produce and ready to go to parishes and others

Project Notes

The making of a Bishop's Crozier for Rev Anne van Gend

1. The Candidate

Once Brother Geoffrey, on behalf of the fraternity, accepted the wonderful task of creating a Bishop's Staff for Anne, my first job was to find a suitable piece of timber. This is easier said than done! I knew the criteria. It had to be simple, beautiful and Franciscan by nature. I also realised it needed to be solid and lasting something that will not fall apart or splinter when knocking on cathedral doors!

I scoured over the hermitage property on more than one occasion. Up and down rocky hills and exploring along the valleys. I noticed lots of proud and stout limbs from many wonderful species – Stringybark, Tallowwood, Ironbark and Blueberry Ash. The stately Brush Box which grows along the creek bank gave me great promise. So much choice, but my eye past over them not sure about what to think.

Some days later, much to my surprise and not a stone's throw from my hermitage, a tall stout Bloodwood grew. Of course, I had always noticed and enjoyed this tree, but it never spoke to me as it spoke to me now! Within its leafy canopy there grew a limb and at first glance it was such an odd-looking branch. Crooked and bent compared to all its sister limbs it looked so out of place. *"I will give you what you want,"* said the Bloodwood tree. *"This limb of mine is so crooked and odd looking; it doesn't blend well with my other lovely branches."* My heart leaped. This is it. This was my candidate holding the potential I was looking for. The decision was made and up the ladder I went with my trusty saw. Down the branch came with a great crack and thud just missing Brother Wayne at the bottom of the ladder but wiping out a section of my little fence around my hermitage. What an odd-looking candidate it was. I knew with the hand of grace something beautiful can be formed from you.

2. The Process

The work had to remain still under my hand, so I locked it up in my big wood-vice. With care and a prayer, I set too with my saw and blade. First, I took off all the bark exposing the new and immature timber (sapwood). Next, I had to remove all this immature growth leaving the heart-wood revealing its true colours. This was a process of considerable length, and it took a number of days to complete.

What a mess I made!!! I stood ankle deep in wood-shavings and bark. Still more timber had to be removed. On reflection, I think the process was quiet extreme but necessary to bring out what lay hidden underneath. In the end I removed nearly 80% of the outside to expose the real beauty and colour of the inside.

I could see the form and shape I wanted. It was already there in the natural shape of the timber. It was the bent and crooked bit that I used to my advantage. What seemed wrong and deformed on the tree was now necessary to use to shape the "Shepherds Crook." This, I believe, to be the heart of the piece.

Next came rasping off followed by a heavy and light sanding. Finally, it was given several applications of a fine bench oil to bring out the natural colour and beauty of the timber. The work was then left to harden over a few weeks.



Jenny Drury on behalf of the Brothers, presenting the Crozier to Anne as Bishop of Dunedin New Zealand

Bush Telegraph

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We are a recognised Contemplative Religious Order
in the Anglican Church.