

# **Benedictine Monks**

## **TRUSTEES' ANNUAL REPORT**

for the financial year ended 31 December 2023

The trustees present their Trustees' Annual Report, combining the Directors' Report and Trustees' Report, and the audited financial statements for the financial year ended 31 December 2023.

The financial statements are prepared in accordance with the FRS 102 "The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland" and Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their financial statements in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102).

The Trustees' Report contains the information required to be provided in the Trustees' Annual Report under the Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP) guidelines. In this report the trustees of Benedictine Monks present a summary of its purpose, governance, activities, achievements and finances for the financial year 31 December 2023.

The charity is a registered charity and although not obliged to comply with the Statement of Recommended Practice applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland FRS 102, the organisation has implemented its recommendations where relevant in these financial statements.

### **Mission, Objectives and Strategy**

#### **Mission Statement**

The Benedictine Monks arrived in Northern Ireland in 1998 in response to a call addressed by the Church to monasteries of contemplative life to engage themselves in the mission of spiritual ecumenism, rooted in prayer, conversion of heart and charity, to serve in those corners of the world where Christians are divided.

A gift of land in the Rostrevor area enabled the building of a monastery adapted to the particular needs of the Community and the aims of its mission. The community moved into the monastery in 2004. The Foundation Decree of the monastery states: "The aim of the Community of Holy Cross Monastery is to live the monastic life, according to the charism of our Benedictine Congregation of Saint Mary of Monte Oliveto. Our particular mission is to contribute to reconciliation between Catholics and Protestants in a land marked by reciprocal violence and stained by the blood of Christian brothers and sisters."

The Benedictine Monks Rostrevor are a charitable trust, established by a trust deed dated 30 December 2001. On 26th January 2017, the Trust was registered as a charity with the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland and given the registration number NIC105757. For tax purposes, the Trust is also registered with HM Revenue and Customs (reference number XR29820).

The object of the Charity is to safeguard and promote the monastic life of the Community, giving special attention to its ministry of reconciliation as outlined in the foundation decree of Holy Cross Monastery. The Trust also has for purpose to heighten awareness of the Community's various initiatives and activities and to raise funds for the implementation thereof.

#### **Objectives**

The principal objectives of the Charity are:

1. The advancement of religion.

The establishment of the monastic community at Holy Cross Abbey provides for the spiritual, physical and mental well-being of the monks of Holy Cross Abbey, its oblates (associates) and the wider community that is served by the monks of the abbey who conduct and promote the celebration of religious services such as public Eucharist and the Divine Office (liturgical prayer of the Church). Prayer of intercession is a key element of these services offering a spiritual support to the many people who confide their intentions to the monastic community.

The main pastoral activity of the abbey consists in welcoming guests who come for worship, retreats and conferences, in groups or as individuals. By these services the guests benefit spiritually through the development of an ethos which shapes their beliefs and behaviour providing them with a sense of purpose and spur to service in the wider community.

2. The advancement of conflict resolution or reconciliation or the promotion of religious harmony

The Charity has as its particular purpose the promotion of reconciliation arising from its commitment to the values of the Christian Gospel. The monks engage in ecumenical outreach, strengthening relationships with other denominations and promoting ecumenical and cross-community links.

The means used to fulfil the purposes of the Trust are constantly monitored and reviewed in order to ensure that the principal aims and objectives of the charity are adhered to.

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The Trustees confirm they have complied with the requirements of Section 4 (6) of the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 to have due regard to the public benefit guidance published by the Charities Commission for Northern Ireland in determining the activities undertaken by the Charity. Throughout this Annual Report the Trustees seek to demonstrate that the Charity's aims and objectives are for the public benefit.

### **Structure, Governance and Management**

#### **Structure**

The Abbey is part of the Benedictine Congregation of St Mary of Monte Oliveto within the Benedictine Order and, as such, does not operate without due supervision. Regular canonical visitations of the community are made by the Abbot General and his councillors to ensure that monastic life and the keeping of accounts are in accord with the principles laid down in the Rule of Saint Benedict and the Constitutions of the Congregation.

The community avails itself of competent professional advice and support in financial and legal matters. The abbey is also greatly supported by the assistance and cooperation of many volunteer helpers.

On-going amelioration work is carried out to the grounds of the abbey to create and maintain spaces where guests can walk, rest and reflect. The natural environment, both well-designed gardens and wild flora areas, have been developed in line with the habitats and bio-diversity of the surrounding Mourne Mountains Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

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### **Review of Activities, Achievements and Performance**

The purposes of the Charity is to safeguard and promote the monastic community known as "Benedictine Monks". It does so by establishing and maintaining the property of Holy Cross Abbey (Rostrevor) wherein a community of Benedictine monks live a life of prayer, work and hospitality, freely embracing their traditional Benedictine vows of obedience, stability and conversion of life.

The monks welcome visitors to participate in the prayer and worship of the abbey, and to share in their life of prayer and meditation as guests, either individually or in groups. The monks gather for worship in the abbey church five times a day and people from the locality and beyond participate in these services on a regular basis. Prayer of intercession is a key element of these services offering a spiritual support to the many people who confide their concerns to the monastic community. A webcam link also allows people who are unable to come to the abbey, whether through sickness, disability or distance, to share in the worship. Surveying the communications received in 2023, the monks are aware that people from France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Malta, Norway, Australia, South Africa, Mexico and the United States (as well as the United Kingdom and Ireland) are following the services on a daily basis.

The monks offer pastoral comfort, spiritual guidance and accompaniment to those who visit the abbey. A Scripture-based sermon, that is related to the realities of contemporary life, is preached each day, and often made available in written form on the abbey's website. So also, a daily spiritual thought is provided on the Facebook Page and the Twitter Account of the abbey. The monks are always available to provide spiritual guidance to those who call to the abbey in times of difficulty, crisis or struggle. The monks also visit individuals and groups in the wider community as part of the day to day pastoral work of the Charity.

Hospitality is a key aspect of Benedictine life. During 2023, the monks continued to welcome visitors who come to participate in the prayer and worship of the community, and to share in the community's life as guests, either individually or in groups. Guests can stay overnight in the Guest house in order to share more fully in the life and worship of the monastic community. In 2023, 384 overnight guests stayed with us for two days to a week, which represents an increase of 30% on the previous year. They can avail of spiritual counselling during their retreat. Monks are also available to provide talks and seminars for groups.

The monks welcome guests who come for retreats and conferences, in groups or as individuals. The guests come from a wide range of backgrounds and all sections of society. The abbey serves as a safe space to facilitate the work of other faith organizations and charitable groups, such as the Knights of Malta or the Birches (Alzheimer Day Care Centre) to name but a few examples. The monks are available to provide conferences, and to animate group discussions on chosen themes - especially related to peace, reconciliation and better mutual understanding and cooperation. The guests come from a wide range of backgrounds and all sections of society. The abbey provides an opportunity for six young organ scholars to build up their confidence by public performance at the Sunday liturgies and thereby enhance the beauty of the worship offered at the abbey.

The Charity has as its particular purpose the promotion of reconciliation arising from its commitment to the values of the Christian Gospel and to social need. The monks engage in ecumenical outreach, strengthening relationships with other denominations and promoting ecumenical and cross-community links. While the abbey is Roman Catholic in denomination, its worship is open to people of different denominational backgrounds. Approximately one half of the guests to the abbey in 2023 came from other Christian Churches, and many such people, including ministers of religion from different denominations, seek spiritual direction from the monks. The abbey offers periodic Study Days, lectures and conferences to encourage cross-community engagement and dialogue. In the course of the year, we welcomed on different occasions pilgrims engaged on St Patrick's way, led by Martina Purdy and Elaine Kane of the St Patrick Centre Downpatrick. These pilgrims drawn from across Ireland and further afield (especially the United States of America) were hosted by the community and given insight into our community's ministry of reconciliation and cross community contact in Northern Ireland. The Board of the Irish Council of Churches (constituted by leaders of Churches of the Reformation and Orthodox Churches present in Ireland) came for a day of recollection at Holy Cross Abbey. We continue to host on a regular basis the Official Theological Dialogue between the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and the Catholic Church in Ireland. Several of the monks are also involved in the publication of an international ecumenical theological journal, *One in Christ*, which makes a valuable contribution to inter-Church theological dialogue and collaboration. Articles related to Church renewal, ecumenical dialogue and the ministry of reconciliation in the context of Northern Ireland have been published in periodicals such as "Doctrine and Life" and "Liturgie".

The monks regularly take up invitations to speak and contribute to services and events in the other Christian Churches: in 2023, they did so at the Anglican Cathedrals of Armagh and Downpatrick, as well as at the Church of Ireland parish of Rostrevor. Two of the monks serve as Ecumenical Canons to Armagh and Down Church of Ireland Cathedrals respectively. Clergy from other denominations were invited to preach during the monastic religious services.

During 2023 the outreach activities of the abbey also extended well beyond the shores of Ireland. Regular visits continued to take place between the Holy Cross Community and the sisters of the Protestant Community of Grandchamp in Switzerland. On-going engagement with Westmont College (California, USA), a higher education

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institution within the Presbyterian tradition, saw students taking seminars at the Abbey during a residency in Rostrevor as part of their European Semester on peace and reconciliation. Three ecumenical groups from the United States of America included a day spent at the Abbey in the context of a time of retreat and fact finding in regard to ministries of reconciliation in Ireland. On-going work too with young people from all over the world in formation at the YWAM (Youth With A Mission) Centre in Rostrevor. These young people come from the Protestant Churches.

The abbey is linked to an international network of monasteries in the Olivetan Congregation of the Benedictine Order. There are regular exchanges between these communities, many of which are engaged in ecumenical dialogue and the promotion of inter-religious dialogue and understanding.

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### Financial Review

The results for the financial year are set out on page 10 and additional notes are provided showing income and expenditure in greater detail.

### Results and Dividends

At the end of the financial year the charity has assets of £5,608,077 (2022 - £5,404,837) and liabilities of £1,942 (2022 - £1,709). The net assets of the charity have increased by £203,007.

### Trustees

The trustees who served throughout the financial year, except as noted, were as follows:

Rev Mark-Ephrem Nolan  
Rev Eric Loisel  
Rev Thierry Marteaux

In accordance with the Constitution, the trustees retire by rotation and, being eligible, offer themselves for re-election.

### Compliance with Sector-Wide Legislation and Standards

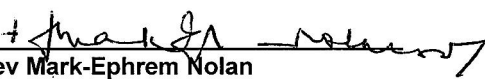
The charity engages pro-actively with legislation, standards and codes which are developed for the sector. Benedictine Monks subscribes to and is compliant with the following:


- The Companies Act 2006
- The Charities SORP (FRS 102)

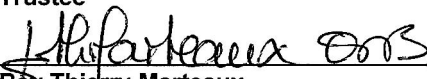
### Auditor

The auditor, Daly Park & Company Ltd, (Chartered Accountants) has indicated her willingness to continue in office in accordance with the provisions of Section 485 of the Companies Act 2006.

Approved by the Board of Trustees on 24 May 2024 and signed on its behalf by:

  
Rev Mark-Ephrem Nolan  
Trustee

  
Rev Eric Loisel  
Trustee

  
Rev Thierry Marteaux  
Trustee