

Community

By Jenny Hayes, Okehampton Quaker Meeting

I frequently visit Buckfast Abbey where I enjoy the peaceful and inspiring surroundings created by the Abbey and the Benedictine monks who live and worship there.

I recently read 'Finding Sanctuary' by Abbot Christopher Jamison, who allowed the BBC to film a television series at Worth Abbey. The series gave a detailed and fascinating account of the experiences of a group of lay people spending some time on retreat there.

His book gives many insights into the Benedictine way of life and I was particularly interested in the emphasis given to the fact that, "for Benedict, the greatest obstacles to true community living, are murmuring and grumbling because grumbling is the opposite of good conversation." Benedict makes a distinction between making a legitimate complaint to someone in authority but says that grumbling is a variant on hate and involves destructive words. So much so that one of the rules of St Benedict is "Above all else, we admonish them to refrain from grumbling."

Grumbling, whether about others, myself or the world in general is truly dispiriting and disheartening, whereas good conversation allows both sides to be heard and space for understanding to develop.

We all experience community life in our homes, schools and areas of our lives where we meet with others who share common interests. May we really value the opportunities for conversation where we create the space and time for speaking and listening to each other.

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