Growing in faith and encountering God: The Kintbury Experience (Great Britain)

After the approval of the opening of a spiritual retreat house for young people during the Chapter of the English District of the Brothers of the Christian Schools in 1974, Brother Damian Lundy, together with Brothers Dominic Green and Joseph Hendron, embarked on a journey that would transform and influence youth ministry in Great Britain for years to come, right up to the present day.

The three Brothers founded St. Cassian's Centre, a Catholic retreat house aimed primarily at young people, who were thus able to learn about the history of St. John Baptist de La Salle.

The Kintbury Experience, as the programme is commonly known, is a combination of activities, spiritual retreats and youth formation, held at Saint Cassian's Centre in Kintbury, Great Britain. Young people (and adults) who participate in the retreats organised at this Centre particularly appreciate its informal educational approach.

The key aspects of this Centre are:

- Offering young people a space for reflection and spiritual growth, helping them to find a sense of community, develop self-awareness and discover the role of faith and God in their lives.
- Basing the retreats on some fundamental themes developed by Brother Damian, such as **Welcome, Awareness, Reconciliation and Good News.**
- Welcoming mainly students from Lasallian schools, but also from other schools, parishes and groups. Many of the volunteers who run the activities are themselves young people, often taking a gap year.

Retreats at St. Cassian's allow young people, immersed in the picturesque countryside of Kintbury, West Berkshire, to take a break from their daily routine, encounter God, discover their own worth and grow in faith. In the total

tranquillity of the facility, young people can reconnect with their inner selves, share stories, engage in meaningful conversations and offer mutual support, allowing a culture of gratitude to flourish within the retreat community.

The first lay people joined the St. Cassian's team in 1979. Over the years, groups of volunteers have continued to come, whose commitment has had and continues to have a profound impact on the young people who participate in the retreats. Currently, volunteers come from countries such as Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, the United States and Mexico, all eager to participate in the "Kintbury Experience", living the opportunity to "touch the hearts of the young people entrusted to their care" (De La Salle) and then continuing the Lasallian mission undertaken at the Centre in their own communities.

Brother Damian Lundy always told retreat participants on the last day together that "the retreat begins when you leave", encouraging young people to be the Good News, sharing their faith, stories, and experiences with their home communities. The Lasallian Family and its Mission are enhanced through this transformative experience.

Without the initial inspiration of Brother Damian Lundy and the ongoing support of the Brothers, St. Cassian's would not have survived for 50 years. This was also recently affirmed by **Brother Chris Patiño,** General Councillor of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, who said that at St. Cassian's, "for 50 years, young people have been invited to become themselves, to become aware, to be reconciled and to become good news". "Without knowing it", continues Brother Chris, "Brother Damian Lundy, attentive to the Holy Spirit and with the desire that young people recognise the Spirit of the living God within them, created a space that still today cultivates that unstoppable hope".

Ms. Emma Biggins, Director of the Centre, also stated that "retreats at *St. Cassian's* allow young people to disconnect from everyday life, encounter God, discover their own value and grow in faith", so that the path traced by the Brothers continues today, 50 years later. "This vision of youth ministry continues to inspire volunteers, teachers, staff and students in schools around the world", she added.

Brother Damian Lundy (1944-1997), born Michael Lundy, was a religious of the congregation of the **Brothers of the Christian Schools** (De La Salle). He is

recognised as a key figure in the innovation of Catholic ministry and education in the United Kingdom.

In **1975**, Brother Damian, together with Brother Joe Hendron and Brother Dominic Green, founded **Saint Cassian's Centre** in Kintbury, Berkshire, Great Britain. The idea arose from his experience and conviction that young people could help adults find new perspectives on how to transmit the Gospel. The centre is a place of spiritual retreat for young people, focusing on themes such as community, self-awareness and respect for others.

Brother Damian was known for his talent for setting new words to familiar melodies, creating popular hymns for the liturgy. His best-known work, "Walk in the Light", is sung around the world. He also wrote books, including "What's the Point of It All?". (1992), and devised an approach to youth evangelisation that became standard practice in the United Kingdom. He was a staunch supporter of liturgical renewal and the reforms of the Second Vatican Council.

Find out more: www.thekintburyexperience.com

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