



## The Cenacolo Community for Drug Addicts

**The Charity Draw at County of Gloucester Circle's 1000th meeting at Cheltenham Race Course raised £510 for the Cenacolo Community, an organisation set up to help the recovery of drug addicts. On 21st October 2007, a cheque was presented to Mrs Margaret Stanley by President Brian Molloy on President's Sunday.**

*Below is a very personal view, by Mrs Stanley, of the Cenacolo Community for those suffering from Addictions.*

My name is Margaret Stanley and I am from the parish of Our Lady and St John, Heswall in the diocese of Shrewsbury. I have been associated with the Cenacolo Community since 1996.

"Cenacolo" (pronounced Chen-ah-colo) is the Italian word for Cenacle - the upper room where Jesus instituted the Holy Eucharist, washed the feet of his disciples and told us to love one another.

In 1983 an Italian nun Sister Elvira Petrozzi, deeply troubled by the sight of young men lying in doorways or in the street, overcome with drugs or alcohol, begged her Mother Superior for permission to help them in some way. After ten years of pleading and praying, she was given this permission.

The Mayor of a little town called Saluzzo in the foothills of the Italian Alps leased her a large house on the hill above the town for the equivalent of 50p a year. The house was derelict having been empty for 15 years - no roof or windows, and trees growing in the inside of the house. It was here on the 10th July 1993, the Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, that Sister Elvira with another sister, a retired school teacher, began their vision of hope and recovery for drug addicts and alcoholics.

Today there are over 50 houses throughout the world and about 2,000 young people in these communities. The houses are in Italy, Bosnia Herzegovina (Medjugorje), USA (Florida), France (Lourdes and Lille), Austria, Poland, Russia, England, Ireland (Knock), Dominican Republic, Mexico, Brazil, Peru, Argentina.

There are separate houses for men and women, with some mixed family houses for those with young children. There are no counsellors, doctors or psychologists. No newspapers, television or radios. Each house is run by ex-addicts - they say they are the only ones who can understand other addicts. It is recommended that addicts stay in

Community for at least two years. Sister Alvira says that anyone who has suffered an addiction for years is not going to recover in weeks or even months. Young people enter the Community voluntarily, usually when they have reached rock bottom and have nowhere else to turn. They are free to leave at any time, the Cenacolo Community is not a prison. Sister Alvira calls it a School of Life.



Life in the Community is based on work, prayer and spiritual healing. It is a disciplined life - addicts' lives are completely chaotic and time is meaningless. Discipline strengthens them, enables them to think and become responsible people. Each house is as self sufficient as possible, growing their own vegetables, keeping hens, pigs, etc and relying on God's Providence. A new entrant to the community is given a "guardian angel", a recovered drug addict, who remains with the new boy 24 hours a day, for as long as necessary. Everyone learns Italian beginning with five words a day. Elvira said "I can't learn 16 languages - you will all have to learn mine". Italian is the common language in each house.

I have a personal interest in the Cenacolo Community. I have five children, four of whom have done very well in the eyes of the world. One is a teacher, one a doctor, another a solicitor and another manager of an expanding veterinary practice. My second son John became a drug addict at the age of 15, starting with cannabis and progressing quite quickly to heroin, crack cocaine, diazepam and temazepam and alcohol. I cannot begin to tell you what it is like living with a drug addict in the family, the police at the door in the middle of the night; sitting at a hospital bedside wondering if my son would recover from overdosing. Phone calls at all hours from drug dealers; the misery for the younger members of the family. Despite state

rehabilitation units and prison John always returned to drugs.

In 1996 I took my son to Medjugorje as I had heard of the Community there for drug addicts. John was impressed with the Cenacolo but felt it was not for him.

A fellow parishioner, Mary Godwin, and I, with the permission of our parish priest, started a fund called "Our Lady's Mantle" to help drug addicts go to Medjugorje. Within months we discovered a group in London doing the same thing and shortly afterwards a group in Birmingham. We all met and eventually "Friends for a UK Cenacolo" was formed. We visited our Northern Bishops and Bishop Patrick O'Donoghue of Lancaster visited the house in Knock, Ireland and was so impressed he wrote to Sr Alvira offering her a property belonging to his diocese. On 19th March 2005, not far from Kendal, the Cenacolo Community, "Our Lady Queen of Martyrs", opened with 10 young men (four English, three Italian, one French, one German, one Austrian).

The Carmelite Monastery in Heswall has been our "prayer base" from the beginning and directed us to Bosco House, a Salesian hostel for homeless young men - the majority of them drug addicts - and from where we helped the first addicts to enter the Community. The Carmelites keep a book at the feet of St Joseph within the enclosure and the names of all addicts who come to our meetings are written in this book and are prayed for.

In Liverpool we meet every Tuesday evening from 7pm until 9pm. We spend the first half hour before the Blessed Sacrament and then we meet in a hall, the addicts in one part and parents separately.

In August 2003 seven years after our visit to Medjugorje my son John, desperate with his lifestyle which had hit rock bottom, decided to enter Cenacolo Community. He went to the Mother house in Saluzzo, Italy. Four months later he told me he had peace in his heart for the first time in years. Now two and a half years later he was one of the "responsible" in the house in Kendal, fluent in Italian and helping other young addicts.

I have no words to thank God for the life of my son. Every morning I wake up with thanksgiving in my heart. Of my five children only John, my once drug addict son, is practising his faith. He gets up at 2am every Saturday morning for an hour of adoration before the Blessed Sacrament and prays for addicts still on the streets of our towns and cities.