

## The Kintbury Experience

St Cassian's Centre, Kintbury is a Retreat Centre for Young People, owned by the De La Salle Brothers and located in the village of Kintbury, near Newbury.

St Cassian's has a rich history. Many stories declare the good work at the Centre over the past 40 years. Every year a residential community, including young volunteers, continues to share the Brothers' vision for a new apostolate – a retreat centre for young people, also known as The Kintbury Experience, a place of Welcome, Awareness, Reconciliation and Good News.

Peer ministry and narrative theology - the practice of ministry through sharing personal experiences and stories - have always been an important aspect of the De La Salle Brothers. At St Cassian's Centre we reflect essential aspects of the vision and heritage of St John Baptist de La Salle and the Lasallian mission.

Our retreat programme, devised to meet the needs of people from different backgrounds, has a full scope and sequence that builds upon itself. It is also designed to be developmentally appropriate for each year group in school as they cultivate their spirit of faith along with their skills of reasoning, highlighting the relevance of our faith to life and contemporary culture. We welcome schools from all over the country, from Y3 to Y13, to experience time away, time together and time with God. We also offer Confirmation retreats for Parish groups, exploring what it means to be a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Disciple. We run Advent and Lent Retreats for adults (18+) and a Family Weekend in June each year allowing all ages to enjoy the 'Kintbury Experience'.

Every year we offer the opportunity to young people who wish to take a gap-year volunteering at St Cassian's. Through formation, service, communal living and prayer with Brothers and professional team members, this experience helps to enrich their faith, fostering and strengthening relationships in order to bring young people closer to God, and discerning God's call in their own lives. It is evident, too, that this invaluable peer ministry has an influence on the lives and development of young retreatants; supporting and nurturing individuals and communities to develop and deepen being a person of Faith.

An annual highlight of our year is our Pilgrimage to Rome, especially to the Generalate of the De La Salle Brothers, its Chapel, and to be able to venerate the relics of the Founder, St John Baptist de La Salle. On occasion we have been very fortunate to meet informally with the Brother Superior General of the De La Salle Brothers

Life after St Cassian's, in whatever chosen profession, reveals young adults who are motivated with Christ as their Guide and St John Baptist de la Salle as their inspiration in living out their vocation. They all have the opportunity each year to gather together on retreat for prayerful support and companionship at St Cassian's Centre. Many Volunteers have gone on to work in the areas of Catholic education, social care and youth ministry.

Lauren Bassett is a former Volunteer and shares her Lasallian Faith Story.

'My Lasallian journey all started when I went on a retreat at St Cassian's Centre as a religiously unresponsive 17-year-old and those four days would change the course of my life forever.

'This led me to apply to be a on the Volunteer Team at Kintbury and because people told me I would be good at it. Maybe it was the fact I came across as loud and confident but with a heart that was in the right place. However, my experience working as a Volunteer gave me far more than I could ever have imagined, equipping me with a Lasallian outlook on life.

Primarily I learnt how to live with people, seeing past any differences and working together as a strong and supportive team. Everyone and anyone who walked through our doors deserved our full respect and attention and were treated with loving care. Our role was to support them on their journey, usually never seeing it to the end, but being able to pick them up, give them a friendly smile and help them move on. This was hard sometimes, watching people grow so much over the retreat and then just waving them off at the end, wondering what will be next for them. As hard as it was it was those retreatants, those experiences, which made you want to face the day.

'My faith strengthened no end while I was working at Kintbury in a way I never expected. Community prayer will always be one of my most precious experiences. It was anything we needed it to be; about us, who we were thinking of, what we wished for, the help we needed, giving us a powerful bond with each other and with God. I felt his presence with me every step of the way and still do. With God by my side I pray that above anything else, this will be what I take with me from my experience of being a Lasallian Volunteer. The friendships are life-changing and the memories unforgettable and my faith has become such an integral part of who I am now.

'I now work as the Chaplain at my old school. I am often told that I am good at my job because I listen, taking time for everyone and giving people second chances. All of these skills I learnt because I was a Lasallian Volunteer. The only reason I am where I am today is because of this experience, learning to live by action and not by faith alone. As a Chaplain if I show respect and love others might do the same, touching the hearts of students and inspiring a Christian spirit.'

At St Cassian's Centre our hope and prayer is that we will keep on telling new stories, especially of how young people, through their Kintbury Experience, have discovered the fullness of life within the Lasallian Family.