

POPULAR WITH STRESSED PROFESSIONALS

NEWS IN BRIEF

COUNCIL BAN ON BEGGING

ATHLONE Town Council wants to bring in bye-laws to ban begging in the town centre.

This week the council supported a motion by Cllr Sheila Buckley Byrne and will write to the Minister Phil Hogan requesting a change in legislation to allow the council regulate begging.

Begging is legal, but gardai have the power to move people on who are harassing or intimidating members of the public.



SPIRITUAL: Geraldine brushes up on theology



SOLITARY: Fr Cuthbert shows Ger the ropes

TRUST

as a hermit

drink in the room. It's all yours. Relax and enjoy!" Fr Cuthbert said.

Of course, the kind of people who will be staying in the God Pods are not the sort to misbehave.

"It's mostly females, from 30s up - people like carers, who need a break," Fr Cuthbert said.

Others who have signed up range from high-powered, stressed-out business types to unemployed people.

Crisis

"Some guests are going through a crisis or just need to recharge their batteries," explained Fr Cuthbert.

Of course, being a hermit means no contact with the outside world. So there was no phone, internet, radio or TV.

So I brought a good book - not the actual Good Book, but a gripping crime thriller. Ironically, I ended up flicking through some books on theology which had been left in the room, including one recommended by Fr Cuthbert: Meditations of a Hermit by Charles de Foucauld. I doubted the 19th-century hermit would approve of the God Pod.

"Not everyone is suitable for the life of a hermit," said Fr Cuthbert, who admits he isn't. "I did spend three days at Glendalough, but I couldn't stick it." He prefers the brotherly camaraderie

of the cloisters with the other 38 monks, who eat and pray together. Rising at 5am, they manage a dairy herd, slaughter their own cattle, raise chickens, make honey from their own beehives and teach in the renowned school.

I joined them for their last prayer at night, the Compline.

At exactly 8.35pm, a bell rang and the monks slipped in from the shadows like ghosts. Incense filled the air as Abbot Patrick led the prayers, mostly in Latin, followed by Latin chants and an act of contrition. Then he sprinkled holy water and the monks vanished silently to their cloisters. I drove back to my hermitage.

I wasn't ready for bed so early, so I went for a nocturnal ramble and ended up breaking my vow of solitude. There were plenty of locals walking around, including some young girls who looked rather well-groomed for a walk in the grounds of a boys' school.

Thinking I'd join the monks for their first prayer at 6.35am, I set my alarm for six, but immediately pressed the snooze button. God may have been listening, but the only sound coming from the God Pod was Zzzz.

You don't have to take a vow of poverty to stay in a God Pod. The suggested donation is €80 a night for a one/two-night stay, but the nightly rate drops to €45 for a week, €40 for two weeks and €35 for three to four weeks. To find out more, see www.glenstal.org.

geraldine.comiskey@sundayworld.com

WORTH €3,000

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