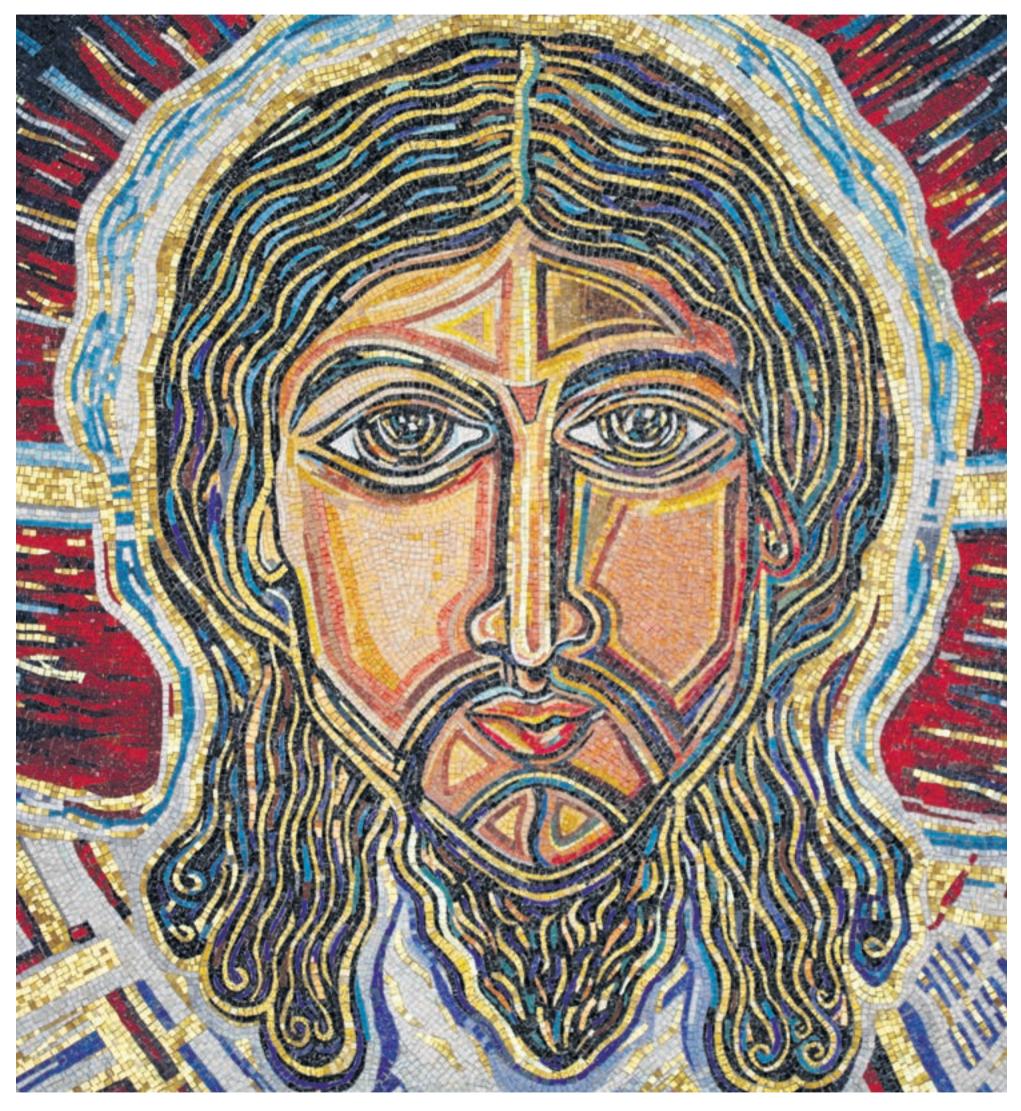
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art for a community

a creative monastic project in Cape Cod

clean-air act

Paul Kerensa's holy jokes

PLUS: folk-singers without knowing it

The pictures tell the story

The vision cherished by two American laywomen was realised in a feast of religious imagery housed in the Church of the Transfiguration, in Cape Cod. Kitty Teague reports

ESTLED in the small town of

Rock Harbor, in Cape Cod

Bay, Massachusetts, lies a rare

jewel. The richly decorated Church of

the Transfiguration, adorned with contemporary artwork, is the home of

The buildings and the community

are the realisation of a dream of two

Episcopal laywomen, Cay Andersen

and Judy Sorensen. The two met at the Episcopal Church of the Holy Spirit, Orleans, Massachusetts, in June

After initiating a prayer-and-Bible-

study group in Mrs Sorenson's home on Crystal Lake, New Jersey, the women began to reach out to larger

audiences, who were inspired by their

practical application of biblical

When the women and their families decided to share a home in 1961,

however, they began to appreciate the benefits of community life. By the following year, they had gathered a

significant following of women who

By now, they had defined several

principles: emphasising the import-

ance of preferring others to oneself;

striving together for a common pur-

pose; and depending on the guidance

of the Holy Spirit in making joint decisions. The Community of Jesus

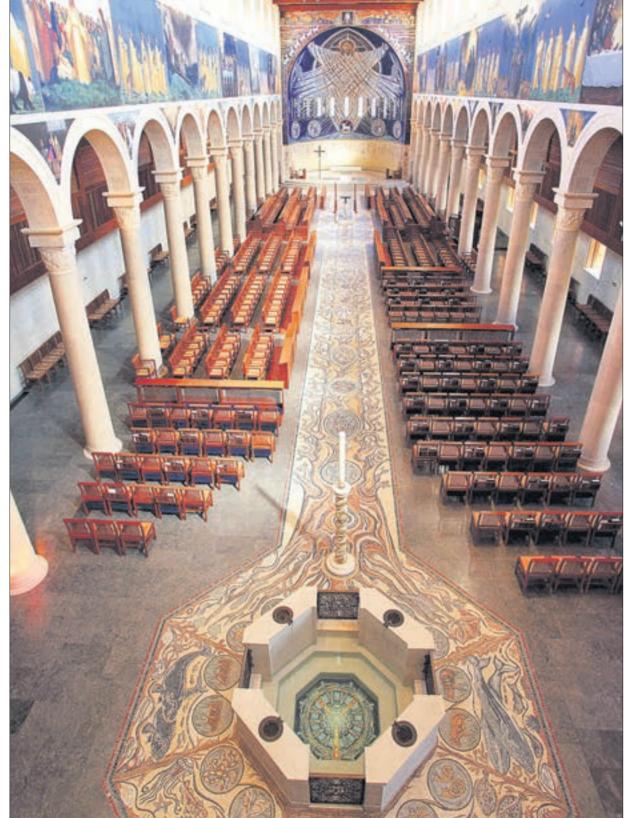
teachings to everyday life.

shared their enthusiasm.

was conceived.

1958, and quickly became friends.

the Community of Jesus.



mosaic aisle; right: the atrium at night,

'The spirit of

carry the

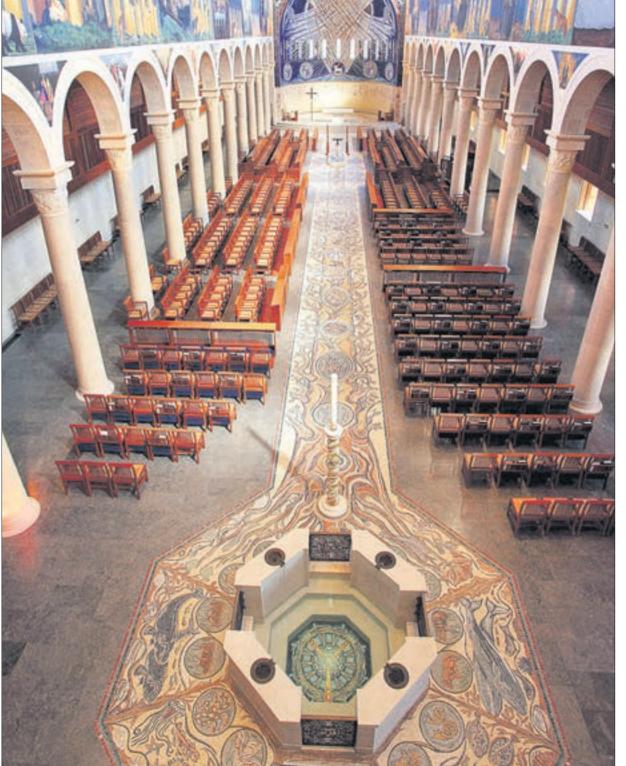
gospel'

creativity can

message of the

It continued to grow, and, by 1969, nomes of the earliest members had been converted into buildings for church use; other houses near by were bought, and the foundations of the community were established. Through the '70s and '80s, the community life evolved into an ecumenical monastic order in the Benedictine tradition, and the community adoped a formal Rule of Life in 2003.

OW, more than half of the lay members live in housing surrounding the church buildings. There are also 25 Brothers living in the Zion Friary, and 60 Sisters in Bethany Convent. Worship and daily



Building community: above: the interior of the church, showing the with the bronze reliefs of Adam and Eve on the west doors



life remain distinctly Episcopalian, but Benedictine.

The earliest buildings of the community — one of them a working bed and breakfast — were the homes of the founders and its first members. But, as the community and the number of visitors grew, expansion became necessary. After Andersen's unexpected death in 1988, and Sorensen's retirement in 1992, the community elected a prioress, Mother Betty Pugsley, who still leads the

It was she who drew together earlier plans and ideas for a new church to replace the first chapel (a converted pump-house). She formed a planning committee to collaborate with architects and lawyers in coming up with a suitable design. William Rawn Associates, Architects, of Boston, was comissioned with the design for the community buildings and the

beyond just words.'

complete.

outside of the high bronze doors,

which were constructed by the

sculptor Romolo Del Deo, is the

image of Adam and Eve with the Tree

of Life — the tree is a recurring theme

NSIDE, a processional pathway in

Caprara and painted by Helen McLean, runs the length of the nave,

and connects the font and the altar.

The first image is a seed and the roots

of the Tree of Life. Then, stories from the Bible flow in chronological order; Cain and Abel, Noah and the Flood,

the life of Moses, and the life of Elijah.

near the altar, are four images that

Towards the end of the pathway,





are emblems of community

church itself, the construction of tivity and spiritual life of the monastic which began on All Saints' Day 1997. community, is followed by a chrysalis, By 2000, the basilica-style church, a symbol of conversion and of the resurrection. Next is a crane, symbolising obedience, and then a rock to built from Minnesota limestone, was

The most striking feature of the Church of the Transfiguration is its commitment to the use of contemporary art and craft, displayed in a recently published and richly illustrated book. Anderson and Sorensen believed that the images in the church should bear faithful adherence to scriptures, and should, throughout the community buildings, tell the story of the Bible from Genesis to Lamb of God.

Sister Mercy, who works in the marketing department of the community, says: "We believe that beauty, visualised in the arts, can be an Christ, from beginning to end. Perhaps the most surprising image expression of the nature of God himself. The spirit of creativity released

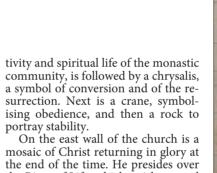
in the community is the depiction of the Transfiguration, which flanks the through the arts can carry the message inside of the main door in the west of the gospel in a powerful way, wall. There is no physical representa-The community commissioned tion of Christ; instead, a panel of gold and clear glass rises to the ceiling, filling the space between the oculus window and the apostles sculpted in artists from around the world, the quality of whose work would not be out of place in a major cathedral. The eloquent narrative begins with the church entrance. Carved into the

The glasswork, by the German sculptor Gabrielle Wilpers, evokes both the Hebrew Shekinah — the presence of God — descending upon, and dwelling with, his people, and the brightness of Christ's transfigured

The presence of Christ, whose face "shone like the sun", is symbolised in mosaic, constructed by Alessandra the vibrant, fiery colours and shapes of the oculus window, created by Helen McLean.

The carvings beneath the glass panel, designed by McLean and sculpted by Régis Demange, show Peter, James, and John, who, true to Matthew's description, "fell on their faces and were filled with awe".

The Church of the Transfiguration by portray the values central to com- the Community of Jesus is published munity life. An image of a bee and a by the Paraclete Press at £39.99 beehive, depicting the organised ac- (Church Times Bookshop £35.99).



mosaic of Christ returning in glory at the end of the time. He presides over the River of Life, which swirls around his feet and gushes forth in the four Gospels, which are represented by the four winged creatures, symbols of the Gospel-writers. In the centre of the bottom panel of the mosaic is the

The series of frescos on the north and south walls of the nave, painted by the Florentine artist Silvestro Pistolesi, recount the story of the life of









Earth and heaven: above: the glass Transfiguration wall, and oculus window; right: the Tree of Life is a recurring theme