



The Prayer Companion

An electronic device developed by the Interaction Research Studio, in the Department of Design at Goldsmiths, University of London has been introduced into the lives of a group of nuns in York who live in an enclosed monastery.

The Prayer Companion - or 'Goldie' as the Poor Clares nuns from St Joseph's in York call it - is a tabletop appliance with a small screen on the top.

Short sentences about current news or people's feelings continuously scroll across the screen reporting up-to-date events and concerns. The sentences are taken from a wide range of global news sites as well as web sites where people can write about their experiences and emotions.

William Gaver, from the Interaction Research Studio, said the overall effect of the Prayer Companion is to give a view onto people's current concerns at individual and social, local and global levels. "We built the Prayer Companion to provide a resource for prayers of intercession after getting to know the Poor Clares nuns from St. Joseph's in York and understanding something about their spiritual lives. They have lived with the device for about a year and a half, and tell us that it has been valuable in keeping their prayers pertinent."

In the York monastery the Prayer Companion is kept on a table by a notice board in a central hallway that the Sisters pass through frequently. The device is designed to be unobtrusive: the screen faces upwards and can only be viewed from a fairly short distance, so that it is not unduly distracting to passersby.



A view from the top: the Prayer Companion displaying a news feed.



Inside the St Joseph's monastery, York.

The Prayer Companion was developed in collaboration with researchers at Newcastle and Northumbria Universities as part of the New Dynamics of Aging (NDA) programme, a seven-year multidisciplinary UK research initiative with the ultimate aim of improving quality of life of older people. The programme is a unique collaboration between five UK Research Councils - ESRC, EPSRC, BBSRC, MRC and AHRC - and is the largest and most ambitious research programme on ageing ever mounted in the UK.