

Life Together in One Heart Chronicle

December 2002

At the beginning of December 2002, we welcomed Benedictine men and women from monasteries in North, Central, and South America to reflect with our community on *The Prophetic Role of Monasticism in Today's World and Church*: Sister Christine Vladimiroff, prioress of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie; Sister Fidelina Monzalvo, from Casa San Benito, Managua, Nicaragua; Sister María del Carmen Cruz, from the Monasterio Reina de Paz, Cobán, Guatemala; Brother Marcelo Barros, prior of the Monastery of the Annunciation, Goiás, Brazil; Abbot Jerome Kodell, Subiaco Abbey in Arkansas; and Sister Patricia Henry, from Monasterio Pan de Vida, Torreón, Mexico.



Sister Fidelina

Brother Marcelo's paper, "The Prophetic Dimension of Monastic Life" (included in this issue), launched four days of rich, challenging, and fruitful discussion among all of us. We all realized that it would not be enough to speak of the call to prophetic existence in the abstract. The challenge, rather, was for each of us to concretize the prophetic dimension of monastic living *within the particularities of the different social, political, and ecclesial situations* in which our communities live. Our discussions moved from theory — whether scriptural or historical — to the concrete exigencies facing the life of each of our communities.



Discussion group on 'The Prophetic Dimension of Monastic Life.'



Sister Christine Vladimiroff, OSB, speaks at the priory.

Sister Christine Vladimiroff posed three questions which, she said, should guide a community's discernment as we try to live faithful, gospel-inspired lives: (1) Who are we? (2) What do we stand for? (3) With whom do we stand? In other words, how are we making the promise of the Reign of God tangible within our communities, as well as for those whom we touch?

Surprisingly, all of the participants highlighted *Benedictine hospitality* as a central expression of counter-cultural, prophetic existence. What seems so humble and ordinary a dimension of our life — the practice of inclusive welcome — becomes a sign of the Reign of God in a world in which human beings are treated

as objects, numbers, statistics, outcasts, or replaceable commodities. We thank each of our Benedictine brothers and sisters for enriching us with their presence and their monastic wisdom.

Shortly after the symposium, we began earnest preparations for Christmas. A few days before the feast itself, five of our Mexican Benedictine sisters came to Weston for two weeks, to celebrate Christmas with us. Their visit included the traditional *Las Posadas*, the Latin American preparation for Christmas, which we celebrated together with Felipe and Elena Ixcot and their family.



Celebration of the Eucharist concluded the days of reflection.

January 2003

We began the New Year by welcoming a group of young men for our Winter Experience “Living With A Monastic Community.” Twice yearly, we open our community life to young men wishing to explore the relevance of Benedictine values to life in today's society. We wish to express our gratitude to each of the young men who shared in our life for those days.

Our Proclamation of a Year of Jubilee was read as part of the Sunday Eucharist on the solemnity of the Epiphany.

Near the end of January, we welcomed Brother Álvaro Oliveira and Brother Lorenzo (Michael) Campos into the community as postulants.

February & March 2003

Dr. Edward Mahoney, director of Graduate Theology, and professor of moral theology at Saint Michael's College in Winooski, Vermont, led our community in two days of study, giving an overview of the rapidly developing areas of genetics and bioethics, and the moral questions these developments pose.

At the end of February, we traveled to Mexico, for a time of exchange with our Benedictine sisters there. We have been in association with our Mexican sisters for more than half of the history of our community. It was, therefore, natural that we would give thanks for the gift of our mutual friendship during our days in Mexico.

For months, the sisters planned a daylong celebration, which began with a two-hour outdoor Eucharist, incorporating Aztec dance, a procession, and the telling of the story of the growth of our relationship as a gift of God. A festive dinner was highlighted by a group of Mariachi musicians, who accompanied us as brothers and sisters danced for nearly three hours! We brothers were moved to tears of amazement and gratitude; our words seemed so inadequate to express the love we felt that day, humbled by the sisters' outpouring of affection. Having walked, risked, laughed, and cried together for more than twenty-five years, the linking of our communities continues to be the work of the Holy Spirit.



Sisters perform Aztec dance during anniversary Eucharist.

As February became March, we took the short flight from Mexico City to Guatemala City, making a brief stop in San Salvador. Four years ago, our Mexican Benedictine sisters, at the invitation of the Benedictine sisters of Ferdinand, Indiana, assumed responsibility for the Monasterio Reina de Paz, located in Cobán, Alta Vera Paz, in Guatemala's north-central highlands.

Touching down on the soil of Central America, the land of so many martyrs, was a profoundly moving experience for us. From Guatemala City, we traveled the seven-hour journey to Cobán by bus. Expecting the lush green of the highlands, we saw instead a land suffering from a severe drought. The dry, brown landscape was a terribly apt visual metaphor for the suffering of Guatemala to this very day.

The monastery, in the city of Cobán, serves as a house of formation for sisters who have made their first profession. The small community is international, with sisters from Mexico, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and the United States.



Sisters, brothers lead singing at the liturgy.

The sisters introduced us to what Latin Americans call *la realidad*, the actual situation in the country. While peace accords have been signed, officially ending the thirty-year long civil war, the accords have not been implemented. Under the guise of a civilian government, the military and wealthy landowners continue the repressive policies of the past. Attempts among the people to organize for change have been effectively stopped, and now a cloud of despair and apathy hangs over the country. Death squads continue to operate with impunity, while some civilians turn to gangs and vigilante justice.

One of the deepest joys of our visit to Guatemala was the presence of Felipe and Elena Ixcot, Guatemalan refugees who live in sanctuary here at the priory. While the country is not yet safe enough for them to return permanently, they are involved in a number of projects among their Maya people, which involve occasional visits to their homeland. We have often dreamt together of the day when we might experience them in their own land. This year, the opportunity arose. Felipe and Elena (who were already in Guatemala, coordinating their Midwife Project) came from their home village to Cobán, and we shared some days together with the sisters.



Sisters in Cobán community, Guatemala.



Nuevo Porvenir resettlement camp community members.

The sisters' monastery is located near a community of Benedictine monks, a foundation of Blue Cloud Abbey in South Dakota. The monks received us warmly, as we joined them for Eucharist and supper one evening. Some of the monks offer pastoral care to remote villages, hours away from the city of Cobán. One of these is a resettlement camp for refugees who have returned from exile in Mexico. The camp's location is more than remote, since it also lacks water and electricity. The people have next to nothing. During a visit to the camp, we met with the people, listening as their leaders told the story of their exile, return, and the harsh struggle for life. The visit concluded with the celebration of the Eucharist in their small chapel.

An afternoon with the Dominican friars in Cobán was an immensely rewarding experience. The Dominicans have established a center whose main work is the inculturation of the church into the reality of the majority Maya population.

Near the end of our experience in Cobán, the sisters surprised us, after the Sunday Eucharist, with another celebration of our fiftieth anniversary — this time, with musicians from the area playing two marimbas.

April 2003

At the beginning of April, Bishop Kenneth Angell of the Burlington diocese visited the community for a day of prayer, exchange, and, as always, brotherly joy.

A few days later, we hosted a weekend of reflection for the women and men who work with us at the priory, and who help to extend our hospitality to so many persons.

May 2003

In mid-May, Brother Richard and Brother Michael represented us at a regional meeting of Benedictine and Cistercian communities held at Saint Joseph's Abbey in Spencer, Massachusetts.

June 2003

Since early winter, brothers had been discussing the possibility of acquiring and raising a small number of animals on our property. Central to the discussions were the values of a better stewardship of our land, and the opportunity to live closely with and to care for other species. An essential ingredient in all the discernment was the enthusiasm of the community to open a kind of new chapter in our life together. At the beginning of June, the dream and the planning became a reality. Within a very short time, we had a small flock of sheep, a donkey and a llama (as guard animals for the sheep), chickens, and rabbits. In addition, we continue to raise two pigs each year.

Already the presence of these animals has brought us a new closeness to the rhythms of nature, a respect for these creatures, and a new dimension to each day, now that “animal chores” are a part of many brothers' work schedules.

On June 3, we visited the monks, nuns, and lay members of New Skete monastery, (an Orthodox monastic community nearby in New York State) for a day of sharing.

Our visit concluded with the celebration of Vespers in their magnificent monastic church, marking the close of the Orthodox Easter season.

As we did in February, we set aside a few days in early June for community education. We invited Fr. Richard Berubé, SSE, professor of theology at Saint Michael's College in Winooski, Vermont, who offered a series of presentations on Islam.

July 2003

A major celebration of our Jubilee took place on the weekend of the feast of Saint Benedict, July 11, 12, and 13. Sister Inés Sánchez, then prioress of our Benedictine Sisters in Mexico, accompanied by Sister Candelaria López, came to Weston for this anniversary celebration.



The 90-member orchestra from Kinhaven Music School opened our festivities.

A ninety-member orchestra, composed of students and faculty from the Kinhaven Music School in Weston, opened the festivities with an inspiring and joyful concert of orchestral and chamber music on Friday evening, July 11.



Folk dancing at the celebration

On Saturday, July 12, we celebrated the anniversaries of monastic profession of three of our brothers at the Eucharist.

In the afternoon, The Flock Theatre of Connecticut presented a dramatization with puppets, highlighting the plight of children in our society.

In the evening, we gathered for the premier presentation of our new video, *With One Heart*.

On Sunday, a festive Eucharist was followed by picnics, the sharing of an anniversary cake, and group folk dancing. Over one thousand persons joined in the celebration on Sunday.

Our Mexican sisters returned to Mexico for their congregation's General Chapter of Election. Sister Rosa González, OSB, who has served the poor in rural Mexico and in Brazil, was elected prioress for a six-year term.

Later in July, we welcomed Buddhist monks and nuns from Maple Forest Monastery, in nearby Woodstock, Vermont, for a day of sharing on monastic practice. The Buddhist monastics offered a chant during our celebration of MIDDAY PRAYER.



Brothers and friends gather to cut the anniversary cake.

Brother Richard serves on the board of the Alliance for International Monasticism (AIM). He traveled to Mount Saint Benedict Monastery in Erie, Pennsylvania for the annual meeting. Abbot Thomas Hillenbrand, OSB, abbot of Blue Cloud Abbey, Marvin, South Dakota, (also on the AIM Board) returned to Weston with Brother Richard, and spent four days with our community. We are grateful for his visit and his joyful, brotherly spirit.

We are always enriched by the many guests who come to the priory, whether individually or in groups. In late July, a group of Jews and Christians who have formed a Torah Study group came to the priory with the rabbi with whom they study. The group invited brothers to join with Rabbi Allan Ullman and the study group in reflecting together on Psalm 23. It was a truly remarkable experience of rabbinic learning, which coaxed the heart's insights out of each person participating.

Finally, at month's end, the community joined with representatives of the parishes of the diocese in celebrating the 150th anniversary of the establishment of the Diocese of Burlington. Bishop Kenneth Angell presided and preached at the Eucharist in Saint Joseph's Co-Cathedral in Burlington. Our community was invited to sing a meditation song after the sharing of communion. The celebration concluded with an immense outdoor picnic on the grounds of the diocesan Bishop Brady Center.

August 2003

This year also marks the fiftieth anniversary of the welcoming of the monastic community by the Diocese of Burlington. To celebrate this dimension of our Jubilee Year, we had a special celebration of Evening Prayer on August 12, involving representatives of the laity, the communities of women and men religious in Vermont, and the clergy of the diocese.



Bishop Kenneth Angell blesses the anniversary tree.

Bishop Kenneth Angell served as presider at Evening Prayer, and our long-time friend, Bishop Paul Bootkoski, bishop of Metuchen, New Jersey, offered a moving homily. (The text of Bishop Bootkoski's homily appears in this issue of the *Bulletin*). The celebration concluded with the planting and blessing of an anniversary tree near the Barn Chapel. Monks and nuns from New Skete Monastery, who also participated in the celebration, offered a Byzantine chant as we blessed the anniversary tree.

On August 15, Brother Richard, Brother John, and Brother Mark represented our

community at the solemn monastic profession of Mother Cecilia of the Abbey of Regina Laudis, in Bethlehem, Connecticut.

September 2003

The beginning of September is the time for our community retreat. It is a time of ingathering, when we hope to strengthen the bonds of brotherhood among us, and to deepen our fidelity to the monastic values we profess. "Shaping Holy Lives,' A Conference on Benedictine Spirituality: God's Workshop," an address by Archbishop Rowan Williams, the archbishop of Canterbury, stimulated a series of discussions (which have still continued!). It was originally delivered at a symposium at Trinity Church, New York City, in April 2003.

Near the end of September, following a meeting of the abbots president of the Benedictine Confederation at the Abbey of Saint Benoît-du-Lac in Quebec, Abbot Thierry Portevin, abbot president of the Subiaco Benedictine Congregation, shared in our common life for a few days. As president of an international congregation of Benedictine monasteries, Abbot Thierry has a world-embracing vision, particularly with regard to monastic life in Africa and Asia.

October 2003

In late October, the monks and nuns of Maple Forest Monastery (the Buddhist communities founded by the Vietnamese teacher Thich Nhat Hanh) welcomed us for a day of shared meditative practice, conversation, and a common meal. Across the differences of language, culture, and religious tradition, we are united by the genius of the monastic vision, in a communion deeper than words.

Also in late October, Brother Richard and Brother Michael represented our community at a two-day meeting of Region I of the Conference of Major Superiors of Men.



Monks and nuns from regional Benedictine and Cistercian communities, who participated in the autumn meeting.

November 2003

As part of our anniversary year, we hosted the fall regional meeting of Benedictine and Cistercian Communities at the beginning of November. The opportunity to mutually share experiences and questions, with other men and women who follow the Rule of Benedict, is always an encouragement and enrichment.

During this year, we have wanted to express our gratitude to the townspeople of Weston and surrounding area, who first welcomed Abbot Leo and the fledgling monastery, and who have been our neighbors for these fifty years. In mid-November, we presented our new video, *With One Heart*, at The Weston Playhouse, followed by a reception with refreshments.

Fall/Winter 2003 Bulletin



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