

# Life Together in One Heart Chronicle

*We came from Palestine to Egypt and visited one of the fathers in the desert.  
After he had welcomed us, we asked him, "When you receive guests,  
why don't you fast? In Palestine they do."  
He answered, "Fasting is always possible, but I cannot keep you here forever.  
I receive Christ when I receive you,  
so I must do all I can to show you love.  
'How can the friends of the Bridegroom fast,  
when the Bridegroom is among them?'"*  
JOHN CASSIAN

In this example from the lives of the early desert mothers and fathers, we see how joy and compassion lay at the heart of the Christian life—a response to the always new presence of God-with-us in the persons who enter our lives, cross our thresholds, capture our hearts, and share our table. As brothers, we are challenged to recognize this gift of Emmanuel in the encounters of each day.

## July 2005

At the beginning of July, the entire community spent a day at the diocesan center with Bishop Kenneth Angell, bishop of Burlington, and with Bishop Salvatore Matano, the diocese's recently ordained bishop coadjutor. Following the celebration of the Eucharist, the bishops joined the brothers for a festive picnic and for a time of informal fellowship



The brothers gathered with Bishop Kenneth Angell and Bishop Salvatore Matano.

Each year, on the weekend closest to July 11, we celebrate the feast of Saint Benedict with many friends of the community, and include during the weekend an opportunity to exchange on values and concerns close to our hearts. This year, representatives of a Vermont based advocacy group, CHABHA (Children Affected by HIV/AIDS), offered an audio-visual presentation and discussion on the HIV/AIDS pandemic, particularly in Africa.

Following the weekend feast, Brother Richard traveled to Mount Saint Benedict Monastery in Erie, Pennsylvania, for the annual meeting of the board of directors of the [Alliance for International Monasticism](#) USA (AIM). This year, the Benedictine Sisters of Erie are celebrating the 150th anniversary of their foundation. In his visit to Erie, Brother Richard was able to convey to the Sisters our best wishes for their Jubilee Year, and our gratitude for their witness as monastic women in the church and in our society.

The forging of links with other monastic communities has been an important part of our life. Such links join us to Christian monastics, of course; but in recent years, the circle of communion has

widened to embrace monastic communities of the Buddhist tradition. Vermont is home to Maple Forest Monastery, founded by the Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh. At the end of July, a group of brothers attended a ceremony of groundbreaking and blessing for a new Tibetan Buddhist monastery, Vajra Dakini Nunnery, in Bristol, Vermont. With reverence for the distinctiveness of our religious traditions, we also recognize a common "monastic heart" which guides our search and our practice.

Near July's end, we mourned the death of our good friend, Aline Proctor, having lived with cancer for seventeen years. Originally from Rhode Island, Aline and her husband Jim moved to the nearby town of Belmont several years ago. We soon recognized in them a love for one another that was palpable, overflowing in generosity toward others, and nourished by a life of prayer. Soon Jim and Aline began helping us in our extension of hospitality, cooking in our kitchen on Wednesdays, and helping in our gift shop. Throughout her long struggle with cancer, even when her energy was at its lowest ebb because of her regime of therapy, her spirit glowed with a remarkable kindness and attention to others. The last weeks of her life were a paschal journey for all who became a part of Jim and Aline's life, accompanying them during those difficult yet grace-filled days. There was an outpouring of support and care from their family, and from numberless friends in the area. Yet everyone knew that Aline was gifting us with her peace and her trust, even as she entrusted herself to the hands of the God of life. Fr. André Houle, pastor of Saint Peter's Church in Rutland, Vermont, who came to know Aline in her final days, presided at the Eucharist of Resurrection.

## **August 2005**

Together with so many persons and communities around the world, we were shocked and saddened by the tragic death of Brother Roger of Taizé. One can only imagine the great blow that this has been for the brothers of Taizé. From the perspective of our Easter faith, we know that Brother Roger had long ago surrendered his life for the sake of the Reign of God. And we believe that this beacon of reconciliation died with the word of mercy on his lips. In Latin America, there is the custom of referring to the death of a believer as his or her *Pascua*, his or her Easter. In giving thanks for the life and witness of Brother Roger, we hold the brothers of Taizé and their new prior, Brother Alois, in our fraternal prayer.

Many of you who have visited the priory over the years fondly remember Ellen Gawenus, a close friend of ours who quickly was loved by those who met her. Ellen died in mid-August at the age of 85. Our Barn Chapel was filled to capacity for a Service of Thanksgiving for her life. Ellen helped us for many years in our Gallery Shop, and was often the first person a visitor might meet in coming to the monastery. Though slight in frame, her welcome was always wide and generous, and her wit lively. What we recognized as her wisdom—the fruit of a committed, compassionate life—she offered simply and unpretentiously. Ellen and Paul Gawenus moved to Weston from New Jersey in the 1960s. A bond of friendship began to deepen, made tangible in Paul's advice to the brothers in the care of our apple orchards, and in Ellen's occasional cooking and in her presence in the Shop. Through regular trips to the southern United States, they gained a profound awareness of our national sin of racism, matched by a vibrant love for African American culture and by friendships that defied the "distinctions" of race. As Ellen aged, her health deteriorated progressively; yet she bore her physical suffering with dignity, her heart set on the gifts in her life. Her love and compassion never weakened. She embodied an expression once used to refer to the southern novelist Flannery O'Connor (whom Ellen loved): "grace on crutches."

**Brother Michael** shares this reflection on the special gift of Ellen Gawenus:

**LAST SUMMER**, Ellen was on the path to the Barn Chapel. It was a beautiful day-lots of sun. Sitting in her wheelchair, she was an integral part of all the beauty around her. Around her neck she was wearing what I thought to be an arrowhead. "What's that?" I asked, wanting, as always, to get to know her better. "A fossilized shark's tooth," she replied, holding the necklace in her hand so that she could see it too. I bent down, feeling invited to hold the rock in the tips of my fingers. "And now you have touched it!" She was beaming. That is the Ellen we love, the one who could touch and be touched, and who kept all of us awake to the dynamic of touching.



"Blessed are the pure in heart":  
Ellen Gawenus with Meg MacLaury,  
daughter of Kyle and Emily MacLaury.

In the last photograph taken of Ellen, she is holding a tiny little baby. Here she was, after many years of living, holding a newborn whose life had only just begun. What was amazing is that the two reflected each other as in a mirror. Who was old? Who the wise? The common ground of God's gracefulness was reflected fully by both of them.

I do not think of Ellen as dead, or as "going up to heaven." She is in our history-the whole history of our earth coming into being, a history that will not forget Jesus of Nazareth or Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. A history-all the stories-that continue in our own times, as little children grow, as wonder is born in each dawning day, in our becoming a leaven for our world. ✚

At the end of August, we began the project of the reconstruction of the plaza in front of the Stone Chapel. For twenty-five years, the plaza has served as a space of welcome and gathering for all who come to the Priory. In the last several years the pavement has progressively deteriorated and has been in need of serious repair. It will include safer walkways and a new handicap-accessible entrance into the Stone Chapel.



The work of reconstructing the chapel plaza well underway.

## September-October 2005

As brothers, we desire that our word of commitment be "new every morning." Yet there are graced times which illuminate the promise of faithfulness. The profession of a new brother is one such moment. Our annual retreat in September was a time of special community preparation for the First Monastic Profession of our brother Alvaro Mota de Oliveira. Brother Alvaro is a native of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. We first met him when our community visited the community of the Benedictine monastery of the Annunciation in Goiás, Brazil, in 2002.



Brother Alvaro's family, with the community: from left to right, Brother Alvaro; his mother, Zita; his sister, Marilia; and his sister and brother-in-law, Lina and Anderson.

Our meeting led to his request to come to Weston for an extended experience of our life. Living those months with us unfolded into a time of observership, postulancy, and novitiate. On Saturday, October 1, brother Alvaro made his First Monastic Profession in our community. Brother Alvaro's mother, Zita, his sisters, Marilia and Lina, and his brother-in-law, Anderson, came from Brazil for the two weeks surrounding the day of profession. Their presence among us was a joy and a tangible sign that our family has been greatly enriched by the warmth of the Brazilian heart. (Brother Alvaro shares his experience in the article "Beginning, Yet a Fullness." The opening article of this *Bulletin*, "That the Word may Become Flesh, Again," is also a reflection on monastic profession in our community.)

Brother Richard and Brother Placid represented our community at the New England regional meeting of the Conference of Major Superiors of Men. This autumn's meeting, held at Assumption College in Worcester, was held jointly with the bishops of New England. Brother Richard offers a reflection on the meeting in this *Bulletin*, "Learning the Art of Dialogue."

Later in October, we received the news of the death of Lady Abbess Benedict Duss, OSB, the foundress of the Abbey of Regina Laudis, in Bethlehem, Connecticut. (Our own founder, Abbot Leo, had once served as confessor to the monastic community at Regina Laudis.) Brother Richard, Brother John, Brother Mark, and Brother Peter traveled to the Abbey for a day, to convey our support during the Sisters' time of loss. Once again, we are grateful to Mother David Serna, OSB, abbess, and to the Regina Laudis community, for their warm and gracious welcome.

## November 2005

Each November for the last twenty-five years, a group of Lutheran pastors from the northeast have made an annual weeklong retreat at the priory. The retreat, within the rhythm of our monastic life and hospitality, has been an opportunity for mutual support and personal renewal, as they offer their ministry of Word and Sacrament to God's people. We count these twenty-five years of friendship as a unique gift in our life, an experience of communion in the freedom of the Gospel, flowing from the grace of "God's love made visible in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8).

Sister Annabel Laity, abbess of Maple Forest Monastery in South Woodstock, Vermont, together

with a small group of nuns and a monk from her Buddhist monastic community, visited our monastery for a day in early November. While there has been ongoing exchange between our communities, for most of the monastics who visited, this was their first meeting with our brothers. We treasure our friendship with the brothers and sisters of Maple Forest Monastery.

The call to deepen our solidarity with the peoples of Latin America comes in many forms, but especially in persons who bear the testimony of hope and struggle in their flesh. The Anglican bishop of El Salvador and Primate of the Region of Central America, the Most Reverend Martín Barahona, together with his wife Elizabeth, visited the priory, to speak with us about increasingly difficult situation in El Salvador today, and about the work of the church in serving the needs of the poor majority. Our friends and neighbors, the Very Reverend Richard Bauer and his wife Stephanie (who have strong ties to the church and people of Central America), made the visit possible. They accompanied the Barahonas, and continue to enrich us with the wealth of their own experience and solidarity.

In part, Weston Priory was born from Abbot Leo's love for the Jewish people and his steadfast commitment to overcoming the churches' centuries-long legacy of anti-Judaism. That love and commitment remain alive in our community today.

In mid-November, Rabbi Arthur Green together with a chanter, Ebn Leader, and a group of students from the Rabbinical School at Hebrew College in Newton, Massachusetts, came to the priory for a time of mutual exchange with the brothers. Our time together included the welcoming of *Shabbat* (the Sabbath) on Friday evening, *Shabbat Morning Prayer* and Torah study, discussion, and the closing of *Shabbat* at sundown on Saturday.

Rabbi Green continues to be a leading voice in the renewal of Jewish spirituality and theology today. We are grateful to him and to his companions for the opportunity to encounter the God of Israel on the holy ground of reverence for one another.



Rabbi Arthur Green (2nd from left) with the brothers.



Chanter Ebn Leader (2nd from right), with Rabbinical students and Brother Columba.

As you may recall from our last *Bulletin*, we have been preparing a recording of some of our newly composed songs. Having recorded six songs in May, we completed an additional seven in early November. In the intervening months between May and November, Sister Laura Bufano, CSJ, has guided and inspired our preparation and practices. John and Ann Quinn offered the hospitality of their home, where John recorded our singing. We thank all these friends for their encouragement and generosity.

## Compassion is Possible

Lest we forget, these last months have been a time of great suffering for the global human family: the enormous devastation and displacement caused by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita; the continuing, shamefully negligent response of the federal government, exposing the economic and racial segregation festering in the soul of this country<sup>1</sup>; the massive loss of life caused by the earthquake in South Asia and by the storms which ravaged Central America; the senseless, mounting loss of life in the war in Iraq.<sup>2</sup>

But this suffering can never be expressed in a listing of tragedies. The age of 24/7 news cycles tempts us to turn the page to the next story and to forget. However, each disaster, every tragedy, bears the face of human lives lost, children orphaned, thousands displaced, and cities and villages destroyed. The voice of conscience should awaken an empathy moving us to actively respond.

In this *Bulletin*, we have heard the voice of our monastic ancestors. These women and men dedicated themselves to realizing the meaning of the commandment of love in their time and place. Their dedication flowered in a profound compassion toward the suffering and weakness of their brothers and sisters. Refusing to forget their neighbor, they became bearers of the mercy, kindness, and tenderness of God in very difficult situations. To them, the neighbor was the presence of Christ in various guises. *"I must do all I can to show you love."* They teach us all that it is possible for our lives to be transformed by love. ✚

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1. Cf. Jonathan Kozol, *The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America* (New York: Crown, 2005).
  2. In October, the number of U.S. military personnel killed in the Iraq war exceeded 2,000. As of November 2, 2005, Iraq Body Count reported the number of civilians killed in the Iraq war to be 26,797 (minimum) to 30,163 (maximum). Cf. [www.iraqbodycount.net](http://www.iraqbodycount.net). Independent British investigators place the number of civilian casualties significantly higher.

### Fall-Winter 2005 Bulletin



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