

Life Together in One Heart Chronicle

December 2004 - May 2005

Each year, the hushed stillness of a Vermont winter offers us the opportunity for a different rhythm in our community life and hospitality, a unique invitation to silence and listening. It is a time for dialogue, in order to deepen the central values of our monastic path. Gradually, the winter landscape gives way to the bursting forth of spring and the beginning of another season of shared life.

DECEMBER 2004

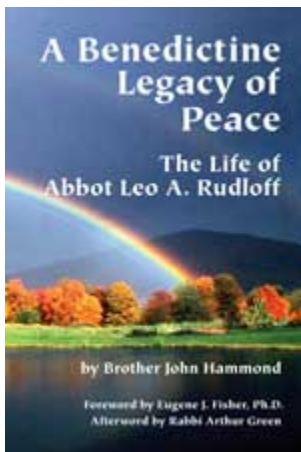
Sharing our fraternal life

The celebration of Christmas was followed by our *Winter Experience in Monastic Living*, during which three young men—Benjamin Rodríguez, David Freiler, and John Flynn—participated in our community life for seven days. Twice each year, young men bring their searching faith, their questions, and their life-perspectives; and we are greatly enriched. We thank each of them for their friendship.

Following the Monastic Experience, both John and David have asked to spend a longer period of time with our community.



John Flynn, David Freiler, and Benjamin Rodríguez, participants in our winter Monastic Experience.



JANUARY 2005

Witness to a life of reconciliation

The beginning of the new year was marked by the publication of *A Benedictine Legacy of Peace: The Life of Abbot Leo A. Rudloff*, written by our brother John. This loving testimony to the life and vision of our founder, brother Leo—the culmination of several years of research and writing—has brought his amazing story of courage and foresight to a wider public. Persons interested in the history of our monastery, as well as in Abbot Leo's role in monastic renewal and in Jewish-Christian reconciliation will find the book richly rewarding. The book's publication was the final fruit of the Jubilee Year of our foundation.

We are pleased to share a few of the responses to *A Benedictine Legacy of Peace*:

- Your marvelous book arrived, and I dropped everything and started reading. [...] It is such a tribute to Brother Leo, relating his struggles, his sufferings, his achievements. [...] I, for one, was not aware of the tremendous struggles of Brother Leo to implement the needed reforms in the reinterpretation of St. Benedict's Rule." (Catherine DeVinck)
- [The book] is a wonderful tribute to Brother Leo, and he was certainly one of the

thirty-six [Just Ones] while he lived.” (Fr. Martin Boler, OSB, prior of Mount Saviour Monastery, Pine City, New York)

- You have created a work that speaks so eloquently of the human, Gospel-inspired work that God brought into our lives.” (The Rev. Richard L. Schaper)
- [Abbot Leo] stayed involved with Christian and Jewish relations and monastic studies till the end of his life. This book is a must for those who have Benedictine collections or collections of Catholic biography.” (Brother Benet Exton, OSB, St. Gregory’s University, Shawnee, Oklahoma)¹

Monastic dialogue and celebration

Later in January, we traveled to Mexico, sharing the life of our Mexican Benedictine Sisters for two weeks. This year, our sojourn in México lindo had a dual focus.

Together with the Sisters, we co-hosted a gathering of representative Benedictine women and men from monasteries in South, Central, and North America. The gathering was a continuation of a similar dialogue held at Weston during our 50th anniversary year. This year, we expanded our circle and gathered at the *Centro Guadalupe* in Cuernavaca, Mexico.



Benedictine monastics from the Americas gathered at the *Centro Guadalupe* in Mexico.

In addition to the Weston community and members of the Mexican Sisters’ congregation, we were joined by the following Benedictine monastics: fr. Simón Pedro Arnold, prior of the *Monasterio de la Resurrección*, Chucuito, Peru; S. Christine Vladimiroff, prioress of Mount Saint Benedict Monastery, Erie, Pennsylvania; S. Patricia Henry, prioress of the Monasterio Pan de Vida, in Torreón, Mexico; S. Maricarmen Bracamontes, also from Pan de Vida Monastery; S. Lupita María Barajas, prioress of the Benedictine Monastery of Perpetual Adoration, Tucson, Arizona; S. Bernadine Reyes, prioress of Saint Scholastica Monastery, Boerne, Texas; fr. Thomas Hillenbrand, abbot of Blue Cloud Abbey in South Dakota; fr. Martin Boler, prior of Mount Saviour Monastery, Pine City, New York; and br. Marcelo Barros, prior of the Monastery of the Annunciation, Goiás, Brazil.

In preparation for this dialogue, representing the experiences and challenges of monastic communities throughout the Americas, we shared a paper written by fr. Simón Pedro on the prophetic call of monastic life in today’s world and church. In our gathering, we moved to reflection on the concrete realities in which each community lives—politically, economically, ecclesially. Each discussion was a call to humility. What are the questions facing us in our rapidly changing post-modern cultures? What kind of presence-in-the-world are we being summoned to? What must we let go of, so that true life may blossom? How does it feel to live between the hopes of yesterday and the unknown of tomorrow? What would it mean to accompany our people in a time of despair and death? What do we see as the gifts that we can bring to the peoples with whom we share our monastic life? In a

profound sense, the Cuernavaca gathering began to flesh out the three-part challenge offered by S. Christine Vladimiroff during our Jubilee year gathering: Who are we? What do we stand for? With whom do we stand? To touch the roots of our monastic calling, in the company of women and men from differing cultures and life-experiences, has been an immensely rewarding experience of the vitality of the Benedictine vision. We all hope that the building of bridges and the forging of links among our communities can be a witness of communion in a world marked by disintegration.

The touching of roots was central to another experience which we shared together during our days of dialogue. Together we traveled to the small indigenous village of Amatlán, approximately one hour from the Center in Cuernavaca. Amatlán has been the home of the Nahuatl people for millennia, and their customs and traditions as the First Peoples continue to flourish, even in the face of persecution and domination.



Leaders of the indigenous community of Amatlán. Ignacio Torres, center.

The leaders of the community welcomed us, and for almost two hours, shared their ancient history, cosmology, and present day struggles. After a festive, traditional lunch (at which we celebrated Abbot Thomas' birthday), one of the community leaders, Ignacio (Nacho) Torres, lead us to a sacred site deep into the cavernous mountains. Gathered together in a circle, Nacho drew us into the profound mysticism of his people, inviting us to share an indigenous ritual of prayer, invoking the Creator Spirit from the four cardinal points. (The two poetic texts in this *Bulletin* are reflections on this experience.)

The second focus of our visit with our Sisters was the celebration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the foundation of their congregation. The chapel of the Sisters' *Casa Central* in Mexico City was filled to overflowing for the festive Eucharist. Elements of indigenous culture were woven into the liturgy, culminating with sisters dancing rhythmically down the length of the chapel, bearing clay pots of incense, and the Book of the Gospels decorated with flowing multi-colored ribbons. The Eucharist was followed by a festive dinner in the Sisters' honor, complete with traditional Mexican music and dances.



Procession with the Book of the Gospels during the 75th anniversary Eucharist at the Sisters' Casa Central, Mexico City.



Cutting the anniversary cake. (From the right: Sister Rosa González, prioress; Sister María Durán, former prioress; Sister Fidelina Monzalvo, former prioress; and Brother Richard.)

Following our experiences in Mexico, brother Richard participated in the annual meeting of Benedictine Abbots and Priors, hosted by the monks of Prince of Peace Abbey in Oceanside, California. Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald, president of the Pontifical Commission for Inter-religious Dialogue, was the main presenter at the meeting. Since the time of the Second Vatican Council, monastic communities have been strongly encouraged to become partners in the encounter of the world's great religions. The article "[*Seeing the Face of God: A Monastic Dialogue*](#)" is a reflection on this meeting, and on the vital importance of inter-religious dialogue.

MARCH 2005

A shared journey of faith

Once again this year, we gathered with the many friends of our community, who join us in offering welcome and hospitality here at the monastery, for a retreat weekend of prayer, reflection, and companionship. The generosity of these women and men, who share deeply in the spirit of the Rule of Benedict, makes it possible for us to open our doors to all who come. We can never say enough how grateful we are for the gift of their friendship in our life.



Sharing the joy of friendship during our co-workers' retreat.

Large numbers of persons joined us for common prayer during the days of Holy Week, culminating in the celebration of the great Vigil of Easter. Each year, we link this central mystery of our faith to the experiences of passover, exodus, self-giving, and resurrection in our own time. As we enact the Gospel of Jesus' gift of self, we discover that it is meant to be our story too, the journey of the entire disciple community.

APRIL—MAY 2005

The family of creation comes to life

Early spring was also marked by the birth of new lambs and rabbits, and the arrival of piglets and baby chicks. Friends of the community, Gus and Peggy Skamarycz and Mike Bayko, helped us to install two beehives and generously shared their years of experience. The bees are already making honey. The pollination of the apple orchards by the bees will lead to magnificent blossoms, plentiful apples, and, in the autumn, apple cider made by the brothers! All creation is interconnected. Our thanks to our friends for helping to make this new venture in beekeeping possible.



Brothers Placid, Augustine, and Daniel rejoice in the birth of new lambs.



Brother Placid and Gus Skamarycz preparing the bee house.

‘For you I am a bishop. With you I am a Christian.’ (St. Augustine)

The beginning of the Easter season was poignantly marked by the death of Pope John Paul II on the Saturday of Easter Week. The Church in Latin America has the custom of using the word *Pascua* (in Spanish) or *Páscoa* (in Portuguese) to refer to the death of a Christian, referring to his or her Easter. The following words from John Paul’s 2001 Easter Sunday message are a fitting testament: “Men and women of the Third Millennium, the Easter gift of light that scatters the darkness of fear and sadness is meant for everyone; all are offered the gift of the peace of the Risen Christ, who breaks the chains of violence and hatred.

Rediscover today that the world is no longer a slave to the inevitable. This world of ours can change: peace is possible even where for too long there has been fighting and death. Men and women, draw from Christ’s tomb, empty now forever, the strength needed to defeat the powers of evil and death, at the service of a better future for all.”

Bishop Kenneth Angell has served as the bishop of Burlington since 1992. During these years, his profound humanity, deep spirituality, joy, and pastoral love have radiated throughout the diocese. Despite clergy shortage and other major burdens of his ministry, and especially the loss of his brother and sister-in-law in the attacks of September 11, 2001, Bishop Angell continued to offer the very best of himself in the service of the local church. He continually witnessed to the inherent dignity of every human person. For our community, he has been a faithful and caring friend. Bishop Angell will retire as the diocesan bishop in the fall of this year, entering into a new stage of his service to the gospel and a well-deserved relief from the daily demands of his ministry. We will miss him as bishop. At the same time, we wish to express to him our gratitude, affection, and prayer.

On April 19, the entire community participated in the liturgy of ordination of the Reverend Msgr. Salvatore Matano, a priest of the diocese of Providence, as bishop coadjutor of the diocese of Burlington. Bishop Matano will become diocesan bishop when Bishop Angell retires. As a Benedictine monastic community, we join in welcoming Bishop Matano to the diocese and assure him of our prayer and brotherly support as he begins his new ministry.

As we entered Saint Joseph's Co-Cathedral for Bishop Matano's ordination, word began to spread throughout the cathedral, in whispered tones, that Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger had been elected bishop of Rome, taking the name Pope Benedict XVI. April 19 became a day of transition for both the local Church of Burlington and for the entire Roman Communion. As he undertakes his new responsibilities at a time marked by such polarization in the church and in the world, Pope Benedict deserves the prayers of all Christians and people of good will, that his ministry may truly be a service of unity and reconciliation. May he be nourished by the teaching of the Second Vatican Council (in its Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*) that the living Word of God is addressed to all God's people. In the long tradition of catholicity, our witness to the Gospel, as a Spirited communion, is *symphonic*- "a concert of charisms." The Word of God is addressed to all; the responsibility to listen and contribute rests on all.²

The teaching of Saint Benedict, in his *Rule*, on the nature of Christian leadership, can surely serve as a guide for the ministry of the bishop of Rome among the churches: that he *listen with the ear of his heart, especially to the least*; that he *strive to be loved rather than feared*; that he *not crush the bruised reed*; that he *love the brothers and sisters*; and that he *prefer nothing to the love of Christ, who came to serve rather than be served*. As Pope Benedict begins a ministry weighted with so much history, may he remember each day the truth once expressed by Cardinal Leon-Joseph Suenens, "that the most important day of [the pope's] life was not that of his papal election, but that of his baptism, and therein recall the dignity and wisdom of all the baptized."³ This same challenge, of living fully the radical foundation of our baptismal vocation, is one that every member of the body of Christ shares with Pope Benedict.

As a young theologian at the time of the Second Vatican Council, Joseph Ratzinger offered this ever-challenging vision, "Christians can never, and must never, be satisfied with saluting and loving only their brothers [and sisters], that is, their fellow believers. They must direct their love to all those who need them, and without asking thanks or response. Everyone who needs their help is, by virtue of that, and independently of his [or her] belief, a brother [or sister] of Christ—in fact, a manifestation of the Lord himself. ... A few days before his passion, Christ described his life's mission in these words: 'The Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.' These words express not only the basic law of Christ's own life, but the basic law of all Christian discipleship."⁴ This vision has lost none of its challenge or beauty. Let us all, as those who seek to follow Jesus, support one another in living out this way of humble service.

Near the end of April, brother Richard and brother Placid participated in the spring meeting of the Benedictine and Cistercian communities of New England, hosted by Saint Anselm's Abbey.

Singing a new song

The gift of new music continues to be born in the community. The inspiration comes from our life together, rooted in our monastic prayer and lectio, and, very often, in our experiences among the people of Latin America. Since early in the year the brothers have been preparing to record some of the newest music.



Sister Laura Bufano, CSJ, and brothers as we record some of our new music.

Our preparation and recording were animated by the friendship, enthusiasm, and musical skills of Sister Laura Bufano, a member of the Albany province of the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Carondelet. In early May, we recorded six pieces of music, with Sister Laura directing and John Quinn presiding at the sound mixing board. During the next months, we will continue our preparations for another recording session. We want to express our deep gratitude to Sister Laura and to John and Ann Quinn for their encouragement and hospitality.

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1. © 2005 Catholic Library Association. The entire review by Brother Benet Exton, OSB, will appear in the September 2005 issue of *Catholic Library World* (76:1). Used with permission.
 2. Mary Catherine Hilker, OP, of the University of Notre Dame, writes: "The Holy Spirit, who is the origin of all power and energy in the universe, is also the Spirit of love who brings the word of God to birth, and who remains the breath of life and source of truth in the Christian community. As the Spirit animates an increasingly global and interdependent community, the word of God is being spoken in new voices and enfolded in diverse communities and cultures." The task is "to create new opportunities and processes by which the many diverse members of the Christian community can 'hear one another into speech.'" Mary Catherine Hilker, *Naming Grace* (New York: Continuum, 1997), 181.
"Listening with the ear of our heart" in order to discern "what the Spirit is saying to the churches" (*Rule of Benedict*, Prologue: 1, 11; cf. Rev 2: 7), we can be encouraged by the words of Pope Pius XII in 1943, at the time of the renewal of biblical studies:
"[Christians] must avoid that somewhat indiscreet zeal which considers everything new to be, for that very reason, a fit object of attack or suspicion" (Encyclical letter *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, no, 49).
 3. Richard Gaillardetz, "Looking Ahead: My Hope for the Next Pope", *Commonweal* (April 22, 2005), 9.
 4. Joseph Ratzinger, *The Open Circle: The Meaning of Christian Brotherhood* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1966), 118-119.