

Life Together In One Heart

DECEMBER 2007

December always holds a special feeling of in-gathering as we move through the beautiful season of Advent and prepare for the special celebrations that surround the Christmas Feast. The rhythm of Advent's reflectiveness and expectation filled our celebrations of Christmas and New Year's with a fullness of joy and gratitude.



Joel Boutin (right) with brother Daniel (left) and brother Elias (center).

Beginning a few days after Christmas we had the privilege of offering hospitality to Joel Boutin of Lowell, Massachusetts, for three months. Joel had been a participant in one of our earlier Experiences in Monastic Living and had kept in touch over the years. He had just returned from an extended commitment of several years as a Peace Corps volunteer and then as a NGO worker in Tanzania. We appreciated his joyful spirit and all the enthusiasm that he brought to our community life.

JANUARY 2008

We began the year by welcoming five men for our Winter Experience in Monastic Living from December 31 to January 6. It was enriching to have among us: Lexy Westphal of New Haven, CT; Michael Bufano of Syracuse, NY; Rob Heppenstall of Davidson, NC; Daniel Hopkins of Etna, NH; and John Torrey of Etna, NH. Our shared seven days were interwoven with prayer, reading, small group discussions, study, work and relaxed time. Highlights from the Rule of St. Benedict became reference points that entered into all of our shared experiences and reflections. Our coming together with these five new friends brought us to new insights into the contemporary search for meaning and the Holy.



(left to right) John Torrey, Daniel Hopkins, Michael Bufano, Rob Heppenstall, and Lexy Westphal during the Winter Experience in Monastic Living.



Brothers and sisters together at the Guadalupe Center in Cuernavaca, Mexico.

From January 11 to 25 we all traveled, the entire community, to Mexico to be with our Benedictine Sisters of Our Lady of Guadalupe at their motherhouse in Mexico City as well as in Cuernavaca at the Centro Guadalupe Retreat Center. What a wonderful experience it was to have our brother Philip with us on the trip! The richness and depth of our exchanges with the sisters made all of the challenges of travel more than worthwhile. We are very thankful for the special arrangements and care which the sisters provided for brother Philip at the motherhouse and at the retreat center.

Our days together were varied and meaningful as we opened ourselves to new experiences shared with us by small and large groups of the sisters. We greatly enjoyed the sharing offered to us by a group of five sisters who offer ministry in Leon, State of Guanajuato. These sisters are accompanying small communities of indigenous people who have fled the poverty of their native lands in the Southern and Eastern regions of Mexico. They are a beacon of hope and love to these searching people who find themselves in poverty on the periphery of one of Mexico's large cities.

On a Saturday we were able to gather with a very large number of sisters in the motherhouse's refurbished large gathering space. It is always a joy to be with so many of our sisters at one time and to catch up on events and occasions of the past year. We began our sharing with a 20 minute video pre-

sensation which brother Alvaro had so skillfully composed and presented. Visiting with those sisters who are elderly and infirm was a particularly tender and joyful experience. We were happy that the Benedictine monks of the monastery of La Soledad were able to be with the sisters and us for the day. Prior Ezequiel and the community took the initiative to come to Mexico City from Guanajuato to spend some time in fraternal exchange.

We spent seven days at the Centro Guadalupe where we entered into the quiet rhythm of the sisters' community life and the atmosphere of the retreat center. Common prayer, reading, relaxed time and gatherings/meetings with the sisters made for a quality experience. On a Sunday we joined the sisters in a meeting and "convivencia" with many of the people who make presentations to the retreat groups who come from Canada and the US. These included: an indigenous leader from Morelos; members of Base Christian Communities ("comunidades de base"); a professor from the University of Mexico; a refugee from Guatemala; translators; persons who work in NGO's (non-governmental organizations); and residents of some poor "colonias" who are accompanied by some of the sisters. The meeting and exchange were dynamic, enlightening, and challenging, unmasking long-held assumptions about the life, hopes and dreams of people in the Mexico of today.



Participants gathered for the Sunday "convivencia" at the Guadalupe Center in Cuernavaca.

FEBRUARY

We returned home from Mexico renewed in spirit and eager to enter into an extended retreat/quiet time at the monastery in Weston. Soon after our return, winter reasserted itself with frequent and heavy snows. Some of the roofs at the monastery needed to be shoveled twice in order to remove the overburden of snow that was becoming very heavy with the absorption of intermittent rains. The small mountain of snow that accumulated from shoveling and snow blowing in front of the Stone Chapel blocked the view of the Visitors' Center and the Stone Chapel for a month and a half.

MARCH

Holy Week and Easter came early in this calendar year and the weather was both whiter and colder than usual. Because of this we had most of our celebrations of prayer in the Stone Chapel and only went out to the Barn Chapel for the major celebration on each of the main Holy Days. Going out to the Barn Chapel in this kind of weather precluded brother Philip from getting out safely in his motorized wheelchair to the daily major liturgical celebration. With his usual gracious and accommodating spirit he joined us in prayer from his room in the dormitory. (Read his reflections in his article in this issue of the bulletin.) Our celebrations were poignantly meaningful this year as we reflected on the life of Jesus during these significant, eventful days of his life as we ourselves walked our own distinctive journey as a community. The many persons who came to the monastery to join with us in prayer enriched the celebration of faith in which we all shared.

Later in the month we hosted the annual Vermont Dismas retreat by welcoming into our community life and our guesthouses persons who minister to people leaving experiences of incarceration and imprisonment. The spirit-filled staff and volunteers of Dismas (the good thief in Luke 23:42) dedicate their energies to helping transiting offenders to re-enter society as persons with dignity who are valued, respected and loved in the very gift of their persons which is God-given and grace-filled.

APRIL

In April we welcomed a group of fourteen students/alumni/teachers from Merrimack College in Massachusetts. We were able to share together about common concerns as faith seekers in today's world and how the monastic discipline of prayer, work and study offers us a balance that is hard to maintain in the larger, fast-moving society. We also remarked on how beautiful it was for two communities with differing gifts to support and exchange with each other. An enjoyable time was had by some of the brothers and many of



Merrimack College students helping in the gathering of maple sap at the priory.

the group in gathering maple sap from the maple trees in our woods. Anticipating the tasting of the newly boiled sap, that had by then become Vermont maple syrup, brought happy smiles after a full afternoon's work.

MAY

At the beginning of the month we hosted a weekend of retreat and reflection for a group of co-workers who help us on a regular basis in offering hospitality, the care of our home, our grounds and our guesthouses. Our gatherings for reflection and exchange were stimulating and fruitful for all of us.

With all the many and varied experiences and events of these past several months there is another dimension of life that continually presents itself in community. Spirit continues to make herself known in ways that encourage and delight us.

Our Animals

Brothers continue to care for our farm animals—a small flock of sheep, our ten hens and eighteen chicks, two pigs, and our prolific rabbits. Our animals provide us with food for our table and connect us in a wonderful way with the rhythms and joys of our natural world.

With the care and work of brother Daniel and brother Placid we now have fourteen bee hives which provide a good deal of honey and bee pollen for our



Several of our 14 bee hives at the priory.

table. Our bees also produce a good deal of wax with which brother Mark and brother Placid have begun making poured and molded 100% beeswax candles. These candles are beautiful and noble in their simplicity and they give off a fragrant natural scent. And since we now have the handmade candles, brother John has begun making some intriguing candleholders from wood saved from the old choir stalls that were in the original wood framed Chapel. The candleholders accommodate from one to four candles and have a beautiful ceramic Talavera tile from Mexico set into their centers.



New Music and Songs

Music has always been an important expression of our community life and our prayer. New music, new songs, and new antiphons continue to be birthed among us through the talents of our brothers Philip and Michael. These are songs and psalms that sing our thanksgiving; songs that entice us to dream ever more daring dreams; songs that lighten the burden along the journey and carry us through the difficult and trying moments; songs that bring us to the threshold of new life!

Spirit inspires and gifts the heart of our community and expresses herself through the talents of individual brothers. With our hearts, hands, and voices we find the gifts of Spirit's encouragement, healing, and inspiration to cry out:

“O Spirit of God, O outpouring love of our God,
Come and breathe within our heart today !”¹



¹ Antiphon © 2008 The Benedictine Foundation of the State of Vermont, Inc.