

Life Together in One Heart

June-July 2006

As the unfolding of spring opened out into the beginning of summer, the brothers set aside two weeks for reflection and community ingathering. It was a time for us to enter more deeply into the meaning and challenges of our common life. This year, the Quiet Days were punctuated by visits to two neighboring monastic communities.

Maple Forest Monastery

Maple Forest Monastery in Hartland-Four-Corners, Vermont, is a Buddhist monastery and meditation center, founded in 1997 by the Vietnamese Zen Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh. It was established as the first branch monastery of Plum Village in France.

In 1998, the monastery founded the Green Mountain Dharma Center, which will become a retreat center and home to a residential lay community. Maple Forest has two monastic communities—of nuns and of monks—led by the abbess, Sister Annabel Laity (*Chan Duc*, True Virtue). Reciprocal visits have united our communities in spirit, ever since the opening of the new monastery. Our visit in June began with the sharing of a traditional tea ceremony—a profound experience of communion (“the closest we have to the Christian Eucharist,” said Sister Annabel). Following the sharing of tea, the Benedictine and Buddhist communities entered into a lively and penetrating discussion of chapter 72 of the Rule of Benedict, on “The Good Zeal Which Monks Ought to Have.” We expressed our hope that, when our communities next come together, we might reflect together on a classic Buddhist text. Walking meditation, amidst the gently rolling pastures of Maple Forest Monastery, preceded the noon meal of simple Asian foods, shared in a spirit of reflection and mindfulness.

New Skete Monastery

A week later, we visited the monks, nuns, and lay companions of New Skete Monastery in Cambridge, New York, monastic communities in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, who are celebrating the fortieth anniversary of their foundation. Following a shared meal and community reflection on the experience of monastic living, we visited the monastic church, the Holy Wisdom Temple, and enjoyed the new stonework and landscaping leading to its main entrance.

Experience in Monastic Living

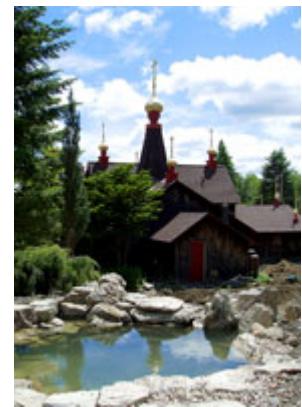
Twice each year, we offer an opportunity to a group of young men to live for a week with our monastic community at the priory. We hope to share together what monastic life and values can mean in our contemporary society. At the same time, it is an opportunity for us to be in touch with life as these young men experience it. From Monday, June 19 to Sunday, June 25, 2006, five men joined us for the experience



Sister Annabel, with (left to right) brother Elias, brother Michael, and brother Placid.



Monks and nuns of Maple Forest Monastery offer a Buddhist chant.



New Skete Monastery



Brother Luke of New Skete (left) and our brother Richard.

in monastic living. Joseph Carey of Springfield, Massachusetts; Gregory Pyne of Orlando, Florida; Heath Wilson of Middlesex, Vermont; Calon Webb of Tampa, Florida; and Brandon Reed of South Hadley, Massachusetts.

Visit of our Benedictine Sisters from Mexico

Beginning June 29th, five of our Mexican Benedictine Sisters were with us for more than a week: Sister Rosa, the prioress of the Sisters' congregation; Sister Fidelina and Sister Fabiola, celebrating their 50th anniversaries of monastic profession; Sister María Teresa (Tere), and Sister Guadalupe (Lupita). We celebrated 30 years of friendship between our Benedictine monastic community at Weston Priory and the Mexican Benedictine Sisters (the *Misioneras Guadalupeanas de Cristo Rey, OSB*). The *Arco-Iris de Alianza*, the covenant between our two communities, has found expression for twenty-two years in the Guadalupe Center in Cuernavaca, Mexico, where many people have participated in the [Faith/Hospitality Experience in Mexico](#), jointly sponsored by our two communities.

On Saturday morning, July 8, there was an informal coffee reception and sharing with the sisters in the Visitors' Center. Among the people who came to greet the sisters were many who had participated in the experience at the Guadalupe Center. That afternoon, the sisters and the brothers gave a presentation with PowerPoint and Video on the experience of our covenant together, and the twenty-two years of the Faith/Hospitality Experience at the Guadalupe Center in Cuernavaca.

On Sunday, July 9th, we had a public celebration of the Feast of St. Benedict, a time of festivity beginning with the Eucharist and continuing with the Grand March, picnicking and contra dancing. The Cold River Band, with Marcos Levy and Mary Barron, provided music, along with Andy Davis who did the calling for the contra dances.

On Sunday evening the brothers and sisters enjoyed a celebration together of Sister Fidelina's and Sister Fabiola's 50th anniversaries of monastic profession, as well as the anniversaries of three of our brothers: brother Columba, brother Augustine, and brother Daniel.



This summer's Experience in Monastic Living: (seated left to right) Joe Carey, Gregory Pyne, and Heath Wilson. (standing) Calon Webb and Brandon Reed.



Visit of our Sisters from Mexico: (left to right) Sister Teresa, Sister Rosa, Sister Fidelina, Sister Fabiola, and Sister Guadalupe.



Sister Fidelina, during the Sisters' presentation on the Guadalupe Center.



The Grand March, following the Eucharist on Saint Benedict's Day.



Anniversaries of monastic profession: (left to right) Sister Fabiola and Sister Fidelina; (left to right) brother Columba, brother Augustine, brother Daniel.

August 2006

Conference of Major Superiors of Men Assembly

The year 2006 marks the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM). The CMSM serves the elected leadership of the more than 20,000 members of vowed religious and monastic communities in the United States. CMSM provides a voice for these communities in U.S. church and society. The Conference also collaborates with the U.S. bishops and other key groups and organizations that serve church and society. Benedictine monks were instrumental in the birth of the CMSM in 1956.

The annual Assembly of the CMSM was held in Burlington, Vermont, August 2 to 5, with the theme “Coat of Many Colors.” Abbot Jerome Kodell of Subiaco Abbey in Arkansas delivered the keynote address. “This milestone of the Golden Anniversary of CMSM is a golden opportunity to reawaken the Church to the treasure in its midst, the many-colored coat of men's religious life... to enrich our awareness of the gifts of one another... and to share with the Church and the world the tapestry of grace God's call has created among us.”¹

Brother Richard participated in the entire assembly. All the brothers traveled to Burlington for the closing Eucharist on August 5, at which the brothers led the music for the celebration.

As part of their deliberations, the CMSM members unanimously approved a [resolution condemning torture](#), stating that “CMSM condemns torture in all its forms regardless of putative justification, and encourages support and help for victims of torture throughout the world, but especially in areas under the control of the United States Government.”²



The brothers of Weston Priory lead the music for the Eucharist of the 50th anniversary Assembly of the Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM) in Burlington, Vermont, on August 5th.



At the CMSM Assembly: Brother Richard; Abbot Damien Carr OCSO, of St. Joseph's Abbey in Spencer, MA; Abbot Jerome Kodell OSB, of Subiaco Abbey in Arkansas; Dominic Izzo, OP, president of the CMSM; and Paul Lininger OFM Conv., executive director of the CMSM.

From Chucuito, Perú to Weston, Vermont: Simón Pedro Arnold, OSB

In 2005, the brothers of Weston and our Mexican Benedictine sisters hosted a gathering of Benedictine men and women from the Americas, centered on the theme of *The Prophetic Dimension of Monastic Life in the 21st Century*. The 2005 gathering of monastics from South, Central, and North America was a follow-up of conversations begun in Weston during our 50th anniversary year. Simón Pedro Arnold, OSB, prior of the Monastery of the Resurrection, in Chucuito, Perú (high in the Andean altiplano, among the Aymará people), offered the keynote paper which provided the stimulus for our days of reflection. During that time, we discovered with Simón Pedro that we shared a similar vision for the future of Benedictine monastic life in the Americas. In late August of this year, Simón Pedro visited us in Weston for a week of lively, fraternal exchange, and for an experience of the monastic life as we live it here in Weston. We look forward to continuing contact with Simón Pedro and his brothers, and to strengthening the bonds of communion by which we can support one another.



Simon Pedro Arnold OSB, of the Monastery of the Resurrection, in Chicuito, Peru.

September 2006

Visit to the Father English Center, Diocese of Paterson

At the conclusion of our community retreat, the brothers visited the Father English Center, an agency of Catholic Charities in the Diocese of Paterson, New Jersey. Our good friends Carol and Bob Vesota are the directors of the Center, and they, together with the committed staff, extended an invitation to experience their work first-hand. After a tour of the facilities and an opportunity to speak with the women and men who offer service at the Center, we gathered for a festive, multi-ethnic meal, reflecting the many rich cultures present in the city of Paterson.³

For several years, the leadership team of the Father English Center has come to the Priory at the end of September for a weekend of retreat and contact with our community. Our visit to Paterson was followed by the visit of our friends from Father English Center to Weston. Welcoming them is a highpoint of our autumn.

“The [Father English Community Center](#),” according to their website, “is a social service agency of the Diocese of Paterson carrying out the tradition of



During our community retreat, the brothers visited the Father English Community Center in Patterson, NJ. Here, the Fr. English Center choir leads us in singing. Carol Vesota is second from the left.

the Catholic Church and the Gospel of Christ in the urban community of Paterson. With the motto 'We Make a Difference' we are dedicated to impact deeply on the lives of the many people who depend on us. The uniqueness of the Community Center lies in its ability to serve the changing needs of the poor with a special commitment to the youth, the aged and to the disabled. We make special efforts to involve and to assist the extended families of our program participants. We are a resource for other professional agencies, parishes and the wider community. Our staff, like the constituency we serve, is a blend of many cultures, generations and backgrounds. In carrying out our mission we are accountable to the Bishop of Paterson, the Diocesan Catholic Charities Secretariat, our public and private funding sources, the agency's Board of Trustees, the community at large, and most importantly the people we serve. We believe in people and we strive to enable all of our staff and clients to reach their fullest human potential."



Bob Vesota (right), executive director of the Father English Center, introducing Anita, who directs the home for troubled teens.

Among the programs and services offered by the Center are:

- [Youth Haven](#): The Program provides residential and crisis counseling services for runaway, homeless and abused youth, ages 11 to 17, and their families.
- [Teen Center](#): The center is an emergency shelter and group home for runaway, homeless and abused young men ages 11-17.
- [Case Management / Work Assistance](#): Employment assistance program and information referral service.
- [Senior & Handicapped Transportation](#): Transportation services provided to senior and handicapped people who have no transportation of their own.
- [PTP English Classes](#): English classes offered to the large multi-cultural, multilingual population of Passaic County.
- [Food Pantry & Boutique](#): Provides food, clothing and other resources to eligible families and individuals.
- [Computer Training](#): Offers basic computer training to participants in the Work Assistance Program who want to better their employment skills.⁴

We wish to express our deep gratitude to, and our solidarity with, the men and women who give of themselves so generously, in order to provide a dignified life to people from the poor communities of Paterson's center city and in Passaic County. The popular song from El Salvador speaks it well: *Cuando el pobre crea en el pobre, ya podremos cantar libertad. Cuando el pobre crea en el pobre, construiremos la fraternidad.* "When the poor believe in the poor, then we will be able to sing of freedom. When the poor believe in the poor, we will build a true brotherhood and sisterhood."

Visit of Abbot Joël of the Abbey of Tournay, France

When our community made a pilgrimage to Brazil in 2003, to visit the Benedictine community of the Monastery of the Annunciation in Goiás, we had the pleasure of meeting Abbot Joël Chauvelot of the Benedictine Abbey of Tournay in France. We were deeply impressed by Abbot Joël's simplicity, warmth, and humility—as a person, and in the exercise of his ministry of leadership as abbot. Since that visit, we have counted him a friend, and have remained in regular contact. We were pleased to welcome Abbot Joël (who was returning from Brazil to his monastery in France) from September 21 to 27. The week of sharing our common life together afforded us an opportunity to come to know one another in a deeper way, to learn of currents in European and Latin American Benedictine life, and to discover one another genuinely as brothers—a sign of which was Abbot Joël's happiness in being called frère Joël, brother Joël.



Abbot Joel (center) with brothers

World Peace Cantata

On Saturday, September 30, we hosted a performance of the *World Peace Cantata*: a work in six movements, for two soprano soloists, piano, keyboard, and flute. Our gratitude to Peter Stewart of Hamilton, Massachusetts, and to the soloists and musicians, for this reflective call to be peacemakers in our divided world.

October 2006

Faith Communities and the Commitment to Environmental Healing

At the beginning of October, faith communities throughout the country observed a special week dedicated to environmental awareness, and the role which communities of faith must play in fostering the integrity of creation. In conjunction with the national effort, the Vermont Council of Churches made the film *An Inconvenient Truth* (former Vice-President Al Gore's documentary on global warming and its effects on the future of the planet) available for showing and discussion in churches, synagogues, mosques and other faith communities during the first week of October. We were pleased to have two showings of the film, on October 3rd and 7th.

[AIM-USA: Alliance for International Monasticism](#)

In mid-October, Brother Richard attended the annual meeting of the board of directors for the United States secretariat of the Alliance for International Monasticism (AIM). The annual meeting was held at Mount Saint Benedict Monastery in Erie, Pennsylvania, where the US secretariat's offices are located. "AIM USA is an organization composed of 168 communities of men and women in the United States and Canada who follow the Rule of Benedict and over 300 English-speaking monasteries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. AIM USA provides spiritual, educational, formation and building assistance to monasteries in developing countries to enable them to be centers of life for others. Monasteries in Africa, Asia and Latin America enrich their brothers and sisters in the United States with global vision, fresh insights into monastic life, cultural diversity and gospel witness of service to the poor."⁵

Welcoming the Communities of New Skete Monastery

On Monday, October 23, we welcomed the monks, nuns, and lay companions of New Skete Monastery, monastic communities in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, located in Cambridge, New York. After welcoming the brothers and sisters, and sharing some light refreshments, we gathered for a rich conversation on our communal and personal experiences of prayer (a reality at the heart of the monastic charism). After dinner, we prayed Midday Prayer, at the conclusion of which the New Skete communities sang an Eastern chant in honor of Mary. The communion uniting our communities "in the joy of the Holy Spirit" testifies to an essential dimension of the monastic witness: namely that Christian monasticism, in the East and in the West, has its roots and wellspring in the *undivided* Church—hence, our common vocation to a life of reconciliation and unity.



The brothers and sisters of the Orthodox monastic communities of New Skete in Cambridge, NY, visited the priory for a time of discussion, prayer and friendship, on Monday October 23.

November 2006

New England Regional Meeting of Monastic Communities

Twice each year, representatives of New England's Cistercian and Benedictine monastic communities of men and women come together for a day of prayer, fellowship, and informal conversation on topics of mutual interest. Brother Richard and Brother John represented our community at the autumn meeting, hosted by the monks of Portsmouth Abbey in Rhode Island. †

Our Wishes for Christmas
and the New Year 2007

*God's Word of Life calls us
to become a disarming presence
in our broken world.*

*Emmanuel, God-With-Us, come!
Strengthen our hope
for this new life.*

Grateful for you,
we wish you the peace and joy of this season.
your brothers at Weston Priory



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1. CMSM Press Release, August 14, 2006, "Catholic Men's Religious Orders Celebrate 50 Years of Their Leaders' Conference."
 2. For the full text of the resolution, cf. <http://www.cmsm.org/justice-statements/statement-2006resolution.shtml>.
 3. Photographs can be viewed on this website
 4. For more information, and for opportunities to support the extraordinary ministries of the Father English Center, [see their website](#), .
 5. From the [AIM-USA website](#).

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