

The first to be startled by my proposal [to convoke the Council] was myself. God knows that I opened my small soul to this great inspiration with the utmost simplicity . . . [it] came forth like the flower of an unexpected spring.¹

Personal thoughts of Pope John XXIII
written a few months before his death

Brothers, open your hearts. The heart is the living core of your person. It is where the Spirit enters into your flesh and blood and transforms you. And then be ready to follow the inspiration of the Spirit as you listen today to God's voice calling you.²

Personal Reflections of Abbot Leo Rudloff
during the last years of his life

THE GOSPEL NARRATIVES OF THE CHRISTMAS FEAST ARE filled with the challenging presence and activity of the Spirit of God. It is the Spirit that moves Mary and Joseph, Elizabeth and Zechariah, Simeon and Anna, the Wisdom-seekers from the East to embrace Jesus, the Word and messenger of God. This is the same Spirit that hovers over the chaos in the event of creation portrayed in the Book of Genesis. God's Spirit breathes forth new life, hope, and salvation, but "you cannot tell where it is coming from or where it is going." (John 3:8) It is the Spirit of the "new Pentecost" of the Church heralded by John XXIII at the opening of the Second Vatican Council.

Down through the ages prophets and seekers have continued to respond to the inspiration of the Spirit, as did Pope John XXIII and our brother Leo, Abbot Leo Rudloff.

As we celebrate in the year(s) ahead the fiftieth anniversary and inspiration of the Second Vatican Council and the sixtieth anniversary of our community's founding and its continued process of birthing

¹ A collage of quotes from *Wit and Wisdom of Good Pope John*, Collected by Henri Fesquet, Translated by Salvator Attanasio, P.J. Kennedy and Sons, New York, 1964, pp. 155-6.

² *The Living Rule of St. Benedict*, an unpublished writing for the Weston Priory monastic community

during the Council years, we rejoice in the profound meaning these celebrations bring to our monastic life.

The stirrings of creative thought, the ferment through a return to the sources, and a desire to authentically live the Gospel message in the present-day world inspired Pope John's decision to convoke the Council. These same hopes were stirring and growing in our community as Abbot Leo invited us to creatively listen in new ways on our monastic journey. The call is to incarnate our life, prayer and work in the soil of Vermont and these United States with a wider vision beyond, to the joys and pains of the world today.

Through the years we have prayerfully searched the scriptures (lectio divina) to uncover the Word behind the word for ourselves and for others. We celebrate that Word in liturgical prayer with the full and active participation of all. The vibrant presence of the Spirit emerges in the flesh of our persons, culture and tradition. As we plumb the rich source of our Christian and monastic life based on our common baptism, the Spirit drives us out into the desert to discern in equality directions and choices for our life and prayer together. Through this we recognize ourselves as church, the people of God led by the Spirit.

Beginning in Jerusalem with the ecumenical passion of our brother Leo, we have grown in friendship and appreciation of other monastic traditions and a variety of religious expressions. Unity emerges amidst diversity. This passion sent us out further to discover the gift that peoples of other cultures and ways of life bring to our life and prayer. The search for justice and peace cannot be realized in our lives until the lives of all our sisters and brothers on this earth find mirrored the same integrity and wholeness.

In the beauty of our surroundings and forest land we hope to create a welcoming place where bread is broken and peace is shared with one another and with those who come to find refreshment among us. John XXIII envisioned the church as a *convivenza* (bringing together/ living together) of all the children of earth.

These are the seeds of Spirit that have taken root in our monastic life and are further watered to bear fruit under the inspiration of Vatican Council II. In the following articles and in a variety of ways our brothers reflect on these many movements of the Spirit alive in our life together and personal/communal stories.

We are grateful to so many of you who have listened with us to the stirrings of this Spirit and who have blessed us in our common search for God. God has so loved us in Jesus to experience the kin-dom being born in our own flesh and bones here at Weston and in the many cultures and peoples of our world. With you we continue to pray even when we do not know what to say, for "the Spirit groans within us" (Romans 8:26) and sings of hope amidst the signs of our times.

May joy be yours this Christmas and peace through the New Year ! ■