

# Life Together in One Heart Chronicle

## Dearest Friends:

As we send you this issue of the Bulletin, the memory of Pentecost is still fresh. The images in our prayer -- fire blazing, wind rushing, water flowing -- give voice to our manifold experiences of God's own life touching us: the Holy Spirit poured out over all creation, permeating all things, as the loving bond "in whom we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17.28).

The rich poetry of Pentecost, bringing our Easter celebration to a close *with flourish and fanfare*, might deceive us, though, into thinking that it is the dramatic and the *extra-ordinary* that count.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

Jesus washed his disciples' feet so that we might know that the Reign of God is *among us*.

Benedict wrote the Rule to encourage us to grow in humanity and holiness through the *daily ups-and-downs* of life together.

Centuries later, Ignatius accompanied searching men and women in finding God *in all things*.

The great tradition tells us that we will discover the truth of Pentecost -- the living water, the Breath of divine freshness -- in the ordinary, or not at all.

This is a necessary preface, as we share with you some wonderful moments in our community life in the past months.

Unspoken here are the daily rhythms of prayer; the labor of community meetings; the responsibilities and creativity of work, study, and classes; the daily housechores; time for recreation and rest; the calls to forgiveness and communion.

These are the threads that support the *extra-ordinary* moments of our lives.

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## January 2000: Sharing a Living Faith

### Living With Our Monastic Community

The Jubilee Year 2000 began with an opportunity to share our community life with five young men, through a Winter Experience in Monastic Living. Coming from diverse experiences of work, university study and pastoral ministry, each of the participants brought a spirit of searching and enthusiasm, and enriched our community life through their presence and friendship.

## Theological Reflection

Later in the month, we welcomed Msgr. Edward Ciuba for a few days of reflection with the community. Now pastoring a vibrant parish in the archdiocese of Newark, Ed was formerly rector of the Seminary of the Immaculate Conception, and professor of Scripture. While he was with us, he offered presentations on contemporary methods in the interpretation of Scripture, and on recent developments in Christology, especially the understanding of Jesus as the *Wisdom of God*. We are grateful for his insight, and for his enthusiasm in guiding us in reflection on faith -- gifts now at the service of his parish faith-community.

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## February 2000: The Benedictine Charism in the World

### Mexico - Nicaragua

Each year, our entire community travels to Mexico to share for two weeks in the life of our Benedictine sisters. (See opening article, *Por los caminos de América*.) We arrived in Mexico City in early February, spending the first days with the local community at the sisters' *Casa Central* (or Motherhouse) near the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe. The life of the sisters' congregation continues to flourish as they serve the poorest sectors of Mexican society, and extend their ministry to the peoples of Brazil, the United States, and Nicaragua. The sisters' presence in Nicaragua continues to bear fruit, including the entrance of young Nicaraguan women into the congregation, and the establishment of a novitiate in Managua. We had the special delight of enjoying the presence of the Nicaraguan novices, who were in Mexico City during our visit. We were also privileged to participate in the First Monastic Profession of two young sisters - one an indigenous Mexican, and the other a Nicaraguan.

### "They are our children"

Despite being the world's largest metropolis, Mexico City shares with all other Third World cities an exponential growth in population, joined with unemployment and the lack of basic human services. A symptom of the deepening economic crisis is the increase in violence and drug use in the cities. The incidence of HIV infection, leading to AIDS, is likewise growing rapidly. In Mexico, as in much of the Two-Thirds World, the fastest growing population of HIV-infected persons are women and children. Yet in a city so large as Mexico's capital, there is no adequate way to gauge realistically the number of children and adults infected. There are, likewise, next to no health services for those who suffer from the virus and its effects. The unreachable costs of treatment, and the still-prevalent social stigma attached to HIV/AIDS, complicate the situation even further.

But hope appears - in women and men who refuse to give up hope, in people who come together to create a way, especially when there seems to be no way. The staff at *Casa de la Sal* are such persons, in whom we discovered hope incarnate as love.

After discovering that a friend of hers had died from the AIDS disease, Dr. Rosa María Rivero Velasco, M.D., devoted the last years of her life to the care of persons suffering from the disease. Aware that there were no AIDS-related services of any kind, she opened a

clandestine house to care for abandoned, infected children. Once the nature of her hospice was discovered, neighbors forced her to flee with the children. Eventually another house was found, where 20 children are now cared for by a staff of volunteers: housewives, nurses, psychologists, doctors. Three of our Benedictine sisters are volunteers at the house, and they invited us to meet the children, the volunteers, and the support staff. One volunteer, herself a mother with her own family remarked, "Well, they are all our children, aren't they?"

### **Meeting of Monastic Leaders**

The monastic leaders of the Benedictine communities of men and women in North America, Central America, and the Caribbean held their joint meeting at the Abbey of Tepeyac, just outside of Mexico City. The dates of this meeting of abbots, priors, and prioresses coincided with our visit to Mexico, making it possible for a small group of them to spend a few days with the Mexican sisters and with us at our *Centro Guadalupe* in Cuernavaca: Father Martin Boler, OSB, prior, Mount Saviour Monastery, Pine City, New York; Sister Joesetta Grant, OSB, prioress, Osage Monastery, Sand Springs, Oklahoma; Abbot Jerome Kodell, OSB, Subiaco Abbey, Subiaco, Arkansas; Sister Mary Jane Romero, OSB, prioress general, Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, St. Louis, Missouri; Sister Veronica Ryan, OSB, prioress, Sacred Heart Monastery, Cullman, Alabama; Sister Laura Swan, OSB, prioress, Saint Placid Priory, Lacey, Washington; and Sister Mary Zenzen, OSB, prioress, Mount Saint Benedict Monastery, Ogden, Utah.

We thank God for the bonds that were forged during those days. In the context of prayer and reflection, we encountered the Christ hidden in the suffering and hope of our poorest sisters and brothers.

Following the meeting at Tepeyac, which Brother Richard attended, we welcomed all of the Benedictine prioresses for a day of exchange.

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### **March 2000: Creating an Environment of Peace**

#### **Thomas Berry, C.P.**

Since last year, the town of Weston has been home to *two* monastic communities. While our monastery was founded almost 50 years ago, the town has also welcomed a small Passionist monastery, a community of women fashioning a monastic life dedicated to the healing of the Earth. The kindness of the Passionist sisters made possible a morning of reflection with the ecological theologian, Thomas Berry, C.P., author of *The Dream of the Earth* and *The Great Work*.

#### **Partners in Offering Hospitality**

From the earliest days of the church, the welcoming of guests has been a central value and practice in monastic communities. It is simply the echo of the Gospel's call, reverberating in the lives of succeeding generations. In fact, Benedict was confident that the monks would indeed

meet the living Christ in those who come to the community's doors and table. This has surely been the experience of our community. The presence of so many women and men sharing in our common prayer, in the silence and reflectiveness of the priory and in the daily rhythm of our life, reminds us that we are indeed partners on a *common Journey*. Every guest, each visitor, comes with his or her own thirst and searching, and our community is challenged and enriched.

Extending hospitality here at Weston Priory involves the gifts of many: the community of brothers, to be sure, but also the hearts and hands and human sensitivity of a large group of men and women. Without them, we could not welcome as many persons as we do. For each of them and for their service - in kitchen, office, Gallery Shop, guesthouses, parking lot - we are deeply grateful. A weekend of reflection and prayer in mid-March was a tangible celebration of the Benedictine values that unite us.

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## **April 2000: Toward a New Self-Understanding**

### **A Visit**

During Easter week, we welcomed the visit of Krister and Brita Stendahl for a few days of reflection and exchange. In our very stimulating conversations, we spoke together about the urgent necessity of a new Christian self-understanding in relation to the Jewish People, the people of the Covenant.

(Dr. Krister Stendahl is internationally known for his New Testament scholarship and for his leadership in Jewish-Christian relations. He served as professor and, later, dean at Harvard Divinity School. He was elected bishop of Stockholm in the Church of Sweden.) The visit of the Stendahls culminated with their participation in our observance of Yom HaShoah (the Day of Memorial of the Holocaust, or the "Destruction") on the Second Sunday of Easter.

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## **May 2000: Creating an Environment of Encounter**

### **Psychotherapy and Spirituality**

We continued to enjoy opportunities for fruitful dialogue during the month of May. Halley Sauseville Lovett, a psychologist and therapist from Washington, D.C., facilitated a very stimulating discussion on the relationship of psychology and spirituality in the search for meaning, together with three of her colleagues, MaryAnn Pollock Dubner, Rosemarie Anastasio Segalla, and Joyce Gorelick Lowenstein. Halley and her husband Ray have been friends of the community for many years, since their days in Vermont. We thank them all for making this time of encounter possible.

## **Monastic Practices, East & West**

Monks and nuns from Maple Forest Monastery (the Buddhist community established in Vermont by the Vietnamese teacher Thich Nhat Hanh) came to the priory for a day in mid-May. Ever since the beginning of the *sangha* near Woodstock, our communities have gathered together for a day of sharing twice a year. On this occasion, the day-to-day challenges of community living were the focus of our discussions. Our Buddhist brothers and sisters participated in Midday Prayer, during which they offered their chant.

## **Seventeen Years of Exile**

Felipe and Elena Ixcot, refugees from Guatemala, have lived in sanctuary here at the priory for more than 16 years. Their daughters and son are now grown. The Ixcot family has become so much a part of our everyday life that it is easy to forget that these have been years of *exile*, of separation, and of longing. But Elena and Felipe have not forgotten. As the years have passed, so their commitment to their homeland has grown and deepened. And the dream of a return.

At the end of May, Felipe and Elena presented slides of their first visit to Guatemala in 17 years, in March and April 1999, and spoke of the continuing situation of danger and violence in that country. We join with them in longing and *working* for the day of peace, the day of return, that the psalmist spoke about: "When from our exile God brings us home, it will seem like a dream" (Ps. 126).

## **Spring-Summer 2000 Bulletin**



**The Monks of Weston Priory**

**58 Priory Hill Road, Weston, VT 05161-6400**

**Tel: 802-824-5409; Fax: 802-824-3573**