

# Life Together In One Heart

## JANUARY 2007

As the celebration of Christmas opened out into the new year 2007, we welcomed three men for our winter Experience in Monastic Living, a week of sharing in the life of our community, from January 1 to 7.

In mid-January, after a few days of retreat, we journeyed to Mexico for two weeks of exchange and sharing with our Benedictine Sisters. Our visit began at the congregation's *Casa Central* (motherhouse) in Mexico City. While sharing life with the community of the *Casa Central*, the visit also included a day of celebration with Sisters from all of the local communities. Each year, we are especially gifted in our contact with the elderly and infirm Sisters; their faithful witness is a strength and inspiration to all of us.

Nestled in the lush, tropical beauty of the Mexican state of Vera Cruz, with a clear view of the volcanic peak of Mount Orizaba, the small town of Victoria is home to four of our Benedictine Sisters who minister to outlying



*Participants in our Winter Experience in Monastic Living: Mark Kutolowski, Wilder, Vermont; Daniel Kinsey, Easthampton, Massachusetts; and Peter Daniel, Charlotte, North Carolina.*



*At the Sisters' mission in Chavaxtla, Vera Cruz, Mexico. Sister Yolanda (back to camera), Sister Teresita, Sister María de San Pablo, and Sister Asunción.*

communities in the parish of Chavaxtla. The Sisters' mission there was the second chapter of our Mexican pilgrimage. Coffee and sugar cane are chief agricultural products of the region; however the negative impact of the North American Free Trade Agreement has made it impossible for local farmers to subsist on the cultivation of these crops. A number of experiments seeking alternative sources of income are underway—including the growing of tropical flowers for sale in larger cities. In the midst of a precarious economic situation, the mission of Chavaxtla is a beacon of hope. The Sisters ministry is clearly one of *acompañamiento* (pastoral accompaniment) of the people. Their priorities are the formation of Base Christian Communities; the development of strong lay leadership; scripture and liturgy; youth and women; and alternative medicine. The loving service of the Sisters is evident in the dynamism of the faith communities of Chavaxtla, but also in the *how* of the Sisters' ministry. They are clearly *not* at the center. Their accompaniment is (in the words of the first Letter to Timothy) "strong, loving, and wise", but always as an encouragement of the gifts of *all* the members of the communities. We thank the Sisters for welcoming us into the simplicity and richness of their lives.

Our experience in Chavaxtla was followed by some days with the community at the *Centro Guadalupe*, the retreat center in Cuernavaca which we co-sponsor with the Mexican Benedictine Sisters. A highlight of our time there was a gathering with Dr. María Alicia Puente Lutteroth, an historian and theologian who is a professor at the University of Morelos. She also serves as a theological advisor to several Mexican bishops. Dr. Puente led us in an afternoon of profound and wide-ranging reflection, on the theme, *An Evaluative Overview of our Ecclesial Journey in Mexico and all of Latin*



*Dr. Alicia Puente Lutteroth presents her historical overview of the Church in Latin America.*

*America, 16<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> Centuries.* Her presentation focused specifically on the faith and culture of the indigenous (“autochthonous”) peoples of Mexico. She invited us to recognize how, in calling the ancient cultures “pre-Columbian” or “pre-Hispanic,” we are defining them from the perspective of the Europeans who invaded their lands. The native peoples, of course, understand themselves differently, according to their own ancient traditions. The voice of the indigenous peoples has still not been recognized; yet where it finds a hearing, it speaks and resonates powerfully with the Gospel values of community, respect, and new life with dignity and justice. The communal voice of these peoples has much to offer, not only to the Mexican society and church, but also to our globalized and self-centered civilization. Alicia’s deep respect and love for the indigenous peoples with whom she has extensive experience, as well as her didactic skills as a teacher and author, captured our attention and gave rise to many questions. We thank her and the Sisters at the Center for her rich and powerful presentation.

## **FEBRUARY 2007**

At the beginning of February, brother Richard participated in the annual meeting of Benedictine abbots and priors, held this year at the Mercy Center in Burlingame, California. The presenters were Abbot Armand Veilleux, OCSO (abbot of the Trappist abbey of Notre-Dame de Scourmont in Chimay, Belgium) and Mother Maire Hickey, OSB (abbess of Abtei St. Skolastika in Dinklage, Germany).

The theme of the Conference was the modeling of our lives on Chapter 72 of the *Rule* of Benedict—the good zeal for our monastic life: supporting one

another with the greatest patience; “competing” in obedience/listening to one another; not pursuing what one judges better for oneself, but what is better for others; expressing sincere love for one another; and preferring nothing to Christ, that we may all be brought together to everlasting life.

The input from the Conference later became an occasion for further reflection and retreat-day discussions for our whole community.

## **MARCH 2007**

In March, we once again welcomed students and alumni/ae from Merrimack College in Massachusetts for a weekend of retreat and sharing in our common life. Padraic O’Hare (professor of religious and theological studies) and his wife Peggy organized and animated the group, some of whom have returned each year for this retreat weekend.



*Our friends from Merrimack College.*

## **APRIL 2007**

In early April, the ewes gave birth to nine lambs—and at month’s end, there arrived an unexpected tenth lamb, born to a young ewe. We would wait until May for the arrival of chicks, piglets, and additional hives of bees.

The heaviest snowfalls of the season surprised us during Holy Week and Easter. Nevertheless, the holy days were marked by the prayerfulness and joyful participation of the many persons who came to the priory to join us in the Holy Week cycle of prayer and liturgy.

The weekend after Easter, masters and doctoral students from Boston University’s School of Theology—participants in Professor Claire Wolfteich’s



“Prayer and Social Engagement” class—came to the priory for a time of exchange with the brothers. We are grateful to all of them for the rich and stimulating discussions in which we shared.

## **MAY 2007**

In early May, brother Richard and brother Michael represented us at the spring regional meeting of Benedictine and Cistercian monastic communities, held at the Abbey of Regina Laudis in Bethlehem, Connecticut. After a discussion on how the use of computers and the internet affect our monastic life, there was a festive lunch with the Regina Laudis community. The brothers returned home with gifts of fresh spring flowers, a wheel of cheese, and delicious preserves, all from the Abbey’s land.

For over 1500 years, hospitality has lain at the heart of every community inspired by the Rule of Saint Benedict. In our contemporary culture—marked by so much isolation, anonymity, and alienation—to welcome the other as *Other*, as *gift*, has become a powerful call to heal the humanity we share. As a Christian community, we believe that hospitality is a reflection and extension of God’s lavish welcoming. Here at the Priory, the welcoming of our guests is made concrete through the blending of the gifts of the brothers and the men and women who help us in so many ways. In May, we welcomed these friends as our guests for a weekend of reflection and sharing, to express our gratitude for their generosity. ☒