



Life Together in One Heart



THE ENGLISH NOVELIST, POET, AND SPIRITUAL WRITER, Evelyn Underhill, articulated the essence of *her* deep faith and *ours* when she wrote: “I can let go. I can surrender. I can die to this day because I expect the resurrection of a new day, of a new life.” In many ways these words capture the leitmotif of the past several months here in community. With love and care, we accompanied our brother Philip as he lived the last weeks of his ALS¹ journey and passed through death into “new life”.

Brother Philip’s courageous acceptance of his terminal illness, and his gracious response to all who made the journey with him, remains as a lasting gift to all of us, his brothers, and to all who accompanied him into the embrace of God’s tender love. His belief in the resurrection both sustained him and drew him on towards the Great Mystery in and with God. Dying as he did in the early morning of Christmas Eve, his own birth into new life came as the community was preparing to celebrate the birth of Jesus.

In death, brother Philip’s face bore a beautiful smile, his hallmark — a memorable gift to all of us. In his dying, he embodied Thomas Merton’s words: “Love comes out of God and gathers us to God.”

December 2008

As November was ending and December was beginning we had the joy of welcoming a Benedictine friend of many years, Sister Patricia Henry, prioress of Pan de Vida Monastery in Torreón, Mexico. In 2006, we had the opportunity to visit and to have exchange with the community of sisters in Torreón as we were traveling to Mexico City to visit our Benedictine sisters there. The Torreón sisters’ Benedictine witness among the poor, the marginalized, and women of their region is both inspiring and prophetic.

During the second week of December we were blessed to have with us Abbot Jerome Kodell of Subiaco Abbey in Arkansas and Father Martin Boler of Mount Saviour Monastery in Elmira, New York. Every four years we welcome brother monks to “visit” with us for several days to reflect, discuss, and share community life in the light of our Benedictine values. During the time of Visitation, our two brother monks were able to

¹ Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, also known as Lou Gehrig’s Disease.

accompany brother Philip for part of each day. We are grateful for their love and their fraternal support.

Brother Philip died on December 24th in the early morning, surrounded by all of us brothers, his sister Margie, and his physician, our good friend, Doctor Delores Barbeau. On the same day, we celebrated his life and person at the 5:15 PM Evening Prayer/Eucharist along with many friends who had gathered with us.

January 2009

On January 3rd, in our Barn Chapel, we celebrated a Memorial Eucharist of Thanksgiving for our brother Philip. We were surprised and humbled by the many people who came from near and far to give thanks for the gift of brother Philip's life. Among them were Bishop Paul Bootkoski of the diocese of Metuchen, New Jersey, a long-time friend; members of the Russian Orthodox monastic communities of New Skete in Cambridge, New York; and healthcare professionals and friends who assisted brother Philip during his illness. Joy and sadness were mixed with profound gratitude as we remembered the gift and committed life of brother Philip. The Burial is planned for May 30th, the Vigil of Pentecost.

From December 29th thru January 4th, we welcomed two men as participants in our Winter Experience in Monastic Living. Sam Bass of Austin, Texas, and Manuel Arce of Ossining, New York, shared seven days with the community, exploring the monastic values which are at the heart of our tradition and life. Prayer, work, study, dialogue, *lectio* and recreation were some of the threads that wove a fabric of friendship at the end of our days together. We wish them well as they continue their journeys.

February

During our Extended Retreat & Quiet Time, we were offered a one-day percussion/drumming workshop by Steve Leicach of Brattleboro, Vermont. Steve is a talented, mostly self-taught musician who specializes in the African drum and other instruments from West Africa. For those of us who do not play a musical instrument, Steve is an encouraging and

inspiring teacher. He opened doors into group playing which gives a sense of belonging to a wider, interconnected community of persons.

Brother Richard attended the annual American Abbots and Priors Meeting, held this year in Cullman, Alabama, from February 13th thru 17th. These meetings are opportunities for leadership persons in Benedictine communities to meet and reflect together on topics and issues of common interest. The Benedictine Abbot Primate, Notker Wolf, who came from Rome, attended the meeting and shared what he sees happening in the wider Benedictine world.

March

Bryan Moyer Suderman from Ontario, Canada, spent the evening of March 16th with us, sharing some of his original "songs of faith for small and tall". A member of the Mennonite Church of Canada, Bryan has been working in youth ministry on a national level and, at the same time, composing songs that are used widely by churches and communities across North America. His songs are at once simple, profound, biblically based, and fun. It was a joy to listen to him and to participate in his enthusiastic sharing of original songs. For more information on Bryan's music go to www.smalltallmusic.com

On March 27th, we had the joy of welcoming two friends, Kathleen Norris and Tomie dePaola. Kathleen is the author of several books: *Dakota – A Spiritual Geography*; *Amazing Grace*; *The Cloister Walk*; and her newest book, *Acedia & Me*. Through her books, she has brought the contemporary experience of monasticism and Benedictine life to countless readers and seekers. Her writing is in the style of plain-spoken meditations that are relevant and accessible. She has admirably lifted up the spirit of Benedictine values and spirituality in our contemporary society.

Tomie dePaola is the author of over 100 children's books including *Angels*, *Angels Everywhere*, and his most recent, *The Song of Francis*. Tomie has been a friend of the community for almost as long as our community has existed. In his early years he spent time exploring his vocation as a monk in our community before deciding that his true calling lay in his wonderful artistic gifts.

Kathleen and Tomie collaborated on the beautiful book, *The Holy Twins – Benedict and Scholastica*, which offers a moving tribute to Saint Benedict and Saint Scholastica and the women and men who have embraced the monastic tradition that they began over 1,500 years ago. ■

