

WESTON PRIORY

FALL/WINTER 2012



Abbot Leo and Pope John XXIII, 1959

“I am Joseph, your brother”

- Words from a greeting of Pope John XXIII
to a group of Rabbis visiting him at the Vatican.

BULLETIN

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² *The Living Rule of St. Benedict*, an unpublished writing for the Weston Priory monastic community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

Imaginative Beginnings

- *brother Michael*

I AM ALWAYS ENCOURAGED WHEN WE READ IN THE ACTS OF the Apostles that the early Christian communities were known as “followers of the Way.” (Acts 9:2) The New Jerusalem Bible has an excellent description and history of “the Way.” It reminds us that “the term is used by extension for the community itself.” Our experience being in community is an adventure of constant change, challenge and movement.

This summer I was offering hospitality to a group of music students from Dartmouth College. I assured the students that we were very happy to have them with us. As I responded to their questions I heard myself saying, “We were founded in 1953 by Abbot Leo. We moved into an abandoned farmhouse and used the barn as our oratory.” Later I marveled at how much I felt I was at brother Leo’s side when he first walked into the dilapidated chaos that we now call home.

I enjoy calling our brother Leo “Abbot Leo.” This man, who died of cancer two years before I came to community, had a colorful life. He went from Gerleve to Rome in the 1920’s to study theology. He traveled from Germany to America in the 1930’s when Hitler came into power. Then he sailed to Israel in the 1940’s to become Abbot of Dormition Abbey in Jerusalem. From there, in the 1950’s, he set out for Vermont to found the Weston Priory. When his hopes to renew the monastic life of the Dormition Abbey Community and to become Patriarch of Jerusalem were dashed in the 1960’s, he returned to Vermont to become a brother in our community. Here in Weston brother Leo assumed the humble task of doing the community laundry. During this time he wrote an essay entitled “The Abbot is Dead.” Certain-



Abbot Leo’s Abbatial Blessing,
Rome, 1953



Farmhouse and barn, around 1952

ly as the retired abbot he was not a prisoner of expectations but was enjoying his imaginative beginnings.

In his senior years brother Leo immensely enjoyed cutting lawns and walking barefoot on the grass in the early morning. Perhaps this is a dimension of growth that we all share: that the simple activities of life become as fresh and luminous as the dawn’s light. He entered graciously into the challenge of brotherhood. To obtain a much fuller picture of brother Leo you may read brother John’s book, “A Benedictine Legacy of Peace: The Life of Abbot Leo A. Rudloff.”

Each of us in some respect can relate our personal wanderings to brother Leo’s journey. Before coming to community I had my own youthful visions, disappointments and struggles. I lived eight months in Pakistan, teaching English in a minor seminary after receiving my Bachelor of Science in Applied Mathematics at the University of Calgary. Pakistan was an awakening! Its innumerable minarets announcing the Muslim call to prayer five times a day, was coupled with a grinding inhumane poverty that could not diminish the simplicity of faith within the tiny Catholic communities. There was one thing I hoped for when I came back: I wanted to integrate all that I had heard, seen and felt in that foreign land. Becoming a brother and all the learning that goes along with this calling has met my hope. To live faithfully in our suffering world is a work of patience, perseverance and creativity.

Cannot all of us tell a similar story of childhood, becoming an adult, making choices and learning from experience? Isn’t it marvelous that we have been given the gift of life in which we are able to make new beginnings?

Abbot Leo became known as brother Leo. He took the risk of remaining faithful to a vision of community that was different from a model of strictures and definitions. Yet he knew that he had not finished this journey of freedom. He said prayerfully before his physical death, “You may say that I have died, but never call me dead.” All of us are still on the way of becoming brother or sister to each other as we search for God. As followers of the Way our journey of heart brings us all together to life everlasting. ■

“Yes” from the Beginning

- *brother Augustine*

OUR CAR WAS BARELY MAKING IT UP THE LONG, STEEP hill on a snowy March afternoon in 1959. I was coming for a short retreat at a small new monastery called Weston Priory that, on this wintery day, seemed closer to the North Pole than to the rural mountains of southern Vermont. My classmate, Douglas Everson, from Holy Apostles Seminary in Connecticut was coming to enter the community, and I had a vague interest in experiencing what this young Benedictine monastery was all about.

When we finally arrived at the top of the hill, having gone through a minor snow squall on the way up, our driver exclaimed, “Where is it, this Priory?” What we saw ahead of us through the blowing snow was a small, white painted barn and farmhouse, with an enlarged chicken coop in the back. “Are you sure this is it?” asked Jerry, Douglas’ brother, who had offered to drive us up to Weston. Douglas assured his brother that we were on the right wooded hilltop of Vermont.

Father Stephen, the Prior at the time, welcomed us warmly and settled us into our sleeping quarters



Abbot Leo at the front door of the monastery, 1953



Renovated chapel and monastery, around 1953

in the farmhouse. After the evening Vesper Prayer with the brothers and a light supper, taken in a very small, multi-purpose dining room, we retired to our rooms. While preparing for the night, I was already beginning to feel the excitement of the challenge that these brothers had chosen in living this simple, monastic life in rural Vermont.

The next day, Douglas was invited to settle into the community area and I was invited to help the brothers in their maple sugaring operation. One of the brothers drove me up the half-mile road behind the monastery to the sugarhouse in the brothers’ old 1950 Dodge Coupe with chains on the tires to get us through the foot of snow that had fallen overnight. At the barn-sugarhouse, two brothers were stoking the wood-fired sap evaporator and canning the hot maple syrup as it was drawn off the pans. I helped to tap the metal tops into the mouths of the syrup cans and to seal the covers.

We worked on the sugaring until dark, and then returned to the farmhouse for Vespers and supper with the community. That night I slept very well, with brief dreams of sweet syrup flowing into metal containers and clouds of steam coming off the evaporator. In the morning, after chanting the Vigil psalms with brothers at 4:00 am and a quiet period of reflection, I could feel a word beginning to form in my heart—Yes! ■



From the Womb of Vatican II

- brother John

IN THE FALL OF 1963 ABBOT LEO SET OUT FOR THE HOLY Land, accompanied by three of the monks of Weston Priory. He wrote in the 1963 Autumn Bulletin, "As a symbol of our 'coming of age' we are sending out this year for the first time a small contingent of three young monks to the mother Abbey in Jerusalem with its dependency in Tabgha at the shore of the Sea of Galilee. This may be said to be a sign of life and confirmation of the belief that the founding of Weston was also a means of reviving the Abbey in the Holy Land."

Abbot Leo's excitement echoed the spirit of the Weston Community at the beginning of the Second Vatican Council. In September of that same year, English Benedictine Bede Griffiths, founder of an ashram in India and author of the monastic classics, *The Golden String*, and *Christ in India*, led the annual retreat for the brothers. He wore the saffron robes of a *Sannyassi* (ascetic monk) and adopted the Sanskrit name *Dayananda* (bliss of compassion).

In the four day retreat, from September 9 to 12, Bede spoke to the brothers of "the special graces for pioneering foundations." He described powerfully his own experiences in India and affirmed the direction of monastic renewal at the Priory. Bede opened new spiritual horizons for the Weston Community. In daily conferences, he drew from Teilhard de Chardin, reflected on creation and nature, and creatively assessed monastic practices and commitment. His vision of Christian monastic life embraced East and West, Hindu and Christian.

Culminating this extraordinary retreat, Bede celebrated the Syriac Rite Eucharist in English with the brothers. This was the first experience of Eucharist in the vernacular for the Weston Community. For the Benedictine Monks of Weston Priory, this retreat was an immersion into the spirit of Vatican Council II just beginning in Rome.

By 1964, the Second Vatican Council was in full swing at mid-term. It had begun with the revolutionary document calling for the renewal of the Liturgy, the communal prayer of the Church. The brothers took to heart the call for renewal sent out to the whole Church. As Abbot



brother Leo and brother John, 1977



Stone Chapel under construction, 1964

Leo had stated in the Bulletin article, the Community had "come of age." Spurred by the spirit of the Council, the brothers enthusiastically set out to forge their identity as a monastic community in the present age. In the retreat conference on monastic vocation Bede pointed out, "Saint Benedict did not propose any form of Angelism¹: Benedict provided prudently for body and soul, calling for cooperation with the creative work of God in labor . . . not an exploitation of nature." Strengthened by many such insights and the workings of the Vatican Council, the brothers undertook the creative work of their own monastic renewal.

Concrete steps for renewal began with the sharing of responsibilities. A committee was created for practically every brother, covering all areas of Community life: Liturgy, studies, kitchen, garden, farm, forestry, crafts, finances, maintenance, and grounds—more than enough responsibilities to go around. Previously all these tasks were carried by the Prior.

To facilitate communication, weekly meetings were scheduled at which every brother had a voice. In the monastic office, the prayer of Prime was the first to undergo change. Previously it included a "Chapter of Faults" and a conference by the Prior. Now, after the reading of a chapter of the Rule, all brothers were encouraged to offer their reflections.

The proposed re-construction of the oratory or chapel offered a unique training ground for living a renewed monastic life. The oratory is the heart of the monastery buildings. There the brothers gather several times each day in their communal search for God in prayer. It is also there that guests and visitors share most intimately in the life and hospitality of the monastic community. The architect's plans for the oratory had been drawn up the year preceding the Council. The Council document on the Renewal of the Liturgy raised new and engaging questions as the community moved toward construction.

Brothers engaged in emotional and enlightening discussions as they

¹ Angelism denies the fullness of the human as body and spirit. It is an ideology that denigrates or minimizes the body in respect to the soul and divorces the spiritual from the material in creation.

integrated the insights and spirit of the Council into the reconstruction and renewal of the oratory. Changes in the plans often occurred in the very process of construction. At the same time brothers labored together gathering stone, hand hewn beams, and bricks from nearby for the building. Community involvement in the project exercised communication and communion among all the brothers. It reached into the heart of monastic commitment—*conversatio morum*—conversation and sharing in all that really matters. It was observed by some that the Community made decisions by consensus—in reality the community was living consensually! The Council teaching on fidelity to the spiritual tradition and responding to the signs of the times took on flesh and blood, stone and mortar. It was neither remote nor abstract.

The first Canonical Visitation of the Priory after the close of the Second Vatican Council took place in 1966. Abbot Primate Beno Gut served as Visitor. He later became the Cardinal Prefect for the Vatican Congregation for Worship or Liturgy. His report on the Visitation confirmed the hopes of the community that emerged from the Second Vatican Council: “We feel that your beautiful chapel is a miniature rustic gem, worthy of the House of the Lord . . .”

The Abbot Primate’s report further described his perception of the community following the close of the Council and the renewal of the oratory, “Perhaps the most outstanding characteristic of the members of the community, in our opinion, is the manifest charity toward all and the love of the brethren. After all, the rule of Christ is the rule of love. The equality of the brethren enhances this love . . . To report on this visitation is at the same time an easy task and at the same time a difficult one. It is easy because we find little or nothing to condemn or correct in the life of the monks; it is difficult because Visitors are expected to find faults and discrepancies, to offer solutions and corrections. Yet we are happy to say that we are much pleased with this visitation and extremely gratified that we find little to criticize. We asked the Father Prior if there was something he thought should be stressed in this Visitation. His only response was: ‘tell the monks to continue being brothers’.”

In the Visitation Report or Recessus of 1966 Abbot Primate Beno Gut confirmed Abbot Leo’s observation that with the Council of Vatican II the Weston Community had “come of age.” As with the Catholic Church throughout the world, the Weston Priory embarked on the path of renewal and a new vision of the Church and monastic life. ■



Abbot Leo, 1972

Lomeo-Bulaty Photo



Weston Priory, 2011

Watch

- *brother Augustine*

Watch carefully, in the fading light of a winter evening for the mystery of life — the air around us filling with the first snow.

Gift of Hope

- *brother Columba*

Gift of hope
our patient waiting,
from inner silence
gently embracing
brother/sister/guest
now and not yet. Amen.

A Wisdom Event

- brother Placid

WESTON PRIORY WAS ONLY TEN YEARS OLD WHEN the Second Vatican Council convened. In many ways the Priory was still a toddler stumbling about as we learned to balance and walk. With the Council came a bold challenge to grow and mature and renew: Church, religious life, monastic life, and, especially, our life here at Weston. I came of age with the Council. A young monk in an old Church, a youngster in a centuries rich Benedictine way of life, someone new in a young monastic community, I suddenly became aware of the enormous richness and promise of the rejuvenating call to life and change the Council was offering all of us. I felt it was to encounter the very Spirit of Pentecost.

As we celebrate fifty years since the Council began, we also mark sixty years since the beginning of Weston Priory. It is a good time to reflect on this connection which became a nourishing source and inspiration for our community life. While there are many areas that strike me, I would like to highlight here the Council as a courageous Wisdom Event: it is the Wisdom embodied in the Council that spoke so forcefully.

The wise courage to set about giving new and bold life to the Church struck us all as a personal challenge to forge our identity and monastic way. It was in becoming a genuine community of fraternal love and trust that we could set out together into the future. We chose at that time to let go of an institutional monastic life style and embrace a more familial communitarian life which found its simple expression in reconceiving the hierarchical structures encrusting monastic living and embracing a consensual way of brotherhood in which we all share responsibility for our life. From decision making to household chores we all were mutually carrying our life on our shoulders.

Just as the Council wisely showed that the way continues not in an unchanging linear line but can turn and still remain in continuity with tradition and history, so too we came to envisage a way forward in our own concrete life. ■

Summoning to Council: Pope John XXIII and Weston Priory

- brother Elias



THE SIGNIFICANT IMPULSE FOR RENEWAL IN THE Church through Vatican Council II called by Pope John XXIII made itself felt across a wide spectrum of the Church body. Seeds of this ferment were already being planted some years before the Council actually began. Pope John XXIII's desire to "launch the Church on an adventure of hope"¹ inspired Benedictines, such as our founder, brother/Abbot Leo, to re-invigorate communities founded in the years just previous to the Council. This inspired a renewed examination of Saint Benedict's foundational document, his *Rule for Monks*. In these communities the "adventure of hope" was being articulated in the dream of a renewed monastic life which had as the primary focus of the community's energies: becoming an authentic community of brothers.

In our experience at Weston, this was begun through another, a more local, calling to council. Through the wisdom and insight of our brother John, who became Prior of the community in 1964, the community was being invited to assume responsibility for a deeper understanding of itself as a brotherhood with a shared responsibility for the spiritual and personal growth of each brother in the monastic community.

Chapter 3 of Saint Benedict's Rule: "Summoning the Brothers for Counsel" (*concilium* in Latin) became a touchstone for living out challenging horizons of shared responsibility based on trust that we had begun to explore on a daily basis through community discussions and shared reflections on the Rule. Saint Benedict continues: "after hearing the counsel (*concilium*) of the brothers, let the abbot ponder it and follow what he judges the wiser course."

Both Pope John XXIII and our brother John were in touch with the remarkable wellspring of Spirit that had started to permeate the predictable ways that the Church had expressed itself up to that time.

With the celebration of fifty years since the beginning of Vatican Council II—a Council of Renewal, and the founding of our monastery, Weston Priory, in 1953, we are called to a renewed listening to the voices that inspire us to journey forward into the future. "Listen with the ear of your heart," Saint Benedict reminds us.

Entering into this new season of Advent and the new year of 2013, we are confident that an "adventure of hope" continues to open here at Weston. ■

¹ Peter Hebblethwaite, *Pope John XXIII*, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1985, p. 4.



- *brother Alvaro*

Let us set out on a pilgrimage of the heart,
Wandering in the wilderness,
Learning how to dance¹
- from our song, *Pilgrimage of the Heart*

I like to think that in these sixty years,
brothers here at the priory
have been engaged in daily learning,
a daily practice of a communal dance.

Not fighting, not dancing against the flow,
nor simply following the flow.
Not flowing in a passive repetition of the past,
nor rejecting the teachings of good dance traditions.

Not struggling to be unique or different,
nor searching to do what has always been done—
simply an alternative way of dancing,
a circle dance, and an open circle.

I saw the movement, listened to the rhythm,
and joined the dance.
That was ten years ago,
but every day we learn how to dance anew. ■

¹Song from the recording *Pilgrimage of the Heart*, © 2007, The Benedictine Foundation of the State of Vermont, Inc.



Brothers with Mexican sisters in Mexico, 2010

Fresh Beginnings !

- *brother Daniel*

AFTER FIFTY YEARS, THE SMILE OF POPE JOHN XXIII continues to disarm us with its childlike charm. He seems to have a playful attitude towards life and people which immediately puts all at ease. The photograph displayed in our monastery, of our founder, brother Leo, and the Pope engaged in conversation, brings to mind a statement Pope John offered at the time of the Council: “The Council is simply the dawn, the forerunner of a new day coming forth.” When I reflect on this statement of the pope, so filled with hope and trust, I wonder how this is translated into our own community and how we, as brothers, experience it in an ongoing way.

When I first met the brothers, my first glimpse had the hues of the new sunrise. It was an early morning in January at our Benedictine sisters’ motherhouse in Mexico City. I had known monks, priests and religious sisters since my childhood. The experiences were positive, although at times they seemed formal and tentative. After the morning Eucharist, we gathered in the dining room for breakfast. I was immediately moved by the tenderness with which the brothers and the sisters related. To my amazement these North-American men were seemingly being led by very simple Mexican women. I noticed that the community of brothers were friends and in communion with one another. I kept paying attention as I interacted with them but I could not tell who the prior was, who the priests were, or who was in charge. They were singing with the sisters as well as sharing laughter amidst their attempts to



Brothers playing volleyball, 1980's

communicate in Spanish. The freshness of that morning still makes me smile as I recall it, realizing: this is different, this is new!

It became clear to me that this Benedictine brotherhood was choosing to dance, to play and to sing their prayer with spontaneity rather than with rigid formulas. I was discovering a community which had chosen to be inclusive, recognizing the full equality of women as witnessed by the covenanted relationship with the Mexican sisters. I felt the light and breath of the Spirit.

What is the spiritual craft that enables the Weston community to interact, then and now, in such an inclusive manner? Perhaps our community recreations over the years offer a glimpse into how we pray, work, welcome guests or visit with our Mexican sisters. During my early years as a monk we played volleyball. The rules, however, were a little different. Everybody on one side of the net had to touch the ball before it could go to the other side. You had three chances at serving, and the players rotated to the opposite side of the net. It was hilarious. Oftentimes when someone asked about the score we realized that no one was keeping score. Here we experienced brotherhood.

As we grew older and less nimble we changed the ball for a softer, bigger red beach ball. The onset of age brought further limitations, so we changed the red ball games for contra-dancing. Now, as we continue to face more mobility and balance challenges in our dancing, we again hope to uncover the potential present in our own vulnerability as we receive the gift of a “new day coming forth into our lives.”

At the end of the Rule for Monks, Saint Benedict tells us that he wrote it for beginners. (RB 73, 1) As we glance at the dawning light, can we still risk the adventure of making a fresh beginning together? New life and spirit continues to abound. May we live it in the grace of that early January morning and in the prophetic vision of Pope John XXIII ! ■



Council & Community

- *brother Mark*

CELEBRATING THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE SECOND Vatican Council as we prepare to celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of our monastic community here at Weston Priory invited me to reflect on aspects of our life that correlate with the experience and teaching of the Council.

An immediate visual image of the Council – the gathering of representatives from all parts of the world – expressed the Church as a very diverse embodied community, grounded in ancient traditions, seeking to discern and reveal the presence of God in the world today. This image reflected our Benedictine emphasis on the coming together of diverse persons in the common search for God where each brother is encouraged to contribute his unique person and voice in continually creating and recreating the common life that welcomes God, in each new moment, in all the concrete variety of our created world. Brother Leo's founding inspiration was that the Weston monastic community would not serve as a local parish and would not maintain and staff a school, as was and is the case of many Benedictine monasteries in the United States. The emphasis, rather, was to be the witness of an intense common life. Work would be within the monastery and welcoming guests a special expression, making it possible for the brothers to maintain consistent personal contact in the various times of community prayer each day, sharing meals together, meeting for discussions of community values and practical concerns, and even setting aside a number of days each month for retreat and special reflection in common.

Vatican II's focus was a response to Pope John XXIII's admonition “to be open to the signs of the times.” In much the same way, the Weston community has endeavored to be faithful to the admonition of its founder, brother Leo, “to be open to the Holy Spirit.” We seek to “listen with the ear of our hearts” to the voice of God in our midst and wherever that voice may be discovered. We always receive a special gift and a new awakening! ■



Abbot Primate Notker Wolf and brother Richard

One Among Many: Rome 2012

- *brother Richard*

IN SEPTEMBER OF THIS YEAR I HAD THE PRIVILEGE TO represent our monastic community at the Congress of the Benedictine Confederation of Monasteries that is convened every four years at Sant'Anselmo in Rome. Over 300 Abbots and Conventual Priors came together for the ten-day exchange. Present were also representatives of the International *Communio* of Benedictine Women, of Anglican Benedictines, and delegates of Eastern Orthodox monastic life.

Global monasticism was evident. Participants came from many countries and diverse cultures: from Africa, Latin America, Europe, the United States and Canada, Australia, India, the Philippines, Korea, China, Vietnam, and several other countries of Asia. They come from monastic communities guided by the Rule of St. Benedict in response to the Gospel call in the world today. Amidst the commonality of our Benedictine identity, there is a rich diversity in our monastic practice. Amidst the autonomy of each monastery, there is a chosen interdependence that provides inspiration and support to one another as members of the Confederation.

In this article I will highlight some of my experiences and personal reflections from the Congress. The Congress provides a springboard for an appreciation of our own monastic life here at Weston Priory especially



on the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of our founding. Our monastic practice was birthed in the years of ferment in the church and monastic life leading up to and during Vatican Council II.

When I arrived at Sant'Anselmo in Rome, a group of us were invited to visit the Benedictine monastic community at the Basilica of St. Paul Outside-the-Walls. A monastic community has lived for centuries at the site of this Basilica where tradition says St. Paul was buried. The ongoing excavations under the Basilica have unearthed the remnants of a monastery and the signs of monastic life from the very early centuries of the church in Rome, even prior to the time of Saint Benedict.

Significantly it was in the chapter-room of the present-day monastery, on the feast of Saint Paul, January 25, 1959, that Pope John XXIII first announced his desire to convoke the Ecumenical Council of Vatican II. Like Saint Paul, Pope John was inspired as he listened to the movement of the Holy Spirit in his own life and in his vision for the church. He likewise was attentive to the diversity of gifts that each part of the Body of Christ, the church, contributed in the proclamation of the Good News of God's mercy and love to all creation.

The visit to Saint Paul's initiated an unexpected basis for further reflection during the days ahead. During the Congress there were two major presentations: one by the Trappist Monk, Michael Casey, on the ancient tradition of "Autonomy" in monastic life over the centuries to the present day; and the other presentation by Michael Hochschild, a sociologist from the University of Paris who has done research at eight monasteries of Central Europe concerning "Continuity and Change in Benedictine Monastic Life."



l to r, Abbot André Laberge from Saint-Benoît-du-Lac, Québec;
Abbot Peter Novecosky from St. Peter's Abbey, Saskatchewan;
and brother Richard from Weston Priory

The address of Michael Casey, O.C.S.O., highlighted for me the importance of autonomy as expressed in the particular, local Christian and monastic community, reflecting the universal communion with the whole body of the church. This insight, quite evident in the first millennium of the church's life, was given prominence in the discussions and documents of Vatican II. Michael Casey accented that "conversation, communion, and cooperation" among diverse communal experiences remains a resilient signpost in the Benedictine monastic tradition.

Michael Hochschild's presentation evoked the challenges and the need for attention to the present-day reality, particularly the creeping individualism so prevalent in Western culture. Individualism can be fostered through new emerging forms of technology and through an approach to work that isolates rather than supports and encourages creative interpersonal communication in service to one another. The day-to-day choices for in-depth conversation and personal interaction in life and work are vital to the evolution of human growth and maturation in today's world.

Abbot Primate Notker reflected that this witness is our monastic contribution to evangelization today: we are to be signs of joy – a community of faith and love in the midst of the church and world, not through power-over but through love, communion and service to one another!

A very hope-filled moment at the Congress emerged in an address and subsequent exchange with Cardinal João Braz de Aviz, the recently appointed Brazilian Prefect of the Congregation for Religious Men and Women in the Church (CICLSAL).¹ He spoke of the important witness of

¹ CICLSAL is an acronym for: Institutes of Consecrated Life and for Societies of Apostolic Life

Benedictine monastic life through the ages and in the present history of the church. He reiterated the equal importance that scripture gives to the charismatic aspects of the church's role in monastic and religious life that complements the hierarchic and magisterial dimension of the church.

Cardinal João underscored the emphasis in the Documents of Vatican II, especially *Lumen Gentium* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church), that the basis of our Christian life is our common baptism into Christ Jesus and not the call to orders that some have received. He said: I may be called to serve as a cardinal, but, first of all, I am a baptized person like every other Christian. I am no holier than a mother birthing and caring for a child or a Religious woman in the church today. My service to the church is but to listen fraternally to others so that I can learn from them and we can faithfully dialogue together as we search for a Gospel response.

AMEN. That is truly a word of hope!

Two additional signs of life and hope at the Congress were reports about the interreligious dialogue Benedictine monks have begun with Shi'a Muslim scholars from Iran that was continued through further exchange in Iran during the days following the Congress.

The other sign of growth is a new direction for AIM (Alliance for International Monasticism) which also is celebrating its 50th year of development. AIM was inaugurated to assist the foundation of monasteries in emerging parts of the world, for example, in Africa, Asia and Latin America. While exchange and assistance will continue, it has become more and more evident that the younger emerging monasteries have a mutual gift to offer to the older and more established areas of monastic life and church. The growth in friendship and dialogue among monastics of different cultures and tongues is indispensable in our globalized and highly individualized world.

The Benedictine Sisters/Nuns have an International Conference called the *Communio Internationalis Benedictinarum* (CIB) that meets once a year. They gather in one of the different regions of the world where their Sisters are located, and every other year in Rome. Such meetings enable the Sisters to experience Benedictine life, its liturgy and prayer, in its grassroots diversity and inculturated expression. It is a witness to "unity amidst diversity" in a globalized church and world. It is a perspective and gift that the monastic women bring to us all.

To conclude with a personal note: I always enjoy visiting Italy since my familial roots come from an area of the country south of Rome. My flesh and bones resound in the culture and food! But even more, the days at the Congress brought me to a deeper appreciation and gratitude for our life as a monastic community at Weston. From this particularity and local identity we have opened to a catholicity and universality that enriches our monastic search for God, flourishing among the great diversity of peoples, cultures, tongues and faith expressions and in the beauty of all creation. ■

Of Gratitude, Droplets and Sparrows

- *brother Peter*



FIFTY YEARS AGO, IN 1962, NEARLY AT THE END OF THE Pontificate of Good Pope John XXIII, Vatican Council II held its first session. The Council produced 16 documents, returned the Church to a more collegial way of governance and gave a voice to the laity, to priests and to bishops. It fostered a real participation in Church life and liturgy with vernacular languages accessible to all. Religious freedom, openness to the contemporary world, and benevolent relations with all Christians and those of other religions, especially the Jewish people, marked a hopeful new beginning for the Church and the world.

Nearly sixty years ago, in 1953, Weston Priory was founded in Weston, Vermont, by Abbot Leo Rudloff of the Dormition Abbey in Jerusalem. Along with the brothers in the new community, Abbot Leo created an opportunity to renew monastic life, returning to the sources of Benedict's inspiration in the Rule and other seminal monastic writings. They together also tried to discern the signs of the times in the contemporary Western world, embedding and inculturating this new community in its own unique environment. Abbot Leo often said "Be open to the Holy Spirit", a saying which invited participation with him and co-responsibility for the future of this new community. The coinciding renewal of Vatican Council II helped and enhanced this new movement.

Though the accomplishments of the Council have been somewhat disregarded and muted over these fifty years, the experience of hope and of a new Pentecost, a new springtime for the Church, really cannot be lost. As Pope John himself, on the night he announced the convocation of the Council, when he had difficulty falling asleep, reflected "Giovanni, why don't you sleep? Is it the Pope or the Holy Spirit who governs the Church? It's the

Holy Spirit, no? Well, then, go to sleep, Giovanni!"¹

The Holy Spirit continues to speak in the voice of the faithful: laity, priests and bishops. All are more aware of their rights and responsibilities for the life of the Church and for their part in bettering life in our world. This sometimes brings controversy and dissidence in the Church. Is this not a sign of the Spirit's working? Have we not changed from scrupulously following unchanging rules absolutely, to living consciously and conscientiously the love of Christ, wherever that may bring us?

One of the maxims Pope John followed in his life states: "Drops of water hollow out a stone (Gutta cavat lapidem)"² His life exemplified patience, trust in the Spirit, and faithfulness to Christ's Gospel. That's what flowered into Vatican Council II. Today there are many faithful Christians, signs of hope, who will eventually hollow out a way forward for the Church. We are called to be faithful.

I am profoundly grateful for the grace of living my life as a monk of Weston Priory. In this Benedictine community I have experienced the joy of Christian brotherhood, the peace of faithful, mutual commitment, and the continual surprise of living in the Spirit which calls us always forward.

Good Pope John characteristically put it very simply: "Be joyful, seek the best, and let the sparrows chirp."³ Ultimately the Council, the Church and Weston Priory are about a way of life and how we relate to each other from the heart, in the love of Christ. Jesus has promised us abundant life, while splashing in living water and singing our Gospel song! ■

¹ *Wit and Wisdom of Good Pope John*, Collected by Henri Fesquet, © 1964 by P. J. Kennedy & Sons, New York, pg. 45

² *op. cit.* pg. 85

³ Brother Roger Schultz of Taizé recounted in many places this advice he received from Pope John.

Life Together in One Heart



Update

Since our last Bulletin the Priory buildings have taken on a youthful appearance. The new vinyl siding is attractive and eliminates the demanding maintenance task of re-staining the wood facing that has served for many years. It adds a valuable insulation factor for winter heating. Extensive necessary repairs have also been done to our Morningside Guest House.

Maria Guarino's thesis for a Doctorate in Philosophy at the University of Virginia, *Listen with the Ear of the Heart: A Contemplative Ethnography of Musical Performance, Communal Religious Life, and Mystical Spirituality among the Monks of Weston Priory*, made intriguing reading during meals in the fall. The Community is honored by her sensitive and provocative study.

The Gallery Shop has been replenished with a two year supply of wool from our sheep processed by Green Mountain Spinnery, a co-operative in Putney, Vermont. Creative pottery, woodworking, and calligraphy by the brothers are also available in the Gallery Shop.

May

From May 28 to June 3, the Priory hosted four young men for the semi-annual Monastic Experience. Richard Meyer from Huntington Valley, Pennsylvania; Michael MacDonald from Monterey, Massachusetts; Christopher Pantazi from Warren, Rhode Island; and Samuel Bauer from Boston, Massachusetts joined the brothers for seven days, sharing the daily life of the



l to r, Rich, Mike, Chris, and Sam

community. They entered into prayer, work, discussions, and meals with interest and enthusiasm.

June

On June 21, Luis Arancibia and Teresa Casillas and their three children from Madrid, Spain, together with Teresa's mother from Buenos Aires, Argentina, brought greetings from the Trinitarian Nuns in Suesa, Spain. Their visit gave occasion to renew the friendship that is growing with the Sisters' community in Spain following the visit of four of the Weston brothers in the Spring of 2010.



l to r, Teresa and Luis

July

During July, newspaper articles in the Burlington Free Press and the Upper Valley News featured the work, prayer and hospitality of the Priory community.

On July 19, four of our Benedictine Sisters traveled from Mexico to Weston. Sisters Roberta, Guadalupe, Margarita and Antonia spent two weeks with the community and joined in work, prayer, and recreation with their

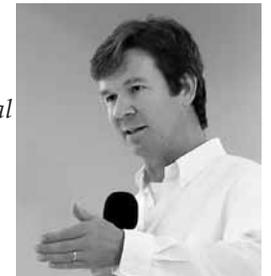


l to r, Sisters Roberta, Guadalupe, Margarita, and Antonia

ebullient familial spirit. The presence of our Mexican Sisters is always a time of joyful sharing and reunion. Each time a small group of the Sisters come to be with us, we feel the presence of the full Congregation that works with such devotion for the poor in Mexico.

August

On August 11, Timothy Byrnes, Professor of Political Science at Colgate University in Hamilton, New York, presented a fascinating reflection on his book, *Reverse Mission; Transnational Religious Communities and the Making of US Foreign Policy*, in the Visitors' Center. The book explores the different yet complimentary vision of "reverse mission" of the Jesuits, Maryknoll Sisters, and Weston Priory. Timothy has known the Weston community for the past thirty-five years and has spent time visiting the Mexican Benedictine Sisters. His



Tim Byrnes

parents, Bob and Helen Byrnes, are longtime friends of the Priory.

The Board of Directors and friends of VAMOS celebrated the 25th anniversary of the founding of VAMOS by Bill and Patty Coleman in the Visitors' Center on August 25th. Patty presented a dynamic historical perspective on the birth of VAMOS. Besides Eucharist, picnic lunch, and exchange, participants were treated to a new VAMOS video by Sean Dougherty.



l to r, Patty, Alejandro, Dick and Agnes Dougherty

September

Brother Richard attended the Abbots' Congress of the Benedictine Confederation in Rome from September 16 to 27. Cistercian Trappist monk, Michael Casey, presented a stimulating paper on monastic autonomy. Belgian sociologist, Michael Hochschild, addressed the Congress on the contemporary question of "Benedictines Between Continuity and Change." The Congress is held every four years and brings together the leadership of Benedictine monasteries throughout the world.

October

A large audience gathered in the Visitors' Center on October 13 to hear Robi Damelin, a bereaved mother whose son, an Israeli soldier, was shot and killed by a Palestinian sniper at a military checkpoint in the West Bank. She offered an inspiring testimony and challenge with the topic, "On the Road to Reconciliation, A Conversation with Robi Damelin." Together with hundreds of other bereaved Israelis and Palestinians, she is working to show that reconciliation between individuals and nations is possible through dialogue and mutual understanding. More information can be found on any one of these websites: www.theparentscircle.org , www.onedayafterpeace.com and www.bloodrelations.org



Robi Damelin

The community had the extraordinary experience of a first-hand view of life for Christians in Pakistan with the visit of Father Emmanuel Yousaf and Andrew Jilani from October 20 to 22. Father Emmanuel is National Director of the Catholic Peace and Justice Commission in Pakistan and Andrew is Associate Professor and Research Adviser at Smith College in Amherst, Ma. They described the precarious existence of the small minority of Christians in Pakistan. The visit was a reminder to the com-

munity that brother Michael is, in a way, a gift from Pakistan. Following his graduation from the University of Calgary, he taught English as a volunteer for eight months in Pakistan. He then journeyed from home in Lethbridge, Alberta, to become a brother in Weston Priory.



l to r, Andrew and Father Emmanuel

November

On November 3, the Priory hosted a workshop presentation by the organization, Migrant Justice/Justicia Migrante, in the Visitors' Center. Migrant Justice "works to engage, educate and organize communities and allies to effectively challenge US immigration, economic, and trade policies and practices that adversely affect farm workers and family farmers." Due to the large number of migrant workers on farms in Vermont, support for the work of this organization is critical in this area. Information about Migrant Justice can be found at <http://migrantjustice.net>.

Directors and friends of Dismas of Vermont gathered for their semi-annual meeting and time for reflection at the Priory from November 9 to 11. Special good news at this meeting is the progress for a new Dismas House in Hartford, Vermont. With the clearing of legal permits, the project can now move forward. It has been a privilege for the Priory to be associated with Dismas and their work of assistance and rehabilitation for persons leaving prison since the beginning of this much needed ministry.



Over, Migrant Justice



Natalia, Migrant Justice

December

As brother Robert celebrates his 91st birthday this month, we give thanks for the meaning our monastic life at Weston Priory and the renewal that Vatican Council II have brought to his many years.

It is in this spirit of thanksgiving that all the brothers send you our loving greetings and sincere best wishes during this Christmas and New Year celebration.

"Peace to all who are far and near!" (Ephesians 2:17) ■



Eliasar, Migrant Justice

Credit:

Page 13: Official Vatican Extraordinary Medal of Pope John XXIII celebrating the convocation of the Ecumenical Council Vatican II. By famed Italian sculptor Giacomo Manzù.



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