



The Guadalupe Center, central building, front



The Guadalupe Center, central building, back



Casitas (houses) for retreatants



Prayer in the chapel

They knew the rubrics which were to be studiously observed and professionally practiced. They knew what was expected from conferences and lectures by learned theologians. But after the celebrations with the simple people of Mexico in remote, indigenous and Latino villages, the brothers' Eucharist, Liturgy and Common Prayer would be forever changed. It was a renewed personification of the Bread of the Holy One's life, celebrated in areas where theologians rarely traveled, but where the body of Jesus was present in the faces and spirit of a welcoming, impoverished people.

Several years later, the Sisters considered enlarging their retreat house in Cuernavaca, the City of Eternal Spring. They welcomed the brothers to join the project. It would provide the monks a home base for their future visits to Mexico. The idea of a shared retreat center emerged and flowered. A center of prayer and hospitality was dreamed into being—a place of welcome for guests from north and south, a sign of the friendship, care, sisterhood and brotherhood of the Mexican Benedictine Sisters and the Weston monks. It was to be a visible and vibrant sign of the living covenant between the Communities of Sisters in Mexico and the brothers of Weston. The Guadalupe Center was born of the *Arco Iris* Covenant, the colorful rainbow of faith and friendship that joined the two communities into one family. It continues today as a sign of hope, for the unity of the Americas and of the world. "That all may be one, one with our God and with each other." ■

A more extended version of this essay is posted on the Weston Priory website: www.westonpriory.org

Dreaming Together

Sister Fabiola

WOVEN BY A DEEP BOND OF FRIENDSHIP between our two Benedictine Communities, the brothers of Weston and the Sisters in Mexico, two dreams became a reality with the creation of the Guadalupe Center in the beautiful, flower-adorned city of Cuernavaca, Mexico. Here this Center provides a favorable space for prayer, reflection, and the encounter with God in the context of our shared Benedictine spirituality. The Prologue of the Rule of St. Benedict calls us to truly form "a school for the Lord's Service." The mutual endeavor to establish the Guadalupe Center has been an inspiration and a gift of God for me, for our two communities, for the Church, and I believe, for many in our world.



There is an expression: "The pilgrim does not have a way, but finds the way by walking it." What truth there is in these words! Our two communities have walked together with a common vision for the Reign of God. We have shared the quest to understand the reality in which our peoples live and have committed ourselves to a vision of peace, justice, freedom, and respect for human rights. Through the simple service of hospitality, prayer, and reflection in our home at the Guadalupe Center, we have tried to offer people a taste of community life and an opportunity to discover God in the faces of the poor.

It is always with joy and enthusiasm that we have received groups of North Americans in our simplicity and with our limitations; and somehow the spirit always brings us to a deep encounter in the gift and uniqueness of each participant. There always remains the challenge of communication because we Sisters lack a good command of English; but ultimately we are able to go beyond mere words and touch a communion of hearts. The challenge of language can be recounted in stories that have always elicited good, hearty laughter. Sisters Reyna and Hilaria and I will share some of these incidents with you later on in this reflection.

There has been such richness in the plurality of the persons and groups who have come to the Guadalupe Center: women and men of different spiritualities, religious backgrounds, cultures, ideologies, age, sexual orientation, etc. Yet we have discovered a common thread that



Weston brothers, Benedictine Sisters (Sr. Fabiola, center) and participants at prayer

unites us in our *Search for God* and the belief that a different and new world for everyone *is possible*.

What has this experience meant to me?

The years lived at the Guadalupe Center have opened me to a wider, more universal view of life. It has been an experience that has touched the depth of my heart and enabled me to encounter myself as the person I am. I have grown as a Sister in our community, with the brothers of Weston Priory, and even more, becoming a sister to all.

As I reflect, I have become more deeply aware of who God is for us: *A Compassionate God* who deeply feels the pain of marginalization, hunger, violence, and death in our country, on this continent of the Americas, and throughout the world. Those who suffer are our brothers and sisters; *A Tender God* who is revealed in my Sisters in community, in many friends and relations, and in the lushness and great diversity of nature (in spite of the contamination that our planet suffers); *A Loving God* who loves with the passion of a woman's heart.

This deeply refreshing experience of God has given me a new way to imagine, think, and express myself through my own feminine reality.

The years at the Guadalupe Center have also helped me to assimilate our own indigenous culture with that of other peoples who share a common vision of respect, love, and care for the earth and for the whole cosmos.

Because of this time of service on behalf of the Reign of God, I am better able to embrace the world as it is, with its goodness and dreams, with its brokenness and limitations. What I have learned at the Center has been invaluable and so life-giving, beyond what I could ever have imagined! I now believe that a new and better world is possible because I have come to know people who share this vision and who are willing to risk themselves in order to make this dream a reality.

Congratulations brothers and sisters! These 25 years of searching, dreaming, and sharing together challenges us to what this experience will continue to mean in our daily lives and in the present-day reality of our world. ■

Anecdotes



I conferred with Sisters Reyna and Hilaria, who also spent many years in service at the Guadalupe Center, and we recalled a few of the many stories or anecdotes of occasions at the Center when we encountered the inevitable "confusion of tongues!"

► **SOON AFTER ARRIVING AT THE CENTER**, we received a group in which two of the men, during their free time, were fixing whatever needed fixing on the doors, windows, electrical contacts, etc. and we were supplying the work tools. One day they were in the dining room and one of the men said to the Sisters, "I need a flyswatter." The Sisters did not understand what he was saying, and they asked him to repeat it. Still they did not understand what he was asking for. So he made a sign that seemed like he wanted to hammer something; so they rapidly went to the storage room where the tools were kept and they brought him a hammer. The man responded, "No, Sister, with a hammer I cannot kill a fly crawling on the window," and he pointed to the fly. Finally, the Sister realized what he was trying to say and brought him a flyswatter—in Spanish, a *matamoscas*. Yes, the man said, just what I said, "a flyswatter!"

► **THERE WAS A PRIEST AT THE CENTER** who came to study Spanish. After some weeks of arduous study, he offered to celebrate Mass in Spanish for us. We assisted him to prepare everything for the Mass. Everything was done properly and according to the rubrics. At the moment in which he should have said in Spanish: *Levantemos los corazones* (Lift up your hearts), he mispronounced the word *corazones* and said: *Levantemos los calzones*, which means: Lift up your underwear!! Well, we Sisters were bursting with laughter inside and we did not dare to look at one another, when suddenly one of us, a little distracted, gave the traditional response: *Los tenemos levantados hacia al Señor* (We have lifted them up to the Lord!). Well, we could not continue responding or singing without laughing. The priest seemed so disconcerted and afterwards asked very seriously, "Sisters, why were you laughing?" He was so formal and proper in his ways that we did not have the heart to tell him what actually happened, but we laugh to this day when we remember this story.

► **WHENEVER I GAVE THE FINAL INSTRUCTIONS** to the group before leaving, they always asked where to put the dirty bed linen. I told them that there is an English word that is dangerous for me to try to pronounce, so please be patient with me as I try to pronounce the word correctly. What happened the first time I tried to respond to the question about the bed linen, in particular the sheets, I said: "You put your *sh_t* in the pillow case!" and everyone was rolling over in laughter.

While there can be a "confusion of tongues" at times, there is no misunderstanding about our hearts and spirit at the Center. We each discover the Reign of God regardless of our language.