

WESTON PRIORY

SPRING/SUMMER 2014

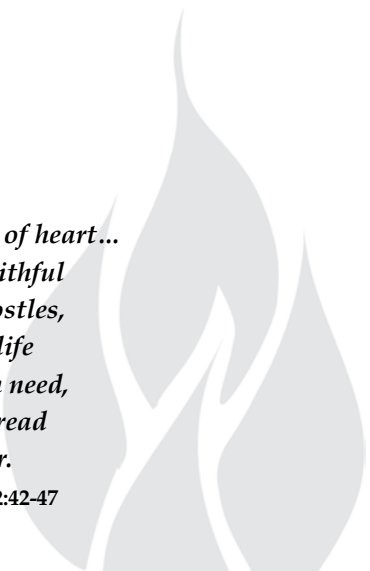


Astounding us with Joy !



Brothers and sisters during a gesture prayer at the Guadalupe Center in Cuernavaca.

BULLETIN



*With great joy and simplicity of heart...
the disciples remained faithful
to the teaching of the apostles,
to living a communal life
and sharing with those in need,
to the breaking of the bread
and a spirit of prayer.*

- Acts 2:42-47

FIFTY DAYS AFTER PASSOVER DURING THE JEWISH SPRING harvest feast (Pentecost) the community of disciples gathered in Jesus' name experiencing an extraordinary fire of love and forgiveness that embraced them all. The many pilgrims who also came for the feast were so moved by the disciples' proclamation of the marvels of God and their new life in the Risen Jesus. What they heard and understood went far beyond the limitations of words and languages. It was the Spirit of God bringing them together, breathing new life into each and all. A new Pentecost was emerging — a springtime of new beginnings and deep hope.

In February, when visiting our Benedictine Sisters (Misioneras Guadalupanas) in Mexico, we gathered at the Guadalupe Center in Cuernavaca for dialogue and mutual support in our monastic life today. We were joined by two of our Trinitarian Sisters from Suesa in Spain, Sisters María Urquiza and María José Sotorrio; and with our Benedictine Sisters Patricia Henry and Maricarmen Bracamontes who came from their monastery, Pan de Vida (Bread of Life), in Torreón, northern Mexico. Also our Benedictine brother Simón Pedro Arnold joined us from the Andean monastery in Chucuito, Peru.

Our days together in Mexico were filled with a profound communion of heart, rooted in the words and experiences that we exchanged with one another, appreciating and transcending our cultural differences and tongues. We will share some of this experience with you through this bulletin both in our own words and through the thoughts and expressions of other brothers and sisters and friends who gift us with life and hope.

We have reprinted a beautiful mantra by Sister Maricarmen from Torreón. Its prayerful rhythm punctuated our gathering in Mexico.

Our brother Simón Pedro Arnold returned from Mexico with us to embark upon a well-deserved sabbatical; the first after more than 40 years living and serving among the Aymara indigenous of Peru. Through his

enclosed article he graciously brings us into some of the journey with his monastic community coming from Belgium to Peru's Andean Altiplano.

Speaking of the indigenous, during our exchange in Mexico we visited our friend Lucio Pérez and his family in Amatlán, a Nahuatl indigenous village outside of Cuernavaca. In the midst of the gracious hospitality of his home and community, Lucio inspired us with the ecological and conservation work they are doing to preserve their land in the spirit of their ancestors. He also shared with us the ancient yet farsighted wisdom of his people who have a tradition of consensus-gathering and gender-equality for the self-governance of their community.

Meeting again with our friends from the Women's Cooperative from La Nopalera, Mexico, it always amazes us how these women of humble background and resources reflect together so profoundly about the Gospel message. They genuinely put into practice their love for one another and service to their communities amidst such staggering challenges in their personal and familial lives. To Sofia, María, Rosa Bravo, Rosa Avilés, Guillermina, Ana María and Rufina, many thanks for your witness to the resurrection and the healing power of the Spirit in and through your lives.

At the beginning of March Sister Laura Bufano spent two months of her sabbatical with us as she concluded six years of congregational leadership among her Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet. She shares a simple but profound poem/moment of "stopping."

On March 24th we marked the 30th Anniversary of the arrival of Felipe and Elena and their family from Guatemala. Three of their daughters, Alicia, Juanita and Maya, took the initiative to come to Weston to celebrate this anniversary with us as a sign of their family's gratitude for the years they lived in Sanctuary at our monastery. While Felipe and Elena, along with their older daughter, Sonia, and son, Julio, could not be with us in Weston, they wrote a beautiful reflection that we have enclosed about how they were remembering those days and years together.

We are also grateful for the outreach to persons leaving prison that Dismas of Vermont has offered here in Vermont over the years. We have invited Rita McCaffrey, who founded and worked hard to encourage the continuing growth of this significant and much needed form of hospitality, to tell about the latest house that is opening and being dedicated in these days.

The ordinary, simple gifts of each other, whether in a word of promise or a healing touch, in a stone or flower, a lizard or bird, in a piece of broiled fish with broken bread, all reveal the blessings of the Spirit's abiding presence. The fearful, dark emptiness of the tomb is transformed into an experience of forgiveness, communion and peace. We hear the invitation to risk all and return with Jesus to the beginning in order to walk anew the roads and hills of Galilee with those at the margins and on the periphery of church and society. Over and again our hearts are humbly astounded in joy, aflame with love and kindling an immense gratitude. ■



Brothers and sisters meeting in Cuernavaca.

How to Speak of Faith?

- *brother Michael*

WHEN WE GATHERED IN CUERNAVACA THIS YEAR WE had the opportunity to listen to our brothers and sisters from Mexico, Peru, and Spain. We gathered together for a number of days to share with each other our experiences of faith. One of the insights I treasure from our encounter is that there are various ways to speak of faith.

We gathered each day for two discussions which were about an hour and a half long. We would share our reflections and stories that come from our community life. As we listened to each other with the ear of our heart a common bond of trust and understanding was woven. As each person spoke the various threads of our sharing created a weaving of faith that was beyond any single thread of expression. Our words held a vulnerability that comes from trying to articulate what is beyond words.

A simple example of this is when Sister María de los Ángeles, whose ministry is in Mexico City, shared her experience about a little boy who was dropped off at school late one day and could not stop crying. Sister Ángeles is the principal of the school and the boy was sent to her. She was very patient with him and finally learned that his alcoholic father was abusing his mother. As she spoke the silence in the room was so complete that we could sense our hearts beating as one. The pain of the little child, the patience of Sister Ángeles, and our own empa-



Sister María de los Ángeles.

thy to this suffering are vital expressions of faith.

In our time together we related to each other in a spontaneous way. A tear flowed from Sister Patricia when she spoke of their community's hunger for a celebration of Eucharist that would feed the needs of the people they serve. She spoke of how their monastery in Torreón, Mexico, is called, "Pan de Vida," which means, "Bread of Life," and her deep hopes that their community continues to be a nourishing presence.

Our brother, Simón Pedro whose monastery is in Peru, is an author and is articulate. His action of coming to Weston Priory for six months of Sabbatical Rest speaks to our hearts. His prayerful presence is an example of being still and listening to God's voice.

Laughter filled the air when Sister María José from Spain shared how the Trinity is not so much a triangle made of straight lines and pointed edges, but more a circle: like a snowball! Having left the snow and cold behind in Vermont for the warmth and flowers of Cuernavaca, we happily contemplated how our gathering could warm our hearts.

Perhaps the most resonate expression of faith was our gathering for Eucharist on Sunday. Earlier in the morning we had shared varied and insightful reflections on the Gospel of the day and so our prayer was simple and without many words. Also present at the Eucharist were the Mexican sisters who work at the Guadalupe Center in Cuernavaca and who offered the service of preparing all our meals. Although they had not been part of our formal discussions, they had fed us not only with food but with their loving kindness, delighting in being present at meal times and at evening recreations.

Tears, laughter, enjoying each other, and being together in silence and prayer are expressions of faith. Isn't it wonderful that our faith escapes the trap of definitions and frees us to become bread for each other? ■

Oh! Sabiduría Divina
Tú fecundas nuestro ser
Y del seno del Misterio
Nueva vida haces nacer.

Oh! Divine Wisdom
You make fertile our being
And from the womb of Mystery
You give birth to new life.

- Sister Maricarmen Bracamontes, O.S.B.



Rosa Bravo, Sofia, Rufina, María, Ana María, Guillermina, Rosa Avilés (l to r).

Rejoice!

*Can we call joy
that otherness we taste
within the taste of all things?¹*

- Catherine de Vinck

- brother Daniel

WHEN WE BROTHERS CAME BACK FROM MEXICO THIS winter, a friend of our community asked I if could translate a note she was writing to the women who make the embroidered shirts that we sell at the monastery. She was so thrilled by the happy feeling those garments conveyed! She spoke of the bright colors of the threads, the playful designs, the hopeful messages, and the simple beauty of the shirts. Of course it was a joy to translate her message of gratitude and appreciation to a group of women whom we brothers have come to know and befriend over the years.

Our friendship with these embroidery craftswomen began 26 years ago, when our Benedictine Sisters were staffing the parish of Our Lady of Guadalupe at a squatters' settlement known as La Nopalera. They organized a sewing cooperative among the poor whom they served. This cooperative was an organic outgrowth of the faith sharing gatherings of both Sisters and neighborhood women. The women reflected weekly on their experience of poverty from the perspective of the Gospel. They decided to buy t-shirts and embroider them to resell and help their families with the extra income. They would learn embroidery from the Sisters, and would share the profits among themselves according to needs in the families rather than their skill or productivity as embroiderers. The room in the parish where they worked became a safe place to talk among themselves without fear. Here they could support one another, at times cry together, and care for each other's children when needed.

The biggest hurdle at the beginning was their husbands' resistance,

¹ from the Poem: *Master of Time* by Catherine de Vinck, in *A God of a Thousand Names*, 1993, Alleluia Press, Allendale, NJ, p. 103.

not letting them come to embroider together. The women would have to sneak out of their homes, enduring all kinds of threats. However, when the men saw the extra income they became tolerant if not supportive. Last year they celebrated their 25th Anniversary as a cooperative. About ten years ago a new bishop removed the Sisters from the parish, yet the women's friendship with them endures at the Guadalupe Center in Cuernavaca. Scripture continues to ground their reflections, and we brothers continue to sell their colorful shirts in our Gallery Shop. Over the last few years we could see these women standing together on the sidewalk at the bus stop after a two hour bus ride from La Nopalera. They would always be giggling, laughing and having a great time, even if they were standing under the hot sun.

In our last two visits, the women have shared with us some of their personal life stories. Many are single mothers who raised families by themselves. Most of them do domestic work as maids in different houses.

One had a son who became a taxi cab driver and was killed by a bullet from a car speeding in the middle of the day. She was devastated. The women of the cooperative accompanied her in her grief.

Another, when she turned 40, was told by her husband that she was unattractive and too old to live with. He left her by herself to raise several children. She lost her self-esteem and went into a severe depression. Although she was not an active member of the cooperative, the women reached out to her in compassion and care, loved her out of her depression, and taught her to embroider. When she saw the reception of her work she began to recover her self-esteem.

Another said good bye to her husband who was going to cross the US border looking for work. She has never heard from him since. She does not know if he died, was jailed, or simply disappeared. She had to become both mother and father to her children who are now grown up.

Another was abandoned as a baby by her mother and raised by her paternal grandmother. Her father was an alcoholic and a womanizer. None of these other "mothers" wanted or loved her. Now in the cooperative she feels loved and appreciated.

One would never guess that these cheerful women who exude such wonderful mirth, having suffered such intense pain and loss. Death and new life are real in their experience. Their playful embroidery is a jubilant resurrection cry!

Now as we celebrate Easter, we proclaim the Risen Jesus coming to meet the weeping women with the radiant injunction: Rejoice! (Mt. 28: 9), we recall that the Risen Jesus is also revealed with his wounds (Jn. 20: 19). The compelling witness of the women touching each other's wounds opens a way for us to embrace Easter joy too. How do we grow from despair to trust, from exclusion to loving welcome, from isolating individualism to caring community? Let us hope our broken world will come to savor the joyous taste of Easter. Alleluia! ■

A Monastic Community in a Peruvian Aymara Indigenous Context: From Inculturation to Interculturality

- brother Simón Pedro

OUR MONASTIC ADVENTURE OF INSERTION INTO THE Peruvian Altiplano among the Aymara indigenous people began 22 years ago on the shores of Lake Titicaca. With hardly a breath of awareness as an inserted contemplative community, we began to realize that to deeply love a people and their culture. It is not sufficient to truly understand them. As Jesus at the Samaritan well, we had a sense of the profound mystery of this people, their Tradition and spirituality; yet we questioned ourselves, do we have the adequate pails for drawing their life-giving water.

As we continued to live a faithful presence among the Aymara people, what we as monks call our vow of stability, we had to admit that we were not able to understand this mystery. We asked ourselves, "Is it necessary to understand?" Our universalism, i.e., "our catholicity," is not by its nature simply theoretical or intellectual. In my personal experience, I am convinced today that James and Peter did not grasp much about Paul's cultural and theological problems in the Antioch community. Nevertheless they trusted the movement of the Spirit of Pentecost within the new gentile Christian communities and in their pastors.

Therefore, we ourselves come before them with very humble hearts and with unbounding respect. In contemplative wonder and humble admiration we can only testify to the privileged icon of God's mystery that gifts us in the Tradition and spiritualities of the Andes.

From Naiveté to Modesty

As a scholar, I had studied and taught Andean culture and religion, and worked a long time in traditional Andean communities. I was eager to translate into concrete reality the intuitions I had encountered and which had matured with over many long years.

Initially, our pretentious enthusiasm and naiveté expressed itself in several ways. We were determined to found a fully-inserted monastic

community that lived in the same kind of dwellings and under the same socio-economic conditions as our indigenous neighbors. We immediately wanted to inculturate our lifestyle, especially our liturgy and prayer. We began studying their language without any idea of its complexity and richness. Neither did we take into account our own intellectual limitations nor our incapacity to think in completely different cultural concepts.

Throughout this first stage of our monastic presence in the Altiplano, the local bishop was a very generous but idealistic man who came from Lima. He urged us to create a genuine Aymara Rite for the celebration of Eucharist. Without hesitation we began to imagine and give form to this undertaking. Were we not Benedictines, the leaders in liturgical matters!?

As we partially completed this task, we already had some Aymara aspirants. During those first six years, we lived in rented houses similar to the peasant houses of our neighbors. On three or four occasions we celebrated our new, supposedly sophisticated Aymara Catholic Rite. Our indigenous friends viewed such a “Disney-like” performance with astonishment, respect, yet with a guarded response. We eventually understood that we were making a mistake. The original Andean religion has its own rites and a genuine way to encounter God. It was not necessary to draw them away from their roots and transplant them into an artificial and faulty religious ground.

Added to this, the first indigenous monk candidates found our way of life in the monastery absolutely incomprehensible. The indigenous do not pray in a chapel but in their “chacra” (field) or on the top of their sacred mountains. But there was further paradox with reference to our simple monastic lifestyle. A young Aymara candidate once said to me: “How can I live all my life in a house just like my father’s? I want to move forward, even if it is just a little”.

Soon we began to uncover deep racist wounds among the Peruvian people—first of all between the two Andean ethnic groups (Quechua and Aymara), and then the mestizos from the coast towards the indigenous in the mountains. Through these experiences we came to know that it is not enough to love a people to have a true understanding of them. Evangelical good will is not sufficient in the face of historical and cultural wounds that we have supported, or even more, have inflicted directly on them. As European monks we learned over time to assume our complicity in the rejection of this culture through our recalcitrant and unconscious paternalistic feelings of superiority. The hour of intellectual and religious decolonization had come.

Adoption beyond Inculturation

Inculturation is not the theater where we act out a fabricated story. Our Andean brothers and sisters bear in their persons the inculturated message of Jesus as they have come to value and understand their faith without foreign intrusion. They know perfectly well how to interpret the Gospel

for their own people. We do not believe anymore in the “inculturation” of the faith. Our hope is just to recognize the true and fully Christian value of their distinctive yet vibrant spirituality.

A religious community from a distant shore whose hope is to be fully inserted in an indigenous culture must proceed in a way of “mutual adoption,” and it must proceed over an extended period of time. With a patient humility, expressed through a simple presence and hospitality, we gently say to this people: we want to live with you and share your day-to-day poverty, your cultural and social challenges, but only if you give us permission. If you open your doors, we shall enter, whenever and in whatever way we are welcomed. In the meantime, we welcome and open our home to you. Come in as you wish and in whatever way you find helpful. The “adoption” of each other requires a respectful patience so that as faithfulness and mutual confidence grow, fear, deep-seated hatred and mistrust are dispelled. As monks, in light of our vow of monastic stability, we say to our neighbors that we will journey with them only if it is acceptable to them and in whatever way they choose.

We sincerely want to open ourselves to the sufferings and joys of all - the children, elders and young people. If they invite us, we participate in their “fiestas,” and we walk with them in their moments of mourning. We enter as simple participants into their Andean rites. At times my friend, Don José, who is a traditional Andean priest, asks me to unite together our two rituals (Christian and Andean). We then celebrate what I could call a “mixed rite” where each of us assumes our own religious responsibility. This is a very joyful “adoption” experience.

In this way we have passed from a false ideological inculturation to a humbler daily inter-cultural practice without idealizing the indigenous world. Human beings are good and bad everywhere. The poor or the indigenous are not better or worse because they are poor and indigenous. We are all brothers and sisters in sin and forgiveness, holiness and mediocrity. Part of our commitment of love for this culture is that we carry their burdens as our own.

I feel now, after 40 years in Peru and 22 years with the Aymara people, that we as neighbors have begun this process the “adoption” spoken about above. We do not need to show spectacular signs, but only to live our life fully and to love each other faithfully. Now they are our people and I hope that they are beginning to believe in some ways that we are theirs. And if God wishes, as I said to my first neighbor 22 years ago, they shall bury us among them.

What will be our future? It does not matter. We only want to be faithful to our wandering with this people and welcome what Saint Ignatius spoke of as the “movement of the Spirit”. Yes, we trust in the Spirit and we also trust the revelation of the Spirit to be in our Aymara friends. We are happy living among them, and we choose to live our monastic life in their midst. ■



i stopped

*- sister laura bufano, csj
april 2 - 3, 2014*

i stopped
felt utter stillness
basked in sky's blueness
heard absolute silence
tasted solitude
i thought
this is living
living simply
an extraordinary moment
in an ordinary day
grateful



Julio, Elena and Felipe (l to r).

Letter from Felipe & Elena – March 24, 2014

Dear brothers,

Oh how the days, months and years fly by so rapidly. An event that actually occurred a while ago can seem like it just happened yesterday!

Yet we know that unforgettable memories will never be lost. We can never forget the beauty of the glistening snow and the splendor of flowers blooming in springtime; the green mountains that brought refreshment and breath to our lungs; the music resounding from the rivers that enabled us to put our problems aside; and the croaking of the frogs and the songs of the birds that trill and chirp amidst the falling rain. These are some of the lasting memories that we have carried with us from such a beautiful place. As the seasons change each year we find ourselves a bit nostalgic. We would love to return and relive those beautiful days, but we realize that those beautiful moments will have to remain the gift of yesterday.

As we began to write this remembrance we found ourselves crossing the border, a journey of immigration and migration without the necessary documents or the permission of authorities, nor having a paid airline ticket. We set out on this labyrinth in a mysterious dream that invited us to go forward and find ourselves at home at a legendary “Terrible Mountain.”

Our dear brothers, we are infinitely grateful for the profound human gesture in reaching out to us and our children and welcoming us into your home on the 24th of March 1984. We are grateful that you have given us life and brought well-being back to our spirit. Thank you for sharing your life and your bread with us.

To all our friends who stood in solidarity with us, we want to say “thank you” for bringing us to the stores and supermarkets, to the clinic, to the meetings and to the airports; to the bank, the schools, and also to the celebration of Eucharist at the monastery. To all of you a thousand thanks.

We ask the Creators and the Formers of the Earth and Universe to shower many blessings on each one of you.

Happy Day of St. Oscar Romero, March 24, 2014 ■



To Hold a Flower Tenderly...

- *brother John*

THE NORMALLY QUIET AND PEACEFUL PRIORY GROUNDS were swirling with activity with an enthusiastic gathering of friends from far and near when the Refugee Caravan drove up the hill of Priory Lane some thirty years ago on a wintery March 24th day. The arrival of a helicopter bearing a CBS TV crew added to the novel sounds and sights customary in the tranquil monastic atmosphere.

Brother Mark opened the door to the red van that carried Elena and Felipe Ixcot and their five young children on the last leg of the perilous journey to Sanctuary from their homeland in Guatemala. From Chicago to Weston, their journey had been public. News media focused the eyes of North America on the plight of the persecuted Maya people fleeing from their country to find refuge in the United States.

The community of Benedictine brothers stood with open arms to welcome the refugee family. Brother Mark plucked the first little child from the van and gently placed her in my arms. Each of the five children found a warm welcome in the arms of awe-struck brothers. In the confusion and crushing excitement of the surrounding crowd, the sensation was one of a gift of peace—a sense of blessing bestowed freely and lavishly on the whole Weston Priory community.

As I began walking with the flowing procession of brothers and friends toward the front door of the priory, I realized that little Juanita who was nestled quietly in my arms, was gazing with rapt attention at a small flower—a daisy—that someone had placed in her hands. There was not an expression of unease or discomfort at being in the arms of this perfect stranger clad in monastic robes or the swirling crowd of foreign speaking people pressing so close by or the eager photographers and reporters competing for photos or a word from the brothers.

This lovely child, absorbed in the beauty of the peaceful flower, gave no sign of fear, anxiety or protest. Not a tremble or a whimper. The child and the flower were as one. The communication was one of trust and faith;

and that communication became a communion of promise: hold the flower tenderly and it will blossom!

Perhaps the experience of the Weston Priory brothers becoming the 100th Sanctuary in the National Sanctuary Movement can best be described as ‘holding a flower tenderly’. The presence of Felipe and Elena and their family was both gift and challenge for the community to grow in faith and trust – to open arms wide in a deeper communion. The gift of the refugee family’s presence in the priory has flowered in the blossoming lives of each member of the precious family.

Thirty years later, we celebrate and behold the promise in that blossoming. Felipe and Elena are now at home in Guatemala with their devoted son, Julio, who runs the family farm. They continue to serve and inspire their Maya people in the cause of justice and peace. They fearlessly speak out in their visits to the United States and at home in Guatemala as representatives of the International Maya League.

Marta, Alicia, Juanita and Maya have graduated from college and, together with their family, have become U.S. citizens. With their life partners they are engaged in professional life, working either directly or indirectly for the welfare, rights, and hopes of immigrants and refugees.

We can become one with a flower if we will but hold it tenderly – and it will blossom. That is a promise! ■



Flower of Beauty

- brother Augustine

Flower of beauty
Speaks, full of mystery,
To quiet a child’s heart.



Sanctuary and Frogs

- *brother Augustine*

JUST DOWN OUR ROAD, AT THE FOOT OF THE HILL, THERE is a large, old beaver pond. It has been home to many families of beavers, each having moved on and left behind their house built of sticks and mud. Each family has altered the size and character of the pond, extending the length of the dam, and clearing away more shrubs and trees.

During the springtime of April and May, the pond is also home to many spring peepers and frogs. The warming sun brings them out of the mud and woods to breed in the waters of the pond. Part of the breeding ritual involves a constant trilling and singing with one another, especially in the late afternoon and evening. Here in rural Vermont, this sound of the peepers and frogs singing with abandon in their ponds heralds the awakening of nature in bringing forth new life.

At the priory on most Wednesday evenings, after the Eucharist and supper, the community would visit for a while with Felipe and Elena and some of the children. Then after the night prayer I would drive the family home, passing by the beaver pond at the foot of our hill. Most times, certainly in the springtime, we would pause for a moment to be enchanted by the chorus of singing peepers and frogs.

After many experiences of this evening ritual it seemed to us that the frogs in their own way were offering a song of hope—that our lives can begin again in nature’s rebirth. To Felipe and Elena this chorus of nature’s coming alive in the pond seemed to offer a healing—a hope for new life, so present in nature’s own Sanctuary. ■

Evolving Monastic Community Life

- *brother Mark*

EVERY NOW AND THEN PEOPLE WHO VISIT THE PRIORY will ask about various aspects of our evolving monastic community life [sometimes it's a question and other times a disappointment or a criticism]. Perhaps there is an expectation rooted in the thought that monastic life, or any religious practice, is fixed-in-stone rather than being an expression of the developing growth of persons who are alive and evolving. The challenge always is to maintain the deepest values of our monastic life faithfully while discerning the appropriate specific expression in the present situation. That discernment is a process rooted in the progressive unfolding of a shared life experience and reflection on that experience, which the full community chooses daily and evaluates regularly, especially in retreat discussions and scripture sharings.

A basic founding principle of the Weston community, prescribed by Saint Benedict in his Rule and flowing through the teaching of our founder, Abbot/brother Leo Rudloff, has been to listen and be open, or as Saint Pope John XXIII encouraged the Church: to be aware of the "Signs of the Times" and respond.

An example of this effort is presented in this bulletin as some brothers reflect on our community experience of offering 'Sanctuary' 30 years ago to the Ixcot family who had fled from life-threatening violence in their native Guatemala. That story is really about the courage and commitment of an indigenous Maya family. For our part it speaks of the effort to implement our Benedictine value of hospitality which calls us to welcome Christ in all persons especially those who are most needy. While the specific expression can and must take different forms that flow from our shared community life experience, the value being implemented remains constant. This approach is very clearly visible especially in our community prayer where our music, spoken words and actions embody the attitudes and concerns that are relevant at the moment as we seek to faithfully enter into meaningful prayer together. ■

Hartford, VT

Dismas House Dedication: A home of transition for former prisoners

*- Rita Whalen McCaffrey,
founder, Dismas of Vermont, Inc.*

ON SUNDAY, JUNE 22nd AT 5:00 PM, DISMAS OF VT WILL dedicate the 4th Dismas House in Hartford, Vermont. The celebration will take place at the Greater Hartford United Church of Christ, a few doors down from the recently opened Dismas House. The brothers at the Priory have played a significant role in their support to the Dismas community and in the development of Dismas of Vermont. Our relationship spans the past 29 years, which have been years of encouragement, as we began organizing our first Dismas House in 1985. We are most grateful for their loving support!

Just prior to the Dedication there will be a house tour given by Dismas House Residents. Invited guests at the Dedication will be the Inter-Faith Community, Government Dignitaries, Upper Valley Service Clubs, local Non-profit Organizations, Dismas House Benefactors, Dismas family and friends.

Hartford Dismas opened its doors a few months ago to a beautifully renovated home for women and men in transition from Vermont prisons. We were first invited to Hartford six years ago, to give a presentation to a group of professionals concerned with transitional housing for former prisoners. A capitol campaign was necessary to raise significant funds for renovating a three family house into a single home.

The good news is that renovations were completed in March and we have hired and trained two new staff: Ben Andrews and Debbie Diegoli. Today, we have eight residents, three women and five men, with a few more applicants arriving upon their release. Exterior house repair and painting will begin very soon.

The Dedication will be a celebration of our latest Dismas House, the 4th in Vermont, along with Dismas Houses in Burlington, Rutland, and Winooski. Our newest house is located in Hartford Village and is humming with healthy activities as community volunteers come to cook the evening meal, Monday through Friday, and residents are



1st dinner at Hartford Dismas House, with volunteer cooks, March, 2014.

looking for jobs with several already gainfully employed. There is a wonderful spirit in the house as folks are becoming a community, living in a clean and sober home, where they are helping each other to face the many challenges in their lives. It is truly a beautiful thing to witness!

Dismas of Vermont recently passed a milestone, having served more than 1,000 former prisoners since 1986. We look forward to the Dedication, along with our brothers, realizing with joy, we are now able to serve 54 residents in our four Dismas Houses and three Satellite Apartments in Vermont. ■



St. Benedict and the Mandala.

Life Together in One Heart



Long before the Night Office began, the man of God (Benedict) was standing at his window, where he watched and prayed while the rest were still asleep. In the dead of night he suddenly beheld a flood of light shining down from above, more brilliant than the sun, and with it every trace of darkness cleared away. Another remarkable sight followed. According to his own description, the whole world was gathered up before his eyes in what appeared to be a single ray of light.¹

THERE IS A PAINTING OF SAINT BENEDICT WHICH hangs in our Gallery Shop's ground floor exhibit room that was painted in 1987 by one of our former brothers, Stephen Leslie, who now lives with his family in Hartland Four Corners, Vermont. You are welcome to come and see it – experience it – for yourself.

The painting depicts Saint Benedict as a compelling monastic figure who is crafting a mandala that is illuminated by a single ray of light that shines from the heavens above. The beam of light passes from the upper reaches of the painting through small images of Monte Cassino and Weston Priory, as well as through the all-seeing eye of a majestic, discerning eagle and the eye of Saint Benedict himself, and then going farther down to the feathered stylus in Benedict's hand that is creating the mandala. The mandala, which is a symbol for Saint Benedict's RULE, is not completed. It is still in the process of being articulated. An interpretation of this feature in the painting suggests that the beam of light brings our attention to the mysterious creative moment that we refer to as NOW. . . the NOW of our own time, place and being. Saint Benedict is offering the wisdom embodied in his Rule to all of us who actively seek to discern the creative energy of this precise and gifting moment in our lives.

It is with gratitude for that ray of light mirrored by the abundant blessings bestowed on us by our God and many faithful friends that we share the following chronology of our "life together" during the winter solstice.

¹ *Life and Miracles of Saint Benedict* by St. Gregory the Great, 1949, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN

January

Our community is blessed to have welcomed Nhân Thê' Nguyễn as a postulant on the first day of the New Year. Brother Nhân has been with us since the first of October in a time of Observership whose focus is to live our life at a closer vantage point. The scope of further integration in the year ahead will include study of the Rule of St. Benedict and monastic history, along with scripture and prayer. We look forward to discovering complimentary interests and gifts with which to deepen our relationships as brothers living according to the wisdom of St. Benedict.



brother Nhân.

From the last day of December thru January 5th we welcomed two men into the Monastic Living Experience which we offer twice yearly. We had the joy of welcoming Thom Courcelle of Seattle, Washington and Brendan Kemeza of Concord, Massachusetts, for the



Brendan and Thom (l to r).

seven day exploration of monastic values and prayer as well as sharing in the rhythm of monastic community life. We are grateful for the generous and joyful spirit they shared with us as well as the questions and perspectives they brought from their unique life experiences.

February

The community made a two week visit to our Mexican Benedictine Sisters in Mexico City and Cuernavaca, Mexico, from February 5th to February 19th. It is always a joy for us to be with our Sisters and to share in their disarming hospitality and warm affection. Each year our bonds of friendship and our common Benedictine legacy are fostered and strengthened.

During the mid-point of our visit we and our Mexican Sisters hosted an intercommunity encounter with representatives of small monastic



Sisters Maricarmen, Patricia, María, Fidelina, and María José (l to r).



Brother Simón Pedro and brother Placid dancing at the Cuernavaca meeting.

communities who are searching for a renewed contemporary expression of monastic life in today's world and global church. Representatives of the several monasteries were: Brother Simón Pedro of the Benedictine community of Chucuito, Peru; Sisters María and María José of the Trinitarian Nuns in Suesa, (Cantabria) Spain; Sisters Patricia and Maricarmen of the Benedictine monastery of Pan de Vida (Bread of Life) in Torreón, Mexico; Sister Miguelina, the Sisters of her Council and several other Sisters of the Mexican Benedictine Community in Mexico City and Cuernavaca; and we brothers of Weston Priory. Our coming together to explore mutual interests and challenges bore fruit in arriving at a better understanding of each individual community, offering mutual inter-community support, and sharing our hopes and dreams for what monastic life can offer our world today.



Sister Catalina and Sister Miguelina (l to r).



Sister Fidelina and brother Simón Pedro.

Brother Simón Pedro Arnold returned to Weston with us at the end of our stay in Mexico. He will be spending six months with us as a sabbatical experience for rest, renewal, and completing a book he has been writing. Brother Simón Pedro's presence is a singular blessing for us in the richness and depth of his person, his musical gifts and deep spirituality, as well as in the wide experience he has acquired in his outreach to many

Latin American and Caribbean religious communities on local, regional, and national levels.

Sister Laura Bufano, CSJ of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, Latham, New York, spent two months with us as part of her sabbatical after serving a six year term as president of the United States branch of her religious order. For many years Sister Laura has been a friend and resource person for our community, especially in her expertise in music and liturgy. We hold her joyfully in our hearts and prayer as she continues exploring what the future holds out for her in service to her congregation and ministry to God's people.



Sister Laura.

March

The 24th of this month marked the 30th anniversary of the declaration of our monastery as a public sanctuary for Latin American refugees and the arrival of the Ixcot family from Guatemala: Felipe, Elena, Marta, Julio, Alicia, Juanita, and Maya.

We were happy to have the presence of Alicia, Juanita, and Maya along with their spouses on Saturday the 22nd to celebrate the event with a gathering in our Visitors' Center of many friends and guests. The event began with a brief video presentation which was produced by brother Alvaro using footage provided by our friend and neighbor, Betsy Ungvarsky of Weston, who fortuitously videotaped the arrival of the Ixcot family and the welcoming celebration that followed on that happy day thirty years ago. The day also inaugurated an exhibit of weavings made by Elena, ar-



Jim and Juanita, Patrick and Maya, JJ and Alicia with Isabella (l to r).



Patrick, JJ, Alicia with her daughter, Isabella, Maya with mic, Juanita and Jim (l to r).

chival photographs and media articles both from the day of the family's arrival and then through the 27 years of our sanctuary journey together. The exhibit, and the creative work that went into it, came from the hearts and hands of brothers John and Nhàn.

On the 23rd we marked the anniversary at our weekly Sabbath celebration of the Sunday Eucharist which included an emotional, heart-felt greeting from Elena and Felipe sent from Guatemala and read by brother Richard. On the 24th we, the Ixcots, and our guests gathered for a festal meal in our monastic dining room. Afterwards, we gathered in our family room to view a video greeting from Sonia (Marta) and her children, Tohil and Ixta, in Florida, and to listen to an audio greeting from Julio, Elena and Felipe in Guatemala. ■




Sonia (Marta).



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