



# a MATTER of SPIRIT

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## New Monasticism

The topic of this issue of *A Matter of Spirit* is the "New Monasticism." What do you think of when you hear the word "monastic?" Do you picture a solitary monk in a hermitage far from town? Do you think of a medieval community reciting prayers in Latin? Or do you think of a group of millennials living and working together today? Each of these, and more, are expressions of the monastic impulse, a desire to connect deeply to a life of prayer and service in community with others.

In this issue, we explore various ways in which the monastic call is being lived out today. Christine Valters Paintner looks at ways of living monasticism in everyday life. Sister Laura Swan gives us a historical overview, and helps to connect traditional monasticism to some of its contemporary expressions. Rory McEntee explores the new monasticism as an orientation in life, and explores some of its key characteristics. Rick Samyn discusses how the monastic way of life leads to a life of service to others, and Gus Labayan brings a young adult perspective. John Marquez and Donna Clifford each tell their own stories, one as a former monk and one as a lay associate.

We hope you enjoy this exploration of the "new monasticism" and that you find in it some tools and insights for your own life of prayer and service.

## Living Monasticism

By Christine Valters Paintner

Over the last twenty years there has been a great renewal of interest in the monastic life, but this time from those who find themselves wanting to live outside the walls of the cloister. It was this desire that led me fifteen years ago to become a Benedictine oblate. Becoming an oblate means making a commitment to live out the Benedictine charism in daily life, at work, in a marriage and family, and in all the other ways ordinary people interact with the world on a daily basis. In our community we meet regularly with one another to support each other in living out values of stability, obedience, conversion, hospitality, humility, silence and more.

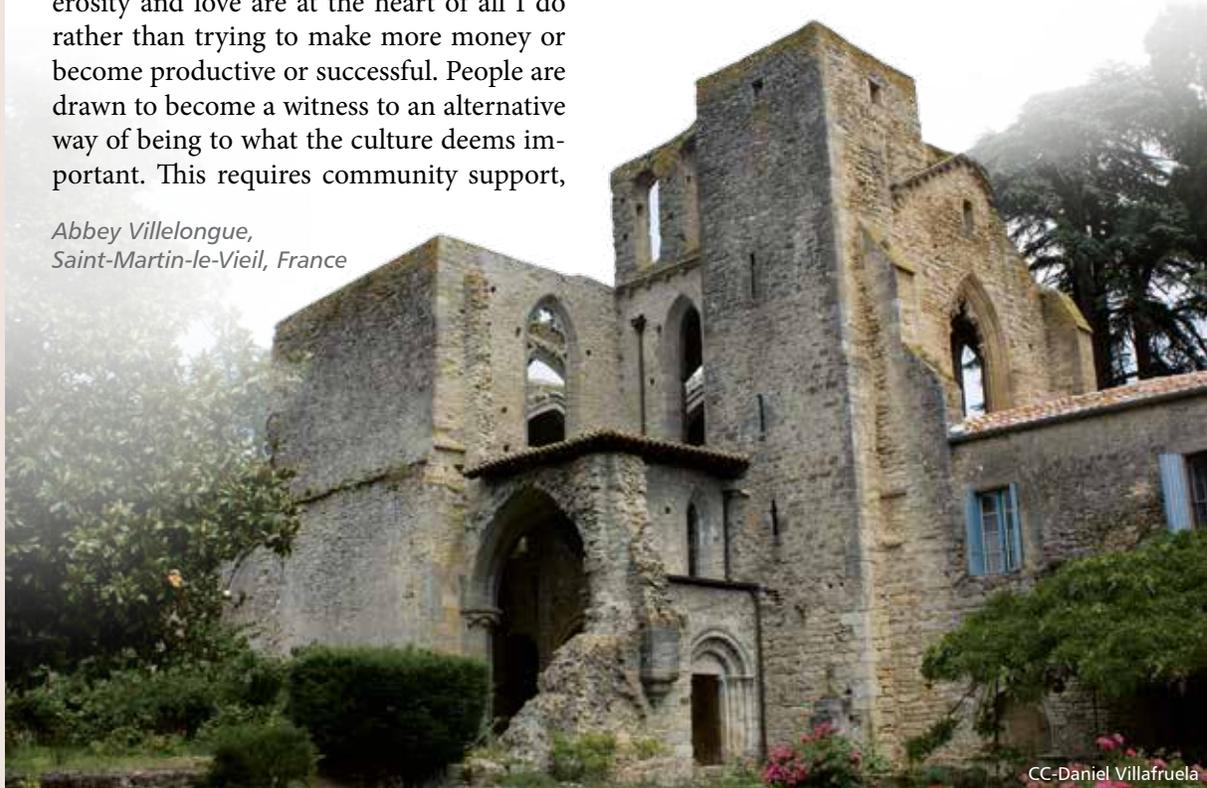
I am drawn to the monastic way because it offers me a framework for a way to live richly, to realign my priorities so that generosity and love are at the heart of all I do rather than trying to make more money or become productive or successful. People are drawn to become a witness to an alternative way of being to what the culture deems important. This requires community support,

journeying with others who are also struggling against busyness, debt and divisiveness.

The root of the word monk is *monachos*, which means single-hearted. To become a monk in the world means to keep one's focus on the love at the heart of everything. This is available to all of us, regardless of whether we live celibate and cloistered, partnered and raising a family or employed in business.

The three main sources I draw upon to sustain me in this path are the Rule of Benedict, written in the fifth century in Italy, the wisdom of the desert mothers and fathers written as short sayings and stories in the second to third centuries in Egypt and Syria, and the witness of the Celtic monks in the early middle ages, especially in Ireland where I now live.

*Abbey Villelongue,  
Saint-Martin-le-Vieil, France*



## Holy Asceticism: Simple Living

There is a story from the desert mothers and fathers where an Abba says to a seeker, “Do not give your heart to that which does not satisfy your heart.”<sup>1</sup> The desert monks were absolutely committed to simplicity so that things or ideas did not get in the way of their connection to the divine.

This way of life requires a commitment of time and energy. Both are resources that we tend to overcommit in western culture. The universal lament these days seems to be “I am so busy.” The monastic way calls us to find a simpler path through our commitments, to say “no” more often so that our “yes” can be richer and more meaningful, as well as to reduce our consumption which harms the earth. We can seek a balanced path, a holy asceticism that does not denigrate the body, but offers more spaciousness to be present to sacred moments.

Asceticism is always meant as a practice in service to freedom. We can begin with things, bagging up those objects that clutter up our lives and being more mindful when shopping in the future. We can pray with our calendars and discern which commitments no longer nourish us, where we can regain more time for ourselves and God. Then we might begin to notice the stories we tell ourselves and the habits and patterns of our lives that no longer serve us, and can begin to let those go as well. The less we hold tightly onto things and ideas, the more generous we are moved to be.

## Holy Pause: Moments of Silence

One of my favorite practices in the monastic tradition is called *statio*, which is the commitment to stop one thing before beginning another. Imagine, instead of rushing from

one appointment to the next, that between each one you pause, you breathe just five long slow breaths. Imagine how this might transform your movement from one activity to another. Or even when you move from one room to another, allow a brief pause on the threshold between spaces. God lives inside our breath and so every breath can become a resurrection.

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*“To become a monk in the world means to keep one’s focus on the love at the heart of everything.”*

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For the Celtic monks, thresholds were sacred places. The space or the moment between—whether physical places or experiences—is a place of possibility. Rather than waiting being a nuisance, or a sense that you are wasting time, it is an invitation to breathe into the now and receive its gifts. The breath can help us stay present to all of the moments of transition in our lives, when we feel tempted to rush breathlessly to the next thing.

*Statio* calls us to a sense of reverence for slowness and mindfulness. We can open up a space within for God to work. We can become fully conscious of what we are about to do rather than

mindlessly starting and completing another task. We call upon the breath as an ancient soul friend to help us to witness our lives unfolding, rather than being carried along until we aren’t sure where our lives are going. We can return again and again to our bodies and their endless wisdom and listen at every threshold.

## Holy Generosity: Service

As we live out this monastic way more and more, acts of service become a natural way of being. The way you treat the others you interact with each day at the bank, the grocery store, the workplace, all have the potential to become acts of generosity and loving kindness. If we are no longer rushing through our lives, we have time to attend to the gifts of the moment and respond.

It is not so much about being called to do more and more, adding more things to one’s calendar, as it is about reorienting oneself so that the way we move through the world becomes one of loving service. The opportunities to help others will always be available if we are paying attention.

Ultimately, in the monastic way, our work is also to be approached as a form of service, and our relationship to work can be transformed into one where we



cultivate gratitude for the ability to use our gifts and provide for ourselves and our families. Labor is cherished as a way to interact with the world and sustain ourselves.

Cultivating interior silence and simplicity will always lead us back to others if we are having an authentic experience of God and of our deepest selves. This is one of the ways we know if our prayer is bearing fruit, when our inner work cultivates in us a wider heart and capacity to be present.

## Conclusion

The monastic way is available to us all, it only requires a shift in perspective, a deep commitment, and companions for support. Community can be found in person or online, in soul friends who can help to keep us accountable, with whom we can share honest questions, and who can help us to see places for deeper growth, as well as to celebrate with as we show the world a different way to live.

▲ *Christine Valters Paintner, PhD, REACE is the online abbess of [www.AbbeyoftheArts.com](http://www.AbbeyoftheArts.com), a virtual monastery cultivating contemplative practice and creative expression, a Benedictine oblate, and the author of ten books on monasticism and the arts. She currently lives in Ireland where she and her husband lead pilgrimages to monastic sites and offer a free online course at their website to become a monk in the world.*

<sup>1</sup> Ward, Benedicta, trans. The Sayings of the Desert Fathers. Abba Poeman saying number 80.

# The Heart of New Monastic Life

*Adapted from The New Monasticism: An Interspiritual Manifesto for Contemplative Living (Rory McEntee and Adam Bucko, Orbis Books)*

New monasticism is not just a theoretical concept. It is an orientation in life, a commitment that asks us to bring every aspect of our lives into a *living relationship* with God, with the Spirit, with one's deepest Self, with all of Creation. New monasticism is also a discipline, a certain ascetical way of being that hopes to make all that we are available to the Divine, so that the spiritual work of transformation can happen.

This kind of life requires structure and commitment to spiritual practice. It is for this reason that many Fathers and Mothers of the fourth century left the world and embraced a disciplined life of being with God. Without a similar type of commitment the calling of a new monastic remains but an ephemeral dream—beautiful, soaring, inspiring—but ultimately fleeting. With an embodiment of disciplined spiritual *praxis*, new monasticism becomes incarnational.

What then, does the spiritual *praxis* of new monastic look like? What follows is a suggested rhythm and practice for new monastic life distilled from my own and others' experiences.

## Daily Practice

A new monastic may start her day with a morning prayer and silent, meditative practice. These are usually modified based on one's vocation, commitments in the world, and availability. For people who live in communities, it may start as a group activity. These activities can include a morning walk (preferably in nature), spiritual reading, absorbing the morning with silent reflection, a ritual of body prayer, Yogic asanas, Tai-Chi, breath work, conscious weightlifting, or prostrations.

After these types of integrating practice, a new monastic moves into silent practice. Most contemplative traditions agree that silent meditative practice is a sublime foundation



for spiritual transformation. For aspiring new monastics, we recommend starting with a receptive method of meditation, such as the Christian practice of Centering Prayer as developed by Thomas Keating, William Meninger and Basil Pennington. It's good to start with 20 minutes of silence twice a day and slowly over time expand the practice to up to an hour or more for each session.

## Weekly, Monthly and Yearly Practices

In addition to these daily practices, it is also good to have a few weekly rituals and practices. Many new monastics are part of self-organizing small groups that gather once a week for prayerful silence and heartfelt conversation, at times followed by the sharing of a meal and/or ritualistic celebration. New monastics are also encouraged to incorporate extended times of practice once a week, month and year. These could be an extended meditation day, a time of fasting and prayer, a "desert weekend," or an extended retreat once per year. The goal of these extended retreats is to immerse ourselves in our practice, following the maxims of early desert Fathers and Mothers who said, "Enter your hermitage. Your hermitage will teach you everything."

## Sacred Activism: The Spiritual Practice of Vocation

Every new monastic is here to bridge the dichotomy of contemplation and action. What Andrew Harvey calls sacred activism "fuses the mystic's passion for God with the activist's passion for justice, creating a third fire, which is the burning sacred heart that longs to help, preserve, and nurture every living thing." We teach new monastics to seek to discover one's calling, or *vocation*. To develop one's unique talents and put them to use in service of compassion and justice under the guidance of the Holy Spirit is to engage in the incarna-

tional work of building the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth.

## Formal Study

Formal study is important to fruitful spiritual formation. Especially in these times, when many spiritual seekers learn about spirituality through a series of disconnected workshops, clichéd phrases, and personal tastes, it is important for each new monastic to commit to formal study. Traditionally, study took place in the form of individualized study and mentorship with a teacher. New monastics may choose to follow a traditional form of study by either entering a seminary or by committing to a new monastic training program through the Foundation for New Monasticism. These programs help formalize the process, yet also individualize training, maintaining flexibility and allowing for discernment of one's vocation.

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*"This kind of life requires structure and commitment to spiritual practice."*

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## Shadow Work

The shadow consists of the dark parts of our personality that have been repressed, and is one of the main culprits in preventing an integrated and mature spirituality. Understanding and working with one's shadow should be a primary practice for new monastics. There are many techniques developed to work with one's shadow, particularly dream work and psychotherapy. Without shadow work many practitioners become victims of what John Wellwood calls "spiritual bypass," where we use spiritual ideas and practices to avoid facing unresolved emotional issues, psychological wounds, and unfinished developmental tasks.

## Spiritual Direction

Since many new monastics follow a fairly individualized path, spiritual



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direction becomes crucial. We recommend contact with a spiritual director perhaps once a month, and at certain times much more. Today, these relationships can be cultivated via Skype. A spiritual director is not primarily a teacher or a guru *per se*. Rather, he or she is a spiritual companion, an *anam cara* or soul-friend on the path of the heart. Spiritual directors help to locate mentees in the truth of their life and give them a dangerous permission to follow it with dedication. They also help to develop the gift of discernment.

## Spiritual Friendship and Community

There is an apocryphal story where Ananda asks the Buddha, "Master, is spiritual friendship half of the spiritual life?" The Buddha replies, "No, Ananda, friendship is the *whole* of the spiritual life."

For the new monastic, the interdependent relationship between spiritual friendship and one's personal practice creates the container for one's spiritual growth. It is the basis of our relationship with mentors and fellow wayfarers on the Path. New monastics create community. In some cases they choose to live in communities. Sharing in contemplative prayer, sacred reading,

heartfelt reflection, discernment of authenticity, friendship and celebration, we begin to discover the Divine's loving presence and action in our lives.

## A Commitment of Vows

In addition to formalizing our commitment to new monastic life, vows tap into dynamic energies of life that express themselves in ceremonial and ritualistic ways. Similar to traditional monastic training, these vows emerge in stages, with each subsequent commitment marking a turning point on one's journey. We recommend the following set of vows for new monastic life, inspired by the work of Brother Wayne Teasdale, though we also encourage an individualization of vows as well.

1. I vow to actualize and live according to my full moral and ethical capacity.
2. I vow to live in solidarity with the cosmos and all living beings.
3. I vow to live in deep nonviolence.
4. I vow to live in humility and to remember the many teachers and guides who assisted me on my spiritual path.
5. I vow to embrace a daily spiritual practice.
6. I vow to cultivate mature self-knowledge.
7. I vow to live a life of simplicity.
8. I vow to live a life of selfless service and compassionate action.
9. I vow to be a prophetic voice as I work for justice, compassion and world transformation.

The goal of the above practices is to create an integrated structure and container within which spiritual maturity can unfold and Grace can descend. Once that begins to happen, the practice, the schedule, and the commitment can evolve. When we can recognize the presence of Ultimate Reality in our lives, our practices become modified. They change to accommodate the uniqueness of our relationship with the Divine so that we may live as a direct response to the guidance revealed in our hearts. Just as there are many stages that one passes through in one's spiritual life, so also are there many stages that one grows into in one's practice.

▲ *Adam Bucko and Rory McEntee are Co-Founders of the Foundation for New Monasticism and Interspirituality. Learn more at [www.new-monastics.com](http://www.new-monastics.com).*

# FOUNDATIONS of Monasticism

By Sr. Laura Swan, OSB

*"Let us prefer absolutely nothing to Christ, and may he lead us all together to everlasting life."* —Holy

*Rule of St. Benedict, 72: 11*

## Roots of Monasticism

Expressions of monasticism are found in most religious traditions and share common elements of days structured around established times for communal and private prayer, silence, and manual labor to support the community, extending care for the marginalized, and providing a quiet space for seekers. Monasteries are rooted in a geographical place, and are both an extension of the culture around them as well as striving to be a prophetic pres-

ence to that culture. A common thread of monastic history across religious traditions has been its quiet rejection of corrupt powers (Empire).

## Christian Monasticism

Early Christians<sup>1</sup> gathered in private homes for prayer, sharing of their faith, reading of Paul's Letters (and later the Gospels) and the Breaking of the Bread. As Christianity spread across the Roman Empire and eventually moved into mainstream society with the legalization of Christianity in the Fourth Century, followers struggled to remain faithful to Jesus' original message in a society that was rife with political intrigue, wars, economic and environmental devastation, and lax morality. How to remain faithful to Jesus' mes-

sage in a world that was vastly deteriorating? How to seek God in the midst of a Church that was torn asunder by powerful political forces interfering in theological debates? Christianity had become a political tool for those who sought to increase their power. Ecclesial leadership had become, too frequently, a path toward political power and social prominence.

Some of these home churches morphed into monastic communities; some remained in cities and others moved out to the edge of the Empire. These communities gathered around one or more charismatic leaders, seeking to live as did the early community in Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup> Other seekers and their families gathered around the edge of these monastic communities, drawing strength from the spiritual heritage experienced there, with both monastic communities and their followers extending care to the poor, the prisoner, and widows and orphans. While there were diverse expressions of monasticism from the earliest days of Christianity, Macrina the Younger<sup>3</sup> (d. 379) is considered the founder of monasticism

in the East and Benedict of Nursia (d. 550) in the West.

As the Roman Empire was again torn asunder by warfare and corrupt government, a young Benedict, disgusted by what he witnessed as a young student in Rome, rejected the life his patrician family had expected for him, and headed east to Subiaco and began a life of solitude. Enticed away from his hermitage, now known as *Sacro Speco*, he es-

tablished twelve new monasteries along the Apennines of Italy. Benedict culled the best wisdom from the desert and early monastic traditions to guide his monasteries of men (women had their own monastic tradition). What we now know as the *Rule of Benedict*, a spiritual and not legal document, was written and rewritten over many years of trial and error, prayer, and hard work with his diverse and often ornery group of monks.

Benedict accepted anyone who came knocking at his door expressing a desire to know and serve God. The entrance process culled out those who were not serious about their calling and, because of his growing fame, those who just sought the attention of a famous spiritual master. Benedict welcomed men from disparate cultures, languages and social and educational backgrounds—from the illiterate to the well-educated—and tried to shape them into “one in Christ” (Gal. 3:28). Thus he provided a way for the illiterate to learn to read and those from the upper echelons of society learned to do manual labor.

Benedict organized his communities with the intent of creating the space where each monk might deepen his relationship with God, suggesting ways to organize their observance of the Divine Office as well as time for personal prayer. He protected times and places of silence so his monks could get away from distracting noise in order to nurture their spiritual journey and increase their capacity to listen deeply for the Divine. Community, central to Benedict’s vision of the Christian journey, was where conversion of life happened. The structure he provided was famous for its flexibility, sensitivity and strength.

Benedictines make a monastic profession of stability, conversion of life and obedience. Obedience is understood as a commitment to a deep and intense listening for the movements of the Holy Spirit. Stability is a commitment to a particular monastic community and its locale. Conversion of life is a commitment to stretch beyond our comfort zones and recognize that all of life and every one of God’s children are the *gospel* being preached to us. Benedictines seek to live from a contemplative stance and embody a contemplative presence in their locale.

Benedict undermined the powers of Empire by avoiding a direct confrontation and offering an alternate path through the contemplative. His *Rule* offered hope for the Reign of God to be

## INFLUENTIAL MONASTICS



**Abbess Hildegard of Bingen** (d. 1179) was a brilliant theologian, healer, and musician who created a lighter and more celebrative form of chant for her nuns. She went on a preaching tour condemning corruption among secular leaders and clergy.



**Gertrude the Great** (d. 1302) was a mystic and theologian who composed *Spiritual Exercises* for her directees and whose writings reveal deep liturgical insight.



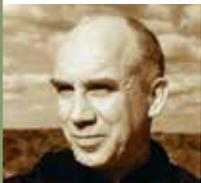
**Bernadeta Mbawala** (d. 1950) was a simple Benedictine nun in rural Tanzania who lived a quiet life of service, but after her death and into this day is seen as a powerful intercessor for women with fertility issues. Her following continues to spread.



**Bede Griffiths** (d. 1993) and **Henri le Saux** (d. 1973) restored connections with Eastern monastic traditions by establishing ashrams in India.



**The monks of Tibhirine** (d. 1996), lived peacefully alongside and interacted with their Muslim neighbors, and bore witness to this commitment in martyrdom.



**Thomas Merton** (d. 1968) engaged in dialogue with those resisting the arms race and the Vietnam War, civil rights activists as well as with those involved in interreligious dialogue.



Benedictine Oblates **Raïssa Maritain** (d. 1960) and **Dorothy Day** (d. 1980) established intentional communities influenced by the *Rule of Benedict*.

birthed through a powerful countercultural way of life to anyone, regardless of class. Benedict had not expected his *Rule* to become the standard of Western Christian monasticism, but due to its common sense and adaptability, it has become the most common monastic *rule* in the West. Now nearly every country hosts either Benedictine or Orthodox monasteries (or both).

Monasteries in the U.S. are shifting away from major institutional ministries, such as direct oversight of universities, high schools and healthcare systems, and returning to their roots: spiritual formation opportunities, new forms of membership, caring for the environment, collaborative ministries, and seeking to be a healing presence in their locales. They have maintained their commitment to beauty through the creative arts, writing, and composing music. U.S. monasteries remain committed to interreligious dialogue and have been journeying with monasteries in developing countries, assisting with education and formation resources. Some monasteries have shifted to non-canonical status in order to welcome non-Catholic Christians, such as Dwelling Place Monastery<sup>4</sup> in Martin, KY and Holy Wisdom Monastery<sup>5</sup> in Madison, WI. In northern Italy Enzo Bianchi established the ecumenical Monasterio di Bose<sup>6</sup> with a focus on the environment, ecumenism and the arts. Oblates have helped monasteries, as they have been ‘right sizing,’ remain connected with the broader church.

## The New Monasticism

Historically there have been people attracted to the *Rule of Benedict* who did not feel called to join a traditional monastery with its celibate lifestyle. Many made promises as oblates, connecting to a specific monastery, and sharing its presence to the broader community. But there have also been those who wanted to shape an intentional community based on the *Rule*, but with its own unique expression of monastic presence. This ‘not new’



*St. Benedict detail in fresco at St. Benedict's Abbey, Atchison, KS*

movement of intentional communities has called itself ‘the new monasticism.’

These ecumenical communities include people who are married, widowed, divorced, single and dating, and sometimes includes vowed celibates living together in differing living configurations, usually near one another. Choosing to live ‘in the abandoned parts of the Empire,’<sup>7</sup> they share in common prayer and meals, deciding how to share resources among themselves, and the place of outreach ministries in their shared lives. They have a formation program for new members, not unlike the historical novitiate, and are committed to a disciplined contemplative life. Some intentional communities have a formal commitment ceremony somewhat similar to traditional monastic profession; some do not. Frequently their place to gather for prayer is a local church that has given them permission to use their worship space for the Divine Office.

Like traditional monastics, the ‘new monastics’ are self-supporting, are dedicated to the care of the environment, and support local economies whenever possible. Some have a specific outreach to peacemaking in the midst of violence. All extend hospitality to the expected and unexpected

guests who will come their way.

Examples of contemporary ‘new monastic’ communities include Shane Claiborne’s The Simple Way<sup>8</sup> in Philadelphia, PA, and Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove’s Rutba House<sup>9</sup> in Durham, NC. Lotus House<sup>10</sup> in North St. Louis seeks to be a peaceful presence in an area with a reputation for crime and poverty. The Community of Jesus<sup>11</sup> in Orleans, MA considers hospitality and healing through beauty as their major outreach. Andrea Riccardi’s Sant’Egidio<sup>12</sup> community in Rome and its branches elsewhere are dedicated in their outreach, HIV/AIDS in Africa, and as mediators in peace negotiations the despised Roma as well as the current flood of immigrants.

The continued growth of intentional ‘new monastic’ communities may soon outnumber traditional monastic communities, and may the Spirit blow where She wills!

▲ *Laura Swan, OSB, a member of St. Placid Priory in Lacey, WA, maintains a passion for recovering women’s contributions to monastic life. Her books include The Wisdom of the Beguines and The Forgotten Desert Mothers.*

<sup>7</sup>Download the footnotes at [ipjc.org/a-matter-of-spirit](http://ipjc.org/a-matter-of-spirit)

# Sacred Activism and the Monastic Life



No Risk, No Gain

*Rick Samyn Beekeeping at the L'Arche L'Honey project*

By Rick Samyn

The monastic way of life is an integral part of who we are, regardless if one is a vowed religious or lay person. Pulling back from the busyness of life is essential to quality of life. We are creatures of flesh and spirit, and it is the act of seeking out solitude to pray and reflect that keeps intact both of these expressions of our humanity. One could say that our society and each of us suffers when the equilibrium between life in the flesh and spirit is disturbed. It is expressed in excessive consumption, social disconnection, and other dysfunctions.

The Christian tradition calls us to carry the light of Christ into our World. Christianity is dynamic and active. We are called to bring forth The Good News of salvation and love to all and must understand solitude in a particular way for us to fulfill this mission. Our solitude is to be in the service of making us ALL whole as God intended. The “pulling away” from society that has defined monastic life is not a complete understanding of its purpose. A monas-

tic withdraws from society in order to initiate the process of deepening her or his relationship with God. However, it's the re-embrace of our wounded world with love that completes this deepening of the relationship. It is the reflective-and-engaged monastic life that teaches us that God is in and all around us,

*“It is the reflective-and-engaged monastic life that teaches us that God is in and all around us, compelling us to act!”*

compelling us to act! This is sacred activism, lovingly laboring for the common good, grounded in contemplation, seeking a deeper relationship with God, the creator and sustainer of life.

Linking our contemplative and active selves in service is vital for a truly monastic life, particularly in today's society which suffers from narcissism and the inability to see life's interconnections and intrinsic value. We cannot deeply accept interconnectedness or honor intrinsic value without living a reflective life—it is the foundation of our actions. This reminds me of the

Buddhist tradition of mindfulness that is so core to the work for peace and non-violence.

At one time I was a Capuchin Franciscan friar. Although the Franciscans are not strictly monastic, contemplation was key to our fraternal life, to our work on behalf of those in need and to the cause of social justice. Contemplation and the monastic practice of withdrawing from society in purposeful/limited ways is a means of acquiring deeper self-knowledge, giving space to discern the Spirit of God. Simply, monasticism is a means of seeking a closer union with the Divine.

The concept of “new monasticism” is rediscovering and engaging in a deep and personal search for God. Perhaps it is a withdrawal

from society as with the Desert Fathers and the early European monasticism, or perhaps from a Franciscan perspective, it is discovering the Divine in all Creation or allowing God to be discovered in the present moment, such as in simple tasks like washing a dish. What is important is that we seek God with every fiber of our being.

The connection being sought with the Divine is never solely an “I and God” relationship, exclusive in nature, but an “us-we” relationship. Seeking greater union with the Divine is never exclusive, but always inclusive with an outward

expression of love for the *Other*. The traditions of the Desert Fathers gave meaning to the Christian Community praying without ceasing. Through the Benedictine communities, the emerging European societies found stability. With the Franciscans, came an understanding of the Humanity of Christ and that the Divine can be seen in all of Creation. The “product” of contemplation is a deeper understanding of the Divine for all of humanity, not just the individual.

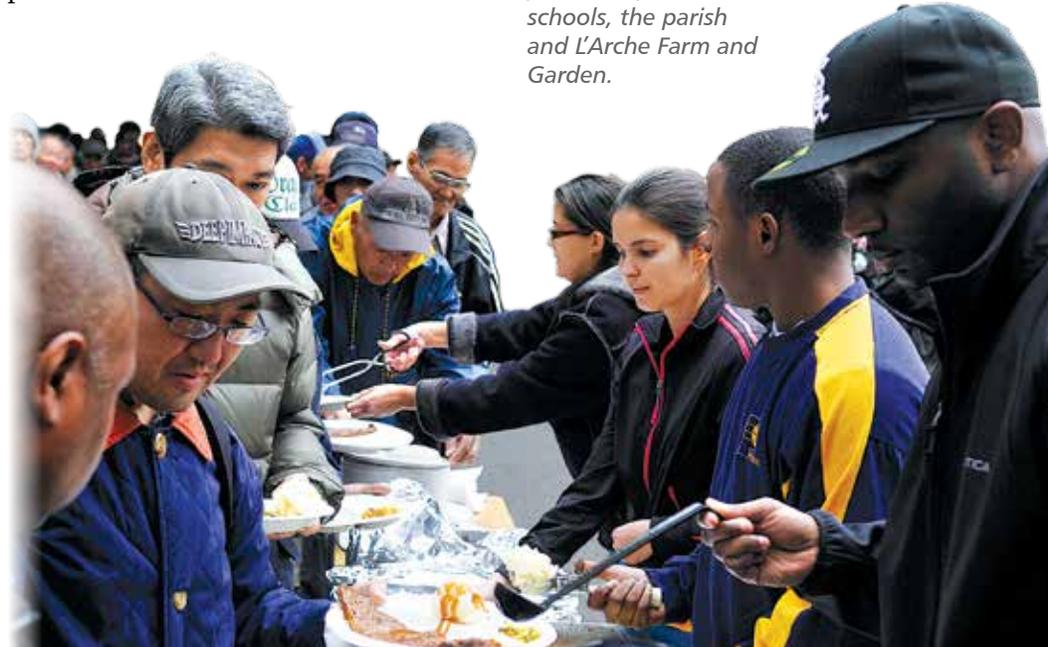
If one's deepening relationship with God is not linked to an outward ex-

pression of love and compassion for others, it is false and not of God. Perhaps the initial reaction to tragedy or disillusionment is to withdraw from the pain of it all, but God draws one back into communion with others and the created world as this is where God is found. This is the pattern of monastic practices through the ages. The early desert fathers fled to the desert to find deeper meaning to faith and their search blossomed into a discipline of prayer, foundational to Christianity. St. Benedict is believed to have been disillusioned by the immorality of Roman society. Through his personal pain he helped establish the Benedictine movement with his rule of monastic life. Through war and sickness St. Francis discovered and proclaimed the humanity of God and that the Vestige of God is found in all of creation. Christians believe in an incarnate God, so by this very understanding we believe that God is all around us: in human relationships, the wonders of science, culture and creation. Sacred activism is mindful-action rooted deep in both this understanding of God's incarnation in all of creation and the desire to cooperate with God's Spirit in bringing the dream of salvation to fulfillment.

Our faith is dynamic and active through many expressions of monasticism. Benedictine communities offer retreats, spiritual direction and programs for the greater community to foster a deeper spiritual life and to promote activism by leadership development and empowering the faith communities to address the issues of our day such as care for creation and social injustices. The Franciscan family throughout the country supports and engages in direct service to those in need, addresses systemic injustices and promotes care for creation.

We are all equally called to sacred activism to deepen our relationship and love with God, our neighbor and Creation. Discover your call and act boldly in prayer and action. Seek out fellowship in your faith journey and know that it is deeply rooted in tradition. Above all, know that you are not alone in this journey.

▲ *Rick Samyn is the Pastoral Assistant for Social Justice at St. Leo Parish, Tacoma, WA. He also manages sustainable honey bee apiaries/educational projects in partnership with area schools, the parish and L'Arche Farm and Garden.*



# Life as a Lay Associate

By Donna Clifford

*"There is a path to holiness within our individual circumstances, that engages our own temperament, that contends with our own strength and weaknesses, that responds to needs of our neighbors and our particular moment in history." Karl Rahner*

## Affiliating With a Religious Community

I was raised Catholic and was taught by different communities of Sisters from grade school through high school and in nursing school. These were wonderful women whom I admired. I toyed with the idea of a religious life until I met my future husband, then

suddenly all that changed. After a full life of marriage (58 years and counting), 5 children and 10 grandchildren, completing my nursing degree and a 30 year career in nursing, I retired. It was then that I had the opportunity to see a community life in action. For many years I had a close friend, Sister Anna Rourke, who was a Sister of St. Joseph of Peace (CSJP) and I visited

her often over the years at the Sister's residence in Bellevue.

I wasn't aware of the CSJP Associate Program until two dear friends told me they were associates, and introduced me to the program. I spent a year in the Pre-Associate Program and made my Associate Covenant in March, 2014. The first covenant is made for two years with the option to re-covenant periodically. After ten years, the associate can ask to make a lasting covenant.

## Living as a Lay Associate

My story as an associate started with a year of discernment, retreats, formation and learning about the community and the history of their founding. After that year, I was invited to covenant as an associate. These vows included a commitment to the charism of peace through justice in my daily life.

This has been an experience of continuous growth and deepening of my faith. The Sisters embrace the associates in their community life. One of our prayer responses is, "We all rejoice in God's daily invitation to seek social justice, love tenderly and to make the good news visible in our lives." This response has been an evolving process for me.

Some of the expectations of me are continuing formation and a commitment to deepen my understanding of the CSJP charism through daily prayer and the integration of the spirituality of peace through justice in my daily life. There are many opportunities to volunteer on committees and nonprofit boards.

I am a member of an Associate Core Group, a forum for the associates and sisters to develop activities for the Congregation, and to facilitate mutual growth and bonding of associates and sisters. I meet once a month with a small group of sisters and associates in a com-

munity "small group" in a home on Capitol Hill. We meet for continuing prayer and education. The relationships have deepened as we also share a meal, great conversation and fun. As an associate, I attend at least two retreats a year, assemblies, Associate gatherings and Congregation events.

It is hard to list all the ways my life has expanded. It starts with the examples I see in my CSJP Community. The sisters and associates are involved in peace rallies, vigils outside the detention center in Tacoma, campaigns to write our legislators, and providing support to refugees and immigrants. They are women and men, teachers, doctors, nurses, lawyers, judges and university professors. Some are hospital administrators who manage hospitals and clinics in the U.S., Haiti and El Salvador. By their example, they are living the charism through peace and justice and one of the precepts of new monasticism: the new monastic cannot turn away from suffering.

## How My Religious Community Supports My Ministry in the World

In the summer of 2016, I answered a call from the Congregation to travel to Calais, France in September where I lived in a Catholic Worker House and ministered with political refugees from the Middle East in an encampment called The Jungle. In a very profound way,

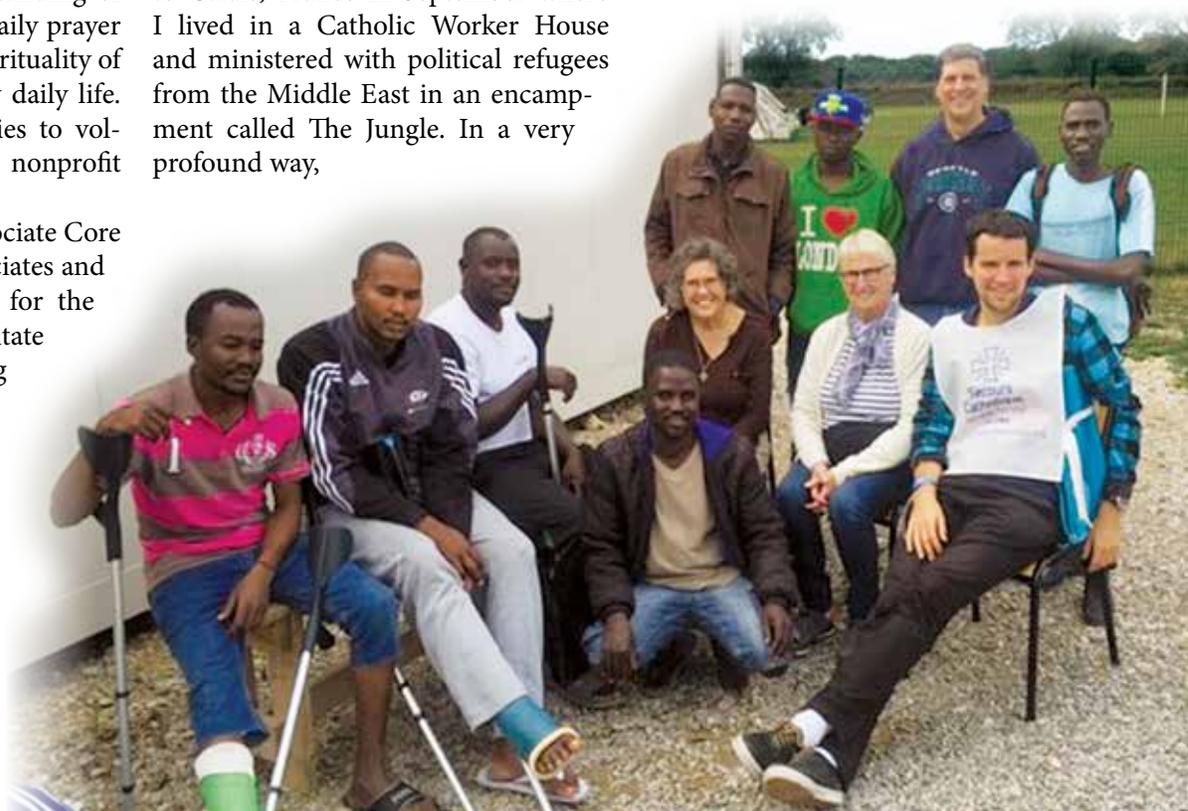
this experience taught me about the commonality of all people. When I started making visits to the camp, I was overwhelmed and humbled by the experience of meeting so many beautiful people who were in dire circumstances. They had lost everything and didn't know what the future held, yet they were so kind, hospitable and faith-filled. I also saw the worst of humanity in violence, human trafficking and rejection. The goodness I saw demonstrated to me how God still can be present in the harshest circumstances.

This experience has opened my husband and me to work with refugees here in Washington. Despite the divisiveness and violence in our world, we can still try to do good in our own environment.

▲ *Donna Clifford, CSJP-A lives in Seattle WA. She has been a parishioner at St James Cathedral for over 20 years and a CSJP Associate since 2014. She and her husband Bob have raised 5 children and have 10 grandchildren. She is a graduate of the University of Washington School of Nursing and practiced nursing in a variety of roles for 30 years until she retired in 2010.*

*For more information about lay associate programs contact [ipjc@ipjc.org](mailto:ipjc@ipjc.org)*

*Donna Clifford, center, outside of the Convalescent Center in "The Jungle"*



# Healing Hands



CC-Abraham Sobkowski, OFM

*Catholic monks during the procession in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem*

*By John Marquez*

In 1995 when I was just shy of 27, I joined the Trappists. The Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance, as they are more formally known, is a Catholic monastic order founded at the end of the 11th century. The monasteries of the Order—houses of men or women religious—are self-contained entities, with limited outside contact, supporting themselves with work, seeking God in contemplative silence, solitude, and humble service of the brothers or sisters, according to the 6th century Rule of St. Benedict.

When I entered the monastery as an idealistic young man, I knew that private, solitary prayer was a significant part of the monastic charism. I also knew that communal prayer—the recitation of the Psalms at set times of the day and the celebration of the Eucharist—was part of the life. But I had to learn by experience how the two—solitary and communal prayer—fed each other and were of equal importance. Moreover, I had yet to learn how all of that prayer flowed into the loving service of my brother monks and how that service in turn nourished my prayer.

I quickly discovered that trying to

pray in the monastery was not always as easy or consoling as I expected it to be. With no television or radio, limited phone and internet use, external stimuli were kept to a minimum. This was a great boon to the life of prayer, but it also amplified the clamor of my thoughts, so many of which tended toward negative judgments, trivial preoccupations, dwelling on the past, grumbling, and a general resistance to the movements of grace. It wasn't always so, and I had many moments of deep prayer and the profound sense of God's closeness, but usually the biggest obstacle to those moments was my own wandering mind. The clear and undistracted realization of my own sinfulness, too, could weigh down my heart and drive prayer far away. However, more often than not it served as an impetus to prayer and helped me to see my need for grace.

Carrying that realization of my own

weakness to communal prayer I found reassurance and healing. Singing Psalm 51, for instance, "Have mercy on me God, in your kindness. / In your compassion blot out my offense," or hearing the reading of the Gospel parable of the prodigal son, or even the sight and presence of my brother monks in choir who I knew had to be going through the same struggles and discouragements, all of that filled me with wonder at God's never-failing mercy.

Apart from the difficult moments in private prayer, its joys and solace also led me to communal prayer with renewed gratitude and fervor, and the words of the liturgy often found their way into my private prayer.

While I experienced private and communal prayer to be intimately linked, I also discovered that the life of prayer was connected to loving service of the other monks, both in the ordinary course of daily tasks and in the more



extraordinary care of the sick and dying. It was this latter experience, accompanying one of the monks in the last stages of his life, that was to give me a startlingly clear glimpse of the truth that we serve Christ in our brothers and sisters.

Br. Paul Bernard was the community organist, a quiet, faithful and kind monk who, I think, everyone had a soft spot for. In February 2001 he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, an aggressive and fast-acting form of cancer. We all knew, including Br. Paul, that he didn't have long to live, and in fact he died about a month after his diagnosis. During that month we cared for him ourselves in the community infirmary, in a tremendous out-pouring of love. I was one of the monks charged with the bulk of his care. Since the pancreas regulates blood sugar levels, I had to take blood samples from his fingertips

a few times a day and, if his blood sugar was too high, give him insulin injections. Sometimes it was hard getting a sufficient amount of blood from his fingers, and then I would have to massage his hands for several minutes to get the blood flowing. This became an increasingly frequent occurrence as the month wore on.

Br. Paul died early on a Sunday morning, and later that evening I came across a photo of him playing the organ. His hands were clearly in view on the keyboard, and as I gazed at the picture I was struck by them: I recognized those hands, I had massaged them numerous times for a month. Suddenly, that connection to another human being through the fragile beauty of the body opened out into the realization that through Br. Paul—through his body—I had been caring for Jesus. I knew it intellectually all along, but it was only in

that moment after Br. Paul's death that I knew in my heart the truth of Jesus' parable: I was ill and you cared for me; whatever you did for one of these least brothers or sisters of mine, you did for me.

I left the monastery at the end of 2003. I came to the conclusion that the lifestyle was a little too insular for me. I needed more contact with the outside world. I still believe that the monastic life is a noble calling, and the lessons I learned about the importance of prayer, both private and communal, and service, and how they are all connected on the broad spectrum of Christian discipleship, have stayed with me to this day.

▲ *John Marquez was a Trappist monk at the Abbey of New Clairvaux in Vina, California from 1995 to 2003. Since 2010 he has worked as sacristan at St. James Cathedral in Seattle, Washington.*

## A Young Adult Monastic

By Gus Labayen

I believe that the future of monasticism is as a lay movement. Young adults are seeking God in Creation through different expressions, such as in the Catholic Worker Movement of Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin. With the dwindling numbers in monasteries and convents, discerning young adults may be found spending time in intentional communities doing years of service. Recurring themes present in my own experience are also reflected in the broad narrative of lay people embracing these traditions in new ways. As a Catholic Worker in Tacoma, I see the new monastic movement as nothing "new," but rather, as a radical way of hospitality to others that realizes and informs the cloisters of today.

A decade ago I met a Benedictine monk who spoke about the spiritual life, and our conversation led me to engage in more than the simple postures of what I call "Catholic Yoga." I desired to do more than stand, sit, kneel and pray. And my prayer was a conversa-





Community outside of Guadalupe House, Tacoma Catholic Worker

tion with God, or so I hoped, as it was mystically silent. Growing up, I was familiar with the daily visible practices of faith, but now I would explore the daily liturgies of faith.

My nuclear family came together every Sunday to pray the rosary. The cultural traditions of faith were important, particularly Simbang Gabi, the night Mass novena leading to Christmas. At this time we would go dressed in our traditional *Barongs* to different churches every night and process in with our colorful *paróls*, which are lanterns representing the Star of Bethlehem. There was always food afterwards, including, of course, the *lechon*, the whole roasted pig; everyone wanted the crispy skin. It's the ordinary liturgy of the Filipinos—to gather around table with food and drink. That is my Filipino Catholic Yoga.

Beyond my spiritual calisthenics I was also involved in youth group, altar serving and choir. Soon I began playing piano and organ at Mass and I became director of choirs at my home parish. This responsibility included taking charge of multiple rehearsals in preparation for contemplative, traditional, contemporary, and LifeTeen Masses every weekend. When I went off to study music at Central Washington University, I felt uprooted and found it challenging to live out my faith. I would spend my breaks experiencing the hallmark hospitality of the Benedictines: staying at guest houses as well as behind the cloister, and collaborating with monastics about liturgy and music. After all, I was named after Gustav Mahler, composer, conductor and pianist.

My namesake Gustav Mahler was a Jewish Austro-Germanic late-romantic composer conductor who said “I am thrice homeless, as a native of Bohemia in Austria, as an Austrian among Germans, and as a Jew throughout the world.” I am a native of Kansas City who moved to the Pacific Northwest, a Filipino among Americans, and Catholic in the world. Both Mahler and I felt *in this world* rather than *of this world*. Mahler resonated with this narrative of homelessness, and so did I.

Eventually, I came to live at St. Martin's Abbey and the Tacoma Catholic Worker Community on the G Street Commons. There is a juxtaposition between the hallmark Benedictine hospitality of St. Martin's Abbey and a discerning practice of lay monasticism. Both are radically hospitable, but also challenging. People said of Dorothy Day, the founder of the Catholic Worker, “She afflicted the comfortable, and comforted the afflicted.”

Radical hospitality allows us to be hospitable to others but also hospitable to our own needs. At St. Martin's Abbey, I came to be involved in people's lives and how they experience the ecology of Creation. How I relate to a monk is dependent on his relationship with God. How I relate to “lay monastics,” like Catholic Workers, is dependent on their relationship with God and their neighbors including those affected by homelessness. Lay Monastic Fr. William Bixel, Jesuit priest and founder of the Tacoma Catholic Worker, was the abbot of sorts. He passed away in 2015 and though I never knew him, he lives on in the friends I live with that do his

work at the Catholic Worker today on the G Street Commons.

A typical young adult intergenerational monastic community is lived out in Tacoma, Washington at the urban center of hospitality, the Guadalupe House and Community Garden. The guests of this house and the surrounding spaces, our “microneighborhood,” support and sustain our work primarily through relationship and service. We donate our time and money to better serve the homeless population here in Pierce County. I have a monastic cell of sorts where I sleep, read and write; everything else is communal. We have a community garden and food is donated to nourish ourselves so that we can nourish others. We have liturgy and dinner once a week and are radically hospitable to those afflicted by addictions, mental illness and poverty. We have microneighborhood meals twice a week. I run the social media Facebook Page (@GuadHouse) where we inform, connect, and host events. For example, the Tacoma Justice Café at Jean's House is a place for intimate discussions on actions for social justice.

We are intergenerational in forming young adult renewed energy balanced by the wisdom and stability of those older than us. Come and let us afflict your comfort so that we can comfort the afflicted.

▲ *Gus Labayen is a music liturgist. His mission is to be radically hospitable by healing Creation, rooting young adults in place through praxis in diverse liturgies through prayer, song, and faithful presence. He is the host of the Tacoma Justice Cafe, a program of IPJC.*



## ▶ Human Trafficking



*Giselle Cárcamo lifts up survivor stories.*

The Multifaith Coalition to Address Human Trafficking through the Lens of Compassion hosted a Fall Gathering focused on the intersection of immigration and trafficking. We were joined by Joanne Alcantara, Executive Director of API Chaya and Giselle Cárcamo, IPJC’s Justice for Women Coordinator. IPJC is a Co-Convener of the Multifaith Coalition with the Missions Office of the Archdiocese of Seattle.

## ▶ Young Adult Justice Café



*The Seattle Justice Café gathered to discuss the November Topic on Wellness.*

Justice Café groups have concluded Season 1 focused on topics related to Health. Starting in January, groups will discuss topics on the Call to Community Participation. Want to join or form a Justice Café? Contact [ipjc@ipjc.org](mailto:ipjc@ipjc.org) today!

### Season 2: Community Participation

- ☞ January: Solidarity & Charity
- ☞ February: Intergenerational Wisdom
- ☞ March: Popular Movements
- ☞ April: Act for Justice!

## ▶ NWCRI Addresses Public Health Crises

### Opioids

The numbers are staggering—the *New York Times* reported that in 2016 more than 64,000 Americans died from drug overdoses. Unfortunately the names of the drugs are becoming all too familiar: oxycodone, fentanyl and heroin.

To address this public health crisis, NWCRI and Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility members have joined state treasurers’ offices, public and labor funds, and asset managers to found Investors for Opioid Accountability. The mission of this 30-member group is to engage with opioid drug manufacturers, distributors and overdose antidote makers, in order to drive pricing transparency and fairness, responsible marketing, greater oversight of distribution, and improved governance to better address the opioid crisis in the U.S. market.

In addition to signing onto 10 letters, NWCRI members have filed shareholder resolutions with Johnson & Johnson and Pfizer.

### Gun Violence

In July NWCRI and ICCR members wrote to gun manufacturers and retailers voicing our concern about the issue of gun violence in our society, and requesting to dialogue with them on the role that they could play in reducing the number of deaths and injuries from handguns. Because the companies did not respond to our letters, in December we filed a shareholder resolution on the Sandy Hook Principles<sup>1</sup> with retailer Dick’s Sporting Goods. In January we will file proposals with gun manufacturers Sturm Ruger and American Outdoor Brands.



<sup>1</sup> [phila.gov/pensions/PDF/Sandy%20Hook%20Principles%20Exhibit%20A%20FINAL.pdf](http://phila.gov/pensions/PDF/Sandy%20Hook%20Principles%20Exhibit%20A%20FINAL.pdf)

**SAVE THE DATE**

**CATHOLIC ADVOCACY DAY**

**WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2018**

Sponsored by:  
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Catholic Community/Housing Services of Western WA · Archdiocese of Seattle

# PEACE & JUSTICE CENTER

NEWS • ANNOUNCEMENTS • UPCOMING EVENTS

## ▶ Welcome Bishop Mueggenborg!

In November, IPJC staff welcomed the Archdiocese of Seattle's new bishop to our office. We look forward to future collaboration.



Elizabeth Murphy, Patty Bowman, Judy Byron, Bishop Daniel Mueggenborg, David Schott and Timnit Ghermay.

## ▶ Donations

**In honor of:** Jeri Renner, OP; Kathy Riley; Sharon Park; Megan Wellings

**In memory of:** Joan Trunk; Dolores Quinn, SNJM

## ▶ Remembering an Advocate & Friend of IPJC



We note with sadness the passing of Marian Malonson, long-time friend to IPJC and tireless advocate for social justice. In 2015, Marian was awarded the Archbishop Raymond G. Hunthausen Humanitarian Award by Catholic Community Services in recognition of her "lifetime commitment to be in solidarity with those on the margin." Marian was particularly committed to ending the death penalty, a cause she and her husband Ray worked on for over 40 years. May her example inspire us all to continue to work for justice for the poor and vulnerable.

## ▶ Support IPJC

Thank you to all who have contributed to our annual appeal.

- ☞ Let us know if your company matches donations
- ☞ Consider designating IPJC in your United Way pledge
- ☞ We accept gifts of stock
- ☞ Designate IPJC when buying from smile.amazon.com



# Contemplative Practices

## A Path to Transformation

*Presented by Anne Kertz Kernion  
the creator of Cards by Anne*

Anne has degrees in Environmental Engineering and Theology. Her thought-provoking presentation will invite us to deepen our spirituality.

- ☞ **Explore** our Christian tradition and the latest neuroscience findings as we ...
- ☞ **Ponder** how the practices of Mindfulness, Meditation and Gratitude can lessen the stress we experience, boost brain function, support our DNA and overall health, and increase our awareness ... improving the quality of our days.

**February 10**

St. Matthew Parish, Seattle

9:00–12:30PM

**Chair Yoga Session (Optional)**

1:30-2:30PM *Bring a bag lunch.*

SUGGESTED DONATION \$15

Complete and return this form by **February 2nd** to: IPJC, 1216 NE 65th St, Seattle, WA 98115  
Suggested donation is \$15. **To register online visit [www.ipjc.org/anne](http://www.ipjc.org/anne)**

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## Reflection

In this issue of *A Matter of Spirit*, we've learned that monasticism isn't solely for monks in solitude. New monasticism allows us to be "monks in the world." After reading, gather with others or take some time alone to reflect on how you might adopt monastic principles in your daily life.

- ✧ Christine Valters Paintner educates us about *statio*, or "the commitment to stop one thing before beginning another." How can I practice *statio* in my daily life in order to "open up a space within for God to work?"
- ✧ Rory McEntee states the importance of having daily, weekly, monthly and annual practices for contemplation modeled on the "maxims of early desert Fathers and Mothers who said, 'Enter your hermitage. Your hermitage will teach you everything.'" What are some realistic rituals and practices that I can adopt?
- ✧ Rick Samyn calls us to go beyond internal reflection as a key piece of new monasticism is how we relate to the outside world. He says, "Seeking greater union with the Divine is never exclusive, but always inclusive with an outward expression of love for the *Other*." What are some ways that I can love the *Other* in my life?

*"S/He should first show them in deeds rather than words  
all that is good and holy." –The Holy Rule of St. Benedict*

