

WINTER 2011

LCG Newsletter

Welcome to the LCG newsletter!

The purpose of this newsletter is to provide the most current information from our local community leaders, area coordinators, members, and friends.

If you wish to submit to the newsletter, you can send your piece at any time to jhvandermey@aol.com.

You might find it convenient to appoint someone within your group or region to keep a notebook for news and other related events that would be suitable for the newsletter.

There is really not a set time for the publication of the newsletter, but if there is enough information forwarded, I can create one as I gather submissions.

Supporting the LCG

We request your annual support check to LCG. While the majority of our LCG efforts are to enhance our relationship with God - and to this end place great emphasis on contemplation, meditation and reading of sacred works - another piece of our dedication and devotion as lay Cistercians is our financial support of LCG.

LCG financial needs are modest, but contributions from members and friends enable us to support and enhance our effectiveness and devotion to the Cistercian charism. Donations are graciously accepted and appreciated.

Please take a moment now to write your check payable to:

Lay Cistercians of Gethsemani Abbey

Please send it to:

**Robert V. Johnson, Treasurer, LCG
5648 S. Dorchester Avenue
Chicago, IL 60637-1751**

On behalf of the LCG we thank you,
Bob Johnson



Coordinator's Corner

Our LCG Advisory Council will meet in April and a major part of our meeting will be to discuss and pray on the LCG relationship with Gethsemani Abbey. For decades we have been welcome at the Abbey and over the years the Abbot has graciously given us support by monks assigned to be mentors and guides. Likewise, LCG folks have been actively and prayerfully involved with the monks (the conventual chapter) through our monthly "Prayers for Monks," LCG annual memorial tree for monks who have died in the past year, our daily readings of the Gethsemani selections, and more recently the shared Chapter Talks generously offered to us by Abbot Elias.

This gracious sharing, some offer, is tangible evidence of a greater unity between LCG and Gethsemani: that of the Holy Spirit.

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It is possible that the infusion of shared devotion, the dedicated application of the Cistercian charism in the lives of LCG members and friends, our mutual and beneficent activities, impel us to more concretely and formally bond—lay people and the coventual chapter, Abbey, and the Order.

We have been blessed with a long and fruitful relationship with Gethsemani and we wish to continue and build on that firm foundation. We are delighted to see an increasing number of monks at our LCG member Commitment services (now gloriously held in the main sanctuary) and welcome the increased number of shared materials from Gethsemani. And particularly we welcome the following observation/challenge from Abbot Elias:

"We've made some progress in informing the community about the LCG groups, but my impression is that we are still pretty far from getting an official recognition from the conventual chapter. That has been the status quo for some time now. To me it seems desirable to do better than that, but I don't hear much from anyone on the topic. It is not clear to me how important recognition is to the LCG members themselves.

Most Associate groups are defined by connection to a specific community, which takes the shape of frequent visits there. The Gethsemani groups are so spread out that this part of the definition suffers. Membership in LCG needs some objective criteria: minimum frequency of meeting with the group; minimum frequency of coming to the abbey.

From the monks' point of view, what they see is what LCG will mean for them. At present they see a few members rather often (i.e., the local group, which is not easily distinguished from other local people who frequent the abbey), and some members seldom or never. The two retreat weekends each year seem to go well, but are an annual or semi-annual visit enough to call "association"? Or are they simply annual retreat gatherings for people interested in Cistercian spirituality with some follow-up during the year?

The Gethsemani groups have evolved this way. If they are satisfied with the loose arrangement and with a

fairly loose association with the Gethsemani community, I suppose the status quo can be maintained indefinitely. If the goal is a more explicitly recognized association with the abbey, the definition of belonging will need to be clear enough that the monks will have something to recognize."

At the 2008 International meeting I asked Dom Armand, the Order's appointed liaison to the lay community, why recognition would be important to the Order. His response: "it is evidence of the Holy Spirit moving in our midst." This challenge—being discussed and pondered and prayed for by monks and laity alike is on our April Advisory Council agenda. Your thoughts should be shared in your local community and with your Advisory Council representatives. In the panoply of our lives—I consider this a blessedly "nice" problem to have.

Blessings and peace to you,

Bob Johnson

Coordinator

Possible volunteer opportunity:

A few volunteers may be needed for hosting duties at the International Lay Cistercian Conference in Dubuque, Iowa May 21-28. This can be for a few days or the entire week. If you have the heart of a host for international visitors, please contact Sue Meissner smeissne@indiana.edu for more information.

If you go into a forest with your mind only, you'll only notice the sounds and the mind will try to interpret them. You might think you're present; but you're not really, you're simply judging what you hear. But if you become aware of the silent dimension underneath the sounds and in between the sounds, then you become present because the moment you become aware of the silence, you also have become silent.

- Eckhart Tolle

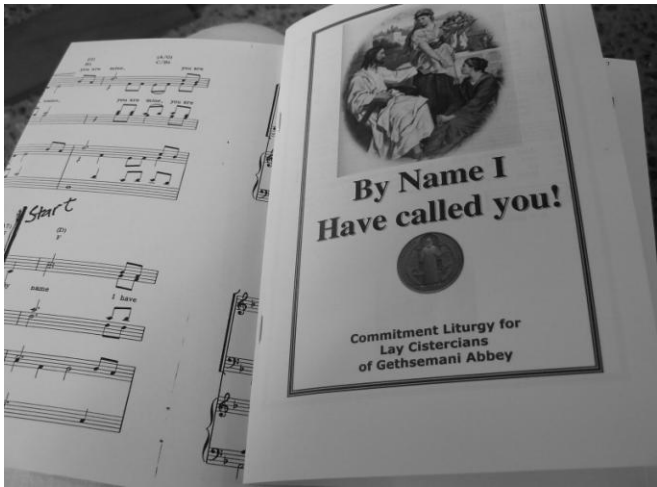
Fr. Matthew Kelty (1915-2011)

With profound sadness we observe the passing of Fr. Matthew who was buried on 2/21/11 in simple Trappist fashion: without coffin and without embalming, lowered gently into the grave by fellow monks. Many of us fondly recall Fr. Matthew's post-Compline poetry and personal reflections drawing from the Word and his love for Christ. Fr. Matthew's gentle and welcoming spirit were a blessing for many of the retreatants at the guesthouse where he was chaplain from 1990 to 2006. Through him, many of us found sound counsel, forgiveness, and spiritual guidance. He leaves us with fond and beloved memories.

We encourage you to write a brief piece about Fr. Matthew which we intend to collate and place on our LCG website. You may send these to Jane Endriss at jendr@aol.com



LCG Community News



Greater Cincinnati LCG Community

Our community has developed our 2011 schedule of community meetings and days of prayer. The schedule is posted on our new web site at www.gclcg.org.

We have included an opportunity for members to gather for a centering prayer session once a month in addition to our regular community gatherings.

For our ongoing formation needs during 2011, we are planning to focus on an in depth study and reflection of the spiritual values and practices outlined in the LCG Plan of Life. We will produce a series of reflections on each element in the Plan of Life that will be made available to the wider LCG.

Mike Johnson - LCG Cincinnati



LCG Northeast Community

The LCG Northeast group continues to have its monthly phone conferences. We have about 8 to 10 regular attendees. We have been reading sections from "**PASSING FROM SELF TO GOD**" by Robert Thomas, OCSO. The discussions have been very thought provoking. We find that our monthly discussions have really helped to support us in our spiritual journey. We now have 3 candidates in formation.

Our Northeast members living in New England have been quite fortunate to have established a relationship with St. Joseph's Abbey in Spencer, MA.

They have been meeting with Fr. Francis on the third Saturday of each month. They generally begin with Lectio Divina using the Gospel of the Sunday following and Father will offer a conference afterwards drawing from the gospel or a timely subject of his choosing.

In December, Father offered a conference on the importance and relevance of St. Joseph to salvation. In January he spoke of the greater need for Lectio Divina and why Pope Benedict is trying to move the Church in that direction.

Ray Palmer is our mentor in New England. We have two members currently in formation and two Friends.

Jane Endriss - LCG Northeast



Chicago LCG Community

The Chicago local community has welcomed two new persons who are interested in pursuing formation toward their LCG commitment. These on top of two who continue in this process. We continue to struggle with regular attendance because of the “usual” reasons: family, travel, employment. Tough to argue against these distractions but laypeople are challenged by the commitment to stability and to LCG. I suppose these only highlight the distance we must travel along our lay Cistercian journey.

Our meetings continue a format: brief introductions and sharing of recent spiritual highs and lows; about an hour in lectio divina focusing silently on a chosen paragraph and then sharing our thoughts about how the passage/Spirit is talking/leading us; sharing thoughts

and ideas from a chosen work; closing with the liturgy of None as done that day at Gethsemani. Our chosen work for the past three sessions has been Augustine’s *Confessions*—a luminous work that all have been pleased to read but some suggested it might be rather too dense and philosophical.

Now, I greatly love the work but must agree that perhaps it was a bit too much of a slog. Our next meeting will focus on the LCG Plan of Life—how we can best apply the Cistercian charism in our daily lives. Will it improve attendance? We do look forward to meeting and sharing—we enjoy a delightful and committed community.

Bob Johnson - LCG Chicago



Indiana LCG Community

Both Indiana groups continue to meet as regularly as possible. The northern Indiana group is studying *Into the Silent Land* by Martin Laird and the central Indiana group has begun to study the *Exordium*. Geography and weather are problems in meeting.

We have finalized our work on ‘Planning a Successful LCG Retreat’ document based on our experiences hosting the June and September retreats. We hope this will be helpful to those hosting future LCG annual retreats.

In addition, we are working on an LCG brochure. If you have any suggestions, please send them to Sue Meissner at smeissner@indiana.edu. Please send them by March 15 as we hope to complete this brochure by April 1st.

Carol Andrejasich – Indiana LCG





Columbus LCG Community

We are a community of around 25. Attendance averages around 18. We meet at Mary Guilbert's home at 10:30 the second Saturday of each month with an hour of spiritual exchange based on selected readings. We are currently using the Cistercian Way, just a few pages at a time, and discussing the content how it relates to our lives.

We begin meetings with ten minutes of centering prayer. At 11:30 we start an hour that includes each person's prayer requests and a "catch-up" on their spiritual journey. At 12:30 we have lunch together and time to socialize. (12:30-1:30).

Jerry Felte has volunteered to be our "scribe" He takes notes on prayer requests and then they are emailed out to the whole group.

We used to meet at 11 with formation time from 10 to 11, but now we begin at 10:30 because everyone wanted to be involved in the formation process.

Mary Guilbert – Columbus LCG



From Father Michael...

The nuns of O.L. of the Mississippi abbey in Iowa have produced a series of DVDs about their experience of five women who came to live with them for forty days. These women are of very difference religious and social background and have a hard time adjusting to the nuns' way of life. The DVDs called **The Monastery** each being about 45 minutes long give a wonderful live-in view of monastic life and the Cistercian charism that is often talked about by LCG members.

Anyway I send this info in case you are interested. I showed them to our novices and a few others in the community and they were greatly appreciated. They may be obtained for \$20 at www.mississippiabbey.org if you want them. They give some great insights into our culture and pre-occupations and the difficulties anyone of us may have in adjusting to the contemplative way.



*From your Lay Cistercian
sisters & brothers...*

a poem written by Randy Cox on the afternoon that he became a Lay Cistercian:

COMMON CALL

I sit
They stand
Unnumbered crosses
Are they more attentive than I?
Silent
Vigil
With names once taken
Years once lived
All await
A common call
To rise

Randy Cox
Gethsemani Abbey
September 26, 2010



From Ray Geers:

Through the Lens of the "Beloved":

A Lay Cistercian Community Discussion

As we begin our Lay Cistercian community discussion for the year 2011, it seems fitting that we reflect together on the nature of prayer as focused in the **LCG Plan Of Life**. In the past we have had many fruitful exchanges on the various forms of prayer as they are outlined in the **Plan**, such as lectio divina, the liturgy of the hours, the Eucharistic celebration, and contemplative prayer. It is hoped that in the discussion beginning today we can go beyond any narrowness that sees prayer and life as completely separate realities. We all agree that they are just different aspects of one unified field in which we all *live and move and have our being*. Using scripture as our starting point, we will turn to the seminal ideas of a non-Cistercian spiritual master who was also profoundly shaped by Cistercian ideals and practices. Using these two sources as well as our own ideas and experience, we hope to more fully en flesh the following hallmark words about prayer enunciated in our beautifully simple **Plan of Life**: "*Prayer must be valued as an expression of our relationship with God, a relationship that is nurtured by a transformed consciousness of the presence of God in our inner depths*".

The gospel account of Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River acts as a pivotal point in his life and ours. Jesus' fullest humanity radiates here when he hears a voice which says "This is my beloved" Matt3:17 or "You are my beloved" Mk1:11, Lk3:22. This is the very story that Henri Nouwen begins his reflections in the book *Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World*. I read this book two years ago and wrote copious notes from which I will be quoting throughout this little introduction. According to Nouwen, Jesus' experience here is the same discovery as ours: our ultimate human identity is as the Beloved of God. Here the primordial relationship to, and purpose of, our lives is clearly given to us. In this relational view, our belovedness is a mutual bond between us and the supreme God-Reality. We become more conscious of this relationship as we

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whole-heartedly accept and grow within it. It is a notion that resonates well, I believe, with the inspired intuitions of our Cistercian tradition.

"The truth, even though I cannot feel it right now, is that I am the chosen child of God, precious in God's eyes, called the Beloved from all eternity, and held safe in an everlasting embrace." Life of the Beloved (LOB) 59

This is our original blessing no matter who we are or whether we realize it or not. Our primordial nature calls us to recognize and respond to this reciprocal relationship. In his treatise *Steps of Humility* St. Bernard, in good Socratic fashion, directs the monk to first of all "know thyself". This advice becomes a hallmark of the Cistercian tradition. Knowing ourselves as originally and continually blessed helps us to navigate the rugged terrain of the spiritual/secular life. Being the beloved of God, who is coextensive with the boundless reaches of all creation/creativity, is love and loving without limit.

"From the moment we claim the truth of being the Beloved, we are faced with the call to become who we are. Becoming the Beloved is the greatest spiritual journey we have to make... (it) means letting the truth of our Belovedness become enfleshed in everything we think, say or do."

LOB 43, 45

Spiritual Living in a Secular World is the subtitle of Nouwen's book for good reason. Like any vowed or specifically religious or dedicated life, being the Beloved involves us in a novitiate through better and worse, sickness and health, partings and death itself. We are journeymen and women setting out on "a long and painful process of appropriation or, better, incarnation." LOB 45 The journey is all the more perilous if we set out on it without good guidelines and good guides. As we try to carry our original blessing with us whole and pure, we discover what tradition has called original sin seeming to magnetically work directly against us.

Commenting upon this phenomena, Michael Casey OCSO wrote in *Strangers to the City* that we live in an age of extreme individualism which is reflected in a "privatized", "designer religion" mindset. Formation according to the wisdom and structures of an ancient tradition attempts to circumvent this obstacle.

"What I want to describe is how the movements of the Spirit of Love manifest themselves in our daily struggles and how we can develop disciplines to identify these movements and respond to them in our actions."

LOB 47

For Nouwen, Eucharistic action becomes the very best model and practice for identifying and responding to God as his Beloved both for our sake and the sake of all sentient beings. The practice has four phases which correspond to the four actions of Jesus in initiating the Eucharist: Taking, Blessing, Breaking and Sharing. My plan is to focus on each of these actions, or prayerful movements into the *transformed consciousness* as described by the **Plan of Life**, in order to see how they affect our lives as the Beloved.

TAKEN/CHOSEN

Now as they were eating, Jesus **took** some bread, and when he had said the blessing he broke it and gave it to the disciples. Matt 26:26

The first "step" in this Eucharistic movement of being the Beloved is to acknowledge that we have been purposefully **chosen** by God, both as individuals and as members of the universal cosmic body. To see ourselves as "taken or chosen" is to realize the divine purposes for us as our possibilities. You could say that the Lay Cistercian **Plan of Life** is one particular way to live this Eucharistic, gospel of life. The seed of Belovedness is offered to all, but whether we truly accept it and allow it to do amazing things to us depends on our willingness to allow ourselves to be taken or chosen by divine possibilities.

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In process thought, the attraction of God's possibilities over us is called the "lure" whereas the *Rule of Benedict* speaks of a "holy desire". In either case, we are freely invited to accept our chosenness and to become more and more deeply the Beloved of God - who in turn becomes more and more our Beloved.

It probably needs to be emphasized that to love God truly always and inevitably means to love the beings created and sustained by God's ongoing genesis. "To be chosen does not mean that others are rejected." LOB 54 The veil of confusion created by sin obscures our true nature and vocation as the Beloved. Nouwen alerts us to the battles surrounding our chosenness. When we lose touch with who we are as unique, special, precious beings "seen by God from all eternity" we also lose touch with the foundation on which we can build a life as the Beloved. The primary problem and temptation, therefore, is to accept the lie that we are not worthy of the divine relationship. This in turn exposes us to the primary sin of self-rejection.

"...the world persists in its efforts to pull us into the darkness of self-doubt, low self-esteem, self-rejection, and depression. And this is because it is as insecure, fearful, self-deprecating people that we can most easily be used and manipulated by the powers surrounding us." LOB 58

As in our own **Plan of Life**, Nouwen proposes a few spiritual practices to help us to safely navigate through this desert/garden world of angels and demons, fruits and weeds.

First, we have to keep unmasking the powers of the world which are manipulative, controlling, power-hungry and ready to destroy in order to get what they want. LOB 59 Nouwen writes of the world's greatest weapons against our owning our chosenness: the power of ignorance and of the lie.

"I beg you, do not surrender the word 'chosen' to the world. Dare to claim it as your own, even if it is constantly misunderstood." LOB 43

"Every time you feel hurt, offended, or rejected, you have to dare to say to yourself: 'These feelings, strong as they

may be, are not telling me the truth about myself.'" LOB 59

Second, we have to keep looking for people and places where truth is spoken and where we are reminded of our deepest identity as the chosen Beloved ones of God. LOB 60 For many of us, such "people and places" would include family and church community, our own Greater Cincinnati LCG, and fellowship with other contemplative traditions.

Finally, we have to celebrate our chosenness constantly. This means saying "thank you" to God and to all who remind us of our chosenness, including those relationships just mentioned above. We can all celebrate our gratitude because it is the most fruitful way of deepening our consciousness that we are not an "accident", but a divine choice. Here is where many of our formal and informal spiritual practices in the **Plan of Life** plug in, such as the practice of spiritual friendship. "Deep friendship is a calling forth of each other's chosenness and a mutual affirmation of being precious in God's eyes." LOB 65

Ray Geers
LCG Cincinnati



Some LCG Responses to the IALCC Survey

- **Please describe how the Identity Document developed at Huerta helps, you, individually and as a community, embody your vocation as a Lay Cistercian.**

“The Lay Cistercian Identity document provided clarity, and answered questions I had been struggling with. I used to wonder what this attraction to monasticism could possibly mean for me in my life as a wife and mother and active member of my community. There was a real sense that it was from God, but to what end? And then I discovered the Lay Cistercians; with the publication of the Identity Document, much of what I had been feeling was clarified and validated. This was a personal call that I was experiencing -- a call to something new: to embrace and live out the Cistercian charism as a lay person in the world. We are not monks, but we share a community with our lay brothers and sisters, and with the monks (in our case) of the Abbey of Gethsemani. We are united with them through prayer and the Holy Spirit in our search for God. We are challenged to find a balance between prayer and action. This ancient charism has found a new and different flowering.”

“The listed attributes help to better consider and apply elements of the charism in my own life. They are useful when, as a group, we consider those elements which unite us, which have a high probability of better forming our attitude and actions to conform to the charism.”

“Actually the Huerta document, although it is a nice statement of what Lay Cistercians are, is, for me, just an elaboration of our Plan of Life. I feel the Plan is more concise and, for me, more helpful in describing exactly what a Lay Cistercian life is, and how one lives it. Neither of these are perfect; they both contain things which need to be clarified, but that is to be expected, and I feel that each one, within its own parameters is a good document and well-done, considering the circumstances under which each was produced.”

“However much I might struggle to develop aspects of the Cistercian way, I can identify with most of the statements of the document.”

“The LC identity document really speaks of a sense of unity and community among diverse cultures and language groups of the work of the Holy Spirit in giving a new expression of the Cistercian charism in our time. Individually, it has been very reassuring and affirming to me in my spiritual journey as I integrate Benedictine/Cistercian values and practices in my life. My faith life has been strengthened in my effort to be more faithful to the gospel of Jesus. I feel that I can more easily claim my Lay Cistercian vocation and with more intentionality live a lay Cistercian life.”

“It clarifies and defines the power of the call to live out the Cistercian charism. I found myself affirming again all the aspects of continuous conversion. Also affirmed the way the Rule of St. Benedict has supported efforts to find balance between times of prayer and action. It articulates brilliantly what I have discovered experientially about being called to the Cistercian charism in my life in my holy and ordinary world. I'm grateful to have it formed and its prophetic words of two equally faithful ways to respond to the call.”

“I have indeed appreciated so much the work that was put into the Identity Document as it puts into a simple form the deep truth of who I sense God is calling me to be as a Lay Cistercian living out the charism through my work in the world. It also spells out what I would like to become as a Lay Cistercian and my longing and desire to be connected to Gethsemani. It is a foundation on which we all can stand on as we work out this call. It is something to which I refer to often and it helps connect me with others who are attempting to live out the Cistercian charism in the world. To know that others are trying to implement it in their daily lives is a source of strength and support to me”

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- **Please describe your relationship with your monastery including a reflection on the strengths and weaknesses of that relationship.**

“Our relationship with the monastery (Gethsemani) is an evolving thing. Certainly since Huerta it has grown, but it is difficult to know if Huerta was the cause of this, or if it is a natural process unrelated to the meeting in Spain. More monks seem to be interested in who we are and what we are about, as witnessed by the increasing numbers of monks at our commitment ceremonies.”

“I am welcomed as a guest which is satisfactory to me. I am not, nor wish to be, a monk permanently residing in the monastery. “Guest” status seems to allow monks to be monks and me, as a layperson, to feel welcome but not unduly interfering with monastic practice. Visiting the monastery allows access to the Holy Spirit and our emerging relationship with the monastery affords a growing continuity of access.”

“I personally feel that I do not have a very strong relationship with the monks at the monastery of Gethsemani. I feel at great arms’ length from them. I have had good conversations with a few monks... There is no relationship for me where I feel that someone knows me, knows who I am. This is a definite weakness. Now, I understand, maybe what I want is not possible under the circumstances...I do have a relationship with the “idea” of the Monastery off Our Lady of Gethsemani, and with the “idea” of living a quasi-monastic life/retreat for a weekend or a week. And these relationships are strong enough to keep me coming back, which strengthens my spiritual practice. So, I see this as a positive factor.

“...For me Gethsemani is not so much “my home” as a place to “retreat” to for rest and renewal. The true test of “spiritual home” is that it is within and goes with me regardless of where I am. If the charism is not within, any effect of being at Gethsemani will be short lived...”

“I feel that LCG’s relationship with the monastic community of Gethsemani is very cordial and mutually supportive. The relationship has been evolving over a twenty year period and has been one that seems to be growing, however, it is not

clear what a formal relationship means for the monastic community, as well as, the lay community. There seems to be some underlying tension and confusion if such a more formal relationship is necessary. Prayer and ongoing dialogue will make the path clearer.”

“My relationship with Gethsemani goes back many, many years. First visit was in the late 70’s. The words God Alone over the gatehouse welcomed me to my spiritual home. Try to visit Gethsemani as many times yearly as possible. It is my second home and I feel very comfortable and always leave feeling spiritually enervated and enriched. Praying the Liturgy of the Hours has been very helpful in being faithful to the LOTH in my daily life. When I finally applied for the Lay Cistercian program it was to claim with a covenant that spiritual home to offer and receive the support of the monks and lay persons as I turn more and more to God Alone.”

“From the first visit, I sensed it was home and still do today even though it’s been 20+ year. Have a deep longing to return. When I applied for the Lay Cistercian program it was an act of faith and a sense that God was calling me to make a deeper connection with Him through studying the ways the monks live out the Rule of St. Benedict each day. It was committing to live with the words “God Alone” in my mind every day. It was at the monastery that I received the call to become a Lay Cistercian. This type of lifestyle and commitment was something for which I had been looking all of my life. I rejoiced when I found it and have received much support from the monks at the monastery.”



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- **Has your relationship with your monastery changed since our meeting at Huerta? If so, please describe.**

“There seems enhanced interest by monks to better know about the lay Cistercians. We have enjoyed increased communication from monks about monastic activity; our LCG commitment ceremonies are now held in the main chapel. Likewise, LCG has attempted to provide an open door for monks to better know LCG by inviting them to LCG commitment ceremonies, sharing LCG-wide communications with our liaison monks, and annually by planting trees on the monastery grounds to honor monks who have died in the past year.”

“The activities we have undertaken at Gethsemani, such as monthly prayers for small groups of monks, and planting trees in memory of monks who have died in the previous year, hopefully will help to bring the communities together. Perhaps we should offer an open invitation to our next commitment ceremony. Looking for positive ways to reach out to the monastic community, and to find ways to bring both communities, lay and monastic, together is a benefit to all.”

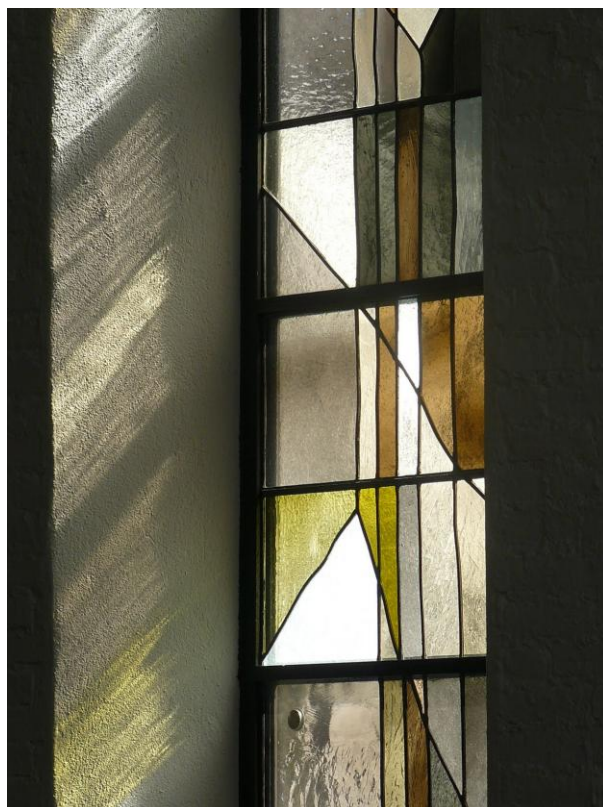
“The relationship between LCG and the Gethsemani community since the Huerta Encounter has been progressing well. Abbot Elias who was present at Gethsemani now shares his chapter talks with the Lay Cistercians. This resource has been a great gift to our formation effort. There has been a noticeable increased presence of monks who attend LCG Advisory Council meetings and the annual LCG commitment service.”

“What has changed most for me is the wisdom of choosing solidarity with the monastery hours of prayer and the development of community with the nearby lay Cistercians. There is indeed a bond. What has changed the most for me is feeling a deeper connection with other Lay Cistercians when we gather as a group, both the more formal weekends we have each year and also the more informal gathering of my group locally. We are studying the same thing and praying together standing on the same foundation of truth that we are---a work of the Holy Spirit and, with little communication among ourselves, we have striven to

live and experience the Cistercian charism in total communion. I continue to be amazed at that work as we discover the same longing around the world.”

“Sense a much deeper sense of community with other Lay Cistercians and also a new and deeper respect for the local community. Have seen much more sharing among the local communities and a striving for sharing information and also prayers for each other. Every time I spend a weekend, I feel a deeper and stronger spiritual connection with the monks.”

“I do not see any major changes in my relationship with Gethsemani since I started my journey. When I go to visit I do think that I am going home. To me it is a place that is open for me to just be myself and be away from the cares of everyday life. Yes, I do have a spiritual connection with the place. The true connection is that of the inner soul at peace with God, due to the examples of the monks and the lay community. It was nice to see that more of the community were present at the commitment ceremony.”



○ BETHLEHEM

*The star arose to greet the night
And over all the world such light
Was never seen before by men
Especially in Bethlehem*

*○ House of Bread, this little town
Embraces one whose arms surround
An infant born who knows no sin
Yet comes for sin to Bethlehem*

*As shepherds, angels dance and sing
Around the cradle hovering
The host of heaven, kneeling, bends
Around this Child in Bethlehem*

*○ Bethlehem, so crowned with light
○ Bethlehem, the heavens delight
To see the Christ such holy sight
○ Bethlehem, ○ Bethlehem*

Randy Cox 7/7/10



Seeds of Life

by Matthew Fleenor – NE LCG (in VA)

Epiphany, 12 February 2011

"Blessed are those who do not fall away on account of me." – Matt. 11.6

'The Knock.' I'm not sure if it struck you the same way it did me the first time I heard it. I kept thinking to myself, "What's that noise? Where is it coming from? What is its purpose?" At the end of the Office, we usually hear this ending – 'Let us bless the Lord, Thanks be to God,' followed by a long pause, and then 'the Knock!' For a while just the mere austerity and mystery of the pause, and of course the knock, drew me to look forward to it, to enjoy it, and to incorporate it into my own meager attempt to keep the Office. I still have no idea what the monks are thinking during this time, or if this ritual serves a set purpose. After over a year and a half of pondering it and repeating it, I now have some personal understanding of that that pause could mean ... at least what it means for me.

As with most good things in my spiritual life over the past (gulp) 10 years, I owe the revelation of the meaning of 'the knock' to the Cistercian traditions in which I have longed to be more immersed. For me personally, the voice of the Lord comes as a culmination, or a conjoining, of seemingly independent streams of information that meets me (square in the face, usually) in my specific context. Consider these specific words, and let me attempt to explain how they have come to connect for me:

(a) From the Psalms, we read "the righteous ... will still bear fruit in old age ... proclaiming 'The Lord is upright, he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him.'" (92.12—15) It is only in my later years, as I am now becoming older in age, that I have thought more about people attributing wickedness to God. As the experiences of life wear on us, we are tempted to look life in the face and claim, "Nah, God is not good; Nah, God is not in control."

(continued)

(b) It is secondly the person of Jesus who speaks the message and incarnates this word. To a confused John in prison, Jesus calls out "Blessed are those who do not fall away on account of me." (Matt. 11.6) and also 'the love of most will grow cold' (Matt. 24.12). It is because our love grows cold that we are tempted to attribute 'wickedness' and/or a lack of uprightness to God. It is because of the humble and compassionate Way of Jesus that we are tempted to fall away from following him.

(c) Third, it is the Cistercian writings that reinforce and add meaning to my experience of the knock. In a book I picked up in the Gethsemani bookstore¹ the traditions of my upbringing (Protestant) are brought to light within the context of Cistercian theology. I read from Bernard that "[ingratitude is] 'a burning wind that dries up the source of love, the dew of mercy, the streams of grace².'" (195) There is the connection point between the words of the Psalmist, the words of Jesus, and my own daily context. It is our lack of gratitude and our lack of thanksgiving that tempts us to attribute wickedness with God, that causes our love to grow cold, and that questions the merciful way of Jesus.

And that is where the knock of the Abbot causes us to pause and to recollect all of the good things we have received from the Lord. "Thanks be to God" (pause). In that moment of silence, the questions come forth – 'What have we received, and from what have we been spared, for which we are thankful? Are not all things in our lives gifts that call forth our thanksgiving?' The knock is not an ending, but a reawakening, a redirection of our lives in light of the thankful heart that is rekindled in that moment of silence.

In his thoughtful introductory essay, André Louf, OCSO, speaks of humility as a metavirtue – a state of being that undergirds and supports all other virtues³. In a similar manner, ingratitude encamps itself as a metasin; it stands beyond sin, undergirding it and encompassing all other sin. Ingratitude is the bedmate of pride, as humility and thankfulness are wed. May we continually be reminded that we have many reasons to 'bless the Lord,' that we many reasons to be thankful, and that thankfulness walks hand-in-hand with the humility that ushers us into the presence of Jesus.

1. I purchased this book for \$2.95 because one of the Brothers purchased a number of them in bulk – Thank you!
2. Franz Posset, *Pater Bernhardus, Martin Luther and Bernard of Clairvaux* (1999), Cistercian: Kalamazoo, MI, p.195–196.
3. André Louf, *The Way of Humility* (2007), Cistercian: Kalamazoo, MI, pp.5–10.

WELCOME

*Welcome to the world tonight
This perfect gift announced in light
Such the sounds and such the sight
A family's hope, a child's delight*

*Welcome to a bed of hay
As morning comes and night gives way
Heaven knows that on this day
All Earth will stop and pray and say*

*Alleluias to the King
Alleluia, joy we sing
Our finest offerings we bring
To Christ the Lord in Bethlehem*

*Welcome to our hearts tonight
All is calm and all is bright
Christ has come, our soul's delight
To all who welcome, all unite (in)*

*Alleluias to the King
Alleluia, joy we sing
Our finest offerings we bring
To Christ the Lord in Bethlehem*

*Welcome to the world tonight
All is calm and all is bright
This perfect gift announced in light
Welcome to the world tonight*