



# REDWOODS MONASTERY

## NEWSLETTER

### Fall 2013

*Dear Friends of Redwoods Monastery:*

*This newsletter is an effort on our part to stay connected with you and to share with you the spirit of Redwoods, even when you are not physically present here. I hope you enjoy these thoughts and pictures and I invite you to let us know what you think of the newsletter. With prayerful wishes for peace, Sister Kathy DeVico.*



Dear Friends,

Greetings from Redwoods!

The path of the seasons moves on as summer fades in the rich harvest bounty of our garden and the shorter days and cool of autumn come upon us. Recently I have been

reading a book titled *On Heaven and Earth*. It is a dialogue between Pope Francis when he was Archbishop of Buenos Aires and Rabbi Abraham Skorka. Both were strong supporters of interreligious dialogue and decided to put their conversations into a book. I was moved by these words of Pope Francis: “What a great word: *path!* In my personal experience with God I cannot do without the path. I would say that one encounters God walking, moving and seeking Him and allowing oneself to be sought by Him. They are two paths that meet”. Two movements making up the ‘path’: Divine life and human life both seeking, longing for the ‘other’.

Pope Francis continues: “On one hand, there is our path that seeks Him, driven by that instinct that flows from the heart; and after, when we have encountered each other, we realize that He was the one who had been searching us from the start... The initial religious experience is that of walking: walk to the land that I am going to give you. It is a promise that God makes to Abraham. In that promise, in this, in this walking, an alliance is established that consolidates over time. Because of this I say that my experience with God takes place along the path, both in the search and

in allowing myself to be sought, even if it may be by diverse paths—of pain, of joy, of light, or of darkness”. Can we, with Pope Francis, utter the same: ‘What a great word the *path*’? For this is where we are met, this is where we are sought, and this is where we bring our seeking. The ‘path’ has different shades and patterns of light and dark. Still, the ‘path’ we are on with its mixture of suffering and joy is moving towards the ‘*telos*’, the end goal, the kingdom of God, fullness of life, life eternal. Our seeking and the Divine seeking: this is the central dynamic of the ‘path’, it forms the living fabric of our relationship with God and God’s relationship with us in all the seasons of our lives.

In this newsletter we would like to share some reflections on this path of seeking and meeting. As we conclude our 50th anniversary year of our foundation we look back and we look forward in the prayer that Sister Veronique offered at the Anniversary Mass and in some excerpts from a remembrance by Sister Godelieve of her fifty years of monastic life. Both sisters were founding members of our community.

Sister Suzanne contributes an article about a new program we have begun called “Monastic Experience Weekend.” The intent of the weekends is to offer young women an opportunity to more deeply enter into the experience of monasticism and to interact and dialogue with members of the community. In May Sister Claire visited a class at the Graduate Theological Union and she offers a reflection on her visit and discussion with students. Recently a close friend of the community, Tracy Schilling, donated a beautiful bell to the community and she has written a short history of the bell and its meaning to her and her family.

As a community we are ever grateful for your support, which helps sustain our monastic presence here on this beautiful piece of God’s creation.

*Sr. Kathy*

Sister Kathy

## Fifty Years of Monastic Life

by Sister Godlieve

My monastic call came after a week of discernment following a crisis of faith that left me very miserable. After reading the book *Christ, Life of the Soul* by Dom Marmion, OSB, I realized: "It is worthy to live the life of Christ." I decided to pursue this, ignoring of course what this exactly meant, and what was involved in it. It was totally accidental that I entered the Monastery of Nazareth in Belgium.



Sister Godlieve

Looking back on all the years I have lived monastic life, I am thankful for the initial formation I received there. But after six years I was aware that I had not lived out much of it in a meaningful way. It is by being in the U.S. that some things happened to me that affected the rest of my life. Events that occur in life, at times in unforeseen ways, become often the opportunities for new insights, leading up to important changes.

As the day is followed by night, I have come to experience the joys of doing my part in creation as well as dealing with dark periods of struggle, doubts and resistances. As the seasons move from springtime to summer and from fall to winter, I have been in touch with new births in the soul, with moments of deep fulfillment; have gained some wisdom in growing older and born the consequences of infidelity, illusions, laziness, and unbelief. I am increasingly aware that 'letting go' of what is 'mine' to embrace the 'other' is an endless endeavor, a must in daily life, to die and rise again.

I have come to see the Rule of St. Benedict as an ancient document to be interpreted according to the time we live in. Its structure has been helpful over the years, as it offers daily continuity as well as change. Prayer is not anymore exclusively a request for help from God, but has evolved as a living in God's presence. Silence and solitude are vital to be in touch with the deepest core of our being. Community life, with its service to one another, is by itself a school of self-knowledge. Poverty is not a deprivation of what is truly needed but rather, in our time of escalated consumerism, calls us to frugality. Lectio divina and study bring us in touch with those who

have gone before us and from whom we can learn. Manual labor, shared together, provides for our own living. Through hospitality we welcome others who are longing to share the same values we live by. I see the Rule of St. Benedict as a prophetic document for our time right now and for the future.

Having entered the last phase of my life, it has become clear to me that monastic life is not something to be 'achieved' but is a 'way of life' moving on with increased awareness and commitment toward the Ultimate Reality of Being, who is God, becoming All in all; who is One, Life and Love and all of this, through the ordinary events of daily life, asking for transformation. Aware of my great poverty, but trusting in God's "mercy, within mercy, within mercy," I am very thankful for the call I was offered and have said "YES" to, and I am hopeful about, and supportive of a future for monasticism. I thank each of you for your support and patience over the years.

### Sister Veronique's prayer at the Fiftieth Year Anniversary

*What is impossible for people is possible for God (Luke 18: 27), Jesus taught. I have strength for everything through him who empowers me. (Letter to the Philippians 4: 13), St Paul wrote.*

*These words have been an undercurrent in these 50 years:*

*In being led by God's Spirit, and the knowing of the strength of community, this community, and the support of all the people connected to Redwoods. I pray God for this day and the days and years to come, that we, as a community may further God's kingdom on earth.*

*And let us give thanks and glory to God for the gift of these 50 years that have revealed the beauty of the human soul in this place.*

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## Monastic Experience Weekend for Young Women by Sister Suzanne

This summer Redwoods Monastery hosted a weekend geared especially toward young women (ages 18-40) who were interested in learning more about monasticism and contemplative prayer. Six women attended – most in their early twenties. Some were interested in a religious vocation, but most came just to experience a deeper level of prayer. This was the second year we hosted this event and we now hope to make it an annual event.



Our guests followed our monastic schedule of prayer, spiritual reading, and manual labor. They got up and joined the sisters for meditation first thing in the morning. For some, this was a stretch, but all believed they benefitted from the experience. Coming from a busy world of work, school, and social life into the silence of the redwoods can be a dramatic transition. Cell phones do not get reception here; there is no texting or wifi for internet connection. Without these distractions, we hoped there would be space for each participant to enter deeply into her heart and soul and listen for God's voice. This is the intent of the weekend.

For morning work, they helped Sister Ann Marie in the garden and constructed a frame for the pole beans. Working with the hands, being in touch with the earth, and collectively creating in community are a foundational monastic practice. Community life is a very simple joy and one that may well be hidden in today's competitive work and study environments.

There were three conferences during the weekend. The first was of a very introductory nature, explaining our prayer practices and giving suggestions for morning meditation. In the second conference, we showed a DVD\* we recently filmed about our life at Redwoods. Sisters also shared their own vocation stories and impressions of monastic life. This conference is usually the most meaningful to the participants. They want to hear about our personal journey to the monastery and the commitment to God that keeps us here. One woman commented that though our life is restrictive, we seem happy, free, and emotionally balanced. She did not expect the joy she saw in us.

The final conference was on the monastic practice of *Lectio Divina*. This is a very traditional practice where scripture is read very slowly and intentionally, listening for the voice of God in the reading. What is God telling me personally through this reading? How do I connect this scripture with my life? We read silently and then shared about the text. The conference gave the participants the opportunity not only to explore scripture, but also to open up new vistas and insights into their personal lives and experiences of God.

On the evaluation for the Monastic Experience Weekend, we asked the question, "What did you find most beneficial to you

personally?" Here are some of their responses:

"To be given the chance to step into the life here. For me it was really valuable to experience for myself how a life of prayer actually works... not just the Office and Mass... but work and living in the surroundings here are a part of the holistic life style."

"The joyful openness everyone fosters here. I felt free to explore the forest, which I know gives me life, but also invited to interact with everyone because of the joy with which you live."

"It was the common prayer - when prayers were offered, sung with beautiful voices - profoundness could be felt. I felt inspired as prayers were offered amidst beautiful nature reflected on the glass (in the church)."

"To join in the gardening as a group is something I did not expect, but it was fun, meaningful when we ate something that we grew."

The impact of the Monastic Experience was reciprocal. The Redwoods community was enriched by seeing young people really "get" our life. They entered into it with "beginner's mind" and reflected back the treasures of monastic life that we sometimes take for granted.

Of course no experience of Redwoods would be complete without walks in the woods, animal watching, and star gazing. And nature did not disappoint us. A doe gave birth right outside the cloister windows and the mother deer proudly showed off her newborn twins to our guests.

\* (This film can be viewed on the monastery's website at: <http://www.redwoodsabbey.org/Life/Vocations/>)



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## Sister Claire's visit to the Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University by Sister Claire

In May I was invited to speak to a class of Sister Julia de Prinz, from the Verbum Dei Community of San Francisco. We have known the Sisters of Verbum Dei for many years now and Sister Julia gives us Biblical seminars every year. Sister Julia is a professor at the Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University in Berkeley and was teaching a class titled "Mission, Hermeneutics and Hybridity." In April, the students watched the movie *Of Gods and Men* about our Cistercian Brothers who were killed in 1996 in Algeria. The students

were asked to reflect on the experiences of the Brothers and how they lived their mission. I know very well the monks' story and had met two of the monks: Fr. Christian de Chergé and Br. Paul Favre-Miville. I cannot forget these two encounters that were so deep and real; it was two years before they were kidnapped and killed and already they were conscious of the precariousness and the challenges of their situation, and ready to live till the end of their call.



It was a warm and sunny afternoon and the grounds of the Graduate Theological Union were green and blossoming. After a visit of the various buildings and the Chapel, where the names of modern witnesses and saints are written on the windows, I met the fifteen students coming from various cultures, religions and backgrounds. They were welcoming and this relieved a little my anxiety. My part in the class was to share what I knew about the Brothers' final years and to answer their questions. Their first reactions after the movie were profound and interesting. They quickly made the link between the monks' monastic life and the surroundings of the monastery in the context of Algeria. They recognized and were interested in the monks' loving way of relationship with their Muslim neighbors, the respect and care from the doctor Br. Luc, the monks' relation with the land, their relationships among themselves in community, and the manner in which they discerned together how to live their monastic call in their unique situation.

Here I would like to share the words of one student which are reflective of what so many others said: "For me, the most significant scene in the film was the meal that the monks shared after Br. Paul's return and only a few hours before their kidnapping. The joy that came with their common resolution was clear from their sharing of music---and a good wine!---in silence.

That same joy became present on the face of each one, as did the awareness of their friends' suffering, and perhaps of the violent death through which they would soon lose - and gain! - their lives. For me, watching that scene was like celebrating the Eucharist, with joy and sorrow mingled in the - one - mystery of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection."

A break helped us to gather our thoughts and questions and we continued on the theme of mission. I shared some stories of the monks: how they all received who they were from their families but also how they were able to make their own what



they received and, further, how they were strong personalities and still able to live together, united by their love for God.

Mission is not the first goal of monastic life but we understood it, after our discussion of the monks' experience, as an "art of presence" as one student emphasized it. An art of presence with the call to love people as Christ loves us, in a humble way, ready to receive from them and even to give one's life for them. What impacts this mission is the quality of the dialogue for discernment, and the life of prayer and liturgy, exemplified by the monks' love for one another growing in the midst of their struggles and the threats around them. It is living the Mystery of Jesus' life, death and Resurrection.

And so the meeting went, it was a great experience for me seeing the beauty of these fifteen students' faces and their teachers! So open, willing to understand, to deepen and to welcome a new reality; but, above all, I was amazed by the commitment each one put in their own reflections and in their faith. I was impressed to see how this came from Sister Julia's teaching and her presence around them, along with the help of Fr. Eduardo Fernandez, SJ. It was a bond of communion received as a gift and a joy.

## The Bell

Recently a friend of the community, Tracy Schilling, gifted the monastery a beautiful bell. This is her reflection on the history and meaning of the bell:

The bell stood for 72 years in my family's summer home on Lake Tahoe. Through the generations, its sole purpose was gathering the family together for the evening meal, the highlight of the day. This time as one family, together, a loving community of many unique individuals living as one was my first and strongest sense of the beauty and richness that community can be. The love and support of this extended family filled my summers with beauty, understanding and a positive sense of potential, possibility and commitment.

When it was time to find a new home for the bell, Redwoods Monastery was the clear choice. Like me, it arrived directly from Lake Tahoe. As I discovered for myself in 1979,

I know that the bell will find a loving home in the diversity and richness of Community, the sacredness and peace of Place, and a sense of wisdom and inspiration that is Redwoods Monastery. It is fitting that the bell ring out bringing together and honoring both past and present.



**Redwoods Abbey**

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