



REDWOODS MONASTERY NEWSLETTER Winter 2022

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,

The profound mystery of the season of Christmas is upon us once again, which gives us the opportunity to share with you a glimpse of what we have lived this year.

We finally opened the guesthouse on a limited basis. It was a moving experience to welcome our dear guests for retreat after a hiatus of almost two years. In the late Summer and early Fall our guests again got to delight in the visit of our neighboring Roosevelt elk. This new experience looks like it may become a permanent feature of the Redwoods' landscape during these months!

In February I attended Part I of our General Chapter where we elected our new Abbot General, Dom Bernardus Peeters who is from the Netherlands. Before Part II of our General Chapter in September, Dom Bernardus sent out a circular letter to the whole Order. In this letter he encouraged us to 'dream.'

He was influenced by the book of Pope Francis, *Let Us Dream*. Here is an excerpt of what Dom Bernardus said: "For Pope Francis, dreaming is a way to get out of a crisis. 'A crisis,' he says, '...is a moment to dream big, to rethink our priorities – what we value, what we want, what we seek – and to commit to act in our daily life on what we have dreamed of.... I want us to look together at the importance of dreams...It is not about the dreams themselves but about what lies behind or beneath them.

The dream symbolizes the spiritual life of each of us, that inner space that each of us is called to cultivate and guard, where God manifests himself and often speaks to us.' (Pope Francis, Audience, 26th January 2022). When we

no longer know how to dream, it is as if the inner space within us where God speaks to us has dried up." (August 17, 2022). These words are so apt for our lives right now.

As we enter the New Year let us not forget to dream with our families, our communities, in our Church, in our work and service. In the synodal landscape of listening and walking together, we, at Redwoods, will be dreaming and praying to hear what God is saying to this little ecclesia of Redwoods Monastery.

In this newsletter you again will hear the experience of some of our interns, and their garden experience. Finally, you will read about the 60th anniversary of the beginnings of Redwoods Monastery. Sr. Veronique is one of our surviving founders. Imagine, 60 years ago on October 31st she set foot on this magnificent property.

Please know of our gratitude for all that you give to us of your prayer, love, and support. We hold you in the heart of our community prayer and pray for many blessings in the New Year.

Gratefully,

Sr. Kathy

"The Sky is gray; the grass is happy with the rain. My soul likes to see the Sun and the full moon, and my heart remembers you."

~ Sr. Veronique

Redwoods 60th Anniversary

Sr. Suzanne

Looking inward to engage Reality – a process of Aggiornamento.

Sixty may seem like a mature age but in monastic time sixty is young. Our Order of Cistercians was founded nearly a millennium ago in 1098. Redwoods Abbey was founded in 1962. The sisters left Belgium the very day Vatican II opened, and the Council's teachings have impacted monastic life at Redwoods ever since.

"Aggiornamento," an important term from the Council, describes these sixty years at Redwoods. It is a process of recovering the deeper meaning and intention of tradition and applying those insights to present circumstances. Aggiornamento requires discernment, prayer, awareness, openness to the Spirit and engaged listening in the present.

For monastics, who take vows of stability, obedience, and conversion, aggiornamento includes our relationship with God, the monastic community, and the beauty of creation. It extends to our wider community of friends and benefactors and embraces the world through our prayer.

We opened our sixtieth year with a retreat given by Fr. Isaac Slater of Genesee Abbey in upstate New York. Together we read and pondered some of St Bernard's (d. 1153) sermons on the Song of Songs and applied Bernard's teachings to our community life. Fr. Isaac stressed that, for Bernard, the movement to spiritual knowledge begins with interiority. Only in the process of discovering my own misery can I be moved outward toward the Love of God and eventual union with him. Far from being an end-run to holiness, this path is long and circuitous - mediated by friendship with Christ, fellow seekers, and guides.

Abundant Seasonal Mushrooms

Sr. Claire



Weeks of sunshine and then a fine and welcome rain for a weekend. Suddenly, yellow, cream-colored corollas appear

in the forest, hiding humorously under the leaves or needles. Guess their name - a name close to a chant. The chanterelles! Picking them becomes a walk, up the hill, down the hill, walking sideways like crabs, turning around and discovering these mushrooms where we did not expect them. Delicious in any recipe: quiche, soup, stew, seasoning another dish...

This year has been surprisingly abundant. A sign of the gratuity and generosity of our God. And we were grateful to be able to share them with others.

Garden Reflections

Sr. Ann-Marie

To be aware of all that has potential for life defines the pace of the gardener's work in the summer season when growth is accelerated.

This year, young interns and monastic seekers gave attentive labor, namely weeding the vegetable beds, staking tender plants, and transplanting seedlings, submerging their fingers into the rich dark soil. The garden's space of beauty and stillness evoked joy, communion, and cooperation among us in our work.

Particular garden activities occurred all in silence: harvesting and cleaning currants, patient thinning of carrots and red beets, and raking hay to mulch garden beds, which led to increased plant vitality and production.

Now, delicious canned tomatoes, green beans, currant, blueberry, and rhubarb jams, fill our cupboards for the winter season. I am grateful for the bountiful harvest reaped this season and for the labor of love in making the garden so beautiful and fruitful.

Monastic Internship Summer 2022

- Maude -

I found myself at Redwoods this summer out of a slow-burning interest in monasticism that kept intensifying. I longed for silence, and I hoped for something I couldn't quite name but that I sensed waiting to unfold in the quiet spaciousness of a patient heart. It seems to me that contemplative life offers us many gifts as we, and our earth, face increasingly uncertain futures.

The monastic tradition has been wrestling with many of our contemporary questions for centuries: what is the true power of our attention and how can we steward it with intention? How does the alchemy of solitude and

community lead us to communion? How might our commitments to love and justice transform our demons? What is all our longing asking us to hear?

Henri Nouwen once credited a friend with writing: “Learning to weep, learning to keep vigil, learning to wait for the dawn. Perhaps this is what it means to be human.” Collectively and personally, many of us are mourning. Many are weeping. Many are keeping vigil in the darkness between what was and what is to come.

Most mornings at Redwoods, I walked up to church in the dark. On moonless or foggy days, the darkness felt particularly impenetrable. I was always aware of my fear, my vulnerability, and the nearness of an unknowable world. Morning by morning, I began to befriend the shadows I feel around the edges of uncertainty in my own life. Rather than offering me clear answers, my experience as a monastic intern slowly brought me into a more dynamic relationship with the depth of the not-knowing that defines our times, my own life, and the search for God.

It has been a blessing to learn to keep vigil from the Redwood’s sisters in their Cistercian “school of love,” which unites the wisdom of the heart, spirit, mind, and body in the rhythm of the monastic day. In their prayerful attention, the Redwoods Community continually enacts God’s love in the world—receiving this gift has been a profound grace.

Redwoods has been a place to sit beneath the moon and be with mystery. The deep humanity of the sisters, the cries of the psalms, and the silent presence of Redwoods

towering around the valley have each nurtured my faith to keep listening for God in the dark and to welcome Love in the shadows of stars.

- Jessica -

I arrived at the Redwoods Monastery after a difficult year in my personal journey. In 2019, I received a master’s degree in clinical social work and had experienced

burnout quite early in my career. Interested in exploring healing, I felt called to the Monastery as an opportunity to access inner stillness and deep listening. The day I arrived I was greeted by each of the sisters with much warmth and open heartedness.

Everyone extended so much grace and patience towards me, particularly those first few days, as I made the transition from the fast-paced and demanding life of Boston,

MA to the calm and quiet of the Redwoods Monastery.

Spending the month at the Monastery, immersed in prayer and contemplation, work and study, while being surrounded by the love and care of the community—witnessing their reverence for each other and the land—I learned a new possibility of approaching life. A life dedicated to God. A life held with so much tenderness and care.

I was seen and accepted exactly as I showed up in each moment—joyous, confused, tired, hungry, excited, quiet—and this was profoundly healing. I will carry this experience in my heart, as a guide to return to what is important, and am very grateful for the opportunity.



Monastic Seekers Maude, Megan, with Sr. Ann-Marie

“... every soul, ... has the power to turn and find it can not only breath the fresh air of the hope of pardon and mercy, but also aspire to the nuptials of the Word, not fearing to enter into alliance with God or to bear the sweet yoke of love with the King of Angels.”

~ St Bernard of Clairvaux, On the Song of Songs Sermon 81.



Shop Our Online Store

Our honey, cards produced from Sr. Victoria's artwork, and Sr. Veronique's handcrafted soap, can be ordered online from our store at:

<https://store.redwoodsabbey.org/>



Redwoods Abbey

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