



# REDWOODS MONASTERY

## NEWSLETTER

### Fall 2007

*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, Sr. Kathy DeVico*

## **To Carry and Be Carried, To Love and Be Loved**

*(adapted from a talk by Sr. Kathy to the Redwoods Community)*

In June of 2007 Fr. Michael McCarthy, SJ, of Santa Clara University gave the community a series of conferences on “St. Augustine and the Psalms.” In reading St. Augustine’s exposition of Psalm 41, I was struck by a story he told in this particular commentary. Whether this story is literally true in the part of Africa where St. Augustine lived, I do not know; however, it is a beautiful metaphor of community life.

St. Augustine writes, “It is said that when deer are walking in single file, or want to swim to a different place to find fresh grazing, they rest their heavy heads on each other. One goes in front, another rests its head on him, and others on them, and so on until the whole line is supported. When the hart who has been bearing the weight in the foremost position is exhausted, he moves to the rear, and another takes his place to carry what the first one was carrying, while this previous leader rests himself by supporting his head on another, as all the others have been doing. They go on like this, carrying the heavy weight for each other; so they make good progress, and do not let each other down. Was it not deer like these that the apostle had in mind? Bear one another’s burdens, he says, and so you will fulfill the law of Christ [Gal 6:2]” (Exposition of the Psalms, vol. 2, trans. by Maria Boulding, p.242).

What does this profound passage mean for a monastic community? What does it call us to live? The “law of Christ” is, of course, the “law of love;” it is a living law, not static, a way of life that we are continually growing into. In bearing one another’s burdens we fulfill, moment after moment, this living

law of love, this love that grows in us as we open our hearts to the Spirit’s gentle transforming power. We have an image of what deer do in supporting each other, but for us, how do we do this? How do we help carry the burden of a sister or brother when they are struggling with painful events in their lives or perhaps the darkness that comes up in all of our hearts?

I would like to share the input of Fr. Michael McCarthy on this simple passage of St. Augustine’s commentary, “As a deer longs for running streams, so my soul longs for thee.” Fr. Michael writes, “It is not just the desire of the one who recites the Psalm, but it is a desire which includes the constant struggle



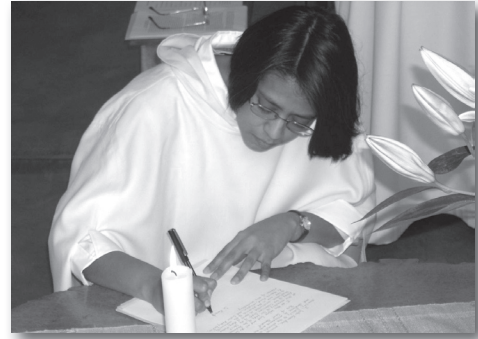
to overcome lesser desires—to put them away so that we can give our hearts more totally to God, so that with greater eagerness we may run swift to the running streams. Furthermore, that desire is not the desire of someone in isolation but of one who lives within a community of Christians exhorted to be forbearing of one another while they all are on the way, on journey, on pilgrimage... Does not our desire include a commitment to support our brothers and sisters, our fellow pilgrims?

Does it not include an expectation that we, in turn, shall be supported in times of need?” (from an essay for private circulation, p.16).

Can we look around this circle, this community that forms the face of Redwoods and that holds the desires of each one of us? We do not live in isolation, when one of us suffers, we all suffer, when one of us rejoices, we all rejoice. To carry one another’s burdens—to remember that in our mutual longing for God we are here for one another, to love as Jesus loved, to serve as he served, bending down to wash his disciples’ feet, loving them till the end.

For Charles Williams, the Pauline text of “Bear one another’s burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ,” was a call to “the practice of substituted love” which he understood as a “spiritual discipline, an active and embodied form of intercessory prayer” (“Bearing Our Burdens,” by Elizabeth Green, *Weavings*, July/August 2007, p.26). This means we have to go beyond ourselves to the other, while paradoxically still being rooted in our true self, that self that is free of all that imprisons it. It means that we can feel and perceive the reality of the other and thus hold her or him in “an embodied form of intercessory prayer.”

Community is about this mutual holding, of carrying one another. We all are to be carried at different moments of our spiritual pilgrimage and we all are, likewise, to carry and support the other. “Each in turn, the Holder and the Held,” writes Charles Williams (quoted in “Bearing Our Burdens,” p.27). It is not one or the other. We participate in both. To let ourselves be carried frees us from our isolation, releases that ego control that we so tightly hang on to. When we are held in our need, we are taught compassion, mercy, a love alive and concrete, embodied in our humanity. And then we, in turn, hold the other in her or his need, consciously, with compassion, calling forth the healing possibility and the capacity for God that is always present and active in whatever struggles or trials being experienced.



*On November 1st, 2007, Sr. Karen Arce made her temporary profession to monastic life. Her mother and two of her brothers were able to attend adding a special joy to the celebration.*

“A practice of bearing burdens”—this is at the heart of any true monastic or Christian community. It makes our prayer real and active. It teaches us how to love and be loved. In simple, profound words Charles Williams writes: “A little carrying of the burden, a little allowing our burden to be carried... this is the beginning of the practice. The doctrine will grow in us of itself” (p.28). We are not asked the impossible. It is as simple as the deer resting their heads upon one another as they journey towards the living water, this water, which is both their and our salvation.

## Reflections of the Sisters on Community and Love

One of the greatest gifts we can give to one another and ourselves in community is the gift of forgiveness, not once, but “seven times seventy times.” We can forgive only when we see our own brokenness, vulnerability, and need for healing in the face of our brother and sister. Our communion with each other deepens in each act of forgiveness. (Sr. Annette)

Community is the womb where mercy is engendered. (Sr. Karen)

Over the years at Redwoods Monastery common meditation has been for me both a gift and a backbone, as has been the daily rhythm of prayer. For this I am eternally grateful to God, to the Community. (Sr. Veronique)

In the midst of the silent redwoods, we witness to Love. An invitation to embrace the Divine through liturgy and nature, and to manifest God as we encourage and support one another through humble, charitable acts in our journey of faith. (Sr. Ann-Marie)

In a community we neither live in a comfortable dependency on one another, nor in control or domination over others, but in graceful interdependency. Above all, mature love, asks that in our mutual relationships, we respect the freedom of one another. (Sr. Godelieve)

One of the greatest gifts of monastic life is communal liturgical prayer. We cannot always be praying but we are part of the unceasing liturgical prayer celebrated all over the world; we participate as a small community in a given time and place. It is praise of our God and it is petition for all in need. As part of a community at prayer, we are, each at different times, those who help carry the prayer and carried by the community at prayer. It is for me such a gift and grace. (Sr. Victoria)

“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn 13:35). This saying of Jesus has always been for me the core of our common life: a daily learning and practice of how to love and to receive love through the million of details that unfold in our relationships, our work, our prayer, our being. (Sr. Claire)



## Renewal *Tracy Schilling*

Looking out at my meadow, I see small patches of new green grass in between clumps of old grass now beaten down almost flat by the recent heavy rains. It is a vision of paradox, the new and the old, together, making a statement about life, and the process of renewal. In order to allow this new life, the old must die off, and yet it is precisely in their juxtaposition that I find such a strong metaphor for the meaning of renewal.

In order to make new, we must acknowledge the old, and in so doing, accept the premise that life is full of the paradoxical. It is through these opposites informing each other that we find meaning for all aspects of our life. If we accept this idea, we give value to those areas with which we do not seem to be directly involved, and thus open ourselves to the possibility of change. To take into consideration that there are other possibilities and potential paths makes it easier to accept renewal.

Renewal is a process by which we can take a step back from our daily life, be it through prayer and meditation or a small change in routine, in order to examine this idea of opposites to

see just where our values stand. It is important to find that place where we can experience detachment in a loving, supportive environment in order to gain perspective and be able to objectively allow the weight of these opposites to take form. To allow space and time where these ideas can develop allows one to come to a new appreciation of the meaning of it all.

Things are rarely black and white, and it may be that the shade of gray does not change for a particular attribute. But chances are that by honoring the process, one's appreciation for that particular shade of gray will be a richer, more positive expression of that value, and it will be a conscious understanding, arrived at with conviction and love rather than by default.

Renewal may be a small jog in the fabric of our days, or a larger more radical experience such as a weeklong retreat. It is always a celebration of the possibility and potential of each unique being, and God's love that underlies all.

## An Update on the Capital Campaign

Unlike most of you, I had not visited Redwoods until 2005. My visit was the result of an invitation from Sister Kathy, who wanted some advice about raising funds for a new senior wing, a renovation of the library and some infrastructure needs. Knowing the drive was going to be about 6 hours from where I live, I assumed it would be a "one shot" consulting session.

Two and a half years and many visits later, like most of you, I have fallen in love with the monastery, its incredible setting and, most of all, its community of sisters and their extended family. I have become a member of Sister Kathy's fund raising advisory group, a wonderful group of dedicated people who cherish all that the monastery represents.

With Sister Kathy's leadership, the fund raising campaign has gotten off to a terrific start. More than \$450,000 has been raised for the new senior wing, which is scheduled to open late next Spring.

Projects like this often include some surprises, and this was no exception. We discovered that the main electrical transformer box and other electrical systems were dangerously corroded and needed urgent replacement. So far we have raised all but \$25,000 of the unexpected \$90,000 cost.

Without this repair work, we wouldn't be able to supply reliable electricity for the monastery. The new electrical system will also provide a reliable source of energy for the renovated library.

The next major project for our campaign will be very ambitious—raising about \$1,200,000 to renovate the badly deteriorating library and another \$300,000 to replace the roofs on the main monastery building and the honey production building.

If you have already donated to this effort, please accept our thanks. If you would like more info or if you are in a position to make a gift now, please contact Sister Kathy at the monastery.

For the Fund Raising Advisory Group,  
*Jim Purcell*, Los Gatos, California

## Redwoods Monastery

*Time is an unbroken circle of hours,  
heart centered. Prayer rises with song  
from these sacred rooms. Year after year  
I return, open to the exact page, words  
still holding. In morning's gray light  
I find my place on the white mat.  
Candle shadows play across the floor  
I close my eyes, slip inside the hush  
of meditation. Darkness gives way  
to sunrise, to a vision of ferns, forest  
and deer. Like answers to unasked  
questions they appear, nosing around  
the corner just outside the tall window.  
It's their ears I notice, and then their  
eyes, dark, observant; russet flanks,  
nimble legs, delicate, so very delicate.  
Silent, first one and then another,  
a half-dozen and two fawns. In this  
precious moment, communion,  
a healing benediction of deer.*

Sandra Nicholls  
On retreat at Redwoods  
August 2007



**Redwoods Abbey**  
**18104 Briceland-Thorn Road**  
**Whitethorn, CA 95589**  
**707-986-7419**  
*www.redwoodsabbey.org*

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## Community News

In our last Newsletter we shared with you elements of our Master Plan for the monastery. We are happy to convey that the construction of the Senior Wing began on June 1, 2007. We have been witnessing the beautiful process of the structure rising from the ground: cement, walls, windows, plumbing, electricity, heating and roof. All of these components are now in place. The interior finish work has just begun.

While we expect the work to be completed earlier, the date for the blessing of this Senior Wing is scheduled for June 28, 2008. Hold the date! We hope to see you then.

Our creamed honey business remains our main work and source of support. Sales are good; however, we would like to increase the production. Spread the word! Any suggestion of help will be most welcome. If you would like to order honey for yourself, or as a gift for the holidays, you can do so through the honey store link on our website ([www.redwoodsabbey.org](http://www.redwoodsabbey.org)).

A year is full of anniversaries. 2007 saw: *the 75th birthday of Sr. Veronique* in April and *the 45th anniversary of the founding of Redwoods Abbey from our Mother House in Belgium*, on October 31. Both celebrations were full of life and love.

It is in this same life and love that we thank you for your presence and your friendship.



### **Help Us Conserve Resources**

If you receive duplicate newsletters, change your address, or do not wish to receive a newsletter, please contact: Redwoods Abbey, 18104 Briceland-Thorn Road, Whitethorn, CA 95589 707-986-7419