



# REDWOODS MONASTERY NEWSLETTER Fall 2012

*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.*



Dear Friends,

This year we celebrate fifty years of Cistercian life lived in the heart of the redwoods. We are grateful for the many ways in which you, our friends, have supported us through

the years: sometimes with your labor, other times with your ideas, gifts and encouragement, but always with a generous heart. For us at Redwoods this newsletter is one way for us to say 'thank you' and to share some of the highlights of our life.

Most memorable is the Mass and celebration of our 50 years of foundation in September. The pictures and talks speak of the beauty and blessings of that day.

We continue with our efforts to find the funds needed to rebuild our library. Understandably the response has been slow and measured during these most difficult economic times. But we are hopeful and press on, as you will read in Jim Purcell's article.

Blessings of this Thanksgiving season and Advent longing to each of you and your loved ones.

*Sr. Kathy*

Sister Kathy



*Sr. Veronique leading liturgical procession for the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary*

## **Redwoods' 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Abbot Peter McCarthy's Homily**

**This is how the birth of Jesus came about. When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found with child through the Holy Spirit... All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet...**

My dear Sisters of Redwoods and Cherished Friends,

The well known Pastor and novelist of our own day, Frederick Buechner, makes the point frequently in his writings and sermons that, despite all our supposed sophistication, stories have enormous power for us even and especially today. Why is this? He offers two reasons. First, stories make us want to know what is coming next.

*There was a young woman named Mary, and an angel came to her from God, and what did the angel say (about being afraid?) and what did she say? And then how did it all turn out in the end?*

But the curious thing is that if it is a good story, we want to know how it all turns out in the end even if we have heard it many times before and know the outcome perfectly well already. Why? What is there to find out if we already know?

And that question brings us to the second reason stories have such power for us... they force us to consider the question... Are stories true?

Buechner concludes... "Every storyteller, whether Shakespeare telling about Hamlet or Matthew telling about Mary and her Child, looks out at the world much as you and I look out at it and see things happening- people being born, growing up, working, loving, getting old, and finally dying- only then, by the very process of taking certain of these events and turning them into a story, giving them form and direction, does the storyteller make a sort of claim about events in general, about the nature of life itself. And the storyteller's claim, I believe, is that life has meaning- that things that happen to people happen not just by accident."



*Abbot Peter McCarthy*

The power of stories is that they are telling us that life adds up somehow, that life itself is like a story. This grips us and fascinates us because of the feeling that it gives us that if there is meaning in any life - in Hamlet's, in Mary's, in Christ's - then there is meaning also in our lives... And if this is true, my Sisters and Brothers, it is of enormous significance!

So, Matthew begins the Gospel for our Sister's Jubilee Eucharist this morning "This is how the birth of Jesus came about." This is the primal story of Christian Community (Communion) and it is essential that we hear it again as we honor the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of this beloved Community-Communion we call Redwoods Monastery. It all began with the Archetypal Woman of Faith: (and what a story!)

As the Northwest poet Denise Levertov recounts it...

*We know the scene: the room, variously furnished,  
Almost always a lectern, a book; always the tall lily.  
Arrived on solemn grandeur of great wings,  
The angelic ambassador, standing or hovering,  
Whom she acknowledges, a guest.  
But we are told of meek obedience. No one mentions  
courage.  
The engendering Spirit  
Did not enter her without consent.  
God waited.  
She was free  
To accept or to refuse, choice  
Integral to humanness.*

My Sisters and Brothers this is the Primal story of Christian Community/ Communion and the very hummus... the very fertile earth out of which this Primal story grows is the open heart of the Woman...yes, the Woman of courage who gives birth to the Story... Which is Our Story. Which is Redwoods" Story; the first 50 years of it!

*This was the minute no one speaks of,  
When she could still refuse.  
A breath unbreathed,  
Spirit,  
Suspended,  
Waiting.  
She did not cry, "I cannot, I am not worthy,"  
Nor, "I have not the strength."  
She did not submit with gritted teeth,  
Raging, coerced.  
Bravest of all humans,  
Consent illumined her.  
The room filled with its light,  
The lily glowed in it,  
And the iridescent wings.  
Consent,  
Courage unparalleled,  
Opened her utterly.*

This is the story that our beloved sisters of Redwoods have been writing these past 50 years... and today we acknowledge through Matthew's primal story of Christian Community/ Communion that each Sister is today a Foundress deserving our deepest gratitude because each

guest here this morning knows that this Redwoods story has given healing-hope and yes, courage and even shreds of priceless meaning to our personal stories... that's why we come here... because this, your story, feeds our souls. Can there be any deeper nourishment than this? Can there be given a more precious gift? Please Sisters, hear us today in our joy for the gift of Your Community/Communion (written with your deep courage and faith each new day to walk in consent and openness).

Several years ago now, when your Sister Claire made her stability here at Redwoods, I shared with you one of the final poems of our friend, the Oregon poet, William Stafford. It was at the end of his life and he was reflecting on the gift – the golden thread - of Community/Communion in any human life; let us remember it together on this Golden Jubilee (here surrounded by your guests – your dearest friends)

*There's a thread you follow. It goes among things that change. But it doesn't change. People wonder about what you are pursuing. You have to explain about the thread. But it is hard for others to see. While you hold it you can't get lost. Tragedies happen; people get hurt Or die; and you suffer and get old. Nothing you do can stop time's unfolding. You don't ever let go of the thread.*

Thank you, Thank you Dear Sisters of redwoods, for this Golden Thread that you have so faithfully (and daily) woven into each of our lives over these 50 years. Each year it becomes more precious to us ... you see, we have come to experience (along with Stafford).. “While we hold it – we cannot get lost”.

## 50th Anniversary Celebration

### September 8, 2012, talk by Sr. Kathy

It is overwhelming to stand here today to even know where to begin to honor and celebrate these fifty years of monastic life lived in this place, in this little corner of God's world. What window should one use to apprehend, to capture, to behold this miracle where so many persons have had a hand, a heart, a prayer in the on-going life of this monastic community of Redwoods Monastery?

There is a story - and fifty years is a long time to capture this story in a few minutes. In pondering what a story is I thought there are TWO elements that surely are present in any true, real life story: these are the history, and along with the history there is Mystery, the hand of God at work in all of it. To use another word besides “Mystery,” I have a sense that there is “poetry” in a story, in any story. In wondering how I came to the word poetry, I went to Webster's Dictionary where poetry is defined as “a quality of spontaneity and grace.” To partner history with the poetry that comes from the soul of a place, its persons, its experiences, its events, indeed makes a story alive, rich, inspiring. So this is the window I am using to give a little snapshot of Redwoods' story, and I hope to do it in such a way that the poetry, the quality of grace that is in this story will be felt and seen.

Where to begin?

1) The Cistercian abbey of Our Lady of Nazareth in Belgium, our motherhouse, is the official continuation of Our Lady of Nazareth in Lier, founded in 1236. The Blessed Beatrice of Nazareth, one of the great women mystics of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, lived there from 1236 until



*Sr. Kathy delivering her talk*

she died in 1268. Beatrice is the mystic that Fr. Roger, our first chaplain, wrote about in his books; this quote from Beatrice's remarkable treatise [The Seven Manners of Love](#) will I believe show you why Fr. Roger was so drawn to her: “Sometimes it happens that love is sweetly awakened in the soul. Joyfully it arises and makes itself felt in the heart without anything to do with human works. Then the heart is so deeply touched by love, so desirably drawn into love, so heartily seized by love, so strongly overpowered by love and so lovingly held by love that it is altogether vanquished by love” (#170).

2) In 1950 the monastery of Nazareth was founded in Brecht, very close to the first Nazareth in Lier. On February 4, 1960 they elected their second Abbess, M. Myriam Dardenne. In 1960 this young and vibrant community numbered well over 60 sisters and so they began to think about making a foundation. One of the main tasks that the new Abbess had was planning for the foundation.





*front, from left: Sr. Lutgardis, Sr. Godelieve, Sr. Guerrica  
back, from left: Sr. Veronique, Yvette Simpson*

With Belgium so involved in the Congo in Africa this was the obvious place where M. Myriam and the sisters thought to make their foundation. Another influence was the monks of Westmalle, Fr. Roger's monastery, who were also going to the Congo to make a foundation. Civil war broke out in the Congo and this caused both Nazareth and Westmalle to change their plans and look elsewhere for their foundations.

3) Meanwhile, some 5,000 miles away in Whitethorn, California, Robert Usher and his friend Bruno Groth had been living on the property that they called "Green Pastures." This property was purchased in the 1940's while it was being logged. The story goes that Bob offered the loggers on the spot cash for the over 200 acres! By the way Bob and Bruno, architect and artist, had been working in Hollywood; eventually they lived full time on the property. Then, one day, while walking among the ancient redwoods, Bob Usher had a profound experience. He heard a voice, a "locution." The voice said "Give this property to God." Bob responded to what he heard. In 1959 he went to New Clairvaux Abbey in Vina, Calif. wondering about becoming a monk there. At Vina, he was advised to gift the property to the Order for a foundation. From 1960 to 1962 Bob spent time traveling in Europe, especially in Rome. He met with the Abbot General of our Order, Gabriel Sortais, and offered the property for a monastery.

4) Myriam, who was in regular dialogue with the Abbot General, learned from him about this property in northern California. In 1961 Myriam visited "Green Pastures," accompanied by the Prioress of St. Mary's Abbey in Wrentham, Mass., M. Cecile. After this visit the community of Nazareth decided to make their foundation in Whitethorn and preparations for the new foundation began. Fr. Roger arrived in September 1962. A number of

monks from Vina were already living on the property in the 'house on the hill' (Bruno's art studio). The Vina brothers built the temporary structure that the sisters were to live in and renovated what is now our library into the first chapel.

5) The new foundation began on Halloween, the eve of All Saints, October 31, 1962, when the first four sisters arrived. The second group of sisters arrived in February 1963. The final group arrived in June 1963.

6) The larger stream of the Spirit's work was happening with the Vatican II Council, whose 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary is also this year! Preparations for the Council began after Pope John XXIII's announcement of the Council on January 25, 1959. The first opening session of the Council was held from October to December 1962. Vatican II was a Pentecost event for the Church, a collective experience for the people of God, an expression of the Spirit breathing forth the new wine of the gospels into fresh skins.

This very abbreviated snapshot shows the amazing convergence of events happening in Brecht, Belgium, the Congo in Africa, Whitethorn, California, and the renewal coming from the Vatican II Council. The flow of grace across continents, the spiritual underpinnings affecting a living story: creating the soul of a place, the soul of a community.

Sr. Veronique told me two things while I was preparing this talk, two things that I knew I had to heed! She said first that a foundation is the work of everyone in the founding community and many others, not just the foundresses. To this point: we are deeply grateful to M. Beatrice and our sisters of Nazareth, and Abbot Nathanel and our brothers of Westmalle for all that their communities did to bring Redwoods into existence, and for their on-going support. It is a great joy to have with us today Sr. Guerrica and Sr. Lutgardis from Nazareth, linking us ever deeper to our motherhouse. We are grateful to M. Rebekka and our sister community of Klaarland founded in 1970. The bond we have, even with the long distance of miles, is an ever-present blessing. To Abbot Paul Mark and our brothers of Vina: our gratitude for the pivotal role the Vina community had in giving the property for this foundation and all the work done to get it ready.

The second thing Sr. Veronique said is that today we are not celebrating just the founding fifty years ago but the whole span of 50 years. I knew she was right and I thought the list of persons we are to acknowledge is vast and to do this is impossible. With this in mind, I first want to emphasize that the many of you, not named today, are in our heart and our gratitude is NOT less. Now, it is important to acknowledge everyone here present and those who could not be here: we actually have all the decades represented today! You may not have had a hand in the foundation but

you are part of the reason that this monastery is here today! And so this is the day for us to say thank you to each of you: to past members of Redwoods, some present here, to all of you who come on retreat and remind us by your presence of what the mission of a monastery is all about, to the many women and men religious who have helped us spiritually and practically, to all who have contributed through various services, volunteer work, and financial gifts, to our diocese of Santa Rosa, which also celebrates its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of existence, to our faithful neighbors, some of whom we have known from the beginning of the foundation, to Sanctuary Forest, a local environmental group, which today also celebrates 25 years of their founding. While M. Myriam was a main inspiration in getting Sanctuary Forest started, we at Redwoods extend our gratitude for their enduring commitment over all these years in preserving the natural resources of this area. Finally, our gratitude to our own Cistercian Order and the monasteries of our US Region who continue to help us in so many ways. I would like to mention by name the monks behind me here and the communities they represent: Abbot Joseph and our brothers of Snowmass, Abbot Paul Mark and the community of New Clairvaux, our nearest brother-community, Abbot Damian Carr and our brothers of Spencer (all three groups of the founding sisters of Redwoods visited Spencer before arriving in California!), Abbot Peter McCarthy and our brothers of Guadalupe, (many of you know Peter, our Father Immediate) and we also remember Br. Kieran and Br. Joseph who did our garden, both were very inspirational brothers for those of you who came on retreat. Last, but clearly not least, Fr. Maurice Flood, our second chaplain (gratitude to Abbot Robert and the community of Berryville for providing us with a chaplain).

Two persons: M. Myriam and Fr. Roger: their spirit lives on in this place. We will always be grateful for what they each gave to Redwoods. It is a special blessing for us to have from Belgium Myriam's nephew and his wife: Stephan and Marie France Dardenne. Another special blessing is the presence of Yvette Simpson. Yvette was one of the foundresses, who came in the third group with Godelieve. Finally, in the first decade of this new century, we began renewing the grounds and buildings and developed a Master Plan; as you walk around you will see fruits of this long-term endeavor. Indeed this work so far is planting seeds for our future: deep gratitude to our architect/consultant David Richen, and the head of the monastery's Advisory Committee, Jim Purcell, and the whole Advisory Committee.

Redwoods Monastery: I think a 'golden thread' in its story is this: "There is NO growth without struggle." This is true

for an individual life, for relationships, for a community. The Paschal Mystery, the movement from death into life imprints all of our journeys and has been the ebb and flow of Redwoods. On behalf of my community I am here to say we are grateful for the struggle, for the suffering moments because these have graced us beyond what any words can express. The gift of this beautiful crucifix, here in the chapel, is but a reminder that the seed that falls to the ground and dies yields a rich harvest!



*Community & Celebrants in Procession for Anniversary Mass*

I conclude with two texts, one from 1968 and the other from 1969; both I believe continue to echo the spirit of Redwoods Monastery. The first words are from Thomas Merton given at Redwoods in May 1968. Merton in speaking about the 'house of prayer' movement said: "Redwoods is a good place to meet because here we are in a house of prayer....It is an authentic realization of the Cistercian spirit...in the Flemish form and tradition, which is authentically mystical. Enjoy this atmosphere: drink it in. Get under the trees and just be, just enjoy it. Then get over by the ocean...there we have sea, sky, waves, birds, sea lions. This is where you will find out about a house of prayer."

The last text is from M. Myriam Dardenne; it is an excerpt from an essay she wrote that was published in Cistercian Studies Quarterly in May 1969. The title of her essay is: "The Cistercian Contemplative Community: Listening, Present, Welcoming." She wrote: "All the tensions in ourselves, in community living, in the world, are the *Kairos*, the moment, place and opportunity of God's revelation. It is there that Christ is to be born; it is there that Jesus is present if we are present in memory of Him. Christian brotherhood, Christian sisterhood is the sacrament of reconciliation" (p.332).



## A Note from Jim Purcell

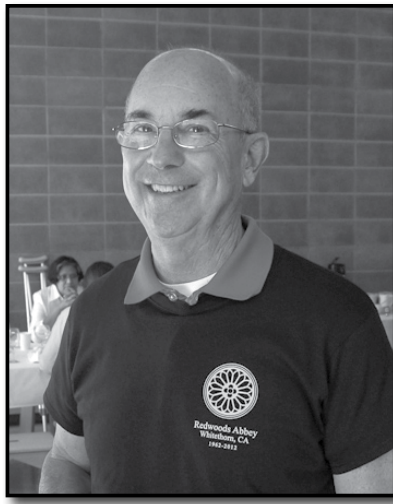
In this age of high tech and social media communications, it is easy to forget the important role that libraries and monasteries have played, and continue to play, in the preservation and passing on of the Catholic intellectual tradition.

During the wonderful 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the founding of Redwoods Monastery, many of us got the chance to visit its library. For me, this visit was bitter-sweet. The library collection, with its thousands of volumes and its precious works from its founding Abbess, Mother Myriam Dardenne, and Chaplain, Father Roger de Ganck, are amazing.

The library's collection provides a solid foundation in the history of the Cistercian Order and in the growth of monastic spirituality, as well as texts on contemporary theological concerns and psychology. It reflects the development of Trappist-Cistercian life from the twelfth to the twenty-first centuries. There are hard copy editions of many important academic sources in monastic studies and difficult to locate periodicals on medieval spirituality and medieval monasticism. Fr. Roger's collection includes many volumes which would be considered rare finds in a European university library.

But the condition of the building itself is very troubling. Several eighteenth and seventeenth century Psalters, breviaries, Cistercian ritual orders, martyrologies, and scriptural commentaries have been moved to the Senior Wing and the House on the Hill to prevent further damage from the damp.

That's why Sr. Kathy and the community at Redwoods have developed plans to replace the current structure with a new facility that is worthy of the collection it will house. Plans are well enough along that the monastery could break ground in about a year if funding was sufficient.



*Jim Purcell*

But to do that, we need a lot of help. And to complicate matters further, we just learned that the monastery needs to replace the roof for the House on the Hill, because it is beginning to leak!

The fund raising advisory committee is working hard to identify some foundations that might consider grants for this important project. And we are going to need help from all of the monastery's friends to raise the additional \$1,000,000 needed to fund the \$1.2 million project. So look for a fund raising letter from Sr. Kathy and please be as generous as you can.

On behalf of the monastery, thanks for your past support and know that whatever you can give going forward will be greatly appreciated.

*Jim Purcell*

P.S. If you have any suggestions about foundations and/or individuals who might consider a significant gift for the Redwoods library project, please contact Sr. Kathy at Redwoods or me at [jpurcell@scu.edu](mailto:jpurcell@scu.edu)

*If you would like to give a present of honey this Christmas season, you can order through our honey store web site:*

**<http://www.redwoodsabbey.org/Store/Honey>**



*The Monastery has some items from the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary available in the online store at <http://www.redwoodsabbey.org/Store/Jubilee>*



**Redwoods Abbey**

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