



# REDWOODS MONASTERY

## NEWSLETTER

### Autumn 2016

*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,

We are coming to the end of the hot and dry days of summer as August gives way to September and the beginning of autumn. Summer is a busy time for our guesthouse and we truly welcome the opportunity to see

old friends visiting again, as well as meeting those making a retreat here for the first time. It is a time for reconnection with our wider Redwoods community reminding us again how blessed we are with your love and support. We are continuing our fund-raising and planning for a new Welcome Center that we hope will further enhance our hospitality toward guests.

In this newsletter, there is a short Chapter talk about community that I gave in early August. Sr. Suzanne, after finishing an icon of the Black Madonna, has contributed a short article on the history and meaning of that sacred image. (Earlier this summer, Pope Francis visited the Black Madonna at Jasna Gora in Poland.) Recently we were able to complete a small renovation project which we've wanted to do for awhile. As you can see in the photo, we were able to add sealed doors between the entrance to the cloister and the chapel. This helps to keep the chapel a more quiet, reflective space of prayer. As many of you know, we put a lot of work into our garden where we try and grow much of our food during the growing season. Since it is summer, we are adding a "News from the Garden" column with pictures,

including a photo of our new compost bins which we and, now some area skunks, use often! Finally, at the beginning of September we will host another Monastic Experience Weekend for Young Women. These are weekends where young women can experience the rhythm of monastic life, listening to God's voice. I'd like to encourage you, if you know of someone who is considering a monastic vocation, to take a look at our website and its vocation page and blog.

Gratefully,

*Sr. Kathy*

Sister Kathy



## **The Black Madonna: An Attraction to Mystery**

*by Sister Suzanne Mattiuzzo*

“*I am black and beautiful*” – (Song of Songs 1:5 NAB)

Dating from the 12th to the 15th century, statues of the Black Madonna made of wood and stone appear in monasteries and churches throughout Europe. Approximately 450 authentic Black Madonnas are dated from this period. At the same time, Black Madonnas appear in iconography of the Christian East in Russia, the Balkans and Poland. Most famous are Our Lady of Czestochowa and Our Lady of Kazan.

Many theories have emerged for the proliferation of the Black Madonna in the High and Late Middle Ages: recovery of the fertility goddess, Isis and other goddesses of Egyptian and Middle Eastern origin; increased contact with people of Africa and the Middle East; and, in psychological terms, a retrieval of the feminine archetype from the collective unconscious. Along with these factors, the time-frame of her appearance is significant. She directly foreshadows the Renaissance and represents the gestation for this epic period of human history and creativity.

Today we are again experiencing a fascination with her image. I have recently received several commissions for Black Madonnas such as Our Lady of Compassion shown here. As an iconographer, I must consider what “black” actually is and how to execute that color in an image of the Mother of God. The first insight in this process is that she is not really black. She is orange, yellow, blue, white, red, and purple with glazes of dark blues and indigo. Black is the medium in which all colors exist.

Black also symbolizes the unknown. There are no defined lines. Faces emerge from the darkness – they are discovered and found. Images are not superimposed on a background: they are produced by the darkness and hidden within it. Black is the mother of all potentiality and a reminder of the womb of life – the darkness that precedes birth and awareness.

Newness emerges from black like a quasar feeding from a black hole and blasting a surrounding galaxy with new energy. In a

similar way, the Black Madonna gives us her Son, the Christ, the bright morning star that emanates from the dark earth of her body. This image holds the tension of all human struggle and creativity.

Finally, the Black Madonna points the way to an ever-more interracial and multicultural church. She is our guide and advocate to healing racial divisions and prejudices that afflict our society. In her dignity, she teaches that Black, Brown, Red, Yellow, and White are all truly beautiful!

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### *Chapter Talk – August 7, 2016*

*by Sister Kathy DeVico*

How do we build up community? How do we build up this body of Christ that we form? The body of Christ: this body of love, this body of forgiveness, this body of mercy...is this not what Jesus incarnated and now expects us to do the same? How do we build up this community? The ‘body of Christ’ that we are



proclaims our oneness in living and embodying the gospel way.

How do we truly become this body of Christ? I excerpt the following from the **Rule of St. Benedict, (Chapter 4), “The Tools of Good Works”**:

*First of all to love the Lord God with one’s whole heart, whole soul, whole strength. To honor all and not do to another what one does not want done to oneself. To prefer nothing to the love of Christ.*

The context of this love of Christ:

*Not to carry out anger: not to store up wrath, awaiting a time of revenge, not to cling to deceit within the heart, not to give a false greeting of peace, not to turn away from love. Not to swear, lest you swear falsely: to bring forth truth from heart and mouth. Not to return evil for evil. Not to cause injury, but rather to bear it patiently. Always to clearly acknowledge and take personal responsibility for the evil one does.*

*To keep custody at every hour over the actions of one’s life. To instantly hurl the evil thoughts of one’s heart against Christ and to lay them open to one’s spiritual father, to keep custody of one’s mouth against depraved speech. To prostrate frequently in prayer, to daily confess one’s past faults to God in prayer with tears and sighs, to amend these faults for the future. To hate no one; not to have jealousy, not to act out of envy, not to love contention, to flee from conceit. In the love of Christ to pray for enemies; to make peace with opponents before the setting of the sun. And never to despair of the mercy of God.*

How am I, how are we living these tools? Do not these tools give us a concrete way of building up

community, a community that is called to be a witness of God’s love and mercy, a community that is to witness to the active presence of God and God’s peace? Wherever there is this quality of relationships **there** is Christ, there is his peace. Every one of these tools is about breaking open the heart from its hardened, stony ways. However, nothing will happen if we are not ready to take responsibility, responsibility for our own life and responsibility for the life of our community.

Somewhere Edith Stein says: “Only the person who... no longer struggles to defend or assert herself, can be large enough for God’s boundless action.” Jesus, with outstretched arms on the cross, totally giving of his whole Self so that the life and love of God will continue to spread everywhere. We are part of his body. What stops us from putting down our defenses and making peace with each other before the setting of the sun?

Our world is armed with guns and violence. And what of our hearts? What would happen if we prayed

like Dom Christian of Atlas who after the visit of the ‘terrorists’ on Christmas Eve in 1993 said: “After the visit I said to myself, those people, that person with whom I had such a terribly tense conversation, what prayer can I offer for him? I can’t ask God to kill him. But I can ask God to disarm him. Later on, I said to myself, do I have a right to ask God



to disarm him if I don’t first ask God to disarm me and disarm us in community? This (now) is my daily prayer...” (A Heritage Too Big, vol. #2, p.27)

What if this would be our daily prayer: ‘Disarm me, disarm my heart O God, disarm us in community’. A disarmed heart, the disarmed heart of a community radiates the face of Christ and is a living body of Christ’s love and forgiveness.

## News From the Garden

by Sister Ann Marie Buss

1. This year in May, six new compost bins were designed and built by Chris Phelps, Mike Hanna and Byrne (Buzz) Sherwood who all donated their work to the project.
2. In 2015 and 2016 our garden shed was renewed with new siding and a new roof by Jerry and Anita Meir who so graciously donated their time and energy to these projects of renovation.
3. Our strawberries, blueberries and rhubarb harvests were abundant this year so our jam-making production increased and will provide a tasty treat during the winter months.



*Our honey, as well as cards reproduced from Sr. Victoria's artwork, can be ordered online from the store on our website:*

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



Please consider Redwoods Monastery in your estate planning. A bequest from your will or living trust allows you to gift any amount you wish after your lifetime to the monastery free of estate tax. You can give a specific amount or percentage of your estate, with or without restrictions. You may also make a gift of a specific asset, such as real estate or stock. You can tell your attorney or tax advisor that the legal name of the monastery is Redwoods Abbey Inc. If you would like more information about an estate gift, please contact Sister Kathy by email: [kdevico@redwoodsabbey.org](mailto:kdevico@redwoodsabbey.org) or phone: (707) 986-7419.



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