



# REDWOODS MONASTERY NEWSLETTER May 2009

*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*



## **Sr. Kathy's Letter**

Once again I begin with an expression of gratitude. The love, support and prayer that we have received from you is a gift that sustains us more than words can ever express.

This newsletter is a little different than the others in that there are several special moments in our community's life this year that we want to share. Sr. Godelieve Theys, one of our foundresses from Belgium, and Fr. Maurice Flood, our chaplain, both celebrate 50 years of monastic profession. This is a remarkable moment of celebrating their commitment to the monastic way and the grace they have received in abundance over these many years.

Also, we have the wonderful news of receiving into our community on March 25th, feast of the Annunciation, Christina Leño as a novice. Christina took the religious name of Sr. Maria Christina. Each of them has written something on their monastic call.

Lastly, I share an excerpt from the talk I gave on March 25th for Maria Christina's entrance into the novitiate.

"The first few poems of a small book entitled, *Upon A Luminous Night* by Christine Rodgers, all focus on the theme of Annunciation. The first very short one is this: 'Who can this lady be that an angel would bend so

low before her' (p.5). What are these words saying? Indeed, in all the art we see the angel in some gesture of obeisance, of bowing as he announces God's message to Mary. So important is Mary's response that God's angel anticipating her heart's opening, bends before her in a humble gesture. And Mary's response meets the angel's gaze: her yes said with the words: 'Let it be done to me according to your word'. The humble gesture of the angel bearing God's Word calls forth another act of humility, one formed and shaped in the word 'yes'. Now, because of Mary's 'yes,' we are brought into the same circle of discipleship, ready to bear God's Word, Christ, into life, our lives, the life of our world. Again

and again God's angel comes in a similar gesture of humble offering, this time before each one of us, offering the Word to us, waiting for our 'yes,' our willingness, our receptivity. Let us behold, the sheer urgency and the delicateness of his message. The angel's humble gesture: God will not force us to receive his Word; no it is offered; it is offered humbly, tenderly and with unconditional love. We are so grateful that Mary said 'yes' and gave birth to God's beloved Son. And now our 'yes' becomes as important: for the on-going incarnation is to happen in and through us, our simple, very human lives are to continue bringing God's very being into the world."



***Sr. Maria Christina  
at her novice signing***

## Monastic Life: 9 Months In Maria Christina Leño

A friend warned me before I entered the monastery nine months ago that things would get interesting once the honeymoon was over. At the time I doubted her prediction, yet I must humbly admit that since then, I have, at times, questioned how I ended up here. Being stripped of many former markers of meaning, like relationships, work, and certain choices, (e.g. Filipino fried pork and rice) has demanded a revision of where my feet and self find their grounding.

Yet monastic life is for lovers, so staying connected to my deepest desire, which is God, keeps my commitment alive. It is to return again and again to my heart's intention that I articulated when our abbess asked me, "What do you ask?" during the ritual of being received into the novitiate last March 25. I answered, "The mercy of God, this community, and of the Order. And to serve God, my neighbor, and all of creation as a monk in this community."

It is this desire which wakes me up in the morning when the owls are still hooting and my body aches for more sleep. "Oh God, you are my God for you I long..." I repeat to myself while slowly emerging from my comfortable stupor. It is this desire to open to God's great mystery within that sustains me in the non-stop monastic practice of self-knowledge. You learn pretty quick that when you come into the monastery, all of you, the good and edgy parts, somehow slip in. Yet God in his loving mercy wants it all, and reminds me, "To get to me, all of you must come too. There are no shortcuts to love." Desire to help build the kingdom of God on earth takes on a new form for a former social and environmental justice activist. Here, I am called to minister to the poor Christ in my community of sisters and a brother, as well as within myself. The tensions of the heart and in relationships become the place of God's salvation for myself and the other.

Yet, the most valuable truth my first months has taught me is that the real discipline of desire is remembering again and again that all of this, all of me, has been God's initiative, way before I was every loved into being. My task is simply to let go and receive. And, as I said in the second part of my response, "To offer myself completely in love to the One who loves and desires me completely." Whether I feel awe at the watercolors in the sky or frustration with a persistent weakness, my job is to allow God to open my heart as wide as the sun shines to receive the mercy that is waiting to flood through me and all of creation. "Big heart, Christina." I sometimes whisper to myself when I get caught in the small stuff. "God is waiting." The world too is waiting, for my yes, for our yes, that indeed grace might flow.



*Fr. Maurice, Sister Maria  
Christina, Sister Godelieve*

## What drew me to the monastic life? Godelieve Theys

I humbly confess, I didn't know anything about it. Having been raised Catholic, I came to a crisis point in my life, when total meaninglessness was my own reality. In desperation I went at the suggestion of a friend to a monastery for a silent week of retreat to come to terms with myself. There I was given to read the book *Christ, Life of the Soul* by Dom Marmion, OSB. Touched by God's grace, I came to the realization that "it is worth it to give one's whole life to Christ." Not knowing at all what this meant, nor what it might ask of me, I felt that for me it was the direction to follow.

A coincidence happened at the time: two of my former students who were teaching in Zaire (former Belgian Congo, now the Democratic Republic of Congo) asked me in a letter if I would be willing to come to the Congo to help start a Normal School for black girls. After reflecting on it, I accepted the offer and considered it to be also a test about my calling as well as an opportunity to make a closure to a relationship. After a term of three years, I returned to Belgium willing to finally enter the monastery.

Having lived this new way of life for more than fifty years, I am in awe and filled with gratitude for all that I have discovered about myself over the many years. It surely has not been easy!

Yet, living the cloistered life has not brought me into isolation from the needs of the world. With growing awareness I feel strongly connected with all of existence and I keep suffering humanity as well as the future of the planet deep within my heart.

### Maurice Flood

This is the 50th year anniversary of my taking vows as a Cistercian monastic. Briefly, my first twenty years were near or in Columbus, Ohio for which I am so greatly thankful to God through my parents (Mary Lucille and Ralph William), my sister Sue, and brothers Thomas Paul and John Patrick. The second twenty years were lived at the Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky for which I am grateful for the lasting formation in the monastic way. The third twenty years were at Holy Cross Abbey in Virginia from which Abbot Robert Barnes and the community then generously gave me to the service of the Redwoods community.

Now I am chaplain at Redwoods Monastery where I have been for almost ten years. Godelieve, who is our elder member and one of the two here at Redwoods who came from Nazareth in Belgium in 1962, asked me early in this year of 2009 if I would like to celebrate my 50th anniversary on the same date sometime after Easter as she celebrates her own 50th anniversary.

So there we are and all that I can do is repeat Mercy Upon Mercy Upon Mercy. For as I have gotten older, I have come to the great realization that it is only through the Great Mercy and Love of God in Jesus that I remained in the monastic life. Peace, Joy, and Love, Maurice Flood.

## Retreat Time

**Michael Monhart** - *Guest and Member of the Advisory Committee*

Crossing the wooden bridge, entering the grounds of Redwoods monastery, time shifts. Far now from cell phones, internet connections, and the incessant barrage of media, the familiar markers of time in daily life disappear and, in the silence, one enters another world of time, monastic time. In the guesthouse rooms there is a schedule of liturgies, meals, prayer and meditation times. It is prefaced by a short introduction to Redwoods which includes:

We follow a daily monastic schedule first codified by Saint Benedict and adapted to our current time and local circumstances. We find the structure of the monastic schedule, in the context of community, beneficial in our search for God. Each day is marked by silence, with time for solitary prayers and common prayer.

Time marked by silence, time organized into periods for prayer. For the visitor it can be a reorientation of time both freeing and uncomfortable (what's happening in the news, how about that call I needed to make, did I pay that bill...). Yet it is also entering into a very strict schedule unyielding really in its day after day sameness. What a visitor experiences as a disruption to everyday life outside the monastery, is experienced inside the monastery as a very predictable, seldom varying structure of time.

St. Augustine famously asked - "What is time? Who can explain this easily and briefly? Who can comprehend this even in thought so as to articulate the answer in words? Yet what do we speak of, in our familiar everyday conversation, more than of time? We surely know what we mean when we speak of it. We also know what is meant when we hear someone else talking about it. What then is time? Provided that no one asks me, I know. If I want to explain it to an inquirer, I do not know. (Confessions Book XI, 17)

Immersed in the monastic schedule we might ask ourselves the same as the daily rhythms of Cistercian life work on our usual parceling of time into discrete periods set aside for meetings, errands, commuting, shopping. All the times for "doing" that are left behind in a retreat.



*Redwoods Community*

St. Augustine, in his relentlessly probing manner, inquires into the nature of time, how we conceive of a measurement of time, and finally comes to a resolution grounded in human experience. He gives the example of preparing to recite a psalm with the expectation of the whole psalm before him. As he recites the words of the expected future enter the past and he is stretched, distended in two directions of memory and the words he is about to say. "But my attention is on what is present: by that the future is transferred to become the past" (Confessions Book XI, 28:38). Augustine then, quite beautifully, extends this perception to the parts and pieces of the psalm, to the longer action of which the psalm may be a part, and finally to the entire life a person.

The French philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005) started his work *Time and Narrative* with this questioning reflection of St. Augustine's. Ricoeur over the course of several volumes adds to this Augustinian conception of time saying "time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence." (*Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 52) Through the making of a plot we tell a story situated in time and in the process both time and the story become human and meaningful. In retreat our story, our times of day, start to cede a little and become instead the story of the monastic schedule, the plot written by St. Benedict centuries ago. The story of the day becomes a rhythm of prayer, reflection, meditation and silences.

Thomas Merton wrote in the *Sign of Jonas*, "Present. The reality of the present and of solitude divorced from past and future. To be collected and gathered up in clarity and silence and to belong to God..." (p.252). The daily monastic schedule leads not just to another story of human life, but to the ongoing search for God. Monastic time leads to God's time, to silences and solitudes

### Variation 5

*Holy Companion of good and bad days  
blessed be thy mysterious presence.*

*Be now and become*

*Become now and be.*

*May we hear your Word and fulfill its meaning.*

*Give us today the courage to be.*

*Give us today the courage to act.*

*Give us today the joy to dance.*

*Give us today the pleasure to laugh.*

*Yes, if we sow in tears may we harvest in laughter.*

*May we judge for ourselves to do what is right.*

*May we grant to others to do just the same.*

*Forgiven, may we know lasting liberation:*

*how to receive love.*

*Forgiving, may we risk how to love another.*

*May your love for us overcome our indifference.*

*Deliver us all from the evil eye. Amen.*

Myriam G. Dardenne

(Abbess of Redwoods Monastery 1962-1990)



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

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**Dear Friends of Redwoods Monastery:**

I want to thank all of you who responded so generously to Sister Kathy's appeal for support in the last newsletter. Thanks to the generosity of so many of you, the monastery received gifts totaling about \$71,000.

The Monastery Fund Raising Advisory Committee met at Redwoods last month and we got to see first hand how some of these gifts were put to use. The new electrical panel and emergency generator systems, housed in a brand new shed, are now providing safe and uninterrupted power to the monastery. And work will start on the new roof for the chapel and the main building in May. Some of your gifts will be used to support the day-to-day needs of the community. We received a few gifts for the new library project but we have a long way to go before raising enough funds to start that renovation.

Sister Kathy also informed us that the monastery will be undertaking an ecological study that will focus on water issues and will probably result in the need to purchase some significant additional storage capacity (e.g. a 50,000 gallon water tank). The monastery is anticipating the possibility that, during certain times of the year, it will not be allowed to pump water from Thompson Creek, their main source of water. For those of you not from California, the state is in the third year of a serious drought and water management regulations are being widely discussed.

In other words, the monastery still needs our help. On behalf of the Fund Raising Advisory Committee, I ask those of you who can, to make a gift to the monastery at this time. Please know that gifts of any size are important and appreciated.

To those of you experiencing economic hardship, our thoughts and prayers are with you.

And thanks again for all your support.

For the Redwoods Fund Raising Advisory Committee,

*Jim Purcell, Chairman*

*A reminder that honey can be purchased at any time through the web store found on the main page of our website: [www.redwoodsabbey.org](http://www.redwoodsabbey.org)*

*We would appreciate any suggestions you might have for distribution or in spreading the word about our honey. Please contact with any ideas: [rmonasteryhoney@asis.com](mailto:rmonasteryhoney@asis.com)*

*Thank you.*