

COCCASIONAL FR PAPERS

A New Monasticism

The renewal of the church will come from a new type of monasticism, which has only in common with the old an uncompromising allegiance to the sermon on the mount. It is high time men and women banded together to do this.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer is most widely known for the way he died—executed by the Nazis for his part in a plot to assassinate Adolf Hitler. Less well known is that in the turbulent 1930s Bonhoeffer, a member of the Confessing Church (those who stood resolutely against the Nazis), organized an underground seminary. Young men, called by God into ministry in the radical, alternative church lived secretly in community under Bonhoeffer's direction. It was during this period that he wrote *Life Together* and *The Cost of Discipleship*. His vision was a new way of being the church, based upon monastic ideals, but in a way suited to the culture in which he found himself. Sadly, he was never able truly to bring his vision to living expression. Nonetheless, his embryonic ideas have intrigued many people. In the resurgence of interest in the monastic

spirit—in all of its expressions—Bonhoeffer's incomplete quest has given pause for thought.¹

For ourselves, since the late-1980s, when we were part of a small group exploring ideas relating to Celtic spirituality,² we have been seeking the mind and heart of God on what a new monasticism may be—what it might look like, how it may be practiced and how relevant it might be in contemporary culture. Our journey, since 1994, has been an exploration of the practice of home-based Christian community, informed and shaped by anabaptist and monastic emphases. In this paper we share understandings of our journey to date with the hope that it may find an echo in the hearts and minds of others who are walking a similar path. We offer this paper, then, as an invitation to conversation with others exploring analogous themes.

Why Monasticism?

What made Bonhoeffer, and others since, look to monasticism for a renewal of the church today?

Essentially, monasticism has been, from its inception, a vision for a different way of living, a “life-style” against the grain of society. Monastic communities were to be signs and symbols of the reign of God. In its earliest and most primitive forms monasticism was a life focused on prayer and service. It offered the unadorned clarity of a disciplined life, radically following Jesus.

It began in the deserts of Egypt in the third century as a diverse movement of hermits who sought a solitary life of holiness and spirituality (termed *eremitic* monasticism). It soon developed into a different form where likeminded believers gathered in loose communities led by a mature leader who acted as spiritual guide (termed *cenobitic* monasticism). In its communal form it spread to the western churches and became more settled. Significantly for those interested in home-based expressions of the church, monasticism was based initially in the homes of wealthy patrons both in the cities and in the countryside.

It saw itself, in its formative simplicity, as sharing the same spirit as Elijah, John the Baptist and the early Christians—ascetic, prophetic and counter-cultural. Yet at the same time monastic emphases were profoundly relevant, dealing with the abiding issues of the human heart. In other words, monasticism was at the same time both counter-cultural



and culturally relevant.

Such an approach to Christianity has often found an echo in the hearts of people looking for authentic spiritual renewal. A renewed monasticism provides the same for people today. As such it has much to offer us in our contemporary situation (see inset, *Listening to the Scholars*). It meets our deepest spiritual needs whilst presenting a radical challenge to those saturated in a consumerist and all too readily violent culture.

Why New?

In what sense are we using “new”? *Not* in the sense, so beloved of commercials “new and improved.” As we have studied the different monastic traditions over the years we are awed at the deep sense of God and profound wisdom we have found there. It would be arrogant, not to say, foolish, to think we could improve on the centuries’ old understandings. There is much we have yet to learn from the “old paths.”

Scholars have suggested that Bonhoeffer, like many Lutherans of his generation, did not have a good grasp of the broad catholic tradition. Historically, it was Martin Luther who had begun the suppression of the monasteries at the time of the Reformation in the early sixteenth century. Bonhoeffer’s brief experience of monastic communities came from contact with the newer Anglican religious houses during his stay in England. It is likely, then, that he used “new” in the sense that monasticism was *new to him*—*from outside his tradition*. In our own evangelical, anabaptist background monasticism was, more often than not, perceived to be “catholic,” and, therefore, “non-evangelical,” something to be left alone. Yet, in recent years different scholars have suggested that renewal movements since the Reformation were themselves a renewal of the monastic spirit. In other words, the same spirit which energized the monastic renewal also energized the anabaptist renewal in the sixteenth century, the puritan renewal of the seventeenth, the Wesleyan movement of the eighteenth, the pietist/holiness movement of the nineteenth and the charismatic movement of the twentieth. Those seeking spiritual renewal from the Protestant tradition may lay claim to the monastic movement as part of their spiritual heritage.

Yet, as with all religious movements, monasticism routinized and departed from its original genius. Like all movements in the history of the church, monasticism has been mixed. It has had both high and low points. We would, for example, want to distance ourselves from the military orders of monks who played a large part in the crusades. Their zeal in taking up the “sword”

Groups Exploring the New Monasticism

Some of these resemble “third order” societies—whose members have a primary church commitment outside of the order, but who live according to the order’s *Rule*. Others function as primary church groups—i.e. the community functions in all respects as a church, including pastoral care, the ministry of word and sacrament etc. Some are now well established and others comparatively new. There is variety and diversity, not unlike in the type of monasticism present in Celtic Ireland and Britain.

Community of Friends in Renewal, CFR (broadly ecumenical in intercommunion with the Communion of Evangelical Episcopal Churches, CEEC)

www.comfir.org

The Iona Community (Ecumenical with Presbyterian roots)

www.ionacommunity.org.uk/

The Northumbria Community (with Anglican, Baptist and Catholic leaders)

www.northumbriacommunity.org/

The Community of Aidan and Hilda (Anglican)

www.aidan.ndo.co.uk/

www.aidantrust.org/

The Taizé Community (Protestant and ecumenical)

www.taize.fr/

The Franciscan Order of Céli Dé, FOCD, and Sisters of Brigid and Clare, SBC (Anglican and ecumenical)

www.geocities.com/celi_de/index.html

The Order of St. Columba, OSC (Communion of Evangelical Episcopal Churches)

www.theceec.org

LISTENING TO THE SCHOLARS ON MODERN CULTURE

Philosophers have spoken, for some time, about a major shift in our society. It is the movement from industrial to informational, from a unified society with a common social vision to a deeply divided society with no center. The certainties of modernity have given way to the uncertainties of post-modernity. Philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre in the mid-80s began to speak of a new dark ages. He likened contemporary culture to the period when the Roman Empire began to disintegrate from the third century CE onwards. In a phrase, MacIntyre characterizes contemporary society as a “collection of strangers.” He suggests that it was small communities of virtue—monastic communities—in which civility was maintained and through which Western civilization was saved from barbarity. He suggests further that it is small communities of virtue who will have the most powerful effect on our present society.

Futurists (for example, Alvin Toffler, Leonard Sweet) have likewise painted a picture of society which is experiencing, and will continue to experience, massive changes. Of course, society has always changed; what we are experiencing now is the *increasing rate* of change, the sheer speed of changes, driven mostly by technology. It is a truism to say that the speed of such changes has provided and will continue to provide our culture with unprecedented uncertainties.

Psychologists (for example, Larry Crabb) have begun to question whether the therapeutic society (of the last 40 years of the twentieth century) has actually done as well as older cultural forms—that is, those based on connectedness rather than counseling. In other words, the deeper human needs are better met by simple human relationships of love, trust, care and accountability. It is the loss of those kinds of relationships which have produced the many neuroses and pathologies of Western society.

Sociologists: At the same time, there has been a reawakening of spiritual consciousness. In the 1960s social thinkers were predicting the demise of religion. It became clear in the last quarter of the twentieth century that, far from dying, religion was revitalized. All around the world (except Western Europe, by and large) religion has had an important resurgence. It has taken many forms, from various fundamentalisms to renewal movements to new religions. Religion is here to stay. But the content and expression of religion is changing (see, for example, the work of sociologists Peter Berger of Boston University, Robert Wuthnow of Princeton). People are now less content with formal, unchanging denominational allegiance and more willing to change, to experiment. Religion is now more experience-based, more felt than thought about. People are longing for the *mystery* of religion and less taken in by the slick commercial presentation.

Theologians: Robert Webber, amongst others, has urged the church to regain the ancient paths, those walked in the first 500 years of the church’s history. It was in this period that monasticism was shaped to be a vibrant spiritual movement which both preserved civilization and remained a counter-cultural challenge to society. John Howard Yoder and Stanley Hauerwas have written urging the church to truly become the church; presenting to the world church as an alternate social reality shaped by the life of Jesus and characterized by enemy love, servanthood and forgiveness.

The New Monasticism in which we are engaged is a Spirit-led movement to serve God and meet the needs of our contemporary generations.

The Rule of CFR

To be a community means that we share a common way of living. At the heart of the God we worship is community. God is Source of All Being, Living Word and Holy Spirit — eternal, perfect community of love. Christian communities through the centuries have adopted a *Rule* to express their commitment to God and each other. We encourage those in community to live a balanced life of prayer, study, work and rest. As a part of that balanced life reading the Office at least once each day, with periods of contemplation and meditation, is important. It is important, also, to reflect on this *Way of Living* often. Stay with a word or a phrase for a morning, a day, or even a week.

There are virtues we aspire towards—virtues at the core of who we are and are becoming. Our virtues are not a list of dos and don'ts. Nor are they a list of self-congratulations, "look at us we've made it!" At their heart they are our prayer. We see these virtues in the life of Jesus; shining, precious gems, winsome, lovely, drawing us out of ourselves and towards him.

We know too, that our community must be for sinners and not saints. Our way of living will always be imperfect. We are ordinary people struggling with real issues. Natural illusions about community will be shattered. Disillusionment leads towards reality.

Charity

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength. Love your neighbor as yourself. The immensity of the task makes it naturally impossible! Yet we are called to be a community of love. Remember, it is God's love, not ours. Perfect, eternal, constant. No strings attached. Not sentimental or romantic. Love is not a feeling, it's an act of will. There is the deepest of all joy in the love of God. Learn to love; to walk in love, to exult in love. Make love your highest aim. Let God's love fill you completely. Our desire is to be free within the love of our heavenly Father—to know God's passionate love for us and to live our lives from within God's acceptance of us.

Equality

In God's sight we are all equal. In the story of the garden, God gave to Adam and Eve an equal dignity, an equal calling, an equal responsibility and an equal blessing. In our community gender, age, race or class are not barriers to service and function. But don't be pushy in seeking your personal "rights."

We are called to radical subordination. Prefer the other above yourself. Let the Spirit dig deep into your unconscious to remove hidden prejudices.

Fidelity

Many have adopted the shopping mall mentality to faith and commitment. When the brand doesn't suit, they change allegiance; they shop for a while in a different store. Too often, faithfulness is missing. But we are called to be together, to travel together, to rejoice together and to suffer together. It's not always easy. Our faithfulness will be tested. Yet, don't resist the test, rather, embrace it. Like gold tried seven times you will be all the stronger. The community will be more real. To be faithful, as God is faithful, requires a community where faithfulness can be learned.

Generosity

We are called towards a generous, self-giving lifestyle. Don't hoard your time, talents, money or gifts. Develop the habit of giving things away. Don't be limited by the tithe. Don't be small in your thinking. Listen for the gentle promptings of the Spirit. You will be surprised how giving God wants you to be. Be generous with the faults and mistakes of others. Forgiveness is seventy times seven—in truth there is no end to it.

Hospitality

Receive others as they are, who they are in Christ. Serve one another through your homes. Let there be common meals, caring hospitality, extending family and friendship. In the breaking of bread, sharing our food, we recognize Jesus amongst us. In entertaining strangers we welcome angels.

Humility

We aspire to be honest, real and down-to-earth. Humility is opposed to the arrogance, isolation and deception that pride brings. We accept our spiritual poverty, our limitations and dependency and, also, accept responsibility for the use of our gifts and strengths for the service of the community: the humble are willing to receive as well as to give. Humility respects and esteems others. It is a form of love that does not seek its own way. Wash one another's feet! Be a grace-filled community!

Integrity

We are seeking to be authentic people. What you see is what you get. Be utterly honest with yourself. Integrity towards others flows out of fearless personal honesty.

Don't wear masks. We desire to see our lives whole and entire. There is a need to break down the difference between the sacred and the secular. Be the same on Monday as Sunday. Be the same at work as at home. Be the same with your family as with your friends.

Liberty

Liberty is not license, to do as we please, to satisfy every whim of the flesh. Liberty is freedom to be all God wants us to be. Freedom to love and be loved. Freedom to serve and be served. Check your heart often for traces of legalism towards yourself and toward others.

Provisionality

We see through a glass only darkly. There is yet more light and truth to break forth from the word of God. Hold on to convictions without wavering, but hold your opinions lightly. Convictions are few, opinions are many. Be willing to change. Be slow to judge. Never condemn. Be quick to acknowledge mistakes and move on.

Simplicity

We need more of God, not more things. Simplify. There is a beauty in space, in openness, in solitude. Enjoy beauty without owning or possessing. Stay focused, single minded, with purity of desire.

Spirituality

Our spirituality is at the level of being. It is who we are in our truest selves. Develop the habit of using the Daily Office. Read the great masters of Christian spirituality. Pursue Jesus, in spiritual intimacy. We are a charismatic community — seek spiritual gifts. The Holy Spirit is generous in distribution. Seek to develop a personal, secret history with God.

Spontaneity

Do things on the spur of the moment. The most joy-filled occasions are often unplanned.

Unity

We are an ecumenical community. In the history of the church, God has allowed many different streams. They are all refreshing in different ways. Reject party spirit in any of its forms. Be secure in who you are and where God has you. Other people do not have to be the same as you. Develop a theology of difference. The walls are coming down!

Vulnerability

Be willing to be out on a limb. You might be rejected, and rejection hurts. But to that you have been called. Jesus was the most vulnerable on the cross. Embrace the cross. To be vulnerable is to be out of control. Yet, in vulnerability there is great freedom.

in Christ's name was a far cry from the early renunciation of the world. In that sense the anabaptists who practiced a radical pacifism in the way of Christ were more in tune with the early genius of monasticism. Nor would we find common cause with the lavish life-style of later monastic houses. But these excesses have been criticized from within monasticism itself and over the centuries there have been many internal renewal movements. The most famous were those led by the Irish Céli Dé (Culdee movement) in the eighth century and by Francis and Dominic in the thirteenth century. These renewal movements called the various communities back to rediscover their roots.

Indeed, it is possible to say that monasticism often has been a renewal movement within the church at large. It seeks to challenge and change those areas wherein the church has ceased to follow the way of Christ. The monastic spirit, then, is profoundly renewing. As in the past, we are seeking the breath of God's Spirit to bring life to our present discipleship.

The Monastic Rule

Historically, communities lived by a *Rule*— an outline statement of the kind of life expected by those committed to the community. There have been many *Rules*, the most famous being those of Augustine and Benedict. These have stood the test of time and many communities are still committed to them.

Included in the *Rule* are often certain vows which are solemnly entered into: eg. poverty, chastity and obedience (Franciscan); and stability, fidelity and obedience (Benedic-

tine). In our pilgrimage we have not felt led by God to insist on vows. We suggest, rather, that those who share our *Way of Living* make a commitment to live a balanced life of prayer, study, work and rest.

Many monastic *Rules* have been exceedingly detailed, even down to the amounts of food to be eaten each day, number of hours sleep etc. Our *Rule* is focused on the values we espouse, leaving the outworking of the details to the guidance of the Holy Spirit in each person's life. We are a charismatic community and place a high value on the movement and inspiration of the Spirit.

In many respects the *Rule* is akin to the idea of "covenant" favored by independent and radical Protestant groups. It is a sign of serious commitment, not to be taken lightly and which, when voluntarily entered, shapes the whole of life.

A Focus on Prayer and the Spiritual Disciplines

There is an increasing sense in the church at large that

God is calling us again to prayer and a vibrant inner life. In an age of relentless activity, the call to prayer, contemplation and the charismatic experience of God is profoundly counter-cultural. The new monasticism offers just such an invitation.

Of course, all Christians pay at least lip-service to the necessity of prayer. In new monastic communities people take seriously the call to prayer as a daily spiritual discipline.

Richard Foster, through his various writings has helped the church immensely in refocusing on the classical disciplines which make for a godly life—prayer, fasting, meditation, celebration etc. The new monasticism is committed to a life centered in the disciplines and Foster's work provides a wonderful introduction and guide.

The monastic life has always been considered a disciplined life and in its inception was vigorously ascetic, treating the body harshly for the sake of purity. Early excesses gave way to more of a balance. In the *Rule* of St. Benedict moderation is considered virtuous.

The new monasticism will take spiritual discipline seriously, while avoiding the extremes. It will provide a balanced life which includes a

Indeed, the orders [monasticism] provide prototypes for Christian secular society, a pattern which finally emerged fully in ascetic Protestantism, where "every [person] became a monk" but lived out [their] "monastic" commitments in secular callings in this world.

Sociologist Talcott Parsons in the Introduction to Max Weber *The Sociology of Religion*.

commitment to prayer, study, work and rest.

Monasticism as Community

*A life profoundly contemplative and thoroughly communal.*³

To be a monastic community does not necessarily mean living together under the same roof. Monasticism has taken many forms, from single dwellings loosely associated with an abbot in the desert, to private homes with

less than a dozen community members living together, to large "monastic cities" in the high medieval period. In reformed monasticism (Dominican) community was based on a "community of persons" rather than on a particular place. In other words, there is an intentionality about a shared commitment to a common way of life. Furthermore, third order monasticism has usually been practised by those who do not share a single dwelling.

In the new monasticism it is likely that most will not live in the same house. Rather, what makes for community is a common commitment to live according to a community *Rule*; to share a way of living with others.

Abba Joseph [one of the desert fathers in the early centuries] presents wisdom from the desert tradition when he says with regard to Psalm 133:

This should be understood not in terms of place but spiritually. For it profits nothing if those who disagree about behavior

and chosen orientation are together in one dwelling, nor is it a drawback to those who are of like virtue to be separated by distance. With God it is the common behavior rather than a common location that joins brothers [sisters] in a single dwelling, and the fullness of peace cannot be maintained where there is a difference of wills.⁴

In other words, the friendship of

The Daily Office

Most Christians agree that spiritual life is sustained by a serious approach to prayer and Bible reading. The "Daily Office" has its roots in the early monastic tradition when it was considered the duty, the "officium," of the monks to pray daily for the whole church.

In time the daily rhythm of prayer developed into seven periods of praying using the Psalms and other scriptures. The Church of England simplified the Office to Morning and Evening Prayer, which became the regular pattern for Sunday worship, though at its inception the idea of morning and evening prayer was for a daily practice not just Sunday.

The liturgical movement of the late 1960s onwards, together with a new interest in monasticism, has prompted the publication of a number of Office books to help the faithful pray in a daily pattern. All the Offices contain prayers for the days of the week in a regular cycle. Most revolve around the church year of Advent, Christmas and Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Ascension and Pentecost. This pattern helps prayer and reading focus on the events of the life of Christ. The Office also gives participants a sense of sharing in the worship life of the whole church throughout the world.

Below is a list of some of the more popular editions of a Daily Office:

A Way of Living: For a Community of Friends in Renewal (Ithaca, NY: ICM, Inc, 1998,1999,2001).

Contains our *Rule*, daily prayer, lectionary, meditations, complete Psalter, canticles, Eucharist etc.

David Adam, *The Rhythm of Life: Daily Celtic Prayer* (London: SPCK, Harrisburg PA: Morehouse, 1996).
A useful resource of daily prayer. An excellent complementary book to the above.

Common Worship: Daily Prayer (London: Church House Publishing, 2002).

The Church of England's new Daily Office. This is a provisional publication, being used as a "test drive" by parishioners before a final edition is produced in 2004. The book contains a wealth of resources for use at different periods in the church's calendar.

Contemporary Office Book (New York: Church Hymnal Corp., 1995).

The Episcopal Church USA. This excellent book has the readings in full for the daily lectionary (the same lectionary as in the CFR *A Way of Living*).

Celebrating Daily Prayer (London, New York: Mowbray, 1992)

The Office used by the Society of St. Francis. A great resource of saint's days and festivals.

The Glenstal Book of Prayer (Collegeville, Minnesota, 2001).

A simple Celtic/Benedictine Office book.

Celtic Prayer from Iona (Mahweh, NJ: Paulist Press, 1997).

The title says it all.

Celtic Daily Prayer (London: Marshall Pickering, 1994, 2001).

Daily prayers and meditations from the Northumbria Community. A wonderful source book of Celtic stories and emphases.

community depends on a common commitment to the same *Rule*, the same chosen life orientation, the same virtues.

Leadership: Spiritual Parenting, Soul Friendship, Spiritual Direction, Mentoring

Leadership in monastic communities was traditionally by the Abbot or Abbess (in the desert tradition Abba and Amma), meaning father or mother. In other words, leadership was seen to be of a familial relationship rather than, say, the hierarchy of military order or, as we would have it today, the bureaucratic efficiency of the modern business corporation. Monastic community is more akin to an extended family with parental care and oversight.

Of course, in the ancient world obedience to parental authority was a primary requirement and in the ancient *Rules* was rigorously enforced. Modern sensibilities find those practices too strict, not to say psychologically damaging. Nonetheless, the notion of spiritual parenting remains valid if reinterpreted through the lens of our modern social construction of the parental task: unconditional love and care, setting an example, creating boundaries in which to exercise freedom, a wise and gentle correction when necessary.

Abbots and Abbesses in their turn, were in relationship with bishops who acted as spiritual advisers to the monastic community. This practice of mutual accountability is much needed as a counter to contemporary radical individualism.

Other key elements in the Celtic monastic tradition in the func-

tioning of communities were soul friendship—the *anamchara*—and “fostering.” These relationships involved friendship at a deep level, concern for the spirituality of the other and guidance in spiritual matters. New monastic communities are rediscovering this valid spiritual practice.

In our community our desire is that all will both be mentored and mentor others. In this way we are encouraging the greatest use of spiritual gifts and building the practice of Christian friendship.

Connectedness to the Whole Church—Not Sectarian

In days when denominationalism is becoming less important to people and unity more important, there is much to learn from monasticism as a renewal movement. Monastic communities have usually had a profound sense of connectedness to the whole church. In this they have differed historically from other renewal movements which have often been dogmatically separatist (eg. the sixteenth century anabaptists and many independent churches today). This connectedness derived from a high theology that there is one church, the one, holy, catholic, apostolic church. Though monasticism called the church to repentance, there was not the sense that “we are the true church, a curse on the rest of you” which has characterized many renewal movements. The strong prophetic call to radical discipleship comes with the awareness that we are *all* the church. In this sense, we are seeking renewal for ourselves and for the whole church. The movement is, therefore, an “intercessory renewal”—communities which stand in the gap for the whole church of God.

It is for these reasons, that in our exploration of a new monasticism, we consciously submitted to ordination episcopally and brought our ministry and leadership school into line with the classical threefold orders of ministry: bishops, priests and deacons. In 2001 our community and ministries were chartered as a jurisdiction within the one holy, catholic, apostolic church by the Most Rev. Wayne Boosahda, Archbishop of the Communion of Evangelical Episcopal Churches. In this we have both an historical connection through the apostolic succession *and* a growing relationship with the wider church. We are glad to have received the gift through Archbishop Wayne.

Whilst this step has important symbolic significance for us, we still, of course, recognize the ministry of those who have not been ordained in apostolic succession. We acknowledge all those called by God, equipped by the Spirit and recognized by God’s church as leaders. It is just that *for us* we have discovered a deep and powerful symbol in the notion of apostolic succession.

The new monasticism will be, therefore, intentionally connectional. In Irish (Celtic) monasticism each monastery formed a loose federation—the *paruchia*—a relational group linked to the founding Abbot or Abbess. We are seeking to learn from this Irish pattern in establishing networks of communities which share the same *Rule* and apostolic leadership. Given the possibilities of the internet, the comparative ease of transportation and modern technology a *paruchia* need not be geographically based. Each *paruchia* will see itself as part of the one great church, its leaders linked both his-

torically and relationally to the succession of bishops from the earliest church.

Culturally Relevant Radical Discipleship — Raising Up a Different Spirit

Each era faces particular challenges. Drawing on the writings of social commentators, there are a number of areas where the new monasticism makes valid intersections with modern culture.

- **Experience.** Contemporary society, according to the scholars, has shifted to a primary focus on experience. Historically, monasticism was based in the daily experience of God through prayer and a disciplined reading of the scriptures, especially the Psalms. (See inset, the *Daily Office*). It was never content merely with a theoretical approach to life. A living, daily encounter with God was at the heart of the movement. *The new monasticism will be centered on a vibrant charismatic and contemplative experience conjoined with the spiritual disciplines.*

- **Participatory.** Postmodern people look for that which includes them as active participants. The egalitarianism of the new monastic communities is explicitly interactive. To be part of a small face-to-face community of friends who share the same way of living and commitment to virtue is in its nature participatory. There are no spectators. *The new monasticism will often and most naturally be experienced in face-to-face groups. Where the new monasticism is considered primary church, it will most likely be home-church.*

- **Visual.** Contemporary society is saturated with the visual. It presents a duality in which people live

vicariously through the images of others. At the same time a focus on image points to a deep desire for the transcendent. That desire is unlikely to be satisfied in the slickly packaged product of an increasingly commercialized Christianity. Monastic emphases, in so far as they are sacramental, provide image through liturgy, color, sign and symbol pointing beyond the temporal and to the eternal. There is the mystery of the divine in contemplation. *The new monasticism will be deeply and profoundly sacramental.*

- **Connectedness.** With the loss of extended families and increasing mobility, through job changes and the breakdown of traditional community structures, contemporary people express a need to be connected. New monastic communities provide a connectedness in loving support, shared values and commitments and accountability which are missing in much of the wider society. *The new monasticism is concerned with creating community.*

Our Monastic Distinctives in CFR

As God has led us forward over the last eight years we believe we have the following to offer the church as a whole:

- **Radically egalitarian.** We demonstrate leadership by an Abbess and Abbot together. The modeling of equality in all aspects of the church's life is important to us. It is a sign and symbol of all God wants to do in the lives of women and men as heirs together of the grace of life.

- **A conjoining of monastic, anabaptist and home church emphases about community.** We are developing a monastic community both

gathered and scattered. For some, our community functions as a primary church. Members of other churches are connected through a commitment to the *Rule* and the reading of the Daily Office.

- **Ecumenical.** We are linked to new charismatic networks (Partners in Harvest, PIH) and to the ancient church through the apostolic succession (the CEEC). We hope to develop more links in the future.

- **Charismatic and contemplative monasticism.** We are open to the leading of the "Wild Goose," the Celtic way of speaking of the Holy Spirit. Our desire is to be as flexible as is the Spirit of God.

- **A commitment to rigorous academic training for those seeking ordination as priests and deacons.** We are a community with a high regard of a "joining of the head and the heart." Our School of Theology and Christian Leadership (based on the ancient idea of the "bishop's school") promotes an in-depth study of theology and the scriptures. We are seeking to hold in dynamic tension spirituality and learning; contemplation and study.

- **A monastic practice open to married, single, single again.** With regard to sexuality we encourage fidelity to the calling we have, rather than celibacy for all. Marriage is an "honorable estate" for those called to it by God; a proving ground for faithfulness, as God is faithful. Nonetheless, we *do* recognize that celibacy is an equally valid calling and to be encouraged. Celibacy stands as a sign and symbol that sexuality is not to rule the lives of God's children.

A Typical Meeting of the Community

So what does our community look like? Well, it's better to experience it than tell about it! In brief, it is a blend of loving fellowship and support, charismatic worship and prayer all focused on the sacramental act of the Eucharist. Being home-based we are flexible so no two meetings are exactly the same, but here is a flavor . . . a "typical" community meeting.

The table is laid with a cloth in liturgical color, bread, wine, cross, candles, offertory and oil adorn the table. We dress informally, the celebrant wearing a Eucharistic stole over casual clothing. We begin around 10.15. The home is prepared beforehand, coffee brewed, the kettle boiled for tea. As folk arrive there is a hubbub of fellowship as news is shared and people "catch up" with each other. When we are all gathered we begin to worship, accompanied by guitar and piano. In our worship we seek to be Spirit-led. We may only sing one or two songs, interspersed with Bible readings, prophecy, singing in the Spirit and spontaneous song. The worship may last for three quarters of an hour or so. Then follows a time of sharing when people bring news, express their concerns and ask for prayer. We try to include the whole of our lives—breaking down the division between sacred and secular—and no subject is "out of bounds." There will frequently be prayer for each other at this time, depending on needs, with the laying on of hands and anointing with oil. After sharing we move to the Eucharist, which has become increasingly important to us over the last year. Our pattern is based loosely on the Church of England's latest liturgy. We encourage our children to believe through belonging and so welcome them at the Lord's table. After communion we take a break for refreshments (tea, coffee, cake etc) and then the children leave us to be taught in their own environment, with activities suited to their ages. The adults share the scriptures, the "sermon" being interactive and discussion based, though carefully prepared and led by Abbess Jane. All are encouraged to take part and all points of view thankfully received. Normally we finish around 1.15. All in all, we are usually well-satisfied. The blend of charismatic, spontaneous worship and prayer, living sacrament, loving fellowship and the sharing of scriptures make for a well-rounded meeting of the community—a contemporary version of the Acts pattern of prayer, breaking bread, fellowship and the apostles' teaching.

We would be delighted to dialogue with any who may be exploring similar new ways of being church, or who are interested in our community *Rule*. In the future, our desire is to oversee many such communities who share our vision for the renewal of the church and embrace our *Way of Living*.

Where Are We Now?

In a frenetically active society, communities which seek a contemplative life will present an alternative voice.

In a world which solves its problems by resorting to violence, communities of peace will be counter-cultural.

In a culture still dominated by power relationships—the marginalization of the poor, the victimization of people of color and the objectification of women—a new, radically egalitarian monasticism will run against the grain.

In a society characterized as "a collection of strangers," face-to-face communities of loving concern, affirmation and accountability will be simply different, yet desperately needed.

Through this type of radical discipleship—raising up a different spirit—the new monasticism will be prophetic of the coming Reign of God.

Presently there are around twenty-five members of the Ithaca CFR (including children), two other communities with leaders trained and ordained by us and several friends in the U.S.A. and U.K. who share our *Rule* and *Way of Living*. In our School of Theology and Christian leadership there are around fifteen at present in the weekly classes in Ithaca. Of these, four have been ordained to the diaconate with another four preparing for ordination. These ordinands are from three different communities. The school is based on the ancient idea of the "bishop's school." In the "dark ages" missionary bishops established schools of

theology and learning to train new priests and deacons. These schools in time became the cathedral schools which developed into the earliest universities. In our school we try to take a vigorously academic approach linked with a vibrant spirituality. In this we see ourselves in the spirit of the early Irish church, on the isle of "saints and scholars."

Those presently ordained or in training exercise the following ministries: leadership of communities, the ministry of strategic intercession, chaplaincy in a care home for the elderly, campus work, prison ministry, internet chaplaincy and work with children.

What of the future?

- We would like to see other communities in our *parauchia* under the apostolic leadership of the community.
- We would like to see more personal members around the world sharing our *Rule* but who may belong to other churches.
- We are also desirous of further developing our training for ordained ministry through new technologies.

If you are interested in any of the above opportunities please contact us.

With blessing in the Three of Love and Glory,

+Andrew, CFR
+Jane, CFR

Notes

1. For an excellent introduction to Bonhoeffer see McClendon, *Ethics*,

chapter 7.

2. The small group, *Northumbria Ministries*, led by Roy Searle, was joined by others and became the Northumbria Community. The Community has been instrumental in leading many into a renewed monasticism from its base at Hetton Hall, Northumberland and through its publication of *Celtic Daily Prayer*.)

3. Thomas Moore, *The Rule of St. Benedict*, p xv.

4. John Cassian's Sixteenth Conference on "Friendship."

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*What Does It mean to be
A Member of Community of Friends in Renewal (CFR):
A new Monastic Community?*

Route One . . . For those who see CFR as their primary church commitment

- Belong to a local CFR community (eg. Ithaca CFR).
- Commitment to the *Rule* of CFR, our vision and values.
- Live a balanced life of prayer, study, work and rest. This would include daily prayer, meditation and reading of the scriptures (for example, the Daily Office in our *Way of Living*).
- Mentoring/soul friendship in consultation with the Abbot/Abbess.
- Seek God's call and function in an area of service to the community and/or the world.
- Financial commitment to CFR.

Route Two . . . For those who are members of another church, but who desire to live according to the Rule of CFR

- Commitment to the *Rule* of CFR, our vision and values.
- Live a balanced life of prayer, study, work and rest. This would include daily prayer, meditation and reading of the scriptures (for example, the Daily Office in our *Way of Living*).
- Mentoring/soul friendship in consultation with the Abbot/Abbess
- Seek God's call and function in an area of service to the community and/or the world.
- Visit "Lindisfarne" the mother house of the community in Ithaca, NY for a weekend once a year, if at all possible.

The Process of Commitment

- A three month exploratory period followed by a meeting with the Abbot/Abbess or their delegate (the traditional postulant).
- A provisional commitment of a year followed by a meeting with the Abbot/Abbess or their delegate (the traditional novice) . . . [symbolized by the reception of the community cross].
- A professed long-term commitment to the community and its Rule (the tradition professed).

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