

# In Love and Service Bound

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The First Forty Years of  
the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory

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Karekin Madteos Yarian BSG





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**The Brotherhood of Saint Gregory**

**The Brotherhood of Saint Gregory  
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*For my brothers and our Brotherhood,  
both my life, my love, and my immortality in Christ*





***God never asks us to be successful, only faithful.***  
***– Richard Thomas Biernacki, BSG***



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## *Prologue*

*I shall be near you when music wakes  
Thrilling your soul with melody divine,  
And in the music you shall hear my voice,  
I am the singer, and the song is mine.  
– Grace Bush*

Among the roster of religious orders and Christian communities in the Episcopal Church there exists a wide variety of expression, from traditional monastic communities to loosely connected prayer societies. In all of these varied expressions of the centuries-old call to a life of prayer and service, one is uniquely positioned as a foundational reform of religious life for the twenty-first century. Before there was the “New Monasticism” there were the Gregorians.

On Holy Cross Day, September 14, 1969, four young men gathered at the Visitation Monastery in Riverdale, New York. In the presence of a few friends and colleagues, they prepared to hold a Bible Vigil as they took up a new manner of life. These men sought to enter into a more meaningful celebration of their work by holding it up as an offering to God and the

church. They sought to engage a prayer life that would enhance their ministry and vocation of music. And they had no idea that they were about to revolutionize an age old institution in the church in a way that had not been done since Francis of Assisi started another model of community known as the Franciscans.

Richard Biernacki, or Brother Richard Thomas as he would be known from then on, didn't have the slightest intimation that he was starting something that would come to be seen as radical. He was simply following the promptings of his spirit to find a deeper meaning behind his life and work as a church musician. He didn't realize what was brewing beneath the simple words of the Bible Vigil. But it was 1969 and whether he knew it or not – in the year that saw the Stonewall riots and a human being walking on the moon – something was happening that would change the face of religious life and would have an as yet unseen impact on the church.

With Pope Gregory I, Gregory the Great (590-604), as their patron, Richard Thomas, Peter, Richard, and Donald founded the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory – a community of vowed men called to serve God and the church while living fully in the secular world.

Not many people took note of the event other than the few who were in attendance. Sister Margaret

Mary Joyce, VHM, of the Visitandine nuns was particularly proud given her role in helping Richard Thomas give structure to his idea and the Rule that he took up that day. But as often happens when the Holy Spirit moves, something as soft as a whisper can cause many to sit up and listen. That was about to happen in a way that no one anticipated. The church was about to take note, and life was about to get very interesting.

It has been forty years since this re-envisioning of religious life arrived on the scene. And while it has struggled to grow in wisdom and experience against no small odds, while it has sought to prove itself in the eyes of more traditional religious orders, it has quietly as of this writing become the largest religious community for men in the Episcopal Church. It has founded a Sisterhood in its short life and it now has members internationally.

The brothers follow a common Rule; take the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, adapted for a contemporary apostolic life; and uphold the call to prayer and service in religious witness for all regardless of sexual orientation or marital status. Its members do not necessarily live in common, and its interpretation of chastity includes celibacy for those who are called, but also permanent fidelity for those members who live in commitment to a spouse or partner.

The Brotherhood is the product of an unanticipated vision: the desire for a relevant and vibrant future for religious life in the church. It is the result of a particular man's vocation to call forth a new community. By the grace of God, that man's struggles and those of the men called to follow his vision have been a success – success not for its own sake, but in response to God's call to each of us to a life of deliberate attentiveness to the needs of others and a deeper response than the world often allows. And from this struggle arose a beloved community in the midst of a world sorely in need of love and service. ✠



## *The Breath of Change*

*There is  
nothing so  
stable as  
change.*

→ *Bob Dylan*

**T**HE 1960S WERE A TIME OF GREAT CHANGE and upheaval. The Vietnam War was taking its toll and the country was divided politically and socially. The sexual revolution was challenging the values of a nation. Civil rights issues were at boiling points, culminating in the struggle for equal rights by African-Americans, by women for equality, and by the nascent gay rights movement for recognition and reform in the laws, epitomized by the Stonewall Riots in 1969.

The churches were experiencing their own inner turmoil at the time. The Second Vatican Council was bringing tremendous change to the Roman Catholic Church. The Episcopal Church was facing its own fair wind of change. Liturgical worship was increasingly adapting new forms, there were rumblings about the ordination of women to the priesthood, and social justice issues were taking center stage in response to

the surrounding culture. The church was, by and large, beginning to speak loudly and clearly about social justice from the pulpit, seeking to break out of the safety and isolation of the sanctuary into a coordinated and outwardly engaged outreach to the poor and marginalized, the excluded and the disenfranchised.

In this vortex of change, Richard Biernacki, an organist in the Episcopal Church of Saint Andrew in Yonkers, New York, sought to find a life of deeper meaning and constancy. Perhaps it was in response to the chaos of the sixties that he would seek order and a life dedicated to a more permanent set of values. Perhaps it was simply that his heart had prompted him to seek a way to lift up his work and find greater purpose. But it is no surprise that, when he explored and found traditional religious life wanting, he decided to take matters into his own hands and create something new. His intention was to answer what he believed was a call from God to do something particular with his life, and he found that there was nothing in traditional religious life that would allow him to do what felt right. In many ways, one could suppose that traditional religious life was also poised for a change. But change was not Richard's intention. Answering his vocation was.

Christian monasticism, as the dominant expression of religious life throughout history, is thought to

have been originated around the 3rd century by hermits and anchorites in the deserts of Egypt, Syria, and Asia Minor. These were simple men and women who were called to lives of prayer and separated themselves from worldly concerns in order to do so. Saint Antony is often venerated as the first of the Desert Fathers. Saint Benedict, largely seen as the founder of traditional western monastic life, founded his first community at Monte Cassino in the 6th century. He envisioned a community of men that would act as a “school of holiness,” separated from the temptations and trials of the world and immersed in the dedication of all activity to God. He wrote a rule – a document that would govern the requirements of this kind of life and serve as the means of discipline necessary to make the community function in a healthy way. Such a rule became a common feature of religious orders; and while the rules of religious communities often differ greatly, they have come to be seen as the basic structure of the life of the individual and the community. The rule was the “order” in the term “religious order.”

Work, prayer, and study were integral to the balance of Benedictine life, and renunciation of individual possessions and worldly relationships was an expected prerequisite for entrance into the community. The Benedictines took vows of stability, obedi-

ence, and conversion of life. These vows ensured that interpersonal conflicts in community were mitigated by the submission of the individual's will to the needs of the community. Vows were also a promise made by these individuals that summed up their intention for a holy life. Religious vows are another common feature of religious communities.

The Benedictine way of life has continued much the same since the 6th century. While there have been many efforts at reform, some in an attempt to be more strict in the daily discipline, some in an attempt to impose more stringent ascetic practices, and others which became more focused on a particular charism (or grace) such as hospital work, teaching, or agriculture, the model has still remained largely unchanged. Benedictine communities still exist around the world, connected by a common rule that has been kept intact since Benedict wrote it down.

Francis Bernardone, the son of a wealthy merchant from Assisi, Italy, was largely responsible for the first major departure from that way of life in the 10th century. He would come to be known as Saint Francis of Assisi. After a dramatic conversion experience, Francis felt called to a different kind of religious expression. He and his followers changed the face of religious life in a dramatic way. Unlike the Benedictines who were confined to the enclosed monastery or con-

vent (and whom many perceived to be too wealthy and comfortable in their lavish common houses), the followers of Francis, or the Franciscans, were itinerant beggars who chose to live in the world and engage in preaching and acts of mercy. They were not permitted to carry money, relied on the charity of others, and adopted the evangelical counsel of apostolic poverty.

Poverty, believed to be mandated by Christ in the Gospels, was seen as a way of continuing renunciation of worldly goods. But it was also intended to emphasize the reliance of the individual on God and neighbor for the means of life. The movement founded by Francis grew rapidly. By the end of Francis' life, the order had caught the attention of the hierarchy of the church and was ultimately recognized by Pope Innocent III. But it had also been changed from Francis' original vision. The Franciscans came under the strict supervision of the church. The codification of the order's governance, and the movement toward conventual life by the fourteenth century, led the Franciscan order to effectively split in two. Some continued to follow Francis' original rule. Others became conventual – meaning that they entered into a common house like the Benedictines – and ceased their wanderings.

While there have been re-visions, and reforms, and countless variations of these two models, the two strains of religious life, the monastics (the enclosed)

and the mendicants (the wandering beggars), continued largely unchanged until the 20th century. Both of these models embraced a rule of life which included living in community, the taking of vows (or counsels), the holding of goods in common, and the celibate life. To a greater or lesser degree, these disciplines were enforced by hierarchy or authority within the order and the church. In both strains of religious community the entirety of the individual's life was dedicated to incorporating work, study, and prayer into the religious expression of life.

The beginnings of religious life and its expression in the Anglican tradition began with Nicholas Ferrar and the community at Little Gidding in the 17th century. Many people are surprised to know that religious life exists outside of the Roman Catholic Church. In fact, it exists in the Anglican and Lutheran traditions as well as the Orthodox Church and increasingly in protestant and ecumenical forms such as the community of Taizé in France. By the beginning of the twentieth century, there were dozens of orders in the Anglican Communion representing these two traditions. There are Benedictines and Franciscans in the Episcopal Church in fairly substantial variety though not in the same robust measure as they have existed in the Roman Catholic tradition.

By the late sixties, however, religious life was undergoing a crisis of sorts. While Vatican II was of great importance to the Roman Catholic Church, its influence was felt as well in the Episcopal Church, particularly in more Anglo-Catholic circles. It was especially felt in religious life. Secular orders – orders open to married men and women – were being founded with increasing frequency. The Second Vatican Council declared that married life was as sanctified and holy a way of attaining to the love of God as religious life. The habit, the distinctive garb of many orders, was either modified or done away with completely in order to modernize. As a result of these changes, many members of religious communities – lamenting this new state of affairs and having believed that religious life was not simply a different but a better way – departed for other experiences. Many married and some even left the church.

The populations of these orders who stayed behind were aging; attracting new vocations was increasingly difficult. Some enclosed orders, in response to dwindling vocations, found it necessary to send their members out to work in order to support the community. But tradition was tradition, and many orders faded into obscurity rather than adapting to new realities or re-envisioning their ministry and way of life for

a contemporary world. In short, during the 1960s, there was an exodus away from religious life.

Something, however, inspired Richard Biernacki to look beyond these troublesome issues and swirling changes to envision something new for himself. He was about to embark on an adventure with some rather surprising advocates resident in the Monastery of the Visitation in Riverdale, a section of the Bronx, New York. ☞



## *A Founder and a Vision*

*Do not wish  
to be any-  
thing but  
what you are,  
and try to be  
that perfectly.*

✦ *Francis de  
Sales*

**R**ICHARD THOMAS BIERNACKI WAS BORN ON December 8, 1942, in Meriden, Connecticut. He was one of four children born to Lucia Sanfilippo and Roman Frank Biernacki. He is fond of telling people that he was born one year and one day after the attack on Pearl Harbor. This would go a long way toward explaining why he was born during a mandatory blackout at the hospital. The country was at war.

Richard Thomas was the oldest of his siblings, including two sisters, Mary and Linda; and a brother Roman. They were born into a culturally Roman Catholic family of Italian and Polish background, although their father was a 33rd Degree Mason, the highest Masonic degree, and was not particularly fond of the church. Richard's father was not Roman Catholic. "He had no use for it," says Richard. "Because it was a

mixed marriage, they could not be married in the church and had to be married by a justice of the peace." His mother, however, was a devout Roman Catholic and raised the children in that tradition.

While still a child, and while his father was overseas during the war, his mother took advantage of the opportunity to pack Richard up and leave Connecticut for Queens, New York, to be closer to her Italian community. Meriden at the time was home to a large Polish population which his father preferred but which his mother found unbearable. In spite of their love for one another, the cultural and religious tension between Richard's parents would have a strong impact on him growing up.

Richard went to Our Lady of Sorrows Roman Catholic School until the eighth grade and had a strong affinity for his mother's faith. He tells stories about his classmates clamoring in the school yard to hold the sister's rosary beads. Richard was always first in line, grabbing them and keeping the other children away from sister so he could keep those beads to himself. He was relatively active in church, worshiping in the fashion of the Italian immigrant community in which he made his home. He and his siblings would lay flowers at the altar of the Blessed Mother, often to bribe her for choice vacation spots during the summer or to secure her favor for some wish or another.

Richard always had a strong relationship with his mother and his siblings, but his father was another story. Richard describes him as “domineering and distant” and, although the two were able to forge a comfortable relationship before his father’s death, Richard still reflects that the obstacles between them were hard to overcome. “We were never what I would call close, but he was still my father. Such are the things that define us,” he says. “It’s no surprise that most of us have these kinds of things to work through in our family, but they all work out. And in the process they help drive our search for God.”

It wasn’t until Richard went to Newtown High School that such a search would begin more earnestly and take an unexpected path, considering his upbringing. His sister Mary had a friend who lived across the street. Her name was Doris. One afternoon, Doris invited Richard’s sister to go to a youth group at a nearby Episcopal Church. At much the same time, Richard had met a young girl named Judith in his high school. She intrigued him. One day, Richard asked her where she lived, to which she responded “I am a church mouse.” When asked to explain, Judith again said, “I am a church mouse. My father is the sexton at the Episcopal Church in Elmhurst.”

Both “sexton” and “Episcopal” were new terms for Richard. He was, after all, Roman Catholic and

while his church had a janitor the word sexton sounded awfully fancy. But Richard was, in fact, more curious about Judith than he was about either of these two terms at the moment. The two started to become friends.

Some short time later, Richard's sister Mary, now happily attending the youth group with her friend Doris, invited Richard to come along one afternoon. "It'll be fun!" she exclaimed. Since the two siblings were very close and often did things together, Richard went along. When he walked into the church with Mary who should he see but Judith! He couldn't believe his eyes.

While Mary went her way with Doris, Richard and Judith spent the afternoon socializing and dancing with one another and chattering away about different things. "It was all very innocent," says Richard. "Not like today's world, we just had a lovely time. No drugs, sex and rock-n-roll!" When it came time to leave for home, Judith walked up to Richard and handed him a 1928 Book of Common Prayer and said, "Hey, come to church some time!" She gave him a hug and went scampering away. He glanced down at the book which, for him, was something wonderful and new. Richard would later describe this as the moment that he found the Episcopal Church. It was a home that would last the rest of his life.

Before leaping in with both feet, however, he decided that it would be best to investigate. So while his sister Mary began to sing in the choir, Richard would spend the next six months going to church at his Roman Catholic parish of Our Lady of Sorrows for the 8 o'clock mass, and then trek across town for the 11 o'clock service at Saint James Episcopal Church. His sister and he would attend the youth group every Sunday. The next pivotal development in Richard's life began shortly before making the decision formally to join the Episcopal Church.

The organist at Saint James had taken a liking to Richard. She soon began giving him lessons on the organ. While he had no previous musical training, Richard took a liking to the instrument and started to learn rather quickly. So began his musical career. He took every opportunity to learn and to practice and found that he not only liked playing, he loved it. Richard became entrenched in the life of Saint James. Soon, when he learned that the bishop was coming to do receptions at the parish, Richard decided that it was time to be received into the Episcopal Church.

The rector of Saint James, George Wellman Parsons, became a close personal friend of Richard. Parsons was referred to simply as "Rector." Richard recalls that what he liked about Rector was that he was once a conductor on the Long Island Railroad. "He

knew every stop on the LIRR by heart," said Richard. "I thought that was neat."

Every day, after school, Richard would be off to spend the afternoon at the church. Rector and Richard would go into the sanctuary and play hymns. Richard would play the organ and Rector would exclaim "I'll sing tenor." As Richard recalls, "I didn't know exactly what tenor was, and I wasn't yet very good at the organ, but we had a wonderful time." The two were a boisterous combination that spent many afternoons raising the roof at the parish.

Richard would spend so much time at the church that each evening his mother would have to call the parish secretary and ask her to send him home for dinner. Richard started singing in the choir along with his sister. Kay, the organist who had started giving Richard lessons, left and a new organist came to Saint James. The gentleman was a fine concert pianist and, as Richard describes, "an adequate organist." They would become very close friends, a friendship that lasted nearly forty years.

Richard also had an elderly neighbor who gave Richard an opportunity to play often so he could keep in practice. She and her husband had been in a terrible car accident, and while they were in the hospital recuperating, Richard gathered their mail, cared for their plants, and generally looked after their apartment. In

the front parlor, the couple had a player piano. Every day Richard would put a roll into the piano, pump the pedals and match the notes as the piano played. He began to learn very quickly.

Richard's life in the Episcopal Church and his career as a church musician had formally begun. When he and his sister Mary informed their father Roman that they had joined the Episcopal Church, they got wonderful support. "He was overjoyed," said Richard. "He had told us that if we found something that made us happy, then we should go for it." And they did.

Richard's affinity for the church and his relationship with God continued to deepen and develop as time went on. He was very much in love with the worship of the church and enjoyed the formality of the Book of Common Prayer. His prayer life continued to deepen. His love of music evolved into a soul-satisfying passion. He started playing music for Episcopal parishes on Sunday, making a career of being a church musician. In his late teens, however, he began to sense that God was calling him to celebrate his work for the church as a deeper vocation rather than simply as an employment opportunity.

Richard considered exploring a possible vocation to religious life as early as 1961, most notably with the Society of Saint Francis – the Episcopal Franciscan order. One of the members of the local Franciscan com-

munity, Brother Dunstan, attended Richard's parish. Richard was captivated by the idea of entering a community. He had spent a weekend with the community at Little Portion Friary on Long Island. During that weekend, he noticed that there was no organ in the chapel. When he brought this to the attention of Father David, his retreat director for the weekend, Richard was disappointed to discover that music was not a part of the worship life at the friary. Richard was noticeably discouraged. He had come to realize that his vocation as a church musician would not necessarily be celebrated or even utilized in a Franciscan setting. There was, David suggested, perhaps something else in Richard's future.

There was also something else that bothered Richard. He had over time come to terms with his identity as a gay man, and learned to affirm that identity, and he was not necessarily sure that God was calling him to disavow that identity in order to enter a traditional community. So while he felt confident that God was calling him to a vocation of some kind, there appeared to be no other options and so religious life was simply put on the back burner for a time.

During this time, Richard had become independent. His family had moved to New Jersey and Richard stayed on Long Island. He began to work playing for



several small churches over a course of years. In his early twenties, he started playing for Saint Andrew's Memorial Episcopal Church in Yonkers and moved to Riverdale in the northwest Bronx.

The tugging of a religious vocation never left him. He recognized that he wanted to find a way to enter more deeply into relationship with God, and to lift up what he believed was a God-given love and passion for church music, into a prayer-filled vocation in service to the church. Encounters with a group of Roman Catholic sisters would allow him to begin to explore his vocation again.

While living in Riverdale, Richard met the Sisters of the Visitation of Holy Mary at the monastery across the street from his home. Walking to and from the train station every day, Richard would pass the imposing and beautiful building. He had always assumed that it was a house of men since it was called a "monastery." Every day coming home from work, he would walk up the one hundred steps that ran alongside the monastery from the Metro North station. On days when it was particularly nice outside, he would come across two sisters sitting on the bench outside the grounds. He sheepishly admits that he thought the women were the cooks for the house. He soon came to find out that they were the occupants. They were Sister

Mary Rose and Sister Rose Angela. One day he started talking with them and so began Richard's pivotal relationship with the Sisters of the Visitation.

At the bench one evening, Rose Angela suggested that Richard come by the house and meet "Mother." A couple of weeks later, Richard – formal invitation in hand – came over one evening and met the Mother Superior Marie Agnes Andeuse. Since the sisters were always required to be in pairs when meeting with others, another sister named Margaret Mary sat nearby. Richard describes meeting Margaret Mary as one of the most spectacular events in his life. "Our eyes met," he says, "and sparks flew!" Richard became fast friends with Sister Margaret Mary, later known as Helen Marie, who is often celebrated within the community today as the "Mother Foundress" of the Brotherhood with Richard Thomas. "She later confessed to me," Richard says, "that I was the only man she ever loved." Richard and Margaret Mary began a relationship which would last many years, meeting with one another twice a week at the monastery in the parlor. They discussed their mutual love of God and their call to service. It was during this time that the two friends talked about the formation of something new: a community of musicians dedicated to the service of the church. During these conversations, the idea of the Brotherhood came into being.

The idea was nourished by the spiritual charism of the Visitation Sisters. The Order of the Visitation of Holy Mary was founded by the efforts of Saint Francis de Sales and Jane Frances de Chantal in the seventeenth century. It was a very traditional, cloistered order of nuns who even as late as the 1960s still lived in "enclosure." The sisters were inaccessible to the public in general, being required to stay behind grilles that were built into the walls. No one was permitted to pass behind the grilles, and the sisters generally were not permitted outside. Richard, probably against all rules, was an exception at the house in Riverdale. Margaret Mary had convinced Mother that it was safe to leave them alone together.

Sister Margaret Mary offered wonderful advice, drawing on the spirituality of de Sales and de Chantal, and her personal experience of a long life in community – in addition to her love and support of Richard – to help Richard formulate his vision for the new Brotherhood. Richard began to consult with members of other orders in the Episcopal Church, seeking advice and counsel, and becoming more convinced that God was indeed calling him to a vocation.

The decision to choose Saint Gregory the Great as a patron for the new order came from a discussion between Richard and Margaret Mary about the community's focus on music. Due to Gregory's traditional

association with Gregorian chant, he was seen as a very suitable choice. The patronage of Gregory and his importance in the definition of the community's ethos, or characteristic spirit, has unfolded and enriched over time to be much deeper than an association merely with music. Because Gregory was a monk called to leave the cloister and live in the world, he is a great model for apostolic life as the Gregorians understand it. His role as a reformer in the church has also inspired the Brotherhood to be open to reform and revision when necessary to keep from becoming a stagnant community. This kind of flexibility has been largely responsible for the community's stability and growth.

The new community's motto was chosen to reflect their understanding that playing music for church was more than just a job; it was a vocation. The motto *Soli Deo Gloria* (To God Alone the Glory) gave voice to that understanding. It was the phrase Johann Sebastian Bach wrote in all of his manuscripts as a form of dedication, and it serves as the motto of the American Guild of Organists.

Of course, if Richard was going to found a new community, he needed to consider what rule would best suit his vision for the order. The rule of any community is the document that determines what is required of the individual. It governs both the outlook

and the expectation, the behavior and discipline that give each order its unique expression. He prayed thoughtfully, read through the rules of existing communities, and earnestly contemplated what would be appropriate for a group of men who were not living in common but fully in the world. Nothing that he read seemed particularly suited to his vision. And so, he began to write. Margaret Mary offered helpful advice.

The first Rule of the Brothers of Saint Gregory was written in 1969. The opening paragraph read as follows:

*It is the object of the Brothers of Saint Gregory to seek that sanctification to which God in his mercy calls us as Church Musicians, and in so seeking to attempt in all ways, corporately and separately, to show forth the Light of the World, bearing in mind the sacred nature of that vocation.*

Richard had grasped, in his first radical expression of his vocation, a great and wonderful vision of God seeking the sanctification of every individual through their work. And further, he suggested that the lifting up of that work as a holy offering was a way to show forth Christ in the world. This re-visioning of all labor as a holy offering and a religious vocation is still a defining principle in the Brotherhood today. While

it is true that the founding vision was intended for church musicians, the expansion of this to include other forms of work and ministry was not far behind.

Richard's expression of his vocation through the Rule is extraordinary in its generosity and vision. For him, it really was about offering his labor as a gift, both in terms of gift to the church's worship and liturgical life, and also as gift to the church's spiritual life through the example of labor made holy by intention. The only vow to be taken by the Brothers was obedience – to the Rule and to the “unwritten rules” of musicianship. In other words, the Rule upheld the ethic that was expected of anyone in the ministry of music, and called them to offer only their very best.

By this time, Richard's zeal for this new vision of community had attracted the interest of some colleagues and friends: Peter Smith, Richard Smid, and Donald Ulm. All of them were involved in church music – some Episcopalian and others Lutheran. At this juncture, Richard's vision was taking form in an ecumenical community crossing denominational lines. While it would not remain so, the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory was founded as an ecumenical order for men in the field of church music. It came to life on Holy Cross Day, September 14, 1969. ✠

## *Holy Cross Day, 1969*

THE INVITATIONS HAD GONE OUT. THE TIME leading up to the big day was a flurry of activity. Brother Richard Thomas had asked Father Thomas Pike to act as chaplain for the new community. Pike was rector of Saint Andrew's, Yonkers, where Richard Thomas was organist, and had become interested in what he was doing. The job of chaplain was to receive the vows of the first brothers, to oversee the prayer life of the community and to give spiritual guidance as it became necessary.

Richard, who at the time also worked at the international headquarters of the Episcopal Church in Manhattan, had combed through the *Episcopal Church Annual* listing of religious orders to send them invitations. In his naiveté, he addressed the invitation to "all Major Superiors," a clearly Roman Catholic concept at the time. Some of the members of these orders came to the event, but most did not. The newly created

Brotherhood, it would later turn out, would pose a serious challenge in the coming years, but for the time being it was still a time of celebration and excitement. A few friends were gathering for the event. The residents of the Visitation Monastery had their own preparations under way, with the sisters preparing for a festive reception after the Vigil.

Richard had written a Bible Vigil for the principal celebration of the founding of the new community and put the final touches on the Rule. The Bible Vigil was a continuous reading of texts from scripture to commemorate the occasion. The early brothers did not have habits – the distinctive garb often associated with religious orders. What they had was the cross that would be their hallmark: small and simple, made of olive wood, with the motto of the Brotherhood on the front and the name of the patron on the reverse. Richard designed the cross's shape after one from Mount Athos; one of the sisters did the lettering on the front and back. As to their original "habit," the men were to be vested in typical organists' dress at the time: Anglican cassock and surplice. Shortly afterwards, on October 3rd of that year, Sister Gemma Maria, another of the Visitandine sisters with whom Richard and the others had become close, presented them with black cowls and replaced the organist's surplice with a black cord cincture – which together with



the black cassock presented a somewhat stern appearance, which also had its lighter side. Richard fondly recalls an occasion when the brothers came to the Visitation Monastery for Evening Prayer. They put up the hoods on the new cowls and it became apparent that they were too high and pointed. The sisters behind the grille broke out into raucous laughter seeing the brothers in their "witches hats."

The sisters, in their great kindness, not only took interest in the budding community of the Brothers of Saint Gregory (as it was known at first), but had truly nurtured it into being with their love and kindness and their confidence in Richard. And now, after months of consultation with Margaret Mary, propelled by the enthusiasm of a man who had pursued his vocation wherever he thought it might lead, the four colleagues prepared to inaugurate a new community.

At four in the afternoon, the men gathered at the monastery. Richard Thomas played a prelude on the chapel's tiny Wurlitzer organ. It was *Impression Gregorienne* by Alexandre Guilmant. Donald played *Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring*, and Richard Arthur played *Meditations from Thaïs* by Massenet. The men then processed into the tiny chapel. Through the grilles on the right, the sisters watched with joy and anticipation as the four men held the Bible Vigil and pro-

fessed obedience to the Rule of the Brothers of Saint Gregory. With the opening words "Let us prepare our hearts and minds to receive the word of God," Richard Thomas, Richard Arthur, Peter Eldridge, and Donald Charles prepared to become the Brothers of Saint Gregory. Anne Pike, Thomas' wife, played guitar and sang "This Little Light of Mine." It was the sixties after all! Hedy Morris from Saint Andrew's, Yonkers, was on hand as the photographer. When the Vigil was over, the forty or so Sisters of the Visitation stood and reached through the grille, joining hands with the new brothers, and together they all sang "They'll know we are Christians by our love." A new religious community in the church was born.

Others in attendance were Sister Alice, then Superior of the Order of Saint Helena; Sister Ellen Stephen, OSH; Mother Marie Jogues of the Marymount Sisters (Roman Catholic); Brother Alberic, a Lay Ecumenical Oblate of Saint Gregory's Abbey in Three Rivers; and Cecil David Williams, a member of Saint Andrew's, Yonkers, later President of the Union of Black Episcopalians.

The sisters and brothers had even accomplished this new thing with Francis Cardinal Spellman's knowledge and blessing, who granted permission for one of the first ecumenical liturgies in the Diocese and Archdiocese. The nuns had kept their superiors informed. The brothers had shared the word with friends and

leaders of the existing communities. But for most of the rest of the world, including the Episcopal Church, it went relatively unnoticed.

After the Vigil, the new brothers were taken in to a festive reception where the sisters had made more cakes than one could imagine. Over the next few weeks, congratulations would come in from many quarters, both Roman Catholic and Episcopal. Richard had achieved his dream by answering the call to God's service. From this time forward, he would be known as Brother Richard Thomas Biernacki, Founder of BSG.

Richard was always grateful to the Sisters of the Visitation for their forward-thinking support of something new, and was able in his own way to return the favor. Not too long after the Bible Vigil, Sister Margaret Mary became Mother Margaret Mary, and set about putting into action some of the reforms commended by Pope Paul VI and Vatican II. Richard excitedly recalls the day the grilles came down. He and some friends, with screwdrivers in hands, went to the Visitation Monastery and helped the sisters take them all down. A terrific celebration followed as the Visitation Sisters took a step into a new century – more than half-way through it.

In later years, as the Visitation community began to decline in numbers due to decreasing vocations and advancing age, Margaret Mary herself chose to leave the order for a time, taking up her baptismal name,

Helen Marie Joyce. She would later return to the order in which she had spent so much of her life, but in the meantime her “exile” experience provided her with the opportunity to visit with the brothers in convocation, in the mid-1980s, sharing with them among other things a vision of dedication and prayer: Jesus, Son of God, mercy! ✠

## *Comings and Goings*

**T**HE NEW BROTHERS TRIED TO PROMOTE THE vision of the new community. They offered organ recitals to local congregations and worked to discover and pray for the intentions of their local communities. Brother Richard Thomas even started a Summer Music School Program at Saint Mary's in Valhalla, New York. By Advent of that year, the brothers were featured in a news article in the magazine *Findings*, a Christian education publication. They were thrilled at the exposure of the community's ideals to the public. But the salad days of the new Brotherhood seemed short lived.

The enthusiasm of the founding time wore off, and within eight months Brother Donald withdrew from the ranks of the community. There was no structure to the life of the brothers other than that called for in the Rule, and there were early indications of the challenges the new brothers faced in trying to gather for community time given their busy schedules. The

brothers had, from the beginning, needed to juggle the requirements of their new religious life with full time jobs and other responsibilities demanded by life in the world. Whatever the reasons, the brothers' lack of experience in governance and mutual responsibility in their community was quickly apparent. There were at that time no mechanisms other than the Rule to determine what constituted their common life. Richard, however, continued to take his commitment to the Rule very seriously, and maintained his vision for a community united in common love for music as a vocation.

In 1969 and 1970, Richard tried his hand, briefly, at a newsletter. The short lived paper, called *The Kyriale*, named for one of the classic liturgical musical collections, was sent to all of the other orders and local churches. In it, he spoke of the vision of the Brotherhood, listed its prayer intentions, and talked with enthusiasm about the work of individual brothers.

In May 1970, the remaining brothers gathered at the rectory of Saint Andrew's for their first Chapter meeting, making decisions about financial affairs and spiritual discipline, and beginning to develop a strategic plan for holding regular meetings. By this time, the brothers had started using the Order of the Holy Cross's experimental *A Four Office Breviary* for their daily prayers. The month of May also saw another im-

portant development as the brothers received the blessing and recognition of the Bishop of New York, Horace W.B. Donegan, who became the first Bishop Visitor of the community. Donegan's wisdom and care of the community would prove invaluable in helping to channel the brothers' zeal and enthusiasm into good decision-making. Members of the community had, for a brief time in early 1970, considered purchasing a small house in the woods to turn into a monastery. Thankfully, Donegan's good sense restrained them. "If you do this, it will kill your community," he said. Richard weighed the advice against the realities of communities who were indeed tied to property maintenance in the face of dwindling vocations. While he was slightly disappointed, from that point forward it was firmly a part of the community's self-understanding that it declined ownership of real property as a part of its ethos.

Before their first anniversary in 1970, the brothers revised the Rule for the first time. The substantive change reflected an expanding vision for a Gregorian vocation to include liturgy, the arts, and other forms of service to the liturgical and spiritual life of the church. This expansion in the aims of Gregorian ministry brought renewed attention to the community.

In September of 1970, the three brothers held a service at Saint Andrew's in Yonkers to renew their

vows. The three remaining brothers renewed their profession for a period of two years. Father Thomas Pike was celebrant at the Eucharist. He had recently been called as rector at the bustling Calvary Church in Manhattan, however, and the increased pressure of responsibilities led him to step down as Chaplain. Father Howard Stowe took his place as the second Brotherhood Chaplain. For a time, Stowe had even contemplated a vocation with the community himself. While he never took that step, at his prompting, the brothers reconsidered their habit and undertook a major change from black to the now-familiar white and brown. They did this because they had begun to feel that the black habit was a bit cheerless and not suitable for a young, contemporary community. They were clothed in the new habit – white tunic, brown scapular, black cincture (brown was not available from church suppliers at that time), and a white hooded capuche – on the Feast of Saint Francis de Sales in February 1971.

Richard attended various clergy meetings in Westchester County trying to spread the word about the community. All of the brothers attended workshops for church music hoping to give added visibility to the order and taking every opportunity to promote their vision of religious life. Richard Thomas and Richard Arthur became active in playing for American



Guild of Organists events and giving recitals to draw attention to music as ministry.

However, the nascent order was fragile. Over the next year, after a couple of false starts, two new members would join the community and quickly leave, along with the two other original members apart from Richard. He was left alone, the sole Brother of Saint Gregory. While he was diligent in seeing to it that the community was listed in the *Episcopal Church Annual*, remaining faithful to his vocation, and trying to get word out to the larger church about the order's work and purpose, Richard largely fell silent during this time. He had no one to encourage him and nothing to sustain him but his love of God and his diligence in his own practice of the Rule. But his vision of the community faltered for a time. He took solace in his music – in his offering of service to God and the church. And while inquiries came in and piled up on his desk, he couldn't quite bring himself to answer them. He needed time to figure things out. "It was," he says, "a very lonely time."

The year 1972 saw some dramatic changes in Richard's life. He met and fell in love with his life-long partner David Henritz, a Methodist minister. Their resulting relationship cost David his position at the time but he remained in the ministry. Richard also took a new job, moving from his parish in Yonkers to

become the organist and choir director at Saint Bartholomew's Church in White Plains, New York. He would remain there for twenty-eight years, during which time Saint Bartholomew's became the home office of the Brotherhood, and the site for many of its Chapter meetings and liturgies in the early 1980s. At David's prompting, Richard began to respond to the inquiries to the community that had accumulated. He was shocked to discover the enthusiasm for the idea of an order that did not live in a common house. It seemed to be exciting to people – and those men seeking to discern a call to ministry were from all around the country!

The rector at Saint Bartholomew's was J. Norman Hall, a classical "Low Church" Protestant Episcopal priest known to all, at his insistence, as "Mr. Hall." While he did not approve of anything remotely reminiscent of the Roman Catholic Church, he gave a tacit nod to Richard and his vocation to religious life. He allowed Richard to use Saint Bartholomew's mailing address for the community. Brother Richard now had a base of operations from which to nurture a new start.

The move to Saint Bartholomew's was a blessing to the community. In 1972, Paul Moore, Jr., the Bishop of New York, became the second Bishop Visitor to the Brotherhood. He would remain so until 1989. One of the members of Richard's choir, Leslie Victor Morgan, entered the community. He made his life profession in

1972 at the hands of David Henritzky who, as an ordained person, was asked to receive members into the order on Richard's behalf. David at the time worshiped with Richard at Saint Bartholomew's and was working at the Bowery Mission in Manhattan. Over the next few years, the church began to take notice of the Brothers of Saint Gregory. Others were soon interviewed and admitted. Brothers Gilbert from New Jersey and Wilyam from Ohio joined Richard and Leslie Victor.

As noted, during this time, profession to the Rule of the community was not received by Richard Thomas. In fact, Richard had not yet been given any title such as "Superior." Admission to the order was received by the parish priest of the new member, wherever they happened to live in the United States, or by the community Chaplain or another ordained person, such as Henritzky. Interviews were often conducted by phone. Occasionally they happened at Richard and David's home or a local restaurant. Sometimes, they were conducted in the florist shop where Richard worked.

In 1973 two new members were added to the rolls, but they didn't remain for long. And then for a time, things were quiet. It was clear that the brothers lacked the structure and balance of the more established orders, and, as it was fairly easy to join, it was also very easy to lapse and depart. There was no directed forma-

tion. Postulancy (a period of introduction to the community's aims) and novitiate (a period of formal education) were not yet defined or required. There was no education program and there were no community Rites. Members simply made profession to the Rule at the hands of their parish priest or another cleric. The first life profession reflected as such in the records was Leslie Victor's in 1972. There were no formal chapter meetings, and gatherings of the community were informally held at Richard's apartment in White Plains. Richard kept a sporadic diary of events as they unfolded, but between 1974 and 1976 he made few entries.

In 1976, the Brothers of Saint Gregory caught the attention of a charismatic man – a man with ideas. And if the Brotherhood was to become more than a small group of men, it was time for the them to begin making some major changes necessary for the community's long term survival and growth. And John Ni-decker was the man who believed himself to be the one to make that happen. ✂

## *Brother Superior*

**J**OHN NIDECKER, FROM ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND, was a special assistant to President Richard M. Nixon during his second term in the White House. He was also a member of Saint Mary's Episcopal Church in Arlington, a long time Lay Reader and Eucharistic Minister. He had caught a glimpse of the Brotherhood through the *Episcopal Church Annual* and sent a personal invitation to Brother Richard to come to visit him as a guest at his home in Maryland. Richard obliged and took a flight to Washington, D.C., where he met John.

Brother Richard Thomas describes John as one of the most influential members the Brotherhood has known. An irascible character, John lived with a perpetual frustration at having never pursued ordination. He channeled all of his energy into helping Richard formulate a better organizational structure for the community. He made his profession to the Rule in

November 1976. This was the only profession of vows he is recorded to have made.

For John, the Brotherhood needed a model of governance. He and Richard drafted the first working Constitution and Customal for the Brotherhood as a part of the Rule to which members would make profession. The Constitution established a form of governance. It was loosely based on a monastic model adapted for apostolic life, heavily borrowing terms and a structure for authority and accountability from a model of governance better suited to a monastery or convent. In some ways, the Brotherhood's adoption of this model was based on traditional notions of what a religious order was supposed to be rather than on the emerging experience of what the Brotherhood actually was. It was also rife with John's idiosyncratic vocabulary. Words like "habiliment" (habit) and "caparisoned" (dressed) for the manner in which side beads were worn harkened back to a deeply old-fashioned understanding of religious life.

The monastic model conferred virtually unlimited authority on Richard to guide the direction of the community and its membership to suit his understanding. This was good in the sense that it gave Richard the power to ensure that his vision was not compromised. Likewise, it restrained Richard whose oft-times exuberant enthusiasm for innovation could

have taken the community in any number of directions. The new model of governance provided a necessary (even if outdated) framework, but one not entirely relevant to the community's experience as a contemporary community.

In addition to being the Founder, Brother Richard was now firmly established as the Superior. The title "Superior" would eventually change, and while his status as Founder would remain undisputed, Richard would be unsuccessfully challenged in the role of Superior over the coming years as the new community came face to face with its own growing pains. But for the time being, Richard was the first and last authority for everything in the community's life. While this model would serve the community well for some time, it had its drawbacks as well.

At first, there was some confusion in the community about what the monastic model would look like in practice. This led to some interesting choices. For a brief time, Richard was fancied as a sort of mitered abbot – likened to being the bishop of the community. He was given a miter, the peculiar head dress of bishops, which he wore to services on occasion – until a photograph of such a liturgy in the community newsletter brought a stern reprimand from Bishop Stuart Wetmore, Senior Suffragan of New York. Richard even took for a time to using the title

**“The Reverend Brother.”** The framework of authority and hierarchy necessitated by the monastic system threatened to undermine the egalitarian aspirations of the order. Unfortunate customs arose around this, for example, requiring postulants and novices to perform menial tasks such as polishing the brass work for the altar. For a short while, junior members of the community were excluded from participation in Chapter, and ate meals at separate tables. Many of these practices were, thankfully, short-lived and Richard often looks back in hindsight with a bit of embarrassment. Many of the brothers who lived through these times look back with wry smiles and shake their heads at their naiveté, even while one or two chuckle and joke about the “good old days.”

The Constitution and Customal began to establish a framework for the community’s governance and articulated its self-understanding. The first Constitution and Customal had a mere twelve articles which governed the following: the name and purpose of the community; fidelity to the canons of the church; the government of the order; the roles of the Visitor, the Chaplains, and the Superior; membership; Chapter; the habit; and two articles on the dissolution of temporal possessions and the life of a brother. Since members were asked to pledge their income toward the work of the community, the first step in the evolution



of a community practice that would later become the vow of poverty, this meant that there were assets to be handled in the event the community was dissolved. The Brothers made provision for these monies to be distributed to the dioceses where the brothers were resident if the community did not survive. As far as the life of the brother was concerned, the document made very clear who the brothers thought they were and what they believed they were doing:

*Brothers will walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, not being anxious for the morrow but seeking first the Kingdom of God. Brothers must always show forth their witness as men in the Religious Life, taking great care to keep the Rule and so become wholesome examples of life lived in Jesus Christ our Lord.*

The following year, 1977, saw one of the biggest advancements in the life of the community to that time. Five new members were either admitted or made profession. One of them was Brother James Teets who would become one of Richard's closest friends and confidantes and, according to Richard, one of the most influential members of the community. That year also saw the end of the assumption that new members would simply make vows from the begin-

ning, and the emergence of a rudimentary formation process. The first officers of the community were appointed at Richard's discretion; among the first appointments was John as Assistant Superior.

The Brotherhood established its first "community ministry" in the Vestment Exchange, at John's instigation. This ministry, later falling under the directorship of Brother Christian Williams for most of its existence, would gather unused vestments and liturgical furnishings, clean and repair them, and donate them to needy parishes around the world. The ministry lasted until 1996 as a public expression of the community's charitable work. By the time that the Vestment Exchange was turned over to an outside entity to continue its work, the Brotherhood had reached the conclusion that no "community ministry" was necessary to its self-understanding. The ministries of individual brothers were at the heart of its ethos.

John also began a new monthly newsletter, called *The Servant*. It became the public record of the community's growth, its work, and its identity within the larger church. John was its first editor.

The following 1978 saw renewed life and energy for the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory. For the first time, the brothers made major modifications to the Rule: the Brotherhood – in its formal Chapter meeting

at Christ Church in Rockville, Maryland – decided to take the threefold vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

Something had started to shift in the identity of the brothers and the aims of the community. The call to vocation had started to coalesce around a more organized vision of apostolic religious life. Richard's vision for a community of men pursuing a religious vocation through their work while living fully in the secular world began to find innovative ways of expressing itself in the life of the community.

The taking of the three vows was a watershed development in the community's self-understanding. At this point, the adoption of the vows was partly in response to the Brotherhood's desire for acceptance among the Episcopal and Anglican orders who constituted the Conference on the Religious Life. It was also in reaction to a strong desire in the brothers to express their deepening understanding of the spirit of the apostolic life. Taking the vows led to no small amount of animosity between the Brotherhood and some of the more traditional orders as time went on. However, according to Richard, taking of the three vows was one of the most important changes in the life of the community, as was the struggle to have the Brotherhood's interpretation of them validated by the larger church.

This struggle has changed the face of religious life for the foreseeable future.

Poverty, as the Brotherhood understood it, involved the dedication of a major portion of the fruit of a brother's labor to the church and the Brotherhood. This did not yet involve the tithe, but required all members to pledge. Poverty was a symbol of gratitude for the graciousness of God's providence. It was likewise a tangible way for the brothers to keep their dependence upon God in mind by giving of themselves as an example of the charity to which all Christians are called. The money given by the brothers was used to fund the gathering of the community for fellowship, study, and work, and would soon be used to offset the cost of the habit, produce and distribute the newsletter, support the work of the Vestment Exchange, and provide for publicity and advertising. There were also early movements to tithe the community's income to outside agencies engaged in charitable works.

The vow of chastity was also redefined for apostolic life in recognition of the marital or partnered status of the Brotherhood's members. Richard had remembered an article he had read about chastity, in which it was said that chastity was not necessarily about celibacy but about fidelity to one's self and others. And it was about love. Richard reflected deeply about what chastity could mean if it were not equated

simply as a negative reaction towards sexuality, celibacy as a refusal, but with a positive attitude towards relationships. The vow was taken by the brothers, celibate or not, as a symbol of love and faithfulness towards all people and as an offering of self – body, mind, and spirit – to God’s service. In this way, chastity was reasserted as a value in and of itself, having little to do with celibacy except as one possible expression of faithful relationship with God and others. A healthy and vibrant sexuality in the context of a faithful and loving relationship – heterosexual or otherwise – was held to be of equal value. In this interpretation of the vow, the Brotherhood had taken a huge step outside of the “closet” propagated by the church and religious life for centuries.

Obedience, the only vow Richard and others initially made, was now no longer simply to the Rule, but to the articles of faith of the Episcopal Church – the ecumenical orientation of the initial founding having been left far behind – and to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. It was also obedience to the superiors and masters of the Brotherhood, of which Richard was now the chief. This newly articulated authority was not lost on Richard, who undertook it with a deep affection and concern for the members of the Brotherhood. And although he recognizes he has not always exercised it gracefully or willingly, he has always done so faithfully.

In many ways, Richard's and John's relationship with one another proved to be remarkable. The passion of Richard's vision for the community, combined with John's propensity for organization and his commitment to the growth of its members even with all of his idiosyncratic ideas from the past, proved to be a dynamic combination. The two together forged a stronger and more vital vision for the Brotherhood's future. But beneath the surface, John's ambition and Richard's protectiveness of the brothers under his care and his possessiveness of the Gregorian vision led to some overwhelming tensions that threatened to undermine the existence of the community.

The community that emerged from Chapter in 1978 was substantially different from the one that went into that meeting. It had a clearer identity and sense of purpose than the one that existed before it. In addition to the vows, the community adopted a clearer process for the formation of its membership, including a minimum term of five years in annual vows before life profession. A postulancy of six months and novitiate of one year and one day were approved. The community also became incorporated as the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory, Inc., a not-for-profit corporation in accordance with New York state law. The first Associates program for the Brotherhood was taken up for consideration and a committee appointed to look at

existing models, an advertising strategy was adopted, and the habit was standardized including the addition of a gold wedding band to be worn by men who made their life profession.

Before Chapter was adjourned, Richard was recognized by the brothers, as reflected in the following minutes:

*for his beloved devotion as Superior and the responsibilities that have been placed upon his shoulders by Our Lord. He has weathered many trials and tribulations during the past year, and we are grateful to him for coming out of the storm unblemished.*

Richard, in turn, pledged his further devotion and commitment to the office of Superior. The challenges were only just beginning. *✠*





## *Growing Joys and Pains*

**I**N 1978, BROTHER JOHN HAD A REVELATION which made him decidedly uncomfortable. It seemed as though his hopes for the future of the community were no longer reconcilable with the fact that some of the members were non-celibate gay men. The issue, surprising after two years of membership in the community and fellowship with the brothers, caused him to confront Brother Richard Thomas and, for a time, their relationship became very strained. It was perhaps the first time that the Brotherhood had to deal with that kind of homophobia from within the community.

John resigned as editor of *The Servant*. He also decided to pull back from deeper involvement in the community as Assistant Superior, shipping his files and records to Richard in New York. A flurry of correspondence took place between John and Richard. Yet while Richard's patience was tested, he loved John

and wanted to make sure that he was not lost to the community. The whole affair led to some uncomfortable relationships and hurt feelings, and challenged Richard's leadership skills as he sought to heal the breach. While it took some effort and time, relationships were eventually mended and John remained, for the moment, a brother among brothers. Still, the whole affair had taken its toll on Richard and other members of the community.

By October 1979 there were fourteen brothers from New York, Maryland, Ohio, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Oregon. Not having a common house, the brothers considered themselves "on mission." Even though not living together, they achieved a community spirit by strict adherence to the requirements of the Rule. Faithfully praying the Daily Office (by that time from the *Monastic Breviary*, the final published version of the Order of the Holy Cross's earlier experimental version) was one way to accomplish this. Brothers knew that even if they were not physically in the same place, their prayer was united across distance. New brothers were trained in the use of the *Monastic Breviary* by Brother Luke Anthony Nowicki – then Postulant and Novice Master – in a class affectionately referred to as "Ribbons 101." The use of this office book, intended for recitation in choir by monastics, came to the Brotherhood as a result of

the monastic model adopted by the community. Until its adoption in 1979, brothers were free to use whatever they wished for the purpose of daily prayer, but the *Monastic Breviary* became the official office book of the community. Spiritual reading, faithful worship, and the studious incorporation of the vows into their practice were also components of following the Rule that gave substance to the brothers' common life while apart.

*The Servant* was now being distributed in over five hundred locations and the number of men interested in the Brotherhood was increasing rapidly. Brother Roger was now the Assistant Superior and Brother James had taken over as editor of the newsletter. The program for those who wished to be associated with the community, now called "Companions," was in operation. A training manual for novices was under development, marking the beginning of a formal education process for new members. For the first time, the Chapter even took up the possibility of founding a women's order based on the Gregorian model. Richard, however, did not yet think it was time for such a big step.

By September 1980 there were nearly twenty brothers. One of them was the first transgender person in the community's history and may well have been the only transsexual in any religious order in the Epis-

copal Church. Among the brothers at this time were some names that will be quite familiar to the members of the Brotherhood today, including James, Luke Anthony, William Francis Jones, and Stephen Storen; as well as John, Thomas Joseph Ross and John Peter Clarke of blessed memory.

Quarterly Embertide reports to the Superior were introduced at this time as a way for Richard to monitor the brothers' adherence to the Rule and to give him opportunity to provide pastoral guidance when challenges arose. And while it took a long time to get the brothers to comply, the community began to require brothers to submit a will and burial instructions to the Superior. This was seen as a matter of good stewardship and it was hoped that members would make clear what role the individual wanted the community to play in their final arrangements. Since many members were estranged from family or had families that didn't understand their life in this new community, such precautions were necessary.

The community was also exploring the creation of its own rites for admissions, professions, and gatherings of the community, and the collection of other special devotions for the prayer life of the brothers. The collection of documents – Rule, Constitution, Customal, and Rites – was now being referred to as the Manual of Usage. The Constitution and Customal (later called the Customary) were split from the Rule. An

emphasis on the Rule having its own integrity, with its own place and importance in the life of the individual brother, and a desire to maintain its simplicity, were key factors in this decision.

Driving these changes was experience. Living out apostolic life as the community grew and spread revealed cracks in the structure. A way of maintaining community while monitoring the brothers' living their vows "in the world" necessitated means of accountability and pastoral care that would have been taken for granted in an enclosed house. Living scattered about demanded that the brothers create the means necessary for such accountability through trial and error. Some things worked; others didn't. Of course, creating the means of accountability meant creating the means of disciplinary action should brothers not comply. Since there was at that point no organized body to act as an executive, Chapter made most decisions. Richard, ultimately, was the sole arbiter of discipline, determining who would enter the community and who would be asked to depart for failure to follow the Rule's requirements, and no changes were even considered that did not have his approval.

The decision to create Council as an executive body came about when the Brotherhood adopted a provincial structure in 1983, as the whole governing structure of the Brotherhood was overhauled in response to the pastoral pressures noted above.

Richard's vision was taking on a life of its own, evolving to meet new needs. But there was still one issue that required resolution – that of validation and recognition.

One of the ironies in the life of the Brotherhood was that it was greeted with more support and enthusiasm by Roman Catholic orders than it was by most existing religious orders in the Episcopal Church. The Brotherhood of Saint Gregory was greeted with skepticism at best, and rancor at worst, from a number of the existing traditional orders. Attempts at creating fellowship with them through any of the recognized federations of religious communities were met for the most part with cold shoulders. The Brotherhood was excluded from giving its expression of religious life exposure to the broader church in any of the venues that the traditional orders maintained. The Conference on the Religious Life (CORL) excluded the Gregorians and other similarly developing contemporary communities from membership in the Conference, which was only for traditional monastic communities.

Ironically, until 1976, the Brotherhood was one of the few officially recognized religious orders in the church. In their naiveté, the brothers had assumed that all CORL member orders were recognized. The history of why this was not so is long and complicated. But CORL's reasons for not recognizing the contemporary orders boiled down to two issues: the Brother-

hood did not live in community, and they were not celibate. The adoption of novel interpretations of poverty and chastity had come back to haunt the brothers. The traditional orders were not happy.

CORL was founded in 1949 to expand and promote the understanding of religious life in the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Church of Canada (a number of the orders operated in both Anglican provinces). It comprised most of the traditional orders. Member orders in CORL guarded their independence from interference by the structures of the churches themselves, and few of them had sought recognition under the canons adopted in 1913, which had several stringent requirements concerning property and the authority of local bishops. The Brotherhood, not owning any property, and willing to take advantage of Episcopal oversight, not only qualified under those canons, but had been recognized by Bishop Donegan at his insistence. (He had also made the same demand of one of the traditional orders founded in New York during his episcopate, the Sisters of the Holy Spirit.) At that time, only these Sisters and one other member of CORL – along with the Brotherhood – were canonically recognized.

At the 1976 General Convention of the Episcopal Church, however, the traditional orders arranged with no great fanfare to have the canons on religious life changed. The onerous requirements concerning prop-

erty were removed, and celibate life in community was specified. In the previous version of the canon, religious orders were defined only by the taking of vows and having a Rule, without the minimal content of the Rule being specified. But the new change meant that only conventual or monastic orders could be recognized as "religious orders." The Brotherhood and other contemporary orders would no longer fit under the altered canon, and the Brotherhood, in particular, ran the risk of losing its canonical status. Ironically, the educational materials the community produced for its own members dutifully included a copy of the amended canon which no longer covered the Brotherhood. Novice Brother Tobias Stanislas Haller, going through the community's education program, pointed this out, and Richard, at that time working in the General Convention Office of the Episcopal Church, was in a position to do something about it. Communicating with the other contemporary orders, it was decided, after some delay, to draft a revision of the canons for submission to General Convention, a revision which would reestablish the Brotherhood's own canonical identity within the structures of the church.

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## *The Canons are Changed*

**T**HERE CAN BE LITTLE DOUBT, BASED ON CONVERSATIONS with those brothers who were involved, that the General Convention of 1982 was both an exhilarating and a painful time in the life of the Brotherhood. The community had by this point learned a great deal through their experiences. Membership in the community was growing quickly, and it was apparent that the ethos of the Brotherhood was fulfilling a need in the larger church. Additionally, the members of the Brotherhood understood their vocation within the framework of a Rule and system of governance that was legitimately arrived at through deliberation in response to the circumstances of their common life. The ministries of individual brothers were gaining respect and admiration in their parishes. The brothers were active in national, diocesan, and local ministry. So while it should have been an exciting time, and in many ways it was, it was also a time for bittersweet experience.

The community was adapting to the issues expected in a scattered community by offering structure, guidance, and pastoral care to its members in the absence of the kind of oversight available in a common house. And it was working. The knitting together of a model of community based on observance of the Rule and the bonds of affection was surprisingly effective. The community had earned the nickname “the flexible friars” from Bishop Paul Moore, Jr., largely because of their adaptability. Such willingness to self-reflect and adapt according to need is now deeply embedded in the community’s self-consciousness, preferring it to the rigidity which had been largely responsible for the decline and death of so many religious orders in the past. While change for change’s sake has always been rejected by the Brotherhood, the need for responsive adaptability has always been accepted even if not necessarily enthusiastically embraced.

From the late 1970s to the mid-1980s, Greater Chapter was held in the Fall and Lesser Chapter in the Spring. These coincided roughly with the Episcopal Church’s celebration of the feast of Saint Gregory on the traditional date of March 12, and the Roman Catholic Church’s celebration on September 3, as changed in the post-Vatican II revision of the calendar. Both events provided the community with opportunities to gather in worship, prayer, and to attend to business

matters, even if only for a long weekend. Chapters also offered opportunities for fellowship. As the numbers of members increased, so did the need to get to know one another and to develop those bonds of affection. While it was still a small community, some members only saw each other twice a year for Chapter.

Being scattered had its advantages as well. Living, working, and ministering in the world and not in the cloister, brothers had an opportunity to meet and build community where they were in their parishes and workplaces. The church was beginning to take notice of the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory. Some of the bishops at the time were wonderfully supportive. Bishop Charles Gaskell of Milwaukee, chair of the House of Bishops Standing Committee on Religious Life, expressed his support of "emerging orders" and the importance of their expression of religious life, in a letter to the Superior. His successor as chair of the committee, Bishop William Sheridan, was also very supportive of the new communities. The Brotherhood was looking healthy and vibrant and held great hopes for the future.

A fly in the ointment was the continued resistance to the Brotherhood by some in the traditional orders. It was often stated among some of them that the Brotherhood was nothing more than "a bunch of gay men dressing up and playing church." While there is a

great deal of internal and external homophobia in such a statement, there was, perhaps, a small bit of truth in it that was too close for comfort – largely in the words “playing church.” The brothers had to learn the ropes of community life, organizational structure, and accountability from the school of hard knocks. There were some early members of the community who did not make wise choices, order their private life, or present an appropriate public image for the Brotherhood. Oversight of members in the community and the means of disciplining inappropriate behavior were often created after the fact – in some cases in response to a scandal or a potential scandal involving a member of the community. And while such members were always dismissed from the community, damage to the Brotherhood’s reputation had, in some cases, already been done. Of course, this does not negate the painful effects of the attitudes, on the part of established orders, towards a community which permitted its membership to include non-celibate gay men. But it does demonstrate that this group of charismatic, loving men, however dedicated to the service of God in religious vows, had a long way to go to prove themselves – and some were simply not ready or willing to let them.

The issue that the canons were changed without the knowledge of the Brotherhood – at the time one of only three communities actually to be recognized un-

der them – made the problem real. Brother Richard Thomas received a call from Sister Angela Blackburn, founder and leader of another contemporary order, the Worker Sisters of the Holy Spirit. She expressed her concern that the emerging communities were not capable of being recognized by the national church. Between 1976 and 1982, most of the member orders of the Conference on the Religious Life had achieved canonical recognition based on the new version of the canon. Angela and Richard set to work to figure out a way to make sure that the emerging orders – those for whom “celibate life in community” was not the cornerstone of their ethos – would not be left behind. The two began to draft an amended version of the canon on religious orders in anticipation of the 1982 General Convention in New Orleans.

Bishop Sheridan was then the chair of the House of Bishops committee and Bishop J. Stuart Wetmore, Senior Suffragan of New York, was a member of the committee. Wetmore was very supportive of the Brotherhood and, after consultation with the Brotherhood’s Episcopal Visitor, Bishop Paul Moore, and the junior suffragan of New York, Bishop Walter D. Dennis, encouraged Sheridan to take a more conciliatory position to the contemporary orders. As one personally associated with the traditional monastic orders, Sheridan could be a powerful mediator. Sister Angela and Brothers Richard Thomas, James, and Andrew

went to New Orleans for the 1982 General Convention, feeling encouraged. If they thought they knew how deeply the animosity of the traditional orders ran, they were in for a big surprise.

The traditional orders felt as if their canon was under assault. One of the sisters from a well-established community walked up to Angela on the convention floor and railed, "Why don't you people just go away!" The rancor only became worse as the week went on, with a couple verbal altercations and at least one instance that nearly came to blows when Richard was cornered in an elevator by a brother from a traditional order. Eventually, the bishops on the standing committee encouraged the members of CORL to sit together with Richard and Angela and talk about their differences. It seems that these differences boiled down to a few words: "traditional," "contemporary," "religious," and "order." The established communities did not like the way in which the revised canon proposed by Richard and Angela used those words. For example, some of the more recently founded monastic communities considered their own adaptations to be contemporary. The CORL communities also felt that "religious" and "order" rightly belonged only to traditional expressions of religious life. Richard and Angela, tired of the fight, made it known that they did not care what the new communities were called as long as they were recognized by the canons.

With the Brotherhood's Chapter meeting approaching the following week, the brothers could only stay for the first six days of General Convention, and by the time they were ready to depart, the amendment to the canons had not even come to a vote. They left New Orleans anxious and uncertain, waiting to see what the final outcome would be. But with some strong episcopal allies on their side, some good news came to the waiting brothers back in Chapter. The revision to the canon was adopted as the last piece of legislation on the last day of General Convention 1982. The contemporary orders were now covered in a second section – essentially identical to the first, but without reference to celibate life in community and common possession of property – called “other Christian Communities.” While distinct from the “religious orders,” the emerging communities qualified for canonical recognition. And while Richard and Angela did not necessarily approve of the wording – any parish church, after all, was a Christian community – they were satisfied to have the canon reflect their existence. ✠





## *A Change in Pastoral Governance*

WITH THE CANONS AMENDED TO RECOGNIZE the Brotherhood and other contemporary communities, it was again time to turn inward to the pastoral needs and concerns of the brothers. The community was growing large enough that Brother Richard Thomas' ability to provide the necessary oversight of every member was being challenged. It was also becoming apparent that too many decisions in the community's life were being handled either by Richard Thomas alone or by the full membership of the order. The situation was stressful and time consuming. And so, it was determined that an executive body within the order should be established. This would be a body of advice and consent to the Superior, and would largely be responsible for interviewing applicants, handling personnel and disciplinary decisions, and dealing with infrastructure issues

necessary to keeping the community functioning. And so, in 1983, the first Brotherhood Council was formed.

The first step in forming Council was to give Richard some help in the pastoral oversight of the community. Following where possible the provincial structure of the Episcopal Church, the Brotherhood organized into provinces. Each province was required to have four full members of the community resident in order to be established. Appointed to oversee each was a Provincial. This role was intended to be the representative of the Superior in each geographic region. The Provincial did nothing without the approval of the Superior, whose title accordingly was changed to Superior General. The first four provinces established in the community were Province One in New England, Province Two in New York and New Jersey, Province Three in Maryland and the South, and Province West – a “missionary Province” including brothers outside the Boston–Washington corridor.

Council comprised the Superior General, the Provincials, the Directors of Education and of Postulants and Novices, two appointees of the Superior General and two brothers elected by Chapter. The Directors of the Vestment Exchange, and of Companions, the Treasurer, Administrative Assistant, Secretary and the “Big Brothers” constituted the remaining officials of the community. In the original proposal Chapter did

not elect representatives to Council, and the Administrative Assistant was a Council member. Big Brothers were the mentors of new members in the community as part of the emerging education program. Council, as thus conceived, was primarily advisory to the Superior General. All of the officials, both on Council and serving in other capacities, were appointed by the Superior General, except for the two Council members elected by Chapter.

At Chapter in the fall of 1983, each member of the Brotherhood was presented with a red notebook outlining the proposed structural changes. It was strongly felt that these changes were necessary for the Brotherhood to grow into the future. Yet a great deal of trust was needed and mustered to create such a body. At the Chapter meeting, each proposed amendment to the Constitution was read in turn, deliberated and voted upon by a simple majority. It was necessary to divide responsibilities. What was Council going to be responsible for and what was Chapter's role? Each item had to be looked at in turn. The only changes to the proposed new Constitution concerned membership of Council as described above: the Administrative Assistant was removed from Council and it was decided that Chapter as a body should have two representatives on Council elected by the membership. Once finished, the package of changes and amendments was then

voted on as a whole. After several hours of deliberation, the proposed changes to the Brotherhood's structure carried unanimously. A call for a second consecutive reading the following year before implementing the changes was defeated. The mind of the community seemed to be clear – a Council was desirable to ensure the long term survival of the community. The changes were to take effect on October 31, 1983. The first meeting of the Council was held in February 1984.

The sudden presence of an executive body, however, created a bit of tension in the community. It became obvious that one of the initial tasks of Council was going to be to prove itself worthy of this responsibility. Not surprisingly, the anxiety related to a new body of authority caused Council and the general membership, as represented in Chapter, to start off with an uneasy truce. It took some years of experience and several adjustments to convince the broader membership that Council had the community's best interests at heart. Since Council was tasked with disciplinary issues, the importance of gaining the community's trust was compounded. It did not help that Council was not a representative body. The saving grace was that Richard was still the one making the decisions. And Richard still had the loyalty and confidence of the membership. Still, the uneasy

relationship between Council and Chapter was an issue that was not to be fully resolved until twenty years later when another major revision to the governance of the community decreased the centralized authority of the Superior General and made Council more responsive to – and chosen by – the membership. 7a

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## *Money Matters*

**T**HE SAME CHAPTER MEETING THAT CHANGED the structure of the governance in the Brotherhood was about to make another landmark decision. At a special Chapter meeting held the next afternoon, the Brotherhood took up the issue of poverty. This time, it was a move to adopt the tithe as the community's practice of the vow.

The Brotherhood's relationship to the vow of poverty was initially as awkward as is the general population's ability to talk about matters of finance. It was either not discussed at all, or it was spoken of with some embarrassment, particularly by brothers who found themselves in poor financial shape or unexpected financial distress. Over time, the Brotherhood developed a level of honesty about money that most people would do well to learn. This is because the community learned to confront the fact that money matters are difficult to talk about – and yet to talk about them anyway.

In the earliest years of the Brotherhood there was no vow of poverty. Financial affairs were an individual matter, not a concern of the community. While members pledged for the good of the order, it wasn't until the vow of poverty was taken that the Brotherhood's members began to pledge to it as a direct expression of their fidelity to Christian stewardship and an expression of the vowed life. There was an initial struggle to interpret the idealized notions of religious poverty for a contemporary order. It was understood that there were bound to be non-traditional interpretations to the vow that brothers would incorporate into their spiritual lives, but the traditional expectations of the meaning of the vow impinged upon the practice of individual brothers. This would lead some brothers in their personal interpretations of spiritual discipline to put themselves, sometimes irresponsibly, in even more dire financial situations than was warranted. Some gave away possessions and one brother even sold his car – his only means of transportation. Poverty, in the eyes of some brothers, was about "simplicity." But simplicity could easily prove itself to be a false idol when misconstrued, and some of those same brothers found themselves standing in judgment over others in the community whose lifestyles didn't fit with their own interpretation of the vow. It somehow got lost on some brothers that each member was asked to live



“each in the situation to which he was called.” There was no one-size-fits-all solution to the individual interpretation of poverty, especially with the religious and cultural images surrounding it. And, living outside a convent where community property was a given, there was no denying that poverty as an actual reality for some was not a choice, even among some members of the community. Religious poverty, lived in the world, needed to reconcile itself to that reality. As Brother Richard Thomas would later write:

*Let no one tell you that poverty is easy to live with “in the world.” We are all stewards of our time and talents and gifts and possessions. Our Patron, Saint Gregory the Great, said that we could and should use what God has given us but we must never count it as our own; it is simply here for us to use, share, and enjoy as stewards.*

By 1983, the Brotherhood realized it was necessary to set a standard for its interpretation of poverty that would be equitable, Biblical, and provide the community with an objective marker of the individual brother’s practice of the vow. Individual interpretation notwithstanding, there had to be a quantifiable standard. The tithe was the perfect and logical choice – one that would place important responsibilities on indi-

vidual brothers to commit to a standard of giving and on the community to properly steward the money given into its care.

At the special Chapter in September 1983, Brother John presented a talk on the tithe, drawing on Rabbinic and Biblical resources. Richard Thomas led the community in spiritual reading and a prayer. The Episcopal Church's teaching on the tithe as the "minimum standard of giving" was foremost of the teachings brought to bear on the issue. The proposal before the community was to begin with all members contributing two percent of their income to the Brotherhood with a goal of reaching ten percent.

This initial attempt to accept the tithe was not ultimately successful, even after a great deal of discussion. But the brothers took a small step. They affirmed the church's teaching on the tithe, and encouraged all members to increase their pledges to the Brotherhood to two percent.

A further step was taken at Chapter in 1984, when the Brotherhood affirmed the formal adoption of the tithe in the community. Brothers were given until 1986 to reach a goal of at least five percent contribution to the Brotherhood. It was assumed that the other five percent would be contributed to the brother's parish. Further, the membership accepted repercussions for not doing so – any first year brother who had not reached that goal was not permitted to renew his annu-

al vows in the community. However, in adopting a significant policy for the use of these funds, the Brotherhood would now pay all expenses for travel and accommodations related to Chapter and Council meetings and, eventually, each brother's first habit would be provided by the community. Given that the community was rapidly outgrowing accommodations with local friends and supporters, this would go a long way toward providing money to use retreat facilities at which the brothers could gather for their biannual meetings. As a further gesture, the Brotherhood as a community took on the tithe, giving away a tithe of its total annual income to missionary and charitable organizations. For perhaps the first time, money management became an important issue for Council and the larger community.

Eventually, the Brotherhood would need to address the issue of financial hardships for brothers who were unable to tithe. Pastoral care necessitated developing a means for dispensation from this requirement. And indeed, for any of the requirements of the Rule, the means and criteria for dispensation would be considered time and time again as the Brotherhood sought to make it their pastoral responsibility to enable brothers to live the Rule. A Tithe Counseling Committee was formed to counsel brothers who were having difficulty. This was the precursor to the Pastoral Care Team instituted by the Brotherhood to deal

with this and other pastoral matters. The Treasurer became the *de facto* official responsible for counseling compliance. Ultimately, the community would see itself as having a responsibility to address financial matters and hardship in ways that were pastorally supportive and sensitive to the anxieties created by the prevailing culture regarding money. Sometimes this was met by individual brothers in the spirit that it was intended. Often, it was met with fear, anger, and frustration. Regardless, the tithe as a standard of giving came to be upheld in the community as the best objective standard for measuring a brother's ability to prioritize, make prudent decisions, and demonstrate fidelity to the vow of poverty.

As noted earlier, the allowance for disposition of the community's money was already provided for in the Customary. But the community was about to receive the first of many significant bequests, this one from the estate of Charlotte Morgan, a woman who admired the work of the Brotherhood. She left a bequest of nearly \$50,000 to the community. The brothers invested it in the Episcopal Church's centralized Trust Fund. Over time, the Brotherhood would establish investment funds and committees to oversee them – quite a long way from the maverick community of the earliest years. The community's stewardship of its funds, in the same way as the individual brother's compliance with the tithe, were considered to be reflec-

tions of the vow of poverty. It was not about anything more than faithfulness to the goals of the order – to love God and others by cultivating one's gifts in service to the church. Over the years, the Brotherhood has wisely used its money to those ends, providing resources to brothers to train in their field of service, and by supporting charitable organizations and institutions carrying out the mandates of the gospel.

Another development during the mid-1980s was the early attempt to establish a Benevolence Fund for the support of brothers in financial distress. The community recognized that, while established communities in residence at a common house could care for the long-term needs of members, the Brotherhood could not easily provide for members in need. Brothers who became ill or disabled were obviously in need of care – but how could the Brotherhood assist in that care? Funds collected by religious corporations could not be used to benefit individual members. Individual contributions directly to a brother in need could go so far; something more organized was needed.

Attempts were made as early as 1982 to establish such a fund. Resources, however, were limited and attempts at building a feasible fund from individual contributions alone were quickly frustrated. Chapter tasked Brother Stephen with investigating the community's options. Given his work in banking, he was an ideal choice to help navigate the complicated re-

quirements and laws governing how such a fund could be established and used. It took a decade, but the Brotherhood finally created the BSG Benevolent Trust, an entity separate from the Brotherhood as far its corporate standing was concerned, and whose managing board was elected independently of the Brotherhood. It became operative in 1992. In order for the Trust to reach a point at which it might be of significant help, money is not drawn from the principal of the fund, but from interest. It was also decided that until the fund reached a certain capacity, no grants would be made. This model was also about good stewardship and demonstrated a suitable understanding of the vow of poverty.

The Customary was modified to require brothers to contribute one half of one percent of their annual income to the Trust to benefit brothers in need. The Trust is an inspiring example of the Brotherhood's dedication in caring for its members. While it took over a decade to build its principal, in 2006 the Benevolent Trust became available as a resource for brothers in financial need. ✂

## *The Chapter of Faults*

**I**N 1984, THERE OCCURRED AN EVENT IN THE LIFE of the community that should not have been entirely surprising. It unfolded at Stony Point, a retreat center in New York state, where the brothers had gathered not just for annual Chapter but also for the celebration of the fifteenth anniversary of the founding of the community. Chapter was held on the weekend of Holy Cross Day, September 14. This Chapter meeting would come to be known as the Chapter of Faults.

The evening before the Chapter meeting the brothers gathered in the lounge of the retreat center residence to celebrate the anniversary with a festive reception. In attendance was Father Pike, the first Chaplain of the Brotherhood, who celebrated the Holy Eucharist and preached a dialogue sermon with Brother Richard Thomas. While gathered in the common room for fellowship, Brother John stood and asked if

he could make an announcement. All present assumed he would deliver a tribute to Richard Thomas, full of his usual flowery and idiosyncratic language. But that was not his purpose, as became clear in very short order. He read instead that he had decided that the time had come for Richard Thomas to retire. This was the opening salvo of what would turn out to be a long night's battle that would continue on to the dawn's early light the next day.

No one really knows what prompted John to try and force Richard Thomas out as Superior General at this particular time. His motives, aside perhaps from his own ambition, were never particularly clear. In his announcement, which took the form of reading a manifesto, he expressed a litany of reasons why the community needed to make the change. One particularly notable issue he had was with the education program, which, as he saw it, required a doctoral degree or seminary education to navigate. So upset was he with the current direction of the community that, for him, the only remedy was for Richard to step down. Further, John had not only decided it was time for Richard to retire but that he should take over as the new Superior General. John had even anticipated naming Richard as Superior Emeritus as a token to soften the blow. While he and Richard had managed to develop a reasonably good working relationship with one



another – no doubt aided by the distance between New York and Washington, D.C. – and while between them they had brought the community to a new level of sustainability for the future, there was no mistake as to John's intention. He announced his decision as if it were so logical and so obvious a choice that it should simply be accepted and moved upon immediately. The response to his audacity in making such a move was exacerbated by the fact that he did so in a very public way and in front of an honored guest, at a reception rather than in the context of the Chapter meeting scheduled for the next day. John finished his manifesto, and strode from the room. The community was dumbfounded. Richard was devastated.

What happened next could quite easily be described as a storm. Richard, in a fury, excused himself from the reception and went to his room down the hall at the far end of the building. He sat there on the edge of his bed in a maelstrom of anger, fear, and uncertainty. He wept. He felt betrayed as he struggled to understand how, in the swirl of changes and growth in the community during the past few years, he had failed to recognize that one of his own brothers wanted to forcibly tear the community from his hands. The community he founded and nurtured and strove for, even when it was a community of one who kept the vision alive, was about to be wrestled from

him. Was he not faithful? Did he not love and care for them? Was it not his vision that called them together and bound them in love and service as brothers? Was he really, now, unnecessary to the community's future? He sat and contemplated these things, his hands trembling, barely steadied by a steady stream of cigarettes.

After some time, there was a knock at Richard's door. One of the brothers had come to see if he was alright. He invited him in. In that room, Richard began to pour out his fear and anger. The brother had brought him a glass of wine. It soothed his nerves. Another knock. He opened it to another brother who came to offer his concern and assure him of his fidelity. Another knock. Another brother and another glass of wine. Throughout the night, they came. They listened, they shared their fear and anger and frustration. They occasionally found a way to laugh. They confessed their affection and fidelity to their Founder. Richard confesses that, during that night, he drew great strength from his brothers and never felt so proud of the community that had grown around him.

At some point during the night, Richard dismissed the last remaining brothers. He sat at the desk, a bit unsteady from the outpouring of emotion and perhaps the wine, and he began to write. He wrung

himself out on that paper looking back at fifteen years of history and struggle, of the obstacles that he and they had overcome together. He wrote of his joys, of his pride, and of his absolute conviction that no brother should or would ever come between him and his care and faithfulness toward the community that he had brought into being. And then he slept.

The next morning, the brothers gathered for Morning Prayer. The night before, Richard had indicated that he might not be there. He wanted to leave the grounds and cancel Chapter. As the hour came for prayer, and still Richard did not appear, the brothers began to pray the office and when Richard arrived a few moments later, he was utterly indignant that the brothers had started without him. He again left the room in anger and Brother Tobias Stanislas followed him. Richard turned and gave him his crozier and said, "Take this with you into the Chapter." Richard then stormed off down the hall to his room. Tobias Stanislas went back to prayer. The air was heavy with emotion and foreboding.

After the Office ended, the brothers rose and followed Tobias, carrying Richard's simple wood crozier, across the grounds to the building in which the Chapter was to be called to order. After an awkward silence, Richard made his entrance into the room and

stood before them. He then gave what he calls “the most heart-wrenching speech I’ve ever given in my life.” He laid it all out before them, his history and fidelity, his love and support, his anger and sense of betrayal. He shamed no one, faulted no one, but simply and eloquently demonstrated a depth of love and compassion for the community that no one had seen from him before. No one in the position to do so other than John had seriously considered replacing Richard. And now, having witnessed this outpouring from their Founder, the possibility was surely off the table, even if indeed it had remotely been entertained by anyone else.

There was no denying Richard’s honored place and the brothers’ trust in his ability to guide them into the future. But there was still John, sitting in stony silence, and an awkwardness and tension that settled upon everyone. Brothers rose to challenge John, responding to the allegations in his manifesto, and a great deal of fervent discussion ensued. Brother Earl – then a postulant, and one of the first African-American members of the community – stood up to leave the room because the tension was more than he could bear. Richard ordered him to sit, to which the good brother replied, “My word, I have never seen white people get so angry!” His humor softened the mood a bit. But resolution was ultimately brought by Tobias.

Tobias was a relative newcomer to the community, being in his second year of vows, and had already become very active in the life of the Brotherhood. He was the custodian of the education program that John had found so objectionable. As Richard was going around the room, highlighting the contributions the various brothers had made to the life of the community, he came to Tobias. Tobias motioned to Richard to pause, stood from his chair and quietly walked over and prostrated himself before John, kissing his feet. "John," Tobias said, "my brother, forgive me." It was, as Tobias later admitted, in part a Machiavellian move; or perhaps it would be better to say, a Franciscan move: a dramatic gesture suited to the moment. Tobias had undermined John's power by acknowledging it and asking for forgiveness. John could do no more. He rose and raised Tobias to his feet and embraced him. It was the first step in a moment of moving forward, a stepping into the breach that could have destroyed the Gregorian family. John's attempted coup was over. And the Brotherhood got back to business.

The Chapter meeting was eventful. On the agenda was another major change in the life of the community: the adoption of the Book of Common Prayer as the primary office book for the community's devotional life. Religious communities, generally, are

very attached to the shape of their prayer lives. Complicating this factor for the brothers was the nature of a scattered community – the *Monastic Breviary* was in large measure a monastic tool. For some of the brothers, the *Breviary* represented an historic connection with the monastic tradition. To pray the office from it gave many of them a sense of continuity with the past and a sense of otherness in their lives as religious that made them distinct from the church even while still committed to it. Yet it was a very complex tool to use on one's own, and it became apparent that many bad habits had developed as brothers wrestled with its intricacies on their own.

It was not an easy discussion. However, Richard was convinced that the community would see the wisdom in making the change, using a form of prayer that would be common not only to the community but with the wider church. He was so convinced of the need for this change that Council had authorized the purchase of a copy of the Book of Common Prayer for each member of the community, and had placed dedicatory bookplates in each copy. In the reception area at Stony Point, the brothers had set up a chapel and erected a makeshift altar using the only furniture available: a baby crib topped with a bedboard, draped in linens and a frontal from the community's "Cathedral in a Case," materials salvaged from the Vestment Ex-

change under Brother Christian's jurisdiction. They affectionately named it the "Chapel of the Nativity." Beneath the altar, in boxes, were the inscribed prayer books ready to give out once the measure was adopted.

The resolution taken up for consideration by Chapter was telling in its choice of words and made the case convincingly. It involved the first change in the Rule for some time:

*Whereas, The Book of Common Prayer is the authorized form of prayer in the Episcopal Church, and this community is a portion and member of that Church; and*

*Whereas, It is our responsibility to participate in that unity as fully as possible, not setting ourselves apart from the Church as the Pharisees did: who in an effort to do more than was required of them, in the end did less; and*

*Whereas, It is inappropriate for us to make use of a privately produced and unauthorized book as the main source of our worship and prayer, especially considering the fact that the Church provides, in the Book of Common Prayer, an office book of great flexibility and variety; and considering the fact that the Monastic Breviary is designed for the use of monastics normally saying the office in choir, which is foreign to our usage and*

*apostolic calling to be active in the world and in parochial service, and that the parishes we serve use the Book of Common Prayer as their regular source of worship; and*

*Whereas, It is poor stewardship for us to expend from three to four times as much money for a book other than the Book of Common Prayer, and to suffer the constraints of availability contingent upon its use; and*

*Whereas, It must always be kept in mind that the office is the communal prayer of the Brotherhood and of the Church, and not a form of private devotion (many forms of which are available for the use of individual brothers, and are recommended to them as aids to spiritual growth, and indeed required in the form of daily meditation under the section of the Rule, Of Personal Devotion), and that we should at all times and in all places join in the common prayer both of the Brotherhood and the Church; therefore be it*

*Resolved, That following the example of Saint Francis, whose Rule required only that the brothers pray the office "according to the usage of the Church," that the second section of the Rule, Of Common Worship, be amended to read as follows:*



*"It is the obligation of each brother to pray the offices on a daily basis, and the offices of the Book of Common Prayer are to be used for this purpose. Other offices may be substituted only when a brother is taking part in a communal or public service (e.g.: when on retreat at a religious house using another form of office). Dispensation from saying the noonday office may be granted by the Superior General when it is impractical by virtue of a brother's work."*

*Be it further Resolved, That the Superior General appoint an ad hoc committee to draw up standard guidelines for praying the offices of the Book of Common Prayer in choir; and that this change in the Rule is to become effective with Compline on the day of its adoption.*

There was a great deal of discussion on the issue. For some, it was obviously emotionally charged. For others, the choice of the Book of Common Prayer was an obvious one. In the end, the resolution passed with no votes against and two abstentions. The Prayer Book became the required office book for the Brotherhood. It has remained so since.

Another major issue taken up for a final vote, as mentioned earlier, was the adoption of the tithe as a

follow-up to the changes in 1983. The move to require the tithe by 1986 was approved. It was another charged issue through which the community successfully navigated its way. And as with the adoption of the BCP, it cemented another defining characteristic of the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory's self-understanding. Additionally, as an illustration of the still tenuous relationship between Council and Chapter, a motion was made to remove the Superior General's appointed Council members. It was soundly defeated. And so, near the end of a relatively difficult Chapter meeting, the brothers were tired but relieved that business was done. They had challenged themselves and emerged with a renewed sense of identity and responsibility.

Another development in the Brotherhood's changing self-identity came to the fore in 1986. During the year, the Brotherhood had its first application from a priest, Edward Riley, for membership in the community. For the first time, a group of lay brothers had to contend with how to address a presbyter in the community. For too long in the history of religious orders communities had been bifurcated into two classes: lay brothers and priestly brothers. Needless to say, in many of these communities those of the priestly order were often granted special privileges, or received automatic deference in decision-making and leadership. The Gregorians were determined that this paradigm

was not going to be the same for them. All brothers, regardless of ordained status, were to be called “brother” and no special privileges or deference were going to be granted to brothers who were ordained. It was a move that significantly demonstrated the brothers’ determination to honor the Baptismal Covenant.

The decision was made all the easier due to the personality of the first priest-brother. When asked, at his interview, why he wanted to be part of a community that was at the time composed entirely of lay men, and one that did not live in a central domicile, he said, “When I was a priest in the Convocation of Churches in Europe, Ed Browning [then the bishop-in-charge of the Convocation, later the Presiding Bishop] called us all together twice a year for fellowship, and it was great. When I later went to serve in Chicago, I thought, ‘Now at last I’ll be able to count on the continued fellowship of all the clergy being close together.’ Boy, was I wrong. I see the same reality with the Brotherhood.” Edward had understood something about BSG that was core to its charism, but which had never been quite so well expressed.

The Brotherhood was growing, evolving, and becoming more itself in the process. But another major challenge to the community’s self-identity was soon to present itself. ✂



## *The Brothers Shall Be Mothers*

*Let those who  
wish to live  
religiously...be  
three brothers  
or four at  
most. Let two  
of them be  
mothers and  
have two sons,  
or at least one.*

*— Saint  
Francis of  
Assisi*

**I**N THE MID 1980S, THE ISSUE OF WOMEN'S ORDINATION could have threatened to undermine the community. While women had begun to be ordained to the priesthood in the 1970s, it took until 1986 for the election of Bishop Barbara Harris to take women's ministry to the next level. Inside the community, brothers struggled along with the rest of the church with women's ordination. There were some who were opposed at first, seeing it as an innovation that was contrary to the church's traditional teaching. Many of them rethought their opposition, both on theological grounds and in terms of their vow of obedience to the doctrine and discipline of the Episcopal Church. Women's ordination was a part of the church and, hence, a part of the brother's commitment to the church's teaching. By the time of Bishop Harris's consecration, however, a few brothers had already departed the Episcopal Church and the Brotherhood in

opposition to women's ordination. Those who remained were supportive of women's opportunities for ministry.

The words from the Rule of Saint Francis at the head of this chapter took on a very personal meaning for the brothers as they began in earnest to contemplate giving birth to a new community: one for women modeled on their own. Interest in the development of a women's order adapted to the contemporary ethos of the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory began as early as 1979. While the issue had come up for discussion, and at one point in the early 1980s Brother Richard Thomas thought it was time to proceed and admit the first sister, many brothers did not believe the community was ready, and he deferred to their discernment. But by the late 1980s it was clear to the majority that it was time to reconsider the possibility of expanding the Gregorian Way in a women's community.

Richard Thomas expressed his desire to formally begin exploring a women's order in his "State of the Brotherhood" address in 1986. In his address to the community, he charged the brothers to see themselves as bridge builders (Matthew 10:40-42); as proclaimers (Matthew 10:27); as healers (Matthew 10:1,8); and as harvesters (Matthew 9:35-38). It was also the first time Richard had exhorted the brothers to see themselves as dangerous disciples, a charge to embrace their wit-

ness as the dangerous conscience of the church. These were no accidental roles. Richard has often seen the responsibility of religious as holding the church accountable to their Baptismal Covenant. This meant, particularly, speaking out against the church's tendency to diminish the ministry of the laity, often at that time based on gender or sexual identity, by living in witness to God's calling of all people to a sanctified life. For some of the brothers, their experiences as gay men in the church emboldened them in their desire to see apostolic ministry made accessible to any who were called by God.

Finding a way to extend the Brotherhood's charism to women was a sensitive matter. A committee was founded to look at the possibilities, and to develop guidelines for the formation of a women's community. In March 1987, the first "suggested guidelines for the foundation of a Companion Sisterhood of Saint Gregory" were submitted to Chapter for consideration. The guidelines were well thought out and the implications of how the brothers and sisters would work together were thoroughly explored. There was great enthusiasm for the formation of the Sisterhood. But the practical realities of organizational structure, not to mention the social dynamics of becoming – for a time – a twin set of communities proved to be vastly more complicated in reality than on paper. Since the

Brotherhood does not live in a communal house, their opportunities to gather come only during Convocations twice a year. The possibility of having another group, one comprised entirely of women, gathering with them during these times of refreshment and renewal took some getting used to.

The committee determined early on in the creation of the guidelines that the most effective way of dealing with the development of a new community was to use the mechanisms that were already in place and proving to be effective. The Brotherhood's organizational structure had been refined over a period of nearly twenty years. There was no need to create something new from whole cloth. Rather the sisters would be under obedience to the same Rule, Constitution, and Customary, and would be accountable to the same pastoral officials governing the community at that time. The Brotherhood would interview and admit sisters in the same way as brothers, use the same formation program, and hold the sisters accountable in the same ways.

One important feature in the guidelines provided for the eventual independence of the sisters. Although a few favored the idea of evolving into a joint community of men and women, the guidelines clearly called for the formation of an independent community for women. This involved setting up a "dowry" from the tithes of the sisters to be presented to them



upon their independence. The brothers also began by allowing the new sisters to be present during the Brotherhood Chapter but without voice or vote, and by giving them a representative role when prospective sisters were interviewed. Professed sisters were to be polled on the profession of any sister. These guidelines would be adapted over time in accordance with continued experience. But in all ways, the sisters were essentially treated the same as members of the Brotherhood until such time as they would have the requisite six full members required to secure recognition by the House of Bishops Committee on Religious Life. Further, the Brotherhood gave itself and the nascent community twelve years to achieve autonomy.

One would tend to believe that with the mechanisms of governance, authority, and accountability hammered out over twenty years that the creation of a Companion Sisterhood would have been able to avoid some of the same pitfalls that beset the early Brotherhood. This was not the case. The membership among the sisters began with fluctuation and continued so for a good many years.

The first prospective sister was interviewed in 1988. The first woman to make her profession to the Rule, Sister Clare, did so in 1989. As part of the guidelines, no sister would be permitted to make life profession until the community achieved independence. Some of the sisters, like Clare, would go through

many more years in annual vows than any brother had up to that time. She would go on to become the first Superior General of the Sisterhood when they achieved autonomy.

Many of the brothers and prospective sisters suffered, and in some cases caused, confusion about the nature of the community being created. There were those on both sides who hoped that the Brotherhood's ultimate solution and choice would be to remain a co-ed community, in spite of this having been excluded from the intended aim of founding an independent women's order. Some of the sisters in the first years seemed more comfortable with the brothers than with each other. Some brothers became very attached to the idea that the sisters would ultimately remain a part of the Brotherhood for the indefinite future. These attitudes, and of course the brothers' and sisters' mutual affection for each other, created some unrealistic expectations for a time. That confusion, and resulting hurt feelings, increased as the sisters became more determined in developing their own vision and as the time for independence grew near.

It came to the forefront the year that the sisters petitioned the Brotherhood for autonomy. A number of brothers, and indeed some of the sisters, were upset at the prospect of separating. How this should have come to be, no one is really certain. Along the way, it

seems that the reason for creating the Sisterhood in the first place had been lost on some of the brothers who had entered the community after the process had begun.

There was also some confusion in the wider church. Knowing that the Brotherhood had married members, some mistakenly thought that the sisters were spouses of the brothers; which was actually only partially true in one case – Clare's husband Christopher entered the community but did not remain after the novitiate.

In the meanwhile, during the Companion Sisterhood's initial years, the brothers and sisters managed to grow in number and in experience and in the process address deeper mutual concerns of formation and common life during their gatherings for Chapter and Convocation. They continued to adapt the guidelines for the Sisterhood's presence and growth, and Richard as Superior General and mentor shared with them his wisdom and experience of the early years of the Brotherhood's life, in the hope that the growing community could avoid some of the same pitfalls he encountered. Early members of the Companion Sisterhood were Clare, Elizabeth Mary, Lillian Marie, Susanna Bede and Helen Bernice – this last petitioned for admission to the community when she was seventy-three years of age.

So it came to be that the brothers were, for a time, in the spirit of Saint Francis, mothers. They acted as mentors to the women in formation, guiding the sisters through their formative years. Many developed very close spiritual relationships with one another. The sisters, for their part, endured nearly as many “false starts” as the brothers had in their early years. Yet while it would take some time, the vision of an order for women under the patronage of Saint Gregory was well underway. The brothers were keenly aware of their new responsibility. ✠

## *Brothers of the Above*

**I**N JUNE 1988, AFTER A LONG ILLNESS, BROTHER John died at the age of seventy-five. He was, at the time, the oldest member of the Brotherhood. While his death was not unexpected, it still significantly affected the brothers. John's contribution to the life of the Brotherhood can never be overstated. During his life in the community he had served as the Assistant Superior, the Provincial of Province Three, the Editor of *The Servant*, and had founded the Brotherhood Vestment Exchange. While John had stepped down from active administrative duties to the community in 1984, he remained active in ministry in his parish in Rockville, Maryland, and throughout the Diocese of Washington, even when health considerations required him to cart an oxygen tank around. John was also responsible for pressing for the provincial model of governance that would help make the community sustainable as it grew beyond a handful of members, and he wrote the first Constitution and Cus-

tomal for the community. He played a pivotal role in calling the community to embrace the vows of poverty and chastity, and even in the midst of some of the more difficult times, John was respected by his brothers for his commitment to their life together and for his faithful ministry. John was in his twelfth year of profession the year he died of congestive heart failure after a long battle with lung cancer.

This was the first time in the life of the Brotherhood that a death occurred among the brothers. The reality of being a scattered community was keenly felt, but a number of the brothers were able to attend the funeral at John's parish, to bid farewell to their brother. Condolences poured in from many in the church, from religious orders, bishops, friends and companions of the Brotherhood, as well as an impressive array of tributes from the many political leaders John had served in his secular employment, including three presidents. One religious sent a deeply comforting note which read, "You are never fully a religious community until you have a brother in heaven praying for you." It was an unexpected threshold, and one in which this spiritual truth gave the brothers great comfort.

And then, suddenly and unexpectedly, in October of that same year, another brother passed into the heavenly choir. Brother William Bunting was much

loved by his brothers and died in his seventh year of profession at the age of fifty-seven. William's death was completely unanticipated and caught the brothers barely out of mourning the loss of John. William died as a result of an acute infection brought on by accidental aspiration pneumonia; he had been unconscious at his home for two days before his landlord found him, greatly weakened, and in critical condition. He never fully regained consciousness. Several of the brothers sat with him in the hospital, comforting him by reading the Daily Office as he passed from this choir to the next.

William had been actively engaged in ministry for many years at Saint Andrew's in the Bronx. For more than forty years, he was a Lay Reader and preacher, a Christian educator, and later exercised his ministry as a brother at the parish. During his life in community, William was Provincial of Province Two, a member of the Education Committee, and a member of Council. He was an avid writer and undertook pastoral correspondence with many over the years, including his detailed travelogues that he shared with the brothers and homebound members of Saint Andrew's parish, and which earned him the nickname "Brother Geographicus." The brothers loved this kind and gentle man deeply. He was a loving soul with a streak of mischief and playfulness.

The loss of two brothers in a year was a sobering experience for the community. It reminded them of the frailty of life and of the reality of the community's ability, or lack of it, to handle certain crises in an individual brother's life in the absence of a common domicile. It brought home the implications of the scattered nature of the community and reminded the brothers of the need to develop new ways of looking out for one another's welfare while living apart. The community's ability to respond in crisis would be greatly improved in the advent of the electronic age, but in the late 1980s, the need to communicate more frequently was deeply appreciated.

The model of governance used by the Brotherhood was, again, beginning to show cracks. When the community was small, Brother Richard Thomas had the ability to monitor each individual brother. But as the community grew beyond family size, it was becoming apparent that one man alone could not bear sole pastoral responsibility for every member. At around this time, the brothers began to let Richard Thomas know when they would be away or out of contact for a period of time. Likened at times to the monastic tradition of asking permission to leave the grounds, it was one small way that Richard would be alert when a member of the community went silent. The need for burial instructions and wills for each member was reas-



serted as essential. Richard kept and still keeps such files for every member of the community, recognizing the pastoral responsibility to care for one another in death. The brothers continue to understand that the proper stewardship of one's final arrangements is a Christian responsibility and a strong symbol of one's readiness for death even while in the midst of life.

The Brotherhood, from this point forward, would be no stranger to death. In 1993, Brother Bernard Fessenden died of complications resulting from AIDS, the first of the brothers to die from a disease that had ravaged the globe for nearly ten years. Brother John Peter Clark followed in 1994. Bernard died at the age of forty-six and was in his eighth year of profession. He left behind a partner of sixteen years. He was a registered nurse and much beloved in the community. Members of the Brotherhood would later open a residential care facility for people with HIV/AIDS named for him. He was buried in his habit in a simple pine box, and many brothers went to Massachusetts and held an all night psalm vigil for their departed brother before the funeral.

John Peter was Bishop's Verger for many years at the Cathedral Church of Saint John the Divine in New York City. He was forty-three years old when he died, in the twelfth year of his profession. He worked for the Department of Welfare in New York. Born in Harlem

and raised by an Episcopal foster family, he dedicated most of his adult life to service in the church, belonging to several national and diocesan organizations, including the Union of Black Episcopalians. He was a graduate of the diocesan Institute of Theology and loved to preach. This was in spite of hearing loss and a speech impediment that might have made some folks choose a different path for themselves.

The scourge of HIV/AIDS had not only affected the brothers in the deaths of Bernard and John Peter. Many of the brothers during this time were actively involved in ministering to the community of the dying throughout the 1980s and 1990s. While the Episcopal Church was devastated at the loss of so many, the Brotherhood suffered the same fate, as friends, loved ones, brothers, and Companions suffered and died from the disease. They ministered quietly, taking hope and comfort in the Scriptures. They mourned, railed in anger, and held to faith in God to give them peace. Above all, they held to faith in the resurrection of the dead. But the sense of powerlessness in the face of AIDS took a toll on the brothers, reflecting itself in their writings at the time. "What more could we have done?" "Why wasn't I with him when he died?" "He died before I could say goodbye."

In the midst of death, the brothers were nurses, chaplains, caregivers. They ministered to those with

survivor grief and sometimes suffered from it themselves. Richard was often appointed executor to the estates of departed brothers. The brothers attended funerals and held memorial liturgies at Convocations. In all of this, they never ceased in their other ministries to their parishes, their communities, and to each other. Largely, during this period of time, the Brotherhood entered its adulthood and came of age. The deaths of the first brothers in the community solidified the need for deeper pastoral care of members scattered throughout the country. And it knit the brothers together in a much more deliberate and deeply felt community bond. The loss of John, William, Bernard, and John Peter emphasized their dependence upon one another – scattered as they might be in the world – while they served God and ministered to the church. Their bonds of affection and the need to minister to one another were tested and strengthened and, in the end, the Brotherhood emerged with a seriousness and a strengthened understanding of community. Not surprisingly, it had little to do with geographical proximity. ✠



## *Let None Be Lost*

**T**HE CLOSING DECADE OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY saw the Brotherhood develop into a robust community. The brothers and sisters in the order began to attend to the deeper needs of community – pastoral care, formation, and discipline. The community was now scattered across the continental United States with several provinces established from the Northeast to the Midwest and several members in the western and the southern regions of the country. Hundreds of inquiries poured in every year from prospective members of both the Brotherhood and the Companion Sisterhood.

In 1992 Brother Ronald Augustine Fox had taken the reins as Director of Vocations. His first task was to begin to refine the application process in order to cut through the sheer volume of inquiries. He adopted a “knock three times” procedure reminiscent of the Be-

nedictine monasteries who tested the commitment of prospective applicants. It was very helpful both for the community and for those seeking direction in their lives. By the time applicants were interviewed by Council, the community could be more assured of their patience and willingness to meet the demands of religious life. In 1994, the community's custom of admitting new members into the postulancy twice a year was changed. Beginning that year, all transitions in the life-stages of formation in the community would take place at the Annual Convocation. Postulancy was increased to a minimum of one year, the novitiate to two. Much of the impetus behind this was to solidify Annual Convocation as the primary event in the life of the gathered community, and to provide for a much more intentional formation and education program for the members. Postulants were more thoroughly tested, and aspirants to the community were committed to waiting if there were a potentially longer period between their acceptance and their reception into the community. Both were clearly positive developments.

The winter gathering of the brothers, on the other hand, became focused around a formal retreat. It was not mandatory, but optional. There would be no liturgies for professions or clothing of novices. Instead, it would be a dedicated time for spiritual renewal. Pro-

grams would be offered that fulfilled brothers' needs for ministry development and prayer, and the beginnings of finding expression for an emerging understanding of the depth and distinctiveness of Gregorian spirituality.

By the mid 1990s, the community was holding two nearly week-long gatherings each year, one optional and the other mandatory. This was quite a change from the gatherings in the 1970s, when there were so few brothers they could be housed locally with Brother Richard Thomas or Brother John and friends from the local parishes. Chapter meetings in these days took place locally, for example at Saint Bartholomew's Church, White Plains, or at John's parish in Rockville, Maryland. By the mid 1980s, however, the community had grown to a size that could no longer easily be accommodated, and retreat centers came to be the venue of choice. At first the gathering itself was essentially a weekend affair. Shortly, however, a number of the brothers decided that they wanted more time for retreat and reflection prior to the Chapter meeting, and at their own expense came to the retreat center a few days prior to the official gathering. Their experience showed the value of such time for reflection to the whole community, and with the adoption of the tithe standard the community came to be able

to afford housing all of its members for these times of refreshment and reflection.

One of the most celebratory of these gatherings was in 1994, the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory and the Jubilee year of Brother Richard's profession of vows. A huge celebration was planned for Annual Convocation at Graymoor, the home of the Roman Catholic Franciscan Friars of the Atonement, in Garrison, New York. One of the events was a re-enactment of the original Bible Vigil that was used on Holy Cross Day 1969. And in a poignant and powerful liturgy the next afternoon, Richard did what he had not done in twenty-five years – he made his life profession to the same Rule that bound the rest of the Gregorian family together in love and service.

Since the first renewal of his vows in 1970, Richard had not formally made his profession again. By the twenty-fifth anniversary, the Rule had undergone many major revisions, most notably in 1978 and 1988. Reflecting on that afternoon, Richard says, "I thought back to Sister Margaret Mary sitting with me in the parlor with the grate between us and sharing the Spirit we both knew was doing something we could not really name."

In the liturgy, presided over by Bishop Visitor Walter Dennis, the Superior General and Founder of



the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory made his life profession of vows. While it was really only symbolic – after all he had in fact always followed the same Rule as every other member and indeed was responsible for the changes to it as much as anyone – it was a moment that was filled with a sense of joy and solidarity. Some of the brothers wept openly. Richard continues,

*The Bible Vigil being re-enacted brought back the first night in many ways. The words we used were still powerful all those many years later. I remember the nuns sitting there witnessing this “thing” which none of us had any idea would be so successful. Being stripped of my ring, cross, and staff – and reciting the very words that all the brothers had spoken to me over the years was the most powerful part of the liturgy. Having Bishop Dennis receive those vows and then give me my cross, ring, and staff was very humbling – me – the instrument of God in this amazing community finally making my life vows.*

It was another coming of age for the Brotherhood.

These middle years of the 1990s also saw another small wave of departures from the community. This time, it was not in response to internal dissent or to developments in the larger church. It was largely a result

of Council's failure to act on red flags in prospective applicants and the long-lasting results of a less than well-structured formation process. The former was certainly a product of wanting to believe the best about prospective applicants; the latter the result of not yet having evolved truly distinctive formation materials that could be brought to bear on the Gregorian experience. The brothers began to come to terms with important distinctions in their desire to raise up servants for the church – it was not so much a matter of discerning whether applicants were called to religious life, but whether they were called to the particular way of religious life as practiced by the Brotherhood.

As the community grew and changed, some older members began to feel as though they were walking in a foreign land. Some newer members discovered that the community was not “monastic” enough to suit their needs – or their dreams. Either way, the community's discernment and formation process was not communicating well enough the fundamental challenges of an apostolic community, most particularly in how it differed from life in a monastery. It was not effectively articulating the distinction between traditional religious life and the Gregorian understanding and expression of it. There was no process for adequately dealing with the challenges faced by older members as they confronted changed realities and a community that was rapidly growing beyond the fam-

ily size to which many of them were accustomed, and the new demands that it placed upon them.

Chapter and Council, along with the officials of the community, began to determine new ways of handling discipline and formation and new ways of managing the pastoral care of members. The Provincials were now asked to provide quarterly reports on the well-being of individual members in their provinces to Council. Embertide reports – quarterly correspondence between a brother and the Superior General – were to be sent to the Provincial as well. This was the beginning of a major shift of the burden of pastoral responsibility from Richard alone to the Provincials. A Pastoral Care Team was developed to allow for more direct and intentional care of members who were struggling with issues related to their religious life or the community. After having grown by leaps and bounds over thirty years, the community was now too large and cumbersome for one man, the Superior General, to see to the welfare and pastoral care of every member.

The mentorship model of formation, adopted in 1993, paired each new postulant or novice with a professed brother to guide them through the formation process. Job descriptions for all pastoral and administrative officials were developed to make sure that there was cohesion in both authority and accountability. 1995 saw the largest class of postulants admitted: sev-

en. For the first time, the Education Committee was given the discretion to ask Council to put a cap on new admissions, in order to assure adequate resources – human and practical – for formation and education.

A Constitutional review was called for by Council to address the issue of profession and separation from the community. What should be the community's response to those in vows who requested release from the Brotherhood? The result was a clarification on the justification, requirements, and opportunities for "Modification or termination of observance of the Rule." The terms and conditions for departure, leaves-of-absence, or dispensation from portions of the Rule were part of both a disciplinary response to members who were unwilling to follow the provisions of the Rule, and a pastoral response to those who were unable to follow them. For those who were by virtue of health or circumstance unable to comply with the provisions of the Rule, something was needed to dispense them (temporarily or permanently) from one or more requirements so as to keep them members in good standing and acknowledge their need for care and shepherding during their difficulties. The community was concerned that all brothers should be faithful – to the extent that they were able – to the Rule and the manner of life they had chosen to serve God. The

counterpoint to these pastoral concerns was the means of dismissal for those whose persistent disobedience required something more. The disciplinary articles of the Constitution were clarified in these years, subject to revision and reconsideration, along with procedures that ensured that the most drastic action – dismissal from the community – was only a last resort.

The question of dismissal or withdrawal for those in life vows was a vastly more complicated issue that needed closer investigation. For many religious orders, life profession of vows is compulsory, and until 1996 this was true of the Brotherhood as well. When one takes on the commitment of following the Rule for life, there must be some accountability. A first step was necessary. Up until that time, the Brotherhood required members to make life vows by their ninth year in annual vows or depart the order. In 1996, the Brotherhood rethought this requirement. Life vows, it was determined, should be a free offering – neither coerced nor required. Council brought a resolution before Chapter eliminating the requirement of Life Profession. There were some fears involved in the decision. What happened if, one day, the community was overwhelmingly composed of members not vowed for life? What decisions could such a body of members make that those in life vows were bound to

keep? In the end, however, understanding life profession as a free will offering won the day and was adopted by the brothers.

If, then, life profession was no longer required, it would become incumbent upon the community wisely to consider who was ready for such a step and who was not. It would also be necessary for the individual to understand the commitment undertaken in life vows. The Brotherhood began to articulate its understanding that individual brothers were not making vows to a community. They were making vows to God in the presence of a community that they trusted to help them meet the challenges involved in their decision. The responsibilities required on both sides were enormous and the weight of them was deeply felt. But the community was now more determined than ever that brothers who made life profession would not then change their minds and leave. The weight and importance of a life commitment is still becoming more firmly embedded in the community's self-understanding and it is still an issue being addressed by the brothers. In 2008, a reflection on life profession was presented to the community, offering a detailed analysis of life profession in the Brotherhood, for members to reflect upon before making such a decision, and in an effort to minimize the number of

brothers who might decide to depart the order once having made a life commitment to the Rule.

The changes and considerations made by the brothers during this period were helpful and constructive. There began to be better retention of members in the community, fewer needs for disciplinary action, and a deeper understanding of the commitments and sacrifices required by the Gregorian way of life both within the community and by prospective members. The members were proving themselves, once again, to be flexible and adaptive to the needs of the community – both in terms of individuals and their need for support and structure, and in terms of the need of the community to maintain cohesion and accountability. There was one more major development on the horizon that would alter the self-understanding of the community in a beneficial way, a development that – while present in undefined form and understanding from the beginning, and surely operative in the lives of its members – in the Brotherhood's short thirty years of existence had not yet had time fully to cohere. ✂





## *Emergence of the Gregorian Way*

**G**REGORIAN SPIRITUALITY HAD, UNTIL THIS POINT, not been particularly well articulated. Gregorian practice was well defined as regards the common life of the community. However, the members of the order often differed vastly in their individual spiritual practice. One would often hear, "I am more Benedictine in my spirituality," or "That brother is more Celtic in his approach to religious life." Why such language should have been found necessary results from several factors. The community had not yet formulated a coherent philosophy of Gregorian spirituality that was expansive enough to accommodate the variety of individual practice and understanding present among its members. In the Episcopal Church there had not been many writings on the religious life and its accompanying spiritual practices. Writings in the Roman Church, on the other hand, were plentiful and easily accessible. The Brotherhood's formation program had come to be comprised largely of writings from other traditions. As

far as the Gregorians were concerned, there were no writings that adequately addressed their particular experience. There was no real precedent for the “Gregorian Way,” and, as such, there were no materials that spoke directly of the realities they faced as a scattered community. It is not that the community lacked a coherent view of religious life, spiritual practice, or the inherent realities of their redefinition of community. It is simply that they lacked the vocabulary necessary to speak about it in terms that were distinctive from the nearly fourteen hundred years of tradition that preceded them.

The need for an articulated vision of the Gregorian Way began to coalesce around 1997. During the Annual Convocation that summer, Dr. R. William Franklin, a member of the faculty at General Theological Seminary, gave a pivotal talk to the community. In it he drew on the community’s patron, Gregory the Great, to elaborate twenty Gregorian themes on religious life. Given Gregory’s history as a pope who was drawn from monastic life into a life of active service, these themes spoke powerfully to the community and began to provide a framework for the articulation of their vision. Franklin identified these Gregorian themes:

- ◆ Religious life is rooted in and deeply engaged with reality, with what is.

- ◆ Religious dedication is born in a tradition that has been handed down over centuries.
- ◆ Holiness leads to miracles.
- ◆ There are dangers in the use of spiritual gifts.
- ◆ Community life offers a corrective to the misuse of those gifts.
- ◆ Spiritual gifts serve the church and wider society, of which the church is a part.
- ◆ The community's leadership plays a key role in developing holiness.
- ◆ The vowed community reveals and expresses aspects of the kingdom of God.
- ◆ The community welcomes those not part of it to experience that kingdom.
- ◆ The community provides a balanced and moderate spiritual discipline.
- ◆ Conversion of life allows our human talents to grow.
- ◆ Conversion of life humanizes and civilizes our animal instincts: it domesticates us for God's household.
- ◆ The spiritual leader is followed as one who guides to freedom, which is key to conversion.
- ◆ The community nourishes and values the full variety of spiritual gifts.
- ◆ The community emphasizes the importance of learning the tradition of holiness from other persons.
- ◆ The Scripture is at the heart of community life, not merely heard or read, but inwardly digested and

meditated upon.

- ◆ Silence and solitude provide a counterpoint to life in community, and provide space for reflection.
- ◆ Holiness warrants the vowed person's presence and stability in the church and in society.
- ◆ Vowed communities are necessary to the world as schools of holiness.
- ◆ The church has a duty to propagate such communities as the matrix in which the Christian life may be realized by those called to the vowed life.

That religious life was rooted in and engaged with reality was certainly not lost on the Gregorians. It was, after all, their founding ethos. But the community's role in nourishing the gifts of individual members – not only for their own use but for the role those gifts played in the larger church and society – went right back to Brother Richard Thomas's generous vision of apostolic ministry in the founding Rule. The use of one's gifts to help "equip the saints for ministry" in the church and in the world was a powerful spiritual paradigm that assuaged the isolation of each member living alone in the world while exercising their ministry. While there was no disputing the fact of a scattered community, there was an up to that time poorly articulated but yet deeply spiritual justification, not only for the fact that the community was in the

world, but for why it must be so. Again, this was not a new development in Gregorian life but it was a deepening of the spiritual perspective of its members. It was a new vocabulary that allowed clearer articulation of their vision. And it was wholly rooted in Saint Gregory.

Following on the heels of Franklin's talk, the community developed its first formation program written entirely from within the Gregorian framework and by members of the community. In short order, three volumes were released to the entire community and from that point forward to each new member upon entering the community.

The first volume, *Gregorian Foundations*, guided postulants to an understanding of the three vows as interpreted by the Gregorians; used the community mottoes – *Soli Deo Gloria* (To God alone the glory) and *Servus Servorum Dei* (Servant of the Servants of God) – as illustrations of the order's aspirations; and presented an historical survey of traditional religious life which demonstrated the Brotherhood's continuity with and difference from it.

The second volume, *The Skillfulness of Shepherds*, unpacked the Rule of the Brotherhood for first year novices and presented a spiritual reflection for each member to use as a template for finding and articulat-

ing his own understanding and practice of the Rule. Quoted liberally throughout the volume were thoughts and insights from members of the community, past and present, giving the community's own authentic voice to the life and practice of Gregorian spirituality.

The third volume was for second year novices. *Equipping the Saints* focused on ministry development and the pragmatic concerns of brothers as they sought to engage religious life and ministry in the world and in the parish, in balance with home and family life. It was a manual of practical experience and advice, drawing on the example of saints from the Episcopal calendar that spoke to the challenges of balancing work, prayer, family life, community life, ministry, and religious life, outside of any conventual cloister.

The development of these materials helped the Brotherhood move from using hand-me-down or borrowed characterizations of their unique spiritual and practical perspective of contemporary religious life. The phrase "Gregorian Way" came to symbolize their journey in religious life as distinct from the traditional orders that came before them, and valuable in its own right – not just for the present but for the future.

The resistance of many traditional communities towards the new expression of religious life the Brotherhood represented had, by this time, dissipated.

Many acknowledged the model of the Brotherhood as viable for the continuation of religious life into the future. Other communities in the church had arisen following the brothers' model. In fact, several former members of the community went on to form religious communities similar in practice and ethos. The Brotherhood, for its own part, never decried the need for the traditional, cloistered orders, seeing them as necessary for the church and as schools of holiness that point to the importance of prayer and contemplation in the calling of the world to the remembrance of God in all things. But the Brotherhood now stood as an example of a new vision for religious life. And the implications for the vocation of the members of the church was now plainly enshrined in a new Gregorian spirituality – one that spoke of the holiness of ordinary life “in the world” now raised up to extraordinary purpose. ✠





## *Graymoor*

**F**OR MANY YEARS THE BROTHERHOOD AND Companion Sisterhood held Annual Convocation, winter gatherings, interim Council meetings, and Chapter meetings at Graymoor, the retreat center and friary that was home to the (Roman Catholic) Society of the Atonement, in Garrison, New York. The Brotherhood's relationship to the Graymoor community was warm and supportive, indeed, as noted earlier, rather warmer than its relationship with many Episcopal orders. The feelings of affection were mutual: from the first meeting of the Brotherhood at Graymoor in 1987, the Brotherhood's deep sense of affection for its own members-in-community and its exuberant spirit and powerful liturgies were attractive to many of the Graymoor friars. Such was the extent of this mutual recognition of kindred spirits that after a few years of this occasional fellowship the members of both communities decided to adopt a joint spiritual covenant.

The Society of the Atonement had been founded as an Episcopal community; it subsequently went to Rome along with its founder, Father Paul Wattson. The Atonement community was devoted to the hopes of Christian unity, and so was a wonderful candidate for ecumenical engagement with the Brotherhood. For a time, the affection exhibited by the Atonement friars and sisters fulfilled a need in the Brotherhood for the kind of validation and support lacking among Episcopal communities. The Brotherhood spent over ten years meeting at Graymoor and developed a great attachment to the community in residence there.

But along with that validation and support came a great enticement: the temptation to identify the community with a particular residence, even if the Brotherhood was only resident for two weeks out of the year. While this was not part of the community's overall self-understanding, many individual brothers began to refer to the "holy mountain" as a kind of spiritual home. This was only natural. For many, Graymoor represented one of the constants of the Brotherhood's dispersed life. Members of the Atonement community and the Brotherhood became very close. The winter gathering every year almost always coincided with the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, a major focus for the Atonement community, as a week dedicated to the prayer that all Christians may be one. Annually, the

Brotherhood of Saint Gregory joined the Society of the Atonement in liturgies with a unity theme in which both communities participated.

The hopes of greater purpose and Christian unity, while noble, coalesced for a time around the mutual covenant adopted by the two orders. However, two components of the Brotherhood's self-understanding and practice would come into direct conflict with the relationship with Graymoor as it developed over the years.

The first was the issue of common domicile. While the nature of an apostolic community such as the Brotherhood would always remain in tension with the "temptation to the desert" represented by a common house, the community had to keep reminding its members that their authentic religious life was lived "out there" and not in any particular and common "here." The Gregorians could not allow themselves to begin to think of any gathering spot as a more authentic expression of community than existed when they were apart. This came to be summed up in the expression, "A house is not a family." Convocation, while a wonderful opportunity to gather in prayer and fellowship, was no homecoming; least of all when it was attached to a particular place. A common house did not necessarily equal a better or more authentic expression of community.

The second issue was one of obedience. Some of the Graymoor friars had come to feel themselves to be at liberty, for a time, to share in Holy Communion with the Gregorians, attending and participating in the Brotherhood's liturgies. It was an act of dissidence on the part of some in the Atonement community. For a time, both communities were content to turn a blind eye to the reality of ecclesiastical polity, particularly in the Roman Church, that forbade sharing communion. But awareness began to dawn that both were perpetuating an act of disobedience, while both were bound by the vow of obedience. The Brotherhood was in danger of becoming "an occasion to sin" for its friends.

Several brothers recalled the witness of Helen Marie Joyce, when she visited the brothers at a convocation held in Massachusetts. She attended one of the Eucharists but pointedly did not receive communion, remaining in her seat with her eyes tightly shut, and sitting bolt upright. She remained in this posture through the end of the worship and even as the brothers were filing out of the chapel. They were concerned that something was very wrong, and went into the large open parlor opposite the chapel quietly. A few moments later Helen Marie appeared at the screen door, somewhat startled when all the brothers spun their heads around to pin her down with questioning looks.

She laughed gently as she came through the door, and then in her typical quiet voice said, "Oh, my brothers; you don't know how painful it was for me not to be able to share with you in our Lord's Body and Blood. But I hope that my small obedience in this may hasten the day when we can truly share it in unity."

That witness made a powerful impression at the time; and the recollection of it came to mind as the brothers realized the importance of obedience not only for themselves but for their brothers of the Atonement. Clearly it was time to reconsider.

Three further developments coalesced for change. First, the friars of the Society of the Atonement who originally formed the prayer covenant with the Brotherhood, most importantly Father Jack Lewis (at the time of the covenant, Guardian of Graymoor), died or found it necessary to move to the eighth-floor nursing care facility for the elderly friars. Second, a few of the stricter friars began to start making lists of who was breaking the rule against intercommunion. Finally, the Brotherhood began to reconsider the impact of such a long association with a single house. There were practical considerations such as accessibility of the house to our own older members, but the Gregorians had also begun – ironically, at the session on the Gregorian Way led by Dr. Franklin at Graymoor – to reflect on the deeper spiritual realities of their experience in becoming too attached to a single place.

After nearly fifteen years of gatherings at Graymoor, the Brotherhood determined that it was time to find a new facility. They did so with two new lessons learned and incorporated firmly into the Gregorian ethos: a common house does not necessarily make a community, and the Brotherhood, much as it longs to share communion with its Roman brothers and sisters, cannot in good conscience put others in a position of being disobedient to their own vows. This desire that all people should be bound to the commitments and vows they make, whether in religious life, married life, or business life, is a deep component of Gregorian spirituality. It is not enough to be bound by one's own promises. The Gregorian must do everything in his or her power to encourage and support others in living the promises they have made. That includes the Baptismal Covenant.

It is notable that one of the last major events to take place at Graymoor was the liturgy at which the Sisters of Saint Gregory made their life vows, and a new, independent community was inaugurated. It was the end of an era and the beginning of a new one. ❧

## *Independence*

**I**N EARLY 1998 THE GROUNDWORK BEGAN TO BE laid for the independence of the Sisters of Saint Gregory. They had petitioned Council to begin to hold their own Chapter meetings and had made clear after two such meetings that they planned to petition for independence in July 1999. During his State of the Brotherhood address in 1998, Brother Richard Thomas noted change as a hallmark of the Gregorian ethos and spoke of the move towards autonomy. He cautioned the sisters to “be critical... never become complacent... and never think you’ve made it.” However, he was speaking as much to the brothers from his own depth of experience.

By this time, most of the sisters and the brothers were ready for the separation. Resources were strained; the sisters were – like teenagers – anxious to assert themselves; and many of the brothers were longing for a return to the men’s community they had ori-

ginally joined. It was a long birthing process, but the sisters were ready to strike out on their own.

Preparations were made for the official launching of a new community in the Episcopal Church: the Sisters of Saint Gregory. The emerging community now had enough members prepared for life profession to be canonically recognized. The Brotherhood had maintained a "dowry" sufficient for them to establish themselves, file the paperwork for incorporation, and advertise. A festive liturgy was planned for 1999, to be presided over by Bishop Catherine S. Roskam, Suffragan Bishop of New York. The sisters began to elect officers, including a Superior General, from among their ranks. Everything was planned for Annual Convocation 1999. Chapter was asked to approve the sisters' resolution for autonomy; the motion was carried unanimously. And a period of excitement mingled with mourning began in the Gregorian community.

This move to independence sparked another change in the Brotherhood. The Brotherhood was ready to revise its governing documents by incorporating actions of Chapter and Council, and in order to be more in line with actual custom and practice which had evolved since the last major revision. The model and language adopted in the years of Brother John had finally outlived their usefulness.



It was time for the Brotherhood to have a governing body instead of an individual man in the person of Richard Thomas. This was less about his performance as Superior General than it was about paving the way for future governing officials once he was no longer capable of exercising the office either through death or disability. There was also significant concern about the size of the community, the ability of one person to guide it effectively, and the load of pastoral responsibility. In the amended Constitution, Council was changed from a body of advice and consent to one of governance. This was accomplished by making the majority of Council an elected body. Richard's title was changed to "Minister General" and the Provincials were now called "Ministers Provincial" in keeping with the pastoral nature of their offices. The Ministers Provincial were to be elected by their provinces, with the consent of Council. The Minister General retained his own voice and vote on Council, and other officials of the community, aside from the Minister General's two representatives, were to be elected by Chapter or appointed by Council.

These changes were necessary to the future growth of the community, and also reflected a need for the responsibility for the well-being and pastoral care of the growing number of brothers to be distributed among a broader base of officials. They also went

a long way toward alleviating whatever tension remained between the Chapter and Council themselves. Rather than an “inner circle” almost entirely appointed by a single leader, Council became a body jointly elected by Chapter itself and by Council in its representative capacity. Chapter voted on the revisions in 1999 and overwhelmingly approved them. The Brotherhood once again demonstrated its adaptability to realities rather than remaining married to tradition.

The impact of these changes on Richard were bittersweet. He was proud of his community for the choices it had made and for its remarkable growth. And yet he felt, as he put it, “a bit displaced” by the turn of events. The community had stepped up to take responsibility for its own well-being and future. He was happy for that. But his days as the lone person responsible for the shape and direction of the community were gone. He mourned as a father would mourn for his empty nest. While the nest was not empty – far from it – and while he was still held in inalienable honor as Founder, and would continue to serve as Minister General – the foremost pastoral authority – until death or disability, or his own choice to retire, it was still painful to watch the two realities unfold. The Sisters of Saint Gregory were becoming independent, and the brothers were too, in a different way. It would take him some time to adjust.

Fortunately, the Brotherhood had also come into contact with a skilled pastor and mentor who would prove invaluable over the next several years of transition, and in further pilgrimage on the Gregorian Way. ✂



## *Bishops Visitor*

**I**N ANY RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY THE ROLE OF THE Bishop Visitor is important and yet often overlooked. According to the Canons, the Visitor is to monitor the pastoral and administrative life of the community, particularly as the guardian of the community's Constitution. The Visitor is asked to ascertain that the community is healthy, living according to its own rules, and that unresolved pastoral matters within the community are addressed. The Visitor, it is hoped, will advocate for the community when necessary in the wider church, and offer counsel and support.

In 1970, Horace W. B. Donegan, then Bishop of New York, became the first Bishop Visitor of the Brotherhood. He was the first to grant canonical recognition to the new community and provided wonderful guidance to Brother Richard Thomas as he looked to develop the community in ministry. He remained Vis-

itor until his retirement in 1972, at which time his successor Paul Moore, Jr., took over. Bishop Moore would remain the Brotherhood's Visitor for seventeen years.

The role of a Visitor, when properly executed, not only nourishes the spiritual life of a community, but also acts as a pastoral presence for those in charge of its governance. As such, the Visitor is encouraged, though not required, to engage in the life of the community to the greatest extent possible.

Over the years, some Visitors have been very involved in the life of the Gregorian community. Others have maintained close connections but due to the business of the episcopal office could not participate too actively. Moore was one such bishop who, as bishop of a large and populous diocese, was a very busy man. Fortunately for the brothers, the Visitors increased their involvement as the community grew and developed over the years.

Moore's successor, Bishop Richard Grein, had an active interest in the religious life, but due to the number of communities in the diocese, and his desire for some more hands-on work with a few of them, wisely suggested that Bishop Suffragan of New York Walter Dennis – who already had a long-term relationship with the community and familiarity with many of its

members – be appointed Bishop Visitor in 1989. This was mutually agreeable; Dennis had been of great assistance, along with Senior Bishop Suffragan Stuart Wetmore, in the passage of the canonical revisions in 1982. Dennis was a deeply affectionate man who took his pastoral responsibilities to the community very seriously. He enjoyed his active involvement in the life of the community, often coming to spend several days with the brothers at their semi-annual gatherings. He would sit in the common room at Graymoor with Richard, and hold a kind of joint fireside chat. These gatherings were an opportunity for newer members of the community to hear stories about the community's beginnings, their struggles, and to ask questions. It was a time for senior members of the Brotherhood to reminisce and to remember, to look at how far they had come, and to envision what the future might look like, and they were an opportunity to once again marvel at Richard's tenacity in the early years and laugh at the folly of some of the old customs.

Those times when Dennis would preach or celebrate at the altar were very special for the community, still appreciative of the support and validation offered by such moments of recognition even after the need for these had begun to pass. His sermons were always tinged with affection and an appreciation of the vision

that the Brotherhood offered the larger church. He continued to encourage the brothers to see their vocation as an extension of their Baptismal Covenant, and held up the hope that, by their witness, the rest of the church would come to recognize the call of all people to holiness of life. Dennis' retirement in 1998 was a sad moment in the life of the community exceeded only by his death in 2003 – the same year that Bishop Moore died.

In 1998, at the urging of Bishop Dennis and with Bishop Grein's approval, the brothers asked Bishop Suffragan of Long Island Rodney Michel to become the new Visitor. Rodney's love and affection for the community exceeded any hopes that the brothers might have had. During his time as Visitor he took the role of pastor very seriously. As Chair of the House of Bishops Standing Committee on Religious Communities, he began almost immediately to put into place some of the pastoral guidelines that the committee had come to see as so important for Bishops Visitor, for the communities, and for the church. He began to engage in one-on-one conferences with each brother to speak about their experience in the community, to find out if they had any concerns that were not being addressed through the community's own mechanisms. He would arrange these meetings over several gather-



ings until each member of the community had an opportunity to speak about their life in the order.

Michel considered himself a member of the Gregorian family without question, and would often spend the entire week with the brothers, engaging fully in the prayer and worship life. His participation in the Gregorian life offered him a deeper understanding of the community's ethos, and an appreciation of the lives of the individuals that comprise it. But no one can speak to his experience of the community better than he himself can. As he says:

*Each time that I am privileged to gather with the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory I experience what I experienced the first time I met with the Brotherhood gathered – hospitality. When I became Bishop Visitor I was welcomed to the first Convocation with open arms, open hearts and much, much love. Hospitality is a great Christian virtue and the Brothers of Saint Gregory exemplify this in their lives and in their actions. The Brotherhood is an inviting community and...I am fully included in conversations, fellowship and decision making. I have come to know most of the Brothers through private conferences and have the privilege of an awareness of their spiritual journeys, their joys,*

*their sorrows, their pains, and their hopes. That spiritual intimacy deepens the interaction of all of us and I attempt to be transparent enough to make that reciprocal.*

Michel approaches the community with seriousness and deep reflection on what the witness of the lives and ministries of the brothers represents. His presence among the brothers has had a great impact on the spiritual life of the community and has encouraged them constantly to be aware of their role in the larger church. He continues to reflect:

*The worship of the Brotherhood gathered is glorious and filled with praise of the Most High God. I find myself carried to spiritual heights and mystical places when I worship with the brothers and I thank God for all of the worship which we experience together. I stand in awe of so many of the brothers who are so gifted and give glory to God through their apostolate and ministries.*

*These and many more levels and layers of interaction and fellowship help me to understand the ethos of this great and wonderful Christian Community in the Episcopal Church. These are men who have given themselves to God and the mission and ministry of God's Church. The Episcopal Church is richer for their presence and their en-*

*gement in the ongoing life within the larger Church. I have come to know and understand the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory through my interaction and knowledge of those who are the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory. The ancient Christian understanding of lex orandi, lex credendi [as we pray, so we believe] is exemplified in the lives and ministries of the brothers, so – as we see them, so we know them and what the Brotherhood is all about.*

With the support and engagement of the Bishops Visitor, the Brotherhood has been able to learn a great deal, and to minister more effectively, both by making sure that they are accountable to their own processes, and by having the freedom to question themselves as individuals and as a community under the loving and watchful eye of a pastor in the larger church. The Visitors' advocacy in the councils of the church has ensured that the community is allowed to flourish and grow without being impeded by the kinds of politics that led to the canonical issues of the early 1980s. The Visitor is guardian and protector, advocate and friend to the brothers. The Visitors have also provided a wonderful pastoral presence for Richard who, as head of the order, has borne the weight of responsibility for the whole community. ✠



## *Shepherding the Vision*

**B**Y THE YEAR 2000, THERE WERE OVER THIRTY-five men in the Brotherhood in over a dozen states, and thirteen women in the newly independent Sisters of Saint Gregory. Both communities were dealing with the separation in their own ways: the sisters by asserting their difference from their founding community, and the brothers by reconnecting to their roots.

The first part of the new decade saw the brothers address issues of concern fundamental to their practice of religious life. One issue required another change to the governing documents as the brothers sought increasingly pastoral ways of dealing with disciplinary issues in the community. It was a time for the Ministers Provincial to take up a pastoral burden that was previously borne solely by the Minister General and the Pastoral Care Team. Most importantly, Chapter removed punitive language from the articles on discipline, and simplified language that had be-

come cumbersome. The Brotherhood had, by this time, come to the realization that “release from vows” was an issue of moral theology and clarified for themselves exactly what the community itself had the right and authority to say in the matter. Further, the community recognized that dispensation from the requirements of the Rule was not a constitutional matter, but a pastoral one, and the articles on dispensation were moved to the Customary. The articles on “Termination of Membership” either by withdrawal or dismissal were clarified both in terms of procedure as the community came better to understand the root principles involved.

The Brotherhood was also firmly planted in the electronic age. The first BSG website went up in the late 1990s. With the growing Internet, the community was able to present a more accessible public face with documents, photographs, and an electronic edition of *The Servant*, which by this time was going in its print version to just over a thousand readers. Vocations inquiries were as likely to come from the web as from any periodical advertisement. By 2000, all of the members had email access. In the years before every member had electronic communication access, Brothers Thomas Mark Liotta and James Mahoney had created a printed digest of email communications to send to those “unplugged” brothers. This interim solution was no longer necessary.

On another front, the Brotherhood, while having much improved relations with the traditional orders, was still not a part of the Conference of Anglican Religious Orders of the Americas (the successor to the Conference on Religious Life), which had defined itself only to consist of the religious orders that lived a celibate life in community. The Brotherhood, always innovative, began to investigate forming an alternative body for the shared needs and concerns of the many other Christian Communities. In conjunction with them, and with the assistance of the House of Bishops Committee on Religious Life, chaired by Bishop Rodney, the brothers joined in founding the National Association of Episcopal Christian Communities (NÆCC). Its purpose is “sharing and communicating the fruits of the Gospel, realized in community, with the church and with the world.” Unlike the Conference, membership in NÆCC is open to traditional and contemporary orders. By 2008, there were fourteen member communities participating in NÆCC. In addition, joint work had begun with CAROA, as representatives from each body attended meetings of the other, and engaged in common exploration of issues that concern all communities, whether monastic or apostolic.

The Brotherhood was also beginning to recognize the need to remember the past as an aid to facing the challenges of the future. With the graying and death of

some of its most senior members, there was a danger that the historical record of the community's initial years would begin to be lost as memories faded. The brothers appointed a committee to investigate and then establish a procedure for archives. Photos and documents were collected, correspondence and memories gathered. There was discussion of the need for a written history to go beyond what the oral storytelling could provide. This book is the product of those discussions.

Brother Richard Thomas, when he founded the community on Holy Cross Day 1969, did not know where his vision would lead. What it had become was not only surprising to him, it was equally surprising to others. In following his own unique vision for a life of service he had become a pivotal person in the history of religious life. He had weathered uncertainty and the storms of progress; he had survived attempts at taking the community away from his care; he resisted the temptations to change it into something all too familiar that would have surely resulted in the community's demise. And here, his beloved Gregorian family – in all their diversity – was sitting on the front-most edge of the 21st century waiting to see where God would lead them next. ✠



## *Twenty-First Century Brothers*

**O**F COURSE, THERE ARE QUESTIONS ABOUT THE future for the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory; only God knows what may come. While there are certainly hopes and expectations about the direction and shape of the Brotherhood of the future, the only thing of which one can be certain is change. Perhaps never in the history of religious life has a community been so capable of self-reflection and adaptation; of willingness to revisit custom and practice to see if they are still useful to the community's life, and to reform when it is necessary to their vision of love and service. And in all of this, they still aim to be true to their foundational charism and the challenges of both the eternal gospel and the changing world.

In the summer of 2009, the community will gather for their Annual Convocation at Mount Alvernia Retreat Center in Wappingers Falls, New York, just a

month shy of their actual fortieth anniversary on Holy Cross Day. Brother Richard Thomas will have lived nearly forty years in vows. The Brotherhood now has forty-six members, making it the largest community for men in the Episcopal Church. Its membership is scattered from Alaska to Maine, from Florida to California, with members in the Philippines, Australia, and Wales. A good number of the brothers are happily married with children and some with grandchildren, many are partnered for twenty-five years or more. There are even couples within the community who live and serve God and the church together under the Rule.

The membership includes teachers, nurses, doctors, and lawyers. There are bankers, retired brothers, and even those on long-term disability. One brother is a hairdresser, another lives and works among the homeless population whom he serves, and yet another in the same house with the men in recovery from substance abuse who benefit from his devotion and care. A number of the brothers are ordained to the priesthood and the diaconate – and who knows, perhaps one of them, or another brother yet to join the community, is destined for the episcopate. The brothers serve as chaplains, lay readers, preachers, and Eucharistic ministers, and a good number work for the church on the parish, diocesan, or national levels.

Some work in social justice ministries, support agencies, and shelters. There are over one hundred thirty Associates in over thirty states and thirteen different countries. The Gregorian community is a presence throughout the church.

The Brotherhood of Saint Gregory has, in its short life, found new ways to define the cherished values of religious life through experience – the kind of experience born through perseverance, making and addressing mistakes, and dealing with the realities of living the vowed life in the midst of a secular world. It has developed a coherent theology of the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience for our time and place; re-envisioned the possibility of community based not upon geography and proximity, but upon shared values and dedication to a common Rule; and re-imagined the possibilities of vocation within the context of such worldly social realities as work, family, and community relationships. It has sought in all ways to bring the holiness of religious life into the everyday experiences of daily life, and has applied the ethical framework of the Baptismal Covenant as an example for others to follow.

Through the pains of growth and change, and the skepticism of some, through the struggles of the church to address the issues of human sexuality, the members of the Brotherhood have maintained a faith-

fulness to the vision of their founder, Brother Richard Thomas Biernacki. Under his guidance and care the community has not simply grown in numbers, but has emerged with a strength of witness and character that offers hope for the future of religious life in the church.

Not content to simply rest in their blessing, the Brotherhood has made changes in its structure to ensure the future growth and continuity of the Gregorian Way, anticipating that day when the community might grow too large to meet in a single place. The provincial structure has allowed for regional growth and development while maintaining the need for pastoral care, spiritual support and encouragement, and discipline of its members. It has begun the process of developing a permanent record of its history, both for posterity and for future generations of brothers. In recent years, the presence of the Brotherhood and its way of life have begun to make inroads in the American South and the West Coast where it was long absent, in addition to prompting curiosity in Latin America and Southeast Asia about the formation of similar communities in those regions. But many brothers will tell you that it does not matter how many brothers there are – it's not about numbers – and that if God wills it, the community will serve its purpose for as long as God has ordained.

The brothers in the community would likely all attest that the vision of Richard Thomas and their experience in the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory has changed their lives. The creation and maintenance of balance in the religious life lived fully in the world requires a strength and courage, a perseverance and personal responsibility not easily understood by those outside of the community. All of this would be impossible without a deeply engaged life of prayer and a fundamental commitment to the Rule. For all its apparent simplicity, the Rule of the Brotherhood governs more than actions and activities, but also the foundational perspectives required of the brothers – perspectives that not only shape what things the brothers must do, but remind them constantly of why they do them, and who they are: a religious life fully aware, and deeply engaged with reality. The Gregorian life is an active one lived both individually and corporately while upholding the values of mutual interdependence and reliance on God to provide the resources for living.

During the 2008 Annual Convocation, the members of the Brotherhood lined up for their community photo to be taken: a yearly ritual that involves lining up all members in single file according to height, before going out to stand on the steps of the chapel. It was just after Evening Prayer, at which five new postulants had been admitted to the community. Once lined

up, the community stretched the entire length of the chapel, from the west doors to the foot of the high altar. Once everyone was in place to begin the march outside to the front steps of the building, Richard walked to the front of the line to issue an instruction to someone and, upon turning around, caught his first glimpse of the entire community stretching back into the chapel. The vesper light outside the windows conspired with the flickering candlelight in the chapel to create a dim glow. The brothers lined up seemed to stretch back into some great unknown space – perhaps of the past, or the future, or even eternity. Richard let out an audible gasp and tears began to well up in his eyes. “Oh my God,” he said. Nothing more was necessary. ✠





Bible Vigil  
and  
Profession Service  
The Brothers of St. Gregory  
(the Great)

The Monastery of the Visitation  
Riverdale, New York

Sunday

September 14, 1969

7:30 p.m.



BIBLE VIGIL AND PROFESSION SERVICE

THE BROTHERS OF ST. GREGORY  
(THE GREAT)

THE MONASTERY OF THE VISITATION - RIVERDALE, NEW YORK

SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 14, 1969 - 7:30 P.M.

AN OFFERING OF MUSIC

*Impression Gregorienne - Alexandre Guilmant - Richard Biernacki*

*Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring - J.S. Bach - Donald Uhn*

*Meditation from Thais - Massenet Richard Smid*

THE BIBLE VIGIL

*Leader: Let us prepare our hearts and minds to receive the word of God.*

*All Kneel for Silent Prayer*

*Leader: Let us stand for the Gospel of St. John (Reading John 15:1-17)*

*Leader: Let us respond to the word of God: Sing aloud to God our strength, shout for joy to the God of Jacob.*

*All: Look down from heaven and see - take care of this vine and protect what your right hand has planted.*

*Leader: Raise a song, sound the timbrel, the sweet lyre with the harp and organ.*

*All: Look down from heaven and see - take care of this vine and protect what your right hand has planted.*

*Leader: Blow the trumpet at the new moon - at the full moon on our feast day.*

*All: Look down from heaven and see - take care of this vine and protect what your right hand has planted.*

*All Sit for Silent Prayer*

Leader: Let us stand for the Gospel of St. John (Reading John 13: 33-36)

Leader: Let us respond to the word of God

Leader: Serve the Lord with gladness, come before Him singing for joy.

All: Behold how good it is and how pleasant when bretheren dwell as one.

Leader: Know that the Lord is God, He made us, His we are.

All: Behold how good it is and how pleasant when bretheren dwell as one.

Leader: We are his people, the sheep of His pasture.

All: Behold how good it is and how pleasant when bretheren dwell as one.

Leader: Enter His gates with thanksgiving, His courts singing praise.

All: Behold how good it is and how pleasant when bretheren dwell as one.

#### All Sit for Reading

Reader: From Ecclesiasticus-

Now let us praise illustrious men  
Our ancestors in their successive generations  
The Lord has created an abundance of glory  
and displayed His greatness from earliest times.  
Some wielded authority as King,  
and were renowned for their strength  
Others were intelligent advisors,  
and uttered prophetic oracles  
Others directed the people by their advice  
By their understanding of the popular mind.  
And by the wise words of their teaching.  
Others composed musical melodies, and set down ballads,  
All these were honored by their contemporaries,  
and were the glory of their day.

All: Alleluia !  
Praise God in His Temple on earth  
Praise Him in His temple in Heaven  
Praise Him for His mighty achievements  
Praise Him for His transcendent greatness  
Praise Him with blasts of the Trumpet  
Praise Him with Lyre and Harp  
Praise Him with Drums and Dancing  
Praise Him with Strings and Organ  
Praise Him with Clashing Cymbals

Let everything that has breath, praise the Lord !

ALLELUIA !

Song by Anne Pike - This Little Light of Mine.....

Homily: The Rev. Thomas F. Pike, Chaplain

V/ The Lord be with you,

R/ And with your Spirit

Let us Pray:

Collect for the Day,

V/ Come Holy Ghost and fill the hearts of thy faithful people.

R/ And kindle them with the fire of Thy love.

Exhortation: My Brothers, you must seek always to be conformed to the image of Our Lord, Jesus Christ. Living in the world, you are to strive to serve him by prayer, study, and active work for His kingdom. You shall set before yourselves, the example of our Patron, St. Gregory, the Great. You are to faithfully keep the Rule of Life, setting before yourselves these aims:

To make our Blessed Lord known and loved everywhere.  
To promote brotherhood among all men  
To live and exercise your vocation in the spirit of  
St. Gregory, the Great.

Officiant: O God, from whom all good things do come, we pray Thee to defend by Thy protection, thy servants who this day have joined themselves to Thee. Keep them in body and soul and give them grace to persevere in their holy resolutions, that they may attain at length to the holy fellowship of thy blessed saints in glory everlasting, through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.

The Profession of the Vow of Obedience to the Rule:

Will you, Name of Brother, in the presence of God and these your Brothers, promise faithfully to live according to the Rule of Life of the Brothers of St. Gregory for one year ?

Ans: I will.

(Here The Officiant will Bless and Incense the Signed Rules, which each Brother will give to the Officiant at the Promise)

The Blessing of the Cross:

O Gracious Father, who in that ultimate act of love for every man presented thine only Son to agony and death - Bless, we ask thee, this symbol of thy gift and protection, that he who wears it may always remember his promise at baptism and never be afraid to witness the Faith of Christ Crucified, through the same, thy Son and our Lord, Jesus the Christ - living and reigning with thee in the unity of the Holy Spirit, eternally, One God. AMEN

Officiant: (Presenting the cross and placing it on the Brother.

Receive the Cross of Christ, in the Brothers of St. Gregory, keeping in mind always, the solemn promise you have made this day, before the family of Christ and your Brothers.

V/ Our help is in the name of the Lord.

R/ Who has made heaven and earth.

V/ The Lord be with you:

R/ And with your spirit.

V/ Let us Pray:

The Apostles Creed - The Lord's Prayer

The Collects: The Collect for St. Gregory the Great

The Collect for the Exaltation of the Holy Cross.

Additional Collects

The Benediction by the Chaplain

Sang: They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love.....

## *The Rule of the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory (2007)*

### *Of vows*

A brother makes the vow of poverty by dedicating a major portion of the fruit of his labor to the Church and to the Brotherhood.

A brother makes the vow of chastity as follows: Chastity is the decision to live with all in love, with respect for each person's integrity. It is not a denial of one's sexuality and capacity for love, but a dedication of the whole self to God: free from indecency or offensiveness and restrained from all excess, in order to be free to love others without trying to possess or control.

A brother makes the vow of obedience to Jesus Christ as his only Lord and Savior, to the discipline of the Episcopal Church, the provisions of the Rule of the Brotherhood, and to the Minister General and other pastoral officials as appropriate.

### *Of the life of a brother*

It shall be the objective of a brother to live deliberately and actively, corporately and singly, in such a manner that his every living moment may be an exemplification of the motto of the Brotherhood: "Soli Deo Gloria - To God alone the glory," that those persons who may come to know him may by his example be brought the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. A brother must endeavor to witness to our Redeemer's love with quietness, patience, humility, charity, courage and prayer, knowing that it is not he who shall finally bring the light, but only that he shall become a messenger for the One who is the light.

### *Of the life of the Brotherhood*

It is the obligation of the Brotherhood to support the work of a brother in his own witness to the gospel. Every brother is vital to the Brotherhood and is an integral member of the body. Let none be lost through negligence, ignorance or pride; but let each be continually fortified and strengthened with brotherly love one toward another.

### *Of the work of the Brotherhood*

It is the work of the Brotherhood to witness to the love of God in Christ Jesus, which has been freely bestowed upon us and upon all of creation. This witness grows and is nurtured by a life in conversation with God, and is nourished daily by active prayer and meditation while living fully in the secular world.

A brother will develop the talents given to him by God in his service in the work and worship of the Church. A brother shall use these talents to the best of his ability in the apostolate and ministry to which he is called.

### *Of common worship*

It is the obligation of each brother to participate in the celebration of the eucharist at least once in each week and, when possible, once in each day. He shall properly prepare for and give thanks for this privilege. Dispensation can only be granted by the Minister General.

It is the obligation of each brother to pray the offices on a daily basis, and the Book of Common Prayer is to be used for this purpose. Other offices may be substituted only when a brother is taking part in a communal or public service (e.g.: when on retreat at a religious house using another form of office). Dispensation from saying the noonday office may be granted by the Minister General when it is impractical by virtue of a brother's work.

### *Of private devotion*

A brother is required to meditate for fifteen minutes in each day unless he is to hear or deliver a sermon or homily on that day.

A brother shall set aside two hours or more in each week for the study of Holy Scripture or other material on the spiritual life.

The example and teachings of our patron, Saint Gregory the Great, shall be held in high esteem by each brother. A portion of his biography or his writings shall be included in the annual reading of each brother, to be assigned by the Minister General at Annual Chapter.



The strength of the Brotherhood is dependent on the prayer life of each brother.

*Of individual renewal*

A brother shall make a careful examination of conscience as to his observance of the Rule and report in writing, as directed. He shall heed any counsel which may be given to him as a result of this report.

All brothers shall be alert to the possibility to a call to retreat at the weekend closest to the patronal festival of the Brotherhood, or at the embertides.

*Of work as an apostolate*

Work, being our share in creation and partnership with God in that creation, can be sanctified. All labor is equal in glory, honor and importance and the work of a brother should bear these qualities. Keeping in mind that all talents are gifts of the Holy Spirit, the work of all brothers must be to the greater glory of God. Work is an oblation to God, as is service to our fellow man. We must therefore give the best that we can offer.



Richard Thomas Biernacki, in the original habit



Richard Thomas Biernacki and Helen Marie Joyce



The original cross of the Brotherhood



A brother is professed



An early chapter meeting



Richard Thomas Biernacki



Richard Thomas Biernacki and Edward Ramón Riley  
distribute communion to the community



Celebrating the Eucharist



At the tomb of Fr. Paul Wattson



The assembled community











# In Love and Service Bound

The First Forty Years of the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory

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*The story of a man and his vision of a beloved community.*

Before there was the “New Monasticism” there was the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory. This first authorized history of the groundbreaking Episcopal religious community known as the Gregorians, explores the growth of a budding community coming of age. Chronicling the history of the Brotherhood from the turbulent sixties through its first forty years, *In Love and Service Bound* offers a personal glimpse into the struggles, successes and personalities that helped guide the community in its unique expression and renewal of the face of religious life in the Episcopal Church. Detailing the vision and character of its founder and first Minister General, Richard Thomas Biernacki, this book offers an honest appraisal of the pivotal moments and inner workings of a community striving to live out the Gospel in the midst of an often skeptical church and world.

Br. Karekin Madteos Yarian’s history of the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory is an insightful, lucid exposition of one of our precious religious communities within the Anglican Communion and the Episcopal Church. The religious within the Episcopal Church are incalculable sources of spiritual depth for our clergy and laity, and within that universe the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory has a peculiar (to use the word in its archaic and positive sense) place, not well known or understood. This book opens up the nature of the Brotherhood’s charism, and will serve to connect the Brotherhood more firmly with the Church it loves and serves.

—The Rt. Rev. Marc H. Andrus, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of California

What is a brotherhood? What is obedience? What is prayer? At once a social and a spiritual history, *In Love and Service Bound* examines the ancient questions of monasticism as they play out in the creation of a new religious order for the postmodern world. Br. Karekin Yarian is not only a skilled writer but an honest one, and his chronicle of the Brotherhood of St. Gregory is full of clear-eyed observations about the way charismatic leadership, church politics, and a deep yearning for service can intersect. For anyone interested in the future of communities of faith, *In Love and Service Bound* is essential reading.

—Sara Miles, author of *Take This Bread*

Karekin Madteos Yarian lives in San Francisco and has been a member of the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory since 1994 where he has at various times served as Pastoral Care Team Leader, Director of Education, and Minister Provincial for Province VIII of the Brotherhood. He is the author of *The Skillfulness of Shepherds* and co-author of *Equipping the Saints*—two volumes currently used in the Brotherhood’s formation program; and *For the Balance of My Natural Life*—a reflection on Life Vows in the Gregorian Way. He is also the subject of the award winning documentary *Changing Habits*. His website is <http://www.punkmonksf.com>.



Photo of Karekin at Mother of Peace Orphanage, Mutoko Zimbabwe

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