

THE SERVANT



**GIVE US THIS
DAY OUR
DAILY BREAD**

*Andrew prepares bread at
Saint Gregory's Retreat
Center and Farm,
Mexico NY*

151

October / December 1993

Founder's Forum

SECOND SIGHT

A second time Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes, and the man looked steadily, recovering his sight, and he saw everything distinctly. Mark 8.25

These words describe what the Brotherhood of St Gregory is all about, at least as I have experienced it over the last few months. In late July we met in Annual Convocation. Some eyes were clouded and some perhaps dim; some were bright and some were electric. But in the end, after retreat and chapter and professions and admissions and receptions, all eyes were on the task; all eyes were brighter. And all saw things distinctly.

Being both founder and superior gives me a certain point of view. I've had the blessing of perspective, and second, third and fourth sight as I see the community change and grow. From this perspective, it strikes me that the most important thing we can do is be vigilant and not allow complacency to creep into our religious lives.

I am proud that the Brotherhood and Companion Sisterhood continue the struggle to remain faithful to the ideals of our foundation. During our convocation retreat we checked and rechecked the balances. We talked about the past and early years, and about our worst fears and best hopes. Through that talking we learned we can never sit back and think "we've made it." Over all of this brooded impending death. We all knew that our beloved Bernard was preparing to meet his God. Through the week of offices and eucharists, meetings and retreat, Bernard was in our minds and on our lips.

Some have suggested the Brotherhood should one day get a house so as to be a *real* community. As the recent convocation ended and we celebrated the closing

eucharist, I said, "These are the times I wish the other religious of our church could see us. They would then sense the power and spirit of *this community*."

A few weeks later, at Bernard's funeral, there were moments when one didn't need second sight to experience the palpable reality of this community—community that transcends space and time—and death. As I waited to lead the community into the church, I watched as the pall-bearers (six life-professed) hoisted and carried the coffin of their brother, tears in their eyes and pain in their hearts. Earlier I had sprinkled the coffin with blessed water, and the rest of the assembled community in their turn did the same—water became the symbol both of new birth and of tears for this our brother, now gone.

I realized in all of this that I had lost a son. I had lost a friend. I had lost a brother. Indeed, we had all lost a part of our body, our community. It's said that, in the early years of the Community of the Holy Spirit, Canon Edward West told Mother Ruth that they would only be a great community when they had a sister in heaven. I caution the Brotherhood that having three brothers in heaven now will not make us a great community! We will only be great if we continue to grow and be true to the ideals of our foundation. All of us as Christians will only be great if we continue to strive to serve and love God.

Richard Thomas

A remembrance of Brother Bernard **THE
CIRCLE IS COMPLETE**



Brother Bernard Fessenden, BSG 1946–1993

Brother Bernard Fessenden, BSG died peacefully on the sunny afternoon of Tuesday, August 10, from complications related to HIV infection. He was 46 years old and in the eighth year of his religious profession.

Anyone meeting Bernard could not possibly help but like him immediately; for the members of our community his loss is felt immeasurably. He had a broad sense of humor and an air of caring

about you, whoever you were and whatever your problems.

Bernard, a licensed practical nurse, applied his skills for a number of years at Massachusetts General Hospital, and up until the time he could work no longer, at the Boston Eye and Ear Hospital. Even over these last several months—when his health was rapidly failing and bouts with pneumonia and other opportunistic infections made him a frequent hospital guest himself—he used every opportunity to visit other patients and to maintain contact with those in the community who were ill. When in better health, vacations usually found him enjoying a bird-watching expedition with Terry, his lifemate of 16 years. His prayer life sustained him well, and he put the Brotherhood's ethos of service into action, reaching out and caring for others while bearing his own cross with dignity.

Though he came late to the Episcopal Church from a Roman Catholic background, Bernard made up for lost time with a vengeance! He never lost his love of liturgy, faithfully and skillfully serving both the Brotherhood and his parish, the Church of St John the Evangelist, Bowdoin Street, Boston, as a master of ceremonies, subdeacon, thurifer and an acolyte, with style and dedication. He also took up other responsibilities for the community, both within his province and nationally, and served on Council as Chapter's representative, where he brought a discerning eye and a caring heart to interviews and deliberations.

A month before he died, Bernard came home from the hospital for the last time. He wanted no extraordinary means to prolong his life. He spent those days of physical decline but mental activity

relatively comfortably, in prayer and hospitality, as many from the community came to make their final farewells. He knew our purpose in coming, at least as well as we did. Richard Thomas and I, William Francis, Stephen, Tobias Stanislas and Richard John drove up from Province II, and Francis Andrew came from California during his pre-profession re-treat, each taking away a last memory of a frail and wasted body that could hardly hold the lively spirit that laughed and joked and wanted to live each moment until the end. But the major community responsibility was borne by Donovan Aidan and the members of Province I, and especially those in the health care professions, who visited and cared for him, and brought him communion—including that consecrated at the Festival Holy Eucharist of the 1993 Annual Convocation—and who assisted his lifemate in dealing with the emotional and physical stresses associated with such a long terminal illness.

A few days before death brought him final peace, Bernard slipped into unconsciousness. He died never wanting to make a nuisance of himself—as if one loved so dearly ever could. But he was deeply grateful for the care and prayers he felt constantly surrounding him, and he commented on it to those who came to see him. On July 19, during his final visit, the Superior General gently bid him peace and Godspeed; Bernard remarked, "The circle is complete." He was then able to begin to let go of the spirit of life he lived so well and fully.

The Friday after his death, community members and friends gathered and the rite of Reception was read at St John the Evangelist by Rector Jennifer M Phillips. A procession was formed, Tobias Stanislas intoned the litany of the saints, and the unfinished pine coffin was borne into the chapel. I officiated at Evening Prayer while the body was vested in the



Brotherhood's habit by Christian, Charles Edward and Benet, as the rector and Terry attended. The viewing continued for two hours, until the coffin was sealed. Compline was read and an all-night vigil began, during which the Psalter was continuously recited, interspersed with readings from Scripture. Christopher Stephen, who was Bernard's cousin, sat the vigil through the night.

The community members assembled the next morning, and joined in the final hour of the vigil. Richard Thomas aspersed the coffin, followed by all others present. The funeral mass was celebrated in the main church by the rector, who also preached on the Gospel text (John 9.1–25). The Superior General presided



and assisted with the administration of communion, as did Ciarán Anthony; the second lesson was read by Charles Edward; the offertory presenters were Benet and Claudia Michael; and I was honored to serve as a pallbearer with Christian, William Francis, Stephen, Roy, and Christopher Stephen. Among many friends in the large congregation were Nicholas DeGruccio, SA, representing the Brotherhood's prayer covenant with the Society of the Atonement; and Paul Wessinger and Jonathan Maury of the Society of St John the Evangelist, a community with whom Bernard had a long and close relationship. In addition to the members from Province I and those already mentioned, John Peter and Richard John, together with Elizabeth Mary and

Associate Richard Belanger attended from Province II. A memorial service took place in the Chapel of Christ the King at St Gregory's Retreat Center, Mexico, New York, and Bernard was re-membered at the eucharist at Graymoor.

Among the last persons from the community to hold a conversation with Bernard was the Superior General, who spoke with him over the phone a day or two prior to his lapsing into final unconsciousness. Though he did not have the energy to speak long or loudly, he was coherent and aware of who he was talking with. Not wishing to tire him, Richard Thomas closed the conversation with a blessing, and the reply came, "Bye, buddy." For us, this is how he must be remembered: A warm and loving friend, one who was with us on the journey for a brief moment but, at least for that moment, he made the time pass lightly and we knew we were in the presence of God.

Each day we *say* the Collect of the community, asking for each of us to be, like our blessed patron St Gregory, a servant of the servants of God. If we can be sure of anything in this or the next life, we can be certain that, on August 10, 1993 a member of the Brotherhood of St Gregory heard the following words: "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter into your Master's joy."
"

James

Words from Bernard

THE WOMAN AT THE WELL

Today we have heard about how Jesus meets a woman at a well and asks her for water. Startled, she attempts to make sense of this by mentioning that she is a Samaritan and he a Jew. This point does not seem to bother him much!

Jesus asks for water. He is, after all, the Son of God, yet he asks for her to give him water! In this he has given us an example which I find astonishing. God asks a human being to minister to him. He tells her what he needs and gives her

the opportunity to care for him. He then tells her that if she knew who he was she would have asked him for water and he would have given her "living water." This she later asks for, but for the short-sighted reason that this way she will not have to draw water daily! But regardless of the reason—and of her questionable relationship—she gets what she needs to realize that here is a prophet.

One of the points that seemed clearest to me is that Jesus asks for what he needs. When the disciples attempt to get him to eat later, he says that he has food which they do not know of. He refuses their promptings. It struck me that Jesus has given us an example. We are to ask for what we need. This is not easy because most of us have been raised to be autonomous and self-sufficient beings, and indicating our needs indicates our weaknesses.

We know that it is more blessed, and *easier*, to give than to receive. That we are to minister to others is evident in our motto, "servants of the servants of God." We have been told it is more blessed to give than to *receive* and we try to emulate St Francis of Assisi by becoming 'instruments of God's peace.' It is harder to be ministered to than to minister.

Let me tell you a quick story.

When I got my first full-time job, I bought the Random House Unabridged Dictionary for my parents for Christmas. (I was also proud that all my Christmas shopping was done in September!) I visited my parents for my birthday that November and we had a lovely time. When I had opened my gifts and had some cake, my mother asked what I wanted for Christmas. I told her that anything she gave me would be wonderful, and I was so excited about what I was giving her and Dad. The subject switched to something else and was not mentioned again that weekend.

When I went home that Thanksgiving, Mother again asked me what I

wanted for Christmas. Again, I stated that anything she gave me would be fine and that I was so excited about what I was giving them. Mother said, "Billy, Christmas really is in the giving, isn't it?" "Yeah," I said. "Well, I just want you to know that, while you're excited about Christmas, mine is being ruined because

I have nothing to give you that will be exciting to you, and therefore fun for me to anticipate!"

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In order for others to be able to give, to give what is needed, those needs must be made known. We need to confess our needs. Sometimes allowing others to minister to us is one of the best ways to minister to them. We give others the opportunity to do that which is helpful and which will help them.

I am struck with the image which occurred a few convocations ago. Brother Richard asked me to meet with him, prior to Evening Prayer. I had talked with Richard on the telephone when I was given positive test results for the HIV virus. I had indicated that I would resign from the community should that be con-

sidered best for all. Richard said that he did not agree with this, which was what my spiritual director had thought he would say. In fact, when we met, Richard stated that, while I had informed only brothers in my province at his suggestion, this news should not be kept from the community, because the community needed to be able to minister to me.

How easy it is to deny the need for help! To push forward and attempt to carry more than our share, rather than to ask for the help needed. Or, when the help is needed and offered, to deny the need anyway. Jesus did not say to Simon,

when he was pressed into helping carry the cross, 'No thanks! I can manage.'

When we ask for help, allowing others to help us meet our needs, we become the children we are told to be. Children admit their needs freely until we adults inhibit their spontaneity. They will at-tempt to do things and will ask for help when they know that they need it. Let us then ask for help from God and from each other—as we need. Let us remember our dependency on him and on each other as we share in the heavenly banquet! Amen!

Bernard

A Convocation sermon

DON'T LOOK B A C K



Another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home." Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."—Luke 9.62

Today's gospel may sound odd to many of us, for we've spent the week looking back over traveled ways, discerning our tracks, seeing where we've skidded off the road. We've remembered the great times

we've had in interesting byways, mourned our losses, buried our dead, and celebrated our having gotten as far as we've gotten, just barely out of our teen years as a community. But our looking



William Edward, Ciarán Anthony and Christopher Stephen are presented to the Superior General by their sponsors.

backward has been balanced by a hopeful (and fearful) look ahead, and by a good, long, careful inventory of where we are now. This has been a week for getting our bearings and recharging our batteries for the challenges ahead. We've been charting a course, trusting God will bring us fair winds and occasional challenges. And the first challenge, as always, is to cast off and weigh anchor: to cut our-



Francis Andrew is drawn in by Richard Thomas, as James looks on.

selves free to be on our way.

Today's lessons begin with a prenatal call to a fetal prophet, (Jer 1.4-10) and end with a clear command to cut the umbilical cord that binds us to the past. (Luke 9.57-62) In between is the taut-stretched tension of the life of discipleship, facing the challenges of the gospel. (2 Cor 6.1-10)

God knew Jeremiah before there was a Jeremiah to know. God had marked out Jeremiah before he was even a gleam in Hilkiah's priestly eye, and spent a good careful nine months a-building this embryonic prophet-to-be—with no small amount of help from Jeremiah's mother, to be sure. Jeremiah was knit together from the substance of her body, consecrated by God while still nestling in her womb, breathing her blood, fed with her food, until the time of birth, when Jeremiah burst forth upon the world with his first lamentation, the common cry all mortals cry when first they breath the air of this good green earth, our island home. The midwife cut the cord that bound him to his former source of life, for now he had a life of his own to live, and a high calling to fulfill. God appointed him over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to

destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant. But the cord had to be cut first.

Jeremiah didn't apply for the job of prophet. He even tried to avoid the assignment, implying that God was in violation of the child labor laws. "I'm only a boy! How will I know what to say." But God was always robbing the cradle, and had the strangest habit of giving high and mighty tasks to those most militantly ill-equipped to carry them out. So God cut the cord of Jeremiah's insecurity, and assure him he would be led by God's strong hand applied right to his kisser. God's hand would draw forth words of prophecy—they would spring unbidden to his lips as the power of God's Spirit filled his mouth. God cut Jeremiah's umbilical cord, but hooked him through the lip with 90-pound test line, and reeled him in as he struggled and shouted, "I'm too small; throw me back!"

No, Jeremiah didn't volunteer for discipleship, not like the characters who come running up to Jesus in today's gospel, application forms in one hand and absence excuses in the other. And who in their right mind *would* volunteer to be a disciple? A disciple's lot is not a happy one, consisting of "afflictions, hardships,



Helen, Richard Thomas, and Karen Ann

calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger” and sometimes death.

The would-be disciples in today’s gospel want it both ways: they want to be with Jesus, but they don’t want to cut the cords that bind them to the past like giant rubber bands. They turn to look back in longing, to reassure themselves they’re still connected to the past they know, since they don’t yet have full faith in the promises of what is to come.

Have you ever seen someone who’s made the awful mistake of trying to get into a rowboat while still keeping one foot firmly on the dock? I believe there’s a name for this attitude in ballet, but it’s not nearly so attractive when performed dockside with a pained expression of impending dampness or hernia. You can only get into the boat by getting into the boat: try to cheat and keep one foot on land and you’ll end up neither in the boat nor on the dock, but treading water.

Jesus pictures someone trying to plow a field while looking back-wards, a surefire prescription for crooked crops. Don’t look back; keep your eyes on the prize: that’s the message for a true disciple. Don’t look back, don’t you never look back. Nostalgia is the antithesis of hope. How many of us have missed present joy because we would not risk letting go of a past we no longer have? Jesus would later advise his disciples concerning the last days, “On that day ... anyone in the field must not turn back. Remember Lot’s wife. Those who try to make their life se-cure will lose it, but those who lose their life will keep it.” (Luke 17.31-33) Hanging on to the past—memories, traditions, old habits—will so encumber your flight that you’ll never get off the ground. Risk it all, spread your wings and you’ll fly.

The truth is that those who give

it all up get it all back, and those who try to keep it lose it. Faithful disciples end up more than adequately recompensed if they are willing to risk cutting the cord to depend on God’s strong fishing line hooked into their hearts.

They may—like Jeremiah—be too young to meet the world’s expectations, but they can set that world on its head when *they* prophecy against it, and pluck



George and Patrick-Francis with the Superior General



Christopher Stephen, Richard Thomas, Ciarán Anthony and Francis Andrew

and plant its kingdoms like so many turnips. They *may* be out on the road in the rough with no place to lay their heads, but they are companions to the maker of heaven and earth, the God—made flesh—whom even the heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain, far less an earthly home. They may not be able to attend their families' funerals or give them a proper farewell, but they'll sit with them one day at the great banquet table in the kingdom of heaven. They may be "treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see—they are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything." They possess everything because they've given everything up: only the one with empty hands is able to receive the gift.

We are called to cut the cords that bind us to the past, but we fear being left adrift. We are comfortable with that little tug from behind, that reassuring resistance that tells us we've still got a mooring. It's hard to cast out, to weigh anchor,

to cut the cords that bind us to the past and send us headlong into life.

But cutting the cord doesn't leave us floating adrift. Because the fisherman's line has caught us by the heart, and God is reeling us in. We struggle and fight sometimes, and God will let us have a bit of play in the line; God loves the challenge of using 20 pound test on 30 pound fish.

In the final analysis, the sport is ours too, because, after all, we're fish that want to be caught. That hook is in our heart — can't you feel it? that poignant longing—and we're being drawn in, drawn to God, drawn by God. We can't look back, we won't never look back, for to take our eyes off the fisherman who draws us towards him on the line of love would be death.

A great Jewish mystic told this story:

At the world's end stands a high mountain; on top of the mountain rests a great rock; and out of the rock flows a spring of clear water. At the other end of the world lies the heart of the world, for everything in the world has its heart and the whole world has a great heart. Now

the heart of the world never takes its eyes from the clear spring of water, but gazes at it with insatiable longing—yearning and thirsting for the spring of clear water—but it cannot take even the tiniest step in its direction. For the instant the heart makes a move from its place, it loses sight of the peak of the mountain with its clear spring; and should the heart of the world ever lose sight of the clear spring, even for a single second, it loses its vitality and at the same time the world begins to die.

The clear spring is without time of its own and is only sustained by time that is granted it by the heart of the world. One day is all the heart allows it. When the day wanes, the clear spring begins to sing to the heart of the world, and the heart of the world to the clear spring. Their song spreads over the whole world and gleaming threads emerge from the song that reach to the hearts of all things in the world and from one heart to another. And there is a man of righteousness and grace who walks through the world and gathers these threads from the hearts and weaves them into time. When he has thus woven one day, he presents it to the heart of the world, and the heart of the world presents it to

the clear spring, and the clear spring lives another day.

God is pulling on the threads connected to our hearts, weaving us together into a new creation, *day by day*. And if we struggle, it is simply the struggle to be born, to emerge into new life with a cry, not of lamentation, but of rejoicing.

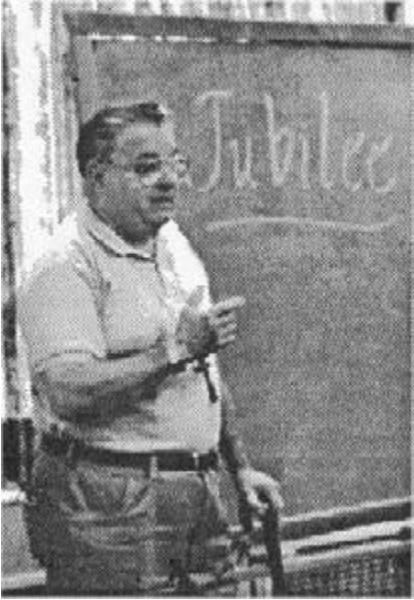
In a few minutes we'll have today's catch—four fine fish—lying out right here on the floor. God has been reeling them in for a while now, and they put up a hell of a fight sometimes. The most wonderful thing, of course, is that when God hauls in the fish, the fish don't die, but are reborn to a new life, a whole new *kind* of life, a new creation. The risk of cutting the cords that held them back, the struggle mixed with longing they've experienced as God has reeled them in, has transformed them into disciples. They are now equipped to help in the task of fishing themselves, to cast out lines and nets that will bring in an abundant catch. Good fishing, brothers and sisters! Amen.

Tobias Stanislas



The schola rejoices at the introit.

Here and there with the brothers and sisters
COMMUNITY NOTES



William Edward shares some of his journey, including Jubilee moments.

Annual Convocation

Annual Convocation took place at Graymoor, the motherhouse of the Society of the Atonement in Garrison, New York. This year's national retreat was entitled "On the Pilgrim's Way"—an exploration of the community's history over the 24 years since foundation, in preparation for the silver jubilee in 1994.

Various members of the community led portions of the four-day retreat, including interviews with the Founder, Richard Thomas; presentations by other senior Gregorian friars; workshops; time for reflection and, especially for younger brothers and sisters, the opportunity to ask questions of the "old-timers."

During the week General Chapter met, as did Council, and Ciarin Anthony was appointed director of postulants and novices; Maurice John and Francis Andrew were elected by Chapter to Council. The community took this opportunity to begin restructuring the formation program in the light of increased numbers of postulants and novices, and a growing pool of senior members willing to act as sponsors in the formation process. Council also approved leaves of absence for Laurence Andrew and Clare.

Personal events in the community's life were, as always, a focus of this convocation. Christopher Stephen, Ciarán Anthony and William Edward made their life professions of vows, and Francis Andrew his first profession, at the festival Holy Eucharist on Saturday, celebrated by Edward Ramón. Patrick Schwing and George Benner were received into the no-vitiate as Patrick-Francis and George. Karen Ann McConnell and Helen Lovell were admitted as postulants in the Companion Sisterhood.

As always, Friars of the Atonement were on hand to celebrate these events and the spiritual covenant they share with the Brotherhood of St Gregory. The ongoing fellowship between the communities is an important feature of every convocation.

Northward to Mexico (NY)

Months of planning and hard work culminated on June 26, with the dedication of St Gregory's Retreat Center in Mexico, New York, a few miles from Lake Ontario. This place apart is a result of the efforts of Maurice John and Andrew, with



The Chapel of Christ the King, at St Gregory's Retreat Center and Farm, before (inset) and after. Many hands and talents went into working this transformation.

the artistic talents of George, and a helping hand from Associate David Smith.

Years ago Maurice John realized that such a place could be a valuable resource for the spiritual needs of many in the area. When a 75-acre farm and orchard became available, he seized the opportunity. Months of hard work have equipped the center with overnight accommodations for up to eight retreatants, a refectory, a chapel which seats 20, and gardens and cultivated lanes to stroll. The facility will be supported by the income

from the extensive orchards, from the gift shop's religious articles and farm products, and from donations of retreatants and pilgrims.

The dedication included the Holy Eucharist and Solemn Evensong. (Bishop Joslin could not be present for the dedication service, so a formal blessing liturgy will be scheduled for later in the year.) The eucharist was to have been celebrated beside the stream running through the grounds, but the arrival of storm clouds made it prudent to move



James is put to work on some of the 75 acres that make up St Gregory's Farm; fortunately most of the acreage is in orchard, not lawn.



Canon Metzler censes the altar during the dedication eucharist.

inside the barn. Spirits were not damp- ened in the least, and over fifty worship- ers made a joyful noise unto the Lord. Two sisters from the Society of St Mar- garet (Utica) and a number of diocesan clergy attended. The celebrant was Canon Martha G Metzler; Dean Richard A Bower proclaimed the gospel and the Rev Tim S Hall led the intercessions. The Rev William J Turner jr, priest in charge of Grace, Mexico, preached the dedica- tion sermon. The choir from the parish lent their voices to the occasion. James, visiting from the Bronx, was the Master of Ceremonies. Solemn Evensong closed the day, officiated and sung by Tobias Stanislas, on his way from the Bronx to Hobart and William Smith College, Geneva NY to teach a course for the Finger Lakes Conference.

The next weekend brought the first celebration of the Holy Eucharist in the chapel itself, with the Rev Gerald F Beritela celebrating. Roy and Donovan Aidan arrived from Framingham, MA in time for the service and a few days of re- treat and restoration. The following week Christopher Stephen arrived, to make his pre-life profession retreat. While there he began the process of converting the farm's former "honey house" into a hermitage. Other early beneficiaries of the retreat facility have been Elizabeth *Mary* and Karen Ann.

St Gregory's is now open for day-long, weekend and longer retreats. If you're



George puts the finishing touches on one of the Stations for the chapel.

interested in receiving a descriptive brochure, write to St Gregory's Retreat Center and Farm, RD #1—Minckler Road, Mexico NY 13114-9775.



Dean Bower proclaims the gospel in the midst of the congregation (and apple baskets. Light under a bushel.?)

And west to Geneva (NY)

Tobias Stanislas led a course entitled "Question: Authority" at the 1993 Finger Lakes Conference held at Hobart and William Smith. Participants examined the nature of authority and its manifestation in church and society, and the tension between the imperatives of prophetic conscience and the demands of the state. Deacon Minka Sprague, key-note speaker for the week-long gathering, set the tone with her careful (and cheer-

ful) analysis of Paul's letter to the Ephesians. During the week, James, Maurice John and Andrew drove down from Mexico and allowed Tobias Stanislas an afternoon of hookey visiting the Glenora Vineyard and sampling the deservedly famous produce of the Finger Lakes region.

Province I

Christian and Charles Edward attended an Ecumenical AIDS service at Trinity Church, Tilton NH. Bishop Theuner of New Hampshire presided.

Resources

AN UNEVEN GUIDE

The "Conference on the Religious Life in the Anglican Communion in the Americas" (CORL) has issued a booklet entitled *Handbook of Guidelines for Anglican Religious Communities, Solitary Religious, and Those Taking Private Religious Vows in Canada and the United States*. While it contains a few notable errors and occasional recommendations not in keeping with the canons or the worship of the Episcopal Church, and omits much significant and relevant material, it is not without its virtues. Significant benefit will be reaped by traditional religious orders engaged in the re-examination of their constitutional documents, and by bishops with limited prior experience who may be called to exercise the role of visitor to such traditional orders. [Note: The Brotherhood published its own brief guide, "What Bishops and Clergy Should Know About Religious Life," earlier this year (the text, less the canons, appears below). We feel this brochure offers a more complete though less detailed guide to clergy and bishops dealing with religious. Copies of this brochure were sent to all diocesan bishops earlier this year, and are available on request.]

There are some significant omissions in the Conference booklet. For example, it makes no mention of the religious communities of the Episcopal Church defined under Canon III.29.2, but confines itself to what the canon calls "religious orders." (This is not surprising, since the Conference membership consists solely of religious orders. The section of the canon on other forms of Christian community is omitted from the booklet.)

More surprising is the omission of section 3 of the canon, governing solitary—a serious lapse in a guide addressing the subject. Also missing is the canon on the ordination of religious. [The full text of all these canons, with commentary, is included in the Brotherhood's publication.]

Some of the booklet's weaknesses may arise from the effort to produce one publication to deal with both the Canadian and American churches, who treat religious life very differently in their canons and customs. The Conference enjoys official status in Canada, but not in the US. This may account for the impression of authority the booklet seeks to give, occasionally through a magisterial tone, and

recommendations phrased as requirements or prohibitions. Guidelines which are appropriately strict in Canada may not be in keeping with the American canons on the subject.

For example, ¶109 refers to members of new communities not making life vows until "the appropriate Standing Committee and the Conference have officially recognized" their communities. The American canon only requires recognition by the House of Bishops Standing Committee on Religious Communities.

Solitary lapses

The section on solitaries begins with what appears to us a novel definition of the term. The booklet describes three classes of solitaries, but only applies the term to the first: members of religious communities who live apart from their community on a more or less permanent basis, relinquishing all chapter rights while remaining "members" of the community. The other classes are hermits and anchorites, and "consecrated single persons." These last live in the world under (the Conference recommends) only the vow of chastity.

In general, *solitary* has been applied to all types of religious without connection to a religious community. In practice, it is difficult to see much difference between the Conference's "solitary" who lives apart from his or her community while maintaining some nominal "membership" in it, and a hermit, or "consecrated single person"—the chief difference between the two being their mode of life in the world. In any case, how a community deals with this sort of solitary is an internal matter for the community to decide, particularly to the extent that such a solitary life is (or isn't) in keeping with the Rule and ethos of the community. There is also some question if such an arrangement is permissible un-

der the canon governing religious orders—which requires "life in community."

Paragraph 116 erroneously states that the autonomous vowed life "does not come within the normal scope of the Standing Committee," and that a bishop who receives private vows should record the fact with the Conference's General Secretary. Actually, Canon III.29.3 re-quires bishops who receive private religious vows to record the fact with the House of Bishops Standing Committee, not the Conference.

The Conference further advises that such individuals should "take no vow beyond the single vow of chastity" nor "adopt any kind of quasi-religious habit or dress. The vocation is to live in the world, and she is not a religious. The individual will not take on a new name on making the vow." However, the rite for setting apart, from the *Book of Occasional Services*, assumes the threefold vows of "religious life," and provides for the presentation of a habit or other external symbol of consecration. Clearly the significance of habits or external signs of religious consecration—for solitaries, *and* traditional and nontraditional religious—could bear with some close examination.

Ordination of religious

The Conference booklet is astute in its observations concerning the ordination of religious, but makes no mention of the relevant canon (III.8.4.0 which allows the leadership of an officially recognized order or community to function *in loco* the Rector and Vestry).

The booklet notes the concern that lay religious might seek ordination as a precaution against separation from or dissolution of their community. We would add the concern that lay persons might join a community in the belief that it

might enhance their opportunities for ordination. Again, this is a matter for further exploration in the church. It might be wise to insist that any person ordained through use of Canon III.8.4.f. also be considered a "local priest or deacon" along the lines of Canon III.9. This would appear to be in keeping with the spirit of the law, and the patristic understanding of ordination from and for the community.

Last words

Finally, on the sad matter of dissolution, ¶1202 says an order "should" (rather than "shall") make provision for dissolution, and the distribution of property, contrary to Canon III.29.1.f.

All in all this booklet may be of some use in meeting a narrow range of needs. It may be that the effort to produce a re-source useful to monastics both in Canada and the United States resulted in one less than useful in either.

WHAT BISHOPS AND CLERGY SHOULD KNOW ABOUT RELIGIOUS LIFE

About the Canons

Episcopal religious communities come in two canonical flavors: *Religious Orders* and other *Christian Communities*. Members of Religious Orders are committed for life or a term of years to holding their possessions in common or in trust, to celibate life in community, and obedience to their Rule and Constitution.

Members of Christian Communities are also committed for life or a term of years to obey their Rule and Constitution. Their Rule may entail life in community, common property, or celibacy, but not necessarily require them.

To be recognized, communities need to have at least six professed or full members, and be approved by and registered with the Standing Committee on Religious Communities of the House of Bishops. They also need what's known as a Bishop *Visitor* or *Protector*: either the bishop of the diocese where their "mother house" or other headquarters is located, or a bishop serving with the ap-

proval of this diocesan. This Visitor is guardian of the community's constitution, and acts as arbitrator in matters the community can't settle on its own.

The rector's role

What should a rector do when a parishioner comes up and says, "I want to join (or start) a religious community"? First of all, vocations to religious life should be taken as seriously as vocations to ordained ministry. There is no canonical sponsorship requirement for rectors and vestries regarding vocations to religious life; but that does not mean they should not be involved. Clergy should consider whether the person is seeking a way to exercise a ministry that could better be realized through greater involvement in the life of the parish.

Clergy should be relieved to hear that the chief role in vocational discernment is played by the religious communities themselves. They have vocations directors, systems for determining the nature

and validity of the call, and their own systems of postulancy and novitiate. The rector should play primarily a pastoral role, guiding the person to an appropriate community.

Options

The first step, then, is to make sure that the individual has examined the options. While it's true that the Holy Spirit has not run out of gifts, and that new forms of religious life emerge, there are over thirty communities in the Episcopal Church, with a wide variety of styles and ministries, and rather than founding a new community, it's better to start with a careful look at what already exists. *The Church Annual* has listings of all the recognized communities, and some developing ones as well.

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The person should examine these listings and descriptions, contact the communities for more information, and answer certain questions: What am I trying to do? What is my ministry? How do I want to live my life in Christ? Do *any* of these communities fit the bill?

While there are only two canonical categories for communities, in practical

terms there are four basic types of religious community in the Episcopal Church today.

- + Monastic or conventual communities are the "Religious Orders" of the canon. Their members live "in common" under the vow of celibacy, following either the contemplative, active, or mixed life. Depending on the ethos of the community, the degree of communal focus ranges from a closer "Benedictine" model to a broader "Franciscan" one. Their work and ministry is similarly varied. The Order of St Benedict and the Society of St Francis come under this heading.
- + Some communities require celibacy, but for the sake of their missionary work do not necessarily live in common. An ex-ample of this type of community is the Congregation of the Companions of the Holy Savior.
- + Other communities focus on a life of prayer and service in common, embracing both single and married members and their families. The first Anglican religious community at Little Gidding was of this type. The Community of the Servants of Jesus is a contemporary example.
- + Some communities focus on work or mission in the world, and require neither celibacy nor common domicile. Their sense of community comes from dedication to a common purpose, a common rule of life and prayer, periodic gatherings, frequent communication, or other unifying principles. The Brotherhood of St Gregory, the Third Order of St Francis, and the Worker Sisters of the Holy Spirit are typical of this kind of community.

It would be a mistake to think all the communities in each category were stamped from the same mold. *Each* has its unique spirit, and there is considerable variety in ministry and life style. Even within the communities each individual member will have some gift or insight

into the vows as he or she explores a personal relationship to God mediated and enriched by a community of faith.

If the shoe doesn't fit

If, however, after checking out all of the existing options, none of them seems right, one can begin the long and difficult process of founding a community oneself. Here a crucial question must be asked: Why am I alone? Why is no one sharing my vision? Few founders (ancient or modern) intended to "found a religious order." They were (and are) people of vision called to a particular way of life, whose holiness or mission attracted others. The development of an "order" was usually an afterthought, or a logical development of the call to common life or work. The order was there to serve the holy life or mission, not the other way around.

Sometimes, though, an individual has a calling which cannot be answered in an existing community. At this point counseling and direction are all-important. This is *not* the stage at which to "make vows." That should be the last thing to happen, after the call has been ratified, and a community has begun to form. The history of Episcopal religious life is strewn with failed attempts, and people who dwell in a kind of ecclesiastical limbo, while still "under vows" of some sort.

Going it alone

There is now canonical provision for solitary religious, incorporated in the 1991 revision of Title III. *The Book of Occasional Services* contains a rite called "Setting Apart for a Special Vocation." Its opening rubric states, "Individual Christians, in response to God's call, may wish to commit themselves to the religious life under vows made directly to the bishop

of the diocese." The responsibility for solitary vows rests, then, with the bishop. As Fr Bede Mudge, OHC, wrote in a re-port to the House of Bishops in 1980, "Free-floating commitments that are incapable of fulfillment are often destructive rather than helpful." Some years ago there was a poignant letter in *The Episcopalian* from one such solitary, pleading, "Is anyone else out there?"

Spiritual direction should be done by someone who knows about the religious life in all its variety. It wouldn't be a bad idea if every diocesan commission on ministry included a specialist in this field to give guidance and oversight. Other options suggested by Fr Bede include maintaining a list of such skilled people, or encouraging existing communities to act as sponsors or mentors; this has happened to good effect in recent years. This provides the solitary with the support of a community, and ongoing spiritual direction.

A final word

One last word of caution: "Do nothing without the bishop." That is an ancient bit of advice, and it still holds true. Souls are at stake; religious life is serious business, both for those who make vows, *and* those who receive them.

Tobias Stanislas is author of The State of the Religious Life and What Bishops and Clergy Should Know ... , and has led two workshops with CORL community members and representatives of Christian Communities on the revision of Canon III.29. He prepared the revision of the canon for submission to the 1991 General Convention at the request of the Title III Revision Committee of the Council for the Development of Ministry.

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels,
nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,
nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation,



will be able to separate us
from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

—Romans 8:38-39

A prayer mandala for HIV+ people and their friends and loved ones.

SONNET TO A LOVING GOD

O soft the tender blossoms whisper, weeping dew-soaked, kissed by dawn ascended,
in hours early by solitude is mended
my spirit in my Master's keeping.
With misted veils of morning, soundless, sleeping, allow
my soul to gingerly be tended
and my sinfulness amended,
to become a humble harvest ripe for reaping.
Through thoughts serene and daydreams peace I ponder, the
fears that oft times cause my heart to harden. In meditative God-inspired wonder,
I humbly ask for pardon.
Reach inside this faulted heart and plunder
those briars that entangle us
within our hidden garden.

Richard Yarian, a/BSG

BLESSINGS

May God the Father, who has called us to new life in his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, grant you the grace of the Holy Spirit, that you may serve him faithfully in this life, and rejoice in his love forever in the life to come. And the blessing of God the Holy Trinity, who in mercy has + Created us, Redeemed us, and Sanctifies us, be upon you this day and forever more. *Amen.*

May the Lord, whose eye is upon all who fear him and wait upon his love, and in whose Name you have put your trust, + grant you his loving-kindness, pluck your lives from death and feed you in time of famine, that you may know his salvation, and rejoice in his Holy Name both now and forever more. *Amen.* (Based on Ps 33.18-22)

May the Lord our God, to whom belongs deliverance, hear you when you call upon him, be a shield about you, and lift up your head to see his glory. And the blessing of the + Lord be upon you for healing and salvation, from this time forth and forever more. *Amen.* (Based on Ps 3.3,4,8)

May God, who by the glorious resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light, grant that you who have been raised with him may abide in his presence and rejoice in the hope of eternal glory. And may God Almighty: + the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit bless you and give you peace this day, and forever more. *Amen.* (Based on the Collect of Tuesday in Easter Week)

Francis Andrew