



The Servant



*Seminary of the Immaculate
Conception*

Huntington NY



#265

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Where there's a will

You can assist and further the ministries of the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory by remembering the community in your will. If you choose to do so, the following form of wording is appropriate:

I hereby give, devise, and bequeath to The Brotherhood of Saint Gregory, Inc., a New York State not-for-profit corporation and its successors for ever \$_____ and / or _____ percent of my estate to be used in such a manner as determined by its Directors.

Are you ready?

Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.

Are you ready? There is a big alarm clock and we do not know at what hour it is set; but we must be ready. In a monastery, there is the horarium or schedule for the day. We Gregorians do not have hours set out for us; as Flexible Friars we are responsible for keeping the hours, the daily round of offices.

Some of you know and remember Bowie Snodgrass who was on staff at the Church Center many years back. She was a student at Union Theological Seminary and, as part of training was to create what was called “a Chapel.” Hers was successful and much of what she said is pertinent to what I will say here today; also appropriate as we leave here today.



I was organist in Norwalk CT, and Bowie presented her “Chapel.” She opened with this line: “I was wondering if ordained women can still wear mini-skirts.” We had arranged lots of vestments at the back of the church. We had racks of fabric, stoles and even a few feather boas. We asked the congregation to choose from these things what they would be and look like when the Lord would return. Everyone got to walk the fashion line and some were chosen to articulate their choice. There were many great connections but one stood out. The senior warden, wearing a chasuble, said: “This is what I would like to be when the Lord comes.” It was an interesting moment.

What day? What circumstances? Where? How will you be dressed? More than that, how will your soul be “dressed?” I ask you here today, how would your appearance as a religious look? Do we have to be in habit? Wearing our cross? I’ll not take this wardrobe thing any longer — suffice it to say, I trust you all to be tasteful.

Jesus uses an illustration: If the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming; he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. Jesus isn’t saying here that he is coming to steal something. Jesus is saying that he is coming at a time people will not be expecting him. That’s when thieves come, when they aren’t expected. It is interesting that this illustration can be found in Luke as well. But there is more. For us, who have taken vows and those here who are beginning to walk the road that leads to vows, how you live those vows, and the vows themselves are what will be scrutinized — they will be the measuring stick.

I am reminded of the sister who led our retreat years ago in Washington

DC. She told of a nun who said: “When the time comes, they can fault me on poverty and on obedience, but they can’t get me on chastity because I have never loved anyone.” Is that a standard to copy? Think of poverty as we understand it, as Gregorians: do we keep in mind that all we have and enjoy is not ours, but for us to use, and for which we need to be thankful. And consider chastity: in this time it is not easy; *people* are not easy; not using them for your advantage is not easy. But our interpretation binds us to more, to be free of that desire to possess or control. Obedience — the hard one we focused on this week in our workshops — is one in which we differ from most other communities. We vow obedience not just to the Brotherhood and its leadership, but to the discipline of The Episcopal Church.

This leads me to another question for us in our current times. What about now? I believe we are in the end times. There are just so many signs — the extreme weather patterns; the extreme heat with which the entire nation and world have been dealing. So much is changed; so much is gone. But the need to prepare is real. The Scriptures still speak to us, and both Matthew and Luke give us the warning. When? How? In Romans there is a stern reminder: “We shall all stand before the judgment seat of God; for it is written, ‘As I live says the Lord, every knee shall bend before me, and every tongue shall give praise to God.’ So then each of us shall give an account of himself to God.”

Are you ready?

RTB

Here and there with the Brothers

Community Notes

SPECIAL EVENTS

The Lambeth Conference

The fifteenth meeting of the world-wide, Anglican Communion-wide Lambeth Conference took place in England on July 26 to August 8, 2022. Convened by the Archbishop of Canterbury every ten years or so, depending upon world events at the time, this major gathering brings the world’s Anglican bishops together for discussion and for exchanges of ideas about the church now and in the future. This year, Archbishop Justin Welby asked the Anglican religious orders and communities to pray for the Conference, and some of those prayers were compiled into a “Prayer Guide for the Lambeth Conference,” published just before the gathering assembled. The Brotherhood featured prominently in this booklet — circulated among all of the bishops attending, and beyond to the provinces and dioceses of the Communion. The Brotherhood’s contribution, crafted by Tobias Stanislas Haller (Maryland), was used during the Bible study on Day 6 of the Conference:

O God, by your grace and Spirit you have raised up witnesses and servants in many lands and cultures: Pour out your blessing upon the churches and

provinces of the Anglican Communion, and upon their leaders as they gather for fellowship in the Lambeth Conference, that their diversity may enrich their common witness and service to the honor and glory of your name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

We give thanks to Br Christopher John SSF, Minister General of the Society of Saint Francis, for his efforts to make Archbishop Justin Welby's request a reality, and for this opportunity to respond and participate in this very personal yet very world-wide way!

Religious Life Sunday

The 80th General Convention of The Episcopal Church took place in Baltimore on July 8-11, and on the crowded agenda of this gathering — postponed and abridged due to the COVID-19 pandemic) — was a resolution jointly submitted by the Conference of Anglican Religious Orders in the Americas (CAROA) and the National Assembly of Episcopal Christian Communities (NÆCC) in support of establishing a Religious Life Sunday in The Episcopal Church — and it passed! Ronald Augustine Fox (Chicago), The Brotherhood's representative on the NÆCC leadership board, participated in the development of the submitted resolution (Boo4) as proposed by Bishop Jeffrey Lee, and endorsed by an impressive list of serving and retired bishops:

Resolved, the House of Bishops concurring,

That the 80th General Convention establish Religious Life Sunday for observance in The Episcopal Church on the third Sunday after the Epiphany.

Explanation

Monastic Orders and Christian Communities have existed in The Episcopal Church since the mid-19th century, but are largely unknown by Episcopalians. The purpose of Religious Life Sunday is to publicize the existence of Religious Orders and Christian Communities, their missions, ministries, and contributions to the Church, and to encourage Episcopalians to connect with these communities for mutually building up the Body of Christ.

For the observance of Religious Life Sunday, member communities of the Conference of Anglican Religious Orders in the Americas (CAROA) and the National Association of Episcopal Christian Communities (NÆCC) will make available videos, online resources, and written materials concerning religious life in The Episcopal Church. Religious will offer to speak and preach at parishes and will offer ways to connect with Orders and Communities. Prayers will be offered for the growth and flourishing of religious life in The Episcopal Church.

This resolution does not include a request for funding, specific committee action, change in the liturgical calendar, or amendment of the Constitutions and Canons.

This action has been a very long time in coming to fruition and we offer deeply heartfelt thanks to the members of CAROA and NÆCC, to the bishops

and deputies of the 80th General Convention, to Bishop Lee for proposing and others for endorsing this resolution, and of course to our own Ronald Augustine — what a great blessing this is! Ronald Augustine is serving on a joint CAROA/NÆCC committee developing resources for celebrating the first Religious Life Sunday next January.

COMMUNITY-WIDE EVENTS

Annual Convocation 2022



The Brotherhood met for Annual Convocation 2022 on August 8-13 at the Seminary of the Immaculate Conception, located in Huntington, Long Island. This vast facility provided ample space and accommodation for the Gregorians in addition to over 140 members of the Roman Catholic order — Daughters of Mary, Mother of Mercy — who arrived for the same week. It was indeed quite a busy time for both orders, and they got along very nicely!

As is true in most of our gatherings, we rearranged the movable furniture in the chapel in order to provide seating in order of profession; as is our custom, even those who were unable to attend — their absence commemorated by a labeled seat in the choir, where each would be if able to attend. Because the Seminary could not provide vessels or vestments, brothers brought along all that was required for worship. Under the experienced and watchful eye of our Administrator, Eric Shelley (Southwestern Virginia), all was arranged “decently and in order” throughout our time together.





Annual Convocation begins with The Gathering Service, a way to center each participant in the surroundings and to bring the members together for the week. The liturgy recalls our many and various ministries throughout the church since our last time together, and calls upon each of us to reflect upon our baptism and our vows. Minister General Richard Thomas Biernacki (New Jersey) invites each person present to “Remember that you are incorporate in the Body of Christ, and that you are sealed as Christ’s own for ever!” It is a moving way to begin our convocation, especially after traveling across the country for a day or longer in order to be here.

Each day of Convocation centers around prayer and celebration — the Daily Office and the Holy Eucharist. Throughout the week brothers serve as an officiant or a reader or as one of the participants in the daily mass. Each morning also includes a house meeting following Morning Prayer, where everyone hears the details of that day’s activities. This also serves as an opportunity for updates to the printed schedule provided by Director of Convocation Liturgy and Music Nathanael Deward Rahm (Chicago).

Our first full day together in Annual Convocation 2022 was Tuesday, August 9th, and that morning and afternoon featured a retreat program presented by Director of Education Thomas Bushnell (New York) in the format



of a panel discussion of religious obedience: Thomas, Ciarán Anthony DellaFera (Massachusetts), Angel Gabriel Roque (Rio Grande) and Carlos Roberto Fernández (Southeast Florida). The afternoon session included Thomas' presentation on the history of the vows as they evolved from the earliest days of monasticism up to the present. The evening served as a time for a number of brothers to renew those vows of annual profession — an expression of religious obedience in itself — while the other members enjoyed some catching-up time.



Wednesday's retreat program was organized by our resident film expert, Scott Michael Pomerenk (Colorado). He arranged a showing of Dreyer's 1928 powerful and evocative silent film, *The Passion of Joan of Arc*. The afternoon session provided discussion time, as Scott Michael brought out many details of that time in history and of the film's technical and dramatic aspects, and brothers shared their reactions both to the film and how it informs the nature of obedience in tension with authority.

Wednesday evening was set aside for the meetings of the six provinces of the Brotherhood, for planning future events, as well as for elections of Ministers Provincial for New England and the Southeast. Province 1 elected Virgilio Fortuna (Massachusetts) for a three-year term and Province 4 elected Bo Alexander Armstrong (East Tennessee) for another term. All present gave thanks for the willing ministries of these brothers being recognized.

Thursday's program began with eight small groups, engaged in conversation around personal observance of the vow of obedience. The afternoon was occupied with the Brotherhood's Chapter Meeting, where the Minister General, the six Ministers Provincial and each of the other officials of the community reported on their ministries on behalf of the Brotherhood over the past year. Chaired by Richard Thomas and kept on its toes by Secretary Joseph Basil Gauss (Chicago), the meeting went smoothly, including the approval of an amendment to the Brotherhood Constitution expanding the membership of



Brothers converse in the seminary faculty lounge...



...and continue fellowship over meals in the refectory.

the leadership Council to include several important officers of the community. Some of the brothers who were unable to be present physically were able to join the meeting virtually by Zoom, as was Bishop Visitor Rodney Michel. (Regrettably the wifi signal in the chapel was not up to livestreaming, but the preaching and worship of the community was recorded and is now available on YouTube via the Gregorian web page.)

Thursday's business concluded with a brief meeting of Council, which ratified the results of the provincial elections — and gave thanks to Enoch John Valentine (Rhode Island) for his years of faithful service as Minister Provincial of Province 1. Council also met with aspirant Clayton D Johnson (Pennsylvania), to discuss his thoughts in becoming a postulant after spending the better part of a week with the gathered brothers. He did indeed wish to go forward and begin postulancy the following day.

Friday also included rehearsals for the rites of admission and commissioning of the new Minister Provincial, which would take place at Evening Prayer that same day; and for the rite of first profession of Christopher Robert Werth (Maryland), at the Holy Eucharist on Saturday afternoon. Master of Ceremonies James Teets (Maryland) took all of the participants through their parts of these liturgies in order, with the participation of Minister General Richard Thomas and his Chaplain, John Henry Ernestine (Newark). That afternoon, Nathanael Deward assembled the schola for a rehearsal of the offertory anthem.

Evening Prayer brought with it Clayton's admission as a postulant and Virgilio's commissioning as Minister Provincial 1. It also included the first performance of Tobias Stanislas' hymn, "I Vow to You My Savior," set to the tune "Thaxted" from Gustav Holst's "Jupiter" movement of *The Planets*. After the liturgy, the



Clayton with Ronald Augustine and the Minister General.

community gathered for a group photo on the steps at the seminary’s main entrance and then some well-earned relaxation before and following Compline.

Saturday, the final day of Convocation, began with Morning Prayer as usual, then followed by the final facet of this year’s retreat program: General Convention Recap. Every year in which The Episcopal Church’s General Convention meets — it has been the practice of the Annual Convocation in that year to include a panel discussion of the events during that most important legislative occasion presented by those members who participated as deputies, staff and/or in other functions at that convention. Three brothers did serve at the 80th General Convention and were happy to constitute a panel to share some of their experiences of that major church-wide event: Richard Edward Helmer served as a Clerical Deputy from California and also as the Secretary of the Agenda Committee; Scott Michael was an Alternate Lay Deputy from Colorado and also served as part of the convention’s audio/visual team; and David Benedict

Hedges was a Clerical Deputy from Arizona. All three brothers provided



A view from General Convention

As part of the deputation from the Diocese of California and secretary for the House of Deputies Resolutions Review Committee, I spent much of my time at this General Convention in what I came to call the “crow’s nest”, the Secretariat on the highest level of the Convention Center. When not in the weeds of keeping resolutions on track for consideration on the floor and between the House of Bishops and House of Deputies, I was watching the floor debates or else out and about with other deputies and alternate deputies of the Convention in downtown Baltimore.

Most moving for me at this Convention were: 1) Standing with Bishops and Deputies from all across the church in a vigil two blocks from the Convention Center, where gun violence claimed another life just as General Convention opened. 2) Watching the “the passing of the torch” as the House of Deputies elected Julia Ayala Harris, the first Latina and woman of color as our president, our first indigenous officer, Rachel Taber-Hamilton, as Vice President, and a host of deputies in their 20s and 30s began to rise in leadership and the floor debates.

Wherever the Spirit leads the Church in the coming decade, our governance is in capable, prayerful, energetic hands!

Finally, it was a gift to get together with David Benedict and enjoy time with James and Tobias in their neighborhood for good eats and more than one laugh! — Richard Edward Helmer

insightful details of this event, and a number of questions followed from those who could not be present, given that the convention was pared back to just four days, and no visitors were permitted, due to COVID restrictions; there was also no display hall or related gatherings or events which normally accompany the General Convention.



The Colorado deputation including (far right) Scott Michael and his wife Erica (serving as a deputy) and son Finnegan (not yet eligible to serve)

The afternoon brought the community to the Holy Eucharist, at which Christopher Robert made his first vows of profession. David Benedict was celebrant; Gordon John Stanley (Chicago) deacon, Joseph Basil



In keeping with a long tradition, James offers a prayer with Christopher Robert, joined by Ciarán Anthony, prior to the profession liturgy.



Christopher Robert prostrates himself before the community during the chanting of the litany.

subdeacon; and the preacher and presider at the rite of profession was the Minister General, John Henry serving as his Chaplain. Many other members took their parts in this inspiring liturgy — as mentioned previously, Nathanael Deward conducted the Brotherhood's schola and he also served as organist for the Daily Offices and the daily masses on Tuesday and on Saturday, while Tommy Mandri (Southeast Florida) took the bench on Monday, Richard John Lorino (Central Florida) was our organist on Wednesday, Enoch John on Thursday and William Henry Benefield



Edward (l) and Thomas present Christopher Robert to make his first profession.

(West Texas) on Friday. We must also mention our excellent preachers during this convocation: Ronald Augustine Fox (Chicago) on Tuesday; Angel Gabriel Roque (Rio Grande) on Wednesday; Richard Edward on Thursday; and David Benedict on Friday, while our celebrants were Tobias Stanislas, Mark Andrew Jones (Southeast Florida), Richard Edward,

and David Benedict; our deacons were Edward Munro (Maryland), Virgilio, David Luke Henton (Rio Grande) and Gordon John; our acolytes were James, Francis Jonathan Bullock (Indianapolis), Scott Michael and Eric — who also served ably as sacristan for the week — and serving at each day's mass and at the Rites as our liturgical thurifer was Ronald Augustine.



Christopher Robert makes his vows...



... and signs the instrument of profession.

Annual Convocation 2022 began with the welcoming provided in The Gathering Service and concluded with The Mission Service, as it always does,





when our Minister General leads us in giving thanks for this fruitful and prayerful time together, and sends us out again to do the many ministries which our individual vocations focus us with — far too many to consider listing! Each member comes humbly before the Minister General with heartfelt thanksgiving, and the Minister General responds to each one in this way: “May the Holy Spirit guide and strengthen you, that in all things you may serve and glorify

God.” The comforting words of the 23rd Psalm are then chanted, after which the Minister General gives the dismissal: “Servants of the servants of God, go forth into the world, rejoicing in the power of the Spirit!” to which all respond: “Thanks be to God, to whom alone be glory!” And all then depart with the words of the Brotherhood’s traditional hymn, “Ye watchers and ye holy ones!” Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

Province 3

Tobias Stanislas Haller’s review of Bishop Andrew Doyle’s *Embodied Liturgy* and William Blaine-Wallace’s *When Tears Sing* appear in the September issues of *Anglican & Episcopal History* and *Anglican Theological Review* respectively.

Province 4

Larry Walter Reich (East Tennessee) is excited about a new opportunity suggested to him by Bishop Brian L Cole, to visit the parish churches in his area in order to “put a real face on religious life” — especially given General Convention’s introduction of Religious Life Sunday throughout The Episcopal Church. Larry Walter asked Director of Public Relations James Teets (Maryland) if The Brotherhood could provide a poster and brochures for him to take along in his travels. The flier, “The Gregorian Way,” was created for just that purpose, and James consulted with Director of Publications Tobias Stanislas Haller (Maryland), and developed a color poster for use on parish bulletin boards. Larry Walter will take the new poster along with him on his travels, and we look forward to seeing more about his visits in the future.

*Serving the Church
Serving Christ*
The Brotherhood of
Saint Gregory

A community of Episcopal men, lay and clergy, single or married, who find their lives enriched by fellowship, prayer, and service to the church in many ministries.

For more about the Gregorian Way, visit www.gregorians.org
Join us in the Daily Office at dailioffice.app

Soli Deo Gloria

Province 5

Ronald Augustine Fox (Chicago) successfully completed a four-week online course entitled “Soul Companionship: Introduction to Spiritual Direction” with the Center Quest School of Spiritual Direction in Pasadena CA. He is currently enrolled in the Certificate in Trauma and Spiritual Care program at San Francisco Theological Seminary in San Anselmo, CA. Congratulations to our dear brother!

A Convocation Sermon

Hidden treasure

Today, Jesus says to his disciples, “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.” Jesus then uses a second example of a man who finds a rare and beautiful pearl. This man immediately sells all of his belongings so he can buy this rare pearl, this treasure.

Today’s treasure for me is John Mason Neale. As noted by James E Kiefer, many Anglicans in his day were very suspicious of anything suggestive of Roman Catholicism. John Henry Newman had encouraged Romish practices in the Anglican Church, and had ended up joining the Romans himself. This encouraged the suspicion that anyone like Neale was an agent of the Vatican, assigned to destroy the Church of England by subverting it from within. “He is trying to sneak Roman Catholic traditions back into the English Church!”

This charge came up again and again against John Mason Neale. Ordained in the Church of England during the middle of the nineteenth century, he was so sickly he could not supervise a parish. Instead, he was assigned to be warden of a poorhouse, Sackville College. In the course of his duties, John had many opportunities to see the misery of the poor in rural villages, some of whom died unattended.

John set out to do something about it. He founded the Sisterhood of Saint Margaret to care for the sick. To other Church of England men, this looked like a return to nuns; they were furious. John Henry Newman had called for reforms and then had switched over to Rome. Was Neale on the same “treacherous” path? This wasn’t the first time John Neale had ruffled feathers. He had denounced churches that allowed the wealthy to box off sections of the church to separate themselves from commoners. Some of these elite folk even placed comfortable sofas in their boxes! The practice flatly contradicted the



One of the sights (sites) at the seminary on Long Island: an outdoor amphitheater

teaching of the Apostle James, who forbade Christians to give special seats to the rich (James 2:1-4).

John's appeals for the restoration of churches and for improved church architecture miffed other clergymen. But when John founded the Sisterhood of Saint Margaret, his very life came into danger. He was mauled at the funeral of one of the sisters. Crowds threatened to stone him or to burn his house. An evangelical pastor incited a riot against him at Lewes. The man's daughter had become one of the nurses and had caught scarlet fever and died, leaving the sisters a large sum in her will.

Another of John's actions that was viewed with suspicion was his translation of old Latin and Greek hymns into English. John explained why he was doing it: "Among the greatest inconveniences that followed from the adoption of national languages in the prayer books of the Reformation, must be counted the abrupt end to using all the hymns of the Western Church. That treasury, into which the saints of every age and country had poured their contributions... became as a sealed book and as a dead letter."

To remedy the problem, he turned such old hymns as "All glory, laud and honor" and "O come, O come, Emmanuel" into English. He also wrote the Christmas carol "Good King Wenceslas." When ill health laid John low and he knew he was dying, did he call to mind the solemn words of one of his own sermons? Resurrection, he had said, "is promised, and can be promised, only to the dead. If we are not dead with Christ, how can we live with him? But one or the other we must be. Dead to sin, or dead in sin; dead to Christ, or dead with Christ." He died on the Feast of the Transfiguration August 6, 1866. Although evil was spoken against him in his own day, he is honored by the church the day after, on August 7.

The Hymnal 1982 contains 27 texts or portions of texts that Neale translated, including such classics as, "All glory, laud, and honor," "Come, ye faithful, raise the strain," and "Of the Father's love begotten." The Hymnal also has two original texts by Neale, including "Good Christian friends, rejoice."

Jesus is speaking directly to us; He is inviting us to look for "the treasure" in our lives. I invite you to take some time today to ask yourself: Whom do I treasure? How do I demonstrate my love and care for those people? Do I frequently tell them how important they are to me or do I often take them for granted? As a huge fan of John Mason Neale, whose icon by Tobias hangs in my entryway, I think we truly commemorate a treasure in our lives, especially one who ruffled feathers time and time again.



Ronald Augustine Fox

A Convocation sermon

Becoming Who We Love: Saint Clare

Lesser Feasts and Fasts says this of Francis: “Of all the saints, Francis is perhaps the most popular and admired but probably the least imitated; few have attained to his total identification with the poverty and suffering of Christ.” The compulsive editor in me is tempted to break out an editorial pen and add an asterisk at the end of that sentence with a footnote that says, “See Clare of Assisi.”

My first ever really thoughtful engagement with Clare probably goes back to Zeffirelli’s famous film *Brother Sun Sister Moon* which mixes the more popular depictions of a gentle Francis with his more historical radical rejection of worldly wealth and embracing an austere life of poverty. Clare appears, stunningly beautiful and zealous, but, like Francis in the film, she is stylized to the point of almost running free of the obligations of well-to-do eligible virgins living in the high Middle Ages, skipping through fields of flowers, of course, complete with folksy guitar music and singing. One almost expects a glimpse of a set crew all wearing bell-bottoms! I digress only briefly to underscore how the popular imagination makes Clare — very much like Francis — more sanitized and palatable to our materialistic, commodified world: the wide-eyed, innocent, earnest pretty girl next door more than the spiritually serious, disciplined figure of both record and tradition.

A more vibrant image of Clare is found in Jan de Rosen’s 1949 mural in the nave of Grace Cathedral, San Francisco. On Palm Sunday, 1212, an 18-year-old Chiara Offreduccio, the desirable daughter of a wealthy and possibly quite ancient Roman patrician family, has escaped the confines of her home under cover of darkness and stands outside the doors of Porziuncola Chapel below Assisi. She is dressed in her fine traveling robe, elegant braids tucked into her



Richard Edward



Brothers engage in a lively discussion of the meaning of the vow of obedience.



Nathanael Deward directs the community schola.

hood, hands outstretched and open, eyes closed in earnest prayer. Around her stand the first of the Franciscan brothers, with grim expressions shadowed by the torches they carry, stirred as they must have been from their prayers or contemplation by the surprise visit of a young woman demanding to see the master himself.

And standing before Clare facing her is a gaunt Francis, whose sermon inspired Clare, hands similarly held outstretched and open prayerfully towards her, perhaps seeing in her a mirror of his own journey to holy poverty several years earlier. The painting captures the sense that Clare and Francis are reflections or dimensions of the same spirituality. For me, it also captures that Clare's insistence is too fierce to ignore or turn away. We are only a few moments from her throwing her fine robe and jewels upon the altar in embracing Francis' call to radical poverty.

Ah, the zeal of the newly converted! Francis must have had to think quickly what to do with the zealous Clare. It would only bring about scandal or even open conflict with her family to house her among the brothers, and so he found her temporary sanctuary in a Benedictine community of women. Within weeks, if not days, she had prevailed on Francis to commit to building her a more permanent home on the grounds at San Damiano. Her father and uncles attempted forcibly to remove her from her Benedictine sanctuary, but her will was unmovable. She clung fiercely to the altar, and threw off the veil to show them her cropped hair as witness to the seriousness of her commitment.

This was the first of Clare's open acts of disobedience to the early 13th-century world she was born into. It would not be her last. Her value to the patriarchs of her family was in an economically or politically advantageous marriage. Once an asset, her turn to radical poverty and leaving the protection of her familial household now made her a



Virgilio proclaims the gospel.



Eric presents (for a blessing) the Book of Common Prayer that Clayton will receive upon his admission to postulancy.

liability. Doubtless her name was already on the lips of the local gossips. The murmurings and questions likely dogged her family in even the most polite company.

But Clare insisted she now belonged to a different spiritual — if not cosmic — order. Obedience for her now meant something different, for her spouse would be Christ himself. Austere poverty would be her practice. And even as the scandal she represented in a highly ordered, patriarchal world would make the ears of pontiffs burn, she would not be deterred. As she would later put it: “We become what we love and who we love shapes what we become.”

Clare’s journey made her among the most influential women in Christianity and religious life in nearly 1,000 years. Not since Macrina taught and disciplined her more famous brothers, Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa in the Nicene Age, did one woman’s action and witness so shape and form much of what was to come.



Also preaching at Convocation were Angel Gabriel (l) and David Benedict (r). All sermons are available on video via links through the home page of the Brotherhood at gregorians.org.



If Francis was dangerous, Clare was more so. Her example doubly underlined the danger of the Franciscan movement — and its inspiration. The movement renewed awareness that the gospel offered a radical counterpoint to the worldly consolidation of wealth and power, especially in the hands of the church and the ancient religious houses.

By the time Clare moved next door to San Damiano, where her sister Agnes — perhaps multiple sisters — and even her devout mother ultimately joined her, a community of women began to form. Initially, Francis oversaw their life. Eventually, Clare became their abbess. They adopted a fourth additional vow to the mendicant three of poverty, chastity, and obedience: enclosure. Her cloistered group became known for its life of simple prayer, quietude, contemplation, manual labor, and acts of service to the poorest of the poor.

Clare prayerfully struggled with what obedience meant for the rest of her natural life. Tradition holds that her community's initially strict observance of a vegetarian diet, remaining barefoot, and sleeping on the hard floor proved ultimately even too austere for her. "Our bodies are not made of brass," Clare reportedly quipped as she relaxed that element of her sisters' practice. She labored uncomfortably for years under a Rule adapted from the Benedictines by Pope Gregory IX. But where she would never relent, even in the face of offers of dispensation from the pope himself, was from the radical poverty she had learned from Francis. This made her a voice of conscience not only for her sisters in the way, but for the brothers of San Damiano and beyond. With the freedom to travel and spread the Franciscan message, the brothers constantly were confronted on the road with the severe limits of their vow of radical poverty. Francis himself would grow frustrated with his friars as they began to found houses, and elements of the Benedictine organization began to seep through the cracks in their austere Franciscan resolve.

But Clare held fast, obedient to her initial inspiration. And because she outlived Francis by 27 years, her witness would become a source of strength for the brothers. With Clare's conscientious call to adhere to Francis' original vision, they would go out and more faithfully struggle with their vows in the world, and the tender young tree of the Franciscan movement and its multiplying branches, of which Clare's was the first, would become firmly rooted in the Christian forest.

For Clare and her sisters, the world would have to come to them. And the world did. By the end, despite ill-health and never leaving the grounds of her community's enclosure, Clare had held true to the vision of simple, radical adherence to the gospel and inspired others well beyond her community to do





The Brotherhood of Saint Gregory in Convocation, 2022

the same, she had penned the first known rule for women written by a woman — officially accepted by the church only two days before her death. She had resisted the temptations of the most powerful men in her society and the church, and, keeping her gaze firmly fixed on Christ, drew many into her spiritual counsel and example.

Clare's community of Poor Ladies of Saint Damien, upon her death, was rechristened the "Poor Clares" in her honor, and they persist around the world to this day in their enclosures of contemplation, radical poverty, offering intentions for those who ask, and sharing what little they have with the poorest of the poor. Clare's indelible mark was that women's orders gained a distinctive, respected place in the growing, evolving religious life of the church.

As we have considered obedience this week, I have been wondering what we might draw from Clare's example. A blessing we have inherited distills Clare's final words on her deathbed and provides us a guide. It opens pithily with the simplicity of her vision:

Live without fear. Brothers, in order to be dangerous and effective as religious, obedient voices of conscience for the church and world we are called to love as God loves them, we must learn and relearn to let go of our fear.

Your creator has made you holy. Clare reminds us we will never be sanctified by our own efforts, but by God's actions alone in our lives.

God has always protected you, and loves you as a mother. Somehow, in all that we have endured and suffered and struggled with as individuals and as a

community, here we are this day. Some might say we have made it this far by grace, and by God's grace alone. Clare goes even further, reminding us that we are cherished beyond our wildest imaginings. Clare points to that bond far beyond words with the one who birthed us spiritually — a bond that can only be related to the deeply visceral love a devoted mother has for her children. This is yet another reason, Clare tells us, that we might obediently begin to let go of the fear that holds us back.

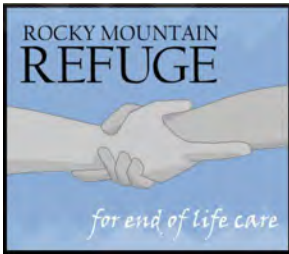
Go in peace to walk the good road. So with that love laid before us and freed from the bondage of fear, we are sent forth from each and every gathering, meditation, office, and eucharist, to the good we are called obediently to do. With blessing. With our eyes, most of all, fixed obediently on our beloved Christ, and the gift of God's kingdom. For, as Clare taught, "We become what we love and who we love shapes what we become."

Richard Edward Helmer

News of a ministry

Refuge at the end of life

James Patrick Hall (Colorado) has worked with The Rocky Mountain Refuge for End of Life Care before and since it opened its doors last February. The following is from a recent press release.



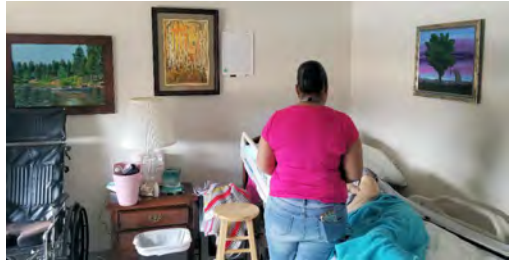
After six months, we are nearing the end of a hot summer. In that time as the cycle of the seasons has evolved, our unhoused neighbors continued their own cyclical rhythms, dealing with the relentless challenges of shelter, food, safety, health, and connections with others. Untold numbers of them died on the streets, under bridges, in tents, and, if they were lucky, in emergency or palliative care hospital rooms.

The difference now is that some of those terminally ill neighbors were able to come to the Refuge and find a safe place to make the final transition from this life. In this place, they found a refuge many hadn't experienced in a long time, if ever.

They came to a place where their personal and hygienic needs were met, where hospice services were provided, where they didn't need to worry about their next meal, and where caring people learned their names and wanted to know their life stories. In short, they had a home they could come into and depart from at ease.

The story of Rocky Mountain Refuge for End of Life Care began nearly five years ago when some friends imagined providing a safe place for unhoused folks to receive hospice care. The founding board members realized that as Denver's population of unhoused people was aging there were increasing

numbers of individuals who were left to face their last days alone, in environments that lacked dignity and without the full support of hospice care. People with terminal illnesses but no stable home have very few options. Emergency rooms, often a last resort for people on the street, are the most costly and least effective. Rocky Mountain Refuge can provide care for our friends at a fraction of the cost of multiple admissions to ER or palliative care rooms.



The Refuge is the first shelter of its kind in the Denver area and one of few nationwide. Hospice agencies assist in one's home and do not typically provide shelter, or if so, have very few beds. If a person with no home is estranged from family, hospice agencies struggle to provide care. Denver's homeless shelters meet immediate, short-term needs while hospice patients need individual custodial care for weeks, with privacy and stability that shelters are not designed to offer.



Resident Jeff Dorris in his last days at the Refuge (photo by Katie Warnke, Green Earth Photography)

The Refuge operates as a specialized shelter that fills this gap in care services. Our staff and volunteers operate as an extension of one's family, giving basic care such as help with laundry, personal hygiene, and companionship. No one who comes to us is alone in their final journey.

The Refuge's hospice agency partners provide the skilled nursing, medication, and physician services which may be needed to care for our residents. This improvement in care is done at a lower cost than repeated admissions to hospital ER or admission to temporary critical care facilities.

Often the most powerful relationship an unhoused person may have is with their pet. We understand that and have a relationship with Maxfund no-kill shelter to accept the pet of a person coming to us. They can rest easy knowing we will take good care of their beloved pet.

We offer shelter for end-of-life care regardless of a person's race, color, religion (creed), gender, gender expression, age, national origin (ancestry), disability, marital status, sexual orientation, or military status.

Information about the Refuge's services for and impact on terminally ill unhoused neighbors, as well as ways to help, can be found at rockymountainrefuge.org.

