



Lay Cistercians of Gethsemani Spring 2007

Welcome to the LCG newsletter!

“The purpose in contemplation is not just that we may become aware of God or truths about God, but that God may see the Trinity reflected in each of us, in our own particular identity.”
Thomas Merton – “The Springs of Contemplation”

Notes from Bob Siegel:

Replies or comments to Bob can be sent to:

Bob Siegel 1714 Sayre St. Midland MI 48640 or

E-mail: bobdee8@chartermi.net

Our Midland LCG community reflected on “LCG Community” question this month. I have been thinking about the various communities of which I am a part: our family, our neighborhood, our church, our friends, LCG Leadership, and all of you. As I was thinking of my participation in community with all of you I realized that we have all kinds of communities in LCG. There are **7 formalized LCG communities** in 6 states, and a couple more considering formation. I also believe as Jesus said where two or three are gathered in my name I am there, and we have several more of these communities.

Which brings me to my request. There are many of our members who live in areas that do not have a ‘formalized’ community. It would be great if we could form small 2 or 3 people communities even via the internet. But we need your help. Would you be willing to form such a union with another LCG member via telephone and the internet. Please pray about this and let me know .

Another community we have is the **Web site “Forum”** we currently have 27 people who are chatting and sharing with one another in this process.

Believe it or not we also have the **“financial” community** which is all of us supporting the upkeep and running of the LCG. If you have not received an Email or US postal letter inviting you to become part of this community please let me know and I will make sure you are included. We certainly do not want to leave anyone out.

Also let me know if there are any community aspects of LCG that I may have left out and I will share them in the next newsletter.

LCG Community News:

Midland group: (submitted by Bob Siegel)

This month the Midland LCG group is studying and sharing thoughts about living in community. The following item was written by Fr. Michael Casey. His comments are on the RB Prologue (45). The Midland group proposes that for us in the LCG our schola is our community.

“It should be noted that a *schola*, “school”, in the time of Benedict was not the equivalent of the word today. It was an assembly room capable of serving various groups: soldiers or officers of a particular company; craftsmen or tradesmen of the same organization; students gathered about their teacher. It could also designate the group which assembled there, as well as the activities in which the members of the group joined when they were gathered together. Both RM and RB speak of the monk as soldier, servant, worker, student, and always within the metaphor of the school of Christ. In every case, Christ is the leader of the group, of the *schola*. Because the expression serves so well to indicate the multiple, intimate relationships of the Benedictine community with its Lord, RB uses it as the most appropriate term to distinguish the monastery from the other Christian communities. The school which Benedict is establishing is cenobitic in character, that is, his disciples live in community”.’ (Fr. Michael Casey)

Greater Cincinnati LCG Community: (submitted by Mike Johnson)

In January the **Greater Cincinnati LCG Community** began its 2007 monthly schedule of community formation meetings and days of prayer. We finally began our group study of the *Exordium* at a community formation meeting on January 20. Debbie Wright facilitated the discussion of the Introduction and Unit One. At our next meeting on February 10, Jan Pettit facilitated the discussion of Unit Two, on the founders of Citeaux. We all were somewhat overwhelmed at first with attempting to approach the task of studying the *Exordium*, but we have been pleasantly surprised of how inspiring and insightful the experience has been. Members of our community are rotating facilitation responsibility for each unit. We use the questions at the end of each unit that are particularly helpful to lay Cistercians, as we become more familiar with the Cistercian founders and founding documents. Some members who have been unable to attend a meeting have submitted their reflections and responses to the questions via email. We will be compiling notes and reflections as we progress through the *Exordium* that will be helpful for future members of our community.

We are also including in our formation meetings an opportunity for individual faith sharing in light of a commitment to the lay Cistercian way of life. We want to get to know each other on a deeper spiritual level, build community, and encourage spiritual companionship.

On the weekend of March 9-11, we will share a weekend "Cistercian/Benedictine Experience" together at the Moyer Spiritual Life Center in Northern Kentucky. This weekend will involve our following a "monastic like" schedule of *ora et labora*, such as, daily Eucharist, vigils (6:30 AM), chapter (formation) meetings, grand silence, work activity, reading at meals, Liturgy of the Hours, silence, and personal time for reading and rest. One of our members, Fr. John Fischer, is planning the weekend for us. He participated in a similar experience for an entire week a few years ago. [If anyone is interested in joining us for this unique weekend experience, please contact Mike Johnson at LCG503@aol.com or 513-523-9358 for more information, including the cost for the weekend.]

Also, the Greater Cincinnati LCG community is planning the 2007 LCG retreat at Gethsemani in September. We are discussing ideas for a theme of the retreat.

We welcome **Sue Kephart** and **Jim Bellew** who are beginning their discernment and formation process with our community. Your prayers are requested for our candidate, **Gary Paquin**, and his family. Gary is being treated for a brain tumor.

LCG Forum: (Web discussion group) (submitted by Jane Endriss)

The LCG FORUM has been discussing several topics:

- Contemplation and its importance in establishing a deep relationship with God
- The Ego – setting up false boundaries to God
- Transcendent and personal nature of God
- Nature and God's Holy Presence

New Hampshire: A new community is just starting in New Hampshire with two members there. Both are very excited about Cistercian life and spirituality, and we look forward to hearing more from them soon.

Southeast Pennsylvania/Northern Maryland: (submitted by Jane Endriss) We have been reading the book, "Finding Sanctuary" and have had some online discussions regarding the nature of "obedience". We are now reading "The Way of Simplicity" by Esther DeWaal. In addition, we have discovered that Mount St. Mary's grotto and chapel in Emmitsburg, MD, provide a wonderful resource for prayer and solitude.

Indiana: (submitted by Carol Andrejasich)

Two of our candidates have elected to postpone their discernment/formation process with LCG. We have recently added two new candidates, both from the Indianapolis area. Mike Johnson will be joining us for a meeting on Saturday, March 3. The group continues to meet monthly on a Tuesday morning at Panera's at 7 am. We are a young group and are exploring ways to connect with each other and form community even though some of us are not close geographically. We have been sharing books we have read via e-mail and are looking at other on-line applications.

Chicago: (submitted by Bob Johnson) Our January meeting focused on *Ora et Labora*, following a lead from Fr. Michael's remarks at the LCG 2007 Epiphany gathering. **Tom Leonard** led our discussion and consideration of tools/styles of meditation—preferred and useful methods we use to enter into meditation. We concurred on the importance of regularity (daily, preferred), the helpfulness of fashioning a "sacred space" in our home devoted to contemplation, and carving a space of silence to facilitate communion with God.

From our members:

Community: George Schaller

"Very few are sanctified in isolation. Very few become perfect in absolute solitude." Merton wrote these words in *New Seeds of Contemplation*. The need for community, I believe is a very basic one. We can't do this alone, this being the road of a contemplative in the middle of very strange land called the world.

We need one another because the light we carry is not bright enough on its own at times to illuminate the way; our capacity for light, the light emanating from the Divine Being, often fails to radiate from us because we block or deflect its brightness by getting in the way. *In* community we become a band of "lamp lighters" for one another when our own dims.

The bronze casting on the hill at Gethsemane represents an image of what is most important about the Cistercian vocation. Friends of Jesus rest in various states of awareness, some asleep, some awake waiting. The casting is of individuals but they are all of one piece almost flowing into each other, becoming whole in their separate states. This oneness is what I find to be the most important on our journey.

I'm fed by the stories that we share with one another about our lives and how we attempt to make sense of this mystery we call life. This breaking and sharing of life helps me to keep on the way when often I want to wander around the edges.



Lenten reflection: The Cross (by Handmaiden)

The Cross:

Symbol of the worlds' offenses bearing down
upon the Lord as He carried it.
Altar upon which the sacrificial Lamb was slain.
Bed upon which the greatest act of Love was
fulfilled.
Throne from which the Lord reigns.
Insignia of the Beloved.
Crest of the Great Warrior.

The Cross:

That which bore Him down to the ground
Also lifted Him up to the skies.
That which was to bring Him shame
Brought unto Him only Glory.
That which was to crush Him out of existence
Established for all times His Good Name.

The Cross:

Hard and plain, cold and cruel
Bearing upon its frame
The gentlest,
The most loving,
The softest,
The most generous
Man
Of all times.

It was everything He was not:
It was cold...
He was warm.

It was hard...

He was soft.
It was immovable...
He was easily affected.
It was crude...
He was delicate.
It was yet chosen from all times
To carry His broken Body
upon its sturdy frame.

The Cross:

That which could not love
Cradled Love Himself.
That which could not live
Held Life.
That which is consumable by fire
Held the Living Flame.

The Cross:

More than a crude instrument of death
For at its crossroads was
The Way
And at its center lay
The Truth
And from its darkness shone
The Light
Directing all of Man's eyes
Heavenward
Towards
the
Father.

Administration:

LCG advisory meeting

The next LCG advisory meeting is scheduled for June 23rd. If members have concerns or suggestions, please discuss them with your LCG area coordinator before time, so that the item can be discussed, if needed, by the advisory council.

Kentucky: Kathleen Ellison and Bryan Sherwood
Columbus, OH: Mary Gilbert and Don Buckingham
Indiana: Carol Andrejasich
Cincinnati: Mike Johnson

Midland, MI: Bob Siegel and George Schaller
PA: Jane Endriss
LCG Forum: Jane Endriss (moderator)
Chicago area: Bob Johnson
Abbey: Fr. Michael Casagram and Br. Paul Quenon

International Lay Cistercian (ILC) Steering Committee Seeking Your Responses

LCG is in the process of reflecting on three questions presented to the 56 worldwide Lay Cistercian communities by the ILC Steering Committee and compiling a collective response to the questions. This process of reflecting, discussion, and preparing a written response is in preparation to the 4th International Encounter of Lay Cistercians to be held at the Monasterio Santa Maria de Huerta in Spain in June 2008. [For more information, visit the webpage of the ILC regarding the 2008 Encounter at <http://www.cistercianfamily.org/guidelinesenglish.html>].

Representatives of the USA region of Lay Cistercians (12 communities) will be meeting at the Abbey of Gethsemani in November 2007 in preparation for the 2008 Encounter in Spain. The main agenda item at the Gethsemani meeting will be to compile the collective responses to these questions from the 12 USA lay Cistercian communities to be included in a report that will be presented at Huerta. During the Encounter at Huerta a final report or letter will be prepared that will include the collective responses of all international lay Cistercian communities. This letter will be presented at the OCSO General Chapter in September 2008.

Bob Siegel and Mike Johnson are coordinating the effort to compile the responses to the following questions from the LCG community. All LCG members and candidates, those belonging to an established local/regional LCG community or not, are encouraged to reflect on and respond to these questions. Confer with your local coordinator(s) who were given directives regarding this assignment. Send your responses to Bob Siegel no later than June 1, so that he and Mike Johnson have time to prepare a draft report to be reviewed and finalized at the meeting of the LCG Advisory Council in June.

1. Reflect and write a description of what it means for individuals within your Lay Community to live their Cistercian vocation in the world. Do not simply list practices (such as lectio, attending Mass, meditation, the rosary, etc.) and values (such as humility, obedience, patience, silence, etc.) but rather describe why these practices and values are important. Is it possible to live a Cistercian lifestyle in the world?
2. Similarly, reflect and write a description of what it means for your members to live their Cistercian vocation together in community. What aspects of community are most important and what contributes most to a sense of one's Cistercian vocation-both when you are together and when you are apart?
3. Lastly, reflect and write a description of what it means to be in a spiritual relationship with a Cistercian monastery (Abbey of Gethsemani). What are the characteristics of this relationship-individually and as a group? What works well and what does not work so well?

Please send your responses to Mike Johnson, PO Box 503, Oxford, OH 45056 or E-mail him at: LCG503@aol.com.

FINANCIAL OFFERING for the LCG

Mailings for annual offering for the LCG for the upcoming year have been sent out. This year, the LCG is asking for a free-will offering with a suggested donation of \$10 to \$25, or other as you see fit. 10% of the money collected for dues will be tithed to the Alliance for International Monasticism. (*Note: The LCG is filing for Tax Exempt status for 2007.)

Make check or money order payable to "LCG" and mail to: LCG, PO Box 503, Oxford, OH 45056



UPCOMING EVENTS

Lay Cistercians of Gethsemani Retreat

2007 Annual LCG retreat will be held **September 28-30, 2007** at the Abbey of Gethsemani.

Reservations will be open as soon as list of candidates, mentors, and presenters (from the Greater Cincinnati community) have been finalized. Bob Siegel and Mike Johnson will notify the membership regarding the opening of the reservations.

CISTERCIAN HISTORY

For the next several newsletters, we are going to include excerpts from “Gethsemani Speaks” written by Father Edward Knecht, the abbey’s archivist in the 1950’s through the 1970’s. The excerpts included here are used by permission of the Abbey of Gethsemani:



Thomas Dunn, Postulant

In the graveyard there is a cross bearing the inscription: “Thomas Dunn, Postulant ...died August 12, 1915”

Every cross in the hallowed ground surmounts a lifetime of history and of grace. But coming generations may miss one of the best of the secrets hidden there under the sod, if it were not recorded now.

Thomas Dunn never wrote a letter to Gethsemani, so far as we know. He corresponded, however, with the Blessed Mother, and she bade him come and try Gethsemani. Tommy came. It was July, 1915. Alas, the poor boy got cold feet and left.

Compunctious visitings came over him and he repented the step. Tommy was at the gate again after a week or two. This time, he knows better and will stay for sure. He made the Way of the Cross often, and told our suffering Jesus his trouble and his determination to live for him alone. Mary would help...

But how weak is our fallen human nature. Tommy once more got the chills and, with tears, he left a second time.

Grace was not at its limit with this soul. Jesus knows human nature, and Mary is ever ready to take the part of a good-willed boy that comes back to throw himself in her arms. Tommy did just that, and came back to Gethsemani a third time.

Now! Now! He was determined!!! He made the way of the Cross again and at the twelfth station he promised our dying Savior his fidelity. He cast himself again in the arms of his Mother and, in a moment of heroic resolution, begged her to take him out of life rather than let him weaken again and leave.

What happened? In the afternoon, as we novices were gathered around the cellar entrance near the secular kitchen, Father Abbot comes out rather hurriedly. Something on his face spoke of real, earnest and fresh news. We waited in suspense...

“Do you know”, he said, “that the postulant is dead? I just came down from his room in the hotel where I anointed him, and held him in my arms as he passed away. Half an hour ago, Father Guestmaster came in a rush to my room saying, “The postulant, Tommy Dunn, is very, very, sick. Took sick suddenly.” I hastened to the room on the second floor, and sure enough, Tommy was dying. I anointed him at once and, before much more could be done or said, Tommy whispered, “Mother has taken me at my word. I am going to meet her. I persevered this time...God be blessed!”

We buried Tommy next day. He rests in Mary’s arms.

From Fr. Michael Casagram, OCSO:

Fr. Michaels Homily for February 7, 2007 – Gospel: Mark 7: 14-23

+If the principal work of the monk is to stand at the door of his heart and watch his thoughts as they arise, discerning whether they are of God from himself or from the evil one, as many of the early monks experienced, then today's gospel text (Mk 7: 14-23) must have been one of their favorites. Jesus is inviting not only monks but everyone who would be his disciple to just such an exploration, to be aware of what comes out of us, from within our person, from our hearts if we are going to be in touch with what really does us harm. Half the battle is won if we know where the real forces of good and evil are engaged. One cannot help thinking that all great insights of psychology could easily be summed up in these few words from St Mark, that it is what comes out of a person that defiles him or her. Jesus tells us that it is our response to exterior events that makes all the difference in the world, that gives us the key to perfect freedom and love. And isn't it the response that we celebrate at this altar that models for us the most authentic response to the exterior forces affecting our lives.

The reason I feel this gospel text is so terribly important is that our response to exterior events is what makes all the difference in the world in how they affect us, the good they bear or the damage they inflict. Jesus was cutting through and exposing meaningless traditions of Pharisees with which they had burdened the people. Only too often we burden ourselves with our own set ways and demanding response. Being aware of the subtle movements in our hearts can reveal great insights into the spiritual life, the movements by which we are carried along by other than grace, by other than our true selves in Christ.

Contributions to Newsletter

- If anyone would like to contribute an article, poem, quote, or prayer request to the next LCG newsletter, please send it to Jane Endriss at JEndr@aol.com



Photo submitted by Bryan Sherwood