

THE WORKER SISTERS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT



BULLETIN



THE WORKER BROTHERS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT



**CELTIC SPIRITUALITY AND THE
DESERT FATHERS AND MOTHERS OF EGYPT
February 2020**

Bulletin Cover St. Kevin's Monastery - 6th Century Ireland

The monastery at Glendalough was enclosed within a circular wall. Unlike Benedictine monasteries, Celtic monasteries embraced entire families; men, women, their children and animals lived in the outer walls, while the celibates lived within the inner walls. In these worlds within the walls, they prayed and worked together in unity with all creation.

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Community Communication Contacts:

Prayer Requests and News Notes for the monthly Bulletin - email Br. Ephrem, andrews8484@hotmail.com or see green sheets for his mailing address.

Changes of address, phone numbers, email addresses - email Sr. Christine casturges@gmail.com or Sr. Wendy Samuel virtue54@outlook.com or see green sheets for mailing addresses.

Urgent Community Prayer Requests for email distribution – email or call Sr. LaVerne Peter: Callaghan@aol.com, Sr. Christine: casturges@gmail.com or Sr. Wendy Samuel: virtue54@outlook.com

Financial Contributions –

Members residing in the U.S., make checks payable to WSHS/WBHS and mail to:

Sr. Nancy Teresa, WSHS, Treasurer, United States, 12900 Glenwood Street, Apt. 108, Overland Park, KS 66209

If you pay any bills through your bank, you can easily send your contributions to WSHS the same way. Use the address above to send your check. You can make a one-time payment or a recurring payment. If you have questions, your bank will be happy to help you. And - you don't need any postage!

Members residing in Canada, make cheques payable to WSHS/WBHS and mail to Br. David, WBHS, Treasurer, Canada. 2170 Preston Road, Cavan Monaghan, Ontario, K9J 0G5 Canada

Contributions to Haiti Clean Water Project –

Check contributions to the Haiti Clean Water Project may be mailed to Sr. Alexandra Francis, WSHS 7711 E Waverly Street, Tucson, AZ 85715.

Please make your check payable to Alexandra Zarris. Put “WSHS Haiti Clean Water” in the memo line.

Problems Receiving your Bulletin - If you are not receiving the monthly Bulletin (by regular mail or by email), please email or call **Sr. Christine**, *not Trina*. Thank you.

If a friend expresses interest in WSHS/WBHS, remember to direct them to our website, www.workersisters.org, www.workerbrothers.org

THE WORKER SISTERS AND BROTHERS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

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Sr. M. Regina Goberna, O.S.B. (New City Press, NY, 1983)

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CALENDAR

**CORPORATE COMMUNIONS
FEBRUARY 2020**

CORPORATE COMMUNIONS

Corporate Communion and meetings are held monthly where members are within physical proximity of each other. Currently these gatherings are taking place in the following locations. For more information, please contact the Community member listed below.

Ontario, Canada
Michigan USA
Kansas City, MO USA
Southern MO USA
Pleasant Hill, TN USA
Arizona USA
Illinois USA

Br. David, WBHS
Sr. Julie Margaret, WSHS
Sr. Dorothy Cecilia, WSHS
Sr. Barbara Veronica, WBHS
Sr. Janeen Julian, WSHS
Ginny Berkey, WSHS
Sr. Diane Richard, WSHS

CORPORATE COMMUNIONS FOR 2020

February 22 • March 28 • April 25 •
May 23 • June 27 •
July 25 • August 22 • September 26 •
October 24 • November 21 • December 12

RETREAT 2020
APRIL 30 - MAY 3, 2020
CELTIC SPIRITUALITY
Mercy Center, St. Louis, MO

Call to Prayer. Please remember our Community in prayer twice a day 8:00 AM and 5:00 PM in your time zone and pray for World Peace at Noon.



8:00 AM - Prayer for our Community
12:00 Noon - Prayer for World Peace
5:00 PM - Prayer for our Community



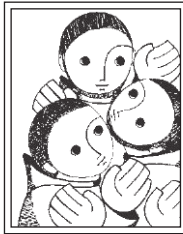
Sr. Brenda Faith was ordained to the Sacred Order of Priests on January 18, 2020 at the Cathedral Church of St. Andrew in Jackson, Mississippi. She is standing to the right of the Bishop. WSHS approved her being vested in the WSHS vestments.



COMMUNITY CHANGES

Please make the following alterations to your Green Sheets

Br. Ephrem has moved to Massachusetts. His new address is:
11 Wenonah Road, Buzzards Bay, MA 02532-4319
His email stays the same.



SPECIAL NEWS NOTES

We received the following prayer request from Br. Frantz Benedict on January 18 as we were compiling the February Bulletin. Please join us in praying for Br. Frantz and the people of Haiti. Thank you for your ongoing prayers.

Greetings from Haiti,

Haiti needs your prayers particularly Bolosse area. My parish is located actually in Bolosse. For the past two weeks it was quiet but suddenly gunshots starts again. For tomorrow our kids planned scout's anniversary. We invited many other groups to share this moment with us. A Baptist minister, scout himself, was invited to preach. Our scouts spend time and energy for this 30th celebration of group Edouard Jones. But we postponed it because of gunshots since last night. Many left their lives. Scout leader and five of them are inside and hesitates to go home. Parish school is affected in this turmoil. From 400 students we now have 159. If this continues we will have real difficulties to continue. Pray for us.

Br. Benedict, WBHS



Renewal of vows of Br Benedict at the chapel of the sisters of St Margareth on December 30th 2019



HAITI

In the month of December, we were able to ship one case of water tablets to Haiti. It is wonderful that with donations coming in, we are able to ship out at least one case monthly.

Thank you Community and individual churches for helping keep our Haiti Mission strong, continuing our cause of supplying water tablets to help alleviate cholera and other diseases that affect the people of Haiti.

And of course, we thank our dear Sr. Betty-Lou Shirley for her continued support for making sure that the tablets are forwarded to Haiti in a timely manner.

Blessings to all our Community,

Sr. Alexandra Francis



FROM YOUR DIRECTORS
RETREAT REMINDERS

By now you may have received your 2020 Retreat Brochure and forms. If not, they are on their way to you! **We invite all members of the Community to attend;** Workers, Sisters, Brothers, Applicants, Companions and Friends. **Plan now to attend! Retreat dates are Thursday afternoon April 30 to Sunday afternoon May 3.**

The Registration and Accommodations forms are the last two pages of the Brochure. Register as soon as possible so we know you are coming! Mail your completed registration form and check by or before February 21, to get the early Registration Discount Rate. The accommodation rates have gone up a bit since last year. This is the first time it has happened in quite some time, and we understand the necessity for it being done.

RETREAT SCHOLARSHIPS

There is some money available for scholarship help to attend Retreat. Send your request (include how much money you would need) to: Sr. LaVerne Peter, E-mail – callaghgan@aol.com

RETREAT AIR TRAVEL PLANS NEEDED

Please email your air travel arrangements as soon as possible to our Retreat Travel Coordinator, Howard McClendon, Companion, at Hmclndn@gmail.com. Howard will again provide transportation from the airport to the Retreat Center for as many as possible and will coordinate travel groups for departure after the retreat, again providing transportation where feasible.

He will need your Name, Email Address, Cell Phone # and Travel Dates/Arrival Time with Flight #, Departure Time with Flight #. Please note that the St/ Louis Airport WILL NOT ALLOW curbside parking, so he will be parked in the cell-phone parking lot which is only a couple of minutes from the arrival pickup lanes. Gather your luggage and then call him at 601-467-7628 when you are curbside. He will then depart the cell-phone parking lot to pick you up - hopefully with 2-3 minutes. If others are arriving at approximately the same time at another terminal it may take a little longer. Once he has most of the travel itineraries he will email a travel schedule spreadsheet to everyone so you can see who will be arriving at about the same time. This may give you a better idea of wait times. Howard's Red Ford Flex can carry 4 passengers and luggage at a time, five in a pinch depending on luggage size. There will be a WSHS placard displayed on the vehicle windshield and passenger side window.

ORDERS FORMS ENCLOSED for WSHS/WBHS Shirts & Sweatshirts

PLEASE NOTE: Send your completed order form and check to **Sr. Barbara Rebecca, WSHS** by **March 15th**. Checks should be made out to WSHS/WBHS and marked "Clothing."

GREEN SHEET UPDATES

Our annual update of the Green Sheets begins now. If your address, email or phone has changed, send the updated information to **Sr. Paula Adelaide, WSHS**. Her email is: paula@paulamorrow.com. Our **deadline for completing the update is March 15th**. Changes throughout the year will continue to be printed in our Bulletin.



SPIRITUAL SHARING

On the 1st Sunday after Christmas, as the gospel was read, I was drawn into the reading from John. "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him and without Him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in Him was life and the life was the light of all people. That shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." It was like being in a dream and hearing the words that were hard to understand and yet felt comforting at the same time. I am excited to start what feels like a new time of spiritual growth.

My final insight for this yellow letter - don't put people in boxes. I am sure that most people would not have been surprised if Saul of Tarsus {later to become St. Paul, the great apostle of the Gentiles} had continued to be a renowned persecutor of Christians until the end of his life. But he was struck off his horse on the way to Damascus one day and history has never been the same.

The verse I plan to recite every day in 2020 at my prayer time is from Ephesians 3: 20-21 – "Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory." This verse always reminds me the Holy Spirit makes sure our prayers are delivered on high.

I have been house cleaning and came across letters from my first Cluster Leader, Sr. Meredyth James. Her last paragraph about writing our yellow letters was such a good explanation of the purpose. She wrote:

“I cannot emphasize enough the need to get down in some concrete manner your journey each month. If drifting I find it anchors, if charging it directs, if lost may find something and so forth. It is work to learn this way and effort is rewarded in so many ways without our being aware. The “effort” becomes nourishment without which we sag. The many parts of us all are involved in the process and to understand and keep all moving requires that we look and learn and act on the process. Even one word is enough. Do not stay away from it for any reason. Embrace it and just be with it. It’s you and the most important thing about you is you.”

This was the last paragraph in her letter, back when we were all writing hard copy on the yellow sheets and putting them in the snail mail in 1986.

I have been struggling with my participation on the Bishop’s Committee at our small church. I have been very involved for a number of years and did not welcome another year on the committee, much less as the bishop’s Warden. Wrestling with the decision for several weeks has allowed me to listen. I now feel comfortable with the decision to continue. It must be the Holy Spirit talking to me. If left to my own, I might not have made this choice.

It seems like I am shifting more and more into caretaking for elderly clients for two home care companies. For one of my clients, I spend most of my time just keeping him company. He has no extended family, no children and no current wife. He is alone most of the time, I believe he is glad to see me. I mostly talk to him. He is very interested in astronomy, so I have brought him children’s picture books about our solar system, our galaxy, and the universe. I show him the pictures and he fills in details about planets, stars, asteroids, meteors, meteorites, and so forth.



FORMATION AND TRAINING

Celtic Spirituality and the Desert Fathers and Mothers of Egypt

By

Sr. Paula Adelaide, WSHS

Sr. Paula Adelaide lives in Chicago, Illinois. She became a Lay Worker at Retreat 1994. Her interest in Celtic spirituality stems from her youth, when she first read of "thin places" and longed to experience one. Today, deeply concerned for "this fragile Earth, our island home," she finds the Celtic connection with all Creation especially meaningful.

This house full of delight
Is built on the rock
And indeed the true vine
Transplanted out of Egypt.



So boasts a seventh-century prayer book from the monastery at Bangor, Northern Ireland.

Surprising as it may sound, Celtic spirituality developed with stronger ties to the Coptic Christianity of Egypt than to the dominant Roman or Greek traditions. Although physical evidence of the link between Celtic Christianity and the desert monastics is fragmentary, it is also fascinating.

A few archaeological examples

- The "beehive" hermits' cells in ancient Celtic sites are unlike anything in the Roman church but similar to the domed cells of St. Anthony's community in Egypt.
- Ancient monastery ruins in Ulster contain the burial sites of seven Coptic monks.
- Celtic monuments are found across northern Africa, especially in Egypt.
- The National Library in Paris holds an early guidebook used by Irish monks on pilgrimage to Egypt.
- An eighth century silver brooch, found in a Cork County bog in 1875, has an inscription in Arabic.
- Most recently (2006!) an eighth-century prayer book was found in a bog in Tipperary. The vellum book is bound in Egyptian manner with papyrus lining.





Unique practices

In addition to the archaeological evidence, there are clues that Celtic and Coptic traditions shared common yet unique liturgical and spiritual practices.

- An early account traces the Irish liturgy back to the liturgy used in Egypt.
- *Crux-vigilia* (cross-vigil), or praying for hours with arms outstretched as if on a cross, was practiced in both Celtic and Coptic monasteries but not in those of Europe.
- Long-handled fans called *flabella* were used in Egypt to keep flies off the Eucharist. Pictures of angels using *flabella* appear in the Book of Kells.

A bit of background

After the Day of Pentecost, followers of Jesus Christ carried his teachings to all corners of the known world. Recent scholarship holds that Ireland had Christian believers even before Saint Patrick's famous mission. Later, as barbarians burned monasteries and looted libraries throughout Europe, stalwart Christians established monastic communities on the wild western coasts of the British Isles.

Meanwhile, men and women had been seeking God in the wildernesses of the Middle East even before the birth of Christ. Think of John the Baptist and Elijah, for example. By the end of the second century, Christian monks seeking to experience union with God in solitude became known as the "Desert Fathers" (now recognized as both Desert Fathers and Mothers). Christians made pilgrimages to them from all over Christendom, and Egypt was for a time considered the "Holy Land," even more so than Palestine.

Early Christians, persecuted at first, had seen martyrdom as the ultimate expression of faith. As Christianity became the accepted religion of the known world, a shift occurred. It was no longer necessary to die physically for one's faith, but Christians could give up their life by withdrawing to the desert.

In the deserts

The Desert Fathers and Mothers of Egypt committed themselves wholly — body and soul, heart and mind — to discipleship. Earliest were the solitary hermits, those seeking God alone in silence. It has been said that St. Anthony, the first Coptic monk whose name is known, "trained himself like an athlete, a spiritual athlete, so that he could combat the temptations of the devil." Then came cenobites who gathered around a revered teacher. They lived in individual cells or huts scattered around a small chapel or oratory, where they celebrated Eucharist together. Their modest communities included lay women and men.

Celtic monastics had their own desert: the Atlantic Ocean. It too is vast and in a sense waterless (since sea water is not drinkable). Wild, empty, often stormy, the ocean is an apt parallel to the Egyptian desert as a place for wrestling with devils. Some ancient Irish texts refer to the ocean as *desertum*, and a number of Irish place names include "Disert." Unlike the formal monasteries of Western Europe, the desert configuration enabled monks to live as hermits while still being part of a monastic community.

Prayer was paramount in both traditions. Desert dwellers lived a life of constant prayer, whether in solitude or in community. Through contemplative prayer they sought union with God. Liturgical prayer was to them a very real protection from the powers of evil.

Despite many parallels, Celtic and Coptic monasticism had contrasts. The eastern monks entered the desert to escape the temptations and sins of society; the island monks seemed more drawn to their wilderness seeking communion with God through creation. Even before the coming of Christianity, Celtic culture was very aware of the spiritual world. Celtic mythology is filled with wonders and magic, and ancient Druidic beliefs saw the divine throughout nature. Blending the strictness of the Desert Fathers with their own native sense of wonder, Celtic Christians came to a faith that is holistic, life-affirming, and in harmony with all Creation and the Creator.

Questions for Reflection

1. Sr. Paula Adelaide did an excellent job of writing about the Desert Fathers and Mothers who we know a bit about. These were the first Christian Hermits so to speak. They gave up all to live in stark poverty alone seeking to be one with Christ. Take time to imagine yourself doing that. They lived without any of the comforts of life and yet grew each day in their faith.
2. We often have a difficult time just living our *Rule of Life*. Read about St. Anthony and how he trained himself to become a spiritual athlete. What disciplinship that would take. Perhaps we can think of him when we feel slack regarding our Rule.
3. Interesting how Celtic monastics saw the Atlantic Ocean as their desert. It would contain storms, be wild and empty just like a desert on land. Something for us to think about. Have we created a imagined desert in our own minds and where would that be?
4. While many of the Desert Fathers and Mothers lived a solitary life, some did live close to some others and gather from time to time for prayer and worship in “Community”. We often hear that one cannot be a Christian alone and they, at times, must have felt that also. Think about that for a while.
5. Sr. Paula ends her article by saying that early Celtic Christians came to a faith that is holistic and life affirming; in harmony with all Creation and the Creator. Words for all of us to live by. Take time to discuss this if you are in a group meeting and share with others in your Monthly Letter.

Sr. Paula Adelaide added the following information for those who would like to do further research regarding her article.

Further study and enjoyment:

- Video, 12 minutes. “Monastic Lives: Desert Fathers to Celtic Christianity. Part I: Desert Monasticism.” <https://www.coursera.org/lecture/western-christianity-200-1650/desert-monasticism-jZ-tM2>
- Press release and photos of missal found in Tipperary bog: <http://www.seandalaiocht.com/blog1/papyrus-fragments-found-with-ancient-irish-bog-book>
- “On the Trail of the Seven Coptic Monks in Ireland” by Abba Seraphim. Metropolis of Glastonbury. <http://britishorthodox.org/miscellaneous/on-the-trail-of-seven-coptic-monks-in-ireland/>
- The Egyptian Desert in the Irish Bogs. The Byzantine Character of Early Celtic Monasticism, by Fr Gregory Telepneff. Sample chapter: <http://www.ctosonline.org/sample/ED.pdf>