



Abbey Letter

no. 242

Summer 2010

Monk's Best Friend

We are blessed with beautiful and functional architecture here at St. Gregory's, and we are grateful to our supporters around the world who have given us the funds to build a place where we can live, work, pray, and offer hospitality to guests who want to share in our life of prayer. One of my favorite parts of our monastery complex is the bell tower over the entrance to the church. Specifically, it is the bell of which I am so fond. Our new bronze bell (it has been hanging in the tower about eighteen months now) is large and produces a pleasant low pitch when struck by its clapper. Our old bell is much smaller and produces a higher pitch, and was hidden in a housing on top of the old dorm until it was moved to its present housing on the roof of the current refectory/library building. Because of its housing, I have never actually seen our old bell, but the new one is hung in an open tower for all to see, and when the sun hits it at certain parts of the day, it shines brilliantly.

Both of these bells have played a big part in my life these past seventeen years that I have been at St. Gregory's, and I am grateful for what they have taught me. They have made it clear to me that as a monk, I am to possess nothing—even my time is not my own. Everything in a monastery is community property, so everything must be shared and taken care of in a way that acknowledges that someone else has a right to use the very same item. This practice of monastic poverty is not meant to express any disdain for the world or the things in the world, but rather to instill in us the utmost respect for all of God's creation. In other words, by practicing stewardship rather than possessiveness, we affirm that everything receives its integrity and legitimacy from God, not from our possession or control of it. Time is one of those things that monastic life teaches us to give up trying to control, so that we can more properly enjoy and use it as best we can to make the world a better place for ourselves and others.

The ringing of the bell marks out the schedule of the monastic day that is broken up into periods of public and private prayer, work, rest, meals, sleep, recreation, silence, private time, and group social time. It does not matter if I want to do any of those things when its time comes, or if I feel like doing them. It does not matter if I like the psalms, hymns, scriptures, or sermons at times of public prayer, or if I like the food served at mealtimes, or if I would rather be talking at silent times or alone at times of group recreation. Since time is not our own to control, monastic life mercifully takes away that illusion of possession and expects us to be where we are supposed to be when we are supposed to be there.

Following such a schedule, rather than our own desires, does not squash our personalities, as some might expect. Rather, it allows our true selves to grow, freed from false ideas of self-importance. We slowly learn that everyone is equally and infinitely important in the eyes of God, as well as the fact that all aspects of our own personalities are important. Since every aspect of our being is important, our desire to do only the things we want to do when and how we want to do them is met with a scheduled discipline designed to help all parts grow. By allowing the monastic schedule to act as a template or structure for our lives, we can flourish in ways that we never expected. Unfortunately, we can also allow the schedule to act as a prison, stifling us and withering our personalities. Of course, it is our choice whether we willingly follow

Cover: a guest and a participant in the July program enjoy a game of "bags" on a Sunday evening

the schedule so that it can foster our growth or resist it and become irritable and sour in the struggle. Having the bell constantly calling us to leave our bed, our work or hobby, or a favorite book or website in order to gather in the church for prayer can have the effect of teaching us that all of our work, rest, and relaxation is special enough to be surrounded by prayer, or it can have the effect of driving us crazy with its demands. If we choose to answer the bell joyfully and gratefully, then more joy and gratitude will follow. If we choose to answer with bitterness at being interrupted, then only more bitterness awaits.

Choosing how we answer the call of the bell is not something we do only when we join the monastery as a postulant or move through the different stages of becoming clothed as a novice and making junior and then senior monastic professions. Every day we must decide to live the monastic life fully, and every day we know we will fail in some way. So the next morning, we must make the same determination to not let our past failures haunt us, but rather to rely on the grace of God to help us fulfill our vows.

I have also learned some other lessons from our bell. In spite of the monastic ideal of a balanced life of prayer, work, rest, and recreation, there are some days when it seems that there is too much to do—more work than there is time to finish. So I have learned the importance of managing one's time well, and of admitting that I can not and should not do everything. On such days, prayer gets top priority, rest and recreation are put aside for another day, and work fills all the leftover time (and almost all pressing tasks almost always get done). At those times when work is overwhelming, it is good to think of our labor as a gift we are giving to the world, rather than as a burden that takes away our free time. We must acknowledge that the ideal of the balanced life is a goal that can not always be met while also realizing that it is not good to constantly let work consume our lives. We must learn to always do our best—no more, no less.

Another lesson I have learned is that being on time is a concrete way to show our love and respect for others, because by being on time to our appointments, we show the other persons involved that they are important to us, and that we respect their schedules. This is important in a monastery, because living in a monastery means living with other people (which is sometimes surprising to those who think that monastic life is geared solely toward the individual's relationship with God). Of course, living in a monastery does include having a relationship with God, so being on time to public prayer is a way to express our love for God, as is making time for our private prayer and scripture reading.

The bell sounds different to me throughout the day, because I am in various parts of the monastery (inside and outside) doing different things as the day progresses. I am also in different moods at different times, but by the end of the day, I am always grateful for its lessons. (At this point I must also admit that its ringing often pleasantly reminds me of two Pink Floyd albums in which certain songs make references to bells: *Dark Side Of The Moon* and *The Division Bell*. However, that subject might be better addressed in another article.) I have not always been a good or willing student of our bell, but I do think it has had a positive affect on me, no matter how slight, and I do hope that I might continue under its instruction for a long time. Once again, thank you, our supporters, for making it possible to have such a bell. It rings throughout the day, bringing the monks and guests together to pray for each other and the world around us. May we joyfully heed its call.

—Br. Abraham



Daily Schedule at St. Gregory's Abbey

Weekdays

4:00 a.m.	MATINS
6:00 a.m.	LAUDS
8:15 a.m.	TERCE EUCCHARIST followed by work period
11:30 a.m.	SEXT
noon	lunch siesta
2:00 p.m.	NONE followed by work period
4:30 p.m.	teatime
5:00 p.m.	VESPERS followed by meditation
6:00 p.m.	supper
7:00 p.m.	community recreation (Mondays, Fridays, and Saturdays)
7:45 p.m.	COMPLINE
(on Tuesdays and Thursdays, COMPLINE is prayed privately)	

Sundays and Major Holidays

5:30 a.m.	MATINS & LAUDS
8:30 a.m.	TERCE EUCCHARIST
noon	SEXT & NONE
12:30 p.m.	lunch siesta
4:00 p.m.	teatime
5:00 p.m.	VESPERS followed by meditation
6:30 p.m.	supper
7:45 p.m.	COMPLINE

Words in ALL CAPS signify public prayer services in the abbey church. Community meetings, private prayer, scripture reading, hobbies and other personal activities are worked in around the public schedule. Slight variations of the schedule occur at times.

NOTES

Prior Aelred attended the Benedictine Formation Workshop at St. Meinrad's Archabbey in St. Meinrad, Indiana April 6th - 10th. Br. John Falkenhain of St. Meinrad's spoke in the topic of "Human Sexuality and Formation for Celibacy."

Fr. William continues his ministry to the Formation Group of the Diocese of Northern Indiana. This group of people preparing locally for ordination meets every few months for mutual exchange, discussion, and presentations concerning practical issues pertaining to ordained ministry. Fr. William is in charge of the spiritual life part of the program.

Br. Cuthbert has decided to not make life profession at St. Gregory's. He leaves with the community's thanks and blessings.

Bishop Cate Waynick of the Diocese of Indianapolis was with us February 15th through 19th.

Sr. Ignatia of the Order of Julian of Norwich was with us February 23rd through 26th.

Our website now has some slideshows showing various aspects of the abbey grounds and monastic life. The website also has many other features, including articles from back issues of the *Abbey Letter*, sermons preached by the monks, information about monastic life, the Summer Vocation Program and monastic vocations, and contact links for the abbot, novice master, guest department, and publications office. Prayer requests and donations can also be made online, as well as calendar and book purchases.

saintgregorysthreerivers.org

Bishop Waynick



Sr. Ignatia

Books from St. Gregory's Abbey

Singing God's Praises (1998)

history of the community, select Abbey letter articles, photographs

\$20.00 Please send ___ copies. \$ ____

Born in the Darkest Time of Year (2004)

15 Christmas stories by Abbot Andrew

\$16.00 Please send ___ copies. \$ ____

Tools For Peace (2007)

Abbot Andrew's reflections on St. Benedict and René Girard

\$24.00 Please send ___ copies. \$ ____

Enclosed is \$_____ in full payment. Please allow 4-6 weeks for delivery.

Name _____

Address _____

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Any payment in excess of the book price will be gratefully accepted as a gift to the abbey.
St. Gregory's Abbey, 56500 Abbey Road, Three Rivers, MI 49093-9595

Music compositions from St. Gregory's Abbey

Missa Brevis

choral symphony by Br. Abraham — Latin text from the ordinary of the mass

Rumi

choral symphony by Br. Abraham — English translation of the poems of Rumi

mp3 files of synthesized performances

pdf files of full scores, piano reductions, and orchestral parts
available at

webbermusic.com

type in Abraham Newsom in the search box

all files are free, but donations are welcome and can be made at the website
or sent to St. Gregory's Abbey designated for "music compositions"

Come & See

Find out what it's like to be
a Benedictine monk.

Worship & Pray Work & Learn

with the monks at St. Gregory's Abbey –
a monastery within the Episcopal
Church at Three Rivers, Michigan

if you are male, 18 to 45, and can stay for at least two weeks
in July. The only charge is \$25 for registration.

For more information and an application form, write:

July Program Director
St. Gregory's Abbey
56500 Abbey Road
Three Rivers, Michigan 49093-9595
novicemaster@saintgregorysthreerivers.org



saintgregorysthreerivers.org



ST. GREGORY'S ABBEY

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Saint Gregory's Abbey is the home of a community of men living under the Rule of Saint Benedict within the Episcopal Church. The center of the monastery's life is the Abbey Church, where God is worshiped in the daily round of Eucharist, Divine Office, and private prayer. Also offered to God are the monks' daily manual work, study and correspondence, ministry to guests, and occasional outside engagements.

The continuing existence of Saint Gregory's is made possible by the support of those who believe that the contemplative vocation within the Church finds valid expression there.

The monks ask your prayers and will be grateful for your offerings.

<http://saintgregorysthreerivers.org/donate.html> to donate online

Donations may be mailed to:
Saint Gregory's Abbey
56500 Abbey Road
Three Rivers, MI 49093-9595