Practices of an Australian Baptist Intentional Community: Holy Transfiguration Monastery

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The Renewal of Monasticism

THE RENEWAL OF Christian monasticism is a great spiritual movement of our day. Imbued with a love for God, neighbor, and self, people are going to monasteries to find peace, to deepen their relationship with God, and to pray.1 In North America, traditional vocations may be declining, but some orders are growing.2 In ten years the number of Benedictine oblates has multiplied by over seventy-five percent.3 Rendering more porous the wall that often separates monastery and world, the Holy Spirit is guiding many Christians to explore contemplative practices suited to the multiple contexts in which they live.4 For lay associates, “the Cistercian charism is a gift of the Holy Spirit bestowed not solely on those who live within


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monastic enclosures. Rather, we feel it is the gift of a 'way of life' that can be as appropriate for a layperson living in the world as it is for a monk or a nun living in a monastery.'

In the 1930s German Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer anticipated the current of monastic renewal in a letter to his brother, Karl-Friedrich:

I think I am right in saying that I would only achieve true inner clarity and sincerity by really starting to take the Sermon on the Mount seriously. This is the only source of strength that can blow all this stuff and nonsense sky-high, in a fireworks display that will leave nothing behind but one or two charred remains. The restoration of the church will surely come from a new kind of monasticism, which will have nothing in common with the old but a life of uncompromising adherence to the Sermon on the Mount in imitation of Christ. I believe the time has come to rally people together for this.

Bonhoeffer drew up an official proposal for a community house that fleshed out what he understood by a new monasticism. Those called to communal life would find strength and liberation in service to the community, to those in need, and to the truth. The "House of the Brethren," an alternative seminary for leaders of the Confessing Church, offered a prophetic witness to a culture in which discipleship was difficult if not impossible. Its premature dissolution led to publication of a little booklet entitled Life Together, which remains a powerful tract for our time.

Writing in the 1950s, Thomas Merton regarded monasticism as a yes to the world, a way of contemplative living fulfilling a call to divinity as children of God: "The most significant development of the contemplative 'life in the world' is the growth of small groups of men and women who live in every way like the laypeople around them, except for the fact that they are dedicated to God and focus all their life of work and poverty upon a contemplative center."

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The renewal of contemporary monasticism recalls an earlier time when monastic orders helped save and shape western civilization. Philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre observes:

If my account of our moral condition is correct, we ought also to conclude that for some time now we too have reached that turning point. What matters at this stage is the construction of local forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained through the new dark ages that are already upon us. And if the tradition of the virtues was able to survive the horrors of the last dark ages, we are not entirely without grounds of hope. This time however the barbarians are not waiting beyond the frontiers; they have already been governing us for quite some time. And it is our lack of consciousness of this that constitutes part of our predicament. We are waiting not for a Godot, but for another—doubtless very different—t. Benedict.

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**Introducing Holy Transfiguration Monastery**

Whether or not another St. Benedict or St. Scholastica emerges or has already emerged since the period of World War II, monasticism offers a prophetic witness in modern life. Luther, Calvin, and other sixteenth-century reformers rejected the monastic life. Thus, the renewal in contemporary life of Protestant monasticism and above all the emergence of a new kind of monasticism are striking phenomena.

Holy Transfiguration Monastery (HTM) in Geelong, Victoria, Australia, offers a case study. HTM began in the early 1970s when Brother Graeme spent nearly three years in the Community of the Glorious Ascension (CGA), founded in 1960. In 1973 Brother Graeme and Brother Steve met at Cleeve Priory, Somerset, England, then the motherhouse of CGA. They explored sources of eastern and western Christian monasticism and the possible place of monasticism in Protestantism. The two brothers were at CGA at the height of its life and growing influence. The remaining brothers and sisters of CGA now live in the South of France and Kingsbridge, Devon, England.

Late in 1975, Brother Graeme arrived at Norlane and accepted the

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interim pastorate at Norlane Baptist Church near Geelong. By November 1976, four young people were gathering for contemplative prayer. They asked if, amidst a culture of materialism, they might model church as an honest reflection of the Holy Trinity and practice a kind of evangelism that identified with the poor in solidarity with the marginalized. Wanting a more authentic consideration of the implications of their baptism, including celibacy, Brother Os urged, “Let’s give it a go and see what happens.” Thirty years later, the entire initial core group remains together: Brothers Graeme, Os, and Neil, Sister Diane, and Brother Steve, who after a number of visits joined permanently in 1986.

Since 1869 a Sunday school and home mission of the Baptist Union of Victoria had met at Breakwater, a suburb of Geelong. In the 1970s, the congregation was praying that God would bring new life. Breakwater Baptist Church welcomed the Community as a mission group of the congregation. Congregation and Community began a journey of deep mutual respect and cooperation. In the next few years, others came from Anglican, Baptist, Catholic, Pentecostal, and Uniting Church communions. In 1989, the remaining members of the Breakwater congregation and the Community united under a new constitution. Though some of the brothers and sisters did change denominations and become members of the Baptist Church, HTM has never required this.

In 2001, by another constitutional revision, four Community lifestyles, bound together by a vocation to contemplative prayer, the development of monastic virtues, and Eucharistic focus at the Cloister, were established. These were life at the Cloister, life in houses of prayer called Sketes, life in the Greater Community, and Companions, friends of HTM who have made the Community their spiritual home.

As of 2007, there are eighteen life-professed monks at the Cloister. Five professed members live at St. Luke’s Skete in Abbotsford, Melbourne, and seven other members are involved in establishing Sketes in the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada. They observe the rhythm of the Cloister, visit the Cloister every eighteen months, and manifest other signs of unity. Thirteen Greater Community members live in walking distance or a short drive away from the Cloister. The Companions, who have a simple discipline and visit the Cloister regularly, number in the hundreds.
Beginning in 1997, Sister Miriam, a minister of The Uniting Church in Australia, maintained a Skete at Mount Waverley, a suburb of Melbourne. In 2000, she moved to the Cloister, and the Skete at Mt. Waverley closed. Several of those who participated in the Skete have since been coming to Breakwater to join in the Community's liturgies and prayers.

The Skete at Abbotsford, a suburb of Melbourne, began in the 1970s when Sisters Gail, Kerri, and Alleyne and Brothers Mark and Eddie joined together as a base community. In 2005, after a long journey similar to that of HTM, the two separate communities joined, formalizing Abbotsford as “St. Luke's House of Prayer.”

HTM members witness to a God who is revealed as “Holy Community,” a “paradigm for human fulfillment and service in our world.” They articulate their commitments in a document known as the Resolve. Distilled and refined over a thirty-year period, the Resolve is not a legal document but rather an instrument for growing into Christ-likeness. It reads as follows:

- Being perfectly assured of your salvation,
- with your whole life proclaim your gratitude.
- Reject nothing, consecrate everything.
- Be the good of love, for God, for neighbor, for all creation.
- Judge no one, not even yourself.
- Love beauty.
- Maintain inner-silence in all things.
- Show hospitality; err only on the side of generosity.
- Speak truth to power, especially power without love.
- Let your only experience of evil be in suffering, not its creation.
- For us there is only the trying, the rest is none of our business.

The last phrase is taken from T. S. Eliot's Four Quartets, where he comments to the effect that each venture represents a new beginning; our part is the trying merely, gain or loss is not our affair. The brothers and sisters of HTM have found that any thought of success or achievement is an attempt at power and control. While there is always work left undone, there is no reason for them to stop trying. In the totality of their lives, HTM members seek greater intimacy between God and their souls. Words posted outside the Cloister in Breakwater read:
Here some of the People of GOD from many Christian Communions live together as an intentional monastic community. In an age of growing fear and terrorism, we seek for peace and unity in a profound union with GOD. We have found it is the human heart that must first be disarmed. We strive to pray our life and to live our prayer, to be conscious, honest, simple and merciful towards all people and the earth. Here the “Prayer of the Heart”—of compassion and gratitude—has not failed. We share our life with any in need.

Here four key aspects of monastic renewal are summed up: ecumenism, prayer, hospitality, and concern for the common good. We explore each in the following pages.

The Practice of Ecumenism

HTM describes itself as Baptist, ecumenical, and monastic. How intentionally Baptist is HTM? HTM recognizes its Baptist identity in many ways. It emphasizes such distinctive aspects of Baptist polity as separation of church and state, commitment to the teachings of the Bible, the importance of a personal knowledge of God and relationship with Christ, the priesthood of all believers, the centrality of the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist, and congregational polity. It is a member of the Baptist Union of Victoria. It pays its full share of fees per member to the denomination. Three successive superintendents of the Baptist Union of Victoria have served as advisors. Members attend Baptist Union of Victoria gatherings, occasionally as leaders of workshops. Every month, Baptist Union of Victoria leaders spend a quiet day at HTM, as do several Baptist pastors.

The denomination holds title to the Community’s property. At its own expense and effort the Community of the Transfiguration has quadrupled the value of the original Breakwater Baptist church property. Having acquired four adjoining properties, the Community has transferred these titles into the name of the Baptist Union of Victoria. Members see this as an act of identity and solidarity with the welfare of the Baptist Union of Victoria.

In 2007, the denomination has officially recognized HTM as a Mon-
astery of the Baptist Union of Victoria. One expression of how to be Baptist, HTM does not deny the right of any other congregation to express Baptist identity in another way. That the Baptist Union of Victoria embraces HTM with all its diversity is a positive witness of the denomination. A strength of HTM is its ability to embrace people from many backgrounds.

How intentionally ecumenical is HTM? HTM members recognize a unity that transcends denominational particularity. Their ecumenism is relational, not official or structural. Members overcome differences by living in community, praying together, and struggling with the pain of a common humanity. The Eucharist is experienced as a powerful uniting, not divisive, reality. To quote from HTM’s Testament and Pastoral Rule, it is the praxis of HTM courageously and foolishly to engage with the unifying implications of baptism and Eucharist.

A) Baptism. By baptism we are made “one family” in Christ. By baptism we transcend all political, ethnic, gender, social, sexual, cultural, intellectual, hierarchical, denominational, academic differences.

Eucharist. Being many, we are One bread, One body.

B) Eucharist is the perpetuation and sustaining of baptismal life. We will have an open table, open to all the people of God to preside, participate, and receive.

“C) Christian spirituality rooted in the suffering, reconciling and uniting love of God in the world is affronted and even astonished by broken bread and poured out wine that cannot be fully shared. It should be understood, then, that a genuine ecumenical commitment to deepen Christian spirituality for our times is likely to further provoke an ecumenical crisis over the unfulfilled expectation of Eucharistic hospitality. And so it should!”

Community of the Transfiguration members seek advice from many sources. They freely make themselves accountable to authorities of all the communions represented in the monastery. They have consulted with representatives of two Anglican monasteries: St. Mark’s Abbey, a Bene-

dictine monastery in Camperdown, and the Community of the Holy Name in Melbourne. It also has relations with members of a Cistercian monastery in the Yarra River Valley, Tarrawarra Abbey, and the Little Brothers of St Francis at Tabulam, an eremitical community in northern New South Wales.10

At the moment, HTM members are being sought out by traditional as well as contemporary forms of monasticism. Thirty-five years of experimenting with and living out much of what traditional monastic religious life has been has made the community somewhat of a working model, a bridge, between past and contemporary forms of monastic religious life.

In 2007, for example, Brother Wayne of the Franciscan hermitage in New South Wales and Bishop Graeme Rutherford of the House of Bishops of the Anglican Church of Australia took the initiative to invite HTM to be present as observers at meetings of the Anglican Religious Advisory Board in Australia for the next two years. They felt that HTM needed to experience these meetings to see if they could be of any help to HTM, and vice versa.11 Such a move, to involve a non-Anglican community in what is currently a purely Anglican Religious Advisory Board and answerable to the House of Bishops, is courageous and fraught with possibilities for future ecumenical and inter-monastic cooperation in Australia and throughout the world.

HTM members are sensitive to and respectful of the differences concerning the practices of baptism and Eucharist among the Christian communions. Sister Miriam represents the Uniting Church in a formal dialogue process with the Lutheran Church in Australia. HTM regularly hosts the dialogue team. Without sacrificing their core values, HTM members exchange ideas with visitors and inter-faith delegations from a number of denominations and teaching centers. They have discovered as true what Jesuit theologian William Johnston described of his experience when Christians and Buddhists came together in Japan: "We found that dialogue based on theology and philosophy did not achieve much; but when we talked from experience we suddenly discovered how closely united we really were."12

11. Email, Bishop Rutherford, April 22, 2007.
During the first years of the new millennium, HTM members increasingly have been called upon to share their experience with members of other groups. For example, in March and April 2006, Brothers Graeme, Steve, and Os met with members of intentional communities and seminarians in the United Kingdom and the United States.

In October 2006, Brothers Stephen and Neil traveled to a village on the Thai side of the border between Myanmar and Thailand. Because of her prior experience with the Karen refugees, the Reverend Ann Lock, HTM Chaplain and pastor of Brunswick Baptist Church in Brunswick, Melbourne, accompanied them. Consultants on a building project, they also offered pastoral care and listened as victims of the corrupt regime in their homeland pleaded, "Do not forget us."

In January 2007 Brothers Steve and Stephen and Sister Anna were in New Zealand for ten days. They participated in several gatherings involving hundreds of people from many groups discussing aspects of monastic spirituality, sustainability of intentional community, and how to deal with the dark side of one's personal and corporate self.

As these invitations suggest, HTM members move easily, in an unthreatening way, across many boundaries within Christianity and outside it. They offer the wisdom of monastic spirituality and a depth of experience for those caught in the differences and crises that inevitably erupt in community living.

In the past, the Baptist Union of Victoria has often been perceived as anti-ecumenical. HTM has played a crucial role in involving Victorian Baptists in wider ecumenical activities through hospitality, relationship building, living together, and participation in inter-monastic and inter-denominational dialogue. HTM has modeled grass-roots ecumenism in non-threatening, practical, relational ways. One cannot overestimate the impact of this little group's hospitality.13

As an example, in 1993 the Reverend Robert W. Gribben, then General Secretary of the Victorian Council of Churches (1989–1995) approached HTM to assist an Ethiopian Orthodox congregation made up largely of immigrants fleeing famine in Ethiopia. This request led to the Com-

nity's coming alongside the priest, aiding and assisting him in settling into Melbourne with financial and material security. Then the Brothers and Sisters renovated the inside of the church so the church members could celebrate their Eucharistic rites as in Ethiopia. This included building their iconostasis, altar, and lavabo, and securing their sanctuary vestments and curtaining for the celebration of their rites according to their rubrics. At the consecration of the new church, the Ethiopian Archbishop Nicodemus from Addis Ababa visited the monastery, gifting the Community with an ancient Ethiopian cross. At times the two traditions pray and worship together. HTM has assisted in uniting Ethiopian families who have been separated by the refugee crisis.14

How intentionally monastic is HTM? HTM members believe that monasticism is a universal gift to the Church. Its spirit has been expressed in nearly all traditions of the Christian faith. To visit HTM is to recognize Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant influences. However, these have not been intentionally developed but are surprising organic similarities that have spontaneously emerged as the Community searched for the truth that harmonized with the needs of their collective souls. Community members have visited Mount Athos and other Orthodox monasteries, Catholic and Anabaptist communities, and many new experiments in intentional community. HTM members study together and draw from sources such as the desert saints and ascetic writings of Pachomius, Basil, Seraphim of Sarov, Staretz Silouan, and the Philokalia, and James Allison, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Joan Chittister, Rene Girard, Donald B. Kraybill, Thomas Merton, Jean Vanier, Evelyn Underhill, J. Denny Weaver, Walter Wink, and many others.

Baptist antecedents include communal forms of the Anabaptists of the sixteenth century and of the Pietists of the eighteenth century, notably Ephrata (the ancient name of Bethlehem), a German Baptist monastic community that began around 1732 in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. There are Baptist sisterhoods in Kenya15 and in Germany, namely in Berlin, Diakoniewerk Bethel, and in Hamburg, Diakoniewerk Tabea. In Hamburg, Albertinen Diakoniewerk has just celebrated one hundred

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years of ministry and has changed to a family community with single and family members, female and male.¹⁶

HTM members believe they are called to re-plant and nurture monastic life in the midst of an exploitative, consuming society. Their observance of monastic practices such as obedience and stability has as its goal lives that manifest such qualities of the Resolve as gratitude, love, prayer, hospitality, and truth-telling. They seek to manifest “the same mind as was in Christ Jesus” (Ph 2:5). By their prophetic witness, HTM members challenge the domination and reign of evil, first within their own hearts and then in the world.

*The Practice of Prayer*

Silence, stillness, and the search for solitude dominate the rhythm of prayer for HTM every day. By “The Prayer of the Heart” HTM refers to the innermost core of the person, the True Self where God indwells. In Orthodoxy, the phrase “prayer of the heart” refers to the Jesus Prayer, “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” Traditionally, saying the Jesus Prayer sustains friendship with Jesus and fulfills the injunction of Paul to “pray without ceasing” (1 Th 5:17). For HTM members, life at the Cloister does not contain or limit one’s practice of monastic living. To pray without ceasing means to pray wherever one finds oneself and to recognize God in that place and in the people there. This can only be sustained by the establishment and maintaining of an “inner silence” and solitude, which is realized “within” through the daily rhythm of personal and communal silence, stillness, and liturgical prayer.

Jesus provided a model for prayer. Jesus began and ended his model prayer (Mt 5:9–13; Lk 11:2–4) by acknowledging the holiness of God. He offered God adoration and prayed that God’s realm be established on earth as in heaven. Jesus then petitioned God to nourish, to forgive, to protect from temptation, and to deliver from evil. In a few brief phrases, Jesus was making a crucial point. Prayer did not insulate him from the world. He wanted people to know that, as they responded to the gracious

call to follow him, prayer should shape their spirituality for life in the here and now as well as the realm to come.

The Lord’s Prayer includes these words, “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” This request establishes a crucial connection between one’s eternal relationship with Jesus and one’s ordinary life in the world. God reigns on earth as in heaven. The prayer of the heart connects the one who prays with concerns in the real world. Through the prayer of the heart, HTM members open their hearts to the world in which God took flesh and seek to live with loving kindness, justice and compassion. In the sentiments of St. Silouan shortly before his death in the 1938, monasticism would come down from the mountain and be in the world because the need of the world is so great.17

The first call of the day is to be alone with God. At various times, members gather for silence in the Oratory. This is followed by corporate Morning Prayer at 7.30, a silent, simple structure for the reading of the Scriptures including the Psalms, intercessions, and the commitment of life and work to the glory of God for the day. The brothers and sisters gather again at the Oratory for Midday Prayer and at 7 p.m. for Compline, which is preceded by half an hour of corporate silence and stillness. Compline is followed by spiritual reading and silence until 8.30 p.m., when households meet to be with each other and relax. There is a curfew at 10 p.m., and silence is maintained until after Morning Prayer the next day.

HTM observes the practice of lectio divina and meditative prayer. Many use the Jesus Prayer and The Lord’s Prayer. Many use icons as an aid to prayer. The Icon of the Holy Trinity by Andre Rublev and the Icon of Christ Pantokrator, the One who holds all opposites together in a creative tension (part of the central door of the narthex at Hagia Sophia in Istanbul), are among icons prominent in the worship of the Community.18

Members write prayers and liturgies informed by ancient wording in dynamic, meditative, poetic, and socially attuned language. Singing is central to all the liturgies. HTM has benefited from the gifts of resident master craftspersons, artists, and architects to create the three buildings used in corporate prayer. The interior design of the buildings as well as

the icons, stained glass, and other artistic features embody monastic values of simplicity, beauty, and holiness.

The Community follows the Christian year with liturgies unique to Advent, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Ascension, Pentecost, and Transfiguration (August 6). September 14, the feast day of the Holy Cross, also marks the origins in 1972 of HTM.

HTM meditates on key events in the life of Jesus in a weekly rhythm. On Mondays, HTM members focus on the Incarnation. At midday, they connect their lives with the One who embraced pain and redeemed suffering from meaningfulness and despair. The liturgy recalls the uncreated Light Who came into the world as “pain-bearer.” HTM members believe, but pray for courage in unbelief (Mk 9:24). They know that “just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, so also our consolation is abundant through Christ... and salvation” (2 Cor 1:5-6).

Tuesdays, members recall the baptism of Jesus. In words at midday, members recall that Jesus descended into the Jordan River and experienced intensely the blessing of the presence of the Holy Spirit. He heard the divine voice in tones of acceptance and joy.

There is an ancient tradition in the church that at the baptism of Jesus as He entered the waters, the Jordan suddenly burst into flames. So was seen the coming together of the opposites, which against their natures did not cancel each other out, but by the Creator/Redeemer's presence co-existed in a harmony that gave birth to new life. Fire and Water. Babylon and Jerusalem. Gentile and Jew. Slave and Free. Male and Female. Here in community we indeed owe our existence to the One who is able to hold all opposites in tension so that new life can come.

The Community's focus on Wednesdays is the Transfiguration, the

19. In The Meaning of Icons (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary, 1993) Leonid Ouspensky and Vladimir Lossky state that the Western churches have since antiquity observed the Transfiguration at the time of Lent, whereas the Eastern and Anglican communions traditionally observe August 6 as the feast of the Transfiguration.


theophany from which members derive the name of the monastery and which recalls the potential and vocation of every person to come into perpetual union with the Divine. At midday, members contemplate an icon of Jesus enveloped by the Shekinah [Glory] of God. “The light and glory of His flesh and His clothing on the mountain is what happens to any part of creation raised to its fulfillment in union with the Divine. Both the saints and the earth itself have manifested this glory at times in the history of salvation.” With Paul, the Community affirms, “all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit” (2 Cor 3:18).

On Thursdays, HTM celebrates the Eucharist. For years, the Community followed the practice of most Australian Baptists by holding a service of worship each Sunday morning, with a monthly “communion.” As HTM members reflected on the rhythm of Jesus’ life and read Scriptures, they came to a more sacramental understanding of baptism and Eucharist and of the way in which the life and grace of God are mediated to humans through the whole of the created order. Since 2000, HTM has celebrated Eucharist on Thursdays and on festivals.

Fridays are a celebration of the death and burial of the Creator of all things. Friday is given to reflection around the cross. In the evening, Taizé-like prayers precede Compline. At midday, the gathered Community recalls the crucifixion with these words:

O Creator of all, today You are struck down by Your creation. 
When You were transfigured on the mountain, O Lord, 
Your disciples saw the glory of the first of their own kind. 
And when they saw You crucified, 
they knew that Your suffering and death were voluntary, 
and would then proclaim to the ages to come that You are truly the “New Creation.”
Cantor: Lord I stand before You. 
All: You have taken my hand. 
Cantor: You will lead me by Your counsel. 
All: And bring me home to Your glory. 
Cantor: Let us say with all our mind and with all our heart: 
All: Glory be to Thee O Lord, Glory be to Thee.

Saturday night and Sunday, the Community celebrates the resurrec-
tion of Jesus and the hope of their own. Saturday provides an opportunity to care for the grounds in the morning, and to rest in the afternoon. There is no corporate Morning Prayer. At midday, the presence of God in hell is remembered and prayed to. On Saturday evening, a Sabbath liturgy announces the resurrection and absolves Community members from guilt and the pressure to produce results:

Today you are absolved from any necessity to provide. No pressure to produce results is to torment you. Today the noise of machinery and the blur of endless words will not trouble you. Not even the power of death. Let no transgression rise up to accuse you. Let go of all that is left undone in the past week. For Christ is risen from the dead, and death cannot trouble us any more.

The reclaiming of Sabbath as an actual day of rest, not just another day to work in a religious way, has been an important decision in the life of the Community, one that has brought the members closer to the Muslim and Jewish communities than did traditional church on Sunday. The liturgist opens with words of welcome: “Blessed be God who gives us the Sabbath and leads us to the waters of stillness.” God’s people reply: “Who restores our soul and commands us to rest.” The liturgist says, “Welcome this day. Receive the gift. Remember the Sabbath and keep it. It is made for you, your freedom, your joy, your healing.”

The public life of Jesus has been perceived as a failure. His was a path consciously chosen. He emptied Himself of all social, religious, and political power. He experienced such temptation in the desert and rejected the offer of success through the use of power to manipulate and control. He chose the right use of power, and not to abuse power. In this light, HTM’s Sabbath liturgy invites the Community to relax.

HTM’s adaptation of the Jewish Sabbath removes the pressure to perform or to be validated by church and wider society. HTM has decided not to worry about survival in terms of vocations or recruitments. Trusting God, HTM floats, to paraphrase Brother Roger of Taizé, on the safe waters of life as it comes, with all the rough weather it may bring (typically Australian). 22 Members give without counting how many years are left. Without undue concern for the long-term survival of HTM, mem

bers cite Simone Weil: “It is not my business to think about myself. It is my business to think about God. It is for God to think about me.”

On Sundays, the brothers and sisters come and go for recreation, family outings, or visits. They may simply do nothing! Brother Andrew serves as pastor of Aberdeen Street Baptist Church (the founding congregation for the original Breakwater Baptist Church). Sister Miriam is pastor at Belmont Uniting Church. With the support of the Community, both try to observe Mondays as a Sabbath day and one Sunday each month with the Community.

At Morning Prayer, members wear a black woolen clerical cloak. Novices and visitors wear a brown one. At Eucharist, members wear their white baptismal albs. An invitation is extended to all the baptized to do the same. Visitors share a meal with the Community after the Eucharist.

Aidan Kavanagh’s words on the dignity of Baptism have shaped HTM practice:

Baptism needs more than drops of water, dabs of oil, taps on the cheek, and plasticized bread dipped in a modicum of wine. Baptism into Christ demands enough water to die in, oil so fragrant and in such quantity that it becomes the Easter aroma, kisses and abrazos [hugs], bread and wine enough to feed and rejoice hearts. And rooms of glory filled with life rather than crumpled vestments and stacks of folding chairs.

To prepare candidates for baptism, HTM has restored the catechumenate. Baptism takes place in Bright Week, the eight days following the Resurrection. The catechumen is immersed three times in water, after which she or he is anointed with oil on the steps of the Baptistry. A prayer for the gift and power of the Holy Spirit accompanies the laying on of hands, that “the Spirit will strengthen, guide, empower, and mother all who are baptized in Jesus Christ.” The appropriate presiding authorities from the communions represented at HTM (bishops, superintendents, moderators, senior pastors) are present to officiate at the chrismation, the anointing, and the laying on of hands.

At every Easter, in a liturgy for the renewal of baptismal life shared by the entire Community, members acknowledge that the integrity of one’s

baptism is more than a one-time event. The pre-Easter liturgy on Saturday evening focuses on the renewal of one's baptism. With enough water to die in, to safeguard the uniqueness of their one and only baptism in infancy or in adulthood, they privately commit themselves once more.

The passages I have quoted from the liturgies enrich our understanding of the "prayer of the heart" as experienced by HTM members. At HTM, the life of prayer offers an antidote to an individualized, otherworldly spirituality. Prayer is corporate as well as personal, contemplative as well as grounded in ancient tradition, and contemporary. Prayer sustains a journey of ongoing conversion and obedience to God.

**The Practice of Hospitality**

HTM characterizes itself as a Baptist hospice. The Community reclaims a medieval understanding of the word as a place of rest and recreation for pilgrims, travelers, and strangers, especially those who belong to no religion, in short, a place of hospitality and a central mark of Benedictine spirituality.

The Incarnation is about the inclusion of all. God invites humans to share in the fullness of the Divine Life and empowers us to do so in God, for God is in us. HTM understands its experience of salvation as the hospitality of God, who has through the Incarnation of the Word made room for humankind within the life of the Holy Trinity. The Community cites Jesus' words to Zacchaeus, "I must stay in your house today" (Lk 19:5), and George Herbert's poem "Love" (III), "Love bade me welcome" as expressing the idea of God welcoming us, an experience of salvation on earth.

Hospitality offers healing power that builds a bridge between enemies, between abusers and their victims, between different faith traditions, political traditions, and sexual orientations. Hospitality extends to generosity in the use of Community finances, time, material possessions, and gifts. Friends of HTM attest that members go out of their way to

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nurture them over many years, genuinely taking them into their hearts, emotions, and being. Debbie Ryman, a recent young visitor, spoke of her experience at HTM as “a hundred percent care.”

Citing “You prepare a table for me in the presence of my enemies” (Ps 23:5), HTM members make room for their enemies, as God has made room for them. They have engaged in dialogue with their critics, those whom they have offended, and those who have offended them, in Baptist and other circles. As a result of this attitude, HTM is widely respected and trusted with building bridges between other enemies within denominational circles.

HTM offers nurture through counseling, spiritual direction, the daily offices, and lengthy periods of residency. As many as a dozen ministers remain in ministry today as a result. Perhaps no quality stands out more than the Community’s ability to create a safe place for healing and for the movement from darkness to light, from unhealth to well-being, or from lack of identity to one’s True Self. All of this takes place from within the daily rhythm of silence, stillness, and prayer, which those who visit and come experience. For long-term observers of HTM, this is a unique gift to the wider church, a source of inspiration and hope for the world.26

In sum, members proclaim the Gospel through generous hospitality. This is perhaps the most conspicuous form of HTM’s prophetic witness. By generous hospitality, members seek to manifest the ecstatic love of the Holy Trinity to all people. HTM has received hundreds of persons. Guests have attended the offices, days of reflection, and varied celebrations. They have been fed and received gifts. Generally, they report having been enriched by the liturgies and the hospitality of the Community, and deeply blessed by the sense of the presence of God in the lives of Community members. I include my wife and myself in this. At times we have been overwhelmed by the prayers and hospitality of our brothers and sisters.

 Practices for the Common Good

A COMMUNITY OF men and women, celibate and married couples, adults and children, HTM has cultivated stable personhood. Of the eighteen

professed members living in the Cloister, twelve are celibates and six are married. Three of the celibates came as divorcees. One brother who lives now as a celibate originally came with his wife and three children, and they lived with the Community supporting their already failing marriage while they raised their children together. At a certain point, his wife and he chose to divorce, and the wife left the Community to pursue her career. The children, the Community, and the mother and father have built new ways of relating well.

Having brought with them the unresolved conflict and grief of a long, difficult marriage, another couple in the Community, with obvious vocations to the contemplative life, have come under significant stress, and while the husband and wife are not choosing to divorce, they are now living as celibates apart from one another, both engaging in a healing journey towards self-realization and the hope of ultimate reconciliation.

HTM has helped raise fourteen children at the Cloister. The children are not members of the Community. They are not second-class citizens. They are no more a problem in Community than the hard-hearted cynicism of some cold cenobiums. They participate in Community life and are taught many basic life skills that others often now miss out on. They have a charter protecting their rights. They elect a celibate who acts as guardian and advisor for them all.

At times, when indecisiveness has prevented the Community from finding consensus and moving forward together, the children have been consulted. One such occasion was the Community’s open or closed attitude toward people dying of HIV/AIDS. The children broke the deadlock by informing the Community that, regardless of right and wrong, the important thing was “to love them as Jesus does” and to care for them at the Cloister while they died. One of the young people raised at Breakwater summarizes the benefits of growing up in the community: “It was great. There was a huge benefit. I learned skills I have applied in my life, in my work, in my marriage: accountability, how to budget and take responsibility for my life, to communicate, to listen. We were respected, our voice counted. I felt I could trust them in all areas to which I was struggling to adjust: spiritual, emotional, and financial.”

How are decisions made? Typically, members make decisions by con-

27. Interview of the youth, 10 July 2004 and 24 July 2004.
sensus. Each day after Morning Prayer, HTM members meet briefly to consider the day's work, which is set by the Prior: the care of the sick and those who are visiting, preparations needed for a happy and peaceful return for those off the grounds, and any other issue. If a minor matter arises during the day, those available meet and settle on what is needed.

The constitution provides for an annual chapter meeting the Saturday before the Feast of Holy Cross, the fourteenth of September. Apart from those living outside Victoria, the whole Community is expected to be present, including the Visitor and Chaplain. The Treasurer provides financial statements and has the monastery books audited for the meeting.

The Prior may call extraordinary chapter meetings to address ordinary or emergency issues. In emergencies, the Visitor and Chaplain are informed and invited to be present if they feel it necessary or if they are able. On extraordinary matters, every effort is made to involve all Cloister, Skete, and Greater Community members.

Members of the Cloister live with a common purse in accord with Acts 2:45 and Acts 4:34. All work and give their income to the Treasurers. Members of the Greater Community tithe. Money matters have never become an arena for dispute. At the annual meeting, the Community agrees to a budget. The Prior and the Treasurer have the major responsibility for money matters, which are reviewed regularly by the entire Community. The Prior is an office made functional by two people, and the Treasurer by three people. Members of the “common purse” receive a small amount of personal money every week.

All the members of the Cloister bring in an income of one kind or another. Some work in the poorest of circumstances in industry near to the Cloister, regardless of academic achievement or prior career choices. This choice enables them and others to return for Midday Prayer and the midday meal at the Cloister. Others work in factories, chaplaincies, education, or health and aged care. In addition to the two clergypersons responsible for congregations, Brothers Stephen and Graeme and Sister Anna all received theological training. One of the founding Brothers, Graeme, has pastoral oversight of the Community. Brother Stephen is co-Prior along with Brother Steve and works in the restoration of heri-
AN AUSTRALIAN BAPTIST INTENTIONAL COMMUNITY

Sister Anna serves as part-time chaplain at a local school and part-time chaplain at the Geelong Hospital.

Transparency and openness in communication are foundational for the life of the Community. Brother Graeme states, “Ours is a spirituality of life that is freely chosen, a path of psychological honesty and transparency.” These qualities are a gift to the wider society. HTM's transparency and vulnerability have always made an impact on people. HTM members see themselves as an “extreme presence” in the world. In practice, this means they are a spark of life, the spark of God in all of life. They offer a prophetic witness not by being overtly religious or by preaching, but by being a presence. Because they are open and transparent about their lives as monks, people come to them and talk about struggles within their lives. Issues include the breakdown of marriage, sickness, financial problems, problems relating to other workers, and career decisions. It all sounds so ordinary: God working through them.

Members generally take a month's vacation annually. Those with family abroad are able to travel abroad every three or four years. On holidays such as Australia Day, the Community may process tomatoes, apricots, pears, and peaches to keep the Community secure during the year. They may take a Community outing. Or they may do nothing!

Members seek to respect the beauty of creation. With three buildings specifically set aside for worship, nearly a dozen houses, gardens, and a guest house, the property encompasses almost four acres. Once a dumping ground for garbage, the Cloister is now a protected bird sanctuary.

Since it began, HTM has reached out to marginalized people. In the 1970s, the work of the Community was amongst people suffering with alcoholism and single parents who in order to provide their children with school uniforms or other essentials, worked as prostitutes. In three local brothels, members formed cells for needs-based Bible study, family-life programs, and re-training for different employment. Many of the women and men went into teaching or factory work and established careers. Two of the three houses were closed.

A key program was For Love of Children, or F.L.O.C. Modeled on a Church of the Saviour mission group, F.L.O.C. organized activities

that had never been part of the experience of many of the children, for example, school-break outings, birthday parties, and Christmas celebrations. Beginning with twenty-three children, F.L.O.C. grew to over four hundred children in the first year. Members have at times been granted limited protective custody of a few young people with family difficulties or mental health issues.

HTM are not social activists, in the sense that generally they do not join movements, but they are certainly socially active. At times, they have taken to the streets—wearing their habits—to protest current federal policies relating to war, refugees, the rights of laborers, and the survival of the environment. Their monastic vows are all related to these global and local concerns.

HTM brothers and sisters seek to give an example of non-violent resistance, sanity, integrity, good common sense, and Christian love, both in protest and in the protection of those in need in the wider Community. Their work begins in the Oratory in silence and prayer with God. This changes their heart, and that dictates the way they are present in a changing society.

HTM has received opposition from those who have seen them as "not truly Baptists," as a "Catholic plot," as being—in a typically monastic sense—"irrelevant." They have been accused of being a "cult" only by those who had no knowledge of them or of monasticism and were decidedly unwilling to visit or dialogue with the Community or believe in its authentic place within the church. It has been easy for those opposing HTM to see divorce in the Community as being promoted by the Community when in fact, and in contrast with the high rate of divorce in wider Australian society, HTM has nurtured stable marriages. With the two exceptions already mentioned, over twelve couples are in stable, lifelong relationships.

One of the outstanding features of HTM's spirituality is its members' love for the enemy, critic, or slanderer, those who have offended them, and even those they have offended. HTM persists in dialogue moving towards greater understanding, repentance in the hope of reconciliation, and a determination to build bridges, often with the help of independent

third parties. They understand this as direct practical obedience to Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount.

Concluding Reflections

HTM is a monastery of baptized people—male and female, married and celibate—covenanted to God and to each other to live as a monastic community that incarnates the life of the Holy Trinity in the world. Members live simple lives of prayer, unity, hospitality, and radical discipleship. As a contemplative community, members strive to be transparent with God and with one another: “to live our prayer, and pray our life.” Reflecting on the monk as “that mysterious archetype—the ‘solitary’ in every human soul—that as Lazarus is in our baptism made alive and called by the Son of God to ‘come forth,’ ” members see themselves still bound by the grave cloths of the past yet alive and free, a profound sign of life in the midst of a culture of death.

In the history of Christianity, monasteries and intentional communities have played several roles. At times they have been centers of survival, providing stability as the wider culture has collapsed. Early Benedictine monasticism provides one example.

At times they have been centers of church renewal, providing sensitive and thoughtful people new ways to live as Christians. Iona in Scotland, Corrymeela in Northern Ireland, Taizé in France, Catholic Worker houses, Madonna House Apostolate, based in Canada, the Little Portion Community near Eureka Springs, Arkansas, and newer monastic communities offer examples of this possibility.

HTM exhibits many of the same strengths of the so-called new monasticism. In this sense it is not unique. Nonetheless, certain qualities stand out at HTM: the centrality of Jesus Christ, communal life under a common resolve, vital worship, use of the visual arts, care for the young and aging, care for the natural world, and ministries amongst marginal-

30. Interview with Os, one of the founding brothers, 21 June 2004.
32. The Rutba House, ed., School(s) for Conversion: 12 Marks of a New Monasticism (Eugene: Cascade, 2005); Shane Clayborne, The Irresistible Revolution. Living as an Ordinary Radical (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006).
ized people. HTM offers a prophetic witness marked by integrity, imagination, admission of the wrongs of the past, celebration of new relations, and commitment to the dream of God.

HTM has been stable in its witness over many years, open to trying to change the environment for Christian witness and powerful in its praise of God. One cannot help but be moved by the liturgies and daily offices.

Three additional features stand out. First, it is Baptist! This fact differentiates HTM from other monasteries, intentional communities, and centers of renewal.

Second, HTM has recovered the simplicity of early Christians. This recovery challenges some expressions of Christianity in Western cultures where there is a marked emphasis on size, growth, and success. At times, this feature has exacerbated tension with mega-churches in the region.

Third, "journey" is a word that characterizes HTM well: "How can we be transfigured, changed, without journey, without exodus?" For a century and a half, people at Breakwater have been a seedling in God's realm. Seeking their identity as children of God, created in the image and likeness of God, now a new generation of contemplative brothers and sisters are journeying from their false (self-constructed) selves to their true (God-created) selves and are enabling other pilgrims to claim their truest selfhood in community as well.

For the past thirty-five years, HTM has moved from one way of being the local church to another, from congregation to community, and now from community to monastery. A further step in the journey is about to unfold. For a number of reasons, including increased membership and the growing need for solitude and greater space for those seeking the focused wisdom of the monastic virtues as they are lived at HTM, the Community is relocating to a very accessible yet more rural environment.

Key to life of the Community is the idea of redeeming time. In the Christian churches of the West, every four hundred years or so there has been an upsurge in monasticism. If warnings about the effects of global warming and other environmental issues are fulfilled, we face possible collapse and hence transformation of civilization. As one smothers a fire by burying coals to keep them burning through the night until the morn-

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33. The Community in dialogue.
HTM is preserving in post-modern, secular society a vision of life's final meaning and a path to come into relationship with that meaning. At HTM, life in Christ is centered not on a body of doctrine but on a Person and is grown not in structures but in relationships, first with the One who calls people to Himself and then with those one is called to live with. Over a lifetime of living into the values of their Resolve, HTM Brothers and Sisters have come to live faithfully as monks. They invite companions to join them in their journey of self-emptying love, compassion, and transparent living in the Presence of a non-violent God.

Synopsis

This article draws on interviews with and writings by members of Holy Transfiguration Monastery, a Baptist congregation and ecumenical monastery located in Geelong, Victoria, Australia. Part of a wider research project on new forms of monasticism and the role of intentional community in making simplification of life possible in the face of modernity, this article focuses on the practices of community members.

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