

Ecumenical Order of Charity

Community Newsletter

Online Edition – August 2002

[Letter from the Editor](#)

Dear Brothers, Sisters, and Associates:

On August 6, 1945, the Enola Gay, a B-29 bomber, dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan. Three days later, Americans dropped another atomic bomb, this one made from plutonium rather than uranium, on Nagasaki. Both cities were utterly devastated with over 150,000 casualties. Death rates continued to grow as people died from radiation poisoning. These assaults on Japan concluded the deadliest war on record.

Our community **Calendar of Celebrations** celebrates Hiroshima Day as World Peace Day. We can protect the earth's future by praying and promoting peace every day. Our small steps will link us with others who are combating violence in the world.

- Corrine McLaughlin and Gordon Davidson write, “Community means different things to different people. To some it is a safe haven where survival is assured through mutual cooperation. To others, it is a place of emotional support, with deep sharing and bonding with close friends. Some see community as an intense crucible for personal growth. For others, it is primarily a place to pioneer their dreams.” Included in this edition is the second installment of our four-part series on [Community: Salvation of the World](#), adapted from M. Scott Peck's book **A Different Drum**
- Anyone who has lost a beloved pet knows the passing of an animal can have a profound effect. Terry Tempest Williams, in [Refuge](#), takes that kind of caring into the wilderness.
- Community is created and renewed when individuals act in love and serve each other. A story called [The Messiah Is One of You](#) illustrates this truth. Which one of us do you think is the Messiah?

- I once heard a rabbi say that the greatest sin of humankind is to forget its place in the universe. A [Meditation on Ego Awareness](#) might help us avoid this pit-fall. Let's dust off those sacred beads and do a little rattling.
- [What's on the Web](#) lists some great websites to help us live out our vows creatively. Take a look.
- You know it's summer in Oklahoma -- dead hot, sticky, and miserable -- when you hear the cicadas singing in the quiet, heavy, breathless air. August would not be complete without an ode to the season in [Summer is the Meanest Season](#).

Community news: Congratulations to Br. Dale and David, the proud adoptive parents of Kyle. We have two birthdays this month: Br. Mark and Br. John. Sr. Diana and Kathy are "thinking" about getting another job. Well, that's encouraging isn't it! ☺ Sr. Pat is back home and Curtis has returned to work.

And finally, on July 11, the Feast of St. Benedict, I attended the installation of Sr. Janice Futrell, OSB, in Oklahoma City, as she began her four-year term as the new prioress of the Sisters of Benedict, Red Plains Monastery, Piedmont, Oklahoma. Please pray for Janice and all the Benedictines at Red Plains. Many years ago an interest-free loan from the sisters made it possible for me to make changes in my life that allowed me to go back to school and get my bachelor's degree. As a former associate, this community holds an important place in my spiritual journey. They are the inspiration for [Red Plains House](#).

Peace and love to you,

Br. John

Love ought to show itself in
deeds more than in words.
~ St. Ignatius of Loyola

[Community,](#) [Key to the Salvation of the World \(Part 2 of 4\)](#)

[Why Communities Form](#)

- **In response to crisis.** Communities form after accidents, disasters, etc., and often disperse when the crisis has passed. The most successful community in the nation is Alcoholics Anonymous.
- **By accident.** This is hit or miss. You accidentally attend a meeting or become involved with a group when there is no crisis.
- **By design.** We can set out to form communities and they will be successful if they follow certain principles.

Stages for Communities by Design

- **Pseudocommunity.** This group pretends it is a community by faking it, being good natured with each other. People stifle their true feelings and avoid conflicts. Differences are not acknowledged. Real community takes a long time and most groups who call themselves community are really pseudocommunity.
- **Chaos.** Chaos occurs when members of the group try to heal or convert other members, to solve their problems rather than just listen to them. Here individual differences are out in the open and members try to obliterate them by offering solutions. This stage is a time of fighting and struggle. Some may try to blame or replace the leader. Some may want to reorganize which is one way out of chaos, but committees and chairpeople do not make a community. Chaos, when a group confronts its conflicts, is better than community.
- **Emptiness.** This offers the best way out of and through emptiness. It is the bridge between chaos and community. This requires members to empty themselves of the barriers to communication.
 - **Expectations and preconceptions.** People fill their minds with false expectations of what the group will be like. One needs an open mind.
 - **Prejudice.** This is more often unconscious than conscious. It includes the snap judgments we make about others – that 90 year old is probably senile, that nerd is nerd is really boring.

- **Ideology, theology, and solutions.** If members are convinced that what they believe and do is right and others are wrong, then communication is stymied. These behavior patterns must go.
- **Need to convert, heal, fix, or solve.** Attempts to do these usually fail. They are self-centered. Such patterns must be emptied.
- **Need to control.** This tries to ensure a desired outcome. It is rooted in a fear of failure. Emptiness is often a painful state but when members can share their brokenness, then they move in the right direction.
- **Community.** Genuine community requires the little deaths of many members. When it finds peace, a soft quietness descends. The room is bathed in peace. A member speaks from her deepest self and others listen attentively. Silence is accepted. No one tries to solve or convert another. A community has been born. Everyone feels it.

Not to be bound by rules,
 But to be creating one's own rules -
 This is the kind of life which Zen is trying to have us
 live.
 ~ D. T. Suzuki

Peace

“To a large extent, the future lies before us like a vast wilderness of unexplored reality,” Christian philanthropist Sir John Templeton writes. “The God who created and sustained the evolving universe through eons of progress and development has not placed our generation at the tag end of the creation process. God has placed us at the beginning. We are here for the future.”

And as pioneers of tomorrow, we have to practice peace right now. French philosopher Simone Weil reminds us that “violence obliterates anybody who feel sits touch.” Most of the tragedies of the twentieth century bear out her point.

In marked contrast to our history, the wisdom traditions challenge us to be gentle, compassionate people, to practice peace.

We begin in our homes with how we treat those who are nearest and dearest to us. “Violence,” Jesuit peace activist John Dear tells us, “occurs when we forget and deny our basic identity as God’s children, when we treat one another as if we were worthless instead of priceless.”

The practice of peace involves introspection. “If you love peace,” says Mahatma Gandhi, the world’s foremost advocate for nonviolence, “then hate injustice, hate tyranny, hate greed – but hate these things inside yourself, not in another.”

The practice of peace continues in the neighborhood and at work where our sense of community has grown tattered and frail. Nobel Prize winner Mother Teresa brings to mind what is at stake here: “If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other.”

Peace also involves the practice of loving kindness and compassion in the mist of the daily grind where tempers flare and tensions reign. Here is a place to join with Zen teacher Robert Aitken, who pledges: “I take up the way of not killing. I vow to cultivate my love and to apply it in my daily life at home and in the large community. I vow to moderate my lifestyle for the protection of all things.”

The little steps we take in the name of peace and nonviolence enable us to feel a connection with other all over the world who are taking their own small steps for peace. “As peacemakers.” Catholic writer Henri J. M. Nouwen suggests, “we must resist resolutely all the powers of war and destruction and proclaim that peace is the divine gift offered to all who affirm life.”

We are here for the future to do what we can by practicing peace and nonviolence. Why now? Because like the Indian mystic poet Kabir, we can say, “Something inside of me has reached to the place where the world is breathing.” To feel the breathing of the world is to join with songwriter John Lennon in his plea, “All we are saying is give peace a chance.”

We are here for the future. Writer Coleman McCarthy voices our understanding: “The earth is too small a star and we too brief a visitor upon it, for anything to matter more than the struggle for peace.”

~ Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat in **Spiritual Literacy**

When I pray for peace, I pray
not only that the enemies of my own country

may cease to want war, but above all
that my country will cease to do the things
that make war inevitable.

~ Thomas Merton

Refuge

It was a dead swan. Its body lay contorted on the beach like an abandoned lover. I looked at the bird for a long time. There was no blood on its feathers, no sight of gunshot. Most likely, a late migrant from the north slapped silly by a ravenous Great Salt Lake. The swan may have drowned.

I knelt beside the bird, took off my deerskin gloves, and began smoothing feathers. Its body was still limp – the swan had not been dead long. I lifted both wings out from under its belly and spread them on the sand. Untangling the long neck which was wrapped around itself was more difficult, but finally I was able to straighten it, resting the swan's chin flat against the shore.

The small dark eyes had sunk behind the yellow lores. It was a whistling swan. I looked for two black stones, found them, and placed them over the eyes like coins. They held. And, using my own saliva as my mother and grandmother had done to wash my face, I washed the swan's black bill and feet until they shone like patent leather.

I have no idea of the amount of time that passed in the preparation of the swan. What I remember most is lying next to its body and imagining the great white bird in flight.

I imagined the great heart that propelled the bird forward day after day, night after night. Imagined the deep breaths taken as it lifted from the arctic tundra, the camaraderie within the flock. I imagined the stars seen and recognized on clear autumn nights as they navigate south. Imagined their silhouettes passing in front of the full face of the harvest moon. And I imagined the shimmering Great Salt Lake calling the swans down like a mother, the suddenness of the storm, the anguish of its separation.

And I tried to listen to the stillness of its body.

At dusk, I left the swan like a crucifix on the sand. I did not look back.

Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth
find reserves of strength
that will endure as long as life lasts.
There is symbolic as well as actual beauty
in the migration of the birds,
the ebb and flow of the tides,
the folded bud ready for the spring.
There is something infinitely healing
in the repeated refrain of nature -
the assurance that dawn comes after night,
and spring after the winter.

~ Rachel Carson, **The Sense of Wonder**

The Messiah Is One of You

Once upon a time there was an abbot of a monastery who was very good friends with the rabbi of a local synagogue. It was Europe, and times were hard

The abbot found his community dwindling and the faith life of his monks shallow and lifeless. Life in the monastery was dying. He went to his friend and wept. His friend, the rabbi, comforted him and told him: "There is something you need to know, my brother. We have long known in the Jewish community that the Messiah is one of you."

"What," exclaimed the abbot, "the Messiah is one of us? How can that be?"

But the rabbi insisted that it was so, and the abbot went back to his monastery wondering and praying, comforted and excited.

Once back in the monastery, walking down the halls and in the courtyard, he would pass by a monk and wonder if he was the one. Sitting in chapel, praying, he would hear a voice and look intently at a face and wonder if he was the one, and he began to treat all of his brothers with respect, with kindness and awe, with reverence. Soon it became quite noticeable.

One of the other brothers came to him and asked him what had happened to him. After some coaxing, he told him what the rabbi had said. Soon the other monk was looking at his brothers differently and wondering. The word spread through the

monastery quickly: the Messiah is one of us. Soon the whole monastery was full of life, worship, kindness, and grace. The prayer life was rich and passionate, devoted, and the psalms and liturgy and services were alive and vibrant. Soon the surrounding villagers were coming to the services and listening and watching intently, and there were many who wished to join the community.

After their novitiate, when they took their vows, they were told the mystery, the truth that their life was based upon, the source of their strength and life together: The Messiah is one of us. The monastery grew and expanded into house after house, and all of the monks grew in wisdom, age, and grace before the others and the eyes of God. And they say still, if you stumble across this place, where there is life and hope and kindness and graciousness, that the secret is the same: The Messiah is one of us.

~ Megan McKenna in *Mary*

This then, is the human problem;
there is a price to be paid
for every increase in consciousness.
We cannot be more sensitive to pleasure
without being more sensitive to pain.
~ Alan Watts

Meditation on Ego Awareness

Pray: Lord, keep me ever aware
that it is my ego
who delights in keeping me
feeling separate –
superior and inferior.
And alone.
Help me determine
in every thought, word, or deed
whether I am serving ego or You
in the following:

in my prayers	(bead one)
in my charity	(bead two)
in my conversations	(bead three)

in my judgments	(bead four)
in my community actions	(bead five)
in my liturgical actions	(bead six)
in my relationships	(bead seven)
in my meditations	(bead eight)
in my correspondence	(bead nine)
in my love for You.	(bead ten)

~Joan Hutson, **Praying with Sacred Beads**

Go to the parking lot of the nearest suburban supermarket and look around: The only conclusion you can draw is that to reach the grocery, people must drive through three or four raging rivers and up the side of a canyon.

~ Environmentalist author Bill McKibben

What's on the Web?

www.paxchristiusa.org – **Pax Christi USA** is the national Catholic peace movement. 14,000 members work for the transformation of society through nonviolent peacemaking, justice, human rights, and global restoration.

www.aclu.org – Since their founding in 1920, the job of the **American Civil Liberties Union** is to conserve America's original civic values -- the Constitution and the Bill of Rights – and defend the rights of every man, woman, and child in this country.

www.warresisters.org – The **War Resisters League** believes war is a crime against humanity. WRL is committed not only to eliminating war, but the causes of war – causes intricately linked to the violence that pervades our society and works for peace within a framework of social justice insuring a society that is democratic, free of economic, racial, and sexual oppression.

www.greenpeace.org – **Greenpeace** is an independent, campaigning organization that uses non-violent, creative confrontation to expose global environmental problems, and forces solutions for a green and peaceful future. Greenpeace's goal is to ensure the ability of the Earth to nurture life in all its diversity.

www.peta-online.org – **People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals** is the largest and boldest animal rights organization in the world. PETA believes that animals are not ours to eat, wear, experiment on, or use for entertainment – period.

I think that what we're seeking is
an experience of being alive,
so that our life experiences
on the purely physical plane
will have resonances
within our own innermost being and reality,
so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive.
~ Joseph Campbell

Summer is the Meanest Season

summer is the meanest season:
fresh cut grass excites evening breezes;
tangy smoke and ash bellow up
from backyard pits
bar-be-cuing pigs & cows & chickens

even fish from ancient streams bake
upon the sacred alters
toasting marshmallows an hour later

i hear tiny feet and tiny voices outside my window
when summer dines,
kicking tin cans down golden streets,
squashing bugs with Gozilla feet,
squeaking trees into giggles of fancy . . .

i hear all too clearly
when summer is in season

but summer swells the mind as well,
torturing green until its brown,
reds the blues up in the sky
to bake the dead
with august breezes

i hear all too clearly
apron strings bursting
and flights to the moon

when summer is stuck
between tunes

yet how she converges . . .
falls around the corner
to sweeten old mothers
and hold still the time
like drowning lakes of clover
three feet thick
slow the rabbits.

and deeply ingrained
inside my heart

i love the trees drifting
off to sleep wishing
that life and death
(where darling shawls hang around our necks
and majesties are both blue and grey
binding heaven with a scent
of sweet remembrance:
kicking tin cans down empty streets
and all of us coming in free . . .)

is just a passing fancy
of the leaves.

~ g.e.warren

The moving finger of God in human history
points ever in the same direction.
There must be community
~ Howard Thurman