“… the religious life is a real dedication of the soul to God, parting with all that is in the world, rejoicing to be buried with Christ, pressing onward to the hidden verities and living in their power. While the Church has a ministerial priesthood for the conveyance of sacramental grace, it has also its religious as a kind of mystical priesthood living in closeness of fellowship around Jesus Christ, the great High Priest…”

Richard Meux Benson, founder of SSJE
In our Rule of Life, we speak of our prayer “...that seeds planted in many years of faithful life will bear fruit in old age. Our older brothers will then be able to contribute their experience of what is essential in our life with God, a sense of perspective, wisdom, their appreciation for the community and joy in the younger members.” Our prayer is answered in our brother David Allen, whose 50th anniversary of ordination to the priesthood we celebrated on December 20.

Following college graduation, Br. David served as an Officer in the U.S. Navy for three years. He then matriculated at the Church Divinity School of the Pacific, in Berkeley, California, from where he graduated in 1958 and was ordained. That year he entered SSJE, making his Profession in Life Vows in 1961. In 1962 he was gladly sent to Japan, where SSJE ministered for 40 years. Br. David served at SSJE’s St. John’s House in Tokyo and then at St. Michael’s Monastery in Oyama until 1975, when we closed our work in Japan. In the Diocese of Massachusetts, no Japanese congregation existed; however there was a more pressing local opportunity with a growing Chinese ministry based at Saint Paul’s Cathedral in Boston. Br. David became a student of Cantonese. Now for nearly thirty years Br. David has assisted in the Boston Chinese Ministry. He has also been an active member of the Episcopal Asianerican Ministry (EAM), both on a local and national level, leading retreats and quiet days, preaching and assisting in services at some of the Japanese-American churches in the States. Br. David will represent SSJE at the Annual Consultation of EAM in July 2009. He says, “all-in-all I think that involvement in Asian or Asianamerican ministry is part of who I am.” We brothers join many friends in giving thanks for Br. David Allen’s life and ministry.
We are also thankful for younger members, four novice brothers, three of whom joined the community in September: James Farrell, Jacob Kidda, and Keith Nelson. Br. Andrew Gary, the senior novice, joined the community in September 2007. Our novitiate program now follows a two-year curriculum, led by Br. David Vryhof, our Novice Guardian. Our website – www.SSJE.org – shares our vision for the formation of novices. We encourage you to refer men to us who could have an interest to explore this two-year program. Our experience of these four gifted, faithful novice brothers is accurately reflected in our Rule of Life: “New members bring with them the promise of new life for our brotherhood. They contribute new gifts for our common good and our mission, both personal talents and gifts of the Holy Spirit.”

We brothers are keenly aware of so many people in North America and around the world who are suffering hardship and fear because of the economic downturn. We hold these sometimes-desperate concerns in the heart of our prayer. A monk of the fourth century, Evagrius Ponticus, said “a monk is separated from all in order to be united to all.” As Christian monks we live on the margins of both church and society in order to hear within ourselves the deepest cries of humanity, and “to discover a profound unity with all living beings in their struggle to attain the freedom of the glory of the children of God,” as we say in our Rule of Life.

Please know of our prayers for you. We welcome you to visit us at the Monastery for sustenance and sanctuary. We are so grateful for your own friendship, prayer, and financial support which enables us to be available to God and to God’s children, especially during these troubling and opportune days.

Faithfully yours,

Curtis G. Almquist, SSJE
Superior
I once had a deaf friend, an earnest Christian, who asked me whether hearing people could hear God’s voice as clearly as they could hear one another’s voices. He had often observed hearing people responding to one another’s voices, mysteriously communicating meaning to one another through the movements of their jaws and lips, and understanding one another even when they weren’t looking at each other, or when the speaker was in another room. He had learned that they possessed a mysterious ability that he had never had, and now he wondered if the same ability that enabled them to communicate with one another even when separated by a wall or a door enabled them also to communicate with God. “Does God talk to you?” he asked; “Can you hear God?”

I assured him that, for me at least, it was not quite that simple. But I could relate to his question. I had grown up listening to the stories of the Bible about how God spoke to Abraham and Noah and Moses and all the others, telling them so very clearly what they were expected to do, and how they so clearly understood God’s voice, even if they weren’t always inclined to obey it. It all seemed so simple and straightforward in those stories, and as I grew older it caused me to wonder if God would ever speak to me that clearly, or even if such a thing were possible in this day and age. I’m certain now that God does speak to us, though seldom (if ever) in the way my deaf friend imagined, and that God probably spoke to those Old Testament saints in much the same way as God speaks to us today. They simply used a more literal language to describe their experience that most of us are likely to use—at least most of us Anglicans.

So how do we hear God’s voice? How do we recognize when God is speaking to us, when we can’t hear the words or judge the intonation? Although the biblical narratives might not seem to offer us much help at first, if we examine them more carefully we may find that they can still speak to our experience today.

Let’s look at the story of the call of Samuel that’s recorded in I Samuel 3.
Perhaps the first thing we can observe is Samuel’s openness to the voice of God, and his eagerness to respond. Of course, at first he didn’t know it was God’s voice that was calling him—he assumed it was the voice of his master, Eli. But note how readily he responds to that voice, jumping up in the middle of the night to see how he can be of service—not just once, but three times! And when Eli finally catches on to what is happening and instructs the boy, Samuel is willing to take on his lips those words which should be on our lips as well, “Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.” The first requirement for those who would hear God’s voice is to listen for it, to wait quietly and attentively and expectantly for that voice, desiring it with all one’s heart, and eager to do whatever it asks.

Here’s a second thing to observe: namely, that the voice of God is a persistent voice; it’s a voice that comes to us not just once (lest we should miss it) but again and again, until at last we are ready to grasp its meaning and respond to its call. So often, when we finally arrive at a place of clarity, when we can say with some certainty, “This is what I believe God is calling me to be and to do.” We recognize that this call has not come to us in an instant—usually not—but has been gradually growing inside us and has finally come to its fullness. It is as if God speaks a word to us in the deepest place of our heart, and that word is gently but persistently repeated over and over again until we finally wake up to its full meaning and impact. Of course this does not rule out the possibility that God might speak to us in words so bold and dramatic that they would change our life’s course in an instant. But for most of us, most of the time, God’s word comes to us persistently over time, gently turning us in a new direction, gradually making clear the will of God for our lives. God’s voice is a persistent voice, and a very patient voice at that.

Here’s a third thing from Samuel’s story: sometimes it helps us hear God’s voice when we have a more experienced listener guiding us in how to attend to it. Granted, Eli was a little out of practice, since “the word of the Lord was rare in those days,” and it took him a few tries to figure out what was going on. But he proved to be an invaluable help to the young boy, advising him on how to answer God, and proving more than courageous when the message that came to the boy turned out to be a prophecy of doom for his own household. It took
his experienced ear to discern that the voice belonged to God, and his wise heart to know how to respond. Sometimes a more experienced listener—a spiritual director, perhaps, or a trusted spiritual friend—can help us sort through all the competing voices we hear inside us and distinguish between those that belong to our past or that come from our culture or that represent our “false selves”—and that one voice which is genuinely God’s.

I wonder how Samuel felt about the difficult message he received from the Lord. Sometimes the word of God to us in a particular situation is not quite the message we were hoping for; it may not be the word we wanted to hear. It may be a word that challenges us or rebukes us or calls us to something that we know will be difficult for us. We don’t get the feeling from reading their stories that Moses was thrilled when God named him the new leader of Israel, or that Jeremiah accepted the call to be God’s mouthpiece with confidence and ease, or even that Jesus himself embraced his call without dreading what it would demand from him. And yet there will always be a “right-ness” about God’s word, even if it demands of us all we have to give and more. There will be something about it that fits in with what we know of the character and purpose and will of God—and with what we know of ourselves—and this sense of “right-ness” will enable us to rise up to meet its challenge. Furthermore, with every challenge there comes a promise; with every call there is an assurance of God’s strength present in our weakness. God never speaks the one without the other.

One final word. The boy Samuel is called to be a prophet, called to become something greater than he now is. And this also seems to be true of the words God speaks to us. So often, when God speaks to us, God invites us into a larger vision—perhaps a larger vision of ourselves, or a larger vision of what we can be or do in the world, or a larger vision of the world itself, of its potencies and possibilities. It seems to me that God’s words are expansive words, leading us beyond ourselves, beyond the safe spaces we have created for ourselves, beyond the cautious boundaries we have so carefully marked out for our lives; God’s words have a way of opening us up to God’s larger vision for us and for our world. “Follow me. You will see greater things than these.” Moses, the shepherd, becomes the prophet standing in the court of Pharaoh—who would have dreamed it? Jeremiah, the young boy too youthful to speak, is given a word for the nations—who could have imagined it? Mary, the simple peasant girl, is told that she is the one who will give birth to the Savior of the world—who ever could have believed it? Surely not Moses; surely not Jeremiah; surely not Mary.
And yet God’s word is a daring word, an expansive word, often a surprising word—that calls us beyond our small and limited selves and joins us to God’s greater Self. God’s word invites us to “greater things.” It is a word of vision and of hope and of inspiration, not of narrowness or discouragement or defeat.

Would you like to hear such a word? God is already speaking it to you, speaking it deep within your heart. Listen for it. In the quiet moments of your life, turn yourself to God and say, “Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.”
For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation. Psalm 62:1

Our 21-month novitiate program offers men between the ages of 21 and 45 the opportunity to explore religious life first-hand. During the novitiate, they will:

• Participate in the common life of the SSJE Brothers
• Join the brothers in praying the Daily Office and celebrating the Eucharist
• Engage in an ordered program of reading and study, with weekly novice classes
• Take on regular work assignments that support SSJE’s life and ministry
• Participate in our ministry of hospitality by extending welcome to our guests
• Receive spiritual direction and training in prayer from professed Brothers
• Be offered opportunities to preach (as they are prepared and able)
• Develop friendships with the Brothers

For more information on how to apply for the novitiate, please contact the Novice Guardian at vocations@ssje.org or call (617) 876-3037, extension 28.
A House of Prayer for All People: A reflection on worship as true communion

Geoffrey Tristram SSJE

The “big top” (as it was called) was filled with people from what seemed every nation upon earth. Everyone was absolutely silent and watching heartbreaking pictures of a terrible disaster. On the screen, we saw the lush and beautiful landscape of Burma (Myanmar) and yet its beauty had been shattered by a terrible monsoon.

We saw pictures of homes destroyed, dead men and women and children floating on the swollen waters of the Irrawaddy, and then we heard the wonderful stories of loving service provided by so many. In particular we saw on the screen the work of the Anglican Church of the Province of Myanmar. It’s not a large church but one whose members sacrifice so much to bring relief to the suffering around them. And then we all sang together a hauntingly beautiful Burmese rendition of the Magnificat.

This was evening prayer on Tuesday, July 29, at the Lambeth Conference. Many of you will have read reports about the conference, the ten-yearly meeting of the bishops of the worldwide Anglican Communion held at Canterbury in England. I was privileged to serve as one of the international chaplains for the conference, and rather than all the words which have been written in the papers about what all did or did not go on during those three weeks, it is the experience of worshiping together in the big tent, a huge canvas tent-of-meeting erected to hold all the bishops. It is the worship like that evening prayer led by the Burmese church that I will most remember.

The Archbishop of Canterbury had reminded us at the beginning of the conference that worship underpins all discipleship. It is the way in which we respond to the gift of life itself. The daily Eucharists and services of Evening Prayer were led by a different province of the Anglican Communion each day, each responding to the gift of life in an wonderfully exotic panoply of words and music. The conference was a rich experience, an opportunity to meet, share worship, meals, and conversation with Anglicans from every corner of the world and to rejoice and give thanks to God for the gift of the Anglican Communion.

A highlight came on Thursday, July 24, nearly 2,000 bishops, spouses, and others marched right through the center of London on a walk of witness for the end to world hunger and poverty. After the walk, we gathered in the grounds of Lambeth Palace and were addressed by the British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, and we pledged ourselves as a Communion to do all that we can to meet the millennium development goals for the eradication of poverty, hunger and disease by the year 2015. I felt really proud of being part of such a community of Christians.
And then there were the other challenges and tensions facing our church at Lambeth.

Questions of gender, particularly in the Church of England and elsewhere in regard to women bishops and the ever-present questions around human sexuality. One of the deep sadnesses of this Lambeth Conference which was felt all the time was the absence of bishops who were either not invited or who chose not to attend. It felt terrible that they were not there at this family gathering.

It is immensely hard to live with brothers and sisters who have very different understandings of how to live the gospel of Jesus Christ. Sometimes our gut response is to wish that those who disagree with us would simply go away. I suspect that each one of you can think of someone, maybe it’s someone in your family, someone you work with, someone you worship with, someone without whom life would be a whole lot easier. “If only he or she wasn’t here,” and yet the hard truth of building Christian community is that God calls every kind of person whether we like it or not.

In the Rule of Life of our community one of the chapters puts it like this: “The first challenge of community life is to accept wholeheartedly the authority of Christ to call whom He will.” That conviction lies behind something very beautiful which you will see every time you come through the outside door and then into the narthex as you come into this monastery chapel.

There on the wall of the narthex are words from today’s Old Testament lesson from the prophet Isaiah.

“My house shall be called a house of prayer for all people.” (Isaiah 56)

As a way of proclaiming that all are welcome, and the welcome is written in fifteen different languages. It describes something of what I felt in the big tent at Lambeth: worship held in Chinese, Arabic, Spanish, Portuguese, Japanese, Korean, Swahili, Urdu, Hindi, Tamil, Malagasy, Myanmar Basa, Kirundi, Sango, and Bahasa.

“My house shall be called a house of prayer for all people.”

That radical welcome was incarnated in Jesus Christ. Read the gospels and see just how often Jesus’ disciples are trying to stop him from talking to the “wrong” kind of people, with “unimportant” people, with foreigners. They try to stop him from meeting and talking and inviting those whom they consider undesirable. They try to keep them out—women, children, Samaritans, tax collectors, prostitutes, and sinners.

Matthew (15:21-28) tells us that Jesus

Br. Geoffrey arrives at Buckingham Palace for the Queen’s Garden Party.

is in the region of Tyre and Sidon. He encounters a woman, a Canaanite woman—not a Jew. She shouts and pleads for Jesus to heal her daughter. “Send her away,” say the disciples. “We don’t want anything to do with her.” Even Jesus mouths the standard Jewish understanding of who is in and who is out—and yet such is her faith that Jesus, enlarges his own vision of the Kingdom, cures her daughter, and welcomes this Gentile into the household of faith.

“My house shall be called a house of prayer for all people.”

For me, the greatest benefit of the Lambeth Conference was bringing together bishops and spouses from every part of the world with radically different ways and understandings of how to follow Jesus and then get them to spend three weeks together talking, eating, worshiping, laughing so that they could hear each other’s voices in the flesh not through the harsh and disembodied words of the Internet and the blogosphere, but in the flesh. That’s what the incarnation is about.

Who is it that you find it difficult to like or accept? About whom do you instinctively still say, “You are in; you are out?” Challenging all our petty divisions and boundaries, stands the Lord of life, with his arms open wide in welcome. In the Eucharist, we hear those extraordinary words. “He stretched out his arms upon the cross and offered himself in obedience to your will a perfect sacrifice for the whole world.” Can each one of us offer our lives to be used by God to share in that priestly work of bringing all of God’s beloved into God’s embrace that none may be left out?

“My house shall be called a house of prayer for all people.”

Br. Geoffrey preaching at Canterbury Cathedral.

Br. Geoffrey, serving as Chaplain to the House of Bishops, pictured with Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori.
Whether we are in the developing Global South or a prosperous province in the West, we all have a lot of work to do around evangelism, allowing this a church to emerge among us. The bishops’ discussions were not around a program to institute but an example we have to set for ourselves and those whom we lead, to go outside the institution to draw people in.

The bishops made a walk around London in order to show our solidarity for the Millennium Development Goals. We wanted to give a witness to the United Nations, meeting in September, that Anglican bishops around the world support these goals and speak in a united voice for the eradication of poverty. It is so important for us to make our voices heard in the public sector on these issues as a way we can be transformational in the world. The Gospel demands that of us.

Tom Shaw SSJE, Bishop of Massachusetts
Br. David: Certainly the time in Japan was pivotal for me, and I certainly enjoy my work with the Chinese ministry at St. Paul’s Cathedral and with Episcopal Asian American ministries. But I would have to say that the years during which I served as a spiritual director for seminarians at the General Theological Seminary in New York resulted in some of the most rewarding relationships that developed in ministry. It has been gratifying to me to see so many of those seminarians go on to become such fine priests. I still keep up with a few of them today. I suppose you could even say they are rather like my “spiritual children.”

Br. David: Well, the changes really all began when Paul Wessinger was elected Superior in 1963. He made several important decisions right at the beginning. The first was the institution of the Tuesday evening Eucharist. This was the first step in the renewal of our hospitality on many different levels. At the same time, he opened the choir for seating our guests, both at the Eucharist and at the Daily Office. These things seem small now, but these were harbingers of an even greater openness in our life that was to come in the years that followed.

Cowley: David, you were ordained here at the Monastery, so all of your priestly ministry has been exercised as an SSJE brother. You had a long tour of duty with our work in Japan, you are still actively involved in Asian American ministries in the Episcopal Church, and you have served as a spiritual director to hundreds of men and women over the years. What would you say has been the most satisfying aspect of your service as an ordained brother in the Society?

Br. David: Certainly the time in Japan was pivotal for me, and I certainly enjoy my work with the Chinese ministry at St. Paul’s Cathedral and with Episcopal Asian American ministries. But I would have to say that the years during which I served as a spiritual director for seminarians at the General Theological Seminary in New York resulted in some of the most rewarding relationships that developed in ministry. It has been gratifying to me to see so many of those seminarians go on to become such fine priests. I still keep up with a few of them today. I suppose you could even say they are rather like my “spiritual children.”

Cowley: In the last few years, your phenomenal memory has been a source of “archival reference” for the community. Few brothers have the store of knowledge to which you seem to have such ready access. You’ve mentioned Paul’s election as Superior as a pivotal event in our history. Since that time, what are some of the other changes that stand out to you?

Br. David: I think the recovery of a
real sense of common life among the brethren. Before Paul called those of use who were serving out in the field, here at home, and in my case, overseas, we were very much a dispersed community. This was underscored by our often necessary practice of individual masses, meaning that each ordained brother was required to celebrate the Eucharist each day. When we had reassembled here at the Monastery, Paul instituted a single daily mass, at which the entire community was present.

Again, this doesn’t seem like such a big thing now, but at the time, it was a huge change. And as with any change, at least for some of us, it was not always easy. I suppose it was the vow of obedience that got us—got me—through it.

Then there was the re-writing of the Rule of Life. I don’t think we could ever go back to the way things were.

And that’s a good thing. The community is so much healthier now, and so many things that were just never spoken of—difficulties in community life, struggles with the vows, that kind of thing—are now addressed in the light of day, just as they should be for men who live in the Light of the Fourth Gospel.

Cowley: Is there a particular part of the Rule that you find especially meaningful?

Br. David: The old rule had so many gaps—there was no mention of the Eucharist or the Daily Office, for instance. The present Rule is much more descriptive of how we actually live, or how we want to live. It took a long time to write, requiring a lot of reflection on how we were living and how we wanted
to live. In the end it was a nine year piece of work.

Cowley: One of the most significant changes in our life in recent days is the re-structuring of our novitiate, as a means for preparing for our future. What are your hopes for the Society's future?

Br. David: I certainly hope we continue to attract men like these we've been seeing in the last few years: young, talented, and ready to test a vocation that is quietly heroic.

Cowley: Quietly heroic. That's a beautiful way to describe the religious life—and certainly your experience and witness. Thank you. 📄
Revised Renovation Schedule

We have revised our starting date, after consulting many advisors and our staff members. We will begin in June 2010 rather than June 2009.

Our original plan was based on two factors: construction costs were rising and financing was readily available. The current economic downturn has reversed these parameters. Construction costs are likely to be static (or possibly even fall); banks are being very cautious, and the terms of any loan are uncertain and possibly onerous.

Meanwhile, there is also good news in this:

- Extending our STONE & Light capital campaign gives us a longer time to raise cash – new gifts and pledged income. Borrowing less, we will be able to renovate more.

- Our early campaign efforts are encouraging. To date we have raised $7.8 million of our $10 million, Phase I, goal to renovate the Monastery Guesthouse and Enclosure.

An ancient monastic principle informs our life, and on multiple levels: freedom is found in limitation. We are facing the limitations of the current economy with a sense of confidence and hope. We are praying for God’s invitation in the present moment. We live to be available – in God’s way and in God’s time – to receive, and then to offer the love, light, and life of Christ. Please know you are in our prayers. We give thanks for your friendship and have hopes in your supporting our capital campaign.

O God, you who hold in your hands every blessing, pour out upon the Society of Saint John the Evangelist such gifts of love that the Brothers, who pass their lives in ministering to others, may be nourished in spirit, strengthened in purpose, and uplifted to your light, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

A prayer written by Polly Chatfield
Member of the Fellowship of Saint John
The Society of Saint John the Evangelist Invites You to Join The Friends of SSJE

When I support a Church institution, I never feel like I’m making a transaction, in the sense that I put something in the offering plate because I am here at worship, as if I’m buying a ticket to the movies or something. Rather, it is this act of gratitude to God for this place, recognizing the life and sacrifice of these men and the simplicity with which they live. And for me, giving of my financial resources, even as a student—which is sometimes hard—is an act of emulating that simplicity, because the money that I give to the monastery is money that is not in my pocket for food or for entertainment. It keeps my life more focused on faith and God.

The Reverend Anne Jernberg, a former HDS student, now Baptist pastor in Denver

Becoming a Friend

Please consider becoming a Friend today. A tax-deductible contribution may be made by check (payable to “SSJE”), credit card, or a gift of securities. Gifts may also be made online through our website.

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Attn: Mrs. Vi Bunclark
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The Bank of Nova Scotia Trust Co
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UK
For UK tax deductible donations please donate via the Charities Aid Foundation (CAF). Contact www.cafonline.org or telephone 01732 520 050. Please specify “The Society of Saint John the Evangelist, Boston” when making your gift.

“I have put SSJE in my will because it is so important to me that this place be available to the next generation. Being part of the Fellowship of Saint John, knowing that I am held up in prayer by the community, having this connection to them, has really been a source of stability in my life over the past five years, which have been full of personal transition. I want this community to be there for other people down the road. So it just seems like a no-brainer to put them in my will.

If I were wealthier, I would give more, but I believe there is power in a gift that’s given with a good spirit. My hope is what I have given will bless the mission and ministry of the SSJE community.”

The Rev. Frances Ann Hills
Please let us know if you would like a copy of the Ways of Giving brochure to learn how you can include SSJE in your estate planning.

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The Friends of SSJE Annual Fund 2009
Information on Giving

☐ US GIVING
SSJE Friends in the USA can make tax-deductible gifts to SSJE.
Checks: Please make checks payable to: SSJE and send to:
The Society of Saint John the Evangelist, P.O. Box 382601,
Cambridge, MA 02238
Online: Credit card donations can be made via www.ssje.org
Stock Gifts: Please email treasury@ssje.org for details.
Monthly Gifts: Please email friends@ssje.org if you would like to make monthly payments by credit card.
Pledging: If you like to pledge please email your pledge to friends@ssje.org
Tax Receipts: After the end of each calendar year receipts will be sent for Chapel gifts made by check and for all pledge payments received.

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SSJE Friends in Canada can make tax deductible donations through The Bank of Nova Scotia Trust. At this time we cannot accept Canadian gifts paid by credit card. Please make checks payable to: SSJE and send to:
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☐ UK GIVING
SSJE Friends in the UK can now donate through Charities Aid Foundation (CAF). This method allows SSJE to reclaim the taxes paid by the donor as is allowed under UK tax law. You can open a CAF Charity Account either online at www.cafonline.org or by calling 01732 520 050. Please specify The Society of Saint John the Evangelist, Boston when making your gift. Please Remember SSJE in your will.
On October 15, the Church celebrates the feast day of Teresa of Ávila, a Spanish mystic and Carmelite nun of the sixteenth century. Due to her influential contemplative writings and spiritual insights, she was the first woman to be declared a “Doctor of the Church”. Though she is now known by the town near which she was born, she was not called Teresa of Ávila during her lifetime. No, she was Teresa de Ahumada y Cepeda, born into a proud and titled aristocratic family. But after she snuck away from home one morning in 1534 to the local Carmelite convent to become a nun, she took the religious name of Teresa of Jesus.

A woman of great devotion, she was inclined to visions and mystical experiences. One such vision stands out: One night, shortly after she had become a nun, she saw an apparition materialized—a radiant figure appeared before her, and asked “Little one, what is your name?” “Sir,” she replied, “I am Teresa of Jesus” – meaning ‘I don’t belong to myself at all; I belong completely to my Lord.’ Then, taking the figure to be an angel and plucking up her courage, Teresa asked, “And who might you be?” The radiant figure must have been moved by her sweet reply, for he smiled and answered, “I am Jesus of Teresa.”

This vision not only tells us much about the nature of Teresa and her spirituality; but it also tells us much about the nature of Jesus. For what makes this little story so compelling is that it reveals the mutuality that is possible in our relationship with Christ.

Teresa de Ahumada y Cepeda changed her name and took on a new essence; a new character, if you will, when she became a Carmelite nun. Taking a new name in religion was a common monastic custom at the time; and still is in many religious orders. Being audacious and enthusiastic, St. Teresa took the name “Teresa of Jesus” to tell the world that she now belonged completely to Christ. But in this early
mystic vision of hers of a radiant figure, something amazing happens. Jesus turns the whole sentiment upside down, and claims “I am Jesus of Teresa, I have taken on a new essence; and I belong completely to you.” There is a surprising and shocking mutuality here.

Throughout her life and her writings, Teresa of Ávila reminds us that Jesus, our God and our Lord, is constantly offering himself to us. God desires us; God longs for each one of us. Intimacy with God is indeed possible, if only we would reach for it with courage and boldness. Teresa’s passionate, embodied, even at times erotic spirituality, is a needful remedy to the overly-dogmatic, insipid, and academic faith so often found in Christian circles today. In Teresa we see an example of someone on fire with the love of God; of a lamp placed on a lamp stand. The intensity of her faith often made others uncomfortable—it still does! But despite opposition and hostility from some of the male clergy of the time, she had the strength to let her light shine before others, even at great personal cost.

And Teresa of Ávila invites us today to pursue God with the same passionate desire. She reminds us that, at least every once in a while, we should set aside our worldly distractions, our mundane apathy, and our scholarly skepticism, and dive headlong into the mystery and romance of our faith. Teresa calls us to be modern-day visionaries; to seek out our Risen Lord with an unquenchable longing; to embrace him with such intimacy that we blush with his glory, and show forth his light to others.
The words Psalm 145 are familiar to many of us, especially those who have been here, or in other churches where verses from psalms are used in the liturgy and as prayers on various occasions. The words I am most familiar with in this psalm are those that were for many years used as the Blessing Prayer at meals here at the Monastery until about 35 years ago when we decided to use more contemporary forms. The same words were also used at many other monasteries and retreat houses. Those words in contemporary English are: *The eyes of all wait upon you, O Lord, and you give them their food in due season. You open wide your hand and satisfy the needs of every living creature.* (Psalm 145:16-17)

I first heard those words in the language of the 1928 Book of Common Prayer over 62 years ago when I attended the summer camp of the then Missionary District of Spokane in the summer of 1946 when it was re-opened following World War II. As a sixteen-year-old in 1946 I was only familiar with what I considered the standard household table blessing, *Bless, O Lord, this food for our use, and us for your service,* followed by whatever thanks my father wished to give that day. There was also a simpler prayer that my grandmother taught me when I was about three or four years old, *God is great and God is good; and we thank him for this food.*

On that first day of camp the summer of 1946 Bishop Edward Cross came into the dining hall at our first meal and greeted us. Then he began singing to Anglican Chant, *The eyes of all wait upon thee, O Lord; and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and fillest all things living with plenteousness.* (You can find today’s version in the current Book of Common Prayer on page 802.) We sang this table blessing then at the beginning of
every meal during the camp session. It was, I think, the first time I had heard prayer being sung except at church services. Later I was to hear it said or sung many times more at retreats or at other gatherings of church people.

The use of those words from Psalm 145 as a table blessing opened my eyes to the use of psalm verses, and other passages from Scripture as prayer. The words, *The eyes of all wait upon you, O Lord, and you give them their food in due season* have essentially the same meaning as my grandmother’s prayer, *God is great and God is good, and we thank him for this food*. But I think that the words from the psalm carry a deeper meaning, and give us more to think about as we pray to God. The contemporary prayers we use now carry the same meaning. In those words we give thanks to God for our daily sustenance and acknowledge our dependence on God for his goodness.

Thinking back I remember other psalm verses that have, or have had their place in our daily prayers. As I recall, another pair of verses from Psalm 145, the first two verses, were used to introduce the prayer of thanksgiving after the meal at the Monastery and many others years ago. “*All your works praise you, O Lord, and your faithful servants bless you, they make known the glory of your kingdom and speak of your power.*”

Other verses from this and other psalms could also be found in the prayers we used in daily offices and intercessions some years ago. When we read those words as they occur in the Psalter I often recall their use as prayer in other contexts.

When we think of psalm verses used as prayers, or as parts of prayers, we can remember that the Book of Psalms was the Jewish prayer book and hymnal. From the beginnings of the early monasteries in the desert to our own time psalms have had an important place in worship, giving praise and thanks to God and acknowledging our sins and faults. In this way we carry on traditions begun hundreds and thousands of years ago.
In the gospel according to Luke we read that Jesus was approached by ten lepers. They asked to be cured. Jesus cured them all, but only one said thank you. Ten were cured by Jesus. And only one leper, a Samaritan, turned back to Jesus and kneeling at his feet, thanked him and praised God with a loud voice.

How often do we say thank you to Jesus? How often do we say thank you for all the good gifts he gives us. Life itself is a gift. The food we eat is a gift. Friendship is a gift. The warmth of the sun is a gift. Intelligence is a gift. The mercy of God is a gift. Living in community is a gift. Laughter is a gift. Tears are a gift. A hug, an embrace is a gift. Rain is a gift. Snow is a gift. Being made in the Image of God is a gift. Our existence is a gift. The Holy Spirit is a gift. Every time we celebrate the Eucharist, it is “the Great Thanksgiving” in which we give thanks for all that has been, all that is, and all that will be.

So our life should overflow with thanksgiving to Jesus. Thanksgiving should be the driving force in our daily lives. When you wake up in the morning, say thank you to Jesus. When you go to bed say thank you to Jesus. Thank you, Jesus. Thank you, thank you, thank you.
Brs. Tom Shaw and Geoffrey Tristram attended the autumn meeting of the Episcopal House of Bishops in Salt Lake City, Utah, September 16 – 19. Br. Tom is Bishop of Massachusetts, and Br. Geoffrey is the Chaplain to the House.

Br. Eldridge Pendleton led a retreat at the Adlynrood Retreat Center in Byfield, MA on September 21.

Brs. James Koester and Jonathan Maury led a quiet day for seminarians at Berkeley Divinity at Yale on November 1.

On November 4, we were honored to have the Right Reverend Suheil Dawani, Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem, as the guest preacher at the Monastery.

Together with Br. Tom Shaw, Brs. Geoffrey Tristram, David Vryhof, and David Allen represented the Society at the annual Diocesan Convention of the Diocese of Massachusetts held in Hyannis Port, MA, November 7 – 8.

Brs. David Vryhof and Robert L’Esperance served as chaplains for the Palestine of Jesus Course at Saint George’s College in East Jerusalem, December 2 – 15.

Several members of the Fellowship of Saint John were on pilgrimage to the Holy Land with Brs. David and Robert: (left to right) Susan Gaumer (New Orleans, LA), Caroline Hines (Exeter, NH), Katy Waugh (Toronto, Canada), Jenn Strawbridge (Alexandria, VA) and Carol Lewis (Pensacola, FL).

Deacon Phillip Schaffner, from Minneapolis, Minnesota, is a graduate student at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government, in a M.P.A. program in Energy/Environmental Policy and Urban Development/Transportation. His wife, Kate Moss, is a graduate student at Emerson college, in a M.A. program in Integrated Marketing Communications. We have been blessed by Phillip’s...
ministry in serving as a deacon during Monastery liturgies.

Bishop Sebastian Bakare of the Diocese of Harare, Anglican Church in Zimbabwe, has been awarded Sweden’s 2008 Per Anger prize for his “committed work for human rights in a politically unstable Zimbabwe.” Bishop Bakare is a member of the FSJ; he and his wife Ruth are long-time friends of the Society. (Source: ENS)

Br. Curtis Almquist preached at St. Saviour’s Parish, on November 9, then led the clergy retreat for the Episcopal Diocese of Maine November 9-11, both in Bar Harbor, Maine.

FSJ member, Bishop Sebastian Bakare of Harare addresses the gathered bishops of the Anglican Communion at the Lambeth Conference.

Br. Mark Brown and Deacon Phillip Schaffner prepare to serve at a Monastery Eucharist.


Brs. Paul Wessinger and James Farrell, both of whom celebrated their 25th birthdays at the Monastery (with several decades’ separation).
Brs. Bernard Russell, who celebrated his 86th birthday in November and Geoffrey Tristram.