IN THIS ISSUE:

In the first of a new Monastic Wisdom for Everyday Living series, Br. Geoffrey offers a meditation on the Transfiguration and the transformative power of God, which we can know through the daily practice of the presence of God.

After one year as Director of Formation, Br. James talks about the value of monastic experience and postulancy.

Following a recent trip to the Holy Land, Br Jonathan explains how pilgrimage opens us up to God’s now, in that context and our context.

Br. David shares tales of the exuberent experience had by a group of city kids at Emery House Farm.

Construction News | Letter from a fellowship member | Community News
Friends of SSJE | Open letter to a inquiring young man

To follow the latest news from the Brothers, visit www.SSJE.org where you can listen to weekly sermons and view photo galleries of construction at the Monastery.

We would welcome hearing what you think of this issue of Cowley Magazine. Visit www.SSJE.org/cowleymagazine to share comments, ask questions, or see color photographs!

Cover photo:

The cover image is a view of the Monastery Tower from the Cloister garden. Its tilted viewpoint is striking as it reveals how the architect, Ralph Adams Cram, used vertical lines to draw the eye ever upward to the glory of God. We are grateful to Mary Margret Anderson for this photo and its use.
Dear Members of the Fellowship of Saint John and other Friends

Geoffrey Tristram SSJE

As I write this letter the long awaited renovations to the monastery have begun. Thanks be to God! We are very excited that after the wear and tear of the past seventy years, our beloved Monastery, chapel and guest house are now being restored and repaired so as to continue to be a place of renewal and sanctuary for many years to come. We Brothers are full of gratitude for all of those whose generosity and kindness have made this possible.

The months leading up to the start of the renovations were some of the most challenging that I can remember. Most of us have experienced moving out of an apartment or house, with all the disruption of packing as well as the emotional demands of leaving one’s home. Moving out of the Monastery meant packing up over seventy rooms, including a very large library, as well as attics and basements filled with objects some of which had been there since the 1930’s! The task was daunting indeed, and would I think have been overwhelming had we not received the tremendous support of so many volunteers, who came faithfully day after day to help pack and move us out. We are so grateful to them.

The move also gave us the opportunity to recognize just how much ‘stuff’ gets accumulated over the years, and it was quite freeing to be able to clear out so much, and let it go. Our Rule says, “The gift of overflowing gratitude to God, who supplies all our needs, enables us to let go of dependence on possessions and all that is superfluous.”
We shall readily share among ourselves the things which we have for our use, and give away whatever we cease to need.” Our grand Yard Sale was a great opportunity to do just that! Thanks to the hard work and organizational skills of our friends, and some judicious advertising, a huge number of people came to the Sale and it was a great success, and a lot of fun. We were also able to raise several thousand dollars for the work of the church in Haiti.

Now that the building work has begun, we brothers are living both in Emery House and in rented accommodations in Cambridge. As a community we have experienced a lot of transition over these past months; a new Superior, the temporary loss of our Monastery and chapel, and living in new places. We are very aware though that for many people today transition and loss come unplanned and unbidden. We are currently upholding many in our prayers who are experiencing transition and loss through bereavement, the breakdown of relationships, unemployment and the repossession of their homes. Such losses and changes to our lives can leave us feeling vulnerable, disoriented and anxious. It is at such times that our faith can be such a strength. When the psalmist felt anxious, and change was all around, he would be strengthened by remembering that God was his rock who would surely save and protect him. “I love you O Lord my strength, O Lord my stronghold, my crag, and my haven: My God, my rock in whom I put my trust.” (Psalm 18:1-2) The rock is a perfect image for the essential faithfulness of God. Whatever happens in our lives, we can trust that God will always be faithful; as strong and immovable as a rock.

When I was at seminary we were called to chapel four times a day by a bell. On that bell were inscribed these words from Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians: “Faithful is he who calls.” (Chapter 4:24) They are words which I hear again whenever the Monastery bell rings, and they are words which remind me of that faithfulness of God which has sustained me throughout my life and ministry and which is the bedrock of our life as Christians.

We Brothers try to bear witness to the faithfulness of the God who calls, by living together the vowed life. It is our joy to share this life with others and so we are very happy that our guest house is now open at Emery House, and that God willing our chapel and guest house at the Monastery will open again next year. As always our faithful God is inviting us into a new and exciting future, and we are so grateful to be sharing it with you and all our friends and benefactors.

Thanks be to God.

Faithfully,

Geoffrey Tristram SSJE
Superior

Profits from the yard sale went to help the work of the church in Haiti.
BOOK RELEASE:

STONE & Light
A Celebration of a Holy Place

We’re pleased to announce the release of a book about the Monastery Chapel!

STONE & Light celebrates the Monastery Chapel of SSJE through a kaleidoscopic portrait of its history and architecture, its beauty in liturgy and its power as a place of prayer.

Lushly illustrated with archival and art photographs, this book draws together essays and meditations by scholars, priests, architects, poets, musicians, and Brothers from SSJE, to ask and answer key questions about this sacred space: What message does the design convey? How has it changed? Why is God so present here?

STONE & Light is a resource for all of us who have entered this holy place and, as one visitor writes, “awakened to love.”

www.SSJE.org/store

Hardcover: $35.95         Softcover: $24.95

Please note: Books are available for purchase only on the web.
SSJE cannot fulfill orders by mail, phone or email.
Letter From a Member of the Fellowship

Why I Stay

The Very Rev. Dr. Donald P. Richmond

As a priest and Examining Chaplain with the Reformed Episcopal Church, I am also a twenty year member of the Fellowship of Saint John. Given our current context and the crises we face, many people might view this association as incompatible. It is easy, especially during times of conflict, to highlight the differences between viewpoints. It requires a greater vision of God and of God’s Church Catholic to see beyond conflict to compassion, caritas, and consensus. While I have not always agreed with the Society, or they with me, living as a member of the FSJ has considerably enriched my life.

When deep fellowship and denominational stability were denied me in other contexts, the FSJ provided that “anchor in the storm” which I so desperately needed. In The Rule of St. Benedict in English, St. Benedict criticizes the “gyrovague” monks who “spend their entire lives drifting”; in similar fashion, The Rule of the Society of St. John the Evangelist calls me to faithfulness—first to God, but also to SSJE “and their various ministries.” Faithfulness, which is little more than love in practice, must be incarnated most especially when disagreements do occur.

Over these many years, and bridging our differences, the Society and FSJ has become my family. When SSJE suffers I also suffer; moreover, I rejoice in our shared efforts and successes. So I pray without hesitation:

Almighty and Everlasting God, by whose Spirit the whole body of your faithful people is governed and sanctified: Receive our supplications and prayers which we offer before you for the [Fellowship and] Society of Saint John the Evangelist and [our] various ministries, that we may truly and devoutly love and serve you; through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Very Rev. Dr. Donald P. Richmond, is a member of the Fellowship of Saint John and lives in Apple Valley, CA.

We welcome letters from Fellowship members and Friends of SSJE to voices@ssje.org.

Seeking a deeper relationship with God?
Consider our one-year monastic experience program.
Contact us at vocations@ssje.org
The Fellowship of Saint John (FSJ) is comprised of men and women throughout the world who desire to live their Christian life in spiritual association with the Society of Saint John the Evangelist. They have a vital interest in the life and work of the community and support our life and ministries with their prayers, encouragement, and financial gifts. The Brothers of the Society welcome members of the FSJ as partners in the gospel life, and pray for them by name in our daily worship, following a regular cycle. Together with us they form an extended family, a company of friends abiding in Christ and seeking to bear a united witness to him as “the Way, the Truth, and the Life,” following the example of the Beloved Disciple.

Members of the Fellowship of Saint John seek to live an ordered life of prayer and service in association with the Society, and follow a Rule of Life which expresses a common commitment to faithful discipleship. The bond between members of the FSJ and our Society is spiritual and personal. Members of the FSJ regularly pray for us, visit the houses of the Society when possible, and keep up to date with the life and ministry of the community. To explore becoming a member of the FSJ, please write to The Fellowship of Saint John, 980 Memorial Drive, Cambridge MA 02138 USA; or email us at monastery@ssje.org.

Br. Geoffrey with FSJ member Whitney Zimmerman on FSJ Day.
It’s a new day at Emery House.
The sun is casting its early rays across the meadow, dismissing the morning mist. Birds are greeting one another with cheerful songs. The animals – 19 chickens, 20 turkeys, 3 pigs, 10 hives of bees, and a dog – are emerging from their resting places. The extensive garden begins to glow in the warmth of the morning light. The trees are a thousand shades of green and the breeze coolly caresses the skin. There is a quiet beauty to this place and a deep stillness. It feels like holy ground.

It’s a new day at Emery House.
After a two-year hiatus, the brothers will once again be welcoming guests to Emery House for individual retreats. Guests will inhabit the hermitages at the bottom of the meadow, walk the trails and soak in the beauty of the land and the bordering rivers. They will join the Brothers for their daily round of worship and enjoy the home-cooked meals. They will have time and space, silence and solitude, a chance to encounter God in new and life-giving ways.

It’s a new day at Emery House.
Our caretaker, Brent Was, and our three interns – Rick Richards, Tara O’Neil and Michael Graskemper – are hard at work, tending the crops and the animals. The food they grow will be enjoyed by the Brothers and their guests, by members of the CSA group that support our farm (CSA stands for “Community Supported Agriculture”), and by residents and guests at two local shelters, “Our Neighbor’s Table” in Amesbury and “Pettingill House” in Salisbury. Extra produce is available for sale at our farm stand on Saturday afternoons.

It’s a new day at Emery House, and we Brothers are thinking about the future of this place. We are dreaming of new ways in which we can extend our hospitality to retreatants and other
guests in the coming years, new programs we might offer here, improved accommodations. We are looking at ways in which staff, interns and volunteers might support and assist our ministries here. We are exploring how we can preserve and protect these 140+ acres of land for posterity.

The land is rich and beautiful. There are forests and meadows, rivers and ponds, and healthy soil for growing. For over 300 years, this land was farmed and occupied by members of the Emery family. For almost 60 years, it has been cared for by the Brothers of SSJE. Now we are working with the Audubon Society and others to protect it by securing permanent conservation easements. This year will be a year of planning and envisioning for us.

We believe that this property and the community life of daily worship, work, and shared meals that we offer here are God’s gifts to us, to be shared generously with all who come. Helping the land help people to know God is our purpose.

*It’s a new day at Emery House*, full of potential and possibilities.
There are many ways in which Emery House and the land it occupies help people to know God more intimately and to appreciate our environmental resources. This story illustrates one of those ways.

On Friday, July 9, a bus pulled into our parking lot at Emery House, depositing 40 children and their chaperones. The children were part of the B-Safe Program, a diocesan-wide program for city kids based in Episcopal parishes in Boston and other urban settings. This group was from Chelsea, and we were hosting them for the day.

Our caretaker and interns had organized a full day. The morning began with four “hands on” activities. Four groups of children were formed, each group having a chance to work at each of the four activity sites. One group picked bugs off the plants and fed them to the chickens; another gathered over-ripe raspberries and fed them to our pigs; a third group dug for potatoes; and the remaining group thrashed stalks of wheat harvested from our garden and collected the grains. Talk about fun!! Digging happily in the dirt, one boy was heard to remark, “This is the best day ever!”

After lunch, the groups gathered for a story. The interns had selected a children’s book entitled Pancakes, Pancakes – the story of a boy who asks his mother for pancakes and who then is sent to various parts of the farm to gather the grain, milk, and eggs needed to make them. At each stage of the story, the children joined in. They used a hand grinder to turn the wheat grains they had thrashed that morning into flour. They added in the eggs harvested from our chickens. They poured in the milk and stirred. The batter was ready.

The children were sent off to a variety of activities in the afternoon. Br. Tom Shaw demonstrated how to use a potter’s wheel and each of the children had a chance to mold clay into cups. Others set off to see the beaver dam on the Artichoke River. Others revisited the animals.

When they returned there was a surprise! The staff was making pancakes from the batter the children had created and French fries from the potatoes they had dug that morning. It was a satisfying end to a great day.

These children reside in the city and rarely have the opportunity to visit a garden or farm like ours. It was a revelation to many of them that pancakes came not from a box, but from the grain, eggs and milk harvested on the farm. It was an opportunity to teach them about the connection between us and our food, and between us and the earth and its creatures. It gave us a chance to talk about the importance of preserving the earth as God’s own creation, and to involve them actively in the life of the farm. These are important things to learn, especially in this day and age.

Almost everyone who comes to this place senses the presence of God. God speaks to them through the beauty of the land, in the shared life of the Brothers, and through the regular worship of the community. This is holy ground.
It’s an amazing fact of church history that letters to small congregations, in cities on distant continents, became and remain today foundational texts of the Christian faith. Today, the New Testament epistles offer an encouraging model for how faith communities can form across distance. The Web now provides a medium for world-wide communication such as Paul could never have imagined.

This coming year, as the Monastery buildings are open on limited schedules for renovations, the Web offers friends of the community a powerful means for keeping connected with the Brothers. Have you recently navigated to www.ssje.org?

Sermons Online

Above all, the Web provides a wonderful way for the Brothers to share the preaching and teaching so central to their ministry. Twice each week, the Brothers post sermons from the week’s major liturgies, to be heard and read by some of the four-hundred daily visitors to the Monastery website (a number up forty percent from last year!). The growing sermon archive at ssje.org/sermons not only bridges distance; it also allows the Brothers’ sermons to continue to reach readers and listeners long beyond the moment when they were preached in the Monastery Chapel. The sermon archive now contains over four hundred sermons, dating back to 2003.

In addition to sharing the most current news of the Society, the Friends of SSJE Facebook page also has become a wonderful gathering place where Friends, far and wide, can share their experiences with one another. Users post news, photos from retreats at the Monastery, and comments on the page’s “Wall”—a sort of virtual bulletin board. The online community growing through these Web pages stretches, quite truly, “through all the earth.”

If you look through the recent comments posted to the SSJE sermon archive, you’ll see messages from distant countries in Europe, Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa, the provinces of Canada, and states all over America. A church in Poland suddenly writes in and strikes up a partnership:

Dear Brothers, during the Paschal Triduum we’ve been adding links to your last years sermons on our blog. In this way we could share the experience of Jesus’ death and resurrection with you. . . We are hopeful that you won’t mind that we added a link to this sermon and this time also translated it into Polish.

We visitors and friends are not only happy recipients of the Brothers’ online ministry; we too are agents in this broadening reach. How encouraging to see the Web working to spread meaningful good news. “I received your sermon via an international healing group list I am on,” one visitor writes in the sermon archive comments, “I am going to share your thoughts with our healing group.” Web lingo might refer to this sort of user-generated chain reaction as “viral marketing”; you could also call it Evangelism.

Visit www.ssje.org to share in these exciting developments.
And check out “Friends of SSJE” on Facebook!
I remember when I first began thinking about coming to the Community, well over twenty years ago, I told people that I was looking for a group of men who took seriously the things that I took seriously: prayer, worship, community life. It’s not that people in my parish didn’t take those things seriously, for they did. Rather, I needed to intensify my experience of those things. It’s one thing to sit beside a smoldering fire, where you can still burn your fingers; it’s another thing to sit beside a blazing fire. And I needed to get close to a blazing fire. I needed more intensity in my experience of prayer, worship, and community life than I was getting. So I came to the Monastery to test my vocation, because I thought I might find that intensity for which I was seeking. I wanted the chance to live beside a blazing fire and discover how I might be changed by that experience.

There’s something very powerful about spending time, however long, in the company of people who take seriously the same things that you do. In Southeast Asia, many men spend some time in a Buddhist Monastery. They’re certainly not going there for the rest of their lives, they’re not going to spend their lives as monks, but they go there, in a sense, to sit by a blazing fire and be changed by it, and in that way be more prepared for life as it happens, on its own terms.

At the Monastery, we’re offering a similar chance to men who take seriously the things that we take seriously, men with a holy hunger for God, who desire, in the words of Abba Joseph, the Desert Father, ‘to be changed into fire.’ We’re calling it the Monastic Experience Program—a year-long experience of living, studying, and praying among
The Society of Saint John the Evangelist describes the qualities we look for in new members, and I think the description applies also to the sort of men who would be attracted to this program: “We seek to find that the candidate has a love for the gospel, a desire for prayer, an attraction to ministry.” To say the same thing in another way: This program will appeal to men who take seriously the things that we take seriously.

The Monastic Experience Program offers a chance not only to look into the monastic life, to live it for a time, but also a chance to drink deeply at the roots of our Tradition in a way that not many other programs or places allow. I’m often surprised to see how rarely people, even people coming out of seminary, have had this chance. They’ve got a little bit of church history, and a little bit of Bible, and a little bit of spirituality, but they often don’t have deep roots in the Tradition. Part of my role, as Director of Formation, is to help the men who come to us—for however long—explore the greater Tradition and to drink deeply from it.

Exploring the Tradition, the inner life, the life of prayer is actually quite risky, because you don’t know what you’re going to uncover or discover. It’s one thing to explore the Tradition intellectually. It’s another thing to explore the Tradition and to open yourself up to being changed by it. This sort of study is actually deeply personal, and you don’t know what you’re going to uncover or discover about yourself and about God. This is why it’s so helpful to do that exploration within the context of a community of prayer and of men who are also exploring these same concerns. A monastic community provides a safe environment for a very risky encounter. As a community, we’re willing to hold one another: both to hold one another accountable, and also to hold one another securely, so that it’s actually safe to take the risk to explore some of the dark corners with in our own pasts and within our lives of faith, as well as the mystery of God. In other words, life in community allows us not just to sit safely by the blazing fire, but to become fire itself.

Holding another person in this dual way is really holy work, and it’s work for which a monastic community provides precisely the right context. This dual holding—holding accountable and holding secure—is different than the kind of holding that an academic community would do: An academic community is interested in ideas and in challenging the mind in an intellectual way. A monastic community is interested in not just ideas and intellectual challenge; we want to hold the
whole person as they are changed into the person God wants them to become. We're interested in helping not just the mind to grow, but the whole person. We want to help the whole person to grow closer to God and to uncover a more integrated sense of themselves.

The word “postulant” comes from the Latin verb *postulare*, meaning, “to ask.” This word holds rich resonances for me in how I understand this monastic experience program, and my own role in it, because of that sense of asking and seeking. In the old days, if you wanted to join a religious community, you needed to stand outside, knocking on the door for several days before they’d even let you in. Standing at the door and knocking: this is a significant image for the monastic experience program as well. You’re not knocking to see if anybody’s there, or even to see if you’ve got the perseverance to stand out in the cold for four days before someone opens the door. Rather, the early days of a man’s time with the community are about standing at the door, looking in, asking questions, seeking, exploring.

Whether or not a man chooses to cross over the threshold, into the monastic life, the time he spends in that liminal space is actually very important and worthwhile in itself. Liminal places are the places of first encounter—where you begin to encounter the other, the next, the new. It’s exciting and different; it’s also potentially life changing. For when you stand in a liminal space, you don’t know what’s going to happen on the other side.

Taking a time to stand on the threshold, to dwell in that liminal space, is a chance for a man to answer Jesus’ invitation in the gospels: “Knock, and the door shall be opened to you.” When you stand in that liminal space of postulancy—asking, seeking—you’re knocking on the door of God’s heart. If after a time here at the monastery, men come to understand that their vocation in Christian service lies elsewhere, the door of God’s heart is ever open, and the next door will open for them somewhere else. That man’s time among us has better equipped him to pass through the next door, into the ministry to which he is called and to carry the fire of his experience into other places. We are confident that no one’s time here is wasted. For other men, the door here may simply open and remain open. I think of that line I love from the book *Revelation*: “And I will open the door, and you will come and sup with me.” And then, as George Herbert paints that wonderful scene of Jesus’ invitation and his own supping: “So I did sit, and eat.” 📖
It’s very easy to start out with a romanticized notion about biblical sites. You go on pilgrimage somehow expecting that you’re going to see scriptural scenes unfolding before you. Or you go hoping to encounter the past, or to confirm how you’ve already decided things were. But, amazingly, such a pilgrimage often reveals that the times in which we live now and the world in which God’s revelation to the Israelites and the first Christians occurred are neither dissimilar, nor at a far remove from one another. The situation now, in what we call “the Holy Land”—politically, culturally, socially, religiously—in many, many ways, mirrors our own and remains much as it always has been.

As one journeys on pilgrimage, the sense of separation in historical time, the understanding that all these stories and encounters happened ages ago, slips away. Instead you get the sense that it’s all happening now, in the present context, today, just as it happened in biblical times. We are not so separated from our spiritual ancestors as we might have thought—or wished to think. In fact, their struggles in coming to know and be loved by God are very close to ours, because the same God who yearned for them is yearning after us today.

God’s yearning, I believe, is the impetus for pilgrimage. Often the people who end up going on a pilgrimage can’t explain exactly why they’re there. You might say, “I came as a pilgrim because I heard about the St. George’s College courses and I’d always thought it would be interesting to go to the Holy Land.” But as the actual experience of the pilgrimage unfolds, you’re likely to discover the ways, deep within you, that God has been inviting you to a personal encounter.

One begins to see that this invitation to encounter now extends not just to you but to many others as well, those on pilgrimage with us and those we left behind—known to us and unknown. We in the West often think of ourselves as the only Christian churches. Taking a pilgrimage to the Holy Land is an opportunity to see the historical and present diversity of those whom God has called into covenant relationship, all the nations and peoples (made up of unique individuals like yourself) whom God is drawing into intimate relationship.

Imagine, for example, standing in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, traditionally seen as having under its roof the hill of Calvary and the garden where Jesus rose, giving the site its ancient name: the Church of
the Resurrection. The church is often bustling with pilgrims as well as tourists (pilgrims called by another name) from every continent and country, speaking many languages as they wait to enter the Aedicule, the empty tomb. In other portions of the church assigned to the custody of particular religious communities, the Eucharist is being celebrated in a plethora of rites and tongues, often simultaneously. As you move in the midst of what is often chaos and always cacophony, a rushing wave of excitement or fear, perhaps both, floods your awareness. There’s a real sense of the Pentecost experience described in Acts, the “pouring out of the Spirit on all flesh”, a palpable connection in faith to God’s presence within us.

God’s invitation to pilgrimage in a cultural content not one’s own is always challenging, often disturbing. It is to be asked to allow oneself to be made vulnerable to and aware of, what Jean Pierre de Caussade named, “the sacrament of the present moment.” To journey as a pilgrim in the Holy Land is to be exposed to the beauties and uglinesses, loves and hatreds, kindnesses and injustices, reconciliations and intolerances shaping individual lives and those of two peoples (Israelis and Palestinians) and three faiths (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) who dwell there. It is to be asked to behold and love all the inhabitants of the land of Jesus as God does.

And to return home from such a pilgrimage is to be asked to continue to live in the very same way in your own time and place. To live and love with the expansive vision which pilgrimage can bring, in the midst of religious pluralism and of material and spiritual hunger, is to be enabled to “seek and serve Christ in all persons”, as we vow in the Baptismal Covenant. It is to have your heart broken open, to see Christ setting ablaze the hearts of those around you. It is to participate in making the world new and alive in its pilgrimage into God now.

Consider our one-year monastic experience program. Contact us at vocations@ssje.org

Interested in Living in a Monastic Community for a Year?
Join the SSJE Brothers on pilgrimage to The Holy Land

December 2–15, 2010
“The Palestine of Jesus”

The pilgrims learn and pray amidst the sacred landscape where the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ unfolded. Course members visit major sites connected with the Gospel accounts: Bethlehem, Nazareth, the Jordan River, the Sea of Galilee, Mounts Hermon and Tabor, the Judean Desert. We will trace the Passion narratives in visits to Bethany, the Mount of Olives, the Garden of Gethsemane, the Church of the Resurrection (the Holy Sepulchre), the Way of the Cross, and Emmaus.

March 11–24, 2011
“Praying the Fifth Gospel”

The phrase “the Fifth Gospel” comes from Saint Jerome. In the 4th century in Bethlehem, as he was translating the Scriptures, he realized the land itself constitutes a Fifth Gospel, shedding so much light on the other four. This pilgrimage is a spiritual journey into the heart of our faith. Meditations and teaching will be offered at key points, with space to pray and reflect deeply. Based in Jerusalem, at key sites in the Holy City, the pilgrimage will also include Bethlehem, the Judean desert, and two nights near the Sea of Galilee. Pilgrims will pray on sacred mountains, seeking stillness and silence on Mount Tabor, the place of Transfiguration, the Mount of the Beatitudes, and the Mount of Olives.

If you’d like to learn more, please contact Saint George’s College, Jerusalem: www.SGCJerusalem.org
Dear Henry.

Although I have not actually met you, I am very glad to answer your letter addressed to our Novice Master. You ask very important questions about the vocation to religious life in general and to the SSJE in particular. You may be interested to learn that I was admitted as a postulant in the Society in July of 1939 and was ordained to the priesthood in May, 1940. I believe very firmly that God calls a man to a particular religious or monastic community, and He calls at a particular moment both in the history of this man’s life and in that of the community.

In your letter you tell us that your parish priest suggested that you write to several communities. It is important for you to come to know something about the “charism,” i.e., the special aspects of each of these communities. In the first chapter of our Rule of Life “On the Call of the Society,” our founder sets forth very clearly the special character of our community. We are a community whose life is centered in our corporate worship, in the celebration of the Eucharist and the singing of the Office, and in our daily hour of individual prayer. Out of this life of worship and prayer flows our ministry and apostolate. I believe, Henry, that your next step would be to come to visit us, so that you can actually share our life, and learn who we are.

You ask about what signs you should be looking for in your discernment of a possible vocation to our community. Each Christian is called to a life of poverty, chastity, and obedience. We whom God calls into the religious life live out that call as celibates—those who choose God as the only partner, friend or lover to whom we give ourselves totally. We make this commitment in community with our Brothers, to whom we are very closely bound.

When I was a seminary student, I felt that God was calling me to such a commitment and so I came to the Society immediately after my graduation. The first years in the community were difficult ones for me. I felt uncertain about my desire and my ability to live as a celibate. I felt a great need for relationships of friendship, which at that time were discouraged in our community. I also had the very false idea that I could become poor, obedient, and, above all, perfectly chaste – as it were - overnight! Exactly ten years after I had been received as a postulant, and four years after I had
taken my life vows, I underwent a very severe crisis, left the Society, and only after four years did I ask to be received back again. I have slowly realized that in the religious life, as in the Christian life as a whole, we are called to be followers of Christ, who very gently but firmly calls us to follow Him in our religious vocation.

I write to you in such a personal manner only in order to help you in your own discernment process. Thanks be to God you are considering trying your vocation not in 1939 but in 1990. What kind of community will you find us to be today? First of all, a community which is authentically Anglican. In our Eucharistic worship we use Rite II; and for the Office: Morning Prayer, Noonday Office, Evening Prayer, and Compline from *The Book of Common Prayer*, with a four week cycle of the Psalms. We regularly have guests and other visitors joining with us in our corporate prayer and worship.

Secondly, you will find us a community of men who are truly brothers. And who share deep friendships. My own greatest personal joy is the love given to me by my brothers, and the love that I return to them. We rejoice that in our diversity we all show forth first to ourselves, and then those who come to our guesthouses, and to those whom we meet in ministry away from home, a real love and affection. We are very much blessed, and our lives are so enriched through our friendships with both men and women, being ministers to them, and our being ministered to by them.

You will also find a community seeking always to live in an active, very demanding tension between our life of prayer and worship, and our ministry and apostolate.

We know that as a community we do not exist first of all for ourselves, but for God and the Church and the world. At the same time, we know how important our community life and our relationships with our brothers really are. For this reason, in all three of our houses, we now keep Mondays as our Sabbath day, and close our guest houses from the end of Evening Prayer on Sundays until Evening Prayer on Monday. It is not easy either to keep a proper balance or to live in this kind of tension. Sometimes we feel overstrained, or that we have taken on too much ministry. During the two times each year that all of us are together, we have very free and open discussion about maintaining this balance, and living positively in this tension.

It has been, Henry, a joy and a privilege for me to answer your letter. I hope that I have given you an authentic picture of our community, as we seek today to live out our vocation as brothers of the SSJE who are seeking to be loyal to the charism of our founder, to incorporate and to manifest the
theology of John the Evangelist, and to live, as our founder bade us to be, “men of the moment.”

I shall begin now, Henry, to remember you in my daily prayers. Your primary vocation is to live out your priestly vocation as a baptized member of the Body of Christ. I shall pray that in your life you will more and more share with all your sisters and brothers in the eternal priesthood of Christ, who by being lifted up from the earth draws all women and men to himself, that He may offer them to the Father; and who for our sakes consecrated Himself. This, too, is your primary vocation. It would give me great joy if you were called by God to live out this vocation as one of us.

SATURDAY WORKSHOPS
Cambridge, Massachusetts

The Brothers will lead a number of Saturday workshops in Cambridge during the fall. Check the website for more details and information on how to reserve a place. www.ssje.org

We are happy to make available for purchase both a 2011 Wall Calendar and the SSJE Ordo, Advent 2010 through Advent 2011. To buy copies please visit: www.SSJE.org/store

The Ordo, compiled and edited by Jonathan F. Maury, SSJE. We are proud to make the guide to our daily round of worship and prayer available to our friends. The Ordo is an in-depth and comprehensive schedule of the readings and prayers used by the brothers of SSJE each day, which will allow friends to follow along and pray with the community.

2011 SSJE wall calendar
The SSJE brothers are pleased to make available a color wall calendar of images from our monastery in Cambridge, Massachusetts, complete with red letter feast days. We hope that you will enjoy watching the seasons at the monastery pass along with us. $15.00 8.5” x 11” 22 pages, coil bound full color
www.SSJE.org/store
The Society of Saint John the Evangelist
Please Join the Friends of SSJE

The Brothers have moved out of the Monastery, and the hoped-for renovations have begun! As with every metamorphosis there is vulnerability in transition. Yet we know that the Brothers will return with a renewed presence in the coming year. During this in-between time, we ask the Friends of SSJE to accept their reduced availability, while continuing to offer full support, which the Brothers need more than ever. We are so grateful for your loyal steadfastness, which will bridge the Brothers across this transition and back into the Monastery next year.

— Jamie Coats, Director, Friends of SSJE

I have been a member of your Fellowship for so many years now, and although I am unable to make my yearly pilgrimage to the Monastery as I once did, I hold each of you in my prayers and consider myself so extraordinarily blessed to have so many dear brothers. I learned to really listen and pray within those hallowed walls, and when I felt most afraid, alone, depleted, and defeated, I could come ‘home’ to the Guesthouse where I always found open arms and God, ready to love me back together again. God bless you each and everyone. I pray someday to be able to visit you again.

— The Rev. Donna Mayfield

My first retreat to the Monastery took place over ten years ago and I’ve returned every year since then. It is where I can go and collect myself, listen to the still, small voice of God and enjoy the hospitality of the monks. Over the years, even in my own office miles away, I can take a five minute retreat, imagining myself in the Monastery Chapel worshipping our Lord Jesus Christ.

— The Rev. John Fritschner

...Sometimes it is the spoken word...other moments it is the music that touches my soul and often it is the simplicity of silence...more recently it has been the expanding internet options... no matter the method or medium it is the Spirit of our Risen Lord that shines through and daily makes such a difference in my life. ...Thank you for all your Blessings!

— Mr. Larry Jenkins
Becoming a Friend

Please consider becoming a Friend today by supporting the SSJE’s Annual Fund. A tax-deductible contribution may be made by check (payable to “SSJE”), credit card, direct deposit or a gift of securities. Gifts may also be made online through our website www.SSJE.org.

Please remember SSJE in your will.

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.

USA
Friends of SSJE
The Society of Saint John the Evangelist
980 Memorial Drive
Cambridge, MA 02138, USA
Tel (617) 876-3037 ext. 24
Email: friends@ssje.org
www.ssje.org

CANADA
“SSJE”
Attn: Mrs. Beth Weintrop
The Bank of Nova Scotia Trust Co
130 King Street West, 20th Floor
PO Box 430, Stn First Canadian Place Toronto, Ontario
M5X 1K1, Canada

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.

Questions or Comments?
Please contact Friends of SSJE
980 Memorial Drive • Cambridge, MA 02138
friends@ssje.org or 617.876.3037 x24
Renovation Update:  
Construction has begun!

Br. Robert L’Esperance is the Facilities Brother, with oversight of the buildings and grounds at the Monastery. Each week the Brothers join the construction team (builders, architects and project manager) to review progress and work through the unforeseen issues that always accompany major renovation. Here, Br. Robert offers an update on construction progress at the Monastery.

Packing and Moving: Over 800 boxes were packed and moved! Beds, desks, chairs, book shelves and all the other household goods acquired across 83 years were removed from the Guesthouse and Monastery buildings. All of the Society’s icons, crosses, altar dressings, and vestments have safely been moved to Emery House or put into storage.

Construction Site: The Monastery has become a construction site under the supervision of the Commodore Construction Company (even the Brothers now need permission to enter the buildings!). Much preparatory work has been completed to protect the existing buildings and grounds from the heavy equipment now at work on the site.

Inside the chapel, scaffolding has been raised to allow for stone cleaning, as well as the installation of new lights and fire suppression systems. The chapel organ has been shrink-wrapped to protect it from dust and debris. Preparations are well under way for the renovations that will make the Chapel fully handicapped accessible.

The old heating system has been completely removed from the boiler room, along with the cast iron radiators, exposed pipes, and asbestos insulation throughout the buildings.

Watching the Progress
We’re pleased to announce a new online gallery, Renovation at the Monastery, where we will add photographs as the work progresses. Check out the progress at www.SSJE.org.

The Society of Saint John the Evangelist  
23
Br. Jonathan Maury was chaplain for a pilgrimage sponsored by St. George’s College in Jerusalem from April 14-27. The course was entitled “The Bible and Its Setting” and drew 40 participants.

On May 2, the community held its annual St. John’s Day celebration for members of the Fellowship of St. John and other friends. This year we were honored to welcome The Most Rev. Dr. Katharine Jefferts Schori, Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, as our preacher.

From May 25 to 27, Br. James Koester led a pre-ordination retreat for candidates for ordination from the Diocese of Massachusetts. The theme of the retreat was “The Faces of Jesus.”

Luke Ditewig was clothed as a novice in our Society on May 27. Luke entered our Monastic Experience Program in November, 2009, and after six months, made the decision to join the community as a novice. He currently resides at Emery House, where he serves as the sacristan and assists with cooking. Welcome, Brother Luke!

The Most Rev. Dr. Katharine Jefferts Schori with Ms. Carol Bass.

The Brothers moved out of the Monastery during the month of June so that the extensive building renovations (for which we have been raising money through the “Stone and Light” campaign) could begin in July. Several brothers are now living at Emery House. Others reside in a house we have rented in Cambridge. The staff is now working out of office space we have rented in Cambridge. Mail can continue to be directed to the “980 Memorial Drive” address; it will be forwarded to our offices by the Post Office.

In preparation for moving out of the Monastery, the community held a yard sale on Saturday, June 12. Books, icons, office supplies and household items were for sale. The event was organized by a group of dedicated volunteers (for whom we are deeply grateful) and was extremely successful.
On July 25th, Brs. Geoffrey Tristram, James Koester and Jonathan Maury attended the centenary celebration of the Order of St. Anne in Arlington, Massachusetts. The Order was co-founded by SSJE and we have enjoyed a long and fruitful association for these one hundred years.

Br. James Koester traveled to British Columbia to lead a week-long icon writing workshop at the Sorrento Centre, July 26-30. Participants worked on one of three different icons, depending on their level of skill and experience.

Br. Curtis Almquist continues to enjoy a lengthy sabbatical following the completion of his term of office as Superior this past May. In August he traveled to England to lead the annual community retreat of the Sisters of the Love of God, an Anglican contemplative community in Oxford. In September Curtis and Br. David Vryhof will lead a pilgrimage to ancient monastic sites in Egypt and Palestine from September 22 to October 5 (the course, “Ways in the Wilderness” is sponsored by St. George’s College in Jerusalem). In November Curtis will lead the annual retreat for students and faculty of St. Philip’s Theological College in Maseno, Kenya.

The Brothers gathered at Emery House for their annual Community Retreat, August 3-11. The theme of this year’s retreat was “Consider Your Call.”

Emery House opens for guests on September 7. For the latest retreat information, visit www.SSJE.org/emory. To book a retreat, please contact Br. Jonathan Maury, the Guest Brother, at (617) 876-3037, extension 11, or e-mail guestbrother@ssje.org.

The Monastery Chapel has been closed during July and August for cleaning and repair. We hope to be able to open the chapel for limited use in the coming months, in spite of the construction work being done on our buildings. At some point this fall, Eucharists will be celebrated on Sunday mornings at 9:00 am and Tuesday evenings at 5:15 pm. With the exception of these two service times, the chapel will be closed during the coming year as the reconstruction project continues.
Brothers’ Summer Reading List

Before the Brothers left for Emery House to begin their annual Community retreat, we asked several Brothers to share the titles of the books they’re currently reading. We hope you might enjoy adding one or more of these books to your own summer reading pile.

On Br. David Vryhof’s Bookshelf:

**The God-Possessed** by Jacques Lecarrière
A thorough yet very readable history of monasticism in the deserts of Egypt and beyond during the third and fourth centuries. Insightful descriptions of the motives of these “God-possessed” men and women who left their families and possessions to whole-heartedly seek God.

**The Desert of the Heart** by Benedicta Ward, SLG
A pocket-sized collection of stories and sayings from the desert fathers that invites deeper reflection.

**If a Tree Falls** by Jennifer Rosner
Reflections of a mother of two deaf girls on her struggle to come to terms with their deafness and to determine the best way to raise and educate them. Rosner skillfully reports on her thoughts and feelings as a parent of children with disabilities.

**Once a Runner** by John L. Parker, Jr
“The best novel about running ever written,” according to Runner’s World magazine. The story of one man’s quest to be a champion, capturing the essence of what it means to be an elite athlete and to devote one’s entire existence to the single-minded pursuit of excellence.

On Br. James’ Bookshelf:

**The Pillars of the Earth** by Ken Follet

**Our Magnificent Bastard Tongue: The Untold History of English** by John McWhorter.

On Br. Jonathan’s Bookshelf:

**The Backyard Beekeeper: An Absolute Beginner’s Guide to Keeping Bees in Your Yard and Garden** by Kim Flottum
I’m aspiring to be an apprentice apiarist with Br James.

**The Wisdom Jesus: Transforming Heart and Mind - A New Perspective on Christ and His Message** by Cynthia Bourgeault
Transformation of consciousness in prayer using traditional contemplative practices from a sometime-Cowley author.

**Divas and Scholars: Performing Italian Opera** by Philip Gossett
Indulging myself in the history and transmission of this musical repertoire which I so enjoy!

On Br. Curtis’ Bookshelf:

**Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years** by Diarmaid MacCulloch of Oxford University
MacCulloch spent his childhood in a rectory and now looks on Christianity respectfully, but from outside. His writing is brilliant, critical, inspiring, humorous.

Continued
Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism
by William Harmless, a Jesuit
This is a very accessible and interesting introduction to the desert abbas and ammas - their lifestyle, teaching, and followers in the Egyptian desert and beyond.

In Pursuit of Silence; Listening for Meaning in a World of Noise by George Prochnik.
“...More than money, power, and even happiness, silence has become the most precious - and dwindling - commodity of our modern world...” Very compelling.

On Br. Mark’s Bookshelf:
I’m enjoying Christianity: the First Three Thousand Years by Diarmaid MacCulloch!

On Br. Kevin’s Bookshelf:
Following Jesus in a Culture of Fear: the Christian Practice of Everyday Living by Scott Bader-Saye
An elegantly written account of the neglected doctrine of providence, advocating a recovery of the practices of hospitality, generosity, and peacemaking. Five stars.

Letters to Jackie: Condolences from a Grieving Nation by Ellen Fitzpatrick
Billed as a “glimpse into the character of the nation,” 250 of the millions of notes, letters, and cards sent to Mrs Kennedy in the wake of JFKs assassination distill with heartbreaking poignancy both a lost era and a lost mode of courteous public discourse.

In This House of Breed by Rumor Godden
A signal novel for me, it’s a story of vocation, lodged in the oh-so-ordinary “changes and chances” of the common life shared by the Benedictines of Brede Abbey in southern England.

The United Cakes of America by Warren Brown
One part cookbook, one part food history and one part Trivial Pursuit factoids, makes for scrumptious reading.

On Br. Luke’s Bookshelf:
The Help by Kathryn Stockett.
The Shattering Sound of Amazing Grace by David Schlafer
Highly recommended - great to use as a devotional with family or friends.

Jesus Freak by Sarah Miles
Introverts in the Church by Adam McHugh

Thinking About Your Future?
Consider our one-year monastic experience program.
Contact us at vocations@ssje.org