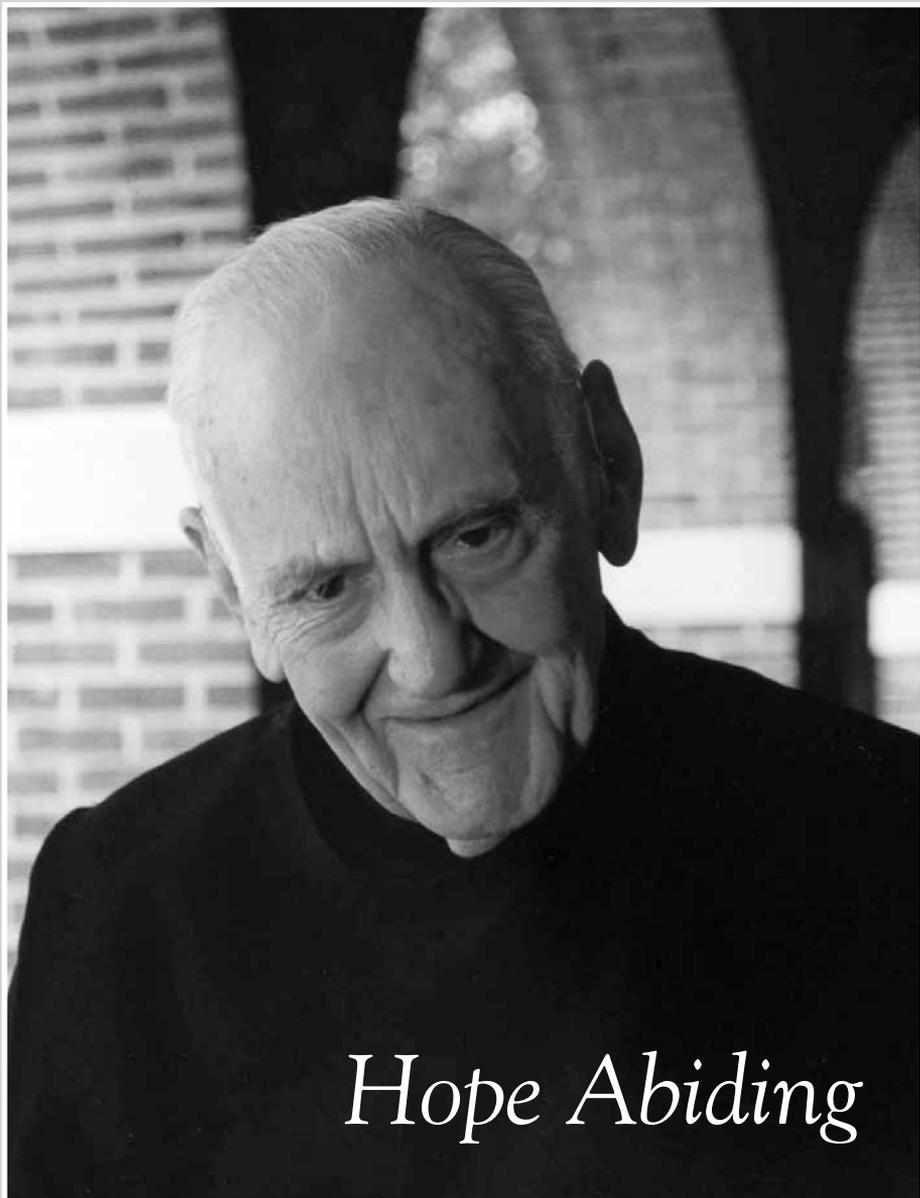


SOCIETY OF SAINT JOHN THE EVANGELIST

# Cowley

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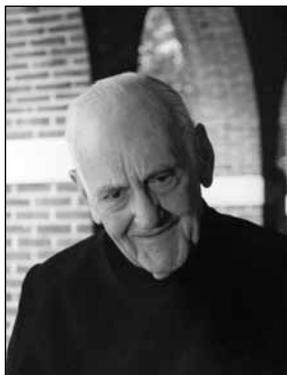


*Hope Abiding*

*“At age twenty-four, when I came to SSJE just out of seminary, I had a very clear definition of God. I feel much closer to God now, but I certainly can’t in any way describe who God is, other than to say, ‘through Jesus I experience God as love.’”*

– Br. Paul Wessinger, SSJE  
on the occasion of his 90th birthday

Photo Credit: Gary-Andrew Smith



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### **Cover photo:**

Br. Paul Wessinger (1915-2009) in the monastery cloister. Br. Paul came to know SSJE while an undergraduate at Harvard (1932-36). After graduating from General Theological Seminary in New York in 1939, he entered the Society and was ordained to the priesthood. He served as SSJE’s Superior from 1972-83. Br. Paul was an “abba,” a spiritual papa, revered by so many people, young and old, the world over.



## A Letter from the Superior

**Dear Members of the Fellowship  
of Saint John and other Friends,**

**Curtis Almquist, SSJE**

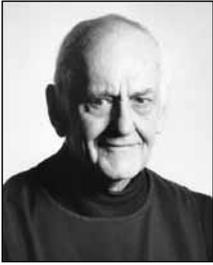
Our *Rule of Life* devotes an entire chapter to “The Gifts and Challenges of Old Age.” Tradition records that Jesus’ “beloved disciple” lived to a great age. We who belong to a community named after him are called to be appreciative of the gifts that come to maturity in old age, and also sensitive to the needs and struggles that accompany it. We saw both in our beloved brother Paul Wessinger. In the 1980s and early 1990s, Br. Paul was an avid contributor to the community’s re-writing of our *Rule*: “We pray that seeds planted in many years of faithful life will bear fruit in old age.” Br. Paul was an answer to that prayer. “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.” There was more. I recall some years ago Br. Paul was asked by a group of young men inquiring into membership in SSJE the most essential quality of character one needed to thrive in the religious life. Was it some kind of spiritual virtue, some ascetic discipline? Br. Paul answered with a twinkle in his eyes, “A sense of humor!” He chuckled a great deal and brought much delight to so many people.

Jesus commended the faithful steward to “draw out of the treasury things new and things old.” We are drawing on the legacy of the religious life and SSJE’s own history; we are also embracing new ventures in our own mission. Br. Paul encouraged both. In the following pages you will read how our life continues to develop. A number of our friends contributed memorial gifts in thanksgiving for Br. Paul’s life and witness. We have decided to use these gifts as seed money for some new initiatives we are taking with students and young adults, very much an interest of Br. Paul. What immediately follows is the homily preached at the Eucharist of the Resurrection on June 16, 2009, in thanksgiving for Br. Paul’s life and witness.

Thank you for sharing in our life. We pray for you, give thanks for you, depend upon you.

Faithfully yours,

Curtis G. Almquist, SSJE  
Superior



# A Homily from the Holy Eucharist of the Resurrection

*in thanksgiving for the life & witness of Paul Wessinger SSJE (1915-2009)*

Curtis Almquist, SSJE

The father founder of the Society of Saint John the Evangelist, Richard Meux Benson, spoke of God's glory being manifest in our own lives through brokenness, which is a real paradox.<sup>1</sup> Our own brokenness—be it our lack of self-sufficiency, our sense of inadequacy or incompleteness, our own character flaws, even our despair—whatever it is, our brokenness becomes the portal in our own soul where God breaks through to us. Father Benson writes that *“if we enter into ourselves we shall find the ground of our heart as it were broken up, and a deep well springing up from beneath it. . . . This well springs up within us in no bubbling spasmodic manner; it is continual, imperceptible, the mighty power of God rising up through our littleness—expanding our nature—gradually overflowing it—until our nature is lost to sight.”*<sup>ii</sup> Or, at least, lost to our own sight. If you read the lives of the saints, or if you simply know someone who, in your eyes, is a saint, a holy person, they most likely do not see themselves the same way. Maybe even quite to the contrary. They are more likely aware of their brokenness; we have the vision to see God's breakthrough in their lives. This means several things about how we are to live within our own skins, and how we are to live with one another.

For one, we have to be patient with life. A phrase that appears so often in the writings of Father Benson is that *“life is progressive.”* We were created in a state of imperfection, full of potential.



Paul as a child (far right)

Therefore, as Father Benson says, *“we ought to find joy in looking forward to that perfection (or wholeness or completeness) which God will give us eventually.”* The temptation that Satan gave our ancestors in the garden of Eden was the delusion that, by our own initiative and strength, we could have the gifts of God, *all* the gifts of God, now: that we do not have to wait, do not have to grow up. Satan's temptation is for us to seize life as our immediate *“right”* instead of to receive it progressively as God's gift. And so, the Fall of humankind is about the forfeiture of life on God's terms, the forfeiture of the progressive coming of the Holy Spirit into our lives in God's good time, as much as we can bear it.

To hear this reminder that we have to be patient in life and patient with God is a tough pill for some of us to swallow. The etymology of the English

word patience is from the Latin *patientia*, to suffer. Patience does not preclude our suffering but rather presumes it. Of course, God must also be patient, must suffer a great deal for our readiness or unreadiness to grow and grow up. But perhaps that's a word of comfort here. Growth is sometimes quite painful—growing pains. If we are having to wait, wait on life, wait on God, painful as that may be, we have some sense of how God waits on us, with infinite patience.

That God will break through to us in our brokenness also invites the gift of humility. Humility comes as a byproduct of a well-lived life. Humility is not something to work on—which would probably only produce its opposite, pride—but rather something that simply evolves within our soul. If you know someone who has the gift of humility, and you were to speak of this quality you see in them, they might protest. They likely see themselves quite differently, hardly as humble. But we know it is true. Humility is in the eye of the beholder, not in the eye of the receiver. The gift of humility will simply come to us in time, in ways in which we are powerless – if we don't resist it. The English word “humility” derives from the Latin *humilis*, “lowly,” or “near the



**Br. Paul as a young priest**

ground,” *humus* being the earth. It's the opposite of feeling oneself to be high and lofty, above and beyond those who otherwise surround us.

For us Christians, the grace of humility is grounded in the incarnation, that is, in Jesus Christ's being born among us and like us. The prophecies that anticipated the coming Messiah consistently speak of the Messiah's humility: “Lo, your king comes to you, triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey...”<sup>iii</sup> Jesus himself speaks of how we should enter his coming kingdom. He says to enter “as a little child.”<sup>iv</sup> Those who exalt themselves, he says, shall be humbled, and those who humble themselves shall be exalted.<sup>v</sup> Jesus says, “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls...”<sup>vi</sup> And in the end, Jesus commands us to love one another as he has loved us: “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.”<sup>vii</sup> This is the grace of humility.

The fruit of a life well lived is patience, humility, and then love. Father Benson had a litmus test for ascertaining the brothers' integrity and faithfulness to the vows we take: poverty, celibacy and obedience. Love. Brotherly love is the evidence that we are grounded in the vows, that the vows have taken root, and that they are bearing fruit. When it's all done and said, the question we will be asked on the Day of Judgment is: Did you love? Were you a lover after Christ? Did you have room in your heart for those for whom Christ has room?

And so for us who actually live under the vows of poverty, celibacy and obedience, Father Benson is constantly challenging us to open the generosity of our hearts. He writes that “it is a miserable poverty which holds back any of its affections from any companion.”<sup>viii</sup>



**Br. Paul meeting Pope Paul VI in 1971**

It's because we are not entering into marriage or partnership that we are more freely able to love more people more. In our vows, it's not that we've said no to love. To the contrary, we've said yes to more love for more. "True poverty," Father Benson writes, "opens all its doors; welcomes all, serves all." We meet Jesus in our baptism where, we believe, Jesus comes to live in our heart, to make his home with us, to abide with us. But this is also true for others. They, too, are a dwelling place for Jesus. We, individually and corporately, embody Jesus. Yes, Jesus lives in me, but Jesus also lives in you. Father Benson says, "How can we possibly love Jesus Christ if we do not love the members of his body?"

Father Benson draws the same conclusion from the vow of obedience. He summarizes the vow of obedience as a call to love. He readily acknowledges that we will be called to take on many things, not all necessarily our first choices. True, we will be asked to rise up to the demands of the moment in each passing day. But ultimately what is behind these various requests is not our being legalistically being bound to a request but rather invited to love. That we do it all for love. What we've been asked to do, we do it all out of love. Whatever it is that we are being called to be and do, it is ultimately not

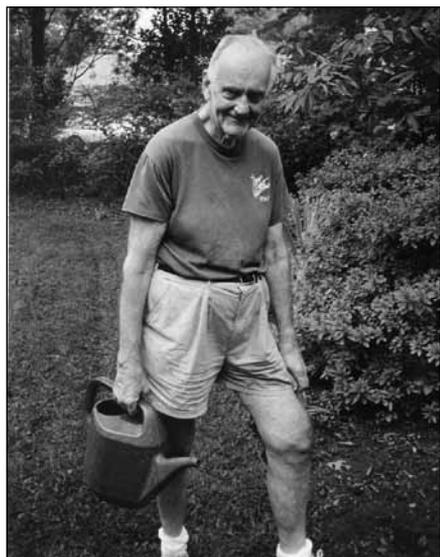
the satisfaction of some juridical rule or code, but rather a response of love. Father Benson writes, "Is he obedient who has forgotten to fulfill the very first commandment of all: 'This is my commandment, that you love one another?'"<sup>ix</sup> Love is the reason for our being, "to live our lives conscious of that love which streams down upon us, and through us to all others."<sup>x</sup>

And this was our brother Paul. But if you were to listen to our brother Paul—and probably most every one of us here, over the years, has listened to Paul in his preaching and teaching, or in meeting with him individually—he would not speak of these qualities we saw in him: patience and humility. By his own admission he was not a patient person. He had made more than a few precipitous decisions in life, some quite wrong, so he admitted. In his younger years, he had been very certain about himself. At the age of 16 he traveled from Portland, Oregon, to Cambridge, completely alone, to begin his studies at Harvard. Upon graduation, he immediately set off for the General Theological Seminary in New York, then ordination. On the one hand you could read into Paul's tenacity and certainty simply his strength of character, his very keen mind, and his privileged upbringing—all true. But it's more complicated than that. An amount of his early strength of character was, by Paul's admission, in actuality a rigidity, a compensation for how inadequate he felt. As a young child he was too small; as an adolescent he was too tall. He was physically clumsy. He was hopeless at small talk. He didn't fit it, not easily.

Shortly after Paul's tenure as our Superior, he became one of the founding brothers of St. John's House, our ministry in Durham, North Carolina. One weekend we hosted a retreat just for men, an opportunity to listen and speak deeply to one another. The

brothers participated in the retreat with the other men who were our guests. The group was asked to speak about the most embarrassing thing they could remember. Paul shared that as a six year old he had arrived at the first day of school still wearing his bib from breakfast. It was a searing embarrassment he still clearly recalled, and now well into his 70s. So many other things he found the courage to talk about, coming from his own broken life: his struggles to make peace with his own sexuality, his fickleness back in the 1950s about where he belonged in the church (was he Anglican or Roman Catholic?), and whether he belonged here in the Society of Saint John the Evangelist (or was he called to the Order of the Holy Cross or to become a Benedictine)?

He was elected Superior of our community because—as Paul said—there simply wasn't anyone else. He showed real brilliance as a leader. He became a leader worldwide in ecumenical conversations. In the 1950s Paul was invited to speak in France at La Tour St. Joseph, the Motherhouse of Jeanne



**Br. Paul in the St. John's House gardens**

Jugan, the Little Sisters of the Poor, the very community who cared for him during these last several years of his life. So beautiful. He traveled widely in the States, in the Far East, in Great Britain, in Europe. We have this endearing photo of our brother speaking with Pope Paul VI, and the Pope is listening!

Paul led our community in making our very cloistered life here in the monastery much more accessible to so many people: a Eucharistic table and a dining table that was shared with brothers and guests alike, both men and women. He had the warmest embrace of women being called to ordained leadership in our church. He had such strong advocacy for the life and witness of gay and lesbian people. He spoke as recently as a month ago, urging us brothers to take courage in risking being on the margins theologically. Paul was the confidant of so many, many people: students, clergy, members of religious orders, especially women's religious orders. Paul embodied sanctuary. He was brilliant in his leadership...except when he wasn't. Paul told many stories on himself about when he was not his best. He had a way of patting his hands and looking down with a kind of eye-rolling twinkle when talking about his mistakes. And there were many, he said, especially about when he did not rise to the challenges of leadership but would retreat or hide or go away to escape.

Not so long ago I was talking with Paul and I asked him how he had changed over the years, his 65 years of professed life in our community. He said, "I have become much less rigid and much more open." He said, "At age twenty-four, when I came to SSJE just out of seminary, I had a very clear definition of God. I feel much closer to God now, but I certainly can't in any way describe who God is, other than to say, 'through Jesus I experience God as love.'" Paul could speak about love:

God's love for him; his love for God; his love for all God's people. Paul could not talk about his virtues of patience or humility. But we can. Especially in this last decade of his life, Paul needed an increasing amount of help from other people. He initially resisted this, and then he made peace with being a receiver. He had been such a giver and now he was being invited by God to be a receiver. It's the very posture Father Benson had talked about in saying, "*It is a great token of humility to receive kindnesses at all people's hands...*"<sup>xi</sup> Paul saw no virtue in this; he was simply aware of his own need, his own brokenness, with which he made peace. We, who had the grace of knowing Paul in this life, can rightly extol on him the virtues of love, patience, humility, and so much more.

Just a short while ago Paul said he

was not afraid of death. He *had* been very afraid of death, but here too he had made peace. How sweet it is that Paul could die in his sleep on the night of the Feast of the Ascension. Paul was an avid reader all his life, up to his last day. He read in English, in German, in French: history, fiction, spirituality, especially the writings of Father Benson and of a great many inspired women. He was particularly devoted to the writings of Elizabeth of the Trinity, a French Discalced Carmelite of the 19th century. Blessed Elizabeth wrote that it is "*this intimacy with God 'within' that has been the beautiful sun illuminating my life, making it already an anticipated Heaven. It is what sustains me in my suffering.*" Her last audible words before her death were, "*I am going to Light, to Love, to Life.*"<sup>xii</sup> Surely also true for our beloved Paul, blessed Paul. ☩

<sup>i</sup>Richard Meux Benson (1824-1915) was the principal founder of SSJE in 1866 in the parish of Cowley at Oxford.

<sup>ii</sup>Retreat at Convent of S. Mary and S. John, Aberdeen, 1873 in the *Cowley Evangelist* 1918, p.29.

<sup>iii</sup>Zechariah 9:9.

<sup>iv</sup>See Mark 10:15f. See also Mark 12:38f, Luke 1:48, Luke 14:11.

<sup>v</sup>Luke 18:9-14.

<sup>vi</sup>Matthew 11:28-30.

<sup>vii</sup>John 15: 12-14.

<sup>viii</sup>Richard Meux Benson, from his addresses at the SSJE Summer Retreat, 1873.

<sup>ix</sup>John 15:12.

<sup>x</sup>Richard Meux Benson: Retreat for the Guild of the Holy Name, 1901.

<sup>xi</sup>Richard Meux Benson in *Instructions in the Religious Life*, p. 59: "It is a great token of humility to receive kindnesses at all people's hands... Humility preserves from any sense of humiliation. It gives the soul such a divine dignity that it never feels itself capable of suffering an injury."

<sup>xii</sup>Elizabeth of the Trinity (1880-1906) was beatified by Pope Paul II on November 25, 1984. In his homily at the beatification, the Pope presented Elizabeth of the Trinity to the Church as one "who led a life 'hidden with Christ in God' [Col. 3:3]," and as "a brilliant witness to the joy of being 'rooted and grounded in love'" [Eph. 3:17].



## Seeking a deeper relationship with God?

Join our one-year  
monastic experience program.  
Contact us at [vocations@ssje.org](mailto:vocations@ssje.org).



## Teach Us to Pray – Fall Preaching Series

Now available online! Listen to audio. Read the text.  
View the Wordle. Add comments.

*“Teach us to pray,” the disciples asked the Lord. (Luke 11:1)*

*Praise* - David Vryhof SSJE

*Thanksgiving* - Kevin Hackett SSJE

*Intercession* - Geoffrey Tristram SSJE

*Adoration* - Eldridge Pendleton SSJE

**[www.ssje.org/monasticwisdom](http://www.ssje.org/monasticwisdom)**

This series will continue in January with three more forms of prayer: *Petition* - Curtis Almquist SSJE, *Oblation* - Mark Brown SSJE and *Penitence* - James Koester SSJE.

### Comments from our website:

*Thank you, Brother David, for speaking God's word so clearly! This is the essence of who we are, and so many people today are asking that question. Bless you, for your faithfulness! (Sandra)*

*Kevin, thank you for bringing us back to basics. In this complicated life I find myself all too involved in what I'm not thankful for and forget the freedom that comes from rejoicing and giving thanks for how much God has given me. Thanks for the peace of your message. (Hillary)*

*Brother Geoffrey: Many thanks to you for your beautiful reflection on intercessory prayer. I am an Episcopal priest in Cleveland and your words are a timely encouragement regarding this dimension of our calling. God's peace, (Lisa)*

*Cher Kevin, Merci beaucoup pour ce message d'action de grace qui me redonne la force de dire merci a Dieu, l'auteur de ma vie. Que le Seigneur vous comble de joie! (Ngijoe)*

*Thanks. You have made my understanding of intercessory prayer both more personal and more clear! (George)*



## A Tribute to Paul Wessinger, SSJE

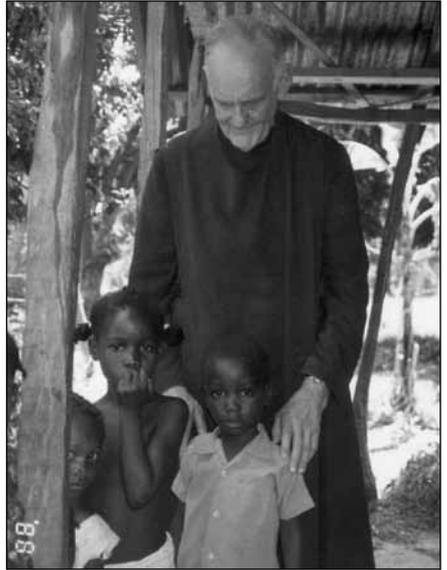
Bishop Frank Griswold

The Rt. Rev. Frank T. Griswold  
XXV Presiding Bishop of the  
Episcopal Church

I met Paul Wessinger some fifty-five years ago on my first visit to the Monastery when a wise priest at St. Paul's School, where I was a student, sent me to Father Alfred Pedersen SSJE for spiritual direction. All I remember of that very brief encounter with Paul was the ungainliness of his movements. Little did I know then that over time he would become the friend of my soul: one with whom I could share my life in Christ and to whom I could disclose the secrets of my heart.

Times passed, as time does, and I responded to my own call to ministry. I was serving as rector of a parish in Philadelphia when I received a telephone call from a sister at St. Margaret's House in Germantown. She wondered if Father Wessinger might be "of use" the following Sunday at one of the services. With vague memories of the man I had met many years ago I said he would be welcome to preach.

The next Sunday Paul appeared for the 9:15 Eucharist, a liturgy populated largely by young families with children. I remember the sermon vividly: it was about the eucharist. The words were somewhat abstract, but they were filled with urgency and passion. I looked around and saw that the children were completely still and their eyes fixed with fascination upon the preacher.



**Br. Paul with children in Haiti**

Paul's way was in huge contrast to my weekly efforts, when with props and other stratagems I worked to secure the attention of the younger members of my flock. Why had this monk succeeded with nothing but his plain words, while I with my clever inventions so often failed?

We had lunch together and spent the balance of the afternoon discovering, to our mutual joy, that we both drank deeply from the same well of contemporary French Catholic spiritual and sacramental theology. When we parted company, I promised to visit the Monastery and renew my ties with the Society.



**Bishop Griswold with Br. Paul on the occasion of Paul's 90th birthday**

Shortly thereafter I made my way to Cambridge and as I sat in the chapel before Evening Prayer I realized that SSJE was very much home. This holy place had been a significant part of my formation since the age of 15 and continued during my college years when the Monastery had been my spiritual ground. Now, Paul had given me a gift in his invitation and encouragement to return.

Several years later Paul suggested to Tom Shaw (SSJE), who had succeeded him as Superior, that I might be invited to give the annual Community retreat. In the context of the retreat and in the years that followed I came to know the secrets of Paul's heart, just as he came to know mine. His capacity to embrace with compassion the idiocies and aspirations of the human condition present in himself and others made him a wise and encouraging friend and counselor. The profligate mercy and love of God, so real to him, became the gift he conveyed to others with an assurance and a confidence that overruled our tendency to resist.

When I was elected Bishop Coadjutor of Chicago it was perfectly clear to me who should preach at the ordination: one who knew both the burdens and graces of a ministry of oversight, and one who knew me. Paul's sermon touched upon the loneliness of the overseer and the importance of love at the heart of the relationship between the bishop and the diocese. It was clear that Paul's own experience of overseeing the Society was reflected in what he said that day, and I have pondered his words again and again over the years.

As Presiding Bishop, it was my great joy to return the favor on Paul's ninetieth birthday and to preside and preach at the Liturgy celebrating his life and ministry. In my sermon I drew from Psalm 92, appointed for the occasion: *"The righteous flourish like the palm tree, and grow like a cedar of Lebanon. They are planted in the house of the Lord; they flourish in the courts of God. In old age that still produce fruit; they are always green and full of sap."*

I then went on to say that "the older Paul gets the more green and full of the sap of interior freedom and youthfulness of spirit he becomes. In him we are confronted by the paradox of an aging body indwelt by increasing interior strength made manifest in a disconcerting spontaneity, graced iconoclasm and impatient clearness about the true heart of the gospel and the lineaments of Christ's risen body, the church."

I last saw Paul several weeks before he died when he was in the hospital for tests. Little did I realize as I leaned over the bed and kissed him good-bye, that this was "Adieu" until we meet again in the realm of the resurrection. As I left the hospital I reflected that now, four years after his special birthday celebration and in a hospital bed, my dear friend Paul was still very much full of sap. 🌱

# Engaging in Ministry with Young Adults:

## The Ongoing Legacy of Br. Paul Wessinger, SSJE

Br. Paul Wessinger wasn't into "stuff." Of all the brothers' cells, Paul's always struck me as the most monkish in character, with just the bare essentials: bed (no bedspread), chair, desk, dresser, lamp, whatever books he was currently reading and whatever pills he was taking that got him well into great old age. Nothing in the way of aesthetic touches and very few mementos of his long and very full life. Paul's treasures were indeed of the heavenly kind.

When he died last spring at the age of 94 we received many generous contributions in his memory. A few weeks ago when our thinking about new directions began to coalesce, it seemed only fitting that instead of memorializing Paul with "stuff," we would use these gifts to fund new initiatives involving young adults. Paul had first become involved with the Society as a student at Harvard, so this seemed especially appropriate.

In reflecting on our life together it became increasingly compelling to us that we are here at 980 Memorial Drive for a reason, that there is a vision to be claimed for this place, that this place not only gives us continuity with our forebears in the Society, but is a galvanizing force of forward movement into God's future. The vision emerging is not a radical reframing of our life and ministry, but it is, we believe, a distinct and intentional shift in priorities. We will continue to do the same work we have done: retreats, spiritual direction,



Mark Brown, SSJE

teaching people to pray their lives. We will continue to offer sanctuary to God's people and nourish their prayer through the rich liturgical cycle that unfolds here day by day, year by year. And, by recalibrating some of this work, we will give higher priority to our work with young adults.

This new priority is already beginning to take shape in concrete ways. First of all, we are setting aside more rooms in our Guesthouse for long term residents, for what we are calling "Monastic Residencies." We have for several years enjoyed the company of young adults living with us in the Guesthouse. These men and women not only help us with the practical work of offering



Produce grown in our Emery House gardens was given to a local food bank and served at the monastery table throughout the summer and autumn. In addition to a large garden, we now have chickens and turkeys being raised on our property! (Pictured left to right) Emery House caretaker Brent Was, and his wife, Windy Dayton; with our summer interns Edmund Harris, Titus Presler, Jr. and his wife, Michelle Schaaap.

hospitality to others, but bring the gift of their personalities and energies to our common life. They, in turn, can receive some experience of formation in the Christian life by living and worshipping alongside us. Until now, we have made this opportunity available to one or two at a time. We are increasing that number by increments as we explore the practical implications of these residencies. “Monastic Residencies,” rather than being a tightly structured program, is a flexible and fairly open-ended arrangement, the details of which are worked out on an individual basis with the Guest Brother. We now have three young adults in residence—Elizabeth Sherlock, who works at the Harvard University Library, and two students at the Berklee College of Music, Ali Amr and Tarek Rantisi (who happen to be from Ramallah).

“NightSong” will be an exploration into offering later evening services geared toward young adults. As I write, conversations are underway with interns from the Diocese of Massachusetts Micah Project and Relational Evangelist programs to plan and implement a pilot event in early December that we hope will become the first of many. The monastery was the site for a day of training recently for these diocesan interns; many of the participants were moved by the beauty of our chapel and worship and have begun to make regular visits. Some brothers are meeting with interns for spiritual direction and mentoring. The possibilities of collaboration with these and other groups are only beginning to become apparent.

Emery House is another area of our life increasingly involving the participation of young men and women. In the last three years or so the property has blossomed (literally!) as a site for organic and sustainable agriculture and training in its methods. Under the energetic and imaginative leadership of

Brent Was, our “caretaker” (the word he prefers), agriculture has returned to the farm in a big way—and getting bigger! Vegetables and fruits, chickens and turkeys and bees—who knows what’s next? Brent’s help in developing this vision goes well beyond the technicalities of growing things organically and into the rich terrain of theological understanding of the earth itself as a revelation of the divine. If at the monastery in Cambridge we are stewards of the mysteries of cross, altar and temple, at the farm we are stewards of the mystery of divine love as revealed in creation itself.

The emerging vision of Emery Farm, as it would be fair to call it, has involved the participation of young adult interns who not only learn the “how to’s” of organic farming, but constitute, along with Brent and his family, a praying, theologically reflective community on site. This last summer’s interns were Titus Presler, Jr., Michelle Schaap, and Edmund Harris.

In a sense, anyone who feels drawn into our orbit, even for just a few moments of quiet meditation in our chapel, has experienced a kind of vocation, vocation in the sense of a calling to respond to the divine initiative in some way. Our new and continuing Young Adult Initiatives are meant to increase the options on the vocational menu, to make more opportunities for young people to respond to vocation, whether it be for a lifetime or for a season of life or for an evening of worship. While it is always our hope and prayer that many will continue to feel called to life-long commitment, it is also our intention to honor the vocations of those who feel mysteriously drawn for a time, be it brief or otherwise.

Br. Paul always struck me as one of the most forward thinking among us—in spite of his very Spartan cell! I like to think he is pleased. 🙏



## A Sending God: *SSJE and Mission in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*

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Kevin R. Hackett, SSJE

Richard Meux Benson was a visionary priest and missionary. He founded SSJE with a dream of a community of men ready and available for ministry and mission, responding to needs of the day and time, and for which no other remedy existed. He envisioned a prayerful community who would go where the ministry of the church, or as he would say in *The Final Passover*, “the presence of the Body,” was most lacking—and therefore most needed.

SSJE, like many other religious communities of the 19th century, was established to brighten (not bring) the light of God to a world that was ravaged by the dark and destructive excesses and unforeseen social and economic consequences of the Industrial Revolution, for which the Church, like the larger society in which it was situated, was completely unprepared.

We brothers believe we are at a point in history not unlike that in which we were founded. We are now faced, however, not with the devastation of industry, commerce, and modernity but that of technology, information, and post-modernity. At no time in history has it been easier to be “connected” to others, at least virtually. At no time in history has it been easier to access information and knowledge. And at no time in history has it been easier to be completely isolated. The virtual world, even on a 72-inch plasma screen, is *not* the real world. It is not the world of the Word-made-flesh, where “that which we have seen and touched



**Brs. Paul Wessinger and Kevin Hackett**

and known” can be communicated to others and made concrete. And that, it seems to me, lies at the crux of our work in mission—and it gets us back to the founder’s vision.

### **A Tradition of Mission**

Father Benson was way ahead of his time in his understanding of mission, which was for him fundamentally about making the presence of God in Christ tangible. It was not about converting the heathen to Christ. A century later, Mother Teresa would undertake the same kind of missionary work. Unlike so many of his contemporaries, he was not particularly concerned with success, at least as the word was commonly understood, and he was especially

disturbed by the preoccupation with numbers. He writes:

*One always feels somewhat suspicious when missionaries speak of success, and I am afraid I am inclined to think that those missions which are truest to Christ will be slowest in their success...*<sup>1</sup>

In fact, he was concerned that India, at the time a prime “mission field” for the Church of England—and not coincidentally, a place where vast fortunes could be amassed—would yield too quickly to Christianity. He was skeptical that such a thing should happen at all, writing,

*Whether India will ever be a Christian country may be very doubtful. I cannot say I wish to see it. The experience of Christianizing countries leads one to believe that the country is Christianized at the expense of the souls...when all are Christians, none are.*<sup>2</sup>

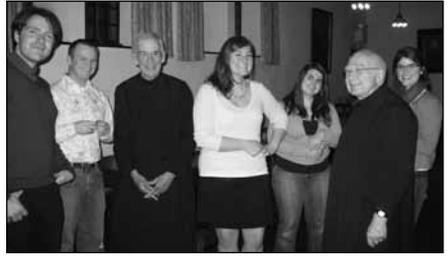
Our present Rule of Life points us in this same direction:

*Christ sends us with the same passionate trust and love with which the Father sent him into the world. Our mission is to bring men, women and children into closer union with God in Christ, by the power of the Spirit that he breathes into us. Christ is already present in the life of everyone as the light of the world.*<sup>3</sup>

I think it would be true to say that we are likely to be far more concerned with the quality of someone’s prayer and their life with God than we are the number of souls we may have won for Christ. That very language seems strikes many of us antiquated and alien.

### **The Mission of God — *Missio Dei***

When I was in seminary, it was commonplace to speak of the “mission of the Church” and “the ministry of the



**In the monastery refectory, Brs. Eldridge Pendleton and David Allen with Nicholas Hayes, Tyler Bridge, Mahala Pruitt, Kelsey Hanf, and Natalie Finstad; interns serving in the Diocese of Massachusetts.**

Church,” in which we were called to share. The language was intentional—a corrective for the student population’s propensity to speak of “my ministry” or “my mission.” That changed, however, after a visit by Leslie Newbigen, then Bishop of the Church of South India. He spoke not of the Church’s mission or ministry but rather of the mission of God, the *missio Dei*. Though it is a completely modern term, arising from Swiss and German theological debates during the 1930s, it is entirely consonant with Patristic writings and with the theology of the Fourth Gospel, with its insistent use of the words *send*, *sends*, and *sent*.

The premise is simple: the Church participates and shares in God’s mission already present and active in the world. Jürgen Moltmann speaks of it this way,

*It is not the Church that has a mission of salvation to fulfill in the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the Church.*<sup>4</sup>

Which means, there is Church (and we could say SSJE) because there is mission, and not, there is mission because there is Church. The Church’s role (and we could say SSJE’s role) is part of, but not identical to, the *missio Dei*. The Church (and we could say SSJE) participates in the mission of God. The Church’s part, our part, is just that: a piece of a much larger whole. This



**Br. Curtis Almquist with children following a worship service in Tanzania**

notion is implicit in our Rule, echoing Scripture, *The divine Wind that blows where it chooses...*<sup>5</sup>

The Church (and we by extension) is *part* of God's mission but by no means the entirety of God's mission and work in the world, and I'll note three examples.

1. The movement for equality among the sexes, for instance, did not begin in the Church; it was secular culture, in the work place, that justice for wages and treatment was first enacted. The Church was very slow in following, though it is also true that SSJE played an important role in such witness as there was, particularly in Br. Paul Wessinger's opening the monastery to women and his advocacy of their role in ministry. Was this the work of God, part of God's mission in the world? I would say, without a doubt.
2. Similarly, the struggle for recognition for gays and lesbians as full and whole human beings did not begin in the Church. Rather, it began when a group of gay men in a dreary bar in Manhattan had finally had enough harassment. Was it the work of God, part of God's mission? I think so, and though the Church is still hashing this one out, I think it is true to say that SSJE has been near the leading edge on this.
3. And third, the finally-growing concern for the earth and the environment. Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* is usually

cited as the galvanizing text and beginning—not anything from the very late-coming, hardly-speaking Church. The work of God? Evidence of God's mission in the world? Absolutely.

### **Essence not Attribute**

The point of all this is to say that mission is of the very essence of the God we know as Trinity, and like holiness, part of God's very nature, not simply an attribute. God, Newbigen would say, is a *missionary* or *sending* God. His warrant (and ours) for such a claim is the Gospel according to John—just as the Father sent the Son and the Father and the Son sent the Spirit, so the Father, Son, and Spirit sends the Church (and SSJE) into the world. Mission then is primarily about making the presence of God incarnate; that is, visible and tangible, in a particular place and a particular time, wherever “the Body is lacking”—and therefore most needed.

This is a call that Father Benson would hear as deeply truthful, I think, and I am confident he would have recognized its theological implications for many missions past. I would not presume to say that the whole of our share in God's mission might be. I believe, however, that if we are fearless and faithful in our work of discerning whatever it is, it will make demands on us that will call forth gifts and strength that we did not know we had. We have at least as much—and actually, much more—going for us than the Twelve. We are no less and no more gifted than they. 🙏

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<sup>1</sup>RMB, *Further Letters*, 1876, p. 115.

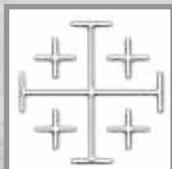
<sup>2</sup>RMB, *Further Letters*, 1876, p. 165.

<sup>3</sup>SSJE Rule of Life, “Chapter 31: Mission and Service,” Cambridge: Cowley Publications, 1997.

<sup>4</sup>Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology*, London: SCM Press, 1977, p. 64.

<sup>5</sup>SSJE Rule of Life, “Chapter 1: The Call of the Society,” Cambridge: Cowley Publications, 1997.

Join the **SSJE Brothers**  
on pilgrimage to



## **The Holy Land**

April 14–27, 2010

“**The Bible and Its Setting**”

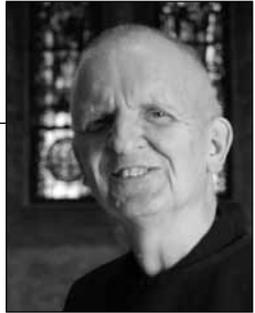
*Chaplain* - Br. Jonathan Maury, SSJE



**The view from the chapel of *Dominus Flevit* (Jesus Wept),  
looking out over the Old City of Jerusalem.**

This course takes pilgrims from “Dan to Beersheva,” – the ancient description of the extent of the Holy Land from north to south (II Samuel 3:10). It is designed to give participants an experience of the sacred geography and topography of the Holy Land, and the physical background to both Testaments. Old Testament sites include the archeological discoveries at the City of David and Hezekiah’s Tunnel, Hebron, Mamre, Beersheva, Megiddo, Jericho, the Jordan Valley and Elijah’s Mount Carmel. New Testament sites include important locations in Jerusalem and the Galilee. We also examine recent archeological excavations at Sefaris and Bethsaida.

This study course/pilgrimage includes two nights in Galilee and one night in the Negev Desert. It combines study and prayer, pilgrimage and spirituality, so the course not only deepens one’s understanding of the Biblical settings but also deepens one’s faith in the God who reveals himself in this land. For more information and to register, contact St. George’s College, Jerusalem, at [www.sgcjerusalem.org](http://www.sgcjerusalem.org).



# Pray Always

**A meditation by John Goldring, SSJE**

*“Jesus told a parable about the need to pray always and not to lose heart.” Luke 18:1*

A wonderful way to pray always is to use the ancient method called “The Jesus Prayer.” It is a simple and direct way to pray. The words are simply: “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.” Breathe in when saying “Lord Jesus Christ”; breathe out when saying, “have mercy on me.” Repeat this many, many times. You can pray this in your home or at your work. You can pray this in a car or on a plane, when washing the dishes, when sitting on a park bench. Gradually this prayer will become second-nature to you. You will become able to pray this prayer as you breathe.

The Jesus Prayer can accompany you throughout the day. The prayer will gradually allow you to ignore intrusive thoughts and to concentrate. It is a very simple practice, and has been used for hundreds of years by both monks and lay people. As you pray, turn inward to your heart, where Jesus resides. Jesus is your constant companion. He resides within you. Jesus is closer to you than you are to yourself.

Breathe in; breathe out:  
“Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.”  
“Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.”  
“Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.”  
“Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.”

**Want to learn to pray your life?**



Join our one-year monastic experience program.  
Contact us at [vocations@ssje.org](mailto:vocations@ssje.org).

We are happy to make available for purchase both a **2010 Wall Calendar** and the **SSJE Ordo, Advent 2009 through Advent 2010**. To buy copies please visit [www.ssje.org/store](http://www.ssje.org/store)

## 2010 SSJE WALL CALENDAR



Society of Saint John the Evangelist 2010

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 changing seasons with us.

**\$15.00**

8.5" x 11" 22 pages  
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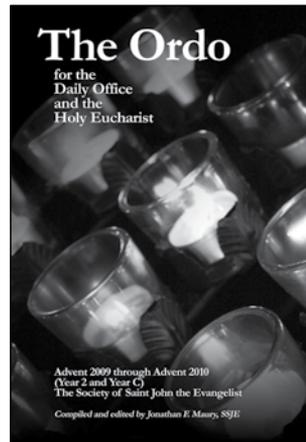
## THE SSJE ORDO

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.

**\$20.00**

244 pages, spiral bound





Consider joining the Fellowship of Saint John (FSJ), an association of more than 850 men and women around the world who share a spiritual friendship and prayer with the SSJE brothers.

More information at [www.SSJE.org](http://www.SSJE.org)



## *An invitation to the Members of the Fellowship of Saint John*

**St. John's Day**, our Patronal Feast, will be celebrated at the monastery on Saturday, May 1, 2010, at 11:00 a.m. The Most Rev. Katharine Jefferts Schori, Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, is our guest preacher.

Please join us for the liturgical celebration and for the luncheon in the cloister garden.



ENS photo BY Robert Williams

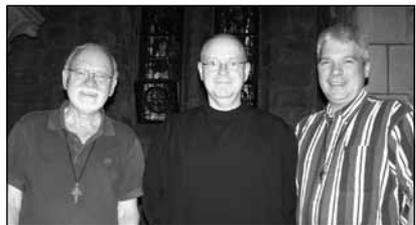
The Most  
Rev. Katharine  
Jefferts Schori

### **The Fellowship of Saint John (FSJ)**

is comprised of men and women throughout the world who desire to live their Christian life in special 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 commit-

ment 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](mailto:monastery@ssje.org).



**Br. James Koester with Yves Samson and the Venerable Pierre Voyer, members of the Fellowship of St. John, from the Anglican Diocese of Quebec.**

## COMMUNITY NEWS



At General Convention in July at Anaheim, California are **Brs. Curtis Almquist, Geoffrey Tristram, and Tom Shaw**, with the Rt. Rev. Frank Griswold, XXV Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church. Br. Geoffrey served as Chaplain to the House of Bishops during the last triennium; Br. Tom is Bishop of Massachusetts.

**Br. Kevin Hackett SSJE** traveled to St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota to attend the annual meeting of the Hymn Society, July 11-17. He was responsible for leading Compline each evening.



**Br. James Koester with the Rev. Barbara Andrews, Director of the Sorrento Centre.**

From July 18 to 27, **Br. James Koester** led an icon writing workshop at the Sorrento Centre in British Columbia. While he was there, a plaque honoring the generosity of the Society of St. John the Evangelist was unveiled. SSJE had a branch house in Sorrento for a brief time. When the Society withdrew, the property was donated to the dioceses of the Anglican Church in British

Columbia in order to establish a center for lay training and education. Today the Sorrento Centre hosts hundreds of people each year to its courses. Br. James has been a regular course leader over the last several years.

**Br. Mark Brown** served as chaplain for a course at St. George's College, Jerusalem, July 21 to August 3. Thirty-five people from around the Anglican Communion participated in this course, including a large group from the Anglican Cathedral in Nassau, the Bahamas. Places associated with the life and ministry of Jesus were visited in Jerusalem, the Galilee, the coastal region and the desert.



**Br. Mark Brown (front center) with pilgrims at St. George's College, Jerusalem.**

**President Obama's Day of Service.** More than 60 people volunteered their labors on September 12 to help us clear the northern shoreline of our Emery House property as part of a diocesan-sponsored service day. The workers



**Standing at the far left, Brs. Curtis Almquist and Robert L'Esperance with our Emery House Property Manager Brent Was and daughter Hannah Maeve, with some of the day's amazing volunteers.**

began the day with a walking meditation in the north fields. Although they worked under some rather trying conditions (rain, mud, difficult terrain) there was lots of good humor and cheer. It was estimated that the volunteers moved over a *ton* of trash—from car tires to disposable pens to fishing gear—that had washed ashore from the Merrimack River. This section of the Merrimack is directly adjacent to the fresh-water marsh that is part of Emery House’s rare eco-system resources.

**Br. Curtis Almquist** led the Clergy Retreat for the Diocese of Southwest Florida at the DaySpring Conference Center, September 14-16.

Twenty young adults serving as interns this year in the Diocese of Massachusetts met at the monastery on September 19, for a day of teaching and reflection led by **Brs. Curtis Almquist** and **David Vryhof**. The interns are participating in two diocesan programs, The Micah Project and the Relational Evangelists’ program. The topic for the day was “Life in Community.”



**Brs. Curtis Almquist and David Vryhof with the diocesan interns.**

The brothers hosted a **Cookout for Students** on September 22 following the evening liturgy. We shared good food—*vegetarian chili*—and good fellowship with undergraduate and graduate students from nearby universities.



**Br. Jonathan Maury and students at our annual fall cookout.**

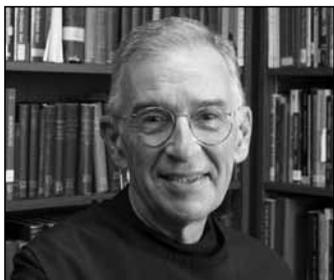
September 24 marked the 15th anniversary of our **Br. Tom Shaw’s** consecration as the 15th Bishop of the Diocese of Massachusetts. Bishop Shaw’s recent book, *Conversations with Scripture and Each Other*, is available from Rowman & Littlefield Publishers ([www.cowleypublications.org](http://www.cowleypublications.org)).

On September 19, **Br. David Vryhof** gave a talk on prayer at St. Anne’s Episcopal Church, Lincoln (MA), entitled “Praying for Others (even our enemies).”



**Bishop Tom Shaw SSJE in 1994**

On September 20, as he has for several years, **Br. Eldridge Pendleton** celebrated and preached at Adelynwood, the retreat center of the Companions of the Holy Cross in Byfield, Massachusetts. Recently he accepted



**Eldridge Pendleton, SSJE**

the position of chaplain of the Parker River chapter of the Companions of the Holy Cross.

**Br. David Vryhof** was the speaker at the Clergy Conference of the Diocese of Pittsburgh, September 30-October 2. He also led a day-long workshop on spiritual discernment and spoke to young people at Calvary Episcopal Church in Pittsburgh, October 3-4.

**Brs. Curtis Almquist** and **Geoffrey Tristram** led the Clergy Retreat for the Diocese of Virginia at Shrine Mont, October 12-14. **Br. Curtis** also led the Clergy Conference of the Diocese of Texas at Camp Allen, October 26-28.



**Brs. Geoffrey Tristram and Curtis Almquist with Bp. David Jones and Bp. Shannon Johnston, Bishop of Virginia.**

In October, the brothers met with Bill Hammer of HKT architects and John Sabbag, our project manager, to receive and review the completed plans for the renovation of the monastery. Old electrical, plumbing, heating and safety systems will be replaced with

new energy-efficient systems. Disability access and enhanced meeting spaces will be created. Currently the **Stone & Light Capital Campaign** has raised \$8.4m towards the 2010 \$10m goal.



**Br. James Koester: Winner!!!**

**Br. James Koester** won *first prize* for the honey produced this year at Emery House at the first-ever Cambridge Urban Agricultural Fair. Our six hives produced 150- pounds of honey. Some of the honey will be sold in the monastery bookstall this Advent; the rest will appear on the refectory breakfast table and in our Eucharist bread, baked for us each week by our friend and Fellowship member Charlene Arzigian.



**Br. David Vryhof preparing to lead a class at St. Philip's Theological College.**

From October 31 through November 14, **Br. David Vryhof** was in Maseno, Kenya, where he led a two-week semi-

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nar and retreat entitled “Christianity in Practice” for the faculty and students of St. Philip’s Theological College.

**Br. Kevin Hackett** served as the chaplain for a “Palestine of Jesus” course at St. George’s College, Jerusalem, from November 3-16. For a listing of courses in 2010 for which SSJE brothers will serve as chaplains, see page 19 in this issue.



**Luke Ditewig**

**Luke Ditewig** arrived at the monastery on November 11 to begin our year-long “Monastic Experience” formation program. A California native, Luke is a graduate of Gordon College and Princeton Theological Seminary and

has worked with Inter Varsity Christian Fellowship.



**Br. Eldridge Pendleton** and Jamie Coats, our Director of Development, traveled to Ripon, Wisconsin, to meet with the Sisters of the Holy Nativity, who have generously donated to us their holdings of the papers, photographs, and memorabilia of Charles Chapman Grafton, one of the founders of SSJE and co-founder (with Mother Harriet Margaret Vose) of the Sisterhood of the Holy Nativity (SHN). Br. Eldridge is pictured here with SHN Sisters Abigail, Margaretta and Boniface. Included in the gift was the first chalice made for the Society (1870), Grafton’s rosary, and the prayer robe presented to him by St. Tikhon.

## Interested in living in a monastic community for a year?



Join our one-year  
monastic experience program.  
Contact us at [vocations@ssje.org](mailto:vocations@ssje.org).



[www.ssje.org](http://www.ssje.org)

## The Society of Saint John the Evangelist The Friends of SSJE



*The monastery offers people in the church an opportunity reconnect with the spiritual river upon which we all depend. That river sometimes becomes inaccessible to those who are working so hard out in the field. We can lose touch with our spiritual underpinnings. Coming to the monastery and being associated with the monastery, even when I am not there, has brought me back into that river. It is a sustaining river of spiritual health, where I reconnect with the joy of being a follower of Jesus.*

The Rev. Susan S. Gaumer

### Please Remember SSJE in Your Will

*Wait just a minute and think about what is the single most important thing to you. Most people probably would say it's some kind of love: your love for your daughter, my husband's love for me, my love for my children, love for a friend. I think most of us want to be able to leave love behind us.*



Polly Chatfield

*There is no institution I know that radiates love the way the Brothers do. If you want to enter into this dream of love—which flows from Christ out through the hands of the Brothers—then make it possible for them to love in this huge way that they do. A bequest to the Brothers will mark your life with love.*

Please remember SSJE in your will. 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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For UK tax deductible donations please donate via the Charities Aid Foundation (CAF). Contact [www.cafonline.org](http://www.cafonline.org) or telephone 01732 520 050. Please specify "The Society of Saint John the Evangelist, Boston" when making your gift.

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**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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### ■ 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](http://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.



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