Dear Friends in Christ,

September usually brings with it a return to routine, which for us normally means a reopening of both the Guesthouse and the Chapel after their closure in August. Not so this year. Like so many routines of the past, done almost as a matter of course in other times, these two markers of the fall are anything but routine this year. Our Guesthouse remains closed, and the Chapel, at least for now, is open only for the Sunday Eucharist. As it is for all of you, our routines continue to be anything but routine now, as we reinvent our life day by day.

One of the things which we have had to reinvent is our understanding of the monastic virtue of hospitality. Our Rule reminds us that people are yearning deeply for "the things of God." Before the pandemic we knew exactly how to offer that to those who came under our roof, through silence, worship, safety, fellowship, security, prayer, beauty, courtesy, acceptance, intercession, guidance, teaching, and encouragement. These are all the things which our Rule tells us are markers of our ministry of hospitality. The difficulty is that the Rule assumes these are done in person, and face-to-face! Now that much of that ministry is online, how can those same markers of hospitality be made tangible virtually? As we have shifted our ministry of hospitality online, our hope is that some of the markers which we value, and you cherish, are just as tangible as they are when you are here in person.

For us however, the graces of hospitality do not flow only in one direction, from us to you. They flow in both directions. Again, our Rule says, "just as we enrich our guests' lives, so they enrich ours." After many of the programs we have offered online, a Brother has always said, "It was so nice to see their faces and hear their voices." As we have reinvented how we do hospitality, we have been so encouraged and heartened by your online presence, just as you have been encouraged and heartened by ours. For that we are grateful.

We are also grateful for the fact that we have at last been able to reopen the Chapel, at least for the Sunday Eucharist. It is so good to have people back worshipping with us, even with cautions in place. Over the summer we have also been able to welcome a few residential guests, including a number of Inquirers. Among those we welcomed to worship with us were Brother Jack's family on the joyful occasion of his initial profession of vows. It was a truly wonderful day, made all the more meaningful as it was one of the first days the Chapel was open to guests.

Being able to welcome a limited number of people again means we were finally able to welcome Michael Hardgrove to come and test his vocation with us. Michael's arrival was delayed by more than a year because of the pandemic, but he was finally able to come this summer, and he was received as a postulant in June.

After several years of a highly successful monastic internship program, we were set last summer to make some adjustments and provide a way for fulltime graduate students to share our life. In the wake of the pandemic, the internship program has changed into a residency, and Sharon Christner & Gabe Colombo moved into the Guesthouse in the middle of August. While we don’t see as much of them as we did the interns, their presence in our lives is already appreciated and valued.

With each small step - residents, postulants, Inquirers, Sunday morning congregation - our ministry of hospitality is beginning to look familiar once again. At the same time, over these last months, we have discovered to everyone’s surprise, and especially mine, that the marks of hospitality which we so value can be experienced in real and tangible ways online, just as in person. While we rejoice in the limited ways we have been able to return to in-person ministry, the graces of online ministry over the last months have been encouraging and heartening. We have been honored that you have chosen to join us, whether in person or online, in real time or in virtual time. By doing so you "enrich our lives" and "enlarge our vision of God's world."

Please know that hold all of you in our prayers,

James Koester, SSJE
Superior
I am one of the lucky ones who has experienced hospitality at the hands of the Society for nearly fifty years now. It was as a young Masters student at Harvard Divinity School in the Fall semester of 1973 (recently arrived from a first degree in Theology from Cambridge University), that I first stepped most tentatively over the threshold of the Chapel for a Tuesday evening student Mass (they were new then, and controversial), and entered for the first time the strangely evocative colors and transcendent atmosphere of the Ralph Adams Cram Chapel. My own mood that evening, I should say, was not promising: I had been more or less 'shoo-ed' in by a former teacher at Cambridge who had insisted that I visit the Monastery; and I had hoped to satisfy his insistence with a light-hearted post-card confirming that I had done what he had asked, and then sign off for good. I was then in a late-adolescent phase of (to say the least) almost obsessive rational deconstruction of the faith. But something caused me to come back, increasingly for the early morning weekday Masses where no conversation was required, but simply quiet and prayer. ‘Hospitality’ in those days at the Monastery, then, was for me nothing less than eucharistic hospitality, in all its multivalent, symbolic power: to quote Oliver Goldsmith, I “came to scoff, and remained to pray.” I had little converse with the brethren at that time (not least because, in those days, they all seemed quite terrified of women!). But perhaps it is important to note, out of this memory, that Christian hospitality can transcend social interaction of the worldly sort in all kinds of wordless ways, and do so in a way that plants the seeds of the gospel deeply in the soul.

Fast forward twenty years from that first encounter with SSJE, and I was back at Harvard as a professor of theology, encountering fresh personal difficulties as Harvard Divinity School struggled to decide whether or not it would be a genuinely Christian, ministerial institution, and if so, of what sort. New and important friendships were built with the community at that time; and I recall, with deep gratitude, the then-superior’s ‘hospitable’ insight in sizing up my rather desperate state of soul and offering me a place of refuge in the Guesthouse every Friday morning in term-time, just for three precious hours of quiet and prayer, reflection, and re-balancing. I came and went wordlessly, again, and without even ruffling a quilt in the room to which I had been assigned! Once more, it is hard to assess what this ‘hospitality’ connoted; but I do know it spoke to depths that were largely beyond words. The same was true when I visited the Monastery trans- atlantically a few years ago for Midday Office and lunch, whilst en route to an academic conference: one of the senior brethren came over, welcomed me, and gently reminded me of the right place in the office book; something about his loving demeanor touched a place in me that was in need, at the time, of healing, and it was profoundly affecting.

What, then, can we conclude theologically about what Christian hospitality connotes in these desperate days of pandemic, cultural and political anxiety, and deep fear of face-to-face encounter? Others in this issue of Cowley make many apposite and important and practical remarks, but here is what I’d like to add in closing, for what it’s worth.

Perhaps it is always good to remind ourselves that Jesus's views on hospitality were almost completely inverse to what the world now (and also then) assumed: Christian hospitality is not about social control and stratification (see Luke 14:7-24), but about openness to surprise and even displacement: why else would angels come at one “unawares” (see Gen 18:2, Heb 13:2), and with such significant divine impact? True Christian hospitality, that is, is deeply inconvenient, humanly speaking, and therein lies its power beyond human words – it represents the space where God, with unique generosity, does something that only God can do. Learning how to lean into this divine generosity is a life-time’s endeavour for us all; but it has always been a particular charism of the SSJE, and these days they are learning once more how to do it afresh.

Sarah Coakley served as Mallinckrodt Professor of Divinity at Harvard Divinity School, 1995-2008, and Norris-Hulse Professor of Divinity at Cambridge University, 2008-2019. She is now assisting priest and theologian in residence in the parish of St Monica and St James, Capitol Hill, DC.
Dear Friends of SSJE,

One of the sayings of the Desert Fathers is “Life and death are in the hands of my brother.” What this means is that we are ministers to one another, not just in what we say but with the full mystery of who we are, of Christ’s all-embracing truth and love which both challenge and uphold us as we are “conformed to the image of [God’s] Son” (Romans 8:29). The sustained period of lockdown the Brothers endured during the pandemic which, in many ways, is still with us, intensified the life of the community, and brought into ever sharper focus both the cost and the gift of being brothers in Christ. At the same time, the community discovered new ways in which to reach beyond themselves and serve the Church and countless “seekers” through ministries described below.

Remaining Constant
In this past 18 months, many things have changed, and it will take years for us to recover from the sense of loss and grief – not to mention the political, economic, and social fallout which the pandemic has highlighted. While some things have changed, and changed drastically, others have remained constant. One of those constants is that, throughout these long months, the promise of God’s abiding presence has not failed or faltered. In the chapter “Prayer and Life” from the Rule we read, “we can learn to stay still in our experience of numbness … and trust that Christ is just as truly alive in our hearts in these times as in those in which we enjoy the sense of his presence.”

Good News
Another good news constant that I am glad to share is the strength of the community. As we have all discovered this year, living under lockdown has presented challenges where normal interpersonal disagreements can intensify; the Brothers have risen to the challenges and in many ways come out stronger. Br. Jack Crowley has recently made his profession in initial vows. Br. Todd Blackham has been clothed as a Novice, and Michael Hardgrove has entered the community as a Postulant. Each of these men builds and strengthens the community. Br. Lucas Hall has become the Vocations Brother and over the summer, eight men have visited the Monastery as Inquirers, following from a successful series of virtual “Come & See” visits. In the coming months, the community hopes to welcome more Inquirers to visit and perhaps invite one to test his vocation as a Postulant. In the midst of the lockdown, Br. Keith Nelson was accepted by the Diocese of Massachusetts to enter the discernment process for ordination.

While the Chapel has been closed to in-person worship, the Brothers have continued to pray the Daily Office, and early experimentation with livestreaming Chapel services has now become “standard practice.” The Brothers livestream the Eucharist as well as Evening Prayer and Compline. Details of livestreamed services can be found at SSJE.org/chapel. The Brothers reopened the Chapel for the Sunday Eucharist during the month of July. On one of those Sundays, Br. Luke presided at the Eucharist in front of the in-person congregation (other than the Brothers) for the first time.

In addition to the regular round of services which have been livestreamed, one special occasion which was livestreamed was Br. Luke Ditewig’s ordination to the priesthood in December, when the Brothers were able to welcome Bishop Alan Gates in an appropriately physically-distanced service.

Online Hospitality
The Brothers’ ministry of hospitality changed with the pandemic, yet the Guesthouse remains a center of welcome, retreat, and renewal. While a switch to online ministry was initially daunting to many Brothers, the incremental steps they have taken over the past 18 months have become lengthening strides as they find a comfort level and understanding of practices that work well for them. With added cameras, lights, and screens, they continue to meet with groups and individuals. Brothers learned new skills and enjoyed the opportunity to see and connect with familiar and new faces. From offering prayer in front of a small iPad to Zoom meetings with breakout rooms, and recently more use of a teaching platform called Teachable to build online small groups, the Brothers have shown it is possible to create sacred space online and enable faith communities to form without being geographically together. Everyone took turns hosting a monthly FSJ Gathering, usually in pairs, with varied forms of teaching, and interaction. Hundreds joined Br. David Vryhof in Lent for “Praying with Gospel of John.” Brothers taught about gratitude, embodied prayer, Julian of Norwich, and Centering Prayer. They led a small group for local students and taught or preached all around, including “in” California, Alabama, Ontario, British Columbia, and Colombia. As Brothers look forward to reopening the Guesthouse, they also want to continue online programs to connect beyond those who could come in person. The response to these online initiatives has been overwhelmingly positive, and the Brothers continue to explore and imagine new ways to offer online hospitality.

Clusters Reimagined
Over the past number of years under Br. James’ focus, the community has set about Renewing Our Foundations – a series of intentional conversations about what it means to be a monastic community today, encompassing the viewpoints of new men joining, those who have recently joined the community, as well as the needs of men long in the community. While elements of this process were interrupted by the pandemic, it continues to be an active conversation within the community as they seek to meet Fr. Benson’s challenge that they truly be “men of the moment, up to the mark of the day.”

In this past year they have worked on internal organizational structures – what the community call clusters: a cluster being a small group of Brothers who oversees named aspects of community life – Pastoral Care & Formation; Liturgy; Hospitality; Mission & Communications; Facilities & Grounds; Office of the Superior, Administration & Finance. Each cluster is comprised of professed men and novices who collaboratively set future goals and approaches for the cluster and hold decision-making authority.
This mix of generations brings fresh insights to existing wisdom and tradition, while cultivating future leadership by forming and supporting new men in leadership roles.

Growing and Living within the Means of a Balanced Budget

In spite of the ongoing challenges afforded by the COVID-19 pandemic, the SSJE operating budget remained in balance for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2021. The continued support and loyalty of their friends sustained the Brothers during these difficult times. Operating expenses totaling $2.5 million were supported by:

- Gifts to the Annual Fund - 58%
- Other sources - 10%
- Spending from Endowment (with a 4.1% draw) - 32%

The Guesthouse remained closed during fiscal 2021, which had a significant negative impact on revenue. However, this was more than offset by contributions to the Annual Fund, which increased 11% compared to fiscal 2020. The kindness and incredible generosity of many friends of SSJE allowed the overall financial structure of the Monastery to be maintained.

The 2020 audited financial statement reports SSJE in good standing. A copy of the audit is available upon request. Fiscal 2021 produced a portfolio annual return of 29%, significantly better that the benchmarks established by the Investment Advisors. The Society and its Advisors are committed to an endowment draw that, in real terms, will provide a steady and predictable stream of income to support SSJE’s activities in perpetuity. The fiscal 2021 draw was 4.1%, down from the fiscal 2020 draw of 4.3%. The Brothers are continuing their plan to step down the draw by 0.1% annually until a new target of 4% is reached in fiscal 2022.

During fiscal 2018 the Brothers initiated a long-term investment of accumulated Building Fund assets into the Fossil Free Fuel Fund offered by the Diocesan Investment Trust. The goal is to provide positive return without compromising operating support generated from the endowment, while simultaneously investing in socially responsible activities in keeping with the Brothers’ social philosophy. The Fossil Free Fuel Fund provided a 41% return during fiscal 2021.

Financial Equilibrium and the Endowment

To achieve financial equilibrium and to be able to stay current with maintaining the Society’s two locations and their buildings, SSJE needs to set aside $250,000 a year in the Building Fund. Currently $154,000 is set aside annually for capital improvements and addition to the Building Fund.

Stabilization Fund

Given the great uncertainty created by the COVID-19 pandemic in particular and the recurrence of financial black swan events generally, the Brothers have created a Stabilization Fund. The intention is to treat this Fund as part of the endowment, but with a crucial difference – the corpus of the Stabilization Fund will provide a source from which to draw monies to support the budget in the event of unforeseeable outside events, without increasing the annual draw from the endowment, should the need arise.

The Legacy Society

As part of their effort to achieve financial equilibrium, the Brothers determined a number of years ago, at the discretion of the Officers, to add bequests received from the estates of friends to the endowment. This discipline will have a tremendous impact on the finances of the community in the years to come. To date, over 100 people have informed the Society of their intention to remember SSJE in their wills.

Engaging the Next Generation: How We Can Help

Over the past five years the Brothers have received support from over 4,000 people at many giving levels and longevity of support. These gifts make SSJE’s life and work possible, and the Brothers are greatly encouraged and grateful for this support. The coming challenge is to engage the next generation of supporters and donors. A way that you can help in this is by sharing your own story of how the Brothers’ ministry has shaped and strengthened your own union with God. One of the wonderful things about the Brothers’ ministry is that it is creative, varied, and easy to share. Forwarding a daily meditation or a short video clip from a Lenten series or Chapel service is not only a great way to share monastic wisdom, it also invites conversation for fellowship. We especially need to reach those younger generations – who may welcome the guidance of living intentionally – and encourage them to initiate their financial support of the Brothers. This support is as crucial to SSJE’s long-term future as their ministry has been to us, particularly during this time of crisis.

What lies ahead as we experience a new outbreak of COVID infections is unclear, but the Brothers’ sustained life of prayer and service in this liminal season is a gift and a source of encouragement to us all, and it is my privilege to serve the community as Bishop Visitor.

Yours in Christ,

The Rt. Rev. Frank T. Griswold, III

Presiding Bishop, retired
The invitation of the table can invite us beyond our boundaries.

Jesus was vilified because of his seemingly indiscriminate eating habits. One issue was what he was eating, and whether this compromised the Jewish dietary laws. More significant was with whom he was eating: with everyone. Though I don’t think Jesus was “a glutton and drunkard,” as he was branded by his detractors, he did not spurn a feast. Jesus shared many-a-meal, and used the occasions of feeding and feasting, of gardening and farming, as venues and symbols for much of his teaching.

If you read the scriptures with an eye for food, drink, and feasts, you will hardly miss a page. The scriptures begin in the garden of Eden, full of “plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind” (Genesis 1:11). The Scriptures end with the promise of a banquet in heaven (Isaiah 25:6; Luke 14:15). In between the beginning and the end are countless stories about people hungering, panting after, thirsting, longing for both the food of this earth and what Jesus calls “the bread of heaven,” food that will last forever. We often have a taste of both from the same table.

The Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all have stories of Jesus feeding a multitude of people. These miraculous accounts of Jesus feeding the crowds with bread and fish come after he has fed their souls. The reason the multitudes had gathered in the first place was because of their hunger for healing, and help, and hope ... and they also turn out to have hungry tummies. Jesus addresses the hunger on both planes. In the Gospel of John we learn of Jesus’ meeting up with a Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well. The woman is quite literally thirsty for water; however Jesus also speaks to her, metaphorically, about “living water,” and she is thirsty for that, too. This mutual longing of body and soul is inseparable. What makes for a meaningful dinner party is not just the delicious food, but also the conviviality of the shared conversation. One without the other will not completely sate our longings.
In our world today – just as in Jesus’ day – “sitting at table” with someone, sharing food or drink, makes a social statement about yourself and your guest. Eating and drinking is our most basic human need, one that is shared across gender, race, culture, language, orientation, religion, education, or age. While the need to eat is universal, we most often tend to sate that need in closed groups. Perhaps you once experienced the proverbial high school lunch room, with its highly defined and stratified groups, each sitting at their own table. In our grown-up lives, the groupings might be less obvious, but can be no less present. We eat within family groups, friend groups, work groups. Eating together solidifies our bond with those with whom we are familiar.

But the invitation of the table can invite us beyond our boundaries. To share food is an experience of being one with another. This opens a possibility to find commonality with those with whom we might disagree. To sit at table with others is to experience the humanity that we share, even with those whom we might consider as “other.” A conversation at table can be a disarming, delightful venue for meeting our neighbors. We are all neighbors to one another. At table with one another, we begin from a point of unity: our common need for our thirst to be quenched and our hunger to be satisfied. I remember sharing tea with someone with whom I had had an adversarial relationship. In the course of tea, the way opened for us to share life together, respectfully, thankfully, hopefully. It was the lemon pound cake. The first forkful did it for both of us. We both hummed with delight. It was so delicious. And with a twinkle in our eyes and smile on our faces, we began our conversation from a common vantage point.

We may not find ourselves very articulate about what all we believe – and why – about so many topics that are the currency of life. On some themes I find myself quite clear; on other themes I often stumble and sometimes find myself greatly puzzled. Perhaps you, also? What about sharing a drink or sharing a meal? With whom? People you know well, and those whom you do not. With the people very familiar to you, you may know their biases, their priorities, their reactions, their beliefs, their politics. Whatever. You know them so well, you’ve got them in a box you could label. And then there are people in your life whom you don’t know well.

So many people navigate their days having to engage in or to avoid a tyranny of small talk. A space in which to share conversation with someone on substantial matters can be so satisfying. It’s not unlike the difference between fast food eaten on the run, and a proper dinner that is shared. I have often found it an amazing experience to meet with someone at table, a kind of “level ground.” A shared meal or drink can quite literally open a portal of discovery, as we meet one another in our full humanity. Enter those conversations as a learner, especially when this person is someone you might call “other” from yourself. Ask inviting questions, such as:

- When you were growing up, what were you taught was most important?
- Who are your heroes?
- How do you celebrate?
- Where have you discovered beauty?

These moments we share with one another “at table” can be such tangible experiences of oneness. The goal is not to agree, but to find the freedom, welcome, and delight in making space for one another in our hearts, which is surely an anticipation of the hope of heaven.
Over the last sixteen months, several of the saints have kept me company in my prayer. Some of these companions of mine will be familiar to you; others will be unknown. Each one of them has had something to teach me about monastic hospitality in this next phase of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In my prayer, I’ve been companioned by the Martyrs of Memphis – Sisters Constance, Thecla, Ruth and Frances, and their co-workers The Reverends Charles Parsons and Louis Schuler – who lost their lives ministering to others during the Yellow Fever epidemic.

Florence Nightingale and Mother Hannah Grier Coome (the Foundress of the Sisterhood of Saint John the Divine in Toronto) have also made their presence known to me these last months. What unites them is the nineteenth-century revolution in nursing, itself the direct result of war. Both women took nuns, 1 not to the battlefield of their respective wars, but to military hospitals, where the experience of religious sisters had a profound impact on the wounded and dying, as well as on the officers and medical staff.

Another companion of mine these last months is perhaps a curious one: Julian of Norwich. Like us, Julian lived at a time of much worry, anxiety, and turmoil.

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1 Along with some Roman Catholic sisters, members of the Park Village Sisterhood and the Devonport Sisterhood (which later merged to become the Sisterhood of the Holy and Undivided Trinity or SHUT) accompanied Nightingale to Crimea. These two communities, founded by Marian Rebecca Hughes and Priscilla Lydia Hughes, were the first two religious communities founded in the Church of England since the Reformation.
The intense emotional and mental health impact of COVID will last for decades.

The Black Death struck shortly after her birth, leaving up to half the population of her city of Norwich dead, and killing up to an estimated 200 million people in Europe, Eurasia, and North Africa. It would take centuries for the population of Europe to return to previous pre-Black Death numbers. This was the context for her incredible work, Revelations of Divine Love.

I’ve also been accompanied these many pandemic months by one from our great cloud of witnesses here at SSJE: Arthur Lee Ballard. Father Ballard came to SSJE from parish ministry in British Columbia and was clothed as a novice on Epiphany 1918. Almost immediately he was given permission to volunteer to work as a chaplain with the YMCA and was sent out to Mesopotamia. At the conclusion of the First World War, he returned to Cambridge, but by then he had already contracted chronic bronchitis. During the Flu Epidemic of 1918-1920 he came down with the flu and died on 8 February 1920. He was the first member of the Society to die in North America, one of an estimated 500 million people worldwide infected with the flu and one of the 20-50 million people who died from that epidemic.

My final companion is a deeply personal one: my grandmother Mavis [Addie] Koester. Grandma was born in Britain in 1897 and emigrated to Canada with her family in 1905. As a young woman of barely twenty, she began teaching in a one-room schoolhouse on the Canadian prairie. Her generation of women knew both the tragedy of the killing fields of France during the First War, and the impact of the 1918-1920 Flu Epidemic. During the Flu Epidemic, Grandma exchanged her school bell for a nurse’s uniform, and the schoolhouse became a hospital for flu patients, whom she nursed. That experience lived with her for the rest of her life. Grandma was passionate about any number of things, among them was healthcare. She volunteered with the Victorian Order of Nurses, a visiting nurse association dedicated to homecare and social services. She was also, I would say, politically radicalized by that experience, and became a lifelong supporter and active member of Canada’s left wing social democratic party the CCF/NDP in Saskatchewan. It was the CCF who first introduced universal, single payer health care insurance to Saskatchewan in 1961, and which later in

The first thing these companions of mine will tell us is that we have been here before, and unfortunately, we will be here again. COVID is just the latest pandemic, but in our lifetime alone we have already seen SARS, AIDS, Polio, Ebola, Swine Flu, and more. While we are all eager to begin embracing any return to “normalcy” that this next phase of the COVID pandemic allows, it is also important to remember that we have been here before, and we will be here again. All my companions tell us that – from Grandma to Father Ballard, to Mother Hannah and Florence Nightingale, to the Martyrs of Memphis, to Julian of Norwich. We have been here before, and we will be here again.

I believe that the most significant thing we will be facing in the years to come – yes, the years to come – is a crisis of grief. While I could not have named it as a ten year old, aware that my grandmother lived through both World War I and the Flu Epidemic, I believe that she lived with a degree of grief from those experiences for the rest of her life.

You may have seen Allison Gilbert’s opinion piece recently in The New York Times, “The Grief Crisis is Coming.” In it, Gilbert estimates that for every death from COVID, nine people are bereaved. We have passed the 668,000 mark here in the US and the 27,000 mark in Canada. It is estimated that over 226 million individuals worldwide have contracted the virus and more than 4.6 million have died.3

Based on Gilbert’s estimate – that for every death, there are nine people grieving – that amounts to an enormous amount of grief. Yet her estimate considers only immediate family members. If extended family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers are included in the calculation, the number becomes astronomical. The toll is made even starker when you realize that at least 40,000 children in the United States alone – and 2 million children worldwide – have lost at least one parent to COVID. The grief these children carry will impact not only their mental and emotional health, but also their education, and that will have a ripple effect on their jobs, housing, and income for the rest of their lives.

Even this dismal summary considers only the grief caused by death. Beyond bereavement, the emotional toll of the past fifteen months is incalculable. Think of the grandparents who have missed out on over a year of their grandchildren’s

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3 All data taken from the Johns Hopkins University Coronavirus Resource Center: https://coronavirus.jhu.edu as of 16 September 2021.
lives; of the children whose educations will be marked, and indeed marred, for the rest of their lives; of the countless people who live alone and who have not been hugged in over a year; of those who have recovered from the virus, but who now live with Post-Covid Syndrome; of the people who have lost their employment, health insurance, secure housing. Think also of the emotional strain we have all been under, even under the best of circumstances, both as individuals, households, and communities. As we inch back toward “normal,” we must acknowledge that the intense emotional and mental health impact of Covid will last for decades.

I’ve been thinking and praying about all of this with my Brothers, as we ponder the next steps for our community. While we are not yet at the point where we can safely open our doors to guests as we did before the pandemic, we are preparing for what we will face when we do. We recognize that literally everyone who comes through our doors – indeed everyone with whom we come into contact in the next years – will be grieving, and we will need to make space for that. Moving ahead, the ministry of hospitality will be about making a safe and welcoming space for grief.

On hospitality, our Rule teaches: “[just] as we enrich our guests’ lives, so they enrich ours. We welcome men and women of every race and culture, rejoicing in the breadth and diversity of human experience that they bring to us. Their lives enlarge our vision of God’s world. The stories of their sufferings and achievements and their experience of God stir and challenge us. If we are attentive, each guest will be a word and gift of God to us” (Ch. 34).

This last phrase is perhaps the most significant for a consideration of post-pandemic hospitality. In order to open a space for grief, and to welcome each guest as “a word and gift of God to us, whose stories of their sufferings...[will] stir and challenge us,” we will need first to make a space for our own grief. When we can do that, others will see in us an authenticity which allows them to be vulnerable in return. A willingness to be honest about our own grief will make it possible for others to share their grief with us. So, it may be that right now, wherever we are in the process of reopening, we are being invited to take time to pray, and even befriend, our own grief.

Part of praying our grief is being friends with death. Saint Benedict instructs us to “live in fear of judgement day and have a great horror of hell. Yearn for everlasting life with holy desire. Day by day remind yourself that you are going to die ... And finally, never lose hope in God’s mercy.” As Christians, it is our relationship with death that allows us to sit with grief. Modeling this relationship with death is, perhaps, one of the great gifts that monastics have to offer the Church. Our Rule reminds us Brothers:

> We are called to remember our mortality day by day with unflinching realism, shaking off the sleep of denial. Paradoxically, only those who remember that they are but dust, and to dust they shall return, are capable of accepting the presence of eternal life in each passing moment and receiving ever fresh the good news of hope. The anticipation of death is essential if we are to live each day to the full as a precious gift, and rise to the urgency of our vocation as stewards who will be called to give account at Christ’s coming. Remembering that death can come to us at any time will spur us to be prepared, by continual renewal of our repentance and acceptance of the forgiveness of God, to meet Christ without warning. We shall remember to express to one another those things that would make us ready to part without regrets, especially thankfulness and reconciliation.

Week by week we are to accept every experience that requires us to let go as an opportunity for Christ to bring us through death into life. Hardships, renunciations, losses, bereavements, frustrations, and risks are all ways in which death is at work in advance preparing us for the self-surrender of bodily death. Through them we practice the final letting go of dying, so that it will be less strange and terrifying to us (Ch. 48).

The gift of being friends with death is only made possible because our lives are rooted in baptismal hope. In Baptism, we all have died with Christ and been raised with him. This is true for all Christian, not just for monastics, though monastics are perhaps called to embrace this aspect of our Christian vocation in a unique way. We can sit with death because our lives are rooted in hope.

It was at a time like ours, filled with death and unrest, that Julian received her Revelations, and wrote with such confidence about the mercy, grace, and love of God. In the face of it all, Julian wrote those famous words, “all shall be well, and

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all manner of things shall be well.” That I believe, is another mark of monastic hospitality in a post-Covid world: confidence that indeed all shall be well. Such a confidence as Julian’s grasped both the reality of sin and the promise of God who will make all things new (Rev. 21:5).

A life of hope accepts the paradoxical reality of the promise of resurrection life without denying the cruelty of death, for we believe that the One who is resurrection and life is the same as the one who wept at the tomb of his friend (John 11). Grief and hope are not in opposition. They are companions. This paradox will be a mark of sacred hospitality in the years to come. Our churches, parishes, retreat centers, and monasteries need to be places of hope and grief: firmly grounded by the reality of death, faithfully pointing to the hope of resurrection.

It is the power of hope – rooted not in wishful thinking, but in the reality of Christ crucified, dead, buried, and risen – that is the core of our faith. This hope will calm our fears, comfort our grief, and reveal to us the risen, yet still wounded Christ, who speaks to us the resurrection greeting: “Peace” (Luke 24:36; John 20:19; John 20:21; John 20:26).

This work will change us. Following their experience of war, and social and political upheaval, Florence Nightingale and Mother Hannah did not retire to nice quiet lives. They returned home with a passion to change things. Like my grandmother, they spent the rest of their lives addressing the burning issues of their day. So too for us. This work will change us, even radicalize us. We will not be able simply to return to doing things the way they have always been done. If we do, we will lose an opportunity to meet the Risen Christ who always travels ahead of us, and not behind us.

Lastly, we must continue to be people of prayer and intercession. The Martyrs of Memphis were able to give their lives, not because they were heroic – although they were – but because they were faithful to their life of prayer.

So, what might hospitality look like after Covid? It will be shaped by – and need to respond to – grief, loss, trauma, and dislocation. It will have the power to change, convert, and challenge us in ways we cannot now even begin to imagine. It will be rooted in hope and prayer. It will befriend death. And through it, we will continue to meet the Risen Christ, present in all who come to us, bringing us his promised “Peace.”
focus is different. Those experiences energize and prompt me to further reach out to others.

“Put one hand on your heart and reach out the other hand to the screen,” Lisa said near the beginning of our online gathering. “We are connected to each other. Thank you for being present today in this group body.” As I reached out my hand, I was surprised to see other faces light up and my own smile widen as I felt my beating heart and gazed at relative strangers through Zoom.

For a year, I was part of an InterPlay small group Lisa facilitated. Playing and witnessing each other was refreshing each week. Experiencing meaningful connections like this on Zoom encouraged me to experiment in my own teaching. I have invited many folks to touch their hearts and reach out to others, a different passing the peace.

When I get to greet guests in person and as I continue to host on Zoom, I will also renew my prayerful understanding of being God’s guest and keep practicing receiving from others. The essence of hospitality has power to transform us all. I look forward to being with you, turning toward you, heart to heart.

Luke Ditewig, SSJE

Being a Guest
Lesson in Receiving Hospitality

Empty seats. Fewer voices. We miss our guests gathered round the altar, the dining table, and staying alongside us in the Guesthouse. With the in-person absence, we’ve been stripped back to basics, including the essence of hospitality and who we are as guests to one another. I have found it a good reminder.

Hospitality is about offering our hearts. It is being present to another. It does not need a table, food, or any particular place. It is taking time and giving intention. Hospitality can be spontaneous and anywhere, on the street, in a store, and on Zoom. It’s not about fresh flowers, folded napkins, or swept floors. It’s not trying to entertain or impress you with my stuff. Hospitality is a generous attending of ear and eye, a healing beholding. With few options for giving the extra touches I had previously enjoyed, I have become more aware of different ways of both giving and receiving hospitality, especially on Zoom.

I am a better host than guest. It’s easier for me to give than receive. A lesson I keep learning is that we are all God’s guests, especially in what appears to be our home. We Brothers are here not only for what we can give but also in order to receive. Jesus touches everyone who comes under this roof whether for a night, a week, a year, or a lifetime. From receiving, we can give. We keep being invited to stop clinging, to let go and, despite our resistances, to receive love.

Relationships and community outside the Monastery sustain me especially because I can be a guest. With some friends, this includes staying in their homes and eating at their tables. Being listened to by friends and professionals – and participating in groups that I do not host or teach – prompts me to receive. That doesn’t mean I no longer actively listen, but the mutuality or
The moment of closing the doors to the Conventual Church and Guesthouse of our Society came swiftly, yet decidedly, and the aftermath of the pandemic shutdown left our heads spinning.

When the pandemic first struck, we Brothers had been in the middle of a year of facilitated community discussions, an exploration of all aspects of our life that we had dubbed “Renewing Our Foundations.” Over the last year, as we’d explored our history, we had marveled at the missionary zeal of our founder, Richard Meux Benson, and our forebears in The Society, as they began to travel to the United States, India, and South Africa. Fr. Benson had a vision for ministry that blended catholic tradition to the evangelical impulse within the Anglican church renewal initiated in Oxford. 150 years later, we stood in the present, looking at our past, praying about our future: What is the mission field for us? And, what exactly is the mission? It was then that, as for the rest of the world, we felt the rug pulled out from under us by Covid-19, leaving us disoriented, confused, and seemingly lost.

If we had felt uncertain about our future “mission field” before, it was only more complicated now, under the new (and ever-shifting) pandemic rules. How long would this shutdown last? How would this change our worship? How would we be able to give retreats when we were unable to travel to parishes or host groups in our Guesthouse? How would our staff be able to continue the daily business that enables our ministry, while keeping them and their families safe? And finally, since we meet Christ in everyone who comes through our doors: how will we meet Christ when those doors must remain closed?

As we attempted to navigate this new terrain thoughtfully and prayerfully, we turned, as we so often do, to the wisdom of our founder, Fr. Benson. We have always known
our life to be rooted in the Gospel of John, with the understanding that our worship, ministry, and work are incarnational. While our ministry has evolved - from a Society of mission priests serving parishes in underserved areas and doing missionary work in foreign countries, to that of monastics providing a space of worship, prayer, hospitality, and sanctuary - this core tenant has remained central throughout our history. Because of this, in recent times, we had often resisted the idea of broadcasting aspects of our life - especially worship - because we did not perceive such mediated contact as being congruent with our theology of Incarnation.

Of all our worship, the Eucharist seemed the thorniest to share in any way beyond inviting others to be physically present in the Chapel along with us. The Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist is perceived not only by sight, but we would say through all the senses. We encounter this in many of the post-resurrection narratives in scripture. In John’s gospel, Jesus appears to the disciples after his resurrection (except for Thomas, who was mysteriously absent) and shows them his wounds. When he appears to them again, this time in Thomas’ presence, he invites him to touch his wounds, which results in Thomas’ proclamation, “My Lord and my God!” Both in this scripture as in our celebrations of Eucharist, we have come to experience Kairos (the eternity of God) in the temporality of Chronos (physical time) - in the sacrifice of Jesus made present to us now, in the flesh. How could this be realized for people unable to be physically present?

Our answer came, once again, from Fr. Benson. In 1874, Fr. Benson gave a retreat to the members of our Society, the content of which was distilled into the third series of addresses entitled Instructions on the Religious Life. From the chapter entitled “Readiness” we have often gleaned inspiration, especially from this passage: “This makes the religious to be specially a man - not simply of the day, but a man of the moment - a man precisely up to the mark of the times. This makes the religious - so far from being the traditional imitator of bygone days - most especially a man of the present moment and its life. His duties entirely throw him into the interests of that present moment.”

In this instruction, Fr. Benson proclaims boldly that one of the great characteristics of the religious life is that of readiness. In the voice of a loving parent, he calls out those opposing states of being that hinder readiness, making us despondent to God’s call: disappointment, disorientation, disillusionment, and the complexity of circumstances that confront us. The vocational call of God is often an exciting prospect which many of us are glad to respond to in the affirmative, until we find ourselves in the midst of work that differs from our romantic notion of that call. How many of us, in any stage of our vocation, and especially in this time of pandemic, have thought or outright said, “This is not what I signed up for”?

None of us were “ready” for the realities of pandemic life - a situation none of us could have envisioned before it suddenly struck. And yet the need to adjust away from our hoped-for reality, toward the one actually in front of us, is familiar across all walks of life, including the religious life. Fr. Benson’s addresses to his community, while eloquent, testify to the sober reality in which the brethren of the SSJE would find themselves in once out on the mission field. Even as we read them today, his words divert the eye away from any notion of romance in the religious vocation and help to refocus our view on what is directly in front of us, which can be as complex as it is mundane.

Fr. Benson’s guidance is to find yourself at home in all situations where God has called you. Peering through the Victorian language, we hear him tell us, “Life happens; things are as they are. Find the possibilities in each moment and situation.” He knew that not only were the brethren needed by those whom they served, but the brethren needed them as well: it was in those faces they would encounter the risen Christ who would bring about their ongoing conversion and their salvation. Readiness - experienced through the lens of contemplation - was precisely to be in the moment God was presenting. Benson wanted the brethren to be assured that “all the energies which are given to eternity are given through that moment.”

In our community’s prayerful discernment after the pandemic began, we were observant first to what others were doing in response to the pandemic (recognizing that, after all, we are not the only ones called by God to mission). We listened to many discussions on what the role of the Church should be in a time when doors were closed: What does community look like? How does our responsibility to God’s creation relate to the health and well-being of our neighbor, since humanity is a part of that creation? How can we help people experience the sacramental life when separated physically from the Sacraments? And, how can we help people to know the constant presence of Jesus - prayerfully inviting them into closer union with him - from afar?
Of course we also very much missed our own local congregation, and as we looked for ways to remain connected with them, we made the surprising – for us - decision to try a small experiment of livestreaming Tenebrae during the Holy Week after the initial shutdown. The numbers of people who attended that service live, and then watched in-demand afterwards, were astounding to us. It helped us to understand the tremendous need felt by those suddenly isolated from their habitual connection to God through the Church. Since the Divine Office is so important in the Anglican expression of Christianity, we took another step to livestream Evensong with a brief homily on Saturday evenings. Quickly thereafter, we expanded our Evensong livestreams to five evenings a week. Next, we added Compline.

To respect Brothers’ initial desire to remain off camera, we had until this point kept the camera trained on a prayer object – an icon, a candle – rather than on the community. Yet as the pandemic wore on, our perspective on this began to shift. We listened to people expressing their need to see us as they prayed with us, which felt very incarnational indeed. It wasn’t long before we were filming the community at prayer, which led to a further shift: we invested in professional cameras and mics that were discreet and yet would facilitate the experience of being truly “with us” as we prayed. And we, on our end, actually experienced the truth of this as we felt joined in worship by those who were sharing with us online. Brothers who had been unsure about having cameras in the church were now waving to the cameras to pass the peace to our online congregation. We wanted to let people know that we were aware and happy they were joining us in prayer and worship.

Another significant turning point came with a community education day with Dr. Lisa Kimball and the Reverend James Farwell of Virginia Theological Seminary, in which we focused specifically on sacramental theology. We came to realize, as Br. James wrote in the last issue of Cowley: “While Anglican eucharistic theology and practice is focused on the eating and drinking of the bread and wine, our day helped us explore other aspects of the Eucharist. We pondered not simply the Real Presence of Christ in the Sacrament, but also the real presences of Christ in gathered community, word proclaimed and broken, prayers shared. With a renewed and indeed expanded understanding of eucharistic theology and practice, we then felt able to livestream the Eucharist on a regular basis.”

Outside of the church, we began holding weekly discussions online with members of the Fellowship of Saint John, as well as Bible studies with students from Harvard. In our Lenten series “Come, Pray” this year, we Brothers taught classic forms of prayer that people could practice in their homes – as well as new ways to pray. One of my own favorite ‘new ways’ to pray is through photography, a practice inspired by the teaching of another one of our forebears in the Society, Fr. George Congreve, SSJE. He writes: “At times, when we have to wait and have nothing to do to occupy ourselves with – Oh! Then it is not wasted time if we have thought of God in it, if we have looked into the face of Jesus. Then anything that we do at the end of such waiting times we do with a glory and a power to witness to Jesus which is, indeed, a precious result. Everything should become by degrees an act of communion with God” (emphasis mine). Along with Father Benson, Congreve promises that God is to be met not elsewhere, nor in another time, nor in another circumstance, but exactly in this present moment. So we Brothers have been met by God as we have embraced new ways of being monastics in these unforeseen circumstances. Since we have not been able to travel or offer hospitality in our Guesthouse, we have offered livestreamed teachings on Julian of Norwich, Embodied Prayer, and the Gospel of John – all of which have elicited an enthusiastic response.

We each have our own ideas of how best to serve God and the Church. However, the reality is that we are joining God on God’s mission – not the other way around – and this mission includes us as recipients of God’s grace, while being conduits of that grace to others. Fr. Benson warns against the finitude of our own vision, especially when we seek to serve God only in the ways which we find attractive. The complexity of God’s call is in the consideration that we are included in God’s mission – not as the architects of salvation but as cooperators in that mission.

Our default in mission should always be born out of the prayer stemming from our relationship with Jesus Christ. This dynamic of prayer is a “call and response”; we first listen for how God is calling us, and then we respond by asking for the wisdom to carry out that vocation. Often, that wisdom is bound up in how God is working in our own lives. Adaptability is crucial to the spirit of readiness, as we know that God will give us the means to engage, even in ways we may find unattractive or repugnant.

And so we Brothers find ourselves, eighteen months into the pandemic, in a situation we could never have imagined: with a closed Guesthouse and mostly-closed church, but an open door online, inviting anyone from around the world to join us in worship at any time. And we’ve been amazed to see how Christ has come through that open door, and met us in online ministry. While it is our hope that we will eventually be able to offer in-person prayer, worship, retreats, and hospitality here at home again, we feel energized that God has sent us into a new mission field to – using a line from our Rule of Life – “bring men, women, and children into closer union with God in Christ, by the power of the Spirit that he breathes into us.” We feel grateful to be learning anew, as Fr. Benson instructed our forebears in the Society, the spirit of readiness: “The Religious life is not to be a dreamy dissatisfaction with the present state of things, it is not to be a mere not knowing what to do next, because things about us are as they are, but it is the consciousness of being able to make ourselves at home under all circumstances and able to turn everything that happens into account.” Even through all the struggles and surprises of the pandemic, Father Benson’s wisdom has proved true for us: “all the energies which are given to eternity are given through this moment.”
As I have reflected on my time in Colombia, and prayed with these beautiful words of welcome, I have come to see how hospitality lies at the very heart of the Christian Gospel. In the letter to the Ephesians, St. Paul proclaims that because of Christ, we are “no longer strangers and aliens, but members of God’s household.” That word “household” really means God’s “family” or God’s “home.” It promises that we who were once strangers have now been welcomed to live in God’s home forever. For St. Paul, Christ’s dying on the Cross for us is the most wonderful expression of God’s love for us, and the most radical expression of God’s extraordinary hospitality. The doors of God’s very home have been flung open for us, and we have been welcomed with open arms of love: “Mi casa es su casa”!

I experienced such radical hospitality in every household I entered in Colombia – a welcome all the more stunning for its contrast with the experience that many Colombians have had in their own country. Colombia is filled with many people who have lost their homes: strangers and aliens, longing for a home, longing to belong. The people of Colombia have lived through decades of violence; terrorized by guerilla groups like the FARC, and suffering through the murderous days of Pablo Escobar and narco-terrorism. What is less well known is that Colombia has the world’s highest number of internally displaced people – more even than Syria. These are Colombian men, women, and children...
who over the past thirty years have been forcibly driven from their homes by armed groups, and who have become refugees in their own land: eight million of them. Many now live in poverty in the outlying barrios which cling to the mountain sides of the great cities. During my time staying with clergy in Bogotá and Medellín, I was able to see the wonderful work done by the churches, welcoming in the most vulnerable and assuring them that they have a place, a home, in the heart of God.

In the face of such challenges, I am particularly inspired to have witnessed one recent development within the Episcopal church in Colombia, the founding this year of a new religious community called the “Orden Misionera Episcopal de la Epifanía” (OMEE). While members do not live in a monastery like at SSJE, they live by a common Rule of Life and support each other by prayer and regular meetings either by Zoom or in person. They are men and women, married and single, clergy and lay. The spiritual center of the Order is in Colombia, but there are also members in Ecuador and the United States. On March 21, 2021, the first eleven members made their religious vows in the cathedral of Bogotá. This moment was the culmination of several years of planning and praying together. It has been a privilege for me to act as spiritual ‘consultant’ for them, helping in the formation of this new community, and sharing wisdom from my experience in SSJE. What a beautiful thing to witness their goal to embody the radical hospitality of Jesus by dedicating themselves to working with the most needy and vulnerable. In Colombia, members of the community work in parishes within the barrios, with young people living on the streets, with people effected by violence and drug trafficking, and now, increasingly, ministering to the nearly two million refugees who have poured into Colombia from Venezuela, seeking a refuge and a place to feel safe and at home.

Such work is very hard, very demanding, and members of the Order find strength and sustenance in belonging to each other as members of God’s household, and holding each other up through a daily rhythm of prayer. In August they held their first General Chapter meeting in Medellín, and although I was not able to attend in person, I was, thanks to technology, able to join them, give an address, and share and pray with them for the next steps of their journey. This growing relationship between SSJE and OMEE has been a real blessing, and we hope that, as the pandemic allows, we can develop closer ties. In particular, we hope to be able to eventually welcome members of the Order to come for times of retreat with us here at the Monastery in Cambridge.

Do please remember the members of the Orden Misionera Episcopal de la Epifanía in your prayers. Pray for their mission and their Superior, Padre Narciso Díaz. Pray also for the people of Colombia, that they may be held in the heart of God.
Jim: When the pandemic forced us to close our doors, all of a sudden it was just us, together, praying. A lot of us felt deeply the loss of the folks who make up our wider community. What has been most significant for you during the time of reopening?

Lucas: What really sticks out to me is hearing Brothers preaching that first week when we had a group of three Inquirers with us. Suddenly there was someone else in the Chapel whom we haven’t been talking with and living with for the past year. And it was electrifying! It was very enlivening to hear Brothers preach to someone else. You could feel that something had shifted. When you can actually see someone who’s physically there – you can see their reactions and their responses – or if you say something funny, they might actually laugh – rather than just us Brothers who have heard each other preach a thousand times –

Jim: We know each other’s jokes!

Lucas: Yeah, we’re a bit immune to that at this point! Even more, just having the actual physical presence of other people with us was really meaningful for the experience of worship. Having these Inquirers with us, there was a sense of hope engendered within the community around the continuing life of the Society through new men.

Jim: Do you think the pandemic has made men consider a monastic vocation?

Lucas: For many, this season of enforced isolation – or at least of change in work or schooling – has suddenly brought into clearer focus a sense of values: What do I actually want to do with my life? How do I want to live? And why? I think in response to big crises it’s not that shocking that people would discover an interest in trying something different out, or seeing what is on offer here. I think the pandemic has led to people looking for stability – certainly looking for community in a world that is quite distanced and isolated. And they’re looking for a life, a vocation, a community that is committed to and founded upon a set of shared values, a dedication to God, and to the work of the Church in a way that cultivates both outer work, but also the inner work of prayer. People want to share with others in a way that is ordered and disciplined and committed. They’re looking for commitment and roots.

We’ve sometimes had men come and inquire with us, then think, “Well, no, maybe this is not the right time in my life. I still have some other things I want to experience.” But with the pandemic, we’re now seeing men come back into the process. Whereas before they could think: “I’ve got plenty of time in my life ... maybe this is something I want to try down the road after I’ve experienced X, Y, Z.” Now with the pandemic, they may not feel like they have all the time in the world. And, really, the quality of that time has become very, very important. There’s a sense that: “If I hear God calling, maybe it’s not best to put it off until I get to X, Y, and Z. But instead to move in and to seriously do some discernment about what God’s calling me to now.”

The pandemic is literally life or death, and that throws things into stark relief: “Okay, what do I really want to do? What do I feel called to do? How do I want to live my life?” More people asking those questions has been one effect of this global season.

Jim: How has your experience of being a Brother of SSJE changed since becoming the Vocations Brother?

Lucas: It’s been amazing to be able to accompany people and shepherd them through the discernment process. A part of me of course wants everyone to come. But I’ve also come to understand more about discernment: It’s not my job to convince people that they definitely should be here. My job is to help them and the community pray and listen to God, to discern where God might be calling us as a community, as well as the individuals who come to us. We ask whether life in this community seems to be where God is calling them. In discernment, “success” does not mean that a man comes here to test his vocation, but rather seeing the process through and being faithful to where God seems to be calling all of us. So I’ve had really successful experiences, I think, helping people discern who have not come here to test their vocation. Just the act of discernment – helping these individuals and the community through that process – has been a really rewarding thing for me. 

Brs. Jack Crowley (l) and Todd Blackham (r), two of the most recent men to discern their vocations at SSJE.

Check out the rest of Br. Jim and Br. Lucas’ conversation in Cowley online: SSJE.org/cowleymagazine

Visit catchthelife.org for more about vocations at SSJE.
Legacy Society

Leave a Mark of Love

“Because love, given and received, lasts beyond the grave.”

A bequest is a gift which leaves a lasting legacy upon the SSJE community. As a stabilizing block in SSJE’s foundation, these funds are crucial in nurturing the vitality of the community and ensuring its ability to meet needs not yet anticipated or emergency causes. Just over one hundred people currently populate SSJE’s Legacy Society. If SSJE has left a mark of love on your life, might you consider a legacy gift in your own estate planning?

Almighty and everlasting God, we were created for relationship with You, and with one another. As a sign of those relationships, our friends have entrusted us with the fruits of their earthly life. Grant us the wisdom to steward these gifts according to Your will. We ask these things in the name of Christ Jesus, who with the Holy Spirit, is alive and reigns with You, one God, in glory everlasting. Amen.

For more information please contact legacy@ssje.org

Friends of SSJE

Annual Fund

One of the gifts of monastic hospitality is that we are not a hotel. We do not deal with customers. We deal with people, real people, individuals who have names and stories. Our Rule of Life teaches us that “If we are attentive, each guest will be a word and gift of God to us.”

We Brothers have come to recognize that whether people come to us in person or through our digital ministry, the longings, needs, and gifts are the same. During these trying days, though we all grieve, our hope maintains. Surely there are days when claiming that hope is difficult. As our community’s founder, Father Benson said, “Our life must be a life of continual hope. Often it will seem irksome…”

This is why our coming together in mutual service, need and prayer is so important. Our life and work are not possible without you. The prayers, cards, and messages so many have shared have inspired and encouraged us, and affirmed our hope. My Brothers and I offer you our thanks for the many ways you care for us. Please consider a gift of support as we continue to extend our hospitality and ministry to the world.

- James Koester, SSJE

Thank you for supporting our Annual Fund and our life of radical hospitality – open to all who seek a life of deeper union with God.

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On July 24, 2021, we were delighted to celebrate the Profession in Initial Vows of our Brother Jack Crowley. It was a particularly joyful event because we were able to welcome friends and family to gather again with us in person in the Chapel. Brother James Koester welcomed Jack as a professed member of the community:

Jack, in this moment, the world exists in a time between times. We are in a liminal time. The pandemic is ending, but it is not yet over. It is no longer night, but it is not yet day. The birds have begun to sing, but the sun has not yet risen. We look at the shadowy figure on the shore, but we cannot yet see clearly enough to recognize him. It is at such a time that you have chosen to make your profession in this particular monastic community. And it is no accident.

If monasteries are liminal places that exist between two worlds, then monks are liminal people, who exist between two worlds. Monks usher us from one world to another, from Chronos time to Kairos time, from the world’s time to God’s time.

As you make your vows today Jack, you take your place on the threshold of two worlds, not as a bouncer at a nightclub (although you are perfectly suited for that job too!), but as a guide who leads, points, and guides. To stand in such a place, this between place, between night and day, between Chronos and Kairos, between what was and what is not yet, requires many things. It requires that you not be afraid of the dark. Like those disciples who went fishing at night, you need to be prepared to launch out into the deep, and into the dark, and take all the risks that implies. Jack, we Brothers can say many things about you, and one of them is that you are not afraid of the dark. You know the dark. You have lived in the dark. The dark no longer frightens you.

Yet to stand in such a place – this between-place, between night and day, between Chronos and Kairos, between what was and what is not yet – requires something else: it requires a clarity of vision. You need clarity of vision to see in the dark, as the stranger clothed in shadows emerges on the shore. You need clarity of vision to be able to see, and recognize, and to say with your namesake, it is the Lord.

Right now, we stand on the threshold between two worlds, between what was, and what is not yet. It is no longer night, but it is not yet day. It is still dark, yet the birds have begun to sing. The pandemic is ending, but it is not yet over.

There are many who are afraid of the dark, who cannot yet see, nor recognize the stranger on the shore clothed in shadows.

It is at such a time as this that the world needs guides. It is at such a time as this that the world needs guides to lead us from one world to the other, who are not afraid of the dark, and who have clarity of vision. It is at such a time as this that the world needs monks. The world needs monks, because monks are liminal people who stand on the threshold of two worlds, guiding women and men of faith, and pointing to the stranger on the shore, saying, it is the Lord.

Jack, today you take your place on that threshold, as a friend and guide to others, who is not afraid of the dark, and who has the clarity of vision to see and recognize the Lord as he emerges, clothed in shadows, on the shore.

Over the last months, and especially in these months of lockdown, you have demonstrated to your Brothers, Jack, that you are such a person. You have demonstrated that you are not afraid of the dark, because you know the dark, because you once lived in the dark. You have demonstrated that you have the clarity of vision to see and recognize the stranger on the shore, clothed in shadows, and to say with the Beloved Disciple, it is the Lord.

Over the last months Jack, you have shown yourself to be a monk, because you are a liminal person, who stands on the threshold of two worlds, guiding and pointing as we move from night, to day, with the simple words of encouragement, it is the Lord.

Jack it is no accident that today, as the world stands between what once was and what is not yet, you have chosen to stand with us your Brothers, as we stand at the threshold of a new world, guiding women and men of faith, and pointing to the stranger on the shore clothed in the shadows, saying it is the Lord.

Jack, the world needs monks who are not afraid of the dark, and who have the clarity of vision to guide all into a new world, by pointing and saying, it is the Lord. Over these months, you have shown yourself to be such a person, and we are all so, so grateful.