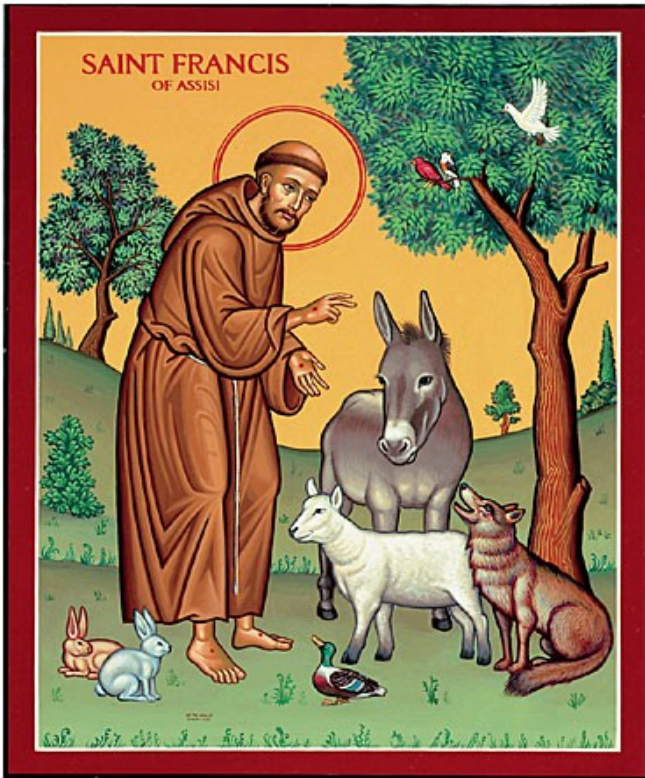


**The Book of Formation**  
**of the**  
**Order of Franciscan**  
**Hermits**



**NOT FOR SALE**

The following formation materials are the work of Rev. Fr. Bjorn, OES, OFH; the first Abbot of the Stewards of Peace Monastery. His intention is to provide materials that are relevant to those both new and experienced in the vowed life as expressed in the Rule and Customs of St. Francis of Assisi, and that are as inclusive and as educational as possible.

These formation materials are intended to serve as guideposts for both the novice brother or sister and those who have persevered for many years in their monastic practices. It is our hope that the following materials will be found to be relevant at every stage of monastic profession, and that the advice and topics contained herein will serve to strengthen a person's monastic observances throughout the duration of their consecrated life.

It can not be stressed enough that you work together with a mentor or spiritual director throughout your consecrated life as a monastic, regardless of when you find yourself in your private cell or cluster of hermits. The name of our community implies a solitary monastic observance, however even those who follow the model set forth by the Desert Fathers and Mothers have at least one person whom they trust and consult in times of need.

With all of these things in mind, it is with great joy that you are welcomed to the monastic way of life as observed by the OFH. It is our communal hope that we will enjoy the blessings of your presence among us for many years to come.

You may feel free to use these materials in e-book or pdf format, or print them and keep them in a binder or folder,

if that is easier for you. My only request is that these materials never be bought or sold for any reason.

## **Guidance for Hermits of OFH**

“Listen carefully, my son, to master’s instructions, and attend to them with the ear of your heart. This is advice from a father who loves you; welcome it and faithfully put it into practice.”

*The Rule of St. Benedict, Prologue, verse 1*

Welcome, dear friend. As you begin the early stages of your monastic profession, the road ahead may seem daunting or confusing. Know that each of us who have persevered in our monastic practice have been where you are now, and that we are here to support you as you begin your newly consecrated way of life.

The act of choosing to lay aside the many possibilities that a secular life has to offer in favor of a life of simplicity and service can be terrifying. Saying yes to this Hermit's way of life means saying no to other ways of living; it is a radical form of consent to the will of God which supersedes the many desires that we ourselves may be accustomed to pursuing.

It is natural for us to wonder what might have been, had we not chosen to lay aside our many pursuits and clothe ourselves in the simplicity of the monastic way. Should these questions become burdensome, you are encouraged to discuss them with your mentor, who has likely experienced similar emotions concerning the choices that have led to monastic life.

Each of us has come to this way with our own preconceived notions concerning what a monk ought to be like, and all too often we are overly harsh on

ourselves when we do not measure up to what is, in most cases, an unattainable image of perfection. This kind of harshness is like a poison to the soul. The unkind words that our minds tell us in the midst of harshness often defeat us before we even begin to take the action required of us as stewards of peace. We must therefore be constantly diligent in realigning how we treat ourselves at our innermost level. Once the seeds of forgiveness are planted within us, we can begin to live in a way that fosters peace in the world around us.

The monastic way does not require perfection. This way of life can be described as a “school for the spirit”; it is a constant source of learning, growth and change for those who practice it with sincerity. Once we have come to the realization that there is no such thing as a “perfect monk”, we enter into a kind of freedom that allows our innermost self to grow in ways thought to be previously unattainable.

Throughout the ages, countless men and women have chosen to dedicate themselves to a consecrated life of prayer, contemplation and service to others. Over the centuries, the traditions that have developed within these communities of monks are numerous, and vary widely in both religious customs and attitudes.

The documents that outline these traditions are commonly referred to as a Rule of Life, which define what is expected of each person who joins in the shared monastic way of life that is practiced within the community they associate with.

Because of our ecumenical nature as a community (as Br. Paul expresses, ALL Franciscans), the Rule of Life that we follow may be interpreted in many different expressions of monastic practice. The example set forth by St. Francis is intended to be a foundation for building your own monastic observances, which should be intentionally implemented according to what is an appropriate way of living out your particular path of faith.

The formation of a monastic is a lifelong process. As humans, we are always learning and experiencing new things which help us to mature in our understanding of the world around us and the world within us. With this in mind, this book should serve as a companion to our common Rule of Life, and should be revisited from time to time throughout your lifelong journey down the path of monastic practice.

## **Recommended Reading For all Brothers and Sisters**

This is a list of published materials that have been found to be beneficial to those both those who are just beginning their consecrated life as a monastic, as well as for those who have been monks and nuns for many years.

Although this list has been compiled with the intention of guidance for the newly professed Novice, the materials listed ought to be re-read from time to time throughout one's life, in order that they might help to reignite and refresh the methods and observances of those called to an Eremitic vocation.

We encourage all who read the materials listed here to employ attentiveness and prayerful intention. Whether or not a particular work is based on your own religious identity, the methods and revelations in the pages of these works ought to be read with objectivity so as to provide the reader with a way of thinking, feeling, or action that previously may have not been known to them.

It is also important to point out that many of the books listed have rich and deeply symbolic content. With this in mind, one might consider using some of the texts for the practice of Sacred Reading, or for finding a daily affirmation or mantra.

We realize that not everyone learns by reading easily. Should this be the case for you, we recommend either reading with the assistance of a mentor, or perhaps with a friend or tutor that you trust in order to help make these texts understandable and applicable for your life and monastic practice.

Furthermore, St. Francis himself was known to not be a fan of books on the account that “book-knowledge” often created the stumbling block of pride. His intent to safeguard his brothers from this was well-intentioned, however there are at least some basic writings, reflections and educational materials that are crucial to safeguarding the longevity of your vocation as a hermit.



## **Christian Texts**

<b><u>Author</u></b>	<b><u>Title</u></b>
Henri Nouwen	Making All Things New
St. Francis of Assisi	The Complete Writings of St. Francis
M. Basil Pennington	Centering Prayer
Fr. Charles Cummings, OCSO	Monastic Practices
St. Aelred of Rievaulx	Spiritual Friendship
St. Aelred of Rievaulx	The Mirror of Charity
Fr. Cornelius Wencel, ER.CAM	The Eremitic Life
Carl McColman	Befriending Silence
St. Theresa of Avila	The Interior Castle

## **Silence: The Cornerstone of Listening**

It is highly likely that in your elementary years of formal education, you have heard one or more of your teachers say the following words in order to quiet the noisiness that is natural among young children: “Your mouth and your ears can not be open at the same time”.

This simple statement may not have seemed all that important at the time, however there is a deep truth held within its words; that it is impossible for someone to listen and talk simultaneously.

The Rule of Life written by St. Benedict, who was an early pioneer of the western monastic model, begins with the following words: “Listen, my child to the Master’s words, and incline the ear of your heart”. This advice is crucially important to anyone who has chosen to dedicate themselves to a monastic way of life.

There are many tools which one can implement in order to develop the skills needed to mindfully and honestly listen; the first and most important of which is silence. The practice of silence is not simply a lack of noise; it is a discipline which must constantly be tended to in order that inner quietness may flourish even in the midst of distractions. Consider for a moment the explanation given by a Trappist-Cistercian monk on the practice of silence:

“Practicing silence is an act of compassion. A kind word left unsaid for the sake of silence allows another who might be in the midst of a deep and prayerful experience to continue that connection with God, uninterrupted. Likewise, it allows us to be open to constantly listening for

the still, small voice of God within the deepest parts of our own awareness. Silence is the place where the Spirit of God speaks to us, instructs us in the ways of love, and forms us into the image of God.”

We live in a world where we experience a constant barrage of messages that attempt to shape us into someone else’s idea of perfection. Everywhere we look there are advertisements trying to sell us an artificial image of wholeness; television programs try to convince us of how we should think and feel, while various printed and digital sources attempt to assert countless points of view upon us.

When we have the luxury of a lack of external noise, our own conscious minds play for us an unending stream of the stories we have experienced and the messages we have heard throughout our lives, both positive and negative. In addition to all of this, cultural influences tell us that silence (such as being quiet in the company of others instead of making small talk for the sake of noise) is considered rude.

It would seem, at first glance, that with all of these kinds of distractions, practicing silence is nearly impossible. In order that we might change our way of thinking about what it means to practice silence, and by extension our comfort level with silence itself, it may be helpful for us to examine new ways of integrating practices that cultivate inner quietness in our lives.

If we adjust our own perspectives concerning both interior and exterior silence, we may find that it is not such a daunting task after all.

The beginnings of the practice of silence start with choosing to step away from the things that distract us in our daily lives. This does not mean that we sever our connections to those we love or to those around us, or that we give up activities that we enjoy. On the contrary, in choosing to spend a little extra time being quiet before liturgical prayer, logging off from our various technological devices earlier than we normally would or choosing to reduce environmental noise such as radio or TV while we engage in our work, we gain the ability to make ourselves more readily available to others who may be in need of a listening ear.

For the novice monk, adjusting to periods of silence can be discomfoting at first. Just as standing at the edge of a tall cliff and gazing into the space below can ignite a fear of falling, entering into silence when we are accustomed to noise and distraction can stir up an uneasiness within us. In order to avoid what could be an extreme kind of shock, the novice monk must enter into the practice of silence gradually and with mindful intention.

The process of entering into silence began when you were welcomed as a seeker with this community. The person who was assigned to be your mentor has been given the task of offering you continual guidance as you enter into the ever deepening levels of self-awareness and spiritual awakening that come from the practice of silence in your daily life.

It is our hope as a community that a deep and lasting bond between the two of you will be one of the many fruits of your shared labor. More importantly, we hope that you will come to trust in the guidance that you are provided, not just by your mentor, but by the community

as a whole.

Reflect for a moment on whether or not you are comfortable with silence in the sense of there being a lack of environmental noise. What emotions does this kind of silence stir up inside of you?

It is vitally important to honestly examine and discover the answers to the above question without making judgments about them. Make a note of the answers that you find so that you can discuss them with your mentor.

There are no right or wrong answers; this is simply an exercise which will help you determine a starting point from which your work of practicing silence as part of your daily monastic observance can begin. Once a course of study and action concerning the practice of silence has been developed and successfully implemented into your daily life and work, the next steps of your formal monastic training will have already begun to take shape.

As you enter into the regular practice of silence, a change in attitude happens within your deepest state of being. This change is very gradual, and often is not even noticeable until a considerable length of time has passed. The markers of this change in attitude include increased attentiveness, open-minded attitudes and the ability to genuinely listen, rather than simply remaining silent in wait for your turn to speak.

At one time or another, each of us have experienced the need to share our stories with others. This basic human need for connection can be easily seen in times when we experience loneliness, when we require guidance or simply need a sympathetic ear. Many of us have also

experienced the disappointment that insincere listening brings. Have you ever felt as if those around you were simply waiting quietly for their turn to speak, rather than listening to and genuinely hearing your words?

Did the realization of the insincerity of those around you contribute to feelings of frustration, loneliness or even helplessness?

The genuine kind of listening that the practice of silence fosters is in and of itself an act of compassion. For a person in need of companionship, guidance or sympathy, having their stories not only heard but understood can be a turning point in the alleviation of their personal suffering.

Take a moment to reflect on that statement. As people who have consecrated our lives to the service of others, the most important task that we are called to carry out is the alleviation of suffering.

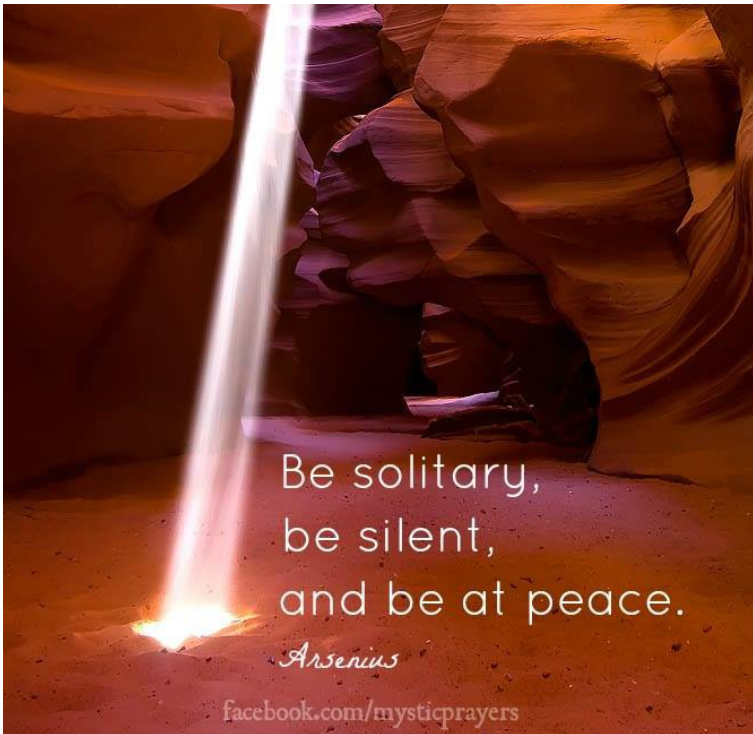
This is reflected in our communal observance of active service (such as feeding the poor, visiting the infirm or offering pastoral care of those in need), as well as in the very nature of this community, which is to show others that our differences of faith and life experience need not stand in the way of peace and understanding.

The kind of listening that our work as individuals and as a community requires of us is more than something that simply happens from time to time. It is a way of living; an attitude of openness that requires both generosity and constant practice.

This attitude, which is shaped by the practices of silence, prayer and service to others, is central to the monastic

way of life and an outward sign of sincerity on the part of the individual monk. As previously stated, the visible changes that monastic practice brings are very gradual.

It is easy to become frustrated or even discouraged when these positive kinds of conversion are not immediately obvious, however part of your monastic formation is to teach you how to develop your own ability to exercise both patience and perseverance.



## **Living In Obedience to Your Conscience**

As with the practice of silence, the examination of one's conscience is central to the monastic way of life. There are many facets to the practice of sincere self-examination, each of which find their roots in the attitude of listening.

On the surface, you might observe the practice of self-examination to look very similar to basic decision making; asking yourself whether a particular action or response is appropriate is often what comes to mind.

To begin to cultivate the practice of a deep and honest kind of self examination, the kind which spurs growth and change at our innermost level, we must be willing to implement the gifts that the practice of silence imparts to us.

It is likely that the process of self examination will stir up feelings of doubt and questions of faith. It can not be stressed enough that both of these things are not a sign of failure; rather that they are a sign of growth. While your mentor can assist you in finding ways to work through these often confusing or even frightening times, it is ultimately up to you to implement the tools that your monastic practice gives to you in order that you may find your own truth.

Similarly, you alone must choose an appropriate course of action in response to that truth. Faith without action only results in passivity; it is through constant effort that our shared task of service to others becomes a tangible force of change for the purposes of good in the world around us.



It is important to remember that because of our inclusive nature as a community, the active response to self examination may differ between individual monks. It is not our place to pass judgment on another; one of our specific purposes as a community is to take a stand against the kind of selfishness (and the suffering that it causes) that religious intolerance and attitudes of superiority breed.

In many Rules of Life for monks and nuns of all kinds, there is an admonition against being overly harsh on yourself. While it is imperative for growth that each of us must be sincere in our examination of conscience, it should never be cause for self abuse.

Everyone makes mistakes; it is part of how we as humans learn, change and grow throughout our lives. Acceptance of this fact is key to overcoming a lifetime of the negativity that is often attached to the mistakes we make.

In place of that negativity, we must constantly strive to cultivate patience and the willingness to try and try again, until we have overcome the challenges set before us. More importantly, we must come to accept that kindness and compassion for others begins with being kind and compassionate to ourselves at our innermost level.

Regardless of what your image of God happens to be, the presence of Its spirit dwells deeply within you. The practices of silence, listening and self-examination are intended to help you actively encounter the presence of God within yourself and in the world around you, which will produce profound kinds of transformation both within yourself and in the lives of everyone you meet.

### **Prayer and Its Various Forms**

“Preach the Gospel at all times, and when necessary, use words.”

This statement that is attributed to St. Francis of Assisi is a concise summary of the monastic way of life. In consecrating ourselves to the service of others as well as the service of our sources of spiritual nourishment, we designate our entire state of being as a form of prayer.

As part of your daily routine, there should be at least 3 periods designated for prayer or silent meditation. This observance as a whole is known as liturgical prayer; it is marked by a formal ritualization of the acts of prayer and meditation.

The times set aside for liturgical prayer are commonly referred to as the “Daily Office” or the “Divine Hours”; they punctuate the daily routine of the monastic way of life and provide a foundation upon which everything else that we do is built.

The Daily Office should begin before the first meal of the day is taken. By beginning our day in prayerful thanksgiving for the gifts of life and new opportunities, our attitude about the work that lies ahead of us can be transformed from one of burdensome obligation to one of joyful response to the gifts which are freely given to us.

Traditionally, many monastic houses observe the “pray, eat, work” model of daily life; the day begins with a liturgical prayer gathering before breakfast, which is then followed by chores and other tasks which keep the monastery running smoothly. This kind of rhythm allows the individual monk to focus on the task they are carrying

out, whether it is manual labor, study, or liturgy.

While many of us do not have the luxury of complete monastic enclosure and therefore must be creative about how we observe our monastic ways while maintaining a secular job or living in an urban area, there is much we can learn both individually and as a community from this kind of model of daily life. When we realign our own way of thinking about work, chores, study and even leisure, we can begin to transform seemingly mundane things into a prayerful and joyful experience.

To spur this change in thinking, ask yourself what your current attitude about work is. Do you dread it? Does it seem burdensome? Whether you enjoy your work or simply muddle through it has a large impact on the way you treat others, as well as yourself, when carrying out the tasks involved in the work that you do.

There are countless sources in our modern society that tell us that work is a negative thing. The effects of these messages can be easily seen in the people we work with and in our own attitudes about work; each of us has been guilty of cutting corners or wasting time in wait for our breaks or for the end of our work day.

The practice of transforming work into a form of prayer, like the practices of silence, listening and self examination require time and patience. As with each one of your specific monastic practices, mindfulness is central to whether or not your efforts of growth and transformation bear fruit. When we intentionally recognize and realign our way of thinking about work in its various forms, a deliberate and prayerful experience develops in place of the suffering that we inflict on

ourselves that comes from harboring a negative view of the work that we do.

Remember also that it is work which helps provide for our needs. Whether we are required to maintain secular employment or not, each of us must engage in work if we wish to continue in existence. Food must be prepared, our living space must be kept clean, and our own bodies must be cared for.

If we strive to be mindful about how we approach our work, we can begin to view any task as a blessing for which we ought to offer gratitude. Whether the work that we do is personally enjoyable or not, glamorous or mundane, it is important that we apply ourselves completely to the tasks before us.

There are many ways that we can transform and integrate various parts of our daily lives into our practice of prayer. Over time, the changes within us that a prayerful way of living produce become easily recognizable, both to us and to those around us.

Remember that, as with all things, growth and change are gradual processes, and that while the desire to cultivate positive changes within ourselves is healthy, it is not realistic to expect immediate results. It may be helpful to you to keep a journal, and read through it from time to time. Reflection of this nature can be both reassuring and enlightening concerning the ways in which we have transformed through our monastic practices.

## **Study and Reflection**

One of the central disciplines of the monastic way of life is the practice of studying. In the previous chapter, we explored some of the ways that studying can become a form of prayer; this chapter focuses more on study for the purposes of educating ourselves and others in order that misunderstandings may be overcome.

We have at our disposal a wealth of information; from books to electronically stored works of text and media, there is a seemingly endless library available to us. There are a few subjects that every monk is required to study. Think of this as a “common core” course of study which will help provide you with a basic understanding of what monasticism is, what it is not and how it has developed over the centuries.

The first part of this common core is the study of how monastic practice has been developed and implemented throughout history. This should include both eastern and western schools of monastic teaching, such as the practices of early Christian, Coptic and Gnostic monastics as well as those of Buddhist, Hindu and other schools of eastern monastic practice.

It is highly likely that in your encounters with others, you will be asked about your monastic way of life and about the community to which you belong. Being able to offer a concise explanation of both of these can help to “break the ice” with those who may be in need of assistance, as well as help dispel some of the common misgivings about what it is that monks do (a few of which are that we are required to engage in practices such as extreme fasting, vows of silence and self flagellation).

Once a basic understanding of the history and development of varying monastic practices has been garnered, the next area of study should focus on how various monastic communities function in the present day. There are several advantages available to us for this particular subject; many monasteries offer retreats, works of text and various classes about their communal expressions of the monastic way of life.

The main goal of requiring you to seek out an understanding of monasticism in the present day is to present you with a wide range of monastic ways of living, in order that your own emerging monastic practice might be enriched. An added benefit of this field of study (as mentioned above) is being able to provide these people with some comparative information might help us to dispel some of the common misgivings about monks and the work that monks are called upon to do.

In addition to these two common core courses of study, you are strongly encouraged to engage in the ongoing study of the history and development associated with your own path of faith, as well as a basic study of faiths which are not your own.

The scholarly examination of religious texts associated with your personal faith is important; it allows you to be aware of how these texts have shaped the commonly held practices of the majority of people who share your faith, so that you might be able to discern which practices are appropriate to incorporate into your monastic way of life. In addition, you may be able to offer varying perspectives on the common practices associated with your path of faith, which can help others to gain increased understanding in

place of preconceived notions about what it is that monastics do.

Finally, the study of faiths that are not your own is also strongly recommended. In our mission to be stewards of peace, we must be able to implement the proper tools that our work requires of us. One of these tools is a basic understanding of various faiths and the practices that are involved with them.

In order to be able to work toward cultivating understanding and peace between people of varying faiths, as well as working to heal the suffering that religious intolerance causes in the lives of those around us, we must exert a genuine effort to seek out that which increases our understanding of others.

It should be stressed that your study of these things does not need to be undertaken all at once. Each of us learns in a different way, and some learn new things more quickly than others. The point of studying the subjects mentioned here is not to gain any sort of academic achievement; rather it is to allow each of us the opportunity to grow in understanding and to challenge the practices which cause suffering in our world.

As previously mentioned, it is strongly recommended that you enlist the assistance of your mentor, as well as that of the other monks and nuns in this community. It is likely that one or more of them can provide you with insight that can assist you in ways that may not have been previously accessible.

One might say that study is one of the most fundamental

parts of the integrated practices of monastic life, whether it is part of a formal education process (i.e. one leading to a degree) or not.

The Rule of St. Benedict places a high priority on the prayerful reading of both sacred and scholarly texts, which is referred to as “Lectio Divina”, or divine reading.

The practice of divine reading as observed by the majority of monastic houses that follow the Rule of St. Benedict usually only involves the reading of sacred texts. When engaging in this practice, a person will read the text slowly and with prayerful intention, until they feel moved to meditate on a word or passage. This process is repeated for whatever length of time that has been designated specifically for Lectio Divina; commonly more time during the winter months (snow is not conducive to working the earth) and less time during the summer months (during which much of the agricultural and grounds keeping work takes place).

For this community, divine reading does not need to be restricted to sacred texts. We find this to be a valid form of study, fit for use with any educational, sacred, or self-enriching text of your choosing.

Divine reading is one of many ways of approaching text-based study from a different perspective. You may find that the practice of realigning your way of thinking about studying in general allows you to learn new things with greater ease, which is a gift in and of itself.

A final word of caution in relation to the practice of study: we must be constantly mindful that as we increase in understanding, we do not allow egotism to take root



within us. Learning can be a satisfying and rewarding experience, however as monks, our main purpose is to alleviate suffering. We can not be genuine in this endeavor if we hold ourselves above those we are called to serve.

## **Conduits of Teaching**

Each of us is a unique being, with unique gifts and perspectives. These differences can help to strengthen us as a community, and should be celebrated with joy and gratitude; they serve as a way to increase our understanding of one another and those around us, as well as to challenge each of us to cultivate patience, listening and new ways of thinking.

Whether we realize it or not, each of us has become a teacher simply by choosing to consecrate our lives as monastics. By dedicating ourselves to cultivating peace and compassion in the face of a world of hostility and misunderstanding, those people we come into contact with from day to day learn that the cycle of suffering can be challenged, which spurs a slight change in their way of thinking. In turn, those changes teach the people they come into contact with, and so the cycle continues in small ways.

In the early formation of the Order of Eremitic Servants (the community to which the writer of this text also belongs), two monks (one who had been professed for some time and one who was in the novice stage of profession) were attending their regular place of Sunday worship. The person who had been scheduled to teach during the service had arrived just before the monks, which was well before most of the people who attended worship in that place.

The teacher had been waiting silently when one of the monks first encountered him. There was a hesitation that could be seen in the eyes of the man who had come to teach, and after this pause, he asked the brother, “are you a monk?” Without giving it a second thought, the monk

replied, “Yes, I am.” The teacher’s facial expression changed in an instant, giving way to another question. “What kind of monk are you?” The brother replied, “I am an interfaith monk. The community to which I belong honors all paths to God.”

A comfortable silence fell between these two men as they attended to their preparations for worship. There seemed to be an unspoken connection between them, which became stronger and more clearly visible as the teacher presented his material to the congregation.

After the worship service, the teacher approached the other monk who had come there to worship. What struck this brother as both strange and affirming, is the way that the teacher approached him. It seemed as if the man who had come to teach had now intended to become a student. This unspoken moment between the novice monk and the teacher was so profound that it served to spur the novice monk into an entirely new way of thinking about what it means to teach.

The novice recounted his experience to his mentor, and before the senior monk could offer his insight, the novice said to him, “I never would have considered that by simply being present, we have become teachers to those around us.”

Not all of us have the gift of being able to present material to a group of people. Some of us may have a problem with our speech, or may struggle to put our own thoughts into an order that makes sense to others. None of these things should prevent us from teaching others; there are many ways to teach without having to speak at all (such as the method of presence mentioned earlier in this

chapter).

Consider for a moment your early years of school. It is likely that during that time, your teacher read various stories to you while you listened quietly. These stories may not have affected you directly at the time, however the message that they conveyed to you has no doubt been a source of learning in your life.

In a similar way, the things that we experience in our lives create a story that contains within it a lesson that might be a source of learning for us, or for those around us.

Sharing the stories of our experiences is one way to take on the role of being a teacher, whether we realize what is happening during this kind of interpersonal sharing or not.

Another way that we might teach others can be found in the way that we conduct ourselves in a public setting. Carrying yourself in a way that is joyful but neither boisterous nor assuming can serve to impart a small glimpse of peacefulness to those who we might come into contact with.

For those of us who possess the ability to teach in what is thought of as the classical way, we must be diligent and thorough in our research, and concise in the presentation of the subjects that we present in a classroom setting. Should one or more of us be called upon to teach in this way, the subject matter being presented ought to be reviewed by one or more of our fellow monks so that constructive feedback may be given well before the topic is presented to others.

This practice can serve many purposes, the first and foremost of which is safeguarding our personal sense of humility. In addition, it can help us to consider how our

words might sound to the ears of those who think, act and observe in ways different from our own.

There are, of course many other ways of teaching that have not been covered in this text. As you grow and mature in your monastic practice and spiritual development, opportunities for both learning and teaching will present themselves in various ways. It is ultimately up to you to implement the talents that your monastic way produces within you in a way that is appropriate and that affirms your vocation to be a steward of peace.

### **Care of Your Sanctuary**

Where would we be without our bodies? Such an existential question might provoke countless paths of thought, however for the purposes of this formation material, we simply wish to call to mind how it is that we act as responsible stewards of the human form that we currently find ourselves in.

There is a book written by St. Teresa of Avila, called “The Interior Castle”. It describes what this Discalced Carmelite nun viewed as the different levels of union with God as various rooms in a grand castle, all of which are contained within a human being. A particularly simple yet profound statement found in the book is this:

“God gave us faculties for our use; each of them will receive its proper reward. Then do not let us try to charm them to sleep, but permit them to do their work until divinely called to something higher.”

Many, if not most paths of faith consider the body a kind of sanctuary. While the overall attitude about and the treatment of the body varies widely between faiths, especially with regard to the ascetic practices associated with a monastic way of life, it is a responsible and healthy thing to care for our overall health. This includes our physical health, mental well-being, spiritual health and social health.

There are some who truly believe that “if it hurts, it must be holy”. On the contrary, physical discomfort and pain for their own sake only serve to increase personal suffering. There is little credible evidence that pain-inducing practices or self neglect produce a “fast track” to spiritual awakening or holiness, therefore we as a community do

not endorse such practices regardless of one's path of faith.

It is our responsibility to make responsible and healthy choices that safeguard our total state of health. Each of the four areas of health mentioned above ought to be tended to as part of a practice of integrating our entire being into our monastic way of life.

We recognize that not everyone has access to quality medical care. If you fall into this category, there are a number of resources available to assist you in getting your basic health needs tended to. Your mentor or the Guardian will be able to help direct you toward assistance should you require it, however it is up to you to implement the resources available to you.

In addition to regular medical and mental health care, it is important that each of us tend to the hygienic upkeep of our bodies. This does not mean that we need to practice perfect grooming or indulge in costly products that promise an artificially constructed picture of beauty, however ensuring that regular cleanliness and basic grooming practices are attended to is expected of all monks and nuns in this community.

An often under-stressed facet of care of the human body is nutrition. As monks, it is common for some of us to observe regular periods of fasting, or to refrain from certain foods altogether. We do not require such practices as a community, but if you choose to observe one or more ascetic practices involving food, you must be diligent in making sure that your nutritional needs are still being met in other ways.

We encourage each person to exercise moderation in their dietary habits. Being mindful of the food that you eat fosters a holistic and responsible lifestyle at the most basic level and creates both awareness and gratitude for the food that we eat. We encourage you to choose your dietary intake by how nourishing it is, rather than how easy it is to prepare (for example choosing to make a meal from scratch with nourishing ingredients, as opposed to a heat-and-eat meal).



### **To Clothe in Simplicity**

As you progress in your monastic practice, you should reflect on this question often. As people who have consecrated our lives to the monastic way, we are called to live a life that is counter-intuitive to the larger societal culture in which we find ourselves. While others occupy themselves with various pursuits and distractions, we intentionally turn away from many of these things, in order that we may become more available for the service of others.

The vow of poverty asks much of us. While many of us, living in dispersed enclosures which are often our own homes are not able to give up all of our earthly possessions and wander as the first Franciscan did, simplifying our homes, possessions and lives as part of their monastic practice is a more modern and easily attainable way of letting go of that which would serve to distract us from our work, prayer and service.

A few examples of this kind of simplifying of our lives would be giving up the clothes that we never wear (that have likely been forgotten in our closets for some time), choosing to rent various media instead of buying it (with the exception of books and materials intended for the common library), or choosing to clear out many of the things which clutter our homes.

It would be foolish to rid ourselves of things which serve to aid us in our work and daily life (such as kitchen appliances, tools, and various other things that we use regularly). In the same manner, any solitary monastic may choose not to give up something that brings great joy during periods of rest (one might enjoy watching a movie, while another might spend their time of rest playing an

interactive game or musical instrument).

As previously stated, the intent of our common vow of poverty is this: in intentionally distancing ourselves from attachment to an excess of material things, we begin to be free from the distractions and divisiveness of greed. This allows us to be more available to serve the needs of others, and safeguards us from causing further suffering that greed would bring to those around us.

One of the hermits of this community was at his regular place of worship one Sunday. The priest there had drawn attention to the hermit during his sermon, saying to him, “I sometimes envy you, and the simplicity of your life. You do not need to spend an hour choosing what to wear; you simply put on your robe and proceed with your day”.

As a community, we do not require that everyone wear a monastic habit. For some of us, it is a reliable and appropriate way to safeguard our adherence to the vow of Simplicity, as well as a clear signal to those around us that we have chosen a way of life that puts service to others above all other personal desires.

The man who had given the talk during that worship service mentioned above followed his statement about monastic simplicity with this: “Tossing aside my fine clothing and putting on a robe is a terrifying thought; I am not there yet. Perhaps one day I will have the courage which you have shown in your dedication to a simple way of life”.

It is unclear whether or not the man realized how accurate and profound his statements about choosing a monastic way of life had been. In saying “yes” to this way

of life, we have foregone many other possible paths, some of which may have led to the often coveted lives of the wealthy and famous.

Whether or not you choose to clothe in your monastic habit, it is important that you conduct yourself in a manner that would not bring shame on the community which you represent. Should you choose not to wear a monastic habit, your manner of dress should be simple (such as a plain shirt, casual slacks or jeans in good condition, and nothing that could be considered flashy or boisterous).

Likewise, each of us must be mindful of our manner of speech. We should endeavor to refrain from rudeness, vulgar language, or speaking in such a way that others might interpret as conceited. In accordance with our practice of silence, we must also be mindful that we do not engage in gossip or idle chatter. This does not mean that we are forbidden from engaging in polite conversation in social situations or community recreation, however our speech should be a reflection of an attitude of attentive listening and mindfulness.

Finally, at the core of an attitude of simplicity is the practice of examining whether or not something is truly needed. This applies to material goods, our words and our actions. The monastic foundations which are rooted in the practices of silence, self-examination and study naturally give way to the practice of consideration in regard to simplicity, however they do not automatically produce the practice of simplicity itself.

As with all monastic observances, a simple way of living requires constant effort and discipline, and its benefits may not be immediately visible. You must be willing to

exercise patience and trust that in due time, the fruits of your labors will show themselves.

## **In Conclusion**

The journey of monastic life is an ongoing process. It does not advance according to our wishes; rather the progression toward inner awakening and union with God happens very gradually and in ways that often go unnoticed for some time.

There will be times throughout your ongoing formation that may bring with them confusion, doubt, or even sadness. It is important for you to reach out to your mentor, as well as your fellow monks during these times, so that we may be able to be a source of support and reassurance for you.

Remember that each of us has made the journey that you are undertaking; we have all faced the challenges which lie ahead of you. Be assured that the rewards that the monastic way can bring outnumber these challenges, even though they may seem hidden to you at first.

One of the most important disciplines that you can implement into your monastic practice is forgiveness, first of your self, and then of others. Making a practice of first recognizing and then letting go of the things which have caused and continue to cause pain in our lives can help each of us to move past them to a place of peacefulness and joy.

Remember that your monastic practice is a personal celebration of the love that exists between you and the God of your heart. While we share in many observances and customs as a community, it is up to you to remain faithful to your own monastic way.

## A History of Western Monasticism

*as found on Wikipedia, edited for clarity and ease of use  
for the purposes of Novice Formation*

*\*Fr. Bjorn claims no copyright for the following text.*

Christian monasticism is the devotional practice of individuals who live ascetic and typically cloistered (meaning that they do not leave the monastic enclosure) lives that are dedicated to Christian worship. It began to develop early in the history of the Christian Church, modeled upon scriptural examples and ideals, including those in the Old Testament, but not mandated as an institution in the scriptures.

It has come to be regulated by religious rules (e.g. the Rule of St Basil, the Rule of St Benedict, the Rule of Saint Augustine) and, in modern times, the Canon law of the respective Christian denominations that recognize various forms of monastic living. Those living the monastic life are known by the generic terms monks (men) and nuns (women). In modern English, they are also known by the gender neutral term "monastics."

The word monk originated from the Greek *monachos* (monk); its root being from the word *monos* meaning "alone".

Monks did not live in monasteries at first, rather, they began by living alone, as the word *monos* might suggest. As more people took on the lives of monastics, living alone in the wilderness, they started to come together in small clusters of 2 or 3 and model themselves after the original monks who had lived in those places. The monks

quickly began to form communities to further their ability to observe a self-sufficient, ascetic life. Monastics generally dwell in a monastery, whether they live there in community (cenobites), or in seclusion (recluses, hermits or eremites).

### **Life**

The basic idea of monasticism in all its varieties is seclusion or withdrawal from the world or society. The object of this is to achieve a life whose ideal is different from and largely at variance with that pursued by the majority of humanity, and the method adopted, no matter what its precise details may be, is always self abnegation or organized asceticism.

Monastic life is distinct from the "religious orders" such as the friars, canons regular, clerks regular, and the more recent religious congregations. The latter have essentially some special work or aim, such as preaching, teaching, liberating captives, etc., which occupies a large place in their activities.

While monks have undertaken labors of the most varied character, in every case this work is extrinsic to the essence of the monastic state. Both ways of living out the Christian life are regulated by the respective church law of those Christian denominations that recognize it (e.g., the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church, the Anglican Church, or the Lutheran Church).

Christian monastic life does not always involve communal living with like-minded Christians. Modern monasticism has varied greatly in its external forms, but, broadly speaking, it has two main types:

- ⑤ the eremitical or secluded,
- ⑤ the cenobitical or community life.

Other variations of these models include the mendicant life (often observed by friars and some orders of nuns), which rely heavily on the generosity of others for their sustenance and are generally emphasized by their many active ministries including charitable works for the sick, the poor, the mentally ill and the imprisoned.

St. Anthony the Abbot may be called the founder of the first (that is to say the secluded life) and St. Pachomius of the second (the communal monastic setting).

Monks and friars are two distinct monastic expressions. In the thirteenth century "... new orders of friars were founded to teach the Christian faith," because monasteries had declined due to various causes, in most cases many schisms had developed within the Christian religion and thus had a profound effect on both the enclosed and mendicant monastic orders.

The monastic life itself is said to be based on Jesus's teaching to "be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). This ideal, also called the state of perfection, can be seen, for example, in the *Philokalia*, which is a book of monastic writings.

Their manner of self-renunciation has three elements corresponding to the three evangelical counsels: poverty, chastity and obedience. These vows, taken by nearly every monastic (with the exception of a few monastic orders such as the Benedictines, who profess the vows of stability, conversion of life, and obedience) throughout history are an easily recognizable expression that finds its roots in the early desert monastic model.



### **History and Biblical Precedent**

First Century groups such as the Essenes and the Therapeutae followed lifestyles that could be seen as precursors to Christian monasticism. Early Christian monasticism drew its inspiration from the examples of the Prophet Elijah and John the Baptist, who both lived alone in the desert, and above all from the story of Jesus' time in solitary struggle with Satan in the desert, before his public ministry.

### **Early Christianity**

From the earliest times there were probably individual hermits who lived a life in isolation in imitation of Jesus's 40 days in the desert. They have left no confirmed archaeological traces and only hints in the written record. Communities of virgins who had consecrated themselves to Christ are found at least as far back as the 2nd century. There were also individual ascetics, known as the "devout," who usually lived not in the deserts but on the edge of inhabited places, still remaining in the world but practicing asceticism and striving for union with God.

### **Eremitic Monasticism**

Eremitic monasticism, or solitary monasticism, is characterized by a complete withdrawal from society. The word 'eremitic' comes from the Greek word *eremos* which means desert. This name was given because of St. Anthony of the Desert, or St. Anthony of Egypt, who left civilization behind to live on a solitary Egyptian mountain in the third century.

Though he was probably not the first Christian hermit,

he is recognized as such as he was the first known and most widely recognized founder of the eremitic monastic expression.

Paul the Hermit is the first Christian historically known to have been living as a monk. In the 3rd Century Anthony of Egypt lived as a hermit in the desert and gradually gained followers who lived as hermits nearby but not in actual community with him. This type of monasticism is called eremitical or "hermit-like."

An early form of "protomonasticism" appeared as well in the 3rd century among Syriac Christians through the "Sons of the Covenant" movement. Eastern Orthodoxy looks to St. Basil of Caesarea as a founding monastic legislator, as well to as the example of the Desert Fathers for its monastic models.

Another option for becoming a solitary monastic was to become an anchoress. This began because there were women who wanted to live the solitary lifestyle but were not able or permitted by church authority to live alone in the wild. Thus they would go to the Bishop for permission who would then perform the rite of enclosure. After this was completed the anchoress would live alone in a room that typically had a window that opened into a church so they could receive communion and participate in church services. There were two other windows that allowed food to be passed in and people to come seek advice. The most well known anchoress was Julian of Norwich who was born in England in 1342 (as a side note, there is an Episcopal monastic order of men and women called The Order of Julian of Norwich (OJN) who follow the written and recorded teachings of Julian but

who live together using a cenobitic model of monastic life).

### **Cenobitic Monasticism**

While the earliest Desert Fathers lived as hermits, they were rarely completely isolated, but often lived in proximity to one another, and soon loose-knit communities began to form in such places as the Desert of Nitria and the Desert of Skete. Saint Macarius established individual groups of cells such as those at Kellia (founded in 328.) These monks were anchorites, following the monastic ideal of St. Anthony. They lived by themselves, gathering together for common worship and meals on Saturdays and Sundays only.

In 346 St. Pachomius established in Egypt the first cenobitic Christian monastery. At Tabenna in Upper Egypt, sometime around 323 AD, Pachomius decided to mold his disciples into a more organized community in which the monks lived in individual huts or rooms (*cellula* in Latin,) but worked, ate, and worshiped in shared space. The intention of this was to bring together individual ascetics who, although pious, did not, like Saint Anthony, have the physical ability or skills to live a solitary existence in the desert.

This method of monastic organization is called cenobitic or "community-based." In Catholic theology, this community-based living is considered superior to others models of monastic practice because of the obedience practiced and the accountability offered.

The head of a monastery came to be known by the word for "Father" in Syriac, Abba; in English, "Abbot." (These terms have also been feminized due to the growth of

communities of women throughout history).

Guidelines for daily life were created, and separate monasteries were created for men and women. St Pachomius introduced a monastic Rule of cenobitic life, giving everyone the same food and attire. The monks of the monastery fulfilled the obedience assigned them for the common good of the monastery.

Among the various demands of obedience were copying books. St Pachomius considered that an obedience fulfilled with zeal was greater than fasting or prayer.

A Pachomian monastery was a collection of buildings surrounded by a wall. The monks were distributed in houses, each house containing about forty monks. There would be thirty to forty houses in a monastery. There was an abbot over each monastery, and provosts with subordinate officials over each house. The monks were divided into houses according to the work they were employed in: thus there would be a house for carpenters, a house for agriculturists, and so forth. But other principles of division seem to have been employed, e.g., there was a house for the Greeks and for those with other distinct characteristics.

On Saturdays and Sundays all the monks assembled in the church for Mass; on other days the Office and other spiritual exercises were celebrated in the houses.

From a secular point of view, a monastery was an industrial community in which almost every kind of trade was practiced. This, of course, involved much buying and selling, so the monks had ships of their own on the Nile, which conveyed their agricultural

produce and manufactured goods to the market and brought back what the monasteries required.

From the spiritual point of view, the Pachomian monk was a consecrated religious person living under a specific Rule of Life.

The community of Pachomius was so successful he was called upon to help organize others, and by one count (by the time he died in 346), there were thought to be 3,000 such communities dotting Egypt, especially in the Thebaid region. From there monasticism quickly spread out, first to Palestine and the Judean Desert; then to Syria, North Africa and eventually the rest of the Roman Empire.

In 370 St. Basil the Great, monastic founder in Cappadocia, became bishop of Caesarea and wrote a work of the principles of ascetic life. His work is often cited as the second great work in a series of monastic writings that have contributed to shaping monasticism as we know it today.

Eastern monastic teachings were brought to the western church by Saint John Cassian (ca. 360 – ca. 435). As a young adult, he and his friend Germanus entered a monastery in Palestine but then journeyed to Egypt to visit the eremitic groups in Nitria. Many years later, Cassian founded a monastery of monks and probably also one of nuns near Marseilles.

He wrote two long works, *The Institutes* and *The Conferences*. In these books he not only transmitted his Egyptian experience but also gave Christian monasticism a profound evangelical and theological basis.

At the time of his conversion in Milan in the years 386-387, St. Augustine was aware of the life of Saint Anthony in the desert of Egypt. Upon his return to Africa as a Christian in the year 388, however, Augustine and a few Christian friends founded at Thagaste a lay community. They became cenobites in the countryside rather than in the desert.

Saint Benedict (c. 480 – 547 AD) lived for many years as a hermit in a cave near Subiaco, Italy. He was asked to be head over several monks who wished to change to the monastic style of Pachomius by living in community. Between the years 530 and 560, he wrote the Rule of Saint Benedict as a guideline for monks living in community, which is still in use today by a wide variety of monastic communities.

Scholars such as Lester K. Little attribute the rise of monasticism at this time to the immense changes in the church brought about by Constantine's legalization of Christianity. The subsequent transformation of Christianity into the main Roman religion ended the position of Christians as a minority sect. In response a new form of dedication was developed. The long-term "martyrdom" of the ascetic replaced the violent physical martyrdom of the persecutions that were common up until that point.

## **Eastern Orthodox Tradition**

Orthodox monasticism does not have the varied kinds religious orders as in the West, so there are no formal Monastic Rules (Regulae); rather, each monk and nun is encouraged to read all of the texts based on and written by the Holy Fathers and emulate their virtues. There is also no division between the "active" and "contemplative" life; Orthodox monastic life embraces both active and contemplative aspects.

There exists in the East three types of monasticism: eremitic, cenobitic, and the skete. The skete is a very small community, often of two or three (Matthew 18:20), under the direction of an Elder. They pray privately for most of the week, then come together on Sundays and Feast Days for communal prayer, thus combining aspects of both eremitic and cenobitic monasticism.

## **Historical Development**

Even before Saint Anthony the Great (the "father of monasticism") went out into the desert, there were Christians who devoted their lives to ascetic discipline and striving to lead an evangelical life (i.e., in accordance with the teachings of the Gospel). As monasticism spread in the East from the hermits living in the deserts of Egypt to Palestine, Syria, and on up into Asia Minor and beyond, the sayings (apophthegmata) and acts (praxeis) of the Desert Fathers and Desert Mothers came to be recorded and circulated, first among their fellow monastics and then among the laity as well.

Among these earliest recorded accounts was *The Paradise*, by Palladius of Galatia, Bishop of Helenopolis (also known as the Lausiatic History, after

the prefect Lausus, to whom it was addressed). Saint Athanasius of Alexandria (whose Life of Saint Anthony the Great set the pattern for monastic hagiography), Saint Jerome, and other anonymous compilers were also responsible for setting down very influential accounts. Also of great importance are the writings surrounding the communities founded by St. Pachomius, the father of cenobiticism, and his disciple St. Theodore, the founder of the skete form of monasticism.

Among the first to set forth precepts for the monastic life was Saint Basil the Great, a man from a professional family who was educated in Caesarea, Constantinople, and Athens. Saint Basil visited colonies of hermits in Palestine and Egypt but was most strongly impressed by the organized communities developed under the guidance of St. Pachomius. Saint Basil's ascetical writings set forth standards for well disciplined community life and offered lessons in what became the ideal monastic virtue: humility.

Saint Basil wrote a series of guides for monastic life (the *Lesser Asketikon*, the *Greater Asketikon*, the *Morals*, etc.) which, while not "Rules" in the legalistic sense of later Western rules, but provided firm indications of the importance of a single community of monks, living under the same roof, and under the guidance, and even discipline of a strong abbot.

His teachings set the model for Greek and Russian monasticism but had less influence in the Latin West. Of great importance to the development of monasticism is Saint Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai in Egypt. Here the Ladder of Divine Ascent was written by Saint



John Climacus (c.600), a work of such importance that many Orthodox monasteries to this day read it publicly either during the Divine Services or in Trapeza during Great Lent.

At the height of the East Roman Empire, numerous great monasteries were established by the emperors, including the twenty "sovereign monasteries" on the Holy Mountain, an actual "monastic republic" wherein the entire country is devoted to bringing souls closer to God. In this milieu, the Philokalia was compiled. As the Great Schism between East and West grew, conflict arose over misunderstandings about Hesychasm.

St. Gregory Palamas, bishop of Thessalonica, an experienced Athonite monk, defended Orthodox spirituality against the attacks of Barlaam of Calabria, and left a legacy that included numerous important works on the spiritual life.

### **Western Monasticism**

The introduction of monasticism into the West may be dated from about A.D. 340 when St. Athanasius visited Rome accompanied by the two Egyptian monks Ammon and Isidore, who were disciples of St. Anthony.

The publication of the *Vita Antonii* was penned some years later and its translation into Latin spread the knowledge of Egyptian monasticism widely and many monasteries and hermitages were founded in Italy to imitate the example thus set forth.

The first Italian monks aimed at reproducing exactly what was done in Egypt and not just a few, such as St. Jerome, Rufinus, Paula, Eustochium and the two Melanias,

actually went to live in Egypt or Palestine, having found those places to be better suited to monastic life than Italy.

The earliest phases of monasticism in Western Europe involved figures like Martin of Tours, who after serving in the Roman legions converted to Christianity and established a hermitage near Milan, then moved on to Poitiers where he gathered a community around his hermitage.

He was called to become Bishop of Tours in 372, where he established a monastery at Marmoutiers on the opposite bank of the Loire River, a few miles upstream from the city. His cell was a hut of wood, and around it his disciples, who soon numbered eighty, dwelt in caves and huts. His monastery was laid out as a colony of hermits rather than as a single integrated community. The type of life was simply the Antonian monasticism of Egypt.

Honoratus of Marseilles was a wealthy Gallo-Roman aristocrat, who after a pilgrimage to Egypt, founded the Monastery of Lérins in 410, on an island lying off the modern city of Cannes. The monastery combined a community with isolated hermitages where older, spiritually-proven monks could live in isolation. Lérins became, in time, a center of monastic culture and learning, and many later monks and bishops would pass through Lérins in the early stages of their careers. Honoratus would later be called to be Bishop of Arles.

John Cassian began his monastic career at a monastery in Palestine and Egypt around 385 to study monastic practice there. In Egypt he had been attracted to the isolated life of hermits, which he considered the highest form of monasticism, yet the monasteries he founded

were all organized monastic communities. Around the year 415, he established two monasteries near Marseilles, one for men and one for women. In time these attracted a total of 5,000 monks and nuns.

One of the most significant works for the future development of monasticism were *Cassian's Institutes*, which provided a guide for monastic life and his *Conferences*, which were a collection of spiritual reflections.

### **Medieval Period**

Monasticism appears to have reached Britain by way of Gaul. St. Ninian, the apostle of St. Whithorn, dedicated his church to St. Martin of Tours, of whose death he heard while he was building it (A.D. 397). St. Patrick's connection with the Gallican Church, of whose saints he speaks with reverence and affection, is demonstrated by the tradition that he was a nephew of St. Martin.

Kentigern established a monastery at St. Asaph's where he divided the monks into three groups. The unlettered were assigned to the duty of agriculture, the care of cattle, and the other necessary duties outside the monastery. He assigned 300 to duties within the cloister of the monastery, such as doing the ordinary work, and preparing food, and building workshops. The remaining monks, who were lettered, he appointed to the celebration of Divine service in church by day and by night. St. David (d. 601) was another saint of noble descent, who founded his monastery at Menevia and made it a place of instruction for the Irish clergy.

The earliest monastic settlements in Ireland emerged

at the end of the fifth century. The traditional founder of the monastic movement in Ireland is said to have been Finnian of Clonard (548) who had received training in Wales.

Ireland was a rural society of chieftains living in the countryside. Commonly, Irish monasteries were established by grants of land to an abbot or abbess who came from a local noble family. The monastery became the spiritual focus of the tribe or kin group. Successive abbots and abbesses were members of the founder's family, a policy which kept the monastic lands under the jurisdiction of the family (and corresponded to Irish legal tradition, which only allowed the transfer of land within a family).

The abbots of the principal monasteries such as Clonard, Armagh, Clonmacnoise, Swords, etc. were of the highest rank and held in the greatest esteem. They wielded great power and had vast influence. The abbot usually was only a presbyter, but in the large monasteries there were one or more resident bishops who conferred orders and discharged the other functions of a bishop. The abbot was superior of the house, and all were subject to him.

The Irish rule was rigorous. It was more or less a copy of the French rule, as the French was a copy of the Thebaid. The daily routine of monastic life was prayer, study, and manual labor. With regard to food the rule was very strict. Only one meal a day, at 3 o'clock p.m., was allowed, except on Sundays and Feast days. Wednesdays and Fridays were fast days, except the interval between Easter and Whit Sunday. The food allowed was barley bread, milk, fish, and

eggs. Flesh meat was not allowed except on great feasts.

Irish monasticism maintained the model of a monastic community while, like John Cassian, marking the contemplative life of the hermit as the highest form of monasticism. Saints' lives frequently tell of monks (and abbots) departing some distance from the monastery to live in isolation from the community.

Irish monastic rules specify a stern life of prayer and discipline in which prayer, poverty, and obedience are the central themes. Irish monasticism spread widely, first to Scotland and Northern England, then to Gaul and Italy. St. Columba and his followers established monasteries at Bangor, on the northeastern coast of Ireland, at Iona, an island northwest of Scotland, and at Lindisfarne, which was founded by Aidan, an Irish monk from Iona, at the request of King Oswald of Northumbria.

Columbanus, an abbot from a Leinster noble family, traveled to Gaul in the late 6th century with twelve companions. Columbanus and his followers spread the Irish model of monastic institutions to the continent. A whole series of new monastic foundations under Irish influence sprang up, starting with Columbanus's foundations of Fontaines and Luxeuil, sponsored by the Frankish King Childebert II.

After Childebert's death, Columbanus traveled east to Metz, where Theudebert II allowed him to establish a new monastery among the semi-pagan Alemanni in what is now Switzerland. One of Columbanus's followers founded the monastery of St. Gall on the

shores of Lake Constance, while Columbanus continued onward across the Alps to the kingdom of the Lombards in Italy. There King Agilulf and his wife Theodolinda granted Columbanus land in the mountains between Genoa and Milan, where he established the monastery of Bobbio.

Little is known about the origins of the first important monastic rule (Regula) in Western Europe, the anonymous *Rule of the Master* (Regula magistri), which was written somewhere south of Rome around 500. The rule adds legalistic elements not found in earlier rules, defining the activities of the monastery, its officers, and their responsibilities in great detail.

St. Benedict of Nursia is the most influential of Western monks. He was educated in Rome but soon sought the life of a hermit in a cave at Subiaco, outside the city. He then attracted followers with whom he founded the monastery of Monte Cassino around 520, between Rome and Naples. He established the Rule that led to him being credited with the title of father of western monasticism. By the ninth century, largely under the inspiration of the Emperor Charlemagne, Benedict's Rule became the basic and most widely-used guide for Western monasticism.

Medieval monastic life consisted of prayer, reading, and manual labor. Prayer was a monk's first priority. Apart from prayer, monks performed a variety of tasks, such as preparing medicine, lettering, reading, and others. Also, these monks would work in the gardens and on the land. They might also spend time in the Cloister, a covered colonnade around a courtyard, where they would pray or read. Some monasteries held a

scriptorium where monks would write or copy books.

When the monks wrote, they used very neat handwriting and would draw illustrations in the books. As a part of their unique writing style, they decorated the first letter of each paragraph.

The efficiency of Benedict's cenobitic Rule in addition to the stability of the monasteries made them very productive. The monasteries were the central storehouses and producers of knowledge. Vikings started attacking Irish monasteries famous for learning in 793. One monk wrote about how he did not mind the bad weather one evening because it kept the Vikings from coming: "Bitter is the wind tonight, it tosses the ocean's white hair, I need not fear, as on a night of calm sea, the fierce raiders from Lochlann."

In the eleventh and twelfth centuries the growing pressure of monarchies and the nation states undermined the wealth and power of the orders.

Monasticism continued to play a role in Catholicism, but after the Protestant reformation many monasteries in Northern Europe were shut down and their assets seized.

### **Contributions**

In traditional Catholic societies, monastic communities often took charge of social services such as education and healthcare. The legacy of monasteries outside remains an important current in modern society. Max Weber compared the closeted and Puritan societies of the English Dissenters, who sparked much of the industrial revolution, to monastic orders. Many Utopian

thinkers (starting with Thomas More) felt inspired by the common life of monks to apply it to the whole society (an example is the phalanstère).

Modern universities have also attempted to emulate Christian monasticism. Even in the Americas, universities are built in the Gothic style of twelfth century monasteries. Communal meals, dormitory residences, elaborate rituals and dress all borrow heavily from the monastic tradition. Today monasticism remains an important part of the Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and Anglican faiths.

### **Education**

The capitulary of 789 reads: "Let every monastery and every abbey have its school, in which boys may be taught the Psalms, the system of musical notation, singing, arithmetic and grammar". There can be no doubt that by boys are meant not only the candidates for the monastery and the wards (generally the children of nobles) committed to the care of the monks, but also the children of the village or country district around the monastery, for whom there was usually an external school attached to groups of monastic buildings.

Irish monks needed to learn Latin, the language of the Church. Thus they read Latin texts, both spiritual and secular, with an enthusiasm that their contemporaries on the continent lacked. Subjects taught included Latin, Greek, Hebrew, grammar, rhetoric, poetry, arithmetic, chronology, the Holy Places, hymns, sermons, natural science, history and especially the interpretation of Sacred Scripture.

By the end of the seventh century, Irish monastic schools



were attracting students from England and from Europe. In the Middle Ages, monasteries conserved and copied ancient manuscripts in their scriptoria. A prospective monk first learned grammar, logic, and oratory. Later, he would take up mathematics, astronomy, and music. The students would use a stylus on wax. Later, when their handwriting improved, they would be given ink and parchment.

Eventually, many of those schools became universities. The dialectical dispute between Peter Abelard and William of Champeaux in the early 12<sup>th</sup> century over the methods of philosophic ontology led to a schism between the Catholic Orthodox of the School of Notre Dame in Paris and the student body, leading to the establishment of Free Schools and the concept of an autonomous University were soon copied elsewhere in Europe.

### **Medicine**

Monastic pharmacies stored and studied medicaments. Some of the works that the monks copied were by medical writers, and reading and copying these works helped create a store of medical knowledge. Monasteries had infirmaries to treat the monks, travelers, the poor, old, weak and sick. In 2005, archeologists uncovered waste at Soutra Aisle which helped scientists figure out how people in the Middle Ages treated certain diseases, such as scurvy; because of the vitamin C in watercress, patients would eat it to stop their teeth from falling out.

The same archeological group discovered hemlock, a known pain killer, in the drains of the hospital. Monasteries also aided in the development of agricultural techniques. The requirement of wine for the Mass led to the development of wine culture, as

shown in the discovery of the *méthode champenoise* by Dom Perignon. Several liquors like *Bénédictine* and the Trappist beers were also developed in monasteries. Even today many monasteries and convents are locally renowned for their cooking and brewing specialties.

The consequence of this centralization of knowledge was that they initially controlled both public administration and education, where the trivium led through the quadrivium to theology. Christian monks cultivated the arts as a way of praising God.

Gregorian chant and miniatures are examples of the practical application of quadrivium subjects. The status of monks as apart from secular life (at least theoretically) also served a social function. Dethroned Visigothic kings were tonsured and sent to a monastery so that they could not claim the crown back. Monasteries became a place for second sons to live in celibacy so that the family inheritance went to the first son; in exchange the families donated to the monasteries. Few cities lacked both a St Giles house for lepers outside the walls and a Magdalene house for prostitutes and other women of notoriety within the walls, and some orders were favored by monarchs and rich families to keep and educate their maiden daughters before arranged marriage.

The monasteries also provided refuge to those like Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor who retired to Yuste in his late years, and his son Philip II of Spain, who was functionally as close to a monastic as his regal responsibilities permitted.

### **Eastern Orthodox Church**

Christian monasticism was and continued to be a lay condition—monks depended on a local parish church for the sacraments. However, if the monastery was isolated in the desert, as were many of the Egyptian examples, that inconvenience compelled monasteries either to take in priest members, to have their abbot or other members ordained. A priest-monk is sometimes called a hieromonk. In many cases in Eastern Orthodoxy, when a bishopric needed to be filled, they would look to nearby monasteries to find suitable candidates, being good sources of men who were spiritually mature and generally possessing the other qualities desired in a bishop. Eventually, among the Orthodox Churches it became established by canon law that all bishops must be monks.

Monastic centers thrive to this day in Bulgaria, Ethiopia, Georgia, Greece, Republic of Macedonia, Russia, Romania, Serbia, the Holy Land, and elsewhere in the Orthodox world, the Autonomous Monastic State of Mount Athos remaining the spiritual center of monasticism for Eastern Orthodox. Since the fall of the Iron Curtain, a great renaissance of monasticism has occurred, and many previously empty or destroyed monastic communities have been reopened.

Monasticism continues to be very influential in the Eastern Orthodox Church. According to the Sacred Canons, all Bishops must be monks (not merely celibate), and feast days to Glorified monastic saints are an important part of the liturgical tradition of the church. Fasting, Hesychasm, and the pursuit of the spiritual life are strongly encouraged not only among monastics but also among the laity.

## **Types of Monks**

There are also three levels of monks: The Rassophore, the Stavrophore, and the Schema-Monk (or Schema-Nun).

Each of the three degrees represents an increased level of asceticism. In the early days of monasticism, there was only one level, the Great Schema, and even Saint Theodore the Studite argued against the establishment of intermediate grades, but nonetheless the consensus of the church has favored the development of three distinct levels.

When a candidate wishes to embrace the monastic life, he will enter the monastery of his choice as a guest and ask to be received by the Hegumen (Abbot). After a period of at least three days the Hegumen may at his discretion clothe the candidate as a novice. There is no formal ceremony for the clothing of a novice; he (or she) would simply be given the Podraznik, belt and skoufos.

After a period of about three years, the Hegumen may at his discretion tonsure the novice as a Rassophore monk, giving him the outer garment called the Rassa (Greek: Rason). A monk (or nun) may remain in this grade all the rest of his life, if he so chooses. But the Rite of Tonsure for the Rassophore refers to the grade as that of the "Beginner," so it is intended that the monk will advance on to the next level. The Rassophore is also given a klobuk which he wears in church and on formal occasions. In addition, Rassophores will be given a prayer rope at their tonsure.

The next rank, Stavrophore, is the grade that most Russian monks remain all their lives. The title Stavrophore means "crossbearer," because when tonsured into this grade the monastic is given a cross to wear at all times. This cross is called a Paramand—a wooden cross attached by ribbons to a square cloth embroidered with the Instruments of the Passion and the words, "I bear upon my body the marks of the Lord Jesus" (Galatians 6:17).

The Paramand is so called because it is worn under the Mantle (Greek: Mandyas; Church Slavonic: Mantya), which is a long cape which completely covers the monk from neck to foot. Among the Russians, Stavrophores are also informally referred to as "mantle monks." At his tonsure, a Stavrophore is given a wooden hand cross and a lit candle, as well as a prayer rope.

The highest rank of monasticism is the Great Schema (Greek: Megaloschemos; Church Slavonic: Schimnik). Attaining the level of Schema monk is much more common among the Greeks than it is among the Russians, for whom it is normally reserved to hermits, or to very advanced monastics. The Schema monk or Schema nun wears the same habit as the Rassophore, but to it is added the Analavos (Church Slavonic: Analav), a garment shaped like a cross, covering the shoulders and coming down to the knees (or lower) in front and in back. This garment is roughly reminiscent of the scapular worn by some Roman Catholic orders, but it is finely embroidered with the Cross and instruments of the Passion. The Klobuk worn by a Schema monk is also embroidered with a red cross and other symbols. The Klobuk may be shaped differently, more rounded at the top, in which case it is referred to as a koukoulion.

The skufia worn by a Schema monk is also more intricately embroidered.

The religious habit worn by Orthodox monastics is the same for both monks and nuns, except that the nuns wear an additional veil, called an apostolnik. The central and unifying feature of Orthodox monasticism is Hesychasm, the practice of silence, and the concentrated saying of the Jesus Prayer. All ascetic practices and monastic humility is guided towards preparing the heart for theoria or the "divine vision" that comes from the union of the soul with God. It should be noted, however, that such union is believed to be not accomplished by any human activity. All an ascetic can do is prepare the ground; it is for God to cause the seed to grow and bear fruit.

### **Western Orders**

Many distinct monastic orders developed within Roman Catholicism and Anglicanism. Monastic communities in the West, broadly speaking, are organized into orders and congregations guided by a particular religious rule, such as the Rule of St Augustine or especially Rule of St Benedict. Eastern Orthodoxy does not have a system of orders, per se.

On 7 February 1862 Pius IX issued the papal constitution entitled *Ad Universalis Ecclesiae*, dealing with the conditions for admission to religious orders of men in which solemn vows are prescribed.

**Augustinians** , founded in 1256, which evolved from the canons who would normally work with the Bishop: they lived with him as monks under St. Augustine's Rule.

**Benedictines** , founded in 529 by Benedict at Monte Cassino, stresses manual labor in a self-sufficient monastery. They are less of a unified order than most other orders.

**Bridgettines** , founded c.1350

**Camaldolese** , founded c.1000 (a reform of the Benedictine Order)

**Canons Regular** , a community of mainly priests living according to the Rule of St. Augustine

**Carmelites** , founded between 1206 and 1214, a Contemplative order

**Carthusians** , also known as the Order of Saint Bruno, founded 1084 by St. Bruno of Cologne. Open to both sexes; combines eremitical and cenobitic life.

**Celestines** , founded in 1244 and originally called Hermits of St Damiano, or Moronites (or Murronites). Became known as Celestines after their founder was elected Pope and took the name Celestine V.

**Cistercians** , also referred to as the Order of St. Bernard or Order of Cistercians of the Common Observance, founded in 1098 by Robert of Molesme

**Cluniacs** , a schism within the Benedictines with a height occurring c.950c.

**Conventuals, Order of Friars Minor Conventual** , commonly known as the Conventual Franciscans, is a branch of the order of Catholic Friars founded by Francis of Assisi in 1209

**Discalced Carmelites or Barefoot Carmelites** , a mendicant order in the eremitic tradition. The order was established in 1593 by two Spanish saints, Saint Teresa of Ávila and Saint John of the Cross.

**Hieronymites** , founded in Spain in 1364, an eremitic community formally known as the Order of Saint Jerome

**Olivetans or the Order of Our Lady of Mount**

**Olivet** , founded in 1313 by Bernardo Tolomei (born Giovanni Tolomei) along with two of his friends from the noble families of Siena, Patrizio Patrizi and Ambrogio Piccolomini.

**Paulines** , Founded in Hungary in 1225 by Blessed Eusebius.

**Premonstratensians, also known as Norbertines** , an order of canons regular, founded in 1120.

**Servites or Order of Servants of Mary** was founded in 1233 AD, when a group of cloth merchants of Florence, Italy, known as the Seven Holy Founders; they were canonized by Pope Leo XIII in 1888. It includes members of both sexes.

**Trappists** , began c. 1664, a further reform of the Benedictine Cistercians, also referred to as the Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance.

**Vallombrosans** , founded c. 1038 by Saint Gualberto Visdomini.

**Visitation Sisters** . The Order of the Visitation of Holy Mary or the Visitation Order is a Roman Catholic religious order for women. Members of the order are also known as the Salesian Sisters or, more commonly, as the Visitandines. The Order was founded in 1610 by Saint Francis de Sales and Saint Jane Frances de Chantal in Annecy, HauteSavoie, France.

### **Anglican Communion**

Monastic life in England came to an abrupt end with Dissolution of the Monasteries during the reign of King Henry VIII. The property and lands of the monasteries were confiscated and either retained by the king or sold to catholic landowners or given to loyal protestant nobility. Monks and nuns were pensioned off and retired or some were forced to



either flee for the continent or to abandon their vocations. For around 300 years, there were no monastic communities within any of the Anglican churches.

Shortly after the Oxford Movement began to advocate restoring catholic faith and practice to the Church of England (see AngloCatholicism), there was felt to be a need for a restoration of the monastic life. Anglican priest John Henry Newman established a community of men at Littlemore near Oxford in the 1840s. From then forward, there have been many communities of monks, friars, sisters, and nuns established within the Anglican Communion. In 1848, Mother Priscilla Lydia Sellon founded the Anglican Sisters of Charity and became the first woman to take religious vows within the Anglican Communion since the Reformation. In October 1850 the first building specifically built for the purpose of housing an Anglican Sisterhood was consecrated at Abbeymere in Plymouth. It housed several schools for the destitute, a laundry, printing press and soup kitchen. From the 1840s and throughout the following one hundred years, religious orders for both men and women proliferated in the UK and the United States, as well as in various countries of Africa, Asia, Canada, India and the Pacific.

Some Anglican religious communities are contemplative, some active, but a distinguishing feature of the monastic life among Anglicans is that most practice the so-called "mixed life," a combination of a life of contemplative prayer with active service.

Anglican religious life closely mirrors that of Roman Catholicism. Like Roman Catholic religious, Anglican

religious also take the three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Religious communities live together under a common rule, reciting the Divine Office and celebrating the Eucharist daily.

In the early 20th century when the Anglo-Catholic Movement was at its height, the Anglican Communion had hundreds of orders and communities, and thousands of religious. However, since the 1960s there has been a sharp falling off in the numbers of religious in many parts of the Anglican Communion, most notably in the United Kingdom and the United States.

Many once large and international communities have been reduced to a single convent or monastery composed of elderly men or women. In the last few decades of the 20th century, novices have for most communities been few and far between. Some orders and communities have already become extinct. There are however, still thousands of Anglican religious working today in religious communities around the world. While vocations remain few in some areas, Anglican religious communities are experiencing exponential growth in Africa, Asia, and Oceania.

### **Protestantism**

Monasticism in the Protestant tradition proceeds from John Wycliffe, who organized the Lollard Preacher Order (the "Poor Priests") to promote his reformation views.

### **Lutheran Church**

During the Reformation the teachings of Martin Luther led to the end of the monasteries, but a few

Protestants followed monastic lives. Loccum Abbey and Amelungsborn Abbey have the longest traditions as Lutheran monasteries. Since the 19th century there have been a renewal in the monastic life among Protestants.

There are many present day Lutherans who practice the monastic teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. In 1947 Mother Basilea Schlink and Mother Martyria founded the Evangelical Sisterhood of Mary, in Darmstadt, Germany. This movement is largely considered Evangelical or Lutheran in its roots. In 1948 Bavarian Lutheran pastor Walter Hümmer and his wife Hanna founded the *Communität Christusbruderschaft Selbitz*.

In other Lutheran traditions "The Congregation of the Servants of Christ" was established at St. Augustine's House in Oxford, Michigan, in 1958 when some other men joined Father Arthur Kreinheder in observing the monastic life and offices of prayer. These men and others came and went over the years. The community has always remained small; at times the only member was Father Arthur. During the 35 years of its existence over 25 men tested their vocations to monastic life by living at the house for some time, from a few months to many years, but at Father Arthur's death in 1989 only one permanent resident remained. At the beginning of 2006, there were 2 permanent professed members and 2 long-term guests. Strong ties remain with this community and their brothers in Sweden (*Östanbäck* monastery) and in Germany the (*Priory of St. Wigbert*). In Germany, *Communität Casteller Ring* is a Lutheran Benedictine community for women.

In 2011, an Augustinian religious order, the Priestly Society of St. Augustine (Societas Sacerdotalis Sancti Augustini) was established by the Anglo-Lutheran Catholic Church. It follows the Rule of St. Augustine, its headquarters is at Christ Lutheran Church ALCC. Kent Island, Maryland, and Fr. Jens Bargmann, Ph.D., is the Grand Prior.

In Lutheran Sweden, religious life for women had been already established by 1954, when Sister Marianne Nordström made her profession through contacts with The Order of the Holy Paraclete and Mother Margaret Cope (1886–1961) at St Hilda's Priory, Whitby, Yorkshire.

### **Other Denominations**

Around 1964, Reuben Archer Torrey III, an Episcopal missionary, grandson of R. A. Torrey, founded Jesus Abbey as a missionary community in Korea. It has some links with the Episcopal Church and holds an Evangelical doctrine.

The Community of the Sisterhood Emmanuel was founded in 1973 in Makak in the Centre Province by Mother Marie, one of the first female Pastors of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon. In 1975 she moved the community to the present site at Agyati in Bafut. It has 10 finally consecrated Sisters, four in simple vows and a handful of others in formation. The Sisters are trained in strong collaboration with the sister Institutes of the Catholic Church. They say that one of their charisms is ecumenism. The Sisterhood Emmanuel is the only Presbyterian Monastery in Cameroon.

In 1999 an independent Protestant order was founded named The Knights of Prayer Monastic Order. The community maintains several monks in its Portland, Oregon, cloister and has an international network of associated lay people. It is not affiliated with any particular congregation.

In February 2001, the United Methodist Church organized the Saint Brigid of Kildare Monastery. It is a Methodist-Benedictine residential double monastery in Collegeville, Minnesota.

### **Ecumenical Expressions**

Christian monasticism is experiencing renewal in the form of several new foundations with an 'inter-Christian' vision for their respective communities. In 1944 Roger Schütz, a pastor of the Swiss Reformed Church, founded a small religious brotherhood in France which became known as the Taizé Community. Although he was partly inspired by the hope of reviving monasticism in the Protestant tradition, the brotherhood was interdenominational, accepting Roman Catholic brothers, and is thus an ecumenical rather than a specifically Protestant community.

The Order of Ecumenical Franciscans is a religious order of men and women devoted to following the examples of Saint Francis of Assisi and Saint Clare of Assisi in their life and understanding of the Christian gospel: sharing a love for creation and those who have been marginalized. It includes members of many different denominations, including Roman Catholics, Anglicans, and a range of Protestant traditions. The Order understands its charism to include not only

ecumenical efforts and the traditional emphases of the Franciscans in general, but also to help to develop relationships between the various Franciscan orders.

Additional expressions of ecumenical monasticism can be seen in the Bose Monastic Community and communities of the New Monasticism movement arising from Protestant Evangelicalism.

Today there are countless monasteries around the world, both in the Church of Rome and in other (mainly the Orthodox and Protestant) Christian sects. For example, in the Anglican communion, (that is to say the Church of England, the Episcopal churches of the United States, Scotland and other forms of Anglicanism) there is a healthy number of monastic houses. The majority of Anglican/Episcopal monastic orders are inhabited by women, although there are some fairly large men's communities, as well as a few coed communities. There are also many who have taken upon themselves solitary monastic vows, or who have adopted the way of life known as "New Monasticism" which is both more lenient and inclusive in its many and varied expressions.