

NAABOD Presentations, for Fall 2011 *Benedictine Oblate* newsletter

## GUEST SPEAKERS DISCUSS “EMBRACING CREATION WITH REVERENCE AND HOSPITALITY: LISTENING TO THE SCRIPTURE AND THE RULE SPEAK”

During the conference, three lectures concerning the stewardship of the land and sustainability and how they relate to Benedictine spirituality were presented. They were well received and all presenters gave practical advice for action in light of the conference theme.

Sr. KATHRYN (Kathy) HUBER, OSB, a member of the spiritual ministry team, at the Monastery of the Immaculate Conception, Ferdinand, IN pointed out that using adult education learning theory, “each of us know about the topic from our experiences” and that our personal experiences have shaped our understanding of the issue. She related her childhood experiences and her understanding of the interrelationship of nature and God. Sr. Kathy was brought up on a “fruit and vegetable truck farm.” The whole family contributed to, and received, from this farm. Nature was sacred because the family lived close to it.

She learned that the laws that govern life on earth are the basis of the whole universe. “All matter in the universe is interconnected and we are all part of a vast web.... God is present in the universe and in energy and the two most important forms of energy are light and thought.”

Christian and Benedictine tradition along with scripture, mystics and the Holy *Rule* abound with references to nature. Judeo-Christian scripture, suggests that all created life is a gift. This is found in Genesis and Psalm 104, in particular. References to the seasons, sowing and harvesting, can be found in these and many other biblical readings.

Mystics are another source of scarceness of nature. Mystics celebrate the interrelation of cycles and life. Hildegard of Bingen suggests that for those who live in Christ, all creation is God’s work including the earth.

“Benedictine spirituality is the intense and intentional living of Christian spirituality.” The *Rule* is the basis of this spirituality. Sr. Kathy noted that “a casual read of the *Rule* does not discuss stewardship of nature or the environment. However, stewardship is woven throughout the *Rule*. Reverence of creation along with cycles of seasons permeates the work. The *Rule* suggests that all resources, such as garden tools, must be wisely used in monastic work. A good *cellarer* discussed in the *Rule* is an example of stewardship of resources. Since all life is interconnected, we must become stewards of the land and our resources.

KYLE KRAMER runs the Lay Degree Program at Saint Meinrad Archabbey. He also lives on, and maintains, a small organic or “green farm” and “has his foot in both the

world of Benedictine spirituality and farming.” He wrote, *A Time to Plant: Lessons of Work, Prayer and Dirt*.

Kyle pointed out that sustainability and spirituality are interrelated. They comprise “a way of living that enables life for all creatures now and in the future” Four aspects of sustainability include:

- Renewable - materials can be renewed and recycled.
- Regenerativity - the earth changes, improves and repairs itself
- Resilience - when disasters happen, a sustainable ecosystem will bounce back
- Community - an ecosystem that is sustainable is a living system of many parts each affecting the other.

Six key themes from Benedictine spirituality also show the interrelationship of sustainability and spirituality.

Benedictines make a vow of *stability* to stay in one monastic community for a lifetime. We can make a commitment to stay in one place and to improve our land. The vow of *Obedience* is putting a community’s needs first and then making responsible lifestyle choices. The vow of *poverty* does not mean not owning anything. “Our land is really not our land, it is on loan to us... we must deliver it in better condition to the next generation. We need to have a *balance* between contemplation and action. *Hospitality* is welcoming nature and people into our home. *Conversion* takes the long view. It takes a long time to change things, both in society and the earth.

Benedictine communities can become an “arc” which can preserve what we are forgetting as a society. Benedictine communities did this after the fall of the Roman Empire. However, “the doors would be open and inviting, not closed, and the ideas would be shared which includes the interrelationship of sustainability, spirituality and hospitality.”

SR. SHEILA MARIE FITZPATRICK, OSB, Director of Facilities for Benedict Inn Retreat and Conference Center and a member of Our Lady of Grace Monastery in Beech Grove, Indiana pointed out that we have an “intimate relationship with creation - we eat, breathe, and exist – we are creation. We are influenced by, and influence creation, and our actions can affect the whole planet.” We influence creation by managing grounds and properties to bring beauty to the world. We also influence nature and creation by ways in which we are not aware such as a disturbance in the earth’s magnetic field on 9/11.

Creation and nature themes are found from antiquity. The ancient Hebrews lived close to the earth. They respected the power of Creation and the power of God’s work in Creation. This is found in Psalms 38, 104, Book of Job, story of Noah, the Canticle of Daniel and other writings. Jesus also used parables with nature themes.

Environmentalist, Rene Dubos, noted that St. Benedict, “managed the land in a way to sustain their livelihood, yet had an ethical approach to creation.” Hildegard of Bingen exclaimed, “we are dressed in the scaffold of creation, in *seeing* to recognize the world;

in *hearing* to understand; in *smelling* to discern; in *tasting* to nurture; in *touching* to govern.” We must use these senses that God has given us to co-create with the world. In this way “humankind comes to know God, for God is the author of all creation.” We need to begin with our relationship with God and live out of our Benedictine values. It is what we are called to as Christians and as Benedictines. “We can begin our action for creation with a contemplative heart.”

All the speakers had concrete actions we could undertake for sustainability and stewardship of nature and their interrelationship with spirituality based upon the *Rule* – in other words becoming good *cellarers* of the world. These actions included such activities as recycling wastes, turning lights off when a room is not in use, opening windows for ventilation and to let nature in, rain gardens, permeable pavement, refraining from using disposable and plastic items, if physically able walking up stairs rather than taking the elevator, planting trees and crops that fit the local environment, planting a backyard/urban garden, or other initiatives.

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