

Advent and Christmas Greetings from



The Monks AT Holy Cross Priory

Looking in New Directions

In celebrating this 40th year of the Order's residence in Canada, Holy Cross Priory has begun a Strategic Planning Initiative with the help of an Advisory Committee composed of six clerical and lay Canadians plus the OHC brothers. We are trying to discern God's call to us in this place and at this time. To help in that process, we have engaged *M & M International*, a consulting firm with expertise in faith-based organizations, to facilitate our efforts to develop a preliminary 5 to 10 year plan for our continuing ministry here.

We believe that this planning process will enable us to clarify our monastic witness here in Canada, and to do that we need your help. We are looking for ways and resources to initiate new ministries within and beyond the Anglican Church of Canada and the Diocese of Toronto. Some of the possibilities include:

- more communication within the Diocese and the larger Canadian Church,
- additional housing space for novices and guests, as well as,
- new and expanded ministries to parishes, their staff, and the wider community.

Your prayers and donations are much appreciated as we live "into" Christmas present and try to discern God's plan for us all in Christmases yet to come.

DAVID BRYAN HOOPES, OHC

Recharging: a Personal Reflection

It was with excitement—and some degree of apprehension—that I made arrangements for my first stay at Holy Cross Priory. I knew I needed to be there; ministry had become marked either by times of intense concentration and demands on my time and energies, or times of ugly boredom in which I felt I was only filling in time.

I was right; I needed to be there.

It was not only the warmth of the welcome that I received, but the invitation to step into a rhythm of life that is ancient in its formation, and that has been an environment for spiritual growth and wellbeing for so many through the years—growth that I so desperately needed, and for which I so deeply longed.

I only stayed a few days—long enough to walk the area surrounding the Priory; long enough to experience silence and wonder; long enough to once again connect with the Source of our being through the Divine Office. I leave refreshed and renewed to once again enter into the ministry I love but often find so draining and difficult. I hope to stay longer next time.

THE REV. BRADLEY FORD, A/OHC
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST



"By a bow of the head, or by a complete prostration of the body, Christ is to be adored [in guests] because he is indeed welcomed in them."

— Rule of Benedict 53.7

Please join us for

AN ADVENT QUIET DAY

on Saturday, December 14, 2013

from 9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

at

St. Martin's in the Fields

151 Glenlake Ave.

(one block north of Bloor and Keele)

Theme: *An Advent of the Heart:
Living Advent as a Way of Life*

Leader: **THE REV. LISA WANG**

Associate priest, St. James Cathedral, Toronto
and Chapel Theologian, Trinity College

(Cost: \$10.00, lunch provided)

Register c/o St. Martin's 416-767-7491
or phobson@stmartininthefields.ca

(Jointly sponsored by OHC, St. Martin's, & St. John's, West Toronto)

Ministry and Monk



What a delight to work with a monk. When Br. Randy was appointed to work at St. Hilary's, Cooks-ville, in the Diocese of Toronto as Assistant Curate, we were curious and intrigued. The parish has had a long connection with OHC, and this seemed like

a good fit. It was a good fit. Br. Randy has brought to us the steady and loving presence of God which is born out of a commitment in his life profession to be saturated in a life of prayer.

The fruit of Br. Randy's prayer life is manifest in his preaching, teaching, and engagement in pastoral moments. Working with a member of a religious community has reminded me, and all of us, that our ministry, activities, programs, desires, and life is grounded in, worked out, and processed through an ongoing encounter with God through prayer. Whether we feel like it or not; whether it's working or not; Br. Randy has reminded us that we are constantly being called back to primarily encounter God in our personal and corporate life of prayer. This is one of the gifts that working with a member of the OHC has brought to us.

As Br. Randy has shared his life with us, worked with us, and prayed with us, we are reminded that life is a journey. On that journey God is always looking for ways to accompany us and call us into the fellowship of the Holy Trinity; into new ways of being ourselves; and into new ways of being in relationship with one another. This is what working with a monk has reminded us. Thank you, Br. Randy, for sharing your life of prayer.

THE REV'D PAUL J. WALKER, INCUMBENT OF ST. HILARY'S

Shortly after this article was written, Br. Randy was ordained at St. Hilary's as a priest in God's Holy Catholic Church (see the picture on the preceding page)



Br. Leonard's Ghanaian Christmas

[Br. Leonard will be teaching at the Anglican Seminary in Cape Coast, Ghana until May. He will be there for Christmas, and so wanted to share his Ghanaian Christmas with us.]



Christmas in Ghana is not only a Christian Family Holiday and Festivities but that of the whole nation, and for that matter Christians, Moslems and people of the African Traditional Faith. Almost everyone in a community is affected. It is celebrated particularly for children. It is a season in which children

are the focus of shopping. They get the best clothes, shoes and the best food and meat.

In rural areas young male children (9-14) make drums from hides and build special booths of palm branches (Festival of Booths?) where they congregate and learn songs for their Christmas outing. No female is allowed in the booth!

December 22-24 are the peak days for shopping in the big cities and towns for the rural folks. On the 24th night most churches are packed to welcome the "New Born Child King". At midnight church bells are tolled and fireworks are set of to signify the Birth of the Saviour.

After the church service children who had made drums go from house to house in the community with songs soliciting for Christmas gifts from the household. Those who offer gifts are blessed and those who do not are cursed! The 25th is reserved for close family relatives who gather to welcome those of their members who have come from afar with songs dancing and jubilation.

On December 26th, fierce masqueraders are set loose in the cities and children ran and hide under beds or behind the parents. In rural areas there are all kinds of games competition for the youths who have returned from the cities to raise funds for development and is crowned with a dance to select the Christmas Beauty Queen. Merry Christmas!

LEONARD KOFI ABBAH, OHC

[As this article goes to press we have word of Leonard's safe arrival in Ghana]

The Other Christmas "Gospel"

Municipalities and other public institutions are frequently hard pressed to decide what, if any, allusions they may make to the traditional Christmas Gospel; even some retailers try to keep their Christ-



mas carols generic (fortunately, few people seem to realize that "noel" means "gospel"). But there is another "gospel" read at Christmas that seems immune to these qualms—one which, (almost) constitutes a kind of secular "gospel"; this is Charles Dickens' Christmas ghost story, *A Christmas Carol* (1843). People who wouldn't think of opening a New Testament will read Dickens' story every year. Dickens wrote several Christmas stories, but this is the one that has become "gospel".

A Gospel is by definition "good news"; the real question here is what makes *this* story Good News? Not the traditional story—it's barely mentioned. Rather, it seems to lie in the counterpoint between Scrooge's "Bah! Humbug!" and Tiny Tim's "God bless Us, Every One!" For in the end, though Scrooge did go to Church, his real moment of joy came when he realized that it was still Christmas after all; he hadn't missed it! And what was so special about that? His nephew put it well: "Christmas", he said, was "the only time...in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they really were fellow-passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys." Scrooge's "Bah! Humbug!" was the opposite all of that—he still had a chance!

The implication, of course, is that he and we should open our shut-up hearts all the time; and so we should. But a little reflection reveals that doing so in practice is not so simple. In an urban society, we *have* to deal with many of the people we meet functionally—in terms of what they do rather than who they are. To do anything else would bring society to a screeching halt. But function is one thing, dehumanization is another. The sheer necessity of treating people functionally makes it all too easy to start treating them as things. That is one of the reasons why it is understandable but unfortunate that we often do not read all of *A Christmas Carol*. For it contains a number of episodes that are not easily dramatized and hence often omitted.

All three have a common theme, and they are set respectively in a miner's cottage, a lighthouse, and ship at sea. In each case people in very unpromising situations are shown taking one another seriously as human beings while "humming a Christmas tune or thinking a Christmas thought". It is not particularly dramatic and it is (as Dickens tells it) a bit sentimental, but it is also indicates why *A Christmas Carol* is Gospel: it shows everyone in the story *but* Scrooge (until the very end) taking others seriously as people. And *that* is "good news".

But why, then, is it so hard for so many to hear the New Testament story as *gospel*? It is partly because it has been labeled "religious". For many people the infernal "philological experts" imagined by C. S. Lewis have made anything labeled "religious" suspect (sometimes with good reason). Likewise, though Scrooge and Tiny Tim are portrayed in a by-gone historical context, it is close enough to our own to be imaginable—the New Testament often is not. Indeed, it all too easily becomes something *only* imagined—a children's story rather than an event. Except for one thing; *this* is the story that makes Dickens' story a "gospel": BECAUSE IT REALLY HAPPENED! Twenty centuries ago in an odd time, in an odd place, God said *You* (no matter who you are) are taken seriously as a person—with all warts—by the Maker of all things. God the Son became just as human as you are. Dickens' "gospel" is good news indeed (and thank God for it!), but it is words on a page. It is Good News because the WORD WAS MADE FLESH. Try to proclaim that Good News this Christmas, and—"May God bless us every one!"

RICHARD PAUL VAGGIONE, OHC



And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

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