

Stability: Beacon of Hope

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Promise of Stability

In Chapter 58 of his sixth century Rule, St. Benedict wrote, “Do not grant newcomers to monastic life an easy entry, but, as the Apostle says, *Test the spirits to see if they are from God* (1 Jn. 4:1).” Only after being clearly tested and told of the difficulties that lead one to God, should a novice promise perseverance in stability, conversion of life and obedience.

Stability is rooted in God’s unchanging fidelity. It is faith in God’s eternal enduring fidelity that empowers Benedictines to accept whatever adverse circumstances may come their way.

The concluding rite of their monastic profession reflects this. Then the newly professed chants the *Suscipe* three times and the community standing with her responds with the same verse: “Sustain me O Lord as you have promised that I may live, disappoint me not in my hope.” Now this is her home until death. Here together with her monastic community she journeys to God in hope during good times as well as trying ones.

Hope in Times of Adversity

Beginning around the year 2009 my community worked with a facilitator for several months in our initial future planning process. A key question we faced was: Did we have a future together? Would we remain as a Benedictine community? Become non-canonical? Transfer to other Benedictine monasteries?

Once we decided to stay together as a canonical Benedictine community, as part of the Federation of St. Gertrude, and to age in place, we could make other long-range decisions. This was a difficult time for all of us, but in our hearts, we placed our hope in God and he continues to see us through.

After this, the next decision, which we made, was to explore an Abbeyfield model, (see: www.abbeyfield.ca for more information). This was providential because Abbeyfield homes provide affordable board and lodging for seniors who want a sense of community while maintaining their own independence. After much prayer and discernment, we decided to approach Abbeyfield Canada to see if we were a viable fit. We had the land and the building. Were they willing to admit us first as a provisional and eventually as a full-fledged Abbeyfield house?

Meanwhile, we worked with Jack Anderson, our eco-friendly architect, to renovate the monastery in an appropriate manner should we finalize our decision to become an Abbeyfield house. Since the monastery consisted of two separate houses, we joined the houses together. This joining together made it safer in winter ice and snow to move from one to the other inside rather than going outside. Then we remodelled the facility so that each person would have a self-contained suite of bedroom, sitting room and a handicapped equipped bathroom as well as a door to the outside.

Jack held an open forum of oblates, associates and friends of the community to glean creative ideas for kitchen, dining room and a live-in-manager’s suite. He also suggested

heating the building with water and including a solarium for growing vegetables year-round. With renovations completed, we continue to move forward.

Essential Work Remaining

First, we must complete the documents that will allow us to become a provisional Abbeyfield house in anticipation of becoming a certified part of Abbeyfield Canada. Why Abbeyfield? It embodies important values that Benedictines hold such as communal living and care for the elderly. Our hope is that these values will be continued in Abbeyfield St. Benedict House, Nanaimo, B.C. when all of us have passed on.

Next, we must write constitutions and bylaws so that an Abbeyfield society may be established and charitable status applied for. In order to safeguard the interests of the Benedictine community, proper legal documentation will have to be drawn up. With all of this happening, the bylaws and constitutions of the Benedictine Sisters of Nanaimo will also need to be updated.

Stability and Eternal Hope

In all of this, we have the active support and encouragement of our Federation and Abbeyfield Canada. It seems like an endless task but throughout we are sustained by the hope that God is with us and we are doing his work. "How awe-inspiring this place is! This is nothing less than the abode of God, and this is the gate of heaven!" (Gen. 28:17).

Discussion Questions:

What challenges have you encountered in the recent past?

Did your community also experience these challenges?

When has your community felt hopeful after experiencing adversity? How and when did hope occur?

Is the place where you and your community live really a house of God, the gate of heaven? Describe how this is so or not so.