

Evolving into Newness

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Keynote speaker Elena Lasida at the CRC's General Assembly in 2018 put great emphasis on the prefix "inter". She spoke of interdependence, interculturality, inter-relationships, intercommunion as well as intergenerational. I would like to address the inter-relationship between Nanaimo Benedictines and their Oblates.

Oblates are men and women who attach themselves to a Benedictine monastic community so as to live their Christian lives more deeply. By prayer and work they manifest the presence of Christ in our contemporary world. Through their oblation, that is, "their self-offering" they live the word of God according to Benedict's Rule in their own churches, homes and workplaces. Some Oblates have become Associates, that is, they live in closer proximity to the monastery in order to pray with the community, share monthly meals and study of the Rule and spirituality.

Passing On the Spirit of St. Benedict

Nanaimo's Benedictines are only seven vowed members; they are in a state of active transformation, passing from death to eternal life. While the vowed monastic community will be decreasing numerically, their Oblates are flourishing being seventeen, six of whom are also Associates.

In the past, the Oblate team planned six yearly retreat days. During one session, Oblates met in small groups and shared how their individual lives had been enriched by following the spirit of St. Benedict. Feedback on this was positive. It was agreed Oblates would meet four times a year in their geographical area. A format, structure and content was provided.

Subsequently the prioress and a team member met with each group. Then one person from each group was chosen to act as a facilitator. These met for two days of training in listening skills and small group leadership.

New Life Emerges

When Oblates met in their own homes, questions arose about inviting non-Oblates to join them. The team devised a process for their inclusion. Thus, new life has begun to emerge here. Being with others, communicating and intermingling has opened many to respond to God revealed in the lives of their brothers and sisters. Put simply, here is an open system drawing participants into something new, transformative.

It reminds me of a Lonergan Workshop I attended several years ago at Boston College. During a small group sharing session, I sat next to a nuclear physicist from Massachusetts Institute of Technology. She spoke of her growth in faith in terms of her work—watching the interactions of matter and energy.

Conditions being exactly right under her nuclear powered microscope, where at first nothing was visible suddenly life sprang into being. As soon as it did, immediately it united

with other newly appearing life forms. She spoke of the unity and oneness of life permeated by the Divine Presence. Is this not how the Spirit of God draws all created beings into unity and oneness, communion? This is what is happening between Benedictines and their Oblates and then radiates into the larger faith community.

Illia Delio, OSF says, "We can get weighed down by what seems to be aging and dying but I am encouraging us to stretch our vision because we are living in an expanding universe—and it is quite exciting." (LCWR Occasional Papers—Summer 2012, p. 4)

The Best Is Yet to Come

While small geographical groups of Oblates embrace everything from inter-relationships to intercommunion between vowed Benedictines and themselves, this relationship is a living gift to the present-day church. Being wholly open, ministering to one another, being prayerful and contemplative; this evolving relationship is close to the grassroots. Together they hear and heed the cry of the poor in today's world. May they be blessed as the gospel comes to life within them—brightening the way to the future and its ultimate fullness, eternal life.

Discussion Questions

1. Have you felt the transforming energy of the Spirit as your community strives for a deeper relationship with your non-vowed members or friends? Explain how.
2. What more can you do to deepen this relationship?