

New Monasticism and the Parish:
An Examination of the Intersection of Intentional Christian Communities
and Congregations

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	i
Introduction	3
Chapter 1: The Roots of New Monasticism	15
Chapter 2: The Rise of New Monasticism	39
Chapter 3: The Reality of New Monasticism	49
Conclusion	92
Bibliography	107

INTRODUCTION

*“Innumerable times a whole Christian community has broken down because it had sprung up from a wish dream...By sheer grace, God will not permit us to live even for a brief period in a dream.”*¹ (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

In the early 1970s, the Rev. John Smith² was called as rector of a small Episcopal parish in coastal Rhode Island, St. Peter’s by-the-Sea.³ St. Peter’s was a fairly typical mainline church at that time, with a handsome English-gothic building and pipe organ fostering a traditional worship and congregational life. The surrounding population consisted largely of middle class families, and the economy still relied heavily on the fishing industry. Decades later, after the fishing industry disappeared, this area would undergo a transition to a more upper-middle class populace, but members of St. Peter’s in this era were still, by-and-large, working class, plainspoken “Swamp Yankees.”

Fr. Smith had a personal interest in the charismatic movement that swept through American Christianity in the 1960s. He had been deeply formed by the Church of the Redeemer in Houston, which functioned as a hub for the charismatic movement within the Episcopal Church in that era, and he relocated to Rhode Island to help the movement’s efforts to expand. In 1971 he was called as Rector of St. Peter’s and began introducing some of the hallmarks of the charismatic movement to the life of the church, starting with changes to the worship customs, and soon extending to the formation of “households.” The idea behind these households flowed from the popularity of communal

¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957), 27.

² The name of the Rector has been changed. All other names in the Introduction are accurate and included with permission.

³ For the information about this period in the history of St. Peter’s I am indebted to four parishioners who were members then: David Binns, David and Jan Terry, and David Teschner, who is now an Episcopal priest. Their written narratives about the households provided me with a much clearer picture of how they began, operated, and ultimately ended.

living in the decade preceding, much of which was not necessarily rooted in religious practice or tradition. The “household” movement popularized first at Redeemer and then practiced at churches like St. Peter’s was enormously attractive to a young generation that sought deeper, more meaningful, and committed lives. One of the household members, David Terry, describes the first time he witnessed one of the households, where he saw “lives that were visibly transformed by...a meaningful church community experience similar to the life of the early church as described in the Acts of the Apostles.”⁴ Other participants described wanting to go further in their spiritual life than standard, traditional worship practices allowed, and to “feel” more connected to God as much during the week as on Sundays. Intentional communal living with fellow Christians seemed to them a natural way to address their spiritual hunger.

The basic pattern of the households at St. Peter’s consisted of a married couple with young children who owned a home and who welcomed several single men or women, usually in young adulthood, to live with them. One of the households was formed in the former rectory adjacent to the church, and several more existed within a few miles of the church in the surrounding neighborhood. Fr. Smith and his wife led one household, and another consisted entirely of a transplanted household of six parishioners from Church of the Redeemer in Houston. At first the single residents came mostly from the nearby University of Rhode Island, though word-of-mouth quickly contributed to the addition of several more residents from around New England. David Terry reminisces,

Some were students or former students from local and other colleges.
Others were recent college graduates, and some were trades people.
Several people learned about the St. Peter’s community through contacts
with community members and some through the network of prayer

⁴ David Terry, email message to author, January 2, 2016.

meetings and charismatic communities in Rhode Island and nearby Connecticut. A few were even hitchhikers picked up by community members.⁵

At its height, there were six households, with most accommodating about ten residents and one being exclusively for single people. An appointed group of five men, led by the Rector, served as “elders” for the church and the households. They made assignments of individuals to specific households, functioned as arbiters in disputes, and provided overall leadership to the effort. Notably, the Vestry of St. Peter’s lacked formal authority or involvement, although they eventually became deeply involved, as will be seen.

Households were communal, in the sense that all things were held in common, but not explicitly monastic. There was no formalized Rule of Life, and the homeowners, who functioned as household leaders, had much leeway to make decisions and guide day-to-day life. “The guiding principle was obedience to the Lord,” reflects former household resident David Teschner,⁶ and beyond that simple principle there were no written rules. This spirit of flexibility and openness was grounded in the charismatic principles of the leadership, with its focus on the free movement of the Holy Spirit. As a result, some households created daily Bible study at mealtimes, while some gathered for lengthy, weekly prayer meetings. Some incorporated music, owing to the gifts of the residents, while others did not. Some households allotted all authority to the owners of the house to make decisions regarding chores, meals, and finances, though one house was eventually established exclusively for single people who had bristled at not being more equal participants in decision-making.

⁵ Terry, email message, 2016.

⁶ David Teschner, email message to author, December 8, 2015.

Importantly, all residents were a part of St. Peter's, and this served as the strongest unifying element to the households. David Terry reflects,

These were not stand-alone communities or cells but were an integral part of the ministry at St. Peter's. Members of households taught Sunday School, conducted youth group activities, and ran church summer day camp programs. Some household members were engaged in pastoral care ministries and conducted visits to the sick and dying.⁷

Householders were expected to attend worship on Friday nights and Sunday mornings. They pledged sacrificially, leading to a substantial boost in the church's finances, and a few of them were elected to the Vestry. This particular development was intended to deepen the connections between the households and the broader congregation, but it had the unintended effect of growing a sense of division within the church. There were those within the wider congregation who were not enthusiastic about the influx of new people, and resisted the stylistic changes in worship and spiritual practice. Meanwhile, there were some within the households who viewed themselves and their fellow residents as being truer, more complete Christians than the non-household members of St. Peter's. "We saw ourselves as being the true church and...suffered from 'spiritual pride' in regard to the larger church," David Teschner remembers.⁸ So it was that even as householders worked harder to support the ministry life of St. Peter's, others felt that their church was being "taken away" from them. Perhaps inevitably, the Vestry became a place where those lines were drawn, and divisions between householders and non-householders expressed in voting and representation. The Rector's support of the households ensured their presence, but resentment and mistrust simmered below the surface.

⁷ Terry, email message, 2016.

⁸ Teschner, email message, 2015.

Eventually three factors led to the rapid decline and dissolution of the experiment with households at St. Peter's. First, personal decisions by household members led to a few of the houses being closed. For example, a number of young adult residents decided to move out owing to job or educational relocation, a desire for more independence, as a result of getting married, or for some, simply a feeling that their spiritual needs were not being met. Likewise, a few of the homeowners also chose to end their sponsorship of households when they had additional children or tired of having several extra people in their home. The lure of "normal living" was compelling and eventually irresistible to many.

Second, the community became burdened by a lack of mission beyond the stability and spiritual lives of its own members. David Binns, who arrived at St. Peter's late in the household era, writes, "St. Peter's community died of a lack of mission. A lack of focus beyond ourselves and our faith. In other words a universal, 'Why are we doing this?' arose across the board, and the answer seemed to come from God: *'I don't know.'*"⁹ Combined with a lack of core, guiding principles or rules, the absence of a clear mission meant that residents lacked structure or purpose. Entropy set in. When reflecting on lessons learned from the experience, David Terry suggests, "The mission or objective should be specifically spelled out. Unless the group is creating a monastic order or a contemplative prayer community, the household should have a specific outreach mission."¹⁰

⁹ David Binns, email message to author, November 22, 2015.

¹⁰ Terry, email message, 2016.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, accusations of sexual impropriety by the rector, Fr. Smith, greatly damaged trust within the households. David Teschner remembers,

After the Rector was caught and our spiritual leader was found out to be doing things that were clearly not allowed, everyone lost confidence in him and the whole project collapsed. Most of us didn't know the details except that something had gone horribly wrong. He stayed for two more years as nearly all the single people left and the households ceased to exist.¹¹

The effect of such accusations on congregations, whether confirmed or not, is well documented,¹² and were expressed in the life of St. Peter's over the subsequent two decades. The Vestry became further factionalized, as some knew the details of the accusation, while others only heard rumors and innuendo. Eventually Fr. Smith resigned, but not before the church began to crumble. In addition to the closure of all of the households, dozens of families left St. Peter's in the succeeding few years, such that the church dwindled to a mere shadow of its former existence. Attendance and giving dried up, and St. Peter's struggled to maintain operation. It reverted to mission status just a few years after, and did not attain parish status again in its diocese until the mid-1990s.

I was called as Rector of St. Peter's in 2006, with no foreknowledge of this chapter in the history of the church. No information about it was presented in the parish profile, and no members of the search committee spoke about this aspect of the church's history in our conversations together. This likely was not an intentionally malicious omission, as no former household residents remained in the church at the time of my call

¹¹ Teschner, email message, 2015.

¹² See Beth Ann Gaede, editor, *When a Congregation Is Betrayed: Responding to Clergy Misconduct* (Lanham, MA: Alban Institute, 2005); Nancy Myer Hopkins and Mark Laaser, editors, *Resorting the Soul of a Church* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1995); John Thorburn and Rob Baker, editors, *Clergy Sexual Misconduct: A Systems Approach to Prevention, Intervention, and Oversight* (Carefree, AZ: Gentle Path Press, 2011).

as rector, and the small handful of remaining parishioners who had been members during that era did not volunteer any information about their experiences. It was not until I had served the church for over a year that a few stories began to trickle out, and I slowly became aware of this important period in St. Peter's history. At first, it helped my understanding of the dynamics of the church, and at least partly explained my perception of a persistent distrust of my pastoral leadership and authority. The focus of this project is not related to family systems' theory, or the writing of Edwin Friedman or Murray Bowen. However, from a family systems' perspective the experiment with households, and more particularly, the way it ended, left a lasting legacy in the church's "system."¹³ I inherited a church that was suspicious of its rectors, with good reason.

Beyond the implications for my pastoral leadership of the parish, learning the story of the households connected with my personal interest in the new monastic movement. I have long been interested in intentional Christian communities, which are also commonly referred to as "new monastic" communities. I am a member of the Fellowship of St. John (an oblate of the Society of St. John the Evangelist in Massachusetts), and I helped establish an Episcopal Service Corps house in Rhode Island during my time there. I have visited many intentional communities around the country, and read widely on the subject, even before beginning work on this project.

Yet the experience at St. Peter's offered more than another example of intentional community; it crystallized the delicate and complicated nature of the intersection of intentional communities and traditional congregations. The experiment with households at St. Peter's is a striking, if tragic, example of this intersection. Members of the

¹³ See Edwin Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Churches and Synagogues* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2011).

households were members of the parish church, and sought to regularly impact its life and ministry in positive ways. The residents' spiritual and common lives were largely grounded in the life of the households, yet they chose to remain formally connected to a church that was larger and broader than simply a conglomeration of the households. The nature of that relationship – how intentional Christian communities and congregations coexist – is the focus of this project.

In the first chapter, “The Roots of New Monasticism,” I will review three 20th century communities that serve as foundations of the current movement, and whose experiences inform my consideration of new monasticism's intersection with congregational life. This history begins with Finkenwalde, Germany, where Dietrich Bonhoeffer briefly led a seminary of the Confessing Church that served as a sort of prototype community for the subsequent new monastic movement. Finkenwalde is the genesis of a definitive era,¹⁴ and despite its brief existence served as a creative inspiration for dozens upon dozens of others, including contemporaries such as George MacLeod in Iona, Scotland, and Roger Schütz at Taizé, France, each of which will also be considered in this chapter.

The examination of the communities of Finkenwalde, Iona, and Taizé will highlight their status as early adopters of the vision of new monasticism, but it will also explore the desire of these communities to serve as far more than cloistered centers of spiritual well-being for residents. To varying degrees, each of these three ancestors of the contemporary new monastic movement, two of which are still very much in existence today, anticipated and sought out relationship with the wider church. They were

¹⁴ Carl Brook, *Bonhoeffer and the New Monasticism: The First Community* (Saarbrücken, Germany: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2011), 2.

reinterpretations of ancient monastic patterns and practices, and one of the ways they embodied a fresh expression of traditional monasticism was to intentionally interact with, inform, and renew the life of the broader church. While none were formally in relationship with traditional congregations, nevertheless, their founders seemed to anticipate the development of such relationships in the way they created, wrote about, and spoke of their communities. Therefore, their stories inform the scope and aims of this project and provide helpful background to new, contemporary experiments where congregations and communities are much more explicitly connected.

After exploring those three foundational examples, in the second chapter, “The Rise of New Monasticism,” the project will pivot to an examination of the contemporary surge in popularity of intentional Christian communities. In the past 15-20 years, many communities have been planted around the country that seek to build upon the wisdom and experiences of Bonhoeffer at Finkenwalde, and offer a new generation of Christians an opportunity to cultivate deeper faith within a particularly intentional context. This movement has been well chronicled, and a number of its leaders have written articles and books reflecting on their experiences and offering insight into what they understand their communities to be about. Particular attention will be given to the leaders associated with a 2004 gathering of new monasticism, including Jonathan R. Wilson, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, and Shane Claiborne, whose writing and personal witness has made them into spokespeople for the modern movement. That gathering produced a document summarizing what they believe to be the “12 marks of a new monasticism,” which articulate the hallmarks of these contemporary communities, including the nature of the relationship with the wider, historic Church.

In the third chapter, “The Reality of New Monasticism,” I will examine three contemporary expressions of intentional Christian community.

- *Community of Jesus* (Cape Cod, Massachusetts) – an ecumenical Benedictine community of monks, nuns, and vowed “household members” including individuals and married couples. Founded in the late 1960s, today the community includes roughly 275 people, including many children.
- *77 Wachusett* (Boston, Massachusetts) – an intentional Christian community created by members of The Crossing, an emergent Episcopal church in Boston. The house currently hosts six residents.
- *Epworth Project* (Dallas, Texas) – a collection of eight intentional Christian household communities around Dallas. The founders of Epworth are United Methodist Church (UMC) elders, and several of the houses are yoked to UMC churches.

Each of these three communities is quite distinct from the others in terms of setting, church affiliation, structure, and governance. Yet the witness of each contributes to a broader understanding of how churches and intentional communities coexist, and how they can (or could) organize their lives in ways that sustainably inform and inspire each other. For example, the Community of Jesus was founded by members of a local Episcopal church in the 1960s, but soon thereafter the community chose to become ecclesiastically independent. Yet today, several local neighbors of the community who are not vowed members choose to participate and support the life of the community, and it functions as their local church. Meanwhile, residents of *77 Wachusett*, while comprised exclusively of members of a mission church of the Diocese of Massachusetts called The

Crossing, have intentionally created a rule and manner of life that distinguishes the two entities in an effort to preserve autonomy and independence; and the communities of the Epworth Project are organized with a formally articulated, multi-faceted relationship to their churches next door. The intricacies and repercussions of these differing relationships with the churches of their founding will be further explored in later sections.

The final chapter will address the underlying questions regarding whether and how relationships between intentional communities and congregations can exist in a sustainable and mutually enriching way. In the case of St. Peter's, the lifespan of the households was barely five years, but the goal of nearly all modern communities planted near, by, or with congregations is to endure far longer. But how? Large and important questions exist whenever this relationship is established, questions that do not exist when a community or a church exist independently of one another. For example:

- How do the two entities align their mission?
- Which should come first? Should the community be born out of the congregation, or the congregation born out of the community? Does the ordering of the origins of each even matter?
- How do members of the community participate in the life of the church, and vice versa? Are the authority structures for each connected, and if so, how do they overlap with each other?
- How can the community be prevented from becoming a “clique” or “faction” of the church, as occurred at St. Peter's when some household members believed themselves to be the “true church,” and instead serve as a type of leaven for the broader congregation's life, mission, and ministry?

- How do the church and community arrange their finances? How much does the church support the community?

These and other questions are extremely important to the sustainability of such a relationship. In this final section, I will offer reflections on these questions that grow out of the longer history of the movement and are grounded in the lived experience of modern communities. I will draw upon the writing of Bonhoeffer himself, who did his own reflecting on the nature of Christian community in *Life Together*, as well as numerous modern writers who are also critically engaging the existence and future of new monasticism, including how new monastic communities interact with the broader church. This concluding section will focus on the lessons and wisdom I have gleaned from the case studies, extensive reading on the subject, and personal reflection, though it comes with the full awareness of the limits of my knowledge: I have not lived this experience myself. I have no personal history of living in a new monastic community, be it healthy or not, and thus all my commentary and analysis is from the perspective of an admiring, curious outsider. Nevertheless, from that critical distance, I will offer my own voice to the broader conversation and suggest answers to the questions I posed above.

Chapter 1: The Roots Of New Monasticism

*“The physical presence of other Christians is a source of incomparable joy and strength to the believer.”*¹⁵ (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

In the history of the 20th century, three communities stand out as exerting special influence on the thought and rise of new monasticism. They were all born during the swirling chaos of Europe in the 1930s, when the Christian Church struggled to respond to the poverty, totalitarianism, and militarism that eventually led to World War 2. One was founded by a German Lutheran pastor to better equip seminarians of the Confessing Church as they prepared to lead churches in a deeply troubled society; one was founded by a Reformed Swiss student, to give living expression to the reconciliation he believed was the hallmark of the Kingdom of God; and one was founded by a Scottish Presbyterian minister and Member of Parliament to strengthen fellow ministers for ministry in the despair-filled world of Scotland’s urban centers. Of the three, two endure to this day, and the totality of their witness and the impact they have made upon the wider church is enormous. This chapter will provide a brief history of each, a summary of the community’s legacy, and a reflection on the ways the community influences new monastic communities today as they relate to congregations and the wider church.

Finkenwalde: A Brief Experiment

There have been few individuals who have furthered the momentum in the growth of new monastic communities as much as Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Such is his legacy and influence that many modern communities bear his name,¹⁶ or the name of the place,

¹⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 19.

¹⁶ In Chapter 3, one such namesake community, Bonhoeffer House in Dallas, Texas, will be examined.

Finkenwalde, where his famous experiment in intentional, communal living took place. Bonhoeffer's vision for a community of seminarians living under a simple rule grounded in the contemplative life and strict adherence to the ideals of the Sermon on the Mount, though it lasted barely two years, has informed countless communities around the world. His legacy may be amplified simply by being the first, although the nature of his experiment, and the way he articulated an accompanying and profound theological vision in subsequent writing, has ensured that he will always be mentioned in discussion about the "new monastic" movement.

Born in Berlin in 1906, Bonhoeffer was one of a pair of twins born to an eminent German psychiatrist named Karl Bonhoeffer and his wife, Paula von Hase. He and his siblings grew up in a home where knowledge, ideas, and music floated in the air, and conversation touched on deep questions of the meaning of human existence. The family was not, however, especially religious, so Bonhoeffer's path to a committed Christian life originated in his passionate intellectual curiosity and capacity for rigorous academic study. He graduated from the University of Tübingen at age 17 and earned his doctorate from Alexander Von Humboldt University in Berlin by 21, with his thesis, *Sanctorum Communio*, exploring the manner in which the Church can rightly be understood to be the Body of Christ: God is both transcendentally distant from humanity, and yet also immanently present in the Church. Later, in *Act and Being*, he wrote about the Church being the place of Christ's revelation: "God reveals himself as a person in the Church. The Christian communion is God's final revelation."¹⁷ These ideas, along with experiences at Roman Catholic and Anglican monasteries in Italy and England, shaped

¹⁷ Quoted in William Kuhns, *In Pursuit of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (London: Burns and Oats, 1967), 92.

the rest of his life and, as will be shown, deeply informed his vision for intentional Christian community.

In the years after the completion of his doctorate, Bonhoeffer served a variety of posts in rapid succession: lecturer at the University of Berlin, pastor of a German congregation in Spain, fellow at Union Theological Seminary in New York, and pastor of a German congregation in London. Along the way, and despite his relative youth, he became a leader of the Confessing Church, an opposition movement within German Lutheranism to the Third Reich, yet one that was ultimately too disorganized and internally conflicted to pose much legitimate challenge to the growth of Nazism.¹⁸ Despite his frustrations with the weaknesses of the Confessing Church, Bonhoeffer levied tremendous influence upon it, earning the respect of older peers like Karl Barth. Eventually, when the need arose for centers of formation akin to the preachers' seminaries of the state-sponsored German Church, yet aligned with the Confessing Church, Bonhoeffer was invited to lead one. It was established in the relatively remote region of Germany of Pomerania, and has ever since taken its name from the neighboring village: Finkenwalde.

Bonhoeffer's selection to lead the theological and pastoral education of the small cadre of students at Finkenwalde was providential, as it offered him an opportunity to experiment with ideas about the sort of deeply intentional living necessary for an authentic, Christian life. For Bonhoeffer, most Christians lacked the sort of core spiritual disciplines that form a healthy and mature faith, let alone foster authentic engagement

¹⁸ Bonhoeffer's efforts to heighten the Confessing Church's oppositional witness against the nationalization of the German Church were ultimately unsuccessful. Yet even as he battled with his fellow Confessing Church leaders over the need for firmer statements and actions, he fought tirelessly in ecumenical circles for the recognition of the Confessing Church as the true representative of German Protestantism. (Brook, *Bonhoeffer and the New Monasticism*, 10)

with the rigorous discipleship demanded by the Sermon on the Mount. In contrast he looked to the example of the monastic tradition, with which he first came into contact in Italy in the 1920s while visiting Rome. Monasticism's strict rule of life, grounded in contemplative prayer, confession, and brotherhood, represented to Bonhoeffer the ideal forum for spiritual health and growth. Despite his deep-rooted Protestantism, he was still able to embrace the ancient holiness of monastic life and ideals, and praised it as an example of "costly grace" in his most famous and influential work, *The Cost of Discipleship*:

It is highly significant that the Church was astute enough to find room for the monastic movement, and to prevent it from lapsing into schism. Here on the outer fringe of the Church was a place where the older vision was kept alive. Here men still remembered that grace costs, that grace means following Christ. Here they left all they had for Christ's sake, and endeavored daily to practice his rigorous commands. Thus monasticism became a living protest against the secularization of Christianity and the cheapening of grace.¹⁹

He perceived the most striking inadequacy in the spiritual lives of fellow pastors, and openly suggested that the fault lay in the process and methods of pastoral formation. In an exchange of letters with Barth in 1936, Bonhoeffer responded to the idea that seminaries should, first and foremost, be places of teaching about preaching and catechizing:

That seems to me either a complete misunderstanding of what young theologians are like today or a culpable ignorance of how preaching and catechism come to life. The questions that are seriously put to us today by young theologians are: How do I learn to pray? How do I learn to read the Bible? If we cannot help them there we cannot help them at all...[B]oth theological work and real pastoral fellowship can only grow in a life

¹⁹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 46.

which is governed by gathering round the Word morning and evening and by fixed times of prayer.²⁰

This thought was echoed in his brief yet profound meditation on intentional Christian community, *Life Together*, written a few years after the close of the seminary at Finkenwalde. In its introduction Bonhoeffer writes, “The entire training of young seminarians belongs today in church-monastic schools in which the pure doctrine, the Sermon on the Mount, and worship can be taken seriously.”²¹ The reference to “church-monastic schools” acknowledges his experience at Finkenwalde, where he melded the practices and goals of traditional seminaries with those of a monastic community. The statement also belies his strict commitment to the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount, which grew to occupy a foremost place in his spiritual imagination, and was the driving influence of his most provocative and influential teaching.

For Bonhoeffer, much rode on the success of these communities. The Church was unwilling or unable to stand against the fear, xenophobia, and militarization of the Reich, and during his travels abroad he saw little that gave him hope that the Church elsewhere was deeply rooted enough to stand against the forces of secularization and isolation. What was needed was a renewal of the Church’s heart and soul, one that could not come about from a continuation of current Church customs and practices. In a letter to his brother, Karl Friederich, in January 1935, he wrote what has grown to become a sort of rallying cry for the new monastic movement: “The restoration of the Church will surely come from a new kind of monasticism, which will have nothing in common with the old

²⁰ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Way to Freedom* (London: Collins, 1972), 117; quoted in Greg Peters, *Reforming the Monastery* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), 111.

²¹ Letter to Erwin Sutz, September 11, 1934; quoted in Peters, *Reforming the Monastery*, 114.

but a life of uncompromising adherence to the Sermon on the Mount in imitation of Christ. I believe the time has come to rally people together for this.”²²

So it was that when he was appointed director of the seminary at Finkenwalde, Dietrich Bonhoeffer constructed a curriculum that emphasized spiritual disciplines long associated with traditional monasticism as much as instruction of core seminary subjects such as doctrine, homiletics, or practical theology.²³ The day began and ended with a simple service said at the dining table that centered on readings from Scripture, recitation of psalms, time for extemporaneous prayer and intercession, and a hymn.²⁴ Further, all students were required to undertake 30 minutes of silent meditation each morning, a number that was soon reduced in response to the students’ strong protests. Private, personal confession was strongly encouraged and enthusiastically modeled by Bonhoeffer. The only element that met outright resistance among the band of cautiously accepting German Lutheran postulants was the practice of reading Scripture aloud during mealtimes, a ritual drawn straight from monastic custom, but one the students declared untenable. Life at Finkenwalde was simple but centered, structured but flexible.²⁵ It was a Reformed Protestant’s experiment with monasticism.

²² From letter to brother, Karl Friederich, January 14, 1935; quoted in Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2000), 462.

²³ Greg Peters writes in *Reforming the Monastery* that Bonhoeffer’s vision for Christian community “is a monastic rule similar to the rule of Benedict of Nursia [with an] emphasis on the daily offices (including the reading of Psalms), regular confession and communion, silence, solitude, meditation, study and work. In short, Dietrich Bonhoeffer had a vision for the implementation of institutionalized monasticism in the Confessing Church of Germany.” (Peters, *Reforming the Monastery*, 119-120)

²⁴ Bonhoeffer referred to the Psalter as the “Great School of Prayer.” See *Life Together*, 47, for more of his vision of this, and Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 428, for a detailed description of an average day at Finkenwalde.

²⁵ Carl Brook writes about what he calls a “pressure-release valve” on the community’s life in that, in addition to the rigorous spiritual and academic life of the students, there was plenty of time for games and athletics, two of Bonhoeffer’s favorite pastimes. (Carl Brook, 20)

When the semester began in the fall, Bonhoeffer doubled down on the experiment, establishing what became known as the “House of Brethren.” Admission to the Brethren was purely voluntary, but offered an even deeper engagement with monastically-inspired practices such as praying the office and extended times of silent meditation.²⁶ Finkenwalde student and later friend, confessor, and biographer Eberhard Bethge later wrote that the way of life at the House of Brethren “showed the very beginnings of classical monastic vows, but these were never explicitly taken, nor were they envisioned for the future.”²⁷ This decision to resist formalizing the rule with vows showed the limits of Bonhoeffer’s experimentation. Finkenwalde would remain decidedly Protestant, even as they waded into the deep waters of ancient monastic practice. It also revealed his discomfort with the community becoming too insular and self-obsessed. This was never meant to be an end unto itself, a cloistered community focused on its own spiritual and practical existence. It was always intended to sharpen the faith of its residents and prepare them for the rigors of pastoral life. They were students, after all, meaning that even if the Nazi government didn’t conscript them into service or arrest them, they would all eventually be distributed around the country in service of numerous, far-flung congregations.

In his writings after Finkenwalde’s closure by the Nazis, Bonhoeffer meditated upon the purpose of intentional community, and what he perceived to be an inherent pitfall to their influence on the wider church. Traditional monasticism had suffered from

²⁶ “There are three purposes for which the Christian needs a definite time when he can be alone during the day: Scripture meditation, prayer, and intercession. All three should have their place in the daily period of meditation.” Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 81.

²⁷ Bethge, 468.

a reputation for being the exclusive domain of a type of super-Christian, which weakened not only its own witness but also the discipleship of the broader Church. A select few could become extraordinary, while everyone else could feel themselves held to a much lower, easier standard. But discipleship is the ultimate standard for all Christians: although the practice of monasticism is good and right for some, the call to rigorous discipleship is good and right for all.²⁸ To illustrate this point in *The Cost of Discipleship*, Bonhoeffer turned to the example of Martin Luther. “Luther had to leave the cloister and go back to the world not because the world in itself was good and holy, but because even the cloister was only a part of the world. The only way to follow Jesus was by living in the world.”²⁹

His thinking on this had led him, even before Finkenwalde, to reject an invitation by a group of pietistic Lutherans known as the Berneuchen movement, who were also experimenting with communal life as a means to deeper holiness, but who, Bonhoeffer feared, were too focused on the internal life and stability of the community and not enough focused on the purpose of the Church as taught by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount.³⁰ As he reflected in *Life Together*,

²⁸ Peters, 112.

²⁹ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 48.

³⁰ In the 1920s, nearly a decade before Finkenwalde, another group of Germans led by Eberhard Arnold decided to leave Berlin for a village called Sannerz, where they began an intentional community built around similar, simple principles. As Arnold later wrote, “We want a genuine school of life, where the simplest work becomes a physical and artistic experience, where there is freedom from intellectualism and its pitfalls, where a new man can emerge, a creative man whose culture expresses what is real. We do not need theories or idealistic goals or prophets or leaders. We need brotherhood and sisterhood. We need to *live* Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. We need to show that a life of justice and forgiveness and unity is possible today.” (Eberhard Arnold, quoted in Peter Molsen, *Homage to a Broken Man*, Rifton, NY: Plough, 2002, 22) By the time of Finkenwalde, the Bruderhof community was firmly established, and eventually expanded to form communities around the world. Today it includes 2,700 people living in 23 settlements on four continents. See www.bruderhof.com

Life together under the Word will remain sound and healthy only where it does not form itself into a movement, an order, a society, a collegium pietatis, but rather where it understands itself as being a part of the one, holy, catholic Christian Church, where it shares actively and passively in the sufferings and struggles and promise of the whole Church.³¹

For Bonhoeffer, the Christian belongs “not in the seclusion of the cloistered life, but in the thick of foes. There is his commission, his work.”³²

Ultimately, the “foes” against which he labored most of his life, the Nazis, brought about the end of the Finkenwalde seminary almost as quickly as it had begun. In the fall of 1937, barely two years after its inception, the SS raided the compound and closed the school. Bonhoeffer and the students scattered around Germany (Bonhoeffer even made it to New York for a brief few months in 1939), making Finkenwalde quickly seem like a dream in the minds of its former participants, a brief glimpse of what could be possible. In 1939 he published *Life Together*, which served as a brief, yet profound, articulation of not only his theological vision of Christian community but also the wisdom he had gleaned from the two years of living in intentional community. Given the brevity of its existence, one could understand if Bonhoeffer waxed nostalgic on the endeavor or cast the experience in a rosy glow, but such was decidedly not Bonhoeffer’s style. Instead, in one of the most moving sections in *Life Together*, he writes,

By sheer grace God will not permit us to live even for a brief period in a dream world...Only that fellowship which faces such disillusionment, with all its unhappy and ugly aspects, begins to be what it should be in God’s sight, begins to grasp in faith the promise that is given to it...A community that cannot bear and cannot survive such a crisis, which insists upon keeping its illusion when it should be shattered, permanently loses in that moment the promise of Christian community. Sooner or later it will collapse. Every human wish dream that is injected into the Christian community is a hindrance to genuine community and must be banished if

³¹ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 37.

³² Bonhoeffer, 17.

genuine community is to survive. He who loves his dream of a community more than the Christian community itself becomes a destroyer of the latter, even though his personal intentions may be ever so honest and earnest and sacrificial.³³

Although short-lived, the two-year experiment in intentional Christian community at Finkenwalde would become the basis of the new monastic movement as it sprang up around the world over the next seven decades. Bonhoeffer's unflinching honesty about both the strengths and challenges of communal Christian life would inspire others to take the plunge, building on his success and working to counter some of the inherent struggles of that life. *Life Together* has become essential reading for all those who feel called to intentional, communal life, and continues to inspire and challenge those who would dabble in it without a proper theological grounding or fantasized notions of what community is like. The centrality of the Sermon on the Mount in Bonhoeffer's vision aligns him not only with leaders of communities in his own generation, as will be seen, but also with the vision of community that inspires contemporary new monastic communities. In their writing, leaders such as Shane Claiborne and Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove hold the Sermon on the Mount with a similar, exalted regard, and place its teaching and demands in the center of their own contemporary expressions of Christian community.

Yet one needn't fast-forward several generations to find echoes of the community at Finkenwalde. Bonhoeffer's "experiment" with monasticism was not the only one of its time. The issues facing the world that ultimately resulted in the 20th century's second global war inspired creative, faithful responses by Christians in other places, too, some of whom felt a similar call to establish alternative expressions of Christian community. In

³³ Bonhoeffer, 27.

Switzerland, in another university community, even as Bonhoeffer was writing his enduring classic *Life Together*, another kind of community was arising.

Taizé: A Parable of Community

In the tense decade of the 1930s, even as Dietrich Bonhoeffer was experimenting with the nature of the Christian life in community at Finkenwalde, another Protestant young man was similarly reflecting on how to live out the gospel in community. While studying theology at the University of Lausanne in Switzerland in the late 1930s, Roger Schütz helped begin *La Grande Communauté*, a group of students that conducted monthly retreats characterized by a search for God through prayer, silence, meditation, and confession.³⁴ As world war broke out and spread across Europe, Schütz reflected more and more upon how this community could manifest a compassionate and reconciling influence on wider society. Initially he and his friends dreamed of acquiring some sort of house, which would serve as a home for their budding community, but the obstacles created by war proved too great to overcome at that time.

However, in 1940 Schütz visited the small village of Taizé, in southeastern France, and he was able to acquire an inexpensive, small house and some property. Drawing on his Reformed background but influenced by a variety of traditions, Schütz maintained a simple, personal rule of life. In addition to serving those around him in the village and harboring refugees fleeing Nazi persecution, he wrote a little pamphlet that outlined his understanding of the monastic communal life, one grounded in the contemplative life, but not exclusively anchored in the Roman Catholic, Anglican,

³⁴ Jason Brian Santos, *A Community Called Taizé: A Story of Prayer, Worship and Reconciliation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsityPress Books, 2008), 57.

Orthodox, or Protestant churches. In a manner that closely resembled Bonhoeffer's, Schütz's vision for holiness and community centered on the pursuit of inner silence and a more dedicated observance of the tenants of the Sermon on the Mount. "Every day let your work and rest be quickened by the Word of God; keep inner silence in all things and you will dwell in Christ; be filled with the spirit of the Beatitudes: joy, simplicity, and mercy."³⁵

The goal of reconciliation and unity was also at the forefront of his vision from the very beginning, and this regarded both societal reconciliation between nations and peoples, as well as reconciliation within the Church. In the years preceding the Second World War, Schütz had visited England and witnessed the Anglican monastic communities resumed over the previous century. They were a foil for him of what he desired at Taizé, as he believed they actually exacerbated separation and isolation within the Anglican Church, rather than fostering unity and reconciliation. As Jason Brian Santos writes in his history of Taizé, "Roger was looking to live out, in the lives of a few men, a parable of reconciliation that would put into the dough of the divided churches a leaven of communion." Thus, Taizé would never be easily characterized or categorized.³⁶

After being forced to flee to Geneva in 1942 to escape Nazi persecution and arrest, Schütz was approached by three young men who had been introduced to his little pamphlet on Christian community. Together they formed a simple community grounded in a common life that included communally shared property, daily work and prayer, a common purse, and a life of celibacy. As the war came to a close, the implications of this community took on greater significance, and the need for an expression of compassion

³⁵ Santos, *A Community Called Taizé: A Story of Prayer, Worship and Reconciliation*, 60.

³⁶ J.L. Gonzalez Balado, *The Story of Taizé* (London: Mowbray Press, 1980), 30.

and reconciliation in post-war France became a calling. Years later, Schütz wrote, “The defeat of France awoke powerful sympathy. If a house could be found there, of the kind we had dreamed of, it would offer a possible way of assisting some of the most discouraged, those deprived of a livelihood, and it could become a place of silence and work.”³⁷

Eventually they returned to France, and the community slowly grew. On Easter Day in 1949 seven men chose to profess initial vows, though Schütz, who by this time was called “Brother Roger,” asked that they be renewed annually. At the outset, Brother Roger was wary of what he perceived to be the rigid minutia of traditional monasticism, so he did not codify a Rule of Life for the fledgling community for several more years, preferring to focus on the lived experience. As Taizé historian J.L. Gonzalez Balado writes, “It is typical of the brothers that they did not find it necessary, or perhaps even conceivable, to begin with a rule of life. No: live first, write afterwards!”³⁸

Even in the relative chaos of the post-war years, and although the Taizé community was not sponsored by the Roman Catholic or any traditional Protestant denominations, when news of the life-vows made by the seven initial brothers became public, there was concern and curiosity. People particularly wondered whether this community would be Catholic or Protestant, or whether this was to be some sort of new church or religion. For Brother Roger, the goal was to be grafted onto the historic lineage of Christian monasticism, while also breathing a new, reconciling spirit that resisted boundaries or walls and influenced the life of the wider Church. The brothers were to be a lived “parable of community” and “a sign of brotherly love” that helped direct people to

³⁷ Santos, 57.

³⁸ Balado, *The Story of Taizé*, 26.

reflect on God in their own lives.³⁹ But they did so while embracing the traditional three monastic tenets of poverty, celibacy, and obedience. As Brother Roger wrote in response to questions about whether he was imitating traditional monasticism at Taizé,

We reasonably tried not to let ourselves be influenced by the experiences of the past. We wanted to begin with a clean slate, in order to live and experience everything afresh. Yet the day came when we realized that we could not stay in our vocation without obliging ourselves fully to putting our goods in common, submitting to an authority, and celibacy.⁴⁰

The “live first, write after” philosophy was exemplified by the community’s commitment to people in places far from Taizé. In 1951, nearly two years before a rule for the community was ever formally created or codified, two brothers were sent to live near and work in a mine 25 miles away from the main house. The goal was to stand in solidarity with the local mining union, which was working for fair treatment. This expression of compassion, rooted in the brothers’ contemplative prayer life, gained for them a positive reputation. Eventually the practice of sending brothers to live amongst the poor or marginalized of the world led them to establish dozens of similar “fraternities,” as they came to be known, in places like India, Bangladesh, and Algeria. They are embodiments of Brother Roger’s hope that the Taizé community be a parable of reconciliation and peace. Cloistered life was never the goal of Taizé so much as responding to the often-demanding call to live out the gospel.

Finally, during the winter of 1952-53, Brother Roger drafted a rule for the community. It barely addresses the practical realities of communal life, but is instead largely focused on the general ethos of how the brothers are to live together. It allows for

³⁹ Balado, 28.

⁴⁰ Quoted in John Heijke, *An Ecumenical Light on the Renewal of Religious Community Life Taizé* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1967), 32.

considerable freedom and leaves ample room for personal discernment. The Preamble sets the tone of the whole:

Brother, if you submit to a common rule, you can do so only for the sake of Christ and the Gospel. Henceforth your worship and your service take place in a community of brothers, within the body of the Church. Common impulse will stimulate your interior discipline, which is so essential for your life as a Christian. From now on you are no longer alone. In all things, you must take your Brothers into account.⁴¹

Yet even as the community took this step toward greater formality, it preserved Roger's initial vision for permeability. In the decades since its inception, Taizé has become enormously popular as a pilgrimage destination, and as a source of spiritual growth and formation for young people from around the world. Owing to its ecumenical approach (despite positive relationships with nearly all major, historic Christian churches, Taizé has never formally aligned with one of them), its focus on lived spirituality and reconciliation, and the beautiful yet accessible form of worship, the community welcomes thousands of guests every year who come to pray alongside the brothers. The responsibility to host so many guests – at certain times of year the number can swell to several thousand at once – could be seen as a tremendous burden on the community. Traditional monastic communities construct chapels and a common life together that are organized around their own internal needs. But not Taizé. Several times in the life of the community the brothers have sacrificed the strict stability and traditional peace of the cloister in order to be hospitable to the crowds of guests and to seek opportunities to impact the life of the wider world. The chapel has been repeatedly remodeled and expanded, new guest accommodations built several times, and the brothers even developed a partnership with a nearby convent to offer support to their hospitality for

⁴¹ Brother Roger, *The Rule of Taizé* (Taizé: Les Presses de Taizé, 1965).

guests. Meanwhile, the fraternities continue to be planted around the world in order to serve the needs of the hurting and poor, and to prevent the community from becoming too insular.

Brother Roger died tragically in 2005, the victim of a violent murder while praying in the midst of the community's evening service. Having been the founder and leader of the community for six decades, his influence on the vision and mission of the community are hard to overstate. It was he whose private witness attracted the earliest brothers, he who wrote the Rule, he who modeled the nature of reconciliation so wholeheartedly that dozens of men became brothers and thousands of pilgrims came to share, even if for a brief time, the experience of Christian community. Some debate lingers over whether Brother Roger converted to Roman Catholicism later in his life, though there is no definitive evidence either way, owing to the discretion with which he lived and his unwillingness to profess openly.⁴² Yet, even if it did occur, it has not altered the ecumenical, reconciling heart of the community, which remains beloved by Christians from all traditions and nations.

Taizé endures to this day, a lasting expression of community that continues to inspire and provoke the Church with its focus on prayer and reconciliation. It was Pope John XXIII, who declared, "Ah, Taizé, that little springtime!" thus offering a poignant

⁴² In an article in the French magazine *Le Monde* in 2006 Yves Chiron alleged that Brother Roger had privately converted to Roman Catholicism in the 1970s, which explained his public reception of communion by then Cardinal Ratzinger at the requiem mass for Pope John Paul II in 2005. However, in 2008 the Taizé website posted an interview by the French magazine *La Croix* with Brother Alois, Brother Roger's successor as leader of the community, in which Brother Alois denied any conversion: "Brother Roger never 'converted' formally to Catholicism. If he had, he would have said so; for he never hid anything about the path he was following. All through his books, often written in the form of a journal, he explained as he went along what he was discovering and what he was living." http://www.taize.fr/en_article6739.html, last checked in February 28, 2016.

metaphor for the community's embodiment in and impact on the world.⁴³ Its outreach to young people, the witness of the Taizé fraternities that serve the poorest cities, and the lasting vibrancy of the worship and prayer life ensure Taizé remains fixed in the ranks of influential modern Christian communities. Unlike Finkenwalde, Taizé endures as a lived “parable of community,” rather than a memory or a short-lived experiment.

Iona: A New Experiment

The story of the rebirth of a community of prayer on the Isle of Iona is, like the stories of Finkenwalde and Taizé, a uniquely 20th century phenomenon. The circumstances present in the world in the early to mid century as the community at Iona took shape under the leadership of George MacLeod, particularly the looming shadow of World War 2, fostered the sort of critical engagement with the practices of the church that led to an embrace of an experiment such as the Iona Community. Christians everywhere, including Scotland, seemed ready for something different, something that spoke to the human condition and the challenges facing society before, during, and after the world wars. A return to the rigidity of traditional, cloistered monasticism seemed inadequate to the challenge, and would have been widely rejected by the Church of Scotland had it been proposed. Yet continuing on in the same path also seemed inadequate, as the urban churches of Scotland struggled mightily to respond to growing despair and disinterest, and began a steady decline that continues to this day. What was needed was not a new book, but a “new experiment,” George Macleod wrote in a letter to the Iona Cathedral

⁴³ Santos, 66.

Trustees in 1938, and his vision of an intentional Christian community on Iona is an important example of the new monastic movement as it evolved and matured.⁴⁴

George MacLeod was ministering to a Church of Scotland parish in Glasgow in the 1930s, and by all accounts experiencing success in his efforts to revitalize and rejuvenate the congregation through strong preaching and intentional reengagement with the neighboring community. Yet despite his success, he could not shake the urge to do something decidedly more radical. As he looked around, he noticed a dichotomy between the churches in Scotland, especially in urban environments, and the communities where they were situated. Churches were busy, clean, and in good order, but the communities around them were in ruins. He also recognized that most Christians' involvement with their church was limited to Sunday, akin to a brief, weekly tonic for the soul, but the renewing affects of the Christian faith were lacking elsewhere in people's lives. What was needed, he determined, was a faith that penetrated to the heart of the common life, one that could answer to the looming clouds of war gathering in Europe in the 1930s and the pervasive despair felt by many resulting from their living conditions and prospects. For MacLeod, radical changes were needed if the Church was to speak a word to the modern world.⁴⁵

Even as he discerned the right response to these conditions, he circulated a paper among friends in which he wrote about the Protestant church's effort to rediscover its catholic heritage. New efforts were required to move the church into the housing schemes and "teach people how to live corporately." He fervently believed that the Church was

⁴⁴ Ronald Ferguson, *Chasing the Wild Goose: The Story of the Iona Community* (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 1998), 53.

⁴⁵ Ferguson, *Chasing the Wild Goose*, 51.

forsaking its responsibility to inform and inspire the lives of people seven days a week, rather than simply placate the people one day a week, and he publicly worried that local leaders seemed increasingly incapable of moving the needle in that direction. At the end of the paper, he proposed a “brotherhood within the Church of Scotland, of no permanent vows, into which men of such a mind could come for the first two or three years of their ministry.”⁴⁶ They would then be ready to “be drafted out – still as members of the brotherhood – to the congested areas and the housing schemes where they would carry their ideas into practice.”⁴⁷ MacLeod’s proposal included a suggestion for a base for this new brotherhood movement, one grounded in the ancient Christian history of Scotland: the Holy Isle of Iona. Only such a location as Iona, on the same soil as St. Columba’s first community, could match the significance and importance of his idea and its context. MacLeod’s Iona would serve as a “modern counterpart to St. Columba’s original intention: the New Light of Protestantism would be lit to meet our day, as his Lamp met his.”⁴⁸

MacLeod spoke and wrote passionately to respond to critics who believed him to be a muddled romantic at best, or a communist papist at worst, forcing him to articulate the vision and purpose of the Iona Community. In contrast to those who accused him of playing at being monks or dabbling in Catholicism, and despite his own personal inclinations toward the monastic tradition and ancient example of Columba, MacLeod was wholeheartedly Presbyterian, which meant that the Iona Community would never

⁴⁶ George MacLeod, from a private letter, cited in Ferguson, 51.

⁴⁷ Ferguson, 51-52.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 51.

abandon its Protestant moorings.⁴⁹ For MacLeod, Iona was never about church politics or ecclesiastical innovation; it was foremost about offering a response to a spiritual crisis he perceived in Scotland and the world, and a concerted effort to strengthen the Church to respond to future demands and challenges. As he wrote in *The Coracle*, the community's periodical, the Iona Community is "an exceedingly calculated movement within the normal purposes of the Church...[W]e only claim a privilege to make perhaps the sacrifice of those who work in really difficult places a little less acute."⁵⁰ Whatever his critics may have lobbed against it, Iona was intended to help equip and form leaders for the issues of the day and demands of the Church.

Steadied by MacLeod's vociferous defense, the community's supporters gained traction, and eventually received not only the consent of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, but also, and just as importantly, approval from the Iona Cathedral Trustees to take up residence on the isle and begin work on the ruined abbey.⁵¹ Thus it was that in July 1938, MacLeod and a group of divinity students arrived at Iona to begin the work of restoring the abbey and establishing a new community. Their experience together proved edifying and inspiring to the group, despite the many obstacles and challenges of such a project, and they flourished. Even as they put the ruined abbey physically back together, participants described the sense that their souls were being reformed and strengthened.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 53.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 56.

⁵¹ The Abbey had been formally donated to Church of Scotland trustees in 1899 by the Duke of Argyll, George Douglas Campbell, and the sanctuary restored over the subsequent decade. However, the rest of the buildings, where everyday life was lived, were left unrestored. (Ferguson, 45)

Such was the community's early traction that, even as World War 2 began in 1939, the community grew and developed, and restoration work on the historic abbey continued. The volunteers changed during the war years, as most men were serving the war effort either domestically or abroad, yet new recruits and participants materialized after feeling drawn into the life of the community. Reflecting on this important time of transition, when the community had to move beyond its initial phase and welcome unexpected or unforeseen participants, MacLeod wrote, "These developments arose not because the Community planned them but because hungry people were looking for bread."⁵² His sense that the Church was filled with clergy and laity who were hungry for deeper, more committed Christian lives proved true, as dozens of Christians from around Scotland filled the ranks vacated by those sent off to war. This momentum built even faster in the days following the war's end, as ministers and lay people clamored to be a part of the Iona movement. In his history of the Iona Community, Ronald Ferguson writes, "As peace came to an exhausted Europe, it was clear to the churches that only a practical form of Christianity would do. Men, and then in increasing numbers, women as well, who had emerged in a hard and cooperative war effort would not be much impressed by rhetoric or a private piety which did nothing about injustice."⁵³

In these same post-war years, the community had grown greatly in numbers and transcended a mere movement within the Presbyterian Church. It was now a genuinely ecumenical movement, and many of its members wanted to continue their Iona experience long after their initial two years. As associates and other supporters returned

⁵² Ibid, 62.

⁵³ Ibid, 66.

to their lives in urban neighborhoods, the question of how they could or should continue their relationship with Iona led to the formulation of the first Rule of Life for the Iona Community. Initially this Rule centered around thirty minutes daily of private prayer, informed in large part by the English Daily Office. Also included was guidance on how to organize a balanced daily life that centered between self-indulgence and overwork. And importantly, the Rule required each member to live according to the national average wage.⁵⁴ This final aspect arose from MacLeod's continuing desire to not be overly sentimental and "spiritualized," but encourage associates to be firmly rooted in practices that went beyond words and could be held accountable.⁵⁵

Over the past 50 years the community has dispersed widely, with members, associate members, and "friends" of the community spread around the world. Membership requires regular contact with the Isle of Iona, to connect with and pray alongside fellow members, but members are able to keep the rule wherever they may permanently live. This allows them to pursue the original mission George MacLeod envisioned when he established the Iona Community, namely, that participants would influence the life and health of the wider church and the communities and neighborhoods in which they are situated. Today the community is most passionately committed to a witness around social justice, as well as renewing the vitality of worship in the Church, as its foundational four tenets reflect:

1. Daily prayer, worship with others, and regular engagement with the Bible and other material which nourishes us.
2. Working for justice and peace, wholeness, and reconciliation in our localities, society, and the whole creation.
3. Supporting one another in prayer and by meeting, communicating, and accounting with one another for the use of our gifts, money and time, our use of the earth's resources, and our keeping of all aspects of the Rule.

⁵⁴ As determined by the Scottish government.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 64.

4. Sharing in the corporate life and organization of the Community.⁵⁶

Iona Community members are affiliated with a variety of traditional churches, including Roman Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, and Presbyterian, and keep their covenant with the community, including its expectations to actively work for economic, environmental, and social justice, while participating in their personal, congregational contexts. However, the reality, according to former Iona leader Norman Shanks, is that some community members are deeply disillusioned with the church, and find in the community a welcome alternative to the limp spiritual life they encounter in their local congregation.⁵⁷ Perhaps this is a natural result of a community dispersed across the world, with limited personal contact and thus meager personal accountability. It is also a byproduct of a monastically-inspired movement in a post-Christian society such as Great Britain, where some members have little or no Christian background, yet who find the Iona Community's focus on the big issues and problems facing the world to be a compelling witness for what Christianity could or should be.

Conclusion

The three communities explored in this chapter have exerted significant influence upon the growth of new monasticism, and the vision and ideals of much more recently established communities around the world. They share a common origin, in that they were all born out of the darkness of 1930s and 40s Europe, when the Church was grappling with the existential crisis of totalitarianism and war. Two of the communities have

⁵⁶ <http://iona.org.uk/movement/the-rule/#>, last checked February 29, 2016.

⁵⁷ Norman Shanks, *Iona – God's Energy: The Vision and Spirituality of the Iona Community* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1999), 206.

endured across the subsequent decades, and the third, Finkenwalde, was shuttered only as a result of being tragically located in the heart of Nazi oppression. Each, then, was founded and nurtured in such a way that it possessed the necessary integrity and vitality to connect with and inspire succeeding generations. Importantly for the purposes of this project, two of the three communities were expressly about the formation of pastors to serve the needs of congregations, and the third, Taizé, has had a deeply renewing influence on the whole Church, including many clergy and Christian lay leaders. The legacy of Finkenwalde, Taizé, and Iona, is rooted in the way they occupy the liminal space between the cloister and the world, drawing meaning and inspiration from both. It is that ability to live between the two seemingly contradictory worlds of the cloister and the city that has led a new generation of leaders to learn from their example, to draw wisdom from their experiences, and insight from their founders' writings. In the next chapter we will turn to this new generation of communities, to see how the mantle of new monasticism has been taken up.

Chapter 2: The Rise of New Monasticism

*“Amongst earnest Christians in the Church today there is a growing desire to meet together with other Christians in the rest periods of their work for common life under the Word. Communal life is again being recognized by Christians today as the grace that it is, as the extraordinary, the ‘roses and lilies’ of the Christian life.”*⁵⁸ (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

In the generations after World War 2, the yearning felt by some Christians for a more meaningful, committed, communal existence ebbed and flowed. The crisis of the war had crystallized the need for intentional expressions of compassion and reconciliation, and propelled a creative witness against war and vengeance. Decades later, during the upheaval of the 1960s, some Christians felt a similar desire to offer a countering witness to the wider Church, and embraced communal living as a method for finding deeper contentment and meaning in their lives. The Jesus People movement was spawned in that era, which harnessed the desire felt by thousands of disenchanting young people for lives of greater significance. However, it and many other communities planted in that era, including the St. Peter’s households described in the Introduction, were founded with a great deal of romantic idealism, the fading of which led to their eventual demise.⁵⁹ Some communities did endure beyond that era, including Reba Place in Illinois, the Bruderhof in Germany (and later international), and Koinonia Farm in Georgia – like “rhizomes” spreading beneath the surface of American culture and Christianity, according to Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove⁶⁰ – but they were exceptionally rare, and largely flew beneath the radar of the wider church.

⁵⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 21.

⁵⁹ One can certainly argue that the correlation is actually in the inverse: namely, that the demise of the communities led to the fading of the romantic idealism of the movement. Either way, the movement waxed rapidly in the 1960s, but waned just as quickly in the 1970s.

However, in the late 1990s the so-called “new monastic movement” began to gain traction. In this chapter I will review the last twenty years of this movement, introducing several of the leading voices, and summarizing some of their writing and teaching on the subject. Familiarity with the principles and ideals of this current generation of new monastic communities and leaders is necessary before conducting a robust examination of how these communities are, or can be, in relationship with congregations.

The “New” in Monasticism

Though famously first coined by Dietrich Bonhoeffer in the 1930s, the term “new monasticism” was popularized by theologian and writer Jonathan R. Wilson in his short 1997 book *Living Faithfully in a Fragmented World*, which was itself an examination of the work *After Virtue* by philosopher Alisdair MacIntyre. Toward the close of *After Virtue*, MacIntyre wrote about a looming, new “dark age” which he suggested was already loosening the moral and intellectual moorings of our society. In response, he suggested that tight, communal structures would be imperative to any effort to transcend these “dark ages”:

What matters at this stage is the construction of local forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained...and if the tradition of the virtues was able to survive the horrors of the last dark ages, we are not entirely without grounds for hope. This time, however, the barbarians are not waiting beyond the frontiers; they have already been among us for quite some time. And it is our lack of consciousness of this that constitutes part of our predicament. We are waiting not for Godot, but for another—doubtless very different—St. Benedict.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, *New Monasticism: What It Has To Say To Today's Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2008), 33.

⁶¹ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 263.

In *Living Faithfully*, Wilson took that brief, enigmatic reference to Benedict, the 5-6th century saint and creator of the earliest and most enduring monastic rule, and conducted what he refers to as a “thought experiment” for the life and witness of the church.”⁶² He wrote:

There are times—and I have argued that this is one of them—when the life of the church has been so compromised that we no longer are capable of fulfilling faithfully our mission. At such a time, the church must withdraw into a new monasticism, not in order to avoid a ‘bad’ society, but in order to recover faithful living and a renewed understanding of the church’s mission.⁶³

For Wilson, these “new monastic” communities continue in the chain of monasticism’s history, offering a repository for knowledge and faithfulness in “perilous times,” as well as existing as communities of integrity and devotion in contrast with the secularization of broader culture. But they are more than sectarian communes, isolated from society and the possibility of influencing the broader Church. Rather, their *telos* as outposts of the Kingdom of God requires them to be actively engaged with the surrounding world, serving as a sort of leaven to the ecclesiastical and secular culture in which they are embedded.⁶⁴ Thus, these are not contemplative centers focused solely on the strict adherence of some modern adaptation of Benedict’s Rule, but communities oriented around a shared rule while remaining authentically engaged with the needs of the world around them.

⁶² Jonathan R. Wilson, “Introduction” in *School(s) for Conversion*, Rutba House, editors (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2005), 1.

⁶³ Jonathan R. Wilson, *Living Faithfully in a Fragmented World* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), 71.

⁶⁴ Wilson, “Introduction,” *School(s) for Conversion*, 5-9.

Wilson ultimately posited four defining characteristics of this “new monasticism,” which he believed would mark their growth and development:

1. They will be marked by a recovery of the *telos* of the world that is revealed in the gospel of Jesus Christ, in order to counter the fragmentation of our lives in culture. Thus, new monasticism will not be marked by sharp distinctions between “secular” and “sacred.”
2. It will be a monasticism for the whole people of God. There won’t be sacred roles or jobs and “secular” roles or jobs, but it will include people who live and work in a variety of vocations and who do so fully for the glory of God and in pursuit of the *telos* of the gospel.
3. It will be marked by discipline, not simply according to old monastic rules, but in small groups of disciples that are oriented around work or life circumstances.
4. It will be undergirded by deep theological reflection and commitment.⁶⁵

When compared with the experience and writing of Bonhoeffer, whose *Life Together* remains a foundational text for all forms of intentional Christian communities, these four tenets sound familiar. While Wilson doesn’t explicitly name the Sermon on the Mount as a focusing element for new monasticism, his references to the teleology of the gospel in the first tenet can comfortably be understood to infer a relationship to Matthew 5-7, where Jesus offers some of the most concrete examples of how we are to pursue our *telos* as disciples. Tenet three echoes Bonhoeffer’s embrace of a carefully ordered life to reorient seminarians toward the goal of greater, deeper discipleship, and “deep

⁶⁵ Wilson, *Living Faithfully in a Fragmented World*, 72-76.

theological reflection and commitment,” tenet four, was the reason for the existence of the preacher’s seminary in the first place. In the second tenet, however, Wilson breaks from the vision for new monasticism expressed by Bonhoeffer. In contrast to the community at Finkenwalde, which was clearly focused on the formation of pastors, Wilson recognizes the possibility of communities existing in a variety of contexts with a diversity of members, most of whom will not be ordained, thus necessitating clarity about the sacredness of all work as long as it is oriented around pursuit of “the *telos* of the gospel.”

Wilson’s summary of defining characteristics have been embraced and expanded upon by a group of leaders of the new monastic movement, perhaps most especially his son-in-law, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove. In the early 2000s Wilson-Hartgrove co-founded an intentional Christian community in Durham, North Carolina, called Rutba House, and has written extensively on the subject of intentional community and new monasticism ever since. Indeed, Rutba House is credited as being one of the pioneering communities in the new monastic movement. But in his book *New Monasticism: What It Has to Say to Today’s Church*, Wilson-Hartgrove writes about his discomfort with the “new” in new monasticism, as he felt that, rather than being a trendsetter or prophet, he had simply fallen into the already flowing river of new monasticism.⁶⁶ He cites numerous communities founded throughout history, the aforementioned “rhizomes,” both historically distant and much more recent, that informed the founders of the modern iterations, and who paved the way for where the movement is today. Some of his important exemplars include:

⁶⁶ Wilson-Hartgrove, *New Monasticism*, 26.

- *The Bruderhof* – founded by Eberhard Arnold in Germany in the 1930s, the Bruderhof is an Anabaptist community that today consists of 2,700 people living in 23 settlements on four continents.⁶⁷
- *Reba Place Fellowship*– founded from the Mennonite tradition in 1957, Reba Place is an intentional Christian community centered in an “urban village” in Evanston, Illinois, and the Rogers Park neighborhood of Chicago. It currently consists of approximately 30 members.⁶⁸
- *Koinonia Farm* – an intentional Christian community located in Americus, Georgia. It was founded in 1942 by Clarence and Florence Jordan and Martin and Mabel England as a “demonstration plot for the kingdom of God,”⁶⁹ and today functions as a working communal farm and focuses on racial and environmental justice.

Indeed, out of recognition of the way this “new thing” was anchored in preceding efforts and iterations, in 2004 Wilson-Hartgrove and a few friends convened nearly 60 leaders of intentional Christian communities for what they called “The New Monasticism Gathering.” Together they reflected on what they perceived to be happening in the church, and how they could offer some form of constructive framework for how they believed it could grow and flourish. Among the people present for that gathering was one of Wilson-Hartgrove’s college friends, Shane Claiborne, who had founded an intentional community in Philadelphia several years earlier called The Simple Way. Claiborne’s book *The Irresistible Revolution* has been a major influence on the movement owing to its popularity, and it has succeeded in bringing the ideals and practices of new monastic

⁶⁷ www.bruderhof.com

⁶⁸ www.rebaplacefellowship.org

⁶⁹ www.koinoniafarm.org

communities to the attention of the broader church. Also present at that 2004 gathering was David Janzen of Reba Place Fellowship, which, having been founded in the 1950s, was among the most mature and well-established of the bunch. Janzen makes his own contribution to the conversation about new monasticism, which he refers to more simply as intentional Christian communities, in his book *The Intentional Christian Community Handbook*, in which he helpfully offers a definition of the term “intentional Christian community”:

[An] intentional Christian community is a group of people deliberately sharing life in order to follow more closely the teachings and practices of Jesus with his disciples. The more essential dimensions of life that are shared – such as daily prayer and worship, possessions, life decisions, living in proximity, friendships, common work or ministry, meals, care for children and elderly – the more intentional is the community.⁷⁰

This focus on the shared life experience of community members clearly informed the reflections by the leaders at the gathering in 2004, as did Jonathan R. Wilson’s earlier writing and his previously mentioned “four characteristics of a new monasticism.”

Ultimately the gathering produced a statement, along with what they refer to as the “12 Marks of a New Monasticism”:

Moved by God’s Spirit in this time called America [sic] to assemble at St. John’s Baptist Church in Durham, NC, we wish to acknowledge a movement of radical rebirth, grounded in God’s love and drawing on the rich tradition of Christian practices that have long formed disciples in the simple Way of Christ. This contemporary school for conversion, which we have called a “new monasticism,” is producing a grassroots ecumenism and a prophetic witness within the North American church which is diverse in form, but characterized by the following marks:

1. Relocation to the abandoned places of Empire.
2. Sharing economic resources with fellow community members and the needy among us.
3. Hospitality to the stranger.

⁷⁰ David Janzen, *The Intentional Christian Community Handbook: For Idealists, Hypocrites, and Wannabe Disciples of Jesus* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2013), 12.

4. Lament for racial divisions within the church and our communities combined with the active pursuit of a just reconciliation.
5. Humble submission to Christ's body, the church.
6. Intentional formation in the way of Christ and the rule of the community along the lines of the old novitiate.
7. Nurturing common life among members of intentional community.
8. Support for celibate singles alongside monogamous married couples and their children.
9. Geographical proximity to community members who share a common rule of life.
10. Care for the plot of God's earth given to us along with support of our local economies.
11. Peacemaking in the midst of violence and conflict resolution within communities along the lines of Matthew 18.
12. Commitment to a disciplined contemplative life.⁷¹

One can detect the multitude of voices and perspectives that influenced the final statement and twelve marks, as it is simultaneously broadly ranging and vague, and in many ways is less clear than the briefer descriptions of Janzen and Wilson. It also leads one to wonder if any of the communities are authentically honoring all of them, or if their leaders simply advocated for the inclusion of particular characteristics that are hallmarks of their own community. For example, the very first mark, "relocation to abandoned places of Empire" accurately describes the communities founded by Wilson-Hartgrove and Claiborne in blighted urban neighborhoods, but may not be so readily or easily embraced by new communities in other parts of the country or world.⁷² Likewise racial reconciliation is an active focus of communities living in places of historic racial division or tension, yet other new monastic communities, such as the Community of Jesus, which will be explored later, are situated in less racially divided places, and thus the pursuit of racial reconciliation is not a singular focus.

⁷¹ *School(s) for Conversion*, xii-xiii.

⁷² For example, Community of Transfiguration in Victoria, Australia, which is the subject of a book in the New Monastic Library series, would fail this first mark. Paul R. Dekar, *Community of the Transfiguration: The Journey of a New Monastic Community* (Eugene, OR: New Monastic Library, 2008).

For the purposes of this project, the fifth mark is particularly relevant, for here is where the movement explicitly demonstrates its desire to cultivate healthy, sustainable connections with the wider church, including, presumably, congregations. Indeed, in a book of reflections on the twelve marks edited by Rutba House a year after the gathering, Ivan Kauffman explores the topic for an entire chapter, much of which is an examination of the need by all Christians to remain in tangible community with one another.

The only alternative to the twin evils of individualism and spiritual pride is a ‘humble submission to Christ’s body, the church.’ Despite their faults – and they are many – every Christian congregation and every Christian denomination nevertheless has within it Christ’s living presence....That may not be our first choice, but it is Christ’s choice, and if we want to follow him will have to take our place among his other followers.⁷³

Wilson-Hartgrove echoes that feeling in the concluding chapter of *New Monasticism*, in which he compares the fleeting Jesus People movement of the 1970s, which he believes struggled for longevity owing to their limited connections with the broader church, to the communities springing up today, which seem decidedly more interested in preserving a grounding in historic churches. He is especially wary of new monasticism being “just a movement in American Christianity,” which would virtually guarantee that it will fade into history and “some other movement will follow, like waves rolling against the shore.”⁷⁴ Similarly, in an article in *The Washington Times* about the new monastic movement, Shane Claiborne is quoted as saying,

What’s unique about our communities today is that we don’t see ourselves as an underground church or detaching ourselves from the larger congregations. Actually, we’re really integrated in our neighborhood. Folks identify us as a monastic movement because they see us as a renewal connected to the larger body, not in schism from it...[O]ur

⁷³ Ivan Kauffman, “Mark 5: Humble Submission to Christ’s Body, the Church,” in *School(s) for Conversion*, 74.

⁷⁴ Wilson-Hartgrove, *New Monasticism*, 146.

embarrassment and frustration with the church is the very reason we engage, not disengage.⁷⁵

But neither Claiborne, Wilson-Hartgrove, Kauffman, nor any other leading voice in the new monastic movement offers much in terms of specifics of what this commitment to the wider church could or should look like. Indeed, this lack of specificity has been a source of criticism by some, who see in the movement a failure to recognize the renewing influences of the historic church outside of modern Protestantism, and who perceive in the movement the mistaken notion that this is “God’s late-breaking answer to what ails the church.”⁷⁶ For such specificity, one must turn to other living expressions of intentionally Christian, or new monastic, communities, who are aligned or in direct relationship with the wider church, be it through broad denominational affiliation or specific congregational ties. It is in these communities that one is able to move beyond the witness of a few figureheads writing from 20,000 feet, immersed in their own particular experiences, and begin to see how new monasticism really looks “on the ground” in places other than the few central communities. This is because new monasticism is not a movement centered around any single individual’s vision, or one church/denomination, or within a relatively consistent context. Rather, there are a wide variety of communities that are experimenting with what it looks like to live closely and intentionally together as Christians, while also remaining connected to the wider church.

⁷⁵ Shane Claiborne, from article “Modern Monastery” appearing in *The Washington Times*, December 14, 2006.

⁷⁶ Gerald W. Schlabach, “Call No Movement New Until It Is Old: ‘New Monasticism’ and the Practice of Stability,” *Pro Ecclesia* (Volume XXI, Number 3), 247-57.

Chapter 3: The Reality of New Monasticism

“The serious Christian, set down for the first time in a Christian community, is likely to bring with him a very definite idea of what Christian life together should be.”⁷⁷
(Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

This chapter will focus on three contemporary expressions of intentional Christian communities. They are quite different from one another in context, background, organization, and membership. The first is an ecumenical community located on the idyllic coast of Cape Cod, and is the most populous as well as the oldest of the three. The second is located in south Boston, and is the offspring of an emergent Episcopal church of the Diocese of Massachusetts. The third is a network of eight houses founded by United Methodist elders in Dallas, Texas, which comprise a broader new monastic community around the Metroplex. The examination of each will seek to provide backstory of the establishment of the community, an overview of its growth and evolution, reflections of day-to-day life based on personal visits to each, consideration of the community’s rule, and a description of how the community interacts with a congregation. At the conclusion of each case study, I will attempt to reconnect them with the lessons of the foundational three communities explored in chapter 1, and the themes that seem to unify or define the broader new monastic movement, as discussed in chapter 2. Then I summarize how they relate to and understand their relationship to the wider church, including, when it is relevant, a connected congregation.

⁷⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 26.

The Community of Jesus (Orleans, Massachusetts)

Background

The Community of Jesus is an ecumenical community in the Benedictine tradition located at Rock Harbor on shore of Cape Cod. The Community was founded in the 1960s by two Episcopal laywomen, Cay Anderson and Judy Sorenson. In 1961 the two women decided to join their households (each was married) together for six months for purely practical reasons, as the Andersons' home was being renovated. Over those six months, the two families came to discern a call to continue this shared life, and they began to listen for how the Holy Spirit was guiding them toward more intentional discipleship. Both were quite involved in the charismatic renewal movement that surged in the church during that decade, and they grew in notoriety around the region for their Biblical teaching, which was known for its simple, direct, and relatable approach. That renewal movement led to the establishment of scores of communes around the country, so the Andersons and Sorensons were not unique in their efforts to foster a new type of intentional Christian living. However, as will be shown, it is the longevity of the community at Rock Harbor that sets it apart, and the way they chose to adapt over time to answer what they believed God was calling them to be and do. That responsiveness, and their willingness to change as they grew, has enabled the community to endure and thrive, even as most other charismatic renewal communities dwindled and eventually died.

As the Andersons and Sorensons worked at creating a shared life in the 1960s, many people were drawn by their witness to attach themselves to this experiment. In 1968 the first group of women professed vows as sisters, the early iteration of religious

life for women that eventually evolved into fully-fledged Benedictine monasticism. When the community was formally incorporated two years later there were 25 people living in residence in five houses, worshipping in a tiny chapel that was converted from an old pump house, and living out a shared vocational commitment to prayer, work, and transformation. In these early days, the Community associated itself with The Episcopal Church, and indeed the chapel was consecrated by three Anglican bishops (The Rt. Rev. John Coburn, Bishop of the Diocese of Massachusetts; the Rt. Rev. Anselm Genders, Bishop of the Diocese of Bermuda; the Rt. Rev. Henry Hill, Bishop of the Diocese of Ontario).

The Sorensens and Andersons were themselves Episcopalians, and attended Church of the Holy Spirit, the local Episcopal parish in Orleans. They had a friendly relationship with the rector at that time and led a weekly Bible study on Thursday evenings. But as the years progressed, the Community began to distance itself from the Episcopal Church, both locally and ecclesiastically. New arrivals to the Community came from a variety of Christian traditions, including other Protestant denominations, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Orthodox Church. Mothers Cay and Judy were increasingly drawn to the idea of creating something new and distinct, and thus they began to shift the pattern of worship away from distinctly Episcopal to more ecumenical, and the arrival of a few ordained ministers (including an Episcopal priest) in the early 1970s meant that worship life could take place fully on the community's campus, rather than relying on the various neighboring clergy and churches. "It wasn't that they were intentionally leaving the Episcopal Church. There was no major break with Holy Spirit,"

reflects a current member and Episcopal priest, Fr. Bill,⁷⁸ who arrived with his family in the 1980s, “but rather that the community was able to carry on its worship life within itself, and it seemed to be part of the natural progression of where God was leading us.”⁷⁹

Membership

Later during the 1970s the Community introduced an order of brothers, corresponding to the women already living as Benedictine nuns, and welcomed dozens of new singles and families into new households. Here it is important to note the distinction between the “households” and the “Brothers” and “Sisters,” as the inclusion of these varied types of members is one of the distinguishing features of the Community.

- *Household members* – These members keep the general rule of the community, which is found in the governing document, *The Rule of Life of the Community of Jesus*. They covenant to maintain the three principle vows of the community, which are grounded in the *Rule of Benedict* – obedience, stability, and conversion of life – but do so while living in homes scattered around the campus. They may be married, with or without children, or celibate and unmarried. Each household consists of more than one family, often three or four, in emulation of the Andersons’ and Sorensons’ original decision to join their homes together. Household families or individuals are required to be financially self-sufficient and participate fully in the shared, daily tasks of home life (e.g. meals, chores, practical decisions). They have responsibilities to the wider community to take active part in the prayer life and worship, financially

⁷⁸ The names of those who are quoted in this section have been changed.

⁷⁹ From conversation with author, August 15, 2015.

contribute in a sacrificial way, care for the buildings and grounds, participate in the community's ministry of hospitality, and submit to the authority of the Community.

As the entire Community is founded on the *Rule of Benedict*, household members take vows according to the stages that traditional rule: postulancy, novitiate, simple profession, solemn profession. Household members may own their home, or they may rent from other home-owning members, but they may be moved by the Superior at any time. Children growing up in the Community as part of households do not take vows, but may do so voluntarily upon turning 17. Today there are roughly 200 household members living in approximately 30 houses.

- *Brothers and Sisters* – According to Chapter 10 of the Community's Rule, in addition to taking the basic vows required of all members that are focused upon the three themes of obedience, stability, and conversion of life,

[t]he Brothers and Sisters of the Community of Jesus make additional vows. Forgoing marriage in order to pursue a life of complete dedication to God, they commit themselves to lives of chastity and consecrated celibacy. Following the example of Christ, who gave up all for the sake of the Father, they renounce all private possessions and embrace poverty, thus serving as a sign within the Community of our total dependence upon God.⁸⁰

Brothers and Sisters live in separate residences (Zion Priory and Bethany Convent), and conduct the daily prayer offices in the Church of the Transfiguration, which is the Community's main worship space. Today there are 30 sisters and 20 brothers.

Several dozen children were born at or raised in the Community during the first full decade of its existence, grew up within it, and upon reaching adulthood in the 1980s and 90s chose to make their own professions of membership, either as household

⁸⁰ *The Rule of Life of the Community of Jesus*, Section 1, Chapter 10, (Orleans, MA: The Community of Jesus), 23-24.

members or vowed sisters or brothers. This marked a turning point in the history of the Community, transforming its reliance upon new arrivals to sustain its life to a more stable, self-sustaining community. Not surprisingly, the Community grew steadily during these first few decades, and the number of households quadrupled from the initial five.

Governance or Rule

As the Community grew and evolved, it required greater structure and governance. So it was that the Rule was first established and then revised over subsequent years, with the most current governing Rule published in 2011. As the Community is self-described Benedictine, the Rule is firmly grounded in the *Rule of Benedict*. Thus, it is a practical as well as theological document, akin to the blending of the practical and theological in Benedict's ancient rule, as well as the more recent revisions of traditional monastic communities like the Society of St. John the Evangelist (Episcopal). Yet the distinct nature of the Community, being a blend of households and traditional religious, causes the Rule to also possess something of the essence of *Life Together*, with its focus on framing Christian community as a means of expressing the vision of the Church as Christ's body.

It also reverberates with a clear sense of the purpose of the Community, one that echoes the writing of Bonhoeffer before, during, and after the Finkenwalde experiment, as well as that of Jonathan R. Wilson in his summary of new monasticism, despite the fact that the Community is not integrated into the broader new monastic movement. The opening of the Rule reads,

The Community of Jesus is a fellowship of Christian disciples called by our Lord Jesus Christ and dedicated to the honor of his name. He is the

source of our life, both individually and corporately, and our existence is made possible only in him. God's call is pure gift, and our grateful response, made possible by his grace, is the complete offering of our lives to him and to his service. We believe, therefore, that the supreme vocation of our lives is to follow Jesus Christ—confessing with our lips, believing in our hearts, and affirming by our lives that he is Lord and Savior.⁸¹

Much like Bonhoeffer's desire that the seminary focus the lives of its residents to more sacrificially follow Jesus, this opening language makes clear that the Community exists to help members make a "complete offering" of their lives to the service of Jesus. Their supreme vocation, their *telos*, to borrow the language of Jonathan R. Wilson's writing, is to confess, believe, and affirm through the fullness of their lives the lordship of Jesus Christ. As will be shown in the next case study, this clarity of purpose must not be taken for granted or assumed, even in communities that profess a Christian identity or originate from Christian churches.

After making clear the mission and purposes of the Community, and setting out the vows and obligations of members, the Rule establishes a highly organized governance structure oriented around the authority of a Superior (called Prior or Prioress), who is elected to an eight-year term and functions as "shepherd," "teacher," and "administrator." The Superior has ultimate temporal authority of the Community, including the ability to relocate members in the households, and reassign roles and responsibilities. Below the Superior is a Sub-prior and a group of five deans, who together comprise the governing "Council." The Rule provides clear guidelines for how conflict is handled, how members assume and fulfill vows, and how decisions are made. In this organization, the Community takes a page once again from the *Rule of Benedict*, which serves as the touchstone for the Community's life and organization. Rather than create new titles,

⁸¹ *The Rule of Life of the Community of Jesus*, 3.

roles, or structures, the Community embraces the wisdom of Benedict, and his rule's proven track record of sustaining healthy Christian communities in diverse places and contexts for nearly 1,500 years. More will be said about the Community's embrace of tradition and antiquity in the section summary.

Relationship with Wider Community

The maturation of the Community was inevitably reflected in its relationship with the surrounding neighborhood and community. In its earliest years, as the Community grew from the original two couples to several dozen families, including vowed religious men and women, the neighboring community was initially quite suspicious. The quiet acquisition of all the houses surrounding Mothers Cay and Judy was the original source of strain, according to David Jones, who moved with his parents to the community in 1972 when he was in middle school. He recalls,

Cay and Judy's houses were the focal point of the movement. So early on, people began buying up houses in the neighborhood, to be nearer the founders. This influx of religious people buying up property – until they community bought up all the property – led to a lot of animosity between members and neighbors. Some of the neighboring families really resented community members for taking over the way they did.⁸²

This tension was played out in the local school, where Community children were treated like outsiders. “We were the weird kids from that weird place,” Jones recalls. Nearly forty years later, Community children continue to attend the local Orleans' elementary school, and some Community members have worked as teachers in the school or served on the local school board. Yet nearly all Community children are home-schooled during

⁸² From a conversation with the author, February 15, 2016.

middle and high school, which likely stems, at least in part, from a lingering awkwardness between the Community and its neighbors.

In the last several decades Community members have made efforts to build relationships with their neighbors, and they have done so in a variety of ways. For example, given the expectation that members maintain financial independence, many have worked in professional capacities in the wider community. There have been teachers, attorneys, and architects. As mentioned above, few have served on the local school board, and several male members have volunteered on the fire department or as emergency medical technicians. Still others have worked on local fishing boats or as landscapers or yard crews to area homes. This past summer Fr. Bill worked 8-10 hours a week working as a host at a locally famous breakfast dive. “I love the work and the chance to meet people, and it has been wonderful to establish relationships with folks who live in the area.”⁸³ Such work in the broader community has included the involvement of every type of professed Community of Jesus member, from household members to vowed brothers and sisters. Everyone who is able is encouraged to find a way to be present to the wider world and interact with non-members in meaningful way. In addition to providing members with livelihoods necessary to fulfill the obligation to financial security and stability, this ability to work in the wider community has had the added benefit of countering skepticism and suspicion by those who otherwise would never visit the Community.⁸⁴

⁸³ From conversation with author, August 15, 2015.

⁸⁴ Owing to its tightly controlled environment, relative isolation from the wider community, and resistance to formal ties with any Christian churches or denominations, the Community has been accused by some of a cult-like existence. Indeed, there is an alternative, parallel website to the Community’s own, created and operated by a former member with the goal of casting doubt on the wholesomeness of the Community. See www.communityofjesus.org versus www.communityofjesus.net.

Worship and Church

During the 1980s the Community's worship practices evolved, and the pattern of daily prayer that Mothers Cay and Judy, by now the co-prioresses of the community, originally established grew into the seven-fold offices of the Benedictine tradition. This was a major endeavor for a community founded in the charismatic renewal movement of the 1960s and consisting largely of people with Protestant church backgrounds. The Brothers and Sisters facilitated this devotional life for the community, but even household members were encouraged to participate on a regular basis. The life of prayer at the Community was further transformed when, upon returning from a pilgrimage to Europe in the mid-1980s, the prioresses encouraged the community to incorporate Gregorian chant. They hoped to enrich the spiritual potency of their communal prayer, and to further demonstrate the Community's commitment to the practices and customs of the ancient church. The resulting embrace of Gregorian chant makes the Community one of the few non-Roman Catholic communities where Gregorian chant is incorporated into daily worship practices. "Not that it's easy or that everyone here loves it," says current household member Barbara, who was born and raised within the community, and who has two children who've graduated high school and chosen to make their own initial professions as community members. "It's taken a long time for us to really make it our own. But we are committed to it for the long run because it offers our worship richness and depth. It is not just beautiful. It is holy."⁸⁵

In the late 1990s the Community began plans for the construction of a new, central church, one that would be able to accommodate the entire professed membership,

⁸⁵ From conversation with author, August 15, 2015.

and in 2000 the Church of the Transfiguration was dedicated. It is the centerpiece of communal life, and hosts not only the daily offices and weekly Eucharist, but also numerous concerts and performances throughout the year. Built in the Byzantine basilica style, it is a showcase of the community's dedication to visual arts, as it is adorned with iconography, mosaic, fresco, and bronze sculptures. Seating is oriented in traditional monastic or choir style, so the majority of the 400 seats in the church face one another across the center aisle in order to facilitate antiphonal psalm chant. A relatively small section of seats are reserved for guests, though the church is open for visitors to take a complete tour six days a week. The church is the centerpiece of life at the Community, and a source of tremendous pride by the members, many of whom serve as docents to guide visitors around during peak tourist season in the summer months.

Importantly, it is the building of the Church of the Transfiguration that marked a turning point in the Community's relationship with non-members. Before the church was finished, visitors to the Community were greeted by a fence and gate, a physical as well as symbolic barrier that quite unsubtly communicated the message "keep away" to neighbors and vacationers. Oblate Jerry DiNardo describes the before and after:

I had known two Community members for more than a decade. I did some accounting work for their law office, and we would occasionally go out to lunch. A few times they invited me and my wife over for dinner, and when we got there, we had to use a phone to call for permission to enter. The gate would open, we'd go inside, then the gate would shut behind us. Around the time they built the church that gate came down, and it made the whole place feel more open, more inviting. I always knew people here [at the Community], but it was intimidating to other people and lots of the locals.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ From conversation with author, August 16, 2015.

The construction of the church had two additional positive effects. First, it is large and can comfortably seat the full membership of the Community as well as guests. This means that worship on major feast days, as well as concerts and performances, is open to the public. On any given summer Sunday, attendance at the Eucharist can include a dozen or more guests, as well as the whole Community, and the worship bulletin is created in such a way as to assist newcomers or visitors to feel comfortable participating in the liturgy. Secondly, for neighbors like the DiNardos, the opening of worship to guests, and the gestures of welcome by the Community, led them to make attendance at Church of the Transfiguration a regular part of their lives. Lifelong Roman Catholics, and not personally inclined to the rigors of community life, the DiNardos never felt drawn to the life of professed membership in the Community. However, they describe their involvement with the Community as being a great deal stronger and more meaningful than merely visiting. “It is our church,” Ellen DiNardo says, “and these people are our dear friends.”⁸⁷

The DiNardos are indicative of a group of people who look to the Community, and particularly the Church of the Transfiguration, to be their core spiritual home. It is, as Mrs. DiNardo succinctly puts it, their church. They give financially toward its life. They worship regularly with the Community in the Church of the Transfiguration, either throughout the year like the DiNardos, who live locally, or for a season or two, for those who are summer residents on Cape Cod. They share their skills and talents, as much as possible, in mutual support, and have developed friendships as a result with various members of the Community. They look to the Community for pastoral care and timely assistance when facing difficult life circumstances, and trust members of the Community

⁸⁷ From conversation with author, August 16, 2015.

to pray for them in times of hardship. When they are unable to attend Sunday worship, the Community brings the Eucharist to them. And the church hosts the celebration of major sacramental or pastoral events in their own lives, or the lives of their close family members.

The power of that last point is enhanced by the standing policy of the Community to conduct worship for members and their families only; for example, they do not host weddings for non-members, despite its lucrative potential. But the policy is just pliant enough to honor unique pastoral situations and relationships, meaning the Church of the Transfiguration will, from time to time, host a service of baptism or a funeral for a non-member of the Community. Such was the case in 2014 when the DiNardo's granddaughter was baptized in the Church of the Transfiguration by a member of the Community's clergy, further deepening their feeling that, although they are not formally vowed members of the Community, this is their spiritual home.

The DiNardos are now more than merely friends associated with the Community. In 2008 they took vows as oblates, meaning they are formally connected to the Rule of the Community and its life together without the expectation of strict adherence to all its vows. According to the Rule,

Oblates of the Community of Jesus are those who have entered into a covenant by which they have agreed to the principles and purposes of the Community as expressed in the *Rule of Life*, and have resolved to integrate the spirit of the *Rule* into their daily lives. While maintaining their obligations to and involvements in their own parishes and congregations, Oblates seek to participate in the Community's life, insofar as they are able, and thereby to associate themselves more closely with our common vocation.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ *The Rule of Life of the Community of Jesus*, 29.

According to Fr. Bill, on an average Sunday there are usually between 25-30 oblates in attendance in worship, a number that rises to 100 or more on major feasts, which is a significant number of people who have formal, active engagement both with the Community and their own local congregations.

Yet not everyone feels this sense of porousness in the boundary between the Community and the wider world. David Jones recounts a story of returning to the Community when his mother died, and being told that he would not be able to sit with his father or sister, both of whom were members, and would instead be required to sit in the guest section in the rear of the church. He recalls

This was utterly unacceptable to me, so I asked for an appointment with the Prioress, which I never received. But I guess it finally got back to her, because they finally relented, and let me and my family sit with my father and sister at the funeral.⁸⁹

Such a prohibition against the presence of non-member relatives, even in situations such as funerals, calls into question just how permeable the boundary with the outside world really is. Surely not every non-member relative is as persistent as David Jones, and therefore has had to mourn the death of parents, siblings, or loved ones from afar.

Summary

The arc of the Community's life has presented various stages in its involvement with the wider Church. It began as a movement within a local Episcopal congregation that quickly outgrew and surpassed that congregation's capacity to support or manage. The Community became increasingly independent and removed as it was able to provide the material and spiritual resources it needed to sustain its own life. In many ways, the

⁸⁹ Conversation with author, February 15, 2016.

story of the Community mirrors that of Taizé: this was a new expression of monastic practice that was quite traditional, autonomous, and physically removed, yet also planted and led in such a way that it never completely lost contact with the surrounding community or the wider world. The Community continues to maintain important boundaries to help preserve its internal, communal integrity, yet those boundaries are just porous enough to allow it to engage the world and offer its leavening, renewing influence to the Church. Guests poured into the Community throughout its early decades, ensuring a steady influx of prospective members and causing the Community to maintain an open, ecumenical attitude regarding the life of the wider Church. Today, much like at Taizé, guests continue to come from around the world to participate in the Community's worship and communal life, to rejuvenate in its midst, and to receive inspiration that they take back to their own churches and communities. It could never become – and the leadership seemingly did not desire it to – completely cloistered and removed from the world, even as it has embraced in increasing devotion the traditional practices of a cloistered Benedictine monasticism.

That relationship with the Rule of Benedict is another distinguishing aspect of the life of the Community, in that the founders looked to the past, and particularly to the early era of Christian monasticism, for inspiration and guidance of their community. Their focus upon antiquity and the spiritual disciplines and practices of the ancient church sets the Community apart from other modern new monastic expressions. They are the living embodiment of an expression Shane Claiborne popularized when trying to capture the essence of new monasticism: “ancient-modern”. It is hard to imagine another community that would welcome and honor celibate singles and married couples, as well

as children, while grounding its worshiping life around a Byzantine church where the ancient prayer offices are offered seven times daily in Latin. In this sense, the Community of Jesus is like a sphinx: it is a hybrid between the ancient traditions of Benedict, the freshness and vitality of Taizé, and the openness to singles and families that characterizes new monastic communities associated with Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove and the twelve marks.

Yet even as the Community has reached this new stage in its history, and exhibits many signs of maturity and stability, there remain questions about the true spiritual health and transparency of the Community. Former Community members have been critical of the practices they feel are manipulative and coercive, causing the Community to struggle to overcome allegations of abuse or cult-like behavior that first surfaced in the 1970s. David Jones, who left the Community as a young adult, but whose parents remained in the Community until their deaths in the last decade, describes one way that authority was exhibited and maintained during his years there:

They have a very high appreciation for sin and expunging it from daily life, so they developed these things called “light sessions,” which were basically meetings where members were reprovved and corrected. The result was that you were never sure where you stood, or where you stood with regard to the leadership.

For David, the lasting impression of his years in the community is one of carefully cultivated power and overgrown egos. He has long since left the Community, yet he perceives that the struggle with ego-centrism and manipulation of power likely remains. “There really isn’t a heart for the wider community,” he says. “They were born from the egos of the founders, and there remains an overwhelming sense of their self-

importance.”⁹⁰ Owing to experiences like the one involving his mother’s death, recounted earlier, he has serious doubts about the sincerity of the Community’s interest in or commitment to fostering relationships with the wider church.

In that regard, it is important to be clear that the Community does not have a relationship with a local congregation so much as it *is* a local congregation. What began as a movement spun from the neighboring Episcopal church has evolved into an independent Christian community, complete with a worshiping and pastoral life that serves people who are not formal community members. This sets the Community apart from the two subsequent case studies, which continue to have direct ties to founding or neighboring congregations, and with which the community must negotiate its mission and practices. The size and history of the Community of Jesus mean that it is not burdened by the same questions and issues that face either 77 Wachusett or the houses of the Epworth Project. Yet it presents an important witness to the conversation about the relationship between new monastic communities and congregations because it manifests that relationship so uniquely: the Community is the church, but the church functions for far more people than merely the Community.

77 Wachusett (Boston, Massachusetts)

Background

Founded in 2008, The Crossing is an emergent Episcopal mission congregation of approximately 75 people that meets at the Cathedral of St. Paul in downtown Boston. From its inception, The Crossing was intended to attract people who didn’t feel drawn to traditional congregations, particularly young adults, gay and lesbian singles and couples,

⁹⁰ Conversation with author, February 15, 2016.

and the homeless. The aspect of The Crossing that most clearly distinguishes it from traditional Episcopal churches is the style and pattern of its worship, which is designed to intentionally engage and involve worshippers by being significantly less reliant upon the priest as principal liturgical minister. Crossing worship typically involves as many people as possible (e.g. reading, leading prayers, playing or leading music).

The philosophy of The Crossing's pattern of worship, with its focus on maximizing inclusivity and participation, is mirrored by congregation's organization and administration.⁹¹ As it is a mission community of the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts, founded and hosted by the cathedral parish, The Crossing is led by a Council rather than a Vestry, and from its inception has resisted more traditional top-down, priestly-centered leadership, or investing an elected, representative body with the sort of authority given a Vestry. Instead, most decisions are made by the whole congregation using the consensus method, and efforts are made to involve as much of the community as possible.

Not long after its inception a small group of six members of the Crossing began meeting together to talk about how they could explicitly incorporate practices of prayer and discipleship more directly in their individual lives; that is, how they could move beyond Sunday-centered Christianity and focus their whole selves toward the pursuit of a comprehensive faith. The group eventually took the name Praying Our Lives, and almost immediately their conversations began to involve an idea for living together in some sort of intentional community. The Diocese of Massachusetts had by this time established an Episcopal Service Corps community (first called the Micah Project, which later grew and

⁹¹ Information about the structure and organizational philosophy of The Crossing comes from conversations with house members of 77 Wachusett, as well as the church's website, www.thecrossing.net.

changed to become Life Together), and offered a basic model for how such a community could exist: people living together according to a covenant to pray together daily, share meals, and live modestly and simply.⁹²

As the conversations between these Crossing members continued and grew more serious, one of them, Gabriel,⁹³ received a significant financial windfall of nearly \$500,000 and offered it as capital to purchase a house large enough to provide space for a small community. Suddenly, the idea of beginning an intentional community went from a pipe dream to the planning stages, and the group began to more concretely strategize how they would order their life together around the core values of prayer and common life. Importantly, no formal covenant or rule was agreed upon at this stage, nor did the group move beyond the original core values of daily prayer, shared meals, and modest living. There was no consensus on what specifically this would look like, or how it would be lived out and expressed on a day-to-day basis. Before such a vision was formalized, in 2011 a suitable house was found in Jamaica Plain, an ethnically mixed, gentrifying area of south Boston, and Gabriel, with the group's support and encouragement, purchased the house and hired an architect and contractor to perform necessary renovations.

Plans were drawn up, and three initial residents moved into the top floor while renovations were conducted on the bottom floors. Quarters were extremely tight and at times tremendously uncomfortable and frustrating to the new residents, but enthusiasm for the intentional community remained high. Soon a married couple joined the house, bringing the total of residents up to six, and despite the early challenges, the group's

⁹² Residents at 77 Wachusett share financial responsibility as equal tenants, but they do not share all income or keep a common purse. Currently all residents are either students or employed, and they have not yet had to address the question of how to respond to a resident who is unable to pay rent or contribute fairly.

⁹³ All names in this section have been changed.

commitment remained strong and the joy of actually initiating this experiment in intentional living propelled them to figure out the details of how they would live in close proximity.

From its inception the house members desired to build upon the foundation of inclusivity and hospitality that are hallmarks of The Crossing, and so were wary of becoming overly insular or inward-focused. “The house was never meant to become the innermost circle of The Crossing,” says Jacob, the only resident of the house who is also a paid staff member of the Crossing. “It is not the ‘brightest and best’ members of The Crossing. We make an effort to counteract any self-glorification of the house, or pretend like we are better than others.”⁹⁴ As one of the original residents, Teresa, says, “I experienced community very strongly at The Crossing, so the house was an extension of that. Community is very important to us in the house, in the way we live with one another.”⁹⁵

The leadership of the Crossing was involved in only a few planning conversations regarding the house, but for liability and practical reasons the decision was made to keep the church and house totally separate entities, and not involve the church in any direct way with the running of the house. But the house has always been a place where Crossing events happen regularly, usually once or twice a month, and visitors to The Crossing are typically invited over to the house within a few months of becoming involved. Jacob reflects,

Church of the Apostles in Seattle had a set of intentional communities that they called house churches, and they had a hard time getting over the boundaries between the houses and the wider church. They struggled to

⁹⁴ From conversation with the author, August 14, 2015.

⁹⁵ From conversation with the author, August 14, 2015.

overcome the tendency to be inward-focused. We've worked to be open and available to The Crossing and anyone else who comes as a guest. We want to keep the windows open and the air moving, so to speak.⁹⁶

Governance or Rule

When envisioning what it should be, Gabriel, whose identity as patron meant he implicitly levied extra influence over the early direction of the house, had three basic goals:

1. The house would be an alternative witness of living to the wider world in order to counter prevailing patterns of materialism and isolation.
2. The house would be a peaceful and pleasant place to live for residents.
3. The house would offer a stabilizing influence for The Crossing and be a place of hospitality.⁹⁷

This broad focus on creating a welcoming, hospitable atmosphere meant that the residents spent much energy on establishing healthy patterns of daily life, and establishing norms about food and meals, common living space, and dispute resolution. When Gabriel got married and decided to move out of the house after only a year, the common life of the house remained grounded on the basic principles of hospitality and friendship. A Rule was agreed upon in 2013 and continues to serve as the basic governing document for life in the house. The rule begins with the following “Commitment of the House,” which focuses strongly on the life-sharing aspects of the house:

We commit ourselves to living deeply interconnected lives, expecting to be transformed as we form common rhythms of life and disciplines of spirit, offer joyful service and hospitality to the world, and find abundance

⁹⁶ From conversation with the author, August 14, 2015.

⁹⁷ From conversation with the author, August 13, 2015.

by depending on each other. We promise to consider each other's needs, to respect our differences, to contribute our unique gifts to the community, and to face life's challenges with patience, humor, and compassion.⁹⁸

The document also contains sections governing living arrangements, dispute resolution, and hospitality toward guests. Detail is given to how the common areas are shared, norms around food, alcohol, and tobacco, and guidelines around chores. The covenant overwhelmingly consists of governing the practicalities of the living arrangements.

Worship and Church

The religious life of the community, however, receives far less guidance or mention in the covenant, possibly owing to the difficulty experienced by the community in its early stages at finding consistency around spiritual practices. The covenant itself reveals the tension around regulating worship life. On the one hand it states, "We worship and pray together regularly in order to cultivate deep communion with God and one another."⁹⁹ However, no structure is provided around that norm, as "the discipline of worship may take many forms, depending on the needs, gifts, and preferences of the participants."¹⁰⁰

The result of this open-endedness meant that worship would become a complicated and awkward element of the house's life. For example, the initial goal of praying Compline nightly together ended after a few months when the residents' varied schedules meant attendance routinely fell short of the full house. A suggestion to shift to

⁹⁸ The Covenant of 77 Wachusett, internal document.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

daily Morning Prayer was met with resistance from those house members who worked later hours, and thus slept later in the morning, so that idea was dropped. The group recognized the deficiency and discussed it regularly at their weekly house meetings, but consensus was never reached on a new plan. They debated options and alternatives, but were generally resistant to making house worship a requirement of house life, or elevating this activity to something more than a goal. Perhaps flowing from the ethos of The Crossing, in which central authority is eschewed in favor of consensus, and no individual's tastes or preferences take precedent over any other, the house residents struggled to overcome the diversity of opinions about what the best times and methods of regular prayer and worship should be. Regular communal prayer and worship remained a priority and goal for the house, yet the specifics of what that would actually look like, and how members would be held accountable for not participating, was not clarified in these early years.

Instead, over time the goal of daily prayer diminished to once-weekly, and several residents supplanted communal worship with individual spiritual practices, or established a praying partnership with another member. Today, four years after the house was first established, communal prayer and worship continues to struggle due to the same core challenges: house members continue to operate on widely different personal schedules, and there is no covenant mandate to participate.

Adding to the struggle to crystalize a successful pattern of communal prayer and worship was the entrance into the community of an atheist, Rebecca, who is married to Jacob, the lone resident of the house who is also a paid staff member of The Crossing. Rebecca and Jacob's involvement with the house began not long after the house was

founded, and almost immediately it influenced the efforts to codify the house's rule of life, as the rest of the residents desired to adapt the rule to accommodate for Rebecca's lack of Christian belief. So, for example, the covenant was edited to remove any explicit mention of Jesus Christ, and it no longer names the house as an intentional "*Christian*" community; indeed, God is mentioned only once, and two verses of a psalm are the only Biblical citation. Beyond the language of the covenant, Rebecca's presence put additional pressure on the already fraying efforts to formulate a pattern of regular, communal prayer and worship, resulting in the room set apart as a chapel being used more often as a yoga studio than a place of communal prayer or worship. Here it is important to note that house residents see Rebecca's presence not as something to be merely tolerated, but as a perfect embodiment of the house's hospitality to all people, whether they be Christian or not. The opinion is shared by all the current residents that Rebecca is as fully a resident as any other, and that the house's integrity as a genuine community depends upon their ability to accommodate people of differing, or even non-existent, belief.

In other ways house life has evolved to create space for residents to deepen their friendships and coexist in peace. Twice a week the group shares a formal meal together (Wednesday dinner and Saturday brunch), and the first floor of the house is dominated by a large kitchen and sitting area that serves as the primary gathering space. Most of the food in the house is shared, and great efforts are made to ensure chores and house-maintenance duties are shared equally. House meeting occurs every Monday, and grievances are aired openly and without prejudice.

In fact, the spirit of transparency and honesty is exemplified by the recent decision of a resident to move out of the house by the end of 2015. George was part of

the Praying Our Lives group at The Crossing that fostered the vision of the house, and he was one of the three who occupied the house even as it was being renovated, so he has been a part of the community since its inception. However, over the past two years George became increasingly frustrated at the lack of communal spiritual practices, and the way the house lacked a regular pattern of prayer or worship. “I moved into the house hoping for something different, for something more, and I’m still looking for it,” he said.¹⁰¹ Over time he voiced his concerns in house meetings and in conversation with fellow residents, and his grievances were received with respect and love. However, as the group took no steps to address his underlying issue, it became clear to George that he would need to move out in order to seek the form of life and community he truly desired. The whole process of discernment and realization happened quite openly, and although George planned to move out by the end of 2015, the group remains friends. “These people have become my family,” he says.¹⁰²

In light of George’s departure, the remaining residents intend to engage in a time of reflection and discernment before recruiting new residents. Part of that process will involve revisiting the covenant and evaluating what may need changing. Some consideration will be given to whether or not to strengthen the expectations of communal life and make some things mandatory that for now are hopes or goals. For example, the question of whether or not to require weekly or daily presence at prayer or worship, rather than simply asking people to attend unless otherwise occupied, will be considered. There is broad awareness that the lack of a clearly stated expectation around worship is

¹⁰¹ From conversation with the author, August 13, 2015.

¹⁰² From conversation with the author, August 13, 2015.

preventing the house from a communal spiritual life. Yet there is collective dis-ease with mandates around worship, for risk of alienating existing residents.

They are also reflecting on whether or not to require participation in The Crossing for new residents. As the resident population turns over, there is discussion about where to seek new residents, and whether all prospective candidates come from the church. Such a policy would continue the existing, though unwritten, custom, one that has ensured a strong, shared interest among the residents. Yet a spirit of openness is similarly central to the ethos of the house, and the existing residents share a desire that the house be open and available to more than simply Crossing members.

And Jacob describes an additional consideration: whether to appoint an “abbot,” or head of the house. “Whenever a really difficult conflict of values comes up and consensus is impossible, we have no infrastructure to make a decision,” he says. Appointing an ultimate arbiter or decision-maker would alleviate some of that tension. However, such situations have only happened a few times in four years, so there is worry that the benefits of the abbot would be far outweighed by what it would cost in terms of mutuality and equality among residents.

Summary

77 Wachusett expresses many of the marks of new monasticism articulated by the Durham gathering in 2004. The location of the house was chosen not only for its affordability, but for also for its placement in the heart of a culturally and economically diverse community. Jamaica Plain may not be “abandoned by the Empire,” but it is far from a homogenous community of privilege and comfort that the movement’s leaders

openly resist (Mark 1). Community members carefully share their life in common, including a blend of single and married persons, with financial equality being of major importance (Marks 2, 7, 8). And hospitality and sustainable environmental stewardship were two of the main priorities offered by Gabriel when he chose to fund the house's establishment (Marks 3, 10). Likewise, the house embodies the deeply intentional character articulated in David Janzen's definition of an intentional Christian community:

[An] intentional Christian community is a group of people deliberately sharing life in order to follow more closely the teachings and practices of Jesus with his disciples. The more essential dimensions of life that are shared – such as daily prayer and worship, possessions, life decisions, living in proximity, friendships, common work or ministry, meals, care for children and elderly – *the more intentional is the community*.¹⁰³

Yet the house is also distinguished by the marks it does not embody, and by the aspects of Janzen's definition that it does not address. It is a fully formed, thriving intentional community, but one that presents little Christian identity. An active and nourishing prayer life is notably absent from the common practices of the house, nor is there a "disciplined contemplative life" (Mark 12). There is no active process of formation for new members (Mark 6), as that would impute a hierarchy of students and teachers, which would counter the egalitarian ethos of the house. A visit to the house leaves the impression of a group of people who are deeply committed to the experiment of sharing one another's lives in a harmonious and simple way, yet not clear about whether, let alone how, to allow that communal existence to form them more deeply as disciples of Jesus. This is most acutely expressed in the language of the house's covenant, with its glaring absence of the mention of Christ, nor any articulation of the ways the house seeks to foster the Christian faith and life among its residents. When the question

¹⁰³ Janzen, *The Intentional Christian Community Handbook*, 12. Emphasis mine.

of what makes this house a *Christian* community was posed, residents had difficulty responding, and one resident went so far as to offer, “I suppose I had never thought of it as being a Christian house.”¹⁰⁴ This muddled religious identity is in stark contrast to the clarity of the Community of Jesus, which robustly expresses its Christian identity in its very name as well as in the first chapter of its Rule, and returns again and again throughout the document to the community’s mission of forming faithful, responsive, deeply rooted disciples of Jesus.

The house’s relationship to The Crossing is similarly mixed. It was founded by a group from the congregation, and all current residents remain members of that church. Church events are often held at the house, and one resident is paid staff. Thus, the ties to the church are embedded in the house’s origin and remain apparent. Yet, the residents’ desire to prevent the house from becoming a church club has had the effect of dramatically limiting their influence on the life of the church. The vision of serving as a leavening agent to the broader church that inspired Bonhoeffer, MacLeod, and even the leaders of the households at St. Peter’s in the 1970s, has not been adopted by the residents at 77 Wachusett. They prefer to preserve a tidy boundary between the church and the house, and allow the house to function primarily as an experiment in communal living, rather than manage the potentially precarious nature of a more developed pattern of engagement and interaction.

¹⁰⁴ From conversation with the author, August 14, 2015.

Epworth Project (Dallas, Texas)

Background

In the greater Dallas area there are eight intentional communities founded through an organization called the Missional Wisdom Foundation (MWF), and collectively known as the Epworth Project. MWF was founded by the Rev. Dr. Elaine Heath, an elder in the United Methodist Church and Professor of Evangelism at Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University. Informed by the example and writing of Jonathan Wilson-Hartgove and Shane Claiborne, among others, Heath felt a growing desire to experiment with intentional community, and began formally discussing the idea of planting a community with Perkins students and other interested Christians. The first Epworth house was formally established in Garland, a Dallas suburb, in 2008, and several more were created within the next few years. A big boost to this rapid expansion came with the involvement of another local Methodist pastor with extensive real estate background and knowledge, the Rev. Larry Duggins, who provided guidance about property acquisition and real estate decisions.¹⁰⁵

The name Epworth derives from the birthplace in England of John and Charles Wesley, the founders of Methodism; thus, the name of the project infers its rootedness in the United Methodist Church. The largest practical implication is that most of the residents are Methodists, and most of the communities are established in partnership with neighboring Methodist churches. However, the original vision for the Epworth houses was to inspire mainline Christian churches across denominational lines to embrace the renewing potential of intentional community, so the religious practices of most of the

¹⁰⁵ Elaine Heath and Larry Duggins, *Mission, Monastic, Mainline: A Guide to Starting Missional Micro-Communities in Historically Mainline Traditions* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), 3-17.

houses are not exclusively or even mostly informed by Methodist custom. Furthermore, the mission statement of the Missional Wisdom Foundation articulates an ecumenical vision for the houses,¹⁰⁶ and the leaders hope to plant communities in coming years that are anchored to non-Methodist churches.

Governance or Rule

The Epworth houses are led by a 24-page “Epworth Resource Guide” that includes a “Rule of Life” for residents. The opening pages are detailed, yet flexible, and provide guidance without an overwhelming amount of requirements. For example, it is expected that each house will conduct a weekly logistics meeting to ensure clarity and transparency about basic issues of shared life, but how long, when, and what precisely this meeting will cover is left to the individual houses to determine. Likewise, care for residents’ spiritual lives is expected, but the specifics of how each house will practice the art of praying together daily and weekly is left to the individual houses. The shorter Rule functions like a covenant document for residents and is oriented around five core “marks” drawn from the Methodist baptismal rite: prayer, presence, gifts, service, and witness. Each section contains a series of “We will...” statements, echoing the strong, positive nature of baptismal covenant language. For example:

- We will pray daily.
- We will fast from food, electronics, talking, media...once a week.

¹⁰⁶ “The Missional Wisdom Foundation is a private non-profit Christian corporation that supports the education and entrepreneurial development of adults in missional theology. We focus on practicing Christianity through a lifestyle of hospitality, prayer, and humanitarian work in local neighborhoods. We want to be part of guiding a new generation of Christian leaders who live, learn, and worship in many expressions of community, helping more people to become disciples of Jesus where they live, work, and play.” Epworth Resource Guide, 23, unpublished internal document.

- We will be hospitable to our neighbors in our families, neighborhoods, and workplaces.
- We will practice regular Sabbath as a means of renewal.
- We will practice racial, gender, and other forms of reconciliation wherever we find sinful and destructive walls of division between people.¹⁰⁷

In addition to the resource guide, Epworth has a carefully organized governing structure, beginning with the leaders of the Missional Wisdom Foundation (MWF). Founders Elaine Heath and Larry Duggins remain in leadership, as well as a few others who have been appointed to the steering committee in recent years. They, in turn, select and work with an abbot who provides day-to-day guidance, spiritual care, and ultimate decision-making authority for all the houses. Below them are priors for each house, who are intended to function as spiritual guides, dispute arbiters, and liaisons to the abbot and the broader MWF leadership. As a whole, the entire cluster of leaders are known as the Spiritual Formation Band, with “band” being a term for a discipleship group from the Methodist tradition. The use of terms like abbot, prior, and band demonstrates the blending of traditions that occurs within Epworth. Effort has been made to draw upon a variety of resources in order to cultivate health and vitality within the communities.

Relationship with Church

The relationship between Epworth houses and partnering congregations is informed by another ancient church tradition, that of the “anchorites.” In anchoritic tradition, men or women who were set apart by a church for a particular vocation embodied their role as a mediating bridge between the church and the world by living in a

¹⁰⁷ Epworth Rule of Life, internal document, pp 13-16.

cell or apartment that was physically attached to the outside of the church building.¹⁰⁸

Traditionally, the relationship between the church and anchorite was one of mutual exchange: the anchorite would commit to a life of devoted prayer, as well as pastoral care or spiritual direction for members and passersby; meanwhile, the anchoring church would provide housing and food, and often assign someone to help care for the anchorite and ensure their health and safety.

This model of mutual, “anchored” relationship greatly informs the practices in Epworth houses. For example, in *Abide: A Guide to Living in Intentional Community* Heath writes, “Intentional communities that are anchored in congregations can become a very important influence toward a church becoming truly missional, because in the intentional community the congregation gets to see and interact with people who are living a missional lifestyle by living a rule of life together within the house, within the neighborhood, and in relation to the church.”¹⁰⁹ Correspondingly, house residents require the presence and involvement of the anchoring church to subsidize the expense of the house, support residents’ common life with meals or service, and provide residents with a consistent, broader congregational community.

The anchoring relationship is also about the community in which the house is embedded. Epworth houses are expected to be authentically engaged in loving service to the surrounding neighborhood, with each house discerning its own unique, contextually appropriate manner of doing so. For example, Amani House is located in an area of Dallas that is heavily populated by refugees, and residents of Amani House are almost

¹⁰⁸ Perhaps the most famous example of an anchorite is Julian of Norwich, who wrote her *Revelations* while dwelling in her cell abutting the church in Norwich, England, in the 14th century.

¹⁰⁹ Elaine Heath, editor, *Abide: A Guide to Living in Intentional Community* (Dallas, TX: Missional Wisdom Foundation, 2014), 118.

entirely refugees themselves. Thus, ministry with and to refugees forms the core of the house's efforts to serve the wider neighborhood. Their context frames and orients their mission and ministry.

The context in which Bonhoeffer House resides also deeply informs its life and ministry as an intentional Christian community. Bonhoeffer House is located in an economically and racially mixed neighborhood just a few miles from downtown Dallas. Four residents currently dwell together in a small house adjacent to and owned by Grace United Methodist, which is the house's anchor church. Owing to the house's proximity to some of the city's poorest neighborhoods and several large homeless shelters, ministry to vulnerable people is central to both the church and house's identity. For example, the church operates a free medical clinic, a free legal clinic, and a companion/mentoring program for teenage mothers. Meanwhile, the residents of the house seek their own opportunities to serve their most vulnerable neighbors.

House residents are deeply integrated into the life of the anchoring church. Bonhoeffer House's prior is on the staff at Grace UMC, and the three other house residents are actively engaged with Grace's ministry life. In observance of the vision articulated by the Epworth Resource Guide, the house aspires to be an "extension ministry of the church in the neighborhood," and the four Bonhoeffer residents see their role as extending the compassionate reach of the church, whether formally through Grace's ministries and programs, or through their own efforts to love and serve their neighbors. Thus, not only are they involved in the various clinics and other outreach

ministries, but they also regularly welcome homeless men to join them for meals and prayer, a few of whom have become regular guests at the house.¹¹⁰

The relationship between Bonhoeffer House and its anchoring church at Grace UMC is mutually understood to be healthy and life-giving. The senior pastor has been supportive of the house, and encourages residents to discern where and how they become involved in the life of the church. She has carefully avoided two pitfalls warned of by Elaine Heath in *Abide*. On the one hand

the intentional community has to find multiple ways to interact with the anchoring church without being sucked into an inwardly focused vortex of church committees and activities....The tendency at first is for anchoring churches to expect and even demand that people living in intentional community be completely focused on the internal concerns of the church....[W]hen this is the prevailing attitude and expectation of the church it is because the pastor and lay leaders regard what happens inside the church building and its programs as what really ‘counts’ in the life of the church.¹¹¹

On the other hand, an inverse pitfall occurs when churches want “little or nothing to do with the people living in the intentional community....In this case the anchor church is really not an anchor, for there was no spiritual or missional connection.”¹¹² Bonhoeffer House residents describe the pastor’s efforts to not “force fit” them into existing needs or explicitly or implicitly require involvement with church committees or governance. “She meets with us regularly to encourage and support us, but wants each of us to discern the ways they will engage,” says house prior Adam White.¹¹³ Thus, residents engage with the

¹¹⁰ The prior of Bonhoeffer has worked hard to earn the trust and friendship of the operators of a neighboring bed and breakfast, who were initially not pleased with the regular presence of homeless men next door.

¹¹¹ Heath, editor, *Abide*, 118.

¹¹² Heath, editor, *Abide*, 118-119.

¹¹³ From conversation with the author, December 18, 2015.

anchor church in uniquely un-formulaic ways, and are allowed to discern how they are called to serve. But they are also not left to their own whims, and the presence and ministry of the house is intentionally celebrated by the church in a variety of ways, such as an annual tradition of having Bonhoeffer residents lead the church's worship on a Sunday morning (preaching, choosing music, leading the prayers).

Worship and Prayer

The spiritual life of the Epworth houses is of central importance, and receives considerable attention in the Epworth Rule of Life, the broader Resource Guide, and in *Abide*, which serves as a more extensive exploration of the communal life. In *Abide*, Heath acknowledges the inherent difficulty of establishing a “rhythm of prayer that works for everyone living in the house, one that accommodates the different spiritualities and personalities of the members of the house, and that can anchor the house in an orientation of contemplation leading to action.”¹¹⁴ This difficulty was exemplified by the struggles at 77 Wachusett to develop an authentic prayer life that could accommodate the needs of the various residents' schedules, while also serving as a genuine source of spiritual refreshment. In the Epworth houses, the response to this difficulty is not, as might be expected, to become more rigid and prescriptive. Detailed norms or requirements are not provided, beyond the simply stated expectation that each house will cultivate its own practices. Yet strong encouragement is provided, with the assumption that residents are hungry not only for a successfully shared communal existence, but also for a deepening and strengthening of their Christian faith.

¹¹⁴ Heath, editor, *Abide*, 20.

The prayer life at Bonhoeffer House provides a good study of how Epworth fosters such health. Initially at Bonhoeffer, the house was occupied by four seminary students whose patterns of worship and prayer were stable and consistent, if not fairly monotonous. However, the composition of the house changed when several new residents moved into the house, transforming the house from a homogenous community of Anglo seminary students to a culturally and spiritually diverse group. To this new group, the monotony of the existing worship and prayer customs felt stifling and lifeless. There was a collective awareness of the need to more authentically express their diversity in prayer and worship, yet that process took time. In *Abide*, Bonhoeffer House Prior Adam White writes,

Over the last year our practice of prayer has been a process of continuing discernment, based on who is living within the house and how each person connects to the divine. The beautiful thing about corporate prayer in the setting of an intentional community is that it can be ever-changing due to different dynamics of those persons currently living within the house. This past year...these practices consist of *lectio* and *visio divina*, Thai-Buddhist meditation, extemporaneous intercession, and recitation of the Psalms coupled with silent contemplation.¹¹⁵

The chapel at Bonhoeffer House is located adjacent to the living room, asserting its priority to the life of the house, and it houses a large bookshelf filled with liturgical and worship resources to inform and inspire the residents. Meanwhile, the Epworth Resource Guide contains a reminder of the living resources: “As your house journeys through building this rhythm of prayer, know that you are not alone. The Abbot and Priors are avenues of support to help you discern the spiritual path you are creating as a house. Instrumental to this work will [also] be the aid of our Spiritual Directors.”¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Adam White, contributor, *Abide*, 26.

¹¹⁶ Epworth Resource Guide, internal document, 8.

In the Epworth Resource Guide, rather than offer detailed prescriptions for worship, emphasis is given to cultivating sacred space to foster prayer and an active prayer life. The goal is to resist stagnation, and foster healthy spiritual practices among the residents who are likely only there for a few years. This is one of the ways the Epworth houses differ from a community like the Community of Jesus. The goal at Epworth is not to establish a worship or prayer custom that will endure across a lifetime, but to foster a practice that is nourishing for individuals who share their lives with one another for a limited and specific period of time. Permanent customs and rituals are important for the Community of Jesus, which is comprised of a majority of people who will be there for the rest of their lives. Yet Bonhoeffer House is much more akin to Finkenwalde, where different customs were experimented with in order to stimulate the spiritual imaginations of the students during the short time that they were there. Despite his devotion to contemplative monastic practices, Dietrich Bonhoeffer was also flexible enough to allow the students to influence the core methods of daily prayer.

Other Factors

A factor in the process of developing relationship between a community and its anchor church is resident-turnover. Relationship-building with the anchor church and the broader neighborhood is extremely important, and as such residents are strongly encouraged to commit to a minimum of three years. As Bonhoeffer House Prior Adam White describes it, “Three years allows relationships to grow naturally and not feel rushed or forced. It is extremely hard on the life and maturity of the community when residents turn over more quickly; the house struggles to build continuity and

connection.”¹¹⁷ This goal has been difficult to achieve owing to the highly transitional life of young adults, who comprise the majority of residents in the eight houses. Most of the residents of the various Epworth houses, including Bonhoeffer House, are either current students or recent graduates from Perkins School of Theology. Thus, it is inevitable that some will need to relocate for work, as well as experience significant life-events such as marriage. For example, Prior White recently became engaged, and despite having lived as part of the Epworth project for nearly six years, he has decided to move out from Bonhoeffer House when he and his wife are married later this year.

Epworth leaders understand this inevitable reality, and choose to embrace it. Residents are not selected based on the likelihood that they will be able to stay indefinitely, nor are they required to take extended vows. The fact that residents will likely move on after a few years is celebrated, rather than lamented, since the fundamental goal of the Missional Wisdom Foundation is to serve as a sort of leaven for the wider church. As the mission statement of the Missional Wisdom Foundation puts it, “We want to be part of guiding a new generation of Christian leaders who live, learn, and worship in many expressions of community, helping more people to become disciples of Jesus where they live, work, and play.”¹¹⁸ Residents who decide to move on are understood to do so with an experience of intentional community grounded in prayer and service, and carry that out to new places. For Adam and the residents of Bonhoeffer House, this is especially fitting, given the original vision for intentional community cast by the house’s namesake saint at Finkenwalde. In the same way that Bonhoeffer recognized that the seminarians who were the community’s members would eventually

¹¹⁷ Conversation with author, December 18, 2015.

¹¹⁸ Epworth Resource Guide, 23.

head out to serve the church in new places, Epworth's leaders recognize that the health and success of the communities is tied to residents' departure. The goal is not exclusively about the internal health and vitality of the houses, but connected to the impact residents have on the broader church when they move away.

This sets the community apart from others like the Community of Jesus, which encourages more permanent, enduring membership. The Community of Jesus is largely comprised of people who moved to the community and never left, or were born and raised in the community and have chosen to stay. Though it has some new ways of being, it functions much more like an ancient monastic community in its pattern of life. This stability is a defining characteristic, and creates a very different culture than that of Bonhoeffer House or 77 Wachusett, which is similarly comprised of largely transient young adults, and does not require any form of time commitment as part of the covenant. The consistency of the population at the Community of Jesus means that people will develop relationships over a lifetime, and experience the major, liminal phases of human life together. The structure of communities like Bonhoeffer House, 77 Wachusett, and even the community at Finkenwalde, cultivates deeply intense encounters with other people, as residents share a highly transitional period of their life together and, in many cases, discern many of the biggest decisions of their lives while living in the community (e.g. decisions around educational goals, vocation, marriage, children).

Interestingly, despite the well-documented influence that the writing and witness of Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove has had upon the Epworth Project, he has advocated for a sort of new monasticism that is more enduring and stable, rather than quite so fluid and transient. Indeed, he wrote an entire book on the subject, *The Wisdom of Stability*:

Rooting Faith in a Mobile Culture, perhaps in response to a common critique that new monasticism was a postmodernist's effort to loosen the restraints on traditional monastic life and practice in order to make it more desirable or accessible to a new age. On the contrary, Wilson-Hartgrove writes,

In a culture that is characterized by unprecedented mobility and speed, I am convinced that the most important thing most of us can do to grow spiritually is to stay in the place where we are. I am not advocating a stubborn provincialism or harking back to a time before the Internet and the automobile when 'things were simpler' and 'life was easier'....But I am convinced that both our use of new technologies and our faithful response to God's call depend on something more fundamental – a rootedness that most of us sense we are missing in our hurry to keep up amid constant change. I believe we need to recover the wisdom of stability.¹¹⁹

This may be the place where the differences between new monasticism and intentional Christian communities are felt most clearly, despite the fact that the terms are typically used interchangeably even by those who live within them. New monasticism would seem, by its very name, to be an embrace of the more permanent, stable pattern of life inherent to traditional monasticism, one that holds as an ideal a lifelong, solemn profession. Such is the witness of the Community of Jesus, which permits people to test their vocation for a trial period (postulancy, novitiate, and simple profession), but which is rooted and sustained by the commitment of its solemnly vowed members. On the other hand, in intentional communities such as Bonhoeffer House, there is no such similar embrace of traditional monasticism's ideal around permanence and stability. These communities are organized on the premise that Christians can, and perhaps even *should*, live together intentionally for a time of no small significance but also not for a lifetime, so that they may be formed by that experience in order to better and more faithfully serve

¹¹⁹ Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, *The Wisdom of Stability: Rooting Faith in a Mobile Culture* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2010), 1.

in future communities and contexts. Such a distinction might help explain why in both Bonhoeffer House and at 77 Wachusett, residents who became engaged felt it necessary to move out from the house after getting married. Their communal experience, in a real sense, was oriented around their identity as a single person, and they did not perceive a need or desire to remain in the community when that identity changed through marriage. Clearly, the monks and nuns of the ancient monastic world never have envisioned such a decision, as the vow of celibacy clearly prohibited such a possibility; yet in communities like the Community of Jesus, as well as in Rutba House, marriage does not hinder one's ability to share in the communal life fully and completely. In fact, it may actually enhance their rootedness and stability.¹²⁰

Summary

Of the three case studies, the Epworth houses most closely resemble the model established by the Durham gathering. The twelve marks of a new monasticism clearly inform the decisions made by the Missional Wisdom Foundation about where to locate houses, and how they are organized and structured. Applicants for residence in the Epworth houses are required to write a reflection on the twelve marks as part of their submission, and *Abide* abounds with quotes and citations from the works of movement leaders like Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove and Shane Claiborne. The influence is particularly felt in the way the community orients itself simultaneously around hospitality, social justice, and the spiritual growth of residents. There is mutuality in the way the houses emphasize the inner and outer lives of their residents: outward, in

¹²⁰ In *New Monasticism*, Wilson-Hartgrove tells a story about his wife Leah's influence upon him, and the way she led him to encounter intentional community life (23-25).

response to the needs of the neighborhood; inner, as they encourage the spiritual growth that cultivates mature disciples.

Abide expresses this duality in the way it presents meditations on various themes encountered by the Epworth houses. When considering the five-fold themes that form the centerpiece of the Epworth Rule (prayer, presence, gifts, service, witness), and which are themselves grounded in the Methodist baptismal covenant, each section has three subsections: community, neighborhood, and anchor church. So, when discussing a topic such as prayer or service, the topic is considered from the way it regards the local community (or household), the neighborhood around the house, and the church to which the community is formally connected. This is one of the ways the Epworth houses embrace the wisdom of the movement's figureheads and then build upon it. Each house is expected to do something practical and concrete with the broad vision of communal living promoted by writers like Wilson-Hartgrove, or even the earlier example of Bonhoeffer. Houses are required to seek the good not only of their own community, but also their neighborhood and their anchoring church.

The concept of an "anchoring church," and the extent to which Epworth's rule and resource guide promote it, distinguishes them from the other case studies, and many of the other new monastic experiments in the wider Church. The relationship is woven into the founding DNA of the house, and it is assumed from the very beginning that members of the house will be connected in real, intentional ways to the ministry of the church. ⁷⁷ Wachusett, despite the church membership of all six residents, has nothing like this formal, organized, and clearly defined relationship to The Crossing.

Furthermore, better known or more mature communities such as The Simple Way, Rutba

House, or even Reba Place Fellowship, are not in such formal relationships with local congregations, even if their members do actively contribute to and participate in the life of one or two churches. The effort by the Missional Wisdom Foundation to anchor these houses to churches has been rewarded with mutually life-giving and beneficial relationships between community and church members, relationships that have fostered a more missional attitude by both parties.

Conclusion

*“Christian brotherhood is not an ideal which we must realize; it is rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate.”*¹²¹ (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

In the Introduction I told the story of the rise and fall of an experiment with intentional Christian community at St. Peter’s by-the-Sea Episcopal Church in Rhode Island. While the characters are unique, and the experience a personal one for me, given how greatly it affected my ministry several decades later, the truth is that the story is not altogether uncommon. A group of people feel called to deeper, more intentional lives of holiness and choose to establish a community for a time, only to discover that communal life is hard, people are flawed and sinful, and the lure back to a more “normal” existence is exceptionally strong. What happened at St. Peter’s could have, and indeed has, happened in many places at many different times. Thankfully, the Church’s lament for the death of these experiments in intentional Christian community has not led to a decline in the fervency for their existence. Rather, Christians seem just as enthusiastic as ever to experience intentional communal living, and their popularity has showed no signs of letting up any time soon.

So then, how can the broader Church support and equip this movement, to encourage greater spiritual and emotional health among those who choose to share in it, and to encourage practices, structures, and behaviors that help it become more sustainable? In the Introduction I posed several questions that are important to address when considering the intersection of an intentional Christian, or new monastic, community with a congregation.

- How do the two entities align their mission?

¹²¹ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 30.

- Which should come first? Should the community be born out of the congregation, or the congregation born out of the community? Does the ordering of the origins of each even matter?
- How do members of the community participate in the life of the church, and vice versa? Are the authority structures for each connected, and if so, how do they overlap with each other?
- How can the community be prevented from becoming a “clique” or “faction” of the church, and instead serve as a type of leaven for the broader congregation’s life, mission, and ministry?

If the examples of the communities described in this project are any indication, there is no single formula for producing a healthy, sustainable, and mutually life-giving relationship between a new monastic community and a church, which means that answering the questions above is not a recipe for success. New monastic communities are so varied and diverse that it is impossible to create a singular pattern for how they should be formed, or how they should establish and maintain a relationship with a local congregation. Therefore, in this Conclusion I will offer a broad set of insights, gleaned from the history of the movement and the case studies featured earlier, which could potentially be applied to a variety of communities or churches seeking just such a relationship.

Don’t Reinvent the Wheel

New monastic communities can easily run the risk of putting too much emphasis on the “new” and not enough on the “monastic.” There is a strong temptation to believe

that this fresh expression of the church's life requires a wholesale break from what has come before, or is somehow so "new" that it is disconnected from the traditions that precede it. Yet the strongest, healthiest new monastic communities are those that have fully embraced their traditional forebears, and taken into their life time-tested characteristics that provide structure and integrity. If the goal is truly to nurture more faithful, committed disciples of Jesus, it is naïve and narcissistic to believe that the past has nothing constructive to offer.

An attitude of openness to the wisdom of predecessors should extend to the formulation of a Rule, establishing a leadership structure, and setting up healthy administrative processes. Christian communities may be "spiritual realities," according to Bonhoeffer, but they still involve the mundane physical realities like financial reports and insurance. Embracing the hard-earned lessons of other communities and mentors can save communities lots of hardship.¹²² Such would have benefited 77 Wachusett, which seems to have felt the need to draft a covenant document almost entirely from fresh cloth, and it shows few signs of influence from any of the leading voices or examples of contemporary intentional, Christian communities.

This effort to embrace the wisdom of ancestors is a bit more difficult when trying to establish a community that is in relationship with a congregation or church. There are simply not a lot of examples of healthy, mutual, partnering relationships in the Church today. The one exception, and an important source of information and guidance for such

¹²² "It is best to approach the first year of forming a missional community as a pilot project so that everyone involved knows that it is an experiment that will involve trying things and then evaluating them...Having said that, it is good to know that some mistakes and headaches can be avoided with good planning. For example, starting with an already developed and proven rule of life will help you move forward more fruitfully than spending months trying to design a unique rule of life." Heath and Duggins, *Missional, Monastic, Mainline*, 63-64.

situations, is the Missional Wisdom Foundation and Epworth Project. With eight houses already in Dallas, most of which are “anchored” to congregations, MWF is leading the effort to experiment with such relationships. Leaders Elaine Heath and Larry Duggins have written about their work, and offer their learning as fodder for the growth of the broader movement. In *Missional, Monastic, Mainline*, the two actually provide a “Field Guide to Starting Missional and New Monastic Communities in Historically Mainline Traditions.” It includes information about getting a pilot community off the ground, constructing a Rule of Life, forming a leadership team, preparing a congregation to anchor a community, administration, and governance. Their insight and experience is extremely important, particularly for those churches within the world of mainline Christianity that struggle to know how to relate to ministries that are different from the status quo.

The Importance of Shared Leadership

It is unfortunate that the literature written by and about the best-known new monastic communities of this generation makes it seem that they are led by solitary charismatic figures. When one reads books by Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove or Shane Claiborne, despite their efforts to diffuse the spotlight, they are imbued with a special glow. It is easy to misinterpret their communities as having been born entirely from their creative, inspirational genius, and also sustained owing to their unique understanding and wisdom. However, neither Rutba House, The Simple Way, nor any of the other enduring new monastic communities of the 20th century are led by a single individual. Shared leadership is essential to creating health and longevity among the community.

In a collection of essays on new monasticism called *New Monasticism as Fresh Expression of Church*, new monastic and Anglican priest Ian Mobsby writes about what he perceives to be the fundamental necessities of healthy, enduring new monastic communities. In addition to the need to have a mission beyond the existence of the community itself, he describes the need for “some form of inclusive and participative governance, modeling the example of monastic chapters.”¹²³ Here Mobsby hones in on two important issues. First, that communities work best when more people are genuinely invested in decision-making, and second, that an effective, proven model for such participative form of leadership exists in the history of the church, namely, monastic chapters.

The influence of the Rule of Benedict on the Community of Jesus has been documented earlier in this project, yet here it bears repeating that the community’s leadership structure is directly inspired by Benedict’s model. A Superior, with the input and support of a small council, possesses authority to conduct all day-to-day administrative and pastoral decision-making, but through the Chapter the entire community is also able to add its voice to ideas or issues under consideration. This ensures that, despite the community’s size (today around 275 persons), everyone is provided with an opportunity to participate in communal governance. Some former community members have complained that authority is still tightly controlled by a small group of leaders, so the feeling of ownership and involvement is not uniformly positive, yet the formal structure enumerated by the Rule does seek to diffuse decision-making broadly around the membership.

¹²³ Graham Cray, Ian Mobsby, and Aaron Kennedy, editors, *New Monasticism as Fresh Expression of Church*, (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2010), Chapter 1: “The Importance of New Monasticism as a Model for Building Ecclesial Communities out of Contextual Mission,” Ian Mobsby, 17.

On a smaller scale, the witness of the Epworth Project provides a good example. A number of people contribute leadership to the houses, from the 10,000 foot level of the Missional Wisdom Foundation team, to the pastoral and administrative leadership of the Abbot, to the priors for each house. Drawing from the model of monastic chapters, as Mobsby encourages, as well as the Wesleyan/Methodist tradition, the Epworth Project has organized a shared leadership model that helps spread the responsibility and authority in such a way that no single person carries too much burden, or receives too much credit. Epworth co-founder Elaine Heath writes,

One of the best ways to prevent a cult from forming, and to keep weird theology from taking the missional community in unhealthy directions, is to practice shared leadership with a team of five to seven people, in which the lead team follows and is accountable for a healthy rule of life.... Shared leadership for a missional community opens the path for an ongoing process of mentoring new leaders who learn to follow the rule of life, who learn to share leadership tasks and accountability with the other team members, and who learn to multiply communities by multiplying teams of leaders.¹²⁴

One of the lingering questions is how to blend the leadership between the community and the church. At St. Peter's in the 1970s, a group of "elders" were appointed by the Rector to share leadership of the households. Yet these elders were all male household homeowners, which created a homogeneity and uniformity in their approach to issues, and prevented a greater diversity of perspectives from influencing decision-making. It also exacerbated the divisions between the congregation and the households, as many in the church felt that they had no ownership or involvement with the households, though the households were enthusiastically exerting ownership and involvement with the church.

¹²⁴ Heath and Duggins, *Missional, Monastic, Mainline*, Chapter 7: "Disciple Formation in Missional Communities," Elaine Heath, 73.

Know Your “Why”

Clarity regarding the “why” of a community, that is, the mission or purpose for which it exists, is fundamental to its health and longevity. Communities that forget the reason for their existence, or fail to ever articulate it fully and formally in the first place, seem doomed. Returning to the example of St. Peter’s from the 1970s, this is one of the problems cited by Dave Binns, who became a member at the tail end of the households’ experiment. “St. Peter’s community died of a lack of mission. A lack of focus beyond ourselves and our faith. In other words a universal, ‘Why are we doing this?’ arose across the board, and the answer seemed to come from God: ‘I don’t know.’”¹²⁵

When a community of any type, be it a church, charity, or business, doesn’t possess clarity about why they exist, they will inevitably lose energy and vitality. Heath and Duggins write about this in *Missional, Monastic, Mainline*: “The ‘why’ of forming intentional community is an issue that should be revisited on a regular basis by persons living in community. It is easy to lose focus in the day to day struggles of mundane life and the clamor of many voices for our attention.”¹²⁶ She cites the example of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, for whom the “why” was often seemingly more important than the “how.” In his letters from the time, and writing in the years the closure of the seminary at Finkenwalde, the “why” was always clear: an uncompromising embrace of the Sermon on the Mount within the context of community. The details could vary, as long as they evolved in a continuing addressal of the central point of the community, the *why*.

¹²⁵ Binns, email message, 2015. Emphasis mine.

¹²⁶ Heath and Duggins, *Missional, Monastic, Mainline*, 108.

Similarly, Jonathan R. Wilson seems particularly focused on the subject of why, though when addressing the topic he uses the more formal theological term, *telos*. For Wilson, the Church's drift away from its foundational purpose, that is, to be the living embodiment of Christ in the world and manifest the gospel in word and action, has been the main reason for its decay and decline, and similarly, Christian communities that forget that same *telos* will inevitably flounder and fail. In particular, he warns against two, opposite "poles" toward which communities may gravitate, to their detriment: (1) over-focus upon self, that is, the spiritual needs and desires of the community's members, and (2) over-focus on "world-service," that is, engagement with the perceived needs of the wider world. In each case, he warns that the community fails to honor its ultimate purpose, which is whole-hearted orientation toward the Kingdom of God and the redemption of creation in Jesus Christ.¹²⁷

When a community fails to possess clarity about its purpose for existence, it runs the real danger of becoming the object of projection by its members, or else the members are so diversified in their understanding of the community's purpose that they ultimately share little beyond a common address. For example, a community could easily welcome someone who is interested in sharing his life for a time with others owing to the excitement of communal living, while a fellow member may be there to engage the social justice ministries of the community, while a third member may be seeking support in his vocational discernment. Without clarity of mission and purpose, the diversity of beliefs will eventually lead people to become dissatisfied or frustrated. This is precisely the situation that plagued 77 Wachusett, when one of the residents admitted his deep disappointment that the community wasn't meeting his spiritual needs. The purpose for

¹²⁷ Jonathan R. Wilson, *School(s) for Conversion*, 7.

which he believed the community existed was ultimately different from the purpose understood by everyone else, which affected how the house constructed its spiritual practices. The “why” was not clear, and it resulted in confusion, disappointment, and separation.

Episcopal Service Corps presents a counterexample. There are currently 27 intentional Christian communities around the country under the umbrella of Episcopal Service Corps (ESC). According to its mission statement, ESC is marked by young adults “serving others in solidarity, promoting justice in community, deepening spiritual awareness and vocational discernment, and living simply in intentional Christian community.”¹²⁸ The “why” is oriented around these central themes, which they boil down more simply to: “Following Jesus as intentional communities of service, justice, and prayer.” Their mission is this concisely articulated statement, which each community in its own context expresses uniquely. Some communities have a particular *charism* or distinguishing characteristics, yet applicants to the program are clear about the purpose of the communities, and can safely assume that their participation will engender opportunities to follow Jesus through service, justice, and prayer.

Clarity about the mission of the community has one more effect, too: it helps the community determine the length of vows. When a community is oriented around a particular mission, such as fostering the growth and formation of young adults, the length of the covenant may be much shorter than that of a community that is intended for people of all ages or backgrounds. For example, Episcopal Service Corps has a one-year agreement, and Epworth asks residents to commit to three years (though this is non-binding). They are both comprised largely of young adults fresh out of college, whose

¹²⁸ <http://episcopalservicecorps.org/our-vision-and-mission/>, checked on January 14, 2016.

lives are still very much in transition. A shorter-length agreement aligns with their mission and purpose. However, the mission of a community like Rutba House or The Simple Way is oriented toward making an enduring, transformational impact on an entire neighborhood, and such an impact requires the consistent presence of residents over many years in order to build enduring relationships. Likewise, the Community of Jesus is explicitly Benedictine, and thus the vows are intended to be lifelong.

Clarity about the “why” is beneficial not only to the members of the community, but also to the congregation with which it is associated. It is important that the two entities be clear with one another from the inception of their relationship about their purposes and mission. A church that establishes a new monastic community, or chooses to embrace one as an extension of their own, broader community, should only do so when they feel that the mission of the community is aligned with their own, and vice versa. They need not be identical, but should be complementary. For example, Bonhoeffer House derives its most basic “why” from the Epworth Project, yet its more specific mission is to express compassion to the neighborhood around it, which aligns neatly with the mission of its anchoring church, Grace United Methodist. In this instance, the church’s mission informed the thinking and decisions of the Epworth leadership, who incorporated that mission when founding the house. That the two were able to get in sync from the start has helped the relationship be healthy, respectful, and mutually life-giving.

The Importance of the Rule

It is hard to overstate the importance of the Rule of Life for the community. This document should be created with prayer and thoughtfulness, because its guidance and

vision have nearly as much influence upon the community as the people who lead and implement it. Communities that forsake the creation of a Rule out of a desire to retain flexibility or openness to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, such as St. Peter's did in the 1970s, typically come to realize the mistake. That lack of a framework, both practical and theological, is especially felt during conflict, or when issues arise that require the full involvement of the whole community, or when navigating the potentially complicated relationship with a companion church. A Rule is fundamental to helping the community preserve its core identity, and resist actions or behaviors that lead to dysfunction or disintegration.

Several sub-points are in order here:

1. A healthy Rule should be clear about the community's "why," as discussed above, and be intentional about framing the connection between that purpose and how they understand God. That is, the Rule can be a statement not only about who the community is, but more specifically who the community is in the light of its relationship with God. Bonhoeffer's *Life Together*, while not a formal Rule, per se, is nevertheless a good example of the synchronization of beliefs about God's identity with an articulation of how those beliefs inform the way a community lives. The rules of two communities examined earlier present two examples of this. The Community of Jesus begins with two chapters, "The Call to Follow Jesus Christ" and "The Call to Live for God," that articulate who they believe God to be, and what that means for their life together. The threads of those two chapters are pulled through the remainder of the document, even as it articulates details about membership, leadership, and discipline. Likewise, the Rule of Life for the Epworth Project is much shorter and

simpler, yet it is oriented around the United Methodist baptismal covenant, and thus is embedded in baptismal theology. It does not use a whole chapter to make claims about God before turning to other matters, because it imputes the claims about God made in the baptismal covenant.

2. The Rule should possess an appropriate level of humility and candor, to dissuade those who project onto it their wishes and fantasies. Bonhoeffer writes poignantly about this in *Life Together*, cautioning against those who see the community as an ideal or fantasy. That person who “fashions a visionary ideal of community demands that it be realized by God, by others, by himself. He enters the community of Christian with demands, sets up his own law, and judges the brethren and God Himself accordingly....When things do not go his way, he calls the effort a failure.”¹²⁹ One of the several issues that plagued the households at St. Peter’s was the disappointment felt by members when the community did not solve their crises, feed all their spiritual hungers, and fill all their emotional needs. Their fantasy was too great for the community to possibly fulfill. It is important that those who enter into this life enter with full appreciation for what it entails, for the gift of imperfection, and the brokenness of fellow residents. This requires forethought in the construction of a sound, thorough rule, one that includes structures to handle conflict and cultivate reconciliation, but first sets out clearly that the community will never be perfect, because it is comprised of people.
3. The Rule should be clear, but also flexible. It should straightforwardly and unambiguously present how the community is organized and led, but also resist the temptation to anticipate every problem by offering solutions or prescriptions in

¹²⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 27-28.

advance. There should be an inherent trust in the community to resolve issues as they arrive, as long as the basic framework for decision-making has been provided – one that ensures collaboration and shared leadership. For example, the Rule of Taizé offers very few specifics about what to do in particular situations or circumstances, yet Brother Roger wrote with a goal to frame the hearts and spiritual imaginations of the brothers, and thus, it allowed for the brother’s faith, creativity, and diversity. Likewise, the Rule of Iona is similarly structured, yet flexible, something the Rule of Life for the Epworth Project also embraces.

4. Importantly, the Rule should establish the nature of the relationship with the church, if such a relationship exists. Communities that fail to include that relationship in the Rule risk undermining the relationship before it begins. The Epworth Resource Guide is a helpful guidepost for communities considering such relationship. It effectively establishes the concept of “anchor churches,” unpacking that idea in the context of Christian history, and then offering numerous examples and suggestions for how the community and church could construct their relationship. It is not overly detailed or prescriptive, but does operate from an underlying assumption that the relationship is real and mutual.

A Hypothetical Community

Today I am the rector of a church in Dallas, which as far as I know has no history of experimentation with intentional Christian communities. I continue to feel drawn to the witness of new monasticism, though it is important to reiterate the confession made in the Introduction, that the closest I have come to living in an intentional Christian community is a dorm at seminary, and my experience in community then was far from

the one expressed in the Bonhoeffer-led seminary at Finkenwalde. Thus, in full disclosure, I have not ever lived in an intentional Christian community. I am one more admiring, armchair-commentating outsider, someone who respects and greatly appreciates the presence of such communities in the life of the Church, and feels drawn to offer a critical response to their ministry and witness.

I do aspire to one day participate in the establishment of such a community, one that would have a direct and intentional relationship with the church. I would be glad for the opportunity to help a church formalize a connection with a house (or houses) and its corresponding, communal residents. I would be profoundly blessed by the presence of those individuals (or families) in the life of my church, and their witness of careful, loving presence to and with one another. I can easily imagine the day when a house will come available, one with room for four or five people, perhaps even more, and the church will be presented with an opportunity to either sell it for revenue, or utilize it for something different. In that decision-making, I would look to the wisdom of Bonhoeffer, the witness of the new monastics like Wilson-Hartgrove and Claiborne, the experience of Epworth, the grandeur of the Community of Jesus, the holiness of Taizé, the creativity of Iona, and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and I pray that I would have the courage to embrace this “new thing” happening in the Church, which has so much to offer our efforts to proclaim the gospel of the love of Jesus Christ to a hurting, fragmented world. For “Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. No Christian community is more or less than this. Whether it be a brief, single encounter or

the daily fellowship of years, Christian community is only this. We belong to one another only through and in Jesus Christ.”¹³⁰

¹³⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 21.

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