

SAINT  
ANSELM  
COLLEGE



1889

BEING BENEDICTINE

A REFLECTION ON THE MEANING AND SIGNIFICANCE OF  
BENEDICTINE VALUES AT SAINT ANSELM COLLEGE

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## About the Author

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## Introduction

### Common Remembrance

Those who work and teach at Saint Anselm College, and those who have come to learn and study here are bound by common remembrance.

In fact, the seasons on our campus fold into one another with such a rhythm of beginnings, middles and ends, that only official records stored in files can help us make order of our shared recollections, from which we recall the departure of one more summer, the too-early arrival of another autumn, and with it one more freshman class to keep us looking forward. And even as we do, we recall the renovation of one old building, and the construction of another; the improbable winning of a past championship, and a faded musical triumph on the stage; the sudden, academic maturity of a student, and the reluctant retirement of a legendary professor; the leaves aflame with color one October weekend, and the onset of an early winter storm; the echoing song of the choir, and another stack of exams;

“WHEN I REMEMBER WHO I AM MOST DEEPLY, I AM AT MY BEST. WHEN SAINT ANSELM COLLEGE REMEMBERS WHO IT IS MOST DEEPLY, IT IS AT ITS BEST.”

– Abbot Matthew Leavy, O.S.B.

the peeling of the bells on Alumni Hall on a glorious spring commencement, and the tolling of the bells on the Abbey Church on a day turned suddenly sad.

Reminiscence, with its accompanying

reveries and revisions, helps us to sustain our common story. For what college does not share and celebrate common memories? Within these stories, however, there is another kind of remembrance whereby we remember who we are by remembering who we are called to be. This is the kind of remembering to which Abbot Matthew refers above, and to which the many voices in this document speak, as they ponder and wrestle with the basic question: What does it mean to be Benedictine?

### Common Identity

Sitting in his office with a stack of midterms on a late winter morning, while his students are away on semester break, Professor Bill Farrell of the Sociology

Department considers the nearly half century he has spent on this campus, and doesn't imagine being anywhere else this morning. "In many ways, this is my home," he states simply, and to understand the identity of this home, he proposes the Confucian adage that "a person should be what he or she is called. A professor should profess," he states simply, "and a Benedictine College should be Benedictine." A statement so obvious that it requires no explanation, provided, of course, one understands what it means to be Benedictine.

The purpose of this document is to assist us in that understanding. It is not, by any measure, a commentary upon *The Rule of Saint Benedict*. Neither is it a systematic assessment of *The Rule's* applicability and relevance to Saint Anselm College, nor an attempt to re-define the college's mission. This document did not develop out of committees, focus groups or workshops. It originated out of conversations, dozens of them. Conversations with Benedictine monks, administrators and professors, some of whom have spent the better part of their lives at Saint Anselm—men, women, scientists, artists, humanists, tradesmen—people who, in the classroom or not, share this much in common: they dedicate their days, and sometimes the better portion of their evenings, to working at Saint Anselm College, and have, along the way, given some thought to what the Benedictine identity of the college means to them and to their work. From these conversations, we hope that dozens more will follow.

### Common Purpose

Long past are the days when the imposing structure of Alumni Hall was Saint Anselm Monastery as well as Saint Anselm College. But the Benedictine monks who currently administer Saint Anselm are the direct religious descendents of their brothers who founded the monastery and college, and who are now buried in Saint Leander cemetery behind the present monastery. Today the monks live their lives in accordance with the same monastic *Rule* as their predecessors, the same Rule that has ordered the lives of Benedictines for over fifteen centuries.

Most of us who spend our days or nights working at Saint Anselm are not monks, and therefore have not taken the three vows of a Benedictine: *Stability, Obedience and Conversion through a Monastic Manner of Life*. Nonetheless, the rhythm of work and prayer that brings order to the lives of the monks who founded and still administer Saint Anselm is a rhythm that many people at the College still seek to make their own.

Father Jonathan, who came to Saint Anselm as a student four decades ago, and has served as its president for the past sixteen years, urges them to persist in this effort: "Though *The Rule of Benedict* was written for monks—for those who, under the inspiration of God's grace, chose to live their lives in a particular way—still there are principles which are 'translatable' to other ways of life, and to the institutions and work with which Benedictines and their lay associates engage themselves."

Today, Alumni Hall is but the central building on a campus of 60 structures on 400 acres of land. Even as the campus and its variety of academic and non-academic facilities and programs have increased, the number of monks in a monastic population that was never regarded as very large, has steadily declined. This reality, as much as any other, speaks of the need for this present document, a document that invites us to recognize the values that have shaped our past, that remain part of our present and that can help us forge our future. “Our desire,”

says Abbot Matthew, “is that the thought in this document will permeate every part of our life here.”

All those who receive this document are encouraged therefore to read it with the attention urged by Saint Benedict at the beginning of his *Rule* when he tells the young monk to “Listen! Listen with the ear of the heart.” Having done so, we may then join in a conversation about our Benedictine identity that we pray will shape Saint Anselm’s future, and remain our common remembrance.

## I.

### The World We Seek To Serve

One has only to surf the seventy or more channels on a television to perceive the moral confusion, ambiguity and ambivalence of the age in which we live. There is the rancor and hype of cable “news” programming, the voyeurism and exploitation of so-called reality T.V., the eroding boundaries to graphic depictions of violence and sex, and the unapologetic celebration of vanity in celebrity mongering and material makeovers. All of it is subsidized by corporate marketing that alerts us to our many inadequacies. We eat, worry, spend, and work too much; we exercise, sleep, invest, and earn too little. And there are pills to fix much of it.

Is it any wonder that the Abbot of Saint Anselm Monastery stands fast against allowing a television into the monastery? And yet the television is but a window into our age of anxiety in which the material comforts and excesses of

“MONKS EXIST IN PART TO BE A QUESTION MARK TO PEOPLE.”

—Father Peter Guerin, O.S.B.

our culture have fostered more neurosis than nirvana.

Former Dean of the College and professor of Theology, Father Peter Guerin,

O.S.B. has long been admired by confreres and laity alike for his adherence to his monastic vows and responsibilities. He first came to Saint Anselm Abbey in 1957, and when he considers the world then, and the one from which our students come today, he acknowledges that for the person seeking a life of faith, the challenges are greater than ever. And yet, he notes, “the thorns” have always been there. “I often think of Jesus’ description of the seeds that fall among the thorns. What are the thorns? The anxieties of the world. If we don’t take time to stop, we are buying into a culture that says work 24-7. It’s a bad sign. If we cave into the expectations of our culture, we will be choked off.”

One office in any institution that deals routinely with the variety of such

challenges is the Office of Human Resources. Pat Shuster, who came to the college in 1994 as the Director of Human Resources and who now serves as the college's Vice President of Administration notes that "reconciling who we seek to be as a community with the challenges of today's society is daunting, and it is getting harder." Of the world of worries that students are bringing with them to campus, Dr. Connie Richards, Director of Health Services, who first came to Saint Anselm as a student in 1965, observes that the past three years show a dramatic increase in the use of our counseling services." She cites many national studies of college students that point to record levels of stress, substance abuse, eating disorders, sexually transmitted disease and depression, as well as the number of students entering college on prescription medications.

Sue Gabert, Director of Campus Ministry observes that the modern technology to which students have become accustomed often leads them to also seek "immediate fixes to complicated problems and difficult circumstances ... Medication is increasingly becoming a means to cope, and there is little time to step away and reflect. Even walking to class turns into a phone conversation. E-mailing, instant messaging and the constant stream of quick media blurbs displace the opportunity for self-reflection, and a quick cell phone call home often takes the place of accountability, ownership and problem solving."

Whether or not the challenges of the world are any greater than they have ever

been, people seeking to anchor themselves in a life of faith have, perhaps, never been more at odds with their world than they are today, when secular thinking and behavior have become more and more persistently the norm of our culture. In his recent popular book entitled *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (Norton, 2004), author Sam Harris declares that the "Iron Age philosophy" and "mountains of life-destroying gibberish" contained in books like the Bible and the Quran mean that "if religious war is ever to become as unthinkable to us as slavery and cannibalism, we will first have to dispense with the dogma of faith." Even those who would not go as far as Harris to advocate the elimination of all religious belief, so-called religious moderates, whom Harris finds equally problematic for their defense of ignorance, cannot be encouraged by the signs of our times: radical violence in the name of religion that characterizes much of the world today, anti-intellectualism and bigotry from certain sectors of evangelical Christianity, and closer to our New England home, the steady closing down of Catholic churches in the wake of an embarrassing sexual abuse scandal. It is, we must admit, a rough time for religion all around, and not the least so in the Catholic Church.

"God is missing," Bishop Joseph Gerry, O.S.B., recalls hearing recently, "but not missed." The former Bishop of Portland, Maine, who joined Saint Anselm Abbey in 1947, two years after he came to the college as a student, and has served as, among other things, a philosophy professor, Dean of the College and Abbot

of the monastery, decries this kind of practical atheism from the standpoint of a philosopher as well as a practical man of faith. “As creatures,” he observes, “we are related to a Creator whether we know it or not. We did not give ourselves being nor do we sustain ourselves in our being. Not to know that is not to know who we really are. Thus if God is missing in our lives because we are unaware of his presence or not paying any attention to Him, He is missed, whether we recognize it or not.” Bishop Joseph speaks of the many students who live lives without the light of faith to guide them in making moral decisions. “They are left,” he says, “to muddle along.”

Several years before he was either Bishop or Abbot, Bishop Joseph served with several other Benedictine monks around the country in authoring a document that sought to articulate on behalf of professed Benedictines the meaning of monastic values in the modern world. The resulting document, *Renew and Create* (1969), constructed amidst the cultural turmoil of the late 1960s, is prophetic in its descriptions of the challenges faced by those who would embrace and seek to live such Benedictine values of stability, obedience and prayer.

Looking back upon “the process of technological concentration” and “secularization” of the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Bishop Joseph and his confreres observed that:

As people began to achieve by technology what formerly appeared possible only by prayer, miracles, or personal charity,

Church and religion began to lose certain functional roles in society. . . In their effort to control the conditions of human living, men have directed their vision more and more towards, but not above, the horizon of this world. Thus in a world which they manipulate so efficiently many people today find it difficult or impossible to experience the sacred and transcendent as these were explained in the past (19).

Pauline Hyson, who joined the physical plant staff twenty-one years ago describes this change in the culture in simpler terms: “I think people have lost reverence for God . . . people aren’t in awe of anything today.” Lack of reverence translates, among other things, into a lack of curiosity. Decades before the arrival of the PC, the Internet, cable television, e-mail, voice mail and cell-phones, the authors of *Renew and Create* described the dehumanizing paradox that while technology was making people’s lives easier, it was also making their willingness and ability to seek life’s ultimate, or even more substantial meaning, more difficult:

The rapidity, multiplicity, and complexity of humanly induced changes in conditions of human living have contributed to a transformation in the way people experience and think of themselves. . . This great concentration of mind and effort on technological know-how has produced vastly improved means for better human living. It has also tended to draw attention away from more fundamental

questions of purpose in human existence. Technological culture makes it more difficult to cope with problems of ultimate meanings (17).

As a lifelong student of this culture, sociologist Bill Farrell laments the increased complexity of his world. Noting that when he came to Saint Anselm in the 1950s the world had roughly 2.5 billion people in it and that now it has over 6 billion, he observes: “We’re in such a different circumstance today. One of the things I think about quite frequently, and one of the things that troubles me is reconciling a life of simplicity and community with the more practical aspects of subsistence in the larger material world.” Citing the cultural historian and philosopher Max Weber’s observation that “we live in an iron cage,” Professor Farrell concedes, “there is no possibility of getting back to the simplicity of a previous economic age.”

Nor, Professor Farrell’s colleagues in Student Services would add, a simpler moral age. “If it is happening out there in the world,” Father Peter frequently observed as Dean, “it is happening on our campus, and it is naïve to think otherwise.”

Amidst a world marked by moral confusion, intellectual skepticism, material progress and spiritual poverty, there are, as there have been for over 1500 years, Benedictine monasteries and convents. As Bishop Joseph and his confreres pondered their world in 1969, they concluded that there was yet one more paradoxical aspect to the modern

predicament. The increasing difficulty of our modern world in perceiving and articulating “ultimate meanings,” they observed, had aroused “in some sectors of society an almost desperate need to probe precisely those questions” (17-18). Hence they concluded of their own vocation:

The monastic witness provides precisely what is needed to counter certain deficiencies to which modern thought and life are prone. For this witness asserts the primacy of God and the things of God, embodies a heightened sense of, and reverence for, the sacred, a profound awareness of the sense and meaning of one’s existence and a single-minded orientation toward its achievement, and a strong affirmation of the value of prayer, silence, community, responsibility, and perseverance” (73-74).

As the creation and primary work of the monks of Saint Anselm Abbey, Saint Anselm College, all would agree, ought to be an extension of this monastic witness. At the same time, however, as a modern liberal arts college with hundreds of complex academic, material, legal, financial, and social obligations to thousands of individual and institutional constituents, Saint Anselm College and its population of faculty, administrators, staff and students reside, unequivocally, in the very world whose deficiencies are described above.

The tension between serving the world and remaining true to its religious founding and mission is one with which every administrator at Saint Anselm is

acutely aware from his or her first day on campus, and with which individual staff and faculty members struggle every day. In order for Saint Anselm College to remain true to its Catholic, Benedictine founding, daily efforts will have to be made on the part of all people in the community. One need not look far to see the many colleges and universities of all denominations in this country whose religious origins and heritage have now

largely been forgotten. Holding to its religious identity in a world that does not understand, value or support that identity as it once did will require a conscious and determined effort on the part of all those affiliated with Saint Anselm. Such an effort must begin with and be sustained by remembering what that identity is. The remaining sections of this document begin to help us do so.

## II

### The Lives We Seek to Live

Out of the chaos of our lives—somewhere within and between the hundreds of pulls upon our time, attention, intellect, emotions and physical well-being—there is a yearning for the stillness we associate with Benedictine life.

WHAT SAINT BENEDICT IS OFFERING US IS NOTHING MORE NOR LESS THAN EXACTLY WHAT WE ARE SEEKING: ORDER IN THE CHAOS. HIS RULE IS AN INSTRUCTION MANUAL FOR THE HUMAN CREATION THAT WE ARE.”

—Bishop Joseph Gerry, O.S.B.

commitments. The rules we follow are by and large the rules of our households and civic associations. The rituals we observe are with the members of our families and with our friends. Even so, for many of us Saint Anselm

Though most of us have not professed vows in a monastery, we all seek, of course, a certain amount of stability in our lives, which we hope to find in our families and our work. Likewise, though not answerable to a religious rule or an Abbot, we are all obedient to many principles and people in our lives. And while we have not taken a vow of conversion through a monastic manner of life, we all desire to change certain things in our lives, to grow positively in our

College does represent something far more than merely an employer, or a place to get a degree; for many it is a significant part of their own stability, and also represents much to which they are obedient; it has even called some of us to convert things in our lives that we otherwise would not have.

Whenever he thinks of Benedictine traits, Professor Jeffrey Schnick, who joined the Physics Department in 1988, says he “begins by imagining a monastery

in an ideal, pastoral setting and then goes from there.” Looking over what she regards as her “very un-Benedictine, cluttered desk,” the college’s registrar since 1996, Ms. Mary Ann Ericson, is “put in mind of the monastic value of simplicity, and how far I am from it; the lack of clutter in one’s life is a monastic virtue, and I have seen it manifest in many places on campus.”

The order and quiet, the balance of activity and contemplation that Mary Ann desires amidst the stacks on her desk, the beeping of her e-mails, and the crowding on her appointment calendar, are things to which most people are drawn. Father Iain MacLellan, O.S.B., artist, teacher and, director of the Chapel Art Center came to Saint Anselm as a student in 1974, and joined the monastery in 1982, after three years as a full-time social worker. “Wherever I am, when I tell people I’m a monk, they *get* that.” What they “get,” if nothing else is the choice of a meaningful existence separate from the often-chaotic ways of the world.

It is no accident that one of the best selling books of this past year was written by a Christian minister and entitled *The Purpose-Driven Life*. What person who has considered his or her existence doesn’t want that? It is what Benedict was seeking when he went into the wilderness of Subiaco, and took up residence in a cave, living a life of severe austerity, devoting himself to prayer. A purposeful life is also what he had in mind when he drew up a blueprint for monastic existence in his *Rule*: “The Benedictine tradition gives us an anthropology of who we are from the deepest and most internal to the most

widely external things in our lives” says Abbot Matthew.

Professor Barry Wicklow, an active field biologist and founder of the college’s Environmental Studies Program, came to Saint Anselm in 1986. Like all of us, he spends his life trying to balance the external and internal things in his life. Unlike most of us, he pursues this balance with a particularly *Thoreauesque* determination. When he is not on campus or wading in the waters of local rivers and streams collecting data, he resides with his family on several acres of land conservancy in rural Frankestown, New Hampshire. His progressive move towards the simplicity of a rural existence is as deliberate as Benedict’s retreat to the wilderness of Subiaco fifteen centuries ago. His desire was and is, he says, “to clear the clutter from my life, and to realize that it is only *stuff*. I don’t know that I would call the life I live monastic, but it is, well, deeply spiritual. I haven’t owned a T.V. for probably thirty-five years now. There’s just no room for it in my life. I find a great deal of strength in the natural world around me, but what I am still lacking in my life is the time to simply be. It’s not as if most of the time I spend in the outdoors is in transcendental wandering; it is mostly collecting data, so it too is driven by external purpose, not internal reflection.”

External purposes—making a living, accomplishing our job, meeting goals and deadlines—are what propel most of us through our days. And yet, in a Benedictine environment one is daily invited from external purpose to the internal reflection by, for instance, the

bells that toll the hours and the bells that summon people to prayer. “I appreciate the monastic rhythm, the structure that the bells provide, says Mary Ann Ericson. “Besides announcing the time, they tell us that it’s prayer time. They’re a constant reminder that there is more to life than work. The bells provide a structure and remind us that there is something more to our lives. Whether or not you go over to the abbey for noon prayer, you know that that is what is going on. The noon bells may signal lunch, but they mean something more than that.”

That “something else is going on” is perhaps what, consciously or not, draws people to work and teach in the Saint Anselm community. A self-described “struggler,” who had pretty much rejected religion at an early age,” Professor Ann Norton of the English Department came to Saint Anselm in 1994 and admits “coming to a Benedictine community has changed me. Saint Anselm has changed my sense of how one lives a moral life in the world.”

What we seek is not a life absent of suffering, but one filled with real purpose. What we know is that we cannot know or understand that purpose without heeding our “most internal” selves. We don’t need to be monks to do this, but we need silence. We need the possibility of quiet space and time separate from the external business of our days, in the

Abbey church, behind a closed office door, on a noontime run or walk, or, in Barry Wicklow’s case, standing for hours in a local river. “What we need in life is the time to sit back and observe,” he says, “the time to be thoughtful. Observation is the universal beginning of all study, and the key to all academic disciplines. As a teacher or administrator, it means, for example, being able to observe when our compassion is needed. What we want to do is to understand what is going on in the world around us and we want to be able to act in a way that is following “*the Way*” without being distracted into despondency or materialism or consumerism.”

What we also need, of course, is to be supported in that purpose by a community of people who respect it and are willing to assist us. “Ask not for whom the bell tolls,” writes the seventeenth century poet, John Donne, of the death knell he hears from his bed in London, “it tolls for *thee*.” Insofar as the disharmony of our own days is characterized by a cacophony of various commitments, and does not include “the time to be thoughtful” or the time to observe and to remember the ultimate purpose of our being, then the bells that toll on our campus—those that mark the passing of time, and those that alert us that “there is something more than that”—toll for each of us.

### III

## The Work We Seek to Do

*W*ork.  
Seldom

does this four-letter word conjure up pleasing connotations.

Most of us describe Saint Anselm College as “the place where we work.” And yet we know

better. The work that we do in our lives extends well beyond the boundaries of the Saint Anselm campus. For those who are parents it begins early—making breakfast and lunches, carpooling children to school—and runs late—attending a myriad of activities, planning and providing meals, banking, doing laundry, attending to projects and the endless variety of errands required to sustain a household. For teachers homework is built into the vocation, be it grading papers and tests, preparing lectures, researching, reading, writing, or communicating electronically with students. For monks there are the

“WORK IS A GOOD THING FOR HUMANITY BECAUSE THROUGH WORK MAN NOT ONLY TRANSFORMS NATURE, BUT ALSO ACHIEVES FULFILLMENT AS A HUMAN BEING, AND, IN A SENSE, BECOMES MORE A HUMAN BEING.”

– Pope John Paul II

wide variety of responsibilities and tasks necessary to help sustain the life of the monastic community. For all of us our work may include attending an evening board meeting,

traveling to a conference, attending a campus activity, helping a neighbor, or devoting a weekend to one of the various communities we serve.

It is no wonder that as cell phones, pagers, the Internet and e-mail encroach into nearly every waking hour of our life, the word work has retained the negative connotations given to it by the popular culture. We all realize that besides keeping us busy, work is how we accomplish things and how we provide for ourselves and those we love; yet only when we see people without the opportunity to work, as in the recent catastrophe in America’s

gulf coast, do we really appreciate the fundamental dignity that it provides us as human beings. For Saint Benedict the value of work is not so much in what it accomplishes, as in what is accomplished *in* us. It makes us humble and more human because it connects us to one another, to the created world and to God.

“Work bears a particular mark of humanity,” writes the late Pope John Paul II in his Encyclical, *Laborem Exercens*, “the mark of a person operating within a community.” In the Robert Frost poem, “A Tuft of Flowers” a man comes into a meadow to pick up cut hay that a stranger before him has mown. He sees that the mower has deliberately left uncut a patch of wild flowers that he too would have spared. In this tuft of flowers the poet recognizes the shared connection he has with the worker who has come before him, and he observes: “Men work together, I told him from the heart / Whether they work together or apart.”

And so it is on the Saint Anselm campus. Some six hundred employees labor at various jobs, all to the same ultimate end: providing the very best, complete, Catholic and Benedictine education possible for our students. Most often, however, we do not recognize the labor that has come before us by another worker in another department whom we have never met. Such labor does not usually come in the form of a spared tuft of flowers, but perhaps in a well-cleaned chalkboard, a well-mopped floor, a well-prepared hot breakfast, a middle-of-the-night technology repair or a daunting snow removal. A coach successfully mentors a student athlete and her

academic performance begins to improve. An admission officer invests dozens of hours in recruiting a student who turns out to be an outstanding campus leader. The Treasurer’s Office discovers a way to save costs, allowing us all to benefit. A development officer spends years cultivating a particular alumnus who ultimately donates a gift to the college that yields students scholarships for decades to come. A professor engages students in research that results in a published article or book that enhances the academic reputation of the college. A monk pays particular attention to a struggling student, who matures into a successful student and becomes an alumnus with special devotion to the college.

These sorts of things happen every day on the Saint Anselm campus, but since we spend our days in separate departments, we typically recognize our connections to one another only when work is not accomplished as we would have liked, and we tend to give voice to more complaints than praise. Not everyone, after all, who comes behind us, will be a poet who sees the virtue in leaving un-mown a certain tuft of flowers. Fortunately Saint Benedict offers more instruction on humility than any other virtue. “Let no one follow what he thinks useful to himself,” he insists, “but to another.” Even a partial adherence to this ideal would significantly enhance the life of any working community.

The belief that our work brings us closer to God’s creation is an idea that is at least as old as the agrarian life of early monasteries. A more surprising discovery for many is the Benedictine belief that not only is our work to be prayerful, but

that the elements of our work are to be revered. In his *Rule* Saint Benedict would have “the community regard all utensils and goods of the monastery as sacred vessels of the altar.” This instruction calls the monk, or all who would share in Benedictine values, to be good stewards of the resources in their care. “It’s not uncommon for people to think of monks as considering material things unimportant,” observes Jeffrey Schnick, whose life study is devoted to the physical universe. “It’s clear from the quality of the campus that such is not the case. Rather, the members of the monastery view stewardship as including responsibilities for building and maintaining a high quality physical plant.”

The well-tended campus of Saint Anselm is both a product and a reminder of our shared reverence and respect for created things. But for Abbot Matthew such stewardship is all part of “a sacramental economy” that involves conserving more than just buildings and budgets. “Stewardship includes caring for more than just material things. The goods of a monastery include not merely tools and material things, but also perhaps even more importantly the intellectual, moral, cultural and artistic assets that are available to the community. We need to steward the “goods” of faith, hope, charity and the worship of God.”

So central to Benedictine teaching is the idea that one’s work be connected to the work of God that it is expressed in a phrase that defines the ideal balance of monastic life: *ora et labora*, *prayer and work*. “This ideal of work and prayer,”

says Professor Jim Chenoweth, who has spent most of his life working among Benedictines, “is the guts of Benedictine life.”

For Abbot Matthew attaining this ideal balance is really a matter of recognizing what is most important in our lives. “Chances are,” he says, “it won’t be what we accomplish in our work.” Taking a break from his own work in the quiet of the monastery refectory, he recalls the familiar example of Martha and Mary, the sisters in Luke’s Gospel who are hosting Jesus in their home. Martha is the one doing all of the work. She prepares the meal, sets the table, and attends to the details. Her sister meanwhile sits at the feet of Jesus, listening to him, enjoying his company. When Martha can take it no longer, she finally complains to her sister, hoping that Jesus too will recognize her unjust predicament. Instead of scolding Mary, however, Jesus gently admonishes Martha the worker, telling her: “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things. There is need of only one thing.” These latter words, says Abbot Matthew, became a common Latin phrase in the Church: “*Unum necessarium. The one thing necessary.* Love of God, acknowledging and being in his presence, this is the one thing necessary. Our work needs to flow from that. Work, after all, is nothing more nor less than the giving of ourselves.”

It is no accident that the word *ora* is contained within the *labora*. It is a good reminder of how completely integral these two ingredients are to Benedictine life. “You cannot have one without the other and live the monastic life successfully,”

observes Father Jonathan. Neither can they be completely separated from one another. “*Ora et labora* is not a call to pray and then to work, or to work and then to pray, but rather to do one’s work in such a way that it becomes a kind of prayer,” says Father Iain, “and this applies to even the most menial of tasks.” Hence, the other familiar instruction from Saint Benedict’s Rule, to work “so that in *all* things God may be glorified.”

That work can be accomplished in a reflective, prayerful and joyful way is, to Father Mark Cooper, “one of the most important lessons we can give to our students.” A member of Saint Benedict’s Abbey for more than three decades, and the college’s Chief Financial Officer for more than a quarter century, Father Mark finds the struggle to maintain a balance between work and prayer harder than ever. “With regard to our work, the easiest thing for all of us to do,” he says “is to be swept and pushed and driven along with the rest of society by data and deadlines. Whenever we buy into a more efficient way of doing things, we also need to consider what we are giving up. If we don’t find a way to do our work that leaves us time for true leisure, prayer, and mental and spiritual renewal,” he cautions, “then it doesn’t matter what we preach to our students. If they don’t see us *living* in balance, they won’t get it.”

Like many of us Professor Dale Kuehne’s work as political scientist, teacher, ordained minister, husband and father leave him “a long way from achieving the balance of work with a life of prayer and study” which he sees as

“one of the most important lessons taught to him by the Benedictines and one that ought to be fundamental to a healthy academic environment.” Many members of the college community share this sentiment, and while it may never have occurred to them to embrace monastic life, most deliberately chose to pursue the life of the mind, the vocation of teaching, or simply the opportunity to work within an academic rather than a corporate environment as a way of balancing the work they do with the more sacred things in their lives: time with family, conversation with like-minded colleagues and friends, time spent in cultural centers, in nature or in solitude. “What does it mean for *all* of us to share that motto of prayer and work?” asks Professor Kuehne. “We have not yet had this discussion on campus and I think we need to.”

In order to continue its essential work of educating students in a manner that is different from the thousands of other colleges and universities in this country, Saint Anselm College must steward its economic resources, physical environment, and its various rudimentary and technological tools. More importantly, it must steward the goods that these material enterprises exist to support: the intellectual life, the arts and culture, scientific knowledge and exploration, health and medicine, civic responsibility, and human and moral understanding. And most profoundly, it must steward what Abbot Matthew refers to as “the goods of faith, hope and charity.” It can do this only as a community of individuals working in service to one another. And such a community necessitates that we

pause and reflect daily upon our work. This is why Saint Benedict made prayer the primary work of his monastery, requiring his monks to stop for prayer several times a day. Only in prayerful

pause from our routines can we possibly begin to recognize that the work we are doing is not only important, but perhaps even sacred.

## IV

### The Community We Seek to Create

The first act of stewardship in any Christian community ought to be our care of one another. This is especially true for Benedictines who, just as they strive for a balance of

work and prayer, place great emphasis upon care of the individual within the community. “Benedict offers us a profound appreciation of what it means to be a human person,” says Father Jonathan, “and this includes the recognition that in the practical living of life we are bound to one another and to God in an inescapable and redemptive relationship. For Benedict, and consequently for Anselm, respect for persons is therefore central. These men not only acknowledged the obvious fact that differences exist between people, but took seriously the fundamental conviction that each person is capable of coming to know and love God fully in and through

“THE MOST IMPORTANT THING FOR US AS A BENEDICTINE COLLEGE IS THE VALUE OF COMMUNITY.”

—Professor Bill Farrell  
Sociology

the varied ways in which God reveals himself, not the least of which is the relationship of one person to another.”

How the value of community has manifest itself beyond the monastery

through the past half-century has of course changed as Saint Anselm has grown in size and complexity. Recalling his first years as a faculty member when he arose early each morning to attend mandatory daily Morning Prayer with the students, Professor Bill Farrell reflects, “at one time the sense of community was so obvious.” The dramatic increase in the size of the campus and its population, the move to co-education, and the dramatic increase in programming and lay faculty necessarily displaced this simpler time. Nonetheless, the sense of community described by Father Jonathan remained intact. Professor David George, Chair of

Classics Department was raised in the Baptist tradition, but has a very high regard for the Catholic and Benedictine values of the college. He began teaching at Saint Anselm in 1986 and recalls: “Those of us who came here a couple of decades ago actually joined a community when we came here. All of us” he believes, “even those who don’t know it, have our faith lives here.”

Professor Denise Askin joined the English Department in 1972, and served as the college’s Executive Vice President for over a decade before returning to full-time teaching. Of her experience of community for nearly four decades, she observes: “We come here as professionals to do our job—but at the center of the institution is not a professional structure, but a spiritual core. This affects what we do and how we do it.” That our “point of reference is faith in God,” she says, has two results: “a high standard of integrity overall and an impact on how we treat one another.” To Professor Askin the spiritual center of the Saint Anselm community is more substantial and important than the superficial distinctions that divide us: “Underneath our professional titles and hierarchal structure, there is a radical egalitarianism—we are all children of God. So we can have role distinctions, but there is a compelling degree of respect that we share for one another. I see it in the building in which I work. Custodial staff and secretarial staff and faculty and students celebrate one another as people. It’s actually very liberating to be able to be a professor *and* a person.”

Many who have experienced the grief of losing a loved one, the joy of a new child or the trauma of illness are acutely aware of the significant spiritual support for the individual that the Saint Anselm community can provide. Some, however, express concern about the college’s ability to retain its spiritual center and sense of community amidst the pressures from a profit-driven world. “We need to remind ourselves that the amorality of corporate and business type thinking,” notes David George, “is not Benedictine.” Among other things, he notes, fostering a Benedictine community requires a particular kind of patience. “It means coming to community consensus through the long, often difficult, process of argument.” And “respect for the individual,” he notes, “requires that we be willing to tolerate a kind of eccentricity.” Noting that for many decades the college over-emphasized “its own peculiar identity” rather than external industry standards, Professor George, as well as others, cautions against an over correction that would de-emphasize care for the individual within the community.

Don Moreau traces his own origins at Saint Anselm to the early 1970s, when his father, the legendary “Blackie” Moreau came to work at the college. As a teenager he worked the college grounds with his father. He graduated from the college in 1980, and returned to work at the college as the Assistant Director of Physical Plant in 1987. As the college’s Director of Physical Plant since 1989, he has observed more directly than anyone the increased growth and complexity of the institution. “When I consider how

much newly developed space the college has added since 1990 in proportion to the amount of workers whose job it is to care for that space, I don't know how the same respect for the individual in the community can be sustained." He worries that in a drive to keep pace with other institutions the college will become more inclined to make corporate style decisions, rather than considering real Benedictine values. "We need," he cautions, "to be careful that bureaucracy does not replace the Benedictine value of simplicity."

"There is a distance always between what we perceive to be the ideal and what we experience" observes Dale Kuehne, "but if we are to call ourselves a Christian community and a Benedictine community, it ought to be reflected in how we treat one another. Do we and can we in our day-to-day work regard one another lovingly?" This fundamental aspect of community is echoed by Father Peter who observes: "The one thing necessary to Benedictine life is a common witness of charity to all and, for the monks at least, flowing from their common life of prayer and work and spiritual reading."

Two particular hallmarks of Benedictine community familiar to many on campus are stability and hospitality. The oldest religious order in the church, Benedictines are also the only religious who take a vow of stability, to live out their lives in the community in which they have professed. The implications of this vow for the professed individual and for the monastic community as a whole are such that it is a distinctive part of the Benedictine charism. The effect

that this charism has upon the Saint Anselm College community is varied and significant.

Properly understood, the charism of stability is not an invitation to resist change or indulge in complacency. On the contrary, the individual monk is called to constant conversion. Stability ought to give an individual and a community the ability to grow and develop in dynamic ways, knowing that its foundations are secure. "Stability," says Pat Shuster, "should provide us the courage to go out and tackle what we have to do—to reach and to change and to make mistakes."

One way to witness the college's foundations in a profound way is to make the short walk from Alumni Hall to the monastery cemetery. Here the lived human history of the college, from its founding to the present, can be traced in the names on the simple grave markers. One person who does so more frequently than most is Walter Gallo, who first came to the college as a student in 1954 and has served the college in a variety of capacities. A person who has cultivated an enormous number of relationships with Saint Anselm graduates, Walter, though officially retired, remains the college's ambassador to its Golden Anselmians, those who graduated from the college fifty or more years ago. "You'd be amazed," he says, "on reunion weekend I bring members of the class of 1938 out to the monastery cemetery to visit, and they carry on conversations with the teachers and prefects they knew as students."

Bob Collins who graduated from Saint Anselm in the 1930s and went on

to become the college's first Director of Development and its first lay Executive Vice President, visits the cemetery regularly. "I know all of the monks out there expect for the first five. They were all my friends and I still go out there and make the rounds from one to another. Stability is the anchor that has kept this college what it is. If it meant so much to these men, it certainly did to me too. It's what I sought and found in my marriage of sixty years."

Even some faculty members confess to making occasional trips to the cemetery "to check in with departed colleagues and friends." But certainly stability is about much more than graveyard conversations. As much as anything, it means that a Benedictine community can afford to cultivate a longer look at things. "Stability means that we do not just attack a problem, but live for the long term solution," says Bishop Joseph, "it means that a fixer-up mentality cannot replace generational effort." To David George "stability is the key to our community because it implies long term relationships. This has real implications. If people make professional decisions based upon the next few years instead of a lifetime, they will make very different kinds of choices, few of which will be good for our students." Father Augustine Kelly, Dean of the College, who came to Saint Anselm as a student in 1979, says that one of the aspects of a stable community that he emphasizes in conversations with prospective faculty is accountability. "When people live or work within a community that is not just transient, they are accountable to one another, to their

work and to the larger community in more substantial ways than if they were just passing through."

Chair of the Education Department, Jim Chenoweth and his wife have lived, learned and taught among Benedictines for virtually their entire lives, beginning, in his wife's case, in grade school and in his own with high school. Both graduated from Benedictine College in Atchison, Kansas, and have taught alongside Benedictines for four decades in New Jersey, South Dakota and now New Hampshire. Jim recognizes that stability implies a large obligation for all who are part of the Saint Anselm community. "We need to recognize that unless there is a major change, twenty years down the road, the people responsible for Benedictine thought and teaching at Saint Anselm and elsewhere will be lay people who have come through institutions like this." Many others echo this observation. "The stability in the community and the Catholic identity of this place in the future will have to come from those who plan to spend their lives here," says David George, citing in particular "the tenured faculty. The real value of tenure," he notes, "is the stability that it provides the institution."

While tenure is part of what has formed the commitment of many faculty members to the college, this is common to nearly every college and university. Perhaps less common is the longevity of many administrators and staff who came to the college with the intention of only staying a few years, and who find themselves one or two decades later more

dedicated to their work and more a part of the community than they ever would have imagined. “The Benedictine values at the college have definitely had a bearing on my being here as long as I have,” says Pauline Hyson, who began her work at Saint Anselm tending to the grounds, and has cleaned nearly every one of its buildings. “I think these values are one of the things that hold people here.” If this is the case,” says Dale Kuehne, “then we ought not to take such dedication for granted. We need to consider what stability means to people who are not part of the monastery. Since as laypersons we don’t take a vow, what do we want stability to mean for us and how are we going to foster that?”

Simpler to understand, but no less easy to practice is the familiar value of hospitality that originates in Saint Benedict’s instructions that a guest of the monastery is to be treated as if he were Christ himself. The treatment of a guest of the monastery has long been understood to extend to any visitor who comes to the campus, and while some visitors may occasionally be overlooked, far more common are the many stories of strangers, guests speakers, prospective students, parents, returning alumni, performers and political campaigners who report the unusual friendliness and generosity with which they were received at Saint Anselm. “To treat every person as Christ himself is tremendous,” says Dale Kuehne whose job it has been to welcome world dignitaries as well as hundreds of strangers to the campus, “It’s probably the most important thing that I have incorporated into my life. I come up short

with *ora et labora*, but hospitality is one I have really worked to develop.”

While those who “open the door” to campus visitors may be members of the admission or public relations staffs, a person’s first contact on campus is just as likely to be a professor, a monk, a coach, a member of the dining or custodial staff or a student. Hence, hospitality is not only something that is ideally extended to all visitors; it is also a responsibility that is shared by all members of the community. And while the college does not have a “Hospitality Department,” the members of Dining Services and Physical Plant offer the clearest examples of how welcoming strangers like Christ is essentially a sacrificial rather than sentimental act. There are legendary stories, everyday practices, and hundreds of unrecorded incidents that exhibit the successful practice of hospitality on the Saint Anselm campus. At the same time, hospitality is a value at the college that is threatened by the increased complexity of the campus, and the greater number of “guests” at the door. “We are still trying to do hospitality, but if we spread too thin we will lose our capacity to do that.” says Don Moreau. “As the campus seeks to use the physical plant to generate revenue it needs to be careful to protect its primary mission of hospitality to our students.”

It is Saint Anselm students of course who occupy an ambiguous place as both “guests” of the college and members of the community. While their stay at the college is necessarily limited, they are simultaneously encouraged to immerse themselves fully in the life of

the community, to carry their experience with them into their lives, and to return to campus as guests as frequently as possible. Thus, how the college treats students is a profoundly important aspect of hospitality. “Part of hospitality is welcoming students into the intellectual life,” reflects Monte Brown, a professor in the Philosophy Department since 1986. “We don’t stand off and impart knowledge in a prideful way; rather we invite students to come into the intellectual life, and we welcome them into it.” Recognizing “the dignity of the individual and treating our students with courtesy” is a basic manifestation of Benedictine hospitality to Professor

Farrell, who notes that true hospitality means, among other things, “listening and hearing what another person has to say.”

The community we seek to create, in fact, depends upon the practice of genuine hospitality not just to strangers, but also to one another. Regarding one another as “guests at the door” of our classrooms, our offices, our minds and our hearts, leads invariably to the kind of “radical egalitarianism” of which Denise Askin speaks. “How do we relate to one another?” asks Bill Farrell, “By function? By purpose? Or as brothers and sisters under Christ?”

## V

# The Wisdom We Seek to Learn

During their first year in the College's Humanities program, students read the story of the frustrated 12<sup>th</sup> century abbot who complains to Anselm

about the students in his charge, young men whom he describes as incorrigible ruffians. "What is to be done with them?" he asks his fellow Benedictine and would-be saint, "We beat them day and night and they only get worse." Centuries before any educational debate over self-esteem and the effects of positive and negative reinforcement, Anselm asks the abbot what he expects these young men to be like when they grow up if he continues to beat them. "Stupid brutes," the abbot replies. "You have certainly spent your energies well," Anselm tells him, "from men you have brought up beasts." Leaving behind the irony, Anselm then goes on, by way of a simple metaphor, to recommend a pedagogical alternative to corporal punishment:

You wish to form in them good habits by beatings and chastisement

“EDUCATION ANSWERS  
‘WHAT IS?’”

—Bishop Joseph Gerry, O.S.B.

alone. But have you ever seen a goldsmith form his leaves of gold into a beautiful figure by blows alone? I think not. How then does he

work? In order to mold his leaves of gold into suitable form, he first presses them and then strikes them gently, and then even more gently raises them with careful pressure and gives them shape. So it is if you want those in your care to be adorned by good habits, you must adapt yourself according to the strengths and weaknesses so you may win them all for God—so far, at least, as your efforts can.

Upon hearing this, the newly enlightened abbot, Anselm's biographer assures us, promised to mend his ways.

Two fundamental lessons are contained in this wisdom offered by our college's patron. And as with the process and product of the goldsmith, these two lessons are not only closely related, but

interdependent. The first lesson affirms the fundamental value of each person who enters our classrooms or sets foot upon our campus. In Father Jonathan's words: "If there is anything that should characterize a Benedictine approach to education it is the profound regard for the dignity and worth of every human person." Recognition of this human dignity and worth then leads one to acknowledge, just as the blacksmith does with his leaves of gold, that each person has a purpose whose fulfillment requires much more than merely the memorizing of information or the earning of an academic degree. Says Father Jonathan: "We need to acknowledge our own ultimate worth and that of the other, not as a collection of possessions or talents assembled, but as a being created with an eternal destiny." Perhaps this is why, in Professor Farrell's words, "Teaching sometimes seems antithetical to the normal measures of success which emphasize material gain."

Since the beating of a Saint Anselm student by a professor has not occurred any time in the past eight decades or so, we may perhaps disregard the first lesson of this story as unnecessary. We may do so, however, only if we believe that the full humanity of all our students is being affirmed in all of their academic and non-academic activities, and that they themselves are conscious of their own dignity and worth. The information in Section I of this document suggests that this is likely not the case. And since such an ideal is as difficult to attain as it is to assess, it is worth our while to remind ourselves constantly of both the reasons

we teach, and the reasons that we teach the way we do.

A core curriculum that is centered around a Humanities Program places an emphasis upon what it means to be human. This is quite different than indulging in a study of the Liberal Arts as an end in itself. Saint Anselm students are reminded in various ways that they have a responsibility to be attentive to what is around them, not just to what they learn, but to the way in which they learn and the reason why they learn. The Saint Anselm curriculum and its faculty communicate to students in a variety of ways that they have both the capacity and the responsibility to come to a deep awareness of the meaning of their lives. The desire to awaken such awareness and responsibility in students has undoubtedly caused more than one frustrated Humanities instructor to briefly reconsider the value of beating, but has much more often persuaded teachers of the need to raise their students "with careful pressure and give them shape."

Just as imitation is the most primitive form of learning, so too good modeling is the most fundamental form of teaching. Hence the wisdom of Saint Anselm is applied with greatest effect if all people who are part of the Saint Anselm community recognize in themselves not just their capacity as goldsmiths, but as gold in need of being shaped. "The image of leaves of gold applies most easily to students," observes Father Jonathan, "but the image really applies to all who are involved in education—teachers, administrators, and students. All are

participants in the process of forming from a common humanity the object of beauty that the Creator intended. This endeavor cannot succeed without all parties appreciating the value of the ones engaged in it.” What we ask of our students, in other words, is something we must be willing to attempt ourselves. “If there is to be no disjuncture between theory and practice, the craftsmen of Benedictine education must make the synthesis in their own lives and have the will and the skill to communicate it effectively to others.”

The willingness and ability to make such a synthesis is, says Father Augustine, what the College seeks in its faculty. “Beyond the expertise that one has cultivated in his or her discipline, there is that other expertise we seek that is not merely technical. It is, in Anselm’s terms, a sense of what is needed to form the object of beauty, of when strength is productive and when tenderness, and of how to distinguish the usefulness of different approaches to the same material. It is what in the Benedictine tradition has been known as discretion.”

The second lesson contained in Anselm’s analogy is both more difficult to apprehend and to teach. It is the idea that each person has an eternal destiny. Destiny, of course, is not the same thing as fate. The latter depends upon one’s fortune or luck. The former depends upon on the choices one makes and upon God’s grace. Fate, in the world of classical antiquity is simply what happened. Destiny in Judeo-Christian teaching is the fulfillment of what God intended to happen. The recognition of this implies,

among other things, that there is a right and a wrong way of proceeding through life; that there is in fact such a thing as good and bad thinking and behavior, and that it is therefore the place of education to help students discern the difference and fashion their lives accordingly, to, in Anselm’s words, help them be “adorned by good habits.”

Certainly this is not a popular notion either in higher education or in the broader culture today. Nor has it been for some time. The monks who authored *Renew and Create* in the 1960s recognized that the attacks on human dignity in the twentieth century—modern warfare, the holocaust, atomic annihilation, racial discrimination--had caused past ethical systems (moral, religious, political an social) to appear “static” and “discredited” in the eyes of many. “In reaction,” they observed “personalist and existential currents of thought stress the historically conditioned character of each human situation and make an impassioned appeal to the values of authenticity, honesty, and freedom of conscience; in place of a system of abstract moral principles, they encourage an ethics considered more responsive to the human demands of each concrete situation” (21).

This evolution in ethical thinking may be characterized at its worst by the kind of experiential relativism that students frequently bring into their first year Humanities seminars. “To recognize that there is a moral component to all human behaviors is a new thing for many of our students,” says Professor Askin. At the same time, the emphasis upon authenticity and freedom of conscience has introduced

the opportunity for more lively moral debate, both in and out of the classroom. “The willingness to engage in moral argumentation, to discern what is right from what is expedient,” notes Professor George, “is a Benedictine trait, and something we should not only cultivate in our students, but expect of ourselves and all decision makers at the college.”

*The Princeton Review’s* recent selection of Saint Anselm College as one of 81 institutions in the nation that it calls “colleges with a conscience,” is a tribute to the college’s active cultivation of volunteer service, engagement in civic life, leadership, and responsibility to the less fortunate. This designation implies, among other things, the existence of a collective conscience, which would of course necessitate a shared understanding of what is good. Standing alongside the many non-sectarian institutions on this list, however, Saint Anselm must recognize that a shared understanding of the good is, well, not good *enough*. As a Benedictine and Catholic college, Saint Anselm would not just have its students do good works, but understand why they do them, and why they are called to persist in a life of good works long after they have graduated. Monte Brown, a moral philosopher with children attending three different institutions of higher learning, insists: “we have a mission to our culture—to graduate students with a spiritual sense who demonstrate real kindness and cooperation with others. Most colleges and universities cannot be relied upon to do that.”

Comparing the enterprise of Saint Anselm to that of other colleges in

1887, one of the college’s founders, Father Hugo Paff, O.S.B., noted that while other institutions labor to fill their students with knowledge, “they neglect the moral man, they do not educate the heart.” His college, he hoped, would be different: “Mind and heart both cry out for nourishment,” he insisted. The mind was often “crammed,” while the “heart received only a stinted allowance, perhaps no allowance at all. I hope that we Benedictines, while pushing the intellectual development up to and even beyond the standard of the children of the world, may be able to show that we do not neglect the moral education.”

As to how this education of the heart gets accomplished, it again may have more to do with how we live than what we say. “It’s not as if we stand in front of our students and say, ‘do what I tell you to do and you’ll be moral,’” says Denise Askin, “Our teaching is in the way we live, the way we treat our subject matter and one another. We attempt to live visibly moral lives; we make moral choices, and we attempt to grow in our own understanding.” The strength to live a good life is something, Barry Wicklow says, “that can be taught to our students. The strength to be humble, the need to be compassionate towards others, the wisdom to not let your ego take you away, the commitment to really care about people and the things that are important, the things beyond your self-interest.” Of the best teachers and mentors he ever had, Barry recalls “they taught me more outside the classroom than in the classroom, and I hope most of my teaching is outside the classroom as well,

where you can teach by example, not a huge, showy example, but to our students every little thing we do is teaching. We need to recognize that, and make every small action count.”

The desire to live well, to make every “small action count,” and the accompanying desire to understand the relationship of what we do to what we believe are traits of an active Benedictine community. Saint Benedict, after all, called his monastery “a school of the Lord’s service,” which implies a place not just where people are continually learning, but where they are pursuing wisdom by steadfastly searching out the ultimate meaning to life’s most enduring and profound mysteries, contemplating, in Bishop Joseph’s words, “what is.”

Jeffrey Schnick recalls that people from outside of the college have often presumed that his own research and teaching as a physicist must be inhibited by the college’s religious ethos, “but that,” he says, “has never been the case. In fact, the opposite is true. I have found that the Benedictines see science as another viewpoint, which along with philosophical and theological viewpoints, is important to develop in our students.” Coming to Saint Anselm from a mostly secular background, Ann Norton recalls, “the emphasis on morality and the thinking through how to live a moral life in the world were truly novel to me. It was amazing to me to meet people seriously devoted to the Christian doctrine. I had to step back and think: ‘Very intelligent people think this—Why? Maybe they see something I don’t.’ That

faith can be accompanied by reason remains a real insight to me.”

For Monte Brown the monastic vow of obedience extends into his life as a philosopher. “Obedience for the lay person means obedience to the truth, to the good, to the beautiful, and the humility that comes from that.”

“The most important thing we can do,” says Denise Askin, “is awaken our students to the fact that their lives are absolutely full of choices, something that they frequently do not recognize. They can choose to be kind, to hold a grudge, or to forgive.”

Ultimately, the success of the goldsmith that Saint Anselm describes may, like wisdom itself, be remote or even intangible. For the imparting and the attainment of wisdom, which is the most important work that any teacher can do, is not a simple thing to measure. “We need to be careful about overemphasizing assessment,” notes Monte Brown, “because if too much emphasis is placed on assessment, we can get caught in a grind of measurement that is antithetical to the development of the intellectual life. How, for example, do you measure the success of the spiritual life?”

Measurable or not, “the ultimate goal of Benedictine education,” says Father Jonathan, “is to assist men and women in their search for God. We persist towards this goal, not by sifting through a scattered or aimless collection of knowledge, but by confronting the reality of humanity in all of its aspects.”

## VI

### The God We Seek to Know

Seeking God? Isn't that something monks are supposed to do?

In fact it is. But insofar as this question implies that only monks are supposed to do so, and that they should come and let the rest of us know when they have found Him, it offers a simplistic and false perception both of monasticism and of life itself. For while seeking God may express the essence of the monastic vocation, to view this pursuit as one that belongs exclusively behind monastic walls, is to abdicate our responsibility for—not to mention our joy in—living a spiritual life. This not only puts an unrealistic expectation upon monks, it offers a fundamentally flawed notion of God's relationship with humanity. From the Benedictine perspective, the lives that we all live, the community and work in which we all share, our greatest sufferings,

“WHEN WE ARE PURSUING THE TRUTH OR PURSUING BEAUTY, WE ARE PURSUING GOD.”

– Professor Monte Brown  
Department of Philosophy

our most unexpected joys, and the smallest bits of wisdom we discover, all originate in and lead back to an Incarnate God. Ours is not a task of seeking, so much as recognizing.

“If we believe that we came from God and are going back to God,” says Abbot Matthew, “then for us to conclude that our life in between has nothing to do with God is absurd. If our origin is in God and our destiny is in God, then our life is in God.”

*A life in God* is the very kind of expression that causes people to want to localize the spiritual stuff of life in a monastery. It sounds too “deep,” or too “heavy” or simply too metaphysical to be really understood. In fact, however, Benedictines derive from the fact of Christ's incarnation what Professor Kelley Spoerl describes as “a very practical

approach to the material and the spiritual world, one that acknowledges all of creation as sacred.” Professor Spoerl, Chair of the Theology Department, and a specialist in early Christianity, began teaching full-time at Saint Anselm in 1996. Her admiration of Benedictine spirituality has increased with her familiarity. She finds it to be “a very sane way to practice Christianity. Benedictine life,” she observes, “has a great appreciation of the incarnational God. This means that we not only meet God in our Abbey Church, but everywhere on campus, as well as beyond campus. It is in other people that we encounter Christ, and so there is a great regard for individual persons. You also see regard for the material world in the fact that our campus is an orderly and beautiful place; you see it in everything from the way we treat the material that we teach to the care with which food is prepared and served, in the various balances we try to achieve, and in our stewardship of one another.”

The Benedictine motto “*Ut in omnibus glorifectur Deus*”—So that in all things God may be glorified—is not so much a call to do holy things as it is to recognize that the things we do are holy. “All of material reality is sanctified by the incarnation,” insists Kelley Spoerl, “and that material reality includes human history; it includes the history of Saint Anselm College and it includes our own personal histories.” No scholar of spirituality himself, Bill Farrell is as casual as he is certain as he looks around at furniture and the shelves of books in his office and declares: “This very office is part of God’s creation. The

history of Saint Anselm College is God’s creation. If we start to look for answers to our problems that take us beyond the Benedictine and Christian way of regarding one another, then we’re in trouble.”

In the best art, literature, science, service and philosophical thought that we share as an academic community it is easy, perhaps even natural, to recognize the presence of the divine. However, we are much more likely to miss the presence of the divine or the opportunity for spiritual growth in the ordinary daily struggles that we confront—the growing stack of un-graded papers, the nagging personnel issue, the broken water pipe, the technology glitch, the reckless behavior of a student, the homesickness of a freshman, the irreconcilable lines in the budget. For Abbot Matthew, the failure to recognize God in such ordinary challenges is not a failure of vision, so much as memory. “When we remember who we are most deeply—children of God—we are at peace. When we forget, we find ourselves among the unnecessary conflicts of life.” One of the benefits of working in a community is that we can continually remind one another. For one faculty member the recognition of the sacredness in the mundane came “at a remarkable moment” when she drove onto campus early one morning and saw a monk, who happened to be a senior administrator of the college, picking up empty beer bottles and other garbage in the parking lot.

As with the recognition of God in the small things in our lives, so too must we recognize God in larger decisions we must make as a community. “I can’t think

of an issue that comes up that doesn't require us to reflect on our mission and identity," says Pat Shuster. Bishop Joseph, who has spent a lifetime reconciling day to day issues with professed ideals insists that "every decision we make should be based on holiness. We need to ask 'Does it assist us in seeking God? Does it assist in making me radically human?'"

Radically human is another one of those phrases that people might prefer to leave inside the monastic cloister, but "the radical human," explains Bishop Joseph, "is anyone who is committed to the idea of the transcendent—the person who is responding to God as God makes Himself known to him." One way God makes Himself known, he says, is in the strangers who knock on our door, whom Benedict says are to be treated as Christ. To Bishop Joseph, the students who come to study at Saint Anselm are the strangers of whom Benedict speaks. "Not to leave an imprint on our students of what it means to be radically Christian and radically human is to have failed them. If there is any impact we should have on the lives of students, it should be to help them seek God."

Another emphasis of Benedictine spirituality that assists us in the practical living of life is its emphasis upon the importance of the individual within community. "In human life," says Kelley Spoerl, "we are all struggling to balance our desire to be in communion with others with our need for autonomy. We experience this struggle as a source of distress and tension, and there are built-in tensions between these two impulses—the solitary and communal—the need to do

what I need to do and the desire to be in community with others." For Professor Spoerl, the Holy Trinity—one God in three persons—represents the perfect reconciliation of these two desires. "We live in the hope of one day being drawn up into that perfect communion where all these tensions will be resolved, and we will be at one with God and with one another."

Meanwhile, however, we are, Professor Spoerl acknowledges, "stuck in this world," and one of the best guides we can turn to is Saint Benedict's *Rule* because it acknowledges and offers us practical guidance in our struggle. "The brilliance of Benedictine life," she says, "is that it understands and affirms our individuality and our desire to be in community. Benedict acknowledges the necessity of balancing the needs of the individual with the needs of the community."

Being Benedictine therefore is fittingly both an individual and a communal enterprise. "For Benedictine education to be truly so, the practitioners must be competent human beings," says Father Jonathan. "They need to be active themselves in their relationship with God, carefully attentive to God's presence in the world and in those around them, and capable of leading others to see beyond apparent good to the reality of God's own goodness."

Few people realize that the motto of Saint Anselm monastery is "*Deum Quaerere*" or "To Seek God." This is a search, says Abbot Matthew, "in which all who are associated with this

monastery take part, and one in which the broader Saint Anselm community shares significantly and often intimately.”

Looking back upon his nearly seventy year association with Saint Anselm, Bob Collins observes, “*Ora et Labora* has been the basis of my own life. I start each day with a prayer. I end it with a prayer. And God knows, I pray a lot during the day. All that I have done in life is traceable back to the Benedictines, and quite honestly I wouldn’t change five minutes of it.”

As for the association that we all share with Saint Anselm, Kelley Spoerl

insists, “The monks have to help us all explore the Benedictine ethos. It will help us. It will offer comfort and clarity to us. As a college community we need to understand our own charism, not only to enrich our own lives, but to better carry out the project that is Saint Anselm College.”

“In the end,” says Dale Kuehne, echoing the words of Father Hugo Paff from twelve decades ago, “we need to recognize that the world really needs a Benedictine college, and the world will support it.”

# Preliminary Questions

*offered as a starting-point for personal reflection and group discussion*

## Common Identity

- ❖ In your experience does Saint Anselm College share a common set of beliefs and values that make it unique from other schools and work environments?
- ❖ How have those beliefs and values been part of your experience at the college?

## I. Our World

- ❖ Do you agree with the observations made by the Benedictine monks in their 1969 document concerning the ways in which technology and modern culture have disrupted the human search for ultimate meaning?
- ❖ Do you believe that it is the mission of Saint Anselm College to see and to help others see “above the horizon of the world?”
- ❖ How do you in your department address the tensions between the modern world and remaining true to the religious founding and mission of the college?

## II. Our Lives

- ❖ Which Benedictine values and beliefs do you desire most?
- ❖ How does the rhythm of the Benedictine life affect the rhythm of your life and work on campus?
- ❖ Does the Saint Anselm environment help you to foster a purpose driven life?

## III. Our Work

- ❖ Does your own life allow for a balance of work and prayer? Do you desire it to?
- ❖ How do you understand your responsibility for the stewardship of the goods of Saint Anselm College within your work on campus?
- ❖ Is your daily work affected by the Benedictine motto “Ut in omnibus glorifictur Deus” – So that in all things God may be glorified – which recognizes that the things we do are holy? How so?

#### IV. Our Community

- ❖ How do you understand the value of stability in terms of your own commitment to Saint Anselm College? In terms of Saint Anselm's commitment to you?
- ❖ How important to you is the value of hospitality? Is it a value that characterizes your work at Saint Anselm?

#### V. Our Learning

- ❖ Do Benedictine values and beliefs inform the way you teach, mentor, administer, manage, or fulfill the various tasks of your work here at Saint Anselm?
- ❖ Is the art of discernment modeled at Saint Anselm College? Should it be?

#### VI. Our God

- ❖ Does your work here at the college call you to live a spiritual life?
- ❖ Do you really experience God in the people you encounter on campus?
- ❖ Do you experience tensions between your work and the spiritual nature of the college's mission?
- ❖ How in your work at Saint Anselm are you encouraged or discouraged from being "radically human"?
- ❖ Do you believe that the monastery's motto of "Deum Quaerere" –To Seek God—is one that is or should be shared by the entire Saint Anselm community?

## Some Resources on the Benedictine Life

- *A Life-Giving Way: A Commentary on the Rule of St. Benedict* by Esther De Waal, Benedict Regula;
- *Asking Benedict: A study program on the Rule of St. Benedict:* for classes and private use by Terrence Kardong;
- *Day By Day With Saint Benedict* by Terrence Kardong
- *Doing Business With Benedict: The Rule of Saint Benedict and Business Management: A Conversation* – by Kit Dollard, et al;
- *Engaging Benedict: What the Rule Can Teach Us Today* by Laura Swan;
- *Listen My Son: St. Benedict for Fathers* by Dwight Longenecker;
- *Living With Contradiction: An Introduction to Benedictine Spirituality* by Esther De Waal;
- *Medieval Women Monastics: Wisdom's Wellsprings.* Editors Miriam Schmitt and Linda Kulzer;
- *Preferring Christ: A Devotional Commentary on the Rule of St. Benedict* by Dom Robert Hale (Foreword), et al;
- *Radical Hospitality: Benedict's Way of Love* by Lonni Collins Pratt, Daniel Homan;
- *Saint Benedict for the Laity* by Eric Dean;
- *Seeking God: The Way of St. Benedict* by Esther de Waal, Kathleen Norris;
- *Spirituality for Everyday Living: An Adaptation of the Rule of St. Benedict* by Brian C. Taylor;
- *The Benedictine Handbook* by Anthony Marett-Crosby;
- *The Benedictine Rule of Leadership: Classic Management Secrets You Can Use Today* by Craig S. Galbraith, Ph.D and Oliver Galbraith III, Ph.D.;
- *The Cloister Walk* by Kathleen Norris;
- *The Family Cloister : Benedictine Wisdom for the Home* by David Robinson;
- *The Rule of Benedict for Beginners: Spirituality for Daily Life* by Wil Derkse, Martin Kessler;
- *The Rule of Benedict : Insights for the Ages (Crossroad Spiritual Legacy Series)* by Joan Chittister;
- *Wisdom Distilled from the Daily: Living the Rule of St. Benedict Today* by Joan Chittister;