

The Navigator



The Newsletter of the Monastic Fellowship of Saint Brendan's

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A Disciplined Faith: Spiritual Direction

Fr. Alan Andraeas, Prior

*"In Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel.
Therefore I urge you to imitate me."
1 Corinthians 4:15-16*

I seem to collect hobbies. Some last a for short while; some last for years. For example, I play the double bass in our local Passamaquoddy Bay Symphony Orchestra. I love playing in orchestras and I love playing the bass. It has been an interest of mine since the 5th grade at Tinicum Elementary when our music teacher, Mrs. Atea Youngblood, singled me out for bass lessons because I was the only boy in class tall enough to hold one up!

My newest hobby—and I hope it also lasts for many years—is amateur (or 'ham') radio. In fact, I just passed the test for my technician's class license and received my official call sign from the FCC. From here on out, my on-air persona is KC1IEQ. Once my "ham shack" is set up, I'm looking forward to talking to friends in the area and making contacts across the region. I even hope to try some of the more technical stuff like texting in Morse Code; or skipping signals off the ionosphere to reach around the world; or bouncing signals off the moon, or meteorite tails, or the Aurora Borealis; or learning how to build my own antennas for best signal propagation; or—are you ready for this?—even talking to astronauts aboard the International Space Station (many of the astronauts have ham radio licenses and the space station is equipped with an amateur radio 'rig' that they use for

talking to family and friends during their off hours—their call sign is NA1SS).

But because ham radio covers such a HUGE swath of activities (and many of them are quite exotic), a beginner can find himself overwhelmed and in serious violation of FCC regulations. So how do you start? By learning from, and being guided by, well-seasoned operators. Every ham radio club has them, and when you find one who is willing to help you (and they love to help), then you have tapped into a rich resource, indeed. In fact, these people even have a nickname; they become your 'Elmer.' A good Elmer encourages your successes. A good Elmer cautions you about mistakes and pitfalls. A good Elmer introduces you to other good operators; helps you prepare for additional tests to upgrade your operating credentials; guides you through the maze of what kind of gear to purchase; and on and on. This month I'll be joining the Saint Croix Valley Amateur Radio Club as a regular member. The next task will be to find my own Elmer.



Now let me tell you how that ties into the discipline of spiritual direction.

Here we are, coming down the final stretch of the monastic disciplines for Saint Brendan's—the internal, external, and corporate disciplines—and I have no doubt that some folks reading this newsletter are probably thinking, "Ugh, there are so many—you've been at this for three years! Just give me the most important one; I'll work on that, and the rest will fall into place."

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It's kind of like the question the Pharisee asked Jesus: "Which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" (Matthew 22:36).

Well, spiritual direction might not qualify as the greatest or most important, but it is certainly the foundation on which the others are built. In fact, it might even be one of the earliest; perhaps even the first. Remember when Moses' father-in-law Jethro came to visit Moses and the nation of Israel during their wilderness journey? He saw how the administrative and spiritual obligations of Moses were ready to press the life out of him, and he said, "The thing that you are doing is not good. Now listen to me: I will give you counsel, and God be with you" (Exodus 18:17,19). For that moment in time, Jethro was a spiritual director for Moses; he was an 'Elmer' to Moses.

Neither Moses nor any of the great saints and monastics throughout history attempted the journey of faith without the aid of someone who could speak into their lives; who could hold a mirror up to their discipline, faith, and practice; a spiritual director; an Elmer. Even Jesus, God in the flesh, Who was dumfounding religious scholars at the age of 12, submitted to the spiritual formation He received from Joseph and Mary! In fact, early faithful believers would travel hundreds of miles for weeks through the wilderness just to hear a brief word of advice from the original Desert Fathers; something to help them discern God's will from these men who had the gift to 'discern spirits.' That's why the practice of spiritual direction has a rich and full history within the disciplines of Christian tradition.

What, then, is the function of a spiritual director? Don't confuse this person with your analyst, life coach, success advocate, or any other popular term for a secular counselor! A spiritual director is *not* a counselor. A counselor's role is to help you find internal homeostasis—a balance or equilibrium between your intellect, affect, and behavior in relationship to your circumstances—and rarely considers the fact that your spiritual com-

ponent is more important than the other three combined! Nor is a spiritual director usually the same person as your confessor (although your confessor may regularly offer advice within the context of the confession). A confessor speaks God's words of forgiveness in the face of your contrition; a spiritual director helps you discern the doorway to God's will and desire. According to the 17th century Benedictine mystic, Dom Augustine Baker, the role of a spiritual director is to simply and clearly lead the Christian disciple to his *real* Director, Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul said it this way: "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1). The relationship here is that of an advisor to a friend or that of a father to a son (cf., 1 Corinthians 4:15); someone who is genuinely invested in you based on the outflow of God's grace in them.

"This person, then, becomes the tool God uses to gather up our concrete, daily experiences and give them sacramental significance so that we can see our lives from heaven's perspective."

This concept, however, seems to have fallen on difficult times in our churches today. Even when we say that we value the counsel of our own pastors or ministers, it often comes with the unspoken caveat: "unless he says something I disagree with." In other words, even our submission to church leadership is conditionally based on whether we like what we hear. That's why the clearest sign of our own humility, of death to self, and of our desire to place our lives at the feet of Christ is the humble act of seeking out spiritual direction; an opening of ourselves in transparency to one who has grown in maturity in the knowledge of Christ, who has proven Christ in their own lives through personal testing and trial, and who is moved by the Holy Spirit to speak on behalf of Christ into your life. This person, then, becomes the tool God uses to gather up our concrete, daily experiences and give them sacramental significance so that we can see our lives from heaven's perspective.

Make no mistake about it, though. Spiritual direction is never a blanket affirmation of what we're doing. That's what the world is looking for; a continuous stream of warm fuzzies. But not everything is awesome, great, fabulous, outstanding, incredible, or

MONASTIC MUSE

muse \ 'myüz \ **1:** *vb* to turn something over in the mind meditatively, **2:** to think reflectively, **3:** *n* a state of deep thought...

"Christian obedience flows from a deeply intimate relationship with a chosen person, namely one's spiritual father, one's *geron*, in which one is no longer engulfed by one's self."

—Fr. John Chryssavgis

Soul Mending: The Art of Spiritual Direction, Holy Orthodox Press, 2000.

excellent; particularly our human nature which is cast in the shadow of Adam. Clearly, there are things that will advance our walk of faith and things that won't. Sometimes the words of a spiritual director are blunt and to the point because the Holy Spirit needs to grab our attention and redirect our steps. Sometimes it feels like 'tough love' because a spiritual director refuses to sanction our whims or actions. Remember, a spiritual director has ears attuned to God and uses that surrendered, time-tested intimacy to help you understand where your various pathways will lead. This echoes the writer of Proverbs, "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another" (Proverbs 27:17).

Here's one more consideration: spiritual direction is never a form of hyper-shepherding. That was a practice made popular in some evangelical and fundamental circles where every life decision is placed before the elders of a church for their decision or permission—from hobbies you can have, to which jobs you apply for, to the car you buy, to who you socialize with, to questions of wardrobe, to whom you're allowed to marry, to the amount you tithe to the church, and who your beneficiary should be if you die (and usually it was the church rather than your family). If a spiritual director in your life is doing something other than holding God's mirror up to your walk of intentional faith, then get out of that relationship and contact us immediately!

So then, who should you entrust as a spiritual director for prayerful input into your walk of faith? As members and friends of Saint Brendan's, Sue and I can certainly encourage your life in Christ. But what we share can only go as deep as those things we know about you from long distance—from what we gather through your letters, emails, or occasional visits to the Priory

House for a retreat. For some of you, this might be exactly what you need just to see how spiritual direction can benefit you; like dipping your toe in the pool before jumping in. Others are looking for spiritual directors who have faced struggles like your own and who have successfully placed those struggles in the care and victory of the Holy Spirit (cf., 1 Corinthians 1:11).



Here's something to think about. An untapped goldmine for spiritual directors are the elderly saints of the church, rich in Christian maturity and wisdom, who've seen the fads and follies of each decade come and go and know that the only thing that can weather the storm is the unmovable Rock, Jesus Christ (cf., 1 Titus 2:4-5). They have a proven track record that far surpasses, for example, that of the young couple in their early 20s who are given the job of mentoring other newlywed couples in their church Young Adult ministry. No matter who your spiritual director might be, our only recommendation to the Friends and Oblates of Saint Brendan's is that you make them familiar with our *Rule of Life* so that their direction

and encouragement doesn't run contrary to the classic Christian disciplines (e.g., they shouldn't say things like, "Don't worry about fasting; that's not a real expectation for Christians anymore.").

Remember, in a day of DIY *everything*, YouTube and self-help books are not the way to a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ. It's the investment of one life into another so that the life of Christ might be glorified. In the end, all the Christian disciplines—even spiritual direction—serve one purpose and one purpose only: to point to the Lamb of God as we prepare to be His Bride forever.

Rejoice!
Fr. Alan Andraeas

When I Grow Up, I Want to Be Like You!

Sue Andraeas

"Join together in following my example, brothers and sister, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do."
Philippians 3:17

If we had to do it again, if we were starting this series of newsletters about the spiritual disciplines all over, I would suggest that we begin with the corporate disciplines—and that Spiritual Direction be first. All the other disciplines, whether they be internal (prayer, fasting, etc.) or external (solitude, submission, etc.) can be faked. What I mean is that they can have the illusion of a Christian activity without bearing fruit which proves the work of the Holy Spirit in your life. And the purpose of ALL spiritual disciplines, without exception, is to develop a deeper

relationship with Jesus Christ in order that, through us, he is made visible to the world. Without Christ being the motivation for our spiritual disciplines they are not Christian.

If you don't take away anything from any of the other articles in this series, please consider this: your disciplined life of faith is first and foremost an honest outpouring of your love for Jesus, to the glory of God, and powered by the Holy Spirit or it is not Christian. It is philanthropy rather than alms; assimilating religious information rather than contemplation; medical fasting rather than spiritual fasting; stress-reducing meditation rather than adoration; networking rather than fellowship. See what I mean? The world has its generic equivalent to spiritual disciplines because they are effective in bringing about 'benefits' for those who practice them. But if those disciplines are not practiced for the sake of Christ, they only benefit ourselves, and we cannot call them Christian.

It would be like Americans celebrating Labor Day without pondering the value of work, or celebrating Thanksgiving without giving a thought to the Native Americans who helped the pilgrims adapt to a new world. It would be like taking great pleasure in having Martin Luther King's Day or President's Day off from work or school but not thinking about the men the day is supposed to honor, or what they had done to deserve our appreciation. (Those of you in other countries can probably add your own examples.) At the very heart of the Spiritual Disciplines we Christians talk about and practice is our love for our Lord and Savior. These tools were given to the Church, by God, to be used to both honor Jesus and to draw us closer to Him, and to make us more like Him. They are not the 'end game' that proves our Christian maturity. Not ever.

But there's another benefit to Spiritual Disciplines. They are tools to make us Christ-like, yes, but they also assist us in becoming the living stones that comprise the Bride of Christ—the Church. Some disciplines are designed to knock off the rough edges of our 'stoniness' so that we better fit together with other 'stones' of the Church. Some disciplines are designed to temper us so that we are granite rather than chalk. Still others help us keep our focus and not wander off to become stones in another structure or rubble to be swept off the sidewalk. They help prepare the Church as the Bride of Christ, spotless and without wrinkle (Ephesians 5:27).



Many books, sermon series, podcasts, blogs and websites have been created to help teach Christians about the spiritual disciplines, but they often lack the transforming power we seek. Why? Because *learning knowledge and technique from a book does not build relationships*. Learning about these spiritual tools does not necessarily help you develop a love for the Master of the Tools or for the people in His 'tool shed,' the Church. And one of the defining characteristics of the Christian faith is relationship.

It began with relationship between the Trinity, then between God and Adam, God and the Israelites...on and on through the ages, and now it is our turn. We cannot possibly be a 'congregation of one,' we cannot be a DIY (do-it-yourself) Christian because it is in our fellowship with each other that Christ is present. Jesus tells us that He will be present where two or three are gathered in His name (Matthew 18:20). He also told His disciples (and, by extension, us) to go into the world and...make disciples (Matthew 28:19).



Disciples become like the one who disciplined them.

The very process of becoming a Christian has mentor/student—or disciple/spiritual director—built right into it! We do not worship a concept or ideology; we worship an invisible God Who makes Himself visible through Christ—Who makes Himself known through our relationships with one another. And relationships are not acquired but built, over time. The relationship between a spiritual director and the one being directed is like that of a master craftsman and an apprentice. St. Paul advised the Church at Corinth to follow his example as he followed the example of Christ (1 Cor. 1:12). A spiritual director helps us to find our place as a 'living stone among other living stones' without getting caught in a popularity contest or prideful mastery of a technique...or giving up and deciding Christianity is too hard.

There's another reason to find a spiritual director rather than rely on books and other sources of information for instruction. When it comes to the implementation of the disciplines, one method does not work for everyone. A person writing a book or website knows Jesus and knows the content of His message, but he does not necessarily know you. The best he can do is offer advice to a general population.

Let's pretend there is a book written about fasting and there are three Christians who want to begin fasting. All read the same book, and all internalize the same information. But one is an active, healthy man in his 20's, another is an anorexic woman the same age, and the third is an older diabetic who drives a truck for a living. You can imagine that one strategy would most certainly NOT work here! It would be very easy for the healthy young man to develop a real sense of pride in his ability to skip meals; the anorexic would be reinforcing a deadly lifestyle, and the truck driver might endanger himself and others. A spiritual

"We worship an invisible God Who makes Himself visible through Christ—Who makes Himself known through our relationships with one another."

director who, first and foremost wants to glorify God and edify the Church, will offer very different direction to these three people—at least I pray he would!

If you want to find a good spiritual director, here are some guidelines. Find someone whose mature Christian walk is Christ-centered. It doesn't have to be clergy, but it should be someone who is in the habit of fellowshiping with other Christians. He (or she) should have a good understanding of Scripture—not because he 'read the Bible all the way through' (you will hear people brag about this as if it's some sort of trophy-worthy activity) but because Scripture pours easily and comfortably from them in any conversation. He should have an active, solid, mature prayer life—beyond intercession and public prayer during church services or Bible studies. The fruit of the Spirit should be consistently evident in his life—not just one or two 'fruits' but all of them. He may not instantly have all the answers you are seeking, but knows how to find them. Any correction offered should be done in love and, if you are earnestly trying to be more like Jesus, should not cause



shame. You will not find any spiritual director who is faultless, but you can find one who is humble.

If your spiritual director does not see you in person on a regular basis, *your* job is more difficult because you must be brutally honest about what you are doing—and why. The right actions or thoughts can be done for the wrong reasons. Much of the time, intent is as important as action. Most importantly, you and your spiritual director must share the same goal: Jesus glorified and the Church united, purified and mature (or, more simply put...“More of Thee, less of me”).

Now can you see why this should have been the first discipline we discussed? If you are struggling with your walk of faith, don't worry. Struggles don't mean you are failing! Find someone who can not only help you avoid the struggles, but who can also help you through the struggles intended to smooth and sand and temper and purify and mature and...we are praying for you!

Rejoice!
Sue Andreaas

**Our God has made us one /
His glory is displayed /
As we build each other up /
Our love becomes His praise /**

"Our God Has Made Us One"

Text: Niles Borop. Music: Jim Weber. 1984 WORD MUSIC, Nashville, TN.

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WE COVET YOUR PRAYERS!!!

Please continue to pray for Saint Brendan's and these various needs:

- For final construction of Saint Brendan's wood shop.
- For strong and willing hands to labor with us.
- Praise God for the ability to minister to local people through the gifts of heating oil, fuel, food, transportation assistance, and hospital visits.
- For necessary remodeling of the Priory House so that we can host more retreatants and guests.
- For electric and insulation in the chapel this winter.

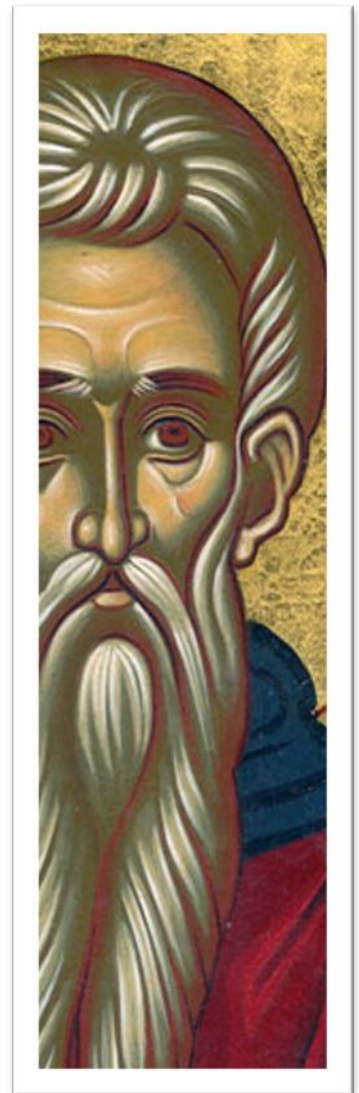
The Final Word: Symeon the New Theologian — Byzantine monk, theologian, mystic, and abbot of St. Mamas monastery in Constantinople (949-1022).

Seek out one who is, if you will, an intercessor, a physician [of the soul], and a good counselor. A good counselor, that he may offer ways of repentance which agree with his good advice; a physician, that he may prescribe the appropriate medicine for each of your spiritual wounds; and an intercessor, that he may propitiate God, standing before Him face to face, and offering Him prayer and intercession on your behalf.

Do not try to find some flatterer or one who is a slave to his belly and make him your counselor and ally lest, by accommodating himself to your will and not to what God desires, he teach you what you would like to hear and leave you in reality an irreconciled enemy of God.

Nor should you choose an inexperienced physician lest, by his over-aggressiveness and untimely incisions and cauterizations, he plunge you into the depth of the anguish of your soul or, worse, allow you by his extreme sympathy to think you are getting better when in fact you are still unwell, and so deliver you to the eternal hell which you had not expected. For this does no more than cause in us the very illness that is already killing the soul.

As for an intercessor between God and people, I do not think that one is quite so easily found. “For not all who are descended from Israel are Israelites” (Romans 9:6), but rather those who both hold the name and have clearly understood the force of the name, namely the intellect that looks upon God (cf., Genesis 32). Neither are all who call upon the name of Christ truly Christians: “For not everyone who says to me ‘Lord, Lord,’” says Christ, “shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father” (Matthew 7:21); and likewise He says: “Many will on that day say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not cast out demons in your name?’ and I will say to them: ‘Amen I say to you, I do not know you. Depart from me, you workers of iniquity’” (Matthew 7:22-23 and 25:13).



Those who have shared in these virtues—whether in whole or in part, according to what is profitable to each—have been enlisted in the choir of the Apostles, and as many as accomplish them today are also enrolled there. These people are therefore the “light of the world,” as Christ Himself says: “No one lights a lamp and puts it under a bushel or beneath his bed, but on a stand so that it gives light to all the house” (Matthew 5:14-15). Such people are recognized not just by these gifts, but also by their manner of life. It is precisely in this way that those who seek them will recognize them, each one of them more clearly than himself. For they, as it were in the likeness of our Lord Jesus Christ, consider humility the highest honor. They give up their own lives in the world for the sake of their love for God and for those for whom they desire to obtain eternal life. They know how, if you will, to bind and loose; for he worships the One who gave him this grace, and longs to provide it in turn to those who need it.

Life at Saint Brendan's



TOP LEFT: A great friend of the ministry, Lloyd ("Pilly") Winchester helps to shingle the exterior of Holy Trinity Chapel. **TOP MIDDLE:** A local construction crew adds a new "mudroom" to the Priory House. **TOP RIGHT:** Neil Hansberger from Dulles, MD, came to Saint Brendan's for a two-week retreat. He's helping to paint some exterior trim boards that will be installed on Holy Trinity Chapel. **MIDDLE LEFT:** Fr. Dave and Judy Brown from England visit Saint Brendan's during their sabbatical trip to the USA. **MIDDLE CENTER:** Sue gets to visit our first grandson, Gabriel Adam, only days after his birth. This four-generation family picture includes Zac and Siobhan (Gabriel's parents), Rowena (Sue's mom), Sue, and, of course, Gabriel (the little one!). **MIDDLE RIGHT:** Melanie was one of our overnight cycling guests. Originally from France, Melanie currently lives in Quebec and competes in international Iron Woman triathlons. **BOTTOM LEFT:** Sue regularly helps one of our neighbors with his team of Clydesdales during horse shows and other events. Here she is with Mick and Bud at the Pembroke Horse and Farm Show. **BOTTOM MIDDLE:** We were blessed with a visit from life-long friends; Dick and Sue Fake from Lebanon, PA. They visited Saint Brendan's ten years earlier to help build the goat barn. How nice to see them again! **BOTTOM RIGHT:** It was time for new signage on the donkey stall gate. The sign says it all!



Holy Trinity Chapel at Saint Brendan's now has a Facebook page. If you would like to keep up with the happenings at the chapel of Saint Brendan's, you can find the page at:

www.facebook.com/holytrinitychapel.maine

facebook

If this works out (this is our first attempt at any kind of social media), and if we can overcome the learning curve, we plan to launch a Saint Brendan's Fellowship Facebook page as well.



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