Julian's Window

A Quarterly on Monastic and Contemplative Spirituality

The Order of Julian of Norwich

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On the cover: Associates, Oblates, Nuns & Monks attempting a group photo at Julianfest

The Order of Julian of Norwich

is an Order of monks and nuns following a contemplative charism in the Episcopal Church. Our aim is to renew the spiritual life of the Church in three ways: first by a renewal of the contemplative monastic tradition, second by supporting a vibrant community of affiliates who are a bridge between the monastery and parishes, and third by occasional works of mission in publishing, retreat leading, spiritual direction, and hospitality. For more information on the Order, please see our website at **www.orderofjulian.org,** through which we publish articles on the spiritual life, liturgical resources, and audio recordings.

Julian's Window, also found on our website, is published quarterly. For permission to re-publish, please write to the Order:

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Community: A Lesson of Love

Fr Harry Allagree ObJN

In an article for JulianFest, May 9, 1998, our beloved Guardian of happy memory, Sister Scholastica Marie, OJN, wrote: *"...early in her writings Julian protests that the visions were granted only so ALL might be stirred to greater love of God:*

'Everything I say about me, I mean to apply to all my fellow Christians, for I am taught that this is what our Lord intends in this spiritual revelation..'

And yet, it is not quite everyone whom Julian represents. In Chapter 73 Julian tells us exactly to whom she is writing, and why. She writes:

'I speak of such men and women who because of God's love hate sin and dispose themselves to do God's will.'

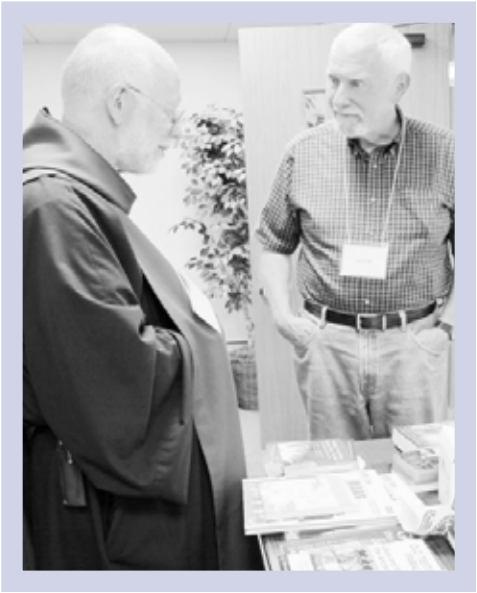
So Julian's audience for whom she wrote are not those on the brink of conversion nor those at the beginning of a dedicated Christian life, but those who have earnestly lived the faith for a number of years. Such persons yearn to make spiritual progress; to be free of sin and attraction to evil; and to experience union with God to the furthest degree possible in this life, through contemplative prayer. I think that is a good definition of those who can truly 'hear' Julian, and I believe it gives the parameters of who we are in the Order of Julian as we commit ourselves to live by Rule and to wait on God in the silence of our praying."

In the ongoing global questioning of institutions and their value over the past few decades, the ideas of "community" and specifically, "religious community", have been not only questioned, but challenged by many. Yet the roughly 220 members of the Order of Julian of Norwich — Monastics, Oblates and Associates — who are currently bonded together "in the spirit of Blessed Mother Julian" have made a clear and rational choice to be a community, and, for over 25 years, have succeeded. These people are, presumably, the kind of folks to whom Sister Scholastica referred above: people "not...on the brink of conversion nor... at the beginning of a dedicated Christian life, but those who have earnestly lived the faith for a number of years...[who] yearn to make spiritual progress; to be free of sin and attraction to evil; and to experience union with God to the furthest degree possible in this life, through contemplative prayer..." This is the common task which they've consciously and willingly chosen to take on, and to become one in doing it through a variety of expressions.

Thus, the Rule, Commentary, and Manual for the Oblates of the Order speaks of the Order as a community of monks and nuns, as well as of Affiliates, who honor the spirit and practices of ancient contemplative Christian monasticism in

order to renew the spiritual life of the universal Church. In this enterprise, both Monastics and Affiliates seek to live as deeply as possible into unceasing contemplative prayer, aided the four vows of holy poverty, chastity, obedience, and prayer, adapted to each one's respective state in life.

"Community" is one of those words which may mean different things to different people, so it may be helpful to distinguish the various levels. First, there is what Gilbert Bilezikian has called "the original community of oneness", the divine community of the Trinity: the social relationship of shared divine nature between the Persons of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. (*Community 101: Reclaiming the Local Church as Community of Oneness*, 1997, p. 16) Secondly, and following from this, there is the community of all human beings, created in God's image and likeness, whether or not they acknowledge the fact. Third, we can speak of the biblical idea of "community" as the gathered and worshipping people of God: the *ekklesia* = assembly, congregation, the ones "called" to gather, or, as we know it today, the Church (the body of the faithful, with its universal mission to proclaim the Good News of God in Christ) or the church (the local gathering of the faithful at a specific site or "parish", along with its particular implementing of the larger Church's mission through a witness of common worship, education, outreach, etc). "Christ desired that his church would be the earthly community of oneness modeled after the eternal community of oneness." (Bilezikian, p. 22) Finally, there are those who experience *koinonia* = a close bonding and sharing, a communion or fellowship. This kind of community consists of believers who experience the living God in and through their fellowship with one another: a "community of communion", as Texas A & M University Assistant Professor of Communication, Heidi Campbell, puts it. In my own mind, these intertwining expressions of "community" are all part and parcel of what the Christian tradition refers to as the "Communion of Saints", and of what Mother Julian refers to as her "even-Christians" or "fellow Christians".



As a professed Oblate, it's an endless and profound realization to know that I'm committed to the oneness, the gathering, the fellowship, the communion of more than 200 other souls who deliberately and intentionally have given their "Yes" to

God and to their sisters and brothers, and have pledged to make that commitment real in daily living. Being part of the OJN family and its mission to bring refreshment and new growth to the Communion of Saints is, for me, a rare grace and an incredible comfort, as well as a daunting invitation to serious responsibility. When I've spoken of "community" in past retreats and conferences, I've emphasized the reality of "common unity" by asking "What's the most important element in community?" Along with the question, I utilize the word COMMUNITY on a sign or on a blackboard, explaining that it's a sort of chain of 9 letters. I highlight the letter "U", and say that "U = YOU are the most important element in the chain which binds the community together." If you're the weak link in the chain, it comes apart. The kind of community which exists, and its quality, depends on you.

Surely I'm not alone in feeling the tedium and cost sometimes involved in being faithful daily to the common task of praying for, interceding for, wishing the best for, my OJN sisters and brothers. One has to be deliberate in praying the long list of names of Oblates and Associates, reminding oneself that a real person stands behind each name. I find it helpful to remember the Monastics, Oblates, Oblate Aspirants, and OJN friends at Morning Prayer, and the Monastics, Associates, those discerning their vocation, and the OJN Departed at Evening Prayer. A long-deceased friend of mine, Bill Hickinbotham, reminded me one time that, even though it feels rather perfunctory to repeat all those names each day, it's the one daily opportunity for real connection, in spirit, between oneself and the rest of the community. "If I look individually at myself, I am just nothing; but in general terms, I am, I hope, in unity of love with all my fellow Christians...and he who broadly loves all his fellow Christians because of God, he loves all that is..." (*Lesson of Love*, p. 23) Does it become a more or less rote exercise at times? Of course. But have you also noticed the emptiness you feel when one of our own dies or withdraws from OJN, and the almost automatic tendency to repeat the name? Even such a mundane exercise binds us closer together in shared prayer.

In the times when I'm struggling and discouraged, hurting, suffering, or too tired, recalling that some 200 others are supporting me, upholding me, by name, and helping me to draw upon the hidden strength to go on is truly an inspiration, sometimes maybe even a prodding-by-guilt! "Then I saw that each kind of compassion that man has toward his fellow Christians with love, it is Christ in him;... because He wants us to be aware that the pain shall all be transformed into honor and benefit by virtue of His Passion, and that we be aware that we do not suffer alone, but with Him..." (*Lesson of Love*, p. 64) Whatever it takes, all of us

"U's" hold the community together. The online OJN network and Facebook page are particularly helpful in finding out what the "needs of the saints" are, not to mention the conversations, real or virtual, which we frequently share among ourselves by phone, or texting, or email, or, perhaps less frequently, in person.

Dorothy Day, who along with Peter Maurin, founded the Catholic Worker Movement, certainly a "community- in-action" if there ever was one, wrote: "We have all known the long loneliness and we have learned that the only solution is love and that love comes with community." That is our common task as daughters and sons of Blessed Julian of Norwich, the abiding lesson which she taught us.

Wherever I Happen to Be

Vera-Jane Warner AOJN

We are currently living in a world where values or at least the values that many of us were brought up on have been turned upside down and inside out. Speaking for myself, my world pre-September 2001 was an exciting one but at the same time safe. I was a seasoned traveller both as part of my profession and also due to my family background. I can remember sitting at Heathrow airport London, waiting for my connection to Africa with joy and anticipation. All this changed as it did for us all. Maybe the world had never been safe and it was all an illusion but to me until September 11, 2001 life had been exciting, each day filled with anticipation.

In the same year I had a near death experience and subsequently gave my life to God, yet I still did not fully realise the implications of drinking from

the cup that Jesus had drunk from and the true cost of discipleship. I lived in Norwich for many years without showing much interest in Mother Julian (who I had never heard of), but a friend of mine felt attracted to the Shrine and I sometimes went with her. I enjoyed the sense of peace.

Sometime later I made the acquaintance of an Associate of the Order, an encounter which made a strong impression on me. That man was one of our Readers, who eventually became my sponsor when I took my vows to become an Associate. At the time I seriously questioned whether I was in fact Associate material, as I was not only an innate rebel but also Jewish with strong Catholic leanings. If this wasn't enough it was all mixed up together with being Anglican, Liberal but at the same time very Biblically grounded, a veritable mish-mash. I also considered myself an extrovert, in no way did I feel attracted to the contemplative life; and I believed — falsely — that I would be unable to pray contemplatively.

The Order drew out a side of me that had been hidden; a side that in fact was contemplative and that loved silence. I realised that like my fellow Associate I felt a great love for our liturgy, feeling very much at home with liturgical prayer. I enjoyed attending Mass at Julian's Shrine and meeting up with my fellow Associates, little by little Mother Julian and the Order became a part of me or part of me became as one with the Order.

Not long after I had begun this journey, however, I felt a strong calling to move, a transition which severed the immediate ties I had developed. I lost my fellow Julians, the Shrine and my fellow Associate's mentoring and sermons in one fell swoop.

Yet, alone in a new place in the past two years being an Associate of the Order has taken on a whole new meaning. I rediscovered the importance of my vows; the Order became an Anchor always, in times of joy and times of trial. I tangibly felt the support of the Order and in spite of my studies endeavoured to follow the daily digest. I found myself quoting Mother Julian, and sensitising others to her, her wisdom resonating in the same way it did during the horrors of plague and violence in her time.

In spite of my health problems which have given me a different insight into Mother Julian, I will be going forward as locally authorised preacher with a view to becoming a lay Reader in the Anglican Church. God is indeed the God of surprises; I was forced to take early retirement in 2002 due to health reasons. This at the time for me was a disaster. I loved my profession. I was a University Lecturer and Teacher Trainer teaching English for Business, Methodology and English for Academic purposes…Now it seems that I will have the privilege of enabling people to grow in Christ the way I have been and am enabled.

Since writing this I have been asked if I would be interested in co-leading a Contemplative prayer group and, yes, I would be leading Julian Prayer. I am still having difficulty in coming to terms with the fact that in my darkest hours when I met Jesus at Gethsemane not once but twice, God's plans were already in place waiting…it was all part of His master plan and I was living in oblivion.

If it had not been for the community I have experienced, with the invaluable support and teaching I received, if it had not been for the community experienced in certain encounters and all fellow affiliates, I would not be here where I am. In a strange way, I know that I would not have had the courage of my convictions. I would not feel so empowered to carry out the work of our Lord and Saviour. If it were not for Mother Julian and the knowledge of the truly horrendous times that she lived in and the scenes that she witnessed I would not be so at peace in the world that we now live in.

As I keep my vows prayerfully reciting and pondering the Daily Office wherever I happen to be, I give thanks for Mother Julian's reassurance that the battle has already been won. It is not my battle; all I need to do is turn to Christ. I try to be mindful of the joys of the present prayerfully, subliminally touching God's world with my mind and thoughts.

I had thought that I knew God…but I didn't because as Julian points out "we cannot know God unless we know ourselves...what we are by Him in nature and grace", because we are one with God, even though we still have our sin and weakness. It has taken over three years but I think this message of Mother Julian's which was subliminally drip fed to me has finally started to penetrate.

"The greatest honour we can give Almighty God is to live gladly because of the knowledge of his love." Safe in the knowledge that "All shall be well, and all shall be well and all manner of thing shall be well."

Tweeting from the Anchorhold

Fr David Simmons ObJN

We are in a new age of connectivity. The technologies that have given us the personal computer and the internet are creating as large a sea change in our society as the Gutenberg press did. While the Protestant and Roman Catholic Reformations formed and were formed by the new technologies of the printing press, whatever the church is heading into at the end of this emergent "Rummage sale" (as Bp. Mark Dyer puts it) is being fundamentally shaped by these new communications technologies that were unthinkable just a few decades ago. One person recently pointed out that if a modern teenager were to be handed one of Captain Kirk's communicators, they would play with it for a minute and then ask, "Is that ALL it does?"

The amount of communication that is enabled by the new social media technologies is simply astounding. An average person can be in instant communication with anyone else anywhere in the world. Geologists have noted that Twitter is a better early warning system for earthquakes than seismographs. Employment is applied for and found on LinkedIn. We are able to be in touch with old friends we haven't seen in years on Facebook, and all it takes is a few clicks of a mouse. The profound effects of social media on politics is being shown again and again in Egypt, Syria, and other places. We are all in touch with a burgeoning percentage of the world population.

There are those that decry this revolution in communication as the death of community, but I've not experienced it that way. If we want to blame technologies for destroying community we need to start with air conditioning. That invention, which is life-saving for many during summer months, also changed the ways we interacted with each other, moving summer social contact inside and making it much less public. The second negative technological impact to community in the last century was television, which set up a one-way tap of information that kept us isolated in our (air-conditioned) living rooms. While sitting in front of computer screens using social media might not be as desirable a pasttime for society as evening strolls in the 1800s were, it sure beats the growing

isolation of recent decades. Whatever we want to say about social media, we need to remember that it is SOCIAL. At its best, it keeps connections alive that might otherwise be dead and may enhance, rather than replace, community in the real world. Social scientist James Fowler has shown evidence in his studies that those that are more "connected," either in the real world or in cyberspace, are happier and less prone to depression. My experience with younger people is that they are less glued to their screens than my generation (Gen-X), as they are more apt to use social media on smart phones and tablets while they move from one real-world meetup to another.

But what does such a communications medium mean for people of contemplation? The need to clear our minds of outward distraction during prayer is a part of all contemplative praxis. The "Monkey Mind" is a common foe we all face, and was an issue for thousands of years before the multiplication of distraction that social media offers. In our everyday lives, as we try to be more centered, social media can pull us away from that center if we let it have control. It is not too uncommon these days to see people ultimately distracted — grabbing for their smartphone the instant it beeps or purrs. How should we approach these new communications tools as we strive for balance?

As Monastics and Affiliates of the Order of Julian of Norwich, we seek to live our lives according to a modified Benedictine rule in the spirit of our patroness. While we spend much time reading and reflecting on the *Shewings*, it is sometimes helpful to reflect on her manner of life, or at least what we imagine it to be. We often think of Julian as isolated, as the band Bombadil sings in their track "Julian of Norwich"

> Julian of Norwich, why did you go away? Don't you know your family thinks of you every day? And though your faith is strong it has to be said, to your own family you may as well be dead.

But we know from historical accounts that this is an incorrect interpretation of her condition. While Julian spent her life as an anchoress in her cell, she was anything but isolated — her window was her interface to the world. She was one of the most sought-after spiritual directors of her age. People came from all over England to speak to her. Julian's window and Twitter share some aspects — they both give a view onto a different world and they are

both limited in their scope. In addition, they both share a feature — one that is obvious in the case of the window but may not be so obvious in the case of social media — they can be closed down.

The perceived problems with social media generally don't have to do with their reach or their scope — they have to do with their distraction factor. Julian did not keep her window open 24/7. It would have been death to the contemplative life that was the core of her vocation. Just as it was important for her to shut her window, it's important for us to be able to shut down the distractions that social media can interject into our lives. When I'm praying, my phone goes into "Airplane mode." Yes, I need to be in contact with people, but is anything really so immediate that I can't be "off the grid" for half an hour? Does the need to be in constant touch really trump the primary need to be still in the presence of God for a short fraction of the day? Likewise, if I'm in a conversation and my phone chirps, do I really need to answer it just this second, or can I finish the conversation and give due attention to the person in my immediate presence? The message will still be there later. Do I really need to know every time a new email appears, or should I check it on my schedule so I am the one in control rather than the device? No one can serve two masters.

While some decry the social media revolution, I'm a firm believer in its positive aspects. Every new technology has its challenges to society, and this one is no different. We can celebrate the gifts it brings while still being wary about its drawbacks. And when push comes to shove, we can put the phone on silent so we can find silence within ourselves.

Community as Prophecy

Mthr Hilary OJN

"For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." Matthew 18:20

From the first days of the Church gathered in Jerusalem after the ascension of Jesus until now, as the basic structure of Christian community life has remained recognizably stable, its prophetic value has adjusted to meet the needs of the time at hand. Now, as then, the structuring principle is the in-forming life of the Holy Spirit of Jesus worked out in practice "in the Apostles' teaching and fellowship, the breaking of bread and the prayers".

The deep structure, the real glue of Christian community is our common baptism into the death and resurrection

of Jesus and the drawing, in and by love, of the Holy Spirit. With the breaking of bread and the prayers, this only is necessary and contains within it the prophetic potential for conversion in every age of time and place and circumstance. In the subsequent development of various forms of Christian community life, everything else is more or less functional decoration.

The enduring subspecies of Christian community that is monastic life, life-in-common 'under a Rule and an Abbot' as St Benedict says, speaks particularly cogently to the needs of each age. As traditionally understood, monastic life is meant to mirror that deep structure of Christian community, from the common life under a Rule giving shape and focus to the new commandment of Love; and in relationship to a leader, an 'abba' or 'amma' understood as representing in the community the servant leadership of Christ. This manner of being gathered by the Holy Spirit of Jesus is simple, and simply replete with consequence; while our destiny is the glory of Jesus, we get there by the way of Jesus, by personal and corporate self-emptying.

In the prologue to his Rule for Monks, St Benedict gives a clue to the flavor of the adventure, saying, "Let us ask the Lord that He supply by the help of His grace what is impossible to us by nature." In this day and age, our own natural impossibility is likely to be the communal requirement of otherness, of having to come to terms with difference. For instance, while the new information technology can foster existing as well as create new ghettoized like-mindedness in which people may choose to hear and see only that which already agrees with them, the pattern of like-mindedness for Christian community is that found in the second letter to the Church in Philippi: In baptism we have put on the mind of the one who, 'although in the form of God, emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, and in that service, became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.' Our crucifix is difference, the fact that we must make community with the ones God has chosen for us in choosing them for himself.

I come to community and what do I find? Eaters of beets, and beans, and Marmite! Perpetual beginners of the violin! People whose first destination in the Sunday paper is not the baseball standings!

(I once heard a religious superior say that, although sometimes they felt tempted to jump in front of a train *because* of their community, they hoped they would be able to jump in front of a train *for* their community, should that ever become necessary.)

On the happier side, genuine community is a crucible for the revelation of hidden beauty, arrived at by sometimes counter-intuitive method: "Let [the brothers] bear [one another's] infirmities, whether of body or mind, with the utmost patience," says the Rule of St Benedict. This is a large portion of our individual and corporate penance, but also the very thing that allows the beauty of each member of community to emerge. How many times, in how many ways is the question asked 'can anything good come from Nazareth?' — and how many times in how many ways do we see, in answer, the beauty of Jesus the one True Human manifested in our brothers and sisters?

Community life is an occasion of surprise and enlargement as each member of it is on his or her unique way to conformation to the likeness of Jesus. How many times have I looked around our household and seen evidence of the many who are no longer with us? They have gone from us one way or another, but their self-gift and impress upon our lives and upon this place is permanent. Well and woe alike are folded in and become part of the fabric of who we are, and are becoming, according to the mind of God.

The fruits of all this are not for private consumption either, for if another prophetic word speaks from the mouth of Christian community, it is that we no longer belong solely to ourselves alone but to Jesus, and through Jesus, to each other. As with the labor and thought of Julian herself, all this life is for each one and for everyone. However hidden, however apparently ordinary and insignificant, the life is for our own salvation and that of many others, exactly who and how, we are rarely given to know. We are here not to provoke one another to spiritual rivalry, to striving competition in nuns' clothes, but to encourage one another to growth by means of each one's loving desire and faithful practice. We are all saved together or we are not saved.

And this could be, in our day and age, the most prophetic word of all. In a time when "being spiritual but not religious" is seen to be a positive value, intentional Christian communities of parishes or monasteries or what-have-you are out-loud religious, 'bound together' in the literal sense of that word, mirroring the binding together in love that is the very basis of the eternal bliss of the Holy Trinity. Real sacramental life requires the one and the many as does real monastic life; requiring one another, we are spiritual precisely by means of being religious.

Book Notes: *Creatures We Dream of Knowing*

Creatures We Dream of Knowing: Stories of Our Life Together
Andrew Marr
iUniverse 2011
ISBN: 978-1-4502-8070-9
paperback pp 201

The "creatures" of the title are various and, each in its own way, fantastical. The creatures have help which they can offer to humans; the creatures need help which humans can offer them — but a new understanding must be gained before the trust which is necessary for the exchange of help can be achieved. Drawing together this fantasy, there is a constant creature running throughout all the stories, namely "the twelve-year old boy", variously named and variously endowed with the different characteristics of that age shared out among the stories. Sometimes the twelve-year old is not likeable, except perhaps for one trait; sometimes the boy is quite pleasing even though he has faults. The boy suffers from the usual problems of his age — misunderstood by his parents, teachers, friends, his talents unappreciated, his skills not called forth. The normality of all these twelve-year olds (good and bad) acts as a foil against the fantastic creatures they meet. Yet it is the creatures who, each in its own special way, present virtues which will smooth out the faults of the human boys, teaching them about justice, peace, compassion, kindness, respect and so on, so that each boy has been helped to "grow up" in character by the end of the story. And helped without "preaching" or "lecturing", too!

The creatures really are fantastical: for example, the elements of the design in an Oriental carpet "come alive" and are the means whereby the human weavers of the carpet can be helped; there are dragons, elusive butterflies of peace, genies released from their bottle by mistake, a tree with strange powers. . . . If by means of learning to understand these creatures — a true feat of mind and heart — a twelve-year old boy can be brought to show understanding and compassion to a classmate in his own school (an equal triumph of mind and heart), then relationships in the real world have been brought one little step closer to love and respect. Grown-up readers can admire the author's skill in reminding them of their own past struggles as they enjoy the complex weave of the fantasy.

Community Notes

While the winter was almost a non-event in Wisconsin this year, our time has been a series of many events. Usually Holy Week and Easter provide enough busyness to keep us quite occupied, but this spring we found it was time for making certain changes around the house. After many years of having some things fixed in stone, we changed our refectory table and stools, the arrangement of serving meals, modified the monastery entryway, cleaned out the sacristy and basements, put new carpet in some cells, painted walls and ceilings, refreshed Julianshop, simplified our phone system, and if all this was not enough to confuse ourselves and guests, revised the horarium. So far all the changes have proved enormously happy and we continue to enjoy their benefits.

While all these things were happening inside the house, outside an unexpected two weeks of summer in March sent the groundskeeper scurrying for tools. A red fox has been frequenting our grounds this spring, much to our interest and to the consternation of the rabbit population. Among our other visitors has been a robin who got caught in the seed netting in the vegetable garden (she was safely released) and a mink who came to check out our new fountain.

It's hard to believe, perhaps because April was such a long month for us, but the new fountain has only been here since Holy Week. It is the keystone of our landscaper's efforts to beautify the west patio and he had been waiting almost two years to finish that part of the project. We are delighted with this gift and the gentle sound it adds to the landscape.

Fr John-Julian's *The Complete Imitation of Christ* was published on 6 May; he continues his work on the book on St Francis de Sales. Mthr Hilary was in Massachusetts in Lent for the New England Affiliates' Retreat, and in Eastertide took off for Ohio for the leaders' meeting of CAROA.

This May, weather permitting, our friends from the church down the road in Wales will be back to take over the grounds with equipment and good will, remove stumps and invasive bushes, and generally have a great time for what seems to be becoming an annual picnic.

Pictures at right: New robins....Maurice's Landscaping installing the fountain in the west patio....The chapel on Julian's Day

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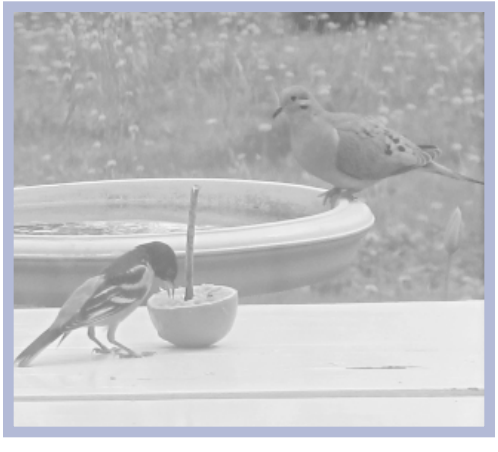

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