



Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

Focus Articles:

- 📖 St. Meinrad Archabbey:
Portrait of a Historic
Monastic Community
(*Monasticism Old and New*,
pp. 62-68)
- 📖 Reba Place Fellowship:
Portrait of a New
Monastic Community
(*Monasticism Old and New*,
pp. 69-76)
- 📖 From L'Abri to
The Landing
(*Monasticism Old and New*,
pp. 77-82)

What do you think?

Was this study guide useful for your personal or group study? Please send your suggestions to Christian_Reflection@baylor.edu.

Christian Reflection

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Snapshots from Home

Through the Benedictine oblate program at Saint Meinrad Archabbey, membership in Reba Place Fellowship, and intensive study in L'Abri Fellowship houses, many Christians are learning new patterns of discipleship in life together. Will their stories of community — snapshots from home — reshape American Christianity?

Responsive Prayer†

Listen, listen, my children! Incline your ears to hear.

Show us your ways, O Lord.

Attend to the advice of the one who loves you.

Teach us your paths, O God.

There is a path to follow, a work to do,
if you would return to him from whom you have strayed.

**Good and upright are you, O Lord, for you instruct sinners
in the way.**

Let us awake, then, for this is the hour to rise from our sleep.

We open our eyes to the light of God.

Hear now the sweetest sound, the holy invitation.

We wait for the voice of the Lord.

See how the loving God shows us the way of salvation.

To You, O Lord, we lift up our souls.

(Unison) **Show us your ways, O Lord. Amen.**

Scripture Reading: Romans 13:8-14

Reflection

“The importance of dwelling with one another cannot be emphasized enough,” Emily Rodgers says of her experience in The Landing, a duplex she shares in intentional Christian community with friends. Matthew Mattingly, retreat director at St. Meinrad Archabbey, and Celina Varela, director of the Intern Program at Reba Place Fellowship, would agree.

Within their diverse communities, Rodgers, Mattingly, and Varela are discovering how monastic practices, classic and new, can help all Christians enrich their discipleship.

- ▶ *St. Meinrad Archabbey's oblate program* offers an ordered plan of Benedictine prayer, contemplation, and practice for Christians who live outside the cloister. The oblates commit to “praying daily at least the morning and evening office of the Liturgy of the Hours; practicing *lectio divina* regularly, including a daily reading from the *Rule of Saint Benedict*; being active members of their own church community (oblates do not have to be Catholics; the program is open to committed Christians of any denomination); and being actively attentive of God’s presence in his or her ordinary daily life,” Matthew Mattingly writes. Oblates value the structure the program brings to their spiritual lives, community with one another, and ongoing relationship with the monks of St. Meinrad.
- ▶ *Reba Place Fellowship*, the oldest urban Christian community in America, is “a community of love, and discipline” that nurtures “other such communities as God gives us grace,” Celina Varela explains. Its ministries of justice, peace, and practical service in the Mennonite tradition center on four charisms: *worship, accountability or mutual correction, spiritual direction, and ministry and witness.*



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▶ *L'Abri Fellowship*, founded by Francis and Edith Schaeffer in Switzerland in 1955, has communities in ten countries around the world. The beauty of the L'Abri model emerges as intellectual pursuits and discussions intertwine seamlessly with practical daily chores. For L'Abri workers and students, everything is spiritual. It is this approach that Emily Rodgers adapted with her graduate student friends in *The Landing*.

▶ *The Landing* is representative of countless informal communities of friends who have made the choice to live intentional Christian lives together. Commitments like daily prayer, living in accordance with the church calendar, and sharing a meal each night make small communities like *The Landing* places of true fellowship, peace, storytelling, and unity.

These diverse groups have found ways to bring the Benedictine focus—*ora et labora*, to pray and to work—to those outside the cloister. By integrating historic Christian practices with their daily tasks, they are beginning to reshape American Christianity.

Study Questions

1. Discuss the key Christian practices of each community—St. Meinrad's oblate program, Reba Place Fellowship, L'Abri Fellowship, and *The Landing*. What is the common goal of these practices?
2. Why is it so important to integrate prayer with everyday tasks? How can an intentional Christian community help us to do this?
3. Consider how your congregation incorporates the monastic values and spiritual practices exemplified in these communities. What could it learn from these communities?

Departing Hymn: "Let Us Walk in the Light" (vv. 1, 2, and 4)

There is a Light, a blessed Light,
that comes from God above;
and in the face of Christ the Lord,
reflects the Father's love.

There is a Light, a glorious Light,
that falls upon our way;
it's brighter shining as we go,
till lost in perfect day.

O blessed, blessed, Holy Light,
to all so freely giv'n;
shine forth, shine forth, O Light of Life,
and guide us safe to heav'n.

Fanny Crosby (1895), alt.

Suggested Tunes: GRÄFFENBERG or ST. ANNE

† The leader's words are drawn from St. Benedict's *Rule of Life* (seventh century) and the responses come from the Psalms, which continue to be central to the worship of monastics, classic and new.

Snapshots from Home

Lesson Plans

Abridged Plan	Standard Plan
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 2	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To examine how monastic practices are being adapted outside the cloister in diverse contemporary Christian communities.
2. To see how a prayerful community that integrates spiritual practices and disciplines with practical daily tasks can prepare its members for the difficult work of Christian discipleship.
3. To reflect on how congregations can be enriched by the monastic values and practices exhibited in the four communities briefly described here.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 10-11 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Monasticism Old and New (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus articles before the group meeting. The departing hymn “Let Us Walk in the Light” can be sung to the familiar melodies GRÄFFENBERG or ST. ANNE, which can be found in your church’s hymnal or on the Web in the Cyber Hymnal™ (www.hymntime.com/tch/).

Begin with a Story

In “From L’Abri to The Landing,” Emily Rodgers writes of the home she shares with a community of friends. “Recently, the deep importance of our little brick house became clear to us when we hosted a friend from Minneapolis for ‘house dinner’ – our daily practice of munching on a hearty evening meal that one of us has prepared. ‘I told some of my neighbors in Minneapolis about what you do here at The Landing, taking turns to cook dinner each weeknight,’ our guest began. ‘They felt inspired by the idea; so now my neighborhood hosts weekly “community dinners” in our homes, based upon a monthly rotation. We all love it! We are finally starting to know one another. And the idea came directly from you guys.’”

“It dawned on us,” Rodgers writes, “by the simple steps of sharing a meal each night, forming the *Landing Literary Society* to discuss one another’s art, cultivating a backyard garden complete with chickens, and adhering to the liturgical church calendar, we are discovering a communal pattern of living that enriches our lives and, as our guest revealed, the lives of others. We are pushing back the culture’s unrelenting press toward individualism and independence that leaves little room for what Dietrich Bonhoeffer aptly calls ‘life together.’” (*Monasticism Old and New*, pp. 77-78)

Along with Matthew Mattingly and Celina Varela, Rodgers notes the transforming power of simple daily habits that embody monastic values.

Responsive Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by leading the responsive prayer in the study guide.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Romans 13:8-14 from a modern translation.

Reflection

In four “snapshots from home” we see diverse Christian communities working to integrate prayer and work in a shared life together outside the cloister. The oblates associated with historic monasteries like St. Meinrad Archabbey integrate values of the *Rule of Saint Benedict* into their daily lives. Reba Place Fellowship members discover “‘the littleness and ordinariness of our lives’ can become an act of worship. When we desire to do the simplest act in love, our mundane actions become ways to commune with one another and with God.” L’Abri Fellowship sees life as “sacred and communal” and “peace as something ‘that comes with work to do.’” In less formal and less well-established groups like The Landing, Christians live, cook, and pray in “a communal pattern of living [that] enriches their lives and the lives of others.” Encourage members to study these four groups for ways of integrating historic Christian practices of spiritual discipline and community into their daily lives and their congregations.

For more information about these communities, visit the Web sites of the Benedictine oblate program at Saint Meinrad Archabbey (www.saintmeinrad.edu/monastery_oblates.aspx), Reba Place Fellowship (www.rebaplacefellowship.org), and L’Abri Fellowship International (www.labri.org).

Study Questions

1. Matthew Mattingly writes that the Benedictine oblates make three commitments that mirror formal monastic vows. They promise: *stability of heart*, remaining faithful to the values of their monastery, their families, and their faith communities; *obedience to the will of God* through prayer and scripture reading; and *fidelity to the spirit of the monastic life*, integrating Benedict’s *Rule* in their daily lives.

In Reba Place Fellowship, covenant members have the highest degree of obligation. They commit to stay in the community until it is discerned that God is calling them elsewhere, participate in all community processes and activities, engage in regular prayer and devotions, share decision making, give and receive accountability, and share what they have in a common treasury.

The L’Abri Fellowship houses are shorter-term communities. Members engage in daily morning prayers, discussion meals, tutorials between workers and students, daily chores, teas, and times of recreation. The friends who live in The Landing share a meal each evening, cook a meal for everyone once a week, share their art at the *Landing Literary Society*, tend their backyard garden (with chickens), and live life according to the liturgical calendar.

Though the emphasis of each group is different, the general goal of all of these practices is to draw participants into the life of God (“to slowly grow in holiness,” as a Benedictine oblate states in Mattingly’s article) and to participate in God’s redemptive activities. Mattingly’s comment about oblates can apply also to members of RPF, L’Abri, and The Landing: “Oblates are living witnesses that centuries-old traditions of monastic prayer, contemplation, and practice truly are capable of transforming the world at a practical level.”

2. Through the disciplines of regular prayer and regular work for and with their community, members enter into a rhythm of life that is focused on God and others rather than on themselves. As Emily Rodgers puts it: “We are discovering a communal pattern of living that enriches our lives and, as our guest revealed, the lives of others. We are pushing back the culture’s unrelenting press toward individualism and independence that leaves little room for what Dietrich Bonhoeffer aptly calls ‘life together.’”

God, who created all aspects of our being, demands all of those aspects in return. By integrating our spiritual lives into our day-to-day habits, we are able to worship God with all of ourselves and through all of our activities. In this way we can become more fully and completely the men and women whom God has made us to be.

3. After you list the communal practices discussed by Mattingly, Varela, and Rodgers, encourage small groups to brainstorm how these practices can be translated to a local congregation. The commitment to engage in daily prayer discussed by Mattingly and Varela, or the LifeTogether Groups that Emily Rodgers describes, are likely places to start.

Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.