

# Monks & Nuns? Anglican?? YES, INDEED!

Make mention of monks and nuns, and a picture of hauntingly beautiful, silent ruins, emerging from the morning mists of an English winter, will probably be envisaged. This was brought home to us one day when a couple doing the 'tourist thing' in this part of Victoria, saw the signs to the Benedictine Abbey, just outside Camperdown, and decided to call in. On answering the door (to historians as it turned out) the monk was faced with looks of incredulity. The tourists were not expecting to come face to face with a real, live monk! Regaining composure, they explained haltingly that having seen the signs to the Abbey, they had come to see the ruins!

However, there are no ruins here, just 21st century monks and nuns! We are Anglican, Benedictine, monks and nuns, living the monastic life in Australia's only Anglican Abbey (though not the only Benedictine community). For many Anglicans the reality of monks and nuns within the church is unrecognised. Many genuine vocations to monastic life may be lost because men and women cannot respond to a call to a life they do not know exists. Seeking God, in a life of prayer, is the purpose of monastic life and it is of vital importance to our church and today's broken and divided world. To prosper and nurture vocation in our young people should be a priority for all Anglicans.

Some will ask, are not monks and nuns wasting their lives? Is not monastic life a denial of all that is good and on offer in this world? Is it not a ridiculous travesty of an affluent, educated society for some of its members to choose deliberately a life of obedience, silence, withdrawal, chastity, in order to pray. The answers to these questions depend on our answer to another: Is love, or rather, is Love, relevant today? Monastic life is not an elitist body in the church, but the response of those who like the prodigal son have 'come to themselves' and find the waiting father is longing to receive them with love.

Love, is the sole motivation for monastic life. Love is the heart of the Christian vocation. It is a love that demands a response. Our response may be to ignore the love God has for us and go our own way; it may be to respond as far as it suits us and does not make too many demands; or it may be a wholehearted and generous response -- loving God because God has first loved us. Christ Jesus is the only human person to have truly and fully lived a genuine response. For the rest of us, no matter how deep a longing in our heart, our response is feeble at best, more like the path in a game of 'snakes and ladders' than the straight road to God that we seek. To those called, the monastic life gives a framework for constant conversion, that our lives may become prayer for the coming of God's kingdom. Monastic life is a lifelong journey into the darkness and joy of Christ's Passover.

Prayer is the backbone of monastic life. In prayer we come before God to praise and adore and hold the world and its people in love before Him. One hallmark of monastic life is silence -- not a vacuity -- but a space of constant attention and docility to the voice of God. A loving, peaceful and joyful being in the presence of Love.

A vocation is a call from God to enter into a particular journey. It involves the hidden and deep relationship we have with God, with other human beings and with ourselves. If we are willing to embark upon and persevere on our vocation journey, we will find both God and ourselves. A monk or nun is one who belongs solely to God, a consecration lived out with God in community. A vocation is not the sole preserve of monks, nuns and priests -- a vocation is given to every individual, and as a human society we are dependant upon each filling their unique role in the human family.

In our generation, with so much superficiality, there is a deep and genuine hunger for the things of the Spirit. There is a quest for a lifestyle that expresses this seeking. The monastic life is an authentic choice that leads to union with God.

Who would embark on a monastic vocation? God calls whom he will. One person may have a meditative and reflective personality; one may have already been living a life of prayer solitarily but now want the support of a community and a tradition; another may seek only to live in communion with God in community; another, a loving concern for souls; or as many other reasons as individuals who are called. There is however, only one reason that matters: it is the longing to give a whole-hearted surrender to the God who calls. This alone suffices for a life of consecration. God who calls remains faithful.

St Benedict in his wisdom, advises that entry into the monastery not be allowed too easily. His concern is that entry is not simply an impulsive fancy of the moment. To one wanting to enter, full of eagerness and anticipation, it may seem an affront to have to wait 'at the door of the monastery'. But, a time of waiting, followed by years of novitiate training, allow for the discovery of the real motives in undertaking this life. Is one truly seeking God -- and willing to persevere in this seeking and necessary conversion, for life? Vows, only taken after lengthy discernment, are a support and encouragement.

We believe there is an important future for monastic life in Australia. God is truly among us. As we kneel in awe and wonder beneath the great sign of the Southern Cross, as we tap into the spiritual heritage of this country, we can truly worship. What could be more effective in the forwarding of the Church's mission -- God's mission of reconciliation and healing, in the world he loves and has redeemed than a life of prayer and freedom.

Is God calling you to share the monastic life?

*St Mark's Abbey, Camperdown, Victoria is an Anglican Benedictine monastic community of monks and nuns. A vocation is to a particular community. There are other Anglican monastic/contemplative and apostolic communities in Australia. A candidate for monastic life will normally be aged 23-45 years, with sound physical, mental and psychological health, free from debt and dependants.*

*Weekend conferences are planned at Camperdown, (dates to be finalized) to help those wanting to discern a possible vocation.*

*For further information on anything in this article, please contact us: The Vocations Director, St Mark's Abbey, P.O. Box 111, Camperdown, Victoria.*

Thanks again Clement,  
Sr Raphael