



Christian Reflection
A Series in Faith and Ethics

Christian Reflection
Center for Christian Ethics
Baylor University
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Study Guides for

Monasticism Old and New

These guides integrate Bible study, prayer, and worship to explore how monastic communities, classic and new, provide a powerful critique of mainstream culture and offer transforming possibilities for our discipleship. Use them individually or in a series. You may reproduce them for personal or group use.

A Vision So Old It Looks New 2

It is hard to be a Christian in America today. But that can be good news, the new monastics are discovering. If the cost of discipleship pushes us to go back and listen to Jesus again, it may open us to costly grace and the transformative power of resurrection life. In every era God has raised up new monastics to remind the Church of its true vocation.

The Finkenwalde Project 4

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's project at Finkenwalde Seminary to recover for congregations the deep Christian tradition is a prominent model for young twenty-first-century Christians. Weary of the false dichotomy between right belief and right practice, they seek the wholeness of discipleship in what Bonhoeffer called "a kind of new monasticism."

Evangelicals and Monastics 6

Could any two groups of Christians—evangelicals and monastics—be more different? But the New Monasticism movement has opened a new chapter in the relations of these previously estranged groups. Nothing is more characteristic of monastics and evangelicals than their unshakable belief that one cannot be truly spiritual without putting one's faith into practice, and one cannot sustain Christian discipleship without a prayerful spirituality.

Ties that Bind: Sharing a Common Rule of Life 8

If we are going to live the Christ-like life in American society today, then we had better do it as a body or else we will never make it. Yet growing a shared life in Christ out of our frantically busy lives is quite a challenge. How can a common rule of life—a salient feature of monasticism, old and new—help us to covenant with others in Christian community?

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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?



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Focus Article:

- 📖 A Vision So Old It Looks New
(*Monasticism Old and New*, pp. 11-18)

Suggested Articles:

- 📖 "We Need Each Other and We Need God"
(*Monasticism Old and New*, pp. 88-93)
- 📖 Learning from Monks
(*Monasticism Old and New*, pp. 83-87)

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A Vision So Old It Looks New

It is hard to be a Christian in America today. But that can be good news, the new monastics are discovering. If the cost of discipleship pushes us to go back and listen to Jesus again, it may open us to costly grace and the transformative power of resurrection life. In every era God has raised up new monastics to remind the Church of its true vocation.

Prayer

Scripture Reading: Luke 14:25-33

Meditation[†]

I beg you to keep me in this silence so that I may learn from it the word of your peace and the word of your mercy and the word of your gentleness to the world: and that through me perhaps your word of peace may make itself heard where it has not been possible for anyone to hear it for a long time.

Thomas Merton (1915-1968)

Reflection

"Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple," Jesus told the crowds that "were travelling with him" (Luke 14:25, 27). He did not say these hard words to people with only a casual interest in his work or to those who rejected him. Yet if being Jesus' disciple is really as difficult as building a skyscraper or launching a war, then it is much harder than most of us ever expected or are prepared to take on. We would need a committed team, and a plan, to follow Jesus.

This insight into the true cost of discipleship is the heart of the monastic impulse, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove believes. Whenever Christians are greatly tempted to reduce discipleship to merely fitting into the surrounding culture and embracing its rules for success – which happens just about everywhere and all the time – God begins to draw them to create, or join, or just learn from intentional Christian communities that can maintain a more radical, counter-cultural vision of discipleship.

Wilson-Hartgrove outlines three creative and defining moments in the rich history of communal monasticism.

- ▶ *Antony's revival.* Though monks existed from the earliest days, they were better known and their numbers increased when Athanasius wrote *Life of Antony* soon after the great monk's death. This ancient bestseller tells how the young Antony (c. 251-356) sold his property, resolved to learn from hermits, retired to the desert to fight demons and the temptations of the Roman Empire, and became the most sought-after Christian in Egypt. When he returned to the city of Alexandria, a revival broke out. "And so, from then on, there were monasteries in the mountains," Athanasius writes, "and the desert was made a city by the monks, who left their own people and registered themselves for the citizenship in the heavens." Wilson-Hartgrove observes that fourth-century desert Christians like Antony "helped the Church discover new forms of faithfulness for a new time. But even more than that, they set a precedent for how the Church remembers the power of God when the powers of



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this world are in transition. They introduced the monastic impulse to relocate and re-imagine our role from the margins of society.”

- ▶ *Benedict’s “school for the lord’s service.”* After the Visigoths sacked Rome in 410, a social crisis gripped the Empire: its forms of life were not sustainable. In this context, Benedict of Nursia (480-547) crafted a Christian model of community and mutual service in his *Regula*, or *Rule of Life*, around the idea “to pray and to work.” In Benedictine communities, “Rich and poor were treated as equals under the Rule, serving one another out of reverence for Christ,” notes Wilson-Hartgrove. “Women could choose not to remain in their father’s house or marry into another man’s house. They could choose to share life and even have the possibility to lead in a house of fellow sisters. These little societies within society became like leaven in a lump of dough, creating pockets of freedom where people could imagine alternatives to the violence and grinding poverty of the world around them.”
- ▶ *Radical Protestant monasticism.* “We forget that much of the so-called Protestant Reformation was driven by the monastic impulse,” Wilson-Hartgrove says. When Michael Sattler (c. 1490-1527) was dissatisfied with efforts to reform the Benedictine monastery where he lived, he joined the Anabaptists and became the main author of the *Schleitheim Confession* (1527). This defining document called for “voluntary membership in community, a common way of life, the disciplined pursuit of holiness, and leadership elected by the community,” he notes. “In other words, they wanted a church that looked like Benedict’s monastery.” The monastic impulse gave rise to reform movements from Quakers, Shakers, and Baptists to Pentecostals, evangelicals, and other radical Christian groups, like the slave churches that formed in the “hush harbors” of nineteenth-century southern plantations.

Study Questions

1. What is the heart of the monastic impulse, according to Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove? Discuss a major contribution from each defining moment of monasticism that he sketches.
2. In “Learning from Monks” Warren Smith notes that scholars are removing “old caricatures of early Christian ascetics and the significance of monasticism in the history of our common past.” What are some of these “old caricatures”?
3. Review the twelve “marks” of the New Monasticism movement (www.newmonasticism.org). Which are most appealing? Which seem most difficult to achieve? Why would you need a community to focus on those marks in your discipleship?
4. In “We Need Each Other and We Need God” Elizabeth Sands Wise says, “the Church as a whole can learn from the new monastic commitment to genuine community, though Wilson-Hartgrove importantly reminds us that the new monastics need the Church, too.” How do congregations and monastic communities, old and new, strengthen each other?

Departing Hymn: “Gather Now around His Teachings”

† Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (New York: Image Books, 1965, 1989), 178.



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Focus Article:

📖 The Finkenwalde Project
(*Monasticism Old and New*,
pp. 19-25)

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The Finkenwalde Project

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's project at Finkenwalde Seminary to recover for congregations the deep Christian tradition is a prominent model for young twenty-first-century Christians. Weary of the false dichotomy between right belief and right practice, they seek the wholeness of discipleship in what Bonhoeffer called "a kind of new monasticism."

Prayer

O God, this world is a place of your activity, a place where your light shines. But there are barren places, too. There are places where your image, which once shined like the sun, is obscured and eclipsed by those you created.

War, hatred, and fear make deserts in your world; but so do our neglect, ignorance, and complacency. Though you came to bring light, we often sit in darkness; though you came to give life, we often walk in the shadow of death.

We hear your call to the deserts of this world.

Help us to answer. Show us how to seek you in the forgotten places.

(Unison) **We pray to you, Father, through Jesus the Christ, in the power of your Spirit. Amen.**

Scripture Reading: Matthew 5:1-12

Meditation†

The restoration of the church will surely come from a sort of new monasticism which has in common with the old only the uncompromising attitude of a life lived according to the Sermon on the Mount in the following of Christ. I believe it is now time to call people to this.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945)

Reflection

"Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) stands as one of the great saints of the Church in recent memory, a saint who died at the hands of the Nazi government. One of his crimes, it would seem, was the formation of a community that sought to live out his conception of a *new monasticism*," explains Will Samson.

Bonhoeffer was not raised in a religious family. Yet in his college studies of philosophy and theology, and his encounter with the rich liturgy and community life of the Roman Catholic Church during a visit to Rome, the young Bonhoeffer began to reflect on the relation of theology to social practice. In his first dissertation, written when he was twenty-one, he calls the Church "the physical manifestation of Christ on earth" and "Christ existing as church-community."

Yet the situation in Germany was far from this ideal after the Nazi takeover. The Nazis "created a new national church, the German Evangelical Church, prohibited Jewish and non-Aryan clergy, sought to purge all non-German elements from the liturgy, and even went so far as to remove the Old Testament from the Bible," Samson notes. Bonhoeffer replied by supporting the *Barmen Declaration* (1934), written largely by Karl Barth, which declared that the Church is not "an organ of the state." In 1935, he accepted an invitation from the confessing church to direct an underground



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seminary that would recover the rich Christian tradition and train a new generation of church leaders in orthopraxy (right practice) as well as orthodoxy (right belief).

The seminary at Finkenwalde became a social experiment in intentional Christian community modeled on the Sermon on the Mount, “a sort of new monasticism.” Bonhoeffer’s *Life Together* gives the details. It lasted but a moment: the Gestapo, the secret state police, closed the seminary in 1937 and arrested more than two dozen of its students. Bonhoeffer was arrested in 1943 and executed in 1945, just weeks before the end of World War II.

Bonhoeffer’s project continues in new monastic communities in America that seek the wholeness of Christian faith in order to transform a culture-captured church. The new monastics “resist their Christian friends today – on the right of current political and theological spectrums – who would have them cleave to orthodoxy with little regard for the orthopraxy of the Church. For without that deep longing of the Church to ‘hunger and thirst for righteousness,’ or justice, how will congregations... interpret for our day the story of the Christ who calls us to transcend categories of race, ethnicity, and gender?” Samson notes. “They also resist Christian friends – on the political and theological left – who embrace a social gospel that has, over time, lost touch with the rich theological heart of the Christian message. Certainly, when social action is understood through and motivated by the orthodox witness of the Church, congregations can engage the culture in response to Christ’s call to lay down our lives. But when they lose this theological foundation, how will they maintain their commitment to live in radical service to others?”

Study Questions

1. What did Bonhoeffer mean by “a kind of new monasticism”?
2. Discuss Will Samson’s point: “Bonhoeffer thought and lived outside of the categories that currently divide Christians into opposing political and theological camps. He did not check out from the hard work of redeeming society. Neither did he bless activities that clearly violated Christ’s call to justice.”
3. How does Frederick Jackson join right belief with right practice in “Master, We Your Footsteps Follow”? Do you agree that following Jesus requires both?

Departing Hymn: “Master, We Your Footsteps Follow” (vv. 1, 2, and 3)

Master, we your footsteps follow, we your word obey;
hear us, your dear name confessing, while we pray.

Now into your death baptizèd, we ourselves would be
dead to all the sin that made your Calvary.

Rising with you, make us like you, in your love and care,
in your zeal, and in your labor, and your prayer.

Frederick A. Jackson (1867-1942)

Tune: STEPHANOS

† Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letter to Karl-Friedrich Bonhoeffer (January 14, 1935)



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Focus Article:

📖 Evangelicals and Monastics
(*Monasticism Old and New*,
pp. 26-32)

Suggested Article:

📖 Old Monasteries for New
Generations
(*Monasticism Old and New*,
pp. 52-59)

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Evangelicals and Monastics

Could any two groups of Christians—evangelicals and monastics—be more different? But the New Monasticism movement has opened a new chapter in the relations of these previously estranged groups. Nothing is more characteristic of monastics and evangelicals than their unshakable belief that one cannot be truly spiritual without putting one's faith into practice, and one cannot sustain Christian discipleship without a prayerful spirituality.

Prayer

Scripture Reading: Psalm 119:161-168

Meditation[†]

Modern society has the idea that if you want to live a truly spiritual life, you have to leave life as we know it and go away by yourself and 'contemplate,' and that if you do, you will get holy. It is a fascinating although misleading thought. The Rule of Benedict says that if you want to be holy, stay where you are in the human community and learn from it. Learn patience. Learn wisdom. Learn unselfishness. Learn love. Then, if you want to go away from it all, then and only then will you be ready to do it alone.

Joan Chittister, OSB

Reflection

The New Monasticism movement—emerging from within the American evangelical community yet deeply connected to the monastic tradition reaching back to the early centuries of Christianity—may seem like an odd hybrid. But to Ivan Kauffman, it makes perfect sense. That is because he takes a long view of Christian history, looking beyond the trees to see the forest.

Imagine a river cutting through that forest. On one side of the river Kauffman sees the "institutional church" with hierarchical institutions housed in imposing buildings. Historically it has been centered in Rome and Constantinople. But on the other side of the river he sees many small, self-governing communities of intentional Christians. "Rather than including everyone in their boundaries, they include only those who have voluntarily chosen to join," he notes. "And rather than being defined by past tradition, they are governed by their members' religious experiences and their study of Scripture." Of these intentional communities, some are celibate monastic, others are lay evangelical.

Kauffman identifies a few basic features that all of these intentional Christian groups, both monastic and evangelical, share.

- ▶ *A sense of calling and willingness to act without support.* Accepting the tasks they thought God, through Scripture and the Holy Spirit, was calling them to do, these groups did not wait for cultural approval or official support. Kauffman says, "They did things everyone else believed were either impossible or misguided, but which often turned out to be prophetic, and thus beneficial to the entire society."
- ▶ *A willingness to suffer and remarkable persistence.* "They asked what needed to be done, and were willing to undergo all sorts of pain,



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ridicule, loneliness, and even outright persecution to get it done," he writes. Sometimes the fruit of their work was evident only decades or centuries later.

- ▶ *Community formation.* Deeply shaped by experiences of their founders, these groups usually formed communities that outlasted their founding members and thrived later on.
- ▶ *Spiritual discipleship.* "Nothing is more characteristic of these groups than their unshakable belief... that one cannot be truly spiritual in the Christian sense without putting one's faith into practice, and that one cannot sustain real Christian discipleship without a deep and prayerful spirituality."
- ▶ *Culture formation.* Viewing discipleship as a way of life, "they eventually became involved in every aspect of human life... [transforming] the societies around them, as well as the cultures that transmit the fundamental values of any society."

Because these intentional Christians, monastic and evangelical, "do not ask 'What must I do to be a Christian?' but 'How can I be more Christian?'" Kauffman concludes, "these persons and their communities have influenced Western civilization to an extent completely out of proportion to their numbers."

Study Questions

1. "Up until the Reformation, celibate monastic communities had the greatest impact," Kauffman says. "After the Reformation, the lay evangelical communities have been the great innovative force in Western civilization." Discuss his view.
2. Heidi Hornik describes the earliest surviving complete, but idealized, plan for a monastery in St. Gall, Switzerland. What does the plan suggest about the complexity of monastic communities, and their roles in the wider society?
3. Do you agree with Ivan Kauffman that the seven basic features shared by all intentional Christian communities have permanent relevance to our discipleship? Which features does your congregation best exhibit?
4. According to the meditation by Joan Chittister, how can intentional communities be crucibles for holiness? Discuss how your congregation is forming you in the traits she mentions.

Departing Hymn: "Come, All Who Bear the Name of Christ"

Come, all who bear the name of Christ,
the work of prayer is ours to do;
God's image borne in each of us
shines brighter, working to renew.

We praise the Holy Three in One,
our God, who sits enthroned on high;
the Lord draws near to hear our praise,
and moves our hearts t'ward unity.

Amber Inscore Essick (2010)

Tune: OLD 100TH

† Joan Chittister, *The Rule of Benedict: Insights for the Ages* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1992), 33.



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Focus Article:

📖 Ties that Bind: Sharing a Common Rule of Life
(*Monasticism Old and New*, pp. 33-40)

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Ties that Bind: Sharing a Common Rule of Life

If we are going to live the Christ-like life in American society today, then we had better do it as a body or else we will never make it. Yet growing a shared life in Christ out of our frantically busy lives is quite a challenge. How can a common rule of life—a salient feature of monasticism, old and new—help us to covenant with others in Christian community?

Prayer

Scripture Reading: 1 Peter 1:13-23

Meditation¹

At the risk of focusing too much on the negative, I want to begin with something that almost everyone in the Church acknowledges: it's hard to be a Christian in America... Monasticism, I learned, isn't about achieving some sort of individual or communal piety. It's about helping the church be the church.

Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove

Reflection

We have often seen it on the news, or in our own neighborhoods: when tragedy strikes, people pull together. Arenas become hospitals, elementary schools become bunkers, and church basements become havens for evacuees. Kyle Childress saw this firsthand when headline-grabbing hurricanes swept through the Gulf coast in 2005. As evacuee families moved into the Austin Heights Baptist Church in Nacogdoches, TX, members stepped up to share in child-care, meal preparation, debris clean-up, and much more. The church was taking the time to be the church.

"I believe that the call of Jesus Christ is to a shared and common life in him much like what I saw our local church embody the week following the hurricane," Childress writes, yet "it is rare to see local congregations share such a common life, and most church members have no idea such a life exists, much less is desirable." How can we recognize that shared calling and shape our lives around it? He suggests that congregations adopt a rule of life, a shared plan for life together in community.

Drawing on his experiences of a rule of life while working for the Baptist Peace Fellowship, and his study of the covenants in contemporary new monasticism, the early church, and Baptist history, Childress offers four characteristics of a rule of life.

- ▶ *Practice-oriented.* The rule of life in a monastic community, old or new, "is not confessional, creedal, or doctrinal (for their orientation to right belief, these communities have the historic Christian creeds), but it makes plain how the members live and serve together."
- ▶ *Common in the free church tradition.* Rules of life, or covenants, were standard in early Baptist and Puritan circles. "Covenant was the 'theological dynamic' for separating from the state-established church and the basis for church membership and governance," Childress notes. "It became common after 1650 for Baptist churches to be organized around covenants; they became the



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basis for constituting new congregations and receiving new members, and the means for maintaining the integrity of church membership.”

▶ *Specific to a local congregation.* Historically, “these covenants were written by the local congregations and reflected their particular effort to embody the New Testament vocation of following Jesus Christ in that place and time. Like the rule of a monastic community, these covenants were practical ... and they spelled out the congregation’s practices of prayer, service, worship, and education,” he writes. A congregation-specific rule of life articulates the commitment among members and their service to those beyond their community. Such accountability keeps the congregation healthy.

▶ *A challenging task.* “In our individualized – some would say hyper-individualized – society, to participate in the body of Christ takes extraordinary time and effort,” Childress warns. “People in congregations have less and less time to devote to God and to each other, much less serving others outside of their congregation. Busyness seems to be the number one obstacle in people’s lives to following Jesus.”

Which develops first – a deep sense of community or a shared commitment expressed in a rule of life, or covenant? “Strange but true, a church needs a covenant to better order the communal life of the congregation, but it takes a rich and vibrant communal life to produce a covenant,” Childress concludes. “Even more, it takes a good common life to even understand the need for sharing a common rule.”

Study Questions

1. Do you agree with Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove that “it’s hard to be a Christian in America”? If so, how does this fact make sharing a common life crucial for local congregations?
2. While he admits some past missteps can make local church covenants seem like “historical oddities” today, Kyle Childress thinks “there is little doubt that most hostility to covenantal ecclesiology, or a common life ordered by a rule, arises from American individualism.” What do you think?
3. Discuss the practical difficulties of developing a shared common rule of life for your congregation. Why might it be difficult to ask church members to make commitments to serve God, each other, and the larger community?
4. “Most of the you’s in Scripture are ya’lls,” Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove has noted. “The Bible isn’t addressed to a person but to a people.”² For example, in his model prayer, Jesus teaches the disciples to pray with communal pronouns – “our” and “us,” not “my” and “me.” How do the worship services in your congregation reflect and inculcate this communal understanding of discipleship?

Departing Hymn: “Gather Now around His Teachings”

¹ Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, *New Monasticism: What It Has to Say to Today’s Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2008), 11, 21.

² *Ibid.*, 57-58.



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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)

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Snapshots from Home

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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.

Appendix: Optional Lesson Plans for Teachers

For each study guide we offer two or three optional lesson plans followed by detailed suggestions on using the material in the study guide:

- ▶ An *abridged lesson plan* outlines a lesson suitable for a beginning Bible study class or a brief group session.
- ▶ A *standard lesson plan* outlines a more thorough study.
- ▶ For some guides a *dual session lesson plan* divides the study guide material so that the group can explore the topic in two meetings.

Each lesson plan is for a 30- to 45-minute meeting, with about one-third of the time being set aside for worship.

A Vision So Old It Looks New

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Meditation	Meditation
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 4	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To understand the monastic impulse as a desire for the sort of community we need in order to embrace the radical demands of Christian discipleship and resist the distortions of culture.
2. To give an overview of the history of Christian monasticism by sketching three of its defining moments.
3. To articulate how monastic communities and congregations need one another.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 2-3 and ask members to read the Bible passages in the guide. Distribute copies of *Monasticism Old and New (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested articles before the group meeting. The departing hymn “Gather Now around His Teachings” can be found on pp. 41-43 of *Monasticism Old and New*.

Begin with a Story

Unlike many American young people who grew up in the 1980s with a sense of living in a post-Christian era, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove was raised in a pious Southern Baptist family in rural North Carolina. “Where I grew up we talked about Jesus like he lived just over the next hill,” he writes. “My people taught me to love Jesus and memorize Scripture, and I did as I was told. By the time I was in high school, I was certain the God had called me to become President of the United States...for Jesus.” So, he moved to Washington, DC, to serve as a Senator’s page. “Just outside the doors of Union Station, as I was walking to get lunch one day, I saw a man crouched down, holding a Styrofoam cup,” Wilson-Hartgrove remembers. “He asked if I could spare some change, and I looked at him without saying a word. I remembered what I had heard back in King about how poor folks in the city were lazy and begged money to buy drugs and booze. A country boy in the city, I was dressed in my Sunday best, doing everything I knew to fit in. I did not want to look naïve. So I looked straight through the man and kept walking.

“But about the time I stepped through those glass doors into Union Station, I recalled a memory verse from Vacation Bible School. They were the words of Jesus, ringing in my head: ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me’ (Matthew 25:40). If those words were true I had not only just ignored a fellow a human being, I had completely missed the Lord I was trying to serve. In my rush to follow Jesus to the White House, I had almost tripped over him outside Union Station. Following Jesus was not as simple as chasing after my dreams. I began to see that it is hard to be Christian in America.” (*Monasticism Old and New*, pp. 11-12)

Reflecting on that encounter and later experiences, Wilson-Hartgrove felt the call to costly, radical discipleship – not to become a spiritual Lone Ranger, but to live out his faith within intentional Christian community. He experienced the lure of a new monasticism.

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by asking God for grace and insight for group members to boldly serve the kingdom of God together with their gifts.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Luke 14:25-33 from a modern translation.

Meditation

Invite members to reflect on the meditation during a period of silence.

Reflection

In this study Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, a leader in the New Monasticism movement, offers an overview of the history of Christian monasticism. He counters the resistance to the monastic impulse, especially among his fellow evangelicals, by interpreting monastic communities, both classic and new, as redemptive, counter-cultural experiments in radical Christian discipleship.

Two studies will explore in detail themes Wilson-Hartgrove only mentions: the twentieth-century context of new monastic communities (“The Finkenwalde Project”) and historical similarities between monasticism and evangelical reform movements (“Evangelicals and Monastics”). How we can appropriate monastic lessons into congregational life is the topic of two concluding studies, “Ties That Bind: Sharing a Common Rule of Life” and “Snapshots from Home.”

Study Questions

1. Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove endorses theologian Walter Capps’s view that “Monasticism [is the West’s] most powerful and enduring instance of counter-culture.” Monasticism has lasted longer and is “more powerful than any other form of resistance to mainstream society we have seen in the West. If that is true, then the real radicals are not quoting Che Guevara or listening to Rage Against the Machine on their iPods. The true revolutionaries are learning to pray.” Monastic communities, at their best, enable their members to encourage and correct one another as they embrace the demands of radical Christian discipleship.

Divide members into three groups to explore the contributions of key moments in monastic history sketched by Wilson-Hartgrove. Antony and other fourth-century desert Christians encouraged many other Christians to resist the lure of late ancient culture; the great theologian Augustine, for example, was inspired by *Life of Antony*. Antony was a solitary, but other desert Christians lived in forms of community. Benedict of Nursia, who was deeply formed by stories of the desert Christians, established the pattern for communal monasticism in the West. Radical reformers adapted his monastic ideals for their congregations.

2. Warren Smith addresses the caricature that monastics fled the world to avoid its temptations and cultivate their own virtues. “Monks who went to the desert were not escaping the temptations of the real world but seeking to be more attentive to the disordered and uncharitable impulses of the soul by removing the distractions that divert our attention from stirrings of our own soul. They did this by entering into the messy situation of living in the close quarters of a monastery so that they might come to know and imitate God’s forbearing love. For life in the desert monastery is not mere co-existence achieved through learning to grit one’s teeth and bite one’s tongue. Rather, it is discovering how intertwined our lives are with fellow sinners in Christ’s body.”

Other caricatures are that monastics are all the same; are “old world” and do not exist today; live in impoverished (or inordinately wealthy) communities; read books all day; are not involved in ministries; are self-centered (or other-worldly); never marry [many “new monastics” do]; live in the country and wear distinctive clothes [some do]; and so on. Encourage members to watch for corrective information in these studies. Perhaps they will want a follow-up study of some of the books reviewed by Warren Smith or Elizabeth Sands Wise.

3. The twelve “marks” are common emphases of Christian discipleship of the various new monastic communities in North America. Each community has a distinctive rule of life that defines how members support one another in living the Christian life together.
4. Elizabeth Sands Wise believes that many congregations need be inspired by and learn from the visions of genuine Christian community in the monastic groups. The monastics need the instruction and correction of the Church as a whole, for many gifted Christians serve the kingdom of God through the teaching, preaching, and ministries of congregations.

Departing Hymn

“Gather Now around His Teachings” can be found on pp. 41-43 of *Monasticism Old and New*. If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

The Finkenwalde Project

Lesson Plans

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

Teaching Goals

1. To recall the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the social context that led to the formation of the confessing church seminary at Finkewalde.
2. To articulate the Finkenwalde Seminary's project to recover for contemporary congregations the deep and rich Christian tradition of both orthodoxy and orthopraxy.
3. To interpret Bonhoeffer's call for "a kind of new monasticism."

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 4-5 and ask members to read the Bible passages in the guide. Distribute copies of *Monasticism Old and New (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article before the group meeting. The departing hymn "Master, We Your Footsteps Follow" is sung to the melody STEPHANOS, 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

Will Samson notes how influential Dietrich Bonhoeffer's life and writings continue to be in the new monastic communities springing up today. I found an example of this influence in Isaac Villegas's blogpost, "school of prayer: Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Finkewalde, and the Psalms" (November 3, 2003; www.rustyparts.com/wp/2003/11/03/school-of-prayer). Villegas was a founder of the Rutba House intentional Christian community in Durham, NC, in 2003. Now he is a Mennonite pastor.

"Bonhoeffer is helping me figure out some spiritual practices for us at the Rutba house. I figure his work would be a great place to learn how to do this intentional Christian community thing since he put it into practice at his seminary community," Villegas begins. He goes on to commend Bonhoeffer's *Prayerbook of the Bible*, for he finds its defense of praying the Psalms at Finkewalde Seminary to be entirely biblical and counter-cultural (the Nazi Party had attempted to remove from the state-approved German Evangelical Church all Jewish practices, including reading and praying the Psalms). Bonhoeffer explains that in praying the Psalms we learn to use the prayer language God has given to us through Israel, the very words Jesus used in prayer.

Now here is the interesting move: Villegas not only agrees with Bonhoeffer's orthodox theology, he embraces Bonhoeffer's orthodox practice. "So how is this shaping our prayer life at the Rutba House?" Villegas concludes. "We have committed ourselves to daily morning and evening corporate prayer where we read and pray psalms together.... The morning prayer shapes my whole focus for the day and the evening prayer gives me a chance to offer up my day in thankful prayer to God. Please join the communion of saints in 'the school of prayer.'"

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by reading the prayer printed in the study guide responsively. The leader begins and the group reads the lines in bold print.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Matthew 5:1-12 from a modern translation.

Reflection

Not just the name “new monasticism,” but much inspiration for the new Christian intentional communities in North America and Europe derive from the life and writings of the German theologian and martyr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer. The central event for new monastics is his founding an underground seminary at Finkenwalde (1935-1937), and the key writings are his descriptions of the seminary’s practices in *Life Together* and *Prayerbook of the Bible*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 5 (Augsburg Fortress Press, 1996). This study is not a dry history lesson, then, but a search for clues to how new monastics have recognized a pressing need to launch intentional communities that integrate historic Christian faith with radical social ministry. Bonhoeffer’s very accessible writings, by the way, are an excellent follow-up study to this introduction.

Study Questions

1. Dietrich Bonhoeffer notes the need for “a kind of new monasticism” in a letter to his brother, Karl-Friedrich Bonhoeffer, on January 14, 1935. To understand the meaning of the phrase, Will Samson reviews events leading up to the formation of the underground seminary in Finkenwalde that year, and describes the form of community life Bonhoeffer instituted among the seminarians. Invite two groups to look for clues to the meaning of “new monasticism” in (1) the historical context that is briefly summarized in the study guide, and (2) the specific seminary practices that Samson sketches in his article.

The first group might mention the faithlessness in the German church, which capitulated to Nazi control, abandoning its roots in the story of Israel and the particular life of Jesus. To restore the wholeness of scriptural faith, the seminary embraced Christian resources beyond the cultural time and place. The focus on Christ’s teachings, especially in the Sermon on the Mount, is a common theme in monastic life through the centuries. The group might mention particular aspects of Bonhoeffer’s experience – his encounter with the rich liturgy and community life of Roman Catholicism, his friendship with Karl Barth, or his appreciation for the social gospel when it is motivated by orthodox faithfulness.

The second group might glean these clues from the seminary practices: students worked with their hands to build and maintain the buildings; Bonhoeffer adapted an egalitarian leadership style from the monastic tradition; they ate and worshipped together daily; they sang African-American spirituals and prayed the Psalms to emphasize solidarity with the suffering people of God across the ages; and seminarians studied without expectation of lucrative or honored posts of service in the church.

2. Samson’s observation has two aspects: (1) Bonhoeffer successfully integrated orthodoxy and orthopraxy; but (2) Christians today are divided into political/theological camps, left and right, that emphasize one of these to the neglect of the other.

Do members agree that the Christian “left” is tempted to embrace orthopraxy (Jesus’ concern for righteousness/justice) without much orthodoxy? Some social gospel leaders in Bonhoeffer’s day were slow to resist the Nazis, perhaps because they lacked a theological perspective to critique the National Socialist regime’s claims to ultimate allegiance. How is this temptation for the Christian “left” manifest today?

Do members agree that the Christian “right” is tempted to wield orthodoxy (agreement with Jesus’ theological beliefs) like a club, without much orthopraxy? Is the faith of these Christians too privatized? Do they fail to address social ills? How is this temptation for the Christian “right” manifest today?

3. Frederick Jackson prays that we will be made like Christ through the power of his resurrection (verse 3), which includes our taking on Christ’s zeal, labor, and prayer. This involves both orthodoxy (right belief) – e.g., obeying Christ’s word and confessing his name (verse 1) – and orthopraxy (right action) – e.g., acting out of Christ’s “love and care” (verse 3).

Departing Hymn

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

Evangelicals and Monastics

Lesson Plans

Abridged Plan	Standard Plan
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Meditation	Meditation
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 3 and 4	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To explore some historical similarities between monastic and evangelical intentional communities in Church history.
2. To sketch the significant contributions of intentional Christian communities, monastic and evangelical, to the Church and society.
3. To allow the ideals of these intentional Christian communities to challenge and inspire our own discipleship.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 6-7 and ask members to read the Bible passages in the guide. Distribute copies of *Monasticism Old and New (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested article before the group meeting. The departing hymn "Come, All Who Bear the Name of Christ" is sung to the familiar melody OLD 100TH, 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

The connection between the evangelical and monastic traditions is deeply personal for Ivan Kauffman. "I grew up in the evangelical community in the 1940s and 50s," he writes. "My father was a revivalist, as were many of his friends and colleagues who were constantly in and out of our home. We were part of a Mennonite community that was just emerging from an Amish past, but our theology and beliefs were evangelical. Our leaders had been trained in Baptist seminaries.

"But there was something different about us. As my wife has often said, 'The house you lived in, the job you had, the clothes you wore, the car you drove, all were determined by the church you belonged to.' I have often told my non-Mennonite friends that it was like growing up in a non-celibate Protestant monastery."

His research into evangelical origins over more than forty-five years convinced him "there is a larger pattern in church history which we miss by studying only one Christian community at a time. We have come to know a great deal about the individual trees, but we have missed the forest they grow in." In this study, he helps us glimpse the whole forest. (*Monasticism Old and New*, pp. 26-27)

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by asking God for wisdom to appreciate the big patterns of God's work through the entire sweep of the Church.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Psalm 119:161-168 from a modern translation.

Meditation

Invite members to reflect on the meditation during a period of silence.

Reflection

Often we respond to new or unfamiliar products, people, or institutions by comparing them to things we know and highlighting their salient differences. Thus the New Monasticism movement may seem strange (in differing ways) when we approach it from an evangelical, a traditional monastic, or an institutional church perspective. Ivan Kauffman's sweeping overview of Church history helps us get our bearings and appreciate these new monastic groups by emphasizing their *similarities* with other Christian groups, especially the post-Reformation evangelical intentional communities. Yet, just as many Christians today are returning to ancient resources of the faith, the new monastic groups respect and learn from classic monastic traditions stretching back to the earliest centuries of Christianity. All Christian monastics, classic and new, draw inspiration from those faithful followers who honored God's *torah* (law) by ordering their daily work around God's praise (Psalm 119:164).

Study Questions

Create two small groups – one to list the contributions to Church and society by celibate monastic communities, and the other to list the contributions by lay evangelical communities. They should begin by reviewing Ivan Kauffman's evidence for these contributions in "Evangelicals and Monastics," but feel free to add other contributions they know about.

Due to space limitations, Kauffman's evidence for the contributions of monastic and evangelical intentional communities could not be summarized in the study guide. His comparative judgment of their impact, pre- and post-Reformation, is a "for the most part" generalization. Notice that he emphasizes the contributions of lay evangelical groups because "The story of the Christian monastic communities has been told by historians, and although there is much still to be learned, that story is well known and available to anyone. The story of the non-celibate evangelical communities, however, has been studied by few historians – most of them unfriendly and disapproving of these communities. The result has been a rather serious blind spot in our understanding of our common past."

1. "The size and complexity of the plan reflect the importance of monasteries as centers of learning and self-sufficiency" in the ninth century, Heidi Hornik writes in "Old Monasteries for New Generations." Daily activities of farming, animal husbandry, food preparation, and skilled craftsmanship revolve around worship in the great church. Areas for hospitality to the poor, the infirm, and travelers are integrated into the village. "The only significant addition to the plan of St. Gall Abbey in later monasteries was the chapter house, or daily meeting room... [that] provided a location for the monks to carry out the communal discernment prescribed in the third chapter of Saint Benedict's *Rule*: 'Whenever any important business has to be done in the monastery, let the Abbot call together the whole community and state the matter to be acted upon.'"
2. Divide members into groups to brainstorm one or two of the basic features of intentional Christian communities. Ask each group to respond to two questions: Is the feature a winsome ideal that is transferable to all Christian groups? If so, how well does their congregation exhibit the feature? Encourage members to see monastic and evangelical intentional communities not as competing alternatives to their congregational life, but as sources of inspiration and guidance for their congregation's reflective discipleship.
3. Joan Chittister states a theme that runs through Benedictine spirituality: we become holy not by retreating from others, but by immersing ourselves in a reflective community where our daily work becomes a prayer of devotion to God. We have many opportunities to learn patience, wisdom, unselfishness, and love, as the inescapable menial tasks, bothersome colleagues, and necessary schedules are redeemed. That's the ideal, anyway, for monastic communities. Invite members to use this ideal to measure and improve their congregations.

Departing Hymn

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

Ties that Bind: Sharing a Common Rule of Life

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1, 3, and 4	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To discuss what it means for a congregation to share a common life in today's busy world.
2. To consider how a rule of life, or covenant, can strengthen community in a congregation.
3. To explore worship practices that encourage a common life of discipleship.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 8-9 and ask members to read the Bible passages in the guide. Distribute copies of *Monasticism Old and New (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article before the group meeting. The departing hymn "Gather Now around His Teachings" can be found on pp. 41-43 of *Monasticism Old and New*.

Begin with a Story

"Every Sunday for over twenty years we have ended worship with a benediction I first learned from an African-American pastor," Kyle Childress writes. "'Let's take each other's hands,' it begins. 'Now look who you're holding hands with, and hold on tight! Because we're going to need each other this week.'

"Several times over these years, church members in unexpected crisis have told me later, 'When I first heard the news, I didn't know what to do or who to call. Then it hit me, who was I holding hands with Sunday? And that is who I called.'"

Childress concludes, "I want my people to think in terms of God and each other, each other and God – that we cannot have one without the other – and to think like this so much that it becomes habitual. It becomes so natural that it is an automatic way of thinking. It becomes instinctive." (*Monasticism Old and New*, p. 39)

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by asking God for wisdom to discern whether a covenant, or rule of life, would encourage deeper community in your congregation.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read 1 Peter 1:13-23 from a modern translation.

Meditation

Invite members to reflect on the meditation during a period of silence.

Reflection

Each monastic community, classic or new, is ordered by its rule of life, its embraced pattern for daily living. "A rule of life in a Christian intentional community might go by any number of names – rule, covenant, document of commitment, oath, vows, and so on," Kyle Childress explains. "It usually represents the foundational vision of the community, or identity statement, that all members subscribe and submit to." Use this study to explore the possibility of your group or congregation developing a rule of life.

For guidance, consider St. Benedict's *Regula*, or *Rule of Life*, which monastic communities have used or adapted since the sixth century. It is available in many printed versions, or online in the Christian Classics

Ethereal Library (www.ccel.org). For contemporary inspiration, see the covenantal statements of The Simple Way, a new monastic community in Philadelphia. They are available online at www.thesimpleway.org/about/ under the links to “commitments,” “foundations,” and “functionality.”

Study Questions

1. Consider how affluence, busyness, individualism, hyper-mobility, and other characteristically American priorities might make discipleship difficult. Ask members to unpack clichés like “the American dream” and “keeping up with the Joneses.”

Kyle Childress notes that as church members become more and more busy, they are less able to participate fully in the common life of the congregation. For example, work and family activities often prevent them from being present in worship. Going it alone makes them more susceptible to discouragement, difficulty, temptation, and disordered priorities. “If our people are going to live the Christ-like life, then they had better do it as a body or else they will never make it,” he warns. “Lone individuals trying to live faithfully cannot stand against sin, death, the Powers, and the overwhelming pressure of society. Church members, as individuals, are easy pickings for the Powers of Death; they will separate us, isolate us, *dismember* us, pick us off one at a time, and grind us down into the dust.”

2. Discuss why American Christians might be reluctant to embrace a church covenant or a common rule of life. Concerns might range from an insistence on personal rights to interpret Scripture, to an understanding of certain topics being “personal” and nobody else’s business, to a fear of legalism in the carrying out the details of the covenant. Discuss why church members would be reluctant to hold one another accountable to a covenant that includes practical matters like church attendance and community service.

Another way to tackle this question is to discuss the pros and cons of individualism within the Church. For instance, personal accountability and responsiveness to an individual calling can be a good thing in an individual believer’s life, especially as she is equipped for service within the body of Christ. But how could these potentially good things get distorted into the type of go-it-alone individualism that concerns Childress?

3. An obvious practical difficulty is that members will disagree on what should be included in the common rule, big issues and little details alike, and how to hold one another accountable to it. As a test, ask group members to draw up a short list of possible items to be included on a shared rule of life – e.g., communal and individual prayer times, service to one another or to the greater community, sharing a particular number of meals each week, defining what it means to be hospitable, and so on. If this is hard in a small group where members already know and trust one another, imagine how difficult it would be in a large congregation. Childress notes the difficulty of committing to a common rule of life: “Overcoming such obstacles to grow a common life takes daily teaching and reinforcement, paying attention and making connections, and just plain old persistence. It takes working and serving together in community, sharing meals together in community, and worshiping together in community. But it also takes the willingness to make sacrifices, to simplify our lifestyles, and give up some of our desires and expectations of ‘having it all.’”
4. Consider whether written prayers, hymns, and responsive readings use communal language and pronouns; how often and in what manner the Lord’s Supper is practiced; to what extent laypersons are involved in the worship service by reading Scripture, leading prayers, or congregational singing; and whether elements of worship (e.g., passing of the peace, open prayer requests, and praise time) build spiritual intimacy among members. Perhaps your congregation would adopt a version of Childress’s benediction, which includes holding the hands of nearby church members.

Departing Hymn

“Gather Now around His Teachings” can be found on pp. 41-43 of *Monasticism Old and New*. If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

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.