

Inter-Community Communications—Questionnaire Responses

It has been proposed by one of our younger confreres, who is away from his community studying for the priesthood, that it is not always easy to maintain contact with one's home community. This is probably a fairly common situation, and although we have many means today at our disposal of keeping in touch, it still requires effort and discipline. This younger confrere places much of the burden on himself, but, as we know, the communication must flow in both directions.

Many of our houses have newsletters and other forums for disseminating information from the home community. Do you have other policies, procedures and methods of keeping the ties strong between those at home and those assigned outside?

The following are the responses generated by this questionnaire. Thanks to those who participated.

St. Vincent Archabbey:

Communication with monks who live outside the Abbey is very important. Without it those living elsewhere feel unrepresented, unthought-of, detached—all of which endangers their membership.

Saint Vincent has no written policy to ensure communication. However, all monks receive our three quarterly magazines from the Abbey, Seminary and College; all receive letters from the Abbot—six or seven a year with news about coming events and reports of past events, personal matters about other monks, minutes of the Monastic Chapter and of the Counsel of Seniors. Email is used to relay time sensitive news, e.g., illnesses, deaths, requests for personal response on any given question, etc.

In addition, we encourage our monks to keep in personal touch with each other with phone calls, personal letters, email and even a visit. This is most effective, but it requires discipline and encouragement with reminders to monks at the Abbey to keep in touch with their brother monks afield or abroad.

Belmont Abbey:

Our community no longer has a newsletter; much of the information about what is going on can be found on our website. More importantly, we keep in touch with our confreres through phone calls and email. I am also aware of some of the confreres send cards and notes, especially for feast days and birthdays.

Assumption Abbey:

We have two printed newsletters: one is a monthly publication just for members of the monastic community and is sent out to those on mission; the other is a quarterly publication for our friends, which community members also receive. The Abbey maintains a Facebook page which

is accessible to those members outside the house. The Abbot is in contact with members through phone calls and/or e-mails. The prior is also in contact with monks living outside the monastery. There is correspondence, through various media, between members living at home and those away from the monastery. Whenever a monk assigned outside the monastery returns for a visit, the abbot meets with him. Yearly the abbot visits with each member of the community—this may entail a trip by the abbot to the monk's place of residence away from home.

St. Bede Abbey:

We here at St. Bede do not have a written policy regarding keeping in contact with those who are studying or ministering away from home. Instead, we count on some volunteerism and Christian charity of community members to maintain some contact. Those who do keep contact usually do so through postcards, notes, or email messages. From time to time, there are phone calls exchanged. Usually the phone calls are initiated by the abbot and made when something dire has happened. When I was away from the community for theology school and then for graduate school, my experience of staying connected to the community was mostly through what I just described.

As for those ministering away from home it has been my experience that those who are stationed in parishes have been geographically close to the abbey and can stop in whenever. Usually the outside pastors stopped in for the annual retreat. They could be counted upon to arrive when there was a community party/get together! We do not have anyone stationed at local parishes any longer so the question for us is probably moot.

For their own reasons not everyone reaches out to maintain contact with one who is away: age, lack of interest, do not know the person very well, just not interested, etc. Whatever those reasons may be, the one who is away can expect to find a warm welcome upon return.

St. Peter's Abbey:

The Abbot communicates by email and/or Skype to the students away at seminary at least once a week. The novice master also keeps in contact at least once a week.

Our abbot sends pictures of goings-on at St. Peter's Abbey. Cards are sent by mail for Christmas and Easter and possibly other special occasions (i.e. Names Day). This depends on the person and the situation.

Students generally return home at the end of April and work during the summer months for the abbey. They also return to the monastery at Christmas time during the university break. It is important that a friendship remains with the Novice Master and at least with one of the other monks. The communication is usually cordial but when communication is forced, it becomes a chore. Some monks prefer sending emails only once a month or less.

St. Mary's Abbey:

We have a monthly newsletter available on-line as well as a quarterly publication for both school and abbey combined. The Prior also distributes monthly calendars, minutes of council / chapter / committees to all monks via email, regardless of residence. Currently, we do not have monks living away the monastery. In the past, the Prior also distributed hard copies of the above materials to all monks living away from the monastery, whether in parishes or in seminary /

graduate studies. Also in the past, the Prior or Formation Director visited monks each semester at their location of studies. In the next year or so, our juniors will begin their studies away from the monastery, as determined by the Abbot and formation committee. Knowing what other houses do is helpful. Thank you!