

Covid-19: A Sharing of Experience

In 1935, in the middle of the Great Depression in America, they elected the 5th Abbot of Gethsemani, just as a wave of influenza struck Kentucky. Within days of the election of Dom Frederic Dunne, the first monk died; seven monks total died within ten days.

Today, July 22, 2020, the 40 monks at Gethsemani are safe and well, thanks be to God!

On March 20, we closed the Retreat House, closed the Church to visitors, and sent our lay workers on furlough. Since then, we have remained isolated, leaving the abbey cum permissu for essential medical and business matters, allowing only 'essential' workers (nurses, maintenance) to enter, who must wear masks and observe 6-foot social distancing. Tele-conferences have replaced personal trips and visits, although we did welcome our Father Immediate on July 11 for an Abbatial Election.

There are no plans to lift restrictions or re-open in the foreseeable future; perhaps the end of the year or the availability of a vaccine will make it possible.

Hygiene: We are consciously observing all recommendations for sanitizing and safety, especially in the Infirmary and food areas, but we do not wear masks within the community. We have prepared a "Quarantine Wing" should anyone become sick.

Liturgy: We have been blessed to be able to continue chanting the Divine Office seven times a day and celebrating our Daily Eucharist together. Some brothers appreciate the privacy of community-only, while others see it poorer without the participation of retreatants and neighbors.

Holy Communion: the Presider alone drinks from the chalice, concelebrants use intinction.

Solemn liturgies are simplified, minus group functions: e.g., foot-washing, processions.

Daily life and work remain unchanged as we continue to make the Fudge and Fruitcakes which are sold and shipped through our mail order business.

Finances: We are fortunate thus far in being able to help the lay workers on furlough. Our income will be lessened due to the closing both the Retreat House and the Gift Shop.

For **Vocations**, post-shutdown 2020 may be a lost year. One candidate awaits travel arrangements to arrive as a postulant. Although a dozen men have expressed interest in a visit, so far this year no one has been able to come as a Monastic Observer.

Abbey of Gethsemani, Trappist Kentucky, USA