

OUR MONASTIC LIFE DURING THE TIME OF THE PANDEMIC

Our community is located in the province of Quebec (Canada), where to date there are more than 57,000 cases of covid-19 (Canada: 111,500) and more than 5,650 deaths (Canada: 8,860), a proportion of 1/10. Faced with this high number, government confinement measures have been quite severe across the province.

In order not to expose the large number of elderly brothers in the community to the risk of contamination, we took the following measures: Complete closure of the church, the guesthouse - which has 15 single rooms, but with shared toilets and showers - and the gatehouse until September 1st. We laid off the community employees, except one. We severely limited the entries into the monastery (to service providers) and the exits of the brothers (save emergencies). However, we did not observe social distancing or the wearing of masks inside the monastery.

For the entire population, confinement with all its consequences has been experienced as a time of trial. For us, on the monastic level - this time of confinement is experienced as a time of grace and solidarity – but, of course, not from an economic point of view. The measures taken have had the effect of making us rediscover and better savor some of our monastic values. The complete cut-off with all people outside has allowed us to experience our Eucharist and our Offices in a climate of greater intimacy and interiority. The absence of employees circulating in the monastery fostered an atmosphere of silence and solitude appreciated by all. The reduction in outings allowed a greater presence and participation of the brothers in community activities. For some brothers, the reduction in working time (to avoid contact with the employees in our workshops and our store) has meant more time devoted to lectio or personal prayer.

Our solidarity with people affected by the virus has materialized in various ways: access to information on the subject (press briefings on TV, readings in the refectory, chapters of the Abbot, newspapers); prayers and Eucharistic celebrations for this intention; availability of our outdoor spaces and our forest trails to confined families in the neighborhood; material assistance to organizations in our locality; financial assistance to our employees.

This time of pandemic which seems to continue on also leads us to pursue our community reflection on various points and the important values of our life, to discover concrete ways to put these into practice: monastic reception, the organization of work, the maintenance of solitude and silence, when we later resume our “normal” activities. As well, it is inspiring us to find ways to live in closer proximity to people severely affected by the confinement.