

## **The Experience of the Covid-19 Pandemic at Our Lady of New Clairvaux Abbey**

New Clairvaux Abbey is located in a rural area of Northern California and there have been relatively few cases of Covid-19 in the region. The monks have been spared the virus to date and we give thanks to God for his protection. Social distancing, wearing of masks, and other protective measures are practiced in our state. In the cloister we are observing the health precautions recommended to us by health professionals, including frequent hand washing, sanitizer solution for use in the regular places and daily disinfecting of commonly touched items such as light switches and doorknobs. Outside trips are kept to a bare minimum.

Our guesthouse is open but at a greatly reduced capacity to allow for social distancing. The Abbey Church is closed to the public. Retreatants are able to join us from the guest section for Vigils, Lauds/Mass & Vespers only. Our Discernment Weekends have been cancelled but visits from individual candidate are possible with due precautions. It is important to us to share our faith and monastic insights during this crisis which we have done through our newsletter and digital media.

The pandemic has also affected our industries. For several month our wine Tasting Room was closed, but reopened in July under strict government regulations, which nevertheless has greatly reduced sales traffic. Prices for our agriculture commodities, prunes and walnuts, are also impacted negatively.

While we miss sharing our space and liturgical prayer with the larger neighboring community, with fewer visitors this time of pandemic lockdown has been an opportunity to focus on the essentials of our contemplative life: solitude & silence, lectio divina, building fraternal relations, deepening prayer, manual labor. These aspects are the backbone of monastic life which allow us to experience God's goodness and His mercy for the world.

We have had the opportunity for several community dialogues on the pandemic and our experience of its meaning. We have also held two community dialogues on the issue of racism in light of the events that have gripped our nation this summer.

While acknowledging the suffering of so many in this global pandemic, the brothers hold fast to their trust in God and express the hope that this is a time of transition, an opportunity for God to bring about something new, a new era.

We are grateful to be able to continue to gather together daily for prayer, the Sacraments and worship when this is difficult, if not impossible, for so many, and are mindful of our ministry to pray for the sick, the dying and the suffering of the world. At each Mass, together we pray to the Virgin Mary, Queen and guardian of New Clairvaux Abbey "to bring healing for all who are afflicted, eternal rest to those who have died, and comfort to all those who mourn."