

Notre Dame d'Oelenberg Abbey

COVID -19: We share our experience!

The facts:

Our community was affected shortly after France declared itself as a country that was now infected with the Covid. At that time, at the beginning of March, the information was not clear in our country. The facts were, at times, even contradictory in terms of the severity of the virus and especially the measures to be taken.

Also, we were not too concerned when our first brothers started to show symptoms of coughing and fatigue, simply seeing it as a seasonal illness that we are used to having. This blurring of symptoms meant that we continued our monastic life, celebrations, and in particular, we received communion with the Body and Blood of Christ, which may have been one of the propagators of the epidemic. These celebrations were not yet restricted.

After a few days, when we were already four sick brothers, the doctor was not alarmed, diagnosing a simple "flu condition". A brother asked him if it could be coronavirus. There was no evidence to give an exact answer to this question: tests were not yet available, except in the case of hospitalization. However, after this visit by the doctor, another doctor, a close friend of our monastery, advised us to put in place certain measures: confinement in the room for the sick brothers, closing off certain areas, wearing masks in certain circumstances. We then decided not to celebrate the Eucharist as a community.

Other brothers, in turn, were affected to lesser levels, which allowed them to provide "vital services" for the community during this special period: meal services in the rooms, care for the sick, especially for our older brother, Brother Leon.

During the confinement, we were supported by the person who was in charge of our economy and the salaried workers, as well as by people close to our community who ensured the shopping to be done (food, pharmacy ...) and gave us valuable moral support.

Faced with the persistence of the fever of our brother Leon (and other brothers) and thanks to the insistence of our economic manager with the health services, we were able to get the visit of the SOS Doctors. The doctor was rather reassuring about the evolution of the health of the brothers but requested the hospitalization of Brother Leon who required respiratory assistance. During this whole period of illness, our brother Leon was for those who watched over him, a very gentle patient, docile and smiling despite the fever, and this until the end. It was a real shock for us to learn of his death a few days later, on March 30.

Soon after, our brother prior, Brother Robert, also developed more worrying symptoms of the disease. Following Brother Leon's experience, the doctor had him hospitalized immediately. It was another blow to our community! Fortunately, Brother Robert came back to us two weeks later.

The consequences:

- The Liturgy:

The services to the chapel were celebrated with the only presence of two or three brothers, and then one. We no longer had a Eucharist. Some followed the Mass on the internet. In the absence of a singing brother, the services were simplified, while remaining very prayerful. The solidarity that united us with our sick brothers through care and services, reflected in our times of prayer. We lived in great communion with each other.

All the brothers were able to meet ten days after the end of the symptoms and the first major celebration was that of the Easter vigil, followed by a very beautiful fraternal meeting.

- **Community life**

The meals were delivered to us by a caterer throughout the pandemic. In order to meet sanitary standards, each brother was served by the refectory servant.

Of the six brothers present at the monastery during the pandemic, only one was not symptomatic. As a precaution, and to protect him, he also was confined. On the other hand, our applicant brother, who initially left for a few days in Engelzell just before the pandemic, enjoyed a long retreat in our daughter house until the opening of the borders: a happy cure of German, his native language!

- **Hospitality at the Guest House**

The guest house was obviously closed from the beginning of the pandemic. It did not reopen until the 1st of August, with the implementation of a protocol for the implementation of the protection measures set out by the government.

- **The Economy**

Work continued at the mill and store in accordance with the rules imposed by the containment. We have been constantly seeking concrete solutions in order to remain at the service of our customers and to help provide the supplies they need. New initiatives have been implemented, in particular the sale of monastic products, delivered to their homes. We were not able to honour all the requests, as there were so many of them. During the confinement, many people have started making bread again and continue to make bread! The gradual extension of the store's opening hours was welcomed with joy by our loyal customers.

The team of employee, has been heavily involved and has demonstrated remarkable dedication, responsiveness, and availability.

In Conclusion

The community of Oelenberg is very grateful to the people of the surrounding villages, to the monastic communities, to the friends who regularly showed their support and friendship, allowing the brothers to go through this painful period in peace and serenity.

The bonds of solidarity and unity that were forged between the brothers during this time of trial have built something new and strong in community prayer, anchoring each of us a little more firmly in an unwavering trust in God and in the Communion of Saints.

The brothers of Our Lady of Oelenberg
and their abbot father, Dom Dominique-Marie.