

EXPERIENCE OF COVID-19 LOCKDOWN: SPENCER

Since the middle of March when the Covid-19 pandemic broke out with intensity in our area, the community at Saint Joseph's Abbey in Spencer has been living a new reality, following mandated safety protocols including appropriate social distancing even in choir. We have radically limited our trips outside the enclosure, except for medical emergencies. And a couple of the brethren make weekly shopping trips to local markets only for essentials. We are grateful that none of our monks has been infected.

Because we cannot yet welcome guests or visitors, we are more aware than ever of our connectedness to the wider Church. Truly, the faithful are integral to our monastic life, especially those who frequent our guest chapels for Eucharist, the Liturgy of the Hours and quiet prayer. Some visitors who love the beauty of our setting or miss praying in church with us continue to come to the Abbey, walking in the areas around the church entrance or sitting in small groups on the lawns by the guest house. And on a recent spring evening we noticed a guest dutifully wearing his face mask and standing prayerfully outside an open church window listening to us chant Compline. Perhaps our greatest frustration has been our inability to welcome inquirers and candidates, especially a few who are ready to begin their month-long observership. The vocation director keeps in contact with these men, and we hope to receive them later in the year.

We have come to understand more than ever our need for prayer and human connectivity to sustain us in hope. The reality of the pandemic has caused us to enter more deeply into the mystery of our hidden life of work and prayer, trusting that it will be a healing grace for all God's people.