

## **COVID-19 at Berryville**

Initially, the Berryville community (like many others) envisaged a relatively short duration of the pandemic. Once the seriousness and extent of this health crisis became clearer, the community readily implemented various safety precautions. In accordance with directives from our diocese of Arlington we closed all public access to the monastery in mid-March—including the Guest House and Gift Shop.

We have repeatedly reminded ourselves how blessed we have been in implementing diocesan and Virginia State directives in trying to curb the spread of COVID-19. Whereas the vast majority of people experienced considerable hardship and difficult adjustments to their lifestyle, ours remained largely unchanged. The closure of the Guest House and Gift Shop (as well as access to the monastery church) afforded us a unique and unprecedented experience of enclosure and separation from the world. This experience has deepened our sense of community and enriched our shared Cistercian life.

The closing of the Guest House and Gift Shop has reduced our usual avenues of income, but our Natural Cemetery has remained open and has been our chief source of revenue since March. We plan on a partial opening of our Guest House in mid-September—operating at half-capacity and implementing various safety precautions. However, the monastery church and Gift Shop will remain closed and the guests will only have access to the Guest House and the other public areas of our property. With regard to new members and observers, we have implemented a two-week quarantine period before permitting their coming into the monastic community.

Given the indeterminate nature of this still unfolding situation, we strive to continue living our monastic conversatio in a spirit of trust and gratitude for our having been kept safe thus far. We are aware that with the passage of time it is all too natural to grow somewhat careless in maintaining our safety precautions. We are keenly aware of the impact this virus will have if one of us becomes infected, and thus we routinely remind ourselves of the need to maintain the safety precautions we have implemented and not grow complacent. We all pray regularly for the victims of this pandemic, those who care for the infected, as well as those working for a cure. May the God who in all things works for the good of those who love him, continue to draw all manner of blessings from this otherwise tragic and distressing situation.

The Monks of Holy Cross Abbey, Berryville, Virginia, USA