

### **Abbey of the Genesee, Experience of Pandemic, Lockdown March-August 2020**

Many experienced the months in lockdown as a time of blessing and renewal and noted an increased focus and seriousness to the community's monastic practice. Interiority came more easily and there was more time free for prayer. A positive impact on community life was also noted: a sense of being together through a historic moment and a time of great unrest and uncertainty. These and similar benefits underline the importance of observing enclosure. Some felt that the experience of reduced interaction with those outside the community has helped to clarify what is most essential.

With social and economic conditions unsettled, the strength of monastic stability has been foregrounded, while the daily reminders of human fragility highlight the value of living toward a transcendent horizon. Perhaps, in part, for these reasons, there has been a significant increase in the number of people inquiring about vocations.

Some miss contact with family, retreatants, and other visitors. The liturgy, with no guests, brings a sense both of relief, of being on retreat, as well as a certain feeling of flatness. One mentioned the risk of the community turning in on itself, growing isolated. Others expressed concern for the poor and those especially vulnerable to the pandemic and its effects.

There is a dawning sense that we are living through not only a historic moment but a Kairos in which the Spirit is moving powerfully to renew the Church and redeem the world. We are encouraged by the increase in vocational activity, however early in the process, and hopeful the pandemic might lead to a broader awareness of the gifts of contemplative monastic life.