

Reflections and Engagement with: Exploring Monastic Interest in Young Adults

Beginning in the Fall of 2021, The Retreat House at Hillsboro began a series of conversations discerning, dreaming, and praying about the emergence of a longing for monasticism that seemed to be stirring in the spiritual but not religious young adults (ages 20-40) that were a part of our extended networks. Where was this longing coming from? What does monasticism mean to this group of people with limited or no foundation in religious life? How might religious communities support the exploration of these longings by meeting those young adults where they are?

Since the fall, The Retreat House developed a process for authentic conversations paced at the speed of relationship. This is not a program that can be air-dropped from one context into another without attention to the particularities because the Spirit moves in the detail of unique incarnation. This resource is intended to support communities and/or parishes interested in forming their own process for listening, praying, and supporting young adults in their exploration of monastic interest. As you move through this resource, please feel free to reach out to the Retreat House for support and conversation.

Begin in Prayer

- Gather a small circle of leaders for conversation (Jesus always sends disciples out in twos)
- Spend time in silence, prayer, and reflection together listening for both the longing and the need in your particular community - What is drawing you to this exploration? Where do you see God already at work in the spiritual but not religious community of 20's and 40's?
- Imagine a rhythm of leader conversation circles, rooted in silence and prayer, happening in parallel with one-to-one conversations with young adults in the community

A Few Things about Beginning

We learned that the process of listening in humility (leading with open questions, holding spaciousness for curiosity) was in itself a form of evangelism. The goal for our interactions was not conversion but conversation - a practice of meeting each other where we are.

Move into Your Community

- Set a reasonable schedule and goals - perhaps each person knows three others in this demographic and can talk with them over the course of three months.
- Bring a few open questions to reflect on in our conversations with individual young adults. We used: What is your spiritual background? What is supportive to you in your searching? What does monasticism mean to you? What do you like about it?

A Few Things about Community Conversations

We learned that there were different levels of support that could be helpful (both for the conversation leaders and for the conversation partners). So we folded in a resource of more specific questions from The Alban Institute to use during our conversations.¹ Additionally, we found it useful to hold the demographic specifications loosely based on what your community needs are. One of the people we talked to was just over the age of 40, others were in their late teens/very early 20's. Rather than searching for people we had no connection with, we trusted that the conversation partners we needed would be just around the corner. That meant, neighbors, roommates, co-workers....people longing for connection even started appearing right on our doorsteps!

Returning to the Center

- Gather continually to share with your leadership circle your own insights. What lit you up during your conversations? Where do you feel energy around this process?
- Reflect on themes, similar longings, and any specific words or phrases that came up during your conversations. Perhaps this could be an expanded "lectio divina" process using all of the one-to-one conversations as your "text."
- Hold each other and the conversations in silence and prayer.

A Few Things about Returning

It may be tempting to push quickly into creating a program or designing a way to bring these conversation partners into your church community - resist the temptation unless it is specifically asked for! In central Vermont, conversation partners from this experiment specifically asked to be connected to each other for a community bonfire to meet and continue the conversation. In other places the request was for continued individual conversation. The Spirit works in Her own time, and sometimes that can be an invitation to simply continue to hold the space and the desire for conversation.

¹ Ware, Corrine. "Discover Your Spiritual Type." Washington DC The Alban Institute.