

## A LETTER OF THANKS

March 2, 2022

Dear Friends and Extended Abbey Community,

Almost two years have passed since I addressed you in this space, two years when life felt “on hold” for many of us, as we waited out the constraints and sufferings of the pandemic. Now, even as we give thanks to God that the first fragile signs of recovery from the pandemic are at hand, we have been plunged into another crisis caused by the brutal, senseless war in Ukraine.

As with the pandemic, the war in Ukraine has very quickly become a global reality in which we are all implicated and by which we will all be affected for a very long time to come. Perhaps this unity among all people in the face of blatant wrong-doing is one good that God can bring out of manifest evil. Maybe God is giving us another chance to come together as one people in peace, for peace.

Some might ask how our small efforts of trying to re-build and maintain this monastery could help change the course of events unfolding across the world, but there is no doubt in the hearts of this community that the two are connected. Regina Laudis was built after World War II by nuns who lived through the horrors of that war. They handed down to us as part of their spiritual legacy the belief that prayer is the most powerful weapon that exists against evil. Through your generosity this house of prayer will continue and our prayers will go out to the suffering people of Ukraine.

Lent has always been both a call to conversion of heart and a time of anticipating the new life of the Resurrection. The word Lent itself refers to the “lengthening” of daylight that comes with spring. It reminds us that no matter how dark things look, we must not lose hope. So, it seems there is no more fitting time for me to express to you my gratitude, and the gratitude of each member of the Regina Laudis community, for what you have given to make the dream of our renovated monastery a reality. Thank you from the depths of our hearts!

Through your extraordinary generosity, we were able to meet our goal. You accomplished the impossible! It took a little over ten years, but the main monastery, the original factory building Mother Benedict first acquired from Robert Leather in 1947, has been brought up to code, made safe and accessible, and as we hope you will all agree, made more beautiful as well. The dark, cramped corridors are now filled with light. There is an elevator that goes from basement to the third floor. In addition to the new cells that at last provide the community with adequate housing, there is a small Infirmary wing that allows nuns with special needs to live within the community as long as possible. The transformation both outside and in is breathtaking, and yet, it is still the familiar monastery so many have come to cherish. Nowhere is this paradox of transformation and continuity more visible than in the glorious simplicity of the new chapel, which will be known as *Our Lady Queen of Praise*.

### *When will the Abbey be open again?*

We hope to be able, when Covid-19 is truly and substantially behind us, to open our doors so that you might finally visit the new chapel and the Art Shop and hear the voice of the Portress announcing *Benedicamus Domino!* We will alert you to the news of opening dates as soon as we know what's possible. The monastery is a complex organism of many interlocking parts, so we may have to open select areas in gradual succession, rather than everything all at once. Please stay tuned for updates. We will do our best to alert you so as to avoid confusion and frustration regarding what parts of the Abbey you are free to visit.

This is far from the last time we will be thanking you. There will be many occasions in the year ahead to reflect back to you what has been accomplished through your generosity and to celebrate the artistry and skill of those who helped re-build the monastery. In the dark days of the pandemic, a steady light was burning here, fueled by the faith and love of people from across the nation and the world, and from every walk of life. We assure you that every gift, small and great, was treasured and will be remembered. We will continue to pray for you daily and ask that a Mass be said for your intentions once a month.

### *What's next for the Abbey?*

In light of the desire of so many people to ensure the future of the Abbey's continuity, we feel we must now turn our focus of concern toward the places on our land that serve our mission of hospitality. Our guest houses, like the main monastic building, have not seen major improvements in many years. They are in many cases worn-out old farmhouses or converted barns, which have served well for seventy years or more and now need immediate attention. Various improvements have already been put in place over the past few years thanks to generous donors, but some of the houses need more radical help.

First on this list is Sheepfold, the home of Bethlehem artist, Lauren Ford, and the place where Regina Laudis began. In 1946, Lauren Ford and her friend Frances Delehanty welcomed Rev. Mother Benedict and Mother Mary Aline to stay with them at Sheepfold while the brave nuns from France explored possible venues to start a monastic foundation in what was to them completely unknown territory. Always charming and magical, but almost primitive in the way it was assembled from other structures, Sheepfold now is desperately in need of extensive repair. We feel strongly that the home that served as the first place of welcome to the nuns of Regina Laudis should be preserved as a treasure of our monastic heritage and a cultural icon for the whole region. Our great challenge will be to maintain Lauren's unique aesthetic, even as we seek to get the house on a stable structural footing.

In the days ahead, you will be hearing more about the history of Sheepfold and the place it holds in the hearts of the Community. We hope it will find a place in your hearts as well. It is truly our next New Horizon!

May the love of Christ sustain us through whatever darkness and trials we are facing this Lent and bring us all together into the hope of his Resurrection,

Rt. Rev. Mother Lucia Kuppens, OSB, Abbess