

Chapter 8: SUPPORT

Please remember, this sharing of our history is not a chronology of how one year led into the next. Holy Redeemer is trying to share the whole experience, which necessarily has to be broken up into pieces for the telling. These separate chapters are not in order of importance. All that has happened is part of the whole, just as every piece of a jig-saw puzzle is equally important to make the entire picture.

Benefactors

There are several passages of Scripture that formed the Mothers' thinking about those who became benefactors of Holy Redeemer. Christ's teaching is this: "Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of people, to be seen by them. Otherwise, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So whenever you give to the poor, don't sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be applauded by people. I assure you, they've got their reward! But when you give to the poor, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you." (Matthew 6:1-4) "If anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is My disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose his reward." (Matthew 10:42)

Only a giver knows his intention for giving (no matter what the nature of the gift), but the Mothers always assume that a gift to Holy Redeemer is something given in secret. No one knows who the benefactors are except for the Board of Directors, who only know for business reasons and are committed to keeping the information confidential. The Mothers never want to be responsible for anyone's losing their reward from the Lord.

When giving to Holy Redeemer is mentioned, financial giving is usually the first thing that comes to mind. As practically needful as that has been on many occasions, dollars are only a part of the precious gifts from our benefactors. No year of building and maintaining Holy Redeemer would have happened without gifts of labor, and encouragement, and prayer, and friendship. There have been gifts as substantial as cars and as seemingly insignificant as dish-washing. The best way to explain is this quote from Holy Redeemer's 1991 newsletter:

"Watching all the pieces of our project(s) come together has caused us to reflect on what St. Paul talks about in 1 Corinthians 12:12-21. Every single act and prayer and dollar that has gone into bringing us to this point in implementing our vision for the monastery is essential to the final outcome. It is indeed like a body in which each member, large or small, beautiful or plain, seen or unseen, is required for the whole to function properly. 'As the human body, which has many parts, is a unity, and those parts, despite their multiplicity, constitute one single body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by the Spirit into one body....Now the body is not one member but many. If the foot should say, Because I am not a hand I don't belong to the body, does that alter the fact that the foot is a part of the body? After all, if the body were all one eye, for example, where would be the sense of hearing? But God has arranged all the parts in the one body according to His design. For if everything were concentrated in one part, how could there be a body at all? The fact is there are many parts, but only one body. So, the eye cannot say to the hand: I don't need you!'" (Phillips translation)

We have seen alms come in from those who have never given to the Lord before, as well as from those to whom almsgiving is a habit. We have seen gifts of thousands and gifts of quarters all accumulate so that only together they were enough to meet our needs. We have received encouragement when no amount of money could buy the good word we so desired. We have received checks in the mail just as medical and car repair bills required cash. Bread customers appeared when we needed gas for trips to Greene County. People have assured us again and again that they were praying for us when we despaired of ever feeling well again. (You can't get that kind of hope or help from a bottle of pills.) There are those who have provided some regular maintenance item or money for the monastery for years without fanfare, and those who have surprised us with one-time gifts. Each has been crucial to what the Lord is doing.



Volunteer giving alms of time and skill

So, be encouraged, all you beloved saints. You may not know you are a member of the body that is establishing Holy Redeemer, or you may think your part is insignificant compared to that of another, but God is using you as it pleases Him. And...we praise Him for it!

Alms: On the Receiving End

If you think that living on the receiving end of almsgiving is an easy place to be, the Mothers would tell you that it is very hard on pride. Being needy is counter-cultural in America, a country where self-sufficiency is a god, and sometimes preached as a virtue. Being dependent is equated with weakness, inferiority, or laziness.

The Mothers have often laughed that it would be so much easier if they could win the state lottery. Until the Mothers were in Agape House and old enough to receive monthly Social Security payments, there was no regular income. Not knowing where or when any kind of help was coming kept teaching them patience (also very hard). Not having enough funds to set aside savings for emergencies gave real meaning to the phrase in the Lord's prayer, "*Give us each day our daily bread.*" (Luke 11:3) When the Mothers first told their bishop that it seemed like a matter of trusting the Lord to give up the security of insurance when the premiums were too costly, he said, "It is good for the Church that the Lord calls someone to walk by faith like that; I'm just glad it isn't me."

However, the Mothers' most significant lesson from dependency has been learning to trust their relationship to the Heavenly Father. His constant provision is a tangible reminder that He can be depended on as the sustainer of life. Beyond that, He desires to be personally involved with His children. Christ says in Matthew 7:9-11: *"What man among you, if his son asks him for bread will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!"* Also in Luke 12:29-32 He says, *"Don't keep striving for what you should eat and what you should drink, and don't be anxious. For the...world eagerly seeks all these things, and your Father knows that you need them. But seek His kingdom, and these things will be provided for you. Don't be afraid, little flock, because your Father delights to give you the kingdom."*

Income-Generation

A large percentage of what the Mothers have tried for bringing in funds for Holy Redeemer has involved manual labor. Because manual labor is such an integral part of monastic life, it is going to be discussed more in depth in a separate chapter. Also, because sheep were a part of Holy Redeemer for so many years, sheep (which were never monetarily profitable) are going to get a chapter of their own, too.

When the Mothers moved to Ladoga, it was their intention to work at secular jobs during the week and get the monastery going on the weekends. Mother Pilar had been a computer programmer, and just before the move from Indianapolis she had been self-employed as a housecleaner. Mother Paula had been a secretary for 20 years. For months they sought employment all over the county and beyond, but no doors opened. Knowing that they had marketable skills, they finally realized that the Lord might be trying to tell them that establishing the monastery was the most important thing, and that they were to trust Him completely for financial support.

From the beginning, it was assumed that Holy Redeemer's operating income would come from work done by the Mothers plus gifts from others who thought the monastic life was important within the Church. It was not until after 2000 that the contributions from others fell below 85% of a total year's income. Some of those years, of course, involved the construction of buildings on the monastery farm, which wouldn't have happened without generosity from our benefactors. However, even during the more normal years the Mothers found generating income from only their own work extremely difficult. One factor was the truth of the axiom "It takes money to make money", and the Mothers never had enough money to invest in a big enterprise. Another factor was that there were only two of them rather than a larger community of many hands and many skills. Perhaps, too, the Lord had designs to teach them humility as well as gratitude for all the gifts of others.

So, what were some of the things the Mothers attempted in order to bring in dollars? The first step was to s t r e t c h dollars. They both had come from families where frugality was practiced, so they knew how to make-do with a little. A very helpful skill! As soon as they moved to Ladoga ,they tried the old practice of bartering, exchanging their labor of housecleaning for rent. When Mother Pilar needed carpal tunnel surgery, they even bartered frozen lamb and bread for the surgeon's fee. They also regularly assessed what items they didn't really need and had several garage sales (sometimes including excess produce they had grown). When they moved to the Bloomfield farm, they had excess trees timbered. Eventually, they sold their land: first a beaver pond they didn't need, then a farm, then a guest house, and finally a ten-acre wood.

Alms of time and labor saved thousands of dollars over the years. In both Ladoga and Bloomfield, all renovation and building were done by volunteers except for foundation work, barn framing, and septic.

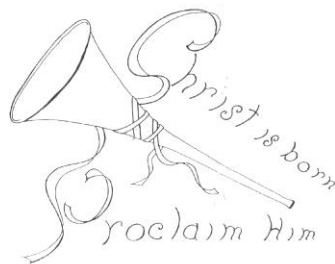
A program that the Mothers put in place while in Ladoga was FRIEND OF THE MONASTERY. It was an opportunity for those who wanted to support Holy Redeemer in some way to make an annual commitment of whatever they wanted to do. Sometimes that was a financial contribution, but more often it turned out to be a commitment to pray (which is more valuable than anything else) or to supply some basic staple. For instance, they didn't have to buy postage stamps for years!

Because their manpower was limited (well, actually womanpower), the Mothers evaluated what skills they had. Each knew how to sew, and they made their own clothing in addition to making aprons to sell. They both knew how to cook, so in addition to feeding themselves and their many visitors, they did a couple of catering jobs for the Rotary Club in Bloomfield. They both knew how to garden, so that supplied a lot of their food. They began making bread, noodles, pies, and cheesecakes to sell in Ladoga, Indianapolis, and Bloomfield by special order and at bake sales.



Mother Pilar is tremendously gifted with animals, and she became a shepherdess and manager of a flock of chickens. Because of her skills she was able to do the majority of the vet work for the sheep and all the household pets. Mother Paula could do record-keeping, so she became accountant for the corporation. She also administered the EOC communion's Episcopal Fund, for which the church paid a monthly stipend. They could both clean house, so for several years they cleaned homes for others.

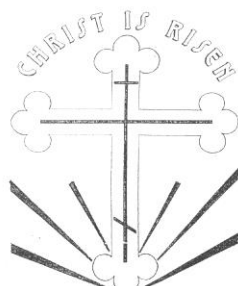
Mother Pilar is the more artistic of the Mothers, so they used her abilities to design several hand-made items that they sold by special order and at craft fairs: Christmas and Easter cards, note cards, bookmarks, and Christmas ornaments. Because of volunteer work that Mother Paula did at the local libraries, they had access to pre-loved Christian books, and for several years they sold books on-line as well as at the monastery.



*I adore the One Who became a creature,
Who clothed Himself in creation without
weakening or departing from His divinity,
that He might raise our nature in glory and
make us partakers of His divine nature.*

St. John of Damascus

Examples of holiday cards
created by Holy Redeemer.
Artwork by Mother Pilar.



HE IS RISEN INDEED!

If it is by the sign of the Cross
and by faith in Christ that death
is trampled underfoot, it is
clear that it is Christ Himself
and none other Who is the
Archvictor over death and
has robbed it of its power.

St. Athanasius

The only actual fund-raiser was The Lamb Raffle. From 1991 to 2006 (Holy Redeemer's 20th anniversary) there was an annual raffle at which someone could win frozen lamb (or a live lamb if they preferred) as well as bakery products and other items which the Mothers crafted or friends donated. The final raffle was the most spectacular, with additional prizes of hand-made quilts, wood-working, pendant crosses, photography-based gifts, and professional cheesecake. The income from the Raffle varied over the years, but it became a time to introduce Holy Redeemer to new people, renew friendships across the EOC communion, and take in some funds to maintain the properties.



As mentioned earlier, the Mothers are now of the age to receive a monthly retirement benefit from Social Security. However when first moving to Agape House it was necessary for Mother Pilar to find work in the community. She returned to school and became a Certified Nursing Assistant. She has a wonderful gift of being able to work with the elderly, and she worked a few hours per week for a Christian home-care business which serves Greenwood and the surrounding area. She now is officially retired and does not work away from Agape House. When Carol Cornelius joined the Mothers in Agape House in 2014, she was still a nurse, but she retired in 2016 to be full-time caregiver for her aging parents.

Walking By Faith

The uncertainty of income has been one of the biggest faith challenges for the Mothers. Trips to the mailbox, even now, are often filled with constant prayer to be content with whatever is inside. St. Paul relates in Philippians 4:11-13: *"...I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know both how to have a little, and I know how to have a lot. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being content...I am able to do all things through Him who strengthens me."* Those of Holy Redeemer are still learning.

Holy Redeemer has been a crucible for learning to trust the Great Provider. In a later chapter the Mothers are going to share some of their favorite stories, some of which tell a few of the amazing ways God met their needs. The Holy Redeemer experience of trusting has, thankfully, been an encouragement to others. These are the comments of their first bishop after his visit to the Bloomfield farm on the occasion of an Open House held for those who had built the house:

"It was my honor to serve the Eucharist at Holy Redeemer Monastery on behalf of the Mothers and all of the saints that had gathered there from around the EOC communion of churches this past weekend. What a time of blessed reflection and worship this weekend was. What did we all reflect upon? The mercy and faithfulness of God and the mystery of what He can accomplish through faith in the lives of

those who believe and trust in Him. With God all things are truly possible. This is what we rejoiced in together as we gathered there in the hills of southern Indiana near Bloomfield on that cool but gorgeous autumn weekend—at the height of the glory of God's forests.

I looked out across the hillside and the valley at the finished dwelling for the Mothers, the barn for the sheep, the freshly mowed pasture land, the tents for fellowship and worship in the midst of all that beauty. I remembered how their priest and the Sisters had come to me nearly ten years ago to share this 'crazy' idea of starting a monastery in the outback of Indiana. They wanted to learn the ascetic life and follow God in celibacy, obedience, poverty, and stability. I wondered at the time how you build such a dream—or vision—from nothing. We knew that if such a thing was to happen, then the God of miracles would have to perform it through faith. If it happened at all, then it would be proof that God wanted such a thing to come to pass. The reality of this miracle, from the experience of watching Holy Redeemer Monastery become a reality, is probably the greatest testimony to me of the faithfulness of God to all who call on His name.

It was a blessing to hear Mother Paula tell the history of the monastery with tears in her eyes and with words that were all choked up on Saturday evening before Vespers. That will stand out in my memory in the future. It was also a wonderful experience to worship together with so many of the faithful from all of our churches, realizing that these faithful had built this monastery with their hands, their tools, their time, and their monetary gifts. I will remember in my heart before God that these are the people who have come to dream the dream also, and to see the vision.

By God's grace, Holy Redeemer Monastery will serve as a beacon to our churches, to Greene County, and to the world all around—which is already traipsing to the doors of this spiritual haven to retreat, help, pray, and learn the Faith—yes, that glorious counter-culture known as The Way. For Christ is there with them—and with us—leading us to God the Father in the Holy Spirit, who are our only hope and salvation: the true God. I am so glad that someone is proclaiming this in a very clear, though quiet and humble, way.”