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Community can't be taken for granted

by Joan Chittister

Community is a matter
of the heart
and the mind.
It cannot be created
by place alone,
and it cannot be destroyed
by distance alone.

It is of the essence
of the soul.

What we identify with,
what gives us a sense of purpose,
of belonging,
of support
is our community.

Community building does not just happen.
It cannot be taken for granted.
It requires both great faith
and great trust
that is generated by a continuing display
of great human care
that begins with me,
and then comes back to me.

It takes a great deal of energy
to create community.
And in today's world,
community takes many shapes.

The kind of community for which
the ancient Rule of Benedict is written,
is based on a great deal
of common physical presence.

But as the world enlarges,
so does the concept of community.
The physical is still important--
but differently.
Now community is often virtual,
but just as real in many dimensions
as sitting next to the same person
in chapel our entire lives.

In a Monastery of the Heart,
what is important is
that we each be an extension
of the Gospel,
and an extension of each other,
and an extension of Benedictine spirituality
at the same time.

What is imperative is that the sharing
of the common mind
be just as important
as once was the sharing
of a common schedule,
or a common dormitory,
or a common work.

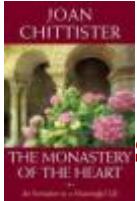
What is central is that together
we use our goods
for something greater than ourselves,
that we "do not store up grain in barns,"
as the scriptures say,
for our own security alone,
but use the profits of our labor
for the good of others, as well.

It is a process of making
all of human community real,
and of doing it
out of a common vision
and one heart,

in whatever form is available--
so that the spirit of community
that is Benedictine to its core
may spread like a holy plague
throughout the world.

[This reflection comes from Sr. Joan Chittister 's book *The Monastery of the Heart: An Invitation to a Meaningful Life* (BlueBridge) .]

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