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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.

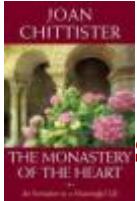
What is central is that together  
we use our goods  
for something greater than ourselves,  
that we "do not store up grain in barns,"  
as the scriptures say,  
for our own security alone,  
but use the profits of our labor  
for the good of others, as well.

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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