

*A warm welcome to new and returning students! It is good to have you here, and good to be in my new position as Campus Chaplain.*

*My new role has been created to provide pastoral care for students and their families, and I am exploring the best ways to serve you. I have a number of thoughts about this (and would welcome your suggestions), and will communicate them to you soon. One idea I wish to initiate immediately, however, is a regular e-mail reflection from me on our life at the Seminary and our vocations as servants of Christ and His Church.*

*The reflections will come from different sources — Scripture, readings from spiritual masters (both ancient and modern), and my personal experience in parish life for many years. Through these short and humble meditations, I hope to discipline myself in pondering and setting down my thoughts about Christian community and ministry; and I also hope that I will be able to offer you an oasis during your busy days and a refreshing thought from time to time as you carry the Cross of Our Lord.*

*Fr. Steven J. Belonick  
Chaplain*

**1<sup>st</sup> Chaplain's Reflection – August 30, 2010  
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“Living in community”

Living at St Vladimir's Seminary may be one of the few opportunities we will ever have to live “in community,” and particularly, in a close-knit Orthodox Christian community. Few of us have ever lived in a monastic setting, though most of us have experienced the joys and challenges of parish life.

Nevertheless living here is unique. We see each other daily in class and in chapel. We work together, play together, and eat together. We all have a devotion to Christ, worship Him in the Orthodox manner, and wish to serve Him. All of this is life giving. But, those of us who have lived here know that communal life is often fraught with pain. Over time, incidents and circumstances open us up to reveal our worst character faults.

This should not surprise us. When Jesus called twelve disciples into close community, trouble ensued. The Twelve specially selected to follow His exalted path squabbled. Some were ambitious and desired recognition. Others tried to impress the Lord by expressing bravado that melted away when danger approached. One betrayed Jesus. Three fell asleep when He needed their support. One denied knowing Him. At His end, all of them fled, except one. We might question our Lord's vetting process, for He had created a broken, albeit life-giving community.

In his short book, *From Brokenness to Community*, Jean Vanier, founder of L'Arche,<sup>1</sup> wrote,

*Community is a place of truth and growth— the revelation of our pride, our fear and our brokenness...When I live with others, I begin to see all the hardness of my heart. This is painful.*

*At moments of fatigue and stress, I see forces of hate rising up inside of me, and the capacity to hurt someone who was weak and was provoking me. That, I think was what caused me the real pain; to discover who I really am, and to realize that maybe I did not want to know who I really was.*

Perhaps we can all identify with Vanier to some degree. Community living makes us vulnerable. It shines a light on our darker side. But communal living also forces us *to learn how to love*—as Christ loved—others and ourselves.

Just as The Twelve belonged to Jesus in their imperfection, so we belong to Him in ours. At St. Vladimir's we can learn to accept, bear, forgive, and lift up each other, while working through the pain of realizing "who we really are." However, even the recognition of our own sin provides a blessing: our hearts soften toward our brothers and sisters, and we go a little easier on them. Moreover, every time God forgives us our reservoir of sins, we're apt to extend that same compassion to those in our community.

We are not competitors nor are we each other's judge. Rather, we have been called to be co-workers with Him and with each other in His vineyard. May God help us, as we learn this spiritual lesson and practice this spiritual principle.

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<sup>1</sup> L'Arche is an international organization, which creates communities where people with developmental disabilities and those who assist them share life together. (*Wikipedia*)