



Monastic Interreligious Dialogue

Sponsored by North American Benedictine and Cistercian Monasteries of Men and Women

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About the Conference

Sr. Mary Margaret Funk, OSB

from **Gethsemani Encounter I, July 1996**

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In July 1996, an historic five-day meeting occurred of close to fifty Buddhist and Christian monks and nuns and other practitioners at the Abbey of Gethsemani in Trappist, Kentucky. It was His Holiness the Dalai Lama who suggested that the meeting be held in a monastic setting, where he could be "a monk among other monks," and who urged that the setting be Gethsemani, the home of Thomas Merton, whom he had met shortly before the latter's death in 1968.

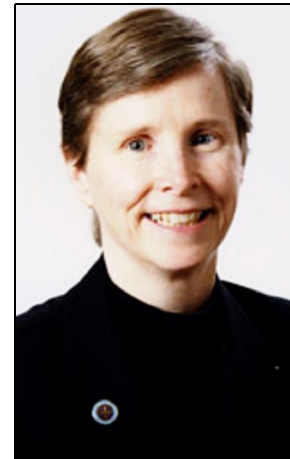
The theme of the Gethsemani Encounter was the spiritual life in the Buddhist and Christian monastic traditions. From this meeting, a book was published, entitled *The Gethsemani Encounter*.

The inspiration for the Gethsemani Encounter happened at the Parliament of the World's Religions in 1993. Prior to the Parliament, Fr. Julian von Duerbeck, OSB, and Br. Wayne Teasdale proposed that the Monastic Interreligious Dialogue (MID) host an interfaith dialogue session at the Parliament with His Holiness the Dalai Lama and other Buddhist leaders. MID is the official monastic organization of the Catholic Church in the United States, Canada and Central America responsible for intermonastic dialogue with other religions. Its members are men and women monastics in the Benedictine, Cistercian, and Trappist traditions. The MID Board accepted the proposal to host a Buddhist-Christian dialogue at the Parliament; and a morning dialogue session on "Emptiness and Kenosis" was designed by Sr. Katherine Howard, OSB, and Patrick G. Henry, who also moderate the event.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama participated in that dialogue, and later—

Related Articles

- **Gethsemani Buddhist-Christian Meeting (Bulletin 56, October 1996)**
- **Introduction and Welcome (Gethsemani Encounter II, April 2002)**



Sr. Mary Margaret Funk, OSB, was the executive director of the MID board from 1989-2004. She was prioress at Our Lady of Grace Monastery in Beech Grove, Indiana and is the author of a number of books, including *Thoughts Matter* and *Islam Is . . .*

All articles by or about Sr. Mary Margaret Funk, OSB

during the Parliament—suggested that the dialogue be continued in a monastic setting. Discussions were then held by MID members at the Parliament, and the idea of a weeklong, in-depth intermonastic encounter on the spiritual life at Gethsemani Abbey—home of Thomas Merton—began to be formulated. The encounter was seen as an opportunity to bring together, for an extended period of time in a monastic setting, a small group of Buddhist and Christian monastics who are mature practitioners and teachers of spirituality. They would live, practice, and celebrate together; and in that contemplative setting, they would dialogue about the practice of the spiritual life and its value for the world today. While there had been local intermonastic hospitality exchanges and dialogues in different parts of the world in the past, this would be the first time an organized international monastic dialogue on the spiritual life would be held at this global level of encounter.

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