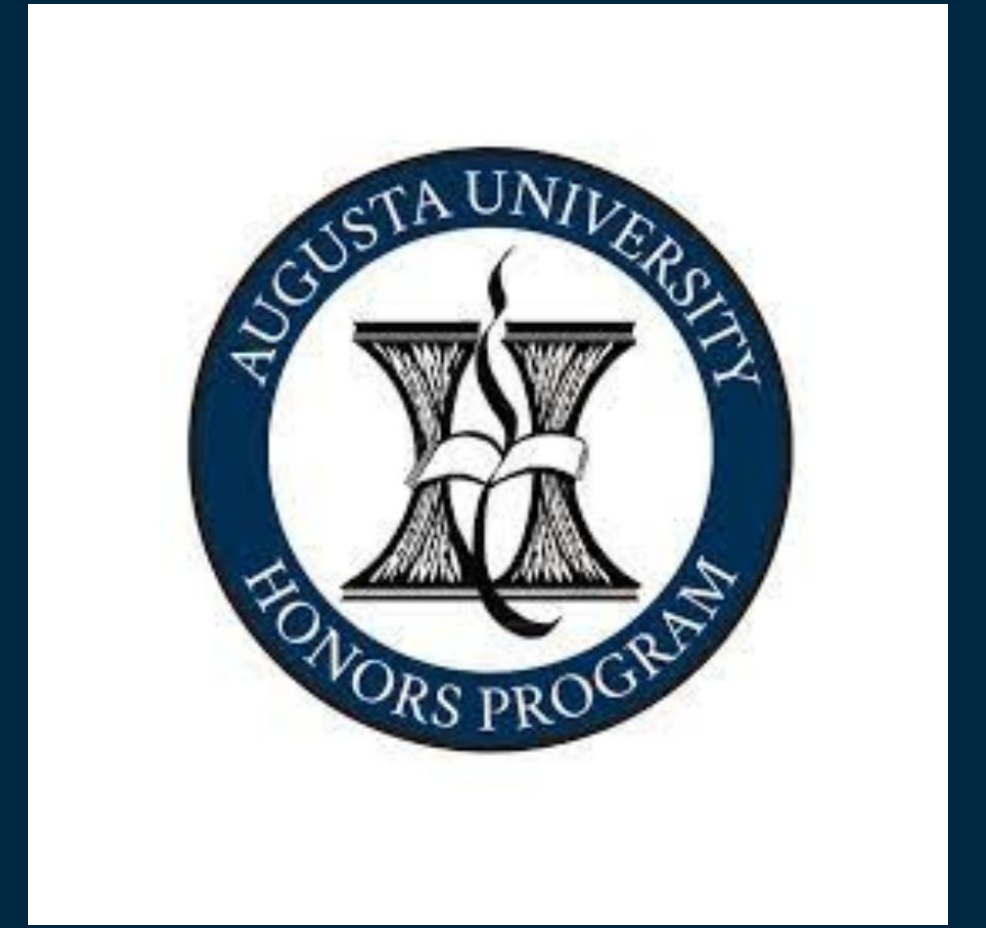


The Real-World Effects of a Monastic Lifestyle

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INTRODUCTION

In conversations concerning attitudes, demeanors, and attention spans of people in today's social climate, the obvious factor of technology commonly appears. The constant stimulation and connection that a smartphone can provide can completely change the way people think. In this sense, the "noise" created by convenient technology has affected the average person's ability to listen (Telegraph).

According to a survey conducted by media researchers M-Lab, one in five adults experience less than thirty minutes of silence per day (Telegraph). However, a 2006 study found that even a few minutes of silence could lead to significant reductions in heart rate and blood pressure, both of which are common metrics for stress (Bernardi et Al., 445). What is often left out of the conversation is the potential of silence, contemplation, and intentional living to change outlooks.

For this project, I plan to examine the daily effects of living a monastic lifestyle via an autoethnographic study of multiple monastic populations in the United States. Regular lifestyle features among monks include vows of silence, fraternal living, and common intention. I believe that my findings can be extrapolated to everyday life.

THE RETREAT CENTER



THE ABBEY AND MONKS

- Roman Catholic monks who are part of the Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance, also known as Trappists
- Trappist monks approach their lives through the lens of the works of St. Benedict
- Monks make an unofficial "vow of silence" upon joining
- Verbal communication is kept to a minimum for a quiet life
- They follow a strict routine, alternating between work, reading, and prayer
- The monks work to preserve the grounds and contribute to upkeep
- They gather together seven times per day to pray the Liturgy of the Hours
- Emphasis on interior life
- Abbey's retreat center allows laypeople, regardless of personal belief, to experience the monk's life



METHODS

Autoethnography: A qualitative, autobiographical research method centered on reflecting the researcher's internal experience. Autoethnography is typically described as a two-part process:

1. Immersion into the cultural environment
2. Description and analysis of experience

- I will make regular journal entries throughout my retreat experience.
- I will note my attitudes, behaviors, and experiences.
- I will revisit my experiences after visits to ascertain how my attitude has changed.
- I will report my findings through an autoethnographic report.

Interviews

- The monks will be interviewed for an informative video describing life at Mepkin.
- The monks will be asked to describe their journey of discerning their vocation, the Trappist order, and their day-to-day operations at the abbey.

TIMELINE

December 16-19: First mini-retreat to Mepkin Abbey

May 14-19: First weeklong visit to Mepkin Abbey

May 21: First set of "rearview" reviews of personal field notes.

May 30: Second set of "rearview" entries.

June 15: Third "rearview" set, one month post-visit.

August 16: Fall 2023 semester starts, begin drafting thesis.

September 29: First podcast recording.

October 20: Second podcast recording.

November 1: Third podcast recording.

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OUTCOMES

Podcast

- Podcast sessions will be organized to facilitate longer-form conversation in contrast to the more formal video and text portions of the project.
- Three hour-long episodes will be recorded, with their content centering on the my insights.

Informational Video

- Quotes used in the video portion will be re-recorded to protect the identities of the interviewees.
- I will take videos of the grounds and surrounding gardens. The retreat center is intentionally and meticulously designed to create a peaceful environment for visitors.
- The goal for the video portion is to accurately depict the setting in which the monks live.

THE CHURCH AND CHAPEL



3:40 AM- Rise 4:00 AM- Vigils 5:15 AM- Breakfast 7:00 AM- Lauds, Eucharist 12:00 PM- Sext (midday prayer) 12:10 PM- Dinner 12:30 PM- Chores 4:55 PM- Supper 6:00 PM- Vespers Gra

