WARNING! This is long so you may want to save for when you have time to digest it.  BUT I do need your help and feedback fairly soon and your constant prayers.  I am not sure what I expected when the Formation Director role fell to me, but it has far exceeded any expectation I could have imagined in amount of time, energy, and thought as well as joy and challenge.  
All of which I am grateful for having been deemed somewhat capable;-)!  
  
Dear Companions,  
  
I am in awe of all that has taken place since last GC.  With your help we are addressing the formation now of 10 postulants and 3 novices.  I thought it would be a good idea to try to summarize what has happened thus far (at least as well as I can remember) and to take the pulse of the process and to get your input and feedback.  So, here is a summary of some of the what and how things have happened this fall/winter and the projections for now until GC.  Thank you for what you have done to help.  
  
**Houston:**

* Virginia's frequent visits (which I may have lost count of) and Elizabeth's presence there have been immensely helpful in giving the Houston group (now 6 of them) a sense of the Rivendell ethos and kept them moving at a good pace.  It is difficult due to their physical distance from one another, but they are considering a mid-month meeting maybe for lunch just to get to know one another better.  I am communicating with the group and with individual's sometimes commenting on their reflections and their personal situations and prayer requests.
* We began in the fall with Christine leading the discussion on Unit A.  There were good written reflections from each person and a group discussion (Sept 28th at Mike's) which I attended on-line with Virginia present.
* During the early fall **Bob** removed himself from the process due to distance and other obligations.  It was a graceful parting.
* Later in the fall **Lucy** decided that her concept of certain issues and ours was not consistent, and she was uncomfortable remaining.  She and Virginia had conversations about it and we sent her to find another way with our prayers.
* The second Unit C (Eucharist) was facilitated by email by Barbi with her presenting herself and her reflection and their responses to Study Guide questions and their understanding of being taken, blessed, broken and given sent by email.  There were two meetings for discussion of these sections. One of these on Nov 16th I was able to attend on-line.
* Scheduling is a bit difficult for a variety of reasons and **Paulette** (with seminary and church obligations) was having trouble being there.  Then Paulette's husband, Larry, had a heart attack.  You have heard Virginia's story about her/our prayers for him, and Virginia and I have encouraged her to take time to be with him without the responsibilities of postulancy for a while.  She was grateful to accept this leave of absence but very much wants to stay in the process.
* **Mike** visited Memphis for an immersion weekend which he very much enjoyed (I was there that weekend, too, so we had some time together.  I am his "companion" in conversation this year.
* **Martha** was here in Asheville last August for the Wild Goose Festival, so we have had an opportunity to get to know each other fairly well.
* They had a weekend retreat in December which seemed to have provided some glue to form the group a bit more.  They spent a bit of time on Unit B with Virginia there and had more discussions of our Rivendellian understanding of our ethos.
* Lisa facilitated the January discussion of the first part of Unit D on prayer with their again sending reflections by email and her sending assignments and reflection.  The on-line discussion which was difficult as Elizabeth, Lisa and I were all three on google and the sound was not good and the conversation a bit disjointed.  They were very frustrated with this format, and we are regrouping for the next meeting which is February 23rd at Elizabeth's.  Virginia is planning to be there again, bless her!  Lisa will send assignments and reply to their written reflections, but we will not try to be on-line for the gathering.
* **Sherry's** health is fragile but her heart and intention are strong and lovely.  Her husband Ed is praying the offices with her and she participates as fully as she can.
* **Ladelle** (an academic with whom I can relate quite well) is also participating both by being present and fully reflecting on the materials.
* **Mary Ann** is quiet and a joy.  Her poetry is lovely, and she is a peaceful presence in the meetings.  Get to know her.

If you have any questions/comments about all this, please let me know.  All the postulants/novices are engaged in the process, and while age/infirmity may at times make being present either in body or "mind" difficult, I am so grateful for their persistence in engaging the materials and their prayers as well as their showing up.  They ALL want to be at General Chapter and if physically possible for them, I am sure they will be.

**Novices:**

The novices (David, Mike, and Martha) have begun a discussion by email and on-line on Fully Alive.  Christine has joined me as will Mike McDonnell.  We wanted to do something together to keep the novices involved in their study and formation prior to this GC, and these materials are providing good jumping off places for conversation.  We have had only one meeting so far, but we will continue through the spring.

**Memphis:**

Thanks be to God for Murray and the Emmaus Chapter!  With their well-established routine of Saturday evenings and twice a month chapter meetings, the Memphis postulants are bonding so well and working together on ministries and having retreats (one in Memphis and now one at the Motherhouse).  They are moving more slowly and deeply (due to time together) into the Study Guide materials.  They are sharing their reflections with me as well.  Virginia visited there this fall, and I was there in October getting a chance to meet in person with them.  June, of course, we've all known and loved for years, so her involvement is lovely.  The Miller's both have incredible background in religious community and are very committed to the intentionality of Rivendell.  The Wolcott's we've also known as friends of Rivendell for several years now, and it is a delight to now hear their story through the reflections.  I am immensely grateful for Murray for also getting the on-line evening prayer going on Tuesdays.  I attend every week (unless not connected) and we range from two to six of us praying together.  This has been so supportive to me as I miss you all so much.

**Missouri:**

We now have Mike McDonnell beginning his postulancy, and I think that the Bethel Chapter is coming up with a plan for his formation that will be a combination of an individual mentor from the chapter and his attending chapter meetings as well as the Fully Alive group with novices.  Lisa can let me know what was decided at chapter meeting.

**Projections:**

* Our goal is to continue the study process in all locations and refine the meeting format as needed, to encourage more real time conversation in Houston to help the group discern their future together there and to develop a deeper sense of community, and to be prepared to present those who are ready at GC for the next step.
* I believe that the one thing that has not worked, and I'm never sure why, is the pairing of companions with individual postulants for more personal contact.  Please do, whenever you can, respond personally to the comments the postulants are making on the list.  If you would like me to share their reflections with you, I am happy to do so (with the warning - there is a LOT of material to read).
* Susie and Becca offered to help with Unit E - Hospitality and Community, and I am wondering if we might have the Houston group send their reflections to the list for this critical unit and to have us all (those who would like) respond?  It could get chaotic, but then what's new!

I know I have forgotten something or mis-stated anything, hopefully nothing of substance.  Virginia can add her "more than two cents worth" as she has been kept involved all along the way, and for that I am truly grateful.  It was so good to have her in Asheville if even for just a few hours of conversation. The Rivendell Mobile must have a million miles on it by now or maybe she has divined how to make it sprout wings.

Lots of love to you all and thank you for your prayers,

Noel