



Monastery of the Ascension

THE DESERT CHRONICLE

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Benedictines and Work

By Fr. Hugh Feiss, O.S.B.

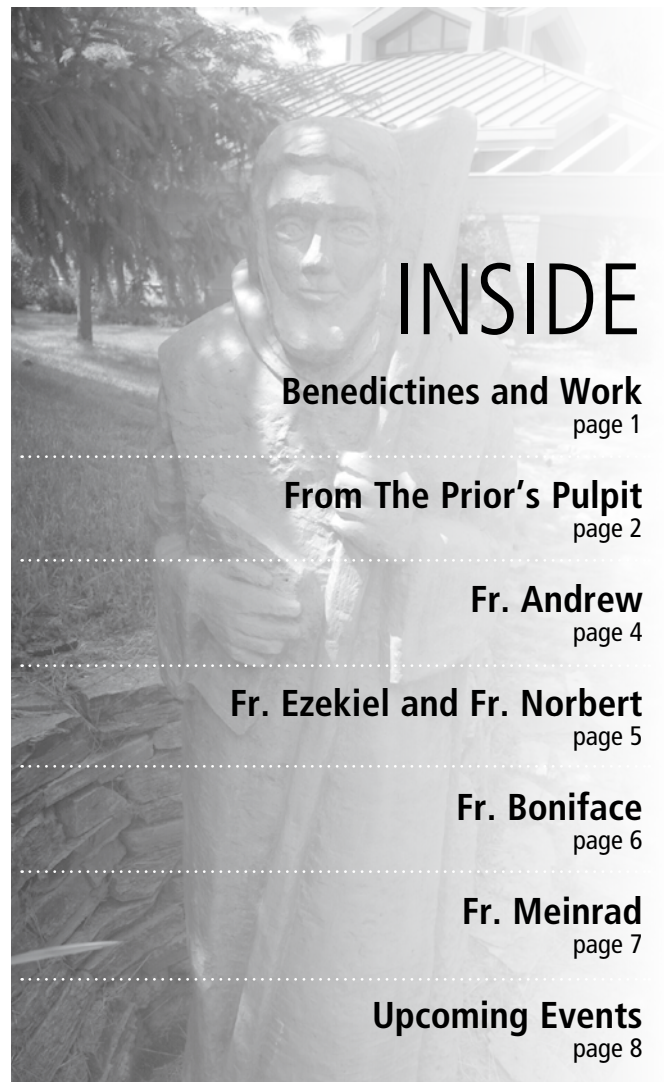
THIS ISSUE OF THE DESERT CHRONICLE IS DEVOTED TO MONASTIC WORK AND TO SOME OF THE WORKS THAT THE MONKS OF THE MONASTERY DO. FATHER KENNETH'S LETTER IS A NICE INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME. WHAT FOLLOWS ARE SOME REFLECTIONS ON WORK IN THE RULE OF BENEDICT AND IN MONASTIC HISTORY.

As Fr. Kenneth notes, one motto that is associated with the Benedictine Order is "Ora et labora": "You need to pray and to work." Like most one-liners, this motto is misleading. A motto that better reflects the Rule of Benedict's priorities is: "Ora, lege, et labora": "You need to pray, read, and work."

Fr. Terrence Kardong has cautioned contemporary Benedictines that they have tended to overemphasize work to the neglect of reading, if not of community prayer and life. Thereby, balance and "Peace" (another Benedictine motto) have been undermined. In fact, throughout history, Benedictines have found it difficult to maintain this balance. During the early Middle Ages, monks such as those of Cluny so expanded common prayer that reading and work were both neglected. At the time of the French Revolution, on the other hand, their critics regarded monks as idle aristocrats.

One reason I decided to join Mount Angel Abbey was that I admired the way the monks combined prayer, study, and manual work. One of my philosophy professors was an all-round handyman, my Scripture teacher did landscaping and poured concrete, my dogmatic theology professor ran the printing presses. Other monks operated a dairy, a pig farm, a cattle herd, an orchard, a garden and the kitchen. These monks whom I admired were the children or grandchildren of immigrants,

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From the Prior's Pulpit

ORA ET LABORA

THIS ISSUE OF THE DESERT CHRONICLE DWELLS ON VARIOUS TASKS THAT ARE UNDERTAKEN BY MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY AND OUR VOLUNTEER HELPERS.

“Pray and work” is generally taken as St. Benedict’s motto along with *ut in omnibus glorificetur Deus* (“that in all things God may be glorified”). However, our American work ethic keeps shouting at us, “In order to rest, you must work longer and harder.” This implies that one should simply allow that “My work is my prayer and the glory that I give to God”.

Admittedly, there is a duality when it comes to work. According to Genesis 2:15, “The Lord God then took the man and settled him in the Garden of Eden to cultivate and care for it.” In other words, work is part of God’s plan for creation and not a punishment for wrongdoing. But alas, sin turned Adam’s garden project into labor: “By the sweat of your face shall you get bread to eat, until you return to the ground from which you were taken; for you are dirt and to dirt you shall return” (Genesis 3:19). As part of our participation in God’s work of creation, we are commissioned to be good stewards of the goods that we have been given. Nevertheless, we find that stewardship can be a heavy burden and an unwelcome responsibility. The monastic life as presented in the Rule of St. Benedict addresses this duality by seeking to strike a balance between work and prayer. This column is not the place to launch into a long dissertation on the meaning and place of work in the Rule of Benedict. But monks are not “God’s holy loafers”.

Our work is also part of the Christian duty to “pray always”. This does not mean that one’s thoughts and lips are always

engaged in actual words of prayer, but that one should never give up praying. The life of all Christians should be based on an awareness of God’s presence in the world and in our individual lives. This is the meaning of “contemplation”. We are all called to be contemplatives. That is at least a goal for which we are to strive. The Rule of Benedict lays out the way in which this goal can be achieved by the grace of God.



Here in the monastery, our work is manifold. Besides care for our buildings and property, we have a variety of “internal” and “external” jobs. Preparing meals, washing and cleaning, Brother Sylvester’s maintenance duties, Fr. Norbert’s big job of scheduling the use of our facilities and looking after the needs of the users of the Ministry Center, my work in the gift shop and bookstore, Fr. Boniface’s and Brother Tobiah’s attention of our machinery and yard, Fr. Andrew’s and, again, Brother Tobiah’s attention to our financial and business operations, and many other “on-site jobs” may be termed our “internal work”.

Then we also have many offsite jobs such as Brother Jose’s work with immigrants, the help that we priests give to a number of parishes, taking our turn helping out with the local parish’s soup kitchen, and so on. Altogether, we have a larger number of jobs to be covered than would be found in an average family. Our challenge is in finding a good balance between time for prayer and time for work. We also need adequate leisure time. And in spite of our numerous jobs as a community and as individuals, we do have healthy and wholesome leisure time--not for loafing, but for catching one’s breath and for personal projects and hobbies. Perhaps these can be featured in some future issue of the *Desert Chronicle*. But for the moment, this will suffice. Now, I have to sign off and get back to work. •



many of whom were farmers. Like my parents, they had come to adulthood during the Depression. They took hard work for granted and they came to the monastery with many practical skills.

After I joined the monastery, things turned out slightly different than I anticipated. We younger monks were assigned to work, but our superiors saw work primarily as a way to make us humble. We were not encouraged to learn anything about the different tasks to which we were assigned, much less given any responsibility for them. As the generation I admired exited the scene, and the number of monks decreased, the production and preparation of food, maintenance, groundskeeping and other tasks were hired out. Monks still worked, but mainly as administrators, a not uncommon occurrence throughout the history of monasticism. In fact, in his provisions regarding the abbot, the prior, the cellarer, the infirmarians, and the guestmaster, St. Benedict outlines a theology and spirituality of administration.

Many monasteries operate schools, which gives the community a common focus and encourages intellectual life among the monks, while they perform an important ministry for the Church. When one joins such a monastery it is very likely that one will work in the educational apostolate of the monastery. The Monastery of the Ascension has never had such an encompassing common work; our common prayer is simple and not very lengthy. Our common work is the ministry center or guesthouse, which is certainly not as labor-intensive as a school or even a retreat house where the monks give the retreats. Because of that, and by deliberate choices, frugal leadership, and help from generous volunteers and benefactors, the members of Priory have a considerable amount of discretionary time. The common tasks of cooking, dishwashing, cleaning, and upkeep, and the necessary tasks assigned to individual monks, do not take up the whole day. With the approval of the prior, individual monks can choose how to use much of their time: for manual or intellectual work, prayerful reading, prayer, or ministry within or outside the monastery. This is a gift and a responsibility that few people, and few monks, have. It is one of the defining characteristics of our community, one that encourages and requires personal responsibility and initiative within a framework of common life and work.

The articles in this issue tell some of the ways in which monks of the community use their time for the common work of the community and for the benefit of the Church. There wasn't room for everyone, so we'll continue the topic in another issue. •



Br. Sylvester decorating the Dining Room



Br. Sylvester, and volunteers Sheryl Jewell, Keith Hansen and Joanne Draper decorating the chapel for Lent



Father Nathaniel





Father Andrew in the Business Office

Fr. Andrew Baumgartner, OSB

I made my profession as a Benedictine monk at Mt. Angel Abbey in 1955 and was ordained a priest in 1960. I have a degree in mathematics and taught math at Mt. Angel Seminary for a number of years as well as ran the Business office there 15 years before being assigned to Monastery of the Ascension. Here at the Monastery of the Ascension I am currently the Choir Master, the Business Office Manager and the Sub-prior. For a number of years I did all of the business office myself. For the last four years Brother Tobiah has been helping in the business office and within the last year I hired Linda Hurley to help me on a part time basis. Over the years the work has increased. For example when we hired LuAnn Kraft as our Food Service Manager, I had to learn all the rules, forms, and deadlines required by the IRS and State of Idaho to keep that aspect of the business office in conformity to Federal and State laws. I do enjoy the business office work, although some parts more than others. Bookkeeping is straight forward, you just have to follow the rules and be accurate. I find the management aspect of the department more of a burden: writing leases, contracts, developing policies, figuring out legal matters and pursuing the best medical insurance for us.

I also enjoy working on the music for our Liturgies. I regret that I don't get more time to develop my proficiency on the organ and piano. Right now Father Ezekiel is a big help in the music area.

Nine years ago I was invited to work in *Kairos* Prison Ministry. Doing this has involved a lot of prayer, time and work over the past nine years. This organization is authorized



Linda Hurley in the Business Office

to minister at the Idaho State Correction Institution located in Boise, Idaho, about 120 miles from the Monastery of the Ascension. At times we deal with the prisoners as a group and at times on a one-to-one basis.

I was apprehensive about getting involved in this prison ministry for two reasons. First of all it was a bit scary to go into the prison itself. You have to pass through three cages where they open one door to let you into the cage (a cage will hold about 15 or 20 people). The door on the other side is not unlocked until the entrance is closed with a loud clang and locked. Then we go into the "yard" where the prisoners are incarcerated; we usually enter it as a team or part of a team, which provides an element of security. The second reason I was apprehensive is that *Kairos* is interdenominational. Ministering with the sincere, generous, zealous, non-Catholic members of *Kairos* is usually a real inspiration. It also gives me a tremendous appreciation of how blessed I am to be a Roman Catholic Christian.

Kairos is active in 32 States and 5 countries. Here is the *Kairos* Mission Statement. "The mission of *Kairos* Prison Ministry is to bring Christ's love and forgiveness to all incarcerated individuals, their families, and those who work with them, and to assist in the transition to becoming productive citizens." The *Kairos* motto is "Love, Love, Listen, Listen." We are not there to find out why a prisoner is incarcerated or for how long, but so that they experience a true, authentic love.

The *Kairos* team (or part of it) meets with the prisoners on a monthly basis for one or two hours. *Kairos* puts on a two-day retreat three times a year and an intensive weekend program once or twice a year. A weekend begins Thursday at 4:00 p.m., concludes at 8:00 p.m. that evening and then meets from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. on Friday, Saturday and most of Sunday. The prisoners are encouraged to join in small groups ranging from two to twelve, which meet weekly to pray, share, support and encourage each other in their effort to live Christian values in the prison environment. *Kairos* is very effective. The average recidivism among prisoners in the United States is over 60%.

For those who have gone through *Kairos* and are faithful to the program the recidivism drops to 11%. A significant reason for this is the "follow through" of the program.

To be a team member for *Kairos* requires considerable sacrifice. For example, in preparation for the intense weekend one is expected to attend four seven-hour meetings. Last October there were about 600 or 800 prisoners on the waiting list who had signed up for the weekend, the *Kairos* team could take only 30 participants. The maximum amount of participants with a full team is 42. The harvest is great but the laborers are few. I find participation as a team member enriching and rewarding. •





Fr. Norbert in his office in the ministry center

Fr. Ezekiel Lotz, OSB

Fr. Ezekiel was already well-prepared for lawn mowing experience when he arrived here at Monastery of the Ascension one-and-one-half year's ago, having spent a month mowing lawns while visiting the monastery in the summer of 2009. With the final demise of the Toro this past October, a new mowing apparatus could be on the horizon for summer of 2013. Let's just hope that whatever it is, it's got a motor in it!

During the winter months, when the grass is either snow- or goose-blanketed, Fr. Ezekiel has been helping out in the kitchen on days when both Luann and Br. Jose are elsewhere. The beauty of cooking for the Ascension community is that meals are small and thus one is mostly in the kitchen by oneself. This provides the perfect atmosphere for recollection and prayer while cooking a meal, unlike in larger, institutionalized venues where any sort of solitude is virtually nonexistent. The non-institutionalized profile of our kitchen also allows for greater use of fresh, locally raised meats, fish, produce, and dairy products that always yields a healthier and tastier meal. Perhaps most importantly, the confreres are both grateful and thankful for the effort made to keep everyone "alimentarily" happy.

When not mowing or chopping and frying, Fr. Ezekiel has found more than sufficient time in Ascension's daily horarium for study and research. The Priory's small but amply stocked theological library along with the invitation to suggest, request, and order new items for the collection has allowed him to continue with old projects and initiate some new study and research in a number of fields. On several occasions Ezekiel has appeared as a guest speaker at the monastery's Road Scholars program during the summer months and has also served as retreat master in Boise for the permanent deacons of the diocese and for the members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. •

Fr. Norbert Novak, OSB

My principal work at the monastery is to schedule and coordinate the activities of the monastery's ministry center. Groups schedule the facility for meetings and other activities, and individuals come for retreats or for spiritual help in a quiet and prayerful environment. Most weekends of the year the ministry center is occupied. Weekdays quilters, school groups and individuals visit or stay with us. In the summer there are six weeklong Road Scholar (formerly Elderhostel) programs. A number of non-Catholic religious groups come to the monastery for retreats and prayers and often join us for prayers. To facilitate their participation I set up the books we use for prayers. To meet the needs of these visitors I coordinate with the monks who do the cleaning and set up the conference room, and with the kitchen regarding how many meals to prepare and any special dietary needs.

For a number of years in the fall and spring I have been leader and participant of a group of local people who meet at the monastery to study the meaning and direction of our Christian life in today's Church and culture. Last fall we studied the 50th anniversary of Vatican II; this spring we will read Lohfink's *Jesus of Nazareth*.



Fr. Norbert setting up the prayer books for Liturgy of the Hours

Like other members of the community I meet with people who come for pastoral counseling, spiritual direction or the Sacrament of Reconciliation. •





Fr. Boniface and volunteer Chuckie Marhsall

Fr. Boniface Lautz, OSB

I'm sometimes asked what we do. After all, living in a monastery should have something "different" about it. Indeed it does. However, since the inhabitants are all pretty human, their activities are much the ordinary stuff that it takes to keep a place going. Since we are a relatively small community and have a fairly large facility, it takes some "doing." We are blessed to have the generous help of many good volunteers who help us do what needs doing.

Routine maintenance is a constant need and often requires skill beyond those possessed by community members. The areas in which I'm involved are general maintenance of buildings and cars. My expertise in these areas is limited, so part of my job is to know the right phone numbers. We have volunteers who can help with small repairs, and sometimes with big ones. We are also blessed to have volunteers. In addition to regular helpers like Georgella Hartwell who faithfully helps with the ministry center laundry and Anita Koehn who helps with some of the flower beds, groups from Mountain Home Air Force Base, one

of the local LDS Wards, college students, young people on service projects, and visitors and friends generously contribute their time and labor.

In addition to my tasks at the monastery, I do regular parish assistance on weekends. Currently Fr. Kenneth and I rotate weekends at three communities in Eastern Idaho: American Falls, Aberdeen and Pingree. This involves five Masses and significant travel over a weekend. Given the bi-cultural makeup of the Church in our part of Idaho, sermon preparation is a challenge, but it is becoming easier. Fr. Hugh and I each participate in the diocesan formation program for candidates for diaconate and lay ministry. That has been an opportunity for me to do some extra study and use some of my educational background.

My life is thus full of prayer and work. Living in community is rewarding for me. There is much for which I am grateful. •





that was asked of me.

Here I still help (but without responsibility) for areas of maintenance, lawn care, and stewardship of the land. This last item is most relaxing for me and entails sawing and clipping lower limbs in the Sisters' forest of pine and fir trees, a never ending project and a good source of solitude and exercise.

As a monk I am grateful for interaction with joy-filled monastic women, and meals and prayers in common. The constant presence of employees, volunteers, oblates, guests, and retreatants takes me out of settling down in a comfortable retirement mode and pushes me to experience the living faith in me and in others. God keeps stretching me. •

Fr. Meinrad Schallberger, OSB

As I write this, I am beginning my second Christmastime in my second stint as chaplain with the Monastic women and others connected to the Monastery of St. Gertrude as well as with the wonderful staff at St. Mary's Hospital and its 24 beds.

St. Gertrude's Monastery buildings are in a beautiful outdoor setting—open to the east toward Montana beyond the South fork of the Clearwater River and to the west are wooded hills with the Salmon and Snake Rivers beyond. Visitors and retreatants enjoy peaceful walks in the wooded areas. Prairie High School is across the street. There are basketball games today. Some time ago a wolf attacked and ate a deer in the soccer field.

This year our liturgical celebrations were simpler because the community has fewer and older members, while the newer sisters are not yet ready. When Christ was born it certainly was simple except for the singing of the heavenly chorus. Nevertheless, all the prayer was solemn and prayerful—maybe even more so for simple people like me.

The architect of St. Mary's Church in Mt. Angel, Oregon (1912), Engelbert Gier, was the architect for the chapel here, which was built around 1920. The acoustics in the chapel are so exceptional that choral groups enjoy coming here for concerts. The Spirit Center (retreat center) and the bed and breakfast Inn operated by the sisters house people who come here for quiet, peace, and reflection. This is truly a place of prayer and hospitality.

My main responsibility here as a priest and monk is to provide sacramental ministry. My great relief and joy is that I am not responsible for the mechanical functioning of the buildings as I was at the Monastery of the Ascension. That helps me relax and brings me healing to my periods of depression and weariness. I felt that I was not qualified to do all



Road Scholar Programs for 2013

June 17-23:

Religion and the Settling of the American West (to about 1885: California Missions, Protestants in Pacific Northwest, Mormons, Catholic Missionaries in Pacific Northwest)

July 1-7:

Windows into the Lives of Medieval People (Village Life, Art, Chaucer and Langland, Books of Hours, Household Books; Rubbings)

July 8-14:

Ancient Rome (History, Literature, Architecture & Engineering, Rise of Christianity)

July 22-28:

Ireland: History, Culture, Literature and Religion (from Ancient Times to the Present)

August 5-11:

Quilting

September 2-8:

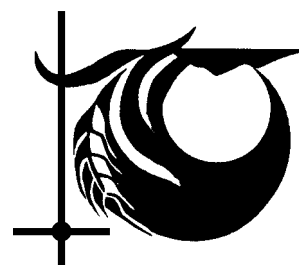
Hiking amid Nature and History in the Snake River Plain



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