



Monastery of the Ascension

THE DESERT CHRONICLE

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Br. Tobiah

By Fr. Boniface Lautz, OSB



ON AUGUST 27, 1987, PHILIP, THE ELDEST SON OF MICHAEL AND MILDRED URRUITA, MADE HIS VOWS AS A BENEDICTINE. HE TOOK THE NAME TOBIAH. In 2012 we join with him in observing the 25th anniversary of his monastic profession, and give thanks for his

years of membership and service at the monastery.

Br. Tobiah came to Ascension Priory, as it was still known in 1986, at the age of 45, bringing with him a variety of work experience and skills. Following a stint in the United States Marine Corps, including time in Viet Nam, he took turns in the insurance business, drove a city bus, and worked in the floral industry.

His return to his native Shoshone after some years in Florida reawakened an earlier interest in a religious vocation. And conversations with his pastor, Fr. Dominic Daws, put him in contact with the monastery in Jerome, where he visited frequently and subsequently sought admission. He was one of the first to make profession at the fledgling monastery.

Since 1987 Br. Tobiah has been assigned a variety of responsibilities. Early on he took courses in food management at the College of Southern Idaho. For eighteen years he was involved in providing meals for the community and an ever increasing number of guests that came with the building of the retreat center in 1993. He took over the cleaning and upkeep of the guest house and for awhile managed the gift

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From the Prior's Pulpit

EMBRACING OUR UNWANTED VOCATIONS

by Fr. Kenneth Hein, O.S.B.

JUST A FEW YEARS AGO, IN THE KITCHEN OF ONE OF MY MARRIED SISTERS WHO IS ALSO A GRANDMOTHER, I SAW A WALL PLAQUE THAT SHOWED A LITTLE GIRL CRYING WITH HER FACE TO THE WALL. The caption read, "Can't get what you want? Then call 1-800-GRANDMA."

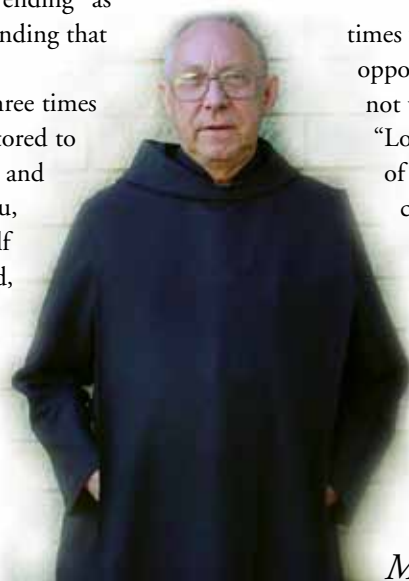
Now I suspect that every reader of the *Desert Chronicle* can tell more than one story about not getting what he or she desperately wanted as a child, and not even grandma came to the rescue. Isn't the rather common story of adults a story of frustrated searches for the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, for a good night's sleep, for family and friends that one can lean on instead of being leaned upon by "them," and for God-knows-what-else? How much of this can a person take before asking, "Are you listening, God? Or are you even there?" The dark night of the soul which St. John of the Cross memorialized and which Mother Theresa of Calcutta experienced—this appears to be what many experience sooner or later in life. I may be painting the picture too dark, but a real, dark night of the soul is just all too real for some people. The rest of us just see a lot of "gray areas" that mark our past with unfulfilled wishes and wants. One of these gray areas may be the occasional feeling or full-time conviction that "I really missed out on my real calling from God, and so I am unhappy with my present lot." Judas Iscariot probably felt that way, and then ended up in a really bad way. The same was true for St. Peter, whose "bad ending" as a martyr, however, was not the same sort of bad ending that Judas had, even though both ended up dead.

After St. Peter professed his love for Christ three times to make up for his three-fold denial and to be restored to Jesus' company, Jesus tells him, "Feed my sheep", and then immediately adds: "Amen, amen, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to dress yourself and go where you wanted; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go" (John 21:18). To this, we can add the apocryphal account of Peter's attempt to flee from Rome when Nero literally made

things too hot for Christians to stick around. Jesus then appeared to Peter and asked "Quo vadis?" ("Whither goest thou?"). Peter the petrified Apostle then returned to Rome and became Saint Peter the Pope and Martyr. That is the sort of thing that happens when we follow the will of God rather than our own will apart from the will of God.

As usual, God writes straight with crooked lines. Often God doesn't give us what we want, and just as often we are led where we do not want to go. It almost seems unfair of God to let this happen. Yet, if we have faith, even as small as the mustard seed, we will see that God has something better for us in mind. It's called "salvation", that is, "healing for eternal life" rather than healing just for the here and now. God's healing medicine often means swallowing a bitter pill. But the bitterness is only a moment. The salubrious effect is everlasting. Jesus told Saul that it was hard to kick against the goad (Acts 26:14). So Saul stopped kicking, was healed of his blindness, was baptized, and became St. Paul. As Saul, he set out to persecute Christians. As Paul, he became a persecuted Christian. He did not get what he wanted. Instead, he got everlasting life with Christ. But note! That everlasting life begins already in this life, when, by the grace of God, we come to say with St. Paul, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I that live, but Christ living in me: and that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself up for me (Galatians 2:20).

As we look back on our lives and see many times when we didn't get what we wanted, but the opposite and found ourselves being led where we did not want to go, we will do well to say with St. Peter, "Lord, to whom else shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:58). If we find ourselves complaining about being on a different course in life than we first wanted for ourselves, then we can thank God for the opportunity to do it God's way rather than insisting with Frank Sinatra that life is good only when "I did it my way". Doing it God's way is the only right way to do anything. •





Fr. Nathaniel José Oliveira: Visitor from Brazil

By Fr. Hugh Feiss, OSB

ON JUNE 28, 2012, FR. KENNETH PICKED UP FR. NATHANIEL OLIVEIRA, WHO FLEW FROM BRAZIL TO SPEND SOME TIME WITH US AND DISCERN WHETHER HE HAS A VOCATION TO OUR COMMUNITY. His coming was made possible by heroic effort and patience by both Fr. Kenneth and Fr. Nathaniel as they worked their way through the procedures of the United States Immigration Service.

Fr. Nathaniel is man of many talents and experiences. He was born on February 6, 1958 in Itapecerica in the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais, which is the size of France, just east of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. Itapecerica is in the center of the state. It is not far from the episcopal see of Divinópolis. He was baptized and confirmed the year he was born and received his first communion ten years later. He went to grade school in his home town, and to a high school operated by the Daughters of Mercy in Divinópolis. Then he earned a teacher's certificate. He taught in Itapecerica for several years. In 1981 he entered the Dominicans in Spain. He studied philosophy and theology at the University of Santo Tomás in Madrid. He was ordained a priest in Madrid on July 1, 1989.

From 1990 to 2000 he ministered in Dominican houses in Italy, primarily in Sicily and Calabria. He taught, gave retreats,



served as chaplain to Dominican Sisters, and did ecumenical work. He visited the United States in 1996. In 1999 he studied canon law for a year at the Angelicum in Rome. He returned to Brazil in 2000 and was incardinated in the diocese of Divinópolis in 2003. He worked in several parishes in that diocese, gave lectures and retreats, taught Romance languages, and served as a spiritual director and confessor. He made a lengthy retreat at the Monastery of Maredsous in Belgium in 2009–2010.

Fr. Nathaniel is working at adding English to the languages that he speaks. However, his actions are speaking for him already. He joins us at the Liturgy of the Hours and at Mass, which now is sometimes concelebrated by nine priests: Fr. Nathaniel, Frs. Kenneth, Fr. Andrew, Fr. Boniface, Fr. Norbert, Fr. Hugh, Fr. Paul, Fr. Ezekiel, and Fr. John Koelsch, a retired diocesan priest who lives at the monastery and serves as sacramental minister to the churches of Gooding, Wendell and Shoshone. Fr. Nathaniel has

also found a spot on the dishwashing crew, where he cheerfully ferries dishes back and forth between the dining room and the scullery and mops the tile floor around the buffet. On Sundays at the social after Mass he chats with one of the Portuguese-speaking farmers who have settled in our area. •





The Artistry of Stacie Smith

By Fr. Hugh Feiss, OSB

ON JULY 8, 2012, STACIE SMITH, AN ARTIST WHO NOW LIVES IN MEDFORD, OR, DROVE TO THE MONASTERY OF THE ASCENSION TO

speak about two of her works that are in the ministry center/ guest house of the monastery. On

her website, www.staciesmithart.com, Stacie writes: "I am a fourth

generation Oregonian and have lived most of my life in the Pacific Northwest. I have been a painter, photographer, printmaker, and sculptor for over forty years. . . .

The natural world informs, inspires, influences and guides my life as an artist." As for artistic influences on her work, the greatest are "anonymous and ancient"—cave painters, Inuit and other aboriginal carvers, and painters of sacred icons. This year she has had works



on exhibit at the Elan Gallery in Jacksonville, OR.

Stacie Smith exhibited at Mount Angel Abbey Library Gallery when I was in charge of it. After that exhibit, we purchased one of her pieces, still on display in the foyer of the library, and she left a large sculpture for exhibit and sale, called "The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo." When I came to the Monastery of the Ascension and a donor made some funding available, we purchased this sculpture. Fr. Boniface and Harold Bulcher drove a big pickup over to Mount Angel to bring back the 550-pound sculpture.

The sculpture was inspired by the story of the mothers of over 10,000 people who had disappeared during years of dictatorship in Argentina between 1976 and 1983. Starting on April 30, 1977, every Thursday the mothers walked quietly around the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires, wearing white head scarves with their children's names embroidered on them. Stacie, a mother of three boys, was deeply moved by the mothers' suffering and their resilience. She had learned of alabaster sculpture from an artist in a pueblo in New Mexico. She went

to Colorado to buy some alabaster stone, and the large piece that became the statue seemed to speak to her. She bought it. Over many months she worked at carving it, letting the stone guide her work. She wanted to commemorate "The Mothers of the Disappeared," showing not just their suffering, but also the deep joy of the reunion of a mother and child. To this primary focus, she added some smaller figures of angels around the lower part of the stone. The result is a pietà, which in commemorating contemporary mothers evokes Mary receiving the crucified body of Christ. At the time she did the sculpture, the largest she has made, she wrote a poem, which expresses the same truth in words::

Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo (1984)

*Mothers of children swallowed by the night,
women widowed by the silent hand,
transmuting grief to this relentless stride,
walking this circle round and round.*

*Our footsteps, like teardrops in a pool,
circles widening outward
from the death of one son.
Memories of vanished daughters
ripple across the conscience of the world.*



When we purchased the sculpture, Stacie made us a gift of prints from fourteen woodcuts she made portraying the “Stations of the Cross.” She had made the woodcuts after discussions with Fr. Charles Lienert, then pastor in Grants Pass. Fr. Lienert encouraged her to work up her own sketches, rather than draw too heavily on existing art works. So, in a blaze of creativity, she carved out the stations on blocks of Douglas fir. The resulting prints are clean of line and powerful. There are four existing sets: Msgr. Lienert has one, two are in churches in southern Oregon, and the fourth hangs along the outer wall of main hallway in the Monastery of the Ascension, a cherished gift from the artist to us. •



“BR. TOBIAH”, *from page 1*

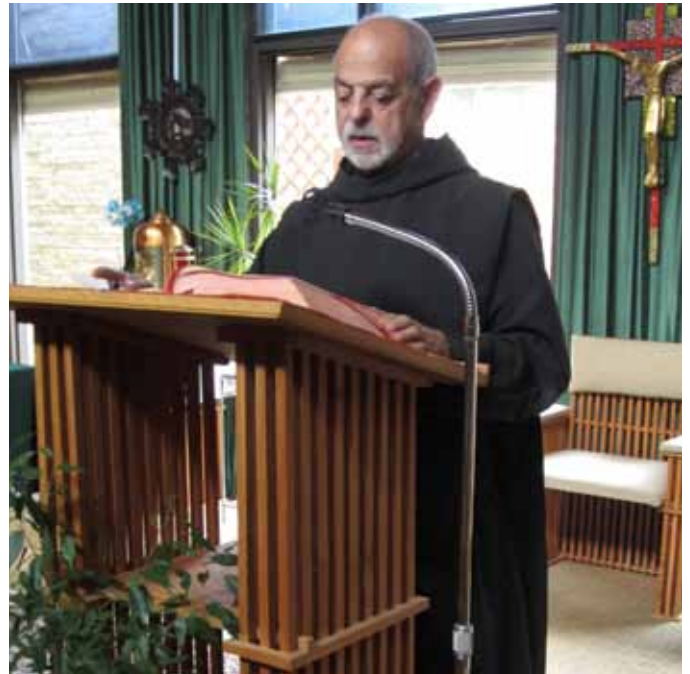
shop. He currently helps in the business office and has overall responsibility for the keeping of the grounds. His years in food service brought him in contact with many local merchants, and the friendly relations he made have continued and make for good public relations.

Br. Tobiah has a great interest in raising birds and showing them, with consistent success. He has membership in the American Poultry and American Bantam Associations. The trophies indicating “best in show” testify to his care for the ducks, geese and chickens.

Br. Tobiah serves where needed. Some of us depend on his barbering skills, and the occasional lovely floral arrangements recall his earlier work experience. He does a regular shopping run to town on behalf of his confreres. And when the kitchen equipment needs a “quick fix,” he is able to help. The same is true when our vehicles or equipment need to be started. In a small community with lots of needs, his ability and willingness to help are a valuable resource.

Asked to reflect on his years of profession, Br. Tobiah wrote: “Twenty five years...where did the time go. I came to the monastery at the age of 45 and here I am getting ready to celebrate my 71st birthday as well as my 25th year of profession as a monk. As I reflect on the highs and lows over the years ...I am ever grateful for my monastic family and support of my family and extended family. I think what I want to share now is the reality of how short life is and how best to live that life. This earthly life is a preparation for life, a life to come after we leave this place called earth.”

And so we rejoice with Br. Tobiah, give thanks for his years in our midst, and wish him blessings for many years to come. •





Benedict - Teen July 2012

By Fr. Ezekiel Lotz, OSB

FOR THE SECOND YEAR IN A ROW, ASCENSION MONASTERY HAS HOSTED A BENEDICT-TEEN WEEK FOR SOME 15 TEENAGERS FROM THROUGHOUT IDAHO AND UTAH. The group was led by Mr. Pete Epsil (a.k.a. The Tattooed Catholic), who counts the Benedictine way as a major influence on his own conversion and subsequent work as a Catholic blogger and teacher. He is currently Director of Youth Ministry at Our Lady of the Valley in Caldwell, ID, but is also active in ministry throughout the Boise Diocese.

After arriving early Monday afternoon dressed in a colorful array of Catholic-themed tee-shirts, the students spent a brief period in discussion with Pete while he provided them with some basic facts about the monastic horarium and cloister etiquette. The students then broke down into smaller groups and toured the monastery, visiting the chapel, the library, the kitchen, and the grounds of the monastery. Members of the monastic community were stationed at the respective sites to provide a presentation on the functional importance of these various places in daily monastic life. Pete remembered that his first visit to Ascension in 1990 (at the tender age of 16) included the exact same presentation by Fr. Boniface of a small-scale model of Guttenberg's press in the monastery library!

Following Lauds and Eucharist on Tuesday morning, students received their work assignments for the morning. Fr. Eugene and Joanne Drapper received ample help in the monastery garden that is growing by leaps and bounds this summer thanks to plenty of sun and some added moisture.

Two students from Utah helped finish staining the trellises in the courtyard (a job that had been started by the Catholic community of the Mountain Home Air Force base two weeks ago) and then proceeded to clean and stain the woodwork on the gazebo the next day. The priory fleet of vehicles received a much welcomed scrubbing and cleaning and the never-ending process of washing the many windows throughout the cloister was tackled by two students.

Evening circle sessions between students and monks included monastic vocation stories highlighting the broad

See "BENEDICT - TEEN", *cont. on page 7*



“BENEDICT TEEN”, *from page 6*

variety of calls that members of the community experienced leading them to enter the monastic life. Students then had an opportunity to ask the presenting monks any questions



concerning the process of discerning a monastic vocation and about the vicissitudes of living in community.

Of course, liturgy played an integral role in the learning experience as well, with all students attending the offices and daily Eucharist. A few early risers even managed to make it into the chapel half an hour ahead of Lauds in order to join in some silent prayer and spiritual reading. Pete planned this retreat to coincide with the July 11 celebration of the feast commemorating the death of St Benedict so that the students could experience the full effect of a Benedictine solemn liturgy (humble as it is at our tiny priory)!

Meal times provided monks and students with yet another opportunity to share in some question and answer. But not all conversations were about *ora et labora*. Fr. Eugene and Elizabeth Liñan conversed freely about logarithms and various other aspects of high school math “yesterday and today.” Others found card games served as a frequently frenetic form of post-prandial recreation.

At least one student, Orlando Avila of Utah, expressed his wonder at the silence and calm of the priory and noted that he is considering the possibility of studying for the priesthood after graduation in another few years. His cousin Omar, who attended the retreat last year, was fascinated by the library and the depth of studying and reading that the monks participate in on a daily basis. Perhaps there are even a few future Benedictines in the ranks of these young people.

In a final gesture of Benedictine hospitality, the young men and women of this year’s Benedict-Teen Retreat invited the monks to serve themselves first in the food line for Thursday morning’s farewell breakfast. •

Chronicle of Events at the Monastery

June 25 – September 27, 2012

June 25–30: Phil Hughes, Presbyterian Pastor, and Sisters Martha and Miriam, CSC, all from Salt Lake City, made private retreats this week.

June 28: Fr. Nathaniel arrives from Brazil to spend some time with us to discern whether he is called to our community.

June 30: For the second time this summer a group of volunteers comes from Mountain Home AFB to help with cleaning and grounds projects at the monastery.

July 2–8: Road Scholar Program on social history of the Middle Ages. Presenters are our friends and/or oblates, Janne Goldbeck, Susanna Lundgren, Jane Rickenbaugh, and Joanne Draper, along with Fr. Hugh and Fr. Ezekiel Lotz, OSB.

July 8: Oblate Picnic: 9:00 Mass; 11:00 presentation on oblates at 11:00; 12:00 lunch; 1:00 talk by Stacie Smith about her sculpture “Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo” and her stations of the cross; 2:00 sing-along with Fr. Andrew.

July 9–12: Benedict-Teen retreat under the direction of Oblate, Pete Espil.

July 16–22: Road Scholar Program on Ancient Rome; presenters Ron Pepin, Ellen Martin, Vanessa Butterfield, Joanne Draper, Fr. Hugh

July 23–29: Road Scholar Program on Religion and the Settling of the West: presenters John O’Hagan, Dale Soden, Roy and Jodi Anderson, Jim Gentry, Megan Murphy and Fr. Hugh.

July 30: Supper put on for the monastic community by the family and friends of Steve DiLucca.

July 31: Annual Knights of Columbus picnic at the monastery

August 2–4: Episcopalian Retreat

August 4: Fr. Boniface begins three weekends helping at Driggs, St. Anthony, Rexburg and Island Park; his ministry is cut short when he has an automobile accident that left him with some broken ribs. Fr. Ezekiel says Mass at Mountain Home AFB.

August 6–9: Silent group retreat

August 7: Fr. Eugene wins nine blue ribbons at the Jerome County Fair for his vegetables.

August 13–19: Road Scholar Program on Quilting: presenters Leona Manke and Marilyn Shake.

August 22–26: Retreat for deacon candidates for the Diocese of Boise.

August 22: Fr. Paul’s petition for transfer to the Monastery of the Ascension is approved by the monastery chapter.

August 27–September 2: Road Scholar Program: Hiking on the Snake River Plain: leaders and instructors: Catherine Nelson, Dennis Pettygrove, Darlene Wagner, Fran Golding, Fr. Hugh, Bart Butterfield, Shawn Wilsey, Anita Koehn.

August 27: Br. Tobiah celebrates 25th anniversary of his profession.



GENERAL OBLATE EVENTS 2012-2013

October 13, 2012, Saturday, Outing to Marymount Hermitage
Retreat: November 2-4, 2012 at the Monastery
Retreat, March 1-3, 2013 at the Monastery (by official of the
Vatican Observatory)
International Oblate Meeting, October 4-10, 2013, Rome
Retreat, November 1-3, 2013 at the monastery

OBLATE MEETINGS, 2012-2013

Discussion text, Terrence Kardong, OSB, Conversations with
Saint Benedict: The Rule in Today's World (Liturgical Press,
2012). Fr. Hugh has copies for anyone who wants (\$13.63).
Or you can order pb or ebook from Amazon.

Treasure Valley (at St. Paul's):

September 21, Friday, 6:30 PM (potluck) (Kardong, chs.1-2)
October 14, Sunday, 2:00 PM (Kardong, chs. 3-5)
December 2, Sunday, 2:00 PM (Kardong, chs. 6-8)

January 20, Sunday, 2:00 PM (Kardong, chs. 9-11)
March 10, Sunday, 2:00 PM (Kardong, ch. 12-13)
April 14, Sunday, 2:00 PM (Kardong, ch. 14-15)
May 19, Sunday, 2:00 PM (Kardong, chs. 16-17)

Magic Valley (at the Monastery)

September 23 Sunday, 1 PM (Kardong, chs. 1-2)
October 21, Sunday, 1 PM (Kardong, chs. 3-5)
December 9, Sunday, 1 PM (Kardong, chs. 6-8)
January 27, Sunday, 1 PM (Kardong, chs. 9-11)
March 17, Sunday, 1 PM (Kardong, chs. 12-13)
April 21, Sunday, 1 PM (Kardong, chs. 14-15)
May 26, 1:00 PM (Kardong, chs. 16-17)

Idaho Falls and Helena, MT

TBA arranged



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The Benedictine Monks of Idaho, Inc.
Monastery of the Ascension
541 East 100 South
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