



Monastery of the Ascension

THE DESERT CHRONICLE

XXIV, No. 1 MARCH 2015

Footwashing

By Fr. Hugh Feiss, OSB

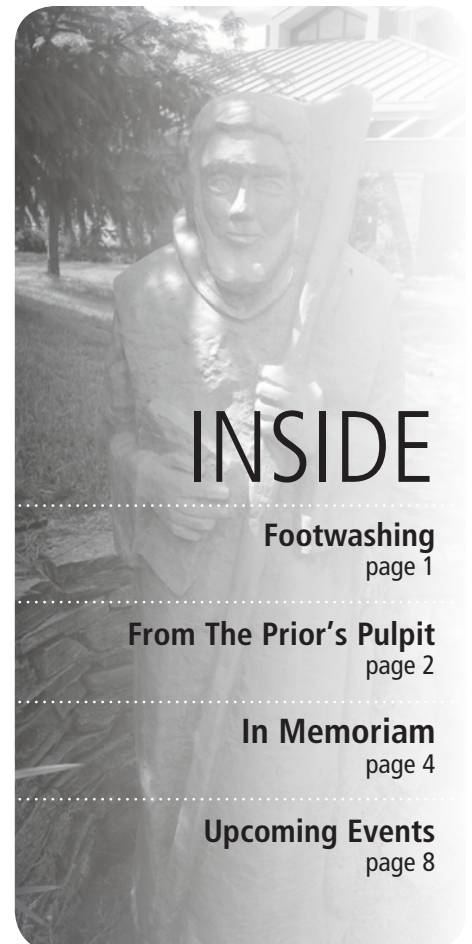
THE FOCAL POINT OF JESUS' MESSAGE WAS THE RULE OR REIGN OF GOD—THE ACTIVITY OF GOD'S TRANSFORMATIVE LOVE AND JUSTICE AT WORK AMONG HUMAN BEINGS. THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS BUILT IN AND AMONG PEOPLE OF FLESH AND BLOOD WITHIN TIME AND SPACE: THE KINGDOM IS WHEREVER GOD'S WISDOM IS RULING, WHERE HIS LOVE AND JUSTICE ARE CREATING HIS NEW PEOPLE.

Each act of Christ was the reign of God in action, and each tells us something about what the reign is like. One such act is Jesus' washing of his disciples' feet at the Last Supper (John 13). John does not describe the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper as the other gospels do. Instead he tells of Jesus' washing of his disciple's feet. He follows that with a long address Jesus gave in which he says goodbye and speaks of his mission and that of his disciples.

John introduces the story of the footwashing by saying that Jesus knew that now was his hour to depart from this world and go to the Father. He had loved his own who were in the world, and now he loved them to the end. So, during the supper, knowing that the Father had put all things into his hands, and that he came from the Father and was going to the Father, Jesus got up from the table, took off his outer garment, tied a towel around himself, poured water into a basin, and began to wash his disciples' feet. When he was finished he asked them, do you know what I, your teacher and Lord, have done to you? I have set you an example—you should do as I have done and wash one another's feet. From now on I am telling you before it happens, so that when it happens you may believe that I AM. Whoever receives the one I send, receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me.

Pope Francis' called attention to the fundamental meaning of the footwashing when he washed the feet of a dozen inmates at a prison for 14-21 year-olds. The inmates were mainly gypsies or immigrants from North Africa. Two of the twelve in the ceremony were women, one of whom was a Muslim. In doing so, he continued a practice he had followed as archbishop: doing the footwashing in jails, hospitals, and hospices. Pope Francis is reported to have said, "This is a symbol, it is a sign — washing your feet means I am at your service," Francis told the youngsters. "Help one another. This is what Jesus teaches us. This is what I do. And I do it with my heart. I do this with my heart because it is my duty, as a priest and bishop I must be at your service." An interesting side note is that the Italian minister of Justice attended the Mass; he has been

See "FOOTWASHING", cont on page 3



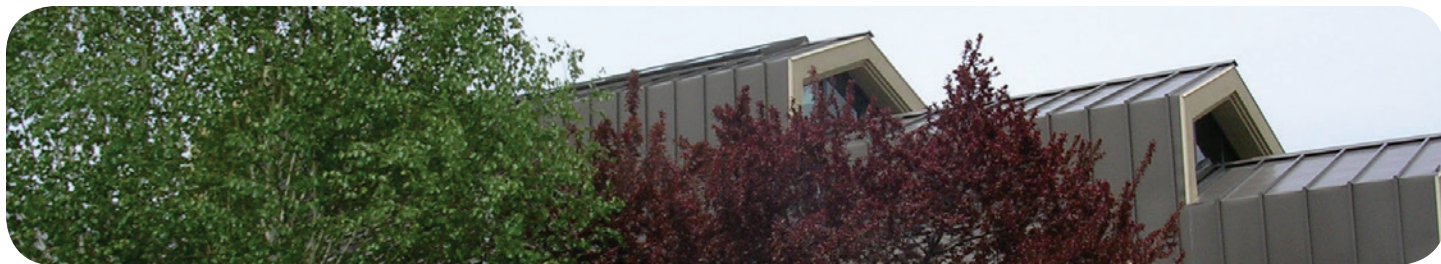
INSIDE

Footwashing
page 1

From The Prior's Pulpit
page 2

In Memoriam
page 4

Upcoming Events
page 8



From the Prior's Pulpit

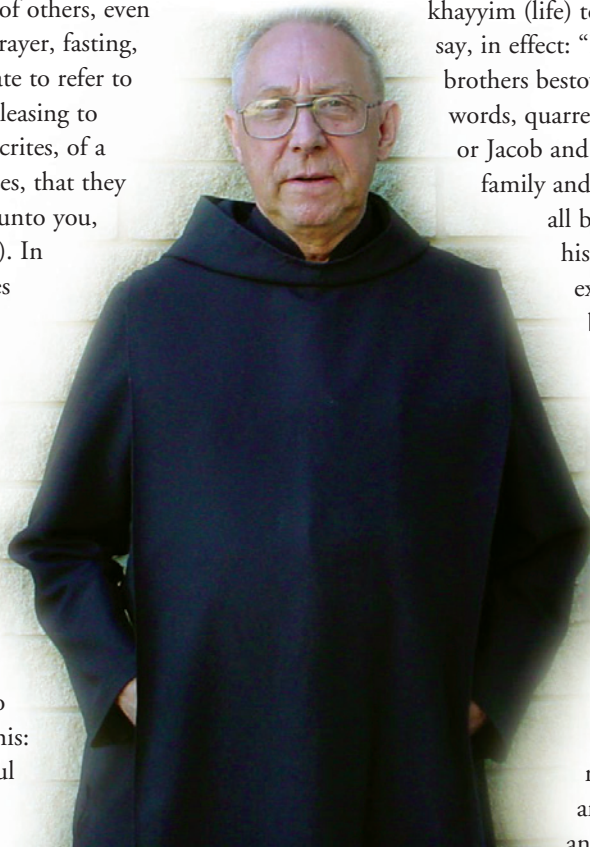
LENT: A TIME TO RELENT

By Fr. Kenneth Hein, OSB

YES, I KNOW THAT THE ABOVE TITLE IS A BIT “CORNY”. BUT IT CONFORMS TO THE KIND OF SERIOUS PUNDITRY THAT WE FIND IN THE HEBREW VERSION OF THE PSALMS--AND THEY ARE DIVINELY INSPIRED! SO, WITH THAT IN MIND, I WILL PROCEED TO UNPACK MY PUN.

The term, “lent”, refers to the lengthening of the daylight during the springtime. “Relent”, from the Latin *relentescere*, means “to soften” or “become less stern”. Now we are just a step away from making a few good Lenten resolutions.

If you tend to be stern, then Lent might be a good time to “loosen up” and try to be less demanding of others, even as you “tighten up” on yourself through prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and so on. Jesus did not hesitate to refer to cheerless penitential practice as less than pleasing to God: “When you fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad appearance; for they disfigure their faces, that they may be seen by others to fast. Truly I say unto you, they have received their reward” (Mt 6:16). In other words, as St. Paul puts it, “God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9:7). But, to use another well-worn cliché, “That’s easier said than done”, especially when one is feeling tired and hungry, and the kids are sick and upchucking, and the rest of the family is cranky, and the boss is on your case, and the car needs repair, and the furnace is not functioning properly, and--well, I’m sure that you get the point. Life often seems to be “the pits” rather than a “bowl of cherries”--to employ a couple more trite expressions. So my suggestion for a Lenten resolution is this: “I resolve, with God’s help, to be a cheerful person at all times and to be thankful for whatever God sends my way. Amen.”



Now, one last thing: Here’s a pun from the Psalms that brings the meaning of the word of God right home to the family and the time of Lent. Psalm 133, as given in the New American Bible, begins with the statement: “How good it is, how pleasant, where people dwell as one.” I don’t think anyone would quarrel with that idea. However, I will quarrel with the above translation. The Hebrew text of this Psalm emphatically states: “Behold how good and pleasant it is, when brothers are dwelling in unity.” The emphasis on “brothers” is made through a play on the words *akhiym* (brothers) at the beginning of this short Psalm and

khayyim (life) toward the end of the Psalm, so as to say, in effect: “Brothers dwelling without strife are brothers bestowing the blessing of life”. In other words, quarreling brothers (think of Cain and Abel or Jacob and Esau) readily disturb the unity of the family and even of nations. Of course, we are all brothers and sisters in the Lord. But historically and in the Psalmist’s own experience, quarreling brothers have brought great harm to many families and communities. So, you men who are reading this column might consider your role of instilling peace and harmony in your homes and at work, and everywhere else. Is it not time that men in particular be less intent on war and get busy with the responsibility of keeping the peace at home and abroad? Certainly, women are not excluded from this task, but it would just as certainly help and be a blessing, if more men “got with it” to bring peace and harmony to our suffering families and strife-ridden world. •





Footwashing in Jesus' time was a common occurrence, an act of courtesy toward guests, which was performed by servants. The modern equivalent of footwashing is perhaps the work that maids do in motels. They pick up the towels that customers leave scattered around the bathroom, have them washed, and neatly arrange them for the next customer. It can't be much fun earning minimum wage picking up after people who barely notice you as they are leaving and you are working your way down the hallway from room to room. That is precisely the example Jesus gives us. He wants us to be servants to one another. This is a command to each of Jesus' followers, a rule in the kingdom of God—serve one another. This command takes on a particular nuance in the case of someone with authority and power. They have their authority in order to serve in a specific unifying and directing way.

In the Rule of Benedict, footwashing occurs in two places. First, in the chapter on the weekly kitchen servers, St. Benedict says that those ending their week of service should do two things: wash the towels the monks used to wash their hands and feet, and with those beginning their week of kitchen service they should wash the feet of all. Thus, over time, all the monks would wash all the other monks' feet.

The second mention of footwashing occurs in the chapter on receiving guests (53:12–14). Benedict says that the abbot should give arriving guests water for the hands then the abbot and all the community should wash the feet of all guests. Then Benedict says, when their feet have been washed, let them say, “O God, we have received your mercy in the midst of your temple,” The monastery is God's house (53.22), his temple. The monks are like their guests; the monks are guest in God's house. They live there by divine hospitality. Christ has invited them to his supper, he has washed their feet, so they should wash each other's feet, and the feet of all whom Christ sends them.

In addition, in medieval monasteries, each week the abbot washed the feet of his monks. This was in fulfillment of Jesus' *mandatum*, the command he gave at the last supper. Hence, the rite was called the *Maundy*. And Holy Thursday was called Maundy Thursday.

This, then, is what it is like in God's kingdom, in a place where “our God reigns.” It is a place of mutual footwashing, of hospitality and service, exemplified in a rite that originally was not just symbolic but practical. Service was not just mutual; it was and is an act of hospitality extended to all those who happen to come to us, and in that extension the Kingdom of God finds a foothold outside the community, as the light of Christ begins to glimmer in a new place. The three persons whose lives are celebrated elsewhere in this issue of the *Desert Chronicle* are examples of people who by their service to others brought the Kingdom of God into the world. •

urging that something be done to ease overcrowding in Italy's prisons.

Footwashing ceremony functions in several ways in the liturgy on Holy Thursday. It is a re-enactment of what Jesus did for his disciples at the meal at which he instituted the Eucharist. In telling the disciples there to do this in memory of me, in some way pointed to the role of priests in its celebration. It is a reminder: as I have washed your feet, so should you wash each other's feet; as I have loved you, so you should love one another.





Marge Prothman, Oblate and Friend (1927-2015)

Fr. Hugh Feiss, OSB

OUR FRIEND AND OBLATE MARGE PROTHMAN DIED ON JANUARY 19, 2015. MARGE WAS BORN MARGARET OWEN IN VANCOUVER, BC, JUNE 22, 1927. AS A TEENAGER she was an avid ski racer and was a member of the Canadian team in the 1950 World Ski Championships. She worked as a ski instructor. In 1950 she married Greg Prothman. In 1954 they moved to Washington, and lived for 36 years in Enumclaw, where they raised their family. Marge worked as an instructor in the Crystal Mountain ski area and in the ski shop.

After retirement, Marge and Greg moved to McCall, ID and then to Hailey, ID, both ski resorts. Marge became a very dedicated backpacker, and hiked the Pacific Crest Trail, and went on trekking expeditions to Nepal and Peru. Her fellow long-distance hikers knew her as the “Old Gal.” She tested lightweight backpacking gear for equipment companies. She also took up weight-lifting as set a world record in her age and weight class. She loved traveling and visited many other countries as well, including a pilgrimage to the Holy Land with Fr. Simeon.

In 1993, one year after she joined the Catholic Church in McCall, ID, when she

was 65, Marge wrote an account in the *Idaho Catholic Register* about finding Catholic churches in Nepal and Thailand and attending Mass at them. The next year Marge volunteered with Mother Teresa’s sisters in Kolkata. In another article for the *Idaho Catholic Register*, she described her work:

“The *Dying Destitute* facility at Kalighat is part of a

complex of buildings which make up the Hindu Temple of Kali. Pilgrims come from all over India to worship the deities of Kali and Shiva. Most of the patients cared for by the Sisters and Brothers of the Missionaries of Charity and the volunteers are either Hindu or Muslim. The facility is divided into half, one side for men and the other side for ladies.

“We had 40 to 50 ladies on our side and they probably had every disease known to man. Most everyone had TB or some type of cancer, Aids, malaria, dysentery, infectious scabies and a number of unknowns. Our job was not to diagnose but to give them breakfast, wash and bathe them, assist with dressings and medications, and spoon-feed those too weak to feed themselves. We also had to scrub the beds down each day and do the washing of the sheets and nightgowns...



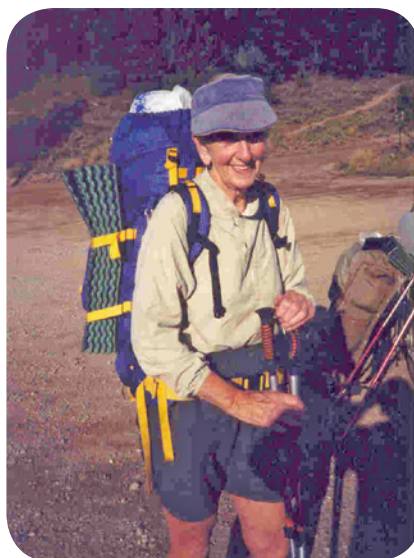
“From Sister Lourdes I came to understand the dying. Sister was 10 years my junior and she had black and blue knees from praying. She also had a quality of spirituality that radiated to me. When the ladies died, and some did each week and I objected to that, she would say ‘now Marjorie’ in that wonderful Indian lilt of the English language, “Do you not see, they are now with GOD.” Then she showed



me a lady whose face had relaxed and was smooth and young looking; there was no more pain; her limbs were now straight. Even though this lady was still breathing you could see that the struggle was over and she was indeed with GOD... Dying with dignity took on a new meaning for me. It means dying with someone holding you, either praying or singing to you,”

Marge became an oblate of the Monastery of the Ascension not long after her conversion to Catholicism. In the Oblate Handbook (2002; 2nd ed. 2006), Marge wrote a history of the oblates and whenever she could get a ride from Hailey she attended the oblate meetings and retreats at the monastery. She represented the oblates at a meeting at St. Martin’s Abbey not many years ago, because she would not allow logistics to stand in the way of going. Greg and Marge worked together on some art projects. In the monastery dining room there is an icon that Marge painted and Greg framed.

She was a good friend of Fr. Simeon Van de Voord, OSB, who served as pastor at McCall for some years, and of, Abbot



Joseph Wood, OSB, who died earlier this year. She and Fr. Andrew Baumgartner, OSB, shared a passion for backpacking, and they went on several hikes together. After Marge lost the use of a leg in an accident in Nepal, she still liked to travel. Fr. Andrew was one of those who went along to help her on these cruises and other outings.

Now her remains

will rest next to Greg, her husband in the columbarium at the monastery. Rest is a strange word to use in connection with someone so full of life and energy as Marge was. Christ said he came that we might have life and have it in abundance. Marge was certainly full of life on earth. One cannot even imagine the vigor of the life she now enjoys with God and the saints. •

Stan Fritzler (1919-2015)

Fr. Hugh Feiss, OSB



STAN LIVED DOWN THE ROAD FROM US, ON THE PROPERTY WHERE HIS SON-IN-LAW DAVE OPERATES THE AUTO REPAIR SHOP WHERE ALL THE PRIORY VEHICLES ARE SERVED. Stan was born in Gooding, ID, and had very happy memories of growing up close to nature, hunting, hiking and

camping with his parents. He married Loretta Belle Lopez in St. Edward’s Catholic Church in Twin Falls, ID, in 1941. The couple travel to California and Ohio, but ultimately returned to Idaho, where Stan worked for the Idaho Department of Highways from 1957–1983.

Stan was a man of many talents. He turned a coal shed into the home where he raised his family. He did woodworking and his crafts graced both his own home and St Jerome’s Catholic Church, where he supplied a beautiful wooden container to hold urns of cremated remains. He helped build the deck on the rooms in the mobile living units installed behind the monastery. He was an enthusiastic rock hound and a very good cook. An avid reader he could discuss knowledgeably local and world events, history, theology and politics. He loved technology and learned to use an iPad at the age of 94.

Stan’s first priority was his family. He is survived by his wife Loretta, to whom he was married for 73 years, and seven children, numerous grandchildren and great grandchildren. The family prayed together. Stan was active in the Cursillo movement and belonged to a long-lived “fourth-day” group. He and Loretta were moving spirits in the Ministry Development Program that met at the monastery in the early 1990s. They were active in the monastery’s oblates for many years before old age restricted their movements. When we took on the task of writing and distributing the oblate manual, Stan helped for hours assembling it, with the care and accuracy that was typical of him. He avoided the limelight, but did the work and the prayer. •





Intertwined Mortalities

By Catfael

ON THE SIXTH DAY “GOD SAID, ‘LET THE EARTH BRING FORTH EVERY KIND OF LIVING CREATURE: TAME ANIMALS, CRAWLING THINGS, AND EVERY KIND OF WILD ANIMAL.’ AND SO IT HAPPENED... Then God said: ‘Let us make human beings in our image, after our likeness. Let them have dominion.’... God looked at what he had made and found it very good.”

It sometimes said that fetal development recapitulates evolutionary history. I think that my history recapitulates the evolution of the relationship of humans and my species (*felis catus*—Dr. Allen wouldn’t let anyone call me an “alley cat”). Feral cats were attracted to human habitations for warmth and food (human habitations attracted rodents and produced edible rubbish). Humans tolerated them for their rodent hunting skills. This pragmatic interaction is evident in the medieval exchange rate of one small goat for nine mousers. Anyway, I don’t know where I came from originally, but I am told that as a small kitten I ended up on the patio outside the monastery dining room. I have since seen mother cats, desperate for the future of their kittens, leave them near the monastery in hopes that they will be taken care of. Maybe that is how I got there. Anyway, if my ancestry was feral, I was not, and my hunger overcame

any fear of humans. I went for the tuna fish and milk that was offered me, and even let humans bring me inside.

The next step in cat evolution and my own life—following quickly on the first step—was attachment. The mouser became a cherished pet. I needed company, and I attached to the monk who took me in. And vice versa. I became an indoor-outdoor cat, who had human friends. Before too long I went on my first traumatic trip to Dr. Richard Allen’s to get “fixed” and get shots. I ran wild in the car the whole way to his office, and I inflicted enough wounds on him that he wasn’t sure he wanted to see me again.

I developed feline friends. Grace was the nicest of them. We used to take walks with people and chase each other around the monastery grounds. I developed feline enemies as well: a resident cat who was old, cranky and extremely territorial, and various feral cats that came on the property and challenged me. I gradually felt at home and felt compelled to defend my territory, roughly the area of mowed grass around the monastery. I got hurt fairly often, developed infections, and each time I had to take another awful car ride to Dr. Allen’s for examination and prescriptions. I have become a walking laboratory for feline antibiotics. He said I was just doing my job. And of course there were the annual appointments for vaccinations. I never liked the rides, but after a while I became friends with Dr. Allen. This was clear the time that I escaped from the car when we arrived at the doctor’s office, then went





and waited for someone to let me into his veterinary office. You might suspect it was an incidence of “Stockholm syndrome,” but it wasn’t. He and his ladies treated me so well that the negatives of visiting him seemed less important.

The last couple of

winters I have not had anyone to brush me, so when I rolled in the gravel driveway and picked up oil, I developed clumps of hair on my back in places I couldn’t reach. Dr. Allen decided I should have a spring haircut, so that earned me more trips to his office. He wisely decided that it would be advisable to administer an anesthetic before the doing the coiffure. I especially liked the “lion cut.”

The last few months have been tough ones. I developed an infection in my eye, which did not respond to antibiotics and other treatments, and eventually ulcerated. Dr. Allen then did a very delicate operation on my eye and saved it. To make sure it didn’t re-infect he kept me in his hospital for a couple of weeks. Everyone was so nice to me. I even gained a couple of pounds while I was there.

Now, he is gone. He died on Monday, February 9, at work in his office-hospital that I have visited so many times and come to feel at home in. It is reported—no doubt rightly so—that cats live in the present and don’t think about death. However, let me break that rule. For all of my twelve years, I have known Dr. Allen. He has saved me from death many times. There will come a time for me when not even Dr. Allen could save me and I will die, just as he as died. He died at 59, which is about how old I am in human years. I know that if I had died before him, he would have missed me, just as I will miss him. He knew that death is inevitable, part of being a creature of the sixth day.

St. Francis, who had eye-troubles of his own, composed the “Canticle of the Sun” not long before he died. It is considered the first literary work in the Italian language. He prayed that God would be praised for and through (*per*) all creatures:

Be praised, my Lord, through and for our sister Mother Earth,
Who feeds us and rules us.
And produces various fruits with colored flowers and herbs.
Be praised, my Lord, through and for those who forgive for
love of you,
Through and for those who endure sickness and trial.
Happy those who endure in peace,
For by you, Most High, they will be crowned.
Be praised, my Lord, through and for sister Bodily Death,
From whose embrace no living person can escape. . . .
Happy those she finds doing your most holy will.

Our Sister Death found Dr. Allen when he was doing God’s most holy will, advancing the kingdom of God one dog and cat at a time. Now he is in the embrace of God. I am sad, but happy for him.



My whole life has been intertwined with the life of the monks, whose prayers I often attend, and with the life of my friend Dr. Allen. A woman once asked an English clergyman if her pets would be with her in heaven, and he replied, “Madame, if they are integral to your eternal happiness they will certainly be there.” Pope Francis recently said that “the new heaven” and “the new earth” that Christ will bring about at the end of times involves “the bringing of all things into the fullness of being.” Years ago, Pope Paul VI told a boy that “one day we will see our pets in the eternity of Christ.” The press wrongly attributed that statement to Pope Francis, who has been critical of spending money on pets to the neglect of the poor. I look forward with the certainty of hope that one day I will see Dr. Allen “in the eternity of Christ.” And Grace, and the monks, and Ellen who gives me creamer I am not supposed to

have, and Sarah who lets me sleep on her bed when she visits. Then, I will be able to tell them, as I did not have a chance to do in this life, how much I care about them. Then I will be not just *felis*, but *felix*, not just feline, but very happy. •





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Retreat

Sr. Barbara Glodowski will be presenting the Breakthrough Enneagram workshop at the Monastery of the Ascension on April 24 - 25, 2015. The Breakthrough Enneagram uses the ancient wisdom preserved by the Monks at Mount Athos and focuses on discovering your personality traits through your weaknesses. Learn how to walk on the path of transformation through Christ's power.



Road Scholar Programs the Monastery for 2015

May 25-31: Geology of the Snake River Plain

June 8-14: Quilting at the Monastery

June 22-28: Medieval Murder Mysteries: Their Settings in English History

June 29-July 5: Ancient Rome

July 13-19: Religion and the Settling of the West

July 27-August 2: Dante

August 31-September 6: Hiking amid Nature and History on the Snake River Plain



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