



THE DESERT CHRONICLE

XXVIII, No. 1 MARCH 2019

CAPSTONE MISSIONS: Twenty Years of Helping Orphans in Tijuana

By Fr. Hugh Feiss, OSB



THE MONASTERY HAS BEEN TANGENTIALLY CONNECTED WITH A LAY-LED ORGANIZATION WHOSE MEMBERS BY THEIR WORK AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT HAVE BEEN HELPING SEVERAL orphanages in Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico. What follows are interviews with two people, Deb Miciak, who has been involved almost from the beginning, the other, Greg Franz, who is currently the board president of the organization.

Fr. Hugh: *Deb, you were involved with Capstone Missions almost from the beginning. How did it start?*

Deb: A man from another non-profit was in Tijuana and came across a struggling Catholic-administered orphanage called San José. He told Ralph May, who lived in Jerome, about San José. Ralph organized a group of volunteers to go to Tijuana to do

See "CAPSTONE MISSIONS", cont on page 3

INSIDE

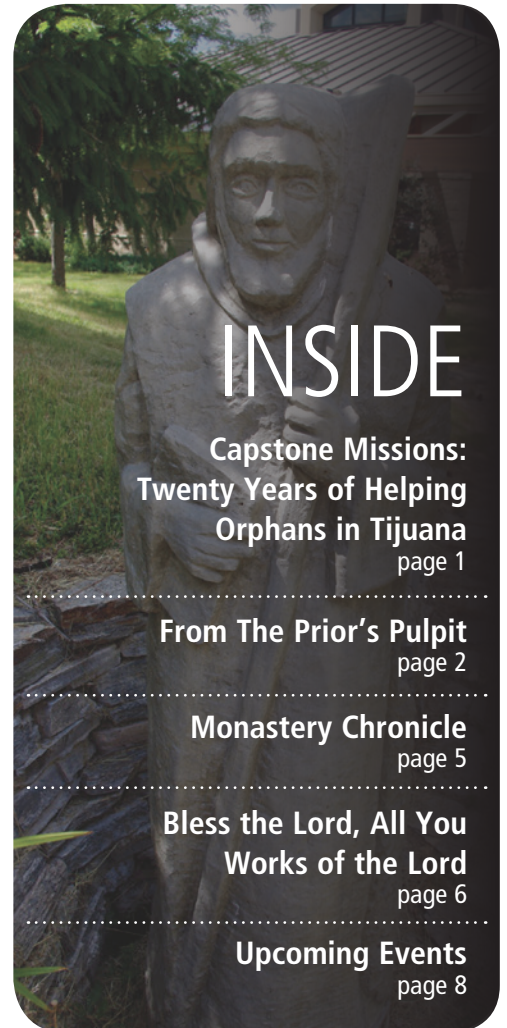
Capstone Missions:
Twenty Years of Helping
Orphans in Tijuana
page 1

From The Prior's Pulpit
page 2

Monastery Chronicle
page 5

Bless the Lord, All You
Works of the Lord
page 6

Upcoming Events
page 8





From the Prior's Pulpit

Dear Friends of the Monastery

IN THE READINGS AT MASS WE'VE RECENTLY BEEN LISTENING TO THE ACCOUNT OF CREATION IN THE BOOK OF GENESIS. IN *GENESIS* 1:25 WE heard: "*God looked at everything he had made, and he found it very good.*" What a marvelous reflection on the creative work of God! All creation is intended to be *very good*.

We're getting ready for Lent, and in Chapter 49 of Holy Rule, *The Observance of Lent*, St. Benedict tells us "to wash away in this holy season the negligences of other times." It seems possible to connect the need to "wash away negligences" with the call to restore the goodness of God's creation described in Genesis: *he found it very good*.

St. Benedict wasn't talking about ecological concerns, but I don't think it would be totally out of place to make that connection. We can certainly give thought to the necessity to respect and preserve the goodness in the creation of human beings. The life and health issues that need attention connected with that are obvious.

What are we doing to promote life in one another? Or from another angle, what have we done to detract from the good life of another? That may well be an application of St. Benedict's advice to *wash away in this holy season the negligences of other times*.

The *washing away* could well mean to stop doing or thinking something about my neighbor. It could also, and maybe even better, mean doing something positive for our neighbor.

Some years ago I read a reflection on Lenten fasting attributed to Pope Francis. I am unable to site the source, but I found it very helpful for my Lenten reflection, and pretty good for the rest of the year as well.

Here is some of it: "Fast from hurting words and say kind words. Fast from anger and be filled with patience. Fast from pessimism and be filled with hope. Fast from worries and trust God. Fast from complaints and contemplate simplicity. Fast from selfishness and be compassionate to others. Fast from grudges and be reconciled. Fast from words and be silent so you can listen."

The word "lent" has to do with new life. We are close to the new life of springtime. So may our lent be a time of renewed life for all of us. And bring us to a Blessed Easter! Please keep us in prayer, and be assured of ours. Peace and good things.

Fr. Boniface Lautz, O.S.B.
Prior





"CAPSTONE MISSIONS", from page 1

some clean up and construction projects. In those days, St. José served special needs children and was very underfunded. Among those who were involved from the very beginning were Reed and Colleen Crozier. They are still very involved. Not long after these mission trips got started Sr. María Elena, who was in charge at San José, came with some of the children (all of them young) to stay at the Monastery of the Ascension for Christmas. This was the beginning of a long association. We have since had several board meetings at the monastery.

Fr. Hugh: *Some of you have been deeply involved in Capstone since the beginning and still are. I had a chance to see how hard Colleen, you and many others worked at the recent Capstone Missions crab feed. So, Capstone was an informal group who helped with construction and funding at San José and other sites in Tijuana. How long did that continue?*

Deb: It went on for about five years; then Ralph and his family left for Peru in 2003/2004 to become missionaries with the Camboni Lay Missionaries, and we decided to organize as a non-profit. We elected a board. Br. Selby Coffman of the monastery was the first president. Colleen has served as president of the board for several terms. We developed a format, whereby we went to Tijuana four times a year with about a dozen volunteers. We drove straight through. Sometimes we took a truckload of building supplies. We were fortunate to have some skilled carpenters, like Marvin McKay and Dave Ankenbauer to guide the volunteers. Ralph had reached out to Deacon Chuck Skoro at St. Paul's at BSU, and he encouraged students to go on mission trips. So many of the participants in those trips, especially the semester break and spring break trips, were college and sometimes high school students. In 2007 St. José was financially and structurally sound, so some of us on the board went to Tijuana to see where else we could help. We chose the Hacienda, which at the time had 100 children and had many financial needs. We started doing repairs there and sending money.

Fr. Hugh: *What animates your commitment to Capstone Missions.*

Deb: I love the people we work with in Tijuana; they are like

family. I believe Jesus called me to this ministry. It has helped me in many ways in my spiritual and personal life. My job is to coordinate most facets of the mission trips. There have been difficulties and hardship, but they are minor compared to the hardships faced by the people we work with.

Fr. Hugh: *Greg, compared to Deb, you are a relative newcomer to Capstone Missions. How did you get involved in Capstone Missions?*

Greg: I first became involved in Capstone Missions in 2008, when Chuck Skoro and you encouraged us at St. Paul's at Boise State University to join a trip. I was a freshman and went along with 12 other BSU students. A scholarship fund paid for most of my expenses. It costs \$450 to go on a Capstone Trip: the money pays for travel expenses, food, and building supplies. It was the first time I had experienced at first hand an impoverished environment. I went back to Tijuana each of the next three years and also helped as a volunteer at some of the crab feasts fundraisers at the parish in Jerome.

Hugh: *What was the impact on those who took part?*

Greg: Going to Tijuana had a big impact on the students who went from BSU. Chuck Skoro, Deb and Rusty Gideon and the other adult leaders had everything well organized and went on many trips themselves. They never let us forget that we were in someone else's place to do what the people there wanted us to do. On one trip, we were asked to tear down a wall. We did, but the next year it had been rebuilt. The needs at the orphanage had changed. That was okay, it was their orphanage. It is their needs that drive what we do. Of course, everyone who goes profits from the experience, but that is not the main purpose of the trips. After all these years, the people there trust us; there is a solid relationship between two cultures. The work can be hard and long, but what we do is a shared enterprise. People learn that they actually like helping others, and that one can be very happy with much less than most North Americans think is necessary. Some participants went on to volunteer in other places and for longer period. For example, several as volunteered, at a facility in the Dominican Republic that offers education and medical care to Haitian refugees.

"Education is an important way to break the cycle of poverty."





Hugh: *You left Idaho for three years after graduation, then came back? How did that affect your relationship with Capstone?*

Greg: For all the reasons I've indicated it was very hard to leave Capstone behind. When I returned in early November 2015 I got involved right away. I came to a board meeting at the monastery later that month, was asked to join the board, and was designated to become president of the board the next year. I had just met Laura who is now my wife. I did not have many obligations besides my job and had the passion the job required, so I accepted. I spent the next year observing how Colleen Crozier, by then in her sixth year as president, did the job. The president has to be involved in everything, but not so immersed in any one thing that he or she loses sight of the big picture. With the help of the board the president must take care of conflicts. Rusty and Colleen had been president before me, and Kevin Rexroat has served as treasurer since Capstone's inception. Besides myself, there are two new board members, Shannon Barnes and Deb Haman.

Different members of the board take charge of different areas, but in general we take care of the finances, plan the mission trips, ensure publicity for events, and fund raise. We meet about once a month. Board members often go on trips—I'm leading the March 2019 trip. They keep informed on what is happening at the orphanages we work with in Tijuana. When a young person from the orphanages needs help to go to school or have medical care we try to help. The board also makes personnel decisions, which can be very difficult in a volunteer organization to which people are deeply committed.

Fr. Hugh: *I went to the crab feast at the parish in Jerome this year and have helped at them in past years. It is a very big undertaking.*

Greg: Yes, it is an extremely laborious endeavor, but is our one big source of funding. Most of the people who come are from the Magic Valley, Twin Falls, Jerome especially. The parish of St. Jerome has been incredibly supportive by allowing us to rent their facilities and by endorsing and publicizing the event. We are very grateful to Fr. Adrian, his predecessors, and the people of the parish. There were about 400 people in attendance this year, eating crab, playing games, buying raffles tickets, taking part in auctions. We are financially solid because of it. We also have had a Fall Fiesta in the Boise area. In the coming years, we hope to make the fall fiesta less a fundraiser and more into a way to get the word out about Capstone Missions.

Fr. Hugh: *What are Capstone Missions plans for the future?*

Greg: We have had requests from schools to arrange for a trip for their students. We want to accommodate them. We have done four trips a year; we might do only three with smaller numbers, depending on how many volunteers want to go. We have partnered with Corazon de Vida a group from Southern California who are involved in the same work. They keep us informed about what is happening week by week. We would like to expand our funding of education. We are currently funding a teaching position at one facility and are supporting another student as he begins college. Education is an important way to break the cycle of poverty.

Fr. Hugh: *Deb what are your hopes for capstone?*

Deb: It would be nice if there came a time when our organization was no longer needed. Meanwhile, I hope we can continue to serve the orphans and poor of Tijuana by providing financial support, sound housing and a safe environment. We can help the young people at Hacienda get an education and provide for more staffing there.

The infants and very young children who were at St. José when we started are now grown up. We have turned the orphanage into housing for young women who grew up in orphanages and now want to attend college. It will be able to house ten young women guided by a house mother. It is now organized as a separate non-profit with a small board of directors, including Felix Castro and Silvia who were involved with St. José even before Capstone was. We will no longer house volunteers at St. José. There is an unused school building at the Hacienda that is to be converted into a hostel for volunteers.

As Greg indicates, because of different priorities now at the Catholic student centers at Idaho's universities, and because spring break times are no longer the same statewide, the board is considering how many trips to have a year and how to recruit for them.

We have had great success partnering with Corazon de Vida and are exploring further partnerships. We occasionally provide construction assistance at a home for single mothers and children. We hope to do more to promote education of the young people and staff training and retention.

Fr. Hugh: *Thanks you both for this interview. You have done and are doing admirable work. God bless you. •*





Monastery Chronicle

By Fr. Boniface Lautz, OSB

DECEMBER

Christmas went well, with a few unexpected glitches. We usually sing/chant vigils before Midnight Mass. At the last minute one of the cantors was feeling poorly and unable to sing. That reduced our choir from seven to six. We cut out some of the singing and all turned out well. We had a good attendance at both Masses. Br. Tobiah and helpers prepared a fine dinner.

Decorations are Br. Sylvester's department. He recruited help from local friends and the whole house took on a festive look on December 16. The day was special because on that Sunday afternoon one of our friends arranged a sing-along, led by Fr. Andrew on the accordion! There were about 40 of us gathered in the guest house lobby and the participation was enthusiastic. Who knows? We may have started something. Credit goes to Fr. Andrew for sure.

Two of our friends were badly injured as they were coming to the sing-along. Their car was totaled. They survived and are on the mend.

Fr. Hugh went to Unity, Oregon for his annual visit and will return mid January. Work to cover the laminated beams began. The workers are a sturdy crew. The weather is cold!

Fr. Ezekiel has contacted us several times. The documents required for his legal stay in Italy are many. Our business manager, Diane Sparks, has done most of the work to supply them. Fr. Ezekiel is doing well in his monastic journey.

The month and the year closed with Br. Sylvester's name's day on the 31st.

JANUARY

A petition at a recent liturgy was for "perseverance in the midst of winter doldrums." January did seem to reduce our energy level, and some events seemed to contribute to that mood.

The parents of several of our workers died. We have been with them pastorally and in prayer. Our own health needs have been a preoccupation. The weather has kept us indoors.

We had fewer groups in the guest house. We did have Episcopal clergy one weekend, and a Lutheran group one other. Both close to the week of prayer for unity.

On the positive side of the ledger: the covering of the laminated beams was completed on January 21. A positive event indeed. It was also Fr. Meinrad's name's day. Two reasons for prayers of thanksgiving.

We had our annual financial report to the community. Fr. Andrew and Diane Sparks led us through the details. Thanks to our efforts, careful management and generous support we are in the black.

Fr. Hugh was re-elected to the Council for a two year membership.

Snow has come several times in small amounts. It sticks in corners on the roof and sometimes results in new leaks. Such was the case when Fr. Hugh felt a drip on his head coming from above his place in choir. Subsequent melts have not resulted in any repeats. Fr. Hugh is grateful and so is the maintenance man. In an unrelated incident, Fr. Hugh published a new book, *Sermons for the Liturgical Year in the series Victorine Texts in Translation*.

FEBRUARY

Some of us watched the Super Bowl Sunday, but with modest enthusiasm. We had some monks from Christ in the Desert visit. It was a good getting-to-know you experience. On February 6 and 9, Br. Selby and Fr. Boniface had birthdays. German chocolate cake was the treat!

We gathered to celebrate the Sacrament of Anointing with our cook Lu Ann in preparation for orthopedic surgery. Surgery on February 11 went well and recovery looks good.

Travels to Pocatello, Boise and elsewhere were taken with caution because of snow. Prior Boniface, Fr. Andrew, and Br. Tobiah attended the funeral from Mother Janice of the Franciscan Sisters of the Eucharist at St. Joseph's Church in Pocatello. Prior Boniface went to a meeting of Benedictine superiors of women's and men's communities at St. Bernard's Abbey in Cullman, Alabama. •





Bless the Lord, All You Works of the Lord

By Fr. Hugh Feiss, OSB

PART I

Unity, Oregon. January 10, 2019

This morning there is glowing white fog in every direction. It will make it difficult this morning for the few people who come here or through here. Whichever way they come, they must cross one or two high passes: from Vale on Hwy 26, Brogan Hill and El Dorado Summit; from John Day, on Hwy 26, Dixie Summit and Oregon Mountain, from Baker City, on Hwy 245, Dooley Mountain. From Vale and Baker you enter the valley in which Unity is located through narrow canyons. St. Joseph's Church, where I am staying, sits in the middle of the valley and has a wonderful view of hills and mountains in every direction. The valley is below the tree line, but above that there are pine forests (many of the them recently burned in forest fires). Unity used to be a lumber town, with a mill and a year-round Forest Service office. That is all gone now, which makes it more difficult to make a living on ranching alone. It was always peaceful here, but it is more so now when there are fewer people and fewer vehicles.

During the Christmas season the Liturgy of the Hours for morning prayer very often uses the *Benedicite*, the canticle from the Book of Daniel.

Three young men were condemned to being burned alive because they would not worship an idol that the pagan king had commissioned. When the three found that the flames were not incinerating them, they sang this song, asking all creation to join them in praising God. Using an archaic image of the universe, they imagined the earth as a sort of platter floating on water under an upside down bowl. This bowl was the firmament: above it were God and the angels: "Bless the Lord, all works of the Lord. Angels of the Lord bless the Lord. Waters above the heavens bless the Lord. Sun and moon bless the Lord. Stars of heaven bless the Lord." In Unity I often wake up in the middle of the black night

to a dazzling night sky, with countless stars that make the snow glimmer. It is as stunning as a photo from the Hubble space craft.

Then the boys in the furnace turn to the area beneath the firmament, the domain of meteorological phenomena: "All you winds, bless the Lord. Frost and chill, bless the Lord. Ice and snow bless the Lord." Since I arrived here in mid-December, there has always been snow on the ground. It is like a Christmas card. The amount of snow has been steady: most nights there is enough snow to match whatever melted during the day. I like shoveling the side walk: keeping the edges even like a well-edged lawn. It is

nice to think that all this snow-covered valley is blessing our Creator.

Then the canticle comes to the earth: "Mountains and hills, bless the Lord. Everything growing on the earth, bless the Lord. Lakes and rivers bless the Lord. Birds of the air bless the Lord.

All you beasts, wild and

tame, bless the Lord." The church is near a reservoir, into which various branches of the Burnt River flow. People ice fish on it now. There are bald eagles that haunt the river as it leaves the dam and flows through the canyon. There are ravens, magpies, red-tailed hawks, and near buildings doves—a meager Christmas bird count. On the other end of the canyon the river has carved and fertilized a long valley. It is divided into hay fields, and every day ranchers spend some cold hours feeding their cattle there. A herd of over 200 elk comes to eat and drink. Out of nowhere one night they thundered across the highway twenty feet in front of my car. Although I seldom think about it, no less wonderful are the tame beasts, the cattle, horses, dogs and cats, who know how to survive the cold and chill. For all of this, the three boys tell us,



"You human sons and daughters, bless the Lord."

It is brighter. The sun is burning off the fog. A few days ago I visited a parishioner who is a year older than I, a man who has been healthy all his life. He used to be a drag racer, has raised sheep and border collies, and is good at many things. He has fallen in love with this valley. In August he bought a state-of-the-art drone and has been taking photos of the town and terrain. From this "god's eye" point of view the town looks much nicer than it is; maybe we do also. Then a test showed his body had been stealthily invaded by cancer, and he has been given only a short time to live. He is at peace.

To take a break from medieval theology, I have been reading Terry Eagleton's *Radical Sacrifice*. Parts of it are beyond me, but two ideas have stuck with me. The first is that Paul and other New Testament writers urged the earliest Christians to live conscious of the imminent end of the world: let go of honor, riches, power, pleasure. Live each moment for what lasts—love and truth and Christ. This teaching made them ready for martyrdom: to witness to Christ and to imitate him, leaving behind this beautiful world

so they could live to the full the eternal life they received in baptism, when they died to sin and death and rose with Him. In the stark beauty of this valley there is an intimation of that eternal life that came and still comes at Christmas time, silently, invisibly like a nighttime snowfall.

The other thing that Eagleton said that struck me is that Jesus calls people to put him first, and if need be, leave all else. That is the point of monasticism, to decenter one's self and live for Christ and others. One gives up possessions, self-will, and even the intimate love of another human being, not primarily to save oneself, but to be able to love Christ above all else, and the members of his ecclesial body more freely. Every monk and sincere Christian ought to be learning to let go, to be ready for martyrdom, or for death however it comes. In this way Christmas gives birth to Good Friday and Easter. In a few months, the valley will turn from brown to green. •



PART II

Jerome, Idaho, February 5, 2019

It is dangerously self-contradictory to pray "Bless the Lord, all you works of the Lord," and not care for those works of God. The last three popes have reminded us of this or duty to care for the earth and all its inhabitants. I have been cleaning out my files. One file that I just recycled was correspondence regarding the Columbia River Pastoral (2001) to which I contributed. The Pastoral Letter studied the ecological past, and present of the Columbia River Drainage under the auspices of most of the Bishops whose territory lay within that watershed (259,000 square miles). It received a lot of attention when it came out. A google search takes one to the text itself and various reactions to it. I have always wondered how much actual change the letter has brought about. I have had the same question about Pope Francis *Laudato si'*. In my own life before and after the letters of the bishops and Pope Francis, I have come across few religious institutions that have shown great enthusiasm for their vision. It has always felt like a bad batch of pop corn, a pop here and a pop there, but then silence.

However, there is a new reason for hope. A scientist, who is an oblate of the monastery, brought by an article about a young woman,

Molly Burhans. She worked for NGOs after high school, then went to college majoring in philosophy. She thought about becoming a nun, but ended up studying geodesign in graduate school so she could help religious communities manage their lands in the most ecologically beneficial way. Right after graduation, she founded a nonprofit company called Goodlands (info@good-lands.org) that does that. She then moved beyond providing help to individual communities to creating an enormous digital map and dataset of Church-owned land all over the world. With this she hopes to form a comprehensive plan about how the Catholic Church can best use its lands to alleviate such problems as climate change, foods insecurity, and mass migration.

She visited the office of the Vatican Secretary of State which encouraged her project. Thus encouraged, her company continues to draw up holistic land management master plans for dioceses and other Church groups, while at the same time working on a digital mapping of all the Church lands in the world. This project will help the Church become comfortable in the digital age and model intelligent and respectful use of data. Burhans has now met Pope Francis three times. She has received permission to test-run a cartography institute under the auspices of the Pontifical Academy

of Science. The possibilities are enormous. Only a visionary aided by grace can pull off such a huge undertaking. Burhans seems to be such a person.

Meanwhile, we—each of us—can and should reduce, reuse, and recycle, xeriscape, share, and use the most ecological beneficial heating and cooling, farming and ranching techniques, cooking and eating, as we pray, "All you works of the Lord, bless the Lord." •





THE DESERT CHRONICLE

The Benedictine Monks of Idaho, Inc.
Monastery of the Ascension
541 East 100 South
Jerome, ID 83338-5655

NON-PROFIT
ORGANIZATION
U.S. POSTAGE
P A I D
BOISE, IDAHO
PERMIT No. 849

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Summer Seminars

2019

Medieval Mystics (#1):

Hildegard of Bingen, Julian of Norwich, Bridget of Sweden, The Cloud of Unknowing, #1
(June 10 to 16, 2019) (Presenters/facilitators: Janne Goldbeck PhD, Fr. Hugh Feiss, OSB, PhL, STD).

Love in Western Philosophy and Christian Theology (#1):

Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, St. Augustine, Aelred of Rievaulx, Thomas Aquinas (July 15-21, 2019)
(Presenters: Lawrence Hundersmarck, MA, PhD, Fr. Hugh Feiss, OSB, PhL, STD).



The *Desert Chronicle* is available in digital form on the monastery website: www.idahomonks.org. If you would like to receive the *Desert Chronicle* in digital form and cancel your paper subscription, please email Fr. Hugh: hughf@idahomonks.org and send him your email address.