

**Monastery of the Ascension**

# THE DESERT CHRONICLE

Vol. XXXV, Number 1 - MARCH 2026

## JOURNEY TO MY CALLING

*By LuAnn Kraft*

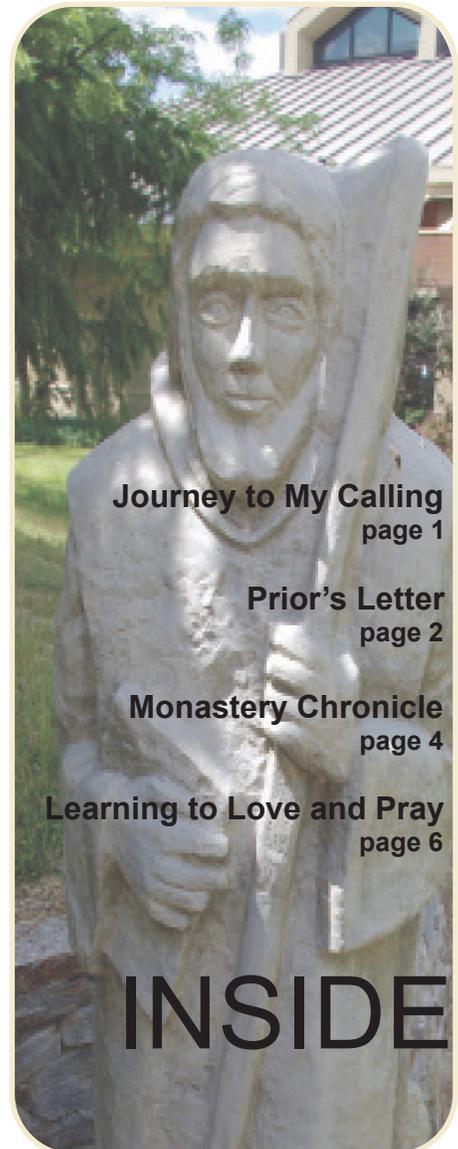
I am midway through my 20th year working for the monastery. I have been drawn to reflect on the path that brought me here.

As a child, I would spend summers at my grandparents' ranch in southern Idaho. This is the ranch where my mother and her siblings were raised. My grandmother fed them all with the bounty of the ranch. She milked cows. Her chickens thrived in a chicken coop that my great-grandfather built for her. He was a Swedish immigrant mason. The coop had cement floors, brick walls and running water. The chickens were happy and well cared for. I got to gather eggs and helped feed the chickens. Sometimes Nana would snatch up a chicken and chop off its head, pluck it, clean it and cook it with homemade noodles and homemade bread. As shocking as it is to see a chicken with its head cut off (and, yes, they do run around afterwards), I had a very acute sense of where my food came from. A respect for the gift the chicken had given to us.

My family also had a babysitter who my parents would use occasionally. Her name was Nora. Nora's garden seemed like the Garden of Eden to me: fruit trees, vegetables and beautiful flowers. Nora would let me help her in her garden. I saw the hard work and dedication it took to maintain the beauty and abundance of that garden. Because of these ladies, my curiosity about food grew.

At the age of eight, we moved into a different neighborhood and school district. I became fascinated by the food at school lunch. The cooks made a type of cookie which I loved. I wanted to know how to make it. I hung around the cafeteria after lunch one day in order to get the recipe. The cook very kindly handed me a recipe card, listing the ingredients and directions as I wrote them down. My first recipe. I was hooked. I made those cookies for my family every chance I had.

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# INSIDE



Dear Friends of the Monastery,

It's nice to be writing to all of you again. I broke my hip last June and since then have been focusing my energies on activities that lead to recuperation. It's been a learning experience.

My daily routine and my independence were disrupted, and I became dependent on others. Things that I took for granted became things to be grateful for. One of the major things was just how fortunate I am to have a supportive community. I still need help from my confreres and professional caregivers, but good progress is being made. Our subprior, Fr. Hugh, has added some of my tasks to his own list. Many of you have kept me in prayer and sent encouragement. Thank you.

Some building repairs are receiving attention. The current one is replacing some windows on the east side of the monastery. The metal frames showed rust spots and repair was in order. The job started in February. Winter is not the best time to remove exterior windows, but our contractor is not concerned, and it's his crew doing the job. So far this winter, the weather has been mild. We've escaped the extreme temperatures that have occurred in other parts of the country.

I'm writing this in mid-February. Lent begins tomorrow. Whatever we do during Lent is supposed to open us to life in Christ. Another way of looking at our Lenten practice is that it will enable us to share Christ's life with others. Either way, opening to life or sharing it might stretch us a bit.

Our sharing of life with the Missionaries continues to be a blessing. They bring a youthful energy to their service with the Hispanic community. They are well received. They are making increased pastoral use of the guest house and administrative responsibilities that go with it. Those who are seminarians take their theology classes here and online.

On May 11 this year, our confrere Fr. Hugh will have the 60th anniversary of his ordination. His scholarly and pastoral service are a gift to many and to us. We look forward to celebrating that day with him.

That's it for this time. Please pray for us and be assured of our prayers for you.

Peace and good things!

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



*Continued from page 1*

In high school, I enrolled in the home economics class, where I learned to make a yummy tater tot casserole, which I also made for my family. This experience was gratifying and rewarding to me. I felt like a genuine asset to my family.

I graduated from high school and was invited on an adventure with my psychology teacher. She was chaperoning a trip to Europe and asked for students to participate. Six weeks of traveling Greece, Italy, Austria, Switzerland, Germany, France, and England. Amazingly, my parents said I could participate. I had never traveled further than 500 miles from my home in Idaho. What a blessing. My culinary education expanded. So many foods and flavors. Complete bliss.

College was next, and ways to fund this journey led me to numerous jobs: one my first experiences in food service in a clerk's job. The food service job was hard work but rewarding. I was sharing an apartment with four other girls and, one evening, was off work and cruising through town. It was the year Evel Knievel was scheduled to jump the Snake River Canyon. Thousands of people had come to Twin Falls to observe this extravaganza. On the cruise, we met two young men from New Jersey, who came to our apartment and taught me how to make a traditional Italian lasagne. So delicious.

Time passed. I met my first husband and studied to become Catholic. I was raised in the Church of Latter-Day Saints. I had been fascinated by the Vatican and the longevity of the Catholic Church; it seemed like a perfect fit for me. I was married at the monastery in Twin Falls before it moved to Jerome. I had five children, and my desire was to raise them in the Catholic religion, so I enrolled them at St. Edward's School. The school had just reopened and was gradually adding grades as the years passed. By the time my fifth child was born, the school was ready to add a lunch program.

When I was pregnant with my second child, both of my parents were diagnosed with cancer six months apart. At the age of 25, and the oldest child in my family, I was drawn to studying and experimenting with foods and healing diets, and practices to help my parents. These practices helped for a time but, ten years later, my parents' cancers returned, and they succumbed to cancer six months apart. So, at the age of 35, I was open to pursuing a career feeding the children at St. Edward's School. I remember, during my interview for the job, Mrs. Peck, the principal, asked me why I thought I would be able to do that job. I could only respond, "I don't know." I just believed I could. Well, she hired me for the job, and my life with food began.

I became part of a program offered through the Department of Education, with classes and training in how to be the best lunch lady ever. I also was taken with a new coffee shop in town that had fabulous coffee and pastries. I became a frequent customer. One day, I asked if they were interested in hiring an apprentice for the bakery. I was told that would happen only if the owner were to become pregnant, which, amazingly, she did. I was hired and reported very early to bake before my job at school lunch.

As time passed, I joined the American Culinary Federation and took many classes that advanced my knowledge and skills. Summers, I cooked at a country club, cooked for fundraising events and the event center in Buhl, and did private catering.

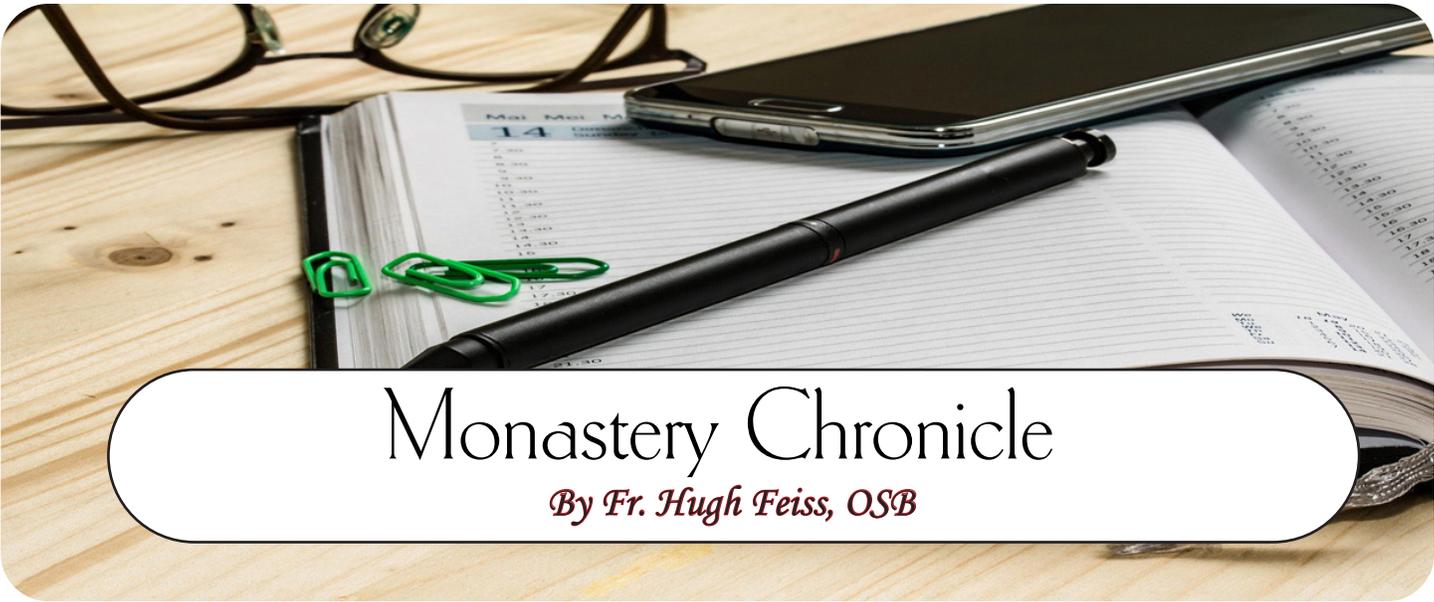


Then, I received a phone call from Fr. Boniface. I was home recovering from a major surgery with several weeks off work. He was asking if I would be interested in cooking for the monastery. I had cooked at the monastery once during a Cursillo, when I oversaw the volunteers and kitchen. It had been a blessed experience. I felt like I had won the lottery. Of course, I said yes. That was 20 years ago.

All these things led me to the vocation I believe that I was meant to pursue. From all my experiences with food, I have learned to pray without ceasing, which has always carried me through even the most stressful times.

The love we put into food is real. Real energy passes from our hands into the food that people are consuming and absorbing. Real Love. We are told that love is the only answer, and that is the truth now and always. Love can heal all things.





# Monastery Chronicle

*By Fr. Hugh Feiss, OSB*

## **November 2025**

November 1: All Saints. Missionaries have overflow Mass in the conference room. Zoom retreat for Oblates, who gather in the library (cozily). Three oblate candidates enrolled at Vespers.

November 2: All Souls Day. We prayed for two boys with birthdays at Mass. Another oblate candidate enrolled, this time by Zoom.

November 4: Election day. Nothing on the ballot for us in the county. Oblate discussion in evening via Zoom.

November 5: Chapter and Corporation meeting to approve what we hope is the final draft of the agreement. It has our approval and that of the Missionaries, the diocese (document forthcoming), and now awaits approval by the Swiss-American Congregation and the Vatican. Four years and four lawyers later. All have been very helpful and kind. Stan Welch and Diane Sparks did the heavy lifting. Thanks to all.

November 6: Monsoon during Mass. Then, sun and clouds.

November 7-8: Fr. Hugh presides at wedding in Nampa for a couple from Unity, Oregon.

November 9: Full chapel for Sunday Mass, said for a woman's son, on the anniversary of his death in Iraq. Fr. Ezekiel and a friend arrive to empty his room. He stays until Saturday morning.

November 11: Veterans' Day, acknowledged in intercessions.

November 12: Home Health here to check on monks.

November 14: Pocatello oblates meet by Zoom.

November 15: A few Boise oblates meet at Bishop Kelly; Fr. Hugh joins by Zoom.

November 16: Sunday Mass well attended. Oblates meet after Mass.

November 17-22: Much of this week spent cleaning Fr. Meinrad's former room for Fr. Boniface, and Fr. Ezekiel's for Br. Tobiah. John and the Missionaries did most of the work. Fr. Hugh spent the week boxing up books Fr. Ezekiel left behind. It will take a year to get them sorted out.

November 20: Last meeting of Patrology class of MSP seminarians and of Adult Faith formation on Dorothy Day,

November 23: Chapel full for Sunday Mass. LuAnn away till Nov. 26.

November 24-26: Cleaning of Fr. Ezekiel's room continued by Br. Tobiah and John.

November 25: Br. Tobiah has medical appointments; John takes Fr. Boniface to the print shop to order Christmas cards.

November 26: LuAnn returns with stories from Tennessee, prepares Thanksgiving dinner.

November 28-30: A very busy weekend for MSPs.

November 30: At Mass, we prayed for Dick Marshall, Mildred S, and the mother of Josie (who works at Creekside), all of whom died this weekend. Fr. David joined us for Mass. He is going to Mexico to review his visa. Dick Marshall's funeral to be on Dec. 10.

## **December 2025**

December 1: Fr. Jesús celebrates Mass for a deceased woman, some of whose family attend.

December 2 Br. Tobiah has doctor appointments; foot lady from Home Health here. Oblate Zoom gathering at 6:00 PM.



December 7: Festive giveaway after Mass of closet cleanings, dried beans, and farm fresh eggs. Visitors from northeast Ohio. Linda H. does usual Sunday cataloguing,

December 8: A few extra people for the Immaculate Conception Mass. Haustus and Chinese food.

December 9: Fr. Hugh and Eileen L. process books from Fr. Ezekiel and ones Linda catalogued. Eileen brings cookies, as usual. After lunch, our house mates were gathered around them like squirrels at a cat feeder.

December 11: Fr Boniface gives brief presentation at the funeral for Dick Marshall at St. Jerome's; Fr. Hugh attends.

December 12: Zoom meeting with oblates in Pocatello. The displays in the flower barrels in front are changed to greens. Fate of pumpkins unknown.

December 13: Zoom meeting with oblates in Idaho Falls. They finish discussion of the Gospel of John.

December 14: The Christmas tree is ornamented after Mass. Diane H. distributes eggs from her farm. John is making peanut brittle. Steve Marshall injured in a fall at home, taken to Boise for treatment; full recovery expected.

December 15: Br. Sylvester to Hobby Lobby. Fr. Hugh to St. Luke's to anoint a dying neighbor.

December 16: Ben and DeWitt Marshall here for year-end financial report on the farm. Prices down, but good yields. Br. Selby hosts centering prayer.

December 17: The weather is abnormally warm and will continue that way 'til Christmas. Quite a bit of rain. The cold weather from the west has been passing to the north of us. Some beautiful sunrises and sunsets. Meanwhile, gifts of cookies and sweets accumulate.

December 21: Fr. Boniface has sleep test, He passed with honors.

December 22: John Wasko and the Missionary seminarians mobilize to shampoo the carpets. The monks' floor hallway and rooms get a good cleaning. There is noticeably less sneezing.

December 23: Rug cleaning continues. Br. Sylvester and helpers decorate the church. Another productive morning of work in the library.

December 24: Br. Sylvester has an ablation on his lower back, to ease his pain. Fr. Boniface anoints Jerry Spanbauer at the Spanbauer home. Missionaries celebrate Christmas Eve Mass. We have Christmas vigils, with Br. Selby singing the first reading.

December 25: Smaller congregation. Jerry Spanbauer died last night. Missionaries prepare 3 pm Christmas dinner: ham and asparagus and baked tomatoes with pie and homemade wine. Larry E. joined us. Br. Tobiah left with his sister, back tomorrow evening.



December 27: Woke to light fall of snow. Cold and windy with some sunlight. Temp at 10:30 was 34o. At last, a hint of winter. Two guests, one a religious sister, are here making a silent retreat.

December 28: Holy Family Sunday.

December 29: Cold weather continues without precipitation.

December 30-31: Br. Tobiah to doctor ... and physical therapy. One of our cars is out of commission because of a seatbelt malfunction. Weekly visit from Home health nurse. Feast of St. Sylvester. His local

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# LEARNING TO LOVE AND PRAY 75 YEARS ALONG

By Br. Selby Coffman, OSB

What do monks do all day? “We fall down. We get up. We fall down again. We get up again,” replied Abba Sospes, a fourth century Egyptian hermit. And how long do we do this? “Til death.” Proverbs 24:16: “For though the righteous fall seven times, they rise again.”

This definitely applies to me, as regards both love and prayer, in my pre-monk life and now. I came to monastic life - in part - due to my failures in romantic relationships (I was, however, celibate for many years before coming to this monastery in 1999). I had more success with enduring friendships, and with love in the form of action for peace and justice.

Love is a decision and a course of action, more than the sentiment. “Willing the good of another.” A sweaty definition of love, by author M. Scott Peck: “Love is the will to extend oneself for the purpose of nurturing one’s own or another’s spiritual growth.” He saw love as conscious, intentional action - or “work” - that requires effort and commitment.



I am learning to love my fellow monks in this way (very imperfectly!) even through the differences in temperament, politics, etc. I don’t necessarily like everyone, 24/7. But I do love each and every one. With affection as well as commitment.

Our prayers of petition can be one way to express love as the will to extend oneself:

“May she/he be filled with loving kindness.  
May they be peaceful and healed.  
May they know the fullness of Christ’s love.”

I have prayed this many, many times, for each of my confreres here and elsewhere, for the Missionaries, for extended family and friends, for those afflicted by poverty, war or disaster, for President Trump, for the Church... And for you, dear Reader.

Wordless contemplative prayer is an act of love: We strengthen the World Wide Web of silent love. “My silence is part of the whole world’s silence and builds the temple of God without the noise of hammers.” (Thomas Merton). “By our prayer, we lift up all creation into the radiance of God’s love.” (Sister Gabriela of the Incarnation)

Other acts of love: Donating to the World Food Program. Advocating for peace and justice. Teaching and mentoring. Listening well to someone who is distressed. Music.

Do I consciously pray when in Liturgy? We are to “...love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” (Luke 10:27). The Church catechism speaks of the importance of one’s “interior disposition” during liturgy. It refers to mere attendance and parroting the words as “superstition.” That sets a high standard!

Alex, a famous African grey parrot, learned to mimic 1,000 words and use 100 of them consciously - about 10%. In reciting our liturgies, 2.5 hours a day, I might be actually conscious of what I’m saying 10% of the time - on a good day! Other times, Alex is ahead of me. I can be totally checked out, rehearsing plans or conversations for everyday life, or have my imagination on myriad other things. Or, I may be somewhere in between “conscious” and “checked out:” vaguely aware of my surroundings and of the act of reciting with my confreres. (In that regard, I try to take comfort in Woody Allen’s “80% of life is just showing up.” But Scripture and the Church demand more!)

But I am slowly improving here, becoming more conscious during liturgy, and especially during the minute of blessed silence we take between each psalm. It’s directly related to my silent prayer practice, which is Centering Prayer. It begins with “God, I open myself to your presence and action within me. For the good of the world.” When I’m on my game, currently 1-1.5 hours a day, then liturgical prayer becomes more fresh and vivid, more 3-dimensional. My myriad thoughts are still there, but I identify with them less, take them less seriously. There’s more room in my awareness for God. And for quiet Christian joy in my heart. Paul Tillich said that the key to faith is to “accept God’s (unconditional) acceptance of you.” My self-critical voices are not gone, but more muted, less dominant. Thanks be to God!

*I welcome spiritual conversation, including zoom and phone. Text me at 208-866-6072.*



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representative gets a massage on his back from Home Health. New Year's Eve will be like the night before Christmas, "when all through the house, not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse."

## **January 2026**

January 1: Small congregation, quiet day. We don't have ESPN, so no football. Dinner at 3:00.

January 3: Fr. Jesús and Lay Missionaries return.

January 4: Epiphany. Church full; lively coffee hour. Social in the evening with takeout barbecue fetched from Twin Falls by John.

January 5: Oblates Zoom meeting 6:00-7:00. Judy Bartz joined us after a year of health problems.

January 6: Community meeting to discuss retreat, farm, and music - music to be continued.

January 7: Fr. Hugh to ophthalmologist for regular treatment.

January 8: Fr. Boniface is main concelebrant; first time since he broke his hip.

January 9: Thirteen Regnum Christi members and their priest begin retreat until Sunday.

January 10: Idaho Falls oblates meet 10:00-12:00 by Zoom.

January 11: Full chapel for Mass. Br. Sylvester ill, so taking down decorations postponed.

January 13: Ben Marshall and Fr. Hugh attend Magic Valley Land Trust gathering. Sewer problems. Books in "Take a Book" cases rotated. Missionaries begin new semester.

January 15: Men's Cursillo begins. Twenty-nine enthusiastic men in attendance.

January 18: Sunday Mass with Cursillo group requires extra chairs in the chapel. Local oblates meet afterward.

January 19: Martin Luther King Day quiet as Missionaries clean guest rooms. An American kestrel is stalking prey in frosted trees. Cathy arrives to stay 'til Wednesday afternoon. Br. Sylvester suffering from bad back. Football playoff passes unviewed and unnoticed.

January 20: Guest cook for breakfast.

January 21: Feast of St. Meinrad. Fr Meinrad gets mentions in prayers.

January 22: Fr. Hugh teaches second class to MSP seminarians on Sacred Art; an imaginary visit to one of the world's oldest Christian churches, Dura-Europos, discovered about 1930.

January 22: An evangelical pastor, now a professor at Northwest Nazarene University, spends the weekend on retreat.

January 23: MSPs host two classes simultaneously. Lots of energy. A young man Fr. Hugh knew at Boise State University arrives for private retreat.

January 24: Community Mass, followed by a lively coffee hour.

January 25: Meeting of the "Corporation" at which Diane Sparks presented the financial report for fiscal year 2024-2025. Accounting is complicated by the delay in getting the Agreement approved by the Swiss-American Congregation and the Vatican. Meanwhile, Diane and our accountants do excellent work. We are financially sound.

January 26: Br. Sylvester, Br. Tobiah and Fr. Boniface are being treated for painful backs. Fr. Boniface has assigned himself to say two Sunday Masses in February, another milestone in his recovery. He is making big strides with the help of the Home Health personnel, John Wasko and Br Tobiah. God bless them!

January 27: We had an inch or so of snow that melted by the next day. Weather still about 30o ± 8o. Great horned owl(s) held a hootenanny during morning prayer.

January 30: Our friend Julie Straight here overnight.

## **February 2026**

February 1: Sunday Mass and Coffee Hour. Haustus in the evening.

February 2: Feast of Presentation/Purification/Hypapante. Celia A. brought infant Jesus to Mass as she does each year. In the afternoon, meeting with Ben Marshall and Evan Roth regarding the farm. In the evening, oblates have spirituality Zoom meeting.

February 5: Br. Selby's 75th birthday. St Agatha's Day without any of her bread. Sunny and warm April weather. Diane H. brings another beautiful amaryllis plant.

February 7: Fr. Boniface says Sunday Mass for the first time since he broke his hip. A large family from Kuna picked the right Sunday to visit.

February 8: Fr. Boniface's 91st birthday celebrated with German chocolate cake made specially by LuAnn, and a white cake and balloons brought by Celia and Santa Montes. Some Methodist ministers arrive for retreat.

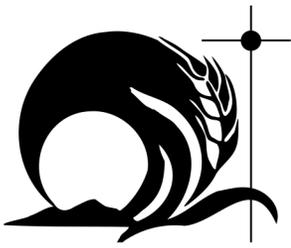
February 10 -11: Contractor prepares to install new windows on southeast corner of monastery.

February 12: Workers install first of the new window after discussion of why the new windows are wooden inserts in existing frames rather than in new metal frames. Methodists depart. First meeting of Adult Faith formation class on St. Paul's Spirituality. A sunny day.

February 13: No window work today. Community meeting regarding farm proposal, food cupboard. Both received favorably. No time to discuss liturgical music, the next topic.

February 17: A second window is installed. Mardi Gras was celebrated with haystack cookies.





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*Happy Birthday,  
Brother Selby!*



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