



# THE DESERT CHRONICLE

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## Pilgrimage toward Home

By Fr. Hugh Feiss, OSB

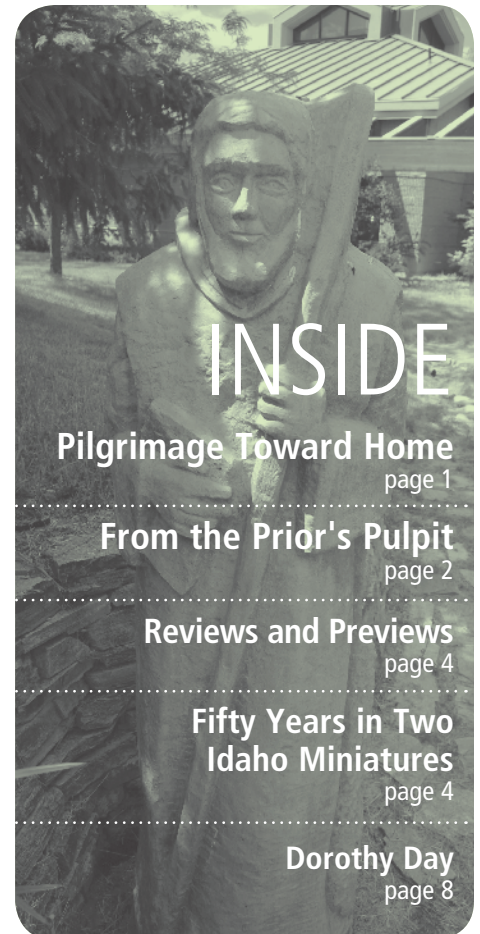
**M**Y GREAT-GRANDFATHER WROTE OUT AN ACCOUNT OF WHAT HIS GRANDMOTHER TOLD HIM ABOUT HARROWING TIMES WHEN SHE WAS A YOUNG WOMAN IN COUNTY Wexford In Ireland. British soldiers would come and search their farm looking for Irish rebels against the English crown; any rebels captured were shot or hung. Her stories referred to a real event, the Wexford Rebellion of 1798. Inspired by the French Revolution Irish people in Wexford declared their independence from England and established what they called the Republic of Wexford. It didn't last very long. In the Battle of New Ross a much better armed British army killed several thousand poorly armed Irish rebels.

Fifty years after the Wexford Rebellion the famine came; my great-grandfather emigrated to North America. Most of the ships bringing immigrants were very unsafe and unsanitary; many of the people who came with my great-grandfather died of yellow fever. Their ship offloaded him in Canada. He traveled a bit, became an American citizen in Kentucky, married another Irish immigrant, and settled in the northern peninsula of Michigan where he became a respected farmer and raised 12 children. When my great-grandfather came to the United States, Irish Catholics were regarded as despicable foreigners, who didn't share the values of Protestant America.

In the Old Testament God reminded the Israelites that they were once foreigners in an alien land, in



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*Photo by John Wasko*

# From the Prior's Pulpit

Dear Friends of the Monastery,

It will be nearing the end of Lent when you read this and springtime will have arrived. It is now mid-February and spring is the subject of dreams and seed catalogs. For many of you and for us, it is a winter to remember. But the promise of Easter gives us good reason to look forward with confidence. Which is what I want to write about.

Getting snowbound can give us a clear sense of our limitations. John Deer tractors and snow blowers notwithstanding, we are at times simply unable to make it better. It keeps snowing. We are fragile. Well, it all depends on how we deal with it.

I recently read an article entitled "When Fragility Becomes Promise of Renewal" by a French economist writing for a monastic publication: "Alliance for International Monasticism". The author, Elena Lasida, was addressing the reality that many monastics experience, fragility. How do we live fruitful lives when we are beset by so many limits? Fragility always has negative connotations: weakness, the idea of need. But when we think about it, fragility can give us the basis for being there to help one another, to depend on others, and be grateful for the other person. We put such value on self-sufficiency that we can overlook or undervalue the talents of others. Fragility can be the basis for true interdependence. It can lead people into a positive working relationship.

Fragility reminds us of our ultimate dependence on God as our creator, our life sustainer, our goal. The unfulfilled in our lives that we are never quite successful in overcoming is finally fulfilled in the Lord. Our trust has to be in the Lord. For some of us it takes a while to learn that. Fragility can help. So we may look forward with confidence, whatever the outcome may be. If we can see a positive side to our fragile conditions, our communities can be life-giving and continue to make a fruitful contribution to the Church.

Well, we certainly want to do that here. We want to look forward while being realistic about our limitations. A lot of our community discussions are on that topic and we are fortunate to draw on the experience of monasteries that are on the same journey. What we are experiencing is certainly not new. It is part of the history of monasticism that has given rise to new ways of living the Benedictine way. It can happen in our time too.

Easter is the reason we can all be people of hope. We are grateful and hope that you are as well. Be assured of our prayers.

Peace and good things.  
Fr. Boniface Lautz, O.S.B.







*Photos by John Wasko*

# Reviews and Previews

## NOVEMBER

Nov. 2: After three weeks in the hospital with pneumonia, Br. Sylvester returned home and is recovering well with some home health physical therapy. With some friends to help, he decorated our dining room for thanksgiving and the chapel for Advent.

We're insured health-wise for 2017. The agent comes and very kindly/patiently gives us options and answers questions. Fr. Andrew arranges all that and makes sure we know what we're asking for. Thank the Lord we have insurance. We use it.

We are a polling station for elections. The turn out here on Nov. 8 exceeded any I can remember. I don't think there was any voter fraud.

Nov. 11-13: We hosted a Spanish Marriage Encounter. As always it was a full house. We also hosted an evening of inter-religious dialogue which went very well. Fr. Norbert helped arrange it. It was sponsored by local congregations.

According to the safety code our front parking area needs designated spaces. Lo and behold one can purchase a little machine that does the job of painting the lines. All that is needed is a steady hand on the controls and the ability to walk a straight line. Two good helpers put that together and completed the job in less than three hours. Bravo!

Thanksgiving was a fine time. We had Vespers and Compline early and had a fine meal. Fr. Ezekiel cooked the main dishes and some of us contributed smaller items plus desert. We had some guests. The day finished with some flics on the big screen in the conference room for the few of us who were interested.

## DECEMBER

Weather (snow) has given direction to our lives now and again. Fr. Andrew cancelled a trip to the Franciscan Sisters in Pocatello. Fr. Norbert cancelled several events at our ministry center. And Fr. Meinrad spent a night in the Seattle airport due to cancelled flights.

Our phone system didn't work for several days because the land lines to our place were out. The phone company had to locate the problem. Turns out it was close to our property. There are some cell phones in our house. But the old line about communication being a problem has some reality.

Car maintenance is in the capable care of Br. Tobiah. Newer cars need special diagnostic equipment. Our Toyota had a "check engine" light come on. Turns out that someone didn't tighten the gas cap after filling the tank.

Christmas celebration went well. We had about 16 with us for Mass at midnight. The weather was blowing and snowing most of the day. Monday we got up an hour later and the following week days were fairly low key. We were facing temperature slower than usual for us.

## JANUARY

*Weather!* Blowing and drifting snow has sculpted some huge piles that defy removal. Our snow blowing equipment has gotten lots of use and has needed repairs at critical times. We have also exercised some unused muscles with shovels! Icy surfaces have got some of us using spiked canes to go back and forth. The local physical therapist has gotten some business too.

Our Fr. Eugene, now 89 years of age, is getting some hospice care and doing quite well in spite of physical limitations. His skills as a mathematician have not diminished. He and his cat, Tigger, get along well in their room on the second floor of the monastery. Tigger has never had it so good.

Council and community meetings have been on the calendar three or four times this month. We've been giving attention to questions of how we look to the future in light of our obvious limitations. It's challenging for sure but brings out some of our best qualities as we "discern" together. •





First Mass on the Monastery Land, August 3, 1965



# Fifty Years in Two Idaho Miniatures

By Fr. Hugh Feiss, OSB

John O'Hagan, *Monastery of the Ascension, 1965-2015* (2016. 150 pages. \$15.00)

Colin Cameron and Fr. Hugh Feiss, OSB, *Towards Omega: St. John's Catholic Center at Idaho State University: the First Fifty Years* (2017. 50 pages. @\$7.50).

IN THE LAST FOUR MONTHS BIZPRINT IN BOISE HAS PRINTED TWO BOOKS ABOUT CATHOLIC INSTITUTIONS IN IDAHO, AND A THIRD, A history of St. John's Cathedral in Boise by John O'Hagan, is on the way from Caxton Press. The fifty-year mark is an important time to write a history of an institution; the human initiators of the enterprise are disappearing from the scene and the written records need to be gathered and given flesh by an historian.

The last fifty years have been an important in the Church. To someone who was ordained a priest at the start of this half-century and has lived through it, it has been a puzzling, even disconcerting time. Vatican II was a time of great hope and enthusiasm for most of my generation; we welcomed a renewed liturgy, a more collegial understanding of the Church, the effort to engage with the modern world and other churches and religions, and encouragement to become more biblically grounded. Our instinct to welcome these new currents seems to have been inspired by the Holy Spirit who was at work in the

Council. In other ways we have not been so discerning; in my lifetime we have frittered away a lot of opportunities because as humans do we have refused to listen and strive for consensus and Catholicity; we have argued about the menu, instead of cooking and eating together.

On the heels of Vatican II came upheavals throughout the world that profoundly changed society and churches. The societal changes are obvious if somewhat difficult to pin down. Pope Francis has described most of them: individualism, social displacement and exclusion, the triumph of a technocracy that deludes itself into thinking it will find an easy fix for each successive abuse of the planet, a sense of futility, an addictive, electronically-aided consumerism that eats away at our empathy, our leisure, and our wisdom. Not surprisingly, civil and ecclesiastical communities are not flourishing.

So the little ships of the Monastery of the Ascension and St. John's Catholic Center have been sailing on a stormy sea.

The monastery was founded when vocations were abundant. Mt. Angel had 120+ members and hiving off some monks

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*"There are no superheroes in these stories; only mostly humble people who tried for long or short periods to contribute to something bigger than themselves, something beautiful for God."*

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to Idaho to start a seminary to take some of the overflow of students from Mt. Angel seemed like an obvious choice. However, like most religious communities, neither Mt. Angel nor the Monastery of the Ascension has added many new permanent members during the last half-century. The charming monastery chapel in Jerome was designed to become the





monks' dining room once the community grew and a proper church could be built. That hasn't happened. On the other hand, as John O'Hagan emphasizes, the monks who have been a part of the community have done wonders—creating an island of Christian peace in the midst of a previously uncultivated desert.

St. John's also started out on a wave of enthusiasm. Fr. Ramón Echervarría guided its establishment and construction. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's vision of humanity converging on Christ, the Omega point of evolution, helped inspire its design. At the time St. John's was built Idaho State University was expanding rapidly; many of the university's buildings are now fifty years old. The two institutions grew together. St. John's became a flourishing parish, then a decline in vocations and funding brought some hard years as the parish became a

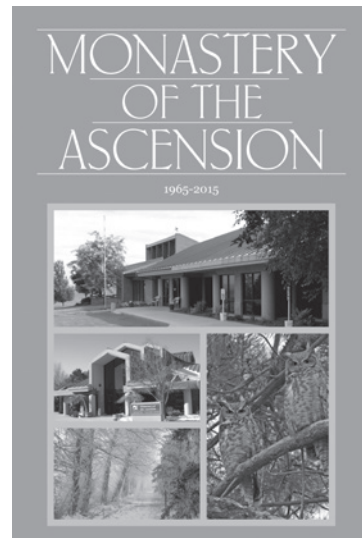
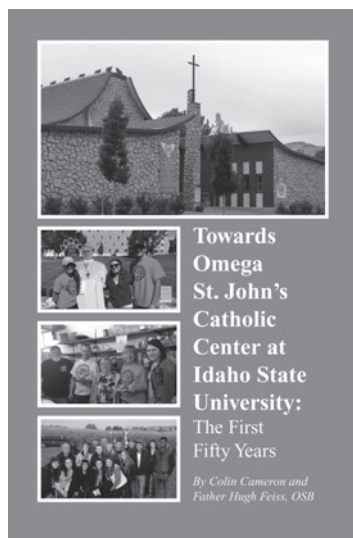


priest-less, poorly funded student center. That reversed in 2014 and there has been a spurt of new life, but like most student centers St. John's still only reaches a small percentage of the baptized Catholics on the campus, even if for those who come it has much to offer.

Each of these books includes many names in an index in the back. These lists are a reminder that every church building and church community is built up brick by brick, potluck by potluck, Eucharist by Eucharist. There are no superheroes in these stories; only mostly humble people who tried for long or short periods to contribute to something bigger than themselves, something beautiful for God. No church community and certainly no building will last forever, but like the stones of the monastery in Ellis Peters' great novel about two medieval Welsh stonecutters, *The Heaven Tree Trilogy*, each brick that someone contributes will



be reused in some form over and over, like the stardust from which our planet and each of us is formed. 1965 was a time to build; the Spirit was a movin' over this Church, this land, these churches. The Spirit is still burning and will flame up again like shook foil in Idaho, in the desert. These two books suggest that the results could be spectacular. •





“PILGRIMAGE”, from page 1

Egypt, where they were mistreated. He told them not to forget that, and to treat foreigners who lived among them fairly and kindly. God could say the same to all my ancestral lines: you were once poor immigrants coming to North America looking for a better life; treat immigrants kindly. Jesus said, I was a stranger and you took me in. So there is obvious irony when Americans today mistreat or repulse people because they are Muslims coming to a Christian nation, or Central Americans fleeing the violence that is the result of American craving for drugs; they are rejecting Christ in the stranger and the poor, and rejecting the teaching of Jesus, thereby showing that they at least are not representatives of a Christian nation.

The December issue of *The Catholic Worker*, published at the New York House of Hospitality cofounded by Dorothy Day, whose cause for canonization is advancing, tells two stories about the people who are being excluded from our country. Muhammed and Ahmed, father and son, traveled from Baghdad to Turkey, to the Greek Islands, then across several countries just as the borders were being closed. They reached Finland, but discovered that few refugees were being admitted there. Muhammed’s application for asylum has been denied, but he is appealing the decision. Meanwhile, back in Baghdad, his wife has to hide their young son for fear he will be conscripted by one of factions fighting there—ISIS, police, army, militia. Fifty

of Muhammed’s relatives, including his brother, have been killed there. His wife is terrified. Muhammed has been thinking about going back to Iraq—“if I get killed with my family, then at least, the Finnish government will know I was a legitimate refugee.”

The other article is excerpted from a book by Deirdre Cornell, *American Madonna* tells of a centuries-old but increasingly popular pilgrimage to the shrine of Our Lady of Juquila, in Oaxaca, Mexico. The Madonna of Juquila is a small statue brought from Spain by a Dominican missionary in the 16th century. He took it with him on his missionary rounds through the mountains and people became very devoted to it. When he died the statue was kept in a village and pilgrims started to come to her, just as she had come to them. Today hundreds of pilgrims come, often traveling the last two kilometers on their





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*"They are children of God and are entitled to be treated with human dignity. We believe that by helping to resettle the most vulnerable, we are living out our Christian faith as Jesus has challenged us to do."*

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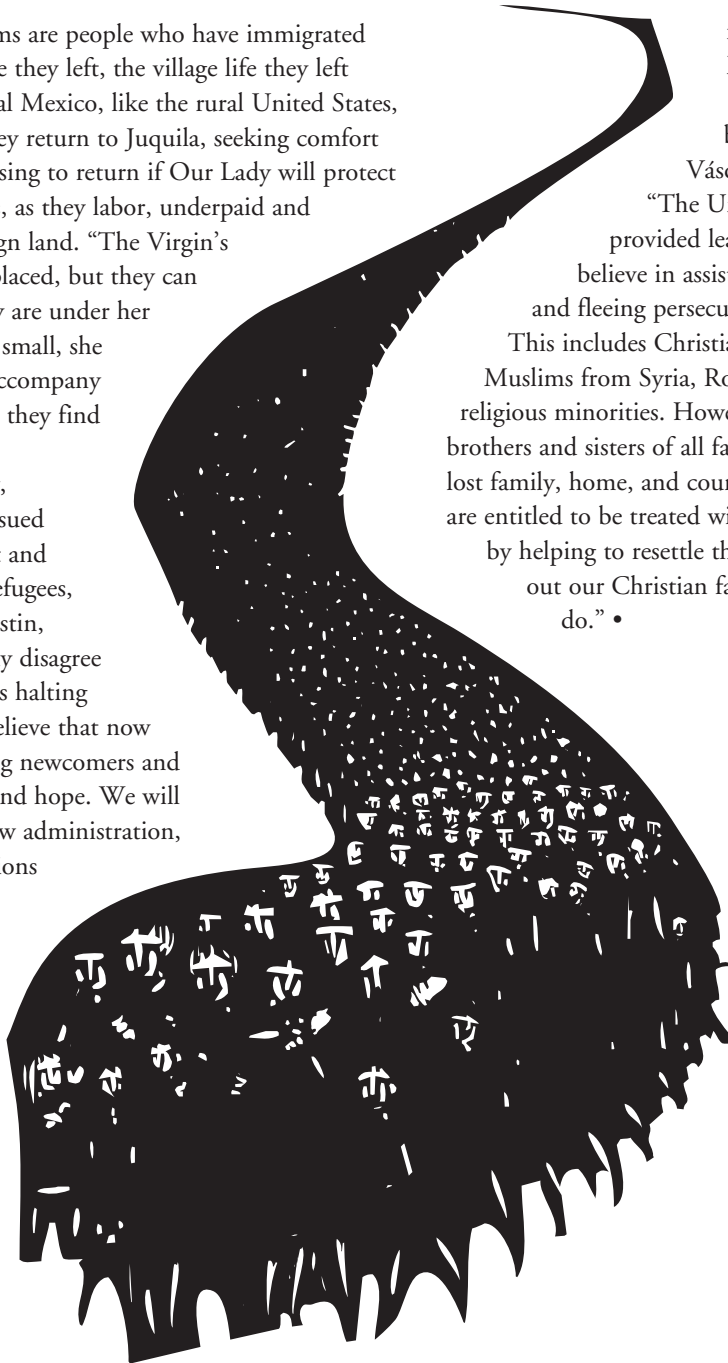
knees. Many of the pilgrims are people who have immigrated to the United States. Since they left, the village life they left behind is vanishing as rural Mexico, like the rural United States, depopulates. Uprooted they return to Juquila, seeking comfort and protection and promising to return if Our Lady will protect them and their loved ones, as they labor, underpaid and underprotected, in a foreign land. "The Virgin's children may become displaced, but they can never be lost, because they are under her mantle" Like them, she is small, she came into exile, she will accompany them. Gazing on her face, they find a portal to eternity.

When in late January, 2017, President Trump issued the executive order to halt and reduce the admission of refugees, Bishop Joe Vásquez of Austin, Texas, wrote: "We strongly disagree with the Executive Order's halting refugee admissions. We believe that now more than ever, welcoming newcomers and refugees is an act of love and hope. We will continue to engage the new administration, as we have all administrations for the duration of the current refugee program, now almost forty years. We will work vigorously to ensure that refugees are humanely welcomed in collaboration with Catholic Charities without sacrificing our security or our core values as Americans, and to ensure that

families may be reunified with their loved ones."

Regarding the Executive Order's ban on Syrian refugees, Bishop Vásquez added:

"The United States has long provided leadership in resettling refugees. We believe in assisting all those who are vulnerable and fleeing persecution, regardless of their religion. This includes Christians, as well as Yazidis and Shia Muslims from Syria, Rohingyas from Burma, and other religious minorities. However, we need to protect all our brothers and sisters of all faiths, including Muslims, who have lost family, home, and country. They are children of God and are entitled to be treated with human dignity. We believe that by helping to resettle the most vulnerable, we are living out our Christian faith as Jesus has challenged us to do." •





## THE DESERT CHRONICLE

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### *Dorothy Day (1897-1980)*

Dorothy Day whose cause for canonization is advancing and whom Pope Francis named as a great American, contributed to the *New York Catholic Worker* paper for 45 years, wrote many letters, and a partial bibliography. She has had several biographers, most recently Kate Hennesey, the youngest daughter of Dorothy's only child, Tamar. Here are some titles in the library:

Day, Dorothy. *All the Way to Heaven: Selected Letters*. Ed. Robert Ellsberg (2010); *Selected Writings. By Little and by Little*. Ed. Robert Ellsberg (2007); *The Long Loneliness* (2009); *The Duty of Delight: Diaries* (2011); *Nothing Held Back* (2016).

Forest, Jim. *All Is Grace. A Biography of Dorothy Day* (2011)

Hennesey, Kate. *Dorothy Day: The World Will Be Saved by Beauty: An Intimate Portrait of My Grandmother* (2017)

Peters, Benjamin. *Called to Be Saints: John Hugo, the Catholic Worker, and a Theology of Radical Christianity* (2016)



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