



Monastery of the Ascension

THE DESERT CHRONICLE

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120 Years of Priestly Ministry: A Reminiscence

By Fr. Hugh Feiss, O.S.B.

IN 20+ YEARS OF WRITING FOR THE *DESERT CHRONICLE* I HAVE HAD SEVERAL OPPORTUNITIES TO PRESENT THE FACTS OF THE LIVES AND DEEDS OF FR. BONIFACE LAUTZ AND FR. ANDREW BAUMGARTNER, who were ordained on May 6, 1960. This time, on the 60th anniversary of their ordination, I'm just going to tell what I remember of 67 years in which I have lived in varying degrees of proximity to these priestly men.

In 1953 I entered Mount Angel Minor Seminary as a high school freshman. The next year they, John Lautz and Wayne Baumgartner, entered Mount Angel Abbey as novices, having graduated from the minor seminary (high school and junior college) that same year. I didn't have much personal contact with them during the next few years, because the young monks were strictly separated from the seminarians.

However, there was one glorious exception. In those days there were two gyms at Mount Angel, the big one that is still there, and the "little gym," a war surplus building that stood down the slope where the abbey's famous library is now located. The minor seminary was a boarding school, and there was not much to do on weekends (there was little free time during the week)—except play basketball. I logged thousands of hours of

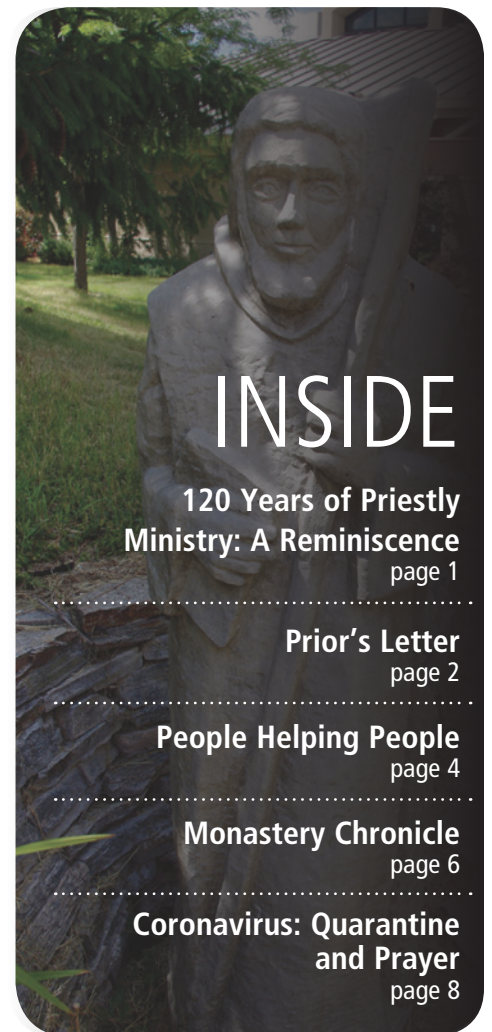
basketball during my seminary years. Some of the "fraters" (monks preparing for the priesthood), notably Fr. Andrew and Fr. Boniface, would come to the "little gym" to play basketball on weekends. Some of us from the seminary would join them to make enough for a game. Many of my memories of people from those far away days are tied to how they played basketball (e.g., "Mike had a good shot from the corner.") I remember one future prelate who played like a fullback. Of those Saturday games with the "fraters" I have only happy memories. We played to win, but quickly regrouped after one game to play another.

Winning was just something to give the game zest, not the end-all of playing. If we committed a foul we called it on ourselves. It was play as Hugo Rahner described it, the practice of *eutrapelia*, the virtue



Fr. Andrew and Fr. Boniface

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Prior's Letter

Dear Friends of the Monastery,

As I write this, the Feast of the Ascension is a week away. Like many of our monastic confreres and sisters across the country, currently we are not hosting guests at programs or liturgical celebrations. Benedictine hospitality is pretty limited for now. Just how long that will be is uncertain. We are much more fortunate than many in our area whose lives have been affected adversely.

In the Nicene Creed we profess: *He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father*. What we are saying is the Jesus' saving work is completed. What he came to do is done. The Father sent him to become one of us in his incarnation, to vanquish through his death and resurrection the powers of evil that separate us from God's love, and to lead us to be one with him in heaven. Jesus, human and divine, is victoriously seated with his Father. He is with the Father as God and man. Our heavenly goal is to be with him as complete human beings, body and soul. What he has done in himself is a real possibility for us. So we rightfully celebrate on the Feast of the Ascension.

Why? Because we have reason to be confident that Christ's promises will be fulfilled. At Mass these past days we've been hearing Jesus speak in the Gospel of John: "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be." (John. 14, 3)

As we live with COVID-19 and the many concerns of our world, our faith in the Ascension of Christ gives us a perspective on how to live. In the first place, Jesus' concern for us is for the whole person, body and soul. We are not destined to be disembodied spirits. So we are to have concern for the basic human needs of all in the here and now, not just ourselves. Our work for the good of others is a reflection of Christ's love. As we struggle with situations that could and do lead many to feel helpless and hopeless, our ascended Christ keeps telling us that there is more, much more to look forward to, and to keep doing the best we can in view of that.

Our striving here and now is for the future. St. Paul encourages us: "It is Christ Jesus who died, rather was raised, who also is at the right hand of God, who intercedes for us" (Rom. 8, 34).

So we pray with the Church: "Gladden us with holy joys and make us rejoice with devout thanksgiving, for the Ascension of Christ your Son is our exaltation, and where the Head has gone before in glory, the Body is called to follow in hope." (Prayer for the Feast)

Know that you are remembered here, even if we can't visit in person. Thank you for your prayers. Peace and good things.

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



that enables us to give ourselves fully to the very serious business of enjoying play or wit.

Another vivid memory is of Fr. Andrew's mother. Toward the end of our senior year of high school we were allowed to go to the college recreation room, which brought with it permission to smoke. It was not unusual for seniors to anticipate that privilege in the woods somewhere. The rector heard about it and said every high school student who had smoked was to turn himself in or else. A pal of mine and I had smoked perhaps two cigarettes, but we didn't like the sounds of that "or else" so we turned ourselves in. Our punishment was to be banned from the graduation dinner. Father Andrew's mother heard about our plight. I can't exactly remember what she did—I think she invited us to her house in town for dinner—in any case I'm sure we criminals ate better than those at the dinner.

When I finished junior college, I decided to join the monastery. I liked the idea that as a monk you never knew what you might be asked to do. That was fine with me: teacher, parish priest, truck driver, they all seemed interesting, provided they didn't involve singing. Fr. Andrew and Fr. Boniface were and are excellent singers and Fr. Andrew plays the organ. In all seriousness, the choir master told me to go join the Jesuits. Anyway, it was a mighty scary thing to walk into those quiet halls of the monastery, where everything was governed by arcane and detailed protocols. One of the first persons I met was Fr. Boniface, whose kind greeting lifted some of the terror.

Later, I can't remember when, the "mother's club" of the seminary decided we needed an indoor swimming pool and agreed to finance it. Fr. Andrew's father took on the task of building it. We were sometimes sent to help him. I was not much interested in swimming, so I don't know that I ever swam in it. I do know that Fred Baumgartner was a very careful, thoughtful man.

In my early years in the monastery there occurred an incident of epic importance. Fr. Andrew and some other "fraters" were assigned to work for Fr. Stephen (known in Idaho as the "black bandit" for his proclivity to ask for things that people had sitting idly in their yards) who had so much to do with

getting the Monastery of the Ascension built at its present sight. Anyway, it was a hot day. When their work detail was over, Fr. Stephen or someone gave them each a cold beer.

It was rumored that when the novice master heard about that he was livid, our greatest fear, even after Mount St. Helen's exploded. As senior member of the work detail, Fr. Andrew was held responsible for



Fr. Andrew

the atrocity.

Sometime in my college career I decided to take Greek (in my years at Mount Angel I actually took First Greek three times). Anyway, I remember Fr. Boniface was in that same class. Unfortunately, we were not taught to speak ancient or biblical Greek, whichever it was, or we might be talking like Xenophon or St. Paul. Or maybe not.

I was there when Fr. Andrew and Fr. Boniface were ordained priests. Fr. Boniface then went off to get a doctorate in theology at the University of Ottawa and came back to teach us what was called "fundamental theology," a study of faith, revelation and doctrine. Ironically, that was the first course I taught in the theology school some years later.

Fr. Andrew did various things for a few years, then he obtained a Master's degree in mathematics at Colorado State University and came back to teach math in the seminary. He was an exacting teacher and brought out the best in his students. If they were especially qualified he let them play racquetball with him, which kept them humble.

Meanwhile, Fr. Andrew was becoming a famed hiker. Those who survived racquetball might be invited to go backpacking. In addition to getting blisters, they also had the opportunity to develop a lasting hatred for instant oatmeal (Fr. Andrew himself does not eat oatmeal to this day, except under duress). I, on the other hand, did something that was called camping, which might involve hiking, but not a 50-pound pack, and during which one could pick huckleberries and put them in real oatmeal. Fr. Andrew would go on to complete the Pacific Crest Trail 2 ½ times. That he didn't finish the 3rd trip—a doctor discovered he had had a heart attack—disappointed a number of bears who were tired of him tromping by and were waiting for him along the trail.

I was ordained and was sent to Catholic University to earn a Licentiate (fancy Master's) degree in theology, and then go to Europe to gain a doctorate in liturgy (that I didn't do that has been good both for liturgy and for me). A philosophy teacher at the seminary quit while I was at Catholic University, so I was called back to take his place. Along with that there was a restructuring of the seminary, so that Fr. Boniface and Fr. Norbert became the rector and vice-rector of the theology school, and Fr. Andrew and I became the rector and vice-rector of the college. This was the late 1960s-early 1970s when college and university administrators were regarded with the same warm feelings as the covid-19 virus is today. There were many adventures: I discovered marijuana plants growing in one of the potted plants in the foyer of the library; I was roundly denounced at a meeting when a student said "you don't trust



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People Helping People

By Fr. Hugh Feiss, OSB

Coffeeland

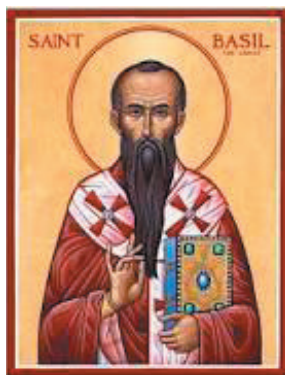
IN 1889, JAMES HILL, MIGRATED FROM MANCHESTER, ENGLAND, TO EL SALVADOR AND BECAME A COFFEE BARON, THE FOUNDER OF one of the “14 families” who controlled the wealth, the army, and the politics of the small nation on the Pacific Coast of Central America. On Halloween, 1979, his grandson, Jaime Hill, was writing a note to his daughter, Alexandra, when he was kidnapped by rebels struggling to overthrow the oligarchy and distribute land to the peasants who worked on the coffee plantations. The rebels demanded \$8,000,000. His brother, Harold Hill asked Archbishop Romero to intercede with the rebels to save Jaime’s life. Archbishop Romero did so on December 16, in a Sunday Mass in Advent: “In the name of this family, and in the name of the families of all those who have been abducted, I beg you, as the Pope did in Ireland I beg you on my knees if it is necessary, to return freedom to these people, our sisters and brothers, and thus restore tranquility to these beloved homes.”

Jaime Hill wanted to be home for Christmas, but nothing happened. The kidnappers set January 16 as the day they would kill Jaime Hill if their demands were not met. Hill’s wife went to Archbishop Romero on January 16. On January 18 she pleaded for her husband’s release on national television. Finally, in March, the kidnappers freed Jaime Hill after receiving \$4,000,000 in cash, his armored Mercedes, and a promise

that the Hill family would pay for advertisements to be run in American and European newspapers explaining the kidnappers’ motives. A few days later Archbishop Romero was shot to death by a gunman sent by a death squad who sided with the oligarchy.

Augustine Sedgewich uses the story of Jaime Hill’s kidnapping and release to frame his book, *Coffeeland*, a history





of the primary role coffee had in the transformation of El Salvador, into a country of 5,000,000 people, most of them very poor. It is a story of how plantation owners effectively enslaved their workers by trading subsistence food for hard labor. In 1821, El Salvador won independence from Spain. In the newly established country here were four lawyers, four physicians, and 250,000 citizen farmers. Most of the farmers worked communal land and sold their surplus in town markets, just as people had done for hundreds of years. Then, swiftly in the second half of the 19th century, communal land was privatized, sold, and turned into large plantations.

Even among dispossessed farmers who now worked on the plantations, there was still a sense of communal bonds, which led them to share the little that they had with neighbors and family who needed help. This sense of community is still evident in the manifesto the kidnappers forced the Hill family to have printed in the *New York Times*: “The struggle that is now taking place in our country, expresses a people’s right to be the author of its own destiny... the people take in their hands what legitimately belongs to them, the huge plantations,... and all the properties of the oligarchy; this is the definite solution and no other that would keep us subjected to poverty and permanent repression is acceptable.”

St. Basil: What is in your closet?

This story of coffee production in El Salvador was still fresh in my mind when I read the latest issue of the [New York] *Catholic Worker*, in which Jim Reagan cites a well-known sermon of St. Basil the Great. Basil says if someone steals clothes we call him a thief. What about someone who has a coat in his closet that he doesn’t use. The clothes and shoes stored in your closet, the food stored in your pantry, the money you hoard--these belong to those who need them. “How can I make you realize the misery of the poor? How can I make you understand that your wealth comes from their weeping.” Those who share their possessions aim at a situation where everyone has as much as they need and no one has more than any other. Reagan wonders, then, how much of a personal sacrifice are we to make, if we love our neighbors as ourselves? He also

wonders how we make amends to those whose exploitation has undergirded our privileged status.

Finding Happiness

When Jaime Hill was finally released he was disoriented. He realized his own life had been controlled by his father and his father’s business. By contrast, he found that his kidnappers were full of purpose. “They were doing something wonderful, fighting for social justice.” They had what he needed. When he was released it took him a while to find himself. Then, he built a clinic in San Salvador, the capital, and invited his daughter Alexandra to help him in providing treatment to those suffering addiction and stress in the wake of the civil war. That brought him peace; made him a very happy man.

Paying Essential People a Living Wage

Jaime Hill spent his captivity in a small hut in solitary confinement, increasingly convinced he would not leave it alive. Most of us have spent a couple of months now in quarantine in our own homes, with some fear we may catch a potentially lethal disease. We have learned one thing, that there is no basketful of deplorables. The people who check us out at the supermarket, or empty the trash, mow lawns in the park, check us in and take our temperatures in clinics are essential workers doing essential jobs. There seems to be a growing sentiment that they should be paid a living wage—which is not \$7.25/hour, the minimum wage for most employees in Idaho (even this does not always apply to people under 20, people who receive tips, farmworkers), nor is \$13 or \$13.50/hour, the minimum wage in California and Washington, a living wage. At a time when dairy farmers and restaurants are having a very hard time, it may seem cruel to think about raising the minimum wage to a living wage. It will also mean the rest of us (many of us categorized as “unessential”) will pay more for food, but that more may well be the extra coat in the closet that St. Basil was talking about, the way to find the happiness that Jaime felt, the happiness that comes from living with, rather than from, others. •





Monastery Chronicle

By Fr. Boniface Lautz, OSB

MARCH

March went out with a 6.5 magnitude earthquake.. With all the preoccupation on COVID-19, it took something of that magnitude to get our attention. The epicenter was in a fairly remote place north of us. As we were coming to supper people felt our building shaking. We had no damage, and there was little damage overall.

Our preoccupation returns to center stage. Since we're all on a "stay home" routine, washing our hands and social distancing, it's not easily forgotten. Following the directives of our state and Church leaders has us doing pretty much what everyone in the country is doing. There have been some "surges" in Blaine County just north of us and others will likely occur closer to home before it's over. Our doors are closed to all visitors and any programs scheduled through September have been cancelled.

March began with our annual retreat. We used presentations by Bishop Barron and incorporated some times of adoration in the evening. Fr. Meinrad was able to join us. I think the days were well spent. Our Oblates' retreat followed and was well received. Fr. Hugh had to make some late revisions of the content and felt the results were very worthwhile.

The Feast of St. Benedict was our last public liturgy. Bishop Peter had asked that public Masses be discontinued after the previous Sunday. The notice came before we could broadcast it widely, so we decided to make March 21 the last time for public Mass.

It was also a day when volunteers pruned fruit trees and did other outside work on the grounds and the garden. John Wasko organized the day and a lot was accomplished.

A retreat for Hispanic deacons and their wives was our final program for now. The scheduled knitting retreat had to be cancelled. It was fully booked. Making similar decisions though September will surely affect the monthly financial reports.

Lack of guests has given us opportunity to do some maintenance jobs. John Wasko and helpers painted the kitchen and dish washing areas. Some of the public rest rooms have gotten "deep cleaning".

COVID-19 has changed some travel plans. Br. John was in Nebraska and returned home a week early due to uncertainty of airlines. Fr. Ezekiel was

visiting in Wisconsin and we told him to cancel his return flight to Idaho until travel conditions looked safer.

Fr. Andrew turned 86. Sylvester turned 75. Celebrations were on the low key side. Maybe we can make up for it after Easter.

APRIL

Making the calendar for May was pretty simple. There weren't any outside events to record. COVID-19 has infiltrated and influenced most of what we do, or in this case, what we will not be doing.

Our liturgy for the Triduum and Easter was modified according to the guidelines we received from the Diocese of Boise. Because we had no lay participants, it was easily adjusted and went well. Holy Thursday without foot washing and procession to the altar of repose felt "different". The Saturday Vigil was brief by comparison with former years.

Mid-month, Gov. Little gave some restrictions to be followed in Idaho. We were familiar with the personal hygiene items but implemented the social distancing in the dining room and chapel. So we eat in the guest dining area. There is plenty of unused space in the chapel. It is unlikely that we will feel crowded very soon. All of us are of an age that leaves us "vulnerable."

Signs of spring. The lawn got mowed on April 18. The vegetable garden was tilled. Br. Tobiah prepared some beds for flowers; daffodils and tulips are blooming. Mother Nature has her own schedule. Our farm



boss reported that the sugar beets had to be replanted. Five days of morning frost took a toll.

The cooling system in the chapel needed attention. We were stuck on 74° and above degrees and the outside temps were approaching 80°. Fortunately that has been fixed. We're at the change of season which brings sunshine, frost, rain and strong winds, sometimes all in the same day.

Going to the doctor and social distancing have interesting variations. Fr. Andrew got a blood test by sticking his arm out of the car window. I went to the pharmacy to get pills and waited in the car for the attendant to bring them.

MAY

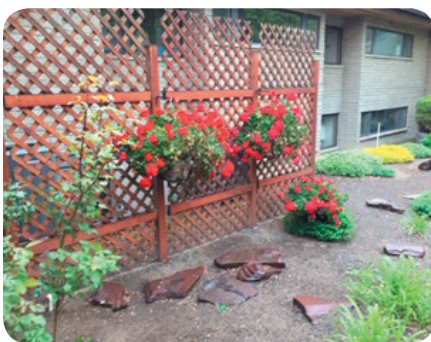
May 1, Fr. Ezekiel returned from Wisconsin and after a two week self-quarantine was back in the ranks. Thanks be to God. The quarantine is required by Idaho guidelines for people returning from out of state.

Our friend, Fr. John Koelsch, died on Sunday, May 3. He had lived with us in his retirement years until he went to a local care facility several years ago. We kept close contact with him and were able provide assistance as needed. His funeral was at the Cathedral in Boise on May 14. Several of us attended.

A good friend brought large containers of geraniums to decorate our chapel courtyard. Our yard and garden machinery got taken for repairs. The farm crew activated the irrigation system for the grounds, so spring seemed officially in place. One can still see a little ice on the sprinkler lines some mornings.

We are voting with absentee ballots. We could apply for one "easily" on the computer, which most did. The "easily" part didn't quite work out for some. But in the end, we all received our ballots in the mail.

Fr. Hugh had a birthday on May 8 and a name day on May 11. It was different this year, because he celebrated at the monastery. In previous years he has been at the Medieval Institute in Kalamazoo, Michigan.



On Ascension Thursday we celebrated our patronal feast. This year we were able to include some additional festivities. Often in past years we were hosting one group or another, with not much time to "celebrate". One positive effect of COVID-19.

May 26, Fr. Andrew and Fr. Boniface observed the 60th anniversary of their ordination as priests. Celebrations with family and friends will be delayed until later. They shared liturgical roles at the community Mass on that day.

Fr. Andrew was the principal celebrant and Fr. Boniface preached. •

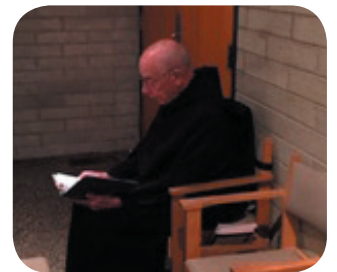
us," and I replied "Some of you, that's true." However, in spite of all the difficult times and adjustments those years called for, they were generally happy times. The seminary, unlike many others, survived. Fr. Andrew was easy to work with, and we made a good cop, bad cop duo, switching roles quite often.

During the time both Fr. Andrew and I were involved in the seminary, there was a small band, made up mostly of high school students. A few of us on the faculty joined to help keep it going. I had played the trombone in grade school and took it up again—thinking it was good to do things you were not good at. Fr. Andrew, who could play a number of instruments took up the trombone also. There were three epic moments in our joint careers. Once during practice one of the students raised his hand, pointed at me, and asked the teacher what is the word for "rhythmically challenged?" Fr. Andrew and I used to practice after breakfast in an out building: one day we looked up and there were deer right up against the window watching us. Finally, one Fourth of July, he and I played "America the Beautiful" from the choir loft of the abbey church during the community Mass, an event without prequel or sequel.

There was another house-cleaning of the seminary administration some years later. Fr. Boniface became sole rector of the entire institution (in Rome he would have been called "Rector Magnificus"). Fr. Andrew became business manager of the monastery. Fr. Boniface was also chaplain at the Benedictine Nursing Home in Mt. Angel, where he became an expert in gerontology. I became the head librarian, where I became an expert of old books and learned some lessons in management. Then, one by one we were

rewarded for our faithful service with a one-way trip to the Magic Valley in Idaho. Fr. Boniface was soon prior of the community, Fr. Andrew was appointed business manager as soon as he got off the bus. A few years later I came with nothing much to do, so I wrote a book. Fr. Boniface and Fr. Andrew have been prior and subprior most of the subsequent years, the glue and wisdom of the community. Under them the Ministry Center was built and eventually paid off.

Fr. Boniface and Fr. Andrew have served in many responsible roles in two monasteries. They have continued to serve long after they might have hoped to retire. They have taught many students, made many friends, lived out what Michael Casey calls the "unexciting life" of a Benedictine monk in some not so unexciting times and situations. Between them they have been priests for 120 years. I have known them for all those years, a caboose to two engines who could. For them and that I, like many, am extremely grateful. •



Fr. Boniface





THE DESERT CHRONICLE

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The Coronavirus: Quarantine and Prayer

The monastery will be closed until September 1, 2020. We will monitor the evolving situation. We miss your visits and your presence at the liturgy. You are very much in our prayers, as we hope we are in yours. Here is prayer for these times from the American Catholic Bishops (slightly revised):

*For all who have contracted coronavirus. We pray for care and healing.
For those who are particularly vulnerable. We pray for safety and protection.
For all who are afraid or anxious. We pray for peace of mind and spirit.
For families facing difficult choices. We pray for policies to help their plight.
For those without adequate health insurance. We pray they will have help.
For those who are afraid to access care due to immigration status. We pray for the recognition of the God-given dignity of all.
For our brothers and sisters around the world. We pray in solidarity.
For officials and decisionmakers. We pray for wisdom and empathy.
Father, during this time may bring, hope, comfort and love to all. Amen.*



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