



Monastery of the Ascension

THE DESERT CHRONICLE

Vol. XXXII, Number 2 - JUNE 2023

HOSPITALITY

By Diane Holley

Lord Jesus, you welcomed all who came into your presence. May we reflect that same spirit through our lives. May your light shine on our hearts to welcome others as you. Amen.

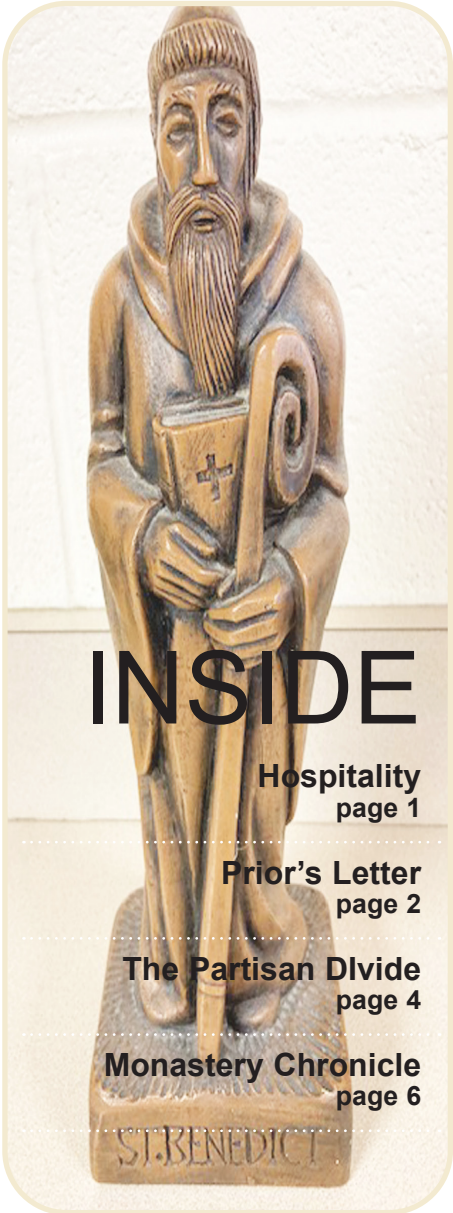
Presence is the heart of our Faith and of Benedictine Hospitality.

The Monastery has been my go-to place for many years, beginning soon after moving here from California in 1981, when we had classes in the basement long before the retreat house was added. When Father Hugh suggested I talk on hospitality, I thought about those early years here and always being drawn back. even though we raised our five children attending Saint Jerome's Parish.

Then, the light came on!

Hospitality was the major factor that always called me back to this place of welcome, place of oneness with nature, place apart from the noise and stress of the secular community. I am grateful for this community of spiritual men who are always grateful for the presence of the other (me included). The sisters at St. Gertrude's in Cottonwood show the same wonderful hospitality toward guests. Sister Chanelle took time to bake and bring some scrumptious goodies when she came to sit and have tea with us guests, despite her age and other duties at the monastery. Thanks be to Saint Benedict for his insight and fortitude to place high value on "welcoming the other as Jesus."

For anyone who would like to read and ponder an in-depth account of *Continues on page 2*



INSIDE

Hospitality
page 1

Prior's Letter
page 2

The Partisan Divide
page 4

Monastery Chronicle
page 6

Introduction to June 2023 Desert Chronicle from Fr. Hugh Feiss:

The oblates of the monastery held a retreat from February 17-19, 2023, during which they gave five conferences on key Benedictine ideas. These oblates gave the same talks at the parish in Jerome, Idaho - one each Sunday for the first five weeks of Lent. This issue offers the text of another of these talks. These are ideas that can apply to anyone's life, and they express from various angles the Benedictine way to God. We hope you find them helpful.

Benedictine hospitality, there is a comprehensive account in the Oblate Manual on the Monastery of Ascension website.

Hospitality is the way we come out of ourselves. It is the first step toward dismantling the barriers of this world. Hospitality is the way we turn a prejudiced world around, one heart at a time.

Using examples, I will provide a short but broad picture of Benedictine hospitality from its origins until now, its attributes and applications.

Old Testament Foundation of Benedictine Hospitality as described in the Rule of Benedict, chapter 53: Genesis 18: 2-11.

Abraham invites three strangers into his home and prepares a more than generous meal for them. Note that he first looks up to see them. That is point one of hospitality: look up from our phones, TVs, and tasks to see and encounter the other. Hospitality starts with the person God has placed in our path to be received as Christ. Other significant points of hospitality Abraham performs are these: he ran to greet them; he bowed before them; he brought water to wash their feet; he provided a meal for them; he served them himself.

He did all that, providing a beautiful example of taking the guests into one's space, welcoming them and caring for them. Abraham and Sarah found themselves entertaining angels (Hebrews 13:1-3(-13), who promised them a long awaited son.

Zacchaeus: Luke 19:1-10.

We know Jesus and his disciples traveled about with no place to lay their heads, unless they received hospitality from those along the way. Read Matthew 25:35-36: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me." Love changes hearts through conversion.

Possibly one of the most moving examples of Jesus' conversion of another is that of Zacchaeus. Jesus stopped what he was doing and what was on his agenda and looked up at Zacchaeus in the tree. That made an encounter possible. Then, with humility and love, Jesus was present to Zacchaeus. After receiving this grace, Zacchaeus set things straight. Is it possible for others to set things right after receiving our love?

Simon, the Pharisee: Luke 7:36-50

Simon invites Jesus to his prestigious home for dinner. This is a party for high class folks. Guess who shows up uninvited: a hopeless sinner of a woman, most likely not dressed for the occasion. Simon sees Jesus look at her and wonders what's on his mind. Simon is expecting Jesus to condemn this woman. Jesus turns the tables and relates a parable to Simon regarding who needs greater forgiveness: the person with the larger debt or the one with less debt. Jesus says this woman offered him unselfish acts of hospitality that were not afforded by Simon. Simon's

Continues on page 3



Prior's Letter

Dear Friends of the Monastery,

During May, a local company began paving the service road and parking area behind the monastery. It's a job that will make winter use a lot better. The equipment being used is large. Big machines, skilled operators, lots of ground being moved, something new in progress. That kind of accomplishment appeals to lots of us; watching it is a pleasant experience. The tasks awaiting my attention may not be exciting, spectacular, or ground breaking, but they need to be done. So, time spent watching the paving operation has limits.

Right now, we've just commemorated Pentecost. After that, the liturgical year will return to "ordinary" time. Major celebrations will be less frequent. But our lives will be filled with things that "need to be done": responsibilities that we have because we are followers of the risen Lord. I'm not saying that major liturgical celebrations are like watching a big paving job. Just as the pavement will make winter travel better, however, so living our lives as people of faith in the risen Lord, guided by the Holy Spirit, will transform our ordinary tasks into offerings pleasing to the Lord. It's one of the reasons why the gift of the Holy Spirit has such great importance.

Some of the events recorded in the chronicle section of this edition were ordinary and foreseen. Deaths were not. Easter, Ascension, and Pentecost make a big difference. Celebrating the feast of the Ascension just days ago, we have reason to be hope filled, confident that future events, ordinary or extraordinary, can pave the path as we follow the Lord.

Thank you for your continuing concern and support for all that we do. We are blessed in so many ways. Do be assured of our prayers for you.

Peace and good things!

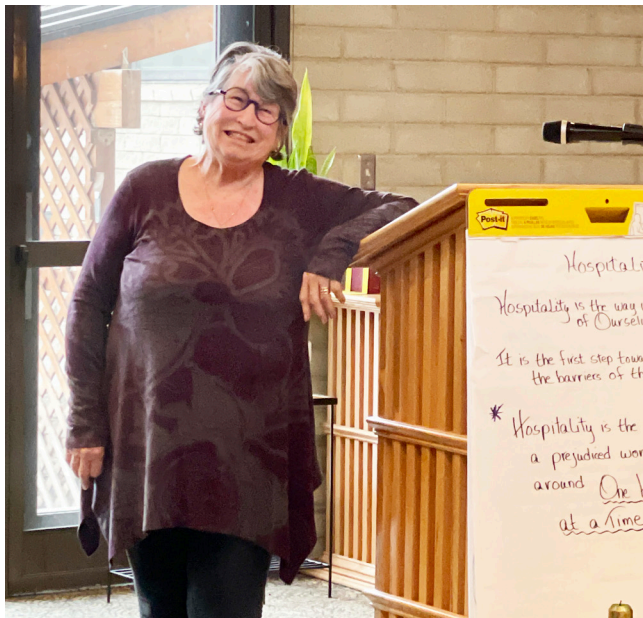
Fr. Boniface Lutz, O.S.B.
Prior



eyes are opened to see how this sinful woman's immense hospitality toward Jesus demonstrated her great love for him.

Bishop Robert Barron notes that the topography of the parable is not incidental. Jesus is between Simon and the woman. When he invites Simon to look at her, he forces him to see her through Jesus, to see her with new eyes and encounter her.

Simon then does an about-face regarding those who owe him money and those who he has cheated. Again, we see hospitality as a vehicle for love that changes hearts. Forgiveness is the beginning; human transformation is the goal.



Diane Holley

Saint Francis of Assisi

Francis was called by God to rebuild the church. Among the old, dilapidated churches he restored in the valley below Assisi, he also found Saint Mary of the Angels, which belonged to a Benedictine abbey. He asked the abbot if he could restore this old church. The abbot said, "Yes." This "Little Portion" became the gathering place for those early Franciscans, with the help of the Benedictines.

Francis eventually journeyed to Rome to request approval of his new ministry. He was assisted in convincing Pope Innocent III to recognize his new Order by another Benedictine monk, Cardinal Colonna. Apparently, Francis returned this gesture by delivering some fish each year for the abbot. Here we see another beautiful example of hospitality in yet another dimension: no competition or territoriality. Praise the Lord for the new Franciscan Order!

When Saint Clare decided she wanted to follow Francis, she was received into a Benedictine women's monastery, where she was safe from the disapproval of her family. Here we see the hospitality of accepting a group whose evangelical ideas may have seemed different. If the spirit of love had been missing, this would not have happened.

The Monastery of the Ascension

A comparison might be drawn regarding the above scenario of Saint Francis and the hospitality afforded to the Missionaries, Servant of the Word, by the Benedictines of the Monastery of the Ascension. We see a group of older Benedictine monks receiving this group of young men, who have a totally different way of promoting the Gospel. It's a joyful, yet challenging sharing of the same place by these two religious communities. The commonality of love of the Lord in both these groups is the "glue" that holds them together despite the challenges of everyday life.

Hospitality in the Teachings of the Early Christian Writers and at the Monastery

A scholar identified five characteristics of early Christian teaching on hospitality:

1. Eagerness to receive guests at any time. (Well, almost anytime here at this monastery.)
2. Guests are always shown precedence.
3. Hospitality involves more than material benefits; it is respectful care of the other.
4. Hospitality is offered to all regardless of race or status.
5. Hospitality is a personal duty not left to others. Such is the hospitality flowing from Gospel love that can change hearts.

A Concluding Story

Many years ago, while working in the St. Jerome's Soup kitchen, a certain monk was talking about the poor people of Haiti. His words inspired me to investigate more about these people just 700 miles off the coast of Florida. How could people so close to our country be living in such poverty? In 2002, I began sponsoring children there through Compassion International. One year, after the devastating earthquake of 2010, I went to visit them. The country was still a mass of rubble. The airport was in shambles; the runway cracked with heaves. Every plane landing was welcomed with a live band playing upbeat music and with folks hustling about as if it were Mardi Gras. We were greeted by happy children singing and grabbing our white hands, shouting "blanc! blanc!" Homes were tarp stretched over posts, with dirt floors, no electricity, no running water. Yet, wherever we visited, a beautiful meal and celebration was provided by a special greeting committee. All this just after a massive earthquake with 300,000 fatalities. There was music, food, a gift of flowers, handmade hats, or whatever they had to offer the guest as Christ. I was taken aback and transformed by their loving hospitality. Since then, I have made numerous trips to Haiti, taking my 16 grandchildren in hopes their hearts will be transformed.

Hospitality is a new way of thinking; a call to action that has the potential to turn this prejudiced world around, one heart at a time.



THE PARTISAN DIVIDE

by Fr. Hugh Feiss, OSB

After reading and discussing Fr. Aaron Wessman, *The Church's Mission in a Polarized World* (New City Press, 2023), a group of us from around the monastery and another group in Boise are motivated and perplexed.

Fr. Wessman's widely praised, and well researched book does several things. His first two chapters show just how pervasive polarization is in our country. People naturally sort into groups by interest, religion, politics, ethnicity, neighborhood, Facebook friends, and so forth. This can lead to homogenizing, which in our time is intensifying. For example, politically this is manifest in maps of red and blue states. In 60% of the counties in the United States, one party regularly wins elections by a margin of at least 20%. A candidate of the other party has almost no chance of winning in those counties and so is not likely to visit them. The people within the counties seldom have contact with someone of another party.

If I know you are a Republican or a Democrat, I can reliably predict your views on guns, immigration, abortion, schools, the death penalty, and so forth. This is, in part, because the two major political parties allow

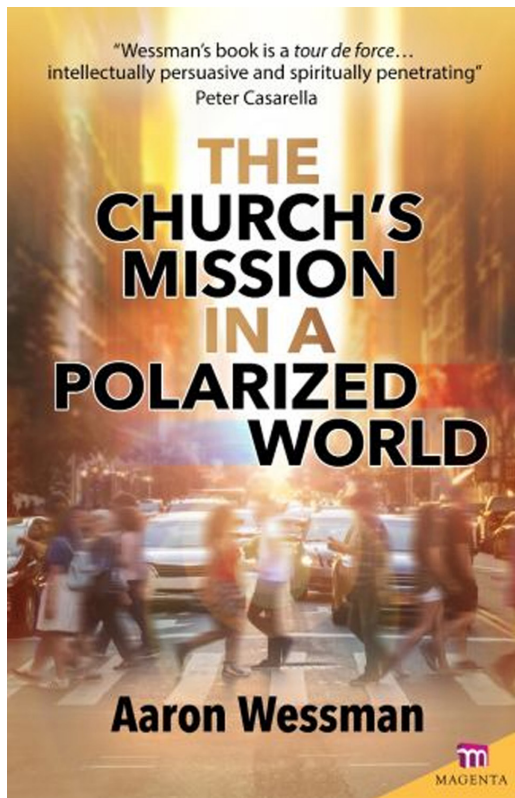
very little diversity in their candidates; those who don't toe a party's line are seldom supported by a party in an election. More extreme candidates tend to win primaries. Extreme media outlets reinforce and exploit the views of those who watch them.

Political affiliation has become a mega-identity, affecting other institutions, such as churches, school boards, and families. Moral issues have become political issues; religious leaders and pastors hesitate to speak about Christian teaching regarding violence, immigration, or the environment, for fear of splitting their communities along political lines. This nudges religion in an inward, individualistic direction. Polarization has become uncivil: the other is the "repugnant cultural other," not a child or image of God, not a fellow citizen, not a friendly neighbor, or fellow Catholic.

In the third chapter, Fr. Wessman turns to the theology of the Church. Catholics and other Christians each week profess a Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed, which says we believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. A highly polarized Church is none of those things. Polarizing division, St. Paul knew, was poison to holiness, community, and mission. Fr. Wessman provides examples of saints who have expressed in their lives these attributes or marks of the Church.

The fourth chapter was perhaps the one that hit home the most. In it, Fr. Wessman examined the use of "war" as a metaphor in our society: "culture war," "a war for the soul of America." In these wars, the other group—"lefties," "rednecks," university professors," "union members," "conservatives," "liberals," "welfare queens," "illegals," "patriots," "traitors," "the media"—are enemies. Most of us who have read this chapter feel compelled to watch our internal and external language, to avoid polarizing labels that make it difficult to interact with those whose opinions contrast with our own.

The fifth and sixth chapters of *The Church's Mission in a Polarized World*, are theological. In a nutshell, chapter two of Paul's letter to the Philippians says that Christ crossed over to earth, to be with wayward



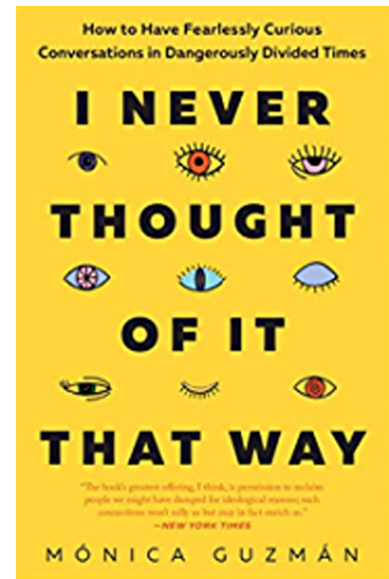
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humanity, even though it exposed him to death. On earth, he attempted to encounter people, to question them, hear them, and help them. For example, in the fourth chapter of the Gospel of John, Jesus enters hostile territory, strikes up a conversation with a woman who belongs to a hostile community. They discuss their respective religious beliefs and before the conversation is over, she puts her faith in Jesus. Fr. Wessman says that, as missionary disciples, we too need to cross over and encounter people who are different from us, especially those who have convictions that are opposite ours. We need to be curious, ask questions, try to understand their point of view. We are not aiming to convert them, though that might happen, but to understand them and help them understand us, so we can be neighbors and, perhaps, friends.

All this is convincing, but it is also frustrating. It is hard to know where to start. For one thing, most of us have little contact with those across polarizing divides. Secondly, even if we do, we have grown accustomed not to talk about a host of issues on which we disagree. One reason is: if we do happen to have a conversation about a sensitive issue, very often it is not easy to learn why people, or we ourselves, feel so strongly about contentious matters, or identify so closely with one of the two political parties. It is easier to crossover if we already have something in common; for example, we belong to the same garden club or Audubon

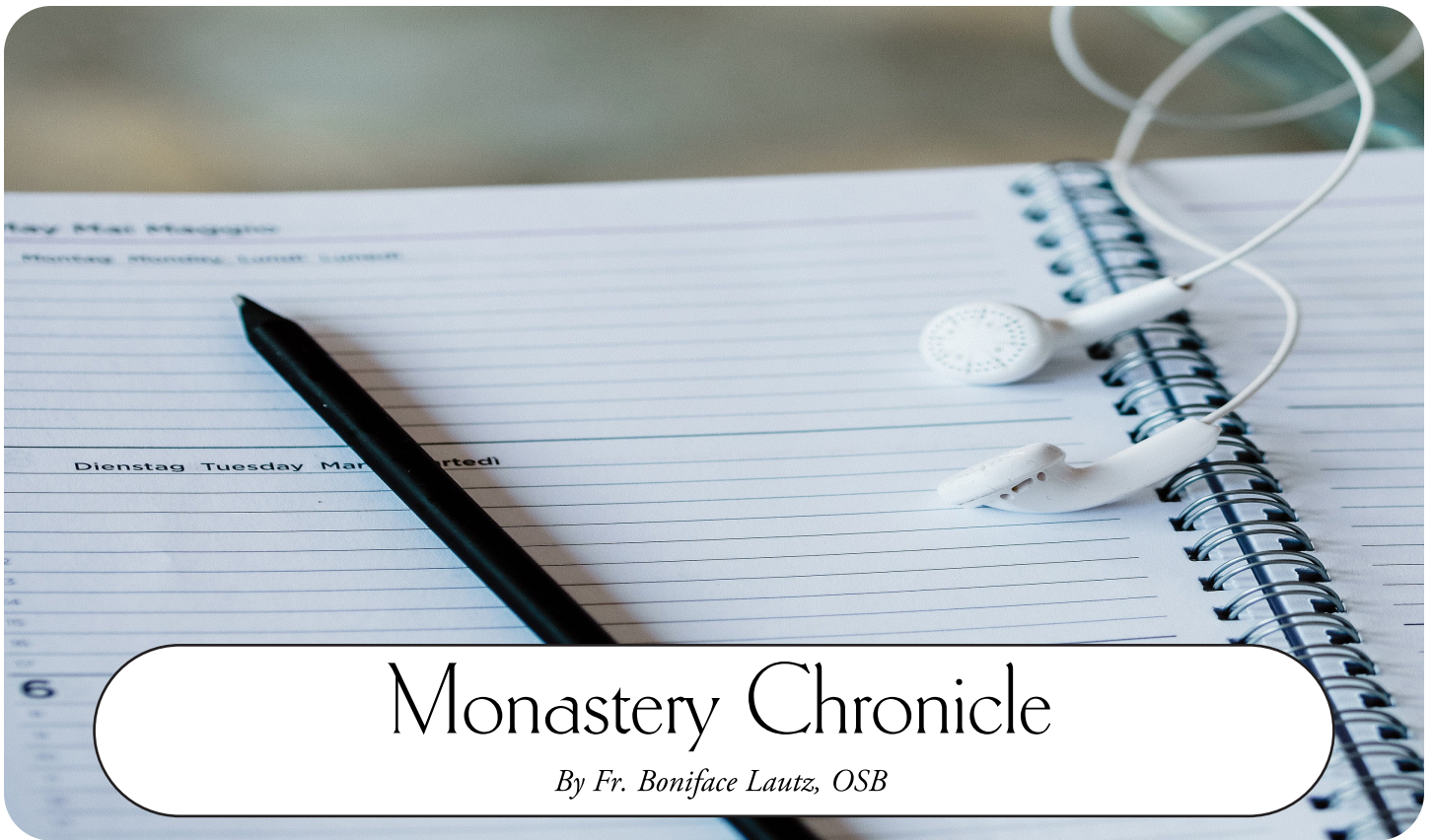
society, or sewing club, and have come to know and trust each other. Braver Angels – a group of citizens striving to depolarize America – seem to be effective at bringing conservatives and liberals together for mutual understanding and respect; we benefitted from a book by one of their writers, Mónica Guzmán. That is as far as we have gotten. We are very aware of the problem; we are mostly not strongly identified with a political party (at least we are Christian believers first); we are watching our thoughts and words to avoid polarizing or demonizing language; we want to respect others, to love our neighbors in an effective and affective way.



...there is a growing loss of the sense of history, which leads to even further breakup. A kind of “deconstructionism”, whereby human freedom claims to create everything starting from zero, is making headway in today’s culture. The one thing it leaves in its wake is the drive to limitless consumption and expressions of empty individualism. Concern about this led me to offer the young some advice. “If someone tells young people to ignore their history, to reject the experiences of their elders, to look down on the past and to look forward to a future that he himself holds out, doesn’t it then become easy to draw them along so that they only do what he tells them? He needs the young to be shallow, uprooted and distrustful, so that they can trust only in his promises and act according to his plans. That is how various ideologies operate: they destroy (or deconstruct) all differences so that they can reign unopposed. To do so, however, they need young people who have no use for history, who spurn the spiritual and human riches inherited from past generations, and are ignorant of everything that came before them.

—Pope Francis, *Fratelli tutti/All are brothers and sisters*





Monastery Chronicle

By Fr. Boniface Lautz, OSB

March 2023

We've purchased OCP Glory and Praise hymnals. They came early in the month and have worked well. These are hard-bound books and contain the Sunday and solemnity readings for the three-year cycle.

Strong winds caused some lengthy power outages on March 10 and 11. LuAnn was able to prepare meals. One of the outages was from 9:30 PM to 7:00 AM. We slept through most of that one. Rain and snow caused some roof damage, so preliminary repairs have been made.

March 13 was Br. Sylvester's birthday.

With St. Patrick's Day falling on a Friday this year, Bishop Peter Christensen dispensed Catholics in the Boise Diocese from the need to abstain from meat on the holiday. Word got to the kitchen too late to cook some corned beef. We had hamburgers instead. We did get corned beef the next day. On the Feast of St. Joseph, we celebrated Mass with the MSP community, as we do every Monday. They joined us the next day for the Feast of St. Benedict. That was a special blessing and a sign of unity.

Fr. Koelsch's van has finally been restored to working condition, thanks to the work of Br. Roger, MSP, and John Wasko. It now belongs to the MSP's. Our Kubota tractor has needed repairs. Thanks again to John, Ben Marshall and Br. Roger, it now works. It was used to till the garden.

On Sunday, March 26, the RCIA candidates and sponsors from St. Edward's in Twin Falls spent a day of retreat. On Friday, March 31, 58 eighth grade students and adults from the Ambrose School in Meridian came on a field trip. They had been studying the Rule of St. Benedict and wanted to visit a monastery. They were a remarkable group of young people with lots of questions.

We end the month in the first days of Spring ... for which we're still waiting. The temperature and the snow and rain have slowed the tilling and planting schedule on the farm. The MSPs are doing preliminary work by planting in the now restored greenhouse. A good friend has donated some green house plants.

April 2023

Holy Week and Easter began the month. Both we and the MSPs had a full cycle of liturgical celebrations. In addition, the MSPs had retreatants here for the Triduum. They enacted a reverent outdoor Stations of the Cross.

Dave Burgess tilled the vegetable garden. Fr. Leo, MSP, did some planting in the greenhouse. By month's end, we had a high temperature in the 80s. Before that we had days of mixed wind, snow and sun. It made farm and garden work difficult.

The Chapter gave approval for the paving of our service road and parking area behind the garage. It will be a major improvement. For some of us, a smooth walking surface will

Continues on page 7



be welcome. One heat pump has been replaced, and another will probably have to be.

Mid-month, we hosted a 12-Step retreat, which was well attended. This group was mostly from Utah and some members were accustomed to going to the former Holy Trinity Trappist Monastery each year.

MSP community members have traveled to California several times. They drive straight through most of the time. We have been able to welcome several new men to their formation program. As we used to be, the MSP priests are major contributors to parish needs in the Diocese. Several of them were named in the recent list of parish appointments.

Sr. Mary Forman, O.S.B., Prioress of St. Gertrude's Monastery in Cottonwood, died on April 20. She was a gifted and respected leader. Br. Tobiah and I attended her funeral, which was held on April 26.

Fr. James Coleman of Portland, Oregon, visited. He was a student at Mt. Angel years ago. It was a pleasure to renew connections. He will celebrate 50 years of ordination in May.

The MSPs conducted a Marriage Retreat April 29-30. It was filled to overflowing with 80 participants. The schedule included presentations by the couples and the MSPs. The MSPs prepared the meals.

Barbara Brockman, a good friend, died on April 27. For many years she and her husband, Bill, attended Mass here on Sundays. More recently, they have had to stay home and attended remotely.

May 2023

May brought days of vacation for several of the community. Br. Sylvester and Br. Selby visited family.

Fr. Hugh tacked some days on to his annual trip to the medieval studies conference in Kalamazoo. Visitors from Oregon brought opportunities to renew friendships and catch up on news from home.

May 8-12, fourth-year diocesan candidates for the permanent diaconate were here for a retreat. They were led by their director, Deacon Sal Carranza, and Msgr. Caleb Vogel. Their ordination is scheduled later in the month.

Fr. Leo, MSP, and helpers planted tomatoes, squash, cucumbers and zucchini. John Wasko and MSP helpers connected the hoses that will water the lawn. Lawn mowing has become a regular activity, as has repair of the mowers.

The paving work began on May 17. Preparation of the parking and road areas took two days. The asphalt was laid on Saturday, May 19.

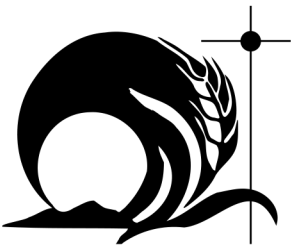
On May 18, we participated in the funeral for Barbara Brockman at St. Edward in Twin Falls and had the inurnment here later in the day.

This year, we celebrated Ascension Sunday. Previously, we celebrated on Thursday and with the Mass on Sunday. The mixing of days and liturgical texts caused more distraction than devotion.

We've been having community meetings about our plans for collaboration with the MSPs as the transition progresses. MSP Fathers Guillermo Martinez and Benito Rojas were here for several days. It was good and encouraging to meet with them.

Fr. Hugh participated in a reading retreat with Oblates at Pine, Idaho, May 30-June 2. A similar retreat last fall went very well, so this second retreat was scheduled.

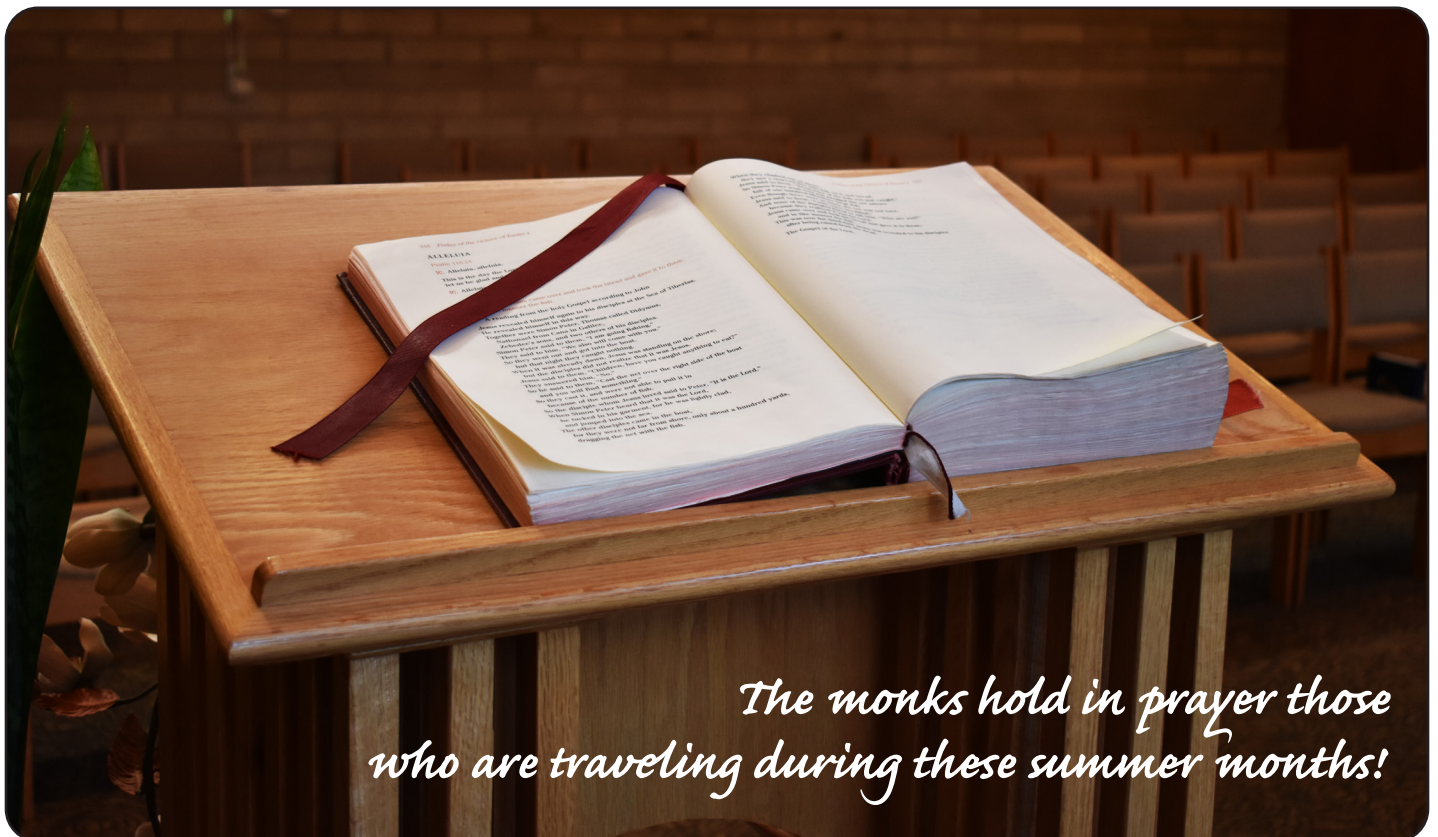




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*The monks hold in prayer those
who are traveling during these summer months!*



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