



Monastery of the Ascension

Vol. XXXIII, Number 2 - JUNE 2024

TRANSITUS

By Hugh Feiss, OSB

The Latin word *transitus* means “going across.” It may refer to crossing a street or the transit of a planet. In Christian Latin, it can mean passing through death from one form of life to another, or the Israelites’ crossing of the Red Sea and the Jordan River, or Jesus’ death, resurrection and glorification, and passage to the Father.

The Monastery of the Ascension is in the midst of a multi-faceted *transitus*. Some years ago, we reached a tipping point: even if some men interested in joining us had appeared, we were too old to support their monastic vocations long enough for them to take over. No other Benedictine monastery was willing and able to send monks to take over the monastery. We were and are going to die out.

Providentially, the Missionaries, Servants of the Word (MSP) came to Idaho. They are a young growing order, founded forty years ago in Mexico by a priest from Italy who is still alive. They are a congregation of priests, brothers, sisters, and lay people whose mission is to evangelize lay people to

become evangelists. They do so by going door-to-door, by offering bible studies and theology courses, retreats for married people and youth. Most of the members of the order are native speakers of Spanish, and much of their missionary work here is among Spanish-speaking people, but as they become more fluent in English, they will do more evangelization among English-speakers.

Although they are very mobile, they do need some permanent places to form their own members, hold meetings, and offer retreats. They have been sharing the monastery with us for several years. The last few months, they have taken over operation of the guest house and the gift shop. With help from LuAnn, they are now working in food service and, along with John Wasco, are doing maintenance and groundskeeping.

In the coming months, we will deed the monastery buildings and the 17 acres on which they sit to the Missionaries. Instead of them being guests in our buildings, we will be



Transitus
page 1

Prior's Letter
page 2

Fr. Meinrad
page 4

Ambrose School
page 5

Monastery Chronicle
page 6

INSIDE



Prior's Letter

Dear Friends of the Monastery,

May 27 was Memorial Day, and on Wednesday, May 29, the National Eucharistic Procession stopped in Jerome. We participated on that occasion by gathering with the local parishes for a public procession and a time of adoration in the St. Jerome Parish church.

On Trinity Sunday, the MSPs weekly Mass had our chapel filled. The day before, their Lay Theology and Bible Retreat programs were well attended. The same is true for the other events they present. People's spiritual needs are being met. Jesus' words in today's Gospel - "Go and make disciples of all the nations" (Mt.28, 19) - are being carried out.

That is the realization of one of the plans when the Priory originally began . It has admittedly taken a different form, but our prayer that this place could be a spiritual resource for the people of Idaho is being accomplished. We thank God for bringing the MSP community to Idaho.

With all our limitations, we do well. Walkers and canes help - as do drivers for doctor appointments - but we're all up and active... most of the time. The Monastery Chronicle in this issue will give you some idea of that.

The crops on the farm are all planted and the farm manager, Ben Marshall, reports things are growing. Weather is another factor. The other day, we blessed all the fields and prayed for good weather. Our farmers give us a good model to follow in life. They do the best they can, and leave the successful outcome to the Lord. That's what we are striving to do.

Be assured of our prayers. Have a good summer. Peace and good things!

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



guests in theirs. We will occupy the six rooms on the second floor of the monastery and the community room there, and several rooms in the annex. As long as we are able, we will celebrate the Liturgy of the Hours, as well as daily and Sunday Mass in the chapel. We remain a Benedictine monastery under the supervision of the Swiss-American Benedictine Congregation, which must approve any major decisions we make.

Our community consists of nine members: Fathers Boniface, Kenneth, and Hugh, Brothers Sylvester, Tobiah, and Selby in residence at the monastery; Father Meinrad, chaplain at the Center for Benedictine Life at the Monastery of St. Gertrude, Cottonwood, Idaho; Father Jerome, serving churches in northern Idaho; and Father Ezekiel, chaplain to a small group on sisters on Shaw Island in Washington State. Six of us are in our 80s, and the youngest is in his 60s. So, we face our own *transitus* from this beautiful, wounded world, to the fullness of eternal life with God.

Our story is not unique. Most religious orders are experiencing a sharp decline in numbers. A few new communities - like the Missionaries, Servants of the Word - are expanding, and a few very traditional orders are attracting members drawn to their traditional lifestyle.

This is part of a worldwide shift in the Catholic Church, which is shrinking in most of the northern hemisphere and expanding in South America, Africa, and parts of Asia. The reasons for these developments are hard to pinpoint. They seem to mirror the human lifespan: a generation or a place grows old and tired, and a new generation or place springs up with new vitality. It is also true that the Christian faith has little support in secularized Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand, which makes it difficult to nurture faith, especially in young people.

I entitled this article *Transitus*, an unfamiliar word, but one that seems to fit the reality we are experiencing. The current term in ecclesiastical jargon for parishes and religious communities that are closing is "completion," which - like "passing away" - is a euphemism for dying. We are, in fact, dying out as a Benedictine monastery. Like all deaths, it is in a difficult passage, not just for the monks, but for our oblates and many friends. In our various ways, we are lamenting. However, as Fr. Boniface writes in his letter elsewhere in this issue, the place will continue to be a house of prayer and mission. Ultimately, love is stronger than death, and nothing good - above all, no love - is ever lost or in vain.



(Left to right) Br. Sylvester, Br. Selby, Prior Boniface, Br. Tobiah, Fr. Kenneth, Fr. Hugh.
Not pictured: Fr. Jerome, Fr. Ezekiel, Fr. Meinrad.



MEINRAD SCHALLBERGER, OSB

60 YEARS A PRIEST

By Hugh Feiss, OSB

On May 7, Fr. Meinrad reached the 60th anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood, adding this diamond jubilee to the diamond anniversary of his monastic life celebrated six years earlier. Most readers know that he has served in many capacities in the last sixty years: parish priest, operator of the Benedictine Press at Mount Angel Abbey, novice master at the Monastery of the Ascension, and resident priest at the Center for Benedictine Life at the Monastery of St. Gertrude in Cottonwood. This milestone deserved something more than a rehash of his many earlier jubilee articles in the *Desert Chronicle*, so I phoned him, and we had a great talk.



Fr. Meinrad celebrates Mass at the Center for Benedictine Life.

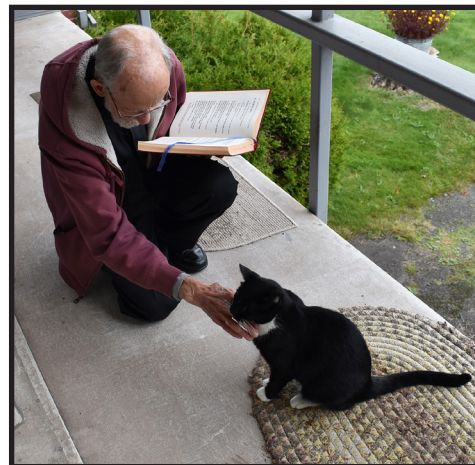
Most of what we talked about are the things for which he is grateful. At St. Gertrude's, he is provided an apartment in Solitude House, shares meals with the Sisters in their dining room, and has good work to do in a beautiful setting. He does not have the energy he used to, so he no longer works in the Sisters' forest. However, when we finished talking, he was going to go outside and trim some berry bushes. He celebrates Mass each day for the Sisters and the other participants at the Center for Benedictine Life. He attends Liturgy of the Hours with the Sisters, as well as weekly meetings with those at the Center. He goes to the excellent local hospital three times a week, and celebrates Mass there on Wednesdays. So much for his lack of energy. He enjoys his solitude, which he shares with Tuxedo, his cat, who - like others of his species - likes to walk across the keyboard of Father Meinrad's computer while he's trying to work.

The monastery is located on the Camas Prairie, an area that has a much higher density of Catholics than the rest of Idaho, which has given the Church many priestly and religious vocations. The pastor of St. Mary's Parish in Cottonwood, Fr. Paul Wander, is also in charge of the churches at Greencreek, Ferdinand and Keuterville, ministers in a prison, and the Catholic school in Cottonwood. Fr. Meinrad is sometimes called on to help him with these duties.

The public high school in Cottonwood is located just north of St. Gertrude's. Through the years, Fr. Meinrad has been a staunch supporter of their sports teams. This year, he was asked by the students - who were not yet born when he first went to Cottonwood - to say a prayer at their graduation.

Cottonwood is a three hour drive from Coeur d'Alene and Spokane, and one hour from Lewiston. These days, Fr. Meinrad is not eager to drive that distance. Spirit Center, the retreat ministry at St. Gertrude's, is very busy hosting retreats and providing a broad range of programs for people from these cities and other places, near and far. Fr. Meinrad enjoys seeing the retreatants and the many visitors who come to view the historic chapel, the museum, or stay at the Inn, a bed and breakfast offering Benedictine hospitality.

Fr. Meinrad has reached the age and wisdom that qualify him as a sage or elder. He is humble, self-deprecating, and compassionate, with listening skills and a calm demeanor that have brought peace to many a soul. I am grateful to have known him since he was 16 - 70 years ago. I look forward to interviewing him again on his Platinum anniversary, ten years from now, either in this world and the next.



Fr. Meinrad blessed Tuxedo on the feast of St. Francis of Assisi.



THOUGHTS ON A VISIT FROM THE AMBROSE SCHOOL

By Hugh Feiss, OSB

In the spring of 2023, a group of 40 eighth-grade students came from Meridian to see a Benedictine monastery first-hand. They came because, in their history class, they were reading the *Rule of St. Benedict*. We discussed with them our practice of the Rule of Benedict; they toured the monastery and then joined us for Vespers. Some of the girls sang hymns, and the group sang the Our Father in Latin before joining us for supper.

In March 2024, a cadre of eighth grade girls studying the *Rule of St. Benedict* visited, accompanied by members of *Devoevo*, their middle school choir, and singers from *Gaudeo*, their high school choir. Under the direction of their music teacher, Julia Kasoff, they gave us a half-hour concert of hymns, mostly in four-part harmony. They helped us pray Vespers and some stayed for supper.

I thought about writing an article reflecting on these visits, but put it off. A few weeks ago, I found myself in a motel in Burns, Oregon. My brother, his daughter, and I were spending four days exploring Eastern Oregon, where he and I and were hatched - as my Baker City uncle Rastus put it. We were sitting at a table in the breakfast room when one of us mentioned Flannery O'Connor, a highly esteemed 20th century Catholic novelist. A young woman sitting nearby turned toward us and asked, "Did you say Flannery O'Connor?" She and a couple of her companions exclaimed, "We were just reading her in our literature class." I chatted with them. It turned out that they were part of a choir who had come from a classical Christian School in Newburg, Oregon, to put on a concert in Burns and another at the Frenchglen School, 60 miles away, which this year has a total enrollment of four.

That brief conversation was enough to prompt me to find out more about the Ambrose School and classical Christian education. The Ambrose school is classical; students study Western civilization from antiquity to the present time in four three-year cycles. The eighth graders are in the medieval year of the third of these cycles. In their history and culture class, they read most of Augustine's *Confessions*, the *Rule of St. Benedict*, *Beowulf*, and the *Song of Roland*, while studying medieval history. They also take classes in science and math, Latin, logic and so forth. Another way in which their education is classical: it is shaped by the trivium, emphasizing grammar in grades 1-4, logic in grades 5-8, and rhetoric in high school.

The school is Christian in that the heart of its mission is to educate Christian men and women. They have a campus-wide prayer assembly once a week, and each class begins the day with a biblical reading and shared prayer. The school is not aligned with a specific church or denomination, but is strongly Evangelical Protestant. They aim to love God and neighbor. They seem to be very successful in their mission. The students who have visited the monastery are eager and open, kind and articulate.

The Ambrose school, opened in 1991, has three campuses: an in-person school on Locust Grove in Meridian, a hybrid or bridge school which combines two days in school with three days of home schooling, and a new in-person school that is being established in north Boise. The current combined enrollment is 900.

It is interesting to see the resemblances of the Ambrose school with Catholic schools, parochial and private. Both kinds of school have little or no state funding. Both have high parental involvement and support. Both would like to accept everyone who wants to enroll, but can't afford the staffing to do that. Both tend to toward college preparatory curricula. Both see Christian faith as central to their mission. I recently met a woman with a doctorate in history from a prestigious state university who teaches Christian morality in a Catholic high school using classical Christian sources, yet another example of classical Christian learning.

The Idaho Freedom Foundation has been unfairly critical of public-school education. Their disrespect for it has created a backlash against private and religious schools. This seems unfortunate. Religious schools provide things that our society champions and needs: diversity and choice. As American culture becomes more secular and a-religious, Christian schools are likely to grow. The best case scenario for the future is collaboration - or at least cooperation - among all those interested in the education of the next generation of Americans, whether in public, private and parochial schools, or in homeschool settings. The motto of Harvard University was *Christo et Ecclesiae* (For God and Church), something Evangelical Protestants and Catholic can agree on. Harvard's motto now is *Veritas* (Truth), something all Americans should be able to agree is the goal of their educational institutions.



Monastery Chronicle

By Fr. Boniface Lautz, OSB

February 2024

We opened the month with a send-off for Diane, our business manager. She had surgery on the 7th and after good recovery, therapy and several weeks in Boise, was able to return home on February 29th. It was one of the main stories of the month and an answer to our prayers.

On February 2, we began the day with a power outage from 4:30 to 6:20 AM. The MSPs joined us for Mass on the Feast of the Presentation. One of our local friends brought a figure of the Infant Jesus to be placed in front of the altar.

Br. Selby celebrated his 75th birthday on February 6.

On February 8, roofers came to the monastery to make repairs over the front entrance and install some guards to prevent heavy snow from sliding over the entrance. Our friend Kathy arrived.

Fr. Boniface turned 89 on February 9.

The MSP's joined us for Mass on the Feast of St. Scholastica on February 10. Super Bowl overtime enabled us to see the end of the game after night prayer.

On February 14, we and the MSPs began Lent together.

An internment service for Barbara Baugh was held on February 15th.

Our Oblates had a retreat here from February 17-20.

On February 18, the MSPs had a Lay Theology day with good attendance.

From February 18 to 23, the monks' community retreat centered on lives of different saints presented on CDs by Professor William Cook with additional options for discussion and shared lectio. The MSPs joined us for the concluding Mass, when we renewed our vows. John Wasko snapped photos of our communities.

The weather continued to be variable On February 24, we enjoyed sunshine and 61 degrees. The next day, we

had strong winds and snow. Br. Sylvester left for vacation in Arizona with family. John Wasko and Br. Paco took our recycling to Twin Falls, but found that service has been terminated.

March

March began with the MSPs giving a men's retreat. The programs and retreats they offer are attracting an increasing number of participants.

On March 7, we welcomed students from Ambrose School in Meridian They met with Fr. Hugh to discuss monastic topics and toured the monastery. They sang a selection of hymns for us, shared Vespers, and departed about 6:00 PM. Some of the students who came were members of their very talented choirs.

On March 8 and 9. Fr. Hugh had Zoom meetings with the Pocatello and Idaho Falls Oblates, and on Sunday met with local Oblates. The weekend began with snow, which increased by Wednesday.

Our Business Manager, Diane, began to return to work for brief periods on March 11. We were glad to see her recovering well from heart surgery.

Br. Sylvester turned 74 on March 12. We had sunshine and snow.

On March 14, all the MSPs went to Boise for the Chrism Mass.

St. Edward's large RCIA class was here for the day on March 16. Some of the monks went to a corned beef and cabbage dinner at Buhl Parish to celebrate St. Patrick's Day.

March 21 was the Feast of St. Benedict, Fr. Hugh celebrated the community Mass, joined by the MSPs. John Wasko brought some used furniture donated by family closing their home.

On March 24, Palm Sunday, Fr. Hugh celebrated Mass for a large congregation.



Holy Thursday, March 28, began the Triduum schedule, and the MSPs began three days of Spiritual Exercises for the laity. An Easter Vigil and Easter Mass were celebrated by each of our communities. There was some heavy snow Easter morning. It melted by afternoon.

April

April began with the return of our helpers in the kitchen and business office from travels and a variety of surgeries. It was good to have them back.

April 4 was Fr. Meinrad's 87th birthday. The Marshalls began working the farm ground. We had snow the next day.

We hosted a large Spanish Marriage Encounter the weekend of April 5-7. Some snow and wind.

We could see some of the solar eclipse on the 8th. Br. Sylvester went for a regular doctor's exam and while there, had some heart fibrillations. He was sent to the ER. After some days in the hospital with unsatisfactory results, he received a pacemaker.

April 10-16, Fr. Hugh took some vacation days in Eastern Oregon with his brother and niece. We hosted a meeting of the President's Council of our Congregation from April 12 to 15. They meet in person annually at different

monasteries. In addition to congregation business, they spent time with us and the MSPs. It gave them a chance to become familiar with our collaboration with the MSPs. We received some good fraternal support.

From April 17 to 22, we hosted a variety of guests; writers from Utah; friends from Oregon, who cooked a very nice dinner for all of us; and a MSP lay retreat. John Wasko and the MSP's set out the lawn hoses, signs of things to come. The MSPs have begun work in the garden, and the lawn has been mowed. The MSPs offered Lay Theology and Bible Study programs.

On April 29, two men who will be ordained permanent deacons for our diocese came for a retreat that lasted until May 3.

May

In early May, Fr. Hugh celebrated both his birthday on the 8th, and his name day on the 11th

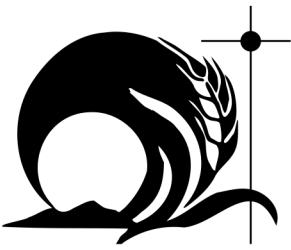
Fr. Meinrad celebrated 60 years as a priest on May 7th. (see page 4)

We celebrated the Feast of the Ascension on May 12, Pentecost on May 19, and the Holy Trinity of May 26, followed by Memorial Day on May 27.



During a visit by students from the Ambrose School, their choirs serenaded the community.





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

NON-PROFIT
ORGANIZATION
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
BOISE, IDAHO
PERMIT No. 849

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Blessed be the God and Father of
our Lord Jesus Christ, who in his
great mercy gave us a new birth to a
living hope through the resurrection
of Jesus Christ from the dead, to
an inheritance that is imperishable,
undefiled, and unfading.

(1 Pet 1:3-4)



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