

Monastery of the Ascension

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TRANSITIONING

By Hugh Feiss, OSB

In the process of transitioning our monastery to the Missionaries, Servants of the Word, we have discovered there are many moving parts.

Some of them concern our aging. At the urging of Benedictine superiors, and by the grace of God, we have contracted with a home health agency to check on us once a week and provide other services as needed. Several of us are also using walkers to alleviate back pain or avoid falls. John Wasko, who lives here, provides transportation to doctors' appointments when scheduled. Thus far, we have all been able to stay at the monastery, which is a psychological and financial advantage.

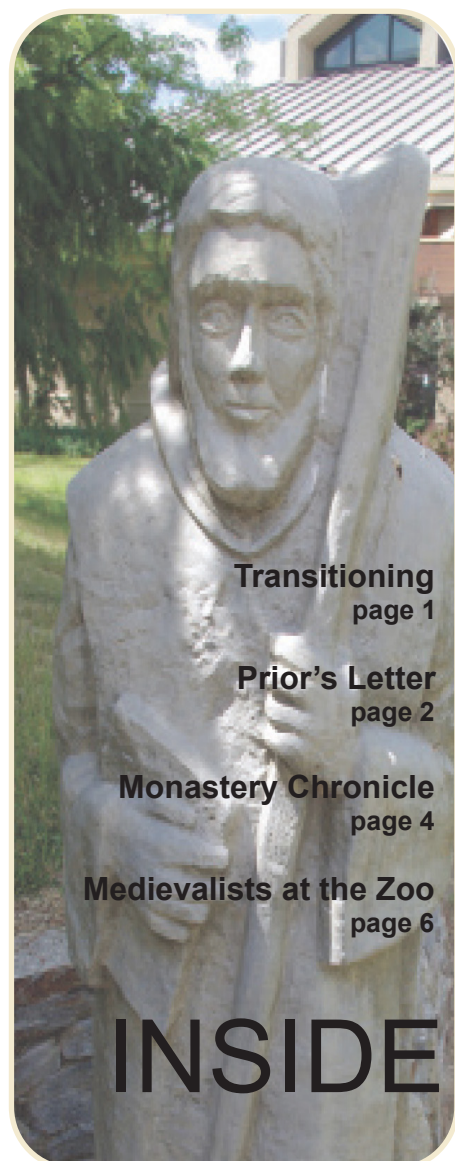
We will soon conclude a conservation easement with the Magic Valley Land Trust. The easement provides that the approximately 580 acres land adjacent to the monastery buildings will only be used for agriculture and, thus, not subdivided or used for a confined

animal operation. The land was originally given to us, and we want it to serve the community which has supported us during our time here. We also want to keep faith with the farm family who have taken care of this land ever since it was brought under cultivation in the late 1960s.

The most complex aspect of the transition is deeding the buildings and the 20 acres on which they sit to the Missionaries. They have been operating the retreat house and the bookstore, while reimbursing us for their room and board. Now, we want to reverse roles, so they own the property, and we pay them for the expenses of housing and feeding us.

Meanwhile, we are paying for capital expenses (e.g. new dishwasher, water heater, roof, and window replacements), and they have been taking care of the grounds. We must come up with an agreement that delineates

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Prior's Letter

Dear Friends of the Monastery,

The year 2025 marks the 65th anniversary of our arrival in Idaho. We and the Missionaries thought it would be a good time to celebrate that event, as well as the beginning of the new monastery building in 1980. We are going to do that on the feast of the Ascension, held on Sunday, June 1. I have been asked to record some thoughts about those beginnings. I will recall the people who made significant contributions to those times.

In December 1965, Abbot Damian Jentges of Mt. Angel Abbey led the community in deciding to make a foundation in Idaho. He had been invited to do so by Fr. Nicolas (later Bishop) Walsh, vocation director for the Diocese of Boise, hoping to begin a seminary program in Idaho. To secure land for the project, Fr. Walsh and Bishop James Byrne filed to get land through the Desert Entry Program. They were able to do so by showing serious intent to "prove up" the land. Charles Marshall of Jerome, Idaho, did the required work. The land was deeded to Mt. Angel Abbey and, later, to the Monastery of the Ascension. Charles Marshall's son, Dick, broke the ground. His family continues to farm the land.

Fr. Patrick Meagher was sent to Idaho as the founding Prior in 1965 and was welcomed by Bishop Sylvester Treinen. He began by serving six months in Immaculate Conception Parish in Buhl. That gave him the chance to become familiar with the area and people. The first monastery was built

in Twin Falls and served as a student center for Catholic students at the College of Southern Idaho.

In the late 70s, it became clear that the community needed to relocate, and the decision was made to move to the deeded property in Jerome. Abbot Anselm Galvin of Mt. Angel strongly supported the community's staying in Idaho. In October 1977, Fr. Stephen Hoffman was directed to oversee construction on the new site in Jerome.

On Ascension Thursday - May 4, 1978 - groundbreaking took place. Under Fr. Stephen's supervision and with the collaboration of the Idaho monks, (Br. Sylvester Sonnen was one of them), the new monastery was mostly completed by the summer of 1980.

Fr. Simeon Van de Voord was appointed Prior and, on August 3, 1980, led the procession from Twin Falls for the foundation of the new monastery in Jerome. He moved quickly to make the necessary arrangements to settle the community.

So, we celebrate these two beginnings by giving thanks for the work of all those mentioned. They had to work for goals that didn't always have clear directions, but they were committed to moving forward. That is how we are, too, with our Missionary brothers. Breaking new ground, in faith and prayer. Keep us in yours and be assured of ours.

Peace and good things!

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



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how this will work in practice: when payments are to be made, shared use of some spaces like the dining rooms and the chapel, parking places, cemetery and columbarium, and so on. The agreement must satisfy the legal requirements of federal and state law, and canon (church) law as well. Fr. Boniface and Dian Sparks have spearheaded the process, with the help of several lawyers and advisers, as well as input from many community meetings.

The Missionaries work very hard hosting retreats, many of which they facilitate themselves. They welcome young people, married couples, hold sessions for adult theological education and so forth. They are considering adding another six-bedroom prefabricated building, so they can house more seminary students studying in English, in addition to taking in-person and online classes in Spanish.

Another task we are finishing up is formulating a legacy statement, in effect a community last will, saying where the residue of our possessions (mostly endowments) will go when we are all dead. Work on this is quite far along. We have identified the charities to which the legacy will go. We have already shipped our archives, including those of Bishop Walsh, and strictly monastic books from the library to Mount Angel Abbey's archives.

It is symptomatic of the good rapport between us and the Missionaries that, on June 1, they are hosting an all-day festival in honor of the 45 years the Monastery of the Ascension has been situated here, as Fr. Boniface reports in his letter in this issue.



Holy Thursday Mass in the monastery chapel - left to right: Fr. Hugh, OSB, Fr. Jesús, MSP; Fr. Boniface, OSB, Fr. Abrham, MSP; Fr. Kenneth, OSB





Monastery Chronicle

By Fr. Boniface Lautz, OSB

February 2025

February has been a month of rain, snow, and warm days. It was 8 degrees on the 12th and in the 50s by month's end.

February 6: Br. Selby's birthday.

February 9: we celebrated Fr. Boniface's 90th birthday. The MSPs graciously provided cakes and songs for both occasions.

February 15: The funeral for Oblate Charles Frantz was held at the monastery, followed by his inurnment. We were his "parish."

February 18-20: we hosted a Methodist Clergy retreat.

February 22: the MSPs hosted a theology class.

Also during the month, Br. Tobiah's younger brother, Richard, died. The funeral was held in Utah.

Fr. Hugh had Zoom meetings with oblates in Pocatello and Idaho Falls. He met in person with Oblates in Boise and here. His Adult Faith class meets weekly.

We continue to have community planning meetings. Scheduling with our resource people is complicated, so we move slowly. We had our annual financial report. Diane made a presentation that was clear and complete. This fulfilled a legal obligation for the corporation.

In the health department, the Visions Health team made regular visits. Fr. Boniface's back troubles had him visit the doctor and the pain clinic. He will get another steroid injection. Br. Tobiah had a sleep test and will have a new C-PAP. There were visits to eye doctors, physical therapists and neurologists. We're all still functioning.

March 2025

March 1: Oblate Retreat on Hope; Jerry Kraft released from hospital.

March 3: Some rain. MSPs celebrate the Mass. Fr. Boniface meets with MSPs.

March 4: Tammi from Visions Home Health here. Mati, a new part-time cook, begins work.

March 5: Ash Wednesday.

March 6: MSPs hold class. Adult Education class on Sermon on the Mount meets.

March 7: Planning for our retreat.

March 9-14: Community retreat.

March 10: Repair of water heater. Fathers Hugh and Abraham attend interfaith meeting in Kimberly.

March 12: A discussion on farm water was held with Ben and DeWitt Marshall.

March 13: The new heat pump was installed. St. Edward's staff retreat. Br. Sylvester's birthday.

March 14: MSPs join us for renewal of vows at end of retreat. Fr. Hugh to meetings in Boise.

March 16: MSPs host large group.

March 17: Snow and rain. The steam cooker needs repair.

March 18: Fr. Boniface being treated for backpain.

March 20: Fr. Hugh teaches history of philosophy class and then adult faith formation class; then to Wells for ranch meeting

March 21: Feast of St. Benedict. MSPs join us for Mass.



March 22: Rain and wind. Anglican parish retreat. MSPs hold lay theology class.

March 24: Meeting regarding our endowment.

March 25: Br. Tobiah to doctor; endowment material mailed.

March 26: Fr. Boniface receives injection for back pain. Visions Health here as they are every Wednesday. John accidentally burns arbor vitae in cemetery,

March 27: Fr. Hugh teaches last adult faith class and MSP history of medieval philosophy. Joanne teaches MSP priests fine points of English. Internet down.

March 28: Chapter approves final signing of conservation easement on farmland.

March 29: MSP hosts several study groups.

March 31: Signed water agreement for farm. Fr. Boniface being doctored for back. Br. Sisto's birthday.

April 2025

April 3: Fr. Meinrad's 88th birthday,

April 6: we hosted the St. Edward's OICA group of about 70. They have made this an annual event. It is a pleasure to have them.

One of our good friends planted the flower barrels outside our front door to prepare for Easter. She and friends brought flowers to decorate the chapel. Br. Sylvester and his crew did a fine job preparing the chapel.

April 10: Fr. Ezekiel's name day,

Holy Week was familiar territory. We and the MSPs had all the services. For our Easter Sunday Mass, there were only five or six empty seats. The MSPs had some additional services that were well attended. We ended Easter Sunday evening with a social.

April 26: the wives of the Knights of Columbus had a day of recollection here. The KCs were having their convention in Burley and their wives came here for the



Br. Sylvester in the chapel decorated for Easter

day. Quite a few of them were not aware of the monastery. It always surprises us to learn how many Catholics do not know we are here.

A physical therapist has been added to our health care team. She showed us some exercises to help us keep mobile and to measure our needs for assistance. Our own personal needs have included trips to quick care providers and procedures at the pain clinic. We're very fortunate to have access to such providers.

Our community, the visiting members of the abbot's council of the Swiss-American Benedictine Congregation and the resident Missionaries, Servants of the Word.



MEDIEVALISTS AT THE ZOO

By Hugh Feiss, OSB

From May 8-10, I was in Kalamazoo, MI, at the 60th International Congress on Medieval Studies, held at Western Michigan University. I started attending the congress in 1982 and have only missed a couple since. People who attend refer to the congress simply as “the zoo.” I usually give a paper and chair one of the hundreds of sessions squeezed into the three-day event. I spend much of the time listening to people present papers on subjects about which I study and read. If I have no other obligations, I pick some fun topic - like art history or Visigoth Spain - and learn about something new.

This year at “the zoo”, there probably were 2,000 people in attendance, in person or online. I was able to attend a session devoted to hermits and animals. One of the papers was about St. Anthony the Hermit and his pig. In another ancient story, St. John the Evangelist was given a pet partridge, which he sometimes showed fondness and attention. Such stories helped justify hermits having pets.

Another aspects of this trend was expressed in the tale of how one of the desert fathers was rebuked for relaxing with some of the other hermits. He replied to the critic that if an archer kept his bow taut, that would ruin it. The same is true of monks, they need to relax sometimes (for example, take a trip to Kalamazoo once a year).

So, it was not surprising that Anthony might have a pet. But a pig? Perhaps the pig stood for lust, which Anthony had conquered. Or, perhaps, in the Middle Ages, monks, specifically Hospitallers of St. John, were allowed to let their young pigs rummage through towns and, when they were grown, butcher them to raise money and to produce fat which the Hospitallers used to treat ergotism, a disease caused by a fungus that grows in rye and other grains.

St. Anthony had other encounters with animals, retold in St. Jerome’s fanciful story of his meeting with Paul the Hermit. When they met, a crow delivered some bread for them to eat. Later, when Paul died, Anthony buried him with the help of two lions who dug the grave.



A bald eagle seen in Boise.



In the same session, I heard a paper about two Old English poems about swans. In one of them, a swan introduces itself to the reader. "What I wear is silent when I walk, or stay at home, or sit on the waves. Sometimes, though, my garments and the wind raise me high up over people. I fly like a wayfaring spirit, and my attire whistles and sings, making music." After the conference, I thought of that poem when I saw a pair of mute swans in a marsh with seven or eight little cygnets. I hope they live to make music in the sky.

To the psalmist, these excursions into the animal world would not seem frivolous. He saw that world as a dialogue or a duet: God said, let them come to be, and they replied, praise God:

*Sing to the Lord a new song ...
Mountains and all hills,
Fruit trees and all cedars,
Animals wild and tame,
Creatures that crawl and bird that fly ...
Young men and women too,
Old and young alike,
Let them all sing praise to the Lord's name.*



A close-up image of St. Anthony the Hermit, painted by 15th century Florentine artist Piero di Cosimo, with a pig in the background.



Swans with their offspring.





THE DESERT CHRONICLE
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God has called me by your election to succeed the Prince of the Apostles ... that I may be a faithful administrator for the sake of the entire mystical Body of the Church. He has done so in order that she may be ever more fully a city set on a hill, an ark of salvation sailing through the waters of history and a beacon that illumines the dark nights of this world ... through the holiness of her members.

*—Pope Leo XIV, homily during Mass with the cardinals
May 9 2025*



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