



Monastery of the Ascension

# THE DESERT CHRONICLE

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## New Faces

*By Fr. Hugh Feiss, OSB*

### Fr. Eugene Esch, OSB

**F**R. EUGENE RETURNED TO THE MONASTERY IN JUNE, AFTER SPENDING FIFTEEN YEARS SERVING AT OUR LADY OF LIMERICK CHURCH IN GLENN'S FERRY, ID. Before that he had spent eight years at Marymount Hermitage in Mesa, ID.

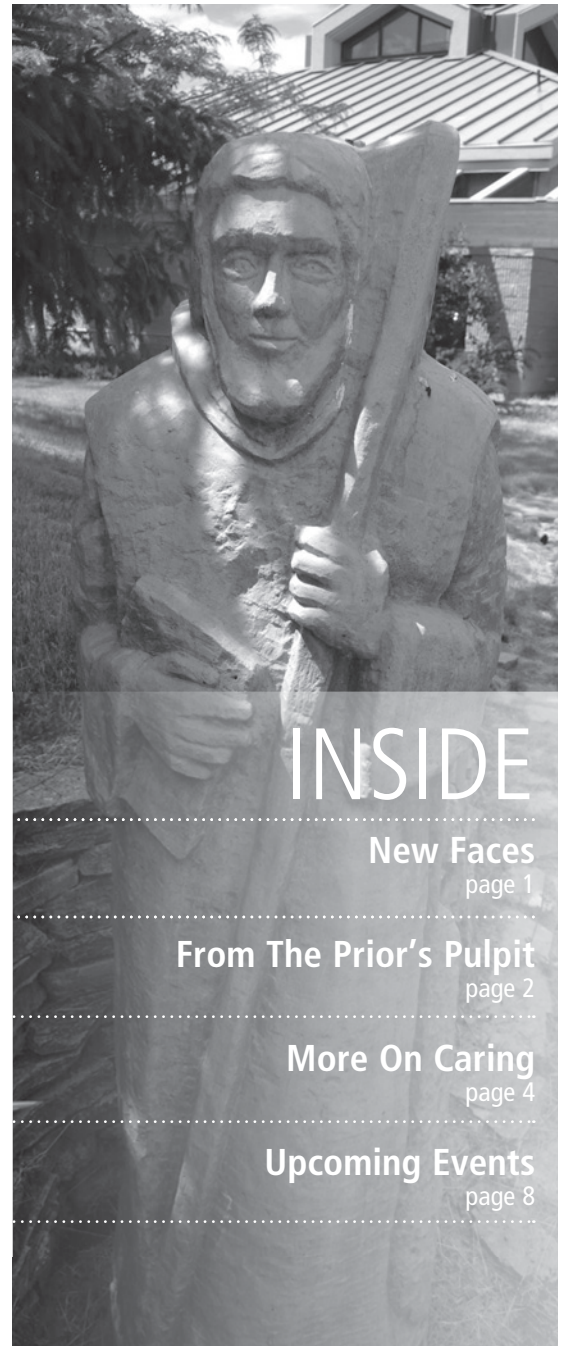
Fr. Eugene was assigned to the monastery in Idaho in 1971, where he joined Br. Sylvester and Fr. Patrick Meagher. He was part of the heroic construction crew that built the monastery at its present location, 1978-1980, under the direction of Fr. Stephen Hoffman, a project that has some of the mythic qualities of the Israelites making bricks without straw under severe Egyptian taskmasters.

Fr. Eugene was ordained in 1954 and is 83 years old. Hence, he is not engaged in any construction projects right now, but he takes his place on the dishwashing and room cleaning crews. He lives in the annex out back with three cats. This locates him strategically near the garden, to which he has returned after a twenty-five year hiatus. He has not lost his touch, however. At the Jerome County Fair in August he won five blue ribbons: for his garlic, cabbage, green tomatoes, onions (both quality and size). He also won a red ribbon for his beets.



*Fr. Eugene Esch, OSB, with his prize winning vegetables*

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# From the Prior's Pulpit

## THE POWER OF NAMES

SOME OF US MAY RECALL THE STAGE PLAY, *THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST*, BY OSCAR WILDE. IN THE PLAY, NAMES ARE treated as indicators of a person's character. Thus, the name, "Earnest", supposedly earned one the distinction of being a person of firm, upright character. But a name like, "Stephen", would not be a good name, since "Stephen" can be dissected into "step" plus "hen", which supposedly indicates that the bearer of that name must stand at the end of the line right behind "Mr. Nobody".

Somewhat simultaneous with the hey day of Oscar Wilde's play was the slogan, "Sticks and stones can break my bones, but names can never hurt me." Children often used this slogan as a sort of psychological bandage after being "called names" by other children. The bandage worked—to some extent and only for a while. Eventually we all admit that names can hurt or heal, regardless of the slogan.

To come closer to home in my own experience, One of my older confreres, "a priest from way back when out west", would compulsively ask, "Who is that person?", whenever a stranger came into view in a room. On one such occasion, I flippantly responded to his question, "Oh, that's Sammy Schwartz".

For a moment, my interrogator felt at ease. But then he compulsively continued his questioning: "What's he doing here?" And now I felt morally obligated to give him a further answer, even if not exactly a moral one: "Oh, he's here in the monastery to do penance for accidentally killing someone."

"What? How'd he do that?", my confrere fairly snorted. Again, I felt obligated to give him some kind of reasonable answer and said, "Sammy Schwartz has a black belt in karate, and he accidentally killed one of his students in a training class at a police academy."

"Really?", retorted my confrere. Then he paused, glared at me, and

blurted: "You're just pulling my leg, aren't you!" And we both had a good laugh now that the cat was out of the bag. I then added: "Father, I believe that you will make it to Heaven; but I don't think you will be happy there."

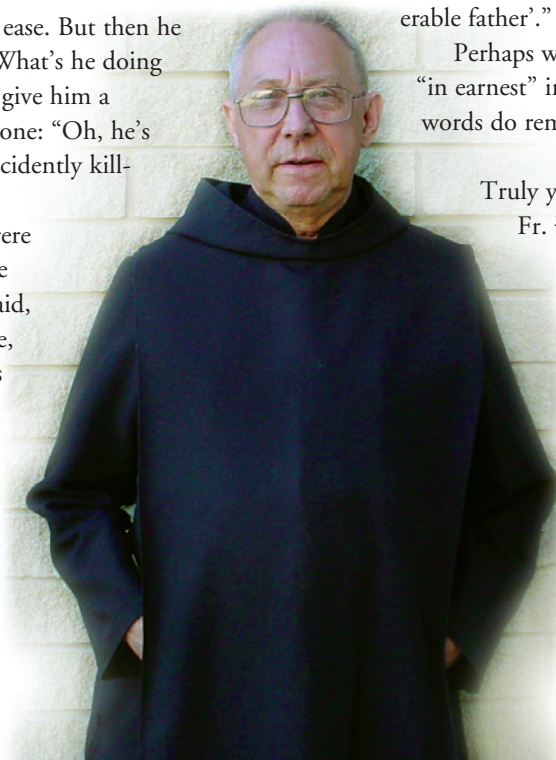
"Why do you think that I won't be happy in Heaven?", he asked suspiciously out of the side of his mouth. This time, I really did give him a reasonable answer: "Father, you are only happy when you are asking questions. But in Heaven, all your questions will already be answered. So how can you hope to be happy there?"

One recent trend that I've noted about names is the practice of giving common names uncommon spellings. Thus, "Sally" becomes "Salli" or "Sallie", or "Matthew" might become "Mathew", and "Alex" sometimes turns up as "Alix". So I'm thinking about turning "Kenneth" into "Kenith". Well, only sort of! I'm not really "earnest" about it. But giving a common name an uncommon orthography gives the sense of distinction that can boost one's sense of self either for weal or woe. Also, there is something earnest about names that St. Benedict takes into consideration in the RB 63:11-12 (or maybe it is better to spell out the name, "Rule of Benedict"): "When [the monks] address each other, no one should be allowed to do so simply by name; rather, the seniors call the younger monks 'brother', and the younger monks call their seniors, *nonnus*, which is translated as 'venerable father'."

Perhaps we don't take St. Benedict's admonition "in earnest" in our present practice and culture. But his words do remind us of the power of names and titles.

Truly yours,

Fr. Kenneth Kenith Hein, O.S.B.





## Fr. Ezekiel Lotz, OSB: On Assignment to our Monastery

OUR FOURTH OF JULY WAS ESPECIALLY FESTIVE THIS YEAR AS WE WELCOMED FR. EZEKIEL LOTZ, OSB, FROM MOUNT ANGEL abbey, who is on assignment to the Monastery of the Ascension for two years. While here he hopes to contribute to our common life and finish some scholarly projects that he is working on.



Fr. Ezekiel Lotz, OSB

Fr. Ezekiel was born in New Brunswick, NJ, in 1959. He graduated from Bowdoin College in Maine with a BA in English literature. He taught elementary school music and high school English for the decade 1981-1990. During that time he visited various monasteries: he stayed with the Carthusians in Vermont for six months and visited the Trappists at Berryville, VA, a number of times. He joined the Camaldolese Benedictines at Big Sur, CA, who sent him to study at Sant' Anselmo. After a year in Rome, he transferred to Mount Angel Abbey. He attended the seminary at Mount Angel and was ordained in 2000.

From 2001 to January 2005 he studied at Oxford University. There he resided at St. Benet's Hall, the academic residence for Benedictines from around the world studying in Oxford. He had the opportunity to visit Downside and Ampleforth Abbeys during his years in England, performing a good amount of his research in the Downside library, which serves as the central library for the whole of the English Benedictine Congregation. Ultimately, Fr. Ezekiel earned a D. Phil. in theology with a thesis focused on the cultivation of private prayers as performed in domestic spaces so constructed to resemble the cells of cloistered monks. He was especially interested in the ways that the nobility of fifteenth-century Burgundy and Flanders were influenced by the Carthusian hermits in their creation of these private prayer spaces.

He returned to Mount Angel Abbey in 2005 to teach humanities in the seminary college and church history and comparative religion in the graduate school of theology. He was made Vice President for Academics in 2006. He was on the board of Monastic Inter-religious Dialogue (MID) for three years and delivered a paper on Thomas Merton and ecology at their

meeting at Gethsemani Abbey which was published in *Green Monasticism* (2010). At Mount Angel he also served as choir-master and organist and was on the formation committee for the monastic community.

Since he arrived, Fr. Ezekiel has spent part of this time on the riding mower doing the lawns, and part of it seated at the organ, accompanying our Mass and Liturgy of the Hours. He also gave a talk at one of the Road Scholar Programs. As for his hobbies, ever since grade school, when he had a number of exceptional teachers, he has been interested in the music, literature, art, and cinema of the European and American avant-gardes.

## Benedicteen Retreat

At the beginning of July we had thirteen new faces with us, as teenagers from Nampa and Moscow, ID, Murfreesboro, TN, St. Vincent's in Salt Lake City, and Judge Memorial High School in Salt Lake City joined us for what we hope will be the first of many Benedicteen retreats. Mari Deleon, youth minister at St. Paul's, Nampa, and Marie Becker, youth minister at St. Mary's, Moscow, joined us for the retreat as well. The retreat was the inspired idea of Pete Espil, who worked with Catholic youth in Idaho at Nampa and Twin Falls before becoming a youth minister at St. Rose of Lima Church in Murfreesboro, TN, and now campus minister at Judge Memorial High School in Salt Lake City, and youth minister at St. Vincent's in Salt Lake City. He led the retreat, the aim of which was to give young Catholics an experience of monastic life.

During the days they were here they participated in the liturgy, joined in work projects, ate heartily, and went swimming.



Benedicteen Retreat 2011

Several of the monks gave them talks on religious life or told their own personal histories. The teenagers' evaluations indicated they enjoyed the retreat, had a positive experience, and made new friends. Their energy and enthusiasm was contagious; we missed them when they departed for their homes. •



# More on Caring

## NURSING CARE

By Vanessa Butterfield, Oblate.

Nursing Student, Boise State University

WHERE IN  
OUR LIVES  
DO WE

EXPERIENCE CARING  
ABOUT PEOPLE WHO  
ARE DIRTY, SMELLY,  
AND ADDICTED?

UNLESS WE GO OUT  
OF OUR WAY AND  
make an effort, very few  
of us ever really have any  
close interactions with

people like this and nothing in our cultural experience really enables us to feel comfortable with an interaction of this sort. We expect people to be clean, beautiful, successful, well-dressed, emotionally stable, and not addicted. If they aren't, we are likely to keep our physical and emotional distance. Do we have a moral obligation to care for people for whom we feel distaste?

As a Catholic, I believe that we do. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* states that "Respect for the human person considers the other 'another self'". It presupposes respect for the fundamental rights that flow from the dignity intrinsic of the person." (p. 525). As a nurse, I have an obligation to adhere to the *Code of Ethics of the American Nurses Association* (2001) which states in Provision I: "A fundamental principle that underlies all nursing practice is respect for the inherent worth, dignity, and human rights of every individual. Nurses take into account the needs and values



of all persons in all professional relationships."

As nurses we have the opportunity to develop, practice, and model this type of caring. Among the many nursing theories on caring, there is one that particularly speaks to me. Jean Watson's Model of Human Caring emphasizes that every person is valuable and "must be approached with unconditional acceptance and positive regard", resulting in the nurse establishing an "intimate, caring relationship with the client." She also believes that a nurse will be more authentic as a result of striving to become more sensitive, and this will result in both the nurse's and the client's growth as a person.

Suppose Edgar, a 78-year-old man, is brought into the Emergency Department smelly, dirty, confused, tearful, and perhaps in a drunken state. His nurse must form a nursing plan that treats him with the dignity that all humans deserve. Edgar has neglected his health and emotional well-being, is regretful about his life, and may be isolated due to his socially unacceptable condition. The physician can take care of his medical problems, but what can the nurse do to provide care for Edgar as a unique, valuable human being? The three nursing diagnoses I would make are (1) risk for self-neglect related to poor hygiene as manifested by his dirty clothing and skin; (2) risk for chronic sorrow related to tearful state as manifested by his statement that he has "made a mess of his life"; (3) risk for social isolation related to his socially unacceptable condition as manifested by the presence of no family or friends.

Because Edgar is incontinent of blood and stool from his rectum, he has arrived with his lower body encased in a plastic bag. In order to decrease his sense of humiliation, the

first step of caring would be to remove the bag, clean him up, and provide clean clothing. Then I would





perform the following interventions that would contribute to both his physical and emotional well-being, thus encouraging his self-growth. (1) Identify the precipitating factors such as recent life events that may have triggered his self-neglect, the possibility of depression, and his level of involvement with family and friends. (2) Assist him to move through sorrow by encouraging him to verbalize his situation, actively listening and supporting him in a non-judgmental manner, and discussing healthy ways of dealing with difficult situations. (3) Ascertain his perception regarding his sense of isolation and his feelings about self, his sense of ability to control the situation, and his sense of hope. Upon discharge, I would encourage Edgar to find help for his alcohol addiction and offer to help him locate appropriate resources.

All of this nursing theory and the diagnoses and interventions look good on paper. Will I or any nurse really be able to have the genuine compassion and authentic presence that is required to carry out these ideas? It may be difficult to do, depending on the life experiences of the nurse. In my own life, I grew up in a family full of alcoholics, and my life as a teenager was greatly disrupted by my mother's marriage to an alcoholic. That experience along with my cultural training in cleanliness would make it extremely difficult to muster up the caring attitude that I am proposing a nurse have. However, as a member of the human community and as a nurse, I simply must take care of my responsibilities toward other human beings no matter how difficult it is. •

## HOME CARE

*By Lynell Jutila, Oblate*

FOR THE PAST 17-YEARS, I HAVE WORKED AT A HOSPITAL, THE LAST TEN OF THEM IN THE HOME CARE AND HOSPICE DEPARTMENT. Currently, I support a large group of nurses, physical and occupational therapists, social workers, aides, and other professionals by facilitating communication of orders between doctor offices, medical equipment companies and assisted living facilities. (Oh, I also cover the phones when the receptionist needs a break!)

Our clinicians travel many miles and make numerous visits regardless of weather or an occasional mishap, such as a traffic jam or dog bite. Our patients range from newborns to seniors, come from all socio-economic backgrounds and suffer from a wide range of illnesses and prognosis, e.g. a teen-ager injured in an auto accident who lives with his parents in a high-end

suburb, an infant whose mother is hooked on meth struggling alone in a low-rent apartment, a centenarian in an assisted living facility who just doesn't feel like doing her physical therapy but will tell stories of the past 95-years, a homeless man at a rescue mission needing wound care, and a smoker, while on oxygen, trying to convince everyone that it's okay to light a cigarette. (These patients are typical, but fictional; we live in the age of HIPAA.)

I deeply admire the dedication, compassion and skill-level of my co-workers. The never-ending orders that cross my desk are full of heart, hope, sometimes humor, frustration, perseverance, sadness, relief, and gratitude. They truly put that special care into Home Care.

My prayer for my colleagues and for you, the reader, is "May God bless you with the ability to care for yourself so that you may continue to care for others. Amen." I'd be remiss if I didn't give you some caring advice: be sure to eat five servings of fruits and veggies every day, always cough into your sleeve, wash your hands for 20-seconds after using the toilet, exercise while you can, and get plenty of rest. •



*Hospice house on the Monastery grounds*



## Who Cares? Insider Lessons from Outsiders

by Jay Richard Akkerman

*“In Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian Cohort, as it was called. He was a devout man who feared God with all his household; he gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God.”*

– Acts 10.1-2, NRSV, Catholic Edition

THE NEW TESTAMENT BOOK OF ACTS TELLS THE STORIES OF THE church’s first generations, and how with God, the impossible can be made possible. In Acts 10, a Roman soldier named Cornelius had been minding his own business until an angel appeared suddenly out of nowhere. God had noticed the man’s prayers, as well as his care for the poor – and now God wanted to make a connection: “Send some men over to Joppa and bring Simon Peter back,” the angel commanded.

In Joppa, Peter was hungrily anticipating lunch. He too was minding his own business when he was startled by his own vision. In this case, the message came in a bizarre object lesson similar to something that Salvador Dali might conjure up: all kinds of non-Kosher food being lowered down before Peter in a large sheet – strange animals, birds, and reptiles – food that was forbidden for good Jewish people to eat. When Peter protested this dinner invitation on the basis of his religious tradition, a voice replied: “Don’t call something unclean if God has made it clean.” Three more times the vision was repeated.

At that same time, Cornelius’s friends arrived at Peter’s gate. Prompted by the Holy Spirit, Peter offered them a place to stay, then he headed back with them the next day to meet Cornelius personally. When they met finally in Caesarea, Cornelius recounted his



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miraculous vision to Peter, concluding “Now we are all here, waiting before God to hear the message the Lord has given you.”

At Cornelius’s house in Caesarea, Peter recognized that God does not show favoritism. God had taught him that he could no longer think of Gentile people as untouchable and unclean. Isn’t it amazing how we can be minding our own business when God suddenly invades the scene one day and drastically changes everything?

Nearly every person who bears the name Christian owes it in some way to this little interchange between Peter and Cornelius, for this Roman soldier’s transformation marked an entirely new opportunity for non-Jewish folks. Here in Acts 10, God is extending grace to all people, not only to those of Abraham’s covenant!

Have you ever noticed that there seem to be some people outside the



See “CARING AT HOME”, cont. on page 7



bubble of the church who appear to be more loving and more generous than folks you know inside the bubble? It seems this was the case with Cornelius: he was devout, he revered God, he prayed, and he gave generously to others. Could it be that God wants to teach us generous living even from folks who live outside the bubble of the church?

For a long time, my problem was that my thinking was tied into *collections*. Somewhere along the line, I had come to believe that my faith was primarily about me *collecting* myself in church with other followers of Jesus so they could rub off on me and I could look more like Jesus. The only trouble was that too often, I ended up looking more like them than like Jesus!

But the Bible reminds me that Jesus seemed to spend his time hanging out with the *wrong* kind of people – he definitely did not play favorites! Instead, Jesus accepted people as they were, but he didn’t leave them as they were.

When I focus more on collecting Christians inside the church than on connecting people outside the bubble, then I run the great risk of missing what God is doing both inside and outside the Church. At times, my neighbor’s ways seem so strange to me, but I am finding that God wants me to look deeper: after all, if God could make me clean, then certainly it’s possible for them, too!

Even more, could it be that our neighbors outside the bubble have something to teach us about generous living? What if we changed our mindsets about collecting people inside our churches in hopes of somehow changing them? Instead, what if we decided that we were going to connect with our neighbors outside the bubble, intentionally choosing first to learn from them about what triggers

their generosity and what they care about? What if we intentionally asked people outside the bubble how they themselves would like to make a difference – and then we joined them in making that difference a reality? In other words, what if we genuinely cared?

What if we simply tried to find out who are neighbors are by asking some simple questions. Here are just a couple of ideas; I suspect you could come up with some even better ones if you put your mind to it...

- *What kind of neighborhood would you like ours to be?*
- *If you could know what God wanted to do in our community, would you want to be part of it?*

The difference in this approach is that all of a sudden, we can actually help make our neighbors’ best dreams a reality. As we make these connections, we find opportuni-

ties to help our neighbors outside the bubble recognize that all along, God has already been reaching out to them right where they’ve been. In both the Old and New Testaments, we find terms like “steadfast love” and “grace” as descriptors of this kind of loving care initiated by God.

As Peter says later in Acts 10.35, there is peace with God through Christ. Jesus is the ultimate in making the impossible possible, both for you and for your neighbor. God

wants to use folks like Peter, like you, and like me

to make connections to neighbors like Cornelius outside the bubble – and perhaps our friends outside the bubble have something to teach us about generous living. Perhaps it’s time we stop minding our own business and find out what inspires our neighbors’ generosity so that maybe – just maybe – some of their generosity could rub off on us in the process as we make the connection together. •



*Thanks to Capstone Ministries and Nicole Poll for photos of the orphanages in Tijuana that Capstone Ministries supports.*





## Upcoming Events 2012

**Square-foot Gardening Training** (April 20-22, 2012) (commuters welcome)

**Pilgrimage to Northern Italy** (May 19-June 2, 2012)

**Road Scholar Programs at the Monastery**

(commuters are welcome)

Ireland: History, Myth and Culture (June 4-10, 2012)

Windows into the Lives of Medieval People (July 2-8, 2012)

Ancient Rome: Life, History, Literature, Christianity (July 16-22, 2012)

Religion and the Settling of the West (July 23-29, 2012)

Quilting (August 8-14, 2012)

Hiking (August 27-September 2, 2012)

For further information, contact Fr. Hugh: 208-761-9389; [hughf@idahomonks.org](mailto:hughf@idahomonks.org)



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