



Monastery of the Ascension

# THE DESERT CHRONICLE

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## Three New Members

*By Fr. Hugh Feiss, OSB*

VOCATIONS TO RELIGIOUS LIFE ARE NOT ABUNDANT IN THE UNITED STATES THESE DAYS, AND IT HAS BEEN OVER A DECADE SINCE OUR JUNIOR MEMBER, BR. SELBY, MADE PROFESSION AT THE MONASTERY OF THE ASCENSION IN 2001, although since then we have been blessed by the transfer to our community of Fr. Jerome and Fr. Ezekiel. Now by God's grace, we have three men who have come to begin the five-year process that leads to permanent membership in the community. Their technical status is that of postulants. During their postulancy they will be taking classes and working with various monks to get a sense of the work that we do. They bring to us a rich diversity of experience and talent.

### JOHN UGOLIK

John was born in rural Poland in 1954. His mother brought the family to the United States in 1964. They moved to a Polish neighborhood and John entered the fifth grade at a parochial school taught by bilingual Polish nuns. To learn English, he became an avid reader. He was an altar boy and went on to graduate second in a class of 140 at Holy Trinity High School. He then attended De Paul University and for a while studied X-ray technology there.

John then worked to support his family while attending Northeastern Illinois University, where he studied computer science. When he graduated, he took a job at Northern Trust Bank, where he installed and maintained software programs on the bank's mainframe. He enjoyed his work but was not satisfied and explored monastic life. He then worked for the City of Chicago, and for a railroad. His skills in mainframe computers were becoming obsolete. He took some theology courses and became a secular Franciscan. He returned to Northeastern Illinois University and became certified as a mathematics teacher. He taught at inner city schools in Las Vegas and Chicago, but found the work unsatisfying.

He then spent two years as a volunteer at Holy Trinity Trappist Abbey in Utah prior to coming to the Monastery of the Ascension. He likes reading, music, woodworking and gardening, and learning new things.



*John Ugolik*

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# From the Prior's Pulpit

## THE FIRST CHRISTMAS CARD OF THE YEAR

*By Fr. Kenneth Hein, OSB*

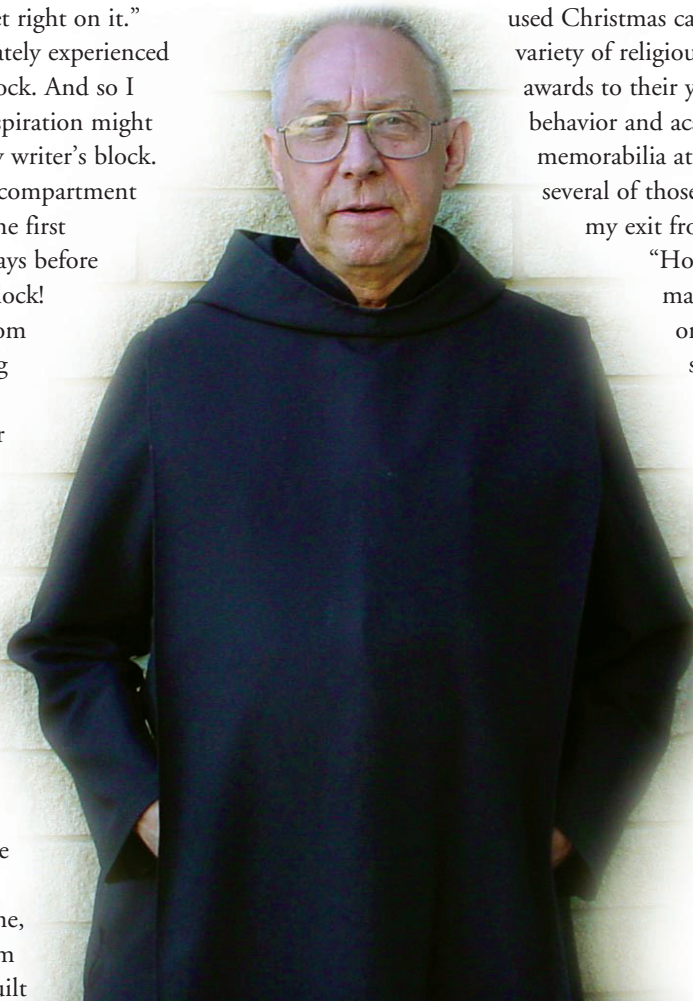
**A**N HOUR OR SO AGO, I ASKED FR. HUGH, IF I NEEDED TO GET IN MY DESERT CHRONICLE ARTICLE SOON. AND HE SAID "YES". AND I SAID, "OK. What's the theme of the next issue of the DC?" And he said, "Christmas". And I said, "OK. I'll get right on it." And so I got right on it and immediately experienced an overwhelming surge of writer's block. And so I went to my mail box to see if any inspiration might come from there that could undo my writer's block. And sure enough! There in my mail compartment unprepossessingly lay the antidote--the first Christmas card of 2014, a full two days before Thanksgiving! Good-bye, Writer's Block! And thank you, dear Card Sender from way down in Georgia! If we are going to give thanks for anything, then among the most important things for which we should be moved to give thanks is Christmas. That's when our Father in Heaven, who set the Earth circling around the Sun of Heaven, reset the Earth into orbit around the Son of God.

Every year, we monks receive many Christmas cards, which are displayed for all the community to see and read. Then comes the time to dispose of these treasures, but always with a large dose of separation anxiety. I put the cards into a neat pile, look again at each one, and then rather reluctantly place them into the waste basket as feelings of guilt

flood over me for disposing of these "holy cards" in this unceremonious manner. "Sacrilege!" my conscience accusingly cries out.

The religious sisters who struggled to educate me during my eight years of grade-school avidly collected used Christmas cards and reformed them into a variety of religious objects that they then gave as awards to their young charges for their reformed behavior and academic efforts. In my box of memorabilia at the back of my closet are still several of those items for others to find upon my exit from this world and to wonder,

"How in the world did this guy ever manage enough good behavior and/or academic excellence to deserve such priceless awards?" The simple truth is that we all have done our share of misbehavior and mismanagement and still find that in God's favor rests on us. So, along with every Christmas card that we will receive this Christmastide, I wish a "Merry Christmas" to all and a Happy New Year forever. •







# Oblates: With the Monks and In the World

**I**N OCTOBER 2013 THE THIRD WORLD CONGRESS OF OBLATES WAS HELD IN ROME. NANCY KOBE REPRESENTED THE OBLATES OF THE MONASTERY OF THE ASCENSION THERE. There were two principal speakers, who addressed the topic of Benedictines as listeners. The oblates in attendance, who came from all over the world, then were divided into groups to discuss four topics: The Rule of Benedict; oblates in relation to the monastery, oblation in our time; listening. On November 7-9, under Nancy Kobe's direction, twenty oblates met at the monastery to present and discuss the four topics considered at the World Congress. Below is a summary of the two presentations in Rome, and the four presentations at the retreat in Jerome, along with some concluding observations and projects for the future. The presentations represent the healthy variety that flourishes among Benedictines as well as the core values that we all share.

## ROME

*Listen with the Ear of Your Heart. Sr. Mary John Mananzan, OSB, a missionary sister in Manila, who is a leader in ecological and feminist movements.*

At the congress and always, oblates are invited to listen to God's voice in the depths of their hearts, in Scriptures, in God's people, and in God's creation. The now well-known sequence of reading (*lectio*), meditation, prayer (*oratio*), and contemplation needs to be followed by action. In this process, it is not just a matter of hearing, but of listening. A major obstacle to listening is conscious or unconscious aversion to silence. Silence and attentiveness to God's presence go together and put us at the disposal of the Word. Solitude fosters listening and attentiveness.

If we really listen we will hear God's call to conversion and





Nancy Kobe

to action. We will hear the cry of people in need, above all the poor, whose lot—in the Philippines certainly—is being made worse by the globalization of the market economy. Throughout the world, millions of people are emigrating abroad to find good jobs. There are millions of others who are in foreign lands to escape persecution or because of human trafficking, and millions more who are internally displaced in their own countries. Women, indigenous peoples, the elderly, the physically challenged, victims of AIDS and homosexuals suffer from discrimination.

Everywhere, mother earth herself is groaning for salvation. Logging in fragile or virgin landscapes, irresponsible mining, ecologically damaging fishing and farming, and various forms of pollution are devastating the natural world. As a result long-standing human cultures that have lived sustainably for centuries are being degraded and extinguished by unsustainable development and wasteful consumerism.

To all of this what should our response be? We must work for justice and transformative change in the economic, political and social system. Examples of this are promoting education, especially scholarships for those who otherwise have no access to education, funding small income generating projects, supporting those who struggle on behalf of the poor, women, children, indigenous peoples, and migrants.

*Ora and labor:* listen, speak out, act!

*The Word Became Text and Dwelt Among Us. Fr. Michael Casey, OCSO, an Australian Trappist who has written extensively on the Rule of Benedict and on monastic formation.*

The Becoming Flesh of the Word at Christmas is in a real way repeated when we listen to the Word become text and receive from his fullness, so that in us divinity and humanity are united. This happens in the believer through a five-fold process made possible by the Holy Spirit: (1) we experience the power

of the Word; (2) we are enlightened; (3) we assent; (4) we put what we have seen into action; (5) we persevere.

All this happens *today*, and it is transformational. “Lectio divina is a contact sport,” which summons us to be the presence of Christ in a world that longs for his coming. The grace that we should pray for when we open the Scriptures is the grace of self-doubt. At any time the Scriptures can call us to compunction. All this requires very close, attentive reading. Faith and the Holy Spirit enable us to hear nuances not intended by the sacred authors, but which are true responses now. Whatever change and insight we experience is not for ourselves alone, but for the Church. We begin by reforming ourselves. That in itself is a contribution. The careful reading and ingesting of the Word is a corrective to what a Jesuit superior general has called the “globalization of superficiality,” a media driven lust for entertainment and distraction. As St. Bernard wrote, “Seeking after frivolity amounts to a contempt for the truth, and contempt for the truth causes blindness.”

The Word encountered in the text of Scriptures sends the oblate reader forth as a Christ-like presence at home, at work, and in the world. “The Word became flesh. The Word became text so that those who receive the Word will become agents of mercy, faithfulness, justice and peace [Ps. 85] so that, ultimately, all may be saved and come to knowledge of the truth.”

## JEROME

*Silence in The Rule of St. Benedict. Joanne Draper, Oblate, Instructor at College of Southern Idaho.*

“Uncrowd my heart, O God, until silence speaks in your still, small voice. Turn me from the hearing of words, and the confusion of too much speaking, to listening, waiting, silence.” Silence makes us uncomfortable. Our challenge is to find positive silence in ourselves and for ourselves, a presence. Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote, “Elected silence speak to me / and bear upon my whorled ear. / Pipe me to pastures still and be / the music that I care to hear. / Shape nothing lip, be lovely dumb— / it is the shut, the curfew sent / from there where all surrenders come / which only makes you eloquent.”

St. Benedict doesn’t speak of silence, but of *taciturnitas*, of a silence that makes authentic communication possible. Even in prayer we can talk too much and listen too little. Benedict rightly thought that in much talking there will be murmuring, gossip and detraction. God spoke his Word in and from Silence, and still does. In the end, what God spoke is beyond the reach of our words, Mystery. As Thomas Merton wrote, “Words are only the threshold of the mystery, and the silence of God’s love . . . is too vast an ocean to be lapped up by the human tongue.”





*Oblates' Relationship to the Monastery. Ellen Piper, Oblate, Boise Catholic Worker (Thomas Merton House; Lazarus House); Terry Reilly Health Services.*

When I read the two presentations from the world congress summarized above, I was overwhelmed by Sr. Mary John's passionate plea to hear the cry of the poor. Fr. Michael Casey told us that media can absorb our time and immerse us in a way of thinking that will make us unable to hear God's truth so that it can shape our worldview and our actions. Both presentations urge us oblates to listen with the ear of our hearts, to put the love of Christ before all else, to take into our homes, work, and the social and political arena what we have learned in our monastery, "a school of the Lord's service." We are called by our promise of obedience, monastic living, and stability to glorify God in everything in a world where everything seems counter to that. Reading the Scriptures and living St. Benedict's *Rule* requires a true conversion leading to action.

In times past oblates could fulfill their promises by offering loving service to the monastery during Lent or offering their gifts by working at the monastery in various tasks throughout the year, in exchange for the teaching, wisdom, and guidance of the monks. This brought mutual benefits to both. However, today's world requires more from Benedictine monks and oblates; it requires of all of us a total offering of ourselves to others, to our world, and to our God.

Here are some things to consider:

In what ways are the monks sharing their gifts and wisdom with the oblates?

How do oblates join in the prayer and work of the monastery while being in the world?

Do we work around our prayer schedule or do we pray around our work schedule?

In what ways are the oblates bringing the monastery to the world?

In what ways are the oblates living the Rule of St. Benedict in the world?

How in a society that runs on consumption might we apply the Benedictine teaching that all material things are to be treated as sacred vessels?

How do we apply the Benedictine teaching that all are to be treated as Christ in a society that values only the young and beautiful?

*Living as an Oblate in the World Janne Goldbeck, Oblate, Professor of English, Idaho State University, emerita.*

We are bringing to consciousness what we already know deeply so that we can look at it clearly. God has led us to be formed to God's will and pleasure through our oblation. As we live our commitment to St. Benedict's Rule, we make space for the holy in a world dominated by action, busyness, time pressures, and we learn to recognize the holy in all around us.

I would call your attention to four of the inner effects of living as a Benedictine oblate. (1) Life structured by prayer refocuses us. We cannot stray too far away from recognizing God's presence when we are called back to God over and over throughout the day. Even when we cannot pray at a particular hour, we remember that it is time for prayer and that others

are praying. (2) We are "marinated" in the Psalms. They become part of our inner landscape. (3) The more time spent with God, the more we experience conversion of life—growing up into the mind of Christ. (4) Attending to the Rule fosters true humility, which is focus away from ourselves, on God and on others, and on God's creation.

One can also single out four outward effects of being an oblate: (1) Service to others—serving others as serving Christ, finding Christ in others. (2) Hospitality—living generously, giving thanks for God's gifts by sharing them. (3) A healthy attitude toward material objects—using them with care, but with awareness that we really own nothing.

(4) Work done to God's glory—part of

our service and in solidarity with all who labor.

For these inner and outer effects of oblation to take place, two conditions are necessary: (1) God's grace; (2) community. In the discussion that followed my talk, the idea that kept surfacing in people's comments was the importance of community for support, correction, and encouragement. One person brought up how community helps keep one faithful, since an individual on his/her own could pick and choose what to observe, or could easily drift away from observance. Without a community, following the Rule could become more about focus on individual self-concept than about focus on God. Other topics touched on in discussion were how different a "radically Christian life" looked from prevailing cultural norms, and the concrete ways one tries to see Christ in everyone.



*Janne Goldbeck*



These suggestions emerged from the discussion:

—Everyone wanted to learn how to be more formed as oblates through workshops, retreats, and participation in the smaller regional groups. It was stressed that oblates should be an active part of these groups.

—We need to be more connected to one another, learning about each other, especially each other's strengths and talents. Perhaps we might form a phone chain to pray for each other's need or seek someone else's help with a project or ministry. We might work on a service project together as well.

—The group suggested more frequent meetings, but wanted those meetings to have a defined and specific purpose.

*Listening. Nancy Kobe, Oblate Representative to the Third World Congress of Benedictine Oblates in Rome*

As we know, the first word in the *Rule* is "listen." In his study of the prologue to the *Rule*, *The Road to Eternal Life*, Michael Casey translates the opening sentence: "Son, listen to the instruction of a Master. Bend the year of your heart to receive gladly the advice of a kind father and fulfill it in practice." For Casey, Benedict is an authority to follow. Joan Chittister's translation is gentler: "Listen, carefully, my child, to my instructions and attend to them with the ear of your heart." The phrase "with the ear of your heart" suggests compassion and listening with understanding and emotion. Listening, as opposed to merely hearing, is an active process.

The "master" envisaged by the prologue may be God. We are called to listen to God, so that our love will be enlarged and our hearts opened to others. We become more humane when we listen to others, more hospitable, more Christ-like.

Listening leads to action: the prologue is full of action verbs: fulfill, labor, fight, rise up, run, do good, pursue. We need to discern the voice of God among the many voices we hear.

Mentors and spiritual guides, books, prayer, journaling can help with discernment.



*Joanne Draper*

## CONCLUSIONS

Our main theme seemed to be that we desired to be rooted in prayer and nourished by community – both our oblate community and the monastic community.

Some ways we can achieve this:

- Begin our meetings with silence and prayer.
- Spend more time together as a group – perhaps reinstate the summer oblate retreat.
- Work on service projects together.
- Discover each other's gifts – compile a list of gifts we have to offer the monastic community and the wider community. Some members of the monastic community indicated that they are very open to having us come and work at the monastery. It was suggested that perhaps we could have one workday



*Ellen Piper*

each season, with a list of seasonal chores to accomplish. We could also have some time to meet for prayer during this time. The monks will work together to come up with a list of their needs.

There were many good ideas for things we could do for the monastic community. The monks host an appreciation dinner for all volunteers at the monastery – perhaps we can host an appreciation brunch for the monks. Some other ideas were:

- Create a list of monks' birthdays, as well as anniversaries of ordination and profession, so we can pray for them and recognize them.
- Adopt a monk for the holidays
- Find out their individual needs
- As the library remodeling is completed, there will be many ways to help put the books back on the shelves in their new lodgings.

Some of us are reading *St Benedict's Toolbox*, by Jane Tomaine. It has several ideas for living out our oblation in the world. There is a website that goes with the book: [www.stbenedictstoolbox.org](http://www.stbenedictstoolbox.org). There is a newsletter to sign up for with lots of good reading and ideas. •



### JOHN WASKO

John was born in West Covina, CA, in 1970. In 1974 his father and mother and their eight children moved to Filer, ID, where his parents had lived earlier and they had relatives. John graduated from Filer High School in a class of fifty-two. He studied electronics in Phoenix AZ, for a year, and then in Boise, for another year. Like John Ugolik, he found that the skills he had learned were soon obsolete. He worked at a grocery store in Ketchum, ID, for several years and then at one in Twin Falls. Next he worked for a bakery company. In 2000 he had a head-on collision with a semi-truck that badly damaged a leg and an arm and caused internal injuries. He was life-flighted to Boise and surprisingly lived through it. He spent a year recuperating.

He took software and computer repair classes at the College of Southern Idaho and went to work for Dell in 2002, but his back couldn't handle the sitting. He had several spinal fusions. He spent the next decade taking care of his mother and father, and then an uncle. During this time he volunteered at Immaculate Conception Church in Buhl, ID, doing cleaning, serving as a Eucharistic Minister to the homebound, and doing photography for church events. During this time he started to volunteer at the monastery, and now that his uncle no longer needs his help, he is able to join. John has many handyman and computer skills, does photography, likes to help people, and does punch-needle embroidery.



*John Wasko*

### KEVIN GAUGHEN

Kevin was born in 1973 in Orange County, CA, the oldest of five children. As his name indicates, his father was of Irish ancestry. The family attended St. Bonaventure's Church in Huntington Beach, CA. Kevin attended Catholic school through the fifth grade, and graduated from high school in 1991.

He then went to work at Orangewood Children's Home, working with children with special needs. He continued this work with children for twenty years in schools and hospitals, taking time off periodically to work in the restaurant business to earn some money and have a respite. He did not want to become a manager, but to



*Kevin Gaughen*

work with children, teaching them about sharing, controlling anger and so forth. He remembers a seven-year old who was acting out. Kevin put him in timeout and sat by him. When the child became agitated, Kevin held him until the child calmed down. When the timeout ended, the child walked away, then turned around and said, "Would you push me on the swing?"

In 2011 Kevin was fired from a restaurant job, a relationship ended, and he felt very depressed. Then he had a profound experience, in which it seemed to him an angel showed him himself surrounded by thousands of people. Then and there, Kevin looked at things very differently, and realized he had to give himself more completely to others. He sold or gave away most of his possessions and went to Utah, where his mother was living. After a year or so, he visited Holy Trinity Monastery and decided to volunteer there. He spent two years doing that, with no bank account, cell phone or debt, working with three or four other volunteers to help the elderly monks.

To interview Kevin, I had to take him away from his efforts to repair a drinking fountain that has not worked for years. He is a handyman in everything but electronics; he has never had a computer. He has many interests: sports, crosswords, music, evangelizing, and landscaping. •







## THE DESERT CHRONICLE

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### *Retreat*

Sr. Barbara Glodowski will be presenting the Breakthrough Enneagram" workshop at the Monastery of the Ascension on April 24 - 25, 2015. The Breakthrough Enneagram uses the ancient wisdom preserved by the Monks at Mount Athos and focuses on discovering your personality traits through your weaknesses. Learn how to walk on the path of transformation through Christ's power.



### *Road Scholar Programs the Monastery for 2015*

**May 25-31:** Geology of the Snake River Plain

**June 8-14:** Quilting at the Monastery

**June 22-28:** Medieval Murder Mysteries: Their Settings in English History

**June 29-July 5:** Ancient Rome

**July 13-19:** Religion and the Settling of the West

**July 27-August 2:** Dante

**August 31-September 6:** Hiking amid Nature and History on the Snake River Plain



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