



# THE DESERT CHRONICLE

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## Father Norbert Novak, OSB (1937-2017)

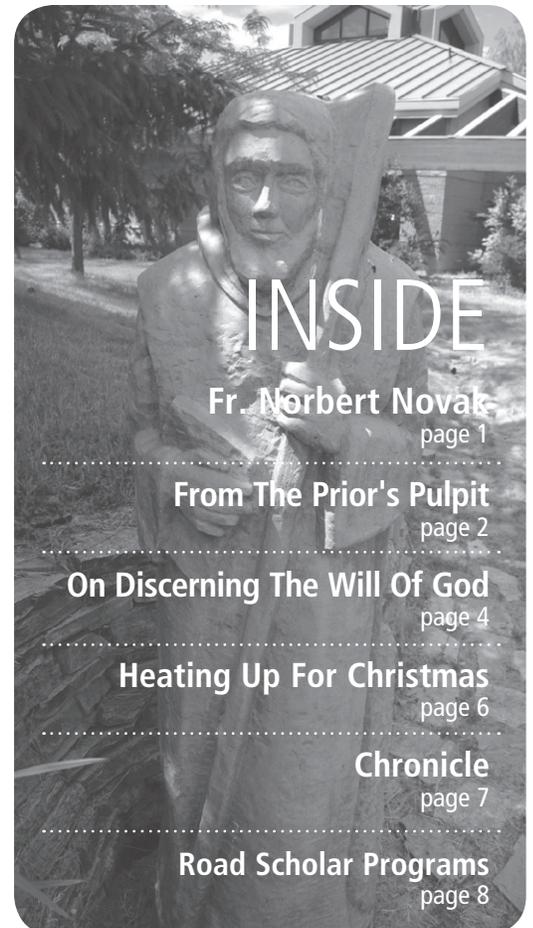
By Fr. Hugh Feiss, OSB

**T**HE BIBLE TELLS US THAT THE HUMAN LIFESPAN IS 70 YEARS OR 80 IF OUR STRENGTH ENDURES. FATHER NORBERT'S STRENGTH DID ENDURE, EVEN THROUGH many years of illness. He told me once that he tried to remain cheerful in spite of his physical limitations, so that he could give example for others. That he did, up to his death from a stroke on November 27, 2017. Although he was increasingly frail it seemed to his many friends and admirers that he could live through any physical disability, but he knew better, and it was clear that he was ready to die.

He was born July 15, 1937, along with a twin sister, Janet. Another sister, Carol, and a brother, Richard, joined the family later. His parents, Frank and Bertha, who were of Czech ancestry, had him christened James. He attended St. John's School in Milwaukie, OR, during grade school, and Columbia Prep and Mt. Angel Seminary for high school. He continued on at Mt. Angel during college and graduate school. He studied at Sant' Anselmo from 1962-1964, and at the University of Ottawa from 1965-1966, where he earned a licentiate in theology. He became a Benedictine at Mt. Angel on September 8, 1958, and a priest in 1965, when he celebrated his first Mass at St. John's, Milwaukie, OR. He moved to the Monastery for the Ascension in 1997.



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*Photo by John Wasko*

# From the Prior's Pulpit

Dear Friends of the Monastery,

Greetings to all,

Advent is a time to reflect and pray about the coming of the Lord. As you will read in this issue of the *Chronicle*, our awareness of the Lord's coming has been heightened this year. Fr. Norbert's death has given us all an opportunity to give thanks for his life, to stir up hopeful expectation, prepare for the Lord's coming, and be more aware of the Lord's presence with us. Many of you will have known Fr. Norbert and we are grateful for your prayers.

Just recently I saw large printed message on a bus: "Jesus is the answer". Given the headlines and lead articles on the news programs, the *answer* seems to be to unasked questions. The concerns and distractions of every day life, let alone the tragic situations in our world, preoccupy us. We look for solutions without reference to the strength that faith can bring. We need to be reminded of the questions that life is. The scripture passages in the Advent liturgy are a good *reminder*. The Old Testament figures and the Apostolic church had to learn to trust and count on the Lord's presence in the midst of seemingly hopeless situations. So do we.

Br. Sylvester will soon be decorating our Christmas tree. For years he has made ornaments that somehow reflect the individual members of our community. Each one of us is creatively represented. Somehow that is a good reminder that each of us is a sign of the Lord's creative work. And such we are ornaments to "show forth", to be a sign to the world. There are lots of shapes and sizes. Somehow they all fit together.

We look forward to the New Year. Confident in the Lord's presence we move ahead with some uncertainty, hoping that our well prepared plans will be a response to the Lord's loving will. We pray the same will be true for you.

Christmas and New Year's blessings,

Fr. Boniface Lautz, OSB  
Prior



The future Fr. Norbert and Fr. Simeon and I arrived at Mt. Angel at the same time in the fall of 1957. My earliest recollection of Fr. Norbert has us standing at a bulletin board listening to Fr. Simeon complain about the misspelling of his name on the roster of new students. Little did we know what adventures lay ahead, or that by the grace of God we would all become Benedictine priests. After his ordination, Fr. Norbert worked in the seminary theology school 1966-1971 as an administrator and teacher. Those were not very good years to teach or be in charge of students, even if they were seminarians, and Fr. Norbert’s somewhat lofty manner elicited a fair amount of pushback, though perhaps no more than any else’s manner would have done.

From 1971-1972, 1977-1980 Fr. Norbert was in parochial ministry at Sacred Heart Church in Tillamook, OR. From 1974-9177 he was a chaplain at Sacred Heart Convent in Yankton, SD. He was chaplain at Providence Hospital in Portland, OR, from 1980-1986, 1987-1997, and worked during those last ten years as a medical ethicist for the Providence Medical system. He would often reminisce about these various phases of his life, usually fondly and not without some fancy embroidery,

By his own telling the highpoint of his life was his sojourn in Rome during the Second Vatican Council. All his life he had an interest in ecclesiastical politics, and during those years he thrilled to the events at the Council. He liked sports and his inclination was to see the council as a kind of football match. He had no hesitation then or later about which side should win. For the next fifty years he thought of himself as a progressive, John XXIII Catholic. He maintained a strong suspicion, if not antipathy, toward male authority figures, including those in cassocks. However, toward the end of his life he seemed to be more at peace with the follies of those burdened with power and less obligated to criticize “clericalism.”

He served for many years as guest master at the Monastery of the Ascension, a task he could do just fine from a wheel chair. He scheduled groups and individual retreatants, assigned them rooms, and looked after their needs. Every morning he was in the dining room early, setting up for breakfast. Most of all, he was available when people needed to talk to a kindly advisor and confessor. During his last few years, twice a year for a number of weeks, he taught what he called “adult faith enrichment classes,” in which he usually discussed a theology book with people from the area, many of whom took every class they could.

And so, not only did he show us how to live with illness, he showed us ways to minister to people, and finally how to die. He was ready for the peace the world cannot give. We can be confident that he has that peace now. •





# On Discerning the Will of God

By Fr. Hugh Feiss, OSB

**E**NZO BIANCHI IS FOUNDER AND PRIOR OF THE MONASTIC COMMUNITY OF BOSE IN ITALY. HE HAS WRITTEN EXTENSIVELY ON CHRISTIAN spirituality. A friend in Italy has recently attended some of his presentations and recommended his writings enthusiastically. Among his works is a pamphlet entitled *Seek the Will of God*. I had a difficult decision to make and retreated with this pamphlet during Thanksgiving week to St. Isidore's Catholic Worker Farm in Mesa, ID, near Marymount Hermitage. His pamphlet ends with some reflections on Advent and Christmas, presumably because hope is the context in which one discerns God's will. Anyway, they fit well in the Christmas issue of the *Desert Chronicle*. Here is a summary of the pamphlet that breathes the discretion (= discernment) and moderation of Benedict's Rule.

## Invoke the Holy Spirit

The first step in discernment is to call upon the Holy Spirit who dwells in you. The Spirit breathes where it wills. No one knows where it comes from or where it is going (John 3:8). The Spirit is referred to by various metaphors: wind, fire, water, and dove. The Spirit is God's secret, but fills the whole world. The Spirit is not directly known, adored or entreated. The Spirit is known only by the Spirit's effects, above all the love poured into our hearts (Rom 5:5), which enlivens, purifies, and sanctifies. If someone is baptized, that person lives always from the Holy Spirit with a life bestowed that opens to a life beyond life. Where

there is the liberty of the children of God, there is the Spirit. As Patriarch Ignatius IV of Antioch wrote: "Without the Holy Spirit God remains distant; Christ remains in the past; the Gospel is dead letter; the Church is simply an organization; and authority is domination; mission is propaganda; worship is a mere evocation; and Christian conduct is a slave morality." Without the Spirit there is no creation, no salvation. The Spirit does not ask us to talk about the Spirit, but he asks us to pray, "Come, Holy Spirit, send your light from heaven."

## To Live according to the Spirit

To live according to the Spirit is to live a fully human life. Such a life is a process of maturation and a daily task. It begins by listening to the Spirit (Rev 2:7) in the Gospels, in people and in situations. Listening elicits faith, a personal adherence to the Lord as his servant and friend, and as a child of the Father. Faith produces knowledge, an awareness of the reality of one's communion with God through the gift of the Spirit. This human maturity is found most fully realized in Christ. The life of the Spirit within calls you to be yourself, whom Christ's calls by a proper name (John 10:13).

For this maturation to take place you must let the Word of God help you recognize the darkness within and without. You discover that God is already there, just ahead of you. The light the Father sends you to follow the Son on the way to holiness is the Holy Spirit.





### What Is Discernment?

Discernment is the capacity, God's gift, to distinguish what the Holy Spirit suggests in the heart of the Christian. It is the ready and alert capacity to understand and choose what one should do in any situation (Phil 1:10). It is born in our hearts by the action of the Holy Spirit (1 John 2:20, 27). It is not a technique, but the grace of a cultivated and critical knowledge, inspired from within by the Word of God. It is a gift and a responsibility (Rom 12:2; Heb 5:14), a prevenient act of examining ourselves and our behavior (1 Cor 13:5; Gal 6:4).

Among the thoughts, feelings and images that arise in us, we need to identify those that come from the "Tempter," and those that may be inspired by the Holy Spirit. First I need to ask myself, "Do I believe that Jesus Christ lives in me? Am I aware that other forces dwell within me that prompt me to evil? Are my aspirations disinterested or prompted by ambition for recognition and success?"

From this it is clear that discernment is not an individual act, but must be communal and ecclesial. If all of us choose to exercise the gift of discernment together, our vocations will be more fruitful, and ecclesial life will be richer with fewer conflicts.

### The Practice of Discernment

The prudence required for discernment presupposes a capacity to judge things with calm, equilibrium, and moderation in order to act responsibly. This requires self-knowledge acquired through self-examination. We will discover limits and weaknesses in ourselves at the affective, moral, psychological and intellectual levels. These are part of our being human and of our poverty. They are a source of humility and a help to understanding others. Keeping a diary and reading good books are ways to enhance self-knowledge. The goal of this effort is freedom, the capacity to form opinions that are truly our own and to remain faithful to them.

To say "yes" to something requires that one say "no" to many other things. Freedom is not always found in what is simplest or most immediate. We need to read the Scriptures each day to stay

in touch with Christ so that we make decisions that will enable us to follow him. Christ is not calling us to deny life, but to be free and capable of love.

### Seek a Spiritual Master

Only in the communion of the Church are we Christians. Each of us needs the accompaniment of someone, a spiritual father or mother, more advanced in the life of faith. Christianity is not simply a teaching, but a life with God in Christ through the mediation of the Spirit. A spiritual father or mother, a mentor, should be someone firm in the faith and discerning. Such mentors need to be full of mercy and to know how to listen, to be patient and respectful. He or she needs to know by personal experience the weariness and sorrow of the spiritual struggle. They need to be able to transmit life and to help those they accompany to develop their own humanity and maturity in prayer and in hearing the Word. Spiritual mentors need to help those they guide be attentive not to them but to the interior teacher, the Holy Spirit.

### Advent

Advent is a time of remembering and of invocation or hope for the Coming of Christ. Christ's coming is the response to the groaning of creation (Rom 8:19ff). Maranathá! Come Lord. St. Basil defined a Christian as someone "who keeps vigil everyday and every hour, knowing that the Lord is coming." For many Advent is simply a preparation for Christmas, for Christ's coming at Bethlehem. This is an impoverishment. Advent looks not to a continuation of what has already happened, but to something new. We know the salvation bestowed on us by Christ in the forgiveness of sins, but full salvation of all people and the entire universe has not arrived yet. The coming of Christ at the end is full realization of the forces unleashed by Christ's resurrection. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin asks us: "Christians charged to keep alive always the burning call of desire, what have we made of the hope of the Lord?"

### Christmas

Christmas is the birth of a child that only God could give to humankind, the birth of the Lord God as a child wrapped in waddling clothes and lying in a manger (Luke 2:7, 12, 16). "Glory to God in the highest!" We Christians need to keep in mind this bond between poverty and glory. Christ was born poor and for the most part lived an ordinary life. When he undertook his public ministry he recalled people to communion with God and with each other by wondrous signs tied to human necessities of food, drink, community and life stronger than death. As the angel said, Jesus came "for all the people," for all humanity. The hope he brings is for all. The joy of Christmas is not for Christians alone. It is an invitation to hope for all. •





# Heating Up for Christmas

By Fr. Hugh Feiss, OSB

**T**HE MINISTRY CENTER/GUESTHOUSE WAS BUILT IN 1992-1995. OVER THE YEARS heating units in some of the guest rooms have given out. Replacement parts are not readily available for these units, so in those rooms where the original heating units have stopped working new high efficiency heat pumps have been installed. The older boiler system still heats the majority of the guest rooms. The noisy tower in the courtyard between the dining room and the guest rooms cools the system. It is now time to replace that tower and the older heating units that it still powers with energy-efficient heat pumps. To supplement the heating/cooling provided by the heat pumps, a propane tank will be installed, which will require piping from the tank to the building. This new system will power not just the remaining guest rooms but also the large public dining room. The result will be energy-efficient heating by more cost-effective equipment. The project has already been announced and assigned to a company that knows the monastery system well and has served us well over the years. The cost of the project is \$155,251.67. We

hope to have it completed by the first of the year. It can be done with a minimum of obstruction to scheduled events.

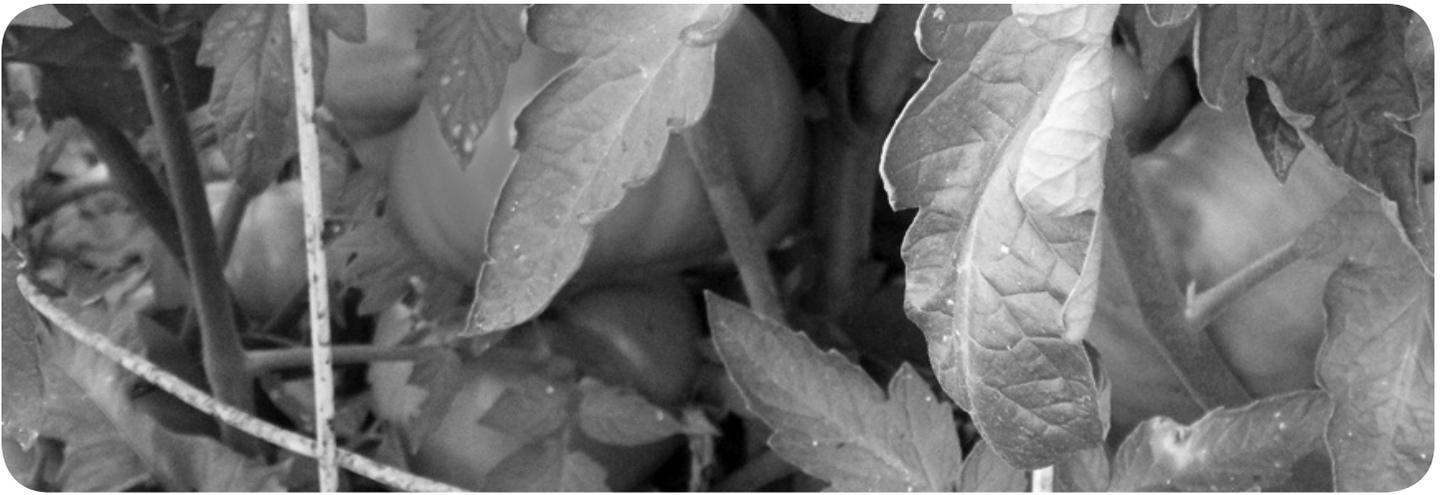
Over the years the monastery, under the watchful guidance of Fr. Boniface and Fr. Andrew, has been setting aside money in a building fund, so replacing these units will not bankrupt us. However, we would like not to deplete that fund too much, because there will be other expenses in the foreseeable future (e.g., refinishing of exterior surfaces, new carpeting and blinds, and some furnishings). Hence, we would not be adverse to a few Christmas presents to help fund the new heating system, and a few prayers as we try to keep our facility in good condition.

The guesthouse is, along with the farm, pastoral work, and donations, one of the four major sources of income for the community. It is also the setting of much of our ministry. The work of the center is something that almost all

of us are involved in in some way or other: cleaning, scheduling, presenting and welcoming. St. Benedict's rule is that all who show up should be received as Christ with love. We are very fortunate to have a facility that is a nice setting in which to do that. We are grateful for those who made it possible to build it, those who help us maintain it as benefactors or volunteers, and those who enrich our lives by visiting us. If St. Benedict is to be believed, each time someone walks through the

door it is Christ. We are welcoming Christ into the inn, *la posada*. As the text for one version of the Christmas observance of *Las Posadas* puts it: "Enter, holy pilgrims. Come into our humble dwelling, and into our hearts. The night is one of joy, for here beneath our roof we shelter the Mother of God and her Son."•





# Chronicle

*Fr. Boniface Lautz, OSB*

## **AUGUST**

August 3 marked the 52nd anniversary of our foundation and the beginning of the barley harvest on the same ground where Mass was celebrated to mark our official beginning. Dick and Louise Marshall were at that first Mass and their grandson Ben was probably driving one of the combines 52 years later.

Our Oblates have generously undertaken a “deep cleaning” project to refreshen our guest rooms. It takes a day for each of the sixteen rooms.

Br. Tobiah celebrated 30 years of profession. Fr. Hugh returned to campus ministry at ISU after a busy summer here.

## **SEPTEMBER**

Our vegetable garden has been productive indeed. Lu Ann has made salsa, spaghetti sauce, juice, and frozen tomatoes. Whether the remaining crops will ripen is uncertain. We’ve had weather predictions of “cold alert”, which could mean a heavy frost.

We’re doing serious planning to replace our heating and cooling system in the ministry center. If the project is approved by the Chapter, it could begin this fall.

## **OCTOBER**

The month began with a dinner to show our appreciation to our volunteers and those who do such good things for us. LuAnn prepares a marvelous meal. It was an enjoyable event.

Heavy rain and wind damaged the roof of the new library and community room. There was some leaking. The exterior flashing will need repair.

Our volunteers finished the vegetable garden, harvesting remaining produce and planting garlic in memory of Fr. Eugene.

Bishop Michael Driscoll died October 26. He had been a good friend through the years and will be missed here.

We all got our health insurance renewed for next year. We are very fortunate to have good insurance.

The Chapter approved the heating and cooling project, which will begin soon.

## **NOVEMBER**

Nov. 4 we had snow, three or four inches, which soon melted. The day before we got delivery on the new snow blower that replaces the one stolen last year. The plan is to secure the new one with a chain to the door. Someone speculated that we will probably lose the door.

A friend generously offered to have the carpet in our major public areas professionally steam cleaned. It was done the day before Thanksgiving. The carpet has lasted since it was installed in 1994.

It was peanut brittle making time. We used 125 pounds of nuts and made lots of brittle and sold it at the local parish bazaar. It was well received. The proceeds go to local charities.

Fr. Andrew is going to take advantage of an opportunity to go to the Holy Land.

On November 24 Fr. Norbert had a stroke; he died on the 27th. The loss will be felt by many. His funeral was on December 4 at the local parish church.



## THE DESERT CHRONICLE

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## *Road Scholar Programs for 2018*

**May 28-June 3:** Geology of the Snake River Plain

**June 11-17:** Quilting

**June 25-July 1:** Quilting

**July 9-15:** England's Medieval Monarchs and  
Mysteries Set in their Reigns (Full)

**July 23-29:** Knitting

Visit Elderhostel Website or contact Fr. Hugh:  
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