

# **The Monastery of the Ascension**

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This monastery, located in the central part of the southern desert of the "Gem State," has been an oasis, a place for retreat and renewal for many pilgrims on their earthly journey. The presence and witness of this Benedictine monastic community to the people of Idaho has its origin in early 1965.

Following is a listing of dates, events and personalities decisive in the evolution of this "daughter monastery" of Mount Angel Abbey in Oregon.

Beginnings: 1956 - 1967

Fr. Nicholas Walsh, pastor of St. Jerome parish, Jerome, ID, used the site of the present monastery as "desert place" in which to pray. On Ascension Thursday, May 28, 1957, Bishop James Byrne gave Fr. Walsh permission to look into the possible acquisition of the present acreage of the monastery through the Desert Entry Law. Charlie Marshall and Harley McDowell aided him in his efforts.

On December 24, 1958, the Bureau of Land Management, Department of the Interior, accepted Bishop Byrne's application for 320 acres and Fr. Walsh's application for 280 acres.

When Bishop Byrne was transferred to Dubuque, Iowa, in 1962, Bishop Sylvester Treinen was named the 5th Bishop of Idaho on March 19, 1962.

In 1964, Fr. Walsh took the qualifying exam to acquire the property. The Department of the Interior then transferred the title for the 600 acres. Bishop Treinen then invited the monks of Mount Angel Abbey to Idaho, and, on December 22, 1964, the Chapter of Mount Angel Abbey voted to form a monastic community in Jerome.

January 7, 1965, Fr. Walsh suggested to Abbot Damian Jentges that the monastery be named "Ascension." The title for the land was officially transferred to Mount Angel Abbey on May 27, 1965, by Bishop Treinen and Fr. Walsh.

July 15, 1965, Fr. Patrick Meagher, OSB, was named the first prior. He was given the responsibility of looking for a location for a Minor seminary. During this time, wherever Fr. Patrick resided, there resided the monastery. For example, when Fr. Patrick substituted for Fr. O'Connor of the Immaculate Parish in Buhl, the Monastery was located there. Later, Fr. Patrick shared the Chaplain's house of St. Benedict's Hospital, Jerome, with Fr. Method Korn, OSB, Nampa native and monk of Mount Angel Abbey.

August 3, 1965, Foundation Day, the Benedictines of Mount Angel Abbey were officially welcomed to Idaho. Mass was celebrated on a rock outcropping in the southwestern section of the property.

1966, the Mount Angel Abbey Chapter authorized Ascension Priory to plan a monastery complex.

Twin Falls, 1967 - 1980

August 16, 1967, Fr. Simeon Van De Voord, OSB, came to Idaho and lived in the Buhl rectory with Fr. Patrick.

In the fall of 1967, Bishop Treinen offered the monks the possibility of staffing a student center to be built on diocesan property adjacent to the College of Southern Idaho in Twin Falls. Accordingly, building plans were drawn and the Mount Angel Abbey approved \$100,000 for the building.

July 4, 1968, the Priory was authorized to build a reduced structure on the diocesan site and to stay within the previously approved budget.

January 17, 1969, St. Benedict's Student Center and Priory in Twin Falls was dedicated, and Fr. Simeon was appointed chaplain of the Center.

June 29, 1969, daily conventual Mass and recitation of the Divine Office officially commenced.

August 19, 1969, Br. Sylvester Sonnen, OSB, a native of St. Anthony's Parish in Greencreek, Idaho, arrived. He made his Solemn Profession of Religious Vows on September 25, 1971.

June, 1971, Fr. Eugene Esch, OSB, arrived from Mount Angel. He taught in Kimberly from September of 1970 through March of 1971.

August, 1972, Fr. Simeon was appointed Dean of undergraduate seminarians at Mount Angel Seminary. Fr. Cosmas White, OSB, then became the Chaplain of the Student Center.

October 28, 1974, Fr. Nicholas Walsh was ordained Bishop of Yakima.

August 22, 1975, Fr. Prior Patrick Meagher, OSB, became pastor of St. Agatha Church, Portland, OR, and Fr. Eugene, who was the senior monk, became the superior. During this time, Abbot Anselm Galvin asked him to look for another monastery site.

October 1, 1977, Fr. Stephen Hoffman, was appointed Superior of St. Benedict's Center and Priory and given the task of overseeing the construction of the new monastery in Jerome.

January 12, 1978, the Mount Angel Abbey Chapter approved construction on the Jerome farm property.

May 4, 1978, Ascension Thursday, the ground breaking took place and construction of the present monastery began. The architect was William Louie of Scott, Louie and Browning of Salt Lake City, UT. The contractor was Robert Ullman Construction Co., of Twin Falls.

July 27 - August 25, 1978, a 530-foot-deep domestic well was drilled by Smith Drilling of Jerome.

October, 1979, Fr. Andrew Baumgartner, Fr. Paschal Cheline, Fr. Joel Kehoe and Br. Samuel Hacking arrived from Mount Angel Abbey.

December 25, 1979, Midnight Mass was celebrated by Fr. Stephen and invited guests. This was the first liturgy in the present chapel of the monastery, which was still under construction.

April 25, 1980, Abbot Anselm resigned.

June 6, 1980, Fr. Bonaventure Zerr, OSB, was elected abbot.

June 19, 1980, Frs. Andrew and Paschal were called back to Mount Angel.

July 11, 1980, Fr. Simeon Van De Voord was appointed Prior. He arrived in Jerome on July 23, 1980.

New Beginnings in Jerome, 1980 - 1989:

July 28, 1980, the monks move from St. Benedict's Student Center and Priory and take up residence at Ascension Priory in Jerome. Their first liturgical service was Compline.

August 3, 1980, Sunday, the solemn dedication of the building took place, followed by traditional festivities.

August - November 1980, Fr. David Nicholson, OSB, at the Priory.

January 10, 1981, Br. Samuel (Mel) Hacking, left religious life.

February 24, 1981, Fr. Adrian Bowlin, OSB, arrived at the Priory, he departed on February 9, 1986.

February 26, 1981, Fr Simeon undergoes a triple by-pass heart surgery. In October of the same year, he led a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, Jordan and Italy.

March 9, 1982, Fr. Meinrad Schallberger, OSB, arrived at the Priory.

Spring, 1983, Fr. Joel designed and began planting a lawn for the cemetery site.

March, 1983, the Oblate program, conceived of by Fr. Simeon, was initiated, with Fr. Joel as Director of Oblates.

June - October, 1985, Br. Hugh Nibler, OSB, resides at the Priory.

August 1, 1986, Philip Urrutia and John-Ross Anderson came as postulants to the Priory.

March 30, 1987, Fr. Simeon resigns as Prior.

May 5, 1987, Fr. Meinrad is appointed Prior.

June, 1987, Fr. Simeon is appointed Pastor of Our Lady of the Lake Parish in McCall, Idaho.

May 5, 1987, Fr. Meinrad was appointed Prior.

August 3, 1987, Fr. Boniface Lautz, OSB, arrives at the Prior.

August 27, 1987, Br. Tobiah Urrutia and Fr. Jude Anderson make their temporary professions.

November 23, 1987, Fr. Eugene moves to Mesa, Idaho, to serve as chaplain for the Hermit Sister at Marymount Hermitage.

June 22, 1988, Abbot Bonaventure Zerr dies.

August 10, 1988, Fr. Peter Eberle is elected Abbot.

August 17, 1988, Bishop Treinen retires.

November 1, 1988, Fr. Boniface Lautz is appointed Prior.

April 3, 1989, Bishop Todd Brown, successor to Bishop Treinen, is ordained in Boise, Idaho.

April 30, 1989, Br. Jude Anderson earns his BA at Mount Angel Seminary.

Building the Ministry Center, 1989 - 1994:

May 12, 1989, Ascension Priory monks made presentations at Mount Angel Abbey and received from the chapter permission to hire an architect to design a guest facility. The Priory also received approval to raise funds for this new enterprise.

July 1, 1989, Charles Hartman and Jos\E9 Francisco Echanove arrive at the Prior as postulants, they made their temporary Professions as Br. Maximilian and Br. I\F1igo on August 15, 1990.

September, 1989, Fr. Joel went to Santa Clara University to study for his MA; he returned to the Priory in 1992.

February 1990, upon the request of the Bishop, Fr. Prior Boniface becomes the South Central Dean.

October 16, 1990, after the death of Fr. Kuiper, Fr. Prior Boniface agrees to serve as Canonical Administrator of the St. Jerome Parish.

October 17, 1990, Br. Tobiah and Br. Jude make their Perpetual Vows.

1991, Br. I\Fligo begins volunteering to help immigrants Thursdays and Fridays at St. Jerome's parish. He had performed this service in Guadalupe for three years before his profession.

July 2, 1991, Fr. Joseph Wood, OSB, arrives at the Priory.

August 21 - 22, 1991, building plans are discussed.

August 29, 1991, the Community celebrates the 25th Anniversary of Religious Life of Br. Sylvester.

January 20, 1992, Fr. Simeon undergoes angioplasty to clear a blocked heart artery.

June 29, 1992, William Archuletta begins as a Postulant, he commenced into the novitiate on August 14 and left the Priory September 27.

August 1, 1992, Rosa Sofia retires after many years of service as a cook for the Priory.

August 17, 1992, a six-room mobile home arrives to serve as a residence for some of the monks.

September 10, 1992, Fr. Boniface has back surgery at St. Luke's Hospital in Boise.

October 3, 1992, the Mount Angel Abbey chapter authorizes the Priory to sign contracts to build two-thirds of the Ministry Center plus the shell of the west wing. Ground breaking took place on October 14, 1992. Fr. Simeon successfully raised the money needed to finish the west wing.

November 14, 1992, volunteers start removal of solid rock outcroppings and complete this chore on December 19, 1992.

May 1, 1993, Lewis Burdick and Don Harris begin postulancy. Lewis entered the Novitiate August 1, and left July 22, 1994. Don departed August 1, 1993.

May 9, 1993, Br. Jude receives his MA in Theology from Mount Angel. On November 13, 1993, he is ordained as a Deacon. On May 8, 1994, he earns his Master of Divinity degree, and on June 10, 1994, his Ordination into the priesthood by Bishop Walsh is celebrated in Jerome.

July 25, 1993, Br. Sylvester goes to Southdown, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, he returned on January 30, 1994.

August 15, 1993, Br. Maximilian and Br. I\Fligo (Jos\E9) make their perpetual vows.

January 11, 1994, Abbot Anselm Gavin dies.

January 23 - May 22, 1994, Fr. Meinrad is at Notre Dame.

February 10, 1994, Fr. Simeon returns to the Priory from Greencreek, ID.

May 12, 1994, the blessing and dedication of the Ministry Center takes place. James McLaughlin of Sun Valley was the architect, and the contractor was Larry Lucas (Jac-Lyn Construction) of Jerome.

New Faces, New Ministries, 1994 - 1998:

June 1, 1994, Michael McMullen becomes a postulant and on December 7, 1994, he becomes a novice. He departed religious life in the summer of 2000.

October 31, 1994, Fr. Joel is licensed as a Professional Counselor in Idaho.

March 19, 1995, Br. Maximilian goes to Mount Angel Abbey.

June 1, 1995, Br. Sylvester moves to Twin Falls.

June 1995, the first Elderhostel is held at the Priory.

July, 1995, Br. Simeon is assigned to St. John's Cathedral, Boise.

August, 1995, Fr. Eugene leaves Mesa to take up his assignment in Glens Ferry.

September 26, 1995, Fr. Joel celebrates his 25th Anniversary of monastic life.

November 9, 1995, Fr. Andrew Baumgartner returns to the Priory.

December 28, 1995, Oblate Rosa Sofia dies.

September 10, 1996, Fr. Hugh Feiss arrives at the Priory.

September 30, 1996, Bishop Sylvester Treinen dies.

November 1, 1996 - April 1, 1997, Fr. Boniface takes his sabbatical in Alaska and Mexico, Fr. Andrew is Prior, pro-tem.

April 22, 1997, Bishop Nicholas Walsh dies and is buried in the Priory cemetery on May 3, 1997.

June 2, 1997, Abbot Peter Eberle resigns.

July 7, 1997, Fr. Joseph Wood is elected 9th Abbot of Mount Angel.

July 25 - October 18, 1997, Peter Page of Jerome carves a statue of St. Benedict in the patio.

December 2, 1997, Fr. Norbert Novak, OSB, arrives at the Priory from Providence Health System, Portland, OR.

January 28, 1998, Fr. Andrew receives a heart pacemaker.

March 3, 1998, Fr. Patrick, founder of Ascension Priory, dies.

May 10, 1998, Br. Kevin graduates from Mount Angel Seminary with an MA degree and renews his vows for one year on January 2, 1999.

May 26, 1998, the Priory is for the first time one of the polling places for the primary elections.

June 11, 1998, Patrick Wayne arrives as a postulant and enters the novitiate December 11, 1998.

June 30, 1998, Bishop Brown is appointed to Orange, California, and installed as Bishop there on September 3, 1998.

July, 1998, Fr. Simeon moves to St. Paul's Student Center in Boise.

July 2, 1998, Fr. Jude leaves for Rome to study for his degree in Spirituality at the Gregorian University. He will reside at the Benedictine College of Sant' Anselmo.

The Independent Monastery of the Ascension, 1998 - Present:

August 3, 1998, the Priory became independent from the "motherhouse" of Mount Angel.

August 13, 1998, with Abbot Joseph Wood presiding, Fr. Boniface is officially elected Prior of the new Monastery of the Ascension.

August 14, 1998, the Blessing of Fr. Prior Boniface takes place at the 7 am Mass.

August 21, 1998, Fr. Norbert Novak is appointed Subprior.

October 5, 1998, Fr. Norbert Novak has hip replacement surgery in Portland and returns to the Monastery on November 20, 1998.

December 28, 1998, Ascension Priory Chapter changes the official name of the monastery to "Monastery of the Ascension," and approves the Articles of Incorporation and By-laws of the Benedictine Monks of Idaho, Inc.

December 31, 1998, Br. Sylvester returns to the Monastery on his feast day.

January 13, 1999, Fr. Simeon undergoes laser heart surgery (33 holes); he is the first patient for this surgery in Boise.

January 19, 1999, Michael Driscoll, Auxiliary Bishop of Orange, California, is appointed Bishop of Boise.

March 17, 1999, Michael Driscoll is installed as Bishop of Boise.

August 17, 1999, outdoor Stations of the Cross designed by Ade Bethune are installed by Fr. Meinrad, with the help of Bill Holley's crew.

September 31, 1999, Fr. Meinrad begins work as chaplain at St. Gertrude's Monastery and St. Mary's Hospital in Cottonwood, Idaho.

September 3, 1999, Fr. Jude returns to his theological studies in Rome, via Spain, where he stayed for a month to refresh his Spanish.

September 8, 1999, Fr. Eugene celebrates his 50th anniversary of monastic profession.

September 10, 1999, Selby Coffman arrives to join the Community.

September 11, 1999, Fr. Simeon leads a group tour to the Holy Land and Europe.

December 11, 1999, Br. Patrick Wayne, after completing his novitiate, makes religious profession of his vows.

December 28, 1999, Br. Kevin McMullen makes his final profession as a monk of the community.

The Monastery presented 5 Elderhostels during 1999. They covered such topics as Christian and Buddhist monasticism, St. Hildegard of Bingen and health care ethics.

During the year 2000, the Monastery was one of the designated places of "pilgrimage" for the Diocese of Boise during the Jubilee Year.

January 3, 2000, Fr. Joel celebrates his 50th birthday.

Mid January, 2000, Br. Kevin helps with the women's Cursillo and Fr. Andrew helped with the men's Cursillo.

January 20 - 31, 2000, Br. Patrick attends a retreat on Centering Prayer at Queen of Angels Monastery in Mount Angel, OR.

February 10, 2000, Fr. Hugh travels to Mount Angel Abbey to give oblate retreats.

February 18, 2000, Fr. Boniface leaves for the OSB Superiors Meeting in Mexico City, and Fr. Joel arrives in Rome to visit Fr. Jude.

March 9, 2000, Fr. Norbert teaches a series of classes on "Catholic Moral Tradition Today."



March 12 - 15, 2000, the monastic community makes a retreat under the guidance of Bishop Connelly and Archbishop Hunthausen. This is followed by an Oblate retreat.

April 13, 2000, Selby Coffman enters into his novitiate year.

April 24, 2000, Fr. Prior Boniface has back surgery in Boise. Fr. Norbert attends the Benedictine Formation Directors' Conference at St. Peter's Abbey in Muenster, Sask, Canada until April 30th.

May 31, 2000, Fr. Jude successfully completes his courses at the Gregorian University in Rome and is awarded a licentiate in sacred theology (S. T. L.).

Two Jubilee retreats were held at the Monastery this year, in addition to the four Elderhostels and many other retreats, such as an HIV/Aids retreat; Beginning Experience, Days of Prayer and four retreats for the increasing number of Oblates.

Also celebrated this year were the 40th anniversary of ordination of Fr. Prior Boniface and Fr. Andrew, along with the 40th anniversary of profession of Fr. Hugh.

Br. Sylvester wrote a piece in the September, 2000, Desert Chronicle on the "First Twenty Years in Jerome." Fr. Hugh is appointed editor of the monastery newsletter.

In September, 2000, Fr. Prior Boniface attended a Congress of Abbots and Priors in Rome. The Benedictines throughout the world are united in the Benedictine Confederation and the superiors of monasteries meet every four years. One of the major events at that time was the beatification of five persons, including Pope John XXIII and Dom Columba Marmion, OSB. From Rome, Fr. Prior traveled with Abbot Joseph to Munich, where they connected with Fr. Simeon and Jude for a week of touring and visiting various spots in Bavaria and then Engelberg, in Switzerland. Frs. Boniface and Jude returned to Idaho on September 22.

Some reassignments took place at the Monastery at that time. Fr. Jude was appointed director of formation for new monks, in addition to working in the bookstore with Br. Tobiah. Fr. Norbert became guest master. Fr. Joel took over the maintenance department and Br. Sylvester became responsible for keeping the Ministry Center in good order.

In the summer of 2000, Patrick Wayne and Mike (Kevin) McMullen discerned that they are not called to the monastic way of life, and left the monastery.

In October, the Monastery hosted Buddhist monks from Tibet who had been traveling in North America as part of a cultural arts program. They left a message prayer and blessing for peace.

In early October, Richard De Marchi joined the Community as a volunteer.

In mid-January, 2001, Richard Jereb came to the Monastery as a postulant.

Fr. Hugh was one of the resource consultants involved in the preparation of the pastoral letter, "The Columbia River Watershed: Caring for Creation and the Common Good." This document was issued in January, 2001, by the Catholic Bishops of dioceses located in the watershed of the Columbia River.

April 24, 2001, Br. Selby made his first profession.

May 11, 2001, Fr. Simeon celebrates the 40th anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood.

In the summer of 2001, Fr. Hugh spoke at the meeting of oblate directors and oblate representatives at St. Benedict's Monastery and College in St. Joseph, MN, and at the meeting of Benedictine development directors at Christ the King Priory in Schuyler, NE.

Summer, 2002, Fr. Prior Boniface and Br. Tobiah represent the community at the meeting of the General Chapter of the Swiss American Congregation held at St. Benedict's Abbey in Benet Lake, WI.

Summer, 2002, Br. Fligo returns to using his baptismal name and applies for United States citizenship.

August, 2002, Br. Maur Morneault, OSB, arrives from Corpus Christi Abbey in Texas which is closing. He will stay for a year before transferring his stability. He takes over managing the bookstore from Br. Tobiah.

August, 2002, the monastery agrees with Hospice Visions of Twin Falls to the latter's construction of a Hospice on the monastery's land.