

Advent 2016

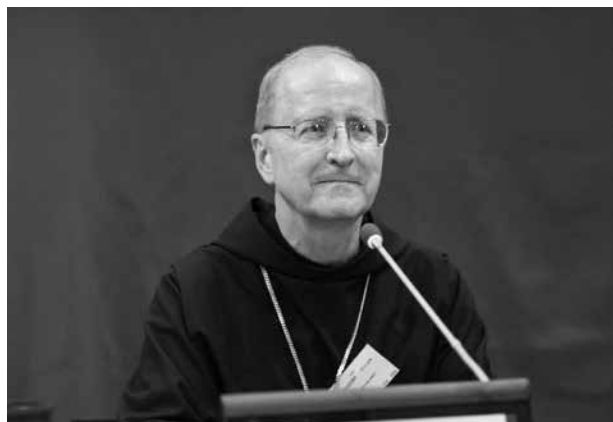
Dear Friends of St. Anselm's,

Here, as in many monasteries and churches throughout the world, we hear on each December 24 the sung proclamation of the birth of Christ as found in the Roman Martyrology. It begins with creation and relates Christ's birth to the major events and personages of sacred and secular history, with references to the 194th Olympiad, the 752nd year from the foundation of the city of Rome, and the 42nd year of the reign of Octavian Augustus. The proclamation goes on to say that "the whole world was then at peace," a fact that many early Christian preachers emphasized. Sadly, we cannot say that our entire world is at peace today, certainly not in Syria or other parts of the Middle East, and there are stark divisions in our own country over social and political issues. This makes it all the more incumbent on each of us to be peacemakers to the best of our ability as we take to heart the words of the Prince of Peace: "These things I have said to you that you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation, but take courage—I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

The Monks of St. Anselm's Abbey

The Chronicler's Column

Late summer brought about a significant change in the Benedictine Confederation worldwide when Abbot Notker Wolf stepped down after sixteen very successful years as abbot primate and was succeeded by Abbot Gregory Polan, the former abbot of Conception Abbey in Missouri. Abbot Gregory is well known to our own community, for he was a



Abbot Gregory Polan

co-visitor at our regular visitation in April, 2015 and has also been our dinner guest several times when he was in Washington on business. An article about the Congress of Abbots at which he was elected appears later in this issue of our newsletter.

We expect Abbot Notker himself to visit us during a period of well-deserved rest before he returns to his own monastery of St Otilien in Bavaria to resume life as "a simple monk." During his years as abbot primate, he was remarkably successful in raising funds for much-needed improvements at our international athenaeum in Rome, even as he also traveled widely

to give encouragement and advice to monastic communities and congregations throughout the world, especially in developing countries.

Closer to home, our community retreat in mid-August was led by Fr Ezekiel Lotz, OSB, a monk of Ascension Priory in Jerome, Idaho. Fr Ezekiel's seven conferences focused on the theme of Benedictine humanism and made much use of the wisdom of various early and mid-twentieth century writers such as Abbot John Chapman of Downside Abbey, who was the author of many published spiritual letters, the French philosopher Gabriel Marcel, and the theologian and cultural critic Romano Guardini. A few days after the retreat ended we began faculty meetings for the new school year, followed by the first full day of class on August 25. As you will read in the following reports about the activities of individual monks, the year now ending has seen us involved in numerous ways of serving others.

Fr Michael Hall serves as the Prior of our community in addition to many other responsibilities. Within the monastery he is our master of ceremonies and secretary of the abbot's council and of the conventual chapter, while in the abbey school he teaches courses in both the religion and social studies departments and serves as campus minister, which not only means organizing student retreats and liturgical services but also requires his being in charge of an extensive service program for the students. Fr Michael likewise continues to lead a program at which parents of schoolboys gather each first Friday during the school year for a mass, followed by discussion of readings on Benedictine spirituality. As a former headmaster and as the abbey archivist, he was well qualified to write the

article on the decision to open the priory school that you will find later in this issue of our newsletter. Since no one can work continually without some recreation, Fr Michael took some well-deserved holiday time this summer in New England and southern Maryland.

Abbot Aidan Shea is no longer physically able to get around as much as in former times, but he continues to have a regular stream of visitors who come to him for spiritual direction or simply to converse about common interests. Those of us who have been here for some years well remember the trenchant observations he was wont to make in his homilies and abbatial conferences. We have care givers looking after Abbot Aidan's needs twenty-four hours a day; among these is Mrs Rowena Corbett, who has had connections with the abbey for many years.

Our resident scripture scholar and a genuine pillar of the community is **Fr Joseph Jensen**, who recently began a series of bi-monthly classes on the Bible that are offered after Mass on the second and fourth Sundays of each month. Many of those who attend these classes are oblates of our community, from whom we regularly hear praise of the well-organized way in which he presents the material, drawn from the many years he taught at Catholic University. His biblical erudition also comes through in his homilies, always well-prepared even when he needs some outside help, for Fr Joseph assures us that his patron, St Joseph, faithfully comes to his aid in a dream the night before he has to preach on his nameday every March 19.

Older than Fr Joseph by a mere month is **Fr Edmund Henkels**, whose 92nd birthday we celebrated at the nearby Carroll Manor nursing home on October 31. Fr Edmund has lived there for some years now since the abbey is not equipped to provide for his physical needs, but the home is close enough to allow for regular visits not only by monks



Fr Edmund (his back to us) faces his birthday cake and his assembled guests.

but by other friends, especially Mrs Joan Castellan, who has known him ever since he taught her sons in our school many years ago. Fr Edmund also enjoys letters from relatives and friends in his native Iowa; he recently chuckled much upon hearing how raccoons had raided the garden of one of these friends in the small town of Monticello.

Fr Christopher Wyvill, who has faithfully served our community in many capacities over the years (especially as bursar and as vocation director, roles he has now turned over to others), still uses his extensive manual skills to tend to various repairs in our buildings, to grow fresh vegetables in our garden each summer, and to look after the maintenance of our "stone house" in Capon Springs, West Virginia, where he recently oversaw the removal of a number of dead or dying trees that were dangerously close to the house itself. Fr Christopher is also one of the regular chaplains for the Daughters of Charity at Seton High School in nearby Bladensburg, Maryland and serves as main celebrant and homilist for a Latin mass one Sunday each month at St

Matthew's Cathedral downtown in Washington.

The public face of our school is its president, **Fr Peter Weigand**, who has developed an impressive network of alumni in all parts of our country, even as far away as Hawaii. He has regular meetings with these former students each summer and, to some extent, during the school year as well. In addition to raising needed funds, especially for scholarship endowment, Fr Peter continues to teach earth science to our younger students in form one, plus occasional electives in anthropology or Native American culture to students in the fifth and sixth forms. This past February, he and Abbot James celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of their vows, both of them having first arrived at the abbey at the tender age of 22. Fr Peter's sister Cathy traveled here from Minnesota as one of his guests on that happy occasion.

When we hear the word "chaplain," many of us first think of persons who regularly offer mass for women's religious communities, but **Fr Philip Simo** is a more thoroughgoing chaplain than that. Some readers of this newsletter will recall an earlier article that he wrote about his chaplaincy work at nearby Providence Hospital, where he is now the director of pastoral services. Being on call for stretches of forty-eight hours at a time (followed by periods of being off-duty for another forty-eight) means that he cannot participate in most of the regular weekly duties at the monastery, but fortunately he is able to be in the regular rotation of Sunday and weekday homilists. Fr Philip is also a master *nonpareil* at preparing our calefactory for buffet suppers on special occasions and at taking charge of cookouts on some national holidays.

Having served as sacristan for many years, **Fr Boniface von Nell** has passed that duty on to another monk, but he continues to be active in numerous other ways. As director of our oblate group, he regularly prepares conferences for their monthly

meetings and also oversees the training of oblate novices. Fr Boniface and one of the oblates spend a week each September at an icon painting workshop in western Pennsylvania, where he prepares the icon that is on the cover of our Christmas card every year. Earlier in the summer he visited friends in his home town of Philadelphia, where the three of them saw a Shakespeare play at St Francis de Sales University, some miles northwest of the city; this year the play was *Julius Caesar*. He is also chaplain for the St Joseph Benedict Labre group, for persons suffering from some form of mental illness. On the second Saturday of each month they have a mass at the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, along with a monthly meeting at the abbey itself. Fr Boniface likewise serves as our monastic librarian and helps out in the school library when needed.

Fr Gabriel Myers is happy working with his colleagues in our business office while also planning and rehearsing the abbey music, and preaching. Like Fr Christopher, he celebrates the Latin mass at St Matthew's Cathedral once a month and continues to help out at Holy Comforter—St Cyprian and Holy Rosary parishes. A special challenge this year was giving his first retreat to the Benedictine sisters at Ridgely, Maryland; they were warm hosts and responsive listeners for the five days he spent there. A special pleasure was a holiday with an old friend and former school colleague, Laura Reed, and her family. This included hiking in Glacier National Park and kayaking on Flathead Lake in Montana.

Later in this newsletter you will find an article about the Christian community in Nagasaki, Japan by **Br Dunstan Robidoux**, who visited that city while en route to give some lectures in Korea. He also spent some time on the European continent and in England, where he took part in the annual board meeting of the Phyllis Walbank Educational Trust and visited our former superior, Fr Simon McGurk,

at Belmont Abbey on the outskirts of Hereford. Here at St Anselm's he manages our gift shop and runs seminars for the Lonergan Institute, which he co-founded.

Br Matthew Nylund continues to teach Spanish in the abbey school, to select readings for use at vespers, and to edit this newsletter. This summer he traveled by train to Boston to visit his sister in Cambridge and to Vermont to visit his friends in Morrisville, a short drive from the monastery of St-Benoît du Lac, where he made a retreat and enjoyed the hospitality on offer at that delightful place.

Our newly appointed vocation director is **Br Ignacio González**, who has taken on this important role with the energy that characterizes so many other things that he does, including the teaching of religion and Spanish in our school, serving on the abbot's council, and pursuing a master's degree in theology at Catholic University. This past summer he organized and participated in a two-week program at a Spanish-language school in Cuernavaca, Mexico, attended also by Abbot James, four students from the abbey school, and some of their parents and siblings. Along with Br Samuel, Br Ignacio represented our abbey at the annual meeting of the Fellowship of Catholic University Students (FOCUS) in Dallas last January; the two of them will likewise be attending a similar meeting this coming January in another Texas city, San Antonio.

Br Samuel Springuel, an alumnus of our school who later studied at colleges and universities in New England, has proved to be a valuable member of our community not only in our liturgical life, where he is one of our regular cantors, but also in helping maintain the physical plant through his technical abilities, evidenced this past summer by his thorough restoration of some wooden doors that had suffered the ravages of storms and termites over the course of seventy-five years. Br Samuel professed his



Brother Samuel at solemn profession mass

solemn vows at conventual mass on Sunday, October 16 and is currently in his third year of seminary studies at Catholic University.

Two other men who had been in temporary vows here have decided to leave. **Br Isaiah Lord** has returned to lay life. The article he wrote for this issue, a very interesting piece on English Benedictine military chaplains during World War I, therefore appears over his baptismal name, David Lord. And **Br Bernard Marra** has decided to try his monastic vocation elsewhere and is now living as a claustral-oblate candidate at New Camaldoli Hermitage in Big Sur, California.

The writer of this Chronicler's Column, **Abbot James Wiseman**, composed most of it during some



free time at the quadrennial Congress of Abbots in Rome in mid-September. As mentioned above, he was with Br Ignacio and others from our school for two weeks of language study at a school in southern Mexico in June. Later in the summer he spent a relaxing week with cousins in a small town in Minnesota, but most of the time he has been at the

abbey itself, overseeing an important project of preparing a master plan for the future development of both monastery and school. He also teaches a religion course to seniors in our school, serves as one of the chaplains for the Daughters of Charity at Seton High School, and occasionally conducts retreats for other groups.

JAMES WISEMAN, OSB

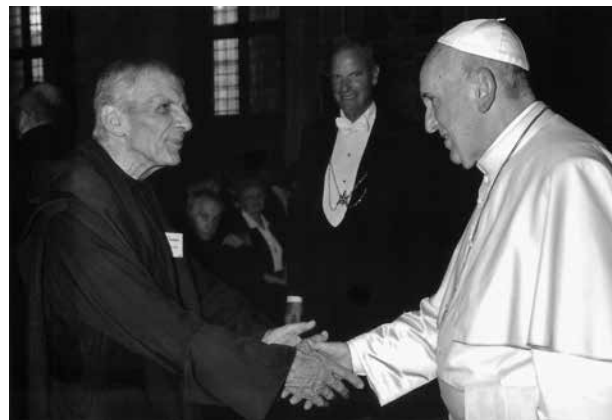


The Congress of Abbots

Every four years, all the abbots of the worldwide Benedictine Confederation meet at our international athenaeum of Sant'Anselmo on Rome's Aventine Hill. The 2016 congress, held from September 6-16, had as a main item on its agenda the election of a new abbot primate to succeed Abbot Notker Wolf, who was stepping down from that position after sixteen years in office. The opening days of the congress were therefore spent on ways of letting the approximately 240 abbots in attendance become better acquainted with the candidates who had previously been recommended by the nineteen congregations within the confederation. Discussions were held both in individual congregations and in the five official language groups (English, French, German, Italian, and Spanish), and at the end of that first week Abbot Gregory Polan of Conception Abbey in Missouri was elected.

Unlike the superiors general of more centralized religious orders such as the Franciscans and Jesuits, the Benedictine abbot primate does not have much executive authority, but the role is nevertheless very important in that he both supervises the operations at Sant'Anselmo itself and also regularly travels to give encouragement, support, and advice to Benedictine men and women in all parts of the world. Abbot Gregory's twenty years of experience as abbot at Conception and the good relationships he already enjoys with various officials at the Vatican give every reason to expect that he will be as successful in his new role as was his predecessor, Abbot Notker, who received a remarkably lengthy round of applause as the assembled abbots thanked him for his years of generous service.

That first week was also marked by a midday visit on Wednesday, September 7 to the Vatican,



where Pope Francis received all of the abbots in his private audience hall. His address included the following words, which in fact highlighted the two major works that characterize our life here at St Anselm's—education and hospitality:

Your international Congress, which sees you gathered in Rome in order to reflect on the monastic charism received by St Benedict and on how to remain faithful to it in a world that is changing, takes on a particular significance in the context of the Jubilee of Mercy.... The world today shows ever more clearly its need for mercy; but this is not a slogan or a formula: it is the heart of Christian life and at the same time its concrete form, the breath that animates interpersonal relations and makes us attentive to the most needy and in solidarity with them.... This is why, in the recent Apostolic Constitution *Vultum Dei quaerere*, I address myself to nuns, and by extension to all monks, like this: "May the words of the traditional Benedictine motto,

‘ora et labora,’ still, and always, retain their validity for you; they train us to find a balanced rapport between the tension towards the Absolute and commitment to daily responsibilities, between the quiet of contemplation and eagerness for service.”

Your work, in harmony with prayer, lets you participate in the creative work of God and be united with the poor who cannot live without work. With your characteristic hospitality, you are able to meet the hearts of those who have most lost their way and are far off, of those who find themselves in conditions of grave human and spiritual poverty. Also your commitment to formation and to the education of the young is greatly appreciated and of a high distinction. Students of your schools, thanks to their study and to your testimony of life, can themselves become experts in that humanism that emanates from the Rule of St Benedict.

After his inspiring address, Pope Francis personally greeted each person present, shaking hands and exchanging a few words, often a request for prayers as he continues his crucial and demanding role of leading the Church throughout the world.

There was another outing the following Sunday, with the option of visiting either Subiaco, where St Benedict established his first monasteries, or Monte Cassino, where he wrote the monastic rule that has guided the lives of countless Benedictine men and women ever since the sixth century. Originally there was to have been a third option for an outing—Norcia, the saint’s birthplace—but that city was so badly damaged by the earthquake of August 24 that that outing had to be canceled. Indeed, the monks of that city had to move temporarily to Rome, leaving two of their brethren behind to look after the basilica while having to spend the night in a tent outside the city walls.



The abbots attending the conference in Rome gathered at the monument to Giuseppe Mazzini near Sant’ Anselmo

During both weeks of the congress there were presentations made in plenary session by invited speakers, such as the Trappist abbot Bernardo Bonowitz from Brazil, Brother Alois Löser of Taizé, and representatives of the Orthodox Churches from Egypt, Romania, and Russia. In addition to these speeches, those attending the congress also had a wide variety of workshops and seminars they could attend, especially during the second week. These were on such topics as “Abbatial Government and Canon Law: Justice and Mercy,” “The Work of the International Commission for Benedictine Education,” and “Applying the Vision of Vatican II to Monastic Life.” On the final day, September 16, there were many expressions of gratitude to all who had worked so hard to organize the entire congress, to provide simultaneous translations of talks into the five official languages of the gathering, and to provide sumptuous Italian meals three times each day, in addition to mid-morning and mid-afternoon snacks. As one long-reigning abbot was heard to say, “This was the best congress of abbots I have ever attended.”

JAMES WISEMAN, OSB

Pilgrimage to Nagasaki

On August 9, 1945, at about 11 in the morning, two priests were hearing confessions in Urakami Cathedral in a suburb of Nagasaki. The cathedral sits on a height, on a hill overlooking the suburb, the village of Urakami, which had been settled late in the 16th century when persecutions first began within the port of Nagasaki against the Christians of Japan. After some had been martyred, the remaining Christians decided to leave the port city and go "up river" to establish their own settlement in Urakami. The "hidden Christians" of Urakami only emerged from obscurity in 1865 when some of them began to visit a newly built Catholic church that had been constructed by French priests who had received permission from the Japanese political authority to operate and maintain a church for the exclusive use of foreign residents who were then living in Nagasaki (following the opening of Japanese ports for the sake of commerce and contact with the outside world).

More precisely, in the early afternoon of March 17, 1865, a group of some twelve to fifteen men, women, and children were standing in front of the Church of the Twenty-six Martyrs (more commonly known today as Oura Catholic Church). Their behavior suggested something more than the presence of idle curiosity. The French priest who was then present saw these people and noticed that they were all Japanese. When the Church had been consecrated the previous month, no Japanese had attended the ceremonies. This priest accordingly opened the church door and was followed by these visitors as he himself moved toward the sanctuary, saying his prayers. After saying the Our Father, three middle-aged women came up and knelt beside him; one of them, placing her hand on her heart, simply

said to him in a whisper: "The heart of all present is the same as yours. We are all from Urakami. At Urakami nearly all have the same heart as we have." She then asked, "Where is the figure of the Virgin Mary?" In Japan, the faithful have a strong devotion to Our Lady. Whenever they come upon her image, her statue, they genuflect before it and make the sign of the cross, paying to her the same honors as we would normally pay to Our Lord, recognizing her closeness to Jesus and the kind of sovereign majesty which, in some way, properly belongs to her as the Queen of Heaven. Before every Catholic Church in Japan, you can find her image and statue.

According to testimony that was given to me by Mr Shigekazo Yanagimachi, who hosted me and an Austrian friend, Roland Krismer, on a recent visit to Japan, many persons know that, on August 9, 1945, the primary target for the dropping of the atomic bomb was not Nagasaki but Kokura. Kokura was found to be clouded over and so the plane carrying the bomb flew on to Nagasaki, the secondary target. However, and this is not widely known in the West, the center of Nagasaki was also found to be clouded over. The bomb could not be dropped. The plane began to circle about, a bit aimlessly, and the crew was on the point of giving up when they saw, in the distance, an opening in the clouds. They flew to this opening and, unbeknownst to them, unleashed an atomic device over the Catholic ghetto of Urakami. Of the approximately 12,000 parishioners who were then living in Urakami around the cathedral, approximately 8,500 were immediately killed by the bomb's blast or died soon afterwards. Many others were, of course, seriously wounded. When a group of us attended Sunday Mass in Urakami Cathedral the

day before Roland and I departed for Korea, as I looked around at the elderly members of the congregation, I could not help but think that I was in the midst of persons who had survived the atomic bombing of August 9.

At 11:02 on that August morning in 1945, Dr Nagai Takashi, a radiologist and specialist in the field of nuclear medicine, was at his desk in the hospital preparing a lecture when a blinding flash filled his office and he was thrown across the room. He received a head injury but, with the help of others, was able to free himself from fallen debris. Most of the hospital staff and patients were already dead:



Dr. Nagai Takashi

about 80 percent. In what followed, a chain of events occurred in a way which points to a kind of self-transcendence which somehow always exists within the human spirit, a self-transcendence which cannot emerge if it were not for aggravating external causes which elicit actions and desires which, in turn, point to an order of being which cannot be seen but which casts its influence on us to bring a new order into the conduct of our human affairs. This new order takes what is entirely lacking in meaning or significance

and fills this void with value and intelligibility in a way which cannot be explained if our point of view is restricted to the mere givenness of material conditions. In what follows, I will cite several incidents which point to this condition.

In the immediate wake of the bombing, the human order at the hospital and in the entire village of Urakami immediately disintegrated. In response to the chaos about him, Dr Nagai called for a Japanese flag. They could not find one, so he took a white sheet and tore it into a square; he then took off his blood soaked bandage and squeezed blood from it to create a round red spot in the middle of the sheet. Fellow staff added blood from their own wounds to create a serviceable flag, and then the Japanese standard was attached to a pole and placed in an open space for all to see. Almost immediately, the sight of this flag triggered an experience of hope in the persons present and the flag became a source of activity for the creation of a new human order to replace the order which had just been destroyed. The symbolism of the national standard elicited joy and a degree of hope.

At around midnight the same day, in the radiology department, workers there heard women singing Latin hymns. Next morning, they visited the site from where these voices were heard and discovered the near-naked bodies of twenty-seven nuns from the Josei convent. The explosion had destroyed the convent; some of the nuns had been killed outright while the others were left horribly burned. These wounded sisters, suffering mortal pain and agony, had gathered together around a little stream nearby. There they had died singing and praising God. Similarly, at the Junshin school run by nuns, when the air raids had begun to intensify the school principal, Sr Ezumi, taught the girls a new hymn which they sang every morning: "Mary, Mother! I offer myself to you, body, soul, and spirit." In the days and

weeks that followed the bombing, little groups of these girls would gather, many of them dying, and encouraging each other, they would sing: "Mother Mary, I would offer myself to you."

As the sun rose the day after the bombing, a hospital nurse brought to Dr Nagai a leaflet that had been dropped earlier by an American plane, warning all residents of Nagasaki to leave the city "before it was too late." Reading this, Dr Nagai concluded that the American authorities had succeeded in developing and dropping an atomic bomb. He immediately took this leaflet and brought it to a distinguished professor of physics, Dr Seiki, who was lying uncomfortably on the ground in a make-shift air raid shelter. Professor Seiki thought about it and then discussed with other wounded physicists what could have happened. Japanese scientists had been working earlier on uranium-235 but the army had decided to cancel the costly project. And so, the gathered scientists talked about who, in the West, could have done the work that was needed to create an atomic device. Possible names were mentioned: Einstein, Bohr, Fermi, Chadwick, the Joliot-Curies, Madame Meitner, and Hahn. At a certain point however, Dr. Seiki asked about the radiation which is always released

by the splitting of the atom. What were its effects, its consequences? And so, given their opportune even if tragic human situation, it was decided that they should all begin to collect data about the effects and the consequences of atomic radiation: its impact on human beings and other living things. They wanted to take advantage of the current situation, horrible as it was, to learn about this phenomenon and see how it could best be dealt with. As Dr Nagai later wrote: amid death and destruction, there emerged "a new dynamism and motivation in our quest for truth. On this devastated nuclear wilderness, something was already growing, the vigorous seedlings of new scientific data."

At midnight on August 9, the badly damaged Urakami Cathedral went up in flames; at the same hour, the emperor met with his council and informed his assembled ministers that he had decided to sue for peace and issue a decree of surrender, immediately ending the war and saving many lives. A few months later, on November 23, a requiem mass was said in the ruined cathedral for all the dead who had been killed. Dr Nagai was asked to speak and so was faced with the daunting task of what to say, no easy task. His remarks occasioned anger among

Urakami Cathedral at Nagasaki after the bombing



some of the people who were there, but by the time he finished, a calm reigned among everyone.

How might I summarize now what he was trying to say to the Christian people of Nagasaki? Let us recall that at Calvary, Our Lord died. He was sacrificed, and he also sacrificed himself. The Lamb of God was slain and, in the wake of this death, we are told about white-robed virgins singing. In Nagasaki, for reasons that we cannot fathom or understand, a like death occurred. The Catholic community was sacrificed and, by this sacrifice, other persons were spared death and suffering, for as fires engulfed and destroyed the Catholic cathedral, at that moment God inspired the Emperor to issue the proclamation that ended the war. Two millennia ago, Our Lord accepted unmerited suffering, and now, in following him, the same path was given to others to follow. And so, as we think about Nagasaki and the life of the “hidden Christians” there, their trials and sufferings and their acceptance of these same trials and sufferings, we find examples that are closer to us in space and time, examples that perpetuate for us or which bring to us the kind of suffering which Our Lord knew on the Cross. How marvelous this all is! At Hiroshima, when the dropping of the atomic bomb is remembered each year, it is said that this remembering is done with a sense of anger and censure (maybe a desire to “get back” or “get even”).

However, in Nagasaki the atmosphere is quite different: there one finds forgiveness, mercy, and compassion. We remember thus that, as children of Adam, we are all sinners. But, in accepting unmerited trials and sufferings, simply by doing this, love and forgiveness is communicated to others. We encounter what comes across to us as the experience of unmerited suffering, perhaps reminding us of the square root of 2 where we encounter lengths and distances that cannot be measured—irrational numbers. A time of dying is changed into a time of living in a manner which is both real and mystical.

In Nagasaki, when they tried to excavate the cathedral to find the bodies of the two priests hearing confessions and the remains of those who were by or in the confessionals, they found no earthly remains of any kind. All they found to mark the location of bodies were clumps of melted rosaries: a clump here, a clump there to mark where someone was standing, sitting, or kneeling. When Dr Nagai, after three days, managed to go back to his house to look for his wife, he dug about the ruins and, in what had been the kitchen, he found only her bones. Wound about the bones of her right hand was a melted rosary. She had been in the kitchen, saying her rosary, at the very hour when the atomic bomb was dropped and detonated.

DUNSTAN ROBIDOUX, OSB

The Decision to Open the Priory School—1941

From the fall of 2016 through the year 2017 St Anselm's Abbey School will be celebrating seventy-five years of existence as part of the ministry of St Anselm's Abbey. Probably a number of articles in abbey publications during this time will look at aspects of the school's history and mission, but in this Advent 2016 number of the newsletter it seems appropriate to try to recount the story of the decision of the monks of St Anselm's in 1941 to open a school for boys.

Our "founding fathers," led by Fr Thomas Verner Moore, did not envision a secondary school as a future mission for the Benedictine priory they were hoping to found in Washington, near the Catholic University of America. They planned a monastic community devoted to prayer, liturgy, and scholarship, made up of academics in the areas of theology, philosophy, and the social sciences, who would engage in research, exchange of ideas, and publications with a major focus on bridging the gap between religion and science. It should, however, be noted that in the document of incorporation in 1923 of "the Benedictine Foundation at Washington, D.C." issued under the laws of the District of Columbia, the purposes of the corporation were described very broadly as "Christian ministry and education," which certainly allowed for a possible school.

These founders were all already ordained priests with doctorates engaged in teaching at Catholic University. With the exception of one, Fr John Hugh Diman, a convert from Episcopalianism, they had no experience with secondary schools. Fr Diman, already by 1923 was the founder of two schools, St George's School in Newport, Rhode Island and the Diman Vocational School in Fall River,

Massachusetts. He felt that in becoming a Roman Catholic priest and a Benedictine monk he was putting that educational career behind him. Events proved otherwise!

Abbot Joseph McDonald of Fort Augustus Abbey in Scotland had responded favorably and supportively to Fr Moore's request

for his group to be adopted, trained, and sponsored as a new Benedictine community of the English Benedictine Congregation. The founders began their novitiate at Fort Augustus in September 1923 and made their profession of monastic vows one year later on September 8, 1924. A few weeks after their profession they returned to the United States in the company of Abbot McDonald himself and a small group of young monks of Fort Augustus to launch St Anselm's Priory in the house they had purchased on Sargent Road near South Dakota Avenue. The monasteries of the English Benedictine Congregation, since their return to England from exile in France at the end of the eighteenth century, had all been actively involved in parish ministry and the education of Catholic boys in secondary schools. Abbot McDonald, ever the realist, felt that a school was the most appropriate and unifying work for a monastery, although he always remained



Abbot Joseph McDonald

encouraging to the St Anselm's community about pursuing their dream of becoming a Catholic "think tank" and center of high scholarship. He did frankly tell the American monks that he envisioned a time in the not too distant future when a school would become a part of the life of the new community.

The four founding monks of St Anselm's mostly returned to their former work as professors at Catholic University or Trinity College, along with some retreat work and parish assistance. The income from those jobs "put food on the table," but a common community work was not quick to develop. The "think tank" idea was proving hard to initiate. Within two years of their return to Washington, Abbot McDonald was urging the still somewhat reluctant founders to look for a site to open a boys school with a monastery attached, one that could develop in a more traditional way. This second monastery could foster the small, more experimental community of scholars in Washington and provide vocations for it. Obediently, Fr Moore, Fr Diman and the others did look into a few sites in the Baltimore and Annapolis areas and in New Jersey and New England, but nothing fell into place.

In the spring of 1925 an event occurred which could almost be interpreted as "divine intervention." Downside Abbey, another house of the English Congregation, had a large property in Rhode Island on Narragansett Bay about 12 miles north of Newport, an area very familiar to Fr Diman. Downside had been planning to make an American foundation there. The project was not going well, and Abbot Leander Ramsay had determined to close it. Hearing that Abbot McDonald was looking for a place to begin a monastery and school, he offered the property to Fort Augustus. This was an ideal solution in the mind of Abbot McDonald. The Chapters at both Downside and Fort Augustus approved the transfer of the Rhode Island property to Fort Augustus.

Plans were made almost at once to open a school there. Fr Moore and the Washington community were loyal and hopeful, but certainly not enthusiastic about this new development, particularly when the abbot announced that Fr Diman, an experienced school leader, would be sent from Washington to Rhode Island to become the founder of what was to become the Portsmouth Priory School, which began its life in September 1926. A small monastery there would grow and eventually also provide vocations for Washington, or so it was hoped.

For the next two decades Fort Augustus, under Abbot Joseph McDonald and his successor in 1928, Abbot Wulstan Knowles, was responsible for the two American priories at Washington and Portsmouth with close links between the two and some interchange of personnel as needed. As the Washington community grew slowly, the monks continued to be engaged in a variety of works, but a common work was still not developing. The candidates applying for admission to St Anselm's were not all PhD's, suitable for the "think tank" idea! Fr Moore was also worried that those monks engaged in university teaching would be reaching mandatory retirement age soon, affecting income. For a number of reasons therefore a new venture was clearly called for if the priory was to survive and be financially viable.

By 1940 Fr Thomas Verner Moore, who had been appointed Prior of St Anselm's by Abbot Knowles in the previous year, saw the need to move in a new direction—one of a more traditional nature. At informal community meetings he began to send up trial balloons by raising the question of possibly opening a small school for boys, a day school only. The older monks were not warm to the idea, but Fr Moore was encouraged to see that the younger monks were very supportive and energized by the prospect, and he correctly saw them as the nucleus of a future school faculty. In a letter of February 1940

Fr Moore reported his findings to Abbot Knowles. He also referred to his meeting with Archbishop Michael J. Curley, the archbishop of Baltimore and Washington, at which the archbishop (a notoriously tough nut to crack!) was surprisingly supportive of the idea of the Benedictines of St Anselm's opening a high school for boys in the Brookland area of his Washington Archdiocese.

The monks at Fort Augustus were skeptical about such a school's prospects and not anxious to undertake any new projects which might prove a drain later on their finances and personnel. In subsequent letters, a now enthusiastic Fr Moore reassured the Fort Augustus community that there was every reason to be hopeful about a successful school. He pointed out that there were only three Catholic high schools for boys in the Washington area: the Jesuit-run schools Gonzaga and Georgetown Prep, and the Christian Brothers' school, St John's. He noted that the Sacred Heart nuns at Stone Ridge and the Notre Dame Sisters at the Catholic University Model School (later called Campus School) were looking for appropriate placements for their male graduates. The endorsement of the archbishop was in hand. A financially modest start could be made with "temporary" buildings. He reported that parent inquiries about a possible school were already coming in. He urged the authorities at the Fort Augustus mother house to give the Washington monks permission to begin.

After further communications between Washington and Scotland, during which assurances were given that the Washington community alone would bear full financial responsibility, the matter was settled. The Conventual Chapter of Fort Augustus Abbey at its meeting on October 20, 1941 granted permission for St Anselm's Priory to open a secondary school for boys and even authorized borrowing up to \$100,000. In a real sense this action was *the foundational charter for The Priory School*. Preparations for



The first freshman class of the Priory School in September 1942

a September 1942 opening of the school were soon undertaken. A few weeks later, in December 1941, the United States was at war, and everyone's plans altered significantly!

With all non-essential building construction now subject to severe restrictions, any school construction, even of a modest "temporary" character as envisioned by Fr Moore, had to be abandoned. Two choices presented themselves: 1) to try to buy back the original priory, the farmhouse on Sargent Road now occupied by the TOR Franciscans and to adapt it, or 2) to take over the novitiate wing of the current monastery, a wing built only in 1940, and to adapt it to school use. The less expensive second option was chosen. The novices were moved to the 3rd floor attic of the main building, and the newer novitiate or "north wing" was adapted for school use by removing some partitions, installing used blackboards, etc., all to the "staggering" cost of \$2000, most of the work being done by Brother Maurus and "casual labor". Fr Moore's long-term plan was to eventually construct separate school facilities



Fr Austin McNamee

Augustus approved the appointment of Fr Austin McNamee to be the headmaster, after Fr Edward Rauth opted out of that kind of public role in favor of the more private one of guidance counselor for the school. Fr Austin had been a Xaverian brother prior to transferring to the Benedictines. He had a lot of experience in teaching in Xaverian schools in New England and embodied their philosophy of hard work and strict discipline! The new school was to have a strictly classical academic program over four years. The tuition was set at \$200 per year! The exclusively monastic original faculty was to include,

either at the corner of Sargent Road and South Dakota Avenue or on Eastern Avenue at the very north end of the monastery property.

From December 1941 through the summer of 1942 the work of constructing a faculty, administration, and curriculum for the new school proceeded apace. The superior at Fort



Fr Urban's physics class in the first science lab at the Priory School

in addition to Fathers Austin and Edward, the young junior monks Brothers Stephen Reid, Hugh Monmonier, Bernard Theall, and David Hurst. One year later the first lay teacher, Bob Dwyer, was added to handle athletics and PE.

The original entering class of fifteen freshmen were welcomed to the new Priory School in September 1942 in their "temporary" quarters in the north wing of the monastery. "Temporary" until 1955! Hopefully the story of those first years may be told in next year's newsletter as our 75th jubilee celebration continues.

MICHAEL HALL, OSB

Benedictine Military Chaplains in the First World War

If you have read and liked Brother Isaiah's articles about priests and religious in the American Civil War in previous newsletters, you may also appreciate the following account of chaplains of the English Benedictine Congregation (EBC) who served during the First World War. Brother Isaiah has drawn this material from a paper that Professor James H. Hagerty of Bath Spa University gave at a symposium of the English Benedictine Congregation's History Commission in 1998.

When hostilities broke out in August 1914, most people thought the war was going to be short, but by the end of 1914 Lord Kitchener, the British secretary of state for war, surprised almost everyone by predicting a much longer conflict and calling for the army to be expanded to seventy divisions. Kitchener's call for volunteers was eagerly answered, and that included Catholic priests willing to serve as military chaplains, of whom more than forty were monks of our congregation—from the abbeys at Downside, Ampleforth, Douai, Belmont,



British military chaplain distributing Communion

and Fort Augustus.

The senior Catholic chaplain for the British Expeditionary Force was a diocesan priest, Msgr William Keatinge, who had been educated at Downside and at the English College in Rome. He had earlier served in the Boer War and so had some experience as a chaplain, but the First World War was to be a conflict of a very different kind. Msgr Keatinge faced many challenges from the very beginning, for nothing was laid down in army regulations about the duty of a chaplain except that he was to seek the spiritual and moral welfare of the men of his religious denomination at the post to which he was attached. The methods adopted by chaplains in the first months of the war were mainly left to individual initiative.

In early 1915, Fr Stephen Rawlinson of Downside, who had also been a chaplain in the Boer War and was described by an associate as "a man of notable ability and commanding presence," was named Keatinge's assistant to help provide more clarity and guidance for those in the chaplain corps. The two men issued guidelines and instructions to chaplains, keeping a close watch on those who were unable to maintain the high standards they demanded. They set about resolving the many difficulties brought on by the circumstances of war, and addressing the personal idiosyncrasies, and the misunderstandings and failings of those with whom they were called to work. Rawlinson was also responsible for the management of day-to-day affairs in the chaplains' office when Keatinge was away touring the

front or visiting military hospitals. The following year Rawlinson was appointed principal chaplain to the Macedonia Army and senior Catholic chaplain on the Western Front. From then until the armistice in 1917, Fr Rawlinson directed the efforts of all Catholic chaplains for the British forces in France and Flanders. He had many contacts with the high command and was universally liked and respected for his gifts of charm, tact, and wisdom.

In the early stages of the war, the fighting was not as dangerous as it became later on, so at first it was not especially difficult for the chaplains to be able to minister to the troops. Later, however, as the fighting grew more intense, the chaplains found it much more difficult to provide appropriate ministry to fallen soldiers. Among those who also faced such difficulties was another EBC chaplain, Fr Anthony Barnett of Ampleforth, who had been ordained a priest in 1911. He was commissioned as a chaplain in November 1914 and attached to the Northumberland Fusiliers. His letters back to his abbey record experiences and emotions that vividly capture the horrors of the war. Of his work at the casualty-clearing stations after the fierce fighting at the second battle of Ypres in the spring of 1915, he wrote:

It is a ghastly thing to see the state of some of the poor fellows brought in. How the human body can stand such terrible rips and holes is a marvel to me. All the ambulance work is done at night.... All night I stay with my ambulance and in the morning I hurry off to the other ambulance's dressing station. They are a mile away, rather nearer the firing line. If any RC is really

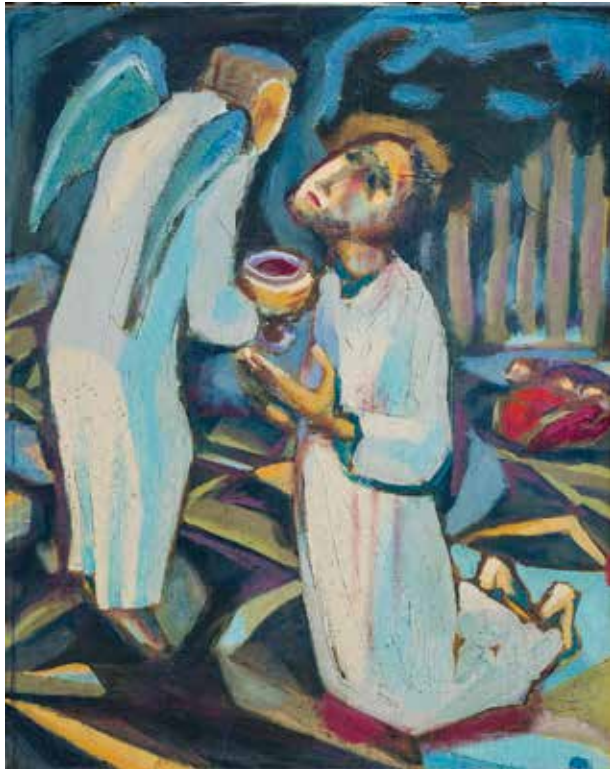
badly hit, an orderly is kept here ready for me to come over to administer the Last Sacraments. I just stumble off through the darkness and administer the last rites. Poor fellows! They do so appreciate the priest's visit.... You really feel that you are doing the good God's work here amongst these poor fellows who today are in robust health and tomorrow are twisted and contorted in agonies or just asleep in death.... One just rushes here and rushes there, trying to get at them wherever one can find them.

Although one might envision first the chaplains' duties on or near the front lines, the work to be done in the camps was just as important. Here the chaplains could celebrate mass and offer the sacraments to the soldiers, perform administrative duties, record injuries and deaths, and correspond with friends and communities back in the UK. Alluding to some aspects of the work, Fr Rawlinson wrote: "The chaplain had to learn military courtesy and discipline, if necessary learn how to ride a horse, and avoid discussing religion. Above all, the chaplain must always be on hand, always ready to bury RC dead or at least make a note of those buried by non-RC chaplains, and must never forget his Mass kit." When he and other EBC chaplains had first entered monastic life, they had surely never dreamt that they would one day be doing this kind of ministry, but they performed it with extraordinary dedication and valor, a rightful source of pride for those of us who now belong to the same monastic congregation.

DAVID LORD

The Agony in the Garden: Fr Stephen Reid Looks at Modernity

Bruce Nixon is a writer who has specialized in the work of contemporary artists. Among his recent publications is *A Communion of Saints*, a compact and insightful appreciation of the work of Fr Stephen Reid, a monk of St Anselm's (from 1941 to his death in 1989), and a teacher of art, drama and French in the abbey school.



The Agony in the Garden

With its ashen palette and melancholy, dreamlike atmosphere, *The Agony in the Garden* belongs near the start of Fr Stephen Reid's career as a painter. It almost certainly dates from the late 1940s, for its character is thoroughly of that period in art and it can be linked



Saint Stephen

in mood and effect to several of his other early works, the similarly twilight, ritualistic *Abraham, Isaac, and the Angel*, or *Saint Stephen*, whose pale salmon hues seem to have been dusted with cinders. All three paintings reveal the course of Fr Stephen's



The Return of the Prodigal Son

visual studies at the time: late symbolism (Paul Gauguin) and German expressionism (Franz Marc, Ernest Kirchner). Art historians have chronicled the arrival of such work in the United States—its introduction in museum exhibitions in New York beginning in the 1930s alongside

cubism and surrealism—and its dissemination elsewhere in the country during the following decade among artists eager to draw from these fresh ideas coming from Europe. Fr Stephen proved susceptible to them, as well, with the exception—crucially—that he was an avowedly Christian artist, not a secular painter intent upon declaring his modernity.



Saint Martin and the Beggar

Gauguin had dealt with explicitly Christian subjects—*Vision After the Sermon* (1888) and *The Yellow Christ* (1889) were well known here—and even in the mid-twentieth century, their vivid blend of symbolism and romantic expressionism continued to offer some recourse to religious painters sensitive to modernism’s marginalization of Christian content in the visual arts, and in Fr Stephen’s case, a painter determined to test

such imagery as he pressed toward a visual language of his own.

With that said, *The Agony in the Garden* provides some insights into Fr Stephen’s visual imagination. First, we can rightly feel startled—and impressed—by how quickly and completely he assimilated his sources. The



Portrait of Jesus with Roman Coin

painting is neither tentative nor experimental. Yet no great preparatory struggle seems to have preceded it. In its complexity, formal balance, and fullness of conception, *The Agony in the Garden* appears to have emerged in full-blown command of a decidedly European format. In *Ecce Homo* and *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, somewhat later paintings, we can observe him absorbing the work of the French modernist Georges Rouault with similar panache. Was Fr Stephen merely a gifted imitator? Not likely. That would go against all that we know of his later work.

But we may be equally surprised by the speed with which he abandoned these same visual tools and, indeed, the trappings of the modernist trajectory in art generally. They had demonstrated their inadequacy, either to his imagery and its particular needs, or to his own more subjective instincts before the canvas. His willingness to cast it aside is a mark of Fr Stephen’s bravery, and his self-knowledge as an artist.

Still, *The Agony in the Garden* should not be regarded as a secondary canvas. It is just about flawless in its synthesis of theme, means, and effect. Fr Stephen has turned the tools of early modernist painting to the task of defamiliarizing a very familiar subject by framing it in a formal language to which it is unaccustomed, and in doing so, he reimagines and reinvigorates it. Loosely “abstract” landscape forms



The Good Shepherd

spill across the image like pieces in a jigsaw puzzle, building toward an intricate harmony of mood-drenched, non-descriptive colors. The scene is uncanny, anxious, fraught—much like the nocturnal cityscapes of the German expressionists, all tilt and menace. The evocative facial features of Jesus, the angular hands, the brown halo, the red shadows, the angel seen from behind—all are dedicated to the privacy and intimacy of the depictive moment.

Over the past century, there have been, of course, many attempts to treat religious material in the formal modalities of contemporary art. Some are successful, most not. In practice, religious material has proven itself resistant to such developments. Artists quickly discovered that when the defining elements of a style or movement were forced upon a religious narrative, the result tended to be synthetic, an exercise, or an obvious imposition that drew attention chiefly to itself. It posed an unavoidable problem, one that Fr Stephen could hardly have ignored. By mid-century, too, as modernism pushed toward increasingly formal solutions to visual problems and inquiries, it had even greater difficulty sustaining deep, authentic contact with the religious image as a document of religious feeling. For the Catholic Church, as we now know, the transmission of visual modernism would be most effective, and most durable, in architecture and decoration, not in the fine arts.

Although Fr Stephen continued to absorb the art of his time—visual curiosity is a hallmark of his work—its influence remains most apparent in his sculpture, especially in his reliance on serial imagery among the crucifixion figures. A decade later, when “expressionistic” formal elements reappear in paintings such

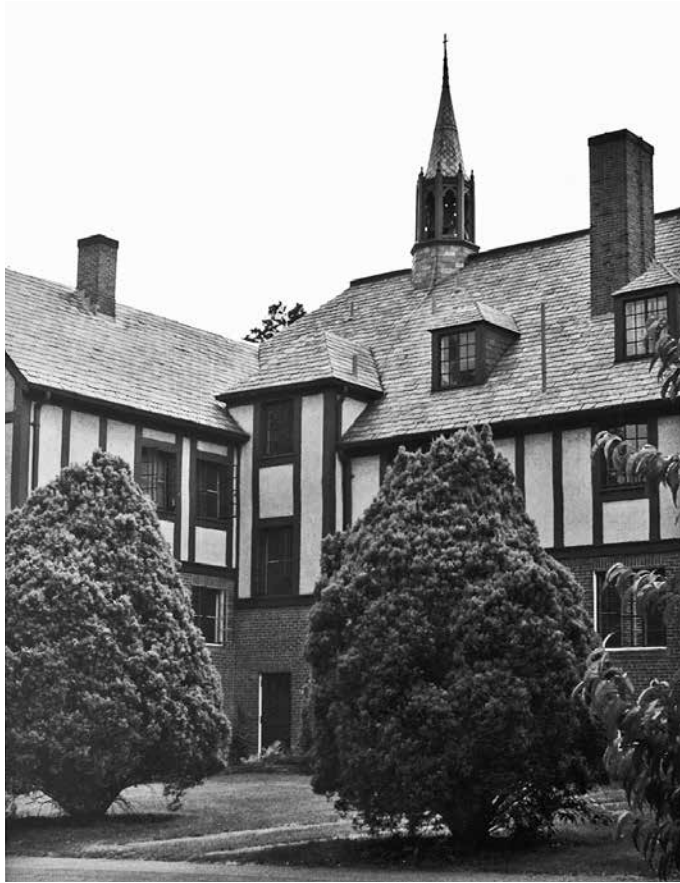
as *The Martyrdom of Saint Stephen* or *Saint Martin and the Beggar*, the lessons of Fr Stephen’s early career had become natural in his hand, subsumed into a broad individual style fully committed to his subject matter, not to displays of painterly prowess.



Father Stephen Reid

We may wish that Fr Stephen had pursued the means he had employed in *The Agony in the Garden*: he handles them so well that we easily imagine the heights to which he might have taken them in a religious context. Perhaps he mistrusted the addition of so much psychological density to imagery that did not require it. Still, we are incorrect to frame its relinquishment in the negative terms of rejection or dismissal. Fr Stephen was learning that no visual language is intrinsically “foreign.” He could select and incorporate elements from wherever he wished, and as he developed his own idiom, it gradually became more open, more light-filled, more direct. By the time he arrived at *The Baptism in the Jordan*, he is again reimagining a familiar subject, now with unaffected simplicity and ease, as he overturns visual expectation by modulating seemingly slight iconic details rather than the painting style itself, and when we look back at *The Agony in the Garden*, we can better appreciate the effort and care that informed his quest for pictorial freedom.

BRUCE NIXON



We ask the friends of St Anselm's to join us in prayer for vocations to our community. We also ask you to recommend St Anselm's to young men who may be open to considering a religious life such as ours, and/or to pass on to us the names of such young men.

Ignacio González, Director of Vocations

ST ANSELM'S ABBEY

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