

VALLEY OF OUR LADY MONASTERY
ADVENT 2024



Valley of Our Lady Monastery
7320 Urness Road
Hollandale, WI 53544

Return Service Requested

V e n i

NEW MONASTERY UPDATE

Twenty-five years ago, when the community first discerned building a new monastery, no one could have imagined the journey it would take us on. After years of prayer, planning, designing, and fundraising, the many challenges of construction, yet always sustained by the prayers and generous support of many, the New Monastery has become a reality. We remain humbled and grateful for the support of all our benefactors.

We were blessed to relocate to the New Monastery in March. The community occupied the southern sections of the monastery while construction continued on the northern section, including the Oratory. Grounds work also continued through the Summer and Fall. With much joy, we celebrated our first Mass in the Oratory at the end of August. We still await the final Oratory furnishings and hope to Dedicate the church in the Spring. May this monastery always be *For God's Glory!*



*O Lord, I love the house of your dwelling;
the tenting place of your glory.
Psalm 26:8*

ADVENT REFLECTION - RELOCATION

It happens, as we live our daily lives, that God in His Wisdom orders events so that we may experience what we read of in Scripture, making his Word come alive for us. After months of planning and packing, deciding what we should take with us or give away, we at last walked out the door of our old home in Prairie du Sac, got into the awaiting line of cars, and traveled in a most unusual procession to our new home in Hollandale. Upon arrival we were ushered into a spacious garage where our architectural team, contractors, and a number of volunteers were waiting to welcome us. The foreman stepped forward and gave a speech beginning with "Welcome home!" At that point I believe most of us felt we had just



Mosaic of the Journey to Bethlehem from the Chora Church in Istanbul. 1315-1320

left home and were entering a new era of life that would take some growing into and getting used to. Most of us did not know our way around this larger building, and for several weeks depended on directional signage taped to the walls with arrows pointing the way to the Chapel, Refectory, Community Room, Offices, etc.

By now, of course, we are mostly settled in, gratefully enjoying the beauty of our new building, its more adequate space and its quiet surroundings of woods and fields. But our experience of the move has left us with a deeper understanding of what

it must have been like for Mary and Joseph to pack up and travel to Bethlehem on short notice and with the birth of Mary's Child immanent. Bethlehem, where no one was waiting to welcome them, where no friends or volunteers were ushering them into adequately furnished shelter. We ask ourselves what that must have been like for them, and what was it like for the Word of God, Lord and Creator of all, to move into a human nature as a completely dependant infant? Our move was in every way "cushioned". Mary and Joseph's was not. God's was not.

A SEASON OF TRANSITUS

Transitus is a recurrent theme in the early days of the Cistercian Order. It often referred to those monks looking for a more austere, simple, humble, and contemplative life. They made their transitus from Cluniac Benedictine communities for greater poverty and simplicity or from Canons Regular for a life of hidden, silent contemplation. More often, it referred to the final transitus of a monk from this life to the Father's House. It also was not unusual for our Cistercian Fathers to discover their initial building or land was unsuitable to the life and would have to relocate to a different tract or rebuild on elsewhere on the same land, a transitus of the whole monastery. Our community has experienced all three sorts of 'transitus' this year.

Firstly, our community relocated to our new monastic home in Hollandale. Due to various difficulties this valley was raised upon a ridge surrounded by the valley. It is an eschatological sign of when every valley will be raised up. This position fills the windows with stunning



views of the rising and setting sun, storms rolling in, and rainbows stretching from north to south. The monastery itself is built in the traditional Cistercian form, something our old monastery lacked. The arches teach body and soul to set their hopes in heaven as our voices now seem to mingle more aptly with the angels. Our cells, far from the rooms used for various work, provide a secret place for each Sister to pray to the Father. The enclosed garden is a reflection of the innermost heart where the Bridegroom takes His repose. This new location and the new building express those hopes of our foundresses for an authentic living of the Cistercian life here in rural Wisconsin.



Secondly, on July 31st, our dear Sr. Stephanie who experienced the first call to transfer when she was a Benedictine Sister, busy teaching and nursing 40 years ago. Defying all the doctors' and nurses' projections, she made the great move from Prairie du Sac to Hollandale and here was called to her final transitus, completing her pilgrimage and entering the true promised land. Sr. Stephanie was an ever-joyful presence receiving and giving continual affection. Her constant gratitude and concern for others needs were expressed to her last days. She was always ready for the next move, "What's next?" "Where to?" To Heaven, Sr. Stephanie! May she rest in peace.*

Thirdly, on October 2nd, the Memorial of the Guardian Angels, Sr. Mary John, made her transitus from the Order of Preachers to the Order of Citeaux, professing solemn vows in the new (almost) completed chapel. The office of the day quoted Exodus 23:20, "Behold, I am sending my angel to go before you and guard you on your way, and lead you to the place I have prepared for

*O Lord, I will confess to you
with my whole heart, for you have
heard the words of my mouth.
I will sing psalms to you
in the sight of the Angels.*

Psalms 138: 1

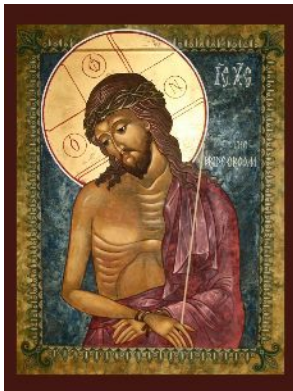
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* In a future newsletter, we will feature more about Sister Stephanie and her life.

you.” This verse resounded as most fitting. After twenty years of itinerant active religious life as a Dominican Sister of Mary, Mother of the Eucharist, Sister made her vow of stability in this place prepared by those who had gone before. She now leads a hidden life of praise mingling her adoration with the angels who always behold the Face of the Father, enclosed with the Eucharistic Christ pondering these things in her heart.



Mother Anne Marie embraces Sr. Mary John after bestowing on her the cuculla and black veil of the solemnly-professed.



Christ the Bridegroom Icon featured on her profession card, commemorating the event.



Dom Vinzenz Wohlwend, Abbot President of our Congregation, prays the Solemn Consecration over the prostrate newly-professed nun, while the community joins in prayer.

RECEIVING THE MONASTIC HABIT

When our Foundresses came to the United States from Switzerland in November of 1957, they had in mind the young American women they hoped would be called to join them and fill up the monastery they were planning. It never occurred to them that a little over 60 years later, when the work they had begun was well established and Americans, as hoped, were filling the monastery, a young woman from Switzerland would ask to enter.

Elise Amez-Droz had wanted to live in the United States from the time she was in grade school. Hard work and intelligent planning made her dream a reality, and led to her living on Capitol Hill and working in Washington DC, the heart of things American. It was then that an acquaintance invited her to a fund-raising event for our monastery. At that event she met our then Novice Mistress and fundraiser, Sr. Bede Berg, and eventually felt called to Valley of Our Lady. After a year of postulancy, she petitioned to receive the Cistercian habit and begin her Novitiate. This took place on August 24th, the Feast of St Bartholomew. She received the name Sr. Marie Stella in honor of Our Lady, Queen of All Saints. It was as if God had said to her, “Elise, when you were on Capitol Hill, sitting under the fund-raising tree, I saw you.”



*Hear, O daughter,
consider, and incline your ear;
forget your people
and your father's house;
and the king will desire your beauty.*

Psalm 45: 10-11

SISTER ROBERTA CELEBRATES 65TH JUBILEE



Sr. Roberta celebrated 65 years of religious vows on August 11th.

Two journeys took place in 1957 that in God's plan would eventually converge. Six nuns of Frauenthal Abbey arrived in Wisconsin to found a new Cistercian monastery and a young woman in Ohio entered the convent. Little did I know that the path I was on would change so much.

Twenty-five years later, in my Jubilee year, I was permitted to transfer from the active life as a Sister of Notre Dame and profess solemn vows as a Cistercian nun. There was no looking back, only a desire to continue on the path designed so lovingly by my Beloved. Love without measure was the theme. His love was without measure. My gratitude could not be measured.

Another 25 years of vowed life and the 50th Jubilee was celebrated and again there was no looking back only a desire to grow deeper in Love. There was no time to waste dwelling on the past for the infinite love and mercy of my Beloved had wiped out all the dragging of my feet over the years. Now 65 years have passed as a thief in the night and I take a quick glance back. Energy and good health have been replaced with hearing devices and a rollator. I see the line of young sisters patiently walking behind me and I thank my Beloved for them and for His love.

So, today I stop and look back for just a moment before I begin the last part of the journey - not with regret nor depression at my failures for I see the long road behind with its joys and blessings, its challenges and yes its mistakes, but thankfully hidden by the mist of my Beloved's love and unbounded mercy.

However, I cannot pause too long for the road ahead is short. I will go forward in peace and joy but never alone, for He has never left me for one moment. How do I know this? My Beloved has carried me all this journey as together we trod my road. One day soon we will arrive home and He will carry me safe in His arms over the threshold. There will be no more path to tread; all that will remain is just to sit at His feet and share our love.

THE THREE ADVENTS OF OUR LORD

Throughout this newsletter we have shared with you the various journeys that have taken place in the last year; in this season of Advent, we are reminded that our whole life is a journey, a transitus, from this earthly life to eternity. Sr. Stephanie has completed the final part of that pilgrimage; Sr. Roberta is stoutly racing the course; Sr. Mary John is setting out on a new leg of the race; whereas Sr. Marie Stella is just out of the starting blocks, setting out on the narrow way.

We are all familiar with the idea of the two comings of Christ: His coming in the flesh at the Incarnation, and His final coming at the end of the ages. The Old Testament patriarchs and faithful ones eagerly awaiting His first coming, and now creation groans and longs for His second coming, when all will be renewed in His final coming. But St Bernard and our Cistercian Fathers spoke of an intermediate coming: the coming of the Word into the heart of each person in his or her earthly pilgrimage. This coming happens not once, but many times in the course of our earthly life, so that one can say that our life is a constant Advent, a constant awaiting, not just our particular final judgment and encounter with the Lord of all creation, but His daily coming in a thousand different ways: in the Eucharist, in meditative reading of His word, in service and communion with our fellow human beings, these least of His brethren.

The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green. Proclaiming, "The Lord is upright: he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him."

Psalm 92: 12-15

In the first coming He came in flesh and in weakness;
in this middle one He comes in spirit and in power;
in the final He will come in glory and in majesty. ...

The intermediate coming is a kind of path by which we travel from the first to the final.
In the first, Christ was our redemption. In the final He shall appear as our life.
In this one, ...He is our rest and consolation.

So that no one may think that I am making up what I am saying
about this intermediate coming, listen to Him:

'Anyone who loves Me will keep My words
and My Father will love him and we shall come to him.' ...

So keep the Word of God in the same way you keep food for your body.

He is the living bread and food for the mind. ...In this way keep God's word:

'Blessed are those who ...hear the word of God and... keep it.'

Let it enter into the viscera of your soul.

Let it pass into your feelings and into your routines.

Eat what is good, and you will delight in its richness. ...

If you keep God's word like this you will surely be kept by Him.

The Son shall come to you with the Father,

the great Prophet who will restore Jerusalem shall come,

and He makes all things new.

St. Bernard, Sermon 5 for Advent



Original artwork of a nun of Valley of Our Lady