

Abbey Letter



Fall 2008 no. 235

Cover: tearing down the old farmhouse



Abbot Mark Serna



preparing the ground for the new building

Abbot Andrew attended the annual meeting of the Colloquium on Violence & Religion held at Riverside, California June 18th - 22nd. This is an organization dedicated to studying the insights into violence and ways to avoid it in the thought of René Girard. Abbot Andrew presented a paper discussing the attempted poisoning of St. Benedict narrated in the Dialogues attributed to Pope Saint Gregory.

Abbot Mark Serna, former abbot of St. Gregory's Abbey in Portsmouth, Rhode Island, was with us June 25th - 26th. He

was traveling from Las Vegas, Nevada to Portsmouth after having been away from his monastery for three years.

The construction of our new church entrance and bell tower continues, with an expected completion date in mid-December. Occasional updates can be found at saintgregorysthreerivers.org

Our July Vocation Program was filled to capacity this year. Some of the participants expressed further interest in monastic life and might possibly join us in the future for more discernment.



pouring the foundation for the new building

Scenes from this Year's July Vocation Program

Participants in our annual Vocation Program commit to staying at least two weeks at St. Gregory's. While here, they are given a glimpse of monastic life as they pray, work, study, and have social contact with the monks.



at class



in choir



Independence Day fireworks



in the garden



Sunday supper on the deck

Available October 21

thirteen months, 15 photos, with the Abbey's liturgical calendar

Please allow 4 - 6 weeks for delivery.



Please send me ___ copy or copies of the

2009 Calendar

Enclosed is \$10.00 for each calendar.

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Any payment in excess of the calendar price will be gratefully accepted as a gift to the abbey.
St. Gregory's Abbey, 56500 Abbey Road, Three Rivers, MI 49093-9595

Hobbies at the Monastery

Life at St. Gregory's is centered around public prayer times in the abbey church. In addition to corporate prayer, the monks are expected to spend time in private prayer and scripture reading every day. We also spend several hours each day on chores involving the upkeep of our grounds and buildings, driving guests to and from public transportation sites, preparation for occasional outside ministry, and correspondence with people who write to us with various questions. Add all of that time together with time spent setting tables, gathering for meals, washing up after meals, bathing, and sleeping, and not much is left for personal interests and hobbies.

Yet we do find time every now and then to engage in favorite interests. St. Gregory's has a good library, music practice room, and music listening room, as well as a selection of video tapes and discs, and so we can often be found spending free time reading, listening to music, or watching a movie. One might ask why monks should even indulge in leisure activities that might take their minds off of God, but a wise monk knows that one of the best forms of prayer and thanksgiving is that of simply enjoying the wonderful world that God has given us. We also know that leisure activities can threaten to become substitutes for prayer or demand too much of our attention during prayer times, and so we must always be aware of our activities and do them in such a way that they foster prayer, rather than hinder it. With all of that said, we thought it might be of interest to our readers to have some of our monks describe their favorite hobbies:

Br. Martin –

After entering the monastery, I became attracted to the use of paper in various artistic ways. As correspondence with an increasing number of people began to develop, I started to make greeting cards in one form or another. These were meant to be both a creative outlet for me, and an encouraging treat within my letters. At first I tried my hand in making pop-up cards. Not only was this fun, but it was also challenging, since I had to work out the mechanics of a successful pop-up.

Currently I work with art rubber stamps to make cards, bookmarks, and stationery. Rubber stamps enable me to use various images to illustrate spiritual truths that are important to me. It also allows me to work with



color, since I kept my pop-up cards simple and monochromatic.

I find making cards not only enjoyable, but also a good learning experience, not merely in learning new techniques, but mainly in teaching me how to focus on a particular thing and forget about myself for awhile. This is important to me as I strive to not be so self-centered but more focused on God.

Br. Abraham –

When I first entered the monastery, I spent a lot of time playing and listening to music. I even gave a recital at the monastery and at a local community college (putting my music degree in bassoon performance to good use). I also wrote a lot of music, knowing full well that I would probably never hear any of it performed, since most of it involved large ensembles. I was OK with that, and can look at a shelf full of my own symphonies with contentment, simply because I know that I enjoy them when I play them in my head. I purposely stopped writing music a few years ago because it took so much time and energy and was pulling at my attention during prayer and work time.

Now I spend much of my free time riding a bicycle on the roads surrounding the monastery. I have several routes ranging from ten to forty miles, depending on the amount of time there is before I need to be home. I picked up this hobby from a friend with whom I took a bike trip down the West Coast the summer before I entered the monastery, and have enjoyed it ever since. I even took a bike trip a few years ago across Wisconsin with Fr. Gregory, OJN, the current superior of the Order of Julian of Norwich. Another hobby of mine involving wheels is that of following IndyCar racing. Occasionally I get a chance to watch televised races in addition to reading about them in the newspaper and online. I have even had a few opportunities to attend races in person at a few speedways, and have greatly enjoyed each opportunity. I am slowly learning to be grateful not only for the cars on the track, but also for each of the tens of thousands of individuals in the stands, even the obnoxious ones — a great way to grow in prayer.



Br. Cuthbert –

One of my earliest discoveries upon joining the monastery was that we had a large amount of brewing equipment in the basement. It seems that some of the monks of long ago had an interest in brewing, and their tools were kept in the basement to

collect dust and await someone else who might want to make an attempt at it. Knowing a bit about the history of monks making beer (a tradition dating back well over a thousand years) and having an interest in the brewing process myself, I decided to try my hand at it in the hope that I had inherited the monkish knack for making good beer. After a few experimental small scale batches that were rather disappointing, I took the plunge and brewed a five gallon batch that turned out really well. That was about three years ago, and ever since I have been brewing beer that is generally well received. We only drink it on Sundays and solemnities, though often that depends on whether I have had the time to brew something ahead of time.

Being the cook, brewing dovetails quite well with my other duties and provides an opportunity to spend enjoyable time in the kitchen that is more than simply 'work.' The beer making process itself — from brewing to bottling — is fascinating to me, as many of our guests have learned when they ask about the beer. Some guests have even suggested that we should start selling the beer, which I take as a compliment, but there are a whole host of reasons why that will likely never happen; not least among which is the extra work it would create for everyone else in the monastery. So the hobby will remain just a hobby, though my hope is that it will continue to surprise and delight everyone who has a chance to enjoy the fruit of what I like to think of as 'leisurely labor.'

My other hobby is making 3-D paper models. Most of what I do comes in the form of kits (pre-printed booklets where one has to score, cut, fold, and glue together the different pieces) although I have been known to draw and build a few things from scratch. Most of the models I have made are of cathedrals or other houses of worship. There are a few examples of my handiwork in different places in the monastery, the most public of which is in the library on top of the card catalogue. Much like brewing beer, patience and attention to detail are important in paper modeling, but the final products of both are quite different. After all, one can't drink a model cathedral!





ST. GREGORY'S ABBEY

56500 *Abbey Road* • *Three Rivers, MI* 49093-9595

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