

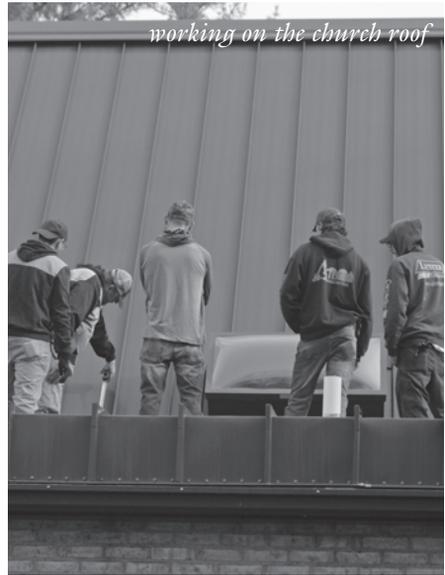
Abbey Letter  
no. 286

Summer 2021

# NOTES

A local contractor has produced a plan to stop the leaks in the church roof. Work has begun on the plan, and it will be a while before we know if it is successful or not. We have had problems with the church roof leaking for decades, the latest problem being in the area where the guests sit.

Abbot Andrew attended the CAROA (Conference of Anglican Religious Orders in the Americas) meeting April 19th – 23rd. This year's meeting was held via teleconference, as was last year's. The guest presenter was Br. Don Bissom FMS, speaking on the topic of "Religious Life in a Time of Pandemic: How the Last Year Has Affected Us and What Will Our Life Look Like Coming Out of It."



Because of the ongoing pandemic and uncertainty of when gatherings will again be permitted, we will not be conducting a summer vocation program in 2021.

If anyone is interested in scheduling an individual vocational visit, please contact the novicemaster. At this time, we are asking that only people who have an interest in monastic vocation contact us about a vocational visit.



# April Fools Day and Holiness

## Benedict Reid, OSB, 1921-2021

Born on April 1, 1921, Richard Reid was an April Fool's joke from the start. He was the youngest of five boys and judging by brief hints I heard from him, he was apparently not the most rambunctious of them, but he wasn't the least either. His arrival at St. Gregory's Priory in 1948 must have looked like an April Fools joke in July when he drove up in a Model A Ford with skis sticking out the back window. The community had only moved to Three Rivers in 1945 and Benedict was among the first group to build up the community in its formative years. In spite of the water skis, he was clothed a novice in January 1949 and took the name of Benedict. His first choice of a name in religion was Bede, but he was told that Bede Reid made a poor combination, so he took the name Benedict. Along with his bubbling sense of humor, Benedict showed a strong resolve to live a life of prayer, and strong leadership qualities emerged early on. During his first year in junior vows (a three-year period) he was entered into the ordination process with the Diocese of Northern Indiana. After making his life vows in January of 1953, he was ordained a deacon in November of that year and priested in July, 1954. During the following year, Fr. Benedict was appointed prior by Abbot Augustine of Nashdom Abbey. (St. Gregory's was then a dependent priory of Nashdom Abbey where the first American monks were trained.) When St. Gregory's became an independent abbey in 1969, Benedict was elected the first abbot of the house. With his energetic personality, Benedict built up solid contacts throughout the church that put St. Gregory's on the map and created a large constituency that is still reflected in the size of the mailing list for the Abbey Letter.

During his long period of leadership, lasting until 1989, Benedict shepherded the community through the fluid years of monastic renewal triggered by the Second Vatican Council. Being a monastery in the Episcopal Church, there was no requirement to do what the Roman Catholic Church did, but the community could hardly ignore what the Catholic Benedictines were doing. Benedict was deeply involved in discerning the twin admonitions of the Second Vatican Council: return to the origins of the Benedictine tradition (most particularly the Rule of Benedict) and apply that charism to the needs of the present day. The most momentous change was in the Divine Office. As good Anglo-Catholics, the monks of Nashdom Abbey taught their American novices the Benedictine Office in Latin and that is what the community did in Three Rivers until 1967 when the switch was made to English. At the same time, the Abbey Church was totally redesigned. The old altar that went up against the wall was taken out and a more modest altar placed in the middle of the Church. There was quite a wide variance of opinion in the community





as to how to make (or not make) the transition, and Benedict had to navigate through these uncertain times.

I joined the monastery in 1972 while this period of renewal was very much in progress. Benedict himself was experimenting with new trends in spirituality to the extent that he seemed to be waiting for the next April Fools joke God would play on him. Things have settled down here and in other Benedictine monasteries long since, but alert discernment for facing present and future trends remains. As I joined the community, I found Benedict welcoming and stimulating in his teaching and his counsel. He preached strongly on God's unconditional forgiveness offered to all of us. More often than not, in conferences with me, he would encourage me to lighten up and let the Holy Spirit work without so much interference from me. At that time, many people who came to visit the monastery sought counsel from Benedict and it was most apparent that they benefitted greatly from his words and presence with them. Benedict was also in high demand as a speaker, preacher, and retreat conductor. To foster parish renewal, he had a particularly keen interest in giving vestry retreats to strengthen them in leadership roles in their churches. At community recreation and at social meals on feast days, Benedict was the life of the party, sort of an ongoing April Fools joke. From time to time, he would bring into the common room a collection of funny hats and invite the rest of us to try them on. Benedict's favorite hat was one that had a funny nose that went over his face.

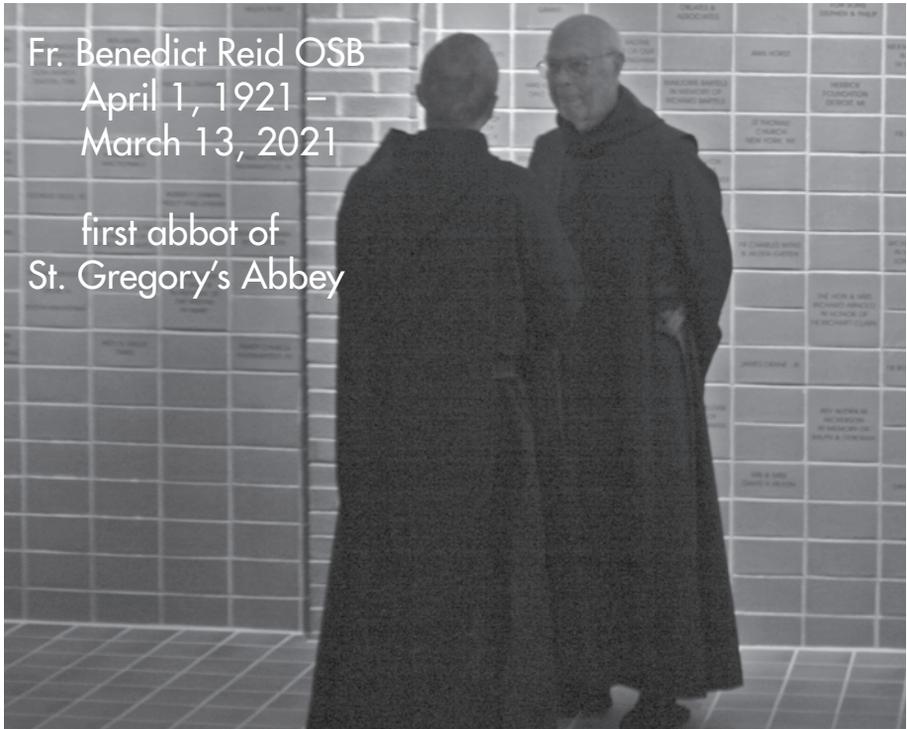
As the 1980's moved to its close, Benedict's leadership in the community became more uncertain although his outside ministries continued to be as fruitful as ever. A sabbatical that he took in 1984 seems likely to have contributed to his unsettling. While away, he had a heavy dose of exploring new ideas and approaches to spirituality. The return may have been a letdown. Benedict brought up the idea of resigning many times and talked often about a desire to found a house of prayer where he could try out some of the experimental spirituality that interested him. In January 1989, a special visitation team led by Bishop Griswold, then bishop of Chicago and chair of the House of Bishops Committee on the Religious Life, guided us through a discernment process which led to Benedict resigning as abbot. As it happened, I was elected the second abbot two months

later. Over the years, I have come to understand many of the things Benedict was up against as abbot and I have a high level of sympathy for him as a result.

Given the circumstances of Benedict's resignation, it seemed unlikely that he would be content to remain at St. Gregory's, and indeed he started looking for alternatives rather quickly. He finally settled on moving to Palm Desert, California to live with the Society of St. Paul because the twelve-step program was integral to their spirituality and that was of great interest to Benedict. The order broke up a few years later, but Benedict remained and used his apartment as a springboard for an extensive pastoral ministry which touched many people. Over the years, I have heard of how people were helped by his counsel in formative ways. He was very active in the Diocese of San Diego, working as a supply priest as needed and doing a highly commended interim ministry for a parish that needed his skills. All this time, he lived simply, practicing meditation and Christian Yoga and being available to people who came to him. He told me once that there was nothing he would rather do than centering prayer. With his strong constitution, his health was remarkably good. His biggest setback was a stroke from which he recovered very well. He told me that, like Bede Griffiths, his stroke was a mystical experience for him that deepened his life of prayer.

Benedict seemed poised to reach the century mark and sail through it, but his health suddenly failed him. A case of pneumonia coupled with sepsis was too much for him and he went to God, half a month short of his 100th birthday. The liturgy prays that he rest in peace, but I can't imagine Benedict resting. I suspect he is playing April Fools jokes on God and the angels and waiting for the April Fools jokes they will play on him.

— Abbot Andrew



## CONTACTING THE ABBEY

**Mailing address –**

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Three Rivers, MI 49093

**Telephone –**

269-244-5893

9:30am - 11:15am or 2:30pm - 4:15pm Eastern Time Monday through Saturday  
(please do not telephone at other times or on Sundays or holidays)

**E-mail –**

**Guest reservations and information –**

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**Mailing list –**

[office@saintgregorysthreerivers.org](mailto:office@saintgregorysthreerivers.org)

**Abbot Andrew –**

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**Information about becoming a monk or participating in the July Program –**

[novicemaster@saintgregorysthreerivers.org](mailto:novicemaster@saintgregorysthreerivers.org)

**Books and calendars may be ordered, prayers requested, and donations made at our website –**

[www.saintgregorysthreerivers.org](http://www.saintgregorysthreerivers.org)



**Saint Gregory's Abbey** now has an e-mail list for those wishing to receive the ABBEY LETTER electronically (PDF). To enroll in the e-mail list, send your full name and e-mail address to

**[abbeyletter@saintgregorysthreerivers.org](mailto:abbeyletter@saintgregorysthreerivers.org)**

Enrolling in our e-mail list does not remove you from our hard copy mailing list. If you do want to stop receiving the hard copy once you are on the e-mail list, simply send an e-mail to

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telling us you are now on the e-mail list and want to be removed from the hard copy list. (If you are in the confraternity, please mention that so that we make sure you receive the confraternity letter via e-mail).

We hope our prayers and presence are of ongoing benefit to you and to the whole world. We invite you to help us continue our ministry of prayerful presence. Your prayers for us are the most important way to help us, but we also need your financial support. You can make a donation by using either the envelope in this newsletter or by using the “donate” button on our website

[saintgregorysthreerivers.org](http://saintgregorysthreerivers.org)

To prolong your support, please consider us in your estate planning and use the name “St. Gregory’s Abbey of Three Rivers, Michigan.” Feel free to contact us if you have any questions.

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## Daily Schedule at St. Gregory’s Abbey

### Weekdays

4:00 a.m. MATINS

6:00 a.m. LAUDS

8:15 a.m. TERCE & EUCHARIST

11:30 a.m. SEXT

2:00 p.m. NONE

5:00 p.m. VESPERS  
*followed by meditation*

7:45 p.m. COMPLINE  
(on Tuesdays and Thursdays, COMPLINE  
is prayed privately)

### Sundays and Major Holidays

5:30 a.m. MATINS & LAUDS

8:30 a.m. TERCE & EUCHARIST

noon SEXT & NONE

5:00 p.m. VESPERS  
*followed by meditation*

7:45 p.m. COMPLINE



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