

Abbey Letter  
no. 297  
Easter 2024



# Come & See...

Find out what it's like to be a Benedictine monk (we think it's wonderful, by the way).

Worship & Pray    Work & Learn

with the monks at St. Gregory's Abbey - a monastery within the Episcopal Church at Three Rivers, Michigan

...if you are male, age 18 to 50, have a serious interest in monastic vocation, and can spend at least two weeks during July at the abbey. The only cost is \$25 for registration. For more information and an application form, write:

Vocation Program Director  
St. Gregory's Abbey  
56500 Abbey Road  
Three Rivers, Michigan 49093-9595  
[novicemaster@saintgregorysthreerivers.org](mailto:novicemaster@saintgregorysthreerivers.org)



*The July program is highly recommended, but if you have a serious interest in monastic vocation and can not come in July, let us know and we can set up an individual vocational visit at another time.*

## NOTES



*Br. Francis Jonathan BSG  
with Fr. William*

Br. Armand attended the joint convention of the Dioceses of Eastern Michigan and Western Michigan in Saginaw October 25th - 28th.

Br. Francis Jonathan of the Brotherhood of St. Gregory was with us October 5th -9th.

Sr. Linda-Susan of the Emmaus Community in Vestaburg, Michigan was with us November 5th -11th.

Br. Abraham preached at the Church of the Mediator in Harbert, Michigan January 21st as part of their observance of "Religious Life Sunday." He is also scheduled to lead a retreat at Waycross Camp and Conference Center in Brown County, Indiana May 16th - 19th.

St. Gregory's Abbey 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 list. If you do want to stop receiving the hard copy once you are on the e-mail list, send an e-mail to [office@saintgregorysthreerivers.org](mailto:office@saintgregorysthreerivers.org) telling us you are 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.)



*Sr. Linda-Susan ec*



## SILENCE

Silence is one of the most important aspects of monastic life. It is also often misunderstood or misinterpreted. Brief visits and even longer retreats at a monastery can provide only a limited perspective. Those who have not actually lived in a monastic community sometimes have wildly inaccurate or romanticized ideas of silence.

Monks do not, for example, take a vow of silence. The Benedictine vows are obedience, stability, and conversion of life. The Rule of St. Benedict requires the practice of silence at certain times and places. Thus it can certainly be argued that the practice of silence is encompassed within the vow of obedience. Some would also argue that some degree of silence is also required to achieve conversion of life. But there is no specific vow of silence.

What then is monastic silence, and what does it mean?

In *Aspects of The Monastic Calling*, Matthew Kelty notes that to some people, "silence means simply 'never talking'... celibacy means 'never marrying'... and stability means 'never going anywhere.' " This is almost certainly a tongue-in-cheek observation, and most monks would agree that this is not what St. Benedict had in mind.

Silence has been part of monastic life since at least the third or fourth century, and it can also be found in pre-Christian monastic traditions such as Buddhism. The practice and interpretation have varied across time and among different communities.

The Rule of St. Benedict calls for silence after Compline. This period of quiet is often referred to as "the Great Silence," and this practice is maintained at many monasteries today. At St. Gregory's Abbey, we observe silence from the conclusion of Compline until the conclusion of our Holy Communion service the following morning.

Most of our meals are eaten in silence, with reading at lunch and supper. And we have a period of silence immediately following lunch, during our afternoon siesta.

But silence does not mean *absolutely no noise*. In practice, it simply means avoiding any unnecessary *talking*, and, to a certain extent, it may mean avoiding any loud, distracting and unnecessary noise during designated periods of quiet. Thus, during the early morning hours between Matins, Lauds, and Terce, we generally do not perform work that would produce an inordinate amount of noise, such as the use of a vacuum or a hammer.





But this type of work cannot be avoided at all times. Kelty wryly observes that

*The average monastery is not nearly as quiet as it should be, since the monks come from a noisy world and think noise a necessary quality of all genuine life. Only slowly do they learn the beauty and meaning of quiet. Machinery is noisy and monks are from a machine age and need a lot of it.*

For most monks, silence is a way of listening to God, and allowing God to have a more active presence in our lives. But it also makes it possible to listen more carefully to other people, and even to nonhuman sources of noise. When we reduce the amount of unnecessary chatter, we can hear things that we might not otherwise be aware of.

In some corners of the monastic world, there is a seemingly unending debate over whether the use of electronic communications, such as e-mail and messaging applications, violates the spirit and practice of monastic silence.

Each community, and indeed each monk, must find their own answer to this question. But context, intent, and effect are what matters. The monks of the sixth century would not have considered the act of writing a letter after Compline to be a violation of the rule of silence. The use of a computer to compose an e-mail message may, in many cases, be analogous or even equivalent to writing a letter.

In contrast, engaging a rapid-fire *dialogue* with another person, whether through e-mail, text messaging, or some other mechanism, even if it does not involve *speech*, might be viewed by some as violating the *spirit* and *intent* of our periods of silence.

But common sense must prevail. In some communities, sending a single text message late at night to inform someone that an appointment must be canceled the next day might actually be preferable to making a phone call, as it is obviously more quiet and less of a distraction to others.

Some aspects of silence cannot be taught or explained. It can only be grasped intuitively, or understood after many years of practice. Kelty concludes his discussion of silence with the following thoughts:

*...unless a man can see the point of silence he might just as well not bother coming to the monastery. It is inevitable that the whole thing will never mean anything to him. He has to have a feeling for this kind of thing. Simply has to.*

- Br. Armand



## BOOKS READ IN THE REFECTORY DURING LUNCH AND SUPPER 2023

**America's Book: The Rise and Decline of a Bible Civilization, 1794-1911**  
*by Mark A. Noll*

**Testament of Youth: An Autobiographical Study of the Years 1900-1925**  
*by Vera Brittain*

**The Fruits of Grace: The Ecumenical Experience of the Community of Grandchamp**  
*by Minke de Vries*

**Burning Rainbow Farm: How a Stoner Utopia Went Up in Smoke (local history)**  
*by Dean Kuipers*

**Apocalypse Delayed: The Story of Jehovah's Witnesses**  
*by M. James Penton*

**A History of Women in Astronomy and Space Exploration: Exploring the Trailblazers of STEM**  
*by Dale DeBakcsy*



## Books from St. Gregory's Abbey

### **Singing God's Praises (1998)**

*history of the community, select Abbey Letter articles, photographs*

\$20.00 Please send \_\_\_\_\_ copies.

\$ \_\_\_\_\_

### **Come Let Us Adore (2011)**

*select Abbey Letter Articles from 1999 to 2011 (companion book to Singing God's Praises)*

\$12.00 Please send \_\_\_\_\_ copies.

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### **Tools For Peace (2007)**

*Abbot Andrew's reflections on St. Benedict and René Girard*

\$24.00 Please send \_\_\_\_\_ copies.

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### **Born in the Darkest Time of Year (2004)**

*15 Christmas stories by Abbot Andrew*

\$12.00 Please send \_\_\_\_\_ copies.

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### **Creatures We Dream of Knowing (2011)**

*fantasy stories by Abbot Andrew*

\$12.00 Please send \_\_\_\_\_ copies.

\$ \_\_\_\_\_

### **From Beyond to Here (2012)**

*more stories by Abbot Andrew*

\$15.00 Please send \_\_\_\_\_ copies.

\$ \_\_\_\_\_

### **The Forest of Windellynn (2015)**

*fantasy novel by Abbot Andrew*

\$10.00 Please send \_\_\_\_\_ copies.

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### **Moving and Resting in God's Desire: A Spirituality of Peace (2016)**

*Abbot Andrew's thoughts on cultivating peace using Christian practices and the ideas of René Girard*

\$20.00 Please send \_\_\_\_\_ copies.

\$ \_\_\_\_\_

### **Seven Times A Day I Praise You**

*Br. Martin's review of personal daily prayer books*

\$3.00 Please send \_\_\_\_\_ copies.

\$ \_\_\_\_\_

### **St. Gregory's Abbey and Benedictine Monasticism**

*A survey of Benedictine monasticism and how it is lived at St. Gregory's*

\$3.00 Please send \_\_\_\_\_ copies.

\$ \_\_\_\_\_

All of the above except for **Singing God's Praises**, **Born in the Darkest Time of Year**, **Seven Times A Day I Praise You**, and **St. Gregory's Abbey and Benedictine Monasticism** are available in ebook formats. To download, go to our website:

**[saintgregorysthreerivers.org](http://saintgregorysthreerivers.org)** and look for publications (digital).

**All books may be purchased as hard copies from our website or by using this order form.**

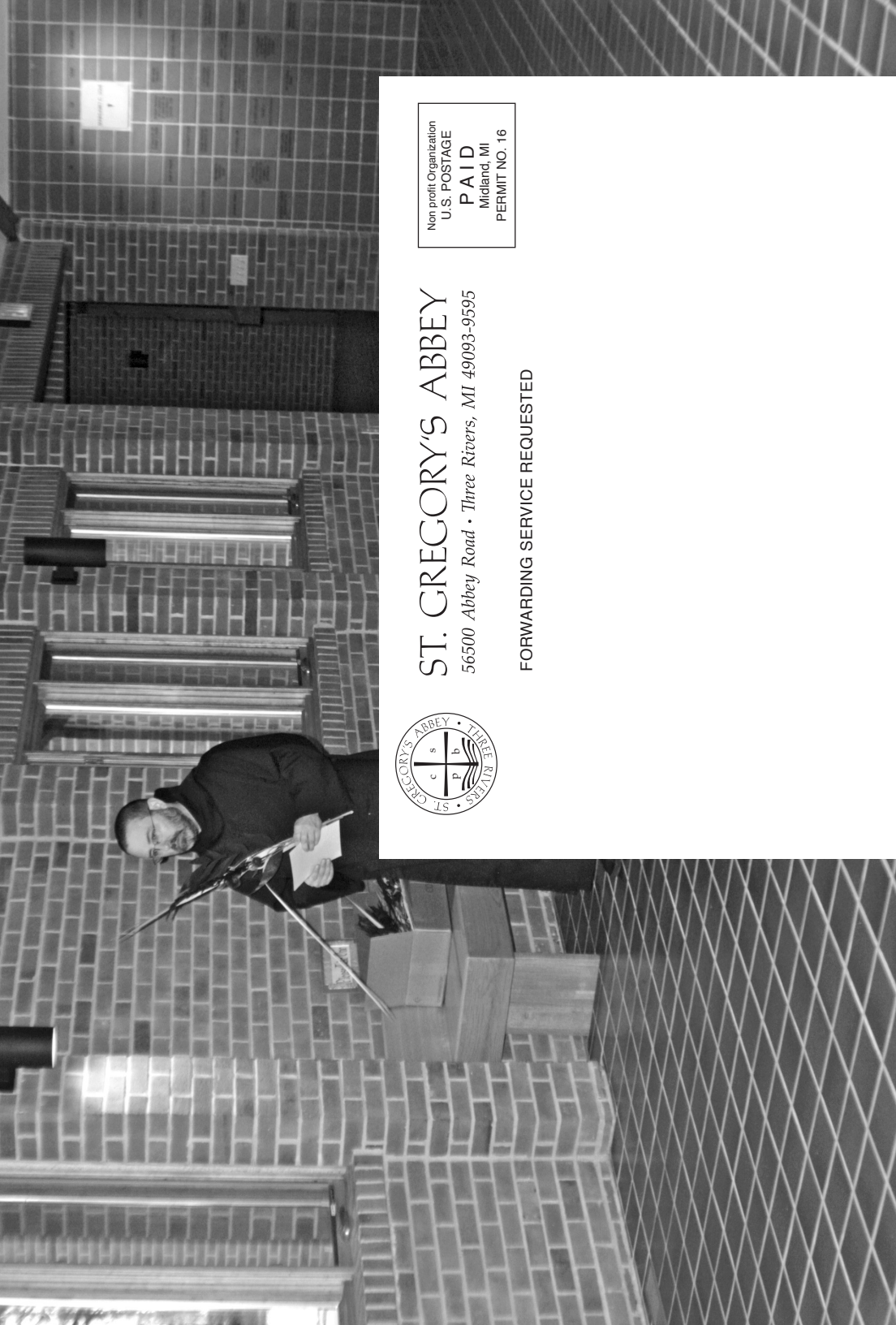
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Any payment in excess of the book price will be gratefully accepted as a gift to the abbey.  
St. Gregory's Abbey, 56500 Abbey Road, Three Rivers, MI 49093-9595



# ST. GREGORY'S ABBEY

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