



The AMERICAN MONASTIC NEWSLETTER

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The mission of the American Monastic Newsletter is to be an instrument of communication and information for monastic communities in the Benedictine tradition in North America, members of the American Benedictine Academy, and other interested persons.

COVID: Blessings Within the Affliction *Report on the Fall 2020 Survey of ABA members*

Everyone reading this newsletter has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Besides the large and mounting toll of sickness and death, our daily practices and way of life within our monasteries, homes, sponsored institutions, workplaces, parishes and churches have been dramatically altered. Most monasteries are closed partly or entirely to visitors, likewise our retreat centers and other ministries. We no longer mingle freely with others in our work or recreation. For most, it has been months since we could attend a talk, conference, or concert. Our liturgies may be fewer, shorter, or otherwise constrained. It would be easy to continue to catalog the losses.

Despite these realities, some Benedictines speak quietly of the blessings or benefits of the changes brought about by the pandemic. In a recent meeting, one ABA board member mentioned that a community was experiencing deeper, richer conversations at supper with two-to-a-table seating. Without the pressure to find topics of general interest to many, members shared about their ministries, life stories, opinions, and spirituality more freely. Other board members described other benefits of the pandemic lifestyle, everything from getting more outdoor exercise to finishing long-delayed projects. The conversation sparked a survey that asked ABA members to share stories of the blessings or benefits of changed lifestyle generated by the pandemic. We received responses from 42 members who listed a total of 72 blessings or benefits of the pandemic. A few could not help but note some of the losses.

The largest group of comments, a third of the total, reported ways in which the quality of community or home life benefited from pandemic limitations. One member reported that spending more time with spouse and children "has helped us all grow in love and support." Monastic members reported better and longer table conversations, a more relaxed atmosphere and less stress because of fewer meetings and activities that required people to be away from the monastery. One wrote, "I have gotten to know other sides of my sisters because I am home more." There was some surprise at this renewal of community life: "We have become amazed how much we like

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President's Message

Dear ABA Members and Friends,

The coronavirus pandemic of 2020 has laid bare, yet again, that modern humanity does not like death. Note only do many modern people not like to talk about death, they are rather uninterested in spending much time even thinking about it. As soon as Covid-19 arrived with a vengeance in March, the government began to lock down the country and states in order to “flatten the curve.” There was a fear that hospitals would be overrun with patients requiring access to limited ICU beds so we needed to slow the spread of the virus so as not to break the medical system. So far, so good. In time, however, things changed in the way that governments talked about the virus, shifting from “flattening the curve” to preventing all deaths. In as much as this was noble, it was not realistic for a virus will do what a virus will do (“Farr’s Law”). Death is unstoppable, even if we refuse to talk or think about it.

As well, all of this, in the end, is quite non-monastic. For let us recall that Benedict legislates that monks must “daily keep death before one’s eyes” (RB 4.47). This is not just a good idea but what a monastics do if they desire to practice the instruments of good works. The Apostle Paul assures the baptized Christian that death has been swallowed up in the victory of Christ over sin and the evil one on the Cross at Calvary and that death no longer stings the believers (1 Cor. 15:54-56). Benedict was saying differently what Paul had already said. For the



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www.americanbenedictine.org

Christian, death is not to be feared even if it is not to be desired.

Ironically, at the same time, we live in a “culture of death” (John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae* §12), which glorifies death for the right “causes.” This “culture of death” is characterized by abortion, euthanasia, needless warfare, resource inequality, etc. So, on the one hand, let us not talk or think about death but on the other hand let us create the cultural markers and structures that allow us to hasten death, all the while devaluing the sanctity of human life that justifies the “culture of death.”

In 1960, Father Louis Bouyer published his *Introduction à la vie spirituelle*. In a section on “Lay Spirituality,” Bouyer spends two pages discussing death. I find this particularly interesting because death is not always thought of as a topic of discussion within spirituality, though it should be. Bouyer’s brief comments are so valuable they are worth hearing again. Death is the “total cross” that everyone must bear. Whereas monastics renounce everything in this life, the lay person renounces the same at death. Monastics are not only to keep death before their eyes but they live as if dead already: a “living death.” It is the inevitability of death that makes necessary and logical asceticism, but only if one accepts not only ultimate death but the cross-bearing death of our lives: “the cross imposed by the natural course of events ... only becomes a sanctifying, life-giving cross, to the extent to which it is freely accepted. This freedom of acceptance always makes some systematic asceticism necessary.”

In short, the topic of death must not be avoided but moved to the forefront of our life and thought, as it is (or, at least, should be) for monks. For it is in understanding death, in embracing it (through monastic vows or through accepting our eventual physical death) that frames our spiritual lives. In one sense, and this is confirmed by Bouyer, death turns all of us lay people into monks. So let us not avoid the hard discussions that come from talking about death but let us be good monks, who not only talk about it but desire to die to ourselves anew each and every day through cross-bearing and asceticism. In so doing we are certain to “keep death before our eyes.”

Greg Peters

ABA president

greg.peters@biola.edu

staying home together.” Not everyone experienced this benefit. One person commented that they discovered they were “not meant for cloistered life;” others reported that the isolation produced tension and they missed the visitors. The benefit extended beyond individual relationships. One person noted that maintaining pandemic precautions required a new level of trust in leadership and in each other. There was a general theme of having more time for conversation, thought, prayer, reading, and a slower pace of life.

In addition to deeper and richer community life, a fifth of the comments described individual benefits, including more time for prayer, exercise, lectio, writing, Eucharistic adoration, and leisure. This resulted in greater appreciation of other people for companionship and mental stimulation. Walking even gave one person a greater appreciation of their own city and neighborhood. Several commented on a deeper sense of call and commitment, increased sense of the unity of all humanity, and a lifestyle that was more balanced, with greater simplicity and detachment.

Various aspects of liturgy were featured in a tenth of the comments. People reported appreciating a more intimate Triduum with just community members, more frequent preaching by the prioress, and, in contrast, a larger crowd than usual when Eucharist was celebrated outdoors. Several expressed a renewed sense of the centrality of communal prayer and gratitude for having it during pandemic.

Another topic mentioned frequently, and with some surprise, was an appreciation of technology. Mentioned in a quarter of the comments, people reported that they mastered new technological skills quickly, whether to participate in online meetings or to make liturgies and other offerings available to people who could no longer attend in person. “Instead of feeling that there is no outreach, we are reaching even more people with our online liturgies and spiritual direction,” wrote one person.

Two mentioned increased connection and participation by oblates at a distance from the monastery, including the possibility of expanding an advisory board to include them. Other members

reported their own enrichment through such offerings as lectures, webinars, worship services, and other events that were previously held in person but now were being livestreamed. “Learning resources were available online that we could never have attended in person.” A few expressed reluctance (“I was forced...”) that turned to appreciation when technology had benefits beyond what they expected. One person commented that unequal access to technology and the internet leaves some behind; we need to work for equitable distribution of this resource as we do for other justice issues.

Three comments reported that a community started something new within the community. One started a reading discussion group within the community. Another changed the way its infirmary was managed in a way that benefited both the workers and the community. Most monastic communities and families will resonate with the community that took a project off the back burner, writing, “We have been able to revise our Liturgy of the Hours prayer books because we had the time to work on it.”

These blessings, while varied, all revolve around elements of the Benedictine charism. Whether in community or family life, there are blessings as well as loss and distress in the pandemic lifestyle. As this small survey shows, communities and families face new choices when, God willing, the pandemic is under control. It also shows that Benedictine monastics, oblates, and friends have experienced and appreciated a simpler, less stressed pace of life. At the same time, we appreciate expanded connections and opportunities through technology. Perhaps we can continue to share our ideas and experiences as we begin to build the next new normal of Benedictine life.

Edith Bogue, OSB
ABA board member
and survey designer



The Structures Of The OCSO (Cistercian Order Of The Strict Observance)

Editor's note - Sister Lynn McKenzie invited a guest columnist for this issue of the newsletter. Sister Eleanor Campion is a member of the Cistercian (OCSO) community at St. Mary's Abbey, Glencairn, Ireland. She obtained her JCL from St Paul University, Ottawa, in 2017, and is passionate about promoting an understanding of canon law as an instrument for the life and well-being of communities and individuals. She serves on the Law Commission of her order and offers a perspective on the life of one of the important branches on the Benedictine family tree. The recent canonical guidance regarding contemplative orders (Cor orans) has highlighted the distinct position of many of our brothers and sisters and, although this column is somewhat longer than usual, we believe that this thorough explanation of one "Benedictine" order's structure will be very informative to others.

The Cistercian Order of the Strict Observance came into being in 1892, when three Cistercian congregations united and became an autonomous order. From the outset, it included monasteries of monks and of nuns. Today it is made up of 160 monasteries, located on five continents.

An order of autonomous monasteries might seem to be a contradiction. So how is the OCSO structured? How do the monasteries relate to one another?

The fundamental unit of the order is the local community, traditionally an autonomous abbey. Before reaching that rank a monastery may pass through two intermediate stages, simple priory and major priory. Priors are autonomous, but lack some of the requirements of an abbey (e.g. economic self-sufficiency, possibility of local vocations, a certain number of solemnly professed).

The monasteries of the order are united in charity by a common tradition of doctrine and law, and by the order's unique structures. Filiation is of primary importance.

Filiation

For the monks, "filiation" designates the relationship between a monastery and its founding house. When a foundation becomes autonomous, the abbot of the founding house automatically becomes its Father Immediate. For the nuns, "filiation" is the relationship between a monastery and a particular monastery of monks, whose abbot is the nuns' Father Immediate. Filiation was outlined in the *Charter of Charity* (1118) at the beginning of the Cistercian movement, and establishes the fundamental bond between communities.

The Father Immediate

The Father Immediate is to watch over the progress of the daughter house. While respecting its autonomy, he supports the abbot/abbess in the exercise of the abbatial ministry, and fosters concord in the community. "If he notices there a violation of a precept of the Rule or of the Order, he is to try with humility and charity, and having consulted the local abbot, to remedy the situation."

The Father Immediate's responsibilities include making the regular visitation and preparing the community for, and presiding at, an abbatial election. He is consulted when an abbot or abbess offers his/her resignation. His consent or opinion is required in various instances, e.g. when a community plans a new foundation; when a foundation becomes autonomous, when considering the relocation or closure of a monastery, in cases of exclaustation, for certain acts of extraordinary temporal administration, etc. For the nuns, the Father Immediate presides at solemn professions; he also proposes to the local ordinary a monk of the order as chaplain. A monk or nun who wishes formally to have recourse against a superior's decision does so in the first instance to the Father Immediate.

Why not have "Mothers Immediate" for nuns? Chiefly because it would separate the monks and the nuns in an undesirable way. At a certain point in recent history, authorities outside the order appeared to want to separate the monks and nuns into two orders. If the filiation structure were altered so that the nuns' relationship with the monks changed significantly, it might give the erroneous impression that such a split is desired by the order. Perhaps the juridical relationship between a nuns' monastery and

its foundations could be strengthened in other ways, and reflection on this is ongoing.

The Constitutions say, “Cistercian monks and nuns ... participate in handing on the same patrimony. They collaborate and give mutual help in many ways, having due regard to their healthy differences and the complementarity of their gifts.” In practice, the differences in outlook and ways of living Cistercian life lie chiefly not between monks and nuns, but between Cistercians from different geographical areas and cultures.

Regular Visitation

A regular visitation of each monastery takes place at least once every two years. Monasteries are visited by the Father Immediate; the Abbot General can also make the Regular Visitation, either personally or through a delegate.

For the nuns, at least once every six years the Father Immediate must delegate another person as Visitor. A visitation can also be delegated in a monks' monastery, but it is not required at stated intervals as for the nuns. A delegated Visitor can be a superior or retired superior of an autonomous monastery, or a Councillor of the Abbot General. However, given the current interpretation of canon 129 CIC, an abbess cannot be the Visitor in a monastery of monks, only in a monastery of nuns. This seems unlikely to change any time soon.

The Visitor may be accompanied by an assistant – also the superior or retired superior of an autonomous monastery, or a Councillor of the Abbot General. (An abbess can be an assistant Visitor in a community of monks, but the Visitor must be an abbot). All the professed meet privately with the Visitor to share their vision of the community. A *Statute on the Regular Visitation* outlines the important aspects of community life which are to be examined.

Afterwards, the Visitor sends a report to the Abbot General, and the community should strive to implement the Visitor's recommendations. Prepared and lived well, the Regular Visitation expresses the bond of charity between the houses of the order and offers the community a real opportunity to grow in fidelity to the Cistercian grace.

The General Chapter

Very important also in uniting the autonomous monasteries of the order is the General Chapter, which has evolved significantly in recent decades. This also dates back to early Cîteaux and the *Charter of Charity*, when the abbots of Cîteaux's first daughter houses came together every year at Cîteaux to “discuss there the salvation of their own souls and of those committed to them.”

Nowadays the General Chapter is ordinarily convoked once every three years; the chapter to be held in September 2020 has been postponed until September 2021 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The superiors of all the autonomous monasteries, with the Abbot General and the members of his Council, have the obligation of participating in the General Chapter. Each region (see below) can also send one or two non-superior delegates, without voting rights. Others may also be invited.

The supreme authority of the order lies in the general chapter. As well as treating matters of significance for the whole order, a report about the state of each community is given to the general chapter, which responds with pastoral care. The general chapter is also the legislative body for the order, voting for changes to be introduced into the constitutions. It is also for the chapter to approve new foundations, to accept the resignations of abbots and abbesses, to elect the Abbot General, and to deal with a plethora of other matters outlined in the constitutions. Given the large number of participants, much of the work is done in small commissions, which then report to the plenary assembly.

Since 2011, the abbots and abbesses of the OCSO meet in one single general chapter. It was not always so: from the 1890s until Vatican II only the abbots participated, dealing with the affairs of both the monks and the nuns. After Vatican II the abbesses began to meet in their own separate chapter to deal with matters concerning the nuns. During the revision of the OCSO constitutions, to facilitate the discussions and because it was desired that the texts for the monks and the nuns be as close as possible, the two chapters decided to meet simultaneously. So the Chapter of Abbots and the Chapter of Abbesses took place in the same hall at the same time; discussions were in mixed groups; and at the end of the discussions votes were taken separately. This situation

lasted from 1990 until 2011, when permission for a single general chapter was granted by Rome. Now all the abbots and abbesses exercise pastoral care for all the houses, and all legislate for both monks and nuns. (For the canonically curious, this is the wording which satisfies the requirements of canon 129 CIC: “The ecclesiastical power of governance for the whole Order resides in the General Chapter in accordance with canon 596 §2 of the Code of Canon Law. It is exercised by the abbots with the cooperation of the abbesses in accordance with canon 129 §1 and 2.” In practice, “exercising” and “cooperating” look exactly the same).

The order still has two sets of constitutions, one for monks and one for nuns; it is hoped to amalgamate these in the future, but issues from *Cor orans* affecting the nuns must be worked out first.

The Central Commission

Each general chapter elects a commission with the task of preparing the next chapter. This is called the Central Commission, and includes a representative from all the regional conferences. It usually meets once between general chapters, and prepares the agenda for the next general chapter by co-ordinating the initiatives coming from the regions.

Regional Conferences

The communities of the order are grouped in regions, which foster communion and co-operation within each geographical area and in the order as a whole. Meetings of superiors and delegates take place at the regional level for discussing questions of common interest that may not concern the whole order, and for exercising mutual pastoral care. Regions often take initiatives in such matters as providing formation courses for their own monasteries. The regional meetings also prepare for the Central Commission and the General Chapter.

There are currently twelve regional conferences in the order; each community can choose which region it belongs to based on geographical location and language considerations. To change from one region to another needs the approval of the general chapter. Regional conferences have no legislative authority.

The Abbot General

The Abbot General, elected by the general chapter, is a bond of unity within the order. He fosters good

relations among the communities, watches over the patrimony of the order, and promotes spiritual renewal in the communities.

The Abbot General lives in Rome with his councillors. Assisted by his council, he acts in the name of the general chapter in certain matters, and in cases that cannot be postponed. He confirms the elections of abbots and abbesses, and accepts their resignations when the chapter is not in session. He acts in the name of the order with the Holy See. He has no legislative authority, but can dispense in all that pertains to the proper law of the order. (For the canonically curious: “The Abbot General is understood in law as Supreme Moderator of a clerical institute of pontifical right, according to the norm of the Constitutions.”)

The Abbot General is elected for an unrestricted term. He must be, or have been, an abbot in the order. While in office, he keeps his stability in his own monastery. He is to offer his resignation to the general chapter nearest his 75th birthday.

The Abbot General’s Council

The Abbot General’s Council is made up of five members. Four (two monks and two nuns), are elected by the general chapter for six years. Since the chapter takes place every three years, two members are elected at each chapter while two others continue in office, allowing for both change and continuity. The fifth member (either a monk or a nun) is chosen for a three year term by the Abbot General and the four elected councillors.

The Abbot General needs the consent or opinion of his council in a large number of matters outlined by the constitutions. One council member is elected by the general chapter as Procurator General, who conducts the business of the order with the Holy See.

These are the major structures of the OCSO. They may seem bewildering to Benedictines (whose structures sometimes astonish us). At times they may be unwieldy or slow-moving – undoubtedly there is room for improvement. In practice, the structures are constantly evolving, albeit gradually. But on the whole they serve us well and permit us to live our vocation in the joy of the gospel.

Eleanor Campion OCSO
St Mary’s Abbey, Glencairn (Ireland)



NEWS

“Being Benedictine in the 21st Century: Spiritual Seekers in Conversation,” formerly scheduled for June 26-28, 2020, at the Sophia Center of Mount St. Scholastica in Atchison, Kan., has been scheduled for May 28-30, 2021, if it is safe by then to hold the event.

In the meantime, those who had registered and other interested persons have the opportunity for ongoing resources through a series of virtual conversations. Presenters and their topics so far have been: Judith Valente - silence, Linda Romey, OSB - community, Jerome Kodell, OSB - discernment, Judith Sutera, OSB - the Rule today, and Nicole Kunze, OSB - leadership. About 70 persons have attended each and were able to engage in conversation with the speaker and each other. Future speakers will include a panel of oblates and Kathleen Norris. Each thought starter is only around 15 minutes long and all are available on the website. Updates, information and registration are at the conference website <www.beingbenedictine.org>.

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After several elections having to be postponed in the past months, a number of new leaders have been chosen in monastic communities. They include:

Mount St. Benedict (Erie, Pa.) - Prioress Stephanie Schmidt, OSB

Emmanuel Monastery (Lutherville, Md.) - Prioress Kathleen McNany, OSB

Saint Martin's Abbey (Lacey, Wash.) - Abbot Marion Qui-Thac Nguyen, OSB

Saint Vincent Archabbey (Latrobe, Pa.) - Archabbot Martin de Porres Bartel, OSB

Saint Joseph's Abbey (Spencer, Mass.) - Abbot Vincent Rogers, OCSO

Abbot Elias Dietz, OCSO has been re-elected to continue his service to the monks of Gethsemani Abbey (Trappist, Ky.).

* * * * *

Due to the ongoing Covid-19 crisis, the General Chapter of the Swiss-American Congregation, which had been scheduled for this year has been postponed and will be held instead June 24-28 of next year, 2021.

* * * * *

Abbot Primate Gregory Polan, OSB has appointed Father Julian Maria Schaumlöffel O.S.B. as president of the International Commission on Benedictine Education, succeeding Elias Lorenzo, OSB, who has been ordained bishop for the Archdiocese of Newark, N.J.

Due to his episcopal ordination, Bishop Elias had to resign his position as abbot president of the American Cassinese Congregation. In accordance with the proper law of the Congregation, leadership of the congregation passed to the first councilor, Abbot John Klassen, OSB, of St. John's Abbey in Collegeville, Minnesota, until the next meeting of the congregation. There was to have been an Extraordinary General Chapter on July 26-28, 2020 to elect a new president but it had to be cancelled because of the pandemic. Now, Abbot John will serve until the abbots and delegates of the congregation convene in June of 2021 for the next Ordinary General Chapter and can elect a new president.

* * * * *

Benedictine communities and oblate chapters have provided much prayer support for the canonization of Dorothy Day, an oblate of St. Procopius Abbey. This November 29th marks the 40th anniversary of her death. Our organization is promoting “Hope in Hard Times: A Novena with Dorothy Day” to be prayed the nine days leading up to this anniversary. We have a website where people can sign up with their emails to be reminded of the novena. Each day of the novena will be posted that day, so one can return each day to the website <www.NovenawithDorothyDay.org>. Each day has a theme, beginning with a short commentary and a quote of Dorothy's related to the theme and concluding with the official prayer for her canonization.

The Dorothy Day Guild is also sponsoring a virtual panel discussion on November 29th at 6:00 EST, featuring David Brooks, Paul Elie and Ann Snyder. Here is a link for more information:

<<http://dorothydayguild.org/the-living-legacy-of-dorothy-day/>>

During this long period of time when no one can gather together as they were accustomed to, remotely praying the novena together from November 20th through November 28th can bring us together for a common endeavor.

David Mueller, Coordinator
Dorothy Day Canonization
Support Network
www.DorothyDaySaint.org

DON'T FORGET

All ABA memberships run concurrent to the calendar year, regardless of when the membership began. If your membership has an expiration date of 2020, it's time to renew for the coming year. The membership form is on the last page of this newsletter and at the ABA website. Please renew soon and encourage new members to join. Payment may be made by mail or by using the Paypal link on the membership page of the website.

www.americanbenedictine.org

<https://www.facebook.com/americanbenedictineacademy>

IN MEMORIAM

The Academy is grieving the recent loss of two stalwart members.



--- Sister Alberta Dieker, OSB, of Queen of Angels Monastery in Mt. Angel, Ore. died on June 14, just a month short of her 100th birthday and in her 78th year of monastic profession. She was prioress of the Queen the

Angels community from 1983 to 1987.

Sister Alberta loved history, teaching the subject to college and seminary students in Oregon. She was active in both the Oregon Catholic Historical Society and the Mt. Angel Historical Society. Her book, *A Tree Rooted in Faith: A History of Queen of Angels Monastery*, was published in 2007.

During her life of distinguished service, she received several awards for her work, including the papal award, *Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice*. In 1998, the Academy awarded her the "Fellow of the Academy" award (predecessor of today's Egregia Award) for her "lifetime of dedicated service to and support" of the ABA.

Sister Alberta was actively involved in the ABA for decades and served as executive secretary of the organization from 1993 to 1998. She was an engaging speaker and writer who shared the history of the Academy in an article titled "Ideas and Ideals: The American Benedictine Academy, 1948-1998" that appeared in the June 2000 issue of the *American Benedictine Review*.

--- Sister Mary Ann O'Ryan, OSB, died suddenly and unexpectedly on Oct. 5 at St. Scholastica Monastery in Chicago, Ill., where she had been a member since 1960. She had a long teaching career and served as prioress of her community 1982-1986. She had also been active in the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, the Benedictine Coalition for Responsible Investment, and the Conference on the History of Women Religious. She treasured history and wrote *A Concise History of U.S. Benedictine Women* in 2007. She attended several ABA conventions and was active in the Monastic Researchers Section.

ABA Business

ABA Hosts First Virtual Convention

Due to the pandemic affecting the ability to travel and gather, the convention scheduled for Benedictine College in Atchison, Kan., instead was a virtual event. In addition to the talks, speakers were able to interact with listeners, and participants had an opportunity to interact with each other through facilitated discussion in small groups.

Special interest section groups were also able to meet and the business meeting was held with reports and election. The schedule included a celebration of the lives of recently departed members, a visual display of art, the presentation of the Egregia and Monastic Essay awards, the installation of the board members, and an address by the new president. Because it was a virtual gathering, monastics and oblates who might not have been able to attend in person, including at least one participant in another country, could take part.

ABA BOARD ELECTION

An important part of the business of the ABA convention is the election of ABA members to serve on the organization's board of directors. A new vice-president (who becomes president in two years) and two board members were elected at the convention. Duties can be found in the by-laws.

Gregory Evans was elected as vice-president of the Academy. He is an oblate of St. Benedict Monastery in Bristow, Va., a member of ABA since 2009, and the convenor of the Visual Arts section. He was serving a term as a board member for ABA at the time of his election.

With his election, there were three vacant board seats to fill. Sister Edith Bogue came to St. Scholastica Monastery, Duluth, in 1998. She is a sociologist and social worker who has taught college and served as an oblate and vocation director.

Tom Piazza was a member of St. Leo Abbey during the 1960's and continues to be devoted to Benedictine life. His background in social science

academic research has lead to numerous projects and articles on the state and future of monastic life.

Sister Jeana Visel has been a member of Monastery Immaculate Conception in Ferdinand, Ind., since 2003. She is currently dean of School of Theology Programs, director of Graduate Theology Programs, and adjunct assistant professor of spirituality at St. Meinrad's School of Theology.

RECORDINGS OF CONVENTION PRESENTATIONS

The ABA has recordings of each of the 2020 convention presentations at a cost of \$8 per video DVD or \$5 for audio only CD (includes shipping), or \$2 each for digital mp4 files.

"Stability and Evangelization" - Sr. Pia Portmann, OSB

"The Monastic World in the Bright Light of Equatorial Africa and the Subcontinent" - Fr. Joel Macul, OSB

"Viewing the World of Latin American Monastics" - Sr. Ann Hoffman, OSB

"Benedictine Time Travel: Going Back to Envisage Possible Futures" - Fr. Hugh Feiss, OSB

Order forms are downloadable on the website or you can make your request and payment directly. Please specify format and desired talks, and send with payment (checks should be made to Sister Judith, not to ABA) to

Judith Sutura, OSB
801 So. 8th St.
Atchison, KS 66002

For any questions, you may contact her at
<jsutura@mountosb.org>

Winners of the ABA Monastic Essay Contest

Each convention year, the ABA sponsors an essay contest exploring topics related to the Benedictine tradition and charism. This contest is aimed at inspiring writing among newer community members and is open to those who have made their first profession or oblation within the past 10 years.

This year, the ABA was rewarded with many fine submissions, more than in any other year in recent memory. It was heartening to see so much participation coming from newer members of our monastic communities and our oblates. Any one of the essays submitted could have been a winner, and our judges consider all as winners who took the time and effort to offer their insights into living monastic values in the 21st century.

The judges found it difficult to select just one winner and decided to name two co-winners. They are Tracy Ritmueller, an oblate of St. Benedict Monastery in St. Joseph Minn., and Brother John Baptist Santa Ana, a monk of St. Andrew's Abbey in Valyermo, Cal.

Of Tracy's essay, "Therefore, Create Silence," the judges wrote: "Superbly and elegantly written. An insightful look into living Benedictine values in daily life and bringing lessons from the monastery into one's home and marriage. The essay doesn't sugarcoat the struggles of living conversatio in a daily context, but shows how the voice of God can be heard in today's noisy world by creating a space for listening and silence."

Brother John Baptist's essay was titled "Don't Laugh: Reflections on Comedy and The Rule of St. Benedict." Of the essay, the judges wrote: "Excelled in content and composition. St. Benedict's 10th step of humility, that one not be "given to ready laughter" receives a hardy challenge in this examination. Most communities know the value of humor and laughter as a good 'WD 40' for communal living. Brother John Baptist explored the middle ground between the 'then' of St. Benedict's time and communal living in our time while respecting both eras."

Tracy and Brother John Baptist will each receive a free registration to the 2022 ABA conference and a copy of Father Michael Casey's latest book, *Balaam's Donkey*.

The judging committee consisted of board members Judith Valente, OblSB, chair, and Sisters Renee Branigan OSB and Colleen Maura McGrane OSB.

Report submitted by Judith Valente, OblSB

ABA Section Reports

Visual Arts: The response to the request for visual images for the Online Visual Art Gallery was incredible! A big thank you to all who submitted. The show may be viewed at <<https://youtu.be/dEmc08Xsr14>>. During the visual arts break-out session, participants discussed the gallery show and offered encouragement.

A memorial tribute to recently deceased members is also online: "In Memoriam 2018 - 2020 ABA" <https://youtu.be/tiwf_X1smJQ>. On Facebook, 1,388 have viewed the memorial tribute.

Gregory Evans, convenor

Monastic Researchers: Our virtual section meeting was well-attended and attendees shared about what they were currently working on. There was also a deep feeling of loss at the absence of the late Father Terrence Kardong, who had facilitated the group for many years. A hope was expressed that we might meet again virtually from time to time. Gratitude was expressed for the *Monastic Researchers Newsletter* sent out several times a year by Sister Ephrem Hollermann.

Sister Colleen Maura McGrane, convenor

Archivists/librarians: Since accepting the role of ABA archives section head in July of 2018, I have received the materials that were in the section's archives and an updated list of ABA members expressing interest in this section. With the membership information, we have begun to explore such topics as access policy development and resource packets for new archivists.

We held our section meeting at the virtual ABA with 8 librarians and 17 archivists registered. Participants were a blend of users, volunteers, archivists, librarians, and administrators, with some individuals fitting in more than one of those categories.

Sister Virginia Jung, convenor

The ABA now accepts digital payment for dues, donations and convention registration on its website. Look for the Paypal button on the page.

The Terrence G. Kardong
MONASTIC STUDIES GRANT

ABA members are invited to apply for Monastic Studies Grants to support projects that “cultivate, support and transmit the Benedictine heritage within contemporary culture.”

Applications will be selected on the basis of quality of the proposal (originality, feasibility, clarity of purpose), potential benefit for monastics, and relevance to the purposes of the Academy. More details are on the ABA website.

To apply for a grant please supply:

Name, address, phone number, e-mail

Religious or academic affiliation (if any)

A brief description of the proposed project

The goal(s) of the proposed project

An itemized budget which includes:

total cost of project

sources of funding other than the ABA

sum requested from the ABA

Send applications to: Greg Peters

THI, Biola University

13800 Biola Avenue

La Mirada, CA 90639

or submitted by email as a Word document to
greg.peters@biola.edu

A note of thanks

Dear Participants in the 2020 Conference,

I want to personally thank each of you again for helping to make the first virtual ABA conference so successful. I was awed by the speakers, the interaction, and the willingness to let this be a learning experience for all of us. I think it showed us that there is a platform we can use in the future to reach those who are unable to attend in person for whatever reason. While it would have been nice to see, hear, greet and hug in reality, the virtual experience at least provided an opportunity to be with each other, to explore some thoughts together and engage in dialogue.

Thank you, too, for the opportunity I had to serve as a board member, as vice president and president. It was an awesome task at times but also a pleasure. I extend a hearty greeting of thanks to the new officers and board members who have taken up the torch with a willing spirit to lead us forward on the mission of this organization. As we continue to live through these challenging times let us pray for each other that we may be signs of hope, love and compassion to those around us and to our world.

Sincerely in Christ,
Antoinette Purcell, OSB
Outgoing ABA president
Beech Grove, Indiana

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

The ABA Biennial Convention in 2022

Give Me a Word

July 7 - 9, 2022

St. Benedict Center

Schuyler, Neb.

DON'T FORGET - MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS ARE DUE JANUARY 1

Your membership supports the ABA website, *The American Monastic Newsletter*, awards and grants for monastic studies, and conventions (for which members receive a registration discount).



American Benedictine Academy Individual Membership/Renewal Form

Date_____

Name_____

Address_____

City_____State_____Zip/Code_____Country_____
(If not USA)

Office Phone_____Cell_____

Email_____

Religious Community_____

(or) Oblate Affiliation_____

(or) Academic/Other_____

Do you have any areas of interest/expertise you wish to share with the Academy?

Please check if you wish to participate in one or more of the ABA sections:

Monastic Research_____ Visual Arts_____ Archives_____ Library_____

Enclosed: \$35 for one year membership_____ \$50 for two year membership_____

Please Remit to:

American Benedictine Academy
C/O Robin Lynn Evans, OSB
802 E. 10th St.
Ferdinand, IN 47532

ABA Use Only

| Date Received | Amount | Check # / Cash | Year Term |
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