



December 2018

# A LETTER FROM THE ABBEY



## Briefly

### **Br. Christopher takes vows**

Br. Christopher takes his first set of monastic vows pg. 2.

### **Br. Raphael is ordained a deacon**

In August Br. Raphael took his solemn vows and was ordained a deacon See p. 3

### **Cistercian Spirituality**

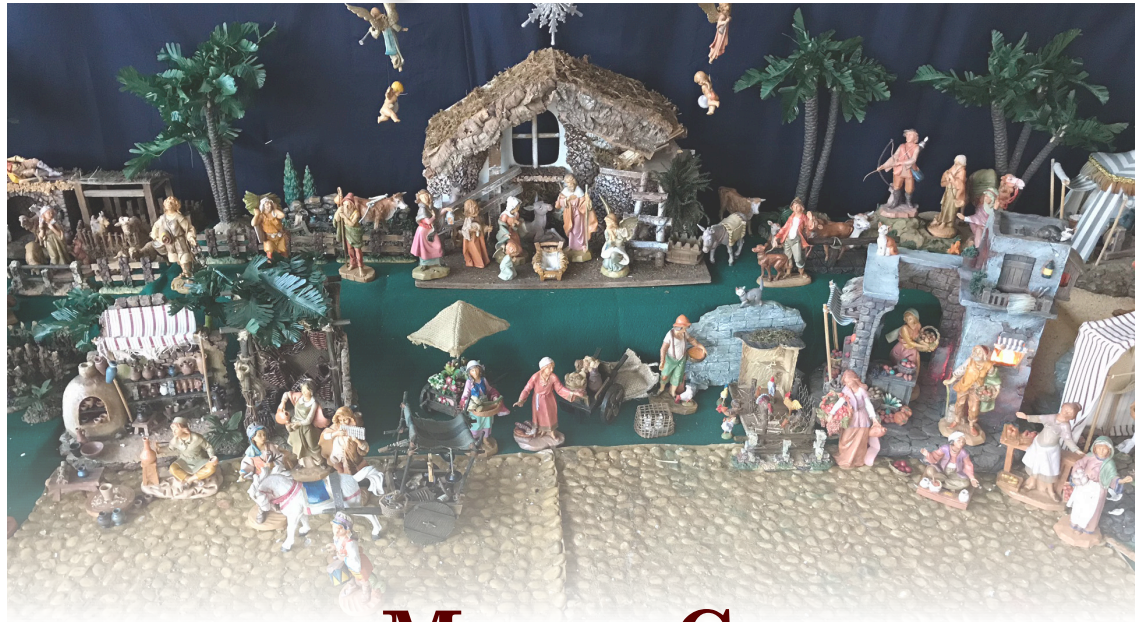
Fr. Denis reflects on a sermon by St. Bernard on the Christmas Vigil See p. 5

### **A trip through the Holy Land**

Fr. Bernard recently visited the Holy Land. See p. 5

### **Fr. Thomas on Vocational Discernment**

The Abbey's Vocation Director considers biblical examples of waiting for God's voice See pg. 6



## MERRY CHRISTMAS FROM CISTERCIAN

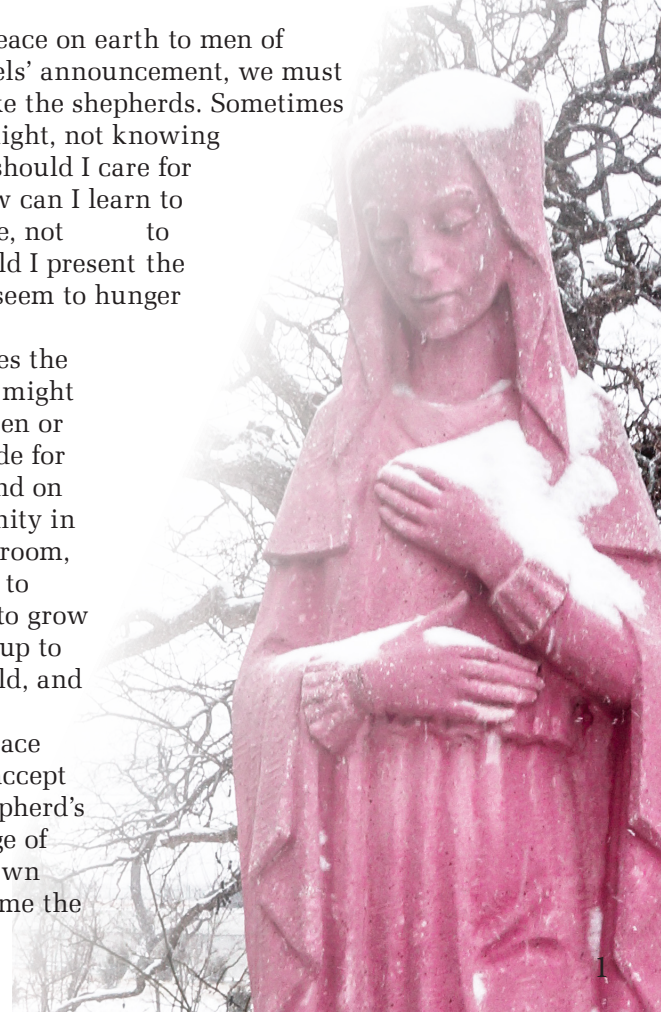
### *A Letter from the Abbot*

by: Fr. Abbot Peter Verhalen

"Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth to men of good will!" To hear the joy of the angels' announcement, we must recognize that we are in some way like the shepherds. Sometimes we find ourselves in the darkness of night, not knowing how to take even the next step. How should I care for those for whom I am responsible? How can I learn to love more selflessly those who love me, not to mention those who do not? How should I present the Good News of the faith to those who seem to hunger for meaning and love?

Sometimes we recognize in ourselves the shepherds' weariness from work. We might work as educators, forming our children or our students. We might work to provide for the material needs of those who depend on us. We might work to build a community in our marriage, in our family, in a classroom, in our neighborhood. But we all work to fight our vices and sinful tendencies, to grow in virtue, to allow our hearts to open up to admiring the glory of God in this world, and to loving others.

"Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth to men of good will" Please accept our wishes and prayers that your shepherd's heart be touched by the joyful message of the angels, and that you enjoy God's own peace in this world, a peace that became the tiny infant Jesus our Christ.





by Fr. Gregory Schweers

The Big Apple - Broadway, HAMILTON, Rockefeller Center Christmas Tree -- and lots of work in Art History! Since September, I've been on sabbatical here studying art history intensively (mostly at the Metropolitan Museum).

But living in The City means learning a lot of "practical" skills: how DO you ride a subway without getting lost or mugged? What does "uptown" and "downtown" really mean? Why do people say 'soda' or 'pop' when they mean "Dr. Pepper"?

## FR. GREGORY TAKES ON NYC

And those words/phrases you must know to survive: 'kicks' (sneakers); 'I'm good' (Everything is fine); 'bodega' (mini-store);

As a Texan, I'm regularly asked about MY oil wells, horses, and "W." My biggest surprise: New Yorkers are KIND to fools like me: cops, street people, subway urchins, museum snobs - they all like Texans - we're 'exotic'!

Living on West 34th Street is great; from the stoop, I can see Macy's and the Empire State Building! Pastoral work is light but regular: confessions, daily mass, divine office, and personal prayer -- and good friends in the parish!

The pastor is a peach (Fr. Rutler), and, Hey, I'm coming back to New York for January, 2019!

## News from the Prep School

### Fr. Augustine Starts Over

Fr. Augustine Hoelke, the Form Master for the class of 2018, found himself welcoming in 43 new Form I students in the fall semester as the Form Master for the class of 2026. Fr. Augustine was the first monastic Cistercian Prep Alumnus to serve as Form Master for the full eight years since Fr. Abbot Peter, and will be the first monk to be immediately "recycled" as a Form Master since Fr. Paul's class of 2013.



Fr. Augustine talks to his new form about the church during Form I Orientation

**Community Service** Since taking over as advisor to the Community Service program, Fr. John has increased enthusiasm by introducing the students to an App, MobileServe, on their phone. Projects have included a tutoring program, making meals at a food bank, and an MLK Day of Service.



Fr. John shows off his dance moves at a school community service event

**Mission Trip:** Over the summer Fr. Ambrose and Fr. Augustine joined sixty students from across the Diocese of Dallas on a 10-day mission trip to Costa Rica. The monks chaperoned the trip, but also said mass for the students and locals, and engaged in numerous community building events.



Fr. Ambrose with students from the Prep School and throughout the Diocese in Costa Rica

## BR. CHRISTOPHER TAKES VOWS

by: Fr. John Bayer

On August 12, 2018, Br. Christopher Kalan professed his temporary vows of obedience, stability and conversion to the monastic way of life at Our Lady of Dallas.

One of the joys for any community is to see the unique personality and gifts that are brought by each new member. Br. Christopher is known as an excellent handyman around the monastery. In fact, during his novitiate he was given many practical jobs like fixing doors, lights and other parts of the building. He found this work to be a nice complement to his studies: "I particularly like doing work with my hands, so the work around the monastery was a good outlet for me. It allowed me to take a break from the studies required by my novice classes and still serve the needs of the community in a way that is unique to my

talents."

Br. Christopher's temporary vows commit him to living the monastic life at Our Lady



of Dallas for the next three years. This period is still one of discernment for him and for the entire community. Every newly professed monk has at least four more years before he can be eligible to petition the community to make solemn vows.

When asked to give advice about discerning, Br. Christopher said, "If I were to try to give advice it would be never say never. I did not picture myself as a monk or even consider a monastic vocation until shortly before I entered the monastery, but I did

try to make myself available to promptings of the Holy Spirit and to be open to many different vocations as I approached the end of my college career."



# Br. Raphael's Solemn Profession

by Fr. John Bayer

On August 17, Br. Raphael Schaner made his solemn profession, committing himself to the monastery for the rest of his life, and on the next day he was ordained a deacon. Abbot Peter received his solemn vow, and Bishop Edward Burns of Dallas ordained him. Both celebrations took place during a mass in the Abbey church and before a congregation of many Cistercian friends

and family. After both masses there were receptions in the Abbey courtyard.

As Br. Raphael says, the Schaner family is “close-knit” and “so supportive of my vocation to this community,” and so it was no surprise to see over thirty of his family members in attendance from all over the country. His family has had ample reason to travel this year with so many members getting married, baptized and confirmed. Br. Raphael joked, “We did the tally, and we realized that with my ordination our extended family has received six of the sacraments this year. The only one we’re missing is Anointing of the Sick, but we’re okay if we don’t end up needing that one just yet.”

When Br. Raphael was asked about the moment he reached this conviction, he said his “decision to request

solemn vows never came suddenly. It was a gradual process of growth, though not without growing pains. In a way, it was much like Elijah’s encounter with God at Mt. Horeb — not in the raging fire, driving wind, or rumbling earthquake, but in a small, still voice. Certainly I experienced what felt like fires and storms in the process of discernment, but ultimately I found such peace in the prospect of solemn vows.”

Discerning involves growing in self-knowledge and accepting new challenges. It can be difficult at times. Br. Raphael realizes that “discernment will not be without doubt or suffering, but Our Lord matches his steps with yours as you carry your cross. Once you embrace the cross, there is a sweetness that far outweighs the struggle.”

As a deacon, this year Br. Raphael will begin serving in a new way through his preaching responsibilities in the school and monastery. He says, “There is a heavy emphasis on service in the diaconate, and I hope to continue growing in that spirit of service. Serving at the altar has been humbling, especially when I kneel right there during the consecration. It makes me feel like a child again — small, watching in wonder as father does his work at the table. I pray that that wonder stays with me, even as I prepare for the priesthood.”

With immense gratitude for his vocation, let us pray for Br. Raphael. May he be a faithful servant of the Cistercian community and indeed the whole Church!



## Catching up with the new generation of young monks



**Br. Raphael Schaner**

Br. Raphael made solemnly profession and was ordained a deacon in August. Originally from Southern California, he graduated from the University of Dallas in 2010. Br. Raphael has graduate degrees in Theology and Humanities from UD. He currently teaches theology in the Prep School and advises the school's yearbook program. He serves as the Abbey sacristan and is preparing for priestly ordination.



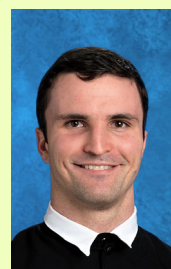
**Br. Francis Gruber**

Br. Francis graduated from the Prep School in 2001 and then attended Texas A&M, graduating in 2005 with a degree in Philosophy. He has a graduate degree in humanities from the University of Chicago and a master's degree in theology from UD. He is currently taking classes and teaching a theology course at UD and teaching an English elective at the Prep School.



**Br. Benedict LaCombe**

Br. Benedict hails from South Carolina and attended Holy Trinity Seminary for a short time, before joining the monastery in 2015. In 2016 he made his first set of temporary vows. He has a theology degree from UD and is working towards his master's degree in theology. He serves as guest master for the Abbey, and assists with technology at the Prep School.



**Br. Matthew Hegemann**

Br. Matthew comes to us from Beaumont, Tx. He graduated from UD in 2015 with a degree in history and is currently pursuing a master's in theology while also taking the philosophy courses required for ordination. He made his first set of temporary vows in 2017. Br. Matthew teaches theology to sixth graders, runs the school's chess club and assists with the soccer program.



**Br. Christopher Kalan**

Br. Christopher is from Albuquerque, NM. He was a classmate of Br. Matthew at UD, graduating in 2015 with a degree in physics. He attended Texas A&M for grad school, graduating in 2017 with an MS in mechanical engineering. He made his first set of temporary vows in August. He's currently taking theology and philosophy classes at UD, while assisting with the chess club.

## Novitiate Investiture

On August 19th, the First Vespers of the Feast of St. Bernard, two novices received the all-white habit and their new monastic name: Br. Zechariah and Br. Samuel. After the ceremony, the community had a private celebration to welcome the newest members.

The novice year is a time of discernment, a time for prayer consideration of God's plan for his life. Novices spend time in prayer, study, and work - living in the community while getting to know the other monks, and themselves, better.



# St. Bernard's message for the Christmas Vigil

by Fr. Denis Farkasfalvy



As a spiritual beggar, I turn again to the ancient monks for some last minute Christmas shopping at the Ancient World Monastic Emporium.

The business model of the Ancient World might be in need of polishing; for instance, its lack of advertising or

salesmanship is ridiculous. It carries only a few exciting items; after all, so many things have not yet been invented. It has no calendars on the wall, no clocks, and certainly no "official" time on the computer - because it has no computer!

But every day has a unique name and special character. The word Vigil does not mean "early dawn," or the afternoon mass before a major feast. "Vigil of Christmas," at the Ancient World Monastic Emporium, means a day full of shopping, for it is a day of preparation for the feast of the Nativity.

At 4:30 AM the monks gather in their community room, called the Chapter Room, to hear what will be special about the day. From a large book, a monk reads aloud: "the twenty-fourth of December..."

There is one significant line to be read; even the novices are prepared to understand its Latin text:

*JESUS CHRISTUS, DEI FILIUS  
NASCITUR IN BETHLEHEM JUDAE*  
(Jesus Christ, the Son of God is born in Bethlehem of Judea.)

No applause, no exclamation

or comment. Instead, every monk kneels down in perfect silence. All other events are dwarfed. After three Hail Marys, all sit down to listen to the sweet voice of Abbot Saint Bernard of Clairvaux who repeats, in an emotionally charged voice, the announcement of the feast:

"Brothers, forgive me, but I must repeat this sentence. It tastes as if it were honey. If I omit even one word, the taste is diminished. Do you understand? The text says, 'nascitur' - that is, he is born, in the present tense. Today, with no more delay, you meet the one promised for centuries. This birth can remain yours for all times. All eternity is embraced in one sentence, all time is engulfed in one single action."

Saint Bernard wrote more sermons on the Christmas Vigil than for Christmas Day. In that one single split-second in which Jesus begins his individual human life, I am validated, recognized, and declared to be the purpose of all creation. When God is a baby, I am allowed to remain speechless and just drink in the Virgin Mother's fresh milk in grateful affirmation of existence.

## A TRIP THROUGH THE HOLY LAND

by: Fr. Bernard Marton

It was truly the chance and the honor of a lifetime that after many years of consideration I was able to participate in a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Under the leadership of a Franciscan father, I was a member of a group of pilgrims, and for ten days visited and walked in the same places where two thousand years ago our Lord Jesus Christ lived, trod, moved, performed his miracles, and ultimately offered his life for our salvation by dying on the cross, to rise on the third day.

In order for anyone to embark on, and really appreciate, the truly faith-based emotions, you must peel off, layer by layer all the advertising and tourism-induced commercialism. This mingling of the profane and the sacred can be disturbing even in the sacred places, because there are one or two or even three sanctuaries built on the historic sites, with altars and mosaics everywhere. At times it is very easy, but other times one has to force oneself to go beyond the outward appearance in order to touch the essence of faith. I experienced both. I was truly touched on the shores of the Sea of Galilee as I sat on a rock, with no candle, mosaic, or incense - feeling only in my innermost being that Jesus was here

... he is here, walking on the water, or even approaching me now, extending his invitation that I follow him. Deep peace and unspeakable satisfaction and happiness engulf the heart.

The other such palpable presence of the sacred is clearly present at Golgotha. Despite the huge basilica, the several denominations competing with each other (Greek, Latin, Armenian) in their concurrent liturgies, it was not difficult to be touched by inspiration as I could reach through a small hole under the altar and touch the spot where Christ's cross stood. The presence of even more awe-inspiring emotions can be told about the Holy Sepulcher. The cave is very small, enough to admit only the four concelebrating priests, but under the altar lies the rock on which the Crucified Body was resting until the resurrection. We were fortunate enough that everything was booked well in advance and we did not have to wait in line for hours to enter the burial chamber.

Before my trip, I was told to be ready for a life-changing experience. The warning was prophetic. From now on, until the end of my life, I will be able to draw from the riches of this life-changing experience.



Fr. Bernard and the group of religious who traveled through the Holy Land together.



Fr. Bernard on the shore of the Sea of Galilee

## Abbey Church Services

### UPCOMING EVENTS

#### Christmas Eve Vigil Mass

11:20 pm - Office of Readings  
12:00 am - Midnight Mass

#### Christmas Morning Mass

Dec. 25th 9:00 am

#### New Year's Eve Adoration

Dec. 31st 9:00 pm-12:00 am

#### Mass of the Motherhood of Mary

Jan. 1st 9:00 am

### DAILY SCHEDULE

#### Office of Readings

& Morning Prayer 6 am

Evening Prayer 6 pm

Daily Mass (Mon - Sat.) 6:30 am

Mass on Sunday 9 am

Confessions Wed. 4-5 pm



**Cistercian Abbey Our Lady of Dallas**  
3550 Cistercian Road  
Irving, Texas 75039

The monastic community of Our Lady of Dallas

## A SECOND WAVE OF YOUNG MONKS JOINS THE ABBEY



by: Fr. Thomas Esposito

Fr. Denis is fond of explaining how the Abbey's long vocations drought came to an end.

In 2001, he returned to Zirc, our motherhouse in Hungary, to attend a Mass in which the bones of Fr. Lawrence Sigmond, his saintly novice master, were returned to the Abbey church. While praying at the tomb of Fr. Lawrence, the then-Abbot of Dallas made a request: he asked Fr. Lawrence to intercede for the Dallas community by sending five vocations within the next ten years.

Fr. Lawrence evidently felt generous: the Abbey in Dallas received 15 in a span of five years, 10 of whom persevered to final vows and priesthood! Among those joining Fr. Denis at that Mass were two recent Prep School graduates of the class of 2001, now known as Fr. Lawrence Brophy and Br. Francis Gruber!

I am blessed to count myself among that initial wave of new recruits, but I am even more overjoyed that a second "youth wave" has risen in the last few years, and shows no

sign of cresting any time soon.

Of the 28 monks presently making up our community, 16 are under the age of 40. Our community is richly blessed with both the wisdom of the elderly Hungarian monks and a youthful vibrancy that animates our desire to seek Christ together in the monastic way of life.

Please pray that our junior brothers and novices in formation will persevere in their monastic calling, and that other young men will prayerfully consider joining them.

We will hold a discernment retreat January 18-20; if you are interested in participating, please contact the vocations director at:

[fr-thomas@cistercian.org](mailto:fr-thomas@cistercian.org)