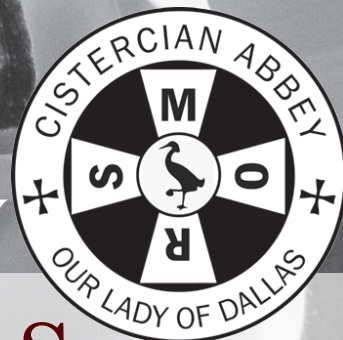




December 2020

A LETTER  
FROM THE ABBEY  
**MERRY CHRISTMAS**  
FROM CISTERCIAN





## What's inside

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### Abbey Church Services

#### UPCOMING EVENTS

#### Christmas Eve Vigil Mass

Dec. 24

Office of Readings: 11:30 p.m.

Mass: 12:00 a.m. Midnight

#### Christmas Morning Mass

Dec. 25 9:00 a.m.

#### New Years Eve Adoration

Dec. 31 9:00 p.m.-12:00 a.m.

#### DAILY SCHEDULE

Morning Prayer - 6:00 a.m.

Evening Prayer - 6:00 p.m.

Daily Mass - 6:35 a.m.

Mass on Sunday - 9:00 a.m.

Confessions Wed. - 4:00-5:00 p.m.



## GOODNESS AND LOVING KINDNESS

### A Letter from the Abbot

Fr. Abbot Peter Verhalen

During the Christmas Mass at Dawn, we read in the Letter to Titus that God's "goodness and loving kindness have appeared" (Titus 3:4). The phrase "loving kindness" translates the more specific and suggestive Greek word *philanthropia*, a love for the human being, not just any sort of "loving kindness." The later Latin translation uses *humanitas*, which suggests not only "humanity" but also the particular set of virtues that make us human. And so at Christmas, God's love for all of us appeared in that He became human, a human being, and revealed our own humanity to us.

Again this year and at this moment in our lives, Christmas invites us to see that God, the Creator of the Universe, loves us (*philanthropia*) in all our messiness, tormented as we are by our own demons, enthralled by desires for pleasure, too often hated or resented by others and resenting them in turn (Titus 3:3) and that He educates us to become the virtuous, saintly men and women to which our humanity calls us.

All of us at Our Lady of Dallas pray that you will experience God's love for you and your family this Christmas and that God will lead you to the fullness of your humanity that is sainthood. Merry Christmas!

## Br. Matthew take vows

Fr. Thomas Esposito

During Sunday Mass on August 20, Br. Matthew Hegemann stood before the Abbot and pronounced his temporary vows of obedience, stability, and conversion to the monastic way of life for three years. After reading the text of his vows, he signed his name to the paper at the altar, then handed it to Abbot Peter. Although the pandemic was powerless to prevent Br. Matthew from taking this next step on the discernment path, it did require a nearly empty church for the occasion; only the monks and Br. Matthew's immediate family were able to participate in person, while the Mass itself was livestreamed on the Abbey's YouTube channel.

Br. Matthew has become an integral member of the monastic and prep school communities. His confreres admire his eager willingness to serve, especially in caring for the elderly monks. Br. Matthew currently teaches religion to the 6th graders, and has participated in the middle school chess club and upper school soccer teams. He recently finished his master's degree in theology from the University of Dallas, and continues to take theology courses there in preparation for the priesthood.

In sharing what he has learned from his initial years of formation, Br. Matthew offered sage counsel for monks and laypeople

alike, especially when confronting the worries produced by the pandemic: "I've learned to stop worrying as much about the future, focusing rather on what God is asking of me today. I've found that my own stress and anxieties were often tied to worries about the future, but God doesn't ask us to carry that burden. Rather, He frees us of that burden and allows us greater freedom to serve others and to build a more intimate relationship with Him."

Please keep Br. Matthew in your prayers this coming year. His next discernment steps would take him to his solemn profession of vows and ordination to the diaconate!





# PRAYER FOR VOCATIONS

Fr. John Bayer

January 14 to 17, 2021, the Abbey plans to host a retreat for young men discerning their vocation and open to a religious and priestly call. This will be the first discernment retreat in an entire year, since the pandemic forced us to cancel the one scheduled for Easter 2020. If you know someone who you think could or perhaps should consider such a call, encourage him to contact any monk for advice, or me as the vocations director. As St. John Paul II once said, “We should not be afraid to directly suggest to a young or not so young person that the Lord may be calling them. It is an act of esteem and confidence. It can be a moment of light and of grace.”

Over the past year two monks died who prayed daily for vocations to the Abbey. Fr. Denis passed away in May, after having done so much in so many capacities to serve the future of Cistercian. In the last years of his life, he gave countless hours to fostering friendships with an untold number of young men. He enjoyed being a friend, and he wanted to help his friends find their path. His wisdom, availability and loyalty are known to so many. Several of the young monks can attest to the fatherly role he played in fostering their vocations.

Fr. Bede died just recently in November, and in his own way, he too served the future of the Cistercian community by praying incessantly for vocations. Almost every single time I saw him in his room, Fr. Bede would ask whether we had candidates and insist upon the need to pray for them. He encouraged me to compose a prayer for vocations and to recommend it to the community. He loved to recall that out of the sixteen boys in his class in high school, four of them became priests (Fr. Bede was one of them). He believed the personal witness of his form master and teachers helped him to discover the joy of following God’s call.

Let us all pray for vocations to Cistercian, and for the courage to promote them in the ways God asks us. Our world must know about God, about his love poured out “to the end” in self-sacrifice for our happiness (John 13:1).



## A Roman report

Br. Francis Gruber

In an effort to make the best of the current situation we find ourselves in (and the many travel restrictions that come along with it), I was given the opportunity to spend this past summer at the Cistercian monastery of Hauterive (pictured below), just outside of Fribourg, Switzerland. Both the stately manner of the monastery itself and the idyllic surroundings create quite an impression. Living a rather regimented monastic schedule for the summer, (which included arising every morning at 4:15 a.m. for vigils,) I would spend some time in the mornings working on my dissertation and the afternoons doing manual labor, helping out either in the kitchen or outside on the farmland. Once a week, during the ‘desert day’ which allows for a bit looser schedule, I would explore the surrounding small villages and make a visit to the historic local church. Additionally, I took this opportunity in the mainly Francophone Fribourg to advance my French to a level beyond where it was when I studied it as a high school student.

On October 1, I took a series of trains back from Switzerland into Rome. Though it was a slight adjustment coming from the peace and quiet of the Swiss countryside, I soon found myself at a home away from home again here at the Cistercian General House in the Eternal City. Since returning, I have found that I have been able to apply the lessons regarding the delicate balance between recreation and work I learned from Hauterive back into my weekly schedule here at Rome. Due to the apparent worldwide trend of a rise in Covid cases, all classes at my university midway through the semester went online, but the library, fortunately, is still accessible, by way of a reservation and following the many precautions. Though Rome is without the usual hordes of tourists, there are still people out and about in the streets. Among other regulations, all museums are closed and all restaurants close at 6:00 p.m. One can really feel the difference of the drop in tourism when one goes to St. Peter’s Basilica, for example, which can be very pleasant, if only it was under different circumstances.



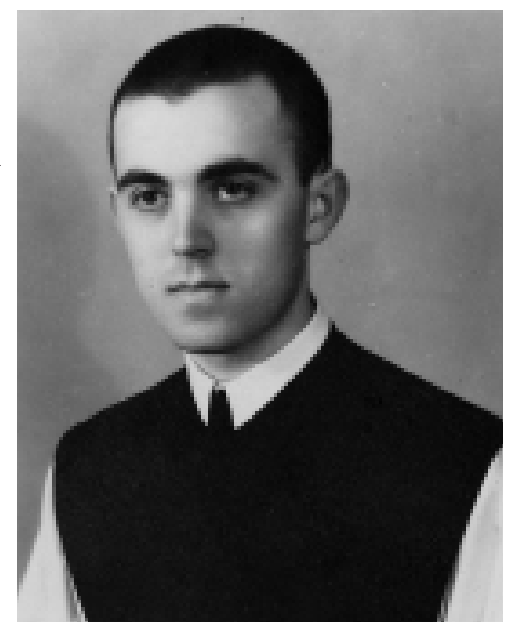
## IN MEMORY OF FR. BEDE LACKNER

Fr. Gregory Schweers

Father Bede Lackner, (12/19/1927 - 11/10/2020) was a most beloved and honored member of the Cistercian Abbey in Irving, Texas. A much-honored scholar and teacher of Cistercian and European history, he was even more beloved as a confessor and spiritual director of seminarians, priests, and his fellow monks. After attending the Cistercian high school in Baja, Hungary, he entered the mother abbey of Zirc in 1947 and completed his novitiate and early studies there, but due to his German ancestry, both he and his family were expelled from Hungary after WWII to Germany.

Undeterred, he traveled to Rome, completed his theological studies, was ordained to the priesthood, and came to the US in 1953 where he eventually joined Our Lady of Dallas Cistercian Abbey.

Having finished his M.A. at Marquette and his Ph.D. at Fordham, he joined the history faculty at the University of Texas in Arlington. There, he distinguished himself, rising to the level of full professor in that department while teaching a variety of courses in Reformation and Cistercian history, Erasmus, and many other courses. His seminal publication, *The Eleventh-Century Background of Cîteaux*, remains a fundamental work in Cistercian Studies. A person of quiet intensity, he fulfilled St. Benedict’s rule of loving both ‘the brothers and the place.’ A slow decline in his health began after a stroke in November of 2019. To the end of his life, he was a quiet friend to all and a man dedicated to Our Lady and the daily prayer of the Rosary. His mortal remains now lie with his brothers in the Abbey crypt.





Fr. Bernard Marton

## SAYING GOODBYE TO A DEAR FRIEND



**FR. DENIS FARKASKFALVY**

JUNE 23, 1926 - MAY 20, 2020

I was about to leave my cell to go to the oratory for our Morning Prayers when I heard the ping from my iPad that a new e-mail had just arrived: sad news from my abbot Peter Verhalen from Dallas – my best friend, confrere in the Order, my former abbot, Father Denis Farkasfalvy was called by the Heavenly Father to Eternity at 10:20 p.m. CTS. According to our time in Zirc, Hungary, that happened at 5:20 a.m. on Thursday, the feast of the Ascension. How fitting and how meaningful a date!

Our friendship goes back quite a ways: among the “young fathers,” Denis was the first one to arrive in Dallas after finishing his studies in Rome. I was the last among the Hungarians and the first of the Americans to enter and persevere in the monastery as novice – barely two months prior to his arrival in Texas. The two of us immediately hit it off. In spite of the fact that the novitiate followed very strict rules (they kept the same rules as they had in Zirc, when there were numerous novices, at least ten young ones – the novitiate was strictly separated from the rest of the monks) – the superiors allowed for the two of us to keep close contact with one another. We understood each other quite well since there was scarcely four years of age difference between the two of us. He told me a great deal about his Roman experience, and I eagerly listened to him since I knew that in a very short time, I would also be sent to the Eternal City for my theological studies. I tried to reveal to him all the secrets of the Wild West since by then I was a seasoned Texan, having spent three years in the Lone Star State and graduating from Jesuit High School in Dallas in 1960.

The friendship that began then lasted until his death: we taught together in the newly formed Cistercian Prep School, and I feel it was at his suggestion that I was brought back very quickly from Europe to serve as Form Master and French teacher. Father Denis was soon appointed Headmaster (by Christmas of 1968) he appointed me as his assistant headmaster in 1971. We weathered some serious crises together, such as the student unrest that stemmed from the very unpopular Vietnam War.

He served two stints as Headmaster, and it

was a foregone conclusion that I would follow him in that post. He was soon elected abbot. We must thank him for the revitalization of the rather meager community that was on the brink of extinction. He often mentioned, with a great deal of emotion, how he sought the intercession of his beloved underground Novice Master, the very holy father Lawrence ‘Sigmond at his reburial in the Abbey of Zirc. He bargained with Fr. Lawrence that if he would send us five novices in ten years for the Dallas abbey to persevere, the monastery would survive. Jokingly he used to mention that Fr. Lawrence pulled a trick on him, and he sent ten novices in five years. They indeed persevered and now are forming the core of the revitalized abbey community.

Denis was a phenomenal intellect: after the failed ’56 Hungarian Revolution the superiors of the clandestine novitiate sent him westward toward Rome for theological studies. He obtained his doctorate in Sacred Theology with flying colors. He analyzed the works of St. Bernard of Clairvaux about Inspiration in the Scriptures, published his doctoral dissertation in French. At the so-called “disputatio sollemnis” – an hour-long lecture at the end of four years of theology – he gained the hitherto unheard of perfect score “summa cum laude” designation. He had hoped to become a professional theologian, but he ended up being an outstanding mathematics teacher for decades at the Prep School – and for good measure, part-time theology professor at the University of Dallas for years. He never abandoned his long time dream; he continued his theological research and published the results of his work on the Johannine gospel, among many others. In his free time – he received a year off from teaching between his two stints as headmaster – he obtained a licentiate in Sacred Scripture from the Biblicum in Rome and Jerusalem. No wonder that he soon was appointed a member of the Biblical Commission in Rome, where he cooperated for years with then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger. He kept pursuing his work in Hungarian literature as well: he translated from the original the whole Book of Psalms, and the

Roman Breviary including all the hymns and canticles into eloquent Hungarian. He loved the poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke, so naturally he translated many of the German poet’s more famous works into outstanding Hungarian poetry.

He was not of strong physical constitution. He was often sick and could recite dozens of operations: from quadruple bypass heart surgeries (he had two of those, thus he no longer had the larger veins in either of his legs), kidney operations for enormously large stones, spine, knees, ankle..., impossible to enumerate them all. Once past his 80th year, he developed other ailments and infections that nearly killed him several times; his conscientious doctors literally brought him back from the brink of the grave. His last serious illness of stomach, thyroid and lung problems was complicated by the Covid-19 infection he contracted that proved to be fatal. His most fervent desire – that he be allowed to spend the remaining days of his life with his beloved brothers in the monastery – could not be fulfilled due to the strict regulations imposed by the pandemic. Abbot Peter was with him – although in isolation and able to see him only through a window of his quarantined room – and gave him conditional absolution and prayed with him the “Commendatio Animarum,” the prayer of the dying person being commended to the mercy of God. Fr. John, one of the younger monks and a dear friend, donned all the protective gear and actually sat with Fr. Denis for some two hours, holding his hand and telling him how much his spiritual sons loved him. Though he probably died earlier, at the moment he was pronounced dead, our youngest monk, Br. Christopher, was at his side, just beyond the glass enclosure.

He died at the age of almost 84 (his birthday would have been on June 23), in the 65th year of his monastic life, 59th of priesthood. He served his community for 24 years as abbot.

-Dated in Zirc, May 21, 2020

# HELLO AMERICA

Fr. Joseph Van House

Many of the greatest modern experts on Catholic theology, and especially on medieval Cistercian theology, have been French, and many of their writings are unavailable in translation. So, as part of my doctoral studies focusing on Cistercian theology, Abbot Peter encouraged me to take the opportunity to develop my French by spending almost three months last spring in a dynamic community of Cistercian nuns in rural southwest France, the Abbey of Boulaur. When the pandemic began to rage in mid-March and borders began to close, the Abbess offered without hesitation to have me ride out the storm there, and so my visit ended up lasting fully half a year.

The longer visit was a huge benefit for my French and has made me an even more committed advocate

of the rewards of foreign language study. I also had the opportunity to visit and learn about many key Cistercian historical sites. Still, the greatest joy of the trip was being embedded in a different thriving



Cistercian monastery and being able to learn about monastic life from their perspective. The nuns don't run a school, but they have similar demographics to us and are in the middle of a major project to revamp their agricultural production

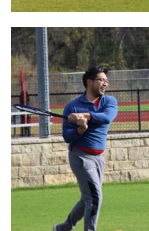
and increase their capacity to host young people and families who want a break from the world, and they are having a grand time doing it. True to their gifts for hospitality, they joyfully made sure I had a roof over my head, healthy food to eat, and fine people to laugh and pray

with, and as I pursued my own dissertation-writing I expressed my gratitude by assisting their chaplain, helping them with some English-language projects, and even working a little with the chickens.

The Cistercian order reaches down the centuries, around the world, and up to heaven. For me one of the blessings of this year was being able to help strengthen the family bonds between these two monasteries. And in turn, one of the unexpected fruits of that is that I have been asked to provide some regular pastoral assistance a bit more locally, to the Cistercian nuns of Valley of Our Lady in Wisconsin. A stronger fellowship with our sisters is an exciting prospect for the future of Our Lady of Dallas.



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On Thanksgiving the monks played "Monk Ball" - a game invented by Br. Christopher. It's a cross between softball and tennis.