



A LETTER FROM THE ABBEY

August, 1995

“I AM THE TRUE VINE...” (Jn 15:1)

The cross shown below, a recent gift by a friend of our monastery, expresses the idea of this saying of Christ from John’s gospel. You see it expressed also in the shield above in a bunch of grapes hanging from the cross and in the two Latin words VITIS VERA (= true vine) written on the shield.



One should read the whole passage of Jn 15:1-8 to realize the depth of the symbol. For a monastic community, Christ, the crucified and risen Lord, is the only true vine which provides an inexhaustible source of spiritual life, continued conversion, renewed dedication, a source of loving service, and an assurance of faithfulness and endurance.

This common source connect the members of our community as grapes in bunches and the communities (families, monasteries, classes of students and alumni) as fruits grown on a common stock and supplied with nourishment from identical roots. We cannot belong to Christ without belonging to each other. Nor can we be spiritually united without belonging to our common, life-giving source that is Christ. Grace and truth are shared as we communicate with each other and exercise our work of service. The lines that connect us intertwine and are often not clearly visible, for both communication and service happen in direct and indirect ways. Every fruit we bring is itself a source of further fruit-bearing and we do not know, or

know only in hindsight, how we have effectively loved and have been loved and helped by others.

I am sending you this image with the scripture text as a challenge, trusting that it may unfold in your own minds and hearts with its many symbolic implications. The monastery, our school and the Cistercian Family as a whole do well if we remain strongly connected to the True Vine by faith and love.

THE STATE OF THE MONASTERY

Over the past year three changes have taken place in our membership. In August of 1994, Fr. Gilbert Hardy returned to Zirc, Hungary, where, by teaching philosophy, he has been for the past year the chief architect of the formation of the youngest candidates for that Abbey. On November 22, 1994, Fr. Rudolph Zimányi preceded us into our eternal home. He died of cancer, suffering much, but experiencing much peace,

also. On January 1, 1995, our postulant, Jonathan Wheat, took the habit and received the name of Bro. William. He is expected to complete his novitiate on New Year's Day of 1996. Thus the monastery has presently 27 members. Of these, 25 live permanently in the Abbey, and two are on permanent assignment outside of the Abbey: Fr. Balthasar right "next door" at his parish in Grapevine and Fr. Ralph overseas in Germany. Furthermore, beginning in the fall Bro. Paul McCormick will be overseas, studying in Rome. On September 1, he will begin a six-week course in Italian (he took Italian at UD during the past school year) and on October 15, his two-year program of theology, aimed at obtaining the licentiate (S.T.L.), will commence at the Pontifical University "Gregoriana." This degree will be that of a papal university qualifying him to teach Catholic theology on any academic level. Our oldest member is 82; our youngest is 26; the average age of the community is 58. We are in need of more vocations to fulfill our commitments and keep the size of the community the same.

Our commitments include both prayer and work. We pray together each day the Liturgy of the Hours and celebrate the daily Eucharist in community. Four times a day -- at morning, noon, evening and at night -- we gather for prayer. Our daily Mass on weekdays is at 6:30 AM, right after morning prayer; on Sundays it is at 9 AM. Our present commitments of work include teaching at the Cistercian Preparatory School (10 members, 9 full-time), at the University of Dallas (six members, four full-time) and at UTA (one full-time) as well as pastoral ministry at various places. For the time being, we provide regular pastoral assistance at the parishes of St. Francis in Grapevine, Holy Family in Irving, Christ the King and St. Monica in Dallas, the Chapel of Carswell Naval Base in Ft. Worth, and the convents of the Sisters at Mount St. Michael in Dallas and of the Holy Family of Nazareth in Grand Prairie. Besides these the monastery offers occasional assistance at other parishes, especially during the summer.

GENERAL CHAPTER OF THE CISTERCIAN ORDER

On September 1, the General Chapter of the Cistercian Order begins in Rome. The Chapter consists of the major superiors (mainly abbots) and delegates chosen by various groups of monks. From our abbey Fr. Peter Verhalen was chosen as delegate. Besides a number of "routine" issues (reports of various officials and committees), the Chapter has two major items on its agenda. The first is the election of the Abbot General. The mandate of the present Abbot General, Polycarp Zakar will expire on the first day of the Chapter. Abbot Polycarp was elected on September 2, 1985, for ten years. He is presently 65 years old and can be re-elected. The second issue is new legislation by the Chapter to regulate the participation of the Cistercian Nuns in the governance of the Cistercian Order. Historically, various monasteries of Cistercian Nuns were founded locally under the spiritual leaderships of monasteries of monks. Their juridical status was different in different regions. Only in this century did the Cistercian nuns recent seek closer ties among themselves and became available for corporate representation at the General Chapter. Since 1974 a limited number of superiors (abbesses) have regularly participated at the Order's General Chapter but only as observers. In the last several years the Holy See became increasingly supportive to the idea that the Cistercian Nuns should send regular members to the Cistercian General Chapter and participate in the election of the Abbot General. This Chapter should build the basic legislative framework for giving them a fuller role in decisions about the life

of the Order. Chances are that the measures to be taken at this chapter will be provisorial.



Convention of Cistercian Abesses in Rome, 1993

Cistercian Nuns embrace a much too large variety of lifestyles, and activities and the nuns themselves are of very different educational backgrounds. Some are in charge of excellent school; some lead a more simple life and are not yet quite ready to participate in the discussions that an international gathering is supposed to hold. The largest number of monasteries of Cistercian Nuns are in Spain, Italy, Switzerland, and Southern Germany (Bavaria). The reasons for this distribution are historical. In these regions the secularist governments of the 19th century suppressed and confiscated with preference the monasteries of monks, and often allowed those of the nuns to remain in existence. In the United States, one monastery of nuns, named "Valley of Our Lady" in Prairie du Sac, Wisconsin belongs to our Order. It was founded in 1957 by the Swiss monastery of Frauenthal and has presently about 15 members. In Hungary the Cistercian Nuns have survived the years of persecution. They live in two monasteries with a total membership of about 40. The largest Cistercian community of nuns is that of Seligenthal in Landshut, Germany. In 1993 it reported 99 members.

GOLDEN JUBILEE OF FR. RALPH

On May 5, the Abbey celebrated a Golden Jubilee, the 50th anniversary of ordination, for Fr. Ralph March. Fr. Ralph who is a founding member both of the Abbey and of the University of Dallas. As a recognized scholar and musician, in 1978 he was invited to become the music director of the famed cathedral of Cologne where he remained employed until his retirement. He is now chaplain for the elderly in a home near Augsburg and lectures at the University of Innsbruck. Each year Fr. Ralph comes back to the monastery for about a month. This year his stay with us coincided with the 50th anniversary of ordination. The Collegium Cantorum of the University of Dallas provided a gorgeous program of music for the celebration. The Mass, celebrated at 7:30 PM, became a memorable event. A huge storm gathered during the first part of the

Mass, and, right after consecration, caused a power outage that lasted for hours. The presence of mind of our youngest brothers saved the celebration. In two minutes all choir members were holding a candle, votive lights were assembled all around the church, six candles were brought to the altar etc., so that the celebration went on as planned, including the reception which was also held by candle light -- in a most "romantic" atmosphere.

THE GREENING OF THE ABBEY COURTYARD

With much help from alumnus Paul Tomaso ('80), Fr. Peter undertook the transformation of the Abbey's courtyard into a garden that cools the air and pleases the eye. Paths were paved and sitting areas were built. A great variety of plants have already be planted but work will continue through the year. We aim at a reasonable balance between creating "good looks" and low maintenance.

EVENTS PLANNED FOR THE ABBEY CHURCH

Every First Friday of the school year (beginning on September 1) the Community's Mass at the Abbey will be at 7:30 PM. The Collegium Cantorum of the University of Dallas plans to participate.

October 8, Sunday, 7:30 PM. Annual Mass of the Abbey honoring the Freshmen of the University of Dallas with reception following.

November 2, All Souls' Day, Thursday 7:30 PM. Solemn Requiem for deceased members, relatives and friends. The Collegium Cantorum will present Anerio's Requiem. We will send you a reminder, asking that you us the names of those deceased persons you especially wish us to remember at this year's celebration.

December 3, 1995, Sunday, 7:30. Benefit Concert of the Collegium Cantorum of the University of Dallas (to be announced in a special invitation).

Cistercian Abbey
Our Lady of Dallas
1, Cistercian Rd
Irving, Texas 75039

