



A Letter from the Abbey

Christmas 2025



Abbot's Greeting

Fr. Abbot Peter Verhalen, O.Cist.

On my way to a biennial Course for Cistercian Superiors in Rome in late September, I spent a few days with our fellow Cistercian sisters in Boulaur, France (45 minutes from Toulouse). Our communities have grown closer in recent years through the visits of Mother Emmanuelle and Sr. Diane to Dallas, and those of our own monks (and Cistercian families) to Boulaur. They are attracting numerous vocations, to the point of having made a new foundation while also exploring ways to assist other, less-populated monasteries. The sisters run an award-winning, organic farm, host numerous guests and retreats, and sing the Divine Office and Mass in moving, traditional chant. Yet, for any differences between our daily routines, the sisters share our values and spirit more than any other monastery in the Order. The rich conversations about Cistercian life today (among the best I've experienced!) and their garden-fresh vegetables and mouthwatering cheese also made this as especially memorable visit.

In Rome, some 50 Cistercian abbots and abbesses gathered from around the world in the Cistercian General House on the Aventine Hill. Among presenters, Sr. Simona Brambilla, M.C. from the Dicastery for



Above: Fr. Abbot Peter with Cistercian monks and nuns, and gelato, in Rome.

Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life Prefect and Pro-Prefect Cardinal Ángel Fernández Artime, S.D.B spoke on the theme of hope and the state of religious life today. A Jubilee Year, one day we made a pilgrimage through the Holy Door at St. Peter's, enjoying visits to various churches on the walk home with stops for lunch, gelato and coffee. The Course for Superiors served to deepen friendships and to allow us to think about additional ways to support one another. Gelato at the Frigidarium near Piazza Navona, by the way, was excellent!

Seven brothers take the next step in their discernment



In August, six novices took their first temporary vows in a packed church overflowing with family and friends. Brs. Jerome, Elijah, Anselm, Gideon, Charbel, and Michael all promised stability, obedience, and a commitment to the monastic way of life for three years. Br. Barnabas, having concluded his fourth year in the Abbey, renewed his own temporary vows for another three years, as he continues his discernment and studies for solemn profession and ordination.



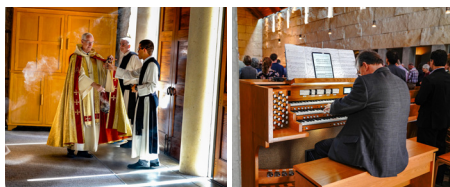
**We rejoice in the abundance of vocations
our heavenly Father is sending!**

To contribute to the “Responding to a Gift” campaign or to the Monastic Fund for the support and education of our young monks as well as for the care of our elderly monks, use this QR code, visit our website, or send a check to Our Lady of Dallas Cistercian Abbey, 3550 Cistercian Road, Irving TX 75039.



The Blessing of Music

On the afternoon of All Souls Day, the monks blessed the new chapel organ and enjoyed a concert of organ music reaching from the Baroque to the contemporary period, along with choral music from the UD Choral.



Fr. Dr. Francis Gruber



Fr. Francis returned to Rome in June to defend his dissertation in philosophy on Martin Heidegger at the Pontifical Gregorian University. His parents, sister, and Fr. Abbot Peter made the long trip from the States to be with him. In a lively discussion (in English *and* fluent Italian) with his two readers, Fr. Francis impressed an audience of about 40 people with the fruits of his *six* years of intense research. To mark the special occasion, a brief toast followed in the Greg Café, and afterward a splendid formal dinner brought Fr. Francis' academic adventure in Rome to a fitting and perfect close.

The Privileges of Jesus' Virgin Mother

Fr. Joseph Van House, O.Cist.

The bond between mother and child is unique. Every human begins in absolute dependence on a mother, encompassed by her being. God's Son, in taking on human flesh, was no exception to this. The exception was how much more intimately he chose to be connected to her by having no biological father; her virginity meant a unique kind of consecration to Jesus, such that a woman's normal order, where love for a man brings a child into being, was reversed, and Joseph's role in Mary's life was defined by her "yes" to the Son. No two human bodies could be more fully consecrated to one another than by being Virgin Mother and only child. As St. Ambrose sang in his hymn *Veni Redemptor Gentium*, "such is the birth that is worthy of God."

In the mystery of his decision before the dawn of time to become man, long before his command that humans "honor father and mother," the Eternal Son decided to create his Virgin Mother as she necessarily would

always have wanted to be for him: he blessed her with the miraculous, exceptional integrity and fruitfulness of soul that exceeded every other human, corresponding to their bodily relationship. Sensing this, the earliest Christian writers followed St. Paul's praise of Jesus as the "New Adam" by recognizing her as the "New Eve." This highest and holiest partnership meant that she was also foretold in the Scriptures as the "tower of ivory" (Song of Songs 7:4) never conquered by the serpent, the "garden enclosed, the fountain sealed [*hortus conclusus, fons signatus*]" (4:12), indeed the one who is "immaculate." (4:7, 5:2) This Christian faith in her exceptional innocence was later expressed by great poets in our own language, celebrating "the daughter of Eve unfallen" (Newman) and "our tainted nature's solitary boast" (Wordsworth). And during these winter holy days where we especially remember the sacred partnership between Mary and Jesus, we are profoundly grateful



that he has made us, too, children of the true "mother of all the living." Indeed, in our little corner of Dallas, schooled in some of the best traditions of Christian knighthood, we especially rejoice in the privilege of kneeling before her, offering her our swords, and speaking to others with devotion of "Our Lady."



A Texan in Hungary

This year Fr. John is spending several months serving in Hungary to foster relationships with our brothers and sisters in the Congregation of Zirc, as well as with teachers and students in the five Cistercian schools spread over the country.

His mission is to help the monks of Dallas, guided by the abbot, to discern God's will regarding ways we can support the Cistercian Order in Hungary. He is following in the footsteps of Fr. Bernard, who spent about ten years serving there. Several other monks have spent shorter periods of time, usually a week or two, serving students at summer camps. These connections are a blessing to the community in Dallas, since they allow us to draw closer to the heroic faith and perseverance that gave birth to our monastery.

Please pray that we discover where else God might want us to serve, and that he continues to bless us with wonderful young vocations.

No Room at the Inn

The Abbey is thrilled to announce that work has officially begun on a beautiful new ten-bedroom extension! With more vocations arriving, the need for additional living space has become clear, and this project marks an exciting step forward in welcoming and caring for our growing community of monks. Four of the new bedrooms will be located on the first floor and fully handicap accessible, ensuring comfortable accommodations for our elder monks. The remaining six bedrooms will be on the second floor, designed to match the existing monk's cells in style and simplicity. If all goes according to plan, construction will be finished in time for new novices.

Beyond the new bedrooms, this project will also include a renovated and expanded kitchen and the addition of two guest rooms to better host visiting religious, priests, and candidates interested in our monastic life. We eagerly look forward to the days when these rooms are completed and, with God's continued blessing, we invite the new occupants into those room and into the rhythm of prayer and community life. If you would like to contribute to the campaign, see the QR to the left.



Three new novices!

by Br. Sebastian Kelly

In addition to an abundance of time for reflection and prayer, the novitiate has provided lots of recreational activities. On one memorable weekend, some of the other brothers and I went to the Cistercian Prep homecoming to see their jaw-dropping decorations (the 20-ft wide homemade Chinese

dragon was my personal favorite), spent a quiet evening at Lake Grapevine, enjoyed a favorite childhood movie (*The Incredibles*), visited the Dallas World Aquarium (my first time there) and played some rugby. The novitiate has not only been highly formative and edifying, but it's also been genuinely fun!



Catechism Class

Four of our new junior brothers serve as catechists alongside the Missionaries of Charity at St. James's Catholic Parish. With their students, fellow catechists, and in such a joyous and lively parish, the brothers experience firsthand the strength and communion of the Universal Church. The Holy Spirit's guidance in their teaching has been a regular source of inspiration for all of them to continue growing in their vocation as monks, priests, and teachers. Please pray for the catechists and all their students as they continue to prepare for their reception of the sacraments this Easter!



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

UPCOMING EVENTS

Christmas Eve

Office of Readings 11:30 p.m.

Midnight Mass 12:00 a.m.

Christmas Day Mass 9:00 a.m.

New Year's Eve

Adoration and Benediction

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

New Year's Day Mass 9:00 a.m.

DAILY SCHEDULE

Morning Prayer - 6:00 a.m.

Adoration - 5:30 p.m.

Evening Prayer - 6:00 p.m.

Daily Mass - 6:35 a.m.

Mass on Sunday - 9:00 a.m.



Merry Christmas from the monks at Our Lady of Dallas Cistercian Abbey!