

August 2004

# A Letter from the Abbey

Cistercian Abbey • Our Lady of Dallas

## Briefly

### Fr. Moses remains in Irving nursing center

Fr. Moses Nagy, O. Cist., who taught French at UD for over 20 years before returning to Hungary a decade ago, is convalescing at the Northgate Plaza Nursing and Rehabilitation Center on Northgate at Story Road in Irving.

He returned to Texas in November to undergo surgery to alleviate a degenerative spinal condition. The complex operation and a stroke in March that paralyzed his left leg and arm have kept him in Texas.

Fr. Moses is very aware, and normally quite lucid and talkative. Members of the monastery visit him daily. He is always happy to receive visits from old friends.

### Abbot to contribute to Cistercian Synod's work

Abbot Denis will work with the Synod of the Cistercian Order in Rome from September 24 to October 1 to conclude work on a document the body will release next year on religious vocations in the contemporary world. He also will help prepare the groundwork for next year's General Chapter, which, among other important tasks, will conduct elections for a new Abbot General for the Order.

### Upcoming Events at the Abbey Church

- **Saturday, August 20, 9:00 am**  
Mass of St. Bernard and of First Vows
- **Tuesday, August 24 at 9 am**  
CPS Opening Mass
- **Sunday, October 3, 7:30 pm**  
Univ. of Dallas New Student Mass
- **Tuesday, November 2, 7:30 pm**  
All Souls Day Mass



Photo by Fr. Mark Rippeger

**A BIG STEP** Brother Abraham and Brother Joseph model their black scapulars and cinctures at the entrance to the Abbey Church where they will make their professions in a 9 am ceremony on August 20. The Cistercian Community is welcome to join in this joyous occasion.

## A new light <sup>on</sup> the consecrated life

*A subgroup of Catholic youth emerges with refreshing religious sensitivities • By Fr. Abbot Denis*

**H**ISTORY BECOMES understandable only in retrospect. Trends in the Church become discernible only when they involve thousands of individual decisions and bring about changed attitudes. An early report on what appears to be "a sign of the times" is necessarily tentative. Only hindsight is twenty-twenty, for even the present is shrouded by what is tentative in our hearts and hindered by our customary blindness of perception.

Still, there is no doubt that a new religious sensitivity has come about in Catholic youth over the last ten to fifteen years. A large number of young

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### Three alumni join the monastery, two novices to take their first vows

John Stanley '97, Ben Hoelke '00, and K.C. Lastimosa '00 moved into the monastery on August 2 to begin a short period of preparation and orientation before they take the white habit of Cistercian Novices on August 19. Please pray for these three courageous CPS alumni as they begin this year of formation and discernment!

Meanwhile, as the first year for our two current Novices (Br. Abraham and

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Photo by Fr. Mark Ripberger

**COURAGEOUS ALUMNI** Cistercian exes Ben Hoelke '00, K.C. Lastimoso '00, and John Stanley '97 will receive their white habits as Novices on August 19 in a private ceremony.

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people are today characterized by new tendencies in their search of a future; some of these tendencies appear to contradict our expectations based on previous experiences. At the risk of oversimplifying them, below are some of these trends.

#### *Demand for orthodoxy in the faith.*

While the previous two generations spent much time trying to accommodate either non-Catholics or non-Christians by building bridges and formulating common platforms, this youth is suspicious of any “watering down” of the traditional expressions of the faith, any reduction of Catholic morality to some merely rationalist or common-sense decency. The most serious Catholics of this new trend want an unabridged and uncompromised version of Catholic doctrine of faith and morals.

*Authentic spirituality.* In this respect the trend is certainly rooted in the contemporary thirst for spirituality: turning inward, seeking interiority in the forms of prayer, in selecting readings and devotional practices. But contrary to what is fashionable in the secular tendencies of what is often called “spirituality,” but ends up being only a vague longing for faith, many of the best young people in church communities are reaching for inspiration in the Catholic past — not in yoga or Buddhism or existentialist philosophies. They read the classics of spirituality: books like those by Thomas a Kempis, St. Francis of Sales, St. Alphonsus of Liguori, and even many of the ancient Greek and Latin Church Fathers.

*Demand for both competency and faithfulness in Church ministries.* While their parents or grandparents were raised with a mostly “human” image of the church where dissent, inadequacy, tentativeness,

and moral failures had to be taken for granted, the young exhibit a new trend, demanding better sermons, more devout and dignified liturgy with attention to details, serious behavior at celebrations, and faithfulness to liturgical norms. These young people set higher standards for priests, religious, lay ministers, teachers, and parents than those people have customarily set for themselves.

#### *New style of involvement for the laity.*

Previous generations thought that “the trend” of modern times would slowly but surely dissolve distinctions between lay ministers and clergy and redistribute chores within the church to create an undifferentiated system of ministry — one in which everyone minds everyone else’s business. The new trend certainly promotes the involvement of Catholic laity in the world — speaking about the faith and for morals in school and the workplace, leading pro-life events, participating in political action and reaching out to the poor are recognized as excellent activities for lay leadership. But the strongest young Catholic Christians keep in mind a certain hierarchy of values. They know that activism for social justice is not a substitute for prayer life, and that there can be no compulsory party line about what activities one “must” participate in. They understand much better the organic way in which initiatives naturally pop up in the church than did the Christian activists of the previous generation, who were often limited by stiff and stale agendas that, though based on principles, lacked any genuine relevance or sensitivity.

*A new awareness of chastity.* This issue is more serious and more openly talked about in the Church than ever before. The committed young Catholics of today are aware of what kind of world we live in, but

they have no sympathy for “part-time” chastity. They know, more clearly than did those of a few decades ago, that the secular culture has swept away all restraints to promiscuity. They have seen the last bastions of social support for a chaste life fall all around them. Many of them are sons and daughters of those survivors of the sixties and seventies who, in the times of the “sexual revolution,” did not swim with the tide, but instead decided for stable and chaste marriage — and set similar standards for their children. Some others were raised by parents who saw that the popular sexual mentality had wounded them, and decided to keep their own mistakes in mind when forming their children.

*Awareness and acceptance of being a minority.* Self-aware and unabashed, the emerging type of religious youth peacefully accepts the human condition as an existence in which the moral norm is never “being average,” in which the ideal that must be set always demands reaching high. A life that could be described as “saintly,” “faithful,” “devout,” and “steadfast” is clearly seen as incompatible with one characterized by adjectives like “typical,” “common,” “random,” and “middle-of-the road.” Young people are more and more seeing Christian life as a deep challenge — as that very same road which the gospels describe: a narrow and arduous path that leads to life.

*Willingness to be counter-cultural.* The young people described here do not look for inspiration to the TV, the radio, the daily newspaper, or the weekend entertainment offered in Hollywood movies. They look at the media as they look at anything on the streets or on the internet: with careful screening and discernment.

Their counter-culturalism is neither arrogant nor defiant, but it is very uncompromising, for it exhibits the same cagey wisdom as the dog that sniffs his food before eating it. Today’s young people have seen enough to know more than any previous generation that not all of the food that society offers is fit for human consumption.

#### **New Availability for Vocations**

Such young people, however they were formed, are freed from many impediments to hearing God’s call to the priesthood and religious life. They are open to the challenge of giving themselves away for the kingdom of God. Of course, in every age, hearing the word of God depends not only on our readiness and openness, but also on the “acoustical conditions” of our way of

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Br. Joseph) have requested admission and been accepted by the community to take their first vows on August 20, the feast of St. Bernard. They will make their profession and receive the black scapular and cincture of Cistercian monks at a special mass in the Abbey Church at 9 am. All are invited to celebrate and pray with us on this happy occasion.

life and our spiritual environment. These young people have some advantage in comparison to previous generations. Their parents succeeded in transmitting the meaning of prayer and the sense of happiness entailed in “connectedness” with God. And while they are somewhat alienated from the culture, they are far less alienated from heaven: they are well aware of what is entailed in the issues of death and afterlife, of the role of suffering; they know what the cross of Christ means, and they understand the significance of its ever-present symbol in the Catholic home, the crucifix.

As a special feature, the devout youth of our days is looking for spiritual direction, and they seek priests who can fruitfully direct their thinking, shape their judgment, and listen to their perceptions. They are willing to be outspoken, open, and honest, but they demand that the people who lead them match their openness; in this point they are like so many of their contemporaries. They do not want priests who approach them from a pedestal of external authority and speak “down” to them as if from a pulpit. They test before they taste, and so they probe the priest to see if he is willing to contradict, to disagree, and to appear opinionated or even ignorant for the sake of maintaining his integrity. Such a priest they often cannot find, mostly because today’s clergymen, overburdened with routine ministry and administration, are unavailable to sit with them for hours to sort out their needs. As a provisional solution, many young Catholics have begun to minister to each other. They form Bible groups and prayer groups, and they consult each other on spiritual matters, not only about “relationships,” but about prayer life, sins and failures, chastity and lust, peer pressure and friendship, laziness and self-discipline. Practically any matter pertaining to faith and morals, or to their intersections

with real life, can become fair game.

#### What about our monastery?

The impressions described above were slowly gathered over the last ten years as a new set of conditions for young men exploring vocations has emerged. While there has always been a certain contact with young people interested in the Abbey, it had been sporadic and followed no pattern. In retrospect, it seems that the construction of the Abbey Church was an event of grace that changed many things. Not only was the church quickly recognized as a building of exceptional beauty, but, more importantly, it gave the monastery a visibility and identity which no other external sign could have given. The students of the Cistercian Prep School quickly identified with this place where their class masses, religious school events and personal spiritual experiences took place. With some regularity they see the monks at prayer, but they also see many other people come to the Abbey Church from the neighborhood, especially students and faculty of the University of Dallas. The new dignity which began to surround special events like the Holy Week services, the First Friday masses, and the Midnight Mass of Christmas, finally communicated in concrete details that the center and foundation of the life of the monastery is prayerful devotion to God, and that our work in education is part of an integral whole, rooted in centuries-old tradition.

In the last five years an open invitation for young men to join the life of the Abbey has been responded to in a new way. It is still not clear how this truly developed. The topic has certainly gained momentum from Fr. Paul’s work as vocation director, and also from the formation of a “vocation committee” in the Abbey and from a number of “vocation retreats” and Bible studies. Still, equally important was an increasing frequency of contacts bringing undergraduate college students — both UD students and CPS alumni — to the monastery, seeking advice about their search for a vocation.

Last spring all this came to a point of maturation as three students of UD applied for admission to the novitiate. Two of them persevered until August and have formally expressed their desire to take first vows. Now, as if to show that the Prep School is equally fertile in vocations, three alumni (two from Class 2000 and one from Class 1997) have signed up for the next novitiate. Thus, for the first time ever, in the fall of

2004, the Abbey will sponsor the formation of five young Cistercians to become monks, priests, and teachers.

#### Where to from here?

With few or no novices, the future of the monastery seemed precarious. Now, after years of very few vocations, a sudden change of perspective has occurred. How real this change is, only the future can show with certainty. But there are a few issues that already deserve attention.

■ The “Cistercian Family,” especially the students, parents and alumni of the School, played a helpful role in this process through their prayers and extraordinary spiritual support. The community of the monks has never been allowed to doubt its future and its viability, because the school community displayed so much confidence and backed it up with their prayers. The importance of praying for vocations cannot be overestimated.

■ Bringing the incoming vocations to fruition is a task which we need to approach as a truly new challenge. Due to aging, in the monastery today practically the same small group of monks attends to almost every task. The arrival of new vocations adds a new task that demands time and energy. This task is more than just teaching a subject or spending time; it requires that the monks spend themselves for the sake of the future. It requires an increased amount of generosity, minding less our own needs and worrying more about a new group of people who are a great deal younger. Transmitting the traditions of a monastery which is not young enough to be dynamic and not old enough to be aware of its own traditions leads to another issue that needs more reflection. Burn out is not an option, but is certainly a danger.

■ For years, the further formation of the new vocations was not much of a problem because there have not been enough candidates. Today we must reconsider what the best available routes are to priestly formation and further studies in a teaching field. Studying theology at UD or in Rome is not what it used to be. The cost too, we hope, must be multiplied by a factor of three or four or perhaps more.

While there is reason for optimism, the road remains arduous with a number of problems that require solutions. But if the evidences makes anything clear, it is that God is leading us on our way. May it always be our heart’s joy to follow wherever he goes!

## *Abbey Church Services*

**Office of Readings  
and Morning Prayer** 6:00am

**Daily Mass Monday  
through Saturday** 6:30 am

**Mass on Sunday** 9:00 am

**Evening Prayer** 6:00 pm

**First Friday Mass** 7:30 pm

The Collegium Cantorum of the University of Dallas will join us for Mass on the First Friday of every month September through December.

Cistercian Abbey Our Lady of Dallas  
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## *Renovation makes abbey a comfortable home*

In early 2003, the Abbey received a very generous donation from the estate of Mrs. Mary Saner. The gift came at a perfect time, for our home had begun to approach a critical stage of disrepair. Two of the three wings needed re-roofing, and the main A/C unit was on its last legs — the ventilation and cooling of the West Wing had even become so problematic that few of the fathers still lived there. Further, the option of a mere "patch-up" project quickly emerged as infeasible; the electrical system and the plumbing were crying out for timely action, and the complete removal of asbestos, so generously applied 45 years ago, had become not only overdue, but a necessary condition for a building permit. A number of issues connected with the original floor plan also clearly deserved attention. The small size of the bedrooms, in particular, had led more and more members to seek additional storage spaces, using the basement or a second room for storage, and continuing to feel cramped in their own rooms.

When the opportunity suddenly arose to start with a major remodeling, we wasted no time. By May 2003 all of the fathers living in the West Wing had moved out, and after the first phase of asbestos abatement, construction began. The whole process, especially the first phase, was very involved and time consuming. During the fifteen months that followed, each person had to move at least once, and most moved two times or more. Vacating one wing at a time, we dwelt in two-thirds of the facility, trying to cope with noise and dust and the constantly changing circumstances of a monastery that had been turned into a construction site.

On August 2, the process finally came to an end when the newly renovated East Wing was reopened and we began the final process of moving back in. Once again, the house feels and functions as a monastery. The new building has solved a number of problems (see box).

We are very grateful to a number of donors who have helped us bring the project to completion. The Catholic Foundation of Dallas gave a particularly crucial gift, and deserves the special thanks of our whole community for their generosity and recognition of our service.

Having crossed this milestone of remodeling the monastery building itself, there remain a number of projects that deserve

### *Abbey improvements*

- A new entrance and reception area close to the chapel entrance, providing for an indoor gathering space after masses, and a main entrance easily monitored by the receptionist.
- A new heating and air system that is more reliable and individualized, and vastly more energy efficient, enabling us to turn off the air in unused rooms.
- An infrastructure that can accommodate new plumbing and electrical systems, solving some acute problems of the old building.
- An ew regulation-sized elevator, adjacent to the sick room upstairs, large enough for a stretcher in case of emergencies.
- A guest dining room that can seat 10-15 for visits from monks' families and for CPS Bible Study groups.
- An expanded refectory (dining room) and recreation room, larger and more secure storage facilities for the sacristy, and a Chapter Room able to accommodate both community meetings and special masses.
- Several small visiting rooms and two confessionals on the first floor.
- Two guest bedrooms for visiting priests and family member of the monks.
- An asbestos-free building.

attention. Landscaping around the entrance has yet to be done, the monks' carport ought to be replaced, and the parking for the Abbey needs to be increased. Further down the road, we even have hopes of building a crypt on the property where we may keep the bodies of our deceased Fathers, and also some sort of a memorial (a Marian grotto, perhaps) for students and members of the Cistercian family who have passed away. Still, these remain only hopes for the future.