

August 2006



A Letter from the Abbey

Cistercian Abbey • Our Lady of Dallas

Briefly

Summer ends with a flourish of activity

As usual, our community retreat closed the summer and preceeded the reception of the new novices.

On Aug. 15-18, Fr. Columba Stewart OSB from St. John's Abbey in Collegeville held nine most enjoyable conferences on early monasticism and its spirituality, a topic on which he is a well-known expert.

After Vespers on August 19, our three new brothers, Stephen (Andrew Gregg), Lawrence (Ed Brophy) and Nathanael (Nicholas Frei) received the habit.

On the next day at the 9 o'clock Mass Brs. Ignatius, Thomas, and Ambrose made their first (temporary) religious vows.

As the school year begins, all seven junior brothers will be attending theology classes at the University of Dallas. The novices will have classes in the monastery. Two of the young monks, Brs. Abraham and Joseph, will also teach religion at CPS in the 3rd (Br. Joseph) and the 4th Form (Br. Abraham).

Escaping the heat, enjoying nature, visiting family

The juniors of the monastery split into two groups to escape the heat of Texas in the Smokey Mountains (Brs. Abraham, Thomas and Philip with Frs. Roch and Paul) and in Colorado (Br. Ignatius, Augustine, and Ambrose with Fr. Peter) where they enjoyed the use of the Bush family cabin (John '70, Joe '71, Jim '73).

Frs. Julius, Roch and Bernard spent a few weeks visiting their families in Hungary. Fr. Abbot mixed in a little "business" (ecumenical dialogue with the Disciples of Christ) in Rome between visits with his sister and brother.

Each of the junior brothers also spent a week with their families or traveling and seeing relatives.

Fifty years ago in Budapest

The highs and lows of a novice in Hungary in the fall of 1956

by Abbot Denis Farkasfalvy

Fifty years ago on the first day of September I took my first vows. Half a century later, sufficient time has passed to provide the perspective to narrate this story.

In late August of 1956, I was on a retreat with my only novice mate, Konrad Egi (who is now a member of the community of Zirc and serves as pastor in a small village). We spent three wonderful days in a shack

hidden in an overgrown, neglected vineyard somewhere on the outskirts of Budapest.

The food we cooked was awful. Each time one of us would choke down another mouthful of the pre-cooked Hungarian goulash, the other could not help but laugh at his colleague's expression. But if you discount these outbursts, we behaved well and maintained our silence.

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TEN IN FIVE In the course of five years, ten young men have joined the abbey. Front row (l-r): Brs. Stephen (Andrew Gregg '01), Lawrence (Ed Brophy '01), and Nathanael (Nicolos Frei). Middle row: Brs. Philip, Ignatius, Ambrose, and Thomas. Top row: Brs. Augustine, Abraham, and Joseph.

A theology of vocation

*Throughout the Bible,
God choses individuals to
follow him in special ways*

By Abbot Denis Farkasfalvy

With the arrival of new candidates every year – now for the fourth consecutive year – it was tempting to write the stories that brought ten brothers into the Abbey in less than five years.

But this is not yet the time – if the time should ever arrive – to put those stories into an essay like this. I would like, however, to share with you the project of a book, a book which I have tentatively named "The Biblical Stories of God's Call."

The project slowly took shape in my mind both as I met the need for the pastoral

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A theology of vocations

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care of vocations to the priesthood and the religious life, and as I began encountering a number of people each year carrying in their hearts the early seeds of a vocation, but needing to be instructed about its nature and the care it requires.

There is little doubt about the shortage in vocations. A variety of diagnostic and problem-solving essays has appeared in religious publications. Many of these reflections sincerely express the magnitude of the crisis, but obscurity reigns about the nature of the problem. From the simple-minded, fast-food kitchen of pop psychologists we have most recently received such approaches as the “God or the Girl” reality show, to which recently the news item was added: “three of the four interviewed for the show have chosen the girl instead of God!”

The ordinary Catholic’s head starts to spin. Is a sacred calling just about a rivalry between God and Girls? What kinds of girls are willing to prey on God’s harvest, anyhow?

Maybe more importantly, what concept of God is being used: God in competition with His creation? Or, if one is sensitive to the way minds are manipulated: is this just the clever suggestion of an amateur solution, “God and the Girl?”

Do our good people producing and propagating such products realize that there exists a “theology of vocation?” Religious life in the Catholic Church is built upon a foundation that goes back to the gospels.

The first writings that explicitly deal with vocation to the consecrated life go back to the third century. Reflection on such matters has always been a part of Christian theology and spirituality. Yet many Catholics who grew up in the last thirty years, and most of the writers and editors of religious publications, have become disconnected from the essential elements in this tradition.

Rather than further lamenting these facts and guessing about the causes, let us line up the job that lies ahead when re-developing a theology of vocation as a partial remedy for today’s situation.

Theology begins with God’s word. Thus, we first turn to the Bible.

From the very beginning of our salvation history, God has approached individuals and chosen them to follow him in special ways for special tasks. God surprises individuals by revealing himself, inviting them to particular familiarity with him and engaging them to follow him on special paths for further goals, goals which only He knows. So it starts in Genesis:

Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” (Gen 12:1-3)

In the next phase of this history, Moses was chosen in a similar “vocation scene:”

God called to him out of the bush, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.” Then he said, “Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” He said further, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.”

And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. Then the Lord said: ... So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.” (Exodus 3:4-10)

In a similar way were the Judges chosen.

The most detailed history is that of Samuel, who was called as a mere child and lived in a time when “such calls from God were rare” and the knowledge of how to handle them was not widespread. It seems that the high priest Eli, although negligent in the proper upbringing of his own two sons, was the first leader who understood the need for the pastoral care of vocations. For the Bible tells us:

The Lord called again, “Samuel!” Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” But he said, “I did not call, my son; lie down again.” Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. The Lord called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” Then Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the boy. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, “Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, ‘Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.’”

So Samuel went and lay down in his place. Now the Lord came and stood there, calling as before, “Samuel! Samuel!” And Samuel said, “Speak, for your

servant is listening.”

Then the Lord said to Samuel, “See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make both ears of anyone who hears of it tingle. (1 Samuel 3:6-11)

So it was not the priest, Eli, who planted the call. Samuel might have thought for a while that the call came on behalf of his “role model,” but no, Samuel had to be taught to understand how God approaches the human heart and starts a man on a prophetic mission.

You might do the rest of this lesson as homework. Fortunately, the three greatest prophets of the Old Testament left for us the story of their vocation: Isaiah in Isaiah 6:1-6; and both Jeremiah and Ezekiel at the very beginning of their respective books.

We just skimmed over the surface of the Old Testament. How much more there is! And the vocation stories of the New Testament are also many: The call of the Virgin Mary, the vocation of Joseph, the call of Peter, Matthew, Andrew, James and John, the Twelve as a group, the conversion and call of Saul who becomes Paul.

Open your eyes and see that Scripture is full of this hope-filled teaching: the harvest is abundant and the owner is recruiting.

He has tasks for all of his servants, and calls some of them to labor especially close to the desires of his heart.

God surprises
individuals by
revealing himself,
inviting them to
particular familiarity
with him and
engaging them
to follow him.

Behind the naming of our new novices

Since the monastery functions as one single family, we want to call each other by our first names.

To avoid ambiguity, each member should have a different first name. This is the practical reason why each person receives a new name when he enters the monastery.

There is, of course, also a deeper reason. When he receives the habit, the novice is told to go through a conversion: to leave behind “the old man” – his old self of sins and vices – and put on a new man, formed in God’s image and likeness.

This transfiguration is also expressed in the Book of Revelation: “To everyone who conquers I will give ... a new name that no one knows except the one who receives it” (2:1).

Thus inspired, monasteries follow the ancient custom of giving a new candidate, together with the religious habit, “a name in religion.” In our monastery this new name is both chosen and assigned; some

time before taking his habit, the candidate submits three possible names, and the Abbot chooses one of these three names and assigns it to the candidate during the ceremony of investiture.

Making these choices is a great exercise for the candidate. He thinks about the names of patron saints he likes and the reasons for which these names appear attractive to him.

Similarly, the abbot must decide on the name by which each candidate will be identified and called, possibly for the rest of his life. This year’s choices were just as exciting and interesting as before.

Andrew Gregg received as his patron the first English Cistercian, one of the founders of Citeaux, St. Stephen Harding, a man who created the first documents of the Order, authoring the “Charta Caritatis” (a “charter of charity”) as its first constitution.

Ed Brophy (whose baptismal name is already that of a Cistercian saint, St. Edmond of Abingdon) received the name of

one of the best-known Roman martyrs, St. Lawrence, a deacon burned to death while fastened to an iron grill under the reign of Valerian in 258.

Legend says that he was so strong-willed that instead of giving in to the Romans and releasing information about the Church’s valuables, at the point of death he exclaimed, “I am done on this side! Turn me over and eat.”

Nicholas Frei has received the name of Nathanael, a man John’s Gospel identifies as one of the first to follow Christ (Jn 1:47). He is often identified (by cross references among the gospels) with the apostle Bartholomew; John’s gospel uses his Hebrew name Nathanael (“gift of God”).

Jesus calls him “a true Israelite Israel in whom there is no deceit” (Jn 1:47).

Of course, these three new names note three new feast days on the Abbey’s calendar: Stephen Harding on January 26, Lawrence on August 10, and Nathanael/Bartholomew on August 24.

Honoring the memory of Fr. Lawrence ‘Sigmond

New novice Ed Brophy ’01 takes the name of Zirc’s persecuted novice master

Giving the name Lawrence to a new novice brings back the memory of a moving event.

Five years ago, June 25, 2001, a long-pursued goal was reached. On that day, the remains of Fr. Lawrence ‘Sigmond were finally transferred into the basilica of Zirc.

Fr. Lawrence was the last novice master of Zirc before the Abbey was suppressed, and served as the imprisoned Abbot’s Vicar and substitute during the first decade of his

captivity, from 1950 – 1964.

Fr. Lawrence himself was imprisoned for several years, but released under a general amnesty in 1964 with special provisions never to resume his ministry promoting young vocations.

As former novices under Fr. Lawrence’s guidance, Fr. Roch and myself represented the community of Dallas at this burial Mass, and I preached the homily. After the mass, the remains of Fr. Lawrence were entombed in the basilica and a marble plaque like those for the abbatial tombs was affixed on the wall (see text in box).

At the tombstone’s blessing, Abbot Polycarp of Zirc, uttered the statement: “Fifty-five years ago as a novice I received Fr. Lawrence’s teaching. I have lived from that treasure ever since. Fr. Lawrence, we ask you to remain with us, because our monastery needs your guidance, teaching and example more than ever!”

Among those present at this reburial there were five newly graduated alumni of CPS, Class 2001, one of whom was Ed Brophy.

As the abbot of Dallas, I had in my heart two prayers: I entrusted Ed’s vocation to the priesthood to Fr. Lawrence and

“I STRIKE THE SHEPHERD
AND THE SHEEP
WILL BE SCATTERED.” (MK 14:7)

HERE ARE
AWAITING THE GLORIOUS DAY
OF THE RESURRECTION
THE EARTHLY REMAINS OF
FR. LAWRENCE ‘SIGMOND
(1911-1964)
ABBATIAL VICAR (1950-1964).
GOOD AND PRUDENT SERVANT,
FAITHFUL SHEPHERD
OF A SCATTERED FLOCK
AND TRUE WITNESS
TO THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST.



Fr. Lawrence ‘Sigmond

repeated my timid petition for five solid vocations in ten years.

Now, five years later, I can tell you the response by Fr. Lawrence: ten vocations in five years. One of them, Ed, chose the name Lawrence when taking the habit.

Is this a miracle or just a legend suited for our times?

You decide, but never forget.

Abbey Church Services

Office of Readings and Morning Prayer	6 am
Daily Mass Monday through Saturday	6:30 am
Mass on Saturday	9 am
Evening Prayer	6 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.

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50 years ago in Budapest

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On the fourth day, Fr. Lawrence 'Sigmond (our novice master, whose story is told on page 3) offered mass and we professed our first vows.

For security, we did not write down our vows as Canon Law required; we just signed a Holy Card with the date September 1, 1956. Our poverty, our sense of being persecuted for an act by which we dedicated ourselves to God, gave us a sense of happiness and stored up in us, we thought, a great deal of energy so that we could face years, even decades of religious life in a hostile secular world.

After the ceremony we locked up the shack and, together with Fr. Lawrence, returned to the city where he invited us to breakfast at a café which was virtually empty. After three days of fasting the meal tasted like a heavenly feast.

As we were savoring our dessert, a man jumped out from the corner, ran to us and greeted us in a loud voice: "O what a nice family gathering: two young men with their teacher!" From under his coat he pulled out a camera, took a quick picture and ran away. We had lived long enough under communism to decipher what this meant.

A chill descended upon our happiness. Fr. Lawrence's face hardened as he said: "We must leave right away. I hope it was only a warning." Konrad and I, still clinging to the last fragments of our happy feelings, hurriedly walked out and took the next street car home.

We promised each other that every year on September 1, for the rest of our lives, we would eat breakfast together. We never did. Konrad enrolled as a seminarian in the Theological Academy of Budapest, while



Colorado summer fun

Enjoying dinner at fresco at the Bush family cabin are (l-r) Brs. Augustine, Joseph, Ignatius, and Ambrose.

I continued the drudgery of Law School, also in Budapest. Not for long, however.

On October 23, 1956 the Hungarian Revolution broke out as suddenly as a storm. A month later, after some persuasion from Fr. Lawrence, I began my journey to the West. Sitting on sacks of salt to be transported to the Western border, I was on my way meandering out of Budapest, when suddenly I saw Fr. Lawrence walking in front of me on the sidewalk.

I began to wave my arms and shout, trying to make him notice me on the truck, but, he kept walking with eyes fixed into the distance as the truck passed him by. I was shouting at the top of my voice, but he kept



20-year-old Br. Denis Farkasfalvy in Rome in Dec. 1956, having escaped after the October 1956 Revolution.

walking until he faded from sight.

He had literally walked out my life. Or had I been mercilessly carried away from him riding on the truck of my destiny, never to see him again.

Well, I did see him once more, but only in a vision (nothing supernatural). It was the product of a tired fantasy and aching heart.

In the summer of 1958, in a boring French class at the Catholic University of Paris, I began to see him unexpectedly with the eyes of my imagination, walking in the night, crossing the street, moving slowly but tirelessly in the middle of silence and loneliness.

As if by instinct, I began to write a poem about an old man (he was barely 50 ...) crossing over an abandoned street, thinking about his sons scattered in the world, whom he formed and sent away on a long journey.

Those sons are still nourished by the teaching he gave them, seeking to build new homes and communities wherever God leads them. Then in my fantasy the old man grew tall, his clothes began to shine, he was walking in a long white robe with other men walking behind him in single file, all robed in white garments.

By the time I came to Dallas, Fr. Lawrence was in prison. By the time I began teaching, he was dead.

Like those in the Book of Revelation, Fr. Lawrence is clothed in white and following the Lamb wherever he leads.