

# Laying a foundation

*Between 1955 and 1958, the newly arrived Cistercians helped found the University of Dallas, carved out a piece of land, and built a monastery.*

By Brian Melton '71

*Editor's note: This is the third in an occasional series of stories celebrating the Cistercian's 50 years in Texas.*

By 1955, things finally seemed to be going right for the beleaguered Hungarian Cistercians. Behind them lay two intensely traumatic experiences: first, their harrowing escape from Soviet authorities back home, and second, the bitter disagreement with their own abbot general from Rome, Sighard Kleiner. His autocratic, imperious orders for them — to live a life of contemplative farm work and prayer at the tiny Spring Bank Monastery in Wisconsin — sat about as well as the forced Soviet suppression of their beloved abbey back home in Zirc (pronounced “Zeerts”), Hungary.

Ahead of them lay a glittering invitation from no less an eminence than the newly-appointed Bishop of the Dallas/Fort Worth diocese, Thomas K. Gorman — come to Dallas and help lift a brand-new project, the fledgling University of Dallas, off the ground.

Bishop Gorman's awareness of the Cistercians came from the Sisters of Saint Mary of Namur, who operated several Catholic schools throughout Texas and were the driving force behind creating the new University of Dallas. Already impressed by the performance reports of two Cistercians (Frs. George Ferenczy and Odo Egres) recruited to teach at the sisters' local secondary schools that previous autumn, Gorman saw definite dividends in encouraging the monks to move en masse from Wisconsin to Dallas. And many of the monks saw advantages in getting out of snowbound Wisconsin and away from frosty Kleiner.

Simply put, the monks needed jobs and Gorman needed teachers. The match seemed made in heaven. But as the Cistercians were about to find out, even providence had its limits.

Not that there was anything to complain about when it came to their new digs in Texas. February found the first seven monks (Frs. Damian Szödény, Thomas Fehér, Lambert Simon, Benedict Monostori, George, Christopher Rábay, and Odo) living and working at Our Lady of Victory in Fort Worth and several other parishes and schools throughout Dallas. And when Fr. Anselm Nagy came down from Wisconsin in the spring, he established residence at the former Bishop Lynch's stately mansion on Dallas's tony Swiss Avenue (4946), which became the unofficial gathering place of his new little flock.

Even better, permission for a Cistercian residence in Dallas came straight from the Holy See and sailed effortlessly through the diocesan attorney's office in March, as did the incipient monastery's successful incorporation in the State of Texas. And in June, at the Order's request, Fr. Anselm was finally officially appointed “Vicar of the Abbot of Zirc” by the Holy See, thus giving him authority to act as leader for the refugee Hungarian Cistercians.

Nevertheless, challenges loomed.

The first came in April when, in a surprise move, the Sisters of Namur (the original proponents and prime movers behind the University of Dallas), backed out of the deal, leaving the monks nervous about the university's teaching prospects (see “Mothers, and sisters, of invention” on page 12).

Concerns also surrounded how the monks would staff the university. While virtually all of the Hungarians wanted to put Spring Bank and its lifestyle behind them, some were already settled into productive routines elsewhere in the U.S. and were hesitant to move to Texas — especially for the vague promise of a university that existed only in blueprints. And despite Anselm's new authority, he lacked the desire simply to order his little flock to Dallas. But happily, most of the priests felt no reluctance whatsoever about the move.

Fr. Benedict, for one, was delighted to shake the Wisconsin snow off his cassock. He looked forward to the change in scenery and professed jubilation about their future prospects. “For many of us and for me in particular,” he recalled recently, “there was no sense of desperation. It was a joyful time, a time of possibilities and expectation, full of planning and readiness. We were looking at the future, not the past, and personally, I was more than ready. Then again,” he added with a laugh, “we were young and foolish.”

### Assimilating into Dallas

The exodus took place gradually over the course of months, as monks arrived individually or in small groups of two or three. They were quickly assigned housing at a Sisters of Namur school, or a local parish, or later the house on Swiss Avenue, which officially became the first Cistercian house in Texas on May 19, 1955, with solemn vespers and benediction by Bishop Gorman.

Fr. Melchior Chladek was one of those lucky priests assigned to live at Swiss Avenue. Although ordained in Milwaukee in 1955, he nevertheless chose to perform his first Mass at the new residence, one day after the official opening. His decision was symbolic, a deliberate statement that his new life had finally begun.

“For me, my new priestly life and my teaching vocation were now underway in my new home,” he said. “It seemed appropriate to celebrate with my very first Mass in Dallas.”

As the youngest priest in the community, Melchior found himself “low man on the totem pole,” tending to many of the various subordinate jobs that helped support the monks in their new community, including serving as errand boy and as Fr. Anselm’s unofficial administrator. Inexplicably, Melchior’s wide-eyed youth was also seen as a perfectly logical qualification to serve as the house’s general chauffeur.

“I was just 24 years old when they handed me the keys to a 1948 four-door Packard, which we received as a donation,” Melchior said. “The hood was miles long and it had whitewalls and an automatic shift, too, which was new and unusual at the time. One afternoon, I was stopped by the police as I was coming back from biology lab at SMU where I was taking courses. The officer said he’d followed me for two miles on Central Expressway and wondered why I was in such a hurry. I told him I was trying to get back in time for choir and prayers. He was flabbergasted but fortunately, I was wearing my Roman collar and he let me go with a warning. I remember that vividly,” he chuckled.

Another aspect of their new life that took the Hungarians some getting used to: the sweltering Texas heat.

“It was a furnace,” Benedict recalled. “You stepped out from the house onto the concrete sidewalks in the middle of July and couldn’t believe the heat. Now, was this worse than Milwaukee in the middle of winter? I don’t know, but it was certainly extreme.”

Fine dining became an indulgence from the old country that aided their adjustment. And it was one evening, over Fr. Lambert’s dinner of genuine Hungarian Chicken Paprikash that the priests,

along with Kenneth Brasted (U.D.’s incoming president) and several board members, began laying out the new school’s schedule and curriculum.

“There was no more doubt about the reality of the university,” recalls Fr. Melchior. “While everyone was new to the whole planning process, a good deal of significant headway was made in the hours before dinner. And after that, all I remember was that the Americans asked for second and then third servings, so everything must have been running well! And while we adapted to a vastly different way of life from what we had known back home, we were excited and ready to begin.”



**CHARTER FACULTY MEMBERS**  
**Fr. Benedict Monostori (left)**  
**and Fr. Ralph March (who still**  
**teaches at the university)**  
**served on UD’s first faculty in 1956.**

### Wrangling at Turkey Knob

While the Sisters of Namur created the concept of the University of Dallas, it was Bishop Gorman who brought it to reality. And to the surprise of no one who knew him well, he assumed the project from the sisters with undisguised zeal. A talented administrator with a strong sense of urgency, he quickly assembled a distinguished board of trustees to help him handle the massive undertaking.

Their first step — find a location — fast.

As originally planned by the sisters, the new university would have been located in the Victorian building occupied by Jesuit High School, at the corner of Oak Lawn and Blackburn, directly across from Dallas’ Holy Trinity Church. But under Gorman, the project’s scope expanded so greatly that the grand old edifice was deemed insufficient.

After considering more than 20 sites, the board settled on an unincorporated parcel of nearly 1,200 acres in west Dallas county known variously as “Turkey Knob” and also, due to its high elevation, “Signal Hill.” The land acquisition cheered Fr. Anselm as much as Bishop Gorman, because it meant that real jobs at U.D. were not far behind. But for Anselm, the acquisition also meant that he was one step closer to a permanent home for the Cistercians, and he wasted no time in negotiating for a slice of the acreage.

Blessed with patience and a solid vision of his desired outcome, Anselm was also a master negotiator. As Fr. Benedict wryly noted,

“Anselm could argue with the devil and still get what he wanted.” Plus, Anselm knew he had leverage: the bishop desperately needed experienced teachers who could step up quickly and serve the new university over the long term.

On February 4, 1956, groundbreaking ceremonies signaled the start of construction on the first buildings at the University of Dallas. Around that time, a confident Anselm went to Gorman’s board with a request that seemed eminently reasonable: fifty acres for the Cistercians, which would provide enough for the seclusion of a monastery and still be in proximity to the new university.

The board immediately countered with an offer of ten acres. Gorman, no slouch in the negotiating department himself, undoubtedly

sor, Abbot Denis Farkasfalvy. “The goal was to build a monastery in a remote and isolated area with no immediate neighbors. Fifty years ago, that was not a problem. Today, even though enormous development is taking place nearby, we are still in a remote and isolated area with no immediate neighbors. It was really a very good choice.”

The same architectural firm that designed several major buildings at U.D. was retained to begin drawing up plans for the first wing of the new monastery — 15 rooms, a small chapel, refectory, kitchen and office space, all equipped with central air conditioning, much to everyone’s relief. And even though the official deed to the property would not be handed over until autumn, the technicality was immaterial: “Our Lady of Dallas” was becoming reality.

But even with real estate and cultural challenges in the rear view mirror, the next challenge loomed as 1956 flowed into 1957 — staffing up for the University of Dallas, scheduled to open in a matter of months.

### The clock is ticking

“I got the impression that everybody was scared, including me,” said Dr. Gene Curtsinger, describing the mood of the fledgling staff as they worked to assemble the university’s first-ever curriculum. A World War II veteran with a Ph.D. in English from Notre Dame, Curtsinger was hired to do double duty, serving as both U.D.’s first English department chair and academic dean. “I guess I overdid it on my job application, because I didn’t even know what an academic dean was.”

Any initial nervousness on his part was quickly soothed by the powerful, confident assurance projected by the Cistercians. “Fr. Ralph had given an impressive talk on Sartre in Milwaukee at Marquette that I happened to attend,” remembered Curtsinger. “So I was surprised to see him again and heartened to know that he, along with others, would be on our faculty.”

Curtsinger was even more impressed when he was invited to attend a dinner one weekend at the Swiss Avenue residence. “We sat around the table and the conversation roamed from English to Hungarian to French to German, complete with multilingual puns and intellectual asides that left me in the dust. I had complete admiration for those men from that moment on. They weren’t beginners in the education field by any means; they were thoroughly bright professionals. You couldn’t always understand them,” he acknowledged with a chuckle, “but they knew what they were doing.”

While plans for the university progressed and construction continued feverishly on the new campus, negotiations with Bishop Gorman on an employment contract for the Cistercians were not keeping pace. Fr. Anselm grew increasingly nervous, aware that his bargaining strength ebbed every day. He also knew all too well that, while many of the monks had teaching experience back in Hungary and Rome, several lacked the degrees required for full professor positions in America.

“Prior Anselm was a skillful negotiator, especially given that he



felt the standing offer was eminently generous and threw his full support behind his board.

Anselm responded, not with another number, but with a strong justification for his request: the new Cistercian monastery, he explained, would be more than just a dorm for priests who taught at the university. Anselm envisioned a full-service monastery and as such, required facilities for novices and seminary students, eventually a secondary school (*gymnasium*, in the tradition of Zirc) and one day, a church that would perhaps even be combined with a parish.

The board responded with the observation that Jesuit High School managed to get by just fine with only ten acres. Anselm patiently pointed out that Cistercians were not carbon-copy Jesuits and reiterated that their order’s 900-plus year’s worth of monastic traditions called for space for permanent privacy and for developing extensive educational facilities. He then conceded that 40 acres might be sufficient.

Gorman nodded in agreement, the board approved, and it looked like the deal was done. But shortly thereafter, the bishop unilaterally lowered the offer to 35 acres and then finally delivered only 34 — “half in a flood plain and a veritable jungle,” noted Fr. Benedict. Nevertheless, Anselm was satisfied.

“The abbot’s decision not only stood the test of time, but in fact we now know just how lucky we were,” emphasized Anselm’s succes-

### PIONEERING PROFESSORS

**Several Cistercians can be seen in this 1956 photo of UD’s first faculty. Standing in the center to the right of the two sisters are (l-r) Fr. Ralph, Fr. Benedict, Fr. Christopher, Fr. Theodosius, and Fr. George. Fr. Odo is standing second from the right. Fr. Anselm is seated on the far right with Dr. Gene Curtsinger seated next to him. Fr. Damian and Fr. Louis are obscured.**



was still so young at the time,” said Abbot Denis. “But the Cistercians had no money, status or backup support then. He was completely at the mercy of the university and, to a great degree, the contract he signed reflected that powerlessness. It was better than nothing,” Denis added quickly, “but it was by no means the perfect answer to their prayers, and he knew it all too well.”

Reluctantly, Anselm signed a group contract with the University of Dallas on June 23, 1956, and with that one pen stroke, nine Cistercian Hungarian monks were suddenly and exactly half the core faculty of eighteen teachers at the new institution (see box). Nevertheless, the contract terms left a bad taste in their mouths that lingered for years.

Anselm clearly had hopes that, as the monks grew into their positions and earned additional degrees, their pay would increase to reflect their expanding contributions. “That’s why Abbot Anselm suggested I go to Fordham for a degree in physics,” explained Fr. Benedict, “and I was glad to go and get it.” (He received his Ph.D in physics from Fordham in 1964 and headed up the physics department at U.D. as acting chairman (1962 to 1966) and as chairman (1971 to 1986).

But the hoped-for payoff failed to materialize until nearly 20 years later, when longtime Cistercian benefactor Bryan F. Smith, serving as U.D.’s chancellor and acting president (1976 to 1978), righted the ancient wrong and decreed competitive salaries for Cistercians a top priority.

Grumbles about pay inequities notwithstanding, the monks were much better off than they’d been a mere two years before, spinning their wheels in Wisconsin. With secure, if temporary, roofs over their heads, plans for a permanent home well underway and job opportunities both at U.D. and in various parishes aplenty, they were well on their way to a brighter future and to fulfilling their educational apostolate.

### Who’ll stop the rain?

On Sunday, September 22, 1956, the University of Dallas opened its doors for business. And while the day was mercifully sunny, the year’s extended drought yielded to a soggy first semester for the 96 students and 18 teachers alike.

“Rain, rain and more rain,” recalled Curtsinger. “We had no sidewalks and after no rain for months, the mud just stuck like glue to the bottom of your shoes in layers. I’d walk from the car to my office and be seven inches taller.”

Fr. Damian, one of the first Cistercian monks to come to Dallas (and later first headmaster of Cistercian Preparatory School), taught philosophy and psychology that first year. He also served as U.D.’s first Dean of Men. However, his job description failed to encompass tasks like fetching a new pair of slacks for President Brasted, who

accidentally drove his car into a mud-swollen ditch and was forced to tramp to his office covered in muck.

“Damian was one of the most cultured men I’d ever met,” Curtsinger says. “His attitude was always great, but he was more accustomed to dealing with intellectual issues. But that’s not to say he didn’t have a streak of the dramatic in him. He came into my office one morning, waving around the recommended psychology text and refused to use it, declaring, ‘This is potty training!’ I told him, fine, teach what you want. And he did, and it was, of course, excellent.”

Fr. Damian continued to teach at the new university, but he quietly yet firmly declined the opportunity to serve another term as Dean of

Men. His ability to adapt to new situations was mirrored by the flexibility of his countrymen. But while the Hungarians were more than willing to adapt to American culture, they were steadfast about discipline and study routines.

“The Cistercians didn’t put up with any nonsense,” recalled Curtsinger. “Fr. Lambert taught chemistry, and if a student didn’t show up at 8 a.m., he’d go right over to the dorm and get him out of bed. And Fr. George always told me that if I needed to have any course staffed, just give him the textbook and a ten-minute head start and he could teach anything. And I believed him. He was smart enough to do it.”

Perhaps the most difficult adjustment for the Cistercians was adapting to what they perceived as a certain laxity about testing and student evaluation methods.

Fr. Benedict, in particular, remembered being “horrified” by true/false and multiple choice quizzes. “Abomination! As a student in Hungary, you stood in front of a panel of teachers and answered the questions they put to you. Only in this way could the examiners be assured that the student knew the material.

But in America, testing was simply a guessing game. I never got used to it,” he said, adding with a chuckle, “and I still don’t like it.”

“The Cistercians simply had no experience with American traditions in higher education,” added U.D.’s associate provost and longtime historian Sybil Novinski, (also the energetic mother of five Cistercian Prep graduates). “So they perhaps had a little disdain for it at first, especially in high school, because they weren’t quite sure students were prepared. At first, that perception caused a few tensions between students and monks,” she admitted, “but it all worked out just fine, even with sorting through the ‘interesting’ language difficulties.”

“The Cistercians brought an international sophistication to this brand-new school out in the middle of nowhere,” she continued. “To be able to start a university with bright, educated monks, with traditions reaching back to the 11th century, was just amazing. The university’s intellectual reach and aspirations were strongly influenced by the Cistercians, and everyone knew that, even back then.”

## UD’s “founding fathers”

Cistercian monks comprised one-half of the University of Dallas’s first faculty in 1956.

### Fr. Damian Szódény†

associate professor of philosophy and psychology and also served as dean of men

### Fr. Anselm Nagy†

associate professor of theology

### Fr. Benedict Monostori

instructor in philosophy and later, chair of the physics department

### Fr. Christopher Rábay†

instructor in philosophy and theology

### Fr. George Ferenczy†

assistant professor of languages and music

### Fr. Louis Lékai†

associate professor of history

### Fr. Odo Egres†

associate professor of philosophy and foreign languages

### Fr. Ralph March

associate professor for foreign languages and music

### Fr. Theodosius Demen†

instructor in physics and mathematics

† deceased

Curtsinger echoed Novinski's sentiment, "I'm sure we could have made it without them. We just would have been a lot dumber and slower. They were an amazing group of men."

Perhaps even more amazing were the events about to unfold back in Europe that would soon engender an entirely new challenge for their little monastery.

### Revolution and renewal

Just one month and a day after U.D. opened, the October Revolution rocked Soviet-controlled Hungary. Within days, hundreds of thousands of refugees were streaming across Europe to new homes around the world. Fifteen of those refugees were Cistercians (including one high school student who later became a seminarian, priest and then headmaster of Cistercian Prep, Bernard Marton), who found themselves, after several nerve-wracking border crossings, in the safety of the west and Rome.

To Anselm, the unplanned migration was a providential blessing. In his mind, the fifteen newly arrived seminarians were perfectly placed to continue their educations, gain their priestly ordination and when the time came, emigrate to Dallas and to become teachers, and not just at the University of Dallas. Because by the time the young monks were ready, he intended that the secondary school he envisioned would be ready, too.

As a result, Anselm wasted no time in flying to Rome in 1957 for what Abbot Denis called "a recruiting trip." At the time, he was not amused.

"When I crossed the border," Abbot Denis recalled, "people were still shooting at each other. Rome was on the itinerary, not America. Not yet, at least. And then Anselm comes into our meeting room and the first words out of his mouth were, 'Don't be afraid of America.' And I'm thinking to myself, 'We're trapped, he's not even asking us what we want to do, he's telling us what we will do and what will

## Mothers (and sisters) of invention

*The University of Dallas began as the brainchild of the Sisters of St. Mary of Namur*

Founded by Cistercian Fr. Nicholas Joseph Minsart in 1819 near Namur, Belgium, the Sisters of St. Mary of Namur quickly established themselves as outstanding educators, organizers and missionaries, and began spreading their order throughout the world. But successful as they were, nothing could have prepared them for their arrival in — of all places — Waco, Texas, in 1873.

The oppressive heat, endless plague of insects on vast, dusty plains and serious lack of interest from locals spelled doom — only eight people attended their first organized High Mass in Waco, and an outbreak of yellow fever slowed their development work to a halt.

Nevertheless, the nuns gamely hung on and by 1952, they were operating seven schools throughout north Texas, and another 13 across the state. One school in particular, Our Lady of Victory Academy in Fort Worth, was bursting at the seams with new enrollments. The time seemed ripe to take their efforts to a new level and create a full four-year university, fully Catholic in heritage yet non-denominational in enrollment, with an integrated, coeducational student body.

The order's Superior, Mother Theresa Weber, called on Bishop Thomas K. Gorman and enthusiastically explained her idea for the new university. Just as enthusiastically, he accepted her offer to donate her order's services as administrators and teachers. And he welcomed her influential fundraising contacts throughout the Dallas lay community and their pledges to help get the project off the ground.

Meanwhile, entirely by coincidence, Fr. George Ferenczy, one of the Hungarian Cistercians living at Spring Bank in Wisconsin, accepted a summer music workshop scholarship at Midwestern University in Wichita Falls. Through a mutual friend, George was introduced to the sisters and heard about their need for teachers at their schools, as well as their ambitious plans for a new university. George immediately contacted his fellow priests back at Spring Bank and said, in no uncertain terms, "This is where we're supposed to be. This is the place."

By 1955, the Cistercians were making their way to Texas and preparing to become university professors and teachers at the order's secondary schools. But behind the scenes, the sisters were be-

ginning to second-guess themselves. Yes, their new enterprise, now called "The University of Dallas," had the support of the entire diocese and the expertise of the Cistercians. And yes, the sisters had done an incredible job of raising funds, acquiring land, finding additional teaching staff and even hiring a qualified president.

But every time they pondered the scale of their new enterprise, it seemed to grow tenfold. The sheer scope of their plan for a college has bloomed beyond their wildest dreams — and outgrown their capacity to effectively control the project with their available resources.

After much internal debate and discussion with their Mother General back in Belgium, the decision was made: ask Bishop Gorman to take over the project. He described the pivotal meeting: "Two weeping nuns came to see me and said, 'Here, take it, the responsibility, the \$2 million-plus raised, the thousand acres, the Our Lady of Victory accreditations, the president we hired, and our continued service.'"

But while the bishop agreed to take over the project, the sisters remained to carry on their missionary work of teaching and administering for the next several generations. When the University of Dallas officially opened on September 24, 1956, four sisters were among the original faculty and administration. Sister Mary Ellen served as the university's first Dean of Women until 1971. Sister Mary Margaret served as university Registrar until 1973. The first librarian, Sister Martin Joseph, served until 1961 and still tells wonderful stories about trying to collect, organize and shelve hundreds of books in time for the official opening. Sister Francis Marie served the longest term, teaching English until 1985. And while not an original faculty member, Sister St. John Begnaud taught English and developed the programs for seminarians, retiring in 2001.

While the sisters may have relinquished overall control of the project, their influence remained strong, creating a legacy that continues to permeate the spirit of the university today. Their founding concept, administrative expertise and spiritual wisdom continue to guide students, faculty and staff in the tradition set forth by the original Belgian Sisters of Saint Mary of Namur.

— Brian Melton '71

happen six years from now. Does this fellow have a crystal ball? Well, as it turns out, of course, he did, and most of us wound up in Dallas, quite happily so.”

A more surprising and unlikely prediction would have been the full and unconditional support for the Dallas-based Cistercian refugees by the icy Abbot General Sighard Kleiner. Yet in a shocking reversal, that’s exactly what happened.

### What goes around, comes around

In a letter to the worldwide Cistercian Order, Abbot General Sighard Kleiner appeared to have undergone a complete change of heart and was now urging every Cistercian community within the order to help the beleaguered monks behind the Iron Curtain with whatever support could be mustered. Inherent in his letter was the message, “Whatever differences we had in the past with Zirc and any of its monks, wherever they may be, are done and finished with. We are all on the same team.”

This total about-face was welcome news on two fronts: one, it meant that bridges formerly thought burned with their superior were, in fact, intact. Two, Kleiner’s global call to action took financial pressure off the Dallas Cistercians, who were squirreling away every nickel in order to build their monastery as they also worried about sending desperately-needed financial support back to Zirc.

Abbot Denis attributed Kleiner’s change of heart to his practicality and acumen. “Kleiner was enough of a politician to see the handwriting on the wall. The Dallas Cistercians were making good things happen. It would have been foolish for him to continue in opposition, and he was no fool.”

So it was with high spirits and higher hopes that construction finally began on “Our Lady of Dallas” monastery on March 30, 1957, on the land granted by Bishop Gorman the year before. But even given Kleiner’s new-found amiability, it was a shock when the Abbot General agreed to make a special trip from Rome to Dallas for the express reason of attending the monastery’s official opening ceremony on February 9, 1958.

Bishop Gorman presided over the ceremony and with typical grace, welcomed Abbot General Kleiner warmly.

Upon his arrival, Kleiner shocked the monks again with his hearty optimism about the monastery’s prospects. All the things he had previously objected to — including the desire for independence and to open a novitiate — were dismissed with a wave of the hand. He eagerly approved of Masses with Gregorian chants, common prayer of all the hours of the Divine Office, and readings and meditations in common. And it was his positive influence that hastened the slow wheels of church politics, helping the little monastery achieve full abbey status on November 13, 1963 — a (relatively) short five years after opening.

Kleiner’s unabashed approval marked a fitting and providential coda to a long and winding journey for the Hungarian Cistercians. Not many would have given fair odds on the establishment of a European Catholic monastic religious order on the outskirts of

a burgeoning western American city not particularly renowned for religious, much less political, tolerance. Few more would have bet on the enterprise’s long term success.

Perhaps the arrival of the Cistercians at the seemingly destitute hills of what was once called “Turkey Knob” was happenstance, a random confluence of events that just happened to lead to the establishment of a major Texas university and one of America’s greatest secondary schools. Perhaps the events were pre-ordained: As University of Dallas President Donald Cowan (1962-1977) simply yet eloquently said, “There is a spirit that walks these hills.”

Providence or plain luck notwithstanding, there’s no doubt that the single-minded determination of the Hungarian monks to es-



**SURVEYING THE LAND**  
**(l-r) Fr. Aloysius Kimecz, Fr. Benedict Monostori, Fr. Henry Marton, and Fr. Melchior Chladek take a stroll on the Cistercian’s new corner of Texas (circa 1957).**

tablish a meaningful, relevant educational institution had delivered them from state-led oppression to a new land of wide-open opportunity. And by rededicating their lives to what they knew truly mattered — education for the fulfillment of spiritual and intellectual longing — their example continues to imbue genera-

tions of idealistic American students with a strong sense of moral responsibility and personal dignity in a boundless quest for virtue, knowledge and self-improvement.

A plaque in the Constantin Memorial Garden on the University of Dallas campus sums up the continuing Cistercian contribution to the North Texas community:

Cistercian Fathers of Our Lady of Dallas  
Fleeing from persecution  
Hungarian monks came to assist at the foundation  
Of the University of Dallas  
And to build their monastery and school  
Adjacent to the campus  
Their motto “To Enkindle and to Enlighten”

Reminds us of the inspiration they have provided in the search for Truth.

email: melt0032@hotmail.com