

Dear Friends and Visitors

It has been said of Assumption Abbey, Ava, ""there is nothing to do there but live the monastic life.""

""Well,"" you might wonder, ""isn't that what any monastery is for...to live the monastic life? What else would you expect?""

If you define ""monastic life"" by anything that goes on in and around any monastery, or by the way anyone who has monastic vows spends his or her time, then, yes, I guess you could say that in any monastery whatever, all people do is ""live the monastic life.""

But I think the point they want to make about Assumption Abbey is that there really is nothing to do here except live the spare and classical elements of the monastic life.

We are a small group of men of various ages, temperaments, and cultures. We agree on the one thing necessary, our discipleship of Christ according to the Gospel. We commit ourselves to live by a single Rule and be served by a superior. We rise at night to come together to chant psalms and meditate on Scripture as we to anticipate the Lord's coming each day.

We support ourselves by the work of our hands in a simple economy. We punctuate our waking hours with several periods of communal prayer. And we do all this in the atmosphere of silence, peace and natural beauty afforded by our remote location in the center of our thirty-four hundred acres of hardwood forest in the Ozarks.

At Assumption Abbey, there really is nothing to do...except to live the monastic life.

That is why, I believe, our small and homey guest house is appreciated by so many lay folk, religious, and clergy. For everyone has ""something of the monk in her or him,"" and a retreat at Assumption Abbey gives this little archetypal monk scope to play in.

All this is to help explain why there has been no update to our News page in a month or two. It is not that nothing has been going on. It is only that all that has been going on here at Assumption Abbey during June and July is, simply, what we always do, and what we are here to do: the monastic life.

In the last News update, I made mention of our Formation Program. This is the ensemble of personal attention, reading material, classes, and periodic evaluation and feedback that we use

to help newcomers form a monastic heart and assist their passage into the monastic community here at Ava.

The Formation Program follows distinct stages of growth. For the sake of convenience, we use a single term to identify each of these stages:

Orientation (for the one- to three-month period of Observership);

Conformity and Identification (for the three-year period of Postulancy and Novitiate);

Internalization (for the three-year period of simple profession).

During this length period of Initial Monastic Formation, the superior, the novice director, and other senior monks accompany the young monk in reading and reflecting on basic Christian texts. Special attention is given to the patristic and early monastic writers. In the Novitiate, an emphasis is given to the Cistercian Fathers of the 12th century.

During the period of simple profession, prior to his solemn monastic consecration, the young monk will do some proper theological studies, such as Sacred Scripture, Dogmatic Theology, Christology.

Throughout the young monk's initial formation, there is on-going self-reflection and, on the part of the community, evaluation. This self-reflection and evaluation are to help the monk recognize his progress in living the monastic life as a member of this particular community. The Order's Abbot General, Bernardo Oliver, made the following remark in a recent conference in Africa. He states here, in general terms, what our local Formation Program is aimed at:

Is there a call from God? The following are positive signs of a monastic vocation: the desire to embrace the community life as a way to reach God; the necessary mental, physical and emotional health to live this life fully; a humble docility, founded on a life with God which allows learning how to live without tension, in solitude as well as in community. Affective maturity consists in a certain stability of emotional states, serene identification with one's own sex and the capacity to welcome others as different...All of this will manifest itself in relationships, through the incidents of daily life, the reception of trials that make one humble, and the deepening of a life with God.

In July, Fr Mark was in California for nearly three weeks. The principle motive for his trip was the annual Pastoral Sharing Meeting of the superiors of the eight Trappist-Cistercian

monasteries of the western part of the US Region. This week long meeting took place in Santa Barbara.

Before the meeting, Mark spent a few days with his parents and family in Carmichael; after the meeting he enjoyed a week at his own monastery, the Abbey of New Clairvaux, Vina.

While the monks of Assumption Abbey continue doing nothing but live the monastic life, contractors and workers continue erecting the new monastic buildings. These consist of an infirmary, additional monks' cells, and a novitiate facility. The work is progressing well. Already it is apparent that the beauty suggested by the architect's printed plans will, in fact, be actualized in concrete, stone, wood and glass.

We are still in need of funds to pay for this modest and important building project. If you would like to contribute to our efforts, contact:

Fr Mark, Abbot