

Dear Friends and Visitors

As we come to the end of a tumultuous year, it is the right time to pause and reflect on the abiding Presence of our Heavenly Father and the ongoing redemptive, saving action of Our Lord Jesus, which has been with us day by day.

Fr. Richard finished his course in January. His obituary and photograph are included with this letter. Abbot Mark had always been concerned that he come home to die here in the company of his spiritual family.

Dom Mark completed his service on February 2nd, and is spending a sabbatical year mostly at our monastery in Snowmass, Colorado....along with a few periods of service at monasteries in the Philippines, India, Genesee in New York and Gethsemani in Kentucky. He is the new editor of our Cistercian Studies Quarterly and the liaison for Cistercian Publications at Liturgical Press.

Our triennial General Chapter to Assisi was truly worthwhile. It was encouraging to experience the positive response, which our monks and nuns throughout the world are making to this time of both vigorous new life, but also severe pruning. (Fruit trees and grape vines must wonder what is happening to them, after a year of bountiful harvest.)

The Lay Advisory Group met in October. We reviewed the projects set up last time---renovation of our guesthouse is about half completed, new brochures and fliers for involvement with Assumption Abbey's community and retreat manuals for our guests. Martha Fly really worked at bringing all the elements together for the writing and printing of these items.

Fr. Donald, our oldest monk at 87, gives living evidence of the good fruit resulting from a long monastic lifetime. He is always "chipper as a chipmunk" (as he says), but has lost ground in balance and mental clarity, so that he needed someone nearby 24 hours a day. We applied to Mercy Villa, where Fr. David and Fr. Richard had been cared for, but they had no bed available. Ava has a nursing home called "Heart of the Ozarks." He has settled in there quite well, a bubbly Catholic presence in the Bible Belt community. Jill, our health worker, who lives in Ava, starts each morning bathing and wrapping his legs. We struggled for 3 years to clear up the chronic infection, open sores and edema. Three whirlpool baths a week, special lotion and special wrapping, have his skin in good condition now. Then Jill comes out here for Wally's care and secretarial work.

One advantage to Fr. Donald being in Ava is that our monks can visit him more often, than they can in Springfield, 80 miles away. Deacon Joe from St Leo's parish brings Fr. Donald Holy Communion on Fridays, and we offer Mass there for him and a few others once a week.

Br. Lazarus, our junior, and I have been helping two skilled local men pull off the louver from the highest peak of our library roof. The original roofer did a slap-dash job there and it has been leaking ever since. Finally, after much work and effort the roof does not let the rain inside now. What a contrast from the New Melleray days, when we worked in robe and scapular, four

stories up on scaffolding without any safety belts or nets. The Lord still takes care of fools, drunks, and Trappist monks, (we hope).

Thanks one and all for your interest and support this year.

Fr Cyprian, Abbot



Father Richard Fox
Ava, Missouri (Assumption Abbey Monastery)

Father Richard Fox, the son of James Fox and Margaret (Russell) Fox, was born on July 30, 1933 in Chicago, Illinois and departed this life on January 5, 2008 at the age of 74 years. Father Richard died at Assumption Abbey outside Ava, Missouri, minutes after his monastic brothers had gathered around his bed to pray in midafternoon. We all had gathered to anoint him after morning Mass.

Father Richard entered New Melleray Abbey in Dubuque, Iowa in 1951, right out of high school, following his older brother Jim. He was sent to our new foundation, here in Ava, in 1954, where his manual labor changed from laying block in Iowa to making blocks in Missouri.

In the late 1960's and early 1970, Fr. Richard pursued academic degrees at St. Thomas University, St. Paul, Minnesota and at Notre Dame University, Indiana. He worked out an inner integration, returned nine years later to the Abbey and persevered to the end.

At the Abbey, Father Richard served as director of novices and as bookkeeper. His principal contribution, though, was his talent as a singer. For decades, until his decline in 2002, Father Richard was the cantor for the monastic liturgies. He suffered migraine headaches all of his monastic life. A malignant brain tumor in 1999 began his final purification.

Father Richard was a generous and faithful friend and a compassionate listener. He also had a terrific, if somewhat unusual, sense of humor. His mother asked him, "When will you grow up?" He loved to laugh and up to the last day of his life and in his weakest state, he was ready to laugh and to find the humor in things.

In the monastery, Father Richard spent regular daily periods at reading and meditation. The fruits of his prayer came out in his homilies at Mass, but especially in the honest way that he lived and related to people.

Father Richard spent the last four years of his life in residence at Mercy Villa, Springfield, Missouri. There he was loved by the staff. Even when he could do nothing for himself, he preached the Gospel by his cheerful patience, his ready smile, and his evident gratitude to all who served him.