

Dear Associates and Friends,  
The Lord be with you—

It took a while, but summer finally arrived in August, along with the solemnities of Our Lady's Assumption and St. Bernard of Clairvaux's feast. Our Associates came for a semi-annual retreat during the August 15<sup>th</sup> weekend. A good number have made lifetime covenant commitments with our monastery.

Fr. Paul, using a Tom Sawyer technique, worked with two prospective family brothers to complete cementing the new fish pond and covering the inside and outside with a rubberized coating which is to prevent water damage. The reinforced block pond should not float—however, there are concrete barges towed on the Mississippi River.

A neighbor of ours died not too long ago. Elaine Sorensen, the daughter of Bridget (who was our guest master for years), lived a remarkable life. She was in her early 50's. She was born with a rare heart condition. Her heart pumped blood backwards, so that her system did not get the oxygen supply needed. Elaine was not expected to live, but she did. Then the doctors said she would not survive beyond her teens. Attending school, she would get her next-older brother to defend her from the kids who made fun of her blue lips and fingers.

Elaine had a spunky cheerful spirit. She kept outliving the predictions about her lifespan. Her physicians found medications which helped along the way. She could not meet the demands of a forty hour work week, but always found part time work and volunteer positions to fill her days. She was always on call to help Bridget when our Guest House chores piled up too much.

In more recent years, Elaine went to specialists at Barnes Hospital in St. Louis. There would be a critical issue and the doctors there would pull her through. Finally no regular treatment or different medications were available. They tried an experimental drug which had not been used on humans yet. It worked for her. She was also supposed to use oxygen to help her breathe.

Elaine and her mother were more like sisters than mother and daughter, going places together much of the time. One Monday Elaine had been the Bingo caller as usual at Ava's Senior Center. The next day she shared ice cream at Ava Drug with a hospice nurse. A little later Elaine was found slumped over in her car. She had pulled over and put the car in park. Rescue was called but it was already too late. She had died with her boots on.

The Franciscan Friars next door held Elaine's memorial, Mass and service. Her family and friends filled the chapel. It was a joyous celebration. As her brother remarked, "Elaine would not want us here with long faces."

## A SIGN OF CONTRADICTION

St. Maximilian Kolbe fulfilled old Simeon's prophecy about Infant Jesus being a sign of contradiction.

Maximilian suffered from tuberculosis all of his life, even losing one lung. Yet he drove himself with great energy all of his life. He was not gifted with scholarly talent, but he was sent to Rome for priestly studies and was ordained there. He tended to extremes, but was a popular pastor and drew vocations to his Franciscan friary. His devotion to Our Lady as the Immaculate One was idealistic beyond ordinary bounds, yet he had a deep anti-Semitic current in himself, not seeing Jewish people as Mary's family.

Maximilian made use of the printed word for communication and for spreading devotion to the Immaculate One. He formed a City of the Immaculate in his native Poland. In his apostolic zeal Maximilian went to Japan, not knowing the language but setting up a printing operation for his magazines and booklets. He established a City of the Immaculate One there also. Sometime later he went to India with the same goals.

On the threshold of World War II, Maximilian was made superior of 760 friars residing in his original City of the Immaculate in Poland. In 1939 Germany and Russia divided Poland between themselves. The Nazis began a ruthless campaign to destroy the Catholic Church in Poland and to exterminate the Jewish people. Three thousand Polish refugees flooded into the City of the Immaculate, so followed by 1500 Jewish refugees. Maximilian welcomed them all. In the face of real human tragedy and suffering, the Spirit of Christ in his heart overcame the blind spot of prejudice in his mind.

Maximilian and some of his friars were arrested. He ended up in the Auschwitz concentration camp, where he selflessly ministered to his fellow prisoners. Finally he offered to take the place of a younger father of a family, who was sentenced to death by starvation along with nine others.

Christian holiness is not the same as human perfection. Maximilian Kolbe shows us a paradoxical combination of the greatest love, laying down his life for a fellow human being, and at the same time a great flaw of racial prejudice. We all share to some degree in the sign of contradiction. We and the Church on earth are fallen, wounded children of Adam and Eve, but at the same time are filled with the indwelling Holy Spirit of Christ.

In this country prejudice against African-American people comes from their 300 years of living in slavery and as second class citizens due to what our forefathers imposed on them. In Europe/Poland the prejudice against Jewish people came from Jews living all through the Christian centuries in ghettos as oppressed outsiders, which others imposed on them.

Christ, our Redeemer and Savior, made up for St. Maximilian Kolbe's prejudice in a striking way. One generation after Maximilian, a little Polish boy grew up playing as good friends with a neighboring Jewish boy. Later he helped Jews escape from Nazi persecution, and even carried an exhausted, starving Jewish woman returning from imprisonment. This priest had the same driving energy as Maximilian Kolbe, and he channeled it to open diplomatic relations between the Holy See and the State of Israel. When he visited Israel as Pope John Paul II, he was greeted by his boyhood Jewish friend and also by the Jewish woman he had helped carry home. Oh the depth of the riches and wisdom of God, Who reaches from end to end mightily and governs us on His way of salvation.

In the Sacred Heart,  
Your monks of Ava

