

Dear Associates and Friends,  
The Lord be with you!

Toward the end of a turbulent year, the funeral of President George H. W. Bush gave a moment of reflection and renewal of the more noble ideals and spirit of our American country and history

We have been spread a little thin lately. Fr. Peter is residing at an unoccupied monastery in California preparing it as a residence house for their Vietnamese monks studying in the United States.

Fr. Thaddeus has been in Vietnam since October, preparing for their General Chapter. The Abbot and monks of Our Lady of Divine Grace hoped to request this new foundation be raised to the rank of a Simple Priory. Their General Chapter did vote in favor of this request at the end of November.

One of the three new monks chosen to come here has his visa approved. The other two failed their interviews at the United States embassy in Saigon (Ho Chi Min City). How do you fail an interview? Our Fr. Basil, who has his green card, was interviewed by the American/Vietnamese office there. He answered in English. So the officer next spoke to him in English. Fr. Basil answered in Vietnamese. This did not go down so well, so Fr. Basil flunked that first interview, and had to request a second appointment for approval. We look forward to the arrival of the new three monks.

Fr. Paul has a repair or remodel job waiting for him at his monthly visit. The latest project was tearing out and replacing the wooden door frames at our fire hose house attached to the deep well pump house. Weather and termites had deteriorated the original wooden beams. Fr. Paul crafted a whole new frame with treated wood beams, which support the double door just fine.

Fr. David, guest master at our Holy Family Guest House, went to the hospital with severe back pain. They found he had fractured a small bone in his lower back. He was able to return home with a plastic brace, which will enable the fracture to heal.

Fr. Cyprian had a knee replacement in early November. He is graduating from a walker to a cane at present. His rate of progress recalls our old Irish Br. Ailbe's question, "How did the snail get from Dublin to Rome?...little by little."

Fruit cake sales are good. Br. Francis has a good efficient helper in shipping. Fr. Jarek is spending a month in our Community for discernment regarding his future path in our Lord's service. They make a great team labeling and mailing the outgoing fruit cakes.

Some of our Family Brothers—Dane, James, the two Johns, have rounded off the old year by a few days living within our Community.

We watched and prayed for the new coming of the Lord during the Church's Advent/Christmas season.



For almost 2,000 years the letters B.C. or A.D. added to the number of a year meant *Before Christ* or *The Year of the Lord*. Now our post-modern society uses B.C.E or C.E. to mean *Before the common Era* or *The common Era*. Shades of the difference between *Merry Christmas* or *Happy Holidays*.

As our custom is, we stop baking the last half of December and during January, which gives a little more time to the spiritual side of life during Christmas Season.

Fr. Thaddeus, returning from Vietnam, picked up the flu bug in Chicago. We usually do not get the flu in our small separated Community, but this year it spread among the older monks. The younger men stayed healthy, and all recovered in the end.

Peter Vu had been in the United States over ten years, and became an American citizen. He was interested in the monastic life, so he lived over a month here as a long-term guest. Then he entered Our Lady of Divine Grace in Vietnam as a postulant. Now he is ready to receive the novice habit there. Peter is visiting us for a couple of weeks and will visit his parents in Louisiana. Then he returns to the monastery in Vietnam to begin his novitiate.

Our yearly retreat in January was given by Fr. Tuan Phan Joseph, O.M.I. He was one of the boat people who left Vietnam, and spent some time in a refugee camp in Hong Kong. He was received in Canada, and established a good life there. Fr. Joseph read Thomas Merton and considered monastic life. His bishop had him enter the seminary. From there he entered the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. He is the only Vietnamese in their Canadian or American Province. He was assigned to a multi-ethnic parish in Boston, and will go the Mexico to learn Spanish.

Fr. Joseph gave conferences centered on the monastic contemplative life. He spoke in good English along with three conferences in Vietnamese. The *Gaudeamus* (final celebration supper) was a blend of American and Vietnamese culture with a rousing Vietnamese hymn of Thanksgiving at the end.

Michael Hogue, our baker, spent the end of January cleaning and waxing, and preparing supplies, for the next fruit cake season.

One chore is replacing dead fluorescent tubes in the high ceiling light fixtures in the bakery and warehouse. The pleasant surprise this year was finding only one burned out tube.

Fr. Paul, our Family Brother hermit in Missouri, was recovering from a bad bout of the flu. However, he slipped on his icy wooden deck, and is now recovering from a painful lower back injury similar to our Fr. David.

We ask prayers for Dick Ortez, our Family Brother from Oklahoma. He has had health challenges for a number of years. Dick was found unconscious in a coma on December 16<sup>th</sup>, and has remained in a coma since then, but there has been gradual improvement. We entreat and entrust Our Lord Jesus, King of Mercy, and Our Lady of Guadalupe for his care.

In the Sacred Heart,

Your Ava Monks



