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# ST. PETER'S ABBEY NEWSLETTER



*May the peace and blessings of Christmas  
be with all our friends into the new year.*

—Abbot Jerome and community

# News from Rome

*Father Maurice Weber left for Rome on Sept. 3 for a year of study in theology and monastic spirituality. He gives us the following account of his first months in Italy.*

The first thing that struck me when we landed in our jumbo jet at Rome was how happy the people were to be back on the ground again after a seven-hour trip from Montreal. They all clapped as the plane settled down on the tarmac. I got a second impression waiting in line for customs. The people were speaking a foreign language. Also, the Italians appeared to be ready to wait for a while, which we all patiently did too, until the customs fellows ascertained that we were honest and had some reason to be coming to Italy. A third impression struck me when I went to pick up my bags. They were not there. After checking all the luggage conveyors at least three times, I rushed to the Alitalia office and in no uncertain terms let it be known that something was missing. The young fellow looked at me with resignation and checked my ticket and then had me fill out a form. I guess they have been through such troubles a thousand times before.

I spent four weeks in Florence and learned how to say some things in Italian. I began to understand a little bit of the Italian character. First of all, the convitto at which I stayed was inhabited by old priests and elderly gentlemen. Bishop Antonio, one of the auxiliary bishops of Florence, was in residence.

After muddling through an explanation of what I wanted and how long I was going to stay (We tried a little English, German and French while the monsignor who runs the place tried some French, Italian and Latin in turn!), I was given a room and they did not ask for payment. I wanted to give them



*Father Maurice*

some money in advance, but the monsignor indicated that there was plenty of time to pay. In fact, this seems to be a custom in Italy in all the smaller bars and restaurants. You have your lunch or coffee and they take your word for what you ate and charge you accordingly.

According to someone's psychological opinion, they expect that you might change your mind and order some more or stay longer. They are unhurried. You get this impression also when you see them walking down the street in a strolling fashion. The guys and girls especially seem to have all the time in the world to enjoy each other.

I saw some great works of art in Florence. It is a city of 500,000 people and twice as many tourists for the most part of the year because it is such a treasure house of art, sculpture and architecture. I walked more than any other time in my life, about four miles a day. I must have lost about 10 pounds.

I marvelled at the huge and numerous churches in Florence and Rome. There seems to be a church every second block, and so many of them would swallow up even our cathedrals in Saskatchewan. They are gigantic and built of stone, appearing so sturdy that one gets a sense of eternity. Some of them have been standing for 600 to 1,000 years.

The art work gives the impression of real dedication, and one wonders how many years the artist dedicated to a painting or sculpture. Many artists made it their life's work. The pulpit in Sienna, for example, took 20 years to complete. Different artists worked on it, carefully carving intricate figures out of marble. One is shocked at the way the churches seem to be like museums and how the tourists file through them even as Mass is being celebrated.

I am picking up what classes are possible for a newcomer in Italian, but I am also getting some scripture and theology. The Europeans put us North Americans to shame with their knowledge of languages. When I get home again I am going to be a strong promoter of languages. It is just amazing how much material there is in French, German, Italian and Spanish. One finds his world quite limited if he only has a knowledge of English.

Life at Sant' Anselmo is easy to take. Rising at 6 am does not seem so difficult when you can look forward to a siesta in the afternoon. We have Lauds and Mass in the morning. Noon Praise is very short before dinner. Vespers at 7:30 pm is well attended. The church is cold now, and you see all varieties of dress for prayer, including overcoats.

## COVER

*Father Damian Yaskowich and Brother Douglas Schmidt decorate the Christmas tree in the main entrance of the abbey.*

Now I know why the monastic cuculla was invented.

One fine experience in Rome is its international flavor. People come here for classes from many different places. There seem to be a lot of dark skinned people here, and I imagine that they are the ones who will hold majority power in the future.

So far I have been reasonably healthy. Must be the wine and the diet. Here the meals include two vegetables, a meat or cheese dish, bread, a soup or pasta, and fruit. No pastries, pies or puddings except for a big feast. I miss not having coffee, but we get all we want at breakfast. First time I went down for breakfast I saw the bowls and said to myself, "Aha, cereal." Well, those bowls are meant to be the cup for coffee, milk or tea.

## Personnel notes

Abbot Jerome Weber attended the Western Conference of Bishops meeting at Cochrane, Alta., Sept. 28-30 as well as the semi-annual meeting of the Canadian Conference of Bishops in Ottawa, Oct. 26-28. At the latter meeting he was appointed a member of the episcopal Commission for the Liturgy. He also attended the Nov. 15 convention in Saskatoon of the Saskatchewan Catholic School Trustees, along with Father Florian Renneberg.

On Nov. 19 Prior Rudolph Novecosky went to St. Pius X Seminary, Saskatoon, for a few weeks of rest in an attempt to settle down a nervous stomach.

Father Gregory Gasser spent Dec. 14-16 at the



Helping to lay a sidewalk to the new parking lot west of Michael Building on Oct. 1 are, from left, Brother Jude Marco, Father Peter Novecosky, Father Lawrence DeMong, Brother Francis Fortney and Father Andrew Britz.

University Hospital, Saskatoon, where he underwent surgery to cut some nerves in his jaw in order to relieve the relentless pain caused by spreading cancer. He reports his condition slightly improved.

While *Father Wilfred Hergott* was in St. Elizabeth Hospital Oct. 8-Dec. 2, *Father Norbert Schwinghammer* continued his solicitous care for him by almost daily visits, accompanied by *Brother Peter Dougan*.

As soon as his passport arrives, *Brother Dominic Distel* plans to leave for West Germany to spend several weeks with his two brothers and relatives at Hochemmingen in the Black Forest. He last visited there in 1963.

*Brother Gregory Brodner* went to St. Elizabeth Hospital on Oct. 21 for a hernia operation. He returned home a week later and now feels fine.

*Father Leo Hinz* attended the annual meeting of the Canadian Canon Law Society in Halifax, Oct. 18-21. Just prior to that, he and *Father Peter Novocosky* were the "odd couple" at a Marriage Encounter at Lumsden, Oct. 15-17.

*Father Lawrence DeMong* went to the National Office of Religious Education, Ottawa, on Dec. 7 to

work for two weeks on the revision of the grade 5 program of the Canadian Catechism.

At the beginning of December *Brother Bede Hubbard* was appointed editor of the *Prairie Messenger*. He made his debut with the Dec. 12 issue, which featured a tribute to the recently deceased *Father Wilfred*, PM editor from 1931-55. Former PM editor, *Father Michael Pomedli*, has asked for a dispensation from his obligations of the priesthood and the religious life. On Dec. 1 he began doing research and publicity work for *Serena*, a natural family planning organization.

*Brother Thomas Gerwing* was appointed this fall to a committee of the National Council for Liturgy to help revise the Catholic Book of Worship. As a member of this committee, *Brother Thomas* will help collect and evaluate hymns, traditional or folk, that merit consideration for the revised hymnal.

*Brother Peter Dougan* will be leaving on Jan. 2 for Newman Theological College, Edmonton, for a semester of theology classes.

*Father Bernard Stauber* returned to Brasil on Oct. 7 after a three-month visit to Canada.



*Brother Thomas Gerwing* directs the *St. Peter's Adult Chorus* at an Advent musical program at the college on Dec. 2. Singing in the chorus are *Brothers Peter Dougan* and *Stanley Vindevoghel* and *Fathers Peter Novocosky* and *Lawrence DeMong*.



# Oldest monk dies

Brother Justus Trettel, 86, the oldest monk in the community, died unexpectedly Dec. 5, just as he was about to be taken to the monastic chapel in his wheelchair for Sunday Mass.

Brother Justus was born in North Prairie, Minn., Jan. 10, 1890. At the age of 17 he joined the community at St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, Minn. as a Brother. For more than 15 years he worked there as carpenter, cabinet-maker, blacksmith, tinsmith, general maintenance supervisor, and finally boiler-room engineer.

At the appeal of Abbot Michael Ott, Brother Justus received a year's leave in 1924 to come to St. Peter's Abbey to assist the community in settling on its new site after the building of St. Peter's College. This leave was extended another year, and in 1926 it was made permanent.

Brother Justus' first concern was to develop the small abbey and college farm to relieve the kitchen of its hand-to-mouth operation. By the time he handed over its management to his successor in 1928, the farm was ready for the expansion which made it capable of providing relief to the most acutely drought-stricken areas of Saskatchewan during the thirties, and later, during the forties, to become a model farm, in close collaboration with the provincial department of agriculture.

After 1928 he first did alone and later supervised all the carpentry and repair work of the monastery, college, and farm. He was responsible for the construction of a large number of farm buildings and made hundreds of cabinets, tables and desks. During harvest time each year he put aside all other work to be foreman of the threshing crew.

Especially during his first 10 years at St. Peter's, Brother Justus created a strong bond of friendship and mutual support between the monastic community and the neighboring village and farm community of Muenster. Before the farm operation was sufficiently stable to meet the demands of the hungry college kitchen, he relied on his farmer friends for a hog or a beef to tide over the gap. The farmers in turn came to him with their cattle and horses for efficient veterinary service.

Brother Justus was a man who never could say "no" to a request for help of any kind — from a fellow monk, a student, or a farm or village neighbor. He rendered his services cheerfully, without questions, and with never a hint of haste or overwork. At the same time he was devout and



*Brother Justus worked in the abbey carpenter shop for many years, helping fellow monks, students and neighboring farmers.*

faithful in his monastic life. One of his most cherished privileges was to render the Gregorian chant propers of the Mass on Sundays with his fellow Brothers when most of the priests of the monastery were assisting in the parishes of the abbacy.

Many generations of students, coming to the carpenter shop with requests, learned to cherish the friendship and spiritual wisdom of Brother Justus. At his golden jubilee celebration June 25, 1959, he spoke to the students on the life of a Benedictine Brother. He said that the life of a Brother is not all drudgery, as some falsely think. The Brothers he lived with for most of his life were the happiest people he knew. "Our life is one of prayer and work. We pray and we make our work a prayer."

A fall, apparently accompanied by a cerebral hemorrhage in 1969, began a long and trying invalidship. During these years the rugged and tenacious aspect of his character revealed itself.

He died as he had lived, a monk who might have walked straight out of the Rule of St. Benedict.

# A monk who wedded two loves

A man of God and a man of the world — that might be the best way to describe Father Wilfred Hergott, 81, who died peacefully at St. Elizabeth Hospital, Humboldt, Dec. 2. His monastic brothers of St. Peter's Abbey and uncounted friends in the abbacy and far beyond esteemed and loved him.

All experienced in him how beautiful it is to harmonize love of God and love of man. The two loves were one in his gentle yet strong concern for others; he was truly a friend to others, cheerful, respectful, compassionate, sharing with others his conviction that man's goodness and good sense, God's gifts, would prevail.

The strength of his concern for the welfare of others, particularly the poor, enabled him to battle, at times almost singlehandedly and against considerable pressure and opposition, in defence of the "social gospel". In the scriptures, which he loved and prayed over as good monks do, he discovered the ideal Christian disposition: love for God embracing all human needs. As editor of the *Prairie Messenger* from 1931 to 1955, he effectively implemented that idea — so much so that the conservative-minded were provoked into calling the PM "red".

As a young man his own views had been quite traditional: the way things were was the way they ought to be. That mentality changed during the Depression when he saw that much of the human misery of the period was caused by the system under which people lived and worked. The pioneering efforts on behalf of working people by men of the caliber of J. S. Woodsworth and M. J. Coldwell impressed Father Wilfred. Through the PM he sought to bring to bear upon social conditions the light of the gospel's teaching on the dignity of man. Party politics was never his concern but promotion of human welfare was.

His integrity, his deep Christian spirit of charity, his humility, were brought to light especially in his refusal to become bitter or frustrated by any hostility. He remained open and frank with all, strengthened, it seemed, by his trust that God's goodness and love for man were being reflected in more and more people with socially sensitive consciences. Father Wilfred could remain undaunted because his Christian hopefulness remained undimmed.



*After he returned to the abbey in 1971, Father Wilfred eagerly joined in all community activities and became an excellent shuffleboard player.*

During the years he was PM editor, Father Wilfred shared with hundreds of English 102 students his radical Christian insights, his love for good literature, his concern for correct and concise composition. As a teacher he was goodnatured and unfussy but a constant enemy of shoddiness and shallowness. A critical analyser of life himself, he had a special affection for writers like Shakespeare and Shaw who exposed appearances to get at reality. As student chaplain from 1935 to 1940, he helped young men see the relevance of the Word of God to the real world in which they lived. His manly reverence at the altar left on students a lasting impression of lived faith.

When he became chaplain of St. Elizabeth Hospital in 1955, his service to the people of the abbacy endeared him to countless more. His

twinkling eyes, his ready and sometimes sly smile made him a great asset to the healing ministry of the medical and nursing staff. His daily visits to patients of all faiths were often looked upon as the most important part of their medication. His ease and familiarity with people of churches other than his own made him an ecumenist long before the term became common. At an ecumenical service in Westminster United Church at Humboldt, Father Wilfred recalled with tears in his eyes the religious hostility and bigotry that were part of his youthful experience in Ontario where he was born.

Father Wilfred's own monastic confreres, however, were his most privileged beneficiaries;

retired to the abbey in 1971 following a brain hemorrhage, he continued with the same indomitable spirit to take part in community prayer, recreation and work. Unable to read well or speak very coherently, he cheerfully and generously did what he could to be of help. With remarkable industry and high spirits he set himself the task of eradicating volunteer caraganas that threatened the survival of areas of the poplar grove south of the abbey.

His kindly smile, gentle, hopeful spirit and firm handclasp were signs of God's own seal of approval and will remain stamped upon the memories of his fellow monks and friends.



*The Christmas crib in the abbey chapel this year was made by the Special Education class under the direction of Sister Miriam Spenrath.*



*Of the 150 Rainbow Trout planted in one of the abbey's dugouts this spring, 66 were netted and provided a couple of excellent meals for the community. Harvesting the fish in late October are, from left, Brothers Bernard Lange, Wolfgang Thiem and Gregory Brodner.*

## Brother Thomas' guestmaster's diary

The autumn has been a busy season in the abbey's guest wing. A group of Lutheran students made a retreat at the abbey from Oct. 1-3, and 60 members of the Society of Friends (Quakers) from western Canada followed them on Thanksgiving weekend. I was especially happy to play host to the Quakers because my mother had often told us as children of their kindness.

From Oct. 16-18 we hosted a conference on alternate lifestyles; alternate, that is, to the consumer lifestyle we are now enduring. Forty concerned men and women from the prairie region studied how to simplify their lives and searched for more wholesome ways of living. Their earnest, almost passionate, search was inspiring to the monastic community.

Also from Oct. 16-18, 15 Regina Separate School teachers came to the abbey to take a mini-course on the Kodaly method of teaching classroom music, from myself. That, believe me, was a super busy weekend.

Fifteen members of the Muenster prayer group held a day of recollection at the abbey on Oct. 23, and 39 students from St. Thomas More College, Saskatoon, made a retreat here Oct. 22-24 under the leadership of their chaplain, Father Brian Hogan, CSB; another STM group was here from Nov. 12-14.

Earlier in October the Sisters of Providence used the guest facilities of the abbey for meetings of their council.

The University of Saskatchewan's extension division conducted a transactional analysis session here Oct. 29-31; and on that same weekend, Serena gave a course in natural family planning to 28 persons.



From Nov. 5-7 the gym and classrooms of the college were humming with the 450 people who attended the abbacy-wide Christian Faith Conference. Keynote speaker was Sister Colleen Mahoney of Ottawa. The enthusiastic way in which people participated is leading the planning committee to think of another conference next fall.

Seventy-five Anglican young people made a retreat at the abbey Nov. 12-14. The Anglicans are planning to return in January with confirmandi, and in February Bishop Ford of Saskatoon will hold a retreat here with his clergy.

The Saskatchewan CCODP executive held their annual meeting at the abbey on Nov. 13. Guests were Chilean refugee families from Regina and Saskatoon who related their experiences under the repressive Pinochet regime in Chile.

Nov. 20-21 was a really beautiful weekend for us as we played host to 60 faculty and trustees of

four Mennonite schools in Saskatchewan and Manitoba. And what were they here for? To study discipline (for themselves and their children at home and at school) in a changing society! They went to the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament and to the gospels and epistles of the New Testament for their models. Those of the monastic community that met the participants and sat in on some of their discussions and talks, were very impressed with their deeply spiritual Christian outlook. For many of us this was the highlight of the guest program to date.

The 1973 arts alumni and alumnae held a dinner here on Nov. 27. Lots of *esprit de corps* in that class. Jim Sarauer, class president back then, provided the initiative.

On Dec. 5 over 30 leaders from seven charismatic prayer groups from the abbacy area met for an afternoon of prayer, discussion and organization.

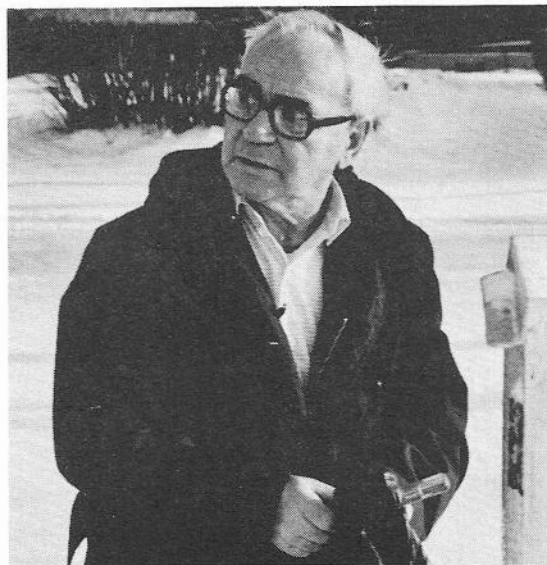
We've had a number of individuals coming to



Fathers Daniel Muyres, left, and Peter Novecosky share a coffee break with Sister Colleen Mahoney during the Christian Faith Conference, Nov. 5-7.

visit or work with us. In mid-October Joe Takatch of Humboldt spent a week here preparing the berry patches for winter. Brother Bede's grandmother from England, who is 80 years old, made her first trip to Canada and spent several day at the abbey after the Thanksgiving weekend. Angela Conway returned to the abbey from Vancouver, Oct. 4-26, to visit as well as to help Father Damian hang pictures in Severin Hall. Two young men interested in monastic life visited the community: James Moss of London, Ont., who has a special interest in the Russian Orthodox church, was here Oct. 16-28, and Dominic Coppola of Montreal came on Dec. 27 to spend several days with the community.

The week before Christmas, in a Monastic Life Experiment led by Brother Bede, Tim Scott and Adrien Joosten of St. Pius X Seminary, Saskatoon, and Neil McCaig of St. Thomas More, spent a few days at the abbey living the monastic life: working, praying and recreating with us and attending special conferences.



Franz Henn of Saskatoon, a retired electrical technician, has volunteered many hours of work to St. Peter's Abbey the past two years. Here he helps to wire the panel for the electrical outlets in the new parking lot west of Michael Building. This spring he helped with the wiring of the guest facilities in Severin Hall. Not all his time at the abbey is spent working. At recreation he plays a mean hand of skat.



Sister Ottilia Saretsky in the abbey kitchen carves the goose for Christmas dinner.

## Senior Council briefs

On Oct. 7 the council approved an interest-free loan of \$5,000 to the La Salette Fathers and donated \$1,900 to Sant' Anselmo, Rome. It also recommended that the farm participate in the Saskatchewan Hog Assured Returns Program.

On Oct. 21 the council agreed that the farm continue to participate in the federal Western Grain Stabilization Plan.

On Nov. 16 the council donated \$1,300 to furnish a room at St. Mary's Villa, Humboldt. Farm manager Brother Bernard Lange reported that this year the farm harvested over 18,000 bushels of wheat, 18,000 bushels of barley and 16,000

bushels of oats. The farm also has 175 beef and 70 dairy cattle, over 450 hogs and 400 poultry.

On Nov. 30 the council decided to purchase a stone flour grinder for the abbey kitchen.

On Dec. 15 the council accepted a recommendation from the Monastic Frontiers Committee that a reforestation program be undertaken on non-arable areas around the abbey. Fathers Philip and Lawrence will purchase a used motor to experiment with an electric car. A donation of 300 bushels of wheat was made to the food bank of the Mennonite Central Committee and \$1,500 was donated to the Southdown Convalescent Home near Toronto.

## Deceased brethren and relatives

Father Damian Baloga, 57, St. Andrew's Abbey, died of a heart attack on Oct. 3.

Father Fabian Heid, 91, Holy Cross Abbey, died on Oct. 4 after a long illness.

Father Leo Ortman, 66, St. Benedict's Abbey, died from cancer on Oct. 15.

Father Donald Baydik, 54, St. Andrew's Abbey, died suddenly in early November.

Brother Joseph Weigl, 89, St. Vincent Archabbey, died on Nov. 23.

Abbot Leonard Schwinn, 86, retired abbot of Holy Cross Abbey, died unexpectedly on Dec. 6.

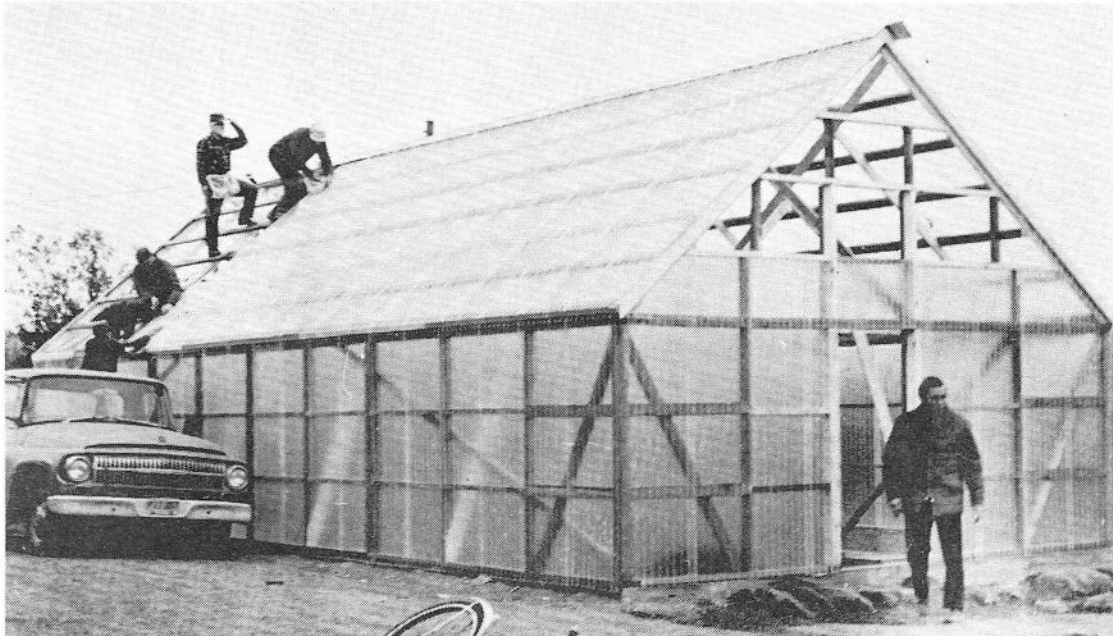
Father Gerald John McMahon, 75, St. John's Abbey, died on Dec. 13.

Mrs. Molly Povolny, sister of the deceased Father John Hable, died in October in St. Paul, Minn.

Joseph Thiem, 86, father of Brother Wolfgang, died in Schwab Gmund, West Germany on Oct. 9.

Alec Gray, 61, brother of Father James, died in Rossland, B.C. on Nov. 11.

Mrs. Agnes Loehr, 84, mother of Father Philip, died in Kamloops, B.C., on Dec. 4 after a short illness.



*The extraordinarily mild weather we enjoyed in October made it possible to build this new greenhouse, designed by Brother Wolfgang Thiem. Helping to bring the greenhouse to completion in early November are, from left, Leo Torborg, Father Rudolph Novecosky, Brother Wolfgang, Brother Oswald King and Father Daniel Muyres.*

