

St. Peter's Abbey Newsletter



Vol. 20 No. 1 Winter 1998

The Christmas Crèche



Background painted by the candidates.

A report from Abbot Peter's desk

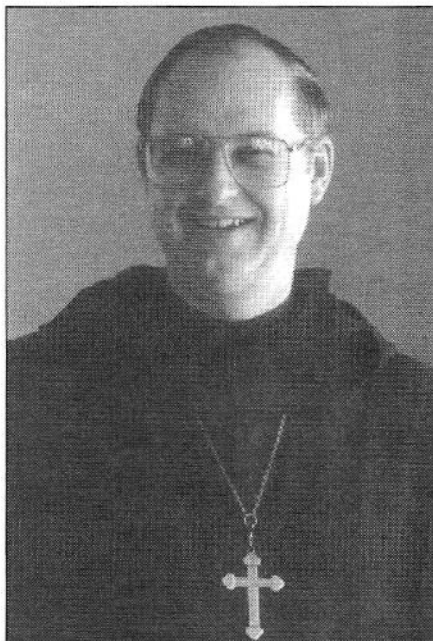
by Abbot Peter Novecosky, OSB

Dear friends,

As I write this, we are already into a new year, 1998. It is the year dedicated to the Holy Spirit. It is a year dedicated to hope. That sets the tone for us as we look forward to the celebration of Jubilee Year 2000 under the direction of Pope John Paul II.

We have experienced a beautiful fall and winter so far, thanks to El Nino. The fact that we had no snow at Christmas was a bit depressing to some people, but no one argued with the fact of the warm weather, which made visiting over the holidays much easier for everyone concerned. The warm weather even allowed Br. Wolfgang Thiem to play golf on our lawn on Christmas Day. A first!

My travels away from the abbey have been quite limited this fall. At the end of October I took part in the annual meeting of the Canadian bishops. It was at Cap-de-la-Madeleine this year, a famous Marian shrine halfway between Montreal and Quebec. Unfortunately, the brilliantly-colored autumn leaves for which Quebec is famous, had been blown away a week before we arrived. After the meeting I was able to take a bus tour with a dozen bishops to Chicoutimi in northern Quebec. This is the area where the Saguenay River



flooded in the summer of 1996. We saw some of the still-devastated blocks of the city where houses once stood. The white house, once portrayed nightly on TV, is still standing.

My other major trip this fall was to Edmonton in November. There was a week-long national meeting on liturgy. Br. Thomas Ward, Sr. Juliana Weber, OSU, and I took part in it. The speakers provided a good overview of what has happened in the last 30 years and they

also looked forward to the revisions being made to the Sacramentary.

On Oct. 26 the abbey had its annual Family Day, at which our staff and their families are invited to an afternoon of games and a supper. At the end of November we inaugurated our Staff Appreciation Night, when we gave out awards to those staff members who have worked here for 10 years or more. At the Students Award Night on Nov. 7 scholarships were handed out to the university students and the College fund-raising drive was kicked off.

In November Fr. Norbert spent some time in the hospital and we were concerned about his health. However, with the help of many brothers, but especially with the generous help of Br. Anthony, Fr. Norbert has bounced back and is able to participate in all our common activities. The community is most grateful for the service Fr. Norbert has provided, especially in playing the organ. He has played organ for over 60 years. This is truly a great accomplishment.

We look forward to the Year of the Spirit with renewed hope. We ask you to continue to pray for the six people we have in formation at this time. We also ask you to pray that our community will work well with the changes that we anticipate this year.

Benedictine life taken seriously by oblates

by Bruce Paproski, candidate

Listening to testimonies of what led people to become oblates and how they live their Christian lives in accordance with the Benedictine way of life, was a heartwarming experience for Phyllis Thompson, who attended an oblate and oblate directors' meeting at St. Meinrad's Archabbey in St. Meinrad, Ind., July 26 to 31. Thompson, oblate of St. Peter's Abbey and campus ministry coordinator of St. Peter's College, was among 117 people at the meeting — she was the only Canadian there.

Particularly pleasing was a panel of six individuals associated with St. Meinrad's who recollected why they became oblates. Thompson told a gathering of 35 oblates at St. Peter's Abbey recently.

"It was very humbling to hear how and why many of them decided to become oblates, and how seriously they take their association with the monks at St. Meinrad's. They spoke from the heart and experience, with down-to-earth and genuine feeling," she said.

Similarly, the love for the Benedictine way of life was reflected by guest speakers, according to Thompson. One was

Janis Dopp, an oblate from St. Meinrad's, who gave a personal talk on The Spirituality of St. Benedict.

"At the outset, she said she was no expert on that topic. But as one listened, it was clear she attends to the 'rule,' on a day-in day-out basis, in order to truly live it in her life, how she turns to it when she needs to make major decisions, or when she wonders if she's totally screwed up, and needs to re-evaluate her priorities or adjust her life so a genuine balance in her various activities isn't ignored or lost. As

Continued on page 7

St. Peter's will lose special status

by Abbot Peter Novecosky, OSB

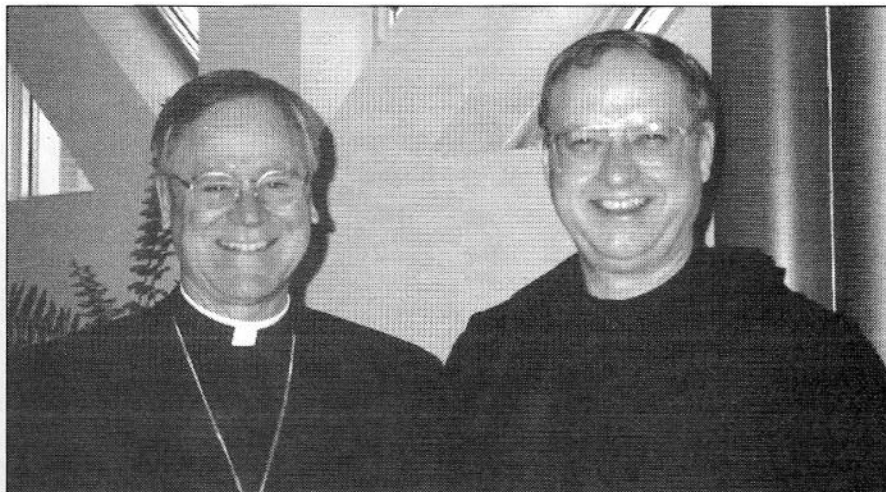
For two years, and more, there has been discussion in Saskatchewan about realigning the diocesan boundaries. Specifically, this involves St. Peter's Territorial Abbey (Muenster Diocese) and the Gravelbourg Diocese.

All of Muenster and part of the Gravelbourg Diocese will become part of the Saskatoon Diocese. And the rest of the Gravelbourg Diocese will become part of the Archdiocese of Regina. There will also be a switching of some territory between Regina and Saskatoon, because of trading and travel patterns.

The Saskatchewan hierarchy met on Dec. 22, 1997, in Saskatoon to finalize the realignment. According to the protocol in such proceedings, the recommendation now goes to the Canadian bishops executive who then pass on the recommendation to Rome. It is expected that Rome will soon give its approval.

The proposed date for the amalgamation is June 29, the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul. A celebration is being planned at Muenster for June 29, the patronal feast day for both dioceses. It has been proposed that the Saskatoon Diocese take Sts. Peter and Paul and its new patrons, to recognize the addition of Muenster Diocese to Saskatoon.

As a territorial abbey, St. Peter's was unique in North America and a "rare bird" in the Catholic world. There are about 15 such abbeys in the world. A



Bishop James Weisgerber and Abbot Peter Novecosky, OSB.

number of them have given up their status in the past 20 years.

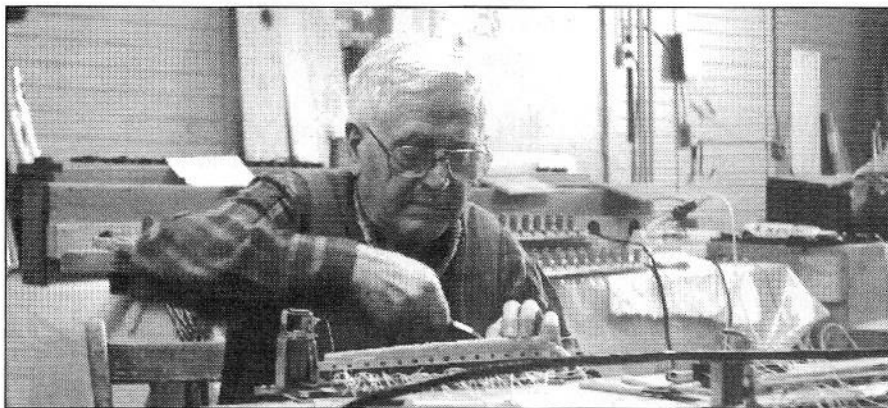
As a territorial abbey, the abbot is the ordinary of the diocese, which means he governs the territory and the parishes in it in the manner of a bishop, as its proper pastor. This is a second hat he wears. The first hat an abbot wears is to be the superior of the monastery and of its various apostolates.

Thus, the proposed change on June 29 will not affect the abbey's apostolates as such. The abbey will still be here, though now as part of a larger diocese. I will have fewer meetings and responsibilities having to do with diocesan work. We will still continue to work in parishes. In fact, there will be little change here. The abbey will continue to

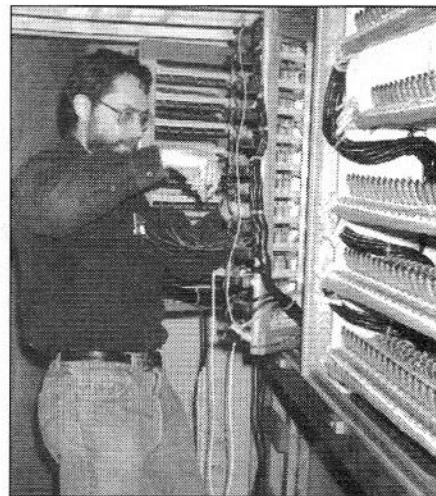
operate the college, the farm, the guestwing, etc. We will become like all the other Benedictine abbeys in Canada and the United States.

St. Peter's was founded in 1892 near Wetaug, Ill., under the name of Cluny. The community transferred to Muenster in 1903, became an abbey in 1911. As an abbey at that time, it was part of the Prince Albert Diocese. St. Peter's became a territorial abbey on May 6, 1921. It will have been a territorial abbey for 77 years.

The change is taking place in the year of the Holy Spirit. This is a good omen for the future.



Br. Wolfgang Thiem working on the wiring for the new organ.



William Thurmeier working on the electronics of the pipe organ.

People and events around the abbey

by Martin Brodner, OSB

1997

July 30 — Candidate Julio Cotto arrived, an omen of good things to come!

Aug 02 — Fr. Francis Lohmer marks the 72nd anniversary of his ordination. He will reach 95 on Sept 03, and is still pastor of St. Scholastica Parish.

Aug 03 — Prior Roman Schneider celebrated his golden jubilee as a priest at the abbey in the midst of a happy family reunion.

Aug 3-9 — Abbey Visitation conducted by Abbot Neil Roth (St. Martin's Abbey) and Fr. Jonathan Licari (St. John's Abbey). The question of relinquishing the abbacy to a diocese loomed large on the future horizon.

Aug 12 — Two candidates, Mary Watson and Diane Carrier, of St. Benedict's Monastery (Winnipeg), spend a week at the abbey, absorbing some of the Benedictine spirit of our community.



Our four new candidates, left to right, Julio Cotto, Roderic Butalid, Bruce Paproski and Marcel De Gagné.

Aug 26 — Fr. Bernard Stauber, stricken with appendicitis, was given an emergency operation. After a long time healing, Fr. Bernard was back on the job as pastor of Assumption Parish, and helping William Thurmeier and Br. Wolfgang Thiem in the advanced stages of construction of our abbey pipe organ.

Aug 31 — Princess Diana was killed in a car accident in Paris. Her friend (in charitable work), Mother Teresa, died a week later (Sept 5) at age 87.

Sept 02 — Enrolment Day at St. Peter's College. The total enrolment was 111 full-time and part-time students, an increase of nearly 20 over last year.

Sept 05 — Brs. Thomas Ward and Randy Senecal are participating in the Lay Formation Program at Queen's House, Saskatoon, beginning with this the first of ten monthly weekend sessions. This program is open to all lay baptized, to deepen and enrich the faith-life and lead to a fuller commitment.

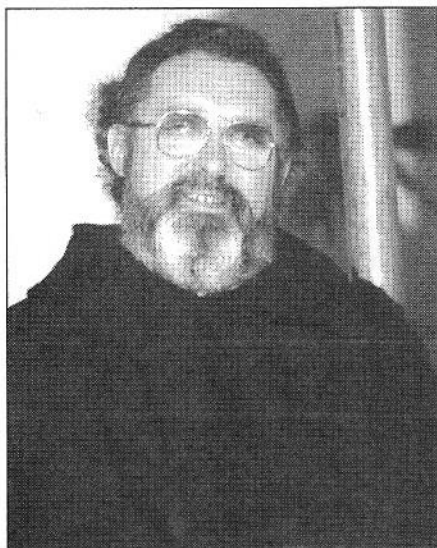
Br. Thomas was named Assistant Formation Director. He will be assisting Fr. Richard Meidl in looking after the monks in formation.

Sept 08 — At Vespers four candidates — Julio J Cotto (Montreal), Marcel De Gagné (St. Boniface), Bruce Paproski (Hudson Bay), and Roderic Butalid (Philippines) — received the community's blessing and welcome as they begin the six month candidacy.



Abbot Neil Roth and Fr. Jonathan Licari, our visitators, this year take a break.

People and events around the abbey



Br. Thomas Ward was named Assistant Formation Director and also Choir Master.

Sept 17 — Br. Thomas was appointed choir master. His job is to "tune up" our liturgy.

Sept 22 — A new water filtration system is being set up at the abbey. This is to replace the older smaller one which could not handle the increased consumption of our water supply. The latter water has been deteriorating in quality

during the hot summer days. So far the results are good. Taste and see!

Oct 09 — Fr. Norbert Schwinghammer, 87, spent three weeks in hospital recovering from various complications. He is back in community life, but with the aid of a wheelchair and many caring monks.

Oct 25 — Oblate Day. Marian Lalonde (Smokey Lake, AB) was enrolled as an oblate, and Frank Poelking (Humboldt) made his final oblation.

Oct 30 — An historic date in the annals of St. Peter's Abbey. The monastic community met to officially express its decision: "That St. Peter's Abbey relinquish the territory entrusted to the abbey in 1921." With the new diocesan boundaries the abbacy would fall entirely within the borders of the Saskatoon Diocese.

Nov 06 — There was another historic moment when a joint meeting was arranged for the clergy of both Saskatoon and Muenster Dioceses at Holy Spirit Parish, Saskatoon. It truly proved to be an informal "get acquainted" occasion for the pastors of the pro-

posed enlarged Saskatoon Diocese.

Nov 9-16 — Abbot Peter and Br. Thomas attended the National Liturgical Conference at the Grey Nuns Centre, Edmonton, AB.

Nov 22 — DIOCESAN BOUNDARY CHANGES. Historic meeting. The diocesan boundary changes will amalgamate St. Peter's Abbey entirely into the Saskatoon Diocese. This process was begun at Rome's request to adjust the Saskatchewan diocesan boundaries, in the spring of 1995. It has advanced rather quickly this fall so that the official implementation of it could be as early as July 1, 1998.

At this (historic) meeting at the abbey, Bishop James Weisgerber of Saskatoon was present, and unofficially met more than 120 of his future parishioners of the abbacy for the first time. Both Abbot Peter and Bishop Weisgerber traced the background and implications of these boundary changes.

Bishop Jim stated that changes must come — diocesan boundaries have changed five times in Saskatchewan. And changes bring pain. We have a right to "grieve the losses" we experience. At the same time the bishop foresaw the enrichments that can come from changes, as we can experience "church" from a broader base.

Nov 26 — Br. Basil Schaan, representative for our community to the Social Justice Committee, left for Montreal, Que., for a meeting on global issues and the CRC — the role of religious in global issues.

Nov 27 — JUBILEE "2000." Abbey faithful gathered at the abbey for the fall session in our continuing education series of Celebrate Christian Community.

This session centred on JESUS: YESTERDAY, TODAY AND TOMORROW, since the first year of Jubilee preparation ending with First Sunday Advent focused on En-



Marian Lalonde was enrolled as a candidate and Frank Poelking made his final oblation.

People and events around the abbey

countering Jesus on a personal, more intimate level.

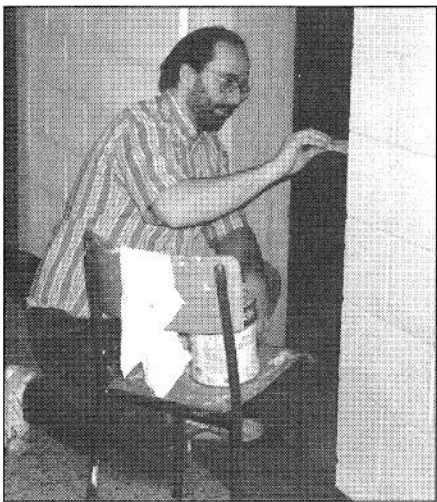
The speaker, Bishop Ray Roussin (Gravelbourg), emphasized the need of experiencing the risen Jesus on a personal level and sharing in his risen power in order to proclaim Jesus effectively to the world today. Vocations, he said, come from a faith-experience in Christ. Such vocations are solid.

Nov 28 — Bishop Roussin stayed on to give the monks two further talks — Experience Jesus Today, and Formative Influence of Mary.

STAFF APPRECIATION SUPPER. This AWARDS SUPPER for the staff is a new venture for our community: to honor employees who have worked for the abbey in its various departments for 10, 15, 20, 25 and 30 years.

At this catch-up supper 11 were given to: Loretta Taming, Doreen Szauner and Viola Kuervers (kitchen); Lucille Stewart, Sr. Marian Noll, Rosemary Strueby and Randy Weber (press); Ann Back and Freda Hilgers (laundry); Brenda McNabb (library); and Al Lange (30 years on the farm).

Dec 13 — Fr. Jerome Weber hangs



Novice Frank Boulet adds the finishing touch to his painting of the abbey corridors.

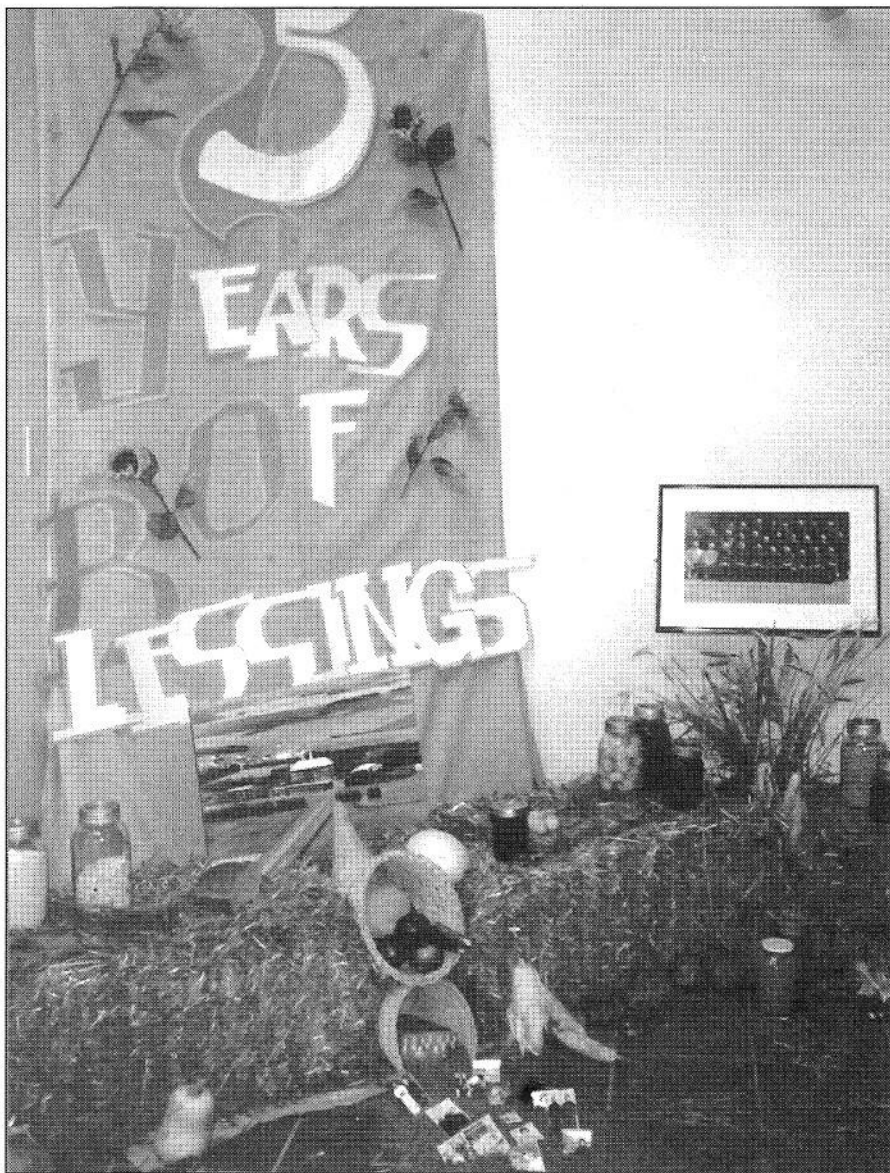
up his skates and hockey stick after a last skate on the new sheet of ice — after 32 years of service. The first game in the new arena was on Dec 8, 1965, against the Notre Dame Hounds!

1998

Jan 01 — That wonderful "El Nino" which gave us such balmy weather for all of November and December, sud-

denly left us as the cold arctic took over most abruptly, plunging the temperature to -37 degrees by Jan 3, and giving us half a foot of snow.

Jan 04 — Epiphany. Abbot Peter used this first Sunday of the new year to officially open the second year of preparation for JUBILEE 2000: THE YEAR OF THE SPIRIT, which will also focus on confirmation and hope.



The Thanksgiving display this year was made by our candidates (see also back page).

Benedictine life taken seriously by oblates

Continued from page 2

one listened, it became obvious that she has a good grasp of Benedictine spirituality, and was the right person to speak on this subject at the conference," Thompson said.

Dopp noted that no one can pretend to be separate from some community, whether a family, colleagues at work, or the monks and oblates of St. Meinrad's.

Rev. Dr. Dennis Okholm, a Presbyterian minister and professor of systematic theology at Wheaton College in Illinois, depicted his love for the Benedictine way of life through his talk on St. Benedict and Living in the World.

In his address, Rev. Okholm, an oblate of Blue Cloud Abbey in Marvin, N.D., linked "rule" and Scripture, explaining that both take seriously the difference between the world as God-created cosmos, according to Genesis (good), and the world as a kind of prevailing ethos that can undermine and destroy the very good God created. He quoted various passages from the Gospels to illustrate how Benedict understood the difference, how he conceived of the "rule" in order that monks and oblates make the best use of the world in the second sense, without being contaminated by it. Through the "rule," the world in the first sense is glorified and redeemed as God and his son intended.

The compelling testimonies were countered by equally disturbing statements about oblates by Father Warren Heitz, director of auxiliary services at St. Meinrad's. He was joined by Barbara Crawford, director of communications for the archabbey.

"Father Warren noted that often the monastic community isn't aware of the pool of resources it has in its oblates, and that it's the job of the oblate director to keep his/her confreres well informed . . . so that whether as volunteers or employees, oblate talent doesn't get lost when the monastic community might well benefit from it," Thompson said.

"It was interesting to note that Crawford presented the more positive view of

how oblates are viewed by Benedictines themselves, and Father Warren took the devil's advocate position and gave an extremely negative view of how he felt many monks thought of oblates . . . if oblates were thought of at all. . . . It was hard to listen to what he had to say. But if he truly represented a percentage of how monks perceive oblates, it's naive to go along thinking the picture is rosy, that we're loved and appreciated or even understood by every monastic in the house to which we're attached," Thompson said.

Another contentious issue which surfaced was the disunity among oblates regarding their call to witness to peace, Thompson said. This was evidenced by Br. Benet Tvedten, the national Benedictine director, who discussed Oblates as Corporate Presence for Promoting Peace and Justice: Do We Walk on Common Ground?

Through a survey, Br. Benet said he found that oblates aren't united in being witnesses to peace. A diversity of opinion surfaced from his monastic confreres, as well, over issues of justice and peace. It will likely be impossible to get a consensus from any particular group about what issues unite the group.

"Br. Benet admitted that the inability to walk on common ground is part of the dilemma of human nature. He also admitted this would leave him extremely discouraged were it not for the many individuals who do get involved in justice and peace issues, whether Greenpeace, racial equity or pro-life organizations, Amnesty International, PFLAG, and AIDS crisis centres, the U.S. equivalent of CCODP, and many other similar worthwhile endeavors.

"If one can be bold and generalize from them, the statistics he cited prove that good Christians, good Catholics, good Benedictines that we are, we're terribly biased, opinionated, judgmental people. This rightly made us squirm in our seats. The talk made us face the fact that we have a long way to go before we're able to see that every other human being we meet is made in God's image



Phyllis Thompson

and likeness," Thompson commented.

Attending the meeting were 43 oblate directors and 74 oblates. The meeting was co-hosted by three Benedictine communities, including the monks of St. Meinrad's, the sisters from Immaculate Conception in Ferdinand, Ind., and the Sisters of Our Lady of Grace Monastery in Beech Grove, Ind. Forty-one Benedictine houses were represented from the United States.

Among the Benedictine communities was one Byzantine and one Camandolese. Mexico was represented by two Benedictine sisters, oblate directors from separate daughter houses of the monastery at Ferdinand. It was unfortunate that there were no representatives from the sisters' communities at either Nanaimo or Winnipeg, or men's communities at Mission, B.C., or Benoit de Lac, Que., she said.

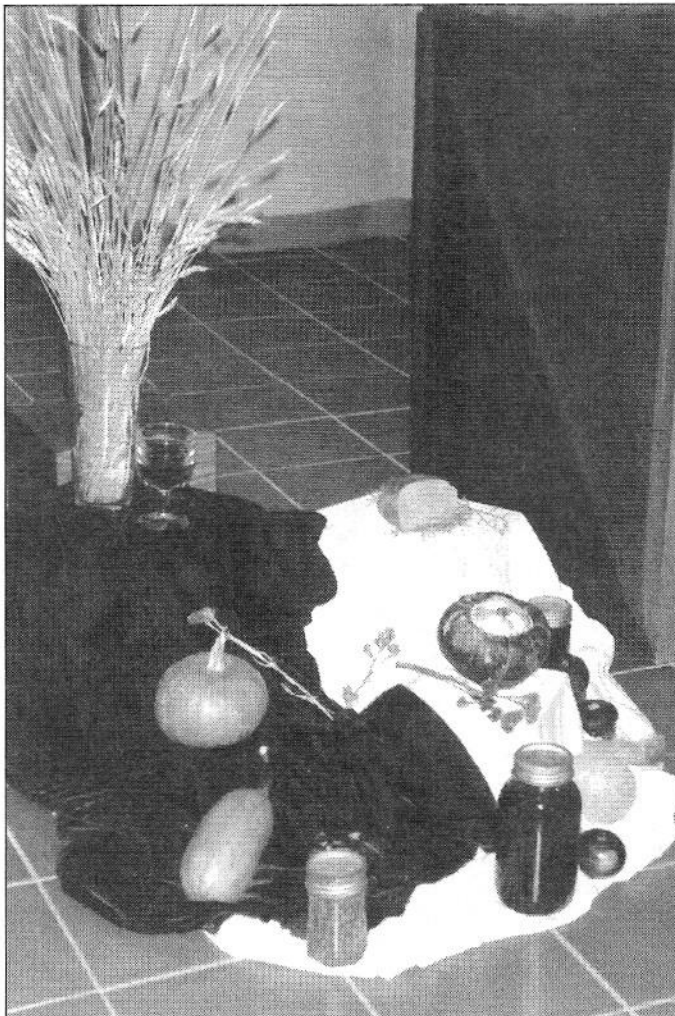
Deaths

Since the last newsletter the following have passed into eternity:

Aug 16 — Tony Brodner, 85, brother of Frs. Martin and George and Br. Gregory

Aug 27 — Sr. Aloysia Gallinger, OSE

Oct 05 — Sr. Johanna Huber, OSE



*In your last will and testament please remember St. Peter's Abbey. Our legal title is:
ORDER OF ST. BENEDICT, Muenster, Sask. S0K 2Y0*

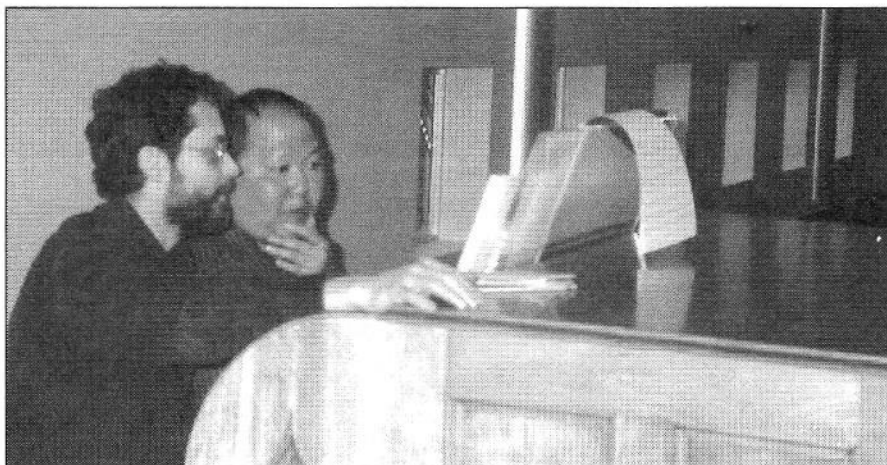
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William Thurmeier teaching Br. Anthony Nguyen to play the organ.