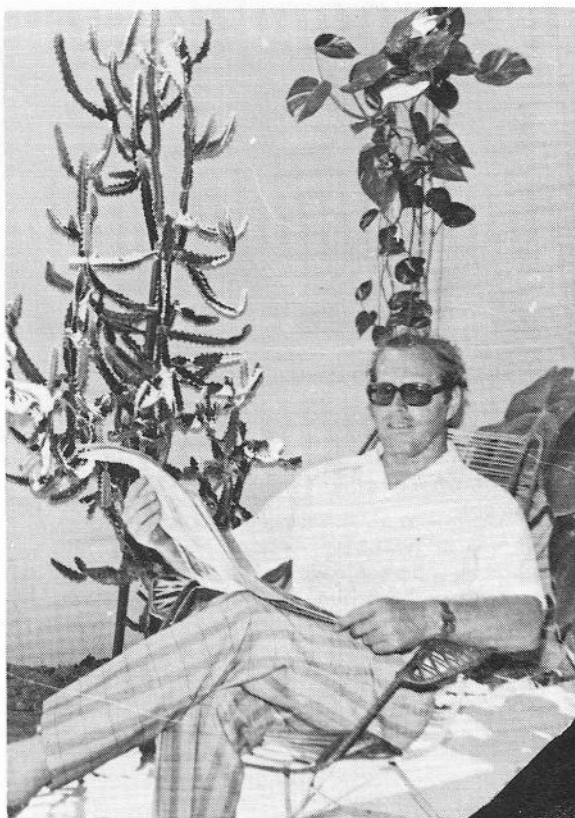


# ST. PETER'S ABBEY NEWSLETTER

Vol. 3, no. 4  
Winter, 1978



# A retreat in Brasil

*At the beginning of February 1979, Father Sylvester Vredegoor, who has been working 11 years in Maceio, Brasil, is beginning an extended retreat (up to a year) at Santa Maria de Serra Clara, a small Benedictine monastery in southern Brasil. Father Sylvester writes how he has prepared his parishioners for his absence and describes a trip he made this summer to visit the monastery.*

The retreat our team here made with Father Bernard de Margerie in 1978 started the strong indication from within (or above?) that I have to go on a "prolonged retreat" in 1979. I admit that the Scriptures speak plenty to me, but at the same time this fountain of life is scarcely tapped so far, mainly because of the rat-race day after day. Since May, the desire has kept maturing, and has changed our action a fair amount.

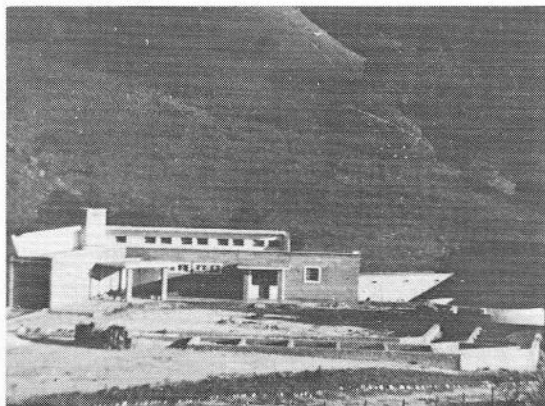
I have prepared the people here on the concept that each community has to be a true community of faith, cult and life; and when on a given occasion there is no priest to celebrate the Eucharist, the community must want to come together and pray as that specific community as best as possible, even in preference to running to neighboring parishes for a Mass.

I told them that on Mission Sunday (a happy coincidence) I would be down in southern Brasil and next year they would often have to celebrate without a priest, since I would be gone almost the entire year — and they should not count too much on Brazilian fill-ins. They got the message loud and clear.

We scheduled a training session for those from each of our five communities that would lead such Sunday celebrations without a priest. Over 30 parishioners showed up and accepted their responsibility toward their community as God-given. On Oct. 31 we called them together, plus other representatives from each area. Bishop Miguel was present as well. They told us what the people thought about the Mission Sunday celebration, and Dom Miguel was asked his viewpoint on such celebrations as well.

Everybody that is community-minded liked it very much and they had the biggest cooperation.

In Guia and Pontal we had lined up ex-priests just for the sermon, but in Pontal the man did not



*Santa Maria de Serra Clara abbey in southern Brasil, where Father Sylvester will spend a year in retreat.*

appear. The people waited 15 minutes and decided to start without him. One of the ladies who had helped prepare the celebration offered to give the sermon. The next day she was kidded at the university that she had become a "Padre".

The work was divided up even more than the roles at the monastic Mass. We followed leaflets prepared for all Brasil. (This kind of celebration is going on mainly in the hinterland for many years already.) We recognize the Spirit at work.

My trip to the South had the double intention of getting to know the other side of Brasil and checking possibilities for next year right here in Brasil. Abbot Jerome offered me the suggestion to go to San Anselmo in Rome and that surely has a lot of positive aspects. But I am afraid it would simply be a busy year of studies and that is not what I need the most right now.

Anyhow, Dom Miguel and priests in Rio and Porto Alegre encouraged me to visit a tiny monastery with fairly great fame in Minas Gerais. It is called Our Lady of the Bright Mountain, Santa Maria de Serra Clara, 21 km from Itajuba, way up in the hills.

They have no telephone nor pavement. But

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COVER

Father Sylvester Vredegoor

priests, Friars, seminarians and bishops like to sneak away to that place for shorter or longer stays.

A couple of monks from Rio started it about 21 years ago and have gotten six others to join them since then. They felt that the Benedictines had tended to get too involved with schools and pastoral work and had lost to some extent the vitality of Saint Benedict's Rule for cenobites.

So, they said, let's just simply give importance to the monastic life as Saint Benedict sets it forth. Return to simplicity. Return to *Ora et Labora* (pray and work).

Even though the prior is a priest, he is called Brother Prior. One of the novices is an Italian priest who has worked several years with the Indians. He has a knack for agriculture and that is about the only source of income for the monks. They have some land, but it is so steep that no tractor could work there.

The poor in the area cannot afford meat more than once a month or so, and for that reason these monks have decided they can live frugally and need no meat at all. I cannot see myself enjoying to put on a habit, but one cannot be choosy. Either you accept to live with them on the terms of the monastery or else stay in the guest department.

They rise at 4:30, have Matins and *Lectio Divina* at 4:45 in chapel, Lauds at 5:50, a break to fix up the bed, Conventual Mass at 6:30, followed by coffee and work. At 9 they get together in chapel

again for Terce and personal prayer, followed by intellectual work till noon.

Sext plus personal prayer is at 12. At 12:20, dinner plus free time; 1:45 manual labor, and then back to the chapel with the work habit at 3 for None and a little lunch. Work again till 4:45. Vespers at 5:30 plus *Lectio Divina* in your room. Supper at 6:30, followed by free time or meetings. Daily community meeting in the chapter room at 7:45. Compline at 8. Bed-time at 8:35.

Once a month each monk goes off into the hills for a whole day of retreat. Every Thursday the group together strolls through the hills in the afternoon, or goes somewhere nearby, semi-picnic.

Ah yes, in the evening they have the famous chapter of faults but not in Latin or with semi-fictitious faults. They openly place the faults of the day before each other, and pray for each other.

The entire group is very hospitable and the various members make an effort to get to meet the visitors and share with them as much as possible.

The neighbor who drove us back to the bus stop had nothing but praise for the whole group.

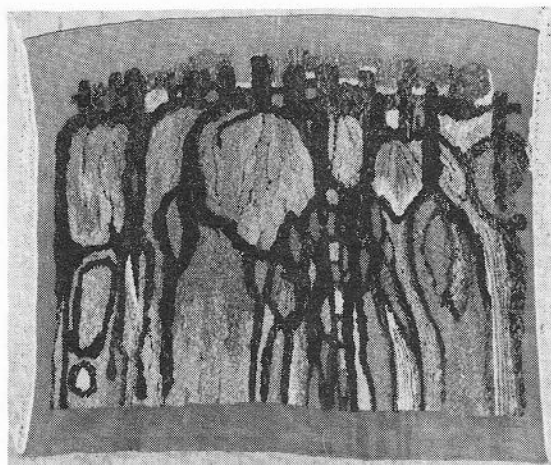
They have been trying to get some money from Germany to finish their guest wing and chapter room but find it understandable that they are not classified as developmentalist. I asked the guest master how much it would cost me for the year, and he said, "Nothing, of course, because you will live as one of us." But I would surely appreciate a donation for them.



Sister Maria (Imelda) Doepker, OSU, came to the abbey on Dec. 27 to speak to the community about the mission in Maceio, Brasil.



*Community members pitched in Christmas Eve to decorate the Christmas tree in the monastic recreation room.*



*This tapestry by Maria Kantor Lizuniec of Cracow, Poland, was purchased by the abbey at Christmas, via Msgr. Edmund Ulinski of Zenon Park. It is entitled "The Maples".*

## Around the abbey

The Christmas season usually brings with it an increase of activity, in the monastery as well as in society in general.

In the week preceding Christmas the novices were busy making a creche display for the chapel. With the help of other community members they also set up an outside nativity scene and decorated central areas of the abbey. On Christmas Eve the creche was moved into the chapel and the Christmas tree in the abbey community room was decorated.

A new element was added to our prayer, too: the use of Gregorian chant notes! The Gregorian notation hadn't been used for several years, but for the older community members it was immediately familiar. It was a challenge for the younger monks until a few practice sessions for the Lauds and



Vespers psalms and antiphons made the singing smoother.

Pastors were busy with the usual pre-Christmas pastoral ministry. The spiritual renewal was more extended in two parishes: Father Leo Hinz organized a mission for Muenster in mid-November, given by Father Ron Dechant, OMI, of Saskatoon; and Fathers Florian Renneberg and Martin Brodner organized a mission for Humboldt, given by Father Jean Pepin of Prince Albert.

About 70 relatives of community members showed up for a day of games, visiting and hot chocolate Dec. 26. Sister Imelda Doepker, OSU, visited us the next day to speak about the mission work in Brasil and to assure us that visitors are always welcome.

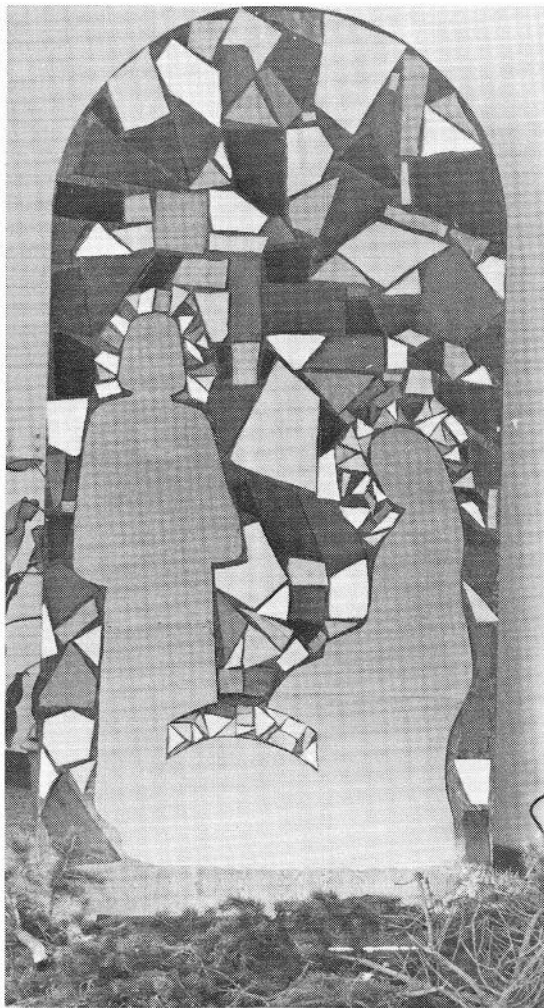
Among the visitors to the abbey around Christmas were two men interested in monastic life. Barry Fitzgerald of Kirkfield, Ont., and Roland Courteau of Prince Albert participated in a live-in coordinated by Father Maurice Weber. Eugene Donovan also stopped over for a few days.

The new bake oven arrived in December and was ready for use on Jan. 5. Meanwhile the Heidelberg offset press arrived just before Christmas but won't be set up until the end of January. There has also been talk about a new press building.

The plight of some 5,000 Vietnamese refugees stranded on the high seas was a topic of concern. Proposals were made that the abbey sponsor several families.

In the college, the arts students and their parents came here Dec. 21 for a supper and social with the teachers. There were discussions on accepting male arts students as boarders and starting a summer school university program next year. Plans are also being made to begin another commercial program.

Earlier in the fall, advisory boards for the press and farm were set up; Sister Rosemarie Steven's request to live at the abbey as a hermit was accepted; and a donation was made to Joe



*The Christmas creche for the chapel this year was made by the novices.*

Borowski to aid him in his court case challenging the legality of the abortion law in Canada.

Abbot Jerome Weber attended a farewell supper in Regina, Dec. 8, for Father Peter Nash, SJ, principal of Campion College, who retired Jan. 1, 1979. Father Florian Renneberg attended a meeting of the Canadian Consultative Commission on Multiculturalism in Ottawa, Oct. 26-29. And Brother Bede Hubbard spoke on "German Catholics" Nov. 5 in Saskatoon as part of a "Building the New Jerusalem on the Prairies" lecture series.

# Brother Thomas' guestmaster's diary

Following a busy July, August and September, the guest house was relatively quiet for the last quarter of 1978.

Six engaged couples made an Engaged Encounter in early October directed by Sister Mildred Kaufman of Saskatoon. That same weekend 60 Anglican youth came to the abbey for a retreat.

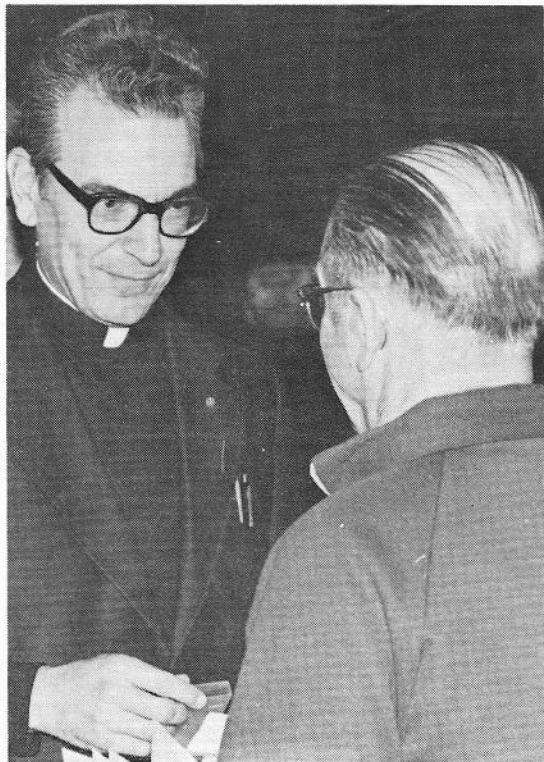
A group of Quebec and Saskatchewan community college educators met for a rap session at St. Peter's, Oct. 19-20.

The first weekend of November was a lively one at the abbey with 500 persons attending the Christian Faith Conference. About 50 sisters from a variety of sisterhoods "lived in" our guest facility.

A generation ago they would have been a colorful sight as well as an edifying experience. Today they are dressed for the most part in the grey, brown, and tan skirts and cardigans of women everywhere — less colorful, but edifying nonetheless.

St. Peter's played host twice to travelling groups from Globe Theatre: for one day in November for the cast of No. 1 Hard and in December for eight days with the members of Globe's school tour. In their off hours they knit, cooked up possible scripts, cooked a marvellous meal, served as schola for a fine Advent liturgy and, by day, taught and entertained in the schools.

The province's Anglican bishops and diocesan delegates met at the abbey Nov. 17-18 to discuss the Anglican World Development program. One of



Father Armand Nigro of Spokane, Wash., guest speaker at the Christian Faith Conference, Nov. 3-5, speaks to Father Philip Loehr.



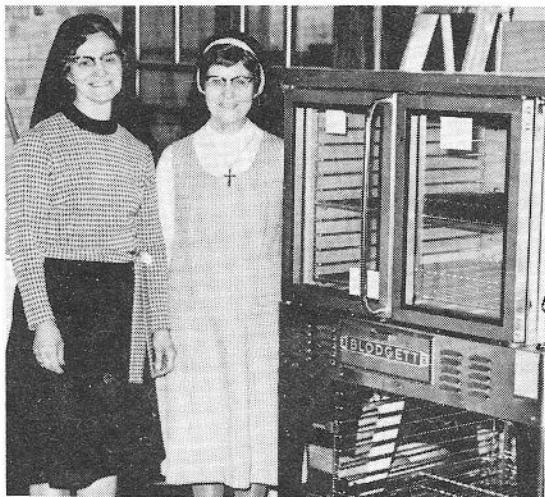
Father Daniel Muyres and Brother Dominic Distel unpack the new Heidelberg offset press which arrived in December.

the delegates flew from the meeting directly to Ecuador for field study.

Nov. 24-26 saw 100 Ukrainian Catholic youth assemble at the abbey for a well organized retreat. The pastor of St. Peter and Paul Ukrainian Catholic church in Saskatoon and a phalanx of seminarians from St. Pius X, led by seminarian Al Simpson, led the young people in a stimulating, challenging and prayerful weekend. All of us at the abbey were impressed with the serious approach used at this retreat.

December was "individuals" month. Sisters came singly and in twos for days of reflection or for a retreat. Several Regina families came for snowshoeing and cross-country skiing; Andy Than, artistic director of the 25th St. Theatre in Saskatoon, came for a Christmas holiday retreat. Sister Rosemary Stevens' father came from California to spend Christmas at the abbey. All in all, a quiet month.

P.S. A VIP participant at the Christian Faith Conference was Msgr. Edmund Ulinski of Zenon Park. He had just returned from attending the installation of Pope John Paul II as a member of Canada's official delegation. Needless to say, he was besieged for details every free minute.



Sisters Valerie Scheiber, OSE, and Gertrude Marie Twordik, OSE, with the new bake oven in the kitchen.



Sister Lina Gaudette of Edmonton spoke to the community on the psychological testing program for new members, Nov. 9.

## Deceased brethren, relatives

Father Claude St. Germaine, 60, St. Bernard Abbey, St. Bernard, Alabama, died of cancer, Sept. 28.

Father Richard Lawrence Jax, St. Bernard Abbey, 58, died of cancer, Oct. 20.

Father Matthew Joseph Connelly, 68, Holy Cross Abbey, Canon City, Colorado, died Oct. 24, after a long illness.

Father Theodore Thomas Fuertges, 65, St. Bede Abbey, Peru, Illinois, died unexpectedly but peacefully in his sleep, Nov. 24.

Father Dominic Joseph Keller, 75, St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, Minn., died Nov. 26.

Brother Anselm Pirog, 91, St. Procopius Abbey, Lisle, Illinois, died Nov. 29.

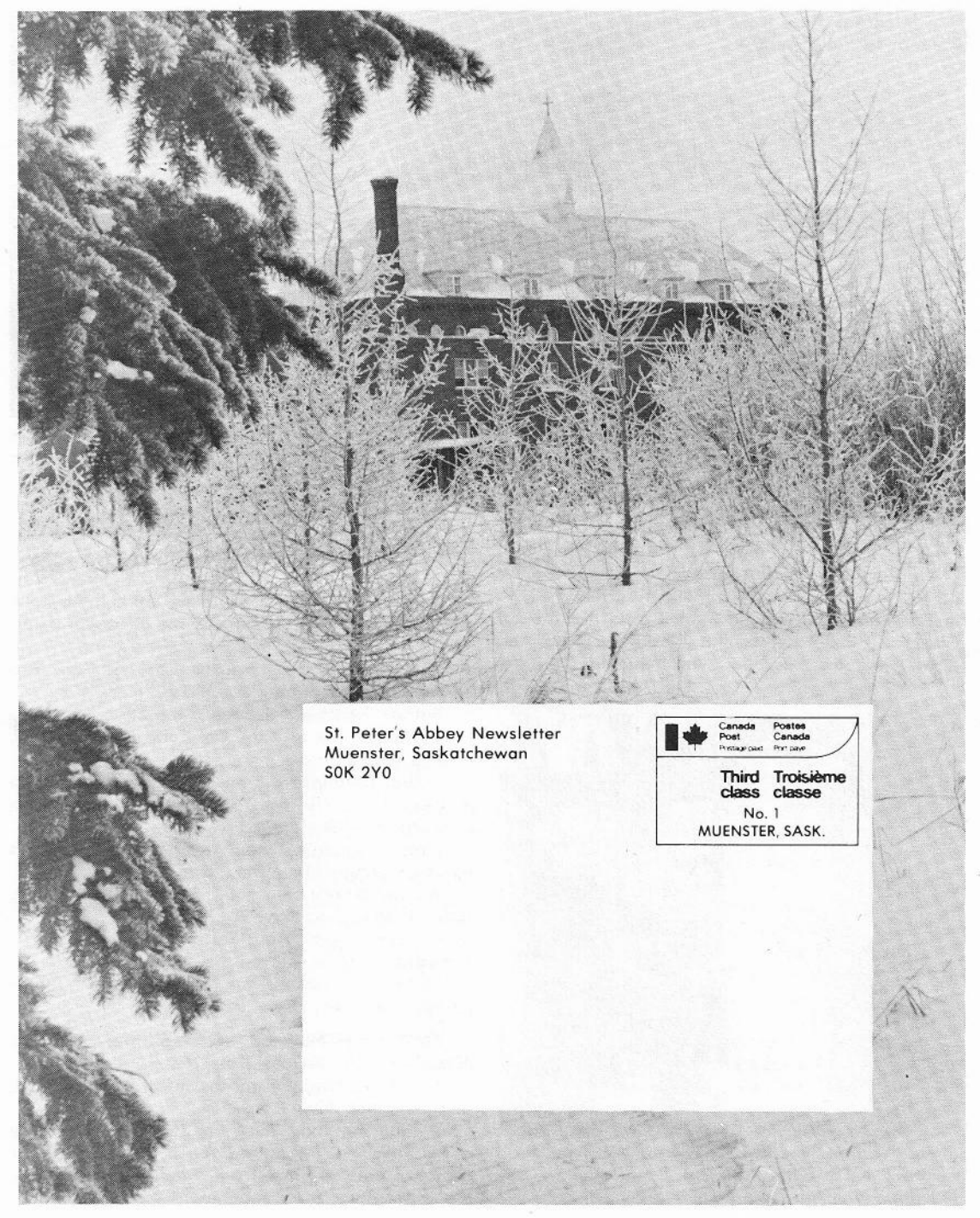
Father Edward Matthias Schmitz, 85, St. Benedict's Abbey, Atchison, Kansas, died Dec. 10.

Father Nicholas Arthur Kremer, 73, St. John's Abbey, died Dec. 23.

Mr. George Neuman, 85, stepfather of Father Joseph, died in Regina, Nov. 20.

Mrs. Ellen King, 96, mother of Brother Oswald, died in Prince Albert, Nov. 26.

William Anthony Donegan, 35, a former novice at St. Peter's (1962), died Dec. 16, in Edmonton, of complications arising from medication for low blood pressure.



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