



# St. Peter's Abbey Newsletter



Vol. 25 No. 1 Winter 2003

*Fathers Demetrius and Richard decorating a Christmas tree*



**From the archives:**

## **Christmas at St. Peter's Monastery 1905**

For those who do not know, until the 1960s individual Masses were the order of the day for priests. Concelebration for priests was not allowed. Solemn High Masses with deacon, subdeacon and master of ceremonies were common. Perhaps we can capture a little of the joy and dedication of the priests as they celebrated Christmas at St. Peter's Monastery in Muenster on Dec. 25, 1905. St. Peter's Colony was less than two years old and its future was still uncertain. This excerpt is from *St. Peter's Bote*, Vol. 2, now available at the abbey.

"Christmas was celebrated solemnly in the monastic

church at Muenster. Rev. P. Prior Alfred had the first High Mass at five in the morning assisted by P. Bruno as deacon, and P. Leo as subdeacon. After that there followed quiet masses practically without a break until 10 o'clock, when the last High Mass was offered. Rev. P. Bruno was celebrant, P. John was deacon and P. Leo assisted as subdeacon. P. Prior gave the festive sermon. Even though there were no guests from neighboring parishes, because all had their own services, the church could hardly accommodate all the faithful. The inspiring song of praise, 'Holy God, we praise Thy Name' concluded the Mass."

# A message from Abbot Peter's desk

We have started a new year. The year 2003 started with thoughts of peace, but also with rumors of war. We read the annual Peace Day message of Pope John Paul II at our community noon table reading. It was issued to commemorate the 40th anniversary this year of Pope John XXIII's encyclical, *Peace on Earth*. Meanwhile preparations continue by the United States to wage war on Iraq's Saddam Hussein.

We began our celebration of 2003 with a New Year's Eve midnight prayer service in our abbey church. Some friends and neighbours joined us for the prayer service to open our centennial year as an abbey in Saskatchewan. The evening concluded with lunch together.

Plans are developing for a series of events to mark our centennial year. An event for our employees will center around Wednesday, May 21, when we plan to have a Memorial Mass at the cairn on the banks of the Wolverine Creek where the monk settlers celebrated their first Mass on Ascension Thursday, 1903, as they arrived at this site on their new homestead. Another celebration involving the Abbey oblates will take place on Saturday/Sunday, June 28/29, the patronal feast day of St. Peter's. Mount Carmel Sunday on July 20 will have Bishop Albert LeGatt of Saskatoon as the main celebrant. The main public event for the abbey and colony will be the Aug. 1-3 weekend, when religious and civic dignitaries and former residents of the area will be invited and a college alumni reunion will be held. It promises to be a busy weekend. Details for these and other events are still being worked out. A *Colony Post*, reminiscent of the ones put out by Al Gerwing 25 years ago, was published in December to publicize the year of celebration.

I am grateful to Fr. Werner Renneberg who has taken on a significant and time-consuming retirement project. He is translating, from German, the early colony newspaper, the *St. Peter's Bote*. This information has been mainly inac-



*Abbot Peter was joined by students at a special meal in the monastic dining room. The students from left are: Pamela Sterner and Kendra Hesselwood.*

cessible because of the language it was written in. Fr. Werner has now translated the first three volumes, beginning with 1903, and it makes for fascinating reading and gives a good insight into the thinking of people 100 years ago. We no longer share many of those prejudices, but they are brought to life by Fr. Werner's faithful translations.

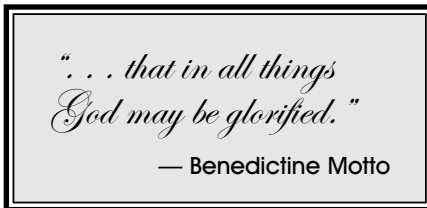
Some people who have purchased copies of the translations have not been able to put the book down once they started, it's so engrossing. It will also be an invaluable resource for people researching family and community history books. Limited numbers of each volume are being printed and are available from St. Peter's Abbey for approximately \$20 each.

Since our summer newsletter, we have experienced the ups and downs of harvest in 2002 rural Saskatchewan. It was one of the most stressful years on record for many farmers, who were faced with drought and then a late second growth in their crops. As a result,

many crops were still lying in the fields when the snow came this fall. The abbey farm combined 200 acres of snow-covered canola, as late as Dec. 1; and 80 acres of canola are still in the fields, to be harvested in spring. Every day, we see trucks loaded with bales heading west, with feed for cattle in Alberta.

Hermit Fr. James Gray, also known as "the bush dweller," moved into the monastery in December after 30 years in his hermitage. This came about because of a heart condition that made living alone precarious. We welcome his presence and contribution to community life in the abbey.

Fr. Richard Meidl was appointed oblate director on Jan. 1, 2003. He replaces Fr. Lawrence DeMong who has become more involved with the abbey's formation program. Fr. Richard introduces himself on the next page.



*In your last will and testament please remember St. Peter's Abbey.*

*Our legal title is:*

**ORDER OF  
ST. BENEDICT**

Muenster, SK S0K 2Y0

# A word from the oblate director

By Richard Meidl, OSB

Who is this Benedictine monk that has become the new oblate director at St. Peter's Abbey?

Seventeen years ago this week I made a dramatic step in my life. Seventeen years ago I backed my truck with a few of my possessions to the back door of the monastery and became a resident of St. Peter's Abbey. Many things have taken place since that week seventeen years ago. Many events and happenings that I had never ever dreamed would happen to me. While there have been some very difficult times during the years, I am very glad today that I made the decision I did seventeen years ago.

During those intervening years, I attended the seminary for five years and was ordained to the ministerial priesthood on Aug. 15, 1992. In 1990 I made my lifetime commitment to St. Peter's Abbey when I pronounced my Solemn Vows on July 11, 1990. Since I returned from the seminary in 1992, I have worked on many projects and jobs around the monastery. For about two years I did pastoral ministry assistance at St. Benedict/Cudworth and in Humboldt. I was the administrative assistant at St. Peter's College for four years along with being the vocation director and formation director for the abbey. Since late 1994 I have been the business manager for the Order of St. Benedict. Until 2000 that meant being responsible for the accounting procedures for all the apostolates of the Order of St. Benedict that is St. Peter's Abbey, St. Peter's College, St. Peter's Press and the abbey farm. In 2000 the college accounting was separated from the rest.

Until this past summer while I was vocation director and candidate director and business manager, I had a part-time assistant to help in the business office. In mid-September she decided to take on another position elsewhere. This left us with some decisions to make. After much discussion with Abbot Peter and others, we decided that I would drop the vocation and candidate director posi-

tions and look after all the matters related to the business office. Dropping the vocation and formation positions meant someone else had to take them on. It was decided that Fr. Lawrence would take on these positions but then that left him with too many "hats" to wear. As a result the "hat" of the oblate director was placed on my head.

So that is how we got where we are today. What does the future hold? I have been doing some studying of what Fr. Albert and Fr. Lawrence did as oblate director at St. Peter's and I have been searching the web sites of the other monasteries in North America to see what they are doing in their oblate programs. There are some interesting things happening both at St. Peter's and at other monasteries. Over the next several months I will be studying these further and hopefully, with the assistance of our oblates we can rejuvenate a program for St. Peter's Abbey.

I believe the meetings for 2003 were decided on and I feel that these will be suitable. There will be meetings at St. Peter's Abbey for the oblates on March 22, June 28 and Nov. 22. I am not sure if there will be a retreat for oblates this year. If there is, it will be at a different date than one of these meetings. I have a few ideas as to what to discuss at these meetings but nothing is firm yet as of today. If the oblates reading this message have any ideas, please send them to me by letter, fax or e-mail.

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or oblates@stpeters.sk.ca



Richard Meidl, OSB

## Pray for our communities

By Werner Renneberg, OSB

The three communities that were in intimately involved in the growth and development of our area of Saskatchewan are suffering from a scarcity of vocations, a lack of new recruits. In particular this is the case of vocations from our former abbacy, the people who benefited most from the efforts of our three communities.

The Sisters of St. Elizabeth operated hospitals early on, when no one else was providing that kind of care. For years they worked, saved lives and did it out of love of God and love of people, because they got very little pay. Some of what they did get went into new facilities, supplies and training of new nurses.

The Sisters of St. Ursula taught in various schools of the abbacy when Catholic teachers were scarce. They did this under enormous difficulties.

Like the Elizabethans, they worked for very little pay. They opened St.

Ursula's Academy and made it into an outstanding high school for young women. Among the blessings they gave to the abbacy was a love for music, art and literature. The Ursulines have now established a small community in Brazil. May God bless their outreach.

The Benedictines were deeply involved in the early settlement and development of the former abbacy area. They were instrumental in bringing many families into the area from the U.S., Germany and other countries. They shared the poverty and difficulties of the first settlers, encouraging them to keep up their spirits. The monks printed the German *St. Peter's Bote* under colossal difficulties. They supplied spiritual care with unimaginable obstacles. They opened a junior college with a first-year arts program, setting up a career for many.

Pray for God's guidance for our communities. If it is God's will, may we continue to serve God and the people of God wherever needed.

# People and events around the abbey

By Martin Brodner, OSB

Sept. 14 — After a rainy beginning, the second part of September proved to be a very favourable harvesting time. Potato crops were very good supplying our needs and those around the abbey. The Super Sweet corn crop was also excellent, satisfying many needs beyond the abbey. The grain crops, helped by the summer rains, were also satisfactory. However, the October snow at the very beginning of the month cut off all combining, leaving our canola crop still uncombined, beneath a layer of snow throughout the month.

Sept. 20-22 — The fall workshops and retreats also began this weekend with the Ukrainian Youth for Christ retreat, with Fr. Mark Baynock from Calgary as retreat master.

Sept. 25 — Cheers! We will be celebrating the 100th anniversary of our Benedictine arrival here in May 1903. Our Br. Paul Paproski has put together a

special Abbey Centennial Calender 2003. The pictures in it trace the growth of the various buildings to the present aerial view of our Abbey-College Complex. \$5.35 each (GST incl.) Postage extra.

September - October — Late September and October the guest department was solidly booked, with many groups and retreats: Holy Spirit-McClure group; Saskatoon Boys Choir; Saskatoon Lay Formation; Evangelical Lutheran Synod; United Church retreat; our Benedictine Oblate retreat; Saskatchewan Diocese Anglican Clergy; and the German Linguistic Group.

Oct. 11 - 13 — Fr. Richard Meidl



Brother Randy, Al Vedress and Brother Basil working on the cement pad at the entrance to the renovated abbey elevator.

assisted at the 180 youth gathering at Zenon Park. Also, Abbot Peter Novocosky conducted a retreat for the Sisters of St. Joseph in Toronto, while Fr. Andrew Britz conducted the retreat for the Oblates in Mission, B.C.

Frs. Richard and Demetrius also assisted at the retreat for 120 youth at Hudson Bay, Sask., Nov. 8 - 10.

Oct. 16 — Fr. Richard Meidl inherits the assignment as oblate director from Fr. Lawrence DeMong.

Additional 'Mysteries of Light' are added to the Rosary on this day by Pope John Paul II, on the 25th anniversary of his election as pope. They are: Christ's Baptism; his first miracle, Cana; his preaching ministry of the Kingdom and Repentance; his Transfiguration; Institution of the Eucharist.

Oct. 29 — A special core-cut crew did a last major job of enlarging our present abbey church elevator by cutting out portions of cement on its floor and wall. The present narrow lift had been removed Oct. 16.

During this work it is impossible for the disabled to get to the church. Fortunately, the company supplied us with a Stair-Trac caterpillar. The wheel chair is strapped to the 'cat' which then, gen-



A 1978 scene at the site where the first mass was offered in the Muenster area on the bank of the Wolverine on May 21, 1978. Pictured are: Mary Gortler, Fathers Philip, Florian, Daniel, Augustine, Albert, Abbot Jerome, Aloysius and Martin.



*Brother Wolfgang on the ladder and Alan Vedress framing the new entrance to the church elevator entrance.*

tly crawls down the stairs! Br. Gregory Brodner (97 1/2) can thus get to the church for prayers and the eucharist.



*97-year-old Brother Gregory going down the steps in the borrowed Stair Trac caterpillar. It was found necessary to revise the former elevator because it was very narrow and wheel chairs had to be given a 90-angle turn to exit. At one time there were three wheel chairs occupants needing the elevator to attend church: Fr. Norbert, Fr. Leo and Brother Gregory. There was a fourth customer when Fr. Rudolph was home. The new elevator allows the wheel chairs to go straight in and out.*

Nov. 6 — The community and other guests welcomed the presentation on “Portraits of Jesus” in the Jerome Assembly Room by Sister Teresita Kambeitz, OSU., superior general of the Prelate Ursulines. With 72 slides Sr. Teresita showed how artists over the centuries have portrayed Jesus from the catacombs to the present day.

Nov. 11 — The Remembrance Day ushered in a week of activities for both abbey and college:

Nov. 13-14 — displays in the gym on career and educational opportunities.

Nov. 14 — Diocesan Day of Prayer in support of Farming Families and Rural Communities. At the abbey we had eucharist at 11:30 a.m. and continuing prayers until Vespers.

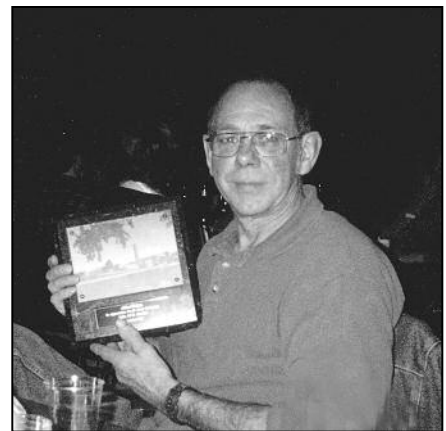
Nov. 15 — SPC Student Award Program filled the Jerome Assembly Room with 120 students, parents, faculty and monks. Entitled ‘Showcase of the Arts’ it featured Visual Art, Creative Writing, Dramatic Arts and Music. Sixteen scholarships and 13 awards were presented to various students.

Nov. 15 - 17, 22 - 24 — The Vita Nova Lay Formation of Prince Albert diocese had two weekend retreats at

the abbey. These retreats were co-ordinated by Antol Proketz and Christine Mader who are also regular contributors to the *Prairie Messenger’s* Liturgy and Life column. Twenty-four members participated in these retreats each time.

Nov. 15-17 — Fr. Werner Renneberg was team priest at a Marriage Encounter Weekend at Queen’s House of Retreats, Saskatoon.

Nov. 29 — Staff & Teaching Faculty Appreciation Supper. Tokens of appreciation for faithful, generous service were given to: Alan Vedress (maintenance); Jenny Irwin (director of student services); Caroline Cotrell (history); Tim Lilburn (Sage Hill Writers Program, philosophy); Diane Mertz (Rural Life office); Russell Weber (business law).



*Alan Vedress with his 10-year service award at the Staff Appreciation supper on Nov. 29*

On Dec. 2 we had a farewell Come and Go Tea for Jenny Irwin upon her retiring after many years of work in various college departments.

Nov. 29 - 30 — After a week of very mild weather we were able to combine most of our 350 acres of canola. The mild December, after a rather cool November, has continued into the New Year of 2003!

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# People and events around the abbey

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December — was a month of various interior abbey renovations; new linoleum in the lower corridor leading to the refectory as well as in several rooms after 40 years; work on widening the abbey elevator to the church was begun in October and was reaching completion before Christmas, so that Br. Gregory, 97 years old, was able to use it again with his scooter from Dec. 21 on; renovation of Business Office rooms just south of the main entrance.

Dec. 15 — a first issue in some years (No. 6) of *St. Peter's Colony Post* was distributed in our parishes. This newsletter brought the first general information on the centennial celebration of St. Peter's Colony, which will

reach its climax August 1 - 3, 2003. The first monks had arrived on May 21, 1903.

Dec. 31 - Jan. 1, 2003 — End of the year midnight Vigil of Light and Thanksgiving, as well as the Proclamation by Abbot Peter of the official opening of St. Peter's Colony Centennial Jubilee Year.

Jan. 6 — College classes resumed for the second semester.



*St. Peter's Press and Prairie Messenger staff, December 2002. Back, L-R: Randy Weber, Maureen Weber, Kelly Wittke, Maxine Hay, Frank Flegel (Regina correspondent), Del Deschamps, Gail Kleefeld, Therese Jelinski (P.A. correspondent), Lisa Bruesch, Lillian Hinz. Front, L-R: Diane Wallace (Winnipeg correspondent), Corie Hetzel, Fr. Andrew Britz, Claire McKay (Saint-Boniface correspondent). Missing: Lucille Stewart, Cindy Bergermann, Rob Muench.*

## Students meet 'Men in Black' at supper

*By Lawrence DeMong, OSB*

How do we connect with our students when fewer and fewer monks are involved with teaching and working within the college? As campus ministry team, we struggled to find a way to connect. Finally it dawned on us that if monks are vowed to prayer and works

of love, they would surely be ready to offer what they are already doing, even if from a sick bed or wheelchair.

Why not invite the students into our space for a festive meal and offer them a relationship of prayer? After a preliminary discussion with the community revealed a readiness and enthusiasm for this proposal, the individual monks

were contacted and asked to indicate their willingness to pray for a number of students and, secondly, whether they would be open to meeting with a student if such a desire were expressed.

Katy, our campus minister, injected a touch of humour into the posters around the college, challenging the students to come for a "free chicken supper with SPC's men in black!" After the Jan. 16 Vespers we all sat down to a festive meal with table cloths and candle light and lots of good cheer as students were randomly mixed in with the "men in black! Soft guitar music by Br. Kurt and animated conversation led into the prayer offer and introductions of all present.

Besides this new and gratuitous connection of students and monks, everyone agreed it was an appropriate and delicate way to bring us together. "I thought it was great fun," said one staff member, "we'll have to do that again, and earlier in the school year!"

May God's Holy Spirit bring surprising gifts out of this initiative.



*Pictured here at the supper with the Benedictine community are, left to right, Tenille Campbell, Shannon Hofmann, Caitlin Ward, Roseanne Lines, Fr. Roman Schneider, Lesia Bomok and Br. Basil Schaan.*

# Printing has a long history at St. Peter's

By Werner Renneberg, OSB

The monks of St. Peter's Abbey have always considered the Catholic press one of their most important apostolates. It is hard to believe that within nine months of the Benedictines coming to Saskatchewan, they began to publish a weekly newspaper, the *St. Peter's Bote*.

The *Bote* was printed in German. At this time the monks had a small log building for themselves and a small church for themselves and the people living nearby. Communications with the world had to be made through Rosthern, some 100 miles to the northwest.

An attempt was made to print the *Bote* in Rosthern. It had a printing press, but did not have the staff to do the job. So the monks decided to laboriously write out the copy and send it to Winnipeg via the railway. The *Bote* was printed and mailed from there for a year and a half. By this time a press building had been constructed at the Muenster monastery where the necessary machinery and other supplies were now at hand.

In our day, with modern equipment, it is almost impossible to imagine how the type was set for the pages and later printed. Moveable letters date back to Johann Gutenberg whose first major work was printing the Bible in 1450. Over the centuries there had been some improvements. No longer were the letters carved out of wood. They were cast in iron. A modern press needed more than a dozen different sizes and styles of type, many with light and boldface letters. German type especially was complex. Some capital letters were quite similar. Often *sz* were combined. Some vowels had the *umlaut* (two dots above them). These were all very important.

For the *Bote*, the letters were picked out by hand and placed into small trays called galleys. Each line was 2.25 inches long, with an average of 30 letters. The eight pages had four columns, most of them were 15 inches long containing 75 lines.

Each column had an average of

2,250 letters.

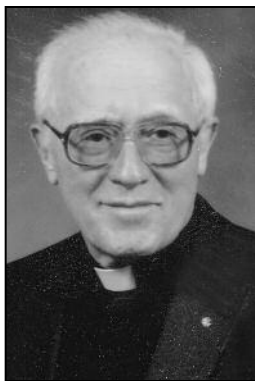
A page of solid printing would have some 9,000 letters. Fortunately, there were large headings, some pictures printed on the pages and many advertisements that could be kept and re-used.

The galleys were proofread and corrections inserted. They were then carefully placed into a steel form, tightened up so they could be lifted and placed on the flatbed of the press. Accidents at times happened if the letters were not tight enough and fell out helter-skelter. This was called a Printer's Pie. It was enough to make grown men cry.

When everything was assembled and the press rolled, each sheet had to be fed through by hand twice to print both sides. Next, they were again hand-fed through a folder which also cut one of the sides so that the paper unfolded into eight pages. Address labels were then pasted on by hand and the finished product taken to the post office.

After the pages were printed, each letter must be carefully replaced in a tray to be ready for setting next week's paper. Trays were about 3 x 4 feet in size with some 35 compartments. Imagine how many letters, especially vowels, were needed each week!

Along with the German letters, the press at Muenster also had complete sets of English letters, which were especially useful for job work. There was money in printing a variety of forms for businesses, government agencies, flyers, etc. The common language in the colony was German, but many could also speak English and they were keenly aware that English was important. After all, they had settled in an English country.



Werner Renneberg,  
OSB

Money was scarce and the Benedictine community went into debt buying needed equipment. Hired labor was needed to do the work. Paper must be bought in large quantities. A year's subscription to the *Bote* in Canada and the United States cost one dollar. Subscriptions to Germany cost \$1.50 for a year. Postage was cheap at the time and over and over it was stated in the paper that if the circulation were fairly large, and if everyone paid for their subscriptions on time, the monks could pay off the debt.

It must be mentioned that many people received the paper *gratis* in order to increase the circulation. Offers were made for subscribers to send the name and address of anyone in Canada, the United States and abroad, who could read German. Four issues would be sent. Those receiving the paper would have to pay if they wanted to continue receiving it.

The pledge was made that if the press would make any money, it would be used to fund a seminary for priesthood students at the monastery. The early years saw no such profit. The paper stayed alive because the monks took no pay and somehow managed to pick up the shortfall. The amazing thing is that, right from the beginning, 52 issues a year were printed.

Each issue, from the beginning, is loaded with local, national and international news. Anyone reading it would have knowledge, no doubt somewhat biased, of what was happening all over the world: in China, Japan, Russia, Europe, Latin America, Australia, etc.

The *Prairie Messenger* is still in the tradition of the *St. Peter's Bote*. Some may think that with radio, TV and daily newspapers it is no longer necessary to read the PM to find out what is going on in the world. The fact is that the Catholic Press, and in particular the *Prairie Messenger*, is more important now than ever. If the PM is somewhat biased in its presentations, the secular press is far less reliable. Secular newspapers and magazines are

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# Prairie Messenger receives high praise

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owned by the wealthy who seldomly allow the real truth to appear, and then on an inside page. The plights of humans in our own country and abroad do not sell subscriptions. Sports, sex, entertainment and the bullying of poor nations by the

wealthy, attract subscribers.

In order to know what is happening in the Catholic Church, it is necessary to get and read the PM. Even people in other parts of Canada and the United States admit that, at present, the

*Prairie Messenger* is one of the best and boldest Catholic papers in presenting issues honestly, and in its assessment of important church matters.


Give the PM a try. Let it open your eyes. See the world as it really is!

The  
Saskatchewan  
Benedictines

invite you  
to experience

**Monastic Life**

by living with the monks at  
St. Peter's Abbey



To assist you in discerning your  
life vocation share some time  
with a community of Benedictine  
monks  
by contacting:

Lawrence DeMong, OSB  
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## St. Peter's Colony Roots

The German *St. Peter's Bote* began its publication less than a year after the beginning of the colony. It was a weekly paper edited first at Rosthern and printed in Winnipeg. It was an outspoken paper trying to cure all the ills present at the time, as the people and priests saw them. Local news has now been translated into readable English by Fr. Werner Renneberg, OSB.

Volumes consist of a year, 52 issues. Volumes 1 - 3 are now at hand. They are wire ring-bound, each with more than 100 pages. They are available at St. Peter's Abbey. Cost is: Vol. 1 and 3 \$20 each. Vol. 2 \$21. The price includes taxes. If requested by mail, postage is extra.

Order from: St. Peter's Abbey, Box 10, Muenster, SK S0K 2Y0

## Deaths: remember the faithful departed

Since the last newsletter the following have passed into eternity:

**Aug. 4** — Fr. Roland Heid, OSB, 88, Saint Vincent Archabbey, Latrobe, Pa.

**Aug. 30** — Br. Alfred Nasticky, OSB, 82, Saint Andrew Abbey, Cleveland, Ohio.

**Sept. 14** — Fr. Arthur Holtz, OSB, 74, Saint Vincent Archabbey, Latrobe, Pa.

**Sept. 19** — Fr. Kieran Rodgers, OSB, 81, Saint Vincent Archabbey, Latrobe, Pa.

**Oct. 2** — Abbot Edward Vollmer, OSB, 94, Holy Cross Abbey, Canon City, Colo.

**Oct. 4** — Fr. Vernon Miller, OSB, 81, St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, Minn.

**Oct. 5** — Catherine Dale, 94, Humboldt, Sask. Sister of deceased Fr. Alfred Engele.

**Nov. 10** — Fr. Augustine Cunningham, OSB, 68, Belmont Abbey, Belmont, N.C.

**Nov. 12** — Br. Gordon Barnard, OSB, 71, Assumption Abbey, Richardton, N.D.

**Nov. 17** — Fr. Berthold Edmund Ricker, OSB, 96, St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, Minn.

**Dec. 4** — Fr. Nicholas Doub, OSB, 53, St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, Minn.

**Dec. 10** — Evelyn Hinz, Winnipeg, Man., 65, Sister of Fr. Leo Hinz.

**Dec. 19** — Isidore Brodner, Dysart, Sask., 92, brother of Br. Gregory, Frs. George and Martin Brodner.