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Finding My Vocation as a Diocesan Hermitess

by Margaret Mary Palczynski

YOU'RE a WHAT? A diocesan hermitess. On May 19, I made my final profession as a diocesan hermitess. The road was long, but the Lord is persistent. It only took 73 years and the span of the continent to get me to this moment. And there were many stops along the way. *Deo gratias!*

What is a hermit (-ess)?

The root *erem-* means 'to rest', 'be quiet'. The word 'hermit' comes from Greek *eremos*, 'desert' and *eremia*, 'solitude', and *eremites*, 'desert dweller'. At my profession, I vowed to 'devote my life to the praise of God and the salvation of the world through a stricter withdrawal from the world, the silence of solitude, and assiduous prayer and penance.' Quite a mouthful and even more for the heart to take in.

The journey was a long one but God was with me at every step, even when I didn't want him there. Though I was a cradle Catholic, the traumatic loss of my mother in my mid-twenties led me to hide myself from his love for nearly 15 years. I married, had a child and taught at university for many years in Montreal. I was very busy, successful, independent. I was also angry,

very angry at God, and I hid myself from him – or so I thought!

God called me back to himself clearly and abruptly. Waking in recovery after a serious

operation, I saw a priest standing at the next bed and I felt an overwhelming sense of gratitude to a God in whom I did not want to believe. I knew it was time for me to let him into my life again. But not in the Catholic Church, that was too painful. So I joined the Anglican Church and slowly opened my heart to the joy of a personal relationship with Jesus. But there was a hunger in my heart for the mystery and fulness of faith which I had once known. So I came back to the fold. I threw myself into various ministries: choir, reader, Eucharistic minister... The joy that

filled my soul was a powerful force that kept me longing for more. I had it all: family, career, faith and an active ministry within the Church.

But did I? I had not yet learned that God speaks in a 'small, still voice' and that I had to stop and listen.

As activity filled my days, my relationships suffered. My husband and I separated; my daughter left home. Work no longer hid the





emptiness within. Very slowly (17 years!), through counselling and in prayer, I began to listen to God's voice of love within my heart. I found spiritual direction, became a Benedictine Oblate, and made private vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. My spiritual director mentioned the 'hermit life' to me in passing. I started to read and learn, and that still, small voice kept bringing me back to the idea.

When I retired, I came to BC to be closer to my daughter. During COVID, my prayer life intensified. I began to seriously consider an eremitic vocation and to live more purposefully towards that end. My Benedictine roots called, and I moved to Mission to teach at the Seminary. In this faith-filled environment, faith and call both flourished. The monks welcomed me warmly, first into their school, and, as my vocation grew clearer and failing eyesight made commuting difficult, to Nazareth House, a small cottage on the monastery property which has now been my home and hermitage for three years. Their

prayers, guidance, example and support have often held me up when my own prayer was arid and the still, small voice within seemed silent. After my husband's death four years ago, my heart was ready and the way was open for me to take the next step. With Fr Abbot's support, I made a formal application to the Archbishop to become a diocesan hermitess.

What is a hermit? Simply put, a hermit is a person who loves God in order to love others, and who lives a life that permits that love to flourish. It is a vocation of listening and of loving: God and those around me. That takes time, silence, solitude and much prayer, hence the 'silence of solitude' and 'stricter withdrawal from the world', the 'assiduous prayer and penance' of the vows.

Not all hermits take public vows. Historically, hermits retreated into the desert, obedient to God's voice within their hearts. Today, many hermits live out their vocations privately, hidden from the world. The diocesan hermit, however, is called to live out this very private calling publicly, as a witness to God's love and presence in his Church. I professed the 'evangelical counsels' of chastity, poverty and obedience, the mainstays of all consecrated life, into the hands of Archbishop Smith and I am responsible to him for the way I live out my vocation.

God's call on his child to any vocation is his personal declaration of love, to be pondered,



accepted and lived out in the power of the Holy Spirit and through the guidance of the Church and of one's brothers and sisters in Christ. Throughout my life, I have been aware of God's presence, even in the dark years and then in much 'quieting and deepening' as my relationship with him grew and he became the central focus of my life. The present call of my loving God to a final oblation to him as a diocesan hermitess is the call to a three-fold relationship:

1) to *be with* him in the total self-giving of my heart, mind and will to the loving God who first gave himself for me, in order

2) to *become* all that he has made me to be:

daughter of the Father, spouse of the Son and temple of the Holy Spirit, and

3) to *be for* others, both as a visible sign of God's presence in the Church, and in my personal relationships with my brothers and sisters.

In the last two years, through the 'silence of solitude', I have learned how much I have to depend not only on God to lead, strengthen and keep me faithful to my vows, but also on the support of those around me: my family, my friends, my prayer community. A hermit cannot live, love and grow in isolation. Please pray for me.

Major Seminary Diary

December

Sun 7: The philosophers once again pulled off an excellent production for the annual Advent Program. Titled "The Good Ol' Days", the skit was directed by Dylan and featured himself, Bijan, Esteban and Jacob. Judging by the roaring laughter of the crowd, the philosophers' weeks of writing and practising paid off!

Thur 18: Having finally concluded exam season, wearied yet relieved, we spent our last evening before the Christmas break celebrating the close of the Fall 2025 semester! The theologians cooked an excellent roast beef meal with the help of Br Joshua, after which we enjoyed rum and eggnog in the rec room and shared our highlights from the semester. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to all!



Pedro Reyes receives candidacy on February 6

January

Sun 4: As we arrived back at SCK for a new semester, we also welcomed a new seminarian to our community: Nhat Le! Hailing from Vietnam, Nhat completed his spirituality year in Mexico, and will continue his studies at SCK for the Archdiocese of Las Vegas in Nevada. Praise God for another brother to study and journey with!

Tues 27-Sun Feb 1: This year's silent retreat was led by Arbp Richard Gagnon, Archbishop Emeritus of Winnipeg. His daily talks centred on the theme "Gift and

Mystery", helping us to recognise our vocations as a gift and to embrace the mystery of priestly discernment. Thank you to His Grace for offering us such a fruitful and refreshing retreat experience, and to the Serra Club Foundation for sponsoring it!

February

Fri 6: Vancouver seminarian Pedro Reyes received his candidacy tonight at the Redemptoris Mater Seminary, which marks the Church's formal acceptance of his public declaration to prepare for Holy Orders. After his candidacy Mass, celebrated by Abp Richard Smith, there was a joyous celebration complete with supper and much singing!

Sat 7-Sun 8: Our Winter Live-In welcomed men from all across BC discerning priestly vocations. We tried a new schedule which allowed more time for discussing and answering questions about vocations, as well as for hanging out over games and snacks. Please pray for them and for all those discerning religious vocations!

Sun 22-Sun Mar 1: The annual Pastoral



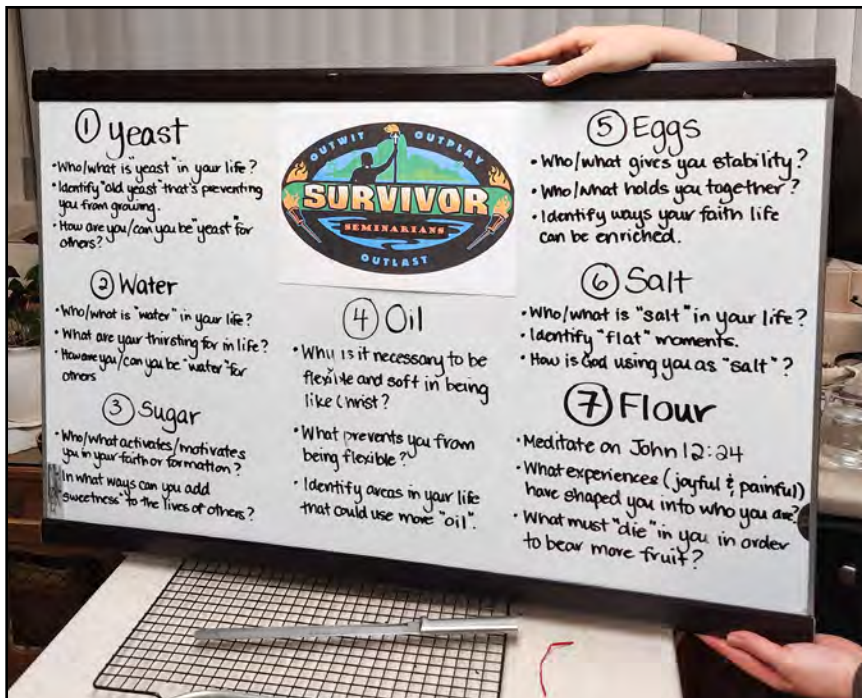
Theologians make bread and learn the ingredients of formation (see picture below) with the Franciscan Sisters of the Eucharist during Pastoral Week

Week saw the theologians living in parishes and engaging in pastoral experiences across the Archdiocese. The week included learning about various ministries at the John Paul II Pastoral Centre, visiting the Catholic chaplaincy at SFU, attending a deanery meeting, dining with priests and lay leaders, and giving our vocation stories

in parishes during their Sunday Masses. All agreed that the week was both insightful for our priestly formation and a ton of fun! Meanwhile at SCK, the philosophers had a party of their own, hosting a bonfire with the fraters from the Abbey.

March

Sun 22: After months of preparation in Mr Donnelly's Speech Arts class, five philosophy students participated in the annual Oratory Contest. Aside from the excellent speeches,



Ingredients for the Survival "Bread" of Formation



Seminarians serve at the Chrism Mass at Holy Rosary Cathedral

attendees were also treated to band and choral performances from the minor seminarians and a dramatic rendition of “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” by some of the majors. Congratulations to all the speech contestants, and especially to Jacob Klaponski, who won with his speech on “Three Keys to Loneliness”!

Sun 29: After a devastating one-point loss in basketball last semester, the major seminarians reclaimed their title as champions against the minors in a best-of-five volleyball match! Though they were initially down two games to one, they managed to prevail in the next two for a stunning comeback. Shoutout to the minors for a great effort, and better luck next time!

April

Wed 1: We were blessed once again to serve at the Archdiocese of Vancouver’s Chrism Mass at Holy Rosary Cathedral. Witnessing so many priests come together in the Eucharistic sacrifice is deeply encouraging as we discern priesthood ourselves. We also enjoyed a delicious meal and friendly conversation with the priestly community afterwards.

Tues 14-Sat 18: Two teams, but only one winner... it’s time for Sports Week! On Tuesday, our Neocatechumenal brothers joined us for some intense basketball and pickleball, and on Friday we battled it out in some handball and badminton (with a trip to the pool in the evening). Saturday featured a full day of activities, starting with track and field events like running, javelin and shot put and ending with the greatest challenge of all: building a boat from scratch and paddling it across Mary Lake. A pizza dinner and bonfire capped off the festivities, during which Team Kebab was crowned the victor over Team Neo-Anglicans. Congrats to both teams for a solid effort, and a huge thanks to the Sports Committee for organising!



Majors summit Mount Crickmer on April 25 (L to R): Dylan Braun, Huy Le, Peter van Leeuwen, Jacob Klaponski, Esteban López García

Fri 24-Wed 29: While we buried ourselves in books during exam week, we also took some time to relax and recharge as a community.

Some of the ways we beat the exam week stress included watching “Titanic”, hiking Mount Crickmer and going out for a pub night! We also had an affirmation night, allowing us to share the appreciation we have for each other which often goes unspoken throughout the year.

Thur 30: We celebrated the end of exam week with a delicious dinner prepared by the philosophers and a toasty bonfire! In between, we screened two videos lovingly produced by the Media Committee: the annual yearbook video, and a tribute video for graduating seminarian Huy Le. In gratitude for his presence in our

community, the community gifted him a car jump-starter to accompany his many journeys ahead in Saskatoon!

May

Fri 1: Our last day commemorated the Feast of St. Joseph the Worker with Mass and a celebratory meal with the monks, faculty, and minor seminarians. After that, all that was left to do was clear out our rooms, say our goodbyes and leave for the summer, ending another grace-packed year at SCK. Innumerable thanks to our formators, teachers and all who guided us in 2025-2026.

Minor Seminary Diary

January

Sun 4: After a refreshing Christmas break, we returned to the Seminary with January blues. *C'est la vie.*

Thur 22-Fri 23: The community traveled to Manning Park Resort, settling into five cabins for the night. Each group made the most of the evening in their own way; one cabin, for instance, gathered around *KPop Demon Hunters* (highly recommended). After Vespers, most of us took a brisk plunge in the pool before turning in for the night. The next morning, they drove up to the ski resort for a truly *ex-chill-arating* half day on the slopes.

Thur 29-Sun Feb 1: Minutes after Gym Class, a bell marked the start of our silent retreat, led by Fr. Caesarius, whose conferences centered on the demanding and liberating art of self-accusation.

February

Sat 21: The seniors rolled up their sleeves and headed out to help clear blackberry bushes from a local trail.

Fri 27: We gathered in the Rec Room for a

presentation by Sergeant Todd Hunter and a fellow Conservation Officer, former colleagues of Postulant Erich Harbich. The two officers brought the room to life with vivid stories from the field: wildlife encounters, close calls, and the rhythms of day-to-day conservation work. The seminarians were wholly captivated, and those sharp enough to answer the officers' questions were rewarded with a badge to show for it.



Candlemas on the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord

Sat 28: Under the coaching of Fr Anthony's brother, Chinh Nguyen, a select

group of seminarians spent the entire Saturday morning drilling volleyball fundamentals, emerging exhausted and noticeably improved.

March

Fri 6-Sun 8: We boarded a bus to Squamish for a change of scenery, spending the days helping the sisters of Our Lady Queen of Peace Monastery with what can only be described as super-duper whooper intense yard work.

Tues 10: In the evening, most of the minors went to a hockey arena in Abbotsford to watch

the Abbotsford Canucks suffer a decisive defeat at the hands of the Manitoba Moose.

Mon 23: Two weeks later, it was our turn on the ice at the Mission Rec Centre. Splitting into two teams, we played a hockey game that far surpassed in intensity the one we had merely watched. Pizza followed. All was well.

Sat 28: The community devoted the entire day to Eucharistic Adoration, collectively spending twelve hours before the Blessed Sacrament. Each seminarian took a one-hour slot in pairs, anchoring the day in Christ.

April

Sat 18: The seniors took part in another local trail cleanup. This time, rather than cutting blackberries, we planted a large number of trees to shade them out, fighting nature with nature.

Sun 19: Two noble representatives from the minor seminary, David Urda and Timothy Koehn, participated with some of the major seminarians in the Vancouver Sun Run.

Thur 23-Fri 24: For the first time in its history, SCK hosted the annual Speech Arts Festival, competing alongside Traditional Learning Academy (Coquitlam) and Saint Jean Brebeuf (Abbotsford). The festival brought with it a familiar mix of nerves and excitement. This year went particularly well: we won the competition!

Tues 28: Culture Trip Day! We boarded the West Coast Express in Mission, disembarked at the Waterfront Station in Vancouver, strolled through Stanley Park, and enjoyed lunch before exploring the Vancouver Aquarium, home to

many fish, crocodiles, seals, and, somewhat unexpectedly, monkeys.

May

Mon 4: May Picnic! The Grade 12s took it upon themselves to serve as the morning's alarm clock, making their rounds through the dorms with pillows swinging. After breakfast, the community walked or rollerbladed to Nielson Park for a day of baseball, capture the flag, and swimming.

Sat 16: Inspired by alumnus Paul Vo's entrepreneurial spirit, Pius Vuong, Mang Bosco and Jude Heimbecker embarked on a project of bringing SCK merchandise to life. After a lengthy procurement process, they acquired shirts and set to work stamping SCK branding, iron-on embroidered crests, and the Benedictine cross. The venture was driven by a dual mission: to spread seminary spirit and to raise funds for the seminary.

Thur 21: The Seminary Hockey League wrapped up its season in memorable fashion, with the Holy Smokes claiming the Fr. Andrew Keber Cup. Led by the determined captain Marko Banić, the squad navigated nearly half the season shorthanded, a testament to their grit and teamwork. Their only blemish came at the hands of Sister Clare's Chickens, whose patron, Sister Clare Crockett SHM, clearly provided some heavenly assistance that not even goaltender Dean Pham could stop. Teammate David Urda proved an invaluable presence, sharpening the skills of fellow teammate Christian Vogel



Seminarians and alumni greet Archbishop Richard Smith while participating in the Vancouver Sun Run



Sister Clare's Chickens sport their teams' logo on custom made sweaters

obstacle course. Teams were locked in separate rooms and tasked with breaking out, beginning with a hidden key search, followed by a team-legged race across the soccer field, a throwing accuracy challenge in the hockey arena, and a blindfolded navigation from the Trinity Tree to Mary Lake, guided only by one sighted teammate. The gauntlet concluded with tug-of-war in the lake. When all points were tallied, Team Black was crowned the winner.

Sat 30: The day after classes ended, we held a movie night,

and others throughout the year. A special mention goes to stalwart Augustine Vandanath, whose performance this season marks his third consecutive championship, making him the odds-on favourite for next year's "first round draft pick."

Fri 22-Sat 23: Sports Day! After weeks of training, the seminarians competed as Team Black and Team White in Javelin, Discus, 100m, 200m, 400m, 2400m, Long Jump, and High Jump. Friday evening brought the Inter-Sports Day

two films — *Dune: Part One* and *Belle-U* — running simultaneously, with drinks and snacks all around. A well-earned celebration. That same afternoon, however, only two remained for Saturday work period. The Grade 12s were out on their Grad Outing, the Grade 11s were at cooking class with Br Joshua preparing desserts for the upcoming Graduation party, and six or seven Juniors were away serving at Hospice, leaving just two to hold the fort. That night, a fortunate few were granted permission to sleep outside.

games, a raucous affair beginning with the decoding of encrypted clues. The Egg Race proved especially memorable: Jude Heimbecker, having won the race, fled at full speed from a mob intent on smashing the prize egg over his head. He did not escape. Saturday brought the final events and the centrepiece: an escape-room



Grade 12 grads (L to R): David Urda, Jude Laurence, Jacob Holmes, Brayden Hoffman, Joe Scaria

Totally Yours: Fostering Vocations in Prince George

FOR the past three years, a monk or two from the monastery have made the journey north to Prince George for the annual Diocesan Youth Conference (DYC). This year, something new stirred. Fr Caesarius, inspired by the apostolic possibilities of the gathering, asked if he might bring three minor seminarians along. The hope was simple and urgent: to inspire young people from the local diocese to consider a vocation to the priesthood or religious life.

And so Fr Caesarius, Frater Charles, and seminarians Brayden Hoffman, Augustine Vandanath, and Victor Banić attended a 5:30 am Mass on the morning of Friday, May 15, before loading themselves into the Ford Escape for the long drive north.

The journey from Mission to Prince George is a nearly eight-hour stretch through some of the most striking landscape British Columbia has to offer: expansive forests, rolling hills, and wide-open skies. The group stopped in Williams Lake, where the Rosario family generously hosted them for lunch on the way up – as they would

do again on the return. Not unlike Benedictine hospitality, offered twice. In between, Brayden read aloud from Jane Austen’s *Emma* for the first leg, followed by periods of lectio divina, conversation, silence, and music.

Upon arriving, the group settled at Vianney House, a formation residence hosted by Fr Ken Anderson, himself an alumnus of the seminary. This year’s DYC, themed *Totus Tuus* – “Totally Yours,” the Marian motto of Pope Saint John Paul II – was held at Sacred Heart Cathedral.

On Friday night, Grace McGeragle, mother of four and sister of Fr Ken, gave the opening talk. With live “chicken scratch” drawings growing before the participants’ eyes, she painted a picture both simple and profound: each of us finds ourselves stranded on an island at some point, relegated there by the crashes of life. But there is a ship – the Catholic Church – come to bring us home, and aboard it is Mary, our mother, who draws us back to her Son. Grace closed by inviting everyone to pray together: “I surrender myself to you, take care of everything.”

Saturday’s Mass deepened the tone further. Fr Caesarius’s homily drew from Paul’s encouragement to the disciples in Asia Minor and Jesus’s invitation to “ask in my name, that your joy may be complete.” He named the lies that take root in isolated hearts – I am a failure; I don’t matter; I am unworthy – and offered the remedy: naming the darkness, speaking it aloud, bringing it into the light of communion, and shattering the lies in Jesus’ name. As Mass concluded, Perpetual Adoration began quietly in the church, remaining open through the day as an oasis of peace.

The split sessions that followed sent the boys outside



Seminarians man the rosary table at the Diocesan Youth Conference



DYC Keynote Speakers (L to R): Frater Charles, Fr Ken Anderson, Grace and Donny McGeragle

with Fr Caesarius for a talk that was part reflection, part spiritual warfare and part capture the flag. Drawing on the history of the Knights Templar and the writing of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, he challenged the young men to become knights of a new order: not men of self-glory, but men who place their strength in service of others. He named the particular battlefield of this generation – the pocket-sized devices engineered to capture young men’s desires – and called them to fight not merely away from temptation, but for someone. For their Queen. For Mary. They closed with three Hail Marys before taking the field.

Frater Charles, meanwhile, shared his own vocation story at the Vocations Panel – a moving and personal account of how he came to embrace monastic life. The three seminarians had a different kind of mission: distributed among the sessions and activities throughout the weekend, they were there to befriend, to give witness, and to gently invite. They also manned a fundraising table for the minor seminary, offering paracord and metal bead rosaries of their own making. There was no need to worry about sales; others at the conference took it upon themselves to send people their way.

Lunch was provided by the Knights of Columbus: burgers, fries, and a surprise dessert of ice cream. Fr Caesarius had challenged the boys to let the ladies go first, and they rose to the occasion admirably for the main course. The ice cream,

however, proved a sterner test of chivalry. A few of the young ladies noted with amusement that Fr Caesarius still had his work cut out for him. Knights in training, it seems, are more reliably gallant before they know dessert is involved.

The afternoon brought Confession, preceded by a short talk from Fr Caesarius: Christ in the confessional, he said, is like a water filter – he takes our impurities into himself, holds them, and gives back only what is pure. He transforms rather than transmits. The sound of the Divine Mercy Chaplet rose through the cathedral as the young people waited in line.

After Confession came the sports tournament at L’Heidli T’enneh Park – volleyball, ultimate Frisbee, and soccer. Fr Caesarius’s team, “The Cool People,” took the prize, to everyone else’s

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Rosary procession around Sacred Heart Cathedral in Prince George

chagrin. The group trekked back to the cathedral for sung Vespers, one of those moments that blessed everyone with its beauty: young people, monks, seminarians, and diocesan families gathered to sing the Church's ancient evening prayer. A dinner followed, prepared by the Catholic Women's League, the boys apparently remembering the lesson in gentlemanly conduct and letting the ladies go first.

Adoration closed the formal evening. Each person was invited to bring a candle to the foot of the altar, bearing before the Lord everything they wished to offer, and receive a personal benediction. The seminarians and Frater Charles led the Taizé chants. Tournament prizes were awarded, and a dance followed. The monks and seminarians arrived back at the Vianney House after midnight.

Sunday began with morning praise and worship before Donny McGeragle delivered a talk as energetic as it was simple – a call and response the young people could carry home. Three questions, asked and answered together: What do we give? Everything. Who are we giving it to? Jesus. How is it gonna get there? Through the Mama. The gymnasium rang with it.

Large group sharing gave participants a chance to voice what the weekend had meant to them before the conference spilled into the streets for the rosary procession. The weekend closed with Mass – presided over by Bishop Stephen Jensen – at Sacred Heart Cathedral, where each participant received a Miraculous Medal: a small, tangible reminder of the Queen they had been called to serve.

The return journey was the good kind of quiet that follows a full weekend. For several hours on the road back to Mission, Fr Caesarius, Frater Charles, and the three

seminarians reflected together on the fruits of the weekend: the conversations at the rosary stand, the young men who had come up to ask about the seminary, the graces poured out in adoration. The seminarians, too, found themselves opening up about something that had stirred at the dance. Dancing with the girls, they had felt a pull, a warmth, a movement of the heart toward another, and they were still wrestling with it. But as they shared their experiences, something began to come into focus: that this impulse, this desire to give oneself for another, was not an obstacle to their vocation but perhaps a glimpse of its very source. They are still finding their way toward it, but they are on their way.

Whether seeds were planted that will one day bear fruit in vocations to the priesthood or religious life, only time will tell. But for a weekend in Prince George, the ancient rhythms of monastic life at Westminster Abbey – prayer, community, hospitality, and mission – were brought north and offered freely to a new generation. And that is more than enough reason to make the drive.

With the Brothers

“THE monk promises to walk the path of return to the Father with his brothers, always listening with them to the Spirit’s call for internal and external renewal.” Thus our Swiss-American Congregation describes the vow of conversatio in its Declaration on Benedictine Monastic Life (paragraph 24). Living this vow, which we translate as fidelity to the monastic way of life, our brothers have shown us the fruits of the Spirit as they labour in works of renewal.

In the kitchen renovation project, the demolition stage was finished roughly around Christmas time. While the first and only snow of Christmas gently fell in the dark evening outside, some of us spent recreation hosing down and squeegeeing the floor of the now empty and very spacious kitchen (as Br Joshua said, “we could play badminton in here”...). After our squeegee Olympics and the remaining clean-up came time for the actual rebuilding. Beginning in April, together with outside contractors, Br Joseph, Br Bartholomew and other helping hands began rebuilding that part of the monastery from the inside out – notably lining with drywall the ventilation duct which runs through the old shaft to the roof.

The kitchen drywall work was Frater Paul’s welcome reintroduction to the world of manual labour after completing his first year of pre-Theology in the seminary. After wrestling with the problem of evil in philosophy of religion class and taking some blows in a verbal wrestle with a resurrected AI-*imago* of Karl Marx in Br Maximus’s AI debate for modern philosophy, Frater Paul was glad to enter the summer break, especially looking forward to the farm work we usually do

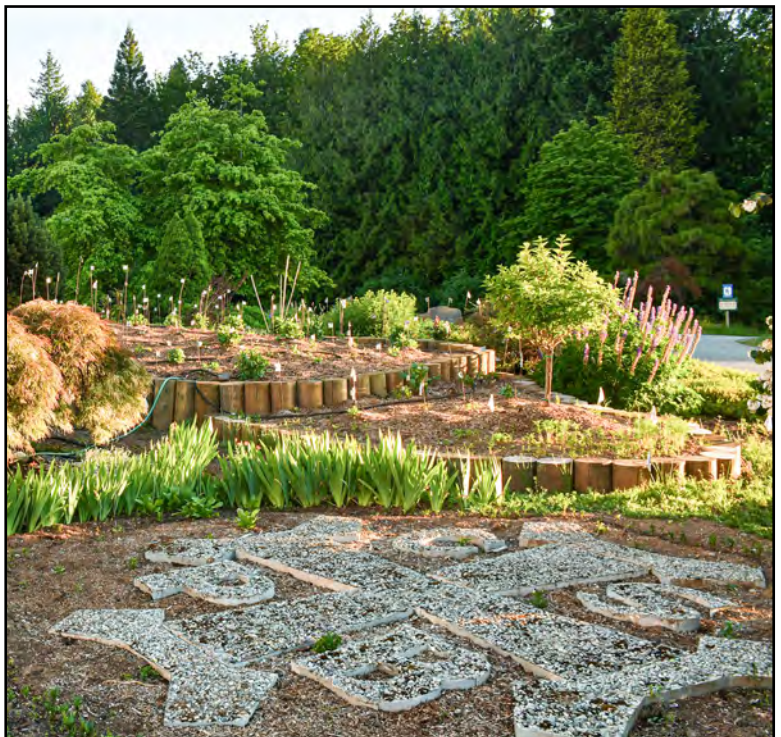
this time of year.

Br Maximus continues to bring together the new and the old, putting AI to good use by, for instance, producing beautiful short videos inspired by entries in the Roman Martyrology, the lives of the saints, narrated by him in Latin.

Frater Charles has reached a milestone in his formation, having completed his Philosophy studies and now looking forward to beginning Theology in the fall. At the flower gardens, he planted the dahlias on the new raised beds with the help of five aspirants, Andy, Thomas, Aaron, James and Cole.

Also beneficial has been the return of our assistant kitchen manager Joe and the help of our friend Caitlyn, working full-time with us for a month. We are also glad to welcome back Alberto to work as our business management consultant/finances.

Br Benedict continues to be a steady presence in the kitchen. He and Br Emeric, two of our venerable elders, have faced the trials of age with humour and steadfastness.



Elevated flower garden in front of guesthouse



Kiko goats pour out of the "goat-boat" in search of the abbey's brambles

At the bell-tower, Br Joshua continues to work with monks and seminarians to hone our change-ringing for the liturgy. He also hosted a group from the UK for a ringing weekend—they, along with Br Joshua and Jude Laurence, presently in grade 12, spent the afternoon doing some general ringing as well as two quarter peals (over 1200 changes each).

As spring weather grew warmer Frater Charles made a trip to the van der Zalm nursery with Frater Athanasius bringing several additions

A BENEDICTINE EDUCATION FUND

originally established during our 50th anniversary celebration, continues to support the education of our young monks in the major seminary, their advanced degree studies, and faculty development. As we mark our 87th anniversary, this enduring fund remains vital to our educational mission. Contributions would be much appreciated at this time to:

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to the gardens like alyssums, petunias, Peruvian lilies and three miniature willows to spruce up the entrance to the gym and majors' residence. Frater Athanasius has been busy getting the vegetable garden started, as well as teaching Latin and refining his musical gifts through organ lessons. His pedal work has improved considerably and he enjoys improvising with different stops.

On the subject of teaching, Br Isidore reports that Charles Dickens' *Little Dorrit* was a great hit with his English 11 class. The students really took to the story and fruitful discussions included topics like hope epitomized by the character of the little girl Dorrit.

The farm is another area of renewal. Br John has started planting a new orchard behind the barn, setting in the ground a variety of fruit and nut trees: apple, pear, cherry, and plum trees, along with hazelnut and haskap bushes. As Eden was guarded by a flaming angel sword, this orchard is protected by an electric fence to keep away curious cows and other munching visitors. Speaking of electric fences, a newfangled portable electric fence system, chargeable by solar panel, has been set up on Mount Sally Anne which would impress Nikola Tesla himself. The fence marks the enclosure of our new animals, the goats. Br John decided to introduce them in order to get rid of the blackberry bushes copiously covering sections of the property. So now we have five Kiko does, briefly housed at the barn and trained on their thorny feed and now roaming the woods of their electric enclosure (incidentally six times more powerful than the fences used for the cows, due to the goats' shaggy insulated fur).

To ferry these new residents around the property, a custom trailer, affectionately nicknamed the “goat-boat”, was built, complete with a solar panel, fitted cupboards, and plexiglass windows. It is a masterpiece of monastic repurposing, assembled entirely from salvaged and donated materials: the old tractor garage door serves as its roof; the frame was a gift from Fr Prior’s parents; the hinges came from Br Bartholomew’s legendary store of saved odds and ends. The remaining elements – a gas pipe, plexiglass reclaimed from the church dome renovation, and wood from the bell-tower restoration – were brought together and finished with Danish oil, giving the whole thing a craftsmanship that belies its humble origins. And the goat-boat did not arrive alone. The community now has a goatherd dog: Miki (as in “Mickey” Mouse), a fluffy, gentle Pyrenees who has become best pals with his charges. The goats, by way of affection, bump him on the side with their horned heads. Br Emeric, Br Bartholomew, and Br John made the trip to pick him up near Williams Lake. One evening during recreation, Br John unveiled the full ensemble, parking the goat-boat, with Miki and the goats in tow, in front of the island garden near the guesthouse and church. Some of us lingered there in the pleasant



Br John and the new farm dog, Miki, strike a pose

spring sunset. “The Twilight of the Goats,” as Fr Prior aptly named it.

The goat-boat and its passengers were not the only additions to the landscape. Extensive fencing renovations were carried out across the property, with 350 new posts installed using a rented fence-pounder. Work included rebuilding the corral by the east pasture and fencing the hay field adjacent to the garden, totalling over one kilometre of new fence laid.

With Easter came the time of outings, and Br Bartholomew, Br John, Frater Athanasius and Frater Charles hiked the snowy heights of Mount MacFarlane. Meanwhile, Br Luke and Frater Paul took a long walk along the Fraser river on a warm sunny day, after which they treated themselves to some cold pancakes with ham and cheese and coconut smoothies in the snack room.



Monks break for lunch atop Mount MacFarlane during Easter week

Towards the end of May we began our great annual work of filling the silo with grass for the winter. Silage, which may well have been the thirteenth Herculean labour after cleaning the Augean stables and slaying the Nemean lion, is a work which brings together a number of confrères in a test of endurance (especially anticipated by the Fraters in their long hours of study). Some of us stand on a trailer and fork tonnes of freshly cut grass into a tractor-powered auger and blower which shoots the forage up into the silo, where others direct the flow and dance around, stomping it down to help the compression—with some singing French or Russian songs at the top of their voices, and others, at intervals between loads, practicing their judo and karate throws on the soft tatami-

like grass in the tower. For those inside, we have recently even acquired fancy new face-shield respirators. Things have gone well this year, despite a couple of brief interruptions due to jammed spout and fly wheel, which caused grass to clogg the blower, and a broken trailer axle.

One of the silage crew regulars is Frater Antonio. A monk of the Abbey of Nuestra Señora de los Ángeles, Cuernavaca, Mexico, he has been with us for his seminary studies for a number of years and has become part of the family. This year we received the amazing news that Frater Antonio will return to his community in order to be sent to found a new monastery in El Salvador with a handful of confrères. Though we are sad to see him go, his humble, peaceful presence with his disarming sense of humour and his example of self-gift in the monastic life will remain in our hearts. We will keep him in our prayers as he

embarks on this new adventure with the Lord.

We have also temporarily parted with Br Basil, with us for studies during the school year. He has returned to his community at Portsmouth Abbey for the summer, where, among other things, he will catch up on months of library work.

Our postulants, Erich and Cedric, have been generous and steady as they live the life of the community seeking the Lord in the monastery. Cedric continues to tap into his English roots, reading and sharing great works of literature from the British Isles like the *Chronicles of Narnia* and *Beowulf*. Erich has been studying the different species of birds on the property. He has also employed his skills in photography to capture important moments in our community, notably the solemn profession of



Postulant Cedric takes a breather by the barn

our sister Margaret Mary as a diocesan hermitess, the hidden beauty of whose vocation continues to inspire us.

The postulants have also been refinishing the guesthouse desks, one of the ways in which we have been preparing to host our congregation's General Chapter, a meeting of the abbots and delegates of Swiss-American monasteries for updates and elections related to the harmonious life of the larger Benedictine family of which each monastery is an independent member.

We are ready to receive the spiritual fathers of our fellow religious in our guesthouse for this important gathering. At the guesthouse, Br Paschasius and Fr Mark continue to work together to welcome our visitors, organise group retreats, listen and give a good word to all who come to us as we carry on our life each day in the school of the Lord's service.

Alumnitems



Alumni Day: Mikhail Rego and Br Joshua

Alumni who are celebrating their silver jubilees of priestly ordination this year include:

Fathers **Bruce McAllister** '01 of Vancouver, **Christopher Blust** FSSP '94 (Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter), and **Derrick Cameron** '96 of Kamloops.

Fathers who are marking 10 years of priestly ordination:

Lucio Choi '16 of Vancouver; **Stephen Innamorati** '09 of St Catharines ON; **Peter Steele** '11 of Yakima WA; **Gleb Pistruga** '05 of the New Westminster Eparchy but serving in the Military Ordinariate; **Mark McGuckin** '16 of Vancouver.

Effective July 9, Fr **Richard Conlin** '20 will become Pastor of Precious Blood Parish, Cloverdale, and Fr **Felix Min** '19 Pastor of St. James Parish, Clearbrook. Fr **Guy Zidago** '16 will become Parochial Vicar at St Michael's Parish, Burnaby. Fr **Raffaele Salvino** '20 will go for studies in Canon Law at the Gregorian University in Rome.

On May 21, Fr **James Hughes** '92 was named Vicar of Renewal and Fr **Mark McGuckin** '16

was named Vocations and Seminarians Director for the Archdiocese.

Chris Moraes '05 writes: "From March 30-April 10, 2026, Alumni **Desmond Sanesh** '05 and I led a spiritual pilgrimage to Italy with 25 graduating students from Clear Water Academy [in Calgary]. Highlights of the trip included a papal audience, Stations of the Cross with Pope Leo, private visits to the Sistine Chapel, the excavation of the bones of St. Peter, and Mass at the Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi, in this, his Jubilee Year. We also saw, in keeping with our Benedictine roots, The Abbey of Monte Cassino."

Gordon Pelletier '83 writes: "The only news from Salmon Arm is that Gus (Germain) is getting married. I am proud to say that I have had 6 sons in the seminary over the years. **Blaise** '04, married with 3 children; **Roland** '08, married with 7 children; **Adrian** '10, married with 4 children; **Alex** '09, married with one child; **Vincent** '11, married with 2 children; **Gus (Germain)** '22, to be married May 30, 2026. Our family would like to thank the abbey for all that they have done over the years to help our children in their journey! All are practicing Catholics, strong in their faith."



Alumni Day (L to R): Br Maximus, Br Emeric, Bill Girard, Brayden Hoffman

Paul Bruneau '15 reports that he'll be married on May 16, 2026 to Faith Alcantara in Ontario. His new address will be in Mississauga ON. **Bishop Gary Gordon**, SCK '77, will be celebrant of the wedding Mass.

Fr **Terry Brock** '88 writes: "I always enjoy reading about alumni, so I'll tell you the news about myself. This year marks my 49th year in the Diocese of Prince George, coming here in 1977 as a frontier apostle. I lived in Prince George for three years as a frontier apostle, driving and fixing the buses and vehicles. I took a Grade 10 mechanics course in New York that I put to good use.

"In 1980 I was at SCK for eight years, and then back to Prince George to work at the cathedral for three years as a newly ordained priest. After that short time, I was sent north to Chetwynd for four years; west to Kitimat for seven years; a bit north to Terrace for 13 years; and I'm completing 11 years in Prince Rupert at the far west end of the diocese, as far away from Prince George as you can get. Of course, if I learned Japanese, I could go further. I also have responsibility for Haida Gwaii [Queen Charlotte Islands], where I am presently. I come here about every six weeks to serve about 20 to 30 people from Masset to the bottom of the island, Daajing Giids. I'm at the mercy of the people. I don't have a church. I don't have a rectory. I stay with two different families and celebrate Mass in a living room or in a non-denominational church. The ferry arrives on Tuesday morning at 4:35 a.m. I then proceed up the island about an hour or so, pull into a campsite which, at this time of year, has no campers, and I set up my Coleman stove, make a hot espresso, cold cereal with yogurt and blueberries, heat up toast already toasted, eat a hard-boiled egg already prepared, with jam, butter, and honey. It's a feast! Albeit, a cold feast. And then I warm up by walking the beach for about two hours. I pray the Breviary and the whole Rosary: all twenty mysteries! One time I was watching the birds run towards the ocean when the wave was receding, picking up whatever food was left, and then when the wave returned, the birds would run back, only to do the same thing over again, run down and get their breakfast.

I thought to myself, 'You of little faith, do not worry about anything; your heavenly Father feeds the birds, and you ... you of little faith are more important than the birds.' (Paraphrased a bit) "August 1st of this year I am returning to where it all began: Prince George. I will be the pastor of Christ Our Saviour on the Hart Highway, with responsibilities for St. Mary's School. St. Mary's Parish is closing down as part of a consolidation of four parishes into three. I'm going there to help with the transition. I suspect this will be my final assignment as pastor. After this assignment I will most likely be a fill-in or supply priest, or whatever else the Lord has up His sleeve for me.

"I am and will be forever grateful for my eight years at SCK. The Benedictine community prepared me very well to serve in the Diocese of PG."

Jesse Smith '04 writes: "I am currently a criminal defense attorney in California, and will be admitted to the bar of the Supreme Court of the United States this June."

Griffin Sawatzky '21 writes: "A point of interest regarding myself is my upcoming wedding on May 23. I will be getting married to Melissa Wiebe at St. Augustine's Parish in Taber, AB. Melissa is a recent convert, having only received confirmation this past Easter Vigil. Being a Mennonite, she was baptized in a Mennonite gospel church in Vauxhall, AB, before her journey through RCIA. My family moved to Taber a few years ago from Abbotsford, BC."



Requiescant in pace:

John E. Haley '64, age 80, of Creston, BC, died on August 18, 2025. His father, Joseph B. Haley '35, of Rossland, BC, was an alumnus from the 1930s and was an Olympic high jumper at the 1936 Berlin Olympics.

Anne Walton, an Oblate, friend, and benefactor of the Abbey, died on April 7, 2026, in Coquitlam. She organized many retreats for married couples in our guesthouse.

Herman Van der Loos, friend and benefactor of the Abbey, died on March 10, 2026, in Abbotsford.

Biennial Alumni Day

ON May 18, Victoria Day, the Seminary Alumni Association held their biennial Alumni Day reunion on the abbey grounds. The occasion brought together approximately 30 alumni and 15 family members for a day of fellowship, prayer, and celebration with the monastic community and seminarians under brilliant sunshine.

Fr Mark Dumont, the Association's Secretary-Treasurer, served as main celebrant and homilist for the reunion Mass. In his homily, Fr Mark reflected on the spirit of the Association's Constitution, which calls all members to pray daily for one another and for the Seminary and its work. As the Constitution further prescribes, each priest alumnus is to offer an annual Mass – preferably on the day of the Reunion itself – for the living and deceased members of the Association. Fr Mark noted that this remembrance extends to those who, while not alumni themselves, gave the majority of their lives to formation at SCK, among them Abbot Eugene Medved and Fr Augustine Kalberer, who served as faculty and



Alumni Day (L to R): John O'Flynn, Paul Vo, Edward Ram

left an indelible mark on the Seminary's mission.

Fr Mark also used the occasion to turn the community's gaze toward a significant horizon. "In just five years," he reminded those gathered, "we will be celebrating the 100th anniversary of the founding of Christ the King Seminary."

The Seminary's origins, he recalled, trace back to 1931, when Archbishop Duke approached the ailing Archbishop Casey at St. Paul's Hospital and asked him to choose from among three proposed names: St. John's Seminary, Sacred Heart, or Christ the King. Archbishop Casey selected the name that has endured to this day. Work then began to prepare the Jubilee Farm in Ladner for incoming students, though renovations were not completed in time for a September opening. And so the Seminary's first 17 students did not begin classes until January of 1932. Fr Mark also shared a notable historical footnote: the future Pope Leo XIV, during his twelve years as Prior General of the Augustinians, visited the first site of Christ



Alumni Day: Fr Caesarius holding Benedict, the firstborn son of Felix and Nora Reichel

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the King Seminary, the very location that has been home to the Augustinian monastery since 1942. Over its 95 years, the Seminary has 264 priest alumni out of a total of 1,840 alumni, a legacy that gives the approaching centenary all the more cause for celebration.

Following the reunion Mass and a picnic lunch enjoyed in the sunshine, the Association held its membership meeting. The outgoing President, John O’Flynn ’83, concluded his term in office, and the Association expressed its gratitude for his years of dedicated service to his fellow alumni and to the Seminary. Edward

Ram ’88 was elected as his successor, and Paul Vo ’25 was elected Vice-President. The pairing of a long-serving alumnus with one of the Seminary’s recent graduates speaks well of the Association’s commitment to continuity across generations.

The afternoon offered more than formal proceedings. Several of the younger alumni laced up for a hockey game alongside current seminarians, the kind of spirited, easy camaraderie that reunions are made for. It was, by all accounts, a beautiful day, warm, sunny, and full of the lasting bonds that the Seminary of Christ the King has been forging for nearly a century.

Abbey Kitchen Renovation: Progress Update

WE are happy to report that the abbey kitchen renovation remains on schedule for completion this September.

The kitchen has been fully gutted and work is progressing well: stud walls are up and the new ventilation system is underway; bricks have been removed from the exterior walls to accommodate the ductwork, which runs through the old shaft to the roof, now lined with at least three layers of drywall for fire safety; new electrical boxes and wiring have been installed throughout, and the existing windows have been removed with new flashing set in place ahead of the triple-glazed replacements.

With the structural and mechanical work taking shape, what remains includes finishing the ventilation system, spraying two inches of insulation on the exterior walls before drywalling, installing a new drop ceiling, fitting the triple-glazed windows and electrical

fixtures, and furnishing the kitchen with new stainless steel countertops, shelving, and appliances, including an updated dishwashing area.

The project is still in need of financial support. If you are able to contribute, your gift – large or small – will make a direct difference in bringing this essential work to fruition.



COST:
\$1,500,000

RAISED:
\$384,000



COMPLETION DATE:
SEPTEMBER 2026

Contribution Methods:

- Online: www.westminsterabbey.ca/giving/how-to-give/
- Electronic Transfer: finances@westminsterabbey.ca
- Traditional Payment Options: EFT, Cash, or Cheque

Please indicate “Abbey kitchen renovation” in the memo/notes section of your donation. Make cheques payable to “Westminster Abbey.” First time donors, please include mailing address.

For additional information, contact us at (604) 826-8975 or manager@westminsterabbey.ca

We are grateful for your continued generosity and prayers.