



SAINT AUGUSTINE'S HOUSE

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NEWSLETTER

Summer A.D. 2021

The Congregation of the Servants of Christ, St. Augustine's House, is an ecumenical Christian community whose life of discipleship is inspired and shaped by the Holy Rule of St. Benedict. We identify with the Lutheran tradition, understood as a movement within and for the one holy catholic and apostolic Church of Jesus Christ.

We are committed to the growth of the permanent resident community, to the pursuit of ecumenical understanding, and to the provision of retreats for members of the Fellowship of St. Augustine and others. We seek to serve the whole Church by our life of prayer and by the use of our facilities.

✠ PAX

The death of Fr. John just before Holy Week made for a very personal engagement with the great themes of death and resurrection during these days. At the same time, the liturgical celebrations helped to place what we had witnessed and experienced within the larger context of the central mysteries of the Christian faith. In my homily at the Burial Liturgy for Fr. John, which took place on Monday of Holy Week, I recalled being present with him the moment of his death. When I realized that his labored breathing had ceased the words came into my mind, "It is finished." These words came to me not so much from what I had just witnessed but from the account of Christ's death in the Gospel of St. John which I knew would be read just one week later in the Liturgy of Good Friday.

The English word "finish" can be used in two senses. In one sense it has the connotation of termination or cessation. Something is over and done with, used up, consumed, spent or empty; it has no further value or significance. On the other hand, we can use the word with a more positive, forward looking connotation: something is completed, perfected, fulfilled. In this sense it marks not so much an ending but a new stage or beginning. An artist or architect may say of a great project—perhaps with relief, but more with triumph and joy—it is finished. In this season of graduations, we can recall that students finish their education with a ceremony called a commencement. Something that is finished in this sense is not over and done with but has reached a new stage of effectiveness.

It is in this latter sense that our Lord spoke these words, "it is finished" on Good Friday. Only the Gospel of St. John gives us these words which from the other Gospels we can gather were uttered in a loud voice. These words were not a whimper of defeat but a cry of victory; his mission is accomplished; the goal has been reached.

But what is it exactly that has been finished, completed, achieved on the Cross? The commentaries point out something in the original Greek that is easy to overlook in the translations. At the beginning of the passion narrative in John the evangelist states that Jesus loved his disciples "to the end" (13:1) These words are followed by the account of his washing of the disciples' feet. If we read no further, we might assume that this humble act is the "end," the fulness of love of to which the evangelist is referring. But



if we read to the end of the Passion story we find a verbal form of the same Greek word for end in Christ's words from the cross, "it is finished." It is at the cross that the end, the outermost limit of love has been reached. It is love that has been perfected, finished, and now has a new power in the world.

In the Gospel the words, "it is finished" are followed by "he bowed his head and gave up his spirit." Yet here too there is a biblical hint of a new beginning, a new life, a new creation. In his book *Death on a Friday Afternoon* Richard John Neuhaus connects the death of Christ with the creation of man in Genesis: "When [God] formed Adam from the primordial muck, he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. He breathes love. Adam inhaled love. Here at the cross...the new Adam exhales, 'It is finished.' The first Adam breathes in and the second Adam breathes out, and both breathe love. What began in Genesis is now finished. What began there is that love should give birth to love" (p. 189f).

Holy Baptism incorporates us into the inhaling and exhaling of the Father's love. It makes us a part of what the new Adam finished for us on the cross. We may recall from the Small Catechism's explanation of Baptism that it "signifies that the Old Adam in us should, by daily contrition and repentance, be drowned and die...and, again, a new man daily come forth and arise..." This daily spiritual exercise in dying is given definitive completion on the day of our actual death. Our Baptism is completed, and we can say, "it is finished." This may indeed be said in relief that the struggle, pain, and indignity of dying is over, but more significantly we can speak these words with Christ and in him. For us too this is an end that is also a beginning. "If we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his" (Rom 6:5).



It is not often that a dying Christian is able to speak his last words with a "loud voice" as the gospels describe our Lord doing, or even to speak at all. The last two days of his life, Fr. John himself was unresponsive. But we do not have to do all of this ourselves. In the Church we constitute the one Body of Christ. We can pray for each other, and we can also speak for and act for each other. When we accompany our loved ones in their dying moments with prayer and love we can also confess the faith their lips can no longer articulate.

Those of us who were baptized as infants were also unable to speak or to mentally comprehend what was taking place. We relied on our sponsors and parents to speak the "I believe" for us and to give witness to our being sacramentally incorporated into the death and resurrection of Christ. In a similar way we who accompany the dying with our presence and prayers can speak the "Amen" for them. The love that Christ perfected by his death on the Cross is not absent in the hour of our own death.

In Christ's boundless love,
—Br. Richard

Gifts are gratefully acknowledged in memory of

JOHN R. COCHRAN
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GORDON RAY
PAULL E. SPRING
GIL & ANGELA STEVENS
JAMES STEVENS
GLEN C. STONE
BARBARA SUSAN

and in honor of
DANIEL SUSAN

News & Notes

For several years Betty Jo Buss has been serving as our regular Sunday organist. For the past several months complications with arthritis have prevented her from serving as regularly as before. In her absence we can manage well signing acapella, but have appreciated those Sundays when guest organists, Alta Brakefield and Daniel Susan have been able to fill in.

The annual chapter meeting of the Congregation of the Servants of Christ was held the evening of May 3rd. Nine candidates were approved as Associate Members (Oblates) of the community. Br. Richard Herbel was elected as the prior for a six-year term. The six members of the Pastoral Council were confirmed for another year. Bp. Matthew Riegel was reelected as the Pastoral Visitor of the community. The financial report for the previous year was reviewed and approved. Other informational reports on a variety of matters were presented and discussed.

Associate Sarah Mark has created a beautiful book to serve as a self-guided tour of the many works of art and architecture in our monastic church. The book is available for visitors to use at the entrance of the church.



The Great Room of Brugger Hall is a large attractive space that connects the east and north wings of the residential building to the Church. We are in the process of refurbishing it with appropriate furniture and configuring the space to best serve its multiple uses as a meeting room for groups, or a place for quiet conversation, or to sit and read alone. Our thanks to associate members Sarah Mark and Astrid DeFrain for coordinating this project.



Bp. Jeffrey and Cherie Bischoff, who were married here by Fr. John last summer, have begun to live on the grounds as Resident Associates. They have received a warm welcome and are developing their roles in the community. Bp. Jeffrey is presiding at most weekday masses and is also

presiding at the Sunday mass on an alternating schedule with the congregation he serves in northwestern Ohio.

After a delay of more than a year because of the pandemic, the first of a planned series of short organ recitals was held on May 25th with Daniel Susan at the keyboard. These ongoing recitals are aptly named "Fifth Sunday at Five," and are planned for 5 o'clock whenever there is a fifth Sunday in the month. The next recital is planned for August 29th.

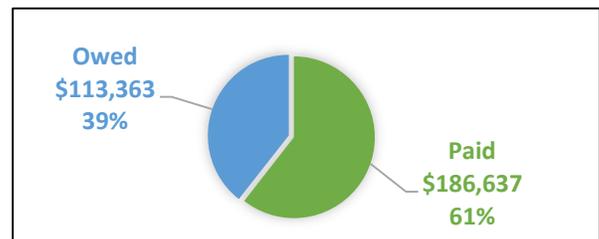


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The monthly mortgage payment is \$3,074. You may participate for any amount from \$100 and up. We gratefully acknowledge the following donors for this past quarter: Pr. Frederick G. Keller; Jonathan & Kimberly Nold; Pr. John J. Palko; and Pr. David H. Westphal.



John Robert Cochran

1937–2021

Fr. John Cochran died at St. Augustine's House on Friday, the 26th of March. He was 83 years old.

On June 30th, 1963, He was ordained into the Lutheran ministry. The active and fruitful ministry which followed could be divided into three relatively equal parts: two decades in Philadelphia, two decades Pittsburgh, and a little less time as a permanent resident here at St. Augustine's House. This third part of his life is, however, larger than it

appears since his relationship with the community preceded and ran concurrently with his other ministries. He first came here as a seminarian. Throughout his ministry he made regular retreats often bringing with him young people from his parish or neighboring pastors whom he wished to introduce to monastic life as it is lived here. From the early 1990's he served continuously on the pastoral council of the community. In 2014 he became the prior of the community and in that office he died.

On Palm Sunday afternoon his body was returned to the church where he lay in repose as we sang the daily round of prayer offices in which he had so faithfully participated in life. At ten o'clock Monday morning the Burial Liturgy was celebrated with our pastoral visitor, Bishop Matthew Riegel of the West Virginia Synod (ELCA) presiding at the Eucharist assisted by several other clergy. His body was interred here in the cemetery behind the church where Fr. Arthur and other members and friends are buried.



These events at the beginning of Holy Week imparted new freshness to the message proclaimed in the Easter Liturgy; “the Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon.” Through our Baptism we already share in this new and eternal life with him and “neither death, nor life...will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Christ's Resurrection—and Ours

[In his book *Jesus of Nazareth*, Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI) reflects on the pervasive power of the Resurrection:]

Only if Jesus is risen has anything really new occurred that changes the world and the situation of mankind. Then he becomes the criterion on which we can rely. For then God has truly revealed himself...

Now it must be acknowledged that if in Jesus' Resurrection we were dealing simply with the miracle of a resuscitated corpse, it would be no more important than the resuscitation of a clinically dead person through the art of doctors. For the world as such and for our human existence, nothing would have changed....

The New Testament testimonies leave us in no doubt that what happened in the “Resurrection of the Son of Man” was utterly different. Jesus' Resurrection was about breaking out into an entirely new form of life, into a life that is no longer subject to the law of dying and becoming, but lies beyond it—a life that opens up a new dimension of human existence.... In Jesus's Resurrection a new possibility of human existence is attained that affects everyone and that opens up a future, a new kind of future for mankind.

So Paul was absolutely right to link the resurrection of Christians and the Resurrection of Jesus inseparably together: “If the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised.... But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep” (I Cor 15:16, 20). Christ's Resurrection is either a universal event, or it is nothing. (Pages 242ff)

