



SAINT AUGUSTINE'S HOUSE

3316 Drahner Road, Oxford, MI 48370-2506 • 248-628-5155
office@staugustineshouse.org

NEWSLETTER

Advent, A.D. 2021-22

✠ PAX

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.

“Every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change” (James 1:17)

The practice of gift giving transcends all human differences. It is an overall human phenomenon regardless of culture, time period, or geographical location. Gift giving serves a variety of purposes, addressing the practical and emotional needs of both givers and recipients. Gifts of food, gifts of clothing, gifts of personal or household items, etc., meet not only the practical needs of recipients, but also demonstrate that someone notices their needs and loves and cares enough to make an effort to meet those needs, providing a sense of security for the recipient in what can sometimes be difficult circumstances.

When gifts are given outside of practical necessity, the offering shows even more personal love and care for the other, demonstrating that the giver has been thinking about the recipient and has taken the time and effort to make such a gesture of love and care. This provides the recipient with so much more than the actual gift, and the meeting of emotional needs results in a bonding effect that builds and strengthens the relationship between giver and recipient.

Though there is a type of quid pro quo giving, in which the giver gives with the expectation of receiving something in return, there is an ideal of pure gift giving, which is motivated solely by the love and care that a person has for others. In this loving behavior, the giver is acting much more altruistically than in quid pro quo types of gift giving. Though the giver may gain from the giving, the giver is giving without expectation of gain, giving with no strings attached, giving solely to meet the practical and/or emotional needs of others, as Jesus describes in Luke 6:34-36.

This is the type of giving that we see in the Magi coming to worship the Christ child. They travel from the East bearing their expensive gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, simply for the joy of showing adoration to the newborn king, who is not in a position to give them anything. This is also the type of giving we see in the person upon whom our present notion of Santa Claus is based, St. Nicholas of Myra, who gave gifts altruistically throughout his ministry. Most famously he provided dowries for three daughters of an evil, impoverished man to save them from being sent out as prostitutes.



This is the type of totally non-self-interested, totally self-giving love in action that we receive in the Gift of our Lord Jesus Christ. In this giving, our Lord, so much more powerful than we, has done something for us that we could



never do for ourselves. He has “saved us... in virtue of His own mercy by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that we might be justified by his Grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life.” (Titus 3:5-7) In order to accomplish this, our Lord Jesus was born as one of us, while also fully divine, and on the Cross “gave Himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for Himself a people of His own who are zealous for good deeds.” (Titus 2:14) All of this He has done, not with the intent to get something from us, but out of pure love for us.

Having been loved so by our Lord, in the total giving of His very self, we are motivated, as opposed to manipulated, to give ourselves totally to Him and, through Him, to one another. In this way, each one of us becomes a gift to others in the same way and by the same power that God in Christ has gifted Himself to us. We experience this here at St. Augustine’s House in so many various ways through the people who come to visit and stay with us as we become gifts to them and they become gifts to us in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. In this fellowship, we share with each other the most precious gift we can exchange, the gift of self- the gift of presence, the gift of time. This is the primary gift that leads to all other giving. In fact, all the other gifts we give are empty without the giving of the self, though all the other gifts are important as concrete expressions of the gift of self.

As we enjoy receiving all the gifts you bring to us beyond your very self, including your presence, your prayers, your financial and practical support, we enjoy being a gift to you, beyond our very selves, in prayer, in presence, and in the maintenance of a place for people to experience life in Christian community. One of our Pastoral Council members has described this monastery as the “spiritual

heart of the Church” in that we present ourselves to the Church and to the world not only in prayer, but also as a concrete example of what it means to live intentionally in close Christian community. In this way, the monastery

informs the life together of families and congregations, and, through these Christians, the lives of neighborhoods, workplaces, and all the believers and unbelievers in these places who need to experience the Gift of the Gospel firsthand toward the reception of the Gift of Jesus Christ our Savior and the Life of Hope, Peace, Joy and Love that He offers. It is your gifts to us that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, make all this possible, and we are grateful to God for you.

Through these times of Advent, Christmass, Epiphany, and beyond, we give thanks for all of the good gifts we receive from the Lord through you and all the others He sends to bless us, and we pray that we will continue to be a blessing in return.

Peace,
+Jeffrey

Gifts are gratefully acknowledged in memory of

MARY LOU VLASOV BAKER
JOHN R. COCHRAN
JAMES and JOAN FACKLER
ARTHUR CARL KRIENHEDER
LOWELL and VIRGINIA LELAND
JUDE (DONALD) MOTAKA
PHILIP H. PFATTEICHER
FREDDY SCHUMACHER
GILL JAMES STEVENS

News & Notes

Over the last several months the community has been engaged in a discernment process by which we identify and assess our strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results (SOAR). We are grateful for the guidance of Dr. David Strubler in this process.

In September Br. Richard and Bp Aubrey Bougher, a member of our pastoral council, traveled to Chicago to attend the General Retreat of the Society of the Holy Trinity. We have enjoyed a mutually supportive relationship with the Society since its inception almost 25 years ago.



Our annual Fellowship Day was held on the second Saturday of October. Pr. Marcus Felde, who holds doctoral degrees from the Lutheran School of Theology and the University of Chicago and is a former missionary in Papua New Guinea, presented a lecture on the Lord's Prayer. His

paper is available on our website under the Documents heading. The morning Mass was celebrated by Bp. Jeffrey Bischoff and included Martin Luther's hymn on the Lord's prayer, "Our Father Thou in Heaven Above."

We were pleased to again welcome a group of students from Hillsdale College for a retreat in October. The students spent three days marked by faithful participation in the daily prayers, silence, reading, and hiking our trails. On their last evening they prepared a meal for the community.



The last Sunday of October our organist, Daniel Susan, gave an organ recital in the church. Among other works was the Fantasia in G. Minor by Bach and pieces by Duruflé and Couperin based on Gregorian liturgical chants.

We note with sadness the passing of Mary Lou Vlasov Baker on November 5th. She along with her husband Ernest have long been active associate members of our community and, until the restrictions of the pandemic, regular Sunday worshipers with us. Memory eternal grant unto her, O Lord.

More than six years ago when construction of Brugger Hall was begun a "temporary" entrance was improvised to the north wing. Thanks to the labors of John Berney and

Brian Helton this has been replaced by a better designed and safer structure and a new sidewalk.

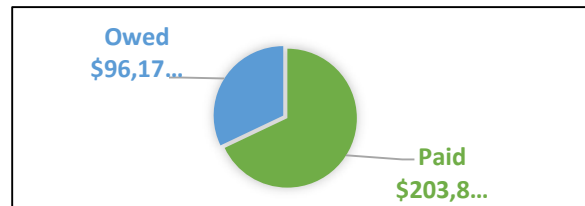


www.StAugustinesHouse.org

Find us on Facebook.

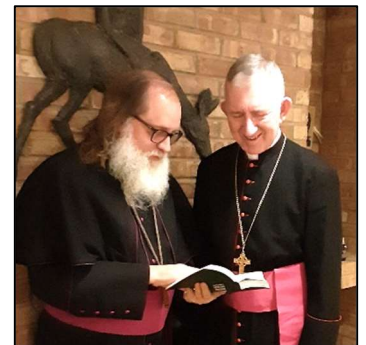
Mortgage Partners

The monthly mortgage payment is \$3,074. You may participate for any amount from \$100 and up. We gratefully acknowledge the following donors: for **September**, Donna Ritchie in memory of Fr. John; for **October**, Eric Petty; and for **November**: Jane M. Bingham; Howard Burk; Robert Walters; and Karla Jaeger in memory of Fr. John.



Visitation of the Monastic Community

It is customary for monastic communities to be periodically visited by authorities within the larger ecclesial community to assess the spiritual health and integrity of the community and the welfare of the individual monks and other residents as well as to offer suggestions and other guidance as they see fit. Such a visitation of our community here at St. Augustine's House was conducted November 17-19. The visitators were Bishop Matthew Riegel of the West Virginia-Western Maryland Synod of the ELCA and Pastor Patrick Rooney, the Senior of the Society of the Holy Trinity. During their time here they shared in the Liturgical



offices of prayer and other routines of our life; they reviewed our governing documents and our financial record keeping; they conducted a private and confidential interview with each resident member of the community; and before departing gave a preliminary summary of their observations to the assembled community.

The Visitators noted some of our strengths but also drew attention to certain challenges facing us. I will briefly summarize some of the points I took away from their comments. It was encouraging that they perceived a strong sense of community cohesiveness, a sense of commitment to the community and its life. The community presently consists of concentric circles with the professed monks at the core surrounded by resident associate members (regular oblates), long term guests; and then other non-resident supporters: associate members (secular oblates), and members of the Fellowship of St. Augustine. The relationship of the circles along with their respective rights and responsibilities may need to be clarified. The presence of the first ever resident oblate couple seems to be going well by all accounts.

Our history and our architecture make us a very open community and members and guests mingle freely. This does allow guests to experience our life rather fully; however certain clear boundaries and distinctions need to be maintained. The retreat ministry cannot be carried out at the expense of the monastic character of the community, which is the reason why guests come in the first place.

The essential markers of this community are Benedictine, Lutheran, and ecumenical. The current residents of the community are Lutheran, Roman Catholic, and Presbyterian. This seems to be working well, however more intentional conversation could deepen and mature this relationship.

The most immediate challenge the community faces is recruitment of men to the core monastic community. The monastic orders that are growing are traditional; the time-honored forms of the Liturgy and of monastic life do not deter but rather attract vocations. The distinctive Christian worldview must be visible in public prayer and in a disciplined and holy life.

I thank our visitators for their time and considered observations and suggestions, from which I and the community take a great deal of encouragement. I invite all who read this to pray with me: "Raise up, we beseech you, Almighty God, men and women of faith to serve you in

monastic communities to the praise and glory of your Holy Name, and to the comfort of your faithful people."

--Br. Richard, Prior

**We wish all our friends the holy
peace of Christmas and a glad
New Year!**

Sam Ewalt, Frank McSherry, Br. Richard,
Br. Andy, Bp. Jeffrey & Cherie Bischoff



Oh, rejoice ye Christians loudly,
For our joy hath now begun;
Wondrous things our God hath done.
Tell abroad His goodness proudly
Who our race hath honored thus
That He deigns to dwell with us.
Joy, O joy, beyond all gladness,
Christ hath done away with sadness!
Hence, all sorrow and repining,
For the Sun of Grace is shining!

Christian Keimann, 1646