



# SAINT AUGUSTINE'S HOUSE

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## NEWSLETTER

**Advent, A.D. 2023/24**

✠ PAX

“... behold, you will conceive in your womb...” Luke 1:31

Stuff matters. It really does.

It can be difficult to acknowledge this especially at this time of year, when there is stuff in front of us everywhere. Black Friday. Thanksgiving and Christmass dinners. Holiday parties. Food everywhere, decorations everywhere, gifts everywhere. Surrounded by so much stuff, it can be difficult to appreciate the importance of stuff. People who do not have that much stuff, especially not enough of the stuff that supports life, such as food, clothing, and shelter, know the truth that stuff really does matter. This can be seen in the better way, in general, I have seen people who do not have much stuff treat other people. It seems that the more stuff a person has, and the more a person denies the importance of that stuff, the worse that person treats other people.

For people are also stuff. Our attitude toward material things is going to affect our attitude toward other people, who are also material things. Not that persons should be regarded and treated as objects, but that people are created matter, just like all the other stuff around us. And people matter.

The Virgin Mary knew this. The angel Gabriel was sent to her to let her know that she was about to receive stuff in her womb, a “product of conception”, as some like to call little persons in the womb these days, and that this stuff would grow into her son, who would rule over the House of Jacob forever. Mary, valuing her God and her people, acknowledged and received this stuff that God willed into her womb, and that product of conception grew into the Messiah who is “God with us”, who has saved His People from their sin by using the stuff of His Body according to the Will and Purpose of His Father. That’s what Jesus does. He transforms stuff.

I once attended a Christmass Eve Mass with a congregation whose practice was to stop everything at the moment of midnight, the traditional moment of Jesus’ birth, and sing “Joy to the World”.

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.



Midnight happened to arrive during the distribution of Holy Communion, which by that point had settled into the comfortable rhythm of “This is My Body, this is My Blood...” at the altar rail while the waiting congregation quietly sang Christmass hymns. Then promptly at the appointed time the zymbelstern began to ring, the sanctuary lights brightened, the organ began playing, and everyone stood to sing out “Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth receive her King...”, including the people who were kneeling at the altar rail ready to receive communion. One of these was a short, round woman with a cherubic face who lifted her gaze to the height of the sanctuary ceiling and sang with such unrestrained joy that she could not escape notice. The ecstasy with which she celebrated the birth of her Savior in human flesh could not be missed. After four verses, the moment passed, as all moments do, just as that moment the angels sang to the shepherds must have passed. The organ quieted, the lights dimmed, the communicants knelt again to receive the Lord whose coming they had just celebrated, and the comfortable rhythm of “This is my Body, this is My Blood...” resumed.

Yet things were not the same. That moment of joy had transformed, transfigured even, all the “stuff” in that sanctuary in an irreversible and remarkable way. I have no idea who the woman singing at the altar rail was. I have no idea whether at the time she was healthy or sickly, having an enjoyable or stressful holiday time, living on easy street or in dire straits. One thing is sure, though, that during the time of her singing, for that moment, she was rapt in joy, and transformed, transfigured even, never to be the same again, even as bread and wine are transformed, transfigured even, as the Words of our Lord are spoken over them, into the Body and Blood of our Lord,

never to be the same again. These are the Words of our Lord God and Creator Who became the stuff of this world Himself, beginning in the womb of a young Virgin who was willing and ready to receive Him no matter the consequences for herself.

This is God’s Will for us, that we receive what He has given us and then allow His Holy Spirit to work through us to transform the stuff of this world into stuff that transforms. This is quite a basic, but often overlooked, principle. St. Augustine presents this principle in his discourse on the Psalms in this way:



“(A Christian) ought to use the world, not become its slave. And what does this mean? It means having, as though not having.” Therefore, we do not deny that we have stuff or how important it is, but we recognize that all stuff comes from God and is best used in a way that accomplishes His Will. St. Augustine continues: “These are the sacrifices most pleasing to God: mercy, humility, praise, peace, charity.” When we allow God to inspire us to use the stuff we have in a humble

way, which is to say recognizing that it is not ours but God’s and is to be put to use according to His Will, in order to express charity by showing mercy which leads to peace and results in praise to God, we truly fulfill our purpose as the stuff of God through the right use of the stuff He has given us.

Having stuff in itself isn’t a bad thing. However, when we collect the stuff of God for pride, or for show, or for security, we do a bad thing by negating God’s purpose for it. With Mary, we can say “yes” to what God has given us and allow Him to work through us to transform it into stuff that saves, for our sake and for the sake of all those around us.

Peace,  
+Jeffrey

## Christmas Schedule

Dec. 17<sup>th</sup>, 6 pm: Advent Lessons & Carols

Dec. 24<sup>th</sup>, 7 pm: Mass of the Angels & Shepherds

Dec. 25<sup>th</sup>, 10 am: Mass of the Eternal Word

## News & Notes

In September we were represented at the annual retreat of the Society of the Holy Trinity, in Mundelein, Illinois by Bp. Jeffrey Bischof and Bp. Aubrey Bougher. We are pleased to support the Society which encourages the use of the daily prayer offices and fosters ecumenism from an evangelical and catholic perspective.

In October we hosted a group of students and two staff from Hillsdale College. They participated in the daily prayers and even fixed a meal for the community.

After the completion of the new church the Quonset hut chapel was demolished and removed. One of the items saved from the old building was the brass door handle from the large front door. This was the handle that Fr. Arthur and countless other residents and guests had grasped each time they entered the chapel. Now it has been installed on the north door of the new church to again facilitate entry into the house of God. For some of us it brings back memories. Below: the door handle on the old chapel and in it's new location.



The past twelve months have seen a number of needed repairs and upgrades to our buildings and property. Last December and January the kitchen located in the old retreat house was dramatically expanded and improved with new appliances. In the late spring a drainage system was installed around the old retreat house to alleviate water leakage in the basement. In the summer the entrance in front of the bell tower received new concrete steps to make it more accessible. Repairs were made to the church roof and to the siding on the upper story, and three



*The Hillsdale College Group*

other buildings had their aging roofs replaced. The pole barn was made more usable with the addition of a concrete floor, electric lighting, and a new door. We are thankful for the generous bequests that have made all this financially possible and for the help of our neighbor Brad Foehlich in arranging and coordinating much of this work.

Bp. Jeffrey Bischoff has primary responsibility for the Sacramental life of our community and celebrates the

Gifts are gratefully acknowledged in memory of

DELMAR BAIER  
JOHN R. COCHRAN  
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and in honor of

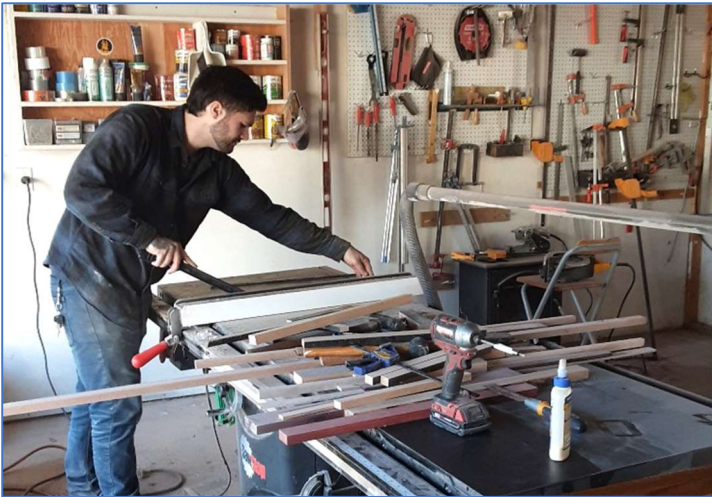
JAMES URBAN

and from the estate of

NORMAN E. NETHING

Holy Eucharist on most Sundays and weekdays. We are grateful, however, for the assistance of several local clergy: Fr. Shaun LaDuc, Pr. Lloyd Buss, Pr. Jacob Hanby, and Fr. Jeffrey Hubbard. In addition, our Liturgies are regularly enhanced with the organ accompaniment of Daniel John Susan.

The wood shop in which Fr. Jude labored until his death three years ago is once again buzzing with activity. Since last summer Matthew Strubler has been producing beautiful dining tables, coffee tables, benches, and cutting boards often from used, or even scrap wood. This is a good example of turning trash into treasure. (Find him on Facebook or Instagram: *Strubler Woodworking.*)



We will host our friends of the Anglican Church of the Advent for a service of Advent Lessons and Carols on the Third Sunday of Advent, Dec. 17<sup>th</sup> at 6 p.m. All are invited to join us.

## Our Birthday Too!

*From a Christmas sermon by St. Leo the Great, d. 461.*

In adoring the birth of our Savior, we find we are celebrating the commencement of our own life, for the birth of Christ is the source of life for Christian folk, and the birthday of the Head is the birthday of the body.

Every individual that is called has his own place, and all the sons of the Church are separated from one another by intervals of time. Nevertheless, just as the entire body of the faithful is born in the font of baptism,

crucified with Christ in his passion, raised again in his resurrection, and placed at the Father's right hand in his ascension, so with Him are they born in this nativity.

For this is true of any believer in whatever part of the world, that once he is reborn in Christ, he abandons the old paths of his original nature and passes into a new man by being reborn. He is no longer counted as part of his earthly father's stock but among the seed of the Savior, who became the Son of man in order that we might have the power to be the sons of God.

For unless He came down to us in this humiliation, no one could reach his presence by any merits of his own.

*To all, far and near, a Merry Christmas  
and a glad New Year!  
Christ is born! Glorify Him!*



Frank, Br. Richard, Bp Jeffrey, Cherie, Sam, and Br. Andy

*Lift up your heads, ye mighty gates!  
Behold, the King of Glory waits;  
The King of kings is drawing near,  
The Savior of the world is here.  
Life and salvation He doth bring,  
Wherefore rejoice and gladly sing:  
We praise Thee, Father, now,  
Creator, wise art Thou!*

*Macht hoch die Tür, Georg Weissel 1642*