



# SAINT AUGUSTINE'S HOUSE

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## NEWSLETTER

**Lent, A.D. 2024**

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

Last January the members of our pastoral council discussed how we might better foster vocations to the monastic life here at St. Augustine's House. I reflected that most of the men who have played a significant role in our life here were not products of our recruitment efforts; rather, having already experienced a call they sought us out. I know this was the case with myself. After an early experiment in community life in St. Louis, I decided to come to St. Augustine's House as the best place to fulfill my calling. Of course, I and others experiencing a similar call need to know of our existence; so there is some need to talk about ourselves and to make our presence generally known.

Now in this time of Lent the Invitatory at the beginning of each day calls out, "O that today you would hearken to the Lord's voice!" (Ps. 95:7b) This season is an invitation to all Christians to re-examine their lives, to correct and renew their relationship to God and neighbor, and to hear the personal summons of the Lord "Follow me" in a fresh way. Lent climaxes with the celebration of Christ's Resurrection with this a reminder and renewal of our own sharing in His resurrected life through our Baptism. This is the fundamental vocation of the Christian from which all other vocations and undertakings proceed. This applies to monastic life as well; it is a vocation within the greater Christian vocation of Baptism. As we advertise in some of our literature, it is "discipleship of Jesus Christ in the monastic way of St. Benedict."

I have tried to make this point when asked what monks do. I say we do what all Christians do: we eat, we sleep, we work and pay our bills, wash our clothes, brush our teeth, and, like other Christians, we pray. The difference lies only in the amount of time and attention given the last item, prayer. We are Christians who feel called to devote a greater part of our time and energy to direct, intentional worship of God. St. Paul writes, "Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thes. 5:16ff). There are different ways in which



the injunction “pray constantly” has been interpreted and put into practice. For Benedictine monks it takes the form of the Daily Office or the Liturgy of the Hours in which designated times for communal prayer are distributed throughout the day. Here at St. Augustine’s House the daily office punctuates—or interrupts—the day’s other activities from 5:10 in the morning until 8:30 in the evening. Altogether these prayer times add up to between three and four hours a day. In his book, *My Brothers’ Place*, George Weckman puts it this way: “To live at [St. Augustine’s] House for even a few days one must enjoy ‘church,’ the singing and recitation, the collective meditation on the Word and Sacrament, the abandoning or subordinating of all other activities and the turning of attention toward God.”

The term St. Benedict uses for this prayer is *Opus Dei*, the Work of God. This expression reminds us that our prayer is to be approached in a serious, intentional, and disciplined way. It is not a hobby we do in our spare time, on our whim. It can also be understood the other way around: the Work of God is the work He does in and through us when we devoutly place ourselves in His presence. The regular practice of prayer is a reminder to us and a witness to others of the transcendent meaning and purpose of human life. Each day of our life is part of a salvation history, a sacred story which extends beyond the narrow horizons of our personal birth and death. Our use of the Psalms in the Liturgy of the Hours reminds us that we too are living in “Biblical times.”

The fruit of prayer can be experienced whether one spends five minutes a day or five hours. It is the specific monastic vocation to incline toward a greater and fuller participation in the traditional liturgy of the church. If one feels a call to this and a desire to join with others in a community dedicated to this pursuit,

there is a process of experience and testing to help determine if the call is genuine and enduring.

St. Augustine’s House follows a pattern that is based on the Rule of St. Benedict and is typical of most religious communities today. The first stage begins with the invitation “come and see” (John 1:39). If the inquirer has never visited us, we ask him to come for a normal retreat of several days up to a week. Ideally, he should make several such retreats. This is followed by a prolonged retreat with the community for about six weeks called an Aspirancy.

The second stage is a time for more deliberate discernment and increasing levels of investment and commitment. First there is the Postulancy which lasts for at least six months. At the end of this period if the candidate petitions and the community agrees he is received into the community as a novice. After at least one year



in the novitiate, he is free to make a simple or temporary profession for a period of three years. At the end of this time, he may ask to renew his simple profession for another three years or to make his solemn life profession and become a permanent member of the community.

A simple but probing question is asked of the candidate at the beginning of the profession ceremony: “What do you seek?” This is the question Jesus asks the two disciples in the Gospel of John (1:35ff). The prolonged procedure outlined above is intended to help the candidate make an informed, intelligent, and confident answer.

Knowing what one truly seeks is necessary for the exercise of freedom. What good is it to have choices if you never choose. Along with choices we must have the maturity to decide and to act. Freedom lifts its wings and takes to flight not while it vacillates between all the choices available but when the choice is made, a decision reached, and a course set.



It is true that in our fallen world we can, and often do, exercise poor judgement, and for that reason it takes courage to make commitments and promises to each other and to God. But it is not mature to think we can live full and happy lives without ever committing ourselves to something or to someone. This is what makes community possible. I believe that most couples celebrating a fiftieth anniversary do not regret the promises they made, and I believe the same for those of us under religious vows. I know it is for myself. I doubt that the same can be said for those who come to old age having kept all their options—those that remain—still open.

Some decades ago, while on retreat at St. Gregory's Abbey near Three Rivers, Michigan I was speaking with the then Abbot, Fr. Benedict Reid, about how to encourage vocations to our community. I mentioned to him that one of our Fellowship prayers included the petition, "Give us an increase of number that will best enable us to fulfill the end for which you have chosen us." He immediately responded, "And if you have faith, God has already answered that prayer." We have in fact never been numerous here at St. Augustine's House, but from the founding of the Fellowship in 1956 until now a form of monastic discipleship of Jesus Christ has been continuously lived here on these forty acres in the Grampian Hills near Oxford, Michigan. Come and see!

—Br. Richard

## News and Notes

During the Christmas Octave at the end of December we hosted seven members of the Detroit area Servants of the Word. This is an ecumenical semi-



monastic community for celibate men who in various occupations seek to live as disciples of and witnesses to Jesus Christ, the Word of God incarnate.

*servantsoftheword.org*

The Society of the Holy Trinity is a ministerium for Lutheran Pastors. We were happy to again welcome members of the Indiana chapter here for their retreat in January. *societyholyltrinity.org*

We take note of the passing of two longtime friends. Ernest W. Baker died in December at the age of 97. For decades he was a frequent presence here and a generous supporter who promoted many of our projects, including fund raising for our new church. In February Fr. Michael Green died at the age of 80. He was a monk at St Benedict's Monastery, our neighboring Roman Catholic community. He ran their print shop and for decades did printing for us. Rest eternal grant to them, O Lord; and let light perpetual shine upon them.

Included with this newsletter is a prayer card with the Intercessions of the Fellowship of St. Augustine. These prayers were composed shortly after Fr. Arthur founded the Fellowship in 1956 to pray for the formation of religious communities among Lutherans in America. They are one of the founding documents of our community and remain an expression of our aspirations.

[www.StAugustinesHouse.org](http://www.StAugustinesHouse.org)

*Find us on Facebook.*

## Prayer, a Witness to Love

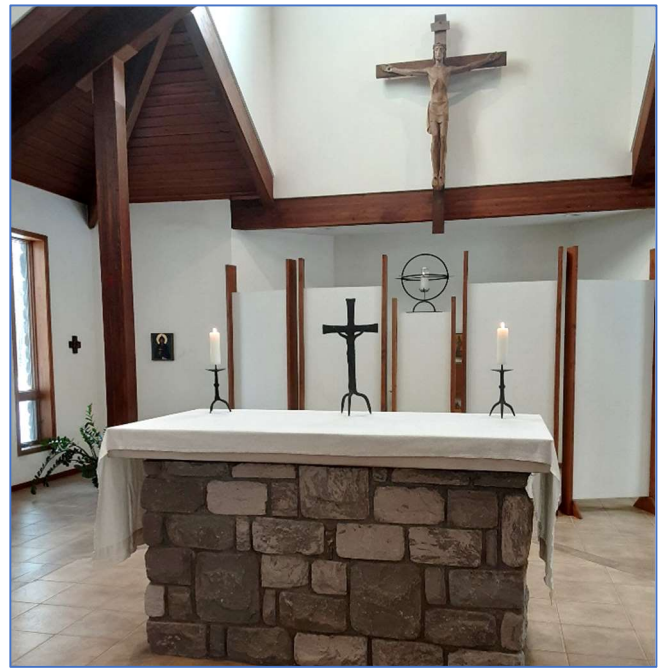
*From Seeking God: The Way of St. Benedict. by Esther de Waal.*

Prayer lies at the very heart of the Benedictine life, it holds everything together, it sustains every other activity.... For praying can never be set apart from the rest of life, it is the life itself. St. Benedict did not ask his monks to take a vow to pray, for he expected prayer to be central in their lives, permeating whatever else they were doing. Prayer is the *opus Dei*, the work of God, and nothing must be preferred to it. At least twice St. Benedict says that nothing must be put before the love of Christ, and he uses precisely the

same phrase “to put nothing before” when he come to talk of the divine office, as if that is the most excellent witness to the community’s love of Christ, the pre-eminent occasion for the expression of that love....

Although he wants his monks to pray without ceasing, as we know from his own life St. Benedict did himself, he knows that spontaneity must be upheld by structure and freedom by ritual; that the personal prayer also needs corporate prayer and that the awareness of the presence of God needs to be fed from time to time from sources external to oneself. So he imposes a rhythm and form on the life of prayer, as he does on other aspects of the monastic life, since it is part of his wisdom to recognize the need for balance in each day, each week, and each year....

Our prayer reflects the way in which we respond to life itself, and so our prayer can only be as good as the way we live. God will not be taken in by fine words any more than the shrewd St. Benedict will be taken in by the monk whose mind is not in harmony with his voice as he sings the psalms. The whole Christ is seeking the whole person.



### Schedule Holy Week

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|------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Palm Sunday, March 24th</b>                       | <b>10:00 a.m.</b> |
| <i>Palm Procession, St. Mark’s Passion Narrative</i> |                   |
| <b>Maundy Thursday, March 28th</b>                   | <b>6:00 p.m.</b>  |
| <i>Mass of the Lord’s Supper, Washing of Feet</i>    |                   |
| <b>Good Friday, March 29th</b>                       | <b>4:30 p.m.</b>  |
| <i>Solemn Liturgy; St. John’s Passion Narrative</i>  |                   |
| <b>Holy Saturday, March 30th</b>                     | <b>8:30 p.m.</b>  |
| <i>Vigil and First Mass of Easter</i>                |                   |
| <b>Easter Sunday, March 31st</b>                     | <b>10:00 a.m.</b> |
| <i>Mass of Easter Day</i>                            |                   |

Gifts are gratefully acknowledged in memory of

- DELMAR L. BAIER  
 JOHN R. COCHRAN  
 RICK DAGIT  
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 NORMAN NETHING  
 JOHN SCHILLING  
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 ROBERT D. YODER
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- BRAD FROEHILICH  
 CHRISTOPHER ERNST TORGLER

