



Our Lady of the Annunciation – The First Decade

Autumn 2009

Dear Friend,

On September 15th, we celebrated the tenth anniversary of the founding of Our Lady of the Annunciation of Clear Creek Monastery. As I reflect on our first ten years here at Clear Creek under the patronage of Our Lady, I must gratefully acknowledge that she has blessed us with a most joyful first decade. No great undertaking is without its sorrows and setbacks, but Our Blessed Mother has truly been with us every step of the way, and along that way she has gathered a vast family of patrons and benefactors to help us build this traditional Benedictine monastery — a monastery to last a thousand years — right here in the heart of America.



Spanning the waters of Clear Creek, this scenic stone bridge is one of the first things we built at our new home in Oklahoma.

The story of Clear Creek has an unlikely beginning. Over thirty years ago, several of us who are now monks, were attending a large Midwest university and had signed up for a Great Books program. Under the tutelage of three outstanding professors, we studied the great works of Western Civilization, and came to understand the enduring legacy of a certain 6th century monk — Saint Benedict, the father of Western monasticism. With knowledge and understanding

came a desire to experience this Benedictine life first-hand, which led us to a centuries-old monastery in France — Notre Dame de Fontgombault Abbey.

There are vocations or “callings” for places just as for persons. Fontgombault is one of those special places in the world, where the spiritual and material realms meet in a kind of antechamber of Heaven. Upon entering the Romanesque church situated near the Creuse River, the lingering smell of incense adds to the mystery of the high-vaulted ceiling and the gentle light filtering through the stained-glass windows. Seven times each day and once during the night, the accents of Gregorian chant make the stone walls vibrate with the oldest and most beautiful and prayerful music our civilization has yet to produce. Though we were thousands of miles from our native soil, we felt as if we had arrived home.



Until the Monastery Church is built, we will continue offering the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in the Crypt.

“Ora et Labora” — Pray and Work — is the motto often ascribed to the black monks. Like most human beings after the Fall, we earn our daily bread “by the sweat of our brow.” Even work, however, is accomplished in a spirit of prayer. Above all a monk is a man of prayer. His life says: “God exists, and we have been created for Him.” By their balanced life, monks offer an example of how to praise God and respect His creation, how to love one’s neighbor and practice the moderate use of material goods. Benedictine communities have always

been a source of inspiration for all who visit them — whether individuals or families. Over the centuries, Benedictine monks have played a quiet but decisive role in the preservation and development of civilization. You might say with little exaggeration that they built Europe.

As we entered into the Benedictine life at Fontgombault — first as postulants, then as novices, and finally as fully professed monks — the years passed into decades. But there was always the hope that someday, perhaps, in the fullness of God’s time, we might be able to return to America and establish a daughter house on our native soil.

Some twenty years later, the Abbot, Dom Antoine Forgeot, began visiting the United States in search of a location in which to establish an American monastery. The dream became a reality in 1998 when a beautiful piece of property was secured in the foothills of the Ozarks, about seventy miles east of Tulsa, Oklahoma and a charter was signed by Bishop Edward J. Slattery, formally welcoming the monks into his diocese.



In addition to the Monastery Residence, pictured above, we have also completed construction of the Gatehouse.

In the fall of 1999, on the threshold of a new millennium, a dozen monks — mostly Americans — arrived in Oklahoma to begin the new monastery placed under the patronage of Our Lady of the Annunciation, formally named Our Lady of Clear Creek Monastery. As we stepped off the airplane in Tulsa, an enthusiastic welcome-party was there to greet



us, singing “Home on the Range.”

Perhaps more than any other people on earth, Americans need a place to reconnect with God’s creation and with the silent center of their own being where God awaits them. The monastery is such a place. Guests, both men and women, are welcome to come stay with us for a few days and share in our life of prayer and work.

The laying of the First Stone, officially blessed on November 21, 2003.

At Clear Creek, the Divine Office (the official prayer of the Church), and Holy Mass are celebrated daily in Latin and sung in Gregorian chant. The Clear Creek monks earn their living the way monks always have: from their farm, their vegetable garden, and their orchard. They also make their own cheese, clothes, and furniture.

In the ten years since our arrival, the progress here at Clear Creek has been dramatic. Benedictines have a long history of architectural accomplishments: they have always been audacious builders. Romanesque architecture is part of the Benedictine heritage and meets the needs of a solemn liturgical life. The Liturgy, the natural setting, the church building, and the monks themselves together form a living prayer. In such a place, visitors from all walks of life participate in a mode of existence that has been a sanctifying presence in our culture for well over a thousand years.

With this Benedictine ideal as our goal, Thomas Gordon Smith, a well-known architect and professor at the University of Notre Dame, was chosen to design a permanent church and a large residential building. In 2002, consulting engineers were hired and a road and a stone bridge leading to the new monastery were constructed. By the end of March 2004, the massive foundations had been poured and the whole monastery crypt successfully completed.

The next big challenge was the building of the monastery Residence. Ever since the founding of Clear Creek, the monks had lived in an old lodge building that was generously donated along with the property. But we soon outgrew that building and as more and more novices arrived, we were forced to build a series of small modular sheds in which to house these new vocations.

The most obvious sign of Divine Providence within any religious community is its number of vocations. Since its inception, Clear Creek has been blessed with a large number of vocations. In ten short years, the number of monks has grown from 13 to well over 30 — with fresh inquiries arriving every day. And so it was with great prayer and anticipation we began work on the monastery Residence.

In January of 2008, this monumental portion of the Monastery was brought to a successful completion, and on April 12th of that year, the formal dedication was made with Bishop Edward J. Slattery presiding and hundreds of friends of Clear Creek in attendance.

Will you help us build the Monastery Church?

With the completion of the Residence, we must now focus on the true heart of the Benedictine Monastery: the Abbatial Church. Monks strive to live in strict poverty as concerns their personal needs. A church is something different though, something that must be beautiful for God. Please help us build an “antechamber of Heaven,” a habitation as worthy as possible for the Lord of Heaven and earth.

The foundation and life of Our Lady of Clear Creek Monastery is something bigger than any of its human actors. It rests on the prayers and sacrifices of a great number of souls, of countless friends, both known and unknown to us. There remains much work before us before the monastery will be complete, but I want to offer a special thanks to all of you who have so faithfully accompanied us on our journey thus far — and to others of you who may just be joining us now. May God bless you and yours, and may Our Lady of the Annunciation intercede before her Son for all your special intentions.



Architect's rendition of the first phase of construction. The Church (pictured at the left) is our next major project.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "br. Philip Anderson, Prior". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

br. Philip Anderson, Prior

Our Special Gift To You

It is our honor and privilege to send to you with this letter a CD entitled *Praise of the Virgin Mary*, recorded at Our Lady of Fontgombault Abbey in France, our Mother-house. May this divinely inspired music lift you up, beyond the horizon of the littleness and meanness of all too many things we encounter from day to day here below. We only ask that, in turn, you pray for the monks of Our Lady of Clear Creek Monastery, who live under the patronage of Our Lady's Annunciation. You can certainly count on our own prayers and thankfulness for your prayers and generous help.