



Our Lady of
Clear Creek
Abbey

Celebrating
25 Years



On the cover:

Top: The log cabin on the Doyle's ranch which served as the original monastery of Clear Creek; The 13 founders of Clear Creek, along with the Abbots of Solesmes and Fontgombault and the first postulant of Clear Creek.

Middle: A birds-eye view of the Abbey taken in April 2024.

Bottom: The community with Raymond Leo Cardinal Burke in October 2023.

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Celebrating 25 Years
1999-2024



Abbey Editions

Hulbert, Oklahoma

2024



Our Lady of Fontgombault Abbey

The French Benedictine Abbey of Fontgombault, with its origins dating back to 1091, stands as a beacon of monastic tradition and continuity. Founded by Pierre de l'Étoile on the banks of the Creuse, the abbey has weathered the tumults of history, including destruction during the Hundred Years' War and the French Revolution, only to be restored and flourish once more with the arrival of monks from Solesmes in 1948. Today, the community numbers 60 monks who celebrate the traditional liturgy including the Latin Mass according to the 1962 Roman Missal, which resonates deeply with traditional Catholics seeking a connection to the historical roots of their faith. The abbey's commitment to the Gregorian chant, a cornerstone of Benedictine spirituality, further cements its role in preserving the liturgical heritage of the Church. Fontgombault's influence extends beyond France, having established daughter houses, including Clear Creek Abbey in Oklahoma.

The Americans at Fontgombault

Clear Creek monastery at the time of its founding in 1999 already had a long history and a prehistory even longer. It goes back to the 1970s and the Pearson Integrated Humanities Program at the University of Kansas under the direction of Dr. Dennis Quinn, Dr. John Senior, and Dr. Frank Nelick. These three professors guided hundreds of students in a reading of the great books of Western Civilization with an aim to revive in them the spirit of wonder and discover the love of wisdom.

Though their program was not explicitly Catholic, the perennial truths to which the students were exposed in the lecture hall sparked a movement of conversion to the Catholic Faith among those students. Wanting to experience the roots of the Catholic faith more deeply, two of the converts, Stewart (Stew) Ashton and Arthur (Tripp) Anderson, made a pilgrimage to Rome and then wished to make a prolonged stay at a traditional Benedictine monastery, which led them to Fontgombault in France in July 1972. As the Abbot was away at the time,



Above: A photo taken in 1977 of the KU students at Fontgombault, some already wearing the habit, and others making a long stay before entering. Seven of those pictured above were among the founders of Clear Creek 22 years later.

the Prior, Dom Antoine Forgeot, received them kindly and allowed them to live in a guest house, work, pray, and eat with the monks and study Latin and French.

Stew entered the novitiate a year later. Though he left after five years, he showed his friends that becoming a monk in a French monastery was not impossible. Each year a small group of KU students would spend several months and many would ask to enter the monastery. In 1974-75, Roark Bethel stayed and entered soon after. In 1975-76 was the prolonged visit of Philip Anderson, Francis Brown (not from KU), Lawrence

Brown, and Scott Markey. In 1976-77 Rick Bales, Mark Owen, and Matthew Shapiro made a long stay and eventually entered; the first two at Fontgombault and the latter at Randol.

While not from the USA, there were a few Canadian vocations inspired by a Fr. Nielsen, a priest in Vancouver who knew of Fontgombault via Dr. Senior. Mark Bachmann entered in 1983 and Kenneth Graham in 1988.

Thus, by 1990s there were 8 Americans and two Canadians at Fontgombault and her daughter houses ready for the foundation of Clear Creek.

John Senior

He was born in Long Island in 1923 and had a colorful early life that included working as a ranch hand in the Dakotas. His experiences on the plains deeply influenced him, fostering a love for the simplicity and beauty of nature. Senior later became a professor of literature and was one of the founding figures of the Pearson Integrated Humanities Program (IHP) at the University of Kansas in the 1970s. Senior's legacy continues to shape generations of Catholic leaders through his visionary approach to education. He passed away on April 8, 1999, just months before the foundation of Clear Creek, while eagerly awaiting the advent of the monks.

The motto of the Pearson Program "nascantur in admiratione" means "let them be born in wonder."

"To be a student is to be alive to intelligence, and the beginning of such a life is wonder. To revive wonder may be said to summarize the aims of the Pearson Program. Hence it should be regarded as an elementary or elemental course, where one discovers the love of wisdom; a course for beginners, who look upon the primary things of the world, as it were, for the first time."

- From the IHP brochure, written by Dr. Quinn



Fr. Abbot Forgeot, Dr. Senior, Fr. Bethel in 1998.



Finding the Location

In 1991, the 900th anniversary of Fontgombault, it seemed to Father Abbot Forgeot that the time was ripe for a foundation in the USA. Thus began an almost decade-long search for a welcoming bishop and suitable site for a monastery. Together with Fr. Bethel, Dom Forgeot made exploratory trips in 1991, 95 and 98, visiting Oregon, California, Illinois, Texas, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, North Carolina, Nebraska, Kansas, and Oklahoma.

In 1995 an old KU alumnus and former postulant at Fontgombault now living in Oklahoma, Kirk Kramer, met with Bishop Slattery, the new bishop of Tulsa, and broached the idea that Tulsa could receive a foundation from Fontgombault in his diocese. The bishop responded with interest and on their next trip to the USA

in May 1995, Dom Forgeot and Fr. Bethel visited Tulsa but did not find a suitable property. They then went on to Tennessee where Bishop O'Connell showed them a property on the Tennessee River he was willing to give to the monks. They returned to France thinking that Tennessee would be the location.

In November 1995 Bishop Slattery visited Fontgombault for the first time, while Bishop O'Connell came on July 11, 1996. Over the next few years, negotiations with Bishop O'Connell stalled, prompting Dom Forgeot to return to Tulsa in 1998 where he first saw the Doyle Ranch out in the middle of nowhere in Hulbert, Oklahoma.

The Eastern Oklahoma Catholic's front-page article announcing the foundation of Clear Creek.

Benedictine monks coming to eastern Oklahoma next Fall

By Father Patrick Brankin

An order of Benedictine monks from France will establish a daughterhouse in the Tulsa Diocese next fall, Bishop Edward J. Slattery announced Oct. 16.

Bishop Slattery and Dom Antoine Forgeot, the Abbot of a traditional monastery of Benedictines signed an ecclesiastical charter on the Feast of the Assumption, last Aug. 15, giving the Abbey of Our Lady of Fontgombault permission to found a daughterhouse here in the Diocese of Tulsa.

This charter, known by its first three Latin words *Ad Dei Gloriam* ("To the Glory of God"), will govern the relations between the Diocese and the new monastery, although the customs and liturgical practices of the monks will be according to the Rule of St. Benedict and the usages of the Congregation of Solesmes, to which Fontgombault belongs.

This new foundation will be located in rural Cherokee County, between Lake Fort Gibson and Lost City about

(For the bishop's column on the monastery, turn to Page 3. For details on the Benedictine community of Fontgombault, turn to pages 9-12)

20 miles northwest of Tahlequah on a 1,200 acre ranch recently purchased for this project. The monastery will be known as the Monastery of Our Lady of the Annunciation of Clear Creek.

Although it is expected that the number of monks will grow to something between 50 and 60, there will be 12 monks who will pioneer the effort, traveling next September from south central France to Oklahoma. Of the 12, most will be American or English-speaking Canadians who are already professed members of the Abbey and for whom the new foundation will be a return



Bishop Slattery and Dom Antoine Forgeot sign charter establishing Benedictine monastery in eastern Oklahoma.

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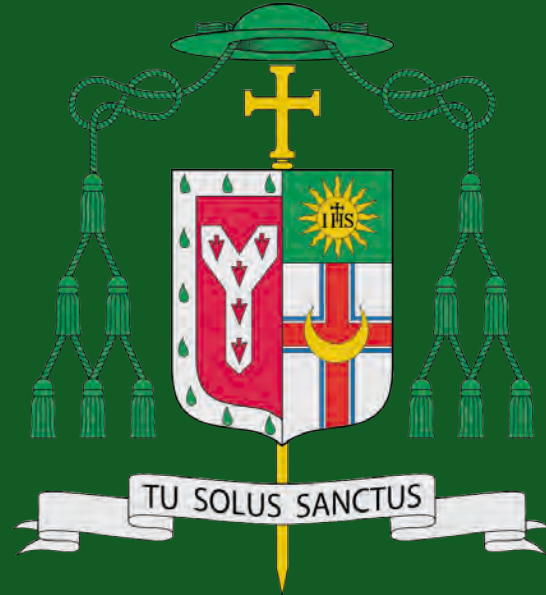


Above: Fr. Abbot Forgeot, Bishop Slattery and Fr. Brankin, September 1999.

Below: Bishop Slattery ordains one of the monks in 2021.



Bishop Edward J. Slattery



Born on August 11, 1940 in Chicago, of Irish descent, Edward Slattery was ordained a priest for the Archdiocese of Chicago in 1966 and was appointed third bishop of Tulsa by Pope John Paul II on November 11, 1993. Slattery was consecrated bishop by John Paul II at St. Peter's in Rome on January 6, 1994. The very next year, he visited Fontgombault for the first time and soon invited the monks to make a foundation in his diocese.

An ever-faithful friend and supporter of the monastery, Bishop Slattery often visited Clear Creek and performed numerous ordinations for the monks over the years.

In 2010, Slattery officiated at the abbatial blessing of Father Abbot Anderson, first abbot of Clear Creek.

Following his resignation in 2016, Bishop Slattery has continued to remain close to the monks.



Above: Bishop Slattery and Fr. Abbot Anderson give the blessing together at the abbatial blessing on April 10, 2010. Below left: Bishop Slattery with Fr. Shapiro in 1999. Below Right: The Bishop with the monks during recreation in the cloister in 2008.

