

## COME AND SEE WEEKEND

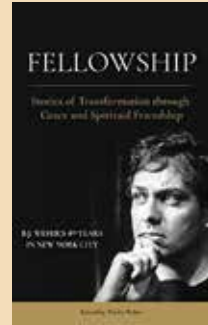


In 2023 we'll be hosting two weekends for young women exploring the possibility of a call to monastic life:

April 14 – 16  
Oct 27 – 29.

The women will have time for prayer, join us for liturgy, hear sisters' stories and share on spiritual topics. If you know a young woman who might be interested, or a church where our fliers would be welcome, we'd be grateful for your help in spreading the word. Contact Sr Myra, [vocations@olmabbey.org](mailto:vocations@olmabbey.org), for fliers or further information.

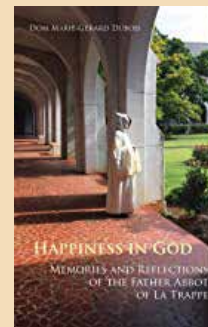
## WE HIGHLY RECOMMEND:



**FELLOWSHIP:** Stories of Transformation through Grace and Spiritual Friendship: B.J. Weber's 40 Years in New York City (2019). Several of us sisters contributed to this anthology.



White, Joann. *Blest Be the Tie: Fables of Faith From the Far North* (2021). Heart-warming stories of an imaginary Presbyterian church in upstate New York; the author was the pastor of one of our young members.



Dubois, Marie-Gérard. *Happiness in God: Memories and Reflections of the Abbot of La Trappe* (2019). Dom Marie-Gérard was a leading light in our Order until his recent death, and this book mixes spiritual profundity with stories from his own life and the lives of monks he served..



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OUR LADY  
OF THE  
MISSISSIPPI  
ABBAY

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monastery  
news

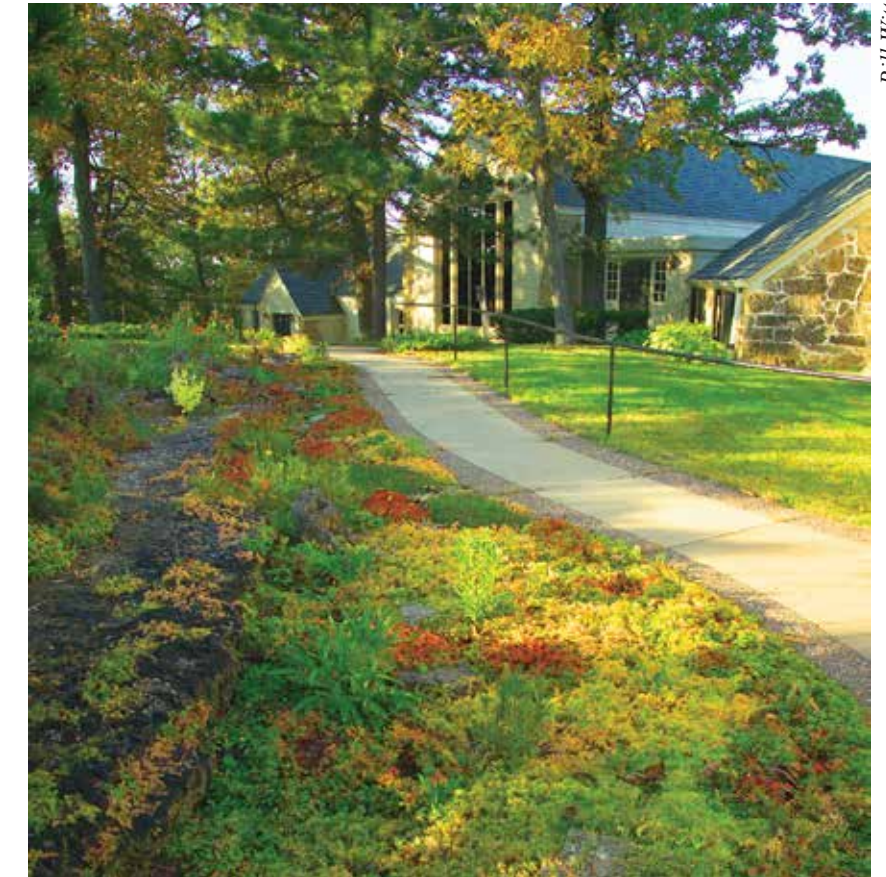
It's not our custom to give a lot of attention in our newsletter to friends of our community, whom you, dear reader, may or may not know. This newsletter we are making an exception, because B.J. Weber, who died on August 2, has been our closest friend for most of our community's history. That being the case, saying a few words about BJ also gives us an opportunity to open our archives and share some of that past with you.

BJ was a Dubuque native, who by all accounts (including his own) had a wild youth, and no belief in God. Remarkably, this future Protestant minister, and finally Anglican priest, had his dramatic conversion to Christ at a Catholic monastery, our brother monastery of New Melleray. Stopping there to buy fresh bread, he met Fr Jim Kerndt, who initiated a conversation that went on through the night. By dawn, BJ had given his life to Jesus.

If New Melleray was the starting point, Mississippi soon became the focal point in BJ's life. Fr Jim enlisted the help of another monk, Fr William, to mentor the new Christian. When Fr William became our chaplain in 1974, and built a hermitage on our property, BJ was soon living nearby, attending our services and helping with the farm work. The next January BJ started seminary studies at the University of Dubuque. While Fr William remained his mentor, our abbess, M. Columba, also began meeting BJ for half an hour 4-5 times a week for spiritual direction. That was an extraordinary level of

personal guidance. Most of our sisters meet with the abbess only once a month!

BJ brought the same outsized personality and whole-heartedness to serving Christ that had made him an outsized rebel and sinner (and continued to make him an enthusiastic rugby player). Something of his reputation quickly spread beyond Dubuque, and one day he came to M.Columba in great excitement because he had been asked to speak at a Billy Graham event, about how Jesus had changed his life. But our abbess was not impressed; she recog-





1977, BJ on our farm; ~ 1985, with wife Sheila and son Max; ~ 1990's, with Fr Jim, our chaplain for 20 years ~ with M. Columba; ~ 2015, with Sr Grace, M. Rebecca; ~ December 2021, a bittersweet visit, as we knew it was probably his last.

nized that this experience could go right to the head of such a new disciple. So she told BJ that he could go speak at the event, but if he did, he would not be coming back to Mississippi. Stunned though he was, he submitted – and then was told to go clean out our sheep barn. (This was a story he would recount with great glee.)

When BJ finished seminary, M.Columba sent him off to New York City, where, to quote his obituary, “he served in rescue and recovery efforts with addicts, prostitutes, teenage runaways and the homeless, while co-pastoring The Lamb’s mission church in Times Square.” Soon his ministry extended to also to businessmen, UN ambassadors, major sports teams – and after 9/11, his local fire station as well.

BJ didn’t just “stay in touch” with us; his life was intertwined with our community’s as no one else’s has been. We can’t count all the people BJ sent to our guest houses at one time or another for some monastic prayer, hospitality and wisdom. And there were the annual retreats of a few businessmen he led at our two monasteries, with some of the sisters and brothers giving conferences and having one-on-one

talks with participants. BJ was here for our important milestones –jubilees, blessings of new abbesses; by the providence of God, he even happened to be around at the first death and funeral of a sister, our Sr Augustine in 2000. When we needed to raise money – quite a lot, by our standards – for our new monastery in Norway, we simply could not have done it without BJ’s help, ideas, contacts, and frequently solicited guidance. In fact, the man who became chair of our campaign, Alonzo McDonald, was one of the many friends we had originally met through BJ.

As BJ continued to grow in Christ, our relationship with him changed too. Until his death he regarded our community and our prayers as a major well-spring for his ministry; but we were on the receiving end of his spiritual gifts as well. His talks to us not only brought us up to date on his projects, but also inspired us with his own fire for Christ.

Monastics living a hidden life must accept that they will rarely see the fruit of their prayers. In an extraordinary way, the change BJ made in so many people’s lives has been a rare source of “visible fruit” for our community.

## CANDY NEWS

The biggest news in our candy business is that, after almost three years of preparation, we have a new website! Still the same old address (monasterycandy.com), but instead of a custom-designed site built just for us, we have moved to an ecommerce platform called “Shopify” which hosts thousands of online stores. It has been a long journey figuring out how to tweak it for our own customers’ needs, and to integrate it with other software we use. But now that it’s live, we’re very pleased, and expect that our customers will be pleased too. Check it out!

As we’ve mentioned in recent letters, our caramel wrapper continues to be a source of concern. Most of the machinery used in our candy business is relatively simple, relatively new, and relatively inexpensive. What little maintenance is needed can almost always be done in a day or two, and parts can be ordered. Not so with the caramel wrapper. It is complex, quite old (70 or so years), very expensive – and no longer made. When the machine is working well, it

does an amazing job: with 5-6 sisters on crew, we are cutting, wrapping, and putting in gift boxes on the order of 180 caramels per minute. That’s more weight of finished product per worker than we produce in any other operation.

Needless to say, we’ve hunted for other similar machines and other solutions for decades, with lots of professional help and ultimately little success. Now we are exploring what it would mean to gradually eliminate wrapped caramels from our product line. By weight they account for almost 60% of our sales; if you add in the assortments which include both wrapped and chocolate-covered caramels, that’s ¾ of the business which supports our monastic life. So we are proceeding very cautiously indeed. And don’t worry – we do know that our caramel is a wonderful product which continues to attract customers by its quality, so we are seeing this as an opportunity to find new ways to turn it into delicious gifts people will be proud to give to those they love.



The candy house in fall



Putting candy into the wrapping machine

Bill Witt



June: Corpus Christi procession



Aug 20, Archbishop Jackal’s first annual visit post-Covid



Feast of the Assumption: M.Rebecca gives a chapter talk, with prioress and subprioress beside her.



The postulants are given a copy of the Rule and a cross made from wood of our trees



Our new novices.

## OTHER NEWS

Like other monasteries, we have an annual community retreat. Someone from outside the community comes for a week to give a daily spiritual conference and to meet personally with any sister who wishes. We had scheduled M.Maureen McCabe, retired abbess of Wrentham and a great favorite of ours, to give our retreat in 2020. You can guess how that turned out. So we re-scheduled her to come in 2021.

Alas, when spring of 2021 rolled around the pandemic wasn’t much better. M.Maureen offered to do what she could via zoom, but we held out for a time we could have her with us in the flesh. Meanwhile both years we still had retreats, beautiful quiet weeks of silence and NO WORK – and lots of time with the Lord.

Well, this year travel has basically resumed, so M.Maureen came to us at the end of June, and her first two days we had excellent spiritual talks. But guess what happened next? A Covid outbreak in our own community. Five sisters were affected, including one senior who was hospitalized for five days. With great sadness, we packed off M. Maureen before she could catch our bug and bring it back to her own monastery. We are already plotting her return...

But in other respects, for us as for everyone else, much is getting back to the pre-Covid “normal.” The US Region of Trappists held its annual 2-week seminar for juniors in person (our 2 juniors attended); the superiors had an in-person Regional Meeting; and above all, our Order finally had a full General Chapter in Assisi, in September. As for Mississippi, we are behind most monasteries in re-opening our guest houses and our gift shop. Partly due to the Covid, our staffing of these facilities has changed, and we are still trying to work out new staffing arrangements.

We’ll end with our best news. Remember the community photo on the front of our last newsletter? If you still have it, you can see two women in the front row wearing civvies – our two postulants. On August 15, solemnity of the Assumption of Our Lady, and patronal feast of our Order, they both received the Cistercian habit. This was the first time in our history that we’ve ever had a double clothing. Sr Annie Rose Marie and Sr Mary Therese entered our community three weeks apart in the summer of 2021, and decided to share this glorious feast for this great step in their lives. Please keep our new novices in your prayers!

Be sure of our prayers for you.

The Sisters of Mississippi Abbey