

Assumption

ABBEY NEWSLETTER

Volume 48, Number 1

Richardton, ND 58652

January, 2020

Monastic Life in a Digital Age:

An Interview with Abbot Daniel Maloney

Many people would agree that digital technology offers both benefits and drawbacks. The benefits include such things as speed and efficiency of communication, access to a wealth of information, opportunities for learning and teaching, better health care and safety. Drawbacks include access to false information, interference and distraction from other more productive activities, and isolation. For many, the key is arriving at a reasonable balance between these effects. How do you see the balance of these consequences for the Abbey? What special considerations are involved?

Our monastic policies strive to keep these things in balance: access to digital technology is limited and monitored. There is always a danger that some monks waste time on social media, and we can monitor that.

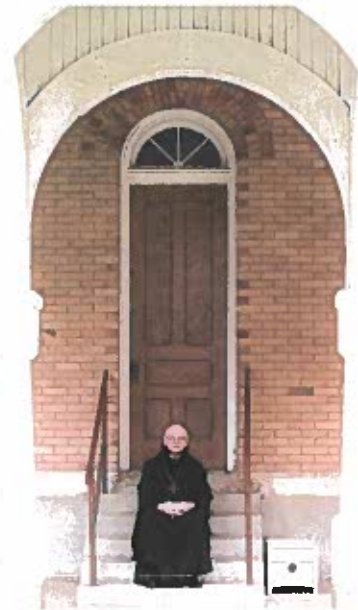
There is a possibility of abuses and these abuses come to my attention sooner or later. But to some extent, we need electronic communication, and I think we have a fairly good balance here at Assumption Abbey.

Have you seen examples of great good, or great harm, from use of digital technology in monastic life?

I've certainly seen good things: the Assumption Abbey webpage is helpful for people looking for general information, or inquiry into the possibility of a vocation to monastic life. One can contact the appropriate people on our website, and we can contact other monasteries and places for information and help. But if the equipment is not working it's not easy to fix.

I use digital technology: email, Google and Wikipedia. I find lots of information and in a hugely time-saving way. Is the information reliable? That depends. Using the computer can give you a head start. Wikipedia is not always reliable: often you find "footnote needed here."

And, of course, it depends upon what you are researching. Politics would not be reliable. Ethical issues might be slanted when it comes to euthanasia, assisted suicide and so forth. Critical thinking is necessary. But there are also reliable sources on the Internet.



Photos by Jacy

Abbot Daniel Maloney

What guidance have you taken, or what things have you learned from what other religious communities are doing about this issue?

Our Benedictine congregation did a survey about regulations, especially for monks in formation. Access is restricted in our monasteries to a greater or lesser extent. For example, smart phones are restricted in some places, and in others every monk is required to have one. St. John's Abbey in Collegeville, MN, gives each monk a phone that is connected to the university system, as is their Internet system. Monk-professors need this to post

grades or make available supplemental information for their classes. And it's easier to contact a monk, and perhaps quieter, too, than having a landline phone in a hallway.

One approach the Abbey might take is an all-or-nothing stance: on the one hand basically allowing nothing that is part of the digital age (no computers, no cell phones, traditional land line telephones only, all research done in hard copy in the library, and so on), and on the other incorporating digital technology similar to anyone living outside in civilian life. Are either of those desirable for Assumption Abbey? Why or why not?

No. Not either one. Monks need some access to the internet, but at the same time some restrictions are also needed, especially those found in our *Safeguards* policies, designed to protect children and vulnerable adults. Our current system is fairly balanced, but everything has its flaws. We restrict ourselves more than the average citizen. Few of us, for instance, have smart phones; the community has only a few flip phones to give out to monks when they are traveling. Because the Bishop demands that all parish priests have at least cell phones, those of us who have pastoral duties carry them. We are perhaps stricter than other abbeys in our congregation with regard to such things because we do not sponsor a school. Abbeys with schools need technology for their work. We don't have a school. And

therefore we can be more restrictive for the sake of our life of prayer.

Is there a parallel to any of the monastic vows, such as the poverty implied in *conversatio*, that monks can't indulge their wants, but needs must be met at a basic level? For instance, monks don't own anything individually, but at the same time they must eat and be clothed and sheltered. Their energy must be focused on the spiritual life. How does this apply to the use of digital technology in a monastic environment?

Monks must have permission to purchase devices and to use them. And we're not buying the most expensive models when we do purchase. Most monks here do not have hand-held devices, and so they must wait in line to use the computers for common use. Some monks have computers in their offices, if they are required.

What if, as with prayer, set times were created each day for brief use of technology, and only at those times would use of devices and computers be allowed? What are the drawbacks of this approach?

Such an approach would probably interfere with the work needs of some. Monks here have differing schedules. They'd have to wait in line to use the computer. Such a thing would be very inconvenient.

If technology is an area where, as a practical matter, some of it must be adopted and used for life to go on, but careful restraints must be followed, what should those restraints be? Is the discipline a monk must use to follow those restraints the same as for other aspects of monastic life, or different in substance somehow?

Our main concern is that monks do not get into trouble.



The Abbey courtyard from the southeast.

Using social media, there is always the possibility of human weakness causing this or that one to run amok. But we, of all people, ought to be upstanding. There are legal and moral issues with regard to social media. Here at the Abbey we block access to porn sites, of course, as a safeguard. Overuse is another danger. We have set times when computers, as with television sets, may not be used. Still, monks might find ways around regulations. It is a concern that one might neglect one's work or duties.

If you knew that more liberal use of digital technology within the Abbey and by monks could triple vocations to our monastic life within the next two years, would that change your views?

No. Certainly not. We wish to provide a monastic life for young people who are looking for balance in their lives and are willing to restrict their use of smart phones and other devices. Yes, it can be a challenge for someone to give up part of his identity by turning in his phone but it is necessary, I think, for a healthy spiritual life.

What is the significance of monastic obedience in today's individualistic, self-centered world?

It's still important that we take a vow of obedience. We are asked to do things that we may not want to do. A superior is concerned for the good of the entire community, and the individual might be asked to sacrifice for that overall good. Yes, today a superior must

consult; there is value in that. Hopefully, a monk's duties will be a good fit with his talents and abilities. Usually things work out that way.

Disobedience causes problems, some very serious. Refusing to obey can be harmful to others and it wears down the community as a whole. As a last resort, a monk—even one in solemn vows—can be dismissed from the Abbey when there is obstinacy. □



AUGUST CHRONICLE

August 1: Two mule deer fawns—no doubt twins—have been making their daily appearance just below the cafeteria windows. They still have their spots and look for all the world like the Disney character Bambi, for someone with double vision. ❖

August 2: A visitor to the Abbey tells us about a friend with her baby who cried every night. Doctors were at a loss. They could do nothing. So, she attached a medal of St. Benedict to the baby's crib and the crying stopped. For those who don't know, the medal of St. Benedict—the one that Benedictine oblates wear—is not only blessed for the purpose of calling down God's blessing and protection, but is especially blessed because it carries with it power of exorcism against Satan. Though lay people, and most priests, are forbidden to

conduct exorcisms, they are permitted to use the St. Benedict medal to ward off evil. According to Dom Prosper Guéranger, among many other things, the medal is effective in destroying the grip of diabolical and haunting influences. ❖

August 8: For several weeks, enthusiasts among us have been working on a thousand piece jigsaw puzzle entitled "A River in Alsace." Unfortunately it has been sitting on a table near the window and nearly 800 pieces were strewn across the floor by the wind. Today, however, it was completed (then, after all that work, taken apart and put back into the box). ❖

August 10: Lil' Opryland Rodeo takes place in Richardton and our venerable prior, who is a member of the volunteer ambulance crew, must sit out the morning at the arena. Some unfortunate cowboy suffered quite a loss when, on the way here, his trailer gate opened and his horse was killed on the Interstate highway. ❖

August 15: The monks celebrate the solemnity of the Assumption of the BVM and invite the next door Benedictine Sisters over for Vespers and supper, wishing them well as they embark on a new phase of their history: they are moving from Richardton into Dickinson, moving up from country bumpkins to city Sisters. They will have neighbors to their immediate right and left, across the backyard, and across the street. ❖

August 18: Four vehicles full of monks travel to Dickinson for an Open House at Subiaco Manor Retirement Complex which has become the new Sacred Heart Monastery. The sisters went from an 87,000 square-foot to a 13,000 square-foot living space, which is actually the fifth move in their long history. ❖

August 20: A retreat group is at the Abbey again this year that does *en plein air* painting which is painting done outside, just as it was done with the impressionists Claude Monet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Alfred Sisley and Frédéric Bazille. The cultural ambiance of this place is lifted with so many people out in the yard working at their easels. ❖

August 21: The old fire hoses are removed from the basement, as well as the first, second and third floors where they have been coiled and ready for action for the last eighty years or more: old canvas hose on each end of the hallways, with a huge spigot. Surprising, that no monk in all those years gave in to temptation and sprayed the floor down for the heck of it. ❖



SEPTEMBER CHRONICLE

September 2: Labor Day. Brother Subprior Jacob organizes a day trip to Shadehill Recreation Area near Lemmon, SD. Eight monks hike the trails along the reservoir there, though it is a cold, foggy and damp day. Their compensation comes in the form of delicious tamales they brought with them, made by Sonia Ciavarella of Bismarck, ND. Thank you, Sonia! ❖

September 5: At silent breakfast, the toaster suddenly pops. (More like explodes!) The sound is like a canon. But there is no smoke, thankfully, and the toaster is not ruined. The cause is a hole in the plug; the chord that came from the factory is too short which has been putting stress on the appliance every time it's used. After such a big noise during the morning silence, it takes a while for the hair on our heads to relax. ❖

September 9: Sorry to say that summer vacation is over. Classes begin for those in formation: one junior and two novices. Maintaining discipline in the classroom isn't difficult, though, with such a nice crew. They are cheerful and eager to learn. ❖

September 13: Friday the Thirteenth! Trouble is brewing somewhere! Another light pops out high up in the vaulting of the church. Novice Stephen rushes to clean up the shards on the floor before monks arrive for Morning Prayer. The lights up there are nearly twenty

years old, but we have our doubts that they are designed to explode when their life-span is over. ❖

September 16: Brother Placid sets fire to the burn pile out behind the Power House. The pile is huge due to the many branches and debris left from the big June storm that brought down six trees in the yard. The blaze is so hot that one can almost roast marshmallows from twenty feet away. Poor Saint Joan of Arc! What courage it must have taken for her martyrdom, and she did not blame her killers. She simply said, "Jesus!" as the flames engulfed her. ❖

September 20: Oblates are here for a weekend retreat and Bonnie Grace Staiger reads from a collection of her poems. Bonnie has been a long-time oblate of Assumption Abbey and was recently appointed Associate Poet Laureate of ND by famous author Larry Woiwode who is Poet Laureate. He has named several associates to help bring an enlightened literary consciousness to people around the state. ❖



Father Denis Fournier in choir

OCTOBER CHRONICLE

October 2: The Abbot and the Prior are visiting work departments, and monks (to put themselves in the best light) are doing lots of tidying up and even outright cleaning before the big guys arrive. But in any case, the Abbot and Prior are not looking for dirt; they're anxious to hear about work conditions and how things might improve. If anyone complains, however, about needing an extra pair of hands, he'll just have to pray for more vocations. ❖

October 4: One of the guest rooms on first floor east has been refurbished as a lunch room, complete with a lovely tile floor, refrigerator and freezer, microwave, sink, counter and cabinets. A table and chairs are there, although new ones have been ordered. Guests can now make themselves tea or coffee, toast or soup, and they can visit there also, if they wish. The window of this lunch room looks out on a courtyard full of snow, in the wintertime, and full of flowers in summer. ❖

October 5: Is it true that Benedictines can't tell jokes? Some people believe that strict Benedictines (i.e. Trappists) take a vow of silence. But no Roman Catholic order takes a vow of silence. (That's the truth!) Their customs curtail speech, but they can always speak to their abbot or their confessor. The Rule of St. Benedict says, "*Jests and idle words, or speech provoking laughter we condemn everywhere*

From the Archives:



This is the formal portrait from Father Adalbert Kraft's first Mass in January of 1910. In those days, flower girls were *de rigueur*. The main girl, holding the pillow, carried the burse that contained the corporal. The other two girls accompanied her down the aisle. Adalbert was born in Germany and was recruited by Abbot Vincent Wehrle in the summer of 1905. He came to North Dakota with sixteen other candidates for the Abbey. After profession and ordination, he became procurator, Rector of the College, a teacher and a prefect. When Placid was elected Abbot, Adalbert was appointed prior and in that capacity he had to find places for monks to go when St. Mary's Abbey went bankrupt. The Trustees appointed him caretaker of the buildings and grounds until Abbot Alcuin Deutsch reconstituted the Richardton Abbey. Adalbert died in 1941.

to eternal exclusion, and for such speech we do not permit the monk to open his lips" (Chapter 6). That seems pretty clear. But the Holy Rule says nothing about *writing* jokes. So, here you are. (Make sure you read it in silence.) It was a dark and stormy night. A young man seeks refuge at an abbey. He is given a room, but he wanders about and comes upon a huge oak door with shiny copper hinges. The door is locked. The next morning he asks one of the monks, "What is behind that door?" The monk explains that the young man must become a monk before he can find out. And so the young man goes through a year of candidacy and two years of novitiate, and after making

simple profession of vows he is given a key to the big oak door with shiny copper hinges. He eagerly unlocks it. Behind it is another door with shiny silver hinges. It is locked. The monk goes to the abbot and complains. The abbot says, "Only monks in solemn vows can unlock that door." So, the young monk stays in the community for three years and then takes solemn vows, after which he is given another key. He rushes to the door with shiny silver hinges and unlocks it, only to find another door behind it with incredible gold hinges. And that door is locked. He complains to the abbot. The abbot says, "Only monks who have taken a vow of silence can

unlock that door." The young monk can't stand it and he says, "Okay, I will take a vow of silence for the rest of my life!" He does so and is given the key to the door with the incredible gold hinges. And what was behind that door? He can't say. He took a vow of silence. ❖

October 9: Brother Symeon, in hopes of beating a winter storm, takes off early for Bismarck for classes at the University of Mary. The storm hits. Classes are not called off at the university, but the weather worsens and Brother Symeon ends up spending almost a week as a guest of the good Benedictine Sisters of Anunciation Monastery. We were afraid he'd never come home, the way the kind sisters were treating him! ❖

October 14: Anyone who would like to read the lovely poetry of Bonnie Staiger, mentioned earlier, her collection entitled *Destiny Manifested* is available on amazon.com. The collection is also available in the Abbey Gift Shop. ❖

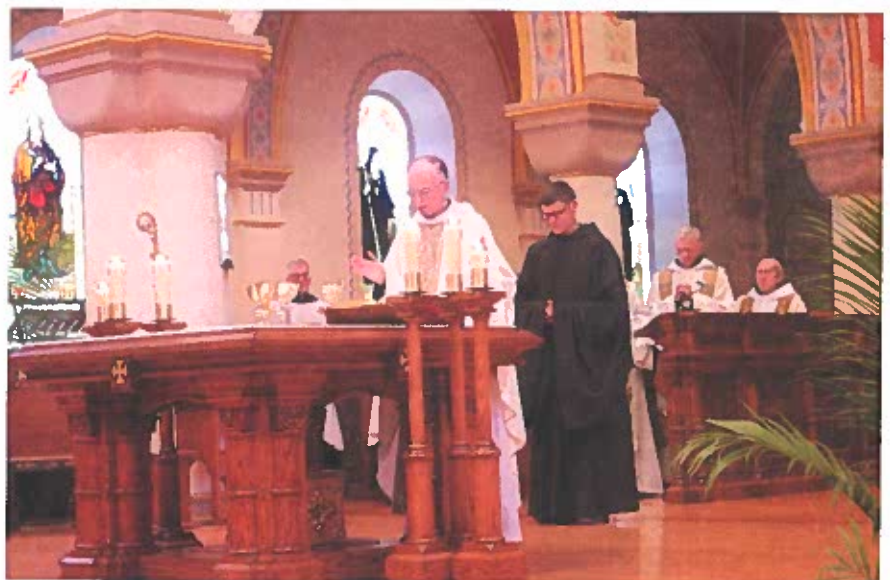
October 16: Richardton-Taylor high school juniors took their PSAT (Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test) in the Abbey North Lounge today. On average, the test requires two hours forty-five minutes to take and about 3.4 million high school students take it every year. According to the Princeton Review, the PSAT does not count toward college admissions applications, but it is the qualifying test for the National Merit Scholarship. It is also practice for the SAT and ACT tests, "an important guidepost



Development Office

Br. Michael Taffe, O.S.B.

Throughout the year and in a variety of weather conditions we have assisted those who have run out of money and need a little help to be on their way. We very much appreciate your donation and will pass it on. Checks should be dated February 13, 2020, in order to qualify for Giving Hearts Day. Contact Brother Michael at 701-974-3315. And God bless you!



At the Eucharistic liturgy, left to right: Brother Michael Taffe, Abbot Daniel Maloney, Brother Symeon Rubbelke, Father Valerian Odermann and Father Anthony Baker.

on your college admissions journey” to quote the webpage collegeboard.org. ❖

October 21: Today is most unusual in that there are no retreatants present, no guests, and only one lone shopper stopped in at the Abbey Gift Shop. We would feel downright abandoned if it weren't for the rotten weather. ❖

October 22: The Prior addresses us at a community meeting about updating our personal files and about necessary information that should be included in our stories. Among the things we ought to leave behind, if God should take us up, are passwords, and a concise autobiography, so that those who write obituaries and eulogies have it straight from the horse's mouth. ❖

October 23: The paving project in the yard has been called off until the spring: no surprise with all the snow outside. A pity because the company must move away all those paving trucks and equipment. Markers will probably not last the winter, so the area must be surveyed again. ❖

October 31: A large package arrives in the mail for Brother John-Patrick, and several of us offer to open (pillage?) the box, because we know that his birthday is tomorrow, on the first of November. Brother John-Pat does not look anything like the 77 years old he is; he looks more like a tremendously weathered thirty-five. Happy birthday, good Brother! ❑

From the Library

By Br. Michael Taffe



A book that I would recommend, if you like reading, thinking and reflecting about ideas, is *The Second Mountain: The Quest for a Moral Life* (Random House, 2019) by David Brooks. The author's framework is that many people spend their lives on what he calls the first mountain. This mountain consists of those efforts we make to satisfy our own desires and wants. The primary example of this is when we work hard in college and graduate school, try to establish a career and often become focused on earning as much as we possibly can. We tend to be very individualistic while climbing up this mountain.

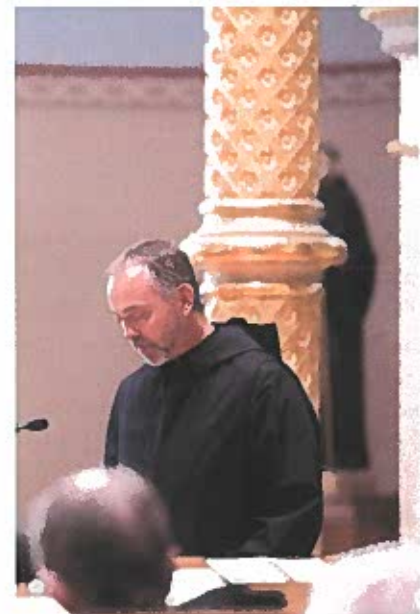
The problem with the first mountain is that those efforts we undertake to satisfy our own needs really do not fulfill us as persons. Many modern people report feeling empty, incomplete and lonely. However, with some insight and work, these feelings, as well as tragedies or crises in our lives, can lead us off the first mountain to the second mountain where people's energies are focused on helping others and making deeper connections to those around us. We are fulfilled when we forget about ourselves and live for others.

The author gives a number of examples of people who have

made it their life's vocation to serve others. This can include feeding the poor, making neighborhoods and cities more liveable, educating children, etc. Dorothy Day was a woman he often cited in his examples.

Brooks notes that a major problem with our society is that of hyper-individualism. He believes that we are called to be more relational in our culture. The latter chapters of the book describe being more relational in marriage, schools and universities, and in how we live our faith. Some of the most compelling aspects of the book are his descriptions of his own unique faith journey and second marriage.

In many ways, what he describes is how we as monks try to live for Christ and for each other. Not everything matches up, naturally, but it was an interesting read and gave room for reflection on how I can live better and more fully as a monk for Christ. ❑



Photos by Jacy
Brother Jacob Deiss at the ambo.



Newsletter

Volume 48, Number 1

January, 2020

Published Quarterly in January, April, July and October
for friends of Assumption Abbey.

Assumption Abbey Newsletter
P.O. Box A
Richardton, ND 58652-0901

www.assumptionabbey.com

Return Service Requested

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Richardton, ND
Permit No. 20

Benedictine Saints

Anyone looking for distinctive names for children need look no further than the Benedictine martyrology. The saints chosen for this issue should provide names odd enough to delight anyone.

January 11 is the feast day of Saint Tethwius, a monk of the Abbey of the Holy Saviour in Redon, France, founded by Saint Conwoïon—or Convoyon—who was an adviser to Nominoe, the first Duke of Brittany, in his dealings with the Carolingian Emperor Charles the Bald. Tethwius, Conwoïon's disciple, was afflicted with paralysis and blindness. Even so, he was

known for his remarkable spirit of prayer and mortification, and he cured people, among them a servant of the abbey who fell beneath the wheels of a heavily laden wagon. Tethwius died in 870.

Saints Harlindis and Relindis were daughters of Adelard, a Frankish nobleman, who had them educated at the Benedictine abbey in Valenciennes. In 730 the parents set up a Benedictine abbey at Aldeneik on the banks of the Meuse River, in modern day Belgium. The sisters were good friends of St. Boniface who blessed both of them as abbesses to reign in tandem.

Harlindis died in 745 and her feast day is October 12. Relindis died in 750 and her feast day is February 6.

Saint Cunegund of Luxembourg was the wife of Emperor Henry II, himself a saint. They lived as brother and sister, so that after Henry's death in 1024 she could claim to be a virgin, entering the Benedictine abbey she founded at Kauffungen. An amazing entrance that must have been: after the Gospel was sung at Mass, she laid aside her crown and imperial robes before prelates and dignitaries of the empire, her hair was shorn, and she put on the humble habit of a nun. She lived among her Benedictine sisters until she died in 1039. She was buried next to her husband in Bamberg. She was canonized by Pope Innocent III in 1200. Her feast day is March 3.

Saint Sisebuto was an abbot in Spain and died in 1082. His remains were enshrined in a marble tomb venerated by the faithful of Cardena. Although he does not appear in the epic poem *El Cantar de Mio Cid*, the abbey took in El Cid's wife and children when he was exiled, during Sisebuto's reign. □



Carvings of Saints Henry and Cunegund of Luxembourg.