



Welcome to Sybertsville

BY TONI CASHNELLI

Stand still and listen. You can't hear a thing – not even the honey bees buzzing around the hives out back.

This is part of the attraction of Holy Dormition Byzantine Friary in Sybertsville, Pa. "It's quiet," says SJB Friar Mike Lenz, who came here three months ago to join four brothers from Assumption BVM Province. Surrounded by 80 acres of undulating green at the foothills of the Poconos, this feels more like a retreat house than a worship center. Throw in an element of outreach, and you've got Holy Dormition, a place where the beauty and mystery of the Byzantine Rite meld with the everyday activities that characterize a parish.

But this isn't a parish, as residents explain. Friars who occupy this meandering wood-shingled complex, established in the 1940s as part of a Byzantine custody, are out to create something unique. There is, of course, daily worship in the chapel, where celebrants in brocaded vestments move back and forth from behind an icon screen to a Holy Table with its Book of Gospels. For today's

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Top, Christ Pantocrator in the dome of the chapel; above, Mike Lenz in the very big backyard of Holy Dormition Byzantine Friary.

PHOTOS BY TONI CASHNELLI

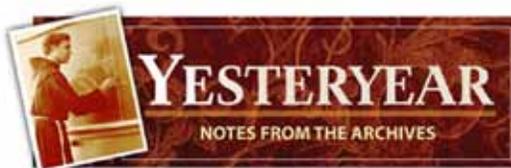
FROM FRANK

St. Francis Retreat House celebrates its 50th Jubilee this Saturday. **Jerome Pavlik** was the first guardian and oversaw the construction in 1959. The first retreat was in September 1961 and the hospitality of the St. Francis has continued non-stop until the present.

St. Francis Retreat House has been a labor of love for the friars and volunteers for 50 years. At my visits I've been truly impressed with the hospitality which reflects **Gospel Inn** values. The friars have always been very hospitable. The volunteers are truly extraordinary. They cut the grass, make the beds, clean the rooms and serve the meals. What a tribute to their dedication to the friars and to sharing the Gospel message.

Scott Obrecht uses his leadership skills to direct the organization. **Dennet Jung** is the in-house preacher and liturgist.

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Yesteryear is our new monthly column on provincial history. Suggestions for stories are welcome!

Retreat House founded as 'bold new mission'

Breaking ground for the retreat house: Left to right are Friars John Joseph Gonchar, Jerome Pavlik, Lawrence Pollak, Bonaventure Buc, Juniper Crouch and Matthew Brozovic. Behind them are Gottlieb Schneider and son Walter, general contractors; and George Rose, plumbing contractor.



BY PHILLIPS ROBINETTE, OFM

Fifty-six years ago, the friars of the Commissariat of the Most Holy Savior listened as their General Visitator encouraged them to "consider a bold new mission." This simple suggestion made by Franciscan scholar **Fr. Thomas Plassmann, OFM**, of Holy Name Province eventually would bear fruit

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with the founding of St. Francis Retreat House in Easton, Pa.

The Delegate Provincial, **Fr. Francis J. Vilha, OFM**, and **Fr. Jerome Pavlik, OFM**, began searching for a suitable location in the counties outside of Philadelphia. Their efforts were rewarded when they discovered the **Mark Swartz** property on Chipman Road in Easton and determined that the location, with its proximity to the highways, the large house and the pleasant features of the site would be ideal for their purposes. After receiving the blessing of Philadelphia's Archbishop (later Cardinal) **John F. O'Hara, CSC, DD**, the property was purchased. Permissions were then obtained from Holy Name Province and Rome for the establishment of this new foundation.

The Franciscan presence in the Lehigh Valley had a modest start in January of 1957, as Friars **Fr. Bernardine Hvizdos, Fr. Bonaventure Buc** and **Br. Juniper Crouch** were welcomed by the Archbishop and then moved into their home, which was now named St. Francis Friary. In September, **Frs. Robert Valent, Matthew Brozovic** and **George Jakub** settled into the friary. Within the small compliment of brothers, Bonaventure, Matthew, and George joined the faculty at Notre Dame High School, and with Bernardine, who was already teaching at Allentown Central Catholic High School, these men became the first friars to serve in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. This apostolate of teaching was beginning to look like the new mission of the Commissariat, and surprisingly, the building of a retreat house in Easton still had not been considered.

The Slovak Province of the Most Holy Savior had been disbanded in April, 1950, as the Soviet Army occupied most of Eastern Europe and the Communist government suppressed the activities of the Roman Catholic Church. By the late 1950s the tensions



Top, friar teachers at Notre Dame High School in Green Pond, Pa.: Left to right, Matthew Brozovic, John Joseph Gonchar, George Jakub and Bonaventure Buc; above, the architect's rendering of the retreat house.

between democratic and communist nations began to escalate. The Catholic reaction was a movement towards spiritual renewal, which could be measured by the surge of construction starts to build new retreat centers. For our Slovak brothers, especially those friars who been forced to flee their ministry and homeland, this movement was keenly felt. While the practical solution would have

been to build a retreat facility near their monastery at Valparaiso, Ind., the idea was surfaced to build a retreat house closer to the exploding Catholic population in the Lehigh Valley. After studies were made, the proposal for a retreat center in Easton was rejected by the Provincial Delegate, yet the possibility was still open for a new administration and canonical visitation to consider. With the 1958 election of **Fr. Lawrence Pollak, OFM**, to the Office of Provincial Delegate and the appointment of

Jerome Pavlik as Guardian of St. Francis Friary – both proponents of the Easton site – the idea became a reality in 1959 as the construction of the new St. Francis Retreat House began.

After the Blessed Sacrament was transferred to the new Chapel on June 16, 1961, followed by its first Benediction, the new friary doors were opened to the resident friars, the first Mass of Thanksgiving was offered the next day and on June 18, 1961, the very first retreat was given for the Friars of the Commissariat. The bold new mission had begun.

Primary References include:

The September 17, 1961 Dedication Booklet, with "The Poverello Comes to the Lehigh Valley," a historical article written by Fr. Matthew Brozovic, O.F.M.

The October 9, 2004 Rededication Booklet, "With Gratitude for the Past, With Hope for Today's New Beginning, With Faith for the Future"

Photos from the Franciscan Archives, Cincinnati, OH and the September 17, 1961 Dedication Booklet

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Feast of the Holy Cross, Cantor **Jerome Wolbert** leads the congregation in singing/chanting the readings. It's not so much the words that stick with newcomers as it is the incense, the tinkling bells of the censer and the bold, iconic image of Christ Pantocrator (all-powerful) at the apex of the dome above their heads.



Left, Jerome Wolbert greets visitors; below, Mike Lenz in the courtyard with Augustine Paulik, cantor and choir director.

Mike is here because "I really like the Byzantine Rite and I knew they were in need of another friar who could work in it – not so much to help in parishes but to build up the community." Granted, there is plenty of outreach going on, with the friars driving 70-80 miles to celebrate Divine Liturgy elsewhere each week and much in demand at local Roman churches. But the main emphasis is on the ministry of presence.

The list of activities at Holy Dormition keeps growing. There are programs like an icon-writing workshop held earlier this month or an ongoing DVD lecture series and Scripture reflection hosted by Jerome. The second Sunday of the month, **Friar Laurian Janicki** leads a faith-sharing community. Catholic men of Roman and Byzantine persuasion meet here quarterly for Divine Liturgy, followed by breakfast at Tom's Diner. A handful of worshippers come to daily Mass, but Pilgrimage for Peace, a day of recollection, drew 500 visitors in August. A gift shop in the friary is supplemented by roomfuls of used books collected for occasional sales. Two guest houses on the property are being developed for private retreats. Local SFOs call Holy Dormition home. Economically, "We're on our own," says Laurian. "We are five here trying to make a go of it" by opening the door to more spiritual guidance and retreats. There is room for more friars at Holy Dormition, but "a lot of them don't even realize there are other rites."

The rustic tranquility of the friary may be a blessing, but it's also a challenge. "After seven years, going from living in Pittsburgh to a rural area is an adjustment," says Mike, who makes the 55-mile drive to Easton at least once a month to connect with SJB friars at St. Francis Retreat House. All in all, "I'm enjoying being stationed here. We have a good community."

After seven years with bi-ritual faculties, "It's still



Above, Mike presides over the Feast of the Holy Cross in the chapel at Holy Dormition.

very challenging learning to chant the Divine Office," according to Mike. "I'm struggling to learn the different melodies." But life in Sybertsville is settling into a comfortable routine. When he isn't celebrating Mass, he's tending the courtyard garden, serving as the mail clerk and bursar, or assisting chief cook Jerome in the kitchen.

Later in the day, when things get *really* quiet, "Sometimes at night I'll just sit outside my door and watch the moon from the courtyard," Mike says. "It's a beautiful area."

PHOTOS BY TONI CASHNELLI

Notes from *England*

From Jeff Scheeler, OFM

(Since Jeff arrived in England last Sunday for an ESC meeting, he has e-mailed a few updates about the trip and the meetings. He heads home Saturday.

Oct. 9:

All is well. Arrived safely. We are at Domus Mariae, a retreat house about an hour outside of London. Quite tired yesterday, but I slept about nine hours last night. We had a “full English” breakfast this morning, with bangers and beans, porridge, etc. We have Mass shortly and then will begin our meeting this afternoon.

Oct. 10:

Not a great night; my body thinks it is still in another time zone! Our meeting began with personal sharing which will continue this morning, and then an overview and preparation for our time with the General Council. They arrive about noon, but we do not start meeting with them until tomorrow morning.

Our rooms are incredibly tiny, with a common bath and shower. Weather is coolish and almost always cloudy. We will see some sights on Wednesday afternoon, so we hope it is nice weather. Cultural differences are interesting: tomatoes and beans for breakfast!

Happy Thanksgiving Day to Canadians (we have two with us to remind us.)

Oct. 11 (afternoon):

It is Tuesday afternoon here, and about 8:30 a.m. in Cincinnati. We began our meeting with the General Council this morning. **Jose [Carballo]** presided at Mass. At our

first session we gave an overview of the conference and then Jose talked with us. We discussed his talk in small groups of four. After lunch we will share the small group discussion and then we will try to give an overview of the conference with brief reports. I have to do the first one on formation. The whole Council is not here. We have the General and Vicar, the Councilors from Asia, Argentina, France, Italy and our own ESC. The Secretary of the Order will arrive this afternoon to join us. It is going well, and it is good to have this dialogue. Jose encouraged us to greater collaboration and to focus on our identity as Friars Minor.

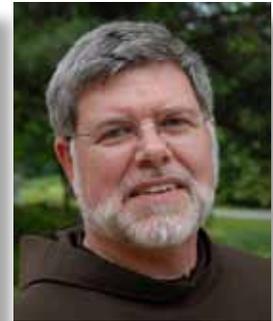
I was at the lunch table with Jose and he said, “With your permission, I will go take a siesta.” I joked that it was a pleasure to give the minister general permission to do anything!

Oct. 11 (evening):

It is bedtime on Tuesday over here in London, so just a quick note before I go to bed. It has been a good but long day dialoguing with the General Council about life in our section of the Franciscan world. After Jose’s presentation this morning, we had a nice discussion. In the mid-afternoon we started giving presentations about various aspects of our life. I gave a presentation about initial and ongoing formation. **John O’Connor** of Holy Name spoke about the quality of our life and ministry and issues we deal with. **Dennis Vavrek** spoke about collaboration and restructuring. Each was followed by some pretty healthy discussion. There is much feeling that “something has to be done” to insure the future quality of our life.



Jose Carballo, OFM



Jeff Scheeler, OFM

After supper Jose and **Michael** the Vicar and **Frank**, the English speaking councilor, asked to meet with the provincials of SJB (me), OLG, SH and ABVM. They know we have an annual meeting of our councils and they want to come to the next one to talk about the future. We told them we may be evolving into a national or even North American gathering, but it looks like they will come at the end of September. The meeting will likely be in Burlington so they can see the novitiate and also visit the post-novitiate. There still is something of a mystique in meeting with the highest leadership of the Order.

Tomorrow we only have a half-day of meetings. In the afternoon we will see the Tower of London, have a bus tour of the major sites, and then out to dinner. Thursday it is back to work.

Oct. 13:

Our meetings with the General Council have ended. We had discussions around the secular and religious culture, our finances, and the abuse crisis. The Minister General was very frank and honest. Tomorrow we meet in sub-conferences, that is, North America and Europe. We will elect a vice president of the conference and make some plans for the next meeting. I hope to spend part of the time in the afternoon seeing some sights. I leave Saturday morning, arriving home about 5 p.m. on Saturday, but it will feel like midnight to me.



Keep walking!

The deadline (Oct. 4) has passed and the province is still 529 miles from Karachi, Pakistan, but don't give up! We'll keep recording mileage until we reach the magic number, 3,387 miles. Please report your progress to Sr. Lucy at walkingtokarachi@franciscan.org.



FOCUS ON FRIARS

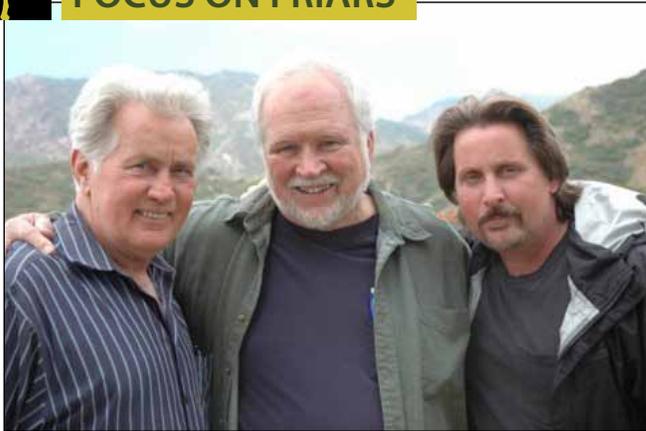


PHOTO BY JOHN FEISTER

This summer in Malibu, Jack interviewed Martin Sheen and his son, Emilio Estevez.

■ St. Anthony Messenger Press is one of the stops on a bus tour that's taking actors **Martin Sheen** and **Emilio Estevez** around the country to promote their movie, *The Way* (opening in Cincinnati Oct. 21). Friday afternoon around 3:30 p.m. they will be met by **Jack Wintz** and **John Feister** and escorted to the SAMP studio for an interview with American Catholic Radio (airing the first week in November). The cover story in this month's issue of the *Messenger* is an interview Jack did this summer in California with Sheen and his son. It's posted online at:

<http://www.americancatholic.org/samo/Feature.aspx?articleid=50&IssueID=29>

■ More feedback on the Contemplative Prayer retreat in Ava. **Ed Lammert** says it was "Delightful if you like a small group retreat and experience: informal, homey, and participative. The physical setting is very conducive to quiet prayer, relaxation if you like isolation in the woods, and paths to walk on. Meals were homemade and self-served. The hosting friars were welcoming, friendly and accommodating. It was an enriching time for one's prayer life. Keep up the offering of retreats. It was a prayerful experience."



On the WEB

Friars featured this month on our province website, www.franciscan.org, include: **Damian Cesanek** and **Bill Farris** (Who We Are Welcome page); **Ed Skutka** (Ministry & Mission Welcome page); **Al Hirt** (JPIC Welcome page); and **Dan Anderson** (JPIC Franciscan Perspectives page).

FROM FRANK CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

Mark Ligett helps with retreats, keeps the gift shop supplied with unusual items and provides music. **Ed Skutka** keeps everyone supplied with his famous coffee. **Ed Demyanovich** has the yeoman's task of maintaining the building. And **Miles Pfalzer** supervises and mostly entertains the volunteers. They all pull together to make it happen. **Bill Reisteter** gives them his prayers and moral support from Sacred Heart Senior Living. It's not easy running a retreat house these days with the expenses, financial problems and maintenance costs. The board, friars, staff and volunteers are committed to moving into the future. They demonstrate what can happen when we all work together and focus our energy, creativity and talent on one mission with our Franciscan values and charism.

Congratulations to all at St. Francis Retreat House! Ad multos annos!

– **Frank Jasper, OFM**

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