

Magnificat

Volume XVIII
Number 2

News from
HOLY TRANSFIGURATION SKETE
Courtesy of Poorrock Abbey Publishing
Society of Saint John
Star Route 1, Box 226
Eagle Harbor, Michigan 49950
<http://www.societystjohn.com>

Summer
2002

There is one thing I ask of the Lord,
for this I long,
To live in the house of the Lord, all the days of my life,
to savor the sweetness of the Lord,
to behold His temple.

For there He keeps me safe in His tent
in the day of evil.

He hides me in the shelter of His tent,
on a rock He sets me safe.

And now my head shall be raised
above my foes who surround me,
and I shall offer within His tent
a sacrifice of joy.

I will sing and make music for the Lord.

(Ps. 26: 4-6)

We are a Catholic Monastery of the Byzantine Rite, under the jurisdiction of the Eparchy of Chicago, and belonging to the Ukrainian Metropolity in the United States of America, which is in union with the Pope of Rome, supreme pastor of the universal Church. We embrace Evangelical poverty, chastity, obedience, and stability of life, according to the Rule of Saint Benedict and the traditions of the Christian East. In our skete at Jacob's Falls, on the shore of Lake Superior in Michigan's Keweenaw Peninsula, we devote ourselves to a common life of prayer and work for the praise, love, and service of God and for the upbuilding of His Kingdom through the arts.

An Investiture

This winter a young man, who had lived with us as a Postulant since mid-summer, formally entered our monastery as a Novice. This significant event in the life of our community took place at Great Vespers on Saturday, February 9, 2002, just before the beginning of the Great Fast of Lent. Witnessing the ceremony, in addition to the monastic community, were friends and supporters of the monastery and the new Novice's parents who had journeyed from Lower Michigan for the occasion. We were pleased to have so many people present to share our joy.

The simple service is called Investiture, because clothing the new Novice in religious vesture, the monastic habit, is its principal action. The rite followed the traditional Eastern order, with the prayers and poetic texts prescribed by the Euchologion published in 1902 by the Kiev-caves Lavra, the first and greatest of the monasteries of Ukraine.

Prior to the start of Vespers (the Evening Service) and following a brief introduction in which our Hegumen, Hieromonk Nicholas, explained for our visitors and guests the significance of what was about to occur and encouraged all present to fervent prayer, the Postulant carrying a lighted candle, was led into the Chapel by the Novice Master. Together they



made the customary veneration of the holy icons at the tetrapod and iconostasis. Then, having acknowledged with the traditional bows all who were present, they stood before the ambon in front of the Hegumen who then began Vespers in the usual manner.

After the usual opening prayers and call to worship, the congregation chanted Psalm 26 in the Galician festal tone and the prescribed Troparion and Theotokion in tone 4. The Hegumen then prayed, thanking God for having called the Postulant to the precious promise of monastic life. He besought God to count him worthy to live that life in a manner pleasing to Him, to protect Him from



every evil of soul or body, and to keep him ever mindful of His commands. Invoking the intercession of the Virgin Mary and of all the saints, he begged divine protection for the Postulant and asked that he be filled with humility, meekness, and love. He implored God to receive him under His saving yoke and make him worthy of being counted among the elect, clothed in holiness, girt with chastity, and a champion of self control. He begged the Lord to bring about in him, and in all present, the perfection of every spiritual gift.

His candle having been placed before the icon of the Theotokos, the Postulant now received the monastic tonsure as a symbol of his having laid aside all worldly vanity and pomp. The Hegumen first snipped his hair, front, back, and sides in the form of a cross; then, while the assembly sang Psalm 15, he sheared it off completely.

Then followed the ancient heart of the rite, the simple act that gives the whole service its name. The Postulant laid aside the cowl-shirt he had worn during his first months of life in our community, and the Hegumen silently clothed him in the black tunic and leather belt common to monks of the Christian East.

Symbolically shorn of all worldly attachments and clothed in his new monastic affiliation, the Novice stood before the assembly, and the Hegumen, as father of the monastic community, announced to all his monastic name: henceforth he would be called Sergius. Having prayed once more to our Lord God and Savior, Jesus Christ, that Novicemonk Sergius be filled with the grace and blessings of monastic life, Father Hegumen extended him the kiss of peace. The Novice then took up his place in the monastic choir as Great Vespers continued with the singing of the festal version of Psalm 103: *Bless the Lord, O my soul...*

At the end of the Service, after the dismissal, taking the Novice by the hand, the Hegumen presented him to his monastic brothers and commended him to their solicitous care. In turn he exhorted the Novice to willing obedience of his spiritual father and to reciprocating the love his new family would give him. He is entering upon a lifelong course of learning Christian love and of striving toward spiritual growth. Progressing through his coming three years of Novitiate and, beyond Monastic Consecration, into – God willing – many long years of fruitful monastic life, the wise guidance of his Hegumen and elders and the example and loving support of his brother

monks will stand him in good stead; through them he will work out his salvation.

Monastic life is not just another career choice, a way of getting by in the world and of providing for a secure future. It is a response to God's call to abandon even the good things of the world and follow Him alone. It is a commitment to exhaust oneself in His service,

to do penance for personal sins and for the sins of others, and to be untiring in singing God's praise and invoking His mercy upon this whole weary world of ours. It is an arduous undertaking, fraught with manifold hardships and peril; unaided, it would be scarcely possible to fulfill. But the Lord, in assigning a difficult task, always provides the graces for its completion, and He has promised great rewards for all who choose to leave everything to follow Him (cf. Mt. 19:27-29).

In reality, however, it is not a matter of choice, at all, but of willing obedience. In one ancient rite of admission to monastic life, when the Hegumen inquires of the candidate whether

Behold, I present to you before God this new member of our family. Instruct him to live in the fear of God and in every virtue by your words and example. Watch carefully, that his soul not suffer destruction because of your carelessness; for you will give answer to God for it on the Day of Judgment.

Presentation of the New Novice



it is truly his will to enter the monastery, he replies: I believe it to be the will of God, therefore it must be my will, as well. The monk must always understand his commitment to monastic life not as having chosen God, but as having been chosen by Him to fulfill a unique and important role on the economy of salvation. When God calls, how can one refuse?

Many first hear the call when they are quite young. Brother Sergius is just twenty, and he first visited us as a high school senior of seventeen. Father Ambrose, our cantor and subdeacon, was also only twenty when he received the habit, as, for that matter, was St. Benedict. So, too, was the Father of Monks, St. Anthony the Great, when, scarcely two hundred years after they were uttered, he heard Christ's words to the rich young man (Mt. 19:21; Mk. 10:21; Lk. 18:22) read out in his parish church in rural Egypt and understood that through them Jesus was speak-

ing to him; giving away everything he owned - which was considerable for his time and place - he fled to the desert and became a hermit.

We firmly believe that the Lord continues to call the young to heroism in His service: the way of the Most High does not change. Sadly, in the chaos and cacophony of our clamorous world, many do not hear, and many others, already well schooled in the all pervasive self-seeking sinfulness of our times, refuse

of to respond. Praise God for the shining witness of those who do!

Brother Sergius is our first new Novice in seven years and the first to be invested here at Jacob's Falls. (We other monks all received the habit from Archimandrite Boniface at Holy Transfiguration Monastery in California when our own Skete was established in 1995.) We regard his commitment as a bright hope for the future and a sure sign of the Lord's blessing. We thank God for the growth He has brought to this community, and we beseech Him to grant Brother Sergius the gift of perseverance and to fill him with every grace and blessing as he progresses in this holy way of life. God grant that many others may soon heed His call and follow, aiding and supporting him in living out this precious vocation and learning from his generous and loving example.

Psalm 15

Preserve me, O God, I take refuge in you.

I say to the Lord: You are my God.

My happiness lies in You alone.

He has put into my heart a marvelous love
for the faithful ones who dwell in His land.

Those who choose other gods increase their sorrows.

Never will I offer their offerings of blood.

Never will I take their names upon my lips.

O Lord, it is You who are my portion and cup;
it is You Yourself who are my prize.

The lot marked out for me is my delight:
welcome indeed the heritage that falls to me.

I will bless the Lord who gives me council,
who even at night directs my heart.

I keep the Lord ever in my sight:
since He is at my right hand, I shall stand firm.

And so my heart rejoices, my soul is glad;
even my body shall rest in safety.

For you will not leave my soul among the dead,
nor let your beloved know decay.

You will show me the path of life,
the fullness of joy in your presence,
at your right hand happiness forever.

The Garment of Salvation

During the Fourth Century, monks began to be seen as somehow separate from the general mass of Christians. This was not so much a case of monks suddenly appearing – the various charisms of monastic life had been lived within the Church from Apostolic times – and then moving away from the larger Christian community. Rather, the community itself, awash in a sea of lukewarm converts following the freedom of the Church and the coming of Imperial patronage, began to move away from the monks. From this time on, monastic life seems to have been marked by the wearing of distinctive vesture.

The first hermits in the Egyptian desert wore rude garments of animal skins held in place by a leather belt. Recalling the garb worn by those great patrons of desert life, the Prophet Elijah and John the Baptist, they indicated the prophetic and charismatic nature of the monastic vocation; it was also penitential dress, reminding the monk of the sin of our first parents, which brought about the wearing of clothes, and the necessity of conversion. St. Anthony owned two such sheepskins at the time of his death, bequeathing one to the Patriarch of Alexandria, St. Athanasius, and the other to Bishop Serapion. There was a certain amount of variation from place to place. The monks of St. Pachomius's monastery, for instance, wore a simple tunic of rough cloth. Poor quality seemed to be the common qualification. It was an axiom among the Desert Fathers that, if a monk's clothes were found lying beside the road, no one would bother to pick them up.

In any case, the garb was sufficiently different from ordinary clothing that merely putting it on marked one as having become a monk. Entrance upon monastic life was simply effected by a change of clothes, and anyone was free to do it. Although few would be inclined to do so out of fraud – there were no social or material advantages to be gained from being a monk – it was soon obvious that changing one's clothing was not sufficient to change one's heart.

Monastic compunction and conversion were

best acquired under the wise guidance of an experienced Spiritual Father. The Abba who took the new monk under his protection and guided him in learning the spiritual warfare of the desert also came to bestow on him the vesture that marked his commitment to monastic life. Thus, the monastic habit and way of life it embodies have been passed down to this day from spiritual father to son in an unbroken line stretching back into the mists of dim antiquity.

Of course, the habit we received from the hands of Abbot Boniface and which Hegumen Nicholas bestowed upon Brother Sergius is a far cry from the sheepskin worn by Abba Anthony sixteen hundred years ago. Time and practical necessities have wrought their inevitable changes, and purely practical garments have acquired an overlay of religious symbolism. The leather belt which gathers the tunic about the waist is now seen as a reminder of the monk's commitment to chastity, and the tunic itself – because the varying degrees of monastic initiation have long been understood as relating to Baptism – has come to be identified with the white garment of the newly baptized.

But the monastic habit is universally black in the Byzantine tradition. This seeming anomaly may be explained by the fact that none of us preserves baptismal purity beyond early childhood. Even those who receive the habit in their youth already have much to mourn and repent of. Reminding the monk, therefore, of the joyous salvation he is heir to by virtue of his baptismal incorporation into the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, this basic article of his everyday clothing also serves to keep him mindful of the many ways he has failed to be worthy of so great a grace. God grant that we may always wear it with humility and understanding.

By Another Name

One aspect of traditional monastic life that many people find hard to understand, and parents, in particular, have difficulty accepting, is the change of name that follows upon entrance into the monastery. While not having as long a history as the habit, this reception of a religious name is virtually universal in the Byzantine tradition – as it also was up until the recent past among the religious communities of the West. Here, again, Baptism is the key to understanding the custom.

In ancient times names held a greater significance than we ascribe to them today. More than just an identifier, the name carried something of the holder's essence, it was inextricably bound up with his very being.

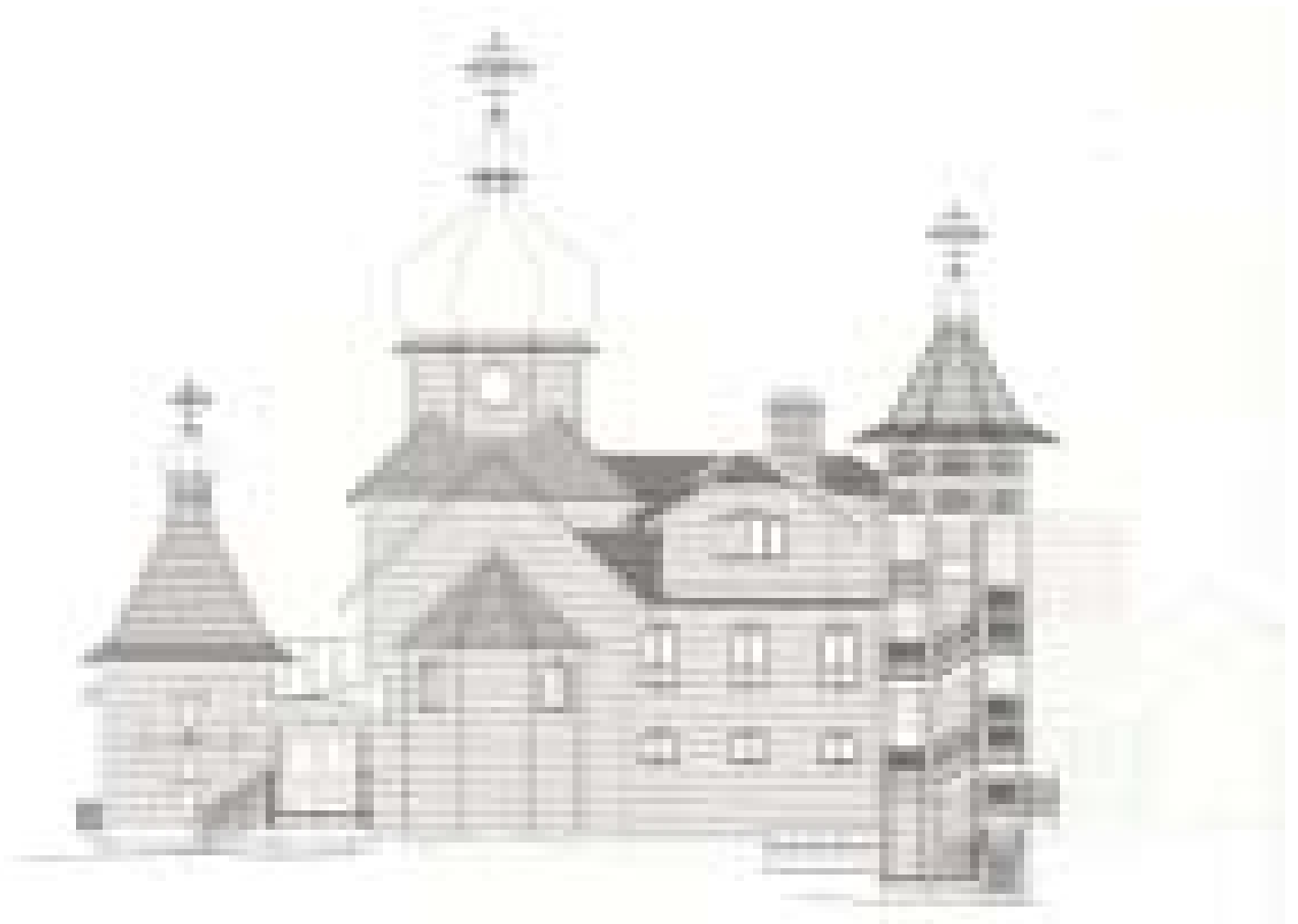
In the Old Testament, names were often given because of some circumstance of the child's birth, of some character, actual or prophetic, that was his, or of some hope his parents may have had for him. It therefore followed that any great change in a person's position should be accompanied by a change of name. Thus, kings often assumed a regnal name when they acceded to the throne, and God changed some of the patriarchs' names in view of future blessings, most notably that of Abram to Abraham (Father of Nations) on the occasion of the inauguration of the covenant sealed by circumcision; to this day, Jewish male children are given their names on their eighth day of life, when they are circumcised. Our Lord also changed Simon's name to Peter in view of the special role he was to play in the Church; so, too, Saul, who had been a persecutor of Christians, came to be known as Paul as he exercised his ministry to the Gentiles after his conversion.

There seems, however, to have been no general custom in the beginning of Christian converts changing their names on the occasion of their Baptism; most of them retained the names their parents had given them as infants, even though they might have been derived from some pagan deity or cultic practice. After the

Mediterranean world had been largely Christianized, those being baptized were almost always no longer converts, but, rather, infants who had been born to Christian parents. Then the bestowal of a name came to be associated with Baptism among the Christians, just as it had long been with circumcision among the Jews. Once the connection of naming with Baptism had become well established, the custom developed for adult converts to assume a new name at Baptism, as well. Similarly, it soon became widely customary for those entrusted with some new spiritual role to be called by a new name, just as had been Abraham and St. Peter. Thus, the Pope assumes a new name at his election, when he enters upon governance of the Church. The monk, likewise, receives one from his Spiritual Father, when he receives the habit and enters into his new life in the monastery.

This should not be seen as a rejection of what has gone before, a repudiation of his parents, or a superceding of his Baptism; these are givens in his life that cannot be changed, ties that can never be severed. Indeed, the grace of his Baptism and the good religious formation given him by his parents remain vital components in his monastic vocation. For this reason, many Western orders have abandoned the custom of religious names altogether.

In the East, however, the monastic commitment is not seen merely as an extension of the common baptismal commitment, a state somehow flowing as a matter of course from the graces of the Sacrament. Rather it is understood as radical conversion, a striving to return to the baptismal purity that has been lost. Entrance into monastic life presupposes Baptism, and the rites that accompany this great change are analogous to the Sacrament itself. Some of the Eastern fathers have actually described them as a kind of second Baptism. They mark the beginning of a new life, and it is fitting that they be accompanied by the bestowal of a new name.



To Fulfill the Dream

We arrived at Jacob's Falls in the late summer of 1983. We had come with one purpose in mind: to build a monastery for the praise and love of God in this beautiful wilderness outpost. We did not know the details of how this was to be accomplished, but we trusted that God, who had called us to this vision, would provide the strength to endure whatever might be necessary to bring it to fulfillment.

The trust has not been disappointed.

The rather improbable business of picking wild berries and making jam, which we undertook during our first summer, has grown steadily. It has adequately provided for our modest but increasing basic needs these past twelve or fifteen years. Despite having been scaled back twice in the past several years, it continues to do well, providing a little more than what is strictly necessary and keeping us very busy.

Formal affiliation with the Ukrainian Catholic Church in 1995 and establishment as a Skete brought us the Canonical status we had long sought. Moreover, it has blessed us with a gloriously rich liturgical heritage and endowed us with Sacramental ministries we had never sought or expected. With the necessary spiritual resources in place, we seem poised for a burst of growth.

Already, we find ourselves surprisingly well known. Thousands of people pass through the doors of our shop each summer; our newsletter now reaches about 27,000 homes across the whole country; and we continue to be written about in the press, most recently in up-scale travel magazines. Since undertaking an advertising campaign in several Catholic publications, we have been getting numerous requests for information; a number of men are in various stages of discernment concerning possible vocations.

All this bodes well for the future. The monastery the Lord called us to build seems well under way. Indeed, the community of consecrated monks and the religious life are already in place; the monks' prayer and work continue in their measured pace; through its publications, personal contact at the **Jampot**, and a limited number of retreats, the monastery is beginning to have its impact on the larger world. But most people identify a monastery with the buildings that house it, and here, perhaps, the growth has been most visible.

When we arrived here eighteen and more years ago, our monastery consisted of two rooms comprising some 640 square feet. This more than doubled with the addition of a two story dormitory building in 1986; three years later, the room that now serves as our community room and refectory added 350 square feet to the complex. Several years of development at the **Jampot** followed. We again turned our attention to the Monastery in 1997; the first phase, completed in 1998, provided a new kitchen and bath (1200 square feet) and the 2650 square foot basement for areas yet to come. Occupancy of the new spaces allowed us to convert our original two rooms into a temporary Chapel and Sacristy pending completion of Phase II of the major expansion. To make these areas more functional and to provide a visitors' parlor and a more sheltered entry way, we added another 1100 square feet to the complex last winter.

Thus, we have seen a tenfold growth in the monastic complex during the past fifteen or so years. This has always been far beyond our capacities and means. Certainly the Lord has been doing it. The growth has not come without its attendant trials and frustrations, of course, but we know that we

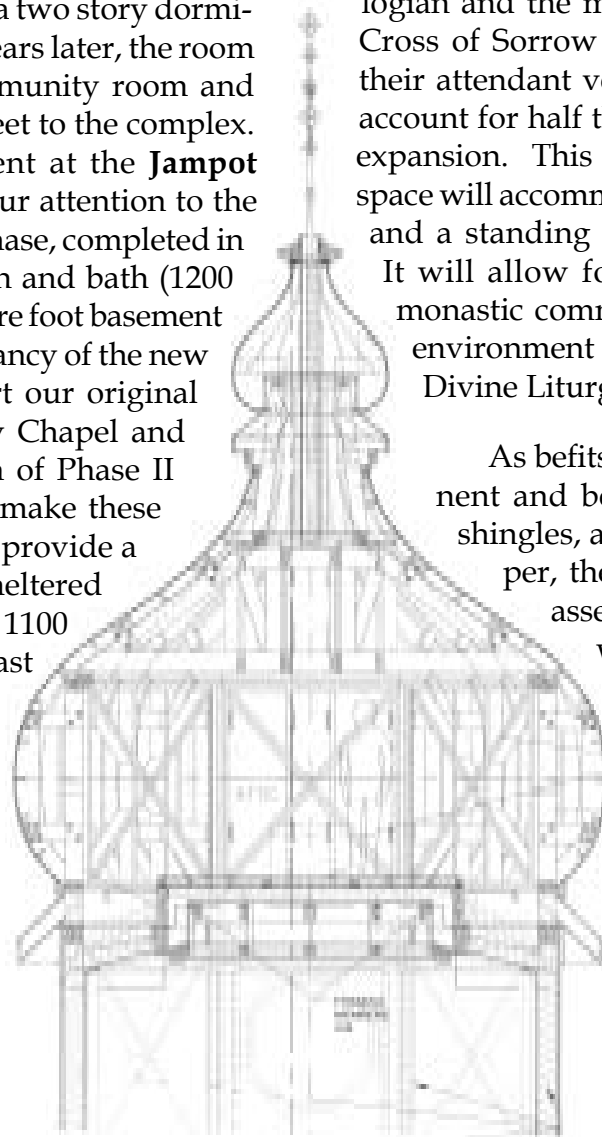
grow from these, too, and we can see the Lord's hand at work here, as well.

We stand now on the brink of our most important expansion to date. Completion of Phase II of the project initially undertaken in 1997 will provide this monastery with the basic living and worship spaces needed for a community of twelve monks. It will mark the fruition of the vision that brought us here nearly twenty years ago and the firm foundation of Eastern Monasticism in this northern outpost. More importantly, the new addition will house the very heart and soul of the monastery.

The Monastic Church of St. John the Theologian and the meditation Chapel of the Holy Cross of Sorrow and Suffering, together with their attendant vestibule, gallery, and sacristy, account for half the floor space of the 4400 foot expansion. This four fold increase in worship space will accommodate a choir of twelve monks and a standing congregation of about thirty. It will allow for growth on the part of the monastic community and provide a worthy environment for the daily celebration of the Divine Liturgy and Office.

As befits a holy place, it will be prominent and beautiful. Clad in local cedar shingles, and its domes sheathed in copper, the new church will be a visual asset to the area, harmonizing well with the environment and adding interest to the ongoing development of the Lake Superior Shore.

The remainder of the new space will house the monks' dormitory, library, and refectory. These will allow for a trebling in size of the monastic community, provide study space for the monks and shelving for the monastery's growing collec-

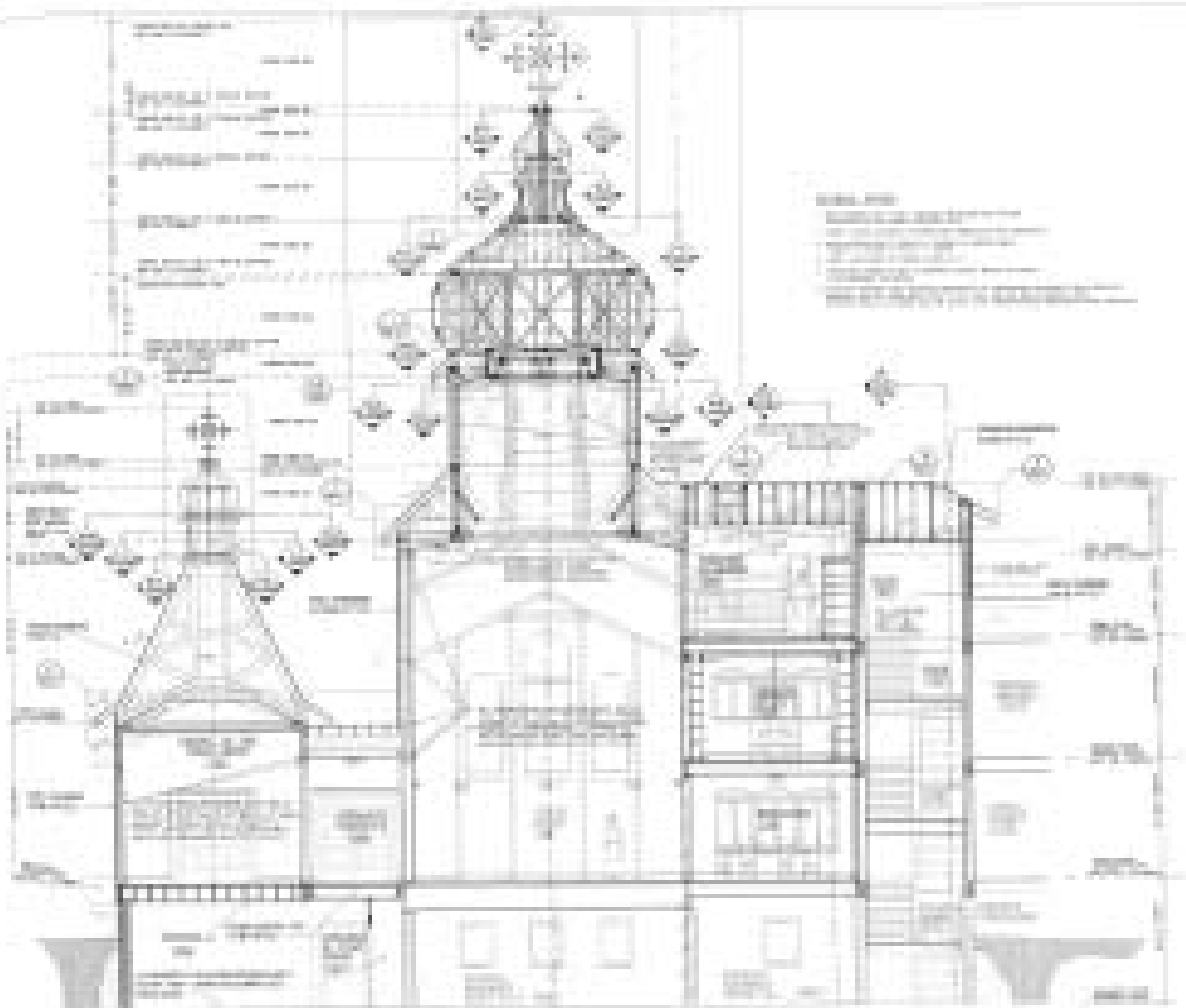


tion of books (some five thousand volumes remain presently in storage for want of shelf space), and insure a special room where the monks may take their meals in silence while listening to pious reading as is the custom.

As funds allow, areas vacated by functions moved to the new addition will be renovated for other necessary uses. Of the approximately 11,000 square foot completed monastic complex, about thirty-five percent will be devoted to the public and semi-public purposes of liturgical prayer and the reception of guests. The remaining sixty-five percent will be cloistered, that is, for the use of the monastic community itself, and accessible only by the monks. Here they will continue to live out their commitment to radical

the spaces in common and claiming nothing for their own personal use.

Completion of the current expansion project will be the fulfillment of a long held dream and the fruition of the labor and generosity of many good people these past eighteen and more years. At last, there will be a fully equipped and functioning monastery on the Keweenaw Peninsula. This will be a true blessing, not only for the people of the immediate area, but also for the many visitors who come to us from the not so distant metropolitan areas of Detroit, Chicago, Milwaukee, and the Twin Cities. The spiritual power of this monastery will reach far and wide, beaming a ray of Divine Brightness into our shadowy world.



Approaching the Goal

This summer should prove very exciting for this tiny monastery on the shore of the Great Lake. It seems as if the labor and struggle of the past nineteen years is about to bear fruit. At long last, the plans are complete and in the hands of prospective contractors. If all goes well, the building we have been working toward for many years will be under way and by this time next year should be ready for use. The long held dream moves toward fulfillment.

There will, no doubt, be numerous frustrations and anxious moments ahead. Already, we feel a certain dread as we approach the opening of bids, finalize the details of financing, and meet with contractors. The project has turned out to be much greater than originally anticipated. Will we, in fact, be able to undertake it? If we do, will we be able to meet the commitments?

We know, of course, that the apprehension is groundless. From the beginning we have undertaken things beyond our capacity. We remember the reactions of friends twenty years

ago when we told them what we felt called to do. Humanly speaking, they were, of course, correct. Our own abilities could accomplish little. But it is the Lord who is doing this, and we find His work marvelous to behold.

We continually thank Him for His many blessings: for the ancient and beautiful way of life He has shown us, for the zealous young men He has called to join us, for the growth He has provided, for the manifold and unexpected graces He continues to shower upon us... Most of all, we thank Him for the good people who serve as agents of His merciful provision. Through their loving co-operation in His generosity, His work of building this monastery moves steadily forward. We hold them in our hearts and remember them daily as we stand before Him in prayer.

Mindful of the many blessings received and confident of the Lord's sure and certain provision and protection, we face the future and move steadily toward the goal.

HOLY TRANSFIGURATION SKETE

Society of St. John

Star Route 1, Box 226

Eagle Harbor, Michigan 49950