

Volume I  
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# Magnificat

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News from the  
SOCIETY OF SAINT JOHN  
Star Route 1, Box 226  
Eagle Harbor, Michigan 49950

## MONASTIC PIONEERS

We are building a monastery in the Keweenaw peninsula. This is why the Lord called us to Jacob's Falls more than two years ago; this is why we are here today. It was this vision that moved us to leave our lives in the world, dispose of all our possessions, and commit our meager personal fortunes to establishing our Society.

The commitment is permanent. The Society of Saint John is legally organized as a non-profit corporation in the State of Michigan. Should it ever dissolve (which the Lord forbid) all its assets must go to other non profit corporations. We as individuals have no way of recovering what we have invested or, indeed, of reaping any financial return. Our reward comes in ways other than personal finances and only in so far as we remain faithful to our commitment. It is a "go for broke" situation, and there can be no hedging of bets.

This, of course, is simply a manifestation of monastic poverty. The goods and property of the monastery belong not to the monks, but to God. The monk owns

absolutely nothing and depends absolutely on the monastery for the necessities of his life. Should he ever abandon the monastery, he has no moral or legal claim against any of its assets, nor is he entitled to any payment for the work he has done while there.

This embracing of poverty is supposed to free the monk from worry about material things that he might devote himself fully to the service of God. The community provides the roof over his head, the clothes on his back, and the food in his belly. It cares for him when he is sick and supports him in old age. It shelters him from the storms of the world and ensures him peace and quiet for developing his relationship with God.

In a large, well established and well ordered monastery, the monk does, indeed, have this freedom from worry, and, all too often, he must be on guard against complacency. There seems little or no risk in the undertaking, and the poverty may not be felt at all.

But what if the monastery consists of

### THE SOCIETY OF SAINT JOHN AT JACOB'S FALLS

We are a community of men embracing the Evangelical Counsels of chastity, poverty, and obedience in the spirit of the Rule of Saint Benedict. In our monastic community at Jacob's Falls on the shore of Lake Superior in Michigan's Keweenaw Peninsula we devote ourselves to a regular life of prayer and work for the praise, love, and service of God and for the upbuilding of His Kingdom through the arts.

five small dilapidated buildings on the windy shore of Lake Superior where the water runs only half of the year and the heat is extracted by much patience and labor from the trunks of trees? What if the community's assets consist of a land contract with a large balance that is due very soon and an ancient pickup truck that is rusting away and on the verge of collapse? What if the community's major income earning activity is processing wild berries which are available, at best, two months out of the year? What if there is no health insurance, no savings to fall back on, and the community's entire population and work force consists of two men approaching middle age whose only training has been academic and whose previous adult experiences have all been urban?

Then there is indeed risk in the undertaking. The poverty will most certainly be felt. And the danger to be guarded against is not complacency, but despair.

We are often asked why we did not join some already existing monastery where the struggle would not be so severe. The answer is simple: that was not our calling. The Lord did not call us to the well established routine among the green hills of Kentucky or on the fertile plains of Iowa. He called us, rather, to hardship and struggle on the stony shores of Lake Superior. His call is to overcome the difficulties by hard work, suffering, and patient endurance. He calls us to risk everything for His sake and to build a monastery where none existed before.

One day this past summer we were visited by a group of ladies. As they came into the yard and stood amidst the debris of wood making in progress, one of them looked about and said, "I know this is silly, but I expected to see a great abbey." Not at all silly, we assured her. For this lady was indeed a prophet: she had expected to see what we expect to see. The Lord had permitted her a fleeting glimpse of our vision, the vision that brought us here, the vision that sustains us through every sort of difficulty. God grant the vision

remain always before us.

We know that alone we will not be able to bring about the realization of this vision. Only the Lord will do this. Only the Lord will inspire other men to join in our pioneering struggles that this community may have the strength and diversity of talent and outlook it needs for the achievement of its goals. Only the Lord will move His people to give of their time and resources that this community might secure its land and upgrade its structures. Only the Lord will give us the strength and courage to persevere in the face of every obstacle.

We have every faith that He who called us to the struggle will see us to the end. And, whenever our individual ends may come, we will be able to look back and say with the Prophet:

O Lord, You mete out peace to us,  
for it is You who have accomplished  
all we have done.

(Is. 26:12)

## Opportunity

For the man called to the religious life the Society of Saint John offers the rare opportunity of participating in the foundation of a monastery in the north woods. No particular qualities are needed for candidacy except a pioneering spirit, a willingness to embrace the struggle, and, above all, a deep love of God and a burning desire to follow Him in community.

We follow the Rule of St. Benedict. Our life, while involving certain hardships, is not excessively severe and is suffused with the joys of community life. We rise at 3:30 A.M., pray the Divine Office in common five times daily, and retire early. Our other time is devoted to contemplation, study, and work for the building, maintenance, and support of our community. We fast on Fridays, abstain from meat on Wednesdays, and in general live moderately as prescribed by the Rule.

If you feel called by the Lord to follow Him in the fraternal charity of the religious life, we may be the community for you.

## SUMMER FRUSTRATIONS

This past summer and fall were busy, even hectic, times for our small community at Jacob's Falls. A constant stream of visitors livened our weekends and brought us a host of new friends. Retreatants swelled our ranks for meals and prayers and shared with us many valuable thoughts and insights besides.

We were often called away from Jacob's Falls. We made trips to Marquette, Garden, Escanaba, and Iron Mountain, as well as to many places closer to home, meeting people and acquainting them with ourselves and our community. We made addresses to the St. Vincent de Paul Society, the Serra Club, and the Knights of Columbus. Our old truck passed the 100,000 mile mark and we feared for its survival, but - praise God! - for the most part it got us where we had to go.

In the midst of all this, the work continued. The berry crop was poor this year, and we had to go much farther afield and devote more time than before to the harvest. We also had to give much time and effort to improvements at our Jampot and to preparation of our cabins for guests.

Our Cursillo weekend at Marygrove in September brought a rejuvenating change of pace and forcefully reminded us that even monks can get too caught up in the struggle for survival. Yet, even after Cursillo, the struggle continued, and there were times the chances for survival seemed very slim.

Delays in the installation of the water purification system made us unable to produce jam and jelly, our major industry, throughout the summer. Our expenses continued, but we were earning no income. Relying on our own efforts we would have come to naught. But the Lord is merciful and sees to the needs of His lowly ones. Through the contributions of retreatants and the generosity the Lord raised up in many good people, we were able to keep our heads above water.

By late September the water puri-

fication system was installed and we were ready for inspection. The food production license issued on September 30, 1985, seemed the fulfillment of all our hope. By diligent effort, we could devote the month of October to processing the berries we had gathered during the summer; the resulting income would allow us to catch up on our past due bills and give us some money to carry us into the winter.

When we had processed about half the berries, we learned that our major customer was suffering financial problems and would not be able to buy jam from us this season. So much for the whole summer's work! The hope that seemed fulfilled two weeks before had suddenly vanished.

It was only through a generous donation from an unsolicited and totally unexpected source that we squeaked through the month of October. For the second time that autumn we had come within a few days of default of our land contract.

Ultimately we were able to sell most of the jam we had already produced to a local buyer. The remaining berries will remain in the freezer to give us a head start on production next year. With our Jampot in operation during the summer months, we should be able to sell a good amount directly to the public.

Income from vestment orders should carry us through the first of the year. Beyond that, things are unclear. Yet we know that the Lord will provide for us as He has in the past. More than anything else the past few months have shown us how truly we can sing with the Prophet:

For though the fig tree blossom not  
nor fruit be on the vines,  
though the yield of the olive fail  
and the terraces produce no nourishment,

Though the flocks disappear from the  
fold  
and there be no herd in the stalls,  
yet will I rejoice in the Lord  
and exult in my saving God.

(Hb. 3:17-18)

## PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD

During Advent the Church holds before us the themes of yearning and preparedness. The people of the Old Testament yearn for the Messiah Who will raise them from their oppression and misery and restore them to grace; the prophets exhort them to prepare themselves for His coming. The early Christians await the coming of Christ in glory when Heaven and earth will be made new; they are told they must be vigilant and prepared lest that day catch them off guard.

We tend to think of these truths as two distinct events separated from us by vast gulfs of time. The wonder and joy of God-almighty humbling Himself to become a weak human being, born in a stable and resting in the feed trough of cattle, often degenerates into greeting card sentimentality. The coming in glory seems so far off that we seldom think of it at all, except, perhaps, as the aftermath of some global conflict which may or may not happen at some future date.

How we miss the point! The yearned for Messiah, the Babe of Bethlehem, is with us even now. "And know that I am with you always, even to the end of the earth." (Mt. 28:20) God, having become man, permanently abides among us in His Word, in the teaching and sacraments of the Church, and in us, the members of His Mystical Body. We meet Him daily in the poor and distressed, in those in pain and sorrow, and even in those whom we find disagreeable or irritating.

Likewise, "already the final age of the world is with us and the renewal of the world is irrevocably underway."  
(Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, #48)

"You cannot tell by careful watching when the reign of God will come. Neither is it a matter of reporting that it is 'here' or 'there'. The reign of God is already in your midst."

(Lk. 17:20 f.)

The coming Kingdom of Christ is not so much some spectacular happening in the

near or distant future as an ongoing process here and now - the coming of Christ into the hearts and minds of us all.

It is here and now that we must prepare His way. It is here and now that we must open our hearts and be ready to receive Him as He comes to us in a multitude of ways every day. He is patient and desires us all to be saved and raised up from our oppression and misery. Through His coming among us He has provided the means of salvation; it is possible for us to repent, to become like Him, as He became like us:

Come now, let us set things right,  
says the Lord:  
Though your sins be like scarlet,  
they may become white as snow;  
though they be crimson red,  
they may become white as wool.  
(Is. 1:18)

But we must co-operate with Him. He will come into our hearts only if we make room for Him. We must wash ourselves clean, put away our misdeeds, and cease doing evil. (Is. 1:16) Then the yearning of the prophet may daily reach fulfillment in us:

Would that You might meet us doing  
right,  
that we were mindful of You in our  
ways!  
(Is. 64:4)

### A PRAYER

Father, all-powerful God,  
your eternal Word took flesh on our  
earth  
when the Virgin Mary placed her life  
at the service of your plan.  
Lift our minds in watchful hope  
to hear the voice which announces  
his glory  
and open our minds to receive the  
Spirit  
who prepares us for his coming.

## Monastic Enterprise

Monasteries strive to be self-sufficient and support themselves by the work of their hands, and St. Benedict prescribes regular periods of work in the daily life of the monk. In his day and, indeed, through most of history, monasteries have subsisted for the most part through agriculture. All their work, save for labor in the fields, was to be accomplished within the confines of the monastic enclosure. Through the Lord's blessings and the diligence of the monks, many monasteries prospered and even grew wealthy from the produce of their lands. But how did they obtain this land in the first place?

The earliest monks seem merely to have settled unused land. Certainly this was the case with those who retired to the Egyptian desert. We have no indication that Benedict himself acquired from anyone, save God, the land for the twelve monasteries he founded in the valley of Subiaco. Apparently his monks just moved in, erected buildings, cleared the land, and began to farm. In few places would this be possible today.

In later times the land was most often donated by the wealthy or by the nobility. Monte Cassino, where Benedict erected his greatest monastery, seems to have come to him in this way. Down through the ages monks have offered earnest prayers on behalf of the benefactors who by their gifts of land have made possible their lives of holy poverty.

For our property at Jacob's Falls we have as yet no such benefactors, nor is subsistence agriculture possible here. Our subsistence here comes from picking and processing wild berries and from the making of liturgical vesture. Both these enterprises are in their infancy and do not bring a large amount of revenue. But, were it not for the burden of land contract payments, even now they would mostly provide for our modest needs.

We pray the Lord raise up benefactors to endow us with this tiny bit of earth that, minds free of all earthly concerns, we might unreservedly follow Him in the monastic life.

## Day of Reckoning

The coming year is critical for our survival at Jacob's Falls. The terms of our land contract require the full principal balance to be paid at the end of three years. When we took up residence here, that somehow seemed far off; there were many other more immediate difficulties to be resolved. Now as we begin our third winter by the shore of Lake Superior, the approaching deadline seems close, indeed, and looms very large in our thoughts.

To pay the land contract balance and secure the property at Jacob's Falls will require about \$30,000.00. Since coming here we have struggled, and often nearly foundered, with the burden of monthly payments; there has barely been enough to keep us alive, let alone put anything aside for this day of reckoning. The payment due is far beyond the resources of this very poor community.

Still, the resources of God are infinite. Often in times past He has rescued us from difficulties that were far beyond our own abilities. The generosity He has raised up in His holy ones has many times been the critical factor in our survival. Having brought us thus far, we remain confident He will not let us perish.

We therefore come to you, His people, the members of His Body, who carry out His will in this vale of tears. We beg you to help us permanently establish our community in your midst.

Thirty thousand dollars sounds like a very large sum - and so it is. Yet with your help it is possible to obtain. Through your loving kindness the foundation of this monastery can be made firm. The Lord has been generous to you in many ways. May He grant you also a share in His generosity.

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The Society of Saint John is a non-profit corporation in the State of Michigan and is recognized as a tax-exempt organization by the United States Internal Revenue Service. Contributions toward its survival and growth are tax deductible.

## Pick-and-Pray Report

Despite generally inclement weather, this summer's pick-and-pray activities on the weekend of August 17-18 met with a certain degree of success.

On each of the days about a dozen hardy souls braved the cold and drizzle to join us in prayer and berry picking. The happy crew picked about 55 quarts of berries during the event, thereby boosting our jam production for the season by about twenty cases.

The weather cleared on Saturday evening and we were able to have our bonfire and community sing on the beach. Sunday's activities closed with prayers in the berry patch.

Our heartfelt gratitude and prayers to all who helped make the weekend a success. Special thanks to the Copper Country Ulteya Community, who coordinated the activities, provided refreshments, and did much of the picking. May the Lord bless you all for your loving support and generosity.

THE SOCIETY OF SAINT JOHN  
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## Thanksgiving

As we enter the season of preparation for Christmas, it is fitting to offer thanks to God for His many blessings this past year.

For the Society of Saint John, 1985 was a year of making ourselves known and making the acquaintance of many new friends. The response from newspaper articles and from "Magnificat" has been a source of joy and support for us in the midst of very trying times. Were it not for the friends the Lord sent us during the past year, we would surely have perished many times. Truly the Lord has done great things for us; holy is His name!

To all who responded so generously to the Lord's promptings we offer our deepest thanks. May the Lord shower His blessings upon you this holy Advent season and prepare you to joyfully receive His Son. May the peace and love of the Christ Child fill your hearts and and remain with you throughout the coming year.

