The Road to Elmira

How God works out His plan can seem downright disconcerting at times—and yet often quite interesting when considered in hindsight. The historical circumstance of how Mount Saviour came to be located in Elmira, New York, of all places, is a prime example. When our founder, Fr. Damasus Winzen, a monk of the Maria Laach community in the Eifel region of Germany, was sent by his abbot to the United States in the 1930’s, it was because it was becoming apparent that Maria Laach’s own existence was at risk with the ascendancy of the Nazis. Relocating to Elmira, New York, was definitely not part of Fr. Damasus’ plans at the time.

Early on, in 1940, Fr. Damasus was speaking of a possible foundation in Bridgeport, Connecticut; however, various complications and delays prevented the acquisition of the property. From 1941 to 1947 a monastic foundation was established in Keyport, New Jersey, which came to be known as St. Paul’s Priory. The house closed after six years, but the experience enabled Fr. Damasus to learn by the necessary pain of trial and error the exigencies of monastic life in the United States. From 1947 to 1950, as chaplain for Regina Laudis, the first contemplative house for nuns in the U.S., contacts and plans continued to be made for a similar house for men. In 1950 a proposed foundation in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, failed to materialize. Another possible location had the necessary support of the bishop of Worcester, Massachusetts. But circumstances intervened when a fire left the Trappists of Little Falls, Rhode Island homeless, and the bishop offered them a new property. Fr. Damasus suspected that the diocese would not be prepared to take on two new foundations at the same time and so he abandoned that plan. Each of these locations had its own providential twists and turns, which while not without their disappointments, were still leading Fr. Damasus further along the path in bringing his goal to fruition.

Fr. Bernard Burns, a frequent visitor to Regina Laudis, was among a group of monks often mentioned by Fr. Damasus who were ready to join in any foundation made by the monks of Maria Laach. A native of Elmira, New York, and a monk of St. Paul’s Benedictine Abbey in Newton, New Jersey, Bernard was admitted to

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UPCOMING EVENTS

May 6, 2018      16th Annual Damasus Winzen Memorial Lecture
with Fr. Timothy Verdon
May 25-26, 2018  Annual Sheep Shearing Days
August 12, 2018  Dedication Day

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NEWS

The following are some highlights of the past year. For updated and expanded notes visit the Monthly News page on our website: www.mssaviour.org.

12/8/16  Solemn Profession of Br. Luke Zimnicky

1/13/17  Knitters' Yearly Weekend Retreat

6/8/17  Community Outing to the Srs. of St. Joseph in Rochester for the Combined 90th Birthday Celebrations of Fr. James and Br. Stephen

Our Absent Brothers

6/11/17  Eleanor Haber Talk on “Jerusalem, The Holy” at St. Joseph's

7/1/17  Fr. Darr Schoenhofen Takes Up Residence as a Second Chaplain

7/15/17  Solemn Profession of Br. Michael O'Connor

8/1/17  Three-Year Appointment of Abbot Cuthbert Brogan as Administrator of Mount Saviour

1/23/17  Chali Govantes Retires After 30 Years at the Monastery

8/13/17  Annual Dedication Day Celebration

2/2 - 2/6  Community Retreat with Fr. Konrad Shaefer, OSB, Prior of Cuernavaca, Mexico

4/19/17  Br. Ignatius Tuyen Returns to Vietnam After Two-Year Stay

4/24/17  Ronald Lau (Br. Mark) Received into the Novitiate

4/30/17  Imam Zaman Warwat Talk on "Muslims, A Mysterious People"

5/7/17  15th Annual Damaszus Winzen Lecture with Fr. Martin Shannon, Community of Jesus, Orleans, MA

5/16-5/27  Annual Sheep Shearing Days

8/25/17  Sixty Years Ago, Harold Eugene Duffee, Br. Gabriel, Arrived at Mount Saviour to Begin His Monastic Life

8/30/17  Br. Savio Returns to Pope John XXIII Seminary for 3rd Theology

9/17/17  Steve Jacobsen Talk: Insights From the Rule of St. Benedict and Modern Conflict Theory

10/1-10/10  Brs. John and Pierre to England and to Maria Laach in Germany

10/13-10/15  Oblate Retreat Weekend

11/5/17  Fr. John Desocio's Talk at Saint Joseph's After Mass
Mary, December 8, 2016, he told me that I had been consecrated as a temple, a holy place, and by my consecration had become another brick helping secure the foundation of Mount Saviour. He also instructed me to be generous, to be obedient, to become a living stone in this monastery by my stability and, by the daily working of the earth of my heart, to become something beautiful for God.

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St. Joseph’s Hospital in Elmira in the summer of 1950. A high school student of his, Damian Milliken, also from Elmira, hearing that Fr. Bernard had been admitted for treatment, went to visit him. He was surprised to find Fr. Bernard sitting up, poring over great sheets of drawings spread over his bed. Milliken was invited to look at the drawings, which he described as being of professional architectural quality. Fr. Bernard said to him, “Just imagine a great abbey like this on the bluffs over the Chemung River in Big Flats.” Milliken said that as he left, Fr. Bernard displayed a look of great satisfaction, absorbed in his pen and ink dreams.

After recovering from surgery, Fr. Bernard asked Milliken to come along with him on a visit, for he thought he had a contact who could put him in touch with people who had property up in the hills along the river. Arriving at the future site of the monastery, they were warmly greeted by Mr. and Mrs. Hofbauer, a solid German immigrant couple. The conversation with them consisted mainly of generalities. After leaving the Hofbaurers, Fr. Bernard said they should go out to say a prayer and plant the medal of St. Benedict that he had brought along. They did not dig a hole but placed the medal under a rock in one of the many rock walls that lined the property. Milliken’s conscience was a bit uneasy, scheming as it were, to pull the land out from under the Hofbaurers’ feet without even telling them what they had in mind when they came up there.

It was at Fr. Bernard’s urging that Fr. Damasus came to Elmira on August 17, 1950, to view the future Mount Saviour property. On November 29 of that year, the two of them called upon Bishop Kearney of Rochester and received his approval for the new foundation in his diocese. Obedience, twists, turns, complications, delays, disappointments, prayer, dreams, intercession, steady perseverance toward a goal, approval, realization—it almost sounds like there might be a message in here somewhere.
A New Chaplain

Last July Fr. Darr Schoenhofen, a retired priest of the Diocese of Syracuse and native of Elmira, began serving as priest-chaplain to the Mount Saviour community. In addition to serving as a parish priest, Fr. Darr also served as a theology instructor in the Permanent Deacon Program there. From 1992 - 1997 he served at the Pontifical North American College in Rome as academic dean, formation advisor and spiritual director. In addition to his new duties at the monastery, Fr. Darr is serving as hospital chaplain at Elmira's two hospitals and continues to serve as spiritual director for a number of directees in the Diocese of Syracuse. Currently living in one of our apartments, Fr. Darr will move down the road to St. James, the big blue house on the right as one comes up Monastery Road, when the contractors are finished refurbishing it.

RECOMMENDED BOOKS READ IN OUR REFOCTORY

*Everyday Saints and Other Stories* by Archimandrite Tikhon Shevkunov

*Not in God's Name: Confronting Religious Violence* by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

*Haiti: The God of Tough Places, the Lord of Burnt Men* by Richard Frechette

*Signs: Seven Words of Hope* by Jean Vanier

*Grandma Gatewood's Walk: The Inspiring Story of the Woman Who Saved the Appalachian Trail* by Ben Montgomery

*Echoes of the Word* by Enzo Bianchi

*The Church of Spies: The Pope's Secret War against Hitler* by Mark Riebling

*American Prophets: Seven Religious Radicals and Their Struggle for Social and Political Justice* by Albert J. Raboteau

*Called To Community: The Life Jesus Wants for His People* by Eberhard Arnold

*Pilgrimage: My Search for the Real Pope Francis* by Mark Shriver

*Chasing the Last Laugh: Mark Twain's Raucous and Redemptive Round-the-World Comedy Tour* by Richard Zacks