

The Santa Rita Newsletter

Annual Christmas Newsletter of the Trappist Cistercian Nuns of Sonoita, Arizona
Vol. XXIII, No. 1

December 2017

Dear Friends,

Here it is again, that holy time of the year when we open our hearts once more to the grace of God poured out on us in so many ways. We remember with much love all our friends, relatives and benefactors with whom we walk this incredible journey of life and whose presence in our own lives means so much and enriches us with love and goodness. Each of your sisters here at Santa Rita Abbey send you our love in return and warmest prayerful wishes for a light-filled and grace-filled season. May 2018 bring you all the blessings of health, happiness and all good gifts from the heart of God.

Our chaplains this year were Fr. Casimir Bernas of Holy Trinity Abbey, Utah (Holy Week and Easter) and Fr. Jim Garcia of San Francisco (July through December). We are grateful to both priests for their ministry. In March and May we celebrated the Jubilees of our Sisters Esther (50 years) and Jacqui (60 years), joyful days for all of us! From April to July, our Sonoita valley suffered a record-breaking wildfire season. The Sawmill fire came a little too close to our monastery, causing us to be evacuated on April 24. Susan and Dave Hetrick, owners of a B & B in Sonoita, kindly put us up for the night, God bless them! We were grateful to return the next day and find our land and buildings perfectly safe. Sadly, in subsequent fires, not everyone in Sonoita fared as well. In June, we broke ground for a new Family Guest House to replace the decrepit trailer built in 1970. In July, the rainy season came at last and proved to be a record-breaker of another kind; we had nearly twelve inches of rainfall in July alone, a full five inches above our previous record! Our summer was blessed also with visitors and volunteers: Clay & Marcia from Phoenix, Xin & Ting from Beijing, and Sr. Jacqueline from our monastery of Humocaro in Venezuela. In September our Mother Victoria attended our Order's General Chapter in Assisi, Italy. In October Fr. Francis Michael Stiltner of Holy Spirit Monastery in Georgia directed our annual community retreat—a blessed time of spiritual refreshment for all. Look inside for more about some of these events.



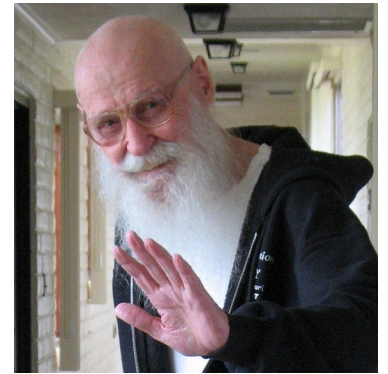
*Our community photo from this August, left to right:
Sisters Esther, Pam, Nettie, Cathy, Kate, Jacqui, Marg, Miriam, Mother Vicki, Sisters Clare and Rita.*

Fr. Bernard Johnson and Fr. Robert Matter, RIP



Two of our former chaplains passed away this year: Fr. Bernard on February 21 at his monastery of Our Lady of New Clairvaux in Vina, California, and Fr. Robert on November 10 at his monastery of Our Lady of the Assumption in Ava, Missouri. Both of them were born in 1925, both served in the Navy during WWII, both were monks for many years (71, and 68 years, respectively), and both served as abbot of their monasteries. Fr. Bernard was abbot of New Clairvaux from 1968-1970, and then from 1971-1990 served our Order in various capacities in Rome. In 1990 he was elected abbot of Holy Spirit Monastery in Conyers, Georgia. After he retired in 2000, he returned to New Clairvaux. He served as our November and December chaplain each year from 2000 to 2012. This kind-hearted

and generous monk enjoyed cooking dinner for us once a week, and loved every aspect of the Christmas celebration. Our Christmases haven't been the same without him! Fr. Robert was abbot of Our Lady of the Assumption from 1972-1986. Afterwards he lived as a hermit near his monastery, and began the first of several stints as our chaplain here in Arizona. In more recent years he came for two months each summer. Fr. Robert, soft-spoken and unassuming, was the only one of our chaplains to help us with the dinner dishes! He was a master at the one-minute homily at daily Mass. We miss his wisdom and his cheerful good humor. May both of these beloved monks rest in peace forever in the merciful heart of God!



New Family Guest House

As visitors to our monastery know, the first building one sees at the top of the hill when driving up our front road is a half-bricked-up double-wide trailer. This trailer was our chaplain's quarters from 1971-1975, our retreat house from 1975-1995, and after the new retreat house opened, our family guest house from 1995 to the present. Thanks to a generous gift, we are at last able to build a new energy-efficient and fully accessible guest house to replace the leaky old trailer. We hired an architect last fall, Hank Krzysik of Tucson, and a contractor this spring, Dave Mellgren of Mellgren Homes in Vail. The building site was blessed on May 25, and ground was broken on June 15. For most of July there was a lake in the middle of the site! The slab could finally be poured in early September. The rest of the month we watched in awe as the block walls went up; we emailed frequent photo updates to Mother Vicki in Assisi. In October the roof trusses went up. As of this writing (mid-November) the interior walls are framed, and plumbers, electricians, and HVAC specialists are busily at work inside. God willing, the building will be completed by next spring.



September 9: the completed concrete slab



September 19: block walls in process

Golden & Diamond Jubilees in 2017

This year we had the joy of celebrating our Sr. Esther Sawal's Golden Jubilee (1967-2017) on March 13, and our Sr. Jacqueline Moor's Diamond Jubilee (1957-2017) on May 13. Sr. Esther is a native of the Philippines where she entered the Sister Disciples of the Divine Master after graduating from high school, making first vows in 1967. After twenty years in active ministry, the Lord called her to the contemplative life, and in 1986 Sr. Esther entered our monastery. She made her solemn profession here in 1992. Sr. Jacqui is a native of England where she entered religious life in 1955 at Holy Cross Abbey, Stapehill. She made her first vows in 1957. In 1991, her community moved from England to Whitland, Wales. From 1995 to

2000 Sr. Jacqui served as the English language secretary at our Order's Generalate in Rome. She was abbess at Holy Cross Abbey from 2001-2005. She came to Arizona in 2011 where our dry and warm climate did wonders for her health. She transferred her stability to our desert monastery in 2014.



*Sr. Jacqui,
Mother Vicki,
and Sr. Esther*



*October 27: Hank, Dave, and Mother Vicki
study the building plans*

On our Christmas Wish List this year are monetary donations to our New Family Guest House Furniture Fund. Anyone who feels moved to contribute may send a donation to our mailing address: Santa Rita Abbey, 14200 E Fish Canyon Rd, Sonoita AZ 85637-6545. Thank you!

**God bless you, one and all!
Your Sisters at Santa Rita Abbey**



Volunteers Xin & Ting with Sr. Nettie

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For much more news and many more photos, look up the monthly journal entries on our website at <https://www.santaritaabbey.org/abbey-journal/>. We post weekly on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/santaritaabbeynuns/>.

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