

## Letters from the Valley of Our Lady

Dear Brothers and Sisters of Saint Michael the Archangel Parish,

For the next several weeks we will have a special insert in our parish bulletin from the Cistercian Nuns of the Valley of Our Lady Monastery. The sisters currently reside in Prairie Du Sac living a life of faith and prayer. We will have the opportunity to have them for mass in the coming year. But before then, we have the privilege to receive a series of their letters from the sisters that will help us learn their life and background.

I ask you to please take the time to read and learn about the Cistercian Nuns and especially about their life of devotion to Christ Our Lord and the Blessed Mother.

Father Chahm Gahng

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## Part 3: Our charism

What is the particular spirit that distinguishes our order and community from others? As Cistercians, we follow the Rule of St. Benedict, who is famous as a monastic legislator for his moderation and balance and for his emphasis on humility and obedience. Our Cistercian fathers deepened their commitment to this spirit, joyfully embracing a simple but beautiful liturgy, hard manual labor, and a sincere and intense search for God through deep personal, contemplative prayer.

When we come to the monastery to seek God, we dedicate ourselves to doing so through the specific means of our vows: obedience, stability (commitment to our particular monastic community), and *conversatio morum* (best described as a commitment to the monastic way of life, which entails poverty and chastity). Practically speaking, we live out this consecration to God through a balanced rhythm of prayer and work. We rise each morning at 3:30 to begin our communal prayer. Gathering seven times a day, we chant the Psalms and other prayers in Latin. We also take time throughout the day for personal prayer, *lectio divina* (an ancient monastic custom of prayerful reading), and study. We also work to support ourselves: We engage in the normal household chores of cleaning, cooking, and laundry; and we produce approximately 13 million altar breads each year, which we sell and ship to parishes around the country.

Whatever we do, whether prayer or work, we strive to do it in a recollected way, in the presence of God. Our prayer is our primary labor, yet our work itself also becomes prayer. We seek Him and strive to love Him above and in all things; but that is only because He Himself has first sought us in love. In this season when we celebrate the Incarnation, we rejoice that God has come to us, a little Child, in order to bring us back to Himself. We long for Him and for our final end, the beatific vision, when we will join with all His beloved creatures in praising and glorifying Him forever. Here on earth, as we strive to follow Christ as closely as we can by His invitation and grace, we catch glimpses of this goal and experience foretastes of total union with Him. We hope that, by thus drawing close to and remaining in Our Lord, we can also help bring others to union with Him.