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Do an internet search for "Detective Steven McDonald NYPD" and you’ll find dozens of stories from every major news outlet in America. Shot in the line of duty during New York City’s murderous crime wave of the 1980s, he was left paralyzed from the neck down and on a respirator for over 30 agonizing years. It was major news, but that’s not why he’s famous.

Traveling the world in an electric wheelchair, Steven became a lion of the Catholic faith, admired by Popes, presidents and regular folks. He inspired with a message of forgiveness that began with his assailant. He died in 2017. A street through Central Park now bears his name.

NYPD Det. Steven McDonald was also my older brother, and a friend of Saint Benedict Abbey. He introduced me to The Abbey in context of one of our favorite topics: spiritual battle. He said the monks here engage in that battle with our common enemy, Satan, who actually exists. Steven chose to be a warrior for Christ, as the monks are each day. He said to think of them as my ‘backup.’ He didn’t pretend the enemy isn’t real, and neither do the monks. Since moving to Boston and discovering The Abbey, I am a more vigilant Catholic. Here I learned a Latin phrase, “bellum gerere” meaning “to wage war.” We do that against dark forces, through the faith.

A strong Catholic faith is our best defense and greatest weapon in this fight. My late brother reminded me often that allies in spiritual battle are where they’ve always been: At church. I renew my spiritual strength (and ready for battle) whenever I pray with the monks.

— Owen McDonald
An Update on the Stations of the Cross Project

The Catholic devotion of the 14 Stations of the Cross recalls the last journey of Jesus to the top of Mount Calvary, where He was crucified for our redemption. The faithful would walk and stop at each station to remember the Passion of Jesus and pray for his grace.

After a year of planning and construction, we have installed a set of brass Stations of the Cross along the hillside of the field that goes from the house to the river, a distance of almost a half mile.

Carving out 14 locations 15 by 15 by 3 feet deep, we replaced topsoil and field stone and organic material with a solid base of 3/4” crushed stone or recycled concrete and packed down in 1 foot lifts.

We poured a concrete platform 4 feet square one foot thick with lag bolts embedded in the concrete.

A flange or sleeve of galvanized steel was bolted to the concrete and the 195 lb 8 foot high station was mounted into the flange. Each station is constructed of cypress wood and covered with a 50 inch roof to protect against New England storms.

The ground around each station is covered in more crushed stone and wood chips to minimize maintenance.

Brother Joachim masterminded the project. Michael Zichelle added his expertise as a steel fabricator. Steve Boucher donated hundreds of tons of material. We were also assisted by the generosity of Bob Morrissey and Aggregate Corporation and Paul Routhier of Newport Materials. Luis Guttieres kindly donated a mountain of wood chips. We also owe a big thank you to Richie Reynolds of Keating Corporation.

It’s actually difficult to start thanking all the people who helped us because we are bound to omit some generous soul. However, Br. Joachim built a special information booth which will recognize all our wonderful helpers.
“Alas, alas, for those who die without fulfilling their mission! who were called to be holy, and lived in sin; who were called to worship Christ, and who plunged into this giddy and unbelieving world; who were called to fight, and remained idle. Alas for those who have had gifts and talents, and have not used, or misused, or abused them!” — John Henry Newman

That snippet from the writings of Blessed John Henry Newman is a favorite of Abbot Xavier Connelly, O.S.B. As the spiritual father of Saint Benedict Abbey, Abbot Xavier spends much of his time speaking with men who feel called to serve in this tranquil New England monastery. We chatted with him about the idea that, “Monastic Life is the Future of the Catholic Church” and answering the call to God’s service by becoming a monk.

Q: In simple terms, why is monastic life so relevant today?

Abbot Xavier: We each have the need to bring Christ into our lives. A monastery is a place where you get away from the world to accomplish that through prayer and work. People may see the monks using smartphones, but seven times a day we go to chapel and pray the Divine Office—Saint Benedict calls it “The Work of God”—and we pray the Liturgy in Latin and Gregorian Chants, the same Latin used by monks for 1500 years. That is how we find the truth about life, the meaning and purpose of our lives. The Church needs a change for the better, and it’s got to come from a focus on prayer—particularly community prayer. That is at the heart of our work at The Abbey.

Q: Who and what is motivating prospective monks these days?

Abbot Xavier: A lot of vocations come through parental guidance. This generation needs guidance that they simply are not getting, with Mom and Dad so busy trying to support the family. When you point out to a young man all the worldly things driving them, the needs and distractions, some of them get it. After a while they understand that it’s just going from one thing to the next. Nothing is lasting. There’s a deeper power and beauty we strive for as monks that comes from a relationship with Jesus and Mary. There’s an openness achieved when your work is reaching out to those in need.

Q: Why is sense of community so central to monastic life?

Abbot Xavier: The Abbey is all about community, and God own life is community. Look at the Trinity. We think of the relationship of Our Lady to the Trinity as part of that community. Technology can destroy community. Look how people are becoming isolated. There is so much talk of loneliness, isolation, separation.
Monastic life is a true fraternity of brothers striving for holiness together, and that truly Catholic fraternity naturally overflows into hospitality. It’s a gift you want to share. It’s a gift that immediately appeals to people because it’s so lacking in the world. It’s one of the reasons Benedictine life is so important. Unlike any other order, Benedictine monasteries practice hospitality, according to The Rule of Saint Benedict. It’s not just community based on relationships with other human beings. It’s a relationship through Christ.

Q: How does the simple work of a monk serve the will of God?

Abbot Xavier: During the time of formation – it’s called the novitiate – the young monk learns that it’s not what you do that is important, it’s why you do it. For example, by embracing the vow of obedience, he learns how to seek God through the basic chores of a family member.

The most mundane task reveals God’s will in this present moment. While it’s true that every Benedictine monk joins the Benedictine Order, a monk attaches himself to a particular monastery because each has a specific mission. It depends on the charism of a particular monastery. For some it’s education. Here at Saint Benedict Abbey it’s living monastic life well to make God present in the world. God is truly and always present, but by following in the tradition of the saints throughout the centuries, we make the Divine Presence something people can experience and embrace.

Q: What does it take to make it as a monk?

Abbot Xavier: Hopes and dreams are the birthright of youth. Monastic life gives young men an opportunity to channel those dreams—to achieve greatness through holiness. Deep down every person aspires to make a difference. The ultimate difference is the difference between heaven and hell. Getting to heaven and helping others to do the same is true greatness.

However, it takes self-discipline. Go online and look up the differences between “hearing” and “listening.” You’ll find a long list of articles explaining the difference. Hearing is a simple physical action. Listening engages the mind and the heart. Listening to God’s call takes discipline, especially because young people are bombarded by the noise of the world. The peace comes from knowing that you’re doing this for God and for people, with your brothers. You recognize that the reward you get is the grace to do this work with a happy heart.

I’ll give you another quote from Blessed Cardinal Newman, “Fear not that your life shall come to an end, but rather that it shall never have a beginning.” Listen to God’s call. Engage your mind and heart. Give your all and God will give you His All. How to do that – Come and See!

“Getting to heaven and helping others to do the same is true greatness”
After a successful course on St. Augustine in 2018, the Abbey hosted our second week-long intensive study of the roots of monastic spirituality. The August 2019 seminar, Masters of Monastic Tradition: An intensive study of Saint Jerome, focused on how his Christo-centric spirituality and militaristic understanding of vocations helped monasticism take hold in the west.

Led by Dr. Timothy B. Noone, Father Kurt Pritzl Chair in Philosophy at The Catholic University of America in Washington D.C., and Dr. Mark Clark, Ph.D., Professor of Medieval Theology at Catholic University, this year’s seminar was structured like the excellent 2018 event. Participants studied St. Jerome’s famous letters bearing on monastic life, the Bible, and Desiderii mei.

“From the standpoint of the two professors it was amazing, both because St. Jerome himself is immensely interesting and inspirational, and because those who attended were superb in every way, from preparation and participation to raw goodness,” said Dr. Clark. “Add in the example and hospitality of the monks, the incomparable joy of Mass and the Hours, and it is always a great privilege to do this at St. Benedict Abbey.”

Days included two 2-hour sessions, leaving time for liturgies, dining with the monks and enjoying recreation in the area. “As a monk I greatly enjoyed reading St. Jerome,” said the Abbey’s own Brother Jerome. “St. Jerome sees the Christian life as a battle; this is even more the case if you are a monk. He considers them to be soldiers of Christ, with the Scriptures as both an arena in which the battle is fought, as well as the weapons with which it is fought.”

**Gladys Alavado**  
**Melissa Bachman**  
**Claire Bataille**  
**Rachele Beer**  
**Dr. Duane Berquist**  
**Lucy Blanchflower**  
**Maureen Bossard**  
**Raymond Bourque**  
**Harold Brown**  
**Richard Catanese**  
**Liz Chambers**  
**Robert Citarell**  
**Sr. Ann Mary Cobb, MICM**  
**James Coppola**  
**John Crisostomo**  
**Deacon Paul Dacri**  
**Frederick Davis**  
**Robert Decker**  
**Alan Dietl**  
**Catherine Ducharme**  
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**Rebecca Shives**  
**Charles Sowa**  
**Elvera Spina**  
**Robert Stanton**  
**Raffaella Stroik**  
**Paul Thomas**  
**Dorothy Townsend**  
**Mimi Villaume**  
**David Waire**  
**Elizabeth Waldron**  
**Jerry Wholey**  
**Andrew Wiles**
But What do Monks do all day?

Saint Benedict make the bold statement that, “then they are truly monks when they live by the labor of their hands as did our fathers and the Apostles.” However, every priest and brother will tell you that the motivation for our work far outweighs the importance of the particular job we do.

Once we develop an awareness of God’s presence, everything we do takes on a new and vital meaning. Saint Therese of Lisieux has long been a spiritual guide to our community. She observed that it is not the greatness of what we do that matters, but the love with which we do them.

While Abbot Xavier is often occupied with many abbatial tasks, he also can be found whipping around the weed whacker or even running the big mower behind the John Deere tractor.

The Prior, Fr. James, is as adept at setting up the Relic Room for dessert as he is explaining the history of our wonderful relic collection to the Knights of Columbus.

Fr. Augustine can be found kneeling before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament but he is also quick to lend a knowing hand to others to attach the mower to the John Deere 6300 farm tractor.

Fr. Peter offers Mass in the Sacristy Chapel of Saint Patrick’s Cathedral, New York for the Parashuk family, but he also smiles when he fires up the Caterpillar 215B given to us by Pietro Guglielmi.

Fr. Marc entertains us with his incredible impersonations when he’s not attending the Sacred Music Colloquium at the Cathedral in Philadelphia.
Everyone knows that Fr. Anthony is a phenomenal cook whether he is preparing dinner for 20 or 200. Every meal is a feast.

Not all have been blessed to attend his Mass at the Chapel of Our Lady of Guadalupe along the banks of the Nashua River. His reverence is so moving.

But you have not experienced the story of creation until you hear Fr. Anthony read from the Book of Genesis at the Paschal Vigil.

Br. Jerome studies even in his free time - a true monk scholar. He is also a tenacious helper doing hundreds of chores all around the Abbey.

Page 3 outlines the masterful work of Br. Joachim who orchestrated the beautiful Stations of the Cross project, but did you also know he is the master of ceremonies for all of the most solemn liturgies throughout the year?

How will you be remembered?
You can be part of the rich monastic heritage of the monks of Still River.
In fact, we realize we cannot achieve all that we do without you.
Contact Abbot Xavier to talk about the ways you can support the Abbey.

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