Assumption Abbey
Monastic Outpost On Lonely Prairie Has Long Record In Providing Service

“We have seen His Star and have come to worship Him.” (Mt. 2:2)

Thus commented the wise men almost 2,000 years ago as they went to visit the Christ child lying in a manger on the outskirts of the little town of Bethlehem, Palestine. Throughout the ages since, countless millions, experiencing the 'peace the world cannot give' have also seen this star and worshipped Him. Among those millions are those men and women who have dedicated themselves to God in the fullest sense. Renouncing everything, even their very lives, these holy monks have labored to prepare the way of the Lord by establishing schools of the Lord's Service. Obeying the command to go and teach all peoples, monks have established themselves in virtually every country...even North Dakota.

Assumption Abbey, located 80 miles west of Bismarck on the outskirts of the little town of Richardson, was founded as a place of worship 78 years ago by three groups of wise men travelling from afar. Its twin spires, a North Dakota landmark, is today a symbol of the indomitable faith of the German pioneers who tamed the eternal prairie. Indeed, the history of the abbey bespeaks highly of a sense of mission, a determination to witness a message of love, salvation and joy to the people of the Flickertail state. Although in Richardson only 78 years, the Benedictine community in North Dakota is 84 years old, having been established in 1894.

The founding of the North Dakota monastery is chiefly the work of a single man, Vincent John Wehrle. Born December 5, 1855 in Berg, St. Gallen, a Swiss canton, Wehrle attended school at the nearby monastery of Maria Einsiedeln, a 1,000-year-old abbey located in the Swiss-German Alps. Maria Einsiedeln is operated by the Benedictines who are a Roman Catholic order of monks soon to celebrate their 1,500th anniversary. Founded by St. Benedict, the order’s chief mission has been to establish communities of men or women, called Schools in the Lord’s Service. In these schools, the students try to help one another grow in faith by living according to the Gospels.

Young John must have been impressed by monks at Einsiedeln. Reflecting upon Christ’s call to seek first the kingdom of God, Wehrle entered the novitiate and on September 2, 1876 he was professed as a member. Evidencing a desire to be a missionary he asked for, and received, the name Vincent in honor of St. Vincent de Paul, a Roman Catholic missionary who worked among the poor in Italy. Vincent Wehrle continued his studies and in 1882 was ordained a priest. Immediately he requested permission to volunteer for missionary work in the wilds of America. Permission was granted and Fr. Wehrle began his rail-sea-rail journey to the New World.

Arriving at St. Meinrad Abbey, Indiana in October 1882, Fr. Wehrle consulted with the local abbot as to where his missionary zeal could best be utilized. Impressed by the faith of the young priest, the abbot sent him to Arkansas to assist the establishment of New Subiaco Priory. Aside from work at the priory, today a full-fledged abbey, Fr. Wehrle was also assigned some

Assumption Abbey in Richardson, North Dakota—its twin spires a North Dakota landmark; symbol of faith of the pioneers.
Brother Stephen Martin meditating on the mysteries of Christmas. As the abbey gardener, he has had great influence on many novices and is widely known for his success in growing vegetables in the dry southwest.

parishes in the surrounding wilderness.

Vincent ministered three years in the Razorback state. Thereafter he was reassigned back to Indiana as assistant pastor of St. Joseph church in Jasper, Indiana.

This move possesses all the subtle nuances of divine intervention. As noted earlier, Fr. Wehrle had just completed three years of missionary work while also helping establish a Benedictine community. These efforts primed him for his epic adventure in the Land of the Buffalo. As fate would have it, no sooner did he settle in Jasper then Bishop Martin Marty, well-known apostle to the Indians and a member of St. Meinrad Abbey, arrived in Jasper to solicit material help for the Indian missions in Dakota Territory. How much material help he obtained has been lost to history. However, he received invaluable spiritual assistance. Following a long conversation in a Hoosier evening many years ago, Bishop Marty was impressed by the young priest’s desire for missionary work. Fr. Wehrle was invited to work among the Indians in Dakota. He accepted.

Arriving in Yankton, Dakota Territory, February 6, 1887, his first assignment was the chancellorship of the diocese. Considering his desire to do missionary work, he must have been chafing at the bit throughout 1887. In any event, he was assigned to the parish centered in Devils Lake. This parish was quite unlike anything he previously experienced. Its territory was strung out along 250 miles of treeless prairie. Towns were located roughly every ten miles and, initially, were watering holes for the iron horses. As the rails crept toward the sunset, so too did human settlement. Occasionally, Fr. Wehrle would have to travel as far west as Havre, Montana, ministering to the needs of the Catholic immigrants from Germany.

The constant influx of immigrants soon made it evident that effective ministry would require more priests and religious brothers. When northern Dakota Territory was granted statehood in 1889, the Roman Catholic church established the Jamestown diocese coterminus with North Dakota. Breaking off from the Yankton diocese, now in South Dakota, served to make the
Fund-Raising Drive In Europe Aided Dream To Establish College in North Dakota In Early 1890s

shortage of personnel even more acute. Treasuring his own Benedictine background and aware of the need for community and fellowship in this strange land, Fr. Wehrle began to work for the establishment of a monastery based upon the Rule of St. Benedict.

In his efforts to bring monasticism to North Dakota, he was assisted by Bishop John Shanley of Jamestown. During the next five years, Fr. Wehrle and Bishop Shanley labored almost thanklessly to establish a School in the Lord’s Service on the prairie. However, just as Mary and Joseph could find no friendly assistance 1900 years earlier, neither were Vincent and John successful in soliciting meaningful aid from friends at Einsiedeln and St. Meinrad. Nevertheless, propelled by faith and a desire to establish God’s Word on the northern prairies, the two men appealed directly to the Pope. On February 18, 1894, permission was received to establish a priory in North Dakota. Anticipating a favorable reply from Rome, Fr. Wehrle had already laid the groundwork for a Benedictine community in Devils Lake. Thus on that cold February day, a mass of thanksgiving was celebrated by three groups of wise men (two priests, two brothers, and three candidates). Once it became official that Rome approved of Fr. Wehrle’s adventure, Einsiedeln and St. Meinrad abbeys reversed their previous policy and sent volunteers to help assist the development of the new Abbey.

The monastery at Devils Lake was christened St. Galls in honor of an eighth century Irish monk who did missionary work among the Germans in Europe. The next step was to acquire land upon which to build a monastery. Two miles south of town on the shores of beautiful Devils Lake, land was obtained and shortly a small respectable two-story building arose.

True to Benedictine tradition, Fr. Wehrle wished to establish an institute of higher learning at St. Galls. To accomplish this as well as bolster membership, he undertook a journey through the German-populated areas of Europe in 1894. His trip was a success as the community witnessed the arrival of nine candidates, four of whom remained life-long members of the North Dakota Benedictines. One of those new candidates was Placidus Johann Hoenerbach, who would succeed Vincent as abbot of the community.

Although Fr. Wehrle had his eye on establishing a college, the needs of frontier life caused his plan to be altered. In September 1895, not only did he open St. Galls College, but also St. Galls High School and St. Galls Elementary School. Luckily the total enrollment was only 25. In those days, education was not compulsory and, besides, if the young 'uns are off to school, who'll be home to do the chores?

In that same year, the monastery expanded to a five-building complex: house, college, workshop, barn and granary. In addition the small community had bought or homesteaded 700 acres and leased another 200. Although the monks

Monks are cowboys too! Scene is on abbey dam road just north of the monastery complex.
Oh, little town of Richardton

of the state where a steady flow of Catholic German immigrants from Hungary and Russia was populating the Slope country.

At that time, it must be recalled, the American Catholic church was primarily the domain of Irish Catholics. Consequently, there was an acute shortage of priests who could either speak German or were familiar with Teuton customs. Thus, many of these new immigrants from Europe had no priests. Hence, the paucity of spiritual assistance coupled with the culture shock of settling in a new, strange and sometimes hostile land, placed these German migrants in real danger of losing their faith.

Fr. Wehrle was well aware of the problems. Indeed, he has gone down in history as the "Apostle of the North Dakota Germans." Many of his journeys to the southwest included peace-making between an Irish priest and German parishioners. One of these peace-making expeditions took him to Richardton.

Fr. Wehrle took an immediate liking to this little town. Richardton had originally been constructed with pre-fabricated buildings in 1883 by an agent of the Hamburg-American Steamship Lines in anticipation of a westward growth of the bonanza farms. This development, though, never materialized and the town stood vacant. Finally, in 1890, a group of Germans from Russia were induced to settle in the area. In those days, with each new town in general competition with each other, it was difficult to determine which settlement would eventually become the main trading town for...
the area. Richardton, because it is relatively centrally located in southwest North Dakota, as well as being astride the main line of the Northern Pacific Railroad, a transcontinental route, did possess many of the earmarks of a trading center. In any event, Fr. Wehrle was very impressed by Richardton. Further, the growing population of Germans and no pastors willing to minister to them made it evident to Vincent that bringing the sacraments to these immigrants was far more important than trying to establish a parochial college. Thus, Fr. Wehrle decided to move his little Benedictine community to the outskirts of the little town of Richardton.

The move from Devils Lake to Richardson was relatively uneventful and quite efficient. The whole monastery (livestock, equipment, and books) was transported in less than 20 days. The buildings in Devils Lake were put up for sale.

Following the recitation of divine office, the first order of business of the new community was to construct living quarters. During the summer, construction proceeded rapidly until September 1, when tragedy struck. A screaming tornado ripped through the little town and totally destroyed all the buildings. Thus, during the winter of 1899-1900, the monks resided with local townspeople. Throughout the winter a strong sense of camaraderie must have characterized the relations between the monks and the townspeople. Indeed, because in the spring the traditional barn-raising was replaced by a monastery-raising. With the whole town assisting, the new monastery and college were erected during the summer. On September 12, 1900, Bishop Shanley blessed the new house of God. The move from Devils Lake to Richardton also prompted a change of name for the community. Since a St. Mary's Church was already extant in town, the Benedictines applied the name St. Mary's to their community.

Attracted by a Benedictine education for only $14 per month, the first year's enrollment was 50 students. With the school off to a good start, and the community settled into truly substantial housing, while actively engaged in apostolic work among the German immigrants, the monks requested from Rome official recognition as an abbey. St. Mary's Priory, now consisting of 31 members, including 13 professed brothers, was granted such status on November 24, 1903. Acknowledging the proper respect that North Dakota winters deserve, the official ceremony was postponed until May 4, 1904.

In 1904, Fr. Wehrle authorized new construction.

Since the abbey land contained large deposits of clay and lignite, it was decided to build with brick. Further, brick is more economical, and affords better protection against the howling winds. Along with a new extension which could accommodate over 100 boarders, the original building also was facelifted with brick. The following year the community was blessed with an additional 20 recruits from the German areas of Europe. Although they remained life-long members of the abbey, one suspects their initial reaction at the stark difference between the strange prairies and the familiar Alps must have been quite a shock.

At this juncture, the new Benedictine community began to construct its landmark, the abbey church. Employing artist Frank Kasmarsic and architect Anton Dohman of Milwaukee, plans for a "Rhineland Romanesque" church in the form of a Latin cross were drawn. The cornerstone was laid in 1906 and on Christmas Eve 1908, the first services were held in what
When one sees monks wear western boots, then one is in cowboy country.

has since been referred to as the "Cathedral of the Northwest." This gem of the prairies with its priceless stain glass windows, massive interior, hand-carved woodwork and unique tubular-pneumatic action 1,100 pipe organ truly ranks in a league with the great cathedrals of Europe.

Growth continued. With the construction of the south wing in 1909, the abbey had a quadrangle wherein which monks could meditate on the glories of God. Along with an active prayer life, the monks eagerly pursued their missionary vocation. In 1907, Der Volksfreund, a German weekly publication was established to knit together the German immigrants and act as their spokesman. By 1916, its circulation reached 10,000.

However, as with all human undertakings, even when blessed by God, pain and problems accompanied the steady growth. For St. Mary's the problem was money—the proverbial root of all evil. The extensive building program amassed huge debts for the young community. In order to acquire equity, Fr. Wehrle tried to get extra land by having the monks homestead. However, not only was most of the better lands already homesteaded, but an inflationary spiral made many additional landholdings almost worthless. To pay off mounting debts, Fr. Wehrle had to resort to borrowing money which only served to make matters worse. Further, the tight money market mitigated against the desires of philanthropers to assist the abbey. To further add to their problems, the abbey experienced crop failures from 1910 through 1914.

Meanwhile, with the abbey facing possible bankruptcy and dissolution, complications arose in other quarters. The Roman Catholic population in North Dakota was growing. In accord with church practice, the population growth meant that the diocese, by now centered in Fargo, had to be divided. The western half of the Fargo diocese became the diocese of Bismarck. The only person competent to be the bishop, however, was Fr. Wehrle. He was so appointed on April 9, 1910, the year the crop failures at the monastery began.

For the next five years, Fr. Wehrle functioned as abbot and bishop. However, the financial crisis continued to plague the monastic community. Although the abbot-bishop, similar to the late Pope John Paul I, was an excellent pastor, he was unable to heal the monetary woes of St. Mary's Abbey. Electing to remain bishop, Fr. Wehrle chose to resign his position as abbot in 1915.

On July 7, 1915, Fr. Placid Hoenerbach was elected as the second abbot of the North Dakota Benedictine community. He was officially blessed October 5 by a triumvirate of Abbot Wehrle, Abbot Conrad from Conception Abbey, Missouri, and Abbot Engel of St. John's Abbey, Minnesota.

Born in the industrial town of Deutz, near Köln, Germany, Hoenerbach joined the Benedictine missionary congregation of St. Ottilien. Praying for an opportunity to go to a far off land for missionary work, Placid chanced upon literature on Dakota Territory and the work of Fr. Wehrle. Obtaining permission to minister to the needs of German emigrants, student Hoenerbach left Germany and came to the New World in 1894, the year St. Galls was established at Devils Lake. Placid was sent to Conception Abbey, Missouri to complete his seminary studies and on June 2, 1899 was ordained a
Aerial scene of monastery complex: Foreground is three-acre garden. To the right of twin towers is the monastic quadrangle where the brothers and priests live. In the background is the lake created by a dam built in 1944.

Two years of strenuous activity on the North Dakota frontier taxed the health of the frail priest. Consequently, he was assigned successively to parishes in California, Germany, and Kentucky in an effort to improve his health. Fifteen years later he returned to the Dakotas as chaplain to the Sacred Heart Sisters at Yankton, South Dakota. Here he ministered from 1906 until 1915.

Fr. Hoenerbach inherited from Fr. Wehrle a spiritually healthy community. Its membership was 52 monks (18 brothers and 34 priests). Its school had 90 students and the community was actively engaged in parochial work throughout North Dakota. But while the monks had accumulated a huge treasury where "... thieves cannot enter," their earthly resources were in shambles. The failure to homestead land and the annual crop failures did not reduce the debts accrued during the building phase. After Abbot Hoenerbach sorted everything out, the total amount of the debt was uncovered—$300,000. Luckily, Fr. Placid was gifted with a talent for obtaining money. Slowly the debt began to be paid off. However, World War I was on and money was quite difficult to obtain for religious endeavors. In addition, Abbot Hoenerbach’s efforts to reduce the debt brought him into unwelcome conflict with Bishop Wehrle. Sparked by a personality clash and fueled by human traits of insecurity and desire of self-preservation, the tragic-comic dispute between the diocese of Bismarck and St. Mary’s Abbey benefited no one.

Recognizing the nature of the Benedictine lifestyle, the best way to reduce the debt was to staff more parishes in western North Dakota. Bishop Wehrle, who decades earlier had championed this need, suddenly reversed his stand and insisted that only diocesan priests staff new parishes. The trickle of bad blood became a torrent. When the abbey suggested a move to Mandan in order to tap a larger source of students for the college, the bishop refused.

With all avenues of assistance from the institutional church closed, the abbot tried to utilize his talent for investments. In line with the spirit of "roaring twenties," he invested in minerals and oil field
Only real faith can make someone smile while washing clothes for 80-plus people. Br. Gregory has the honors.

did not emanate from the now-empty manger on the outskirts of the little town of Richardson.

But for Christians, death always precedes a glorious resurrection. The struggling Benedictine community of North Dakota still had its mission to accomplish among the German settlers. Musing upon the words of Gamaliel, God must have wanted his community to remain on the prairie. Two years later, in 1926, those monks from St. Mary's who had gone to St. John's, petitioned the abbot at St. John's to reopen the school of the Lord's Service at Richardson. Armed with assistance from a prestigious abbey, the monks approached Bishop Wehrle.

Abbot Alcuin Deutsch of St. John's bought back the monastery buildings from the Schmidt Company of Chicago for $50,000 and appointed Cuthbert Goeb as prior. On September 8, 1928, community life at Richardson was resumed. Several weeks later the North Dakota community was formally resurrected with a new name: Assumption Abbey.

With a clean start, Prior Cuthbert reopened the school. But, first the buildings had to be renovated. Besides general maintenance, severe hail storms during the preceding four years had damaged most of the windows. No sooner did the monastery get back on its feet, then the Depression of 1929 struck. However, the lessons of the past were well-remembered. Not only did the monastery not suffer in the Depression but the abbey had a bumper crop of recruits and, despite the hard money that characterized the 1930s, managed to pay off all its mortgages by 1938. Meanwhile, on December 15, 1931, the monastery had its abbatial status reinstated.

Prior Cuthbert Goeb was accordingly raised to the level of abbot. A capable administrator, his long tenure, known as the Goeb Years, extended from 1928 until 1954.

After repairing existing buildings, the steady growth of the monastery and its school made it evident that newer buildings were needed. After totally renovating the oldest wing of the quadrangle (the east wing), work was begun on the library. Starting from scratch in 1941, constructed almost entirely by the monks, it was the first new structure at the monastery since the building spree of 1899-1909.

Three years later, the monks took a major step in enhancing the beauty of their prairie paradise. The famous Abbey Dam was built. Constructed across a small valley north of the monastery, just beyond a spring-fed pond, the dam established a beautiful lake. Stocked with lake trout and offering a cool respite from the hot North Dakota sun, the lake is the site of the popular Abbey cookouts.

In 1947, the church interior was redecorated. Following that, the monks constructed a new laundry and garage. Finally, in 1950, a gymnasium and some facelifting for the north wing was undertaken. The now-thriving monastery must have brought tears of joy to the older monks who had suffered so much a scant 30 or 40 years earlier.

Like Abbot Hoenerbach, Abbot Goeb was also a man of frail health. In 1954, at 61 years of age, he asked for a coadjutor. A year later, his health failing, he moved to St. Alexius Hospital in Bismarck, where he remained until his death in 1973.

His successor was Ignatius Hunkler. A native son from Napoleon, he was the first North Dakota-born abbot for the Flickertail state's Benedictine Community. Professed a monk in 1941, and formerly instructor of
music and speech at the abbey school, Abbot Ignatius was one of the youngest monks to be elected to that high office, assuming his miter at the age of 35.

Inheriting a spiritually and physically healthy community, Abbot Ignatius's reign is remembered for the great strides in education and apostolic work undertaken by the monks of Assumption Abbey during the 1950s and 1960s. One of the first steps in that direction was to appoint Fr. Matthew Fettig as superintendent of the school. Under the tutelage of Fr. Fettig, the school was transformed into a college-prep institution. By the early 1960s, the student enrollment was 220, many of whom were prep seminarians from dioceses in North Dakota, Montana, and South Dakota.

With student enrollment climbing, the community saw the need for bigger buildings. In 1958, a new structure with ten classrooms, two large study halls, and a music department was erected. It immediately had a noticeable effect on relieving congestion in the other buildings. Meanwhile, faculty development kept pace with the new status enjoyed by Abbey Prep. By 1960, most of the teachers had masters degrees along with undergraduate degrees.

1960 was also a watershed year for the monks of the Benedictine Community in North Dakota. After 66 years of missionary work, strengthening the faith of German pioneers on the prairies, the community embarked on a new missionary journey. Responding to a plea from Pope John XXIII for missionaries to go to Latin America, Abbot Ignatius invited Archbishop Concha of Bogota, Colombia to address the monks at Assumption Abbey. Noting the long and successful missionary work of the monks in North Dakota, Fr.

Assumption Abbey is 80 miles west of Bismarck, North Dakota.

Concha detailed to the community the rampant growth of weeds and thorns which were choking the faith of the believers in Colombia. The monks decided to act.

On June 10, four monks, Gerald Ruele, Adrian Mundt, Frederic Mundt, and Lawrence Wagner, well-schooled in the Lord's service, departed Assumption Abbey for tropic climes. Detouring two months in Puerto Rico for a crash course in Spanish, the four holy men arrived in Bogota August 6. They went to work immediately.

Arrangements had already been made for the monks to rent a former diocesan seminary. Aware that the problems in Latin America can best be solved by education, the seminary was converted into a school for boys. In February 1961, Colegio San Carlos opened its doors to 136 students in grades, 6, 7, and 8. The following year, all 12 grades were added and enrollment increased accordingly. Presently, the school has a student body of 1,100.

The steadily increasing number of students prompted a need for the school to relocate to newer and more permanent surroundings. In 1962, land was purchased about ten miles north of Bogota. Today, on these 40 acres, is a 40-classroom school, church, cultural center and various administrative and maintenance buildings.

In 1965, the growth of the missionary work of the North Dakota monks in Colombia prompted the abbot at Assumption Abbey to raise the status of the missionary community to the level of a dependent priory. The priory, which was granted the right to conduct its own novitiate, is named "Priorato de Tibati." This name is indicative of the spirit of the community and the gift it offers the people. Tibati is the Chibcha Indian word for "Joy of the Lord."

Nearing the end of its second decade, the new Benedictine Community in Bogota has already established itself as a leader among Latin American monasteries. In addition to its own growth and busy novitiate, Tibati has also hosted the Second Monastic Encounter for Latin American Benedictines in 1975.

Back home in Richardton, the community underwent more growth. Responding to the 'baby boom' of the 1940s, the monks expanded its two-year program for college seminarians into a two-year liberal arts college. The new school accommodated lay-students in pre-professional fields as well as liberal arts. Under the presidency of Frs. Paul Kolling and William Caspers, Assumption Abbey prospered encouragingly. Hence, more new buildings were erected. The dormitory, Schnell Hall, and the cafeteria/recreation building with its breathtaking view of the northern prairies, were constructed in 1963. Finally in 1966, efforts at improving the campus scenery were truly noticeable when Assumption College went co-ed!

All human institutions, such as churches, no matter how lofty their meaning, have a tendency to mellow over the years, often changing considerably their very reason for
scholastic efforts were then directed at making Assumption College a major institution of higher learning. Under the presidency of Fr. Richard Wilhelm, a young and well-qualified faculty, including the Sisters from Sacred Heart Priory, was assembled. In addition, the library was considerably expanded. (Today, it ranks as one of the finest libraries in North America, possessing an excellent collection of original manuscripts on religion.) The college also embarked on a vigorous recruiting campaign.

But all to no avail. The modern world had seriously weakened the value of a two-year college education. Further, located in a rural town, with no McDonalds or discos, the school was unable to attract students who were being seduced by the lights of the big cities. In 1971, Assumption College closed its doors.

The closing was truly a sad day for the Benedictines. Teaching and education had been the major function of the community for the past several decades. Understandably, the termination of the college had a quite bewildering effect on the abbey.

But physical decline does not reflect in spiritual decline. Indeed, the spirituality has not only not declined but has rooted itself even stronger. Unencumbered by the problems of operating modern schools, the monks of Assumption Abbey have put their best efforts into conducting a profound and inspiring renewal of their monastic commitment. Indeed, hearing the monks sing evening vespers cannot help but place one in the presence of a loving and providential God.

In line with its renewal and stronger commitment to the philosophy of Jesus Christ, Assumption Abbey has become an ecumenical mecca for North Dakota. Aside from retreats for Roman Catholic organizations, other denominations hold regular conventions and retreats at the Richardton Abbey.

Since the closing of the college the monks of Assumption Abbey have invested most of their energies in pure spiritual endeavors.

Many of the priests and some of the brothers continue to minister to the spiritual needs of Roman Catholics throughout the prairie. Remaining faithful to the dream of Vincent Wehrle, these monks staff many parishes in the German towns which dot the North Dakota landscape. In addition, the monks are quite active in bringing the Word to Indians. This ministry is centered in Mandaree and encompasses the Ft. Berthold Reservation, straddling Lake Sakakawea.

Further, the community is presently pursuing the establishment of a retreat house in Montana. The purpose of a Big Sky house of prayer is to offer the population centers of Butte, Billings, and Great Falls opportunities for spiritual renewal. As of now, Montanans must often undertake a time-consuming trip to obtain the enrichments received during a retreat. Undoubtedly, the Montana project is also an answer to the prayers of those monks from the High Country who long to work among their kinfolk.

But what is life like at the abbey itself? In a word: inspiring. Indeed, one of the most warming scenes in all North Dakota occurs at seven on weekday evenings when the monks sing evening vespers. The old Gregorian chant has been replaced by a soft, stirring rendition of the psalms known as the 'Gelineau Psalms.' The chords emanating
from a 67-year-old handmade organ give excellent accompaniment to the praise of a majestic, yet personal God. The 18-rank-organ with manual tubular-pneumatic action has 1,100 pipes ranging from six inches to 16 feet. Some pipes are made of metal while others are of wood.

In addition to psalm singing, evening vespers also includes a monk reading scripture or a spiritual classic. Following the reading is a period of silence while the monks meditate on the message. The silence is ended with the recitation of the Lord’s Prayer.

Of course, evening vespers are not the only prayer period. Arising at 6 a.m., the monastic community begins morning praise at 6:30. A short prayer period at 11:45, known as noon praise, helps the monks place all their daily toils in proper perspective. Rounding out their prayer periods is Holy Mass, celebrated at 5 p.m. On weekends, the prayer schedule is slightly altered. Saturday morning praise includes mass, while vespers is at 5 p.m. After Saturday supper, at 6:30, the monks recite Compline, a period of recollection centered around the inspiring prayer “Guard us O Lord while we sleep, and keep us in peace.”

On Sunday, morning praise is recited 15 minutes later. In keeping with traditional custom, Sunday Mass is celebrated at 9 a.m., while evening vespers is sung at 5 p.m. On the weekends, noon praise continues at 11:45.

Monks, however, pray with their bodies as well as their minds. Hence their entire lives vibrate with the joy of the Lord. Between prayer periods, each monk works during the day at specific tasks assigned by the abbot. Since all human toll at the monastery is viewed as a prayer to a loving Father, the abbey stands as a beacon of peace in a restless world. Whether one is

The late Fr. Adrian Mundt displaying his artwork. Monks are encouraged to develop all the talents God blessed them with.

assigned such prosaic tasks as cleaning washrooms or given laureate tasks like establishing a Montana foundation, each monk glories in the joy of the other. The holy men know that in God’s eyes each is equally loved and the toils of each monk is equally and dearly appreciated.

Although St. Benedict, in writing his Rule 1,500 years ago, states that monks should rotate their assignments as an effort at resisting the temptation to pride, the modern demands for specialization has caused the rule to be shelved. Yet, the monks have held true to the spirit of Benedict by not falling prey to pride. This, perhaps, is why the abbey is a happy, cheerful place of worship.

Since the demise of the college, the 2,000 acre farm with its fields of waving grain and 200 head of beef cattle, is operated efficiently and successfully by Br. Placid Gross. In addition to his farming duties, Br. Placid, who knows almost everybody in North Dakota (and that’s no exaggeration!) is also very active with the North Dakota Historical Society of Germans from Russia. Anyone wishing information on one’s ancestors would do well to contact this man. He is easily the best resource person for information on researching one’s family tree.

Assumption Abbey is also the site of the well-known Abbey Press. Manned by Br. Gordon, the pressroom has three printing presses. His output includes everything from multicolor magazine to small office pads. Br. Gordon also has the responsibility for the apiary. As with the farm, all

Assumption Abbey
Continued on Page 50
the monks chip in to help at the harvest time.

Right next door to the pressroom are facilities for bookbinding. This art is the domain of Br. Victor Frankenhausen, whose mastery of the art is internationally known. Aside from binding new books, he is very adept at saving the lives of old and worn manuscripts. In addition to saving books, Br. Victor is also excellent at saving souls, as indeed, are all the monks. A local native of Richardton, Br. Victor is mighty with the pen, too, having written two books whose portrayal of the sufferings of mankind defy description.

Master carpenter-boilermaker-steamfitter, Br. John Seiler has the tasks of keeping the buildings in proper repair. Those readers of PRARIES who have been a guest at the abbey on a cold winter night can truly appreciate the labors of Br. John. Although fully capable of doing all the repair work himself, he prefers to defer his glory to another monk, the affable and friendly Br. Henry. Formerly a professor of music, Br. Henry, the tallest monk, is also a hustler at billiards.

General maintenance is the domain of Br. John Pat Arnett, a Colorado native. Br. John Pat is also the abbey photographer.

Any institution of this size needs a business office and qualified workers to keep track of financial records. For Assumption Abbey, the work requires the use of two trained economists. Hence on any given day, Br. Aaron and Fr. Odo can be seen in the office balancing books, keeping records, and plotting the cash flow of the monastery. These two monks are also accomplished organists. Thus, during lulls in the business schedule, they exercise their talent to plan meaningful and soul-inspiring liturgies. Both have already written music designed to put one in the presence of God.

Travelling by the monastery during the warmer months enables one to observe Br. Stephen Martin tending the monastery's three-acre garden. Assisted by candidates and novices, the garden is annually turned into an oasis with bountiful harvests of corn, onions, potatoes, kohlrab and other vegetables. Because Stephen works so closely with the novices and has much contact with customers, he has developed an excellent ability at offering sound spiritual advice.

Along with the above-mentioned Br. Victor, the abbey has two more authors residing at the Cathedral of the Northwest. Fr. Brian Wangler has written an in-depth study of Catholic spirituality. His book, "Self-Concept and Spirituality," discusses how people view themselves and how this self-view influences their relation to God and neighbors. Finally, Fr. Dennis Fournier is authoring a North Dakota classic. His book on the history of the Benedictines in North Dakota will be over 1,000 pages when completed, truly a fitting memorial to the struggle to establish a School of the Lord's Service on the northern prairie.

The third author is the well-known Fr. Louis Pfaller. A renowned historian, he has written voluminously on the life of frontier Christians and their efforts at injecting Christ-like love into the struggle between the white man's desire for more land and the Indian belief that land cannot be owned.

To describe all the accomplishments of these holy men would require countless pages. Suffice to say, then, the monks at Assumption Abbey have found the peace the world cannot give. Praying daily with body and soul, their hearts radiate to all a priceless glimmer of the joy of the Lord. A joy given to all, who seeing His star, have come to worship Him.

John A. Fink was a monk who lived at the abbey in Richardton.