



SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



Prior Gregory On His Call

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"I became a priest because I experienced God's love in my life and his ability to heal, to bring comfort and consolation; his ability through the Spirit to make the world a different kind of place. And I wanted that for other people. I wanted others to know about it too. For, all of us -- no matter what kind of life we live -- experience something of what Jesus talks about in the beatitudes. To some extent we all are sorrowing and need to be comforted. To some extent we all hunger and thirst for what is right and holy. We all need mercy. We all want peace. And we all have experienced hurt, insult of some kind, and need the healing presence of God. I became a priest because I felt that God's presence, in my life certainly, was a powerful and healing thing and it changed life. It made it a joy . . ."

Gregory's association with Saint Louis Priory School and Saint Louis Abbey has indeed been a lifelong one. He acknowledges that the monks have always been a part of his life. "I certainly looked up to them." In 1970 he entered the Junior House at Priory. He recalls the Junior House as a playful place. High School was more serious and Gregory felt it immediately as one of the ninth grade's appointees to the Headmaster's Committee. "There were eight of us -- two from each class -- and we ate lunch with the headmaster every day. That certainly altered the kinds of conversations we had at the lunch table."

At the end of his junior year Gregory decided to join the monastic community. That summer he took part in the "monk for a week" program -- the first of its kind and forerunner of the monklet program. "In the following weeks I knew with certainty. There was a qualitative change in my decision." He did not divulge his intent to classmates until after graduation. "Some tried to talk me out of it, though more and more became supportive as time went on."

His plan to join the monastery stood the test of time during his years away at the University of Pennsylvania. One reason he chose a secular college was to get away from Priory, to get a taste of the real world, to see if he did indeed have a genuine vocation. In fact, it grew stronger. Thanks to vigorous Priory preparation, he was able to complete the requisites for a BA in English in just three years and was named a Benjamin Franklin Scholar at Penn.

His early years in the monastery went smoothly. He was clothed as a novice in September 1979. Simple profession -- the formal, written pledge to live a life of obedience, *conversatio morum*, and stability -- followed in September 1980. While studying philosophy and theology at Saint Louis University, Gregory served as assistant guest master, taught eighth grade religion, and was involved



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in campus ministry. He was solemnly professed in September 1983.

"I always tell my students that the difference between a monk and a priest is the difference between a lifestyle and a ministry. A monk is a member of a family, just as a father is a member of his family. But being a priest is a ministry in much the same way that being a doctor is a father's profession."

Father Gregory Mohrman was ordained, along with Abbot Thomas Frerking on June 21, 1986. One of the joys of being a priest, which Gregory admits he had not anticipated, is the act of consecrating the Eucharist. "It's an indescribable feeling. I cannot deny that it is very special."

Musing on his call, the dedication of his life to God amidst the societal values of the *me decade* in which he grew up, Gregory calls himself "atypical of the seventies," and admits to identifying more with the sixties generation than with his own. "I've always been sort of a closet hippie. I felt that becoming a monk was the ultimate counter-cultural statement . . . In one of his last talks, Thomas Merton linked monks and hippies. Both try to change the world. One of the greatest rewards of monasticism is the growing awareness of how holy everything and everyone is everywhere." Monks are called to seek God. The more they seek, the more they find that God is everywhere.

In the years since his ordination, Father Gregory has been a strong presence in the life of the school. "The best part of teaching is being with the kids and helping them grow intellectually. To see learning happen . . . it's wonderful to watch and very gratifying. What's important is simple: it's holiness and the spirit of God. I want to teach them that holiness and faith are essential to being happy. It's becoming harder for them to get that message and harder to believe it.

Father Gregory admits that he cannot conceive of his life apart from Saint Louis Abbey. "I haven't always enjoyed it; it's not always pleasurable. But I have no doubts that this is where I belong. I have never regretted it. It has always been a part of my life.