



## SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



### SHOULD MONKS BE PASTORS?

by Father Gerard Garrigan, OSB

*[Father Gerard, who has been pastor of Saint Anselm Parish since 1996, answers this question in the positive, quoting both from authority and from history. As he points out, when monks find themselves as pastors, it is not because they have sought the position but because a call has been made on their charity for the good of the Church. Ed.]*

For several centuries monks have struggled with the question of whether they should remain in their monasteries to live a life of prayer and community or whether they should go out from the monastery to minister directly to the pastoral needs of the people. Some communities of monks have decided that their calling to serve God is within the monastery by living and praying with and for one another and for the people outside the monastery without venturing out of the monastery to work directly with the people.

In September 1967 the Congress of Benedictine Abbots addressed this question of the appropriateness of pastoral work for monks on pages 26-27 of *A Statement on Benedictine Life*:

Finally, particular conditions of time and place may sometimes oblige monks, for urgent reasons of justice and charity, to leave the monastery in order to provide men with essential spiritual benefits: for example, through missionary and parish work. If these activities are characterized by obedience and monastic spirit, and, in so far as circumstances permit, are undertaken in accordance with monastic forms of life, they do not necessarily militate against the witness which remains the primary and indispensable duty of the monk.

The openness to pastoral work of our English Benedictine Congregation is explicated on pages 322-323 of *Consider Your Call: A Theology of Monastic Life Today* by Daniel Rees and other members of the English Benedictine Congregation:

Throughout the three centuries of its existence our (English Benedictine) Congregation has never been without a pastoral orientation. Even its more 'monastic' tendencies have not repudiated its preoccupation with the conversion of England, but have had different views on the best way of setting about it... If on this point we ask the classical question, 'What would our Fathers say?' the reply that history gives is that at the very beginning our founders made a deliberate choice to be apostolic monks... They experienced, quite independently of one another's influence, a common calling to be monk-priests. In spite of many tensions and imbalances, time seems to have borne out their belief that this combination of monk and priest can be a single viable vocation. The tensions themselves have often been a source of strength and creativity.

When we consider the history of monks and pastoral work, there is certainly precedent for monks doing pastoral work. Saint Gregory the Great turned his home in



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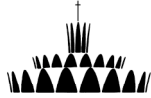


Rome into a monastery and would have preferred to remain there living the monastic life but was called to pastoral service of the Church as Pope. To Saint Gregory are commonly ascribed *Dialogues* which popularized the life of Saint Benedict and his monastic way. And it was also Saint Gregory who, around the year 600, sent Saint Augustine of Canterbury and other monks from his monastery of Saint Andrew's in Rome to convert the English to Christianity by their pastoral work from their monastery at Canterbury. This Saint Augustine was a true pastor, in fact, becoming the first bishop in England. Monks from England were eventually to go to Germany as missionaries to help convert that people to the faith, the English monk Boniface being considered the Apostle to the Germans. The monk Saint Anselm, the patron of our Parish, was similarly to leave his monastery at Bec for England where he busied himself at his pastoral work as Archbishop of Canterbury.

After the Reformation, English monks fled their native country to establish monasteries on the Continent where they trained priests for the English mission. A number of these priests were martyred for their pastoral ministry during the Penal Times. One of them, Saint Alban Roe, the patron of our nearby parish, was a monk of the community of Saint Laurence at Dieulouard, France. After the monasteries returned to England, the monks continued their pastoral work and many monks worked on a number of parishes. To this day many Ampleforth monks work on parishes in the north of England.

The monks of our monastery came to Saint Louis in 1955 and after to live the monastic life of prayer, community and service after being beckoned by Catholic lay people who solicited them to establish their monastery and Catholic college preparatory school. When the population of the Saint Louis area began moving to our area, a parish was formed here and Monsignor Slattery, a priest of the Saint Louis Archdiocese, became the first Pastor of Saint Anselm in 1966. After Monsignor Slattery became head of Catholic Charities for the Archdiocese, Archbishop Ritter asked the monks if they would be willing to undertake the care of Saint Anselm Parish. Consonant with our English Benedictine tradition, the monks responded in charity to the pastoral need of the Church and in 1981 accepted the call of the Archdiocese to provide pastoral care for the parishioners of Saint Anselm. Father Timothy Horner, OSB was installed as our first monk pastor by Monsignor Flavin on April 26, 1981.

Father Timothy's many years of devoted and tireless service to the people of Saint Anselm Parish prove that yes, indeed, a monk can be a model pastor, an exemplary shepherd for his parish flock. The warm affection and deep appreciation of the parishioners of Saint Anselm for Father Timothy attest to the fruitfulness of his ministry as a monk pastor. If we want living proof that a monk pastor can be an invaluable gift to his parishioners, then we need only hold up the example of our beloved Father Timothy. And Father Timothy is living proof to us monks that, despite the inherent demands and tensions attendant on a man who seeks to serve God and others as both a monk and a pastor, the life of a monk priest can bring him real and profound satisfaction and fulfillment. I think all of our monks who have ministered to the good people of Saint Anselm Parish would agree that we have been privileged to get to know and to be so kindly treated by the many good people of our Parish whom we have been blessed to serve as monk priests, as monk pastors. As monk pastor, Father Timothy grew in love of



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God and others and he helped the parishioners he so loyally served grow in love as well. Father Timothy, therefore, shows that being a monk pastor can be good for the monk who is pastor, good for the people whom he is blessed to serve and good for the honor and glory of God who is love and who calls each one of us to return that love to him and to share that great love with one another.