

MOUNT ANGEL | Letter

WINTER/SPRING 2026



*“Accept me, O Lord,
as you have promised.”*



INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Winter/Spring 2026 | Volume 79, Number 1

DIRECTORY

ALUMNI RELATIONS
503.845.3030
alumni@mtangel.edu

BOOKSTORE & COFFEEHOUSE
503.845.3345
abbeystore@mtangel.edu

COMMUNICATIONS
503.845.3030
communications@mtangel.edu

DEVELOPMENT
503.845.3030
development@mtangel.edu

GUESTHOUSE
503.845.3025
retreat@mtangel.edu

LIBRARY
503.845.3303
circulation@mtangel.edu

MOUNT ANGEL ABBEY
503.845.3030
www.mountangelabbey.org

MOUNT ANGEL SEMINARY
503.845.3951
seminaryinfo@mtangel.edu

OBLATE PROGRAM
Fr. John Paul Le, OSB
johnpaul.le@mtangel.edu

VOCATIONS
Fr. Odo Recker, OSB
vocation@mtangel.edu

VOLUNTEER PROGRAM
503.407.8175
volunteer@mtangel.edu

Special Thanks to the Monastic Advisory Council for *Mount Angel Letter*: Abbot Jeremy Driscoll, Abbot Peter Eberle, Fr. Pius X Harding, Fr. Odo Recker, Fr. Ralph Recker and Fr. Vincent Trujillo

Contributors to this issue include Abbot Jeremy Driscoll, Fr. Jeff Eirvin, Alexander Delsman, Fr. Anselm Flores, Br. Jonah Poissant, Fr. Michael Shrum, Victor Mitre, Fr. Matt Libra, Deacon Scott Pearhill and Ethan Alano

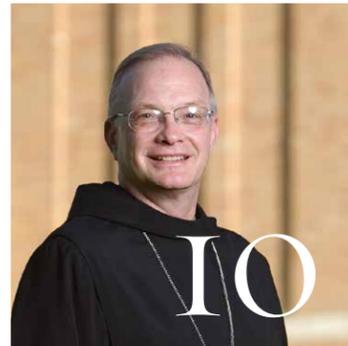
Photo Contributors include the Archdiocese of Portland, Mack Alano, Ethan Alano and Karen Jacoby

Editor: Dr. Amanda Staggenborg
Design: Karen Jacoby

Mount Angel Letter is printed using paper milled from responsible FSC approved sources and agri-based inks.



Simple & Solemn Professions



In Memoriam



Fellowship of Scholars



\$10 Million Grant Awarded

Please note our mailing address: Mount Angel Abbey & Seminary, PO Box 497, Saint Benedict, OR 97373-0497. All other Abbey mail should be addressed to 1 Abbey Drive, Saint Benedict, OR 97373.

Would you like to receive our publications, invitations and news? Visit mountangelabbey.org/update to sign up.

Do you have special requests regarding the mail you receive from the Abbey? Give us a call at 503.845.3030. Please send address changes or comments, along with your mailing label, to Mount Angel Abbey & Seminary at PO Box 497, Saint Benedict, OR 97373-0497.



Calendar of Events

MARCH



- 6-8 Faith Over Fifty Retreat: *St. Augustine & the Prayer of Remembering*
- 17 Mount Angel Seminary Ministries Mass
- 21-22 MAI Mount Angel Chamber Choir Concerts
- 28 MAI Christian in the World Lecture: *Everyday Humility: Twelve Benedictine Steps into a Life of Joy. Part III: Simplicity, Gratitude, Hospitality, Silence*

APRIL



- 1-5 Holy Week Paschal Triduum Retreat
- 3 Solemn Way of the Cross with the Relic of the True Cross
- 11 MAI Catholic Land Movement Lecture
- 17-19 2 Become 1: *A Retreat to Explore the Beauty & Truth of Catholic Marriage*
- 18 MAI Christian in the World Lecture: *Everyday Humility: Twelve Benedictine Steps into a Life of Joy. Part IV: Be Childlike, Speak Gently, Live Humbly, a Life of Joy*
- 19 Abbot's Appreciation Mass & Brunch
- 24-26 MAI Sacred Space & Human Scale: *Alvar Aalto Symposium*

MAY



- 9 Mount Angel Seminary Baccalaureate Mass & Commencement
- 16 MAI Chant and Singing Workshop
- 16 MAI Young Chorister's Retreat
- 16 MAI Concert

JUNE



- 13 MAI Ecumenical Fellowship
- 22-27 Classical Iconography Institute Retreat
- 27 MAI Oregon Bach Festival

JULY

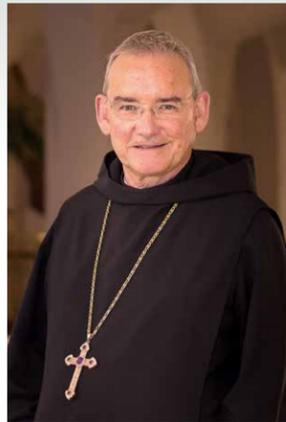


- 10 MAI Concert: *Young Voices of the Philippines*
- 11 Saint Benedict Festival
- 29-8/1 Abbey Bach Festival



Learn more at MOUNTANGELABBEY.ORG/JOIN-US

MAI events are sponsored by the Mount Angel Institute.



Dear Friends of Mount Angel,

It is with a joyful heart that I share the first *Mount Angel Letter* of 2026. This issue is filled with the moments that mirror a spirit of hope, community inspiration and intentional works that reflect our faithful commitment. The Rule of St. Benedict states that, “As we progress in this way of life and in faith, we shall run on the path of God’s commandments, our hearts overflowing with the inexpressible delight of love” (RB Prologue 49).

Each day brings us a new joyful beginning, a gift from the Lord. As we delight to begin anew, it is equally refreshing to reflect thoughtfully on those who came before us. As I wrote in *Awesome Glory*, “we are the rich

heirs of various theological currents.” While I was specifically referring to liturgical history, this thought can be applied to Mount Angel history as well. After reviewing early editions of the *Mount Angel Letter*, I began to thoughtfully explore how to sincerely bring life to words written so long ago. These early editions often featured a “Question Box” section in which members of the community could ask the abbot a question about monastic life. We are pleased to resurrect this feature as we invite our readers to ask questions about life at Mount Angel Abbey.

There are many reasons to celebrate life at Mount Angel Abbey, many of which are highlighted throughout this issue. For our monastic community, 2025 included the joy of ordinations, professions of vows and jubilees, as well as the sorrow of Abbot Nathan Zodrow’s passing. Through the Mount Angel Institute, we also welcomed Christian scholars from around the world, including Cardinal Mario Grech and Msgr. Piero Coda, for a Fellowship of Scholars on the Eucharist and the Trinity. As I participated in this workshop, it highlighted what I have experienced as a monk of Mount Angel for over fifty years: this is a place where faith seeks understanding and where we have true communion with God and each other.

As we continue on God’s path, we step out in faith with the Scriptures as our light. As we look for the Lord in all things, we find many ways to celebrate, and I prayerfully encourage you to experience life with us on the Hilltop. I share these words of St. Paul with you as my own: “We give thanks to God always for you all, constantly mentioning you in our prayers” (1 Thessalonians 1:2).

God bless you in the New Year,

+ *Jeremy Driscoll, OSB*

The Right Reverend Jeremy Driscoll, OSB
Abbot and Chancellor
Mount Angel Abbey and Seminary



Dear Brothers and Sisters,

With winter underway, it is important to remember the guiding hand of the Lord that warms our souls, even on the coldest days. I am often moved by the message of Proverbs 16:3, which states, “Commit your work to the Lord, and your plans will be established.”

As president-rector of Mount Angel Seminary, I pray each day for our seminarians who have committed to answer the Lord’s call and the faculty who guide them. Through all stages of seminary formation, we support and prepare young men for a life of faithful leadership.

In this issue, I am proud to share many exciting updates, including scholarly work from our gifted faculty and a collaborative mentorship and training endeavor, generously funded through the Lilly Endowment’s *Pathways for Tomorrow* initiative. We also celebrated the return of the Seminary Benefit Dinner to downtown Portland, drawing close to 800 attendees in support of the Seminary. God’s presence in our Seminary is ever-present as he surrounds us with his light and warmth as we carry out his plans. I recently came across a reading from a Seminary alumnus, the late Fr. Mel Sprute of the Diocese of Boise, who described his experience as a seminarian here in 1961, “For some reason, I even liked to visualize myself as a priest some day. But why? So few others did. To me, it seems the verification of Christ’s words: ‘You have not chosen me; I have chosen you.’” His words symbolize the Seminary perfectly.

In October, I participated in the Clergy Days of the Diocese of Sacramento, where I delivered several presentations on the *Program of Priestly Formation* and the accompaniment of seminary candidates. In January, we hosted the Bishops of Region XII for their annual retreat, coinciding with our seminarians’ silent retreat, which was directed by Bishop Peter Smith, a Mount Angel alumnus and Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Portland in Oregon. Throughout the year, we celebrated numerous feast days, including Our Lady of Guadalupe in December and Santo Niño and the Vietnamese New Year (Tết) in January, honoring diverse and rich cultural traditions among our seminarians.

These are but a few of the many blessings of the year thus far, and they inspire me as we work together for the future of the Seminary. I am profoundly grateful for each seminarian who, like Fr. Sprute, receives his vocation as a gift from God and freely offers his life in service to our Lord and his Church. This issue of the *Mount Angel Letter* showcases not only the Seminary’s continued growth, but also the faithful support and encouragement of so many who support these callings.

Blessings,

Rev. Jeff Eirvin

The Very Reverend Jeff Eirvin
President-Rector
Mount Angel Seminary





Seeking
Purpose
in GOD

SIMPLE VOWS OF BR. JONAH POISSANT, OSB

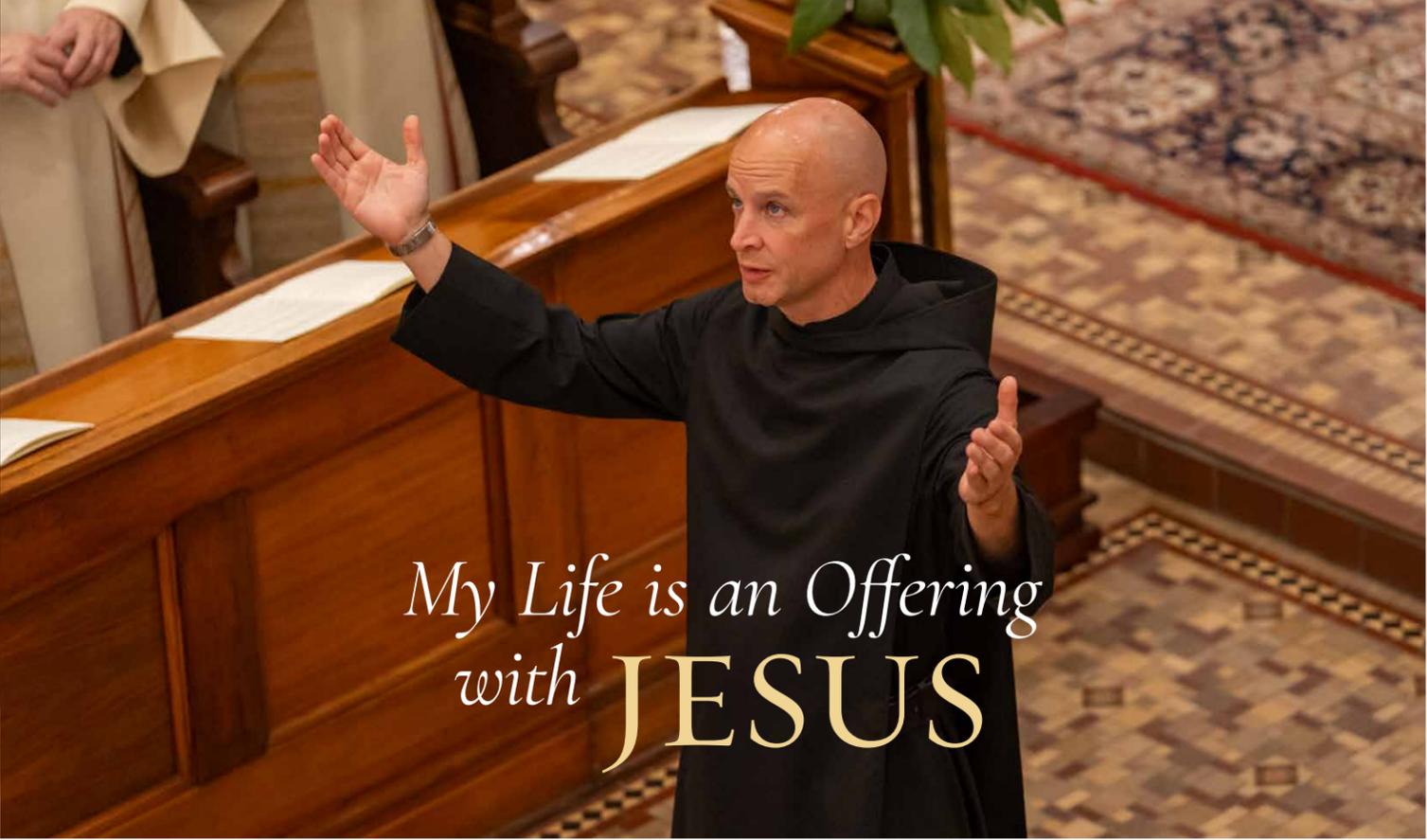
We all have a God-given purpose to find in our lives. As we grow up, we are confronted by suffering, sometimes to our own surprise, which often leads us to decide against pursuing the opportunities God has in store for us. As a result of abandoning these opportunities, complacency shrouds us in darkness, leading us to lives of selfishness and reluctance.

It took me a long time to realize I was in a downward spiral into selfishness and reluctance as a result of my tribulations with epilepsy, pushing away God's plans for my life. It is in this downward spiral that I learned an important requirement in following God. As we follow him it requires trust in spite of what fears we may have towards God and his plans for us. We can't continue to run from God's plans, and so we must accept that suffering can be a part of his plan for us.

So upon reflecting on the sufferings I endured, I petitioned and was given the name Jonah. I thought it was fitting since Jonah was also self-centered and reluctant in his story and so fled from God's commands. Likewise, I sought after the pleasures of the world to numb myself to his call before me. Eventually, I was thrown into the depths like Jonah, into a place of despair— into a life without God. It was there in this darkness I found a new beginning and took a leap of faith. I entered into this new beginning as I witnessed the solemn profession of Br. Matthew where I heard the Lord's call to love him.

At Mount Angel I was "spit out" out to seek purpose in God, leaving the world as I processed to the altar to take my simple vows. As I made my profession my heart weighed heavily on the following purpose: to love the Lord my God, to carry the faith, and to be a light to my confreres, family and friends.

— BR. JONAH POISSANT, OSB



My Life is an Offering
with JESUS

SOLEMN VOWS OF FR. MICHAEL SHRUM, OSB

After the bells finished their tolling and we began to enter through the main doors of the Abbey church, my heart swelled as I saw so many people whom I love, some of whom I hadn't seen for at least four years and others for longer than that. I was overwhelmed with gratitude and joy for all the wonderful people that God has brought into my life. As a friend related, "It's what heaven will be like. Everyone's here!"

After I made my vows, I then walked out into the nave of the church. As I walked towards the pews there was a crowd of little ones gathered at the end of the pews and in the aisle. Their faces were filled with awe and attention as I came towards them. Two of those little ones were my godchildren, and they were gathered with their siblings, cousins and a few other precious children. Arriving at where they were standing, I turned around to begin the journey to the altar with hands raised to God, offering myself

to him chanting three times, "Accept me, O Lord, according to your promise. Accept me and I shall live. Do not disappoint me in my hope." *From the bosom of a loving family, the Lord received me into the loving embrace of the monastic life to suffer with him in this monastery until death, so that I may also share in his kingdom.*

Then, after the presentation of the gifts, I laid down prostrate before the altar, and Fr. Israel placed the pall over me for the mystical burial, signifying my death to the world. As I laid in front of the altar during the Eucharistic Prayer, I was tuned in more attentively than usual listening to the words as Abbot Jeremy prayed them. I was keenly aware in a new way that my life is an offering with Jesus in the Eucharist. In each celebration of the Eucharist, Jesus invites us to renew that offering as we die to ourselves so that we may live for him.

— FR. MICHAEL SHRUM, OSB



ORDINATION of A DEACON

Br. Matthew Sislow, OSB



Ordained a transitional deacon in May 2025, Br. Matthew Sislow, OSB, said, “We’re all one great Body united in Christ in this Church.” He experienced the Church’s catholicity in the anticipation and liturgy of his diaconal ordination. He reflected, “*One thing I was really struck by in the days leading up to the liturgy, and during the Mass itself, is the great sense of the universal, praying Church.*” Br. Matthew heard that family, friends, and monks, both nearby and in Rome, Mexico, and Guatemala, were praying for him as he began his new ministry of service. But he was also reminded of the perpetual prayers of the Church Triumphant during the Litany of the Saints while lying prostrate before the altar.

The call to become saints and live in unity connects strongly to the first verses of Ephesians chapter four, Br. Matthew’s scriptural selection for his ordination card. The passage struck Br. Matthew during lectio divina last year and has remained with him in prayer since. Seeing Ephesians chapter four as one of the ordination Mass reading options, Br. Matthew “took it as another providential sign of God’s placing it in my life right now.” He explained, “I like this passage in particular because it has both the challenge to live this religious life worthily, but also *how* to do it, in a relatively compact formula: humbly, gently, patiently, bearing with one another through love, all aimed at the unity which our Christian lives are ultimately meant for.” This unity, Br. Matthew noted, is perfectly modeled in the Trinity.

— ALEXANDER DELSMAN

ORDINATION of A PRIEST

Fr. Anselm Flores, OSB



There’s too much to say about Christ, ministry, and my monastic vocation, but it was a letter from a theologian friend that really focused and prepared me for the reality of priestly ordination. I wrote and invited her to my ordination, and in her letter back to me, she said that she had been praying for me as “I came to the great moment of priestly ordination ... a most mysterious and awe-inspiring act of kenosis, as you prepare to represent Christ at the altar.” Now, being a theologian, my friend gave a pretty accurate definition of the meaning of priesthood, but it struck me that she said it was “awe-inspiring.” And not because you get new responsibilities for ministry, but because it’s an act of “kenosis,” or self-emptying.

The awe isn’t induced by power, privilege, title, or “new things I get to do,” but by the fact that, *in representing Christ at the altar, the priest himself must be a sign of total self-emptying, of total kenosis, as Christ himself was.* In other words, the awe, beauty, and joy of sharing in the priesthood of Christ stems from the total giving of one’s being and mind to serving God and his people. This terrified me. And it also inspired me and brought me to tears. I knew this would be impossible for me, and so I leaned on prayer and on the Holy Spirit to give me the gifts of fortitude and prudence. All I can do now is be in wonderment and gratitude, doing my best to be ready for God’s will.

— FR. ANSELM FLORES, OSB



60 Years of PRIESTHOOD

Fr. Edmund Smith, OSB

On May 11, 2025, Fr. Edmund Smith, OSB, celebrated 60 years of priesthood, having been ordained in 1965 by the Archbishop of Portland at the time, Archbishop Edward Howard. Fr. Edmund's priestly ordination was the first ordination liturgy at Mount Angel celebrated in the vernacular. He celebrated his first Mass of Thanksgiving at St. Luke Parish in Woodburn.

Born in St. Paul, Oregon, in 1938, Fr. Edmund was raised on a farm between Mt. Angel and Woodburn. He attended St. Luke parochial school and then the Mount Angel Seminary high school in 1952. Fr. Edmund entered the novitiate at Mount Angel Abbey in 1958, made his first profession of vows on September 8, 1959, and made his solemn vows on September 12, 1963. Following his priestly ordination, Fr. Edmund was sent to study for a

Master of Arts in Religious Education at Fordham University in New York.

His "yes" to the priesthood, along with his monastic vow of obedience, led Fr. Edmund to serve Mount Angel and the wider community in many different roles: hospital chaplain, vice rector of the seminary, prior of the monastery, pastor of parishes in Oregon, Washington, and Montana, procurator, guesthouse director, and spiritual director, to name a few.

We give thanks to God for Fr. Edmund's six decades of priestly ministry and pray that the Lord Jesus, the Eternal High Priest, continue to pour out his blessings on his humble servant.

— ETHAN ALANO

60 Years of MONASTIC LIFE

Fr. William Hammelman, OSB

Fr. William Hammelman, OSB, summarized 60 years of monastic life by saying, "I feel grateful for my life. I feel very blessed." On September 8, 2025, Fr. William celebrated 60 years of monastic profession, having made his first profession of vows into the hands of Abbot Damian Jentges, OSB, on September 8, 1965.

On a clear day, Fr. William can see his childhood home, his family's farm in Mt. Angel, from the Abbey Hilltop. Both sets of his grandparents had several friends who were Mount Angel monks. His mother, Adelene, worked closely with Fr. Alcuin Heibel, OSB, on a World War II overseas aid effort, Mount Angel Relief. Amid these strong connections with the Abbey, Fr. William joined the high school seminary. "When I joined the Seminary, I was thinking about priesthood, but the only priests I ever knew were the Benedictines," says Fr. William. He entered the novitiate in 1964 and found that "community life was much more appealing to me."

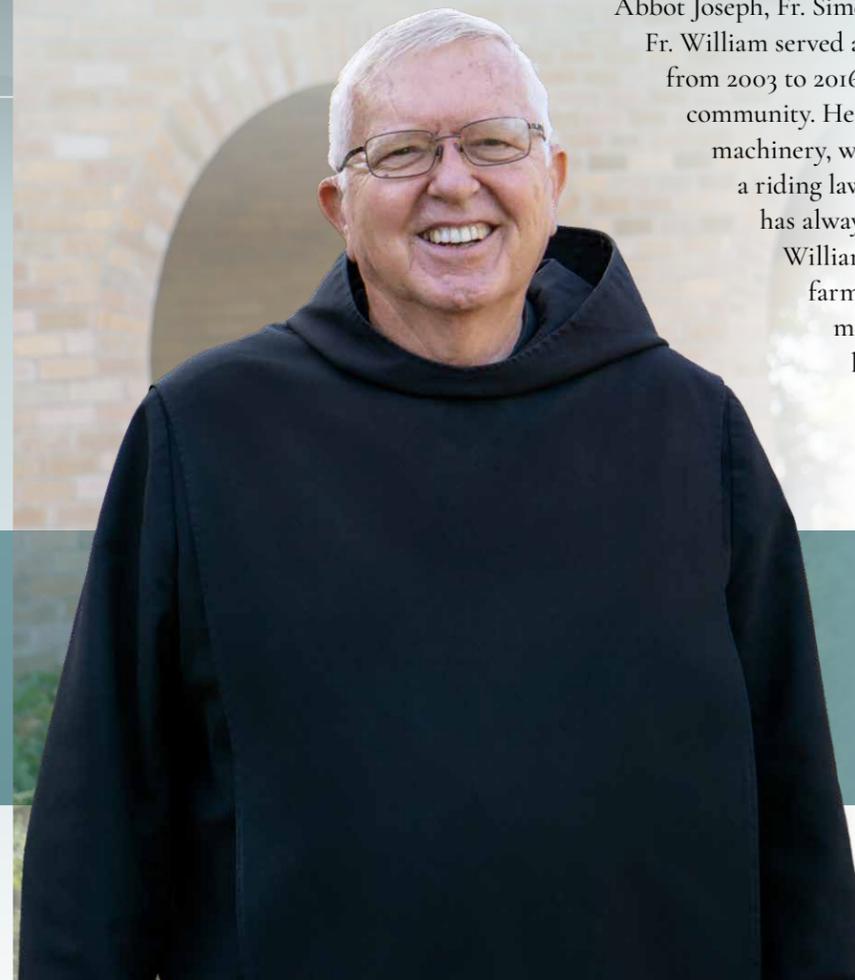
Fr. William's work at the monastery over these 60 years has been diverse. He fondly remembers his work at Mount Angel Seminary and the friendships he developed with other monks working in that apostolate, especially Abbot Joseph, Fr. Simeon, Fr. Pascal, Fr. Daniel and Fr. Boniface.

Fr. William served as pastor of St. Paul Parish in Silverton from 2003 to 2016, during a period of rapid growth for that community. He has often worked with his hands and machinery, working as a groundskeeper and operating a riding lawnmower or backhoe. "[Manual labor] has always been a big part of my life here," says Fr. William. "I was involved in the orchard and tree farm and on the grounds a good part of my monastic life. I guess the farmer in me is still having to be outside."

Mount Angel's monastic community gives thanks to God for Fr. William's monastic vocation and jubilee.

Fr. William expresses his gratitude for his brothers, saying that "community life has been very good for me."

— ETHAN ALANO



I N M E M O R I A M

*Abbot Nathan Zodrow, OSB**(1952–2025)*

On April 8, 2025, Abbot Nathan Zodrow, OSB, passed away to the Lord at age 73, having celebrated 50 years of monastic profession in December 2024 with Abbot Jeremy Driscoll, OSB, and Br. Claude Lane, OSB. Abbot Nathan, whose birth name was Gary, grew up in Chewelah, Washington, in a family of eight children. Gary attended Mater Cleri Seminary in Colbert, Washington, where he met Dan Lane, the future Br. Claude. While attending Gonzaga University, he visited Mount Angel for the first time during a trip with Jesuit novices, where he said, “the sheer beauty of the place was tangible.”

Gary made his first profession of monastic vows on September 8, 1974, receiving the name Nathan. Ordained to the priesthood on April 16, 1988, Fr. Nathan helped strengthen Mount Angel Seminary in different leadership roles. In 2001, the Chair of the U.S. Bishops’ Committee on Priestly Formation invited him to serve on the drafting committee of the *Program of Priestly Formation* (5th edition), a document which guides U.S. seminaries, now in its 6th edition.

In July 2001, the monks of Mount Angel elected Abbot Nathan as their 10th Abbot. Taking the abbatial motto, “Serve the Lord with Joy,” Abbot Nathan guided Mount Angel through one of the most difficult times for the Church with the abuse crisis. He established the Office of Child Protection and the Abbey Foundation of Oregon to ensure the financial vitality of Mount Angel. Abbot Nathan met these hard times not by simply maintaining but by actively growing the good at Mount Angel. He established the Seminary Benefit Dinner in 2004 and initiated major beautification efforts on the Hilltop, including the construction of the Seminary’s Annunciation building in 2006 and the Bell Tower of the Visitation in 2007.

After retiring in 2009, Abbot Nathan served as the beloved pastor of St. Agatha Parish in Portland until 2018. In his final years at Mount Angel, he used his gifts for art and beauty through his roles as curator of the Abbey’s Art Collection and chair of the Arts and Environment Committee.

Abbot Nathan is greatly missed by the Hilltop community, his family, and friends. May he rest in the peace of Christ.

— COMPILED BY ETHAN ALANO

I N M E M O R I A M

*Monsignor J. Terrence Fitzgerald ’62**(1936–2026)*

On January 14, 2026, Msgr. J. Terrence Fitzgerald, the 5th president-rector of Mount Angel Seminary, passed away to the Lord after nearly 64 years of priestly ministry.

A Utah native, Msgr. Fitzgerald grew up in Salt Lake City and attended Judge Memorial Grammar School and High School. Following high school, he entered Mount Angel Seminary in 1954 and was among the first seminarians from the Diocese of Salt Lake City to be sent to Mount Angel.

“For me, Mount Angel was a gift, from the day I arrived. I loved the Seminary; I loved everything about formation,”

said Msgr. Fitzgerald, in an August 2022 interview for *Mount Angel Letter*. For him, the presence of the monks in the classroom and around the Hilltop was indispensable. “All of the monks were role models for me,” said Msgr. Fitzgerald. “They were also well-educated and experienced.”

Msgr. Fitzgerald was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Salt Lake City on May 12, 1962. Following ordination, he earned a master’s in social work from The Catholic University of America. Returning to the Diocese of Salt Lake City, Msgr. Fitzgerald served as a pastor, director of Catholic Education, director of Catholic Charities and vicar general, gathering much administrative experience that would serve him well in his next assignment as president-rector of Mount Angel Seminary.

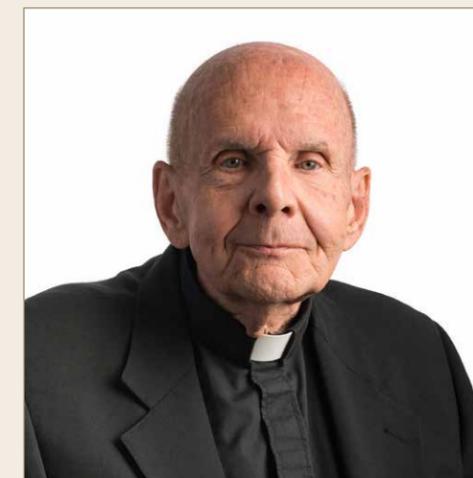
Appointed by Abbot Bonaventure Zerr, OSB, with the permission of his bishop, Bishop William Weigand, Msgr. Fitzgerald began his service as

president-rector in 1984. The late Abbot Nathan Zodrow, OSB, who was a good friend of Msgr. Fitzgerald, said that “he was warmly received by the monastic community, administration, faculty, and students.” With his skills in administration, Msgr. Fitzgerald worked tirelessly to organize the seminary administration and to strengthen its relationship with the Abbey through the involvement of more Benedictine monks on the

Seminary formation team, which he established. Abbot Nathan, who joined the formation team in 1988, recalled that “[Msgr. Fitzgerald’s] vision was explicit in everything we did: to serve the Church as a trustworthy seminary shaped by the *Program of Priestly Formation* and rooted in the Benedictine charism of the Abbey.”

The monastic and seminary communities mourn the passing of Msgr. Fitzgerald and pray for his eternal rest, that the Lord may say to him, “Well done, good and faithful servant . . . enter into the joy of your master” (Matthew 25:23).

— ETHAN ALANO





Catholic Strength in the Heart of Portland



MOUNT ANGEL
SEMINARY
BENEFIT DINNER



Seminarians, monks and guests filled the ballroom at the Hilton Portland Downtown, gathered in Christ to support and celebrate Mount Angel Seminary.

For the first time since before the pandemic, the Hilltop returned to the city on November 8, 2025, for a very successful Mount Angel Seminary Benefit Dinner. The event brought together 750 friends of the Abbey—including 102 seminarians and 20 monks—to celebrate and support priestly formation.

THE RETURN TO PORTLAND

Abbot Jeremy Driscoll, OSB, noted that while the Abbey loves hosting guests on the Hilltop, “we also want to arrange a large gathering of Catholics all at once in the heart of downtown Portland to bring the Seminary community to you.” This move proved to be a powerful affirmation of the deep ties between the Seminary and the wider community.

A FINANCIAL BLESSING

The evening was a resounding display of Catholic strength, raising a staggering \$1.2 million — surpassing the event goal by 20%. Thanks to the generosity of our benefactors, every dollar given ensures that the legacy of Mount Angel Seminary continues to flourish for generations to come.

A GROWING COMMUNITY OF SUPPORT

The event featured a beautiful mix of longtime and new friends. We welcomed new benefactors to the Seminary Benefit Dinner, ensuring a bright future for the 102 seminarians currently in formation.

SAVE THE DATE

We hope you can join us for the 2026 Seminary Benefit Dinner on Saturday, November 7, at the Hilton Portland Downtown. We could not do the Lord’s work without you!

— VICTOR MITRE



To support the Seminary, visit mountangelabbey.org/sbd

View photos from the Seminary Benefit Dinner on Flickr.





MOUNT ANGEL ABBEY WORKSHOP

Highlights Model of Synodality for International Scholars

In a polarized world, the concept of “togetherness” is frequently discussed and at times, intensely debated. The “why” often conflicts with the “how.” At Mount Angel Abbey and Seminary, togetherness is more than merely a concept or discussion point but a way of life. From September 29 to October 3, Christian scholars from around the world gathered to think with “the mind of Christ,” (citing 1 Corinthians 2:16) sharing scholarly work that engages spiritual reflections for practical application. Faculty from Mount Angel Seminary joined with scholars from leading institutions, including Duke University, Boston College, Providence College, The Catholic University of America, the University of Exeter, and several others, to reflect on “Trinitarian Ontology,” exploring the centrality of the Eucharist and the Trinity as the source and form/shape of the Synodal

Church, in an effort to enrich scholarly discussion but also applied in everyday life. The week-long workshop featured a Mass and remarks from Cardinal Mario Grech, Secretary General of the General Secretariat of the Synod at the Vatican, who participated in all of the Workshop’s discussions.

Created by Abbot Jeremy, Abbot of Mount Angel Abbey and Chancellor of Mount Angel Seminary, in discussions with Cardinal Grech and Monsignor Piero Coda, Secretary General of the International Theological Commission for the Vatican, the Workshop focused on five focal points: the Mystical Identity of the Church as communion, the decisive mystagogical significance of Christian initiation, the formation of the synodal Church in light of the Eucharist and Trinity, the practice of conversation

in the Spirit, and the sacramental efficacy for the evangelization of the synodal Church. Enriching discussions and reflections about morality, symbolism, literature, and other topics offered the basis for reflection among the invited group, representing different theological disciplines. Each session began with a short theological contribution from one of the participants followed by a period of prayerful silence, allowing the participants to listen and think deeply before sharing their reflections on the topic.

“What’s in the middle is the Holy Spirit,” shared Abbot Jeremy, reflecting and quoting the third chapter of the Rule of St. Benedict guiding the spirit of the gathering. He stated that for this reason, Mount Angel Abbey and Seminary is the perfect space for deep, varied conversation:

“As often as anything important is to be done in the monastery, the abbot shall call the whole community together and himself explain what the business is; and after hearing the advice of the brothers, let him ponder it and follow what he judges the wiser course. The reason why we have said all should be called for counsel is that the Lord often reveals what is better to the younger. The brothers, for their part, are to express their opinions with all humility and not presume to defend their own views obstinately In the monastery no one is to follow his own heart’s desire.”

Holly Taylor Coolman from Providence College, expressed her enthusiasm for the Workshop, stating that “there is consistent interest in making sense of connections.”

Joy surrounded the conversations, with several stating how uplifted they were to participate in such a creative, rich model, necessary for current society. In lives rooted in the guidance of Christ’s teachings, one contributor proclaimed the originality of the event, categorizing the Workshop as a “cross between a retreat and academic conference.”

At the beginning of the Fellowship of Scholars, Cardinal Grech expressed his gratitude to Mount

Angel Abbey and Seminary for “having chosen to dedicate this International Seminar to the theme of synodality in the life and vision of the Church,” calling this initiative both “precious and indeed necessary in the current phase of implementation of the 2021–2024 Synodal Process.” At the beginning of Mass for the Solemnity of the Archangels, Mount Angel Abbey’s patronal feast day and the first day of the Fellowship of Scholars, he described the Abbey as a true “spiritual oasis.” At the conclusion of the week, he shared his experience at the Abbey that, “the monks have so much to share, both from their reading and their own experiences. It is a place of beauty and beauty is a way that leads to God and it’s also a place of silence. Nowadays, we lack silence. But in silence, we can listen, really hear what the Spirit is trying to convey.”



The Fellowship of Scholars, gathered in the Holy Spirit, is a prophetic sign to the Church and the world of God bringing together unity in diversity for the proclamation of the Gospel. As Cardinal Grech shared in his opening remarks, “the Church is the Temple of the Holy Spirit in which all those anointed by the Spirit at Baptism (and Confirmation) are enlightened by the Spirit of truth in order to contribute to the faithful reception of the Gospel in the various contexts of ongoing world history.”

As many currently feel a shifting of values, moral integrity and intellectual curiosity around the world, Christian scholars at Mount Angel Abbey and Seminary display, through their rich conversations and dedication to synodality, that the timeless example of Christ continues to guide and shape our lives.

— DR. AMANDA STAGGENBORG

Looking Ahead:

SEMINARY LAUNCHES COLLABORATIVE MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

With \$10 Million Grant

BY DR. AMANDA STAGGENBORG

In December of 2025, Mount Angel Abbey announced a grant of \$10 million through the Lilly Endowment Pathways for Tomorrow Initiative to coordinate a collaborative model of priestly mentorship able to be replicated nationally. This model addresses the challenges that transitional deacons and newly ordained priests face as they transition from the seminary into the reality of fulltime parish ministry.

According to the 2025 Catholic Project's National Study for Catholic Priests, more priests are experiencing burnout and feel greater responsibilities than in previous generations, especially in the first 5 years of priesthood. While this study acknowledges that this varies among dioceses, the need for collaborative preparation was clear among many as "there is a gap between pastoral aspirations and institutional realization."

Mount Angel Seminary will lead the new program, which launches in the fall of 2026, in partnership with collaborating institutions, including:

- Saint Mary Seminary (Cleveland, OH)
- Saint Vincent de Paul Regional Seminary (Boynton Beach, FL)
- The Saint Paul Seminary (Saint Paul, MN)
- USML Mundelein Seminary (Mundelein, IL)
- Saint Charles Borromeo Seminary (Philadelphia, PA)
- The Seminary Formation Council

Dr. Amanda Staggenborg, Director of Communications for Mount Angel Abbey, interviewed Fr. Jeff Eirvin, President-Rector of Mount Angel Seminary, to discuss the significance of the grant and how it could significantly increase the positive generational impact of priestly formation and readiness.

DR. STAGGENBORG: "Why is this program essential to addressing current challenges that many new priests face?"

FR. EIRVIN: "A first-parish experience is so important. It is always the first pastor who could determine the course of someone's priesthood. Parish ministry is changing and there are more demands that are being put on the pastor. Often times newly ordained clerics are placed right into that environment without the needed accompaniment and support system. So, we want to set up that transition so that they have every needed resource as they transition into fulltime parish ministry. And now, more than ever, with the demands, it's not as it used to be where newly ordained would be at a parish as a parochial vicar for many years allowing time for transition before taking on the weight of being a pastor."

DR. STAGGENBORG: "How would the grant specifically help with this?"

FR. EIRVIN: "It would help us here at Mount Angel Seminary to be able to mentor experienced pastors to be able to accompany newly ordained through the transition from seminary into active parish ministry. It also enables large-scale collaboration with seminaries and ministries nationwide. The mentorship program would be scalable for different regions, so that it is not a one-size fits all

approach but allows for various dioceses to use something that could be helpful without needing to replicate what we are doing. Through this particular grant, there is also an exciting matching fund opportunity for donors to help establish a sustainable endowment. We are building a scalable model that can be adopted throughout the Church."

DR. STAGGENBORG: "Is there a difference between the Seminary's current program and the future launch of this model?"

FR. EIRVIN: "Looking at the name of the new "Vocational Synthesis Stage" answers this question best. This new approach serves to "synthesize" all of the formation that already takes place from entry into the seminary to ordination and into parish ministry. This strengthens Mount Angel Seminary's program into a more cohesive process. My hope is that we receive feedback from the pastors and lay parishioners who are working with the men so that parishes can help strengthen our formation process. This is a wonderful way for the sending dioceses and the Seminary to grow together."

Note: Fr. Eirvin emphasizes that this work would have been necessary and timely without the grant, but the grant assists in the launch of a larger, collaborative relationship that can be regionalized.



Fr. Jeff Eirvin
President-Rector
Mount Angel Seminary



Fr. Matt Libra

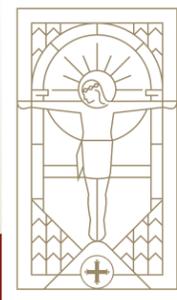
“A CALL TO NAZARETH”

Coming to join the staff at Mount Angel Seminary is an experience of hope and gratitude. It felt like a call to Nazareth, to live a hidden life, to return to a place of silence as St. Paul VI shared when he visited there. When I found out I would be joining the Propaedeutic men in their journey, St. Joseph immediately came to mind—he was called away from a life of his own to live with and accompany the Christ as he grew in wisdom, age and grace before God and man.

Our good Lord is impressing upon me that, like St. Joseph, I get the privilege of accompanying young men who have heard him calling them to some unique mission in his Kingdom. These men are giving themselves so generously to Jesus' call, and God wants to give them a guardian, a foster father to help them grow in wisdom, age and grace. Now, none of these guys is the Christ and I am no St. Joseph. I won't know all the answers or all the right things to do, yet God gives a great gift in calling me to step away from what I have been doing, to come and live with them and father them as they offer their hearts to Jesus and he makes their hearts more like unto his own.

I am deeply humbled to receive this call and look to St. Joseph to show me the way to walk well with the Father's beloved sons. St. Joseph, as we enter our “Nazareth,” teach us to wonder at what the Father is doing. Pray for us to be filled with hope at all the unexpected movements of the Spirit. Guide us to respond generously in gratitude for the gift of Jesus' call.

— FR. MATT LIBRA, COORDINATOR OF THE PROPAEDEUTIC STAGE



ATTENDING TO THE NEEDS *of the* FLOCK

When I was nine years old, a seed of the Gospel was planted in me by the 1977 hymn with the poignant refrain, “Whatsoever you do to the least of my people, that you do unto me.”

I heard the tune during release time at my local Catholic parish, where our teacher had our group of nine-year-olds sing it together. I didn't know the words came from Matthew 25, but the experience of singing it caused me to understand something definitive about Jesus. My nine-year-old self felt a yearning to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, and shelter those without homes.

Of course, I had no idea how to do any of that and told no one how I was feeling—such a desire wasn't “cool” by any standard of my peers. Thanks be to God that his divine seeds have tenacious roots, because the vocation to serve Christ by caring for those in need survived my self-centered and tempestuous teenage years, and flourished in me as a young adult.

As a newly married man who recently graduated from college, I began volunteering in various parish pastoral ministries, visiting the sick in hospitals and in their homes, teaching in the parish process now known as OCIA, and assisting with the parish prison ministry. Recognizing the need to improve as a servant of the Lord, I pursued a Master's degree in Pastoral Theology from Loyola University, New Orleans, which set me on a course of professional service in the Church, first as a lay pastoral associate and later as a deacon. Eventually, I returned to school and earned a Doctor of Ministry (D.Min) degree from Mount Angel.

Today, I have the distinct privilege of teaching Pastoral Theology to seminarians at Mount Angel.

So what exactly is “Pastoral Theology?” The term “pastoral” comes from the Latin word for “shepherd,” and refers to the way a shepherd cares for his flock. Jesus called himself the “Good Shepherd,” and so the discipline of Pastoral Theology concerns the way we

care for others, drawing from Jesus' own life as “one who lays down his life for the sheep” (John 10:11).

You can think of Pastoral Theology as a form of *applied* theology.

Fr. Kenneth Baker, S.J., supplies a concrete definition of Pastoral Theology that I like. He writes, “It is a practical science which tries to apply the revealed truths of our faith, and the directives of the Magisterium, to the problems of daily living.” Pastoral Theology helps those who care for the sheep

to skillfully and artfully attend to the needs of the flock, so that the flock (and the pastor) may attain eternal life.

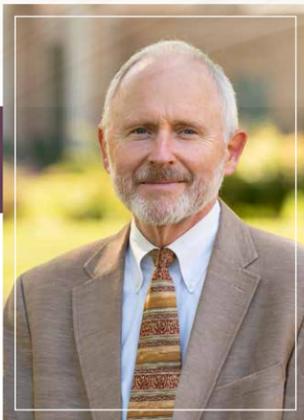
For seminarians, Pastoral Theology encompasses caring for both soul and body. They will learn about conferring sacraments, preaching, and teaching in ways that evangelize. Their Pastoral Theology will grow out of an “ecclesiology of communion,” a deep sense that the Church is Christ's body, nourished and sustained by Jesus' self-offering love on the Cross and the power of his Resurrection from the dead.

In this way, Pastoral Theology is truly a Eucharistic discipline. For me, it powerfully embodies Christ's words, “Whatsoever you do to the least of my people, that you do unto me.” (Matthew 25:39).

— DEACON SCOTT PEARHILL



Deacon Scott Pearhill

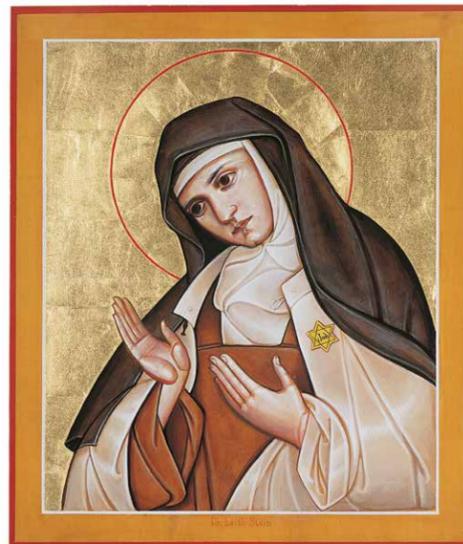


DR. JOSEPH PAPA'S NEW BOOK

Edith Stein's Freedom and Grace: A Companion

In her Canonization Mass, Pope St. John Paul II described St. Theresa Benedicta of the Cross, born

Edith Stein (1891 – 1942), as someone whose “*mind never tired of searching and her heart always yearned for hope,*” who realized that “*only those who commit themselves to the love of Christ become truly free*” (Rome, October 11, 1998). Scholars in the English-speaking world continue to unpack the thought and significance of this 20th century philosopher and Discalced Carmelite nun as they translate her works from the original German. Dr. Joseph Papa, Associate Professor of Philosophy at Mount Angel Seminary, has significantly contributed to this scholarship through the upcoming publication of his new book, *Edith Stein's Freedom and Grace: A Companion*.



philosophical language, even more curious since Stein wrote this work in 1921 prior to her baptism.

Dr. Papa acknowledges that reading Stein is difficult because she wrote and thought as a phenomenologist. Stein herself was a research assistant and collaborator with Edmund Husserl (1859 – 1938), the founder of phenomenology. But Dr. Papa sees *Freedom and Grace* as “low hanging fruit into Stein’s thought.” He says that while Stein employs philosophical language in *Freedom and Grace*, the experiences of Christian life that she articulates “are so clear that I think this book is going to be a really good book for people to read to understand Stein’s way of thinking . . . and should open up real possibilities that people might be able to reach Stein.”

In his commentary on *Freedom and Grace*, Dr. Papa explores what this work says about Stein’s intellectual development since she wrote it during her conversion process rather than later in her Christian life. “The assumption is she started with Aquinas from zero,” says Dr. Papa. “She didn’t start from zero. She started from a very thoroughly articulate series of reflections on Christianity.”

Bloomsbury Publishing will publish *Edith Stein's Freedom and Grace: A Companion* in September 2026.

— ETHAN ALANO

Edith Stein icon written by Br. Claude Lane, OSB

DEACON OWEN CUMMINGS RETIRES

Embracing the Immensity of God

“I think so much in life has the sense of a gift about it, rather than something you’ve earned,” says Deacon Owen Cummings, who retired from Mount Angel Seminary in May 2025 after thirty years of generous service. Every morning, he begins his day with a verse from the Psalms: “As I awake, I am content in your presence” (Psalm 17:15), reminding himself of the divine presence that he calls “the immensity of God.”

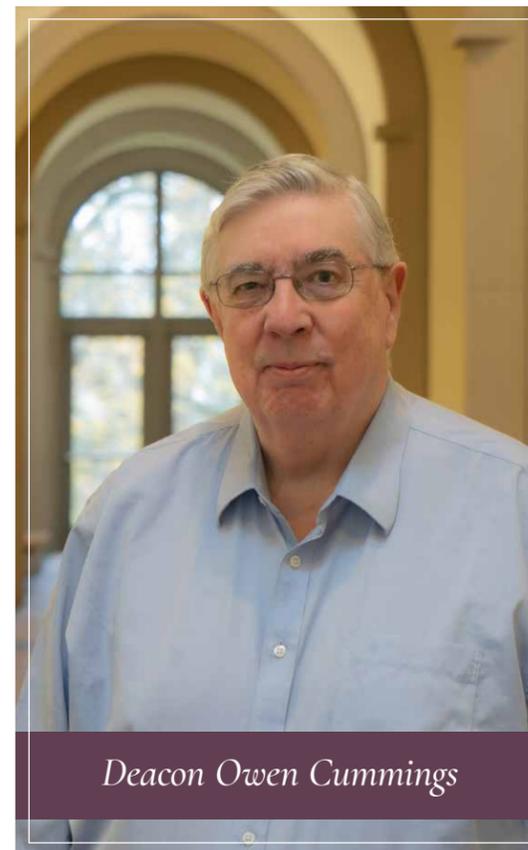
In the summer of 1995, Deacon Cummings met two Mount Angel monks, Fr. Paschal Cheline, OSB, and Fr. Jeremy Driscoll, OSB, at a conference of The Society for Catholic Liturgy in Salt Lake City, where he was working and living at the time. Fr. Paschal later called Deacon Cummings and asked if he would consider a job at Mount Angel Seminary, inviting him to contribute to the renewal of the Seminary’s curriculum centered on Communion Ecclesiology. He accepted the job offer from Msgr. Patrick Brennan, the President-Rector, and began commuting back and forth from Mount Angel to Salt Lake City to not uproot his family.

He received permission to teach at Mount Angel from his diocesan bishop, the late George Niederauer, who said to him, “Well, go for a couple of years, Owen. See how it works out.” Thirty years later, it’s safe to say that it worked out very well.

Deacon Cummings has greatly appreciated “the exchange in the classroom,” seeing each hour of class as “an opportunity to have *real* conversation with the students.” He sees this exchange as something “that stimulates and invites people to question, not in a negative way, but seeking understanding.” In his three decades at Mount Angel Seminary, Deacon Cummings has essentially taught every course of systematic theology, “aspects of Christian doctrine that have always been close to my heart.”

In his retirement, Deacon Cummings is spending more quality time with his wife of 52 years, Cathy, and supporting her in these later years of life. He continues to study and read in gratitude to God for the gift of faith he has received.

— ETHAN ALANO



Deacon Owen Cummings



At the Service of the Word

DEACON SHAWN KEOUGH, PHD

On October 25, 2025, Mount Angel Seminary's academic dean, Dr. Shawn Keough, was one of five men ordained a permanent deacon for the Archdiocese of Portland in Oregon by Archbishop Alexander K. Sample at St. Mary's Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. Mount Angel Abbey and Seminary was well-represented with Abbot Jeremy Driscoll, OSB, Fr. Jeff Eirvin, and priest-monks and Seminary priest faculty concelebrating the liturgy and faculty and seminarians in the congregation. Deacon Keough's wife, Dr. Myrna Keough, and their five children showed their support from the first pews.

This was one of the largest ordination classes for the archdiocese in years, a positive sign of men responding to God's call to serve the Church. The other men ordained included Deacon Rolando Moreno, a former adjunct professor at Mount Angel Seminary, Deacon Eddie Caudel, Deacon Randel Livingood and Deacon Brian Suda.

In his homily, Archbishop Sample focused on the deacon as a servant of God's Word. "This is what is greatly needed in the Church today," he said, "a bold and loving, compassionate, patient proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in our world today." This proclamation is not limited to the deacon's proclamation of the Gospel in the Mass, but it extends into everyday life, wherever the deacon may find himself.

Archbishop Sample has assigned Deacon Keough to St. Mary Parish in Mt. Angel and prison ministry, a ministry close to Deacon Keough's heart that he served as a layman. He preached his first homily at St. Mary on the Solemnity of Christ the King. Reflecting on a passage from St. Luke's Passion narrative, he said, "When we look at the cross with the eyes of faith, we see what the good thief saw. We see the victory of our King."

Reflecting on his ministry, Deacon Keough says that "being a deacon is one way I can respond to Jesus' call to love and serve those most in need, 'the least of my brothers and sisters.'"

— ETHAN ALANO

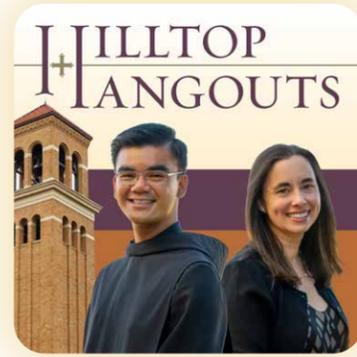
Question Box

When visitors come to Mount Angel, we often receive many questions that cover a wide range of topics. Here are some common ones: 1) *What is this place?* 2) *What do the monks do all day?* 3) *What is the difference between a monk and a priest?*

You might have these same questions or other ones, and we look forward to answering them in the **Question Box** section of the *Mount Angel Letter*. This was a feature of the earliest editions of the *Mount Angel Letter*, and we are eager to bring this treasure back for our readers.

If you have a question that you would like to submit, email communications@mtangel.edu with the phrase “**Question Box**” in the subject line.

Abbot Jeremy or another monk of Mount Angel will answer some of these submitted questions in subsequent issues of the *Mount Angel Letter*.



A New Podcast from Mount Angel

Fr. Anselm Flores’s opening line builds excitement for Mount Angel Abbey’s new podcast: “Welcome to Hilltop Hangouts, where we have spiritual conversations exploring life at Mount Angel Abbey.” He and Dr. Anna Petrin, professor of theology at Mount Angel Seminary, are the co-hosts of Hilltop Hangouts, a video and audio podcast that launched in December 2025. It is a collaboration between Mount Angel Abbey and Mater Dei Radio.

Fr. Anselm and Dr. Petrin record the podcast in the Spiritual Ministries office in the Saint Benedict Guesthouse and Retreat Center, a fitting place since they view the podcast itself as a spiritual ministry. “I’m imagining we get to offer a little retreat for folks who happen to be in their car or who happen to be doing anything. We get to open up the conversations we’re having up here and invite people in,” said Dr. Petrin in the pilot episode. Continuing that thought, Fr. Anselm said, “This is hospitality. Join us at table and just in good spiritual conversations about values, about life, spiritual topics, interesting topics, liturgy.”

While Fr. Anselm and Dr. Petrin are the main co-hosts, they welcome guests, both familiar Hilltop faces and visiting lecturers, scholars and artists through the Mount Angel Institute. In December, Fr. John Paul Le, OSB, joined the show to speak about Advent, while a later episode featured Fr. Teresio Caldwell, OSB, speaking about Christmas.

Hilltop Hangouts is available on all major podcasting platforms, including Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Amazon Music and YouTube.

— ETHAN ALANO



LISTEN



WATCH

PLANNING FOR ETERNITY

A Legacy of Prayer, Formation & Hospitality

What does Mount Angel mean to you?

Whatever brought you here, you have become part of a legacy that has endured for over 140 years—and that, with your help, will endure for generations to come. A planned gift is one way to make that support everlasting.

Joining the Legacy Society

Legacy Society members have included Mount Angel Abbey in their estate plans through:

- A bequest in a will or living trust
- A charitable gift annuity
- A beneficiary designation on a retirement account, life insurance policy or bank account
- A gift of appreciated stock
- A gift from a Donor-Advised Fund (DAF)

Your gift sustains the prayer of the monks, the formation of future priests and the care of the Hilltop.

Your Next Step

Request your free estate planning guide—a simple resource to help you think through your goals. No obligation, no pressure.

Have you already included Mount Angel Abbey in your estate plan?

Please let us know so we can thank you and welcome you into the Legacy Society.

We would love to hear from you

All conversations are held in the strictest confidence.

Sarah Jordan
Planned Giving Manager
971.343.2728
sarah.jordan@mtangel.edu

Susan Gallagher
Planned Giving Manager
503.312.5425
susan.gallagher@mtangel.edu



Learn More
Scan the QR Code or visit
mountangelabbey.org/planned-giving

Connect With Us



MOUNT ANGEL ABBEY & SEMINARY
BOX 497, SAINT BENEDICT, OR 97373-0497

NONPROFIT ORG.
US POSTAGE
PAID
MOUNT ANGEL
ABBAY

JOIN OUR MAILING LIST



mountangelabbey.org/update

GET THE LATEST
MOUNT ANGEL NEWS



mountangelabbey.org/news

ATTEND UPCOMING EVENTS



mountangelabbey.org/join-us

SEND PRAYER & MASS REQUESTS



mountangelabbey.org/oremus

FOLLOW OUR
SOCIAL MEDIA & PODCAST



MOUNT ANGEL
ABBAY & SEMINARY



MOUNTANGELABBAY.ORG

JOIN THE MONKS OF MOUNT ANGEL ABBEY
for MASS AND THE LITURGY OF THE HOURS

WEEKDAYS

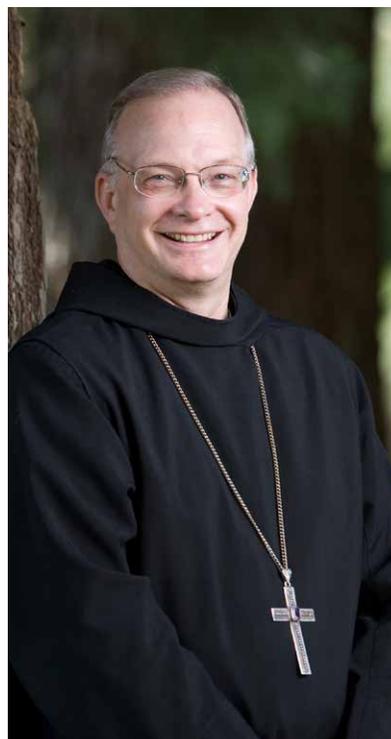
Vigils: 5:25 am
Lauds: 6:35 am
Mass: 8:00 am
Midday Prayer: Noon
Vespers: 5:20 pm
Compline: 7:30 pm

SUNDAYS & SOLEMNITIES

Vigils: 7:30 pm (Saturday)
Lauds: 6:40 am
Mass: 9:00 am
Midday Prayer: Noon
Vespers: 5:20 pm
Compline: 8:05 pm

MOUNTANGELABBAY.ORG/LIVE-STREAM

WAS THERE A MOMENT AT MOUNT
ANGEL THAT CHANGED YOUR LIFE?



Many recall particular monks, spiritual directors or teachers whose words and presence made all the difference.

If mentors at Mount Angel have helped you or a loved one to grow in new ways and opened doors to God, please consider planning a gift or bequest to honor them. That way, others will have life-changing opportunities as well.

For information, contact
Sarah Jordan at 971.343.2728 or
Susan Gallagher at 503.312.5425
plannedgiving@mtangel.edu
mtangel.giftlegacy.com

*Please note, when writing your will, please leave bequests and other estate gifts to:
The Abbey Foundation of Oregon
Box 497, Saint Benedict, OR 97373-0497
(Tax ID number: 04-3703021)*

Abbot Nathan Zodrow, OSB
1952 – 2025