



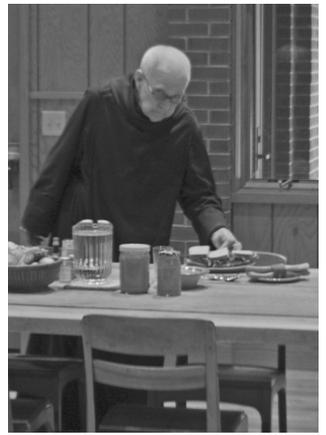
Abbey Letter  
no. 268  
Christmas 2016



Abbot Andrew



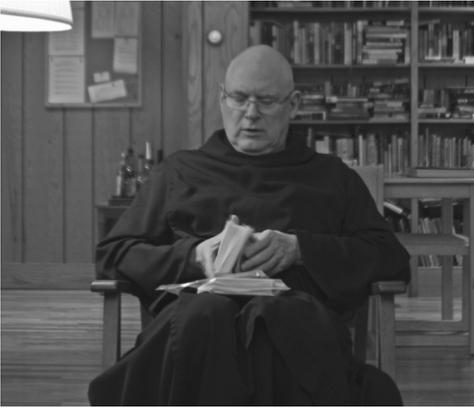
Prior Aelred



Fr. Jude

*The monks of St. Gregory's Abbey wish you  
a Merry Christmas and a joyful 2017.*

Fr. William



Br. Martin



Br. Abraham



Br. Armand



## NOTES

Many of the monastery's buildings had extensive roof repairs this past fall – Michigan winters are hard on roofs.

The Rt. Rev. Wayne Smith, bishop of the Diocese of Missouri, was with us August 1st – 8th.

A group from St. Andrew's Church in Valparaiso, Indiana was here for a quiet day August 4th. St. Andrew's is one of the churches where our monks first ministered after returning to the United States from the United Kingdom at the beginning of World War II, and our first monastery was a house owned by St. Andrew's Church.

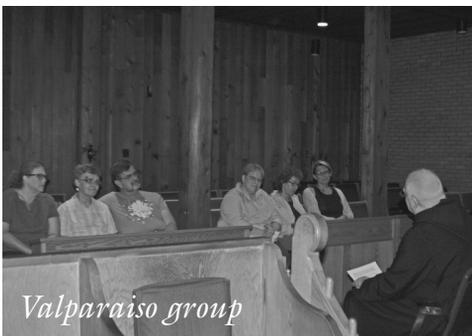
Abbot Gregory Polan of Conception Abbey in Conception, Missouri was elected abbot primate by the world congress of abbots meeting in Rome on September 10th. Abbot Gregory led our community retreat here at St. Gregory's Abbey December 1st – 4th 2010. Although Benedictine abbeys are independent communities, the abbot primate performs an important pastoral function.

Abbot Andrew led a retreat for the Diocese of Michigan's "Exploring Your Spiritual Journey" program at Emrich Retreat Center in Brighton, Michigan September 9th – 10th. The program is part of a year-long discernment process for people considering lay or ordained ministries in the Episcopal Church. He later traveled to Aliquippa, Pennsylvania to serve as spiritual director for the Community of Celebration September 19th – 21st.

Members of the Order of Jesus Christ Reconciler were with us September 16th – 18th. The ecumenical religious order has a house in Chicago (Community of the Holy Trinity) and is forming a house in Detroit.

Fr. William preached at his niece Emma Horn's ordination to the presbyterate of the Presbyterian Church (USA) at First Presbyterian Church in Newark, Delaware September 25th.

Br. Abraham was at All Saint's Church in East Lansing, Michigan September 25th speaking on the topic of Benedictine Hospitality.



# Reintroducing Evagrius Ponticus

The past is filled with people who have had a great impact on our present time but are not as well-known as they should be, given the amount of influence they have had. They suffer from what is known as the “Todd Rundgren Syndrome,” named after a musician who has had a wide influence on current popular music but is barely known outside his fan base. One of these people who are not as well known in Western society as they should be is Evagrius Ponticus.

Evagrius was born in AD 345 in the town of Ibora, which was located in the Roman province of Helenopontus (his name means “Evagrius of Pontus”). The location is now in modern day Turkey. His parents were Christians, and he became a deacon in Constantinople. During his time in the imperial capital, he liked to dress in fancy clothing and flirt with women, some of whom were married. In time he became aware that his lifestyle was not productive of the sort of person he wanted to become, so he moved to Jerusalem and eventually became a monk in AD 383. He soon moved to Egypt to live in the famous monastic communities there, and died in AD 399.

He was more highly educated than many of the monks in Egypt at the time, and he wrote some theological works that are now considered quasi-heretical. He was writing at a time when orthodox Christian theology had not been as well-defined as it is now, and he was merely trying to explain theological concepts in a way he thought helpful to his intended readers, but because of the accusations of heresy, these theological works were removed from many libraries and lost to Western Christians.

Besides these troublesome theological books, he also wrote some other works dealing with the more mundane topic of monastic life, and these have been more accessible to us because they were treasured by the monastic communities that had copies of them. They are still treasured by monastic communities because of their insight into (and concrete suggestions to help correct) recurring problematic thought patterns experienced by nuns and monks. These insights into thought patterns mark Evagrius as an important early psychologist. They are also the reasons he should be better known now than he is, because his insights and helpful suggestions hold true not only for nuns and monks in the fourth century Egyptian desert; they are also helpful for us now, whether or not we live in monasteries.

The psychological insights of Evagrius stem from the idea that recurring thought patterns greatly influence our actions. Therefore, a person who wants to act in a loving, peaceful way needs to replace his greedy, self-centered thoughts with loving, peaceful thoughts. That is harder than it sounds. In order to do it, one must first be aware of one’s thought patterns – something of which we are rarely aware. So, the first step is to objectively observe one’s thoughts for a period of time in order to see what is going on inside our heads. After we have come to know our thought patterns, we realize that some are helpful (love, compassion, gratitude, etc.) and so we want to foster them, and others are harmful (judgmentalism, jealousy, bitterness, etc.) and so we want to lessen their frequency. Fostering the helpful ones is the easier task: whenever they pop up, dwell on them. Lessening the harmful thoughts is the difficult task. Evagrius suggests certain scripture verses to repeat to ourselves whenever these harmful thoughts pop up. Eventually the scripture verses will crowd out and replace the harmful thoughts. His

suggestion does indeed work, but it is slow and difficult work. That is ok – any lessening of harmful thoughts, no matter how small and hard won, is change for the better. As our thoughts slowly become more loving and peaceful, so do our actions. One important thing to remember is the fact that having harmful thoughts is not sinful or shameful or even our fault, but willfully grooming them and acting upon them is.

Evagrius came up with a list of eight major harmful thoughts (*logismoi* in Greek) as a diagnostic tool for discerning which areas of our own thought patterns we need to work on: **gluttony, greed, acedia, sorrow, lust, anger, vainglory, and pride**. It is noticeable that some of these harmful thoughts are about good things such as food, money, and sex – the problem comes when we are obsessed with them to the point that our lives are controlled solely by trying to acquire more of them than we need or even more than we can really enjoy. Sorrow is also on the list, but it is in the sense of self-pity, rather than depression (which should be taken care of by a professional). Acedia is the one item on the list whose name is least known to us nowadays but is perhaps most experienced by us; it is a combination of sloth, loathing, boredom, and torpor. Maybe the best word we have for it now is “ennui.” Basically, it is a crippling disgust of one’s current situation, no matter how good and normal that situation is (being in truly unhealthy surroundings is another case). In other words, it is an angry desire to be anywhere but where you are, doing anything but what you are doing, and being with anyone but whom you are with. Changing one’s situation is not a cure for acedia, because unless you yourself change, you are bringing the acedia with you. A cure for acedia common to many monastic elders is not to change your surroundings, but to learn to see the inherent beauty in them and be grateful for them.

If these “Eight Logismoi” look a little familiar, it is because many of them are found in the list of “Seven Deadly Sins” which became popular in the centuries after Evagrius (the new list became more popular, not the sins; they have always been a hit). Don’t try to figure out which of the two *logismoi* are combined in order to bring the list from eight to seven – they are a reworking, rather than a condensation. One might get the idea that if people were coming up with lists of sins, then they were unhealthily preoccupied with sin. Actually it is the other way around: Evagrius was healthily interested in helping people live full and joyful lives free from the bondage of unhealthy and misguided attachments to the otherwise good and beautiful things of this world.

If you are interested in learning more about Evagrius, there are several books about his life and work. Three of the most popular in our library here at the monastery are: *Talking Back*, an English translation by David Brakke of Evagrius’ book *Antirrhetikos* from Cistercian Publications; *Praktikos*, an English translation by John Eudes Bamberger OCSO of Evagrius’ *Chapters On Prayer* from Cistercian Publications; and *Thoughts Matter* by Mary Margaret Funk OSB, a survey of writings on the “Eight Logismoi” by John Cassian (AD 360 – AD 435), a slightly younger near contemporary of Evagrius, from Continuum Publishing Company. Of course, you can always Google both Evagrius and John Cassian – there are many websites devoted to their teachings. Learning from these almost forgotten pillars of Christian life can be a rewarding experience. And while you are at it, look up Todd Rundgren.

— Br. Abraham

## Books from St. Gregory's Abbey

### **Singing God's Praises** (1998)

*history of the community, select Abbey Letter articles, photographs*

\$20.00 Please send \_\_\_\_\_ copies. \$ \_\_\_\_\_

### **Come Let Us Adore** (2011)

*select Abbey Letter Articles from 1999 to 2011 (companion book to Singing God's Praises)*

\$12.00 Please send \_\_\_\_\_ copies. \$ \_\_\_\_\_

### **Tools For Peace** (2007)

*Abbot Andrew's reflections on St. Benedict and René Girard*

\$24.00 Please send \_\_\_\_\_ copies. \$ \_\_\_\_\_

### **Born in the Darkest Time of Year** (2004)

*15 Christmas stories by Abbot Andrew*

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### **Creatures We Dream of Knowing** (2011)

*fantasy stories by Abbot Andrew*

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### **From Beyond to Here** (2012)

*more stories by Abbot Andrew*

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### **The Forest of Windellynn** (2015)

*fantasy novel by Abbot Andrew*

\$10.00 Please send \_\_\_\_\_ copies. \$ \_\_\_\_\_

### **Moving and Resting in God's Desire: A Spirituality of Peace** (2016)

*Abbot Andrew's thoughts on cultivating peace using Christian practices and the ideas of René Girard*

\$20.00 Please send \_\_\_\_\_ copies. \$ \_\_\_\_\_

### **Seven Times A Day I Praise You**

*Br. Martin's review of personal daily prayer books*

\$3.00 Please send \_\_\_\_\_ copies. \$ \_\_\_\_\_

### **St. Gregory's Abbey and Benedictine Monasticism**

*A survey of Benedictine monasticism and how it is lived at St. Gregory's*

\$3.00 Please send \_\_\_\_\_ copies. \$ \_\_\_\_\_

All of the above except for **Singing God's Praises**, **Born in the Darkest Time of Year**, **Seven Times A Day I Praise You**, and **St. Gregory's Abbey and Benedictine Monasticism** are available in ebook formats. To download, go to our website:

**[saintgregorysthreerivers.org](http://saintgregorysthreerivers.org)** and look for publications (digital).

All books may be purchased as hard copies from our website or by using this order form.

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Any payment in excess of the book price will be gratefully accepted as a gift to the abbey.  
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# 2017 Calendar

Enclosed is \$10.00 for each calendar

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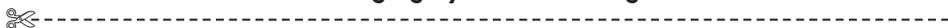
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## Daily Schedule at St. Gregory's Abbey

Weekdays	Sundays and Major Holidays
4:00 a.m. MATINS	5:30 a.m. MATINS & LAUDS
6:00 a.m. LAUDS	
8:15 a.m. TERCE	8:30 a.m. TERCE
	EUCCHARIST
11:30 a.m. SEXT	noon SEXT & NONE
2:00 p.m. NONE	
5:00 p.m. VESPERS	5:00 p.m. VESPERS
	followed by meditation
7:45 p.m. COMPLINE	7:45 p.m. COMPLINE
(on Tuesdays and Thursdays, COMPLINE is prayed privately)	

## CONTACTING THE ABBEY

**Mailing address** –  
St. Gregory's Abbey  
56500 Abbey Road  
Three Rivers, MI 49093

**Telephone** –  
269-244-5893

9:30am - 11:15am or 2:30pm - 4:15pm Eastern Time Monday through Saturday  
(please do not telephone at other times or on Sundays or holidays)

**E-mail** –

**Guest reservations and information** –  
[guestmaster@saintgregorysthreerivers.org](mailto:guestmaster@saintgregorysthreerivers.org)

**Mailing list** –  
[office@saintgregorysthreerivers.org](mailto:office@saintgregorysthreerivers.org)

**Abbot Andrew** –  
[abbot@saintgregorysthreerivers.org](mailto:abbot@saintgregorysthreerivers.org)

**Information about becoming a monk or participating in the July Program** –  
[novicemaster@saintgregorysthreerivers.org](mailto:novicemaster@saintgregorysthreerivers.org)

**Books and calendars may be ordered, prayers requested, and donations made at our website** –  
[www.saintgregorysthreerivers.org](http://www.saintgregorysthreerivers.org)

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