

GESTA MONASTICA

NEWS FROM THE ABBEY OF NEW CLAIRVAUX

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Ovila Chapter House – The Next Phase

Another \$500,000 will allow us to begin!

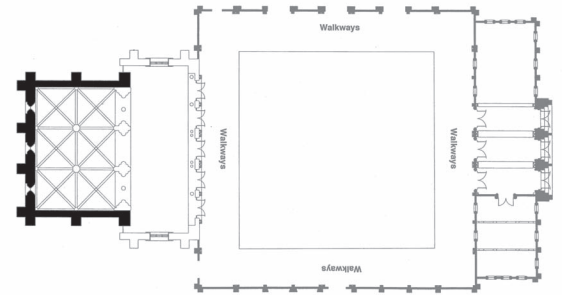


What a breathtaking view—the exterior of the Ovila Chapter House. This extraordinary accomplishment is a tribute to the years of planning and hard work by so many people—including our team of Cistercian scholars, architects, and stone masons, our wonderful project team, and everyone who helped us reach our goal of \$3 million.

At last, our dream of resurrecting this remarkable building is in sight. In the next phase, we will finish the Chapter House interior, construct an entryway, parking area, and walkways, as well as an atrium that will protect the priceless 800-year-old stones from the effects of the weather. An additional \$3 million will allow us to complete all of this work, at which point the Chapter House will be open and ready for use.

We will begin this phase once we raise the first \$1 million of this total. And the good news is we are already halfway there. Once we raise the next \$500,000, we will break ground on this portion of the project.

Each day we move closer to achieving this next milestone. Thank you for being a part of it.



The exterior of the Chapter House as it stands today, outlined in black (above). The completion of the Chapter House, Atrium, and hardscape elements will be constructed in Phase Two as shown in gray.

Welcome to New Members of the Ovila Legati

From the first moment we began to share the dream of rebuilding the Ovila Chapter House, a key part of our success has been a special group called the Ovila Legati. The Legati act as ambassadors to help promote the Sacred Stones project in their respective areas. We are gratified and pleased that Professor Michael Noone and Harry S. Parker III have accepted the Abbot's invitation to join this group.

*Professor Michael Noone,
Georgetown School of Law*

Professor Noone has a very special connection to New Clairvaux, as his father, Michael Noone, lived at the monastery as an oblate from 1967-1990. A resident of Santa Ana, the elder Michael Noone had traveled the long distance to Vina regularly for retreat for many years. After he retired, Mr. Noone, then a widower, decided to live among the community as a lay person. He built a little cottage for himself and performed errands for the monks. "They used to love to visit him because he'd offer them whiskey and they'd have to accept out of politeness," Professor Noone remembers.

Although Professor Noone and his family lived on the east coast, they'd visit New Clairvaux and stay in the guest house, where they would interact with the monks. "The grandchildren thought it was cool," he says. Professor Noone's father eventually took preliminary vows, and continued to live at Vina until his peaceful death.



Prof. Michael Noone with his father.

When they were dating, Professor Noone and his wife Ann often visited the Cloisters in New York City. Since that time they have shared an affinity for Cistercian architecture. "We were very taken with the Sacred Stones project," he explains. "We wanted to be a part of it."

"We've really enjoyed staying in touch. We like to hear about the travails that the stones have been through. Our involvement is also a small sign of gratitude to the monks, to be part of what they are doing."

*Harry S. Parker III, Former Director
of the Fine Arts Museums
of San Francisco*

Last Christmas, Harry Parker retired after a long and esteemed career in the museum world. He joined the Fine Arts Museums in San Francisco as director in 1987 after earning

his reputation at the Dallas Museum of Art and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Not long after arriving in the Bay Area, he heard from a Cistercian abbot who very much wanted the Museums to grant hundreds of 800-year-old stones from a Spanish monastery to his community in Vina.

"As Director of the Museums I came to believe that Father Thomas was capable of the monumental task of re-erecting the Cistercian Chapter House. I recommended to the Board of Trustees that he be given the opportunity," Mr. Parker recalls. "The rest is history and a wonderful accomplishment."

Harry Parker has dedicated his life to the idea that art museums enrich people's lives, whatever their background. He believes people require stimulation in their lives that's beyond their day to day. "Something spiritual. Provocative," he explains. "A museum is the perfect vehicle for somebody to absorb information and experience it in an intuitive way. To be a museumgoer is to follow your nose, to perceive things, to challenge assumptions. It changes your whole way of seeing the world."

To that end, he is happy to have played a part in reconstructing the Ovila Chapter House. "The Sacred Stones project is one that I am proud to be associated with and to have had confidence in from the beginning."

Below, Harry Parker and Dede Wilsey view a newly-cut stone with Father Thomas.

Sacred Stones Make Debut at the New de Young

On April 6th, Dede Wilsey will host a reception in honor of Abbot Thomas Davis at the newly re-opened de Young Museum. "We are delighted that this will be our first San Francisco event," Father Thomas said. It was in Golden Gate Park, very close to the location of the new museum where the abbot, then a young monk, first saw the stones in 1955. "It is particularly fitting to be at the de Young, as it was the Fine Arts Museums that granted the stones to us. We're coming full circle."

Mrs. Wilsey, who was instrumental in building the new de Young, and her late husband Al were among the founding supporters and advisors of the Sacred Stones project more than ten years ago. "Al Wilsey was one of the first believers," Father Thomas explained. "Without Al Wilsey, there would be no Sacred Stones project."

We express deep thanks to Dede Wilsey and look forward to a wonderful event.



A Word from Abbot Thomas:

In 2005 we celebrated our community's Golden Jubilee. This momentous year gave us the opportunity to share with you, our wonderful friends, who we are, what we do, and why we do it.

The monastery is apart from the world, but it is also a part of the world. Thousands of visitors tell us they are attracted to Vina because in our Cistercian life, in our open grounds, they find an unearthly sense of peace.

Our community is fifty years old, but our tradition goes back 1500 years. To visit a Cistercian monastery in Europe, one experiences an even deeper, transformational sense of our spirituality. This is because our architecture is conducive to pure, contemplative prayer that allows a person to meet the Divine.

So many of you have shared our dream of bringing this powerful architecture to California, to create a place where pilgrims of all faiths can come to experience through our Order's architecture the indefinable awe, the magnetism, the attraction of God. Thanks to you, this dream is finally becoming real.

One more construction phase will complete the Chapter House, at a total cost of \$3 million. Last year I announced that we would begin once we raised \$1 million of this amount.

Today I am delighted to report that we are now only \$500,000 away from beginning this phase. Your participation is truly making a difference.

Welcome and Thanks

I'd like to express my heartfelt thanks to:

- The Ovila Legati, particularly new members **Professor Michael Noone** and **Harry Parker**, as well as long-time member **Judge William P. Clark**, who recently was instrumental in helping us connect with the **Dan Murphy Foundation**. I am pleased to report that the Dan Murphy Foundation has joined in our second building phase with a gift of \$25,000.

- The members of a newly-formed **Steering Committee** that will guide our Sacred Stones funding going forward. This leadership group, headed by our good friend **Jane Flynn**, is comprised of outstanding people who share our dream and are eager to make it happen.

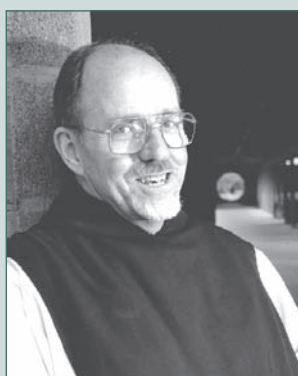
- **Valerie Husek**, my new administrative assistant. If you have not already had the chance to meet Valerie, I hope you will soon.

- **Harry Parker**, who has recently retired as director of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. From the beginning, Harry has been extremely supportive of our dream of resurrecting the Sacred Stones, and has helped in innumerable ways. Please join me in wishing Harry many blessings as he enjoys this new phase of his life.

In Prayer,

Thomas X. Davis, OCSO

Abbot Thomas



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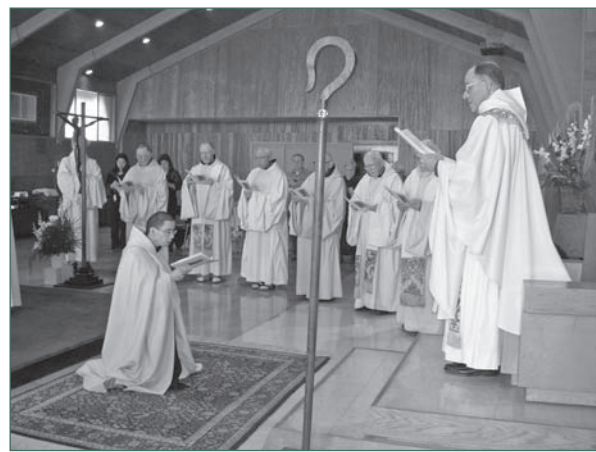
Publisher - Abbot Thomas X. Davis, OCSO
Editor - Victoria J. Coe

Brother Placid Morris Takes His Final Vows

We celebrated with great thanksgiving when Brother Placid Morris officially joined our Cistercian community, taking his final vows in a beautiful ceremony on January 15th. One of triplets, Brother Placid welcomed his brothers, parents and special friends to Vina for the Mass and reception. "It was tremendous to have my family and friends from stages of my life present," he said. "Each one of them had a share in forming me for this moment. One even flew in from Connecticut just for the one day."

"When I gave my responses there was a joy and a clarity that I have rarely experienced," he said. "During the ritual, I felt at peace, and excited at the same time. The most powerful moment after receiving the cowl was being received by the brothers, of kneeling and being embraced by them as they picked me up. Something of what community is to be like in ritual form."

Brother Placid remembers feeling called to religious life for the first time at age 12. Later, as a young man, he was influenced by the writings of Thomas Merton. "I was struck by his words and wanted to pursue



Brother Placid's ceremony was a joyful moment for our community.

this path," he explained. "But in 1994 when I visited Vina for first time, the vocations director felt I should go elsewhere. Then the next day, I went out to look at the orchards. I felt God's presence, saying what was to stop me, and there was silence. After that first visit, I never felt called to go anywhere else."

Over the years, Brother Placid's faith and fortitude continued to lead him to New Clairvaux. "I knew this was where I wanted to spend the rest of my life—deepening my relationship with God and others in Love. I never doubted my calling all these years, because it became less about myself and more about the path to be more like Christ," he said. "My hope for myself is to keep growing in my vocation, deepening my bonds with my community, and growing more in union with God."

The Morris family was glad to be able to share in Brother Placid's special day. "They are proud of me and they love me very much," he explained. "Although at first the separation was more than they would like. But as they came to visit, my parents' support grew and they were happy I was here." Following the Aspirancy and the first family visit, his brothers also gave their wholehearted support. "One of my brothers wrote to tell me it was gratifying to see me in my place." Indeed, the entire New Clairvaux community is grateful for the many blessings that Brother Placid brings to us!



Brother Placid with his parents, Mr. and Mrs. John Morris, and his triplet brothers, James and Joseph.

A Monk's Solemn Vows by Father Paul Mark Schwan

Solemn vows are permanent, life vows that a monk makes which is not unlike a marriage commitment or ordination although it differs in that solemn profession is not a sacrament. For a minimum of three years prior to life vows, a monk is in what we call simple (temporary) vows. Included in that time is a two-week Aspirancy retreat, following which the candidate and the vocations director meet to decide whether to continue the process. So, during the ceremony in January, Brother Placid simply stated that now after several years he was ready to commit himself for life to these vows.

This commitment of life vows always takes place in the context of the Eucharist which is the sacrament of offering and giving, that of Christ of his life to God on behalf of the people of the world for the sake of forgiveness of sins. We call it redemption. By doing this, the monk is offering and sharing in the life of Christ, in Christ's passion, death and resurrection in a most particular way.

A monk following the Rule of Saint Benedict makes three vows to God: stability (he belongs to this particular monastery and brothers, promising to love the place, the brothers, and the Rule), fidelity to monastic life (he does the things necessary to live the monastic life, including poverty and chastity, so that he will respond more readily to the grace of his vocation in being transformed into Christ, the symbol of the large white garment called the cowl), and obedience (he practices inner listening and readiness to respond to all that God asks of him in realizing the above points in following Christ).

The following is a quote from our Constitutions stating exactly what solemn profession is and implies:

By making profession of solemn vows a brother gives himself to Christ in a spirit of faith and commits himself perpetually to lead in his community a way of life in accordance with the Rule of Saint Benedict. The abbot and the brothers are to welcome him warmly into the community, knowing they are duty bound to help him by prayer and example, more and more to put on the likeness of Christ. Constitution 56.

Meet the Steering Committee

At the conclusion of the first building phase, Father Thomas formed a Steering Committee—a leadership group which will guide the funding for the Chapter House's next phase, and the master plan going forward. These people lend their professional expertise, collaborate with staff to raise needed funds, help identify others who might want to get involved, and support the project with personal gifts. We are very grateful to these committed, energetic, and generous individuals who are each in their own way very personally connected to the Sacred Stones. We hope you'll find their stories uplifting and inspiring.

Jane Flynn, Committee Chair, owner of Pacific Farms, Gerber, CA: My history with the Abbey dates back to the early 1950s when my late husband's (Vincent J. Flynn) family sold the Vina property to the monks. A contingency from Gethsemani in Kentucky had been sent to California to locate a place to establish a new monastery. They found and fell in love with the Flynn's Stanford-Vina ranch. My mother-in-law, so the story goes, dug in her heels, but my father-in-law, the monks, and God's plan prevailed. This all happened many years before I met and married my husband. However, not long after relocating to northern CA, I was introduced to the Abbey. It was love at first visit! The affection, long held by my husband and his family for the monks and their works crept into my heart and has continued to flourish there through the years. My husband established his relationship with the monks through agriculture. This relationship continues today through our neighboring farm, myself and our son, Brendon Flynn, who manages our farm properties.

The Sacred Stones project gives me big goose-bumps every time I think about it, or speak of it. One doesn't have to have a spiritual bone in their body to acknowledge and appreciate the rich history involved in this project. To know that these same stones, having provided a place of peacefulness and prayer hundreds of years ago, having made the very long journey home to Vina, having withstood serious scrutiny over the past few years, will one day soon hear the same readings and prayers of the same religious order of relatively silent, spirit-filled men that they heard and held hundreds of years ago in a very far away place—that, to my small mind, is a very overwhelming and powerful reality.

I consider my friendship with the Abbey an incredible gift. An opportunity to be involved with the Sacred Stones project, in any small way, is just icing on the cake.

Rick Lynch, CPA: I first started coming to New Clairvaux 12 years ago after a men's bible study about the spiritual disciplines. I wanted a deeper relationship with Christ, and through the study of the spiritual disciplines combined with the contemplative nature of New Clairvaux, I truly felt my faith grow for the first time. It was no longer "performance oriented," as I observed in many churches. As I spent more time at the Abbey I became friends with the Abbot and learned of his passion for the Stones Project. As important as it is to restore a 12th century Chapter House, I believe it is only a vehicle to take seekers out of the hustle and bustle of everyday life and restore their faith through the serenity and solitude of New Clairvaux. Psalm 46:10 Be still, and know that I am God.

John Deterding, owner of John Deterding Company, home builders: I met Father Thomas through my family friend, Dorothy Emms, who was a Carmelite. Father Thomas invited us to tour the stones, which were then in the shaping and planning phase. I was impressed that he spent hours with us. As I'm a builder, the project struck a chord with me. After that, an architect I was working with was killed, and I wanted to remember him so I sponsored a stone in his memory.

At one point, Father Thomas sent me a stone cross. When I got that I thought it was an amazing gift. I felt so honored. I gave that cross to my mother who has been sick for a long time. She keeps it by her bedside. For me, those really are Sacred Stones. Through their history, 800 years and a previous life in Spain, there is so much power and prayer. I feel very

much connected to them. I relate to the sacred part of the Sacred Stones because I believe that's exactly what they are.

Jim Parenti, Attorney and Investment Advisor, owner of Aladino Financial Services, El Dorado Hills: In a spiritual context, I found myself at the monastery. Blessed in God's Providence to have gone through a mid-life crisis at a young age, 18 months of spiritual growth culminated in a week's retreat at the monastery just before I turned 40. That time with God in the setting of New Clairvaux confirmed that the "new Jim" had matured. Retreats at the Abbey since have invoked some of the most powerful spiritual experiences in my life, and strengthened my journey in faith.

The monastery offers a quiet and calm that gives an opening to God's graces that one may not otherwise experience due to distractions of daily life. You may leave the monastery, but you carry it with you, refreshing your soul in each day's encounters.

When the Sacred Stones project was launched, my wife and I wanted to respond immediately with a financial contribution to this wondrous endeavor. I'm honored and thankful to sit on the Steering Committee, and hope to share my passion for the Abbey in a special way through this campaign.

Mary Griffin, owner of lobbying firm, Griffin & Associates, Sacramento: At Vina, the peace and tranquility was just what I needed, but I could not have told you that until I got there. I knew I wanted a retreat, but looked for years and did not find one that seemed to fit me. I attended the groundbreaking ceremony and the next time I thought about a retreat, I decided that perhaps Vina would be a good place. No structure, just a place to rest, participate in the monks' hours or not. I brought a full briefcase, thinking I'd have some time to catch up on work.

Being at Vina allowed, or really forced me to make decisions about what I would do with myself during the hours I was there - no cell phone, or email to interrupt me. I found myself in the library reading. I took time to sit in the small chapel and not think, just listen. I found time for prayer, reflection and most important for me - a confessor. I did not open that briefcase once.

History has always been my favorite subject; therefore, this project touched me deeply. The fact that the monastery was granted the rights to the original stones from the 12th Century monastery building to reconstruct this Chapter House in our own backyard is captivating for me. I believe that William Hearst was God's emissary in rescuing the stones in the 1930s and that they were meant to be restored to their original purpose at Vina—a place where all people are welcome to enjoy the special beauty and peace of this ancient, almost lost architecture.

Mike Conway, owner of Ashwood Construction, Inc., Fresno: My bible study group began planning retreats to Vina about nine or ten years ago. The first year, we booked the whole place, but only three of us went. The setting was wonderful and all the priests and brothers were very pleasant, at peace. My friend went to confession with Father Paul Jerome and raved about the experience so much I wished I'd done it. So the following year, I made a point to go, and I really enjoyed it. I've visited Vina six different times over the years and one time I asked one of the monks what is the advantage of spending his life at a monastery rather than at a parish. He said their role is to pray—for peace, for conversion—and to give people a place for solitude, where they

can think only of God. At Vina, everything else in the world is secondary to God. When I leave there, I'm in a much different frame of mind than when I arrived. It's been an absolutely wonderful thing in my life.

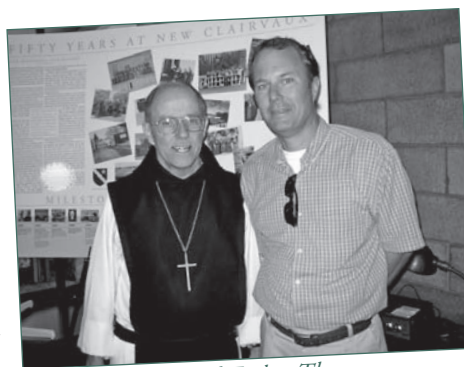
I didn't know how a stone could be called sacred, but we're building a monument to the Lord. That's why I wanted to get involved.



Jane Flynn and Brother Pierre



Rick Lynch with Father Paul Mark Schwan



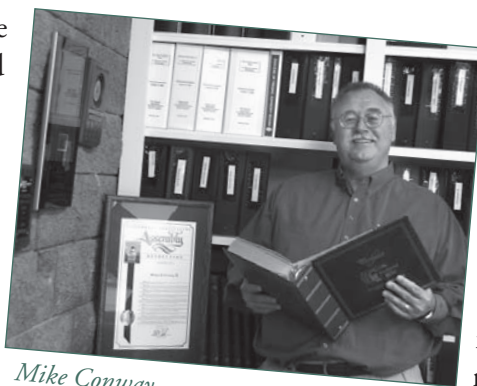
John Deterding and Father Thomas



Jim Parenti with his wife Margaret and daughters Angela and Serena



Mary Griffin with Father Thomas



Mike Conway

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GESTA MONASTICA

NEWS FROM THE ABBEY OF NEW CLAIRVAUX

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A Good Year for the Winery

Our winery's debut last August was a huge success. During the steaming hot Jubilee Open House, our newly-opened tasting room welcomed hundreds of visitors, and we're excited to say the reviews were overwhelmingly positive. The tasting room is now open weekends, from 11:00-5:00. Vineyard manager Brother Rafael and crew invite you to come taste the fruits of our labor.

Out in the vineyard, winter is in full swing, and it looks like another wet one. The vines are doing well, enjoying a deserved rest after the abundant harvest they gave us last year. Pruning has begun. We made the decision to reduce the Zinfandel and increase the Tempranillo and Graciano. Now we are taking cuttings, which will be sanitized and put into cold storage. With the coming spring, a crew will come out and do the grafting. We're anticipating good things, as the Tempranillo and Graciano vines do very well in this location and their fruit make a very good wine.

In the winery, all the wine finished fermenting nicely after the end of harvest last October. Since then, the majority of the wine has been barreled and put away to age. The three whites—Albarino, Viognier, and Trebbiano—have been bottled, and tasting room visitors

have been enjoying these new additions to the wine list. We also made a rose wine, similar to the Nouveaus made in the Beaujolais region of France, except we used Zinfandel grapes as opposed to Gamay. We call this wine our "New Zinfandel" and the response has been fantastic [ed. note: This wine is really outstanding!].

Currently at the winery, our winemaker Aimee Sunseri has been busy at work preparing the 2004 red wines for bottling. "I'm very excited for our May release because our '04 vintage has been some of our best wines yet," she reports. We are releasing the same four red varieties as last year—Petite Sirah, Syrah, Tempranillo, and Zinfandel—with the addition of one new varietal, Barbera.



The New Clairvaux wine tasting room is open on weekends from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.

When the New Clairvaux Winery becomes profitable – which we hope will be in 2006 – proceeds will help with the monastery's operating expenses (the Sacred Stones project is funded by private donations). Wines can be purchased at our tasting room, or by telephone at 530-839-2200 (additional shipping fees apply). Our future plans include a winery web site where we will be able to provide greater information about our wines and convenient on-line purchasing. Stay tuned.

As we continually learn and grow, we are grateful for all the enthusiasm and support for the new winery. Our extraordinary beginning is a testament to the energy and talents of many people—including so many of you. It has been and continues to be a very good year.