

ORA ET LABORA

a newsletter on gift planning

Please visit us at our gift planning website legacy.conceptionabbey.org

SPRING 2026

Hearing God's Call: The Power of Monastic Retreats



Jesus said to them, “Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while.”

Places of quiet and solitude are getting difficult to find. Our world seems more hectic every day. How can we hear God speaking through all the distractions that constantly bombard us?

As you know, Benedictine monasteries have long been places of silence. Places where you can hear God because those distractions are kept out. Hospitality is an important virtue for Benedictines. “Let all guests who arrive be received as Christ,” is not just a slogan for us. It is central to the lives of the monks.

Each year, thousands of pilgrims knock on our doors seeking solace, seeking direction. What you might not know is how many of those pilgrims are youngsters and young adults.

We have regular retreats for high schoolers, college students, and young adults. We host weekends that offer young men the opportunity to reflect on a vocation to the priesthood.

(continued inside)



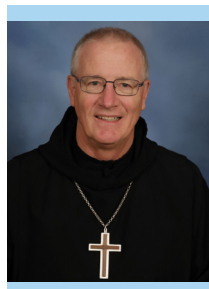
A Message from Abbot Benedict

“Turn it down. It’s too loud.”

Do you remember ever hearing these words when you were growing up?

The world around us seems to get louder and more distracting with each passing year. Wouldn’t it be nice if turning just one knob could bring us some quiet again? It doesn’t seem that easy these days. We are constantly being bombarded by noise from all directions, making it more difficult to find a sense of peace and calm.

One of our core ministries is to provide a prayerful refuge for those searching for peace in their lives. This ministry is not just reserved for those who are older. It is also extended to the youth and young adults, many of whom seem to be caught up by the allure of worldly distractions.



We monks offer the gift of silence to our young people through our ministry of youth retreats. We offer retreats for high school and college students. Twice a year, we hold our Encounter with God’s Call experience where hundreds of young men come to explore a possible religious vocation. The time these young people spend at our abbey strengthens and deepens their relationships with our Lord, allowing them to focus on what really matters in life.

This issue of *Ora et Labora* offers you an insight into how young lives (and old) can be changed because of your support. Two of those lives are our very own Br. Joachim and Br. Mark. Truly we couldn’t do what we do without you.

May God bless you for the friendship and kindness you have shown the monks. Our ministries are made possible because of your support. Please know that we are grateful to you and that we remember you daily as we celebrate the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

Sincerely in Christ,

Abbot Benedict

Abbot Benedict Neenan, OSB

HEARING GOD'S CALL:

THE POWER OF MONASTIC RETREATS

Gregory Conti and Andrew Nelson were two young men who came to Conception Abbey seeking a deserted place to reflect and be still. We are blessed that they heard God's call to join our monastery and are now known as Br. Joachim and Br. Mark.

BR. JOACHIM CONTI

"I first came to Conception Abbey intentionally seeking to experience something different from the way of life I found "in the world"--something more explicitly centered on Christ and energized by God's action in prayer. From the moment I arrived, I was filled with a profound peace in the melodic chant, the steady rhythm of returning to the basilica for prayer, the wide open landscapes, and the balance between silence and conversing with the older monks or with those in formation.

When I eventually entered the monastery, however, I discovered that I had nevertheless brought "the world" with me - the noise of disordered priorities, habits and perspectives. I realized I needed to profoundly transform myself and not just change my surroundings. Could I have grasped this truth if it weren't for those first visits? They were times when God showed me the stark contrast of monastic life and the compelling example of communal life concretely structured by prayer."

BR. MARK NELSON

"As an adult convert to Catholicism, I first visited Conception Abbey for a weeklong retreat in October 2014 while preparing for the sacrament of Confirmation. For such a momentous occasion in my life, it was fitting to step away from my normal routine and enter into a time of prayer, silence, and reflection. From the first moment, I was struck by the abbey's tranquility, so clearly set apart from my many distractions.

During my stay, I appreciated the opportunity to meet with a monk for spiritual direction, and to learn about the Rule of Saint Benedict and the Benedictine vow of stability.



After a spiritually nourishing visit, I left with a renewed outlook, reflecting on how to incorporate Benedictine spirituality into my life back home. Although I was not thinking of joining a monastery at that time, I departed with the confident sense that this would not be the last time I visited Conception Abbey.”

These are just two stories of the many young people whose lives have been transformed during their visits to Conception Abbey. Thank you for your prayers and for your support. You are a part of this ministry. You help us keep our doors open to the thousands of pilgrims who are seeking the fulfillment that only God and bring.

YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

The checkbook can be a powerful instrument in charitable giving but it isn't your only option. There are alternative ways of giving that may work better for you which can be just as impactful and tax-wise. We have illustrated a few of the options here.

A GIFT FROM YOUR IRA

Fred is thinking about his options for a gift of \$1,000 he wants to make to the Benedictines. He could pull out his checkbook or he could use his IRA to make a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD).

With the IRA gift, he avoids paying taxes on the distribution and, since he just turned 73, the QCD would count as part of his Required Minimum Distribution (RMD). He can avoid taxes and keep the money in his checkbook for whatever he wishes.

A GIFT OF STOCK

Helen would like to make a \$10,000 gift to the Benedictines without disrupting her regular sources of income. She remembered that she bought 100 shares of stock several years ago, with a cost of \$25 a share. Today, those shares are valued at \$100 apiece, or \$10,000.

If she had her broker transfer those stocks to us, her gift wouldn't affect her regular income and would avoid capital gains tax. She could even claim a charitable tax deduction of \$10,000 rather than the amount she paid for the shares. If Helen sold the shares, she would have to pay 15% capital gains tax on the \$7,500 of appreciation. This would reduce the value to her by \$1,125.

FUNDING AN ANNUITY

Joan, age 78, wanted to make a gift to us, but regretted that it couldn't be more. We suggested a gift idea that would not only support our future needs, it would also put money in her pocket.

By creating a charitable gift annuity, she would receive payments for life at a payout rate that is tied to her age. We told her that a significant portion of her payments would be tax free.

Joan decided to create a \$10,000 gift annuity. Her payout rate, which will never change, is 7.6%.

Please contact us to learn more about the many gift options that are available.

This article is offered for general information purposes only and not intended for tax or legal advice.

We encourage you to consult your financial advisor or tax preparer so you can find the best gift option for you.



TAKE A CHARITABLE DEDUCTION WITHOUT ITEMIZING

In 2026, even those who do not itemize their charitable gifts on their tax returns will be allowed to deduct up to \$1,000 in charitable contributions—or \$2,000 for those who file jointly. This is in addition to the standard deduction.

WE ARE HERE TO HELP

There are many gift options that you can use to support the monks in their ministries. We would like to help you find an option that works for you.

For more information, please contact **Christopher Brite** in our Planned Giving Office at **(660) 944-2825** or **cbrite@conception.edu**, and don't forget to request a free copy of our *Estate Planning Quiz*, which is full of useful information if you are working on or are reviewing your estate plans.

We would also like to encourage you to talk to your tax planner or financial advisor. They can work with you to find the best gift option for your financial situation.

CONTACT US



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