

The Navigator

The Newsletter of the Monastic Fellowship of Saint Brendan's
Volume VII, No. 3 — Summer 2012

Christ in the Cheese Pot

Fr. Alan L. Andraeas, Prior

***“And you will have plenty of goats’ milk
to feed you and your family...” (Proverbs 27:27)***

Saint Brendan’s has dairy goats; just four of them. They’re actually *your* dairy goats because they belong to the ministry. From a more practical point of view, however, they are our dairy goats because we tend to their daily care. It comes with a lot of work and...a lot of milk!

Did you know that these four goats—Brigid, Fiona, Gertrude, and Matilda—often produce milk in excess of six gallons a day? Six gallons! Every day!! Far too much for the two of us to drink and even too much to share with people who visit the property!!! So what do we do? We give it away to the elderly and widowed in town and we sell some of it to those who want to buy it. Even so, we still have to deal with gallons of raw milk on a daily basis! The solution? Lots of cheese, yogurt, and ice cream.

One of our investments last year was a five-gallon cheese pot, a sort of double boiler affair. It goes to work on the stove so often that we had to add a second cheese pot this year. We also have two cheese presses for when I make cheese that requires pressure during its molding process.

Mother Sue calls me the “Stinky Cheese Man” (from the 1992 title of Jon Scieszka’s young reader’s book *The Stinky Cheese Man and other Fairly Stupid Tales*), and I suppose it fits. Not that my cheese doesn’t smell delicious—in fact, I’m getting better at it each year—but because of the amount of time that I’m required to stand at that pot.

Some of the most basic hard cheese recipes require up to four hours of processing time to go from raw milk to pressed curds—culturing, precipitating or renneting, cutting, stirring, heating, expelling, draining, salting, and finally banding and hooping the curds in the cheese press. Even after all of that, the cheese often needs to be unmolded, redressed, and re-pressed at ever-increasing pressures until it can sit undisturbed under 50 pounds of weight. But it doesn’t stop there. The next day it’s removed from the press, sometimes brined, and air-dried with frequent turnings for several days so that the interior moisture is evenly suspended throughout the cheese while it develops an external rind. And then it’s finally waxed (or vacuum-sealed) and spirited away to the “cheese cave” (in our case, a small dorm refrigerator in the basement set to the right temperature) where it must age for 1-12 months depending on its variety. Is that it? Nope. It still must be turned every week or, for cheese with an exposed rind, it must be misted with bacteria or oiled or wiped down or scraped at regular intervals in order to achieve the proper molds, flavors, and textures.



Mother Sue with one of the goats in the milking parlor.

My attempts this year have included English Derby, Colby, Monterey Jack, Pepper Jack, Montasio, Feta, Cottage Cheese, Ricotta, Queso Fresco, Cheddar, Mozzarella, Chevré, cream cheese, and sour cream. Some of the curds are even been blended with garlic, onion, dill, chive, jalapeño, and garden vegetables prior to pressing. I can’t wait for those cheeses to reach the right age so we can see how they taste. In fact, we recently ac-

(Continued on page 2)

IN THIS ISSUE OF “THE NAVIGATOR”

Christ in the Cheese Pot	1
Join Us in Prayer	3
Vacation? Recreation? Re-Creation!	4
The Final Word—St. Clement of Alexandria	6
Life at the Priory House	7

quired the proper powdered molds to produce Blue Cheese, Gorgonzola, Roquefort, and other varieties in the “Blue Cheese” family. Cheesemaking is one of those arts with a centuries-long history in monastery kitchens. So it only seems natural that Saint Brendan’s should include this venerable practice as part of our monastic labor. Oh, and did I say that it also helps us to deal with our surplus milk?

Why this introduction to cheese? It’s not so much the end product I want you to be aware of as much as the process involved. In fact, not even the process so much as I want you to understand the amount of time it requires. Once the cheese is started it needs to be monitored to the exact minute and to the exact degree or else you end up with something totally unwanted. What it ultimately means is that from late spring through early fall I spend a LOT of time standing in front of the stove... stirring. Hours upon hours. Yes, I can qualify it as my contribution to our food preservation (Mother Sue will soon begin the process of harvesting, processing, canning, and lacto-fermenting much of what is in our garden and we will also spend quite a few days butchering chickens and turkeys for meat). But in many other ways it may seem like wasted time—or is it? I guess it depends on your perspective.

There are certainly a host of things that need to be done at Saint Brendan’s. We need to rework our fence line. The front porch needs to be rebuilt. We’re beginning the process for the construction of Holy Trinity Chapel. I still have a whole season’s worth of fire wood that needs to be cut and split so that it has several months to cure before we need to burn it. We need to pull out the current wood stove and install our recently acquired wood ‘cook’ stove in its place (we want to reduce the amount of propane we burn). We’re preparing to have an additional certified kitchen added to the back of the house so that we can legally sell the things we make. These things don’t even take into consideration the Daily Offices, our administrative responsibilities, preparing for worship services, the counseling and spiritual direction we offer to others, lending help to folks in the local community, and our ongoing academics (we’re both finishing up advanced degrees). There are a whole host of demands placed on us, but for several hours a day I find myself at the cheese pot, stirring.

Sometimes I read, sometimes I listen to music, but I can’t leave the cheese pot. Most of the time, however, I ponder spiritual things—questions that we’re praying about; passages of the Bible that we’ve read that morning; how to move

Saint Brendan’s forward according to God’s vision given to us. It is a time for solitude and contemplation; of making myself available to heaven’s agenda. In a sense, I use that time to find Christ in my curds. Now wait a minute! Is that to say Jesus is in the cheese pot?

I’ve read some humorous news reports where people say they have seen the face of Christ in a piece of French toast at the breakfast counter of a local restaurant; others see Him in the rings of tree stump; still others in the mold growing on the side of building—and all with pictures to prove it (and that piece of French toast was put up for sale on eBay!). But I see Him in the cheese pot, or rather, in the time I spend at the cheese pot. Here’s what I mean.



Fr. Alan surrounded with various samples of his cheeses.

Brother Lawrence, a 17th century French monk, was one of those rare people who didn’t need to find Jesus in the great cathedrals of his day or even in the important tasks of his religious community. If you should read his book, *The Practice of the Presence of God* (and I would highly recommend it), you’ll find that He was content to discover Christ in the lowest and most menial tasks of his monastery. In fact, the bulk of his greatest religious experiences took place while he was serving as a cook in the kitchen; not in the chapel, not in the oratory, not in the refectory, not in his cell, not in deep conversation with his abbot or fellow brothers, but while in obscured and hidden service to others in the hottest and most demanding job of the community. His little book chronicles this relationship with the Lord—how he found Christ and how Christ found him—and how it may not have happened for him in any other location. He was so blessed by his time of spiritual elevation in the kitchen that he referred to himself as “the lord of all pots and pans,” for truly Jesus gave him a dignity of spirit that could only have been achieved through humility and servanthood.

So while I stand here at the cheese pot, praying, it becomes a point of intersection between heaven and earth. Here I stand at the cheese pot trusting to find Jesus in the (sometimes numbing) chore of turning curds into “slices of milk” [cf., 1 Samuel 17:18; Hebrew *chârits châlâb*]. When I set my heart and mind to that task, the hours seem to slip away; my time spent in that solitary place and in those mechanical actions soon becomes a meeting place between my Lord and me. And like Abraham in Genesis 18:8, that visitation allows me to offer the Lord a gift of cheese curds for Him to eat; the fruit of my labor given to Him.

All of that leads me to ask you this question: Do you find Christ in the things you do throughout the day? Is your mind prayer-

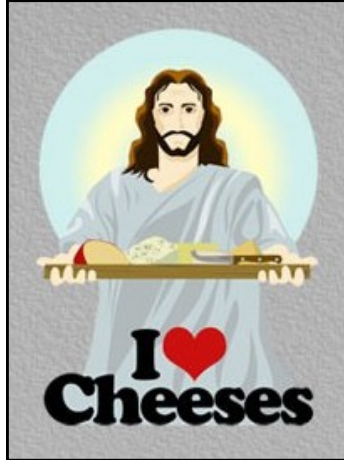
“Brother Lawrence...was content to discover Christ in the lowest and most menial tasks of his monastery.”

“...for the true believer there is no difference between the sacred and the secular.”

fully attuned to see Jesus where you work? In what you do? In the people around you? Hear me: for the true believer there is no difference between the sacred and the secular. Jesus doesn't wave good-bye as you leave the church parking lot after Sunday worship. Jesus is in your kitchen, at your desk, standing beside you in your laundry room, taking stock inventory with you, sitting next to you at a stoplight, reaching out as you serve the next customer, and looking over your shoulder as you work on a computer spreadsheet. There is never a time when He is not there. With enough practice and desire you'll soon discover that the sacred and the secular are inseparable because Jesus "is all, and is in all" (Colossians 3:11).

And what about the other side of the coin? From Christ's perspective, does He see Himself in *you* as you leave the church parking lot? While you're in your kitchen? At your desk? In your laundry room? Taking stock inventory? Sitting at a stoplight? Serving the next customer? Or working at your computer? Does He see Himself reflected in your words, moods, actions, and interactions? Is He content to be present in your email forwards, your enter-

tainment choices, your reading material, your daydreams, or anything else that becomes the place where you physically or emotionally 'tabernacle' throughout the day? That's how a 'monastic eye' should be viewing things: you in Christ and Christ in you, even in those things that are seen as drudgery, monotony, and anything but uplifting.



For centuries cheesemaking, with its strict schedule, became a natural extension of monastic spiritual life. So much so that the monks began to see a correlation between Christ's Passion and the process of making cheese. There are 14 traditional Stations of the Cross; there are 14 steps in cheesemaking, each with its own religious significance. From cutting the curds, to expressing its 'blood', to wrapping it in bandages, to pressing it under extreme weight, to placing it in a cave, to being resurrected and brought into the light when it's ready for eating at the table. Indeed, the cheese pot has become my unique place of 'communion' with the Lord. As a Friend or Oblate of Saint Brendan's, I pray that the Holy Spirit opens your eyes to see Christ in all that you do...and that Christ also sees Himself in you. ✕

JOIN US IN PRAYER. Please help us pray through several needs and concerns that we have at the Priory House. **(1) Permanent perimeter fencing.** We need to revamp our fencing to ensure the safety of the animals. Much of our fencing is temporary; permanent fencing would be a valuable asset. Cost will run approximately \$2.00 per foot. **(2) Manure management.** Animals make manure. Ours make TONS of it! All of it is currently raked, shoveled, and managed by hand. A small garden tractor with a front-end loader (e.g., John Deere 1 Series Sub-Compact Utility Tractor) would be ideal, but way beyond our means. Help us discern an answer that will allow for the best stewardship of our time, strength and resources. **(3) Holy Trinity Chapel.** We'll be presenting the Town of Dennysville with our building application to begin construction of Holy Trinity Chapel. Pray for favor with the town building committee. **(4) Work from home.** We're having a small certified kitchen added to the back of the Priory House so that we can sell the things we make. Help us pray to find/afford the proper equipment (stainless steel counters, sinks, shelving/racks, etc.).

MONASTIC MUSE

muse \ 'myüz \ **1:** *vb* to turn something over in the mind meditatively, **2:** to think reflectively, **3:** *n* a state of deep thought...

“holding festival in our whole life—persuaded that God is present everywhere—we cultivate our fields, praising; we sail the sea, hymning; and in all aspects, we conduct ourselves according to discipline.”

— St. Clement of Alexandria (c. 195 AD)

Vacation? Recreation? Re-Creation!

Mother Sue Andraeas, Prioress

*“And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us,
and establish the work of our hands for us;
yes, establish the work of our hands.”*

Psalm 90:17

July is a month of celebration for us: the anniversary of Fr. Alan’s ordination on the 7th, the establishment of Saint Brendan’s Retreat Community on the 11th, and the Feast Day of St. Benedict on the 17th. There are also days we recognize within our family—anniversaries, birthdays and so on—and the days that are recognized in agrarian settings such as the harvest of the first sugar peas and beets, the first tomato and pepper blossoms, and, most importantly, the mowing and gathering of the hay.

This past week we collected, moved, and stacked over 400 bales of hay in our barn. It’s like a party in the hay fields, believe it or not. People who have been isolated in their own beef and dairy barns and horse stables all winter, and tethered to their property by milk pails and gardens all spring, meet in the hot, dusty fields and catch up with family news and local

‘farm talk’ as they work together to fill all the barns and lofts. Hay binds farm to farm, farmer to farmer, and all to the land like no other commodity. By the end of the day we collapse hot (“make hay while the sun shines” as they say) and exhausted (we move tons and tons of bales a day for sever-



al days—all by hand), hay rashes on our arms, and dust in our eyes and sinuses. No one complains. And the animals we depend on for our food will have their own bellies full through the coming winter. REJOICE!

We celebrate the full barn, and we celebrate that God has granted us the health and strength for the task for yet another year! In the midst of these special occasions our typical daily prayers and intercessions are set aside for joyful prayers of praise and thanksgiving. We are exhausted but we are blessed! And the day after all the hay is in, we take the day off from heavy labor and the Offices and simply but genuinely praise God from Whom all blessings flow: work and rest, isolation and gathering, provision for both man and beast, and His most obvious love and care for us all.

As much as I enjoy the excitement, the workout, and the celebration of that week when the hay is mown, I’m thankful to get back to the routine. Life at Saint Brendan’s, as those of you who have been here well know, varies little from day to day. Goats are milked every morning at 5:00 and again every

afternoon at 4:00, every day—whether we want to or not, whether we are sick or healthy, whether we need to go into town or even if we have to get hay! I’m convinced God made the Israelites dairy herders because nothing tempers the soul or disciplines the body like animals with udders!! Prayer Offices occur on a schedule that is almost as strict as that for milking, not because we are legalistic about our prayer life but because... nothing tempers the soul or disciplines the body like a set prayer schedule (except, perhaps, udders J).

These daily routines of milking and praying roll into weekly and monthly routines of planting and harvesting, pruning and haying, interspersed with the praying and milking. Skip one of the spring steps and there will be shortfalls later on. Our common life truly does depend upon each other’s toil. You may not see it so profoundly in urban and suburban settings but that doesn’t make it any less true. Routine life of work and structure are more than helpful; they are necessary. You’ve got your own routines, I’m sure; ones that make it possible for your household to function smoothly and profitably. At least I hope you do!

But what happens when routine (secular ‘liturgy?’) is seen as mundane, and daily chores as something to rush through,

escape from, or delegate to someone else so that we can get on with ‘real life?’ (I could head off on a rather impassioned tangent about the harm done to a family that decides that food preparation and gathering around a table is a waste of time and effort when meals that are microwaved from—or delivered in—a box can easily be eaten at a restaurant or in front of a screen;

when every day must be a ‘feast day’ that caters to everyone’s culinary whims. And if the routine of physical meals is so important, what does that say about a family’s spiritual nourishment? What happens when family devotions are left to ‘when everyone is ready’ or ‘if everyone feels like it’ rather than at a specific time that everyone is expected to attend? Or when everyone can just ‘do their own thing’—or not? We

(Continued on page 5)

HOW TO CONTACT US

**Father Alan L. Andraeas, Prior
Mother Susan G. Andraeas, Prioress**

**The Monastic Fellowship of Saint Brendan’s
38 Cemetary Road**

Dennysville, ME 04628-4326

207-726-5129

saintbrendans@pwless.net

www.saintbrendans-online.org

have become a culture that feasts on non-nourishing variety and makes routine out of spiritual famine. I'll leave this 'soapbox' for another time...)

"These celebrations were not a get-away from God but a get-away to God."

Our culture puts so much emphasis on get-away weekends, dream vacations, and even little moments of escape throughout the day with almost no veneration, or even recognition, of the routine that *is* daily life—except to identify this blessing of the daily routine of labor as a 'necessary evil', or 'daily grind', or as something that we must *routinely* escape and eventually, gladly, retire from. For today, let's take a closer look at just our devotional routine. Those of you who are Oblates have copies of the *Breviary* and are expected to use it as part of your daily prayer time. Novices and Life Vow members are expected to not only use it but to have developed a well-engrained routine of either Morning and Evening Prayer or the (shorter but more frequent) Daily Offices.

Our expectation is not that there is never a 'day off' from this routine—as I explained earlier, we have had our share of non-Office days this month! But these days spent away from the routine are not vacations or escapes for us. They are more like the Old Testament Feast Days. The Israelites, ready to move into the Promised Land, were instructed to take specific days off—not to spend them away from God but to celebrate His goodness in the routine of their lives. They celebrated the collection of the first grains. They celebrated God's provision in the wilderness, a kind of 'camping trip' spent in booths or tents. They celebrated the Passover, remembering how God spared them from the ravages of the angel of death. (You can read about all the feasts in Leviticus 23.)

While these days were indeed celebration, they were 'fixed.' An Israelite could not decide to make up his own feast days, or decide that his regular agrarian work was mundane and boring and needed to be replaced with more exciting 'feast day getaways' provided by a local tour guide. And the focus of these feast days, as I just mentioned, was not a vacation from his expected prayers but a special day of praise—or contrition. They were not to forget or repress the labor God had given them but to celebrate the provision their God-given labor provided. These celebrations were not a get-away from God but a get-away to God. To avoid work was laziness. To avoid a feast was rebellion. The work was not simply a necessary intrusion to fund their diversion or something that could very well be avoided if only there was enough cash. The work—the routine—was a gift as much as the break from work was a gift!

Let's plug this back into our contemporary devotional life. The daily routine of prayer, Scripture reading and meditation are just that: routine. They do not need to be 'new' and 'fresh' and

'exciting' or 'mystical, charismatic experiences' to have merit. The merit is in the routine and the discipline it provides. A 'day off' should not mean we have no obligation to spend time with God. It should be special recognition, not an omission. It should mark something significant within the routine—for us, the feast day of St. Benedict, or of Fr. Alan's ordination, or the promised harvest fulfilled. (You have your own family or church observances perhaps, but as a spiritual community, some of ours could very well overlap with yours.)

There is only one reason why any of us would want to 'skip' devotions: we do not understand the gift we have been given. The repetition of daily prayers does not weaken their effectiveness. Quite the contrary! Maybe it would make more sense if we thought of the Daily Offices as spiritual vitamins. We take vitamins every morning here. We don't take them for a few days, decide they are boring or hackneyed and either quit taking them or look for a more exciting brand. We know the greatest benefit comes from taking them every day—and quality vitamins, not the ones on sale at the dollar store. They are not for our culinary amusement or to be the highlight of our day (despite what the advertising agencies might want us to think). We get the best we can afford and

sacrifice other 'fun stuff' if necessary to make sure we have them. And while we would still be alive without them, our health might be impaired—and why risk it? Another brand may be just as effective, but we have chosen to take the ones we take, and we stick with that brand because we have seen results in our health from taking them.

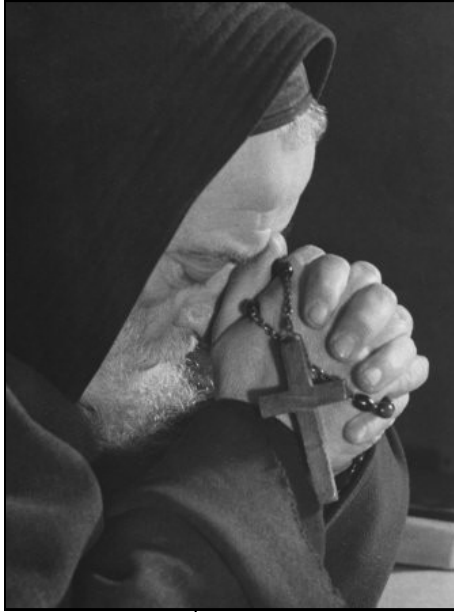
In the same manner, we do not pray the Offices for our amusement or entertainment. (Of course, that doesn't mean there aren't 'dry' periods when the prayers seem so monotonous that we are tempted to believe they are ineffective. Boredom, after all, is a dastardly trick Satan uses to keep us from God.) We

don't jump from one form of Daily Prayer to another to keep ourselves interested, nor do we settle for the briefest, fluffiest devotional we can find simply so we can 'feel better' because we have a devotional life. It's not that there aren't other good prayer books available. There are! It's just that we have chosen the *Breviary* (or rather God has chosen it for us) and we have seen spiritual benefits from praying the Daily Offices, so that's what we do.

(Continued on page 6)



The world would have us believe that there is great value in variety and flux, and that routine is boring and makes us boring. But those who have followed a spiritual routine, especially those who have followed it for years, know differently. There is a stability that comes with ‘constancy and consistency,’ as St. Benedict teaches, that the ‘new and exciting’ cannot match. There is a grounding that keeps us protected during life’s storms; an anchor that holds us fast. God is unchanging (Malachi 3:6). And if God is unchanging—the ‘routine of heaven’—Christ is the Feast Day. If you worship at a liturgical church, you hear this testified weekly: “Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us; therefore, let us keep the feast’ (1 Corinthians 5:7-8).’ What feast do we keep? The Feast of the Eucharist, the ultimate Passover celebration, where Christ is both the ‘feast day’ of the Passover AND the feast itself! And it is celebrated routinely since Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8)—a paradox if ever there was one. What a wonderful, mystical gift; a routine feast!



This year, Alan and I celebrated the 9th anniversary of taking our Life Vows—our promise to humbly serve Christ in the routine of monastic life and not look for a way out. Nine years hardly qualifies us as experts, I know, but (as Alan

would say) it is what it is. While the routine has changed little during those nine years, it has changed us greatly. If you are still trying to develop your own spiritual, devotional routine, please let me encourage you with this. The ‘excitement’ is not found in the daily experience but in the transformation. It will not be new and uplifting every day; in fact you’ll go through phases where it will be extremely, unbearably boring. And you will see little value in it if you are looking for daily euphoria or instant impact.

Don’t give up!! Instead of striving for ‘extraordinary’ on a daily basis, think of your devotional time as a spiritual vitamin, one that may take months, perhaps years, before any benefit is observed. (Taking a free sample vitamin pack one day won’t bring a sudden surge of health either.) Think of it as time spent growing roots that will anchor your faith; and in the same instant, time spent growing wings to soar above life’s problems. Think of it as necessary as daily hygiene, as important to your spiritual life as vitamins are to your physical health; as strengthening to our ‘geographically dispersed but spiritually connected’ community as shared meals—as your tether to a God Who never changes and a Savior who is the Feast. Rejoice! ✠

**The Final Word:
St. Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-215 AD)**

“We are commanded to reverence and honor the One whom we are persuaded is Word, Savior, and Lord, and to honor the Father through Him—not on special days as some others do, but continually in all our life, and in every way. Hence, it is not in a specified place, or in a special shrine, or at certain festivals and on appointed days, but during their whole lives and in every place that the truly spiritual—whether alone or in community—honor God, that is, return their gratitude for the knowledge of the way to live. Holding festival, then, in all our life, in the certainty that God is completely present on every side of us, we cultivate our fields, praising; we sail the sea to the sound of hymns, and we conduct ourselves as citizens of heaven. The truly spiritual are closely allied to God, being at once grave and cheerful in all things,...rendering thanks to Him through the One who is the Gift, Unction, and Word. Their whole life is one long sacred liturgy.”

[Little is known of St. Clement’s life. Scholars believe he was born in Athens, Greece, and, after studying Christianity and philosophy, he became a teacher in Alexandria, Egypt. Only a handful of his works are extant. Those that do exist attempt to address and correct the charge that Christianity was a religion for the ignorant and to find a middle way between Christianity, philosophy, and Gnosticism while maintaining that the ultimate goal of Christianity is the imitation of God (cf., Matthew 4:48).]



Life at the Priory House



TOP LEFT: Rev. Dcn. Michael and Juli Clark visit Saint Brendan's for a retreat. They flew in from Lynchburg, VA, and are the newest members of the Monastic Fellowship of Saint Brendan's. Welcome Michael and Juli! **TOP RIGHT:** Fr. Alan begins to tackle a truckload of tree-length firewood. It needs to be cut, split, stacked, and cured for keeping the Priory House warm throughout the winter. **LEFT:** During a fieldtrip to the Saint Brendan's homestead, a young student had the chance to demonstrate some of our bee-keeping equipment. **MIDDLE:** It's time to round up the alpacas for their annual shearing. Mother Sue will 'card and spin' the fiber into yarn. **MIDDLE RIGHT:** Mother Sue steadies our donkey, Chula, as one of the visiting students gets ready for a ride. **BOTTOM MIDDLE:** Local musician, Alan Cook (guitar), and good friend and 'farm hand' of Saint Brendan's, John King (banjo), provide a folk music concert for the children during the fieldtrip. Alan Cook also played the fiddle and mandolin. Fr. Alan joined along on the acoustic bass. John is the teacher from the visiting school. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** Nothing wraps up a homestead fieldtrip like hugging a baby goat!

The Navigator

Monastic Fellowship of Saint Brendan's
38 Cemetery Road
Dennysville, ME 04628

