

# The Navigator



## The Newsletter of the Monastic Fellowship of Saint Brendan's

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### Saint Brendan's: Why Are We Here?

Fr. Alan Andraeas, Prior

*"Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you;...and I will bless you."*

Genesis 12:1-2

Why are you here? Sounds like something you would find written on the blackboard of a first-day "Intro to Philosophy" college class. The answer, of course, varies from person to person and it might be different for each 'season' in your life. But if you're in a place and you don't know why, the alternative is that God may want you to be somewhere else altogether.

We had to ask ourselves that question a short time ago because we received a letter from my side of the family suggesting that we had been faithful in our ministry objectives and that it was time to "come home"—meaning, for me, Bucks County, PA; or for Sue's side of the family, Lebanon County, PA. We know it was sent in love and that they miss us. But it took several days for that letter to sink in as we re-examined God's call to our work with the Fellowship of Saint Brendan's and to the people of Down East, Maine; to remember how we got here and to what God has given us; to our definition of parish ministry and the "cure" of souls; to our desire to live in respectful cooperation with the land and to learn the skills of homesteading; to live apart from a consumer-driven and frenzied world and to relish the 'simplicity' of rural life; to earn the trust and acceptance of

our neighbors (which isn't easy in New England when you're 'from away') and for them to befriend, trust, and rely on us; and to renew our conviction that we will live, serve, die, and be buried on this little piece of property and to see how that commitment has knit us into this community.

In the end, we realized that we *are* home; right here. This was wonderfully confirmed just a few days ago when Sue and one of our neighbors, Nancy, brought over a pickup truck load of freshly-baled hay for the goats. I maneuvered the truck into the goat paddock where it would be stacked and stored for their use. When the last bale was put away, Nancy climbed into the truck with me for the short ride back over to her vehicle. I mentioned

this family request to move back home and her whole expression changed as she solemnly asked, "What are you going to do?" I answered, "How can we leave this? This is our home. You're our family now." Her expression relaxed as a big smile crossed her face. She made a fist in the air, and, with a quick, downward pull, exclaimed, "Yesssss!"

You may not understand the significance of her answer, so

let me take a few moments and explain how it all came about. Do you know what a martyr is? The word literally means 'witness'—a witness for Christ that usually ends in blood; the loss of life. The history of the Church and the ranks of persecuted believers of today are full of martyrs. These Christians are known as 'red' martyrs—red referring to shed blood—who give the ultimate sacrifice for Christ. But not all martyrs are red mar-



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tyrs. There are also the ‘blue’ (or sometimes ‘green’) martyrs. These are Christians who die daily with Christ through fasting, hard work, acts of privations, penance, prayers, and vigils; think of strictly devout monks and nuns. And finally, there are ‘white’ martyrs who, for the love of Christ, offer their lives into the hands of God, without counting the cost, without looking back, believing that God will lead them to exactly where He wants them to be. Many of the early Irish missionaries were white martyrs, setting themselves adrift in small leather boats without oars, sail, or rudder; allowing the winds, currents, and God’s hand to take them to His chosen destination. And whatever land they were set upon, that’s where their mission was established. White martyrdom was like accepting a voluntary exile from one’s homeland for Christ’s exclusive service.

Saint Brendan was a white martyr, setting off with a handful of brothers to share his love for Christ wherever God caused his *cunragh* to go (you can read his story at our website, [www.saintbrendans-online.org/about-st-brendan.html](http://www.saintbrendans-online.org/about-st-brendan.html)), even traveling as far as the Americas 1,000 years before Christopher Columbus! It’s no wonder, then, that he’s the patron saint of seafarers. So, when I retired from the military as a Navy chaplain, Saint Brendan quickly became a personal hero as well as the namesake of this ministry. Here’s how it happened.

Several years before retirement, Sue and I sensed of the Lord that we would have a home open to hospitality and that it would somehow be our post-military ministry. The location ranged anywhere from Alaska to Puerto Rico, but the call was always toward Christian hospitality. We were also involved in a monastic formation group and were soon given the responsibility for its leadership. Okay, so now it was Benedictine hospitality coupled with the classic spiritual disciplines. A number of prophetic words were spoken over us by several bishops and their wives that would add the additional layer of rural life (with very specific property-related elements that had to be accounted for); and that it would be used as a place of training, retreat, healing, preparedness, hiddenness, solitude, prayer, outreach, animal husbandry, the learning and sharing of homesteading skills, and that, somehow and at some point in time, the care of children and youth would be added to the overall mission.

The final location was as much a move of God as the rest of the story. While serving at a Coast Guard base in Puerto Rico, the

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wife of a retired Navy submariner—and a regular member of our chapel community—wanted to ‘gift’ us with some land in Down East Maine for our future post-military ministry. Down East Maine was perfect. Our observance of the Daily Offices of prayer would have us up for *Lauds* and interceding for the Church and the nation as the sun was touching the eastern-most point of the United States (Washington County, Maine, is known as the nation’s “Sunrise County”). When we were at our final duty station at the Naval Training Center near Chicago, and a few months out from retirement, we contacted this lady to see if she was still wanting to gift this land to the ministry. It turned out that the property had been sold, but the area was fixed in our hearts. Sue got to work contacting realtors in that area and, through multiple miracles—they still seem staggering as we remember them—our little homestead in Dennysville was finally secured; and only about ten miles from the original offer of land!

About the property. The original house and barn were built between 1803 and 1804. Yep, 215 years ago. They were built by Zenas Wilder, an officer in the Revolutionary War, who obtained the property as part of a land grant from General Washington in recognition for his service during the war. The young nation didn’t have much money to make its payroll, but it did have land! And the barn, we’re told, is still one of the oldest, continuously-used, timber framed barns in the county! What a beautiful place Zenas was given to heal—particularly after the things he had seen and participated in—as he took on his civilian trades as a farmer and blacksmith.

As for as the history of the house, it was kept in the Wilder family for the next five generations (to within one year of our purchase of the property). During that time, it was used in Dennysville as one of the houses for the hiding of slaves and

Native Americans during the days of the Underground Railroad. We have preserved that hiding place during our renovations. And during World War II, an enemy aircraft search tower was built by the War Department right beside the barn (one of the highest points in Dennysville) to watch for long range German bombers and fighters coming across the Atlantic. Most of the women in town took their turn in that tower with binoculars

and a direct phone line to Dow Army Airfield in Bangor. It's amazing to see how the property's own history of healing, hiding, watching, and stewardship of the land plays directly into the ministry of Saint Brendan's—a parable of God's ongoing work. Today Saint Brendan's operates from ten acres of the original farm with house, barn, chapel, woodshop, and out-buildings totaling over 6,000 sq. ft. of living, working, and ministry space; all of it dedicated in service to our Lord, Jesus Christ.

About the ministry. For the bulk of our *Navigator* readers, Saint Brendan's is, in effect, a fellowship based on the Holy Spirit's call to intentional holiness of life patterned after the ancient and classic disciplines associated with monastic spirituality. Our newsletters provide articles for edification and instruction. We offer study guides for select books on monastic discipline. We offer fellowship members a place of spiritual retreat right here on the property. And we make ourselves available for spiritual direction. But do you know what kind of ministry happens right here apart from your quarterly newsletter?

It all began the day we arrived on the property, July 10<sup>th</sup>, 2005. We decided to exorcise and consecrate the land to the glory of Christ through 40 days of fasting, prayer, and multiple celebrations of the Eucharist (the same pattern used by early English and Irish monks when they established new monasteries!). During that time, we also made some pretty major decisions. One of them was that, though Washington County was one of the poorest counties in Maine, and I had a military retirement that took care of the mortgage and utilities, we were not going to live in excess above our poorest neighbors. Our lives would imitate our neighbors around us in hard work, struggles, and challenges—we couldn't be ministers of Christ with all kinds of outside resources. We also decided that this place is where we would live, work, and die. Dennysville was our home. You can't gain the trust and respect of your neighbors when you make it known that you have 'options' and that you have a fallback plan when things get rough. When the folks here finally understood that we weren't going anywhere—that their winters were our winters; their blackflies were our blackflies; and their community bean suppers were our community bean suppers—everything changed as we showed them humility, love, and respect for the dignity of their often difficult lives.

Local ministry opportunities soon emerged as we helped two area churches with interim support. We were also able to find



work within the community: part-time school bus driver; bookkeeping at a neighboring farm; substitute teaching; and serving as a post office window clerk. Each one of these knit us deeper into the lives our community while we continued to provide leadership for Saint Brendan's. Soon a small chapel community formed around the Sunday Eucharist celebrated in our house. This soon led to plans for the construction of Holy Trinity Chapel on the property. With the addition of donkeys and dairy goats (and at various points in time, sheep, alpacas, and a yak!) also came the need for hay... and the invitation to work in the local hay fields during the height of summer with the promise of hay for our use throughout the winter (and the rare privilege of being counted a part of that farm family!). Sue even has the great fun and experience of regularly working with a local team of Clydesdales who are called upon for frequent carriage rides at weddings, parades, town and county fairs, and school graduations. These things don't go unnoticed because, at times of need, we're also called upon by folks in town at the death of loved ones, to make hospital visits, to help with meals, to visit the elderly, and even to offer the blessing over community suppers. This is the true meaning of parish. Not the people in the pews but the people of the community where we live; a close-knit community that spreads across several small towns; the original "cure of souls" (i.e., pastoral care exercised over a determined district in which the church is located). In other words, this whole part of the county is our parish!

As if that wasn't enough, we've also listed our homestead on various websites for cyclists and other travelers. Because our chief ministry is hospitality, we like to think of these people as pilgrims although they might not think of themselves that way. Without cost, these people stay with us, eat with us, often help us, and are even encouraged to join us for worship or the Daily Offices. We've had guests from Canada, Russia, South Africa, France, and the Czech Republic, as well as Illinois, southern Maine, Florida, Georgia, and other states. One guest, a professional Triathlete from France, joined us for Evening Prayer and said that she hadn't been in church since she was confirmed and, referring to our service, said, "This was really important." Who knows what the Holy Spirit will use from that time spent in our chapel in order to work a renewal in her heart and spirit. Oh, and these visits are all in addition to those who come



here for retreats, again, at no cost; trusting the Lord will always provide what we need to maintain the homestead and the ministry.

Where is all of this going? The Lord Himself knows, and we, truth be told, may never see its conclusion. All we can do is be faithful to His call. On some Sundays, especially during the winter, our Eucharist at Holy Trinity Chapel includes just Sue and me—and the heavenly host and that “great cloud of witnesses.” On other occasions the chapel has been filled to capacity with folding chairs borrowed from the local grade school. For most services, there are three to seven people. But remember, our chapel is only a part of our parish; our parish is not our chapel. On special occasions, our parish has extended all the way to the State House—and by extension, the whole State of Maine—when I’ve been invited to pray for all the State Representatives and even for the Governor himself in his office, anointing him with oil and praying God’s protection and blessing upon him. To be honest, there are days when we feel overwhelmed by the grit and grind of rural life, but then we must remember that our neighbors face the same thing. They’re our family now, and we love the Lord in each one of them.

Did you know that Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont are the most unchurched states in the nation? New church plants barely last a year; pastors moving to the area last about three years; and youth/associate pastors, on the average, can only hang on for about a year and a half before resigning from the ministry. This is spiritually hard soil. So we can only thank God for last 13 years and what He has worked through us (and often in spite of us!). We’re home because this is where the Lord has called us to be. And our prayer is simply that enough of Jesus shines through us so that there is a witness of His love and compassion even for those who think that God doesn’t even know their name. And while we dearly love our parents, siblings, and children, this is Saint Brendan’s. We *are* home.

Rejoice!  
Fr. Alan

## 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...

[Regarding martyrdom] “We conquer in dying, and go forth victorious at the very moment we are subdued.”

—Tertullian of Carthage (160-230 AD), North African *theologian and apologist*.

## The Plans I Have for You Sue Andraeas

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.”

Jeremiah 29: 11-12

Our calendar for July looks like this:

July 1: Feast Day of St. Brendan

July 7: 22<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of Alan’s ordination to the priesthood (he had already been an ordained pastor for over a decade)

July 10: 13<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of St. Brendan’s Monastic Retreat Community

July 11: Feast Day of St. Benedict

July 14: our wedding anniversary (19 years!)

There’s also birthdays of family and friends, and the anniversary of my dad’s departure for heaven. I always find myself spending a great deal of time in July praying about where we’ve been and where we’re headed. (I do the same thing in January, but on a more personal level – July is more of a Fellowship pondering.) Things I talk to God about include how we came to decide to pattern our spiritual life after St. Brendan and St. Benedict.

They were both born in the late 400’s AD and lived through the early 500’s. One was a Celtic monk/explorer who turned evangelism into an extreme sport. The other was an Italian monk/rebel who perceived that legal Christianity was causing Christians to become comfortable and socially inert, so he moved to the hills and started one of the first monastic communities ever. And I wonder,...If these men would visit us, would they be able to see their influence in my life? Would they be okay with having their name associated with this place? Are we making any progress? Is the Lord always first served here, or are we also becoming socially inert and comfortable; forgetting the danger/thrill inherent in Christian faith? How come, after 13 years, it’s still just the two of us living here? How can we be a ‘community of two?’ Are we still following God’s plan, or have we taken an easier, broader rabbit path?

I can answer one of those questions immediately. The Lord is not always first served in this place, my life or my heart—but it is my daily goal and I’m getting better at it. Some days. The problem is that my expectations are different from God’s. I tend to think that God is interested in what I am *doing* for Him, as though He can’t accomplish His plans without me being busy. (Funny, isn’t it?) I also tend to believe that once I have my act together, even if it is only a temporary accomplishment, I deserve some sort of kudos, usually along the line of visible, tangi-

ble blessing (and by 'blessing,' I mean something fun or amusing). I expect God's 'discipline' to be behaviorally corrective but not affect my internal life, my thoughts or secret desires. I want it to be a private, confidential teaching that doesn't involve others knowing what's wrong with me. I don't want the kind of 'discipline' that requires a change in habit or the giving up of addictions; that require me to radically change how I perceive the world, our congregation, our family—or interfere with my life overall. I like the legal, comfortable, philosophically stimulating Christianity that requires I read and learn rather than the kind that demands me to carve the worldly parts of me away. I like to think that what God requires of me is to attend church, be 'nice' to others, read my Bibles daily, pray, and obtain Christian information. But for all the lists I can find in Scripture, that one isn't there.

The verse Jeremiah 29:11 shows up on this property at various places. It's been written on construction studs as people have helped us build. It was at the top of a letter written by a dear

friend as we left for the wilderness we now call home. We all have seen this verse on graduation cards, pictures, coffee mugs. "For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a

future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.'" I like this verse a lot. It's inspiring. But it's the flip-side to the verse in Hebrews 12, "And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, 'My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.'"

God spoke to Jeremiah during Israel's Babylonian exile. I'm sure it didn't feel like a good plan to the Israelites living it! Why would God plan exile? What hope is there so far away from home? God later says that He'll deliver them from captivity—in 70 years. 70 years!!? That meant they'd have to tell their kids about it because most of the people hearing that prophecy wouldn't be around then!

And there's the rub. God is looking for obedience, for trusting in Him rather than in our own ability to sort it all out. To ensure we don't muck things up, His plans often exceed our chronological ability to fulfill; we start something but someone else finishes it. St. Brendan was tossed around in the Atlantic in a tiny boat that didn't even have a rudder. St. Benedict was abandoned by the first members of his community and had to start all over again. Neither got to see the immense impact their lives

"I know that discipline is not a 'time out chair' but a training camp preparing me for an eternal adventure."

and faith would have on Christians—even centuries later. And us? We're still remodeling a 200+ year old farmhouse; trying to teach our suburban brains how to think like farmers; how to pull off amazing feats with physical ailments and synapses that are beginning to seize up; and how to juggle all of this while keeping up with the administrative demands of a fledgling lay monastic community—and all while nobody can even tell us what a 'lay monastic community' actually is! Some days, I am pathetically dysfunctional. Others, I am mind-numbingly frustrated. But then there are the days when that 'peace that passeth understanding' settles deep in my soul and I know that discipline is not a 'time out chair' but a training camp preparing me for an eternal adventure with my Savior and Friend. And that so long as God's discipline continues, I can rest assured that He counts me as a daughter because THAT IS WHAT HE HAS PROMISED.

So, I do not lose heart. His long-term plans are for the prosperity of His Kingdom. I am a part of that Kingdom. Therefore, His plans will prosper me. Maybe not today. Maybe not tomorrow. Maybe not even in this earthly life. But they will one day. Oh, the blessed

hope of the resurrection! How shallow our lives become when we expect every blessing to be a happy, earthly one! How short-sighted we become when we can't see beyond this physical life. How mundane and unexciting our life of faith can be when we forget that God is much more creative and adventurous than we could ever be!

A blessed Feast Day of St. Brendan and St. Benedict to you all. Enjoy the ride!

Rejoice  
Sue



# Life at the Priory house



**TOP LEFT:** Our friend, Pilly Winchester, helped us finish the exterior shingling of our new entryway (i.e., “mudroom”). **TOP CENTER:** Ron Kilby, Sue, and Pilly Winchester pose for the “Victors Picture” at the completion of the metal shell for the new Saint Brendan’s woodshop. **TOP RIGHT:** Sue and Molly get to know each other during well-deserved bareback horse rides. **MIDDLE LEFT:** Rachel Green, an intern at a neighboring farm, came over to help us butcher goats. All she wanted in return was a chance to ride Molly. **MIDDLE CENTER:** The Priory House gets a rebuild on the



back porch. This time our local construction friends (Pilly and Ron) were helped by our daughter, Audralee Shaw, who was visiting for a week from Kansas. **BOTTOM LEFT:** Sue helps Ron Kilby and his draft horse, Jerry, as they prepare for the local Memorial Day parade, using Dennysville’s own 1892 hearse. **BOTTOM CENTER:** Fr. Alan in recovery after his left total shoulder replacement surgery.

## HOW TO CONTACT US

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## WE COVET YOUR PRAYERS!!!

Please continue to pray for Saint Brendan’s and these various needs:

- For final construction of Saint Brendan’s wood shop.
- For strength and safety during hay season.
- Praise God for the promise of family and friends who wish to come and help with chores and projects while Fr. Alan convalesces.
- For necessary remodeling of the Priory House so that we can host more retreatants and guests.
- For electric and insulation in the chapel this summer.
- For favor with medical concerns and upcoming surgeries.

**The Final Word: St. Cyprian** — Bishop of Carthage, North Africa. Often worked underground during fierce religious persecution. Finally captured and executed by the Romans, obtaining the “martyr’s crown” in 258 AD.

Cyprian, to the martyrs and confessors in Christ our Lord and in God the Father; everlasting salvation be yours. You were not kept back from the struggle by fear of tortures. Bravely and firmly, you have returned with ready devotion to contend in the most extreme contest. Of you, I find that some are already crowned. Others are even now within reach of the crown of victory. The multitude of those who were present saw with admiration the heavenly contest—the contest of God, the spiritual contest, the battle of Christ. They saw that His servants stood with free voice.

Precious is the death that has bought immortality at the cost of its blood, which has received the crown from the consummation of its virtues. How Christ rejoiced therein! How willingly did He both fight and conquer in such servants of His! You are fighting under the eyes of a present Lord, whom you are attaining by the confession of His name to His own glory. He is not someone who only *looks* on His servants. Rather, He Himself also wrestles in us; He Himself is engaged in the struggle.

If it glorious for soldiers of this world to return in triumph to their country when the enemy is defeated, how much more excellent and greater is the glory to return in triumph to Paradise, when the devil is overcome? To bring back victorious trophies to that place from which Adam was ejected as a sinner.

An assorted group of people, following your example, have confessed alike with you. Of these, there is no lack of virgins in whom the hundredfold is added to the sixtyfold. In boys, also, a courage greater than their age has surpassed their years in the praise of this confession. Accordingly, each sex and every age adorns the blessed flock of your martyrdom.



**When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie /  
My grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply /  
The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design /  
Thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine /**

**When thro' the deep waters I call thee to go /  
The rivers of sorrow shall not overflow /  
For I will be with thee, thy troubles to bless /  
And sanctify to thee thy deepest distress /**

**"How Firm a Foundation"**

**Text: Anonymous author known only as 'K', 1787.**

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## A Special Thankyou

We would like to offer a special thankyou and prayer of blessing to our Saint Brendan Friends, Clay and Marcia Landwher, for the thoughtful donation made to this ministry in honor and memory of Marcia's mother, Ruth Smith. May the Lord's peace be yours, this day and forevermore.

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