“To live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often.” These were St. John Henry Newman’s wise words when describing life in this lower world of space and time. We have certainly come to feel their relevance in the months since the eruption of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Changes in life on the abbey hill have mirrored those elsewhere. Because the latter are familiar to everyone, what follows is a timeline of only some of the more prominent changes and how they have impacted monks and seminarians.

2020.03.11 Rumblings of an approaching foreign flu have been echoing in the media for some weeks...Perhaps in a providential forewarning of the dramatic weekend coming up, monks enter the abbey church for Lauds this Wednesday morning and find a scene of desolation: a light, grey haze hangs in the air; a slimy liquid is splashed on the altar steps; the tabernacle has been sprayed with the same residue. Intruders have broken into the buildings and emptied the contents of two fire extinguishers into the sacred space...How vulnerable we feel!

03.15 The seminarians have gone home for the long weekend as per their calendar. But now COVID-19 is on our doorstep. A decision is unavoidable: will the seminarians be allowed to return to the seminary after the weekend or not? A community meeting is called: a good number of the monks would like to carry on as usual. A meeting of the abbot’s council the following morning gives heed to urgent medical advice and Father Abbot decides that it is safer for the seminarians to wait out the storm at home. Safe distancing measures are so important that there is no opportunity for a proper end-of-year farewell. Accustomed to keeping the digital world at arm’s length, the monastic faculty wakes up needing to learn online teaching on the run in a brief two weeks.

03.21 Restrictions come rolling in: no congregation at Mass, no common serving bowls at table, no playing of bridge at recreation, no hockey, no...Ouch! We are attached to many things and it is not easy to let them go in this time of pandemic, even if there are good reasons for doing so. Nostalgia and resentment mingle with agonised soul-searching and blind faith. Why must it be this way, Lord?

04.12 The Holy Week liturgy culminates in the joy of Easter. Christ is victorious over all sin and evil and we will not dampen our celebration of it! The pressures of this time beckon us to extend the joy of this day to the few “stranded” seminarians still present. The Easter Sunday noon meal is a feast for all in one common refectory.

April-May Teachers discover the possibilities...
and limitations of teaching online. One can entrust students to a plethora of educational sites to further their learning but until a high-speed internet connection is in place, there are many teaching sessions with frozen faces and slurred speech. By May, our internet connection thankfully gets an upgrade.

07.06 For some weeks, monks have been wondering whether it will be possible to have the annual community vacations in Lillooet, BC. The reason why? We, who are used to offering hospitality, would be the intruders at our usual vacation spot! This small BC Interior community is on high alert against any non-residents spending several days in the area; they have not yet had a single case of COVID-19. In the end, fears are allayed and the vacations are possible.

July-August Thankfully, British Columbia sets a high priority on having schools open and running by September. So, as the province tackles the logistics of containing the coronavirus among a body of students, the monastic community also prepares for the coming school year. What a mountain of details to sort through! From deciding how many students can wash their hands simultaneously at the sinks before a meal to where spiritual direction sessions can take place with adequate distancing, almost every aspect of the seminary routine is re-evaluated for its COVID safety. Through these meetings, however, the fatherly desire grows in monks’ hearts to hear the halls of the seminary ring again with the youthful voices of seminarians to accompany in their discernment.

09.04 The monastic community feels the lack of understanding of public authorities in handling the COVID-19 crisis. Only after three weeks and on the third attempt, after numerous hours of waiting and dialoguing with border officials, can our candidate cross the border from Washington State and enter the monastic community as postulant.

09.13 We are informed that one of the students newly arrived for the school year has tested positive for COVID-19. In the space of three hours, it seems like the monastery and seminary are turned upside down: Quarantine for anyone who had contact with him; classes are cancelled so that each community, monastic or seminarian, remains isolated within its own part of the buildings. Amid the chaos, however, creativity also emerges. For the high school, teachers send school work remotely to senior students, who substitute for them in teaching the younger grades – all according to class schedule. After two days, a video conference with the public health authorities reassures us that our reaction to the COVID-19 case was diligent and that only five students need to remain in quarantine. Others only need to monitor themselves for symptoms. So, we wear masks at all times – even while singing the Divine Office – until two weeks elapse and no new COVID-19 cases emerge.

09.29 At last! The period of self-monitoring is over and everyone is in the clear, although many safeguards remain in place. The celebration of Father Abbot's anniversary of abbatial blessing has a special significance this year.

Looking back, we are grateful for God’s protection, grateful for the solicitude of friends towards us, vigilant about new cases of COVID-19, and trying to accept ever more peacefully that life will never be the same.
Brother Gregory Hansler, was born in Vancouver, BC, on February 2, 1961, of Werner and Catherine (née Stock) Hansler. He is survived by his brother Paul who lives in Kamloops, BC.

Baptized at St. Monica’s Parish, Richmond, BC, he grew up mainly in Vancouver and received his education successively at Kerrisdale Elementary, Vancouver College, and Point Grey Secondary. As a teenager he was rebellious and spent a great deal of time with the wrong crowd, partying, drinking and smoking marijuana. In Grade 12 he began experiencing bouts of double vision which led very quickly to the diagnosis of a brain tumour; emergency treatment was in order. Providentially, he chose at first to follow a course of radiation rather than surgery, and this humbled him with its predictable side effects. In his own words, this “kick-started my open and public return to the practice of my faith.”

After his health stabilised, Brother pursued such occupations as grain inspector for the Canadian Wheat Board, limousine driver, and – after university studies – instructor in English as a Second Language.

In the meantime, in 1982, faced with the re-emergence of the tumour from three years earlier, “I promised the Lord that if the surgery went well, I would openly return to Him and His Church.” God’s providence struck again and this time Brother joined a Catholic social group, though his life was that of a smorgasbord Catholic, picking and choosing doctrines he wished to believe in. Yet another turning point came when he joined the Legion of Mary and was taught to pray the Divine Office. During the evening recitation of the Office one day, he was immersed in the peace of Christ and knew that he wanted to serve God alone. His parish priest, Fr. John Brioux, OMI, encouraged him to try the Claretian Missionaries. After a disappointing stay at a Claretian parish in Chicago, he attended a live-in at the Seminary of Christ the King. This time he followed up on an inspiration of joy while praying before the Blessed Sacrament, “I want to be a monk so that I can live under the same roof as the Blessed Sacrament!”

Brother Gregory (Kurt) Hansler with his parents
On Nov 9, 2002, Brother entered into the community. Although he went through the customary monastic formation, by the end of his temporary vows it was discerned that he would be more suited to the life of a claustral Oblate. And so, on September 1, 2007, he made his oblation and renewed it annually in the ensuing years.

Brother Gregory remained a prayerful man all through his monastic life, with a special devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. He showed himself ready to take on any humble task that would be useful to the community with a quiet and cheerful dedication. He peeled potatoes, mopped floors, weed wacked, mowed lawns, cleaned out calf pens, emptied the garbage every week and trucked it to the dump.

Brother’s monastic life was marked by both simplicity and many a limitation, but above all by peace and prayerfulness that came from a deep acceptance of the will of God. His previous brain operations had the effect of aging him prematurely and slowing down his bodily movements, yet he maintained a unique sense of humour which he kept even when being corrected for some fault or forgetfulness. He knew how to accept humiliations without anger or defence. He had an inquisitive mind and disarming genuineness in his questions about deepening his life of prayer. He was also compassionate and a champion of the underdog. His eighteen years with us were years of God’s providence preparing his servant for himself and stretching the monastic community to love and serve him in ways beyond the usual. Throughout, he was a man on a mission as he prayed steadily for his father and his brother, wanting them to have a share in the joy he had found in his faith.

When diagnosed with a brain tumour for the third time in his life a year ago, he accepted the surgery ahead of him with equanimity. When he returned to the abbey for his last three months, the community witnessed many transitions in him as he prepared for death, for he gave much through the care that was asked of us. On November 18, Brother Gregory passed to the Lord. We thank God for his witness and his life among us. May he rest in peace.
Retirement of Frank Turner

By Abbot John Braganza, OSB

From 1999 to 2019, when I crossed the parking lot to teach at the Major Seminary, I would often meet Frank Turner as he headed towards our gym to teach the major seminarians their introductory drama and speech class. Behind his bright smile and cheery hello was a deep faith and interest in the education of priests as a noble task. Frank C. Turner is an actor and iconographer born in Wainwright, Alberta, and now living in Port Coquitlam, BC. Married in 1976, he has four adult children, and is a member of Holy Family Parish, Vancouver.

He received his theatrical training at the University of Alberta, graduating in 1975 with a BFA. For the first few years after graduation he acted in theatres across western Canada and Ontario. In 1983 he moved to Vancouver, BC and has worked mainly in film since then.

In his own words, “I have made my living mainly as an actor, with 40 years of professional experience. Favourite credits include Airbud IV, The Addams Family, Lonesome Dove and The Duke. In 2003 I appeared as George Bernard Shaw in debate with G. K. Chesterton on G. K. Chesterton: The Apostle of Common Sense with EWTN and in the summer of 2008 completed more work for the program, The Quest for Shakespeare and for Theatre of the Word. Most recently I worked on Spooky Buddies, Diary of a Wimpy Kid 3, and Spooksville.

“In 1991 I began studying iconography under Vladislav Andreyev and have now completed more than 60 egg tempera icons in the Byzantine tradition for individuals and churches. Since my initial studies with Andreyev I attended workshops several times at the Mount Angel Iconography Institute where I studied with Charles Rohrbacher, Mary Katsilometes, Cathy Sievers and Claudia Coos. In 2006 I took a workshop with Father Gianluca Busi from Bologna and in 2007 spent a month working in his studio in Italy. In July 2008 I assisted Don Gianluca in conducting a workshop in Edmonton. I give private instruction in my studio and have taught workshops for Living Water College, Redeemer Pacific College, and Holy Family Parish.

“Most of my icons have been smaller 'personal' or 'hand' icons for individuals. However I have also completed a number of larger icons installed in churches, most notably a set of eight 3’ X 3’ icons installed on the doors of Corpus Christi Church in Vancouver, a St. Joseph for a chapel in London, Ontario, and most recently the crucifix installed in the lobby of John Paul II Pastoral Centre.

“Along with Chris Kieliesinski and Michal Janek, I was a founding member of Epiphany Sacred Arts Guild, and served as its president for ten years.”

More recently he has assisted Fr. Dunstan, our in-house 96-year-old monk-artist with the gessoing of 14 large panels for a Stations of the Cross project which Father has begun for the monastic community. (In 2011 he had renewed the Stations of the Cross for his parish.)

We are grateful to Frank for his generous and long volunteer service to the education of future priests. It is hard to estimate adequately any volunteer teacher’s contribution to the life of a seminarian. Each teacher’s contribution is like a little stream that swells into a river as the man is ordained and takes up his post in the sheepfold of the Lord.
Volunteer Teacher: Diane Petraszko

In the daily routine of a seminary classroom, teacher and students grow accustomed to dealing with predictable topics like the memorisation of a poem by G.K. Chesterton or the grammatical forms of a French verb. Infrequent is the occasion when a teacher opens up about childhood memories. But when such a moment comes, put down your pens: this is something worth listening to!

Few would suspect the origins of Diane Petraszko, the French 10 teacher since September 2015. She was born in Val-d’Or, QC, a small gold mining town about 300 km north of Ottawa. Her parents were Ukrainian in background. Cooking borscht, and making cabbage rolls, perogies and potato pancakes were typical cultural activities. She loved to attend the Slavonic Divine Liturgy and to paint Ukrainian Easter eggs.

After her teacher training at the University of Toronto, she embarked on a career of teaching French in several schools in Ontario, then after retirement moved west. Her recent years of teaching at the Seminary of Christ the King have been unlike anything she experienced before. She recalls from her earlier career once having been denounced to the principal by a student for having prayed with him even though she had obtained his permission beforehand. At the seminary, by contrast, she enjoys being able to pray with and for her students. Being a part of the seminary community has been greatly enriching. To see monks and seminarians roll up their sleeves to wash dishes together or to take part in a common meal with all the monks and seminarians are tokens of a school setting following a different inspiration than the usual.

Diane came to the seminary by a less than usual route herself. Living in Abbotsford, she heard of the possibility of coming for the sacrament of penance at the Abbey. On the appointed day, it was the rector, Father Peter, who heard her confession. When she found out that the seminary was looking for experienced teachers who could volunteer their time, she offered herself at once. The very next day, after an interview with Father Abbot and Father Alban, she was accepted.

In the seminary, “Madame Petraszko” brings the gentle radiance of a grandmotherly presence. She has been married 54 years and has two daughters. The elder is married with three children and lives in West Vancouver; she is one of the chief haematologists working for Canadian Blood Services across Canada. The younger daughter is an artistic florist and Early Childhood Education teacher in Aurora, ON. From her experience in life, Diane wants to build an atmosphere of wisdom, trust and understanding in the classroom, so that students find acceptance and also encouragement to develop their language skills.
Ordination of Richard Conlin

Richard Conlin will be ordained to the priesthood on December 11th at Holy Rosary Cathedral, Vancouver, by Archbishop J. Michael Miller, CSB. He entered Christ the King Seminary in 2014 and completed two years of pre-theology and four years of theology this spring.

He was born in Richmond, BC 32 years ago and attended St. Joseph the Worker Elementary, and Vancouver College for his secondary studies.

In 2007 on a golf scholarship he attended St. Mary's College in Moraga, California, and in 2011 received his B.Sc. in Business Administration and Economics. On his return to the Vancouver area he articled as an accountant at KPMG.

During his last month of university studies at St Mary's College in California, his mother had asked him to go to confession for her birthday. He had a profound encounter with Jesus Christ. That proved to be a turning point in his life that led him on a path to pursue a vocation to the priesthood. Archbishop Adam Exner and Monsignor Gregory Smith also had notable influences on his vocation. During his internship Richard served at St. Joseph’s Parish, Langley, Holy Rosary Cathedral, and Corpus Christi parish, Vancouver.

Among his interests are: reading, exercise, golf, food, and anything Catholic. His favourite sport is golf. “I planned to be a professional golfer my whole life until Jesus called me to the seminary.”

He will say his first Mass at Christ the Redeemer Parish in West Vancouver on December 12th, and be stationed at Corpus Christi Parish in Vancouver where he has served as deacon for the past few months.

“I am studying to become a priest because Jesus has shown me that the priesthood is the best way to become a saint, and saints are the happiest people in the world!”

FORM OF BEQUESTS

I give, bequeath and devise to WESTMINSTER ABBEY LTD, Mission, BC, a corporation under the laws of British Columbia, the sum of $........ to be used at the discretion of the Benedictines of Westminster Abbey for the building program and general benefit of the Seminary of Christ the King, Mission, BC, Canada.

First Priestly Blessing:
BC Catholic (Analyn Perez photos)
Major Seminary Diary

September 2020
11: The Majors and Spirituality Year students arrived today.
14: All classes were supposed to start today but have been cancelled due to the active COVID case in the high school.
15: Regular classes started today.
26: This evening, there was much rejoicing, laughter, and embracing as the two-week period of quarantine was finished and masks were no longer mandatory.
29: Today, we celebrated Father Abbot’s feast day and had no classes. After the common meal, the five Americans who were quarantined were asked to share their experiences in isolation, and we ended with a Te Deum.

October 2020
2: Today we had the first day of community sports since the last school year. We played soccer on the new field and were joined by the Redemptorists Mater seminarians and the seminarians from the Spirituality Year.
9: Today was the beginning of the first long weekend where we were not able to go home. However, we were able to find many ways to spend the weekend and to rest. This included watching the first movie of the Lord of the Rings trilogy, hanging out at the CSJB house (formation house of the Congregation of St. John the Baptist), or simply taking advantage of the free schedule to rest.
31: Today, we had an All Saints’ Day party. Rather than dressing up as a holy person or object as in usual years, we each had to make our own chasuble. After Vigils, we spent the night playing various games.
September 12-16: The Spirituality year for 2020-2021 began differently than most. We had the usual five day retreat that introduced the four of us to the year and gave us a taste of the personal and spiritual formation that was to come. We started to get to know one another as well as our formators, but we didn’t get to see each other smile. This was, of course, due to the use of masks to protect us from each other because of COVID-19. There was plenty of hand washing, cleaning of surfaces, and the smell of hand sanitiser was everywhere.

September 29: It was Father Abbot’s feast day today and it was certainly a day to celebrate. The whole community was finally able to come together after the quarantine period finished, we all had lunch together and no one had to wear masks. (Yay!) Everyone was so excited to be together and it was so nice to get to meet some of the monks and other seminarians.

October 2: Today Father Hien took some of us to Mt. Cheam for a hike. It was an incredible day for a hike, the sun was shining, there was a cool breeze, and the smoke which had filled the air for a week before had disappeared. The scenery of the hike was breathtaking, we walked through idyllic meadows, watched paragliders soar above us, and stood on the top of the mountain in awe of the view. The day was one to remember and something all of us would love to do again.

October 12: Thanksgiving would normally be a weekend we go home to our families, but this year we are unable to go home because of COVID-19. However, that didn’t stop us from having a festive Thanksgiving. We made a full turkey dinner with stuffing, mashed potatoes, and roasted vegetables. It was so much fun to make the meal and was even better to eat!

October 23: Today we were fortunate enough to attend Raffaele Salvino’s ordination to the diaconate. It was a very beautiful Mass, and two of us were privileged to serve in the Mass as well. Seeing an ordination is great for guys like us who are discerning, because it shows how beautiful the call to priesthood is and the joy it can bring in one’s life.
September 6: Minor seminarians began returning today and everyone, except Charles Testa, arrived by Wednesday the 9th. The Americans, although they expected a delayed entry into Canada, did arrive as smoothly as possible, and were put into quarantine.

September 13-15: The American students were tested and one tested positive with COVID-19. Classes, supposed to have been resumed, were happily usurped by the Grade 11s under the watchful care of Br. Joseph. Fathers Abbot, Prior, Peter and other faculty took part in a video conference with officials in Victoria, and on Monday, Fathers Peter, Joseph, and Br. Maximus were released from their isolation. School resumed the next day with substitutes for the lay teachers.

October 9-11: Thanks to Divine Providence, and the spontaneous planning of Father Peter, the 34 minors, accompanied by Father Leo and Brother Bartholomew, travelled to the Queen of Peace Dominican monastery near Squamish, BC for the weekend. The trip involved the clearing of dead and burned trees (due to the forest fires during the summer), clearing and weeding soil, chopping a lot of wood, and stacking it for easy access for the nuns. The Mother Prioress even gave Daniel Bittman and Oscar Laurence the keys to the truck, and they both happily and eagerly accepted the driving experience! All in all the weekend was filled with many unintentional and yet meaningful experiences, including the nuns’ amazing and tasty food. In those few days, there was such a profound sense of God-given peace as the boys worked hard and prayed reverently, for the most part.

November 6-9: Due to COVID, the scheduled home-weekend was cancelled, and in its place was an event-filled weekend that had its own charm. On the evening of Friday, minors relaxed after classes and watched the movie Ben Hur, before they headed off to have a Holy Hour with the monks. After hopefully being filled with holiness, the boys headed off to bed for an unexpected tomorrow. Saturday morning, they were allowed to sleep in till 7, and they woke up to a breakfast of eggs, toast and Father Peter’s famous kombucha. Tasks were distributed, and the fire started on the
previous evening, by Brother Bartholomew, was soon roaring and blazing in all its glory. Trees lining one of the monastery’s pastures were cut down and their wood stacked. Noah Campbell, with the help of Gus Pelletier, led a caber toss tournament, with the winner being, unfairly, Br. Maximus. After Midday Prayer the minors eagerly assembled hot dogs and warmed them over the embers. The morning’s work resumed after lunch and the day ended with toasted burritos, and rosary around the dying fire. Sunday was a peaceful day of relaxation, but along came Monday. The seminarians had another sleep in and after Mass they split into two groups; one went to Bear Mountain and the other felled the last six trees with Br. Bartholomew. The group cutting trees had a similar day to Saturday, but the group going to Bear Mountain had quite the excursion... Daniel Bittman, Noah Canero, Jacob Klaponski, Dominic Cummings, Ethan Dreveny, Ian Yun, Michael Anhel, and Juan Carlos Joosten roller-bladed to Bear Mountain accompanied by Oscar Laurence, Gus Pelletier, Sam Hertel, and Nathan Ticman on their feet. Halfway to the mountain, the weather changed and started to drizzle snow on the talkative wayfarers. Getting to the base of the mountain, the group halted and, after a hasty Midday Prayer, devoured their lunch. To everyone’s surprise Daniel managed to light the fire and thanks to Juan Carlos’ sacrifice of a sock, they soon had a contained and warming fire. After a brilliant but unsuccessful attempt to get a ride home from one of the monks, but not being able to get a hold of anyone from the seminary, they decided to start walking back. The near-constant but light snowfall created a fun-filled but very perilous journey back for those on skates. On the way back, the seminarians found a gate open, and had to herd a few cows back onto monastery grounds. The weekend ended with all the minor seminarians back together for the evening, with memories that would linger for a while.
Rather than putting up new buildings this summer, the brothers have been putting up with pandemic protocols in solidarity with the global society. Mask-wearing, bleach-watering, hand-washing and plenty of COVID meetings have all been grinding away at everyone’s inclination for convenience but also giving us plenty of opportunities to think of others. One of the many unlooked-for pandemic blessings has been the increasing emergence of wildlife from their hiding places due to the increasing paucity of people roaming the monastic grounds. Not that the brothers prefer animals to people, of course – it is simply a welcome surprise to see the marvellous creatures God has fashioned.

Perhaps the first surprise of this sort came one summer evening when Frater Athanasius glimpsed a bobcat strolling past the car garage then disappearing into the juniper bushes. It wasn’t seen again but Kevin and Mary Reese, an Oblate couple partaking our abbey life, glimpsed another wildcat and found telltale signs of a cougar on the property. These prowling predators were drawn to our domain by a bourgeoning bunny population. For a while, the bunnies had little fear of people so the monks were able to observe their antics quite freely and availed themselves of the opportunity, until one of them was caught red-footed in Father Abbot’s flower garden munching on the petunias. Novice David, in accord with his namesake who defended sheep from wild lions, was given permission to defend the petunias from these wild rabbits. The rabbits soon learned to dive for cover at the slightest provocation as their friends and family found their way into our freezer, destined one day to be turned into Hasenpfeffer. The original day set for this delicacy came and went after Br. Benedict, who along with many of the brethren has a soft spot for the critters, conveniently forgot to thaw out the frozen meat.

Some confreres, notably Br. John, joined Novice David in the defense of our monastic vegetation by combatting hordes of slugs which revelled in the wet June weather and gobbled down vegetable seedlings like there was no tomorrow. Brother had no qualms of conscience in destroying the gastropods especially after hearing that Fr. Paul of Moll, a 19th century wonder-working Belgian Benedictine had helped many farmers combat such vermin with the belief that they come from the Evil One as did the darnel in our Lord’s parable. After much persevering labour, the garden this year finally produced many fine vegetables and fruits including some cantaloupes, watermelons, and flat-headed cabbages.

In a similar vein, now that Br. Maurus has gone to his eternal reward, someone was needed to fill his clogs with regards to the defense of monastic lawns against rummaging moles. Br.
Bartholomew and Novice Isaac gallantly took up the task but with limited success. Br. Maurus had purchased some mole traps directly from the Netherlands and it seems it may require a native Dutchman to utilize the contraptions to their full potential. Nevertheless, the Bruneau brothers contest the age-old saying, “If you ain’t Dutch, you ain’t much.” The bears this year were bolder than usual, walking near the buildings in broad daylight and even across the church porch one evening. A good dose of French Canadian from our brothers always sent them in the right direction however. Unfortunately, one miscreant managed to find a window of time in which the Bruneaus weren’t out and about and he happily wolfed down vast quantities of corn.

Bears were also seen up in Lillooet during our vacation time. The wildlife there always affords delight to the monastic community. Besides the bears, deer, mountain sheep, pygmy owls, pack rats (who have been known to try and pillage swim trunks at night) and the delightful hummingbirds which fight one another for sugar water are some members of the Lillooet fauna. A new guest this summer came in the form of a weasel who, completely oblivious to the monks, went about his business of devouring house mice. Finally, some beautiful rainbow trout caught by Br. Joshua and Frater Athanasius were heartily enjoyed at breakfast.

After camp-time, another surprise for Frater Athanasius came when, in the very same locale of the bobcat sighting, he glimpsed a fat furry beast waddle off into the bushes. At camp Frater had joined Fr. Matthew, Fr. Leo, Br. Joseph, Br. Joshua, Br. Isidore, and Br. John on a three-day hike into marmot country. When Frater espied the fat furry beast he reckoned it was a travelling marmot but Br. Emeric assured him that the Abbey grounds are not marmot habitat. Br. Paschasius suggested it may have been a stray dog. Others proposed a porcupine or a migrating beaver. Frater rather hopes marmots are indeed expanding their territory to the monastic property since the monks now know how to blowtorch a marmot Mongolian-style from a book read at table on Genghis Khan a few years ago.

Lest you think the monks are a little too concerned about the edibility of animals, it is important to remember that we are Benedictines and not Franciscans. The only reference to animals in the Holy Rule of St. Benedict is indeed a reference that concerns their edibility, namely, that the monks are to abstain from the flesh of four footed animals (Ch. 39). After centuries of putting up with this uncharacteristically stringent rule by resorting to two-footed animals, many monks deemed this was a rule that needn’t be kept to the letter especially since St. Peter himself was told in a vision to slaughter and eat four-footed animals (cf. Acts 10:12-14). The only other primary written source we have for getting
to know St. Benedict besides his Holy Rule is his biography by St. Gregory. You may recall from there the friendship St. Benedict had with a raven. We too have come into contact with these black birds but, as Father Alban pointed out in a homily one weekday, our ravens are not useful like St. Benedict’s or Elijah’s were. Two pesky members of the species have been attacking their reflections in the windows of our new sacristy and actually causing some damage. Brother Joshua attempted to spear them in a surprise attack but narrowly missed the fine feathered felons. They continue their unsurprising attacks with raucous war cries to this day.

Recreation this year was amply blessed with its fair share of animal-sightings. There were the eagles and vultures, of course, and the bunnies, to be sure, but some frisky coyotes also brought the community en masse to the windows. One evening, the mosquitoes being particularly bad, a bat zipped into the recreation room to help protect the monks from their stinging proboscises. The gallant bat also picked up some dusty cobwebs in his wake before flying out into the dusky air. Thanksgiving Day provided the juniors with an opportunity for some outdoor recreation so they went for a walk along the dyke and introduced our new postulants, Isaac and Agostino, to the local camels (!) as Br. Isidore zealously gathered woolly bear caterpillars into his arms to keep them from harm.

As much as we can get to know the brothers through their interactions with animals, it is their relationships with one another which take precedence and reveal their true colours. One day, as Br. Joseph was coaxing some big beef into a cattle trailer by offering them pears, he received a phone call from a nurse regarding Br. Gregory. Back in June, Br. Gregory had had a brain surgery to remove a cancerous growth. He never fully recovered. After a long stay in the Vancouver General Hospital, during which he was visited almost daily by Father Abbot or Br. Joseph, he was finally able to come home. He required a lot of loving assistance which the brothers generously gave him in between coaxing cows and teaching classes. With the help of a lift and wheel chair, Br. Gregory was able to join the community on occasion for the liturgy and recreation. Apart from tending to his many physical needs, the brethren also visited him throughout the day simply to be with their beloved brother. Br Maximus, for example, was often found playing the guitar for Brother Gregory. Yes, precious in our eyes is the gaze of our brother who humbly received our rough fraternal love and patiently put up with our hastiness and forgetfulness. Pandemic or not, it is in the gift of our brothers that we encounter Christ and in loving our brothers that we truly become Christian monks.
Tom Widdowson ’45 writes: “After retiring as a biology professor in California I settled in Victoria on a one and a half acre property with a heritage house, four heritage trees, and two streams. So social distancing is not a problem for me, and there is plenty to keep me busy. I belong to a social group of mostly ladies at the local senior center and we use the ‘reply all’ feature of e-mail to communicate en masse. I am concerned that we are showing signs of ‘COVID-19 fatigue’ and am doing my best to keep the exchange going. E-mail is indeed a blessing to me as I am very deaf and find it hard to use the phone. I have the feeling that the virus will be with us for a long time to come. On a positive note, the medical system is learning all the time, so after nine months virus free we elderly types stand a much better chance of survival if we were to catch it now.”

James Bond ’56 of Burnaby writes: “There will not be many who will remember me as I left in 1956 and am now 82 years old. The pandemic has slowed me down a little and keeps me at home more than I would like. I love to fish the rivers and enjoy the walks through the woods to reach my favorite fishing spots. It is too bad that the government has closed the Fraser River for sport fishing as my supply of salmon is dwindling.

For those of you who were at the Seminary at Deer Lake you will remember the prison [Oakalla] on the south side of the lake. I now reside in a townhouse there. My wife of 53 years passed away in 2016 but left me with four wonderful sons who join me for dinner every Thursday evening. I stay in touch with Desmond Hegarty who also was from St Patrick’s in Vancouver. Des and I spent 13 years in the same classes. He now resides in Orlando, Florida.

I am a member of St. Helen’s parish in Burnaby and am head usher at the 11:30 Mass.”

Frank Verkerk ’57 writes: “There isn’t much going on here in Maple Ridge. Lia and I are doing a lot of hiking and biking because we can keep our social distance from everyone. I am very fortunate because I am a volunteer at St Luke’s so I can attend mass every Sunday. The rest of the week we are online for different topics like Into the Reach, Archbishop’s Dinner, Knights of Columbus Monday evening prayer group etc. So I am staying busy. Keep my family in your prayers.”

Requiescant in pace:

Rachel Turgeon, the grandmother of Father Prior Benedict Lefebvre, on August 30 in Mission, aged 98.

Gerry Blatz, the uncle of Father Caesarius Marple, on September 19 in Sylvan Lake, AB.

Agatha Pulaski, the aunt of Father Peter Nygren, died on September 23 in Mission at the age of 105.