

Chapter 3: THE SECOND PLACE

Bloomfield, Greene County, Indiana

This is what the Sisters shared with the Holy Redeemer Board of Directors at their 1991 annual meeting: “After more than a year of praying and seeking the Lord about the future of the monastery at the Ladoga location, we have decided to look for a piece of property which we can own and develop for our own monastic needs and for those who may join us or come after us. We believe we need more seclusion (further from the road and with more trees), more quiet (out of a jet flight pattern and away from dog kennels and truck traffic), more acreage (for sheep pasturing and development of visitor/retreatant facilities and chapel), control of environment (buildings, choice of utility services, property development), and more distance from a local parish (to allow for a separate identity). We have provided a list of our desired parameters to realtors in Michigan and Indiana.”

There had been some difficulty in the relationship with the Ladoga landlords, and the EOC episcopacy made sure the Sisters were not merely choosing to flee from that. Each of the bishops contacted them for serious talks about the necessity for reconciliation before they took another step, and that hard work was done.

When the sense of relocating persisted, the Sisters didn't know what to do but to start looking. Farm land in the county where they were living was prohibitively expensive (and, of course, the Sisters had no money). A very remote place north of the EOC parish in Michigan was considered, but it was not prudent for two single women who relied on the communion and assistance of fellow believers. Less expensive land nearer to parishes in Indiana, in a less populated area of the state, seemed desirable.

A realtor in southern Indiana had a property owned by a timber company several miles from Bloomfield in Greene County. The property had a small house and some fenced fields, so the Sisters might have moved in and worked on improving things as they could. However, when a required inspection was done, it was found that there was no safe water. Drilling a well would be a first priority on top of the purchase price, and the total cost was beyond reach. The Sisters had spent what small savings they had, plus all their energy, in many 85-mile trips to pursue this property. Deflated, they told the Lord on the way home through Bloomfield after the inspection that if He wanted them to continue to look, He would need to show them where. It was just then they saw a display of realty papers in front of a store, and the realty office still open after hours. A listing said there were 58 acres for sale just outside of town, and the realtor offered Sr. Pilar an immediate tour.

Both of the Sisters were convinced this place tucked between rolling hills was the spot for Holy Redeemer, and the kind realtor loaned them enough money to stay in town overnight so they could make an offer the following day. The offer was accepted. It was August 6, the Feast of Holy Transfiguration.

The next step, of course, after alerting the Board of Directors and all who were praying for the project, was to find a way to pay for it. The Sisters went to the Bloomfield banks and banks in surrounding counties. "No one is going to lend two single women with no assets and no steady income the money to buy land that has nothing on it but grass and trees." Well, they were to learn that ours is a God who provides. One of the bankers suggested they try a bank in a nearby town which catered to farmers, and this bank agreed to give a mortgage with payments twice a year instead of monthly if a couple of co-signers could be found. One of the EOC churches and a couple from another became co-signers, and an additional EOC couple offered an interest-free loan for the downpayment. In March, 1992, Holy Redeemer owned its own property. The hard part was surely over.

The Sisters sent out up-date letters to everyone they knew, asking that people pray about donating toward making a beginning on the new property. On the weekends they camped on the grounds in a tent, envisioning how to develop things and deciding where to locate the house and barn. Then they waited. And waited. Prayed, and waited some more. Not one dollar came in.

The following year in the middle of summer they received an envelope in the mail with no letter but a check large enough to buy all the materials necessary to build a small house. One of the EOC bishops in Illinois was a contractor, and he had already promised to oversee a Bloomfield building project with EOC volunteers based on plans that Sr. Pilar had created. That was the summer of a great flood along the Mississippi River, and the lumber yard told him that if the request for lumber had been a month later, there probably wouldn't have been a board anywhere in the Midwest for purchase because of the reconstruction forced by the flood. Not only does God provide, He has perfect timing.



Monastery Farm on Iron Mountain Road, Bloomfield, IN

October 11th, on the anniversary of the founding of the monastery, there was a blessing of the foundation by the EOC bishops from Illinois, Indiana, and Michigan. Guests included Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant friends who rejoiced with the Sisters over what was happening. Thirty people stayed for the first work weekend, and by Sunday evening the 800 sq. ft. house was under roof. A month later there was a second work weekend by the EOC volunteers, and by the end of that weekend (it snowed, by the way) there was a wood stove installed and the outside of the house completed except for the installation of doors, windows, and siding. The door and window openings were covered over for winter, and everyone went home.

In the Spring of 1994 work again began by volunteers coming whenever they could to bring whatever skill they had. By December all that was left to do was drywalling, painting, and floor covering. Sr. Pilar moved in with a bed and a picnic table to keep the woodstove going for those doing the finishing work. By the end of the month, she had moved the sheep flock and guard dog to the newly constructed barn. The following month one of the EOC saints from Saskatchewan, Canada, who was a commercial painter, gave up his annual vacation to drive down to paint every room of the three-bedroom house. Sr. Paula closed up the house in Ladoga and the move was complete. It was another six months before running water and electricity were in place, but Holy Redeemer had a new home.

Not long after the move to the monastery farm, Sr. Pilar and Sr. Paula took final vows as nuns. More about this in another place, but one of the consequences was that they both began, by Orthodox tradition, to be called “Mother”.

The Mothers were now impacted even more by the natural setting around them. More than half the property was in trees. A creek ran between the fields. Mother Paula started collecting and identifying samples of different kinds of wildflowers, and from February to May she had more than one hundred. The easily seen sheep pastures made all the Scriptural references to being the Lord's flock come alive for them and their visitors. God's abundant and beautiful creation was all around. The EOC catechism begins with the work of the Holy Trinity in creation and quotes Genesis 1:31. *“God saw all that He had made, and it was very good.”* Part of the liturgical readings at the monastery is reading the Psalms over and over, and the Psalms are full of descriptions of creation, such as Psalms 145:10-11. *“All You have made will praise You, Lord; the godly will bless You. They will speak of the glory of Your kingdom and will declare Your might...”* Being surrounded by the natural world is a constant visual reminder of all of this. Plants and animals are so intricately made and so diverse. How can paying attention to them not turn your heart toward their Maker?

For ten years the Mothers prayed and labored in this awesome beauty. But once comfort sets in, God often seems to bring new challenges. By the winter of 2005 the episcopacy was asking the Mothers to consider relocating either back to Indianapolis (90 minutes northeast) or to Terre Haute (60 minutes west). For many years the Mothers had been traveling to both parishes alternately for Sunday worship. It seemed apparent that there were not going to be younger women joining the monastery, and maintaining the property and sheep business were getting more difficult for just the two. The bishops were concerned about the Mothers' continuing on in Bloomfield without close assistance from EOC parishioners.

By this time an adjoining property with a small house had been purchased in order to have guest facilities for visitors and retreatants. It was named Shepherd's House. The Mothers decided to sell off that property and its woods while seeking the Lord's guidance for the next in their journey.

A newlywed young couple stopped by to look at Shepherd's House, but said they really wanted a farm. The Spirit spoke again. *“Why not sell them the monastery farm instead, and the two of you move into Shepherd's House?”* That meant the Mothers wouldn't have to move away immediately, there would not be so much property to care for, and the funds would give them some options for the future. The newlyweds were so excited that they visited often and immediately started planning for the changes they wanted to make. The sale included the flock of sheep, and they were going to add steers and horses. In a decision unpopular with business-minded friends, the Mothers gave

over the property to them before the closing, and by June, 2006, Holy Redeemer had moved up Iron Mountain Road to the small guest house.



Shepherd's House

The Mothers weren't to be in Shepherd's House very long, but they didn't know that at the time. They renovated the house, drilled a well, and added a septic field. Without the sheep flock less manual labor gave them ample time to wait on the Lord for direction about the future, and there was an opportunity for Mother Pilar to have two arthritic knee joints replaced. If there were to never be more women so that the monastery could be perpetuated, how should the Mothers think about spending their remaining years? They were back to the original question they had asked themselves: "If you could do anything you wanted, what would you choose to do? "

Mother Pilar has a strong gift of evangelism, and she said she would love to go to the mission field. Mother Paula's limited mobility made her uncertain what she could realistically consider. Just at this time they made the acquaintance of an Episcopal bishop who was planting churches in East Africa, and he invited Mother Pilar to go with his staff on their upcoming trip to discern what might be next for her. Mother Paula kept house, and Mother Pilar went to Rwanda. This trip, which is explained elsewhere, was to change things more than the Mothers could ever have imagined. The African work made it sensible to finally return to Indianapolis where there were others involved in the African mission. The Mothers would end their specifically monastic life style for a more active participation in parish life and ministry. To reflect this, after the move Holy Redeemer officially became Order of the Holy Redeemer.