

## Chapter 18: THIS & THAT

Over Holy Redeemer's 30-year history, there have been several questions frequently asked. There are several stories we have loved to tell. Finally, it seems only fitting that each of us explains how we ended up as part of Holy Redeemer. A little of this and a little of that.

### Questions

#### **When you sold baked goods, how did you get customers?**

One of the ideas the Mothers had for a bakery was to purchase a used mobile home to use as a place for commercial baking and packaging. They were never financially in a position to do that, so they only baked and made noodles in the convent kitchen.

They started by baking for people from church and other monastery supporters. The regulations for selling baked goods to the public in Indiana required cooking in a space separate from home cooking if you wanted to advertise your goods for sale. So, they were not able to advertise and had to rely on word-of-mouth exposure.

An interesting consequence came from having customers who were friends of other customers. Through initial customers the Mothers eventually met a doctor from Crawfordsville Hospital whose wife had them bake for her family. Just before purchasing the farm property, when they were still renting in Ladoga, Mother Paula had to have gall bladder surgery. This doctor who was their customer tended to her in the Emergency Room, and he later pushed through the arrangements at the hospital which paid for the surgery. He asked to "scrub in" when the surgery took place, and Mother Paula remembers hearing, just before she fell asleep, "Take good care of her, she bakes my bread!"

#### **What is your position regarding carrying insurance?**

The Mothers strive to find a reasonable middle ground between no insurance and having a level of insurance that more than covers any eventuality. The idea of funds set aside through an insurance company to cover medical costs in case of accidents (auto and property) seemed a wise use of their money, and some of this is, of course, mandated by the State of Indiana. Insurance to replace material things is more a reflection of how important those things are to you and, perhaps, how much you fear loss.

Matthew 6:19-20 says: "*Don't collect for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But collect for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thief don't break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*" Some insurance coverage has been required as a part of mortgage loans, and the Mothers had to comply with this. Beyond that, they have tried to carry minimum levels of insurance coverage on property and things as a reflection of their value not being the most important thing.

In regards to life insurance, the Mothers did not have life insurance until 2010. A reduction in their mortgage payment freed up enough funds to be able to pay monthly premiums on insurance

to cover burial expenses. Their advancing ages made this purchase seem a reasonable need that Holy Redeemer would eventually have to meet.

For many years the Mothers were not able to afford any kind of health insurance. After the move to Bloomfield, because of the high risk of injury to Mother Pilar by the amount of physical labor the farm required, a high deductible policy was used. Because of Mother Paula's disability, state insurance was available to her. After the move to Agape House, when Mother Pilar worked in home health care, her low income qualified her for pro-rated premium, state-assisted health coverage. Now, due to their ages, both of the Mothers qualify for federal Medicare health coverage. When Carol moved to Agape House, she brought her existing insurance with her.

### **What was it like to be on retreat at the monastery?**

From the very first the Mothers had a vision for offering space for people to retreat from the stresses of busy lives in the city. The original Ladoga house had two large upstairs rooms, one of which was renovated first to use for retreatants. The Mothers moved into the house in October, 1986, and the first retreatant came before Christmas. Women could be accommodated for over-night stays, but men and families could only come for day retreats until Shepherd's House was purchased in Bloomfield. The youngest individual retreatant was a 12-year old who came for a weekend before her confirmation in the church.

There was no set schedule for retreatants, although they were expected to join the Mothers in the chapel for morning and evening prayers (it was, after all, not the state park). Until Shepherd's House was available, all the meals were eaten together with the Mothers. When Shepherd's House was opened for retreatants, its kitchen was stocked with breakfast and snack items if a retreatant wanted to have more solitude. The Mothers were always available for fellowship and conversation, but this was up to the needs of each individual.

There were only two requirements to retreat at the monastery. First was that, at some point during their stay, the retreatant(s) give some alms of manual labor. There was always a wide range of things to do – barn work, gardening, animal care, trail management, meal preparation, cleaning. Especially for those whose work at home entailed a lot of mental focus and energy, manual labor was a needed rest. Secondly, the retreatant had to keep the hours of silence that the Mothers observed from after evening prayers until morning prayers. This was a challenge for the talkative.

### **What was your Book Corner like?**

The idea for an area for selling items that the Mothers made started when they were making greeting cards in Ladoga. In order to get the best price on printing, they had to print a volume larger than what they were selling to card customers, so they considered putting some out for sale for any visitors or retreatants who would be interested. They were also making candles and cards from photos they had taken on trips. From time to time they had extra icons, which others might want to use in their own devotions.

After the move to Bloomfield, Mother Paula began volunteering at the local library to sort book sale donations, and she had access to a wide variety of pre-loved religious books at low cost. By that time the Mothers had also been introduced to Christian Book Distributors, a catalog and on-line source for contemporary books that could be ordered in bulk. They ordered Christian classics, such as PRACTICING THE PRESENCE, and books for young people on the lives of contemporary influential believers such as John Wesley, song-writer Fancy Crosby, and martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

There was such a wide assortment of items that they purchased a hutch to display items for sale on the open upper shelves and to store inventory in the drawers below. While they were at the farm, this was the Book Corner in the living room. When they moved to Shepherd's House, which had a built-in corner cupboard in the kitchen, that cupboard became the Book Corner. When the EOC's website was created, for a period of time the Mothers maintained a link for The Book Corner to take orders from a wider range of customers for the good literature they had to offer. All of this was discontinued when they moved to Agape House.

### **What does the Board of Directors do?**

The most important job the Board members have is to pray for the Resident Members. These Board members, more than anyone else, know what is involved in the women's lives and Holy Redeemer's ministries.

The Board members are up-dated monthly on income and expenditures for good accountability. They come together each August to discuss the financial stability of the corporation, the well-being of the resident women, current plans for projects, and a vision for future months. The Mothers and Carol depend on their counsel and the life experience that each brings in Kingdom living.

**What part did their own families play in the women's lives?** Both the Old and New Testaments are very clear about what God thinks about honoring fathers and mothers. In pressing this out for themselves, the Mothers believed that this included staying in touch, visiting when time and resources made it possible, and encouraging family to visit the monastery. This sometimes meant hosting family celebrations and holiday gatherings, gift-giving to family members (especially the children), traveling for reunions/weddings/funerals, and, in their parents' later years, visits to hospitals and retirement homes. Each families was very supportive of what was unfolding at Holy Redeemer, and the Mothers were blessed to have their encouragement. The only restriction that the Mothers put on this family involvement was Christmas Day, a day they reserved for staying at home to celebrate the Incarnation in their own space.

When Carol came to live at Agape House, her own parents were living in Texas and about to retire from pastoral ministry. She also had this desire to honor her parents, and as soon as Carol retired from nursing, she asked her parents to move to Greenwood so that she could share in their later years. This eventually meant full-time care giving in a house adjacent to Agape House supporting her as a Holy Redeemer ministry.

## **Some Favorite Stories**

### **THE CAT ADVENTURE**

Not long after moving to Greenwood, Mother Pilar got two sibling kittens from the Animal Shelter that were only weeks old. The female was named Elza, and her brother named Damian. He was a yellow blotched tabby with a striking swirl pattern on his side. He had a particularly sweet nature and was loved deeply. When he was about five years old he developed diabetes, and we decided to care for him as much as we were able with Carol's and Mother Pilar's giving him daily insulin injections. However, his health continued to deteriorate, and when he developed seizures and it was discovered that he had a brain tumor, we had him put to sleep.

For two weeks we grieved over the loss of our feline friend. One evening just as we were getting ready to begin evening prayers in front of our living room altar, there was a knock on the door. When the door was opened, there were two little boys holding a kitten...a yellow blotched tabby

that looked exactly like Damian. We had no idea where the boys had come from as we had never seen them before (and never saw them again). They wanted to know if we wanted a cat. We all just looked at each other. After all of the heartache and expense we had just been through with Damian, what did we want to do? How could we not take this little one in, realizing that he could not replace Damian, but also knowing he needed a family? So, on this feast day of Dionysius we got Dio (pronounced DEE-oh). It took some time for Damian's sister Elza to tolerate this young, rambunctious addition to the house, but they co-existed for several years.

Then, Dio started to get himself into trouble in the house whenever he looked out the front window at a wandering neighborhood cat. Dio would get mad and spray his mark inside the house, for which he was banished to the enclosed deck on the back of the house. Dio was not a loner. In fact, he immediately loved every person who came into the house. He would not do well out there by himself, and Elza was not volunteering to join him. About a week after he was exiled to the outdoors, we got a call from a long-time friend who had to find a home for her cat...and Dio got a full-time companion.

### **THE TRUCK ADVENTURE**

When we acquired our '50s Chevy truck after starting the sheep business in Ladoga, it was VERY well-used. It was drivable, but the outside had lots of rust and the floor of the interior gave you glimpses of the road passing under you. Several of the dashboard elements were missing. However, it met our needs for transporting sheep, equipment, and feed, especially after moving to the Bloomfield farm. On the farm it was parked in a three-sided storage area near the house and barn. One day we road together in the truck north of town to pick up bags of sheep feed, about a ten-minute drive.

While Mother Pilar was driving back, a snake came up out of the windshield wiper trough onto the outside of the windshield. She whipped on the windshield wipers, and the snake went back down. While we were wondering how it got in there, and how we were going to get it out, it began crawling down from under the dashboard into the cab of the truck. Amidst much screaming and Mother Paul's pounding it with her cane, it retreated back to wherever it had come from.

By that time, we were nearly into Bloomfield. We drove straight to our local gas station and piled out of the truck. The station attendant was at the pumps servicing another car, and he came around to see what we wanted. When we explained that we wanted him to get the snake out of the truck, he threw up his hands, backed away, and said, "I hate snakes! I'm not going near that thing!". So, we got back into the truck with the snake to drive (very carefully) the couple of miles back home. As soon as we got the truck parked, we jumped out again and left all of the doors wide open for the rest of the day. We never saw the snake again.

### **THE TRASH CAN ADVENTURE**

When the house was designed for the Bloomfield farm, it was intentionally made with three bedrooms, one each for Mother Pilar, one for Mother Paula, and an extra one for guests. But the house was small, so each of the bedrooms was small with not much space except for a single bed and one other piece of furniture. In Mother Paula's room the bed took up nearly all of the space along one wall. There were just a few inches at the end for a trash can.

One Spring day the Mothers were both in their rooms after morning prayers. In coming around the end of the bed to throw something away, Mother Paula stubbed her toe on the bed caster and pitched head-first into the metal trash can. For those who are able-bodied this would have been no problem. Her muscular dystrophy made it impossible for her to straighten back up. The only alternative was to cry for help, which she did...loud and clear. However, it appears that when you are in the inside of a metal can, your voice doesn't sound quite like what you expect.

As she kept calling, Mother Pilar ran past Mother Paula's open door (where her backside was clearly visible up-side-down) straight for the kitchen door to the outside yard, calling "Where are you?" Then Mother Paula called even louder, "I'm in here!" Mother Pilar hurried back inside to the rescue. Needless to say, this story made the rounds for many years. The picture it evoked was evidently so good that the incident was included in a song written for Mother Paula's 60<sup>th</sup> birthday party.

### Thank God I'm A Country Nun

Well life on a farm is kinda laid back;  
Ain't much an old country nun like me can't hack.  
It's early to rise and early in the sack.  
Thank God I'm a country nun!

A simple kind of life never did me no harm.  
Raisin' me some sheep and workin' on the farm,  
My days are filled with an easy country charm.  
Thank God I'm a country nun!

Well I got me a habit with a belt 'round the middle.  
When the sun comes up I pray just a little,  
And life ain't nothin' but a funny, funny riddle.  
Thank God I'm a country nun!

I'd watch Sean Connery all day if I could  
But the Lord and Pilar wouldn't take it very good,  
So I watch when I can and work when I should.  
Thank God I'm a country nun!

I wouldn't trade my life for diamonds or jewels;  
I never was one of them money hungry fools.  
I'd rather have my Bible and my Star Trek too.  
Thank God I'm a country nun!

My life ain't always easy 'cuz there's lots to do  
Cookin' and cleanin' and avoidin' sheep poo.  
Gotta keep my head out of trash cans too.  
Thank God I'm a country nun!

Well I'll serve the Good Lord 'til the day I die  
'Cuz He took my hand and held me close to His side.  
He said, "Live a chaste life and teach others how to die,  
And thank God you're a country nun!"

## THE CHECK

When the mortgage was obtained for the Bloomfield property, we were very fortunate to deal with a bank that had lots of farm customers. The bank allowed us to make mortgage payments twice a year rather than monthly. That meant that most months there was no pressure to find mortgage money. The bishop who pastored the monastery encouraged us to let people know what our specific monetary needs were when we were faced with large bills so that, if people wanted to give alms toward a particular need, they would have the information to make a decision.

One December as we approached a January mortgage payment, we had sent out several letters explaining our situation. The day came for the payment, and we had had no responses. It was a day of unusually terrible ice and snow, but we decided give the bank at least the amount of the interest payment, which we had accumulated. Mother Pilar made the treacherous drive into the bank, only to find that (for the first time in its history) the bank was closed due to bad weather. We learned, in fact, that the police had ordered everyone off the roads.

The following day in our mail was an envelope from the Post Office. Inside was a chewed-up envelope addressed to us from one of our benefactors who had gotten the December letter, along with an apology from the Post Office for their machinery eating our mail. Inside the letter was a check to cover our mortgage payment, but the check was a mess.

Mother Pilar went back to the bank with our pitiful check on the day the bank reopened, and they said they would cash it and apply it to the mortgage. Evidently the bank's policy was that if the amount on the check and the signature were readable, that was enough for them. Those were the only two legible things on that scrap of paper.

*"I will thank God with all my heart; I will declare all Your wonderful works."* (Psalm 9:1)

## Our Personal Stories

### **Mother Pilar, why are you a part of Holy Redeemer at Agape House?**

The simple answer is: God led me here.

After my baptism at 13, I "knew" I was to be a religious sister. Being Protestant at the time, that made little sense. However, God, knowing the end before the beginning, led me in His perfect path.

At 29 I was chrismated in the Evangelical Orthodox Church. At age 30 I took vows as a novice (Sister Pilar), and at 34 was founding Holy Redeemer Monastery with the then Sister Paula.

At each step of His leading on this journey there has been excitement and trepidation. But, He has always been faithful. Now as we are in our golden years, Agape House has been a great blessing to us as it meets our needs and our desire to extend hospitality. Being more involved with the Parish of St. Paul the Apostle has been a great asset to us, and, hopefully, to them.

Did God lead me here? Absolutely! It seems we often take rabbit trails in life, but, fortunately for us, His paths are always straight.

## **Carol, why did you come to Agape House?**

I met the Mothers when they lived in Indianapolis, but I didn't know much about nuns, so I just observed and didn't interact much. They were Sisters at that time, and when they moved to Ladoga they were inviting women to come to their house for a retreat. When I went I was a little confused. I remember asking them what I was supposed to do, and they said, "You don't need to do anything, just BE." That was a foreign concept to me, but it was the beginning of a whole new way of thinking, and a wonderful relationship.

Then they moved to Bloomfield. I went there for some work days, and also for the celebration of their vows when they became Mothers. Our relationship continued to grow when I spent some of my vacations helping to deliver baby lambs in the springtime. To give Mother Pilar a break, I would sleep in the barn in a little tent and be there for night deliveries. I learned a lot from them about farm life and about prayer. I grew to love some of the Vespers chants and enjoyed some time of solitude, as well as developing friendships with both Mother Paula and Mother Pilar. I felt very safe in entrusting them with my heart and my struggles. Since that time Mother Pilar and I have been overseas together, traveling in Sweden, Germany, Poland, and Africa.

In 2008 I moved to Martinsville (about 45 minutes from Indianapolis) thinking I was moving closer to them, but I realized it wasn't all that close. Before long they sold the farm and moved to Greenwood. After seven years in Martinsville, I began to realize how isolated I was, and it weighed heavily on me.

By this time the Mothers had become the Order of Holy Redeemer, and I was on the Board, which met once per year. They had often mentioned that they longed for other women to join them, but that never seemed to happen.

One day after the Board meeting in August, 2014, I was hanging around and looking at their third bedroom (where the cats stayed at night), and I said, "I should just move in here." Mother Pilar replied, "What would it take to get you here?" I thought about it a few seconds and said I would have to sell my house in Martinsville, and I would need enough space for my long arm quilting machine. So, Mother Pilar quickly got out her tape measure. By the time I returned the next week, she had a plan all worked out. She moved the cats out of the small bedroom, started painting the bigger bedroom for me, and moved herself into the cats' room.

I put my house up for sale and started moving things to Greenwood. I would spend the night with the Mothers on weekends. By Christmas Eve, 2014, I was a permanent resident of Agape House.

## **Mother Paula, why are you a part of Holy Redeemer?**

First, I would have to explain why I am in the Evangelical Orthodox Church (EOC). My early school years were in a non-sacramental Protestant church. Then in high school and college I was involved in parachurch groups, Youth for Christ and Inter Varsity Christian Fellowship. During the college years I worshipped with both Episcopal and Quaker congregations. After school I was in a non-denominational Christian church until meeting some young people who were part of the beginning EOC in Indianapolis. In the EOC I experienced such a healthy balance of theology, fellowship, and spiritual growth that I have never wanted to leave.

When I felt called to the religious life, we were investigating that as a new expression within the EOC. When we were encouraged to pursue the monastery within the EOC, the unknown future of that within the EOC was much more appealing to me than finding a place within an established community in the Anglican, Catholic, or other Orthodox denominations.

When I met Mother Pilar (and later Carol), I saw a devotion to the Lord within His church similar to my own. I knew I would not be content to be a person with church attendance as just part of my life. Creating Holy Redeemer was making a home for myself, an environment where I could mature in the Lord and find outlets for the things I had to offer.

Interestingly enough, at the time I first considered the religious life, I was actively looking for a husband through a program the church was offering to introduce singles to other singles in EOC congregations. There was, however, this promise from the Lord Himself recorded in Matthew 19:29: *“Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name’s sake will receive many times as much, and will inherit eternal life.”* That “many times as much” has certainly been true for me. Being a part of the monastic expression within the church has gained me nearly too many mothers, fathers, and children to count!

Holy Redeemer has never “belonged” to any single EOC church, although now we live within the St. Paul the Apostle parish and are actively a part of their parish life. That position of autonomy has allowed us to travel to all of the parishes in North America (and Mother Pilar to travel to Sweden and East Africa), have many of the EOC saints in our home, participate in conferences and episcopal synods, and be partners with all of the parishes in our prayers.

From my sheltered life on a small farm in Ohio, I have had the privilege of becoming friends with God’s people from Canada, Sweden, Africa, and across the U.S. I have been involved in the lives of children from multiple families. Instead of having only two brothers, I have gained a myriad of brothers and sisters, particularly the two godly women with whom I live, who love me and lay down their lives for my well-being. Who would not choose this? I thank God every day that I have been able to be a part of such a family through Holy Redeemer.