

# New monastery an answered prayer

By BILL SHERMAN Tulsa World Religion Writer  
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**Clear Creek Monastery will be the new home of a community of monks established in 1999.**

HULBERT -- Hidden among miles of scrub oak and gravel roads, a monastery modeled after the ancient churches of Europe is under construction one hour southeast of Tulsa.

The 80,000-square-foot, \$17.5 million complex will be the new home of Our Lady of Clear Creek Monastery, a Benedictine community that originated in France.

Clear Creek was established in 1999 by the French Benedictine Abbey of Notre Dame de Fontgombault.

It sits on 1,000 acres of rolling Ozark woods and fields north of Hulbert, in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Tulsa.

At the heart of the community is a group of University of Kansas students who left the United States in the 1970s to live a monastic life at the Fontgombault monastery in France.

"We thought we would be gone 10 years, and then return to establish a monastic community in the United States," said the Rev. Phillip Anderson, prior of the Clear Creek community.

"But it took 25 years."

The dream he has nurtured since the 1970s is now taking shape.



**France comes to Hulbert**  
Standing in what will be the basement of the chapel, the Rev. Francois de Feydeau holds a model of the 80,000-square-foot complex that will be the future home of Our Lady of Clear Creek Monastery. Feydeau is subprior of Clear Creek and overseer of the construction project.

*DAVID CRENSHAW / Tulsa World*

Three foot thick, steel-reinforced concrete walls sit atop a hill overlooking a valley cut by the transparent water of Clear Creek.

Those walls will form the lower level of an 80-by-180-foot church with a bell tower 110 feet in the air, a separate residence building and a welcome center.

Two more buildings will be added later: a refectory, for dining, and a chapter house, for meetings.

The buildings will enclose a cloistered garden where black-robed monks can pray and meditate without interruption from the outside world.

"The cloister is the heart of the monastery," Anderson said.

The monastery will be Romanesque in architectural style, according to the Rev. Francois de Feydeau, a Frenchman who is subprior of Clear Creek and overseer of the construction project for the monks.

It is designed to be like the Fontgombault monastery in France, where he and his American brothers lived for years.

"It's being built to last a thousand years," Anderson said. "We believe we're adding something of permanent value to the culture."

Anderson said the monks have an excellent working relationship with Manhattan Construction Co. of Tulsa, which is building the monastery.

Steve Ludwig, project manager for Manhattan, said workers have been asked to respect the atmosphere of the monastery by not cursing or listening to radios on the job.

"This is a unique project for us," he said, working with a classical architect, Thomas Gordon Smith, with the Notre Dame University School of Architecture.

Clear Creek is a contemplative community, Anderson said.

It exists to bring a fully contemplative style of monastic life to America.

Monks in the community spend eight hours a day in prayer, meditation, study and worship.

Much of every day is spent in silence -- even during community mealtimes -- to avoid distraction from focus on the spiritual.

The monks of Clear Creek offer an example of the benefits of quiet reflection and prayer at a time when busy Americans need it, Anderson said.

"We're in a cultural war. There are contradictory influences offered to young people," he said.

The monastery will be an oasis of peace and quiet, where visitors can find a sense of orientation, sanity and spiritual light, he said.

When monks are not in prayer, they work on the property tending sheep, cattle, gardens and orchards. They make cheese and wine and build wood furniture and other items to be sold.

The community now lives and worships in a large log home, a converted horse barn and other buildings that were on the property when they bought it.

The community has doubled in size since 1999 to about two dozen monks, Anderson said. The present facilities will not accommodate others who would like to come.

The new monastery will have rooms for up to 40 monks.

They live a disciplined, simple life. Each has a tiny room with a desk, bed and sink with cold water. Living conditions for monks will remain the same in the new buildings, but guest quarters will be less spartan, Anderson said.

Monks who have sacrificed worldly pleasures for a life of prayer do not feel deprived, he said.

"It's a very rich life; there's a great deal of joy and peace. "We feel that we're spoiled, not deprived . . . God gives such an abundance," said Anderson.

Clear Creek monastery is being built on a cash basis. Most of the funding for the new buildings has come from the Fontgombault monastery in France. American Catholics have made some donations, but much more is needed, Anderson said.

If funding comes in quickly enough, the project could be completed by the summer of 2005, he said.

Bishop Edward J. Slattery of the Tulsa Diocese blessed the first stone in the new church building in a Nov. 21 ceremony attended by hundreds of people.

The stone bears an inscription in Latin from the first chapter of the gospel of Luke.

In blessing the stone, Slattery said that those who have given themselves to a life of cloistered prayer will be the "principal evangelizer(s) of our communities."

"From the marvelous and wholly divine arrangement by which those in the world are supported by those in the cloister, and those in the cloister are engaged in the most vital work imaginable in the world today, a new American civilization will be born, a civilization of love, rooted in contemplation and alive with the holiness of God," he said.

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**The Rev. Francois de Feydeau walks near the first stone that was set for a new church building at the Clear Creek monastery.**

*DAVID CRENSHAW / Tulsa World*



**The Rev. Phillip Anderson, prior of the Clear Creek Monastery, strolls near a bridge built by monks at their Benedictine community, located on 1,000 acres of rolling, Ozark woods and fields north of Hulbert.**

*DAVID CRENSHAW / Tulsa World*