

New Day Dawning For SVD Seminary

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Conesus — Thanks to the skills and hard work of the nine brothers and three priests in residence, the Divine Word Seminary, St. Michael's, empty of all but the most necessary activities for the past seven years, will soon regain much of its former animation.

The bustling, four-story seminary buildings, which once echoed with the voices of hundreds of seminarians, had been slated for sale. Instead, they are being refurbished.

Many groups and individuals have inspected the 900-acre estate overlooking Hemlock Lake in the past few years.

Xerox toyed with the idea of using it as a "think tank" for its executives. But one by one all the deals fell through, and the Society finally decided to withdraw the property from the market.

The property includes the O-Neh-Da Winery, vineyards, a farm, seminary buildings, a church and outdoor grottoes depicting scenes from the mysteries of the rosary. A massive restoration and remodeling project has begun now that the decision has been made not to sell.

According to Father Richard Thibeau, who is directing much of the interior remodeling, the Society hopes eventually to regain some seminary functions at the Conesus site, in addition to becoming a center for retreats and gatherings such as marriage encounter and campus ministry groups.

The Society of the Divine Word, an international mission order with 5,000 members in 37 countries, bought the Conesus property from the Rochester diocese in 1925 and put up the first of the seminary halls in 1936.

St. Michael's was a formation and training center (including high school, college and novitiate programs) for young men preparing for missionary service overseas as priests and brothers. However, since the early 1960s the Society has gradually moved these programs to its properties in other parts of the country.

Now, in addition to remodeling, the priests and brothers also plan to work the farm acreage again to its fullest extent, buy cattle and perhaps even resume the winery operation which has been leased out for a number of years.

The O-Neh-Da Winery was founded in 1872 by Bishop Bernard McQuaid, the first bishop of Rochester, for the production of altar wines. Through the years, the winery has added a variety of table wines.

Even though the winery isn't under the Society's direction now, Brothers Joachim and Patrick still work for it, delivering wine and taking orders.

All of the SVD members who live at the seminary now are contributing their time and skills by helping with the remodeling and the restoration of the outdoor grottoes and statues.

In addition to those pictured here, Father Paul Thunich works in the grottoes, Brother Anthony cultivates the garden, Brother Joseph takes care of the farm, Brother Bernard is in charge of inside maintenance and Brother Aloysius lends a hand wherever he can.

However, Father Thibeau and Brother Ralph, both skilled in such crafts as carpentry, are doing most of the remodeling. They began in the Spring to remodel some 30 rooms on the second and third floors into private rooms with baths for guests or retreat.

They also plan to install a religious goods store, conference rooms, a movie room and a set of mission displays which will show the work done in other missions as well as their own.

For the children that he hopes will be visiting the grounds, Father Thibeau has bought ducks and he also hopes to get some colorful oriental pheasants.

Despite the work that still lies ahead, their ambition remains undefeated. If all goes as planned, they hope to have everything ready in late Fall.

Much of their skill in doing this sort of thing has come from their training. Brother Ralph, who entered the Society in 1951 and took his final vows in 1964, has relied heavily on the training he received in mechanics and other areas.

"When we were still operating as a seminary," said Father Thibeau, "some of our shops here for training brothers included carpentry, radio, electronics, plumbing, mechanics, tailoring and music."

"They received as much training as possible to round them off so that when they got to the missions they could just about do anything that was needed," he added.



Brother Francis takes time out from his office work to pose for a picture.

Father Thibeau, ordained in 1957, has never been assigned to foreign missions. A Buffalo native, he spent the 11 years before coming to Conesus last winter doing inner city work at Our Lady of the Divine Shepherd Cultural Center in Trenton, N.J. While he was there he picked up many of the skills he's now using.

He began the center to give those in the area an opportunity to work, and together the group fixed up old houses, built new ones, began a library and started a day care center.

The Society of the Divine Word Missionaries was founded in 1875 in Steyl, Holland, by Father Arnold Janssen. Its first foundation in America was established in 1900 at Techny, Ill.

Next year when the Society celebrates its 100th anniversary, Father Janssen and Father Joseph Freinademetz, a missionary who died in 1908, will be beatified.



Brother Anthony's garden supplies the community with a lot of its food.



Father Robert Hunter, seminary superior, relaxes after lunch with some good reading material.



Man may not live by bread alone but Brother Matthew's cooking sure helps the community keep up its physical strength.



Using his carving skill, Father Richard Thibeau plans on making all the wooden figures that will be part of the mission displays. Neighborhood women are giving him a hand by making clothes for the figures.