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## HOW TO BUILD AN ABBEY WITH THE SOUND OF MUSIC

Sometimes God is really listening. Several years ago, the priests at St. Michael's discovered that all the buildings on their site – which include an Abbey, a preparatory school and novitiate, are situated on geologically unstable ground. Additionally, St. Michael's has seen dramatic growth in their community of priests. While many churches and orders are seeing shortages vocations to the priesthood, St. Michaels has the opposite problem – too many men and too little space to house them. The shortage of space combined with geological instability of the land, has led to a decision that if the abbey is to continue its mission, it must relocate.

The community has found a site that is suitable about a 34-mile drive from their current hillside location. They have since engaged French architect, Jean-Louis Pagès, to create drawings for a new abbey, school, and additional buildings. He has worked with his associate, Bernard Lacourte and two US architects, Dan Conrardy and Ed Sapigao, to design an abbey complex and school. However, the cost of the building project is well beyond the ability of the abbey to fund. To meet those needs, an expansion fundraising project was developed.

As fundraising proceeded, two home produced CDs of the community's Gregorian chant came to the attention of the producers at Jade Music. They offered the priests a recording contract, and the Fathers are using the profits generated by that CD to fund St. Michael's Abbey Expansion Project. These profits will only be a fraction of the cost of a project of such a vast scope.

Currently, the priests in the development office are establishing ways of raising the tens of millions of dollars needed to complete the vision of a new abbey and school for St. Michael's Norbertines.

### ***Background:***

The present location of St. Michael's Abbey makes it impossible for the community to live their life, since they have outgrown their facilities. Many of the priests who live away from the abbey are unable to stay with the community when the preparatory school or the summer camp is in session, because there are not enough places to stay. When all the priests come to stay, they are unable to fit in the choir for the sung prayers of the Divine Office: they do not have space for this essential work of the abbey.

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## **ST. MICHAEL'S ABBEY**

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The novitiate house, where future priests live and have classes is so full that former classrooms were transformed into housing for vocations and three modular units are now being used to relieve the pressure for classroom and storage space. St. Michael's is teaching their future priests in temporary buildings because there is no other space. There is a critical lack of storage in all areas and they are unable to properly care for the things necessary to their life: books, tools and musical instruments.

Structures that had been 'temporary' have become permanent and are in a dilapidated state. Dining facilities are cramped, and will soon be unable to accommodate the abbey community as they accept the vocations God is sending them. Access and accommodations for their aged and infirm fathers is problematic. Finally, parking is a challenge on Sundays and feast-days, and the road around the abbey does not meet fire department regulations.

### ***Geological Problems:***

In March of 1998, the El Nino storms alerted St. Michael's to the extent of the geological instability of the property. They experienced severe slope failure that required demolition of more than 3,000 square feet of the main high school building – a huge loss to the school. Temporary modular space alleviated part of that challenge, but there is no viable building platform space left to replace the rest. Their current site is deeply flawed.

Deeper still is an ancient slide plain that undercuts the entire property as well as some 200+ acres of surrounding land. Further development on this site would require removal and compacting all the soil to reinforce the property. The project would be massive, and preliminary discussions suggest that such a plan would not gain approval from the county government. Even if such approval could be obtained, the community would not be able to remain on site while the work was being done.

Consequently, St. Michael's must move the abbey and high school to a larger, more suitable property – one that allows for expansion in the future. After shoring up the instability, the priests anticipate leaving the present property in a reduced size for some other use. With the rapid growth they are experiencing, such a move and building project are essential. While nature has been favorable since 1998, and they have had dry seasons, it is clear that St. Michael's Abbey cannot live with these safety issues and space constraints.

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