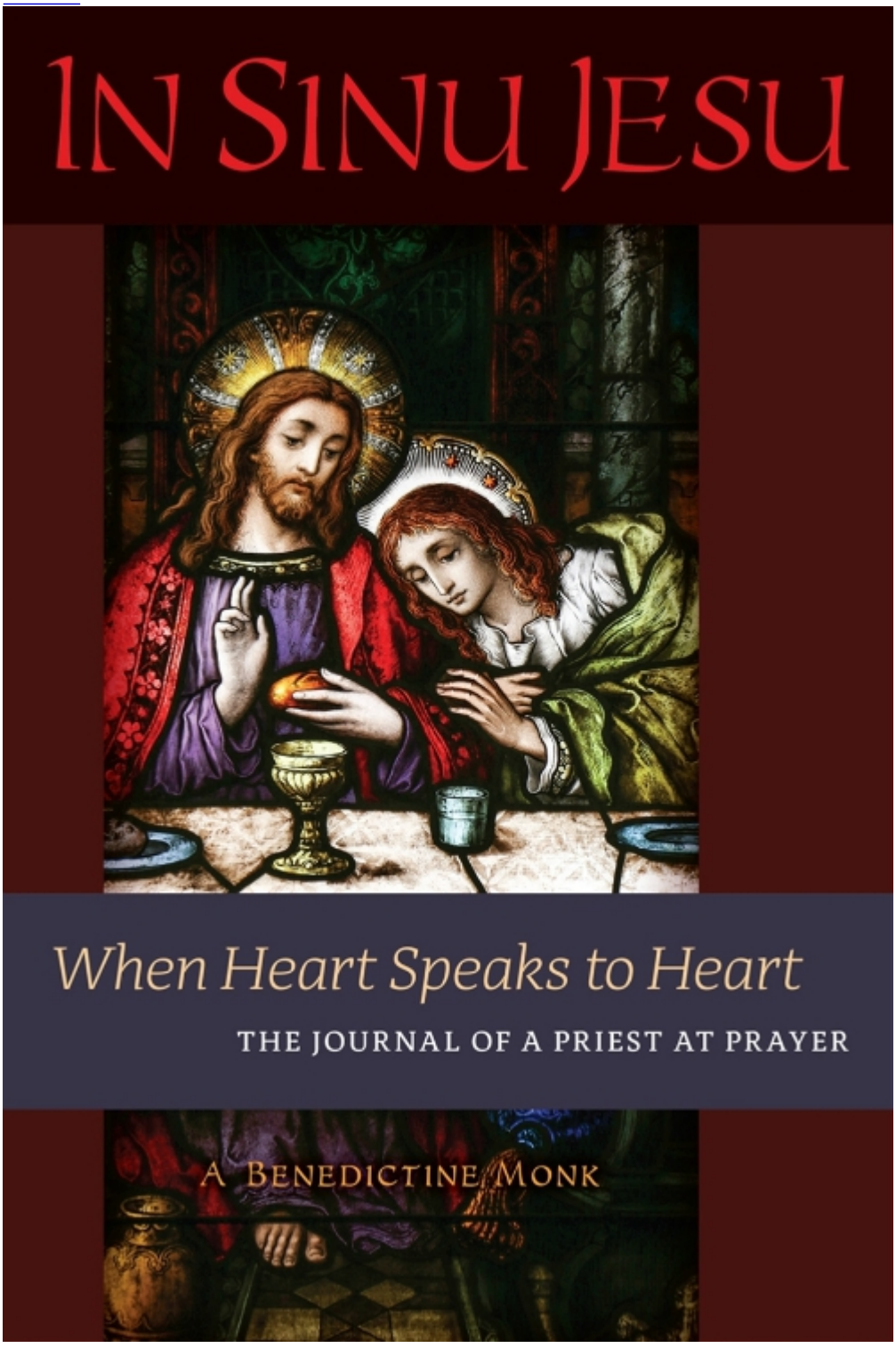
[News]


IN SINU JESU
When Heart Speaks to Heart
THE JOURNAL OF A PRIEST AT PRAYER
A BENEDICTINE MONK



by Christopher White

Former Vatican Correspondent (2021-2025)

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A monastery in Ireland founded by a U.S.-born Benedictine monk — whose popular, though scrutinized, theological writings have been heralded by a number of leading traditionalist church prelates, including Cardinal Raymond Burke, Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò and Texas Bishop Joseph Strickland — has been subject to a canonical visitation.

NCR has obtained a copy of the visitation decree of Silverstream Priory. Signed on May 2 by Bishop Thomas Deenihan of Meath, Ireland, and Vicar General Fr. Declan Hurley, the decree says those overseeing the visitation would be "paying special attention to concerns recently raised regarding the community dynamic."

A five-page report on the visitation, also obtained by NCR, enumerates concerns about the financial management of the monastery and the structure of its community life.

Silverstream was founded in 2012 in the Meath Diocese by Prior Mark Daniel Kirby, who moved to Ireland from Tulsa, Oklahoma, with another professed monk after being unable to find a suitable property to establish his community in the United States.

Martin Long, director of the Catholic Communications Office of the Irish bishops' conference, framed the visitation as a routine event. He also told NCR that the diocese had received a sexual misconduct complaint against Kirby but that the allegation was not related to the visitation and that the priest has denied any wrongdoing.

"Silverstream does not belong to a monastic congregation. Before 2017 it was an 'association' and not an Institute of Consecrated Life," Long told NCR in an email. "It is usual for a monastery to have a visitation at least every four years and, earlier this year, Silverstream had its first visitation as a Diocesan Institute of Consecrated Life."

Mercy Sr. Sharon Euart, a noted canon lawyer who is the executive director of the Resource Center for Religious Institutes, said that a visitation has historically been used "as an administrative tool to address a problem in order to remedy the situation."

"A visitation is often a response to a concern or a complaint in order to correct a situation," Euart, who is also a former associate general secretary of the U.S. bishops' conference, told NCR.

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"Generally, a visitation may occur when the bishop or superior such as a dicastery of the Holy See has become aware of a situation that may need to be changed for the good of the community and/or church," she continued. "Visitations have been made to dioceses, seminaries, religious institutes or monasteries."

Euart said that following a visitation, the findings will either stay with a diocesan bishop or will go to the Holy See if further action is needed.

According to the decree, a three-person team consisting of Benedictine Abbot Brendan Coffey of Glenstal Abbey, Trappist Abbot Richard Purcell of Mount Melleray Abbey, and Msgr. Gearoid Dullea of the Diocese of Cork and Ross were assigned to conduct the visitation, which took place June 9-12.

In their report, the three visitators say they are "very concerned about your current financial situation and the economic viability of the monastery."

"Your income last year was only 50% of what it was in each of the three previous years, but your expenses have been increasing by 20% each year, over the last four years," they state.

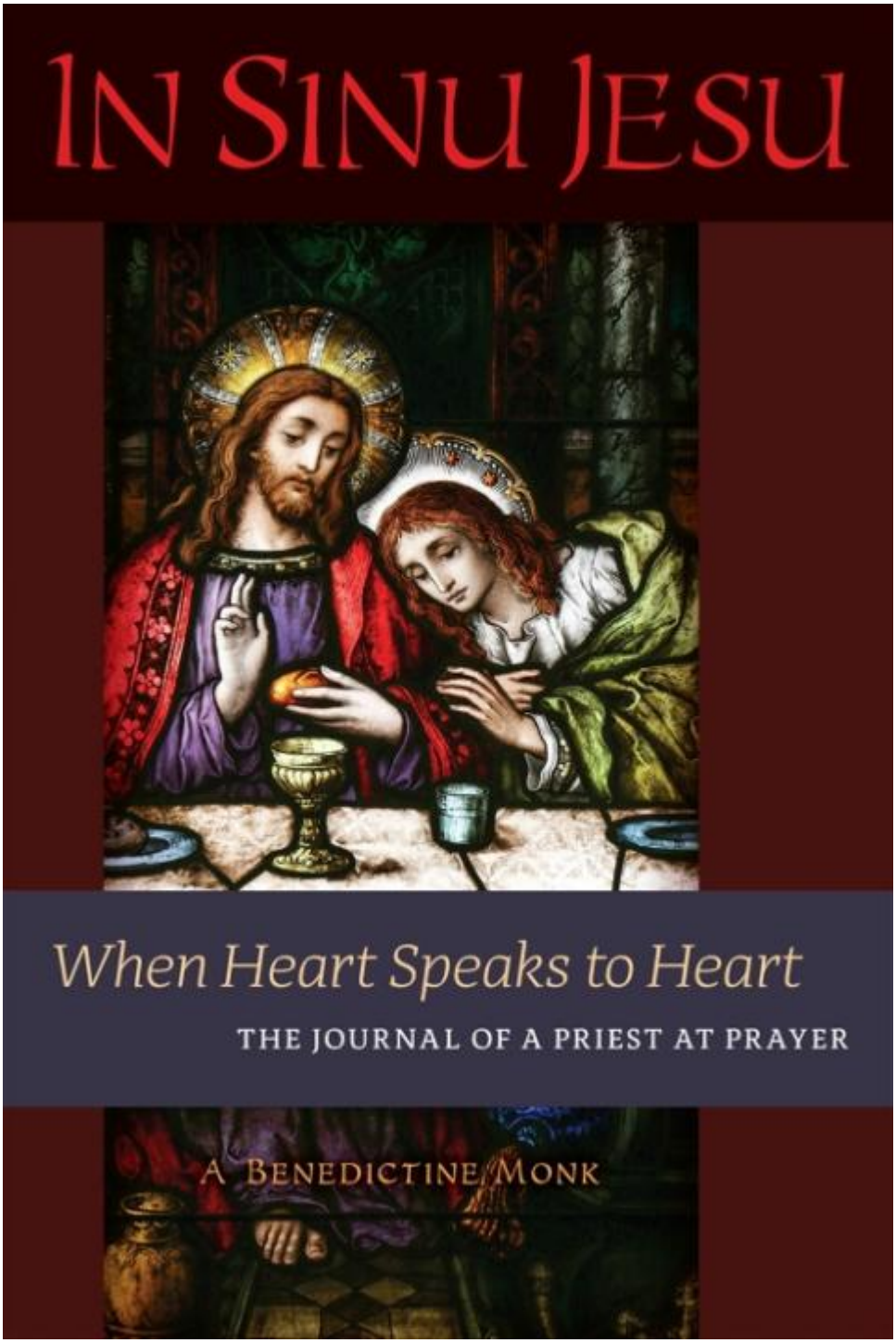
The report says that over 2.5 million euros ($3 million) have been spent purchasing and renovating property at the monastery from 2016 to 2019. It also says that the visitators spoke to the monastery's auditor, who expressed concern "about your tendency to spend all the money you have and not put anything into reserve."

The report states that going forward, Silverstream must produce an annual budget that is voted on and approved by the monastery.

Long told NCR that at present there are 15 members of the Silverstream community, 13 of whom are currently in residence.

"The role of Superior and that of Confessor, in particular, need to be kept separate," the visitators wrote. "It is very unwise for any Superior to hear the confession of his subordinates," they state, adding that Pope Francis has recently reiterated this position.

Among the other concerns outlined in the report are the need for recorded minutes from chapter meetings and votes, and the need to improve the communication between the monastery and the diocese when it comes to safeguarding children and the required annual child protection audit.



In recent months, Kirby's writings, which inspired the formation of the monastery, have come under scrutiny. He is the alleged author of *In Sinu Jesu: When Heart Speaks to Heart: The Journal of a Priest at Prayer*, a popular spiritual bestseller that, although published anonymously as written by "A Benedictine Monk," is a compilation of his own private revelations and meditations on his personal blog.

NCR has also confirmed with a source close to Silverstream that Kirby is the sole author of the text, which is sold out in the monastery's bookstore and promoted as authored by a member of its community. The text has been praised by Viganò, a former Vatican ambassador to the U.S. and one of Francis' leading critics. Viganò called it "a great consolation."

In a 2013 interview, Kirby discussed the monastery's "commitment to the traditional forms of the sacred Liturgy, celebrated worthily, in Latin and Gregorian chant."

"Like all Benedictine monks, we open the sacred Scriptures daily, in *lectio divina*, to discover there, shining through every page, as if through the 'lattice-work' of the text (Cant. 2:10), the adorable Face of Christ," he said at the time.

According to Long, Kirby remains a priest in good standing and is currently on sick leave in Dublin and has resigned his post as superior.

Kirby, said Long, "has suffered from long-standing health issues and has tendered his resignation as Prior of Silverstream on the basis of his poor health. His resignation has been accepted and it is expected that Dom Mark will return to Silverstream Priory as a member of the community in due course."

Long told NCR that the sexual misconduct complaint against Kirby was made by a monk who no longer resides at Silverstream.

"This was referred to the civil authorities and Father Kirby has denied any wrongdoing," said Long. "No further action has been taken by the civil authorities to the best of our knowledge."

Deenihan, the bishop of Meath, has appointed Coffey, who led the visitation, to serve as administrator of the monastery. According to Long, no member of the community has the required number of vowed years to make them eligible to serve as superior.

Long, who responded to NCR on behalf of Coffey and Deenihan, confirmed that the visitation remains open "until the bishop decides to close it."

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