Merry Christmas from Esperanza (Father Stan)

December was a month of being sure daily that everything looked ready for the end of the Creche Festival. General cleanup continued as did mulching the leaves.

January will find us doing the winter pruning and shaping, amending the soil with lime and bone meal for the roses, continuing to remove vines and paint stubs with brush killer, cutting the down the Beautyberry and turning our attention to cleaning and oiling the garden equipment.

Update on Gardens:

This month we have so much information on Christmas and Esperanza, I will not attempt to include all the individual gardens.

Church:

Father Jonas was kind enough to send these beautiful photos of the interior of the Church at Christmas. As usual, Father Guerric made everything so special for the coming of our Lord.
I felt like I was there with these wonderful pictures.

**Secular Cemetery:**

The Secular Cemetery is in a restricted area of the Monastery, but the Volunteers still take care of it. Craig took this photo so we can show you what a peaceful place it is.

**Orchard:**

We picked the last of the persimmons. It must have looked funny to a by
stander. I climbed the ladder and Norm would try to steady the ladder while I dropped the fruit to him. Our act was getting ready but we ran out of ammo.

The strawberries are looking good. The plants are filling out and the best part for us is the don’t require us to work on them.

We planted the blueberries. Our plan initially was that we would leave the plants in the greenhouse until spring. Some of the plants were losing leaves and generally failing so we figured we would put them out. For now they look better. Time will tell.

The citrus have small spot lamps on the plants for warmth. Next week we will need to recreate the yurts to provide additional protection from the wind.

The figs have had some pruning to make it easier to get around. A heavier pruning the end of January. Howard

Odds and Ends:

Creche Festival:

Father Guerric reports that Mepkin had approximately 8,325 visitors this year. The Festival was very successful. The Creche Contest results were as follows:
1-The Shell Nativity
2-The Mepkin Monks Nativity
3-The Mosaic Nativity (seen last month in St. Clare)
4-The 17th C Nativity
5-The hammered copper Nativity

Go to the Mepkin website if you would like to see photos of these.

Honey Crop:

As you are aware, we have several Beehives at Mepkin. Lo and Behold! The lucky Volunteers received Mepkin Honey for Christmas! Father Joe was also given several bottles as was Enzo, the chef in the kitchen to use them for the Brothers. I am stunned at the amounts. Thank you, brother bee.
Santa Maria de la Esperanza:

Father Stan sent the following background on the Trappistines the Mepkin Brothers support. This is the third and final PART of the information about the Trappistines. This month we are showing some of the interiors and greetings sent at Christmas by Father Stan.

Santa Maria de la Esperanza: PART 3
Background: “Santa Maria de la Esperanza, Our Lady of Hope, was founded in 1990 by a group of four Sisters from the Trappistine monastery at Tulebras, Spain. The founding Superior was a former Abbess of Tulebras and she was accompanied by her blood mother, an oblate of the community, and two other very exceptional women. They came to a very poor section of Ecuador in the northwestern corner of the country near the city of Esmeraldas.”
Blessed Christmas from Ecuador. May the Joy and Love of the Word made Flesh be with you all in abundance and remain with you throughout the New Year.

The Sisters, whom I serve as chaplain, send their greetings along with me. They are so happy to be linked with Mepkin and offer up so much prayer for the good of all of you and your families.

There is no such thing as a White Christmas here in Esmeraldas, a
seacoast city a few miles north of the equator. Usually it was never super cold at Mepkin, certainly no snow. But this is a different animal altogether. The day before Christmas and it is 90 degrees outside (about the same inside, as the windows are all open since we do not have air conditioning).

This first Christmas in Ecuador is proving to be a real blessing. Advent is truly split into two parts, as the liturgy calls for. Before December 17 and from December 17 to Christmas. Many, many crêches were set up on the 16th (but without the baby Jesus in them) and the music in the liturgy took a major step forward. Some beautiful and haunting melodies, especially for the O Antiphons.

I look forward to Christmas Day itself and the days following up to the Baptism of the Lord.

Here are some photos to give you a feel for this wonderful community of Trappistine nuns where I am so privileged to minister. I love it here and seem to fit in well.

Stan

Crêche in Church
Creche in Visiting/Dining Room

The Esmeraldas community with retreat leader
Mepkin has its oak allee, Esmeraldas has a palm allee.

My thanks to Howard for the Orchard Report, Father Jonas for the wonderful Christmas photos, Craig for the various photos, and Father Stan for all the information and photos of Esperanza. Always, many thanks to Langhorne for editing.

Happy New Year to each of you. May the Christchild bring you peace and happiness throughout the year. dottie