

A VISIT TO THE MONASTERY

By Robert DiPiante

CULLMAN, ALABAMA — We approached from the east on a small gravel road, and watched the setting sun melt away behind the large brick building in front of us. The small sign: “Christ the King Monastery” welcomed us as we drove between the seven-foot high brick pillars flanking each side of the still smaller dirt road leading to the main building.

Five years ago, I had stood with a 65-year-old Benedictine monk within 50 feet of where we were driving. He had stretched his hands toward a patch of high ground and said: “Right there, on that rise right over there, we will build our Monastery. And right beside it, our Monastic Church.”

He promised that when the monastery was done, we could come back and spend a few days with the monks. “We will have guest rooms, places where visitors and friends can stay,” he promised.

We all had been skeptical of his dream. He was, after all, a lone monk who wanted to retain the traditions of the monastery where he had been a monk for 35 years. He wanted traditional values in a church rapidly changing to a more modernistic approach to worship, religion and the Benedictine life.

Now the time for promises had passed. Three of us were back, accepting the invitations he had extended in 1988.

The Monastery of Christ the King, located in the rolling countryside 60 miles north of Birmingham, is more than a building; it represents a way of life for the six monks who have settled into an exacting daily cycle of work and prayer.

The monastery has room for 20 monks. Some have come and found the life too rigid or found they were not prepared for the commitment. Those who remain lay claim to a unique peace not found in the world outside the monastery.

For visitors, it's a different kind of experience. The silence creates an atmosphere distant from the fast moving society in which we spend our daily lives. It's the perfect place to look deeply into your own