

Spring/Summer 2016

the Mount

BENEDICTINE SISTERS OF ERIE



CHOOSE *Life*

Choose life and live.

—Deuteronomy 30:19

| | |
|------------------------------------|-------|
| From the Prioress..... | 3 |
| Healthier Living Choices..... | 4-5 |
| St. Benedict Education Center..... | 6-8 |
| Conference on Nonviolence..... | 9 |
| Monastic Formation..... | 10-11 |
| The Art of Woodturning..... | 12 |
| Life in a Monastery..... | 13 |
| Vocation Ministry..... | 14-15 |
| Oblates..... | 16-17 |
| Jubilarians..... | 18-20 |
| In Memoriam..... | 21 |
| Annual Report..... | 22-23 |
| CARE..... | 24-25 |
| Happenings..... | 26-31 |
| Life Experiences..... | 32 |
| SBA..... | 33-35 |

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It is impossible to count the number of choices that face us each day. However, I believe that if we choose life as a guiding principle then whatever daily choices we make will give purpose and meaning to who we are and all we do. If we choose life then our day-to-day choices must lead us down a path that includes faith, justice, peace, integrity and sustainability.

This issue of the *The Mount* shows how the choices we make really do matter. Whether it is the choice to be a Benedictine sister, an oblate, a “Riepper,” or member of Monasteries of the Heart; or the choice to eat healthy and exercise or to pray and love more; or maybe the choice to pursue a creative outlet or craft, or the choice to work with passion for a better world and a lasting earth—the choices we make that help us live relevant, committed lives will both benefit us and impact the lives of others.

May you find something in this issue that will feed your imagination, nurture your spirit, and grow your heart. I hope that you will be inspired to make the choices in your life that will sustain you and make your soul sing. Remember: the choices you make today may not only make your life more holy and whole, they can also make the world in which we live more holy and whole.

Charlotte Anne Zalot, OSB



(L-R) Sisters Beth Adams, Therese Glass, Postulant Valerie Luckey, Sisters Michelle Wilwohl, Pat Witulski

From the Prioress

SEEKING WHOLENESS

I love vegetables, fruits and salads. I am not much for sweets and am below average on choosing meats. All of which, in this era of concern for and concentration on wellness, makes me right in line with what nutritionists are pushing when it comes to healthy eating.

But, of course, there is much more to wellness than food.

Another natural piece for me is exercise, especially walking and enjoying the outdoors. The nature which surrounds the monastery, including our own creek and lakefront property, and the wonders of Erie's Presque Isle State Park, have won me over. I now know the names of many birds and flowers that I didn't know before. I can read the signs of the seasons just like a lifelong Erie resident, even when it comes to differentiating between snow clouds and everyday winter clouds.

When I travel I often seek out nature parks, zoos, aquariums and other local sites that feature the natural world of wherever I am. A trip to the London Zoo was one of the highlights of a visit to that city a number of years ago.

Yet wellness is even wider...

I also take care of myself by giving time to prayer, the Benedictine practice of *lectio divina* and spiritual reading. You generally will not find me in my office until 8:00 a.m. most mornings, as I use the time between 7:00 and 8:00 a.m. for *lectio*, reading, and writing the blessings needed for prayer for the upcoming day. It is a special grounding time for me.

In recent months the monastic councilors (advisors to the prioress in a monastic community) and I have been reading a marvelous book on spirituality: *Grounded* by Diana Butler Bass. She is a talented and creative writer and has opened her own heart and soul to share with other seekers. Bass's book is subtitled: *Finding God in the World—A Spiritual Revolution*. In the first half she uses the backdrop of the natural world for her reflections, with chapter titles such as, "Dirt," "Water," and "Sky." In the second half she hones in on more human interactions with titles like "Home" and "Neighborhood." She deepens our awareness that God is everywhere in the world around us, animating creation and community. Diana writes, "The spiritual revolution is the shift from the vertical God to God-with-us," and invites us to reflect on God, ourselves and the world as humans seeking beauty, and wholeness.

Valuing sacred time, personal wellness, and being grounded in listening to the Word of God through creation and beauty is what feeds my spirit and contributes to my wholeness. They are my healthy living choices and they serve me well. What I have learned from making these choices is simple: the body, mind and spirit will thrive if they are attended to with care and intention. Remember: "Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where nature may heal and give strength to body and soul." (John Muir)



Anne Wambach, OSB
Prioress, Benedictine Sisters of Erie



Healthier Living Choices

“Wellness is a connection of paths: knowledge and action.” Joshua Welch.

It was just a year ago that the sisters committed to a walk-a-thon as a surprise gift to Sister Anne Wambach, prioress, in celebration of her installation for a second term of office. In the weeks leading up to the installation the sisters walked at least 10 minutes a day for 10 days and prayed for Sister Anne while doing it.

Mary Rita Groucutt, Director of Health Services for the Erie Benedictines, who proposed the walk-a-thon gift, explained how her idea originated: “Coming to the Mount each day for work I was impressed with the beauty and nature that surrounds us. We have the ideal setting for relaxation, exercise and meditation. And I knew that the love this community has for Sister Anne would be an incentive to do a beneficial activity in her honor. In addition to the gift of prayers the community also demonstrated their willingness to embrace a healthy living choice with intention.”

The walk-a-thon was the first of several initiatives with the goal of making healthier living choices—a goal that many of you, like us, struggle with daily. “Initial expectations were met above and beyond my hopes,” said Mary Rita. “More than 80% of the community participated in the first walk-a-thon. For me, this reinforced the desire and ability of this community to make changes, even for brief periods of time.”

Next Mary Rita planned a community education session on exercise to improve balance and help prevent falls. “Poor balance and agility issues lead to

falls,” she said. “What we do in the daily affects our aging process and well-being. As I began to see subtle changes in overall health numbers such as blood pressure readings, sodium levels and body weight, I planned additional education sessions and incentives for healthier living.”

In one incentive program, the sisters received forms to track their healthy choices regarding food and exercise and prizes were offered for completing the forms. “I had no idea how much being accountable would help me,” shared one of the sisters. “Keeping the log was a good way for me to think about my choices and as a result I ate less between meals and worked hard not to eat after 7:00 p.m. Within a few weeks I could pinpoint some good body changes as a result of better choices.”

Mary Rita was thrilled with the results: “My hoped-for result was a greater awareness of the impact of healthier choices on overall health and aging. Just as the spiritual is a part of the everyday for this community, I was hopeful that healthy choices could be a part of the everyday as well and my hopes were not disappointed.”



Sisters Dorothy Szczypinski and Bernadette Lorei enjoy walking the grounds.



Sister Mary Louis Eichenlaub and Mary Rita Groucutt chat about healthy living choices.



Sister Dona Obenrader understands that reading helps the mind like exercise helps the body.



Kitchen staff, Michael Benjamin and Megan Schultz, prepare the salad bar that offers many healthy options.



Sister Irene Warchol understands the profound influence prayer can have on health.

Simple choices made day in and day out can add up to success for any of us. Whether it is using less table salt, moving more, doing intentional exercise, turning down the second snack, reaching for a piece of fruit instead of a cookie, taking these steps can move anyone in a good direction. Whether the goal is weight loss, muscle strengthening or improved quality of life, informed decisions and thoughtful choices have the potential to move one forward. "When you take small steps every day you actually cover a lot of distance," said Mary Rita. "I heard a proverb once that went something like this: 'Don't be afraid of going forward slowly; only be afraid of standing still.'"

Mary Rita is encouraged by the accomplishments that the sisters have shared with her. "I continue to look for new ways to motivate and encourage positive efforts that will help in the long run to eliminate the need for more medications, decrease the probability of falls and ultimately hospitalizations," she reflected. "The hope is to make this initiative on-going so that it becomes second nature for the sisters. Just as the spiritual is so much a part of the everyday, I hope we can reach a point where healthier choices, moving more, eating right, and supporting the environment can become an unconscious decision."



Sister Charles Marie benefits from sun and fresh air while mowing.



Mary Rita Groucutt, RN

Mary Rita Groucutt has been the Director of Health Services at Mount St. Benedict Monastery since May 2014. She directs and coordinates activities associated with the health care of the sisters, working to ensure the quality of the nursing care and managing the nursing/assisted living area of the monastery. For her, ongoing education geared to health care, healthier living and aging in place is an essential part of the director's role. She explains why this work is a ministry, rather than a job, for her:

I have always believed that nursing is a ministry rather than a profession. It is truly an honor to care for people during the most vulnerable times in their lives. To have an impact and assist with healing is always a miracle to witness.

Secondly, I have always felt very close to this community because of my education at St. Benedict Academy (The girls' high school that the community closed in 1988). Now, I feel I have an opportunity to give back to the strong women who helped form me.

Many of the nursing roles that I held during my tenure at Saint Vincent's Hospital provided me with skills that I am using in this position. Some of these roles were: nurse management, nursing education, nursing recruitment and staff nursing. I really enjoy being here and am honored every day to spend time with such a beautiful group of women who do so much for the disadvantaged in the Erie community. I am blessed!

I also love all the prayers directed my way and never refuse the opportunity to have a prayer offered for my intentions! Where else can you get that in your work life?

SBEC works to break cycle of poverty

BY JOANNE CAHILL, OBLATE

From its founding in 1988, St. Benedict Education Center (SBEC) has held the goal of wellness of families uppermost in its programs and job placement services to those on public assistance. Breaking the cycle of poverty is a first step in bringing stability to families in Erie and the surrounding five counties SBEC serves. The programs are varied yet all strive to support families by improving the economic health and well-being of the household.

“SBEC offers a welfare-to-work program,” explains Nancy Sabol, executive director and oblate of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie. “We are funded by the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services and all program participants are referred by the County Assistance Office. Our goal is straightforward: to move our students from public assistance to steady, productive employment that will improve their lives and the lives of their families.”

Referrals arrive weekly and begin with an intake process led by Kara Bauer, supervisor of county program coordinators. “To each group of new participants, I explain the program goal which is to secure employment. We are a job placement agency and offer an array of customized learning experiences that will increase the likelihood of employment,” she says. Each participant is then assigned to a Program Coordinator (PC) who assesses needs and develops a personalized plan of action. Such a plan may include classes, résumé development, computer job searching, training in



Kristen Triana, Kara Bauer, Cheryl Witherspoon, Jeanne DeForce, Diane Catrabone

interviewing skills, community service and other learning opportunities. “The program coordinators build relationships and work hard to understand the unique needs of each participant. Occasionally a participant is homeless; obviously this needs to be addressed first. Some are refugees and need help developing their language skills. Still others have a reasonably good work history but may be experiencing an unexpected set-back in life,” adds Kara. It is the job of the PC to navigate the many issues and challenges that stand in the way of full employment and to provide



Diane Weaver and Deborah Maxwell



Eduardo Lugo, Damanta Khadka, Pabrita Timsina, Sister Cindy Hoover, Clifton Peoples

encouragement and support to the participant through the process.

On day two at SBEC, job seekers begin employment preparation classes with Sister Pat Witulski. She works with the participants on résumé development, letter writing, job search skills, interview practice as well as softer, but no less important, skills such as self-esteem, communication, professional interactions, and successful behaviors in the workplace. “I have found it important to make time to share stories. Most come to us thinking they are alone in their situation. Slowly they discover they are not and are able to support one another through the process,” she explains.

Some SBEC participants, particularly the refugee population, have a unique set of challenges. Language and cultural literacy present the biggest barrier to employment for them. “Special efforts are made to teach English as it relates to job applications and interviews,” explains Stephanie Krauza, director of program management. “Many refugees have never worked or gone to school in their country, so filling out a job application is very overwhelming for them.” Three teachers, along with several volunteers, provide intensive language instruction to the refugees in order to prepare them for eventual employment.

The refugees arriving each day for class at SBEC have the opportunity to practice their budding language

skills with Sister Cindy Hoover, receptionist and office manager. “As I manage the front desk, I have the pleasure of greeting all who enter. With our immigrants, a greeting each morning and afternoon, a simple exchange of how they are doing and where they need to go is a great way for them to practice English in a real setting,” says Sister Cindy.

While developing language skills, refugees may also spend time in a community service placement or at The Factory (an on-site job training setting) where they develop job skills. Often they work alongside North Americans who have good language skills but lack sufficient experience for job placement. Here the job seekers experience a simulated workplace where they learn about promptness, reliability, production expectations, and team building until they are ready for job placement. Like immigrants before them, these refugees contribute to the fabric of American culture. Sister Dorothy Stoner, who manages The Factory, observes that, “Our challenge is teaching them how to integrate into U.S. culture while at the same time not lose who they are in their own unique culture.”

Seeking employment is the priority for all participants at SBEC. Sandy Osmanski is an employment coordinator who assists participants with their job search. “Many of our students have varied levels of



Jennifer Schweter, Jody Wielobob



Nancy Sabol, Stephanie Krauza, Sister Dorothy Stoner, Sister Judith Trambley

confidence, education and job experiences. They often lack support networks. We help them to identify their strengths and transform weaknesses and we encourage them to set goals for themselves and their families. Slowly they begin to recognize what they have to offer a potential employer. They begin to reach for something. This is a transformative moment,” she explains.

Sandy, along with her colleagues, Judi Jaworski and Kula Dhaurali, also cultivate relationships with local employers. Because of such efforts, SBEC has earned a reputation for recommending well-screened job candidates to such employers. Executive Director Nancy Sabol says, “I can promise any employer in the area that we work hard to understand their unique hiring requirements, to be prompt and responsive, to prepare and screen applicants, to refer only the most qualified, and to remain present through the transition to ensure they have made a successful hire. Nothing less than this is acceptable to us.”

For the staff at SBEC, no challenge is too great. Transportation, housing, wardrobe and child care issues are addressed. Once a participant is placed in a job, the staff remain available to them to ensure a smooth transition. Continued coaching, counseling and support are generously offered during this critical phase. Students are required to present at least seven months of pay stubs to satisfy government funding



Maureen Donnelly, Sandy Osmanski, Judi Jaworski, Kula Dhaurali

requirements. This period of successful employment is part of the measure that one has met the goals and has successfully completed the SBEC program and also satisfies the requirements of the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services.

PC Diane Catrabone sees the larger picture even in the midst of the day-to-day challenges her participants face. “I care about the next generation. How long will welfare be available? If it stopped tomorrow, we must ask ourselves: ‘Have we given our participants the tools they need to be self-sufficient?’ That is what is at stake here. We transform families,” she says.

Read more, find information about volunteer opportunities or wish list items at sbec-erie.org.



Kristin Glasser, Rebecca Fox



Mary Lou McCall, Sister Audrey Steff, Taha Najem, Sister Pat Witulski

Sister Anne McCarthy, OSB, participated in a unique international conference, co-sponsored by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and Pax Christi International on *Nonviolence and Just Peace: Contributing to the Catholic Understanding of and Commitment to Nonviolence*, held in Rome, Italy, April 11-13, 2016. Excerpts from her journal follow.

Conference on Nonviolence in Rome – A Journal By Anne McCarthy, OSB



Sunday, April 10, 2016

At the Missionary Benedictine Sisters of Tutzing's guesthouse in Rome, I am reading reflection papers from 85 invited participants before an historic Conference in Nonviolence co-sponsored by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and Pax Christi International. I am blown away by the depth and diversity of nonviolent campaigns today. A few highlights: Bishop Paride Taban of South Sudan, established Kuran Peace Village, where those of diverse ethnicities and faiths live together, welcome all for dialogue, and create safe space for women and children. South Koreans are occupying land on Jeju Island, planned site for a naval base threatening sacred indigenous land and culture. A daily Eucharist supports the occupation and upholds the resistance.

The goals of the conference are sweeping and include, "a new articulation of Catholic teaching on war and peace, including explicit rejection of "just war" language...." A tall order, indeed! The Just War Theory, moral criteria for both why and how wars are fought, was articulated by the Roman philosopher Cicero and picked up by Augustine of Hippo in the 4th Century. Expanded later by Thomas Aquinas, it became a mainstay of Christian ethics. In the first three centuries of the church, war, violence, and participation in the military were seen as incompatible with the gospel of Jesus.

Monday, April 11

The conference began this evening; energy and expectations both high. Marie Dennis, co-president of Pax Christi, who chaired Pax Christi's National Council when I was the National Coordinator, is the primary force that created this conference and garnered the unusual Vatican co-sponsorship. I have deep respect for Marie's wisdom, goodness, and vision. Her genius at group process is clear from the agenda. We received the major presentations electronically weeks ago. Panels with short reflections will be followed by small group discussions, each with a recorder feeding details to a writing committee.

This evening began with prayer and a statement from Cardinal Turkson, from Ghana, head of the Pontifical Council for Justice and

Peace who brought a message from Pope Francis supporting our work.

Tuesday, April 12

My small group is a treasured conversation like no other I have been in. I want to remember those around the table: Merwyn of JustFaith in Kabul, Afghanistan; Cory, who participates in Christian Peacemaker Teams in Palestine; Bishop Odama, chairs the Bishop's Conference in Uganda; Mairead, Nobel Laureate from Northern Ireland; Rania, Palestinian from Bethlehem; Sr. Catherine, worked in El Salvador and now in South Sudan; Bishop Kevin Dowling, of South Africa, co-President of Pax Christi International; Sr. Ann, Leadership Conference of Women Religious, Dr. Terrence, Marquette University; Rev. Boniface of the Pakistani bishop's conference.

Here, nuanced discussion of violence, nonviolence and just peace take flesh.

Wednesday, April 13

The dreaded consensus process—85 participants in four languages dealing with a 2-page final statement—was amazing. As we went through the statement, paragraph by paragraph using hand motions to signify agree, reservations, or blocks, Cardinal Turkson participated from the midst of the assembly. That has to be a first for a Vatican Prefect! The most passionate discussion was around the just war theory. The strongest pleas to reject it came from the global south: a Dominican sister from Iraq, a Jesuit from Colombia, a young priest from Uganda, all of whom are in lands torn apart by violence. Just Peace is one new framework providing criteria and moral assessments which help create lasting peace in places of violence and oppression.

In the end, we agreed to a groundbreaking statement calling for an encyclical on nonviolence, rejecting Just War, embracing nonviolence as consistent with the gospel and committing to education and action toward these ends.

After a rousing final liturgy, we collected our prayer symbols. I had brought an icon of Dorothy Day, Benedictine oblate and co-founder of the Catholic Worker. During Vatican II, she went to Rome with a small group to fast and pray for a condemnation of war and nuclear weapons. I sense that the work of the conference continued her legacy. Surely she was with us.



Initial Monastic Formation Provides Opportunities for

By Stephanie Schmidt, OSB, Director of Monastic Formation

When Benedict begins his Rule with the exhortation, “Listen,” he emphasizes the stance required of those who choose to seek wisdom by following his way. For the new members of our community, the initial monastic formation program provides opportunities that help develop the posture of Benedictine listening and that also contribute to their overall personal and communal well-being. Among these opportunities are semi-annual weekends away for those in initial monastic formation and weekly reflection days for postulants and novices.

MONASTIC FORMATION WEEKEND

The four women in the initial monastic formation program, Sister Pat Witulski, scholastic, Sisters Dina Lauricella and Karen Oprenchok, novices, and postulant Valerie Luckey along with the sisters on the formation team and Sister Stephanie Schmidt, director, gathered at the community’s Glinodo Center for their spring weekend.

“We focused on the topic of mercy since Pope Francis designated 2016 as a Jubilee Year of Mercy,” explained Sister Stephanie. “But we added a twist. We want to help new members assimilate the community’s history so we invited sisters who could share how our outreach to the poor in the city of Erie began. We could then see the living expression of mercy in our own community history and ministries.”

Sister Miriam Mashank, founder and past executive director of St. Benedict Education Center (SBEC), spoke about the transformation of St. Benedict Academy (the community’s academy closed in 1988) to SBEC and the mini-miracles worked along the way as welfare-to-work and other programs provided a different kind of education. Sister Diane Rabe, director of St. Benedict Child Development Center, shared stories of Sister Alice Schierberl, founder of the day care, who reached out and empowered women in the neighborhood. Sisters Carolyn Gorny-Kopkowski, Mary Lou Kownacki, Mary Miller and Rosanne Lindal-Hynes explained the beginnings of Pax Center, a Christian community for nonviolence, that functioned from 1972 until the early 90s, and initiated the Emmaus soup kitchen. The soup kitchen grew into Emmaus Ministries and under Sister Mary’s direction now includes a food pantry, kids cafe and urban farm school.

“I was so moved by the passion, trust and courage that led these women to step out in faith and stand in solidarity with the poor and marginalized,” said Sister Pat. “Their testimonies provided rich community history and inspiration and offered a challenge to all of us: Be open to new and creative ways of responding with mercy to the needs of the times.”

REFLECTION DAYS

As Benedictines we work to reverence the whole person—body, mind, and spirit. We emphasize the importance of this with new members by providing them with one day a week for reflection. Each postulant and novice makes it her own, maybe praying at the lake or biking to the beach, indulging in extra time reading poetry or exploring the creative arts, for example.



A Day to Reflect

By Postulant Valerie Luckey

All too often we miss out on opportunities to slow down and experience God working through our lives amidst the busyness that we create. During the postulancy and novitiate years of initial monastic formation, women discerning their vocation in the community are given sacred space to reflect on the ways God is always at work in our lives.

A weekly reflection day provides time to sit with the moments of life calling us to growth. We are able to experience God’s love for us and listen with the ear of our heart.

We live in a society that values a demanding, always-at-work attitude, but by entering religious life we chose to do our work with God. Weekly reflection days give us time to meet with our “business partner” who demands only love of us.

New Members

WISDOM CONNECTIONS: USING TECHNOLOGY TO BUILD COMMUNITY

"Wisdom Connections: Timeless Tradition in Technological Times (T4 for short) is an exciting new adventure in the Benedictine world," said Sister Stephanie Schmidt, Director of Monastic Formation. Through a generous grant from GHR Foundation (ghrfoundation.org), T4 is making it possible for Benedictines across the United States to enhance education, formation and communication among new members through the use of digital technology.

Erie Benedictine women in initial monastic formation are in web-based discussion groups with women in monasteries around the country at the same stage of monastic formation. Each group of five meets monthly to discuss current topics in monastic life via a video app. "The goal is to build supportive relationships among newer members that will continue throughout their religious lives," explained Sister Stephanie. "The directors of formation in participating communities also meet for monthly sharing. These relationship-building groups are designed to promote bonds that will strengthen our collaborative efforts as we share Benedictine values with the world."

Another benefit of the T4 program is access to a digital resource library featuring presentations by Benedictine scholars, writers and educators. This online video library already has 36 presentations ready for use by those in initial monastic formation, including several by Erie Benedictine Sister Joan Chittister. This resource is especially beneficial to smaller monasteries in geographically isolated areas with limited resources.



Valerie Luckey, postulant, Sisters Karen Oprencok and Dina Lauricella, novices, Sister Pat Witulski, scholastic

"Our involvement in T4 is a great opportunity for women in initial monastic formation," Sister Stephanie added. "We hope that the sharing of resources via technology will prepare the next generation of Benedictine women to be well versed in the wisdom of the tradition and ready, willing, and able to carry the legacy of our Benedictine foremothers into the future."

T4 is an initiative of the Conference of Benedictine Prioresses. Thirty communities will participate over the three years of the initial project.

Ongoing Formation Opportunity

Gathering of Benedictine Sisters 55 & Under

Sisters Katherine Horan and Cindy Hoover were among a group of Benedictine Sisters, age 55 and under, who gathered for a weekend of input and relationship-building at Our Lady of Grace Monastery in Beech Grove, IN. Participants came from monasteries within the Federations of St. Scholastica, St. Gertrude and St. Benedict, as well as from the Congregation of Perpetual Adoration and the Missionary Benedictines of Norfolk, NE.

The theme, "New Wineskins," took shape in a number of presentations and discussion topics revolving around the importance of collaboration, relationship-building and the use of technology. Sister Katherine Horan shared, "I am always empowered by the energy and insights that each sister brings to the gathering. It is an opportunity to connect with those who are of the same chronological age and have been in monastic community a similar number of years."



Sisters Cindy Hoover and Katherine Horan

The Art of Woodturning: An experience of creativity and wholeness

Woodturning: the art or process of fashioning wooden pieces or blocks into various forms and shapes by means of a lathe (merriam-webster.com)

Did you know that the Hebrew words for creator and health share the same root? The Hebrew words *briya* (creation) and *briyut* (health) share the root, *bara*. What does this suggest? Maybe that there is a dimension of health and well-being in allowing God's life-giving energy to flow freely through our minds, bodies and spirits making us co-creators with God of this world of ours.

One concrete way of doing this is through the arts.

"The novice is given a choice of artistic experiences where she can learn something new, discover her creative spirit, and engage in beauty and meditation throughout the process. We call it 'art as meditation,'" explains Sister Stephanie Schmidt, formation director. "Monasticism has always encouraged the practice of the arts—from the illustration of texts to the singing of sacred chant, to tapestry weaving, sculpting, poetry and writing—and we want our new members to learn this tradition because it supports the development of a whole, healthy person."

Novices Dina Lauricella and Karen Oprechok are finding this to be true in their novitiate experience of art as meditation. Both of them have practiced the art of wood turning with Sister Audrey Steff, a master

wood turner. "Pablo Picasso said that 'Art washes away from the soul the dust of everyday life,'" Sister Karen reflected. "In this art as meditation experience I'm creating a little dust as I learn woodturning in Sister Audrey's workshop."

Sister Audrey has been turning wood since the 1970s. "When I see the beauty that comes forth from a piece of wood I understand 're-birth' in a new way. Wood turning fulfills a basic need within me to be creative; it is a stepping stone to a deep joy that contributes to my wholeness as a person," she said. "That is what I attempt to share with my wood turning students: through creative expression one can gain a sense of wholeness."

"I have really enjoyed this experience," shared Sister Karen. "Just as Michelangelo chipped away stone to reveal the sculpted David, I've used gouges and chisels to reveal candle holders and Christmas trees inside blocks of wood. Concentration, power, and finesse all play a part. As a beginner it's easy to remove too much wood and have to adjust the plan — just like life. In the end, though, I have found it to be very rewarding and enriching."

**It starts out as a stump, trunk or branch of wood
and ends up as a bowl, candle holder or cup.**



Sister Audrey Steff



Sister Dina gives Sister Karen pointers



Sisters Dina and Karen admire their creations

Life in a Monastery

By Joanne Cahill, Oblate



Joanne Cahill

The *Rule of Benedict* is a rule for life written in the 6th century – yes – but it is also a living tradition that has sought expression in every age. In this age, the Benedictine Sisters of Erie, faithful followers of the Rule since 1856, offer a contemporary expression of the Rule for seekers like me. The Benedicta Riepp Program is designed for women who wish to immerse themselves in the monastic rhythms of prayer, work and community for a period of time. The sisters believe that anyone who walks the way of Benedict with them for an extended period will live differently as a result of that experience and be a great gift to their families, communities and church.

And so it is with me, a participant in the Benedicta Riepp program. I am affectionately known as “the Riepper” and as I conclude my time here, I know I have changed because of this time. Whether the journey to the monastery is one from Eichstatt, Bavaria as Mother Benedicta Riepp before us in 1856 or a journey like mine from a small town in central Pennsylvania, the journey is first and foremost a journey of the heart.

All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ...Once guests have been announced, the prioress and the community are to meet them with all the courtesy of love. Rule of Benedict, Ch. 53



Sister Anne Wambach, prioress, Joanne, Sister Stephanie Schmidt, Monastic Formation Director

That’s exactly what happened when I arrived at the front door of Mount St. Benedict in late September. The prioress, another sister and three postulants welcomed me warmly and set about unloading my overly-stuffed car. (I would learn to live more simply.) For seven months I prayed, worked, studied, shared meals, watched movies, and planned peace vigils and parties with the sisters. I studied the Rule, learned music, practiced creative writing, explored personality traits helpful to community living, while I also took my turn doing dishes, answering phones and dusting the library. How could such ordinary activities become the framework for such an extraordinary journey? I’m not sure but I know I will never be the same.

How could I? And, perhaps, how could they – these sisters? When we allow ourselves to be touched by others we are never the same. That’s what happened in the midst of prayer and dishes – we were touched through one another with the loving hand of God.

Touching others is what these women do best. These past months I worked in two of their ministries: Emmaus Food Pantry and St. Benedict Education Center. Here I discovered firsthand the community’s commitment to the poor – especially women and children, their uncompromising desire for peace and justice in the world, and their commitment to seek God in prayer and community. These are the hallmarks, I discovered, of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie.

An oblate of the community, I have known the sisters for many years as a frequent visitor to the monastery. But, this was different – very different. My relationship to them has deepened in beautiful ways. As I pack up to go home, I do so with the awareness that I have much to “unpack” from this experience. What does this mean as I go forward? How will I live differently because of my time here? As I prepare to take my leave, I do so with more questions than answers. Yet, living the questions is what we must do, isn’t it? As this journey of the heart comes to an end, I know that it will live on within me for many years to come.



Sister Judith Trambley, Mentor, with Joanne

The Benedicta Riepp Program is open to women from any Christian tradition. See a complete listing of requirements at eriebenedictines.org/benedicta-riepp-monastic-experience or contact Sister Stephanie Schmidt, Director of Monastic Formation, 814-899-0614 ext. 2511 or email formation@mtstbenedict.org.

Vocation Ministry

God will guide you continually, watering your life when you are dry and keeping you healthy, too.
You will be like a well-watered garden, like an ever-flowing spring. (Isaiah 58:11)

Lectio Divina

Reflection by Marilyn Schauble, OSB, Vocation Director

The women who are discerning a vocation to the Benedictine Sisters of Erie often ask me what is life-giving and enduring about Benedictine life. What gives grounding for the long haul of a deep, fulfilling relationship with God lived in community? I believe there are many attributes of Benedictine life that can answer this question but let me talk about just one of them here: the daily practice of *lectio divina* (Latin for Divine Reading).

Benedict writes in the opening phrase of his Rule, "Listen carefully to my instructions, and attend to them with the ear of your heart (Prologue 1)." A life of listening in the way of the ancient method of *lectio divina*, the slow, meditative reading of scripture, has as its long-term intention union with God. *Lectio divina* is not a time to dissect every word or phrase of the text. Instead it provides time for reflection, prayer, and contemplation with an outcome of action and so contributes to the vitality of Benedictine spirituality. Reading and pondering scripture has the potential to shape healthy thinking about God, our own life and our own experience. While it is true that spiritual wellness requires time and effort on our part, it is God who does the majority of the work. We have but to listen.

Benedictines make a commitment to "do" *lectio divina* every day. In its purest form scripture is the foundational text. But as Psalm 103 tells us, "everything on earth is filled with sacred presence." The practice of *lectio divina* can open us to see the divine in all of creation's many texts: a poem, the song of a bird, the new-green of springtime, the sister in chapel, the guest. It is one of the many life-giving and enduring aspects of the Benedictine life. In this way, as we "put on" daily *lectio divina* listening, we can see everything as a way to union with God and it becomes an integral part of our outlook.

For a woman discerning the path of her spiritual life journey *lectio divina* can be a powerful encounter with God and all of God's creation. It might be just the way for you, too, to deepen a fulfilling relationship with God. Why not give it a try?



| | | | | |
|---------------|------------------|---------------|---------------------|--------------|
| Lectio | Meditatio | Oratio | Contemplatio | Actio |
| Reading | Meditating | Praying | Contemplating | Acting |

Canisius College Annual Women's Retreat

The Benedictine Sisters of Erie hosted the Canisius College Annual Women's Retreat for the 6th year with the help of Oblate Sarah Signorino, Associate Campus Minister at the college, and Sister Marilyn Schauble, Vocation Director.

During the weekend, the group joined the community for prayer and meals. In addition, two community members provided special sessions: Sister Helen Heher, Art as Meditation experience and Sister Jean Wolbert, Music as Meditation.

Sister Helen explained to the group: "Light in the Night is what I have called this painting meditation. It is meant to be an expression from the inside out. Follow your energy...surprise yourself. There is art in you."

Spring Ministry Trip with a Twist

Spring Ministry Trip with a twist brought six staff and faculty members from Canisius College to the Mount. They enjoyed a mini-experience of the service trips that so many students have enjoyed through the years. The days were filled with monastic prayer, service in the Benedictine ministries and meals with the community. Special sessions included input on the Monastic Way and the importance of *lectio divina*. The group also participated in the April First Friday Vigil for Immigration Reform. "It was a busy few days," noted Sister Marilyn Schauble. "Nevertheless, as always, it was special for them and for us. We were energized by their participation in our life and ministry and although they left tired, I think they were, too."

January Canisius Group, Winter Service Week

Seven Canisius College students and their adult leader lived at the monastery for one week and worked with the sisters in various ministries for their Alternative Winter Break Ministry Trip. Sister Marilyn Schauble, Vocation Director and organizer of the week, said, "This has become one of our favorite weeks of the year. We are always pleased and excited to welcome the college students into our home and hearts."



Reflection Days Stretch Oblates

By Dianne Sabol, OSB, Oblate Co-Director

We need to stretch. We need to stretch our bodies, our minds, our hearts, our spirits.

We need to be stretched. Monastic life in this Erie Benedictine community and through the Oblate Way of Life can stretch us beyond what we thought we could do and who we thought we could be. The Oblate Afternoons of Reflection this past Advent and Lent asked us to stretch ourselves through mercy....mercy for the earth and mercy for prisoners.

Advent Reflection: Mercy for the Earth

Sister Annette Marshall presented *Mercy for the Earth* to about 30 oblates and a few potential oblates at the Advent reflection on December 12. "The topic integrated Pope Francis's appeal for dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet (*Laudato Si*) and the Year of Mercy that he opened on December 8," said Sister Ann Hoffman, oblate co-director.

Sister Annette first considered the Year of Mercy in relation to the parable of the Good Samaritan and our current response to the damage done to the earth. We then looked at environmental issues in general and, in particular, at climate change as the result of human activity. "There is no Planet B," said Sister Annette. "It is our responsibility to reverence and protect the natural world and to take whatever actions are necessary to right the many wrongs that humans have inflicted on the rest of creation."

"It was a privilege for me to share the wonder and enthusiasm that I experience whenever I contemplate the complexity and beauty of even the smallest of creatures," said Sister Annette, a long-time environmental educator.

Oblate Tom LeBeau from Lancaster, NY, shared, "This weekend has deepened my sense of belonging to this humble yet vital Benedictine community and my sense of belonging to and cherishing of the earth as well. Just



Sister Annette Marshall presents *Mercy for the Earth* during Advent Reflection Day

when I think I'm searching for God, this community and presentations like *Mercy for the Earth* remind me that it is God who finds me and never lets me go from a loving embrace."

We need to stretch. We need to be stretched.

Lenten Reflection: Mercy for Prisoners

In keeping with the Year of Mercy the theme for the Lenten reflection was, *When I Was a Prisoner*. Again about 30 oblates and some sisters gathered for the afternoon reflection on March 12.

I opened the afternoon with an overview of the community's history of prison ministry beginning with Sisters Bernardine Goebel, Mary Margaret Kraus and Miriam Vos who, upon their deaths, left us a legacy to continue. Seven sisters and oblate Janice Etchison carry on this ministry. Janice spoke with the group about what it means to her, saying, "My presence with the women in Erie County Prison has always been a very powerful experience for me. I am lifted up by their involvement in



Lenten Reflection Day: *When I was a Prisoner*

our prayer service and pray that what I say may make even a small difference in their lives that day. I am humbled by their profound responses to the scripture passages we read and am very thankful for their warmth and gratitude for our time together. As they were leaving our gathering space on a recent Sunday, one woman remarked, 'Thank you for not judging us.'

Sister Mary Lou Kownacki then shared her experience as a prisoner for civil disobedience in Washington, D.C. jails by reading excerpts from the chapter, "D.C. Jail," in her book, *A Monk in the Inner City*. One of the most poignant points was her recognition that, "We were eventually released from the prison but part of each of us remained locked up in the D.C. jail; part of each of us still sits and waits. It is the least we can do for those we left behind."

"Hearing Mary Lou share her jail experience moved me personally," said oblate Andy Kukec who came in from Milwaukee, WI, for the weekend. "I will never forget the compassion she expressed for the prisoners and the conditions they are subjected to while waiting for release."



Chris (former prison warden), Jackie Burns, Oblate, Maggie (former prison warden), Judy (prison physician)

Oblate Jackie Burns is from Delaware, OH, and is involved in prison ministry in that state. She and three companions (Judy, a prison physician, and Chris and Maggie, both former prison wardens), talked about "Kindway Embark," a Christ-centered prison ministry launched five years ago that focuses on helping prisoners transition from incarceration to independence. "We are thrilled to report that 63 men and women participants in this program have successfully transitioned; only two participants returned to prison for probation violations. No one has recommitted a felony," said Jackie.

It was good for me both as a sister and as oblate co-director to be part of this amazing Lenten reflection afternoon. Like many of the oblates, I, too, was greatly affected by the compassion and love and empathy that we experienced in the stories and prison ministry initiatives. Everything we heard and experienced emphasized the importance of mercy, forgiveness and hope. All of us were given a lot to think about in this regard.

We need to stretch. We need to be stretched.

Oblate Way of Life

If you desire to deepen your relationship with God, with others and with yourself, ground your spirituality in values based on simplicity, respect, hospitality, and reverence for all life, and enter into a distinct relationship with others on a similar spiritual path, then consider becoming an Oblate of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie. To learn more, visit ErieBenedictines.org or contact the co-directors: oblates@mtstbenedict.org or 814-899-0614.



Oblate Co-directors: Sisters Ann Hoffman and Dianne Sabol

Jubilee Year

In a Benedictine community, jubilee is important. It is a celebration that commemorates the passage of years in which a sister has lived the vowed life with faithfulness and fidelity. This year 8 sisters are marking jubilees. These women have been faithful to seeking God in the communal life and have responded in prayer and ministry. Each of these sisters is celebrated for her unique and special witness. They have been and continue to be gift to community, the church and the world.

Sister Bernadette Lorei 70 Years



That Sister Bernadette Lorei is known as a hard worker is no surprise to those who have heard her quote her favorite verse from the Rule of St. Benedict, "Every time you begin a good work, you must pray to God most earnestly to bring it to perfection." (Rule of Benedict, Prologue 4) Having grown up in a large, close-knit family in Erie, PA, she learned at an early age to be dependable, diligent and careful in her work while also respecting both work and worker.

Fidelity to the Rule is a hallmark of Sister Bernadette who celebrates 70 years as a Benedictine Sister of Erie. She is a strong witness to commitment and stability in the Benedictine way of life having spent nearly 50 years as a passionate educator in the Diocese of Erie, primarily as an elementary teacher, but also as a principal and secretary. In her later years she worked in the monastery infirmary, cooking and serving breakfast for infirmary residents, and assisting them as needed. Now, an infirmary resident herself, Sister Bernadette's ministry is centered in prayer and presence.

Sister Mary Daniel Meahl 70 Years

Sister Mary Daniel Meahl, an Erie native and graduate of St. Benedict Academy, was a music-maker long before she became a Benedictine sister. During her 70 years in community, Sister Mary Daniel used her skills in piano, organ and harp to minister to children, teenagers and adults throughout the Erie Diocese as a music teacher, choir director, and church musician. A certified Kindermusik instructor, she introduced toddlers to music and the joy of making music themselves. In addition, Sister Mary Daniel served the community as a liturgical musician. Until recently she was also a private instructor of piano and organ.

Now, in her ministry of prayer and presence, she finds the beauty of community prayer and mutual love and support to be her greatest strength. "Being a Benedictine sister has always been my primary vocation," she says. "I was happy to be able to bring the gift of music to the lives of others in my various ministries through the years. I continue to enjoy music and am grateful that I can still join my voice with my sisters in praise of God."



Sister Joachim Frey

60 Years

Sister Joachim Frey, a native of St. Marys, PA, became a Benedictine sister and professed her first vows in 1956 at St. Joseph Monastery in St. Marys. When that monastery closed, Sister Joachim transferred her vows to the Erie Benedictines and was fully incorporated into the Erie community in 2015.

Sister Joachim was both an elementary and high school teacher for almost 30 years before moving into a variety of ministries that included administrative assistant work, pastoral care coordination, and internal ministry in the St. Marys monastery including a number of years as the community's treasurer and also in the community's insurance office.

As an Erie Benedictine, Sister Joachim has taken on a number of responsibilities around the monastery. Soft-spoken by nature, she does many things quietly, with a twinkle in her eye and a smile on her face. "That's the way I learned from teachers through the years, starting with my parents," she says. "When you see something that needs to be done, you do it and it doesn't matter who sees it. Many good things are accomplished quietly and calmly."



Sister Dorothy Szczypinski

60 Years



Sister Dorothy Szczypinski met the Benedictine Sisters as a student at St. Benedict Academy and then became a teacher and principal there after professing her vows 60 years ago. Her ministry in education spanned 44 years: in addition to SBA, she was a math teacher in elementary and secondary schools throughout the diocese, a tenured assistant professor of math at Gannon University, and an instructor at St. Benedict Education Center.

When the community welcomed Vietnamese refugees to Erie in the 1970s, Sister Dorothy was very involved in assisting the families and helping in the resettlement of the Vietnamese sisters, Lovers of the Holy Cross. When the Lost Boys of Sudan arrived in the 1990s she took an active interest and through her work at St. Benedict Education Center helped them adjust to life in America. "I learned so much from both the Vietnamese refugees and the Lost Boys of Sudan," said Sister Dorothy. "I took very seriously the call to be a beacon of hope. I think that is why the Benedictine *Suscipe* means so much to me: 'Uphold me, O God, and I shall live and do not fail me in my hope.' I felt humbled to be able to share that message with people in need." Presently Sister Dorothy is engaged in the ministry of hospitality as a community receptionist as well as in the ministry of prayer and presence.

Sister Norma Jean Kingsley

60 years

Grounded in Benedictine spirituality, Sister Norma Jean Kingsley credits community prayer and liturgy as the source of her strength for the past 60 years. After graduating from St. Benedict Academy, Sister Norma Jean worked for several years before entering the convent. As a Benedictine sister she taught at both the elementary and secondary levels in the diocese, took on administrative responsibilities at the community's Camp Glinodo and also served as community secretary and was Scholastic Director for sisters in temporary vows.

For a number of years Sister Norma Jean worked at Ecclesia Center, an outreach of the Diocese of Erie to religious and priests in need of spiritual renewal, offering pastoral ministry and spiritual direction. She then served in pastoral care at Heartland Hospice and Lakeland Area Hospice until she retired in 2015. "My years of companioning people on their spiritual journey have been a great blessing," said Sister Norma Jean. "It has given new meaning to life and my ability to strive for 'the heights of perfection.' I have truly learned that it is what we become that matters more than anything we do." At present, in addition to continuing as a spiritual director, Sister Norma Jean offers pastoral care in the monastery infirmary. She is also a part-time monastery receptionist.



Sister Rosanne Lindal-Hynes

60 Years

"I grew up wanting to be a sister as I watched my great Aunt Kate who lived next door feed every homeless person who came along," said Sister Rosanne Lindal-Hynes, a native of Oil City, PA. "When her husband died people thought my aunt would be afraid to welcome strangers but her only fear was that she might 'miss the Lord.'" In her own work at Emmaus Ministries, Sister Rosanne emulates her Aunt Kate.

In 1991 Sister Rosanne began her present ministry as women's advocate at Emmaus. "My work ranges from the most urgent situations to the joy – and long hours – of collecting, wrapping and distributing gifts for the families of Emmaus at Christmas," she said. "I try always to be a presence of peace and compassion in lives that know too much trouble. It is a ministry that tugs at my heart strings but one that is Benedictine in the deepest of ways. I take seriously Benedict's call to relieve the lot of the poor."

Prior to Emmaus, Sister Rosanne was an elementary teacher in parish schools throughout the diocese and also worked at St. Benedict Child Development Center. In her 60 years in community, she has also been director of social services at St. Martin Center and a counselor at Community House for Women, head teacher at the East Coast Migrant Head Start program run by the Benedictine sisters and on staff at Pax Christi USA, all in Erie.



Sister Claire Marie Surmik

60 Years

Sister Claire Marie Surmik is rarely without a smile and she brings joy to all those with whom she comes in contact, an indication of her love of the Benedictine charism of hospitality.

Sister Claire Marie began her religious life in the Sisters of Saints Cyril and Methodius, Danville, PA, the community she entered in 1953. With degrees in English, education and administration she was an elementary teacher and principal in a number of dioceses and an assistant superintendent of schools in the Diocese of Scranton. All the while a desire to serve the poor and work for peace and justice grew within her. As she discerned these promptings she experienced the call to monastic life. In 1988 she began the transfer process to the Benedictine Sisters of Erie and made her final incorporation in 1991.

In Erie Sister Claire Marie was a staff member at Emmaus Ministries where she is still a part-time Food Pantry Coordinator. Her direct contact with the poor has made her a staunch advocate for systemic changes that will better the lives of those who are the "casualties of our culture." Community life and her own work enliven a hope that we will all one day live, as she says, "in openness to the call of the Spirit by facing our future with hope and joy as we struggle to reshape our lives to meet the needs of these times."

Sister Janet Staab

60 Years

Sister Janet Staab grew up in St. Joseph Parish, Oil City, and was a graduate of St. Joseph High School, where she first met the Benedictine Sisters of Erie and felt the call to religious life. She entered the community 60 years ago after her graduation and her first ministry was teaching, primary grades then junior high, throughout the Diocese of Erie. In addition, she taught in parish religious education programs (CCD). When a L'Arche house to support people with intellectual disabilities opened in Erie, Sister Janet ministered there for several years. She also cared for children in the East Coast Migrant Head Start program. She served as the community chronicler and also as archivist for almost 35 years until retiring in 2014.

"Responding to the needs of others has always been important to me in all my ministries," said Sister Janet. "I am committed to 'listening with the ear of the heart' so that I can bring about positive change in my own life and hopefully in the lives of those in need. Now I do it primarily through prayer and there is nothing more important than that." Sister Janet is presently in the ministry of prayer and presence. Each new day finds her living out not only her favorite quote from the Rule of Benedict, "Listen with the ear of your heart" (RB, Prologue: 1), but also her favorite line from Psalm 46, "Be still and know that I am God."



In Memoriam

Sister Kathleen Warner, OSB, 88, died on March 24, 2016, in the 70th year of her religious life, at Mount St. Benedict Monastery in Erie, PA. Born in Buffalo, NY and baptized Mary Lucille, Sister Kathleen was the daughter of Floyd and Mina (Langevin) Warner. She entered the Benedictine Sisters of St. Joseph Monastery, St Marys, PA on September 5, 1944. On August 20, 1946, Sister Kathleen pronounced her first vows; October 22, 1949 marked the date of her perpetual profession. When it became clear that St. Joseph Monastery would be closing as a result of a climbing median age and lack of new members, Sister Kathleen moved to Erie on April 14, 2014. After prayer and discernment she asked to transfer her vows to the Benedictine Sisters of Erie. On August 11, 2015, Sister Kathleen was fully incorporated into the Erie Benedictine community.

Sister Kathleen held a B.S. in Education from Villanova University and an M.A. in Religious Studies from St. Charles Seminary, Philadelphia, PA. From 1946 to 1995 Sister Kathleen was engaged in the ministry of education, both elementary and secondary teaching, and administration as a school principal. Teaching was her passion and she was especially grateful to share her love of God with her students. Over the years she taught at Sacred Heart and St. Marys Parochial, St. Marys; St. Callistus, Kane; St. Joseph, Lucinda; St. Joseph, Warren; St. Boniface, Kersey; and St. Adalbert, Pittsburgh. She was a part-time teacher at Elk County Christian High School while serving her community at St. Joseph Monastery as Vocation, Affiliate and Postulant Directress before becoming a full-time English and Theology teacher at Elk County for 15 years. After serving as the community's sub-prioress from 1995-1996, Sister Kathleen retired from teaching. From 1996-1999 Sister Kathleen served in pastoral ministry at St. Anthony's Parish, Sheffield, PA as an RCIA instructor and Religious Education Coordinator. In 1999 she returned to the monastery in St. Marys and served in the ministry of hospitality, spirituality and formation. At the time of her death, Sister Kathleen was engaged in the ministry of prayer and presence at Mount St. Benedict.

Sister Kathleen was predeceased by her parents as well as her siblings: brother, Laverne Warner; sisters, Monica Huntz and Anita Winters; step-sisters, Elizabeth (Philipps) Young and Jean (Philipps) Conklin. She is survived by her Erie Benedictine community, the sisters from her community of origin (St. Joseph Monastery, St. Marys, PA), good friends Sabra and Joe Pasky and Father Michael Ferrick, as well as cousins, nieces and nephews.



Sister Kathleen Warner, OSB
June 29, 1927 – March 24, 2016



Perpetual Monastic Profession
October 22, 1949

What is more delightful than the voice of the Holy One
calling to us? See how God's love shows us the way of life.
—Rule of Benedict: Prologue 19-20

*Kind and loving God,
our sister, Kathleen, has found her peace in you.
She died as she lived: ever strong and determined
to remain true to the woman she knew herself to be.*

*Kathleen gave of herself and used her gifts
through the monastic way of life
and the ministry of teaching.
She was steadfast in her commitments
and unwavering in her fidelity to the vowed life.*

*When overcome by physical infirmity
Kathleen accepted her limitations
and fiercely protected her independence,
always grateful for kindnesses shown her.
She knew her mind and expressed it with clarity,
ever aware of the call to daily conversion.
Despite its challenge, she embraced change
with humility, holiness, honesty and simplicity.*

*God of all blessing,
may we uphold the memory of our sister
whose faithful love has brought her
to fullness of rest in you, now and forever. Amen.*

Building Community Together

By Mary Jane Vergotz, OSB, Development Director and M. Diane Cook, OSB, Treasurer

The Benedictine way is to seek God in the communal life and to respond in prayer and ministry.

—Benedictine Charism Statement

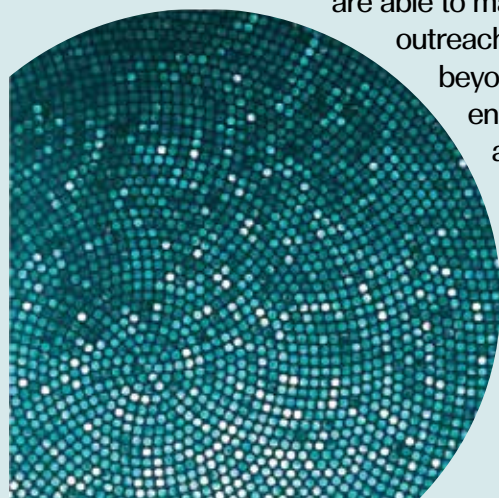


A charism is a particular way in which people respond to God's call; a community's charism embodies the way its members carry out their mission and ministries.

For the Benedictine Sisters of Erie, this means seeking God in community through a life of prayer and work. Living in accordance with the Gospel and the Rule of St. Benedict, we respond to the needs of the Church and the world through our ministries. This is the means by which we attempt to build community in a world in need of commitment, cooperation, and compassion.

Having arrived in 1856, this year marks 160 years of our presence in Erie. We know that our monastic way of life and the ministries which flow from that life are immensely enriched by the gifts of love, prayer, volunteer hours, and financial support that you extend to us. With your support we are able to remain firm in our efforts to "build community together," combining the gifts of all those desiring to bring about the realm of God in our midst, being creative in our response to the world in which we live, and engendering a spirit of peace and justice, reverence and respect for all.

Through this annual report we hope you can see that the Benedictine Sisters of Erie maintain sound fiscal practices and use your gifts responsibly. With the help of our supporters we are able to maintain a presence and outreach to the people of Erie and beyond. We are blessed by your encouragement in this regard and we thank you for your ongoing faithfulness to us as we continue to seek God in the communal life and respond in prayer and ministry.



Operating Income

Our overall operating income decreased slightly from the previous year. We attribute this to our investment performance as a result of the downturn of the Dow at the end of the year. We ended the year with a one-half percent increase in our portfolio. Sisters' stipends and salaries were also lower due to changes in sisters' ministries and to members' deaths. Overall income from development activities increased by 25% last year. This additional revenue made up for the loss of sisters' ministry income. We also experienced an increase in the number of bequests over the previous year. Development income from our annual programs increased by 12%. Sisters' stipends and salaries from their ministries, social security and pensions continue to be the majority of our income followed by development income and investment activity.

Our long-standing donors have been joined by many new supporters who believe in the Benedictine Sisters and our good works. Each year some of our donors join our planned giving program by remembering us in their will. Others pledge ongoing monthly or quarterly donations via our website. Many continue to respond when we ask for help and often wish to remember those who have died or who are celebrating special occasions by making a donation to the Benedictine Sisters of Erie.

Operating Expenses

In 2015 our overall operating expenses decreased slightly from the previous year. Payroll expenses were lower due to staffing changes. Members' personal expenses decreased due to a health insurance cost reduction and additional members joining Medicare. Administration expenses were reduced. Property, building and transportation expenses increased when we experienced a major gas line leak at the monastery and had to cover the high cost of replacing the gas line.

Summary

Once again we are able to report that our overall financial standing continues to be favorable. We completed the 2015 fiscal year with our operating income exceeding our operating expenses. We ended the year in the black due to careful management of our budget and the continued good will and financial support of our donors. The community is committed to finding ways to cut or maintain costs wherever possible. Our investment strategy continues to provide ongoing income for our operational budget as well as support for our retired sisters.

According to the National Religious Retirement Office (NRRO), we are 74% underfunded to meet our future retirement needs, a slight decrease from 2014. We were asked to join the NRRO planning and implementation program which will help us develop strategies to increase our retirement account. This growth in retirement income will allow the community to focus more fully on our ministries as more sisters move toward full retirement.

Thanks to our Benefactors



Sue and Rick Clayton



(Standing L-R) Sister Rita Groner, Paul Kopkowski, Sister Carolann McLaughlin (Seated L-R) Janice Etchison, Joanne Cahill, Sister Carolyn Gorny-Kopkowski



(Standing L-R) Judy Alstadt, Sister Susan Doubet, Rev. John Downey, Dan Dahlkemper (Seated L-R) Tom Loftus, Chris Loftus, Sister Anne Wambach, Kathy Dahlkemper



(L-R) Joanna Zurn and Sister Margaret Ann Pilewski



(L-R) Shelly Miller, Mark Bliley, Patti Eichen



(L-R) Sheila McLaughlin, Jo Clarke, Marilyn Reiser, Bill Reiser

2015 ANNUAL REPORT

Development Income

| | |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| Annual Programs | 393,008.00 |
| Unrestricted Gifts | 197,260.00 |
| Restricted Gifts | 302,710.00 |
| Total | 892,978.00 |

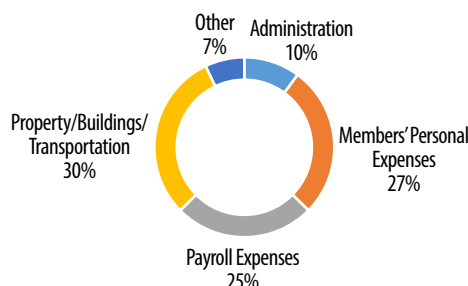
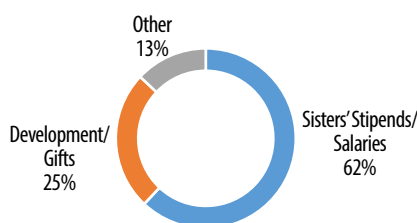
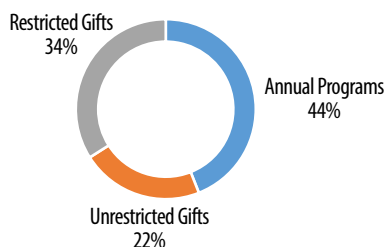
Benedictine Sisters of Erie

Operating Income

| | |
|------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Sisters' Stipends/Salaries | 2,155,055.00 |
| Development/Gifts | 892,978.00 |
| Other | 465,504.00 |
| Income before Investment Activity | 3,513,537.00 |
| Investment Activity | 96,275.00 |
| Income after Investment Activity | 3,609,812.00 |

Operating Expenses

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------|
| Administration | 350,264.00 |
| Members' Personal Expenses | 983,281.00 |
| Payroll Expenses | 894,503.00 |
| Property/Buildings/Transportation | 1,073,494.00 |
| Other | 246,409.00 |
| Total | 3,547,951.00 |



Annual Benefactor Appreciation

"It is one of my privileges each year to express the enormous gratitude that the sisters and I have both for you and for your generosity," said prioress, Sister Anne Wambach, as she welcomed the community's major benefactors to the annual appreciation event. A special Evening Prayer, followed by a festive dinner, was the setting to express thanks to the group of benefactors who provide major support to the mission and vision of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie. The benefactors support the ministries of the Benedictine Sisters and in so doing they invest in the future of the people served. "Together, every day — you our supporters, our sisters, staff, oblates, and volunteers — work tirelessly to build a world where all people, regardless of race, creed or circumstance can achieve their full potential," Sister Anne affirmed. "May all of us continue to be an empathetic, passionate people, longing to be the face of justice for each other."

CARE for the Earth

By Annette Marshall, OSB

“We pledge...to reduce our carbon pollution 50% by 2030 and to become carbon neutral by 2050.” (Paris Pledge*) In 2015 our community’s long-term commitment to living sustainably on planet Earth took on a new dimension as we embraced a specific, measurable goal for reducing our carbon footprint by signing the Paris Pledge.

When three separate yet related things happen within a short time frame, it’s a call to pay attention:

In October 2014 a small group of oblates and sisters formed a committee that they named CARE—Committee for Alternative Resource Energy—to research renewable energy sources and the practicality of their use for our community buildings.

In June 2015 Pope Francis awakened the entire world to the dangers faced by Mother Earth, particularly with regard to climate change and its impact on the poor and on future generations. His encyclical, *Laudato Si’*, is a clarion call to action.

In December 2015, 190 nations gathered in Paris to negotiate a planet-wide agreement to change the trajectory of global warming.

These “signs of the times” spoke clearly. We knew *what* we needed to do—but we weren’t quite so clear on *how* to do it.

Over the years we have undertaken numerous energy-related initiatives. Most recently, extensive renovations at Mount St. Benedict monastery, including increased insulation, installation of efficient hot water and heating systems, window replacement and improved lighting have increased energy efficiency.

As the renewable energy committee began researching local solar possibilities, our first steps were:

1. gathering energy usage data from all our buildings
2. procuring professional help with initial energy assessments, and
3. recording current and historical data so we could measure our progress. We found that the assessment tools of ENERGY STAR** suited our needs well.

Current projects include re-lamping our chapel with LEDs and pursuing other LED installations. Although LED lamps are more expensive than traditional lamps, the pay-back is very short (4-5 years) and they last 10 years or more. We are also reviewing our current electricity provider and hope to move to a “greener” source soon.

In addition to the work of the CARE committee, several sisters and oblates are active in a local group dedicated to preventing fracking, the unconventional horizontal drilling for gas, from impacting our area of Pennsylvania as it has other parts of the state.

Global warming is very real. Let’s all respond to Pope Francis’ call to take immediate action to “escape the spiral of self-destruction which currently engulfs us” (*Laudato Si’, #163*).

*As signers of the Paris Pledge, we’ve joined with thousands of other faith-based groups, businesses, universities, cities and other entities to fulfill the U.S. commitment made at the 2015 Paris Climate Conference (COP21) gathering of 190 nations. While the agreement that they reached is far from ideal, it does commit signers to carbon emission reductions sufficient to avoid the 2-degree Celsius temperature increase that would be catastrophic for the planet.



(L-R): CARE Committee Members, Oblates Barb Roseborough, Marlene Trambley (Chair), Sharon and Neal Mosher

CARE Committee

Marlene Trambley, Oblate, chair
Sister Charles Marie Holze
Sister Cindy Hoover
Sister Dina Lauricella
Sister Pat Lupo
Sister Annette Marshall
Sam Miller
Neal Mosher, Oblate
Sharon Mosher, Oblate
Barb Roseborough, Oblate
Lynn Weissert

Maintenance Team: Gary Good and Dan Welch

Consultants: Guy McUmbert, Green Building Alliance
Steve Porter, NW PA Green Economy Task Force

** ENERGY STAR, a joint program of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Department of Energy (DOE) has developed both residential and commercial building assessment tools that allow us to record our data and then to compare it with the data from similar buildings across the country.

Not only does this give us benchmarks for determining progress toward meeting our Paris Pledge commitment, it gives us good information for funding applications. Visit energystar.gov for this excellent—and free—resource.

Our challenge: Reduction in carbon emissions

Our approach: Seek the advice of consultants; prioritize energy efficiency measures according to expected reduction in electricity usage and the time it takes to pay back the investment. All the experts agreed – lighting is the best place to start.

Project: Replace lighting in all areas of the monastery that had not had upgrades during the recent renovation period (800+ fixtures). Old style fluorescent and incandescent ceiling lighting was replaced with LEDs which use $\frac{1}{4}$ of the energy of the older lamps and last 10 years or more.

Funding: The PA Sustainable Energy Fund awarded a grant for \$25,000. Their purpose is both to assist nonprofit organizations to employ systems that are sustainable for the planet and to educate the public about these measures. In addition, Penelec's rebate program will be a great help in achieving funding for this project.

Your challenge: Investigate the possibility of changing your lighting at home or work to LEDs. It will significantly reduce your electricity consumption and your use of fossil fuels.

Benedictines participate in FAITH-BASED “MORALtorium” on Fracking in Pennsylvania

Faith leaders from across Pennsylvania gathered in Harrisburg on Monday, March 21, 2016 to raise the awareness that Pennsylvania's energy policy is a moral issue. Among them were Benedictine Sisters Pat Lupo, Norma Jean Kingsley, Lucia and Claire Marie Surmik and oblate, Sheila McLaughlin. Sam Miller and Dave Weinkauff from Our Water Our Air Our Rights filled out the Erie contingency.

“The Faith community sees fracking as a deeply troubling moral issue,” explained Sister Pat. “Many faith leaders, with their congregations and supporters, are beginning to stand up and recognize this as an issue that must be addressed in their community and in the state. We must keep fossil fuels in the ground. It is time to seriously invest in alternative energy sources.”

Included in the day were: lobby training; an interfaith worship service; a rally in the Capitol Rotunda; and visits with legislators. The legislators were asked to sign a letter to Governor Wolf expressing their support of the call from the faith community for a MORALtorium on new unconventional drilling. Sister Pat offered a call to action and in her reflections she emphasized: “Pennsylvania cannot continue to ignore the fracking issue. Fracking poisons our environment, threatens our health, especially the health of our children and is destroying our natural resources. It is time to cast this dangerous practice aside and transition to clean, renewable energy that does not put our lives at risk.”



Happenings...



Sister Mary Miller (left) is congratulated by Sister Mary Lou Kownacki, past recipient of the Oscar Romero Award

Sister Mary Miller receives awards: the Oscar Romero Award from Mercyhurst University and the Humanitarian of the Year Award from the Notre Dame Alumni Club of Erie

Sister Mary Miller, Director of Emmaus Ministries, received the Oscar Romero Social Justice Award from Mercyhurst University. "This marks the 25th anniversary of this award," said Robert von Thaden, Jr., Ph.D., chair and associate professor of religious studies, "It is our honor to present it to a woman who has been an advocate for the poor for the past 35 years and who has done a prodigious amount of work on behalf of the voiceless."

Sister Mary also received the Humanitarian of the Year Award from the Notre Dame Club of Erie. The award, named after Fr. Richard McBrien, one of the outstanding post-Vatican II theologians in the country who taught at Notre Dame for many years, is given to a person whose actions demonstrate and advocate the Catholic faith.

Linda Lyons King, Executive Director of SafeNet, Receives Prophet of Peace Award

The Benedictine Sisters of Erie presented their 2016 Prophet of Peace Award to Linda Lyons King for her extraordinary work as Executive Director of SafeNet, Erie's only domestic abuse agency. "Her work is indeed a pursuit of justice and peace that is rooted in reverence and respect for the dignity of all," said Sister Anne McCarthy, member of the nominating committee.

The award recognizes an individual or group that embodies some aspect of the community's corporate commitment and its concerns for peace and justice, sustainability, and the needs of women and children. "By her very example and efforts, Linda Lyons King stands before us as an example of what prophets do: call attention to central and pressing issues of their day," said Sister Anne Wambach, prioress.



Sister Anne Wambach, prioress, congratulates Sister Pat Lupo

Sister Pat Lupo honored with Women in Conservation Award

"For a long time, too many years to count, I have worked with young people and adults to create change in the communities where they live, in the communities that we care about and in communities where justice demands that we work with our sisters and brothers to address their issues of concern," said Sister Pat Lupo in her acceptance of the annual Women in Conservation Award. The award, presented by Penn Future, a Harrisburg-based environmental advocacy and political lobbying group, celebrates Sister Pat's commitment to environmental activism and her achievements in conservation in Pennsylvania.



Linda Lyons King and Sister Anne Wambach



(L-R) Fadhail Ibraheem, Sister Stephanie Schmidt, Niken Astari

Faith-Witness and Sincerity speak to Enrichment Series Audience

In a chapel filled with more than 150 guests, Fadhail Ibraheem and Niken Astari shared what it is like to be Muslim in a United States that is struggling to understand the Islam religion while at the same time absorbing its growing population. Both women expressed how personal interaction is the most effective means to create true interfaith understanding and counteract the anti-Muslim rhetoric that fills the world. Niken pointed out: "The word Islam has at its root 'salam' which means peace. As Muslims we seek peace with our God and with our neighbor."

Sister Stephanie Schmidt, Director of Monastic Formation, said: "We hope that this presentation in our ongoing Enrichment Series has promoted a better understanding of Muslims in our city and nation and fostered a culture of acceptance."

Next Enrichment

Series: Sunday, July 3, 2016, 7:00 p.m., Mount St. Benedict Chapel, *Crossroads of Europe: Music for Cello and Piano*. Performed by the husband/wife **Duo Polaris** – Kirill Kalmykov, cello and Julia Haager, piano, and inspired by their passion for travelling, this program features chamber music masterpieces by the great European composers Franz Schubert, Robert Schumann and Manuel de Falla. Further details can be found on the community web site, eriebenedictines.org. The event is free and open to the public.



(L-R) Sisters Stephanie Schmidt, Miriam Therese Winter, Anne Wambach

Sister Miriam Therese Winter and Energy: The Pulse of Life, the Power of the Spirit

Sister Miriam Therese Winter, PhD, professor at Hartford Seminary in Connecticut and award-winning author of books on biblical women, feminist ritual and quantum spirituality, was the guest speaker at the community's annual spring community weekend. She addressed areas of convergence between science and spirituality from the perspectives of quantum physics and the new cosmology. "It is at the threshold where science and spirituality meet that we take our quantum leap," she explained. "The physical universe is telling us spiritual truths: we are all connected. Quantum is energy. It unites us on a deeper level. Can we learn to connect energy and come to see it as the potential for doing good and changing the world?"

"What an inspiration," said Sister Anne Wambach, prioress. "I am grateful to Sister Miriam Therese for reminding us that 'the Spirit is the channel of Divine Energy' and we need to 'evoke a deeply rooted positive, good, merciful and just energy for being in the world' – a world that is so in need of what we can bring to it by the power of the Spirit."

Happenings...



Sisters Margaret Ann Pilewski and Linda Romey

Art Show 2016 Online Gallery: The Call for Mercy

Each year Sister Margaret Ann Pilewski celebrates Women's History Month by organizing and staging an art show exhibiting the artwork of Benedictine sisters and Oblates. The theme of this year's show was "The Call for Mercy" in consort with Pope Francis' declaration of 2016 as the Year of Mercy. It remains available at eriebenedictines.org/art-show-2016 as a virtual art show. The online gallery is a first and it allows you to view and reflect on the various pieces and mercy connections made by the artists—all from the comfort of your own home. The artwork was photographed by Sister Ann Muczynski; Sister Linda Romey designed the web page.



Art piece by Audrey Steff, OSB and oblate Jackie Burns (Wood and polymer clay)



Sisters Kathryn Disbrow and Beth Adams

Two Benedictines among Admired Women in Erie



Sister Mary Miller



Sister Annette Marshall

During Women's History Month and National Catholic Sisters Week two Benedictines were featured in the Sunday HER Times, a monthly supplement to the Erie Times-News. "Erie Women We Admire" included Sister Mary Miller, Director of Emmaus Ministries, Inc. and Sister Annette Marshall, Executive Director of the Inner-City Neighborhood Art House, both of whom were interviewed by Rebecca Styn.



Benedictine Women throughout the World

The CIB (*Communio Internationalis Benedictinarum*) Administrative Council met at Saint Benedict Monastery in Montserrat, Spain from January 20 to 22, 2016. Erie Benedictine, Sister Mary Jane Vergotz (pictured in back row, second from left), serves CIB as secretary.

CIB had its beginning in 2001 in Nairobi, Kenya at a meeting of representatives from women's Benedictine communities worldwide. While each Benedictine community has its own charism and unique character, unity exists as a result of the Rule of St. Benedict and the Benedictine tradition that continues to flower in countries and cultures throughout the world. CIB allows for that union and uniqueness to be appreciated and recognized.

A Match made in Heaven

"St. Benedict Child Development Center is better because of the commitment of Sisters Kathryn Disbrow and Beth Adams," said Sister Diane Rabe, director. Both sisters recently received service awards from the East Coast Migrant Head Start Project (ECMHSP), a program committed to preparing the children of migrant and seasonal farm workers for success. Sister Beth was honored for 20 years of service and Sister Kathryn recently completed 15 years of being in charge of the infant room.



Photo: Seated (L-R) Sister Mary Sue Kennedy, OP, Brother Robert Metzger, SM, Sister Mary Frances Johnson, CSJ; Standing (L-R) (Council Members and Prioress) Sisters Charlotte Anne Zalot, Diane Cook, Anne Wambach, Susan Doubet, Annette Marshall (Missing from photo: Sister Mary Lou Kownacki, Councilor)

Moving Forward with NRRO

The Benedictine Sister of Erie have benefited from the annual national appeal, Retirement Fund for Religious, sponsored by the National Religious Retirement Office (NRRO) and launched in 1988. Now, they are about to utilize some of the special services the NRRO offers to religious communities of men and women. "Besides giving direct assistance to religious communities for retired sisters, NRRO also offers help through a Planning and Implementation Program," explained Sister Anne Wambach, prioress, who announced the community's acceptance into the April 2016 Planning and Implementation Program.

At a recent on-site visit, Br. Robert Metzger, SM, NRRO Associate Director for Planning and Education, met with the prioress, the assigned consultants, Sister Mary Frances Johnson, CSJ, St. Louis, MO and Sister Mary Sue Kennedy, OP, Palmyra, MI, and the monastic council. "Planning is crucial to helping to decrease unfunded retirement liability," he said. "NRRO can help with grants for studies and eventual implementation of the plan that can best serve a community in their efforts to care for their elders in the future."



(L-R) Sitting: Sister Karen Oprechok, Colleen Ahearn, Oblate, Sister Dona Obenrader; Standing: Sisters Sallie Harrington and Cecilia Sullivan, Jan Gehrlein, Sisters Helen Heher and Marilyn Schauble

Loom Knitting is definitely on a roll

The "Stay in the Loop" loom-knitting project is gaining momentum. With more than 200 hats made for Emmaus Ministries, and thanks to many yarn donations, the group continues to grow strong.

The loom knitting project was initiated by Sister Karen Oprechok, novice. "Loom knitting is a great craft," said Sister Karen. "I am especially happy that it makes knitting accessible to those who may have arthritis or hand dexterity issues." As part of the project, Sister Karen is also working with some of the elders who can no longer manage knitting needles but still enjoy creating something beautiful and usable.

With the assistance of teacher-mentors, Jan Gehrlein and Becky Kathman, many sisters, visitors, friends, oblates and employees have joined the movement, mastered the art of loom knitting and helped the cause.



Sister Karen Oprechok, Becky Kathman, Jan Gehrlein

Happenings...



Mid-Life / Long-Life Directions

The first of two Mid-Life / Long-Life retreat-workshops was offered by Sister Rosanne Loneck in April, 2016. The ten participants were invited to deepen their awareness of self, the world and the Divine through reflection, journaling in word and symbol, and scripture. The experience provided the sacred space for sharing and listening to the wisdom of each one's life journey.

The next Mid-Life / Long-Life Directions for Personal and Spiritual Growth will be offered September 9-11.

A brochure and registration details are available on the community web site: eriebenedictines.org/retreats-workshops

Called to Proclaim the Mighty Acts of God

The annual Ecumenical Worship Service sponsored by Inter-Church Ministries (ICM) of Erie County was held at Mount St. Benedict Monastery on January 31. Participants from various Christian traditions gathered to sing and pray for Christian Unity by celebrating the theme: "Called to Proclaim the Mighty Acts of God." (1 Peter 2: 9) Benedictine Sister Mary Ellen Plumb, who is actively involved in ICM, was part of the worship planning team.



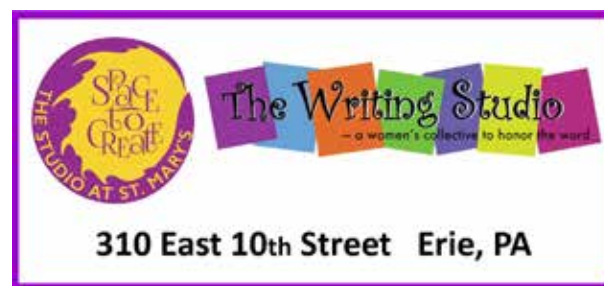
Sister Mary Ellen Plumb



EARTH DAY: CRM, Children and *Laudato Si'*

Sisters Marian Wehler, OSB and Tina Geiger, RSM see the enthusiasm of children for the earth and its people, especially those most in need. As part of Catholic Rural Ministry (CRM) in the Oil City Deanery they work with young people in the schools, parishes and religious education programs in Venango and Clarion Counties. "We have been showing the students animation videos based on the Pope's encyclical: *Laudato Si': On Care of Our Common Home*," shared Sister Marian.

As a result of the video teaching, the various groups of students responded with concrete actions, some of which were donations to a clean water program sponsored by Catholic Relief Services, the organization of a school recycling program, and an effort to clean up outside litter. "The students really got it," said Sister Marian. "They understand that Pope Francis is urging us to protect and care for the earth."



A New Initiative: The Writing Studio

The Writing Studio, a new collective of women writers and literary advocates whose mission is to honor the word, has a home in The Studio at Saint Mary's: Space to Create, located at 310 E. 10th Street in Erie.

Initiated and coordinated by Sister Mary Lou Kownacki, The Writing Studio sponsors such activities as writing workshops, author readings, book discussions, literary public art projects, and literary activities with women in transition.

To learn more visit The Writing Studio web page (writingstudio-erie.org) that was designed and developed by Sister Linda Romey, OSB. You can also see what's happening at The Studio at Saint Mary's: Space to Create by visiting its Facebook page (facebook.com/StMarysStudio).



Sister Nancy Fischer, SSJ, Bishop Persico, Sister Anne Wambach

Bishop Persico visits the Mount during NCSW

"Thank you for your service. I express my gratitude to all of you for your life and ministry here in the Erie Diocese," said Bishop Persico when he visited with the Benedictine Sisters as part of the celebration of National Catholic Sisters Week (NCSW), celebrated annually March 8-14. Bishop Persico had designated March 13 as "Sisters Day" in the diocese. To show his appreciation he visited the Sisters of St. Joseph, the Sisters of Mercy and the Benedictines to share his personal gratitude. He was accompanied by Sister Nancy Fischer, SSJ, Diocesan Director for Religious.



Reverend John Downey, Sister Anne Wambach, Sharon Downey

Episcopal Cathedral Deans Visit the Monastery and Pray with the Sisters

The Episcopal Cathedral of St. Paul in Erie hosted the annual Conference of North American Cathedral Deans, April 7-10. The Opening Evening Prayer with the Cathedral Choir featured a forum with Sister Joan Chittister who gave a major presentation: "Scarred by Struggle, Transformed by Hope." In addition, Reverend John Downey, rector of Erie's Episcopal Cathedral, arranged for the deans and their spouses to visit Mount St. Benedict and join the community for the Saturday Vigil Prayer of Sunday.



Sister Marlene Bertke, OSB (left) with Sister Helen Prejean, CSJ

Sister Helen Prejean: Her Passion Ignites

For more than 30 years Sister Helen Prejean, a member of the Congregation of St. Joseph and author of the book, *Dead Man Walking: An Eye-witness Account of the Death Penalty in the United States*, has traveled the world speaking out against the death penalty. This time her travels brought her to Erie, PA. Sponsored by Benedictines for Peace (BFP), Sister Helen presented her thoughts and feelings about this important topic at the Annual BFP Speaker Series held in the chapel at Mount St. Benedict.

"Everyone is worth more than the worse thing they have done," said Sister Helen repeatedly as she spoke of the men on death row that she has companioned over the years. "Sitting at the feet of prisoners destined for death, many of them innocent, I witnessed suffering that changed me and set me on fire," she explained. "I heard their cry and it changed me."

Sister Helen received a standing ovation. "This evening was truly inspirational," said Sister Anne Wambach, prioress. "Sister Helen believes in the restoration of life and the reverence for every human being no matter what. She is a living reminder that we are all called to be the passionate voice of justice, to be people of care and concern for human dignity."

Reflecting on the presentation, Sister Marlene Bertke, BFP member and one of the organizers of the event shared, "Sister Helen began her talk with the words, 'I had an awakening. Grace awakened me and set me on fire.' She's still on fire and I have no doubt that she set many of us on fire this evening. I know that I go away with an increased passion to continue the work of peace and justice and an emboldened desire to live the Gospel of love in today's world."

LifeExperiences



Looking for an Indoor Sport? Check out Pickleball® at St. Benedict Community Center

Pickleball is easy to learn and a fun sport that promotes a healthy lifestyle. A cross between tennis and ping pong, pickleball has become a fast-growing sport and the fastest growing court game in the US.

St. Benedict Community Center has 2 courts for anyone interested in Pickleball. Equipment is available thanks to a donation from Oblates Betsy and Marco Monsalve. First visit, with training included, is free. Membership and discount cards can be obtained. Call Sister Dianne Sabol, Director of St. Benedict Community Center, at 814-459-2406 for more information or to schedule court time.



God Speaks in Many Tongues: A Personal Retreat Experience

"Retreat time is the flagship piece of the year that sets the standard for a rhythm of life..."
writes Joan Chittister in *The Monastery of the Heart*.

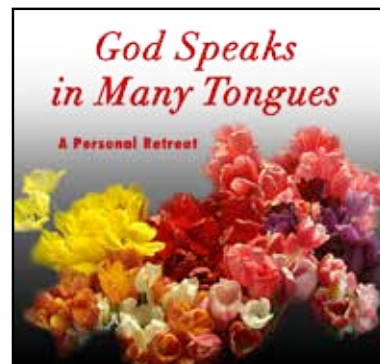
Are you ready for a retreat, but have trouble fitting it into your schedule? **God Speaks in Many Tongues, A Personal Retreat**, is designed to be used on a schedule that works for you. Make this retreat in one day, over several days, or over a week. We give you all the pieces; you make it work for you.

Based on the writing of Joan Chittister, the personal retreat includes prayer experiences from Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu and Native American traditions, presented by Erie Benedictine Anne McCarthy.

Sister Anne will use text, audio and video resources in the presentation of this retreat. She will suggest personal rituals, demonstrate simple movement prayer and offer ways to put

your faith into action. Because this is a personal retreat, there will be no shared comments and no facilitator. The resources are supplied for you to use as you create your own retreat experience.

God Speaks in Many Tongues: A Personal Retreat will be posted on June 13 and available for your use at any time during the year. For more information and to register, visit monasteriesoftheheart.org.



From the
Director
By Ann Comstock, Oblate

*"We'll always come to thee again,
when Alma Mater calls"*



Let us pray...

For our SBA alumnae who
passed into eternity—

| | |
|----------------------------------------|-----|
| Constance Lipinski Sulecki | '51 |
| Mildred Welsh Henry | '35 |
| Mary Ellen Scarry Tormey | '41 |
| Rita D. Bugaj Moskalczyk | '49 |
| Donna Enders Bardroff | '50 |
| Rosemary Rastatter Southard..... | '52 |
| Theresa Michalski Dzikowski | '53 |
| Margaret J. Roach Cross | '54 |
| Rita Santor Sulecki | '54 |
| Patricia L. Wehan Hawley | '55 |
| Rosemarie Kupniewski Wingrove | '55 |
| June JoAnn Doyle Vash | '56 |
| Mary Lynn Nelligan Cote | '56 |
| Jeanmarie Wenzel | '60 |
| Dolores M. Radecki Peskorski | '60 |
| Annette M. Szpara Fogleboch | '61 |
| Sandra Andrews | '64 |
| Sandra Leigh McAninch Osborne Moses .. | '64 |
| Darcy Przerierski Kosobucki | '69 |
| Christine Somolani Zalas | '70 |
| Cheryl A. Dunford Mingoy | '81 |
| Darla Jean Bondurant Davenport | '85 |
| Melanie A. Szpara Johnson | '90 |
| Natalie Ann Oleson Geiger | '91 |
| Eleanor J. DeDionisio Dubaj | |

Keep in Touch...

We want to hear from you! Class reunions every five years are a tradition with SBA alumnae. We will gladly include information regarding your reunion on our website. Send us the facts and we'll post them as soon as we get them. We'll send you an updated class list from our database and a set of mailing labels. Please provide us with any follow up stories and photos (digital, please) you might wish to share and we will post them on our website (ErieBenedictines.org/sba-alum). Classes who are planning reunions are eligible to receive a \$35 check to help defray mailing costs. We ask that you provide us with new or updated addresses for the database. It is one of the best ways we have to keep in touch.

Please contact Ann Comstock. Call 814-899-0614 ext. 2573 or contact by email: sbaalum@mtstbenedict.org

Please visit our Website

Visit ErieBenedictines.org/sba-alum for event updates and to download sign-up forms, or send your email address to Alumnae Director Ann Comstock at sbaalum@mtstbenedict.org to receive electronic reminders and sign-ups. If you don't use email, write to Ann at Mount Saint Benedict Monastery, 6101 East Lake Road, Erie, PA, 16511. Whenever you see or hear about SBA alumnae being honored or highlighted for their achievements, let us know. Clip an article or jot down the details then call, write or email us the information so we can share the news with all our members.

*"Spirit of SBA"
is alive and well.*

2016 SBA Spring Luncheon

On May 21, 2016 a group of SBA Alum, 135 strong, gathered at Erie Ambassador Conference Center for the annual Spring Luncheon. Reminiscing together created many fun moments for those gathered and lots of camaraderie. In addition, 11 vendors were available for the ladies' shopping pleasure.



The Class of 1961 took the opportunity to celebrate their class reunion. There were several members of that class able to be in attendance to mark their 55th year reunion. Ann Comstock, SBA class of 1964, SBA Alumnae Coordinator and a Benedictine Oblate, explained: "Several members of different classes attend this spring luncheon rather than the Christmas party due to distance, bad weather or compromised

road conditions. The spring event provides another opportunity to renew friendships and catch up with one another." She added: "The luncheon was a huge success. The SBA alumnae association is a special group of women. You could easily see how happy they were to get together and share memories. It was just great!"

Sunday morning brought a number of SBA alum to Mount St. Benedict Monastery where they joined the sisters for Eucharist and a social gathering afterward. Excitement ran high and one guest remarked, "This is the perfect ending to a perfect weekend. I am so glad I was able to be a part of it!"



Christmas Party 2015

The annual SBA Christmas Party was held December 2nd at the Ambassador Conference Center with nearly 400 guests in attendance. Classmates, friends, teachers and sisters had the opportunity to catch up with each other and enjoy a festive evening. There were 67 baskets of surprises donated by various classes and individual alumnae members. The proceeds were used to help support the St. Benedict Child Development Center. The funds raised provided partial scholarships for children of low income and refugee families.

Scholarship Winners 2016-2017

At the Spring Luncheon 20 scholarships of \$250 were awarded to relatives of alumnae members who will be attending Catholic grade or high schools for the 2016-2017 school year. Scholarship checks will be sent directly to the schools prior to the opening of the school year.

Scholarship Winners

| STUDENT | ALUMNAE MEMBER | RELATIONSHIP | SCHOOL |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|----------------|-------------------------------|
| David Kaliszewski | Rita Drexler Kaliszewski | Grandson | St. Luke School |
| Rebecca Lynn Jones | Lynn Kostek Jones | Daughter | Our Lady of Peace School |
| Cassidy & Kasey Netkowicz | Donna Andrychowski Netkowicz | Granddaughters | Our Lady of Peace School |
| Paige Bennett | Nancy Ketchel Bennett | Granddaughter | Our Lady of Peace School |
| Rachel & Holly Ciotti | Jennifer Jones Ciotti | Daughters | Blessed Sacrament School |
| Conor Joseph Russell | Bernadine Mackowski Amendola | Grandson | St. George School |
| Selena Rose | Rose Marie Widomski Rose | Daughter | St. George School |
| Robbie Kerner | Dianne Sabol, OSB | Great Nephew | St. George School |
| Sophia Skrzypczak | Susan Skrzypczak Chase | Niece | Villa Maria Academy |
| Abigail Godlewski | Barbara Trohoske Magraw | Granddaughter | Villa Maria Academy |
| Morgan Szoszorek | Mary Lou Wagner Schroeck | Granddaughter | Villa Maria Academy |
| Madeline Slater | Arlene Turbaczewski Slater | Granddaughter | Villa Maria Academy |
| Nicholas Gavio | Miriam Heid Gavio | Son | Cathedral Preparatory School |
| Isabella Logan | Dorothy Tucholski Abate | Granddaughter | Mercyhurst Preparatory School |
| Ryan Patterson | Karen Richards Shrum | Grandson | Mercyhurst Preparatory School |
| Gino M. Romeo | Eileen Betza Romeo | Grandson | Mercyhurst Preparatory School |
| Matthew Bengel, Jr. | Jill Figurski Bengel | Grandson | Mercyhurst Preparatory School |
| Thomas Palotas, Jr. | Christine Palotas Bowler | Nephew | Mercyhurst Preparatory School |
| Alyssa Hellmann | Heddy Giewont Hellmann | Granddaughter | Holy Cross Academy |
| Samuel Patton | Joanne Kraut Cargioli | Great Nephew | Central Catholic High School |

Mark Your Calendars

6/22

Wednesday, June 22, 2016
Hoss's SBA Fundraiser (all day)

Hoss's Restaurant
3302 W 26th St
Erie, PA

Contact: Ann Comstock, 899-0614 x2573



8/10

Wednesday, August 10 @7:05 PM
SBA Erie SeaWolves Outing – Buck Night

Jerry Uht Park
Erie, PA

Contact: Cathy Stemmler, cdstemmler@gmail.com



12/6

Tuesday December 6, 2016
SBA Christmas Party

Ambassador Conference Center
7792 Peach Street
Erie, PA



Benedictine ✠ Sisters of Erie

Mount Saint Benedict Monastery
6101 East Lake Road
Erie, PA 16511-1599

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Please help us to maintain an accurate mailing list and keep our costs down by contacting us with any change in mail or email information. If you prefer not to receive *The Mount* please let us know. Send correspondence to: Ann Comstock, Benedictine Sisters Development Office, Mount Saint Benedict Monastery, 6101 East Lake Road, Erie, PA 16511, (814) 899-0614, ext. 2573, sbaalum@mtstbenedict.org

*Life and all
her wonders*

