



the Mount

*Benedictine Sisters of Erie
Spring/Summer 2020*

Where flowers bloom so does hope.
(Lady Bird Johnson)

the Mount

Spring/Summer 2020, Volume 33, No. 1

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Benedictine Sisters of Erie
6101 East Lake Road
Erie, Pennsylvania 16511
(814) 899-0614
ErieBenedictines.org

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Contributors

Jo Clarke, Oblate, Ann Comstock, Oblate,
Susan Doubet, OSB, Patti Eichen, Novice Jen Frazer,
Katie Gordon, Postulant Colleen Leathley,
Valerie Luckey, OSB, Annette Marshall, OSB,
Anne McCarthy, OSB, Mary Ellen Plumb, OSB,
Linda Romey, OSB, Dianne Sabol, OSB,
Marilyn Schauble, OSB, Mary Jane Vergotz, OSB,
Anne Wambach, OSB

The Mount Photographers

Ed Bernik, Jo Clarke, Oblate, Paul Lorei,
Charlotte Anne Zalot, OSB

Editor: Charlotte Anne Zalot, OSB
Copy Editor: Linda Romey, OSB

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Benedictine
✠ **Sisters** of Erie

Where flowers bloom so does hope.
(Lady Bird Johnson)

I've been thinking a lot about hope lately. Housebound for weeks, glued to the news, fearful and confused about the pandemic, wondering if the virus will visit our home ... so many things that have the potential to whittle away hope. Yes, all of these things can change the course of life ... but, so can hope. After all, Scripture reminds us: "Those who hope in God will have their strength renewed; they will fly like an eagle, run and not grow weary." (Isaiah 40: 31)

Since we have had our stay-at-home orders I have committed to walking outside. Every day I try to find that half hour where I can walk the monastery grounds. With trees budding, grass growing, and birds singing, it has become for me a study in hope. I have come to understand that yes, *where flowers bloom so does hope*. I have watched the daffodils and jonquils survive heavy winds, pounding rains and even snow, and still hold their heads high. Who knew something appearing so fragile, delicate and vulnerable could be surprisingly strong and courageous in the face of harsh elements?



The monastery grounds change day by day and come alive with seasonal growth and foliage. Rhododendron and azaleas, irises and roses, tiger lilies and hydrangea—each have their turn to bloom. They don't give up; they find the way to show their true colors and unfold their beauty. Yes, *where flowers bloom so does hope*.

This issue of *The Mount* does a similar thing. You will read about the Benedictine Sisters of Erie—women who strive to be signs of hope in the midst of a world in need. Whether it is the stories about women who have courageously taken the step to explore religious community or the ones who traveled to the Mexico borders to work with the migrants; the oblates who share how they are feeling in the midst of a changed world or the reports of generous donors and benefactors; the sisters whose deaths we mourn or the jubilarians who are celebrating years of faithfulness—all are a reminder that "Everything that is done in this world is done by hope." (Martin Luther) Hope enlivens. Hope empowers. Hope inspires. May our magazine energize the hope in your heart and encourage you to grow and blossom and unfold your beauty like the flowers of the earth, especially in the changing times in which we find ourselves because "Once you choose hope anything is possible." (Christopher Reeve)

Charlotte Anne Zalot, OSB

Cover photos: Charlotte Anne Zalot, OSB

BENEDICTINE CHARISM STATEMENT

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

From the Prioress

A Time for Everything

Ecclesiastes Chapter 3 begins with the beautiful wisdom poem, “There is a time for everything...” For the past ten years it has been my time to serve as prioress of our Benedictine community, a great privilege for me.

After I was elected prioress in 2010, two chapters in the Rule of Benedict became more important to me and directed my life in new ways: Chapter 2: Qualities of the Prioress and Chapter 64: The Election of a Prioress.

These chapters call the prioress “to hold the place of Christ in the monastery, to teach by words but more by example and to show goodness of life.” I can honestly say that I prayed every day for the grace to be faithful to this call and its numerous responsibilities.

I am truly grateful for the innumerable opportunities afforded me in my ministry as prioress. Serving on boards, attending local, national and global events, welcoming guests into the monastery and representing the Benedictine Sisters of Erie in countless situations have been a privilege and an honor.

Closer to the everyday, the interpersonal relationships with all of my sisters in community have been the most poignant experiences for me. Being a part of someone’s spiritual journey, its glories and its struggles, is a privileged position. I am grateful for their trust and their faith in our life together.

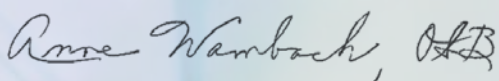
Equally, the unique place that the prioress shares with sisters on their final journey to God is an experience I will never forget. Twenty-eight sisters died in the last decade, most here at the monastery. Some deaths were the culmination of a long aging and dying process, others were much more sudden. Their deaths and the beautiful rituals and services that we have following the death will forever be a part of my special blessed moments.

On the other end of life’s spectrum are the memories and blessings of new members. I strongly believe that the entire community, every one of us every day, are the strongest contributors to the discernment process that women who are exploring our community need. To have so many women inquire, visit and, if the Spirit leads them, come and enter into monastic life with us, is another sacred occurrence that I was fortunate to have many times.

I want to say thank you to each of you—oblates, benefactors, friends and families for your gracious and generous support during these past ten years. I will cherish the memories, deepen the relationships and look forward to the future in community.

Yes, there is a time for everything and at this time the community will bless another sister and call her forth as prioress.

Blessings to you and to your families and loved ones.



Anne Wambach, OSB
Prioress, Benedictine Sisters of Erie



Find your voice

By Jen Frazer, Novice

Note: This is an edited version of a talk I gave at the middle school where I taught art in Boston before coming to the monastery. It was for “Wednesday Wisdom” – a time when the teachers took turns giving short inspirational talks to the students. I was reading this talk over and it struck me how much I needed to hear the message now. So, as much for my own sake as for any reader who might be in similar need, I offer it here. I have taken it out of cold storage and ironed out a few of the wrinkles (and added the odd sprinkle of cheese for a bit more flavor!).

The spirit of God is upon me, because God has anointed me; and has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners, to announce a year of favor from God and a day of vindication by our God.
—Isaiah 61:1–2a

In school, the comment section of every single report card I ever got began the same way: “Jen is quiet.” My specialty was a cunning combination of stealth and accommodation. My nickname was “Mouse” and I wore it well – quiet and also fond of cheese! I believed no one needed to know what I thought or believed, and that life was easier all around if they didn’t.

In the sixth grade I discovered I was pretty good at art, thanks to my teacher, Sister Mary Kay. Despite the fact we got along like water and oil, she was the first to recognize and call forth this gift. It was through art that I found a part of my own voice and discovered something amazing – that other people did want to hear my voice and I could bring the “glad tidings” of God’s love a tiny bit better through my unique voice. An amazing discovery for the silent mouse to make!

God comes to free us and sends us out to free more of God’s children. We are liberated from what imprisons us, from prejudices that blind us to the goodness and love in our neighbors, from fear that holds us back from sharing that irreplaceable part of God’s love that lives in our hearts. The Gospel, the good news proclaimed by Jesus, is that we are beloved by God and, even more importantly, that we are **LIKED** and truly valued by God.

Your voice may not be heard best by making speeches. Not everyone needs to be great speakers. I’m certainly not, even now. Your voice may not be the loudest or



most popular one in the room. Even so, like Isaiah, you must find a way to speak what God has given you to speak. You will certainly need practice using your voice and the more you practice, the easier it becomes.

When I taught art, I saw a lot of copying of other artists, and sometimes I had to let it go, and sometimes I had to tell the students to cut it out. Copying is a good way to learn the techniques, but I never wanted them to get stuck trying to be someone else. Don't play someone else's game. Michelangelo is my favorite artist, but as much as I wish I could be an artist like him, the world does not need another Michelangelo. It needs a you and it needs a me.

Bottom line, the world needs your voice, even if it doesn't yet realize it. I need your voice. God has anointed you and needs your voice. It's ok to be scared, or even terrified, but please don't let fear rob you of your voice. Even if all you can manage is to paint a picture or write a poem, even if your voice is shaky, and you don't believe anyone wants to listen to you, even if you don't believe it's very good, even so, risk being heard.

Let us pray that each of us learns to speak and to hear God better in each other.

Original Art Work: Jen Frazer

Hospitality on the Border

by Valerie Luckey, OSB, Mary Ellen Plumb, OSB, Linda Romey, OSB

"I had never been to Mexico, or Texas for that matter. I had never been in the minority as I was on both sides of the border....so much was new, and when we are in the midst of new experiences, our eyes are open a little wider," wrote Sister Val Luckey in her journal last January.



Sister Mary Ellen Plumb with Raul at the boy's orphanage.

Val was one of three Erie Benedictines, along with Sisters Mary Ellen Plumb and Linda Romey, who spent a week volunteering on the Texas/Mexico border, a trip born of their desire to "do something" in response to the injustice suffered by migrants hoping to relocate to the United States. They traveled to Eagle Pass, Texas, where Sister Ursula Herrera, a Benedictine Sister of Boerne, Texas, is the driving force behind

the community's mission *Caridad de Corazón*, Charity of the Heart, which she founded in 2000. Since she retired from nursing, Ursula has dedicated all her time to *Caridad de Corazón* and its mission of responding to the needs of the poor and disenfranchised living in communities near the border where she has lived for 23 years.

Val: I saw how difficult it is for someone to swim across the Rio Grande. On our first day Ursula took us to see the river. We drove right up to the water and could see

Mexico no more than a football field's distance from us. So close, but so far.

It looked harmless, but Ursula told us that in Mexico the people call it the "Rio Bravo" because of its dangerous currents. I thought about one of my dearest friends in



Sisters Val Luckey, Ursula Herrera and Linda Romey at *Caridad de Corazón*.



The Rio Grande, U. S. side. Also known as the “Rio Bravo” in Mexico.

Erie who had told me she crossed the river with her family as a young teenager, was taken into custody and returned to Mexico. They tried again and the second time were able to relocate—at that time, years ago, we were friendlier to immigrants.

We visited a migrant shelter in Mexico where refugees from Central America, Haiti, Cuba, South America and Africa can spend three days and two nights. If they aren’t allowed to cross the border at that point, they are turned out onto the street. Many end up in a violent section of the city where they often fall victim to gangs. And some, in desperation, try to cross the river.

Ursula told us about another family who tried to swim the river, parents with their infant. The father drowned and the baby survived only because he was atop his father’s floating body. How can our hearts not break as desperate people take such huge risks to escape violence and fear in their own countries?

Linda: Being immersed in the Latin culture again, with its distinctive pace and warmth, and speaking Spanish brought back vivid memories of the seven years I lived

with the poor in Colombia, South America, before becoming an Erie Benedictine.

One of the first things I learned in Colombia was that survival depended not on bank accounts or well-paying jobs or retirement savings. Survival amidst poverty and violence depended on relationships with family, friends and community, and deep faith in God.

I don’t want to romanticize poverty or violence—the systems that produce them are unjust and wrong. But in them, people survive in community and hope. Although I was only at our southern border for a week, I experienced community and hope there, too. We met Bessie and her two sons who are living at *Caridad de Corazón* while waiting for her husband to be released from an ICE detention center. Their lives were threatened in Honduras so they made the treacherous journey north in the hope that they can resettle in a safe place.

We met Rosie at Mission Border Hope, an organization that is the first stop for immigrants who are permitted passage in the U.S. Rosie and her co-workers help orient the newcomers as well as provide them with basic hygiene products and clothing as they usually arrive



Children at a soup kitchen in Mexico run by volunteers with help from *Caridad de Corazón*.



Making deliveries to a group home in a Mexican barrio.

with only the clothes on their backs. Then, they get the refugees to the bus station so they can travel to waiting relatives who will sponsor them.

Mary Ellen: Almost immediately after arriving in Eagle Pass, I realized that Ursula's ministry is one of presence and accompaniment. Whether it be receiving guests—immigrants, refugees, volunteers—into her home or taking food, toys, clothes, medical supplies and more to those in need in Piedras Negras, Mexico, she is present to everyone. I fell into bed every night exhausted but grateful.

We spent time at two orphanages in Mexico, one for girls and one for boys. I was astounded that just two women religious run each orphanage. With the exception of volunteers who help with meals, these sisters are responsible for the children's every need. They take turns sleeping in the children's dorm so that every other night each one gets a full night's sleep. The second time we visited the boys' orphanage two of the boys were sick and had been separated from the others. That meant that each sister had to spend the night in a dorm. I was so grateful Ursula suggested that we stay and play with the boys so the sisters could each get a short nap and shower.

Then there was the morning we served a hearty breakfast to two families we'd taken in the night before, one from Brazil and the other from Guatemala. They had traveled through Mexico for days to seek asylum in the U.S. We'd welcomed them with dinner the night before and in the morning sent them off on their journey to host families. And then we stripped and washed the bedding to be ready for the next migrant family who would appear with only a moment's notice.

The three of us were most grateful for this opportunity to "do something" to support our brothers and sisters who daily face such injustice and challenge. We are also grateful to our Benedictine community who, through our Corporate Commitment to "be a healing presence and prophetic witness for peace and justice by actively addressing the climate crisis and the rights of women and children," made it possible for us to make this trip, and to the many sisters, oblates and friends who contributed to the donation we made to *Caridad de Corazón*.



Visiting a group home for adults in Mexico and delivering needed supplies.

Contributed Photos

Listen to podcasts with Sister Ursula: scholastica-celebration.org/podcast/ursula-herrera-osb and
Sister Val: scholastica-celebration.org/podcast/valerie-luckey-osb

40th Annual Good Friday Pilgrimage for Peace: A Virtual Experience

By Anne McCarthy, OSB, BFP Coordinator

After 39 years of an actual peace pilgrimage through the city of Erie on Good Friday, because of the COVID-19 global pandemic, the 2020 40th anniversary Pilgrimage for Peace was a virtual event viewed around the world.

The Benedictine Sisters of Erie, sponsors of the pilgrimage, offered an online video that highlighted the theme of this year's Stations, "The Way of the Cross; the Way of the Migrant." During the pandemic, migrants are particularly vulnerable, giving the theme even greater urgency.

Sister Anne Wambach, prioress, described in the video's introduction how "for 40 years, we have gathered on Good Friday in prayerful remembrance of the passion and death of Jesus. We have walked through our city, calling to mind Jesus' journey to the cross 2000 years ago, as we passed through places where Christ is still suffering, in the agony and oppression of our brothers and sisters today."

The video pilgrimage included images of eight downtown Erie locations associated with migration policy or crises:

- St. Peter Cathedral ("Muslim ban" dooms refugees to famine and war)
- Emmaus Grove (Drought and climate crisis drive migrants from their homes)
- St. Benedict Education Center (U.S. cuts admissions quotas as refugee camps overflow)
- Social Security Office ("Public charge rule" punishes immigrants for poverty)
- Federal Building (Migrants fleeing violence are refused asylum)
- State Street Fishing Platform (Failure to address climate crisis drives migration crisis)
- Governor's Regional Office (Immigrant families with children incarcerated in Pennsylvania)
- Intermodal Transportation Center (Enhanced enforcement by Immigration and Customs Enforcement creates a culture of fear)
- Mount St. Benedict Monastery (U.S. immigration policies rupture families).



Sr. Anne Wambach holds the cross before the doors of St. Peter Cathedral while Sisters Marcia Sigler and Val Luckey dramatize Pilate condemning Jesus to death.



Pictures in the video illustrated the suffering endured by migrants including Felipe Gomez Alonzo, eight years old, who died in U.S. custody after requesting asylum. He fled Guatemala with his father after drought devastated their rural village.

Contributed Photos

Sister Linda Romey produced the video based on a script written by members of Benedictines for Peace that included Scripture and real-life stories of injustices suffered by migrants. In addition to backdrops of pilgrimage sites, it included images of migrants from many countries and liturgical movement by Sisters Marcia Sigler and Val Luckey to the chanted refrain, "Open wide my arms, that the suffering of the world may come in."

Although the community hopes to hold the 41st Annual Peace Pilgrimage on location next year, we are grateful that more than 1,000 people—both in Erie and beyond—prayed with this year's alternative offering. In this, it was indeed a universal way of the cross, way of the migrant, way of the Gospel.

You can view the video and pray the Stations here:
eriebenedictines.org/good-friday-pilgrimage-peace-2020.

We Call You Friend



by Jo Clarke, Oblate, Director of Annual Giving

"I address you as 'my dear friend' because I have had the privilege of coming to call many of you friend during my 10 years as prioress of the Benedictine Sisters. We have corresponded through regular mail, emails, and magazine articles. We have talked on the phone and in person and, of course, prayed together," is how Sister Anne Wambach began her final Easter Appeal letter as prioress.

As Director of Annual Giving, I consider you friends, too, even though I haven't had the opportunity to meet all of you. I'm an introvert which might make you think it's strange, but for me there is nothing more energizing than picking up the phone and calling you, our supporters. It's one of my favorite things to do because it's a time to catch up with old friends, make new friends, and most importantly, to express our deep appreciation for your generous support. The sisters, oblates, staff, volunteers, and all those we serve cannot thank you enough for your financial gifts, particularly now.

"Why on earth do you like to raise money?" is a question I often get. First of all, it's because as an Erie Benedictine Oblate I profoundly support this community and all that it stands for and, secondly, it's because of you. The conversations I have with you bring me back to why I do this development ministry. And it's because of the relationships that have been formed and the lifetime friendships that I have made over the years.

These relationships have stood me in good stead and, as Albert Schweitzer said, "At times our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us."

This is so true right now when we can't interact face-to-face and have to learn new ways of communicating and supporting each other. As we move through this new reality together, your support gives us strength, brings us hope, and lets us know that we are all part of a community

of love and care. You are indeed an integral part of this extended Benedictine community, and you bring us light and hope every day.

Now is a time of difficult decisions when we have to rethink what we do and how we do it. Many of us are working from home, the monastery closed to visitors in mid-March, and the uncertainty of how long these measures will stay in place is hard. Right now, our primary focus is on your wellbeing and that of the sisters, particularly our elders.

We will keep you informed about monastery status and how we are adapting our lives and ministries during this pandemic through our regularly updated website, ErieBenedictines.org. Or, stay abreast of online and, eventually, onsite events by signing up on our website to receive our Happenings e-newsletter, emailed the first of each month. The Monasteries of the Heart online community, monasteriesoftheheart.org, offers spirituality resources and opportunities for online e-courses and conversations. These are ways we can continue coming together and being community today.

We are in this together and one of the most important gifts we can bring to one another is prayerful support. The sisters come together daily in chapel for a half hour of shared *lectio*, "Our Prayer for the World," followed by Evening Prayer. If you have a prayer request for yourself, a family member, or friend, jot down your request and email it to me at joclarke@mtstbenedict.org. You can also leave a message on my office phone, 814-899-0614, extension 2281. I will make sure your prayer requests get to the sisters. And, while we and the sisters pray for you, we all ask for your prayers as well.

Together we weave the rich fabric of Benedictinism, and it is with you that we can create a bright future. Thank you for being that small spark of light and hope and for continuing to walk with us during these difficult times.



BENEDICTINE SISTERS OF ERIE 2019 ANNUAL REPORT

By Mary Jane Vergotz, OSB, Director of Development

The Benedictine way is to seek God in community and to respond in prayer and ministry and as Benedictine Sisters of Erie, we also embrace a corporate commitment to be a healing presence and prophetic witness for peace and justice by actively addressing the climate crisis and the rights of women and children. We do this through a variety of ministries and outreach that is only possible with the support of our family and friends, oblates and benefactors. The support you give us in prayer and donations is vital to our work. You empower us and allow us to continue to share and deepen Benedictine tradition and values in our monastic life and ministries.

This 2019 annual report provides highlights of the community's 2019 fiscal year. Thank you for your generosity. It is a gift and a blessing, and we are most grateful.

2019 BY THE NUMBERS

Total number of donors	3,360
Total number of gifts	4,784
Monthly Giving Program Participants	90
Planned Givers	80

Development Income Total **\$ 636,323**

Development Expenses

Salaries, Wages and Benefits	\$156,291
Special Programs	\$42,338
Contract Services	\$3,407
Benefactor Relations	\$4,941
Travel, Education, Dues and Memberships	\$1,220
Office Equipment and Supplies	\$9,747
Printing and Postage	\$9,016
Annuity Payments	\$ 940

Total Expenses **\$227,902**

Net Income **\$408,420**



2019 BEQUEST AND ESTATE INCOME

We are grateful to our family members, friends, long-standing donors, former students, clergy and others who remembered the Benedictine Sisters with a bequest in their wills in 2019. We remember each of them in our daily prayer.

Total bequest gifts	\$793,185
Total number of Donors	7
Total number of Gifts	12

For more information please contact Sister Mary Jane Vergotz, smaryjane@mtstbenedict.org or 899-0614, extension 2409.

GIFTS AND GRANTS

By Patti Eichen, Development Associate



ERIE GIVES

Erie Gives, a rewarding opportunity hosted by the Erie Community Foundation, is **Tuesday, August 11, 2020**. It's a great day to support the **Benedictine Sisters of Erie!**

During a designated 12-hour period of online giving on August 11, the Erie Community Foundation and their sponsors will increase each donor's gift by providing a pro-rated match. Between 8:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m. ET, you can make an online donation to the Benedictine Sisters of Erie at www.ErieGives.org.

The minimum gift amount is \$25 and only Visa, MasterCard and Discover are accepted.

Or, write a check made payable to the Erie Community Foundation. Your check must be accompanied by a Check Donation Form that will be available for download beginning June 15 at www.eriecommunityfoundation.org. Checks must be delivered to the Erie Community Foundation office (459 West 6th Street, Erie, PA, 16507) **no later than Monday, August 10, 2020**.

Because of you the Benedictine Sisters of Erie look to the future with hope. Your support of Mount St. Benedict Monastery and the sisters' ministries is vital to continue the work which the community started 164 years ago. You help us so we can help others.

For more information on the Benedictine Sisters of Erie visit ErieBenedictines.org or contact Sister Mary Jane Vergotz, OSB, at srmarijane@mtstbenedict.org or 814-899-0614 Ext 2409.

For more information on Erie Gives Day, visit www.ErieGives.org.

THE HEAT IS ON

Thanks to two generous grant awards the heat indeed is on at St. Benedict Community Center.

A new steam boiler heating system has been installed at the Center on East 10th Street. The old system, after many years and numerous repairs, no longer functioned and was deemed unrepairable.

The Erie Community Foundation and ECGRA (Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority) contributed funds to this project. These organizations recognize the importance of the programs at St. Benedict Community Center and partnered with the Benedictine Sisters of Erie to make it happen.

Situated in Erie's inner city, St. Benedict Community Center, a ministry of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie, provides a recreational and therapeutic facility that serves a diverse population that includes at-risk youth, persons with physical challenges, able bodied young adults, and retired seniors.



Not only are the results of this project a warm physical environment, the warmth and caring of the staff and volunteers is radiated to those who use the facility.

RENOVATED ACCESSIBLE BATHROOM

The monastery's south side ground floor now has an accessible women's bathroom made possible through a generous grant from **SOAR! (Support Our Aging Religious)**. This area had not been renovated since the monastery was constructed in 1970.

The new bathroom features an automatic door opener, a stall and sinks to accommodate wheelchairs and walkers, raised toilet seats with grab bars, new mirrors and lighting and a new countertop. It will accommodate sisters, staff, visitors, and retreat attendees. Many of the sisters have commented about the brightness of the area and the ease of mobility both in and out of the area.

We are most grateful to **SOAR** for partnering with us on this project.



Benedictine Sisters of Erie Charity Fundraiser

Golf Tournament

Tuesday • August 4 • 2020
Lake Shore Country Club • Erie, PA

Honorary Tournament Co-Chairs
Betsy and Bill Vorsheck
PNC Bank

This tournament will also honor
Sister Anne Wambach, prioress, for her ten years
of service and leadership in the Erie area.



In memoriam

Since the last issue of the *The Mount* four community members have passed from this life to the next—into the very fullness of God's life. As the ritual prayers at the time of death remind us: "Life is changed, not ended . . ." And while there is finality in death that cannot be denied for those left behind, therein also is the root of Christian hope, "a hope that does not disappoint." (Romans 5: 5)



Sister Mary Bernard Lander, OSB

May 22, 1929 — December 21, 2019

Our sister, Mary Bernard, died as she lived:
quietly, peacefully and assured of God's love.

Mary B, as she was affectionately called,
proved herself to be a woman of great strength.
Time and time again she was called upon
to embrace challenge and change
and she did it with dignity and acceptance.

She knew how to set down roots
in the places where she was meant to be,
and always found a way to do so
with grace and humor, wit and spirit.

The twinkle in her eye never seemed to go missing
and her quiet presence, so simple and so humble,
was a gift and a blessing to all.

May we seek to respond to our vocation in life
as Mary B. did so well:
with faithfulness and generosity,
dedication and definition,
so that in all things and all ways,
God may be glorified, now and evermore.
Amen.



Sister Dorothy Szczypinski, OSB

March 9, 1931 — December 21, 2019

Our sister, Dorothy,
a gifted woman who was
teacher, mentor and friend to many,
passed from this life to the next,
quietly and peacefully.

Fully aware that her earthly life
was coming to an end,
Dorothy never wavered in her faith.
Her wit and humor remained strong
even as her body weakened.

Committed to the monastic way of life
Dorothy remained faithful unto death.
Her love of community was real;
her gratitude for kindness was sincere.
Her vulnerability became her strength
and she died with grace and fortitude.

God of all peace and fulfillment,
may we, too, be strong in faith,
finding our joy in you,
the source of all goodness and love,
now and evermore. Amen.



The lives of our sisters, the faithfulness they lived so well, the seeking of God in which they persevered until their last breath, remain with us in memory and call us to be present in the here and now, to live fully alive so that we too may live into the fullness of life with God who seeks us even as we seek.



Sister Irene Warchol, OSB

March 6, 1924 — January 5, 2020

Our sister, Irene, enjoyed a long life.
She passed into eternal rest
and the comfort of God's embrace
as quietly and as simply as she lived.

Irene will be remembered as one
who was steadfast in spirit and humble of heart.
Through the work of her hands
many were fed with a taste of God's love.

Her unfailing faithfulness to prayer,
stable presence in community,
and dedicated commitment to ministry
satisfied her every need
and provided her with abiding peace.

God of all goodness,
we are grateful for this woman
whose sight is now restored to fullness.
May the memory of her constancy and fidelity
be our strength as we follow your way
and seek to glorify you in all manner of being,
now and evermore. Amen.



Sister Kathryn Disbrow, OSB

September 24, 1938 — May 7, 2020

God of all blessing,
our sister, Kate, passed into your arms
quietly and peacefully, gently and without fanfare.

Known for her steadfast spirit,
Kate faced hardship with stamina
and rejoiced in opportunities
to celebrate life and living.
She grasped her independence
with direction and purpose,
and kept her mind and heart
on the monastic way,
working tirelessly
to be in the mainstream
of community life and prayer.

Kate was ever mindful of family and friends,
always nurturing the bonds of relationship
with attention and affection, kindness and care.

May our living be marked by faithfulness and love,
modeling the example of this religious woman,
so that you will be glorified in all manner of being,
now and evermore. Amen.

Jubilarians

The year of 2020 is the Jubilee Year for six community members. These monastic women continue to seek God, living in community and responding in prayer and ministry. The Benedictine Sisters of Erie are proud to recognize our jubilarians and celebrate the gift they have been and continue to be to the community, the church and the world.



75

Sister Jerome Eustace has been a Benedictine Sister of Erie for 75 years, devoting her life to community, prayer and ministry. Sister Jerome ministered in elementary education throughout the Diocese of Erie for 35 years, both as teacher and principal. She then moved into health care for 15 years as a nurse aide before becoming involved in contributed services in the monastery which included being a community driver, front-desk receptionist, and long-time infirmary laundress. Now, at the age of 94, Sister Jerome keeps busy assisting the kitchen staff with daily chores and ministering through prayer and presence. Sister Jerome is a faithful monastic who models commitment and stability and she says: "Believing God is with me has helped me. Prayer empowering work has kept me going. Nothing is more important than that and I have no intention of giving it up."

Sister Anne McGreevy has been a vowed monastic for 70 years and has been steadfast in her commitment to monastic life and ministry. The field of education was her forte for 58 years. It was the place where she was best able to use her talents and gifts. Sister Anne taught elementary school for 12 years before becoming an exemplary school administrator for 46 years. She served in schools throughout the Diocese of Erie as well as in the Dioceses of Cleveland, OH and Arlington, VA. In 2008, after retiring from her work in education, Sister Anne became the monastery Director of Housekeeping Projects. It was a ministry she undertook with thoroughness and care until 2013. Although her health has declined her spirit remains strong and she now stays active in the ministry of prayer and presence.



70



60

Sister Jean Wolbert was born and raised in Oil City and entered the Erie Benedictines after graduation from St. Joseph High School. She has been a faithful monastic for 60 years. During that time she served in elementary school education, first as class room teacher before specializing in music and becoming a music teacher. Sister Jean spent 38 years in various schools throughout the Erie Diocese sharing her gifts and inspiring children with her love of music. For 22 years Sister Jean served as community liturgist putting her liturgical education from Notre Dame to good use. Today she maintains a strong involvement in music ministry and adds a special beauty to the liturgy with her flute playing. In 2010 Sister Jean began her service as Director of Hospitality, the ministry in which she is presently engaged. She is known for extending a warm and gracious welcome to the many guests who visit the monastery.

Sister Karen Kosin, a graduate of Saint Benedict Academy, has been a vowed and faithful Benedictine Sister of Erie for 60 years. For 29 of those years she was an elementary teacher in schools throughout the Erie Diocese. In 1988, Sister Karen joined the staff at Second Harvest Food Bank of Northwestern Pennsylvania. She has served in a number of capacities there and is currently the product resource manager, a position she has held since 1995. Sister Karen's concern for the hungry and her careful, meticulous approach to her work serve the food bank well. Her gifts were also recognized in her role as Oblate Co-Director from 1993-2006. Sister Karen worked closely with the oblates and helped to strengthen them in their commitment to living the Benedictine way through a meaningful relationship with the community. She continues to be known for her gentle presence, kindness and commitment to the monastic way of life.



60



Sister Miriam McMullen-Pastrick entered the Benedictine Sisters of Erie after graduating from St. Joseph High School in Oil City. She celebrates 60 years of monastic life and is known for her compassionate heart and warm, welcoming presence to all. The academic world is where Sister Miriam found her niche as a teacher. Her career in education spanned 53 years. It included five years in elementary education and 13 years in secondary education in schools throughout the Diocese of Erie. She then became involved in higher education and taught for 35 years as a college professor. In 2017 Sister Miriam retired from her teaching career at Penn State Erie—The Behrend College where she had spent 27 years. The academic world suited Sister Miriam and she was always concerned for the good of her students. They, in turn, found in her a person who genuinely cared for them and who was always interested in their welfare.

60

Sister Judith Bohn attended St. Benedict Academy before entering the Benedictine Sisters of Erie where she has been a faithful monastic for 60 years. Initially she served in various roles in the Erie Diocesan school system: first as a primary teacher and then as office staff member in several schools, both elementary and secondary. After that her ministries included health care in the monastery as a nurse aide, a typist for the former Benet Press (the community's print shop), and secretarial work for outside employers. In 1979 Sister Judith took on fostering and became foster mother to very young babies who would eventually be adopted. She fostered babies for 15 years and provided unconditional love at a very crucial time in their early development. Sister Judith is presently a member of the business office staff, where she has served for 22 years. She is a joy-filled presence to all and her kindness and care are evident in all that she does.



60



To know Sister Anne

By Susan Doubet, OSB, subprioress

You can't be in conversation with Sister Anne for more than a few minutes before hearing about her family roots: roots that are strong, loving, formative and located on the East Coast—Philadelphia and South Jersey, specifically. How a Philly-Jersey girl made the transition over 25 years ago, to the Great Lakes plains of Erie, is a bit mystifying: sun, ocean seashores, huge Catholic dioceses and people everywhere were exchanged for snow, a fresh water lake, a much smaller Catholic diocese and many fewer people.



But, Anne did indeed do that and we are much blessed because of it.

No matter where she has ministered, she has brought her full energy and devotion to that endeavor. And that self has been on full display over the past decade as she served as Prioress of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie.

Being prioress of a Benedictine community today involves a careful blending of administration (a non-profit corporation in the state of Pennsylvania and a canonical entity in the Catholic Church) and personal interactions with 88 women who are on the same spiritual journey.

Anne has been blessed with talents in both areas. Administratively her style is extraordinarily collaborative. She understands well, from years in educational administration and community life, the way to involve people in decision-making. It takes a blend of listening and discussion and then knowing when and how to come to conclusions most efficiently and effectively. During this time she has worked very hard at communication—both internally among the sisters and externally with our many “publics.”





She has little ego and need for confirmation and praise. She is very comfortable letting others have the attention for accomplishments. She's not the type to run to the head of the line or to boast when things go right or to blame when they go off kilter!



It is in the second concern of any prioress, however, where Anne really shines: in her interpersonal relationships with the sisters. During these 10 years she has spent countless hours listening and talking, advising and consoling, and just "being with" all of us as we consult her on the stages and decisions of our lives. Perhaps her attention and care for the elderly stand out the most. She has grown into a true spiritual companion when a sister is at a point of major change in her life or even at the end of her earthly journey. Both she and I count the experiences of our sisters' deaths and all of the rituals and family interactions that follow, as among the most privileged and most significant experiences of our time in administration. These included the deaths of both of our mothers during the last decade.



Anne knows what her talents are and gives them generously. I would include these among her most prominent: her work ethic, which is quite amazing in its boundless energy, self-discipline and generosity. The sisters are always kidding her about her walking speed: moving around the monastery while the space between her and any companion continues to grow. Her music background and experience have served her well. She told us when first elected in 2010, that her





music would have to continue to be a strong part of her life, even as prioress. It has a pivotal place in her prayer and in her entire approach to life. If you've ever heard her play "Gabriel's Oboe" on her own oboe, you'd know that this is true.

Anne, herself, I believe would want mention of three factors that she credits with "making her" the woman and religious that she is today: 1) her childhood, idyllic years of growing up in the Kensington neighborhood, Ascension Parish, in the Church of Philadelphia. It was within a large, loving family—her parents, brother, four sisters and now the next



generations, with whom she continues to have that unique bonding common in large, close families,

2) the excellent education and formation she received in her early adult years, primarily through the Sisters of St. Joseph—within community life and in the schools they staffed and, 3) her years as a Benedictine woman here in Erie—a place that has made her heart sing and her life expand in the embrace of the monastic traditions of the Rule of Benedict which began 1500 years ago and continue throughout the world today—and most assuredly at Mount St. Benedict Monastery in Erie, thanks to her leadership and devotion.



Contributed Photo



Sister Anne Wambach
Prioress
2010 – 2020

Vocation Ministry continues—even in a pandemic

By Marilyn Schauble, OSB, Vocation Director

Vocation ministry is often about “come and see”—come and visit, see who we are, join us for prayer, work beside us. So, what happens during a pandemic when the monastery is closed to guests and visitors?

I have continued to discern with women who have expressed interest in our community. Much of my time is spent in conversation with and listening to women who are searching for the community in which they can best seek God. The pandemic has not changed that. While the women who were scheduled for a visit during Holy Week or Easter were not able to physically be with us, thanks to technology I was still able to be in contact with them and help them continue to move forward on their vocation journey.

Listening and being supportive goes on despite physical distancing and is maybe even more significant because of social distancing. As vocation director, I know my interactions with women interested in the Benedictine Sisters of Erie need to be ongoing despite the pandemic, even if in unexpected settings. Whether on the phone, through email, via skype or face time, the sacred responsibility to accompany someone on their discernment journey is something that does not get put on hold. Virtual interactions allow for valuable connection and conversation as well as meaningful listening. I find these interactions to be gift and I value time with each woman who is seeking a closer relationship with God. Above all, it allows for the vocation discernment journey to continue for those pursuing religious life.

Please know that your joining with us in prayer for vocations is essential, powerful and very much appreciated so “that in all things God may be glorified.” (1 Peter 4:11 / Rule of Benedict 57:8)

Canisius at the Mount—Wonderful!

For a group of 12 students and mentors, winter break meant a trip to Erie. “It was a wonderful week,” said Sister Marilyn Schauble, Vocation Director and organizer. “Canisius has been coming to the Mount for many years, even before I started working with them 10 years ago. Each year I enjoy it more.”

The group lived at the monastery and worked with the sisters in various Benedictine ministries. In addition, they experienced special sessions that helped them learn about monastic life and also enjoyed fun times with the community. New friends were made and invitations to come back and visit were plentiful. “We are already looking forward to next year,” said Sister Anne Wambach, prioress. “The students and their mentors are a blessing to us in more ways than I can count.”



PRAYER FOR VOCATIONS

Loving God,
we believe that
Benedictine monasticism
bears fruit for the world.

We are grateful for the witness
of the Benedictine sisters among us.

May their faithfulness
to the monastic way of life
awaken women to the
stirrings of the Spirit.

Bless others with the courage
to accept the invitation
to seek you in community
through prayer and ministry.

May these seekers find fulfillment
for the longing in their hearts:
in communal life well-lived and
in loving attention to the needs
of your people.

May they be upheld as we are upheld
by your constancy and steadfast love.

We ask this with confidence
in your goodness and grace,
now and evermore.
Amen.

Postulant Jen becomes a Novice



"I ask that I may continue to seek God through sharing the monastic life with this Benedictine community," requested Postulant Jennifer Frazer during a special ritual at Evening Prayer on May 2. In response, the Benedictine community welcomed her into the novitiate, the second stage of initial monastic formation.

During the ritual Sister Anne Wambach, Prioress, invited the community to support Jen and Sister Stephanie Schmidt, Novice Director, throughout this year of continued discernment. Sister Stephanie then presented the new novice with a copy of the Rule of Benedict as a sign that it will be a focal point of her studies in the coming year.

Novice Jen will experience a year of intensive prayer and study, with classes on the Rule of Benedict, monastic history, psalms, liturgy and Scripture. She will minister within the monastery, which will give her the opportunity to come to know the sisters more deeply and learn from them.

"This is a special time for the community," said Sister Anne Wambach. "When we have a novice in our midst we, too, are called to growth and change."

L-R: Sisters Rose Ann Kolbas (*Lectio* partner), Stephanie Schmidt (Novice Director), Anne Wambach (Prioress), Jen Frazer (Novice), Marilyn Schauble (Vocation Director)



An In-Formation Supper

Colleen Leathley, Postulant

Since 2018, the women in initial monastic formation (IMF) have hosted an annual “Sunday Night Soup Supper” for the community. As a postulant, this year marked my first foray into this hallowed tradition.

With our group now numbering seven, we could be likened to the Seven Sisters.* Our star performers include four scholastics in temporary vows (Dina, Karen, Val, and Kathy) and three starry-eyed postulants in their first year in community (Jen, now a novice, Jacqueline, and me). Monastic Formation Director Sister Stephanie Schmidt provides North Star guidance as we navigate the terrain of monastic life in this Benedictine community.

Together, this talented line-up prepared and delivered a delicious and wholesome menu for the community that included three homemade soups, freshly-baked bread, carrot-cake cupcakes, and a new treat of New Zealand origin (made by me, a native New Zealander) called “mothballs” — or as our concerned formation director preferred to market them, “marshmallow delights.”

Conversation flowed, and many people went up for seconds — and even thirds! Sister Mary Therese Egan, whose initial formation days have long passed, affirmed our efforts, saying, “Let’s give a hand to our wonderful folks in initial monastic formation!” This was followed by a long, loud (and undoubtedly well-deserved!) applause and gratitude to us ‘young uns’.



L-R (front): Jacqueline Small, Colleen Leathley (Postulants), Sr. Valerie Luckey (Scholastic); (back): Sr. Karen Oprenchok (Scholastic), Jen Frazer (Novice), Sisters Stephanie Schmidt (Monastic Formation Director), Dina Lauricella and Kathy McCarthy (Scholastics)

Personally, I found it a delight and privilege to be able to nourish our sisters in this way, and to be able to show our grateful appreciation and recompense for the nourishment they provide to us through their presence, wisdom and guidance. It was also fun to cook and

share this time with my fellow IMF-ers. Oh, yes, and also to know that if I stick with this group, I will not starve in the future!

**A star constellation named for the seven sisters who are companions of Artemis in Greek mythology.*



Oblate Way of Life

By Dianne Sabol, OSB, Oblate Director

When Lent began none of us knew how differently it would unfold. Just a few weeks later the COVID-19 pandemic made it necessary for us to close the monastery to guests and visitors and our Lenten journey took on new significance as we sheltered in place and practiced physical distancing. As oblate director, I reached out to our oblates to let them know that we, like them, were adjusting to a new normal. I assured them of our prayerful support and invited them to share how being an oblate might be helping them through this unprecedented period. The following are a few of the responses. I hope they inspire you as much as they inspire me.



Nancy Small: Worcester, MA

I wouldn't say I'm on the front lines, but I continue my work as a hospice chaplain (we are part of the health care system). I'm aware that I go out while many are told to stay home, that I continue to have a paycheck while others do not. New fears are arising, like the daughter who is afraid her father in hospice care may contract the virus and what does that mean for them, as she suffers from asthma....Or the funeral that I officiated this week where only 10 people were allowed in the funeral home at one time, so the daughter of the man who died has her grief compounded by guilt that she couldn't provide the type of funeral service he would have wanted.

Coping is more challenging because some of the rituals that ground me have been suspended, like Sunday liturgies and my weekly yoga class. So, it means even more to me to draw from the power of your community when you gather. I really rely on those of you who are keeping the flame of prayer and holy presence alive to be a lifeline of spiritual sustenance for me, helping to calm my fears and remind me that I belong to a community steeped in a tradition that transcends pandemic and panic. I am remembering the warm welcome I receive any time I've walked through the doors at the Mount, and the warmth of that welcome helps to melt away some of my fears. I am trying to bring that sense of hospitality and holy presence to the homes that I visit in these uncertain times.

Mary Hembrow Snyder: Erie, PA

I am just finishing my extended *lectio* this 5th Sunday of Lent and remembering that you asked us, "What does it mean to be an Oblate at this particular time?" Here is my response after reflecting on Ezekiel 37:14, "I will put my spirit within you and you shall live...."

I don't want to squander this time –
The hegemony of this Pandemic –
Demanding social distancing (and for some of us,
isolation), yet overrun with a peculiar largesse
of silence and solitude –
How shall I embrace this?
With Affection? Trust? Hope?
My answer: I am trying to "listen with the ear
of my heart,"
trying, once again, on this new day of my
"one wild and precious life," as the poet wrote.
Holy Mystery, help me, help us all, please.

Being an Oblate, being in solidarity with all the sisters, is sustaining me.

Mary Ann Novascone: Prairie du Sac, WI

We miss being with you in person, but are strong in body and spirit, and with you in the heart space that really is the REAL presence! Thanks for working so hard to keep in touch. I think you folks are in the chapel about to pray the stations. We are having a bit of soup now—after all, that's been our Good Friday lunch at the monastery for 21 years, and the tradition holds. Then we will do the stations here. This morning, via Zoom, we prayed the stations at the border wall there...most of us virtually.

Kelly Adamson: Xenia, OH

On Holy Thursday I had planned to make chili and cornbread and ended up pulling out a clay cup and plate.



I placed them on the table with a bowl of water and towel. I put the cornbread on the plate and gave everyone a small glass of wine (from a cheap single serve plastic bottle, it's what we had).

We read the readings of the day, blessed our bread and wine and dinner. Broke the bread, sipped the wine (my daughter Sophie was not impressed!) and ate our meal in thanksgiving. It was a simple and beautiful act of family communion—it was eucharist.

Ironically, after years of wishing I could join you all for the



Good Friday Peace Pilgrimage, this year I finally did! *Ora et labora* was quite literal as I prayed with you virtually (see page 9) with my phone propped up as I made 50 bag lunches for our

St. Vincent de Paul shelter. As I worked, I sang with you, "Open wide my arms that the suffering of the world may come in." I continued as I drove to deliver the lunches and, long after the video stopped, I found myself singing it as a mantra and praying as if it were a sung *lectio*.

Thank you. Thank you all, for who you are in our world and for directing us always toward God who is compassion and mercy and love, the God who breathes in each of us.

**Contributed Photos*

Tom LeBeau: Jamestown, NY

We at Kidder Memorial United Methodist Church here in Jamestown are using Zoom for worship and some meetings and Bible study. We are also able to continue the backpack program to our neighborhood elementary school, being careful to observe social distancing.

Harry Finkbone: North Ridgeville, OH

Honestly, I think I am working more now than before. It is taking a lot of persistent effort to stay in touch and minister as a pastor to folks I can't actually touch. I make calls and I am developing a Zoom meeting ministry of prayers (using the Liturgy of the Hours).

Janine Mariscotti: Glenside, PA

I feel more connected than ever to your community as well as to other groups I'm intentionally staying in touch with.

Susan Fullam: Greensboro, NC

I recently started to re-read *The Monastery of the Heart* by Joan Chittister and it is proving to be quite appropriate for this time. It reminds me that I am never truly alone, that I am associated with a community of like-minded people. And I am able to recall many truly moving liturgies from the years I have spent Holy Week with you. We indeed have a rich tradition from which to draw on during times of crisis. I cannot imagine going through this without my faith to sustain me. In some sense we will continue to be in Lenten spirit for a while. And celebrating Easter during this time will/should bring us a renewed sense of hope. The same can be said while watching the rebirthing of nature, with all its colors and sounds.

In memoriam

Carl Puleo

Hamden, CT 12/29/2019

Rev. Kenneth Laber

Salinas, CA 1/17/2020

Mary Beth Kennedy

Erie, PA 1/25/2020



A decade of Monasteries of the Heart: Benedictine spirituality for contemporary seekers

by Katie Gordon, Monasteries of the Heart staff

Almost ten years ago in April 2011, Joan Chittister released her book *The Monastery of the Heart: An Invitation to Meaningful Life* and an online movement was launched. With a website under the same name, Monasteries of the Heart began as an outreach of the Benedictine Sisters, but really was much more than that—it was a monastery “without walls.” The online space was designed to respond to the great longing for spirituality that exists in today’s world. In Mary Lou Kownacki’s words, “Monasteries of the Heart welcomes seekers of God everywhere.”

Nine years later, the website has surpassed 21,000 online members, and in February BlueBridge released a new edition of the book, now titled *The Monastery of the Heart: Benedictine Spirituality for Contemporary Seekers*. Where does our online monastery stand now?

We have a sense of the scope and depth of the impact of the website thanks to a survey sent to all members in the summer of 2019. Over 700 people responded, and we learned why people are signing on—and coming back—to our digital monastic community.

First, we learned that most people are primarily seeking spiritual nourishment through our resources. In our “confused world,” as one respondent put it, Monasteries of the Heart is providing a stable footing. In the midst of loneliness or isolation, people are finding deeper connection; in the midst of political chaos, people are finding prophetic wisdom; in the midst of religious hypocrisy, people are finding spiritual integrity. One person called the online community a “refuge.” Others said: “It is a spiritual life-line.” “Monasteries of the Heart grounds me almost daily.” “Monasteries of the Heart is like a full well in the desert.” “It has become the anchor of my spiritual life.”

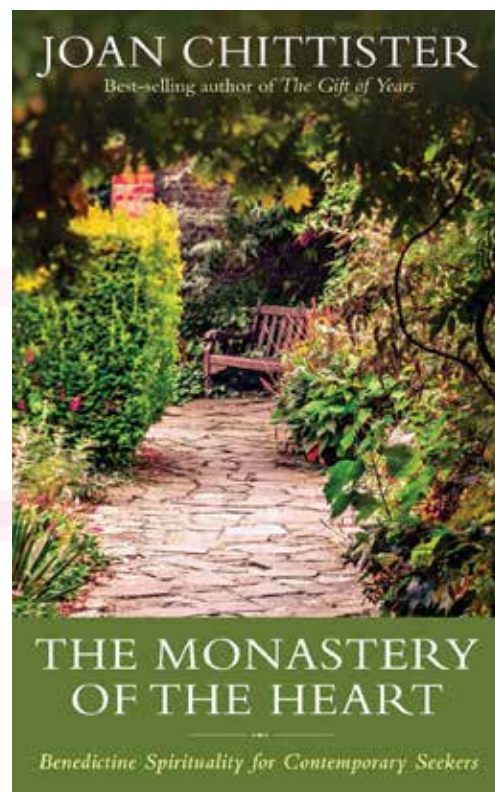
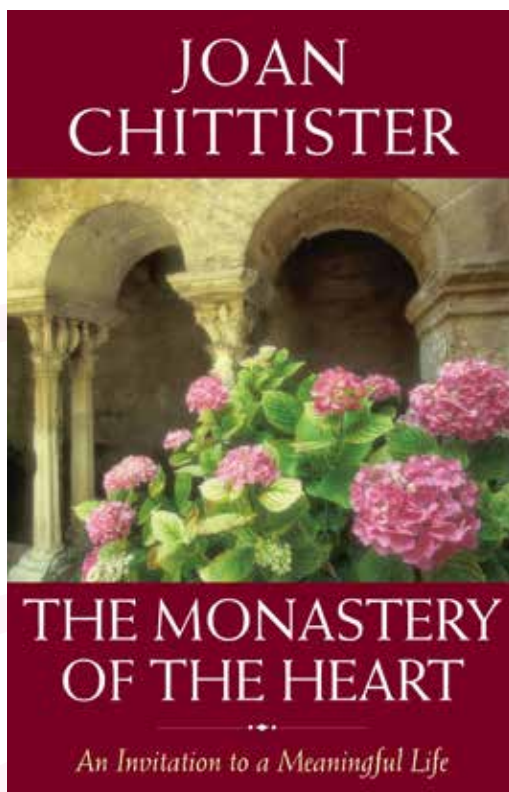
While the community is all online, quite different than the monasteries many of us are familiar with, the fact that it is online opens up new possibilities. For example, as a result of the current pandemic when social distancing became a way of life, it provided an excellent forum for things that matter. As one respondent said, they were able to gain a sense of “the growing number of seekers in our busy world.” Another said that they enjoy “being a part of a global community with so many different ways of experiencing God.”

Through this online space, seekers are finding the resources to bring monastic rhythms of life into their own homes or communities. Many respondents said that through the site, they no longer feel alone on the journey; they have found others with shared questions and desires.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, when people were quarantined in their homes, Monasteries of the Heart provided special assistance for those who flocked online for spiritual sustenance. In addition to Zoom prayer services attended by people around the world, it also offered a free eCourse in Psalm Writing, which with 1100 participants, was the largest and most engaged e-course in our history.

However, there is room for growth. One striking result of the survey is that roughly 84 percent of respondents are 60 years old or older, and almost 99 percent of respondents are 40 or older. While the website is appealing to seekers of many stripes, it has not drawn in younger generations. Thinking about the aging





demographics of this online community becomes vital when we think about how monasticism and Benedictine tradition is translated to emerging generations, and therefore, for our future. The website has the potential to be an inter-generational community—as monasteries always have been. But we need to ask: What are young people seeking, and how can we become a spiritual home for seekers across generations?

Additionally, there are members who value the content, but are looking for something more, something deeper—whether it's in-person discussion groups, retreats or live-in monastic community. How else can we open our doors—whether digitally, into our tradition, or physically, into our community?

The spiritual hunger at the core of Benedictine tradition and Monasteries of the Heart exists across generations, although it may be expressed differently. It is as Sister Joan acknowledges, every age and every culture manifests monastic wisdom differently. Monasteries of the Heart is an online resource (at monasteriesoftheheart.org) that can continue to adapt to these changing realities and evolving desires, truly responding to the signs of the times. Sister Joan's work, rooted in tradition while expanding it into new possibilities, is continuing to lead the way for Benedictinism in the 21st century.

Katie Gordon is a staff member of Monasteries of the Heart, and a national organizer with Nuns & Nones. Her work is focused on building bridges between traditions and generations, in an effort to translate ancient wisdom for contemporary seekers to respond to the greatest challenges of our own time. Katie is a graduate of Harvard Divinity School, with a Master of Theological Studies in Religion, Politics, and Ethics.



Congratulations



Sister Phyllis Schleicher (left) is congratulated by Sister Anne Wambach, prioress.

Women Making History: Sister Phyllis Schleicher

The Benedictine Sisters of Erie were present to support and applaud Sister Phyllis Schleicher at the Women Making History 2020 annual event sponsored by the Mercy Center for Women and held on March 4 at Mercyhurst University. Sister Phyllis was named as one of this year's thirteen dynamic women honored. For more than 30 years phenomenal women from Erie County have been recognized each year. Sister Phyllis is now counted among them because she, too, has made a difference in the lives of countless people.

For 61 years, Sister Phyllis Schleicher has been a professed member of the Erie Benedictines. Born an only child in Erie, PA, she was raised by a single mother during war time. From her mother she learned that commitment meant dedication, hard work, and infinite fortitude. Likewise, the sisters who mentored and formed her into the religious woman she is today were also examples of courage and perseverance. "I have been inspired by the strong women in my life who taught me, loved me and showed me how to be faithful and committed by their very example."

Among her greatest achievements has been the leadership that she has been able to offer as a teacher,

administrator, and prioress. As a servant leader she learned to put the needs of others first and worked hard at achieving what was best for the common good. Sister Phyllis explained that she does this with honesty, integrity, commitment, and passion. She attributes her success to her ability to live faithful commitment. At the present time, Sister Phyllis is Co-Director of Catholic Rural Ministry (CRM) in the Erie Diocese, Potter and McKean Counties, a position in which she has served since 1999. The mission of CRM is to bring "Hope and God's Compassionate Presence" to all. Her overall goal for the future is to simply be of service for as long as she can. She strives to be present to the moment, do the work at hand, embrace the challenges that come, and be grateful for the blessings.

Sister of the Year

Sister Anne Wambach was named 2020 Sister of the Year by the Erie Serra Club, an international Catholic lay organization dedicated to supporting and encouraging vocations to the priesthood and religious life. According to Dennis Deiner, current Serra Club president, "Sister Anne was chosen for her witness and example as prioress of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie. Her work as prioress, her attention to the needs of Erie, her hospitable spirit, and musical contributions to worship celebrations at the monastery make her most deserving."



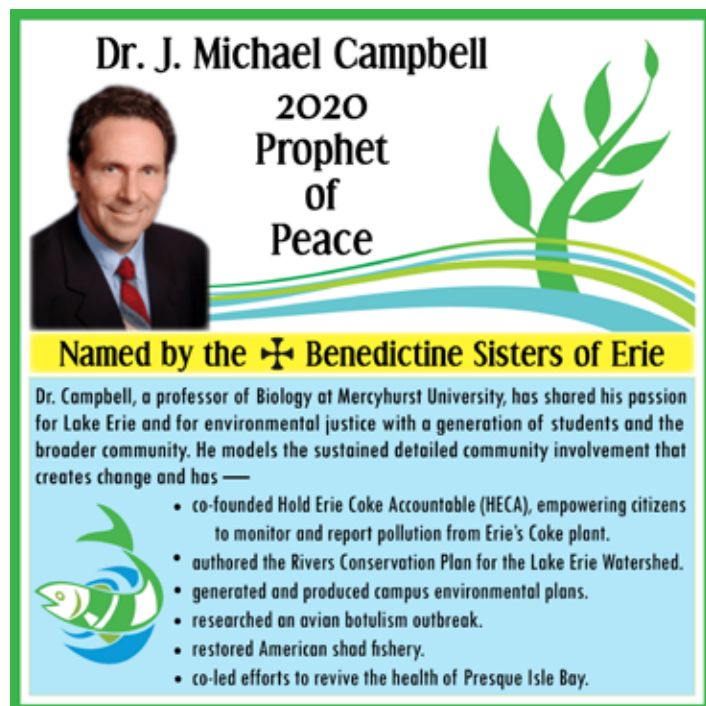
The Serra Club of Erie, in existence since 1960, has been designating this award for the past 30 years. Although there were no public festivities this year due to the imposed restrictions on public gatherings as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Serra Club did make a donation to the charity of Sister Anne's choice. "Sister Anne chose the Inner-City neighborhood Art House, a ministry of the Erie Benedictines," said Mr. Deiner. "Before becoming prioress, she ministered there both as Program and Executive Director."

Erie Benedictines name Dr. J. Michael Campbell 2020 Prophet of Peace

The Benedictine Sisters of Erie presented their annual Prophet of Peace Award to Dr. J. Michael Campbell for the extraordinary manner in which he has used his gifts for the good of creation. Dr. Campbell's efforts have resulted in contributions that are both significant and far-reaching. His work is indeed a pursuit of justice and peace that is rooted in reverence and respect for all of creation and his contributions to environmental justice and sustainability are notable.

"We are called to responsible management of human activity affecting the natural environment; we are called to ensure the conservation and preservation of natural resources and values for the sake of future generations of humans and all creation," said Sister Anne Wambach, prioress. "We honor a man who understands that responsibility—a man who has lived his care for creation with significant and dedicated efforts."

Dr. Mike Campbell, a professor of biology at Mercyhurst University, has shared his passion for Lake Erie and for environmental justice with a generation of students and the broader community. He models the sustained detailed community involvement that creates change. He and his wife, Anne, are parents to four children and also have three grandchildren. Dr. Campbell serves as an Elder and Clerk of Session for the Belle Valley Presbyterian Church. He considers his life-long faith to be the primary source of strength and motivation for his professional, community and family service.



Authors in our midst

The following sisters and postulant have had articles published. Links to their contributions can be accessed on the community web site at <https://www.eriebenedictines.org/>:

Sister Anne McCarthy

Review of *Thomas Merton's Encounter with Buddhism and Beyond: His Interreligious Dialogue, Inter-Monastic Exchanges, and Their Legacy* by Jaechan Anselmo Park, published in *THE MERTON SEASONAL: A QUARTERLY*, Volume 45, #1, Spring 2020.

"Nonviolence: Building Gospel-based Communities Addressing Situations of Violence Today," published in *Expositions* 13.2 (2019) 94–112.

Sister Mary Ellen Plumb

Reflections on mourning included in article by Liz Allen in the *ERIE Reader*: "Grieving in the Era of the Coronavirus—How Erieites can find help coping in exceedingly difficult times."

Global Sisters Report (<https://www.globalsistersreport.org/>), an independent and non-profit online source of news and information about Catholic sisters:

Sister Susan Doubet

Reveille at 5:45 a.m. (January 22, 2020)

Postulant Jacqueline Small

Love, loss, communal life in an intergenerational community (May 7, 2020)

Sister Linda Romey

Sharing sandboxes for heart-training (March 19, 2020)



CARE

The mission of the Committee for Alternative Resource Energy (CARE) is to positively respond to the challenge of climate change by serving as a resource for the Benedictine Sisters of Erie as they seek to reach their goal of carbon neutrality, and by promoting sustainable energy use by the general public.

An integral ecology includes taking time to recover a serene harmony with creation, reflecting on our lifestyle and our ideals, and contemplating the Creator who lives among us.

—Francis, *Laudato Si*, 225

Community Enters Conservation Easement

By Annette Marshall, OSB
Committee for Alternative Resource Energy

Fishing Anyone?

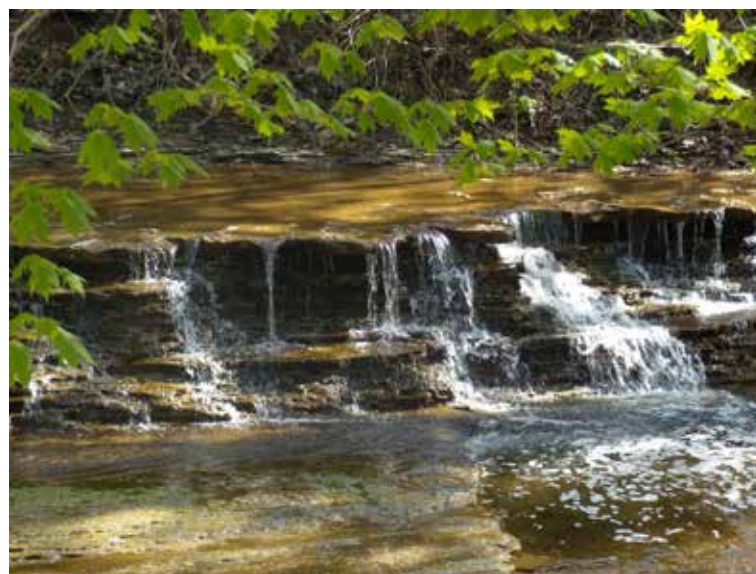
The Benedictine Sisters of Erie recently entered into a conservation easement agreement with the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission. The easement guarantees that the portion of Seven Mile Creek that flows through the community's Glinodo Center will remain available for fishing with area restrictions and usage requirements to keep the area litter free and in its natural state.

By purchasing the easement from the Benedictine Community, the Fish and Boat Commission fulfilled part of its mission, "to protect, conserve, and enhance the Commonwealth's aquatic resources and provide fishing and boating opportunities." Besides receiving a financial benefit, the sisters recognize that such a trust is a guarantee that the riparian zone along the creek will remain green space for generations to come.

In addition to preserving places for wildlife to thrive and providing walking trails for us to enjoy, conservation easements can be a significant way to address climate change. Local organizations such as land conservancies can help landowners investigate options to preserve forests, meadows and other green spaces. For example, trees are amazingly effective at removing CO₂ from the atmosphere yet in the past 50 years half of the world's tropical forests have been lost. Tree planting is available to most of us, whether in our own yards, or in parts of the world suffering from excessive deforestation. Let's hear it for the trees! Let's plant them and let's protect them – for the habitat they provide, for their beauty, and for the positive effect they have on climate change.

Despite earlier denials, it is now abundantly clear that **human activity** is the root cause of the climate crisis. A very gradual warming of the planet has been happening since the last Ice Age. However, continuously increasing greenhouse gas emissions, especially CO₂ and methane, ushered in by the Industrial Revolution have far surpassed what the planet can absorb. "Our negligence has catapulted climate change from an existential challenge to the dire crisis it is now. Every day that passes is one day less that we have to stabilize our increasingly fragile planet which is now on its way to becoming uninhabitable for humans." (Figueroes, Christiana and Rivett-Carnac, Tom; *The Future We Choose – Surviving the Climate Crisis*, 2020).

What can we do? We can **change the human activity** that brought on this crisis.



A bit of good news:

Fewer flights, cars, and factory emissions during the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic showed large, measurable reductions in air pollution across the world, particularly in areas with dense populations. NASA satellite images showed that the U.S. Northwest had a 30% or more reduction. Imagine what could happen if industry and transportation fuels were changed to renewables.

What's been happening in the monastery . . .

Since mid-March the Benedictine Sisters of Erie have taken the COVID 19 pandemic orders seriously and have made every effort to stay at home. We have continued our ministries, doing as much as possible virtually and keeping physical distancing when on-line response was not the answer. At the monastery we have maintained our daily *horarium* which has promoted health of mind, body and spirit. Specific times for prayer and *lectio* and meals—the routines with which we are familiar as monastics, serve us well. And with some ingenuity the “in-between” times have been very rich and full. We have played games, watched movies and laughed together. We have enjoyed putting together a “Quarantine Follies,” and participating in art lessons, joining writing circles and book clubs, taking “trips” to new countries and watching videos that have expanded our understanding of the Benedictine values we hold dear. We have been able to do more than anything we had previously experienced.



has been quite a ride and it is not over yet. We look forward to the day when we will be able to re-open our monastery to guests and visitors. But until that time comes, we move forward in faith and are grateful for the many blessings that are ours as together we seek God in community and respond in prayer and ministry. The pictures shown here capture a few of our many activities and give you a view into what's been happening in the monastery.

Creativity doesn't wait for that perfect moment. It fashions its own perfect moments out of ordinary ones." —*Bruce Garrabrandt*





Your talent is God's gift to you. What you do with it is your gift back to God.

—Leo Buscaglia

Quarantine Fallies





O Word of God, come into this space.



Interactive / Reflective Prayer
Taizé Chants and Gesture

My soul is at rest in God.



Gloria in excelsis Deo!



Let our hearts
overflow with love!



Alleluia!

The true sign of intelligence is not knowledge but imagination. —Albert Einstein



A trip to New Zealand



Mask-Makers



*Coffee House Singer
(Every Monday Night Supper)*





From the
Director
By Ann Comstock, Oblate

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



Friends helping friends, businesses helping nonprofits

What happens when you mention to a friend that the monastery is running low on back-ordered sanitizer? Your friend has a friend and low and behold, a need is met—thanks to Mazza Vineyards and Five & 20 Spirits and Brewing.

It all started when Sister Dianne Sabol shared the problem with Oblate Margaret Kloecker. It just so happens Margaret is a friend of Kathie Klemen Mazza, a classmate of hers since 3rd grade through high school. By the way, all three attended St. Benedict Academy (SBA), classes '70 and '68 respectively. And as you well know, the SBA Alum truly upholds faithfulness, generosity, outreach and care. The Alum has been ongoing in their contributions to the community's ministries since St. Benedict Academy closed in 1988.

"Kathie Klemen Mazza and her husband are the owners of Mazza Vineyards and Five & 20 Spirits & Brewing," explained Sister Dianne. "Desiring to help their community they gave their distillery a new purpose and have begun producing hundreds of gallons of hand sanitizer to help with the shortage brought about by the coronavirus pandemic." Margaret shared: "When I asked Kathie if she might help out the sisters, she responded enthusiastically and she immediately put me in touch with the staff at Five & 20. After conferring with Sister Diane Rabe (Monastery Coordinator and SBA Class of '69) I picked up 10 gallons of sanitizer and delivered it to the monastery."



Sister Dianne Sabol, SBA '70, receives sanitizer donation from Five & 20 Spirits & Brewing courtesy of Kathie Klemen Mazza, SBA'68.



Margaret Kloecker, SBA '68, delivers hand sanitizer to the monastery.

A group effort among friends who just happened to be SBA Alum, responded to a need at the monastery; a gift was given and gratefully received. The kindness will not be forgotten. "Five & 20 is donating the sanitizer to nonprofits and community organizations that need it and the Erie Benedictines are certainly grateful to them for this donation in response to our need," said Sister Anne Wambach, prioress. "Friends helping friends, businesses helping nonprofits—a ray of light in a time that threatens darkness and proof that the SBA spirit remains alive and well. Thank you, one and all."



"Spirit of SBA" is alive and well.

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. 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). Call Ann Comstock at 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 St. 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.

High School Reunion: Reminisce and Remember • Celebrate and Have Fun

The Class of 1975 – 45th Class Reunion

SAVE THE NEW DATE

October 8—10, 2021



*If you have any questions, comments,
or suggestions contact*
Evelyn Grabinski, '75
egrabinski@gmail.com
973-390-0387



SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS 2020 – 2021

For the 2020 – 2021 school years, we awarded 25 scholarships of \$250, a total of \$6,250, to alumnae relatives who will be attending Catholic grade schools or high schools in the fall of 2020. These awards have exceeded \$86,000 since we began the program in 1991. Funding for these scholarships come from monies raised by the Alumnae Association at the annual Christmas Party and the Cash Bingos.

WINNER	SCHOOL	ALUMNAE	RELATIONSHIP
Sadie Messer	Mercyhurst Prep	Barbara Berdis '61	Granddaughter
Auhjinae Dunn	Villa Maria Academy	Sandra Caldwell '67	Niece
Moir Dieteman	Villa Maria Academy	Anna Dieteman '88	Daughter
Emma Adams	Villa Maria Academy	Catherine Adams '90	Daughter
Kasey Kensill	Cathedral Prep	Andrea Kensill '91	Son
Hailey Zielinski	St. George School	Patricia Zielinski '66	Granddaughter
Roman Luniewski	Our Lady of Peace	Edith Luniewski '86	Son
Andrew Barczynski	Incarnate Word	Jeannette Barczynski '65	Grandson
Morgan Cathryn Sigler	St. James School	Mary Sigler '61	Granddaughter
Henry Dvorznak	St. George School	Joanie Froess '68	Grandson
Theresa Stull	Villa Maria Academy	Pat D'Annibale '69	Niece
Santino Montefiori	Cathedral Prep	Deborah Montefiori '83	Son
Rachel Ciotti	Mercyhurst Prep	Jennifer Ciotti '89	Daughter
David Kaliszewski	Mercyhurst Prep	Rita Kaliszewski '60	Grandson
Lucas Loeffler	Blessed Sacrament	Carrie Loeffler '91	Son
Grace Sidelinger	St. James School	Joanne Sidelinger '68	Granddaughter
Dominick Scarpino	Cathedral Prep	Patricia Scarpino '59	Grandson
Hannah Steppic	Villa Maria Academy	Adrienne Steppic '84	Daughter
Michael Kuzma	Cathedral Prep	Maureen Hubert '73	Cousin
Lillia Dahlkemper	Mercyhurst Prep	Joyce Dahlkemper '64	Granddaughter
Damien Vazquez	St. James School	Darlene Vazquez '90	Son
Conor Amendola	Mercyhurst Prep	Bernadine Amendola '61	Grandson
Caroline Sitter	St. George School	Michele Sitter '87	Granddaughter
Calli Rajasenan	Blessed Francis Seelos	Rosemarie Rajasenan '89	Daughter
Michael T. Popovich	Mercyhurst Prep	Marcia Popovich '87	Son
Morgan Cathryn Sigler	St. James School	Mary Sigler '61	Granddaughter

Let us pray...

For our SBA alumnae who
passed into eternity—

Sister Irene Warchol, OSB	'43
Eileen C. May Mele	'49
Sister Dorothy Szczypinski, OSB	'49
Agnes Ruza Priscaro	'53
Rita L. Krasinski Desser	'54
Theresa D. Narducci Reisenweber	'54
Geraldine L. Kinecki Tomczak	'55
Evelyn A. Zmijewski Gostomski	'55
Mary Ann Benecki Toohey	'55
Barbara Finchio Carpenter	'57
Sister Kathryn Disbrow, OSB	'57
Emelie L. Marchini DeSanti	'58
Mary Elizabeth Kaliszewski Baker	'59
Martha Wozniak Markiewicz	'59
Christine Szumigala	'60
Joan Angelotti Heubel	'60
Dianne Bernard	'63
Margaret Kearney Krumpke	'68
Jean Sardini Fink	'72
Agnes P. Borowicz Majczyk	

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

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

the Mount

