We shall awaken from our dullness and rise vigorously toward justice.

If we fall in love with creation deeper and deeper, we will respond to its endangerment with passion.

— Hildegard of Bingen
12th century Benedictine Abbess
Welcome to our Benedictine story
We are grateful you’ve come and look forward to this time together. We hope that when you leave these pages, you won’t be the same person you were when you entered into them, that you’ll have some new ideas and bigger questions to carry into the next weeks and months.

Let me introduce those who assisted with the creation of our Summer 2021 story: The Mount Editorial Committee. Newly formed, this group of diverse, creative, articulate and questioning women have agreed to help shape the content of The Mount twice a year. They are:

Susan Doubet, OSB
Joanne Cahill, Oblate
Annette Marshall, OSB
Katie Gordon
Annie Rosenthal
Michelle Basista

You will notice a variety of contributors in this issue of The Mount. One name, however, appears a few times. Sister Jacqueline Sanchez-Small is in her Benedictine novitiate year and as part of that experience, she spends a few hours a week in a selected ministry. These past months that ministry has been Development and Communications. Because she is a good thinker and an insightful writer, I sought her collaboration in putting this issue together. She has also been helping in the area of Development—if you are a monthly donor, you may have received a thank you call from her. We are grateful for Sister Jacqueline’s contributions and have enjoyed having her with us.

For anyone looking to learn what the novitiate is about, or how to become a Benedictine Sister of Erie, please visit eriebenedictines.org/become-benedictine or scan the QR code here.

And what are these QR codes that you’ll see scattered throughout this issue? QR stands for “quick response” and the codes hold scannable information, in this case, websites. Use the camera on your tablet or phone (it may require an app) to scan the QR code and go directly to the website. Or, type the website into your browser and skip the QR codes.

We hope you enjoy reading this issue. My email address is communications@eriebenedictines.org should you need to contact me.

Thank you,

Linda Romey, OSB
Editor

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Photographers: Susan Freitag, OSB, Ann Muczynski, OSB, Linda Romey, OSB, Ann Hoffman, OSB, Susan Doubet, OSB; Pages 4-5: ID 149724075 © Iryna Verhelesova | Dreamstime.com; and Contributed and Archive Photos

Editor and layout & design: Linda Romey, OSB

Editorial Committee: Susan Doubet, OSB, Joanne Cahill, Oblate, Katie Gordon, Annette Marshall, OSB, Annie Rosenthal, and Michelle Basista

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

Corporate Commitment of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie: We commit ourselves 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.

Thank you to Printing Concepts, Inc., for the printing of this issue of The Mount in Erie, PA.
Welcome to our Summer 2021 issue of The Mount. We are grateful to be visiting you once again through the words and images on these pages and the corresponding expansion of their themes that you will find on our website, eriebenedictines.org.

The past year of pandemic living has brought us to encounter in new ways one of the three vows we take as Benedictines: *conversatio morum*. This promise is often translated as “conversion of life” and it means that we choose to spend our lives in an ongoing process of conversion that will bring us closer to God and others. It is a vow of openness that commits us to face up to the demands of growth and change. In other words, we have vowed to embrace change as a way of life. In our Benedictine tradition, we act from the belief that each day, we begin again.

Living in pandemic conditions has forced us to deal with some harsh realities at personal and societal levels. COVID, by stopping life as we know it, has forced us to admit that we are not in control and that life is out of balance. We have been invited to reflect on some necessary changes as we move forward to a “new normal.”

This has been the subject of community conversations at the monastery as we determine ways to respond to the waves of inequities uncovered by the pandemic. These new realities cause us to look at ourselves, our world, and be challenged by God and others. We can take our new awareness of white privilege, of the technology gap, of food and housing insecurity, of how quickly the earth responds when exhaust is not spewed into the atmosphere, and we can change.

Change does not come easily. It often involves loss, lament, letting go of a way of life, of security, the reshaping of relationships, and the learning of new behaviors. Grieving those losses is a necessary part of moving through change if we want to emerge whole and healthy on the other side.

We must let go, but there is always hope. There is hope because we can change. The Spirit of God is with us laboring to bring about a new creation. We can stop the “we’ve always done it this way” mantra and we can change. As we put into practice the lessons learned from the pandemic, we can do things in new ways that create a more just world. We can, as Gandhi said, “be the change that you want to see in the world.”

Benedict’s challenge of ongoing conversion is daily before our eyes. May the Spirit be your companion as you face the challenges to change in your life. Thank you for your support and friendship as we walk this path together. We believe that with God all things are possible!

Sister Stephanie Schmidt
Prioress
“Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High/will be safe from the plague that stalks through the darkness,” wrote the author of Psalm 91 some 3,000 years ago. As the COVID-19 pandemic spread in early 2020, hundreds of modern-day psalmists logged on to Monasteries of the Heart and drafted their own poems, expressing shaky but strong faith in God, fears and hopes, and unexpected blessings found while sheltering in place. They shared them with other members of the online monastery, an outreach of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie that began in 2011.

With churches, schools, libraries, and restaurants shuttered indefinitely, there was a palpable sense of loneliness and uncertainty across the country and the world. But the Monasteries of the Heart site offered its 23,000 members a familiar place where they could gather to exchange insights and questions, and pray with images, poems, and lessons.

In the early days of the pandemic, the Monasteries of the Heart staff offered a free eCourse, “Songs of Lament and Hope,” facilitated by Sister Mary Ellen Plumb and Oblate Joanne Cahill. They led more than 1,000 participants in reading and praying with the psalms—the ancient poetic prayers of Jewish and Christian communities—and responding by writing their own psalms. “The psalms, the backbone of Benedictine communal prayer, are known for their emotional rawness, and for expressing a total dependence on God, even in the midst of terrible suffering. They offer a template for today's seekers to find the words for their own experiences in a confusing, frightening time,” explained then-staff member Sister Jacqueline Sanchez-Small.

As pandemic restrictions begin to lift and vaccines are becoming available, Lachlan M., the writer of the psalm shared here, reflects, “Now, in the last few weeks, we are in a stage that is like the beginning. In Nova Scotia, we are again in full lockdown with COVID-19 variants out of control. My partner and I are trying to work from home in a small apartment with a six-year-old in online school and an 18-month-old, slow in his development, at home from daycare. It is a challenge, back in the small rhythm of locked down life, facing uncertainty and fear for our family and community. Naming the loss and pain, and turning attentively to the breathing, life-giving, holding presence of God in this unstable moment is my refuge, my stronghold, my shelter. Living in the monastery of a family in lockdown is the reality and having lament and hope in moving through this gives me strength to be the love that is needed around me.”

Visit monasteriesoftheheart.org or scan the QR code.

Participant Lachlan M., after praying with Psalm 46, wrote:

God is with us.
Holding us gently.
In disruption, in fear, in pain.
As the ground melts and flows away,
And what was solid crumbles around us,
And what we thought we knew is lost.
God is with us.
Holding us gently.
The borders of the world as we understood it,
Have been dissolved.
And we are floating in uncertainty.
But here there is a space.
And in the stilling breath, we find you with us.
God is with us.
Holding us gently.
There is ground we are anchored to.
The threads have not been severed.
When we turn, and look and breathe,
You are always holding us gently.
God is with us.
Holding us gently.
Raising Holy Sparks
Our Call to Tikkun

By Adam Horowitz, Guest Columnist

For all of its devastation, perhaps we can also view the pandemic as a rite of passage—an invitation to cross the threshold between what is and what could be. Unlike a traditional rite of passage, however, no one is holding this container for us, and so we are paradoxically tasked with being both initiates and guides. It is on each of us to incorporate the learnings of this time into our own hearts, minds, and bodies such that, as we return to the public sphere, we can re-form our collective body according to a set of principles more deeply rooted in the truth of our interdependence.

At this threshold—and every threshold—we have an opportunity to recommit ourselves to balancing our soul qualities to align with our highest highest purpose (tikkun hanefesh) and to partnering with God in the healing and repair of the world (tikkun olam). These ancient Hebrew phrases have been interpreted in many ways over the millennia—animating the lives of ancient mystics and modern activists both—and provide a lens through which we can direct our action today, as we emerge from the pandemic.

Many Jewish mystical teachings draw from 16th century Kabbalist Isaac Luria’s explanation of the “shattering of the vessel.” A unity underlies everything, but early on in the process of creation, the divine vessel shattered into innumerable pieces. Sparks of holiness were concealed within everything in the material world. Our task is to see and draw out those sparks, revealing the underlying unity through spiritual attention and ethical action. In so doing, we participate in acts of tikkun (repair or mending), “raising holy sparks” and making possible more wholeness on both spiritual and material levels.

The Hebrew phrase tikkun olam ascended into contemporary consciousness in the 1960s as subsets of American Jews engaged in a process of spiritual renewal rooted in the call of prophetic justice. Throughout the Civil Rights and Environmental Movements the term gained traction and helped focus attention on the spiritual imperative to engage in the healing of the world, by partnering with God to bring about divine principles of justice (tzedek), compassion (chesed), and peace (shalom).

The pandemic has further revealed profound inequities and precarities already present in our society—and, for many of us in this time of isolation, also revealed the fissures and fears in our own hearts and souls. Our invitation now is to bring this lens of tikkun as we draw out learnings from this liminal time and bring intention to charting a path of reincorporation that does not equate to a return to normal.

So, let us ask ourselves: In our own souls and in the world around us, what has been revealed about what needs mending? As our lives and communities open up in the months ahead, how might we see each choice point as an opportunity to live and act in a way that leads to healing and repair? And, in a time when we can’t necessarily count on our pandemic-besieged religious, cultural, and civic institutions to hold the necessary space for communal transformation, how might we each dispatch ourselves as guides for this rite of passage? How can we support others in emerging from the pandemic with deeper courage, compassion, and commitment, rooted in the reality of this year’s experience of loss and interconnectedness? In these complex and troubled times, there are no clear paths, but a commitment to tikkun on both the spiritual and material planes can help us find our way.

Adam Horowitz is a co-founder of Nuns & Nones, Taproot, and the U.S. Department of Arts and Culture. For more resources on creating ritual to make meaning and move through this pandemic, visit nunsandnones.org/portal or scan the QR code here.
The Benedictine commitment to our earth is coordinated by the Care for the Earth committee: (seated, L to R) Sisters Judith Trambley, Annette Marshall, Jacqueline Sanchez-Small, (standing, L to R) Sisters Kathy McCarthy, Pat Lupo, and Cindy Hoover. They will help the community be faithful to its goal to strengthen, deepen and expand our living of the Benedictine tradition as we engage with renewed urgency to reverse climate change and foster care for the earth and all creatures, through behavior change and through our individual and corporate actions.

The Benedictine Sisters have joined the effort to plant one tree for every Erie County resident—275,000. On May 4, sisters, oblates, and volunteers planted 100 trees along Glinodo’s expanse of Sevenmile Creek in order to slow erosion. “We will also be planting 170 trees on the hill at Glinodo, across East Lake Road from the monastery,” said Sister Annette Marshall. “This will be a tree nursery; when the trees are big enough—but not too big—they’ll be transplanted to their permanent homes.”

The massive tree-planting effort, called ReLeaf, is an initiative of the Lake Erie Arboretum at Frontier Park (LEAF). Vern Peterson, LEAF executive director, Rosa Fatica-Showers, program director, and Jamie Keim, creative director, guided the Benedictine effort. “ReLeaf and its many partners, including the Erie County Conservation District, Neighborhood Art House and Keystone 10 Million Trees to name a few, hope to plant 275,000 trees within the next 5-10 years. About 3,500 trees have been planted since fall 2020. The 271 trees planted with the Benedictine sisters help us move one step closer to our goal! Thank you to all of the sisters and volunteers who planted with us!” said Rosa. Sister Pat Lupo is part of ReLeaf education. “It was great to expand the riparian buffer along Sevenmile Creek as part of the ReLeaf project,” she said. Visit releaferie.org to learn more or scan the QR code.

When we plant trees, we plant seeds of peace and seeds of hope.
—Wangari Maathai
Care for the Earth

Rosa Fatica-Showers and Jamie Keim, LEAF
Sisters Therese Glass and Pat Witulski
Sisters Stephanie Schmidt, Ann Muczynski, and volunteer Mary Nelson
Volunteer Erin Carey, Sister Val Luckey, and volunteer Oblate Paul Groucutt
Sisters Anne McCarthy and Colleen Leathley
Sisters Diane Rabe and Kathy McCarthy
Vern Peterson, LEAF Executive Director

Sisters Stephanie Schmidt, Ann Muczynski, and volunteer Mary Nelson
Sisters Therese Glass and Pat Witulski
Nothing felt normal in the early days of January 2021. With the monastery in the thick of a COVID-19 outbreak, we were unable to gather for meals or prayer. Although my case of COVID was mild, I was feverish and achy. Desperate for a shred of peace, I went on very slow walks through our woods every afternoon. The pine trees, with snow covering each limb and outlining every needle, became a chapel for me in those weeks, quiet and welcoming and sacred. The pandemic and civil unrest in our country were still very real, but they weren’t the only things that were real: beauty was real, too, and so were the mysterious but dependable cycles of death and birth. I would come back after each walk able to breathe a little bit easier.

One evening, another sister asked if I knew where the woods had come from. I confessed that I had no idea—the thought that there could be a story behind the woods had never crossed my mind. She told me that Sister Mary (William) Hoffman, who recently celebrated her 70th jubilee, planted 7,000 trees on our property in the early 1970s, just after the community moved to the monastery on East Lake Road from the former motherhouse in inner-city Erie. “It’s a great story,” the sister told me. “You should ask her.”

Sister Mary had done her planting in the middle of another very turbulent time in history: the tail end of the Vietnam War, the beginning of the modern ecological movement, and our community’s transition through Vatican II renewal. Maybe, I thought, she would have something to tell me about carrying out a dream that improves a hurting world.

Sister Mary is a person without artifice, someone who speaks plainly and sees clearly. She told me, matter-of-factly, about how the builders’ lack of awareness for the earth left the monastery grounds “scarred,” and how, after a summer spent making the lawn fit for grass and gardens, she thought it would be nice to start planting evergreen saplings, which she could get from the state of Pennsylvania, $7 per 1,000 trees. Girls from the St. Benedict Academy Science Club came out to plant with her after school.

When I asked questions like, “What was your vision for the woods?” or “What’s your hope for our land going into the future?” she just smiled with one eyebrow raised, and said things like, “To cover the ground,” and “I never worry about things like that. We have wonderful women here to make decisions.” We had been talking for over an hour, and while I had a much better understanding of her and of the history of the woods, I was no closer to having a sense of what it would take to preserve the trees and use our land for the benefit of the whole planet. She was not going to give me a strategic plan or a formula to produce hope or creativity.

“One more question,” I said. “What advice would you give a novice today?” She paused for a moment, thinking, her eyes fixed on the evergreen trees out her window. “Work hard,” she said. “No, no—not just ‘work hard.’ Know what you want, and work hard to get it.”

I told her how grateful I was for her work, how meaningful the trees are to me. “I hope you know we younger sisters thank you for it,” I said.

“Then keep it,” she said. Know what you want. Work hard to get it. Keep the important things that others have handed on to you.

Sister Mary did not give me blueprints for laying out possible futures for the community’s land. She didn’t offer any tips on how to get a diverse group of people onto the same page in executing a long-term project. She made no mention of how to keep the spark of hope burning in a time clouded by private and public challenges. But she told me that, if you don’t get in your own way, if you’re open to trying something new even if you can’t see quite how it will work out, beautiful things can happen.
Emmaus Soup Kitchen made sure their guests had food to eat throughout the pandemic. Staff and volunteers continued to cook and serve with modifications suggested by the Health Department. Many Emmaus guests would have gone hungry without this daily meal. Whether packed in to-go boxes and handed through the window or gift cards distributed for a hot meal at a local eatery when a COVID scare closed the kitchen for deep cleaning, Emmaus made sure food was available even in the “food desert.” We asked Breanna Mekuly, who does presentations around the city on food insecurity, to give us an overview of the issue for *The Mount*. “There’s so much to say,” she wrote, “we could do follow-ups on food insecurity and health, and the healthcare system, and budgeting, and ‘food deserts’ vs. ‘food apartheid,’ and transportation, etc.” COVID has exposed many more gaps in equality with food being one of them.

Our brains are designed to ensure the body is well-fed. When we’re hungry we feel crabby, angry, ill. We struggle to focus on anything other than food. Our performance in school or the workplace decreases.

At the Emmaus Ministries Kids Cafe, children who struggle with hunger on a regular basis have a harder time paying attention at school. At St. Benedict Education Center, clients struggling with hunger on a regular basis have a harder time finding and retaining jobs.

The continual fear or state of being without reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable and nutritious food is called “food insecurity.” A “food desert” is a location in which more than 33% of residents live below poverty level and the closest supermarket that regularly stocks fresh produce and healthy foods is further than a mile away.

The County of Erie has identified 12 food deserts, 10 of which are within the city limits. Our Benedictine ministries in the city are located within one of these food deserts. The closest supermarket is two miles away. About 50% of residents in this census track do not own a vehicle. Almost 70% do receive SNAP (food stamp) benefits. Ergo, our guests or clients may have the financial support to purchase healthy and nutritious food but might also lack reliable access to a supermarket.

In Erie, grocery stores are located on the outskirts of the city whereas a high concentration of small convenience stores are located downtown and in its surrounding neighborhoods. For the most part, these convenience stores stock highly-processed, packaged, high-fat, high-sugar foods and drinks while lacking healthy meal options. SNAP recipients can use their benefits at 100 or so of these convenience stores in the city; but only six have agreed to offer...
Brothers and Sisters in Humanity

An interview with Taha Najem, Workforce Readiness Specialist, St. Benedict Education Center (SBEC), by Linda Romey, OSB

You are from Baghdad... what's your home like?

I grew up in the west central part of Iraq, an area that is very green with many orchards, warm but not hot. Other parts of Iraq are desert but not where I lived. After school I’d go to the orchard with friends and teachers. We’d sit by the river, have a fire, make tea and food. Here I only see friends on the weekends. Even funerals are on weekends. I miss the orchards, getting together, our food. And walking. Sometimes we would walk with our teachers, hours just walking and talking. We didn’t feel the pressure of time.

Every week four or five families came together—one brings rice, another eggs, another chicken. We came together, not just for the food but to play games and to chat. For when I talk to you, my burden releases. What is inside me, releases. I miss that. But it’s different there now, that was in the 1970s and 80s.

And you studied English?

My desire was to be an English teacher. During summer holidays, I would go to the orchard and work with my father, then help my mother clean the carpets, and play some soccer. After that I would read English for an hour or two, because my desire to learn it was so great. In college I studied English and English literature. When it was time to do my service in the Iraqi military, I had only 90 days of basic training because English, math, and Arabic teachers were excused to teach. You know, I did so well because I had much desire, I wanted to do something that would help others. Since 1994 I have helped others by teaching English.

How did you come to work for the U.S. military?

My friend told me, “Go take the test to translate for the U.S. military, earn extra income for your family.” We were struggling under the economic blockade (1990-2003), and so I said yes. I passed the tests. That was in 2003 and I worked for the commander for civil affairs and we went to orphanages, neighborhood meetings with the head of tribes, and to hospitals.

Wasn’t this work with the U.S. government dangerous?

Yes, there was danger. I wore a vest and carried a pistol at times, I was sometimes targeted. I worked with different teams, every year with different persons, and it was challenging and helped me learn to adapt. In 2006 the sectarian violence and killing increased. My boss told me the U.S. would give me a visa to leave. My family did not want to go. In 2008, it was more dangerous. I told my family I was leaving, and we came together, my four kids and my wife and me, we came to Erie.

What did the violence we saw in Washington in January feel like to you?

I moved here for safety, for security. So, when I see that I feel shocked, there is something wrong. I was shocked because back in Iraq, America is a supreme

healthier food and beverage options. Erie is also home to a smattering of international markets that meet several needs of residents in the area yet are not deemed “supermarkets” by the USDA because they do not supply enough fresh produce.

Supporters of addressing food insecurity are just as concerned with filling empty stomachs as what stomachs are being filled with. A daily diet of highly-processed, packaged, high-fat, high-sugar foods can sustain a life but drastically increases one’s potential for long-term health problems including diabetes, heart issues and obesity. These health problems also have significant impact on the overall health care system.

But even if all our ministries’ clients and guests had the financial means and reliable access to a supermarket, Erie’s food issues wouldn’t magically disappear. Creating a grocery list and meal plan, budgeting, and preparing food are new experiences to some. I’ve met families at the soup kitchen who have never prepared a meal in the way the USDA deems healthy due to lack of experience and lack of knowledge.

Breaking the cycle of food insecurity demands our creative attention in whatever sector we find ourselves working and volunteering: ensuring folks have access to reliable transportation, financial literacy and budgeting, an understanding of health and healthcare systems, meal planning and preparation, nutritious fast food options, and recognizing the direct correlation between hunger and school/workplace performance.

It is important to note that the term “food desert” has been highly criticized by some food access activists who choose to use the term “food apartheid” instead. Food apartheid refers to an area in which “public policy and economic practices have created these areas that have low access to foods, and food desert does not speak to that intentionally.” — Malik Yakini, quoted in Food Apartheid: What Does Food Access Mean In America? by Isabel Lu, Center for Nutrition Studies, https://nutritionstudies.org/food-apartheid-what-does-food-access-mean-in-america/

Article sources include Eric County Health Department and American Community Survey (ACS), conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau.
power, they don’t expect this. My friends were worried, but I told them, Erie is safe. In my culture, I don’t go out when it is dark, except for emergencies and if I see people crowding, I avoid that because in Iraq bombs go off. If I see a crowd like the animal market (The Ghazil animal market in Baghdad where a deadly bombing occurred on November 23, 2007.), I don’t go. My son wanted to go to that animal market, I told him we won’t go. Then it was bombed. I learned to be cautious.

What helped you adapt to a new country and culture?

Coming from a country that is war-torn, it teaches you a lot. If you come to another country and don’t know anyone, you help others. Put yourself in their shoes. Imagine that. When someone comes to me, if I can help, I will do it. It’s how my mother and father raised me, and my schooling. Others from my culture, they are tough, even when they go to Walmart, you see the men walk first, then the women and children follow. That is their culture. For me, I say no, I say to the wife, kids, you walk in front of me, I walk behind you and protect you. I am watching always.

As a translator, what do you think about how words and language shape who we are?

Language transmits values. The way we use it impacts our cultural identities. It doesn’t express our thought only but shapes what we want to express. We don’t need to generalize. Like if a part of Iraq is not good, don’t generalize that all of Iraq is not good. Always we should think before we speak. There is a saying in Iraq: man—I mean human, he/she!—is of two kinds. Either they are your brother or sister in religion or your brother or sister in humanity. I don’t want to be biased, one time in an interview, someone said to another guy, “Are you Sunni or Shia?” and that guy was furious. “Why is he asking me that? Tell him I am a Muslim.” The other said, “I am sorry I didn’t know about the culture.” But not everyone believes we are one. They think if they are superior in education, or if they don’t understand your language, you are less. Look at your fingers, they are not the same, all are different, like people, but they are one hand!

You are resilient. How do you help others learn resilience?

I teach the refugees at SBEC to be optimistic, have faith, develop a strong network, the more people you know the better. Believe in your ability. Be confident. You have to establish goals. If you don’t have a goal, this life means nothing. Increase language skills, get a good job, a better life for children, buy a house. That helps with resilience. My early goal to be an English teacher/translator, I continue here. Because I want to do something good.

Taha Najem is a Workforce Readiness Specialist at St. Benedict Education Center where he began working in 2010. In addition, Taha works with clients in the Refugee Social Services Program, administered by Erie’s Multicultural Community Resource Center (MCRC), through a subcontracted arrangement. This collaboration between SBEC and MCRC enables Taha to address the needs of more refugees in the area.
Sister Miriam Mashank
believes that education has the power to change a soul, a city, and the world. So it’s no surprise that she has spent much of her 70 years as a Benedictine sister sharing that power with those who often were denied it: women, people living in poverty, and immigrants. From 1951 until 1970, she was a classroom teacher at Catholic schools in Oil City and North East, and at St. Benedict Academy, before studying for a Master’s Degree in Education at Boston University in 1972. From there, she began to minister at Mercyhurst University, (then Mercyhurst College) as the director of many different programs, including Developmental Education,

Sister Patricia McGreevy
made her first profession of vows as a Benedictine sister 70 years ago and has spent much of the decades since blazing trails for Catholic sisters and all women. Originally from Oil City, PA, Sister Patricia entered the Benedictine community at age 16, and trained as an educator, teaching in elementary and high schools before furthering her own education—acquiring a certification as an archivist as well as Master’s degrees in History and Church Administration. In 1991, she made community history when she became the first sister in the Diocese of Erie to earn a licentiate in canon law (JCL). She was one

Sister Marlene Bertke
entered the Benedictine Sisters of Covington, KY, in 1949. A recent high school graduate with a mischievous streak, she expected that she would be ready to leave religious life within about six weeks, but this year she marks the 70th anniversary of her first monastic profession. In her community of origin, Sister Marlene ministered as a teacher, primarily in high school math and science courses, and earned a Master’s Degree in Mathematics from the University of Notre Dame. In 1974, her passion for social justice and desire to work for peace led her to Erie, where Benedictine
of only four women enrolled in the program at the time. This training prepared Sister Patricia to become the canon lawyer, and often the only woman on staff, in the Dioceses of Richmond, VA, Dodge City, KS, Erie, PA, and Colorado Springs, CO, and to be the first woman canonist to act as Diocesan Chancellor in the United States. Sister Patricia went on to become a private canonical consultant to religious communities, helping to ensure that justice was served whenever canon law issues involving religious orders arose. She has also served the community, including as archivist, human development director, and a member of the Monastic Council. Serene and sophisticated, perceptive and witty, Sister Patricia’s presence continues to bless her community, family, and many friends.

sisters were active in the Pax Center, an intentional living community focused on Christian nonviolence. Sister Marlene came to the Pax Center intending to learn as much as she could about their mission and their practices, with the hopes of starting a similar movement in Kentucky. Within a few years, she felt called to transfer her vows to the Benedictine Sisters of Erie. In the years that followed, she worked zealously for peace, ministering with Pax Christi USA, serving as associate director of the Alliance for International Monasticism (USA) for 16 years, and co-founding Benedictines for Peace. In addition to establishing the Take Back the Site Vigils and participating in countless demonstrations against war and injustice, Sister Marlene taught English as a Second Language and continues to care deeply for the rights of immigrants and refugees. She was named an Erie Times-News Person of the Year in 2016.
Celebrate

Sister Audrey Steff

is a story-teller at heart, and the 60 years since her first monastic profession as a Benedictine sister have given her enough material for many, many stories. Her ministry as a teacher and principal took Sister Audrey to Catholic schools all over the Erie Diocese during the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, including St. Stephen’s in Oil City, Sacred Heart and St. Joseph’s in Sharon, Immaculate Conception in Clarion, Mount Calvary in Erie, and St. Boniface in Wattsburg. Later, she became a teacher at St. Benedict Education Center, working with adults—including immigrants and refugees from all over the world—who were receiving job skills training and learning English. They found in Sister Audrey a caring, committed instructor with a patient, listening ear, someone who was eager to learn from them, not just teach. After retiring from that ministry in 2017, Sister Audrey has been able to spend more time turning wood, producing beautiful works of art in the form of candle holders, bowls, boxes, and more. Her open heart, infectious laughter, and gift for friendship are a blessing to her community and to all who know her.

Sister Rose Ann Kolbas

is celebrating 60 years as a Benedictine Sister of Erie. She entered the community a few years after graduating from St. Benedict Academy, and soon became a teacher there herself. She also served as an educator at St. Stephen’s in Oil City and Venango Christian High School, before shifting to administrative and secretarial work. Sister Rose Ann brought her organized, efficient approach to her ministries at Camp Glinodo, Erie Community Food Bank, later Second Harvest Food Bank, and Mount Saint Benedict Monastery. She continues to minister in the monastery’s Business Office. She is a gentle, thoughtful presence, a true seeker of God, a gifted composer, lyricist, and cantor whose musical abilities have enriched community worship for decades, and above all else, a kind and devoted friend. “I feel so blessed! I live with a dynamic, prophetic, talented, visionary group of women religious who challenge me to grow, support me in all my endeavors, and stretch me beyond anything I could imagine myself becoming,” said Sister Rose Ann. “God has been so good to me!”
Sister Mary Lou Kownacki,
a Benedictine Sister of Erie for 60 years, does nothing halfway. She brings passion, creativity, and total commitment to everything she does, from the teaching ministry she undertook as a young sister to the peace and justice work that has filled the majority of her life. After spending the 1960s as a teacher in several Catholic grade schools, and a short stint as a feature writer for the *Erie Times-News*, Sister Mary Lou became a founding member of the Pax Center, an intentional living community that brought together sisters, activists, and people in need, united by a desire to live the Gospel. She also served as the National Coordinator of Pax Christi USA, the head of Benedictines for Peace, and the Executive Director of the Alliance for International Monasticism, working through each of these organizations to challenge Church and civic leaders to find nonviolent solutions to local and global problems. She helped to shape her Benedictine community as well, working as Director of Development and Communications, serving on the Monastic Council for a total of 18 years, and founding several ministries, including the Neighborhood Art House, which gives free art and music lessons to children living in poverty, Emmaus Soup Kitchen and Food Pantry, and Benetvision and Monasteries of the Heart, which offer contemporary spirituality resources to today’s seekers, and of which she is still director. A gifted poet, the author of award-winning books, a skillful organizer, a loyal friend, a joyful athlete, and a lover of justice, Sister Mary Lou continues to work steadily and whole-heartedly for the Reign of God on earth.

Celebrate 25 years

Sister Ann Bannon,
originally from Camp Hill, PA, marks 25 years as a Benedictine Sister of Erie this September. Sister Ann entered the Benedictine community after raising her two children, Robert and Theresa, and after working as a grade school teacher for many years. As a Benedictine, Sister Ann continued her teaching ministry at Blessed Sacrament School in Erie and the St. Benedict Child Development Center, and also served at St. Mark Catholic Center as the director of programs developed to help families after separation and divorce. Among her community, Sister Ann is known and loved for her playful sense of humor, her steady presence as receptionist, and her willingness to join in whenever a card game is being played.

Sister Patricia Hause
has been a Benedictine Sister of Erie for 25 years, time which she has spent faithfully and prayerfully working for those in need. An Erie native with a degree in social work from Gannon University and training as a Manager of Housing, the majority of her ministry has been as the administrator of Benetwood Apartments, a housing complex for low-income senior citizens sponsored by the Benedictine Sisters. Sister Patricia began her ministry as administrator in 1999 and since that time, she has helped to shape Benetwood into a community where all residents feel welcomed, known, and cared for. She has also been a member of the Independent Council on Aging for the past 15 years, was named Member of the Year in 2013, and has served as the organization’s president for the past two years. A compassionate and reflective person, Sister Patricia currently serves on the Monastic Council and is the personnel director for the community in addition to her ministry at Benetwood.
The Benedictine Sisters of Erie say a profound and humble “thank you” to our many friends, oblates, collaborators, and family who have supported us in this past year. We are blessed by your generosity and by your kindness. You supported our Benedictine lives, mission, values and ministries during a year unlike any the world has ever known. Thank you.

“If the only prayer you said in your whole life was, ‘thank you,’ that would suffice.” – Meister Eckhart

A special thank you to our 91 monthly donors, who pledge to give, both large and small, on a monthly basis. Counting on this regular income each month is important in our planning, ministries, and ability to respond to needs quickly and generously.

Thank you to –

2,580 generous individuals

Who made 5,602 gifts

Totaling $903,985 in 2020

The full and part-time members of the Development and Communications Office staff are here to invite and welcome you into the Benedictine story. Meet (front row) Annie Rosenthal, Sister Susan Freitag, Sister Irene Spacht, and Michelle Basista, and (back row) Sister Laura Beichner, Sister Linda Romey, and Ann Comstock. Reach any of us at 814-899-0614 or find additional contact information on our web page, eriebenedictines.org/support-monastery. Scan the QR code for direct access. We look forward to continuing to build relationships with our friends and benefactors.
Our friends and benefactors support a Benedictine spiritual presence that changes lives.

Hospitality that embraces all guests. • Award-winning daycare that supports families and children. • Spiritual materials to widen the vision of seekers. • Adaptive sports to include physically challenged persons. • Job training that gives hope to families. • An online monastery that forms monastic hearts. • Prayer that changes the world. • Beauty that creates a better future for inner-city children. • Housing for low-income elderly that enables community. • Environmental advocacy to help heal the earth. • Food shared with respect for the hungry. • Sisters in international Benedictine organizations and rural ministry that have an impact beyond Erie. • Work for justice that demands a more equitable future for all.

Thank you seems an insufficient sentiment in light of all you helped us accomplish in 2020. Gratitude, sincere appreciation, and remembrance in our daily prayer are our gifts back to you.
How You Can Help

There are many ways you can continue to help the Benedictine Sisters of Erie bring hope to the hopeless and light into the dark corners of our community.

- Make a cash gift. Use the inserted envelope to make your gift, go to eriebenedictines.org and click “Donate,” or use the QR code here.
- Support an upcoming fundraiser: Erie Gives Day on August 10, or the Benedictine Sisters Golf Tournament on August 16, see below.
- Sign up to become a monthly giver—counting on your monthly support is a blessing. Use the inserted envelope, go to eriebenedictines.org and click “Donate,” or use the QR code.
- Make a memorial gift to acknowledge someone special in your life.
- Remember us in your will. A bequest gift allows your estate to support Benedictine values long into the future. Your own legacy helps to ensure our community’s future. Here is sample bequest language that may be helpful to you: Upon my death, I give, devise and bequeath to the Benedictine Sisters of Erie, whose location is: 6101 E. Lake Rd. Erie, PA 16511, and whose federal tax identification number is 25-0965501, the sum of $________ or _______% of the rest of my estate.
- Make an IRA Charitable Rollover gift. If you are age 70 ½ or older you can transfer up to $100,000 from your IRA directly to the Benedictine Sisters of Erie.

If you’d like to talk with us before making any of these decisions, please contact us: Sister Linda Romey, 814-899-0614, ext 2409, lromey@eriebenedictines.org
Michelle Basista, 814-899-0614, ext 2281, mbasista@eriebenedictines.org

The Sports Page

Let’s Play Pickleball

Pickleball is returning to St. Ben’s after a year-long pandemic hiatus. Our first group, Mary Beth Stanton and her brother and sister-in-law, Tom and Karen Stanton, returned in mid-March after receiving COVID vaccinations.

“We enjoy playing pickleball at St. Ben’s. The facility is very clean with ample parking. We feel safe being able to schedule a private court time. It is a plus that the equipment is set up and we are supporting St. Ben’s Community Center with the reasonable fee,” said Mary Beth.

Morning and early afternoon court times are available. Call Sister Dianne Sabol at 814-459-2406 for more information.

Sponsor Our Golf Tournament

The 2021 Benedictine Sisters Golf Tournament will take place on Monday, August 16. There are still $1,000, $500 and $250 sponsorships available if you would like to support this fundraiser. Visit our golf tournament page to choose your sponsorship: eriebenedictines.org/golf or scan the QR code.
Sister Andrea Weidle, OSB
Perpetual Monastic Profession August 18, 1950
Died February 26, 2021

A native of Oil City, PA, Sister Andrea began teaching grade school in 1947 and taught at various schools in the Diocese of Erie until 1962 when she completed her Bachelor of Science degree in elementary education at Villa Maria College, Erie. She then taught physical education and religion at St. Benedict Academy. After retiring from teaching, Sister Andrea worked two years as an EKG technician at St. Vincent Hospital and then returned to St. Benedict Academy as a clerical assistant.

In 1980 she became an administrative assistant to her dear friend, Sister Mary Margaret Kraus, who was the administrator of the community’s Camp Glinodo on East Lake Road, across from the monastery. Sister Andrea continued her ministry at Glinodo until 1991 when she began working at Catholic Charities for the Diocese of Erie, where she remained until she retired from active ministry in 1995. As her health declined, Sister Andrea continued to be a steady and kind presence in the monastic community.

Sister Mary Bernadette Ladner, OSB
Perpetual Monastic Profession May 7, 1958
Died April 5, 2021

Sister Mary Bernadette was born in Philadelphia and baptized into the Episcopal Church and given the name Beatrice. As a young adult, she earned a BA in Religious Studies from St. Charles Borromeo Seminary in Wynnewood, PA, in 1942.

Near the end of World War II, her only brother was reported killed in action. Hoping to meet someone who had been in his division, Bea volunteered to read to injured soldiers at Valley Forge Hospital. There she met a wounded chaplain, a Benedictine monk, who introduced her to monastic life. Eventually she converted to Catholicism and entered the Benedictine Sisters of Benet Lake, WI.

Sister Mary Bernadette served as a religious educator and administrator in parishes in Wisconsin, Illinois, Michigan, and in Tucson, AZ, until she was elected prioress at Holy Family Priory in Benet Lake in 1980. She served two terms (eight years) during which time the community began a merger process with the Benedictine Sisters of Erie that was completed in 1991.

During her years as prioress, Sister Mary Bernadette completed an MA in Religious Education. Once in Erie, she taught high school and then returned to Illinois as a Director of Religious Education. In 1996 she returned to Erie and began working in the monastery library, a ministry she continued until 2016 when she retired.

We will celebrate the lives of our sisters with family and friends when the monastery reopens. Obituaries and prayers are at eriebenedictines.org/obituary-sisters or scan the QR code.
How do you answer these questions that we asked our oblates?

1. How have Benedictine values and practices sustained you through the pandemic?

2. What new learnings about resilience in the face of loss and change (of relationships, of resources, of mobility, of connection, of life...) have you gleaned during this past year?

3. Based on your learnings expressed in Question Two, how do you hope to live life differently as the world begins to emerge from the pandemic?

**OBLATE VENA EASTWOOD**

I believe that Benedictine values have sustained me since I read about the Benedictines when I was appointed Chaplain at St. Benedict’s School in Derby, UK. The fact that my home is named Benedict’s Barn says a great deal about what Benedictinism means to me. Memories of working, praying, living and laughing alongside the sisters during many visits to the monastery and with those sisters who have visited the Barn, have sustained me ever since, including through this pandemic.

Benedict’s Barn has a large garden (yard), however I have felt hemmed in despite the Barn being in the midst of farm land and the moors, with magnificent views of the Pennine Hills all around. I have a friend who lives with me at the Barn, Jean, who was classed as “clinically extremely vulnerable” during the pandemic and this has meant I have had to shield also, so we have both been in lockdown for just over a year! The large garden has become my passion and my spiritual oasis. Jean and I pray together but meditation time for me is in the garden. The peace, the joy, the rewards and disappointments are all found in this special place. Working with nature (and against it where weeds are concerned!), seeing nature at work through the seasons, helps things, situations and opportunities fall into place. I am grateful and thankful for this portion of God’s creation. However, at the time of writing this, I think of my friends in India and pray that they are safe. So many people have lost so much.

I am very practical, an energetic doer, I enjoy the physical activity of digging, planting, recycling, building in wood and stone, and mixing cement—which is very satisfying and quite permanent! I am sure this isolation will make me appreciate my friends, my home, sharing my garden produce with friends. I hope when the world is rid of this dreadful pandemic we can all focus on a more wholesome, caring, and thankful future remembering those many, many people who have lost so much, and have given so much.
I believe the Benedictine values are helping me get through the pandemic. If I look at the positive side of the pandemic it has given me more time for prayer, meditation and reading books I may not have read.

I think the pandemic has taught me to open my eyes, to see that my life is not so bad. There are so many people who have it a lot worse than I do. I have learned to appreciate what I have, I also have started to enjoy nature more, having the time to see the beauty of God’s work.

I hope to become more involved with those in need around me. To come out of my comfort zone.

OBLATE PATRICK BRADLEY

During the initial year of the pandemic I coordinated the non-clinical emergency response at the hospital where I worked. Living into Benedictine values helped relieve my stress and gave me insight into the dedication and mission focus of my co-workers, especially during the most trying times.

I saw people acting in meaningful ways, including the use of virtual visitation, to stay connected with their loved ones. I believe this has given us a deeper appreciation of relationships that prior to COVID-19 we may have taken for granted, and an urgency to renew and refresh those relationships as we put the pandemic behind us.

I will be more intentional and patient in my interactions with others and place a greater emphasis on the non-material values that nurture my spirit.

Patrick J. Bradley
Lewiston, NY

OBLATE BEVERLY McARThUR

I believe the Benedictine values are helping me get through the pandemic. If I look at the positive side of the pandemic it has given me more time for prayer, meditation and reading books I may not have read.

I think the pandemic has taught me to open my eyes, to see that my life is not so bad. There are so many people who have it a lot worse than I do. I have learned to appreciate what I have, I also have started to enjoy nature more, having the time to see the beauty of God’s work.

I hope to become more involved with those in need around me. To come out of my comfort zone.

Beverly McArthur
Mentor, OH

OBLATE MARY JANE POTOCKI

Erie, PA

The Benedictine values have helped me in so many ways...keeping faith in God and faith in people. I have also worked on the “pause” aspect of life in that I realize that I should stop and think and weigh what I say and do.

I’ve learned that I can get through anything if I remain connected in any way to family and friends. I discovered that believing in people has helped a great deal. We need to continue to believe in our life connections.

I hope to continue to be unafraid to smile at people and ask how they are doing. I do this a lot when out grocery shopping. I want to continue the attitude of caring and sharing the gifts that God has given me.

INTERESTED?

If you are interested in the Oblate Way of Life contact Sister Dianne Sabol or Oblate Joanne Cahill, co-directors. Email oblates@eriebenedictines.org, or go to eriebenedictines.org/oblates or scan the QR code.

Oblate Recognized

As part of Women’s History Month Erie Benedictine Oblate Barbara Richardson was celebrated as an “unsung heroine” by a nonprofit to which she has devoted her passion, her compassion, and her wisdom for the past 10 years. Barbara volunteers as the Board Treasurer of Holy Ground PBC, an organization that shelters and mentors young, homeless, pregnant or parenting mothers and their children in Palm Beach County, FL. However, her contributions to Holy Ground extend far beyond her work as treasurer. Barbara puts in extra hours every day, assisting Executive Director Phyllis Turner Jepson (another Erie Benedictine Oblate), often stepping up to do the work no one else wants to do. Thanks in large part to her efforts, Holy Ground is celebrating its 10th year of service this year. Despite putting in so many hours of nonprofit work, though, Barbara is never too busy to be present for anyone who needs a hand or a hug. Barbara’s selflessness, understanding, patience, and inner strength are truly values to be celebrated.
PNC awarded the Erie Benedictines a $12,500 Charitable Sponsorship to purchase equipment and infrastructure that will facilitate online programming. “We were thrilled when Vickie Lampe, PNC’s Vice President, Client and Community Relations Director, reached out to us about this possibility,” said Sister Diane Rabe, sub prioress. “We called this a grant for ‘enriching the spirit’ because with it, we will be able to offer online programming to those who are unable to come to the monastery for spiritual enrichment.”

The Pucker Family Fund, Pucker Gallery, Boston, is the sponsor of a new five-year annual Art and Spirituality speaker series that honors the Erie monastery’s late artist-in-residence Brother Thomas Bezanson and Erie Benedictine Sisters Joan Chittister and Maureen Tobin. Sister Joan Chittister delivered the opening lecture, “Beauty, Art, Spirituality: A Study in Soul, in Spirit, in Bread and in Lilies,” on February 28 via Zoom. Access Sister Joan’s presentation here: eriebenedictines.org/node/35381 or scan the QR code. The quote on the back cover is from this presentation.

Novices Colleen Leathley, Jacqueline Small, and Jen Frazer (pictured below) received grant awards of $500 each from the Ancient Order of Hibernians in America and the Ladies Ancient Order of Hibernians. The Hibernian grants assist those who are studying to serve the Church in the hopes of helping further vocations. These awards will be utilized toward the cost of the 2021 Novice and Director Institute (NADI) hosted by the North American Benedictine Vocation Formation Conference.

The Benedictine Sisters, the Sisters of St. Joseph of NWPA, and the Sisters of Mercy celebrated 2021 Catholic Sisters Week, March 8-14, with a virtual presentation and virtual food drive: Erie Catholic Sisters: Feeding the Soul, Feeding the Hungry. “The idea behind marking a week to celebrate Catholic sisters is evolving,” explained Erie Benedictine Sister Linda Romey, chairperson of the national Catholic Sisters Week committee as well as co-planner of Erie’s event. “While we recognize and honor the rich contributions of women religious to our history, we also want to emphasize a forward thrust in how we share and live those traditions today. This week is also a celebration of who we are now and our deep connections with so many people who are carrying our traditions into the future with us.”
Catholic Rural Ministry benefits from #iGiveCatholic
Erie Benedictine Sister Marian Wehler and her co-worker in Catholic Rural Ministry (CRM) of the Oil City Deanery, Sister of Mercy Tina Geiger, received more than $4,000 for CRM in donations through #iGiveCatholic and, in addition, won cash prizes from the Catholic Foundation of NWPA, facilitator of #iGiveCatholic for the Diocese of Erie, including for the ministry with the most individual donors. “With this additional funding we can financially assist folks with utility bills, medical and prescription co-pays, and transportation-related expenses. As families have been facing cut work hours or the disappearance of jobs due to COVID and the depressed economic climate in our counties, many need more help now than ever,” said the sisters.

Sisters Tina and Marian not only help with physical needs but also attend to the spiritual wellbeing of those they serve. During the pandemic they have found ways to connect with people through phone calls, cards, and book discussions on Zoom.

Save the date for 2021 #iGiveCatholic Giving Day on November 30.

The Paulist Center in Boston presented Joan Chittister with the Isaac Hecker Award for Social Justice on March 6. The ceremony included a presentation by Sister Joan on Pope Francis’ encyclical, “Fratelli Tutti.” The award recognizes outstanding commitment of a North American Catholic to building a more just and peaceful world. On May 8, Carlow University, a liberal arts college in Pittsburgh, PA, presented Sister Joan with an honorary doctorate.

Erie Arts & Culture awarded the Benedictine Sisters the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Award for their work through St. Benedict Child Development Center and the Inner-City Neighborhood Art House. The award was presented virtually during Erie Arts & Culture’s End of Year Variety Show on December 5. Sister Katherine Horan, left, director of the Child Development Center and Sister Annette Marshall, director of the Art House, accepted the award virtually.

Sister Mary Miller, director of Emmaus Ministries, was named to the Mercy Center list of Women Making History in 1995. She has been highlighted again this year for her continued presence in the inner city, remaining faithful to feeding the hungry and committing herself to the call of the Gospel for over 45 years.

“My son Mathew has spastic quadriplegic cerebral palsy. That doesn’t stop him from enjoying his life to the fullest nor does the pandemic—not with the help of the Adapted Sports Program at St. Benedict Community Center (SBCC).

“Mathew is non-verbal but very social and loves his sports and being active but the pandemic put a halt to all his activities at SBCC. Sister Di (Dianne Sabol, SBCC director) and staff member Michelle Wagner started a weekly Zoom with the group that Mathew looks forward to every week. He laughs practically the whole time. Michelle even delivered chocolate Advent calendars as a surprise and they were a big conversation piece at the following Zoom chat. Sister Di always ends with ‘Love y’all...mean it.’ One day we were shopping and spotted a wooden sign that said Love you...mean it. We had to buy it for her. We are so thankful to have this group.” —Kim Serafin, Mathew’s mom
The SBA Alumnae Association is pleased to announce that 25 scholarships of $250 each were awarded to relatives of alumnae who will be attending Catholic grade or high schools for the 2021-22 school year. Awards have exceeded $92,250 since the scholarship program began in 1991. Funding comes from monies raised at the annual Christmas Party and the Cash Bingos.

Let us pray for our SBA alumnae who have passed into eternity—

Eugenia (Jean) Kubeja Hughes ‘42
Marjorie Morgan Scutella ‘43
Ethel Trohoski Nowak ‘45
Joan Sosnowski Menosky ‘48
Charlotte E Knoebel Wienczowski ‘53
Carmelita Hogan Munch ‘53
Margaret Martin Curtis ‘53
Dorothy Brzozowski Deutsch ‘54
Anna Marie Gorka Neimeic ‘54
Theresa Pol Luarnoff ‘55
Louise Joann Felder Leigl ‘55
Alice R Froess Kowalski ‘58
Judith Schell Ferrare Bodnar ‘58
Margaret Roward Pond ‘60
Norma Jean Mikula Kalie ‘60
Amy Hines ‘61
Anna Marie Nicolia Scarpino ‘62
Jean Marie Grolemund Konopka ‘62
Mary Ann Heibel Wilkinson ‘63
Susan Gorney Grettler ‘64
Mary Carol Brown ‘64
Catherine Ignasiak Stumpo ‘67
Irell Armwood Harden ‘71
Marilyn Larese Brown ‘75

2021 Scholarship Winner List

The SBA Alumnae Association is pleased to announce that 25 scholarships of $250 each were awarded to relatives of alumnae who will be attending Catholic grade or high schools for the 2021-22 school year. Awards have exceeded $92,250 since the scholarship program began in 1991. Funding comes from monies raised at the annual Christmas Party and the Cash Bingos.

WINNER
Charles Campbell
Jordyn Worsdale
Ellen Dieteman
Graham Hewitt
Henry Tellers
Curtis McGraw
Holly Ciotti
Alexis Mobilia
Owen Vereb
Emily Marz
Benjamin Markley
Isabella Noal
Alli Heidt
Ashlyn Jessup
Alexander Little
Kasey Netkowicz
Samuel Applebee
Addison Claire Johnson
Matthew Bond
Michael Popovich
Eli Pinzok
Samuel Staab
Kamron James Veshecco
Rita Reedy
Emily Piecuch

SCHOOL
St Luke School
St Stephen Catholic School
Villa Maria Academy
Our Lady of Peace
St Matthew Catholic School
St Joseph School
Blessed Sacrament
Villa Maria Academy
Our Lady of Peace
Our Lady of Peace
St Jude School
Guerin Catholic High School
Villa Maria Academy
Mercyhurst Prep
Cathedral Prep
Our Lady of Peace
Mercyhurst Prep
St Luke School
Cathedral Prep
Mercyhurst Prep
St James School
Cathedral Prep
St George School
St Gregory School
Villa Maria Academy

ALUMNAE
Kathleen Belczyk Burik ‘77
Allene Schroock Kraus ‘49
Anna Sabotinic Dieteman ‘88
Peggy Henretty Hewitt ‘69
Rosalie Hodas Tellers ‘65
Lucrecia Rogers Johnson ‘63
Jennifer Jones Ciotti ‘89
Kathleen Mobilia ‘68
Catherine Kupniewski ‘72
Rosemary Marz Niebauer ‘72
Sandi Pulinski Veihdeffer ‘72
Patricia Phillips Noal ‘54
Joan Dvorakowski Heidt ‘58
Darlene Elsesser Kovacs ‘69
Kathy Patalita Little ‘67
Donna Netkowicz ‘65
Cindy Anderson Tabolt ‘76
Patty Kuntz Johnson ‘73
Jennifer Devine Bond ‘90
Marcia Popovich ‘87
Barbara Dulin Kobylnski ‘65
Janice Staab Shaffer ‘78
Mary Beth Veshecco ‘73
Cecelia Filipkowski ‘66
Gerri Bruno Piecuch ‘81

RELATIONSHIP
Nephew
Great Granddaughter
Daughter
Grandson
Grandson
Great Nephew
Daughter
Great Niece
Great Niece
Great Niece
Grandson
Granddaughter
Granddaughter
Granddaughter
Great Nephew
Granddaughter
Cousin
Granddaughter
Son
Son
Cousin
Nephew
Grandson
Great Niece
Daughter

Reunion News
The Class of 1976 will be celebrating their 45th class reunion on Saturday, August 21. There will be a catered picnic held at the Erie Runners Club, Beach One, at Presque Isle State Park. The gathering will begin at 2:00 pm. For more information, contact Susan Pacinelli DiVecchio at 814-440-9092 or email sdivecchio1@gmail.com.
St. Benedict Academy impacted my life in a remarkable way. My experience at an all-girls school defined me as a person, a woman, and a servant of God. SBA gave me lifelong friendships and confidence to face adversity with a smile.

The sisters and teachers at SBA taught us to be independent, self-sufficient, and rise above the storm. Somewhere along the way I learned that through God, “All things are truly possible.”

A bittersweet time, one of uncertainty and adjustment, high school also prepares you for your forthcoming journey and purpose in life – and little did I understand then God’s plan for me, or how I would get there.

In the years following graduation, I earned a degree in business from Gannon University; worked as an office manager at Hamot Medical Center; made a career shift to recruiting and cultivating donors to fund Catholic education.

But there was still something missing. The sisters at SBA told us to “be the change we wanted to see in the world,” to be passionate about life and fight through challenging times. It was time to move forward but to where? Then in 2017 I walked into a building off East 27th Street in Erie and found my true home.

It was the day I walked into Mercy Center for Women (MCW) to interview for the position of executive director. I am not certain if it was the laughter of children echoing throughout the building or the simplicity of the home. Or knowing the women who came to MCW had survived real difficulties in life and how the gifted and talented staff at Mercy Center was making a difference for them. I took the position.

Mercy Center for Women was founded by the Sisters of Mercy in January 1994 and provides homeless women, with or without children, with up to a year of transitional housing and support services. The women are often fleeing domestic violence and addiction, and at MCW they have opportunities to learn financial literacy, basic life skills, parenting, and spirituality.

Jennie Buffalari Hagerty enjoys the blessings of the wonderful children of the Mercy Center for Women.

Sometimes women show up to MCW without a driver’s license, social security card, or even a birth certificate. They were homeless and some sought warmth at a Tim Horton’s or Walmart. I could not imagine a mother with her children having to seek a place to stay warm or living in a car. In the program, they work hard to get clean from drugs, find employment, and develop self-esteem, a beautiful gift from God. This is a mission I get behind every minute of the day. Before COVID-19, I would attend Drug Treatment Court to witness the graduation of our former clients. I tear up whenever a woman shares her gratitude to MCW with her head held high.

My heart explodes with delight when a mother reunites with her child. My passion is to interact with these women and children, they are my family and life. I often sit in morning reflection with each woman’s story. They make me stronger by fighting battles beyond their control. To enjoy a laugh or a moment of tears is truly what God has called me to do.

The most difficult part I have witnessed is when a client has a set-back. We surround our clients with support

Jennie Buffalari Hagerty enjoys the blessings of the wonderful children of the Mercy Center for Women.

St. Benedict Academy office aides pictured in the 1983 Scholastican. Jennie is in the center of the third row.
after they graduate from the program. When a former client loses her battle to an opioid overdose there is a wound within all of us. How could we have prevented this?

Other times a woman shares with me how her life was shattered with broken relationships, but now she works fulltime, owns her own vehicle and is back in the lives of her children. These are the happy endings for which we are most grateful.

My teachers at SBA provided me with strength, courage and a sense of accomplishment in four short years. That is the core of my passion to help and serve others, to give back to my community and take on adversity with a smile. We can hold Mark 9:23 close to our hearts, “For all things are possible; for one who believes.”

A cheer for all SBA alumnae! Although the school no longer exists it will forever hold precious memories within our hearts. Smile, offer a prayer, be kind!

Have an address change? Story to share? Idea to highlight your class in the newsletter? Email:

sbaalum@eriebenedictines.org

Our COVID photo album

December 24, 2020 to January 22, 2021

Our kind and attentive health-care staff worked non-stop. Nurses Patty and Mary Beth did door-to-door COVID testing. This was one test we wanted to fail!

Two-person teams served meals thrice daily to sisters on room lockdown for a month. Looks like a bad hair day for Sisters Susan D. and Linda!
Gifts left under the Christmas tree when sisters began their month-long lockdown became prizes for winners of pen & pencil games created by Sister Susan D. Sister Colleen shows off her mystery prize.

Morning, mid-day, and evening prayer were broadcast over the PA system. Prioress Sister Stephanie gives her blessing at the end of prayer.

Ice, anyone? Sister Beth serves sisters on the COVID wing, fully protected.

Heidi (in the background) and Keri, two of our marvelous kitchen staff who quickly adapted, packing to-go meals for 60 sisters three times a day! And, here come the ice cream ladies. Sisters Val, Kath and Diane R. deliver treats from the ice cream carts!
It is beauty that enables us to rise above the sordid in life and so to transform it from the inside out, to give it meaning, to give it feeling, to give it insight, to give it vision of a better world.

— Joan Chittister, OSB