love
is hard work
Love is hard work...

Welcome to the Summer 2022 issue of The Mount. We are grateful you’re relaxing with us for a bit as you make your way through these pages. We hope you feel the embrace of love in which we hold you.

In addition to The Mount’s regular features, this issue highlights two special groups: our jubilarians, sisters marking significant anniversaries (page 10), and our benefactors, recognized in our annual report for the good work they enable (page 12).

The interview with Sister Margaret Ann Pilewski, the inspiration of oblates Victor and Nancy Rutkoski, and the tender story relayed by guest columnist Abbot John Klassen, along with our jubilarians and benefactors, bring both the hard work as well as the joy of love to life. As Abbot John says, Corita Kent (in her cover artwork) “expresses the paradox of love in action: it is hard work but transformed by a power larger than us.”

About Corita Kent

Corita Kent (1918-1986) entered the Immaculate Heart of Mary community in Los Angeles, CA, at 18 and later taught art at Immaculate Heart College for many years.

The politically-charged decade of the 1960s deeply informed her art. Through her bold and colorful serigraphs, Corita shared ideas about faith, love, and justice. She challenged racial and economic inequality at home, protested the war abroad, and pushed boundaries in the Church and the art world.

While teaching in the art department at Immaculate Heart College, Corita transformed the tiny college into a thriving creative community. She encouraged her students to engage with the world beyond the classroom both artistically and socially. The Los Angeles Times named Corita one of the “Women of the Year” in 1966. In 1967, Newsweek put her on the cover with the headline, “The Nun: Going Modern,” and she was profiled in Harper’s Bazaar.

Her work incorporated song lyrics, consumer culture and anti-war slogans alongside traditional biblical themes. Identified by some as “the rebel nun,” Corita drew increasing ire from the local Catholic archdiocese, and her art and contemporary views were labeled radical and blasphemous. By 1968, weary from the struggle with the Church and her uncompromising schedule, Corita left the order and relocated to Boston where she continued her pioneering screenprinting.

As we prepare to send this issue to press, we are once again mourning the violent murder of children in another school massacre. Let us all commit to the hard work of love and take action—pour out onto the streets—and do whatever it takes to end gun violence.

Blessings,

Linda Romey, OSB
Editor
What is your theme song? What word or phrase do you always fall back on? What song do you sing when something needs to be sung? All my friends will say that my song is LOVE. I’ve been known to teach that LOVE is the answer to everything. Sounds simplistic at first glance, yet to go to the depths of love is no easy feat!

I’m not talking about Hallmark® card or movie love, romantic feel-good love. Feelings are fickle. Real love is a choice we make, a daily decision. As Corita Kent’s cover artwork tells us, “Love is hard work.” And like bread, it needs to be made fresh daily.

Love transforms us and the world around us. It reminds us that we are one interconnected family, that our lives are not just about us, for in love we are called to tend to the common good in the service of life and love.

When we make a decision to love someone we take a risk because every relationship brings with it joy and pain. It means giving of ourselves and our time to be with the ones we love. I believe the risk of loving is always worth taking because love gives value to life. It brings us meaning, comfort, delight, and happiness.

Jesus gave us the greatest commandment: “Love God with all your heart, soul, and mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.” It is our foundation and our destiny, we were created by a loving God to become love and share it with the world. When we know and believe that we are unconditionally loved by God, then we can be rooted in and live from an inner place of love. We can love the whole of God’s creation.

We are called to BE love and compassion for others. And BEING love is tough work because it is a moment by moment practice. We show our love for the divinity in each person when we fight for equal rights, dignity, peace, and respect for Mother Earth, our common home.

At the end of life, we will be judged not on how many things we own or how many exotic vacations we have taken. We will be judged on how we have loved.

Have we loved extravagantly, freely, and generously, or have we been stingy with our love? Let’s opt for extravagance because love is the answer to everything!

Sister Stephanie Schmidt, OSB
Prioress
Sister Margaret Ann Pilewski entered the Benedictine Sisters of Erie with 12 other young women in August 1965. She was 18 years old and had recently graduated from St. Benedict Academy. In 1972 she was the only one who made her final profession—the other 12 having left during the formation period. She recently retired from the Inner-City Neighborhood Art House where she taught for 17 years and was program director for 10 years. Prior to that, she taught elementary and high school for 19 years. She currently manages Chapter 57, the monastery gift shop.

Why did you stay when the more popular option seemed to be leaving? What did you find in this life that anchored you?

It was a very chaotic time in community. We would go to prayer in the morning, and someone wouldn’t be there—they’d left the evening before. We still operated under the old pre-Vatican II rules, and no one told us when someone left. Sometimes we found out that a companion was preparing to leave when we saw a trunk open in the attic!

Through it all, I felt like I belonged. It was a life where people were happy, there was a sense of family. But more than that, there was this draw in me, too—God’s call. I was so young, I was immature, but it was like a total gift of myself, recognizing this is where I belong, where I saw a lot of goodness and kindness reflected in the sisters.

I’m the oldest of nine children and our family was very strong. We went to church every Sunday, prayed the rosary together. So the seeds that were planted in my family life of prayer continued in community and reaching out to others.

It’s not to say I didn’t question, but I realized in high school that being in the national honor society or being on student council wasn’t all there was to life. There was something more.

When did you discover you were an artist? How did that fit into your calling?

I wanted to take art and piano lessons as a child but my family couldn’t afford it, there were too many of us. The real confirmation of my art came when I attended the Monastic Institutes at Mount St. Scholastica in Atchison, KS, in the late 1960s and early 1970s. I had art as meditation for the first time with Sister Helen Buening. She took us out to a junkyard where we took slides and then we came back and talked about our images as we projected them onto the screen. Our Sister Joan Chittister was speaking at the Institute so she was there. Sister Helen pulled her aside and told her I had artistic talent and it must be cultivated. When we got back to Erie, Joan taught me how to develop my own film and develop my own pictures in the darkroom—we were working with film back then!

Taking photographs was a way for me to pray and find out who I really was.

Erie Benedictines Sister Annette Marshall and Sister Margaret Ann (far left) prepare to do some touring with Benedictines from other monasteries during a Monastic Institute 50 years ago.
Say a little bit more about the Institutes—it sounds like those gatherings of Benedictines from many different communities were life-altering.

They were. Several of us went to the Institutes over a number of years. I went the first year prior to my final profession and Brother Ambrose spoke to us about the Rule of the Master (An early monastic rule that scholars assume influenced Benedict when he wrote his rule). I had never heard about the Rule of the Master! Sister Janet Goetz, who was going to make her final profession with me, and I went to talk with him about the profession ritual and he clarified for us the role of the prioress as opposed to the role of a bishop or a priest in the profession ceremony. He explained that you do not need a bishop to hear your vows because as an independent monastery you make your vows in the presence of your prioress and your community. We brought that understanding back to Erie, to Sister Mary Margaret Kraus who was prioress at that time, and she said yes, change the ritual according to what we learned. I was forever grateful for that talk we had with him because from that day we changed our understanding and the practice of our profession rituals.

What do you experience people seeking today, especially younger people, or those who identify as spiritual but not religious? Do we have anything to offer them?

In the chaos of today’s world, I think how we live life provides stability, that’s one of the hallmarks of the Benedictine life. And there has to be a time and a space where people can step back and think, be able to breathe and say to themselves, What is it that I want? Who am I?

When I do art as meditation with the novices, I always tell them it’s not the product, it’s the process. Then a couple weeks ago I was nervous about beginning this new acrylic pouring and Sister Val was there listening to me worry. She repeated back to me the words I’d said to her five years ago! It’s the process that matters.

It’s the same with how our Benedictine life touches others. We’re known by our actions, by our kindness and our compassion towards others, by the public statements that we make and the stands we take against violence, for example. There is an energy around us that people feel, especially when they are open and seeking what we seek. I’ll use the analogy of the butterfly. The fact that the butterfly flaps her wings affects everything else. Likewise, everything we say and do affects others.

It’s like surrounding yourself in light—which is what I always told the children at the Neighborhood Art House to do. It’s another kind of energy that surrounds us.

Can you paint a picture of a Benedictine future?

I picture a tree. It grows new branches that are not the same as the trunk, but it comes from the trunk and remains connected. I think that’s what we’re trying to figure out now. Or, it might be a branch that is grafted onto this trunk because somewhere there has to be the lifeline, the core, the energy.

We have our temporary live-in program, and we’ve had interns live and work with us. We’ve tried it. But somewhere there has to be a repository of the core values, like the Rule of Benedict. I don’t think it has to be 100% in the Catholic Church, especially as women. The Church is evolving but it’s taking a long time. Even when I was young, I can remember thinking when the question of women priests came up that yes, there will be women priests, but it’s going to be a new model. Just dressing up and stepping into old ways won’t work.

How would you summarize what you’ve learned in 50 years?

Life is hard work! Like Corita Kent’s cover artwork says—“Love is hard work.” But that doesn’t mean it’s debilitating. When you learn from your mistakes and move on, it is life-giving. And knowing that I’m good enough.

I remember once someone commenting to me that my work in clay didn’t look anything like Brother Thomas’s pottery. (Brother Thomas Bezanson, a world-renowned potter, was an artist-in-residence at the monastery for many years.) And I looked at her and said, “That’s because I’m not Thomas, I’m Peggy.” It’s coming to the point of knowing we each have our own gifts and what we have is important and is ours to share.

At some point I had to claim the title artist for myself and believe in it. As an artist, I sometimes focus on shadows. And cracks. Nothing is really as we see it, something may be whole and then it cracks and breaks. And there’s beauty in all of it, even the shadows and the brokenness. And that’s how I reimagine the pieces and celebrate the cracks.

When she retired from The Neighborhood Art House in 2021, the staff gifted Sister Peg with a quilt featuring children’s artwork. The center piece is her oft-repeated guidance to children and staff: Surround Yourself In Light.
Who of us could forget the words of the old monk Father Zossima to Madame Hohlakov in *The Brothers Karamazov* by Fyodor Dostoevsky? “Love in action is a harsh and dreadful thing compared to love in dreams...” This is an account of love in action.¹

He limped in off the street, leaning on a wheelchair that had “Second Floor Pain Clinic” written on the seat. On the back, it just said “PAIN” in large letters. This event occurred during the 12 days of subzero temperatures in February of 2021. Like so many places, this shelter struggled to help homeless people in the ferocious cold and ongoing pandemic.

Joe, a volunteer, helped the man open the door and he told him how many places had put him out into the street without care. No more room, no way to help. As he spoke, he sat down in the wheelchair. With a slow but determined effort he took off his tattered shoe and the wet sock underneath, revealing a horrid sight: A missing big toe, and the other toes blackened from frostbite. Pain, indeed.

After listening to his story, Joe spoke with the director and caseworker who came up with a quick plan for assistance. Around that time, a young woman came in, also desperate for help. She said she had lost everything and had slept outside that night. It was just too cold to bear. In the middle of the conversation, the man in the wheelchair started to cry. He was shivering cold, in pain, and overwhelmed.

Joe consoled as best as he could, and in between interviewing others who had come in, he noticed that the young woman had started talking to the man in the wheelchair: “Why are you crying? What happened to your foot?”

When the caseworker called him into his office, the woman pushed his wheelchair. And when they left the office with warm clothes, food, and housing resources in hand, she knelt in front of him, held his foot, and carefully put on a dry sock and shoe that he had been given. She asked him if it felt okay. He nodded. Not only had he stopped crying, he almost smiled as she gently held his foot and all his painful history in her hands.

Moments like this make love real. More than that, they make it possible, and maybe even inevitable if we are alert to its possibility. They show us a pathway, they show us what it looks like in real time. Because on a freezing cold bitter day in February, in the muddied entrance of a shelter, Joe watched a young woman with nothing except her love, dignity and compassion, become Christ to someone who had even less. And in that moment, under the scourgé of cold and in full view of the ravages of illness and injustice, Joe saw a tireless love pouring out of her and over all the world’s brokenness.

In Corita Kent's work “Love is hard work,” the text is scribed at the bottom of the serigraph. The majority of the work is dominated by the bright colors we associate with the Easter season, the triumph of life over death, of healing and forgiveness over suffering. The artist expresses the paradox of love in action: it is hard work but transformed by a power larger than us. Dostoevsky says it so well:

“I am sorry I can say nothing more to console you, for love in action is a harsh and dreadful thing compared with love in dreams. Love in dreams is greedy for immediate action, rapidly performed and in the sight of all.... But active love is labor and fortitude, and for some people too, perhaps, a complete science.”

¹ Recounted in April issue of *Give Us This Day* by Michael J. Sanem.
“How good it is to greet our guests face-to-face once again, to serve a sit-down meal, to engage in conversation. How we missed the human interaction that is at the heart of Emmaus,” said Sister Mary Miller, Director, on the reopening of indoor dining at Emmaus Soup Kitchen.

For almost two years, and without missing an evening, volunteers and staff served a nightly dinner at Emmaus Soup Kitchen to-go style, in order to protect guests and volunteers from the possibility of covid exposure. But with infection rates falling and vaccination rates rising, indoor dining became possible again, beginning March 9.

Seating, of course, is about more than just seating: at Emmaus, it means friendly conversation, time to linger over a meal, and daffodils on each table. It means having a safe place to go where guests can count on being treated with respect.

For now, seating is at half-capacity and to-go meals are available for guests preferring not to risk eating inside. But, still, March 9 marked a turning point in the pandemic, a moment of hope and gratitude.

Sister Mary led the staff and volunteers in prayer just before the 175 guests began arriving:

**God of all creation,**
**We thank you for food,**
   **And remember the hungry.**
**We thank you for health,**
   **And remember the sick.**
**We thank you for friends,**
   **And remember the lonely.**
**We thank you for freedom,**
   **And remember those in bondage.**
**May these remembrances**
   **stir us to service,**
**That your gifts may be used for others.**
**Amen.**

**Neighborhood Art House Art & Sole 5K fundraiser held again**

After a two-year covid hiatus, the Inner-City Neighborhood Art House Art & Sole 5K run/walk was again real on May 14, complete with perfect running weather. “Art & Sole is truly a community event! We were fortunate this year to be back in person, to have help from so many volunteers, and with over 180 participants. We could not be more grateful!” said Kelly Stolar, Art House Executive Director.

Benedictine sisters and oblates were among the more than 70 runners and more than 40 walkers as well as among the volunteers and staff who welcomed and registered, offered post-run snacks and beverages, provided children’s activities, stood guard at points all along the course, and captured the joy of crossing the finish line in photographs.

Art & Sole raises funds that help support the free programming in the arts offered year-round to inner-city children and youth.
Oblate Victor Rutkoski has learned a lot about running in the past five years. He started running on his 75th birthday and his discipline and steady practice paid off last September when, at the age of 79, he ran his first marathon, the Erie Marathon at Presque Isle, completing the 26.2 miles in 6 hours, 16 minutes and 18 seconds.

Running isn’t the only place he’s gone the distance—Victor and his wife, Nancy, have been married for 52 years, raised two daughters, and have three grandchildren. They became Erie Benedictine oblates in 2011 because they felt called to join the Erie Benedictine community and wanted to grow spiritually. In a recent conversation, they spoke about faithfulness for the long haul—and how the teachings found in the Rule of Benedict can help followers stay the course.

How does one maintain the discipline of running? “You get dressed and you put your shoes on and you open the door,” Victor explains. “The thing is, once you do that, you’re going to run. It’s really that simple. And then, you run the mile you’re in. At the beginning, don’t think about how many miles you have to run and at the end don’t think about how many miles you’ve already run and how tired you are. You simply run.”

And why do monks go to chapel for prayer three times a day, day after day? “We go to the chapel for prayer,” Erie Benedictine Sister Joan Chittister writes, “because the bell rang.” We all need cues, we need reminders, we need nudges to help keep us going even on the most difficult of days.

Once your shoes are on—or you’re seated in chapel—you must still be faithful to your practice. Victor shares from his running experience that “a mistake a lot of runners make is taking their training too fast. You really want a lot of slow, distance running because your body and your mind have to adapt. And sometimes, when you are tired or the running is hard, all you can do is see a telephone pole and you tell yourself, yeah I’m going to run to that telephone pole. You get to the telephone pole. Then, I’m going to run to that tree...” It’s a slow process, developing habits and staying the course, and our progress is incremental, as Victor points out, and it requires both physical and mental effort.

Sounds a lot like the spiritual life. Benedict tells us at the beginning of his Rule that he isn’t about setting down
anything harsh or burdensome. But, he cautions, the good of all may “prompt us to a little strictness in order to amend faults and to safeguard love.” Benedict doesn’t gloss over human nature. Progress in the spiritual life won’t be easy and we will have days when all we can do is get to the next marker. But then, he promises us, “as we progress in this way of life and in faith, we shall run on the path of God’s commandments, our hearts overflowing with the inexpressible delight of love.”

Victor and Nancy’s hearts overflow with love when they speak of their family: Rachel, Reva and her husband David, and their three grandchildren. Nancy says the joy comes with the commitment that grows out of the hard work of love, but a sense of humor is also important. “I mean, you can’t take yourself too seriously. You have to have a sense of humor,” she says. And, as she spoke of a conversation she had with her teen-age granddaughter, she’s obviously passed on her wisdom. “I asked her what advice she’d give to her younger self, just entering high school, and was so surprised by her answer. She said, ‘Well, don’t get in over your head, and don’t take yourself too seriously.’ Two really good pearls of wisdom!”

Not taking oneself too seriously was a lesson Victor had to learn when he began running. “My daughter Rachel, who is a marathoner and my coach, told me not to compare myself with any other runner, only to compare my own runs against my past runs, not anyone else’s runs.” Benedict’s 12 steps of humility found in Chapter 7 of his Rule are the ultimate guide for not taking oneself too seriously or comparing oneself with others and much more besides. They are about letting God be God, knowing one’s place in the grand scheme of things and living well with others. “I don’t care who’s passing me. If I’m running the race I want to run, I’m happy,” Victor said, in alignment with the wisdom of Chapter 7. “My sense is, because of running, I think I’m a much calmer person. Things don’t bother me as much anymore. I don’t know if others have noticed the difference, but I feel the difference. I think I’m more at peace now after five years running. And I find joy in running,” Victor says. Sounds a lot like the fruits of a well-lived spiritual life, too.

Benedict concludes his Rule with these words, “Are you hastening toward your heavenly home? Then with Christ’s help, keep this little Rule that we have written for beginners. After that, you can set out for the loftier summits of the teaching and virtues..., and under God’s protection, you will reach them. Amen.”

It may not be easy, but it is simple. Put one foot in front of the other and focus on the mile you’re in. And enjoy it.

Dr. William Glasser’s study of long-term runners and meditators demonstrated that the physical benefits are woven in with psychological ones. His research indicates that a mix of blessings comes to those who are, in his words, “positively addicted” to their disciplines. Over time, these people developed

- subjective feelings of inner confidence, self-trust, outward serenity, calm or grace;
- creative thinking aptitudes;
- the ability to resolve inner conflicts and/ or expanded ability to spot new or varied options in problem solving;
- a firm sense of self, including the willingness to speak up and take action on behalf of what they sense was right and true for them;
- an increased ability to cope with pressure, manage stress and deal with ambiguity and change.

— in *Ordinary People as Monks and Mystics* by Marcia Sinetar
Mary Grace Hanes, OSB, celebrates 75 years of monastic profession this year. After graduating from St. Benedict Academy in 1945, she entered the Benedictine Sisters of Erie and made her first profession in August 1947. After teaching in schools throughout the Erie Diocese, Sister Mary Grace, known affectionately as “Gracie,” transitioned into administration, serving as principal and later as guidance counselor at St. Benedict Academy. She used her training in business education, in which she received a Bachelor’s degree *magna cum laude* from Villa Maria College, and her Master’s in administration from Saint Louis University, to prepare many young women for productive, meaningful lives and careers. While teaching at St. Benedict Academy she also served her community as the Mount (monastery) Coordinator. Later she assumed administrative roles in Sister Joan Chittister’s office, where she ministered for 33 years until retiring from active ministry. Her wisdom and many years of experience as a Benedictine sister make her an invaluable part of her community.

Mary Louis Eichenlaub, OSB, made her monastic profession 70 years ago this July. A graduate of St. Benedict Academy, Sister Mary Louis earned a Bachelor’s degree from Villa Maria College and a Master’s degree from the University of Notre Dame, as well as a graduate certification in Gerontology from Catholic University. She spent many years as an English teacher, primarily at the high school level, in schools that included St. Benedict Academy, Venango Catholic, and Cathedral Prep. She instilled her love of beauty, poetry, and art in her many students over the decades. After leaving the classroom, Sister Mary Louis worked for several years in pastoral ministry for the aging at St. Mary’s parish in Erie, as an English instructor at St. Benedict Education Center, and as a Director of Social Services at St. Joseph Apartments. She also was a member of Interchurch Ministries of Erie for many years, forming important relationships with religious people and congregations throughout the city. In 1990, she received the Papal Cross in recognition of her many years of service to the People of God. Dignified and convivial, Sister Mary Louis continues to strengthen and enrich her community with her beautiful smile and deep spirituality.

Cecilia Sullivan, OSB, made her monastic profession 70 years ago, having entered the Benedictine Sisters of Erie shortly after graduating from Sharon High School, Sharon, PA. The 11th of 12 children, Sister Cecilia brought a love of young people and family life to the many schools and parishes where she ministered throughout the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. In communities throughout the Diocese of Erie, from Clarion to the City of Erie, Sister Cecilia prepared children for First Communion, and taught academic subjects for all levels of grade school. She earned her degree at Mercyhurst College (now University). In 1981, Sister Cecilia went to Ketchikan, AK, for five years, to work as a teacher in the Holy Name and Holy Family Missions. After returning to Pennsylvania, she ministered with the elderly at John XXIII...
Jubilee

By Jacqueline Sanchez-Small, OSB

Sister Mary Louis Eichenlaub and Sister Cecilia Sullivan, 70 years,
Sister Theresa Zoky, 60 years, and Sister Linda Romey, 25 years.

Home in Hermitage, PA, for eight years, and then spent almost 20 years on the staff of St. Benedict Education Center in Erie, helping the underserved develop job skills and immigrants and refugees transition into life in the US. Since retiring from active ministry at the age of 80, Sister Cecilia has served the monastic community in many different roles, including sacristan and portress. She offers a warm, steadfast presence to her community, her family, and her many friends and former students.

Theresa Zoky, OSB, celebrates her 60th jubilee this year. Raised in Sharon, PA, Sister Theresa entered the Benedictine Sisters of Erie after graduating from high school. For 23 years, she taught in Catholic grade schools throughout the Diocese of Erie, educating countless children and helping them develop their talents and fostering curiosity, respect for others, and self-esteem in them. She holds a Bachelor’s degree in elementary education from Mercyhurst College (now University). Beginning in 1984, she worked for the Diocese of Erie, and for 20 years was the Director of the Mission Office. Sister Theresa was instrumental in growing the Mission of Friendship, building relationships between the Diocese of Erie and the Archdiocese of Yucatán, Mexico. She also ministered at Our Lady of Mercy Parish as the office manager. From 2013 to 2018, she served as the Director of AIM USA, the U.S. Secretariat of the Alliance for International Monasticism, encouraging relationships between monastic communities in the developing world and those in the United States. For the last several years, she has been the archivist for the Erie Benedictines, keeping record of important events in the life of the community. She has brought a keen eye for detail and a love of beauty to all of these ministries, and to daily life with her sisters, and the neighbors in her East 10th Street neighborhood.

Linda Romey, OSB, entered the Benedictine Sisters of Erie 25 years ago when she returned to the U.S. after spending seven years as a lay missioner in both Monteria and Cartagena, Colombia, South America. She grew up in Kansas City, MO, where she earned a Bachelor’s degree in theology from Rockhurst College (now University) before moving to Colorado Springs, CO, where she lived and worked with an intentional peace and justice community in Colorado Springs before joining the mission team of the Archdiocese of Denver and going to Colombia. Sister Linda has ministered mainly in the areas of publishing and communications in her 25 years as an Erie Benedictine, with Benet Press, Benetvision, and Monasteries of the Heart as well as with the Communications and Development Offices. She also spent five years as director of marketing and advertising for the National Catholic Reporter Publishing Company. She earned a Master’s degree in business administration in 2008 and currently serves on the Monastic Council. Sister Linda is an innovator, with a creative and inquisitive spirit. She enriches and strengthens her community with her enthusiasm for life, love of justice, and ability to look beyond what is to what could be.
Thank you is such a simple statement.

A simple “thank you” seems to pale in comparison to how grateful we are to our friends and supporters. In 2021, the Benedictine Sisters of Erie received a total of $1,132,305 in donations from the following sources:

Breakdown of 2021 Income Sources

- Annual Appeals: $208,885
- Bequests and Estates: $187,970
- Grant Requests: $187,217
- Golf Tournament: $82,615
- ErieGives/iGive Catholic: $40,464
- Mount Magazine: $28,475
- Monthly Giving: $61,281
- Unsolicited Gifts: $335,398

To our 4,464 donors who made a total of 5,542 gifts in 2021, thank you! A special thank you to our 98 monthly donors, faithful friends who journey alongside the Benedictine Sisters with a recurring gift. We count on your support, thank you!

Because of you, we can offer hospitality to guests in comfortable monastery rooms. Sisters Phyllis Schleicher and Jean Wolbert, hospitality ministers, are grateful to a donor for new chairs and bedding they purchased for the guest wing.

Chapter 53 of the Rule of Benedict says, “Let all guests who arrive be received like Christ.” No monastery is without guests because people have always sought out monasteries as places where they could grow their faith and renew and restore their spirits. Whether people come for liturgy, a weeklong retreat, or a yearlong immersion program, your support helps us extend hospitality to them.

Here are some recent comments from our guests:

- “Thank you for the hospitality! I was able to rest and re-set emotionally, physically and spiritually.” —Christine
- “Thank you so much for opening your hearts and home to me this past week. It was a blest time and I so appreciate being able to come here once again.” —Patricia
- “Thank you so much for the warm, generous, uplifting hospitality! My mom and I felt so cared for, and inspired to bring some of your kindness back to our communities. We’d love to return again sometime!” —S and J

Your support helps us to act with justice, care for the most vulnerable in our city, and serve those we meet.

St. Benedict Child Development Center is one of our inner-city ministries that attends to not just the physical needs of those we serve but also their need for beauty, belonging, and the possibility to create a better tomorrow. Here, Erie Mayor Joe Schember reads to the children at St. Benedict’s on National Read Across America Day, March 2.
Your generous support helps to fund our Lakeside Health Unit with 24/7 nursing care for sisters’ medical needs. West wing rooms on the monastery’s second floor offer assisted living where nursing staff provides ancillary care to sisters as needed.

Our faithful staff provided excellent health care to 18 sisters who resided in Lakeside and the west wing throughout 2021. The Benedictine Sisters of Erie are committed to the care of their elder members and we thank you for helping us care for them.

Today, 77 sisters age 29 to 104 at Mount Saint Benedict Monastery are a community of monastic women seeking God through prayer and work. We strive to be a healing presence to those in need and a prophetic voice for peace and justice.

Your gifts help support a Benedictine spiritual presence that changes lives.
There are many ways to join in our work and help us. You can:

Make a gift today. Use the inserted envelope to send a check or credit card number to Mount Saint Benedict Monastery, or you can give online at eriebenedictines.org.

Journey with us as a monthly giver. You can mail your monthly check, or set up your monthly gift on your credit card or to via ACH debit from your banking account.

Make a gift for the future. Join your legacy with ours to remember the Benedictine Sisters of Erie in your estate planning. It is easy to include us in your estate plans. Here is sample bequest language you can use:

Upon my death, I give, devise and bequeath to Benedictine Sisters of Erie, Inc., located at 6101 East Lake Road, Erie PA 16511-1599, and whose federal tax identification number is 25-0965501, the sum of $_____ or _____% of the rest of my estate.

Whether you make a one-time gift, a recurring gift, or a final gift, your commitment to our Benedictine community and its vision supports a spiritual presence that changes lives. Thank you for your desire to partner with us.

Michelle Basista
Development and Communications Associate
(814) 899-0614 x2218
mbasista@eriebenedictines.org

Sister Linda Romey, OSB
Communications and Development Coordinator
(814) 899-0614 x2409
lromey@eriebenedictines.org

Visit eriebenedictines.org
eriebenedictines on Facebook
Requiescat in Pace

Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” — John 8:12

Sister Bernadette Sullivan, OSB
Perpetual Monastic Profession July 10, 1957
Died March 3, 2022

A native of Sharon, PA, Sister Bernadette Sullivan was the 12th and youngest child of Cecilia (Hammond) and John Sullivan. She entered the Benedictine Sisters of Erie after graduating from Sharon High School in 1952, making her perpetual monastic profession in 1957.

Sister Bernadette taught first and second grade in schools throughout the diocese until 1971, including St. Joseph, Oil City, St. Mary and Mount Calvary, Erie, St. Joseph and Sacred Heart, Sharon, and St. Michael, Fryburg. She taught at St. Benedict Academy in Erie from 1971 to 1975, when she left teaching and worked for two years at Benet Press, a printing ministry of the Benedictine Sisters.

In 1967 Sister Bernadette earned her Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education at Mercyhurst College (now University). In 1971 she completed her Master of Interdisciplinary Arts degree at Manhattanville College in Harrison, NY.

In 1979, after completing the Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) program at Trinity College and Walter Reed Hospital, Sister Bernadette became an ecumenical chaplain at Hamot Medical Center (now UPMC Hamot) in Erie. She retired in 2013 after 34 years as chaplain. During that time, Sister Bernadette served two years as president of the Pennsylvania Society of Chaplains. She was a member of the National Association of Catholic Chaplains and served on the Erie Diocesan Medical/Moral Team. Sister Bernadette was named Ambassador of the Year at Hamot in 1992.

Sister Bernadette’s passion was photography—she rarely went on an outing without her camera, and her artist’s eye drew her into nature where some of her favorite subjects were birds, sunsets, and Irish countrysides. Here is her prize-winning photo of a boater taken at Findley Lake, NY.

Garden of Memories

Throughout our lives, people come and go and leave their marks on our hearts. The Benedictine Sisters of Erie invite you to honor and remember people you have loved, and those who have loved you, in our Garden of Memories on the monastery grounds.

Memorials in the Garden opened in 1999. Throughout the Garden are engraved pavers and tree name plates, dedicated in memory and in honor of special people who have impacted our lives. It is a place where sisters, guests, and friends can stroll, pray, and remember loved ones who are honored in a special way.

Memorial opportunities in the Garden of Memories include:

- Brick pavers (7” x 9”) ~
  suggested donation $300
- Gazebo area brick pavers (12” x 12”) ~
  suggested donation $600
- Tree plaque (8” x 4”) with granite name plate ~
  suggested donation $800

To place a memorial in the Garden of Memories, please contact Michelle Basista, Development Associate, at mbasista@eriebenedictines.org or (814) 899-0614 x2281.
Sister Mary Lou Kownacki honored

Sister Mary Lou Kownacki is serving this year as an honorary co-chair of the Pax Christi USA 50th Anniversary Committee with Bishop Thomas Gumbleton, retired Detroit auxiliary bishop. During the organization’s national assembly in Washington, DC, this August she will receive special recognition for her many years of dedicated leadership. Sister Mary Lou served as national coordinator of Pax Christi from 1984-1991 and her leadership was instrumental in not only growing the organization’s membership base but also in increasing its reach through publications and newsletters. Sister Mary Lou was named a Pope Paul VI Teacher of Peace in 2006.

This Pax Christi archive photo was taken May 5, 1987, at the Nevada Test Site where two bishops—Tom Gumbleton and Charles Buswell, and 96 others—including Sisters Mary Lou Kownacki and Anne McCarthy—crossed the line barring entrance to the nuclear test site on the fourth anniversary of The Challenge of Peace: God’s Promise and Our Response, the U.S. Bishops’ pastoral letter on war and peace. It was organized by the Nevada Desert Experience and Pax Christi USA while Sister Mary Lou was National Coordinator. Bishop Gumbleton sent letters of invitation to the Catholic community and over 300 people showed up and 98 were arrested. This was only the second time in the history of the Church in the U.S. that a member of the hierarchy had committed civil disobedience. In 1986, Bishop Emerson Moore of New York was arrested for protesting apartheid.

Sister Joan Chittister in conversation with Dr. Mary McAleese

Sister Joan Chittister and Dr. Mary McAleese, former president of Ireland, professor at the University of Glasgow, and Chancellor of Trinity College Dublin, appeared in conversation in the fifth Joan D. Chittister, OSB, Lecture Series at the Mary D’Angelo Performing Arts Center, Mercyhurst University. The two discussed the role of women in the church, polarization in the country, and the insights Dr. McAleese gained from doing reconciliation work with people from the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Art & Spirituality Lecture

The Spirituality of Icons with Sister Jeana Visel, OSB, was the 2022 Benedictine Sisters Art and Spirituality Lecture. It took place virtually on May 1. Sister Jeana holds a DMin in Spirituality from the Catholic University of America and is Dean of the School of Theology Programs and Director of Graduate Theology Programs at St. Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology in St. Meinrad, IN. The Pucker Family Fund, Pucker Gallery, Boston, is the sponsor of the 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.
The Fairfield Hose Company Volunteer Fire Department recently named Sister Pat Hause their Citizen of the Year. Sister Pat, who will soon be retiring from more than two decades as manager of the Benedictine Sisters Benetwood Apartments, was in frequent contact with department members when emergencies arose. Benetwood, adjacent to the monastery, is a government-subsidized non-profit 75-unit apartment building administered by the community.

The Benedictine Sisters of Erie honored the Blue Coats Nonviolence Initiative with their 2021 Prophet of Peace Award. In presenting the award to Brother Daryl Craig, co-founder of Blue Coats, and member Bruce Wayne, who is a daily presence at Emmaus Soup Kitchen, prioress Sister Stephanie Schmidt said, “We are honored to have Brother Daryl, Bruce, other members of the Blue Coats, and their families with us tonight. The presence of the men and women who are Blue Coats among us has shown us the impact of meeting each person with respect and dignity. They have shown us that peacemaking is possible.” Many Emmaus volunteers joined the honored guests and sisters in the monastery chapel for prayer and the award presentation. The Benedictine Sisters give the annual Prophet of Peace award to an individual or group that embodies some aspect of their current 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.”

Guests and sisters rededicated a refurbished statue of Mary in memory of Sister Mary (William) Hoffman, her brother and sister-in-law Paul and Peg Hoffman, and her parents Emil and Veronica Hoffman. The statue was originally a gift of the St. Benedict Academy Class of 1946 to the now-closed girls’ high school. Guests included members of the Hoffman family, friends of Sister Mary and Sister Phyllis Schleicher, her longtime friend who shared many ministries with Sister Mary, members of the St. Benedict Academy Alumnae Association Board, and Dan Welch and other members of the monastery maintenance team. Paul and Peg Hoffman’s nephew Bill Shephard generously funded the refurbishing of the statue and donated the bronze memorial plaque that sits at its base.
The Oblate Way of Life with the Benedictine Sisters of Erie

If you desire to
• deepen your relationship with God, with others and with yourself
• ground your spirituality in values based on simplicity, respect, hospitality, and reverence for all life
• enter into a distinct relationship with others and want to be sustained by others on a similar spiritual path

Consider becoming an Oblate of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie. For more information about the Oblate Way of Life contact:
Oblate Co-Directors
Joanne Cahill, OSB Obl and Dianne Sabol, OSB
Telephone 814-899-0614 ext 2402
E-mail oblates@eriebenedictines.org

Give Me A Word

In celebration of the Feast of the Epiphany earlier this year, oblates embraced the ancient desert tradition known as “Give me a word.” In those times, seekers would ask the desert ammas and abbas for a word, a message that would bring new awareness as the seeker ruminated on his or her word, plumbing its depths for the wisdom it offered. The word would be a “threshold place” — a doorway to new insights, new practices, new ways of being in the world.

Oblates were invited to ask for a word in prayer, to surrender into a place of deep trust and receptivity, and to notice what emerged for them. Was it a call to greater openness, to release fear, to practice more gratitude or compassion? They were encouraged to allow their word to be an epiphany for them, to trust it, and to allow it to shine for them like the Star of the Magi, leading to places of new growth.

The response was magical. Beautiful words poured forth the richness of the new insights that emerged among the oblate community. Oblates are leaning into their words this year, growing in self-awareness and bringing new life and spirit into the world.

Sharon McSweeney, an oblate candidate from Massachusetts, developed this beautiful word cloud incorporating the oblates’ words and offering a powerful image for reflection.

—Joanne Cahill, Oblate Co-Director
Reunion News

The Class of ’67 will celebrate 55 years since graduating at their annual picnic to be held Wednesday, August 10. Information will be sent by email only, so if you are not currently receiving class emails and want to be included, contact Janet Romanowicz Hammond, hammondjanet@hotmail.com, or text to 814-873-0118. More information will be sent in early summer.

The Class of ’82 will celebrate their 40th Class Reunion on August 13 at the new Holiday Inn, 2260 Downs Drive, Erie, Pa. We will have a private meeting room with access to the outdoor patio and pool. This will be a catered event, bar available. We have a block of rooms reserved at a discount rate, before booking a room contact Sue for the group code. Contact Sue Skrzypczak Chase text or call her at 814-218-1423 or email skryp63@gmail.com. Please send Sue your updated addresses.

Save the Date

July 17 (Sunday) Cash Bingo “Christmas in July” at Polish Falcons Club, 1 - 4 p.m. to benefit St. Benedict Child Development Center

August 21 (Sunday) Luncheon “Celebrate the Spirit of SBA” at the Ambassador Conference Center

December 3 (Saturday) Annual Christmas Basket Raffle at Polish Falcons Club, 1 - 4 p.m.

SBA Alum Alternative Christmas Celebration

Santa’s elves helped the St. Benedict Academy Alumnae Association raise more than $6,000 for scholarships to Catholic schools and for ministries of the Benedictine Sisters. “We really wanted to hold the annual Christmas party and dinner this year but once again decided it would be safer to offer the alternative basket raffle,” said Darlene Kerstetter, ’82, co-chair of the SBA Board of Directors. For three hours there was a steady stream of former students, reconnecting and selecting baskets at the Polish Falcons Club. Winners were notified after the 1-4 p.m. selection time ended.
Please alert Ann Comstock, Benedictine Sisters Development Office, of any address changes. Call her at 814-899-0614, ext. 2573, or email communications@eriebenedictines.org. If you prefer not to receive a print copy of The Mount, Ann can also remove your name from the list. Current and past issues of The Mount are available on our website at eriebenedictines.org/mount-back-issues.

Ever Changing, Always Changeless:
Exploring the Spirit of Monasticism

“...It is the Spirit that leads us on. It is the nature of the Spirit behind it that gives a movement life. ... It is the Spirit of Monasticism that not only keeps it alive but keeps it changing changelessly,” writes Joan Chittister.

As the tradition continues to change changelessly, how might the spirit and stories of Benedictine wisdom inspire us anew? Join us as we explore ancient questions with contemporary writers Sister Joan Chittister, Scholar Bonnie Thurston, Oblate Judith Valente, and Brother Paul Quenon.

Bonnie Thurston on Saint Mary of Egypt
Wednesday, June 15, 2022 at 7-8 p.m. ET

Judith Valente and Paul Quenon on How to Be
Wednesday, July 20, 2022 at 6-7:30 p.m. ET

Joan Chittister on The Monastic Heart
Wednesday, August 24, 2022 at 7-8 p.m. ET

Register at: bit.ly/ MOHWebinars