

the Mount



Benedictine Sisters of Erie
Winter 2021



Vacare Deo
Make room for God

the Mount

Winter 2021, Volume 34, No. 2

The Mount Magazine

is a biannual publication of the
Benedictine Sisters of Erie

6101 East Lake Road

Erie, PA 16511

814-899-0614

eriebenedictines.org

From the Prioress	3
Peace Is Still Our Calling.....	4
Bearing Witness to God	6
Take Back the Site	7
Monastic Professions	8
The Monastic Heart.....	10
Care for the Earth.....	11
Ministry Notes.....	12
Oblates	13
Seeking Meaningful Change	14
O Antiphon Zine	15
<i>Requiescat in Pace</i>	17
Noteworthy.....	18
Thank You	20
SBA Alumnae Newsletter	21
Friends We Never Can Forget	22

Cover Artwork:

Photo 109536316 © Ievgenii Tryfonov |
Dreamstime.com; "Vacare Deo" quote and
translation from Demetrius Dumm, OSB, in
Cherish Christ above All

Photographers: Ann Muczynski, OSB, Linda
Romey, OSB, and contributed photos

Editor and layout & design: Linda Romey, OSB

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

The Benedictine Charism is to seek God in
the 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.

Merry Christmas!

This time together as you read these pages will give us a chance to
wish you Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. Our prayer is that 2022
becomes COVID-free and that our learnings from the pandemic help us
make room for God in new and bigger ways.



Here's an update on our growing saplings.
In our last issue we told you about our
participation with ReLeaf in an effort to plant
one tree for every citizen of Erie County. We
planted 271 trees on our Glinodo property
and they have grown in the past six months.
Sisters and volunteers made sure they
received water when it was dry and attention
when they needed it. Their protective sleeves
guarded them from becoming deer food and
will offer some protection from the coming
Erie winter.



Last issue I also acknowledged Sister Jacqueline Sanchez-Small
who was spending one afternoon a week collaborating with the
Communications and Development Office. You will find two pieces of her
writing in this issue. And, on page 9 you'll see that Sister Jacqueline,
along with Sisters Colleen Leathley and Jen Frazer, made her first
monastic profession on November 13. While Sister Jacqueline will be
returning to full-time ministry, I hope she will still appear on these
pages from time to time.



I would like to give a shout-out to our archivists,
Sister Theresa Zoky and Sister Janet Goetz. I have
turned to them for each of the past three issues
of *The Mount* and their response is always well-
researched and complete. For this issue, I was
hoping against hope when I asked Sister Theresa if
there was any chance we had a 1926 St. Benedict
Academy yearbook. When she said, "yes, I believe
we do," and then quickly located a box and pulled
it out, I was in awe. You'll find the picture of Ruth
Welch Fisher, Class of '26, in the SBA Alumnae
section, page 23.



Don't miss the **QR codes!** QR stands for "quick
response" and they take you to the noted websites. Use
the camera on your tablet or phone (it may require downloading a
free app) to scan the QR code and go directly to the website.

My email address is communications@eriebenedictines.org should
you need to contact me.

May the Christmas season be a time of joy and peace for you and
your loved ones,

Linda Romey OSB
Linda Romey, OSB
Editor



Sister Theresa Zoky



Sister Janet Goetz

from the **Prioress**



Making room in one's life for God can very easily displace everything else. It can upend the familiar, dismantle securities, change the entire course of one's life. And every year at Christmas, we hear the story of how "making room for God" changed Mary's life.

Mary of Nazareth was young, poor, and female, an unlikely candidate for greatness 2,000 years ago in a patriarchal world. Her planned future with Joseph was interrupted by a personal encounter with God through the angel Gabriel who appears to Mary and tells her that God has found favor with her, and she will bear a son whom she will name Jesus.

Scripture tells us that Mary was "greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be." In other words, how was she to make room for God when her life was already planned out for her? All was set, she was to marry Joseph, there was no need to change anything.

The angel explains further, offering encouragement—Mary has found favor with God—but Mary remains confused. "How can this be?" she asks. It's not the way of things, it doesn't compute, things are just fine as they are.

But Gabriel doesn't give up. "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High God will overshadow you. Therefore, the child to be born will be called the Holy One of God." And Mary sees. With Gabriel's assurance that nothing is impossible for God, Mary replies, "Yes, I am ready." She makes room for God's love to empower her so that she can say yes and commit to trusting the mystery. Mary's renunciation of her own plans to make room for God in her life leads her to the joy which she will later proclaim in the Magnificat, "My Spirit rejoices in God, my savior, for this God has done great things for me."

And, my friends, that is the gift and the mystery of Christmas that comes to each of us every year. We, too, receive the invitation to make room for God. And when we, like Mary, trust in God's love and say yes, come in, welcome, disturb my projects, upend my plans, shake up my life, God will be born in us, too.

Christmas Blessings!

Sr. Stephanie Schmidt, OSB

Sister Stephanie Schmidt, OSB
Prioress

Peace Is Still Our Calling

An interview with Sister Mary Lou Kownacki

By Linda Romey, OSB

*Forty years ago, Sister Mary Lou Kownacki went on pilgrimage with the purpose of speaking to monks in Europe and the U.S. about monasticism and the peace movement. Her journals from that trek as well as a few other interviews were published as *Peace Is Our Calling: Contemporary Monasticism and the Peace Movement*. Long out of print, it is now available as a Kindle ebook.*

Q. In the introduction to *Peace Is Our Calling*, you say that it's an impossible task to define monasticism, "How do you define an experience?" you ask. You cite two attempts at definitions: monastic life as a "rhythm" (Tony Mullaney, OSB) and Brother David Steindl-Rast, OSB, who said it is mindfulness that makes an environment monastic. Would you still consider rhythm and mindfulness as key to monasticism?

I'd probably give a little more time to defining a monastic spirit. But let's go with these two.

Rhythm is a fluid word. For a monastic it means the days of our life are spent in prayer, sacred reading, work, service, and the building of community—all of course for the purpose of seeking God's will on earth. And what is God's will? Well, God wills humanity's well-being. So, all our efforts are geared to that end. I much prefer the word rhythm to balance. Balance, to me, is a bit anal and brings an image of people walking about with measuring rods—this much time for prayer, this much time for leisure! Not the way I think a monastic goes through life. Rhythm, on the other hand, flows as circumstances allow. Sometimes leisure isn't possible because of work deadlines, sometime prayer is cut short because I woke up on the wrong side of the bed, but, in the span of days, there is a monastic rhythm to one's life.

As for mindfulness, absolutely, that is what makes a monastic environment. My idea of mindfulness is this story from the Jewish tradition: a Rabbi entered a room in his home and saw his son deep in prayer. In the corner stood a cradle with a crying baby. The Rabbi asked his son, "Can't you hear? There's a baby crying in this room." The son said, "Father, I was lost in God." And the rabbi said, "One who is lost in God can see the very fly crawling up the wall." What I think the rabbi is saying is that a prayerful person "sees as God sees" and a monastic training in mindfulness can help you to see that way. It's a false prayer that doesn't hear the wailing of the world's children or see all of God's creation as sacred.

And the nice thing about a rhythm of life and a growing sense of mindfulness is that anyone with a monastic heart—inside or outside a brick-and-mortar monastery—can live this way.

Q. You wrote then, "It is my belief that the future of monasticism rests with women." What would be the top one or two actions we should take immediately for the sake of the future of women's monasticism?

I think I wrote this in the context of the question I was exploring—What does the Benedictine motto *Pax* (peace) mean for members of a monastery? Does it only concern inner peace or is there a responsibility to bring peace to a world torn with violence? At that time, women monastics were beginning to be voices for the poor, advocates for an end to war—social justice was seen as integral to the life. And women monastics, as did the majority of women religious in the country, led the church in understanding what Vatican Council II meant when it said, "social justice is a constitutive element of the gospel." It is not extra-curricular or optional.

As for immediate actions...I'm a firm believer in Dostoyevsky's prophecy, "In the end beauty will save the world." I think all monasteries might take that as a theme for a year or two of prayer and study and see what they come up with.

Q. What are the questions monks should be asking today?

The advice to preachers attributed to theologian Karl Barth is still relevant: "Hold a bible in one hand and a newspaper (or iPhone) in the other." If you pray that way, you will know what questions monks should be asking today. Especially if you pray in the manner the rabbi in the tale told his son to pray—you will be so mindful that you will hear the cries and wails of all the helpless and dispossessed, you will see the goodness in all creation, and you will act.

If you need questions, these are off the top of my head: Given the advance in science, how

**PEACE
IS OUR
CALLING**



**Contemporary
Monasticism
and the Peace
Movement**

Mary Lou Kownacki, OSB

foreword by Rosemary Haughton
epilogue by Joan Chittister, OSB

can we make the idea of God meaningful to a new generation? What is a human being? When are we going to erase dualistic redemptive theology for a non-dualistic creation-centered theology? In a future where robots and Artificial Intelligence do most of our work, what will give humans a sense of meaning and fulfillment? What is Plan B if we succeed in our efforts to destroy the earth and all living things as we currently define them? Patriarchy, sexism, misogyny—it is the original sin of the church and needs to be repented. If that is not done, nothing will change. How can we eradicate it?

Q. You quoted Henri Nouwen as describing “monasticism as a resistance movement.” What should monastics be resisting today? What should the world expect of monasticism now—if monasticism were to remain true to itself?

I think in *Peace Is Our Calling* I quoted someone as saying that a monastery should stand as a question mark to society. And I would add, that the monastery should always stand as a question mark to the institutional church. It’s very Jesus-like. Jesus resisted both temple and king by acting differently than the status quo—welcoming outcasts, identifying with the poor, treating women as equals, refusing an “eye for an eye,” empowering the disenfranchised, speaking truth to power, rejecting the expectation to lead a violent insurrection against the occupying forces. So he was a threat to both and had to die. The monastery does likewise because we believe that Jesus saw with the eyes of God and so we imitate. We believe in the sharing of goods, not accumulation for personal gain; the welcoming of all people, inclusiveness, not division; nonviolence, not war and cruelty; the building of community, not social privilege and status; a life devoted to prayer, beauty, leisure and “good” work, not the accumulation of money and power; a stewardship of the earth not acts of destruction—all these are counter-cultural and acts of resistance. Perhaps the most counter-cultural of all is that the God we believe in is not one of prosperity and power and wealth and patriarchy.

I go back to the original question of mindfulness: in the monastery we are being trained to “see with the eyes of God.” When that starts to happen, you become a resistance movement. I mean, your heart should be getting softer and softer, more compassionate, more courageous, ready to risk it all so that others—and the earth—may come to what God wills: all of creation’s well-being. Your very way of being speaks truth to power.

Q. In the last issue of *The Mount*, you were featured as a jubilarian celebrating 60 years of monastic life. In those 60 years, what has given you the most joy, made you smile the most often?

I’ve been lucky enough to be in the company of children a good part of my life and learned from them genuine joy and ease of laughter. Looking in the mirror makes me laugh when I think of how ridiculous that person staring back has been at times, too many times. Finally, I’ve been diagnosed with terminal cancer and recently my oncologist said to me, “You have two things that will help you on this last journey: a strong constitution and good friends.” That filled me with a lot of joy and even made me smile inside because it told me that all of it—despite the difficult things that come with every life choice—was worthwhile. I couldn’t ask for more.



Search for
*Peace Is Our
Calling* in the
Kindle store or
scan QR code.



Sister Mary Lou, far right, traveled to Washington, DC, with a group of Erie monastics in January 2017 for the Women’s March the day after President Trump’s inauguration. With her are, from left to right, Oblate Janice Etchison, Sister Jacqueline Sanchez-Small, Sister Mary Miller, Oblate Breanna Mekuly, and Sister Pat Lupo. Sisters Mary and Mary Lou are holding photos of Sisters Maureen Tobin and Joan Chittister. Sister Maureen had just died and Sister Joan had remained in Erie to be with her. They were both present in spirit.

Bearing Witness to God

The Very Rev. Melinda Hall
Guest Columnist

Recently I attended a Take Back the Site vigil (see next page) for a woman in my congregation who was murdered, a victim of domestic violence. Gathered on the grass with others from my congregation, friends, and neighbors, I felt lost. As the prayers began, I looked out and saw a whole host of monks I knew standing in the street; one of them nodded to me. I let the prayers wash over me, and I watched as water was ritually sprinkled on the lawn. Time slowed and I suddenly felt held, held by the sacred but also by the presence of women religious, monks among them, who risk hope and love in this chaotic and sometimes cruel world. The moment embodied the gifts they bring to this world, acting as signposts of hope and love through their grounded presence, directed social action, and relational commitments.

As much of the world moves at an increasingly frantic pace, the monastic community defies the trend and continues its ancient pattern of patience, discernment, and groundedness. Throughout time, monasteries have been havens of peace: the calmness of a monastery pulls us to sacred time, and the monastic rhythm reminds us to slow down, to listen more deeply to others and ourselves, and to realize neither the spiritual journey nor any other aspect of our lives is a race. We are reminded that taking time for silence matters and that we can sink deeper roots into a holy grounding that holds us and gives us stability in a turbulent world.

That sense of grounding shines in the advocacy and community work done by monastics in Erie. The array of social justice enterprises they collaborate in and their gift to the under-served in our city is incalculable, but the compassion and commitment it demonstrates is a model for us, too. Advocating for change is difficult, frustration can easily lead to burnout and anger. Living from a sacred space, the advocacy work I witness from monastics is patient and compassionate, concerned for process and people. What a profound witness to the world for how change can happen without demonizing and dividing.

But then, monastic life is all about unity and finding ways to be together despite difference. The intentional community of monasteries exemplifies how human relationships could be. Monasteries bear witness to the relationships God imagines for us all: connection with others in Love, holding each other in our imperfections and encouraging one another to be our best selves. And although the bond in the monastery is unique among the sisters or brothers, there is nevertheless a delight in others beyond the walls of the monastery, an open hospitality that invites and welcomes.

Through their grounded witness and work in the world, monastic communities point beyond themselves, reminding us of God in our midst. No matter the fissures and fractures in our society or lives, the monastic way of life calls us back to our truer selves, to the ongoing invitation from God to slow down and re-center ourselves. In their stability, monastics live hope, a trust that God will show up again and again to the same people and places with new grace. Such hope and trust is a light in the darkness and a gift to us all.



The Very Rev. Melinda Hall is the elected Dean of the Cathedral of St. Paul in Erie, the first woman to lead the congregation and one of the Episcopal Church's youngest cathedral deans. Melinda is married to Nathan and they have a two-year-old son, Luke.

**Throughout time,
monasteries have been
havens of peace:
the calmness of a
monastery pulls us to
sacred time, and the
monastic rhythm
reminds us to slow down,
to listen more deeply...
—The Very Rev. Melinda Hall**

Take Back the Site vigil for Amy Hoffer, victim of domestic violence.



Take Back the Site

Take Back the Site vigils started in 1999 after a five-year-old girl was murdered in Erie and the Benedictine Sisters decided to promote peace and healing by reclaiming murder sites for nonviolence. The vigil held on October 12, 2021, for domestic violence victim Amy Hoffer described on the previous page, was the 143rd vigil since the first one in November 1999 for Anora Manus, a young mother killed by a man in October 1999.

The Benedictine Sisters of Erie and Oblates, Sisters of St. Joseph and Associates, and Sisters of Mercy and Associates sponsor and organize the vigils when a violent death occurs in the city.

During each 15-minute vigil, usually held at the site of the violent death, those gathered pray for the victim and their loved ones, and for the perpetrator and their loved ones. The prayer includes song, scripture and the symbolic sprinkling of holy water to reclaim the ground as holy. Family, friends, neighbors, and others committed to being a presence for peace and nonviolence participate. Organizers speak to family members prior to the vigil to offer condolence and to invite them to participate. This prayer time helps build community and allows the families of both victims and perpetrators to begin moving forward after horrific loss.

"It is not about making judgments but rather about reclaiming places where violence has occurred for nonviolence, for peace. We take that site back, reclaim it for the neighborhood, for the people involved, and for the city. And in doing so, we are committing ourselves to work for peace so this kind of tragedy stops happening, so our vigils aren't needed," said Erie Benedictine Sister Mary Ellen Plumb.

**Sign up at
eriebenedictines.org/bfp
or scan the QR code to sign
up and receive email alerts
when a Take Back the Site
vigil, a Silent Peace Walk,
or other Benedictines for
Peace (BFP)
action is
scheduled.**



Support for Victims of Domestic Violence

The clients at St. Benedict Education Center often face many challenges in addition to the need for job training, skill development, and employment opportunities. The staff at SBEC may never know the extent of the challenges their clients face, but they are now prepared to provide greater assistance with one terrifying challenge: domestic violence issues. SBEC is now a PurpleOne Certified Safe Place for Domestic Violence Victims. There is a purple dot on the building's front door that indicates this status.

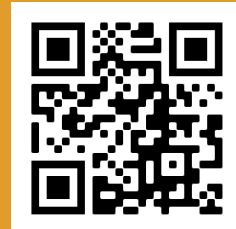
The majority of the staff have completed PurpleOne training that teaches them to recognize victims of domestic violence, respond appropriately, and refer them to the best resources. SBEC is one of more than 50 organizations around Erie that are PurpleOne Certified.

Purple One was created by Safe Journey, an Erie County-based agency, and Rural Domestic Violence Task Force in Union City, PA. Safe Journey provides free shelter, confidential counseling services, and educational resources for women, children and men who are victims of domestic violence and teen dating violence. The hope behind Purple One is to empower victims and community members to take action that will lead to the eradication of domestic violence.

Visit purpleone.org



Visit mysafejourney.org



Final Monastic Profession

Making room for God

By Jacqueline Sanchez-Small, OSB

Sister Valerie Luckey, OSB, made her perpetual monastic profession on October 9, promising to live as a Benedictine Sister of Erie for the rest of her life. She made this promise in the chapel at Mount Saint Benedict Monastery in the presence of her Benedictine community, her parents and grandmother, and dear friends and coworkers, all of them attentive as she pledged herself to the lifelong practice of obedience, stability, and *conversatio morum* (conversion to the ways of a monk). Even though COVID precautions required face masks, there was no way to mask the smiles on Sister Val's face and on the faces of those of us who love her.

The profession ceremony was the culmination of six years of monastic formation, during which Sister Val learned to live and pray in community, studied spirituality, theology, and Benedictine history, worked in the community's ministries serving the poor and marginalized, and faithfully sought God's will, always discerning how she could best grow in love. In making perpetual profession, one part of that discernment comes to an end: Sister Val is now committed to seeking God within this cenobitic community, not by any of the other paths that can lead a person to spiritual wholeness. But even as her initial monastic formation comes to an end, Sister Val's monastic life, her journey toward an ever greater love of God and creation, is only just beginning.

Those who gathered to witness Sister Val's profession joined in praying that she would be faithful to this way of life, and the sisters promised to support her however they can. But ultimately, monastic profession is an expression of deep reliance on God alone. This was especially clear as Sister Val sang the *Suscipe*, a ritual that dates back to the time of Saint Benedict. The monastic making profession stands in the center of the chapel, moving toward the Paschal candle, and sings the *Suscipe*, a verse from Psalm 119, three times, "Uphold me, O God, according to your word, and I shall live, and do not fail me in my hope." The monastic community, women who have made this same commitment, echoed Sister Val each time.

Sister Val reflected later, "Although the thought of such a deep commitment can produce fear in the moments leading up to it, making profession and choosing to live into the vows of obedience, stability, and *conversatio* have freed me to live a life focused on God. Although this is often challenging, I have found there is always joy greater than the fear or challenges."

That joy was highlighted at the end of the profession



Sister Val sings the *Suscipe*.



Sister Stephanie Schmidt, prioress, and those gathered bless Sister Val.



Tom and Denise Luckey, Sister Val's parents.



Dear friends Katie Gordon, Sister Jacqueline, Sister Val, Oblate Breanna Mekuly, Erin Carey.



Vist eriebenedictines.org/
become-benedictine or
scan the QR code.

To learn more about the process of
becoming a Benedictine monastic,
email vocations@eriebenedictines.org.

Three sisters make First Monastic Profession

ceremony, when Sister Stephanie Schmidt, prioress, gave Sister Val her "title," continuing a tradition of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie. Each newly professed sister receives a title, a short phrase that identifies a specific spiritual virtue or quality that the prioress sees in her, a characteristic that she hopes the sister will continue to develop throughout her life. Sister Val's title, "Of Mary, Joyful Bearer of the Word," was perfectly fitting. It points to her love of Mary, her delight in poetry and the Gospel, to the joie de vivre that Val brings with her wherever she goes.

It is a serious thing to make this perpetual monastic profession, to promise to leave oneself open to God forever. But the most palpable spirit, throughout the ceremony and in the little moments and details of the entire day, was one of deep, deep joy. Sister Val, the Benedictines, and those who gathered, rejoiced that a talented, earnest young woman has found a place to set down her roots and be nourished by a community that recognizes her gifts and encourages her to grow toward the God who loves her. What could cause more joy?

Sisters Jen Frazer, Jacqueline Sanchez-Small, and Colleen Leathley made their first monastic profession at Evening Praise on November 13. With first profession, they become scholastics and will spend the next three to six years focusing on the integration of prayer, community and ministry. The scholasticate is a time of discernment and preparation to enter a permanent covenant relationship with God and the sisters of the community.

Sister Jen is an artist and has Master's degrees in divinity and theology from Boston College. She is originally from Hawaii and visited the community many times before entering in 2019. Sister Colleen is from New Zealand and has a Master's degree in Social Science Psychology. She spent many years in Australia where she worked in private practice and taught at the Australian Catholic University. She initially came to Erie as a participant in the Benedict Riepp Monastic Experience Program. Sister Jaqueline holds Master of Divinity (Princeton) and Master of Social Work (Rutgers) degrees. She received the Joan Chittister Internship in 2015, then moved to Erie after graduation to work with Monasteries of the Heart before entering the community in 2019.



Sisters Colleen (seated), Jen and Jaqueline

Workshop and Retreat Experience



"Monastic profession is more than a commitment to community," explained Sister Kathy McCarthy when sharing her experience at the Benedictine Spirituality Workshop and Retreat. "It is about being available to the world in a different way, through our community relationships to be attuned to God and to be a positive presence in the world."

Sister Kathy was at St. Benedict Monastery in Bristow, VA, for three weeks in July for the workshop and retreat which is designed for Benedictine sisters who have made first profession, an initial commitment, to their communities and are now actively discerning perpetual profession. This year's theme was "Expanding Hearts: The Way of Profession."

The Monastic Heart

50 Simple Practices for a Contemplative and Fulfilling Life

A new book from Sister Joan Chittister

Practice 42 THE MONASTIC: *On "One Thing Only"*

Monastics are monks and nuns who spend their lives in monasteries under one of the ancient monastic Rules that have formed religious life and society for over 1,500 years.

They devote their lives to the one thing necessary—the search for God in life.

The questions are important ones: What is a monastic? What do monastics do? And how do they do it?

It's 5:30 A.M. There is no noise on the street yet. This hour, the early morning hour of Lauds, for morning praise, it seems, has been reserved for monastics alone, fresh with praise and gratitude, to start the day for the rest of the world. It is time to renew our trust in the presence of God among us. It is the moment to refresh our faith in the certainty that life has purpose, has meaning, has a sense of the Creator and a taste of creation that must shape our lives, that can be abandoned only at our peril. Indeed, monastic life is a sign of the eternal, a resting place on the Way, a breath of incense, a path lit by lights that lead to heaven. It takes a lifetime to mold a monastic heart in a society more concerned with the stock market, the election, the promotion, the security of it all.

... Between the Benedictine monks and the nuns, who came to this small area (Erie, PA) in 1856, strangers became home to one another. They were not alone any longer. And neither were we. We were simply doing what monastics had been doing for almost 1,500 years: creating community. America, the polyglot of countries and inner-city communities like

our own, saw them all. First, the Irish, then the Polish, the Blacks, the Russians, the Vietnamese, the Latinos, the Nigerians, the Cubans, and now the Muslims and Bhutanese.

... Clearly, monasticism is not about a flight from life. On the contrary. The monastic life is a life in love with life. The difference between monasticism and any good organization is that we give our lives to being the light of the soul for many.



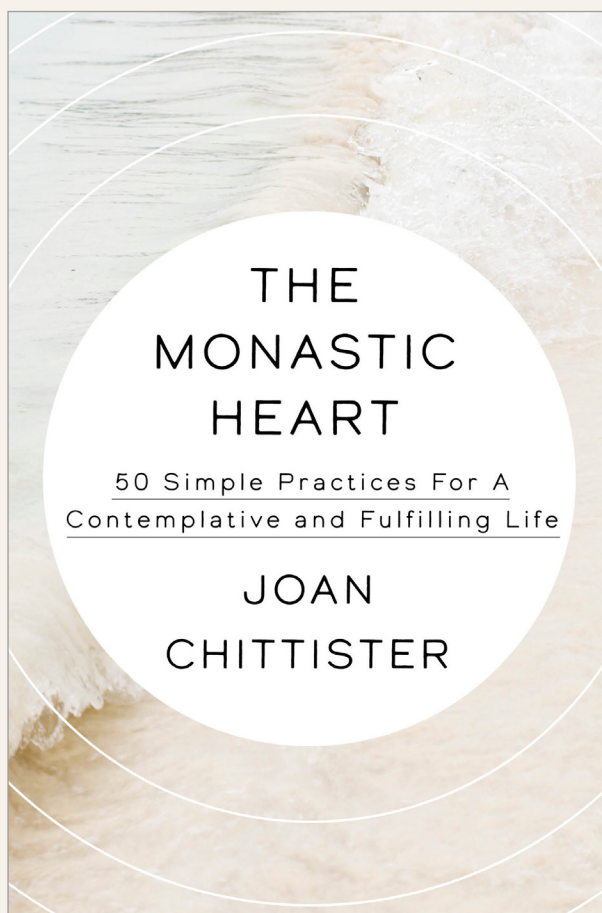
Sister Joan and her faithful feathered companion, Lady.

Integrating the Practice

Monastics live immersed in the scriptures, looking for the guidance to know what to do for people under stress. We make ourselves a model of the hope that strangers really can live

together in peace. We call ourselves to bridge the differences between people. To become signs of what it means to live a holy, happy, and purposeful life together. We spend our lives immersed in the scriptures so that we can know when as a people, as human beings together, we are beginning to lose our way, to follow false prophets, to forget the ways of Jesus. We try to understand how the basics of the spiritual life and the needs of the people around us might become disconnected. Then from decade to decade we reach out to freshen those relationships again and again.

Our spiritual life, as God says to the prophets of Israel, is to warn the people of their departure from the Way. We are to be heralds in the camp who hear the Word of God and repeat it so that others may also find and keep the path. We are celibates who live a life of reflection on the Word of God. We ask the questions others either miss or cannot deal with when their own lives—their jobs,



Published by Convergent Books, an imprint of Random House.

their children's education, their families' lives—depend on them.

It is one thing for us to denounce nuclear weapons, to protest gun legislation, to demand equality, to shout out loud against sexism, racism, inequality, and to be devoted to the fact that Black Lives Really Matter! But when a family is barely making it, when they need to work in industries that contribute to sexist, racist, militaristic culture—they cannot be expected to protest so much that they lose their own jobs. Then it is monastics who are free of that kind of public engagement that have the right, the obligation, to confront those issues, as monastics did for centuries before us. We live to establish communities of peace and justice. We live simple lives—as signs of what is possible in a culture which, instead, makes things and power the measure of success. Monastics live lives whose value is not computed by the plethora of things we own or by what we do not have. We set out to live ordinary, commonplace lives so that others may see life's superfluities and understand that losing them is no loss at all.

We divide our lives into times of choral prayer, private reflection and contemplation, useful service, personal development for the sake of others, and community building. In that way the hospitality and spiritual companionship we offer to others is as true of our lives together as is our care for theirs. We live full lives. We attend every day to the things of the soul, the spirit, the self, and the society around us. We live to be authentic voices of the love of God for us all. It is a template you can follow for a balanced and a happy life.

Our lives, our goods, our time, our care all belong to the people. We offer them words of faith, signs of love, an experience of home. And together we listen to the words of contradiction loud enough to signal all of us that we are living in a society that numbs us into becoming less than we are humanely meant to be.

To us there is only one thing that is important—and that is to live in the Presence of God for the things of God so that others may truly live also.

The monastic life in this particular monastery, like your own life, has had its challenges, its difficult decisions, its hard times to live through. But with it all, the breeze in the window at 5:30 A.M., cool and low, tells us that this life in the midst of toil and tumult is, nevertheless, a stable and steadfast one. It is a quiet life, a regular life, an intense life. This life, for both you and me, is about personal growth, communal growth, and human growth, all of them measured by the spiritual peace, growth, and light they give to everyone whose life we touch.

Visit joanchittister.org or scan the QR code. Receive a \$2 discount if you use coupon code MOUNT at checkout.



Care for the Earth managing money wisely



The Erie Benedictines and Emmaus Ministries, Inc., are two of 72 faith institutions from six continents who announced their commitment to divest from fossil fuels in an October 26 post on the Laudato Sí Movement web page. "The institutions' prophetic actions follow the recent call from Pope Francis and other faith leaders to global governments to address the 'unprecedented ecological crisis' ahead of COP26." The Benedictine statement reads: "The climate crisis is an emergency. Divesting from fossil fuel is one way to decrease carbon emissions. The Benedictine Sisters of Erie, Pennsylvania, make a corporate commitment to 'be a healing presence and prophetic witness for peace and justice by actively addressing the climate crisis and the rights of women and children.' We sign this pledge to make real our commitment." Visit laudatosimovement.org/act/divest/

At the community's annual October gathering, Sister Anne McCarthy introduced the Laudato Sí Action Platform, LSAP, and its seven goals. LSAP is intended to empower the universal Church and all people of good will to respond to Laudato Sí, Pope Francis' encyclical on caring for our common home. The goals' holistic approach acknowledges the planetary limits of all socio-economic systems and the human roots of the ecological crisis. They call for a spiritual and cultural revolution to realize integral ecology.

1. Response to the cry of the earth
 2. Response to the cry of the poor
 3. Ecological economics
 4. Adoption of sustainable lifestyles
 5. Ecological education
 6. Ecological spirituality
 7. Community engagement and participatory action
- Visit laudatosiactionplatform.org/

Monasteries of the Heart marks 10 years

The Benedictine Sisters of Erie opened Monasteries of the Heart, an online movement sharing Benedictine spirituality with contemporary seekers, 10 years ago. Today, it has over 23,000 worldwide members. Sister Joan Chittister's book, *The Monastery of the Heart: Benedictine Spirituality for Contemporary Seekers*, launched the movement and is its core text.

Sister Joan writes in her welcome to the site, "Throughout the centuries, the Rule of Benedict has attracted seekers like you because it offers a template of what it means to live an ordinary life extraordinarily well. Monasteries of the Heart is that template for the 21st century."

Sister Mary Lou Kownacki, director, leads the staff in creating a solid curriculum based on the core teachings of the Benedictine wisdom tradition, most specifically what Sister Joan calls the five pillars of monasticism: community, study, prayer, *lectio divina*, and good work. Every week each pillar is updated with new wisdom, reflections, commentary, and monastic practices. Additionally, eCourses and eRetreats are offered on monastic themes each year by a variety of teachers and facilitators.

Monasteries of the Heart is truly a monastic template for today. Sister Joan invites us all to consider ourselves the "new bearers" of this great monastic tradition. What will we do with it?
—By Katie Gordon, Monasteries of the Heart staff.



Visit monasteriesoftheheart.org or scan the QR code.



Leadership change at Neighborhood Art House

Kelly Stolar, CFRE, is the new Executive Director of the Benedictine Sisters' Inner-City Neighborhood Art House. Sister Annette Marshall, who held the position since 2010, said, "I am grateful to be handing leadership of this important ministry to someone as capable, committed, and visionary as Kelly. We began the Art House in 1994 because we believe 'that the

need for art and beauty in the inner city is as real as the need for bread.' I believe that Kelly, along with our dedicated staff, will carry that mission forward in ways that meet shifting cultural and population needs."

Prioress Stephanie Schmidt noted that "Kelly has been Development

Director at the Art House for the past three years and is a valued part of the Art House family. Her dedication to the children is evident in her commitment to building and funding programs to help them create dreams for the future.

She has also grown to value the Benedictine charism that is at the core of our work in the inner city.

"It is because of Sister Annette's vision and dedication that we have such a program to hand on to the next director," continued Sister Stephanie. "We are grateful for the love and leadership

Sister Annette has given to the children, staff, volunteers, and donors over these many years. She will now begin to use her gifts towards another passion, care of the earth, as she becomes more involved in the Benedictine community's corporate commitment that includes actively addressing the climate crisis."

Visit neighborhoodarthouse.org or scan the QR code.



Kelly Stolar, CFRE



Annette Marshall, OSB

Sister Karen Kosin retires from Second Harvest

Second Harvest Food Bank of Northwest Pennsylvania is, for the first time, without an Erie Benedictine sister on staff.

Sister Karen Kosin, who served as Product Resource Manager, recently retired after 33 years. "During my years at Second Harvest I found my various roles challenging, all the while realizing that my work was helping people in need of food," she said.

The Food Bank was founded in 1982 with Erie Benedictine Sister Augusta Hamel as the first director.

Over three plus decades, Sister Karen held numerous roles including inventory oversight, solicitation and purchase of food, arranging shipping, and gleaning at local farms. She helped establish connections with grocery stores and farmers so that surplus food and produce could be redistributed to the hungry. Sister Karen also developed a volunteer program to help with packing and distributing food, giving volunteers an opportunity to find meaning in helping and serving others.

Today Second Harvest Food Bank of Northwest Pennsylvania serves the hungry in 11 counties and runs multiple programs.

While Sister Karen's retirement marks the end of an era—it will be the first time in 40 years that there is no Benedictine sister on staff—the good work will continue. "Ministry to the community is an integral part of the rule of St. Benedict. Sister Karen lives that legacy and we have been privileged to work alongside her and have learned from her selfless dedication to the poor," said Karen Seggi, CEO of Second Harvest Food Bank of NWPA.

"Sister Karen has set an example for us to follow and her guidance will be truly missed."



Karen Kosin, OSB



VIRTUAL OBLATE GATHERING:

For Everything There Is a Season: Care for the Earth

Nearly 90 oblates joined online for the 2021 oblate gathering “For Everything There Is a Season: Care for the Earth” that was grounded in the spirituality of Ecclesiastes 3 and attuned to the pressing needs of the day. Planning team Oblates Becky Spudich, Priscilla Richter, Mark Gorman, and Sandy Selby, worked with co-directors Sister Dianne Sabol and Oblate Joanne Cahill to plan what they initially hoped would be an in-person gathering at the monastery.

Panel presenters Sister Anne McCarthy spoke on the Laudato Sí Action Platform (LSAP) and Sister Annette Marshall on the vision of the community’s Care for the Earth Committee that embraces the “integral ecology” of Laudato Sí and sets forth measurable goals.

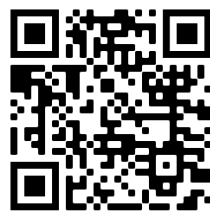
Oblate panelists Mark Gorman and Marlene Trambley challenged oblates to recognize the urgency of the times and the responsibility to make our Benedictine practices of listening, humility, and stewardship come alive in new ways as oblates and sisters commit to LSAP.

Prioress Sister Stephanie Schmidt encouraged oblates to recognize the opportunity—the responsibility—to join the growing worldwide momentum to address “one of the most critical issues facing the world today.” She encouraged them to, “Be honest in your conversations, be bold in your vision, and be committed, along with the sisters, 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.’” Read remarks of panelists at eriebenedictines.org/story/oblate_panel or scan the QR code.



Co-director Sister Dianne Sabol watches as Oblate Joanne Cahill, co-director, places 200 oblate commitment papers in the prayer space at the beginning of Evening Praise.

On Saturday evening, eight new oblates made their commitment and 200 current oblates renewed their commitment to the Oblate Way of Life with the Erie Benedictines. Four new oblate initiates were welcomed at the ceremony. At left, oblates participate via Zoom while sisters are gathered in the monastery. During prayer, oblates made their annual commitment. To inquire about the Oblate Way of Life, email oblates@eriebenedictines.org.



Thank you to Oblate Jo Clarke for the beautiful design of the new logo.

New Initiates:

Nicole Kearney
Callander, ON, Canada
Linda Shank
Elliottsburg, PA
Bernadette Strada
Rushville, NY
Merrilyn Tucker
Seattle, WA

New Oblates:

Cynthia Legin-Bucell
Edinboro, PA
Michael Bucell
Edinboro, PA
Cherylann Carter
Erie, PA
Claude Frankart,
Mason, OH
Katie Holzheimer
University Heights, OH
Dorothy Pearman
Hamburg, NY
Rob Giannamore
Albion, PA (transfer)
Nancy Stroschio-Haney
Bethel Park, PA (transfer)
+ Carolyn Lange
Sun City West, AZ
(formalized her commitment
before her death on May 21)

Requiescant in Pace

Susan Laber
Salinas, CA
Died December 15, 2020

Carolyn Lange
Sun City, AZ
Died May 21, 2021

Jerry Trambley
Erie, PA
Died July 4, 2021

Joan Agnes Pew
Haverhill, MA
Died August 15, 2021

Anne Marie Wykoff
Erie, PA
Died August 29, 2021



Seated L to R: Marilyn Randolph and Cari Serafin; Standing L to R: Jose Uc Chan, Nestor (son of Manuela y Nestor), Aide Varguez Pech, Azucena Santos Martin, Manuela May Chable, Nestor Puc, Josefina Martin Leon, Jessica Chan Varguez, Nelsi Varguez Pech, Vanessa Chan Varguez.

In Merida, Mexico, many oblates renewed their oblate commitment at Mass at the Sisters of Charity chapel followed by a party to celebrate 26 years of relationship with the Erie Benedictines.

Sister Pat McGreevy: Seeking Meaningful Change

—By Jacqueline Sanchez-Small, OSB

It's easy to feel cynical about institutions, and the Catholic Church, with its scandals and antiquated beliefs about women, gays, and other marginalized groups, is no exception. As a young woman embarking on life as a member of a religious community, sometimes I find myself wondering whether there's any possibility of progress, of meaningful change, in the enormous structure of the Catholic Church. Then I look at my community, women who have committed their lives to seeking God in times of inertia and in times of rapid evolution, and that provides a bit of perspective. One of our most committed change makers, Sister Patricia McGreevy, who spent decades building a renewed Church, recently told me a bit of her story, and helped me see what it means to be a part of living progress and creating change.

Sister Pat has been an Erie Benedictine for over 70 years, having become a postulant when she was a 16-year-old high school girl. The community she entered and in which she came to adulthood was part of a pre-Vatican II world, an apparently unmovable way of life. But when the Church and religious life began to implement the changes of the Vatican Council, Sister Pat—by then a young woman with intellect, perceptiveness, and wit that couldn't be overlooked—was chosen to be the chair of the committee that would guide Benedictine sisters in communities of the Federation of Saint Scholastica in finding a new sense



Sisters +Mary Margaret Kraus, +Rita Pruchniewski, Pat McGreevy, and +Phyllis Weaver load up the car behind the East 9th Street motherhouse before their drive to Chicago, IL, for their 1968 General Chapter of the Federation of St. Scholastica.



of what their life together could be. Everything, from their governance structure to the way that they prayed to the clothes that they wore, was to be evaluated, renewed, and shaped into a form that was more genuinely monastic and life-giving. The sisters had a wide range of hopes, expectations, and visions for what would emerge, and it took years to reach conclusions that everyone could accept.

"The process was...difficult, you could say," Sister Pat told me, and the courage it took to see it through is clear in her voice even now, 50 years later. "I reflect on it so happily now, but there were really, really tough times."

Amid the challenges, though, Pat discovered an aptitude for working through organizational and canonical complexities that those around her recognized and affirmed. So, some years later, when she felt called to find a new ministry—after over 20 years teaching at Saint Benedict Academy—it was natural for her to study for a Licentiate in Canon Law, a degree in the Church law that regulates Catholic institutions around the world.

She was one of the first women to undertake this course of study, but when I asked her what the community's reaction was when she made this move, she only smiled, waved a hand, and said, "It was to be expected. I had the training."

Two other women religious were in her program, along with 60-some clerics. I asked if there was difficulty coming into such a male institution as a woman in her mid-40s, if the priests minded the presence of women.

"Oh, sure, some of them," she said. "It's like anything else. You find your friends, the people who support you, who work with you and study with you. Some of the priests were wonderful, too. And everyone realized before long that we sisters were superiorly prepared for this kind of work. We had the education, we had the experience." She thrived in her studies, writing a dissertation on consultative bodies.

—Continued on page 17



Sister Pat and Bishop Richard Hanifen, first bishop of the Diocese of Colorado Springs, attend a banquet in 2001.

Turn this page into an O Antiphon “Zine”



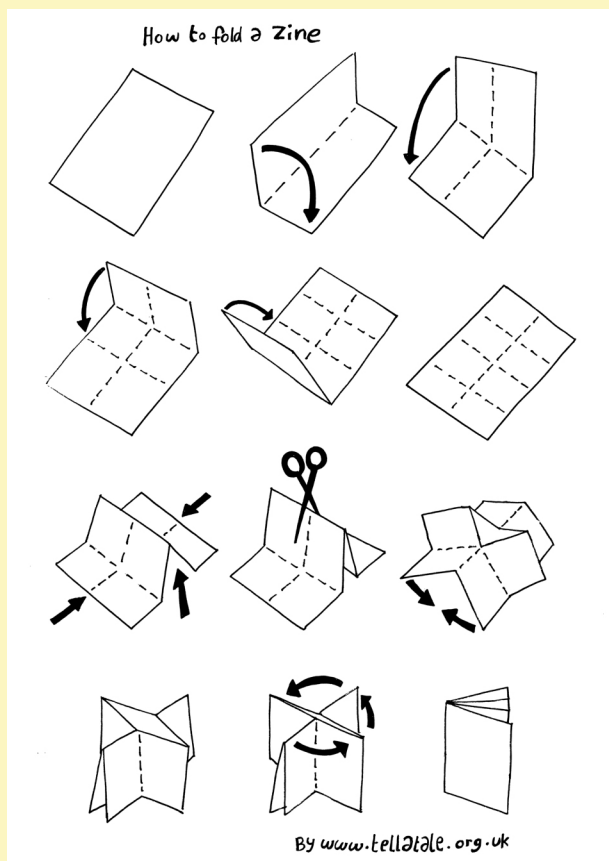
The “O Antiphons,” one of the oldest liturgical rituals in the church, are prayed around the world the seven days before Christmas. We recall in each of these prayers a quality of Christ that must be realized before the presence of Christ can consume the world.

“Zines” have been around only since the 1930s but have gained new popularity in recent years. Short for “magazine,” zines are generally handmade publications for sharing one’s own art, poetry, and profound thoughts.

To create your O Antiphon Zine, cut on the DASHED lines, crease on the DOTTED lines, then with the center slightly folded, gently push the ends together as in the illustration below. Re-crease your folds so that your Zine begins with the cover page and opens successively to the daily reflection. Keep your Zine handy so you can join in each day’s prayer beginning on December 17 and know you are praying with others around the world. Sister Joan Chittister wrote the daily reflections.

On the right side of this page (you’ll have to unfold your Zine to access them!) is the text for the chanted antiphons that you can listen to on the Erie Benedictine website. They were composed by the late Sister Mary David Callahan and are sung by the sisters.

Listen at eriebenedictines.org/zine-o-antiphons, or scan the QR code at the bottom right of the page.



December 17

O Wisdom, flowing from the mouth of the Most High; reaching far and wide, disposing of all things sweetly and mightily. Come teach us the way of prudence.

December 18

O Adonai, leader of the ancient Israel, giving Moses, while in the burning bush, the law on Sinai. Come with outstretched arms and teach us.

December 19

O Root of Jesse, standing as protector of the people; silencing rulers, inspiring the people to make supplication. Come do not delay, deliver us.

December 20

O Key of David, rod and staff of the house of Israel, one who opens and no one closes, the one who closes and no one opens. Come lead prisoners caught in darkness.

December 21

O Dayspring, Sun of Justice, bright eternal light, one who shows the way, the one who sets us free even in darkness and death. Come, disperse the gloomy clouds of night.

December 22

O Ruler of Nations, cornerstone of the people, desire of all; from the clay of the earth, by your own hand you have formed us and fashioned us. Come and open our hearts to one another.

December 23

O Emmanuel, leader and desire of all the nations, you set captives free, comfort the lonely; you feed the poor and the hungry. Come be born in us, God of Life.



December 19 O Root of Jesse

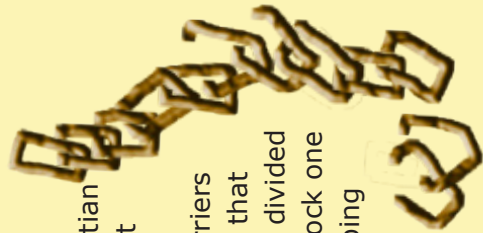
It takes generations to build the Christ vision in the world, just as it took

generations after Jesse to prepare for the coming of the Christ. It is our task to root ideas now that will bring the next generation to wholeness.



December 20 O Key of David

We are called to the kind of Christian commitment that opens doors and breaks down barriers between people, that brings unity to a divided world. Try to unlock one door that is keeping someone locked out of your heart.



December 18 O Adonai

When we build a vision of life it is necessary to realize that Jesus must be the center of it not our institutions, good as they may be; not our plans or personal talents, necessary as they are.



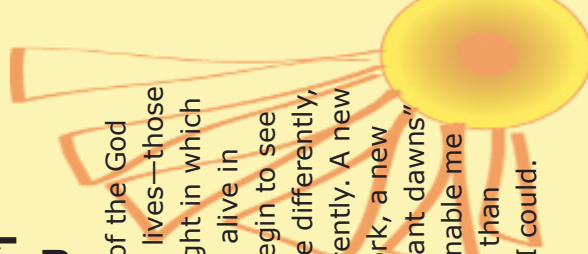
December 17 O Wisdom

Wisdom: the ability to see the world as God sees it. Try reading the newspaper today through the eyes of a God who was born in a stable, counted to be of no account, hounded by society from one place to another.



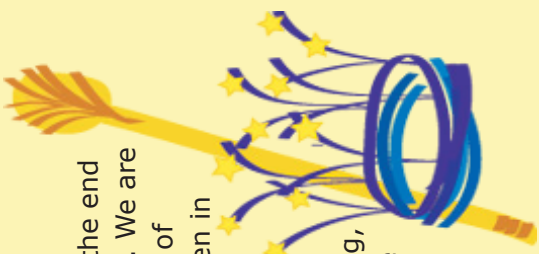
December 21 O Dayspring

The celebration of the God of Growth in our lives—those moments of insight in which life comes newly alive in me—helps me begin to see differently, to live differently, to function differently. A new friend, a new work, a new idea are all “radiant dawns” in life that can enable me to become more than I ever dreamed I could.



December 22 O Ruler of Nations

We are not the beginning and the end of the universe. We are part of a vision of humankind, seen in Jesus, and yet to be achieved in us, a vision of global sharing, universal peace and individual security.



December 23 O Emmanuel

Jesus Emmanuel has already come. It is not a matter now of Christ's being where we are; it is a matter of our being in the consciousness of where Christ is in life and where He is not as well. Where is Christ for you? Is there a place in your life that you know down deep is not in the spirit of Christ at all?



O Antiphons

Pray the



Prayers for December 17-23
by Sister Joan Chittister

Benedictine Sisters of Erie
eriebenedictines.org



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 Mary (William) Hoffman, OSB

Perpetual Monastic Profession August 22, 1952

Died September 26, 2021

Sister Mary was born and grew up in North Collins, New York. The year after she graduated high school in 1946, she boarded a train bound for Erie and presented herself at the door of the convent and declared she wanted to be a sister.

Sister Mary taught elementary and secondary education in Erie Diocesan schools. She earned a B.A. in Sciences at Mercyhurst College (now University) and an M.Ed. in math and physics from Catholic University of America. For many years she was the local director of the Pennsylvania Junior Academy of Science. While on the SBA faculty from 1964-1978, she led many groups of students on European study programs.

In 1978 she left teaching to move to Hermitage, PA, with her close friend, Sister Phyllis Schleicher, who had been named administrator of St. John XXIII Home in Hermitage. Sister Mary became the full-time activities director there.

In 1990 Sister Mary returned to Erie with Sister Phyllis, who had been elected prioress of the Benedictine community. She became assistant manager and program director at Benetwood Apartments. Nine years later, after Sister Phyllis had completed her time as prioress, she and Sister Mary moved to Potter County, PA, and became the founders and first directors of Catholic Rural Ministry in the Diocese of Erie.

When not engaged with ministry or the commitments of Benedictine community, Sister Mary was happiest outdoors, planting and gardening, walking, and playing with her dog. Seven thousand trees that make up the woods on the monastery grounds owe their existence to Sister Mary who, with her St. Benedict Academy students, planted them in the 1970s.

Obituaries and prayers for our deceased sisters are at eriebenedictines.org/obituary-sisters or scan the QR code.



—Continued from page 14

From there, Sister Pat went on to spend almost nine years in Colorado, working as the chancellor—the right-hand person to the bishop—in the newly founded Diocese of Colorado Springs. “It was a rare experience, to start a new diocese. And it was very, very exciting, to be able to create the local church from the ground up, to follow the new code coming from Rome, to be able to set up parish councils and presbyterial councils. You can’t describe what it is to walk into a new diocese, to create whatever is needed, to help the priests and the people,” she said. “You’re in a position to create structures that affect all levels of the local church, and you hope you’re doing it the way it was meant to be structured.”

She and the bishop worked closely together, at times seeing eye to eye and at times at odds with each other. “But I appreciated that he was upfront with me,” she said, “I could ask him, ‘Bishop, have you already made up your mind about this issue?’ and he would

tell me honestly. And he knew that I knew the way that things were supposed to be arranged, supposed to be done.”

Sister Pat would go on to work in the Dioceses of Richmond, VA, Dodge City, KS, and Erie.

It’s hard to imagine what it would be like to be so intimately involved in the creation of policies that affect so many people. Sister Pat’s serenity, her grounded, healthy view of both her own gifts and the enormous responsibility she had, is remarkable. It’s something I hope to carry with me as I try to find my own path, my own way of contributing to my community and to the local and global Church.

I asked her what advice she would give to someone like me, someone setting out in Benedictine life. She paused, reflecting. Finally, she said, “The word, ‘search,’ comes to mind. Continue the search.” That search for God, she says, is what sustained her throughout all the years of change, of envisioning and implementing what was once considered impossible.

Senator Casey visits Emmaus Kids Cafe



"No public official should be satisfied when there are so many children without enough food to eat," U.S. Senator for Pennsylvania Bob Casey stated with conviction as he began a press conference at Emmaus' Kids Cafe last June.

Kids Cafe Coordinator Breanna Mekuly explained the reality of the children who attend the Kids Cafe, "There is food insecurity in Erie. We have families who aren't certain when they will have a next meal. When a child arrives crabby, I ask them when they ate last. Sometimes, they haven't eaten since the last meal they had with us."

Senator Casey sat down with the children and answered their questions. One boy asked him to play one-on-one basketball, but the senator declined, acknowledging that age wasn't on his side, but also admitting that he does enjoy the game.

SBEC officially home to ECCCPA



St. Benedict Education Center (SBEC) opened its doors in September to students enrolled in classes at the newly-established Erie County Community College of PA (ECCCPA) that now occupies part of the SBEC building on East 10th Street in Erie. A lease was signed at a ceremony in July that paved the way for SBEC to become one of the host sites for the new community college. "ECCC will provide affordable, accessible education for the very population that St. Benedict Education Center serves," SBEC Executive Director Nancy Sabol said.

Benedictine Colloquium next June



Federation of Saint Scholastica 100th Anniversary

Benedictine Life: A Vision unfolding

The Federation of St. Scholastica, to which the Erie Benedictines belong, will celebrate its Centennial with a colloquium open to all followers of Benedict: women and men who are professed, oblates, or spiritual seekers. The colloquium will take place at Mount St. Scholastica in Atchison, KS, June 21-24, 2022. Six presenters will explore Benedictine wisdom, witness, and envisioning the way forward. This will be a hybrid event with both onsite and virtual presenters and participation. Erie Benedictine Sister Linda Romey is co-chair of the Federation Centennial Committee that is planning the colloquium. More information at scholastica-celebration.org or scan the QR code.



That in
all things
God may
be glorified

Nancy Sabol, left, SBEC Executive Director and Sister Stephanie Schmidt, Prioress

Nuns & Nones

"I live a commitment to God, in a spirit of justice, and want to hold myself accountable to my community across a lifetime." The statement could have been made by any one of the Benedictine sisters gathered at the monastery for a panel conversation with six young guests in July.

Sisters don't retire from "good work"



Sister Laura Beichner and Sister Susan Hallstein

Recently, two sisters who have spent many years working in internal structures within the monastery, Sisters Susan Hallstein and Laura Beichner, have "retired." After 31 years in the Insurance Office, Sister Susan now spends her days meeting other needs, offering her sewing skills to do mending and alterations. "I have time now to make hand-crafted greeting and note cards," said Sister Susan, "as well as extra time for personal prayer, meditation and reading."

Sister Laura's second career (after 36 years in education and administration) was 26 years in the Business and Development Offices. "The work enabled me to use my math education and record keeping skills. I also could fulfill my desire to serve others in community," she said. Sister Laura has a long to-do list that will easily fill her days, including making intricate folded-paper notecards.

SBA Alumnae Association supports St. Benedict Day Care Center

The St. Benedict Academy Alumnae Association supports Benedictine ministries as part of their mission. At three recent bingos, one of their major fundraising activities, members collected gifts and raised funds to benefit the children at St. Benedict Child Development Center and their families. Players received an extra packet of cards when they brought an item for the Center: One event collected toys, another scarves, mittens, and hats, and a third, personal hygiene items. After Sister Katherine Horan, Center director, spoke to the SBA Board about the needs of the 135 children and their families, the board members took immediate action and gave each child's family a \$25 gift card to a local market. They ordered \$1,000 worth of diapers and began purchasing books for the children to take home—books are a luxury many of the parents aren't able to buy. Board members delivered the gifts on December 1.



SBA Board members standing L to R Katie Young, Sue Zill, Cheryl Zingelewicz, Sue Chase, Darlene Kerstetter. Seated, L to R Alumnae Liaison Sister Rosanne Loneck, Ann Comstock, and St. Benedict Center Director Sister Katherine Horan.



...at the monastery

But it wasn't a sister. It was Brittany Koteles, one of the six core team members of Nuns & Nones, an "intergenerational, spiritual community dedicated to care, contemplation, and courageous action in service of life and liberation," according to their website. Brittany, along with team members, L to R, Diana Marin, Adam Horowitz, Alan Webb, Brittany, Sarah Jane Bradley and Katie Gordon, spent two weeks at the sisters' Glinodo Center, the first time they had gathered in person since the COVID pandemic began. They came from across the country: Milwaukee, WI, Bay Area, CA, Albuquerque, NM, Boston, MA, to dream, plan, learn, and enjoy time together. Katie lives with the Erie Benedictines at Pax Priory in inner-city Erie.

Raising Funds: We host events, write grants, *and count on you!*

Please consider a gift to the Benedictine Sisters of Erie this Christmas.

Your support of us enables us to support those who turn to us in our ministries and at our monastery.

We are grateful, too, when you make a gift in honor or in memory of a loved one—we are privileged to be a part of this special kind of gifting.

There is a return envelope folded in this issue of *The Mount*. You can also call us to make a donation, 814-899-0614, ask for Sister Linda (Ext. 2409) or Michelle (Ext. 2281).

If you prefer to donate online, go to eriebenedictines.org or scan the QR code.

Thank you, and may the peace and joy of Christmas fill your hearts and homes.

Linda
Linda Romey, OSB

Michelle
Michelle Basista

3rd Benedictine Sisters Golf Fundraiser



Prioress Stephanie Schmidt, center, and the Big Bees team, L to R: Tina Delio, Sue Minarich, Kathy Danch, and Irene Harrington.



A drizzly day didn't dampen any spirits during the 3rd annual Benedictine Sisters Golf Tournament on August 16. "What a wonderful event," said Mary Hoffman, third-time participant in the sold-out tournament held at Lake Shore Country Club in Fairview. "My team is already looking forward to next year, we had a great time!" The tournament raised over \$82,000, mostly in sponsorships, and those funds help the sisters continue their good works and meet the ongoing needs of the monastery. List of sponsors and winners are at eriebenedictines.org/story/winners-and-sponsors-golf-tournament-2021 or scan the QR code.

SAVE THE DATE

**4th Benedictine Sisters Golf Tournament
August 15, 2022**

The Foundations of Care

Gratitude for 2021 grants to support sisters' health care

The grant awards from four foundations are helping to support the care and comfort of sisters who reside in the monastery's Lakeside Health Unit. Part of the grant from Support Our Aging Religious paid for a new whirlpool tub and a blanket warming cabinet. The Ray and Kay Eckstein Charitable Trust, the Theresa and Edward O'Toole Foundation, and a foundation that wishes to remain anonymous, supported the nursing care provided to sisters.

Sister Therese Glass volunteers on the health unit and is grateful that sisters can be cared for in the monastery rather than go to a nursing home. She says, "Living in community is the primary ministry of Benedictine Sisters. Lakeside Health Unit makes it possible for sisters to live in community even as their needs for health care increase. And we can offer temporary care for sisters of all ages after surgery or for rehab. Generous gifts by donors make this continuity of living in community possible."

Staff member Jill Belmonte has been with the sisters on the Lakeside Health Unit for 28 years. "The staff and the equipment we have on the Lakeside Health Unit helps sisters to live, eat, and pray in community. This is their home and they can stay here and receive the care they need. The most important thing is that they don't have to go to a facility," she says. "The staff feels so proud to be able to give the very best care to the sisters. And because of your support, they have the tools they need to do so."



Jill Belmonte and Sister Mary Grace Hanes review a catalogue.



St. Benedict Academy
Alumnae Association
Newsletter
Winter 2021

"We'll always come to thee again, when alma mater calls."

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

sbaalum@eriebenedictines.org

Recent Reunions

Class of '67

Members of the **SBA Class of '67** gathered for their annual class picnic on August 11 at Glenwood. After not being together since the 2019 Christmas Party, there was a lot of catching up to do! The class will celebrate their 55th reunion at the 2022 picnic, Wednesday, August 10. Information will come via e-mail, so if you have not been receiving e-mails, contact Janet Romanowicz Hammond, hammondjanet@hotmail.com.



Class of '76

The **SBA Class of '76** celebrated their 45th reunion on Saturday, August 21, at Presque Isle with 27 classmates from states including New York, Maryland and Colorado. They enjoyed a catered meal, a Lassies Auction (gift auction), a Memories Table of uniform parts, newsletters, yearbooks and more. They played games like SBA Trivia and had a raffle for Train (an Erie band) tickets. Everyone enjoyed catching up and reminiscing. The proceeds for the Lassies Auction will fund this year's Christmas basket donation and the next big reunion—their 50th.



Sitting: Barb Ditrich King, Beth Bruno Gawronski, Susan Pacinelli DiVecchio, Cathie Piorkowski Hedderick; First row: Debbie Stockman Lasko, Maureen Maloney Johannesmeyer, Leslie Phillips Borressen, Carol Holdnack, Cindy Andrzejczak Rettger, Jane Earll, Ann Pilewskie, Patricia Rettger, Steph Heher, Barb Archacki Zdarko, Ruth Siatkowski Lowers, Carolyn O'Brien Carmosino, Diane Adkins-Tobin, Mary Beth Cermak Bell, Cathy Phillips, Darlene Webb Feeney, Jane Hogenmiller Steineck, Karen Kuchcinski Sonney; Top row: Cindy Anderson Tabolt, Jeanne Anderson Brady, Debbie Allen Parr, Nancy Szczutkowski Cross, Selena Laufenberg

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

Kathleen M Alberstadt Nowak '44
Theresa Zuzula Steers '47
Priscilla F "Pat" Gallo Zasada '48
Irene B Haraburda Abbate '49
Carol Ann Sohl Mallozzi '53
Catherine Ann Danowski Peterson Mansfield '53
Cynthia Bentze Nitzczynski '56
Nancy A Martin Wells '56
Grace M Hann Howells '57
Patricia Ann Cieslak Parmarter '59
Annette Felice Schaal '59
Kathyleen Benes '61
Margaret Jane Walkiewicz '63
Clara Dachtyl Meyer '66
Linda Ciocco Gidos '67
Susan Wroblewski Horvat '72
Betsy Ann Weber Soboleski '73
Patrice M DiTullio '75

Generations of “Friends we never can forget”

*“We thank thee for
thy guiding care,
and all we’ve learned
from thee.”* –SBA school song

Creating community is in the DNA of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie. One of the greatest testaments to this DNA is the enduring strength of the St. Benedict Academy Alumnae Association—even though the sisters closed St. Ben’s in 1988.

The first Benedictines arrived in Erie in 1856 to educate the children of German immigrants. In 1867 they opened St. Benedict Academy on East 9th Street. In response to the burgeoning Catholic population in the 1940s and 50s, they built a new high school building on East 10th Street that opened in 1955. By 1988, changes in the local population and in religious life made it financially impossible for the sisters to continue running the school and SBA closed its doors.

But the SBA community spirit wasn’t bound by the physical. Through the SBA Alumnae Association, it lives on in friendships, through reunions and parties, at bingos and fundraisers to support the sisters’ inner-city ministries.

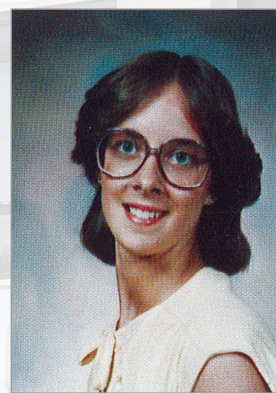
The first all-girls academy in Erie, in the course of its 121-year history many mothers and daughters and daughters of daughters went to SBA. Four mother-daughter pairs shared their experience of the character-shaping, friendship-building SBA spirit for this issue of *The Mount*. While graduating classes ceased to exist, graduates from the 1950s through the 1980s continue to influence family, friends, workplaces, the city of Erie and beyond.

SBA Alumnae Association Board, she plays a very active role in organizing the annual Christmas party and the bingo events where thousands of dollars have been raised to help support Benedictine ministries.

Darlene’s mother, Margaret Somjai Harkness, ’51, also formed lifelong friendships in her years at SBA. “Mom’s years at SBA nurtured her caring heart,” Darlene explained. “After graduation she enrolled in the St. Vincent School of Nursing and spent 45 years working in the St. Vincent Nursery and NICU, in addition to raising a family.”



Carol Fisher Kuna '56



Anne Marie Kuna Shiel '79

Like Darlene, Anne Kuna Shiel, '79, named friendship the greatest gift of her time at St. Ben’s. “There was something about St. Ben’s—the teachers we loved, our friends—that made us feel special, that we belonged.” Anne’s faith was nurtured at the Academy, too, and it is still an important part of her life, something she has shared with her step-daughter and grandkids.

For the women who studied there, the quality of a St. Ben’s education mattered. Anne continued, “when I interviewed for my first job at Hamot, the interviewer looked at my application and asked, smiling, “You graduated from St. Ben’s?” “I said yes, and knew I was in. That was 42 years ago and I’m still with Hamot.”

Anne’s mother, Carol Fisher Kuna, '56, confirmed that the lyrics of the school song, “friends we never can forget,” have proved true for her, too. She and her SBA friends have shared a lot of life since they graduated in 1956: “We’ve been through marriages, babies, divorces, ill health, become grandmothers...we’ve been there for each other, and our ‘club’ still meets regularly,” Carol said. “Ours was a neighborhood



Margaret Somjai Harkness '51



Darlene Harkness Kerstetter '82

“The greatest gift I received during my time at SBA was the joy of lifelong friendships,” said Darlene Harkness Kerstetter, '82. “And the joy I get through volunteering began at SBA. I am grateful to be able to help the less fortunate in our community.” Darlene made this observation in the same breath as she spoke of the “caring community” at St. Ben’s. As president of the

*“With friends
we never can forget,
who join us in our praise.”*

community—we walked down Parade Street to school every day, our numbers growing as others joined us en route.”

Almost every day Carol uses skills she learned at SBA. “Sister Mary Philip Kiehlmeier taught us sewing and I am still sewing and quilting. I taught my granddaughter to quilt,” she said.

Carol’s mother, Ruth Welch Fischer, was also an SBA alum, Class of 1926.

Sue Skrzypczak Chase, ’82, echoes the mantra of strong SBA friendships. A contributing factor that helped build those friendships was the sisters’ involving the students in the greater Erie community. “We walked from SBA to St. Stan’s for swimming lessons, to the gym at St. Mary’s, and we went to Camp Glinodo together. Then there was choral—we went all over the city to sing. We learned to love our community together,” Sue said.



Ruth Welch Fisher '26



Letitia Chimenti Skrzypczak '52



Susan Skrzypczak Chase '82

Add to that the excellent education and strong work ethic—“Businesses all around Erie recruited at SBA because we had such potential,” she remembers. “It’s how I got my first job.” Sue also spoke to the cultivation of a faith and prayer life at SBA. “We were grateful for what we had and we learned to give back, and we still do that today through the SBA Alumnae Association.”

Sue’s mother, Letitia Chimenti Skrzypczak, ’52, remains in contact with a few SBA friends although some of her memories have faded. Letitia does remember, though, that when she was at SBA everyone was going to be a secretary—but even in that, there was a desire to excel. “Because of her own experience, mom knew I’d get a good education at SBA and that I’d have many more choices than she did,” Sue said.

“Not going to school with guys let our strengths as girls shine through. It was girls who filled all the roles, like class president or in sports, and all the resources were devoted to us,” said Marjorie Bolash Adamus, ’82. “It made a positive difference.” And then there was the pride she felt in her SBA family. “My mom’s experience at SBA, her lifelong friendships, made me want to go there and be part of that family, even though most of my grade school friends went to a different school.”

Experiences outside the classroom, the connection with the larger community, stayed with Margie, too. “My science classes with Sister Pat Lupo influenced me the most. I learned that science was bigger than the classroom when we went out into the neighborhood or to Presque Isle.”

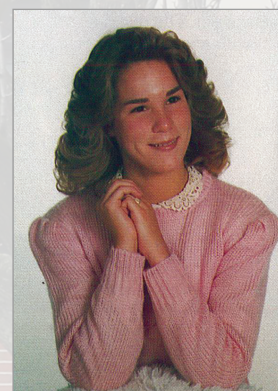
Anne Kaiser Bolash, ’56, was a west side girl—SBA was on the east side of the city and most students were from the east side—but Anne was sent to SBA through a set of unusual circumstances and it made all the difference. “The sisters valued us as persons and wanted us to learn,” she said. “They taught us to be gracious and kind.”

The first three years at SBA, Anne was in the 9th Street building. “The new building on 10th Street opened for our senior year. We were top dog!” she said in describing the experience. They got their uniforms at Kraus’ Department Store and spent lunch time dancing in the old gym—“I loved to dance, and I learned to polka,” Anne recalled.

Prayer and Mass were an important part of the experience, too. “Sister Mary David Callahan had a group of us sing the Mass prayers. And we loved being part of her choral group, we sang all over the community, even once with the Erie Philharmonic,” Anne said, echoing the sense of belonging to the larger community.



Anne Kaiser Bolash '56



Marjorie Bolash Adamus '82

The presence of a monastery in a city should have far-reaching effects—it should be a haven for the society in which it exists. Through decades of educating, respecting, challenging, and guiding generations of young women at St. Benedict Academy, the Benedictine Sisters of Erie have indeed been a haven. One would probably be hard-pressed to find a local business, company, a parish, school, or non-profit in Erie that somewhere in its history didn’t have a connection with a graduate of St. Ben’s. Generations of strong women, confident in their abilities, strong in their sense of friendship, and committed to the value of community and faith have been a haven in Erie and beyond. Their legacy—the DNA they inherited at SBA—is now passed on through their lives.



Benedictine Sisters of Erie

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

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.

the Mount

And she brought forth
her firstborn Son,
and wrapped Him
in swaddling clothes
and laid Him
in a manger, because
there was no room
for them in the inn.

—Luke 2:7

