If God worked through one woman to bring redemption, how is it that anyone can argue that God does not go on working through other women as well? —Sister Joan Chittister
I hope you enjoy your time with this issue of *The Mount* as much as we enjoyed putting it together for you! The various pieces seemed to fall into place and our cover artwork became a fitting capstone to the reflections and stories in the issue.

Let me introduce the artist who created *The Visitation* that graces the cover: Laura James. Oblate Kelly Adamson introduced us to Laura’s work during our retreat last summer. Laura, of Antiguan heritage, is a self-taught painter and illustrator. She illustrated *The Book of the Gospels* lectionary, published by Liturgy Training Publications in 2000. Her religious art is at the forefront of the movement toward a more inclusive representation of biblical figures. Find more of her work at www.laurajamesart.com.

Our opening pages feature an interview with Mary Novak, Executive Director of NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice. Mary offered a public lecture and a day-long workshop for sisters and oblates during the community’s annual October Community Weekend. Erie’s Liz Allen, retired newspaper columnist and editor is this issue’s Guest Columnist. She shares a poignant reflection on “three blessed Marys” on page 11.

The Spirit moving in the Church inspired Prioress Sister Stephanie Schmidt’s reflections on the listening process used during October’s Synod on Synodality, see facing page. An excerpt from Sister Joan Chittister’s address at Spirit Unbounded: Human Rights in the Emerging Catholic Church, a lay-led synodal assembly that took place in Rome and virtually at the same time as the Synod, is on page 9. May you find inspiration and encouragement in their words.

We feature Benetwood Apartments in this issue, introduce Michelle Scully, a new member of the Communications and Development staff, recognize the winners in our 2023 Annual Golf Tournament, and more. Enjoy the read!

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Cover Artwork: *The Visitation* by Laura James

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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.
For the past month I have been fascinated by the Synod on Synodality that took place during October in Rome. It was a gathering of 465 selected believers from around the world and billed as “the most important gathering in Rome since Vatican II.”

The word synodality comes from the Greek and means “to journey together.” Pope Francis has invited our Pilgrim Church to journey together in prayer, reflection, and dialogue as we name the challenges of the present moment and discuss dreams, hopes, and opportunities for the future.

The process itself attracts me more than the content. The underlying premise is that all people count and have something to say that can contribute to the ongoing evolution of the Church.

Listening has been a key component in this journey that started two years ago when local Church communities were asked to meet in small groups and discuss their concerns and their dreams for the future. After collecting, sorting, and compiling local responses, a report from each country was sent to Rome to help create the agenda for this Synod.

At the beginning of the Synod, the selected participants spent three days on retreat praying for the world and for openness and freedom from their own biases.

Fr. Ormond Rush, an Australian scholar on Vatican II, encouraged the participants to “be aware of the traps that can draw them into ways of thinking that are NOT of God. These traps could lie in being anchored exclusively in the past OR exclusively in the present OR not being open to the future fullness of divine truth to which the Spirit of Truth is leading the Church.”

The actual meetings were conducted with small, diverse groups sharing conversation at round tables. Twelve people with equal time to speak shared their stories and experiences of Church and spoke their truth. A reverential silence permeated these Spirit-filled conversations.

Some participants reported that this was the first time they felt listened to by the Church. Others spoke of being transformed by the process of listening to others’ stories about their faith journey.

Praying, sharing, listening, silent reflecting, welcoming diverse perspectives—all tools of the Spirit that can be used in our own communities, families, and organizations to navigate change.

To participate with integrity in this kind of process involves letting go of old attitudes and learnings that have worked well for us in the past so that we can be open to develop new ways of being in the world. This is not an easy task, but definitely a skill that we need in this world where everything is in flux.

May the Spirit of freedom be with us all, and may we remember that Benedict instructs us to “Listen with the ear of our heart.”

In peace,

Sister Stephanie Schmidt, OSB
Prioress
In a collaborative effort to share Mary’s message more widely, we partnered with the Episcopal Cathedral of St. Paul to host a Friday night presentation in downtown Erie.

October Community Weekend public lecture: “Engagement in the Public Square, a spiritual practice” with Mary Novak

In his final book, Where Do We Go from Here, Chaos or Community, Martin Luther King, Jr., described the white backlash that every step forward for equality incurred. He noted, however, that a minority of whites genuinely want authentic equality. “Their commitment is real, sincere, and is expressed in a thousand deeds. But they are balanced at the other end of the pole by the unregenerate segregationists who have declared that democracy is not worth having if it involves equality.”

You have spoken of the fragility of our democracy. What are the beliefs or attitudes that you believe must shift if we are to come to a mutual understanding of the common good on which a stable democracy rests? How do you think we can shift them?

Answer

One of the uglier recent examples of the erosion of our democracy was at the end of August, when a Congressman from Virginia indicated that he welcomed a government shutdown, because “most of the American people” would not miss the government if it went away. Apart from the racist dismissal of all the disproportionate harm that communities of color would experience, this comment also lays bare how enemies of democracy have a vested interest in people believing the system does not work for them. And here we have a direct echo of Dr. King’s assertion that many people would reject our system of government if it serves all people without exception.

This is why we at NETWORK highlight how transformative federal policy can be and how much is actually getting done despite the headlines. We see our democracy work served through our policy agenda – promoting healthcare, housing, food security, economic equity, tax justice – not in spite of it. And I know that few people are aware of how faith-based groups like NETWORK came together en masse with our secular partners to protect so many human needs programs in the recent debt-ceiling debate last May; this is democracy at work.

We also call for a deep investment in the value of solidarity, which our politics have significantly divested from since the 1980s. The stratification of the ultra-wealthy from the rest of society is a failure of policy, and it offers a frightening foretaste of the society we would have without the protections of a robustly functioning democratic system. Pope Francis is very clear on this, about how the very people whose policies make our society less just and equitable are also the ones who blame problems on immigrants and people in poverty.

Pope Francis is right to emphasize interconnection as a value in need of wider adoption in our society. He is also clear that the common good should be pursued through political activity and government action and when it happens, it is “A Better Kind of Politics.” He calls the embodiment of this kind of politics “a lofty vocation and one of the highest forms of charity” – charity here meaning how we love our neighbor. If we can help enough of the sincere people Dr. King described to engage in this lofty vocation to help others see it is in their best interest to engage (and thus protect) our democracy, then we can round this corner and experience lasting transformation in our politics.
ON WOMEN RELIGIOUS: Question

Can you briefly explain why the work of NETWORK includes both lobbying and educational efforts? As the patriarchal, capitalist, white foundations of our religious institutions are being challenged by our rethinking of history to include women and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) communities and by our evolving consciousness, what does this mean for NETWORK? Who will be the players helping NETWORK to shape a new world as the women religious institutes we know today come to completion, merge, or evolve into new manifestations of living "religious" life?

Answer

NETWORK has always educated, organized, and lobbied as a way of raising awareness, building power, and working for structural change at the federal level. This is how to work most effectively toward the common good in a democratic system such as ours. But NETWORK was not created to be, nor is it now, just an organization for political change. NETWORK is a political ministry founded by Catholic sisters out of the depth of their experience of God and out of their experience walking with those pushed to the peripheries, those in our communities most impacted by the sinful parts of our structures. As one of the early intercongregational ministries of women religious, NETWORK is echoing the evolutionary process women's religious communities are experiencing, my being the first lay leader of NETWORK is just one example. What we have found is, like most transitions of ministries of religious to lay leadership, mission and identity work is crucial. Staying connected to the wellspring of our foundresses as well as our history is also essential.

Even as so many have benefitted from NETWORK's political ministry over these 50+ years, we are still reckoning with the legacy of systemic racism in the U.S. and how it still excludes so many. This has driven us to center racial justice at NETWORK across all of our issue areas and to center the experiences and perspectives of Black women, and Black sisters in particular. As the number of women religious decreases in the years ahead, what we are seeing is that communities of sisters see NETWORK as an important part of their legacy. It is something they built and nourished through the years, and it is something that can continue to be a driver of transformation in our society, perhaps especially as the sisters themselves create more and more space for their charism carriers and collaborators. At the same time, the leadership of women has always been and will continue to be a constitutive part of NETWORK's identity. It remains a prophetic and sadly necessary point of reference in both our politics and the church, though I would dare to say that both – with incredible effort and despite their many challenges – are moving in the right direction.

Community Weekend Speaker

Mary Novak brings her experience as an organizer and activist, a trauma-informed lawyer, educator, chaplain, and restorative justice practitioner to her leadership role as Executive Director of NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice.

NETWORK, founded 50 years ago by Catholic sisters, is an inclusive, national, Catholic advocacy organization open to all who are working to achieve equity and justice for everyone.
Erie Benedictine Oblates

a monastic presence for today’s world

The Erie Benedictine Oblate Community is 259 strong, active, and growing. Many of these oblates have been “a monastic presence for today’s world” for many years and we’d like to recognize them. Twelve 25-year plus oblates were present at the monastery for a group photo, see facing page. Others are listed at right with the number of years they have been an oblate.

Requiescant in Pace

Oblate Eileen Hothow
Tonawanda, NY
Died October 17, 2023

Georgina Moroney
Florence, MA
Died June 30, 2023

Helen Gzanowicz
Cato, NY
Died September 03, 2021

Doris Kreuz
Lockport, NY
Died May 14, 2021

Oblate Jubilarians
Frances Rizzo, 45
Marlene Trambley, 43
Rev. Dorothy Konyha, 42
Bob Wehrer, 42
Elizabeth Morris Downie, 41
Barbara Strauch, 41
Pat Sabol, 40
Nancy Sabol, 38
Karen Davis, 36
Mark Davis, 36
Mark Gorman, 36
Leroy Hammond, 36
Theresa Caritas Serafin, 36
Jessie Ferriols, 35
Rita Scrimenti, 34
Kate Arkwright, 33
Glenda Armandi, 33
Marilyn Randolph, 33
Annette Slater, 33
Kathy Stephens, 32
Adele DellaValle-Rauth, 30
Ralph Kelch, 30
M.J. Lyon, 30
Lanora Queckborner, 30
Dee Samples, 30
Mary Hazlett, 29
Dolores Prestay, 28
Kirill Kalmykov, 27
Margaret Kloecher, 27
Kay Hosterman, 26
Anne Martin, 26
Kathleen Pae, 26
Carol Richardson, 26
Lyta Seddig, 26
Marie Dietrich, 25
Rebecca Martel, 25

Oblates gathered at Glinodo Center on Friday of Community Weekend to consider their vocation—a way of life that brings a Benedictine presence to the many places, organizations, and people they encounter each day—and to examine the ways in which they support the fundamentals of Benedictine life: prayer, community and ministry.

The works of eight oblates were featured in an art show during Community Weekend. Varied media, from recycled tea bags to oil and acrylics, woodworking, fabric art, watercolor, and gilding—were beautifully displayed in the Chapter 57 Gallery at the monastery. Oblate Jo Clarke and Sister Margaret Ann Pilewski curated the show. Artists included, left to right, Oblate Jo Clarke, Initiate Gina DeMauro, Oblate Jackie Burns, and Oblate Rose Anne Jesenovec.
For more information, contact Oblate Co-Directors:
Joanne Cahill, Oblate and Annette Marshall, OSB
814-899-0614 ext 2402
oblates@eriebenedictines.org
Erie Benedictine Oblate Jackie Burns, a retired Episcopal Deacon and prison minister, represented the community at the Fifth International Congress of Benedictine Oblates this past September at Sant’ Anselmo in Rome. Reflections on her experience follows.

The Congress theme, “Moving Forward, Living the Wisdom of the Rule,” focused on the past, present, and future of Benedictine oblates committed to solidifying their role in the monastic tradition by being a presence and source of support, not only to their monasteries, but to the Benedictine charism and their community’s Corporate Commitment as well. The insights of keynote speakers, workshop presenters, and discussions between facilitators and oblates regarding formation brought these points home. I came to the workshops fully prepared to contribute to the discussions because Erie Benedictine oblates had provided valued responses to the pre-work questions, and for this I was most grateful.

One hundred fifty-four oblates representing monasteries from 26 countries and every continent except Antarctica were present. They spoke English, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, Catalan and Korean. Yet, even with the variety of languages, there was good communication in small group discussions, workshops, and daily office. The workshop that had the least difficulty with translation was the three-part “Islands of Silence,” a lesson in listening with the ear of our hearts to the sounds around us when no one is speaking.

For many years my heart’s great desire has been to visit Subiaco and stand near the cave where St. Benedict was a hermit because he led the way for my spiritual growth for over 25 years. As with any loved one that has passed on, there is a desire to visit the places they lived in hope that the spiritual essence of their physical presence lingers on. So I went on the tour to Subiaco and stood in the very present essence of St. Benedict and offered a prayer of thanksgiving for what he has given to the world in the way of spiritual stability, constancy, and unity through monasticism.

We also had a much-anticipated private audience with Pope Francis. Little did I know there would be eight flights of stairs to reach the Clementine Room for the audience. With about 25 steps in each flight, I was out of breath and my legs were wobbling when I reached the last landing—I walked in and sat in the closest chair. But it was worth every step and I would do it all over again to relive the moment with His Holiness, who exemplifies what it is to be a Christian who lives out of an expansive heart toward all people. We “listened with the ear of our heart” to the words of Pope Francis: “I invite you to continue to expand your heart and entrust it every day to God’s love, never ceasing to seek it, to bear witness to it with enthusiasm, and to welcome it in the poorest whom life leads you to encounter.”

Three conferences were given at the Congress:
- “Expanding the Mission of the Monasteries We Serve,” Abbot Primate Gregory Polan.
Scan QR code for conference transcripts.
Sister Joan Chittister addressed a global audience at Spirit Unbounded: Human Rights in the Emerging Catholic Church, a lay-led synodal assembly that took place October 8-14 with live presentations streaming from Rome October 13 and 14. Below is an excerpt from Sister Joan’s Friday keynote in Rome, “Living the Discipleship of Equals.”

Spirit Unbounded was a worldwide offering from more than 40 international reform groups and more than 115 voices. It was offered alongside the XVI Synod of Bishops in Rome, called by Pope Francis.

The major question facing the Catholic hierarchy today is, What does discipleship really mean in a church that wants silent women in a world that needs thinking, committed, caring courageous ones like Mary of Nazareth, Mary Magdalen, and the deacons Prisca, Lydia, Thecla, and Phoebe to gather the church anew?

If discipleship is reduced to maleness, what does that do to the rest of the Catholic dispensation? If only men can really live discipleship to the fullest, what is the use of a woman aspiring to the discipleship baptism implies—no! correction, demands—but does not demonstrate in the life of the church at all?

What does it mean for the women themselves who are faced with rejection, devaluation and a debatable theology based on the remnants of a bad biology theologized?

What do we do when a church toys with the equality of women—a reading here, distribution of eucharist there—but builds itself on structures that assure their inequality?

What, in fact, does the rejection of women at the highest levels of the church mean for men who claim to be enlightened but continue to support the very system that mocks half the human race?

What does it mean for the church that claims to be a follower of the Jesus who healed on the Sabbath and raised women from the dead and contended with the teachers of the faith?

And finally, what does it mean for a society badly in need of a cosmic worldview on the morning of a global age?

The answers are discouragingly clear on all counts. Christian discipleship is not simply in danger of being stunted. Discipleship has, in fact, become the barrier to something the church itself teaches is required of us all. Women are beginning to wonder if discipleship has anything to do with them at all. And therein lies the contemporary question of discipleship.

Some consider faithfulness to the gospel to mean doing what we have always done.

Others find faithfulness only in being what we have always been. The distinction is crucial to our understanding of tradition. The distinction is also essential to the understanding of discipleship in the modern church.

When “the tradition” becomes synonymous with “the system” and maintaining the system becomes more important than maintaining the spirit of the tradition, discipleship shrivels and becomes at best “fidelity” to the past but not deep-down commitment to the presence of the living Christ here and now confronting the leprosies of the age.

The world into which Jesus was born called the blind and diseased sinful, a female child useless, a menstruating woman unclean, and so all of them marginal to the system, condemned to the fringes of life, barred from the heart of the temple.

But Jesus takes each of them to himself, despite the laws, regardless of the culture, notwithstanding the disapproval of the spiritual notables of the area and fills them with himself and sends them as himself out to the highways and byways of the entire world.

To be disciples of Jesus means that we must do the same. Discipleship infers—requires—no less than the confirming, ordaining, love of Jesus for everyone, everywhere.
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 Miller, OSB

Perpetual Profession August 15, 1969, Monastic Incorporation June 13, 1987
Died May 14, 2023

Sister Mary entered the Sisters of St. Joseph in Erie, Pennsylvania, after high school graduation and taught in elementary schools in the Diocese of Erie and served as principal. She earned a Master of Education degree in religious education from Boston College in 1974.

She left education to serve as a parish religious coordinator and then work in social services at Community House for Women and then, from 1981 until her death, as director of Emmaus Soup Kitchen, a Benedictine outreach. In 1987 Sister Mary completed her transfer from the Sisters of St. Joseph to the Benedictine Sisters.

During her 42 years leading Emmaus, its outreach grew from a soup kitchen serving a daily meal to Erie’s hungry to a multi-faceted ministry of service to the poor, Emmaus Ministries. The most recent Emmaus project was the establishment of The Studio at St. Mary’s: Space to Create in the former St. Mary’s school building. The artistic space in the inner-city upholds the Emmaus mission of providing “bread for the body, care for the soul.”

Another oasis of beauty in the inner-city overseen by Sister Mary is the East 22nd Street Poetry Park. She was a co-founder of the Trinity Square Foundation, a non-profit organization dedicated to rehabilitating the East 22nd Street neighborhood where she lived and where the park is located.

Sister Mary received numerous awards and commendations and was often invited to speak about her work with Emmaus. Equally soft-spoken and passionate, the stories of her personal relationships with the guests who dine at Emmaus made visible for her hearers the lives of those in Erie who are most often forgotten and overlooked.

When not attending to the needs of others, Sister Mary enjoyed reading, gardening, and golf.

Sister Mary Therese Egan, OSB

Perpetual Monastic Profession August 14, 1961
Died September 16, 2023

A native of Oil City, Pennsylvania, Sister Mary Therese entered the Benedictine Sisters in 1956 and began her ministry of elementary school teaching. She taught at schools in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Virginia and also served in administration.

She earned her Bachelor of Arts in elementary education from Mercyhurst College, and her Masters in elementary education from Edinboro University. Throughout the 1980s and 90s, she received certifications in the field of computer technology at numerous colleges and computer workshops. In Virginia she set up the school’s first computer lab and trained teachers and all personnel in data systems and various educational computer programs.

In 1995 she accompanied another sister to Dodge City, Kansas, for ministry. She worked for the Catholic Diocese of Dodge City in the position of Computer Tech/ITV Coordinator. Returning to Erie in 2002 she was named Director of Information Technology for the Benedictine Sisters and oversaw both the computer and telephone systems for the community until her retirement.

Sister Mary Therese was extremely proud of her Irish heritage and shared her great Irish wit with everyone she met and at every St. Patrick’s party she attended. The Korean people and their culture became close to her heart when her brother, Fr. Tom, served as a missionary in both China and Korea, which she visited while he was there. Back home, during the football season, her loyalties and enthusiasm belonged to the Pittsburgh Steelers whose games became the highlight of every week.
As I walked along Erie's bayfront, wondering how to weave a tribute to strong women into a reflection about the Blessed Mother, “The Memorare” came to mind.

Saying the prayer aloud, I contemplated one line, “Mother of the Word Incarnate,” and focused on a single word: “Word.” I realized then my first lessons about how to write, speak, remember and reimagine words came from the strongest woman I know, Eva Ann Tremori Allen, my mother.

Mom was placed in an orphanage when she was about nine months old, along with her two older sisters. My family and I know why the three girls were left parentless in 1925; the details are too sad and grim to share here.

But after Mom died, I faced two mysteries.

First, why didn’t she have a birth certificate? Vital records show that both of her sisters were born to Italian immigrants in Tyler, Pennsylvania, a coal-mining town in Clearfield County, but there is no paper trail for Mom.

“I think I fell out of a tree,” my mom once joked. I delighted in that image. Maybe Mom tumbled out of a weeping willow, like the one that towered over our front yard, and her guardian angel caught her.

But it stung that part of her identity was lost. When she had to prove her age for Social Security, Catholic Social Services wrote back: “Unfortunately, I cannot find a birthdate for you in your file.” Luckily, the government eventually accepted proof of age from the baptismal certificate in the orphanage archives, which assigned her the birthdate of September 12, 1925, but misspelled her parents’ names and changed Mom’s original first and middle names.

I’ve found clues that my mom might have been born in Connecticut. Ellis Island records show that my maternal grandfather was headed there in June 1925, after visiting Italy and before returning to Pennsylvania.

A more ephemeral puzzle haunted me after Mom died. Why did it take her death for me to appreciate that Mom’s deep devotion to the Blessed Mother had been fostered because she grew up motherless?

I asked a cloistered Carmelite my question. “Don’t you realize, Liz, that’s your mother speaking through you?” she explained.

Mom still talks to me, in old letters with recipes for spaghetti sauce and manicotti; in my high school English book, where she tucked her handwritten notes about grammar and vocabulary; in books left behind when she died, Under the Tuscan Sun, by Frances Mayes, set in Cortona, Italy, my maternal grandparents’ hometown, and Are You Somebody? The Accidental Memoir of a Dublin Woman, by Nuala O’Faolain.

In turn, the late Sister Mary Lou Kownacki taught me how to talk to my mom. At Mary Lou’s Women’s Writing Workshop in 2017, she challenged us to compose an imaginary dinner invitation. I wrote to my Italian grandmother, Rosina Capoduri: “Please come to my dinner party. I’m inviting my mom, too. I want you to meet each other. We will have manicotti. We will serve Mom’s sauce.”

I told Rosina that she would also learn that although I was officially named after St. Elizabeth, the Blessed Mother’s cousin, my mother, known as Eva Ann, had, by chance, given me part of her birth name, as noted on her baptismal certificate: Olivia Elizabeth.

My mother’s mother must have been speaking through Mom when she named me, just as I often channel another strong Mary, the late Sister Mary Miller. She hired me to write for the Benedictines two months before she died.

If I rewrote that dinner invite today, I’d ask Sister Mary Lou and Sister Mary to join us for supper. They made sure that the good meals served at Emmaus Soup Kitchen come with heaping helpings of hospitality and kindness. Mom could relate.
Providing independent living for seniors is big business. The over 65 population is expected to increase by nearly 70% between 2020 and 2060 according to the Commercial Real Estate Development Association. There is a growing need for safe, secure housing when people decide to sell their homes and find a place more suited to their needs as they age.

In a prescient move more than 45 years ago, the Erie Benedictines decided to build a low-income senior living community on property adjacent to the monastery. The first person moved into the 75-unit Benetwood Apartments in 1981 and the building has been housing seniors ever since.

Wendy Wallace, manager at Benetwood, sees the need. “I think housing is a major issue for older adults in general, finding a place that is safe that they can call home,” she says. “Everybody wants to stay independent in their own homes. But sometimes it’s just not possible. The home becomes too much to care for and maybe they don’t have local family support. A lot of our residents have families living across the country and some across the world. They really need someone to help steer them through these changes.” Benetwood excels at creating such a caring community.

Benetwood is a stand-alone senior apartment building which makes it unique in Erie because most other options are part of corporate enterprises. “If senior housing is income based, it tends to be part of the corporate structure because they’re doing economies of scale and possibly sharing staff and responsibilities over several buildings,” explained Wendy. “But our independence, that kind of makes Benetwood a little bit of a unique commodity in Erie, which I think makes it special.”

It also stands out because of the longstanding Benedictine influence that fosters a spirit of community among residents and staff. Wendy notes that she felt at home from the first day she began as Benetwood’s service coordinator in 2015. She held that position for four years, working closely with then-manager Sister Pat Hause and absorbing the Benedictine spirit. She returned as manager at the tail end of the pandemic when there were still people isolating and keeping to themselves. “So when I started, I knew I wanted to get

Sister Stephanie Schmidt, prioress, offers a blessing at the annual Benetwood dinner when residents join sisters for a special meal in the monastery dining room.
people back together and build up that sense of community again, to provide for socialization again. That’s been kind of my driving force since I came back to Benetwood.”

Wendy’s thinking is in line with that of Erie Benedictine Sister Joan Chittister who writes in her book, *The Gift of Years, Growing Older Gracefully*: “The fact is that relationships are the alchemy of life. They turn the dross of dailiness into gold. They make human community real. They provide what we need and wait in turn for us to give back. They are a sign of the presence of a loving God in life. There is no such thing at any stage of human development as life without relationships. In this later stage, then, the only uncertainty is whether we will decide to live inside ourselves, alone with our past relationships, or trust that the life made glorious by others in the past can be made glorious again—by new meetings, new moments, new spirit.”

Wendy has a lot of support not only building community at Benetwood but also in efficiently running the facility. Sister Colleen Leathley is the assistant manager. With a background in psychology and a grounding in Benedictine spirituality, she is thoughtful and a good sounding board for Wendy. Sister Marla Bleil has been the administrative assistant since 1999 and brings a vast knowledge of the history of Benetwood, what has been done, what has worked, and what hasn’t, in addition to her Benedictine spirit. Terri Meyers is the service coordinator, a skilled social worker with experience working with seniors in housing. Mike Johnson is the maintenance coordinator and has many talents—he can fix almost anything and has saved Benetwood thousands of dollars with his knowledge and his workmanship.

And then there is the decades-long relationship between the Benedictine sisters and the Benetwood community. Wendy is the first non-sister manager of the Benetwood complex and, although the day will come when there is not a professed Benedictine sister on staff, that does not mean the Benedictine spirit will disappear. “As institutional religious life, which has served its purpose for centuries, changes to meet the needs of today’s church and world, there will be less dependence on professed religious women owning and running service ministries,” explained Sister Stephanie Schmidt, prioress. “The laity have absorbed the spirit of our charisms, in our case Benedictine spirituality. They now join us in following the teachings of Benedict and in living these principles and values from their own state in life. Yes, the monastic community of vowed women will be part of the mix, but we won’t be the ones ‘running the show.’ Wendy clearly operates out of a Benedictine heart, she is part of our broad Benedictine community.”

The annual Benetwood dinner at the monastery is one way we share our common spirit. We share grounds, walking through the woods and enjoying the beauty of each other’s properties. Benetwood residents occasionally attend liturgy at the monastery, and have served as volunteers. The sisters are sometimes invited to Benetwood events and sisters sit on the Board of Directors. Some support is more personal. “Sister Stephanie has been amazing. She has kept up with me since I started,” said Wendy. “She walks over and she visits with me, and it’s very meaningful. She assures me that I have the support of the sisters. And it’s just such a warm feeling to know that.”

Benetwood is a government-subsidized (HUD) non-profit facility administered by the community.
Michelle Scully joined the Development and Communications staff in June as Program and Events Coordinator and by August she had more than gotten her feet wet. Michelle, who was previously campus minister at Mercyhurst University for five years, became the first to hold this new position. It was created to respond to changing needs in the monastic community and to embrace opportunities to continue to strengthen a Benedictine presence in Erie. “We recognized that planning programs and events that bring people to the monastery as well as increasing our presence in the city are key to building relationships with persons who want to share our Benedictine monastic spirituality, collaborate with us in ministry and justice work, live near or with us, and possibly consider permanent membership,” explained Sister Linda Romey, coordinator of Development and Communications. “This new position is about communicating, sustaining, and growing our Benedictine charism, tasks that Michelle is deftly handling with energy and enthusiasm.”

Michelle’s first major event was this summer’s Goat Fest, planned and executed in conjunction with members of the Care for the Earth Committee, Sisters Annette Marshall and Jacqueline Sanchez-Small, and carried out with the assistance of many sisters, oblates, and friends who volunteered their time on a hot August afternoon. They welcomed some 250 people, including many families, who came out to see the goats, walk the story trail, engage in art projects and games, eat carnival popcorn, and simply enjoy the beautiful lakeside grounds.

You can reach Michelle at mscully@eriebenedictines.org or 814-899-0614 ext 2507.
Facets of Benedictine Community

A prayerful collaboration

A Benedictine community—a collection of persons whose encounter with the Rule of St. Benedict shapes how they choose to see the world and work and live in it—consists of many facets. The monastic community, those who have bound themselves to each other through perpetual profession and live communally in the monastery, is one facet. But just as many facets make for a more brilliant diamond, so too with Benedictine community.

As different facets of the community come into focus, we realize that being part of a larger Benedictine community enables us to respond to the needs of the world in a great variety of ways informed by the vision we share.

In the prayer at right, we see facets of Benedictine community reflected through three women: Lynn Weissert, a retired RN who cuddles babies in the Magee-Women’s Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) at Erie’s UPMC Hamot Hospital and who lived 23 years as a member of the monastic community before responding to a new life calling; Mary Beth Peterseim, a nurse who worked for several years in the monastery infirmary before taking a position in the NICU; and Sister Mary Ellen Plumb, a member of the monastic community who is also a hospice chaplain. Each sees and responds to the world through a Benedictine filter that is also colored by their own personal callings.

The Benedictine thread that runs through each of their lives brought them together when they felt a need for a way to offer comfort and solace to the parents of babies in the NICU. They wrote this prayer for those parents.

“O Divine One,
Thank you for the gift of this beautiful new child—a manifestation of your Light, a miracle that reflects your love and your grace. Gift__________’s life with beauty, joy, and hope. May she (he) grow ever stronger in body, mind, and soul. As our warm hearts surround her (him) today, may she (he) feel our love and caring presence.

In this time of fear and uncertainty, let your presence be a steady comfort to calm our (my) anxious heart(s). Help us to remember that we (I) do not face this challenging time alone.

Bless and support all who compassionately care for__________ .
Uphold them as they bring healing and comfort to our (my) child.

Please hold and protect baby__________ .
May your loving embrace shield her (him) from illness and distress.
Fill her (him) with inner strength so that she (he) may become stronger and healthier in every way and overcome any obstacles she (he) may face while in the NICU.

I (we) ask all of this with great faith and hope and in gratitude for your presence in our lives. Amen

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BENEDICTINE DONORS MATTER

Benedictine donors matter. Many of our donors are in it with us for the long haul, having donated year after year for decades, or making monthly contributions. Others have remembered us in their wills. Whether you are a first-time donor or a lifelong donor, know that your financial support to Benedictine life and good work will be far reaching and long lasting.

When you contemplate a gift to the Benedictine Sisters of Erie this Christmas (or anytime), you are considering a choice that will make a difference in the world that will ripple outward for years to come.

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 at right.

Leave your mark on the future

Thank you, and may the peace of Christ be yours now and always.

Linda Romey, OSB and Michelle Basista, CFRE

St. Benedict Academy class of ’66 graduate Christine Froehlich Tatalone says, “We were taught by phenomenal women at SBA who were committed to doing social justice work. The Benedictines were very forward thinking. I want to remember the Benedictine Sisters of Erie in my will because I believe they will follow these passions and continue this work long after I’m gone. I want to support their vision for the future.”

Your gift helps secure the future of a Benedictine presence in Erie. If you would like to make a planned gift to the Benedictine Sisters of Erie, contact:

Michelle Basista, CFRE
Development Associate
(814) 899-0614 x2281
mbasista@eriebenedictines.org

Our legal name and address is:
Benedictine Sisters of Erie, Inc.
6101 East Lake Road
Erie, PA 16511

Our Federal Tax ID number is: 25-0965501
On August 14, 144 golfers joined sisters and volunteers for the 5th annual golf tourney that netted $58,000 to help the sisters continue sharing Benedictine spirituality, advocating for a more just and peaceful world, and being a healing presence to those most in need. This year the tournament was renamed to honor Sister Mary Lou Kownacki who died on January 6.

**Congratulations to tournament winners:**
- 1st place Womens: Jo Clarke, Nancy Sabol, Cindy Liotta, Ann Daugherty
- 1st place Mens: David Bertges, Rodney Chiarelli, James Engstrom, John Frey
- 1st place Mixed: Charlotte Kneidinger, Kirk Kneidinger, Nathan Kneidinger, Michelle Robertson

- 2nd place Womens: Denise Quadri, Sharon Buettner, Marion Hargreaves, Lynn Fogle
- 2nd place Mens: Pete Fedorko, Kevin McGarry, Tom Pickwick, Bob Imboden
- 2nd place Mixed: Rick Clayton, Sue Clayton, Leo Olszewski, Rachel Olszewski

Womens Long Putt: Nancy Sabol
Mens Long Putt: Rick Clayton
Womens Long Drive: Karen White
Mens Long Drive: Rodney Chiarelli

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**Monthly donor honored**

Sister Audrey Steff (right) offered the invocation at the ACES 2023 Awards Luncheon honoring Valerie Laufenberg as the Bob & Betty Merwin Outstanding Citizen. The two first met when Sister Audrey was Valerie’s teacher at Mount Calvary Grade School in Erie. Valerie, a decades-long benefactor of the Benedictine Sisters, recently retired after a 36-year career as Executive Director of ACES (Americans for the Competitive Enterprise System, Inc.), a nonprofit dedicated to teaching students about free enterprise and economic education. The Bob & Betty Merwin Outstanding Citizen Award recognizes an individual who is dedicated to their profession, while contributing to their community as well.

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**Life, you see, is not about traveling through.**

**Life is about doing something that lasts beyond us, something that will, eventually, at least, bring the world one step closer to the completion of God’s will for it.**

—Joan Chittister, OSB
Listening Hearts, a grassroots program offering Benedictine spirituality to women in Erie challenged by poverty, launched its 2023-24 cohort at Mount Saint Benedict Monastery on October 11. Over the next nine months, the group will be exploring ideas from Chapter 7 of the Rule of Benedict on the 12 steps of humility, using The Way to Inner Freedom journal by Sister Joan Chittister. The first session included prayer, introductions, an overview of the program and this year's theme, a lectio activity and sharing of insights. Eight participants joined the sisters for lunch, expressing their appreciation for the beautiful surroundings, companionship and meal.

This year marks a new beginning for the group, with a new location and new facilitation team. Sister Anne McCarthy, who co-established the group in 2016 with Sister Carolyn Gorny-Kopkowski, is co-facilitating this year’s cohort with Sister Colleen Leathley and Oblate Cherylann Carter. Listening Hearts is a ministry of Monasteries of the Heart, sponsored by the Benedictine Sisters of Erie. For more information, email retreats@eriebenedictines.org.

That in all things God may be

Sister Susan Doubet, long-time educator, principal, and basketball coach at Villa Maria Academy in Erie was recently inducted into the 2023 class of the Cathedral Prep Athletic Hall of Fame. The Catholic Diocese of Erie closed Villa in 2022 after 130 years of operation, and the all-girls school merged with the all-boys Cathedral Prep for the 2022-23 school year.

Sister Susan is a 1965 graduate of Villa and helped move the school’s basketball team into its formal status as an annual state contender. The Villa Victors’ appearance in the 1982 PIAA Class 3A state finals game was a highlight of Sister Susan’s 1968-90 coaching career. In 2022 she was featured in the Erie Times News as a female sports pioneer: “Women who have made a difference in area athletics.” This recognition was held for the 50th anniversary of the passing of Title IX, giving equal opportunities in athletics, regardless of gender.

“I truly loved my years with basketball, both as a player and as a coach. My only regret is the knowledge of the hundreds, thousands, of talented girls and young women who, before Title IX, never had the chance to pursue a high level of athletic achievement,” said Sister Susan.

Listening Hearts program moves to monastery

Sister Mary Ellen Plumb, Oblate Mary Hembrow Snyder, Sister Anne Wambach, Sister Susan, and Sisters Charlotte Zalot and Judith Trambley

Sister Susan inducted into Athletic Hall of Fame

Sister Mary inducted into Athletic Hall of Fame
Benedictines for Peace sponsored a Silent Peace Walk at the site of the United Electrical Workers strike at the Wabtec plant in Erie. Strikers joined the 20-minute silent walk/prayer for peace. In a news interview at the conclusion of the walk, Sister Jacqueline Sanchez-Small noted, “We’re moved by the workers’ struggle, we know there is a human cost to what they are doing.” The strike ended after 10 weeks when an agreement was reached.

Mother Blandyna Michniewicz, OSB, Abbess of the Monastery of Perpetual Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in Warsaw, Poland, presented a first-hand account of the tragedy of the war in Ukraine to sisters and guests at her monastery on August 31. She shared stories of 20 Polish Benedictine communities’ outreach to refugees of the war in Ukraine. The presentation was sponsored by the Alliance for International Monasticism. AIM USA promotes cooperation and solidarity among monasteries throughout the world.

Regina Jaworski, an SBA alumna, served as translator for Mother Blandyna. Click QR code above to view presentation.

Sister Katherine Horan was recently named principal at Blessed Sacrament Campus where she will continue providing a faith-filled education that promotes rigorous academics along with service to others. Sister Katherine has 32 years of educational and administrative experience. She was an administrator for Migrant Head Start and Pre-K Counts/Head Start programs at the St. Benedict Child Development Center in Erie from 2020-2022 and she previously taught for the City of Erie, the Diocese of Erie and Erie Catholic being at St. Jude School from 2016 to 2020 as both a teacher and an administrator. Most recently, she was Assistant Principal at Blessed Sacrament Campus.

The Trinity Square Foundation sponsored a block party at the East 22nd Street Poetry Park in honor of Sister Mary Lou Kownacki and Sister Mary Miller, the creators of the park, who both died earlier this year. Their memory was honored with a new plaque that was installed at the park.
Woodturner Sister Audrey Steff was recently awarded a lifetime membership in the Presque Isle Woodturners, an organization she helped establish 25 years ago.

Sister Audrey has been wood turning more than 40 years—an art that she discovered by accident. A student's family invited her for dinner and the student's dad had a workshop and showed her how the lathe worked. "I was hooked," she said. She now works out of a small workroom at the monastery and offers her beautifully crafted bowls, candleholders, and other works for sale in the monastery gift shop, Chapter 57.

For more than 30 years Sister Audrey was an elementary teacher and principal followed by 20 years teaching adult refugees at St. Benedict Education Center. After retirement she was able to dedicate more time to wood turning.

Five Erie Benedictines participated in the Blasco Memorial Library’s Read-In “to reaffirm the importance of free and equal access to materials representing all children and families.” The Read-In was in response to public complaints about a “Read with Pride” display at the library featuring LGBTQ+ children's books. Rather than remove only the “Read with Pride” display, librarians opted to take down all displays in the Children's Library.

“There were a lot of people who supported the effort, and it was good for us to be there representing the Benedictine Sisters of Erie. As a community, we work to bring peace and equality to our world, to create a climate of equal rights for all people. This creative action united us with so many others who share our values,” said Sister Stephanie Schmidt, prioress.

The Benedictine Sisters give the annual Prophet of Peace award to an individual or group that embodies an 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.

Sister Stephanie Schmidt, prioress and Doreen Petri

2023 Prophet of Peace

The Benedictine Sisters presented their 2023 Prophet of Peace Award to environmental advocate and educator Doreen Petri on September 20. Doreen is a passionate advocate for the environment, making sure that children in the Erie Public School District learn to solve environmental problems collaboratively by working to change harmful policies and practices. She has instituted gardens in all of Erie’s public schools and has begun helping families design and implement gardens in their own backyards. Doreen collaborates in an Urban Agriculture grant at the Benedictine Sisters’ Inner-City Neighborhood Art House.

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Sister Audrey awarded lifetime membership

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Sisters Jacqueline Sanchez-Small, Stephanie Schmidt, Kathy McCarthy, Colleen Leathley, and Therese Glass.

Read-In to support LGBTQ+ rights

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Interviews form base of script

Mark Sunday afternoon, June 30, 2024, as a date when Alma Mater calls! On that afternoon, theater artist and Alum descendant Jenn Bokoch Gillett will present an original interview-based theatre piece, scripted from the dozens of interviews she has conducted with SBA alum, Benedictine sisters, and others. This particular style of performance tells a non-linear story built on the memories of interviewees as told in their own words. Jenn uses a combination of live actors and media to bring to life an experience lived in a particular time and place that continues to reverberate in those telling the story today.

“As I listen to so many diverse voices I am hearing common threads that weave through the many stories, and that together create a shared history of women who have had great, although often behind the scenes, impact on the lives of others. Families, like my own, were shaped by women who knew they had something special to give the world and passed that sense of purpose on to their children. Religious women who knew the strength of prayer and community used their voice to make a difference, not only at SBA but also in the local community and in the larger church and world,” said Jenn. “The story I will tell through the script will simply do more of what the sisters and their graduates have done for decades: inspire those who hear it, invite them into a way of life that can bring good and positive energy into all our lives.”

On a recent trip to Erie, Jenn conducted several in-person interviews and helped scout possible venues for the June 30 production. (The venue will be in the city of Erie but is not yet confirmed.) Use the QR code below to access our last eNewsletter that includes interview clips.
Thirty-two members of the Class of ’67 gathered for their annual summer picnic in August. They caught up on each other’s lives, shared a meal, and enjoyed a 50-50 raffle. Class members are looking forward to next year’s picnic on August 14, 2024 (SAVE THE DATE!), along with this year’s Alumnae Christmas Party on Sunday, November 26.

Wasn’t it just yesterday that we walked the halls of the Academy? And now we are gathering to celebrate our 75th birthdays. We were a band of young girls in 1966 and 57 years later, as we sang “with friends we never can forget,” we cherished how precious those years were and how they helped us to become a strong union of caring, kind and loving women. Lively chatter filled the air at our lakeside cottage site, decorated for our celebration. After questions about family, health, and travel, the talk turned to days spent at the Academy. Each of us related how our times at SBA had molded us in one way or another to become the women we are at age 75. A special thank you to Georgeanne Antalek, Cynthia Patalita, and Veronica Martin for all your wonderful help.

—Mary Margaret Pfister Joswig

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

Frances Marie Hobeck Salarino ’50
Theresa V Bryce Millard ’50
Dolores “Emily” Radomski Malinowski ’53
Nancy Jackson Mozart ’55
Rose Mary Samulewski Chludzinski ’57
Dolores J Kowalski Corsi ’58
Madeline Giacobello Wolf ’60
Mary Ann Kanonczyk Denning ’61
Jeanmarie Puckly Pietsch ’67
Kathleen Ryan Irving ’68
Jean Merryman ’74
Cathy Cancilla ’74
Karen Opatich Finley ’75
2023 Scholarship Winners

The SBA Alumnae Association is pleased to announce that 25 scholarships of $250 each were awarded to relatives of alumnae who will be attending Catholic grade or high schools for the 2023-24 school year. Funding comes from monies raised at the annual Christmas Party and the Cash Bingos.

Brooke Taylor, St Mark Catholic School, Granddaughter of Mary Przepyszny; Lila Kitchel, St Joseph Catholic School, Great niece of Susan Chase; Juliet Jocuns, Mother of Sorrows School, Cousin of Diane Lugin; Kinsley Rowe, Our Lady of Peace, Great niece of Janet Frazer; Lucas Coeffler, Blessed Sacrament, Son of Carrie Loeffler; Jameson Kaiser, St Luke, Nephew/Niece of Kathy Klapthor; Connor Wolf, Cathedral Prep, Grandson of Joan Wolf; Sophia Swanseger, Cathedral Prep, Cousin of Mary Beth Graml; Paige Belton, Cathedral Prep, Niece of Anne Bolash; Julia Dieteman, Cathedral Prep, Daughter of Anna Dieteman; Kathy Anysz (814)403-1940 or kanysz44@gmail.com with your new information.
Erie is the only major city in Pennsylvania in the path of totality for the solar eclipse on April 8, 2024. For nearly four minutes, the afternoon sky will go dark as the moon passes between the sun and the earth. The partial eclipse begins at 2:02 p.m. ET, and total darkness at 3:16 p.m.

At Mount St. Benedict Monastery we’ll be celebrating this spectacular once in a lifetime event (Erie won’t be in the path of totality again until 2144) with special prayer and celebration on Sunday and Monday.

We’ll share details in our monthly Good Zeal Zine eNewsletter (GZZ) as they become available. Scan QR code to sign up for GZZ or visit eriebenedictines.org.