

God's Time

Called to the Journey



Sister Michelle Sinkhorn (front, second from right) participated in an alternative spring break in Louisiana with a group from Bellarmine University. More information is available on page 2.

Discernment: How do we know?

By Sister Anita Louise Lowe



How do we know to what vocation God is calling us? How do we find a fit for our lives? If only we could ask for and receive a clear sign. Skywriting would be great! But rarely do we receive such overt signs from God.

So, how do we know? How do we make these difficult and challenging decisions?

Important decisions require that we spend time in prayer — that we discern. We need to look at all the aspects: What's good? What's right? What's best?

"How will I know?" While John the Baptist was in prison, he sent his disciples to ask Jesus if he was "the one." John had been present when Jesus was baptized, yet he still wondered and wanted to know for sure. When Mary Magdalene looked in the empty tomb and then met the gardener (who turned out to be Jesus), she must have questioned how she would know for sure that Jesus had arisen.

When we stop and think about it, we are in good company. Noah had to have wondered,

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God does give us signs to help us as we discern. Often, though, they're a bit more subtle than we would desire. These signs can be broken down into four areas:

1. Availability and Openness: Am I open to whatever God is calling me? Am I free to respond to that call?
2. Desire: When I consider this choice, do I feel hope and joy?
3. Motivation: What's my motivation? Is it to serve and love God and God's people? Would this choice bring me happiness and fulfillment?
4. General Disposition: Do I have reasonably good health (physically, emotionally, spiritually) to follow through with this choice?

Often a sense of feeling not worthy hinders our ability to hear and follow God's call in life. Yet, God is the inviter. God chooses each one of us for a special purpose in life. By

our Baptism, we are each called God's beloved daughter or son. That, in and of itself, makes us worthy of responding to whatever vocation God has called us.

So, how do we know? We never do have 100% surety. Look to the ordinary events of your life. Where do you find God? Where do you find joy? Where do you experience a sense of peace? Pay attention to these moments and what they tell you about yourself, your relationship with God, and your movement toward the future. In the end, as you make a choice, look for a deep inner peace. This is God's sign to you that you are moving in the right direction. That deep, inner peace (even if tinged with a bit of anxiety at the unknown future lying ahead of you) is the rainbow that God places in your heart, letting you know that you are not alone, and that you are following God's plan for your life.

Comings and Goings

A lot has been happening the past two months! In February, we held a High School Come & See Weekend, and eight high school girls attended. The girls were from Evansville, Princeton, Haubstadt, Rome, and Tell City, Indiana, and Louisville, Kentucky. Exactly a month later in March, we held a "regular" Come & See Weekend and four women attended that. They were from Colorado, Florida, Ohio, and Indiana. Both weekends were filled with great learning experiences, prayer, fun, and relaxation.

At the beginning of March, I attended an Alternative Spring Break mission trip with Bellarmine University students. Bellarmine is a Catholic university located in Louisville. We drove 16 hours and spent the week helping an organization called Project Build a Future. It is much like Habitat for Humanity, in that they build houses for low income families. It was created in response to Hurricanes Rita and Katrina. It was a wonderful week of service, fun, prayer, and reflection. I very much enjoyed spending the week with such a wonderful group of young people.

Top: Participants in our High School Come & See Weekend spent some time shelling nuts. **Center:** Some of the visitors during our March Come & See Weekend pose with the sisters. **Bottom:** Sister Michelle with "Team Sista" pull weeds during the mission trip to Louisiana.





What I do... as a Ferdinand Benedictine

Sister Jeanne Ellen Niehaus

Current Ministry:

Social Services Coordinator

Name of the place you minister:

St. John Day Center for Homeless Men

Location of the place you minister:

Louisville, Kentucky

How long have you ministered there?

11 years

Approximately how many people do you serve?

About 185 visitors daily

What ages of people do you serve?

Ages 20-100+

What is a typical day like in your ministry?

We open the shelter at 7 a.m. We close at 3 p.m. We offer social services, counseling, veterans services, legal aid services, housing options and basically serve as a safe place during the day hours. We offer free coffee. They can take showers from 7 to 11. They can watch TV, read the newspaper or magazines or books. This is a place for socializing and networking. They can use the phone for local or long distance calling. They can use our address as their mailing address. We help them get Kentucky IDs and birth certificates. We help them acquire food stamps. We assist them with job searches and help them with filling out all types of paperwork and application forms. We are very busy all day long. We have a staff of 20, and we have over 150 volunteers that help us carry out our mission of serving the homeless men.



Robert Anderson, a homeless man, and Sister Jeanne Ellen share a laugh inside the St. John Day Center for Homeless Men.

Tell a story about something that has happened in your ministry.

The most rewarding stories for me are the stories of men who were really struggling until they came to St. John. Once they become engaged in our programs and meet the staff and begin to ask questions and follow our suggestions, they eventually find themselves on the road to recovery from addictions, or are enrolled in college or GED classes, or have found jobs and are now able to get an apartment. They begin to find relief from their medical or mental health issues. The excitement and gratitude they have for the many things that we take for granted is very rewarding.

How do you do what you do differently (from someone else in your position) because you are a Ferdinand Benedictine?

That is a very difficult question to answer, because our staff is very dedicated. I do know that who I am makes a difference to many of our guests. Many of them come into my office and want to share their stories or ask a lot of questions about God or about spirituality. They know that I will respect them and hold in confidence what they choose to share with me. They ask me to pray for them and sometimes they ask me to pray with them right then and there. Many times they just want to talk about things that bother them or about things that weigh heavy on their hearts. I believe this is because I am a religious and not because I am a social worker.

How do you find meaning in the ministry in which you are presently engaged?

My work is very meaningful and rewarding. Seeing the poor and the homeless showing gratitude for a pair of socks and a cup of coffee, knowing that last night they slept at a shelter or under a bridge, always keeps things in perspective for me. Seeing them come into the shelter soaking wet from the rain and sitting silently without complaining is also very thought-provoking and powerful.

How does your Benedictine, monastic community life support you in your ministry?

I feel supported by my monastic community through the prayers prayed for the poor and the homeless and by the interest they show in the work that I do. Many sisters have been to St. John or have asked questions about the work that I do.

Sister Wilma Davis' story: Me and My Shadow

My Shadow dances with me, urges me, pricks me at times, gives me plenty of shoves, and yet rejoices with me in love. My Shadow, the Holy Spirit, is always hovering over me.

I had “show people” for parents. My father was in a circus band, trombone player. My mother played the clarinet in her family band and traveled up and down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers on a showboat. When they met each other, seven children burst forth from this union, five girls and two boys. I, Clara Jean Davis, alias Jeanne Davis, landed in the middle. My father insisted that all in the family be music conscious. Since there were no dancers, I was chosen. Later, my younger sister joined me, and we were a song and dance team until the Shadow called.

My Shadow began to surround me when I was born. The doctor told my mother I'd never live to be an adult. When I was about seven years old, I made up my mind to be a sister. Why? I don't know, except I had been taught by Ursuline sisters. Did they help? The Benedictines entered my life when I was in the fourth grade. My sister and I shared our prayer life with Sister Madeline. Since our baby sister had died shortly after birth, we were praying for another baby sister. Our prayers were answered several years later in the form of a baby brother.

The Benedictines became intertwined with me and my family. I will always remember that their door was opened wide for us, not just peeking through.

Then My Shadow frowned as I entered into the sixth grade. I was going wayward. But my seventh and eighth grade teacher, Sister Mary William, captured me through her discipline in the classroom, her interest in me, and her fun-loving ways with the class. She invited me to visit the

Academy (Academy Immaculate Conception – later Marian Heights Academy). My sister and I, after a bit of begging from our parents, began our high school years on the “Hill” at Ferdinand.

Prayer life at AIC and the mystery, yet kindness, about the sisters caused me to yearn for religious life. I was told to WAIT. Again I had my “fling,” and yet My Shadow remained at my side. I was torn between two loves, but I chose religious life and entered at 17 without my father's permission. A year later, my sister entered the convent with no obstacle course. We exchanged names and that is how I am known as Sister Wilma. What confusion for the family!

God has bestowed an abundance of love upon me. Throughout my life, I have had many blessings in my ministry of teaching and my day-to-day living. I know I have touched many lives, including little ones, teens, and adults. I enjoyed participating in Teens Encounter Christ, Renew, Quest, and Cursillo. The Shadow kept whispering to me to try something “new” and I did it.

My spirituality is a person-centered one. Alone in my bedroom, during *lectio divina* and at Eucharist, I find the person, Jesus. Being filled with him, I try to take him to others. The surprise is: He returns his Love to me each time I meet another.

My Shadow has ushered me into the Benedictine life, the Gospel way. My future is limited. I wish I had more years to spend with this loving, energetic, and talented community. All I ask of my remaining years is to be a Jesus amidst the crowd and ask My Shadow to lead me and the Community. How? I will leave that up to My Shadow.

After I professed my final vows, my mother told me her secret. Her prayer at my bedside, as an infant, was: “If she lives to be an adult, God you can have her — however her life's journey leads her.” On a walk on my profession day, my father whispered to me, “I am happy you are a nun.” Life dealt my parents three married children and three in religious life. Now isn't My Shadow a conniver?



Sister Wilma Davis (front, left) enjoys a presentation during the summer Community Days.

Catholics On Call young adult summer program

Every summer, Catholics On Call hosts an annual four-day program at Catholic Theological Union (CTU) in Chicago. This experience is designed for women and men (ages 18 to 30) who may be thinking about a life of service in the Church as a lay minister, religious sister or brother, or priest, and those who are undecided and want guidance in determining how God is calling them.

- Pray together, share your stories, dreams, and concerns, and enjoy the company of like-minded young adults.
- Hear nationally known speakers offer insights about how to listen to God's call in our lives.
- Meet outstanding Church ministers who share the stories of their service and how they came to hear God's call.
- Learn discernment skills and different styles of prayer.

The summer program provides a relaxed, comfortable environment for your personal discernment. It won't be an experience of recruitment to any Church group or community. Rather, it is a chance to listen to the voice of God, as God speaks within you and through others.

To learn more and to apply for the conference, go to catholicsoncall.org, write to catholicsoncall@ctu.edu, or call 773-371-5431.

Application process web site: catholicsoncall.org/apply



Include us in your summer travel plans

Are you making plans for this coming summer? Consider a visit to the monastery as you do so! We have scheduled a Come & See Week, June 24–30. This week offers you the opportunity to live at the monastery and at one of our mission houses for a week, to pray with the sisters, to share meals, to shadow them in their ministries, and to learn more about the Benedictine way of life.

The theme for this summer's experience is *Seek. Pray. Share. by Service to Others*. In addition to input and discussion around

this theme, you will have time for reflection, opportunities to share with others who are discerning a vocation to the religious life, and time for relaxing with the sisters.

You can sign up to attend at thedome.org/vocations or by contacting us by email at vocation@thedome.org or by phone at 800-738-9999.

We hope your summer travel plans include a visit to our monastery!

Future Come & See Events

June 24–30, 2011 (week) • October 14–16, 2011 • January 6–8, 2012 • March 16–18, 2012

- The weekend or week is free.
- Room, meals, and input are provided.
- Participants will pray, eat, and recreate with the sisters.
- This is a chance to visit with other women who are discerning religious life.
- Your parish, a local Serra Club, or Knights of Columbus may be able to help you with transportation costs. You never know — just ask!

For more information or to register:

- Call Sister Michelle
 - 812-367-1411, ext. 2830
 - 800-738-9999
 - 812-661-9104 (cell)
- Email vocation@thedome.org
- Register online at thedome.org/vocations.



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SISTERS
OF ST. BENEDICT
FERDINAND, INDIANA

Seek. Pray. Share.

Mission Statement

We, the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand, Indiana, are monastic women seeking God through the Benedictine tradition of community life, prayer, hospitality, and service to others. By our life and work, we commit ourselves to be a presence of peace as we join our sisters and brothers in the common search for God.