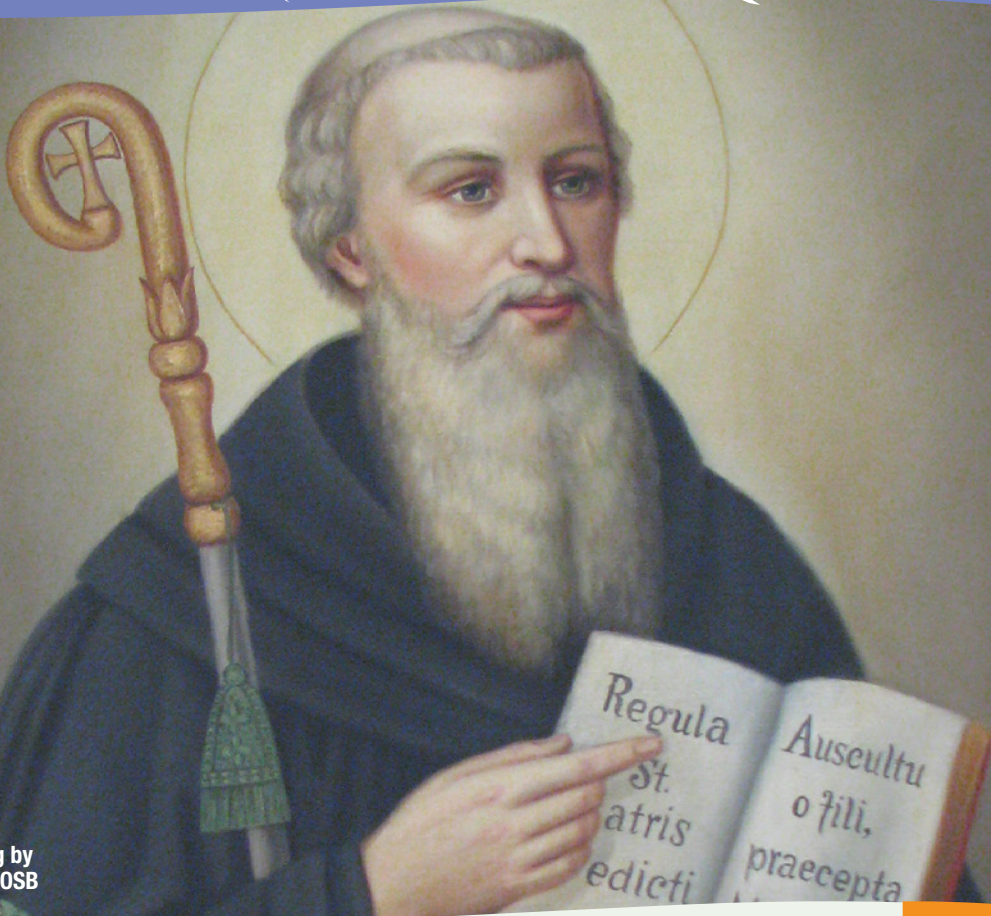


God's Time

Called to the Journey

St. Benedict painting by
Sister Gregory Ems, OSB



The Rule of Benedict in today's society

By Sister Jeana Visel



In the Benedictine charism, we find a spirit of Christianity that is countercultural, yet adaptable. In this life, we are invited to seek God in common with young and old. We seek God in shared liturgy. We seek God in times of silence and personal prayer. We seek God as our prayer flows into ministry and service to others. In our

work and prayer, in our encounters with the others who come to our door, we search for God, and in these things we discover the joy of finding God. This is the basic framework of Benedictine life. Men and women have been following this way for 1500 years,

and in every age, monastics have become holy saints. Our founder, St. Benedict, is our guide to Christ, and he very helpfully wrote a Rule to pass on his wisdom.

The built-in flexibility of the Rule of St. Benedict serves the needs of every time and place. In his great humility, St. Benedict gives many specific directions for how to live and pray together, and yet at the end of his efforts, he says, effectively, "If this doesn't work for you and you have a

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The Rule of Benedict in today's society

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way that is better for your situation, go ahead and do it. Just be sure to preserve the spirit of fervor and devotion that I'm trying to offer you here." What a gift St. Benedict gives us! Because he isn't so proud as to suggest that his exact way is the only way, his Rule is in fact more useful to us, and his true spirit has in fact become more easily shared, across cultures, across centuries, even across denominations. By the very nature of the Rule, we are not allowed to become so rigid in our practice that we cannot be open to growth and change when it is needed. What is constant in Benedictine life are the core Christian values St. Benedict imparts. These are aspects of life that are meaningful in every era: community, seeking God in prayer, care for the needy, and hospitality to others.

Benedictine prayer speaks to the value of community. When we take scheduled time to pray the Liturgy of the Hours and Eucharist together, this is not just about some "me and Jesus" notion of private sanctity. Certainly each of us is to be fed in private prayer with Scripture, what we call *lectio divina*, or "holy reading." At the same time, though, we are not hermits. In Chapter 72, Benedict prays that God will bring us "all together to everlasting life." We need each other to grow in holiness, and we journey together. Together, in the Liturgy of the Hours, in the Eucharist, we seek and find God in a beautiful way.

Benedictine life also has something to say to today's world about how we care for the weakest and most vulnerable among us, whether we are talking about unborn children or those deemed too old to be "useful." For Benedictines, as for all Christians, those who lack regular strength are not to be condemned for their weakness, but seen as an opportunity for the rest of the community to serve the suffering Christ. If we cannot find Christ crucified among the weakest among us today, where can we find him? Every human is marked with limitations of one sort or another, and St. Benedict invites us to accept them, as God accepted the limitations of becoming human in Jesus.

In the value of hospitality, Benedictine life offers us the calm words of Christ: "Do not be afraid." Trust God. Be at peace in yourself, and offer peace to others. We are invited to be receptive to the other, to recognize the innate dignity of each human person, to welcome the presence of the Holy Spirit in all those who come into our lives. Benedictine life invites us to see ourselves as gift to each other, not as threat. Benedictine hospitality says to our world, "Hey, don't be so scared to look around you and find God!"

Is Benedictine life relevant today? I think so. Not everyone is called to seek God within a monastic community, but the values that St. Benedict teaches are fundamental Christian values. As Christians, we are the Body of Christ. We belong to each other, and so we must be one, with Christ as the Head. Benedictine communities aim to be models of what this could look like. That's not to say we're perfect peaceful utopias. Every one of us Christians is on pilgrimage, and redemption doesn't just happen in the instant of our baptism. We have to participate in our own salvation. Professed Benedictine life gives the world an example of what can happen when we stay in it for the long haul. Beautiful transformation happens. Growth happens. Joy and friendship and overflowing delight in God happen. "Are you hastening toward your heavenly home?" St. Benedict asks at the end of his Rule: "Then with Christ's help, keep this little rule that we have written for beginners. After that, you can set out for the loftier summits of the teaching and virtues we mentioned above, and under God's protection you will reach them."

St. Benedict's aim is nothing less than the goal of every Christian life: to be united with Christ in heaven. In St. Benedict's Rule, we are given tried and true tools for reaching that goal. Step by step by step, if we allow Benedictine values to shape us, we will be drawn closer to each other. In the process, we will be led closer to God, and at the end of the day, at the end of our pilgrimage, we will discover that God has been with us every step of the way. That is a gift for today's world.



The four women at the January Come & See Weekend were joined by Sisters Jeana Visel (back row, at left), Rebecca Ann Mathauer (back row, third from left), and Gail Hamilton (back row, at right) and Sisters Diane Fischer (front row, at left) and Michelle Catherine Sinkhorn (front row, middle).

What I do... as a Ferdinand Benedictine

Sister Kathy Bilskie

Current Ministry

Administrator in a nursing facility/nursing home

Name of the place you minister

Hildegard Health Center, Inc.

Location of the place you minister

It is within our monastery at Ferdinand

How long have you ministered there?

Since July 2009

Approximately how many people do you serve (typically)?

17 nursing facility residents

What ages of people do you serve?

80-95+

What is a typical day like in your ministry?

Hildegard is a licensed long-term health care facility, whose purpose is to provide a home-like environment with nursing care. Everything I do is geared to provide the residents what they need while ensuring that the facility remains licensed by the State of Indiana and certified by Medicaid. There are meetings after meetings, talking with and assisting residents, and providing staff with support, supplies, and equipment to fulfill their duties.



Sister Kathy talks with a sister who resides in our health care facility.

I usually make rounds in the facility about 6:30 a.m., on my way to Morning Prayer with the community. After prayer, Mass, and my own breakfast, I may stop in the dining room to talk with more residents as they eat. Then

there may be a meeting or paper work. Sometime during the morning, I may visit a resident in her room, seeing how she is doing while also looking at the cleanliness of her room. It's important that we keep the facilities clean and neat for the residents' comfort. If I am able, I will join the residents in the afternoon for a few minutes as they participate in some group activity.

In between, a resident may ask to talk with me about a concern or share a letter received from a friend.

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

One resident in particular is a great example of living in the present moment. Although she struggles with some memory loss, her smile is brilliant and she can say the "Hail Mary" over and over again with great devotion.

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

Since all of our residents are currently members of the Ferdinand Benedictines, I help them continue to live their monastic lifestyle. Both the sister staff and the sister residents share our values with non-sister staff and visitors daily because we are living our work.

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

The Rule of Benedict speaks to the care of the sick. My work is a direct living out of the Rule. The Gospels also demonstrate Jesus' love for the sick, the disabled, the disadvantaged. I am directly involved in care for those who need attention, sometimes those people the "world" might consider less useful. Yet, every day I see how our residents continue to give love and support to each other, to staff, and to visitors. I see these sisters pray for the world's people each day.

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

My community life provides me support, structure, and balance so that I can minister faithfully with joy.



Sister Briana Elisabeth Craddock's story

I was born on September 29, 1971, in Burbank, California, to John and Susan Craddock. We moved around a lot when I was little, but mainly stayed in the Southern California area. It bored me to tears to go to church, and my mom would often give me paper to scribble on so that even if I would not behave, I would at least be quiet. One time I even put my "drawings" in the collection basket, to the great embarrassment of my parents! As a three-year-old, I was very much offended when they quickly retrieved them.

As I look back over my childhood, I realize that I learned more about God from the example of the people and experiences in my life rather than through formal instruction. Grandma Schaefer, my maternal grandmother, showed me what God's unconditional love was like, not only through her love and care for me but also through the respect that she showed to me even as a small child. My dad's mother, Betty Bay Craddock (Gaga), taught me about God's presence in nature, especially in the wild birds that she fed religiously throughout the winter in her backyard in Granville, Ohio. While Gaga was not a religious woman by any stretch of the imagination, she impressed upon me the responsibility that we, as individuals, have to care for the creatures that inhabit the earth.

While a lot of people in my life gave me examples of God's love and creativity, I really did not think that much about God. I went to Catholic school for most of my elementary school years, but religion was very automatic. I had faith, I did not feel like God and I had a relationship. I asked God for a lot of things, much like most children do. At this time, one moment of prayer stands out in my mind. My sister was born on March 7, 1982. She arrived two months early

and weighed only three pounds. When she was just a few months old, her pediatrician thought that she might have hydrocephalus. The day that my parents brought her to the neurologist, I climbed up onto a counter in our kitchen and had a talk with God about the situation. I begged God to let Blair be healthy, to let the doctor be wrong, for there to be a different reason why the doctor thought her head seemed abnormally large. As it turned out, the doctor made a mistake when he measured her head; she was perfectly fine. At that age, I knew I could ask God for anything. I never dreamed that God would ask anything of me.

I discovered differently a few years later. I began attending La Reina High School in Thousand Oaks, California. (Several years earlier, I had sworn that I would never become a "La Reina Girl," but God had other plans.) During October of my freshman year, we had a vocation awareness week. The school was plastered with posters asking questions like "Who will serve?" I did not think it would be I. Once again, God had other plans. One night I had a dream. I was with a group of nuns at the beach. Everybody was laughing and having a good time. Suddenly I realized that not only was I with the nuns, I was a nun. I woke up and realized that maybe God was trying to tell me something. I spoke with Sister Mary Ann Carla, my religion teacher, about the dream and asked her how to go about becoming a sister. Since I was only 14 at the time, she told me to keep praying and listening to God and that I would know when it was time to act.

I joined campus ministry, went on retreats, and did a bunch of other high school stuff. I put the thought of becoming a sister in the back of my mind. It stayed there until I was a sophomore in college. I felt restless.

After a young adult conference in Santa Barbara, California, I spoke with Sister Mary Ann Carla again. She asked me if I had given any more thought to becoming a sister. I seriously began thinking about it again, and found myself attracted to the order to which Sister Mary Ann Carla belonged. I ended up entering that order in June of 1991. I left in February of 1992, after realizing that while the sisters were very nice, I was not called to be one of them. It was a very difficult and painful decision to leave that community, but I realized that I needed to trust God's plan even when I didn't understand it.



Sister Briana, at age 3

Sister Briana Craddock's story

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At the time I thought that God was not calling me to religious life. Actually, I probably did not want God to call me to religious life. In fact, I think my exact words to God were, "Leave me alone. Don't bother me anymore. I cannot be a sister." I think God said, "I hear you, but I am not going to listen to you. I am going to keep calling you. Someday you will hear me."

Eventually, I decided to listen to God's voice calling me. I joined a discernment group and received a copy of *Vision* magazine. I saw the ads for our Ferdinand Benedictine community and felt a pull. I circled the number on the response card and sent the card in. I received a video and some information, but while I liked it, I told God that Indiana was too far away from California. Once again, God did not listen. Fortunately, God also got my dad involved. For my college graduation, my dad gave me money to pay for a plane ticket to Ferdinand for the Benedictine Life Week in July of 1993. I attended the week and felt "at home," but told Sister Rose Mary Rexing that I really did not think that God was calling me to the community in Ferdinand.

Sister Briana with her class members after temporary profession: (from left) Sister Paula Wolff, Sister Briana, Macy Marshall, and Sister Jayn Elizabeth Lein.

Have you ever noticed that God gets to you when your guard is down? God stepped in and got past the defenses my mind was putting up. God spoke to my heart. God did such a good job that by the time I was sitting in the plane on the runway to go back to California, I was certain that I had forgotten something. I went through my mental checklist: hairbrush, clothes, toothbrush, toothpaste... I finally realized when I got home that I had left my heart in Ferdinand. That's not an easy thing to live without. I realized that God was right (as usual) and that home was no longer California, but Indiana. Specifically, 802 E. 10th Street, Ferdinand, Indiana, 47532.



Life Awareness Weekend

**If you are considering a life choice and wondering ...
Is God calling me? How will I respond?**

**If you are a single man or woman, age 18-35, asking these questions ...
Here's your opportunity! Join other searchers to share, learn, and pray with others.**

The Life Awareness Weekend program for single adults started in 1983 in Houston, Texas. Its purpose was to provide single adults an opportunity to learn more about religious vocations and to begin the discernment process, if they choose to. Several religious sisters, brothers, priests, and diocesan priests will be at the event.

When: June 10-12, 2011

Where: Sarto Retreat Center, 4200 Kentucky Ave., Evansville, Indiana

Directions/Transportation: Upon request, a map will be sent with directions for those traveling by car. Transportation will be provided from the Evansville airport.

Registration Deadline: May 20, 2011

Future Come & See Events

March 18–20, 2011 • June 24–30, 2011 (week) • October 14–16, 2011 • January 6–8, 2012

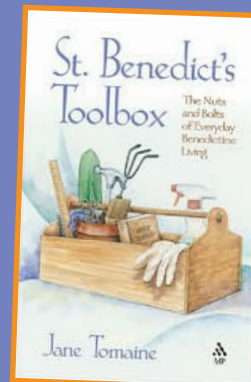
- The weekend or week is free.
- Room, meals, and input are provided.
- Participants will pray, eat, and recreate with the sisters.
- This is a chance to visit with other women who are discerning religious life.
- Your parish, a local Serra Club, or Knights of Columbus may be able to help you with transportation 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.

Come & See Weekend March 18–20

The theme for the weekend is *Lectio Divina*: Prayer of a Monastic Heart. Sister Kathy Bilske will talk about ways to pray with scripture.



As an added treat, Friday night speaker Jane Tomaine, author of *St. Benedict's Toolbox*, will be here at the monastery. She will introduce participants to the basics of Benedictine Spirituality and explore how ideas from the 6th century Rule of Benedict can help them stay centered in Christ in the frazzling world of the 21st century.

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Click here if you have a new mailing or email address.

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.