

# God's Time

*Called to the Journey*

Sister Alexandra (right) and her mother, April Bingham, share the joy of her entrance into the novitiate.



## God a 'dance leader' for Sister Alexandra

*By Greg Eckerle*

Sister Alexandra Larsen, 29, easily recalls how anxious she was to enter the Ferdinand Benedictine community.

"I wanted to be there right now, I was tired of waiting," said Sister Alexandra, who entered the two-year novitiate period of incorporation into the religious community on April 24.

"Then a friend told me I just needed to let go, to realize we're impatient as human beings, and that God has a reason for the timing. So I prayed on that for a while, and realized there is truth to it."

It naturally follows that her advice for someone considering entering religious life is to "have an open mind and an open heart, and let God do the leading, kind of like a dance, let God lead."

In Sister Alexandra's case, that lead took her to the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand. She visited other communities, but "just didn't feel that pull" with them. She felt it right away at Monastery Immaculate Conception.

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The pull for her was how welcoming the sisters were, how easy they were to talk to, and how comfortable they made her feel.

"I just felt that sense of inner peace, that I was at home," she said. "The sisters are so loving and full of wisdom. There's such a wide variety of women here, and they all have so many stories to share. I learn so much from them every day. I've found it's just the simple things in life that make you happy."

One class taught by the sisters that really impacted her was on the Rule of Benedict. It was beneficial for Sister Alexandra to hear their stories and absorb their experiences from living the Rule for so long.

One part of the Rule that's helped her is the advice to not be daunted, that this is not an easy task, but don't run away from it, take it one day at a time. Other sisters continually reinforce the "one day at a time" theme, reminding her that the community is all in this together.

She previously was an infant and early childhood teacher in Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

Now, she's looking forward to the novitiate period as "a time of growth and deepening my relationship with God and the community."



Community members and Sister Alexandra's family extend their hands in blessing for the new novice and her formation director, Sister Rose Wildeman, far right, as Sister Kristine Anne Harpenau, prioress, reads: "May God bless you with a listening heart to understand and assimilate the Benedictine values of stability, community, hospitality, and stewardship of the earth. Amen."

One act of the sisters that makes its mark on her is the compassion and love shown by them when they sit up with a sister who's sick or dying, no matter the hour, so that sister is not alone for one minute.

"That just really touches me," said Sister Alexandra.

She also enjoys the continuing support of the younger sisters who are out on mission, who are "always there for me to talk to."

She describes being part of the community as feeling like "we're one big family, that we're here on this journey together."

And Sister Alexandra is enjoying every step of the dance.

### Come & See!

Join us June 25 - July 1 to experience the reality of Benedictine Monastic life with us!



For more information or to register, email Sister Michelle Sinkhorn at [vocation@thedome.org](mailto:vocation@thedome.org) or call 800.738.9999.



# What I do... as a Ferdinand Benedictine

## *Sister Mary Judith Fleig*



### **Current Ministry**

ESL Coordinator/  
Translator/Receptionist and  
Translator for Courts

### **Name of the place you minister**

Guadalupe Center and  
Dubois County Court

### **Location of the place you minister**

Huntingburg and Jasper, Indiana

### **How long have you ministered there?**

Since 2001

### **Approximately how many people do you serve (typically)?**

This is difficult to say, but in one day, probably about 30 people.

### **What ages of people do you serve?**

Mostly adults but at times children also.

### **What is a typical day like in your ministry?**

Every day is different. Sometimes I spend the whole day at the Guadalupe Center receiving people who come for various reasons (like inquiring about preparation for Baptism of their child and signing up for English classes), calling a doctor to make an appointment because the Hispanic person does not feel comfortable speaking in English on the phone, translating a document, typing the Sunday bulletin in Spanish, or teaching English as a Second Language class. Other days, I go to court sometimes three times a day, so I do a lot of driving between Huntingburg and Jasper. I also visit the Hispanic people who are hospitalized at Memorial Hospital.

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

I had been translating for a particular gentleman that had been charged with dealing drugs, a felony, Class A. I had known him before he was charged and I really felt that he was not guilty, but since I am just a translator I cannot do much about the charges filed against someone. However, after I had gone to the jail with the probation officer to do a pre-sentence

report, the officer told me that she really questioned whether or not he was guilty as charged. She asked me to write a letter to the judge and explain how I saw this man and how I knew him. I hesitated to write the letter, but after some consideration, I did so. At the end he received a charge much less serious and much less jail time.

### **How do you do what you do differently (from someone else in your position) because you are a Ferdinand Benedictine? How do you share our Benedictine and monastic values?**

The Benedictine value of hospitality is uppermost in my mind. I try to be very conscious of receiving each person as Christ. I am particularly aware of this when I visit someone in the jail. It seems to me that some of them are in jail unjustly, so I want them to feel that they are loved as a person and not just a number.

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

I find meaning because I have been asked by my community to work in this ministry, and I feel that I am helping the marginalized people of our society. I am very happy doing what I am doing!

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

Living in community gives me energy to go out and minister to God's people. The sisters show their interest in my ministry by asking me about it and they encourage me to keep going. Of course, our prayer life is a great support, and I can bring to prayer the needs of the people I am serving.

Sister Mary Judith ministers at the Guadalupe Center in Huntingburg, Indiana. Here, she helps a Hispanic citizen during an English class.



# Sister Jackie Kissel's story



The first time I remember thinking about a vocation to religious life was when I was a sophomore in high school. I decided at that time I wanted to be a missionary. So later, when I was with my parents, I told them that the following year I wanted to join a missionary community. I then asked if it was all right with them. My dad told me I was too young to go that far

from home and if I wanted to be a Sister at my young age I had to go to Ferdinand where he could keep an eye on me. Since some 60 years have passed, and I am happily a Ferdinand Benedictine, that seems to have been the best choice for me.

I find God in many ways: in the other members of our community, in prayer, in my work/the people with whom I work, in my family, in nature, and in special events in my life. The reality of this has changed through the years. Some years God is evident more strongly in one way or the other. No matter where and how, God is a gift in my life.

Sister Jackie enjoys the time she spends with other parish ministers during their weekly staff meetings at St. Anthony Parish in Evansville, Indiana. Next to her is Sister Teresa Gunter, youth minister.

My prayer life has changed through the years, too. At times communal prayer would be the form of prayer in which I experienced God most powerfully. Some years personal prayer has been most important. During retreats I am very aware of God's presence, most particularly when I made a 30-day retreat in Cottonwood, Idaho. I will never forget how present God was to me then. On the occasion of my 25th and 50th jubilees I especially felt God's love.

Each time someone welcomes me as I am, I experience that same acceptance from God. I am also challenged to be a person of hospitality.

I have been leading a small group of parishioners in contemplative prayer. This has been a holy experience. Being present and hearing how God is calling the men and women to greater love and faith has been a reminder of who God is calling me to be. Being a director of faith formation gives me cause to continue my own faith formation and to know life is a journey and I am a pilgrim. I will not be finished until I die.

My life at Ferdinand has been a blessing. I know I have had many opportunities to continue to better myself. I have felt loved as well as challenged through the years. My best friends are my Ferdinand sisters. I am grateful for their love.

## Where have all the nuns gone?

Our brand-new booklet has some interesting answers!

And we'd like to bring copies with us on a visit to your college this fall.



Is your school a possibility? Contact Sister Michelle Sinkhorn at [vocation@thedome.org](mailto:vocation@thedome.org) or call 800.738.9999.





# Come & See the real deal

Last summer we gave our Come & See Week an extreme makeover! We restructured the schedule, added a retreat day, provided an experience to live up close and personal with a group of sisters, and more. Those that attended the week were very happy with it and remarked that it was a great way to see and be a part of our community. This summer, June 25 to July 1, we will again offer this opportunity to visiting women.

The week will include two days of service work, one in the civic community and one at the monastery; a chance to visit Saint Meinrad, the men's Benedictine community close by; an overnight at one of our mission houses; shadowing a sister in her ministry; a retreat day on the theme "Radically

Counter Cultural"; time to talk with the vocation directors; and, of course, common prayer, Mass, recreation, and meals with the community. In addition to those activities, women will also have time for swimming, boating, faith sharing, adoration, walks, personal prayer, and more.

Women who may not be able to attend the whole week because of work or school commitments are welcome to come for part of the week. Also, if there are any who have been in touch with us on a regular basis and need help with travel expenses, we may be able to find a way to help out. Just let us know.



## Thank you, Sister Agnes Marie!

For over six years now, Sister Agnes Marie Dauby has served our community in vocation ministry. In 2004, when Sister Kristine Anne Harpenau, our prioress, asked her to serve the community in this ministry, she recalls thinking, "Me?"

I've always admired the sisters who are in vocation ministry, but I never thought of myself as doing that ministry!" After talking with Sister Kristine Anne and praying about it, Sister Agnes Marie felt she could do it. She realized that many of her skills as a pastoral associate were transferable skills she could use in vocation ministry as well.

Sister Agnes Marie says of the ministry: "Vocation ministry is humbling, challenging, and involves prayer, patience, and perseverance to walk with women as they discern where and to what God is calling them. It is holy ground and it's a sacred space to be with someone who is in discernment. It involves building relationships and allowing those in discernment to see how my life is different because of following Christ in this way of life. Not everyone is called to this way of life. God calls each of us to follow God's way but we have to decide how we can best do that. Marriage

and the single life are both callings from God, and these callings are beautiful ways to follow in the footsteps of Christ. Discernment is about finding how we can best serve God and use the talents God has given us to serve others. Vocation ministry is really God's work. Vocation directors plant lots of seeds, but it's up to God to bring those seeds to life. I have felt honored to share in this ministry and promise to do my part to continue to promote vocations to the religious life, married life, single life, and priesthood."

Sister Agnes Marie will be in the Vocation Office until July 1, 2010. Those of you who have been journeying with her should have received an email explaining the changeover that will take place. Please take the opportunity to wish her well in her next ministry and pray for her as she transitions from one to the other. If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to email, text, or call!

**Sister Agnes and Sister Michelle pose with two visitors at the National Catholic Youth Conference in Kansas City — St. Benedict and St. Scholastica!**



# Future Come & See Events

**June 25–July 1, 2010 (week) • October 15–17, 2010 • January 7–9, 2011 • March 18–20, 2011**

- 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 the Vocation Office at 800-738-9999, email [vocation@thedome.org](mailto:vocation@thedome.org), or register online at [thedome.org/vocations](http://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.

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