

It's What We Do

A collection of stories about the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand, Indiana | 2015



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Welcome to the fifth annual edition of *It's What We Do*, which concentrates on how the Ferdinand Benedictines continue to touch the souls, hearts, and minds of the thousands that they so compassionately serve.

In the lead story, you'll hear what others think of night nurse Sister Anna Marie Brosmer. Her dedication is typical of what the sisters bring to their ministries. Such devotion is why the Indiana Senate passed a resolution last spring honoring the long work of the sisters, which you can read about on page five.

You can also learn about some of the programs our sisters present at the Benedictine Hospitality Center at Kordes Hall on our monastery grounds. These programs help participants develop a deeper sense of God and themselves, leading to a more fulfilling life. Feel free to find out more about the ongoing programs by calling 1-800-880-2777, or visiting www.thedome.org/programs.

We hope this issue will give you a better idea of what the sisters are up to. But rest assured there's much more to be covered. To keep up regularly with what the sisters are doing, please visit our website, www.thedome.org, or our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/FerdinandOSB.



On the cover: Sister Anna Marie Brosmer takes the blood pressure of Sister Mary Victor Kercher.

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Sister Anna Marie the night nurse ‘angel’

By Greg Eckerle

Dianne LeDuc's life changed forever when she woke up in St. Joseph's Hospital in Huntingburg, Indiana, over 40 years ago and looked up into the eyes of Sister Anna Marie Brosmer.

Dianne was a freshman student from Alabama at Marian Heights Academy in Ferdinand when she became very sick and was rushed to the hospital.

"When I woke up, and looked up, there was this angel in white over me with beautiful blue eyes," says Dianne. "It was Sister Anna Marie (she wore an all-white habit at the time). She took care of me for a month. I remember her flitting around and always being so positive and cheery. I was 14, scared, and homesick. She was just so kind, I knew I was going to be OK. She exuded from her being that I was going to be all right, and that God was with me, and she was taking care of me. I was so afraid and she was my port in the storm.

"I just admired her and what she did for me, in her nursing profession as well as in her spiritual life. She's the reason I'm a nurse now, because of her generous, loving care. I wanted to be like Sister Anna Marie. I wanted to have her knowledge, I wanted to have her love of

the job, her dedication. All of that spoke to me during that time she took care of me."

Dianne, 55, now the nurse practice manager for Allergy Partners of Northern Virginia, reconnected with Sister Anna Marie about a year ago, attending retreats at the Ferdinand monastery, and is planning to become a Ferdinand Oblate. So she still sees Sister Anna Marie in action as a night nurse at Hildegard Health Center in the monastery.

"I see how hard she works," says Dianne. "I see she's always willing to take care of the sisters in the infirmary, even beyond what her job hours call for. She did the same for me. There are people that stand out in your life as heroes – she has always been mine.

"She's still a go-getter. I know I can't keep up with her when I go to the monastery. She's 72, and I've never seen such an energizer bunny in my life. She's just go, go, go."

Above: Sister Anna Marie Brosmer takes the blood pressure of Sister Wilma Davis, a resident in the Hildegard Health Center at Monastery Immaculate Conception in Ferdinand.

“She has always been there for me. She’s there for anybody who asks. She just tries to lighten everybody’s load.”

Dianne endearingly calls Sister Anna Marie “my Florence Nightingale of the night,” comparing her dedication to the 19th century heroine who made the rounds of wounded soldiers at night during the Crimean War and is often called the founder of modern nursing.

Sister Anna Marie spent 30 years in health care ministry in Huntingburg. She then moved to the monastery infirmary in 1989, where she worked in administration and supervision for five years. Most of her years since 1997 have been on the night shift, from about 10 p.m. to 6:30 a.m. She’s long since adjusted to the nocturnal working schedule that can often derail one’s internal body clock. In reality, she enjoys it, especially the people she works with. For the past 10 years, she has worked most often with Christine Kelley, a certified nursing assistant, who, eerily like Dianne LeDuc, describes Sister Anna Marie as a “walking angel, she’s so kind to everybody.”

Christine points to the close relationship that Sister Anna Marie has with every Hildegard patient, because they are all Benedictine sisters she has known for years.

“She knows them better than any of us,” says Christine, so she is usually able to make a connection, even if they have dementia. “She’s just a very upbeat, very loving person. I think she was born with that personality. And being a Benedictine sister allows her to use her personality and her traits in a more positive way. There’s never anything negative that comes out of her mouth. Being a sister is an added plus.

“She has always been there for me. She’s there for anybody who asks. She just tries to lighten everybody’s load.” Christine also laughs that they’ve had a couple of challenges, but Sister Anna Marie just goes into the chapel to “pray for me, comes back, and everything’s good.”

A typical night shift consists of checking and giving medications, counting all 17 patients and ensuring they are safe, checking their bed alarms and call lights, completing paperwork for lab tests and doctor appointments, washing and cleaning various items, and helping sisters with their personal needs.

Sister Anna Marie (left) took care of Dianne LeDuc when she was gravely ill in 1975, then prayed for her for the next 40 years before they reconnected about a year ago.

“Sometimes if patients can’t sleep, we’ll fix them warm milk and honey, or crackers and cereal, and play soft music for them,” says Sister Anna Marie. She’ll pray the rosary with the sisters in Hildegard’s chapel or by the front desk.

Many have asked her why she’s not burned out after being in nursing for over 50 years, when many last only 10 to 15 dealing with the emotions of caring for the sick and dying. She answers simply that “it’s because I think it’s what God wants me to do.” That’s the source of her continually finding the strength to do what’s necessary. And she is serious about taking care of herself so she can better take care of other people. To relieve stress, she loves to watch sunsets, plays loads of music, usually before heading to work, and performs various crafts. And she simply loves taking care of her fellow sisters.

How she conducts herself has motivated others besides Dianne LeDuc to follow suit. “Quite a few people I know became nurses because they say I was a good example over the years,” says Sister Anna Marie. “That makes me feel good. They say they want the peace and the joy that I have. That’s a nice thing to say. I try to be a good nurse, to be very sensitive, to be the most caring person that I can be for God. It’s rewarding to me just to see the sisters pain-free and at peace. And to just see their needs are met, whether it’s getting them up into a wheelchair or turning them in bed so they’re comfortable. For sisters who can’t help themselves, we turn them every two hours to make sure they are clean and dry.”

For Sister Anna Marie, working while most of us are sleeping allows her to attend her community’s early-morning prayer and Mass, and



In October, 2012, Sister Anna Marie kids with the late Sister Michelle Willett (left) before Sister Michelle gives a presentation on coping with cancer to a group in Vincennes. Sister Anna Marie developed a deep camaraderie with Sister Michelle and supported her through some difficult times.



evening meetings and Vespers. So that works out better for her community life. And on the nights when she doesn't work, she jokes that she's "still roaming around," doing her laundry or extra praying.

Occasionally she is on call for Hildegard at night, but by living only two floors away in that part of the monastery, she can respond quickly when sisters become sick. And she brings the patience, compassion, and listening ear that is the trademark of Benedictines.

Despite her hectic pace, she has no thoughts of retiring as a nurse anytime soon. "I'm healthy and enjoy my work and would like to continue, because I feel I have some gifts I can bring to the sick," she says. "People have told me one of the greatest gifts I have is to see Christ in each person, whether they are healthy or confused by illness or dementia, and to not judge them."

Two Hildegard residents, Sister Mary Victor Kercher and Sister Wilma Davis, speak warmly of Sister Anna Marie.

"She's very gentle, kind, and considerate about what she needs to do for you," says Sister Mary Victor. "What she's doing here is phenom-

enal. She's in her element. I admire her very much. When she's not on duty, many times she's helping with the handicapped people up in the church balcony.

"She's very sensitive and observant to reaching out and helping people in trouble. St. Benedict was very insistent that the sick be taken care of, and that is her forte."

Sister Wilma notes that as soon as she rings the help bell, Sister Anna Marie is there. "I need all these different pillows around me, and she knows just how to put them to take care of me," she says. "I may need extra help at night, and she is always there. Even if there's an aide with her, she comes right forward to help. She has a charism to really help others, especially to the sick and the old people." ■

"What she's doing here is phenomenal. She's in her element. I admire her very much."



How psalms can set us free from pain

By Greg Eckerle

Sister Donna Marie Herr firmly believes the 150 psalms are a wonderful prayer book for our lives, because there is a psalm that fits every one of our wide-ranging emotions, from joy, gratitude, trust and praise, to grief, fear, doubt and outrage.

And there will come a time we'll need help in expressing those emotions to God, she told an audience of 11 at her program, "Praying with the Psalms," at Kordes Center in Ferdinand.

"The psalms are the perfect go-to prayer when we can't quite muster the words to express what is going on in ourselves," said Sister Donna Marie. "I don't think there is any prayer more honest than the psalms. It's OK to be honest with God, and to turn those feelings over to God. That keeps us from being possessed by those feelings, and ultimately sets us free."

She spoke particularly of the importance of the lament psalms, and how the honesty within them about how things really are can deepen our relationship with God.

"The lament psalms are necessary because they help us deal with the reality that life is not always easy. They give words to our cry for help. They often use harsh words, but that's because the feeling is so deep. They help us face those really difficult times. If we refuse to lament,

we hide some of our inner self from God, and that blocks a deeper relationship with God.

"We can turn it over to a higher power, and God will handle the situation in God's way. But we have to express it to open up the path to healing. Evil and pain don't have to have the last word." In essence, use the psalms to turn it over to God and become free.

Sister Donna Marie also mentioned that since the psalms are inspired words, they have the power to transform us over time, if we are open to it. It takes regular praying of the psalms, and reflecting on how they touch us. She feels the psalms can form our minds and hearts without us even knowing it, as long as we stick with them.

"The psalms remind us that we can call on God, and trust that God will hear us. Healing can come only if we deal with the pain. Expressing the pain helps us give it over to God. Some tragedies are so awful there's nothing to do but lament. The psalms tell us a broken heart is normal when the pain is deep, and also tell us there's been a lot of grieving people before us, so we're not alone. We have a right and a need to lament when the loss is deep. We have to allow grief to unfold in its own time and in its own way.

"And remember, nothing is off limits in our conversation with God. God is big enough to hear it all. God knows our pain and our need, but we need to express it because that helps liberate us.

"Pain can make a person bitter, or better."

The psalms are a way for the better. ■

Above: Sister Donna Marie Herr addresses a question during her "Praying with Psalms" program at Kordes Center in Ferdinand, Indiana.

Indiana State Senator Erin Houchin reads a resolution at a Statehouse legislative session in Indianapolis honoring the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand. Standing at right are Sisters Barbara C. Schmitz and Kathryn Huber.



Indiana Senate honors sisters

The Indiana State Senate recently acknowledged the long history of service of the Ferdinand Benedictines by adopting the following resolution during a legislative session at the Statehouse in Indianapolis:

"Whereas, the story of all Benedictines began in sixth-century Italy when St. Benedict wrote his Rule, a guideline for happiness and holiness, which stresses a balanced life of prayer and work and that is as meaningful today as it was 1,500 years ago;

"Whereas, following St. Benedict's Rule, monasticism spread throughout Europe, and eventually, the first Benedictine women arrived to the United States from Germany in 1852;

"Whereas, later, in 1867, four Sisters of St. Benedict, Sisters Benedicta Berns, Xaveria Schroeder, Rose Chapelle, and Clara Vollmer, came to Ferdinand, Indiana, to make a difference in the lives of local settlers;

"Whereas, Ferdinand at that time was a young Catholic settlement that particularly needed teachers who could speak German, and thus the Sisters quickly went to work teaching at the Ferdinand parish school;

"Whereas, a short three years later in 1870, the Sisters of St. Benedict opened the Academy Immaculate Conception, a boarding school for girls, which was later renamed Marian Heights Academy;

"Whereas, as Ferdinand grew, the Sisters of St. Benedict grew along with the community, becoming independent of the St. Walburg Monastery and constructing a larger monastery of their own, with 72 sisters moving into the structure in 1886;

"Whereas, The Sisters of St. Benedict's teaching ministry continued to expand as well, with the sisters eventually teaching in more than 75 schools in 12 states and five countries, and in 1914, the community of Ferdinand even established a training school for teachers, St. Benedict Normal College;

"Whereas, despite challenges later in the 20th Century, the Sisters of St. Benedict have continued to pursue opportunities to serve the community, and in 1978, the Sisters of St. Benedict opened the Kordes Retreat Center, which offers programs for spiritual renewal and personal growth;

"Whereas, The Sisters of St. Benedict have even been documented in The Wall Street Journal and on ABC's "Nightline" for consistently gaining new members and for making an impact in their community and around the world; and

"Whereas, through the Sisters of St. Benedict's hard work, Monastery Immaculate Conception stands today as a tangible sign of the sisters' enduring faith, affirming of the value of the monastic tradition and the dynamic future of religious life. ...

"The Indiana Senate honors the Sisters of St. Benedict from Ferdinand for their long history of serving the needs of the people of Southern Indiana...."


The session opened with a prayer delivered by Sister Barbara C. Schmitz:

"Almighty and Loving God, you have revealed your love and glory to all peoples and to all nations. God of wisdom and justice, through you, authority is rightly administered, laws are enacted, and judgment is decreed.

"Today we ask your blessing on our State Senate. May they be enabled by your powerful protection to discharge their duties with integrity, honesty, and ability. Assist with your spirit of counsel and fortitude these women and men who are entrusted to guard our political welfare. May the laws enacted seek to preserve peace, respect the rights of each person, promote the common good of all, and continue to bring the blessings of liberty and equality for all people of this state.

"We likewise commend to your unbounded mercy all people of the state of Indiana. You prepare and bestow upon us all countless signs of your love; grant that, as we receive your gifts, we may always see you as the giver. May we build communities of love and care, always willing to share with our brothers and sisters in need.

"We ask that you continue to guide us, to protect us, and to shelter us in the shadow of your wings. We pray to you, who are God, forever and ever. AMEN." ■

A woman with short brown hair, wearing a black polo shirt, is standing at a desk and opening a cardboard box with a utility knife. The box has a shipping label and a 'Gift Card' sticker. On the desk, there is a small white shelf with various items, including a black circular object and some papers. The background is a plain white wall.

Connecting Benedictine communities through technology

By Laura Reckelhoff

Sister Glenna Smith of Bristow, Virginia, first project director of the Wisdom Connections T4 project, said of Sister Barbara Lynn Schmitz, prioress of the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand, Indiana, "Her vision and energy is what got us going and got us organized. Her vision has and is a terrific driving force for the rest of us." The basic concept of the T4 project was generated by Benedictine prioresses. Similar ideas also surfaced at the last Benedictine 55 & Under gathering in 2014.

Sisters Glenna and Barbara Lynn, along with Sister Juliann Babcock of Beech Grove, Indiana, Sister Pat Nyquist of Clyde, Missouri, and Sister Michelle Sinkhorn of Ferdinand, who also serves as the T4 technology administrator, make up the core team for the T4 project. Sister Joella Kidwell of Ferdinand is the facilitator.

Sister Glenna said, "Sister Michelle is absolutely vital to this project. Having her own Benedictine heart inspiring what she does is so beneficial. Her technological expertise and contacts with tech people brings a crucial element to the project. When teaching others she is patient, clear in instruction, and personable."

The two core purposes of the T4 project, which stands for Timeless Tradition – Technological Times, is to create a program of formation and education for newer members of Benedictine communities across the United States and to develop an ongoing method of communication through the use of technology. The project was made possible by a three-year grant from GHR Foundation with a total payout of \$440,434. T4 is a collaborative endeavor designed to unite efforts of all the Benedictine monasteries of the United States with newer members. For the first year, ten Benedictine monasteries were chosen to

be the pilot group. Ten more monasteries will be added each year to eventually have 30 monasteries in the network.

One of the components of the initiative is preserving the history and wisdom of the Benedictine communities' wisdom figures and capturing thoughts of those that are emerging as future leaders. Videos of these wisdom figures and future leaders will be placed in a secure digital library, accessible by all Benedictine communities in the T4 project. A content committee made up of two core team sisters and four sisters from other communities are contacting presenters asking them to be a part of the project.

Another component is creating a possible curriculum for the women in initial formation and who are newly perpetually professed. This is a vital piece of the project because some communities may not have sisters to teach all the topics beneficial for a solid monastic foundation, nor the resources to pay people to come in and teach them. The digital library will be an asset for many communities for years to come.

The third component is to foster relationships between the communities, especially with those that are in initial formation and who are newly perpetually professed. With women entering Benedictine communities singularly or in groups of two or three, it is important for them to be able to connect with peers entering other communities. A video conferencing program called Zoom for Cloud Meetings is being utilized to connect these women and their formation directors. A relationship building

Above: Sister Michelle Sinkhorn opens a projector for one of the Benedictine communities participating in the T4 project.

committee made up of one core team sister and four sisters from other communities are spearheading this part of the project.

There are two paid positions within the T4 grant: Sister Michelle's and the project director. As the technology administrator for the project, Sister Michelle's main responsibilities are to research and recommend forms of technology and equipment needed for all aspects of the project, make sure all the technology and equipment work, and instruct all the sisters involved how to use the technology and equipment.

The official beginning date of the T4 project was December 1, 2014. Since that day, some of the things Sister Michelle has done so far and continues to do are:

- research and test various software and equipment;
- purchase video cameras and related equipment;
- train sister videographers how to use the cameras and equipment;
- set up the secured digital library location;
- edit and prepare complete videos for the digital library and upload them;
- set up and administrate cloud storage, online learning tools, and a project private Facebook page;
- create training videos for various aspects of the project;
- purchase and set up ipads for the pilot communities;
- in person training sessions with seven of the 10 pilot communities at the American Benedictine Formation Conference (ABFC) in Nebraska;

Technology is a new field of ministry for Sister Michelle and she is

excited for it. She says, "It is a bit of a stretch for me, having no formal Information Technology training. I did not have access to a computer until I was 24 years old but thankfully I seem to have a natural intuitiveness and savviness about computers, software, etc. And I like to learn!" Sister Michelle also credits Bob Vaal who is IT director for the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand, Indiana, as a great resource to have just down the hall from her office. Vaal serves as an IT consultant for the T4 project. The T4 project also has a technology committee of four sisters from other Benedictine communities who support and help her along the way and Sister Edith Bogue from Duluth, Minnesota, who consults for the project as well.

As project executive director, Sister Barbara Lynn carries the overall responsibility of the grant and manages the grant funds.

Sister Glenna said, "The generosity of all the prioresses in the pilot communities has been outstanding. We have gotten support across all the Benedictine communities."

The GHR Foundation grant runs through November 30, 2017. In the third year, there are plans for a symposium, a face-to-face gathering of participants where they will be able to share experiences, and suggestions for the future. A comprehensive review will also be conducted to determine where to go from that point.

The hope and prayers of the core team and all involved is that this project "may enhance the life and vitality of the Benedictine Charism around the world now and into the future – That in all things God may be glorified. Amen!" as stated by Sister Glenna in her T4 overview presentation. ■



Spanish Mass of Commemoration

Francisca Rivas (center) of Huntingburg, Indiana, and Benedictine Sisters Betty Drewes and Joan Scheller (at right) lead a procession into Monastery Immaculate Conception Church in Ferdinand prior to a special Mass of Commemoration in Spanish for slain Salvadoran Archbishop Oscar Romero. Rivas carries a photo of Archbishop Romero, who was her great-grandfather's brother. The procession wound from the Monastery Event Hall to the church. Archbishop Romero, who spoke out against poverty, social injustice, assassinations, and torture during his country's civil war, was shot dead celebrating Mass in 1980 in San Salvador. His campaign for human rights had earned him a Nobel Peace Prize nomination. He was declared a martyr by Pope Francis last February, and his beatification last May puts him one step away from sainthood. After the Ferdinand mass, a pot-luck meal was held at Monastery Event Hall.



Teaching new computer tricks

By Laura Reckelhoff

Sister Sharon Hollander enjoyed teaching computer classes to her fellow Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand, Indiana. "They are so eager to learn and they are excited when they catch it. It is energizing for me and them."

The classes were offered to the sisters through an initiative stemming from the monastery technology committee. Various classes were presented, such as Excel, Facebook, Google Chrome, Word, Acrobat, and even classes where anyone can ask any computer question they wanted.

Sister Sharon taught classes about Facetime, Skype, Word, and iPads. She feels one of the largest hurdles for many of the sisters is learning the technical vocabulary. Many of the sisters taking classes are in their 70s, 80s, or even 90s. Sister Sharon says, "I admire those 90 year olds that still want to do it and learn. That's amazing!"

Sister Mary Francis Williams partnered with Bob Vaal, the monastery information technology director, to teach Excel classes. Sister Mary Francis says, "We were a good team. It was good to have both of us there."

Being the teacher of computer classes was a familiar position for Sister Mary Francis. She used to teach at Mater Dei High School in Evansville. She says, "When teaching high school students, there is more to the class. For the sisters I tried to teach them specifically what they wanted to know. With less computer exposure than the high school students and the sisters' age, I had to approach it in a different way. With the sisters there is an excitement they feel and I feel from them when they learn something. They really want to learn it."

She says the biggest similarity between teaching high school students and teaching the sisters is they all have a curiosity to satisfy.

One of her curious students was Sister Mary Carol Kinghorn, who says, "The classes were very beneficial and gave me hands-on practice with Excel. Sister Mary Francis even helped me create some spreadsheets that I will need in the near future. I appreciated learning techniques that are practical and useful in my work."

Sister Mary Francis is often stopped in the evening by sisters asking general computer questions, or asking for a quick review of something they learned in the Excel class. She is planning to offer a more advanced Excel class sometime and wants to include how to set up a personal budget.

She says, "Some sisters knew very little and just wanted to know more about Excel. They were glad to learn and very interested. The key is to keep using what was learned so it is not forgotten."

Sister Sharon says, "The sisters are excited about learning more with computers. We will need to keep offering classes to refresh the information."

Sister Michelle Sinkhorn, as well as monastery employees Angi Seffernick and Cyndi Faulkenberg, also taught various computer class topics. All instructors will be offering classes to both the sisters and the monastery employees again in the future. ■

Above: Sister Sharon Hollander (standing) gives instruction to Sister Sylvia Gehlhausen (left) and Sister Louise Laroche during a computer class.



Sister Jolinda teaches about grace in our lives

By Greg Eckerle

Sister Jolinda Naas drew from the familiar beginning to one of the most popular prayers ever to pose the perfect question for her audience of 22 teenagers and 12 adults.

"Hail, Mary, full of grace," she said, "do you ever stop to think what that meant?"

It was early in her program on "Grace in our Christian Life" at Kordes Center on the grounds of Monastery Immaculate Conception in Ferdinand.

She spent the next two hours explaining the concept of grace – how you receive it, how you can give it, and what it does for you.

To answer the question she posed, Sister Jolinda said, "That was how the angel addressed Mary when announcing she was to bear the Son of God. Mary was full of grace, not by something she did or didn't do, but God filled her with grace because she had a deep relationship with God before that angel ever came. And each of you has a relationship with God in your own way."

It was an ideal subject for the teenagers, who were all high school freshmen and sophomores from a Confirmation class at St. John the Baptist Catholic Parish in Newburgh, Indiana.

One student wrote on his class evaluation form, "Although I may not have been the most devout young man in my brief 15 years on this Earth, this program has given me a new understanding of Grace and what it really means in my daily life."

Karen Bernabe, coordinator of youth ministry and religious programs at St. John Parish, said the teenagers saw the program as a good opportunity to attend a required retreat. "They were gung-ho about learning more about grace," said Bernabe, who emails information about the sisters' programs to the students. She was pleasantly surprised about the large number that decided to attend. "I got a lot of good feedback upon their return, that it was a very enlightening day for them.

"I thought it important for them to be able to acknowledge the different graces in their life and to make the connection. A lot of times we go through life without realizing the things that are happening to us, and being able to connect that to our faith. This was an opportunity for

Above: Sister Jolinda Naas enjoys a lighter moment with a teen-age student at her "Grace in Our Christian Life" program at Kordes Center.



Sister Jolinda Naas discusses grace during her program attended by 34 people at Kordes Center.

them to get in tune with the Holy Spirit, to recognize and stop and reflect. And to be able to do that in a beautiful setting (at the Ferdinand monastery), because that really enhances it and helps them to focus. I love that area, it's very peaceful, very serene. It's very conducive to them taking the time to just stop. We just don't do that a lot in this day and age, we're always on the go. We're here to connect the youth to our community, to celebrate our faith together, and rejoice. Having that opportunity just lined up, like the stars. The Holy Spirit was saying, 'This is the way, Karen.'

Another student wrote, "The program was very inspirational. It made me realize a lot about God's presence, and about the graces of God I never realized before. I need to be aware more of the graces in my life."

Sister Jolinda noted that grace is not quantifiable, or easily expressed. We can't see it, we can't touch it, but we can feel it at times. Grace is God's light and love within us. It is God giving us his friendship, a gift from God because of our relationship with him. We can either accept that relationship or ignore it. Or worse yet, we can reject it. It can be fruitful in us only if we accept it, which means entering into a relationship of love with God.

But as great as that gift is, grace is much bigger. It's in all the seemingly simple things that we take for granted and overlook every day.

Sister Jolinda pointed out that it's a grace just to wake up in the morning.

And to be able to walk to the bathroom, and to feed yourself. Just think of all those who can't. Grace is enjoying a beautiful sunset, seeing your child for the first time, and smelling the aroma of your favorite meal. It's all that, and much more.

She revealed how our actions can be a grace for others – visiting someone in a nursing home, or willingly helping anybody needing assistance. Or it is just our attitude. "You can either walk down the hall looking like a sourpuss, or you can greet people with a smile," she said.

Sister Jolinda stressed that we don't earn grace, but that it's God's free gift to us, and it can transform our nature after we accept it. And she encouraged the attendees to be grateful for all they've been given.

"It takes so little to say, 'Thank you, God.'" ■

"You can either walk down the hall looking like a sourpuss, or you can greet people with a smile."

Sisters show the way to treasure

By Greg Eckerle

Twenty-one parish catechetical leaders (PCLs) and directors of religious education (DREs) converged at Kordes Center to get re-energized and motivated for their wide-ranging parish duties. And maybe to discover just what kind of treasure they truly hold.

They were attending a program presented by Benedictine Sisters Jane Will and Betty Drewes called “You Hold a Treasure.”

Sister Jane began the retreat by advising the participants they have to sometimes let go of their worries and concerns to find the treasures within themselves.

“You do have the power to not worry,” she said. “Don’t look back with regret and anger. Don’t look forward with fear and anxiety. Be present with the graced moment of now, which is God’s gift. You come here hope-filled, to get renewed and energized. So this is an opportunity to put away your worries for now.”

The sisters then had participants create a box in their mind to put all their concerns in, and to let God take care of it.

Sister Betty then began to unravel the mystery about the “treasure.”

“You are a treasure, no doubt about it,” she said. “And our treasure is Christ. Jesus says we are safe, we are known intimately, we are treasured, and we are empowered. This is what we’re all about. But how many of you embrace yourself?”

“Jesus says, ‘I give you eternal life, I will never forget you.’ Remember this, PCLs and DREs, you can do all things, for Jesus strengthens you and gives you the wisdom to do what he calls you to do. Scripture says we’re loved, treasured, and safe. What more could you ask for as PCLs and DREs in parishes? And if you channel these scriptures to your people, that would be a great treasure, too.”

More clarity was shared from the Gospel of Matthew: “Where your treasure is . . . that is where your heart is!”

Sister Jane followed by saying, “Of course, our greatest treasure is ourselves. Home is where the heart is. Our basic home is ourselves. Honoring and loving ourselves is so important. God loves us more than we know what to do with. But we sometimes have difficulty loving ourselves.”

A reflection written by an unknown woman, age 84, was read. Among her pearls of wisdom: “If I had my life to live over, I’d try to make more mistakes next time. I would worry less about what others thought of



Sister Betty Drewes addresses the group at the “You Hold a Treasure” program.

me, and accept myself as I am. I would swim more rivers and watch more sunsets. I’d eat more ice cream. I would regret my mistakes, but not spend a lot of time feeling guilty about them. I would tell more people that I like them. I would not hold grudges. I’d ride more merry-go-rounds.”

Evaluations from the participants showed that the program’s lessons took root.

Janie Kempf of St. Anthony wrote, “I came with a heavy heart this morning; just some really sad things happening in the parish. Putting those things away in the “box” has helped me tremendously. I feel like today has helped me spiritually!”

And Jay VanHoosier from Newburgh wrote, “The high quality of the presenters, coupled with the beautiful setting, made for an uplifting and spiritually rewarding day! I am so glad I came!”

Sister Jane told the group in some final thoughts, “Feeling free and living in the present moment is a wonderful gift. As we do that, we can experience the treasure that is within, and share that with others. I think that’s what we want to be about. For you indeed not only hold a treasure, you are a treasure.”

Before leading a closing song, Sister Betty thanked Kathy Gallo for helping make the program a reality. Kathy, who is director of the Office of Catechesis for the Diocese of Evansville, thanked the sisters in return for the experience and added, “What a gift this is to have this in our very own backyard. And, of course, this group is amazing, and the dynamic between the two.”

You might call it a treasure. ■



Sister Karen teaches about – and learns from – Hispanics

By Greg Eckerle

Sister Karen Durlat, who has served Hispanics in her ministry work the past 14 years, took time out to teach eight curious Americans about Hispanic culture and Hispanic Catholic customs in a program at Kordes Center.

Audience members, who've had increasing contact with Hispanics as their population grows locally, came because they wanted to better understand the Hispanic culture and improve their interactions.

Sister Karen was a perfect fit for the group. She ministered in Guatemala, served recently as director of Hispanic ministry for the Diocese of Evansville, and is now director of religious education for St. Patrick's, a parish in Indianapolis with a large Hispanic membership.

"The ideal is that the Hispanics bring their best gifts into our country, we share our best gifts with them, and we all become better people," said Sister Karen. "We have this great opportunity to bring together different cultures and traditions, to learn from each other, to appreciate each other, and we will become a better Church for it."

Sister Karen particularly loves that Latinos hold on to the customs and traditions of their native country. "I think that's their gift to the Church, to bring some of those traditions back, since we so often let go of some of those customs in America."

Among Sister Karen's observations about Hispanics were:

- They love processions, and integrate them into many of their religious observances;
- All Saints and All Souls Days are very important; Hispanics will create altars in their homes and display candles and pictures of their deceased family members;
- They are very devoted to saints, and display many statues of saints.

Among occurrences that contribute to misunderstandings between Hispanics and Americans:

- The Spanish word "si" doesn't always mean "yes" to a Hispanic; they may say "si" to you, but it could just mean they want to do something, not that they will;
- If motorists get stopped by police in Mexico, they are supposed to get out of the car; when immigrants do that in America, police become apprehensive;
- Hispanics at first will not look at police in the eye, because to not look at one in the eye is a sign of respect in their culture;
- Many Hispanics feel powerless to make a difference or make changes in the U.S., so they are reluctant to learn English; some older Hispanics come here primarily to give their children an opportunity for the education they couldn't get, and the older ones want to spend their time working and being with family, and often don't have the time or energy to learn English;
- One of the worst myths about Hispanics is that they are lazy; local employers routinely call them very hard workers.

Sister Karen also marvels about the Hispanics' extreme hospitality. "I'm Benedictine, I'm supposed to be welcoming," she says, "but I've learned a lot from them. And I'm also learning about forgiveness from them."

"It all goes back to whoever we're with, we're supposed to learn from them. Wherever God puts us, we have something to learn." ■

Above: Sister Karen Durlat answers audience questions during her program about Hispanic culture.



Meeting a sister for the first time

By Laura Reckelhoff

When four of the Sisters of St Benedict of Ferdinand, Indiana, visited St. Mary of the Knobs Catholic School in Floyds Knobs, Indiana, it was the first time many of the students ever talked to a religious sister. The students were excited to realize they had some things in common with a sister, such as a love of math.

Sisters Mary Victor Kercher, Briana Craddock, Rachel Lynn Geracitano, and Jane Ann Breen were invited by fifth grade teacher Kimberly Paris to talk with the school's fourth through sixth grades. The students had read the book *A Door in the Wall*, which takes place in the Middle Ages and is about a young boy who is taken in by Brother Luke.

Paris said, "We compare monasteries of today with those of the middle ages. Many of my students have no idea about your (the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand, Indiana's) beautiful monastery."

Sister Briana told the students about the monastery's first sisters being forbidden to pray the Divine Office and being required to pray the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin. She then asked the students if there is something they like to do that they would be sad to be forced to give up. One student responded by admitting she would not want to give up math. Sister Briana said she knows a sister that would feel the same way. The little girl's eyes grew big and she exclaimed, "Really?" Then another student chimed in saying he liked soccer. Sister Briana told him the same sister that likes math also likes to play soccer. "Really?" was also that student's response. Sister Briana said, "The kids were excited to have something in common with a sister and to hear about the sisters doing normal things. It was great to see their excitement."

Paris noted the students' overall excitement for the visit, saying, "I think the highlight is actually meeting a sister that they have heard about all their Catholic school career, but have never met in person."

"The children discover that they (the sisters) look different from each other and pursue different hobbies, careers and interests and their faith is what joins them in community, much like our school and parish community. I believe it plants seeds in the hearts and minds of my students about their own vocations. The sisters stayed for lunch and it was a precious time of sharing with the teachers on our staff as well."

A highlight of the day to Sister Rachel was Mass with the students. Each student played a role during Mass and was enthusiastic about their part. Sister Rachel said, "The kids were really getting into it and the priest was really good for the youth. It was a fun, interactive Mass."

All of the sisters were complimentary of the students' behavior. Sister Briana said, "The kids were very respectful." Sister Jane Ann chimed in, "I was impressed by all the students' behavior and questions."

Each of the sisters left carrying three roses given to them by the class. A few days later they each received thank you cards from the students. Grateful for the opportunity to visit, all four of the sisters would welcome the chance to visit again. ■

Above: Sister Briana Craddock has the attention of a group of students during a visit to St. Mary of the Knobs Catholic School.



Getting close to Pope Francis

By Laura Reckelhoff

It was the luck of the draw that provided Sister Jill Reuber the experience of a lifetime. Nineteen regions of the world were to send a perpetually professed sister that was under 50 years old and had been a religious sister for at least five years to the CIB (Communio Internationalis Benedictinarum) Symposium in Rome, Italy. The Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand, Indiana, are part of the region comprising of the United States and Canada. The names submitted from the region were put in a hat and one was drawn out. Sister Jill was ecstatic!

She said, "Rome is a place I never thought I would get to. I almost do not have words for the experience. I am very grateful and still processing it all."

As president of the Federation of St. Gertrude, Sister Joella Kidwell, also a Sister of St. Benedict of Ferdinand, was on the trip too. She had been to Rome many times, even having ministered there. Sister Jill said, "Sister Joella was a big help. She knew where she was going."

The seventeen young sisters attending the symposium were tasked to discuss different issues, but first they needed to elect a leader. Sister Jill was chosen. Many different languages were spoken within the group, but luckily at least one sister in the group knew a language the other non-English speaking sister spoke.

In another scenario, the young sisters drew questions from a fish bowl and discussed their answers while in a panel setting surrounded by the other attendees of the symposium. Sister Jill was chosen to facilitate this discussion. She said it was hard to get used to hearing other sisters talk in French and listening to the translation to English on her headphones. In another application Sister Jill heard the discussion in Italian, the translation to German, and then the translation to English since the English translator spoke German and not Italian.

Sister Jill reflected, "It was neat to see living the Benedictine life is all over the world. We may live it differently, but still all have Benedictine roots."

Above: Sister Jill Reuber was so excited to be so close to Pope Francis that this is the only picture she took. Right: Sister Jill Reuber in St. Benedict's cave in Subiaco. As is custom for visitors, she touched the foot of the Benedict statue and prayed for personal intentions.



Sister Jill Reuber (far right) is pictured with four of the seventeen young sister delegates for the CIB Symposium. The sisters pictured are from Poland, Italy, Belgium, and United States.



Each sister in attendance was to bring a picture of suffering in their region. Sister Jill said, "It was breathtaking to see all the sufferings of all the regions. I was very grateful of what I have, niceties such as electricity and running water."

Sister Jill also was able to do some sightseeing. Her favorite places visited were all those related to Saint Benedict. She visited St. Benedict's bedroom in Rome, the cave in Subiaco where he was a hermit before he organized his first community, and Monte Cassino, where he wrote the Rule of St. Benedict and where he and his sister, St. Scholastica, are buried. Sister Jill described it as "Awe inspiring. It was breathtaking to be in the space where St. Benedict was."

"If I would not have had formation these places would not have meant so much to me. It was more meaningful since I am a Sister of St. Benedict. I knew what happened in those spaces."

On the last day of the symposium, and the last day for Sister Jill to be in Rome, her and two other sisters, one from Australia and one from Africa, decided to go to St. Peter's Basilica, a place they had not yet visited. Father Paul Nord from St. Meinrad Archabbey, who was living in Rome, gave the tip to be at St. Peter's at 7 a.m. to beat the crowds.

When the sisters arrived at 7 a.m., thousands of people were at the Vatican, even though Father Paul said no one would be there. However, it was the day of the general audience at the Vatican. Not having a ticket, the three sisters stood outside the fence as observers,

until two of the sisters who were wearing habits were handed tickets to go inside. Hoping to see the Pope, the two sisters darted inside the gate, leaving Sister Jill to wait for them. Sister Jill looked around and noticed she was standing next to a road and it was said the Pope was out in the Pope Mobile. His route led him to Sister Jill. She stood just ten feet away from Pope Francis. She says, "I was so flustered, I only got one picture! I had just bought rosaries for all of my students (Sister Jill is a first grade teacher). When Pope Francis put his hand up in a blessing, I held up the rosaries. So I am considering them all blessed."

The other two sisters that had gone inside in hopes of getting close to the Pope, just saw him from a distance. Since St. Peter's Basilica is closed during general audience, none of the three got to visit the basilica.

Sister Jill brought the rosaries and a prayer card back for each one of her students and also made a video showing them where she had been. On the day the school was praying the rosary as a group, every one of Sister Jill's students brought in the rosary she had given them. It was obvious they were a treasure to her students. Plus, they had been blessed by the Pope. ■

"It was neat to see living the Benedictine life is all over the world. We may live it differently, but still all have Benedictine roots."



Walking labyrinth like being in ‘hollow of God’s hand’

By Greg Eckerle

There is no one “right” way to walk a labyrinth. That’s part of its beauty. Each person walking it will likely have a different intention going in. And experience a different benefit coming out. And that will likely change again each time a person repeats the walk.

It’s kind of like what many want to get out of praying – it could be to find meaning, to find peace, to get beyond troubles, to find understanding, or to simply relax. Or it could be something entirely different. Such flexibility is the whole point.

A labyrinth is a winding path of about 10 progressively smaller circles, with up to about 30 turns. After reaching the center of the circular configuration, one reverses the path to walk out.

Sister Linda Bittner recently explained the power of the labyrinth to 40 people in two different evening programs, called “The Labyrinth: Walking Our Way to Wholeness,” on the grounds of Monastery Immaculate Conception in Ferdinand. The groups met in Kordes Center for her explanation, then took a short walk to the labyrinth cut in the grass in front of Benet Hall.

Sister Linda shared some general guidelines: Pause briefly at the entrance of the labyrinth, take some focusing breaths, recall your intention for the walk, bow in gratitude for the gifts to be received, and enter slowly.

After walking the winding path into the center, and then back out, which took about 30 minutes, the participants noted on their program

evaluation forms their reaction to the experience. That the answers ranged widely was not a surprise.

Arleta Weyer of Ferdinand wrote, “It was relaxing. I got in touch with things going on in my life. I know the Spirit was with me on my walk.”

Judy Hamilton of Trafalgar, Indiana: “The walk caused me to slow down and really listen to my thoughts about God and my relationship to him. The beauty of nature and those around me let me know I am not alone in this walk.”

Patty Nord: “Very peaceful. Felt the presence of God.”

Joni Wagner of St. Anthony of Padua Church: “Walking the labyrinth was very calming and gave me an opportunity to realize some things that needed to be let go.”

Angie McVey of Boonville, Indiana: “I have a hard time settling to pray. I now see walking, and especially walking a labyrinth, as a very good way to settle for prayer.”

Above: Sister Linda Bittner (far left) pauses to consider her intentions before starting to walk the labyrinth on the monastery grounds in Ferdinand. In the background are some of the other participants of Sister Linda’s recent programs on walking the labyrinth.

Barb Leinenbach (far right) of Jasper, Indiana, walks the labyrinth during the Sisters of St. Benedict's program "The Labyrinth: Walking Our Way to Wholeness." Barb wrote on her evaluation form that "the labyrinth is a peaceful place to reflect and pray."



Sister Linda describes the labyrinth as a "tool to assist us on our spiritual journey, as we move to our true selves in God." Through this walking meditation, she says we can catch glimpses of wisdom and insight regarding our thinking, choices, and behaviors.

"Labyrinths call us to listen, to receive whatever is calling our attention," she says. "It's designed to help us find our way, a way for a deeper relationship with God."

She encourages people to consider "your needs, hopes, dreams, questions" before beginning the labyrinth walk. For example, do you need some healing in a relationship with someone else? Do you need to forgive? Do you want to know more about your hesitancy to relax, or your resistance to forgive? Are you apprehensive about an upcoming surgery, or a difficult transition in your life? Or you might want to simply have a walk of "awareness" – to your breath, to the surrounding air, to the sounds and sights of nature, to the way you are moving.

Many labyrinth walkers talk about always coming away with a gift of some sort. It could be an insight, a feeling, an idea, or a solution to a vexing problem. A favorite quote heard and shared by Sister Linda

was "sometimes the gift is the calm that surrounds me, as if I'm being held in the hollow of God's hand."

Sister Linda recently did a "memory walk" with a first cousin who just died. "I had her in my mind and in my heart, and relived the many times we spent together. The walk helped me to grieve her passing and begin a new way of being in relationship with her."

She notes that sometimes the answers to her walk's intention come later, maybe even weeks later. So it's often a walk that keeps on giving. What's more, the walks are free and, of course, a good way to exercise.

No wonder that Sister Linda calls walking the labyrinth a metaphor for walking our way to God. ■

Sister Mary Lee's artwork wins state honor

Sister Mary Lee Hillenbrand, one of our talented artists, was recently honored for her outstanding artwork at a reception at the Indiana Statehouse in Indianapolis.

Her watercolor painting, "Iris Prismatica," was one of 14 winning entries in the 2015 Hoosier Women Artist Contest. Sister Mary Lee's painting will be displayed in Lt. Gov. Sue Ellspermann's office for the next year.

The contest, in its eighth year, is part of the state's celebration of Women's History Month. Entries are judged by Ellspermann and Dr. Laura Holzman, assistant professor of art history and museum studies at the Herron School of Art and Design at Indiana University - Purdue University Indianapolis.

Sister Mary Lee Hillenbrand, right, displays her painting, "Iris Prismatica," along with Indiana Lt. Gov. Sue Ellspermann at the Indiana Statehouse.





Celebrating Latino culture

By Laura Reckelhoff

One of the three Magi wore fluorescent green tennis shoes, and all three were Latino. The gentlemen were a part of the Latino faith formation day celebrating the Epiphany on January 3, 2015, hosted by

the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand, Indiana. The inaugural event was attended by 90 people representing 34 families.

The Epiphany, a church festival commemorating the coming of the Magi to Jesus at Bethlehem, is celebrated as a significant feast by Latino culture. Each country and family may celebrate a little differently, with their own traditions. The faith formation day brought those traditions and customs together since the attendees were from a number of Central and South American countries.

The spirituality ministry department of the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand, Indiana, has added a new Latino outreach to their repertoire of programs. According to Sister Traci Stutz, "We are making a concentrated effort to have programming directed to the Latino community in addition to our current offerings."

Sister Joan Scheller said, "Many of the Latinos did not realize they could come here (to the monastery). For three quarter of the attend-

Above: The three Magi stand in front of the room of Latino faith formation day attendees as Sister Joan Scheller directs the presentation.

Left: Sister Jane Ann Breen holds a sleepy little attendee of the Latino faith formation day as she chats with Sister Mary Judith Fleig.





Sister Jill Reuber writes the house blessing on top of the door frame of St. Gertrude Hall during the Latino faith formation day.

ees, it was their first time here.” She hopes it was the first of many visits to the monastery.

The sisters also shared the traditional Epiphany house blessing, in which a prayer of blessing is recited and the year and initials of the magi are inscribed above the doors using blessed chalk (20 + C + M + B + 15). Each family was given chalk, holy water, and the prayer of blessing so they could bless their homes.

Sister Joan said, “Everyone was able to share with each other, learn our house blessing, get to know where we live, and feel our Benedictine hospitality.”

One of the participants commented to Sister Joan that she was so grateful to be with a large group of Latinos that were not just family

or parish people and it was nice to mix with other parishes and do something together.

Many sisters who helped with the formation day did not speak Spanish, or spoke very little. Sister Joan said, “The sisters realized they could still communicate and the Latinos also attempted to speak English. Sister Doris Market tried to talk to a little boy in Spanish. He looked at her and said, ‘Don’t you speak English?’”

Sister Traci said, “We were able to open our house to them and they felt they could come celebrate and be part of us. It was all multi-generational formation and was really neat to see all the families coming together.”

With a big smile, Sister Joan said, “It was a good day!” ■



Coming together as a Latino community

By Laura Reckelhoff

Physically carrying a cross in an outdoor Way of the Cross reenactment was just one component of the Latino Family Faith Formation Day on March 28, 2015, hosted by the Spirituality Ministry of the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand, Indiana, at Monastery Event Hall. The theme of the day was “From Ashes to Fire: Lent – A journey of love, pardon and reconciliation.” Sister Joan Scheller, coordinator of Spirituality Ministry’s Latino Outreach, was quite pleased to see 65 people representing 20 families at the event.

For the Way of the Cross, each person drew a number to assigned stations. This intentionally mixed up families and parishes within each group and had people working together who don’t live together and may not have even known each other. Even the little children in the group were included in the carrying of the cross.

Sister Joan said, “Coming here gives them the experience of the larger Latino community. They share a meal and share experiences with people they don’t normally encounter.”

Parishes represented at the Latino Family Faith Formation Day included Our Lady of Hope in Washington, St. Mary’s Catholic Church in Huntingburg, Saint Joseph Catholic Church in Jasper, and St. Joseph Catholic Church in Dale, all in Indiana.



Above: Participants in the Outdoor Way of the Cross.

Left: Sister Kristine Anne Harpenau helps a young participant color.



Sister Jill Reuber addresses the children's group.

Carlos Mireles, an attendee, said he was looking for “more programs of support of faith and opportunities and programs to get together and get to know the Latino community.”

Numerous sisters assisted with the day, even though most could not speak Spanish.

Prior to the Way of the Cross attendees broke into age groups--adults, children, and teens--to talk about the Prodigal Son, pardoning and reconciliation.

At the end of the exercise, Sister Teresa Gunter's group of teens did a reenactment of a modern day Prodigal Son. Sister Joan was impressed. “They really got into it. Parents loved that the youth were doing this.”

Directed by Sister Jill Reuber, the elementary children made stick puppets and used them to tell the Prodigal Son story. They also colored pages about the Prodigal Son, cut them out, and stapled it all together to make a storybook to take home.

In regards to the day, participant Rosa Serrano said, “I really enjoyed the shared experience with my fam-

ily, with other people from other parishes, and especially liked the live Way of the Cross.”

Sister Joan was again thrilled with the success of the event. “It was another really, really good experience. I think the people enjoy coming here; they like the interaction with the sisters and are starting to feel more at home here at the monastery.”

The next Latino Family Faith Formation Day will be November 7 to celebrate All Soul's Day. ■



Outdoor Way of the Cross

Monastery Immaculate Conception
802 E. 10th Street • Ferdinand, IN 47532



How you can be part of what we do to help others

- Visit Monastery Immaculate Conception – for Mass, a tour, community prayer, or a peaceful stroll on our grounds.
- Explore and renew your faith at a program hosted by our Spirituality Ministry.
- Volunteer your time and talents.
- Consider becoming an Oblate.
- Ask for our prayers. It's what we do, at least three times a day.
- Visit our gift shop, For Heaven's Sake, either in person or online (forheavensake.org). Our monastery-baked cookies are always available there.
- Or support our ministries with a gift.

However you wish to take part, we welcome you to our community with joy. Because hospitality is another thing that we do.