

Seek. Pray. Share.

Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand, Indiana

VOLUME 2 NUMBER 1 FALL 2010



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"Seek. Pray. Share." — our tagline — was officially a year old on August 20, the 143rd anniversary of the founding of Monastery Immaculate Conception. And *Seek. Pray. Share.* — our magazine — is marking its first birthday this fall.

Those three words, which are contained either literally or implicitly in our mission statement, represent well what our community is about. We *seek* God in all facets of life. *Praying* is at the heart of our life as Benedictine women. And we are called to *share* with others what we have — our spiritual riches, our gifts, and our resources.

A fundamental way we share is through our individual ministries. The profiles of our sisters that appeared in the first two issues of *Seek. Pray. Share.* captured some of them: the tradition of our service in education, providing both temporary shelter and permanent housing to those in need, ministry to the Hispanic and other immigrant populations, parish ministry, and the many forms of music ministry.

In this issue, we profile two sisters who assist the homeless in different ways. Sister Mary Frances Schafer helps secure federal funding to serve Louisville's homeless, and Sister Jeanne Ellen Niehaus brings hope, respect, and dignity to homeless men. With the current economy, the poor and homeless are among the most hurting. With their ministries, Sisters Mary Frances and Jeanne Ellen are responding to a great need.

The reason we came to southern Indiana in 1867 was to respond to a need — the need of the German settlers who desired German-speaking teachers. The French-speaking Providence sisters were already in the area and were doing wonderful ministry, but the language difference was an issue. And so four Benedictine sisters came from Covington, Kentucky, to respond to the need of the German immigrants — to teach them in German.

Education was our community's first ministry, and it was clearly our primary ministry for at least a hundred years. As the needs of the Church and the world changed, we began to respond to those new needs through other areas of ministry. We continue to have a strong presence in education. But now we also have sisters in social services, parish ministry, religious education, pastoral care for the sick and dying, health care, and Hispanic ministry.

From the very beginning, it was about sharing. The willingness to share their gifts brought our sisters to southern Indiana in the first place. With them came the Benedictine life of seeking God and prayer, which continue to be central to our lives today. And from our practice of seeking God and praying together flows our ministry, our sharing with others the gifts that God has given us.

In the years ahead, no doubt differing needs will emerge in the Church and the world. I hope and expect that our community will continue to respond to those emerging needs with the gifts, the skills, and the talents we have. Because it's the people of God, no matter what their needs, who are our key focus, not the ministry we do.

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "S. Kristine Anne Harpenau OSB". The script is cursive and elegant.

Sister Kristine Anne Harpenau, OSB
Prioress



Seek.Pray.Share.

Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand, Indiana

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Mission: 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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Cover: Sister Michelle Catherine Sinkhorn practices slacklining.



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

Sisters' street rep helps harbor homeless

by Greg Eckerle

Bill Bratcher is one of the hundreds of homeless Louisville men that Sister Jeanne Ellen Niehaus gives hope to, and respect, and self-dignity. Gifts that mean the world to them.

He's not just another face to her. He knows it, and so do the hundreds of others who come to the St. John Day Center for homeless men just because she's there. Because Sister Jeanne has a reputation among the downtrodden on the streets of Louisville — she will help you, and that kind of word spreads quickly through the homeless.

Bratcher talks reverently about Sister Jeanne, and the emotion in his voice quickly underscores what she means to those in his predicament.

"I can't tell you how many times I've come here dead broke, needing a stamp for an envelope, or something, and she'll give it to me," he says, choking up. "We know how society reacts to us, how others judge us every day on the streets, but she leaves the judging up to God, the way it should be."

Sister Jeanne, St. John's social services coordinator for 10 years, helps men get jobs, birth certificates, IDs, and counseling for their drug and alcohol addictions.

Bratcher knows her advice is good, and the right thing to do.

"I drink to feel good, to forget. I don't know how to feel good anymore, but drinking does it," he says, as he tears up, bowing his head. "She talks to me about getting into therapy, and I need it."

He pauses, reflects, and says, "Sister Jeanne makes me feel good, too. She's a trusted confidant. Having a nun around is important. She sets an example, but doesn't force it on you. We trust her, her door is always open, and she takes the time for us."

For Sister Jeanne, it's all about digging for ways to help the homeless.

"I enjoy listening to their stories, finding opportunities to motivate them, helping them to remember what their talents really are," she says. "I want to show them opportunities to get more training, to find a job."

"Some of these men are hardly recognizable when they come in. They're living on the streets, or in the woods, a far cry from who they were. This is the only place they have. They are on their last ray of hope."

The most rewarding parts for her are seeing the success stories materialize, and just to see the men smiling again. Sometimes the successes are relatively small. It could be filling out paperwork or providing a signature. Some can't read and can't fill out a required form. Then it's Sister Jeanne to the rescue.

Robert Anderson, another homeless man who's known Sister Jeanne for several months, says, "I believe God sent her here to help us. She can help you with any problem. And I've never seen her get mad or turn anybody away."

Bratcher readily agrees with the notion of divine intervention, saying, "Just picture it, her driving over here in the winter in the middle of snow and ice, just to open this place up for guys like us. Think about it. Now if that's not by the grace of God, I don't know what that is. And the heart. And the soul."

St. John Center is open daily from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m., serving over 250 men a day.

Sister Jeanne talks fondly of the men who rehabilitated themselves through the drug and alcohol treatment program, or men who went on to college, or landed jobs, or moved into apartments. She smiles about the ones who are now benefitting society. And admits men have later told her, "You saved my life."

She downplays such accolades, but her boss and co-workers readily bring them up.

Maria Price, executive director, St. John Center, says, "At least half the men here would say 'Jeanne's my best friend.' She's a great listener and crisis counselor. And they count on her to be honest with them, to help them be held accountable. Some have said they would tell her things they'd never tell anyone else.

"Some may have been sober for months, then found themselves using last night, and know they can talk to her to put them back on the right path."

The homeless obviously face a lot of pressure, and some will get mad and yell at others as they struggle through another challenging day.

Price notes that Sister Jeanne has the knack of getting men to believe that she believes in them. She's the calm in a storm, unflappable, solid as a rock. She's often the one relationship a homeless man has had where someone genuinely cares for his well-being. For the first time in his life.



Above: Louisville's St. John Center is the day shelter for hundreds of homeless men who have no place to go. It becomes their "living room," a place to meet their friends. In the background are the altar and religious decorations from the building's former days as a church.



Left: Sister Mary Frances helped Louisville land \$7 million this year to serve the city's 11,000-plus homeless people.

"One man told me, 'Sister Jeanne said I didn't deserve to be homeless, that I deserved a place of my own, and had some really nice things to say about me, so the next day I came back for more,'" said Price, laughing.

"She helps the men come to their own answers and decisions, and she gives them so much credit for that. Men that have been out of homelessness for years come back to see Jeanne, men she's helped, and by the grace of God changed their lives.

"I can't stand to think of the day when Jeanne decides to retire. It'll be a tremendous loss."

So it's little wonder she's been dubbed "Jeanne Supreme" by her co-workers. Sure, it's a bit tongue-in-check, yet noticeably heartfelt. She naturally rolls her eyes at such references, quickly saying, "Quit saying that. I don't go there."

Continued



Bill Bratcher, a homeless man, gets a cup of coffee from Sister Jeanne Ellen at St. John Day Center.

Where she does go, often, is out of her office and onto the floor to talk to the homeless men.

Bratcher and Anderson both talk about her perpetual smile, how she'll listen to your opinion, and is always volunteering to help. When a confidential conversation is needed, the men appreciate the discreet discussions in her office.

"She's one-of-a-kind," says Anderson. "At first, I was wondering why she was so nice. Then I found out she was a nun. I really like talking to a nun. She has the spirit of God in her."

Recalling seeing Sister Jeanne sweep the floor and moving chairs around, Anderson shakes his head in disbelief. "A nun doing that? C'mon," he smiles. "There are still good people in the world, and she's one of them. That's why men fight to get in the door to see her. She's for real."

When Anderson was really struggling, Sister Jeanne shared the Bible story of Job with him. He often thinks of the patience of Job when times are tough for him, and of Sister Jeanne's advice to "don't give up."

"She gives you confidence," he says. He also smiles when telling the story of buying a \$6 rose to give to a girl, but when she wasn't around, he gave it to Sister Jeanne. "It's an honor to God to give a nun a rose. I don't give anybody a rose but a nun."

Ron Sweat, director of mission advancement for St. John Center, and a former Roman Catholic priest for 17 years, says about Sister Jeanne, "I don't know that I ever met anybody who better typifies the zeal, compassion, and Christ-focused energy that she puts into what she does. She epitomizes the ministry. Her personal faith and witness is at her very heart and soul."

"I see an inner core that is inspired by faith and Gospel values. It's as Gospel-related as any kind of behavior I've ever seen."

Beyond seeing her in action, Sweat also overhears remarks about her on the streets outside St. John.

"If somebody new to the neighborhood shows up, they'll ask a question of a homeless guy who's been here. It's not uncommon for them to say, 'Well, if you go in and talk to Sister Jeanne ...' That's the person they will always direct you to. I hear that often."

Sweat says Sister Jeanne is able to motivate men to do things that nobody else can, and that some men come to St. John just because they've heard of her.

"I challenge them and they challenge me," she says. "My being a sister does have an influence for some people. One guy would genuflect before coming in, saying he did so 'because you're a sister.'"

"Some have issues with the Catholic Church and God, so we'll try to work through that. We'll discuss the Bible, rules, spirituality. Many of the men have done many things and think they don't have a chance, so I try to get them to have a relationship with God."

And while Sister Jeanne is assisting homeless men directly with their immediate needs, another Sister of St. Benedict, Sister Mary Frances Schafer, plays a key role in obtaining grant money to attack the homeless problem in the entire Louisville area.

As director of community coordination for the Louisville Coalition for the Homeless, Sister Mary Frances helps mesh over 40 area services to best use federal funding.

"She talks us off the ledge," laughs St. John's Price, who works with her on an advisory group. "Sister Mary Frances shapes policy at a high level. She's great. She's a lifeline for many when working on applications. She's so energized by it, and is fierce with an Excel spreadsheet. Nobody can crunch that data like Mary Frances."

"Homeless services are greatly enriched by the contributions of the Sisters of St. Benedict. Louisville is very blessed with those two women and their very special contribution."

Sister Mary Frances arrived at an opportune time for the coalition in 2006. It had been receiving \$5 million a year from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), but funding had just been cut to \$2 million.

"Many people in the city kept saying the sky is falling, we're going to lose all these homeless shelters," says Sister Mary Frances. "I said if we can get all of the 40-plus projects to work together, if everybody is willing to give, we can save every project. And we did. We were forced to work together and created many partnerships in the granting process that are more efficient."

In short, Sister Mary Frances has helped facilitate about 60 people representing 45 projects wanting money, to continually put together united proposals that HUD likes. In just four years, Louisville's annual funding from HUD has grown from \$2 million a year to \$7 million.

The coalition must prove to HUD that Louisville needs a certain amount of money to provide homeless services.

Sister Mary Frances's job is to keep current with HUD changes, figure out how to get all the Louisville groups to connect with where HUD is headed, and continue to grow the city's funding. Her gift was to coordinate all the different personalities and wish lists. She not only changed the system, but played a key role in saving it.

The most rewarding part for her was seeing some city agencies work together and make progress, knowing they hadn't in the past.

"I want to help people see the possibilities that are there if they maybe change the way they look at it, or put the pieces together differently," she says. "It's satisfying to me to help people prepare their grant proposal so it feeds into HUD's focus instead of not touching on it."

Sister Mary Frances thrives at being a negotiator between people with widely varying interests and perspectives. Others, like coalition director Natalie Harris, have taken notice.

"She has a non-confrontational way about her and the ability to get people on different sides to work together," says Harris. "She gets people to prioritize the gaps in homeless services, which is the hardest part. That's where everybody's self-interest gets involved. She gets people to see beyond their own agency and to see what's best for the community."

Sister Mary Frances facilitates monthly meetings where about 60 people decide how to best allocate HUD money. She's created a system to numerically show how a proposed project would measure up to HUD goals. "So it's based on fact rather than whether I like you or not," she says.

Harris feels the approach is working well. "It would be easy for Sister Mary Frances to say 'this is what I think you ought

to do.' But she's set up a way for the group to be informed enough to make the decision. It's a lot of work. It's a lot harder to create a system to empower people. But then everybody owns it.

"We want to live in communities where there are resources for people in need. It makes it a better place to live."

Maybe the best symbol of what's going on between the Louisville homeless and Sisters Jeanne and Mary Frances is to take a thoughtful, lingering look at the inside of the St. John Center. It's a former church, built over 100 years ago, with the altar still there, the stained glass windows, the religious statues, and Jesus on the cross.

"You sit there, and you understand you're in this former church built for a certain purpose, and you now think about what's really going on here," says Sister Mary Frances. "They don't serve meals, but you see people serving one another, like Sister Jeanne, and it's the real Eucharist. It's pretty powerful."


A look on a typical day reveals the homeless men milling about, getting coffee, reading newspapers, making phone calls, watching TV, waiting to take showers, or taking a nap because the weather was too brutal to sleep well under the bridge last night.

At any time, you can see Sister Jeanne befriending someone, helping them get through another tough day. And you know that Sister Mary Frances is a few blocks away, diligently working at getting more money to help all the people in need that you see. There are a lot of them.

And you'll see the altar, and a statue of Christ, looking over it all. The symbols are always there, and you realize it's so right that they are. Like it was meant to be. And you know that it is.

St. John Center is the largest of three day shelters for homeless men in Louisville.





The community gathers together three times each day to pray the Liturgy of the Hours.

A beginner's guide to the Liturgy of the Hours

by Sister Anita Louise Lowe

When you visit the monastery at certain times of the day, you'll find the sisters gathered inside the church for prayer. You are always welcome to join us and, if you do, one of our sisters will hand you a book and assist you in following along.

What we are praying at morning, midday, and evening is the Liturgy of the Hours. This collection of prayers is described as the official prayer of the Church, recognizing the sacredness of each part of the day. It is also called the Divine Office. St. Benedict, in his Rule, used the Latin words *opus Dei*, meaning "the work of God," for the Liturgy of the Hours. He stipulated that monastic men and women should pray the *opus Dei* in common each day.

The Liturgy of the Hours can trace its heritage back to early Christianity and, to some extent, to Jewish customs predating Christianity. The Jewish people at the time of Jesus offered morning and evening sacrifices at the temple, and they had synagogue services four times a day: morning, afternoon, and evening, with one additional hour of prayer at some other point during the day.

In the New Testament, we find passages depicting Jesus praying in the morning and in the evening, as well as keeping vigil through the night. Early Christians gathered for daily services at morning and at evening. These prayer times allowed people to dedicate the coming day to God and to give thanks at the end of the day for the blessings of that day.

In monasteries, the Liturgy of the Hours eventually developed into eight prayer times by the late Middle Ages. Today, the number of prayer times varies by religious community. At our monastery, we pray in common three times a day.

Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer continued to be the prayer of the people through the years until the late 18th century, when changes began taking place. Attendance of lay people at morning and evening services started to decline. And the Liturgy of the Hours became more identified with the clergy.

In the reforms of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), the Church called for a renewal of the Liturgy of the Hours as the prayer of the whole people of God. The council documents say that the Liturgy of the Hours is not the exclusive possession of clerics and religious in its origin or by its nature. Rather, it belongs to the whole Christian community. The purpose of the Liturgy of the Hours is to sanctify the day and all human activity, and the two "hinge" hours are Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer. In a sense these two hours form the bookends for one's day — beginning and ending the day with prayer.

The Monastic Hours is a directory for celebrating the Liturgy of the Hours. It describes the Liturgy of the Hours as the spiritual summit of the monastic life. By stopping periodically to gather and pray together, monastics are able to allow chronological time to be changed into what is called *kairos* time, a saving moment in which we enter the eternal time of God. The directory also provides norms for individual monasteries to use in creating their own arrangement of the Liturgy of the Hours.

“The Liturgy of the Hours in Benedictine communities is a response to the basic human need to pray, to pray daily, and to pray with others.”

— *Of Time Made Holy*, written by the Conference of American Benedictine Prioresses, 1978

In 1978, the Conference of American Benedictine Prioresses created a document on the Liturgy of the Hours which they titled *Of Time Made Holy*. The document notes Benedict’s adaptation of the prayer traditions of his time and his call that “nothing is to be preferred to the work of God.” For Benedictines, common prayer is intended to be our sustaining force. The daily Liturgy of the Hours is a recurring sign of the community’s unity with Christ and with one another.

The main elements of the Liturgy of the Hours are a call to prayer, a hymn, psalms, a reading with response, a Gospel canticle (the Canticle of Zachary, also known as the *Benedictus*, in the morning and the Canticle of Mary, more often called the *Magnificat*, in the evening), prayers of intercession, a concluding prayer, and a blessing.

Scripture forms the core of the Liturgy of the Hours through the psalms and the readings. Silence is important, allowing the word to penetrate, to sink into our very beings. That’s why we pause between psalms and after the reading. It’s also why we pray in a slow manner, more deliberately than people are often used to. The prayer isn’t a task to rush through, but a time to allow God’s word to become part of us.

There are also some customs that we use when we celebrate the Liturgy of the Hours that have special meaning.

- *Statio*: This is a Latin word that means a halting place, station, or guard post. On Saturday evenings and at First Vespers the evening before a solemnity (a major feast day), the community gathers in the Blessed Virgin Room across from the entrance to the church. We stand in silence and then process into church. By doing so, we journey together into prayer, into the presence of God, as one united community.

In her book *Wisdom Distilled from the Daily*, Sister Joan Chittister, OSB, describes *statio* as “the practice of stopping one thing before we start another.” She writes, “The practice of *statio* is meant to center us and make us conscious of what we’re about to do and make us present to the God who is present to us.”

- Call to prayer: The rituals we do at the beginning of prayer help mark the time and space of prayer apart from the rest of the day. At Morning Prayer, we trace a small cross on our lips while saying, “O Lord, open my lips ...,” and at Evening Prayer, we make the sign of the cross while asking, “O God, come to my assistance”

- Bows: We bow during the doxology (“Glory be ...”). We also bow at the end of Evening Prayer, concluding our day by recognizing God’s presence in the altar, and then turn to bow to one another, recognizing God’s presence there as well.
- Praying in choir: We alternate reading or chanting the stanzas of the psalms from one side of the church to the other. This is a form of dialogue. We try to pray together, with one voice, so that the prayer truly is a communal prayer — not the prayer of any one person but of the entire group.

The prayer we have here at the monastery is the same as what our sisters pray who live away from the monastery in mission deaneries. Because of the setting and larger numbers, prayer at the monastery is a bit more formal and solemn. The sisters here chant and sing more than the sisters at the mission houses do. But it’s the same prayer with the same purpose.

We invite you to experience the richness of praying the Liturgy of the Hours with us on your next visit to the monastery.

Please join us for prayer in the monastery church.

Monday – Friday

Morning Prayer 7 a.m.
Midday Prayer 12 p.m.
Evening Prayer 5 p.m.

Saturday

Morning Prayer 8 a.m.
(*On Sabbatical Saturdays, Morning Prayer is at 10 a.m., with no Midday Prayer.*)
Midday Prayer 12 p.m.
Evening Prayer 5 p.m.

Sunday

Morning Prayer 10 a.m.
Evening Prayer 5 p.m.



Helping others hear God's call

by Karen Katafiasz

At 26, Missy Sinkhorn may not have seemed a likely candidate for religious life.

She didn't really know a sister until she was in her 20s. A nanny for three children, she was certain she wanted "eight babies" of her own. She was advancing toward a black belt in karate. She had worked as a hot walker, exercise rider, and groom at thoroughbred racetracks. She loved roller coasters. She liked living alone. And one other thing — she was pretty much "set against" becoming a sister.

Then she met Sister T — formally known as Sister Teresa Gunter, a Sister of St. Benedict of Ferdinand, Indiana. The two of them worked together at a junior high summer camp for girls, sponsored by the Conventual Franciscan friars at Mount St. Francis in southeast Indiana.

You might say Sister T wasn't "typical" sister material either. Just her well-used nickname would tip you off. Plus she liked wearing a baseball cap, playing ultimate Frisbee, being outdoors every chance she'd get. The two became friends instantly.

But for Missy, knowing a real live Benedictine sister wasn't enough. The road to the monastery was still a journey of resistance. Some friends had teased her for several years about becoming a sister, and now Sister Teresa was urging her to consider religious life. Sister T invited her to Ferdinand; Missy initially was "not impressed." She still had no desire to enter a religious community.

Then one October weekend, while staying at a hermitage at Mount St. Francis (something she liked to do once a month), she read through a copy of *Vision* magazine, for people considering religious life. She prayed. And she followed Sister T's advice: "If you want to know what God wants of you, just ask."

"I already knew what I wanted — I wanted a husband and eight babies — but I told God 'If you want me to do otherwise, you'll have to let me know.'" On Monday, Missy learned that she had ovarian cysts and eventually was told that she also had severe endometriosis.

Today, Sister Michelle Catherine looks back at that time and says, "God gave me the grace to see that as an answer to my prayer. Maybe I needed to open my mind and ask 'What if God is calling me to religious life?'"

For the last three years, as director of vocation ministries, she has been inviting other women to consider that same question: "What if God is calling me?" And when she does, she's able to draw on her own experiences of uncertainty and reluctance, which lasted even after she entered the monastery in August 1997.

"I was ready to hit the road by October," she admits. But Sister Teresa convinced her to stay until December. When she left after the community's Christmas celebration to visit her family (she's the youngest, with three brothers and one sister), she became homesick. For the monastery. And for the sisters.

“I already knew what I wanted, but I told God ‘If you want me to do otherwise, you’ll have to let me know.’”

When Sister Michelle is giving “vocation talks” at schools, she likes to point out that her first ministry as a sister was working at a daycare in Evansville, Indiana. Nothing surprising about that, given her experience as a nanny. But a curious thing: she was in charge of eight children, 12 to 24 months — her eight babies!

She went on to become director of the Saint Bernard Preschool & Daycare in Rockport, Indiana, for seven years, and in that time touched the lives of hundreds of children and their families. She was happy before she entered the monastery, she says. “I don’t remember feeling something was missing in my life.” And she is happy today. “I haven’t regretted what I gave up.”

“The key to vocation ministry is building relationships,” says Sister Michelle. She receives inquiries from women through a multitude of channels: vocation publications and web sites, the sisters’ own web site, conferences where the Vocation Office has a booth, visits to colleges, diocesan outreach programs.

Then the communication begins — as much or as little as the individual wants. For some women, receiving a lot of information right away “freaks them out,” she says. Some opt for only the vocation newsletter (*God’s Time*), and then, “if they like what they see, they move up their commitment” to other ways of connecting. Sister Michelle stays in touch with over 200 women using e-mails, phone calls, Facebook, and texting.

Until this past July, she shared her vocation ministry with Sister Agnes Marie Dauby (see page 10). The two of them moved into new technology and social media “to meet the women where they are.” Many young women are more likely to connect through Facebook and to text than use regular e-mail, she says. “I never thought I’d write ‘LOL!’” (a common texting abbreviation), she adds with a Laugh Out Loud.

What does she know for sure about vocation ministry? “There’s nothing for sure about vocation ministry,” she responds. “It’s one of the most fluid things I’ve ever done. The women are unsure, scared, and often don’t know what they want.”

Some need basic information to start. They aren’t aware of the different types of religious life. In addition to monastic communities (such as the Sisters of St. Benedict), there are cloistered, contemplative, apostolic, evangelical, and missionary communities.

Sister Michelle provides that explanation and continues the conversation. She learns more about the women and their lives, helps them to know the community better, listens, encourages and supports them, and walks with them in their discernment. Sometimes the women visit the monastery, and sometimes she visits them.

Other community members become part of the conversation as well. The Prayer Partner Program matches up a woman and a sister, and the two pray for each other and learn about each other through electronic or postal mail. For a woman further along in her discernment, the Companion Program pairs her with a sister who accompanies her. They keep in touch through monthly phone calls and discuss a relevant book together.

Building relationships with women who are discerning can take a long time. “And then you might work with somebody for two years and they say they’re not interested anymore,” she says. Some women enter another community or decide to marry. “There’s a sense of sadness,” she admits, because these women might have a lot to offer a community. On the other hand, she says, “The job of a vocation minister is to help a woman find what God is calling her to. You’re happy that she’s found the right fit for her.”

One of Sister Michelle’s goals is to keep increasing the community’s visibility. That’s what using Facebook does, as do having an interactive web site, going on mission trips, visiting schools, and having a group of sisters wear their shirts with the community’s logo at public events.

“And saying this is a great way of life,” she adds. “We have so much to offer for someone looking for community and prayer and ministry, for someone who’s enthusiastic and in love with God and her Catholic faith and wants to find a way to live it out.”

About five years ago, Sister Michelle’s niece in California introduced her to slacklining, a fairly new sport already popular in the state at the time. It involves walking on a one-inch wide flat nylon line anchored between two points. The line isn’t as rigid as a tightrope, but “slack.” Thus, the name.

“It’s a great hobby. I love it!” Sister Michelle says. It requires being focused and balanced and can be “a prayerful experience.” She especially enjoys teaching other people how to slackline. “To watch them struggle and learn to get their balance and to hold them and support them and eventually let go and see them take a couple steps — that’s fulfilling.”

It also sounds a lot like being a vocation minister.



For a list of upcoming vocation events, please visit thedome.org.

In God's time

by Karen Katafiasz

Six years in vocation ministry has taught Sister Agnes Marie Dauby two certain truths: "It's not easy" and "It's in God's time."

Appropriately, when she and Sister Michelle Catherine Sinkhorn, both directors of vocation ministries, were revamping the vocation newsletter last year, they renamed it *God's Time*.

As much as they might work telling women about religious life, using mail, phone calls, e-mail, and new technology to stay in touch with them, inviting them to the monastery, and visiting them at their homes, it comes down to this: "It's not in our time."

"Vocation ministry is really God's work," Sister Agnes Marie says. "Vocation directors plant lots of seeds, but it's up to God to bring those seeds to life."

She offers these reflections as she enters a new chapter in her life, having completed her last day in the Vocation Office on July 1. "I have felt honored to share in this ministry," she says. "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," she wrote for the June/July issue of *God's Time*.

"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."

One person Sister Agnes Marie accompanied through her discernment is Sister Gail Hamilton. She says Sister Agnes Marie was "incredibly patient" with her many questions and "the challenges I presented her with," and "she was very open and honest about them all."

Sister Agnes Marie "never pushed or became invasive or pressured me in any way," Sister Gail adds. Today, four years after entering the monastery, she expresses her gratitude for Sister Agnes Marie's attentiveness, sincere Benedictine hospitality, and selflessness. "She was so genuinely giving" and was truly interested in "whether I was doing the right thing for me."



"Discernment," Sister Agnes Marie says, "is about finding how we can best serve God and use the talents God has given us to serve others." It is, of course, a lifelong process. And so recently Sister Agnes Marie found herself realizing "it was time to move on to something else." She wants to be closer to her parents, who live in southeastern Indiana, to give them more assistance. And she would like to minister in social services.

That desire has a deep history for her — going back to 1968. She had just graduated from Marian Heights Academy, was working as a nurse's aide in a nursing home, and planned to go to college and become a social worker. But people kept asking her if she was going to become a Sister of St. Benedict. She had considered that an option, she says. She had relatives who were community members, and while at the academy, "I could see that the postulants and novices were happy."

Her first ministry was serving as a pastoral associate at St. Anthony Parish in Evansville, starting in 1973. She was, in fact, the first Ferdinand Benedictine to be a pastoral associate. Much of her work in her six years there was social ministry — working with the needy, helping groups apply for grants, assisting Vietnamese families settling in the area.

Religious life is “a sign that God is still at work in our world.”

She later was a pastoral associate at St. Mary Parish, Washington, for five years, and at St. Joseph, Evansville, for 12, and over the years also worked in the monastery Business Office, at Kordes Center, and at Mater Dei High School, Evansville, as a bookkeeper.

Then the prioress, Sister Kristine Anne Harpenau, asked her to consider vocation ministry. “I’ve always admired the sisters who are in vocation ministry, but I never thought of myself as doing that,” she says. She realized, though, that many of the skills she used as a pastoral associate were well-suited to vocation ministry.

Sister Agnes Marie is convinced religious life is relevant today. “I think it’s a sign that God is still at work in our world and that there can be a value system not based on money or prestige.” She acknowledges that young people have so many life choices today and it seems to take them longer to decide to make a commitment to religious life.

But she believes the Ferdinand Benedictines will continue to see new members. (Currently the community has 18 members who entered in the last 15 years.) “We’re fortunate that two of our charisms are community life and prayer, because those are two things that young people are looking for when they consider religious life these days.”

Though at this writing Sister Agnes Marie isn’t sure what her next ministry will be, she was scheduled to give a vocation presentation to the Benedictine sisters in Rock Island, Illinois, in August. “I like to say, ‘Once a vocation director, always a vocation promoter.’”

The journey to final profession

What does a woman experience, reflect on, and pray about as she moves toward making a permanent commitment to religious life? Fifteen months ago, we invited Sister Jeana Visel to share her journey with us, and she generously agreed.

On October 2, near the time you receive this issue of Seek. Pray. Share., Sister Jeana, 31, will make her perpetual monastic profession as a member of the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand. She has been keeping a journal since July 2009. A few of her first entries appear below. More entries and photos of her profession ceremony will appear in the spring 2011 issue.

July 17, 2009

It’s so nice to be at the monastery over the summer. I’ve been doing a lot of time at switchboard and helping out with some of our older sisters. I’m so glad to see all of our sisters back from retreat and vacation. We’ve been operating on a bare minimum in church, and it’s refreshing to hear the fullness of voices again at prayer and meals. We really do have a wonderful community.

July 24, 2009

At Familien Fest tonight [an annual celebration held at the end of summer community meetings], T [Sister Teresa Gunter] dismissed us for dinner by rank, from the eldest to the youngest. It was interesting to see the future of our community as the elders departed decade by decade. Toward the end we were saying, “Look around, ladies, because this is going to be it!” We are going to be a smaller community in the future. I’m completely okay with that, but those of us who will be that community are going to have to work together in a whole new way. Of course, we don’t yet know those sisters yet to come.

September 19, 2009

Today my spiritual director, Sister Mary Claude Croteau, looked at me squarely and asked, “So, do you really want to do this? Commit to this life — uncertainties and all?” And I said something like, “I think so.”

“But are you really sure?” And I think I said, “As much as I can be, given the realities we’re facing.”

“You’re not looking at going anywhere else.” I said that I think about other places with curiosity and perhaps some admiration for one aspect or another of their life, but that this is the only place I really want to be. She seemed satisfied.

Honestly, though, does one ever really know with absolute certainty? I’ve had confirmation of one sort and another that this is where I should be, but I imagine God could work with me wherever I might end up. Nonetheless, I do love our church and our prayer and our community life. I am peaceful and content and healed of my frazzled edges when I come home to Ferdinand. That is a great gift for which I am grateful. God is good to me.



NEWS from the Dome

St. Benedict School establishes Sister Karlene Sensmeier Endowment

St. Benedict Cathedral School in Evansville has honored its 27-year principal, Sister Karlene Sensmeier, by establishing a \$5,000 endowment in her name to provide tuition assistance for those in need to be able to attend the school.

Tom Miller, a volunteer fundraiser for the school, which has classes from pre-school age through the eighth grade, said the Legacy Society at St. Benedict decided to honor Sister Karlene for her "long, distinguished service record to the school."

Sister Karlene said, "Why would I want to work anyplace else, in terms of the pastors, teachers, parents, and students. This is really about us. I'm just one person. It's their legacy also."

A native of Haubstadt, she taught for one year at St. Benedict, then served as principal from 1971 to 1985. She returned as principal in 1997 and oversaw a \$4 million building expansion completed in 2004. Since 1985, the school's enrollment has grown from 218 to over 450, making it the largest Catholic elementary school in the Diocese of Evansville. It also ranks in the top 10% of schools academically in Indiana.

"A lot of that is credited to her," said Miller. "Many are drawn to St. Benedict because of her, the pastors, and the teachers."

Miller recalled seeing Sister Karlene planting flowers on a Sunday in front of the new school building.



"She makes things happen," he said, "and the Legacy Society felt the need to acknowledge her."

Sister Karlene is proud of the school's desire "of everyone having the opportunity for a Catholic education."

"St. Benedict's has always been generous to those in need," she said. "If a student wants to attend and they make the effort, they will be allowed to attend."

Free concert of sacred music October 30 in monastery church

A rare opportunity for you to enjoy the vocal group Angelus will be Saturday, October 30, at 7:30 p.m. EDT in the monastery church. Angelus, a group of five women students from Mount Vernon (Indiana) High School, performs sacred music of varied religious traditions and historical periods. Also performing will be Sister Jeana Visel, vocalist, and Sister Theresita Schenk, organist.

Angelus' recent concert appearances included Chicago, South Bend, Indianapolis, and Evansville. Their summer tour schedule had performances in Cincinnati, Philadelphia, and New York City.

This is the first concert of the Mechtilde of Hackeborn Sacred Music Series, sponsored by an endowment established by the Verkamp Family with the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand in honor of Sisters Mary Aquin and Mary Ann Verkamp and their love of sacred music.

Although there is no charge for the concert, a free will offering is welcome.

Additional contributions to the endowment are also welcome. For more information, contact Sister Barbara Lynn Schmitz at barbaral@thedome.org or 812-367-1411, ext. 2630.



Sister Alexandra Larsen enters novitiate



In a simple ceremony on April 24, the Sisters of St. Benedict received Postulant Alexandra Larsen, 29, into the novitiate, the second stage of incorporation into the religious community.

A native of Madison, Wisconsin, Sister Alexandra graduated from Belmont Abbey College in Belmont, North Carolina, in 2003 with a bachelor's degree in educational and early childhood studies. Before entering the monastery in August 2009, she worked as an infant and early childhood teacher in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. During the past year she took religious formation classes, assisted with activities for the monastery's Hildegard Health Center, and volunteered in child care at the Tri-County YMCA in Ferdinand.

During her two-year novitiate period, Sister Alexandra will live and work at the monastery and continue studies in Scripture, theology, and Benedictine history and spirituality as she prepares for vowed membership in the Benedictine community.

"The sisters are so loving and full of wisdom," she said. "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."



Sister receives prestigious hospital award

Sister Maura Beckman has been named the 2010 Little Company of Mary Award recipient at Memorial Hospital and Health Care Center in Jasper, Indiana. The LCM Award is given annually to an employee nominated by his or her co-workers and chosen from a group of finalists by the hospital's Mission Committee. Nominees for this award demonstrate Memorial Hospital's mission and core values through their daily work.

Sister Maura has been a member of the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand for 60 years. She currently serves as a chaplain for Memorial Hospital, where she has been employed for 20 years. Before becoming a chaplain, Sister Maura worked as a registered nurse for 37 years.

Sister receives Mother Teresa Award

Sister Karen Durliat has been honored with the Mother Teresa Christian Service Award presented annually by the Diocese of Evansville.

Sister Karen received one of the three Special Nominations for the award, which recognizes parishioners who strive to imitate the example of Mother Teresa by "doing small things with great love."

Sister Karen is director of Hispanic Ministry for the diocese and director of the Guadalupe Center in Huntingburg.

In a letter of congratulations sent to each recipient, Bishop Gerald A. Gettelfinger wrote that the awards are "presented to faithful members of the Church of Southwestern Indiana who daily live three qualities in an outstanding way: willingness to hear Jesus' words, to listen to them, then respond to them."

The nomination description read: "Sister Karen has spent her life living out the call to service, especially to the poor. It began with her teaching career, where she helped to develop mission awareness in the students she taught. It continued in her work with the Benedictine missions in Guatemala, where she worked directly with some of the poorest people in the country. It continues now with her work as the diocesan director of the Spanish-speaking ministry. In her work with our Spanish-speaking sisters and brothers she is an untiring advocate for those who find themselves marginalized by our society. She is a great witness to the words of Jesus — 'when I was homeless you opened your door to me.'"



Three sisters celebrate golden jubilees

Three sisters celebrated the 50th anniversary of their monastic profession on July 3 at the monastery.

The jubilarians, Sisters Shirley Ann Schultheis, Mary Francis Williams, and Mary Lee Hillenbrand, made their first profession of monastic vows in 1960 and their final profession in 1965.

Sister Shirley Ann, of Evansville, entered the monastery from Sts. Peter and Paul Parish, Haubstadt, in 1958. She taught at schools in Fulda, Celestine, St. Henry, and Evansville. She was supervisor at Southern Indiana Rehabilitation Services (SIRS) in Ferdinand, supervisor of Adult Day Activity program at SIRS in Boonville, and director of social services at the monastery. Currently, she works in the monastery gift shop.

Sister Mary Francis, a native of Vincennes, entered the monastery from St. Thomas Parish in 1958. She taught at schools in Celestine, St. Anthony, the Academy in Ferdinand, Schnellville, and at Mater Dei High School in Evansville, where she has served since 1967. She received the Evansville Diocesan Teacher of the Year Award in 1993 and the Vanderburgh County Outstanding Educator of the Year Award in the high school division in 2009.



Sisters Shirley Ann, Mary Francis, and Mary Lee

Sister Mary Lee, of Evansville, entered the monastery from St. Benedict Parish in 1958. She was a radiology technologist and physical therapist at Stork Memorial Hospital, Huntingburg, and occupational therapist at the Ferdinand monastery and at Visiting Nurse Association in Spencer County. She served in parish ministry at Apache Junction, Arizona, and at Troy, Indiana. She was a chaplain at St. Mary's Hospital, Evansville, and an early childhood teacher at C.K. Newsome Community Center and Sacred Heart Parish, Evansville. Currently she does support services and health care ministry at the monastery.

Two sisters observe silver jubilees

Sister Louise Laroche and Sister Susan Mary Hooks celebrated the 25th anniversary of their profession of monastic vows on June 5.

Sister Louise, a native of Berlin, New Hampshire, entered the Benedictine monastery in Martin, Kentucky, in 1983. She made her first profession of vows in 1985. She moved to the monastery in Ferdinand in 1986, where she made her final profession in 1993.

She has a bachelor's degree in elementary education from Rivier College in Nashua, New Hampshire, a master's degree in elementary education from Plymouth State University in New Hampshire, and a master's degree in theological studies from Saint Meinrad School of Theology.

She taught at Our Lady of the Mountains Catholic School in Paintsville, Kentucky, and

at Mountain Christian Academy in Martin, Kentucky, where she was also elementary school director. Since 1987, she has been a teacher at Holy Family School in Jasper. She took a leave of absence last year to care for her father.

Sister Susan Mary, of Slovak, Arkansas, entered the monastery in 1984, made her first profession of vows in 1985 and her final profession in 1993. She has a bachelor's degree in business administration, with a major in accounting, from Memphis State University.

Since 2001, she has been assistant vice-rector for administration/comptroller at the Pontifical North American College in Rome, Italy. Before, she was business manager at St. Helen Parish, Louisville. She also worked in the Business Office at Marian Heights Academy, Ferdinand, and as patient accounts manager at St. Joseph Hospital, Huntingburg.



Sisters Louise and Susan Mary

In memoriam

by Sister Paulette Seng

Sister Jennifer Dippel died at the monastery in Ferdinand on March 9 at the age of 63.

For many years, she battled melanoma, determined to beat the cancer. Through her long and difficult struggle, she remained optimistic and never gave up hope. With patience and courage, she endured her illness but did not let it control her life. A colleague shared, "She always wanted to go to work regardless of how she felt physically, even in those last weeks."

Sister Jennifer brought that same spirit and enthusiasm to her ministry in physical therapy and rehabilitation services for over 30 years. Making persons whole and healthy was her passion. She inspired hope in her patients and helped them believe that nothing was impossible. She shared her best medicine — joy, laughter, and a positive attitude — in addition to her professional skills and knowledge.



Sister Jennifer entered the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand in 1964 and made her first profession of vows in 1966 and her final profession in 1971. In her ministries, she served as a teacher, a physical therapist, and a coordinator of clinical education, staff development, and rehabilitation services.

She lived life to the fullest and found great fun and adventure in ordinary experiences, which later became fodder for her dramatic storytelling. People loved being in her company because of her sense of humor and her joyful spirit that always found good in others.

Hallmarks of Sister Jennifer's life and ministry were her upbeat attitude, peaceful presence, generosity, undying hope, and unconditional love.

A poem in one of Sister Jennifer's spiritual reading books reflects her view of life. "I'd like the memory of me to be a happy one. I'd like to leave an afterglow of smiles when life is done. I'd like to leave an echo whispering softly down the ways, of happy times and laughing times and bright and sunny days."

"**Sister Leta Zeller** prayed that she would be able to minister up to the time of her death," recalled a longtime friend of hers. Her prayer was answered. Sister Leta died suddenly on June 10, at age 60, at the parish convent in Poseyville, Indiana, where she was ministering as pastoral associate and director of religious education at St. Francis Xavier Parish.



Sister Leta entered the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand in 1981 and made her first profession of vows in 1983 and her final profession in 1986.

She worked in parishes for 24 years, but her ministry extended far beyond the parishes and included people "from the cradle to the grave," as she once said.

A friend shared, "She was an instrument of God's peace and healing for thousands of people."

"There is an appointed time for everything. A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to heal; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance" (Ecclesiastes 3:1-4).

Being totally present to others in those sacred times — that was Sister Leta's greatest gift. Parishioners remarked, "She was always there for us, in crises, in sorrow, and in joy."

The image of a clown (she was involved in "clown ministry") depicted how Sister Leta understood her role as a minister — sharing in the life experiences of others with tears and smiles.

"She cared for many who were ignored or neglected by others; she sought out the least, the lost, the unnoticed," Sister Kristine Anne Harpenau said. Like Robert Kennedy, Sister Leta dreamed things that never were and said "why not?"

A memorial card distributed by St. Francis Xavier Parish described her as a "Woman of faith. Woman of passion for her work and ministry in the Church. Woman of compassion for the young, the elderly, the sick, the dying, the grieving, and the troubled." That was Sister Leta's legacy.



Complete obituaries can be found at thedome.org.

In memoriam

Sister Mary Mark Graf, a pioneer in special education, died July 26 at the age of 85.

Extraordinary, amazing, incredible, and remarkable is how friends and colleagues described Sister Mary Mark. She changed thousands of lives and entire families in her 43 years of ministry with special needs kids. She established and served as director of two schools, and according to the children and their parents, she worked miracles.



"She brought new hope to the community in Memphis by giving children with disabilities the chance to shine in our society." "She overlooked our children's shortcomings while building on their strengths. She gave them the spirit to believe they could do anything with God's help." "She was the spark that gave so many of us hope for the future by helping our sons and daughters find a place in this life. Her pioneer spirit was always, 'We can do it together with God's help.'"

A wall hanging in her office read, "We don't just believe in miracles, we make them." She said, "If you have faith, nothing is impossible."

Like Peter, who was called by Jesus to step out of the boat and walk on water (one of her favorite Gospel stories), she took risks, overcame doubts, and put her trust in God. "She believed in living one day at a time and living it to the fullest, trusting that God would send angels to help her in her needs," said Sister Judy Dewig, a friend and colleague.

Whenever confronted by "you can't do that," she found ways to get people to support projects for the "special kids." People couldn't say "no" to her. It's no wonder the title of a book about her life and ministry is *Together We Can*.

In that book she said, "I pray that I will be remembered for having a heart and love for the handicapped." She saw Jesus in every person, every face.

"Perhaps more than any person I have ever known, Sister Mary Mark epitomized goodness. Her beneficial impact on the lives of so many is a legacy which few achieve," said a friend.

Sister Mary Mark's wish for her epitaph: "Here lies Sister Mary Mark Graf, a Benedictine nun who loved life to the fullest. She believed in miracles because she gave God credit for whatever she accomplished in life. May she rest with God."

Sister Mary Celeste Oberst, 88, died July 31 at the monastery.

In a sense, Sister Mary Celeste was an enigma. When asked a question, she usually answered with a question of her own. She was a private person and reluctant to share much about herself, yet, as a keen observer of people and events, she was always seeking information from others, from books, newspapers, magazines, and workshops.



The final months of Sister Mary Celeste's life were a special blessing and a gift to the community in that the sisters got to know her better. She became more expressive of her affections, asked people to stay and talk with her, and frequently expressed her gratitude for everyone's care and companionship. She built relationships she'd been less open to before and shared things never shared before. She was patient with her suffering, filled with peace while waiting to die, and gentle toward all who visited her and cared for her. When asked whether some youth volunteers who visited her had worn her out, she said, "I am full of gratitude."

Sister Mary Celeste's wit, quick comebacks, and sense of humor — much appreciated by her sisters in community — stayed with her until her death. Given a description of heaven a few days before she died, she responded, "That sounds beautiful. Maybe we can go there together." When one of the sisters asked her to pray for her, Sister Mary Celeste said, "Why, what have you been up to?"

Sister Mary Celeste loved teaching journalism, which she did for 25 years. She sometimes "hounded" students with her demand for quality work and high standards in the production of school newspapers and yearbooks. And she loved words. If a certain section of the daily newspaper was missing, everyone knew she was working the crossword puzzle, a daily routine for her.

In her dying, Sister Mary Celeste taught us how to live — with humor, openness, appreciation, patience, gentleness, gratitude, and with a quiet presence to all that is.



To learn more about how you can support the work of the Sisters of St. Benedict, please visit thedome.org/supportus.

Max and Dorothy were also taught by Benedictines, Max at St. Mary in Huntingburg and Dorothy at St. Anthony. And here's some trivia for you: Only two men ever attended Marian Heights Academy, and Max was one of them when he took language classes for two summers before college.

The Olingers appreciate the many ministries of the Sisters of St. Benedict and believe they could not donate to a better cause. One of the ways they do so is through our gift annuity program.

Because of our attractive rates, the fixed payments for life, and the tax benefits, Max believes that the Ferdinand Benedictine charitable gift annuity is truly a win-win proposition — both they and our community benefit.

Max advises, "Don't wait to leave gifts to charitable causes only in your will. By creating a gift annuity, you can enjoy seeing how the sisters benefit from your sacrifice during your lifetime."

Charitable gift annuities: a win-win situation

Max and Dorothy Olinger have been closely connected to our Benedictine community for many years. Both Max and Dorothy had relatives who were sisters. And Max knew people in high places! His great-aunt was Mother Seraphine Kordes, who was prioress of our community from 1914 to 1949. Max fondly remembers spending many Sunday afternoons visiting his great-aunt here at the monastery.

Charitable giving can provide tax savings at year's end

by Karen Blesch, CPA, CFP®, Planned Giving Officer



As you do your year-end planning, many types of charitable giving options provide an opportunity for tax savings. Your gifts by cash or check are always most appreciated. But did you know that there are other ways to help — ways that might even help you?

For example, establishing a charitable gift annuity pays you income for life at a fixed rate and offers you a charitable deduction, and a portion of your payments is even tax-free! And our rates, which we recently raised, are terrific! For example, a 75-year-old would receive 6.7%. Best of all, your gift will also help our community plan for our future growth.

By making a gift of stocks, bonds, or mutual funds (held more than one year) directly to us, you are allowed a charitable deduction for the full market value, and you'll owe absolutely no tax on the capital gain.

Savings bonds cannot be transferred to us without paying taxes (except through your will), but they still may be a perfect gift. Here's an idea: redeem your matured bonds and then fund a gift annuity. The deduction you receive will help offset the taxes, and you will have taken non-income producing bonds and turned them into an income-producer.

And what about life insurance? You can donate a policy outright today or make the Sisters of St. Benedict a full or partial beneficiary, just by completing a simple change of beneficiary form that is available from your life insurance company.

Finally, please consider including the sisters in your will. This would make a wonderful Christmas gift to our community. Our corporate title is *Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand, Indiana, Inc.* You can make a specific gift, designate a percentage of your estate, or leave a residual amount after your loved ones have been cared for. If you already have a will, your attorney can help you to write a simple, inexpensive "codicil."

To help you with your year-end planning, we are offering our booklet **Tax and Financial Planning Techniques**. Please see the insert enclosed to request your free copy.

Make a difference by joining Women of the Rule

A unique partnership with the
Sisters of St. Benedict
You help decide which
new ministries to fund!



womenoftherule.org

Our road map to the future

by Sister Kristine Anne Harpenau

In February 2008, the Sisters of St. Benedict gave ourselves a road map for the next five years — our Strategic Plan. We had worked on it for nearly a year, defining our three-part theme of “Renew, Revitalize, and Reach Out” and formulating the goals, objectives, and action steps that set our direction for the future — all in support of our mission. (See page 1 for our Mission Statement.)

The purpose of our Strategic Plan is significant: to ensure our community’s continued existence, our continued presence in this region, and our community’s vitality in such areas as vocations, finances, ministry, and more.

Our Strategic Plan has been serving us well. Our intention when we approved the plan was to review it regularly to assess its relevance and our progress, then to revise it where appropriate, and to map out more actions. We have done that and, as a result, our Strategic Plan is truly a “living plan” that responds to the realities of the present while continually looking forward.

You first heard about our Strategic Plan in the fall 2008 issue of *The Dome* (the precursor to *Seek. Pray. Share.*). Here are its key components today:

Sisters of St. Benedict Strategic Plan Summary ***Our Call and Challenge***

Renew: Prayer, Conversion, and Fidelity to the Monastic Way of Life

- Goal 1 Live deeply our Benedictine way of life
- Goal 2 Nurture and encourage leadership of Ferdinand Benedictines

Revitalize: Stability: Sharing, Promoting, Ensuring, and Preserving the Benedictine Presence for Future Generations

- Goal 1 Accept four healthy, vibrant women as members of our monastic community annually by 2013
- Goal 2 Share the Benedictine charism with those seeking to grow in faith and service
- Goal 3 Achieve financial stability
- Goal 4 Align our facilities and properties with our Benedictine values
- Goal 5 Impact our future by making discerned decisions and taking strategic action

Reach Out: Ministry and Service

- Goal 1 Share our Benedictine spirituality through all our ministries
- Goal 2 Minister to our sisters and brothers who are searching for God
- Goal 3 Use our resources to meet the needs of the wider community

As we move ahead with our Strategic Plan, we do so with both careful deliberation and hope in the future to which God is calling us. Our vocation efforts are central to our planning. We believe that God continues to call individuals to religious life, and we are committed to gaining new members. We are working to achieve a financial stability that includes meeting the challenge of supporting our senior sisters as they live out their lives in the monastery, their home. Our sisters minister in many creative and life-giving ways, and we want to continue to respond to the needs of the Church and the world through our ministries.

One area of planning that has seen a great deal of activity, even before we launched our Strategic Plan, is facilities and property master planning. Goal 4 under “Revitalize” is “Align our facilities and properties with our Benedictine values.” It includes objectives for rightsizing the facilities, becoming environmentally friendly, and determining leasing opportunities for buildings which support our mission.

The accompanying article reports on what our facilities and property master planning has accomplished, as well as its positive economic impact for our community, and indicates what might be on the horizon.

Four facts about the sisters' facilities and property master planning

by Karen Katafiasz



Eric Pund and Dave Kern, in maintenance, move furniture into Kordes Center for sisters who relocated from Benet Hall as part of the rightsizing taking place at the monastery.

This past summer provided a moving experience for 32 sisters at the monastery. Literally. They moved to different buildings as part of a master plan for facilities on the monastery grounds. These relocations are just one part of what's been happening as a result of the facilities and property master planning process that the Sisters of St. Benedict have undertaken. To see the full picture, here are four key facts that you should know.

Rightsizing is the word.

Rightsizing — a word coined about 20 years ago that means “adjusting to an appropriate size” — is the reason behind the new room assignments for 32 sisters. The fact is that the religious community has more facility space than it needs. Some buildings on the grounds were constructed for a much larger community, and some buildings were used by Marian Heights Academy, which closed in 2000. Consolidating space can save on costs for utilities, maintenance, housekeeping, insurance, and more.

Rightsizing is very much part of the Benedictine value of stewardship. “We need to be good stewards of what we have been given and to use the space that we have well and appropriately,”

says Sister Kristine Anne Harpenau, prioress. “Rightsizing our facilities and the amount of space we use is one way to respond to the challenge of good stewardship.”

To operate more effectively and efficiently, the sisters are phasing out the use of Benet Hall, following the recommendation of the Facilities and Property Master Planning Committee. During this first stage, 27 of the 34 sisters who resided in Benet have moved elsewhere — most to Kordes Center, some to two houses the sisters own on Alabama Street (which runs along the western edge of the monastery grounds), and some to St. Benedict Hall, the five-story residence on the monastery's north side.

For now, seven sisters and the monastery gift shop, For Heaven's Sake, will remain in Benet, which was built in 1964 downhill from the monastery. Closing most of Benet's 55,000 square feet (almost three of its four floors) should save \$50,000 to \$100,000 within a year's time, says Alan Hoffman, chief financial officer and business manager for the Ferdinand Benedictines.

“We're in the process of determining a location for the gift shop,” he adds. The goal is to close all of Benet, which would not only save \$100,000 annually, but would also make the building available for leasing.



At a meeting of the Facilities and Property Master Planning Committee, Sister Kristine Anne Harpenau, Alan Hoffman, and Duane Dart, with Schmidt Associates, examine a design for the master plan. Schmidt Associates, an Indianapolis firm, has been working with the sisters on facilities and property master planning.

The sisters have done much already.

Comprehensive facilities planning began in the early 2000s, when a committee began conducting space usage studies of all the community's buildings in Ferdinand. Focused on needs, it tackled such rightsizing questions as how much space is needed for an activity, where is the best location for a department, and where can space use be reduced.

The committee looked especially at buildings left vacant by the closing of the academy. Marian Heights had used over 160,000 square feet of space, more than a third of the total square footage in all monastery buildings. The sisters decided to close Madonna Hall, the east annex (also known as the academic wing), sections of St. Joseph Hall, and parts of the south quadrangle. Those closings totaled 151,745 square feet, which amounted to 37% of all square footage.

At the same time, the sisters aggressively investigated other uses for the empty academy buildings. A team headed by Alan Hoffman met with consulting firms, surveyed 600 religious communities, and informed businesses, non-profit organizations, educational institutions, and government agencies about available buildings.

Various uses have been explored for Madonna Hall — the large residence hall with five floors, a partial basement, and 104,000 square feet — that included such options as an independent and assisted living facility, a long-term care facility, a conference center, and a retreat center. Each of the uses had major drawbacks, and none was financially feasible. A potential arrangement with AmeriCorps, the government-supported national service program, failed to materialize when federal funding dried up.

During the last three years, there have been serious discussions with Indiana Developmental Training Center (IDTC) to lease Madonna Hall for a residential treatment and day school facility. IDTC provides treatment to children and adolescents who are dually diagnosed as developmentally disabled and emotionally disturbed. Studies have shown a need for such a facility in southern Indiana, but economic conditions have halted the negotiation process.

To become reality, the project would require licensure from the state of Indiana, Hoffman says. The costs of renovating Madonna Hall and the licensing and start-up costs would be significant for both the Sisters of St. Benedict and IDTC. A solid funding stream is necessary for success. Unfortunately, "funding is not imminent with the state's financial condition," Hoffman says.

The community has had success with leasing two buildings formerly used by the academy. In 2004, the Tri-County YMCA began leasing the gym and art studio. The YMCA is currently building a new facility in Ferdinand and will probably move out of the gym and art building in mid-2011.

The sisters have undertaken other efforts to achieve operational effectiveness and efficiency. They have made environmentally responsible improvements, such as installing energy-saving windows in St. Benedict Hall and upgrading systems. And in June 2005, they achieved state licensing and certification for Hildegard Health Center (HHC), the monastery's long-term care facility — making the community eligible for Medicaid reimbursements.

The overall economic impact for the community in cost reductions and new revenue has been substantial. If you add the operational cost savings from building closings, efficiency gains, and personnel reductions to the new operating revenue received from leasing and HHC licensing, the result is \$1.2 million a year in today's dollars.

The sisters are making tough decisions to shape the future.

The Sisters of St. Benedict are making difficult choices — closing buildings, consolidating space, and considering different facility use. The sisters strive to be self-sufficient and, contrary to what many people assume, aren't subsidized by the Church. They are doing all they can to guarantee the long-term viability of the community and sustain strong and vibrant ministries.

Perspectives

What would you do if you knew you could not fail?

Projections indicate that the community size will continue to decrease in the future, as older sisters die, which will be the case for nearly all religious communities. But projections also show that the community will maintain strong numbers for years to come.

And the Ferdinand Benedictines are committed to continuing their vocation efforts and actively reaching out to young women. The community has a significant number of newer members — 18 current sisters entered in the last 15 years. And it has set the goal of gaining four new members per year by 2013.

The sisters are striving, as their Strategic Plan says, to share, promote, ensure, and preserve “the Benedictine presence for future generations.” They want to continue welcoming visitors to these sacred and peaceful grounds. They want to safeguard the historic integrity of the beautiful monastery buildings. They seek the financial stability to sustain their long tradition of service, sharing their abilities with God’s people through their varied ministries.

There are more big decisions to come.

The community continues to develop an overall facilities and property master plan that is in alignment with the mission of the sisters and that effectively utilizes their space — space that serves as a home, a place of worship, and a place of ministry, as well as providing leasing opportunities for other entities.

The Sisters of St. Benedict have been part of recent discussions with Ivy Tech Community College, the town of Ferdinand, and the Ferdinand Chamber of Commerce as Ivy Tech explores the possibility of adding an instructional center in Ferdinand. Sister Kristine Anne says that the sisters would like to talk about providing space for leasing if Ivy Tech decides to open a facility.

“We continue to look at leasing opportunities and are cautiously optimistic about a couple of possibilities,” says Hoffman. He notes that there will be renovation costs associated with any endeavor.

During the planning process, it has become apparent that parts of the quadrangle and the attached annex have unused potential. At the same time, the community has considered the possibility of moving the Spirituality Ministry and guest house, now in Kordes Hall, up to the monastery. Sister Kristine Anne describes the idea as “one of our great hopes.” The quadrangle and annex would require major transformation, but they offer adequate space, Hoffman confirms.

The word today is rightsizing. Tomorrow’s word will be renovation.

I would walk the Appalachian Trail. Why would I do this? When I am out in the midst of God’s creation, I am able to stay in the present moment and my heart is full of peace, joy, and gratitude. How would I ever be able to do this? Only with God’s grace, strength, and help would this be possible.

— Sister Mary Longtine, current events activities in Hildegard Health Center



I’d actually for once buy a lottery ticket! Couldn’t fail? I take that to mean I’d definitely win! When that happens I would ask the community to consider giving a sizable donation to Mater Dei High School and the St. Vincent de Paul Food Pantry (two great organizations close to my heart!) and still have plenty to support our other ministries and “rightsize” our buildings at Ferdinand so that the monastic life will be a viable option for women for years and years to come!

— Sister Donna Marie Herr, coordinator of St. Vincent de Paul Food Pantry and Emergency Services in Evansville, Indiana

Build, extend, and refurbish hiking and bicycle trails in the area. Promote any outdoor activity that creates better health for all that use it.

— Dennis Boeglin, vehicle maintenance supervisor for the Sisters of St. Benedict





SISTERS
OF ST. BENEDICT
FERDINAND, INDIANA
.....
Seek. Pray. Share.

What a wonderful web this will be.

Check out the sisters' new web site coming your way in mid-October. We've woven a more user-friendly web design just for you, putting more features, information, and photos right at your fingertips.

A "What's Happening" section at the very top will keep you updated with the latest Twitter, Facebook, and blog entries. Below it will be a prominent space featuring continuing stories of what the sisters are up to and how they're always reaching out to help those in need.

There will be a calendar where you can quickly discover what's going on every day. A "Find a Sister" section where you can revisit the teacher you loved so dearly. A "Get Involved" section where you can join in the fun of helping others — by volunteering, becoming an Oblate, or participating in one of our programs or retreats. A convenient form to make a gift. An expanded listing of recent news. A storehouse of recent photos that you'll love poring through.

Plus the old favorites will still be easily accessible, like prayer requests and sites for the bakery and gift shop.



Sounds like this will be one web worth tangling with. Visit us at www.thedome.org.

Calendar of Events

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| October 2 | Final profession of Sister Jeana Visel |
| October 15–17 | Come & See Weekend |
| October 17 | Oblation |
| October 30 | Sacred Music Series: Angelus |
| October 31 | 70th and 60th jubilees |
| November 6 | Women of the Rule Awards Banquet |
| November 19-21 | Christkindlmarkt |
| December 24 | Christmas Eve services in the monastery church |
| January 7-9, 2011 | Come & See Weekend |
| January 16 | Oblate meeting |
| March 18-20 | Come & See Weekend |

Please Join Us!

Upcoming Spiritual Enrichment Programs and Retreats

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| October 9 | Mom's and Dad's Family Spirituality |
| November 6 | Centering Prayer |
| February 21, 2011 | Compassionate Healing |
| February 26 | Sunday Eucharist: Why We Do What We Do |

Saturday Morning at the Dome

| | |
|------------------|---|
| October 16 | Inner Peace: Staying Sane Amidst Turmoil |
| November 13 | Art and Soul: Art as a Prayer Form |
| January 15, 2011 | Grieving Our Losses |
| February 19 | Marriage as a Process |
| March 19 | Holy? Me? Nourishing Our Relationship with God Through Prayer |

For more information or to register, please visit thedome.org/programs.