

Seek. Pray. Share.

Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand, Indiana

VOLUME 6 NUMBER 1 FALL 2014



INSIDE

Teaching through
cancer

Family Scholar House
update

Keeping on at 94

Oblate spreads word

A lot to be thankful for



Various stories in this issue of *Seek.Pray.Share.* speak loud and clear to me of so much we Sisters of St. Benedict have to be thankful for.

From volunteers to donors to Oblates, there are so many generous people giving of themselves, their talents, or their resources to the cause of our community. We are forever grateful that each of you has chosen us to support. Rest assured we will do all we can to live up to your commitment.

I think of the dedication of Mary Jo Holmes, a hair care volunteer at the monastery for over 15 years, and of all the other volunteers who seek us out time and time again to help in a myriad of ways.

There's the initiative of Oblate Teresa Bauer, who was so inspired by her Oblate experience here that she created a Benedictine Spirituality group in her hometown that's been meeting regularly for more than five years. Talk about taking it upon yourself to spread the word!

And I marvel at the thoughtfulness behind the "Thank you, donors!" pieces we've been running lately in this magazine. While the photos of their donations represent just a part of what our contributors provide us, I wish you could hear

all the excited comments from the sisters as they take advantage of the new equipment. It all combines to make us healthier, safer, better able to communicate, and more hospitable to our guests.

What precious gifts we are so fortunate to receive.

As always, we also include stories about the latest with the sisters, and how they are using their own gifts to serve others. I am amazed by the fortitude of Sister Barbara Jean Luebbehusen and how she continues to teach the youth of Louisville. And the faith shown in Sister Joella Kidwell as she was re-elected to another term as president of the Federation of St. Gertrude. Hers is a demanding, stressful, often thankless job that brings untold benefits to 15 monasteries across the U.S. and Canada.

We are genuinely grateful for all that these folks share with us. May God bless you for what you do and who you are.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sr. Barbara Lynn Schmitz, OSB". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Sister Barbara Lynn Schmitz, OSB
Prioress



Seek.Pray.Share.

Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand, Indiana

Sister copes with cancer	2	News from the Dome	12
Sister Joella re-elected	5	Going strong at 94	17
Long-time volunteer	7	Oblate starts group	19
Supporting Family Scholar House	8		

CONTENTS



Cover: Sister Barbara Jean Luebbehusen and a 1st grade Spanish student tend to a class-opening prayer at Sacred Heart Model School in Louisville, Kentucky.

Left: A bird found a peaceful place to make her nest — on the cross in our cemetery.

Above: Some autumn scenes on the monastery grounds. (Photos above by Sister Kim Mandelkow, OSB)



802 E. 10th Street, Ferdinand, IN 47532

Phone: 812.367.1411

Fax: 812.367.2313

info@thedome.org

thedome.org

Follow us on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.

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.



Students raise their hands to answer a question posed by Sister Barbara Jean.

Coping with cancer by Way of the Cross

by Greg Eckerle

Two days before Good Friday, Sister Barbara Jean Luebbehusen was talking to her third grade religion class at Sacred Heart Model School in Louisville, Kentucky, about the resiliency Jesus had on the way to his crucifixion.

"How many times did Jesus fall on the way to Calvary," she asked the class. "And what did he do each time? GET BACK UP. So it's not how many times we fall, but how many times we get back up."

Although she'd never admit it, Sister Barbara Jean could well have been talking about herself. Diagnosed with breast cancer in late 2011, which metastasized to the bone, and recently spread again, she continued returning to her beloved classroom.

Last spring, she taught Spanish to 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 6th grades, and the religion class. She openly discusses her cancer with each group. The school also has a child with leukemia, and several

students have parents or grandparents with cancer. One can't hide from it. And Sister Barbara Jean is the ideal person to teach children how the realities of cancer intertwine with spirituality, perseverance and trust in God. She knows such discussions are healthy. "We've got the opportunity, so take advantage of it." She pauses, stares blankly for a moment, then chuckles. "I don't know if I really want to say this word or not, but in some ways the cancer has been a blessing. As far as learning about perspective, teaching religion from that angle, and of helping students to understand what a chronic illness is like." Just leave it to a sister to use cancer as a teaching moment.

The Ferdinand Benedictine community's care and concern has been a big support for her, as well as from the teachers at her school. And yet she doesn't want the relationship to always be about the cancer.

*“It’s like Jesus is standing right there saying,
‘Don’t worry. I am with you through it all.
Whatever it is, I am there. I will be with you.’
Then I can go on.”*

“I have realized, through my prayer, that I am not cancer. I am a person who has cancer. As for the negative feelings, I think God can handle them. The Way of the Cross has been my salvation. I make it quite often, I’ve got them all memorized. By going that way with Jesus, I die to that negative of whatever I’m carrying at that time, and then I can live.”

Sister Barbara Jean surely smiled inside at one student’s response when asked to draw a symbol of Jesus’ love for her. “I put the cross because it reminds me that, when we’re really alone, we have hope,” explained the student. That certainty is expressed often by Sister Barbara Jean, and she easily recalls its origin.

With stage IV cancer, she felt she “was only going to live a very short time, and that upset me.” Laying in bed one night, worried into sleeplessness, she heard some welcoming reassurance for the first time. “It’s like Jesus is standing right there saying, ‘Don’t worry. I am with you through it all. Whatever it is, I am there. I will be with you.’ Then I can go on.” That experience has happened to her several times, and has removed her fear. Because her sense of being alone inevitably returns, but so does her feeling that God is “right here.”

During the tough times she routinely holds in her hand a little cross the Ferdinand Benedictines gave her, and reminds herself of the phrase ‘I am with you, don’t worry, it will be OK.’ She treasures the comfort of that cross often, especially when going to sleep. Or she’ll think of the pillow the students made and gave her over two years ago, after her first surgery, that still has an honored spot in her classroom. Stitched on the pillow is “Hermana,” the Spanish word for sister, and what she properly insists on being called in her four Spanish classes. Students also gave her a prayer blanket they made, presenting it and the pillow to her in a touching prayer ceremony at the school.

“No matter where, the kids are praying for me, they are with me,” says Sister Barbara Jean. Just like God is always there. She notes that invariably during her daily classes when she asks for the students’ prayer intentions, one will pick her, every single day. They never forget.

Many of the children will embrace her with a hug as they enter the classroom. And as the smiling, eager faces rattle off correct answers during class, Sister Barbara Jean will mutter, “These kids are unbelievable.” Well, so is she, as she patiently answers a barrage of questions throughout class, and gently steers some to understand complicated material.

She began teaching in 1972 at Holy Spirit in Evansville, then went to the sisters’ mission in Peru for 15 years. Arriving there with no knowledge of Spanish, she learned on the fly, eventually teaching every subject in Spanish. She came back to the U.S. to work in monastery administration, then went to the sisters’ mission in Guatemala, then back to the monastery to work in technology, and she just finished her 12th year at Sacred Heart Model School. She has worked in the sisters’ bakery for years.

Dr. Mary Beth Bowling, the school’s principal, notes that Sister Barbara Jean often meets students outside class times for free tutoring sessions. And parents remark to her often about sister’s commitment to the children, that it’s apparent she’s not at the school “for any other reason than to serve the kids.”

Says Dr. Mary Beth, “Sister is incredible in terms of her strength and how she rebounds from everything she’s been through. She’s just an inspiration. I know she doesn’t feel well many days, but she sets an example for us, saying, ‘I can do this,’ and of course her faith is what shows us.”



Sister Barbara Jean acts out the meaning of the Spanish words “to hear.”

“As for her cancer, I believe her tremendous faith has helped her cope. Giving up is simply not something she is willing to do.”

Sister Barbara Jean prefers teaching the younger students. “I love to see them when they catch on to something, and then they just glow. The little ones give me a lot of life, and I thrive on that.” She also enjoys having hallway conversations in Spanish with older children, and when former students return and thank her for the start she gave them. “One boy said, ‘I learned a lot of Spanish from you, but I also learned how to be a student from you.’ That really made me feel good, because I have to teach them how to learn.”

A fellow teacher, Linda Greenwell, says Sister Barbara Jean’s greatest teaching strength is “her ability to work with children as individuals, to recognize the struggling child and go out of her way to make sure that child is reached.”

But there is much more to her contribution. “Sister Barbara Jean has been the face of God for her many students,” says Linda. “I have seen sister’s influence on kids. My own grandchildren have been blessed to be her students. In a world increasingly confusing and materialistic, she reminds our little

ones to pray every night and find God in everyday things. Sister brings something to our school that no one else can as she lives out the mission of the Sisters of St. Benedict.

“As for her cancer, I believe her tremendous faith has helped her cope. Giving up is simply not something she is willing to do. However, she is not too proud to ask for a helping hand now and again. Through it all she continues to be a mentor to other teachers. Her spirituality gets her through. She knows when to listen, to her body, to her doctors, and most importantly, to the greater power of God.”

Sister Barbara Jean has also learned how to answer the innocent question of a student: what is it like to live with cancer?

“It’s not easy, your whole perspective on life changes,” she says. “What used to be important, all those little details, isn’t as important anymore. What is important is how you can be with people. And how I can get across to you about being with someone who has a chronic illness. I think my students are a lot more aware and attentive to someone who can’t do everything all the time. Let me teach by example, that’s what I pray for.”

She smiles broadly. “It’s been more than two-and-a-half years, and I’m still going. I told the doctor that I’m going to be one of those you’re going to write about, that lived the longest. I just trust that God’s going to be with me, no matter what. I just take it as it comes. I live in the moment. That’s what I’m learning with this cancer. If you can’t take advantage of the moment, you’re wasting your time. It’s being mindful of what’s going on.” ■



One of many spontaneous hugs Sister Barbara Jean will receive during a class day.



Sister Joella re-elected federation president

By Greg Eckerle

Sister Joella Kidwell has been re-elected president of the Federation of St. Gertrude, a group of 15 autonomous Benedictine monasteries with 629 sisters spread across the United States and Canada.

Sister Joella, who completed a first term of six years, will now serve a three-year term. There is a two-term limit.

The Federation of St. Gertrude, founded in 1937, is one of three such federations in the U.S. In the 1920s the Sacred Congregation in Rome, headed by the pope, resolved that Benedictine Sisters, then under the jurisdiction of local bishops, should establish themselves into federations, over which the Holy See will have direct jurisdiction. This group is governed by a Federation Chapter which establishes constitutions and by-laws and elects a president and council to oversee the federation.

The federation president conducts a visitation of each monastery at least every five years, presides at the election of the prioress of each monastery, and presides at her formal installation.

The president also provides support and a listening ear for the

prioresses of the monasteries as they seek advice in the ups and downs of leadership.

After her re-election, Sister Joella was presented with a list of 40 reasons as to why the voting sisters were asking her to again lead the federation as president.

Fittingly, the characteristic of "having the energy" popped up often, along with having the vision, skills, wisdom, and gifts to lead the federation forward. A personal note to Sister Joella was added at the end of the list: "Please keep this for the hard days and believe that you are cherished."

For it's no secret that leading the necessary changes for some of the aging communities is not easy. Sister Joella has already

Above: Sister Joella Kidwell (at left) is installed for a second term as the president of the Federation of St. Gertrude by Sister Jacquelyn Ernster, the federation's first counselor. Sister Jacquelyn is from Sacred Heart Monastery in Yankton, South Dakota. The installation took place at the federation's chapter meeting at the Monastery of St. Gertrude in Cottonwood, Idaho. At right is Sister Anita Louise Lowe, a Ferdinand Benedictine, who chairs the federation's liturgy committee.

“I think some of her energy just comes from her love of Benedictine life. She believes in it, and wants it to continue.”

overseen the closing of two monasteries that included helping members resettle in other monasteries, dispose of their property, move their cemeteries, and mourn their many losses.

So while she is full of energy, Sister Joella, 77, is also a realist. That's where her honest compassion serves her well. While many would run away from such heart-wrenching situations, she is eager to facilitate and find a solution.

“That's the way I see my gift,” says Sister Joella. “I just put it out there and say, we've got to face this. I think that's who I am. Somebody has to intervene. And you take the flak from doing it, but somebody has to. The wisdom is to know when to do it. The federation council helps a lot there.”

Sister Juliann Babcock, prioress of Our Lady of Grace Monastery in Beech Grove, Indiana, says, “I think Sister Joella's main strength is she just has a love for Benedictine life. And she has such a vision. She challenges us to look beyond what's right in front of us. It's very helpful to the communities.

“I think some of her energy just comes from her love of Benedictine life. She believes in it, and wants it to continue. She helps communities look at the reality of their future, and to make some good choices. Some have had to make tough decisions, but she helped them through in a very gentle and compassionate way that's brought life to those sisters that they've moved (to another monastery).

“She's a good facilitator, very organized, and very present to you. She's very supportive of the prioresses, is very available, and gives you advice on whatever situation you have. That's a wonderful quality.”

Sister Jennifer Kehrwald, prioress of Mount St. Benedict Monastery in Crookston, Minnesota, points to Sister Joella's wide experience with each of the federation's religious communities. “Her emphasis on future planning and trying to help communities find a way to do that probably has been the best thing that has happened in the last six years. She has a broad vision.

“She worked tirelessly to help some small communities with details, buildings, and finances. She's helped them find resources. She and the federation finance committee wrote a grant to the national retirement office to allow for consultant help that was a turning point

for some communities. Also, the federation, under her leadership, developed two handbooks relating to transitions that helped our federation and other religious communities in the U.S.”

During the monastery visitations, among the areas analyzed are the formation program, financial situation, governance structure, and the fidelity to the monastic way of life. Recommendations for improvement are made. But the program has been special for her.

“It's very rewarding to visit all the communities and to see how they're really living out the Benedictine life,” says Sister Joella. “They're involved in some wonderful things, and I feel privileged to be a part of their lives.”

The visits reaffirm for her all the good works that sisters are doing. One community has opened a shelter for women and children, another some housing for immigrant labor. There's a new food pantry and a shop for low-income people to find clothing.

Sister Joella and the federation's finance committee peruse every monastery's financial statement, to try to catch any festering problem before it gets too bad.

As president, she will represent the federation at a symposium in Rome this fall. And the presidents of all the U.S. Benedictine federations, both men and women, meet every couple of years to discuss issues.

It normally comes back to the same approach for Sister Joella.

“We have to face our reality with honesty,” she says. “Because then we can plan for it. We can't keep denying it. Sometimes you have to challenge people to deal with reality, and help them not to judge it, to realize that it's not bad, and help them plan with that reality in mind.”

That's why Sister Joella has embraced another term. It gives her a chance to finish some initiatives she's started. And to use her experience to start tackling whatever else will invariably confront some monastery.

As she said in her reflection at the recent federation chapter meeting in Idaho, “(We are called to) make the necessary shifts so that we can continue to be a viable and vital monastic presence . . . it is in facing these challenges honestly and courageously that we can find hope for a future . . .

“Each monastery will have to deal with the challenges in some way if they are to survive . . . But we are still being called to be centers of hospitality and peace for our world. We can do that no matter how old we are. In fact, as we age, we have even more wisdom to offer and we may find ever new ways to share. . . .”

You can bet Sister Joella will be right in the middle of those efforts, ever ready to calmly lead the discussion on the most sensitive topics. ■

Wash, cut, style, repeat

by Laura Reckelhoff

On any given Wednesday morning, lots of talking and laughter can be heard coming from the hair care room at the monastery. The sisters living in Hildegard Health Center are having their hair done for the week and chatting with the sisters acting as beauticians. Rolling hair into curlers and talking along with them is Mary Jo Holmes, who is a volunteer each week.

After over 15 years of volunteering in hair care, Holmes fits right in and is a friend to all of them. Sister Agnes Weinzapfel comments about Holmes' commitment to the sisters, "She's still here, always faithful."

Holmes replies, "I would have a big hole in my heart and life if I quit. I have made so many friends."

One of those friends is Sister Mary Roman, who Holmes taught grade school with before retiring. Sister Mary Roman worked in hair care but was not comfortable in the role, so she spoke with Holmes about filling in. Laughing, Holmes says, "I was only going to fill in for an hour."

"The sisters all tell me how my service is needed and appreciated but I get much more out of it, friendship, love, and it's a peaceful place to be. This adds to my life. Plus it gets me going on Wednesday mornings too!"

Holmes is involved in other areas with the Sisters of St. Benedict as well. She is a part of Women of the Rule, Hildegard Society, and a hostess for the Family Scholar House board.

Her junior year of high school, Holmes attended Academy Immaculate Conception, the all-girls boarding school run by the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand. Then she entered the convent. Her sister followed in her footsteps. Sister Barbara C. Schmitz went on to final profession and is now Family Scholar House Coordinator at the monastery. Holmes did not become a nun, deciding God was calling her on a different path.

She later graduated from St. Benedict's College, also run by the Sisters of St. Benedict, eventually earning a Masters of Religious Education from St. Meinrad School of Theology.

Holmes has continued to be connected to the sisters. Her two daughters attended all four years of high school at the academy, and



Volunteer Mary Jo Holmes

she travels often with one or more of the sisters.

As Holmes adds rollers to Sister Mary Alice Schnur, she leans over and gently asks, "Are you comfortable, Sister Mary Alice?"

Sister Mary Alice turns the conversation to the status of Holmes' daffodils.

The flurry of activity in the hair care room starts to subside as Holmes removes the last curler from Sister Mary Alice's hair and brushes it out.

Over the years, Holmes has photographed many of the sisters for whom she has fixed hair. She has also written a poem about each one.

Holmes feels volunteering with the Sisters of St. Benedict gives a person something enriching that they won't get elsewhere. She adds, "It's about following the Gospel and serving others."

Sister Agnes can certainly tell when Holmes isn't in the hair care room. "Something about her presence; the sisters look forward to her being here. She is a blessing, a real gift."

Holmes finishes Sister Mary Alice's hair, gives her a big hug, and tells her, "You look so pretty."

A few more hugs are exchanged between Holmes and her sister friends and then the hair care room is quiet. Holmes arranges a few chairs, returns a few curlers to the bin, and finishes sipping her coffee from earlier in the morning before leaving the monastery for the day.

She'll be back next week to wash, roll, and comb out multiple sisters' hair, but most importantly, she'll get to again visit with her sister friends. ■



Supporting and rooting for single-parent students

by Greg Eckerle

Sister Barbara C. Schmitz smiles, raises her arms, and exclaims, “I’m a cheerleader for single-parent families, I really try to be a cheerleader.”

As outreach family advocate for Family Scholar House – South Central Indiana, Sister Barbara has built energy and results for the nearly two-year old program. And her cheerleading is for a much more serious cause than a random football or basketball game.

She’s cheering for struggling single parents to earn a college degree, to get a foothold to improve life for their family. But better yet, she doesn’t have to remain entirely on the sidelines cheering. She plays a vital role in the single parent’s battle by being a resource for them for just about anything. While she may not have an immediate solution to the wide-ranging requests for help, you can bet she’ll find a contact person for the student.

Well beyond the normal years of retirement, Sister Barbara has even become a college professor through the program – she teaches a money management class called “Habitudes” at Oakland City University’s satellite location in Rockport, Indiana.

The Family Scholar House effort began in Louisville in 1995 by four communities of religious women. Their intent was to leave a legacy of helping women and children. Later Cathy Dykstra, president, and the board of directors took the program another step with the mission to end the cycle of poverty by giving single-parent students the support they need to earn a college degree and attain a viable independent lifestyle. With the Ferdinand Benedictine Sisters’ approval and commitment, the program began an operation in Dubois County in late 2012 that has grown to assist 65 families in a five-county area.

The life circumstances of some of her clients are heart-wrenching. An unmarried mother calls her, really nervous that her child’s father is suing for custody. Sister Barbara offers to go to court with her, and reassures her, saying, “Just know that you’re a good mother, and tell yourself that 10 times.”

Above: Sister Barbara Catherine Schmitz teaches a money management class at Oakland City University’s Rockport location. It’s part of the services she provides as outreach family advocate for Family Scholar House – South Central Indiana, a program that assists single-parent students attain a college degree.

“It was so important to me to graduate, being a single parent. And it was just great to see somebody there actually cheering me on and supporting me.”

A former drug addict ended up in tears during an initial conversation with Sister Barbara. But “he has absolutely changed his life around,” she says, “which I think is so neat.”

Another parent confided in Sister Barbara during the emotional upheaval after her daughter had been kidnapped and raped.

She’ll get calls from parents whose daughters are in college, became pregnant, and don’t know what to do. They now have Sister Barbara and the Family Scholar House to turn to.

Some single parents need tuition assistance. Sister Barbara refers them, based on their need, to the Family Scholar House office, or she might contact local foundations. Someone even asked for furniture. She called the St. Vincent de Paul Store about the procedure, then advised the student the steps they could take. She also refers clients to other local agencies, such as Tri-Cap or Crisis Connection, depending on the type of help needed. Single-parent students have been helped by gas cards, gift cards, utility assistance, and emergency rent.

Among the skills training Family Scholar House provides are money management, assertiveness training, healthy boundaries, goal-setting, and giving back.

“I’m really trying to teach gratefulness to the students, to learn to give back when they can,”

says Sister Barbara. “Several single parents have told me, whenever they’re on their feet, they want to give back. For me, that’s the ultimate goal. For them to become self-sufficient, raise good healthy families, and be able to give back. It’s important to me to stress that.”

Although she feels the program hasn’t gone in depth yet with services of some social agencies, she thinks “it’s coming.” She’s particularly interested in assistance for landing jobs for program graduates. And she notes two grants awarded last year for Family Scholar House’s use, one of \$5071 from the Dubois County Visitors Center (raised through the Ferdinand Folk Fest Fondo) and another for \$5000 from Dubois County Emerging Leaders.

Sister Barbara and the Benedictine Sisters have a tender spot in their hearts for the single-parent students. “When you see them struggling so much, the fact they’re working and raising children and going to school, you know it’s difficult for them,” she says. “I have such admiration for them, and when they graduate, it’s so very special.

Sister Barbara discusses Family Scholar House services at a student fair at Vincennes University Jasper Campus. She also hosts orientation sessions and has open office hours on the campus to serve students.



Sister Barbara discusses goal-setting in a class at Oakland City University – Rockport.



"The program fits us well as Benedictines because it's all about education. It's so important to set up an environment for education. That's what the Benedictines have done, all through the centuries."

Her student's graduations are such a milestone for her that she attended Nancy Lasher's ceremony in Oakland City, Indiana, along with fellow teacher Sister Mary George. "I was so glad we went for her," says Sister Barbara. "I delighted in that." And so did Nancy, as none of her family could attend. But her Benedictine cheerleaders pulled through. "It was a huge support," says Nancy. "It was so important to me to graduate, being a single parent. And it was just great to see somebody there actually cheering me on and supporting me. That was a huge vote of confidence to know they were there backing me."

When she first met Sister Barbara, Nancy talked to her for an hour and a half, including the struggles she was having with her children, and her difficulty in balancing everything. "She was very easy to talk to," says Nancy. "It's great to have somebody there that will sit down and pray with you, and talk to you. Unfortunately, my kids come from a split family and I talked to Sister Barbara about that. It was just very easy to open up to her. She really listens. You can tell she truly cares about people. With some you can tell instantly it's an act. With her, it's genuine."

"I'm always open for (praying with her), because I think the power of prayer is just amazing. I think that's great, because I've come across some ministers and nuns that don't just sit down and pray with you. That's something she does and I think that's awesome, because the prayers that she says, you can tell come straight from the heart. It's like she knows

exactly what I need to have said. God has placed her right exactly where she needs to be. She's one of the most genuine people I've ever met."

One incident that tore at Sister Barbara was a young mother with four children that married someone, who then started abusing her right away. She called Sister Barbara, who went into her listening and cheerleading mode. "She was just really beside herself," says Sister Barbara. "I tried to build her self-confidence, to keep her going." She looked for support for her two older sons, and calls her periodically. Such dilemmas become emotional, but Sister Barbara's Benedictine community life carries them through it. The situation has improved for the mother, and Sister Barbara says she is "so proud of her" for the steps she has taken.

One of the Rockport students, Katrina Kelly, cites Sister Barbara's help on budgeting, and "how to get your bills paid before you do your socializing."

"A lot of it is (her) emotional and moral support, just letting you know you can do it," says Katrina. "It's a difficult thing when you've got kids, you're trying to go to school, trying to work a job. I just think it's the notion (she's) there to support you, and if you need someone to talk to. It doesn't have to be about school, it can be about anything. She let us know they're there, and if we need anything we can go to them, whether it's school-related or not."

Katrina also appreciates the cards she routinely receives from Sister Barbara, just to let her know she's there for her, and that she's thinking about her. Family Scholar House also threw a Halloween party for the students' children and presented them with gifts at Christmas.

“She’s so sweet, and a caring person. She has a religious perspective, which is nice to hear.”

Another Rockport student, Josh Burdin, mentions that Sister Barbara communicates at a level that people can understand. “I haven’t exactly lived a good life,” says Josh, 34, “but she doesn’t treat me like that, she treats me like a person. When I’m feeling down, being depressed, she’s able to comfort me, makes me feel better. She tells me, hey, you’re on the right road, you’re going to school, you’ve got your son, he’s being taken care of, you’re in church, you’re doing all these right things.”

Just like the cheerleader that she is.

She helped him find resources to pay his electric bill, and left him some socks to keep his feet warm in winter. It was a personal touch that will be long remembered. And her money management class has persuaded him to think differently about where he needs to spend his money.

“She’s so sweet, and a caring person,” says Josh. “She has a religious perspective, which is nice to hear. They couldn’t have picked a better person to run that program, and she made me feel good to be in the class.”

Pam Bolen, who manages the Rockport facility, endearingly calls it an “hour of power” when Sisters Barbara and Mary George teach at the school. “When they walk in, it’s like two radiant beams,” she says. “Those two are awesome. Students love them. They are wonderful women who encourage those students to just keep pushing to be successful. And when you’ve got the two sisters sitting there for graduation, that support is just amazing. It empowers the students, and that’s truly what the sisters do for us. It’s just an act of God that they’re here.”

Sister Barbara has also created a 15-member advisory committee for Family Scholar House – South Central Indiana. The committee helps identify single parents that could be helped, lines up resources, and provides invaluable advice.

One member, Bill Hochgesang, superintendent of Northeast Dubois Schools, thinks the program is a perfect fit for the Sisters of St. Benedict. “Our faith teaches us to be Christ-like. In many parables in the Bible, Jesus fed the hungry and healed the sick, and said ‘go and spread the good news.’ This is definitely

spreading the good news. The sisters are not simply giving a person a fish, but teaching that person to fish, so that they can provide for themselves and prosper. They truly are breaking the cycle of poverty, one person at a time.”

Jessica DeLorenzo, director of student services at Vincennes University Jasper Campus, where Sister Barbara keeps a routine presence to connect single-parent students to Family Scholar House services, says, “I have found Sister Barbara to be an absolute delight. She always has a big smile on her face and in her heart. She is a very positive influence, because of her attitude. It makes sense that the sisters and Family Scholar House have come together to increase the value of these students’ lives. They leverage human connection and family values to make meaningful changes for our students.”

The Family Scholar House program in Louisville chose the Sisters of St. Benedict to collaborate with for the south central Indiana effort because of the sisters’ commitment to community, hospitality, and service. Kristie Adams, the Louisville program’s vice president of programs and services, says, “Sister Barbara’s faith powers her understanding of social justice and drives her passion for the mission. Her compassion for single-parent students and their children is evident in every interaction. Through this work she embodies Christian service.

“Everyone loves Sister Barbara, how could you not?”

Michelle Brockman, who helps Sister Barbara with administrative tasks, personal contacts with single parents, and is also on the advisory committee, says, “Students realize they have a one-stop source for the needs and challenges they face as they try to raise a family, often alone and without assistance. If Sister Barbara doesn’t have a direct method of helping them, she finds the local community support that can. The program is a perfect complement to the work the sisters already do, going out into the area, seeing needs, and finding ways to fulfill those needs. It’s what they do, it’s who they are.

“The students that will be able to provide a better life for their family will be the real testimonials to the good that Sister Barbara and the sisters have done with this program.” ■

NEWS from the Dome

Two sisters make profession

Sisters Jane Ann Breen and Rachel Geracitano recently made their first profession of monastic vows, officially joining the community of the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand, Indiana.

A native of Louisville, Kentucky, Sister Rachel is a graduate of Bellarmine University in Louisville with a major in theology and a minor in psychology. She has been an activities assistant in the monastery's Hildegard Health Center, volunteered at the Guadalupe Center in Huntingburg, and assisted in the Vocations Office and with various monastery services. In addition to these services over the past year, called the Novitiate year, Sister Rachel has been taking classes at both Saint Meinrad School of Theology and through the formation department at Monastery Immaculate Conception in preparation for profession. This fall, she will begin working on a Masters in Pastoral Theology.

Sister Jane Ann is originally from Indianapolis and is re-entering the Sisters of St. Benedict community. She was a teacher at



Sister Rachel



Sister Jane Ann

Academy Immaculate Conception for 20 years, where she also served as principal for four years. She was a principal and teacher at Shawe Memorial Junior and Senior High School in Madison and taught at Madison Women's Correctional Institution through Oakland City University. She was an instructor at Ivy Tech, for which she now teaches online classes. She is also a Red Cross instructor. Since returning to the monastery in January, she has been getting to know the community again and assisting in various ways throughout the monastery in preparation for profession.

Vocations ministry new leadership announced

The vocations department of the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand, Indiana, has a new leadership team of co-directors Sister Teresa Gunter and Sister Anita Louise Lowe. Providing assistance are Sisters Jackie Kissel, Rachel Geracitano, Jill Reuber, Barbara Jean Luebbehusen, Kathy Cash, Sarah Youngwirth, Jane Will, and Judy Dewig.

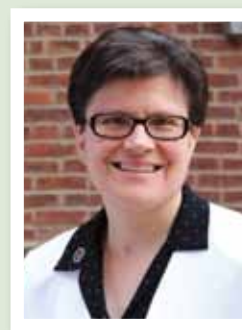
A focus for the team will be developing a new plan to seek out women that are discerning a religious life and invite them to visit the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand, Indiana. Plans for a discernment house are being developed to allow women to further explore life as a Benedictine Sister.

Sister Teresa was most recently youth minister at St. Anthony Parish in Evansville, Indiana. There she led two ministry programs: Life Teen, comprised of high school students and young adults, and EDGE, which is for middle school students. Previously she had been a youth minister and teacher in Fort Branch, Haubstadt, and Louisville. She was director of physical education at Marian Heights Academy and director of religious education in St. Anthony. She also served in Guatemala for a year.

Eager to take on her new role, Sister Teresa says, "I'm excited about the discernment house and building relationships with the young women who are in the discernment process. I look forward to visiting the colleges and universities and talking about this way of life."



Sister Teresa



Sister Anita Louise

Sister Anita Louise is also Monastery Immaculate Conception liturgist and music minister. Sister Anita Louise was previously an English and French teacher at Marian Heights Academy, public relations manager at Presentation Academy in Louisville, assistant director of communications, and director of vocations at the monastery.

Sister Anita Louise says, "I am excited about our new marketing endeavors and look forward to sharing our Benedictine life with women who are seeking to make a difference in the world."

Sister Teresa says, "I ask that if anyone knows women who are interested in religious life, to send them my way." She can be reached by calling the monastery at 812-367-1411 or by email, tgunter@thedome.org.

Anniversaries

On August 23, (pictured from left) Sisters Jeannine Kavanaugh, Ida Otto, Rebecca Abel, and Karlene Sensmeier celebrated their 50th anniversary of profession. Sister Anita Louise Lowe celebrated her 25th anniversary of profession of monastic vows on June 21. (Photo on previous page.)



Honoring their sisters

Sacred Heart and St. Augustine Parishes in Jeffersonville, Indiana, held a special recognition recently of former parish members that are now in a religious vocation. Sisters Rosemary and Agnes Marie Dauby, both of whom are Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand, Indiana, and biological sisters, were the only two nuns of the seven religious that were honored.

The honorees were called to the front of the church during mass and given a wooden penholder and pen set inscribed with, "Serving because Christ served. Well done faithful servant. Matthew 25:23."

The recognition was to highlight religious vocations. A picture of each of the honorees was also displayed in the church, along with biographical information, for three weeks.

The church's Children's Faith Formation classes each adopted one of the religious, the sixth grade adopting Sister Rosemary, and the fourth grade adopting Sister Agnes Marie. Each class prays for the religious person and sends periodic correspondence, including birthday cards. Sisters Agnes Marie and Rosemary have also been invited to visit each of the classes.

When talking about Sisters Agnes Marie and Rosemary, Ann Northam, director of religious education for Sacred Heart Parish, said, "I just love those sisters."

Sister Agnes Marie made her first profession of monastic vows in 1970 and is serving as activities director for Hildegard Health Center. Sister Rosemary made her first profession in 1972 and is a physician assistant.



Sister Rosemary



Sister Agnes Marie

The Message: Benedictine Sisters Proclaim Their Vocation During Camp Marian

(Reprinted with permission of *The Message*, Diocese of Evansville newspaper)

By Kate Bittner, *The Message* Intern

From the outside world looking in, it might seem strange that the highlight of the summer for some young ladies includes spending three days with religious sisters, sleeping in hot tents, learning about the religious life, celebrating mass outside on the grass, and playing silly games. But there's just something about the intriguing and, for some, entirely mysterious life of a Benedictine sister that draws them in and makes it a wonderful few days away from their homes – at the dome!

The Camp Marian retreat with the Sisters of Saint Benedict in Ferdinand, held on the grounds of Monastery Immaculate Conception, started more than a dozen years ago, and it has been booming ever since. Designed for girls only in grades five through eight, many rush to sign up as soon as it is open. However, the past few years, there have been many disappointed young ladies stuck on a waiting list, due to the number of campers who are able to attend. About 50 girls have been in attendance every year, and a waiting list for counselors to help is also in existence.

"Camp Marian is a time to share our Benedictine life with the girls who come to camp," reflected Sister Jill Reuber, the main director of camp. We can help them to realize that we are just like anyone else. I love that we can share our love of Christ with them. Some of these girls have never met a Benedictine sister before, and Camp Marian allows them to, in a more relaxing atmosphere."

Campers enjoy a tour of the monastery, delicious meals, archery, swimming, a slip-and-slide, and other exciting activities. Girls also are given a peaceful time to get away from life, and relax with the Lord and meet new friends.

The favorite part of the retreat for many is the bonfire – because of the S'mores and all the fun songs around the campfire. But it's also an exciting opportunity to meet the many sisters who come down to enjoy the fire. It's a good opportunity to meet some of the older sisters who have lived the vocation for much longer.



Benedictine Sisters from the monastery joined the young women for the evening campfire. Here, Sister Jean Marie Ballard (second from right) toasts a marshmallow with some campers.

Sister Michelle Sinkhorn, a leader of the camp, mused, "I consider myself a vocation from the camps. Back in 1995, pre-nun days, I was on the team for the very first camp with Sister Teresa Gunter at Mount Francis. It was eye opening for me then – to see how 'normal' and cool the sisters were. Now it is a joy to watch the same reaction of the campers just from the other side. Thirteen camps later here in Ferdinand, we are still going strong!"

Camp Marian is also a great time for the young girls to be more exposed to the idea of the religious life. In a world where there is not much of a sisterly influence in schools or any aspect of life, it is very important for young girls to understand the options for what God might be calling them to in life. Every day they can see what marriage is like, but many are rarely – if ever – around nuns. The sisters in this camp give witness to a different path of holiness and encourage the youth that their way of life is a beautiful sacrifice for the Lord.



Donor Discussion

Sister Maura Beckman (left), Mike Schwenk, and Sister Marilyn Schroering talk during a donor party hosted by Mike and Pam Schwenk.

Thank you, donors!

There have been recent additions to the monastery thanks to the generosity of donors.

As recipients of a SOAR (Support Our Aging Religious) grant, the sisters were able to purchase a recumbent exercise bike, a treadmill, and five captioning phones.

A grant from Women of the Rule, a philanthropy circle affiliated with the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand, and a contribution from Dubois County Community Foundation enabled the sisters to purchase a walk-in tub.

Spencer Industries donated a second walk-in tub, thanks to the facilitation by Nate Schuler and Joan Schuler.

The estate of Mary Jane Krempp donated a NuStep Exerciser and a power wheelchair.

TV ears were purchased from another grant from Women of the Rule.

Kordes Center received new carpet in two rooms and new curtains thanks to Jean Siebelts, who is also an Oblate of the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand.



Sisters of St. Benedict Spirituality Ministry

Please join us for Benedictine spirituality!

November 1–2, 2014	Praying with Icons
November 8, 2014	Forgiving What We Cannot Forget
December 13, 2014	Praying with the Psalms
January 3, 2015	Grace in our Christian Life
January 5–7, 2015	Come Away Retreat
January 10, 2015	Hispanic Culture and Catholic Customs
January 17–18, 2015	Soul Collaging Retreat
February 13–14, 2015	Heartfulness: Transformation in Christ
February 28, 2015	Monastic Lectio Divina
March 7, 2015	Psalms: Prayers of the Heart
April 2–5, 2015	Triduum Retreat

Sister Jeana Visel, OSB
Sister Jane Becker, OSB
Sister Donna Marie Herr, OSB
Sister Jolinda Naas, OSB

Sister Karen Durliat, OSB
Sister Rose Mary Rexing, OSB,
and Sister Kate Willegal, OSB
Sister Kathy Bilskie, OSB
TBD

Sister Rose Mary Rexing, OSB
Sister Kathryn Huber, OSB

Personal retreats, lodging for group retreats, and spiritual direction are available by contacting Kordes Center. The Sisters of St. Benedict Spirituality Ministry holds retreats at Kordes Center, on the spacious, relaxing monastery grounds. It's an ideal place to pray, think, and reflect. Come experience a sincere hospitality and religious environment that's difficult to find elsewhere.

For more information, or to register: 812-367-1411, ext. 2915 • 800-880-2777 • www.thedome.org/programs

How to Remember the Sisters of St. Benedict in your Will

After you have carefully considered the needs of your family, you may want to consider a bequest in your will to the Sisters of St. Benedict. The satisfaction of knowing that your support of our Sisters can continue in perpetuity can be easily accomplished. Listed below are four popular ways of making such a bequest.

Residue

Residue refers to whatever is left after other bequests have been granted. To leave such a bequest simply state, "The residue of my estate, including real and personal property, I give, devise and bequeath to the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand, Indiana."

Percentage

To leave a percentage of your estate, state, "I give, devise and bequeath to the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand, Indiana, ____% of my estate."

Dollar Amount

To leave a specific dollar amount, state, "I give, devise and bequeath to the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand, Indiana, \$_____."

Specific Property

To leave a particular piece of property, state, "I give, devise and bequeath to the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand, Indiana, (DESCRIPTION OF PROPERTY), located at (EXACT LOCATION)."

St. Hildegard Society

The St. Hildegard Society is an honorary society that was established in 1990 as a way to recognize those who choose to support us, the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand, Indiana, by remembering us in their estate plans. The Society is named in honor of St. Hildegard of Bingen, a 12th Century Benedictine abbess of Rupertsberg on the Rhine, near Bingen, Germany.

One of the benefits of being a member of the St. Hildegard Society is being remembered in the daily prayers and work of the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand, now and into the future. We also invite members each year to join us for Mass and dinner on a Sunday near the feast of St. Hildegard, which is celebrated on September 17.

For more information, please contact:

Sisters of St. Benedict, Sister Kim Mandelkow
802 E. 10th Street • Ferdinand IN 47532 • 812-367-1411, Ext. 2631 • kmandelkow@thedome.org

In memoriam

by Sister Paulette Seng

Sister Mary Esther Steckler

January 23, 1921 – July 9, 2014

Sister Mary Esther, blessed with many talents, spent her life in service to others as teacher, principal, counselor, and librarian for over 50 years, and in monastery and diocesan leadership.

With a sense of adventure and eagerness for new learning, she wholeheartedly participated in all aspects of life, fun or serious.

As "a wisdom figure," she guided, affirmed, and inspired others through ministry and the way she lived. Her gift of sharing good energy brought peace and calming to many struggling in their last hours.

Filled with compassion, she welcomed with unconditional love anyone who came to her for material or spiritual help, never questioning their motives.

She loved being in nature — frequently walking the outdoor labyrinth, swimming in the pool, working in the yard, or planting a tree or flower around the monastery as a "living memorial" when someone died. Nature spoke to her of God and was a source of peace and strength for her, as she was for others.

The sisters who lived with Sister Mary Esther in California for more than 40 years fondly called her Queen Esther because "she did everything with grace and dignity." No less true during her final years, she remained a "woman of grace, hope, and strength" to the end.



Sister Maria Tasto

January 25, 1938 – July 13, 2014

Sister Maria had a special spiritual mission. One of her greatest desires was to deepen her own relationship with God and to help other people on their spiritual journey. For 34 years she directed retreats and spiritual and personal growth programs and served as a spiritual teacher and guide.

Maria exemplified how to be attentive and receptive to God's presence and action in one's life, open to being transformed, whether in the crucible of suffering or in the ordinariness of daily life. Her struggle with recurring cancer and treatments for more than 40 years certainly transformed her. She not only endured suffering, she embraced it with abiding trust and steadfast hope in God's plans for her. She witnessed how to live life fully in the face of pain and hardships.

Fourteen years ago when she was told she had little time left, she asked God to give her an extension on life so that she could do more good.

She became a fountain of life for others. One of her spiritual directees wrote, "Maria, you are for me a midwife, coaxing and cheering new life into existence." She was the first person people turned to in their deepest need and most difficult times. With a listening and compassionate heart, she gave them hope and renewed faith, calmness and strength, guidance and clarity, affirmation.

Her spiritual leadership profoundly influenced religious communities, laity, and ordained throughout this country and beyond. She left a great legacy of her spiritual wisdom and teachings in a DVD series, *A Transformed Life*, and in her book on *Lectio Divina*.

Maria's prayer is now fulfilled. "Oh God, pour into me Your energy so that I may be a conduit of your tender, compassionate presence."





Sister Theresita Schenk, 94, in a familiar place — at the balcony organ in Monastery Immaculate Conception Church in Ferdinand, Indiana.

Sister Theresita still has it at 94

by Greg Eckerle

Like countless others, Phyllis Claycamp is amazed that Sister Theresita Schenk, 94, can still make the church organ sing. But to Phyllis, what's most meaningful is that Sister Theresita is "truly such a love story."

"The love of Christ, you can see it and you can feel it when she plays the organ," explains Phyllis. "When she plays, the organ just vibrates, and it makes your whole body vibrate. You can feel the vibrations of the love of God. Music is a big form of prayer, and you can feel the love. She makes beautiful music. I love to watch her."

Phyllis, an Evansville resident and an Oblate of the Sisters of St. Benedict, has enjoyed Sister Theresita's performances for about 40 years. Even at age 87, she occasionally makes the hour-long drive to Ferdinand to see her beloved Benedictines. After attending a Sunday Mass in June at which Sister Theresita played, Phyllis sent her an e-mail saying, "You still have it. You sure made that organ talk this morning. What a celebration. So beautiful. Thank you with love and prayers."

Phyllis often has sat close to Sister Theresita at the organ to get an even better view of her musical talents. "Her fingers are just like little

butterflies, fluttering across the keys, she has such a gentle touch," says Phyllis. "Those little flying butterflies are just as beautiful as they were a long time ago. And her little black shoes tip-toe across the keys. I wonder how many times she's been across those keys with her feet."

Yet Sister Theresita keeps on playing, and playing, and playing. Plus she spends a lot of time composing music. "I keep thinking, when am I going to stop," says Sister Theresita, laughing. "I stopped teaching music when I was 90. But I don't know when I'm going to stop playing the organ. Sisters don't retire, we say we get recycled. I remember when Sister Joella (Kidwell) became prioress in 1998, she said, 'You don't have to keep on doing all this.' I said, 'well, what am I going to do if I don't?'"

Long ago, when she was director of music and/or liturgy, she had one stretch of 23 years when she played virtually all of the monastery church music, three times a day, every day. As there are now more sister musicians at the monastery, she'll play about one or two days a week.

Sister Theresita's fingers fly "like little butterflies" across the organ keys.



Sister Theresita's mother was the organist in their parish. She learned from her, and began playing the organ in grade school in the 1920s. She is just plain good, she enjoys it, and others enjoy her gift, so why stop now?

She never gets tired of the music, but concedes her stamina is less. Yet it's nothing a little break won't rejuvenate. Sister Catherine Duenne, also a talented organist, says, "Sister Theresita's musical ability is amazing. Add to this that she's 94, and it's mind-boggling."

Sister Theresita's organ skills were recorded on her 2008 CD "Glory to God." She chose that title because "that's what I want my music to do, give glory to God." The 15 pieces included compositions from Bach, Pachelbel, Franck, and Sister Theresita's original work, "Hymn to Hildegard." It sold out.

Sister Catherine, who took piano and organ lessons from Sister Theresita, and still gets occasional pointers, is also a big fan of her teaching style. Because her musical advice also applied to life: Slow down. Work on the hard parts first, don't just skip over them. "One time she told me, 'You can get by, but you're not really playing the music,'" says Sister Catherine. "I was faking my way through the music, hoping no one would notice." But Sister Theresita noticed, and didn't let it go. Just like she had Sister Catherine play the much-hated scales first, ruining her plans to save them for last, hoping they'd be forgotten.

Although Sister Theresita had been interested in composing church music early in her career, she first started writing melodies for the Ferdinand Benedictines' song-prayers out of sheer necessity after the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s allowed Mass to be celebrated in English rather than Latin. The Ferdinand sisters love to sing prayers in church, more so than many other religious communities. And since there was no music available for the English versions of various pieces, Sister Theresita got her chance to create the melodies. And the sisters kept right on singing. Some versions are still in use now at the monastery church, nearly 50 years later. She has no idea how many melodies she's written. She guesses hundreds of antiphons. And hymns, and an array of other songs. And she's still composing music, too. "If there's no good music for the prayers you like, you just write it yourself," she says, shrugging.

She pulls out a couple of thick binders of church music. "I'm working on this now, along with some other sisters. We use this every day in church. These hymns, I wrote some. And the antiphons through all these books. There's a morning one, an evening one, one for Lent and Easter and Christmas, and one for the sisters' feast days. Mostly everything I've written is church music we Ferdinand Benedictines can use."

To compose a new piece of music, Sister Theresita studies the accompanying words thoroughly, gets comfortable with their meaning, then tries to fit the melody to suit the words. She sometimes has to come up with the wording as well, but normally pulls that from Scripture.

She admits that coming up with new melodies can be challenging at times, to get the right melody to fit the words, which is crucial in church music. But her typical approach is "you have to do it, so you just do it." When she was earning her degree in music education at Indiana University, a teacher asked her to write some melodies in chant. She cringed at first, not knowing how to do it, but she found out how. She hasn't backed off since. And she'll pray to compose a really good piece of music. "Bach did that," she says, laughing, "so I often do that, too."

Her passion for music included putting in the time to improve her playing skills. Even in her 60s, she was taking organ lessons from Mark Hatfield in Evansville. "You're never too old to learn," she says, chuckling.

Sister Theresita entered the monastery in 1938, took some more music lessons, then started teaching in 1940. She taught in a variety of places, including the monastery, Evansville classrooms, Minnesota, Vincennes University, and St. Meinrad. She taught piano, organ, and the cello. And left a legion of followers wherever she went.

Sister Catherine says, "One of the best compliments I ever received about playing the organ was, 'You sound a lot like Sister Theresita. Did she have anything to do with your playing?' I replied, 'She has everything to do with my playing.'"

And the beat goes on. ■



Oblate starts spirituality group in her parish

by Greg Eckerle

Theresa Bauer had been strongly linked to religion all her life. From her 1967 graduation at Academy Immaculate Conception at the Ferdinand monastery to all her years as a church musician for various denominations. But by 2007, something was missing.

She admittedly was meandering around, and that “something just wasn’t connecting.” There was some disenchantment. Then she visited the Ferdinand monastery with an Academy friend. While there, Sister Mary Claude Croteau suggested that Theresa join the Oblates, who are Christians who associate with a specific Benedictine monastery to enrich their way of life.

By 2008, Theresa was a full-fledged Oblate of the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand, and everything changed. “I wasn’t a joiner before, but being with the Oblates has been good, I’ve found my path, that was my conversion,” she says. “Because I finally found something to ground me, instead of wandering. The camaraderie with the other Oblates supports you, so going to the meetings is critical. Almost immediately I could see changes happening. I just became calmer. I used to have road rage, inside my car, but I stopped doing that, and just calmed down. It was about seeing Christ in every person.” Which is one of the principles of the Rule of St. Benedict, which Oblates study thoroughly and promise to adhere to. Lessons from The Rule gave Theresa a path and a focus,

showed her what to work on, enabled her to stop “fighting battles everywhere,” and convinced her she didn’t have to prove herself anymore.

Plus, she laughs, joining the Oblates officially made her a part of the Ferdinand monastery, and that’s “my place, that’s my holy ground, that’s where my spirit is at home.” She enrolled in the Academy there at age 14, and has felt the connection ever since. “The sisters would take you under their wing and make you the best you could be. And they are so open and accepting to people, that’s Benedictine hospitality. They are the queens of it. Twenty years ago when I lost my dad in a car accident, I just fell apart and needed a safe haven. The sisters let me come, and talk. It was so peaceful.”

Oblates are also encouraged in their regular meetings to spread the spirit of St. Benedict. To her own amazement, motivated by her Oblate experience, Theresa has become quite the role model as a

Above: A Benedictine Spirituality Group in Corydon, Indiana, led by Theresa Bauer shares a laugh during a recent meeting. Bauer is an Oblate of the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand.

Theresa Bauer (far left) discusses a point during a monthly meeting of her Benedictine Spirituality Group in Corydon, Indiana.



leader for sharing the word. “After I became an Oblate, I thought, holy cow, this is so-o-o wonderful, why doesn’t everybody think about this? I thought I needed to spread this around. I never started a group before, but this was just too much for me to keep inside, I couldn’t contain it. It was just too good to keep it to myself. More people needed to know about this.”

So Theresa, who is director of music ministry for the Catholic Community of St. Joseph, Most Precious Blood, and St. Peter in her home parish of Corydon, Indiana, took it upon herself to start a Benedictine Spirituality group there. She simply announced within the parish she was starting such a group, and invited anyone to join. To her surprise, eight people showed up, and more than five years later, the group continues going strong, meeting monthly to discuss a variety of spiritual topics. She says the endeavor has gone way past anything she expected. Obviously, she created something people needed.

Often, Theresa leads her Corydon group through an agenda similar to a Ferdinand Oblate meeting she has just attended. So seeing how the Rule of Benedict fits into everyday life takes center stage a lot. Studying the Rule improves their prayer life and balances out their work. “A lot in our group say the meetings give them focus,” she says. “Some were disenchanted like I was, and I think this has helped keep them in the Church. I think they look at it as a time to feed their spirit. Benedict’s thoughts are relevant in any age. Since they’ve been around for 1500 years, they’ve got to be good.”

Diana Andriot, drawn to the group by the environmental discussions they had on respecting the earth, says, “I think

everybody here has gone through a critical time in the past five years, and we just shore each other up.”

Veronica Alstott talks about the recent issues in the Church and the effect on her. “This group has kept me coming back. I probably still would return to the Church because there’s just a beauty there you can’t find anywhere else. But it would have been a much more difficult struggle.”

The group shares thoughts on different religious books, and dives into subjects ranging from Lenten contributions to silence to meditation to how they can give back to the parish. Last year a Corydon priest asked if they could put on a huge bereavement dinner for people who had lost someone in the past couple of years. The group did such a fine job that the dinner is now an annual event. Theresa also started an evening prayer service every Sunday night during the last Lenten season. The group sometimes serves doughnuts on Sundays. “We’re not just sitting here huddled up by ourselves,” she says. “I’m leery of groups that don’t do anything in the greater community.”

Theresa treasures all the things she learns from the group’s sincere conversations, but there are plenty of wisecracks and funny one-liners along the way to keep everybody loose and upbeat. It creates an atmosphere where no one is afraid to speak up. A real blessing is that if anyone has a subject they want to discuss, that’s where the meeting goes. And they’ll often share follow-up thoughts via email between meetings.

In one recent meeting, participants talked about the benefits of attending the Centering Prayer and Compassionate Healing

Perspectives

What are you most grateful for?

"I think they look at it as a time to feed their spirit. Benedict's thoughts are relevant in any age. Since they've been around for 1500 years, they've got to be good."

programs at the Ferdinand monastery, and how the techniques "clear your mind so you can hear what God is saying, and recognize his presence there."

Tuyuq Hightower, 20, who joined the Church three years ago, says, "I enjoy coming because it's a good intellectual discussion, has a feeling of community, and reminds me to make a better person of myself."

Linda Daming recalls the members' original idea of investigating the Rule of Benedict and how to incorporate it into their lives, and cherishes how the meetings have grown into "how you can build your spiritual life." That includes ideas bounced around that some would never have thought of on their own, ideas that Linda takes home for further contemplation. "I wouldn't miss this meeting for all the money in the world," she says.

Mary Seipel loves learning something new from everyone at the meetings. "It's very refreshing to have people connected to the Church, but this is a much more personal and intimate discussion than any group I've ever been in."

Trish Beddoe had eight years of schooling from Benedictine sisters, so knew about St. Benedict. But she yearned to know more. "I feel this group helps me keep learning about spirituality," she says. "I don't think that a person's faith should be static, and this is a great place to grow, it really is." ■



For more information about the Ferdinand Oblates, call 812-367-1411, ext. 2827, visit thedome.org/oblates, or e-mail oblates@thedome.org.



The gift of life and what sustains me on this journey;

the love and support from all the special people in my life — my family, my Benedictine sisters, and other friends;

my vocation to this monastery and Benedictine way of life;

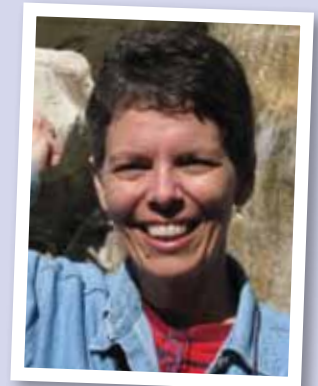
the wonders of nature and all of God's creation in the universe;

the beauty, inspiration, and joy that music and art bring to me.

— Sister Paulette Seng, AIC/MHA Alumnae director, special events coordinator at the monastery, and communications liaison

In addition to being grateful for my family and friends... I am most grateful for the opportunity to travel. Being able to travel throughout North America, Guatemala, and Europe has given me a greater appreciation of many different cultures and how even the poorest of the poor are happy.

—Lynn Belli, Adult, Young Adult, and Circulation Services Librarian at the Ferdinand Branch Library, and Benedictine Oblate



I am most thankful for the musical ability that God has given me. At a very young age, I always had a popular tune in my heart. When I was in the 8th grade, my father encouraged me to take guitar lessons. Since then, I have been sharing my love of music with people wherever I have ministered. I am indeed grateful to God, my family and my friends for allowing me to express my deepest prayers through music.

—Sister Brenda Engleman, Mission Advancement, Oblates, and Music Ministry



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- To honor, support, and acknowledge the leadership and work of women in the Church.
- Connect with spirituality and theology. Feed your soul. Grow your gift of leadership.
- For further information, contact: Sister Teresa Elizabeth Stutz, OSB, at 812-367-1411, ext. 2901, or tstutz@thedome.org or Sister Jane Will, OSB, at 812-367-1411, ext. 2841, or jwill@thedome.org.

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

For fees and further details, check our website thedome.org/wlc in January 2015

Calendar of Events

2014

October 11	Hope @ the Dome Youth Rally
October 17-19	Come & See Weekend
October 18	Benedictine Hills Pilgrimage
October 19	Rite of Reception of Oblates
October 20	Dome Golf Classic
October 26	Mechtilde Series Concert – University of Evansville Choir
October 26	Diamond Jubilee Celebration
November 14	Christkindlmarkt Eve Performance
November 15-16	Christkindlmarkt in Ferdinand
December 6	Women of the Rule Spirituality Day
December 7	Music students' Christmas recitals
December 24	Christmas Eve services in the monastery church

2015

January 2-4	Come & See Weekend
January 18	Oblate Meeting

Dome Golf Classic

October 20, 2014

Victoria National Golf Club • Newburgh, Indiana



Join us at one of the most elite golf clubs in the country for an enjoyable day on the course and assist in helping thousands of people by supporting the ministries of the sisters.

Register, or find more information, at thedome.org/golf or call Susan at 812-367-1411, ext. 2643.

For more stories about the sisters, visit thedome.org/news.