

Seek. Pray. Share.

Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand, Indiana

VOLUME 7 NUMBER 1 FALL 2015



INSIDE

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Looking at leadership



I think all of our Benedictine Sisters are effective leaders in their own way, no matter how they are serving our Lord's people. And there are many sisters who take on a more visible leadership role. One of those is Sister Rose Mary Rexing, who has been executive director of mission integration for Memorial Hospital and Health Care Center in Jasper, Indiana, for nearly six years.

The first article in this issue examines how Sister Rose Mary approaches her ministry and details its importance for the hospital. It's easy to see how the hospital's mission dovetails so well with our Benedictine values. And it's readily apparent from others' comments that Sister Rose Mary is having success in motivating employees to better live out the hospital's mission.

Another leadership example is a look at our new Spirituality Ministry Latino Outreach department. Sister Joan Scheller is heading up our charge to provide accessible, affordable, and credible immigration services for the surrounding area. Through these services and five special programs Sister Joan is planning for Latino families, we estimate we'll help nearly 500 people this year.

It's also nice when other leaders recognize how the sisters contribute in various ways. In an interview in this issue, Indiana Lieutenant Governor Sue Ellspermann shares her thoughts about the sisters.

You can also read how our reach extends far beyond Indiana. There's a feature on Sister Karen Joseph delivering some thought-provoking presentations in the Philippines, and a look at a trip some Women of the Rule members took to see how our sisters are serving in Peru.

Plus, we have the latest on how we're finding uses for a couple of our vacant buildings, and an early look at the potent speaker lineup for the Women of the Church conference planned for October, 2016.

So enjoy catching up on the happenings with the sisters. And come visit us sometime. We'd love to see you.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sr. Barbara Lynn Schmitz, OSB".

Sister Barbara Lynn Schmitz, OSB
Prioress

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Left: A fall scene near Kordes Hall on the monastery grounds

Above: Some fall scenes on the monastery grounds

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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.



Sister Rose Mary helps integrate hospital mission of being for others

by Greg Eckerle

The sign on Sister Rose Mary Rexing's office door at Memorial Hospital and Health Care Center is so simple, yet explains so much about her ministry.

It reads: "Listen with the ear of your heart." The advice is from the Rule of Benedict, appropriate as can be for Sister Rose Mary, a 45-year member of the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand and executive director of mission integration at Memorial Hospital and Health Care Center since 2009.

But the sign's advice is also appropriate for every employee of the Jasper, Indiana, hospital, because it's a good starting point for living out the hospital's mission statement – "Christ's healing mission of compassion empowers us to be for others through quality and excellence." And as she quickly points out, her long-lived background in Benedictine values is a perfect match for furthering the hospital's mission.

Kyle Bennett, the hospital's president and CEO, has noticed how Sister Rose Mary "definitely focuses on others." "She works to understand where others are coming from," he says. "If they're patients or employees, she focuses on understanding their

perspective. She operates with extremely high levels of integrity and compassion, and that gives a great deal of credibility to her message here."

Empowering the hospital's 1,500 employees to "be for others" is at the heart of Sister Rose Mary's ministry. "My greatest joy is when I feel like I've empowered another employee to live the mission more, to be more compassionate, to be in touch with their own gifts and how to share them with our patients and visitors," she says. Sister lights up recalling when an employee shared with her about a retreat in which the employee came to discover more fully how much God loves each individual. Sister Rose Mary chuckles. "Isn't that neat when you come to that awareness? It's those little God moments, the sharing of faith-filled moments, gazing into the face of a newborn infant, or bringing a smile to an elderly person, that bring me great joy. It's not what I'm doing, it's how God is working through me when I listen with the ear of my heart."

Above: Sister Rose Mary Rexing (at right) discusses with Heather Faith, a house supervisor at Memorial Hospital and Health Care Center in Jasper, Indiana, how to pray with families experiencing a tragedy.

Sister Rose Mary by one of the several walls inside Memorial Hospital and Health Care Center where its mission is displayed.



Integrating the mission is also about helping others to change. One of Sister Rose Mary's favorite quotes is from Father Richard Rohr: "transformed people transform people." She says that's her true call. She admits she had to be transformed first, which to her means being continually open to seeing Jesus' call at the moment, open to being changed in her way of thinking and behaving. Which is the life of a Benedictine. "It's our daily vow of 'conversatio morum,' or conversion of life," she says, "to try to be a little bit better and closer to Christ this day than yesterday."

So Sister Rose Mary is still being transformed, finding opportunities daily where she can be more loving, more giving, more thoughtful, more compassionate. She talks excitedly about the section in the hospital's employee handbook that lists numerous ways "to be for others." She feels humbled every time she gazes at it, thinking she has "a long way to go." The list is a valuable tool when she leads annual re-commissioning ceremonies about the hospital's mission, vision, and values in every department. She encourages each employee to pick one or two items from the list to focus on, and to try to grow on, in the coming year.

In the eyes of Ray Snowden, hospital chairperson of the board, she is a natural at such encouragement. "Sister Rose Mary has empowered people to look beyond, and to do things they weren't sure they could do. She is that kind of empowering person. She is constantly striving to improve our culture. She ignites that excitement in other people, which allows them to grow. I wouldn't want to lose her."

To Sister Rose Mary, "empowering employees to be for others is simply what it's all about." And it starts with being willing to be changed, from the inside, from the heart. Only then can one really be for others, and to put others first.



Sister Rose Mary's path to becoming the hospital's first executive director of mission integration gives one the sense another force was at work.

The position's job description was formulated in 2006. In a side conversation with Snowden in late 2008, she learned, seemingly by luck, that the hospital was looking for someone to guide their mission and help sustain its Catholic identity. She was immediately interested, but was on a six months' sabbatical at the time. "That position just kept flowing through me, challenging me and yet calling me," she says. She later asked Snowden about the position's status, was interviewed, and hired.

"Talk about the Spirit working," she says, her voice softening. "Every day since, I have felt the Spirit arranged this for me. What a perfect fit for my gifts and values. I sometimes just shake my head and say, 'God, how can I thank you for bringing me here?'"

Her primary responsibility is to ensure all 1,500 employees live out the hospital's mission and to see that all major decisions flow from the hospital's mission, vision, and core values. She helps the staff understand the official document Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services, which guides all Catholic healthcare. She also oversees the pastoral care department, parish nursing, and volunteers.

Memorial Hospital and Health Care Center, a regional health center based in Jasper, Indiana, has more than 30 clinics in seven counties in southwestern Indiana. It provides care to

Sister Rose Mary often refers to this section of the Memorial Hospital and Health Care Center employee handbook that lists ways "to be for others."

“There’s danger when we become complacent and think we can’t learn anything else. She’s not letting that happen. We need to give our best to the patients every day. She takes that seriously.”

over 4,500 inpatients, 150,000 outpatients, and about 1,000 newborns every year. So it’s easy to see why administrators placed Sister Rose Mary’s position into the administrative team.

Snowden points to the dwindling numbers of the hospital’s sponsoring organization, the Sisters of the Little Company of Mary, as a key reason to establish a position to help “maintain our Catholic heritage and the values of the sisters” and their founder, Venerable Mary Potter. “This job is a huge responsibility, and Sister Rose Mary has just been a blessing. She is extraordinarily self-directed, and creates a lot. Through her excitement, she builds excitement. She directed the reforming of our mission and vision statements. She is beloved by the people at Memorial, and is a breath of fresh air. She is the real deal.”

Bennett notes that Sister Rose Mary participates in all key administrative decisions. “She is the leader in making sure that the mission is considered first. She is also the leader in making sure the mission is conveyed appropriately to all levels of the organization. Our mission is more broadly lived within our organization since Sister Rose Mary arrived.”

A program Sister Rose Mary helped create that she is “probably most proud of” is the hospital’s “Prayer and Presence” service. It’s patterned after the national program Let No One Die Alone. Sister Adrian Davis, who came to the hospital as president and CEO in 1992 and served as board chairperson from 1999 until

her death in 2012, was very passionate about starting a similar program. Sister Adrian had arranged for speakers to share about how they started the program in a hospital in Michigan. Then she gave the task to Sister Rose Mary, who involved others, including Sister Adrian, to create a unique program to help patients and their loved ones use the time of suffering, illness, and dying as a path to wholeness.

They invented a 6-week training session to educate volunteers on how to interact with the dying – everything from grieving to praying to understanding what the dying are going through. There are now over 60 trained volunteers. Sometimes, when a volunteer can’t make it at the last minute to sit with a patient, Sister Rose Mary pinch hits. She relishes doing it, as she knows the experience will help transform her as the volunteer. She recalls sitting with a woman during Advent, knowing the woman was waiting to see Jesus, which gave Sister Rose Mary a whole new outlook on the concept of waiting. And she remembers sitting with a gentleman who had no known relatives on a Memorial Day Weekend, when a sense of “we are all family” enveloped her. She left with a deeper understanding of the notion “we are all connected, because we’re all part of the human race.”

As Sister Rose Mary helped deliver spiritual programs to the hospital staff, she didn’t want to forget about the physicians. So she developed spiritual formation opportunities for them, too, and included their spouses. “She hit a home run there,” recalls Snowden.

She helped create an orientation program for new employees that emphasizes the mission, vision and core values. She is there to lead every monthly session.

The people who work closest with her readily see Sister Rose Mary’s impact.



Kyle Bennett, Memorial Hospital and Health Care Center president and CEO, goes over his upcoming schedule with Sister Rose Mary. It’s part of a frequent hospital administrative gathering called the “Huddle” where executives update each other on their projects and initiatives.

Sister Rose Mary (second from left) explains some rituals supervisors can do for the grieving that can turn into “moments they will remember for the rest of their lives.” Listening are (from left) Heather Faith, Glenda Harris, and Brooke Nichter.



Chaplain Doug Faulkner, pastoral care staff team leader, notes the importance of caregivers reflecting the hospital’s core values. “In order to give to other people, we have to be full of good things,” he says. “We have to be fed spiritually, emotionally and feel valued as employees. That’s a big part of Sister Rose Mary’s job, the formation and instilling of those values. If employees are given those tools, they will naturally minister to that patient. She’s done an amazing job. God called Sister Rose Mary Rexing. She is affecting lives.

“There’s danger when we become complacent and think we can’t learn anything else. She’s not letting that happen. We need to give our best to the patients every day. She takes that seriously.”

Chaplain Linda Bieker, pastoral care patient team leader, is highly appreciative of the support and trust Sister Rose Mary gives her staff. “She tells us we are not alone. That’s a wonderful gift she brings. And she’s very outspoken about the hospital’s mission. We are a Catholic health care institution, that’s getting to be more the center of everything we do, and she’s a big part of that push. It’s a beautiful movement.”

For Deb Boyles, who leads the hospital’s volunteer crew of 275, Sister Rose Mary’s influence has been personally helpful, too. “She has brought me great joy,” says Deb. “We have a lot of fun with her, because her heart is always open. She has actually taught me what true laughter is, just by being with her. But she has really taught me more than that. She’s taught me a deeper sense of God. It’s being around her that has given me the gift of

a deeper understanding of life and faith. It’s her presence. She’s willing to be there for you. She cares about it all.

“And she’s very energetic, just nonstop. Relentless. She’s almost an example of the person that’s found the perfect passion in her life. If there ever is an image of grace, she would be in that picture, she would fill the caption every time.”

Janet Owen, who leads the hospital’s health ministry office, says, “What’s nice is Sister Adrian put somebody in place (Sister Rose Mary) that knows you have to live by faith and trust, especially in a faith-based organization. Sister Adrian knew it had to be somebody that had that strong spiritual component.”

Sister Rose Mary credits her Benedictine training and values for providing a solid foundation for her role at Memorial Hospital and Health Care Center. “I can’t imagine doing this ministry without that foundation, without the understanding and support of my Benedictine family of sisters. And it all integrates so well with the hospital’s values. The Little Company of Mary Sisters’ charism of compassion for the sick and dying fits perfectly with St. Benedict’s attention to the sick and dying, and the reverence and care we are called to have for each individual. I’m so blessed to be here.” ■



Sister Rose Mary (far left) shares a lighter moment in a staff meeting with Deb Boyles, Doug Faulkner, and Linda Bieker.



Sisters reach out to Latinos with services, programs

by Greg Eckerle

The Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand have opened a new chapter in their 31-year history of service to Latinos in the area.

The sisters' Spirituality Ministry Latino Outreach has held two well-attended Latino faith formation days this year, and has opened an office at Monastery Immaculate Conception in Ferdinand to help provide low cost immigration services.

Sister Barbara Lynn Schmitz, prioress, says, "Our Benedictine community welcomes the Latino presence in our area and is excited to share with them our Benedictine spirituality and hospitality through new programs for their families, as well as provide a needed immigration service."

The first Latino faith formation day at the monastery, celebrating the Epiphany, drew 90 people from 34 families. Another formation day focusing on Lent was attended by 65 people from 20 families.

The Sisters of St. Benedict have also been recognized by the U.S. Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) to serve legal needs of immigrants in matters of family immigration law.

Sister Joan Scheller has received BIA accreditation to consult with immigrants to determine their eligibility for certain immigration benefits. If they are eligible, she can then assist in applying for the benefits, which include: citizenship application and preparation for the citizenship civics test and interview; applications to provide temporary protected status and work permission; application for permanent residency; renewal of permanent residency card; renewal of temporary work permits; and travel permission applications. She also provides Spanish-to-English written translations of personal identification documents. She previously did similar work for nearly six years.

Interested immigrants should call Sister Joan for an appointment at 812-367-1411, ext. 2102, or at 812-639-1711, both of which have Spanish voicemail. The service is called the Sisters of St. Benedict

Above: Sister Joan Scheller meets with immigration clients at Monastery Immaculate Conception in Ferdinand.



Sister Jill Reuber discusses the scripture passage about the prodigal son with elementary school children at a recent Latino faith formation day at Monastery Immaculate Conception in Ferdinand.

Immigration Outreach, and is part of their Spirituality Ministry department. The service also operates as a member of the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. (CLINIC), the immigration arm of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). As members of CLINIC, the sisters are networked with similar immigration offices throughout the U.S. They receive technical support, access to immigration lawyers and on-going updates and training in immigration law.

Sister Traci Stutz, director of Spirituality Ministry, says, "Through the new Latino programming, we heard of the need to develop a small office to provide accessible, affordable, credible immigration services."

Sister Joan says, "Our Benedictine tradition of hospitality is to receive guests as Christ and to reach out to those on the margins socially, culturally and spiritually. The new programs and immigration service gives us more ways to help those in need."

Those helped pay a nominal fee, significantly lower than the expense of an immigration lawyer.

Sister Joan notes that it has been a good ministry for the community and the area. She expects the office to serve about 200 clients this fiscal year (ending June 30, 2016).

The Spirituality Ministry Latino Outreach will offer five programs this fiscal year: three family faith formation programs in Spanish, a retreat for Latino mothers and daughters, and a retreat for Latino women. "The family faith formation days provide topics of importance to the Latino culture, their devotions and Catholic faith," says Sister Joan. "The retreats for the women, mothers and daughters will help them grow in their relationship with God and each other, with emphasis on building self-esteem and celebrating their gifts as women."

Erica Nunez, who attended the Lent program this year, said, "It was very nice. It's a time for reflection, too. My husband said he liked everything (about the program) – the walk, the cross, the food, all the kids' activities. The kids love to come with me here. They love the sisters, too. Sometimes the sisters play with them."

"The sisters receive me with friendship and love. I enjoy coming here, too. There is peace and quiet." ■



Erica Nunez attends some of the Latino programs.

Indiana Lt. Governor: 'I count on the sisters'

Indiana Lieutenant Governor Sue Ellspermann grew up in Ferdinand and began a life-long relationship with the Sisters of St. Benedict at age five when she performed in a ballet program at Monastery Immaculate Conception. She was taught by many of the sisters in grade school, has conversed with them on many issues since, including whether to be considered for lieutenant governor in 2012, and is a member of the Women of the Rule, a philanthropy circle affiliated with the sisters. In this interview Sue talks about her connection with the sisters.

Why do you have an illustration of the Ferdinand monastery displayed on your office wall in Indianapolis?

Sue: It's a great opportunity to show visitors the monastery in my hometown. I tell them about the 150 sisters. I think part of being here is leaving a taste of southern Indiana and understanding what's important to the person in this office. I tell people to stop by the monastery, that it's beautiful. Then I'll say I have such a huge respect for those 150 women religious as leaders. I count on the sisters in so many different ways, as friends, as prayer partners, as spiritual leaders, as great mentors.

We've heard you say that whenever you go home and see the monastery that your blood pressure goes down?

It does. It's been that way my whole life. As I'd drive in, and see that monastery on the hill, I could feel myself relaxing, and feel a different sort of peace come about. There's a very special presence around the monastery.

Your thoughts about the sisters as you got to know them well?

So many of them taught in our schools at very low wages. We got the great benefit of their early and best years of their careers. I personally feel we benefitted and we should be giving back. It's important we show our appreciation for what they've done in so many people's lives, and for our church. Think of the thousands of children they taught. They were truly public servants and church servants. They've always found a way to make a difference. Just being there for people. During the lowest moments of my life, those sisters were there praying for me, and listening as friends. As spiritual women and friends, they understood, and were non-judgmental. It's a great gift they have, the way they love the people.

Instances where you saw the sisters helping others?

I have seen that in so many ways. I worked with Sister Joella Kidwell on training for Creative Problem Solving. I think of Sister Rosemary



Sister Kathryn Huber, Indiana Lieutenant Governor Sue Ellspermann, and Sister Barbara C. Schmitz stand by an illustration of Ferdinand's Monastery Immaculate Conception that is displayed on a wall in Ellspermann's Statehouse office.

Rexing's vocations programs. Sister Mary Frances Shafer's work with the Louisville homeless. Watching St. Benedict's School in Evansville become even stronger under Sister Karlene Sensmeier's leadership. And there are many other examples. It's their willingness to lead and role model. The Ferdinand Benedictines are good at changing. They understand the world will always change and they look to see how they can make a difference and model what a Benedictine is in that world. There are so many special gifts in that community.

What does being a member of Women of the Rule bring to you?

It gives me a way to ensure that I give back to them, because it's a high priority for me to support the sisters. But in the giving, you always get back so much more. I just love being with the sisters. I do take advantage of their spiritual workshops and retreats. Particularly in my lieutenant governor role, I need to make sure I'm spiritually fed, that I stay grounded, that I stay close to the values in our Church and the faith I see modeled through the sisters.

Obviously you have challenges in your position. Do you ever think of the sisters and how they might approach those challenges?

Oh sure, and more than that, I don't hesitate to reach out to ask for not only prayer, but for spiritual guidance. The Rule of Benedict brings out the best of our humanity. And I asked Sister Kathryn Huber for a lot of prayers as I was considering my interest in the lieutenant governor position. ■



‘Our Father, how will I be your name?’

by Greg Eckerle

Kids say the darndest things.

And it often opens up eyes much better than we adults can.

During a recent Spirituality Day for the Women of the Rule, a philanthropy circle affiliated with the Sisters of St. Benedict, member Pat Evans shared a thought about the Gospel on the Visitation, when Mary visited Elizabeth.

Pat noted that Scripture said Mary “set out” to travel to greet Elizabeth. “If we set out daily to honor someone in some way,” said Pat, “what purpose that would give to our lives if we deliberately got up every day and set out to honor someone.”

The day’s presenter, Sister Kathryn Huber, nodded and smiled at the suggestion. And followed with a related story with another message, as she often does. A minister of a local congregation had asked the people to write a prayer as they began a building project. A little girl piped up, “I want to write the Our Father.”

Sister Kathy continued, “Now what we say and what children hear is sometimes different. But listen, this is powerful. The girl wrote, ‘Our Father, who art in Heaven, how will I be your name?’”

For Benedictines, who strive to be Christ-like and to see Christ in every person they meet, the child’s innocent misinterpretation was golden. Sister Kathy mused, “Just think if we set out each morning with that in our heart – how will I be your name today?”

Such reflections and sharing are what turn each program with the sisters into a thought-provoking, educational session.

“We’re called to reflect on Scripture, and on our own life experience,” said Sister Kathy. “Not only how God is present in

Scripture, but how has God been present in an encounter. I think of that little girl and her Our Father – ‘how will I be your name?’ When we choose to follow Christ, we bear his image to the world. What does this image look like? Saint Francis of Assisi said, ‘Preach the Gospel; if necessary, use words.’”

Sister Kathy shares that Saint Francis quote often, because it reminds us to be “aware of what we do.” Attendee Betty Weinzapfel swiftly agreed, saying, “I love that, because so often the example is more important than the words.”

Sister Kathy talked about the value of pondering and reflecting on issues, no matter if they’re joyful or difficult. “Mary is the ideal recipient of God’s Word,” she said. “She reflects on God’s words and deeds in her heart. This is all about being called to see, a seeing that can transform you. And being mindful is very important. Especially when in a conflicted relationship, that’s when we need to stand back, and ponder.”

Carolyn Fuhs spoke of how much the Women of the Rule periodic sessions have given her, through the friendship, openness and sharing. She also talked about how the group can go out among many, among people that are hurting, and make a difference.

Kind of like ‘how will I be your name?’ today.

“We need to be open, we need to be receptive,” said Sister Kathy. “And the older we become, the more we’re able to do that, I believe.”

And the more we can ponder the wisdom spoken through children. ■

Above: Sister Kathryn Huber addresses members of Women of the Rule at one of their periodic Spirituality Days.

Igniting Benedictine blessings around the world

by Greg Eckerle

Sister Karen Joseph is ever humble about the value of her presentations on Benedictine spirituality.

"It's just my usual stuff," she shrugs, referring to the talks she has been giving far and wide for years. But the content is always pretty special to the listeners. That consistent quality is likely the reason she continues to get asked to present the material all across the globe.

One extended venture was last year, when over 160 Benedictine sisters in the Philippines attended her three retreats.

The first was a two-day workshop near Manila on spiritual leadership and spiritual direction for 30 Benedictine superiors and formation directors. Next was an 8-day retreat of 16 conferences titled "To be Benedictine, To be Faithful, To be a Blessing" at the same location for 77 sisters. She presented the same 8-day retreat later to another 56 sisters.

Sister Karen was asked to do the Philippines retreat by the local prioress, Sister Adelaida Ygrubay. Sister Adelaida knew full well how worthwhile Sister Karen's messages would be for their annual meetings of sisters.

After the programs, Sister Adelaida wrote to Sister Karen, "More than the topics . . . was (your) manner of delivering . . . you stood there in front of us day after day, burning with passion, appealing to us in a dramatic tone of voice for the first fervor of our monastic profession: Let us be Faithful!"

Sister Karen said she "really wanted to reignite their enthusiasm, their good zeal, for monastic life, to get them to live the life of a woman religious in the daily with more energy and more enthusiasm." She knew she had succeeded when Sister Adelaida thanked her for "providing the ignition key; this retreat brought alive my dream of a monastic community that is a blessing to our world!"

"What a privilege it is for us to live this life," says Sister Karen, "and we need to do it with all our energy. I love to talk about living the Benedictine life and values, I really do."



Sister Karen Joseph (in black in the middle of the front row) poses with the Benedictine sisters she gave an 8-day retreat to in the Philippines.

That her passion made an impact on her audience was quite apparent in the thank you cards she received from sisters after returning to the Ferdinand monastery. Better yet, her words had spurred action on the other side of the world. Therein lies the ultimate payoff, as those sisters go forth and minister to thousands.

Among the many positive comments sent to Sister Karen:

"The power of words is more powerful than any Powerpoint, but that is because you have the gift of convincing people. Thanks for convincing me."

"I thank my God each time I think of you. You made me renewed again."

"Thank you for bringing Benedict's lifestyle back to life, and to be LIVED!"

"How I wish I could have more of you every year."

"Thank you for inspiring, encouraging, and challenging us to be Benedictine women who can lead others to God with love and compassion." (Sister Adelaida)

“Thank you for bringing Benedict’s lifestyle back to life, and to be LIVED!”

“You are special and God’s gift to all of us. Remain our Benedictine apostle to other Benedictines and the world. I received so much from the bounty of your heart. I shall always treasure (your) words. . . . You are the sister God has given me to encourage and support me in my journey to Him Now that you have articulated our common vision and mission, I am sure many of us have been strengthened (What) we do for love of Him (can) be used for the good of all, the millions crying out for food, shelter, jobs, justice, truth, and love.” (Sister Lydia, subprioress)

She intentionally named the retreat “To be Benedictine, To be Faithful, To be a Blessing” because the word Benedict means “blessing.” “So to be a Benedictine is to be a blessing to each other and to those we serve,” says Sister Karen. “That’s why we talk about authentic living.” And that’s why Sister Karen talks so much about being faithful to the monastic life, and being aware of happenings in the daily, so Benedictines can indeed be a constant blessing to those they serve.

A key part of her presentation was her thoughts on “monastic instincts,” something she developed over 10 years ago. “I’ve become known for my monastic instinct talk,” laughs Sister Karen. “I’m probably going to have ‘monastic instinct’ carved on my tombstone. I’ve given that presentation all over.”

The seven instincts she talks about are: listening, humility, holding one’s tongue, helpfulness, bearing with one another, reverence, and consistency. “It’s about continuing to cultivate what is appropriate for the monastic person. I think those instincts, which guide our choices, speak the loudest of the Benedictine world. I picked them out of the Rule of Benedict, which is the base and the glue that holds us Benedictines all together.”



Sister Karen Joseph

Sister Karen emphasized that Benedictines must be women of prayer, that they could not teach about a God that they don’t know. She feels that those who pray faithfully are changed, and are better able to walk with others as they strive to deepen their relationship with God. The Gospels and the Rule of Benedict provide the guidance needed to transform lives. “We listen with the ears of God that we may speak the Word of God.” Benedictine humility allows such listening.

Among other key points of Sister Karen’s retreat for the sisters:

- Relax! Take a deep breath and calm yourself!
- Awareness of the present moment gives our life meaning and depth.
- Ride the monsters down that keep you from being your best self, that keep you from loving, and you will break through to something precious.
- Let us be faithful. We are true disciples of Christ and followers of Benedict when we learn how to stay at table.
- We must care about people and be sensitive to how our life and choices impact them.
- Nothing is to be preferred to the Work of God. Prayer carries us safely through the day.
- We receive the stranger in the same way the Lord received us.
- Silence is a great teacher. To learn its lessons you must pay attention to it. It creates the atmosphere of peace.
- Never despair of God’s mercy, for you are going to make mistakes. Keep trying.
- Have the motivation daily to go deeper into the cave of wisdom and life.

All are rather simple points, yet hold immense power if followed. It’s why the sisters told Sister Karen they could understand her so well. She maintains she’s not “real academic,” that her material is “real nuts-and-bolts.”

Truth be told, those are often the best lessons to learn. And why being a Benedictine can be a blessing for those they meet. ■

NEWS from the Dome

Ferdinand sisters welcome new member

The Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand, Indiana, have officially accepted Lisa Schutz into the postulancy, which is the first stage of incorporation into the religious community.

Schutz is the 37-year-old daughter of Ken and Carole Schutz. She has an older brother and a younger sister. She was a member of St. Thomas More Parish in Munster, Indiana. Before moving to the Ferdinand monastery, she lived in Crown Point, Indiana.

Lisa has a Bachelor's degree in Elementary Education, early childhood and elementary teaching certificates, and CNA certificate. She taught preschool and most recently was a CNA at Deer Creek Assisted Living in Schererville, Indiana. She has also volunteered with the St. Vincent DePaul Society.

Lisa says, "I began thinking about religious life after teaching preschool for three years. I saw a spiritual director for four years to make a decision about where my life was headed. Community living and the prayer life attracted me to the Benedictines. The Benedictine Sisters have common values and minister to people of the community."

Founded in 1867, the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand currently number 150 and serve in the areas of education, parish work, health care, retreat and spirituality work, social services, counseling, and mission work in Indiana, Kentucky, and Peru.



Sisters celebrate jubilees

Sisters Jane Becker, Donna Marie Herr, Agnes Weinzapfel, and Eileen Reckelhoff celebrated their 50th anniversary of profession at the monastery on Saturday, August 22, 2015. The golden jubilee sisters entered the monastery in 1963 and made their monastic vows in 1965.



Benet Hall apartment project picks up pace

The project to turn Benet Hall into affordable senior housing apartments is picking up steam.

Renovation of the facility is expected to begin this October. The target date for opening the senior housing is October, 2016. That's six months quicker than the original estimate. Thanks to the project having solid financial support, we received favorable loan terms that enable us to start the process sooner.

A key part of the funding came through tax credits granted in

February by the Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority. The Benet Hall project will receive tax credits of over \$411,000 each year for 10 years, for a total of over \$4.1 million. This cash will be used to transform Benet Hall into senior housing.

The project will make available 15 two-bedroom, two-bathroom apartments. There will also be a manager apartment and a resident recreation room. Monthly rent will be priced in compliance with affordable rates for senior citizens as set by the state.

St. Benedict's Brew Works to open

The monastery grounds is getting a new business venture – St. Benedict's Brew Works, a microbrewery that produces a variety of high-quality craft beer, was set to celebrate its Grand Opening on September 26.

The brewery sits just north of the Monastery Event Hall building, which also houses the sisters' For Heaven's Sake Gift Shop. Both buildings are located behind Monastery Immaculate Conception, down the hill to the east.

Vince Luecke, co-owner of the microbrewery along with Andy Hedinger, says that fall and winter hours will be Thursday through Monday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Eastern time. They plan to be open six days a week by spring 2016. The two are leasing the building from the sisters. Visitors will be able to sample beer in a tasting room, tour the operation, and purchase beer in bottles. They plan to offer four beers initially, with a specialty beer available for Christmas. Some food service is planned, including



Andy Hedinger and Vince Luecke in front of brewing equipment at St. Benedict's Brew Works.

pretzels and beer cheese made in the brewery. They eventually will have gourmet sandwiches. Gift items, including St. Benedict's Brew Works t-shirts and mugs, will be available.

The operation is the latest in a 1,500-year-history of beer being brewed in various monasteries to support their ministries and way of life.

Sisters of St. Benedict Programs and Retreats at the Benedictine Hospitality Center at Kordes Hall

October 30–31, 2015	Introduction to Dreams	Theresa O'Bryan
November 6–7, 2015	Using Spiritual Practices to Improve Health, Healing, and Wholeness	Ruth Stanley
December 5, 2015	Revelations of Divine Love: Praying with Julian of Norwich	Sister Jeana Visel, OSB
December 12, 2015	On Staying at Table: Being Faithful Amidst Life's Difficulties	Sister Karen Joseph, OSB
January 4–6, 2016	Come Away Retreat	Father Eugene Hensell, OSB
January 5 and 6, 2016	Reading the Bible as Story	Sister Kathy Bilskie, OSB, and Sister Celeste Boda, OSB
January 16, 2016	Introduction to Centering Prayer	Sister Traci Stutz, OSB
January 23, 2016	Confirmation Retreat	Sister Jane Becker, OSB, and Sister Jane Will, OSB
February 13, 2016	Forgiving What You Cannot Forget	Father Eugene Hensell, OSB
February 20, 2016	Jesus' Journey to Jerusalem in the Gospel of Luke	Sister Karen Joseph, OSB
February 27, 2016	Never Despair of God's Mercy	Pat Evans
March 19, 2016	Loss and Grief: "Why Didn't They Tell Me It Would Hurt Like This?"	Sister Betty Drewes, OSB
March 24–27, 2016	Triduum Retreat	

As part of their outreach, the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand offer group or individual programs and retreats that educate and provide personal spiritual direction. These programs develop a deeper awareness of God, the world, oneself, and others that leads to a more meaningful and fulfilling life. The sisters also open their facilities and grounds to groups seeking a hospitable, peace-filled environment for meetings, programs, or other gatherings.

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

Women of the Church conference draws high-profile speakers

At first glance, it's curious why so many high-caliber speakers will descend upon Ferdinand, Indiana, next October 7–9. But the speakers didn't hesitate, because they know the messages and the conversations are sorely needed.

The first woman believed to have offered a reflection at a Sunday liturgy inside the Vatican is coming to share her thoughts on leadership. So is the woman who has been called “the very face of Catholic female leadership in the United States.”

And they are just part of an impressive 16-speaker line-up for the upcoming conference “Women of the Church: Strength of the Past. Hope for Tomorrow. A Catholic Leadership Conference.”

The Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand and the Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology are co-hosting the conference in response to Pope Francis's call for “a more incisive presence” of women in the Church. The conference will also follow growing encouragement to have continued conversation about women in the Church.

The reflection at the conference's opening Vespers liturgy will be given by Kerry Robinson, the executive director of the National Leadership Roundtable on Church Management, based in Washington, D.C. She also serves on the advisory board of Voices of Faith, a global platform in the heart of the Vatican that celebrates the contribution of women to the Church. When the group met at the Vatican on International Women's Day last March, an archbishop invited Robinson to offer a reflection at the Sunday liturgy. It is believed Robinson is the first woman to have had such an opportunity at a Sunday liturgy at the Vatican.

Dr. Kimberly Baker, a co-chair of the Ferdinand conference who is also assistant professor of Church history at Saint Meinrad, knew of Robinson's international work that includes advising the Vatican on the inclusion of women in leadership roles in the Catholic Church, and felt she would be an ideal conference speaker. She invited Robinson to participate. “Her response, ‘This is an extraordinary invitation and I am both humbled and grateful,’ just really stunned me,” says Baker. “I mean, she just came from preaching at the Vatican, and she was thrilled to hear about this conference in Ferdinand, and is excited about coming. It was incredible to hear.”

The opening Vespers will be followed by the kickoff keynote speaker, Carolyn Woo, president and chief executive officer of Catholic Relief Services, the international aid organization that reaches 93 countries and nearly 100 million of the world's poorest people each year.

Sister Jeana Visel, the other co-chair, who is a Ferdinand Benedictine and works at Saint Meinrad, said Woo's organization is “doing some of the most important work of the Church.” And a profile of her in *America* magazine stated, “. . . Ms. Woo is, in many ways, the very face of Catholic female leadership in the United States.”

Archbishop Joseph Tobin of Indianapolis and Bishop Charles Thompson of Evansville will participate in a moderated “Conversation with the Bishops” hour at the conference. “We felt it important that it not just be women having this conversation,” says Baker. “We heard the bishops

speaking about the value of women being at the table, both in leadership and particularly with peace-building, which prompted us to invite them. Both have been very supportive.”

The conference, designed for both women and men in the Church, seeks to recognize and support the many ways that women participate in the mission of the Church. Topics for the breakout

sessions include leadership formation, vocational discernment, spirituality, Catholic health care, youth ministry, the Benedictine charism, and cultivating leaders for a multicultural Church.

“It's inspiring to gather this caliber of people together, and to see women who lead major organizations that serve the Church,” said Sister Jeana. “It's a great starting point for people who didn't think of being a leader as part of their future.”

“The conference won't be just talking about women, but it will be talking to and with both women and men. How can we enhance relationships with the people we work with, and improve relationships in the wider Church? We are not setting women against others, but talking about how we can work together for the common good. We can't wait until everything is perfect before we start. We want to partner with others now. As Benedictines we have been entrusted with building community. That's what we're trying to do, to strengthen the Church community in a way that will benefit everyone.”

Baker points to how the pope is opening eyes to the many different ways that people lead. It's not tied strictly to the clergy or ordination. “He's saying that all voices need to be involved, that all gifts need to be welcomed. We're all gifted by the Spirit. Another conference keynote speaker, Kathleen Sprows Cummings, director of the Cushwa Center for the Study of American Catholicism at the University of Notre Dame, told me our conference is timely and important. I hope our participants go out with a renewed sense of call, a renewed sense of dignity in what they're doing, and a greater sense of what God is asking of them. Our focus will be on supporting and helping the women and men who will be right in front of us.”



For more complete information about the Women of the Church Conference to be held in Ferdinand, Indiana, from October 7-9, 2016, please visit the website womenofthechurch.org. It's anticipated that registration will open through the website in January, 2016.

Donor receptions a way to say thanks

When it comes to hospitality, there's nothing like that in-person thank you -- so for the last three years, the sisters have traveled across the United States attending receptions to deliver a heartfelt thank you to various donors and to make connections with new friends.

The receptions have been graciously hosted by donors, with the sisters lending a helping hand.

Mike Schwenk and his wife, Pam, hosted a reception in Jasper, Indiana. "The sisters made it a fairly easy event to host," says Mike. "They did all the legwork as far as getting invitations out. It was just about finding a spot and coordinating a little logistics. It's always a pleasure to have the sisters around. There's no question they serve a wonderful purpose, whether it's supporting the immigrants, serving the poor, serving from educational standpoints, there's just many aspects where they're there to serve. You can't help but feel good about supporting that service."

"People at the reception enjoyed having the chance to meet with the sisters. Of course, they're always so pleasant to meet and talk with, so they made it a very hospitable and welcoming reception. It was a way to get to know each other a lot better."

According to Becki Romans, director of major gifts, the sisters are trying to average 12 receptions a year. They've held events from California to Texas to Florida. They normally last about two hours, starting with 45 minutes to socialize with the sisters. Sister Barbara Lynn Schmitz, prioress, who is at most receptions, then provides updates about the sisters and all of the exciting changes happening at the monastery, followed by a question-and-answer session. Sisters who minister in the area also normally attend.

"A wonderful aspect of the receptions is that they give donors the opportunity to introduce some of their friends to the sisters," says Becki. "The number of guests can range from 10 to 75, depending on what the host feels comfortable with. A majority of the hosts



At the Louisville donor reception: (from left) Craig Mackin, Bill Rothwell, co-host Ginny Mackin, Lynn Fischer (daughter of the hosts and sister of Louisville Mayor Greg Fischer), and Sister Barbara Catherine Schmitz.



Sister Barbara Lynn Schmitz (far left) presents Louisville reception host George Fischer with a 60th anniversary gift for him and his wife Mary Lee. In back are Becki Romans and Sister Rebecca Abel.

have been in relationship with the sisters for years. Many were taught by the sisters and feel the values the sisters instilled in them helped form them into who they are today.

"We've made some really great connections in all the communities we've visited so far. We've reconnected with old friends and made new friends. We've had people visit the monastery who have just met the sisters through a reception. It's been a wonderful experience so far."

Sister Barbara Lynn says, "It is amazing to me to travel around the country and visit with our donors from various cities. I love to thank them for the role they play in our ministries and to let them know how important their partnership is to the sisters. They thank me for being a part of the Sisters of St. Benedict. Every party we've experienced brought us to a greater sense of 'together we can' and reminded me how God has brought each one of our donors into our lives for a reason. God can do more than we can ask or imagine."

Ginny Mackin was the co-host of a recent reception held at the home of George and Mary Lee Fischer in Louisville. "The sisters give their life to us," says Ginny. "They do so much, such as teaching children and working in hospitals. They give of themselves, so I give back."

"I'm trying to get more people in Louisville to know the sisters." She's also organized two 50-person bus tours to the Ferdinand monastery, one from her church and one from a social group.

"I just love the sisters. When my husband died, they kind of filled my void."

If you are interested in hosting a reception for the Sisters of St. Benedict, please contact Becki Romans to make arrangements at bromans@thedome.org or call (812) 367-1411, ext. 2632.

Leave your legacy through St. Hildegard Society

What will my legacy be?

How can I give more?

What is the best type of planned gift for me to give?

Many of our donors ask these questions.

One simple way to support the sisters is to include them in your estate plans. Through this or any planned gift you will automatically be enrolled in the St. Hildegard Society, an honorary group established in 1990 as a way to recognize those who support the Ferdinand Benedictines.

Over the past 25 years, 524 St. Hildegard members have donated over \$8.2 million in matured gifts with an additional \$8.3 million expected to be realized through their generous planned gifts. These gifts have made a tremendous difference in helping the sisters continue to serve our community through their ministries.

St. Hildegard appealed to her contemporaries to be co-creators of goodness and caretakers of the earth. Members of the St. Hildegard Society answer this appeal. They know they are serving God with the sisters through their generosity. By upholding the many works of the sisters, members know they feed the hungry, teach the children, shelter the homeless, serve the Church, and help instill meaning and purpose in countless lives.

Members of the St. Hildegard Society enjoy many spiritual benefits. You will be remembered in the daily prayers and work of the sisters, now and forever. Members are invited each year to join the sisters for Mass and dinner on a Sunday near the feast of St. Hildegard, which is celebrated on September 17. You are also given a beautiful clock upon becoming a society member.

The society is named in honor of St. Hildegard of Bingen, a 12th century Benedictine abbess in Germany. She was one of the most remarkable women of the Middle Ages. A great contemplative,



Fran Bartley gives a passionate testimonial on what being a St. Hildegard Society member means to her. At left is Sister Barbara Lynn Schmitz.

she was a doctor, musician, poet, artist, and theologian. Hildegard staunchly defended the sanctity of all life.

There are many ways to enter the St. Hildegard Society, each with its own advantages.

One member, Max Olinger of Huntingburg, Indiana, says, "By creating a gift annuity, you can enjoy seeing how the sisters benefit from your sacrifice during your lifetime."

Or, you can set it up so your gift may cost you nothing in your lifetime. Such a legacy can be done by naming the sisters as a beneficiary of your retirement account, by including the sisters as a beneficiary of your life insurance plan, or by including them in your estate plan.

You can learn more by visiting the sisters' website, thedome.org. Click on "Make A Gift" at the top of the home page, then click on "Planned Giving" in the drop-down box that appears. Or you can call 812-367-1411, ext. 2631, for more information on what may be the best option for your situation.

Your gift will help ensure that the sisters, a rare and vibrant community, will be able to continue serving others for years to come. Through your gift, you show your love, you serve your God, and you change lives for the better. It's a legacy you can count on.



Enjoying a St. Hildegard Society dinner are Sisters Mary Carmen and Mary Carmel Spayd, and Jack and Linda Doyle.

Cookies sell at Atlanta show

The cookies from our monastery bakery, Simply Divine, received good exposure and landed orders at the International Gift & Home Furnishings Market, a huge show last July in Atlanta.

Two large orders were placed by Bronner's CHRISTmas Wonderland in Michigan and by the Villa Trading Co. in Massachusetts. Bronner's, a popular tourist attraction in Frankenmuth, Michigan, has a retail floor space the size of 1-1/2 football fields and bills itself as the "World's Largest Christmas Store."

Many other current and potential customers visited Simply Divine's booth at the show and said they will be ordering cookies in the future.

According to Katie Mehling, who works in sales and marketing for Simply Divine, people were fascinated to learn that cookies were being baked at a monastery, and were happy to see an exhibit at the show. She collected 80 business cards from interested cookie prospects representing 21 states, Canada, and Mexico.

For the latest information on the sisters' cookies, visit simplydivinebakery.org. The sisters sell their bakery products through the Monastery Immaculate Conception gift shop, For Heaven's Sake. Orders can be placed online at forheavensake.org.



Booth for Simply Divine, our monastery bakery, at a show in Atlanta.

In memoriam

by Sister Paulette Seng

Sister Dolorosa Hasenour

July 4, 1915 – February 9, 2015

Whatever Sister Dolorosa did, she did it with intensity. She was serious about life — faithful and deliberate in living the monastic way of life for 84 years and ministering as a teacher or principal for 60 years.



Proud of being German, Catholic, and Benedictine, she lived a life of prayer and service, accompanied by a strong work ethic that sometimes made it hard for her to have fun — she once chose to study Greek over watching TV or playing cards. In her later years, she found great pride and joy in teaching German and translating German documents and newsletters for the monastery archives.

Sister Dolorosa was an outstanding teacher, strict, but fair and supportive, and clear in her expectations. With her as principal, teachers, students, and parents knew that the school would be run efficiently and effectively, and that students would learn.

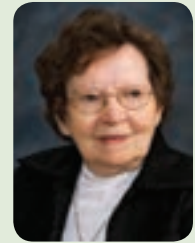
As the last of her generation, she held a very important and respected role in her family. She loved them dearly, and they appreciated her presence at family events and her prayers.

From her youth Sister Dolorosa desired to please God. As her life unfolded, she slowly let go of her worries and came to trust totally in God's unfailing love for her. She has now found peace with a merciful and loving God.

Sister Brenda Englert

November 4, 1921 – June 6, 2015

"Goodness personified." That was Sister Brenda.



Not only was Sister Brenda a kind and wise elementary teacher for over 30 years, but she taught many lessons outside the classroom, also. From her we learned simplicity and humility— how to accept oneself, reverence others, and trust in God. She knew who she was, and no deceit was found in her. In her we saw gentleness, gratitude, and a faithful witness to the Benedictine way of life.

Sister Brenda was an activist ahead of her time and in her own quiet way — peaceful, grounded, and caring. Her care of the earth and concern for social justice grew out of her respect for all God's creation. She advocated for the disadvantaged and wrote letters to legislators to voice concerns about situations that adversely affected people's lives. She promoted recycling, reusing, and reducing before those words were commonplace.

Although quiet and shy, Sister Brenda had a sense of humor. Not taking life too seriously, as supervisor of the monastic dining room she once told a newer member who was to mop the floor, "clean up only the big crumbs."

Throughout her life Sister Brenda listened to God, lived faithfully God's will for her, and now rests in God's loving presence.



Complete obituaries can be found at thedome.org.

Women of the Rule visit Peru mission

by Greg Eckerle

Photos by Kerri Cokeley

Five members of the Women of the Rule, a philanthropy circle affiliated with the sisters, visited our nine Benedictine sisters in Peru, and their ministries, last fall.

Making the trip were Nancy Habig, Pat Koch, Kathy Kleindorfer, Carolyn Fuhs, Kerri Cokeley, who is also employed in mission advancement at the Ferdinand monastery, and Sister Barbara C. Schmitz.

"Everyone had an amazing experience," said Kerri. "We stayed with the sisters in their monastery for five nights. Those sisters are amazing. They're up before dawn. They're working every minute of every day to improve the lives of the Peruvian people, and they're non-stop. The people love the sisters, they would do anything to protect them, and they wouldn't know what to do without them there.

"The biggest shock for us there was that they didn't have hot running water. So we suggested that the Women of the Rule might help fund a hot water heater for them. But, those sisters asked, why? They said it wasn't necessary, that it would just be a luxury. They take showers with cold water and think nothing of it. How modest. Amazing." ■



Carolyn Fuhs enjoys the company of a family she just met in the mountains of Peru. She gave the little girl some toys and candy.



The travelers meet with Bishop Dan in Peru. From left are Sister Barbara C. Schmitz, Pat Koch, Bishop Dan, Carolyn Fuhs, Kathy Kleindorfer, Sister Mary Leah Baehl, and Nancy Habig. The bishop praised the local sisters' work, especially their help in growing St. Rita's School from two classrooms to over 900 students.



Kathy Kleindorfer works with some children in a school in Morropon, Peru.



Volunteering into membership

by Laura Reckelhoff

The Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand, Indiana, are blessed to have many volunteers coming to the monastery. Whether they come individually or as groups, the volunteers make an impact on the sisters and the sisters hope to make an impact on them as well.

Sister Mary Philip Berger, volunteer coordinator at the monastery, says, "It is a ministry for us to be with the volunteers. They are doing a service for us and we get to show them our way of life. The volunteers appreciate the connection with us, the sisters, and with God and the Church."

Opportunities to volunteer continue to increase and change each year.

Recently, volunteers have been utilized as chauffeurs, mainly to take sisters to doctor appointments in Evansville, Louisville, or Jasper. Marilyn Seng was the first volunteer to chauffeur and has now been joined by Harold Schipp, Stan Fischer, and Ginny and Lee Begle. The chauffeurs do not go into the appointments with the sisters, but enjoy driving them.

Stan Fischer recalls a few trips to Evansville with Sister Mary George Kissel. "She's an interesting person to talk with," said Fischer. "I even took her to lunch to Long John Silvers."

Fischer and Dick Mohr were recently also working on putting screens on the shelter house near Madonna Lake. They both volunteer in various ways on a regular basis.

Seng and Lynn Belli now clean in church regularly and Patty Schroeder, a master gardener, has started caring for the Kordes Center gardens.

Colton Glenn organized a few Ferdinand Boy Scouts and their fathers to move trees that had been cut down and to clean up the woods on the way to the sisters' camp as his Eagle Scout project.

A youth group from McLeansboro, Illinois, has been coming to the monastery for years to volunteer and this year were here June 21 – 25. Among other projects, they tore down all the wallpaper in St. Gertrude Hall, in a matter of just a few minutes, and scrubbed the walls to remove the glue residue. They had intentions of painting the large room, but it was discovered the plaster needed fixed by professionals before any painting could be done.

This year, the sisters had a cook-out with the McLeansboro group of volunteers. "That was fun," says Sister Mary Philip. It was also another way the group got the opportunity to spend time with the sisters, to get to know them, and learn more about their life.

The McLeansboro group has a tradition of stopping work around 3 p.m., getting cleaned-up, and having individual "God Time," as they call it. They will also join the sisters for prayer and dinner. The group meets of an evening and discusses their "God moments," the times they saw God in the day, with the group.

Sister Michelle Mohr comments, "It mimics the rhythm of our life, the work and the prayer. Volunteering is one of the various ways that is considered a form of membership in our sister community. They come for what happens to them in the form of prayer and of being here. An Oblate has commented to me, 'I need to come and get my dome fix.'"

Sister Mary Philip smiles and quickly adds, "It is also a way to include the men, who obviously can't be sisters."

For more information on volunteering opportunities at the monastery, either individually or for a group, contact Sister Mary Philip Berger at 812-367-1411.

Above: A few of the volunteers from McLeansboro, Illinois, work on a project for the mission advancement department and share a laugh with Sister Doris Schepers (far left).

Sister Kathy on her murdered father and opposing the death penalty

by Sister Kathy Cash, OSB

My parents taught me from an early age to respect life. We didn't kill things in our house, except maybe the occasional fruit fly. We learned early on how to treat others with kindness and compassion, even if they had done something to hurt us. When we argued, we had to stop and listen to each others' positions rather than yelling and screaming. And most of all, my parents taught the three of us (my brother, sister and me) that it is never okay to kill another person.

I was born into a small house on what used to be known simply as the prison farm just outside of Eddyville, Kentucky. My dad was a guard and farm supervisor. Each day he took his crew of men out to milk the cows and complete the daily farm chores. But his time with his prisoners did not end when he clocked out at the end of the day. Each year he would sign out several of his guys so that they could go to midnight mass on Christmas Eve. My mom and

I would bake cookies to send to work with my father so that the guys could have a little snack on their break. From what I know, he never treated the men as though they were irreparably damaged goods. He didn't see them for the crimes they had committed but for the human beings that they were. He had an inherent trust in other people. My aunt once asked him if he was ever afraid of working among so many criminals. He responded that they didn't scare him – they were just people, too. Few ever tried to escape and if anyone ever did, Dad would hand over his truck keys immediately. He didn't even carry a gun. He liked working with and learning from the men on his crew. In fact, my father's attitude towards the men won him much respect among the prisoners as well as his superiors. He was well-liked by everyone.

On May 9, 1986, my dad set off for work early in the morning. He met with his crew and took them out to work. However, work halted quickly when the tractor they had planned on using broke unexpectedly. My father asked one man, William Thompson, to stay with him to fix the tractor and sent the rest of the crew on to begin the day's work. Shortly after the other men left the two of them alone, my father leaned over to check something. Mr. Thompson took a wrench that the two had been using and hit my father repeatedly in the head. This was my father, a man who respected his men enough to stay after work for a talk, who had helped feed Thanksgiving dinner to his crew, who said that if anyone wanted to escape he would simply hand over the keys. And Mr. Thompson did not just hit him one time. Reports showed that my father was struck in the head twelve times, though he must have been unconscious after the second or third strike. My father, of course, had no chance. He was dead long before his supervisors found him half an hour later. I was only three years old when I became a victims' family member, when I lost my father to murder.



In Kentucky there is no gray area when it comes to killing a prison guard. Once convicted of this crime, the punishment is almost automatic — death by lethal injection. By October of that year, Mr. Thompson found himself still in my beautiful hometown of Eddyville, but now on the other side of the city in the maximum security state penitentiary, where he now bore the label of death row inmate. In a town with two state prisons, Kentucky's law is held with high regard. Many friends spoke highly of the fate of Mr. Thompson. My mother, though, did not agree.

My mother is a truly amazing woman. She is a woman of faith who faced incredible hardship in her life. Her life changed drastically that morning in early May. She lost her husband and her home. She lost the father of her three children and she lost the security most feel in small town life. All of these things, and so many more, had been ripped unjustly from her by a man that she knew, someone she had baked cookies for and even prepared meals for. But my mother was not vengeful. From what I'm told (though I have little memory) she almost immediately began working to change Kentucky's law. She did not believe that the death penalty should be invoked in this case or in any case. When she had the chance, she would grab a politician's ear. She wrote letters to lobbyists. She pushed for life sentences that would keep such dangerous prisoners locked up with no possibility for parole. She was known among pro-life advocates in Kentucky. But in our small town, people preferred that she keep her mouth shut. Most people who live there are either prison employees or are related to one. Those citizens who work day in and day out with the most dangerous prisoners in the state feel that the only way to protect their own lives is to have laws that advocate strict and sure punishment. They believe that the death penalty is the only way to keep prisoners from attempting more murders like my father's. And so my mother learned to be quiet, to keep peace. But she never said she agreed with it.

My mother's witness was strong for me. She taught me a lot about right and wrong. I learned from her that the eye-for-an-eye policy does not lead to a just world. When I was 16, Mr. Thompson's attorneys called for an appeal of the sentence. By that time, I was old enough to think for myself. I realized that I had always been against the death penalty just because my mother told me that was how I ought to feel. I remember finally coming to terms with exactly what had happened to my father. I was angry at Mr. Thompson for taking my dad away from me. I was upset with the system that had allowed such a dangerous man to be

in a minimum security prison. I was sad that my father would never be around to see me play soccer or graduate from high school. But as I began to grapple with all of the issues, I realized that even in my anger and sadness, my sense of right and wrong was the same as it had always been. I did agree with my mother. Killing is not okay. I believe in life and in a consistent life ethic. To me, believing in life means believing that all life is of God, all life deserves respect and no human can make a judgment on who should live or die.

Proponents of the death penalty say that the execution can help bring closure to the victim's friends and family. For me this is not theory, it is real life. I cannot speak for all victims' families, but I can say this: I will not feel any better knowing that Mr. Thompson is dead. I watched my grandmother live 28 years of her life suffering the loss of her son. If Mr. Thompson ends up executed (he remains on death row to this day), there will then be two mothers grieving the loss of their sons, two graves filled with murdered men, and two families missing a loved one. I cannot understand how this is considered justice. Even at the height of my angry period, I have never had any sense that the death of another man will make my father's death any more justified.

I asked to share this with you today because I wanted you to know about my dad and my mom and the wonderful people who raised me. I wanted you to know that for me capital punishment is beyond an academic topic. I wanted you to know that the topic of the death penalty stirs in me many thoughts and feelings in a profoundly personal way. Each morning that we as a community pray for someone who is scheduled to be executed, we also pray for all victims of violence. I wanted you to know that each time you say that prayer, you are praying for my father, for my family, for me. And, in all likelihood, someday you will also be praying for a man named William Eugene Thompson, scheduled to be executed in the state of Kentucky, who, for better or for worse, is forever connected to my life story. And I will be praying for him, too.

(Note: Sister Kathy is working as a research assistant at the University of Louisville in Louisville, Kentucky, where she is also working on her doctoral dissertation. She gave this speech to the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand some time ago. An edited version of the speech was also recently published in the Catholics Mobilizing Network newsletter.) ■



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Calendar of Events

2015

October 16-18	Come & See Weekend
October 17	Benedictine Hills Pilgrimage
October 17	Perpetual Profession
October 18	Rite of Oblation of Oblates
October 24	Mechtilde Series – Lecture on “Music and the Spiritual Journey”
October 25	Diamond Jubilee Celebration
November 20	Christkindlmarkt Eve Performance
November 21-22	Christkindlmarkt in Ferdinand
December 13	Music students' Christmas recital
December 24	Christmas Eve services in the monastery church

2016

January 1-3	Come and See Weekend
January 17	Oblate Meeting
February 20	Oblate Meeting
March 18-20	Come and See Weekend

From Facebook...

Comments from our post about the mission ceremony on July 25, 2015

May God continue to Bless you and all your hard work. The community of Sisters have blessed us in so many ways. Thank you — Carla Wildeman



God bless all of you! You have served Him for so many, many years and now, once again each of you, as part of your community, has committed to Him another year of service. Belated happy St. Benedict's feast day and many blessings be yours in the coming year. You're in my prayers daily, including praying for an increase in vocations. — Agnese Bartlett

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