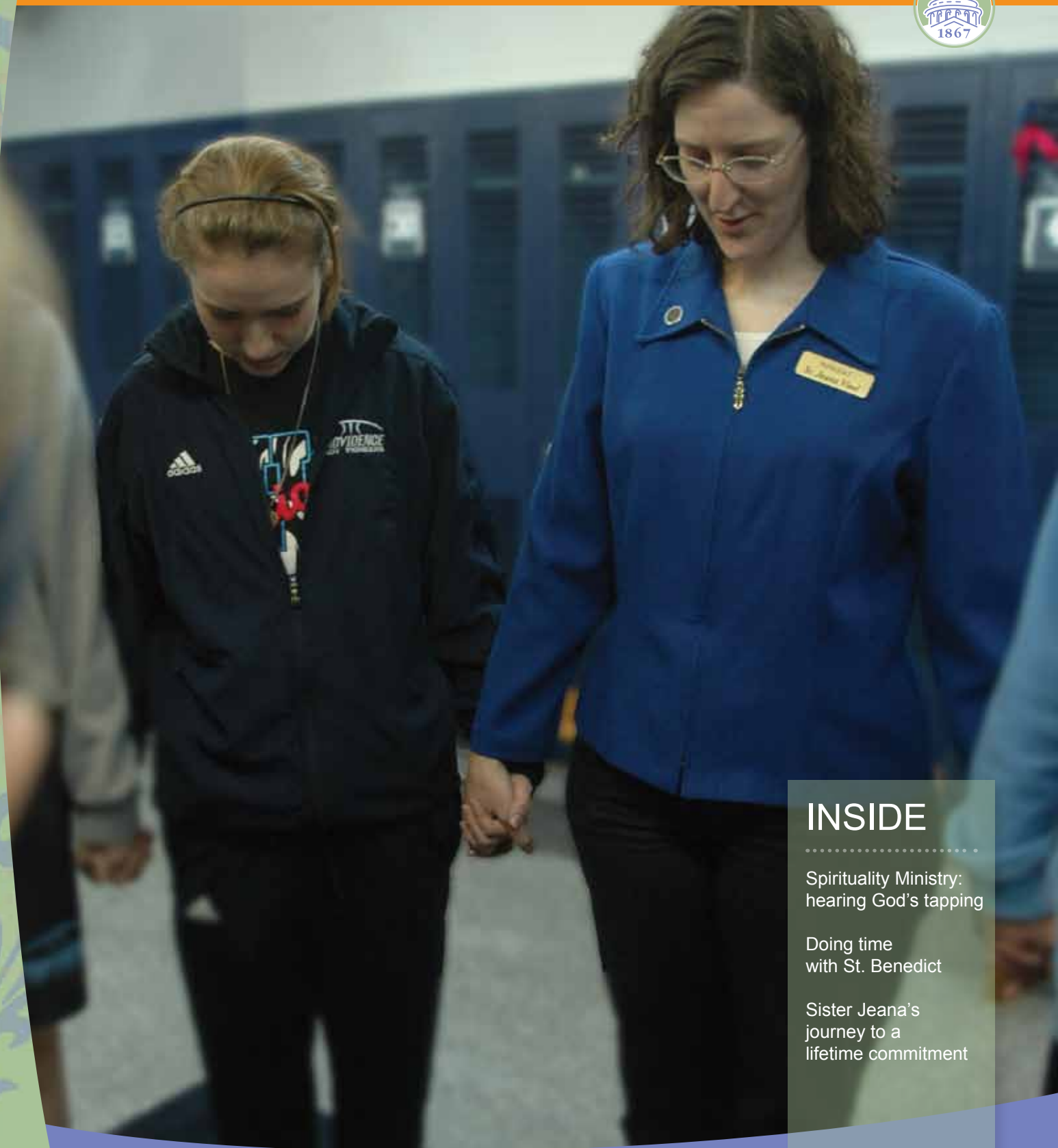


Seek. Pray. Share.

Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand, Indiana

VOLUME 2 NUMBER 2 SPRING 2011



INSIDE

Spirituality Ministry:
hearing God's tapping

Doing time
with St. Benedict

Sister Jeana's
journey to a
lifetime commitment

From small beginnings...



In 1867, four young women (ages 19, 22, 23, and 33) arrived in Ferdinand from our motherhouse, St. Walburg Monastery in Covington, Kentucky. They were responding to a request for German-speaking sisters to teach in the town. These four young Benedictine sisters founded Monastery Immaculate Conception. They listened to the call of God and journeyed to southern Indiana. From those small beginnings, this community has grown and thrived.

Since 1867, our sisters have given over 5,000 years of service to southern Indiana and the surrounding area. Most have been educators, teaching in all grades — pre-school, K through 12, and college. Some of our sisters went on to found six other monasteries that became independent — in Arkansas, Indiana, North Dakota, California, Louisiana, and Kentucky. And we established missions in Guatemala and Peru.

Our sisters have touched the lives of thousands of people in the Diocese of Evansville and in the archdioceses of Indianapolis and Louisville, as well as many other people in the diverse places we've ministered.

Ministry is a central focus of our lives! Our service to the people of God flows out of our commitment to prayer, hospitality, service, and community life. In Ferdinand, we love and support one another in ways that enable us to live these values both here and in the world as we minister. Because we live as a family, the care of those who are in need within our community is a very high priority for us. Chief

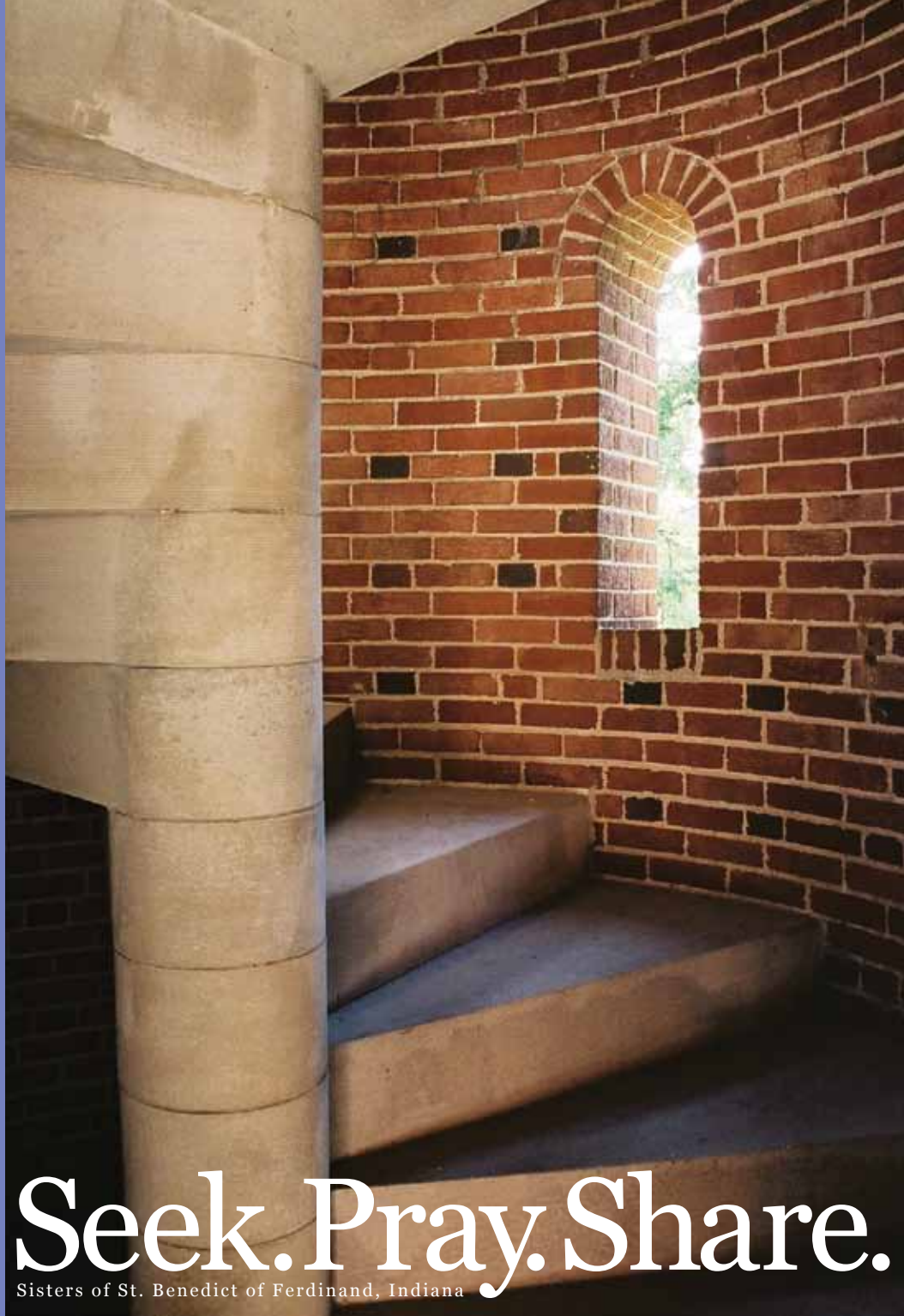
among those in need are our own senior sisters, who co-labored in Christian ministry for years for little or no salary and benefits. Accordingly, most of our care comes from our own limited funding. As Benedictines, we believe it is our privilege and responsibility to care for our senior sisters here at the monastery so they are still in the midst of the community.

However, our commitment is not limited to our own Benedictine community. Beyond our walls, we are compelled by our calling to minister to the people of southwestern Indiana and northern Kentucky in the name of Christ. To do so, we must continually plan for our future, striving to build a solid foundation so we may continue to live the monastic life well and serve the people of this area. Planning sometimes requires change, and we anticipate making several changes in the next few years that will improve our ability to serve others. One significant change will be moving our Spirituality Ministry and other activities up to the monastery quadrangle. That will enable us to better serve the thousands of people who come to the monastery each year for spiritual renewal, retreat, and reflection.

As we plan for our future, we remain dedicated to serving the people of God for many years to come through education, parish ministry, health care, social services, and ministry to the marginalized. In the coming months, you will hear more details as we move forward in facilitating these changes. We ask that you pray for us as we seek God's direction and continued favor. We pray for you daily. In addition, we invite you to seek God's guidance in determining how you might become engaged with our efforts. We deeply appreciate the many ways that you support and encourage us, and we look forward to journeying with you.

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

Sister Kristine Anne Harpenau, OSB
Prioress



Seek.Pray.Share.

Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand, Indiana

From the Prioress	i	Journeying with Sister Jeana	14
Spirituality Ministry: helping us hear the tapping of God	2	Blessed are those who teach struggling kids to read	18
Doing time with St. Benedict	7	How the sisters touch lives	20
News from the Dome	11	Perspectives	21

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.

CONTENTS



Cover: Sister Jeana Visel prays with the Our Lady of Providence girls basketball team the evening before a game. (Bill Sheets Photography, Louisville, Kentucky)



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.



Sister Maria Tasto connects with the audience at a Centering Prayer workshop.

Spirituality Ministry: helping us hear the tapping of God

by Greg Eckerle

If you're searching for something in your life, but you're not sure what it is, you've got plenty of company.

Maybe you were a model student, landed a great job, worked your way up the corporate ladder because that's what you were expected to do, put in more and more hours as your bank account grew fatter and fatter, but you saw less and less of your family. And you begin to wonder.

Or maybe you weren't a model student, just slid through school, took any kind of job to pay the bills, and suddenly it's years later, and you begin to wonder.

Or you spend a lot of time, and money, trying to prove that you really are a success. There's always something new you have to have, and you begin to wonder.

And then, horrors upon horrors, you see your children start to follow a similar path, a path that leads to — where? And you wonder some more, a lot more.

Is this all there is in life?

Who can possibly help me find something deeper?

Sister Maria Tasto, program director of the Spirituality Ministry of the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand, has often seen the puzzled, searching faces.

"They're not sure what it is, but they're just not finding in life the happiness they thought," she says.

Beginning their search with the Spirituality Ministry group at the monastery is a good first step.

There's something about the monastery grounds, from the majestic dome to the peaceful surroundings, that invites the searchers in. But it's who they talk with after they arrive, the Benedictine sisters, that really gets their journey jump-started.

“We respond to the needs of those who are searching for the meaning and purpose of their lives, and who desire a deeper relationship with God.”

The Spirituality Ministry sisters firmly believe they are on this earth to let God work through them to help people along on their journeys. It could be helping them get immersed in Scripture, or discussing issues in spiritual direction sessions or in one of the many Spirituality Ministry programs and retreats, or guiding them in a prayer form that will work best for them, or maybe simply listening to one's troubles and not passing judgment.

What makes the sisters so uniquely qualified to help on one's journey?

Take a look at their mission, who they are, how they live their life, and how they share that life. Tie it into one neat package, and it's apparent why thousands have sought out the Ferdinand Benedictines for help since 1867.

The group's mission is to “collaborate with others in sharing the Gospel values through the lens of our Benedictine spirituality.” Its vision is “to be a vibrant and collaborative source for learning and for integrating the values, tools, and wisdom of the Benedictine tradition.” The sisters meet with both individuals and organizations.

Says Sister Maria, “We respond to the needs of those who are searching for the meaning and purpose of their lives, and who desire a deeper relationship with God.

“The Gospels reveal who God is in the person of Jesus. Jesus is open to all, loving unconditionally, responding to all with forgiveness and mercy. Benedictine spirituality captures this openness in our commitment to hospitality. In our programs we draw upon the Scriptures to explore how we might live our lives in this same spirit of generosity.”

Visitors to the monastery often talk about the sense of peace they feel when attending a program or walking the grounds. The environment is perfect for that, but it's the sisters who bring it to life. They exude a presence of peace — that's who they are — and the sisters' choice on how they live their lives, a life dedicated to prayer and service to others, motivates visitors to explore the meaning and purpose of their own lives and to find the time to nourish their inner spirit.

The phrase “what our Benedictine community takes for granted is what the public needs” is often heard in meetings at the monastery.

“Values integral for us have become ‘second nature’ to us,” says Sister Maria. “For example, being hospitable is just who we are and how we live. In a world plagued by violence, there's a tremendous need for a safe place where people can have silence and time to reflect on all they're dealing with, and to be reaffirmed in God's unconditional love for them.

“Our life of prayer and work brings us an inner peace, which is a gift our world so desperately needs. Hopefully our presence radiates that peace and gives people hope.”

The sisters feel their ministries are effective because they flow out of their lives, and lifestyles, they share together. The sisters are there every day supporting each other, praying, working and eating together, generating an atmosphere that thrives on seeking God in the midst of the ordinary. No matter what sort of issue a sister is dealing with, there are plenty of other sisters to help her through it. So if a lay person is looking to build a better relationship with God, a natural place to start is with a community of sisters that focuses on that all day, every day, year after year.

Such togetherness grows and improves the entire group. And brings them to knowing who they are and who God is, and to then share the fruits of that understanding with others searching for help.

People have told Sister Maria that participating in Spirituality Ministry activities has changed their lives.

“Sometimes it gives people hope in the midst of suffering, nourishes their faith at a time of darkness, helps them discern a decision at a crucial time, and helps them recognize and give thanks for God's many blessings in their lives. Many say it makes them more accepting of differences in others. As we sisters truly listen as others share their life experiences, we help them notice how God is calling them to be fully themselves.”

The sisters are grateful they can be instruments of God in touching the lives of many. But they are quick to point out it's not just the sisters that God is working through, but through all of us. God reaches out to each of us through each other, so we all benefit.

Continued

Sister Kathryn Huber speaks at a
“Grieving Our Losses” program.

Sister Kathryn Huber, a member of the Spirituality Ministry, points to how the sisters continually talk about the importance of developing a relationship with God. She also cites a key statement recently shared by Pope Benedict XVI with seminarians in Rome — that Christianity is not a set of moral rules, but a path to a relationship with God, who is love. “I think people want that,” she says softly, sincerely. And that is exactly what the sisters are all about delivering.

Pope Benedict XVI also shared that Christians are not so much called to obedience as to accepting God’s love in Jesus, and acting in a way that demonstrates how God’s love has transformed them. That, too, is what the sisters are all about. And a big reason why people come to the sisters for help. As professional religious, not only do the sisters know something about the topic of spirituality, but they live it. They ooze peacefulness.

“St. Benedict says we live this way of life and our hearts expand,” says Sister Kathryn, with the utmost feeling. “Everyone should feel accepted and respected, just because they are a human being. St. Benedict also says to make this journey with the Gospel as our guide. When people struggle with issues in our society, I always say, ‘And what does the Gospel say?’ We help people pray with the Scriptures, sit with the Gospel, and to understand what Jesus teaches.”

She said we all need to tell our story, we all need someone to hear our story, and we all need someone to receive it without judgment. That’s what the Gospels tell us Jesus did, and that’s what the sisters feel they’re called to do, particularly listening and withholding judgment on whoever comes to them.

“People tend to judge themselves so much,” says Sister Maria. “Their fear is that others will judge them, too. So they keep their guard up.”

With the sisters, one can keep their guard down. There is no judging going on.

The sisters maintain the greatest guidance we have is the Scriptures. But it takes time to understand the passages, to take them deep inside oneself, and to let them improve one’s life. By spending so much time every day with the Scriptures, the sisters become specialists at walking with others through the wisdom of the Gospels.



One song the sisters sing is about the hunger in the land, not for food, but for every word that comes from God. The trick is to take the time to soak in the Scriptures, and then to just reflect. We all need that quiet time. One woman at a monastery workshop said her quiet time was the wash line, that “my wash line is my line to God.” Others put Jesus in their car’s passenger seat, saying their vehicle is their last place of solitude and quiet.

Both Sister Maria and Sister Kathryn cite people’s egos as a challenge in spiritual journeys. The drive for more money, a bigger house, a fancier car, or more prestige often delays one’s journey.

“I can’t begin to imagine what our world would be like if we didn’t trust in possessions,” laughed Sister Maria. “We should trust in God rather than possessions. That’s the challenge, isn’t it? Actually, in our lives as Benedictine monastics, that’s really what it’s all about. We don’t take a vow of poverty, but we share our goods in common. We do have some of our own personal items, but the intent is to know that God is really our security. That’s the truth we’re trying to live out. We don’t always do it very well, but ideally that’s what the vows are all about.”

That’s why the sisters make such good companions for those that are hurting, or looking for more. Because the sisters have struggled, too. But they are honest about it, and are open to walking with God, every single day, to deal with it. And are open to walking with others on their journeys.

“People usually approach life from a position of scarcity,” says Sister Maria. “God approaches life from a position of abundance. For us there is never enough; for God there is more than enough to go around.”

A tombstone inscription for an unknown male infant, in a cemetery near the monastery, who has helped several people heal spiritually.

Says Sister Kathryn, “When I think of the Christian journey, I always say it’s inward and outward. It’s coming to know God, inwardly, and then living this in my daily life.”

A key moment in Sister Kathryn’s life was when she came face-to-face with her own ego long ago as an elementary school principal.

“I wanted to be the best principal there could be. But how would I know? And my ego wondered, how would everybody else know, too? The ego wanted the recognition. Then I was elected to a state office in the Indiana Elementary Principals Association. I remember standing up at my desk and saying, ‘I think I’ve arrived.’ And before I got to the corner of my desk, I literally said, ‘And so what?’ Right then I got serious about seeking spiritual direction. And I think that reaction made me more effective in my job. I wasn’t trying to stroke the ego any more, but doing what needed to be done because it was the better thing to do.

“So I always think it’s amazing how God works in people’s lives, if we are aware. We can’t respond unless we are aware.”

It’s a phrase she says often, softly, with feeling — “awareness, awareness, awareness” — of who you’re with, what they’re saying, and how God is in the midst of the ordinary, every day of our lives.

There are many stories of how the Spirituality Ministry team has helped those in need. Sister Kathryn recalled one heart-wrenching story, which she was given permission to share, so it could benefit others.

A woman confided to Sister Kathryn that, as a young teenager, she was a victim of incest, and became pregnant by a family member. Later, the girl, not knowing where she was being taken, and against her choice, was taken to a back alley abortion clinic. Her twins were aborted. She eventually dealt with it psychologically, but came to the sisters searching for help on finding spiritual healing. Sister Kathryn suggested she spend some quiet time at the tombstone of an unknown dead male infant in a nearby cemetery, and to particularly note the marker’s inscription — “A Child of God Asleep in Jesus’ Arms.” The woman spent a lot of time at that grave. It helped her heal spiritually.



“I always prayed that this infant’s life would not be in vain,” says Sister Kathryn. “It was so traumatic, a dead infant being found, abandoned. But look how life-giving that infant was to the woman who came searching for help. And he has companioned several other women trying to deal with similar circumstances.”

One of Sister Maria’s favorite stories was of a woman with an addiction problem, who “always did everything over the top; she got the adrenaline rush from the risk.” But her whole world came crashing down about three years ago. She went into treatment, and still attends recovery groups.



Sister Karen Joseph emphasizes the importance of personal awareness during a Compassionate Care presentation to employees of Memorial Hospital of Jasper, Indiana.

Says Sister Maria, “She told me recently, ‘I never noticed anything unless it was out there huge, but I’m beginning to hear the quiet tapping of God in simple, ordinary, daily events; just a little tapping.’ I thought that was such a beautiful expression.”

Sister Karen Joseph of the Spirituality Ministry group notes that “people feel nourished when they come here because they meet a God of love and compassion that the sisters speak of.” Much of that has its roots in how seriously the sisters take the value of hospitality as presented by St. Benedict.

“St. Benedict said every guest was to be treated as Christ himself, and that always strikes people,” says Sister Karen. One reason she was attracted to Ferdinand was because of the joy she felt in the community.

“I hope people come to Spirituality Ministry activities because they see us as happy people who live lives of meaning, and they see they can share in that. And visitors will tell me ‘you are a happy community, you really do love each other!’”

Sister Karen senses the spirit and values of St. Benedict are especially appealing to people today — the priority he placed on balancing work and prayer, the hospitable way we should treat each other, and his way of living the Gospel in a non-violent manner.

“It’s an alternative way of living that is a good spirituality for the 21st century,” says Sister Karen. “It’s something everybody can do.”

Sister Celeste Boda, another member of the Spirituality Ministry group, thinks Benedictines offer a critical service for today’s world.

“Society looks for so many material things,” she says. “But there is a search for something deeper than ourselves. It’s at the heart and soul of people, whether they know it or not. The Benedictines’ lives are dedicated to that search. Our life is very ordinary, yet we understand our searching for God together brings us together. We exude that search for God in a very ordinary way, which turns into a very unique way.

“In our materialistic society, most answer that search for something ‘deeper’ by acquiring stuff, but that doesn’t really take care of the deep inner search. There is an alternative, and that’s to be open to God as the only answer to realizing that depth. That’s a lifetime immersion for Benedictines.”

As Sister Maria recently shared with the sisters in a reflection, “Our world is very much in need of repentance. War, hunger, poverty, prejudice, and violence all result from a perspective of scarcity, from our small ego-centered way of thinking. As we slowly let go of our distortions and let our cup be filled with the abundance of God as expressed in the Scriptures, we will become women who bespeak by our very presence God’s promise.”

And Sister Kathryn poignantly remembers just one reading from her profession, so many years ago, which stated simply “on this holy mountain, people will flock.”

She says, “I think that’s part of the Spirituality Ministry. That people will come here to be nurtured, people will come here to be fed, and people will come here to find their way.”



Doing time with St. Benedict

by Greg Eckert

John Wallace had to go to prison to be set free.

To be freed from himself and a life full of devastating addictions. To be free to bury the early John Wallace that was sentenced to 65 years for murder. And to be free in his mind to become an Oblate of the Sisters of St. Benedict, to try to put his shattered life back together, and to serve others rather than always thinking of himself.

Wallace, 36, is incarcerated at Wabash Valley Correctional Facility in Carlisle, Indiana. He's been imprisoned since age 22. His earliest possible release date is February 22, 2027.

"I'm responsible, I'm guilty," said Wallace. "I know I'm here to pay for my crimes." But he felt there had to be more to his life than that.

And for Wallace, there is — thanks to many who appeared out of nowhere to help him, including Sister Mary Victor Kercher of the Ferdinand Benedictines' Oblate Leadership Team.

"To have such a prisoner on our Oblate list is a special gift," said Sister Mary Victor. "The Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 25, speaks to us about 'visiting the prisoner.' The sisters and our Oblate community are aware of and support such a ministry."

Wallace admits his early religious life had "no substance to it." Nor did he have any stability.

"My father wasn't in my life," he said. "Mom did the best she could, but I was hard-headed. The damage was done early. Mom said dad gave me drugs at an early age. He and his buddies were partying, feeding me whatever drugs they were doing and watching me run around the house and falling. They thought it was funny.

"Mom divorced him when I was about five. He was an alcoholic and abusive."



Sister Mary Victor
Kercher

“I’m responsible, I’m guilty,” said Wallace. “I know I’m here to pay for my crimes.” But he felt there had to be more to his life than that.

A 5th grade teacher told Wallace he never would amount to anything, and banished him to sit out in the hallway. A classmate later introduced him to alcohol at age 13. That feeling of being “on top of the world” drove away his emptiness, so his days then existed to stay intoxicated, and his life spiraled out of control. His grandmother kept telling him that “God loves you,” but he could never figure out why.

“My crime is the result of me being totally strung out. Me and my friend, who was convicted with me, had been up for like seven days straight without any sleep, on meth. I chose to do drugs, so I’m responsible. I deserve to be here.”

After being arrested, Wallace sat disconsolate in his cell, knowing he had disgraced his family, feeling he was nothing and didn’t deserve to live, and contemplating suicide. Then a lady clerk who had been conducting a Bible study down the hallway peeked her head around the corner.

“I was ashamed, I was crying,” said Wallace. “She told me, ‘God’s not done with you, don’t give up.’ She gave me a Scripture, and said she wanted me to keep it the rest of my life. Jeremiah 29:11. It said I know the plans I have for you. It just spoke to me. I realized maybe there is something that’s redeemable.”



John Wallace lives in this cell house at Wabash Valley Correctional Facility.

His first prison stop was Michigan City, where he got into immediate trouble and was put into a special cell house. It was total chaos there, with inmates screaming and threatening each other.

“It was scary. I realized I am in hell,” said Wallace, slowly, softly, seriously. “I don’t want this. It all came in on me. I started crying. I said, ‘God, do what you want with me. I’m open.’ I believe that day was when things started falling in place.”

He flipped through a Bible that night his grandmother had sent him, literally looking for help.

“I came across John 3:16,” he said. “That night, for some reason, it meant something to me. Something inside me woke up.”

He was later transferred to Wabash Valley, where he earned his college degree, joined religious activities, and volunteered to be in the P.L.U.S. program (Purposeful Living Units Serve). P.L.U.S., a prisoner re-entry initiative based on faith and character, focuses on strengthening spiritual, moral, and character development.

Wallace began studying religion, and reading religious books.

“I was in prison, and it’s awkward to say, but for the first time I was living,” said Wallace. “I was doing what I should have been doing on the street.”

He read about St. Benedict in *The Seven Storey Mountain*, the autobiography of Thomas Merton, and was hooked because the story was like his own — a life of chaos, no stability, no roots. Then he read the book *How to Be a Monastic and Not Leave Your Day Job – An Invitation to Oblate Life*, by Brother Benet Tvedten, a monk at Blue Cloud Abbey in South Dakota.

“I started practicing stability, silence, and solitude without knowing what it meant to be an Oblate,” said Wallace. “I prayed the Liturgy of the Hours. I realized a centering going on within me. I felt like I had direction. So I wrote Brother Benet, he wrote back, telling me about Oblation. He suggested I write the sisters at Ferdinand. I did, and Sister Mary Victor responded. I owe a great deal to her.”

In a 2008 letter to her, Wallace wrote, “As an incarcerated person it is very hard to find someone, let alone a whole community, to take you seriously and show interest in your spiritual formation.”

An icon Wallace drew for Sister Mary Victor is on display in the Oblates office in the monastery.

He pulled out the St. Benedict medal that Sister Mary Victor had given him during her visit to the prison. He wears it constantly on a chain around his neck. He recalled her holding the medal for a long time before giving it to him. He cherishes the memory, and the medal.

"I feel blessed to work with, support, and journey with John," said Sister Mary Victor. "Reviewing my life as a Benedictine, this is another way I have been privileged to seek out, pray for, and share our gifts and resources with others, no matter their creed, color, language, or life experiences.

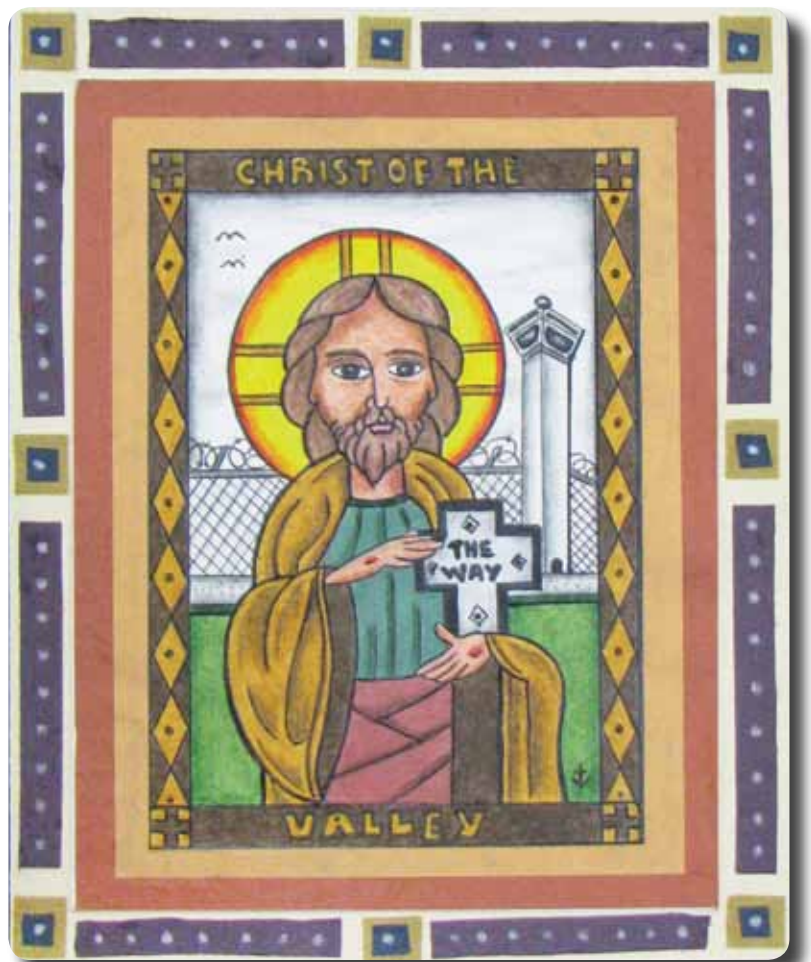
"John is no longer alone in his search. He belongs to an Oblate community in South Dakota and Indiana who also search for God and desire to live a productive life, a life of service."

Father Bob Nemergut loaned Wallace a copy of the Rule of St. Benedict. Wallace took it so seriously that "I copied it all out by hand so I could have my own copy."

He noticed how the Rule applied to prison life. If you hear the Lord, don't harden your heart. Open your heart to him, and listen. Wallace knew he hadn't listened his entire life, that he insisted on doing his own thing before. So he threw off the years of disobedience and started down a new path. He made his Oblation in July 2008.

Sister Mary Victor notes how Wallace has attended many classes and read books by Merton, Sister Joan Chittister, and St. Teresa of Avila. That was evidence enough for her of his sincerity, and for her to encourage him in his quest for growth in his relationship with God, himself, and others. She added that the Ferdinand Oblates support him in his search for growth, and hope for the future.

The most rewarding part for Wallace to being an Oblate is knowing he has a community praying for him. He was genuinely touched on his last birthday when he received a card from Oblate Sandy Turner, saying the Ferdinand Oblates were thinking about him and praying for him.



Sister Mary Victor said, "He speaks of the mutual support of prayer, us for him, and him for us. Sometimes it is a challenge to know who is the giver and who is the receiver, and who is the teacher and who is the learner.

"His openness indicates a man of purpose and looking to a future with faith and hope."

Being an Oblate has helped Wallace in prison because living the Rule of St. Benedict has given him a path, and brought order and stability to his life. He also said being an Oblate has helped him to "grow up" and deepened his relationship with God.

He is a fan of Sister Joan Chittister's monthly publication "The Monastic Way," which she incorporates into her prison ministry. He wrote to her about how he considers his prison cell his monastic cell, and she published his letter under the heading "A new monastery."

Wallace also helped the late Sister Geraldine Hedinger — he facilitated one of her "Why Catholic?" discussion groups she formed for inmates at the prison.

He admits there are doubters of his changes, those who scoff that he is simply trying to escape through something that isn't real.



Wallace says being an Oblate in prison helps him because living the Rule of St. Benedict has given him a path and brought order and stability to his life.

"No," said Wallace, "following these rules, following the monastic disciplines of prayer, solitude and fasting, have made me who I am today." He does all he can to keep his earlier self buried.

He sometimes feels he can't contribute to society from inside the prison walls, but he does through his volunteer work for P.L.U.S. (which doesn't reduce his sentence), and through his artistic talents. He gives away his drawings to inmates, to families of inmates, and he sent a special one to Sister Mary Victor.

He also has a copy of that special icon displayed in his cell. It depicts Christ in front of the prison's barbed wire fence and guard tower, holding a cross inscribed "The Way."

"The tower represents God," said Wallace. "He's always watching, always present no matter where you're at. The two birds represent the Old and New Testament."

The inscription "The Way" has a deep symbolism for Wallace. To get rid of the earlier version of himself, the person who always wanted everything his way, he felt "The Way" to do that was to pick up the cross and follow Christ. For Christ to be resurrected in Wallace's life, the old John Wallace had to die.

"To me, Christ is my savior, my teacher, my guide, and this is 'The Way,'" he said.

Besides drawing and reading, Wallace makes continual notes for a possible book about his life, which he's thought about titling "Doing Time With St. Benedict." He would reflect on how the Rule of St. Benedict has changed his life and how he lives by it today.

Asked if being an Oblate has helped him come to grips with what happened that put him into prison, Wallace responded, "Yes, being an Oblate and the P.L.U.S. program. My whole life it's been take, take, take, you've got to get what John needs. Through spirituality with St. Benedict, it's not about taking. It's what you can contribute.

"Prayer and meditation brought me to that awareness of, hey, I'm a jerk and I need to change. There are people that are locked away that are doing good work, that are making changes. Not everybody that comes out of prison is bad."

Who are Oblates?

Oblates of St. Benedict are Christian women and men from all walks of life who associate themselves with a specific Benedictine monastery to enrich their way of life. They desire to share the prayer and work of the monastery in order to spread the spirit of St. Benedict.



To learn more about the Oblates of St. Benedict, please visit thedome.org/Oblates.

NEWS from the Dome

Ferdinand sisters celebrate jubilees

Four sisters celebrated special anniversaries of their religious profession on Sunday, October 31, at the monastery. Sisters Wilma Davis, Mary George Kissel, and Theresita Schenk observed the 70th anniversary of their monastic profession, and Sister Mary Leah Baehl celebrated her 60th anniversary.

Sister Wilma, a native of Columbus, Indiana, was a founding member of Queen of Peace Monastery in Belcourt, North Dakota, established by the Ferdinand Benedictines, and she served there 47 years. In 2004 she transferred back to the Ferdinand monastery, where she did support services and served on the Benedictine Oblate Team. She currently serves in the ministry of prayer.

Sister Mary George, a native of Evansville, has been a teacher, principal, reading therapist, and missionary. In 1975, she established The Reading Carrel in Evansville for children with reading problems and learning disabilities. She continues to serve there as director and teacher.

Sister Theresita, a native of St. Philip, taught music for almost 60 years at schools and colleges and served as an organist in the Academy and parishes where she taught. At the monastery, she has served as liturgist, organist, and composer of liturgical music. Currently, she gives music lessons, plays the organ, and composes music.

Sister Mary Leah, a native of Evansville, has been at Monasterio Paz de la Cruz, a monastery established by the Ferdinand Benedictines in Morropón, Peru, for 32 years. There she has served in pastoral ministry, peace and justice work, teaching, and ministry to the elderly and homeless. Currently, she teaches English and ministers in a nursing home.



Front: Sister Wilma Davis; back: Sister Theresita Schenk, Sister Mary George Kissel, and Sister Mary Leah Baehl

Sister Karen Joseph transfers to Ferdinand monastery

Sister Karen Joseph, a Benedictine Sister of Perpetual Adoration, made a permanent transfer from the Benedictine monastery in Clyde, Missouri, to the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand in a ceremony during Evening Prayer on September 19 at the monastery.



Sister Karen, a native of Olean, New York, serves as assistant director of Spirituality Ministry.

Sister shares reflections on the rosary

When Sister Madonna Helmer celebrated her golden jubilee as a Sister of St. Benedict in 2006, she felt there was "something special I should do as I met that milestone in my life." What she ended up doing, even though she never considered herself a writer, was write a book — *A Mysterious Journey: Reflections on the Mysteries of the Rosary*.



The book is available for \$9.99 at For Heaven's Sake, the monastery gift shop, and online at www.forheavensake.org.

Sister nominated for national principal award



Sister Karlene Sensmeier has been nominated for the Distinguished Principal Award given by the National Catholic Education Association. She is principal of St. Benedict Cathedral School in Evansville, where she first served as principal from 1971 to 1985 and now since 1997.

The award will be one of several given by the NCEA at its annual convention in April. Nominations come from the superintendents of schools in each diocese.



To learn more about these sisters, visit thedome.org for longer versions of these news stories.

Congress extends IRA charitable rollover

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



There's good news for seniors who want to make a gift to a favorite charity from their IRA account.

The Tax Relief, Unemployment Insurance Reauthorization, and Job Creation Act of 2010, which was signed last December, extends the IRA charitable rollover for 2011. For those persons 70 ½ years of age or older with IRA accounts, a provision in the law allows them

to have gifts of up to \$100,000 directly transferred to charities, such as the Sisters of St. Benedict, without their having to pay tax on the distribution.

The benefits to you when you make this type of gift from your IRA are:

- The transfer generates neither taxable income nor a tax deduction, so you will receive the benefit even if you do not itemize your tax deductions.
- The transfer may count against your unsatisfied required minimum distribution.
- You'll make an immediate impact on the ministries of the Sisters of St. Benedict, allowing you to witness the benefits of your generosity.

Simply direct the custodian of your IRA to transfer your gift directly to us to ensure that you will pay no tax on your distribution. Please call our office as well, so that we can ensure proper transfer of your contribution. Regardless of how you handle your tax return, this is a winning strategy because it allows you to avoid declaring income on your IRA charitable rollover distribution.

Only standard IRAs and Roth IRA accounts qualify under this law. Other retirement accounts, such as 401(k), 403(b), SEP, KEOGH, and SIMPLE IRA plans, cannot be used to make an IRA rollover gift.

"We are delighted that the IRA charitable rollover provision has been extended through 2011," said Sister Kristine Anne Harpenau, prioress. "It's a great opportunity for our donors to give to the Sisters of St. Benedict, or any charity, because of the tax savings they realize. It helps them to help us with our ministries, and we are so grateful."

To further assist our donors with tax planning, we are offering our new booklet, *Minimizing Your Income Taxes*. Please see the enclosed insert to request your free copy, or call Sister Barbara Lynn Schmitz at 888-649-1121, ext. 2648.



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

Women's philanthropy group awards grants to Ferdinand sisters

Women of the Rule, a philanthropy group affiliated with the Ferdinand Benedictines, awarded the group's first grants in November for four initiatives from among 14 proposed by the sisters:

- A new roof and gutters for the monastery in Morropón, Peru (\$4,500)
- A freezer for Simply Divine, the monastery bakery (\$6,657)
- Tuition for one year for three sisters working toward education degrees (\$13,000)
- Development of a long-range facility and property master plan (\$11,470.52).

After the grant recipients were announced, a member of Women of the Rule, who wanted to remain anonymous, offered to fund a fifth proposal — \$1,625 for scholarships for centering prayer programs for cancer patients and their caregivers.

Women of the Rule was publicly launched in June 2009 and has over 60 members.

Hildegard Health Center rated deficiency free

Hildegard Health Center, the 17-bed long-term nursing care facility in the monastery, received a deficiency-free rating from the Indiana State Department of Health in January.

The rating was the result of the annual Recertification and State Licensure Survey conducted by the Division of Long Term Care, Indiana State Department of Health, to determine if facilities participating in the Medicare and/or Medicaid programs are in compliance with federal requirements.

HHC was found to be in compliance, and no state or federal deficiencies were cited. This is the second consecutive year that HHC has received no deficiencies in the annual survey.

"The mutual respect and care that are demonstrated between the residents and staff promote an atmosphere for no deficiencies," said Sister Kathy Bilskie, HHC administrator. "We are blessed to have dedicated staff, and we are also thankful to have such wonderful women who live in Hildegard Health Center."

HHC received licensing and certification from the Indiana Department of Health on May 31, 2005. There are 17 sisters currently in HHC.

In memoriam

by Sister Paulette Seng



Sister Catherine Beach, 92, died September 5.

Sister Catherine's life was a beautiful blending of Martha and Mary in Luke's Gospel — a life of service and of prayer. Like Martha, she served others with great love and hospitality through her ministry in food services. And like Mary, the contemplative, she nourished the spirit.

She had a very practical nature — sewing, baking, cooking. But she also believed that beauty was essential for health of body and soul. After teaching school in her earliest years in community, Sister Catherine became a dietitian. Food preparation and presentation became her passion — her way of ministering to the whole person.

In her later years, she cultivated flower gardens and watched hummingbirds feed. Her ministry of prayer found expression in nature.



A welcoming smile and gentle, caring ways is how we remember **Sister Mercedes Emmert**, who died on February 10 at age 96. At her wake service, the assembly broke out in spontaneous song: "You are my sunshine.... You make me happy when skies are gray."

She had a wonderful sense of humor, a childlike innocence and simplicity, and great wisdom. So loving and loveable, humble, kind, and affirming.



Sister Mary Ruth Krack, 64, died February 2.

"Sister Mary Ruth will be remembered for her genuine, authentic spiritual care. The more severe the crisis, the greater was her ability to bring calm and empathy," said her supervisor at Bloomington Hospital, where Sister Mary Ruth was chaplain.

Being outdoors — hiking, camping, fishing, canoeing, cross-country skiing, bird watching — was "almost heaven" to her. Nature renewed her spirit.

She accepted the fact that she had terminal cancer and was at peace with her decision to discontinue treatment, but she didn't like the idea of having her life cut short. "There's so much more I want to do," she said. Yet, in her 64 years, she lived a full life, with energy, enthusiasm, and purpose.

Yet, she bore heavy burdens in her lifetime: worry, anxiety, and years with Alzheimer's. "Come to me all who are weary... and I will give you rest." Jesus' invitation comforted her. A few days before she died, she shared with one of the nurses, "My soul has moved forward. I am with Jesus, and I am at peace."



Complete obituaries and reflections for these sisters are posted at thedome.org.

Meditation Garden at Kordes Center

Volunteer Reen Gutsell and Sister Marilyn Schroering, facilities director at Kordes, work on a new meditation area that was dedicated to the late Sister Geraldine Hedinger last October. Volunteer Deanne Seifert and groundskeepers Dave Kern and Eric Pund also worked on the space, which includes a sitting area, abundant flowers and plants, a fountain, and stones etched with Sister Geraldine's words: "Be leaven. Be salt. Be light. Make a difference."





Sister Jeana reads her profession document before the community on October 2. Standing in the rear are Sister Kristine Anne Harpenau, prioress (left), and Sister Ann Francis Hillenbrand, her formation director (right).

Journeying with Sister Jeana

Last October, seven years after entering Monastery Immaculate Conception, Sister Jeana Visel made her perpetual monastic profession as a Sister of St. Benedict of Ferdinand.

She teaches theology to high school students, is chaplain for the girls basketball team, creates icons, and sings beautifully (she's been the singing angel who opens the town's Christkindlmarkt celebration). And she's a skilled writer, which is why we asked her to share thoughts from her journal as she moved toward making a permanent commitment to religious life.

Three of her early reflections appeared in last fall's issue of *Seek. Pray. Share*. Here's a selection from those remaining. We hope you enjoy accompanying her on this unique and sacred journey.

October 10, 2009

Yesterday I was back at the monastery for spiritual direction and my bimonthly meeting with Sister Kris [Harpenau]. I brought her my letter requesting to make final profession, and at our meeting, she had me read it aloud to her. She asked how it felt to speak it: honest, I guess. I have no delusions that this is going to be an easy life, or that I won't have to share in any hard decisions. At the same time, I am hopeful in the goodness and the enduring legacy of Benedictine life. God will be with us, even through the hard things that inevitably are coming.

October 24, 2009

Well, today I read my letter to community requesting to make final profession. I read it soberly, slowly, taking breaths often to get through sentences. It was blunt and honest about where I am and where our community is right now. Apparently I made a few sisters cry. One asked for a copy, as she considered it a "meditation" on our community. Thank God, it's delivered.

Sister Jeana Visel: Some biographical information

Age: 31

From: Winnebago, Illinois

Parents: Gerard and Gloria Visel

Siblings: Three brothers, one sister

Education

Bachelor's degree in religious studies from Kenyon College, Gambier, Ohio

Theology classes at Saint Meinrad School of Theology and the University of Notre Dame

Before entering

Worked in Chicago for two years as a pre-GED teacher and community literacy project assistant in the Jesuit Volunteer Corps

Ministry

In her fourth year teaching theology at Our Lady of Providence Junior-Senior High School, Clarksville, Indiana



Sister Jeana receives her ring from Sister Kristine Anne as a sign of unbroken fidelity to God and to her profession. The ring, worn by all perpetually professed sisters, signifies full incorporation into the monastic community. Sister Ann Francis is at right.

March 13, 2010

I am so relieved to be finished with this process: the Chapter met, they shared, and they voted me in! October 2nd I will make perpetual monastic profession here. Wow. It's a strange feeling to be able to share the news, to have nothing but time and particular preparations between me and that day now. The sisters said nothing but sweet, kind things at the microphones, and I could feel the power of blessing and prayer in the community room as the sisters in formation sang their blessing over me while we awaited the vote. The sweetness of the applause on our return to the Chapter room was matched only by my delight at my friend Sister Karen's [Joseph] reading her letter requesting to transfer to our community!

March 19, 2010

I finally made it to retreat! I've been going so hard lately that I'm exhausted, and I'm so ready to rest. Here I am, tired and hungry for God, hungering for a real sense of Jesus. Who is this Christ I'm going to marry? Who is this God? I hope that as the week unfolds I'll gain a deeper sense of God and Christ's great love, and I hope I'll come out more loving on the other end. God, guide my steps.

March 21, 2010

Today I walked out to camp in the rain and rocked in the porch swing for a good while, watching the rain drizzle on the lake, and I realized I was sad. I was sad for all the things I'm leaving behind for this life, all the dreams I have to let go. And so I came back and made a collage of "The Things We Leave Behind." A very good-looking guy looks you in the eye. A little girl leans against her mother's pregnant belly and looks up trustingly. A beautiful home, stylish clothes, and makeup and jewelry are there too. I trust that when one lays things down for Jesus, when one dies with Jesus, all is resurrected in some new, unforeseeable life. But you do have to grieve your losses before you can be free to celebrate the good things.

March 23, 2010

I made another collage today. Ella Fitzgerald sings her heart out. Martin Luther King preaches justice and speaks peace to the people. A quirky old woman and her dog sit with dignity. A beautiful young woman smiles confidently at you, while children whirl in their games. A rose arbor beckons, as pink roses draw you closer. This one speaks to not being afraid of the crucifixion. It speaks to living in the beauty of now, giving everything to life, seeking, radiating, living, hoping, praying, surrendering to the sweetness that is life lived for Christ.

July 31, 2010

I... thoroughly enjoyed meeting with Claude [Sister Mary Claude Croteau] for spiritual direction. It was good to articulate for her all

the blessings of the last month. I feel just so full of gratitude right now: thankful for quality time with my family, grateful for the time at Notre Dame to read, reflect, and pray, appreciative of all the outsider perspective on Benedictine life and the gift we bring to the world by being a model of community as the living Body of Christ. Coming from a community where we don't really talk about the contemplative life much, I'm so grateful to realize that we actually do live everything that Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross talk about — only quietly!...What a fantastic preparation for final profession.



Bishop Gerald A. Gettelfinger, of Evansville, congratulates Sister Jeana at the end of her profession ceremony. Sister Kristine Anne joins in the applause from the community and guests.



These reflections are only a small portion of Sister Jeana's journal entries as she journeyed to perpetual profession. You can read them all at thedome.org.

August 30, 2010

Mom called tonight....[She] suggested we sing "Holy Darkness" together for the recital I'll be doing that weekend. I love it. I looked at the words tonight, and the verses are so beautiful, befitting the mystery of profession and the mystery of pain and beauty intertwined. Thus is life.

September 9, 2010

Today one of the seniors stopped by my classroom and asked in his typical loud way, "Sister Jeana, when's your wedding?" "You mean my wedding with God?" I laughed. "Yeah!"...It made me smile that he would think of it as a wedding, because in my heart of hearts that's how I see it. Okay, it's weird, but I'm marrying God. I guess that's a statement to the world that God is in fact real enough to marry — real enough to commit your whole life to in a quite emotional way. In this I'm saying that you can have a relationship with God that is meaningful enough to exclude any other marital relationship.

September 29, 2010

Okay, it has to be said: Providence people are amazing! I was so grumpy this morning, and then we had our homecoming Mass. And at the end, the principal called me up in front of the whole student body, and they wanted to give me some gifts for profession. Yikes. So out comes this Vera Bradley bag, heavy enough with a laptop inside, and then a box they told me was a printer, so that I could continue my studies! And then a card with money raised by the students for icon painting stuff, and a check left over from what the faculty donated! I was shocked and utterly floored. No one's ever given me gifts that expensive, unless you count my college scholarships. The kids were just cheering. And after I looked baffled and surprised and utterly heartwarmed for a minute, they waited for me to speak. I had over 500 teenagers listening attentively as I talked about listening and praying to know your own vocation in life... it was amazing. And they had this huge card that the art teacher had decorated, signed by tons of juniors and seniors. What a heartwarming day, to be bowled over by their generosity and genuine care. We've come a long way together since I started teaching there in 2006. I am so blessed. Thank you, God!

October 1, 2010

It's the night before my final profession. I've now gone through the Rite of Renunciation, so in a sense, I'm halfway there already — I signed the paper giving up my right to private property; might as well finish the deal tomorrow! Honestly, though, First Vespers was beautiful. Karen's [Sister Karen Joseph] reflection on "renounce yourself and take up the cross" was perfect, a fantastic moment of teaching and reflection for the whole community.

Afterwards I stayed in church to practice music for the recital tomorrow night. It was so incredibly beautiful. I've never really had the chance to sing full voice a cappella in there, and the acoustics are fantastic, especially when the church is empty. I hope I have a decent voice tomorrow night.

This afternoon, going through the practice for the ritual, everything became even more real, even more emotional....Listening to Edward [Sister Jeana's younger brother] and Sister Mary Karen [Hill] practice "Gabriel's Oboe" this afternoon just about made me cry — it was so beautiful.

October 2, 2010

What a day. Words just can't capture what today was. This morning I woke up after a mostly sleepless night to enjoy some of BJ's [Sister Barbara Jean Luebbehusen] homemade rhubarb coffeecake and warm scones.

The actual Mass felt like a fog at certain points....I got down on the floor for the Litany of the Saints, and Kim [Sister Kim Mandelkow] did a good job keeping everything together properly. I was lying with my forehead on my hands on the marble, and my eyes were closed but moist as she went through saints and more saints, and I tried to be aware of what verse she was on but couldn't quite think straight to know until I knew she was nearing the end. ...it felt like one thing just led to another, such that after I made profession, signed the document on the altar, and came back down, we were standing there together and then I felt this almost panicky feeling of, "Oh! I'm supposed to sing now! It's time for the Suscipe!" So I did. And that was beautiful.

Then the prayers over the ring and over me seemed to go on a long time....finally we hugged and people clapped....The rest of Mass was just lovely, and I was able to sing along without choking up. I did feel for Dad, who apparently cried through the whole thing.

Back in my room, opening cards and small gifts from people, I had a little more time to reflect. I just hope I can be a good monastic woman, a good witness to the Christian life. So many people have witnessed this commitment today — it's been so public — it's not just about God and me or even me and the community. This is something I promise for the universal Church. Being who we are as sisters is a contribution to the world that we must make freely and authentically. I don't fully understand the value of our gift to the world, but I know it's valuable. Thank you, God, for today. What a powerful, blessed event.

October 3, 2010

Mom called to say that they made it safely home tonight, and in tears, she just wanted to say how wonderful everything was — the music was so perfect and the liturgy was elegant, and my recital was still going through her head. She said that they have some bigger bills to be paying right now, but that in the future they would like to support the sisters more. And I'm not quite sure why that makes me cry, but it was just so clear this weekend that this is where I'm supposed to be, and that the sisters have been the ones to utilize all my talents in such a way that I've blossomed so much in the past seven years. I think Mom sees it and is as grateful as I am. It's just such a beautiful, tender thing. I think she's seen through what sometimes appears to be our lack of explicit piety to the deeper spirit of our community. I am so grateful, so glad in my heart. It's as if I finally got full parental approval of my spouse. What a gift.

October 5, 2010

Back to school today. So much work to be done, and yet all is well. I keep marveling at my ring....Looking at it,

I feel like a real adult — a ring speaks to someone who finally has chosen one. It takes courage and discernment to get to the point of being able to make a life commitment, and almost beyond belief, here I am. Odd, and yet so many people make life commitments every day.

October 19, 2010

This evening I made another "soul collage".... My collage is a mix of natural images with a couple naturalistic human-made elements: a swirl of leaves in water beneath a big tree in a swamp, the curl of a chambered nautilus shell curving out of an ancient modeled golden bowl, the hollow of the inside of an avocado without the pit, fossil rock bits in the sand, golden ears of wheat, an outdoor chapel, a dark night of trees and water, candles. It's quiet and yet it breathes life and movement. It shows a hollowing out process, a journey into the inner layers of my shell, a dark, quiet time punctuated by small holy lights.

So a Benedictine life begins: quietly, naturally, artfully, without fanfare or hype, but with quiet vigil and waiting. God quietly begins a new work within me, hollowing out all that is me to make more room for only God. It may feel dry sometimes, or fruitful; it may feel like a swirling pit or a quiet afternoon in chapel. It happens in darkness and in light. God help me to be open to the work within me.

"So a Benedictine life begins..." Sister Jeana created this "soul collage" 17 days after her perpetual profession. She describes its contents in her last journal entry.





Sister Mary George (left) and Sister Margaret Carolyn show the toys that their students can earn with their good work.

Blessed are those who teach struggling kids to read

by Greg Eckerle

The unique learning environment at The Reading Carrel in Evansville, Indiana, is something to behold. Its old-fashioned charm, and 35 years of proven results, may be surpassed in wonderment only by the dogged determination and enthusiasm of its two teachers.

You would never believe that The Reading Carrel's founder and director, Sister Mary George Kissel, is 87 years old. Or that her fellow teacher and blood sister, Sister Margaret Carolyn Kissel, is 82.

But after hearing them excitedly explain their teaching approach in a two-room apartment that's jammed with some of the most kid-friendly teaching tools ever, it's easy to believe how over 4,500 area children that were in serious danger of never learning how to adequately read were completely turned around at The Reading Carrel.

For it's really not important how old the books and teaching games are — what's important is the connection the sisters make with the troubled kids when they show up. Combined, the sisters Kissel are in their 118th year (!) of teaching kids, and they know how to make a difference after students get lost in a large, fast-paced regular school classroom.

It's why Sister Mary George opened The Reading Carrel in 1975, and has no intention of retiring.

"I used to teach classes of up to 60 students," she said, "and I could never reach that slow learner. Those children could learn, but I didn't have time for them. I've always wanted to help those children, because once you work with them one-on-one, they're wonderful."

The Reading Carrel can accommodate 15 kindergarten through grade 3 children — each gets a half-hour of individualized instruction four days a week. The students have severe reading problems, often have other learning disabilities, may have failed a grade or two, may be underprivileged, and are likely dealing with being labeled a failure.

“I love what I’m doing,” said Sister Mary George, smiling and waving her arms around for emphasis. “I’m just as happy as I can be when we have these students coming in here.”

The sisters pride themselves in never having turned away a child for financial reasons. They’re adept at operating with meager funding — Sister Mary George raised all the money to start the venture from local businesses, many of their teaching devices are handmade, and the hundreds of books, learning aids, and toy animals awarded to successful students are all donated.

The benefactors realize the sisters are rescuing the kids at a critical part of their educational lives.

Students often arrive depressed, spewing tears and a sour attitude on their first day at The Reading Carrel.

They’ll often say they hate school, they hate their teachers, and they’re not going to do the work. They’ll say their school teachers won’t help them, their mom yells at them, and their dad says they’re dumb. But the sisters don’t flinch.

“We don’t let them sit here and cry, we work with them,” said Sister Margaret Carolyn. “Often they just need an extra pat on the back.”

Sister Mary George tells them the first day that they’re smart, then proves it by giving them something easy to do so they get an A. The beaming child then receives a sticker, a star, or a toy.

The students love the awards they earn by doing good work. It’s amazing how the promise of a stuffed clown or plastic horse will motivate a child to learn the alphabet.

“They’re hungry for a reward; they don’t get that at school,” said Sister Margaret Carolyn. “They’re simply hungry for love and special attention.”

The sisters most enjoy seeing a child advance each day, and take satisfaction that they’ve helped.

Their energy is contagious, and the students are soon giggling as books with pop-up monkeys and fuzzy animal fur makes education fun for the first time.

And the sisters entertain no thoughts of stopping their reading instruction anytime soon.

“I love what I’m doing,” said Sister Mary George, smiling and waving her arms around for emphasis. “I’m just as happy as I can be when we have these students coming in here.”

The sisters slough off any double-takes on the old-time flash cards or thirty-year-old books they use.

“One student’s grandmother said you’re kind of old-fashioned, and I said, ‘thank you for the compliment, your grandchild is learning the words,’” said Sister Margaret Carolyn, smiling broadly. “We’re not modern, but it works.” They pride themselves in giving students “TLC” (tender loving care) when they need it most. The children, and their parents, remember it forever.

A mountain of thank you notes, cards, and letters testifies to their success.

One of their students from 2001, Roy Whetstine, wrote a school essay in 2006 about the sisters titled “Angels Among Us.” In it, he wrote, “My parents would always tell me the best teachers are those sent by the Word of God, to help us grow in faith and knowledge. I would always wonder how the Word of God could possibly send a teacher. Then I met Sister Mary George Kissel and Sister Margaret Carolyn Kissel. . . . I was falling behind in my work and having trouble with my reading and phonic skills. . . . the sisters helped me identify my weakness and work to overcome it. They . . . brought out my full potential.” Whetstine is now a senior at Evansville Memorial High School, and served as president of his freshman and sophomore classes.

Another student, Steve Jerwers, attended The Reading Carrel in 1984. He’s now a doctor in California.

His father, James, recalled, “He could not read a single word, in spite of having passed Reading in the first grade. I tried to help him, with no success. The first day, he told (the sisters) he did not like to read and he did not like them! They were unfazed. After four months, they had him reading at a 4th grade, second semester level. The last day there he thanked them! He walked out of the program changed forever. I will never forget what they did for my family.”

Steve, now 33, said, “They had a fun way to learn. Without that foundation, I couldn’t have achieved what I do now. It was a key moment, it was life-changing for me.”

His picture is now among many displayed in the apartment, mixed in with colorful displays ranging from dinosaurs to smiley faces to giraffes.

Taking a long look around The Reading Carrel, Sister Mary George leans forward in her chair, and says, “Aren’t we blessed to have all this?”

I think their 4,502 students, and about 9,000 parents, would quickly agree, and probably say the biggest blessing is the two sisters.

How the sisters touch lives....

Praying without words

Sister Maria Tasto knows full well the challenges facing many of us lay people when it comes to prayer. “Most of us don’t know how,” she said. “Centering Prayer is great for that...”

Read more about Sister Maria’s story at thedome.org/news-maria.

Volunteer hears Heaven

Tena Karcher, part of a volunteer group from southern Illinois that’s generously helped at the monastery a few times the past two years, loves to sing the praises of the sisters. But maybe not as much as she loves to hear the sisters sing.

Read more about Tena’s story at thedome.org/news-tena.

Sister gets her kicks as a boys’ soccer coach

Sister Kathy Cash knows it’s a bit unusual to be the only female coach at Louisville’s all-male Trinity High School. And she expects a few of the players at each summer’s first freshman soccer practice to do a double-take and “look at me weird, thinking ‘is she really the coach?’”

Read more about Sister Kathy’s story at thedome.org/news-kathy.

Lively singing about God spins special music

The noisiest room at St. Raphael School in Louisville during its Religion Fair had to be where Sister Sarah Yungwirth was leading a Christian Song Sing-A-Long.

Read more about Sister Sarah’s story at thedome.org/news-sarah.

Singing is believing for Sister Catherine and her students

There’s probably not a better music teacher for the song “When I Believe” than Sister Catherine Duenne. Because she’s a living example of the truth in the song’s main lyric.

Read more about Sister Catherine’s story at thedome.org/news-catherine.



Perspectives

What will you do during Lent to make a difference in someone's life?



The one thing we will be doing together is facilitating a new session of "Why Catholic?" We are with people who take their faith very seriously. Our time is spent in prayer and discussion. We get to share our faith and beliefs with others who are interested in what we do. We have the chance to listen to others as they explain what their faith means to them. We have been moved by what we have heard, and told by others that they have learned much from what we have talked about. The best thing about facilitating is we spend time together getting ourselves ready for the experience. This has helped the two of us grow closer to each other and to God. What a blessing!

— Ken and Monica Sicard, members of the Executive Advisory Council for the Sisters of St. Benedict. Ken is the Ferdinand Town Council president and works for Kimball as an environmental safety manager. Monica is a nurse at Scenic Hills Care Center in Ferdinand.



I will help others during Lent by organizing the Cocoon Tree Project at St. Benedict Cathedral. Cocoons labeled with food or household items are taken by parishoners who purchase the items for Sister Joanna's House of Bread and Peace, a homeless shelter for women and children. [Editor's note: The house was founded by Ferdinand Benedictine Sister Joanna Trainer in 1984.]

— Sister Patricia Ann McGuire, pastoral associate at St. Benedict Cathedral in Evansville, Indiana



I will listen... plain and simple. I think one of the most important "acts of kindness" we can bestow on anyone is to listen to them... listen to their stories of pain, pleasure, love, hate, joy, despair, needs, and gratitudes. True listening is an art that requires discipline and a type of intuition... hearing not just what is said but, more importantly, what isn't said. Sometimes, all we need is just to have someone listen. I will listen.

— Paul Poirrier, major gift officer for the Sisters of St. Benedict



I hope I go about being the best person I can be. Through my prayer I can bring before God the needs, struggles, and thanksgivings of persons who enter my life. My alms giving may benefit others in need; I might have a treasure that would bring a smile. My model of fasting may give someone confidence to fast from something in their lives.

— Sister Teresa Elizabeth Stutz, associate director of youth ministry for the Archdiocese of Louisville, Kentucky

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



Programs and Retreats
June 2011–2012

The world getting to you? Come along with us.

Our Spirituality Ministry group has designed another year's worth of programs and retreats that will give you unique insights and experiences.

We are all searching for answers to a myriad of problems, and how to deepen our connection with God. Our presenters have extensive experience with those challenges, and are all about sharing and helping others. Like you.

This is more than a job to us. It's our way of life.

So, for once, let yourself go.

Reflect with the sisters, consider a fresh perspective. They've been doing this for over 1,500 years.

Check out our new 2011–2012 program and retreat booklet that's online at thedome.org/programs. You can also register there for upcoming programs.

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



For more information, call 800-880-2777, or 812-367-1411, ext. 2915.

Calendar of Events

April 17	Oblate Meeting
April 24	Easter Blessings!
May 15	Oblate Meeting
May 28	Golden Jubilee Celebration
June 13–15	Junior High Camp (5th and 6th graders)
June 16–18	Junior High Camp (7th and 8th graders)
June 24–30	Come & See Week
June 25–26	Academy Alumnae Reunion Weekend
June 30–July 6	Federation of St. Gertrude Chapter
August 15	Dome Golf Classic at Hurstbourne Country Club, Louisville
August 21	Oblate Picnic
September 25	Reception of Oblate Candidates
October 14–16	Come & See Weekend

Please Join Us!

Upcoming Spiritual Enrichment Programs and Retreats

April 9	Staying at the Table: Being Faithful Amidst Difficulties
June 3–10	A Cosmic Communion: Eucharist and the Healing of the Earth
June 17–24	Refocus Your Life in the Light of Christ
June 19–26	Centering Prayer Retreat: Intensive & Post-Intensive
July 8–15	Individually Directed Retreat
August 27	Compassionate Healing
September 9–16	Individually Directed Retreat
September 23–24	Soul Searching: The Journey of Thomas Merton

Saturday Morning at the Dome

April 16	Reflections on the Sorrowful Mysteries of the Rosary
August 27	The Joy of Humor
September 17	Growing Through Change and Transition
October 8	To Lead as Jesus Did

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