

# Seek. Pray. Share.

Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand, Indiana

VOLUME 4 NUMBER 2 SPRING 2013



## INSIDE

Our primary ministry

Power of prayer

Praying for you

Handling prayer requests

## Why prayer matters



This issue of *Seek.Pray.Share.* delves into the very heart of what we do as Sisters of St. Benedict – lead a life of prayer.

Prayer is our primary ministry, and for good reason. Our greatest desire is to seek God. And prayer is the best way to build a relationship with God.

We always say our various ministries flow from our prayer. That's because our strength and ability to perform those ministries have their very roots in our regular prayer routine. At the monastery, we pray together at least three times a day. Each sister also has her own personal prayer practice in the morning, the evening, and God only knows how many times in between.

Indeed, Benedict said in his Rule to “let nothing take precedence over God’s work.” The work that is at the very core of our monastic life is praying the Liturgy of the Hours. But in our connotation of “work,” it’s really a labor of love. A love of praising God through prayer, and bringing before God, through prayer, the needs of all people.

In this issue, you’ll read about how Sister Michelle Willett has dealt with one cancer after another, relying on prayer to get her through some trying times, and to become a unique source of energy for our sisters in Hildegard Health Center. She’s a great example of the essence of Benedictines – thinking of others rather than themselves.

You’ll also read about how our sisters go about prayer, what they think about it, and why it’s so central to their lives.

Many of you take advantage of the opportunity to send in prayer requests through our website, or through our mailings, or through contact with our sisters. You can read here how those requests are answered, and how they are put in God’s hands through our popular prayer board in the monastery.

The sheer number of prayer requests we receive daily are overwhelming proof of your belief in the power of prayer. As well as all the thanks we get from those asking for our prayers. During the Christmas season alone, it’s estimated we received over 4,000 prayer intentions. We take every one of those seriously, and put them into our prayer practices.

But we also emphasize the need to say prayers of gratitude. It’s not always all about asking God for something. We also must thank God regularly for all God has done for us. And we do.

*S. Kristine Anne Harpenau OSB*

Sister Kristine Anne Harpenau, OSB  
Prioress





# Seek.Pray.Share.

Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand, Indiana

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**Mission:** We, the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand, Indiana, are monastic women seeking God through the Benedictine tradition of community life, prayer, hospitality, and service to others. By our life and work, we commit ourselves to be a presence of peace as we join our sisters and brothers in the common search for God.

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Cover: Sisters Helen Maurer and Mary Clare Scheessele pray in the Eucharistic chapel.

Top photo: Sisters Michelle Mohr and Anita Louise Lowe talk with Oblate Mary Taber during the January Oblate meeting.

Bottom photo: Former Indiana Governor Mitch Daniels visited the monastery in September 2012. Here he talks with Sisters Kristine Anne Harpenau, Sylvia Gehlhausen, and Betty Drewes.



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Some of the sisters in prayer during Liturgy of the Hours in the monastery church.

# “Your prayers were the only way we got through this”

by Greg Eckerle

The ironic trait about those who don't spend much time in prayer is they invariably resort to it in their time of greatest need.

Even the toughest, gruffest soldier seems to find religion in a foxhole.

“When my brother, who was not an overly religious guy, was in the Korean War, he would send letters to mother saying, ‘Keep the prayers coming, there’s more than luck keeping me alive,’” says Sister Kathryn Huber. She smiles. “There is no atheist in a foxhole.”

After the recent school shooting tragedy in Newtown, Connecticut, many solemn newscasters talked of the need to pray. When there’s no other solution, people tend to end up on their knees, in prayer.

None of this is new to the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand, who have prayed through two wicked world wars, and been asked for prayers in help against probably every calamity known to humankind.

Visitors to the monastery often marvel at the peace they experience on the grounds. The sisters are used to that, too. They talk often of God’s healing energy that is generated by prayer. When hundreds of sisters, for over 145 years, pray in the same place throughout each and every day, there should be some peace and calm in the air.

They also talk fondly of the 10 angels in the top of the monastery church sanctuary, and how the angels all get sent out every morning, energized by the sisters’ prayer, fanning out to help in crisis after crisis around the globe.

So why is prayer the sisters’ primary ministry?

Sister Barbara Lynn Schmitz just smiled and said, “Well, all things are possible with God.

“Situations happen that cannot be cured by any of us. We have to go to God with them. Our whole life stems from being able to live together, and grow together, because we have the grace of God to do so.”

Sister Kathryn notes, “In the Rule of Benedict, he asks, ‘Whenever someone new comes to the monastery, what is it they seek?’ We sisters come to the monastery to seek God. Benedict’s beauty is his advice to do that alone, and to do it together. That’s why we have community prayer, and personal prayer, at various points in the day. Prayer is an integral part of who we are.”

For Sister Michelle Catherine Sinkhorn, prayer is the Benedictine value she signed on for.



*“Our life is to pray for others,  
and they know it.  
It’s a real honor for us.”*

“Prayer is important to me because it’s my relationship with God. It’s how I spend time with God – walking with, talking to, asking favors of, offering to do things for, and sharing about God with others.

“The Benedictines’ prayer and life together gives us the strength and energy to perform our ministries. And out of those ministries flow our Benedictine and Gospel values.”

She recalled being cornered in a school office by a huge, threatening man, who was yelling at her, yet she remained calm through it all. Witnesses later asked how she stayed so calm. Sister Michelle could only point to her Benedictine background, and asking God to give her the strength to not get upset. Maybe it was all her time spent in prayer, and the resulting “peacefulness that seeps in, and you don’t even know it.”

The sisters’ personal prayer time spent alone, whether it be lectio divina, centering prayer, walking a labyrinth, or any other form, provides them silence and solitude. Out of that grows compassion and awareness, which are critical to effective ministries.

The sisters also have an important nightly time of silence and solitude, which creates a real bonding among them because they know all in the community are doing the same thing.

Benedictines want to see the world and its people as God does. The best way is by their meaningful prayer time, day after day, making the journey with the Gospel as their guide.

Sister Barbara Lynn says conversations with sisters, who have many different ministries, has always helped her prepare for talks with others on difficult topics. And the true genesis of the advice is all the sisters’ time spent in prayer.

“When we go to our ministries we know the power of prayer is with us,” she says. “I wouldn’t know what to say to people without a prayer life, without saying to God, our faith is important to us.

“I need to pray to get centered, to know what I’m doing is for God, and is about spreading God’s love to those needing to recognize they’re loved by God.”

As director of mission advancement, Sister Barbara Lynn often

goes into people’s homes for heartfelt discussions, and always asks if there are any special intentions they want the sisters to pray for. There usually are, because people know the sisters are serious, really serious, about the offer, and just as serious about following through.

“I think people ask the sisters to pray for them because we have more than a personal relationship, it’s the entire community being with them in prayer,” she says. “Our life is to pray for others, and they know it. It’s a real honor for us.

“Many times people will casually say, ‘Oh, I’ll pray for you,’ and it feels empty. But when sisters say it, it’s more than an offhanded comment, and I believe people feel we really will pray for them. And we do, because that’s how we grow together.”

Thank-you calls and notes to the sisters pour in about as fast as the prayer requests.

*“Thank you for praying for us, things have resolved, we really felt your prayers, especially in the hospital room.”*

*“It meant the world to us to know you were praying for us.”*

*“We don’t know if we could make it through this without knowing we’re held in your prayer.”*



**Sister Linda Bittner reflects amidst the peacefulness of Grotto Hill on the grounds of Monastery Immaculate Conception.**

Sisters gather to pray in the monastery cemetery on All Souls Day.



*"Your prayers were the only way we got through this."*

When a sister was delivering a Christmas gift to a donor recently, the man said, "Oh, sister, the best gift you can give us is prayer."

People often say, when they have the sisters' prayers, that they don't feel alone when going through troubled times, and how much difference that makes.

"People ask for our prayers because they know we will pray for them," says Sister Kathryn. "There's great consolation in that. Research has proven that those who have people praying for them do better than those who don't. It's the power of prayer."

Another key for the sisters has been the monks from the nearby Saint Meinrad Archabbey coming to the Ferdinand monastery daily for years to celebrate Mass for the sisters.

Sister Michelle Catherine points to one more advantage of prayer time in church – sometimes a solution to an issue will pop into her head that she's certain would not have come to her if she wasn't in prayer. She even put a note pad in her church locker for that reason, so she wouldn't lose the solution. She's seen other sisters do that, too.

For Sister Barbara Lynn, praying for peoples' special intentions is "the cream of the things we get to do."

"It's a way to minister to other people. For them to trust you enough to share their inner struggles, to share that their daughter is in rehab or whatever, can you pray for her, that is a sacred bond."

"As St. Benedict says, we believe the divine presence is everywhere, but most especially when we gather together to pray," says Sister Kathryn, softly.

And so the sisters go on praying the Liturgy of the Hours together at least three times a day, along with daily Eucharist. And with their personal prayers coming at any hour, it's likely an around-the-clock ministry. It's how they keep up with all the requests out there. And how they continue building that relationship with God, and sharing it with all. ■

## You are invited to prayer . . .

Sister Kristine Anne Harpenau, prioress, extends a special invitation to you to feel free to join the sisters in prayer at Monastery Immaculate Conception. You are most welcome to join with them at their three-times-a-day Liturgy of the Hours prayer services in the chapel, at 7 a.m., noon, and 5 p.m. on weekdays; 8 a.m., noon, and 5 p.m. on Saturdays; and 10 a.m. and 5 p.m. on Sundays. You may also join them at Mass on Monday through Friday at 7:25 a.m., Saturday at 8:25 a.m., and Sunday at 10:30 a.m., and at the Hour of Adoration for Peace on the first Friday of each month from 6:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. All times are Eastern time.

You are also invited to pray on your own at other times in the monastery church, or on the grounds at Grotto Hill or the labyrinth. The monastery prayer spaces are intended to be used by all as a means of building a better relationship with God. Sister Kristine Anne notes, "That's why we are here."





# Sister Michelle: “I’m not a quitter, I’m going to live until I die”

by Greg Eckerle

Sister Michelle Willett has been thrown one cancer after another, then a stroke, then some more cancer.

But you would never know it by her disposition. Even though she is wheel-chair bound and paralyzed on her right side, she is funny, engaging, energetic, and filled with faith. And so determined to help others despite her own predicament, and so successful at it, that she’s changed people’s lives.

Who would have ever thought that several of the sisters she lives with in Hildegard Health Center, the nursing facility within the monastery, now play a raucous weekly game of Wii bowling?

Leave it to Sister Michelle, 59, to boldly lead many of Hildegard’s other 16 residents, from their 70s to 97, to places they’d never been before. Or even dreamt of.

Like taking a surprise Halloween trek in their wheelchairs through the monastery’s living quarters, merrily distributing treats, but also sneakily teepeeing fellow sisters’ doors. Or joining Sister Michelle in her self-created card-writing ministry that brings joy and inspiration to others every day. Or adding to her signature howls of laughter as they gather in her room to munch popcorn and delight in watching another Dean Martin classic comedy.

It’s no wonder Sister Michelle won the coveted Karen Bell Caring Award last fall sponsored by Generations, the area agency on aging based in Vincennes. Fittingly, she was presented the award after giving an inspiring speech at a Vincennes gathering of about 300 residents of 23 nursing homes in southwestern Indiana.

Above: Sister Michelle Willett, paralyzed on her right side by a stroke, can still use her left arm to send out hundreds of notes in the Hildegard Health Center card-writing ministry she started.

Ann Cardinal (right), enjoys a crack made by Sister Michelle Willett during her Vincennes presentation.



Ann Cardinal, the agency's long-term care ombudsman for six Indiana counties, told the crowd that she picked Sister Michelle to give the keynote speech because "she is so open-minded about her condition and a wonderful person to give us reasons to get out of bed every day."

Her health issues started about six years ago, when her parathyroid gland had to be removed. Then cancer was found in her thyroid, so that was removed, too. Then she tripped on some steps, falling and breaking her left shoulder. While in the hospital, a cancerous tumor found in her kidney was removed. Two tumors were also found in her brain. A chest x-ray revealed small tumors in her lungs. Then, in July, 2010, she had a stroke in her monastery room that caused her partial paralysis. Luckily, her left arm is still useable, and she's left-handed. And, unlike many stroke victims, she never lost her ability to speak, which is a major asset as she brings joy to others with her humor, and motivates many with her confident, infectious, and positive attitude.

Last fall, another cancerous spot was found on her rib. Then three more in her head.

But through all the disheartening news, she's kept her spirits high, and a smile on her face. She joked about the loss of her hair to the Vincennes crowd, asking if they liked her "inverted Mohawk" haircut. Before starting chemotherapy for her most recent cancer, Sister Michelle was told her hair would turn color. She requested magenta.

A sister mentioned she heard that more knots were found on her head. "Yeah, just call me knobby," replied Sister Michelle, keeping things as light-hearted as ever.

Told that Oblate Judy Powers described her as so cheerful, so full of God, so faith-filled, and that Powers was impressed that she never complained, Sister Michelle simply said, "Well, what is there to complain about? I'm so lucky to be alive."

Part of her charm is the jokes she cracks no matter how dire her circumstances. On the emergency helicopter flight to Louisville after her stroke, she told an attendant she'd never been on a helicopter before. When asked if she was scared, Sister Michelle said no, this is going to be fun, then laughed. The attendant later said they never had a patient that happy about riding in an emergency helicopter.

"During the ride, I said a prayer to God," recalls Sister Michelle. "I said, 'God, you're in control, because I can't do anything, other than talk and move my left arm.' I said, 'God, I'm in a real bad situation, so I need all the help I can get, and I will do whatever I need to do to keep myself in a positive mode, and a happy mode.' I've done that ever since."

While she was recovering in Louisville for a week, her good friend, Sister Anna Marie Brosmer, stayed with her the entire time, sleeping in a recliner by her bed. As a night-time nurse in Hildegard, Sister Anna Marie still regularly helps tend to her.

"She knows her time is limited and she's going to live the best she can," says Sister Anna Marie. "She's so full of energy, and not afraid of anything. She keeps saying, 'I'm going to live until I die.' Recently she mentioned, 'If I die tomorrow, I'm at peace.' What a wonderful thing to say. She knows she's not going to live long, so she just does whatever she can for other people. Her personality has made people in Hildegard blossom. Some of the senior sisters who had been shy have really come out of their shell. It's amazing."



There's no question her helicopter prayer to stay positive has been answered. And part of that answer may have come in the bulging bag of get well cards and letters awaiting her when she returned to the monastery after a rehabilitation stint.

"I was humbled and overwhelmed with all the people wishing me well, and I knew I had to thank them," says Sister Michelle. "So I wrote everybody a card. Then I started sending cards for all the sisters' birthdays and feast days, then sympathy cards, get well cards, and anniversary cards to all kinds of people. That's how I began my card ministry.

"And I got the other sisters involved in the card-writing. So now it's OUR ministry. As for the trick-or-treating and the Wii bowling, the whole idea is just to have fun. I also find jokes, poems, gags, and cartoons that I include in the cards."

She told the Vincennes audience she enjoys living in the nursing home, and gets up every day and thanks God she's alive, and can do things, whether she's sick or not.

There were 12 nominations for the recent Karen Bell Caring Award that Sister Michelle won. According to Ann Cardinal, it's given to the nursing home resident that is deemed to provide "the most outstanding extra help in the facility to help others."

In the nomination letter for Sister Michelle, Hildegard sisters and staff wrote, "Sister's cheerful presence... through phone and mail... letting (others) know of her prayers and concerns .... Sister has developed a greeting card writing ministry reaching out to many... (she) notices those around her who need assistance and encouragement... initiates conversation and activities... enjoys sharing with others... shares her positive attitudes... takes an active role in her own health, (motivating) others to stay active..."

Violet Sims, 82, from Odon Nursing Home, was among those who heard Sister Michelle's speech at Vincennes. Sims' daughter, Anita Aders, a monastery employee, later sent an email to Sister Michelle, saying my mother "went on and on about your talk and about how you had inspired her. She wanted me to let you know how much she enjoyed it... my sister said all the nursing home residents were talking about you on their trip (home). She said your words were 'life changing' for them... thank you for your willingness to share your experiences with a group of strangers... you truly did make a difference in their lives."

Sister Michelle entered the monastery in 1981. She worked with mentally handicapped children for several years, a nice fit for someone with her personality.

Sister Anna Marie Brosmer  
regularly helps Sister Michelle.



She even made an impression on doctors and nurses caring for her in recent years. "In Evansville, those doctors loved her," says Sister Anna Marie. "They would come in early because they knew she'd be telling jokes, be so pleasant. The staff said, 'You're awesome. We have to deal with brain tumors daily, and you just come along and brighten our day.'

Said Sister Michelle, "One doctor told me, 'Thank you for being here, and being so supportive to the patients here, bringing them such joy and delight.'

"I come up with these crazy ideas, and ask the Hildegard sisters if they want to do them. Sometimes their eyes glaze over, but we do it. It's just fun. I keep telling them, you can't just sit around doing nothing, because you're not dead yet. I'm not a quitter."

Many sisters marvel at how her positive energy is changing all the sisters, not just the ones in Hildegard.

And behind it all is the power of prayer. "My prayer life has grown so much since being here, because in a sense, that's all we have," says Sister Michelle, softly. "We're always praying for other people. And I just keep asking God, 'You have something in mind for me, please guide me on it.' When I had the brain surgery, I kept saying, 'God, you know what's in the plans, I don't, but I'm going to believe in you.'

The hundreds of people who have received her cards, all with a personalized note that really sets them apart, are the benefactors of her prayers. And many tell her how much they appreciate it, especially the personalization.

As Ann Cardinal told the Vincennes audience, "She has chosen not to stay in her room, to be depressed, and to think of her disabilities. She could be, (but) she is living every day, and helping others, and that's what you all can do."

"Sister Michelle's prayer life is more oriented to other people," says Sister Anna Marie. "If she can help you be a better person, she'll do that, without you knowing it." ■



Sister Diane Fischer records an online prayer request in her notebook.

# Answering online prayer requests provides hope

by Greg Eckerle

*"Please pray for my unborn child that she may be healed against all the odds the doctors have given us. It sounds hopeless but I believe that nothing is impossible with God . . ."*

*"Our child is in trouble from her mom's drug abuse . . ."*

*"We need help from Hurricane Sandy. No electricity, no food, the police won't come."*

*"I've been unfaithful to my wife, and I am such a mess . . ."*

*"My son's killing himself with alcohol, he has two beautiful sons who need their father . . ."*

*"Please pray that my atheist husband returns to Jesus."*

*"I got my last two job rejections today. No job, no prospects, no friends, no hope."*

The online prayer requests keep coming, day after day, year after year, through the sisters' website (thedome.org).

Many are pleading, some are desperate, some sound like a 911 emergency call, some sound like they're on the verge of suicide.

Nearly all can break your heart.

But every one of them reaffirms one's belief in the hope and power of prayer. And the belief that making the prayer request of the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand is the prudent move. After all, the sisters have been praying for those in need at least three times a day, every day, since 1867.

The Ferdinand Benedictines even took their prayer service for others to another level several years ago – they respond to any online prayer request when the sender provides their name and email address, and request a response.

Sister Diane Fischer, 76, has been the designated person replying to the website prayer requests since 2007.

"Some of those I read are pretty depressing, so I pray for them, and I feel helpless about not being able to do more," says Sister Diane, the hurt evident in her eyes.

Yet she talks about her strong belief that energy goes out from you to those you are really praying for, no matter where they're at. And she thinks about the power of the whole Ferdinand



*“Some of those I read are pretty depressing, so I pray for them, and I feel helpless about not being able to do more,” says Sister Diane, the hurt evident in her eyes.*

Benedictine community, 160 strong, and the immense energy they send forth with their daily prayers.

“That really can do some good, just through our prayers,” she says. “When I read what others are going through, it makes me more compassionate. I keep thinking how blessed I am when I see all the problems happening to so many people.”

Despite the challenges of responding to 8 to 10 daily prayer requests, some admittedly bizarre, Sister Diane truly enjoys how she can help people.

“Trying to cheer them up with our prayers, I know it means so much to people. I feel like it’s a real ministry, a ministry of reaching out to people.”

The regular thank you notes she receives for her responses underscores the value of the sisters’ prayers. Many will say something like, ‘thank you for the prayers, we really appreciate it, you don’t know how much it means, the person who was sick is doing better, and it’s because of your prayers.’

Among her favorites was a reply from London, England: “It makes me really happy to receive a message like the one you sent me, because it gives me hope. It also gives me strength to think that we are united in prayer. I really feel lonely so your message has been a very important part of my day. I have read it and re-read it . . . I feel Jesus’ presence and love in my life.”

To keep track of every person who has asked for a response to their prayer request, Sister Diane meticulously keeps records in a notebook, now on version #3. She even takes the notebook into church with her on occasion, to have its presence there for more prayer.

After she answers the daily prayer requests, she will still pray for all the requesters some more, even though she knows they’re being prayed for by the entire sisters’ community.

She does emphasize, chuckling, that “I am not an advice column, it’s a prayer, and a notice that we sisters are praying for their intentions.” For the thornier problems, she writes that she hopes “you can get guidance or counseling that might help you.”

She always makes sure to say her response is “from Sister Diane of the Sisters of St. Benedict,” so requesters realize it’s a sister answering them, not just someone hired to do so. Still, one lady from Canada called just to ensure there really was a Sister Diane, because ‘I’ve been getting all your nice messages.’

Requesters also appreciate the relative quickness of the replies, most within a day or so. One note remarked, ‘This is wonderful you answered right away, most of them I send in I never hear from again, you don’t know what it meant to me to get an answer.’

Prayer requests pour in from all over the globe – Manila, Nigeria, Ukraine, Australia, India, Saudi Arabia, Japan, Turkey, South Africa, Poland, Brazil, and Rome, among others. Some come in a foreign language.

Most requests deal with finances, jobs, marriages and relationships, and health issues. Then there are the ones that ask for help in winning the lottery, or to win a contest for concert tickets.

“I won’t say that we’re going to pray you win the lottery,” says Sister Diane, smiling, “but we’ll pray you can get help and guidance with your finances.”

Sister Diane usually ends her responses by saying she’ll ask God to be with you and all your loved ones, and to be with your intentions, and to give your family the graces they need at this time.

*“Please help me. Time is running out . . .”*

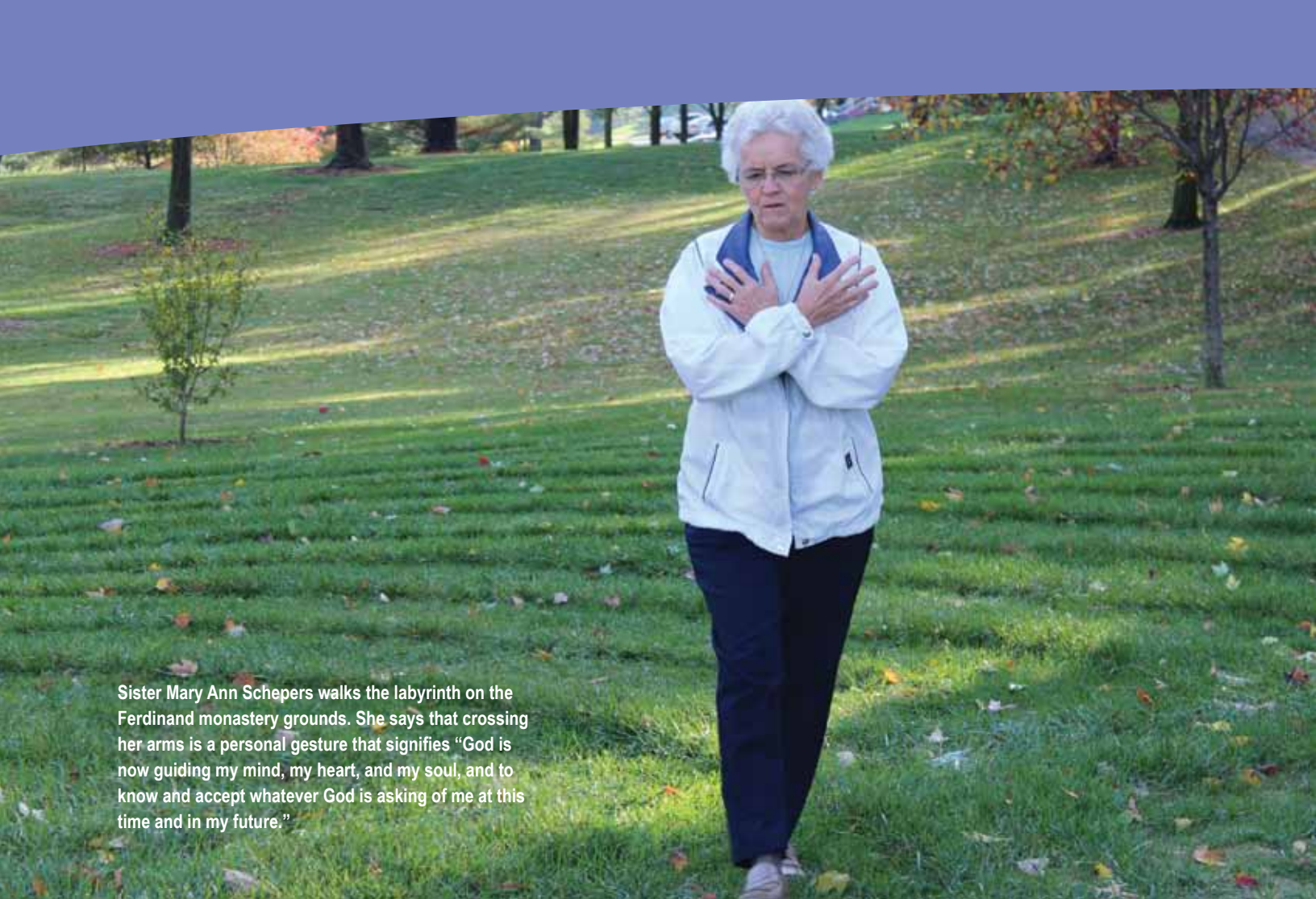
*“I need a way to pay my college loans.”*

*“Pray for a miracle cure for our baby.”*

*“I was sexually assaulted in my home last night.”*

*“My friend attempted suicide . . .”*

The requests for help don’t stop. But neither do the sisters’ prayers. ■



Sister Mary Ann Schepers walks the labyrinth on the Ferdinand monastery grounds. She says that crossing her arms is a personal gesture that signifies “God is now guiding my mind, my heart, and my soul, and to know and accept whatever God is asking of me at this time and in my future.”

# Labyrinth a prayer walk to peace

by Greg Eckerle

Sister Mary Ann Schepers is often asked if a labyrinth is a maze, if it's confusing to find the center. Will I get turned around, and miss the whole point?

“No,” she smiles, “it's simply a prayer walk, like a walking meditation. It's an easy, single path walkway that always takes you to the center. You will never get lost.” To the contrary, the labyrinth is a prayer form that enables many to find themselves.

Some walk it to deal with grief. Others, to relieve fear. Or whatever comes to mind during this time of prayer. Some will think of favorite Scripture verses.

“I walk it the most to relieve doubts,” says Sister Mary Ann. “When I'm facing something that's all mixed up, the labyrinth puts me back in focus, and eventually helps me understand the next thing to do.”

A labyrinth is a winding path of about 10 progressively smaller

circles, with up to about 30 turns. It's a sacred meditation, a walk of quiet and prayer that opens us to peace and whatever God shares with us on the journey.

She notes there is a spiritual and physical change when walking the labyrinth. When a person has too much stress, one of the two lobes of the brain becomes overloaded with that stress. Making all the turns in the labyrinth restores balance to the brain, and a sense of balance to one's thinking, making thoughts more clear.

“That relieves stress for me, so then I can see more clearly what God really wants me to do. That's often my prayer when I walk the labyrinth – God, help me to know what you want me to do.

“It also helps me spiritually, to get centered. There's a calmness that comes from having the right and left brain hemispheres in balance. That's a prayer experience for me, an inner life and growth experience. For me, the best thing is the centering.”



Another benefit is that the walking, about 20 minutes each time, keeps her active.

Before entering the labyrinth, Sister Mary Ann pauses to center herself, and to make her prayer intention. She might have a specific question. Or be seeking God's help for the intentions of others who have requested prayers, such as the prayer intentions written daily on the monastery prayer board.

Sometimes she doesn't have the answer when she walks out. But as with all the sisters' prayer forms, that doesn't stop them from praying again and again.

Or she may not be looking for an answer to an issue, but an idea will come that's filled with promise. She feels those special revelations wouldn't happen if she wasn't walking the labyrinth.

"If you're open and receptive to what's happening, there might be a new experience that happens," she says. "There's always something, maybe a new thought on a different approach to an issue. Or it just gets you back into focus on where you need to be."

While walking, she will periodically touch her forehead, or extend her arms out and turn her palms upward, or cross her arms in front of her chest. Those movements are simply a part of her personal prayer. She is thinking of her mind, and her heart, and her will to do what God asks her to do.

"It's beneficial while walking to focus on a challenge you are having in life. Sometimes we are stuck and can't even think of options. The walking, and the rebalancing, helps me get a better perspective on the situation, to help find a solution, or to accept something new. But it might take a few walks."

Upon reaching the center of the labyrinth, she thinks of her connection with everyone else in the world praying at that same time. Or she'll pray for special intentions. Some people restate the question or issue they are focusing on. Some simply enjoy just being there, and breathing.



Sister Mary Ann Schepers performs the finger labyrinth each day before her morning meditation.



When entering a labyrinth, one should let go of their troubles, go slowly through life's twists as represented in the labyrinth, and all the while be open to God, who is with you. Upon reaching the center, think of the gift of that moment, and take that gift back out with you. This wooden finger labyrinth is displayed in Kordes Center.

Sister Mary Ann, a native of Celestine, Indiana, entered the Ferdinand monastery in 1955, and moved to California in 1969. She was among four sisters who transferred from Holy Spirit Monastery in Grand Terrace, California, back to Ferdinand over a year ago. She was prioress at Holy Spirit for its last 11 years, and she now serves in supportive services at the Ferdinand monastery.

She began walking a concrete-and-brick labyrinth daily at the California monastery in 2003. She has faithfully continued the practice in Ferdinand, normally after lunch or the evening meal. The labyrinth is cut into the grass northeast of the For Heaven's Sake gift shop on the monastery grounds. If the weather is too inclement, she performs the journey inside by tracing her finger over a portable labyrinth. Another option is walking a figure 8.

The California labyrinth was highly popular, open all day to people, who came daily to pray. It was wide enough for wheelchairs, and some brought babies in strollers, and some had their dogs walk it, too. Some walked it at midnight to a full moon. And sometimes Sister Mary Ann walked it with a flashlight.

Over 4,000 years old, the labyrinth is said to be the oldest contemplative and transformational tool known to humankind.

Unlike a maze, there are no choices to make along the way, besides deciding to trust that the path will lead you to your goal.

And it's one path without road rage, because this journey is intended to get you focused, calmed down, and to find inner peace. ■



For more information, reference the book *Praying At Every Turn: Meditations for Walking the Labyrinth* by Carole Ann Camp.

# NEWS from the Dome

## Sisters part of new education service

Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand are collaborating with the Family Scholar House of Louisville to bring a new service to Dubois County to fight poverty through education.

The effort, called Family Scholar House, was begun in Louisville in 1995 to end the cycle of poverty by giving single-parent students the support they need to earn a college degree and attain a viable independent lifestyle.

Family Scholar House started operations in Dubois County recently by opening an office in Monastery Immaculate Conception, the home of the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand. Sister Barbara Catherine Schmitz of the monastery is the on-site staff person beginning the program's implementation.

The program seeks to provide academic advising, case management, family support, community activities, connection to other resources, peer support, and eventually, housing, for qualifying single-parent students. It predominantly serves women, often single mothers, who are unemployed or underemployed and desire additional educational and career opportunities.

The Louisville program has grown to include 173 families in residence on three campuses, with a fourth house due to open in summer 2013. There are another 659 families in the Louisville pre-residential program receiving services while waiting for housing to become available.

Cathe Dykstra, CEO, president, and chief possibility officer of Family Scholar House, said, "We chose to collaborate with the Sisters of St. Benedict because of their commitment to community, hospitality, and service. We believe the location of the monastery in Ferdinand will serve as a good home base as we provide educational information and assistance to the area."



Greetings were exchanged between (clockwise from top left) Jane Chappell, Sister Barbara C. Schmitz, Sister Jane Will, and Kristie Adams and Harvetta Ray from Louisville's Family Scholar House before the start of an orientation for Family Scholar House at Vincennes University Jasper Campus. Thus far 18 VUJC students have been met with as potential participants.

"We look forward to having the sisters involved as tutors, mentors, encouragers, and supporters of those seeking to improve their lives through education. To educate a mother is to bless her child. The sisters will be involved in laying a strong educational foundation that promotes prosperity for families now and for generations to come."

The program's first phase in Dubois County will be assessing what services are available through Tri-Cap in Jasper, Crisis Connection in Jasper, and Lincoln Hills Development Corporation in Tell City.

Family Scholar House representatives have begun talking to area groups, looking for referrals to single parents interested in entering the program and pursuing a college degree.

Joyce Fleck, executive director of Tri-Cap, said, "We see dozens of families annually that would be good candidates for this program." Beth Stein of Crisis Connection also sees a need in the area for such a program, noting that many people they serve "could very definitely be candidates."

Although the program will start in Dubois County, Family Scholar House is also open to eventually serving surrounding counties.

Sister Barbara C. Schmitz explains aspects of Family Scholar House to potential participants during the first orientation at Vincennes University Jasper Campus. The orientation began with an interfaith prayer, chosen because, as Sister Barbara said, "We all come from different backgrounds."





Sister Barbara L. Schmitz, director of mission advancement for the Sisters of St. Benedict, said, "Our collaboration with Family Scholar House is an ideal way to serve the people of Southern Indiana and to continue our commitment to education. We could also eventually have distance learning through a computer lab on our campus.

"The sisters have been teachers since arriving in Ferdinand in 1867. We feel education is absolutely crucial for the family unit. Many children are in need of the resources they need to succeed in life. This is particularly difficult when a single mom or dad has little support for advanced education. So, we want to help the parent so the children are helped, too.

"We have met with Vincennes University Jasper Center and area school superintendents, and they are all excited about the program

coming here. We see this as a wonderful fit to help single parents become healthy citizens and contributing members of the area."

Bill Hochgesang, superintendent of Northeast Dubois School Corporation, said, "The Sisters of St. Benedict, along with the Family Scholar House, will become a huge asset to all our communities. What a great way to help single parent families, to help both the child and the parent achieve a college degree."

Program participants can attend any accredited college. Funding comes from a variety of sources, with housing funding supported by tax credits. Additionally, strong community collaborations assist students in accessing benefits and subsidies through community programs.

## Anniversaries celebrated

Nine Benedictine sisters celebrated special anniversaries of their religious profession on Sunday, October 28, at Monastery Immaculate Conception in Ferdinand. (Front row) Sisters Mary Alice Schnur, Mary Kenneth Scheessele, and Sylvia Gehlhausen celebrated 70 years as a Benedictine sister. (Sister Johnette Finis is missing from the photo.) (Back row) Sisters Vera Kloeck, Mary Claude Croteau, Mary Roman Dall, Maura Beckman, and Mary Benet Goodrum marked their 60th anniversary. These sisters have given a total of 580 years of consecrated life and service to the Church.



## Great news for you if you are 70-½ years old or older



Congress has passed the long awaited IRA rollover provision!

For those who want to take advantage of this, it is a tax-free provision for gifts distributed to qualified charities. It allows individuals aged 70-½ or older to make tax free charitable donations up to \$100,000 (\$200,000 for married couples) from their IRA accounts. This provision will be in effect for both 2012 and 2013.

Under "Other Miscellaneous Individual Provisions Included in Legislation" was this clause:

"Extend through 2013 the provision allowing for tax-free distributions from IRAs that are rolled directly to a charity (the legislation also makes provision for rollovers made in January 2013, to allow them to be claimed for the 2012 tax year, and for distributions taken in December 2012 to allow them to be contributed to a charity in January 2013, and count for the 2012 tax year).

We want to be sure you are aware of this option for charitable giving. Please consult with your financial advisors for taking advantage of this new provision for your personal giving.



To learn more about how you can support the work of the Sisters of St. Benedict, please visit [thedome.org/supportus](http://thedome.org/supportus).

## Michigan sisters review *A Transformed Life*

### Chaplain Mary M. Foley, D. Min., BCC

This fall, I facilitated a six-week spirituality program for our Sisters at the Dominican Life Center in Adrian, Michigan. The program featured the video presentation, “A Transformed Life,” with Sister Maria Tasto, OSB, who is Director of Spirituality Ministry for the Ferdinand Benedictines. I was eager to share with our Sisters the wisdom and talents of Sister Maria, who I knew personally as a gifted spiritual director.

The program here was a great success. Many sisters participated in the series, which was presented twice weekly; once during the day and once in the evening for those who were working or otherwise busy during the day. There are almost 300 retired sisters living on our campus in various levels of care – from supported independent living, to assisted living, to skilled nursing care. Many sisters gathered for our weekly sessions in our Rose Room. Approximately 50 women purchased the optional guidebook that goes along with the program. Many other sisters were able to view the program from their rooms or apartments, as we have broadcast capability on campus.

*A Transformed Life* sometimes reminds you of some things you already know about the spiritual journey, yet even with the familiar, Sister Maria’s gifted storytelling draws you to deeper reflection. Her holistic approach to the spiritual journey (taking into consideration the emotional and developmental aspects of the human person) also introduced new elements that many of us had not before considered.

*A Transformed Life* provided us with the opportunity to reflect upon our own lives and to share our stories with others in a way that

helped further build relationships and community. The work of *A Transformed Life* still continues, even after our program came to a close. This program can be used by individuals or groups. There are enough rich ideas and stories to last a lifetime and help each of us continue the lifelong process of transformation as people of God.

### Sister Helen Walsh, OP

I very much enjoyed the series. My great joy is in looking at myself quietly and with profound thinking. I am sure that I need to have repetition for full understanding. I look forward to giving time to the book. I will think of the presentation as I read. This is a very worthwhile preparation for further listening and further growth. I walk away with a treasure.

### Sister Helen Dompierre, OP

In Sister Maria’s presentation, she brought to mind many insights that I had not reflected upon in my meditations. So, I spent some time pondering these issues in my personal life. Why do I react to people and situations in the way I have been? Should I not see the face of Christ in those I encounter? Clearly, I have been missing the point. Did not Christ say, “Love your neighbor as yourself”? If I am to imitate Him, must I not do the same? Transforming my views will not be easy. But as Sister mentioned, we are never too old to change.

Even as busy as Christ was, he took time apart to a quiet place and conferred with His Heavenly Father. I need to do the same.

Sister shared many stories; personal stories of people she encountered showed her compassion for those she met. She touched many lives because she was open to all. People trusted her. Obviously, she is a wonderful spiritual director.

I am grateful to have had the opportunity to view the series. The charts and references to scripture passages were very helpful. Since I have a copy of her book, I can continue my transformation.

### Sister Jean Irene McAllister, OP

I have long wanted to be the person God created me to be. The spark was there, but the program, “A Transformed Life,” ignited the spark into a living flame. Besides the video, the beautiful watercolors in the Guidebook drew me to prayerful wonder of God in the beauty of nature depicted on several pages.

### Sister Marie Luisa Vasquez

This process was very transforming for me. I appreciated the opportunity to have a tool which helped me look into my heart and allow God to guide me to a greater awareness of myself and the unconditional love God has for me.

## Available at For Heaven’s Sake gift shop!

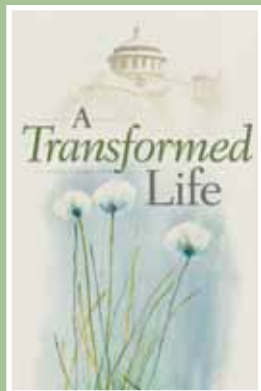
### *A Transformed Life* DVD Course and Guidebook

In six 45-minute conferences, Sister Maria Tasto guides you along the path of becoming who God created you to be.

Learn more at [thedome.org/ATL](http://thedome.org/ATL).

DVD and guidebook: \$94.99

Additional guidebooks: \$9.95 each





## See selected clips from *A Transformed Life*

To get a good idea of how Sister Maria Tasto's DVD course, *A Transformed Life*, can help you, visit [www.thedome.org/ATLclips](http://www.thedome.org/ATLclips).

The course, a special 3 DVD set and guidebook, includes six 45-minute conferences. *A Transformed Life* is a healing, enriching series that promises a fresh start for all of us who are wounded, yet seeking the full life God wants for us.

The website contains 10 minute clips of all six conferences. It's a great way to preview the course, to decide if it's a resource to obtain for you or your group to make positive changes in your lives.

Sister Maria guides the viewer along the path of becoming who God created them to be. Using the lens of Scripture and inspired

by the work of Father Thomas Keating, she shares what she has gleaned from years of walking with others on the spiritual journey, and from her own remarkable path. Sister Maria will help you transform your attitude and responses, deepen your relationship with God, and find where true happiness lies.

Among viewer testimonials for *A Transformed Life*:

Ashley Erny: "The programs have helped me spiritually walk down the path and grow during some difficult times."

Hospital employee Charlotte Stephenson: "I feel refreshed and ready to use God's gifts to better the lives of others, and to show his love through my actions."

Jean Johnson: "Sister Maria presents from the heart, and gives all the information and tools to live a transformed life if you choose to do the work."

Ann Byrom: "Sister Maria is excellent at simplifying the spiritual journey. Her delivery style is one of peace and ease, and she is a wonderful story teller."

Buy your copy of *A Transformed Life* by calling 812-367-2500 or by visiting [www.thedome.org/ATL](http://www.thedome.org/ATL). The course is \$94.99, plus shipping and handling. It's also available at For Heaven's Sake, the Sisters of St. Benedict gift shop at Monastery Immaculate Conception in Ferdinand, Indiana.

## Sisters of St. Benedict Spirituality Ministry

*Please join us for Benedictine spirituality!*

April 13, 2013 **The Radical Christian Life: Rediscovering Benedictinism for Our Times**

Sister Joan Chittister, OSB

April 20, 2013 **Harvest of Wisdom: Exploring the Benedictine Blessings of Prayer, Work, and Hospitality**

Sister Karen Joseph, OSB

May 4, 2013 **Song-Prayers of the Heart Throughout the Ages**

Sister Louise Laroche, OSB

May 4, 2013 **A Day Apart: Rest and Reflection**

June 12–14, 2013 **Understanding Jesus in the Light of Modern Christian Scholarship: the Challenge of Christology today**

Father Diarmuid O'Murchu, MSC

June 21–28, 2013 **Directed Retreat**

July 14–21, 2013 **Intensive and Post-Intensive Centering Prayer Retreat** Sister Kathy Bilske, OSB, and Sister Maria Tasto, OSB

September 13–20, 2013 **Directed Retreat**

Personal retreats, lodging for group retreats, and spiritual direction are available by contacting Kordes Center.

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



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[www.thedome.org/programs](http://www.thedome.org/programs)



# Powerhouse of prayer

by Laura Reckelhoff

First thing each day Sister LaVerne Scheller says good morning to God, and, as she says, “talks to Him about what kind of day we are going to have together.”

Sister Wilma Davis starts her day similarly. She explains, “Without morning prayer, my whole day would be out of sync. The day opens up to me in prayer. It shows how I am going to live my day with God and with others.”

Both sisters, as well as the 15 other sisters that reside in Hildegard Health Center (HHC), serve in ministry devoted to prayer. With a total of 1103 years as professed sisters, HHC is sometimes referred to as the Powerhouse of Prayer. Plus, these sisters do not normally have other ministries outside of their prayer ministry. Sister Wilma says, “An important part of HHC is to pray. We have activities too, but most important is to pray. If we don’t take that time, I think we fail.”

Daily, these sisters come together to pray a rosary in the morning, attend Mass prior to lunch, and later have Evening Prayer. Some choose to gather again in the evening to pray Compline. Plus, there are their private prayers to start and end the day and times of personal *Lectio Divina*.

So how much time do the sisters of HHC spend praying? Sister LaVerne explains, “St. Benedict says everything we do is considered prayer, so our whole life is a prayer really.” She loves to knit and makes items for family and to sell in the sisters’ gift shop, For Heaven’s Sake. This use of her time and talent to make something for others is a form of prayer.

Sister Carlita Koch would agree. An example she used is picking out and shelling pecans, an activity she enjoys. “Every pecan I pick is a prayer. I find it contemplative, sitting alone, quietly, focusing on picking pecans.

“Enjoying the beauty of a rainbow or walking outside can also be ways of praying. Listening to music hymns or soft music is my favorite way of praying. I think sometimes people get angry with God, but that’s still a prayer. You are still communicating with Him.”

Above: Picking pecans is a form of prayer to Sister Carlita Koch. “I find it contemplative, sitting alone, quietly, focusing on picking pecans.”



Communicating with God during times of sitting down and praying comes in various forms for the sisters. Reading scripture, the Divine Office, praying the psalms, and *Lectio Divina* are frequently mentioned as ways to pray.

Sister LaVerne is particularly fond of praying the psalms. In a week's time, she typically prays all 150 psalms. She says, "As you pray the psalms, there are always verses that tell you what you are praying for." She then reads verses from Psalm 119, "I call with all my heart; answer me, O LORD, and I will obey your decrees.... Yet you are near, O LORD, and all your commands are true." She closes her Bible, looks up, and says, "Now that's powerful."

Prayers to the Holy Spirit are favorites of Sister Wilma. She says, "I ask the Spirit to guide me in my thoughts and actions and the love I should have for God and others." She feels the Spirit has been a guiding presence in her life. One story she tells is when she was driving and decided to put her frost-covered window down before pulling onto the road. At that moment a semi went by. She alludes to the Holy Spirit in keeping her from pulling out in front of that semi.

Another example is when she returned to Ferdinand after ministering in North Dakota for 47 years. Only after returning did she realize her health was failing. The Holy Spirit had brought her here to be cared for in HHC.

With all these different forms of prayer, Sister LaVerne says, "You don't need fancy words, just talk to God."

As the types of prayer are varied, so are the intentions of those prayers. During rosary, the prayer intentions are verbalized by the group. They pray for the intentions listed on the prayer board, for the prayer requests received online or by another means, and for the benefactors and donors to the monastery and their intentions.

Private prayers include those intentions, but are also for themselves, for their family, for their fellow sisters. Sister Carlita pointed out, "Many private prayers are personal, and not shared with anyone but God."

Sister LaVerne says HHC prayers are "for peace and everyone in the world."

Sister Wilma is almost 92 years old and made her final monastic profession in 1943. Sister LaVerne is 94, making her final monastic profession in 1950. Over that many years as a Benedictine sister, their prayer life has evolved.

Sister Wilma says, "I've become better at it, which I should have. When you are young, prayer is more petition, when older you place yourself in God's hands and God can do as God wills with you. My prayer has deepened since younger days."

Reflecting on her prayer life, Sister LaVerne says, "When I first came (to the monastery), I sensed a closeness to God in the atmosphere. Now I sense even more closeness to God on this floor (HHC). The longer in religious life, you should be closer to God."

The way these sisters talk about prayer, one does get the feeling they have a personal closeness with God. They simply have conversations with God throughout the day. It seems to be a casual closeness they enjoy.

Sister Wilma's last prayer of the day, as she lies down to sleep, asks God to keep her close. "And if I should die, forgive me of all my failings." When she wakes in the morning, she starts her day by praying, "Thank you God for waking me up."

God, we are thankful you woke up Sister Wilma too, and are thankful for all the sisters that contribute to the "Powerhouse of Prayer." ■

Sister Wilma Davis prays the rosary each morning as part of her prayer ministry.





Sister Elnora Shidler reads the latest requests for prayers.

# Sisters put prayer board requests in God's hands

by Greg Eckerle

It's easy to find Sister Mary Roman Dall in the Ferdinand monastery every morning. As surely as people the world over are in need of prayer every day, is as surely as Sister Mary Roman will be writing on the prayer board the many prayer intentions that pour in daily to the sisters.

A casual "How you doing today?" greeting to her recently was answered with, "I'm OK, but there are a lot of people that aren't," she said sadly, pointing to the requested prayers already on the board. "It's good to know people still have confidence in prayer."

And it's good to know the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand are still praying diligently several times a day for those in need, just as they have been doing since 1867.

The prayer board beckons to the sisters from an ideal spot in their monastery – between the dining room and the church. So it's nearly impossible to miss, which is exactly the way they want it.

As they walk to the 7 a.m. Liturgy of the Hours, the sisters routinely gaze at the prayer board, soaking in the latest requests for them to include in their upcoming prayers. And they look again nearly every time they pass the board, which can be several times

a day. The sisters note that employees stop to look, too. Since prayer is the sister's primary mission, the board is rightfully in the middle of all the action. They know the importance of presenting the intentions to God in prayer. Simply, it's what they do.

Often, two or three sisters will gather to somberly read the requests. Invariably, to break the silence, someone will say something like 'there sure are a lot of people needing help.' Heads will nod, and away they will walk, quiet, and likely already saying a prayer for what they just read.

The list is even emailed to those sisters living away from the monastery, those who are out on mission, from Rome to Minnesota, Indianapolis, Louisville, and Evansville.

While the board is mostly filled with information on people's concerns that need prayer, an occasional note appears that reminds everyone of the power of prayer.

*"In thanksgiving for prayers answered. The girl who was to have surgery to remove a tumor did not need surgery. The golf ball size tumor miraculously disappeared."*



Sister Mary Roman has been tending to the board full time since 1996, after retiring as a teacher from Ferdinand Elementary School.

She loves to share a favorite story with a pertinent lesson for all about the reality of prayer.

In 1948, in the 8th grade, she heard from a Sister of St. Benedict about a little girl who was praying for a doll for Christmas. The girl knew God would hear her prayer, but a friend disagreed. When the doll didn't appear at Christmas, the friend gloated, 'See, God didn't hear your prayer.' The girl, 8, replied, 'Oh, yes, God did hear my prayer. God said, 'no.' And the girl went on to play with her other toys, knowing her prayer was answered, and she was OK with it.

"That story has played a big part in my life," Sister Mary Roman says. "It's a lesson that has always stayed with me. We have to be careful, because sometimes our prayers aren't answered the way we ask. It taught me that God does what is right for us, but sometimes it's hard to accept that answer. God knows better than we do what is good for us, so we need to have that faith in God."

Prayer requests that Sister Mary Roman writes on the board come in through the website, by phone, or by notes from sisters. She can put up to about 22 on the board each day, and sometimes displays more on a nearby sheet. The requests never stop coming in.

Some of the phone calls, especially ones from hospital emergency rooms, can get quite emotional, but Sister Mary Roman's calm demeanor, and her ability to truly listen, are invariably much appreciated by the caller.

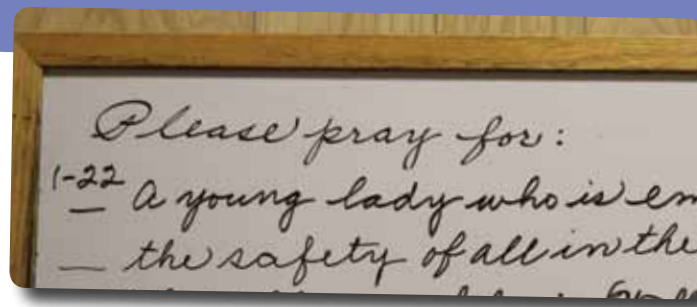
"I pray to the Holy Spirit that I give an answer that's acceptable," she says. "I am sometimes surprised about what I say, so it must be the Holy Spirit helping. Empathy and compassion are what they need." And that's what a Benedictine sister is all about providing.

Sister Mary Roman is adept at finding the right thing to say, whether it's encouragement, consolation, or reassurance. Sometimes the caller just needs to be listened to. She has the patience and attentiveness for that, too.

Many requests are for healthy delivery of babies. Frequent intentions are for those who have died, who are sick or injured, have cancer or heart problems, or have pressing family issues.

Sister Mary Roman has no doubts about the effectiveness of the prayer board. "Judging from the number of prayer intentions coming in, I believe people feel the board is useful. They wouldn't give me all those requests if they thought otherwise.

"I am impressed by the faith people have in the power of prayer. God's answer may not always be what we want, but maybe the person will receive the gift of peace and acceptance of the situation."



The heading of every prayer board listing begins with, "Please pray for..."

She relishes hearing the joy, satisfaction and relief in the voices of callers who tell of prayers answered. And their usual parting words are, "Be sure to tell the sisters thank you for their prayers."

She is affected by all the suffering she hears about, but is comforted in knowing the sisters "put it in God's hands."

"We trust in the Bible verses about 'Ask and you shall receive.' To believe in prayer requires faith in God. We are always in God's presence, but prayer helps me to be more conscious of the reality of God's presence. With God, all things are possible.

"My work with the prayer board makes me realize how much pain is out there, and how much we need to depend on God's intervention.

"Sometimes I just say, God, I place all these sufferings in union with the sufferings of your son. For Jesus is the one that suffered the most, and it was done for all of us." ■



Sister Mary Roman Dall writes requests on the prayer board in the Ferdinand monastery.



Sister Christine Kempf reads a letter from her prayer partner, Ali Zachman.

# Partners in prayer

By Laura Reckelhoff

Even though Sister Christine Kempf and Ali Zachman live in different states (Indiana and Illinois respectively) and have quite an age difference (Sister Christine is 79, Zachman is 19) they share a special bond. They are prayer partners.

In 2009 Sister Christine picked up a profile off the sisters' community room table of a teen looking for a prayer partner. The two have been in regular contact ever since.

"I really enjoy it," says Zachman, "I pray for Sister Christine and know she in turn prays for me. When I had a bad day it helps to know Sister Christine is praying for me, as is my family."

Zachman was a sophomore in high school when the partnership started and is now a freshman at Southern Illinois University. She has visited Sister Christine at the monastery twice, first in 2010, with a volunteer group from Illinois, then in 2011, this time bringing her family as well. "I plan to come back," Zachman excitedly announces.

The two mail letters, sometimes even hand-written, corresponding about once every six weeks. Zachman says, "I think it means more coming in an envelope. It seems to have more value than an email." The letters contain information of activities in each of their lives. They may also request the other to pray for a special intention in their life.

A special intention for Zachman is part of Sister Christine's daily prayers. "Sometimes the prayers are specific for what Ali has asked, other times they are for the well being of Ali and her family," Sister Christine explains.

Sister Christine describes Zachman as a very mature and conscientious person, as someone active in her church and elsewhere, and one who is dedicated to her studies.

She says, "I enjoy being in contact with a young person, sharing with them, and sharing prayers. Ali is a lovely person."

Zachman enjoys the relationship with Sister Christine as well. She says, "Our age difference is a big positive. She has so many life experiences. The chance of her going through something similar as I may be going through is great."

Sister Mary Philip Berger coordinates the volunteers at the monastery, and as such, assists in setting up prayer partnerships between sisters and volunteers that request it. Sometimes a youth minister will request prayer partners for their entire group of students.

Sister Christine looks forward to her correspondences with Zachman, saying, "She's even sent me pictures of her little brothers. I like that she shares her family with me. Her older sister even requested a prayer partner, which is now Sister Mary Philip."

Ali Zachman and Sister Christine Kempf have been prayer partners since 2009.





# Perspectives

How does prayer help you?



*Prayer helps me not to lose heart when things look difficult. It helps me keep trusting God, even when it's hard. It helps me remember that we all need each other and can hold each other up when we bring each other to God. If I don't take the time to do it, I start to feel really off balance!*

— Sister Jeana Visel, director of faith formation/assistant director of liturgy and worship at St. John's University Campus Ministry, Collegeville, Minnesota

*Prayer fills me with joy and peace. It gives me strength and courage and helps me to face tough things with hope. It is part of everything that I am, like breathing. Prayer is such a beautiful and wonderful gift!*

— Sister Sarah Yungwirth, teacher at St. Patrick Catholic School, Louisville, Kentucky



*Prayer calms me, alleviates my anxieties and sadness, and brings me hope. Prayer helps even when situations leave me feeling helpless. For example, the Sandy Hook tragedy. Prayer is the only thing that makes sense to me.*

— Sister Briana Craddock, teacher at St. Philip School, Mt. Vernon, Indiana

*Prayer helps me to refocus on God and on what is important in life. It helps me to let go of unnecessary worry and petty concerns. It gives me strength and peace.*

— Sister Paula Wolff, secretary to the archbishop for the Archdiocese of Louisville, Kentucky



*Often there are occasions during the day when I find myself saying a quick prayer for guidance in responding to some difficult situation.*

— Sister Mary Cheryl Uebelhor, instructor at Brescia University, Owensboro, Kentucky



*Prayer engulfs my life and is imbedded in my soul. I believe prayer puts me in touch with God. I don't "hear" God respond, but have a sense that God is present, or was present when I responded to someone or something in a loving and caring way.*

— Sister Anna Corrine O'Connor, theology teacher at Presentation Academy, Louisville, Kentucky



**NEW!**

## Assorted Cookies Gift Box

Our new gift box assortment holds five assorted cookie flavors to enjoy. Cookies are cheerfully prepared by the Sisters of St. Benedict in their very own Simply Divine bakery. The sisters are pleased to share with you these special cookies from family recipes, several of which have been given the distinction of "Indiana Artisan." Colorfully packaged, this assortment makes a great gift for any occasion or a special treat for you.



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### Calendar of Events

April 21, 2013	Oblate Meeting
May 18, 2013	Volunteer Appreciation Day
May 19, 2013	Oblate Meeting
June 17-19, 2013	Camp Marian (5-8th Grade girls)
June 21-27, 2013	Come and See Week
June 29-30, 2013	Academy Alumnae Reunion
July 6, 2013	Hope @ the Dome Youth Rally
July 13, 2013	Installation of new Prioress
August 24, 2013	Golden Jubilee Celebration
September 7, 2013	Women of the Rule Banquet
September 13, 2013	Sacred Music Concert
September 20, 2013	Ferdinand Folk Festival Fondo
October 18-20	Come and See Weekend
October 19, 2013	Benedictine Hills Pilgrimage
November 9, 2013	Monastery Angels – donor recognition

## Hope @ the Dome Youth Rally

**Help us spread the word!**  
Saturday, July 6, 2013



High school youth are invited to an outdoor extravaganza of prayer, service, and celebration at Monastery Immaculate Conception in Ferdinand, Indiana, hosted by the Sisters of St. Benedict.

What is this "Youth Rally?" Find out as details are released at [thedome.org/hope](http://thedome.org/hope).

For more stories about the sisters, visit [thedome.org/news](http://thedome.org/news).