

Serving others for 150 years



This issue's cover photo of Sister Christine Marie Fendel tenderly assisting a nursing home resident reflects how our community continually strives to help others.

Such service takes many forms in our ministries. One that is vital to our continued existence as a community is the story depicting Sister Louise Laroche's guidance of our novices and postulants into our Benedictine lifestyle. It's also a classic example of how different generations teach each other and become something greater than they are by themselves – indeed, it's one of the benefits of a religious community having members from their 20s to their 90s.

You can read how Sister Joan Scheller continues to build a welcoming environment within our community for the area's Latinos. One of our guiding principles is to be hospitable to all, particularly those that often feel isolated. It is so satisfying to see Hispanics coming onto our grounds for events that are planned especially for them. And you can learn more about the

lifelong passion of Sister Jackie Kissel to doggedly fight to correct injustices for people in need.

Other articles focus on how our new altar bread ministry helps people receive Jesus, how Sister Jane Ann Breen keeps our Hildegard Health Center sisters in tune with world events, and how Sister Traci Stutz and Sister Betty Drewes assist people in seeking God.

As always, we live to serve the people of God in various ways. We ask that you pray for us as we continually search for God's direction, and rest assured that you will forever stay in our daily prayers.

We would love to see you at our special Summer Social planned for June 2-3. It will be the culmination of the year-long celebration of our 150th anniversary in Ferdinand. It's truly been our community's pleasure to have been a part of people's lives for so long, and we look forward to continuing to help however we can.

Sister Barbara Lynn Schmitz, 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.



Sister Louise helps integrate newcomers into Benedictine lifestyle

by Greg Eckerle

Agreeing to leave a job she loved to become the sisters' initial formation director for novices and postulants was "one of the hardest things I've ever done," says Sister Louise Laroche.

But the importance of the new position accompanied a call that she couldn't, in good conscience, ignore. As initial formation director, she helps welcome, incorporate, and integrate new members into the Ferdinand Benedictine community. That means guiding them into a deeper relationship with God and the Benedictine way of life.

It's a huge responsibility – Sister Louise must plan their integration, teach them various subjects, be available to mentor them whenever the inevitable challenges arrive, and herself be a witness to the monastic life the newcomers aspire to live.

And she must do all that knowing full well that the future of the Ferdinand Benedictines depends on growing new members. Although Sister Louise realizes God is the ultimate formation director, that the community is number two, and she comes next, she is still the sort that "can't leave any stone unturned, and I want to cover everything" when it comes to helping the entrants.

Which is part of the reason why Sister Barbara Lynn Schmitz, prioress, picked her for the position. "She is a beautiful example of our Benedictine life," says Sister Barbara Lynn. "She has the gifts needed and the spiritual depth to bring her years of wisdom to those beginning religious life. Sister Louise can integrate life experience in a way that her faith and the faith of those around her are deepened. She sees the reality of life and its challenges, yet she trusts in God's guidance.

"She gives our new members an important background in Catholicism and theology. Otherwise, they would be going out into the field without enough background to minister well."

A big challenge for Sister Louise was deciding to leave her 25-year-

Above: Sister Louise Laroche (right) enjoys a point made by Sister Lisa Marie Schutz as part of her presentation on Psalm 50 in a class at the monastery.

stint as a religion teacher at Holy Family School in Jasper, Indiana, to become initial formation director. "I brought it to prayer, and it seemed like every scripture passage I read pointed to a new life for me," she says, grinning. "One reflection said something like 'leave your comfort zone, God is waiting to do a new thing with you.' I had given 25 years to Holy Family, and I thought it was time to give to my community."

Her new role is complex – she's a counselor, a mentor, a teacher, a spiritual guide, a supervisor, a spiritual mentor, and sometimes a peacemaker. Her focus is caring for the newcomers, which means paying attention to them in everything.

"My goal is that they are transformed by this way of life, and not merely adapted to this way of life. It's a lifelong process, but this is a beginning. I provide an environment where we can discern together their call, and their capability of living the Benedictine life."

She is in charge of the entrants' first stage of formation, which extends from six months to two years. The formation is on several levels: intellectual, spiritual, human, and pastoral. The classes she teaches introduce them to St. Benedict's Rule, Benedictine spirituality, and private and communal prayer. It's a time to reflect and discern whether they are a fit for the community and if the community is a fit for them. There will be times of struggle, but that often leads to a deeper commitment.

Sister Louise has a weekly conference with the postulants and novices, where no subject is off limits. After trust and confidentiality are built, the discussions can turn quite frank. But the tone is always what is best for them and the community. And there are plenty of conversations outside the conference, as they all live on the same formation floor at the monastery.

A key responsibility for Sister Louise is giving a recommendation to the formation team (includes Sisters Barbara Lynn; Jane Becker, subprioress; and Pat McGuire, director of temporary professed) on whether a person should move ahead or not on their formation path.

"Benedict says the concern must be if the novice truly seeks God and shows eagerness for the work of God," says Sister Louise. "The novice should be told of the difficulties that will lead to God. All of life comes with hardships, so the question is how do you see God in the turmoil. A hard question I ask is, 'Do you have the skills to live the life?' Can you go from being independent to being interdependent? Can they go from 'me' to 'we'? Are you willing to be transformed by the life? It's a school of the Lord's service, and we never graduate from that school."

When the newcomers struggle, Sister Louise must discern when to discuss the issue, and when to be silent. It's knowing when to support, when to confront with care, and when to get out of the way and leave it all to God. So she is in a listening mode all the time. And she says she's "never prayed so much in my life." She often hears people ask themselves if it's worth it – to change from their prior lifestyle to the Benedictine lifestyle. "I understand that," she says. "I entered the community when I was 33, so I get it. But I will say to them, 'You already had that life, and you wanted more. So are you going to find the 'more' here, or someplace else?'"

Sister Louise prepared for her new ministry by attending an intense nine-month program at the Institute of Religious Formation in Chicago. She formed many relationships there that she still leans on today. She is part of a group of formation directors from all over the U.S. that has proven to be a rich source of knowledge and support.



"An enjoyable part of my ministry is getting to share my love to this Benedictine way of life, and to see our new members grow in their love and commitment, and in their sense of belonging to one another. They believe in our future, so they give us hope. I know this way of life will not only continue, but thrive."

She also realizes that in her role she's not always on

Sister Louise, Sister Lynn Marie Falcony, Sister Charlene Ann Wheelless, and Sister Jacqueline Shively like a comment made by Sister Lynn in her classroom presentation about Psalm 127.

everyone's favorite list. At times she has to initiate some difficult conversations and address certain issues. We all have growing edges. She also readily admits, "I have failed at times, and I will fail. But I learn from it, and I thank God for the lesson in humility."

One of the newcomers, Sister Lisa Schutz, who recently made her first monastic profession, appreciated how Sister Louise listened to her concerns, gave suggestions, and tried to help her solve problems.

"She always told me that your prayer life is important, that if it's not consistent, you're not going to make it in community," said Sister Lisa. "Because when you have difficulties, your prayer life will help you through it. In the middle of my novitiate, when things were getting overwhelming, I thought about what Sister Louise said. I got back into reflecting and into my prayer life, and it really did help. Her classes gave me a good background on how to have a good prayer life, and how to live this life out. I know some other communities don't have classes like we do."

"Sister Louise is a hard worker, spending many hours getting our classes together. It's important to learn about things like our community history, because eventually I'm going to be passing the history along to somebody else. And knowing how to live out Benedict's Rule is really important, because that's what we do. I've learned so much from classes. Another thing she stressed is to have balance in your life. Plus, she has a quiet peacefulness about her, even if she's struggling with something. She's very easygoing and easy to talk to."

Postulant Roxanne Higgins cites Sister Louise's most beneficial attribute as being "a very prayerful person, therefore she's able to discern when she needs to engage, and when she needs to just give a little space."

"Sister Louise has been very patient and understanding. She's a friendly advisor that is there to help me with the journey. She helps with the transformation from the life outside to the life inside, to this way of living. My biggest challenge has been keeping the balance between the work of God and the regular work. Sister Louise makes herself available if I need to talk."

Postulant Roxanne also values how Sister Louise brings other sisters into various classes so she can see the wisdom of their years, too. "It's important to see what the transformation looks like, even though they themselves are still transforming," says Postulant Roxanne. "They say they find it a blessing to be in the classes themselves. It helps us see what living the life looks like over an extended time period."

At the end of one of her classes on the psalms, Sister Louise talked about how the generations before us gave us the psalms to nurture our lives, and we pray the psalms daily, continuing to give the psalms to those who follow us. "This is a gift that has been given to us as Benedictines," she said. "And as we pray the psalms, this is a gift we continue to give. Isn't that powerful?"

It's similar to the sisters' formation program – a gift that keeps on giving, from one generation to the next, a gift that keeps the Benedictine spirit alive. ■



Sister Patricia Ann McGuire (temporary professed director) and Sister Louise Laroche gather with the newly professed sisters, Sister Lynn Marie Falcony and Sister Lisa Marie Schutz.



Sister Christine lights up lives

by Greg Eckerle

It's no wonder people break into a smile when they see Sister Christine Marie Fendel.

Her visits to the homebound, senior citizen centers, and area nursing homes are all about being upbeat, positive, and bringing joy.

As coordinator of the ministry to the sick and elderly for St. Ferdinand Parish, Sister Christine Marie is constantly on the go six days a week, delivering communion, prayers, compassion, and hope.

At a recent prayer service attended by 10 residents at Scenic Hills Care Center in Ferdinand, Indiana, Sister Christine launched into her usual rousing start.

"OK, how many of you woke up this morning with a good attitude? You're not up yet? Goodness gracious," she laughed. "When you wake up, you can have a good attitude, or what? A bad attitude. You can be happy or grouchy. So let's be happy today, how about it?"

There were smiles and nods of agreement as Sister Christine gave instructions on how they were all going to just relax and meditate for a bit before a communion service. Sit up straight, close your eyes, breathe in deeply and hold it. Breathe in the love and goodness of Jesus, and breathe out anything bothering you. Breathe out any pain, your worries, your anxieties.

"You can do this exercise every day," she said. "Jesus is telling you,

'I am with you, I love you, trust me.' So when you get ruffled, think of Jesus saying that to you."

After leading the group in prayer, Sister Christine asked if anyone could think of something they'd like Jesus to do for them.

"I have a great grandson I'd like to be baptized," said one.

"I'd like to have my children stay in the Catholic faith," said another.

"I'd like to get walking again."

"I'd like Jesus to give me a better mind."

"I want my children healthy."

A gospel was then read that reminded Sister Christine of the song "You Light Up My Life." Before playing a tape of the song, she told the residents, "Jesus lights up our life every day. When I come here, you light up my life. As we listen, think of Jesus lighting up your life, and giving you hope to carry on." She then handed out colorful streamers to everyone, turned on the song, and led the group in happily waving the streamers while singing along.

Above: Sister Christine Marie Fendel and a Scenic Hills resident enjoy a moment together.

Sister Christine then visited other center residents, either in a gathering area or in their rooms. She greets people with comments about their pretty clothes, or a stylish hairdo, or how they're looking like a movie star. The subsequent meetings typically include praying aloud together, receiving communion, and delivering a blessing: "May the Lord bless you and keep you, may the Lord let his faith shine upon you . . ."

As Sister Christine weaves a beeline through Scenic Hills, one resident shakes her head, saying, "She just keeps going and going." Her normal routine is visiting parishioners in nursing homes in Ferdinand, Jasper, and Huntingburg, then traveling to see the homebound. Her job is termed as part-time, but is likely much closer to fulltime. She declines to count the hours she works, because she feels "it's a real honor to serve these people." She's been serving for nearly five years, after ministering for the Sisters of St. Benedict in California for 44 years, mostly teaching special education children.

"They're all so special; I love them all," she says of the people she visits. "Aren't they delightful? Wherever they go in what they're talking about, you go with them.

"Both teaching special education and this ministry are alike in that it's a blessing to be with them. I see it as a real sacrament, a true honor. And they teach me so much. I feel they give me more than I can give them. I have a plaque in my room that says 'What do we live for if it is not to make life less difficult for each other?' That's how I see it. These people are in need of help. I want to do as much as I possibly can for them, because they deserve it.



Sister Christine Marie leads Scenic Hills Care Center residents in waving streamers while listening to the song "You Light Up My Life."

"I feel I'm in the presence of Jesus when I talk to people. They have lived such a good life, and are trying so hard. Just to see what some go through is such an inspiration to me. They give up so much. Most have lost a spouse, or a child, or their home. Most of them go through the suffering so cheerfully. They're generous, and kind, and patient. People in a convalescent home have to be patient, because their whole life is about waiting. It's inspiring to see that. Many who loved to read can't anymore because their eyesight is gone, many can't hear. Yet they do it with such a good spirit, and are so accepting of so many things."

Helping to keep their spirits up are the visits by Sister Christine.

At a prayer service at Brookside Village Senior Living in Jasper, she appropriately plays the song, "You are my sunshine, my only sunshine . . .," on a rainy day. She exhorts everyone to show their happy face. And they invariably do. She reads aloud a gospel about Jesus curing a paralyzed man, and then asks the crowd how they are paralyzed. Maybe it's pain, or a worry, or a grudge. She encourages them to let it go, to put it in God's hands, so they can get closer to Jesus. As always, she follows by leading a suitable prayer.

Later, in a visit to a bedridden patient in her room, she delivers a Blessing of the Sick. Sister Christine blesses her forehead, ears, eyes, hands, feet, and heart, all the while thanking her for the many ways she used those senses. She concludes by saying, "The whole world has been better because you have been in it. You have touched your family so much . . . you are the light of Christ . . . thank you for being a gift in our lives."

The people she visits quickly claim that Sister Christine is a gift in



Sister Christine Marie comforts a resident during a prayer service at Scenic Hills.



Sister Christine leads a resident in prayer at Scenic Hills.

their lives as well. Kathy Nauman, whose mother, Freida Berg, has lived alone for 48 years, told Sister Christine, “She always talks about you, and how much she appreciates that you come out. It’s the companionship and that you’re so genuinely interested. And of course the spiritual side of it, too.”

Laverne Uebelhor and her husband, Jim, of Ferdinand really look forward to Sister Christine’s weekly visits. “She’s an angel, just a super person,” says Laverne. “She comes up with the most beautiful prayers you ever want to imagine. She says a prayer over us, and it’s so meaningful. It makes you feel wonderful. She’s just real close to us.”

Pat Bender’s home is filled with people who love Sister Christine’s appearances – Pat and her 95-year-old mother, Violet Kunkler; Pat’s husband, Larry; and their son, Greg. “We just love her,” says Pat. “She’s the sweetest person. She is so good with my handicapped son. He’s basically at home all the time, and he really enjoys when

she comes. It’s a pleasant time; it makes us all feel good.

“I always tell her that I’d love to adopt her. She knows how to treat people. I don’t think there’s a situation she couldn’t fit into.”

Along with the happy discussions Sister Christine ignites, there are often serious, spiritual talks, too. “They ask me questions, and I try to be a good listener,” she says. “A lot feel guilt because they’re not able to go to church anymore. I reassure them that God has a plan for all of us, that sometimes it’s not our way, and we have to follow God’s way. It’s not always the easiest, but I tell them God never makes a mistake.” ■



Sister Christine receives a bag of Christmas goodies during her visit to the home of Freida Berg (left). In the middle is Freida’s daughter, Kathy Nauman.

Nursing home letter of intent signed

A letter of intent has been signed by Trilogy Health Services, LLC, and the sisters to lease eight acres of monastery property for a proposed new nursing facility.

The operation would offer skilled nursing, assisted living, regular nursing home care, and rehabilitation services to the public and the sisters.

“This is another way to use our land resources to help meet area needs,” said Sister Barbara Lynn Schmitz, prioress. “It also improves access to long-term care needs for our sisters, giving us a safety net to take care of them. We will no doubt use their facilities when our Hildegard Health Center is too small for our needs, or when our sisters

need care beyond our services.”

If the next steps proceed as planned, the facility could be operating in about two years.

The structure would be accessed off of East 5th St., and located east of St. Benedict Drive.

Trilogy also operates the nearby Scenic Hills Care Center in Ferdinand.

The sisters will continue to operate Hildegard Health Center in the monastery.



Sisters welcome Latinos

By Greg Eckerle

“The Hispanics in the area definitely are a vulnerable part of our population,” says Sister Joan Scheller. “They don’t often feel accepted, welcomed, or valued. They are more used to being excluded than invited. They are sometimes fearful to really be who they are.”

But the Ferdinand Benedictines are making inroads in changing all of that. For the past two years, Sister Joan has been directing the sisters’ Latino Outreach and Immigration Services programs. She offers low cost immigration services from her monastery office, and also sets up various events each year customized to the Hispanic population that has drawn many to the monastery grounds.

And once the Latinos are there, the time-honored Benedictine hospitality is ready to greet them. “We as the sisters offer them warmth, we offer them peace, and we offer them a smile, even if some can’t say anything in their language,” says Sister Joan, who also speaks fluent Spanish. “We offer Latinos a place to come, and it sometimes eases their burden of feeling isolated.”

She enjoys the questions of the Latinos who visit the monastery grounds for the first time. What is this place? Who are the Sisters of St. Benedict? What do you do here? Sister Joan fills them in. Then,

invariably, they ask: You mean we can come here to church and pray? We can come to the grounds, to Grotto Hill, and pray, without permission? Of course. That’s why it’s here.

Sister Joan especially enjoys when the Latinos return. After a Marian Devotion Day last May, she recalled seeing some Hispanic families about a month later at the same Grotto Hill location, lighting candles and praying. Sometimes she’ll see flowers that have been left at the Guadalupe statue, just like Latinos do at the real Guadalupe Basilica in Mexico. “It just makes me feel good,” she says, “that through our events they feel they have a place where they can go, just to pray. Yes, they have their parishes, but this is a different space and a different welcome.”

Periodically she will receive a phone call from Latino visitors: “Sister, we were over praying at the Guadalupe statue. We didn’t see you, but just wanted to let you know we were there.” The comments are a testimony to the space and welcoming environment the sisters strive to create.

Above: Latinos arrange decorations by the monastery’s Guadalupe statue as part of Latino Family Day activities last May.

Sister Joan also is accredited by the U.S. Department of Justice to serve legal needs in matters of family immigration law, to determine eligibility for certain benefits. This includes helping people prepare and apply for a citizenship interview and test. Successes there have created some very rewarding moments for her. Some Latinos she's helped, upon walking out of the Indianapolis office knowing they passed citizenship requirements, will phone her, saying, "Sister, I got it! Sister, I got it!"

"It's so exciting for them," says Sister Joan, smiling broadly. "It's enjoyable for me, too, when I can help them maneuver through a very complicated process."

Father Carmelo Jimenez, pastor at St. Michael Archangel Parish in Sebree, Kentucky, is one who was successfully helped by Sister Joan. A fellow parishioner had recommended her to him. "The reason I came to her was because there was a lot of paperwork, and I didn't want it be wrong," he says. "I gave her all the information and she did it for me. She also prepared me for the interviews with immigration officials. It's very hard to fill out the application forms, especially for the poor people, because lawyers



Sister Joan Scheller and a young Latino enjoy a moment at Monastery Event Hall during Latino Family Day.

are too expensive to go to. Many (Latinos) don't speak English, they need somebody to speak in Spanish. So a lot of people go to her because it's cheaper and she can speak Spanish and translate for them. There's a lot of help from her to the people."

There's also how much a Benedictine cares.

"As sisters, we do ministry a little differently than what a lawyer would do," says Sister Joan. "I don't know that a lawyer goes to



Latinos pray in the monastery cemetery during an All Souls Day celebration.

bed at night worrying about somebody who's stuck in Mexico, whereas I do. It's because we get personally involved in people's lives. They're not just a client, or a number. We care about them." Whenever someone goes for a citizenship interview, she puts a notice on the sisters' prayer board, so the entire community is praying that all goes well.

She currently has 44 cases in process. While some are relatively simple, others can take two to three years to complete. She wrapped up about 50 cases in 2016. Over 400 immigrants were aided by her office in fiscal year 2015-2016, including phone and office consultations. So there is a lot of work, but more help is on the way – Sister Michelle Sinkhorn, who already assists in tracking cases, is in the process of getting certified.

Elena Vicente, a parishioner at Our Lady of Hope in Washington, Indiana, is a fan of both the immigration services and the outreach programs. "All the programs and the immigration work Sister Joan has done have been a benefit for the community," she says. "She's really helpful in filling out the immigration papers. She's always willing to help in anything she can. She's a really great resource, someone we can always count on. We've always been thankful for her.

"I loved the women's weekend retreat that we stayed in Ferdinand for. Another program, the Day of the Dead, was great for the families there. People said they enjoyed it, that they learned more about God with Sister Joan. I'm so happy to go there and continue my faith."

When Sister Joan, late in her ministry career in 2009, agreed to study immigration law, she initially wondered why she had taken on such a task. But she didn't question herself for long. "It was what was needed for the area," she says. "That was what inspired me to do it. We sisters are drawn towards the marginalized. We have a sensitivity to those who struggle. We try to care for them in

a special way. And we also do it because our mission statement says we seek God through hospitality and service to others, and because Benedict calls us to receive the stranger, and the poor, as Christ.

“Working with the Latinos is a spiritual gift that has helped me. To see life not always as something that needs to be fixed, but something that just needs to be lived. To be able to deepen my own trust in God, and trust in others. The community has been graced, I think, by the presence of the Latinos.”

The sisters offer various faith formation events in the Spanish language every year. Those days are family-oriented and enable Latinos to express their Catholic faith through their culture and traditions. About 166 Latinos participated in the outreach programs at the monastery in fiscal year 2015-2016. ■



Sister Joan Scheller helps straighten out a ribbon that Latinos are going to place over the statue of our Lady of Guadalupe on the monastery's Grotto Hill.

Benet Apartments open

Benet Hall Apartments, located on the peaceful grounds of Monastery Immaculate Conception, is now open.

The facility, which makes available affordable senior housing, offers 15 apartments that include a stove, refrigerator, microwave, dishwasher, washer/dryer hook up, walk-in showers, and pull cords for emergency alerts to neighbors.

One resident of a new apartment says, “There have been so many unforeseen blessings as a result of my move here. I have lived many different places and never felt settled anywhere. When I moved into Benet, I felt I was home. I know this is a result of being in the daily presence of the Benedictine community. I feel Benet Hall is filled with the peaceful spirits of the sisters that lived in the building before. It is very much a spiritual and prayerful space.



Benet Hall Apartments

“My favorite things include the beautiful view of the monastery, being able to worship with the sisters, and the ability to walk the monastery grounds. The apartments are beautiful and have an open concept. I like the security features, including the pull cords, having a sprinkler system, knowing my neighbor tenants went through a background check, and having exterior and interior locking. Having access to

the two community rooms in Benet and being able to entertain gatherings of family and friends means a lot to me. There is also a media room if we want to gather and watch a movie, and an exercise room and laundry room. We have 24 hour maintenance help if needed. I highly recommend Benet as a safe, spiritual environment to live out one's golden years. I would like to live out the rest of my life here.”

For more information, call 812-998-2058. Monthly rent is priced in compliance with affordable rates for senior citizens as set by the state.



Sister Jackie perseveres for justice

By Greg Eckerle

Fighting for justice, even when it's clearly the right thing, can still be a long, lonely road.

But Sister Jackie Kissel of Evansville, Indiana, who has been clamoring to right wrongs her entire career, is undeterred by the notion she may not live to see some injustices corrected. She will still hammer away at the sometimes painfully slow work to make it happen, just like she always has.

When CAJE (Congregations Acting for Justice and Empowerment) was formed in Evansville in 2003 to push for solutions to local social issues, Sister Jackie couldn't volunteer to help fast enough.

She's been an integral part of CAJE convincing local officials to implement several improvements, including adding a bus transportation line so people could get to their jobs, the opening of a free dental clinic for low-income residents, an agreement to develop a crisis care center for those with mental health issues, and the creation of a housing trust fund to help provide affordable housing.

Another success was the placement of the opiate antidote Narcan with first responders for use in the life-saving treatment of drug overdoses. That move saved seven lives in the first two years. "It makes me feel great," says Sister Jackie. "We had to fight a battle

about that for several years, because police didn't want to spend the money to get Narcan in all their cars, but it's proven that it works."

Sister Jackie's affinity to fight injustices began in the 1960s-70s when she taught and was principal at a school for mentally and developmentally-delayed children. The school was located in the middle of an African-American community, which also had its share of justice issues. "I saw how their families had to struggle," she says. "It helped me see the broader picture."

She serves CAJE in various roles, as a member of the board of directors, as a network organizer, and as part of various research committees.

"I stay involved because it's not just my job, it's a personal investment," says Sister Jackie. "I want to invest in this work that Jesus calls us to do. He calls us not only to charity, but also to justice. So many of us Catholics have been involved with charity all our lives, but justice is another story. Because when you want to solve injustices, often you have to confront systems, which is difficult."

Above: Sister Jackie Kissel talks with a participant during a break in a program about living a life of justice that she presented at the Benedictine Hospitality Center in Kordes Hall in Ferdinand.

That's why CAJE, which is made up of 21 religious congregations of various faiths, actively recruits people to publicly support the corrections the group is recommending. They rely on people power to motivate officials to listen. CAJE spends months identifying, researching, and discussing the most pressing concerns facing the community. Then once a year they will meet with community leaders to discuss and negotiate possible solutions. Last year 1,300 CAJE supporters attended the meeting.

The group is a true advocate for powerless people, in essence giving a voice to the voiceless. That stirs the passion within Sister Jackie.

"The Gospel calls me to both charity and justice. CAJE allows me to be about the work of justice, and to be supported in that work. It takes a community to accomplish change. Each time CAJE is successful in changing unjust systems, I celebrate."

Camille Davis Bradford, an organizer for CAJE, says, "Working for justice is something Sister Jackie really lives out in every part of her life, not just her involvement with CAJE. That always has really inspired me. She builds up a lot of the other people who work with the justice ministry. I know she does with me. She was very passionate about addressing the lack of affordable housing. It's important to her that everyone is able to live with dignity. Some people currently aren't. I know that really bothers her.

"It inspires me to see her perseverance. Justice work takes time. She puts in that time, and is not dismayed. She keeps everyone else's spirits up, and is an amazing woman. Religious sisters know the work they do plants a seed they might never see come to harvest, but they understand they're working to make a better place. So whether or not they see that better place doesn't deter them. That's absolutely how it is with Sister Jackie. She's motivated by knowing this is what she's called to do as a person of faith, and this is what Jesus would be doing, and not only when it's easy or popular."

Camille notes that Sister Jackie was selected to be on CAJE's executive committee because "she makes a difference and an impact not only on the people in her congregation but on the whole organization. She's a very big leader. She forms relationships with all our congregations, and is incredibly well-respected."

The newest issue that CAJE is working on is a smooth re-entry into society for people being released from prison. Sister Jackie cites the sad cycle those people often endure – with no place to go to, and with no job, they often end up back in prison.

Another key part of Sister Jackie's job is motivating other people in the community to become involved with the work of CAJE. That includes businesses as well as individuals.

"My mission as a Christian is to extend God's love to all the broken places and people of the world. If we say we love God, then we must love our neighbor, too. We are called to reject labeling of the poor, we are to work among the sick and poor as Jesus did, building relationships with them.

"Sometimes it's easier to say, 'Let somebody else do it.' But actually each of us needs to speak up in any way we can. I think justice is about giving everybody equal time, whether rich or poor, and giving the energy and time to sit there and really listen with your heart to what somebody has to say. Think about something you know is not right, then ask, how can we change that?" ■



Sister Jackie speaks to community leaders at the annual CAJE action event last April in Evansville, Indiana. Over 1,300 CAJE supporters attended the meeting.

Donation for Family Scholar House

Several Sisters of St. Benedict, monastery employees, and representatives of Dubois County Tourism gather at a ceremony where DC Multisport's Chris Welp presented a \$2,000 check to Sister Barbara C. Schmitz (center) to go toward the sisters' Family Scholar House ministry. Proceeds came from the 4th annual Ferdinand Folk Fest Fondo. The Family Scholar House program helps single parents achieve a college education.



Women of Church Conference spirit-filled

by Greg Eckerle

The recent “Women of the Church: Strength of the Past. Hope for Tomorrow. A Catholic Leadership Conference” held in Ferdinand, Indiana, had a lot going for it.

Pope Francis sent his greetings via a letter. Several high-profile female leaders addressed the crowd of 260. Archbishop Joseph Tobin and Bishop Charles Thompson shared reflections, then answered questions from the audience. Several break-out sessions were conducted.

The conference, created in response to Pope Francis’s call for “a more incisive female presence” in the Church, was co-hosted by the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand and Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology.

In his greeting, Pope Francis said, “... It is my hope that the Conference, by exploring the multifaceted contribution of women to the life of the Church in America, past and present, will open new horizons for their greater and more inclusive presence and activity in the future. The challenge of an authentic missionary discipleship, so essential to the Church’s witness in this time of epochal change, requires not only that the distinctive gifts of women be recognized by the ecclesial community, but also valued as indispensable to the new evangelization and, indeed, the renewal of society as a whole...I would repeat the words I addressed to religious sisters last year: What would the Church be like without you? Women of strength, fighters, with that spirit of courage which puts you in the front lines in the proclamation of the Gospel! . . .”

Judging by feedback from participants, the conference was a hit. Here are some of the comments --



Kerry Robinson

Kerry Robinson, founding executive director of the Leadership Roundtable in Washington, D.C., who gave the opening reflection: The conference was full of light and possibility. There was a tremendous sense of solidarity and goodness. The hospitality and welcome was warm and gracious. It was a conference of profound hope. I was reminded of how many women and men of good will care deeply about the role of women in the Church

and understand how elevating women to positions of meaningful leadership positively impacts the Church. There was a group of young women who are leaders in campus ministry at their university more than an hour away. Their presence meant so much to me and they

were so profoundly grateful that I had specifically lifted up young adult women in the Church. It always gives me so much hope to see such well educated, thoughtful, committed, young women who want to be a blessing in the Church and in the world. I am profoundly grateful to the sisters for their hospitality and vision, their countless acts of mercy, their witness, and their beer!

Dr. Carolyn Woo, president/CEO of Catholic Relief Services, the kickoff keynote speaker: The

conference was extremely well organized and the spirit was infectious. There was a sense of the gathering of a family. It was good to see a lot of the young women who are excited about the contributions they stand to make and the leadership they can provide in this community. I

walked away with a real sense of solidarity among the women of the Church: our collective passion and contributions. There is an unmistakable love for the Church. I started the presentation by saying that my journey started with love, the love for my parents, and that love is the best guide. I also made the point that God has been with us every step of the way even though we do not always recognize this. Finally, I hope that we remember that God comes to us through the other: He sends us to others and them to us when He promised that He would not abandon us. . . (The sisters’) generosity in co-hosting this conference is both visionary and generative. They sparkle with the hospitality that the Benedictines are well known for. It is a treat to be with them.

Sister Jeana Visel, OSB, conference co-chair: I was surprised and delighted at how a spirit of gratitude and joy pervaded our time together. So many people came up just to say ‘thank you.’ I found myself marveling at how the different speakers kept bringing out the theme of how blessed we are by our baptism; all these stories kept manifesting all the cool things we can do by virtue of our baptism, whether women or men. The pope’s letter affirmed what women can and must do as part of the new evangelization: we are to live and proclaim our faith in Jesus in a way that makes it attractive to others. This is something one can do no matter one’s status in the Church. We have great dignity in living out our faith well, and this is a powerful, beautiful thing. Overall, I was so grateful to all the people who stepped up to help things go smoothly, and I am glad we could provide a space where women could hear a sense of the Church’s



Dr. Carolyn Woo



Sister Jeana Visel, OSB, and Dr. Kimberly Baker at the conference opening

'thank you' and recognition that sometimes gets muffled in everyday life.

Dr. Kimberly Baker, conference co-chair: The main highlight was the spirit of the conference community. The spirit was electric. One participant described that spirit as a creative energy in the room. Another highlight was seeing four women from the University of

Evansville gathered around Kerry Robinson as she affirmed their gifts and the leadership they are already offering. One moment that stands out for me was when the room broke out in applause when Kathleen Sprows Cummings said that leadership flows from baptism. She struck an important chord that spoke to the needs and hopes of the group. I was energized from all that took place. I was humbled by the joy and gifts of those I met. One young woman approached Archbishop Tobin to share some thoughts. That she would feel empowered and welcome to do so thanks to the conference makes the work worthwhile. Some spoke about the spirit of the community and how energizing that is. We couldn't program that (spirit). It's a gift.

Some comments from evaluation forms:

Your whole plan was incredibly meaningful.

Excellent program, beautiful location, wonderful hospitality, inspiring and informative speakers.

An enriching experience.

Monastery makes for a perfect environment for prayer, reflection, and dialogue

Spirit of gratitude and joy was palpable.

Speakers were wonderful role models – so much spoken to inspire us.

It was more than I had expected or hoped to hear. I feel sent forth. ■

Eleven sisters celebrate jubilees

Eleven Benedictine sisters celebrated special anniversaries of their religious profession on Sunday, October 30, at Monastery Immaculate Conception in Ferdinand, Indiana. Sister Corita Hoffman, Sister Mary Carmel Spayd, Sister Mary Carmen Spayd, and Sister Beata Mehling marked the 70th anniversary of their profession of monastic vows. They entered the monastery in 1944 and made monastic profession in 1946. Sister Joella Kidwell, Sister Diane Fischer, Sister Madonna Helmer, Sister Jacqueline Shively, Sister Helen Jean Kormelink, Sister Leona Schlachter, and Sister Doris Market celebrated their 60th anniversary. They entered the community in 1954 and made monastic profession in 1956. These sisters have served a total of 700 years in ministries in Indiana, Illinois, California, Kentucky, and Tennessee.



Front Row (L to R): Sister Corita Hoffman, Sister Beata Mehling, Sister Mary Carmen Spayd, Sister Mary Carmel Spayd. Back Row (L to R): Sister Madonna Helmer, Sister Leona Schlachter, Sister Doris Market, Sister Helen Jean Kormelink, Sister Diane Fischer, Sister Joella Kidwell, Sister Jacqueline Shively

Now accepting candidates for summer Service to Sisterhood

The Sisters of St. Benedict are accepting applications for the 2017 Service to Sisterhood program. Young women ages 18-25 who are interested in a combination of service, community life, and prayer are

invited to contact Sister Teresa Gunter at tgunter@thedome.org for more information or to apply for the program.

Altar bread ministry helps people receive Jesus

by Greg Eckerle



Sisters Mary Leah Baehl and Beata Mehling process communion hosts as part of a new ministry for the Ferdinand Benedictines.

The newest ministry at the monastery – the distribution of altar bread, or communion hosts, to parishes in the Louisville area – is about as appropriate as could be for a religious community.

The previous distributor, the Carmelite Monastery in Louisville, certainly knew that when they went looking for someone to hand over the business to when they realized they could no longer keep up with it themselves. Sister Carol Curtis asked the Ferdinand Benedictines if they were interested, and Sister Barbara Lynn Schmitz, prioress, agreed, saying, “What we were really excited about is this is something our senior sisters can do. It’s a real community-building venture for our sisters, and a real way they help in ministry.”

Since last October, around 10-14 senior sisters, including some from the Hildegard Health Center, have been sorting and packaging the communion hosts, which are sent out from the Monastery Gift Shop. Sisters Mary Leah Baehl and Beata Mehling coordinate the sorting and packaging, while Angi Seffernick, co-director of Monastery Goods and Services, manages the business end.

For Sister Mary Leah, who recently returned to Ferdinand after ministering for the sisters’ monastery in Peru since 1977, it’s a perfect assignment. “I love it, I really do, because it brings me old memories when we sit around the table with the other sisters and we talk,” she says. “It’s fun. It isn’t work. It gives me something to do, and I feel like I’m helping somebody. I come here and I leave all my concerns behind. And it’s a family project, it’s not just mine or Sister Beata’s, it’s the community’s. That’s the reason I love it.”

Sister Beata points to the spiritual aspect of the ministry. “I think of all the people being able to receive Jesus, just because we’re

providing it to them by sending hosts to their parishes. And I especially think of all the little children who are receiving Jesus at their first communion, and how we’re helping make that possible.

“I also feel that working with the hosts is enriching for us sisters, because we feel like we’re doing something worthwhile.”

Sister Mary Leah wants to create a prayer that the sisters can recite before they begin working on the altar bread. She wants to pray for the people who are going to receive communion, particularly for the ones not really prepared, and for those that are sick. “I want the sisters that are here to know that they’re working for a cause, and that it’s for the good of someone,” she says softly, passionately. “I don’t want us to just do it because it’s a job, but we’re doing it because someone is going to receive Jesus.”

Sisters Beata and Mary Leah were picked to coordinate the new ministry because they’ve managed other operations in their careers, and have a gift for bringing other people on board and working with them.

Sister Carol, who coordinated the distribution before it transferred to Ferdinand, traveled to the monastery to explain the operation to the sisters. “Working with the sisters those few days, it was a joy to see how ‘at home’ the altar bread work was among them,” she said. “They are quick learners, with good ideas on how to adapt it to their situation, such as getting gloves and hairnets from the kitchen to wear while handling hosts. We are grateful the work is being continued as a ministry, and will help support a religious community.” ■



Sister Carol Curtis, who trained the sisters on the communion bread ministry, weighs some hosts. At right is Sister Mary Leah Baehl.



Sister Jane Ann creates news time for senior sisters

by Greg Eckerle

Sister Mary Rose Hasenour enters the day room at the monastery's Hildegard Health Center and asks her usual question of Sister Jane Ann Breen: "Do you have any good news for us today?"

Sister Jane Ann smiles, and responds, "I think I do, there's always some good news somewhere."

Another sister chimes in, "Just that you're able to read or hear, that's good news."

They were gathering for Sister Jane Ann's three-Thursdays-a-month "News and Views Class," which is a highly-popular meeting for the sisters residing in Hildegard.

Up to 11 sisters regularly attend the classes. Most were teachers during their careers, and love to keep up on the news. Some are in their 90s, and not able to read as they once did. But they still have questions about what is going on in the world. And Sister Jane Ann is there to answer them.

Sister Jane Ann is a retired social studies teacher, and a perfect choice to regularly scour the news and pick out what is pertinent for the sisters to hear. She was first asked to do this for the senior sisters back in the 1980s, faithfully doing so until she was away

from the monastery for 11 years, returning in 2014. She was then asked by Sister Agnes Marie Dauby, Hildegard's activity director, if she would resume the News and Views Class. Sister Jane Ann had been hoping for that call.

She loves conducting the class, which usually lasts about an hour, because she gets to spend some quality time with her fellow sisters. Some had been her teachers long ago, and others she had ministered alongside.

Her news sources are normally The Evansville Courier, Associated Press News, New York Times, Huffington Post, the local Herald, various television news shows, and her trusty smartphone. She arrives at the class with several pages of handwritten notes – her lesson plan – and after helping some sisters get situated and comfortable, she begins sharing the highlights she's chosen. Sister Jane often shares her view of some events, and is ever ready for some sisters to pipe up with opposing thoughts. But, as one would expect with Benedictine sisters, it's all discussed civilly and with occasional dashes of humor.

"You never know the reaction you're going to get from one class to another," she says. "It's wonderful. I get challenged once in a while, which is great. Many of the sisters keep up with the news on their own, but this is still a good time to come together. There are always a few sisters that have something to say. They won't be shy. If they don't quite understand some of the news, they'll ask

Above: Sister Jane Ann Breen (far left) shares news highlights with sisters at the Hildegard Health Center in the monastery.

me for clarifications. Like, what's the difference between a caucus and a primary? Or we'll discuss political candidates. I do watch what I say and try to cover both sides. They are very wise women. I just love doing this. These sisters teach me more than I teach them."

At one class after the November election, the questions came fast: What does Trump stand for? Does he have any children? How old is he? What about the new First Lady? Sister Jane Ann fields the queries, then talks about why the U.S. has the electoral college, along with some of its problems. She later explains cyberbullying, and talks about immigrants coming to the U.S. in search of a better life.

In a December class, Sister Jane Ann talks about snow and bitter cold in the upper Midwest. Subjects then swing from gas prices to Oprah Winfrey, Syrian refugees, the Pope's birthday, the importance of changing passwords, and what happens if the electoral college voting doesn't select Trump. Later, a sister comments that sports figure salaries are way out of line. The other sisters erupt in agreement. Then one joked, to both laughs and groans, "All I know about football is that one coach went to the bank and wanted his quarterback."

As the session ended, a newcomer, Sister Mary Karen Hill, said, "Sister Jane Ann, this was my first time hearing you, and I was very impressed. What I heard about you was certainly true; thank you."

Sister Agnes Marie, Hildegard activity director, says, "The sisters really like to keep up on the news. Sister Jane Ann does a nice job telling them about it. I hear comments that they're glad she offers the class, and they look forward to it. Sister Jane Ann has an interest in social studies and is an excellent teacher."

Although some of the news isn't very uplifting -- wars, terrorism, police being shot -- the sisters feel they still need to know about it. But Sister Jane Ann always brings in some positive news as

well, and tries to end on a bright note.

Sister Mary Alice Schnur, who has a magnifier to enable her to read small print, and is a regular class participant, says, "I've been enjoying the classes very much, because the others and I am very interested in the news. Sister Jane Ann has been doing a fine job of informing and sharing with us. It's a time we look forward to. I have a hard time reading, but I still do manage. It's a gift that I can still read." ■



Sister Jane Ann answers a question from a sister during her "News and Views" class.

In memoriam

Sister Wilma Davis

February 20, 1921–January 16, 2017

"Sister Wilma Davis was the holiest woman I have ever known."

While Sister Wilma suggested that statement as a remark people could make at her funeral, she did not seem to realize how close to the truth it was.

Sister Wilma was a joyful woman with a ready smile and a dry wit. She infused everything she did with love, but she was not a pushover. Sister Wilma was strict; she ran a tight ship. She valued the people whom she served, both children and adults, and challenged them to grow in whatever way they could. Her love, kindness, and patience helped others to see Christ in others and in everyday situations.



by Sister Briana Elisabeth Craddock

Sister Wilma had a special place in her heart for women who were new to community. She made it a point to get to know all of the younger sisters, and became a wise elder for many of them. Through listening and sharing joys and struggles, she offered support to her family and community members.

The 57 years that Sister Wilma spent in North Dakota while a member of Queen of Peace Monastery in Belcourt shaped her personally and spiritually. Her love of the people was evident in the service that she offered as well as the stories that she shared with the Ferdinand community after she returned to Indiana. She was beloved by the people of Belcourt as well. "Sister Wilma was like a national treasure to the Belcourt people," wrote North Dakota Oblate Joseph Marion. "She was a blessing to all of us."

Sister helping create catechist formation class

by Greg Eckerle



Sister Traci Stutz shares a teaching tip in a pilot class to help create a catechist training program. At right is Lana Fierst, a religious education teacher for elementary and middle school students.

When the Diocese of Evansville was looking for a facilitator that could help with a pilot program to create formation for catechists, one name immediately popped up: Sister Traci Stutz.

She had trained youth ministers and coordinators for confirmation programs in the Archdiocese of Louisville for seven years, and also helped with the University of Dayton online courses.

“Sister Traci has extensive knowledge and experience in ministry and with catechesis,” said Mary Kaye Falcony, assistant director of catechesis for the Diocese of Evansville. “We thought she would be an awesome fit. Besides, she’s very inviting, very welcoming, and the environment of Monastery Immaculate Conception is great to be in. We wanted a really quality experience for our pilot participants. We thought (Sister Traci at the monastery) fit the bill.”

When asked, Sister Traci readily volunteered to help. “It’s just helping out a need. And it’s a way the sisters can be involved. It keeps the sisters and our mission in front of catechists. If they can recommend their experience at Kordes Hall, that’s a good thing.”

The pilot program tested three different learning styles -- two online courses and a gathered, in-person learning

experience, which was what Sister Traci facilitated at the monastery for five area catechists. She conducted five Monday evening sessions at Kordes Hall on the monastery grounds.

“We all learned from each other,” said Sister Traci. “There were good examples shared of what worked in the classroom and what didn’t work. I enjoyed helping people trying to figure things out.”

One class participant, Lana Fierst, is a religious education teacher for elementary and middle school students at St. Joseph’s Parish in Jasper, Indiana. “Sister Traci’s classes helped me by being able to hear from others about their faith experiences and teaching experiences. I felt strengthened in my role as a catechist. I want to try several new things in my classroom. With my sixth graders I am going to try shared fellowship over food. With my fifth graders, I want to put various items on my prayer table, let them pick one, and (talk) how it relates to our faith or scripture. I also want to do ‘peer learning’ in smaller groups, and maybe a Catholic Jeopardy or Family Feud type of game. Lastly, I took away from Sister Traci’s classes that we need to live our faith and share our faith journey with our students. We need to be authentic.”

The pilot program was the first phase of the diocese’s effort to create an instrument to train catechists and teachers in religious education and formation. By helping their formation, they in turn can better teach their faith to adults and children in their classes.

“It’s not just about book learning,” says Sister Traci, “but about teachers developing their own spirituality. It helps them create an atmosphere of life-long formation. You should keep developing spiritually. We’re hoping to create a community of life-long learners.”

Falcony says the next phase is to have a team of about 10 people recommend a curriculum and a timeframe, all with an eye on launching classes by September, 2017.

“Sister Traci also graciously volunteered to be on that team,” said Falcony. “Her students had an awesome experience with her in the first phase. There was a lot of positive feedback about being able to ask her questions, and her having the knowledge and experience to say this works, or this doesn’t work. She could really speak to the tasks of catechesis, because she does them so well.” ■

Sister Betty talks power of prayer

by Greg Eckerle

To illustrate her point that one's personal prayer can take just about any form, Sister Betty Drewes revealed in her "Prayer and Spiritual Direction" program that she often sings a song to praise God when she's by herself in a car. She uses her own words, creating as she goes, usually without a pattern.

Sister Betty knew that the 14 in attendance at her presentation in Evansville, Indiana, were there to learn more about how to pray, how to go deeper in their relationship with God.

"Prayer practices are up to each individual," she said. "It could be Centering Prayer, Lectio Divina, the breath prayer, or even writing a poem."

She explained the principles and features of several types of prayer, but a key message was that each person should pick the style best suited for them. "What are the practices that feed you, what nourishes your spirit, what gives you life? Don't keep saying the same prayers if it's not working. Try something different. Whatever lights your heart and gives you energy, do it."

Sister Betty began her presentation by lighting a Christ candle, which she said speaks to us, and that we want to be that light. "One way we become that light is through our prayer," she said. "Prayer changes things, and it changes people."

It also gave her the confidence to tell the audience she believed she could condense her normal two-hour presentation on prayer into one hour. "We can do it," she said. "You know why? Because you can do anything if you believe in God."

She shared her love of St. Theresa's definition of prayer: prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a simple look toward heaven; it's a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy.

Sister Betty advised there is no official "formula" for prayer, beyond the need to nurture it with words and silence. She mentioned many people tell her they wish they could pray like she does, or pray like Pope Francis or Thomas Merton. But she responds that is not the goal, that "your prayer is your unique prayer, your relationship with God; so bring your prayer to God." She repeatedly encouraged attendees to pray the way they want to pray, that prayer essentially is each person finding their own way.

"Although, prayer is not just for me," said Sister Betty. "When I pray, hopefully I'm building up God's community, which is everybody, including people opposed to who I am, and even the people that hurt us. God loves them, just like God loves us."



Sister Betty Drewes explains various prayer forms to a group in Evansville, Indiana.

She thinks of the perpetual challenge of seeing with the eyes of faith, of seeing with God's eyes, and the difference that could make in the situations she encounters.

After explaining various prayer methods that can draw people closer to God, she concluded with the power one can gain by pausing every so often – by hitting the "pause button" to gain an outlet to God, to give yourself energy.

You may even find yourself singing at the top of your lungs while driving down the street.

(Sister Betty's presentation was held in Evansville as part of an outreach effort by the Sisters of St. Benedict Spirituality Ministry, who usually present their programs at their Ferdinand monastery. The sisters offer group or individual programs and retreats that educate and provide personal spiritual direction. These programs develop a deeper awareness of God, the world, yourself, and others that lead to a more meaningful and fulfilling life. For more information, or to register for upcoming programs, visit www.thedome.org/programs, or call 812-367-1411, ext. 2915, or 800-880-2777.) ■

NEWS from the Dome

Women of Rule trip 'like a pilgrimage'

For Jenny Schmitt, a recent trip to Italy "really was a joy to share with Women of the Rule who were able to go."

The group visited Rome, saw Pope Francis up close, and toured several towns and churches, learning about their history, significance, and associated saints. "It was a spiritual experience being able to walk in the footsteps of the saints the churches were named after," said Jenny. "And because of all the people over the centuries who have gathered there for prayer and celebration of faith. We went to one church after another. It really felt like a pilgrimage."

The Women of the Rule is a 92-member group dedicated to making a difference in the world by financially supporting the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand and their ministries. Members can vote on annual award proposals, and also have the opportunity to enjoy various programs and activities. The Italy trip was an option open to members and their spouses, or a friend. Ten people went on the excursion, including Women of the Rule members Diane Weiss-Altstadt, Carolyn Fuhs, Kerri Cokeley, Gloria Shreve, and Jenny Schmitt.



Sister Barbara C. Schmitz and Jenny Schmitt in Padua, Italy.

Sister Barbara C. Schmitz, who coordinates the Women of the Rule effort, helped put together the trip and accompanied the group. The travelers also visited Venice, Florence, Padua, and Assisi. "Everybody loved Assisi," said Sister Barbara C. "That was a big deal. Another big deal was seeing Pope Francis."

Said Jenny, "I am so grateful for Sister Barbara making it possible for us to have this experience. It was impressive to see firsthand the rich heritage passed on to us and preserved by the people of Italy."

A three-year-member of Women of the Rule, Jenny joined the group because she wanted to continue to be supportive of the sisters' ministries. "To help empower the needs the sisters would like to see happen come into being is a rich experience. The sisters impact our diocese and beyond in so many ways. I think people have no idea how far-reaching their ministries are. Their presence and their ministry have a huge impact on the lives of so many in so many different walks of life." Jenny, who operated a landscape business, is semi-retired and lives in Evansville, Indiana.

(Note: For more information about Women of the Rule, or if you are interested in joining, contact Sister Barbara C. Schmitz at bcschmitz@thedome.org or at 812-367-1411.)



Gloria Shreve, Susan Shreve, Kerri Cokeley, Diane Weiss-Altstadt, Elana Holz, and Sister Barbara C. Schmitz in St. Peter's Square in Rome.

Donor remembers sisters' 'special help'



Ann Wagner Harper

The late Ann Wagner Harper of Indianapolis, who had a distinguished career in singing and broadcasting, was always quick to point out the early help she received from religious sisters.

She was so appreciative that

she became a generous donor and a planned giver to the Ferdinand Benedictines, including naming them in her will.

Ann, who died last October at age 92, wrote in a note to the sisters, "I have remembered you in my will because of the special help the sisters gave me when I attended Sacred Heart Grade School in Vincennes, especially Sister Mildred (voice, piano, and violin)." Her gift was designated to "continuation of the sisters' mission and ministries." In phone conversations with the community she would note that she enjoyed helping the sisters, and that "the sisters have done a lot for me."

Blessed with a wonderful voice and the early music instruction, Ann

won a scholarship to the University of Louisville School of Music. Later, she had a singing show on Vincennes radio, which led her to singing at WIBC in Indianapolis. Ann joined WFBM in 1947 as a staff announcer, and soon was reported to be the first commercial female disc jockey in the United States. She later became the chair of the Radio and TV Department and manager of WAJC at Butler University in Indianapolis, all leading to her election to the Indiana Broadcasters Hall of Fame.

Ann's sister, Dorothy Rohrer, said, "Ann talked about the sisters quite a bit. She was very fond of the nuns who had helped her. I think they recognized her talent and wanted to help it grow. She was a very devout Catholic. She thanked the education she had and the help that she had through life, by the nuns. We had a very active Catholic family. That's why she thought so much of the nuns. They were good to her, and she was good to them."

(Note: If you are considering a planned gift to the sisters and would like more information, call 812-367-1411, ext. 2631.)



Ann Wagner Harper

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

March 18, 2017	The Book of Glory: Reflections on John 13-21	Father Eugene Hensell, OSB
March 31-April 1, 2017	Healing and Music	Ruth Stanley
April 13-16, 2017	Triduum Retreat	
June 11-18, 2017	Private/Personal Retreat	
September 8-15, 2017	Directed Retreat	

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

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



SISTERS OF ST. BENEDICT
FERDINAND, INDIANA

150th Anniversary Summer Social June 2-3, 2017



**5-10 p.m. (EDT) Friday • 8 a.m.-10 p.m. Saturday
on the Monastery Grounds**

- Games and Inflatables for the Kids •
- Quilt Raffle • Grand Raffle • Duck Race •
- Food Booths • Hot Air Balloon •

Friday, June 2:

Fish Fry
“Swallow Tale” concert
“I Am Spartacus” concert
All booths open.

Saturday, June 3:

Color Run
Chicken dinners
Live music
Grand Raffle drawing
All booths open.

Calendar of Events

2017

March 18	The Book of Glory: Reflections on John 13-21	May 20	Ora et Labora Day for Oblates
March 18	Oblate Meeting	May 20	Volunteer Celebration
March 24-26	Come and See Weekend	June 2-3	150th Anniversary Summer Social
March 31-April 1	Healing and Music	June 12-14	Camp Marian for 5th-8th Grade Girls
April 9	Palm Sunday	June 17-23	Come and See Week
April 13-16	Triduum Retreat	August 4	Women of the Rule Banquet
April 16	Easter Sunday	August 5	Golden Jubilee
April 21-23	A Monastic Experience	August 25-27	A Monastic Experience
April 22	Oblate Meeting	September 8-15	Directed Retreat
April 29-30	Quilt Show	September 25	Dome Golf Classic at The Donald Ross Course



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Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand, Indiana

VOLUME 8 NUMBER 2 SPRING 2017



Sister Christine Marie adjusts a resident's glasses at Brookside Village in Jasper before delivering a Blessing of the Sick.