

Seek. Pray. Share.

Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand, Indiana

VOLUME 3 NUMBER 2 SPRING 2012



INSIDE

Greeting the 'children'

Caring for Alzheimer's

Part of something
greater

Learning compassion

Hospitality more than a cheery 'hello'



A basic Benedictine belief is that "Every person is to be received as Christ."

Thus, as Benedictines, we strive to be representatives of Christ to all we meet.

That's a lot to live up to. It really takes the concept of hospitality way beyond merely warmly welcoming visitors to the monastery with a cheery 'hello.' It extends hospitality into true caring for others, no matter what they are like, and to sincerely walk with others on their journey of seeking God, no matter where they are on their journey! This kind of presence to others can be a great gift!

That's why all of our sisters, in one way or another, strive to meet those goals. Some, through their ministries, are prime examples of taking hospitality to another level.

In this issue of *Seek. Pray. Share.*, we take a closer look at how some of those sisters exude hospitality. The caring extends from our unique receptionist to our tour guide, to sisters that serve the sick, to a huge parish in Evansville, Alzheimer's people, and our own sisters in the monastery's Hildegard Health Center. And you'll even learn about one of our Ministers of Hospitality.

St. Benedict tells us to make this journey with the Gospel as our guide. In it, Jesus says to love one another as I have loved you. In the Gospels, we see that all are welcomed, no matter their station in life and no matter what their past may be. So our approach to hospitality is to intensely live the Gospel message.

We also recognize that your spiritual path is just as important as the sisters' collective spiritual path. The more steadfast we are on our journey, the more in touch we can be with you. Our prayer life helps us become more aware, so we can better walk with the people we meet.

We are very intentional about what we do, and we invite others, like you, to become part of that. Then we can all share in the joy that each brings. Because there is no question that when guests like you come to see us, we receive as much as we give in hospitality.

S. Kristine Anne Harpenau OSB

Sister Kristine Anne Harpenau, OSB
Prioress



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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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Above, top: Janet Werne and Sister Sylvia Gehlhausen enjoy the atmosphere in the monastery’s Cloister Hall.

Above, bottom: Sister Mary Andre Gettelfinger describes the lighting in the monastery chapel to a visitor.

Cover: Sister Sylvia Gehlhausen and Rayven Meyer delight in each other’s company in the monastery church.



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Sister Gail Hamilton shares a laugh in the activity room with a resident of The Heritage Center.

Sister Gail ‘does things I didn’t think possible’

by Greg Eckerle

A walk through an Alzheimer’s unit can rip out your heart.

But not if you’re with Sister Gail Hamilton. She allows no time for depressing thoughts, and is all about how she can put a smile on everybody’s face.

As senior activity director at The Heritage Center in Evansville, Indiana, Sister Gail works wonders with her 31 Alzheimer’s people and 61 more residents in assisted living.

Alzheimer’s is one downright nasty, miserable disease. Those afflicted are prematurely robbed of their intellectual and social skills. Family members and friends often say it’s the most heartbreaking experience you can watch a loved one go through. Many nobly try to be caregivers, but eventually surrender in anguish.

Not Sister Gail. She lives to make their day. And observers stand by in amazement as she does.

Deborah Banks lost her father to Alzheimer’s last July after 15 years, while her mother-in-law currently battles the early stages.

“Sister Gail could get a smile out of dad when no one else could,” says Deborah. “And she got my mother-in-law to start walking to activity sessions, when all she did before was just sit in a chair. I’m amazed at the interaction she can get from people I thought were really lost.

“She can get them talking, and singing, when I couldn’t, or anybody else I saw. She does things I didn’t think possible. Most give up on Alzheimer’s people. It’s so hard. There’s not a lot of feedback from them.

“I don’t know how she does it. I would pull my hair, it’s really frustrating. Sister Gail being a nun, I guess it’s her faith and religion.

"I think about how much better I could have been. Back then, just my head was working. Now, it's my heart, my soul, and my prayers. It's God working. It's more spirit-led than ever."

"She's so positive, upbeat and always interested in their lives. Her thoughts are for those people."

Sister Gail readily admits her passion truly lies with Alzheimer's people. She's been drawn to them ever since helping care for her grandmother, who passed away from the disease. She termed that as a very disheartening, horrible, and scary time. But instead of running away from the condition, she embraced it.

In 2000, she responded to a newspaper article that she thought was looking for volunteers to sit with Alzheimer's people. Turns out it was a paid position. Her immediate reaction was "this will never become about money for me."

True hospitality starts with such an attitude.

Sister Gail, a native of Canada, worked at that organization for six years, before joining the Sisters of St. Benedict in 2006 at age 42.

"There's nothing but God's will that I am a sister," she says. "My parents never had a Bible, we never prayed, we went to church twice a year to look like we were Catholic. But I would want to go. I'd often go by myself."

Her deeper calling in life soon became apparent. She took garbage bags and cleaned up her neighborhood, held a carnival to raise money for the MDS telethon, and loved to work in soup kitchens. She "loved giving back, that's where I got life from."

Now Sister Gail is "very driven that my Alzheimer's people deserve the best."

And the best is what she delivers. The best in activities, the best in treatment, the best in compassion and care.

Her walks through The Heritage Center are a lesson in hospitality. Everyone receives a heartfelt 'hello,' noticeably filled with a lot of joy and love, and she naturally addresses her many residents by name. There's often a slight touch of greeting, a gentle rubbing of a shoulder, a caring hold of a hand.

Her attachment to the people is unmistakable. Her sincerity is etched deeply in her face.

"They are close to my heart," Sister Gail says, patting her own heart, for emphasis.

She is highly sensitive to their needs, whether it's continually asking what they'd like, or taking whatever time needed to discover the activities they enjoy most.

"This is their home, it's not a place for them to die, they have a lot of living to do," she says. "To me they are the most incredible group of people in the world. Every day is a celebration with them. We need to ensure they can enjoy everything. They're very special, and they need to know that."

As activity director, Sister Gail's challenge is keeping all her people engaged, and being creative enough to deliver programs that enrich their lives. The tough part is that many residents don't speak, so direct feedback is often minimal. So she has become adept at noticing other signs of approval. A facial expression. Body language. A smile. A nod. Following her with their eyes. Just looking at what she's doing. Tapping a chair or moving a foot to the rhythm of a song.

"I need to make sure they are enjoying this, and are involved, and are getting some sensory stimulation," says Sister Gail, who has a professional dementia certification. "It has to be life-enriching for them."

Her personal touches are everywhere. She puts out treats. She placed a prayer box in the front lobby. Decorates tables. Lays out napkins. Serves the coffee of choice. Involves residents in changing the seasonal décor. Wraps a blanket around them when they're cold. Cleans their dirty glasses. Laughing at each other's jokes. Or gently comforting someone alone and crying, looking for their mom.

"It's extremely life-giving just being with them," she says. "It's very important to me to let them know they are safe here, they are safe with me, and I love them unconditionally."

That unconditional love has its roots in her being a Benedictine sister, and her deep knowledge of the Rule of St. Benedict.

"When I first read the Rule, my reaction was 'yes, yes, yes!' I was SO passionate reading about how different our world would be if everybody could live the Rule," she says, her fervor as visible as her sincerity.

Continued



Above: Sister Gail Hamilton, senior activity director at The Heritage Center in Evansville, Indiana, talks to an Alzheimer's patient. At right: Sister Gail converses with a resident.



"I can't imagine doing this without the formation of the Rule, our sisters' community living together, and the formation of our daily prayer together. It helps me deal with the challenges.

"When studying the Rule, I'm always thinking about how I can apply it to my relationship with Alzheimer's people. It absolutely helps."

Patricia Ebrecht sees the pay-off when visiting the facility daily to see her dad, 82, who has some dementia.

"They're lucky to have Sister Gail there," she says. "She listens to everybody's concerns, always has a smile, she doesn't ignore anybody. I've never seen her in a bad mood. Dad doesn't talk a lot, but he smiles a lot at her.

"She constantly has activities and interacts with the people."

Patricia talked of one lady resident who thinks she is going home every day. And Sister Gail is there to comfort her, to ease her through the struggle.

A fellow employee, Judy George, who heads spiritual care for The Heritage Center, says, "I would love for Sister Gail to be my advocate, because she's so passionate about her residents. She always strives to get the very best for them. And she's always hospitable and cheerful with everyone, not just her assigned residents. I always love for her to come by.

"It's awesome to see someone that cares that much. From everyone that I hear, she's so attentive, so kind, and so gracious, just like you think Jesus would be."

Which is an ironic observation, because Sister Gail often asks for inspiration from Jesus. Especially when a resident is highly distressed, but can't communicate the problem.

"I ask for inspiration for how I can help this person," she says. "St. Benedict talked about putting the other person first, to do what's best for them. Every day I pray, 'Jesus, leave me here at the house, and I want you to be the one that comes to work at my ministry.' I don't want people to see me, I want people to see Jesus."

She often reflects on how she cared for Alzheimer's people before she became a Benedictine sister.

"I think about how much better I could have been. Back then, just my head was working. Now, it's my heart, my soul, and my prayers. It's God working. It's more spirit-led than ever.

"Because it's not about me. I am nothing. Sometimes I feel like that I cannot do enough for them."

But with Jesus and St. Benedict on her side, there's no doubt her residents are loved unconditionally. And though they can't always show it, they surely must know it.

Greeting the 'children'

by Laura Reckelhoff

After 42 years of teaching, Sister Sylvia Gehlhausen started hearing from her young students that she had taught their grandparents. She decided it was time to retire. But, retiring at the Sisters of St. Benedict doesn't mean taking it easy. It means a new ministry.

The sisters' council decided Sister Sylvia would be one of four Ministers of Hospitality, greeting monastery visitors, giving tours and making everyone feel welcome.

Sister Sylvia froze. She was used to teaching small children. How would she talk to adults?

Sister Mary Walter, prioress at the time, said, "Adults are just little children in grown up bodies." That resonated with Sister Sylvia and is how she still approaches people. Not treating them like children, but engaging them and making everyone feel welcomed, just as she would do on a child's first day of school.

"No matter who comes, Christ is there," says Sister Sylvia. As a Benedictine sister, she demonstrates that belief daily.

Indiana Governor Mitch Daniels has even visited Sister Sylvia. She invited him, never expecting a response. Then she got a call that the governor would be visiting that day. He had always wanted to visit and appreciated the invitation. He was also intrigued to meet someone with the title "Ministry of Hospitality."

Sister Sylvia has given tours to many government officials and religious authorities, but is never intimidated. "They're just like you or me," she says.

Put at ease by her warmth and smile, many tell Sister Sylvia personal stories of struggles and hope, like eager children. Sister Sylvia listens to each story and prays for them and with them. She has had struggles and needed prayer as well.

Sister Sylvia almost died in 2009 due to a heart condition. Her fellow sisters were told she wasn't going to make it. But with the help of sisters' prayers, she survived and persevered through rehabilitation.

After 12 weeks of cardiac rehabilitation, Sister Sylvia rewarded herself with a motorcycle ride. She had often commented to Alan Cherry, a monastery employee who rode a motorcycle to



work, that she would like a ride sometime. Cherry was happy to oblige. At 85 years old, Sister Sylvia climbed into the passenger seat of Cherry's Honda Goldwing for a ride. Local newspapers were there to photograph the event. "I didn't tell a soul what I was going to do, but somehow everybody knew," said Sister Sylvia. Her therapists even hung a picture of Sister Sylvia on the motorcycle in their therapy room as inspiration for other patients.

Inspiring and helping others is so natural to Sister Sylvia that she doesn't even realize she is doing so. Many visitors send notes saying she was so kind and they will always remember her.

Continued

Sister Sylvia Gehlhausen gives prayer books, and a warm smile, to monastery church visitors Karri Meyer and her daughter Rayven.

A visitor Sister Sylvia will always remember was a little girl with her mother. The child wouldn't say a word, but Sister Sylvia lovingly took her by the hand and showed her around, giving her special, undivided attention. After a while the girl started crying and shared with Sister Sylvia that her daddy had just died. At the end of the visit, the little girl's mother said that Sister Sylvia had helped her daughter more than she will ever know.

Now 88, Sister Sylvia doesn't give tours as much anymore, but, as a Minister of Hospitality, she continues to greet visitors to church. When she knows a group is coming for prayer, she'll make a special guide for them to more easily follow the sisters' prayers.

To Sister Sylvia, being a Minister of Hospitality doesn't simply mean being kind and friendly, but also means wanting to meet people, make them feel better and worth something. Most of

all, it means seeing Christ in people and helping them know "you love them because Christ is in them."

Sister Sylvia says, "Be kind. Kindness wins souls." As she greets another guest with her bright smile, her signature style of a comforting hand on the guest's shoulder, and a "welcome" greeting that melts away the outside world, Sister Sylvia must be winning many souls.

Sister Agnes Weinzapfel chats with Sister Carlita Koch as she cracks pecans in the activities room.



Sisters caring for sisters

by Laura Reckelhoff

"Care of the sick must rank above and before all else, so that they may truly be served as Christ," states the Rule of St. Benedict. The sisters take diligent care of their fellow sisters.

Hildegard Health Center (HHC) is the nursing care facility inside the monastery so the ailing and aged sisters remain in their own home.

The community of sisters makes great efforts to ensure the sisters in HHC are still integrated and feel like a part of the community. Sister Agnes Weinzapfel, activities director, ensures that each sister in HHC has another sister of the community as a companion. These companion sisters visit with the sisters in HHC, take those that are able to prayer and mass for special events, and escort them outside on nice days. Other sisters also visit routinely.

Sister Agnes and her staff of fellow sisters conduct a variety of activities for HHC and other interested sisters. The twice-weekly Bingo, birthday celebrations and feast days are popular. Every six weeks a HHC sister plans a menu to be served in activities. But the most popular activities are centered around prayer. Sister Agnes says, "Prayer is the biggest difference here," compared to other nursing care facilities.

The most-attended activity is Saturday evening reflection given by a sister, prior to giving it at mass.

Complin, an evening prayer time for Benedictine sisters usually prayed privately, is led by a different sister each night. There is also daily praying of the rosary.

"On a scale of one to ten, Hildegard is a twelve," says Ms. Joan Estes, a HHC board member. "There is so much more at Hildegard because of the commitment of sisters to each other." Ms. Estes finds it a joy to serve on the board because the sisters are always looking to improve care and to ensure they can continue to have HHC at the monastery.

Sisters of the community also receive health care at the monastery, through the community health department. Sister Barbara Ann Offerman, a registered nurse, is director of the three-person staff. Community Health also receives shipments of medications and distributes them appropriately. When sisters are sick or recuperating, Sister Barbara Ann or one of her staff will be there to check on them.

Sisters caring for sisters, as St. Benedict teaches, is their way of life.



‘We are just part of something greater’

by Greg Eckerle

Sister Patricia McGuire faithfully takes communion to Marge Slaughter, 90, at her home every Friday.

When it comes to being hospitable, “Sister Pat practices the Rule of St. Benedict like you wouldn’t believe,” says Slaughter, laughing. “I just love her dearly.”

Sister Pat is a six-year pastoral associate at St. Benedict Cathedral Parish and its school in Evansville, Indiana.

Despite her many duties, Pastor Father Gregory Chamberlain, OSB, says, “She is the epitome of hospitality. She meets people beautifully, and always makes them feel wanted and worthwhile, no matter the situation. She’s a real gem.

“She’s always open to whatever needs done, and has a genuine interest and concern in helping people. I’ve never seen her ruffled when somebody needs something. I’ve never seen her flustered with what’s going on.”

And there’s a lot going on in the parish of 1,150 families and 2,000-plus people.

Sister Pat trains and schedules the altar servers, is the church sacristan, and is heavily involved with the Catholics Returning Home program, the Legacy Society, Gabriel Project, Silver Club, Spiritual Growth program, Christian Social Action, Congregations Acting for Justice and Empowerment, bereavement ministry, Parish Council and committees, health ministry, and a variety of other tasks that never ends.

“She is everywhere,” says Deacon Dave Cook.

Continued

Above: On one of her weekly in-home visits, Sister Pat McGuire (left) talks with Marge Slaughter, a member of St. Benedict Cathedral Parish in Evansville, Indiana. “Sister Pat is so gentle, kind, and thoughtful, she really is,” says Marge. “She’s a dear sweet soul that exudes sweetness.”

Sister Pat gives instruction to 6th grade altar servers Jacob Samm and Molly Durham in St. Benedict Cathedral in Evansville, Indiana.



"If something comes up at the last minute," says Father Gregory, "I'll ask if she can handle it, she's doing 10,000 things anyway, but she always finds a way to fit it in." Better yet, he says she does it cheerfully, with no grumbling.

Sister Pat sometimes wonders if she's doing a good job in all that she's involved with, but quickly remembers that she's not in it alone.

"I love my job, and enjoy seeing people," says Sister Pat. "It's very rewarding to think that one is an instrument. I think we're all called to carry Christ to others. I don't do that probably any better than anybody else. There's a joy in realizing that one is called, and can be that instrument."

She views hospitality as seeing the sacred in everyone and everything. She welcomes all -- the rich, the poor, the young, the old -- and realizes the challenges of that, yet rests in the knowledge that "that's what we're all about as Benedictines, seeing Christ in all."

Sister Pat draws comfort from the backing of the Sisters of St. Benedict community, and from their long history of helping at St. Benedict Parish, since 1913.

And, as the sisters have said many times, "we don't do this alone, we are just part of it, part of something greater."

She's particularly enjoyed the success of the Catholics Returning Home program.

"The joy and peace people experience when they come back to the church has been very touching," says Sister Pat. "It's very humbling to be a part of that process, in seeing God's grace at work. Because it's clearly not us, it's clearly God's grace that touches them, and they're wanting to return, and to receive the sacraments."

Seeing the peacefulness in those returning to the church, and seeing their faith being sustained, makes her feel good.

Deacon Dave, who works with her in the program, says many of the returners feel good about seeing Sister Pat, too.

"In the Catholics Returning Home program we take a gentle, listening approach," he says. "There are some who I think feel more comfortable if Sister Pat's going to be there, at least initially. People just think the world of her."

"I see her compassion, and her hospitality, come out in spades there."

He notes her special connection with children, from altar servers to those she prepares to receive the sacraments.

She trains the servers, adjusting her schedule to accommodate the times that work best for them and their parents, spends hours scheduling the servers into masses, and also gives them feedback.

“Occasionally I hear from parents that their children will say, ‘It’s time to go see Sister Pat!’ They look forward to it.”

“I’ve seen her work with some rather stubborn servers,” says Deacon Dave. “But she’s persistent with them. I remember one kid who refused to do something, but she encouraged him, worked with him, and now he asks to serve. Sister Pat has a positive influence.”

Deacon Dave also marvels at the reception she gets from her sacrament preparations with children.

“Parents and kids alike don’t want those sessions to be over. A lot of those kids just really connect with her. I think it’s a respect that she has, and a love for kids that just shows. They catch on to what she is teaching. She is sharing a valuable lesson, something really important, not just for those sessions, although they enjoy them.

“Occasionally I hear from parents that their children will say, ‘It’s time to go see Sister Pat!’ They look forward to it.”

Another example of her compassion, cites Deacon Dave, is the Gabriel Project, which provides support for women with an unexpected or troubled pregnancy. Sister Pat is the primary contact, and has also recruited several parishioners to help out.

One of her biggest challenges is drawing people into participating in parish activities. But she pushes on doggedly, promoting the benefits of involvement and the resulting growth of community spirit. Obviously, she can’t do everything herself, so she’s become adept at lining up and training volunteers, and they respond well to her. Although there are plenty of activities competing for people’s time, Sister Pat is undeterred.

“When people get involved they often feel more connected with the parish,” she says. “People involved in the Gabriel Project have felt very good about it. People in the Legacy Society, too, feel they are passing on their values to future generations by making provisions through a planned gift. Some of the endowments are set up to help pay school tuition for those who

can’t afford it. There is a good feeling about passing on the values of a Catholic education. We are all God’s people, and sometimes we have to help those who can’t help themselves.”

Besides her parish duties, Sister Pat also cares for her mother, who still lives alone in her late 90s.

Deacon Dave notes that it takes a special person to do the pastoral associate job well. He says Sister Pat is a superb example of that, as well as being a very good example of a good Catholic.

“She just exudes kindness and hospitality,” he says, emphatically. “I think she really lives out that commitment of the Benedictines.”

Sister Pat McGuire and altar servers Jacob Samm and Molly Durham arrange candles in St. Benedict Cathedral in Evansville.





Doctor: ‘I’ve learned more compassion for patients working with sister.’

by Greg Eckerle

William Coomer, 62, has been a patient of Sister Rosemary Dauby for the past eight years.

“She’s as good as any doctor I’ve ever seen, and I’ve seen a lot of them,” he says.

Sister Rosemary, a physician assistant at Harrison Crawford Health clinics in Leavenworth and Corydon, Indiana, does about everything a doctor does, but under the supervision of a physician.

Her days are filled with patient visits. She performs physical exams, EKGs, breathing treatments, sets up stress tests, MRIs, CT scans, and prescribes medications.

Sister Rosemary Dauby performs a health check on William Coomer. “Sister Rosemary always has a smile,” says Coomer. “And she talks to you, she doesn’t just run in and then run out the door. She listens, is very thorough, and she does care.”

“Some would rather see sister than us, those who need that time,” Dr. Pierce readily admits, laughing. “And that’s nice. You don’t get that often.”

But as a Sister of St. Benedict and a former social worker, Sister Rosemary takes her ministry to another level. She’s in the perfect spot to shower the Benedictine value of hospitality over a wide range of people and families.

She listens. She empathizes. She comforts. And she provides the precious gift of time.

Dr. Devi Pierce, who’s worked with her for 10 years, says, “Patients love her. When they talk to Sister Rosemary, they feel like they’ve been really listened to. They feel like they’re getting more than just medication. I’ve learned more compassion for patients working with sister.”

Busy healthcare practitioners are known for seeing patients quickly, then out the door they go. Not so with Sister Rosemary.

“Some would rather see sister than us, those who need that time,” Dr. Pierce readily admits, laughing. “And that’s nice. You don’t get that often.

“She listens well to patients, and they respond to that.

“Plus, she is very passionate about her religion. It shows in her attitude, and you can see that in her work.”

Sister Rosemary’s compassion is a product of her upbringing -- from her parents to her Ferdinand community of sisters.

She spent a lot of time recently, along with her biological sister, Sister Agnes Marie Dauby, caring for her aging parents. Her father, who had a stroke in 2006, passed away a few months ago; her mother died in late 2010.

Sister Rosemary, 60, thinks often of her parents as she cares for elderly patients in area nursing homes.

“Seeing the elderly is like seeing my mom and dad,” she says. “I want to be respectful of them, but I want to take care of them like my parents. My parents took care of me as a child, and I think of all the sacrifices they made for me, and now it’s my turn. When I go to a nursing home, or when the elderly come to the office, I think about what I would want for my mom and dad in this situation.”

The tears come as she talks of caring for her dad. “Just bathing him, thinking of the body of Christ, bathing Christ, and him being so vulnerable. Mom taught all of us children to take care of each other, and how to take care of dad. We had to do everything for him. He was such a gentle soul.”

That caring approach is what Sister Rosemary strives to provide to her patients. According to her fellow employees, she delivers.

Paula Bowling of the Leavenworth office notes her calming presence, how sympathetic she is, and how adept she is at counseling and listening.

Dr. Anne Fogle, who’s been around Sister Rosemary for four years, says her hospitality is quite evident.

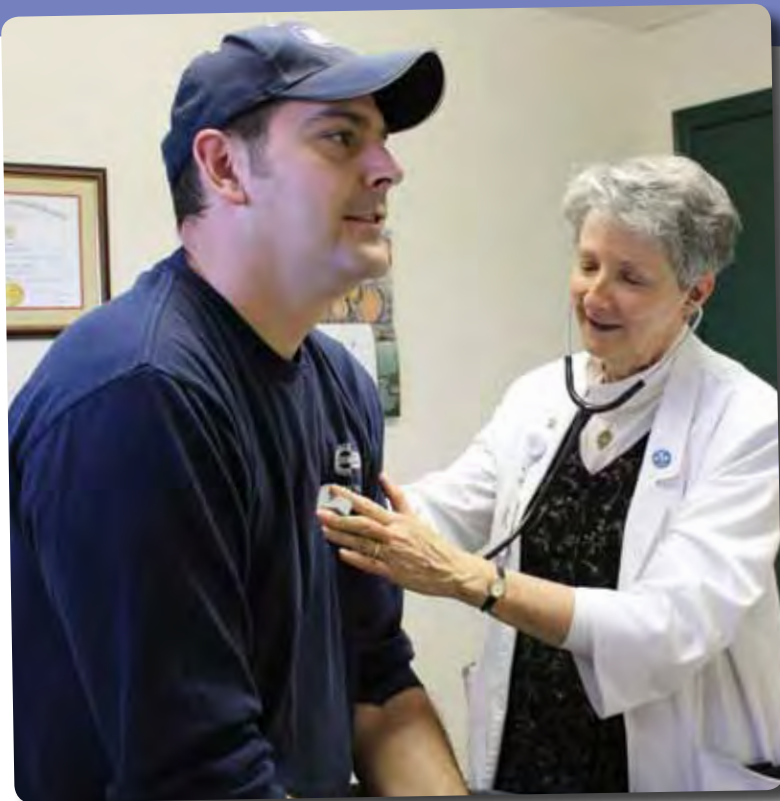
“Patients appreciate the direct attention she gives them, and the peace that she brings.

“The ease with which she brings in elements of faith is a real benefit.”

As a Benedictine since 1970, living out the value of hospitality as voiced in the Rule of St. Benedict has almost become second nature to Sister Rosemary. His advice to “welcome all as Christ” is ingrained in her.

“The Rule makes me realize they’re all individuals, and they need to be treated with respect,” she says. “Some patients have told me, ‘it’s so easy to talk to you.’ Being a Benedictine, listening is very important to me, and being able to spend time with patients. It’s difficult for me to just go in and be business-like, only saying, ‘OK, what’s the problem, let’s take care of that, good-bye, see you in four weeks.’ I want to make them feel comfortable. Being a sister, maybe there’s a trust there, a trust that I will hold what they say in confidence, and really listen to them. I think they pick up on the caring, and treating them as a person.”

Continued



Sister Rosemary Dauby monitors the breathing of Ted Goldman. "Sister Rosemary is real easy to talk to," says Goldman. "I don't hold back with her, I feel comfortable with her. She's a professional, she's trying to help you."

Indeed, when patients call in with concerns over anxiety problems, the office staff invariably says, "Well, we'll put you in with sister, she's good in that area." Afterwards, their anxiety lessened, they'll tell her, "I think you understand."

Sister Rosemary's approach is to relate to them as a person, not as a patient. To make them feel welcome, and comfortable enough to openly discuss other personal problems, ones people are reluctant to readily share, that may be contributing to their physical troubles.

Again, she thinks her Benedictine background helps, that people realize in a hurry whether you're genuine or not.

Her 30-year career in healthcare has had many enjoyable moments, but she "loves seeing the little ones, doing the well baby exams, and having a 'conversation' with them."

Another rewarding part is forming a strong relationship with patients and their families over time, seeing them and finding out what's going on in their lives, and if medical treatment is helping.



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"It's great to see patients feeling better," says Sister Rosemary. "And it's rewarding to see the trust people put in you, knowing that it makes a difference in their lives."

She also likes to help people navigate the often-complicated healthcare system, to help them get the assistance they need, whether it's medications, obtaining a home health aid, medical equipment, a motorized wheelchair, or a mini-nebulizer.

And she relishes seeing the times when she knows God is working.

"Someone will tell me, 'You were the one who found the trouble I was having.' I have to think back, and I think that's a miracle, that I was able to find something, and then I think, 'that's God.'"

"I might find a heart murmur on an exam, and do further testing, and find it's a problem where they need surgery. I just try to be open to whatever the situation is, and pray that the spirit will lead me. Those are miracles, I think.

"I think it's a miracle, too, when people come in and bare their soul. I feel like I'm privileged to hear that story. Then, there's a connection that has developed because of that sharing, a bond between the patient and myself. I think that's a miracle, that they feel they've been understood, and that somebody has heard them."

Sister Rosemary is right.

And the miracle comes from the hospitality.

NEWS from the Dome

Ferdinand sisters celebrate jubilees

Five sisters celebrated special anniversaries of their religious profession on Sunday, October 30. Sister Mary Charlotte Kavanaugh celebrated her 75th anniversary; Sister Martha Marie Tempel observed her 70th anniversary; and Sisters Joanna Trainer, Lorraine DeVault, and Mary Dominic Frederick celebrated their 60th anniversary.

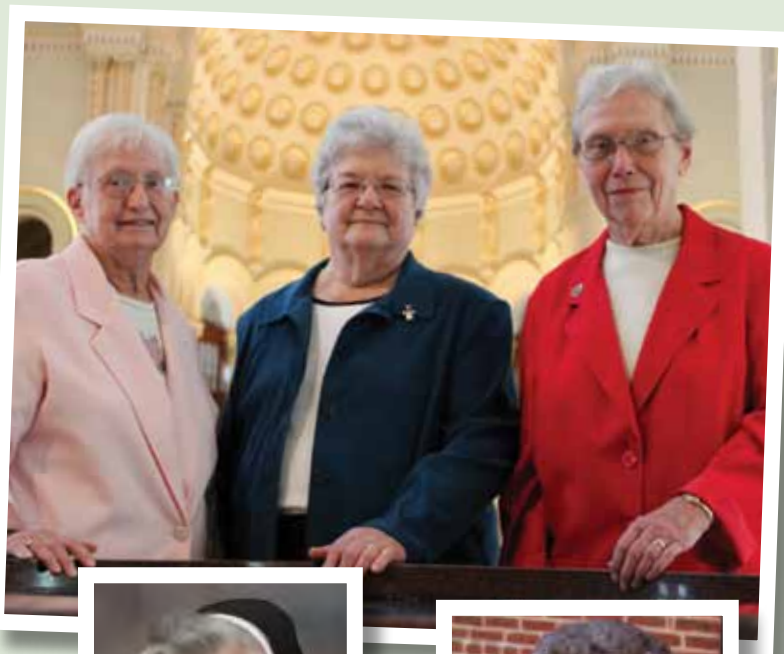
Sister Mary Charlotte, a native of Cannelburg, Indiana, ministered in areas of education for 63 years. She currently serves in the ministry of prayer.

Sister Martha Marie, a native of Siberia, Indiana, taught in area schools and was a religious education teacher. She served as sacristan at the monastery and provided supportive services. She currently serves in the ministry of prayer.

Sister Joanna is a native of Evansville and was a teacher in Evansville area schools. She helped establish the House of Bread and Peace ministry and shelter in Evansville in 1984 and served as its director until 2003. She currently provides supportive services at the monastery.

Sister Lorraine, a native of Loogootee, was a teacher and principal before holding secretarial positions. She currently works in supportive services at the monastery.

Sister Mary Dominic, a native of Louisville, was a teacher and served as principal at Academy Immaculate Conception/Marian Heights Academy. Her current ministry is as monastery archivist.



Top: Sisters Lorraine DeVault, Joanna Trainer, and Mary Dominic Frederick
Above: Sister Mary Charlotte Kavanaugh (left) and Sister Martha Marie Tempel



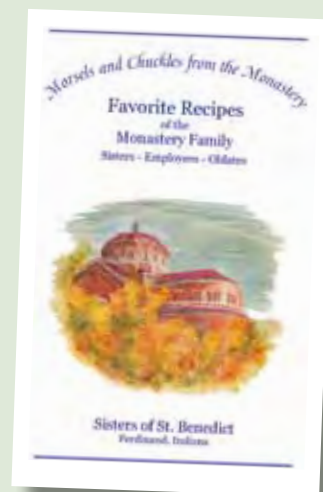
To learn more about these sisters, visit thedome.org for longer versions of these news stories.

Sisters announce new cookbook

The Sisters of St. Benedict have been compiling recipes and humorous stories from the monastery family to produce "Morsels and Chuckles from the Monastery," a 287-page cookbook launching in January.

This third cookbook edition from the sisters includes over 450 recipes for appetizers, beverages, soups, salads, vegetables and sides, main dishes, breads, rolls, desserts, cookies, and candy. Also included are excerpts from the Rule of St. Benedict, which is the guide by which the sisters live and minister, and where one can find food as part of the topic of six chapters. The sisters, their employees, and the Oblates have submitted their best recipes, as well as over one hundred chuckle-inducing stories.

The cookbook can be ordered from the sisters' gift shop, For Heaven's Sake, by visiting forheavensake.org.



Is it time to **CHANGE COURSE** with your life? To become the person God wants you to be?

Presenting Sister Maria Tasto's new DVD and Guidebook COURSE all about making possible CHANGES for yourself, for your group

For years, Sister Maria Tasto has been traveling to places near and far to offer her group presentation "A Transformed Life," in which she guides persons along the path of becoming who God created them to be.

Now this acclaimed presentation is available in a new DVD set produced by the Ferdinand Benedictines. The set consists of video of six conferences, each about 45 minutes long, on three discs, as well as an accompanying guidebook that includes original watercolor art by Sister Mary Lee Hillenbrand. The guidebook is also sold separately for participants in group presentations.

Through the lens of Scripture, Sister Maria describes the individual's spiritual journey of seeking God. She shows viewers that they can change their attitudes and responses, grow in awareness, unmask their false self, discover their true self, and embrace inner freedom and true happiness.

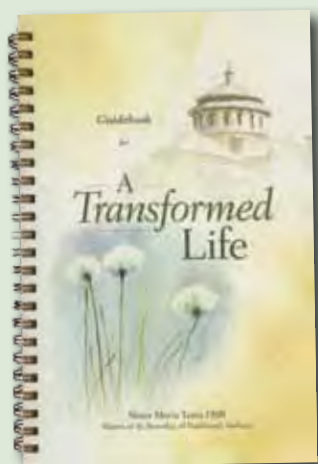
She speaks openly of her own challenging spiritual journey, which has included surviving two bouts with cancer. The first time, she became angry with God because many of her attitudes and motivations for living a Christian life were challenged. The second time, after being given two weeks to live, she experienced God's loving, forgiving presence.

A founding member of the Resource Faculty of Contemplative Outreach, Sister Maria developed "A Transformed Life" for Contemplative Outreach chapters throughout the world. She has for years walked with others on their spiritual journeys as a spiritual director, counselor, retreat director, and workshop presenter. She is currently program director of the Ferdinand Benedictines' Spirituality Ministry.

The DVD set with guidebook (\$94.99) and the guidebook alone (\$9.95) can be purchased from For Heaven's Sake, the monastery gift shop, in person, online at thedome.org/ATL, or by phone at 812-367-2500.



- Become engaged, enlightened and inspired to be transformed into your true self.
- Sister Maria shares touching stories of how people have overcome their troubles, including her own near-death ordeal, and her experience with God one memorable night.
- Hear unforgettable stories of how others have found personal freedom.
- Discover the meaning and purpose of your life.
- See how to come to your truth out of your struggles.
- If you are depressed or angry, watch this.
- Ideal for group discussion and reflection, or for individual enrichment.
- The guidebook, which includes a facilitator's guide, enhances the viewing experience for both individuals and groups.



Join our email list

See what the sisters are up to

If you would like to learn more about what the sisters are doing, or become more involved in our community, visit www.thedome.org/email to sign up for periodic emails specific to your interests.

Among the items you can choose to receive:

- General newsletter
- A weekly Monday Message
- Information on programs, retreats
- Tourism updates

- Gift shop, bakery specials
- Volunteer opportunities
- Vocations possibilities

Of course, we will not sell, rent, or give your name or address to anyone. And you can unsubscribe or change your preferences at any time.

In the meantime, we will strive to make your association with us a beneficial one. As Benedictines, we will do all we can to help you in your journey. That's why we are here.

Sisters of St. Benedict Spirituality Ministry

Please join us for Benedictine spirituality!

April 28, 2012 **Enneagram**

May 12, 2012 **The Rosary: Glorious Mysteries**

May 19, 2012 **Rest and Reflection Day**

June 16-23, 2012 **Centering Prayer Retreat**

August 18, 2012 **Compassionate Healing**

September 8, 2012 **Hospitality**

September 29, 2012 **A Day Apart: Rest and Reflection**

November 3, 2012 **Introduction to *Lectio Divina***

November 10, 2012 **Walk This Way: Spirituality of the Two Halves of Life**

Sister Karlene Sensmeier, OSB

Sister Madonna Helmer, OSB

Sister Maria Tasto, OSB,
and Sister Kathy Bilskie, OSB

Sister Anita Louise Lowe, OSB,
and Sister Michelle Mohr, OSB

Sister Donna Marie Herr, OSB

Sister Maria Tasto, OSB

Sister Kathryn Huber, OSB

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

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



812-367-1411, ext. 2915 • 800-880-2777
www.thedome.org/programs

The past comes to the web

"You can't know where you are going until you know where you have been."

There isn't dust to blow off the archives of the monastery. Sister Mary Dominic and Sister Mary Philip would never let the dust gather. The archives department is alive with information on the past and now snippets of that information are on thedome.org/archives.

The community's 145 years of history, encapsulating the energy of over 1,000 women, is painstakingly preserved. Deeds for acres of monastery land, final vows from one of the original Ferdinand Benedictine sisters, and a daily log from our properties manager are among the documents found in the precisely coded boxes of archives.

The collections area holds treasures of the past. Artwork by the sisters, wooden springerle molds directly from Germany, worn prayer books, and other treasures help tell the story of the Ferdinand Benedictine Sisters.

In memoriam

by Sister Paulette Seng

Sister Anna Mae Schepers

1923-2011

Sincere and authentic, never pretentious, and always grateful, even for the little things in life. Sister Anna Mae is remembered for those qualities as much as for her ministries of teaching, in both religious and elementary education, and providing hospitality and other supportive services at the monastery. She lived simply and worked diligently, in quiet, unassuming ways. A casual greeting became a sacred encounter. "When we met in the hall, I could see God's love in her smile and her eyes."

Volunteer work, especially for Mission Advancement, filled her retirement years. "She was the first to respond to a request for help and the last to leave the job." Also in her later years, she designed and pieced quilt tops and did needlework. Such tasks, usually done in solitude and silence, became daily prayer.

She took her prayer ministry seriously, as evidenced by the names of relatives and friends penciled in her prayer books for special remembrance. Many people entrusted their needs to her prayers. And without doubt, she continues to intercede for us.



Sister Benedicta Clauss

1926 – 2012

"An eternal optimist who saw eternity in the night sky," enthusiastic, joyful, and passionate — that was Sister Benedicta.

For over 50 years, Sister Benedicta instructed and inspired students, primarily in universities. Expecting much from her students, she instilled confidence by encouraging and affirming them to realize their potential. Speech and drama were her forté and great love. Students have vivid memories of "fantastic" theatre productions she wrote and/or directed.

Passionate about serving the marginalized in society, the imprisoned, the downtrodden, and unacceptable, she spent her summer breaks immersed in these "subcultures" around the country. Recognizing Jesus in those rejected by society, she was a "Good Samaritan" to many in need.

Her enthusiasm and passion in her ministries carried over into her hobby — watching sports on TV as an avid fan of Notre Dame, Indiana University, Indiana Pacers, Indianapolis Colts, and St. Louis Cardinals.

Her last years were especially difficult as cancer silently took over her mind and body. But the illness could not conquer her spirit. She always found more reasons to be grateful than bemoan the limitations of a situation.



Sister Mary Philip Berger, archives assistant, and Sister Mary Dominic Frederick, archivist, inspect the contents of an archives box.

Small excerpts from that story can now be viewed online. Learn the sisters' story, through their files and collections of the past, on thedome.org/archives.



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

Make a difference by joining Women of the Rule

A unique partnership with the
Sisters of St. Benedict

You help decide which
new ministries to fund!



812-367-1411, ext. 2649

Charitable gift annuities offer attractive returns

With Treasury Bonds, Certificates of Deposits, and money market funds offering interest rates at near all-time lows, many of our donors are inquiring about a Sisters of St. Benedict Charitable Gift Annuity as an alternative to receive higher fixed payments. While a charitable gift annuity is not an investment, for donors who wish to support our ministries and receive fixed payments for life, a charitable gift annuity offers attractive benefits.

A charitable gift annuity is a simple contract where a donor makes an irrevocable transfer of cash or securities to the Sisters of St. Benedict in exchange for fixed payments for life. A charitable gift annuity offers the following benefits:

- A charitable income tax deduction in the year of the gift
- Fixed payments for the life(lives) of the annuitant(s)
- Part of each annuity payment may be tax free
- Avoiding some capital gains tax when funding the annuity with appreciated stock
- Helping the sisters fulfill our ministries

Refer to the rate chart at thedome.org to see what your rate will be for charitable gift annuities funded before July 1, 2012.

There are three steps you can take now:

1. Look at the rate chart at thedome.org to determine what your fixed payments will be for annuities funded before July 1, 2012
2. Call 1-888-649-1121, ext. 2648, or email maoffice@thedome.org to request a personalized, obligation-free proposal
3. Call 1-888-649-1121, ext. 2648, or email maoffice@thedome.org to ask for additional information or discuss other gift opportunities

Thank you for your continued support.



Current gift annuity rates can be found
online at thedome.org.

Building an abundant table

"We need to do something about this." Such a simple statement made by Sister Joanna Trainer back in 1979 led to a profound impact on hundreds of people and to a legacy that continues today.

On October 29, 2011, the soup kitchen at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Evansville, Indiana, that was founded by Sister Joanna twenty years ago was named "Sister Joanna's Table" in her honor.



Sister Joanna founded the soup kitchen to feed the hungry in Evansville. Before the soup kitchen, she helped with a Christmas meal for the homeless and food deprived, but she noticed how starving those people really were and wanted to do more.

For one year Sister Joanna prayed to find an answer to how to feed those in need. She also studied the works of Dorothy Day, who started Catholic Worker Houses in New York, where food, clothing, shelter and hospitality is extended by volunteers to those in need. During this time, Sister Joanna approached pastors in the Evansville downtown area in search of someone interested in hosting the soup kitchen. Only one church, St. Paul's Episcopal Church, responded.

The new soup kitchen was opened every Saturday and staffed by volunteers of multiple faiths. For the opening day meal, only ten people came. That has now grown to over 200 people seeking nourishment each week.

St. Paul's Church has since expanded the soup kitchen. There is now a clothing room and food pantry. A chapel has been built that is connected to the soup kitchen to provide for spiritual nourishment as well.

Sister Joanna said that growing up she had always wanted to be a sister and after joining the Sisters of St. Benedict always had a yearning to help the poorest of the poor. The many people that have found a hot meal and a welcoming atmosphere at Sister Joanna's Table have benefited from her following her dreams.

The House of Bread and Peace, a homeless shelter for women and children in Evansville, was also founded by Sister Joanna.



Greetings from the ‘crazy nun’

by Laura Reckelhoff

Have you been to the monastery and talked to the self-described “crazy nun” at the receptionist desk? Sister Mary Austin Blank is not a typical receptionist. She’s not even sure receptionist would be her title.

She does greet guests and welcome them as they come to the monastery. But guests can also expect lots of teasing to come their way. Sister Mary Austin enjoys a bit of banter. She is confident guests will remember “that crazy nun behind the desk,” as she says. But the banter has another purpose, to help put the guests at ease.

One visitor walked in and asked how much a tour would cost. Without skipping a beat, Sister Mary Austin said \$100. (Tours of the monastery are actually free.) When the rest of that group walked in, she told them each person would cost \$100 and that the first person who had entered would be the one paying. Those guests were fine with those arrangements. Sister Mary Austin did eventually tell the guests that the tour was free. The leader of that

group came back to talk with Sister Mary Austin again before they left. That group is likely to remember the beauty of the monastery, but will also remember the sister that teased with them and made them feel at ease in an unfamiliar environment.

The receptionist position at Monastery Immaculate Conception was previously held by a lay person (not a sister) until she retired. There was talk of different sisters taking turns throughout the week to fill the position. Sister Mary Austin thought having one person would provide more continuity, so she volunteered to fill the role. She also felt it was important to have a sister greet guests as they arrive. As a member of the community, Sister Mary Austin feels she can give first-hand knowledge when answering questions or giving information, especially since she has been at the monastery for over fifty years. She made sure the nametag

Above: Sister Mary Austin Blank shares a laugh with Brad Stetter of UPS as he makes a package delivery.

she wears identifies her as a sister so guests can recognize it, since one of her most often asked questions is, "Are you a sister?" Sister Mary Austin isn't just welcoming guests to the monastery, she is welcoming them into her home.

Hospitality, when very basically defined by Sister Mary Austin, means being nice to people. As St. Benedict teaches in his Rule that the sisters follow, treat everyone as Christ. She adds that hospitality means "going out of your way to help, even if it is inconvenient to you."

Hospitality is to come first, even if you are doing something else. For Sister Mary Austin that means the hospitality aspect of her position comes before her other task of teaching online college courses for the University of Phoenix and Upper Iowa University while at the receptionist desk. A laptop is always sitting in front of Sister Mary Austin so she can teach the math courses. She had previously been a teacher at the University of Phoenix campus, as well as an academic counselor.

Sister Mary Austin also taught and later was president of Marian Heights Academy, the all girls high school that was at the monastery. Sister Mary Austin was president when it was decided the school would close in 2000. "That was a very difficult year," she says.

While teaching the online courses and greeting guests, Sister Mary Austin also takes care of deliveries to the monastery, answering calls, getting tour guides for groups, and tracking down other sisters when they are needed. She likes to keep the front lobby neat and without boxes sitting around, so when a delivery is made, the recipient is called and expected to come get their items in a timely fashion.

She does receive the occasional very random phone call. One instance is when a person called the monastery looking for a previous teacher that was a nun. However, this teacher was not a nun from the monastery in Ferdinand and the caller wasn't sure where his former teacher was from or even what order of sister she was. Sister Mary Austin was a bit perplexed by that question.

Monday through Friday you will find Sister Mary Austin at the front desk of Monastery Immaculate Conception greeting guests, helping to guide them to tour the church, and answering their questions, along with all her other tasks. And no matter if the person approaching her desk is a guest, or another sister coming to visit, or one of the sisters' employees, there may be a little teasing to go along with her hospitable greeting.



Please join us for Mass or prayer.

MASS

Monday – Friday..... 7:25 a.m.

Saturday 8:25 a.m.

(On Sabbatical Saturdays, Mass is at 10:25 a.m.)

Sunday..... 10:30 a.m.

PRAYER

Monday – Friday

Morning Prayer..... 7 a.m.

Midday Prayer..... 12 p.m.

Evening Prayer..... 5 p.m.

Saturday

Morning Prayer..... 8 a.m.

(On Sabbatical Saturdays, Morning Prayer is at 10 a.m.)

Midday Prayer..... 12 p.m.

Evening Prayer..... 5 p.m.

Sunday

Morning Prayer..... 10 a.m.

Evening Prayer..... 5 p.m.

We would be happy to pray for any special intentions you wish to share. Please visit

www.thedome.org/prayers.



Sister Christine Kempf, tourism director for the Sisters of St. Benedict, shows the grand monastery church to visitors Christa and Ava Widolff.

Giving more in a tour

by Laura Reckelhoff

For Sister Christine Kempf, director of tourism for the sisters, her job is much more than simply showing guests a building.

Over 10,000 people come to visit the monastery each year. Her goal is to have every visitor she encounters have more of a spiritual experience than simply receiving a tour. She follows the Rule of St. Benedict to treat everyone as Christ, but Sister Christine goes one step further and strives to have guests see Christ in her. She also wants guests to learn about the sisters' community life and to see the presence of their spirituality.

An important part of hospitality of a tour guide, according to Sister Christine, is to get the guests to relax, feel comfortable, and make them feel important. She has observed many visitors' spirit change for the better. Many comment on the peacefulness that is felt throughout the monastery grounds.

People confide in Sister Christine. Often she is more a counselor and consoler than a tour guide. Visitors talk to her about hardships, the loss of a loved one, or ask her to pray for them.

Sister Christine prays for all the people she encounters, saying extra prayers for those making a prayer request.

Monastery tours are given daily. Sister Christine will give a tour no matter the number of people. She says, "One person is just as important as one hundred."

She has formed many friendships with guests. In her office are some of the gifts from visitors - a handwritten letter, a photo, a hand-knitted small cross, and an angel in a latch hook piece.

Sister Christine named the doors opening to the church the "awe doors." Because when she opens them during a tour, most have a reaction of awe on their first look at the magnificent church. She has seen many guests, both men and women, moved to tears at the experience. She always pauses and lets the guests experience the moment before continuing her tour.

In giving tours, and in life, Sister Christine says, "You never know how you touch people." She pauses, then adds, "And you don't have to know." She will not know how many people she touched by being more than simply a tour guide.

Perspectives

What is the first thing you think about when you wake up in the morning?



Upon waking each morning, I am always first filled with thoughts of gratitude. I recently moved out to the country in Floyd County. I now wake to silence and stillness, which is quite a gift after living many years in the city. I always begin my day with prayer and a dedication to doing the very best I can each day to follow God's will for me (followed closely by the desire for a big cup of coffee).

— Becki Romans, director of major gifts team for the Sisters of St. Benedict



Because the years since my birth have been piling up lately, often the first thing I think about is: What day is this? :) After that I usually settle in for my morning prayer time. I wonder how God is planning to use me today. And I try to let God know that I am available for whatever. I know that whatever it is, God will always be with me and won't ask anything of me that God and I cannot handle together. I also know that whatever it is, I am to do it with love. Sometimes as the day progresses, I am very surprised by what God's plan seems to be!

— Sister Barbara Ann Offerman, director of community health for the Sisters of St. Benedict



As a distance runner, my daily run is a time of meditation and communion with God. My first thought of the day is one of gratitude for another day and an opportunity to begin again. My second thought is about the weather — how warm or cold it is outside and how that will affect my run!

— Sister Kimberly Ann Mandelkow, minister of music and liturgy at Sts. Joseph and Paul Catholic Church in Owensboro, Kentucky



The Sisters of St. Benedict are celebrating and you are invited!

July 7, 2012
11 a.m. – 9 p.m. EST

Over 35 booths of food and fun!

Country store, art show, over 40 handmade quilts, money wheel, musical entertainment, kids' fun and games, bingo, grand raffle, guided tours of the monastery church, and so much more!

Come hungry! We'll have chicken dinners, BBQ, brats, hamburgers, hot dogs, pork chops, walking tacos, baked goods, and lots more!

Follow the sisters on Facebook to be among the first to see information on the social as it is released.

SISTERS
OF ST. BENEDICT
FERDINAND, INDIANA
.....

Seek. Pray. Share.



Join us for our Summer Social on July 7, 2012! • thedome.org/social • 812-367-1411

Calendar of Events

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| April 8, 2012 | Easter Blessings! |
| April 15, 2012 | Oblate meeting |
| April 18–22, 2012 | Vocation Conference – Awakening: A Rebirth of Enthusiasm in Vocations |
| May 19, 2012 | Volunteer Appreciation Day |
| May 20, 2012 | Oblate meeting |
| June 11–13, 2012 | Camp Marian – 5-8th Grades |
| June 22–28, 2012 | Come & See Week |
| June 23–24, 2012 | Academy Alumnae Reunion |
| July 7, 2012 | Summer Social |
| August 4, 2012 | Golden Jubilee Celebration |
| August 27, 2012 | Dome Golf Classic |
| September 8, 2012 | Women of the Rule Banquet |
| October 19–21, 2012 | Come & See Weekend |
| October 28, 2012 | Diamond Jubilee Celebration |

Consider a fresh perspective

Our Spirituality Ministry group has designed another year of programs to give you unique insights and experiences.

We all search for answers, and how to deepen our connection with God. Our presenters have experienced those challenges, and are here to help you.

Check out our new 2012-2013 program and retreat booklet that's online at www.thedome.org/programs. You can also register there for upcoming programs.



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