“There is a quiet exuberance for life as gift.”
During a casual conversation recently at the monastery, Sister Margaret Ann Pilewski remarked that “flowers are the gift of summer” as she shared some of her delightful seasonal photographs. While we contemplated the theme of this issue, that phrase took root, blossomed and burst into bloom, inspiring us to recall the many kinds of gifts we are so blessed to receive each and every day.

We invite you to leisurely read about these gifts as we take a little time to kick off our shoes, revel in the tranquility of a late August sunset, and sip some lemonade. Shhh . . . A butterfly might be nearby!

In Sister Christine’s “From the Prioress,” you will read her thoughts on the gifts of life, of nature, of friends, of love and of gratitude. Our cover quotation is from her reflection. The “gift of summer” you also see on Sister Christine’s page is one of Sister Margaret Ann’s photos. Another appears on page 24 where the gift of the life of our late Sister Nora is remembered and revered.

We are also gift to each other as you will observe in the stories celebrating our seven jubilarians, our newly professed Sister Kathy, several ministries and accomplishments, and a much welcomed gift to a mission in India, thanks to the friends of the monastery.

Our sacred newly renovated chapel is the transformation of a vision into an exquisite reality through the generous gifts of our many benefactors. The gift of the women of the Saint Benedict Alumnae Association in their support of our Heritage of Hope Capital Campaign is truly extraordinary as they offer their time and talents. Sister Mary Jane shares a very special summer afternoon with Sisters Margaret and Joanne; and in the chapel blessing story, the stained-glass windows photo is another gift of the artistry of Sister Margaret Ann.

We hope you are enjoying, as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote: “That beautiful season the summer! Filled was the air with a dreamy and magical light. ...”

Thank you, our friends, for the wonderful gift you are to us.

“The greatest gift is a portion of thyself.”
Ralph Waldo Emerson
You, our friends, are gift to us.

To move through life and acknowledge that all is gift is to cultivate gratefulness of heart. To be surprised and in awe as the first crocus pierces the earth and pushes through to blossom is a recurring miracle of spring. To see the first snowfall as a blanketing of the earth is a discovery to be celebrated every winter. I never tire of it. I believe in life as gift and for me the sky is a marvelous piece of art, ever changing with each movement of the clouds across the canvas above me. When I look out our dining room windows at breakfast and see the deer in the orchard, the little fawn running like a child with boundless energy, I stop and give thanks for being alive to the moment. When we are truly alive, our eyes are open and our ears are listening deeply. We are experiencing life as gift.

Recent studies have shown that people who describe themselves as feeling grateful to others and God tend to have more vitality and optimism, suffer less stress reactions and are less likely to be depressed. In addition, grateful people tend to suffer less anxiety about status or the accumulation of possessions and are more likely to appreciate the interconnectedness of all life. By looking at one’s life with open eyes, a person can see that she has much to be grateful for and can even be humbled by her rich life. With a worldview receptive to what life is offering, as opposed to what life is denying, one can begin to understand that our assumptions, not life, generate disappointment and dissatisfaction. Gratitude is related to a fuller awareness of life as gift.

There is a story that has shaped my stance of seeing life as gift and the cultivation of generosity as my desired response to life.

A wise woman who was traveling in the mountains found a precious stone in a stream. The next day she met another traveler who was hungry, and the wise woman opened her bag to share her food. The hungry traveler saw the precious stone and asked the woman to give it to him. She did so without hesitation. The traveler left rejoicing in his good fortune. He knew the stone was worth enough to give him security for a lifetime. But, a few days later, he came back to return the stone to the wise woman. “I’ve been thinking,” he said. “I know how valuable this stone is, but I give it back in the hope that you can give me something even more precious. Give me what you have within you that enabled you to give me this stone.”

The monastery is a school of love where we learn what that wise woman had inside to give freely and immediately: The stone of great value. The monastic endeavor does not well tolerate half-heartedness. There is a quiet exuberance for life as gift that permeates all our days as we are mindful of God’s graciousness to us.

You, our friends are gift to us. We have experienced your generosity. We treasure your friendship and we celebrate your gift of resources. Because of you, life awakens in us hope for the future and a passion for the possible. Together we can gift the world with loving service and ultimately the justice that brings peace.

From the Prioress

Prioress, Benedictine Sisters of Erie
The Benedictine Sisters of Erie processed for the first time into the newly renovated chapel at the monastery to celebrate a 10 a.m. Eucharistic Liturgy on Sunday, April 29. The chapel had been closed since July 2006 for repairs and renovations.

Included in the liturgy celebrated by Bishop Donald Trautman, bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Erie, was the Rite of Blessing and consecration of the new altar. Friends, family, benefactors and Oblates joined the Sisters for this joyous occasion.

There was an Open House for the public that afternoon from 3-5 during which Sister Charlotte Anne Zalot, OSB, offered a brief tour and commentary on the architectural and liturgical highlights of the chapel. Sister Charlotte and Kathy Linse, director of communications, will be producing a commemorative chapel booklet this autumn.

This is a blessed day and an historic day for this monastic community of Benedictine women. ‘The environment is appropriate when it is beautiful, when it is hospitable, and when it clearly invites and needs an assembly of people to complete it.’ Your presence was necessary to complete the renovation of the holy space, our monastic chapel.

This space embraces us, enfolds us, draws us closer to each other. It strengthens the monastic heart of this community that welcomes the stranger as Christ.

Thank you seems so little to say yet it contains it all. The Sisters and I are humbled and grateful for your support.

Sister Christine Vladimiroff, OSB, prioress
Bishop Donald Trautman consecrated the new altar during the April 29 Rite of Blessing for the newly renovated chapel.

Incense was burned on the altar to signify the sacrifice of Christ.

The Paschal Candle is the symbol of the risen Christ. The water symbol reminds us of our baptismal vows and of the Sisters’ Benedictine vows.

Sacred chrism (holy oil) was poured upon the altar. With this anointing, the altar became a symbol of Christ, “the anointed one.”

Sister Jean Wolbert, OSB, liturgist, shares:

We gathered in the new narthex (gathering space), a threshold or transitional place away from the external noises of everyday life into an inner openness and quiet for the celebration of the liturgy.

Because life is movement and process it is fitting that we moved toward God with one another in community. As a result there were processions during the liturgy as we approached the altar – Christ.

The new water symbol reminded us of our baptismal promises. Through the waters of baptism we entered a community of faith and became a member of the body of Christ. It connects us with Christ’s dying and rising.

The sprinkling rite and the water symbol also reminded us that our Benedictine vows are an intensification of our baptismal vows. It was also a call to repentance.

The worship space (nave) needed to be hospitable and accessible to all: So all may see, hear and experience themselves as a community in dialog with God who is transcendent and in their midst. Thus the floor has been flattened and the chairs face each other in antiphonal style as is the manner of praying in monastic communities. This is not only for seeing and hearing but for a more profound expressing of our faith to one another.
Sister Mary Therese Egan (center) welcomed Jan Urban (left) and Bessie Bruno from Oil City.

Dawn Laughlin-Levin and Sister Norma Jean Kingsley, OSB.

Chuck, baby Elizabeth and Betsy Weiss with Sister Dorothy Szczypinski, OSB.

• **Liturgy of the Word**: We listened to the Word of God as expressed in the readings from the fourth Sunday of Easter – Good Shepherd Sunday.

• **The Litany of Saints**: This was sung to ask the saints to support the prayers of the assembly. Included were Benedict and Scholastica whose relics were placed in the altar.

• **Consecration of the altar**: Sacred chrism (holy oil) was poured upon the altar. With this anointing, the altar became a symbol of Christ, “the Anointed One.”

• **Incense**: This is burned on the altar to signify the sacrifice of Christ. As the fragrance of incense filled the chapel, so should the fragrance of Christ fill the whole world. The altar was cleaned and then covered with an altar cloth to signify the place of sacrifice as well as the table of the Lord.

• **Lighting of the Paschal Candle**: This is the symbol of the risen Christ – the light to all nations.

• **Liturgy of the Eucharist**: The bread and wine was changed to the body and blood of Christ.

Sister Miriam Mashank, OSB, welcomed two Sisters of St. Joseph, Sister Ricarda Vincent, SSJ, and Sister Mary Ellen Dwyer, SSJ.

Sister Mary Margaret Kraus with her brother, John Kraus.

Brother Thomas Bezanson, artist-in-residence, and Oblate Doris Cipolla.

Sister Jean Wolbert, OSB, center, with Oblates Bob and Lyta Seddig.

Sister Margaret Ann Pilewski, OSB, with her father, Frank Pilewski.

Pearl Jeffries and Sister Audrey Berdis, OSB.
The renovations also include a Blessed Sacrament Chapel and a Reconciliation Room.

This small chapel is on the center axis of the main chapel in a direct line with the water symbol, the altar and the Word (ambo). It is a place of reserve for the eucharistic bread which is needed for the sick and dying. It is a quiet and private place for prayer and adoration.

We pass the Reconciliation Room on the way into the chapel and it stands as a reminder that we need to leave our gift at the altar and be reconciled with our brother or sister before entering in. It is a reminder that forgiveness and reconciliation is the way to bring about right relationships with God and one another.

I have spent time these months thinking about why religious life is so important to me. Most likely one of the reasons my reflections have intensified is because we pray in newly renovated chapel. It is so wonderful to be able to hear all the voices of our community members echoing back and forth across the chapel, to see faces and glory in the gift of each Sister present. On each side, behind the praying choir, are the beautiful chapel windows: The array of color, movement, light and dark, and symbols represented in the windows is, to me, like a mirror of who we are in my community.

Sister Janet Goetz, OSB

Photos by Carol Comstock, Sisters Margarita Dangel, Carolyn Gorny-Kopkowski, Stephanie Schmidt and Bernadette Sullivan.
Seven Sisters celebrate the joy of their Jubilee Years  

By Sister Mary Ann Luke, OSB

“Uphold me, O God, according to your word. ...”

-Psalm 119

The Benedictine Sisters of Erie will recognize and celebrate the Jubilees of these Sisters during Evening Praise on Saturday, September 29.

Here we share how these Sisters have been a gift to their Benedictine community, family, friends and beyond.

Mary Benedict Irish – 50

Sister Mary Benedict Irish, as is typical of her, finds much in community life to be grateful for: Our prayer life together, the hospitality of the Sisters to one another, and the good care that enables her to participate in community life.

Sister Benedict came to Erie in 1989 from Holy Family Priory, Benet Lake, Wis., when the two communities were in the process of merging. She entered Holy Family Priory in 1950 and first professed her vows in 1957.

In her years at Benet Lake, Sister Benedict earned the BA degree at Dominican College in Racine, Wis. She continued to learn through the workshops and meetings she frequently attended to increase her expertise in her various areas of ministry, especially liturgy and teaching religion.

She worked in day care, and taught religion in several parishes. Nearby Benet Lake Abbey operated a print shop and publications sales facility where Sister Benedict ministered for many years in several positions. She was also librarian at the abbey and at Holy Family Priory.

She served her Benet Lake community on the formation team, as a member of the community council, community secretary, and as delegate to the General Chapter of the Federation of St. Scholastica. She was the priory’s liturgist and choir director.

After she moved to Erie, Sister Benedict became librarian at the Mount. A voracious reader who often has three or four or five books in process at a time, she sorted out the library, added to the collections and saw to the general good order of the records and the good looks of the room.

Sister Benedict has now retired from the library. She continues, however, to be to us all a model of courtesy and of constancy at prayer. It is her hope that we continue to search for God through Scripture, lectio, silence and our prayer together, to bring about peace and justice.

She values especially the Prologue of the Rule and its ending in Chapter 72: “Let us prefer nothing whatever to Christ and may he bring us all together to everlasting life.”

Carol Ann McLaughlin – 50

Sister Carol Ann McLaughlin, a native of Bradford, Pa., was an educator for the first years of her religious life. A graduate of the St. Bernard parish schools, she received the BA degree from Villa Maria College and studied further at Gannon University and Edinboro University of Pennsylvania. She continues professional development in the seminars provided by the National and the Northwest Kidney Foundations.

Sister Carol Ann served as an elementary teacher and principal in Blessed Sacrament, Our Lady of Peace, St. Paul and St. John schools, Erie, as well St. Leo, Ridgway and St. Brigid, Meadville. She then turned to health care.

The most significant of the gifts Sister Carol Ann finds in community is “that we uphold each other in love and support as we continue our journey in seeking God.”

This is the mind-set and the gift that she brings to her present ministry. For nearly
20 years, Sister Carol Ann has ministered as a dialysis technician. Her work is based on training. But her care of her patients begins in the kindness and competence that she brings to it and that they readily perceive in her. In the tedium and the fear that accompanies chronic illness, she offers them both reassurance and real compassion. The process of treatment becomes less frightening and less burdensome with her support.

Her approach to her work is reflected in the words of the Rule, a passage important to her: “Every time you begin a good work, you must pray to God most earnestly to bring it to perfection.”

Sister Carol Ann finds pleasure and renewal in music, reading, cross-stitch, swimming and biking.

Her hope for the community’s future is that we never “lose sight of the importance of liturgy, lectio and the Liturgy of the Hours in our daily lives.”

Roberta Lavin – 60

Sister Roberta Lavin cherishes these lines found in Chapter 19 of the Rule: “We must always remember, therefore, what the prophet says: ‘Serve the Holy One with reverence (Ps.2:11)’ and again, ‘Sing praise wisely (Ps. 46:8).’” The words that St. Benedict found in the Psalms reflect her love of music and dance. Sister Roberta contributes often to the beauty of the community’s prayer as organist and dancer, deepening the community’s prayer as they do her own.

Sister Roberta, a daughter of John Patrick and Agnes Lavin, is a native of Sharon and attended the Sacred Heart parish school and Sharon High School.

She received the BA degree in Spanish and Latin at Villa Maria College, Erie, and the MA in secondary education at Notre Dame University. She is also a guidance counselor, having received her certification from Youngstown University, Ohio.

Teaching languages allows her to present an insight into the unity of humanity by showing that language need not be a barrier. As a community instructor, she has prepared several community members for service in Spanish-speaking areas and others for graduate studies requiring a knowledge of Latin.

Sister Roberta first taught in elementary schools: St. Mary’s, Erie; St. Michael, Fryburg; and Immaculate Conception, Clarion. She also served as piano teacher in Clarion and Fryburg.

Sister Roberta taught on the secondary level at St. Joseph High School, Oil City; Cathedral Preparatory School, Erie; Kennedy Catholic High School, Hermitage; and at St. Benedict Academy, Erie, where she also served as guidance counselor. She was a guidance counselor at All Saints School, Wickliffe, Ohio.

Sister Roberta has just completed several years service as program director at St. Benedict Education Center where she will continue to minister as teacher and counselor.

Her hope for the community’s future is that, “as Benedictine women, we would remain faithful to our call to be a community of prayer amid the chaos and confusion in society and the world.”

Margaret Mary Nielsen – 50

Sister Margaret Mary Nielsen was the first prioress of the newly independent Holy Family Priory at Benet Lake, Wis.

A Chicago native, she attended the parish schools and is an honors graduate of St. Benedict College, St. Joseph, Minn., with a concentration in sociology. She was elected to the national Catholic honor society, Delta Sigma Epsilon. She also attended Dominican College in Racine, Wis., and has attended many workshops, seminars and internships in her field.

In her first years as a member of the Benet Lake community, Sister Margaret Mary assisted with clerical tasks at the print shop of the nearby St. Benedict Abbey. The Sisters were the mainstay of the staff that produced publications on prayer, faith and a wide range of other religious topics.

Later, she was a teacher of religion in several parishes in the Benet Lake area, director of religious education in St. Benedict Parish, Bristol, Wis., and later parochial assistant and coordinator of volunteers at Christ the King parish, Bristol, Wis.

In addition to her service as prioress, Sister Margaret Mary served her community as formation director, council member and community secretary.

Sister Margaret Mary moved to Erie when the Benet Lake and Erie communities merged. She has been an assistant...
in the community's fine arts shop, Chapter 57, contributing time and care to the many tasks that need doing in such a project.

In recent years, she has visited other Sisters residing in the infirmary, encouraging and attending to their needs and comfort as much as possible. She sees the community’s prayer life as its greatest gift to her and hopes that in the future the same prayer life will be a source and sign of hope for all.

She finds the sum of the Rule of Benedict and goal of all monastic life in the words of Chapter 72, “Let us prefer nothing to Christ and may he lead us all together to everlasting life.”

**Andrea Weidle – 60**

Sister Andrea Weidle, who first professed her vows as a Benedictine Sister on August 18, 1947, finds deep significance in St. Benedict’s injunction to “prefer nothing to the work of God,” by which he means the daily prayer of the community. The work of God has been the mainstay of life in community from the beginning of Benedictine monasticism.

It has been the work of God and the support of community which has empowered her ministry for these 60 years. Sister Andrea, who received the BS degree in education from Villa Maria College, was an elementary teacher who served in several parish schools: St. Gregory, North East; St. Joseph and St. Stephen, Oil City; and St. Mary’s, Erie.

Since Sister Andrea is a native of Oil City and attended the parish elementary and high schools, teaching at St. Joseph and St. Stephen gave her the pleasure of homecoming as well as the satisfaction of service.

She also taught religion and physical education at St. Benedict Academy for several years. Later, she was an administrative assistant at SBA and was an EKG technician at St. Vincent Hospital.

Sister Andrea taught Confraternity of Christian Doctrine classes and was a part of the staff at our former summer camp at Glinodo for many years. Her times at camp were also times to take pleasure in the surrounding beauty of the lake and the grounds, the birds at the feeders, each new family of rabbits and the summer sunsets.

In recent years, her focus has been ministry to frail elderly persons whom she assists in many ways.

Her hope for the community’s future growth is expressed in Chapter 72 of the Rule of Benedict: That the community will always “Prefer nothing whatever to Christ and may he bring us all together to everlasting life.”

**Mary Grace Hanes – 60**

Sister Mary Grace Hanes, who first professed Benedictine vows 60 years ago, looks forward to a future in which her community retains the Gospel values that are the foundation of Benedictine spirituality and remains deeply rooted in Christ even as it adapts to a changing world. She notes that the world changes in many ways and that, in order to better serve the people of God, we must adapt to change. But the central focus is always to remain rooted in Christ.

Sister Mary Grace was born in Kane, Pa., a daughter of the late Albert E. and Susan Griebel Hanes. Her family moved to St. Ann’s Parish, Erie, where she attended the parish elementary school. She is a graduate of St. Benedict Academy, Erie.

Sister Mary Grace taught at Immaculate Conception Elementary School in Clarion, at St. Gregory High School, North East and St. Joseph High School, Oil City. For nearly 25 years she ministered at St. Benedict Academy. There she served variously as teacher, assistant principal, principal and guidance counselor.

But her real gift to the students, the faculty, and the administration was her ability to make everything run smoothly. She always knew what was needed by whom and how to provide it. And provide she did, without delay and without fanfare.

In the meantime, she served her community as treasurer and later as Mount coordinator. The latter is an indefinable and largely undoable task: To provide for the material needs of all the Sisters at the Mount, a very large family. Again, she made everything run smoothly.

Sister Mary Grace became the very efficient community secretary and then secretary to the prioress, at that time Sister Joan Chittister.

Since 1990, Sister Mary Grace has served as secretary to Benetvision and Aid to International Monasticism (AIM). She most appreciates these words of the Rule, Chapter 72: “Monastics are not to pursue what they judge better for themselves, but instead, what they judge better for someone else.” And: “Let them prefer nothing whatever to Christ.”
I have no love for divided hearts.  
My love is for your law, O God.  
You are my shelter, my refuge.  
I hope in your word.

Leave me, all who do evil.  
I will keep God’s command.

Uphold me, O God, according to your word, and I shall live, and do not fail me in my hope.

You disown all who turn away from your law; they deceive only themselves.  
The wicked count as nothing.

I tremble before you, standing in awe of your decrees.

The Sisters sing the third stanza when they renew their vows.

Psalm 119

I hope for the future of our community that each member grows in her love of Christ and for each other and that this love will be expressed in compassion and hope as well as love for the people we serve.

Laura Beichner – 50

Sister Laura is a native of St. Joseph Parish, Oil City. She attended the parish schools where our Sisters had taught for many years and, after high school, joined the many St. Joseph alumnae in our community. When she became a novice she took her mother’s name, Laura. She has found in community the gift of the examples of the older Sisters – prayerful, patient and loving women.

Sister Laura studied at Mercyhurst College where she received the BA in elementary education and at Clarion State University where she received the MS in mathematics for elementary schools.

She taught first at St. Mary’s, Erie, then in several other parish schools: St. Gregory, North East; St. Joseph and Sacred Heart, Sharon; St. Michael, Fryburg; and St. Stephen, Oil City, where she taught for several years and was principal for another dozen years.

Sister Laura is now ministering in administration at the Mount where she assists in the business office in the spirit of a quote from the Rule of Benedict which is significant to her: “Let us serve one another in love.” (Chapter 35, v.6) Her facility in mathematics and her administrative experience make her present work a good fit.

She takes pleasure in the splendor of creation; she enjoys gardening, camping and boating in mild weather. In chilly weather, she sews, does craft work, and especially enjoys the company of her cat, for she appreciates the personality and beauty of these independent creatures.

Sister Laura hopes for the future of our community that “each member grows in her love of Christ and for each other and that this love will be expressed in compassion and hope as well as love for the people we serve.”

Sister Laura finds the community’s best gift to her to be its “rich liturgical life” by which her own prayer life “has been deepened and enriched.”
Through the monetary offering of the Sisters and friends of Mount St. Benedict Monastery who attended our Easter Liturgy last year, a generous donation was sent to the Foundation for Children in Need. The foundation is a Catholic lay organization based in Arlington Heights, Ill. Geetha Yeruva, M.D. and Tom Chitta, lay missionaries from India, established the foundation five years ago; Tom takes care of the sponsorship program and the foundation’s administration.

Dr. Geetha is well known to our Benedictine community as she has stayed with us several times over the past few years. Tom and Geetha work in the interior villages of south India. They have established several schools and hostels for boys and girls. The Foundation for Children is now sponsoring 1,200 children and college students. Their lives are much improved because of this program.
As a medical doctor, Geetha has established a community health center through which she and her team are able to reach out to 10,000 people living in 20 different villages. She also helps to facilitate St. Xavier’s Home for more than 50 elderly people in Shantivanam, India.

Each year, the parishes in the Catholic Diocese of Erie invite a missionary to speak about their mission activities. During the weekend of July 28-29, Sister Bernadette Sullivan, OSB, spoke on behalf of the foundation at Our Lady of Mercy Church in Harborcreek.

“Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.”

Romans 12:13
God has blessed us with the gift of generous people

I recently had the pleasure of spending a summer afternoon talking with the two most senior members of our community: Sisters Margaret Harrison, OSB, and Joanne Huether, OSB. I found that both Sisters truly know what it means to be a Benedictine Sister of Erie. And I was reminded of what a gift these two outstanding women are, not only to our Benedictine community, but to all the people whose lives they have touched.

Sister Margaret (who is now first in community rank) came to St. Benedict Convent in August, 1928, followed by Sister Joanne in February, 1929. They met as schoolgirls, second-grade students at St. Joseph School in Sharon, Pa., where the Benedictine Sisters of Erie taught them.

When we celebrated our 150th Jubilee in 2006, they held the distinction of being members of the community for 77 years; that's over half of the life of this community. Now at age 95 they have lived the Rule of St. Benedict through times of great struggle and great joy.

"During our early years, we were very poor," recalls Sister Margaret. "The breakfast meal was a cup of "cambric tea" (hot water with a little milk) and one slice of bread. At supper we had the tea again with some fried potatoes. At noon we had a 'square' meal meant to nourish us for our labor."

"I don't know how the Sisters were able to sustain us," added Sister Joanne, "as they had to provide for our education so we were prepared to teach along with all of the other expenses. We relied on the grace of God, prayer, hard work and the generosity of the families in Erie, Oil City, Clarion, Sharon and Fryburg who shared what they could with us."

Sister Margaret believes "the community was a blessed with intelligent, God-centered leaders throughout our history. How else can we explain the foresight and the courage of the Sisters who in 1906 purchased a 120-acre tract in Harborcreek Township for $11,500 which now is the home of the monastery, Benetwood Apartments and Glnodo Center?"

Despite many physical and economic hardships over the last 79 years, the Sisters continue to face struggles with a commitment to seek God through life in community under the guidance of the Rule of St. Benedict and the leadership of the prioress, and to respond through prayer and ministry.

"Our families, friends and guests often comment on the sense of peace, joy and hope they experience through their relationships with the Sisters," says Sister Joanne. As "Nanny Jo" she has spent the last eight years sharing her kindness and joy with Michaela and Lauren Belmonte who visit with her regularly to learn lasting lessons inspired by a life centered in the love of God.

She continued, "Since it is difficult for me to leave the monastery, I am committed to serving my Sisters through prayer, and by providing support and encouragement to the Sisters, my caregivers, family and..."
friends. I remember in prayer the students I taught from 1931 to 1975 at St. Joseph and St. Stephen schools in Oil City, Sacred Heart and St. Joseph School in Sharon, and St. Mary's and Mount Calvary Schools in Erie.

“I try not to miss community meetings, celebrations and events even though I may not hear all that is said and have to rely on others to read to me due to visual impairment. The commitment I made to this community and to the Church at my perpetual monastic profession in 1933 remains the focus of my life.”

Sister Margaret summarizes her life as a Benedictine Sister in this way: “We have a wonderful community. In the early days we were educated as teachers and musicians. My musical talent was recognized at a young age so I served as a music teacher for 38 years. My students (St. Benedict Academy, Erie; Immaculate Conception, Clarion; St. Joseph and St. Stephen, Oil City; St. Michael, Fryburg; and St. Joseph and St. Scholastica Convent, Sharon) learned musical technique and practice, but my real gift to them was love and appreciation of the spiritual dimension of music. A number of my students went on to professional music careers.

“We have experienced many changes in the Church and religious life since I entered. Some of these centered on the externals like clothing or always traveling with a companion, but most changes occurred because of a deeper, clearer understanding of our Benedictine heritage.

“In 2005 when we began discussing our need to renovate our chapel due to safety concerns and lack of accessibility, I was ready. I had already lived through two changes in the chapel at our original convent on East Ninth Street and the move to our new chapel at the Mount in 1970. I knew that through prayer, study and deliberation the community would renew itself as we renewed our chapel space. I think I was right. Just look at the pictures of the chapel blessing in this magazine.”

For Sisters Margaret and Joanne, the theme of our 150th Jubilee Celebration – Gratitude for the Past, Hope for the Future – evoked a strong sense of appreciation for the Sisters who had gone before them and paved the way for the present community facing its future. During our conversation they remembered the eldest member of the community when they entered, Sister Benedicta Hellriegel, who joined the community in 1861 as its 20th member. They named the nine women who served this community as prioress since 1928, four of whom are still living. They shared experiences of many relationships of mutual love and support that have helped them in their quest for God.

Central to their reflection on the Jubilee theme was the acknowledgement and gratitude to the people who support the community. From the earliest days when the German immigrants brought food, helped with housing and provided transportation – to today when our supporters are helping us to raise $9 million for the Heritage of Hope Capital Campaign, God has blessed us with the friendship of generous people.

“In 2004 when the community discussed embarking on a capital campaign to renovate our monastery properties and establish a ministry fund to support current and future ministry, I prayed for direction,” says Sister Margaret. “I knew we needed to address safety concerns in our chapel as the ceiling tiles were ready to fall in and the slanted floor prevented some of our Sisters from fully participating in prayer and the celebration of the Eucharist.”

Likewise, Sister Joanne listened to the concerns of the Sisters like herself who need assistance with personal care. She experiences physical barriers to her independence. Her motorized wheelchair sits in the hallway outside of her room since the doorway is not wide enough to accommodate the chair. Sister Joanne must disconnect her oxygen supply in the hallway while reaching for her walker to enter her bedroom so she can reconnect to her oxygen tank. She too prayed that the community would make a wise decision.
When the community agreed to take a bold step and announce the public phase of the $9 million campaign on November 1, 2006, Sisters Margaret and Joanne were present at the media conference to lend their support. They were eager to share their enthusiasm about the campaign with the media, our benefactors and potential supporters. Gifts to the campaign have allowed us to complete in May the first phase of our Monastery Renovation, the chapel and front entrance. Now the second campaign project, the Community Living Space Renovation, will result in the creation of enlarged bedrooms with accessible bathrooms and improved energy efficiency. The widened doorways, increased bedroom space, private baths and air-conditioning will allow Sisters Margaret and Joanne and others to live in a safe environment where they can be independent for as long as possible. Since both Sisters use motorized chairs and oxygen, they are excited about the possibilities of spending their energy participating in community prayer, meals and activities without the worry of conserving their energy to deal with the physical barriers in their bedroom area.

As they contemplate the future, the Sisters consider the coming generations. Sister Margaret’s concern for the global environment was made practical recently by her skills as the community seamstress. On July 11th, the Feast of St. Benedict, she presented each Sister with a cloth shopping bag she had sewn as a gift to help save the environment. She is contemplating a new project that would supply these bags to the clients at Emmaus Food Pantry.

As women dedicated to the future of religious life, Sisters Joanne and Margaret are part of 11 a.m. daily prayer of the rosary for vocations to the community. Both acknowledged support for the capital campaign plan to improve facilities at the monastery that may aide in attracting young women to the community.

“Times are much different than when we entered, says Sister Margaret. “Many of us came to the community at 16, 17 or 18 years of age from large families with modest homes. Now young women considering religious life have professional careers, live in apartments or own homes or condos.” Adds Sister Joanne, “They may find it difficult to live in an 8 by 10 room. Since we cannot go out to meet our donors, we support the future of our community by praying for our supporters and the success of the campaign.

As Sisters Margaret and Joanne reflected on the campaign theme, Heritage of Hope, they left me, indeed all of us, with these words of Benedictine Wisdom:

“God has blessed us with our call to be Benedictine Sisters and with the grace to live lives faithful to our calling. We want to share this life of joy and hope with other women. We know that God will answer our prayers.”

Mary Jane Vreelt, OSB
Heritage of Hope Capital Campaign
Reaches $7 Million Mark


The Sisters continue to be blessed by the generosity of our families, friends, Oblates, graduates of St. Benedict Academy and the business community. We are grateful to you for our beautifully renovated chapel where the community gathers to pray the Liturgy of the Hours each morning, midday and evening. Our communal prayer sustains us as we reach out to others through our varied ministries throughout the Erie area and beyond. Your gifts help us to help others.

The Benedictine Sisters remember our supporters in a special way each Sunday in our Eucharistic Liturgy. Your gifts to this campaign have helped us to renew not only our chapel space but also ourselves. May God bless you for your generosity.

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Last updated July 31, 2007

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1936 was a very good year! Were you born then?

If you are 70 1/2 or older, own an IRA and would like to contribute to our Heritage of Hope Capital Campaign, the Pension Protection Act of 2006 can help you do just that. The act permits individuals to roll over $100,000 from an IRA directly to qualifying charities like the Benedictine Sisters of Erie without having to count the donation as taxable income. The provision is limited to the tax year 2007, so you need to act quickly.

If you are interested in making such a gift, please talk directly with your professional financial advisor, and then call Jo Clarke, director of annual giving, at 814-899-0614, Ext. 2281. (e-mail: joclarc@gmail.com)
Sister Katherine Horan, OSB: Perpetual Monastic Profession

Sister Dorothy Stoner, OSB, director of formation for the Benedictine Sisters of Erie, reflects on this happy occasion.

Sister Katherine Horan came to Mount Saint Benedict Monastery several years ago. She has lived in the center of community as she progressed through her “formation” period. She has prayed, studied Scripture, theology, morality/ethics, monastic studies and the history of the Erie Benedictines. As a member of the community she cleaned, did dishes and worked in the yard. She was committed to care of the Earth and environmental issues; she gave time and energy to the education of children.

During all these years Sister Kathy observed the Sisters around her and her own life, asking, “Is this the life God is calling me to live? Is this where I can become my best self? Will this life enable me to make a difference in this world?” The community asked the same questions.

The response became evident on Saturday, July 7: The celebration of Sister Katherine Horan’s Perpetual Monastic Profession. Certainly it is a significant event for her and for us. It calls forth celebration of the gift of Sister Kathy to the community and to the world. What is this all about?

Early in the Rite of Perpetual Monastic Profession the prioress says to the woman before her:

We are called to an abiding faithfulness to one another, living together over a lifetime, growing in faith, in mutual love and in reverence.
Is it your intent to join us in this expression of stability?

We are called to seek God with an openness which expands our hearts and frees us to be transformed each day, every day. The way of life set forth in the rule provides an opportunity for this transformation to take place.

Is it your intent to join us in this expression of fidelity to the monastic way of life?

Sister …., after praying, studying and living as a Benedictine woman, is it your intent, with God’s help, to live the rest of your life as a woman religious in this Benedictine community?

Startling questions. Bold questions. Amazing questions. Perhaps even more startling, bold, and amazing is to hear a woman standing before us say clearly and with conviction:

It is my intent…It is my intent…Yes, it is my intent.
Meet Sister Kathy
By Sister Mary Ann Luke, OSB

When Sister Katherine Horan made her vows on July 7, 2007, we counted two firsts: The first profession in our new chapel and the first profession of our second 150 years. Nonetheless, her profession was, in its essentials, the same as that ritual has been for all the community's years; it was the same as it has been at St. Walburg Monastery in Bavaria, our founding house, for far longer.

Sister Kathy's religious formation began with her family: Her parents, Joseph and Joan, and her sister, Michelle. She continued to learn in the parish schools of her home town, Pottsville, Pa. She excelled academically and in sports – basketball was a favorite.

Her goal was, and is, to teach and, most importantly, to incorporate Catholic principles and values in all aspects of her teaching. She attended Edinboro University of Pennsylvania and earned three education degrees: BS, mentally and physically handicapped; BS, elementary, and M.Ed.

Sister Kathy has taught in parish schools in Erie and in elementary schools in the Erie School District. She has continued to broaden her education in many aspects of her teaching; she is especially interested in science and the environment. She will join the faculty at St. Luke Elementary School, Erie, this autumn.

Her first contact with our community was a result of work with community members on environmental concerns and in peace and justice issues. She came to the monastery to learn more about Benedictine life and the search for God. She has found in the Rule of Benedict and in the community's prayer a rule for life.

Over the past several years she has lived, worked and studied in community. We have found in her a God-seeker, a generous person, a fine teacher, a hard worker and a woman who says, “I enjoy life; I enjoy life here.”

She finds in community life that the best gift is the love and support the Sisters give her. Sister Kathy points to this verse, which Benedict quotes from Romans, as most significant to her: “They should each try to be the first to show respect to the other.”

She hopes and expects for the future of the community that the Rule of Benedict will continue to guide us always, and so she has made her commitment to the Benedictine Sisters of Erie for a lifetime.
Sister Audrey joins
Benetwood

Sister Audrey Berdis, OSB, has accepted the position of service coordinator for the apartments and began her new ministry May 1.

As service coordinator, Sister Audrey says her objective is “to help the residents stay as long as they wish!” Her work involves assisting in many areas such as coordinating outside agencies, service providers, the Benedictine community’s personal assistance, meals, transportation, counseling, preventive health and wellness screening and legal advocacy.

She will also be educating residents on services from community agencies and manage the provision of such.

This is a job with a built-in reward because I feel great satisfaction whenever I can ease someone’s burden. I am delighted to be at Benetwood.

- Sister Audrey

Called to be
women of hope

Sister Marian Wehler, OSB, will be moving from her ministry at Falls Creek, Pa. as director of religious education for two parishes to be part of the Rural Ministry Team in Venango and Clarion counties. The success of the first Rural Ministry Team with Sisters Phyllis Schleicher, OSB, and Mary William Hoffman, OSB, has convinced Bishop Trautman, deans and priests that this will be an effective compliment to their ministry in the diocese. The team will be under Catholic Charities of the diocese.

Sister Marian and Sister Clare Marie Beichner, SSJ, will live in Oil City at the former rectory of Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church.

The words of Msgr. Swoger at our first meeting tugged at my heart. He spoke about wanting Sisters for Rural Ministry to bring hope to people in the Oil City Deanery.” Hope” was the job description. Sister Clare Marie and I accepted the new position and plan to begin Sept. 1. We want to be a hopeful pastoral presence in this vast and lovely rural area where poverty has increased in recent years. Please keep us in your prayers.

-Sister Marian

Second Harvest honors Sisters

Second Harvest Food Bank of Northwest Pennsylvania commemorated 25 years of service to the Erie community at an Aug. 4 event: “Filling Plates for 25 Years.” The highlight of the evening was Karen Seggi, executive director, presenting the first Sister Augusta Hamel Leadership Award to the Benedictine Sisters of Erie.

Sister Christine Vladimiroff, OSB, prioress, accepted the award on behalf of the Erie Benedictines for their role in establishing and developing the food bank. She was also the guest speaker for the evening. Sister Christine was president and chief executive officer of the Second Harvest National Network in Chicago from 1991-98. You can read her remarks at ErieBenedictines.org

The Erie Community Food Bank opened in January of 1982 at the Curtze warehouse, 2001 Wallace Street, with a staff of six under the direction of Rev. Thomas Guerdot. In July, the Benedictine Sisters of Erie agreed to become the sponsoring agent of the Food Bank, and Sister Augusta Hamel, OSB, a member of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie, was appointed executive director succeeding Rev. Guerdot.

Former First Lady of Pennsylvania Michele Ridge, honorary chairperson, welcomed guests to the dinner at the new Bayfront Convention Center; Bishop Donald Trautman of the Catholic Diocese of Erie gave the invocation.

Karen Seggi, executive director of Erie’s Second Harvest Food Bank, presented the award to Sister Christine Vladimiroff, OSB, prioress.
Please welcome Charlene Ray, RN

Charlene began her position as the new Director of Health Services early in June.

The director, formerly known as infirmarian, is a member of the administrative staff and reports directly to the prioress. She has the responsibility of coordinating the services of the health care team, including physicians, nurses, allied health professionals and support departments that are involved in the care of the Sisters in her charge. All staff serving in the infirmary report directly to Charlene.

She will ensure the quality of the nursing care and assume the overall management for the nursing/assisted living area. Charlene will also oversee personnel recruitment, staff development and ongoing in-service training.

Charlene is a 1970 graduate of Hamot Medical Center with a 3-year diploma as a Registered Nurse. She has completed college work in the areas of management and supervision as well. She has held many responsible positions in the health field, including training nurses aides and working with hospice teams, all of which gives her great experience and skills.

Sister Janet has taken the position of Vocation Minister. She chaired the ad hoc committee that explored the area of vocation ministry and is intimately knowledgeable about the research and recommendations that were sent on to Sister Christine Vladimiroff, OSB, prioress, and the Monastic Council.

Sister Janet has worked in Formation since 1995, served on the American Benedictine Formation Conference Executive Committee and was elected chair by her peers. As Vocation Minister, she will provide continuity in working with women discerning whether or not God is calling them to monastic life.

She will be directing all activities associated with promoting membership to the Benedictine Sisters of Erie and increasing the general public’s awareness of the meaning and call of a monastic vocation.

LCWR lauds Sister Joan Chittister

Sister Joan Chittister, OSB, received the 2007 Outstanding Leadership Award from the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, (LCWR) on Sat., Aug. 4, at the annual assembly in Kansas City, Missouri.

The award honors a woman religious who has made a profound contribution to religious life and the church.

The LCWR is an association of leaders of congregations of Catholic women religious in the United States. The conference has more than 1,500 members who represent 68,000 women religious in the U.S. To read about LCWR, visitLCWR.org

Sister Joan served as president of the LCWR (1976-77), president of the Conference of American Benedictine Prioresse (1974-90), and was prioress of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie for 12 years.

You can read more about Sister Joan at Benetvision.org

“T am in the process of receiving a very good orientation and want to thank all of you. Everyone I’ve met has been gracious, warm and encouraging. This means a lot to a new person! It’s been a joy to see how well everyone works together to get things done.”

-Charlene Ray, RN

Sister Joan gives her acceptance speech at the LCWR assembly in Kansas City.
She sought out those whom the world forgot

Sister Nora Curran, OSB, died at her home on July 15, 2007 after a long illness

Sister Nora Curran, OSB, died at her home, Mount St. Benedict Monastery, on July 15, 2007 after a long illness. She was born in Oil City, Pa., a daughter of the late Frank and Mary Anna Kresinske Curran, and she received her early education in St. Joseph Parish schools. She entered the Benedictine Sisters of Erie in 1943 and graduated from St. Benedict Academy the following year. Sister Nora made her final profession as a Benedictine Sister on August 28, 1947 and has celebrated her 25th and 50th and 60th anniversaries of profession.

She was an accomplished teacher whose education included a BA degree in social studies, English and Spanish from Villa Maria College and an MA in Spanish literature from the International University, Saltillo, Mexico, where she later served as dean of women. Her post-graduate studies included work at Gannon, Fordham and Georgetown universities. She also received a Fulbright grant for study at the Cartagena University, Bogota, Columbia.

Sister Nora taught in several parish elementary schools: St. Mary’s, Erie; St. Joseph, Oil City; St. Joseph, Sharon; and St. Gregory, North East. She later taught at St. Joseph and Venango Catholic high schools in Oil City and at St. Benedict Academy, Erie. After her service in education, Sister Nora’s ministry came to be centered in her deep concern for the poor, especially for the poor in Latin America whom she served for nearly 30 years in Saltillo, Mexico and in Cali, Colombia as teacher, mentor and friend. She returned in recent years to Mount St. Benedict where her love for the poor continued to be manifested in her monastic life.

As well as her parents, Sister Nora was preceded in death by her sisters, Winifred Toy, Marie Diamond and Martha Curran and by her brothers, Joseph and Frank Curran. She is survived by her religious community, the Benedictine Sisters of Erie, and several nieces and nephews.

This tribute was written by Sister Mary Ann Luke, OSB. Memorials in honor of Sister Nora may be made to the Benedictine Sisters of Erie Development Office, 6101 East Lake Road, Erie, PA 16511.
The Saint Benedict Alumnae Association was featured in a recent package of “classmates connecting via the Internet” stories in the July 15 edition (Sunday Living section) of the Erie Times-News. The stories were written by Tricia Wood-DeMarco of the ETN Features department. “Schools reach out, touch alumni online” included an interview with Ann Comstock ’64, SBA alumnae director. You can read the story online at ErieBenedictines.org.

Some members of SBA Class of 1962 gathered for their 45th reunion at the annual alumnae picnic.

**Back Row, from left:**
Darlene Bernard Doehrel, Mary Kay Henry Kaeberlein, Maureen McManus Humphreys

**Middle Row:**
Karen Trocki, Ann Marie Woznicki Kirker, Charlene Cackowski Schroeck, Remle Phillips Walczak, Bernie Andrejczak Stefano, Barbara Trohoske Magraw

**Front Row:**
Joanne Schneider David, Carol Kruszewski Weir, Mary Stephany Theiss, Ann Nicolia Scarpino, Mary Ellen Cleaver Crane, Jeanne Schroeck Gerlach
Frances Burt announces that the Class of 1953 has begun planning for their 55th Reunion.

“We will be having Mass at the Mount on Sunday, June 8th, 2008. For several years now, we have been having a Mass said on our anniversary at St. Mary’s Church, which, of course, is right next door to the old academy. This Mass is always said for the living and deceased members of our class.

“By the way, this is the exact date of our graduation, 55 years ago! There will also be a breakfast at the Maennerchor, immediately following the Mass. It will be the usual Maennerchor Brunch in the Crystal Room.

The following Tuesday, June 10th, we will gather for a luncheon at the Yacht Club.”

Frances also shares some news: Classmates enjoyed a luncheon in May at the Maennerchor and a July picnic at Mary Lou Koenig Burkhart’s home in North East.

There will be a Holiday Luncheon at the Maennerchor in November.

“These three activities have become a tradition for us,” she said.

Alumnae Brunch

On Sunday, April 15, the annual Alumnae Communion Brunch was held at the Lawrence Park Golf Club. More than 60 women gathered to meet with friends while enjoying a wonderful brunch. At the event, $4,000 in scholarships for students attending Catholic schools for the 2007-2008 school year was awarded. Since 1991, the alumnae association has awarded approximately $38,000 in scholarships.

This year’s winners are:

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<th>#</th>
<th>Student</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Relationship</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Jonathan Selleny</td>
<td>St. Gabriel</td>
<td>grandson</td>
<td>Evelyn Wilczynski Selleny ’53</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Andrew Holland</td>
<td>St. Ignatius High School</td>
<td>grandson</td>
<td>Barbara Mikolajczyk Cyterski ’57</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Patrick Froehlich</td>
<td>Conwell-Egan Catholic High School</td>
<td>nephew</td>
<td>Chris Froehlich Tatalone ’66</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Robert &amp; Anthony Young</td>
<td>Blessed Sacrament</td>
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<td>Donna Barber Adiutori ’56</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Marina Tojaga</td>
<td>Blessed Sacrament</td>
<td>granddaughter</td>
<td>Kathy Cermak Polito ’63</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Maria Earl</td>
<td>St John/Holy Rosary Eastside Catholic</td>
<td>granddaughter</td>
<td>Ruth Neve Earl ’53</td>
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<td>Jesse Hodapp</td>
<td>St. Boniface</td>
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<td>Dorothy Heintzel Hodapp ’63</td>
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<td>Mary Swigonski</td>
<td>St. James</td>
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<td>Rebecca Wojtasik Swigonski ’83</td>
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<td>Tristan Casey</td>
<td>St. George</td>
<td>grandson</td>
<td>Audrey Nagle Casey ’58</td>
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<td>Gavin Eisert</td>
<td>St. George</td>
<td>son</td>
<td>Mary Lilly Eisert ’64</td>
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<td>Logan Lego</td>
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<td>daughter</td>
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<td>Stacey Stachera</td>
<td>Mercyhurst Prep</td>
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<td>Theresa Phillips Stachera ’78</td>
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<td>Theodore Mitchell</td>
<td>Mercyhurst Prep</td>
<td>son</td>
<td>Deborah Kania Mitchell ’70</td>
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<td>Mercyhurst Prep</td>
<td>niece</td>
<td>Janet Bulishak Frazer ’56</td>
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<td>son</td>
<td>Marcia Majchozak Nitzynski ’74</td>
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<td>Jack Rinderle</td>
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<td>grandson</td>
<td>Patricia Hughes Kelleher ’49</td>
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<td>Linda Shreve Freytag ’65</td>
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<td>Laura Van Volkenburg</td>
<td>Villa Maria Academy</td>
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<td>Patricia Van Volkenburg ’70</td>
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<td>Lauren Wiesen</td>
<td>Villa Maria Academy</td>
<td>niece</td>
<td>Colleen McGraw McLaughlin ’69</td>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Alexandra Grab</td>
<td>Villa Maria Academy</td>
<td>great-niece</td>
<td>Pat Moske Gennaro ’57</td>
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Alumnae show wonderful support of capital campaign

We gathered for our annual picnic in June and were updated on the $9 million “Heritage of Hope” Capital Campaign.

Now as of Aug. 15, total pledges to the campaign are $7,078,230. Of that, the alumnae contribution thus far is $590,140.

Did you know? The first St. Benedict Academy boarding school for girls opened in 1869 in a one-and-a-half story frame building, just east of the convent on East Ninth Street. Tuition was $1 per month. A new academy was built at 345 East Ninth Street in 1890 with renovations over the years. Although our school closed in 1988, our alumnae association is strong and active in supporting the Sisters and their ministries.

Proceeds from the first phase of the campaign were used to renovate the chapel, enhancing the worship and prayer spaces, at Mount St. Benedict Monastery. Renovation of the Sisters’ living space to improve safety and accessibility in the bedroom areas at the monastery is the next campaign project. The third major aspect of the campaign is to create a ministry fund to support current and future ministry.

For information about the campaign, please contact Sister Mary Jane at (814) 899-0614, Ext. 2409 or Jo Clarke, Ext. 2281.
The talents of the design and printing departments of Printing Concepts, Inc., in Erie, have made this issue of The Mount affordable for the Benedictine Sisters of Erie. This issue of The Mount is produced by Kathy Linse. The executive editor is Sister Mary Jane Vergotz, OSB.

Please help us to maintain an accurate mailing list and keep our costs down by contacting us with any change in mail or e-mail information. If you prefer not to receive The Mount please let us know. Send correspondence to:

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