Illuminating the Word of God

The Saint John’s Bible

A monumental achievement and historic undertaking, The Saint John’s Bible is a major artistic, cultural and spiritual endeavor. It is the first handwritten and illuminated Bible commissioned since the invention of the printing press.

Donald Jackson, world renowned calligrapher and illuminator in collaboration with artists and theologians, has woven word and image in this once-in-a-millennium project. This work of art unites an ancient Benedictine tradition with the technology and vision of today, illuminating the Word of God for a new millennium.

Commissioned by the monks of Saint John’s Abbey and University, Collegeville, Minnesota, as a Bible for our time, The Saint John’s Bible is a unique blend of ancient methods, materials and tools with modern themes, images, technology and text. The Saint John’s Bible is monumental – two feet tall and three feet wide with nearly 11,000 pages bound in seven distinct volumes.

The Benedictine Sisters of Erie will host an exhibit of 25 prints from this Bible at the monastery, Oct. 25-Nov. 25. The exhibit opens Sunday, October 25 with Vespers at 3 p.m. and a lecture at 3:30 p.m. featuring Sister Mary Irene Nowell, OSB, of St. Scholastica Monastery, Atchison, Kansas. As a member of the Committee on Illumination and Text, Sister Mary Irene brings her personal experience with the project to her lecture entitled “Visio Divina.” Sister Mary Irene holds a Doctorate in Biblical Studies from The Catholic University of America and is a noted biblical scholar and a leading authority on the Psalms.

The exhibit will be open Mon.-Sat. 9-11:30 a.m. and 1-4 p.m.; Sunday hours are 10:30-11:30 a.m. and 1-4 p.m. Evenings are by special arrangement. (Exhibit is closed Nov. 14-15.) Groups are welcome.

Whether you have a deep reverence for Scripture, are drawn to the precise work of the quill, are an avid art collector or just curious about this fascinating manuscript you won’t want to miss this exhibit. Selected books and notecards will be available for purchase in Chapter 57, the monastery’s fine arts gift shop.

For more information, please contact Sister Irene Spacht, OSB, at (814) 899-0614, Ext. 2507 or e-mail her: sispacht@aol.com

BENEDICTINE CHARISM STATEMENT

The Benedictine way is to seek God in the cenobitic life and to respond in prayer and ministry.
The love of art comes from a life that is intent on the search for God.

Benedictine history is as dynamic and vast as human culture. Its manifestations in every age, in every place on the planet, give witness to the creative Spirit of God at play in the world. The Word of God in Scripture is central to living the monastic life in communal prayer and personal lectio. The Benedictine monastic tradition has graced three millennia—gifting us with a legacy that we claim today. It is that same spirit that animates us today.

Across the years, in all lands, monasticism has fostered the arts, whether in music, painting, writing, pottery, or architecture. The love of art comes from a life that is intent on the search for God. Artistic expression in whatever medium gives us a glimpse of the journey of the monastic soul. Ultimately, the peace of creating something beautiful will take one to God. God alone satisfies the monastic heart.

The earliest surviving complete Bible in Latin, the huge Codex Amiatinus, now in Florence, was made in one of the twin Benedictine houses of Wearmouth or Jarrow in northern England in the early eighth century. The great Carolingian Bibles of the ninth century were almost all prepared in the Benedictine monasteries of Tours. The immense Bury and Winchester Bibles of the twelfth century England were Benedictine commissions. The custom of creating and using vast manuscripts of Scripture comes into our day, as well, through the Benedictine legacy. Saint John's Abbey in Collegeville, Minnesota, has commissioned Donald Jackson, one of the most skilled living calligraphers, to produce a handwritten and illuminated Bible for our day. Jackson supervises, from his Scriptorium in Wales, a team of scribes and illuminators. The Bible is being written with quills on vellum, using hundred-year-old sticks of ink. The illuminations are made with a combination of ancient and modern computer techniques. The Saint John's Bible recaptures the spirit of the great medieval Bibles, yet it grows out of a completely contemporary artistic and theological sensibility. It is a work of faith.

In the spirit of our ancient tradition, the community of Mount Saint Benedict Monastery invites you to our home to view an exhibition of 25 prints of the illuminations from The Saint John's Bible. We humbly offer it to you as a testimony that our lives are rooted in God's word and that word speaks to us in our time. Join us on a spiritual journey searching for God in the beauty and truth that art opens for us. Pablo Picasso once commented that “...a work of art is only half finished and each person who truly communicates with it refinishes it again.” Come and see with us a work of art that will only be finished when seen with eyes of faith.

Benedict wrote in his Rule: “If there be artisans in the Monastery, (then) let them practice their crafts with all humility.” (RB 57).

From the Prioress

Prioress, Benedictine Sisters of Erie
The Process

“The continuous process of remaining open and accepting of what may reveal itself through hand and heart on a crafted page is the closest I have ever come to God.”
Donald Jackson, Artistic Director

The Saint John’s Bible is a work of art and a work of theology. A team of artists coordinated by Donald Jackson in Wales and a team of scholars in Central Minnesota have brought together the ancient techniques of calligraphy and illumination with an ecumenical Christian approach to the Bible rooted in Benedictine spirituality. The result is a living document and a monumental achievement.

Back in the 1990s, Donald Jackson observed the monks of Saint John’s Abbey processing with their Book of the Gospels for Sunday Mass, and he recognized the importance of “their book.” To create a Bible that would capture the beauty and tradition of centuries of liturgy and carry it into the future—that is the vision that united a calligrapher in Wales with a group of Benedictine monks in Minnesota.

“The illuminations are not illustrations. They are spiritual meditations on a text. It is a very Benedictine approach to Scriptures.”
Fr. Michael Patella, OSB, Chair of the Committee on Illumination and Text

Before any page was written, a number of decisions were made about the very words themselves and how to represent them in text and illumination. What to emphasize? How to represent the divine? These decisions—from what translation to use to what size page to allocate to a particular illumination—are guided by a set of principles and careful consideration about the themes.

At Saint John’s University, a committee of artists, medievalists, theologians, biblical scholars and art historians called the Committee on Illumination and Text reflect on each of the volumes before they are written. This team provides the background material and plan that guide the illuminations and text treatments in The Saint John’s Bible.
Mirror of Wisdom

Wisdom of Solomon 8-10

Artist: Donald Jackson

The motif of the mirror comes to full fruition in this illumination, with the face of Wisdom reflected in a mirror. As mentioned earlier, it is in this book that Wisdom is elevated to full divinity. We read in chapter 7, “For she is a breath of the power of God, and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty… she is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, an image of his goodness” (7:25-26). We can never see God directly in this life, but in wisdom we see God’s reflection in the mirror—and it is a female face we see.

A photograph of a Palestinian woman was used to make the image seen here. The only other time actual human faces appear in The Saint John’s Bible is in Genesis, with Adam and Eve. In fact, it is worth going back to that image, which was accompanied by a quotation from the book of Romans. “And all of us with unveiled faces seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another” (Rom 8:19). The mirror connects both images, and the idea as well of humanity created in God’s image and reflecting back God’s glory.

The round frame of the mirror depicts the twenty-eight phases of the moon, another association with the feminine in the universe. In the four corners of the outer frame are paintings based on images from the Hubble telescope, again pointing to the cosmic nature of wisdom. The shapes here, of the circle and the frame, hearken back to the walled garden in Song of Solomon, or even to the vision of Solomon’s temple in Ezekiel. When contemplating Wisdom, we should employ all our metaphors: journey, creation, reflection, and relationship, and any others that help us approach the mystery of God. (Reflection by Susan Sink.)
The Garden of Eden and Adam and Eve (two page opening)

Genesis 2-3

Artists: Donald Jackson with contribution by Chris Tomlin

Creation, the Garden of Eden and Adam and Eve form a trilogy offering a powerful and detailed visual insight into the opening pages of the Old Testament. This two page spread gives the context for the illumination, allowing you to enjoy Word and image. Each page of The Saint John’s Bible is an artistic creation. In addition to the illuminations and handwritten text, these pages offer many other elements that create a visual harmony for all to behold. These include chapter numbers, chapter letters, marginalia, notations, book headings and verse numbers.

The Garden of Eden

This illumination contains details from oceanic life, earthly vegetation, bird and animal life, including the emergence of human beings as hunters and members of family groups dancing and making music. The beginnings of our impact upon our environment are symbolized by the use of prehistoric rock paintings, the female hunter from Africa and drawings of men, women and children from
Australia. There is insect and reptilian life in the details of the background, the crude painted stripes of the border are contrasted with the use of burnished gold edging here and there to imply God’s unifying presence and purpose in the “chaos” which we inhabit and create for ourselves. There is a hint of menace in the presence of the snake and poisonous insects.

**Adam and Eve**

This illumination represents the reality of knowing. Adam and Eve now understand their nakedness. The “taking on of clothing” is represented in the use of fabric pattern, a feather boa from Peru and African body painting with patterns drawn into the paint. This illumination is profound in the way it embraces the mystery of the origins of mankind. Notice the presence of the snake and the facial expression of Eve.

Ecclesiastes (Frontispiece)

Ecclesiastes 1:1 – 2:11

Artist: Donald Jackson

As a Wisdom Book, Ecclesiastes, focuses attention on life, death and God’s relationship with humanity. A raven, a common symbol of death, serves as a messenger flying up from the center of the illumination appearing to carry the breath of life back to God. It is pierced and surrounded by gold and silver bars, designations of divinity.

The divine, human, and natural realms are juxtaposed with each other as they portray the various ways in which God creates.

The four elements of creation are all here: the green hues of fertile earth, the mysterious blues reflected in both sky and water, and the fire found in stars and comets. Despite the chaos of circling images spinning off the page, there is a constant communication between the heavens and the earth.

Ecclesiastes, Donald Jackson, Copyright 2006, The Saint John’s Bible and the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library, Order of Saint Benedict, Collegeville, Minnesota, USA.
God’s giving of the Ten Commandments atop of Mount Sinai ranks was one of the greatest religious events of all time. Moses acts as the intermediary for the people who are too frightened to approach the mountain or who have been prohibited from doing so. Not only do the Ten Commandments have significance in religious history, but they have also had a tremendous effect on civil law the world over. Just as the creation in Genesis brought order from the chaos, the Law, according to Jewish interpretation, brings order from the chaos of lawless society. In this sense, the giving of the Law is a new creation. The law forms the foundation of the covenant that God is establishing with His people.

In the words of Thomas Ingmire: “The most fascinating part for me in the Ten Commandments is their relationship to the history of writing. The Commandments were given in alphabetical form, rather than pictograms. As I see it, the Commandments could only be taken in as a mysterious code by the Hebrews (themselves slaves and not necessarily literate). The Lord, by the second Commandment which forbade the creation of engraved images, reinforced the mystery. His words, in alphabetical form, were the strongest evidence of his existence: I am who I am - no pictures, statues. . . . Words = God. This is clearly an abstract concept - just as the alphabet, when one really thinks about it, is a completely abstract concept. I am interested in the idea that God presented himself as an abstraction and the abstraction was the Word. There is a cold clarity to the idea reinforced by the Commandments - no images or any “likeness of anything that is in heaven above or earth below”. I wanted to show the power and promise of the Commandments, showing them forming out of a beautiful chaos. To reinforce the sense of abstraction, power and promise, I wanted the letters to be in the Latin alphabet and with use of typography.”

The Prophets describe a coming Messiah who will restore peace and justice to Israel, yet he will be despised by the wicked and bear their sins quietly. Thus, he is called the Suffering Servant. In Jackson’s image, an emaciated prisoner stands above the head of a lamb, referencing the text in which the Messiah endures his tormenters with grace, “like a lamb that is led to the slaughter.” The shadow of a modern chain link fence surrounds the Servant, drawing a parallel between the Messiah’s suffering and that of victims of suffering in today’s world. But just as the figure stands alone in Jackson’s image, so the Suffering Servant will one day be singled out by God to reign in Zion.

Suffering Servant, Donald Jackson, Copyright 2005, The Saint John’s Bible and the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library, Order of Saint Benedict, Collegeville, Minnesota, USA.
The Saint John’s Bible reflects universal themes, including the goodness of creation, reality of salvation, and bond of the covenant. It also reflects the 1500-year-old tradition of Saint Benedict and his Rule. The following Benedictine themes receive particular attention:

HOSPITALITY
The Rule of Saint Benedict says the guest should be received as Christ. The Saint John’s Bible emphasizes texts advocating hospitality for the poor, the pilgrim, the seeker and the stranger.

TRANSFORMATION
Benedictines take a vow of conversatio or conversion of life. Conversatio entails an ongoing process of aligning one’s life more closely to the life of Christ.

JUSTICE FOR GOD’S PEOPLE
Of special concern to Benedictines and all believers in biblical revelation is the repeated call for justice for all of God’s people.

Production of The Saint John’s Bible

INITIAL DESIGN
A computer is used to size text and define line breaks. The two foot by three foot pages of each volume are laid out in full-size spreads. This enables scribes to work on pages simultaneously, maintain consistency and avoid awkwardly breaking words.

CALLIGRAPHY
The script used in The Saint John’s Bible was designed by Donald Jackson with three qualities in mind. The text had to be readable, modern, and appropriately dignified for the Bible. Subtle differences in the final script mark the work of the six individual scribes on the project.

ILLUMINATIONS
A schema put together by Donald Jackson and the Committee on Illumination and Text tells which passages will be illuminated and designates the size of each illumination. Many illuminations are commissioned to artists or the result of collaboration between Donald Jackson and additional artists.

The Saint John’s Bible is a work of art and a work of theology

ECUMENICAL TRANSLATION
The Saint John’s Bible uses the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) translation of the Bible. This translation was chosen because it is theologically sound and because its predecessor, the Revised Standard Version, is officially authorized for use by most Christian Churches: Protestant, Anglican, Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox.

REPRESENTING THE DIVINE
Several approaches are taken to representing the divine in the pages of The Saint John’s Bible. Reading the Gospels, you will see the images of Jesus range from representational to abstract. In Prophets, the rainbow, that sign of God’s enduring promise to Noah, is used to show the presence of God. Gold leaf is used throughout, from Creation to Apocalypse, to direct the reader to the presence of the divine.

IMAGERY
Throughout The Saint John’s Bible, you’ll see the signs of our times. Strands of DNA are woven into the illumination of the “Genealogy of Christ.” The Twin Towers in New York appear in the illumination of Luke’s parables. Satellite photos of the Ganges River Delta and photos from the Hubble telescope were used to depict Creation. In Acts, “To the Ends of the Earth” includes the first vision of earth as seen from space in a hand-written Bible. What do you see?
Creation (Also shown on the cover)

Artist: Donald Jackson with contribution by Chris Tomlin

This opening illumination to the Book of Genesis is a diagrammatic, explicitly setting out each of the steps in the creation of the world. Starting with symbolic fractals which imply that even chaotic brush marks and the exploding telescopic views of the cosmos have within them a structure of God’s making. The Hebrew phrase, tohu wa-bohu (Gen 1:1) which means formless and void is part of the representation of this first day.

Gold is used throughout to symbolize God’s intervention in the chaos and his ordering of the universe and its elements; hence the gold squares are applied geometrically, starting with day one and expanding progressively outwards and upwards in influence until reaching the serenity and simplicity of the Sabbath.

Day four refers to the sun and moon, with the implication of movement. Day five demonstrates the teeming mass of life within the oceans and birds in the sky. Notice the subtle presence of the snake.

Day six is the first sign of mankind upon earth and here Donald has drawn from early cave paintings in Nigeria. The figures at the bottom of the panel are men and women. The figure of the hunter holding a bow is a woman, set against a background of a volcanic eruption which emphasizes the dangerous and volatile nature of our earthly existence. Day seven is given over entirely to the contemplation of the spirit.

Creation, Donald Jackson with contribution by Chris Tomlin, Copyright 2003, The Saint John’s Bible and the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library, Order of Saint Benedict, Collegeville, Minnesota, USA.

A vast illuminated manuscript, The Saint John’s Bible, has been commissioned by Saint John’s University in Collegeville, Minnesota, from the contemporary scribe and illuminator, Donald Jackson. Mr. Jackson works in the Scriptorium in Wales, where he handwrites the Bible and creates illuminations in a unique collaboration with other artists and scribes.

www.saintjohnsbible.org

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The special knife used to scrape the skins is referred to as a lunellum. The crescent-shaped blade is set at a ninety-degree angle to the handle. Scraping the skin is highly skilled work. A small mistake in the use of the lunellum can tear or cut the skin, ruining it. Exactly the same process is illustrated in medieval manuscripts.

Copyright Michael Freeman, Michael Freeman Photography, London, England
The monastery isn’t the only thing that’s been renovated recently. The Benedictine Sisters now have a brand new presence on the Web at ErieBenedictines.org.

The new Web site has been in development for more than a year and with its launch comes a large number of improvements and new features. Upon visiting the site you’ll find a brand new design and layout aimed at making it easier for visitors to find the information they’re looking for. You’ll also find easy access to all of the Mount’s publications, which can be downloaded and read from anywhere in the world.

One of the primary goals in redesigning the site was to make content easier to find and access. Unlike the previous Web site, which was constructed incrementally on an as-needed basis and lacked a real structure, the new site has a unified navigation scheme and a common look and feel across all pages. “Broken links”, that is, hyperlinks on pages that don’t lead anywhere, have been eliminated, and content has been regrouped into logical sections that are easier to browse.

Another goal was to move the entire Web site to an updated platform that would allow the site to use newer, better technologies. Technologies such as database integration and server-side scripting make it easier to archive old content so that past news articles and events are always available. These technologies and improvements, along with the structure of the new site, provide a foundation for future Web content and features as well.

Visitors should also notice an increase in the speed and responsiveness as well, thanks to a new caching system used by the site.

The behind-the-scenes technologies don’t just benefit visitors to the Web site; they benefit the Sisters as well. A new communication system is in place to allow visitors to easily contact Sisters at the monastery while greatly reducing the amount of spam the Sisters receive in their e-mail inboxes. It is also much easier to make changes to existing content, making it easier to keep pages up-to-date.

The design isn’t the only part of the Web site to receive a makeover. Most of the content has been completely rewritten as well. The Sisters have made changes to many parts of the Web site to better reflect the Sister’s current programs and ambitions, including monastery life, spirituality programs, and the many ministries the Sisters are involved in.

But I won’t spoil everything for you. Surf on over to ErieBenedictines.org and check out the brand new Web site today!
“Here we go again!” echoed voices throughout the monastery on July 20th when our construction crew arrived to begin the third and final phase of our renovations – the Sisters’ living space on the first and second floor of the south wing. During the previous few weeks, 28 Sisters had to pack their personal belongings to prepare for a move to temporary quarters in the monastery’s guest wing, Glinodo Center, or a small group residence in Erie. The move was more challenging for some than for others. Hint: Some Sisters have occupied the same room since the monastery was completed in 1970 or since they moved in between 1971-2008. The Sisters maintained an upbeat attitude throughout the relocation knowing that this temporary inconvenience would result in a new environment more conducive to lectio, prayer and rest.

When the dumpsters were delivered we watched in fascination as the truck delivering the dumpsters sank into the grass and mud on the rain-drenched south lawn. This caught the attention of those of us whose offices, music studios and living spaces are located on the ground floor of the south wing. We realized it was our turn to experience the excitement of renovation with its dust, dirt, noise, water leaks, electrical outages, odors and now stranded dumpsters. “Bang, drip, pound, buzz” became our mantra. Now as we hear the workers boring holes to prepare for plumbing installation, dust falling into the ceiling tiles and county western music accompanying the beat of the tools we chuckle, envisioning the workers auditioning for “Dancing with the Construction Stars.” Some days we wonder about the progress of the project as we observe delivery of construction materials, missing ceiling tiles in areas outside of the construction zone and the occasional false fire alarm. Other days we wonder if we should be wearing hard hats. And/or earplugs.

A tour of the construction zone is always a surprise. We are taken aback when we cannot recall how the space used to look and then ponder the new look that is being created. Over the next four months we look forward to the transformation of these areas into larger bedroom space with private baths on the second floor and larger bedroom space with sinks and an updated common bath on the first floor. Infrastructure improvements include insulation of the outside walls, upgrading of electrical service and HVAC. Our target date for the completion...
of the renovation is December 31st but wouldn’t it be nice to move in before Christmas? (Special note to the construction crew.)

A few of us are glad to have four more months to muse about our experience of “bang, drip, pound, and buzz.” It gives us lots of material for our community story board. Like, “Do you remember the day when water was running from the second floor into the ceiling tile above your head in your ground floor office?” For others like the 28 sisters who have been displaced because of the construction, they look at the next four months as a time of anticipation of new surroundings that will be simple, safe and energy efficient. All of us realize that our monastery renovation has been a labor of love. The construction crews demonstrate that labor of love each day in their expert craftsmanship, the quality of their work, their concern about cost and safety. Our donors demonstrate that labor of love through the generosity they have shown by giving of their financial resources to make this project possible. The Benedictine community demonstrates that labor of love as we pray daily for all of you. You are a blessing to us.

Mary Jane Vergotz, OSB
Sister Mary Jane, Vergotz, OSB
Director of Development

Please consider remembering the Benedictine Sisters of Erie in your Will.

A bequest will ensure that part of your estate will continue to benefit others through the work of the Sisters and be part of your own living legacy. Your attorney can advise you on how to include the Benedictine Sisters of Erie, Inc. (our legal title) in your Will.

For more information, please contact Sister Mary Jane Vergotz, OSB, director of development: srmaryjane@mtstbenedict.org; (814) 899-0614, Ext. 2409 or Jo Clarke, director of annual giving: joclarke@mtstbenedict.org; Ext. 2281.
Imagine – 33 days in Rome! Imagine – 33 days of Benedictine pilgrimage, Benedictine journey! Imagine – 33 days of exploring our roots! This is the experience that I and 29 other Benedictine women had this summer. We came from four different countries and different Benedictine communities within the United States. We lived, prayed, ate, studied, shared, laughed and walked together—we formed community—as we lived our Benedictine Renewal Program. The program, now in its 14th year, is sponsored by the Conference of Benedictine Prioresses and allows us to return to our monastic roots.

Imagine – returning to Norcia, the birthplace of Benedict and his twin sister Scholastica – the quaint town within walls; the church built above the house where they were born; and down into the remnants of the house itself; imagine seeing the art that depicts their life; imagine dining with the Benedictine Sisters.

Imagine – traveling to the church of St. Scholastica, just outside the walls of Norcia, to what had been their “summer home”, to where Scholastica had her first community. Imagine the frescoes in this simple church. Imagine renewing your vows “in the presence of God, our brother, Benedict, our sister, Scholastica...” As we renewed our vows and sang the Suscipe, the tears flowed. For me, this was as powerful a moment as when I made my final profession or celebrated my jubilee.

Imagine – traveling to Subiaco and climbing the mountain to Sacro Speco (Holy Cave) and sitting in the cave where Benedict lived and prayed for three years—and feeling his presence yet today; of seeing the grotto where he preached to the shepherds and the monastery he founded that continues to this day. Imagine viewing, no, “reading” the centuries of frescoes that tell the story of Benedict’s life. Benedict spent 20 years at Subiaco; we spent a day.
Imagine – yet another journey. This time we journey to Montecassino. Montecassino, located at the top of the mountain. It was at Montecassino that Benedict finished writing his Rule. It is at Montecassino that Benedict and Scholastica are buried. Montecassino – Holy Ground.

Imagine – a train ride into St. Peter’s. Imagine viewing the dome of St. Peter’s Basilica and then walking until arriving at the Square. Imagine your amazement at the sheer size of the Basilica and the square and the dome and the sculptured statues. As you enter the Basilica you are again overwhelmed by the sheer size and the amount of beauty – Michelangelo’s Pietà, the canopy, the bronze statue of Peter, Peter’s crypt, and the sculptures. And you realize, this is our Church. You return another day and climb to the top of the dome and view the magnificence of all of Rome. Imagine you return once again – this time going from the heights to the depths. You walk deep under the basilica and see where Christianity began. You touch the ground that Peter touched. You see Peter’s tomb. You hear the stories and touch the Earth and touch the core.

Imagine – you return yet again. This time you are at ground level. This time arriving early in the morning and waiting in line. This time you are there to attend a Papal liturgy. You are one among thousands. And you are seated among people who speak Italian and Vietnamese and Filipino and Spanish and Swahili and English. And you realize: This is Church. This is universal Church. We are the Church.

Imagine – your days are more than just traveling. Imagine you spend an equal amount of time in classes listening with your ear and the “ear of your heart.” You hear about “Cultivating our Monastic Instincts” – things you’ve already known but important reminders – like the essence of prayer and community and the seven qualities of listening, holding one’s tongue, helpfulness, bearing, reverence, and consistency.

Imagine – studying the history of Rome and the early monastic men and women with new eyes and ears – studying, learning out of the desire and eagerness to be enriched. And then imagine seeing those places – like the Coliseum and the Forum and the Mamertine Prison where Peter and Paul were both imprisoned. Imagine seeing Sant’ Ambrogio, the family home of St. Ambrose and his sister Marcellina – and subsequently the first women’s community. You see that those women, strengthened by prayer and community, overcame all adversity for 1,500 years until suppressed by Napoleon in 1810.

Imagine – your joy at studying the Rule of Benedict for three days with renowned scholar, Sister Aquinata Böckman, OSB, and then two days with Sister Manuela Schieba, OSB, her protégé, as they broke open the Rule anew as well as placing passages into a cultural, historical context. You are challenged to continue to “listen.”

I was given these gifts and more this summer. I am challenged to listen with new ears, a new heart. I am called to live monastic life intentionally. I was given the opportunity to walk through our past into our present. Now the call to me is to live out the essence of monasticism, a life filled with promise and hope, as we journey into the future.
The Mark of Quality

Saint Benedict Child Development Center earns National NAEYC Accreditation

Saint Benedict Child Development Center’s program ranks among the top in the nation! Accreditation from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) - the nation’s leading organization of early childhood professionals, gives testimony that this unique blend of programming is worthy of special notice.

The Center offers a Child Development Program that includes: a Head Start program for migrant infants, toddlers and preschoolers, the PA Pre-K Counts Preschool program, a School District Early Intervention program for children with special needs, state subsidized Child Care and a private Child Care program.

“We’re proud to have earned the mark of quality from NAEYC, and to be recognized for our commitment to reaching the highest professional standards,” said Sister Diane Rabe, OSB, director. “NAEYC Accreditation lets families in our community know that children in our program are getting the best care and early learning experiences possible.”
To earn NAEYC Accreditation, the Child Development Center went through an extensive self-study process, measuring the program and its services against the 10 NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards and more than 400 related accreditation criteria. The program received NAEYC Accreditation after a site visit by NAEYC assessors to ensure that the program meets each of the ten program standards. NAEYC-accredited programs are also subject to unannounced visits during their accreditation, which lasts for five years.

In the 23 years since NAEYC Accreditation was established, it has become a widely recognized sign of high-quality early childhood education. Almost 8,000 programs, serving one million young children, are currently accredited by NAEYC – approximately 8 percent of all preschools and other early childhood programs. “The NAEYC Accreditation system raises the bar for pre-schools, child care centers and other early childhood programs,” said Mark Ginsberg, Ph.D., executive director of NAEYC. “Saint Benedict Child Development Center’s NAEYC Accreditation is a sign that they are a leader in a national effort to invest in high-quality early childhood education, and to help give all children a better start.”

The NAEYC Accreditation system was created to set professional standards for early childhood education, and to help families identify high-quality preschools, child care centers and other early education programs. To earn NAEYC Accreditation, a program must meet each of the 10 NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards.

“We have been NAEYC accredited since 1995,” comments Sister Diane, “and each time we work toward reaccreditation, they have raised the bar of excellence several notches.” Saint Benedict Center was one of the first Centers in Erie to achieve NAEYC accreditation. For the 2009 accreditation, each classroom provided proof of the NAEYC standards put to daily practice using a prescribed notebook format. “It was a mammoth task” said Sister Diane “which took the classroom staff about six months to complete. Alongside of the classroom portfolios, the administrative staff reviewed and updated all of the policies and procedures. In addition to assuring a topnotch program, an immediate benefit of all of these efforts was a tremendous renewal of teamwork and comradery among the staff.”
From the Director

“We’ll always come to thee again, when Alma Mater calls”

Alumnae Annual Appeal 2009

In 2006, we suspended the Alumnae Annual Appeal (which you most probably remember as the phonathon) in order to launch the Heritage of Hope Capital Campaign. As always, you rose to the occasion and supported us in the renovation of our chapel, monastery, and in the establishment of a Ministry Fund. Because of your support, you have touched the lives of the Benedictine Sisters in this community and as a result, you have touched the lives of many others.

We are returning to the Alumnae Annual Appeal. Materials have been mailed to all alumnae members. This year the proceeds from the appeal will be used to help fund the upgrading of the surface and equipment in the toddler area of the playground at the St. Benedict Child Development Center. The Child Development Center provides a managed daycare program, Head Start for migrant children, and infant care. It offers space where children of different races and cultures can become friends, where they can play, solve problems, and learn together.

Your gift also helps us to continue awarding scholarships to students attending Catholic schools. We have awarded $45,500 in scholarships over the past 19 years, to 380 students who were relatives of alumnae members. It helps support the Benedictine Sisters who helped so many and gave so much at St. Benedict Academy. A small portion of your gift helps the Alumnae Association with mailings, organizing events and planning class reunions.

MAIL CALL!

We need your e-mail address in order to complete class lists for reunion purposes. Please send it, including your first, maiden, last name and class year to Ann Comstock. sbaalum@mtstbenedict.org

LET US PRAY...

For our SBA alumnae who passed into eternity—

Helen Schmitt Wright ‘40
Dolores Jean (Dee) Zalas Fiedler ‘53
Alice Vommaro Marino ‘53
Patricia Mazanowski Bujalski ‘56
Jane Dailey Graham ‘69

Volunteers Needed: Can you help?

St. Benedict Education Center: Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Program

St. Benedict Education Center serves as the primary contractor for the Department of Public Welfare’s Employment and Training Programs for parents who receive cash assistance.

One cohort of this population is a refugee population with varying degrees of English language skills and varying degrees of education and literacy skills in their own culture. We currently have enrolled refugees from 10 countries. Some have been in the States for several years; some are coming directly from refugee camps. SBEC has professional staff members who work with the refugees to assist them to develop pre-employment/life skills. We are currently attempting to assemble a volunteer group interested in committing some time and interest in helping these folks.

We need:

Someone to serve as Volunteer Coordinator
Volunteers for break-out groups of 4-5 refugees to engage in general conversation. These sessions are Mon.-Fri., 1 p.m. - 2:15 p.m. Volunteers could help any or all of the days.

Our refugees are very cooperative and quite motivated to become part of our country’s culture and life style. Please consider being a “helping hand!”

Contact: Sister Miriam Mashank, OSB, executive director
(814) 452-4072, Ext. 234
mmashank@stben.org
Reunions

Kathy Anysz reports:

It was a beautiful summer evening at Jr.’s on the Bay. The view from the deck was picturesque. There were 26 girls from the Class of 1969 who attended our 40th class reunion on Saturday, August 1st. We enjoyed a cocktail hour along with a delicious buffet dinner. We shared pictures, e-mails, life experiences and stories from the good old days.

We decided we don’t have to wait every five years to get together. Some of us meet once a month on a Sunday for brunch at Peggy’s at the Liberty Plaza and attend the yearly SBA Alumnae Brunch. We also get together at the Alumnae Christmas Party at the Avalon. And occasionally we plan other outings including bus trips and dinners.

We’d like to keep in touch with our fellow classmates and keep your info updated. E-mail Pat Causgrove Wheeler at pwhels@aol.com with your name, address, e-mail & phone number and we’ll keep you informed on all our activities so you can join in. And if you do not have e-mail call either Kathy Anysz at (814) 866-0802 or Pat Causgrove Wheeler at (814) 456-3180. Looking forward to hearing from you!

Class of ’69

Lisa Manendo shares:

The Class of 1974 held its 35th class reunion on Sunday, July 26 at the Erie Yacht Club. Thirty-two classmates gathered to reminisce and rekindle old friendships. Several classmates traveled from out of town, the farthest from Florida. A pre-event gathering was held at the Plymouth Tavern on Saturday evening.

A DVD, created by Judy Pulinski Ward, was shown during the brunch. The DVD was a compilation of all four years at St. Benedict's including class trips, dances, and graduation. A memory table of yearbooks, school uniform, dance programs and other memorabilia was thoroughly enjoyed by all the classmates.

Hostesses Lisa Manendo and Judy Pulinski Ward would like to thank all alumnae for sending in photos and remind them to keep in touch by joining the Facebook group: Saint Benedict Academy Class of 1974 (Erie, PA).

Class of ’74

LAST CALL FOR ANYONE WANTING YEARBOOKS

Sister Mary Ellen Plumb, OSB:

SBA class reunions are always a chance to catch up with old friends, reminisce about the great fun and great opportunities afforded by an SBA education, and of course, laugh and cry and to be amazed by the classmates who were your dearest friends so long ago (and maybe still are).

Never has this been more true than when the classes of ‘89, ’90 and ’91 gathered at the Mount this past June for a first-ever reunion! Twenty years after the closing of Saint Benedict Academy, we invited the students who never had the chance to graduate from the academy back to remind them that even so, they are still very much “SBA grads!”

About 35 members of these three classes gathered with the Sisters and former teachers for a picnic lunch and lots of time for sharing stories and gratitude and yes, pain for never having the chance to finish at the “best high school ever” – addresses were exchanged, more discoveries made of “lost” class members and the beginnings of a more complete mailing list. And with the sharing came healing and understanding and even more gratitude. It would be an understatement to say the event was a success and there are definite plans in the works for a repeat event next summer with double the attendance.

All of us!
Watch the Mail! Invitations for our Annual SBA Christmas party will be mailed during October. This year’s party will be held at the Avalon Hotel on Tuesday, December 1, 2009. If you or any of your classmates would like to donate a gift basket for our Gift Basket Raffle, please contact me at 899-0614, Ext. 2573. Proceeds will go to the Child Development Center this year.

Reunions

Twenty-five members of the Class of ‘67 attended their 60th “Birthday Bash” aboard the Victorian Princess this summer.

Forty alumnae joined the Sisters at Mount Saint Benedict on June 23 for a picnic supper.
Mount Saint Benedict Monastery
6101 East Lake Road
Erie, PA 16511-1599

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: Ann Comstock, Benedictine Sisters, Development Office, Mount St. Benedict Monastery 6101 East Lake Road, Erie, PA 16511, (814) 899-0614, Ext. 2573, sbaalum@mtstbenedict.org

The Saint John's Bible: Speed is of the essence when gilding. As the artist holds the bamboo tube in her mouth, breathing over one tiny section of the piece, she holds a tiny sliver of gold leaf on her left index finger.

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