Let your works shine and bring forth the image of God. Let all you do reflect God's glory.
Let All You Do Reflect God’s Glory
Charlotte Anne Zalot, OSB

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efforts to be good stewards of the earth.

Let all you do reflect God’s glory...

Last summer my nephew was married out in Arizona. The wedding flower of choice
was the sunflower. Much to my surprise, it was the perfect choice and it was more
beautiful than I thought it could be. I always viewed sunflowers as huge and gangly,
hardly refined and lovely. But I have changed my tune. In fact, I have come to realize
that the huge and gangly is the refined and lovely.

A sunflower is a pretty amazing flower especially when we can see its head turned
toward the sun as a young sunflower does.
I recently learned something even more interesting: the flower on a mature sunflower
is actually a flower head of numerous small
flowers crowded together. The petals within
the cluster are usually in a spiral pattern. Each
floret is oriented toward the next producing a
pattern of interconnecting spirals. And, those
individual flowers mature into seeds, hundreds of seeds! And, the seeds have uses
galore—food, medicinal remedies, cosmetic care, and of course, wedding bouquets,
to name a few.

So, why is this important? I think the sunflower fits the overriding theme of this issue
of The Mount: “Let your works shine and bring forth the image of God. Let all you
do reflect God’s glory.” The pages ahead are filled with stories and information that
show how the Benedictine Sisters of Erie and those associated with us strive to do
good; how we work hard to reflect the image of God’s glory. From the transformation
of a neighborhood to work with veterans of war, from personal reflections to shared
memories, from giving thanks to giving praise, from reaching out to reaching in—all
of it has the potential to give you ever-new insights into the Benedictine Sisters of Erie.
In many ways, I think we are like the sunflower. We turn to the Light for guidance
and direction; we work together to plant seeds that will provide care, compassion,
warmth, welcome and the hope of peace and justice for a long time to come. The
sunflower—“plain, honest and upright” (Henry Ward Beecher). The sunflower—“a
favorite emblem of constancy” (Thomas Bulfinch). The sunflower—a reminder of
what we can be: beauty, bounty and blessing for all.

Charlotte Anne Zalot, OSB

Cover Photo: Lucia Marie Surmik, OSB

BENEDICTINE CHARISM STATEMENT

The Benedictine way is to seek God in cenobitic life
and to respond in prayer and ministry.
When I was elected prioress two years ago one of the questions I received most often was, “Will you continue in your music ministry?” I hardly paused as I answered, “Yes, of course, I pray through and with my music; I could never give it up.”

When being assigned an instrument for the high school orchestra and band my music teacher asked me to try an oboe since I had already played piano for many years. Oboe players are not the most common instrumentalists and there was a need for one in our high school orchestra. I did try it and its sound immediately captivated me.

I played throughout high school and occasionally with a local college orchestra, but soon after graduation I put the oboe aside. Music continued to be an important part of my life and ministry as a teacher, parish musician and later in graduate school. My instruments included piano, guitar and voice.

Soon after I came to Mount Saint Benedict, where liturgy, prayer and music are integral to the Benedictine life, my desire to play the oboe returned and I was surprised at the ease with which it came back to me. I realized how much I had missed it — especially hearing and feeling its unique and rich sound and depth. Playing again was like coming home.

If you have ever heard Garrison Keillor’s delightful routine, “A Young Lutheran’s Guide to the Orchestra,” you’ve heard a common take on the beautiful, low and somewhat mournful timbre of this instrument. As he works his way through all sections of an orchestra, he rejects the oboe. He concludes that its sound is too enthralling for a young Lutheran.

There are only two instruments Keillor finally finds appropriate for a young Lutheran: percussion instruments, because the player needs to be patient and exacting, waiting over long periods just to add a few well-timed beats and, of course, the harp, as not only does it sound angelic but it, above all other instruments, keeps you humble: it takes hours to tune and just 20 minutes to get out of tune!

For me, being involved in music or playing a musical instrument is a significant and meaningful way to “bring forth the image of God” and “reflect God’s glory.”

As Benedictines we carry on a long history of preserving and promoting music, especially within the area of liturgy. Music is indeed “a universal language,” understood and appreciated by all.

Anne Wambach, OSB
Prioress, Benedictine Sisters of Erie
The Transformation of a Neighborhood

**Picture this:** Eleven-year-old Sierra is going door to door selling candy for a school fundraiser in a neighborhood once known for its headlines of violence. When she knocks on the door where Sister Anne McCarthy lives she says, “This is the first time my mother has let me go door to door. She always said it was too dangerous. Now she feels we live in a safe place.”

**Or picture this:** It’s Christmas season and Sister Mary Ellen Plumb, her Villa Maria Academy high school girls and neighborhood children are walking through the same inner-city neighborhood singing “Silent Night” and “Jingle Bells” and then gathering for hot chocolate and cookies.

**Or how about this:** Sister Mary Miller got Johnston’s Nursery to donate 12 flowering trees for the neighborhood. But how to dig the holes, lift the trees and plant them? Mary called Cathedral Preparatory High School and luck was on her side — six senior boys had misbehaved at the prom and couldn’t graduate unless they did service hours. Voila! Free labor for a graduation certificate!

**And a final picture:** When the sisters first arrived one of the men in the neighborhood said to Sister Mary Lou Kownacki, “You can’t do nothin’ here, sis, this is The Hood.” Six months later he walked down the clean street, lined with flowering trees and blooming flowers, and shouted to anyone who would listen, “Welcome to suburbia.”

How did this neighborhood transformation take place?

**Early History**

Erie Benedictine Sister Mary Lou Kownacki moved into her eastside family home in 2003 to take care of her father who was dying of cancer. What was once a stable, well-kept, safe neighborhood in the heart of Erie was now an area of concentrated poverty, highly transient, with a history of drugs, violence, and many abandoned properties in code violation. The neighborhood was not unique in Erie, but it was among the worst.

She immediately began a clean-up and reading program with the 24 children who lived in the block. “I set up an incentive program with a neighborhood grocery store, Serafins. The children received “Serafin Dollars” as an allowance for cleaning the block, reading books and doing extra school work,” explained Sister Mary Lou.

After her father died Sister Mary Lou asked to stay there and three other sisters — Sisters Mary Miller, Anne McCarthy and Mary Ellen Plumb — also moved into the neighborhood. “We wanted to be a Benedictine presence there — to pray and work with the people and see what happened,” she said.
The Transformation of a Neighborhood

The Sisters’ House

Most importantly, the four Benedictines opened a neighborhood center called “The Sisters’ House.” Sister Mary Ellen, a teacher at Villa Maria Academy who lives upstairs in the house and Sister Anne, a member of the Catholic Worker House, organize activities for the children and neighbors. Activities include an environmental club, weekly reading and tutoring by Gannon University students, as well as a summer program with the help of General Electric Intern volunteers, caroling and decorating at Christmas, a Thanksgiving dinner prepared by neighborhood children with a family sit-down dinner at The Sisters’ House, sledding trips to Frontier Park, an occasional movie trip, an Easter egg hunt in the poetry park, an afternoon at the Pumpkin Farm. You get the idea.

Villa Maria students in Interact, the high school Rotary club that Sister Mary Ellen monitors, have adopted the neighborhood and assist with all the special events. Also volunteering to help build the neighborhood community are: Betsy and Bill Vorsheck, Grace Church, Erie Redevelopment Authority, General Electric Volunteers (helped renovate two homes and built garden), Erie Community Foundation, International Institute, Johnston’s Nursery, Dalhkemper’s Landscaping and Marquette Savings.

“It’s definitely a community effort,” said Sister Mary Lou. “And we’re not naïve. The neighborhood is still volatile; it can erupt with violence at any time. There are still major housing, drug and poverty problems. And it’s only one little block. But, is it better because of a Benedictine presence? I think so. And isn’t that all we’re expected to do in life — to leave our place on earth better because we have been here.”

Benedictine Presence

What happened was that these four sisters (during their off-work hours) did what Benedictines do wherever they find themselves: they created a community.

With the assistance of Deacon Marty Eisert, who at the time was administrator of Holy Trinity parish, they immediately brought together a group of neighbors, businesses, religious leaders and committed citizens to form a non-profit organization whose mission it was to reclaim the neighborhood. They called it Trinity Square Foundation because one of the anchors in that area is Holy Trinity Church. The non-profit itself, however, is a private one.

“The Foundation was created to assure the long-term success of this effort. We all recognized that the neighborhood didn’t deteriorate overnight, and that it will require a sustained effort over many years to bring it back. But bringing it back we are doing; one house at a time,” explained Marty Eisert, chair of Trinity Square board.

In its six years of existence, the group has taken significant steps.

It rid the neighborhood of a nuisance bar — the scene of two murders — and a Detroit-run crack house. Eleven abandoned homes in the block have been purchased by individual board members or by the Erie Redevelopment Authority and sold to Trinity Square Foundation on condition that they renovate or demolish the homes. Six of the homes in the block were renovated and are currently occupied. Four homes were demolished because repairing them was cost prohibitive. Three of those empty lots were landscaped. One lot became a neighborhood garden managed by Mary the Apostle Catholic Worker House whose members work with the children. Working with artist Amara Geffen, faculty of Allegheny College, the two other lots were transformed into a unique poetry garden where neighbors can rest and play. Trees and flowers were planted to beautify the block. Sister Mary Miller has spearheaded all of this renovation and is contact person for all the new renters.
Interview with 
Sister Mary Miller

Sister Mary Miller, director of Emmaus soup kitchen, food pantry and Kids' Cafe for over 30 years, coordinates the housing and beautification efforts for the neighborhood.

MOUNT: Mary, you work closely with all the neighbors. What have you learned from them?

Mary: This has been a great growing experience for me. Let me tell you two lessons I’ve been taught by the neighbors.

1. Beauty is important to any lasting neighborhood revitalization. I remember when we were planting the trees we received from Johnston’s. Every neighbor — renter, home owner, addict, refugee — came out and asked that a tree be planted in front of their home. Everyone. I love this quote, “Beauty is the gateway to the energy of God.” We need this energy to lift the soul from the drabness and banality of poverty. Start with beauty.

2. Everything changes, nothing changes. I remember when one of our board members, David Slomski, was interviewing a Puerto Rican neighbor who wanted to purchase another home in the block. Romero talked about his strong desire to bring his family members from Puerto Rico to the neighborhood. “I want all of us to be together,” he said. And David made this beautiful connection. He said, “You remind me of my grandfather who wanted to bring all of his family to this neighborhood from Poland many, many years ago. And he did it. And that’s where our family settled, rooted and grew.” It’s David’s hospitality of heart that we need if we are going to turn our inner-city neighborhoods around. Most of our families trace their roots to immigrants who came for a better life and were given a chance to make it happen. We have to return the opportunity.

Editor’s Note: Special thanks to Mary Lou Kownacki, OSB for her contribution to this article.

The Sisters’ House

By Mary Ellen Plumb, OSB

The beauty in our neighborhood brightens daily because of the children, our richest asset. It is delightful to hear their laughter as they run and play in the poetry garden. We share their excitement when they watch a seed they planted grow into a tomato plant before their eyes and then, gather the tomatoes to take home to their family. We are touched when they scramble to find the most eggs during an Easter egg hunt and then, add some of theirs to the bag of one of the younger children who couldn’t keep up with the competition. We are grateful every day that they are maturing in an environment where they can be safe, secure, sure of themselves and kind to one another.
The Sisters’ House is a restored home renovated to accommodate the neighborhood children who participate in activities designed to entertain, teach, challenge, and nurture each child. We teach them to love the earth and care for its resources; we teach them to study and in some cases, to manage the English language so they can be successful students; we provide a library filled with books that take them to different worlds than their own and we show them how to prepare simple, nutritious food by themselves. And, every now and then, we host a special event to celebrate a holiday, or a significant event, or the beginning of summer vacation. For example, near Thanksgiving, the children themselves help us prepare a Thanksgiving dinner with all the trimmings and the next day, they bring their families with them to enjoy the dinner in style served by volunteers who make it a four star event. In short, we try to fill their lives with the small and big milestones of childhood in an attempt to stretch their hearts to a larger future. The children delight us, yes, but our true focus is their future — we stake our efforts on the conviction that they will be happier people, more responsible citizens, and stronger of soul because they grew up in a neighborhood where they mattered.

Mary the Apostle Catholic Worker

By Anne McCarthy, OSB

Five minutes after several Gannon University students were in the front door of Dorothy Day Catholic Worker in Washington, DC, they were asking how to begin a Catholic Worker in Erie, PA. A few had worked with Sister Mary Lou Kownacki on a children’s program and heard her invitation for others to move to the block where she lived to be a presence, especially for the children. That was the impetus for Mary the Apostle Catholic Worker on East 22nd Street. Jess and Matthew Ochalek acquired a house that was in code violation on August 24, 2006. Sister Anne McCarthy, who had been their advisor at Gannon, joined them. Jesse and Matt’s first child, Brigid, was born in January 2007. The house, full of the refuse of squatters and former tenants, needed doors, windows, paint, carpet, heat, electricity, roof, insulation, and siding — generally in that order over the next years.

Catholic Workers are each a unique expression of the vision of Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin. Mary the Apostle focuses on neighborhood presence and gardening with the children. This summer will be the 6th year for the neighborhood garden and some of the children can teach the GE Intern volunteers how to plant and harvest different vegetables. The small community, now seven members including two children, is a unique blend of Catholic Worker and L’Arche, welcoming a friend with developmental disabilities in July 2011. They also witness to gospel peace and justice in Erie and Washington, DC, usually around issues of war and torture.

Trinity Square Steering Committee: Deacon Marty Eisert, Sister Mary Lou Kownacki, OSB, Sister Mary Miller, OSB, Philip Slomski, Susan Trochowski, David Slomski, Jon Grucza, Dale McBrier, Joe Hilbert, Sister Anne McCarthy, OSB, Jesse and Matthew Ochalek.
Hospitality in a Virtual World

by Susan Doubet, OSB

The newly redesigned website of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie (eriebenedictines.org) has had 28,880 visits between its launch on December 6, 2011 and April 6, 2012.

Google, through its Google Analytics service, offers statistical reports on all aspects of a website. We would like to share some of our statistics with you, as we find them both fascinating and encouraging: Benedictine spirituality continues to fulfill the longing of 21st century seekers.

We are grateful to you and all of our web readers for the interest you have shown in eriebenedictines.org, our effort to share our Benedictine life, prayer and ministry with the world – so that “In all things, God may be glorified” (Rule of Benedict: Chapter 57).

TOTAL NUMBER OF UNIQUE VISITORS: 10,819
AVERAGE VISITORS EACH MONTH: 2,705
AVERAGE TIME ON SITE: 4 MINUTES 20 SECONDS
#1 DAY: DECEMBER 15, 2011: 699 VISITORS
BOUNCE RATE*: 42.5%

(*The percentage of visitors who leave the home page without going to any other pages. The lower this number, the better.)

Visitors come from all states and the District of Columbia. Only four came from Wyoming. See map for the top 10 states.

TRAFFIC SOURCE
Traffic Source refers to how visitors come to your site. Over one-third of our visitors come directly on their own, not through any other referral page.
Our visitors come from 89 countries, the Top 5 being: United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Mexico and Australia.

Of the 94,235 pages viewed in the first four months, the most viewed pages are Pray with Us (daily prayer) and the Rule of Benedict (a daily excerpt from the Rule). See the graph for others.

VISITORS’ FLOW

Visitors from the United States by and large come to the home page first. Many of the visitors continue to other pages. The majority who continue on go to one of four other pages. Google analytics provides a “wild” flow chart tracking where visitors move through and within our site. Here’s a “tame” version of their flow chart.
Listen with the Ear of the Heart

By Ann Muczynski, OSB

In August 1976, as I was preparing to teach my first group of students at St. Joseph’s School in Lucinda, PA, a friend who knew me well gave me a poster with a picture of a shaggy dog. The poster read: “I always see better with my heart.” Putting up that poster was an important part of getting ready for the new school year for each of the twenty years I taught. But little did I know that the words on that poster would be guiding me for many years to come, and that I would find that same wisdom from St. Benedict who said, “Listen with the ear of your heart.”

What does this have to do with my present ministry at Erie’s VA Medical Center in Behavioral Health? Absolutely everything! One of the main gifts I bring to this ministry is the gift of a listening heart. No matter what ministry I have ever been involved with in my past, listening has always played a major role. This ministry is no different. Working with veterans from all war eras since World War II has stretched me further than I ever thought possible, and sharpened the listening ear of my heart.

In my current position I provide both individual and group therapy to veterans who have been diagnosed with PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder). This diagnosis means a person must have experienced severe trauma or a life-threatening event, in which s/he felt as if their life or the lives of others were in danger, or that s/he had no control over what was happening. In addition, they may have witnessed people being injured or dying, or may have been physically harmed themselves.

Several of the veterans I work with gave me a much better understanding of PTSD than any class I took or book I read, by the way they answered one simple question I often ask on a first meeting: “When were you in the war?” Many simply answer, “Last night in my nightmares.” This is where listening with the ear of my heart, as Benedict calls me to do, is so very important. José Narosky once said, “In war there are no unwounded soldiers.” I have come to understand this so much more deeply after working daily with the invisible scars of war that keep so many men and women feeling on edge, experiencing recurring nightmares, jumping from sudden noises or simply staying home more and more.

It is very interesting to me that every 4th of July we, as a nation, celebrate our freedom and independence with fireworks, while so many veterans hide in the basement or put headphones on to drown out the noise. They often say, “I know they are just fireworks, but they still sound like incoming mortars; it takes me right back to
my deployment, and that is not a good place to go."

As a Benedictine who believes in and strives for peace, hearing the stories of so many veterans who are never able to shake the haunting images of war has opened my heart. I meet monthly with a man in his 90s — a World War II veteran who spent one year in a POW camp in Germany. He has a wonderful sense of humor and remembers everything, especially his wife whom he misses terribly. As we chat in my office about numerous things, there is always that moment of deep sadness when his eyes fill with tears and he asks, “Why does the war still seem so real to me, as though I am right there?” The pain he experienced, and the suffering he witnessed, haunts him daily. One day, after a particularly difficult time with his memories, he said to his daughter, “I would never do it, but now I understand why some people choose to kill themselves; these memories are very painful!” Thank God he has a strong faith life that sustains him and keeps him living day to day.

I have come to recognize that the things I take for granted, those little things that are a normal part of my life, are not so normal for so many of our veterans. I used to drive to work on garbage day without thinking much of it; now I am mindful of many veterans who are scanning every piece of debris, avoiding every pothole, not knowing where the explosive may be. Now as I ride to work, I pray for our veterans who are haunted daily by painful memories and, as a result, struggle to find some sense of peace in their lives. I am grateful that my eyes continue to be opened to the many who suffer daily.

One of the tragedies of war is that more soldiers die from suicide than are killed in combat. So many men and women are making great sacrifices for a cause they believe in, but when they come home, all too often great suffering comes with them. Many of our soldiers who are returning now, as well as those who returned from war 40-50 years ago, continue to suffer daily.

This is why I ask each of you to listen with the ear of your heart. Nothing can change the past for any of us. The veterans I work with often have deep, searing questions for which I have no good answers. But I have found that when I open up to receiving another’s pain, when I listen with the ear of my heart, when I meet their anger and fear, their tragedy and trauma with compassion, healing begins to happen. And in that, God is glorified.

Sister Ann Muczynski, OSB, LCSW, is a board-certified clinical social worker. She holds a master’s degree in social work from Case Western University (2002). In July of 2003 she became a Trauma and Loss Consultant and Specialist from the National Institute for Trauma and Loss in Children. Before taking on her present position in behavioral health at the Erie Veterans Affairs Medical Center, she worked primarily with children and adult victims of sexual abuse and/or domestic violence. She now works solely with veterans suffering from PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome) and/or MST (Military Sexual Trauma).
Welcome the Call and Put it into Practice

When Carolyn Bain of Salem, Virginia chose to become an Oblate Initiate with Mount Saint Benedict Monastery (2011-2012), her book club decided to honor her with a prayer service celebrating her decision. Carolyn recalls that the reflection time was especially meaningful.

“Each person made personal remarks about me and my journey. One woman said I was the sister she never had. Another said she was sure I had begun a journey I never imagined taking.”

Carolyn’s story doesn’t stop there. Her witness and faithfulness to her spiritual journey also inspired the members of her Sunday School class to a show of support. One of them created a special prayer in which they all joined:

As you begin your commitment to the way of Benedict, we promise to support you, as best we can, by prayer, active listening and encouragement. With you, we will continue to seek union with God through prayer, reflection and dialogue. We continue together as seekers of Divine Union and open our minds and hearts to our own spiritual calling. Amen.

We really never know how others might be influenced by our choices, especially those involved with the spiritual life. But one thing is certain: when we choose to live with purpose and passion blessings will gift us, our families, our friends and all those with whom we come in contact. So when the call comes, do what Benedict says, “Welcome it faithfully and put it into practice” (RB Prologue). Your choice to seek God might just encourage someone else along their way.

Marilyn Schauble, OSB
Oblate Director and Vocation Director

A Call to Personal and Global Transformation

More than 70 oblates and 30 sisters gathered at Mount Saint Benedict Monastery for the annual Oblate Lenten Reflection Experience. Thanks to the efforts and planning of oblates, Jo Clarke, Nancy Sabol and Barb Roseborough, Edwina Gateley, noted poet, author, speaker and retreat leader, was engaged for this year’s event. Jo said it well: “Edwina challenges you – she charms you – she soothes and inflames you …” and that is exactly what participants experienced. Edwina’s plea for both personal and global transformation was passionate. Her story-telling held the group spell-bound, simultaneously stirring deep-bellied laughter and tears of compassion. Her insights captivated the minds and grabbed the hearts of all present. “Edwina is clearly a woman of great wisdom,” said Oblate Director, Sister Marilyn Schauble. “When an equal amount of wit is combined with that wisdom, the result leaves listeners breathless with desire and overflowing with energy to give birth to a little bit of God in the work of peace and justice.”
Bienvenidos, Mexican Oblates!
The Mérida, Mexico Oblate group of Mount Saint Benedict Monastery has been in existence for 15 years. Recently, two of the oblates, Josefina Martin Leon and Nelsi Varguez Pech, visited the monastery in Erie. They, along with their parents, Nelsi’s mother and father, Asteria and Pascual, and Josefina’s mother, Margarita, spent the week visiting Benedictine ministries, doing some sight-seeing, praying and dining with the community, and enjoying the connection they have with the Benedictine Sisters of Erie. One thing that everyone learned: language barriers can be overcome. The universal language of warm welcome is always understood when extended with kindness and care. The Spanish-speaking sisters in the community were a great help but even those who knew little or nothing of the language were proficient with the basics by week’s end. As mothers everywhere teach, por favor and ¡gracias! go a long way, not to mention a big smile and a simple ¡hola! Although the need to learn “adiós” came all too soon, it was a memorable visit for guests and sisters.

Yes, it was bien — in fact, it was muy bien! And for your information, in the end, it was decided “Hasta luego” was by far, the better farewell.

Bienvenidos
¡Hola!
Por favor
¡Gracias!
Adiós
Hasta luego
Welcome
Hello
Please
Thank you
Good-bye
See you later

Landmark Anniversary
L’Arche Erie is celebrating its 40th anniversary and long-time Benedictine Oblate, Donna Carr, celebrates 40 years as a member. Donna was an original member of the L’Arche community founded in 1972 by Fr. George Strohmeyer and Erie Benedictine Sr. Barbara Ann Karznia, who died in 1982. L’Arche Erie was the first L’Arche community founded in the United States. Donna, now a resident at the Erie Benedictine’s Benetwood Apartments, continues her relationship with L’Arche Erie. Sister Audrey Berdis, staff member at Benetwood, said, “I am so proud of Donna. She has taught me a great deal. Donna never stops giving and last year alone she gave more than 200 volunteer hours at Brevillier Village, a housing and health care facility for elders.”

Everything on Earth is filled with Sacred Presence
During her winter visit to Mount Saint Benedict monastery, Oblate Vena Eastwood from Burnley, Lancashire (United Kingdom), delighted the sisters with pictures and stories of her award winning garden, a garden that in her words has become “a visual expression of her Benedictine spirituality.” Located on the grounds of Benedict’s Barn, an ecumenical, Benedictine place of hospitality and spirituality, the garden reflects both the labor of her hands and her heart. For 10 years now Vena has called Benedict’s Barn home and made it available as a place and space for visitors and guests to seek God. Being a Benedictine Oblate, Vena chose the garden as a means of expressing the reverence for the wonder and beauty of creation that Benedictine monasticism has deepened in her. Everything about the garden speaks of the cultivation and care of beauty as a means of experiencing the presence of God. “This garden is meant to give pleasure to all who come to enjoy it,” says Vena. “There is nothing better for me than to sit in the garden after a hard day’s work, take in a sunset over Pendel Hill, and be able to say, ‘I lift up my eyes to the hills, from there comes my strength.’ ” (Psalm 121)
The glory of God is humanity fully alive.” St. Irenaeus

Benedicta Riepp Monastic Experience

This year we are witnessing this “aliveness” in the three women who are participating in the Benedicta Riepp Monastic Experience Program. Day by day they say YES to life and love and God as they live the Benedictine way of life intensely. They embrace the world and its challenges each morning as they go forth to their ministries where they work with toddlers, teenagers, and adults. Their faithfulness to community prayer every morning and evening shows that they understand the importance of this Work of God (Opus Dei). The sincere seeking and generous self-giving of these three women testifies that they are truly “fully alive” and glorifying God.

Stephanie Schmidt, OSB
Director of the Benedicta Riepp Program

When I think of my time spent so far as a Benedicta Riepp participant, I can’t help but recognize God’s glory in everything I do and take part in. This is especially true in my ministry and in my interactions with different people. It’s amazing how much of God one can experience in other people, and how much one can be a reflection of God for others.

At St. Benedict’s Day Care Center, whether the children will ever realize it or not, God is working through me in the form of patience, laughter, creativity, and above all, love for every child that walks through those doors each morning. In return, I am given the blessing of their love every day, and the joy that comes from just seeing their smiling faces. The glory of God radiates in everything and everyone. Being able to recognize it in myself and in the small, everyday wonders is the real glory of it for me.

Alyssa Harpst
Participant in the Benedicta Riepp Program

Every day, in the work of my ministry, I believe I am reflecting and receiving God’s glory. I’m sharing the love God has for me, and for all of us, when working with the children at The Kids Cafe. Spending quality time with them, playing games, doing homework, playing at the gym, and serving them dinner are all moments in which God’s glory and love can shine. God has provided many blessings in my life, and I know they are not mine alone to hold. I have to share these blessings with others, and I find the most joy in doing so with my “cafe kids.”

Carrie Parsons
Participant in the Benedicta Riepp Program

The Benedicta Riepp program provides many opportunities to reflect God’s glory while ministering in inner-city Erie. Presently, I am in the ministry of hospitality at St. Benedict Education Center (SBEC). As receptionist I have a wonderful opportunity to bring God’s light and love into the lives of others. What an honor to reflect God’s glory in the very name I received in Baptism. Just as all of creation is a reflection of God’s glory, how “glorious” it is to hear others answer my good morning greeting to them with, “Morning, Glory.”

Sometimes, an elevator ride to the third floor is a chance to look into the eyes of another with love as they speak of their needs and frustrations. Often just listening with compassion brings light to a weary parent or teacher as they pass by the desk and share the burdens and struggles of the day. Oh! And did I mention the many moments that are shared throughout the day with all the pre-schoolers who pass by looking for a special greeting? All of these opportunities to bring a Benedictine welcome give me a share in the mission of Christ to let my works shine and bring forth the image of God—and for this, I am grateful.

Glory Piovarcy
Participant in the Benedicta Riepp Program

Follow the journey of Carrie and Alyssa on their blogs. Find links at eriebenedictines.org/benedicta-riepp-monastic-experience
Every day since April 2011, in addition to the Liturgy of Hours which I pray daily with my Erie monastic community, I have prayed the “Prayer for Those Who Dwell in a Monastery of the Heart” as well.

More often than not, this prayer prompts a stirring in my heart from the very privileged perspective I have at the center of this new moment and movement in monastic life. There is nothing unique about a “new monasticism” – for over 1500 years, the Rule of Benedict has been embraced, refreshed, adapted and reformed in astounding ways, ever new yet always faithful to the original vision: to seek God with others, to pray always and to make one’s corner of life and the world a more beautiful place by becoming “compassionate co-creators of a world in process, creative keepers of the human community, loving listeners to the heartbeat of the world, caring sisters and brothers to its wounded and bringers of peace to a world in distress” (from the “Prayer for Those Who Dwell in a Monastery of the Heart”).

What started in the soul of my own monastic community, with its support and love, has truly grown to a heartbeat of thousands felt round the world. In this very exciting new Monastery of the Heart movement, the details of connection, shared wisdom and support for one another may be new: ranging from small groups who meet very regularly, on-site and online, studying, praying and engaging in good works together, to those who visit our website and offer their seeking hearts and wise insights there instead. But the shared seeking and longing, the souls upheld in love and mutual reverence, the common vision and spiritual journey are anything but new; they are quite familiar, in fact, to this monastic soul. It is still and always the Benedictine way of life, wherever it is found and however it grows, that has simply found a new and exciting way to do so.

Monasteries of the Heart reminds me once again what nearly every Benedictine in the world will tell you: that this ancient Rule and way of life is real life stuff, dynamic and ever-changing, depth of soul and warmth of heart, living and breathing with new vitality because Benedict himself told every seeker: “If you find another way, a better way to do the same, do it.” Just make sure it gets done.

This new moment, and new movement, simply answers that ancient call of Benedict: to get it done, to transform the world by bringing God’s reign and beauty and love to it every day.

Sister Mary Ellen is a part-time Monasteries of the Heart (MOH) staff member engaged in creative planning for the MOH website. She also takes part in online formation development and is a discussion leader for online course and book conversations and she serves as an on-site group coordinator. All this is in addition to her ministry at Villa Maria Academy where she is campus minister.

The Monasteries of the Heart membership now totals 4,700 with new members joining daily. For more information or to become a member visit www.monasteriesoftheheart.org or call 814-899-9224.
Jubilee Year

This year marks the jubilees of six Benedictine Sisters of Erie. Celebrating 60 years are: Sisters Dona Obenrader, Mary Louis Eichenlaub and Cecilia Sullivan. Sister Theresa Zoky is a Golden Jubilarian and the Silver Jubilarians are Sisters Anne McCarthy and Elizabeth Adams.

Jubilees are faith times; jubilees are fun times. The fun will begin when those celebrating 60 years are honored at a special Benedictine community gathering where Evening Prayer will be prayed, vows will be renewed, a festive dinner will be enjoyed, and memorable moments will be shared.

Sister Dona Obenrader, celebrating 60 years of monastic life, sees this jubilee as an opportunity to express her gratefulness to God for allowing her to keep giving to others for as long as she is able. After spending more than 35 years in the field of elementary education, then having worked as a school secretary and librarian as well as an adult tutor, Sister Dona engaged in the ministry of hospitality as a monastery switchboard attendant. This ministry was in complete alignment with her favorite verse of the Rule of Benedict: “I was a stranger and you welcomed me.” Time and time again, Sister Dona reached out to the guests who found their way to the monastery and for many years she offered them a kind and caring welcome. In 2004 Sister Dona began her volunteer ministry in the Development Office, a ministry she continues to this day. Day in and day out Sister Dona finds ways to give of herself and for her, this giving is not a duty but a privilege. We celebrate Sister Dona and her desire to continue giving of herself. It teaches us that “It is only in the giving of oneself to others that we truly live” (Ethel Percy Andrus).

Sister Mary Louis Eichenlaub has spent much of her 60 years as a Benedictine Sister of Erie devoted to education and pastoral ministry. She found her niche and spent more than 25 years teaching at the secondary level. After that she worked in Social Service and Community Public Relations. When she was called to Pastoral Ministry for the Aging she was challenged to use her energies more directly by responding to the needs she personally witnessed in St. Mary’s Parish, Erie. After more than 10 years in this ministry she resumed teaching English at St. Benedict Education Center. All the while Sister Mary Louis was an advocate for ecumenism in the Church and worked with passion as a member of the Board of Directors for Inter-Church Ministries of Northwest Pennsylvania. In 2008, Sister Mary Louis took up the ministry of prayer and presence at Mount Saint Benedict Monastery. She says, “Celebrating my 60th jubilee is a celebration of God’s patience and love for me that is always there as my support.” We celebrate Sister Mary Louis for her love and patience in her presence to the present. It teaches us that “The art of life is to live in the present moment, and to make that moment as perfect as we can by the realization that we are the instruments and expression of God” (Emmet Fox).
Public celebration to mark 50 and 25 years of Benedictine life

One hundred years of monastic life will be celebrated when Sisters Theresa Zoky, Anne McCarthy and Elizabeth Adams are honored in a public celebration of their jubilees to be held in September. The profession of these women to seek God in community and to serve with faithfulness gives witness to the value of a religious vocation. These sisters are gift to the Church and to the world; they are gift to this community of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie. Their commitment, as well as their dedication and fidelity, is immeasurable.

Sister Theresa Zoky of The Humanity of Christ is celebrating 50 years of bringing the human face of Jesus to any and all situations. Sister Theresa spent almost half of her religious life teaching elementary school. From there she worked in the Erie Diocesan Mission Office, eventually as Director, and was also the Diocesan Director of the Propagation of Faith. For more than 10 years she played a special part in being a beacon of hope, especially for the people of the Misión de Amistad, the Mission of Friendship in Mérida, Mexico, adopted by the Diocese of Erie in 1971. Presently, Sister Theresa serves as secretary at Our Lady of Mercy Church in Harborcreek where there is no shortage of opportunities to show the human face of Christ to all. In addition, Sister Theresa assists in the community’s Archives Office as the chronicler.

Sister Cecilia Sullivan celebrates 60 years of monastic life. During these years of faithful service as a Benedictine monastic she has ministered to people of all ages and had the opportunity to extend Benedictine spirituality beyond the borders of Erie as a missionary in Alaska and visitor to the Erie Diocesan Mission of Friendship in Mérida, Mexico. After many years in education, Sister Cecilia spent eight years as an administrative assistant at John XXIII Home in Hermitage, PA. In 1994 she assumed a variety of responsibilities at Saint Benedict Education Center (SBEC) including teaching, data entry, and the job of building supervisor. As Sister Cecilia says so simply, “I am humbled to touch and have been touched by school children, the elderly, and now, refugees—our new Americans. I feel blessed that the Benedictine way has been spread through my ministries. I desire to live and spread both Benedictine and Gospel values as long as I can.” Although she is soon to retire from SBEC, she knows that there will be new opportunities awaiting her. We celebrate Sister Cecilia for the example of her fidelity and trust. It teaches us that, “The freedom to move forward to new opportunities and to produce results comes from living in the present not the past” (Brian Koslow).

Every Sister who has ever made final profession in this community for the past 156 years has received a title that is unique to her. This title, chosen for each sister by the Prioress, captures distinctive qualities or traits of that person.
Sister Anne McCarthy of the *Spirit of Profound Compassion* is a Silver Jubiliarian. After working as an emergency room nurse she committed her compassionate heart to peace and justice work. At Pax Christi USA she served in a variety of positions, eventually becoming National Coordinator of the organization. Sister Anne has also served as a staff member for the Alliance for International Monasticism (AIM), a staff member in the community’s communications office, and as Director of the Center for Social Concerns at Gannon University. Presently she is on the staff of Benetvision, the community’s publication ministry, and Monasteries of the Heart, a movement of seekers who shape their spiritual lives around Benedictine values and priorities. Sister Anne is also active in retreat ministry as a retreat and workshop director on monasticism and Benedictine spirituality.

Sister Elizabeth Adams of the *Quiet Presence of God* is also celebrating 25 years. Better known as Sister Beth, she spent seven years as a printer for Benet Press, a past ministry of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie. From there she went to St. Benedict Day Care Center where she has been a teacher for 17 years. Presently, she is lead teacher in a classroom of three and four year olds. In addition to her ministries, Sister Beth is an annual volunteer at the Senior Citizen’s Summer Camp run by SOME—So Others May Eat, a Washington, DC-based organization that works to restore hope and dignity one person at a time. Sister Beth is also a weekly volunteer ESL (English as a Second Language) teacher to the refugees of Erie. In her gentle way she is the quiet presence of God in all of her encounters.

Sister Theresa Zoky

One of the highlights of our Monastic Profession as part of the Erie Benedictine community is the receiving of our “title.” On the evening before my profession 50 years ago, the community and I waited in anticipation for this big moment. It was my turn to be given a title by Sister Mary Margaret Kraus, prioress at that time. My title has always been special to me: “Sister Theresa of the Humanity of Christ.” While Jesus walked the earth in the flesh, he brought comfort and healing to those in need. I hope that through my teaching ministry, my love for the missions and, as I strive to be Christ’s presence in this hurting world, I am doing the same.

Maybe that is why my favorite quote is really the prayer of St. Theresa of Avila:

*Christ has no body on earth but yours;*  
*No hands but yours; no feet but yours;*  
*Yours are the eyes through which His love Looks out to the world;*  
*Yours are the feet with which He goes about doing good;*  
*Yours are the hands with which He blesses people now.*

This prayer sums up the whole Christian message of love and service for me. I am called to use the gifts and talents bestowed upon me to enable the God of Life to be present to all with whom I live and work. It is only through my prayers and actions, and by all of us working together, that the Humanity of Christ is made manifest in this hurting world.

This jubilee means a lot to me. A celebration such as this gives me the opportunity to express gratefulness to all the people in my life—my family, my community, and my friends—who brought me to this time in my life. I can’t think of a better way to express my love and appreciation than in the form of a jubilee celebration. It is going to be the best party ever!

This brief synopsis of their ministries gives you a small window into the monastic lives of this year’s golden and silver jubilarians: Sisters Theresa, Anne and Beth. What follows are the personal reflections that they offer as a way to invite you into the heart of jubilee and what it means to each of them.
Sister Anne McCarthy

These days, my morning begins with coffee and a book when it’s quiet on East 22nd Street and at Mary the Apostle Catholic Worker where I live with six others, including a young couple with two children, and a friend with developmental disabilities. Later, I join three other Benedictines on the block for morning prayer. Breakfast is with five-year-old Brigid while Lisa watches for the Lift pickup for work and John, a toddler, re-discovers the kitchen cabinets. My ministry is with Benetvision and Monasteries of the Heart, stretching the boundaries of Benedictine life to new forms for the future. Later there might be neighborhood gardening, or meetings at the monastery or a peace demonstration. At the end of the day, Jess and Matthew, the parents, and I gather briefly for night prayer.

When I made monastic profession, I did not envision the form of life I now live. The only sure bet about the next 25 years is there will be more new forms. But the essentials will hopefully remain: a rhythm of prayer, community, ministry, nonviolent witness, celebrations, and leisure. My hope is that monastic life—life structured for growth in gospel love and freedom—will still be forming me.

I have a favorite quote of Dorothy Day, well known Catholic social reformer, that supports my hope: “We can throw our pebble in the pond and be confident that its ever widening circle will reach around the world. We can give away an onion. We repeat, there is nothing that we can do but love, and, dear God, please enlarge our hearts to love each other, to love our neighbor, to love our enemy as well as our friend.” It is clear that significant and effective actions are built on love. This is a beautiful model and a great hope.

I am looking forward to jubilee. It is a moment in time to bring together my family, friends and monastic community. Most importantly, it is a chance for me to re-articulate my monastic life. It is going to be a great day!

Sister Elizabeth Adams

When I was 28 years old I was living in Washington, DC and working at a Senior Citizen’s Center. I had a persistent, deep down feeling that God was calling me to do more with my life. After much discernment I felt called to Benedictine monastic life. Thomas Merton believed that monastic vocation is not chosen. He said, “Instead, it picks you.”

After living this monastic life for 25 years I believe it did pick me. I believe my monastic vocation is to seek God each day and to live my monastic vows of stability, fidelity to the monastic way of life, and obedience.

I have many favorite quotes, one of them being from the Prologue of the Rule of Benedict: “Do not be daunted immediately by fear and run away from the road that leads to salvation. It is bound to be narrow at the outset.” As a very practical person, this very practical advice reminds me to keep going despite difficulties and challenges and because of joys and blessings. As Thich Nhat Hanh says, “Life can be found only in the present moment. The past is gone, the future is not yet here, and if we do not go back to ourselves in the present moment, we cannot be in touch with life.” Living in the present moment is what I try to do; living in the present moment is what I cherish doing.

Why this upcoming jubilee is important to me is really quite simple. Celebrating my 25th jubilee is a time to honor all that has happened in my life as a Benedictine Sister of Erie; it is a time to thank God for the past 25 years. I can hardly wait!
Benedictine Sisters of Erie embrace their Corporate Commitment in a variety of ways. Time and time again it is lived out in ordinary ways with extraordinary passion. As Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, the great 19th century German writer, said, “Whatever you do, or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius and power and magic in it.”

SBEC begins new Bicycle Repair Skills Training

“With the assistance of Eric Brozell, an Erie bicyclist, we are offering a training program in bicycle repair to participants,” explained Sister Dorothy Stoner, Centralized Worksite Supervisor at SBEC. Eric developed a six-week training program on bicycle repair skills which was offered February 16-March 29. During that time he taught the first two “trainees,” Datta and Natalya, the names of tools, their use, and a process of evaluating bicycle mechanics and repair. Thanks to a generous donor, SBEC was able to purchase the tools, equipment, and supplies to begin the program.

As a result of the training program, firstly Eric has volunteered many hours to develop this program, to advise staff on the tools and equipment needed, and to teach the skills of repair as well as safe practices when bicycling. He has been working with various individuals and agencies in the Erie area, particularly the Erie County Department of Health, to raise awareness of the benefits of traveling by bicycle and to assist in making Erie a “bicycle friendly city.”

“We don’t have much of a bicycle culture in Erie,” said Sister Dorothy. “Eric is committed to building up that culture. We’re hoping our training program encourages our refugee participants to once again use bicycles as a primary mode of transportation here in Erie as they did in their countries of origin. And perhaps we will learn from them!”

If you’d like to help this training program continue contact Sister Dorothy Stoner at SBEC-Erie, 814-452-4072 ext. 291. Cash donations are always welcome. A limited number of bicycles and/or parts would also be helpful.

If you are interested in helping make Erie County (or your own city/county) bicycle friendly contact Eric at Eric@BicycleErie.org. The website BicycleErie.org is in construction right now but will soon be a resource for all Erie bicyclists.
It is Finished in Beauty

Christ is crucified today whenever and wherever hatred, violence and injustice prevail. On Good Friday, as they have done for 32 years, the Benedictine Sisters, along with oblates, family members, friends and interested public, walked through downtown Erie marking the Way of the Cross, mindful that an injustice to one is an injustice to all. Liz Allen, Public Editor for the Editorial Section of the Erie Times News, captured it well: “[The sisters walk] to call attention to injustices that hurt Erie residents and damage prospects for peace, here and abroad.” The Pilgrimage for Peace is a faith walk. It renews hope. Somewhere, somehow there is going to be a resurrection, even in the places of the greatest injustices.

Take Back the Site

With violence on the rise, the Benedictine Sisters of Erie, along with the Sisters of St. Joseph and the Sisters of Mercy, know first-hand that their “Take Back the Site” ministry is crucial. For 10 years now Take Back the Site Vigils have been held at the site of any death in the city of Erie that resulted from an act of violence. In an effort to reclaim the site for non-violence, consolation and support are offered to family and friends of both the victim and the perpetrator. Prayer, song and words of comfort form a group of strangers into a community united in its efforts to be a healing presence. The desire to bring an end to violence is strong; the prayer for peace is fervent. As one sister remarked, “In reclaiming this space for nonviolence, we also reclaim our better selves. May we, each of us, find strength in this prayer together—strength for a journey toward nonviolence, always, in every circumstance and every place, with every other person we meet.”

As of May 2012, 63 vigils have been held in the city of Erie in the past 10 years, five of them in 2012 alone, with three of those five over a three-week span in March and April.

Sister Joan Chittister Receives Award

Sister Joan Chittister, OSB, received the Erie District 13 Toastmaster’s Communication & Leadership Award at its Spring Conference. The award is given to “a person in the community who is an outstanding communicator or leader.” Mary Yonkers, (pictured between Sister Joan [left] and Sister Maureen Tobin), former student of Sister Joan and member of the conference committee, nominated Sister Joan for the award. “Sister Joan was my high school teacher. She challenged me to excel. I often tell people she was the best teacher of all,” said Mary. As one participant remarked at its conclusion, “Sister’s speech made me want to go out into the world and make a difference.”

Toastmasters International is a non-profit educational organization that teaches public speaking and leadership skills through a worldwide network of meeting locations. District 13 serves Toastmaster clubs in western Pennsylvania, northwestern West Virginia, western Maryland and southeastern Ohio Valley.
In memoriam

In memoriam announces the death of two members of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie and offers information about their lives and accomplishments. More importantly, it shares with you, our extended family, one of the special traditions of the Erie Benedictines—a memorial prayer that is individual and distinctive for each sister, written upon her death. These prayers, written with the deep love that comes from sharing life for many years, offer a sacred glimpse into the soul-life of each one of these Benedictine sisters.

Sisters Mary Benedict Irish and Kathleen Ruszkowski died just a few weeks apart. Each was surrounded by community members in her final moments; each died quietly and peacefully. One was an older member; one was a younger member. Both were mourned equally; both were remembered affectionately.

In keeping with Benedictine tradition, community and church rituals commemorated and celebrated the gift that these sisters were to community, family, church and world. The services were rich and memorable, comforting and consoling. Without a doubt, these sisters are missed but in the words of St. John Chrysostom: “Those whom we love and lose are no longer where they were before. They are now wherever we are.”

Sister Mary Benedict Irish, OSB

Sister Mary Benedict Irish, OSB, 98, died on March 25, 2012 at Mount Saint Benedict Monastery in Erie, PA.

Born in Decatur, IL and baptized Ann Katherine, Sister Benedict was one of four children born to Charles and Emma (Bone) Irish. She entered the Benedictine Sisters of Holy Family Priory, Benet Lake, WI on December 8, 1950. She lived as an Oblate until beginning her canonical novitiate in 1956 and pronounced her perpetual vows in 1960. Sister Benedict celebrated her Silver Jubilee in 1982. In 1986, the Benedictine Sisters of Benet Lake began a merger process with the Benedictine Sisters of Erie; it was completed in 1991. Sister Benedict celebrated her Golden Jubilee in 2007.

During her years of ministry at Benet Lake Sister Benedict worked primarily in day care, both as teacher and director, and as a teacher in Religious Education. She served the community as a member of the formation team, an appointed council member, and as liturgist. Before pursuing her degree, Sister Benedict also gained experience in the operation of a print shop and publication sales facility. With a B.A. in English Literature from Dominican College, along with library course work and a love for reading, Sister Benedict became the priory’s librarian. Eventually, she became the librarian at St. Benedict’s Abbey of Benet Lake, WI, a position she held for 17 years. After transferring to the Erie Benedictines, Sister Benedict continued...
her work as the monastery librarian. Most recently, as an infirmary resident Sister Benedict engaged in the ministry of prayer and presence at Mount Saint Benedict Monastery.

Sister Benedict was preceded in death by her parents, three brothers, and nephew, Thomas, and his wife, Marilyn. She is survived by her Benedictine community, and her nephews, George Irish (Jeanie), Charles Irish (Mary Lynn), and John Irish (Diana) and their families.

Sister Kathleen Ruszkowski, OSB

Sister Kathleen Ruszkowski, OSB, 63, died on Thursday, April 19, 2012, at Mount Saint Benedict Monastery in Erie, Pennsylvania.

Born April 15, 1949, in Jersey City, New Jersey, Sister Kathleen was the daughter of Chester and Rosalyn (Sacente) Ruszkowski. She entered the Benedictine Sisters of Erie in 1968, pronounced her perpetual monastic vows in 1973 and celebrated her silver jubilee in 1995.

Sister Kathleen held a B.A. in English and a B.A. in Fine Arts from Mercyhurst College, now Mercyhurst University, and an M.A. in Theology from St. John’s University, Collegeville, MN. Her ministries incorporated her many gifts and she served as a secondary teacher in English and Theology, St. Benedict Academy (1971-77); Director of Religious Education, St. Julia Parish, Erie (1977-79) and St. John the Baptist Parish, Erie (1979-85); Food Service Manager, Mount St. Benedict Monastery (1985-87); Pastoral Minister, St. George Parish, Erie (1987-89); Associate Director of Worship for the Diocese of Erie (1990-1993); Adjunct Faculty of Religious Studies, Mercyhurst College (1992); and Director of the Mercyhurst Institute of Religious Education and Lay Ministry, Mercyhurst College (1994-96). After earning her B.A. in Fine Arts in 1999 and being honored with the Senior Art Award, Sister Kathleen was Director of the Monastery Grounds from 1999-2003. In 2003 she became the Director of Religious Education at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish, Bear, DE, a position she held until 2008. From 2008 until February of 2012, she served as Pastoral Associate at St. John the Beloved Parish, Wilmington, DE.

Sister Kathleen was preceded in death by her father, Chester. She is survived by her Benedictine Community, mother Rosalyn, brother Richard and his wife, Diane, and their children: Allison Lolli (John, and children Jack and Jake), Lauren Schlegel (Ryan), and Rich; sister Maryann Ammon and her husband, Charles, and their children: Renae Graeff (Derek), Charles, Eric, and Chelsea; as well as many good friends and co-workers.

Memorials in honor of Sisters Mary Benedict Irish and Kathleen Ruszkowski can be made to the Benedictine Sisters of Erie, 6101 East Lake Road, Erie, PA at ErieBenedictines.org.

Gracious God, our sister, Kathleen, having endured suffering and embraced death, is now enlivened by Resurrection.

Kathy, a woman of boundless gifts, filled space with beauty through all manner of art. Courage and conviction enlightened her vision; creativity and care animated her efforts.

Her passion for excellence was beyond measure. Because of it she lived with intention; because of it she died with purpose.

In the end, her manner of dying became her greatest work of art. It opened hands to acts of love; it opened hearts to ways of love. It empowered expansive kindness and allowed selfless giving. It inspired family and friends and upheld the meaning of community.

May we honor the memory of this woman whose strength of spirit and attention to detail guided her to fullness of joy in you, her God, the one in whom all things are glorified, now and evermore. Amen.
Each year as we prepare this report, we reflect on our ministries as Treasurer and Development Director. How does our work relate to our commitment to the Rule of Benedict lived out as members of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie? How does it engage the corporate commitment of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie? How does our work reflect the theme of this issue of *The Mount*: “Let your works shine and bring forth the image of God. Let all you do reflect God’s glory.”

Over the years we have learned the importance of staying focused on the true meaning and purpose of our ministry of money. You, our supporters, have the final say as to whether our work reflects God’s glory.

**Operating Income**

During the 2011 fiscal year, our overall income decreased from the previous year as our 2010 income was positively affected by an extraordinary increase in bequests. The majority of our income continues to come from the stipends the sisters receive from their ministries and from Social Security payments. It has been 10 years since the sisters became eligible for Social Security and that has had a major impact on our retirement income. Another factor that influenced our income was our ability to successfully sustain our investment income during the downturn in the market in the second half of the year.

**Operating Expense**

In 2011 our expenses decreased, continuing our pattern over the past several years. Administration expenses decreased due to a reduction in staffing, unemployment compensation payments, office supplies and the renegotiation of telephone services. Property expenses also decreased due to a reduction in natural gas usage as a result of our energy efficient HVAC system at the monastery, and the gas well at St. Benedict Center (345 East 9th Street). Health insurance coverage was our most significant area of increase with a 7% rise in premiums over 2010 figures. In an effort to improve overall health and maintain health care costs in check, we offered programs in weight management, exercise, relaxation, and stress reduction.
Summary

We are pleased to report that we had a very favorable year with operating income exceeding our operating expenses due to careful management of our budget and the continued generosity of our benefactors. Our investment strategy helped us to avoid a major loss in investment income during the downturn in the market while management of our expenses resulted in a cost reduction.

As the sisters continue to experience changes in ministry due to full and partial retirement, we are aware of the effects on the overall budget and our financial picture. Over the past 10 years, Social Security benefits have supplemented our income but do not cover 100% of ministry stipend decreases. We rely on our retirement funds valued at $4.5 million to generate sufficient income to meet our expenses. According to projections from the National Religious Retirement Office, our community is underfunded by 81%. We continue to explore ways of increasing our retirement funds through cost cutting measures and through our development program.

Since 1856 when our sisters arrived in Erie from St. Marys, PA, this Benedictine community has relied on the generosity of others. We know that our faithful supporters are available to help us when we ask or, oftentimes, help without being asked. Thank you for your generosity in the past and your support in the future. Please join us as we live our theme: “Let your works shine and bring forth the image of God. Let all you do reflect God’s glory.”

### Development Income

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### Benedictine Sisters of Erie

### Operating Income

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### Operating Expenses

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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>2,968,716.73</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Hope is the hallmark of Christian belief and, as we move into summer, we are surrounded by clear signs of new life and God’s glory.

At Mount Saint Benedict Monastery we experience hope and new life in all kinds of ways every day. One of the most humbling signs of this experience is the financial support and generosity of friends like you. Some of you we know very well and we see you regularly at the Monastery, volunteering at one of our ministries or praying with us at Sunday Eucharist. Some of you we’ve never met personally, but we’ve spoken on the phone, communicated via email, or through a quick note. And many of you . . . we have never met but you choose to give hope to the sisters, and all those they serve, with financial gifts.

I’m always awed when we learn of the generosity of a donor who has remembered us in their will. I’m even more amazed when no one knows that person. It naturally raises questions in my mind as to why someone, who doesn’t appear to have any connections to the sisters, chooses to leave a bequest to this community. Whether we know people intimately or not, we all share a common humanity — people who care enough to bring a smile to the face of a child, a parent, a refugee, a retiree, or a sister. Perhaps it’s the belief that we really can bring about change if everyone is given the opportunity to reach their full potential, no matter their financial circumstances. Perhaps it’s the belief that if we do as Benedict says and “welcome everyone as Christ,” we can all be a part of the legacy of change: a hope and dream that can change the world one person at a time.

Bequests are one of the most critical sources of long-term funding and we need caring and loyal individuals like you to come forward and take that step to remember the sisters in your will. Your bequest can make an extraordinary difference in the lives of the sisters and those they serve every day. It will ensure that all will continue to have access to the services provided by the sisters and pave the way for unforeseen future ministries.

EVERY GIFT IN EVERY WILL MAKES A DIFFERENCE: Join the Benedictine Legacy Society TODAY

Remembering the Benedictine Sisters of Erie in your will is a wonderful way to make a real difference in the lives of the sisters and in the lives of generations to come.

Be like sunflowers, “who seek out the light, no matter how little light there is and hold their heads high in worship. Just like having a faith, these flowers are a symbol of constant, true and unswerving loyalty to something bigger and brighter than themselves.”

(Marie Williams Johnstone)

SHARE YOUR PLANS

If you’ve made a bequest to the Benedictine Sisters of Erie, please let us know so we can thank you and include you in our Benedictine Legacy Society. Simply complete the enclosed envelope or call Sister Mary Jane Vergotz, OSB, Development Director, at 814-899-0614, ext. 2409 or Jo Clarke, Director of Annual Giving at ext. 2281. For more information on making a will go to our website: ErieBenedictines.org.

Again, thank you for the extraordinary generosity you have shown this community over the years.
Charitable gifts play a critical role in advancing the works of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie. Since arriving in Erie in 1856 to teach the children of German immigrants, the sisters continue to serve the poor and marginalized in Erie’s inner-city. With your help we have been able to foster an atmosphere of community, a community in which we are one.

Charity sees the need, not the cause. – German Proverb

In bestowing charity, we must provide the means to those who face disparities within our society, work to eliminate hunger, homelessness and unemployment and provide access to educational and cultural programs to develop the whole person.

Online giving is a secure and convenient way to designate a charitable gift to support the works of the Benedictine Sisters. Our redesigned website, www.eriebenedictines.org, launched late last year, makes it easy for you to donate online. Simply go to Support the Monastery and by choosing Donate Now you will be able to make a secure on-line donation. If online giving is not for you, choose Ways to Give where you have the option to choose your preferred way to designate a gift to the sisters. Together we can strive to build a world of peace, justice, equality and community where all are called “friend.”

We are grateful to you, our friends, for your continued support. With your help, we are able to minister to the people of Erie and beyond.

*The Mount* magazine is a biannual publication of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie. In order to help us maintain an accurate mailing list, please contact us with any change of address and or email information. If you prefer not to receive *The Mount* we kindly ask that you let us know. This helps us to save postage costs and preserve the environment.

Send all correspondence to Ann Comstock, Benedictine Sisters Development Office, Mount Saint Benedict Monastery, 6101 East Lake Road, Erie, PA 16511. (814-899-0614, ext. 2573, sbaalum@mtstbenedict.org)
In preparing the SBA Alumnae Section of this edition of *The Mount*, we reflected on the theme for this issue: “Let your works shine and bring forth the image of God. Let all you do reflect God’s glory.” How does the Association, through its works, bring forth the image of God and reflect God’s glory?

Perhaps a reminder of the Alumnae Association’s stated mission is in order here: “The purpose of the Saint Benedict Academy Alumnae Association is to promote and maintain the bond of the members, support the ministries of the Benedictine Sisters, promote Catholic education and support and encourage its members in their involvement in service to ministries that promote Benedictine values and traditions. We are committed to carrying out the philosophy of our Benedictine education — to develop to our full potential, to build community wherever we are, and to offer our gifts for others so that in all things God may be glorified.”

We were taught these Benedictine values as students at Saint Benedict Academy and have endeavored to carry them out as adults. Though the school is gone, the spirit is not! We do what we do as an Association to promote and support these values. Whether it be awarding thousands of dollars in scholarship monies to students attending Catholic schools or celebrating annually with over 425 of our best friends at a Christmas Party that raises thousands of dollars to support a particular ministry of the Benedictine Sisters, we remain true to our mission. Through our prayers, our presence and our financial support of the Benedictine Sisters, we do what we do so “that in all things God may be glorified.”

**Upcoming Events**

- **June 30**  
  Summer Picnic — Glinodo, 6270 East Lake Road, 11 a.m. - 3 p.m.

- **July 13 - 14**  
  Relay for Life — McDowell High School, 3580 West 38th Street

- **July 28**  
  “Walk the Halls” — Saint Benedict Academy (Saint Benedict Education Center) 330 East 10th Street, 2 p.m. - 4 p.m.

- **December 4**  
  SBA Christmas Party — Ambassador Conference Center, 7794 Peach Street, Erie

**Call for Email addresses...**

We frequently alert Alumnae Association members of upcoming events as well as timely news items. We need your current email address for this. Please send email information as well as your current home address and phone number to Ann Comstock at sbaalum@mtstbenedict.org.
A New Event: Christmas in July

Would you like to walk the halls of SBA with “friends you never can forget”? Would you like to support the Benedictine Sisters’ ministry of providing Christmas gifts to the children of Erie who live in poverty? Would you like to do both at the same time?

Then join your friends and classmates and former teachers for ‘Christmas in July’ at SBA on Saturday, July 28 from 2:00 - 4:00 p.m. Walk the halls of SBA and recall cherished memories. Sit in the cafeteria again where Christmas cookies and punch will be served. What’s your cost for this exciting event? Please bring a new, unwrapped gift of clothes for a child between the ages of infancy and 14. These gifts will be wrapped by volunteers that afternoon and will be donated to the Benedictine Sisters for their Christmas giveaway in December.

If you cannot attend and would like to participate, please send a cash donation or clothing to Ann Comstock, 6101 East Lake Road, Erie, PA 16511. If you have any questions about this new event, call or email Ann: 814-899-0614 ext. 2573 or sbaalum@mtstbenedict.org.

Reunion News

The Class of 1982 will be celebrating their 30th Class Reunion on Saturday, September 8, 2012. The event will be held at Jr’s on the Bay, starting at 6:00 p.m. until? If any class members are interested in helping the planning committee, the members meet on a monthly basis. Please contact Sue Skrzypczak Chase at 814-825-2980 or mchase1@neo.rr.com. The committee is also looking for updated addresses to send out invitations. Please contact Sue with any recent information you may have.

The 45th reunion of the Class of 1967 will be held Saturday, July 28 at Glinodo. Plans are being made for a picnic, 4 p.m. to dusk. Contact Janet Romanowicz Hammond at hammondjanet@hotmail.com with any questions.

Classes planning reunions are eligible to receive $35 to help defray mailing costs. We will also provide an updated class list from our database. We ask that you provide us with new or corrected addresses and any pictures from your reunion to post on our website. It is one of the best ways we have to keep in touch with friends and classmates. Please contact Ann Comstock at sbaalum@mtstbenedict.org or 814-899-0614 ext. 2573 for help.

Let us pray...

For our SBA alumnae who passed into eternity—

Frances D. Mikotowicz Crooks ’42
Isabel A. Grace Wiley ’44
Jane Fischer Hardner ’46
Marilyn Sopp Konzel ’61
Rosemarie Pruzenski Pacuran ’61
Carol M. Skibicki Kurpiewski ’62
Mary Elizabeth Bruno ’66
Lucia Catherine Schnelzer Johnson ’66
Julia Shade ’66
Christine M. Urbaniak Sullivan ’67
Pamela May Marinelli ’71
Jory M. Jackson Valimont ’76
Carroll Ann “Sissy” Moffett ’76
Madelyn Bruder Chaffee ’85
### Scholarship Winners 2012-2013

The annual SBA Communion Brunch was held on April 15 at the Lawrence Park Golf Club. We are very pleased to announce that 20 scholarships of $200 each were awarded to SBA alumnae relatives who will attend Catholic schools for the 2012-2013 school year. This program, begun in 1991, has contributed over $56,750 in support of Catholic education. The alumnae association is very pleased to show our support for Catholic education through this annual event.

#### Scholarship Winners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Alumnae Member</th>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lauren Wiertel</td>
<td>Anne Marie Ropelewski ’51</td>
<td>Niece</td>
<td>St. Gabriel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob Heberle</td>
<td>Paula Roseborough Medina ’89</td>
<td>Nephew</td>
<td>Our Lady of Mt. Carmel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nia Bowers-Pickens</td>
<td>Tracie Bowers Stuckie ’80</td>
<td>Niece</td>
<td>Villa Maria Academy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Amann</td>
<td>Nancy Martin Wells ’56</td>
<td>Grandson</td>
<td>St. James</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sydny Brunner</td>
<td>Esther E. Hubert ’56</td>
<td>Niece</td>
<td>St. Boniface</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthony Malone</td>
<td>Nancy Finchio Malone ’60</td>
<td>Grandson</td>
<td>Cathedral Prep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aydin Zill</td>
<td>Michelle Andrews Zill ’65</td>
<td>Grandson</td>
<td>Cathedral Prep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Kuehl</td>
<td>Barbara Trohoske Magraw ’62</td>
<td>Grandson</td>
<td>Cathedral Prep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calvin &amp; Sean Reed</td>
<td>Mary Alice Gorny Wilczynski ’54</td>
<td>Grandsons</td>
<td>Cathedral Prep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gina Majczyk</td>
<td>Pamela Czerwinski Majczyk ’78</td>
<td>Daughter</td>
<td>Mercyhurst Prep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Megan Brzozowski</td>
<td>Dianne Rzodkiewski Brzozowski ’61</td>
<td>Granddaughter</td>
<td>Mercyhurst Prep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam Riley</td>
<td>Diane Krumpe Swanson ’67</td>
<td>Grandson</td>
<td>Cathedral Prep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katelyn Gourley</td>
<td>Evelyn Komorek Scheidmiller ’54</td>
<td>Granddaughter</td>
<td>Villa Maria Academy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lindsey Friello</td>
<td>Marilyn Sanner Schwab ’49</td>
<td>Great niece</td>
<td>Our Lady of Peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna Grychowski</td>
<td>Mary DiPanfilo Grychowski ’70</td>
<td>Granddaughter</td>
<td>Our Lady of Peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justin Hilbrich</td>
<td>Carol Madras Hilbrich ’59</td>
<td>Grandson</td>
<td>Cathedral Prep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bailey Leona Witherspoon</td>
<td>Tracy Witherspoon ’85</td>
<td>Daughter</td>
<td>Mercyhurst Prep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah Marchant</td>
<td>Mary Ann Kaleta Marchant ’80</td>
<td>Daughter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Michael Causgrove</td>
<td>Patricia Causgrove Wheeler ’69</td>
<td>Nephew</td>
<td>Cathedral Prep</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mary Therese Nelson</td>
<td>Karen Berdis Nelson ’78</td>
<td>Daughter</td>
<td>Villa Maria Academy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Visit [ErieBenedictines.org](http://ErieBenedictines.org) for event updates and to download sign-up forms, or send your email address to Alumnae Director Ann Comstock at sbaalum@mtstbenedict.org to receive electronic reminders and sign-ups. If you don’t use email, write to Ann at Mount Saint Benedict Monastery, 6101 E. Lake Rd., Erie, PA, 16511. And whenever you see or hear about SBA alumnae being honored or highlighted for their achievements, let us know. Clip an article, jot it down, or call us, so we can share the news with all our members.
SBA Class of 1969 from left to right:
Sue Lackovic Koprowski, Barb Strohmeyer, Marie Donohue Catrabone, Margaret Smith Williams, Gerry Burchick Miller, Ann Bauer Glasperl, Theresa Sybil Ignaczak, Sue Kiehlmeier Custer, Pat Stull D'Annibale, Pat Causgrove Wheeler, Sister Diane Rabe, OSB, Kathy Anysz, Jean Luschini Markiewica, Chris Patalita Pardini.

Happy Birthday . . . The Class of 1969 turned 60 this past year!!! They decided to celebrate the passage of time with multiple events.

The first event, on August 13, was held at Jr’s on the Bay. Several class members enjoyed great food and drink as well as wonderful conversation and a beautiful Lake Erie sunset.

Following this get-together, a few classmates, along with family and friends, took a bus trip to New York City on Columbus Day weekend. Sites visited included Central Park, the Statue of Liberty and the Top of the Rock as well as other well-known NYC sites of interest. Heck, they even got to hold up their birthday banner on the Today Show. They took in a Broadway show and had dessert at Sardi’s. One final Happy Birthday Wish was held at the SBA Alumnae Christmas Party on December 6. It was a year of good times, memories and friendships.

Just a note…

Alumnae Members,

Would you like to demonstrate your SBA school spirit? Why not join the classes that donate a theme basket for the 2012 SBA Christmas party, proceeds to benefit the Inner-City Neighborhood Art House, a ministry of the Benedictine Sisters. If you are still in contact with your classmates, get together to create a basket that will be raffled at the party. Baskets generally are valued from $50 - $100. If you moved away and are no longer in contact with your old friends you can still participate. Send a gift card or monetary donation that will be added to your class basket. Please include name, address, phone number, email and year you graduated. Make checks payable to Saint Benedict Academy Alumnae Association. Mail donations or gift cards to:

Debbie Chimenti Sciamada
515 Hilltop Rd
Erie, PA 16509

Jeanne Luschini Markiewicz
1119 East Arlington
Erie, PA 16504
PRAYER FOR VOCATIONS

Loving God, we believe that Benedictine monasticism bears fruit for the world.

We are grateful for the witness of the Benedictine sisters among us.

May their faithfulness to the monastic way of life awaken women to the stirrings of the Spirit.

Bless others with the courage to accept the invitation to seek you in community through prayer and ministry.

May these seekers find fulfillment for the longing in their hearts: in the communal life well-lived and in loving attention to the needs of your people.

May they be upheld as we are upheld by your constancy and steadfast love.

We ask this with confidence in your goodness and grace, now and evermore.

Amen.