A Miracle is...

What is a miracle, really? This question was posed to me by a student in a Sacred Scriptures class that I teach at Gannon University. We were studying the Gospels and the miracle stories of healings and cures. We were considering bible passages that make it clear that the Reign of God is for everyone, including the marginalized, poor and oppressed, and those that recount surprising things like a baby born to save the world through passion, death and resurrection. We were grappling with the question: What is the “real” miracle in the stories? It was a question that raised more questions: Is it possible that the miracle is much deeper than that which meets the eye? How did the miracle happen? Is it magic that makes the miracle? Who or what is responsible for the miracle?

I set out in search of answers to these questions. Here is what I discovered:

• The word ‘miracle’ comes from the Latin word ‘miraculum,’ meaning something that causes wonder.

• “Miracles occur naturally as expressions of love. The real miracle is the love that inspires them. In this sense everything that comes from love is a miracle.” (Marianne Williamson, spiritual teacher, author and lecturer)

• “The true miracles of life are hidden in plain sight, in the blessings and beauties that surround us....” (François Mauriac, French author)

• Miracles are acts that free the poor and suffering from oppression.

• Raising the question of miracles today means that we are invited to seek and realize concrete signs that speak to our world of liberation such as human dignity, human life, health, justice, peace and freedom.

As you read through this magazine, maybe you will come to a new understanding of miracles. An urban farm school on East 11th in Erie might stir wonder in your heart. Perhaps the story of the “foster grandbaby” will deepen your awareness of the miracles that come from love. Maybe the East 22nd Street Poetry Park will show you that a place of beauty and peace in the inner city is possible. The creation of Monasteries of the Heart among prison populations might help you recognize the importance of acts of liberation that can give new dignity and meaning to the lives of the incarcerated.

Years ago I saw the 2003 movie Bruce Almighty, an American religious comedy in which a TV reporter who is down on his luck is given the opportunity to be God for a week. When things start to get out of control and go wrong for Bruce (Jim Carrey), God (Morgan Freeman) gives some advice that I still remember: “If you want to see a miracle . . . be the miracle.”

What is a miracle, really? Maybe this issue of The Mount will provide you with some answers. Maybe this issue of The Mount will show you ways that you can be the miracle, too.

Charlotte Anne Zalot, OSB

Angel with Harp

Cover Photo by Jo Clarke, Oblate

BENEDICTINE CHARISM STATEMENT

The Benedictine way is to seek God in cenobitic life and to respond in prayer and ministry.
Signs and wonders, magic and miracles...

Signs and wonders, magic and miracles, is the language of the holidays as the seasons change and we approach Christmas. For most children the magic starts with Halloween and grows until Christmas arrives. Adults, too, begin to get into the holiday spirit that soon permeates most of the spaces where we live, work and pray.

Throughout Scriptures the term “signs and wonders” is used frequently, most often in the Acts of the Apostles: “Now many signs and wonders were done among the people through the apostles.” (Acts 5:12) For me, every day, be it a holiday or “ordinary time,” is an occasion to see the signs and wonders the author of Acts speaks about – for we are the descendants of those first Christian communities and we bring the message of Jesus to our time as well.

What I witness daily in our Benedictine community, in the sisters’ hospitality that welcomes our many guests, their generosity in giving of their time to help another, their dedication in ministry and to each other in community, is sign to me of the life of Jesus in them. Our oblates, too, strive to be signs of a different way of living in their own homes, among those with whom they interact on a daily basis. The good works of the sisters and oblates, their willingness to reach out and meet the needs of the people with whom they live, work and interrelate, are today’s extraordinary signs and wonders done through these followers of Jesus.

The fourth chapter of the Rule of Benedict, “The Tools for Good Works,” reminds us first of the primacy of the Great Commandment and the Ten Commandments, followed by the importance of prayer and charity. The list of “tools” continues, advocating works of justice, peacemaking, respect, trust, kindness, simplicity and the Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy. These are the tools for the spiritual life, and they are to guide our ways of acting.

Each day we are faced with many decisions and choices to respond or not to God’s presence in our midst. Monastic spirituality is a way of life, a way to see Christ in the other and to bring Christ to another. This litany of tools becomes the basis of the signs and wonders that shine through us, as disciples of a life lived dedicated to God.

These signs and wonders are mediated through you, too. Every time you help a family member, reach out to the poor or someone in need, show love to a child or console a friend in distress, act kindly to a person in sorrow, minister to the sick or respond to a request for help, you are indeed a sign and wonder of our compassionate and merciful God.

May our God, who lavishes gifts, graces and miracles on you in abundance, be your inspiration and joy always.

Anne Wambach, OSB
Prioress, Benedictine Sisters of Erie
Jubilee – September 28, 2013 Everything is full of Sacred Presence. It is this Sacred Presence that called the

Because a life-long commitment to prayer is cherished, jubilee day is sacred.
Jubilarians to Benedictine life; it is this Sacred Presence that brought them to Jubilee day. Is this not a miracle?

Because a life overflowing in a wide variety of works and forms of service is valued, jubilee day is real.

Because joy in community life is reverenced, jubilee day is a true celebration.

(See the Spring/Summer 2013 issue of The Mount at eriebenedictines.org/mount for each jubilarian’s story.)
Monastic Life: The Many Forms
Choosing the Monastic Way of Life
By Stephanie Schmidt, OSB, Formation Director

We are now in that magical time of year when “good will and cheer” abound as we celebrate the miracle of Christmas — the miracle of love made flesh in Jesus. Let us not forget that this gift of love is ours throughout the year no matter the season.

Two women who responded to God’s call to “be love” by choosing to live the gospel as Erie Benedictines remind us in a very tangible way that the miracle does continue. Their eagerness, enthusiasm, and sincerity in responding to this call are wonderful gifts. The presence of Pat Witulski and Ann Michaud as new seekers in community rekindles the fire of passion that prompts each of us to recommit ourselves daily to the call of the God of love.

PAT WITULSKI BECOMES A NOVICE

After a year as a postulant, the first step towards becoming a Benedictine, Pat Witulski discerned that her call continues to be seeking God with this community and she asked to move into the second phase of monastic formation, the novitiate. In her formal letter of request to begin the novitiate Pat wrote, “Within this Benedictine community I have found that the sisters support each other in prayer and in ministry. My adjustment to community living entailed joy, disappointment, surprise, and the usual challenges that our shared life can bring. Just like any family, community has its struggles. However, I have seen that, in seeking to live the Gospel life with one another, people of different ages, backgrounds, and temperaments can indeed witness to the fact that the love of God is stronger than anything that may divide us. I wholeheartedly believe that it is God’s love that drew me to this specific monastery with these particular seekers.”

At Evening Praise in early August the community celebrated the Rite of Entrance into the Novitiate with Pat. Sister Anne Wambach, prioress, asked the community to support Pat as she continues on this journey of faith. Novice director, Sister Stephanie Schmidt, presented Pat with a copy of the Rule of Benedict as a sign that this will be a year of prayer and study as she grows into the Benedictine way of life.

The novitiate year is a special time in the initial monastic formation process where one is immersed in community life and experiences the living tradition of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie. The novice is given time to focus more intensely on deepening her relationship with God through prayer and study. In addition to time given to quiet prayer and reflection, classes on the Rule of Benedict, monastic and Church history, Scripture, liturgy, the community’s Corporate Commitment and human development form a major part of the schedule. The novice does not work in an external ministry during this year so that she can focus on her studies and learn the essentials of monastic life. Time is spent working with sisters in the infirmary and assisting in the monastery with chores necessary to the daily functioning of the community. The novice is also encouraged to explore the creative arts (Pat has been taking piano lessons and learning candle making and quilting) and appreciate the beautiful grounds that surround the monastery.

Of course the discernment process continues throughout the year as the novice listens deeply to the voice of God and her seeking intensifies.
The community gathered in the monastery foyer to welcome a new seeker into our midst on October 6. Ann Michaud began her postulancy by knocking on the front door of the monastery. Sister Anne Wambach, prioress, welcomed her with the question, “What is it you seek?” Ann responded with, “I seek to live the monastic way of life within this community as I continue my spiritual journey.” The community sang a psalm of praise and promised to support her in this journey. This simple ritual marked her movement from the inquiry stage to the postulancy when she moved into the monastery and began living Benedictine life.

Ann, a theology teacher from Salem, MA, found the Erie Benedictines through the community website, eriebenedictines.org. After corresponding for a year with vocation director Sister Marilyn Schauble and making a number of visits to the monastery, Ann decided to take the next step. In her letter of request to enter the postulancy, Ann stated, “I am attracted to the Benedictine cenobitic way of life with its rhythm of prayer and ministry. I respect the way the Erie community has chosen to be a healing presence and prophetic witness for peace within the Catholic Church and for all people by working for sustainability and justice, especially for women and children.”

As a postulant, for the next year Ann will live, work and pray with the community. While not yet a full member, she will enter into the daily rhythm of monastic life. She will have the opportunity to work in a community ministry and participate in community functions and events. All the while Ann will continue to discern her call as the community also comes to know her in this year of exploration, discernment and growth.
College Service Weeks Change Lives
By Marilyn Schauble, OSB, Vocation Director

For more than seven years college students from various schools have spent their spring or winter break service week living and working with the sisters at Mount Saint Benedict Monastery. Sisters and students share faith and feasting, friendship and fun. I think it is safe to say that by the time the students leave they have a better understanding of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie, life in a monastery and service in our Benedictine ministries.

One of the things that we share with the students is our Corporate Commitment: *As Benedictine Sisters of Erie we commit ourselves to be a healing presence and prophetic witness for peace by working for sustainability and justice, especially for women and children.*

Recently, I had an experience that helped me to see that what the students experience here doesn’t end here. Meet Katie Welsh, a young woman from McMurray, PA, who is a chemical engineering major in her junior year at the University of Dayton. In addition to her studies Katie is a Resident Assistant, an officer in the Society of Women Engineers, and a Chaminade Scholar (a program for honors students to respond to leadership and service through the lens of their Christian faith).

Katie was part of a Ministry Week at the monastery with other students from the University of Dayton in May 2013. As part of that week, she took full advantage of the opportunity to learn about and serve in our Benedictine ministries. In other words, she took our Corporate Commitment to heart.

On September 10, I received an email from Katie:

“Hello, Sister Marilyn! This is Katie Welsh from the University of Dayton Breakout Group. I want to let you know that the Mount should be receiving seven packages tomorrow (Wed. 9/11) from my family and me. They are filled with items that I want to be donated to your ministries. There will be clothes, shoes, knee socks, art supplies, and some other various items . . . .”

The contents of all seven big boxes soon found their way to the children of the Inner-City Neighborhood Art House and the immigrants of Saint Benedict Education Center. When I informed Katie of this she said, “This is music to my ears. I am so happy everything was distributed!”

When I sat back to reflect on Katie’s efforts and the Welsh family’s generosity in responding to some of the needs Katie experienced while serving in our Benedictine ministries, I thought about how easy it could be to become disheartened with the sadness and suffering, injustice and poverty that exists in today’s world. But, when something beautiful happens it is magical. An unexpected kindness like Katie’s restores hope!
New Group from Canisius

For six years student groups from Canisius College in Buffalo have been coming to the Mount for winter and spring break ministry trips. For the past two years the Canisius College women’s retreat has also been held at the Mount. In September, Sarah Signorino and Joe Van Volkenburg, Campus Ministry staff at Canisius College, brought yet another group to the Mount: service and justice interns.

Service interns work with local community partners to do and direct service and to serve as a liaison between partners and the Canisius community. They organize student groups, provide orientations to the service sites and offer reflection opportunities to the college’s students.

Justice interns work to educate the campus community on a variety of justice issues, provide prayer services in response to the need for peace and organize advocacy opportunities. The focus for this year is humane immigration reform.

“Spending time at the Mount allowed the interns time to discuss connections between service, justice and solidarity and to bond with each other, experience community prayer, and spend time planning and reflecting on the year ahead,” explained Sarah. “Coming here, whether for a service week or a retreat experience, is always special for us.”

Words from a recent vocation visitor:

Visiting the Benedictine Sisters of Erie was an experience I will not soon forget. The most memorable part of my stay was participating in some of the community ministries. Between St. Benedict Education Center, Sister Gus’ Kids Cafe, and the St. Benedict Child Development Center, I was able to meet many different people. I was able to see the face of Christ in each and every person encountered. They truly helped me more than I was able to help them. The effect they had on me will stay with me for the rest of my life.

Canisius College Keeps their Connection Growing

Winter Service Week - January 5-11, 2014
Ignatian Retreat - January 24-25, 2014
Spring Service Week - March 16-22, 2014
Women’s Retreat - April 4-5, 2014

Are you looking for ways to bring your faith-life into action?
Are you willing to look for and see the face of Christ in every person and encounter you have?
Are you yearning for meaning that will stay with you for the rest of your life?
Are you ready to “open your eyes to the light that comes from God, and your ears to the voice from the heavens?” (Rule of Benedict, Prologue)

If so, consider responding to God’s call to live the Gospel message more intensely as part of a religious community. Come and see if our community might be the right one for you!

For more information, contact:
Sister Marilyn Schauble, OSB
Mount St. Benedict Monastery
6101 East Lake Road
Erie, PA 16511
vocations@mtstbenedict.org
or visit ErieBenedictines.org

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"I have some exciting news," wrote Sister Joan Chittister to prison chaplains and volunteers across the country who monthly receive free spiritual publications from her Fund for Prisoners. Her exciting news was an invitation to participate in a pilot program to create Monasteries of the Heart communities among prison populations.

Monasteries of the Heart is a new form of Benedictine life for our time. It is a monastic movement for lay people designed to respond to the great hunger and thirst for spirituality that exists in today’s world — even among prisoners. As the inspiration behind this movement, this monastery “without walls,” Sister Joan envisioned the rehabilitation impact of creating such monasteries in prisons by offering the same life-changing Benedictine values to prisoners.

Already in contact with 90 prison ministers nationwide through the Fund for Prisoners, Monasteries of the Heart applied for and received a pilot grant from the Hilton Fund for Sisters to train 20 prison ministers to begin the new monastic program in prisons. The staff organized two leadership training seminars for interested prison ministers, scheduling one each on the east and west coasts.

The first of two seminars took place in October at Mount Saint Benedict Monastery in Erie, PA. The second seminar will take place in February 2014 at San Damiano retreat center in Danville, CA.

The seminar, conducted by Mary Ellen Plumb, OSB, a staff member of MOH, included prayer and reflection together as well as the study of the qualities of the monastic way of life, the nature of monastic leadership and practical guidelines for setting up and sustaining regularly scheduled Monastery of the Heart gatherings for incarcerated men and women.

“Nothing mattered more,” Sister Mary Ellen noted, “than the solidarity this seminar experience created for those with a shared passion for ministering to ‘the forgotten’ and the energy it generated for those who are determined to bring this hope, this new life to the prisoners with whom they work.”

Seminar participants plan to stay in touch with each other and the Monasteries of the Heart staff by forming their own online community where they can share experiences, exchange creative ideas, and glean advice for confronting the unique challenges of prison ministry.

As one participant put it, “This has been like a dream come true for me — until now, I felt so alone in all I was trying to do – now, I take back to the imprisoned women with whom I work, the certainty that we are part of a much larger community sharing the same journey to wholeness and into the heart of God.” Or as another explained, “The shared core of what is already in process at Monasteries of the Heart, the foundation of the monastic way of life, is edifying as I begin this new and exciting phase of prison ministry.”

Imagine what might happen in the hearts of men and women who live in the loud, harsh environments of our prisons when they receive, and answer, an invitation to create a monastery of the heart where they are. “I have some exciting news,” indeed.

If you’d like to support this ministry, please visit the Joan Chittister Fund for Prisoners web page, joanchittister.org/prisoners.html. Monasteries of the Heart can be found at monasteriesoftheheart.org
The Oblate Way of Life

Oblate Commitment Ceremony
The annual Oblate Commitment Ceremony was celebrated at Mount Saint Benedict Monastery on Saturday, October 26, when over 260 women and men renewed their commitment to the Erie Benedictines as oblates. More than 100 oblates were present for the commitment rite that took place at Evening Praise. During the ceremony, nine people became initiates (the initial commitment that leads to becoming an oblate) and then joined the renewing oblates in expressing a desire to seek God and respond in prayer and ministry and to support the community’s Corporate Commitment: As Benedictine Sisters of Erie we commit ourselves to be a healing presence and prophetic witness for peace by working for sustainability and justice, especially for women and children.

“Ultimately oblates commit themselves to relationship,” said Prioress Sister Anne Wambach in her reflections. “With God, with our community, with all humanity, and with all creation. To be in relationship with this community is to stand with the poor, to embrace justice, to act with integrity and to love inclusively.”

As part of the commitment ceremony, the sisters blessed and welcomed all of the initiates and oblates into a relationship of mutual support and invited them to be a strong voice calling for the transformation of the world. The community expressed their affirmation in these words:

May God give you the courage to live the Gospel authentically.

May the Rule of Benedict be a guiding light on your journey with God.

May your lives continue to be transformed by God’s ever-abiding love.

May you be filled with love for the poor of the world.

May you embrace all creation and work for the healing transformation of the universe.

To learn more about the Oblate Way of Life visit ErieBenedictines.org/oblates or contact co-directors, Sisters Ann Hoffman and Audrey Steff, at oblates@mtstbenedict.org or 814-899-0614.
Erie Benedictine oblate Kelly Adamson was one of 38 North American oblates selected to attend the World Oblate Congress in Rome in October 2013. The Congress, which takes place in Rome every four years, brings together oblates from around the world for a week of prayer, input, conversation and reflection. Kelly makes her home in Beavercreek, OH, with her husband, Jason, and daughter, Sophie. She is campus minister at the University of Dayton. Kelly’s reflections on her experience follow.

“How was Rome?”

I am still unsure how to field this question, and it’s not because of lack of practice. I’ve heard it many times by now, and it usually comes with an inflection, a facial expression, or even a wording (was it wonderful?) that tells me there is an expected answer. Part of the dilemma of answering this seemingly simple question lies in the complexity of my own thoughts and the fact that I am only beginning to sift through it all. During the World Oblate Congress I wrote in my journal, “This schizophrenic psalmist is resonating with my experiences during these days here.”

The other dilemma in responding to the question, “How was Rome?” lies in my own unspoken concerns about the questioner: “Does this person really want to know the truth? Are they ready? Am I ready to trust them with my story?”

As a seeker and a Benedictine oblate, I want to say that I am about the single-minded search for God. The question I began asking myself before I left was, “Do I trust that God is enough for me?” What does it mean to trust that God is enough?

On the morning of my departure as I searched frantically for my rosary (as a nervous flyer, I have come to trust that Mary and I are the only thing that keeps that plane in the air), I heard a voice in my head say, “Do you trust me?” “Yes,” I replied. I gave up the search, although my husband found the rosary minutes later! Glad to have that question answered (Hah!), I got in the car and made a last minute stop at the bookstore for an Italian-English dictionary. Trust?! As I got back in the car I nervously began wondering what I thought I was doing heading all by myself to a country where I do not speak the language. I started the car and Mumford and Sons’ “I Will Wait” was on the radio. Suddenly, I knew again that God was waiting for me…to settle, to fall heavy into God’s arms, to trust, to believe I am enough, to see God anew. More of these graces followed throughout my travel to Rome: opportunities to trust that God is enough.

As the Congress unfolded, themes of trust and enough continued to unfold and questions continued. In the opening evening’s remarks an oblate spoke of all that is expected of us as oblates, and as oblates from around the world seemed to nod knowingly, I suddenly felt like a Benedictine slacker! This feeling continued
throughout the Congress as others spoke of expectations and rigorous formation processes. Suddenly, I began to wonder, what is expected of me from my community? I have a vague answer, but what specifically might be expected?

As this particular Benedictine community has given me a space where I have come to know myself as enough for God, my insistent questions upon beginning to be an oblate, “What does this mean? What am I promising? What do I do?” resurfaced in the face of other oblates who seemed so sure of what was expected of them. I am coming to realize that I want to hold on to this sense of being enough that is a gift this community has given me while also being challenged to not settle for less than enough in seeking God and living oblation. Is God calling me to more prayer? More action? What action? How can I trust in my “enoughness” without becoming complacent or, to paraphrase Sister Joan Chittister, without swimming in my own backwater? Who beyond this Congress will challenge me in this? How can the Erie Benedictines and our oblate community continue to form and challenge me?

As the days went by old wounds opened up and familiar questions arose. Most, if not all, of the consistent and vocal leaders at the congress leadership table were male. All of the vowed Benedictine leaders were men. All of the lay leaders who were consistently present and who spoke (beyond housekeeping and time-keeping items) were men. At San Anselmo, the Benedictine center of Rome, the tour/orientation guide spoke of the wonderful unifying nature of the place, emphasizing both that it unites all Benedictines and emphasizing the roles of the 20 confederations of Benedictine men. How can all Benedictines and men be the same? How do women relate? As we visited the monasteries at Subiaco and Monte Cassino, both Benedictine birthplaces, several of us wondered, “Where would Scholasticas (Benedict’s sister and the founder of a women’s community) monastery have been? Do we know?” As we asked around, no one we spoke to seemed to know, which wasn’t as troubling as the fact that the questions didn’t even seem to occur to most people. I expected to encounter my wrestling with gender issues in the Church when I went to Rome. What I did not expect was to wrestle with them in the Benedictine family. That was probably naïve of me.

But in this place, in our community, the Erie Benedictines are the people, the community in the Church, who have given me hope for the future. It is here that I have come to feel what I know intellectually, that I am made in the image and likeness of God.

Prayer after reading 2 Corinthians 5:18-21
Reconcile me O God
Reconcile me
And I shall be your ambassador
Yet, you have reconciled me
Help me accept reconciliation
Help me accept You
Your perfect Gift, your perfect Sacrifice
Help me accept me
Your imperfect gift, your imperfect sacrifice
That my oblation may be holy and acceptable in your sight.

Rome
Lord, I have come seeking your holiness
I have found my anger
I have come seeking you
And have found me.
I have come seeking mystical experience
And have experienced Church
Messy
Divided
Painful
Beautiful
Not in spite of my womanhood, but with my womanhood. It is this community that trusts me as one called by God to ministry. This community sees that as natural rather than an oddity or a problem to figure out. It is in the chapel in Erie, in the dining room, in the halls, that I most know myself to be loved, and that I can most trust that I am enough for God. How can we, as women, speak this truth and find our voice in the church, and in our Benedictine family?

Speakers also challenged me. Sister Mary John Mananzan from the Philippines made me question, “What is enough?” She stopped in the middle of her speech, looked up and said, “You people in the first world must really look at yourselves. You are likely the reason the rest of the world is so poor.” That rings in your heart differently when you are surrounded by folks from developing nations. What is enough? How much is enough? For me? For my family?

Australian monk Michael Casey paused to say, “If you add up your time spent in lectio and with scripture and compare that to the time you spend watching TV and listening to the radio or other media, that will tell you what is really shaping you.” Yikes! I think I’ve heard this before, but I’m embarrassed to answer the question, “What is shaping me?”

Working groups of oblates exploring such questions as the role of silence in the Rule, the oblates’ relationship to the monastery, living oblation in our time, and listening surfaced lively conversations and debates and many questions. How is silence treated in the Rule, explicitly or implicitly? (How) do I practice silence in my life? How does the monastery transform the oblate? (How) do oblates transform the monastery? Since the congress I have wondered, how does formation of the oblate express trust in the oblate as one called to live a Benedictine oblate vocation? The working group also explored whether Christ’s kenosis, Christ’s self-emptying, might be a way to understand oblation. I wrote in my journal, “Oblation for me is not sacrifice, it is not self-emptying – I was wounded, being part of church was sacrifice. I was empty and feared invisible. In oblation, I found a community that saw me. Now, I can see myself as a sacrifice ‘holy and acceptable’ to God.” What is required to listen? What is our image of the God we are listening to/for?

These questions are only a beginning of the questions the Spirit had for me. I trust that the Spirit will be with me as I continue to wrestle with them. I pray, in the Benedictine charism, that we may wrestle with these and other questions together. After all, ours is the charism of seeking God together in community.
Sister Christine Vladimiroff, Executive Director of St. Benedict Education Center and former prioress, was one of nine women honored as Distinguished Daughters of Pennsylvania during a luncheon ceremony hosted by Governor Tom Corbett and First Lady Susan Corbett at the Governor’s residence in Harrisburg on October 16. The women were recognized as examples of how one person can make a difference. “While their community service and career paths span many different areas, all of the honorees have positively impacted the lives of their fellow Pennsylvanians through their leadership and commitment to their work,” said Governor Corbett.

In her remarks, Sister Christine acknowledged, “With opportunity and recognition comes responsibility. This gathering from our State makes it evident that the women in this room are exceptional and our beauty lies in the work we choose to do, in the meaning we have given our lives, and in what we do for ourselves and for one another. Our society is better because we have been engaged in the human endeavor of making the world a better place.”

Sister Anne Wambach, prioress, accompanied Sister Christine along with Sisters Diane Cook and Katherine Horan. “It was a very special event and we couldn’t be more proud,” said Sister Anne. “Sister Christine’s leadership and personal strength have been the source of inspiration for many, as well as the foundation of innumerable and extraordinary accomplishments.”

Distinguished Daughters of Pennsylvania began in 1948 as a way to honor women who have shown distinguished service through a professional career and/or voluntary service. The women are nominated to receive the honor by non-profit organizations within Pennsylvania.

Sister Christine Vladimiroff, OSB, has dedicated her strong leadership skills in service to others, especially in fighting hunger and poverty in America. She served as President and CEO of Second Harvest, the nation’s largest food bank network, as Board Chair of Bread for the World, a 60,000 member faith-based community, and as a delegate to the World Food Summit.

A former Superintendent of Schools for the Diocese of Cleveland, she served as prioress of the Benedictine Sisters, as President of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious in the United States and President of the Conference of Benedictine Prioresses. She is Executive Director of St. Benedict’s Education Center in Erie and also leads the Pennsylvania Welfare to Work Program in six counties in Northwest Pennsylvania where she focuses much of her work helping refugees.

Throughout her life, Sister Christine has devoted her considerable energy and inspirational leadership to helping those in the greatest need in the state, the nation and throughout the world.
From All Of Us...
To All Of You...

“Women of heaven, women of earth, by your commitment, by your rebirth lead us through darkness, send us God’s light; by your example keep our hope bright.”

Women of God – Hymn by Mary David Callahan, OSB (1923-2005)

You make miracles and magic happen every day of the year

by Jo Clarke, Oblate, Director of Annual Giving

Did you believe in Santa Claus when you were a child?

Did you believe that the gifts under the tree on Christmas morning were placed there by a jolly, bearded man in a red suit?

Did you believe that this larger-than-life figure delivered gifts to children around the world in ONE night?

And did you believe that Santa Claus not only travelled the globe in one night, but he did it in a sleigh pulled by eight flying reindeer?

I expect, like me, you did! But what happened? Somewhere along the way someone told us that Santa didn’t exist…and then we began to grow up, mature and think logically. We realized there were expectations on our behavior and we began to worry about being successful, fitting in and doing things the right way…in other words, we became an adult! Unfortunately in many ways these cultural norms that we assimilated prevent us from seeing the magic and miracles that are right in front of our eyes every day.

The Benedictine sisters, along with you and me: their oblates, staff, friends, families and donors, still believe in magic and miracles, because at Christmas we celebrate perhaps the greatest miracle of all! We celebrate the miracle of a child who was born to bring God’s light into a dark world and to keep our hope bright. Individually it’s difficult — together, all is possible.

Some among us have a clear vision of what is possible through this miracle of God’s light and love. Others guide us along the path that leads to fulfillment of the vision. There are those who can easily share their passion and excitement for the vision, energizing those around them into supporting it and making it a reality.

At its inception the vision is just an idea. It might be something that no one has yet seen or experienced but we come to believe that we can reach the vision and make it a reality. Why? Because we already are doing it with the support of like-minded people who believe that the newborn infant in the manger came to bring the message of light, hope, and peace to our troubled world every day, not just at Christmas.

You, our loyal friends and supporters, make it possible for the miracle of Christmas to touch countless lives 365 days of the year. Your financial gift supports the sisters in a wide range of ministries, whether it’s the sister who:

- spends her day in the kitchen preparing the nourishing meals for the community, employees and the many guests;
- coordinates the operations of the monastery so that all who find refuge there have a comfortable place to renew their energy;

by Jo Clarke, Oblate, Director of Annual Giving

Did you believe in Santa Claus when you were a child?

Did you believe that the gifts under the tree on Christmas morning were placed there by a jolly, bearded man in a red suit?

Did you believe that this larger-than-life figure delivered gifts to children around the world in ONE night?

And did you believe that Santa Claus not only travelled the globe in one night, but he did it in a sleigh pulled by eight flying reindeer?

I expect, like me, you did! But what happened? Somewhere along the way someone told us that Santa didn’t exist…and then we began to grow up, mature and think logically. We realized there were expectations on our behavior and we began to worry about being successful, fitting in and doing things the right way…in other words, we became an adult! Unfortunately in many ways these cultural norms that we assimilated prevent us from seeing the magic and miracles that are right in front of our eyes every day.

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You make miracles and magic happen every day of the year

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Thank You!

- oversees the grounds and maintenance at the monastery so that all who live and work there do so in a safe environment;
- welcomes all guests like Christ;
- pays the bills making sure that resources are used wisely while caring for all;
- facilitates the liturgical life of the worshiping community;
- oversees the community’s development programs;
- answers the door and the phone whatever time of night or day;
- spreads the message of the Benedictine community through publications like this.

A simple, balanced way of life nourishes and allows the sisters, oblates and volunteers to continue to minister to inner-city children, to the elderly, the poor and the hungry in the many ministries outside of the monastery.

As Sister Joan Chittister writes, “It is labor’s transfiguration of the commonplace, the transformation of the ordinary that makes co-creators of us all.” We have many different skills and talents but we are all part of a common spirit that envisions a human race where all have the right and opportunity to live the Christmas message of hope and peace, whether you were born in a manger or in a mansion.

Be a part of bringing this vision to life by adding this Benedictine community to your Christmas gift list. A financial gift to our Christmas appeal will be graciously received no matter the amount. Whether it is $1 or $1,000, the sisters smile and say, “THANK YOU!”

Just look at the faces of the sisters on the previous pages and remember the words of Sister Mary David Callahan: “Women of heaven, women of earth, by your commitment, by your rebirth lead us through darkness, send us God’s light; by your example keep our hope bright.”

Thank you for believing in the real spirit and miracle of Christmas.

Other ways to bring the spirit of Christmas to life:

- **Give the gift of love** by sending someone who is dear to you an alternative gift. An alternative Christmas gift will touch the lives of the sisters and those they serve. A Christmas card will be sent to the gift recipient announcing your gift. The amount will not be mentioned in the card.

- **Believe in a future with possibilities for all** by remembering the Benedictine Sisters of Erie in your will. By joining The Benedictine Legacy Society, you can continue to make a real difference in the lives of people for generations to come. If you have already included the sisters in your will, please call us or drop us a line and let us know. If you haven’t yet made a will and would like to talk with someone about your specific needs and vision, call Sister Mary Jane Vergotz, Director of Development, at 814-899-0614, ext. 2409, or email her at smaryjane@mtstbenedict.org. She will be more than happy to sit down and talk with you about our visions for the future.

- **To send your Christmas gift to the sisters** either use the remittance envelope included in this magazine or go to our secure website, ErieBenedictines.org, and click on Ways to Give. Please feel free to call me, Jo Clarke, Director of Annual Giving, at 814-899-0614, ext. 2281, or email me at joclarke@mtstbenedict.org with any questions or concerns.
Miracles do happen...

It was early spring and everyone was looking forward to warm days, lots of sunshine, and simply being able to get outside without having to bundle up in ten layers of clothing. Unfortunately, what sometimes comes with the promise of spring are heavy downpours, and this past year “heavy” was an understatement.

Here at the monastery, it rained so heavily that the sump pump failed and a huge area on the lower ground floor was flooded with water and mud. However, it wasn’t a total disaster as no one was hurt, but it did do a great deal of damage, destroyed papers, caused some sisters to have to abandon their offices, and resulted in an expensive cleanup and long-term fix. When people tell you that disasters can have a silver lining, they are right in this case. There was one little miracle that emerged from the monastery flood: we found the missing angel!

For the past three Christmases, we have featured one of four stained glass angel windows that came from the sisters’ original motherhouse on East 9th Street on the cover of The Mount magazine. Unfortunately, after searching high and low around the monastery, which is quite large, we were not able to track down the fourth angel. It was lost and the only thing we could think was that somehow it had been thrown out by mistake. As unthinkable as that was, we couldn’t find any other explanation for its disappearance. Then, low and behold — when the maintenance men were clearing out some items high up in a storage area that had been flooded, there she was, our fourth angel. They found two pieces of the four-piece window, and the top piece with her lovely head, face and small lyre, was still intact. The stained glass was dirty and falling apart, but the angel window was decidedly fixable.

As you can see from the picture, she needs quite a bit of restoration. But also, as you can see from the magazine cover photo, when the light shines through the window the fourth angel is really very beautiful.

Miracles do happen and perhaps one day in the not too distant future hopefully you’ll see her in all her glory, renovated and displayed in the monastery. In the meantime, please enjoy her on the cover of this issue of The Mount.
Meet Amelia Rose, daughter of Megan and Chris, and “foster grandchild” of Sister Judith Bohn. While guests in the form of newborn babies are no strangers to Mount Saint Benedict Monastery, this little one came with a very special history.

For 16 years Sister Judith Bohn fostered babies. It was in November 1979 that she welcomed her first “Benedictine baby,” naming her Joy. In the ensuing years, until 1995, 30 babies followed. “I only accepted one baby at a time,” said Sister Judith.

“I always believed these little ones were so special that they needed one-on-one attention and care.” The babies stayed at the Mount anywhere from six weeks to four months depending on the given situation. Sometimes the birth mother would be ready to take the baby back; other times adoptive parents were chosen.

Megan was one of Sister Judith’s foster babies. With her bright red hair and quick smile she was easily remembered long after her adoptive parents welcomed her into their home. Sister Judith always knew there was no guarantee that she would ever see the foster babies again once they went to their new homes. If the child went back to the birth mother, the relationship ended there. But for adopted babies, the decision for an on-going relationship was in the hands of the adoptive parents. And while this detachment was difficult, Sister Judith knew it was important: “If the relationship was to continue I knew it was the decision of the new permanent parents. I loved all the babies entrusted to my care but in my heart I knew that their time with me was temporary and a stepping stone to a forever family.”

Megan’s adoptive parents chose to nurture the relationship that had begun in a monastery with a foster mom and lots of foster grandmoms and aunts. Through the years they visited regularly and Sister Judith and the community were able to watch Megan grow and meet life’s various milestones. Now, Megan is a mom and as Sister Judith explains, “I think that makes me a foster grandmom and I love it.”

Amelia Rose is a beautiful little baby, born into a loving family and wonderful parents. “I am so pleased Megan and Chris brought Amelia back to the first home Megan knew,” shared Sister Judith. “It was very special to extend the love and welcome and care that are so much a part of my Benedictine living with a new little one, especially one who is my foster grandbaby!”
**Happenings**

**Benedictine Sisters Receive Erie’s Excel Award**

County Executive Barry Grossman presented the county’s Excel Award to the Benedictine Sisters of Erie at a press conference at the County Courthouse on September 17. Mr. Grossman explained that he gives the award to “thank people who really make a difference in this community” and in the case of the Benedictine Sisters, for “making our community kinder and gentler every day.”

At Mr. Grossman’s invitation, Sisters Mary Miller (Director, Emmaus Ministries), Mary Lou Kownacki (Director, Benetvision Publications and Monasteries of the Heart), Christine Vladimiroff (Executive Director, St. Benedict Education Center), Miriam Mashank (Director Emerita, St. Benedict Education Center) and Joan Chittister (Author and Lecturer) accompanied prioress, Sister Anne Wambach, as she accepted the award in the name of the community for its commitment to provide education and social services to many people in the Erie area.

In her remarks Sister Anne thanked Mr. Grossman and Erie County for the honor given to the Benedictine Sisters saying, “Those who have no work, cannot work or no longer work are cared for through our ministries and social programs — with the dignity, care and hospitality fitting their circumstances. If they need food we provide it. If they need assistance in navigating government systems, we can help. If they need housing, we know how to advise them. Furthermore, as a faith community of religious women, we offer ‘food for the soul’ through the spirituality we live and share.

“As we have been in Erie and ministered in the surrounding townships and small cities for over 150 years now, we have worked side by side with our lay employees, oblates and many volunteers in caring and providing for a finer quality of life for all in northwestern Pennsylvania. As followers of Benedict we know that all work is the co-creation of the world. Whatever we can do to make the world a better place for all its people is well worth it.”

**Sister Joan Recognized by Penn State University**

Sister Joan Chittister was recognized as one of eight Library Leaders at a Donor Reception held at the Penn State University Library on October 11. This annual event recognizes friends of the library who have contributed $25,000 or more annually. Sister Joan was honored because of the recent donation of her Literary Archives to Penn State. As reported in the last issue of *The Mount* magazine, Sister Joan has established an archival collaboration between the Benedictine Sisters of Erie, Penn State University, and Mercyhurst University in Erie to preserve and make accessible her accumulated works. These three institutions have a common desire to preserve the works of Sister Joan, described in a Penn State press release as “an internationally renowned writer and lecturer and one of the most articulate social analysts and influential religious leaders of this age.”

**Sister Patricia Hause: Recipient of the ICA Member of the Year Award**

The Independent Council on Aging (ICA) honored Board Member Sister Patricia Hause, administrator of Benetwood Apartments, with its “Member of the Year” Award at its June meeting.

Benetwood is a 75-unit government-subsidized non-profit apartment facility that is a ministry of the Benedictine Sisters. It offers housing to low-income elderly and handicapped persons and provides Benedictine hospitality to the elderly. Sister Audrey Berdis, service coordinator at Benetwood Apartments, shared that “Sister Pat is very deserving of this award. She is untiring in the contribution of her presence, time and energy as a board member of ICA.”

The ICA, which meets monthly, has as its mission “to improve the quality of life for mature adults while fostering a positive image of aging.”
Not Different Yet Different

Every year the Benedictine Sisters show their appreciation to the Fairfield Hose Company, the volunteer firefighters and EMTs (emergency medical technicians) who respond immediately when a call goes out from the monastery. It is generally over a spaghetti dinner where more than 35 Fairfield men and women along with some of their spouses and children sit at table among the sisters they are committed to protect. After dinner the firefighters present an educational moment that exposes the sisters to a new safety practice or piece of equipment or rescue procedure. Dessert, always a make-your-own ice cream sundae bar, follows. The sisters give their guests a little gift and there are a few special door prizes. This year was no different, and yet it was different.

Maybe it was the moment when everyone bowed their heads and asked God’s blessing on the celebration. Or when all the new officers, by their choice, took their oath of office in the presence of the community.

Then again, it could have been the plaque the department awarded to the community for its kindness and support. Or maybe it was the moment when the department recognized Sister Marcia Sigler, one of their own, a former EMT volunteer at Fairfield, for celebrating her golden jubilee in September.

Possibly it was the delight shown when the firefighters received homemade monastery quick breads. Maybe it was the glee of being a door prize winner or the presentation of a special gift to Captain James Hawryliw.

But maybe, just maybe, it was an old realization made new: the sisters and the Fairfield Hose Company have a lot in common. Both are communities willing to risk their lives to help others, who know what it means to be a neighbor and a friend, who enjoy each other’s company, who take pleasure in simple things like a spaghetti dinner and ice cream sundaes. Both understand what it means to be committed and self-giving.

Sister Marcia, who organizes the annual event, shared, “Saying thank you to these volunteers has always been important to our community and this pleasant, fun-filled evening is a small gesture on our part to do just that. In fact, I am already planning for next year!”

Annual Benedictine-Benetwood Dinner

The Benedictine Sisters of Erie welcomed their neighbors from Benetwood Apartments for what has become an annual event: Evening Prayer followed by a special dinner – a simple celebration of friendship, faith, food and fun.

This year, more than 60 residents attended the September event. “I love coming,” said Jean, a Benetwood resident for almost 19 years. “The sisters always make me feel so special!”

After prayer with the community, the guests were invited to the dining room for dinner. Maryann, a Benetwood resident for three years, shared, “People say food is always good when you don’t have to cook it yourself — but this food was exceptional! We had great conversation and a lot of fun at our table.”

Benetwood Apartments, a community ministry that offers monastic hospitality to low income elderly and handicapped persons, is located on property adjacent to the monastery. The 75-unit apartment building is a government subsidized non-profit facility administered by Sister Patricia Hause. Her staff includes Benedictine Sisters Marla Bleil, Audrey Berdis and Ann Hoffman.
"Center Down" — Discover the Light Within

Quaker Dr. Alan Kolp offered Benedictine sisters, oblates and guests a new understanding of contemplation based on the Quaker perspective of “centering down” at the September Enrichment Series Lecture in the monastery chapel.

A professor, lecturer and author from Baldwin Wallace University, Dr. Kolp explained how the process of contemplation can be summed up very simply in four words: discover, engage, embody and practice the Presence. By “centering down” one can get in touch with the “Light,” the God within, and become enlightened. In addition, Dr. Kolp pointed out, “to be a contemplative is to be intentional about being in touch with one’s center.”

The lecture concluded with a period of “centering down” — an opportunity for all present to move the new information from the head to the heart during a time of silence and stillness.

In expressing her gratitude to Dr. Kolp, who is also a Benedictine Oblate and member of First Friends meeting, Richmond, IN, Sister Stephanie Schmidt, director of ongoing formation, said, “I quote Meister Eckhart, ‘What one takes in by contemplation, one pours out in love.’ Thank you, Alan, for pouring out so simply and for calling us to center down so we, too, can go forth pouring out love and making a difference.”

The Enrichment Series began in 2012 with the goal of inviting the local Erie community to the monastery to share some of the community’s educational and inspirational opportunities on a broader scale. The events are announced on the community website, eriebenedictines.org, and anyone is invited to attend.
Cultivating Compassion in an Interfaith World

During the community’s October Weekend, Dr. Julie Hliboki engaged the Erie Benedictine sisters and oblates in an appreciation of the major non-Christian religions by exploring the similarities and differences among the world’s great wisdom traditions. She emphasized the elements common to us as human beings in Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism and Islam and focused on our capacity for compassion. “Julie’s tour of world religions and introduction to the beauty of each one was a heart and soul tour,” commented Sister Stephanie Schmidt, Director of Ongoing Formation. “Julie has personified a holy presence among us and inspired a new enthusiasm for seeking compassion.”

As part of the day’s input, Dr. Hliboki talked about the Ninety-Nine Names Peace Project that she established to connect artists dedicated to peace by inviting them to paint one of the 99 names of God. As an artist herself, Dr. Hliboki has been inspired to create watercolor mandalas expressing the various names of God, several of which she showed during her presentations. In addition, Dr. Hliboki shared parts of her 2012 publication, Cultivating Compassion in an Interfaith World: 99 Meditations to Embrace the Beloved. Published by Transilient Publishing, the book is an invitation to deepen into relationship with the Beloved through cultivating compassion.

Dr. Hliboki earned her Doctor of Ministry from the Graduate Theological Foundation, an affiliate of Oxford University. She has studied and practiced the world’s religions for many years.

With the Help of Giant Eagle the Landice Has Landed

Thanks to the efforts of Patti Eichen, Mount Saint Benedict Development Staff, and the generosity of The Giant Eagle Foundation, the monastery fitness area now has a new Landice L7 Sports Trainer Treadmill. The Landice replaces a 20-year-old treadmill that has seen much use.

“All that we behold is full of blessings (William Wordsworth),” says Patti, “and we are most grateful to The Giant Eagle Foundation in Pittsburg for the generous $3,500 grant that allowed us to purchase this new, state of the art treadmill. It is a huge contribution to the promotion of the fitness and wellness that maintains the health and spirit of this Benedictine community.”

The fitness area at the monastery encourages a healthy lifestyle by providing the opportunity for sisters, oblates, and guests staying at the monastery and employees who work there to utilize the exercise equipment.

Sister Helen Heher, Director of Wellness Services at Mount Saint Benedict Monastery, develops and coordinates a holistic wellness program for the Benedictine community that includes use of the fitness area. Her focus and efforts encourage the greater integration of mind, body and soul.
On a September afternoon, friends, benefactors, neighbors and children gathered at the East 22nd Street Poetry Park to enjoy a celebration of poetry. The event began on the corner of East 22nd and Ash Streets with the dedication of a “Little Free Library,” a project of Gannon University’s Erie-GAINS (Gannon Alliances to Improve Neighborhood Sustainability) Initiative. The project is an attempt to promote literacy and love of reading through the building of free book exchanges.

After the dedication, the gathering moved across the street to the Poetry Park where guests were treated to a poetry reading hosted by Chuck Joy, local author and lover of poetry. Invited poets, Sara Ries, creator of the Woodlawn Diner Poetry Series in Buffalo, NY, and Don Wentworth, publisher and editor of the Lilliput Review who travelled from Pittsburg, started the reading. An open mic followed and several members of the audience shared their original poems. The reading session ended with poetry written and shared by Sister Mary Lou Kownacki, who together with Sisters Mary Miller, Mary Ellen Plumb and Anne McCarthy, brings a Benedictine presence to the East 22nd neighborhood.

The concluding event was a foot-tapping fun time of music provided by The Bangerzz, a local Erie band. Children and guests listened or sang along in between bites of hot dogs and snacks provided courtesy of Gannon University and the Erie Community Foundation.
Emmaus Grove—The Miracle on East 11 Street

Emmaus Ministries partnered with Ellen DiPlacido and Rosemary Gantz to begin Emmaus Grove: The Erie Urban Farm School. As co-directors of the project, these two women worked with benefactors and volunteers to turn an empty lot into a small urban farm with 65 raised beds and a 500 square foot outdoor classroom. Located next to the Emmaus Soup Kitchen, the miracle on East 11th Street was able to teach its neighbors to both grow and share fresh food.

“This urban farm is our newest attempt to meet the needs of Erie’s poor,” explained Sister Mary Miller, Director of Emmaus Ministries. “It was our dream to feed bodies and souls and to teach minds and hearts,” said Ellen. Rosemary added, “It has been a blessing for me to be able to share my passion for gardening. What I received in return is more than words can express.”

The luscious beauty and prosperous growth of Emmaus Grove has allowed many to see that miracles can happen when vision is combined with generosity, support, hard work and effort.

Visit Emmaus Grove on Facebook (facebook.com/EmmausGrove) to learn about its ongoing activities. The project’s first season and its success in providing free organic vegetables, herbs and classes to people the city is only the first of many seasons and successes yet to come.

Sr. Anne Wambach, Prioress, and Sr. Mary Miller, Director of Emmaus Ministries
As you’ve read this issue of The Mount you may have noticed the theme of “miracles and magic” running through its articles. To help us develop this theme, our editor offered quotes for us to ponder, and one in particular drew my attention. It was a quote of Mother Theresa: “The miracle is not that we do this work, but that we are happy to do it.”

Another thought that caught my attention was a question posed by the same editor: “Are others touched by miracles and magic because of your work?”

Thus my question was: Miracles and SBA? Does it fit? Is there a miracle in what we do, and if so, are we happy to do it? Do we help to provide miracles and magic for others?

Is there a “miracle scale” from 1 to 10? If it exists, would any of the following activities of the SBA Alumnae be measurable:

- providing Christmas gifts of clothing, games and books for impoverished children through Emmaus Ministries;
- providing financial assistance in purchasing equipment, books and supplies for pre-school inner-city children at the Saint Benedict Child Development Center;
- providing financial assistance to programs for immigrant families with children at Saint Benedict Education Center;
- helping to purchase outdoor furniture for seniors at Benetwood;
- providing financial assistance for the purchase of instruments and supplies for the Inner-City Neighborhood Art House;
- providing financial assistance for purchasing and replenishing equipment for the Saint Benedict Community Center?

I think the answer is a loud and resounding YES. The women of the Saint Benedict Academy Alumnae Association continue to support the Benedictine Sisters of Erie and their various ministries. We are grateful for the education we received and ever mindful of our own Benedictine roots. The generosity of time and presence of the SBA women, their prayers and monetary support have had an impact on the lives of many.

Are we happy to do it? Again, YES. Anyone who has read past editions of The Mount knows this to be true. Consider the number of pictures from Christmas Parties, Summer Picnics, Spring Luncheons, Concerts, Homecoming Events, Communion Brunches and more. Lord knows, for every cause the SBA Alum hold a social event. That’s who we are and that’s how we perform our small miracles, always with a smile, always with those friends we never can forget.
Reunions

We want to hear from you! Class reunions every five years are a tradition with SBA alumnae. We will gladly include information regarding your reunion on our website. Send us the facts and we’ll post them as soon as we get them. We’ll send you an updated class list from our database and a set of mailing labels. Please provide us with any follow up stories and photos (digital, please) you might wish to share and we will post them on our website (ErieBenedictines.org/sba-alum). Classes who are planning reunions are eligible to receive a $35 check to help defray mailing costs. We ask that you provide us with new or updated addresses for the database. It is one of the best ways we have to keep in touch.

Please contact Ann Comstock. Call 814-899-0614 ext. 2573 or contact by email: sbaalum@mtstbenedict.org

Please visit our Website

Due to the timing of *The Mount* magazine schedule, SBA’s two main social events usually have been held by the time the magazine is published. **Check the website eriebenedictines.org/sba-alum frequently for current information.** There will always be an announcement on the page regarding upcoming events along with a downloadable reservation form that can be printed at work or home.

For those living out of town and unable to attend, we always include numerous photos of the event on the website. You can view the occasion and try to spot any classmates. You can also view pictures from past events. They are archived for your enjoyment.

**Visit ErieBenedictines.org/sba-alum** 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 East Lake Road, Erie, PA, 16511. Whenever you see or hear about SBA alumnae being honored or highlighted for their achievements, let us know. Clip an article or jot down the details then call, write or email us the information so we can share the news with all our members.
Each year we begin the celebration of Christmas with our annual Christmas Party. Last year we celebrated Peppermint Twist 2012 with reservations for 469 attendees. Traditionally we raffle off an incredible assortment of themed gift baskets to raise funds to support one of the Benedictine Sisters’ ministries. It is a gala event and everyone is encouraged to attend. Each year we get closer to our goal of 500 attendees. Maybe 2013 will be the year!

Last spring we hosted a new event, a Spring Luncheon followed by a visit to SBA Academy to “Walk-the-Halls,” held on a Saturday in June. Ten vendors were at the luncheon for the guests’ shopping pleasure displaying jewelry, candy, candles, and soap among the items for sale. The following day a liturgy and social gathering were held at Mount Saint Benedict Monastery for the alums and it was all a great success. The event planners hoped for 50 alums and got 200! Two classes used the event as part of their reunion celebrations and many alums who were unable to attend the Christmas Party were able to join us that day.

We have decided to repeat the event. There will be a luncheon on Saturday, May 31, 2014 at the Ambassador Center. The following day, Sunday June 1, there will be a liturgy and social event at the Monastery.

Keep this in mind if you are planning a reunion or class get-together. Please watch the mail in March—further information on the luncheon as well as scholarship nomination forms will be sent to all alums.
Faculty and Staff of St. Benedict Academy Reconnect

Sister Roseanne Loneck was on the St. Benedict Academy faculty when the school closed 25 years ago this summer. When she cleaned out her classroom on the last day she brought home the faculty and staff contact list—and she’s kept that list for 25 years and stayed in touch with many of the 40-45 people on it. “We were a faculty and staff that was like family, traveling together in a professional arena as well as celebrating the happy events and difficult times in each other’s lives,” she said. “We were always there for each other.”

That special bond and the 25th anniversary of the school’s closing inspired Sister Roseanne, community liaison to the SBA Alumnae Association, to organize a faculty and staff reunion—an opportunity for former co-workers to reconnect and share memories. Two reunion gatherings were held, one in May and the other in October, at Mount St. Benedict Monastery where the former faculty and staff members joined the sisters, some of whom were also on staff, for prayer, dinner and conversation.

“The reconnection was such a good time that we’ll make it an annual event,” Sister Rosanne said. “The time we shared at SBA touched all of us and coming together again after so many years was its own special kind of homecoming.”

October 12, 2013
Back row (l-r): Sr. Rose Ann Kolbas, Evelyn Caffarel, Marlene Trambley, Mike Manafo, Cecilia Polumbo
Front row (l-r): Sr. Rosanne Loneck, Linda Pikiewicz, Melody Laudensack Lewis, Charlene Antalek, Sr. Pat Lupo

May 4, 2013
Back row (l-r): Sr. Annette Marshall, Sr. Pat Lupo, Steve Zmigrosky, Maria Mioduszewski, Chris Polotas Bowler, Sr. Margaret Zeller
Front Row (l-r): Sr. Mary Ellen Plumb, Sr. Rosanne Loneck, Anne Sundean, Lucille Powers
Give thanks to God upon the harp; with ten-stringed lute chant praise. The Giver of Life fills the earth with Love. (Psalm 33)

The prayers and good wishes of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie resound with joy and thanksgiving for the blessing of support, friendship and care that you so generously extend.

We welcome you to share in our gratitude at Christmas liturgy in the Monastery Chapel: Christmas Eve at 8:30 p.m. and Christmas Day at 9:30 a.m.

May the spirit of Christmas which is peace, the miracle of Christmas which is hope, and the heart of Christmas which is love enrich you and your family throughout this holy season and in the new year to come.