Listen with the ear of your heart

(Rule of Benedict, Prologue)
Listen with the ear of your heart
(Rule of Benedict, Prologue)

Sit down, relax and enjoy what we have to share with you. The pages of this issue of The Mount are filled with stories that will reveal to you the heart and soul of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie. Some of the stories are long; some are short. Some may stimulate your thinking; others will touch your heart. Some might draw you to a new way of seeing or impel you to take action to transform our world. And all of them have the potential to give insight into that about which we are passionate, and to which we are faithful: listening to the call of the Gospel with the ear of our hearts.

As author Madeleine l’Engle says, stories can make us “more alive, more human, more courageous, more loving.” It might be the stories about commitment that you find inspirational — from sisters who have lived religious life for 50, 60 and 70 years or from women just beginning their religious life in this 21st century. Or perhaps it will be the story of Emmaus ministries, 40 years strong and moving forward with even greater desire to respond to the needs of the poor, that motivates you to respond as you are able to those in need. Maybe it will be the efforts of the oblates or college volunteers to be a part of our story or our benefactors, family, friends and SBA Alum who support us that will resonate with you. No matter which it is, as you read try to do as Benedict urges: “Listen with the ear of your heart.” Be attentive to the soul and spirit of those words. There just might be a message in these pages that surprises you and encourages you to live life more fully.

Charlotte Anne Zalot, OSB

Stories can make us “more alive, more human, more courageous, more loving.”
—Madeleine l’Engle
A number of years ago the Indian-born Jesuit Anthony deMello wrote what became a best-seller in both the English and Spanish speaking worlds, *The Song of the Bird*. It is a collection of 125 short wisdom stories from many faith traditions: Christian, Zen, Hasidic, Sufi, Hindu, Chinese — both ancient and modern.

These are timeless stories, as the best stories usually are. Each holds a message, a wisdom teaching, a lesson that is different for every reader. Their messages also change as the reader changes — in age, experiences, and needs. And their meanings can evolve just by the passage of time. What they have in common is that they always elicit a response — one that can range from “ah ha” to “hmmmm.” Or from “WOW” to “What?”

Here is one of my favorites:

“Excuse me,” said one little fish to another. “You are older and more experienced than I, and will probably be able to help me. Tell me: Where can I find this thing they call the Ocean? I’ve been searching for it everywhere to no avail.”

“The Ocean,” said the older fish, “is what you are swimming in now.”

“Oh, this? But this is only water. What I’m searching for is the Ocean,” said the young fish, feeling quite disappointed as he swam away to search elsewhere.

No matter our age or circumstance, the questions may be very similar: What is the “Ocean” we are searching for? Are we really surrounded by that for which we are searching elsewhere? Why do we or don’t we find answers and wisdom from those who have already been where we presently are? It’s the answers, not the questions, that vary.

In the Christian faith tradition, the Gospel parables of Jesus that we hear so often are some of our best wisdom stories. They share similarities with the young fish story: they are often a paradox; with each hearing they can evoke different reactions in us; they bring different messages for us as we ourselves are different at every reading or hearing. And, above all, they hold the mysteries and wisdom of life within them.

So, I challenge you, and myself, to listen with a different ear the next time the Gospel begins with: “Jesus told his disciples this parable” and, as one of his disciples, see what you hear — this time.

Anne Wambach, OSB
Prioress, Benedictine Sisters of Erie
This program offers me a year’s practicum on peace: peace with God, peace with self, peace with the other monastics and peace with the world, especially the needy. After completing the program, I hope to live in a faith community that helps the suffering.

Benedicta Riepp participant since mid-February

Why did you come to live in a monastery and what has struck you thus far?

Regarding his stay at Walden Pond, Henry David Thoreau wrote, “I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.”

For decades, I was a Catholic schoolteacher of children. I also worked in the administration of an interfaith seminary consortium. These were wonderful years. At this juncture of midlife, I came to Mount St. Benedict Monastery in response to a tug of the Spirit. I am very drawn to living in a community with sisters whose lives are pared to the essentials — prayer and ministry to God’s people.

From the first, I was grateful that my bedroom is simple, but beautiful, and that the whole monastery environment is conducive to peace and joy. At meals, I am touched by the gentle inclusiveness of those at table and by the storytelling, humor, and kindly conversation. As one interested in the psalms, but rarely moved to pray them, community prayer is a baptism by fire. I am intrigued to learn, little by little, the fruitfulness of this prayer form.

I spend four days a week at two wonderful ministry sites, the Inner-City Neighborhood Art House for the local children and the sisters’ infirmary. Finally, I’m grateful for Erie. It is marvelous to walk from the monastery along a forest road and stream and arrive at the shore of Lake Erie. And the small city of Erie, with its Catholic heritage and immigrant hospitality, is a good place to be.

This program offers me a year’s practicum on peace: peace with God, peace with self, peace with the other monastics and peace with the world, especially the needy. After completing the program, I hope to live in a faith community that helps the suffering.

Benedicta Riepp participant since mid-February

Why did you come to live in a monastery and what has struck you thus far?

Regarding his stay at Walden Pond, Henry David Thoreau wrote, “I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.”

For decades, I was a Catholic schoolteacher of children. I also worked in the administration of an interfaith seminary consortium. These were wonderful years. At this juncture of midlife, I came to Mount St. Benedict Monastery in response to a tug of the Spirit. I am very drawn to living in a community with sisters whose lives are pared to the essentials — prayer and ministry to God’s people.

From the first, I was grateful that my bedroom is simple, but beautiful, and that the whole monastery environment is conducive to peace and joy. At meals, I am touched by the gentle inclusiveness of those at table and by the storytelling, humor, and kindly conversation. As one interested in the psalms, but rarely moved to pray them, community prayer is a baptism by fire. I am intrigued to learn, little by little, the fruitfulness of this prayer form.

I spend four days a week at two wonderful ministry sites, the Inner-City Neighborhood Art House for the local children and the sisters’ infirmary.

Finally, I’m grateful for Erie. It is marvelous to walk from the monastery along a forest road and stream and arrive at the shore of Lake Erie. And the small city of Erie, with its Catholic heritage and immigrant hospitality, is a good place to be.

The power of story is never stronger than when it lives on the breath of those from whom it came.

— Gayle Ross, Cherokee storyteller
POSTULANT

“Call/vocation” is not just for myself. It is from and for God, for those with whom I work and live, to whom I minister and from whom I also receive: the local Erie community, the Church, and the world. Gradually I am growing into covenant with this community. They have more to teach me about who I am, my gifts and limitations, what I have to offer the world, where I am open and where I need to be more open. I am grateful to be here.

The community members are warm, loving, giving women, individuals with different personalities, temperaments, and pace of doing things, who choose to live together, respect the differences among themselves, and adapt as necessary. It is uplifting to be with those who recognize each other’s gifts and the need for variety as well as a common vision.

The community’s oblates, the guests who come for Sunday liturgy, various presentations and retreats, and the college students who elect to spend their break working with the sisters, all bring with them a deep love of God, a desire to nourish their spiritual lives, and a heartfelt concern for others. I am amazed at their level of dedication, sharing, and self-awareness.

The scope and multiplicity of ministries is astounding; works which provide assistance and offer challenge and hope in a chaotic world. I am witnessing daily how God is able to work through all of us in an infinite variety of ways, especially through those to whom we minister.

The prayer life at the monastery is rich and full, with creative and thoughtful liturgies, beautiful music, and encouragement always to attend to one’s personal relationship with God through lectio divina (holy reading) and attentive listening.

I love this community of women — who we are, and what we stand for, and who we are becoming.

POSTULANCY

To begin the 12-month postulancy a woman requests admission to the monastery so she can continue to discern her vocation. She experiences the Benedictine way of life with the community by entering into the daily rhythm of prayer and work all the while discerning her call to permanent membership.

NOVICE

Being a novice means learning how to “let go and let God” while becoming more reliant on God’s strength. My novitiate journey has been one of faith, fidelity, and gift.

Faith in the God I love; trusting that this path before me is in alignment with God’s will.

Fidelity to my daily prayer, spiritual reading, and lectio divina, that gives me the grace to listen to God’s invitation gently nudging me toward conversion of heart, to become more and more the reflection of God’s love.

Gift to have been blessed with discovering that in stillness, silence, and solitude, I have been able to listen deeply to the inner voice of God — that quiet voice that asks me to accept a life of conversion.

I learn from my sisters through faith sharing, classes, table conversations, openness to advice given, and simple unplanned chats. It is only in practicing hospitality day after day that I can make room to receive another sister into my heart space.

When we learn to trust each other and hold ourselves personally accountable for the quality of the common life, it will draw us closer together on our journey toward God.

I have studied monasticism, the liturgical year, the psalms, the Gospel of John, community history, the Rule of St. Benedict, as well as Art as Meditation (piano, candle-making and quilting), and more.

Working at the monastery itself gives me the opportunity to practice obedience and cooperation, learn humility, and discover deep within myself the readiness to act with generosity. I am delighted that the sisters I work with are open to my sense of humor, which made for a much more relaxing work atmosphere.

I am able to engage lovingly with each sister in our infirmary. Although my one-on-one encounters vary, I have received the grace to see the suffering Christ in each of them. When we engage in simple frivolity and laughter, the smiling joyful Christ delightfully shines through them.

My novitiate journey has taught me to seek God with all my heart, to be faithful to my prayer life, to open my heart to receive the Christ in the other, to go the extra mile, to grow a generous heart, to stretch out of my comfort zone, and most especially to keep my mind, heart and ears opened to the gentle whispers of being called God’s beloved.

NOVITIATE

The novitiate follows the postulancy and is a year of intense study and immersion into community life. The novice learns more about the Benedictine charism and the monastic vows. At the end of this year, if she and the community have discerned that she is being called to continue this journey, she will make her first monastic profession.
As Vocation Director, I walk with many people who are wondering if they might have a vocation to the Benedictine Sisters of Erie — or perhaps to another religious community. As part of the process we talk about the importance of discernment in all decision making.

Discernment — what’s it all about? How does one discern a religious vocation?

The word discernment comes from the Latin word discernere which means to distinguish, to sift through. It is a process of listening to the inner movements of the heart. Benedict tells us with the opening words of his Rule to “Listen with the ear of your heart.” He is encouraging us to be attentive and mindful of God’s presence in and around us.

If we are truly hoping to hear God’s voice we need to spend time listening. Openness to explore all the possibilities of life is a big part of listening. We need to be so open to whatever God wants that one possibility will be just as welcome in our life as another. Pray for the gift of openness.

In honest discernment trust in God is crucial. The outcome may be very different than we expect. Trusting in God’s presence is invaluable when we discover that what we planned might not be the path we are called to travel. Pray for the gift of trust.

Discernment is uniquely our own process and takes time. Spend time reflecting on what you are feeling. Pray for the gift of patience.

Openness, trust and patience can help discernment facilitate decision-making for anyone. For the person discerning a religious vocation it is essential.

If you are discerning a religious vocation, gather as much information as possible and take an objective stance. Listen to what God is saying through other people, through scripture, and through events. Then put your imagination to work. Envision outcomes. List the advantages and disadvantages of each outcome. Spend time with them. Reflect on what you are feeling. Keep listening to what your heart is telling you.

Yes, keep listening to what your heart is telling you and talk with someone who will listen and respond to what they hear you saying, someone who will ask you where it is that you experience hope, joy or energy.

And don’t forget: inner peace is the ultimate sign of God’s presence and good discernment. Pray for inner peace.

Tales told from the heart reach the heart.
—Steve Sanfield

Witness to a Different Way

“Wake up the world! Be witnesses of a different way of doing things, of acting, of living!”

Witness Tales told from the heart reach the heart.
—Steve Sanfield

Sister Marilyn Schauble with Karen Oprencok

From the Vocation Director
By Marilyn Schauble, OSB, Vocation Director
College students experience service and monastic life

The 2014 Canisius College Winter Break Service Trip began on a cold winter day when seven students and their campus ministry leader arrived in Erie for a week of monastery life and ministry service. The group joined the community for prayer and meals and served in a variety of Benedictine ministries. Evenings provided the opportunity for input and discussion on various aspects of monastic life and Benedictine values. Social time was also an important part of the week. At the end of the week, student Christine Frank, shared: “I enjoyed this week so much, especially the time spent in communal prayer. I tend only to think about praying for my family and friends, or myself. The sisters showed me how prayer is about much more than that — it is about praying for every person in the world, and that alone is a new way of looking at the world for me.”

Seven Canisius College students and their adult leader lived at the monastery for one week and worked with the sisters in various ministries as their Alternative Spring Break Ministry Trip. This was the second trip for one of the young women and the third trip for another. “The students are a blessing to us,” said Sister Marilyn. “Their enthusiasm and energy is contagious. I never cease to be amazed at their willingness to participate in everything asked of them.”

In 1997, Pope John Paul II instituted a day of prayer for women and men in consecrated life — February 2, the feast of the Presentation of Jesus, the day on which Jesus was dedicated to God by a ritual purification in the Temple according to Jewish custom. This year, Pope Francis asked religious women and men to “Wake up the world! Be witnesses of a different way of doing things, of acting, of living!”

Consider praying with us for vocations so that we may welcome others to “wake up the world” and “witness to a different way” of living a Gospel life.

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 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.
Oblate Lenten Reflection Day: Feast on Your Life

“I will never read a poem again without thinking about Sister Mary Lou’s presentation,” exclaimed one oblate at the end of the annual Oblate Lenten Reflection Day. She, along with 35 other oblates, attended the program, Lectio through Poetry, presented by Sister Mary Lou Kownacki.

Using the poem Love after Love by Derek Walcott, Sister Mary Lou explained how poetry, the most ancient of all forms of prayer, can be used for lectio — sacred reading that involves the whole person through reading, meditation, prayer, contemplation and action.

Sister Mary Lou read the poem aloud and also provided an audio version of the same poem as well as a sample of one woman’s lectio on the poem. Each oblate then identified their favorite lines from the poem and had time for reflection and sharing. For the final activity, Sister Mary Lou encouraged everyone to do an artistic interpretation of the lines that most resonated with them. “The sharing of music, dance, dramatization, art and original poems was very moving and fun, too,” said Oblate co-director, Sister Audrey Steff.

“The entire time spent on the lectio touched my heart deeply. The poem said to ‘Sit. Feast on your life.’ — and we did,” shared Oblate Janice Etchison. “The richness of it all was like a banquet for me. I reveled in the opportunity to feast on my life in five lines, so important for me to do… My feast included memories of singing in the St. Benedict Academy choir with Sister Mary David Callahan, of my daughter Melanie expressing total joy when she was just a year old, and my work experiences at Gannondale. What a feast!”

Sister Mary Lou, a published poet, is director of Benetvision Publishing and Monasteries of the Heart, ministries of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie. Her publications include Between Two Souls: Conversations with Ryokan and Old Monk.

Love after Love

The time will come when, with elation you will greet yourself arriving at your own door, in your own mirror and each will smile at the other’s welcome,

and say, sit here. Eat.
You will love again the stranger who was your self.
Give wine. Give bread. Give back your heart to itself, to the stranger who has loved you all your life, whom you ignored for another, who knows you by heart.
Take down the love letters from the bookshelf,

the photographs, the desperate notes, peel your own image from the mirror.
Sit. Feast on your life.

—Derek Walcott

People become the stories they hear and the stories they tell.
—Elie Wiesel
The Birdhouse: A Sign that Benedictines Reverence All of Creation

A weather-worn birdhouse on a wall by the monastery's side door has been refurbished thanks to Oblate Vena Eastwood.

One day when passing the birdhouse one of the sisters was drawn to it by something she had not noticed before: an etching of birds and flowers and, to her surprise, an engraved metal plate that read: "In loving memory of Sister Mary Helen Maher."

In August 1996, Sister Mary Helen was killed in a car accident along with her mother, sister and brother-in-law. "The birdhouse was a gift from Sister Mary Helen's family after her death. It was hung on the outside wall of the prioress' apartment where it has stayed for all these years," explained Sister Phyllis Schleicher, prioress at the time of the accident.

Thanks to Vena, the life of the birdhouse has been extended. "I first put on a new roof and outside perch, and then I added a weatherizing coat of sealer, and was able to clean up the engraved plate so it can now be clearly read," she explained. "I made sure not to disturb the nesting material inside the house because I wanted the birds to find a home that was still familiar to them when they returned."

This birdhouse, while of sentimental value to the community, is even more an important sign of Benedictinism. As Benedictines we reverence all creation and work hard to lovingly attend to it. This birdhouse replicates the monastery as a center of hospitality to all of God's creation — a place in creation where God's creative and transformative love can be felt and experienced.

Oblate Jo Clarke recognized as a Shriver Reporter. See page 16.

Oblate Barbara Roseborough honored as one of the Dynamic Dozen at Women Making History 2014. See page 24.
More and more people come every day to our new “Monasteries of the Heart” website. In fact, since the Benedictine Sisters of Erie initiated this web-based lay monastic movement in 2011 more than 10,000 people have registered on the site and the numbers are growing steadily.

And, frankly, I’ve been asking myself why. After all there are monasteries all across the world. Why not just go to one of those every once in a while instead of to a website?

But the more I watched people participate on the site, read the discussions there, and listened to their questions and comments, four distinct answers emerged in a new way within me.

First, I became aware as never before, just exactly how many people there are now in the world who are totally unaffiliated with any established religion anywhere. Over 15% of the population of the globe now say that they are “Nones,” they claim no religion at all. In the United States, it’s 21%. Of those under 34, it’s 33%.

Then, I realized that in the United States, too, “Nones” are the second largest “denomination” in the country. All of these people have left somebody’s church, parish, congregation, or religious tradition to find their way through life alone. Many of them are sad to have gone, they say, but found nothing there spiritual enough to keep them.

And yet, third, I also realized that “spiritual” but “not religious” has become a major marker of religious identity. These people are seekers who say that they cannot find the spiritual sustenance they seek—they deeply need—in the traditions that formed them. And so they go from one place to another looking for lifelines, wanting a home away from home.
And finally, the research data shows that many of those who remain in affiliation with an established tradition, are also seeking outside of their religious traditions for a sense of meaning, for spiritual direction, for the secret to the fulfillment of life.

All of these people are both free and struggling at the same time. They have been freed from denominational prejudices. But they are struggling mightily, at the same time, to find the spiritual path and practices that bring peace, purpose and a felt union with the God who is bigger than any one religion.

In all that data, in all those realizations, it became clear to me again why Monasteries of the Heart is attractive to so many.

Monasticism is the one spiritual discipline that is at the heart of every major tradition and crosses every religious boundary.

It offers a spiritual journey grounded in a way of life that is ever ancient, ever new. Benedictine monasticism has outlived every century for the last 1500 years. It has nourished one age after another and seeded the spiritual life of whole populations for generations to come. Monasticism has something to say to the here and now wherever and whenever that “here and now” may be.

Monasticism teaches the presence of God in life. Contemplation of what makes for holiness and happiness in every age is at the center and the soul of it.

It engages the human soul in a consciousness of God that illuminates every dark moment of life and confirms the love of God however commonplace the present.

Monasticism does not require spiritual heroics; it requires spiritual consciousness of the power of simplicity, humility, equality and care of the earth.

It brings us to see the great purpose of life to which each of us is called. It brings us to understand the sanctifying dimension of human community. It leads us to care for one another as God has cared for us.

And most of all, perhaps, it comes out of a past tried and true to steep the present in God and make a better future possible.

Monasteries of the Heart gives seekers an anchor, a ladder, a path. It immerses them in the contemplation of the God-life within and grows in them a contemplative view of the world itself.

Monasteries of the Heart is here to ground people in God strong and steady, as the earth around them shakes and threatens to fracture.

Monasteries of the Heart invites members to hold onto the God their hearts seek in a way that transcends both political polarization and ecclesiastical competition. It enables them to concentrate on fashioning—either alone or in groups—contemplative monasteries of justice and peace, equality and universal care. Wherever they are.

So why are so many people interested in Monasteries of the Heart? I think they come to this monastery without walls to find in the Benedictine Sisters who are directing this new development in Benedictine spirituality and the multiple lay communities that are developing out of it, the wisdom and strength they seek but cannot find unless we are all there to share it with them.

Erie Benedictine Sister Joan Chittister is the author of The Monastery of the Heart: An Invitation to a Meaningful Life, the basic text for the new initiative. She is the prime animator and spiritual teacher of www.monasteriesoftheheart.org
Sister Rita Pruchniewski and Sister Irene Warchol know what Benedictine life is all about. For 70 years they have lived the vowed life in community as Benedictine Sisters of Erie. “It doesn’t seem that long,” said Sister Rita. Sister Irene promptly agreed and said, “It feels like just yesterday that we were beginning our life as Erie Benedictines.”

Sisters Rita and Irene professed their first vows on the same day in August 1944. “Things were so different back then but my happiness was knowing I was beginning my life as a Benedictine sister,” said Sister Irene. Sister Rita added, “New beginnings are always exciting times.”

Sister Rita, an accomplished vocalist, was also proficient in piano and violin. Her life of prayer and devotion to the community included 38 years of teaching music in both elementary and high schools throughout the Erie Diocese. She also worked as a bookkeeper at the monastery, Glinodo Conference Center and Benetwood Apartments. In addition Sister Rita served as Oblate Director for 12 years and as a reading instructor and tutor at St. Benedict Education Center. Sister Rita is especially happy to now be engaged in the ministry of prayer and presence at the monastery. “Every day, I am grateful to be able to pray. Living each day with gratitude is what guided me through 70 years of religious life. Simply being grateful for what you have, for the blessings of God and the comfort of community, makes all the difference in the world.”

Sister Irene’s life in community included more than 60 years of ministry in food service. Initially she ministered in church and convent kitchens throughout the diocese and eventually at the monastery where she devoted 32 years to baking bread. In 2011 Sister Irene retired from her longtime ministry of bread baking and undertook her current ministry of prayer and presence at the monastery. “Our daily communal prayer and the time for private prayer are a very special blessing, even more so now that they have become my primary ministry,” said Sister Irene. “I like the song lyric: ‘Tis the gift to be simple.’ It’s a reminder to me that to live a good life does not have to be complicated. For me the gift to be simple means that I follow the Rule of Benedict and find my strength in community life and prayer. I am blessed to still be able to do that.”

Sister Placida Anheuser worked as a clerk in Chapter 57, the community gift shop, and also as portress, the ministry of hospitality in which she is still engaged. Sister Placida is an avid reader with a keen interest in current events. In addition, she serves in a ministry of prayer and presence at the monastery. One of her favorite quotes is from G. K. Chesterton: “One may understand the cosmos, but never the ego; the self is more distant than any star.” “I think about this concept often,” says Sister Placida. “I look at the stars and see the glory of God. This quote reminds me not to forget that all of humanity is made in the image of God as well. That beauty humbles me and keeps God at the center of my actions and desires.”

Sister Joan Chittister became a member of the Erie Benedictines on September 8, 1952. She taught in the Erie Diocese for 20 years in both elementary and high schools. Now, as a best-selling author and...
well-known lecturer, both nationally and internationally, Sister Joan's classroom extends throughout the world. Over the years Sister Joan has been heard to say that our role in life is to bring the light of our own souls to the dim places around us. “Chardin said, ‘The only task worthy of our efforts is to construct the future.’ That's what I think Jesus was about and that's what I think religious life must be about,” said Sister Joan. “The Creator left the ongoing process of creation up to us. We are here, then, to leave a better world to those who will follow us. It is to this work of co-creation that, steeped in the contemplation of the Gospel, we give our lives.”

Sister Joan has served the community as prioress, the Federation of St. Scholastica as president, the Conference of American Benedictine Priories as president, and the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) as president. She is the founder and executive director of Benetvision, a resource and research center for contemporary spirituality, and the guiding force behind Monasteries of the Heart, a new monastic movement. In addition, Sister Joan is co-chair of the Global Peace Initiative of Women, a partner organization of the United Nations. Her awards and honors are numerous and she continues to write and lecture on justice, peace, human rights, women's issues and contemporary spirituality. And why does she continue? “Because,” she says, “as the proverb teaches, ‘Nothing we do changes the past, everything we do changes the future.’”

Sister Bernadette Sullivan also entered the community on September 8, 1952. “It really was a wonderful time. We were where we wanted to be,” she shared. “Prayer, classes, chores and recreation turned the days into an adventure and it only got better when we went out on mission.”

Sister Bernadette’s initial ministry was in education and she taught in both elementary and secondary schools for 25 years. She then trained as a hospital chaplain and began her chaplaincy at Hamot Hospital in Erie. During her 34-year tenure as chaplain Sister Bernadette received the Hamot Ambassador of the Year award of which she says, “It was an honor to receive this award. Chaplaincy work was such a blessing for me and it was always my desire to be compassionate and open to all.” In addition to her hospital chaplaincy duties, Sister Bernadette also served the Pennsylvania Society of Chaplains as president and then as secretary.

“My religious life has been full and whenever I feel restless in the midst of it I remember a favorite quote of mine from Augustine of Hippo: ‘Our hearts were made for you, O God, and they are restless until they rest in you.’” After 60 years I know that to be true,” said Sister Bernadette. “These words inspire me to always make an honest effort to calm my restlessness through faithfulness to God, community life and ministry.”

Sister Bernadette, a prize-winning amateur photographer, now serves in the ministry of prayer and presence at the monastery. “I know that my heart was made for God and it is in God that the physical limitations with which I am presently challenged find their rest. My faithfulness is rooted in God and that is what brings me peace.”

Sister Lucia Marie Surmik was first a Sister of Saints Cyril and Methodious and served as an elementary school teacher and administrator until beginning the transfer process to the Erie Benedictines in 1990. “I came to Erie and experienced the Benedictines and I discovered that there was a monastic hiding in my heart,” Sister Lucia said. “It’s not easy to make the change from one community to another but I knew that God was directing me and I have never doubted my decision.” Once in Erie, Sister Lucia became a staff member of Emmaus Soup Kitchen and Food Pantry. After her transfer she became co-director of the community’s Oblate program, a position she held for 13 years. At the present Sister Lucia ministers part-time at the Emmaus Food Pantry. “Monastics never really retire and it is just beautiful to experience a community where involvement is a priority. Now that I am working part-time I am able to be even more involved in peace and justice initiatives in our city, nation and world, and to read and become more educated on women’s issues,” said Sister Lucia. “I also have more time for photography!”

Sister Lucia finds the words of the artist Eric Gill very meaningful: “The artist is not a special kind of person, but every person is a special kind of artist.” “In the suffering of a deeply hurting world, it is art that speaks to me and gives me hope. God’s gift of life in all of creation has the power to heal and to fill us with wonder. As a photographer, my soul is fed by the incredible beauty of nature,” says Sister Lucia. “Just focusing my lens on the miracle of a sunflower, or a child fearlessly sliding on the ice, or a magnolia tree in full bloom in our monastery courtyard, makes my spirit burst with joy and gratitude. It is humbling to think that I can capture such magnificence with my camera!”
Sister Mary Miller

When I was a novice, I was attracted to this quote by Teilhard de Chardin: “Nothing is profane to those who know how to see.” Given my limited world view at the time, I had a naïve interpretation of its meaning. The lovely children I taught, the caring families I encountered, the simple and sheltered convent life of the time, made it easy for me to see all of life as a reflection of a loving God. Then the years passed and my worldview widened. For instance, I visited Haiti five times and saw unbearable poverty and destitution. I began working at the Emmaus Soup Kitchen and listened daily to story after story of depression, abuse and suffering. Nothing is profane? Really? I wrestled with the meaning of Chardin’s quote until I realized that the key words were “know how to see.” It was up to me to see differently, to take “a long loving look at the real” and find God there. All of it is real—the beauty and suffering, the kindness and greed, the hospitality and loneliness, the sense of justice and oppression. And all of these realities live in me, too. I cannot turn away. I am still learning to embrace all of it with love, with presence and with prayer because “nothing is profane to those who know how to see.”

Sister Mary Miller professed her first vows in 1964 as a Sister of St. Joseph of Erie. During her time with the Sisters of St. Joseph she ministered primarily in education, which included teaching and administrative positions in schools in the Diocese of Erie. In 1981 she became involved at Emmaus Ministries. Sister Mary began a transfer to the Benedictine Sisters of Erie in 1984, a process that was completed in 1987. She continues to work at Emmaus Ministries, where she has been the director for 33 years.

Sister Helen Heher

The reasons I came to this community are not the reasons I stay in this community. Fifty-two years ago, just ready to turn 18, I left my home of origin in Oil City, Pennsylvania, and followed the sisters home to Erie. I loved the sisters because they enlarged my innate gifts and emerging talents. Mostly they invited me into their lives and immersed themselves into my life.

I had a humongous sense inside of me that I wanted to take care of the world, be a kind of candy striper for the multitudes. At a young age, I did know that I found my Soul in the canopy of the forest behind my home, and in the other world-ness of sitting in an empty church.

Obviously, I was guided by the hand of destiny, the awe of the sisters, and the joy of my family.

I am re-committing, staying in this community out of gratitude for the freedom and encouragement of those same gifts in me from the very time I entered in 1962. From candy striper to moon woman, I am. From 2014 to 2034 my anthem will be the regeneration of the Self for the sake of this community and the world community.

Sister Helen Heher was an elementary school teacher in the Diocese of Erie for several years. After 1971, her education in Therapeutic Recreation led her in a new direction that included ministry as activities coordinator and bookkeeper at John the XXIII home in Hermitage, Pennsylvania. Administrative Assistant at St. Benedict Academy, and Summer Camp Director and Recreation Program Director at Glenodo Conference Center. Sister Helen is presently the Wellness Coordinator at Mount St. Benedict Monastery, a ministry she began in 1993.

Sister Christine Kosin

For me, being Benedictine is being blessed by a loving God who placed me in a faith-filled family and then in a community of faith-filled women. This has been my greatest joy. This is what I celebrate at Jubilee. Little did I know when I first heard the call to monastic life, a life of seeking God and serving others, what the call meant.

The timing was right. To experience core values of the monastic tradition (prayer, community life, hospitality, peace) in a Pre-Vatican II era followed by a period of renewal and change that called forth deep faith and commitment was a great grace and challenge. As a community we heard the Gospel with the ear of our heart and knew that we were to live the Gospel tangibly, daily. Our eyes were opened to see anew. Our hearts were stretched to touch the world.

At Final Profession I received the title “Christine of the Risen Christ.” It is this Light of Christ that guides me to see the way I should walk in relationships, in community, in ministry. It is this light that enlightens my mind and spirit to live life fully. As I look to the Paschal Candle, I live in the present moment with an eye to the future.

Michael Casey, in his book The Road to Eternal Life, states that, “the Prologue of...
Sister Carolyn Gorny-Kopkowski

Born and raised in Erie, I was part of a loving, creative family. I recognize that the depths of the unconditional love of my parents and early formation in a family of Christian believers grounded me for future tasks, struggles and challenges.

My current philosophy is to live in the present moment with a listening ear and a wide-open heart. I attempt to live guided by my title, Pax – the Peace of Christ – received at my final profession. The Benedictine witness of prayer, community, peace and justice-making resonates with the “call” I experienced as a lay teacher in 1962 at St. Mary School.

The Gospel reminds us of Jesus’ invitation to “lay down one’s life” with the assurance that we have been given everything needed to “bear fruit that will last.” To this day, I depend on these sacred words. Their roots continue to deepen in me. I rejoice in our Jubilee and celebrate all those persons, events and creation itself that form me.

Perhaps any future goals could fall under just one: to seek wisdom, believing it is within me as that is where God and I reside most intimately.

Sister Carolyn Gorny-Kopkowski ministered in education for 20 years, both as an elementary and secondary teacher, as well as an elementary administrator before undertaking the ministry of spirituality in which she still serves. Sister Carolyn facilitates retreats and days of reflection for many different groups at the Erie monastery and around the country. She has held numerous positions in the community including: Administrator of Glinodo Conference Center, sub-prioress of the Benedictine Sisters, Director of Human Development, and Director of Novices and Sisters transferring from other communities. In addition, she was one of the founding sisters of the Emmaus Soup Kitchen.

Sister Marian Wehler entered the Benedictine Sisters of Elk County where she ministered as an elementary school teacher in the Diocese of Erie until 1980. She then became a missionary and taught English, Scripture and geography in the Arusha Catholic Seminary in Tanzania. This was followed by service as the Pastoral Care Director and Chaplain at Elk Regional Hospital in St. Marys. In 1996 Sister Marian began the transfer process to the Benedictine Sisters of Erie at which time she worked as secretary and staff member for AIM, the Alliance for International Monasticism. In 2004 Sister Marian became Director of Religious Education at St. Bernard parish in Falls Creek, Pennsylvania. In 2007 Sister Marian began her present ministry: Catholic Rural Ministry in the Oil City Deanery.

“...The Prologue of the Rule of Benedict maps out the road to eternal life.” Jesus not only indicates the road we should walk, but He is the road, the only road that leads to eternal life. On the road I have been guided to walk with the poor, with little children, with those seeking peace.
Women of Wisdom, Women of Hope: The Benedictine Sisters of Erie at ShriverReport.org

When Maria Shriver launched The Shriver Report: A Woman’s Nation Pushes Back from the Brink on January 15, in partnership with the Center for American Progress, Oblate Jo Clarke was listening. “The report invited people to be citizen ‘reporters’—to submit stories on what they are doing ‘out there’—how they are making a difference in the lives of women on the brink,” she said. “I knew immediately that there isn’t a better example of women making a difference than the Benedictine Sisters of Erie. The story of the sisters and oblates working every day to try and change the lives of women, whether 5 months or 95 years old, is one that should be told far and wide.”

Jo wasted no time in contacting Cara Lemieux, the Managing Editor of the Shriver Report, thinking that her photo collection of the sisters and oblates working together in various ministries would be just the thing they had in mind. “I hadn’t even thought of a story so when Cara asked for an essay along with photos I was blown away. I knew it was a chance for us to reach a national audience that includes all strata of society—people we would not normally be able to reach,” Jo explained. “I’m a great believer that we never know how our actions, writings, photos or example of lifestyle are going to affect someone. Even to inspire just a couple of people to believe that they, too, can do something to make a difference made it worth the challenge to pull this project together in a short time.”

Jo has experienced firsthand the community’s corporate commitment “to be a healing presence and prophetic witness for peace by working for sustainability and justice, especially for women and children.” As a Benedictine oblate she upholds this commitment and her understanding comes through with clarity in the pictures and story that are now showing on the Shriver Report web site shriverreport.org/women-of-wisdom-women-of-hope-the-benedictine-sisters-of-erie. “It’s thrilling to see the Benedictine Sisters counted among those making a difference in the world,” said Jo. “This project was a challenge but a fun one! It was a wild idea and it worked!”

Sister Anne Wambach, prioress, shared Jo’s excitement. “We are so pleased to have our story told through the Shriver Report web site and we have Jo to thank for that,” she said. “Her initiative in responding to the invitation because she believes in the Benedictine Sisters of Erie, and her efforts in undertaking this project is a blessing for us and hopefully, will be an inspiration for others.”

Jo, who is also the community’s director of Annual Giving, is now a recognized Shriver Reporter. “To see my name listed as a ‘Reporter for the Shriver Report’ was such a huge honor,” she said. “Who knows? There is definitely more story to be told. Perhaps the next one will reflect on what can be done to help the mission and philosophy of these Benedictine women, both sisters and oblates, survive for another 150 years as they continue to respond to social needs, particularly of women, in the future.”
Individually it would be almost impossible to challenge the injustices that surround us; however, with the support and energy of like-minded people this vision of welcoming all as Christ is becoming a reality. Vacant lots are being turned into poetry parks; murder sites are reclaimed through prayer vigils and reconciliation services; at-risk children are given a hot meal after school and inner-city youth learn to play the violin.

This Community has challenged others, locally, nationally and internationally, to reject the status quo and become a part of the solution. The sisters have taken public stands on many issues from war, to poverty, to injustice against women and children. The writings of Sisters Joan Chittister, Mary Lou Kownacki, Christine Vladimiroff and others call us to speak out in the world and in the church, urging equality and opportunity for all.

It is a return to the monastery, to daily prayer, where creativity, energy and common philosophy take root. It is at the monastery where one gathers the strength, resilience and faith to respond with hope. When women in the Church and society care about, work for and stand by the marginalized, anything is possible.

Anne Wambach, Prioress says, “Throughout history, Benedictine communities have produced strong women who were writers, leaders and healers of their day, who confronted the needs of the people of their times. The paths that these women took are our paths also. Every day in our ministries and in all our undertakings, we must continue and never stop being the women in the church and in society that our foremothers were—women who care about, work for and stand by the poor, the needy, the underpaid and the homeless—especially women.”

Only when food, clothing, shelter, health care, and education are seen not as luxuries but as the basic need and right of every child and family will society change for the better. Those of us whose lives have been blessed with some measure of resources have a responsibility to help and empower those who have little. When we are an advocate for the voiceless we offer a hand instead of pointing a finger, giving each person we touch the ability to realize their full potential.

Only when the common good is valued as much as individualism, will lasting change occur. Together as community, we can indeed be co-creators for the good.

To see how you can take part in transforming our world, visit the Benedictine Sisters of Erie website ErieBenedictines.org. If you are local check out our Ministries page and see if you might be interested in volunteering. Go to Forms of Association to see the various ways you can work with, live with and pray with the sisters regardless of your location. Check out the Oblate page and see how you can join the sisters and their nearly 300 oblates in working for change. Or visit a local community or agency near you and ask how you can become a vital part of reaching out to the marginalized.
Emmaus Ministries, a commitment to the forgotten and the faceless of society, has been a Christian presence and outreach in Erie since 1974 when Sisters Carolyn Gorny-Kopkowski, Rosanne Lindal-Hynes and Mary Lou Kownacki opened the Emmaus Soup Kitchen. This year marks the 40th anniversary of the first meal served. Current director, Sister Mary Miller, reflects on her 30-plus years at Emmaus:

"Staying at what is worth doing does as much to remake us as it does to remake the world," wrote Joan Chittister, OSB. Looking through photos of so many guests and volunteers who became part of the Emmaus family over the decades, I realized the truth of Joan’s words—I have been remade because of them.

And by remade I mean that over the years my soul has been stirred and stretched by soup kitchen guests that I grew to love and admire. Here’s one example of how Emmaus has remade me. On the serving line at the kitchen, volunteers constantly ask our guests, "How are you today?" And our guests—who have no food at home, stand in line for one meal, and cannot choose what they will eat each evening—more often than not, respond, "I am blessed." I try to use their words as a mantra, repeating, "I am blessed" throughout the day—no matter what happens to me.

As for staying at something for 40 years in hope of "remaking the world," … well, Emmaus’s contribution has been minimal but steady. The soup kitchen opened on January 9, 1974 at Immaculate Conception Church and twelve volunteers served one guest a bowl of soup; we now serve 200 a day. In 1983 we opened the Emmaus Food Pantry to help the working poor who needed extra food to stretch meager budgets. When an elementary teacher told me that she asked one of her students, "What are you having for supper today?" and the child replied, "What’s supper? We only eat in school."—we opened Sister Gus’ Kids Cafe. Emmaus also sponsors a Women’s Advocacy program, the Emmaus Children’s Christmas Program, and an outreach to Haiti, the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. Last year we opened Emmaus Grove: The Erie Urban Farm School to help people grow healthy food.

To celebrate a 40th anniversary means that the faithful staff, volunteers and donors believe Emmaus is worth doing. It certainly has been worth my life. It is a privilege to be remade each day by the people we serve.

**Pax, a center for nonviolence, opened the Emmaus Soup Kitchen in 1974. Sisters Carolyn, Rosanne and Mary Lou share reflections from the early days at Emmaus.**

"We had a wonderful spirit at Pax Center. When we saw there was a need, we just tried to meet it without worrying too much where the money or support was coming from. We really believed that if it was good work, God would care for it. For example, we started the soup kitchen because a few times a week, Joe, an elderly alcoholic, would ring our doorbell in the evening and ask for something to eat.

"Was feeding the hungry a need in Erie?" we asked ourselves. To find out we didn’t do a survey, we opened a soup kitchen.

—Carolyn Gorny-Kopkowski, OSB

"When the Pax Center opened in 1971, we served sandwiches to the hungry at the old convent on East Ninth Street. One Saturday, the front door bell rang and it was Ken asking for a sandwich. I opened a window on the second floor and said, "Ken, just a minute. I’ll be right down." When I opened the door, Ken was crying. I said, "Ken, are you sick?" He said, "Sister you know my name. I haven’t heard anyone call me by my name in years." When we opened the soup kitchen, I made it a point to stand at the door and greet everyone by name.

—Rosanne Lindal-Hynes, OSB

"I’ve always loved the story where Dorothy Day, founder of The Catholic Worker, was given a diamond ring by a donor and she, in turn, handed it over to a poor woman. Just gave it to her, no strings attached. Dorothy’s staff was not happy and complained that it should have been earmarked for rent money or to pay the food bill. Dorothy replied that the woman had dignity and could use it for a trip to the Bahamas if she’d like. “Do you suppose God created diamonds only for the rich?” Dorothy asked the staff. I’ve always believed the poor should enjoy strawberries in December, a bottle of beer or glass of whiskey on Friday night, a pack of cigarettes for pure pleasure. As the English writer Samuel Johnson said, “Life is a pill which none of us can bear to swallow without gilding; yet for the poor we delight in stripping it still barer.” The Pax Community started the soup kitchen to be a sign of the “reign of God,” a lavish banquet, a display of God’s extravagance toward each of us—rich or poor.

—Mary Lou Kownacki, OSB
Looking back at Emmaus...

- 230,000 volunteer hours have served at the soup kitchen ... people like Marty Schaaf who’s been volunteering so long she’s lost count of the years though her reason for coming remains the same: “I always say to myself, ‘If it were my son or daughter, I’d be glad to know they weren’t hungry.’”

- 2-week-old infant who came with his mother and grandmother is the youngest soup kitchen guest... oldest guest was a 92 year old gentleman who walked 15 blocks every day for his one nourishing meal.

- 1,200,000 meals served at the soup kitchen... the menu grew from peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and a bowl of soup to full-course meals.

- 24 years that Sister Lucia Surmik served as head “chef” at the soup kitchen... she was preceded in that role by Timothy Lee Lynn, Patrick Driscoll, Sister Carolyn Gorny-Kopkowski and Sister Mary Miller and followed by Shirley Whaley.

- $1,000,000 largest gift received by Emmaus from an anonymous donor... to put the gift in perspective—of the annual donations given to Emmaus, 4% are gifts over $500; 4% are gifts from $100 to 499; and 92% of donations are less than $100.

Some days when I go home from the soup kitchen I pray even harder. Some days I go home and I can’t pray at all. Some days it’s my faith that gets me through and other days I don’t have any faith at all. — Sister Mary

I don’t think soup kitchens should exist in this country. We need to rearrange the system so that the “have-nots” have something and the “haves” have a little bit less. Soup kitchens are band aids... they’re not the answer to the problem. You have to get to the cause. As a sister, I feel we have to stand up with the poor—not just feed them, but speak for them. — Sister Mary

Sisters Claire Marie and Lucia Marie Surmik share a combined 50 years of service at Emmaus. “We are grateful for the opportunity of cooking for and serving our guests. Daily, we ministered alongside staff and volunteers who worked to live St. Benedict’s admonition to welcome each guest as Christ. One thing we know with certainty: we were blessed to experience the love and light of Christ in our guests and in all who in any way contributed to our ministry at Emmaus Soup Kitchen and Pantry.”
The Helen Boyle Memorial Archive in Honor of Joan D. Chittister, OSB, located at Mercyhurst University in the Hammermill Library, was dedicated April 30.

As part of the dedication, Tom Roberts, editor-at-large of the National Catholic Reporter, gave the first lecture in the Joan D. Chittister Lecture Series instituted by Mercyhurst. “I felt the weight of the request to be the one to give this inaugural talk,” he said. “I met Sister Joan in 1997. She is an author with numerous awards and honors. She is a world traveler. She has stretched the imagination regarding the image of God…from God as a trophy to God as cosmic unity and everlasting light.”

The archive space at Mercyhurst and the lecture series have been endowed by the Boyle Family in honor of Helen Loebelenz Boyle, Mercyhurst Class of 1934, and a longtime friend of Sister Joan, herself a 1962 Mercyhurst graduate.

Among the displays of photos and archival materials are copies of the 50 books authored by Sister Joan and a number of her handwritten journals. A 70-inch interactive touch screen that allows guests to view information about Sister Joan’s books, read her blogs and watch videos of her lectures is a centerpiece of the display. “It’s like Sister Joan is in the room,” said Dr. Mary Hembrow Snyder, Director of the Center for Mercy & Catholic Studies at the university and archive room coordinator. Oblate Jo Clarke, one of many visitors on opening day, was awed by the space calling it “technology at its best and most accessible. The entire room is just beautiful.” The archive room also includes a computer, which researchers can use to access Sister Joan’s complete collections of books, articles, presentation CDs and more.

In her remarks following Tom’s lecture, which he titled “Sacred Uncertainties: A Journey with Sister Joan Chittister,” Sister Joan first expressed gratitude for her friend Helen Boyle in whose memory the archive was dedicated. “Helen Boyle was a visionary, a saint of our times, a bridge builder who seeded my future,” she said. “Everything we do changes the future, not the past. We all have a responsibility to do this.”
She also addressed the reasons for an archive: “Life must be lived forward but we can only understand it backwards. An archive holds the key to the imagination that drove [the work] it preserves and the results that evolved.” Sister Joan expressed her gratitude as well: “Thank you that a woman’s history be kept for women that we might seek what they sought and do it better [for] an archive exposes the lighthouse and the hermit cave where old ideas are kept and new ideas can begin.”

Sister Joan’s archive is a collaborative effort of Mercyhurst University, Penn State University and Mount St. Benedict Monastery. The Eberly Family Special Collections Library at Penn State is the chief repository of Sister Joan’s material with both Mercyhurst and Mount St. Benedict having permanent archive rooms with access to Sister Joan’s books, articles and memorabilia for study, research, enrichment and inspiration. “This three-way partnership that we share with Mercyhurst and Penn State is a unique way to present and share Joan’s literary achievements with a broad audience,” said Sister Anne Wambach, prioress. “Nothing could please us more than to bring this dream to fruition and to celebrate the giftedness of a woman we call sister, a woman who embodies a vision of peace and justice that inspires and challenges all of us to do the same. Thank you, Joan!”
Many of us are very familiar with the story of the widow's mite in the Gospel of Mark: Jesus was observing how the crowd put money into the treasury. "Many of the wealthy put in sizable amounts; but one poor widow came and put in two small copper coins worth a few cents." Jesus spoke to the disciples saying, "That poor widow contributed more than all the others because they gave from their riches while she gave from her want, all that she had to live on." (Mark 13:41-44)

Jesus provides a unique and challenging insight into charitable giving. He saw beyond the amount of money a person gave to what each gift meant to the giver. The poor widow in her generosity gave from the little she had, from her poverty, while the larger gifts of the rich were given from the wealth they had to spare.

During the economic downturn of recent years many people faced loss upon loss: lost jobs and health insurance, full employment to under employment, investment losses, home foreclosures and reduced educational opportunities. In this richest country in the world, many were forced to live in reduced circumstances—from small lifestyle adjustments to major changes that were barely tolerable.

Despite this economic reality, our donors, many like the widow, continued to respond with generosity and often giving from their own needs. They remained faithful to their belief in the good works of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie. We are grateful for the essential financial support our donors have given to the Benedictine Sisters of Erie and their ministries from 1856 to the present. We rely on others to work together with us to bring about a world where all people are treated with dignity, respect and mercy. We offer our thanks and gratitude to all of you.
Operating Income
Our 2013 overall operating income increased by 9.6% from the previous year. Development income increased substantially last year due to contributions toward the renovation of the dining and community rooms at the monastery and an increase in bequests. We continue to attract new donors and retain long-standing supporters. Sisters’ stipends and salaries, from their ministries, social security and pensions, continue to be the majority of our income. The community fully participated in the stock market and therefore reaped the benefits of a 32% capital gain increase.

Operating Expenses
In 2013 our overall operating expenses increased by 4% from the 2012 fiscal year, basically the cost of living increase. Payroll expenses increased due to staffing changes at the monastery and increases in employee health care costs. Members’ personal expenses also increased due to the rising cost of food, supplies, and medical care. On a positive note, our property/buildings and transportation expenses decreased by 3% in part due to an adjustment in the size of our car fleet as well as our continued work to improve energy efficiency in our buildings.

Summary
We are able to report that our overall financial standing continues to be favorable. Once again we completed fiscal year 2013 with our operating income exceeding our operating expenses. We ended the year in the black due to the careful management of our budget and the continued good will and financial support of our donors. The community is committed to finding ways to cut or maintain our costs wherever possible. Our investment strategy continues to provide ongoing income for our operational budget as well as support for our retired sisters. According to the National Religious Retirement Office, we are 80% underfunded to meet our future retirement needs. We continue to study our retirement needs while working to identify additional funding streams.

Our donors, like the widow in the Gospel, continue to respond with generosity and often from their own needs. May God bless you for your kindness and generosity.

Development Income
Annual Programs 309,020.00 38%
Unrestricted Gifts 149,909.00 18%
Restricted Gifts 361,612.00 44%
Total 820,541.00

Benedictine Sisters of Erie
Operating Income
Sisters’ Stipends/Salaries 2,113,696.00 62%
Development/Gifts 820,541.00 24%
Other 508,243.00 15%
Income before Investment Activity 3,442,480.00
Investment Activity 529,914.00
Income after Investment Activity 3,972,394.00

Operating Expenses
Administration 313,142.23 10%
Members’ Personal Expenses 980,757.50 29%
Payroll Expenses 863,049.27 27%
Property/Buildings/Transportation 911,439.17 28%
Other 177,529.00 5%
Total 3,245,917.17
Prophet of Peace award to Sister Simone at the beginning of the Benedectines for Peace (BFP) Annual Speaker Series for which Sister Simone was the featured speaker.

In explaining the choice of Sister Simone for the award Sister Anne Wambach, prioress, said, “Through her person and presence, through her teaching and Gospel witness, through her commitment to truth, Simone Campbell has brought peace and justice to birth. In so doing, she has embodied the corporate commitment of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie and its concerns for peace and justice.”

Sister Simone, a Sister of Social Service, is a religious leader, attorney and poet with extensive experience in public policy and advocacy for systemic change.

As Executive Director of NETWORK, a global movement for justice and peace that educates and lobbies for economic and social transformation, Sister Simone was instrumental in organizing the 2012 “Nuns on the Bus” tour of nine states to oppose a budget that would decimate funding for safety-net programs. In 2013 she led a new cross-country “Nuns on the Bus” trip focused on comprehensive immigration reform. Around the country, she is a noted speaker and educator on these public policy issues.

After the award presentation in the monastery chapel, Sister Simone became teacher. Her talk was entitled: “View from the Bus: Economic Disparity and the Call of the Gospel.” Using members of the audience as a living bar graph she was able to show how income has been apportioned and affected in the years since Reganomics took hold. Sister Simone explained, “Economics in the United States is changing the story of our nation from the story of a country with a sense of community to the story of a country where individualism has taken hold.”

What are we to do? What is the call of the Gospel? “We must hold everyone in our hearts; we must care about the president and leaders as much as we care about the poor and the oppressed. Everyone is part of the body of God. I came to realize that if I don’t do that I am divided from God,” said Sister Simone. “It’s about radical acceptance and fighting for — not fighting against, but working together to fight for a new vision.”

In closing Sister Simone shared her poem, “Incarnation,” which can be found in her recently published book, A Nun on the Bus. Using its words she offered challenge and encouragement:

Let gratitude be the beat of our heart …
Let resolve flow in our veins …
Let compassion be our hands …
Let wisdom be our feet …
Let love be our eyes …
Let community be our body warmth …
Let us remember on drear distant days …
We are the body of God!
Women Making History, 2014

Sister Carolyn Gorny-Kopkowski, left, and Oblate Barbara Roseborough were among the 2014 Dynamic Dozen honored at Women Making History, an annual event sponsored by the Mercy Center for Women. Sister Carolyn and Barbara were nominated for the honor because each met the criteria of dedicated service, honesty, integrity, strong values, courage of personal convictions and commitment to women’s issues.

“Faithful to the Song Within You” was the evening’s theme and each honoree shared her favorite song, many with lyrics that carried messages of empowerment, inspiration, grace and gift. Sister Carolyn’s song was “How Can I Keep from Singing” and during her presentation she expressed her feelings with the words, “I am so grateful. I am so blessed. This is the endless song that echoes in my soul.” Sister Carolyn, a facilitator of retreats and days of reflection, sees herself as a woman who never stops listening to her inner spirit and says, “I work each day to live in the present moment with a listening ear and a wide open heart.”

As a Benedictine sister she does this in her service to God’s people and as an advocate for the poor and for women in the church and society.

Barbara, a mother of two grown daughters and grandmother of four, is a retired nurse and now a faithful volunteer at the monastery. Barbara shared that she would never have become the woman she is today without faith. “Faith is intensely important,” she said. “It motivates me, it makes me tick.” Barbara’s chosen song was “Imagine” by John Lennon: “Imagine all the people, living for today. Living life in peace, sharing all the world.” As a member of the steering committee of Benedictines for Peace, a peace and justice outreach of the Erie Benedictines, and as a Benedictine Oblate, Barbara is committed to bringing about nonviolence, social change and justice by direct action, prayer and bearing witness.

HAPPENINGS

Celtic Ball Honors Erie Benedictines

Benedictine Sisters have served at All Saints of St. John Vianney School (Wycliffe, OH) since it was founded in 1977. At this year’s annual Celtic Ball the “Father Kline ‘Do-the-Right-Thing’ Award” was given to the six Benedictine Sisters who have been instrumental in the education and formation of the parish’s young people through the years: Sister Anne McGreevy, founding principal, and Sisters Roberta Lavin, Dona Obenrader, Mary Therese Egan, Pat Lupo and Veronica Mirage. The award is a memorial to the founding pastor, Father Kline, who stressed to “always do the right thing.”

“The Benedictine Sisters of Erie definitely are examples of wonderful religious women who do the right thing,” said Father Tom Johns, present pastor. “We are especially grateful for the gift of Sister Veronica. She has been a remarkable influence and is loved by students, alumni, parents and staff more than she will ever know.” Sister Veronica is in her 30th year in ministry at the school as Religion Coordinator and religion teacher in the upper grades. To recognize her service a scholarship has been established in her honor.

The Celtic Weekend is a major fundraiser for St. John Vianney parish (Mentor, Ohio) and school. Each year 10% of the profits are given to a charity. “This year we chose the charitable works of the [Benedictine Sisters of Erie] as our charity of choice,” said Father Johns. Sister Anne Wambach, prioress, attended the Celtic Ball along with some of the sisters. “It was a wonderful event,” she said. “The inclusion we experienced was warm and welcoming and the generosity simply amazing. We are humbled to be honored with such loving and sincere gratitude.”

Storytelling is the thread which is woven deep in our lives, our conscious, our humanity. It has the power to bring understanding amongst the peoples of the world. Tell and listen.

—Antonio Rocha
We Pray Best before Beauty

Brother Mickey O’Neill McGrath, Oblate of St. Francis de Sales, was the presenter for the community’s annual spring ongoing formation weekend. As an artist, writer, and speaker he explores the relationship between art and faith. “It was so energizing,” shared Sister Mary Louis Eichenlaub. “Brother Mickey’s art work is beautiful and his explanations were easy to understand and thought provoking. They went right to my heart!”

Echoing the words of St. Frances de Sales, founder of his community, Brother Mickey began the weekend by explaining, “We pray best before beauty.” His main message was that art has healing power that can lead us to light and grace. “After making art,” he said, “my favorite thing to do is to talk about art, especially as it relates to faith and spirituality.”

Using his paintings as a springboard Brother Mickey shared insights into and information about Thea Bowman, Dorothy Day, Kateri Tekakwitha and Georgia O’Keefe, among other saints and visionaries. He encouraged all to “see the beauty of God in the unexpected face” and to “discover the beauty of Christ in the most unexpected places and to allow ourselves to be changed by it.” He was clear: “We are saved by beauty. In the end, beauty will save the world.”

“I am in awe of the experience of this weekend,” said Sister Marilyn Schauble. “Being in the presence of such beauty, visual and spoken, was amazing. Brother Mickey and his art work will speak to me for a long time to come.” Prioress Sister Anne Wambach added, “Brother Mickey was such an engaging speaker and the time we had was truly enjoyable. He is gifted in his ability to show how faith and spirituality can be nurtured and developed through beauty and we were the beneficiaries of that gift.”

Visit Brother Mickey’s web site at bromickeymcgrath.com/ to learn more about him and his work.

Giving Witness to Justice

There are thousands of immigrants in Erie and throughout the United States who have documents that give them the right to live here and get a job here. There are also 11.5 million immigrants who do not have documents. They came into the country illegally or stayed after their visas expired. What they did is illegal but they are not illegal; they are simply undocumented. Benedictines for Peace is asking Congress to pass a bill that will allow these immigrants to get documents.

“We’re a motley crew—but we’re not alone,” says Sister Marlene Bertke, coordinator of Erie’s Benedictines for Peace. “Every monastery of Benedictine women in the United States is joined in working for immigration reform. The Roman Catholic bishops are working for immigration reform. NETWORK, the lobbying group of women religious in Washington, DC is working for immigration reform because we believe that those 11.5 million undocumented immigrants are our brothers and sisters and we want a just immigration bill for them.”

Benedictines for Peace is sponsoring a Justice for Immigrants Vigil on the first Friday of each month until the Immigration law is passed. The vigil is held at 2nd and State Streets in Erie from 5:15 – 5:45 p.m.

It includes three points that Benedictines for Peace believes are essential: a clear path to citizenship; the protection of rights of immigrant workers; and keeping family unity secured.

“We when tell and listen to stories, we can almost feel our souls breathing fully and deeply. Our capacity to see options, to visualize possibilities, to imagine expands and we are somehow more alive.”

—Michael Parent
First Enrichment Series of 2014

In a chapel filled with more than 200 sisters and guests, Father Jim Piszker presented what Sister Stephanie Schmidt, Director of Monastic Formation, described as “a solid, scholarly synthesis of Pope Francis’ vision of the church.”

“It would appear that [Francis] desires a church that is messier, more open, more welcoming, more missionary, more merciful and compassionate, more joy driven, less doctrine focused, less clerical, less bureaucratic, less self-absorbed, and more Christocentric in the best sense of the word,” said Father Piszker. “Systemic change takes time and support. One person cannot do it alone.”

In the words of Francis, Father Piszker urged all present to be people capable of “warming the hearts of the faithful ... walking with them in the night, dialoging with their hopes and disappointments, mending their brokenness ... ” These are the actions of Gospel living; these are the actions of Gospel love; these are the actions of Gospel hope. The time to start is now.

Jim Piszker is a priest of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Erie ordained in 1991. Currently he is chaplain and adjunct faculty member at Mercyhurst University in Erie. He is also a Sunday presider at the Mount.

Honorable Mention for “Passionate Purple”

Sister Lucia Marie Surmik entered a framed photograph in the 2014 Senior Art Exhibit sponsored by the Independent Council on Aging (ICA). “Passionate Purple” received an Honorable Mention. “As a photographer, my soul is fed by the incredible beauty of nature,” she said. “To have one of my nature photos be acknowledged is very humbling.”

The event was open to both professional and amateur artists. The mission of ICA is “to improve the quality of life for mature adults while fostering a positive image of aging.” The Senior Art Show is just one of the ways that this goal is fostered.

Celebration of 100 Volunteer Hours

Sisters Carolann McLaughlin and Rita Groner, members of the Friends of St. Mary’s Home of Erie, were honored at the annual Friends Dinner. They, along with their therapy dog, Rusty, were recognized for their first 100 volunteer hours. The sisters and Rusty bring a special joy to the St. Mary residents in skilled care, residential living, adult day care and the Alzheimer’s unit at both St. Mary’s East and Asbury Ridge. “We love doing this volunteer work,” said Sister Carolann. “Sister Rita and Rusty and I are privileged to have the opportunity to interact with the residents. Rusty brings a spark of life and energy that we all enjoy. The unconditional love and companionship he extends are priceless.”

The Early Church 30 AD – 130 AD: From a Jewish Messianic Sect to the Body of Christ is the title of the next Enrichment Series presentation. It will be given by Father Casimir Wozniak, a professor from Gannon University, on Wednesday, July 16, at 7:00 p.m. in the chapel at Mount St. Benedict Monastery. The event is free and open to the public.
What Sisters Are Reading

By Susan Doubet, OSB, Book Review Editor

The Benedictine Sisters of Erie read. Whether it be on their Kindle or Nook, borrowing from the monastery library or the Erie County Library or sharing books among friends, we read.

Knowing this, when our website committee was brainstorming new features for our community page, we came up with “What Sisters Are Reading.” Since the first review posted in March 2013, 30 sisters have shared their summaries of 35 books. All kinds of books. The feature has consistently ranked among the most frequented pages of our website and for good reason: the books are varied, the reviews are well-written and enticing, and many of our web visitors are obviously avid readers and curious about what others are reading.

Biography, spirituality and fiction are the three major book categories, with some general non-fiction popping up every few weeks. One of our sisters has taken to finding her own reading ideas from this page. Within a couple weeks after a new posting she’s telling me what book she’s just finished and she always agrees with the review that: “It was a great read.”

Personally, I enjoy reading about books that I know are on the best-seller list or that I overhear bantered about among my friends or at community events. On Heaven and Earth, by Pope Francis and Rabbi Skorka was one of those. The sister-reviewer commented that after reading it she had a better look into the philosophy and ideas of the new Pope. She also conveniently mentioned that it was available in large print, as an e-book and as an audio book.

I also enjoyed the review of The Orphan Train, which, although categorized as fiction, is really historical fiction, as there were orphan trains a century ago that sent children to the Midwest and into new families.

Visit eriebenedictines.org/what-sisters-read to find the latest book review as well as an archive of all previously reviewed books. If you’ve read any of the reviewed books, please rate them by giving them one to five stars.

The power of story is never stronger than when it lives on the breath of those from whom it came. —Gayle Ross, Cherokee storyteller
SBA
By Ann Comstock, Oblate

Just a thought…
On the program cover for the SBA 2013 Christmas Party were the following five lines:

It all began in 1856…
Then came Saint Benedict Academy
Next came
Saint Benedict Education Center
AND...THE TRADITION GOES ON!

Nicely put. These five lines embody the history and the story of SBA as well as the Spirit of SBA. The buildings in which we were educated may now be used to house other students but we, the alumnae of Saint Benedict Academy, are there in spirit.

We are so grateful for the education we received and the relationships we built while at the academy. 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. We support the ministries of the Benedictine Sisters, and promote Catholic education.

We arrived, we received, and now we help return to others that which we received. The circle is complete. Just a thought…

Mark Your 2014 Calendar

Sunday     July 27  SBA SeaWolves Picnic/Game Jerry Uht Park

Tuesday    December 2  SBA Christmas Party Ambassador Conference Center

“SPIRIT OF SBA” IS ALIVE AND WELL.
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 (www.eriebenedictines.org/sba-alum). 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’ll also post them on our website. Classes 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, Alumnae Director. Call 814-899-0614 ext. 2573 or email: sbaalum@mtstbenedict.org

Scholarship Winners 2014-2015
We are very pleased to announce that 20 scholarships of $250 each were awarded to relatives of SBA alumnae who will attend Catholic schools, grades K through 12, for the 2014-2015 school year. Since it began in 1991, this scholarship program has contributed over $66,750 in support of Catholic education. The alumnae association is pleased to show our support for Catholic education through this program.

SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Alumnae Member</th>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Skyler Sonney</td>
<td>Karen Kuchinski Sonney</td>
<td>Grandson</td>
<td>St. George</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitchell Wagner</td>
<td>Bernadette Olewski Slomski</td>
<td>Grandson</td>
<td>Our Lady of Mt. Carmel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack Hilbrich</td>
<td>Carol Madras Hilbrich</td>
<td>Grandson</td>
<td>Our Lady of Peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph John Selleny</td>
<td>Suzanne Riddle Selleny</td>
<td>Grandson</td>
<td>Blessed Sacrament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isabella Pacinelli</td>
<td>Michelle Pacinelli</td>
<td>Daughter</td>
<td>Mercyhurst</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sidney Brunner</td>
<td>Esther Hubert</td>
<td>Cousin</td>
<td>St. Boniface</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophia Chaney</td>
<td>Jeanne Marie Ryan</td>
<td>Granddaughter</td>
<td>Our Lady of Peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah Cravener</td>
<td>Rose Ann Sekula Garbulinski</td>
<td>Granddaughter</td>
<td>Villa Maria Elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carmella Leone</td>
<td>Christine Somolani Zalas</td>
<td>Granddaughter</td>
<td>Our Lady of Peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abigail Hinds</td>
<td>Jennifer Krumpe Troncone</td>
<td>Niece</td>
<td>St. Boniface/Mt. Carmel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logan Lego</td>
<td>Mary Akus Soltis</td>
<td>Grandson</td>
<td>Mercyhurst</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie Tabolt</td>
<td>Cindy Anderson Tabolt</td>
<td>Daughter</td>
<td>Mercyhurst</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courtney Kindle</td>
<td>Valerie Joint Purzycki</td>
<td>Daughter</td>
<td>Holy Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shane &amp; Ashley Kujan</td>
<td>Charlotte Kowalski Kujawinski</td>
<td>Grandchildren</td>
<td>St. George</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy Lynn Buettner</td>
<td>Deborah Wodecki Buettner</td>
<td>Daughter</td>
<td>Mercyhurst</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christopher Seth</td>
<td>Bridget Presuti Seth</td>
<td>Son</td>
<td>Mercyhurst</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Megan Dugan</td>
<td>Linda Shreve Freytag</td>
<td>Niece</td>
<td>Mercyhurst</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthony Sparacino</td>
<td>Sharon Plumb Sparacino</td>
<td>Son</td>
<td>Villa Maria Academy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily Lemonski</td>
<td>Barbara Kabylinski Seelin</td>
<td>Cousin</td>
<td>St. Joseph High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark Miller</td>
<td>Theresa Jankowski Hiney</td>
<td>Grandson</td>
<td>St. Luke</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 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 it down and send it to us or call us with details so we can share the news with all our members.
Each year, the Alumnae Association holds its annual Christmas Party. It has become our premier social event of the year and each year it seems to grow and improve. Last year’s party, Silver Bells, proved the point: over 465 alumnae members gathered at the Ambassador Conference Center to celebrate, to share memories and rekindle friendships. It was such a beautiful sight—all the lights, all the smiles, and all the girls having fun! Anticipation ran high as alum waited to hear if they were lucky winners of the more than 100 beautiful, donated themed gift baskets. The party committee received donations from 13 major sponsors as well as gifts and donations from 95 others. Monies raised provided a generous gift of $6,800 to Saint Benedict Education Center’s Refugee Resettlement Program, a ministry of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie. As always, it was a wonderful event, one that grows and improves with each passing year. Thanks to all who made it such a memorable evening.
Listen with the ear of your heart

(Rule of Benedict, Prologue)