There are in the end three things that last: Faith, Hope and Love, and the greatest of these is Love. 1 Corinthians 13:13
Perfecting the art of composition and lighting to create a meaningful and memorable still life image is certainly no easy task but photographer Ed Bernik did it successfully. His cover photo of the ceramic art of Brother Thomas Bezanson* captures beautifully the message of this issue of The Mount: “There are three things that last: faith, hope, and love, and the greatest of these is love.” (1 Corinthians 13:13)

You can find reminders of faith, hope and love everywhere. The words appear on ceramic stoneware, posters, cards, jewelry, even embroidered on socks and tattooed on bodies. From ornaments to key chains and tee shirts to pajama pants, the reminder to uphold and embrace the great virtues of faith, hope and love comes in a variety of sizes and shapes.

Three simple words; three big gifts. The very gifts that capture the deepest meaning of Christmas.

Christmas proclaims the birth of Christ entering the world in human form and empowering us by word and example to love one another, to be strong in faith, and to radiate hope in any and all situations. The Mount celebrates that very essence of Christmas. It showcases occasions and people, experiences and happenings. Maybe it will be a story or just a phrase, a photo or a person that will revitalize your hope, increase your faith, and enliven your love. Whatever it is, may it be a reminder that as people of faith our ability to love and to bring hope into the lives of others is the greatest gift we can give and receive.

This Christmas may you give the gifts that keep giving long have the last present is unwrapped and the decorations are put away—the gifts of faith, hope and love.

Charlotte Anne Zalot, OSB

*Brother Thomas Bezanson, a world-renowned potter, was artist-in-residence with the Benedictine Sisters of Erie from 1985 until his death in 2007. The cover shows ceramic art pieces from the monastery collection.

Front Cover Photo: Ed Bernik
Back Cover Photo: Jo Clarke, Oblate

Charlotte Anne Zalot, OSB
When December appears on the horizon, my thoughts naturally turn to the seasons of Advent and Christmas. As I reflected on what to share with you here I decided on the celebrations and experiences that are often in the background to the broader themes of these particular seasons.

As Benedictines we observe and celebrate the entire liturgical year—the annual cycle of events that unfolds the life and message of Jesus and what that means in living a full Christian life. The liturgical year begins on the First Sunday of Advent and continues in the seasons following (Christmas, Lent, Easter and Ordinary Time); all include memorials and saints’ days, feasts and solemnities. This kind of attention to a full 52 weeks of liturgical consciousness has dwindled considerably, but for us, living the liturgical cycle binds us together as community.

In Advent nearly every day is unique. During the four weeks leading up to Christmas and the Christmas season that follows, the Church has placed numerous feast days into the celebration and they help make these seasons special for the community and for me.

Our Morning and Evening Prayer (Liturgy of the Hours) is enriched by special prayers and songs that celebrate the life stories of saints such as Andrew, Nicholas, Lucy, the apostle John, Thomas Becket and the first martyr, Stephen. When you add the feasts of the Immaculate Conception (December 8) and Our Lady of Guadalupe (December 12), you can see how the Advent-Christmas season is filled with models of courage, hope and delight that inspire us to discern the presence of God in the world today.

The one feast that I have been thinking about a lot falls on December 28, right in the middle of Christmas week. It is the Feast of the Holy Innocents—the story that both enthralls and alarms us, not only when we first hear it as children, but even as adults. The story recounts how King Herod put to death all of the Hebrew boys under age two in his futile effort to make certain that the newborn “King of the Jews” was among those killed.

I believe this ancient feast has new meaning for us today. Here in Erie we are not immune to the violence in our society that particularly affects the “holy innocents” among us: the 6th grader who still cannot read, the 19-year old young man killed on our streets, the 50% of Erie’s children under the age of five who suffer the effects of poverty.

Please remember these “holy innocents” of our own time during these weeks of the Advent and Christmas seasons. Thank you for all that you do, at this time of year, through your generosity, your good works and your prayers—especially for the most needy “innocents” in our midst.

Daily I pray for God’s blessings of peace and joy for you and for your families.

Anne Wambach, OSB
Prioress, Benedictine Sisters of Erie
Pope Francis focused attention on the gift of God’s mercy when he designated the Year of Divine Mercy beginning on December 8, 2015. The year officially ended on November 20, 2016 but the invitation to give and receive mercy continues. One of the most beautiful things we can contemplate, especially at Christmas when we celebrate the incarnation of God’s mercy in Jesus, is our own experience of the embodiment of love, kindness, compassion and unbounded generosity. In the reflections that follow sisters and oblates share how they have experienced the incarnation of mercy.

**With gentle touch**

**Therese Glass, OSB**

Two very aged Tanzanian women wrapped in kanga stood to the left of the entrance to the Church of the Holy Spirit near Karatu, Tanzania. A young English-speaking Tanzanian man stood further to the right presenting an oral overview of the parish to a group of six Americans of which I was one. Each of us hoped to learn and become a more informed bearer of peace, mercy and compassion.

As I listened I noted the two Tanzanian women silently observing our group from a distance.

Then the first woman, using a rugged stick for support, silently approached. She put her free hand on my left hand.

The second woman approached. She put one hand on my left arm. Neither woman knew any English. I spoke no Swahili. No words were exchanged.

With gentle touch each woman had welcomed me—the stranger. I, who had hoped to learn by hearing words about their culture, had been taught . . . by their simple and spontaneous action which proclaimed the oneness of all. Indeed, their outreach was an incarnation of mercy!

**AIMing for MERCY**

**Mary Hembrow Snyder, Oblate**

Jesuit ethicist James Keenan has described mercy as “entering into the chaos of another.” This fall semester, as a university professor, I have been invited to do just that.

You see, I am privileged to have among my many students, four who are participants in our AIM program (Autism Initiative at Mercyhurst). Each is delightfully gifted and decidedly challenged. Regarding the latter, some more so than others.

Intellectually, I am learning to understand them as I companion each across the sometimes rocky terrain of their academic lives.

Emotionally and spiritually, I have been profoundly moved by the suffering they have experienced—and often meet on a daily basis. Amazingly, however, I have discovered that these four young adults are courageous survivors and bold adventurers facing a sometimes cruel and ignorant world. Yet, they surprise with wit and humor, employ an indefatigable determination to rise after every fall, and knowingly reach out to the marginalized “Other.” All, moreover, are guilty of bearing beams of tenacious hope in good times and in bad. Each has shown me the face of God anew. THEY are my incarnations of mercy.

**Mercy, mercy**

**Barb Roseborough, Oblate**

Such simple words sung to a haunting melody, in a darkened Lenten chapel, sparked my heart’s exploration of its meaning for me. As a child and adolescent, I learned about the “thing” called mercy: the understanding benevolence of God, the compassion of one person toward another, clemency vs. justice. But as an adult, this hymn, repeated over and over, brought home to me that mercy was more than a thing. It was actually a person: the God in whom we seek refuge and in whom our hope is found. God is mercy; mercy is God.

Several years ago a good friend of mine, a monk, was dying. When we discussed his impending death, he made quite clear to me that all that was left for him to rely on was mercy; his only hope was God.

As I have grown into aging adulthood I have also grown into a deeper realization of the presence of God within me. If God abides in me, so too does mercy. It is up to me to bring it to life.
Mercy begets mercy

Margaret Ann (Peg) Pilewski, OSB

A student left the Neighborhood Art House because she had moved to another school district. Not long after, Grandma visited me and asked if the girl could return to classes because, “In this day and age I had no idea that Mary would experience discrimination and bullying because of her light skin and tight knit hair.”

“Of course, we would love to have Mary come back,” I said.

The following week I encountered Mary on her first day back. We exchanged a hug. “Welcome back” and she squeezed me.

“Thanks, Sister Peg.”

“I am so sorry that you had a bad experience at your other school.”

“It’s OK,” she whispered.

“No, it’s not OK for people to be mean to you, Mary.”

I left her smiling.

Another ten minutes passed and there was laughter and a gaggle of girls surrounding Mary welcoming her back to the Art House. She was encircled by love and care. As we gathered for the opening of classes Mary came by with a young girl in each hand; one child was from Russia, the other was from the Congo.

“They don’t speak English, Sister Peg, so I am going to help them.”

Jesus visited me that day in this brief exchange of compassion and kindness. I experienced the example of Jesus relived here on the corner of 10th and Holland and understood yet again that mercy begets mercy.

Incarnation—the holy life coming down flowing over and through us. We are blessed.

The face that calls for mercy

Mary Ellen Plumb, OSB

His name is Omran Daqneesh. His innocent face, bloodied and covered with dust, sitting silently in an ambulance awaiting help, is a stark reminder of the toll of the war in Syria. And his face is an “incarnation of mercy” for me—calling me to stand for adequate educational opportunities and health care for every single child.

I long to love as God loves. It is these faces, these “incarnations of mercy and love” that stretch my heart and soul to that possibility.

Spend some time with a child you love. Look into their face. Imagine that face to be the face of an Iraqi child, a Muslim child, an Hispanic child, an Israeli child. Would you wish for that child anything less than you wish for the child you know and love? Imagine what you would be willing to risk, to lose, to give up, to sacrifice for the future of that child—and do something about it.

You will know then an incarnation of mercy and love.

Message of Divine Mercy

Placida Anheuser, OSB

When Pope Francis designated the Year of Mercy some may have thought he was a little late coming to the table but his insights into mercy, as well as his very manner of living, show that he knows God’s mercy has been front page news since Adam and Eve experienced the compassion and love of God.

Our Pope’s Jubilee of Mercy was called “to know the face of God’s mercy, which is Jesus Christ incarnate . . . (for) the whole Church is in need of such mercy . . . .”

Prayer, always a direct contact with God, is how I have come to know the face of God’s mercy. I have found “The Message of Divine Mercy,” given by Jesus himself to a young Polish nun in Krakow, Poland, to be a simple and outrageously rewarding way to know and understand God’s mercy. The diary of Sister Maria Faustyna Kowalska, canonized St. Faustina in the year 2000, inspired the Divine Mercy Chaplet. This Christian devotion has provided the means for me, at the age of 99 years young, to pray for the incarnation of mercy in myself, others and in our world. Just google Chaplet of Divine Mercy and you can learn for yourself the blessings promised to those who pray for mercy. It has helped me to trust in the endless mercy of Jesus and to live mercifully toward others. Maybe it will help you, too.
Young women seeking spirituality, challenge and human connection, come on in. Young women who believe your lives matter and who believe just as strongly that all lives matter, come on in. Young women willing to spend some of your life for others, come on in.

Over the last two years four young women have come in and found community with the Erie Benedictines. Each lives her experience in a distinct way—demonstrating, perhaps, that monastic life is morphing into wider expressions as new generations shaped by a different culture and worldview search for a meaningful life.

Each of the four are bloggers: sharing their personal search for meaning, their thoughts and insights, hopes and dreams, with a world-wide readership is not a strange concept to these women who grew up with the Internet. What follows are excerpts from the blogs of

★ **Sister Valerie Luckey**, age 28, an elementary school teacher from Emmaus, PA, who has chosen to enter the community and is currently a novice; Val’s blog is here: walkingintheholypresence.blogspot.com

★ **Jacqueline Small**, age 23, has a Masters of Divinity degree and is now in an MSW program. She interned in the office of Sister Joan Chittister in 2015, became an oblate and visits frequently; find Jackie’s writing here: www.monasteriesoftheheart.org; see Monks in our Midst, Jacqueline Small

★ **Breanna Mekuly**, age 26, has a Masters of Theological Studies and was the 2016 Sister Joan Chittister intern. She has moved to Erie to be closer to the community and work in community ministries; look for her writing at www.globalsistersreport.org/authors/breanna-mekuly

★ **Erin Carey**, age 22, is a recent college graduate from Ankeny, IA, who is living and working with the community as part of the Benedictine Women Service Corps (BWSC). Erin’s blog is here: stbensisters.blogspot.com, search for Erin Carey

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**Breanna**

Spending time with the sisters helped me realize the things I deeply desire in my own life. I am attracted to the sisters’ practices of prayer, reflection, balance and stability while living in intentional community, and as I participated in these practices in Erie, I came to recognize my longing to live a life of passion, joy, love and purpose.

My friends and I are not necessarily in stable jobs or living situations. Yet the stability of the sisters seems to extend beyond their physical location. The sisters are stable in part because they gather to pray at least twice a day, following the practice of the daily office that brings them together in body and spirit.

This makes me wonder, then, with my constant moving to different physical locations in order to try new things and seek out my vocation, what might it look like for me to become stable, to become an established and trusted member of society?

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**Jacqueline**

There are many things I look forward to each time I prepare to visit the monastery. There are sisters with whom I want to talk, walks to Lake Erie, ministries and routines in which I want to participate, and little neighbor children with whom I want to play.
Although the Liturgy of Hours, which is prayed in the morning, at noon, and in the evening, gives a distinctive and reliable structure to my days in the monastery, and although I’ve tried to incorporate a modified version of it into my own daily life, on each visit, I am surprised again by how much I have missed this, too. Whenever I settle into my seat in chapel, the bell summoning sisters and guests to prayer, there is a sense that things are as they should be.

We sit facing one another and pray the psalms aloud, alternating sides. There is a shared purpose, a sense of unity, and yet as many unique manners of living that out as there are voices praying. And those of us who are not sisters get to add our voices, our intentions, our desires, and our deeds to theirs, whether we are sitting in the chapel or connected through a ministry, through the internet, or simply through our mutual desire for a more just and peaceful planet.

Erin

At St. Benedict’s Education Center, I tutor refugees in conversational English, reading and math. They come from Iraq, Iran, Somalia, Afghanistan, Syria, the Congo, Bhutan and Nepal and are examples of the Benedictine values of work, community and hospitality. They work together to understand another language and culture, while providing for their children and families in a foreign place.

I was struck by the vulnerability it takes to learn a foreign language. One Syrian man opened my eyes to the constant struggle to be understood. While we studied English vocabulary, he would ask me to repeat the words back in Arabic. We laughed as we mispronounced or forgot words in each other’s language. I was self-conscious of my pronunciation and concerned if I was using the correct word.

Watching the news has become a new experience. Seeing images of Syrian towns reduced to rubble has now become seeing places that someone I know might be homesick for. The refugees have opened my heart wider to humanity. The world is becoming smaller and much bigger than I ever imagined.

Valerie

I have been so grateful for the support of community, friends, and family as I journey into this life, but there are still people who question my choice to enter a “dying institution,” joining a religious community where I am the youngest by more than twenty years. But as for me, I think there are many stranger things I could be choosing to do with my life. By entering this community, I am choosing to make a commitment to a group of wise women who live a life of prayer and witness, a life that upholds those on the margins, a life that demands relationship with God and with others.

I believe it is that very wisdom and love that we receive through relationship that will give us the energy to continue on the journey.

It is so easy to fear; it is a very real part of being human. But, we do have a choice to trust that God is indeed at work all the time and to move toward a place of loving the Mystery. Any time I am able to do that, great gratitude runs through me.

If you would like to experience Benedictine prayer, ministry and community, contact Sister Marilyn Schauble, Vocation Director at vocations@mtstbenedict.org or 814-899-0614. Sister Marilyn can help you decide how you’d like to connect with us—as an oblate, a regular visitor, living with us short term, volunteering in a ministry or as a seeker considering membership.
Following the Path
By Marilyn Schauble, OSB, Vocation Director

“Deciding what we must do to be happy ourselves so that we can be a gift to the world around us is the central question of life,” Sister Joan Chittister told ten women gathered at the monastery for a vocation discernment retreat last July. Seven of the women had traveled to the monastery from five different states and Canada and three of them are already in our initial monastic formation program discerning their call to Benedictine life.

That idea—that responding to our own personal vocation is the key to our happiness—was the cornerstone of Following the Path – Vocation Discernment Retreat. The weekend opened on Friday evening with an introductory session led by Sister Joan. Throughout the day Saturday Sister Joan engaged the women in an exploration of vocation using her book, Following the Path: The search for a life of passion, purpose, and joy, as the basis for the conversation.

During their weekend at the monastery the women experienced some of our monastic values including prayer, community, leisure and celebration. They had a taste of community life staying at the monastery, they joined us in praying the Liturgy of the Hours, we planned special leisure activities with them and they celebrated the Feast of Benedict with us on July 11. A number of the sisters joined us for the weekend which also gave the women the opportunity for impromptu conversation about monastic life and values.

“We had a beautiful day for our Sunday afternoon leisure at Presque Isle State Park followed by Evening Prayer and a cookout on our Lake Erie waterfront property,” said Sister Dianne Sabol, member of the Vocation Committee. “On Monday the women experienced our ministries, visiting and helping out in some of the inner-city ministries as well as ministries at the monastery.”

I felt it was a good weekend and comments I received from participants affirmed that feeling. “This entire opportunity was very helpful and just what I needed,” said one participant. “It is good to know that there are others out there discerning where their life path might be taking them.” Another participant shared, “We are leaving nourished, affirmed in our searching, welcomed by the community, and wanting more.”

I am profoundly grateful and very hope-filled to have been in the presence of women who have a strong desire to listen and respond to God’s call. Their insights, questions and ponderings revealed them to be seekers of God, not just for themselves but also for the betterment of the world.

New Postulant Accepted
Kathy McCarthy, originally from Pittsburgh, PA, has been accepted as a postulant. For many years Kathy worked for L’Arche Erie but for the past 16 years she worked for L’Arche Calgary, Canada. The ritual of entrance, scheduled for the end of November, will mark the beginning of Kathy’s postulancy. Postulancy is the first phase of monastic formation. As a postulant Kathy will participate fully in the life of the community and live the communal life of prayer and ministry. She will learn community history, vision and values and have classes on Benedictine spirituality as she continues to discern her vocation.

Upcoming Events
Hosted by Marilyn Schauble, OSB
Canisius College, Buffalo, NY

Winter Service Experience for 8 – 10 students
January 8 – 14, 2017

“Be the Light” Leadership Retreat for 10 – 12 students
Facilitated by Mary Ellen Plumb, OSB
Funded by the Lily-Foundation Youth Theology Institute
March 24 – 25, 2017

Women’s Retreat for 20-25 women of Canisius
April 28 – 29, 2017

To learn more about the Benedictine way of life, visit ErieBenedictine.org or contact Marilyn Schauble, OSB, Vocation Director, at vocations@mtstbenedict.org or 814-899-0614.
VALERIE LUCKEY BECOMES A NOVICE

“I ask that I may continue to seek God through sharing the monastic life with this Benedictine community,” requested postulant Valerie Luckey during a special ritual at Evening Prayer on September 10. In response, the Benedictine community welcomed her into the novitiate, the second stage of initial monastic formation.

During the ritual Sister Anne Wambach, Prioress, invited the community to support Val and Sister Stephanie Schmidt, Novice Director, throughout this year of continued discernment. Sister Stephanie then presented Val with a copy of the Rule of Benedict as a sign that it will be a focal point of her studies in the coming year.

As her postulant year with the community came to an end and she decided to continue her monastic journey, Val explained her choice: “Life is about seeking God wholeheartedly. The call to this Benedictine life is deeply rooted in my spirit. The novitiate will provide a more unique time and space for my discernment.”

WITH HEARTS EXPANDING: NOVICE AND DIRECTORS INSTITUTE

By Karen Oprenchok, OSB, Novice

Unshakeable faith . . . love of our Benedictine charism . . . enormous courage . . . a capacity for suffering and self-sacrifice. Those are some of the things novices will need as we assume our role as part of the re-shaping generation of religious women, explained Sister Ephrem Hollermann to our group of 12 novices gathered at St. Benedict Monastery in St. Joseph, MN, for the annual Novice and Directors Institute (NADI).

Sister Dina Lauricella, also an Erie Benedictine novice, and I, along with our formation director Sister Stephanie Schmidt, attended NADI last May. The Institute provides an opportunity for novices and directors to learn about the Benedictine way of life and come to know each other through the lens of initial monastic formation. This year’s theme, “With Hearts Expanding,” came alive for me in many ways.

The novices and directors traveled from nine states for the 10 day gathering. Together we reflected on the Rule of Benedict and its relationship to the gospels, the Saint John’s Bible, Benedictine foundresses in North America, community life, iconography and more. We engaged in outreach and service, made a visit to St. John’s Abbey, enjoyed a fun day at Como Park Zoo & Conservatory and went on a Mississippi riverboat cruise. Sister Dina echoed my sentiments when she said, “We shared community and vocation stories, faith and fun.”

The input I received continues to expand my heart. Sister Laura Swan, from St. Placid Priory in Lacey, WA, told us that “listen” is the most dangerous word we will ever learn as it will prompt us to action. Sister Ephrem, from our host community of St. Benedict Monastery, also told us that in addition to faith, love of our charism and courage, we will need the ability to imagine how the gap between gospel values and reality can be bridged and that we’ll need a prophetic spirit of risk-taking. I pray for all of those qualities.

NADI left me with an expanded heart and I am grateful for all I learned about the Benedictine way of life, the lives of novices in other communities, and about myself and the choices I’ve made. I experienced many new connections and came away with the realization that we novices are committed and connected as Benedictine women who seek God in the communal life and respond in prayer and ministry. It is a connection that I will cherish for a long time to come.
INCREASING OUR CAPACITY TO LOVE

by Valerie Luckey, OSB, Novice

According to psychologist Brother John Mark Falkenhain, two Benedictine traits are key to developing the gift of learning to love in community: hospitality and humility. Humility, he explained, calls us to accept our entire selves—gifts as well as areas where we need to grow. As we learn to love our entire selves, we also learn to extend that same love to others through hospitality. In his presentation that looked at our celibate lifestyle, Brother John Mark challenged us to view celibacy as part of being a healthy and fully integrated person, reminding us that all our choices should, “increase our capacity to love.”

Brother John Mark, a monk from St. Meinrad Archabbey in St. Meinrad, IN, was our presenter at last October’s East Coast Benedictine Formation Weekend, “Celibacy,” held at St. Benedict Monastery, Bristow, VA. This annual event also gives newcomers to the monastic life an opportunity to come to know other Benedictine sisters in initial monastic formation while hearing about a topic relevant to our lives.

Five of us traveled from Erie to Bristow for the weekend: the four of us in initial monastic formation, Sisters Pat Witulski, Dina Lauricella, Karen Oprenchok and me, and Sister Stephanie Schmidt, our formation director. In addition to attending the workshop, we took advantage of Bristow’s close proximity to Washington, DC, to spend a day enjoying the Smithsonian museums where we saw that the Museum of American History recently added Trappist monk Thomas Merton’s widely recognized denim jacket to one of its displays.

A TOPIC DEAR TO MY HEART

By Pat Witulski, OSB, Scholastic

This past summer I traveled to St. John’s University, Collegeville, MN, with Sister Stephanie Schmidt, Director of Monastic Formation, to attend the 2016 Monastic Institute titled “Monastic Profession,” a topic dear to my heart as a religious woman in temporary profession discerning perpetual profession of vows. St. John’s School of Theology and Seminary sponsors the annual event to foster reflection and conversation on matters of concern to both Christian and non-Christian monastic communities.

The Institute’s presenters were Sister Michaela Hedican, Prioress of St. Benedict Monastery in St. Joseph, MN, and Abbott John Klassen of St. John’s Abbey. I found them to be very engaging in their ability to foster positive and enthusiastic energy within a group of 102 participants that included professed religious and oblates.

While the conference offered a wealth of practical information on the various aspects of monastic profession, what Sister Shawn Carruth, Prioress of Mount St. Benedict Monastery in Crookston, MN, said about monastic obedience (one of three vows monastics profess—the other two vows are stability and fidelity to the monastic way of life) spoke to my heart: “Through listening, through our obedience, through our foregoing of our independence, we do not diminish our own person. Rather, we recognize the legitimacy of an obligation that urges us to become more than we already are with and for other people.

As I continue to contemplate these words I am coming to understand that it is by monastic obedience that I will learn to empty myself for the purpose of being more Christ-like and better able to serve others. I am reminded of what Benedict says in Chapter 4 of the Rule: “Never turn away when someone needs your love.” Monastic obedience is about love and although it sometimes challenges me beyond my comfort zone it is definitely growing my compassion and empathy. As Sister Michaela said, “Benedict is calling us to listen as to how we can perform our ordinary day-to-day living tasks in a way that makes Christ present in the monastery. Obedience is about love. It is graced mutuality in community life.”
TWO YOUNG WOMEN EXPERIENCE LIFE IN THE MONASTERY

By Stephanie Schmidt, OSB, Director of Monastic Formation

Jessica Varguez, a 24-year-old oblate from Mérida, Mexico, is a new participant in the Benedicta Riepp Monastic Experience Program. On September 19 she officially made her promise to live with the community for six months, immersing herself in prayer, ministry and community life. During the simple ritual, Sister Anne Wambach, Prioress, welcomed Jessica and the entire community offered her a blessing.

Jessica is eager to deepen her own spirituality and to discover more about the daily living of Benedictine values. During her time in the program she is working at St. Benedict’s Child Development Center where she has the opportunity to use her native Spanish language with the children. Sister Linda Romey is Jessica’s mentor and meets with her weekly as part of the program.

The Erie Benedictines maintain a strong connection with their oblates in Mérida: sisters and oblates from Erie have visited and worked in Mérida and oblates from Mérida have traveled to Erie. The original connection was made through the Erie Diocesan Mission of Friendship. Jessica is the first oblate from Mérida to live at the monastery.

Erin Carey, a 22-year-old graduate of the College of St. Benedict in St. Joseph, MN, is living and working with the Benedictine Sisters of Erie as part of the Benedictine Women Service Corps (BWSC). This program is an outreach of Saint Benedict’s Monastery, St. Joseph, MN, that invites recent College of St. Benedict graduates to travel to another monastic community where they build relationships that support justice and service in a new location as they strive to live Benedictine values.

Erin will live at the monastery and share community life for nine months as part of her commitment. Her degree is in elementary education and she is also a musician which led to her working part time at the Neighborhood Art House teaching music to children and part time at St. Benedict Education Center tutoring refugees. Erin is from Ankeny, Iowa.

INITIAL RITE OF INCORPORATION

The Initial Rite of Incorporation process for Sister Jacinta Conklin took place on Monday, November 14, during the community’s Evening Prayer. Sister Jacinta came to the community from St. Marys, PA. When it became clear that their monastery would be closing as a result of a climbing median age and lack of new members, the 17 Benedictines of St. Joseph Monastery started to visit other Benedictine communities. After prayer and discernment Sister Jacinta asked to come to Erie. “With open hearts we welcome another monastic into our midst,” said Sister Anne Wambach, Prioress. “She is indeed a blessing to us.” During the ritual, Sister Jacinta received the community pin as a symbol of her desire to become a fully incorporated member. “Transferring your vows to another community is never an easy decision,” said vocation director Sister Marilyn Schauble. “It is a privilege for us to support Sister Jacinta as she continues the monastic journey with us.”
Oblate Commitment Ceremony

The annual Oblate Commitment Ceremony was celebrated at Mount St. Benedict Monastery on Saturday, October 29, when 290 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, six 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.

And the journey continues

Oblates Alyssa Harpst and Josh Kissel, who were married in September, tell us how Benedictine relationships and values have shaped them as individuals and strengthened them as a couple.

Alyssa:
I first met the Benedictine Sisters of Erie seven years ago through a service immersion spring break trip in my sophomore year at Canisius College in Buffalo, NY. In the first few hours after arriving at the monastery, I found myself feeling completely comfortable with this community of women and the hospitality I experienced encouraged me to return several times for service trips. I ultimately decided to participate in the Benedicta Riepp Monastic Experience Program following graduation in 2011. During that year living in community—the most formative year of my adult life—I learned how to live my life for others as I grew stronger in my faith. The sisters taught me the meaning of being
selfless and how to apply this to every part of my life. I became an oblate in 2012, and my relationship with the Erie Benedictines only grew deeper. Although I matured in leaps and bounds during this time, I am always a work in progress. As I continue to learn how to live my life for others, I now apply that to the newest role I play: wife.

Josh:
Alyssa introduced me to the Benedictine Sisters of Erie two and a half years ago. When we first started dating, she explained to me about the community, what they do, and how close she is with the sisters. I remember her saying that the sisters came with her as a package deal, all or nothing. Before meeting the community, I was a little nervous, but afterwards, I could not have been more comfortable. They welcomed me with open arms. I have watched how they live their lives with deep faith and love, and have learned and grown with them. I came to deeply admire, appreciate, and respect what they believe and how they live, and the only way I knew how to show my admiration was to join them. I became an oblate in 2015. I have learned so much from the sisters, and continue to grow in every aspect of my life, especially in my new role as husband.

Alyssa and Josh:
The Benedictine Sisters of Erie have helped us become grounded in our faith as a couple, and continue to play a significant role in our marriage. The love and support that we feel from the community cannot be put into words. We will continue to live out Benedictine values in our marriage, in our home as our family grows, in the workplace, when we attend Sunday liturgy, and in our everyday interactions.

Oblate Receives Gannon Distinguished Alum Award

Oblate Betsy (Roebuck) Monsalve, also a St. Benedict Academy Alum, was honored as a 2016 Gannon University Distinguished Alumna from the Morosky College of Health Professions and Sciences. She earned her nursing degree from Villa Maria College in 1970 and her Masters of Science in nursing from Wayne State University in 1976. She was one of the first certified nurse practitioners in the country and eventually became a certified industrial hygienist and safety engineer. Betsy formed her own occupational and environmental health and safety consulting firm in Washington, D.C., where she consulted for 18 years before returning to Erie. She has been an active volunteer with Gannon University on the Our West Bayfront Neighborhood Planning and Development Association, is a Benedictine oblate and volunteer, a member of the Erie Rotary Club and co-founder, with her husband Marco, also an oblate, of the Mercyhurst Prep Aura Scholarship for Hispanic-American girls.

Oblate receives LGBT Community Progress Award from GEAE

Oblate Doris Cipolla received an LGBT Community Progress Award from the Greater Erie Alliance for Equality (GEAE). Doris, a pioneer in the LGBT movement in greater Erie, was honored for her efforts and commitment on behalf of marriage equality and inheritance rights. “I am so humbled to be chosen for this award,” said Doris. “I have worked for these rights for many years and continue to be committed to issues of equality in the greater Erie community.” Doris continues her activism on behalf of social justice, peace and the environment, the interests that she and her late partner, oblate Charlene Tanner, shared and in whose name Doris established the Charlene M. Tanner Speaker Series, an annual event hosted by Mercyhurst University that brings award-winning speakers devoted to promoting these same values to Erie.

Oblate Way of Life

If you desire to deepen your relationship with God, with others and with yourself, ground your spirituality in values based on simplicity, respect, hospitality, and reverence for all life, and enter into a distinct relationship with others on a similar spiritual path, then consider becoming an Oblate of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie. To learn more, visit ErieBenedictines.org or contact the co-directors: oblates@mtstbenedict.org or 814-899-0614.
Imagine small pockets of people interested in becoming small monasteries meeting across the country to pray, practice lectio, study, and act in the Benedictine tradition. One such group is Heart to Heart monastery in Youngsville, PA, part of the Monasteries of the Heart (MOH) movement created by the Benedictine Sisters of Erie in 2011 to share monastic spirituality with contemporary seekers.

Though Monasteries of the Heart is primarily an online movement with some 15,000 participants, we do have over 20 communities that meet onsite in various locations around the country. As coordinator of the onsite communities for Monasteries of the Heart, I visited Heart to Heart a few months ago to learn more about what motivated them to become an MOH community and how this decision has affected their lives.

The five people who comprise the core of the group are active in their parish, Holy Redeemer in Warren, PA. In addition, Marge and Neil Himber, who host their weekly meetings, have been oblates of the Benedictine community in Erie since 2003.

“We had been meeting as a small faith group since 2010,” said Marge, “so when Sister Joan’s book, The Monastery of the Heart, was published, Neil and I decided it was the right time to introduce the others to the Benedictine way of life by reading and discussing the book during our weekly meetings.” This decision also influenced everyone to become members of the MOH website.

The other members of the group wanted to learn more about monastic living and the Rule of Benedict and agreed that “being part of the group and using the Monasteries of the Heart website enhances our spiritual lives and has deepened our understanding of the rule.”

Moved by the growth in their spiritual lives, the other core members are now oblates of the Erie Benedictine community, too. Joan Eighmey said to me, “MOH is a very important part of my life and I recommend it to other oblates because I have gained insight and encouragement in my own spiritual journey through study of Sister Joan’s books, monastic prayer, and open sharing of others’ journeys.”

Neil, who has been involved in prison ministry in the Erie Diocese for over twenty years and is a volunteer at the St. Joseph’s Soup Kitchen, discussed the impact his membership in MOH has on these commitments. He said of the group, “The fruit of our study and the encouragement we get from meeting as a small group spills over to our ministries in our parish and our community. We feel closer to each other and feel safe sharing at a deeper level because of the support of a group we can trust.”

The meeting ended with these words from Mary Sullivan: “After studying Sister Joan’s books as a group, I see the promise and hope for a world that is often full of negativity and mistrust.”

If you would like to learn more about Benedictine monastic values and the Monasteries of the Heart movement, go to www.monasteriesoftheheart.org.
As web developer for ErieBenedictines.org I am always on the alert for new web features, for ways to repurpose content and share our spirituality and our corporate commitment to work for sustainability and justice with newer and wider audiences. And didn’t Sister Carolyn Gorny-Kopkowski come to mind as the keeper of 30 years’ worth of repurpose-able content on creation spirituality and Benedictinism.

Here’s how it went down: I walked into Carolyn’s office and asked if she’d be willing to repurpose her retreat content as podcasts that we could share on our website. She literally dried her tears before asking me what a podcast was. “I had just been crying to my friend that I didn’t know what I was going to do now that I was retiring from leading retreats. And in walked Linda asking me to do podcasts, whatever those were. Talk about God answering prayers!” she said later.

After learning to maneuver a digital recorder and reviewing the basics of creating a good podcast, Sister Carolyn began writing and then recording her scripts and “Sister Carolyn on Creation Spirituality” was born. It debuted on the Retreats and Spirituality Resources page at ErieBenedictines.org. Subsequently the podcast was added to iTunes which lets followers subscribe to the biweekly episodes using their smartphone or tablet app. Every two weeks when a new episode is posted it will appear in your list of podcasts after you subscribe. It’s free so anyone can listen on a phone or computer.

In her first episode, “Knowing God,” Sister Carolyn introduces the four paths of Creation Spirituality:

- **Path 1**: is the *Via Positiva* (via meaning way)—I call Path 1 the Way of Blessing: the experience of God in creation.
- **Path 2**: is the *Via Negativa* and I say the Way of Emptying: the experience of God by letting go and letting be.
- **Path 3**: is the *Via Creativa* and I identify it as the Way of Re-Creation: the experience of God in breakthrough and giving birth to self and God.
- **Path 4**: is the *Via Transformativa* and I know it as the Way of Transformation: the experience of God by way of compassion and social justice.

And in the second episode, “The Five Senses,” Sister Carolyn says, “Creation Spirituality is rooted in being open to the present moment. Entering—not merely observing—the present moment can be an intense discovery. The intensity may highlight the beauty of God’s creation.

“However, you could be facing the frustrations, even the challenges that life presents. Immersing yourself in the present moment means breathing in whatever is within you, before you, surrounding you at any given moment whether it be the darkness or the light. The five senses, imagination and the present moment are key to Creation Spirituality.”

A new episode is posted every two weeks. Find all episodes and a link to the iTunes feed here: www.eriebenedictines.org/podcast-creation-spirituality

Sister Carolyn began offering retreats based on the seasons of Summer, Fall, Winter and Spring connected with the four Paths of Creation Spirituality over 30 years ago and has led more than 100 retreats on the topic. She received her Master’s Degree in Creation Spirituality from Mundelein College, Chicago, IL.
Like Johnny-jump-ups short poems are popping up on the front steps of homes in east side inner city Erie as part of a “Step Into Poetry” project under the direction of Erie Benedictine Sister Mary Lou Kownacki.

“We plan to paint 20 steps and are halfway to our goal of spreading beauty in blighted areas,” said Sister Mary Lou, coordinator of The Writing Studio, sponsors of the project.

Local artist Joe Gallagher, who proposed the poem idea, is painting all the sites. “I received a great response from neighbors who gathered to watch me work and from others walking by. ‘Thumbs up’ and ‘looks great’ were the two most common comments.”

A belief in the power of art is what drew Margarita Dangel, Neighborhood Manager of the Eastside office, Sisters of St. Joseph Neighborhood Network, to participate in the project. Dangel, who has been instrumental in energizing residents around the project, said “Like all art, the poems allow you to pause for a few seconds and create a space of calm and rest inside yourself, to get in touch with who you really are.”

For Dan Serafin, owner of the eastside Serafin’s Food Market, the project is important because “it shows that someone cares. Somebody doesn’t think this is just a dilapidated neighborhood that should be ignored. Somebody took the time to do something positive here.”

Step into Poetry was made possible by a grant from Erie Arts & Culture and a private donor.

**WHY DID YOU CHOOSE THIS POEM FOR YOUR FRONT STEP?**

**Dan Serafin**, owner of Serafin’s Food Market on 24th and Ash, oldest grocery store in the city of Erie.

*Shadows on wall
Noises down the hall
Life doesn’t frighten me at all*

—Maya Angelou

604 E. 24th

When people talk about where my store is located they say—it’s a bad area, it’s a bad this, it’s a bad that. Serafin’s has been here 90 years and the people who live here will tell you that it’s not as bad a neighborhood as you hear and they are not scared. For me, the poem speaks on behalf of the neighbors.

**Margarita Dangel**, Sisters of St. Joseph Neighborhood Network, shares her favorite poem
Morning is a new sheet of paper for you to write on —Eve Merriam

I think we limit ourselves a lot by the stories we create about ourselves. Those stories determine how we think, what we believe, and how we react. This poem says to me that we can start totally fresh every day. We can look with fresh eyes at ourselves and at every person we meet. Every day is a real new beginning.

My candle burns at both ends;
It will not last the night;
But ah, my foes, and oh my friends—
It gives a lovely light.
—Edna Saint Vincent Millay

It’s a way to bring neighbors together. Children coming from school stop and ask what it means. And we talk about it. My neighbors stop and ask if they can have a poem on their stairs. So it’s brought a lot of conversation and community building to the neighborhood. On a personal note, the Millay poem represents the kind of life I hope I’m living. I want my life to give a “lovely light.”

Mary Beth Smogorzewski / 711 East 25th

The Writing Studio is a collective of women writers and literary advocates whose mission is to honor the word. It is located in The Studio at Saint Mary’s: Space to Create at 310 E. 10th St. in Erie, PA. The Writing Studio sponsors such activities as writing workshops, author readings, book discussions, literary public art projects, literary activities with women in transition, and initiatives to celebrate National Poetry Month. Erie Benedictine Sister Mary Lou Kownacki initiated and coordinates the writing collective that includes Hannah Paul, Education & Outreach Chair, Film Society of Northwestern PA; Kathy Felong, Vice President of Strategic Communications / Strategic Marketing Division, Erie Insurance; Laura Rutland, Chairperson, English Department, Gannon University; Marcy Hall, artist and Outreach Services Manager, Erie County Public Library; Liz Allen, freelance writer and editor; Marjorie Podolsky, retired senior lecturer in English from Penn State-Behrend College, Linda Romey, OSB, web developer and designer, Benetvision and Monasteries of the Heart. For more info, www.writingstudio-erie.org

Mary Lou Kownacki, OSB
Christmas means many things to different people—a time of celebration, gift giving, wonderful foods, carols, friendship and family traditions. It also means reaching out to others—to lend a helping hand and to make sure that all feel a part of our extended human family.

Most of us reading this magazine are a part of the extended Benedictine family. Why? Because for one reason or another you have a connection to this community:

❖ you might be a sister’s family member;
❖ perhaps you were taught by the sisters;
❖ you may have made a retreat here at the monastery;
❖ you may have been influenced by the sisters’ stand on social justice issues;
❖ you are an oblate;
❖ you benefitted from one of the community’s ministries;
❖ you are a volunteer;
❖ you read some writing by a sister that made you think and fed your spirit;
❖ or perhaps you visited our website and saw all the incredible things happening in this community.

The list can go on and on and on! All amazingly different experiences of the sisters and not just limited to the Erie area.

The sisters who founded the Erie community 160 years ago didn’t come from the Erie area, either. By now you have probably received Sister Anne’s Christmas appeal letter that describes the beginnings of this community when the first six Benedictine women arrived in Erie, PA, from Germany. What a journey those young sisters experienced as they faced terrible poverty and illness with few resources to draw upon! However, their commitment to serve the poor and immigrants was unwavering, and in spite of their struggles, they persevered. By reaching out to those around them this community continued to grow. Today there are nearly 100 sisters ranging from 28 to 99 years young, more than 250 oblates, and thousands of friends, family, staff and volunteers who are supporters of this community. Yes, that’s YOU!

You already know the amazing things that happen because of your financial support. If you need reminding, just read some of the stories in this magazine and see how YOU have changed lives. You also know how grateful the sisters are for your gifts. Without your help, many children, families and especially women would not experience the warmth of a hot meal, get help in finding a job, or be given the skills to navigate a new land. Perhaps most important, though, is that together we have built a community of caring where people can always turn if they need help. Two examples of the transformative power of a gift to the sisters is that through their ministries they give inner-city children access to the arts and teach refugees English. As you know, access to education is crucial in fighting poverty.
FROM ALL OF US TO ALL OF YOU,

THANK YOU!

MERRY CHRISTMAS

This extended community of such a diverse group of people is, indeed, a microcosm of a world many of us wish for. YOU are a critical part of that dream and in order for us to keep this spirit alive and healthy we need your continued support to reach out to all who need help—no matter where they’re from, or what their religion might be.

Please send us a financial gift to celebrate this Christmas. You know that whatever you can afford, whether it’s $5, $50 or $5,000, it will be spent wisely and help transform lives. Just go online to our secure website, ErieBenedictines.org, and click on Donate Now. You can also write a check, complete the information on the enclosed remittance envelope and return it to us via regular mail.

I’m sure you also have friends who have decided they don’t want a traditional gift or they tell you there is nothing they need. You might be thinking it would be nice to get them some small little thing anyway. We have the perfect gift for those people in your lives. An alternative gift to the sisters to celebrate or honor someone who is dear to you, whether alive or deceased, will bring positive change to the lives of the sisters and to those to whom they minister. Just complete the section on the enclosed envelope or go online to ErieBenedictines.org and choose to Donate Now. A card will be sent to the person, or family of the person, in whose name the gift is given.

Finally, many of you let us know how much you love seeing the sisters’ pictures on these pages and on the Christmas appeal that you should have received. We hope that the pictures this year also bring back happy memories and spark gratitude for this amazing group of women. Some of the smiling faces are sadly no longer with us and some are new but one thing never changes: their Faith makes all things possible; their Hope makes all things work; and their Love makes all things beautiful.

We, the sisters and worshipping community, give thanks for you every Sunday at Liturgy. Merry Christmas and thank you to ALL OF YOU, our faithful supporters and companion dreamers.

Jo Clarke, Oblate
Director of Annual Giving
Be a part of Annual Giving or our Sustainer Program

You have seen many stories over the past year about what happens at the monastery and in the ministries because of your financial support. If you can make a yearly gift to the sisters we would be enormously grateful.

A convenient way to give is through our **Sustainer Program.** This method allows you to donate a gift automatically on a recurring basis. You can choose to give monthly, quarterly or semi-annually, whatever fits your budget. You can do this online, via the enclosed envelope or call one of us at the Development Office and give us your information over the phone.

We always love to talk with you, our supporters, and get feedback on what you think we are doing right, or listen if you have any questions or concerns. Please feel free to pick up the phone and call us anytime. Also, if you would like a tour of our monastery or a particular ministry, call me at 814-899-0614, ext. 2281, email joclarke@mtstbenedict.org. You can also call Patti Eichen, Development Staff, at ext. 2442, email peichen@mtstbenedict.org.

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 peoples’ lives for generations to come. If you have already included the sisters in your will, please 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 Mary Jane Vergotz, OSB, at 814-899-0614, ext. 2409, or email her at srmaryjane@mtstbenedict.org. Sister Mary Jane will be happy to sit down and talk with you about our shared dreams for the future.

Are you 70 ½ or older?
Do you own an IRA?
Would like to contribute to the Benedictine Sisters of Erie?

If the answer is “Yes!” to all of these questions, then please read on.

On December 18, 2015, Congress passed legislation to make tax-free IRA gifts permanent. If you are 70 ½ or older when the distribution is made you can **transfer up to $100,000 from an IRA directly** to qualifying charities, like the Benedictine Sisters of Erie, without having to count the donation as taxable income.

If you are interested in making such a gift, please talk directly with your professional financial advisor and then call Sister Mary Jane Vergotz at Mount St. Benedict Monastery, 814-899-0614, ext. 2402.

*Please remember this tax-free charitable gift must be made directly from your IRA to the Benedictine Sisters of Erie.*
“Be stubborn about the vision, but flexible with your plan,” wrote John C. Maxwell.

In the year following the devastating fire at Emmaus Soup Kitchen, I have come to appreciate that advice. When a good part of the soup kitchen went up in flames, we decided to build a new facility that would service both the kitchen and the food pantry. The people of Erie generously responded to our plans and we were set to break ground on the plot of land behind the present soup kitchen.

But two things made us reconsider. First, the projected cost of a new building was more than we originally budgeted and had collected from your generous donations and from the insurance settlement following the fire. We did not want to draw from reserves devoted to the feeding of the poor by putting more of that money into facilities rather than food. Second, we learned that both our kitchen and pantry buildings would have to be demolished and we would be unable to serve our guests for an extended period of time. We were not comfortable with both of those realities.

After much consultation and consideration, we decided to renovate the remaining parts of the soup kitchen rather than build a new facility. We based our decision on four considerations:

1. The functional part of the Soup Kitchen as we knew it remained intact despite the fact that fire destroyed the second floor apartment and soup kitchen bathrooms.
2. The present Food Pantry property that is adjacent to the Soup Kitchen is still a solid building.
3. Given the proper renovations, it would be possible to use these two buildings in tandem and enlarge the seating area at the same time.
4. The insurance money received for the renovation of the Soup Kitchen as a result of the fire—in addition to the spontaneous donations received from our friends and supporters to help with these renovations—is largely sufficient to cover the repairs and renovations needed.

Our architects, Weber Murphy Fox, changed the plans but kept the vision. Renovations are now underway. The second floor of the present soup kitchen—destroyed by the fire—has been removed and both structures are being renovated. We have connected the two buildings by a short enclosed ramp, and the present pantry, previously used only two mornings a week, will now provide a separate dining area for the growing number of families who frequent the soup kitchen as well as provide needed space for other needs as they occur. Peter Hardner & Sons was chosen as contractor and work began in late August.

Here’s the good news: As the renovations progressed, we only had to close the kitchen and pantry for two weeks. We are continuing to feed the hungry during the remainder of the restoration.

I feel very confident that our decision for a new use of old property is a truer response to our mission to feed the hungry than the much larger costs of building an entire new facility.

From the bottom of my heart I thank you for your support.

Sister Mary Miller
Director, Emmaus Ministries’, Inc.

As of the end of November, the renovations are nearing completion and the Emmaus Soup Kitchen is maintaining its normal schedule.

Sister Mary Miller, director of Emmaus Ministries, received the 2016 Monsignor Wilfrid J. Nash Principles of Christian Conduct Award as one of five Distinguished Alumni honored by Gannon University at a dinner Friday, September 30.

“The criteria for this award is based on Monsignor Nash’s outstanding Christian service, especially in the area of educating others,” said Greg J. Czarnecki, president Gannon University Alumni Association, in his introduction. “This year’s recipient is Sister Mary Miller for her unending love, mercy and compassion for the less fortunate.”

Drawn by her charisma and passion for the Gospel, thousands of people in the Erie community have embraced Emmaus. Presently, the group is served by over 300 local volunteers and is the largest on-site food provider in the state of Pennsylvania. Annually, the Emmaus Soup Kitchen serves 45,000 meals, the Food Pantry distributes over 15,000 bags of groceries, the Kids Café serves 7,000 meals to inner-city children, and Emmaus Grove harvests roughly 2,000 pounds of produce to help feed soup kitchen guests.
“Due to the urgent need for low to moderate income housing for the elderly and handicapped we are proposing a plan for a housing project that corresponds to the community’s concept of social justice,” were the words of the late Sister Mary Philip Kiehlmeier (d. 2008) that marked the beginning of what is now known as Benetwood Apartments. Sister Mary Philip was the first administrator of the 75-unit apartment building the Benedictine Sisters built on property adjacent to the monastery with a low-interest loan from the Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

The groundbreaking took place on June 23, 1980, the 124th anniversary of the foundation of the Erie Benedictines. The building was completed in September 1981 and by mid-October it was fully occupied and has remained at full occupancy—with a waiting list—ever since. “Benetwood is much more than a HUD-subsidized apartment building for low-income elderly and/or mobility-challenged individuals,” said Sister Pat Hause, current administrator. “Benetwood is home. Benetwood is community.”

“Benetwood has earned its reputation as a well-respected property,” Sister Pat continued. The three-story, inverted T-shape building features a centrally enclosed foyer and atrium, sun and shade porches and outside patios. Numerous renovations through the years, including the addition of a computer room, beauty salon and second elevator, have improved the facility and the living experience for the residents. HUD also provided funding for office space and a service coordinator.

Benetwood Apartments celebrates 35 years

Architect Dan Wallace oversaw the most recent prize-winning interior design renovation (see sidebar). Thanks to donor Mrs. Jackie Wallace, three new paintings were also placed around the building. “We were so pleased with the results of the renovation,” said Sister Pat. “What better way to mark our 35th anniversary then with a new look and an Open House?”

The Benetwood staff, Sister Pat, Sister Marla Bleil, administrative assistant, Roberta Yetman, assistant manager, Wendy Wallace, service coordinator, and Rick Cass, maintenance, welcomed guests for the Open House on September 18. Residents served as tour guides and guests were invited to handmade cookies and finger foods. Sister Anne Wambach, Prioress of the Benedictine Sisters, offered a blessing: “Grant that the blessing we impart this day, O God, will allow the Benetwood community to flourish for all those present and all those to come.”

In honor of the occasion, Benetwood residents purchased a unique clock for the community gathering rooms where they spend evenings, holidays and special times together. Resident Mary Ann White presented the clock: “This clock is singular but more importantly, the message it conveys is especially
meaningful for us here at Benetwood: *Time spent with family is worth every second.*
Another resident added, “This is a beautiful place to call home. It is the perfect place for me and I could not be happier.”

Several of Benetwood's nine-member Board of Directors were also present for the special celebration. The collective support and oversight of members Marcia Nitzcynski, Katie Jones, Eileen Jefferys, Gery Nietupski, Eileen Cullen, Kitty Holtz, and Sisters Charles Marie Holze, Rose Ann Kolbas and Cindy Hoover is instrumental in the ongoing operation and development of the highly-ranked facility.

Sister Pat concluded the event with a final note of appreciation to the residents, their families, the sisters and guests who came together for the anniversary event, “Thank you for the many beautiful gifts that celebrate this anniversary. I thank you for the kindness and support that you offer each of us daily. It does not go unnoticed or unappreciated.”

(L-R) Roberta Yetman, Sisters Marla Bleil and Pat Hause, Wendy Wallace

The Professional Affordable Housing Management Association (PAHMA) awarded Benetwood Apartments its top interior design award, the Platinum Award in Interior Design, for renovations made in 2015. Those renovations included eye-pleasing paint hues that updated all three floors and new nature-inspired canvas artwork highlighting accent walls. Comfortable new furniture was purchased for the foyers and carpeting was installed throughout the common areas, modernizing the building without sacrificing its warmth and hospitality. All 75 resident apartments have new wood laminate flooring in kitchens and bathrooms. New stoves and refrigerators were installed and raised toilets were fitted to improve safety. Sister Pat Hause accepted the award at the 2016 PAHMA conference held last October at the Seven Springs Convention Center in Champion, PA.
The ecological crisis that is facing us today requires many things to change, but it is we humans above all who need to change.

—Pope Francis, *Laudato Sí* #202

Climate change is a moral issue. Pope Francis writes in *Laudato Sí* that the gravest effects of all attacks on the environment are suffered by the poor. By adopting the Paris Pledge with its goal of 50% reduction in fossil fuel emissions by 2030 and carbon neutrality (net zero carbon emissions) by 2050, the Benedictine Sisters are addressing their corporate commitment to work for sustainability and justice, especially for women and children.

Leading us in this effort is the Committee for Alternative Resource Energy (CARE) with its mission to positively respond to the challenge of climate change by serving as a resource for the Benedictine Sisters of Erie as they seek to reach their goal of carbon neutrality, and by promoting sustainable energy use by the general public.

Because extensive research is key to make informed decisions the CARE committee engaged consultants including Guy McUmber, Green Building Alliance, Steve Porter, NWPA Green Economy Task Force, and Sam Miller, retired engineer, to gain greater understanding. After careful consideration, CARE chose to investigate solar energy. The committee visited the solar installation at the Corry Area Redevelopment Authority in Corry, PA, to better understand ground-mounted solar arrays.

We realized that before any kind of renewable energy installation is considered, our buildings need to be as energy efficient as possible. In our research we found that changes in lighting would have the greatest effect on energy consumption and that moving to LED bulbs would be the fastest, easiest and most effective action we could undertake. A PA Sustainable Energy Fund award of $25,000 plus a PENNELEC rebate of $2,485 helped make LED installation and retrofit project at the monastery possible. We retrofitted or replaced 819 indoor and 39 exterior lights with LED lights including 96 incandescent bulbs in the chapel. We will see a 16% reduction of kilowatt hours used and a 14% reduction in CO₂ emissions. The financial impact is almost immediate: estimated savings for the first year is $11,555 and for the first five years it is nearly $64,000.

The change-out to LED lighting at the Mount provided an opportunity for CARE to hold Energy Efficiency Education sessions for sisters, employees and oblates with a goal of empowering participants to become part of the ecological solution by becoming energy efficient advocates in their homes, workplaces and communities. Consultant Guy McUmber explained, “By holding this program at Mount St. Benedict Monastery, we were able to highlight the effectiveness of lighting retrofits and show...
that such projects are not beyond possibility for non-profit organizations.” CARE also hosted an information session presented by Green Building Alliance.

CARE is now looking at energy efficiency in all the buildings owned by the Benedictine Sisters and Emmaus Ministries. Brian Smith of Sodexo Quality of Life Services did a walk-through of our buildings as a first step in assessing LED lighting project possibilities in our ministries.

At the Neighborhood Art House, all of the light fixtures have been retrofitted to accommodate LED lamps. In addition to the improved efficiency, the teachers notice that the lights are brighter and do not have the hum and flicker associated with fluorescent lamps.

Suggestions for a Green Christmas

- Purchasing Christmas lights? Choose LED lamps, especially for outdoor lights. Though more expensive, the savings are considerable.
- Set a goal for replacing a particular number of incandescent bulbs with LEDs through the new year.
- Weather strip drafty doors and windows.
- Purchase items that are locally grown or manufactured.
- Compost vegetable and fruit scraps from Christmas dinner.
- Serve fair trade coffee.
In Memoriam

Sister Rita Groner, OSB, 84, formerly Sister Germaine, died on July 13, 2016 at Mount St. Benedict Monastery after a brief illness.

Sister Rita was born in Marble, PA to Henry and Agnes (Hartle) Groner and grew up as a member of St. Michael Church, Fryburg, PA. She entered the Benedictine Sisters of Erie in 1948 and finished her high school education at St. Benedict Academy. Her first vows in 1950 were followed by perpetual monastic profession in 1953. Having marked the milestones of 25, 50 and 60 years of vowed life, Sister Rita was in the 66th year of her religious life at the time of her death.

Sister Rita held a B.S. in Education from Villa Maria College and spent 44 years in elementary education before becoming an assistant teacher and then a teacher aide at St. Benedict Child Development Center where she ministered for 18 years. Her teaching assignments in the Diocese of Erie included: St. Gregory, North East; Sacred Heart and St. Joseph, Sharon; Immaculate Conception, Clarion; and St. Stephen, Oil City. In addition she taught summer religious education over the years in Emlenton, Coudersport, Rouseville, Titusville and Oil City. Sister Rita credited the children she encountered through the years for teaching her the simplicity and love of life that kept her young at heart.

In 2007 Sister Rita embarked on a special adventure that ultimately led to her becoming a certified member of Therapy Dogs United (TDU), a ministry she began in 2008 and in which she was still engaged at the time of her death. Together with Sister Carolann McLaughlin, OSB and their therapy dog, Rusty, Sister Rita visited nursing homes, schools and hospitals, ministering to the elderly and the young, helping others and growing personally.

In addition to her parents, Sister Rita was preceded in death by her step-mother, Winifred McGarry Groner, brothers Stephen and John, and sisters Germaine Groner and Mary Grace Winger (Lester). She is survived by her Benedictine community, and her sisters, Helen Strickenger (Kenneth, deceased), Jean Marie Shaffer, Patricia [Jane] Wright (Chuck) and Judith Groner, as well as many nieces and nephews.

Sister Rita Groner, OSB
March 18, 1932 — July 13, 2016
Perpetual Monastic Profession
August 12, 1953

... as we progress in this way of life and in faith, we shall run on the path of God’s commandments, our hearts overflowing with the inexpressible delight of love.
— Rule of Benedict: Prologue 49

Our sister, Rita, passed peacefully from this world to the next with the quiet simplicity that marked her person and presence.

Rita saw good and responded to it. Her love of children, animals and all of creation energized her life and enlivened her heart, keeping her open and aware as she aged in place and lived a full life with gratitude and generosity.

Her kindness and affirmation touched many; her mindfulness of community and family, manifested with love and attention, was a testimony to her sensitivity and compassion.

We reverence the memory of this grace-filled woman. We pray that her example will inspire us in our efforts to live life well with warmth and wonder, constancy and care, now and evermore. Amen.
“Meeting Pope Francis personally was a moment I will never forget. His compassionate smile as he moved among us touched my heart,” said Sister Mary Jane Vergotz after she returned from the 2016 Conference of the International Organization of Benedictine Women (Communio Internationales Benedictinarum, CIB). The conference was held in Assisi in September and from Assisi the group traveled to Rome for the 2016 Congress of Abbots where they were participant observers.

The CIB is organized worldwide into 19 regions and each region sends a delegate to the annual conference, hosted in a different location each year. Twenty-six Benedictine women, including delegates and administrative council members, from countries in Europe, North America, Australia, South America and Africa, the Philippines and India attended the 2016 conference. Sister Mary Jane serves as CIB secretary.

On September 8 the 250 participants of the Congress of Abbots and CIB had an audience with Pope Francis at the Vatican. He urged the Benedictine women and men to maintain their monasteries as “oases of the spirit” while reminding them, “Your service to the Church is very valuable.” Sister Mary Jane was touched by the Pope’s message: “Pope Francis told us not to be discouraged if our members age or diminish in number. Instead this was his emphasis, ‘Conserve the zeal of your witness, even in those countries that are most difficult today, with faithfulness to your charism and the courage to found new communities.’ It was truly inspiring.” After addressing the group the Pope proceeded to greet each person present. “When he took my hand, I introduced myself and thanked him for coming to the United States last year,” said Sister Mary Jane. “I told him the sisters love him and are praying for him to which he replied ‘I need it.’ I think I was in awe as I returned to my seat. If I only have one opportunity to meet a Pope, I am grateful that it was this Pope of the People.”

The Congress of Abbots elected Father Gregory Polan, Abbot of Conception Abbey, Conception, MO, the tenth Abbot Primate of the Benedictine Confederation. “It was exciting to witness an American be elected Abbot Primate,” said Sister Mary Jane. “He is the fourth American to hold this position as the representative leader of all Benedictine congregations.” The office of Abbot Primate is designed to represent Benedictines at global meetings and to promote unity among Benedictine groups worldwide. Abbot Gregory, a student of Scripture and Theology, succeeds Abbot Notker Wolf, former Abbot of Sankt Otilien Archabbey in Bavaria who served as Abbot Primate since 2000.

“As I reflect on the 2016 CIB conference meeting in Assisi and my time with the Congress of Abbots in Rome, I feel blessed,” concluded Sister Mary Jane. “The opportunity to serve the international Benedictine community has broadened my experience of the expressions of Benedictine life in the 21st century and is one of the highlights of my monastic life.”
Enrichment Series at the Mount
Throughout history monasteries have been renowned as centers of learning and culture. Because study is reverenced as a means of enlarging the mind and the heart, the Benedictine Sisters of Erie have continued the Enrichment Series that was begun in 2012.

Duo Polaris
A Sunday evening concert on July 3 in the chapel at Mount St. Benedict Monastery—two phenomenal musicians, an audience of music lovers, the music of Franz Schubert, Robert Schumann and Manuel de Falla—heavenly! “Our hearts are filled, our spirits touched; for me this was an experience of the Divine,” shared Sister Anne Wambach, Prioress.

Kirill Kalmykov, longtime friend of the community, and his wife and pianist, Julia Haager, are a professional Calgary-based cello/piano duo that performs under the name, Duo Polaris. Both are extremely talented and competent musicians who share their gifts with a passion and pleasure that is simple and humble.

“The chapel space was filled with music that soared to the heavens and penetrated the depths of the soul,” said Sister Marilyn Schauble, one of the community’s musicians. “I was not surprised by the long and thunderous standing ovation they received. It reflected an audience truly touched by an experience that words could hardly describe.”

Moving the theme of Nonviolence and Just Peace Forward
Erie Benedictine Sister Anne McCarthy participated in a unique international conference, co-sponsored by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and Pax Christi International. Nonviolence and Just Peace: Contributing to the Catholic Understanding of and Commitment to Nonviolence was held in Rome in April, 2016. In the August Enrichment Series offering Sister Anne reflected on this experience. “The conference initiated a conversation about Catholic teaching on war and peace, including explicit rejection of ‘just war’ language in favor of an alternative ethical framework for engaging acute conflict and atrocities by developing the themes and practices of nonviolent conflict transformation and just peace,” explained Sister Anne. “It was filled with energy around the appeal to the Catholic community to recommit to the centrality of Gospel nonviolence.” Sister Anne also noted that Pope Francis has decided to highlight nonviolence in his message for the 2017 World Peace Day to be celebrated on January 1. “This is especially significant,” she explained, “since the conference called on Pope Francis to share an encyclical on nonviolence with the world.”
Catholic Social Teaching: One of our best kept secrets

“Well, the secret is out of the bag,” said one guest after attending the Enrichment Series which featured Father Jim Piszker and his presentation: Catholic Social Teaching: One of our Best Kept Secrets. “Thanks to Father Jim I have a much better understanding of what that secret is—a wealth of amazing social justice and peace documents from Popes, Vatican II and synods and conferences of bishops over a period of 100 years that spell out the basic tenets of Catholic Social Teaching.”

As presenter of the October Enrichment Series, Father Jim outlined the biblical and documental basis for Catholic Social Teaching and then turned to key principles. He emphasized that human life is sacred and the dignity of the human person is the foundation upon which all the principles are based. Whether it be a concern for the common good of all, a preferential protection of the poor, an understanding of our responsibility to be the keepers of our brothers and sisters, the stewardship of creation or the promotion of peace, at the heart of the teaching is a reverence and respect for human life, equality and rights that must guide how we live in today’s world.

“Credenda becomes the agenda,” said Father Jim. “The beliefs must become the acts. Catholic Social Action flows from Catholic Social Doctrine and it takes shape by faith and the Gospel.”

Make Mercy Real

Sister Michele Donnelly, RSM, addressed sisters and oblates on the topic of mercy at the community’s annual October weekend. “As co-director of Mercy Spiritual Ministries and adjunct theology professor at Gwynedd Mercy University, in Gwynedd, PA, Sister Michele was the perfect presenter to lead a reflection on the richness of mercy as both gift and challenge,” explained Sister Stephanie Schmidt, the community’s Director of Ongoing Formation. Sister Michele engaged the group in a consideration of how they might implement the revolution of tenderness and mercy to which the church was invited by Pope Francis when he designated 2015-16 to be a Jubilee Year of Mercy. A reflection on the tender mercy of God paved the way for an examination of the works of mercy as a practical way of pursuing action of mercy in the world in which we live.

Jubilee — a time to give thanks

To be grateful is to recognize the love of God in every person and everything. In gratitude for community and life together we, the Benedictine Sisters of Erie, showed appreciation for our sister jubilarians at a special community prayer and dinner. Their very lives among us are reason for joy and celebration.
**Happenings...**

**AIM Board gathers at Mount St. Benedict**

Sister Theresa Zoky, Executive Director of AIM USA (Alliance for International Monasticism) hosted the annual meeting of the AIM Board of Trustees at Mount St. Benedict Monastery with the help of her staff, Sisters Therese Glass and Ann Hoffman. Sister Anne Wambach, Prioress, was also in attendance. "It is always a pleasure to welcome these dedicated monastics into our home," said Sister Theresa. "We are enriched by their presence and their commitment to assisting missionary monasteries throughout the world."

Learn more about AIM by going to http://www.aim-usa.org/ and viewing their new web page recently designed and completed by Sister Linda Romey, OSB, web developer.

**MID Board meets at the Mount**

The Monastic Interreligious Dialogue (MID) Board meeting was hosted at the monastery by Sister Anne McCarthy, a member of the Board for several years. The group included Benedictines, Cistercians, and Trappist women and men. "This is my last meeting on the board, although I will continue as President of International MID," said Sister Anne. "I am glad for this opportunity for our community to connect more deeply with the work of MID."

MID is a board of Catholic monastic religious from the Benedictine and Cistercian orders, as well as an advisory board drawn from experts in religion from academia and other religious traditions such as Buddhism. They are part of the larger DIM (Dialogue Interreligieux Monastique) / MID group which works under the aegis of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue in Rome. The purpose of MID is to foster dialogue with the monastic traditions of other religions, in particular Buddhism.

**Special Contribution Award**

Sister Ann Muczynski, along with several of her coworkers, received a Special Contribution Award for her unique contribution to the mission of the Erie VA Behavioral Health Department. Erie VA Behavioral Health recently received the ranking of being #1 in the nation. "With some of the bad publicity that VA Hospital has gotten, it is nice to know that locally our Veterans are extremely pleased with the high level of care they are receiving," shared Sister Ann who works as a PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) Specialist and is also the MST (Military Sexual Trauma) Coordinator for the Erie VA. "It is a great privilege to be working with such an excellent staff and so many Veterans. This is one way for me to live out the Erie Benedictines’ corporate commitment of being a healing presence. I am blessed and humbled that God is working through me to instill hope and bring some healing to the lives of so many different Veterans who suffer daily with the ‘invisible wounds of war.’"
Another Successful Summer for SBEC Intern

“I am required to complete two summers of service at various agencies of my choice,” Tyler Allen, a Bonner Scholar at Allegheny College, explained. “Having had a positive experience at St. Benedict Education Center (SBEC) in Meadville, PA in 2015, I contacted SBEC in Erie requesting to work with the refugee population.”

The 2016 internship turned into an unexpected way of working with the SBEC refugee population. Although Tyler did not work directly with the refugees, he feverishly accomplished a hands-on job skills curriculum for our refugees and welfare recipients,” said Sister Pat Witulski, SBEC staff member. “It was a wonderful success.” To achieve this success, Tyler turned an empty classroom into a training center. He set up a number of stations where SBEC clients could obtain skills for various jobs such as housekeeping, cashier, and telephone operator.

First Awardee of ICM Scholarship visits the Mount

In 2015 Inter-Church Ministries of Erie (ICM) established a “Moral Leadership Award” in the name of Sister Mary Louis Eichenlaub to honor her 20 years of service on the ICM board. The award provides educational scholarships to graduating high school seniors. The first scholarships were awarded in June, 2016. One of the recipients of the $500 scholarship came to the monastery to meet and have dinner with Sister Mary Louis. Julian LaBenne and Sister Mary Louis hit it off immediately. “How wonderful to meet such a fine young man and for him to be honored,” said Sister Mary Louis. The scholarship is given in recognition of leadership qualities, including integrity, responsibility, dependability, character, positive attitude, moral leadership and service with a heart. “I am thankful not only for the scholarship but for the opportunity to meet Sister Mary Louis,” said Julian. “It was very special.”

Gift to Emmaus and Neighborhood Art House

Mary Alice and Tom Doolin, 2016 recipients of the Erie Community Foundation’s prestigious Edward C. Doll Community Service Award, remembered two ministries of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie when it came to selecting nonprofits to benefit from a $12,000 grant that accompanies the award. Emmaus Ministries and the Neighborhood Art House (NAH), were among the nonprofits selected by the Doolins, who received the honor at the Erie Community Foundation’s annual meeting held at the Bayfront Convention Center. “Mary Alice and Tom are two people who have given copious amounts of time as well as financial gifts to better Erie, the city that is so dear to both their hearts,” said Sister Mary Miller, Director of Emmaus Ministries. Sister Annette Marshall added, “What a blessing! We are so grateful for them and for their gift.”
NUNS on the Bus in Erie: Brief but Amazing

“NUNS on the Bus were in Erie less than 24 hours but their impact will last much longer,” said Sister Marlene Bertke, OSB. In addition to spending time at the monastery the group held a Town Meeting at St. Paul’s Parish Center, Erie. “It was an opportunity for people to get together and talk about the issues in the Erie community and consider viable solutions,” explained Sister Marlene. “The turnout was great, the process even greater, and the end result was enlivened hope. We were blessed to have the opportunity to share conversation with them about issues that are near and dear to us in our efforts for social justice.”

It has been 5 years since NUNS on the Bus began their efforts. Led by Sister Simone Campbell, Executive Director of NETWORK (https://networklobby.org/) and religious leader, attorney and poet with extensive experience in public policy and advocacy for systemic change, NUNS on the Bus are a group of Catholic nuns who are advocates for the church’s long-standing commitment to social justice.

Benedictine Sisters benefit from PNC Foundation Grant

On behalf of the PNC Foundation, James Stevenson, PNC Regional President, made a visit to Mount St. Benedict Monastery to present a $10,000 grant to the Benedictine Sisters of Erie. “We are pleased to benefit from the generosity of the PNC Foundation, a group with whom we share many of the same priorities,” said Sister Anne Wambach, Prioress, who graciously accepted the award which will be used to replace mattress sets and chairs. “Our gratitude is extended to Jim and the foundation for this grant that will provide new necessities for our sisters, many of whom work in the Benedictine inner-city ministries that serve the poor and underprivileged.”

PNC and the PNC Foundation have long histories of enriching the lives of the residents of their local communities. They have provided resources to seed ideas, foster development initiatives and encourage leadership in nonprofit organizations where imagination and determination are at work enhancing people’s lives every day.

Joan Chittister, OSB, wins two 2016 Catholic Press Association Awards

Congratulations to Sister Joan Chittister who received two 2016 Catholic Press Association awards in recent award announcements.

Sister Joan’s book, Two Dogs and a Parrot: what our animal friends can teach us about life, (BlueBridge) won a First Place award in the category of Best Book by a Small Publisher. In the category of Best Blog–by religious/clergy, she was awarded a Second Place award for “From Where I Stand” a blog she has written for the National Catholic Reporter newspaper since 2003.

In addition, Tom Roberts, editor at large for the National Catholic Reporter won a second place award in Biographies for his book: Joan Chittister: her journey from certainty to faith. (Orbis)

Sister Joan has now won 16 Catholic Press Association awards. Visit http://www.joanchittister.org/ to learn more about Sister Joan and her ministry.
Faith Communities demonstrate their commitment to environmental action

“We believe that we are called as Faith Communities to demonstrate our commitment to environmental action and to do it in partnership with environmental organizations, local communities, and civic and governmental entities,” explained Sister Pat Lupo before heading to Philadelphia to participate in the March for a Clean Energy Revolution on the eve of the Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia this summer. Benedictine Sisters and Oblates, the Secular Franciscans, Benedictines for Peace and Our Water Our Air Our Rights, joined other activists in this effort. “The demonstration was an effort to show politicians the public’s feelings on climate change and fracking,” added Sister Lucia Surmik. “It was endorsed by close to 800 organizations.”

Erie Philharmonic Outreach: Long Term residency at St. Benedict Child Development Center

Fall 2016 brought the Erie Philharmonic to the classrooms at St. Benedict Child Development Center. This first time ever Long Term Residency will have teaching artist Sarah Lee visiting the center 60 times by the time February rolls around. The goal of this program is to create positive musical experiences for the children that promote early music appreciation. In addition, the Philharmonic aims to bring music into pre-kindergarten classes in order to aid language and literacy development as well as the organization and application of knowledge through creative thinking.

Sarah Lee, who has led the Philharmonic’s outreach and education and is Erie Phil’s second bassoonist, spent the summer creating lessons. “Already we have had lessons in woodwinds, strings and shakers with visiting guest artists from the Philharmonic,” said Sister Diane Rabe, the center’s director. “Of course, all of this was preceded by a great teacher training day that we thoroughly enjoyed.” Visit http://eriephil.org/ltr to view photos from these sessions.

SBEC participants benefit from a special kindness

Before she died in 2015, Sister Mary Therese Eichenlaub made a weekly trip to the UPMC Hamot Surgery Center to collect “disposable” socks that she laundered, bagged and distributed to guests and clients at both Emmaus Ministries and St. Benedict Education Center. After her death, Sister Colette Korn took over this outreach and has faithfully collected, washed and bagged the socks weekly. Every other week she makes a delivery to St. Benedict Education Center (SBEC). Over the summer they were stored by Sister Audrey Steff, SBEC refugee instructor who shared: “We were able to give out 600 pairs of socks to our participants. We are so happy to be able to provide this comfort as the cold weather sets in. We are very grateful to Sister Colette for continuing this wonderful service.”
“We’ll always come to thee again, when Alma Mater calls”

Class of 1967 Turns 67

By Ann Comstock, Oblate

Twenty-six members of the Class of ‘67 came together with SBA school spirit for a joint birthday celebration picnic last August. Since the majority of these ladies have recently retired, there were lots of stories about what everyone is doing with their new free time and it seems they are keeping very busy. They shared news and photos about travel, grandchildren, volunteering, and where to get the best senior discounts! Classmate Sandy (Homicz) Kempisty said it best: “What a great time. I am always so grateful to be able to call all these ladies my friends. What a wonderful bunch of women! God bless all of us, and the place, St. Benedict Academy, that brought us all together.”

This group of active alumnae has met annually for several years and they also support the Alumnae Association by attending the annual Christmas Party and Spring Luncheon.

Of course, the most important item on their agenda is planning their 50th Class Reunion in 2017, scheduled for the weekend of July 7, 8 and 9. If you are a member of the Class of ’67, please provide your email address, mailing address, and phone number to Janet (Romanowicz) Hammond at hammondjanet@hotmail.com as soon as possible. We welcome your ideas and reunion suggestions as Kathy Sulewski and the committee organizes this important event.

Classes who are planning reunions next year are eligible to receive a $35 check to help defray mailing costs. Also provided will be an updated class list from our database as well as a set of labels. Please provide us with any information regarding your reunion that you would like posted on this website. We would also appreciate any follow up stories and photos you might wish to share. All we ask is 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 with friends and classmates. Please contact Ann Comstock at 814-899-0614 ext. 2573 or sbaalum@mtstbenedict.org.

Let us pray...

For our SBA alumnae who passed into eternity—

Eleanor Sylvetski DiLuzio ..................’39
Dolores Sarafinski .....................’43
Therese Ann Jordan Larson ..........’43
Helen Herzog Anderson ...........’46
Christine Hyziewicz Ekimoff ....’46
Sophie Stella Wodarski Bruno ....’49
Donna Enders Bardroff ..............’50
Theresa Michalski Dzikowski ....’53
Leona M. Drzdewski Mink ..........’54
Rita Santor Sulecki .....................’54
Mary Ann Chodasiewicz Mikołajczak ’54
Rosemarie Kupniewski Wingrove ...’55
Angela F. Radomski Helsley ......’57
Theresa V. Wawrzyniak Simonelli ’58
Christine Brzostowski Eckert ....’64
Connie V. Dopierala .................’69
Janet Strohmeyer Youngdahl ......’71
Diane Allegretto Mayo ..............’73
Julianne Marie Baker Dodson ......’79
Christine Brower Krolczyk ..........’82

“Spirit of SBA” is alive and well.
Whatever the reason, be it a Birthday Party, a Christmas Party or a Spring Luncheon, the ladies of SBA like to get together and celebrate.

Mark Your Calendar
Saturday, June 3, 2017
2017 SBA Spring Luncheon
Ambassador Conference Center
7794 Peach Street
Erie, PA

Keep in Touch…
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. 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). Call Ann Comstock at 814-899-0614 ext. 2573 or contact by email: sbaalum@mtstbenedict.org

Please visit our Website
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 St. 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.
Christmas proclaims the birth of Christ entering the world in human form and empowering us by word and example to love one another, to be strong in faith, and to radiate hope in any and all situations.

The Benedictine Sisters of Erie celebrate the faith, hope and love that you so generously extend to us in the gifts of support, friendship and care.

You will be remembered at our Christmas liturgy:

Christmas Eve at 8:30 p.m.
Christmas Day at 9:30 a.m.
We invite you to join us.

May you and your loved ones know grace-filled blessings throughout this holy season and in the new year.